

# The Keystone Magazine

鼎石志

13

## Hours That Matter

After School  
at Keystone,  
the Learning Never  
Stops



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Selected student groups and clubs from Keystone Academy Activities (KAP)  
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# 13

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Issue 13

## Hours That Matter

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# Building Mountains

## How the Keystone Activities Program Expands the Meaning of Success

### Foreword

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From its very beginning, Keystone was conceived not as a factory for a single type of achievement, but as a landscape for discovery. This foundational belief—that education should fuel passion—finds its most vibrant and dynamic expression in our Keystone Activities Program (KAP). The ethos of this program was one of the most innovative elements of Keystone’s founding educational vision, and one that year over year draws a rare kind of teacher to our school.

My favorite memories of my quarter-century as an educator are grounded in life beyond the classroom. The strongest relationships I have built with students were the ones who I taught and coached, lived in the dorm with, or advised their senior projects. This multi-dimensionality improves the quality of classroom teaching and learning; it builds the types of relationships in a school that strengthen our identity as a learning community, as described in the design principle of our “second keystone”, which is about character and community. Our over 300 activities (85 of which are student-led this year) are not “extra” as some schools call them—they are core. They are what set Keystone apart.

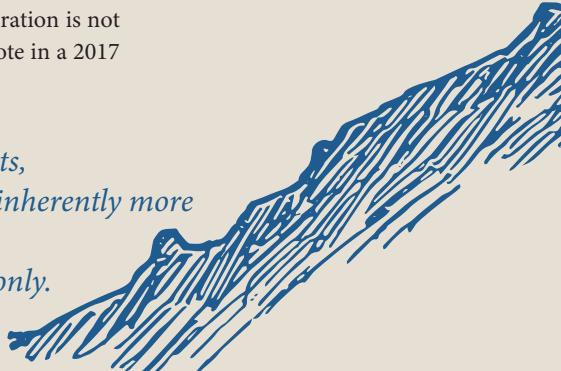
Within the pages of this magazine, you will catch a glimpse of the vast ecosystem of opportunities that the Keystone Activities Program provides. In our 12th year, this program features well-trod pathways, like our ever-improving sports teams and renowned arts ensembles, alongside nascent clubs born from a single student’s curiosity. The true magic of KAP, however, lies in how our students mix and match these experiences to design their unique journeys. As interests evolve, some activities sunset while others take root, often leaving a legacy that shapes students’ experiences for years to come. In this way, KAP is a living, breathing entity, continually renewed by the most important voices in our school: the students themselves.

But KAP is more than just a list of options; it is the highest expression of Keystone’s commitment to a broad definition of success. It is the practical answer to a critical question: How do we help students discover what truly ignites and inspires them?

This commitment is vital for two profound reasons. It prepares our students to be the innovative, multifaceted problem-solvers our world needs, and, just as importantly, it acts as a critical protective factor for their own well-being. When success is not a narrow target, the fear of failure diminishes. This freedom from constant comparison, just by the sheer fact that there are limitless pathways here, reduces anxiety and creates the psychological safety necessary for deep, authentic learning to flourish.

This question of how to discover pathways that ignite passion and inspiration is not a new question for us. Our founding head of school, Malcolm McKenzie, wrote in a 2017 letter to the community:

*At Keystone, we encourage a wide range of academic interests, and we try to undermine any attitude that regards some as inherently more important than others [...] We focus as much as we can on assessment for learning, rather than assessment of learning only.*



He regularly urged students to pursue what they really want, rather than settling for external expectations.

This philosophy is woven into Keystone's DNA. We are not a school that honors one type of excellence. Here, a student's growth is not about racing to the top of a single, narrow ladder. Instead, our students are builders. Like tectonic plates shaping new landscapes, they are not climbing to a prescribed peak; they are building the very mountain range they and subsequent generations will inhabit. Each effort and collaboration adds another layer to this unique landscape of our school, and the impact expands far beyond our gates.

The role of teachers in this ecosystem is to be architects of this potential. As former Dean of Students & Faculty Kelli Sanchez always said, we must always "figure out how to say 'yes' to kids".

This philosophy pulses through our campus daily. Especially between 3:30 PM and 5:30 PM, and often into the evenings and weekends, the energy on campus expands exponentially as teachers and students find ways to say 'yes' to their most exciting ideas. Few schools in the world can match the depth of engagement or the sheer range of opportunities found here.

This is not optional for us; it is core to our mission. When every child finds a way to reach their highest potential through a unique combination of experiences, we know we are fulfilling our promise as a New World School. We are protecting our students' limitless potential from the pernicious pressure of a narrow definition of success, and we are delivering on our promise to cultivate unique talents. Their future lives of service and excellence will have an immeasurable impact on a peaceful and prosperous future for our planet.

*It is in these moments at the edges of what we sometimes consider the boundaries of school—a bus ride home from a soccer match; students teaching their foreign-born teachers Mandarin after school; sipping from a water bottle on a mountain peak after wondering if you could really make it—that enduring memories are forged, making all the learning meaningful.*

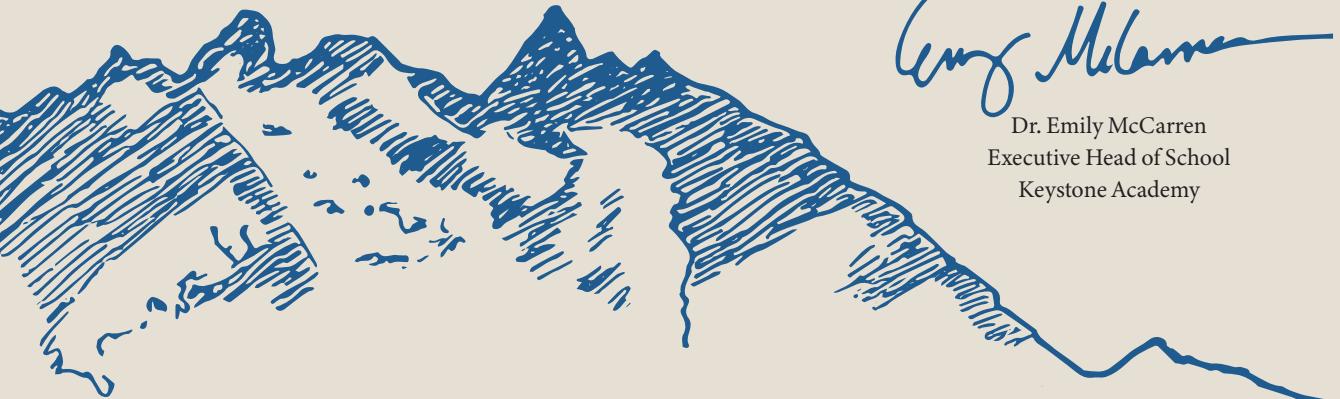
Reading through the stories in this magazine, you will see the philosophy of Keystone's educational model in action. You will see the countless ways our students sparkle and shine. We believe there is enough light for every one of them, and we know the world will be a brighter, more innovative place because they have the space to find their own brightness, as they embody their unique definition of success.

(3)



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Emily McCarron".

Dr. Emily McCarron  
Executive Head of School  
Keystone Academy



# Aspear

Since its founding in 2014, why has Keystone  
published a magazine every year?

Academy continued to

**Editor's Note**

Now, as editor-in-chief of *The Keystone Magazine*, I've had the chance to truly reflect on our school's simple yet enduring print edition and reimagine what this substantial publication could become. I first took over the magazine's editorial management in 2018, when I was one of its author-editors.

This year, we wanted to produce a magazine full of creativity. We wanted to bring the spotlight back to students, teachers, and the community; to make print feel vivid and engaging; and to inspire a new generation of students to rekindle the unique joy of reading magazines on campus.

When we chose "Hours That Matter" (or "After School" in the Chinese edition) as the magazine theme centered on the Keystone Activities Program (KAP), this presented the perfect opportunity to begin our renewal.

Keystone has, from the start, called its after-school offerings KAP as they go beyond the conventional idea of extracurriculars. Our students are encouraged to freely and seriously explore any area that interests them, which is a vital part of our education model.

As we explored this further, we found that Keystone's uniqueness lies in a question that is simple yet profound:

## *What do Keystone students do after school?*

Before answering that, we listened to how our students spoke about their KAPs. Their sharing and insights echoed our editorial vision for this magazine.

With "innocent curiosity" (Cyan Xing, p. 21); with the hope that "every voice deserves to be heard" (Muyi Dong, p. 19); and showing that "every article we publish is not just 'another post,' but a commitment from student media to the entire community" (Ava Guo, p. 50); and "prioritizing authenticity, emotional resonance, and a strong sense of purpose over academic weight" (p. 16) as a way to test their own boundaries and possibilities.

In this issue's Cover Story, "Hours That Matter: After School at Keystone, the Learning Never Stops", we made a series of firsts:

- We used eleven independent stories to interpret a single theme.
- We planned the cover design, from the photo shoot onward.
- We featured student authors and illustrators.
- We redefined our internal roles, calling ourselves a creative team.

Throughout this process, we found ourselves resonating with the very students we were writing about—learning, exploring, and growing together.

Like a solo, each story stands on its own, complete and moving.

(4)

*Yet the true magic happens when these narratives, brought together under one theme, form a grand symphony composed of many distinct solos.*

Drawing from Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the polyphonic novel, we sought to let multiple independent and equal voices coexist in the "Hours That Matter". None silences another; instead, they engage in dialogue and connection, weaving a network of shared meaning. Even you, our dear readers, may find your own interpretations and add your own notes to these stories.

As you read further, another thread quietly appears—the passage of time and the unfolding of growth.

In "Hours That Matter", our second graders are taking their first steps in a nature observation KAP, while in the Graduate Profiles column, we meet a graduate who has entered their dream university, pursuing a passion first sparked years ago during KAP.

Past and future flow together in this river of time, with these students standing side by side at the same point of origin.

(5) As that metaphorical river flows on, Phoebe Sun '18 writes candidly to her alma mater about confusion and hesitation. Her writing, featured in the new Alumni Insights column, offers a precious possibility, that "maybe there's no complete puzzle at all", and that "the act of placing (a puzzle piece)—of searching—is itself the long-awaited answer."

And still on that river, the artist Zhao Bandi continues to expand his creative boundaries. Without a defined audience, Mr. Zhao's quiet conversation with our students on the Keystone quadrangle—one that was filled with the unrestrained sincerity of youth—reminded him of his early days.

At that moment, the river of time seemed to return to its source.

This was the first time in many years that I truly felt the magazine as a complete whole—interconnected and alive—collectively interpreting the themes of growth and time.

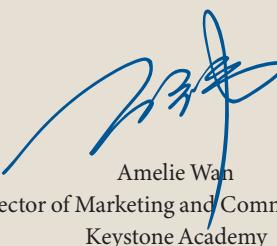
*We believe that this 2025 issue, as years pass,  
will transcend the people and events it records.  
It will go beyond moving storylines, beyond time itself,  
to reveal a shared narrative of Keystone:  
a community whose spirit is tightly bound together through writing.*

Ethnologist Helen Verran once documented a ritual of Australia's Yolngu people: when they wish to unite the dreams and memories of their ancestors with the present, they end the ceremony by throwing a spear into the center of the storyteller's circle.

That act of throwing the spear is what fuses the present with the past.

This magazine in your hands is our spear—a spear thrown at time.

# Thrown



Amelie Wan  
Director of Marketing and Communications  
Keystone Academy

at Tinne

Philosophy<sup>1</sup> Hours  
That<sup>2</sup> Student Voice  
Service<sup>3</sup> Matter<sup>4</sup> STEM  
Learning<sup>5</sup> Chinese Thread  
Keystone<sup>6</sup> After School  
Student Ambassadors  
at<sup>7</sup> Theater Physical  
Keystone,<sup>8</sup> Education  
Student<sup>9</sup> the Learning<sup>10</sup> Teamwork  
Media<sup>11</sup> Creative Ideas<sup>12</sup> Never Stops  
the Learning<sup>13</sup> Creative Ideas<sup>14</sup> Never Stops  
at<sup>15</sup> Keystone,<sup>16</sup> Student Ambassadors<sup>17</sup> Chinese Thread<sup>18</sup> STEM<sup>19</sup> After School<sup>20</sup> Physical Education<sup>21</sup> Teamwork<sup>22</sup> Never Stops<sup>23</sup>



When the last bell rings on the Keystone Academy campus, the day doesn't end but transforms. In the glow of the late afternoon, the academic building and other school facilities hum with motion, thanks to the many students that rehearse, create, move, or plan. These are the hours of the Keystone Activities Program (KAP), when learning steps outside the classroom and students build new worlds of their own making.

In this special cover story of *The Keystone Magazine*, we feature a series of deep-dives that capture how students test ideas, lead projects, and create meaning beyond grades and timetables. In one corner of the school, performers explore identity and emotion through drama and dance, or think deeply about the universe. Down another hallway, others map Keystone in Minecraft, fix broken gadgets, or design logos that shape the school's visual identity. On the field and in the gym, young athletes learn resilience, teamwork, and the discipline of shared goals. Each space becomes a stage for discovery, one where curiosity and confidence grow side by side.

Teachers play a quiet but vital role in these worlds. They are mentors, coaches, and facilitators who help students navigate the creative process without taking the reins. For them, KAP is a reminder that real learning often happens in moments of trial, experimentation, and reflection. These are the times when a student conquers a difficult move, rebuilds a device, or simply finds the courage to try something new.

From student-led design studios to color guard routines, robotics projects to service initiatives, KAP time is where ideas turn into action and passions take root. These stories aren't just about hobbies; they are about shaping a culture of curiosity, care, and self-direction. As the campus lights dim and the last group packs up for the evening, what remains is more than just a record of activity but a portrait of a community that keeps learning, long after the bell.

CHAPTER I

## How a philosophy club opens doors to deeper thinking and learning



Story by  
Muen Zheng

# Theory of Everything

Edited by  
Andy Peñafuerte III

# Philosophy Isn't Fantasy

The classroom was already full.

Leaning against a table at the front, Mr. Sun Zhongyao began as he often did—posing a question that touched on life's everyday struggles. From there, he invited his students to unravel it, raising new questions, testing familiar assumptions, and guiding them to think beyond their own boundaries.

Midway through, the door opened. Another student slipped in quietly and joined the discussion. No one seemed surprised. In Mr. Sun's class, it was common for students to audit, and even a late arrival couldn't break the current of inquiry flowing between teacher and students.

*"Does time really exist?"*

*"Are we living in a giant's dream?"*

*"Do we truly understand the saying, 'Heaven will bestow great responsibilities on those who are capable of them'?"*

*"From an evolutionary perspective, how do you explain the human need for a 'gene that loves repetition'?"*

From abstract musings to arguments rooted in science, Mr. Sun led students through ideas they had never encountered before.

Looking into their curious eyes, Mr. Sun sometimes felt transported back to his own high school days, when he first wrestled with questions like "What is the meaning of life?" or "Why do we exist?"

His teacher's answer was blunt: "Don't ponder questions you can't understand."

But unanswered questions never disappear. Mr. Sun kept asking. That was when his own philosophical journey began.

Years later, after earning a PhD in physics from the University of Pennsylvania and receiving a Penn State fellowship, Mr. Sun became a teacher. Physics gave him insight into the dimensions of existence—space and time—but philosophy gave him the tools to reshape his thinking. For him, it is less about arriving at answers and more about broadening horizons, igniting new questions, and nurturing reflection.

In 2022, he brought that same spirit to Keystone by founding a KAP called The Theory of Everything. It would not be about memorizing difficult philosophical texts but about starting from everyday struggles,

social phenomena, and global challenges. Students would learn to raise questions, question assumptions, and search for new ways to understand themselves and the world.

"Philosophy emerges from life," Mr. Sun tells his students. Each person can forge their own path of inquiry when guided by reflection, conversation, and lived experience. And for him, philosophy has never been confined to books.

## Ain't No Mountain High Enough

Mr. Sun often recalls his experience as a long-distance runner: "Around the second kilometer, the pain feels unbearable, like you can't keep going. But once you get through it, you feel completely free." Running, he explains, teaches perseverance and the strength that comes from pushing through discomfort.

It is the same with challenges in school. Students often feel crushed by exam stress or failures that seem overwhelming at the time. Mr. Sun reminds them that life's obstacles resemble steep mountains: "They seem intimidating as you climb. But once you look back, those difficulties are just small bumps."



**"We don't need to judge experiences as good or bad. What matters is what we learn and how we grow."**

Adolescence itself is full of confusion and the ache of feeling misunderstood. In his KAP sessions, Mr. Sun encourages students to reflect on these challenges through a philosophical lens. Thinking about life in this way, he says, expands beyond the self to society, to the world, and to our relationship with time and space.

Philosophy, he tells them, is not fantasy; it is the foundation from which other disciplines once grew. "It's not an exaggeration to say philosophy is the mother of science," Mr. Sun says.

In his view, philosophy covers four dimensions: metaphysics, physics, psychology, and sociology. In the Theory of Everything KAP, students encounter all four. Mr. Sun helps them apply scientific theories to human behavior, explore social dynamics, and understand themselves and others more deeply.

Take repetition, for instance. To many, daily routines seem as meaningless as Sisyphus pushing his boulder uphill. But Mr. Sun urges students to consider evolution: the gene for repetition ensures survival and stability. At the same time, every person carries the gene for heroism and for resistance—the "troublemakers" who prevent stagnation and spark change.

When students doubt themselves or struggle with negative emotions, Mr. Sun's class helps them return to

rational reflection—or view their situation from another angle.

"When Heaven is about to confer a great responsibility on someone, it first tests their mind and will," Mr. Sun quoted Mencius as he offered a fresh interpretation through Stoic philosophy: every setback can contain opportunity. "We don't need to judge experiences as good or bad. What matters is what we learn and how we grow," he says.

## Meet on Thursdays

In the Theory of Everything KAP, Mr. Sun poses questions that spark reflection, invites students to share their views, then guides them. The conversations are not structured as classroom lectures but a discussion brimming with expanding, pulling back, and moving forward together.

Now in its fourth year, the club fills up as soon as registration opens. Those who can't enroll often come as auditors, drawn to an enigmatic atmosphere that unfolds every Thursday. Students step outside their "worlds" and gather in what has become an invigorating huddle.

For Mr. Sun, students are his equals with valuable ideas. He listens closely and respects their individual-



fig.2

ity. Students, in turn, open up and talk about science fiction, philosophy, artificial intelligence, books they've read, or even a popular video channel. In this free and relaxed space, they speak without fear of mistakes and discover their authentic voices.

Participants come from different backgrounds—science enthusiasts, budding artists, even a student who wrote a 20,000-word novel. "The common trait," Mr. Sun says, "is their love of thinking and asking questions."

Eleventh grader Fan Zixuan, who has been part of the club for two years, recalls how one classmate's constant questioning shifted her perspective: "At first I thought he was too serious. But later I realized that only by asking questions constantly can you understand something more deeply. Through his questions, I also gained new insights." She remembers Mr. Sun saying, "People cannot know what is beyond their own cognition." That idea left a deep impression: "In the club, our thoughts expanded into vast and unfamiliar places."

In a session that focused on mortality, Zixuan asked whether the fear of death stems from fear of the unknown. Others argued it is because death takes away a life still to be lived; some saw it as simply the end of suffering. Mr. Sun reminded them: because death is unknowable, we should cherish the present more.

## Philosophy to Nurture Thinking Citizens

Keystone alumna Xing Zhitong '25 found in this KAP the learning style she had been searching for. "It felt like Socrates with his friends, except more relaxed. We sat together, deconstructing a small part of the world. Sometimes it was monkeys, sometimes nihilism, sometimes time itself. These conversations will stay with me for a long time." Now accepted at Minerva University, she will continue her journey of inquiry in another innovative learning environment.

The approach echoes a French view of philosophy in civic education, described by *Sanlian Life Weekly* as cultivating *citoyens éclairés*—enlightened citizens able to reflect, critique, and participate in times of crisis. The "Theory of Everything" KAP is Keystone's attempt at something similar: using philosophy as a way to nurture thinking citizens.

Beyond this program, Mr. Sun also teaches mathematics and Theory of Knowledge (TOK), helping

"No matter what the outcome, keep trying. Even if you fail, only in this way can humanity continue to progress."

students reflect critically on knowledge itself and dismantle the boundaries between disciplines. His goal: to inspire them to question, analyze, and form independent opinions.

There is another motivation for the Theory of Everything KAP. Many online platforms misinterpret philosophical ideas—turning Descartes's "I think, therefore I am" into empty inspiration, or Lao Tzu's *wuwei* into "do nothing." In class, Mr. Sun helps students see the underlying meanings: that Descartes was grappling with the uncertainty of knowledge, and that *wuwei* invites people to follow their ideas and strive boldly, even in the face of meaninglessness.

He often tells students: "No matter what the outcome, keep trying. Even if you fail, only in this way can humanity continue to progress."

In the film, *Dead Poets Society*, the protagonist John Keating urged his students to stand on their desks and see the world differently. He inspired them to pursue their own voices and live authentically.

In his own way, Mr. Sun does the same through his KAP. He invites students to break free from mental constraints, to question, to explore, and to expand their view of the world.

As Mr. Keating once told his students—words Mr. Sun hopes his own students will remember:

*You must strive to find your own voice, because the longer you wait to begin, the less likely you are to find it all. Thoreau said, 'Most people live in quiet despair.' Don't get stuck in that situation. Break out.*

"Oh, Captain, my Captain."

fig.1 — In Sun Zhongyao's Theory of Everything KAP, students go deep into philosophical questions, which helps them reflect on and make sense of their adolescent experiences

fig.2 — Members of the Theory of Everything KAP club

Keystone's student-led speaking platforms make space for courage and creativity



Story by  
Zaiqi Yu

Edited by  
Andy Peñafuerte III

# Have a Say

# Speak and Be Heard

Welcome to Keystone Talk, an event dedicated to empowering student voices and offering a platform to explore and delve into Keystone values, our identities and collective goals, as well as MYP Global Contexts embedded within each unit and subject in Middle School.

This introduction greets visitors to the Keystone Talk website. Scroll further, and you'll find the six Global Concepts in the Middle Years Programme (MYP), a review of past events, and steps to join.

Since its first event in April 2024, Keystone Talk has hosted six keynote speeches, three roundtable discussions, and one activity. For Maya, an eighth grader who spent a holiday teaching herself programming, building a website, and drafting project plans, the series' growth was something she never imagined.

## The Key Questions of MYP Global Contexts »

Identity and Relationships  
Orientation of Time and Space  
Personal and Cultural Expression  
Scientific and Technical Innovation  
Globalization and Sustainability  
Fairness and Development

As a member of the Middle School Student Council, Maya had been tasked with planning assemblies. After several sessions, she realized "the entire meeting was almost entirely transactional, with no creative elements and no student voices." She also knew many students wanted to speak but lacked both a platform and a topic.

"They wanted to give speeches, but they didn't have the right place or theme," she added.

That sparked an idea: assemblies could be redesigned, cutting back routine announcements and giving the stage to students. "I wanted to plan a series of keynote speeches and invite different students to share and discuss," Maya said. But what should they talk about? And how could the experience be both academic and engaging?

Maya took her time refining the project. Drawing from her reflections, she outlined the MYP Global Concepts that every middle schooler should grasp: Identity and Relationships, Orientation of Time and Space, Personal and Cultural Expression, Scientific and Technical Innovation, Globalization and Sustainability, and Fairness and Development.

Who am I? Who are we?  
What is the meaning of 'where' and 'when'?  
What is the nature and purpose of creative expression?  
How do we understand the worlds in which we live?  
How is everything connected?  
What are the consequences of our common humanity?

On paper, these concepts were clear. But Maya worried they were often reduced to checkboxes for grades rather than honest exploration.

"That feels unnatural and unfortunate," she said. "I wondered if presentations could revolve around these themes in ways that students actually enjoy. Wouldn't that make learning more engaging?"

With support from her teachers, Maya launched Keystone Talk. A new platform for student voices was born. But it wasn't the only one.

In June, tenth grader Richard Deng was captivated by a speech at the recent #TEDxKeystoneAcademyBJ, themed "Left in the Dark". Unlike watching a video, hearing a peer speak live moved him in ways he hadn't expected.

When the organizer, eleventh grader Bella Zhao, announced that she could no longer continue the event as she entered her final year, Richard hesitated. He was

new to Keystone, with no event-planning experience. But eventually, he wrote an email applying to take over.

"There must be so many excellent speakers in the Keystone community," he thought. "It would be a shame to lose this platform."

Unlike Keystone Talk, hosting a speech under the TEDx brand required an official license. With only one semester to prepare, Richard faced the challenge head-on and successfully secured the permit. He then recruited classmates, including three with prior experience organizing TEDx events, and launched a new KAP activity to plan the event.

At their second meeting, while discussing possible themes, one student suddenly asked: "What's the point?" The room fell silent, then broke into laughter. The question struck them as simple yet intuitive and profound, exactly the kind of theme they were seeking.

For co-organizer Muyi Dong, a tenth grader skilled

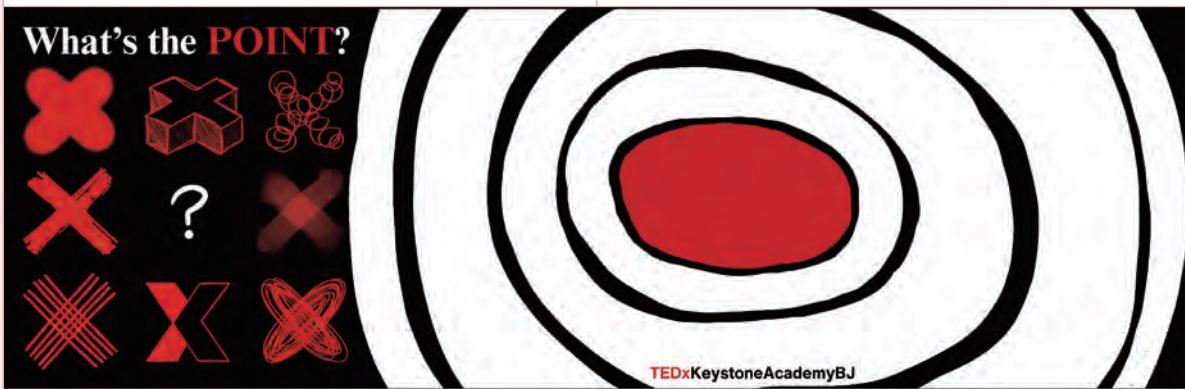


fig.1

in design, the theme was both visually and intellectually compelling. She created posters featuring eight Xs and a question mark, a nod to the team's size. Reactions were diverse: some saw a fingerprint, others a whirlpool.

"Everyone has different interpretations, which is great," she said. "Ideas change everything."

Whether planning content or visual design, Muyi often recalls the philosophy coined by TED founder Richard Saul Wells. Although she feels more comfortable in design than in public speaking, Muyi highly regards having a voice, particularly an equal voice for everyone.



At their second meeting, while discussing possible themes, one student suddenly asked: "What's the point?" The room fell silent, then broke into laughter. The question struck them as simple yet intuitive and profound, exactly the kind of theme they were seeking.

## Academic Topic or Personal Experience?

When Keystone junior Max Lan first applied as a TEDx speaker, he considered big themes like artificial intelligence or history. Never did he imagine he'd come to the Performing Arts Center stage to speak about running—why he started, the setbacks he faced, and the meaning it has brought him.

"Running isn't about escaping, but about confronting," Max said, who completed his first half-marathon at 16. "It awakens a spirit that never loses its way, stays humble, and always has a purpose."

His talk, titled "Why I Run", was more of a "deconstruction of grand narratives" as much as it was a way to respond to the nihilism he saw around him, and to show how a personal passion can hold wider meaning.

The organizers valued this approach. Out of 18 applications, they selected ten speakers, prioritizing authenticity, emotional resonance, and a strong sense of purpose over academic weight. "Some overly grand

fig.2 ↵

and abstract topics were not chosen because they went far beyond the speakers' life experiences," Richard explained.

Authenticity was key. "When Arika Jiao talked about her frustration and determination during the college application process, you could tell she really wanted to express herself," Muyi recalled. "That sense of honesty is what TEDx is about."

Though time was short, the team worked closely with speakers, offering feedback while respecting each voice. "The charm of TEDx lies in the uniqueness of every speaker," Richard said.

fig.3

## "I Hope You Come Because..."

For Maya, securing speakers for Keystone Talk proved to be more challenging. She personally wrote invitations to students she believed had ideas but were hesitant to speak. Each letter was sincere and specific: "I think you are well-suited to speak on this topic because..."

To help them understand Keystone Talk, Maya created a website to promote the project. Her efforts worked. Six students spoke at the first event, sharing their perspectives on globalization. Despite it, she realized that hard work wasn't enough, and that an organizer's creativity and energy were limited.

The success of the first talk, along with her reflections, encouraged Maya to expand the project, transforming Keystone Talk into a KAP activity.



However, reality dealt her a blow: "Only a few of my friends wanted to sign up."

Faced with this situation, Maya once again opted for a targeted invitation, reaching out to middle schoolers she'd wanted to invite and sending them topic outlines and open roles and responsibilities.

"I messaged them through WeChat and email, and many students responded!"

When asked about how many letters she sent, Maya kept mum but smiled. Instead, she was proud to share that the Keystone Talk KAP team had grown to 25 members by the summer of 2024.

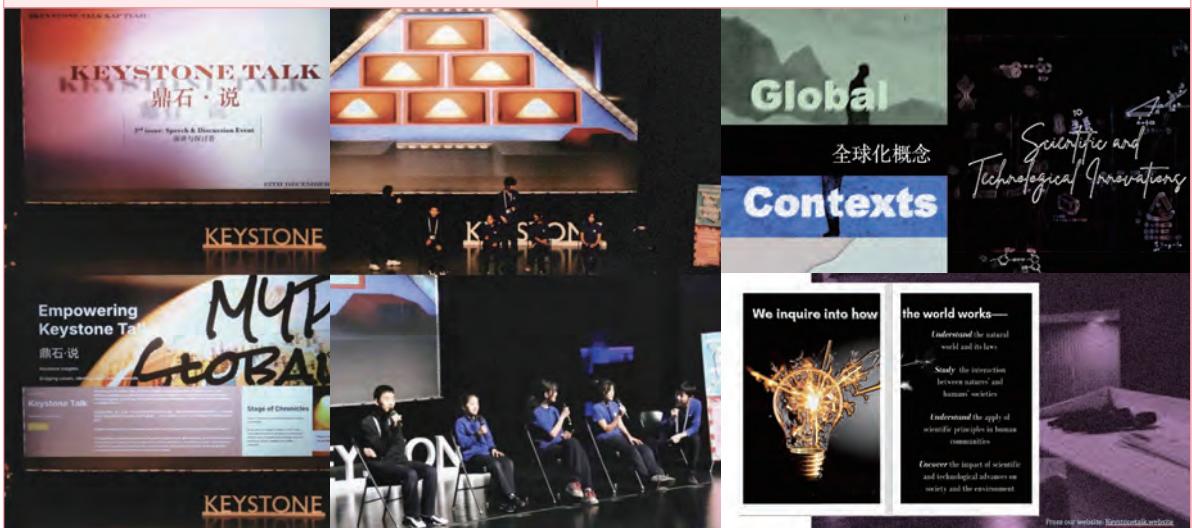


fig.4



What began as a formal project soon evolved into playful experimentation. Members suggested adding crosstalk comedy, games, or even mini-dramas to assemblies.

At first, Maya hesitated as she'd preferred a more academic tone. She also initially assigned the members to different work groups based on their interests and strengths. Eventually, she let them try: "They constantly surprise me, and I find my passion for this growing."

To her surprise, these were the most engaging sessions, full of laughter, applause, and eager participation. These genuine connections that transcend grade levels have made their KAP a meaningful learning community. Their teacher-mentors also noticed these changes.

Maya's definition of success shifted. It was no longer about polished flow or efficiency but about whether students learned, enjoyed, and resonated.

"Joy is more important than anything else," she said. "Their creativity taught me that learning doesn't have to be formal. Joy and reflection can happen at the same time. It was their insights that brought these concepts to life."



# Every Voice Deserves to Be Heard

It was the premiere of #TEDxKeystoneAcademyBJ in June, and in three minutes, the stage curtains would open. The Performing Arts Center was nearly silent, and yet, the only thing Richard Deng could hear backstage was the sound of his own thoughts.

Would the audience appreciate the theme, "What's the Point?" Regardless, he and the other speakers had already prepared an answer. Even the shyest speaker, William from Grade 8, was energized to step into the spotlight.

And then the speeches happened.

Flaws in planning and execution no longer seemed important. What mattered was the courage to speak. "Every voice deserves to be heard," Muyi said in retrospect.

At the same time, Maya began preparing for a transition. From the start, she had hoped Keystone Talk would outlast her. She has since invited younger students to take leadership roles, ensuring continuity as the project grows.

fig.5 ←  
fig.6 ↓  
fig.7 ↘

"Their creativity taught me that learning doesn't have to be formal. Joy and reflection can happen at the same time. It was their insights that brought these concepts to life."

"It's become a tradition at middle school assemblies," she said, smiling. "But maybe one day, it will appear in high school assemblies too. For example, we could discuss what it would be like if procrastination were an IB course."

Keystone has always encouraged students to initiate projects and experiment. Since November 2017, when the first student-led TEDx event featured a maze-inspired stage design for the theme, "Off the Beaten Path", generations of students have built platforms for expression, curiosity, and creativity.

Whether through speeches, performances, or research, Keystone students continue to explore, question, and imagine. They are not bound by method or scale but by the belief that sincere expression can connect and inspire communities.

They speak and listen. They listen and speak. And in this, perhaps, lies the meaning of education.



fig.1 — Muyi Dong designed a series of posters, themed T - shirts, and canvas bags for #TEDxKeystoneAcademyBJ 2025

fig.2 — Muyi Dong is the student co - coordinator for TEDxKeystoneAcademy BJ 2025

fig.3 — Maya Ma is one of the founders of the Keystone Talk KAP

fig.4 — The third Keystone Talk on December 12, 2024 highlighted the MYP Global Contexts

fig.5 — Richard Deng is the student leader for TEDxKeystoneAcademy BJ 2025

fig.6 — Max Lan was among the student speakers at #TEDxKeystoneAcademyBJ 2025

fig.7 — The #TEDxKeystone Academy BJ 2025 executive team and speakers involved a group of 25 students and teachers



CHAPTER 3

## How KAP service learning clubs bridge barriers



Story by  
Zaiqi Yu

# Friendships Formed Across Differences

Edited by  
Andy Peñafuerte III

"Congratulations, Teacher Guo,  
on being admitted to Tsinghua University!"  
"I wish you all the best!"  
"Happy graduation!"

In the Keystone Gansu Online Teaching Program KAP classroom, shy but eager voices echoed across the screen. Instead of their regular English lessons, the children organized a small farewell party for the older students who had accompanied them for four years.

The Keystone Gansu Teaching Program began in March 2021. That summer, the first group of student volunteers traveled with their mentors to the mountains of Gansu, spending two weeks with students at a local central elementary school. When they returned to Beijing, the Keystone students created "Cloud Top" program to support the children through charity sales and concerts. They also continued teaching English online through KAP.

To spark curiosity and promote exploration, the student volunteers designed English lessons that went beyond the compulsory curriculum. Over time, they added science classes and weekend workshops, guided by the children's growing interests in biology, physics, and other subjects.

Gradually, weekly classes became year-round memories. At the farewell ceremony, Keystone senior Sam Li reflected: "Spending time with you each week is the most beautiful memory of my high school years."

At Keystone, students who participate in service learning often share a similar feeling. Independently or with their mentors, they learn to care for others, identify needs, and build connections. They not only sustain projects but also push beyond established frameworks, experimenting, innovating, and redefining what service can mean.

# Perceiving the World with Your Hands

*"In the first semester of tenth grade, we had a soccer game for the visually impaired. The blindfolded players were much better than we were. I eventually gave up, sat on the lawn, and talked with an elderly blind man. He told me his stories, and I told him mine. Mine felt so much more boring than his."*

*I still remember—it was getting dark, so I described what the sky looked like and what colors I saw. We talked from dusk until night."*

Two years later, recent graduate Cyan Xing still recalled that afternoon vividly: "I realized we can use what we've learned to create beautiful memories for others."

Over the past four years, Cyan and her fellow KAP clubmates from different grades, supported by Keystone teachers and mentors from the Hongdandan Visual Impairment Cultural Center in Beijing, have built lasting connections with visually impaired friends. Their projects expanded from film storytelling with Xinmu Cinema to recording audiobooks, hosting the Journey to Light Charity Concert, making Braille bookmarks, and organizing sports events. Step by step, they formed valuable friendships.

Last September, Cyan, who entered her senior year, brought an unfinished sculpture from her art class to KAP. That small gesture inspired an idea: the Seeing by Touch exhibition, inviting visually impaired guests to experience visual art through touch.

To enrich the experience, students prepared relief sculptures, fabrics of varied textures, and models of rockets and lunar probes to bring news events to life. Cyan chose marine life models—whales, dolphins, sea urchins—because, she explained, "compared to land animals, sea creatures are more abstract to people who have lost their sight."

She remembers the delight when participants felt the soft spines of a sea urchin or imagined the size of a whale. "Their questions were so basic, things any biology student could answer," she said. But their "innocent curiosity" made her realize how much is missing from their education—not just biology, but the chance to experience things beyond immediate needs.

"Due to their limited vision, the current system makes travel very expensive for them," Cyan shared.



fig.1



"They struggle to participate in public life, more so, to enjoy a safe and appropriate environment."

For many students, the exhibition revealed that what matters most to visually impaired people is not only material support, but also access to experiences that satisfy curiosity and imagination.

## Welcome to "Parallel World"

*"Welcome to Parallel World | Pride and Prejudice. This is a performance designed for the visually impaired. You may close your eyes and enter a world built entirely from sound, music, and dialogue."*

With these words from junior student Angel Hua, Jane Austen's classic love story was brought to life at Keystone in a new way. The project, directed by Angel and co-led by tenth grader Crimson Liang, broke away from traditional stage formats, creating a performance built around "multiple auditory experiences."

Angel, who has long combined her passion for drama with service learning, reimagined the novel through the voice of an elderly Elizabeth Bennet. Her script idea came during the late spring holiday as she was on a bus trip to Henan.

"I wanted to use Elizabeth's voice to describe the scenes and emotions of those years naturally," Angel added. This style allowed visually impaired audiences and other viewers to follow along without losing the flow of the drama.

Five key moments were staged: the ball, Jane's illness, the argument in the rain, Bingley's proposal, and Darcy's second proposal. The students emphasized the liveliness of theater, using footsteps, high-fives, and the rustling of skirts to create atmosphere. Guided by Hongdandan teacher Jiang Bo, they learned to go beyond literal narration: to describe scenes poetically, "like a group of swans dancing gracefully on water."

Meanwhile, Crimson led the music team in composing three original pieces: the opening and closing themes, and the score for Darcy reading a letter. She used their preliminary research findings to design scores that match the heightened sensitivity to melody among visually impaired audiences.

The result was a two-hour performance that blended drama, music, narration, and discussion. For the visually impaired guests, it was an immersive and unforgettable artistic experience, with one expressing gratitude through a voice message: "This is the first time I've understood *Pride and Prejudice*. Thank you for allowing us to enjoy art."

fig.2 ←

fig.3 ←

fig.4 ↓



For others in the audience, it was a chance to enter a "parallel world" and glimpse how their visually impaired friends perceive art.

For Angel, the feedback was deeply moving. "I knew some of them traveled three hours to get here. I just wanted them to feel it was worth it."

## The Courage to Bridge Barriers

To their instructor, Director of Libraries Kacy Song, the "Parallel World" project was more than a performance; it was a meaningful experiment. Throughout the process, she guided students with questions: "Why this story? Are there too many dramatic elements? Is there enough space for dialogue with the visually impaired?"

Her approach encouraged constant reflection on the deeper purpose of service learning. With her support, the project received funding from the IB Global Youth Action Fund (GYAF), ensuring it could be staged at the scale the students envisioned.

Ms. Song found out about the funding application shortly before the deadline. So, for her, getting the grant was unexpected, although she felt it was bound to happen, "because what they are doing is exactly what this fund aims to support."

Perhaps many beautiful things in the world grow in this way: slowly, steadily, through encounters that may seem small at first.

Perhaps many beautiful things in the world grow in this way: slowly, steadily, through encounters that may seem small at first. Each class, each project, each performance is a chance to meet another community—one that may be overlooked, or seen but never truly understood—and to write new stories together.

Whether through the Seeing by Touch exhibition or "Parallel World", the students chose not the easy path of surface-level attention, but the harder, braver path of genuine connection. Their work was less about "innovation" than about sincerity—friendship offered naturally, without expectation.

And in this friendship, formed across differences, lies a deeper lesson: the courage to bridge barriers, the humility to listen, and the imagination to create new ways of seeing.

fig.1 — These elementary students from a Gansu school offer their graduation wishes

fig.2, 3 — At the Seeing by Touch exhibition, Keystone students accompanied visitors with low vision to touch and feel the items on display

fig.4 — The theater performance of Parallel Worlds | Pride and Prejudice



CHAPTER 4

From robotics to racing and medicine,  
Keystone's student-led STEM clubs are building more than  
machines—they're building futures.



# Future By Design

Story by  
Muen Zheng

Edited by  
Andy Peñafuerte III

# The Basement as a Robotics "Base"

In the basement of the Secondary School academic building, there is a classroom that doubles as a robotics "base". Once classes end, students like William Dai, Ted Zhang, Derek Han, and Isabella Wang gather there.

It was in this very room, back in ninth grade, that they built their first robot. Today, William and Ted are fixtures in the space, often staying two or three hours after school. During competition season, the team spends more than 40 hours a week in their workshop.

In March 2025, William, Ted, Derek, Isabella, Henry Ma, and Alice Zhao (all G10), Clem Long (G11), and William Hu (G9) traveled to Shanghai with their robots to compete in the 2025 FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) Shanghai International Regional. They competed against 43 teams and nearly a thousand young contestants from China, the United States, Australia, and other countries.

For William and his teammates, this was already their third FRC in just two years—the first was in Sydney, the second in Beijing. Looking back, their journey began with little more than curiosity and determination. To build their first robot, they taught themselves

mechanical engineering concepts usually reserved for university students. They learned programming, pored over online resources, and debated endlessly about the best robot design. William even spent months developing the programming framework for their first chassis.

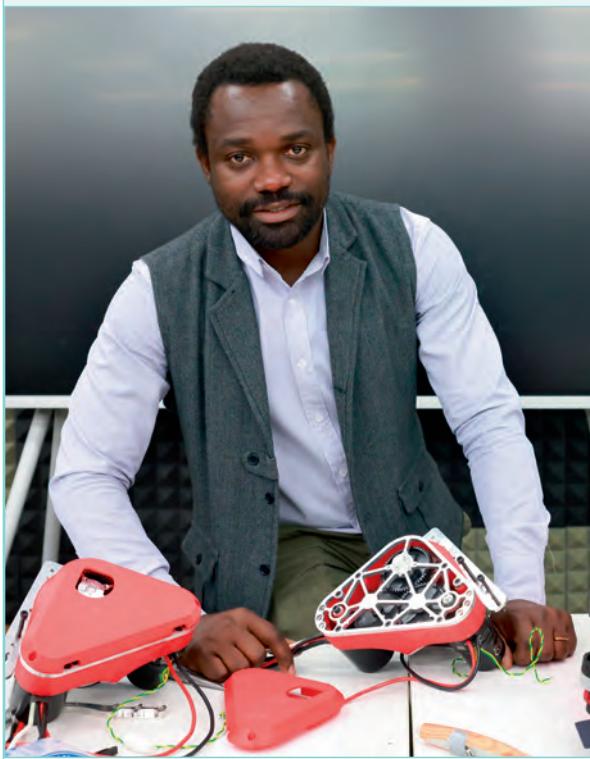
The process was grueling, challenging, frustrating, and at times discouraging. Yet the moment their first robot came to life, they knew they wanted to keep building together.

In 2023, a group of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) enthusiasts at Keystone founded the Forté 10558 FRC Robotics KAP. Every Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, members gather in the school to design, code, and assemble their robots, proudly representing Keystone on the FRC stage.

» **The FIRST Robotics Competition**, organized by the nonprofit FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology), is one of the world's most prestigious robotics events for high school students. With a history spanning more than 30 years, the FRC challenges teams to design and build robots to complete specific tasks, competing head-to-head in a dynamic and high-pressure environment.



fig.1



The robot-building process feels almost magical. Once the mechanical team finalizes a 3D model, the outlines of a chassis, lifting arm, gripping mechanism, and sensor layout begin to take shape on the screen. The team then virtually assembles the robot, running preliminary simulations and checking for conflicts. That digital vision soon becomes reality as students fire up the classroom's tools—3D printers, laser cutters, lathes, and milling machines—to produce parts, which they then carefully wire and assemble.

It is a process of constant trial and error. Some parts fail quality checks and must be refined; circuits glitch; sensors misalign. But once the programming team takes over, writing the code that gives the robot its "soul," the long hours and frustrations feel worthwhile. From start to finish, each robot takes nearly two months to complete. And while the competitions matter, the students say the real reward lies in the creative process itself.

"Our team is made up of students who are passionate about STEM," William said. "Several of us are in the classroom almost every day, running experiments and building machines. We also collaborate on small projects and learn from exchanges with other teams. That's what helps us keep growing."

So far, the Keystone team has built three robots. Compared with many established FRC teams, they are still newcomers. But in just two years, members say they have made tremendous strides not only in



technical skills but also in resilience, problem-solving, and teamwork.

For their mentor, Jacob Kouassy, watching this growth has been rewarding. The students' presence in his classroom has become routine, even outside the FRC season.

"Through this student-led project, the team continues to develop exploration, innovation, and teamwork skills, while also expanding their inclusiveness and impact," Mr. Kouassy said. "They are fully committed, and I've seen their sense of responsibility grow alongside their engineering, project management, and team-building abilities."

Perhaps most importantly, they have established Keystone's first official school team to compete at the FRC level. The seeds of innovation they planted are already taking root, ensuring that robotics at Keystone will continue to grow in the years to come.

**"They are fully committed, and I've seen their sense of responsibility grow alongside their engineering, project management, and team-building abilities."**

fig. 2 ↵



↑ fig.3

## STEM-Powered Students

The hum of machinery in the robotics base is just one sound in Keystone's thriving world of STEM. While the FRC team spends long afternoons in the workshop, other students are leading their peers into equally fascinating fields of science and engineering—sometimes with nothing more than a whiteboard marker in hand.

"Electric potential... concentration," Kevin Zheng explained, standing at the podium and sketching diagrams across the whiteboard.

In the rows of desks before him, classmates leaned



fig.4



forward, listening as his lively metaphors turned complex ideas into moments of sudden clarity.

This was a session of the Advanced University Medical Knowledge KAP, co-led by tenth-graders Kevin and Howard Zhang, who together guide students into the "mysterious" world of medicine.

On Monday afternoons, for example, the F1 Racing Technology Club transforms the design classroom into a pit lane. Guided by tenth-grader Leo Jiang, students study the principles of a four-stroke engine, explore aerodynamics, and even 3D print a V6 engine model for assembly. In another corner of the school, the Engineering Club, led by tenth-graders Claire Yan and Isabella Wang, introduces middle schoolers to programming and robot assembly, sparking an early love of engineering in younger students.

This is the learning culture Keystone has built beyond its classrooms: a place where curiosity travels freely across grades, and where older students share knowledge and inspiration with younger ones.

For Kevin, medicine has been a calling since Grade 6, when he first taught himself biology and chemistry. His collaboration with Howard in Grade 10 brought that passion to life through the creation of their medical KAP. Yet Kevin says his goal is not only to teach information, but to pass on a way of thinking.

"Studying biology is learning a way of thinking," he explained. "Life exists in a dynamic balance, and a single cause doesn't always lead to a single result. Medicine is the same: you analyze underlying symptoms through surface observations. Diagnosis requires considering multiple possibilities, not jumping to conclusions. This process of analysis and association is what I call clinical thinking."

Hearing such reflections, it's easy to forget Kevin is only in Grade 10. Yet what makes his leadership even more remarkable is his commitment to sharing these ideas with others.

Keystone's student-led KAPs reflect this spirit of exploration. Whether it's racing engines, building



robots, or simulating medical practice, students set ambitious goals for themselves and others, always pushing further.

Looking ahead, the leaders already see ways to expand. Leo hopes to bring more hands-on learning into the Racing Club. Kevin plans to expand the Medical Knowledge KAP into a larger club, featuring lectures and health awareness campaigns. William envisions the Robotics Club opening its doors to the wider community, demonstrating how STEM can be exciting and approachable.

At Keystone, these young innovators are not just consuming knowledge; they are creating new pathways for others to follow—proof that the journey of discovery is most powerful when shared.

## Powered by Support

For the robotics team, ideas don't stay sketches on a screen for long. After 3D modeling and virtual assembly, the FRC members move into production—using the school's array of 3D printers, laser cutters, lathes, and milling machines. And in the new semester, Keystone will add machines for processing complex metal parts, allowing the team to manufacture almost every component of their robots on campus.

These facilities are not limited to robotics. Across campus, students work in a digital learning center, multimedia rooms, science labs, and design studios. For anyone eager to explore STEM, the resources are abundant and within reach.

That reach will soon extend even further. Keystone has launched the Transdisciplinary Studies in Engineering Technology (TSET), a new program with leaders Taryn Loveman, Assistant Head of School for

Teaching and Learning and Chris Hansen, Dean of Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) – Emergent Technology & Engineering. With experience building interdisciplinary engineering and technology programs at Harvard University and MIT, Mr. Hansen brings fresh energy and vision to Keystone's STEM initiatives.

**TSET Is All Set! »** TSET engages project-based learning, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and practical exploration across engineering, design, art, and the humanities. Through TSET and with guidance of expert teacher-coaches, students apply emerging technologies to address real-world challenges. Primary School (PS) students will also have dedicated EET courses, where they can engage in deeper, more focused exploration of science, technology, and engineering under expert mentorship.

fig.5

For students, the experience is remarkable. William recalls a moment when his father said, "I'm actually a little jealous! If I'd had these facilities in middle school, I would have slept in the lab."

fig.6



But resources at Keystone go beyond machines and space. Teachers provide not only expertise but also emotional support, investing extra time to create a safe and encouraging environment. As William reflected:

*I've always felt that Keystone provides some of the best learning resources in the country. But it wasn't until I began experimenting, conducting research, and writing papers that I realized how far it goes. It's far beyond my imagination! I've read that university professors often need to apply for funding and permissions before starting experiments. At Keystone, all we need is an idea—and suddenly we have over 800 square meters of space. That contrast makes it clear: if a student here has curiosity and perseverance, the school will help turn ideas into reality.*

This culture of support fuels not only innovation but also continuity. As the FRC's core members transition into the Diploma Programme, they are preparing younger students to inherit the team. In KAP sessions, William and Ted guide newcomers through essential skills, ensuring the next generation is ready for larger challenges.



The team, whose core members have already entered the Diploma Programme (DP) phase in high school, is also documenting its journey for posterity. They have borrowed video equipment from the Digital and Innovative Learning Department to record their robot-building process—planning a library of 50 to 60 videos to upload to their video channel. Meanwhile, Ted has authored a technical manual detailing the robot's structure, materials, and design choices—resources that will guide future FRC members.

That sense of legacy runs deep. Clem Long, one of the founders of Keystone's FRC KAP, will graduate this year. William and Ted grew under his mentorship, and now they are passing the baton in turn. The spirit of nurturing successors—mentoring while creating—is part of Keystone's DNA. It is what ensures that innovation will not only flourish here today but continue to thrive tomorrow.

During the 2024 FRC season, as the Keystone robotics team built their practice court, Derek Han and William Hu carved their heights onto a wooden plank. A year later, when the team rebuilt the court for the new season and brought out that same plank, the two students stood beside it once again. Both had grown noticeably taller.

The moment drew quiet smiles from everyone. For Ted, it captured something deeper than a playful tradition.

"That little height mark not only records their physical growth," he said, eyes bright. "It also becomes a reminder of how much we've all grown together—as a team, and as individuals. On this journey of chasing our robotics dreams, we've been learning, building, and improving side by side."

It was a simple wooden plank, yet it told the story of Keystone's robotics team: a story of persistence, mentorship, and discovery. And just like the lines etched year after year, their progress will continue to rise.

fig.1 — William Dai is debugging the robot chassis

fig.2 — Design Technology teacher Jacob Kouassy is one of the instructor-advisors of the Keystone FRC Robotics Club

fig.3 — In the Advanced University Medical Knowledge KAP club, Kevin Zheng leads sessions to share lessons or information that students had not yet encountered

fig.4 — The F1 Racing Club is co-led by Leo Jiang and Justin Yin (both from the Keystone Class of 2027)

fig.5, 6 — In the Engineering KAP club, students learn programming and practice assembling robots

CHAPTER 5

At Keystone, the "lions" revive tradition with a modern beat



Story by  
Muen Zheng

Edited by  
Andy Peñafuerte III

# Hear Us Roar

# Walking the Lion's Steps

It was just another lunchtime in May, until two small lions burst into the Keystone Secondary School cafeteria. One was yellow, the other red. Covered in long fur with round blinking eyes, they pranced to the rhythm of the global hit song, "Gangnam Style". Instead of the traditional beat of gongs and drums, the playful remix set the room alight. Students and teachers put down their chopsticks, and even the kitchen staff paused to watch.

Suddenly, both lions planted their tails into a deep horse stance and lifted their heads high. The cafeteria erupted in applause.

This flash mob was the work of five students from the Keystone Lion Dance KAP, performing during Arts Week 2025.

Lion dance at Keystone began in 2019 when then Chinese Civilization and History teacher Li La first organized a student team. The "secret troupe" became a crowd favorite, opening cultural festivals, temple fairs, and year-end celebrations with their spirited performances.

As one of China's earliest national intangible cultural heritages, lion dance weaves together martial arts, dance, embroidery, painting, and music. The feline the dance represents has long symbolized

strength, courage, and vitality. Each lion dance performance is steeped in tradition while demanding athletic discipline.

At Keystone, no matter the occasion, a lion dance consistently earns a collective "wow".

By 2022, martial arts teacher Niu Ben had joined as a technical coach. Though practices were rare, mostly squeezed in before festivals or holidays, the troupe's dazzling shows never failed to impress. Yet, with students' schedules packed, the team's lineup kept changing, making it difficult to sustain momentum.

"Why not form a dedicated KAP?" Mr. Niu thought, because that way, membership could stabilize, and students would have the chance to learn the art systematically. When he shared the idea, ninth-grader Milanda Zheng's eyes lit up.

## The Art of Coordination

Milanda first joined Ms. Li's lion dance group in Grade 8. Now, she grows with the team and has become one of its driving forces. She performed with the troupe in the "Gangnam" lion dance flash mob, an idea that sprang from her proposal to integrate modern music with traditional dance.



fig.1

That choice was no accident; she once saw a video where children ignored a traditional lion dance—until the soundtrack switched to the massive K-pop track. Suddenly, the crowd lit up. It made her wonder: how could they help more young people appreciate this heritage? Her answer was to blend modern rhythms with classical movements, making the tradition accessible without losing its roots.

Partnering with lion guide Milanda and Amy Hong applied for and established Keystone's first official Lion Dance KAP.

The group now trains weekly under Mr. Niu's guidance. The first lion has Milanda playing the head role and Daniel Yang covering the tail. Meanwhile, sixth grader Malika Kambarova and seventh grader Tina Zhu partner in the second lion as its head and tail respectively. Amy, wielding a hydrangea, leads the lions with agility and martial flair. Their training as former members of the Keystone Wushu during their Primary School years proved handy as the dancers quickly grasped the demanding athletic moves taught by Mr. Niu.

Malika, who joined Keystone in preschool, had once stunned the community when she mimicked lion movements as a fourth grader at a temple fair. "She used to learn from videos on her own," Mr. Niu said of the Kazakh student. "Her movements were surprisingly good, but she lacked the fundamentals. I invited her to join, and she happily signed up."

For Malika, lion dancing is incredibly cool: "Its rich historical heritage captivated and made me want to be part of it. I love every aspect of lion dancing, especially the teamwork and trust it requires with a partner."

The team performs the Southern style of lion dance, known for its delicate, expressive movements. In KAP sessions, students begin with history and cultural con-

text before drilling into martial arts-based stances—horse, Qilin, low, middle, and high—each requiring discipline and precision.

"When students master the structure and practice the details," Mr. Niu said, "the lion's spirit truly comes alive."

Milanda recalled long hours of honing their lifting technique: "At first, I could only stay balanced for a second before falling. By the fourth class, I could hold for several seconds—and even spin while standing on the tail lion's hips."

Still, mistakes happen. During a flash mob, Milanda slipped mid-lift. Quick thinking saved the moment: the pair turned the stumble into a playful skit that had the crowd cheering. By lunchtime, they had corrected the technique and nailed the lift to "Gangnam Style" without a hitch.

**Lion's Moves** » Lion dance is always performed in pairs. The head conveys spirit and expression, blinking and bowing, while the tail anchors balance and power. The two must move as one.

Milanda, as head, explains: "I need to keep the lion's energy alive through arm positioning, while also controlling its expressions—like making it blink or open its mouth."

Meanwhile, the tail's role demands strength and invisibility. Hidden under the fabric, the tail supports the head during acrobatics and lifts. One misstep can topple both dancers.

**Power in Every Bend** » Together, waist and knee bends embody the Chinese philosophy of balance—flexibility and strength in harmony. The lion is "still fresh, swift as a rabbit": poised in stillness, explosive in motion.

**Waist bends:** In lion dance, waist bends aren't just leaning over. Dancers use the "sinking waist, sitting horse stance" to engage core strength, keeping the back straight like a bow and the center of gravity at the *dāntián*, or the body's "energy center" close to the diaphragm. This allows the lion's head to sway with rhythmic force—soft yet strong—mimicking the animal's patrol and sniffing movements while building momentum for leaps.

**Knee bends:** Footwork depends on two bends: the deep "low-stance" squat for stability, and the lighter "walking" bend that bounces to the beat of gongs and drums. Both require feet firmly gripping the ground, projecting either the lion's alertness or its playful spirit.



fig.2 ←

**Did you know? The differences between "Northern" and "Southern" lions »** The Northern and Southern lion dances not only differ significantly in footwork and performance but also in appearance. Northern lions are majestic and strapping, while Southern lions are delicate and agile.

## More Than Lions

Though student-led, the Lion Dance KAP has thrived thanks to Mr. Niu's behind-the-scenes guidance. "We thought he would just give us a few technical tips," Milanda admitted. "Instead, he stayed every week, teaching us harder moves, bringing resources, and even promising to learn plum blossom pole skills this summer to pass on to us."

Mr. Niu added a lion-leader role—uncommon in Southern lion dance—to give students more opportunities. With a hydrangea ball and martial arts moves, the leader commands the lions while captivating the audience.



fig.3



fig.4

Beyond skills, Mr. Niu reminds students that lion dance carries a deep heritage and etiquette. To dance a lion is not to memorize routines but to embody respect: you cannot grab the lion's horns as it is disrespectful to Southern lion culture, and that a lion dance begins and ends with a traditional bow. In essence, everything about lion dance becomes more than just knowledge: it engenders a deep connection between the dancer and the art. "Because I love lion dance, I want to participate," he says. "Because I participate, I can truly feel its history and traditions. That is how the dance lives on."

As Milanda enters her senior year at Keystone, she hopes to take the lion dance with her into college. "I want to keep sharing this tradition, help more people experience it, and let the world see how amazing it is."

This kind of passion spreads. Before moving to Australia, former member Lucy Liu gifted Keystone her beloved pink lion cape. Even abroad, she kept practicing and stayed in touch, eager to share updates about lion dance.

Keystone's cultural atmosphere encourages this kind of connection. From martial arts and visual arts to calligraphy and Chinese music, students immerse themselves in traditions that grow into personal passions. International students also experience Chinese culture through immersive learning. At Keystone, not only Chinese students, but also international students become ambassadors of Chinese culture.

The success of Lion Dance KAP has already inspired a Dragon Dance KAP, launching this school year. Mr. Niu remembers the sight of four dragon teams—two teacher groups, a student team, and an international elementary team—performing together at a temple fair. "It was the largest dragon dance we've ever had at Keystone," he recalled, eyes shining.

During Arts Week, the student troupe even unveiled a luminous dragon. As the lights dimmed in the Performing Arts Center, the glowing dragon surged across the stage like lightning, leaving the audience breathless.

fig.1 — On the Keystone Performing Arts Center stage, students perform a dragon dance. The dragon has glow-in-the-dark decorations, making for a stunning display of artistry

fig.2 — Lion Dance KAP instructor Ben Niu also teaches wushu. He demonstrates how to perform the traditional dance while holding the lion's head

fig.3, 4 — Lion Dance KAP members practice different stances, which need agility and coordination

CHAPTER 6

Meet Keystone's Student Ambassadors  
who are redefining school stories



# Reconstructing Narratives

Story by  
Zaiqi Yu

Edited by  
Andy Peñafuerte III



After a year at Keystone, Sophia Wu began thinking about transferring schools.

She had grown up in an environment defined by long hours of study, cramming exercises, and endless papers. At Keystone, she found herself out of step with the community's more balanced rhythm. Her intensity clashed with the relaxed demeanor of her classmates, leaving her unsure if this was the right place to continue her studies.

Seeking clarity, Sophia turned to the first person she met at Keystone, admission counsellor Steven Liang.

"That conversation was incredibly inspiring," Sophia recalls. "I still remember him telling me that at Keystone, studying isn't the only thing—you should keep experimenting and developing soft skills beyond academics."

Mr. Liang then invited her to join the newly established Student Ambassadors KAP, hoping it would help her view the school and its academic programs from a new perspective. Just a month later, Sophia found herself standing in front of families in Dalian, introducing Keystone alongside the Dean of Admission and teachers.

At that event, the first of its kind for the club, Sophia had been given complete freedom to choose her topic. She spoke candidly about her year at Keystone, using her science and Chinese classes as examples, and compared its approach to that of public schools.

"At first, I thought I should carefully plan my words and answer questions cleverly," she said. "But I realized authenticity was enough. I just wanted to share my experience as a friend, offering a reference for families curious about Keystone."

For her, this became the essence of the Student Ambassador program: telling honest stories that reflect the school's spirit.

## All My Visions of School Come from Keystone

Unlike other KAPs, the Student Ambassadors' most meaningful work happens beyond classroom meetings. Over the past year, 15 members from Grade 8 to Grade 10 formed a close-knit group that accompanied admissions staff at four Middle School info sessions. They also co-hosted an online session with Head of High School Nick Daniel, which attracted more than 4,000 online visitors. Aside from these, the Student

**"She's in the same grade as me, so we'll be in class together," Kate reassured. "Now that she knows me, we can have meals together. I'll be her first friend at Keystone."**

Ambassadors have served as translators, panelists, and guides for hundreds of parents on tours and attended two school choice fairs in Beijing as student representatives.

Their club's impact has gone beyond collaboration and has also become practical and personal. "We didn't have a template," said tenth grader Sam Wang. "When we designed the campus tours, teachers showed us key spots, but each group chose their own route and way of speaking." Having transferred to Keystone in Grade 8, Sam uses his own experience of adjusting from day school to boarding life to address parents' concerns with candor.

He remembers his co-ambassador, then-eighth-grader Kate Yang, with whom he collaborated during an online question-and-answer session about prospective students and their families. A prospective student, who participated virtually, was shy to speak,

but then Kate simply asked: "What do you like?" That broke the ice. Sam appreciated Kate's action to bridge the virtual gap.

"She's in the same grade as me, so we'll be in class together," Kate reassured. "Now that she knows me, we can have meals together. I'll be her first friend at Keystone."

The warmth of that reply, Sam recalls, did more to convince families than any prepared answer.

## Creating Authentic Connections

For some Ambassadors, the role is a chance to reshape stereotypes. Tenth grader Jason Guo, along with his friend Richard Deng, developed a playful and witty "crosstalk" style on tours, earning them the moniker, "campus tour duo."

"We want parents to see that Keystone students aren't only academic," Richard said, adding that they hope to dispel the *xuébà* (academic overachiever) stereotype for Keystone students. "We hope they can focus on our school community and educational phi-

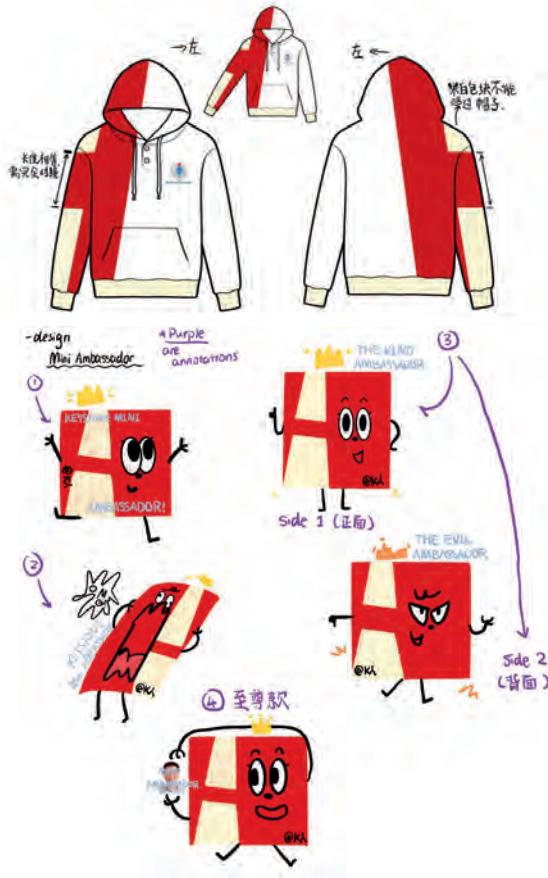


fig.1

Iosophy, rather than just academic performance or college admissions results."

The Ambassadors' initiatives have grown steadily. They filmed *A Day in the Life of a Keystone Student*, weaving through dorms, cafeterias, and classrooms from their point of view. They partnered with the Service Council to host orientation sessions for new students. Some are now drafting handbooks or refining designs for official KAP merchandise.

fig.2



Through these efforts, they are not simply repeating prepared lines. They are creating authentic connections—between students and families, between the school and the public, and within themselves.

## A Brooch with a Story

To represent Keystone, Ambassadors have learned to first understand it, then communicate it, and sometimes confront themselves along the way. Others view their volunteerism as deeply personal. "I've been at Keystone since the first grade," Sydney Zhang said.



fig.3



fig.4

"For me, the idea of 'school' is Keystone. All my visions of school come from here." Sharing Keystone, she explained, is like sharing herself.

Sydney remembers the graduation speech shared by Keystone senior Yolanda Wang (from the Class of 2024) on her WeChat Moments: "Keystone is like blood to me. I can't imagine what would happen if I lost it."

"That's how I feel about Keystone," Sydney continued. "Although I can't quite express my feelings drastically, I can translate them into more tangible ways and share them with more people, which has helped me develop my understanding of Keystone."

For today's Ambassadors, that sentiment continues in action, whether on a stage, in a tour group, or in an online chat.

So, if, in the new school year, you notice a student wearing an Ambassador brooch, stop and listen. Behind their badge lies not just a story of Keystone, but also of a student learning to tell their own.

fig.1 — Student ambassadors Kate Yang and Sophia Wu at a campus fair

fig.2 — Illustration of merchandise designed by Kate Yang for the Student Ambassadors KAP

fig.3 — Student ambassadors Owen Yang and Lucas Ma provide guidance to new Keystone families through the "Ask Me Anything" event

fig.4 — Some Student Ambassadors KAP members stand with Admission Office staff in front of the calligraphy of the five Keystone shared values

CHAPTER 7

In conversation with the Keystone students who  
reimagined a rebellious play into a Chinese musical



# The Walls We've Smashed Together

Story by  
Muen Zheng

Edited by  
Andy Peñafuerte III

In 2003, 17-year-old Zhang Chengyi (or Xiaoliu) was tired of living under limits. His father, Zhang Zhongli, a *qūyī* artist (traditional Chinese oral performing arts), insisted his son carry on the family legacy. The breaking point came with a forced closing performance. Xiaoliu and his friends staged their own act of defiance: on the very night of his father's show, they launched a rock concert of their own, swearing to "Smash the wall" together.

Two decades later, in April 2024, Keystone music teachers Jasmine Yang and Chau Tan took Rosie Yu, Joyce Zhang (both Grade 11), Kevin Zhang, Craig Zeng, and Arika Jiao (all Grade 10) to watch *Smash the Wall*, a play inspired by Xiaoliu's rebellion. Its themes—pursuing ideals, searching for identity, and breaking rules—struck a chord.

Rosie reached out to the original playwright, and with the support of Performing Arts Center Director De Anne Dubin, Keystone secured the rights. From there, the idea of staging their own version of *Smash the Wall* began to take shape. Two months after the original play, Rosie Yu, Joyce Zhang, and Amber Yuan established a new drama KAP under the guidance of Chinese teacher Wang Yang. The student leaders organized auditions and assembled a creative team, and then months of work—casting actors, preparing props, designing sets, and rehearsing scenes.

Their vision became real on April 17, 2025, when *Smash the Wall* premiered at the Keystone Performing Arts Center.

The play explores the metaphorical walls faced by both generations: Xiaoliu and his classmates, struggling against the strictures of youth, and Zhang Zhongli, determined to uphold tradition. But offstage, the 62 student cast and crew encountered their own "walls" in the long road to opening night.

"I can still remember the auditions," one student shared. "Posters everywhere, actor interviews, endorsement photos, recording my first demo on Logic Pro, Amber editing my sound, and constant team meetings—plan, talk, revise, talk again, revise again..."

Challenges piled up: rules barring musical accompaniment in auditions, rehearsal clashes with the English play *Dreamland*, cast members leaving for family reasons, sudden school closures from strong winds, and two major exams just days before the curtain went up.

In a WeChat post after the final performance, student directors Kevin Zhang and Angel Hua reflected on the turbulence that hit *Smash the Wall*: the setbacks, the frustrations, the near-derailments. Yet together, the students pushed through. Their persistence and creativity transformed difficulty into art, delivering a production that spoke of ideals, rebellion, courage, and uncertainty—the very spirit of youth.

"Theatrical performance is more important than anything else," says Zhang Zhongli in the play, a line about his devotion to opera. It became a quiet motto for the student company. With sincerity, professionalism, and raw energy, they created Keystone's first student-led Chinese musical—a milestone and a memory that will last.

In this cover story feature, we've invited some key creative voices behind *Smash the Wall* to talk about the process that brought the play to life and led us back to the cold, turbulent winter of 2003.



## In Conversation With: Creative Minds of *Smash the Wall*

### DIRECTORS

**Angel Hua** (Grade 11), **Kevin Zhang** (Grade 11)

### ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

**Liv Lü** (Grade 10)

### ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

**Rosie Yu** (Grade 12 at the time of production)

### STAGE MANAGERS

**Marta Chen** (Grade 11), **Zoe Fang** (Grade 10)

### PROPS

**Crimson Liang** (Grade 10)

### ACTORS

**Arika Jiao** (Grade 11) as Dalian

**Craig Zeng** (Grade 11) as Zhang Chengyi (Primary 6)

**Leo Zhang** (Grade 11) as Zhang Zhongli

**Lucas Wang** (Grade 9) as Fatty

*The following interview was translated from Chinese and has been edited for brevity and style.*

**The characters in the play live in a different era. In your freer, more open school environment, what wall do you want to break through?**

**Arika Jiao**

Although we live in an era different from *Smash the Wall*, the walls young people with dreams and a desire for adventure face are similar to theirs. For me, that wall is society's rigid template for "excellence" and "success." Even in an open environment, those standards still define which paths are seen as valuable and which are dismissed as "unrealistic". If you follow your passion without obvious rewards, people can easily label you as unmotivated or a failure. I want to break through that prejudice. No matter how small a dream may seem, if it brings happiness and comes from genuine passion, it deserves respect.

**Craig Zeng**

Every character in the play has a wall they're willing to hit with everything they have, without regret. At Keystone, though, we live with abundant resources. Our parents, teachers, and the school give us nearly everything we need. That can make it hard to know what direction to take. For me, the wall is finding my own path, or our "inner uniqueness" in a rapidly changing world and amid the vast sea of knowledge we take

in. In a place with so many options, you have to discover what makes you unique, and that's not easy.

**Compared to original student-written plays, working on *Smash the Wall* seemed more demanding. What challenges did you face, and how did you handle them?**

**Zoe Fang**

The biggest challenge was keeping the spirit of the original while innovating and making it our own. We had very few references for the stage design, so we couldn't replicate it exactly. Still, we wanted to preserve its "layering" style, and this method is an element that had not been used in previous Keystone plays. So, we were determined to create this "layering" style. For example, we hand-built and painted staircases instead of just printing designs on plastic boards. This took a lot of time but gave the set texture and depth. While perhaps not as neat or varied as in the original production, our replicas still blended seamlessly into the story and kept that sense of layering.

**Angel Hua**

We shaped everything in last year's Chinese play, *Zhù Dǐng*, from setting to dialogue and other minute details of each character's movement and expres-



fig.1

sions. With *Smash the Wall*, we couldn't change a single line because of the contract. That made rehearsals tricky. For instance, one actor might have a long monologue while another stood silently on stage. The actor asked me, "How should I act to avoid awkwardness?" I had to study the script and the characters carefully, imagine different stage movements, and test ideas until the scene flowed. Sometimes it took many failed attempts, but gradually we found solutions.

#### What scene or line left the deepest impression on you?

##### Leo Zhang

For me, it was the finale—when the father and son hold hands and bow together to sing "Father and Son". I cried during that scene on the first and third nights, and even on the closing night, when everything went smoothly, the emotions overwhelmed me. It even moved Craig, who played Zhang Chengyi.

##### Lucas Wang

I was struck by the song, "We All Know the Answer". Its lines "I want to bang my head against the wall again / I want to try again, / I want to wait and see if there's another possibility" and "Even if we all know the answer, / I wouldn't be willing to give up now" echo

the "what if" and the feeling of pushing forward even when success seems impossible.

My doubts about my passion for theater vanished after the play concluded. *Smash the Wall* confirmed my desire to continue acting. Some fellow theater enthusiasts share this same spirit. We only live once, so we must pursue what we love. Even if we fail, at least we tried. As the encore in *Smash the Wall* goes, "Even if I don't know where the end is / at least I'm on the road!"

##### Craig Zeng

Theater magnifies kindness and love. Everyone encourages one another, onstage and off. When I sang "Rock Music for Youth" alone on stage, I was incredibly nervous and afraid to forget or mis-sing the lyrics. But hearing the audience clap along reassured me.

I'll never forget another moment: when my voice cracked in the final show! It sounded like fireworks, and everyone still laughs about it.

#### Why do you love theater? What does it mean to you?

##### Kevin Zhang

Theater doesn't always have a clear purpose, but it compels you to give everything. For some reason, you just have to do it. The theater process is an

fig.2

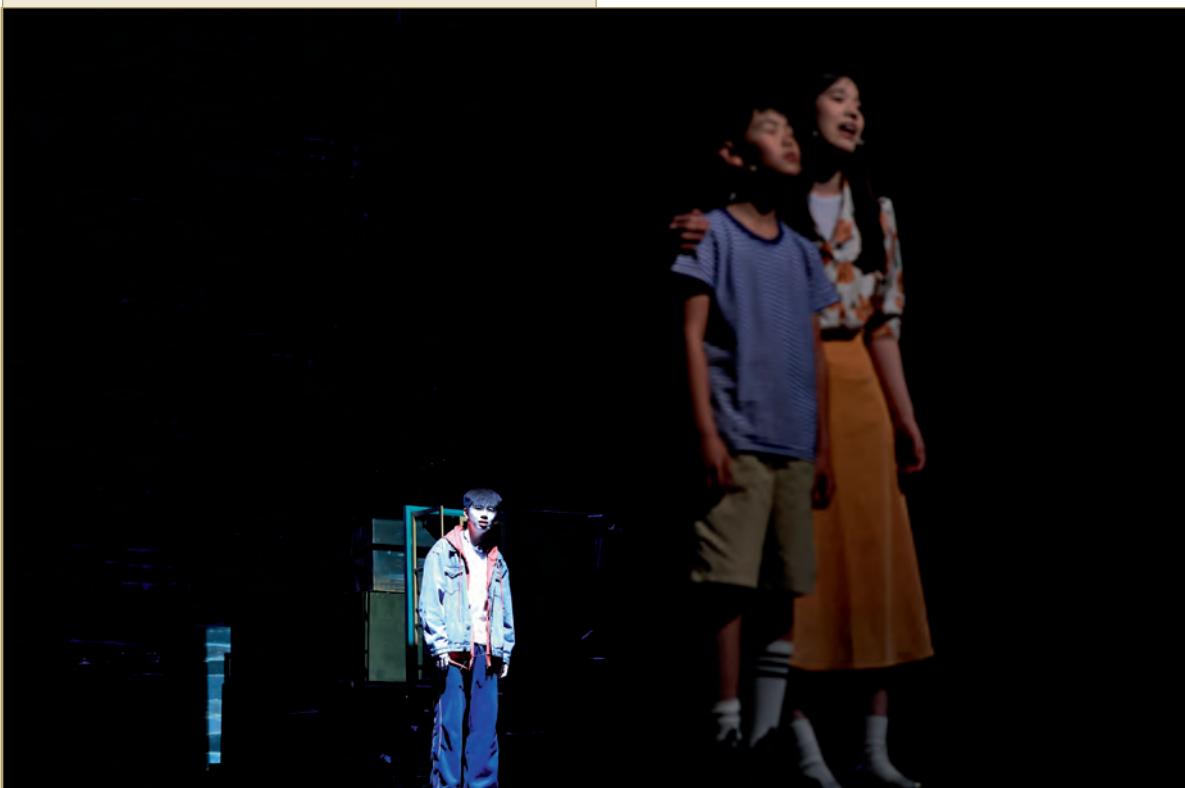




fig.3

adventure, full of disagreements and different interpretations. It's like love and hate: some people hold fast to their ideas, while others listen. Everyone experiences the process differently, and yet continues to move forward with an open mind.

Looking back, so many things have passed in the blink of an eye. Yet, every rehearsal felt unique and meaningful. That's the beauty of doing theater in secondary school.

#### **As backstage crew, you're invisible to the audience. Do you feel a sense of loss?**

##### **Zoe Fang**

Not at all. Backstage work gives me a stronger sense of belonging. The only moment I step on stage is during the curtain call, which makes each performance feel extra special. When designing props, our thought was always, "How do we wow the audience?" Everyone in our team spent dozens of hours in the PAC backstage workshop to create the best stage design, which we consider our own "children". We all want to see our work light up the stage, and when our work gets appreciated, it gives us a sense of accomplishment.

##### **Crimson Liang**

Even if we do not perform on stage, my team and I love this work. Seeing the sets we built under the stage lights feels like being on stage myself. What moves our audiences is not just the actors but also the world that we create for them. That immerses them in the action. Standing in the dark doesn't feel like a loss. It feels like pride, knowing we're the foundation of the show.

The production crew's work is the foundation of the entire play. With that, it's our responsibility to do our best. Without the right sets, costumes, or props, even the best actors couldn't fully draw the audience in.

#### **What did you learn from being part of *Smash the Wall*?**

##### **Liv Lü**

*Smash the Wall* gave me growth in every way. It was almost entirely student-led, so we had to coordinate directly with the original team and with Keystone's departments. That strengthened my organizational and communication skills and gave me a better understanding of how every detail matters in theater.

Every rehearsal and meeting was a learning opportunity. I learned how to problem-solve,



fig.4

collaborate, and think more clearly under pressure. This opportunity has made me not only a playwright but also a more mature collaborator and thinker.

#### Looking back, what do you miss most?

##### Marta Chen

This play meant so much to me, and every minute I spent on set was unforgettable. Working alongside the cast and crew created a bond that was special. Everyone met each other outside of the play, but we got to know them better during the rehearsals. We were always right beside the actors, testing the props, putting stage marks, and adjusting the effects around them. At these moments, I'd look up at the audience and see the crew in the control room. I always felt that this was the most beautiful scene—everyone working hard, all together. It was beautiful teamwork. I probably won't get another chance to work backstage in high school, so this feels like the perfect closing chapter for me.

##### Rosie Yu

Everyone! The most precious part of my senior year was having a crew that felt like home—warm, sincere, and always there for one another.

*Smash the Wall* itself was a miracle. Since we first chose it in 2023, the production has gone through one of the most difficult journeys in school history. It was truly arduous. Without the help and encouragement of every crew member, there's no way this musical could have made it to the stage as beautifully as it did.

Now as a Keystone graduate, what I want most to leave in our school publications is a simple "thank you." I am grateful to the teachers, the friends, and everyone on and off stage who built *Smash the Wall* together. Thank you for turning a wall into a home. All the most beautiful and moving moments of my high school years live here, in this home I call *Nán Qiáng*.

**Keystone's has a strong tradition of Chinese theater productions. What do you think you've inherited in *Smash the Wall*, and what do you hope to pass on?**

##### Arika Jiao

For me, it's courage—the courage to keep going even when you know you'll hit a wall. It's the determination to pursue your dreams despite uncertainty and failure! And it's also about companionship: standing by each other through highs and lows, both on stage and in life. This sincerity we share will never fade.

Zoe Fang

When I worked on last year's production, *Zhù Ding*, as a stage design crew, our production director, Wang Yuean, was incredibly enthusiastic and encouraging. That kept me motivated and taught me how important it is to support others. In *Smash the Wall*, I felt our teamwork was even stronger.

Angel Hua

I've been part of Keystone Chinese theater productions for four years, since *Wen Dao*. What we've inherited from this experience is unwavering drive and perseverance. From acting in *Wen Dao* and *Wandering* under the guidance of our coaches, Ms. Pei Lu and Ms. Kacy Song, to directing *Zhù Dǐng* and *Smash the Wall*, their entire crew always worked together and overcame obstacles. We strived to present our best work to our audiences.

Mr. John Han (the school's technical specialist) once told me, "Things will work out when the time comes". Even if we felt unsure if every play would be performed, we always experienced the surge of energy and determination in the final two weeks of preparation. This is the spirit that I want future casts to feel too: to give everything, leave no regrets, and create lasting memories.

Kevin Zhang

I think the tradition isn't about a fixed style—it's about authenticity. In every production, we bring our real stories and conflicts to the stage. My co-actors in *Smash the Wall* often articulated the elements that resonated with us. It's not just because the plot strikes a chord, but we color it with our stories and experiences.

What we pass on is the courage to put ourselves into the play fully. As long as the stage remains open for students to feel, engage, and experience, that spirit will continue.

# Easter Eggs

## Reflections from

### *Smash the Wall*

The *Smash the Wall* KAP officially closed on April 19, 2025, three days after the final curtain call. For its 62 cast and crew members, the relief of finishing was mixed with a deep reluctance to let go. The stage design they rushed to complete at the Performing Arts Center, the lines and songs rehearsed again and again, the careful placement of every prop—moments that once felt overwhelming now remain as treasured memories, etched into their lives.

After the show, the creative team took to WeChat Moments to share their feelings. Their words were part farewell, part reflection, and part celebration of a journey that had consumed months of effort. Raw and unpolished, these emotions carried a weight that polished speeches could never match. Here are some of their reflections—final “Easter eggs” from *Smash the Wall*.



*The following WeChat Moments posts  
were originally written in Chinese.  
Their English translation has been edited  
for brevity and style.*

*After everything.*

*It was all like a dream. Inside it were our rock band, Liuzi's father's folk art, the DV camera Liuge gave me, and a red curtain.*

Through the tears and after the stories ended, I think I'll always remember that night—forever marked in my memory by a lullaby.

## Henry Shi

Grade 11

Played De Hua in *Smash the Wall*

fig.1-4 — *Smash the Wall* premiered on April 17, 2025, with a premise of dealing with the metaphorical walls that generations face

fig.5 — The cast and crew of *Smash the Wall*, after their premiere performance

*The performances struck me like lightning, splitting through the long, cold night of a life that always seemed to derail no matter how carefully it was planned. What emerged was something softer, sweeter, and more enduring.*

*To those behind the scenes, who broke through countless walls to bring us here, I savor your work with deep gratitude. The emotions you stirred in me will linger long after the thrill of the performance has faded.*

*That's all I have to say. Thank you.*

April 17, 2025, 10:39 PM

●  
**Oscar Chen**

Grade 11

Audience member

*At the closing ceremony, I kept asking: "Is this really the end?" Shouldn't youth be as eternal as rock and roll? Yet this story's ending was OE [open-ended]... Everyone's youth ends abruptly at some point, and the road ahead stretches out like fresh snow.*

*Still, we can always look up at the same moon, sing these little songs again and again, and carry the Nán Qiáng as strength. Hey, don't be afraid, set sail anytime.*

●  
**Rosie Yu**

Grade 12

Artistic director, *Smash the Wall*



fig.5

*When it ended, I tried to hold on, but it slipped away with the applause. Sitting at the subtitle machine, I watched the performance leap from my hands, vanish into a folder I might never open again.*

*When the red curtains closed, the stage itself became part of the past. I stared at the poster for the band "Hit the South Wall" while the word "graduation" was already flashing in our group chat. Still, [as one of the lines goes:] "At least I'll always remember these beautiful moments."*

●  
**Amber Yuan**

Grade 12

Music director, *Smash the Wall*

*Across three shows, I didn't cry during the first, shed a little during the second, and cried through the entire third. Because I truly feel you are all wonderful.*

*I'm so grateful to you all, and I'm so sad to leave you all. I was truly blessed during the seven or eight months I spent with the cast of Smash the Wall. In this incredible show, I got to play my favorite role, do my best work, and meet so many amazing friends. I was truly blessed. Don't let it sink; lift it higher.*

●  
**Lisa Gao**

Grade 10

Choreographer, *Smash the Wall*

# Teamwork

## Voices of Our Own

Story by Ava Guo and Tina Qiu  
Translated by Allen Zhu  
Illustration by Tina Qiu  
Edited by Andy Peñafuerte III

### Build Worlds beyond The Classroom

Story by Andy Peñafuerte III

The school day is over, but the Keystone campus is far from quiet. In one classroom, dancers rehearse in sweeping silence, their movements carrying the weight of a story. In another room, flags ripple through the air in arcs of blue and silver. Out on the pitch, a whistle pierces the evening as players sprint into formation. These are Keystone's after-school hours, where Keystone Activities Program (KAP) clubs and organizations redefine learning spaces: classrooms, rehearsal areas, sports fields, and performing and visual arts stages become places for discovery.

# Come and Move with the Keystone Sports Committee

Writers Eric Zhang, Xixi Liang, Jerry Wang, Richelle Li, Emily Xu, Owen Yang, William Wang  
Contributors Rachel Lin, Tina Jiang, Bella Wang, Richelle Li, Mario Yao, Mac Ding, Jack Liu, Jerry Wu, Chris Cai  
Advisors Sonja Song, Maikel Popovic



Keystone Sports Committee Team members

During a high school assembly in 2022, Keystone senior student Jason Liu introduced a sports platform he co-founded with peers to the campus community. Jason and other founding members showcased the outstanding performances and achievements of Keystone students in various sports through photographs and videos collected from different athletic events and activities. Jason aimed to inspire greater engagement in sports by highlighting these scenes of passionate competition and camaraderie among teammates. During that assembly, Jason said, "Our original intention is to enable every community member who loves sports to connect closely through this shared bond, collectively fostering and passing down Keystone's unique sports culture and spirit."

The sports spirit that Jason hoped to cultivate has been passed down within the Keystone community. Through the efforts of successive generations of students, this initial modest sports platform has gradually evolved into the more comprehensive and structured Keystone Sports Council.

Today, it comprises 15 representatives from the school's various varsity teams. Driven by a pure passion for athletics and a sense of mission to promote

system, ensuring that every student's thoughts and passions are seen and heard.

In this article, we write stories about Keystone student media organizations like *The Voice*, Student Media Services (SMS), and the Keystone Academy Broadcast Station (KABS) to explore how Keystone students use voice, words, images, and the arts to make their presence the most vibrant on campus.

## The Voice

At Keystone, every story deserves to be told and every voice deserves to be heard. *The Voice* is a campus media platform that has dedicated itself to this mission for nine years, consistently maintaining a student-centered perspective. Founded in 2016, *The Voice* team has grown to 40 members, and its format has evolved from a traditional print school newspaper into a mature digital media platform with an official WeChat account that has amassed 3,793 followers and counting. *The Voice* has become a vital medium for fostering community identity and nurturing student creativity.

Since its foundation, *The Voice* has published 514 articles, embodying students' passion and thoughts while documenting the growth and transformation of the Keystone community. The account invites over 20,000 annual views, a figure that not only reflects the extensive reach of its content but also signifies the genuine connection among voices within the Keystone community. As the longest-running and most widely covered student media outlet on campus, *The Voice* has long transcended the role of an ordinary official WeChat account: it bridges students with the school, connects past with future, and ensures every ordinary campus moment is deeply remembered.

KAP is more than an extracurricular schedule—it's a network of opportunities where students test themselves in new arenas, guided by teachers who act as mentors, coaches, and facilitators. For Drama teacher Joel Godiah, English teacher Jessica Ward, and PE teacher and sports coach Hendrik Jordaan, KAP has been a place to watch students surprise themselves, and even their teachers.

## For Drama-Related KAPS, Storytelling Is Always in Motion

In one brightly lit rehearsal room, Drama teacher Joel Godiah leaned against the wall, watching as his students rehearsed a scene from *Caged Bird*, a student-led Chinese dance drama. On stage, the performers moved in perfect unison, their gestures carrying the weight of the story—about finding freedom within constraints.



Students rehearse a play at the Black Box Theater

"The Dance Drama initiative was established to tell impactful stories through movement," Mr. Godiah said. "Our aim is to convey profound social themes that res-

Keystone's spirit of sports, it organizes diverse sporting events to build and transmit that spirit, ensuring that all community members experience the joy and allure of sports.

They are committed to creating an inclusive, caring sports community where no one is judged by their athletic ability. They also encourage everyone to showcase and express themselves through sports, unleashing their potential. "Seeing faculty and staff from different divisions or departments, teachers from various subjects, and students from all grade levels come together for our sporting events is the greatest encouragement for us. That moment is truly rewarding", Jerry Wang, a member of the Sports Council, said.

This sense of fulfillment remains strong even behind the scenes. As organizers and planners, Sports Council members may not always shine on the field, but enabling the community to immerse itself in sports and allowing more individuals to demonstrate their talents bring us a strong sense of achievement.

Here's a review of a series of enriching sports activities organized within the Keystone community over the past academic year.

## House Cup A Competitive Feast throughout the Year

To strengthen cohesion within each House, promote interaction and integration among teachers and students, and foster a positive, united, and collaborative sports atmosphere on campus, the Sports Council initiated four House Cups, each based on one of the five Houses—Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth. In these intense matches, we witnessed not only the students' individual abilities but also the power of unity.

As a campus media outlet, *The Voice* primarily focuses on reporting and reviewing school events. The team is divided into five roles: writers, editors, photographers, graphic designers, and video editors. Members in



The two editors-in-chief of *The Voice*, Ava Guo and Tina Qiu



Official WeChat Account  
@thevoice\_keystone

**How do we work?**



The two editors-in-chief of *The Voice*, Ava Guo and Tina Qiu



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**How do we work?**



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○ October 2024  
Basketball House Cup



each role group collaborate on the topic and data-gathering process, editorial planning, and publishing and promotion. *The Voice*'s content goes beyond event coverage to include in-depth interviews with students and faculty, interesting trivia, and the annual flagship event "The Voice Week".



Students have designed their own  
giant tomato-shaped merchandise to promote *The Voice*

At the start of the academic year, the first House Cup event, the Basketball House Cup, was held in one of the school's gyms. Memorable moments happened throughout the games: when a player accidentally fell during a scramble, an opposing player immediately paused the attack and abandoned their offensive opportunity to offer assistance with a concerned hand and inquiry; and when a player scored a remarkable shot, opponents congratulated with high-fives and sincere praise, saying "Nice shot!" These seemingly small acts perfectly exemplify the true spirit of sports.

○ January 2025  
Volleyball House Cup

The Volleyball House Cup was held in winter with each House team engaging in fierce offense and defense across the net—serves, spikes, blocks—each point drawing cheers from the audience lining the court. The match between the House of Fire and the defending champion, House of Metal, which fielded several strong players, was particularly unforgettable.

experiences that develop critical problem-solving abilities."

"These opportunities also facilitate networking with peers, teachers, and industry professionals, potentially leading to future career paths," he said.

## Keystone's First Color Guard Is Flying High

*"No one twirls the flag the way I do.  
No one moves quite like me."*

One of the current editors-in-chief, Ava Guo, stated: "The Voice isn't just a simple 'campus noticeboard'. We aim to see through students' eyes and speak in their language, using words to convey the ever-present yet often overlooked warmth flowing through our campus."

Ava's favorite piece is the "Sweet Teacher Couples" feature published in the 21 Questions column during the 2024 The Voice Week event, which was interviews with married faculty members on campus. Going beyond sharing three couples' love stories, this report offered Keystonians across different ages and roles a shared moment of humor and warmth. After publication, many parents and students commented in the discussion section, remarking, "This is the first time we've gotten such a close glimpse into Keystone teachers", marveling at the distinct personalities teachers reveal beyond the classroom.

In the second semester of 2024-2025, Ms. Ward finally opened Keystone's first color guard KAP after several attempts in the previous academic years. It was also personal to her.

*"Color guard gave me confidence and a creative outlet. I loved everything about it—the costumes, the music, the flag designs, and especially getting to perform with friends. That feeling of putting together something beautiful as a team really stuck with me."*

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The favorite project of another current editor-in-chief, Tina Qiu, is the "Perfect Lunch" initiative, which exemplifies how *The Voice* turns online content into real experiences. By launching a poll to let the Keystone community choose their favorite dishes, they ultimately



Jessica Ward and the members of the Color Guard KAP presented during the Arts in Bloom festival week in 2025

The students who joined had no idea what color guard was. "They just thought it sounded cool, and that was enough to get them to try it," Ms. Ward recalled. That willingness to step into the unknown was exactly what she hoped for.

*"Sometimes it only takes one event or one moment to change someone's life completely. If my KAP could be that moment for even one student, that would mean a lot to me. It would honestly be really touching to know that something we created together had that kind of impact."*

At this critical juncture, Mr. Patrick Yang, Coach and Senior Assistant to the Assistant Head of School, called a decisive timeout. He guided the team to analyze the situation calmly, adjust tactics, and gave warm encouragement that reignited the team's fighting spirit. Although they narrowly lost due to a service error, there was no blame or complaint in the post-match discussions, only mutual understanding and encouragement, with teammates offering comfort and saying, "It's okay. Let's try again next time."



The 'Voice' editorial and production team

### What have we gained from *The Voice*?

Tina said, "We consistently hold ourselves to professional media standards when producing reports". From topic planning and interview coordination to writing, editing, and visual layout, team members experience the entire journey of creating an article from scratch. As both an editor and a graphic designer, Tina emphasizes: "Every background color, line spacing, image selection, and stylistic element must be consistent to present readers with the highest-quality, precise, and readable content". Through practical experience, team members gain an understanding of detail-oriented work, namely, how typography, white space, and color selections convey meaning and elevate a report's overall quality and credibility.

Throughout her nearly five years at *The Voice*, Ava has seen firsthand the immense power of student creativity. "Our reporting output repeatedly proves that an entirely student-run organization can demonstrate the creative energy and content quality of a professional

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February 2025  
Aquatic House Cup



The aquatic events took place in a lively and innovative setting within the swimming pool. The Aquatic House Cup included exciting relay swimming races and underwater tug-of-war competitions that blended entertainment with tactical thinking. Participants battled in the water while the audience cheered from the poolside, creating an energetic, vibrant atmosphere.

"During an underwater tug-of-war, all team members must cooperate and give their absolute best to win. When the rallying cry of "One, two, one, two!" echoes through the pool, the collective energy and shared experience are irreplaceable," said Steven Ren, a Grade 12 student and participant in the Aquatic House Cup.

June 2025  
Handball House Cup



team. Last year, we achieved 20,000 views and nearly 1,000 shares. Behind these numbers are countless intense discussions during lunch breaks and evening study hours, and the passion poured into refining every headline."

However, what's more precious than creativity is the sense of responsibility cultivated through practice. "Every article we publish is not just 'another post', but a commitment from student media to the entire community", Ava emphasizes. This responsibility drives team members to approach each report with rigor while learning to listen, communicate, and trust through collaboration.

We're still on the way

As their follower count steadily grows and content formats diversify, *The Voice* is actively expanding into video reporting —a new medium for telling Keystone's stories in richer ways. Approaching their first decade, *The Voice* remains true to their founding belief: to speak for Keystone through authentic documentation and youthful language.

SMS



SMS crew members

The Handball House Cup brought the sports series to a successful finish as the academic year also ended. During the third-place playoff and championship match, the Sports Council expanded seating to accommodate more students watching from up close. The thunderous cheers created an electric atmosphere throughout the event. Teachers and students from House of Wood even brought drums to the game to cheer for their team. Their passionate drumming energized the crowd and elevated the atmosphere to new heights.

**Seniors' Night**  
Heritage and Farewell

To honor our graduating students and send them off with our best wishes, the Sports Council organized a special series of "Seniors' Night" activities.

## Sports-Related KAPS Show How Teamwork Makes the Dream Work



Keystone U14 Boys' Football Team in a match

Meanwhile, out on the football pitch, PE teacher Hendrik Jordaan was rallying his U14 (Under 14) boys' team. They had just gone two goals down in the first two minutes of a tournament match. Instead of folding, they fought back—and won 4–2.

"These boys always found a way to fight until the end," Mr. Jordaan said.

His year was split between the competitive U14 squad and a program that introduced students aged under 11 to football, handball, and track and field for the International Schools Athletic Conference (ISAC) athletic contests.

"For the U14 Football team, the focus was on playing in a competitive environment, fostering strong team chemistry while improving skills and teamwork," he said.

"The U11 ISAC program was more about participation and representing Keystone. For many, it was their first time being part of a team."

The U14 boys trained twice a week during their sim-

These events are more than just technical contests between students of different grade levels. They are more about the continuation of Keystone's spirit of sports. The significance of these activities goes far beyond winning or losing. They are emotional connections and heartfelt farewells.



## Secondary School Sports Days

### A Celebration of Joy and Collaboration

During the final two days before the end of the academic year, the Sports Council hosted Secondary School Sports Days on the Sports Field.



All students were divided into 12 groups based on their Houses and grade levels, working together to tackle various sports activities, including ball relay

Let's first turn our lens to a team constantly behind the camera. SMS, short for Student Media Service, is one of the most active student organizations on the Keystone campus. They are responsible for capturing footage of various school events and activities, documenting over a hundred campus events in the past two years. If you ask who knows the most about what's happening on campus, SMS students would be among the top. You can spot them at nearly every campus event, headphones on, eyes fixed intently on their cameras. For this interview, we spoke with SMS student leaders, Grade 12 students Justin Jin and William Huang.



SMS members are normally invited by teachers to cover, film, and take photographs of various campus events

### What is SMS?

SMS is a student-run organization providing media services for the school. Justin shares that over the past two years, SMS has received commissions for approximately 100 campus events, including the traditional new student orientation and live broadcast of the Grade 12 Graduation Ceremony.

SMS operates through three departments: Outreach, which handles commissions and coordinates teamwork; Production, which captures footage; and Post-Production, which edits and refines the footage. All members are Keystone middle and high school students. When discussing their roles as student leaders within SMS, William explained that they primarily manage com-

gle-term season, playing about 15 matches against other schools. The U11 group practiced once a week for three terms, each dedicated to a different sport, culminating in meets with other ISAC schools.

Hendrik noticed growth on and off the field.

*"Most students who joined the younger teams became good ambassadors for the sports. I've seen them teaching others during PE lessons or recess how to play correctly."*

Coaching older players was a change of pace. "I give them more freedom during training and matches, letting them contribute tactically and technically," he said. In training sessions for the younger ones, especially those who Mr. Jordaan said joined the KAP because "they want to be part of it", they're "focused and driven toward our specific goals".

For Hendrik, sports are a microcosm of life. "Being part of after-school activities is a great way for students to grow physically, mentally, and socially," he said. "This is one of the most important aspects of the school and its culture."



Keystone U14 Boys Football Team

races, frisbee throwing, water slides, and other fun collaborative activities.

Students collaborated with joyful laughter and pushed themselves through sweat and effort. Success at each station earned points for their respective Houses, strengthening their collective pride. Notably, Secondary students from the House of Fire participated enthusiastically in various activities, helping their House accumulate substantial points and ultimately securing their fourth House championship of the academic year since Keystone was founded.

## Keystone's Varsity Teams

Keystone encourages students to pursue their athletic passions and join the varsity teams, where they can showcase their talents while developing a strong sense of belonging through various team activities. Keystone proudly maintains over ten competitive teams, including volleyball, basketball, soccer, badminton, frisbee, swimming, wushu, table tennis, and our newly established golf team this year, which has already participated in competitions outside Keystone. They run across the fields of youth, experiencing both victories and setbacks, growing stronger with each match.

During the 2024-2025 academic year, Keystone's varsity teams achieved numerous highlights. We are honored to invite select team members to share their experiences and insights from last season's competitions. Through their stories, let us revisit the playing fields and rediscover the passion and allure of competitive sports.

munication and lead KAP sessions. During weekly KAP meetings, two senior members regularly train newcomers on equipment and workflow procedures. Additionally, when executing filming assignments, they often serve as directors and, when needed, can serve as production managers or cinematographers.

### Memorable moments from past work

For both leaders, the most impactful moment each year is undoubtedly the grade 12 Graduation Ceremony. Held in late May, this event represents the most demanding and time-consuming project of the academic year, capturing countless tears and smiles. For William and Justin, the most memorable aspect of their work is that they can preserve these memories through their photography skills.

"I directed the 2025 graduation, which was my last time filming one because I'm now in Grade 11, and next year's ceremony will be my own", William shared. "Watching the scenes from the director's booth, I couldn't help but wonder what our graduation would look like next year, and what SMS would become then."



An SMS member editing video and mixing audio

For all three teachers, and even their colleagues leading various KAP clubs and activities, the work may be demanding but deeply rewarding. Mr. Godiah sees KAP as a chance for students to step into roles of responsibility, while Ms. Ward treasures the moments when students light up with confidence. Mr. Jordaan takes pride in seeing his players grow into leaders.

As the sun sets and the last rehearsals wind down, the sense of purpose lingers. In one room, a dancer practices a final movement, adjusting her posture until it feels right. Outside, two younger footballoers linger on the pitch, passing the ball back and forth, laughing. Down the hall, a student folds away a flag, already planning next week's routine.

These aren't just after-school activities; they are spaces where students test ideas, build friendships, and discover parts of themselves they didn't know were there. And for the teachers guiding them, that's the real victory.

### • The most rewarding aspect of SMS work

When asked about this, William recalled a swimming meet filming assignment. "SMS received numerous compliments from coaches across different schools. We set up cameras poolside to livestream the event. Since our production booth was in the pool office, many coaches passing by saw our equipment and workflow. They repeatedly praised us in person and commended us to Mr. Westcott (Keystone Director of KAP)", he said.

Justin believes witnessing a project's completion is the most rewarding moment. "When we deliver the finished product to event organizers and receive positive feedback from them, it brings me great satisfaction. Sometimes our edited videos are used in additional contexts, like follow-up promotions or recaps. Though

## U19 Boys JV Volleyball Team

Champions from ISAC Tournament (D4)



## U19 Girls' Volleyball Team

3rd Place from ISAC Tournament (D5)



SMS operates relatively behind the scenes, seeing these outcomes reach wider audiences has always been my motivation to keep working."

This year marks SMS's 7th anniversary, and they continue to expand their horizons. Though Justin and William will be "retiring" within the next year, SMS is welcoming new members from Grades 9 and 10. When they remove the lens caps, their footage will bridge the past and future of this student organization, preserving cherished moments in unchanging images.

## Keystone Academy Broadcast Station (KABS)

My most unforgettable moment was the match against the Beijing City International School (BCIS) team. During the game, our team's morale took a hit, and we repeatedly made coordination mistakes. However, our team's greatest strength is our ability to maintain a positive mindset. Even in such a challenging situation, we never gave up and fought hard for every point. After all, we play volleyball because we love the sport and enjoy the process, not just for the results.

— Stella Li,  
HS Girls' Volleyball Team Captain,  
Keystone Class of 2025

## U19 Girls' Basketball Team

3rd Place from ACAMIS Tournament (Silver Division)



"We want the 'voice of students' to be truly heard, both physically and spiritually. Radio, as a unique medium, seamlessly and unobtrusively comes into everyone's daily life. It's like background music in the morning. You don't need to 'listen intently', but rather, it feels like casually chatting with friends", KABS student leader Kiki explained. "KABS brings a warm presence to Keystone. With its relaxed, natural tone, neither intrusive nor demanding, it quietly yet familiarly enters the ears of students and teachers during those unassuming moments."



Some KABS team members and announcers

### Program Content Design

In designing its content, KABS balances entertainment with functionality. The Monday "Music Column" is especially popular among students. This segment not only recommends uplifting mainstream tracks like Charlie Puth's "Look at Me Now" to kickstart the week's studies but also features classic, soothing jazz pieces such as "Just the Two of Us", reminding everyone to cherish life's beautiful moments amidst the hustle. These music

I started playing basketball in Grade 5, so it's been 6 years now. It has also given me a team that feels like family. Basketball taught me that as part of a team, you don't need to be perfect or excel at everything, because there will always be someone to have your back, tell you it's okay, and encourage you to take your time. Basketball has deeply changed my life. It ignited my passion for sports, made me more outgoing, and built my confidence. All of these have shaped the passionate basketball player I am today.

— William Wang,  
HS Boys' Soccer Team Captain,  
Keystone Class of 2028

selections aren't arbitrary; instead, they're based on student submissions collected via forms at the start of each semester, truly embodying the motto "chosen by students, played for students". Once, after airing a Monday recommendation, the station received overwhelming positive feedback from students. "In that moment", recalls Yoyo, the Music Column's director, "we felt not just recognition, but a genuine, deep connection with the student body."

## U19 Boys' Soccer Team

### ISAC D2 Champions



From the moment I first touched a soccer ball at four or five years old, I fell in love with the feeling of running across the pitch. I cherish the focus of dribbling and shooting alone on rainy days, the synergy with teammates as we pass and attack to secure a goal, and the joy of celebrating with the whole team after a tough match.

— William Wang,  
HS Boys' Soccer Team Captain,  
Keystone Class of 2028

## Keystone Table Tennis Team

### (Select Members)



Keystone students do not "turn a deaf ear to worldly affairs to focus solely on academic texts". Beyond student organizations focused on campus events, Keystone also nurtures publications that keep a watchful eye on the wider world. *The Mug*, established just last academic year, is one such publication. As a humanities journal dedicated to showcasing student work, *The Mug* has released three issues to date, gaining recognition across campus for its high-quality, rich content.

The name *The Mug* literally means "coffee mug". Co-founder Max Lan explained in a promotional email that the name was chosen with the hope that readers would hold a mug filled with coffee while reading *The Mug* on a quiet afternoon, exploring the humanities world within its pages.

"Lucy and I founded *The Mug* to encourage students to practice humanities writing outside the classroom, explore humanities knowledge, and appreciate the humanities and arts themselves. We observed that MYP offered many excellent opportunities for humanities creation, yet lacked a platform to showcase student

Two podcast announcers from the Keystone Academy Broadcast Station (KABS)



Beyond music, Tuesday's news program focuses on campus and social updates, delivering practical information such as upcoming event schedules and club activity details. Thursdays provide promotional opportunities for various student organizations, including Service Council, Keystone Talk, and anti-bullying week initiatives. This structure further strengthens the broadcast station's role in community service.

As Kiki said, "The student voice isn't just sound waves. It's an expression of our perspectives and attitudes". KABS, with its unique presence as a broadcast medium, blends thought, music, information, and emotion into the background soundtrack of life at Keystone most gently and powerfully, becoming an integral part of countless Keystonians' campus memories.

## The Mug



The Mug team

The moment I defeat my opponent, I am a winner and a champion. After the match, though, I must start fresh and strive for the next victory. Achieving success isn't just about 24-hour intensive training sessions; rather, it's the accumulation of experience from each competition, continuous reflection, and constant adjustments. Only by combining deep thinking with strong execution can one move closer to success. Failure is commonplace in table tennis.

— Jerry Wang,  
HS Table Tennis Team Member,  
Keystone Class of 2026

work. That's why we set out to create such a platform", Max said.



(Select Members)



## High School Badminton Team

(Select Members)

In badminton, both success and failure are commonplace. Success isn't necessarily winning a match, but seeing my own progress. Defeat isn't the end; instead, it's an opportunity to learn. Every loss clarifies my weaknesses and motivates me to train harder and improve my game. Badminton has taught me that as long as you don't give up, there's no such thing as true failure.

— Xixi Liang,  
HS Badminton Team Member,  
Keystone Class of 2027

## Keystone Swimming Team

(Select Members)



*Memories*, an art magazine founded in 2021-2022, provides a platform for students and faculty to showcase, share, and perpetuate these silent yet powerful artistic expressions. As a fully student-led print art magazine, *Memories* has been dedicated since its inception to collecting diverse artworks from the entire school community. From paintings and photography to mixed-media creations, any work that embodies self-expression can shine within *Memories*.

"We're not just making a magazine. We're building a bridge where art can be seen, touched, and felt", says one of the editors-in-chief, Estee. The name "*Memories*" emphasizes the intentions, dreams, and emotions entrusted within each piece by its creator. Through the printed magazine, the *Memories* team allows these voices to resonate with a wider audience in every stroke of color, every brushstroke, and every artwork. It ensures that these expressions extend beyond the artwork itself and reach the entire community.



The two editors-in-chief of *Memories*, Jenny Li and Estee Li

Unlike many digital art publications, *Memories*, as a printed magazine, particularly emphasizes the warmth and ritualistic quality inherent in paper. "We believe art truly enters the heart only when you hold the magazine in your hands, feel the texture of the paper beneath your fingertips, and immerse yourself in every artwork and detail", Estee adds. This tangible reading experience elevates *Memories* beyond dissemination, transforming it into a medium for emotional connection.

It's worth noting that *Memories* also values content curation and visual design. For instance, Jenny, another editor-in-chief of the magazine, highlighted the work that left the deepest impression on her: "The DP visual arts portfolio by Lillian Ning, a student from Keystone Class of 2024, features a strong personal style and clear information organization. We included it in the maga-

Through years of competition experience and countless hours of practice, swimming has helped me become a more well-rounded individual. Balancing studies and training has sharpened my time management skills, making me a more efficient learner.

— Leo Jiang,  
HS Swimming Team Member,  
Keystone Class of 2027

## Keystone Golf Team

participates in the 2025 ACAMIS International Golf Tournament



From the first time we wore our team uniforms to the first time we stepped onto the golf course, we have collectively witnessed and written a new chapter in Keystone's history as golf becomes a true varsity sport. Step by step, we have established our own rhythm and style. These "breakthroughs" aren't just about scores. They reflect our growing team cohesion, building confidence, and individual personal growth!

— Sabrina Guo,  
HS Golf Team Captain,  
Keystone Class of 2026

## Keystone MS Frisbee Team

(Champions of ACAMIS Frisbee Tournament)



As team captain, I frequently encourage my teammates and provide them with ample room to grow. During competitions, I also make sure to give more players opportunities to participate. I hope frisbee can become a traditional sport at Keystone, and I wish more students could discover this amazing sport. One day, when people ask which sport Keystone students are the best at, I want everyone to think of the Frisbee Team immediately.

— Milinda Zheng,  
HS Frisbee Team Captain,  
Keystone Class of 2027

## Keystone Wushu Team

(Select Members)



My love for wushu, this ancient and charming sport, comes from the strong sense of heritage and inner strength I feel every time I step onto the training ground. I began practicing wushu at age 10 and have persevered ever since. From basic five-step boxing to the Staff Technique: The Third Wushu Routine, I have never given up. People often ask me: isn't it hard? Isn't it exhausting? My answer is: Of course it is, absolutely. But each time I overcome a new challenge in training, the genuine joy I experience surpasses all the fatigue and pain. Wushu has shaped my character, giving me the courage to embrace challenges and the determination to never quit until I achieve my goals.

— Owen Yang,  
Wushu Team Member,  
Keystone Class of 2028

# KEYSTONE'S MANY TEAMS

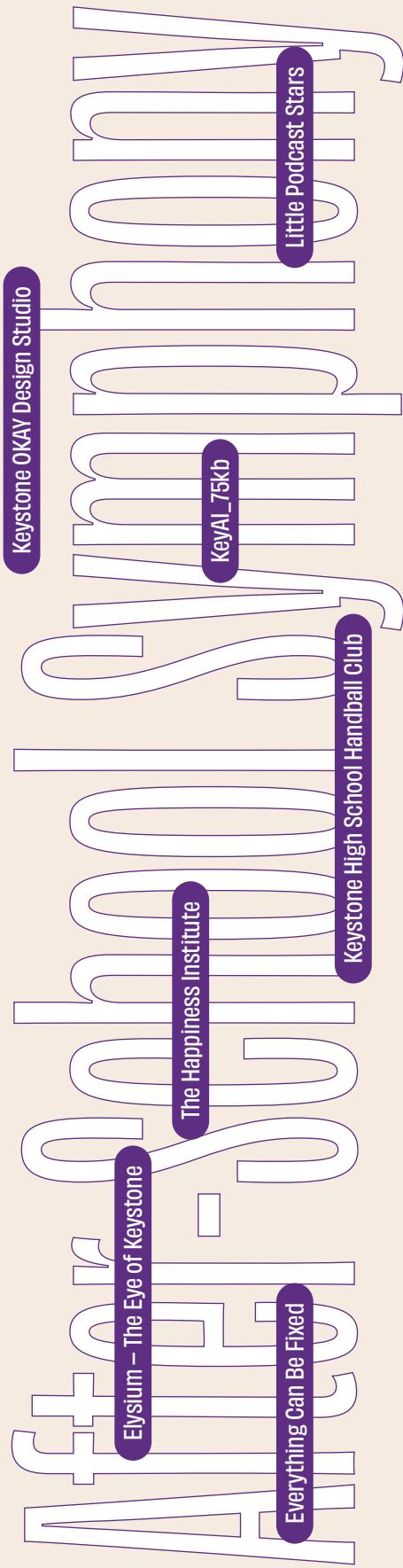
zine as a typography example to help more students understand how to enhance the expressiveness of their work through colors, layout, and visual unity". These visual considerations ensure that *Memories* not only represents diverse content but also effectively guides members of the Keystone community in harmonizing the various elements of an art project.



The cover pages of two *Memories* editions

*Memories* elevates the quiet yet vibrant expressions within the Keystone community, allowing everyone to convey their thoughts through art and ensuring that the voices carried within are heard.

At Keystone, students may be contemplative learners in the classroom, but beyond the classroom walls, they also are builders, chroniclers, and catalysts of campus life. Some freeze memories with their lenses, others convey warmth through words, and still others connect community members through sound. These student organizations and leaders have vastly different visions. Still, each responds in its own way to the same conviction: the community we inhabit should be shaped by our own hands, and this shaping manifests in countless concrete actions. These forces, whether passionate, serene, innovative, or profound, converge into youthful yet sincere voices. Perhaps we can call them voices of our own.



## Mapping the joy of creating in KAP time

Story by Siyue Li, Zaiqi Yu and Andy Peñafuerte III



From experimenting at the workbench to designing logos from scratch, recording their first podcasts, or mapping the Keystone campus on Minecraft, the explorations of Keystonians beyond the classroom are diverse, creative, and heartfelt. These stories happen throughout KAP clubs and events. Whether driven by personal passion, a desire to help others, or simply the joy of creating, each activity is a distinct piece in an extensive map of after-school life at Keystone.



# Upside Down: Building "Another" Keystone in Another World

Elysium – The Eye of Keystone

Student Leaders:

Gabriel Cheng, Maggie Chen, Alice Shi, Jacqueline Fan

Supervisor:

Zhongyao Sun



Have you ever wondered how Keystone looks like on Minecraft? Some students created Keystone's virtual version on the game!



**Plan:** Outline the buildings and scenes, and decide on layout, dimensions, and details.

**Use the right tools:** Plugins can dramatically improve both speed and accuracy.

**Work as a team:** Divide tasks based on strengths and maintain clear communication.

TIPS

when walking  
your own  
Minecraft campus...



Using Minecraft, students built an immersive, accurate 3D model of the Keystone campus. Players can now explore the academic building and interiors virtually by walking through a fully interactive map.

*"We ran into server issues and technical setbacks during construction, but the breakthrough came when we learned to use tools like World Edit. That's when our building efficiency and creativity really took off."*



# PEACE



## What Do We Talk About About When We Talk About Happiness?

The Happiness Institute

Student Leaders:

Phoebe Xing, Howard Zhang

Supervisor:

Mingzhu Wei

Welcome to the Happiness Institute KAP, where students discover joy in everyday life through games, music, cooking, and reflection.

Founded by two psychology enthusiasts, Happiness Institute is a place to learn about the psychology of happiness.

"Together," Phoebe Xing says, "we face the 'crocodiles' of adolescence, name our emotions, and tackle challenges with honesty and care."

In each class, students spend 50 minutes exploring a key emotion and building deep emotional connections through activities such as group games, music, sharing experiences, and de-stressing cooking.



**Sticker game:** One student sits in the middle while classmates share their strengths. A sticker is added for each kind word. By the end, the student is surrounded—visibly and emotionally—by encouragement.

**Letting go of negative emotions:** Picture your feelings like a balloon. Now, release it. Let it float away.

TIPS

Make your class  
happier!



**P**erhaps the most important part of the KAP is the **fixing** part. Students learn how to repair real items—hair dryers, fans, and headphones.

**3**

## The Path to Becoming a Master Repairman

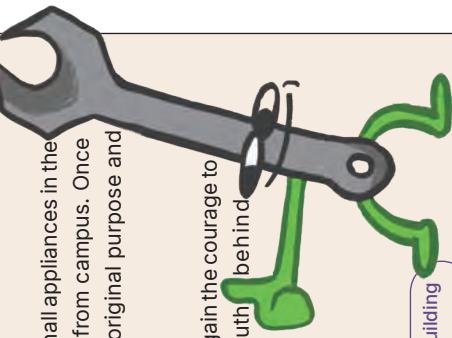
Everything Can Be Fixed

Teachers:  
Peter Chen, Jenny Zhang



How do you stop fearing life's little malfunctions? Start fixing things. In this KAP, students repair real items—hair dryers, fans, and headphones.

"This is more than repair work," Peter Chen says of this KAP. "It's learning how to move forward amid uncertainty."



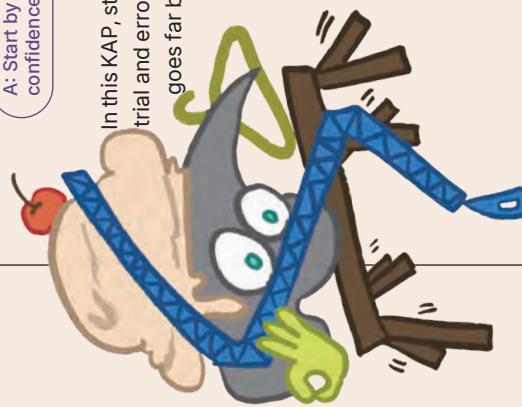
From the pencil sharpener in the art classroom to the small appliances in the dormitories, all the items waiting to be repaired come from campus. Once "revived," these objects are quickly returned to their original purpose and become vibrant again.

Beyond learning repair techniques, club members also gain the courage to "deconstruct the everyday" and the spirit to seek the truth behind things.

Q: How to be less afraid of life's "glitches"?

A: Start by disassembling old appliances and rebuilding confidence in 'Everything Can Be Fixed' KAP!

In this KAP, students repair real items and learn to problem-solve through trial and error and iteration. This ability to 'move forward in uncertainty' goes far beyond just repair skills.



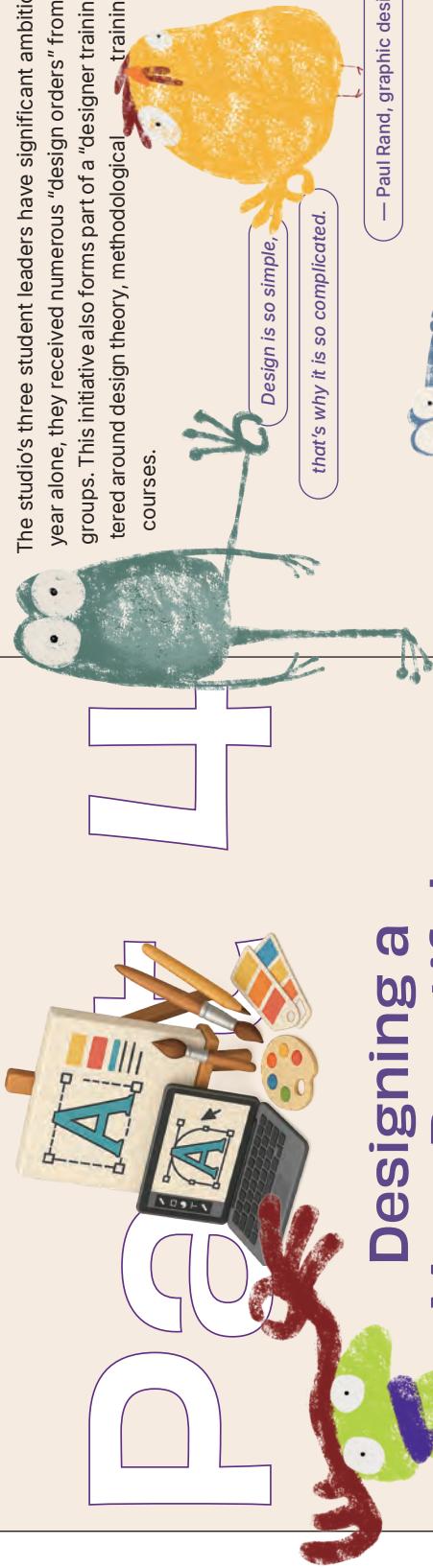
Repair  
TIPS

**Hardware check:** Inspect plugs, cables, switches, motors, and blades. Note that the long-term use of these components may lead to wear-and-tear damage. Disassemble the device and use specialized tools to locate the specific fault point for repair or replacement.

**Software check:** For smart devices, firmware errors or chip issues could be the problem.



The studio's three student leaders have significant ambitions. In their first year alone, they received numerous "design orders" from various student groups. This initiative also forms part of a "designer training program" centered around design theory, methodological training, and practical courses.



## Designing a More Beautiful Community

Keystone OKAY Design Studio

Student leaders:

Muyi Dong, Charlotte Xia, Zoe Fang

Supervisor:

Andrew Firestone

This student-led studio nurtures designers through training in design theory, practical exercises, and real-world projects. The goal? Improve the Keystone community's overall aesthetic awareness, design thinking skills, and even the desire for free expression through design theory, methodological training, and practical experience. At the same time, the KAP hopes to use this model to empower others.

"Whether it's about teaching methods or design style, we are a sustainable team. Everyone's a designer, from the founder to the newest member."

— Paul Rand, graphic design legend



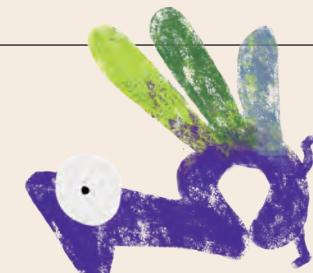
New to designing?  
Try these out

### TIPS

**Layout:** Try Canva for its easy-to-use templates, illustrations, and stickers.

**Drawing:** Procreate offers a wide selection of brushes for detailed hand-drawn work.

**Inspiration:** Pinterest is a treasure trove for layout and product design ideas.





## In-class

## AI quiz

Guess the author of the poem.

A. Artificial Intelligence B. Human

How confident are you? (0-100)

The frost lies soft along the meadow's rim, yet ivy clings with quiet, steadfast green. Beyond my pane, the pale dawn gathers dim, and smoke drifts slow where hearth and heart have been. The night is still; the moon on silver snow

## Between US and

## Artificial Intelligence

KeyAI\_75Kb: Fun AI, A User Guide

Student Leader:  
Jeremy Zhang  
Supervisor:  
Jenny Zhang



In the world of AI, the focus has never been on technology and code, but on expanding our horizons and seeing broader possibilities. AI technology is evolving far faster than we imagine. Faced with this uncertain yet dazzling future, we can't help but ask: "How far has AI progressed? What can we do with it?"

This KAP isn't about code—it's about curiosity. Students play with AI tools, apply them to daily problems, and ask bigger questions about how machines think, create, and "understand."

"Why can AI write poems? Is the music original? Does it really understand us?" Jeremy Zhang wonders.

Moves like a thought too tender yet to speak.  
Here, in the hush, contentment seems to grow—A gentle warmth that winter cannot bleak.

What experiences have students personally put into the Fun AI KAP class? They tried finding ways to solve everyday activities—from garbage sorting and automatic light switching to programming, composing music, writing poetry, painting, imitating your science teacher with private tutoring, and even participating in a real-and-fake AI competition!

While experiencing it, they dissected the underlying principles, attempted to form their own understanding, and reapply them, personally participating in this ongoing "tech storm".



When prompting an AI, include a specific example or thought process. It helps generate more accurate and meaningful results.

## AI TIPS



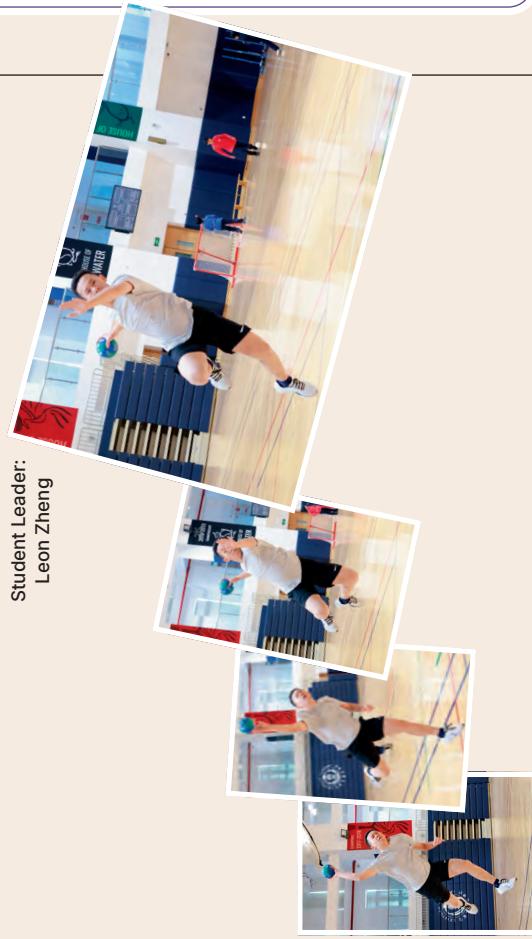
At Keystone Sports Gym, a group of students is redefining the feeling of “flying” with handball. From leaping outside the penalty area, thinking in mid-air, to the decisive shot before landing, handball’s unique “jump shot” has become a highlight they practice repeatedly and constantly strive to achieve.

Handball KAP founder Leon Zheng has transformed his love for the sport into patiently and enthusiastically guiding students from the very beginning. Although most of the recruits have no experience with handball, the ninth-grade student coach has developed a comprehensive teaching plan, starting with the most basic passing movements and breaking down exercises like the jump shot, encouraging students to step into the world of handball.

## Leap, Smash, Experience the Moment of “Flying”

Keystone High School Handball Club

Student Leader:  
Leon Zheng



### Trying handball for the first time?

#### TIPS

**Start with the basics.** Dribbling, passing, and jumping shots are the three fundamentals of handball. Try to avoid prolonged dribbling and pass more often to create chances. Passing isn’t just about using your arms; it’s about using your whole body to move your body. Don’t rush when jumping shots; assess the goalkeeper’s weaknesses before executing the shot, which tests your coordination and judgment.

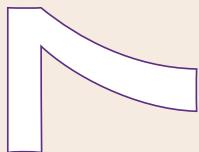
**Teamwork is key.** Handball isn’t a one-person sport. Pick-and-rolls, passing and cutting, and creating offensive space for teammates all require chemistry and trust. Remember, passing is always faster than dribbling!

**Enjoy the “flying” moment.** When jumping shots, time seems to slow down. In the air, you consider angles, observe the goalkeeper’s weaknesses, and decide where to attack—in that moment, you’re not just playing, you’re “flying”.

**Don’t rush for success.** Handball is a sport that requires time and patience to master. From every pass, every jump, slowly feel the freedom that handball brings you and the trust your teammates have in you.



"One group recorded an episode on their favorite game—it was lively, clear, and full of joy," club coach Ying Yin shared. "During the recording process, they vividly described the features and gameplay of their favorite game, resulting in a truly wonderful recording! That's what learning through play looks like."



## This Is a Paradise for Sound



Little Podcast Stars

Teachers:  
Ying Yin, Stephanie Wang



Decide on a podcast topic, discuss and draft it in small groups, learn how to use professional recording equipment and operate it firsthand, and finally select and edit the material. This sounds like the daily workflow of a professional podcaster, but at Keystone, it's a weekly task for third- to fifth-grade members of the Little Podcast Stars KAP club.

Here, they dive into the world of podcasting—choosing topics, writing scripts, recording, editing, and finally sharing their voices with the world. From campus life and historical stories to video games and questions about natural science, Little Podcast Stars podcasters create their own based on topics of their interest.



Thinking about  
your first podcast?

TIPS

**Choose a topic you love:** A favorite book or movie, a funny weekend, or a heartwarming family tradition.

**Keep it simple:** Use a phone to record in a quiet room. Make an outline first, then speak freely.

**Practice and play:** The more you try, the better it gets.



Listen now to  
"Super Cat Tales 2"





# Writing about the Past, and Not Rewriting It

Jack Wang  
and  
His Path to Yale

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The parents of Jack Wang once hoped he would follow in their footsteps and pursue a future in science. But in the fifth grade, he discovered his love for history. He looked up to historians and writers, especially Yuval Noah Harari, the author of *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, who inspired him to imagine a future where he, too, could explore humanity's big questions through writing and research.

Over the years, Jack immersed himself in books on history, philosophy, and the humanities, reading the works of thinkers like Kant, Hegel, Laozi, and Jin Yuelin. His WeChat blog, with 254 articles published since 2017, reflects on both the past and the present. Aside from these, Jack has actively pursued historical research projects connecting him with his local community and beyond.

Step by step, he brought his vision to life.

"When you feel anxious, just do it," he said. "It's only when we really commit to something that we can begin to see our future clearly."

In February 2024, Jack visited Yale University for the first time. Walking through the campus, he noticed the dates of major historical events engraved on the brick walls of Yale's centuries-old structures. For Jack, Yale is both timeless and modern where he feels like standing at the crossroads of the past and the present.

Later that year, in December, he received his own place in Yale's story: an admission letter. Along with the official email came a handwritten note from his admissions officer, a personal gesture that, to him, felt meaningful and sincere—almost like a small moment of history in itself.

Jack is the fourth Keystone Academy student to be admitted to Yale. He doesn't see himself as someone who has "made history", but rather as someone who wants to write not about his own but of humankind, from his humble perspective.

## PART ONE

# Jack's Utopia

On January 25, 2025, the second day of the Spring Festival holiday, Jack updated his WeChat public account, *Jack's Utopia*, with a new article titled "The Collapse of the Mediterranean Trade Network in the Late Bronze Age." In it, he explored the reasons behind the mysterious end of a vast and prosperous trade system that connected the Mediterranean over three millennia ago.

Five days later, he followed it up with his 253rd article: "The Pursuit of the 'Absolute Error' Creed: An Unrealizable Fantasy."

In the seven years since founding *Jack's Utopia*, Jack has published more than 260 articles—averaging nearly one a week. Maintaining that pace would be challenging for any professional journalist, let alone a student balancing academic pressure. But Jack has a deep impulse to write. Through *Jack's Utopia*, he transports himself across different times and places, reflecting on history, current events, art, philosophy, and more, in both Chinese and English. Each article raises new questions and offers his evolving answers. Writing, for him, is a way to sort through his understanding of the world—and to test the limits of where words can take him.



Jack launched *Jack's Utopia* in 2017, just four months after arriving at Keystone. At first, he wrote simple historical stories. Then came his reflections on different eras. Over time, his work grew into deeper analyses of historical events and commentary on current affairs.

What started as a personal project slowly became something bigger: a platform for his ideal of understand-

ing the present through the lens of history and, through that understanding, working to reduce prejudice and division in the world.

Jack's love of history started in fifth grade, when a single history class sparked his curiosity about the past. Since then, he has tried to view history as something alive—a way to connect the past with the present, and himself with his own era.

He's drawn in by the narrative of historical periods, and the rich stories coming from the people, places, and ideas that shaped those eras. His articles take readers from the Hittite civilization to the Qin Empire, from the violence of the Viking Age to the beauty of ancient Greek temples. He writes not only to retell these stories, but to explore the forces that drive historical change.

Reflecting on the Viking Age, for instance, Jack once wrote:

*"Undoubtedly, the Vikings' violence and bloodthirst caused a catastrophe for the Europeans. But looking at history from an overarching perspective, were all destruction extremely detrimental to the light of civilization? I think not. I believe the Vikings contributed positively to the unification of multiple nations in Europe, brought deep-rooted changes to the European political systems, led to the birth of mercantilism or the outlook of global trade, and created cultural merging through their bloody conquests. These contributions did not fade away together with the Viking Age. Instead, most became the cornerstones for Europe and the Western world at large we see today."*

Seeing his passion for history, Jack's parents became his strongest supporters. His mother often joins him whenever he reads history books. He makes mind maps in English; she takes notes in Chinese. Then they discuss and debate, sometimes at home, sometimes on the car rides back to school. His parents regularly challenge his ideas, pushing him to consider new perspectives and ask sharper questions.

One of Jack's favorite memories is standing beside his mother in the kitchen at noon, talking loudly over the clatter of pots and pans about *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. They could barely hear each other, so he had to shout just to keep the conversation going.

Those same conversations continue with his admissions counselor, Sonja Song, who shares his love of history and often becomes a thoughtful listener to his latest ideas. Keystone Dean of Admission Chris McColl and Dr. McCarron have also become regular readers of *Jack's Utopia*, joining him in discussions about patterns of the past and possibilities for the future.

Moments like this remind him history isn't just an aca-



Jack Wang is fond of exploring museums

demic subject but a connection that carries warmth, emotion, and meaning.

"History is also about the future," Jack said.

He has spent hours standing before ancient ruins, reflecting on what they tell about human civilization. He has thought deeply and quietly at museum exhibits on war and peace, rise and collapse, division and reunification. He has searched for patterns in the works of Socrates, Nietzsche, Kant, and Hegel—trying to answer his questions with philosophy, and to find the future inside the past.

**For Jack, history is endless.  
"Without the memories of the past,"  
he said, "how could we have today?  
And without what we do today,  
how could there be a future?"**

Even as the world changes at incredible speed—where technology advances and globalization deepens—conflict, discrimination, and cultural divides persist. Wars continue. Trade barriers rise. And yet, Jack believes people across regions, nations, and even centuries have more in common than we sometimes realize.

Through dozens of articles in *Jack's Utopia*, he has explored these connections. He's written about the shared symbols, beliefs, music, art, and ideas of the East and the West. He looks to history for ways to better understand the present and the future. And while he knows conflict is inevitable, he hopes that by changing how we see each other, and by approaching differences with empathy and fairness, people of different nationalities, religions, and

ideologies can find more respect, cooperation, and dialogue.

This belief is the thread running through *Jack's Utopia*. It's the ideal Jack is still pursuing through his writing.

When asked what learning means to him, Jack answered simply: he wants to use his knowledge—and his sense of justice—to make the world a better place.

In one of his articles, posted in *Jack's Utopia*, Jack wrote:

*"Human history brims with destructive impulses, an endless cycle of brutality and annihilation that ignites wars, genocide, and the downfall of civilizations. Yet, inscribed within our very nature exists an opposite quality. This inherent aspect has guided humanity to establish a spiritual civilization that reaches beyond basic necessities—a world abundant with imagination, compassion, art, and philosophical contemplation. Within this fundamental duality of human existence, we must continuously nurture hope for what lies ahead."*

**In *Jack's Utopia*,  
audiences can see the ideals of  
a young scholar at work—  
his hunger for knowledge,  
his belief in fairness, and his desire  
to take on responsibility.**

After over seven years and 254 articles, Jack has turned his love of history into real work and lasting action. With each essay, he lays another brick in the foundation of his

vision, a bridge connecting people across countries and cultures, and a shared "utopia" built not just for himself, but for others, too.

PART TWO

# Links in Reality

One evening in Kenya, Jack dimmed the lights of a small house on the grasslands as his Bangladeshi roommate laid out a blanket to pray. Though Jack had studied Islam in textbooks and explored its history, watching this quiet, personal ritual moved him deeply. In that moment, cultural differences felt real and powerful—not as an abstract idea but as a lived experience.

"It's hard to describe the shock of this cultural difference in words," he reflected. "You can only feel it when you're there."

In 2023, Jack traveled to Kenya with Keystone students and Director of Experiential Learning Chris Cartwright and Executive Head of School Dr. Emily McCarren to attend the Round Square International Conference. There, he and his roommate—two people from different backgrounds, beliefs, and traditions—began talking. Their

conversations weren't about the broad strokes of religion or politics but small, everyday details: family traditions, prayer habits, childhood memories. Jack realized that real understanding often starts not with differences but with shared, ordinary experiences.

Reflecting on this, Jack launched an interview project during the conference. With another student, he spoke with attendees from around the world, asking simple, human questions: "How do you view childhood?" "How do you think about death?" "What are the customs around daily life in your culture?"

The responses revealed just how naturally people connect when they begin with empathy and curiosity.

—  
Trust, he found,  
grows out of small exchanges,  
and real dialogue follows.  
—

Jack brought this project back to Keystone, recruiting students to interview teachers and classmates from countries like Uganda, Greece, Ethiopia, and India. In more than 20 video interviews, they captured honest reflections on life, traditions, and identity. These conversations confirmed what Jack experienced in Kenya: the similarities between people are far greater than the differences.

This belief continues to guide his work. After graduation from Keystone, Jack hopes to build new cultural bridges at Yale, sharing Chinese culture and learning from

Jack taught these children at a local Kenyan school during the 2023 Round Square Conference



others. He also hopes his classmates from Keystone will carry this spirit into their communities, becoming ambassadors of cultural exchange wherever they go.

Jack's commitment to connection has shaped much of his work at Keystone. After three years in Keystone's Round Square Council, Jack, who was then a high school junior, became its chair and helped grow its membership from 30 to over 100 students. During the pandemic, he worked with international schools in Ningbo and Shenzhen to develop a Chinese language lab, offering online courses on Chinese language and culture to over 170 students from more than 30 countries. Inspired by this success, Round Square expanded the concept to include labs in French, Japanese, and even New Zealand Māori, turning language learning into meaningful cultural exchange.

"As an organizer of the Chinese language lab," Jack said, "I felt how it allowed students to share cultural values in a way no ordinary course could. There were no barriers, just direct, equal communication between students."

This same vision of connection shaped *Jack's Utopia* and guided his KAP (Keystone Activities Program) on linking Eastern and Western civilizations. Through history discussions with 15 students from Grade 6 to Grade 9, he encouraged them to explore both their national identity and the shared humanity across cultures.

Even in small moments, like reading with primary students in the Keystone Library through the "Reading Buddies" KAP, Jack found meaning in bringing people together. High schoolers and young children, two groups who might otherwise never interact, shared stories and time, giving each other unexpected warmth and companionship.

For Jack, whether through history, dialogue, or daily life, every connection strengthens the links that hold our shared world together.



During the Round Square Conference in Kenya, Jack also interviewed local environmentalists

the most rigorous math option: Analysis and Approaches.

At first, it was overwhelming. Complex calculus and advanced functions pushed him far beyond his comfort zone. Most students interested in the humanities avoided the class entirely. After a difficult start and disappointing test scores, Jack worked closely with his math teacher, Amanda Shen, and his parents to adjust his study strategies. With renewed confidence, he persisted, eventually earning a perfect score of 7.

This experience changed the way he thought about learning. Rather than separating math and history, Jack began to see how they could support each other. He applied mathematical modeling techniques to a historical research project called "Stolen Relations", led by Brown University Professor Linford Fisher. The project focuses on the enslavement of Indigenous people in early American history.

While searching through fragile 17th-century court records and handwritten diaries in Rhode Island, Jack felt the thrill of uncovering the past firsthand. His years of writing, research, and analysis came together in a 10,000-word paper that earned high praise from Professor Fisher, who commended his creativity, rigor, and academic resilience. Jack's mathematical model, designed to find patterns in historical data, further impressed the team and revealed the vast potential of interdisciplinary research.

This work opened a new path forward. Jack hopes to combine history with mathematics or computer science in college, believing history has never existed in isolation. For him, it has always intertwined with literature, science, philosophy, and music—fields that deepen his understanding of the past and present.

That same curiosity drives *Jack's Utopia*, his WeChat blog. In one series, "History and Classical Music," he uncovered the historical moments behind the works of Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, and others.

Music, like history, has become an emotional anchor in his life. After 13 years of piano, Jack still finds himself

### PART THREE

# Everything Is Connected, Like History

While his parents encouraged him to focus on math when he was in Grades 6 and 7, Jack's heart belonged to history. Ancient civilizations, Viking sagas, Sumerian texts—these stories captivated him far more than equations. Still, when choosing Diploma Programme (DP) courses, he wanted to challenge himself. He enrolled in



Jack and Leo Tseung (background) took a selfie with their other Primary School student members of the Readers' Friend KAP

moved to tears by pieces like Chopin's Ballade No.1 in G minor, Op. 23, hearing the echoes of heroism, longing, and resilience from centuries past. Though his teacher once encouraged him to approach the piano objectively, Jack has always felt the weight of history in every note. In these moments, time and place dissolve, and the shared emotions of humanity come alive.

That sense of connection extends beyond the page and the keyboard. Jack believes history is not only something we study—it's something we create. At Keystone, he's seen this firsthand. In the history KAP club, Linking the East and the West, his passion inspired younger students like Raymond Zhang to launch their projects, exploring topics like global legal systems and ancient languages.

Through all these moments, Jack is reminded how much the people around him have shaped his story. He often thinks back to his first week at Keystone, in fifth grade, when a classmate, Oscar Zhou, reached out with a simple question: "Can we be friends?" That invitation sparked a

friendship that has lasted seven years and counting.

It's the same with his roommate Tony Xie, whose optimism has grounded Jack through challenges. When Jack faced failure, Tony helped him see it not as a monster but as a natural part of life. And when Tony needed someone to listen, Jack was there. For four years, they've continued to choose each other as roommates, creating a steady partnership built on mutual support.

Jack has come to realize that these connections are what make history matter. They exist between people, across cultures, through time and space—linking the East and the West, the past and the present, the known and the yet-to-be-discovered.

One night, just before summer break, Jack shared a *National Geographic* photograph of the night sky with his friend Andy Ren. Stars filled the frame, bright, endless, mysterious. Andy was mesmerized. Over the summer, he borrowed the magazine from the library and convinced his mom to take him out to see the stars for himself.

Months later, back on campus, Andy found Jack and shared what he had discovered:

**“When I saw the starry sky  
in *National Geographic*,  
I thought it was just Photoshop.  
But when I saw it with my own eyes,  
I knew—  
that’s the real starry sky.”**

For Jack, that's exactly what history is. It's not just something you read about. It's real, vast, and full of light, waiting to be seen and connect us all.

Most of the records in Jack's collection contain classical music. Ancient melodies and historic sounds are preserved in the delicate, sinuous grooves of the vinyl, bringing a fresh, life-affirming quality to each playback—like an artistic parallel to life itself.

People often call utopia an unreachable destination, an aspiration difficult to fulfill. Yet over these past seven years, Jack has, through devoted action and genuine passion, with spontaneous, pure, youthful dreams, maintained a sense of pain, vigilance, questioning, and skepticism within himself. He looks toward distant horizons and moves steadily toward that ideal place.

As Professor Luo Xin of Peking University writes in a book: "The future may not be exactly what we expect it to be, but without those expectations and efforts we invest, this future would become something else—something we would find even more unacceptable."

History takes shape through storytelling, and our lives are constructed through our words and actions.

Jack chooses to build a utopia that belongs to the future.



Allan  
Wang

# A Promising Leader of Substance

75

*Picture this: You are in a race, where others speed ahead in roaring racing cars, while you pedal forward on a bicycle. On the same stretch of asphalt, even with identical training, shared rules, and common goals, your fate is sealed—you will never cross the finish line first. This track mirrors the societal blueprint for success: high grades, elite universities, stable careers, retirement, and the quiet fade into obscurity. But what if you were born to ride a bicycle? What if your path is not measured by speed or conformity, but by the rhythm of your own wheels turning? Perhaps the real question is not whether you can win the race, but whether you need to race at all.*

In November 2024, when the college application season was in full swing, Allan was invited to speak at the Keystone Education Salon whose theme was “How to Endure When Stability Slips Away”. As a student dialogue guest, Allan reflected on the pressures many students feel and shared the metaphor of the cyclist—an image that resonated deeply with his classmates.

A month later, Allan received his admission letter from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, becoming the first student in Keystone’s history to be admitted there. The news spread quickly across campus. But for Allan, the moment of realization came quietly—when he opened his regular decision documents and saw the materials he had just finished polishing the night before. It hit him: the application journey was over.

So, what now?

For Allan, getting into Wharton was not a finish line but a pivot. The result gave him a new direction and the need to reassess how to spend time and energy. “Applying to Wharton” joined the list of completed experiences on his résumé—important, meaningful, but a moment in the past. He seldom brought it up again. Instead, his attention shifted to something else entirely.

Allan has always cared more about people than prestige, and the journey than the race. And now that one path had ended, he was ready for the next—toward the community around him, and the mountain beyond the mountain.



## PART ONE

# Economic Analysis as Training Empathy

*Do you think procedural justice is more important than outcome justice?*

At 2 a.m., Allan received this message from his friend Oscar Zhou. A spontaneous conversation unfolded. Over that winter break, news had broken that the CEO of a major health insurance firm in the United States had been shot in Manhattan. Public reactions were polarized—some framed the act as “righteous revenge,” but Oscar disagreed. He saw it as a procedurally unjust act and argued that justice could not be achieved if the process itself was flawed. Allan agreed.

Their conversation turned to the famous O. J. Simpson murder trial, where, despite strong evidence, the suspect went free due to procedural mishandling. For Allan, a just process in many cases “is more important than the result”.

“Just like in life, we should focus on the journey, not obsess over distant goals,” he told Oscar, who was surprised after hearing such a comment. As someone who had worked with Allan in high school business competitions and shared an interest in economics and philosophy, Oscar had assumed Allan’s strong academic performance came from being rigidly goal-driven. But the more they talked, the more he saw a different side—someone who deeply valued learning for its own sake.



“I didn’t expect him to love the process of learning itself rather than chasing outcomes,” Oscar said.

To outsiders, Allan appears composed and focused, with clear goals and a seemingly predestined path. But behind this calm surface is a young man who has navigated uncertainty and made deliberate choices about his future.

Allan’s first encounter with economics came almost by chance in Grade 9. Curious and up for a challenge, he decided to participate in the National Economics Challenge with three schoolmates. With only basic knowledge at the time, they picked up Mankiw’s *Principles of Economics* and began learning together. That independent exploration sparked his interest, but it also made him reflect. “If I’d had a chance to dive deeply into physics, I might have fallen in love with physics. If someone gave me a great book, maybe I’d be into literature,” he said.

Still, something about economics stuck. The deeper Allan explored, the more he realized it wasn’t a dry set of formulas but a lens for understanding life. “It’s not something I need to sit down to think about, or something I’d run into a pole thinking about while walking. It’s more like a way of thinking that shifts how I see the world.”

That insight led to action. Allan noticed that many students didn’t really know what economics was before choosing courses in the Diploma Programme (DP). To bridge that knowledge gap, he co-founded the Keystone Economics Club (KEV) with schoolmates to help younger students discover what economics truly means.

Unlike many Keystone clubs, KEV wasn’t part of the KAP (Keystone Activities Program) and had no fixed meetings or mandatory tasks. Everything—from learning sessions to projects—was driven by genuine interest and a shared desire to give back. More than just a study group, KEV aimed to challenge perceptions.

“People often think economics is about money, or that business is just about profit,” KEV’s co-founder Wang Dan said. “But economics is really about choices, and busi-

Allan has taught traditional Chinese painting to children.



ness is about solving problems. We want to spread that understanding."

To bring this vision to life, they launched the school's first student-led social science magazine—*Key to Social Science Journal*—which publishes student-written articles exploring topics beyond textbooks. They also created the Amazing Business Challenge (ABC), a competition that invites primary school students to identify real-life problems and pitch solutions in the form of business plans.

Of all the concepts he encountered, Allan was especially drawn to economics' ability to "see the essence through phenomena."

"What fascinates me is the tension between appearance and reality. Economic thinking teaches us to uncover deeper truths—and that, to me, is a kind of empathy training," he said. "It's about learning to view the world from multiple perspectives."

Even as his interest in economics deepened, Allan remained curious about other fields—physics, literature, philosophy, biology, and art—and continued exploring leadership and service.

In the summer of 2022, he enrolled in "Essentials of Leadership," a Wharton Global Youth Program course. That class marked his first connection to the University of Pennsylvania and Wharton. He was struck by how approachable the professors were and how open the learning environment felt. Most of all, he was moved by a simple but profound assignment: to write and share a personal mission statement.

So, what did he write?

**"I hope to have more time with my family and become someone who helps others."**

That mission was a turning point. For the first time, Allan began piecing together the deeper reasons behind his passions—from economics to service learning. He saw a clear thread: a desire to address social inequality. That, he realized, was a cause worth committing to.

## PART TWO

# The "Nerd" who Transformed into a "Student Leader"

After returning from a trip to Gansu in the summer of Grade 8, Allan sought ways to combine service with learn-





Group photo at the Keystone Color Run and the Charity Ball

ing by joining student organizations. But for an introvert without experience in school elections, stepping into leadership wasn't easy.

His first setback came early: a loss in the student council election. But rather than dwell on the outcome, Allan quickly reflected on why things hadn't gone his way. He realized he lacked confidence in public speaking. More importantly, he discovered that it wasn't the title he cared about—it was the chance to be involved in meaningful activities.

In the second semester of Grade 9, he joined the Keystone Service Council. From there, his calendar filled up fast: Color Run, Giving Tree, Charity Ball, Cultural Mosaic, and so on. He wasn't just participating—he was learning to lead. In a short time, he went from a quiet newcomer to the initiator and organizer of multiple events that sparked a deeper shift in him. He began asking himself bigger questions: Was simply joining existing activities enough? Could he do more?

Student leaders of the Service Committee pose for a group photo with their advisor, Alfonso Rivera (leftmost)



"There are two ways to serve at Keystone," he explained. "One is to join existing clubs or activities. The other is to notice what's missing—and create something new. I prefer the second path."

At Keystone, it's relatively easy for students to start their projects. The harder question is: *what kind of project is actually meaningful?* Allan often reminded himself not to plan events just for show. "I want to initiate things that truly help the community and resonate with students."

Rather than look outward for ideas, he reflected on his experience transferring to Keystone. He remembered feeling lost, unsure of how to navigate the school's systems, use digital platforms, or connect with classmates. Surrounded by opportunity, he still felt "helpless".

When he brought this up with friends, he realized he wasn't alone. Many had felt the same confusion in their early days. That shared experience inspired a new initiative: the Keystone New Student Guidance Program.

Each summer, while most students relax, program members begin their busiest season. They coordinate with the Admission Office to learn about incoming students, email parents introducing the program, and start recruiting upper-grade student mentors or buddies.

Matching mentors to mentees isn't random. Both sides fill out detailed questionnaires about their interests and personalities, so the team can pair them thoughtfully, one-on-one. By the start of the school year, every participating first-year student has a student buddy—a familiar face to guide them through their first days at Keystone.

"We want the student buddy to be the first 'smile' new students see, the first 'welcome' they hear, and maybe even the first friend they make," Allan said.

The program doesn't stop with matching. Partnering with the boarding committee, the team organizes welcome events like a masquerade party and themed sharing sessions, helping new students feel the warmth of the Keystone community in fun and personal ways.

Now in its third year, the New Student Guidance Program has supported over 210 new students. For Allan and his peers, every answered question and solved problem makes the effort worthwhile.

To Alfonso Rivera, the Service Council advisor, Allan is not just an active listener, but a bridge-builder. "He's naturally quiet, but his passion for service pushes him to take initiative and rally his peers around a common cause," Rivera said.

Still, this dedication didn't guarantee recognition in the traditional sense. After two years of hard work in the Service Council, Allan once again ran for the top role—this time, for committee chair—and again, he didn't win. But it didn't shake his commitment. He continued to contribute ideas, lead projects, and support his teammates with the same enthusiasm as before.

In appreciation, his fellow committee members gave him a unique epithet: "Chair of Honor." This gesture wasn't just a title but their way of thanking Allan, who, for them, was more than a teammate—he was a reliable partner, a thoughtful collaborator, and a quietly effective leader.

When asked how he would feel if he never got the chance to lead a project or take the spotlight, Allan didn't hesitate.

**"Then I'll focus on doing what I can. Even in a supporting role, I want to bring my strengths and improve the process, even just a little."**

### PART THREE

# True Leadership is about Giving a Positive Influence

Looking back on his years in the Service Council, Allan doesn't dwell on titles or accolades. What he remembers are the moments of action—planning events, leading projects, solving problems, and learning from every challenge. With each experience, he made careful notes, recorded lessons, and passed them on to younger students.

"Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime," Allan said, referencing the well-known proverb. "When I started in Grade 9, I ran into all kinds of problems. Sometimes, I figured them out on my own. Sometimes, I wished someone could just point me in the right direction. Now that I'm a senior student, I want to be that person for others. If we can make it easier for the next group, community activities can become even better."

For Allan, influence isn't about charisma or speeches—it's about consistent action. Quiet, steady, and often unnoticed, leadership by example is what he's always seen in his parents. "They never told me how to be a good person. They just showed me how to be, day after day," he said.



Allan Wang (center) and the co-founders of NEST

Growing through years of service, Allan remains modest and soft-spoken. But he has become more observant, practical, and proactive. More importantly, he's developed his philosophy of leadership. "Rather than call it leadership, I prefer the word *influence*. I want to be an altruistic person. That doesn't depend on position or status—I can do that anywhere."

Still, the more involved he became in public service, the more he saw the world's complexities. Behind every problem solved were more that remained. School communities like Keystone offer incredible space and support—but there are limits to what any one school or student group can do. Not every project continues. Not every need gets met.

And so he began asking more complicated questions: *What happens to the students we don't reach? What happens when a project ends before the work is done?*

This led to a new idea—connecting student change-makers beyond the boundaries of a single campus. "Every school has students doing service projects," Allan explained. "A lot of times, we're doing the same things—like programs for stray dogs—but no one talks to each other. So, each group stays small and isolated. What if we could work together?"

In his junior year, Allan and his classmates decided to test the waters by reimagining Keystone's annual Service Fair. In past years, the event had showcased only internal projects. This time, they invited students from other schools to participate. Over six weeks, they reached out through emails, social media, and personal connections, explaining the purpose and goals of the event. Despite the difficulty, three schools accepted the invitation.

To Allan, that was a promising start. "It wasn't about numbers. Just the fact that we brought people together from different communities—that was a win," he said. "It showed us where the communication gaps are, and also what's possible."



Allan introduces NEST to the community

Building on that momentum, Allan and several student leaders from Keystone and Beijing Huijia School launched a new cross-school initiative: NEST. They built a website, created email channels, and opened social media accounts both domestically and internationally. They aimed to connect service-minded students, facilitate cross-campus collaboration, and link with NGOs to broaden impact and learning.

Launching NEST was a massive challenge—especially for teenagers. How do you introduce a new organization? How do you build trust between unfamiliar schools? What kinds of activities actually work? These weren't theoretical questions; they were real obstacles the team faced daily. Still, Allan remained steady. His co-founder Wang Dan, at first, struggled to understand his calm.

"I used to get really anxious," she said. "I'd worry the outcome wouldn't match our effort, and it affected my mood a lot. I'd ask him, 'Aren't you frustrated?' But he always reassured me, 'We're building something from zero to one. It takes time. Don't rush.' Working with him made me feel safe."

For Allan, NEST was a platform that allowed them to rethink what service learning could be. He hoped that by encouraging students to collaborate rather than compete, they could remove unnecessary internal friction. Even among student-led service projects, Allan noticed subtle comparisons: Who raised more money? Whose event was bigger?

"To me, this kind of competition doesn't help anyone," he said. "It doesn't help the organizations we're trying to support, and it distracts from the real purpose of doing service. But once you start collaborating, you realize that most people doing this work want to cooperate."

Within the first year, NEST brought together student representatives from 21 schools in three countries, partnered with nine NGOs, and organized five cross-school service events alongside more than 20 shared initiatives.

**"Our role is to be a bridge—to promote cooperation and amplify our collective impact," Allan said. "I hope NEST continues to grow at Keystone, and eventually, I'd love to bring what we've built back to support this community and its curriculum."**

To Allan, a person's connection to their community should not end at graduation. Leadership is not about holding office—it's about having a long-lasting, positive influence. And for him, giving back to the community that raised him is an ongoing commitment, not a one-time gesture.

From "community" to "society" to "world," Allan and his peers stepped forward just before graduation—not with certainty, but with courage. Embodying Keystone's spirit



and a vision of global citizenship, they took their first steps onto a larger stage, hoping to make their voices count in a wider conversation.

Step by step, Allan has shaped and nurtured the community around him. Through every project, he's built his understanding of leadership: leadership is service, and service is leadership. He doesn't shy away from ambition—because he refuses to ignore injustice. His hope is simple but profound: to find a better, more integrated way to help.

"I want to make the world a better place," he said.

"Through public service or a charity organization?" we asked.

"And economics—or a new kind of business model," Allan replied, with quiet certainty.

While many students preparing for university applications opt for internships at big-name companies to build their résumés, Allan followed his instincts. For him, it was one of the best decisions he's made.

At *Krishi Star*, Allan met someone he now considers a life role model—the founder, who disrupted traditional business models by prioritizing social impact over profit. The organization helps small-scale farmers increase productivity and income using innovations like data analytics and internet-of-things (IoT) technologies.

"His experience showed me a new kind of business—one that aims to do good, not just make money. I was fascinated and inspired," Allan said.

But watching others isn't enough; Allan knew building something meaningful takes vision and long-term learning. Between his twin loves—physics and economics—he began asking deeper questions. If he wanted to address real-world problems and drive social change, which field would give him more tools?

It was a hard call. He admitted, "I love physics, but I'm not especially talented in it. If I can't make a real contribution in the long run, I'll feel regret." So, with clarity and calm, he chose economics—a path that felt both grounded and full of possibility. Still, he hopes to study physics in college and speaks admiringly of peers pursuing it. "I admire their purity, ideals, and courage."

#### PART FOUR

# Finding My University

In Grade 10, Allan made an unconventional choice: he interned with *Krishi Star*, a social enterprise in India.



This same clarity carried into his college search. Last summer, Allan joined Wharton's *Leadership in the Business World* (LBW), a three-week program often described as an "MBA for high school students." Mornings were spent in classes with global peers; afternoons focused on real-world business cases. Yet, the experience left him uncertain. "Is my vision too idealistic? Will a business school be too narrow? Can I still explore other fields?" he asked himself.

True to form, he didn't make any rash decisions. Instead, he dug deeper, researching schools, programs, and philosophies. Then, a recruitment letter from Wharton caught his eye. It described students they hoped to attract: those eager to use business for global good, with strong leadership and math skills.

Allan saw himself in that description. And with further research, he realized Wharton wasn't just a traditional business school—it offered flexible, interdisciplinary study. "You're required to take a quarter of your classes in other schools. It's about ideas, not just management. That

excited me," he said. "At that moment, I was sure: I want to go to Wharton."

Even so, he dreaded the application essays. "Writing essays meant I had to reflect, express, even promote myself. I don't like talking about my accomplishments; I prefer learning new things."

But conversations with his college counselor, Yanni Liu, changed his view. "If not for the essays, I wouldn't have paused to think through my journey. It helped me understand how I became who I am—and what I want next."

Now, Allan sees college application as 5% submission and 95% self-discovery. "Through it, I figured out my values, goals, and what kind of person I am."

His teacher, Jeffery Heitmann, once praised his insight: "Allan is sincere and reflective. He sees the essence through the noise."

For Allan, that essence lies in authenticity. "Anyone can prep for college. But if you create a fake persona, you'll have to live with it for four years. That's exhausting."

Quoting Tufts' admissions blog, he added: "The point of college search is to find a school that fits you, not one you force yourself to fit."

Self-exploration is complicated—full of detours and doubt. But Allan embraces that complexity. "Knowing your uniqueness helps you live your life, and not someone else's."

He likens it to racing: "Life isn't only asphalt roads. Maybe your path leads through valleys or alleyways. Sometimes, the detour is the fastest way to the finish line—because the race car is too big to fit."

And maybe, just maybe, knowing yourself *is* the victory.

During the interview with the Keystone Office of Marketing and Communications, Allan often used "if" to imagine better possibilities—for individuals, for society, and for a more inclusive and fair world. He constantly reflects, questions, and reexamines, yet his stories rarely center on himself. It takes time and careful listening to uncover the depth behind his calm and composed demeanor. At times, however, his clarity cuts through: direct and unwavering. He doesn't shy away from "big questions" and speaks with quiet conviction when he says, "I want to change the world."

Allan's strength lies in his willingness to share, his eagerness to learn, and his openness to trial and error. He sees growth not as a straight path, but as a layered process, much like the traditional Chinese paintings he has practiced for over a decade. In those works, the beauty lies not only in the detailed strokes of mountains and rivers, but also in the restraint, the blank space, and what is left unsaid. For him, that balance of intention and openness defines how he approaches both art and life.

Now, with the university admission result in hand, he views it not as an end but as a marker of one stage along a longer journey. Allan still faces the future with the same calm enthusiasm and thoughtful courage. Beyond the visible mountains and rivers, he believes, there is more waiting to unfold.

# As Right as Rain

Dawit Samuel  
Habtamu's  
Journey  
from Ethiopia  
to China

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At the edge of the sand dunes, beneath an endless blue sky in Inner Mongolia, Davit Samuel Habtamu stood still. The wind there was sharp and cold, different from the dry gusts that sweep across the Ethiopian plateau where he was born. In this vast, unfamiliar landscape, Davu paused to hold onto the feeling. After winding through mountains and valleys, he had finally arrived. And somehow, this place felt like his own.

Davu, as he is fondly called by friends, grew up in the Ethiopian capital city of Addis Ababa. His connection to Keystone Academy began in the eighth grade through distance learning classes, and by ninth grade, he had moved to China, joining a school community where he was part of a visible minority. The transition was complex, full of challenges and adjustments. But looking back now, Davu doesn't separate the hardship from the beauty. Both have become part of his story.

On an experiential learning trip to Inner Mongolia in Grade 11, Davu picked up a weathered stone—its coarse surface holding traces of time. While his classmates moved ahead, he lingered, wanting to hold onto the moment. Today, that stone is still with him. In fact, he presented it at the Character and Community Exhibition of Keystone's Class of 2025 members. "This stone is like my future," he said. "It reminds me not to forget where I come from. My past shapes everything that lies ahead."

Now, as he weighs his university options—offers from the University of Notre Dame and Davidson College, and potentially, a joint program between Tsinghua University and the Chinese University of Hong Kong—Davu continues to carry that stone, not just in his hand, but in what it represents. It holds his quiet strength, his perseverance, and a deep sense of responsibility. "For the past five years," he said, "I've lived as a minority in a Chinese community and become part of it. I've been shaped by Keystone, and I've shaped it in return. No matter where I go, I want to keep building bridges, to see others—and be ready, once again, to belong even as a minority."

## PART ONE

# Building Bridges

Before his younger brother was born, Davu's closest companion was his cousin, just a few months older. They did everything together: attended school, played football, and got into the kind of mischief that defines childhood. In the yard outside their home in Addis Ababa, football transported them to a world of joy and possibility.

Ethiopia has only two seasons: rainy and dry. When the rains came, football came to a halt, and time seemed to slow down. But these rainy days gave Davu space to reflect. On rainy nights, he and his mother, Elizabeth Tesfaye, would stay up listening to the rain. Standing on the balcony, Davu would close his eyes and listen to the rain tapping against the metal roof, a soft drumbeat that seemed to lift him from the ground and carry him gently upward.

Outside the rainy season, Davu and his cousin returned to their game. They both tried out for their school football team. His cousin was selected; Davu was not. In a country where football holds deep cultural meaning, this rejection felt sharp. Davu could sense the judgment from classmates, and the sting of being left behind by the cousin who had always been by his side. In frustration, he kicked the ball far across the yard and turned away.

But he didn't stay down for long. Davu resolved to improve—not just to make the team, but to prove something to himself. That summer, he began training on his own. He watched professional matches on repeat, broke down each player's footwork, and practiced for hours each day in the yard. When a move didn't feel right, he didn't blame talent. "My connection with this movement isn't strong enough yet," he thought. So he tried again.

Whenever he felt discouraged, Davu remembered the sound of rain. It calmed him, grounded him, and reminded him of the strength he found in stillness. "If you live in a fixed mindset, you can't challenge yourself," he said. "Because you don't believe you can grow. But it's not that you can't do what you're not good at—you just need to look at it with a growth mindset."

The next year, Davu made the school team. He came to Keystone in ninth grade and joined the football team in the following year. Then, he formed a deep friendship with Tony He, a teammate who would become both a close companion and a Chinese language mentor.

Still, adjusting to life at Keystone was not easy. The language, culture, and social customs were entirely unfamiliar. Although classes were in English, most students

spoke Chinese outside of class. Davu couldn't understand the conversations around him—the hallway chatter, the jokes between friends. "They could enter my world at any time," he said, "but I couldn't really enter theirs."

He felt like an outsider, lost in a place where even his own language, Amharic, no longer had a place. He missed his cousin, his family, the large dinners with injera bread, and the familiar sounds of home. He told his parents about the loneliness. His mother's response was simple: don't retreat—find a way forward. "If language is your obstacle, then learn Chinese well," Ms. Tesfaye told him.

Davu remembered everything it had taken to get here: waking up early to attend online classes during the coronavirus pandemic, staying up night after night for a year before finally setting foot on campus. He had come nearly 10,000 kilometers from Ethiopia to Beijing. Retreat was not an option.

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"I want to set an example for  
my younger brother," he said.  
"He'll face the same challenge one day,  
and I want him to see  
how it can be done."

—



Davu (right) and his brother at their home in Ethiopia

Determined, Davu dove into Chinese. He kept a notebook for unfamiliar words, asked questions constantly, and practiced speaking, even when it felt awkward. "Chinese is hard," he admitted. "But I knew I had to push through."

Teachers noticed his effort. In the Theory of Knowledge (ToK) class, he would look up every unfamiliar Chinese term, even asking about stroke order and handwriting. Kacy Song, Keystone Director of Libraries and Davu's ToK teacher said, "He is learning anytime and anywhere," and that "even words he didn't need to know, he wrote them down, asked for the pinyin, and learned them seriously."

The rain Davu once relied on for comfort became something internal. He no longer needed it to calm or guide him. His motivation now came from within—his quiet persistence, his belief in self-growth, his refusal to settle.



Aside from learning Chinese, Davu also studied wushu at Keystone

When he entered the IB Diploma Programme, Davu chose the more difficult Chinese Language B instead the Chinese Language *ab initio* course, even knowing it might hurt his final grade. “I didn’t do it for the score,” he said. “I wanted to go deeper—to understand Chinese culture and connect with this place for real.”

In three years, Davu moved from Phase 1 to Phase 3, a process that typically takes around four years. At this stage, students, and even some foreigners who have learned the language for longer than Davu, do not typically choose Chinese B. But Davu challenged himself to do so. By the final Diploma Programme (DP) class, he was speaking fluently, even using idioms. When his classmate Corban Whitney remarked that Davu’s Chinese had surpassed his own, Davu smiled but stayed focused.

For Davu, language isn’t just a skill. It’s a bridge—between cultures, between people, between who he was and who he is becoming. “Don’t wait passively,” he said. “If you want to truly connect with others, you have to start building the bridge from your side. The other person will build from theirs, and one day, you’ll meet in the middle.”

## PART TWO

# 48 Hours at the Airport

“I don’t like flying, because airplanes never seem to like me.” Davu says it with a half-smile, but his experiences make it clear: air travel has rarely gone smoothly.

One of the most difficult moments came during the summer of Grade 10, when he traveled to Kyrgyzstan for a scientific research project alongside Science teacher Baldeep Sawhney and senior Arsh Noman. They transited through Kazakhstan—where Davu, unlike his companions, was stopped at customs.

“I was nervous. I knew something was wrong, but I didn’t know what,” Davu recalls. Unlike Chinese passport holders, Ethiopian citizens need a special transit visa to pass through Kazakhstan. Davu didn’t have one. Customs gave him two options: fly back to China or wait for a direct flight to Kyrgyzstan without leaving the transit zone. Both options would delay him by two days.

He chose to wait. Though Mr. Sawhney and Arsh could have gone ahead, they stayed. “Davu is my student, and I want to stay with him,” Mr. Sawhney told the airport staff.

But waiting in an unfamiliar airport was far from easy. With no beds or rest areas, the trio attempted to nap on a series of chairs in the far corner of the airport. Right next to them, the massage chairs screamed reminders. Sleep-deprived and stranded, Davu felt exhausted, powerless, and overwhelmed.

It was during this sleepless stretch that he began reflecting on something deeper.

Amid this situation, the trio encouraged each other and discussed deeply on the issue of identity. As they successfully reached their destination and completed the summer research program, the experience crystallized a question Davu had long been asking himself: “What can I do to really help people in need?”

He thought of immigrants who may not be able to access basic services. “Without these resources, these people cannot live or work well,” he said.

During the DP, Davu chose the economics course, not just as a subject, but as a lens through which to answer that question. In Dorothy Mubweka’s class, Davu saw how economics could uncover hidden structures,

In his Extended Essay, he studied Colombia’s response to Venezuelan immigration. It was a dual concern: how to offer humane protections like healthcare while maintaining economic sustainability. “I realized economics isn’t just theory—it’s tied to real life,” he says. He hopes to study the field further in college to develop actionable solutions that support both immigrants and the countries that receive them.

Davu’s commitment to others runs through every part of his life. On the #TEDxKeystoneAcademyBJ stage, he

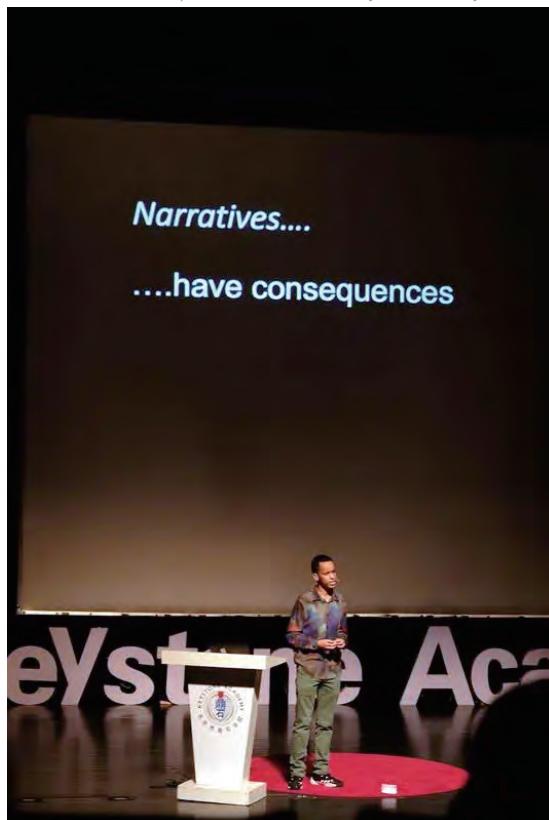
spoke on rediscovering kindness and escaping narrow definitions of love. His talks, filled with humor, clarity, and rhythm, are the most-watched TEDxKeystoneAcademyBJ speeches on YouTube. "Davu is born for the stage," Richard Gao, a former leader of the Keystone Student Council, said. "But he never chased titles. He leads because he wants to serve."

That spirit of quiet leadership is just as visible behind the scenes. Davu has been a member of Keystone's Student Media Services (SMS) for three years, helping live-stream events like Climate Change Conference (COP26), school plays, charity concerts, and graduation ceremonies. "Although we stand outside the spotlight, it is just as meaningful as standing on stage," he says.

In September 2024, during a school-wide event on "How Service-Based Learning Influences the Future," Davu served as a student volunteer, helping with everything from check-in to translation equipment. At the closing ceremony, he invited not just the speakers, but the behind-the-scenes staff—chefs, cleaners, translators—on stage for a group photo. "I wanted everyone's silent contributions to be seen and cherished," he says.

That photo, filled with laughter and shared pride, remains one of Davu's favorites.

Davu was one of the speakers at the #TEDxKeystoneAcademyBJ event



Percy Jiang, Keystone's Director of College Counselling, said of Davu: "He never treated himself as a foreigner temporarily studying here. He treated Keystone as his home."

That deep sense of belonging runs both ways. In the school cafeteria, younger children often gather around him. Even during the intense Grade 12 application season, Davu always made time to listen. "He gave the children time to share even their 'insignificant' words," Mr. Jiang said.

In early 2024, Davu co-led a community initiative titled "Belonging" with classmate Tony He. Inspired by the words of his classmate Louis-Paul Rolland, "I won't say I studied at Keystone. I'll say I am a Keystonian", they created posters inscribed with "We are all Keystonians" and collected handwritten New Year wishes from students and teachers. These posters became Spring Festival gifts for Keystone's chefs, cleaning staff, and security personnel.

Davu and Tony later delivered a speech on "Belonging" during a high school assembly. The words resonated so deeply that Executive Head of School Dr. Emily McCarron invited them to repeat it at the year-end faculty meeting. In the final moments, Davu asked the entire audience to stand and declare aloud: "I am a Keystonian!"

"It was a solemn and moving moment," Tony says. "That's Davu—he brings people together with sincerity and purpose."

### PART THREE

## Leave-takings

The sun streamed through the café window, warming the floor and dancing up the green wall. Sunlight lit the faces of Davu's classmates, making the moment feel vivid and alive. Sitting among them, Davu wished he could freeze time.

It was the last ToK class. Teachers Kacy Song and Catherine de Levay had taken the class across the street to a café for their final session. Unlike usual classes filled with spirited debate, this one carried a quiet tenderness. Memories of past lessons—the intellectual clashes, the shared epiphanies—rose in everyone's minds.

For Davu, ToK was one of the most meaningful courses. It wasn't about fixed answers. It was about questioning the foundations of thought itself.

In class, students explored everything from the US election to vegetarianism on campus, from identity and ethics to the definition of art and history. They examined

the overlap between math and art, debated whether AI is inherently dangerous, and wrestled with big questions like: Does technological advancement guarantee progress in human understanding?

"In ToK, I felt that learning truly came alive," Davu says. "If everyone agrees, the discussion dies. Real thought emerges in the deep waters beyond simple rules."

That curiosity—pure and sincere—is what struck Ms. Song most. "Davu learns because he loves knowledge," she says, adding that "He's like Confucius in spirit."

"No matter what field he will be engaged in in the future, Davu will be the teacher who can inspire others and bring positive influence to everyone."

Davu's contributions in class weren't limited to offering ideas. He actively included quieter students in discussions. "He always encouraged others to speak up, especially those who were usually silent," says Ms. Song. "His curiosity is sparked by difference."

Davu describes ToK as a collaborative journey:

"My classmates are artists, tech experts, historians.

The real discoveries happened together—when we explored complexity and came back with thousand of ways of thinking."

His notebooks are filled with classmates' moments of brilliance. "The real challenge" he wrote, "lies not in your opponents. Rather it is with those who always agree with you."

Davu's approach to learning extended beyond the classroom. In Grade 10, he took over leadership of the Keystone Model United Nations (MUN) club. MUN's format of role-playing as diplomats to tackle global challenges deeply resonated with him.

"I loved trying to understand problems from other people's perspectives," he says. "When I attend conferences, I don't take representing countries as an assignment. I truly embrace the nation and its culture."

"My father Habtamu Ejigu is the one who taught me that MUN is about 'making human connections,'" Davu shared. Mr. Ejigu and Mr. George Nyamweya are Davu's MUN supervisors.

He and his co-leaders guided younger students through rigorous MUN sessions, helping them prepare proposals and explore global issues with sincerity and depth.

This same spirit animated his literature and drama classes. English literature discussions lit sparks of insight; in Grade 9 and 10 drama, students co-created stories and performed them to explore emotional depth.

"When we're truly collaborating, we forget the words but remember the feelings,"

Davu says.

"When it becomes so vivid, you reach the realm of reality that is hard to capture. It is a unique and profound experience."





Davu is among SMS's most intrepid and active student photographers

"Maybe one day," he adds, "we leaders of tomorrow will sit down and talk like we do in ToK class. Maybe then we'd understand each other better."

As high school came to a close, Davu found himself pausing in the halls, remembering the exact feeling of entering each classroom, of learning shoulder-to-shoulder with friends. He smiled to himself and whispered, "Thank you."

Back in the café during that final ToK session, memories flickered through his mind like a film reel—those

unrehearsed, irreplaceable moments of thought and dialogue. "Each class felt like walking through a cool, clear rain," he says.

After saying goodbye to the rains of Ethiopia, Davu had found another kind of rain—one of thought and discovery. And in the café, he stood and said: "Thank you, everyone. We created this course together and felt the reality of learning. Let's say goodbye, just how we treat beautiful things that will eventually pass."

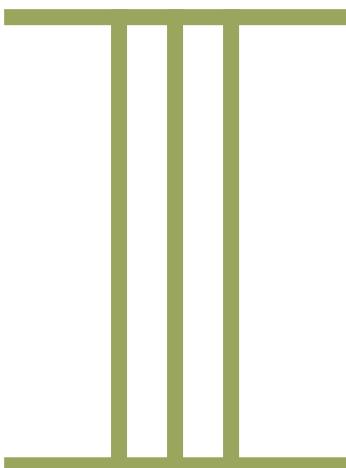
Davu still remembers something that Science teacher Portia Mhlongo said when he first arrived in Beijing. On the school bus from the airport to Keystone, his mother chatted with Ms. Mhlongo. One line stuck with him: "Many students think about what to take from school. But they should also ask what they want to leave behind."

That is one of the principles that shaped his years at Keystone.

"I think about Gao Jingbo, the student council president, quietly preparing assembly slides instead of eating lunch, never asking for credit," Davu says. "Or Lisa Li, who gave a remarkable speech about body shaming and set up a free sanitary pad station in the girls' bathroom. She started something, and now more students have joined her."

He continues listing classmates—Henry Ye, Yolanda Wang—leaders who left legacies not through titles, but through quiet, persistent effort.

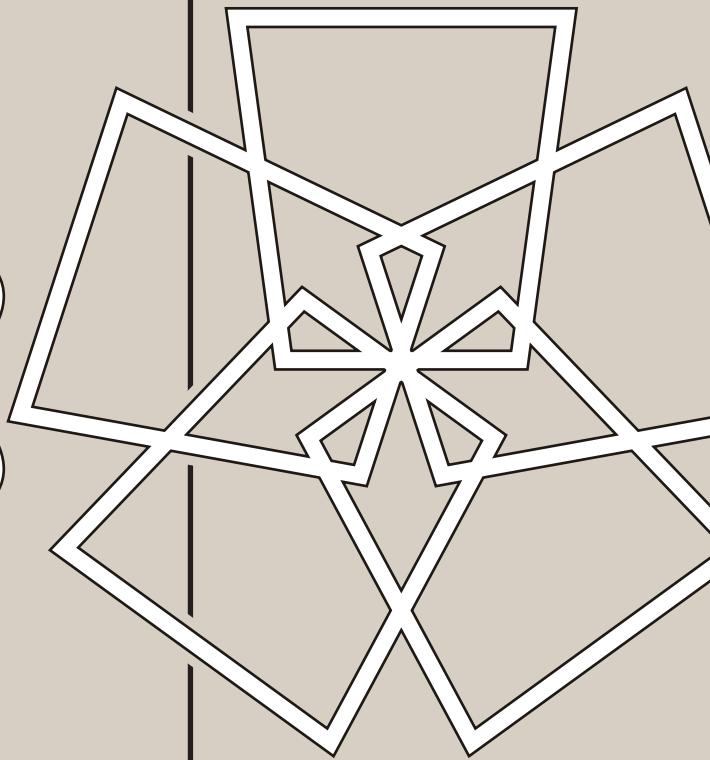
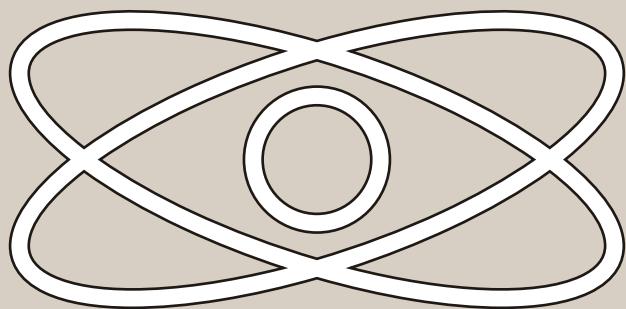
"To me, leadership means keeping your promises, especially when no one's watching."



Keystone Academy's 2024–2025 academic year showcased vibrant community leadership, student achievements in competitions and projects, meaningful alumni engagement, and the successful graduation of the Class of 2025. Through partnerships, service, and academic excellence, Keystone continues to inspire growth, resilience, and a strong sense of belonging across its global community.

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# Annual Highlights

# Keystone Education Salons in 2024–2025 Bring Ideas in Conversation

This year's Keystone Education Salons brought a stage for big questions and bold ideas, inviting leading voices from education, science, public health, art, and philosophy to share their work with the school community. Audiences heard how innovation can be nurtured in an AI age, how societies respond to uncertainty, what our genes reveal about life, and how art builds cultural bridges. They debated questions about truth, identity, and the power of curiosity. Through speeches, panels, and Q&As, students, educators, and parents explored the intersections of global issues and everyday life—making each salon a lively forum for learning beyond the classroom.

1



On October 8, 2024, Dr. Barry Groves, President of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), spoke on preparing Generation Z for a fast-changing world. He urged schools to spark innovation by helping students uncover passions, define purpose, and adapt to the challenges and opportunities emerging in the age of artificial intelligence. [↑]



Watch video



“Anxiety culture” took center stage as Dr. John P. Allegrante of Columbia University unpacked how global instability fuels mental strain. Keystone students and staff joined him on stage on November 21, 2024, to connect the salon theme of “Living with Uncertainty: How to Endure When Stability Slips Away” to youth well-being and community resilience. [↑]



Watch video



In a talk on December 9, 2024, that spanned the Human Genome Project to AI in biology, academician Yang Huanning explored life's code with students and scientists. The discussions in his salon, "Into Life's Codebook: Unraveling the Order and Revolution Behind Genes", touched on genes, environment, and breakthroughs in disease prevention. [↑]



Watch video



On May 7, 2025, Renmin University's Professor Zhou Lian turned philosophy into an interactive exercise—posing puzzles about reality, memory, and truth. His message during his salon, "Philosophy Is a Verb": curiosity and critical thinking are tools for navigating both academic life and an AI-driven future. [↑]

From meeting avant-garde artists to directing UCCA, Philip Tinari recounted his journey in Chinese contemporary art. His talk, "Building Bridges: A Life in China's Art World" on April 14, 2025, explored how art sparks cross-cultural understanding and why public engagement is at its highest in decades. [↓]



# Keystone Thought Lab Launched as a Forum for Ideas and Possibilities

Launched last school year, the Keystone Thought Lab quickly became a hub for intellectual exchange, inviting experts from journalism, entrepreneurship, science, and more to spark conversations with the community. Sessions blended lectures with interactive discussions, pushing students to think beyond conventional boundaries. In the process, students, educators, and parents engaged directly with leading thinkers, making the Thought Lab a space where curiosity meets real-world perspectives.

# ?



In the inaugural Thought Lab on November 13, 2024, award-winning journalist and professor Leonard Cassuto discussed ideas from his book, *Academic Writing as if Readers Matter*, urging Secondary School students to see writing as a bridge to readers. The session challenged labels and encouraged storytelling grounded in clarity and purpose. [↑]

Venture investor Steven “Captain Hoff” Hoffman led the second Thought Lab on November 26, 2024, exploring AI, nanotech, space tech, and gene editing. Students pitched entrepreneurial ideas and debated the ethics and potential of emerging technologies shaping the future. [↓]



Watch video





## Arts and Culture on Performing Arts Center Stage

On January 8, 2025, Tsinghua University lecturer Geng Deng asked, “Is science the only path to truth?” His talk wove history, philosophy, and humor—from alchemy myths to Ming dynasty translations—inviting the audience to see science as one of many ways to understand the world. [↑]

Performing Arts events at Keystone this year brought a rich mix of cultural heritage, classical tradition, and student talent to the stage. The Keystone Performing Arts Center (PAC) became a showcase for the next generation, as Primary and Secondary students delivered dynamic performances spanning pop, jazz, film scores, and classical repertoire. Whether through international artistry or homegrown talent, each event invited the community to celebrate creativity, cultural exchange, and the enduring power of performance.

# 3



Silken robes glowed under gallery lights as Chinese robes and artifacts filled the PAC Lobby with color and history from the start of the semester until November 10, 2024. Visitors moved between intricate costumes and architectural designs, while in the Secondary School academic building, sixth- to tenth-grade students shared vivid stories and hand-crafted artworks related to their trip to Jingdezhen. [↑]



On October 18, 2024, the first notes of Humoresques drifted through the PAC before swelling into Czech composer Antonin Dvořák's soaring melodies. Pianist Jin Wenbin and guest musicians from Beijing and Tianjin brought the audience on a journey of nostalgia, honoring the legacy of Dvořák, 120 years after his passing. [↑]



From pop anthems to jazz riffs, the PAC stage burst with student energy. Primary musical ensembles charmed with bright harmonies on May 29, 2025. Two days earlier, MYP performers transformed into choirs, film-score composers, and a roaring big band, proving that Keystone's music program hits all the right notes.

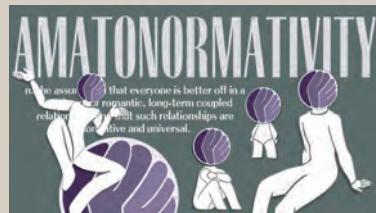
## Keystone Abroad: Learning, Leading, and Earning Recognition Worldwide

In a world where borders are increasingly fluid and challenges run global, Keystone students are proving that learning without limits means engaging beyond the classroom, and beyond China. This year, they have brought their voices and skills to international stages, with achievements spanning diplomacy, environmental stewardship, innovative social campaigns, and creative writing. These experiences highlight how Keystone fosters a global mindset, where education connects knowledge, action, and community to shape a better future.

4



At the United Nations (UN) Summit of the Future in New York in September 2024, Dr. Emily McCarron and Dr. Rae Yang reaffirmed Keystone's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Student initiatives addressing local and global issues showed how knowledge can be transformed into action for a sustainable future. [↑]



During the Spring Festival 2025 break, students in Grades 6, 8, and 9 traveled to Bali and explored coral reefs, mangrove forests, and sustainable enterprises during the Ecological Environment Management Study Program. Elsewhere in Europe, fifth and seventh graders went on a Polar Study Tour to Sweden, which blended science, sustainability, and culture. [↑]

Ninth grader Richelle Li's campaign #loveyourway was selected for the Global Online Academy's Capstone Showcase this year, standing out among 1,300 projects worldwide. Her work challenges amatonormativity and promotes inclusivity, aligning with UN SDG 10 on reducing inequalities. [↑]

## Keystone in Seasons: Celebrating Milestones Through the Year

The rhythm of the school year unfolds through lively seasonal celebrations and milestones that unite the Keystone community. These moments of joy, creativity, and connection underscore the dynamic life at Keystone, where learning goes hand-in-hand with celebration.

Three Keystone students earned international writing honors in early 2025. Aiden Tao (Grade 4) and Doremi Wang (Grade 5) won Children Pay Children's annual contest on love, while Olive Wang (Grade 3) reached the finals of the American Writing Awards with her fairy tale *Oleyn*. [↓]

鼎石小学生凭借爱与想象获得国际文学殊荣

Kestonians Receive International Recognition for Their Stories on Love and Imagination

5



Autumn Fest filled the campus with color and creativity on October 27, 2024. Dr. Emily McCarren's collaboration with the Keystone Yunyin Orchestra brought to life Mary Oliver's poem, "Don't Hesitate", while students showcased art, music, dance, and martial arts in a vibrant day of community celebration. [↑]



Watch video



Keystone rang in the Year of the Snake with a hiss-terical Temple Fair on January 24, 2025, full of lively performances in the Secondary School Gym and Performing Arts Center. From a festive lunch to a student-led giveaway, the campus buzzed with cultural pride and fun during the Spring Festival. [↓]

The week-long Arts in Bloom festival from June 9 to 14, 2025 transformed Keystone into a stage for diverse performances—from lion dancers to original productions like *Timeless Rhythms and Blossoms*. Each day brought fresh artistry and energy to the school community. [↑]





## Keystone Students Shine on Global and Regional Stages



During the last three days of school on June 23-25, 2025, Keystone marked summer's arrival with laughter and play. Primary School's ice cream party kicked off Sports Day festivities, followed by Secondary School students competing and celebrating on the football field. The academic year closed with Keystone Summer Fest, a day of games, celebrations, and promotions, welcoming the season with friends and family across all grade levels. [↑]

Keystone students demonstrated their creativity, innovation, and talent through competitions this year spanning science, sustainable development, and the arts. These accomplishments reflect Keystone's commitment to nurturing excellence and real-world impact, with students engaging meaningfully in academic challenges and cultural exchanges beyond the classroom.

# 6

In September 2024, twelve Keystone Primary and Middle School students competed in the global Youth Innovation Campaign on Sustainable Development for Children and Teenagers by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In this sustainable development innovation challenge, our school received an Outstanding Organizer Award, as well as special accolades for participating Keystonians. [↓]



In October 2024, Keystone's team for the International Genetically Engineered Machine (iGEM) competition in Paris earned gold medals and special awards for developing a synthetic biology project targeting allergies caused by the Peking poplar tree pollen. Their innovative project addresses a pressing health concern affecting Beijing's population. [↑]

Ten student musicians captivated audiences during the Keystone Young Musician Competition, held at the Performing Arts Center on November 6, 2024. The winner represented Keystone at the Beijing International Schools Young Musician Competition and faced off with other young musicians in China in the finale in late November. [↓]





Keystone's Wushu Team dominated the 16th Beijing Sports Conference Wushu Championship with 15 golds, 13 silvers, and seven bronzes, plus multiple group awards and the "Sports Ethics" Award. The 37-member team excelled among 90+ competing teams, showcasing outstanding martial arts prowess and sportsmanship. [↑]



Hosting the Junior International Schools Athletic Conference (ISAC) Swim Meet in mid-November, 2024, Keystone swimmers secured top podium finishes in multiple events, including first place in the men's 25m butterfly. The meet united swimmers from 13 international schools, highlighting Keystone's growing prominence in competitive swimming. [↑]

On March 30, 2025, the first Keystone x YiXi Youth event took place at Keystone. Seven guest speakers from the fields of nature, medicine, philosophy, and journalism, and a Keystone student speaker, Mia Cheng, jointly presented a special "thought marathon" at the Keystone Performing Arts Center. By telling the audience that "I feel able of seeing more when I am seen less", they guided us in exploring perspectives beyond the mainstream, revealing different facets of a complex and authentic world. Mia shared her experience of working as a full-time waitress for a month during summer break. As the first Secondary School student speaker in the YiXi Youth lecture series, her sincere account demonstrated a 17-year-old girl's brave exploration of real life, highlighting her efforts to truly hear and see the voices and communities often overlooked. In an era marked by rapid advancements in AI and virtual reality technologies, it is more crucial than ever to break free from preconceptions, shed a winner's posture, and authentically engage with, participate in, and experience the world. [↓]

Keystone Secondary musicians performed classical, jazz, and contemporary pieces at the International Schools Choral Music Society (ISCMS) Gala Concert in Shanghai on February 23, 2025, impressing audiences and fostering connections with international peers under expert guidance. [↓]



# Keystone Shows Why It Is at the Heart of Education and Civic Partnership

Keystone's leadership goes beyond academic excellence to embrace active partnership with local government, long-term commitment to staff, and recognition from prestigious bodies. This year, the school welcomed various local government delegations, participated in joint volunteer initiatives, and hosted large-scale university fairs that serve the wider Beijing community.

# 7



At Shunyi's International Volunteers Day event on December 1, 2024, Dr. Emily McCaren joined major local leaders to launch a community volunteer initiative, delivering a stirring speech that showcased Keystone's civic commitment. [↑]



On April 16, 2025, 75 Keystone staff and 24 third-party employees were honored for long-term service, sharing reflections on growth, purpose, and their meaningful roles within the school community. [↑]

Keystone received a full six-year re-accreditation from WASC, affirming the school's strategic priorities and the integrity of its educational programs, a milestone marking sustained excellence and community trust.

Keystone hosted the Global University Fair on March 17, 2025, welcoming more than 110 institutions and 500 attendees. This fair aimed to spark or sustain valuable connections between students, families, and international universities. [↓]



# Keystonians' Work Showcases Passion, Culture, and Scholarship

Keystone students express their creativity, identity, and scholarship through a variety of projects that combine personal growth with cultural exploration. These projects demonstrate Keystone's dedication to nurturing independent thinking, cultural awareness, and meaningful engagement both inside and outside the classroom.

# 8



Secondary School's Cultural Mosaic Week on March 24-28, 2025, featured themed days celebrating individuality, cultural heritage, and global perspectives through exhibitions, messages of hope, traditional attire, and country-themed booths. [↓]

At the opening night of the Grade 10 Personal Project Exhibition on January 19, 2025, Grade 10 students unveiled their undertakings, insights, and innovations focused on "Becoming Myself" to showcase creativity, resilience, and a strong sense of community. [↑]





The Keystone Campus Weekend on March 29-30, 2025, highlighted China Day workshops and a gala, followed by a dormitory service project exhibition and charity sale supporting long-term initiatives and local organizations. [↑]

On June 6, 2025, 130 students in Grade 10 presented their Capstone projects exploring Chinese civilization. Their comprehensive explorations were featured in 23 focused sessions spanning history, arts, science, and contemporary culture, preparing them for Diploma Programme challenges. [↓]

## Keystone Alumni: Lifelong Connections and Shared Journeys

As Keystone alumni build connections across cities and years, they continue to embody the school's enduring spirit. Recent gatherings brought together graduates from various cohorts to reconnect, share experiences, and celebrate milestones.

9



Twenty-seven Keystone alumni from multiple graduating classes reunited in Chicago on April 12, 2025, to share college and career experiences, discuss future gatherings, and reconnect with the community. [↓]



Over 100 alumni attended the on-campus homecoming on June 6, 2025, engaging with Capstone presentations, participating in sharing sessions with parents, and enjoying a festive reception featuring favorite alumni dishes. [↑]



## Keystone Class of 2025: Reflections, Achievements, and New Beginnings

The Keystone Class of 2025 marked the culmination of their high school journey with meaningful reflections, outstanding university admissions, and heartfelt celebrations that highlighted their growth as individuals and community members.

10



Keystone Grade 12 students reflected on their journeys through the “Transformation”-themed Character and Community Exhibition on April 10, 2025, sharing personal stories and objects symbolizing their growth and aspirations. [↑]

Keystone’s Class of 2025 secured over 500 university offers across 11 countries and regions, including elite institutions in the Ivy League, and also first-time placements at Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, Williams College, and the University of Notre Dame. [↓]

On May 22, 2025, an open sharing session with Keystone’s newest graduates provided candid insights on college applications, course selection, and life beyond Keystone, enriching parents’ understanding of the academic path. [↓]





The Class of 2025 celebrated their resilience and kindness during their Graduation Day on May 24, 2025, with speeches inspiring graduates to use shared values as a compass for positive global impact. Graduates donned traditional Ewenki-patterned stoles, honoring China's ethnic heritage while embarking on their new life chapters.

[↑]



Watch video

Before the end of the academic year, KEyTEC began the construction of KEyTEC, its new STEM center. Here, students will start a brand new educational initiative called Transdisciplinary Studies in Engineering Technology (TSET). Teachers will guide students through transdisciplinary collaboration and hands-on practice spanning engineering, design, arts, and humanities, fostering exploration and creative innovation. This journey aims to deliver a deeply personalized learning experience. Notably, the Class of 2025 families generously donated a wood router to KEyTEC. We sincerely thank them for their support of Keystone's educational innovation. [↓]



# Engaging Keystone Parents: Conversations, Community, and Collaboration

Keystone values its parents as essential partners in the educational journey. Through engaging events such as the Fireside Chats, Town Hall meetings, and nearly weekly Parent Coffee mornings, parents have opportunities to connect with school leadership, deepen their understanding of Keystone's vision, and promote transparency and strengthen the community bond.



Dr. Rae Yang, Keystone's new Assistant Head of School for School Affairs, shared her educational philosophy and vision in a Fireside Chat hosted by the PTA on November 3, 2024. Her session highlighted experiential learning and cross-grade collaborative opportunities. [↑]

Dr. James Rupasinha, Keystone's new Safeguarding Lead and Director of the Center for Student Development (CSD), showcased the ongoing work of the department in a Fireside Chat on April 20, 2025. Dr. Rupasinha highlighted how language, learning, and counseling specialists collaborate to support and upskill students, parents, and teachers. [↓]

Keystone's PTA organized town hall meetings for Secondary and Primary School parents on December 8 and 16, 2024. Dr. Emily McCaren and academic leaders shared updates and addressed topics such as teaching practices, assessment, faculty development, and screen time management. [↓]



11

# Nearby Species Journal



A FIELD GUIDE TO THE  
ECOLOGICAL WONDERS AT  
KEYSTONE

110

How long did it take you to get to know every corner of the Keystone Academy campus? In the rush of daily routines, how often do we pause to really see the world around us?

In this issue of *The Keystone Magazine*, we introduce “Nearby Species Journal”, a new visual column that invites us to slow down and rediscover the life that thrives around us. The following pages will encourage you, our dear readers, to notice the rhythm of nature that quietly unfolds across the campus.

Nearby Species Journal opens with two groups of students who have become explorers of their own environment. In one, Primary School students turn their curiosity into a magnifying glass, using all five senses in a “Nature Observation” game to notice what’s often overlooked: the sound of the wind, the scent of flowers, the texture of bark, and more. In the other, Secondary School students document the diversity of summer plants through careful photography and research, turning their findings into an illustrated field guide. From the wonder of discovery to the precision of study, they’re together creating a species index that belongs uniquely to Keystone.

*"There's a magpie's nest in the tree by the school gate!  
They pass it every day but never really see it."*

Guided by PS teacher-librarian Lizzy Wang, a group of second graders set out to explore the campus as "nature detectives".

They didn't just rely on sight—they closed their eyes to listen to birdsong and the rustling wind, reached out to feel the rough bark of trees and the delicate veins of leaves, and breathed in the scent of the grass and flowers around them.

From the magpie's nest in a sycamore tree to the pond, the wildflower garden, and even the turtles in the middle school greenhouse, the students formed new, vivid connections with the natural world within their familiar surroundings. Amid their laughter and questions, the seeds of curiosity—and of care for nature—quietly took root.



NEARBY  
SPECIES JOURNAL

111

*Magnolia liliiflora*

*"I hadn't realized how diverse our campus was."*

With a passion for both biology and photography, tenth grader Sophia Zheng spent the summer turning her camera into a tool for exploration. She began by sketching a hand-drawn map, marking out plant locations, and then spent months documenting their forms and seasonal changes from June's tender buds to September's deep greens.

Her photos reveal more than beauty; they tell the story of a thriving ecosystem.

Across the Keystone campus, plants from China, Japan, and the United States coexist in quiet harmony. Sophia's visual diary has become a small ecological atlas—one that encourages us to look again at the green world we think we already know.



NEARBY  
SPECIES JOURNAL

112

*Malus asiatica nakai**Lonicera maackii**Magnolia liliiflora*



NEARBY  
SPECIES JOURNAL

113

*Styphnolobium japonicum*



*Malus asiatica nakai*



*Ginkgo biloba*

*Acer Rubrum*



# Lost, At a Loss, and Still

By

Phoebe Sun

(Keystone Class of 2018)

Edited by

Zaiqi Yu, Andy Peñafuerte III

## About the author

Phoebe Sun graduated from Keystone Academy in 2018. She completed her Bachelor of Arts in Economics, with a minor in Japanese Studies, at Middlebury College in 2022. She earned her dual degrees in Master of Public Administration at Columbia University and Master of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore. She is also the Co-Founder of the Keystone Alumni Association.



In the spring of 2025, the Office of Marketing and Communications received a letter from Keystone Academy alumna Phoebe Sun.

Through what could've been a usual notification to buy a plane ticket, her perception of the boundaries of age and definition of youth were quietly drawn. As she went on a journey from Kunming to Dali, Phoebe wrote candidly to unpack and document the uncertainty that has haunted her throughout her formative years—the anxiety about identity, youth, self, and the future.

After completing her undergraduate studies in economics and Japanese culture at Middlebury College in the United States, Sun earned dual master's degrees in public administration from Columbia University and public policy from the National University of Singapore. Despite her experiences in various journeys, her inner confusion persisted. She continues to grapple with these questions: "When goals are achieved, where will life lead?" "When those around her find their way, what path does her own take?"

For this edition of *The Keystone Magazine*, we launch Alumni Insights, a new column that invites former Keystone students to reflect on life after high school and share their views of the world. We begin with Phoebe's telling essay, "Lost, At a Loss, and Still", a reflective piece that is more of an open letter with unguarded introspection and dialogue. She doesn't intend to provide answers, nor does she deliberately portray a mature persona. As the words flow, we witness a young person's sincere self-reflection amid confusion on her journey marked by inquiry and experimentation. In her writing, she gradually pieces together her own vision of life.

This sense of bewilderment and helplessness isn't a hallmark of youth, but rather a constant interrogation that everyone faces throughout life. Phoebe's writing offers a precious possibility: when we learn to confront and embrace confusion, it ceases to be an obstacle to progress and, through reflection, transforms into a guiding force.

*This article has been edited for style and clarity.*

A few days ago, I was booking flights for the summer trip. As usual, I clicked the youth discount.

“Payment failed.”

“You are not eligible for this offer.”

“Payment failed.”

I repeatedly checked the youth discount terms but couldn’t figure out the issue. The Trip.com customer service replied, “It’s now 2024. Based on your ID, you’re 24 years old, which doesn’t fall within the youth discount range.”

So, I was no longer considered “youth.”

At 24, I can’t say I feel much like an adult. (If the stage after youth isn’t “old age”, then perhaps I can call it “age of maturity”?) Yet, the 24-year-old Phoebe Sun is made up of the so-called “youthful” Phoebe Sun from ages 15 to 23. Every feeling she has is a product of those youthful years.

So today, aside from youth, I know nothing else.

*In Chinese class today, Mrs. Li said that there are three ultimate questions in life: Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?*

*I am Sun Wenjie—but who is Sun Wenjie?*

*I was born in Taiyuan, Shanxi—but what has Taiyuan given me? Why does being born there mean I came from there?*

*I’m going to the U.S. for college—but what is the U.S.? How do I go there? And what comes after that?*

*I don’t know how to answer any of these. I know they are questions I must ponder, and they already live somewhere in my mind and heart. But before I can think about existential questions, I need to finish my homework and presentations first.*

— 2015, 15-year-old Phoebe Sun

If the theme of youth is bewilderment, then mine began at fifteen. At that age, the concept of ‘not knowing’ planted its seeds in my heart and mind. I didn’t understand how “I” came to be, how my past shaped who I am now, or where my future was supposed to go. These vague, floating questions perplexed me. It was like looking for mountains through fog—no matter how hard I blinked, I couldn’t see how many green peaks stood behind the white mist. I can’t even recall the exact moment confusion began, but I know that after returning from visiting schools in the United Kingdom/United States, while researching the difference between liberal-arts colleges and universities, while choosing International Baccalaureate (IB) courses—I must have been confused, more than once.

In 2016, during the eleventh grade, I had more self-study periods. A classmate named Johnson Li had a similar schedule. We often competed for the same desk by the library window—the sunniest, quietest spot, separated from the hallway by a single bookshelf. Eventually, we reached an agreement: one spot for each of us.

While I was busy rushing through homework, he sometimes alternated between writing and reading, sometimes simply closed his laptop to read. We chatted now and then, but I never asked what he was reading or why. Later, the librarian Ms. Kacy Song told me, “He feels lost—he’s trying to find answers in books.”



Phoebe Sun (Keystone Class of 2018) attended the Columbia University School of Public Affairs commencement ceremony on May 20, 2025

After graduation, he went to University College London (UCL). He said he wanted to finish college early.

When confusion entered my own mind, it didn't torment me, but it led me to endless, aimless pondering. Thought without answers unsettles a student used to finding correct ones. I didn't know how—or where—to continue thinking, or how to solve the confusion itself.

I would stand at Ms. Moh's classroom door and ask, "What kind of person do you think I am? What should I do in the future? What kind of person should I become?" In her Singaporean-accented Chinese, she answered, "Girl, only you can know those answers."

Fortunately, the long-rooted goal of "getting into a good university" always pulled me out of this whirlpool of confusion. I decided to think first about the questions that would help me achieve that, and leave the rest—the bigger ones—for college.

Have you ever imagined what you'd do when you finally receive an offer from your dream school? I did—often, especially before falling asleep in the dorm.

On December 7, 2017, at 21:00, I received my early decision offer from Middlebury College. It was a Saturday, and I remember that day vividly. In my memory, my mood that day should have been like the still water of Erhai Lake—almost completely calm. Strangely, I woke up naturally at eight.

With no desire to study, my mother and I drove from Shunyi to Guomao, wandering through one store after another. Inside the mall,

you couldn't see the sky, so time seemed to slip away unnoticed. This was exactly what I needed—a place to pass the day quietly. Yet time passed painfully slowly: 15:10, 15:25, 15:50...

By 18:17, we sat across from each other at a table with two cups of lukewarm tea without steam left on the table. I glanced at my phone; from the corner of my eye, I saw her look up, glance at me, and order almond tofu.

“When will the result come out?” she asked softly, cautiously.  
“Eight o'clock.”

She pushed the almond tofu toward me. “Shall we head home after this? It'll take more than an hour.”

I picked up a spoon, skimmed off the liquid, and scooped a piece of tofu.

We got home at 19:40. She went straight to her room. I took out an unused copybook for *The Heart Sutra* and began copying.

20:00—she came out for an apple.

20:15—she hovered by the sofa.

“Any results?”

“Haven't checked yet.”

“Check first; it's time.”

At my desk, I opened Chrome. The only tab read Application Submitted.

20:20. “How is it?”

“Didn't get in.”

She came over. “It's okay, just focus on the next one.”

I looked up at her and smiled. “Not yet—it's winter time in the US; probably 9 PM in Beijing.”

She glanced at my screen. “You scared me.”

I went back to copying *The Heart Sutra*, one identical copy after another appearing on the paper.

21:05—she appeared again. I was staring at the phrase “form is emptiness.”

“I haven't checked. Let me finish this line.”

21:35—I capped my pen, put the notebook away, and pulled the laptop closer. A notification popped up in the upper right corner: Middlebury College—Your application has been updated.

From my afternoon internet browsing, I knew “Congratulations” at the beginning meant acceptance. I didn't dare look anywhere else—just at the first letter. “I.”

My heart sank. My hands went cold. I looked again; it still started with “I.”

Then I forced myself to read the first sentence:

*I am delighted to inform you that the Admission Committee has voted to admit you to Middlebury College for the term beginning in September 2018...*

Wait—delighted is good, isn't it? I read again. “Congratulations” appeared in bold at the top of the screen.

I read it once more and said to Mom standing at the door, “I think I got in!” She came to the desk. “Check carefully.” I read it again. “Really, I got in.”

She jumped up. My father rushed in. They hugged, crying tears of joy. My lips curved into a smile; I felt relieved, as if a lump in my throat had finally dissolved. I sat in the chair, admiring the offer repeatedly, while my parents' phones kept ringing.

That night, I fell asleep easily.

The next day—or maybe the day after—I can't remember how I felt. Life went on exactly as before; nothing changed. I still slept until eleven on Sunday mornings.

Later, I learned my mother hadn't slept at all that night. I completely forgot all the fantasies I had before receiving the offer. The only thing that truly changed was that the breath I'd been holding was gone. My body and mind felt lighter, calmer, as I watched the orchids on the windowsill and the branches outside. I wandered through anime, movies, TV shows, and various books I'd never seen before.

The younger I was, the more I believed that December 7, 2018, would be a giant dot—perhaps an endpoint. But when December 8 arrived, I realized life didn't stop. It went on, endlessly. That previous "giant dot" was merely a tiny bump on an infinite line—an insignificant speck in an endless continuum. Losing direction after a long-chased goal confused me again; the existential questions crept back in.

While I was still tangled in these abstract questions, my classmates had already embarked on their journeys. Vincent, interested in biology since high school, took it as a Higher Level subject, entered Tsinghua, and now pursues a Ph.D. in oncology. Rachael discovered her gift for understanding people's minds, studied psychology at New York University, and now practices counseling. Leo, knowing his strength in math and science, majored in applied math and CS at Emory University, later earned a master's in artificial intelligence at Carnegie Mellon University, and now works at an AI firm in the U.S.

Shortly before high school graduation, I chatted with the Head of School, Mr. Malcolm McKenzie and told him, "I don't know what I want to do." I asked how he'd found his path in education. He said some people know very early what they want to do their whole lives—that's great, they're lucky; others might never figure out what they truly love, and that's fine too. We just need to know what we don't like, eliminate options step by step, and the answer will appear before us in the process.

At college, I took all sorts of classes—from computer science, which I was terrible at, to statistics, Chinese classics, Japanese, and psychology. I read widely, learned data tools, and finished countless projects—many of them, admittedly, academic garbage.

Then the pandemic came and strangled the throat of my youth. My body was confined in concrete walls; my mind overloaded and drowned in the vastness of the internet. Between eating and sleeping, I turned to the dusty books at home. Remembering how Johnson once sought answers in reading, I tried too—but the words blurred before my eyes. Reading on felt like a guillotine after a feast. To make myself feel better, I pushed these thoughts aside and stopped trying.

Once I watched a short video online. Someone asked:

*"Why do we read? To gain knowledge? But now, one tap brings answers—especially in the age of AI. To remember things? Yet I forget everything. With time, I remember less and less."*

Like the question itself, years later, even if the answer sounded profound then, I can't recall a single word now.

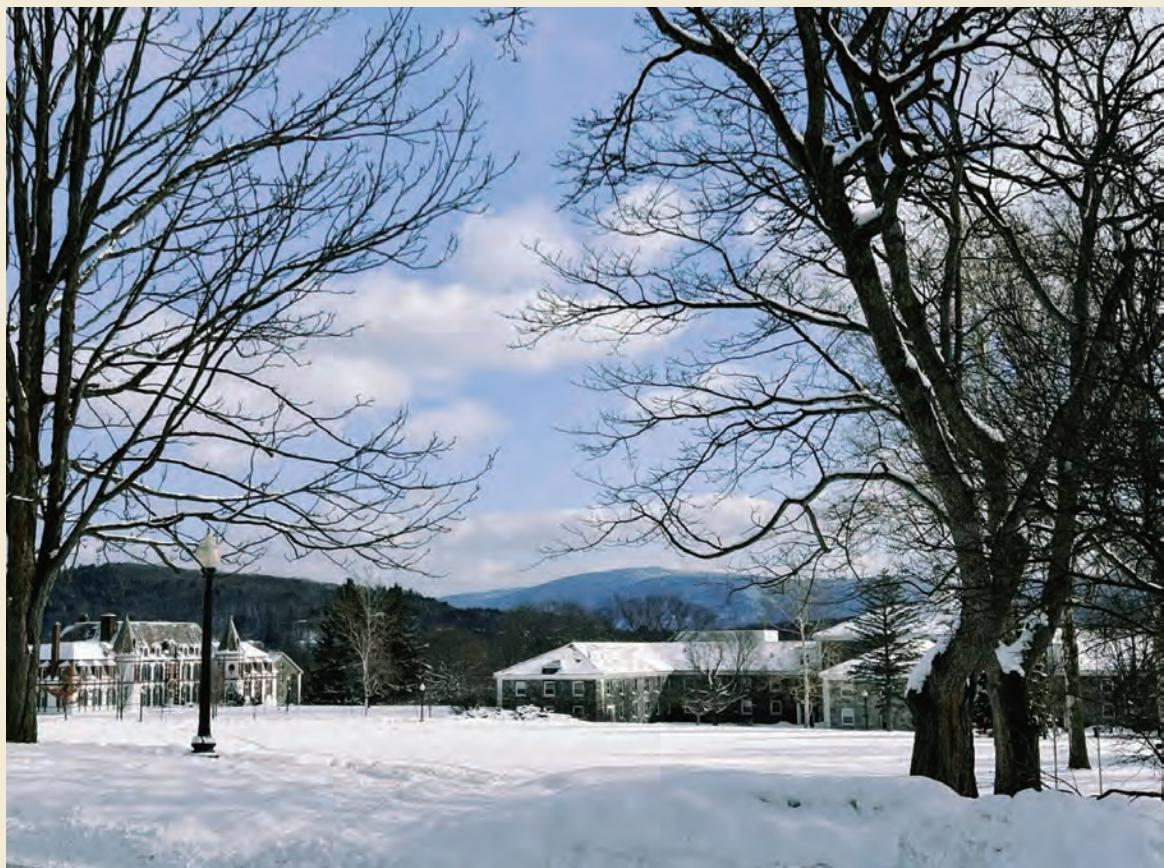
But something must remain, right?

Just like being in school produces "academic junk", being alive means constantly emptying something from the trash bins in the kitchen, living room, bedroom, and bathroom—continuously leaving evidence of "I was here" in this world.

When my thoughts spin in the vortex of dust called confusion, they roll with Sisyphus's boulder—falling again and again, yet pushed upward by an unyielding will under the scorching sun. That endless climb, that repeated rise and fall, drowns me in sweat and tears. I forget that the view from above is bathed in golden peace, forget that his ever-enriched heart symbolizes strength and resolution.

The moment the boulder reaches the summit—it isn't the end, but a rebirth when sunlight pierces the earth through to the soul. Yes, every book, every video, every article I've consumed—their physical forms vanish quickly, but fragments of their consciousness remain somewhere in this human container that is me—perhaps in the capillaries of my fingertips, or the fibers of my hair. Even if evolution erases them from this body, the surroundings they touched will still bear the proof of their existence.

Winter at Middlebury College. Photo by Phoebe Sun



This essay has taken me nearly a year to write. The first half came in two days; the second—where I had to confront confusion—stuck for months. After the Lunar New Year, spring arrived, and I reopened the file. I realized I couldn't in good faith tell younger students that reading, or reading this book, could solve their confusion. Because even ten years later, at almost 25, I still can't give my fifteen-year-old self a perfect answer. But the answer I can provide now seems a bit fuller:

*“My name is Phoebe Sun. I’ve lived for shorter or longer periods in Taiyuan, Beijing, Middlebury, New York, and Singapore. My thoughts have soaked in these contrasting cultures. Perhaps, at the beginning of encountering a certain culture, I felt trapped in a sandpit, like Niki Jumpei in *The Woman in the Dunes*. But as I struggled to escape and kept living within it, those cultures collided and crystallized into something solid and many-faceted, like minerals formed from pressure and persistence, like the water storage device Niki Jumpei created after being able to leave the sandpit but choosing to stay...”*

(Please allow me to selfishly keep this unfinished self-analysis to myself!)

As for confusion, this thing so ethereal, perhaps it shares the same answer as reading—or an even simpler one. Failing an application isn’t the end of the world. Getting into your dream school isn’t the start of eternal ease. Confusion is merely one of youth’s many names.

I’ve tried countless times to piece together a complete map of “confusion” with my youth, as if that would free me from bewilderment. But I forgot precisely that it was while holding confusion, curiosity, ignorance, and recklessness during the youth named ages 18-24 that I laid down puzzle piece after puzzle piece into place for my life, drawing smooth hair and blushed cheeks onto this body... Maybe there’s no complete puzzle at all. Each time you place a piece, your peripheral vision reveals another new empty space. The act of placing—of searching—is itself the long-awaited answer.

And if, like that short video, you still ask me, “Why do you feel lost?”

Then I can only give you the same answer—and add one more line: Youth, please don’t leave.

(End)

## Finding Calmness in an Age of Anxiety

### When confronting a problem marks the start of change

Today, anxiety is no longer seen as just a private struggle but a condition that has permeated our contemporary culture. At the same time, adolescent mental health has moved beyond the limits of clinical psychology and research. Instead, it is now shaped and layered by social and cultural forces.

How do we make sense of this shift? How do we respond?

What perspectives can both seasoned scholars and young people bring to this urgent question?

In this special feature, we present thought-provoking discussions from two distinct campus events. First, we share the transcript of the Keystone Education Salon session hosted by Professor John P. Allegrante of Columbia University. We follow it up with our interview with eleventh grader Anna Xiang, who co-authored an academic paper with Dr. Sandra Thompson from the Keystone Center for Student Development (CSD).

A lecture and a paper. A sharing and a collaboration.

Together, these works create dialogue between theory and practice. They remind us that education cannot turn away from the anxieties of our era. Instead, it must offer understanding and action, helping young people to reflect, build networks of support, and find strength in their shared experience.

Every young person has the potential to raise questions, contribute to research, and shape the future. And as this feature shows, this is only a beginning of such dialogues at Keystone.

# EDUCATION SALON

# Living with Anxiety



## Living

Keystone Education Salon with  
Anxiety Culture Project lead Dr. John P. Allegante

Edited by Zaiqi Yu, Andy Peñafuerte III

In 1947, the poet W. H. Auden described his generation through a single word—anxiety—in his long poem [“The Age of Anxiety”](#). More than seventy years later, that word still defines our time. From climate change to rapid technological shifts, from extremism to migration, people everywhere are living with a constant undercurrent of unease.

Anxiety today is no longer just a medical or psychological concern. It has become a cultural condition shaped by our social and environmental realities. Turning to schools, and to the learning and lives of teenagers, raises pressing questions: How does this anxious culture affect young people's mental health? How do gender, school experiences, and family relationships shape that experience? And what can we do, both individually and collectively, to respond to our own and others' anxiety?

The Keystone Education Salon had the honor of inviting Dr. John P. Allegante, Professor of Health Behavior and Education at Columbia University, to deliver an enlightening lecture on this topic on November 21, 2024.

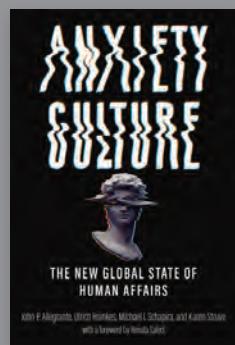
In recent years, Dr. Allegrante and Professor Ulrich Hoinkes of Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel (Kiel University) in Germany led an international, interdisciplinary research project titled the Anxiety Culture Project. Working with scholars across disciplines and countries, they have examined how anxiety manifests in public education and argued that it can serve as a useful lens for understanding contemporary culture shaped by globalization, technology, populism, and climate change.

At the salon, Dr. Allegrante discussed the origins of anxiety culture, its interdisciplinary framework, and new ways of thinking about anxiety. He drew on his research and personal insights to offer practical ideas for schools, families, and young people on how to better cope with it.

We share on the following pages the transcript of Dr. John P. Allegrante's Keystone Education Salon speech.

# Speech

*This transcript has been edited for clarity and style.*



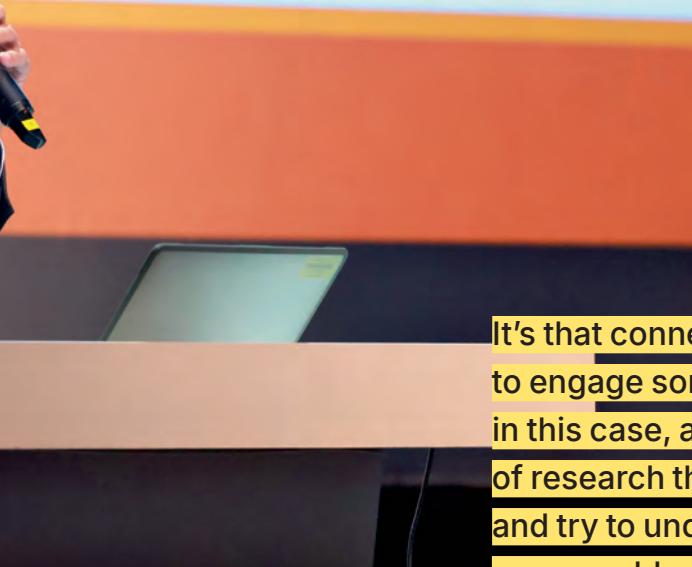
This past week, I've been in Hong Kong and in China promoting the release of *Anxiety Culture: The New Global State of Human Affairs*, published by the Johns Hopkins University Press. And it's a book that takes up anxiety precisely as this idea of a broader concern, if you will.

So, let me tell you about a man in Kiel, Germany, and this goes back to the genesis of the project. Ulrich Hoinkes is a Romance-language scholar and linguist at the Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel. He's a distinguished colleague who came to New York in January 2015. At that time, I was the associate vice president for international affairs, so it was my job to greet and meet with anyone from another academic institution or country who came to the college.

Many of these individuals come to seek collaborations with Columbia University faculty at Teachers College. And it was my job to welcome them and often listen to their idea and perhaps act on it in some way.

The story behind the basis for our collaboration is worth recounting because I think the account of the origins of the Anxiety Culture Project will give you a sense not only

# Salon Series



scholar, researcher, or someone who thinks they might pursue a career at a university as an intellectual, mentor, and teacher to consider interdisciplinary work. That's essentially what's so important about this book that we've just published. It would not have occurred unless there were multiple scholars at the table in conversation about this from their own disciplinary perspective.

One thing I want to point out: Ulrich Hoinkes is a Romance-language scholar and linguist. I'm an applied behavioral scientist in the health area. We have very different backgrounds and not much in common in terms of research interests. But there was a connection that actually deepened over time. And it's that connection and that willingness to engage someone who is different, in this case, a person who has a different line of research than your own, and try to understand from their perspective some problematic thing that you're working on. I think that is at the heart of why this effort has been successful in elucidating a new construct for scholars to think about.

It's that connection and that willingness to engage someone who is different, in this case, a person who has a different line of research than your own, and try to understand from their perspective some problematic thing that you're working on.

of the context but also the historical background and the motivation behind writing the book we wrote.

I want to encourage as many young people as possible to consider the life of the mind as a potential calling and career. I have been, as I like to say, institutionalized for all of my adult postdoctoral life at Columbia University, located in Morningside Heights in Manhattan, a great, deep concentration of intellectual talent. I consider it a privilege to have been there for 45 years. I have no plan for retirement, so I'm likely to be there for a while longer.

What I'm getting at here is the idea that there may be one or two or more future scholar-researchers in this audience. What I want to try to convey is by describing the work that we've done here, which is related in a major way to the idea of uncertainty and how we cope with that. I'm trying to see if we can catalyze interest among a young

It's really important that you understand that anxiety was not part of either of our research trajectories. I conduct research on improving behavioral self-management of chronic disease, funded by the US National Institutes of Health.

When Ulrich and I first met at Teachers College and at Columbia in 2015, I don't think we realized what would follow from that original encounter.

We deepened our relationship in Kiel, Germany, in June 2015. That's when Ulrich proposed that I form a delegation of other scholars from Teachers College who might go to Kiel and engage in what we were calling a "come into touch" conference, where we could learn from each other about the kinds of issues common in education.

I organized a group of scholars from Teachers College. Ulrich, at that point, organized a group of scholars from Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel. And the individual who actually brought the two groups together was the director of the IPN Leibniz Institute for Science and Mathematics Education, also at Kiel.



To be honest, we had a fairly modest goal: to share our research, explore and elucidate some cross-cultural points of comparison, and open up a dialogue, perhaps about the possibilities for future formal collaborations and themes of common interest. Anxiety wasn't even mentioned.

Throughout the two-and-a-half-day conference, we gave brief presentations and discussed what we were experiencing. And then at the end, we had a synthesis session where we tried to pinpoint a common concern from both the German and the American delegations' perspectives. And the theme that emerged over those three days of conversation was the prevalence of threats and dangers in public education.

We saw this across subfields as diverse as second language, literacy, teacher education, health and science

education, technology, and educational policy studies. And despite bringing together scholars from the arguably wealthiest advanced economies of the Global North, both with long-established and, in many cases, envied institutions of higher education, the meeting itself produced a very clear sense of what we were facing. It had to do with the topic for tonight's overall gathering: uncertainty about the future. We felt what was pervading the kinds of research we were doing and the issues and concerns we had really had to do with the sense of this threat to public education.

Following the Kiel meeting, we attended a series of other conferences and symposia, both in Germany and in other locations in Europe and the United States. We did that to further elucidate, understand, and articulate the contours of this unease that we were feeling and its implications for public education.

As with any descriptive exercise of this kind, there were, as you can imagine, quite vigorous and at times even heated debates about the appropriate terminology. And in fact, what it was that we were trying to get at and put our finger on was that we thought might have implications for

scholarship going forward. So, questions like these, 'Was our description of threats and dangers adequate?' 'Were we talking about mere discourse or in fact existential realities?' and 'Should public education remain the orienting frame? And if so, should the emphasis be with the 'public' part of it or the 'education' side of it?'

These discussions not only brought up and introduced us to anxiety culture as a workable construct but also gave shape to what Ulrich and I realized was a potentially exciting and important research program that could stretch far beyond the bounds of our discipline-based educational scholarship and the American-German context.

Obviously, this involved nations from the Global North, again, advanced economies. We were unable to bring people from the Global South and from more developing economies into these early efforts.

Another point I want to make is that the project is not only multidisciplinary. It is, in fact, global now. All our meetings and workshops have enabled us to interact with a growing universe of scholars from diverse disciplines across Europe, North America, and Asia. Our collaborators include anthropologists, economists, political scientists, psychologists, and sociologists, as well as educators, neuroscientists, and experts in communication, literature, and culture studies, policy studies, marine geosciences, and other fields to be sure. So, it's an effort to understand from a very broad set of other disciplines:

'What does this look like and what are the implications?'

Our institutional collaborators come largely from Germany and the United States, but a diverse group of global academic institutional partners is now contributing to the project, including three Icelandic universities. I don't know how many of you know about Iceland, but it is a small country in the upper reaches of the North Atlantic. I have been going there for 20 years. I went there first as a Fulbright specialist for part of a summer in 2005. I went back in 2007 as a Fulbright scholar. It's a remarkably vibrant culture, 300,000 strong, very different size, very different density in a place like China, or, for that matter, most parts of the world. And yet, there is an extraordinary group of intellectuals in Iceland who are leading in artificial intelligence, geothermal science, and computing science. I would also argue that they have the capacity to map the human genome and to understand issues such as adolescent substance abuse from a behavioral, environmental, and genomic perspective.

So, they're very important partners in all of this. And we have others, and the list is growing, and I'm in China in part because I hope to recruit other partners to the anxiety culture project. I hope I can do that before it's out.

## Part 1

# Driving Factors

A little bit more on anxiety cultures as a construct: Following these salons that we were convening—essentially from 2015 up until about 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020—by 2018, when this paper was published, we had a good working idea of what it was that we were trying to describe in something that we were calling 'anxiety culture'. We published this paper in Europe, and this became essentially the basis for the book, against the backdrop of this publication.

Work began on the book in 2019—a year before COVID-19 disrupted our lives. When the Johns Hopkins University Press approached me about what kind of work I was doing, and when I described this project, almost as an afterthought to an acquisitions editor who had come to New York to have lunch with me, he said, 'Tell me more. That sounds really interesting, really different. And would you be willing to write a prospectus?'



Prof. Allegante's Education Salon also attracted parents from the Keystone community

So, I wrote a prospectus for that, and they accepted the proposal to produce the volume. And then much of the work on the book occurred during the course of this unfolding pandemic, as we watch some 6.5 million people globally lose their lives to the virus.

Despite the deprivations and the dislocations that the pandemic caused, we...adapted and persevered with absolutely remarkable resilience, which I think is another key to greeting this notion of uncertainty.

Despite the deprivations and the dislocations that the pandemic caused, we, and especially our contributors—almost a third of whom had participated in the conversations of one or more of the Anxiety Culture Project conferences and symposia—adapted and persevered with absolutely remarkable resilience, which I think is another key to greeting this notion of uncertainty.

I think resilience is a very important concept for psychologists, and it might be something the panel wants to discuss.

On this point, though, I do want to say that scholarship is often produced by lone scholars who sit at their keyboards; they have an idea, research it, and develop new materials so they can contribute to new knowledge. That's what essentially university professors are doing: they're trying to create new knowledge.

What I think is so important about what we've done with this project is that we have taken that other model, which is more of a team-based approach to investigation, and a team that is highly interdisciplinary, having iterative conversations over time about the issue. And that's exactly what we did at these intellectual salons—we would convene different groups, we would bring different people in. We talked broadly about how we were viewing this idea of anxiety as a sociocultural concern. And then, we'd have people from their different disciplines write and give a paper for discussion at the meeting, then go back and ultimately reiterate papers that became chapters in the book.

The resulting book starts with the foreword by the Slovene philosopher and sociologist Renata Salecl. We, as editors, provide an introduction to the book. But it is really about the 22 chapters, organized into six major parts. And I like these six major parts; the four key parts being what I like to refer to as the '[Pressing Planetary Challenges](#)' that, I think, in many respects are driving the global sense of anxiety and the sociocultural element of anxiety.

We've got these six parts: '[Disciplinary Perspectives](#)', '[Climate Change and the Environment](#)', '[Population, Health](#)

[and Social Wellbeing](#)', '[Migration, Language, and Culture](#)', '[Technology](#)', and then there's a final concluding section.

We have leading scholars and thinkers from Asia, Europe, and North America. Just in case, you're wondering, '[Do we have anything that's related to the Asian and particularly the Chinese context?](#)' We have a wonderful chapter that is titled '[Anxiety and Global Health: The Chinese Perspective](#)'. The writing was led by Angelika Messner, a very well-known sinologist at Kiel University. She had a couple of co-authors and collaborators, including Professor Zhao Xudong of Tongji University in Shanghai.

Two main factors really drive the book:

- Anxiety culture presents not only a timely, theoretical question for the academy and for scholars, but also a highly socially and culturally relevant question that needs to be addressed in response to the cultural, political, and societal imperatives of the moment. I would say that, since it is on the present, both in terms of topics and geographical areas, examining the construct from interdisciplinary perspectives was indeed warranted—and, in fact, necessary—to understand what we're talking about.
- The remarkable factor was the ease with which our seminar participants, over time—and our contributing authors, who came from diverse fields of scholarship, as I mentioned—were able to enter into these interdisciplinary conversations about this wide-ranging semantic field of anxiety. Moreover, they were able to exit their conversations with great enthusiasm. I witnessed young scholars who were quite skeptical, even coming to these salons to participate in this idea, leaving with a sort of recognition that this was something they perhaps should even begin to look at from their own research perspective.

What I think is very exciting is that this included both individual scholars from new and applied fields, such as climate change and technology studies, to more established fields such as anthropology, philosophy, and political science.

To preserve the interdisciplinary nature of the collaboration, we eventually established four basic research clus-

ters, all representing the pressing planetary challenges of the moment. Each was specific enough to delimit the aspect of anxiety culture under investigation, yet capacious enough to integrate different streams of research and methodological approaches to generate a useful set of what we might call middle-range theories we could really use.

These middle-range theories concerned climate change, population, health and wellbeing, and technology. They were present from the outset. It wasn't until the great immigration and migration crisis in Europe in 2016 that we then realized that we had to add a fourth cluster, 'Migration and Culture'. We did that because we were witnessing not only what was happening in Europe from 2016 onward, but also what we began to see at the southern border of the United States and elsewhere around the globe. These cut across each of the areas and the broader influences of the deeply divisive cultural and political polarization that we've seen emerge in the last decade, particularly in the United States, but across a lot of the post-World War II liberal democracies of Europe, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and the Israel-Hamas War that broke out in 2023. And, at least as of the last two weeks, and most notably perhaps, at least from my perspective, the results of the US presidential election that we've seen.

There's no question that anxiety is a pervasive feature of modern life. I think we all feel that medical idiom—that individual concern every day—that anxiety is something that we have to cope with on a regular basis.

I often have said to my students that when I have to give a public lecture, a public talk like this one, I feel a certain level of anxiety. But it's the anxiety that one feels that immobilizes, slows your thinking, and interferes with action—that's what we're talking about here, not the kind of anxiety that can improve one's performance, because that little bit of anxiety that's manageable shows that you care.

The fact that I still get anxious about a talk like this shows that I care; I want my audience to feel inspired or, at least, more knowledgeable by the end of the talk. So, it's a feature of our modern life. But it's become more global, more intense, and more problematic.

If you take the field of psychology, where, though long-established as an issue of concern, anxiety has moved to the forefront of clinical concerns.

But let's start with the definition first. This is where I had the benefit of collaborating with a German scholar, because the concept of anxiety, or angst, has long fascinated German philosophers and scholars.

So, anxiety, in fact, the word angst is an Indo-Germanic route and refers to a narrowing, constricting, or tightening of physiological feeling that we have when we are anxious.

Think about when you're anxious, what do you feel like? You feel that narrowing, you feel that constriction. You feel that in your chest, and you feel it in your throat often. And why does it occur? It occurs naturally in response to our fears, threats we perceive we face, and the various dangers we might encounter.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders—the American Psychological Association's (APA) document, often referred to as the DSM or the authoritative guide to diagnosis of mental disorders used by health care professionals in the United States, and, in fact elsewhere—anxiety disorders include those that share features of excessive fear and anxiety and related behavioral disturbances.

In 1980, the third edition of the APA's DSM (or DSM-3) devoted 15 pages to anxiety disorders. This was 30 years ago. In 1987, the revised edition included some 18 pages of such disorders. But by the DSM-4 publication in 1994, the entries had increased to 51 pages, only to be eclipsed in the 2013 DSM by 99 pages on anxiety and related disorders.

## Part 2

# Defining Anxiety Culture

What do you think we mean by anxiety culture? What exactly do we mean by it? Does anyone want to take a guess and shout it out?

All right, you want me to reveal it, don't you?

**It's a feature of our modern life.  
But it's become more global,  
more intense, and more problematic.**

When you see the progression of concern by authorities and professionals who are seeing people with clinical manifestations of anxiety, is it any wonder that the National Institutes of Mental Health estimates that a full 31%—almost a full third of adults—will experience an anxiety disorder in their lifetime? That's an important thing to keep in mind.

But this book is not clinical anxiety—important as it is as a concern to many—or the biology of anxiety. It's not about the treatment of anxiety. Rather, it is about a sociocultural phenomenon we're trying to understand, something larger, something more insidious, enveloping and shaping the contours of our very existence and human experience.

can be anxious must resonate deep in America's cultural bones, because the phrase has been used to describe countless moments from the vogue to tranquilizers, like Miltown and Valium in the 1950s and the 1960s, to the coronation of today's young adults, as in the *New York Post*'s recent estimation, an anxious generation.

At this point, it's difficult to imagine a slice of time whose resident humans would not agree with the notion that their lives were more hectically modern, more anxiety-inducing, more in need of the occasional Benzo—the drug—than any time before.

## Part 3

# Talking about Anxiety Culture

Why give all this attention to anxiety? Why is it warranted?

The US National Institute of Mental Health estimated that almost 32% of adolescents—young people, those of you in the audience—overall, you will experience an anxiety disorder sometime in your lifetime, with about 8% of you experiencing a rather severe impairment. Interestingly enough, female adolescents have the greatest risk for the kind of anxiety that really immobilizes and interferes with functioning, which often leads to serious mental health concerns.

These trends are increasingly reflected in our popular portrayals of anxiety as a pervasive and insidiously eroding feature of our modern life. For example, in the United States, anxiety is seen as producing the '[anxious generation](#)'. There is evidence from recent surveys to support that characterization.

In 1947, W. H. Auden published a very long poem that—despite winning a Pulitzer Prize and not necessarily being about anxiety *per se*—is now remembered less for its contents than for its title. "The Age of Anxiety" was the title of the poem. Something about the idea that an age

Following the Prof. Allegriante's keynote speech, Dr. Emily McCaren led a discussion together with student representatives to deconstruct and elaborate on the concept of anxiety culture



Jonathan Haidt has a book out about anxiety. It's a popular treatment. I've seen it in many places, and people are reading that. Now, we have what we've produced, which is perhaps more of a bit of scholarship about a new construct of anxiety culture.

What's driving all this? The 2018 APA survey assessed the level of stress among members of Generation Z—young adults aged 15 to 21. The results show that high-profile issues such as mass shootings, the rise in suicide, climate change and global warming, immigration, and sexual harassment are all significant stressors for Generation Z.

For example, almost 60% of Gen Z say that the separation and deportation of immigrant and migrant families is a significant source of stress. And this was a survey before the global pandemic in 2020. This may be relevant, especially to the Western and particularly the US domestic context, because no other advanced economy sees the kind of gun violence that we see in the US. And there are reasons for that, specifically the Second Amendment, which guarantees access to firearms in the US. But these are the things young people are concerned about.

**These trends are increasingly reflected in our popular portrayals of anxiety as a pervasive and insidiously eroding feature of our modern life.**



If we go outside the United States—and, in fact, look at data from the surveys my colleagues and I have been conducting in Iceland—you can see evidence of the rise in anxiety through the lens of this work.

I have been collaborating with Icelanders since 2005 on a number of issues in adolescent health and human development. And this figure shows the trends for symptoms of high anxiety among Icelandic adolescents between 2006 and 2016. The symptoms of anxiety, again, especially for girls, have been rising dramatically during the last decade.

Why is that? What do you think could be driving that?

There is additional work that we've done. We've studied the adolescent experience among Icelanders, and it also shows that participation in social media is perhaps the key reason for the amplification of the symptoms of anxiety that we are seeing. So, these devices we hold and cherish—we turn to them all the time to get news, communicate, and post.

I'm not on many of these social media sites, but I know people are on Instagram and other platforms. It turns out that what's happening in Iceland is relatively consistent with other studies, finding that passive social media use is related to greater symptoms of anxiety and or depressed mood among adolescents, especially girls. Add in the isolation that a pandemic produced for young people for almost two years, and you have really the perfect "angst storm" that I think has been fueling this great rise in reports about anxiety from adolescence.

This is a much more pragmatic listing of the kinds of concerns that are quite typical when you talk to adolescents about what's driving their anxiety. It ranges from things like 'The world is just not safe', COVID-19, and the failure to cope with it. I think it is more evidence for young people that the elders in the room, professionals, and authorities haven't been handling these things well. So, naturally, one becomes anxious about the uncertainties facing them when one sees failures like this.

Think about the more internalized elements. 'I don't deserve love or success.' No human being should think or perceive that, yet many young adolescents do. 'I'm not capable', 'I'm not smart', 'I'm not attractive', 'People I love will leave or reject me', and on and on. These are what young people are telling investigators and scholars, when asked, 'What's driving your anxiety?'

But enough on the individual level. I want to say, again, this book is not about clinical anxiety, as important a concern as it is to many. And again, it's not about the biology or treatment. Rather, it's about anxiety as a sociocultural phenomenon—something larger, more insidious that is enveloping and shaping the contours of our experience.

Our constructive anxiety is intended as a heuristic for understanding the characteristics of the anxieties that define our collective worries. Perhaps, most notably, the loss of confidence in our potential futures, which, at least in advanced Western economies, gets translated into things like this:

- First, **the worry about securing personal well-being and maintaining socioeconomic prosperity**. All families worry about the future—whether they can pay their rent or mortgage, or how they're going to pay tuition for their son or daughter to attend Keystone Academy or another school. These are very common to the human experience, whether you live in New York, Paris, or Beijing.
- Second, **the worry about the destruction of our natural environment**, on the planet that we inhabit. This is where we talk about climate change. It's not 'weather', although changes in the weather are but one expression of climate change. But this is a very serious issue; I think about truly existential matters—it is climate change and what we're doing about it or not. So, there's a lot of worry about that.
- Finally, it's a very existential concern, **the worry about the threat of conflict, especially nuclear conflagration, and the end of civilization as we know it**. The group of US atomic scientists who have this atomic clock and say we are now closer than we've ever been to the number of seconds before we have a nuclear conflagration.

These collective worries—the worry about our personal finances or economic future, the worry about the environment, and the worry about nuclear war—these are driving, in many cases, beyond anything that we've seen, the anxiety that we see the world now. Such worries invoke notions of crisis or danger, which tends to speed up our thinking and lend a sense of urgency to our actions. And all of this worry comes at the expense of a deeper understanding of the changing face of our societies and how to cope with it.



If anxiety culture is about having fears, they are much more generated by feeling the pulse of contemporary life and the struggle to conceive of the future than by a cold, analytic study of the present.

Those of us who are educators and scholars know, from the renowned Columbia philosopher John Dewey, that learning possibilities follow from a slower, patient, and more reflective approach to our fears and the confounding features of our environment, and to the often bewildering times in which we live.

If anxiety culture is about having fears, they are much more generated by feeling the pulse of contemporary life and the struggle to conceive of the future than by a cold, analytic study of the present.

In other words, an examination of anxiety culture is an attempt to resist the reductive leap toward solutions or definitive understandings, and rather to develop a generative new set of conceptual tools for understanding and coping with the present moment. Thus, as Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish existential philosopher and social critic, put it: *'Anxiety really is our best teacher'*, and as it did for the characters in W. H. Auden's "The Age of Anxiety" poem, it invites us to meditate on our lives, hopes, losses, and human condition.

To come to a close, our projects in this book are not about the study of anxiety as a reductive psychological or medical idiom, but rather about describing the contours of anxiety as a more expansive sociocultural phenomenon—a new global state of human affairs. And some key questions are:

- How is anxiety perceived across cultures and in different sociopolitical and economic contexts?
- What is the role and responsibility of our social mediating structures, especially schools and education, to address anxiety culture?
- What are the long-term impacts and costs of an anxiety culture for all of us?

Those are the questions that I hope our panel will address to some extent. In addition to it, whatever else they would like to say about the whole question of uncertainty in front of us.

Finally, I would like to thank all the scholars and staff who made this sharing session possible, and for guiding me to Hong Kong and mainland China, and to Keystone Academy. And then finally to Emily McCarren, also a daughter of Columbia and Keystone Academy, for having me give this talk.

# The Magic of Collaboration

Anna Xiang and Dr. Sandra Thompson on co-writing for an academic journal



Story by Zaiqi Yu,  
edited by Andy Peñafuerte III

"Do you want to publish this manuscript?" Anna Xiang didn't expect such a response when she sent her article on adolescent mental health to Dr. Sandra Thompson, a social emotional counselor at Keystone Academy's Center for Student Development (CSD).

Starting from Grade 9, Anna developed an interest in research on depression treatment and spent two consecutive summers exploring this in the laboratory. However, as the neuroscience experiments became increasingly advanced, more unresolved questions emerged.

"Why, despite so many experts—pharmacologists, neuroscientists, psychiatrists—working on this issue, does the number of depression cases keep rising? What are we missing?"

Seeking answers beyond the lab, Anna interviewed psychiatrists and psychologists working in clinical practice. Through those conversations, she realized the treatment gap for adolescents is wide, and public understanding of teen mental health is often limited—or wrong.

She also recognized that medication, while helpful, is just one piece of the puzzle. The broader social environment—encompassing school, family, and community—plays a crucial role. "Science alone can't solve this," she said. "This is no longer just a scientific issue. It's a social issue—a public health issue that needs broad attention."

With that in mind, Anna began to shift her approach. She turned from clinical and pharmacological questions to the social roots of depression, viewing society as an ecosystem that can nourish or harm its members. In her words, a society can provide nutrients—or generate toxins that lead to collective illness.

After months of research and reflection, she wrote a paper titled Confronting the Mental Health Crisis: Addressing Depression and Anxiety Among Adolescents Through Prevention and Social Renaissance. In the abstract, she writes:

We advocate for a holistic, prevention-oriented approach, emphasizing lifestyle modifications, social environmental enhancements, psychotherapy access, and psychoeducation intervention, for addressing these disorders. A multitiered strategy engaging educational institutions, clinical practitioners, and policymakers is proposed to foster an environment where adolescents can thrive.

That paper, bridging science and social policy, marked a turning point in her academic journey. After attending an Education Salon titled "Living with Uncertainty—How to Endure When Stability Slips Away" and listening to a conversation between her peers and salon speaker Professor John P. Allegrante from Columbia University, Anna decided to share the paper with Dr. Thompson.

"She understood the questions I was trying to ask," Anna said. "And I wanted to hear her thoughts."

That act of sharing led to an unexpected opportunity—and a challenging journey.

"When she first reached out and shared the paper with me, [I thought] it was just an ordinary document," Dr. Thompson recalled. "I took my time and read through it. I was honestly amazed. Despite her being modest and uncertain, I could actually see the core of a powerful, well-informed, and original thinking process in the document."

Dr. Thompson, a long-time researcher in psychology, was especially struck by Anna's integration of evolutionary, social, and environmental theory—and her proposal of a concept she called "social renaissance."

"The moment I read it, I said to myself, 'That knowledge shouldn't be kept here,' she said. "It should be shared with the world. And I did not want her voice to go unheard."

That's when she asked Anna directly: "Have you considered publishing it?"

Anna was surprised—and unsure.

"I didn't think I could do it," she admitted. But Dr. Thompson reassured her: "Don't be afraid. I'll guide you through every step. Just tell me—do you want to try?"

Ana said yes. She wanted her ideas to spark conversation. And so, the two began the process: identifying journals, preparing submissions, and revising drafts. The first submission was rejected. However, a second journal showed interest and sent the paper to two reviewers. Publication was still uncertain—it would depend on multiple rounds of revisions and editorial approval.

Anna began what she now calls a "hard and winding path."

"The reviewers didn't know I was a high school student," she said. "They addressed me as 'Dr.' and gave very rigorous, sometimes harsh feedback."

She was overwhelmed by the first round of comments.

"That's when Dr. Thompson really stepped in," she said. "We reviewed every sentence together. I sent her my revisions, and she always responded quickly. Without her, I probably would have given up."

Then came an unexpected hurdle. During the Spring Festival, while traveling with her family, Anna received an email: after two rounds of review, the journal planned to reject the paper. There was one last option—a formal rebuttal. She panicked.

"I was afraid all my work would be wasted," she said. At the same time, Dr. Thompson was vacationing in Europe—seven hours behind in time.

But Dr. Thompson didn't hesitate. "As soon as I told her, she came online," Anna said. "She helped me understand what a rebuttal letter was—and had already drafted a version before I even figured out what to do. I was a mess, but she was calm, patient, and encouraging."

After three intensive rounds of revision, the paper was accepted and published on March 21.

Back at school, news of the publication spread quickly. Teachers and classmates were thrilled—and curious: How did a high school student navigate such a complex academic challenge? What was it like to collaborate so closely with a mentor? How had their understanding of mental health changed through the process? And where would Anna's research go next?

With these questions in mind, we interviewed Anna and Dr. Thompson to look back on this unique academic journey. Through their story, we hope more students will be inspired to explore challenging questions, seek mentorship, and engage with academic writing—not as a task but as a way to make a difference.

# Interview

*with Anna Xiang and Dr. Sandra Thompson*

Q. 1

Your paper introduces the original concept of a "social renaissance." What inspired this idea, and how do you define it?

**Anna Xiang:**

I was first reminded of the Black Death in the late Middle Ages—one of the deadliest pandemics in human history, which killed an estimated 25 million people in Europe alone. That catastrophe forced people to confront the fragility of life. It led many to question religious authority, turn to humanism, and refocus on human values and reason.

In my view, today's mental health crisis is a similar wake-up call. Like the Black Death, it urges us to reflect deeply on life's meaning—not to wait until disaster strikes before we begin to question our values. That's why I propose the idea of a "social renaissance": a call to action to harness the transformative power within a crisis to bring about social change.

This renaissance involves reestablishing core values—much like the original Renaissance. It calls for rebuilding interpersonal connections, restoring social trust, encouraging civic participation, and reviving spiritual meaning. These are not easy tasks. But must we always wait for disaster before we are moved to change?

At the same time, the concept of a social renaissance is also about raising public awareness of the limits of modern medicine. While medicine is essential in responding to mental health issues, we shouldn't over-rely on it. Many hypotheses about depression remain unproven, and there is a growing tendency toward medicalization. We need to be cautious. The deeper work lies in identifying and addressing the root causes—many of which are embedded in our social environment.

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Keystone Student for Center Development (CSD) counselor Dr. Sandra Thompson and Anna Xiang (Keystone Class of 2026) collaborated on an academic paper on the phenomenon of anxiety in adolescents

Q. **2**

These days, topics like anxiety, depression, and adolescent mental health are widely discussed—both in the media and offline settings. While it's essential to give these issues attention, could the constant focus on them actually contribute to more anxiety? Should we acknowledge that anxiety can't be eliminated entirely and instead learn how to live with it?

**Anna Xiang:**

These conversations are necessary—we can't avoid them. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), as of 2020, depression is the second leading cause of disease burden worldwide, and it's projected to become the top cause by 2030.

My hope is that through open discussion, people will be encouraged to develop healthier ways of coping with chronic stress, build cognitive resilience, make positive lifestyle changes, and even extend support to those around them.

**Sandra Thompson:**

To some extent, anxiety can be beneficial. Think back to your school days – why did you keep studying? Often, it was because you feared failing. Anxiety is closely linked to fear. Not knowing what grade you might get creates a sense of urgency, motivating you to prepare and perform well. In this way, anxiety keeps you alert and focused, pushing you to excel.

However, it's important to assess your own experience. When does anxiety stop being helpful and start hindering your learning? If anxiety prevents you from concentrating, taking care of yourself, or engaging in social relationships, then it becomes a problem. Excessive anxiety can isolate you and undermine your wellbeing.

P. **137**

Understanding your personal relationship with anxiety is the first step. As highlighted in research on adolescent wellbeing and social identity, recognizing how anxiety affects your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors allows you to seek appropriate support.

Whether through counseling, cognitive strategies, or culturally sensitive approaches that consider personality and social context, there are tools to manage and reduce anxiety.

# 3

Q.

What did you learn while writing this paper? Did any of your views change during the process?

**Anna Xiang:**

Writing this paper taught me that even when dealing with social issues, we need to approach them with the same rigor as in the natural sciences. That means using clear logic and backing every argument with evidence and data.

At first, I was a bit too casual. I assumed that since these were common social issues, most of the points were just common sense, and that everyone already understood these things. I thought I didn't need to justify or carefully build each argument. But I realized that's not the case. A clear and rigorous line of reasoning is just as important in social science writing.

I also learned that I don't need to wait until everything is perfect before sharing my work. Even a rough draft is worth discussing. By showing it to my teacher early on, I was able to get valuable feedback and discover new ideas through that exchange.

# 4

Q.

How is publishing a paper different from regular classroom learning?

**Anna Xiang:**

Publishing a paper is a learning process, not just a way to present results.

Along the way, you receive feedback from reviewers with different perspectives. Each round of revision brings new suggestions, and with every update, you learn more. It can be challenging, but it's also incredibly valuable. It teaches you how to absorb expert opinions, think critically, and approach problems creatively. That's been the most important part of the experience for me.

**Sandra Thompson:**

She's right. It is actually an intense process of self-discovery. It builds resilience in you and helps you become disciplined.

Imagine, Anna was just a high school student, and her work would be peer-reviewed by professors and doctors in different parts of the world. We didn't know what feedback they would have. I told her, 'Your work will go out like a human being but will come back like a skeleton.' They threw so many aspects away, and they wanted us to merge what they feel is right. So, it helps you also to be patient.

We went through three rounds of reviews, and one to two reviewers almost rejected it. And then, the last part was between one reviewer and the publishers to decide if they would accept or reject. Why?

Because Anna introduced a fresh perspective that challenged conventional thinking. While much of the existing research on behavior and mental processes such as the biological and cognitive approaches emphasized on internal mechanisms, Anna urged us to consider the profound role of society and social representations. Many researchers tend to overlook these social dimensions, not probing deeply enough into how cultural and group identi-

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# 5

Q.

Anna once shared that she sees your relationship as more than that of a typical teacher and student—more like that of a mentor and apprentice. What have you gained or reflected on through this close collaboration?

### **Sandra Thompson:**

During Chinese New Year, when everyone was having fun and recharging for the upcoming semester, Anna and I were working across different time zones. I was in Europe while she was here. Every day, I was happy to say, "Hi, Anna, let's do this."

I just didn't care [about messaging her via Teams during the holiday] because I promised her from the start, "I want us to complete this." I didn't want her to feel at any point that I was even giving up. So, the pressure on her felt like, "If Dr. Thompson is not giving up, how do I give up that trust?" What shook me was when the paper was accepted, her mother wrote to me and said, "Anna almost gave up."

It made me understand that when you are supervising students, it's not only about academics but also their emotional state. I did not think about her emotional well-being at that point because I felt she developed the scripts, which she loved to continue writing. It made me come to terms with the fact that if you are working with a student, along the way, check on their emotional well-being. But I also think one thing she held on to was 'our trust' that was built right from the start of the collaboration.

### **Anna Xiang:**

Working with Dr. Thompson made me realize the importance of making use of the resources around me.

At Keystone, there are many teachers who are capable of guiding student research and who have strong academic interests of their own. If you're willing to reach out, learn about their past work and publications, and start a conversation, you'll find they're more than happy to help. For example, I initially shared my draft with Mr. Chris Liu, our psychology teacher, and we brainstormed ways to refine the ideas in my paper. Teachers are very open to collaborating with students.

I also found that working with a teacher on a publication is very different from learning in the classroom. In class, it's easy to lack a sense of urgency or purpose. But once you commit to publishing a paper, you take on a stronger sense of responsibility—to do the research, revise seriously, and engage actively with your teacher. In that sense, the process of publishing became one of the most effective and meaningful ways of learning for me.

P.

ties shape experiences. Thus, they could not grasp and come to terms with what this young student was telling us. So, basically, when you go through this process, it builds your academic muscles.

Wherever Anna is now, I'm sure she's proud of herself. She has that tough skin because she's gone through peer review standards and now finds herself in the space. In fact, she's the lead writer. She's the corresponding author, so she will be receiving emails from other journals wanting her to also review works of authors. Imagine a student in this grade level reviewing the works of professors and PhD holders. She must be proud of herself. And then also she would be invited by other journals to publish articles related to their themes or topic of interest. They will reach out to Anna and say, 'We would want you to publish with us', 'We want you to review'. So, she's now in that space of an academic colleague who can, in fact, proudly peer-review academic works.



Q.

6

If a student wants to improve their academic writing skills, where should they start?

Anna Xiang in the laboratory

**Sandra Thompson:**

Start with passion. You should first be someone who has an interest in even writing. When the interest is there, then find a subject or subjects that you have an interest in. Yes, Anna is a pure science student, but she ended up studying a discipline in psychology. Sometimes the interest won't necessarily be in the field you are in now. It can be elsewhere, and that's okay.

The moment you know the subject, then find which areas under it you are interested in. The broader subject for Anna, for instance, is psychology. Her broader interest is abnormal psychology. Then look for a specific subtopic. For Anna, it's depression and anxiety. These are also subtopics under abnormal psychology because we have several mental health disorders.

Once you find these subtopics or areas of interest, be curious about them. How do you become curious? By reading published journals or books about that topic. So here, you are finding the bigger interest, focusing yourself, and then reading about it.

Once you begin to narrow down, you'll see that something pops up for you. "Oh, I have an interest in this. I want to know how adolescent mental wellness, especially depression and anxiety, are impacting them."

So, the moment you find the topic, the area, and then you read and find what you want to write on, ask yourself, "What do I even want to write on?" Put it down. "Is it a problem I want to solve?" Write it down. "Where are the problems coming from? Where is this problem coming from, and how do I solve it?" Continue to read, and then you do, most importantly, what we call free writing. Sometimes, students don't immediately bring structure. No, just do free writing, even if you have to write a hundred pages.

Once you are done writing, now find an adult, a supervisor, or a teacher and then speak to them: this is the area of interest or problem you have identified. "This is where the problem is now and this is how I want to solve it. Please, I need your help." The moment you get that adult involved, it is their role to bring structure and help you clarify some doubts. You will realize that those 100 pages begin to shrink to 50, then they will be cut down to 20, and the structure will emerge. This same adult is the one who guides you. Just find

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# 7

Q.

What support does the Keystone community provide for students who are interested in exploring academic writing?

**Sandra Thompson:**

The ability for students to respond to standard essay questions in the classroom setting functions as a foundational writing experience. Additionally, higher students undertake extended essays identifying problems and developing solutions, demonstrating more advanced academic writing skills. Every student in my opinion, within this community, possesses some level of academic writing ability.

Keystone Academy offers a rich environment for inquiry, which we can continue to strengthen through mentorship and opportunities for publication. My experience with Anna reinforced a vital lesson: when student passion is paired with dedicated teacher support, remarkable outcomes emerge. Globally, few high school students publish articles, and relatively few teachers do as well. When these two forces combine, a passionate student and a supportive mentor, the impact can be transformative, fostering resilience and scholarly growth.

Our community thrives when we celebrate and elevate such collaborations. At Keystone, we make it a point to honor various forms of academic achievement—whether it's a student interview, a teacher's recognition, leaders' achievement, or student publications—because each contributes to our collective culture of inquiry and excellence.

By fostering environments where curiosity, mentorship, and cultural understanding intersect, we build not only academic skills but also the "academic muscles" (similar to Anna) needed for students to tackle complex challenges confidently and contribute meaningfully to their fields.

Let's continue to nurture and celebrate these successes as integral to Keystone's mission and vision for holistic student development.

# 8

Q.

What do you most hope readers will take away from your paper? If we view a paper as a form of action, what kind of impact or inspiration do you wish to leave with your audience?

**Anna Xiang:**

I hope readers will recognize the need to search for new solutions—and that this effort shouldn't be limited to scientists alone. People from all sectors of society should be involved in finding ways to drive social change within their own fields.

For me, publishing this paper is also an opportunity—a way to connect directly with researchers and academics who might read it. That connection creates the possibility that meaningful change can begin.

Following the publication of their paper, Anna and Dr. Thompson were invited to present at several academic conferences. This summer, they will travel to Singapore and South Korea to share their research with a wider audience.

This new beginning leads to a broader academic world—one that invites more Keystone teachers and students to explore, contribute, and grow.

ARTS

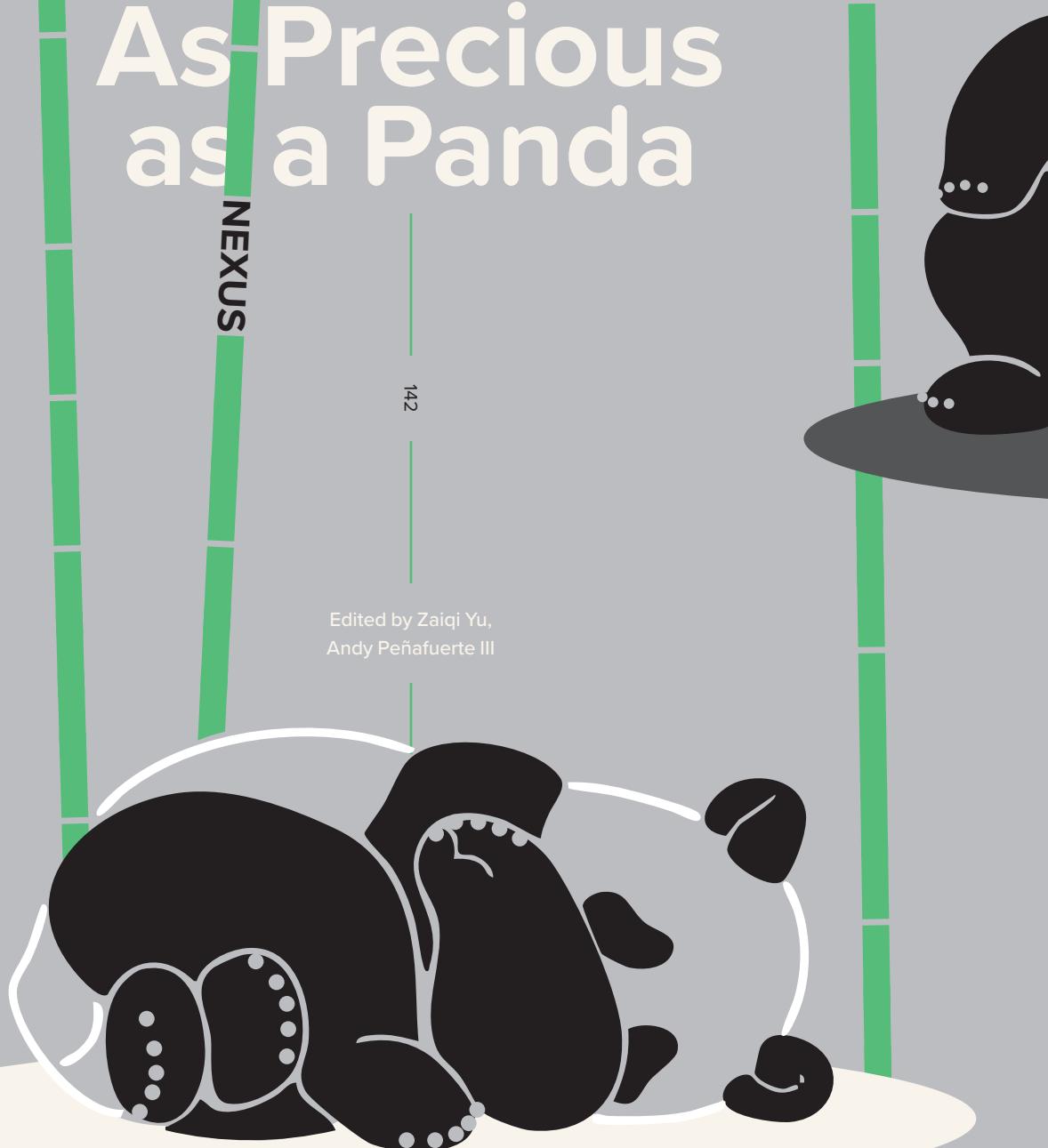
# In Conversation with Zhao Bandi

## As Precious as a Panda

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Edited by Zaiqi Yu,  
Andy Peñafuerte III





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When artist Zhao Bandi's "Brook" was officially installed on the Keystone Academy quadrangle, an exciting art co-creation quietly began. Students and teachers gathered around the installation—gazing, touching, embracing, taking photos. Each gesture became a dialogue with the work itself, sparking unexpected moments of creativity: a short poem, an impromptu dance, a quick sketch, a quiet conversation.

At Keystone, art education has always been an essential part of the school's humanities program. Over the years, the community has continued to explore ways to integrate art more deeply into everyday learning. With this same spirit of curiosity and reflection, the Office of Marketing and Communications (OMC) has launched a new initiative—Keystone Arts Nexus—to bring art into the community through imaginative collaborations. The goal is simple yet profound: to make art visible, participatory, and co-created—something that lives and breathes within the campus.

For the first Art Nexus event, Keystone invited renowned contemporary artist Zhao Bandi, who brought his panda-themed public installation "Brook" to the heart of campus. Through both "art co-creation" and open dialogue, Zhao and the students embarked on an inspiring artistic experiment.

In this issue of *The Keystone Magazine*, we present the "More Than Just Pandas" artwork gallery, along with a special conversation between Zhao Bandi and Keystone students held in autumn. Whether through the works themselves or the reflections they inspired, this exchange conveys a clear and heartfelt message: art isn't distant or exclusive but a sincere expression that can enter the classroom, the campus, and our daily lives, creating shared moments of meaning and connection.

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*The following dialogue  
has been edited for brevity and style.*



Zhao Bandi's "Brook" installation became a welcome addition to the Keystone quadrangle

## My Relationship with Art

**Zhao Bandi:** I'm Zhao Bandi, born in a *hutong* in Beijing. I've loved art since I was a child. I studied at the High School Affiliated to the Central Academy of Fine Arts, then continued at the academy's Oil Painting Department. After graduation, I was assigned to teach at what was then the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts, now the Academy of Arts & Design at Tsinghua University.

After a year as an intern, I was supposed to become a full-time teacher, but I realized that teaching didn't suit me. I wanted to be a freelance artist. I also felt that I didn't yet have the ability to teach others, and I didn't want to mislead students. So, I resigned. For a year after graduation, I didn't work a single day in a traditional sense. I lived freely.

That freedom made me a bit arrogant. My first solo exhibition was successful, and my paintings sold for a lot of money. People praised my technique and said, "Zhao

Bandi's oil painting skills are incredible." But that kind of praise made me uneasy. I asked myself, "Is technique all I have? Can I make art without relying on it, or even without painting at all?" So, I began experimenting with other forms of art, ones not dependent on technical skill. Luckily, those explorations were also well received. They encouraged me to take more creative risks and to keep searching for new ways to express myself.

Today, painting takes up only about a quarter of my energy. In recent years, I've started exploring sculpture. I'm still learning and don't see myself as a sculptor yet, but maybe I'm on my way there.

**Emily Xu:** I was born in 2008, and I'm in Grade 12. I don't know much about art, but I love music. I think music and art are connected—they share something essential.

**Charlotte Xia:** I was also born in 2008, and I grew up in Beijing. I've loved drawing since I was little. My mother didn't want me to take formal lessons too early; she



**Zhao Bandi:** I love that word you used: “Companion”. I make my living through art, but I still feel that, in many ways, art accompanies me. It’s helped me through some very difficult moments.

Life isn’t perfect. The world isn’t perfect either—it can be cruel. I often feel disappointed by reality, but I try not to pass that on to you. Because of art, I’ve learned to live with courage. In my inner world, art helps me create a kind of parallel universe. That makes me genuinely happy.

**Emily Xu:** I think people are, by nature, lonely. You can’t rely too much on another person; you should rely on what you love. Hobbies like art can give you strength, something to hold on to until the end.

**Muyi Dong:** My interests are quite broad. I love art and music, but my biggest passion is architecture. I hope to pursue architectural design because I believe design can change people’s lives.

I started drawing when I was very young, maybe four months old. I didn’t take a formal art class until I was twelve. Before that, I drew every week: an A2-sized picture, all year round. I filled an entire wall of my home with those drawings. What mattered most wasn’t the outcome, but the process. Through drawing, I felt I was finding myself—or at least getting closer to who I am.

That’s why I believe design can change lives. I once watched a documentary called *Dream Home Makeover*, where architects helped ordinary families transform their homes. It inspired me. It made me believe that art and design can not only change my own life, but also improve others’ lives too.

## Art as a refuge and an escape route

**Nina Qu:** You mentioned feeling disappointed with reality. For you, does art help you escape from that reality, or does it help you express your disappointment? When ideals and reality clash, how do you deal with that conflict, especially when reality seems to stand in the way of your ideals?

**Emily Xu:** You’ve said that art is both your passion and your lifelong profession. But when your passion becomes your job, do you ever feel bored or disappointed?

**Zhao Bandi:** You’ve both asked very good questions. Yes, art can be a refuge when I’m dissatisfied with reality. But it’s more than that. The power of art is extraordinary, often beyond my own imagination. When you create something sincerely, when you pour your talent and emotions into it, that work stops belonging only to you. That’s why I often say that art is a parallel world.

wanted me to explore freely, in both form and content. In the seventh and eighth grades, I took a year of drawing classes, and now I realize I was actually lucky to have had that early freedom. Still, I’ve also come to see how important sketching is. It’s a foundation.

I’m very interested in art and want to keep pursuing it. But I’m not sure about my future identity. I don’t necessarily want to make a living as an artist or freelancer. I’m also interested in business and would love to start my own brand, something where art can still be part of my life.

**Zhao Bandi:** Art and business are quite different, strictly speaking.

**Charlotte Xia:** Yes, they are. But I’m not really drawn to art management. I’d rather create something of my own, with art as my companion along the way. A teacher once told me, “You can return to art anytime. It can be a lifelong companion.”

During one of the hardest periods of my life, during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, I returned to China after being quarantined in Singapore for six months, only to be quarantined again in Shanghai. Everyone remembers that period differently, but for me, those two weeks in Shanghai were extremely difficult.

While staying at the hotel, I recalled that someone had once invited me to participate in a small exhibition in Shanghai. I had declined at the time, but the memory resurfaced, and I thought, "Why not create something that could make me feel at peace?" I wanted to build something simple and comforting, like Robinson Crusoe surviving on a deserted island. That's how "Zhao Bandi's Little Shelter" began.

I used bamboo to build a small structure, a humble "home" filled with a sense of survival and calm. I invited one or two artist friends to sit and talk with me there, to help us all get through that dark time together. The curator and the museum supported the idea, and the work opened to the public in November 2020.

At first, it was just friends from the art world who came. We would sit together, chat, drink tea, or simply look at each other quietly. I even turned a face mask into a large hammock. The space had a bamboo-covered lawn, and the atmosphere was serene.

What surprised me most was when ordinary visitors—people with little interest in art—began coming in. Some arrived in small groups, simply wanting a place to relax. A few even cried. When I asked why, they said they didn't know but only that it felt deeply beautiful.

That was when I realized this small shelter wasn't just my refuge, but it resonated with others. The heart of the work was tenderness, and I think many great works of art carry that same quality.

So, for me, art is not only a refuge but also an escape route. I used to grow weary of treating art as a profession, but not anymore. The more disillusioned I become with the world, the more I believe in art. It's something worth devoting my life to: not only for myself, but for others too.

**Emma Qu:** I really relate to what you said about resonance. For me, art is a kind of comfort. When I'm sad, I'll listen to a song and notice how many people have liked or commented on it. It reminds me that others have felt the same emotions. I think artists are brave for expressing their experiences so openly, giving others a window to feel understood.

**Zhao Bandi:** Yes—comfort. That's a beautiful word. I think that's something we all seek, and I hope everyone can find a sense of comfort in their own life.

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## Artistic creation is both painful and healing

**Charlotte Xia:** Mr. Zhao, I'd like to ask a more specific question. I remember seeing a forum you led at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA), where you said that when you painted, especially oil paintings, you often felt anxious, almost like being in love. You couldn't sleep after finishing a painting and had to get up again to check whether it still looked good.

**Zhao Bandi:** Yes, that anxiety was intense.

**Charlotte Xia:** Do you have any ways to manage it now?

**Zhao Bandi:** The creative process is often accompanied by pain, especially when you're anxious. But joy and pain are always linked, and that's what makes creation interesting. If it were only sweet, it would be dull. About ninety percent of the process is painful, but in the end, it can be healing.

When people go through unbearable pain, they sometimes use physical pain to release pressure. I think artistic creation is similar—it's full of doubt, questioning whether you really have talent. Even Van Gogh destroyed many of his own works; he must have often felt unsatisfied. Some painters even buy back and burn their earlier works because they can't bear to let imperfect ones circulate. That's also a kind of self-respect.

**Muiyi Dong:** Do you ever experience a lack of inspiration? When I was younger, I painted freely, without overthinking. Now, I sometimes feel trapped by the need to express something meaningful, and that limits me.

**Zhao Bandi:** Everyone goes through that.

**Muiyi Dong:** How do you deal with it?

**Zhao Bandi:** It takes time. It's not easy to see yourself clearly. Developing your potential requires long exploration and patience.

**Emily Xu:** I have a practical question. I'm a senior in high school and will soon choose a college major. I want to study art, but my family discourages it, saying it's not stable. I think that mindset discourages people from following their interests. What do you think?

**Zhao Bandi:** I don't think reality is as fixed as people assume.

**Emily Xu:** So you believe I should be firm in my choice?

**Zhao Bandi:** Yes. If you're determined enough, the odds of success are fair.

**Emily Xu:** If your art hadn't achieved recognition, would you have chosen a different path?

**Zhao Bandi:** We really don't need to go back in time. Talking with you reminds me of how I felt when I made my decision. It helps me recall my original intention: to understand why I chose art in the first place. If I had to choose again, I wouldn't change my decision. But I'm not saying everyone must pursue art. The companionship and comfort we've discussed are what truly matter.

**Richelle Li:** I find that interesting. People often say the art world feels crowded—that most themes have been covered. But maybe that's because many who have something genuine to express haven't yet had the chance.

### “Absolutely No Expression” — Another *Guernica*

**Muyi Dong:** What social issues concern you most right now?

**Zhao Bandi:** Besides my panda-themed works, I've been painting something new for about a year and a half. You know Picasso's *Guernica*, right?

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**Charlotte Xia:** Yes, it depicts a bloody, war-torn scene.

**Zhao Bandi:** Exactly. Picasso painted it to protest the 1937 bombing of the Spanish town of Guernica, where Nazi air raids killed around 1,600 civilians. It was both a blow by the fascists against the opposition and a weapons test to assess the destructive power of modern weapons. Picasso responded through painting, creating a lasting indictment.

You may also be aware of today's events. In the past two years, many wars have occurred around the world, especially in Gaza, where Israel's bombings have been equally devastating and heartbreakingly. I've been thinking about that work again. In 2026, I plan to paint a piece the same size as *Guernica*, titled *Another Guernica*. It will reflect the tragedies of today, not one specific place.

I didn't plan to focus on this subject, but after watching the news, I couldn't stop thinking about it. Picasso isn't my favorite artist, but I always return to that painting. In the past, I found it too grand; now, I think such themes are necessary. Humanity still needs to confront them. Whether my own work brings comfort or provokes reflection remains to be seen.

**Oscar Chen:** I remember your pandemic installation: the bamboo room where visitors could relax and even

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bring food. And the sculpture on the lawn, where people could lie down or picnic. That interaction felt new to me. For *Another Guernica*, will you also consider how the audience will experience it?

**Zhao Bandi:** Before thinking about the exhibition format, I've been questioning the purpose of the painting itself. If it's just an indictment, I don't need to make it—there are already countless protests and commentaries. What I seek is the artist's distinct contribution. Where does the artist's uniqueness lie? Where does my unique contribution lie?

My earlier "shelter" installation taught me something: art can be more than expression; it can be space. That piece wasn't only about my emotions; it created a place for others to enter and feel calm. While it may not be entirely so—perhaps I still expressed my emotions to some extent—overall, the space is spacious enough to accommodate others besides myself, and I think this direction is wonderful.

Many great paintings have achieved this as well. I'd like *Another Guernica* to do the same. Despite the grim realities it reflects, I want the painting to give viewers room to breathe. My requirement for myself was that the painting itself should make people feel relaxed.

In my notes, I wrote one key phrase: "absolutely no expression". The painting shouldn't indulge in emotion or self-display. When I find myself expressing too much, I have to stop.

**Charlotte Xia:** Speaking of the tragedies you want to portray, do you think human society has truly progressed? Wars continue, just with different weapons. It feels like history repeating itself, as if people forget pain once it fades.

**Zhao Bandi:** I agree. That's exactly why I believe there are still reasons to repaint *Guernica*. My version, though, will take a different approach from Picasso's.

## Art resonance and success

**Emma Qu:** Mr. Zhao, I have another question. The panda bikini you presented in your fashion show gave me a strange, almost absurd feeling. Pandas are seen as national treasures, cute and endearing. Meanwhile, bikinis symbolize fashion and modernity. Combining them felt disjointed, even empty. It made me wonder: much of what we consume today—limited editions, collaborations—feels like an empty shell. Are we really buying what we want, or what's been designed for us to want?



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**Zhao Bandi:** That's a thoughtful observation. I'm preparing a panda-themed event in 798 this New Year's Eve called "You and I Are as Precious as Pandas". As you know, my pandas are different from typical ones: they're hybrids, somewhere between human and panda.

Let me share how I make them. I design each pose myself first, asking two assistants to record it—one takes photos, the other films—so every angle is documented. The sculpting team then recreates me as a panda based on those images. Sometimes I join in to guide the process. Each sculpture is created that way.

This method helps me understand my inner self. Some panda poses come from moments of struggle, and what you finally see is the result of that process.

**Emily Xu:** Do you think a work of art must resonate with others to be considered successful?

**Zhao Bandi:** I think it should touch at least one other person besides yourself. Maybe that sounds demanding—but to move even one person is enough.

**Emily Xu:** I'm not sure. Today, people often equate success in art with popularity or emotional resonance, but I don't think that's the only measure.

**Zhao Bandi:** True. We've long abandoned the idea of pleasing everyone. To move a few is already good. Actually, "pleasing" isn't the right word—great art doesn't please, it moves.

I read the notes your teachers shared. One of you wrote: "I'm afraid that when I embark on my own path, I'll drift further and further away from the world's path." Another wrote: "I feel like I'm just an observer in this world."

That's interesting. You may think you're just observing, but one day you'll find yourself in the center of the storm without realizing it. Many things feel distant simply because you're already inside them. No one can stay an observer forever.

**Emily Xu:** Everyone is the center of their own world.

**Zhao Bandi:** Exactly. It's hard to be an observer when real pain or joy arrives. You have to live it.

Faye, you made a mother's belly out of a pillow. Can you explain it to us?

**Faye Yang:** I created a corner installation using handmade pillows of different shapes, arranged on the wall to form a womb-like space. That corner felt like a part of myself I had lost—a small nest, a refuge that belonged to me. Building it was a way to reclaim something missing.

**Zhao Bandi:** Like swaddling clothes.



**Faye Yang:** Exactly. The space felt very warm, a place where I could let go of worries and just rest. The piece came from a longing for maternal love; I grew up with my father and always missed that side of care. Making the installation helped me feel restored.

Even though the work didn't fully reach the effect I had imagined, it still allowed me to immerse myself and find comfort. More than anything, it expressed a simple wish: to be held and loved like a child again.

## Will AI replace artistic creation?

**Zhao Bandi:** There's one more topic I'd like to discuss: artificial intelligence (AI) art. Many people ask my opinion, and I still don't have a perfect answer. But I think it's a crucial issue. Many painters fear AI, and I think their fear is valid. In terms of image generation, AI might already surpass 90% of painters—its richness and detail can be astonishing.

**Emma Qu:** But I think it lacks style. It merges too many influences—too much information, too many references. Maybe because it knows too much, it ends up without a distinct voice. That's why the human painter remains irreplaceable.

Starting from “Brook”, Keystone students created various original artworks for a dialogue with the community

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**Zhao Bandi:** Yes, AI lacks individuality—and individuality is a virtue.

**Richelle Li:** I see the rapid rise of AI not as a threat but as an opportunity and an era for artists and creators. As machines take over routine tasks, the value of uniquely human creativity will stand out even more.

AI can simulate experience, but it can't truly live it. Our art comes from real emotions and lived moments. Maybe one day I'll stop creating if I have nothing left to say, but AI will never have that problem, because it never truly feels.

**Zhao Bandi:** Beautifully said. That gives me even more courage to paint *Another Guernica*. During its creation, I welcome everyone's input to help us all understand what makes us human and precious in the age of AI.

Maybe this is not a crisis but an opportunity. The flood of AI-generated images makes real human work even more valuable.

I once told a curator I'd love to hold an exhibition featuring 100 artworks—99 made by AI and one by me, the only living artist. We wouldn't tell the audience which is which. That, I think, would be a real challenge—to defend human dignity and the dignity of art itself.



*Not Just Pandas—A Journey Across the Ocean Through Time*  
Michael Xu (Class of 2035)  
Watercolor, marker, and colored pencil



*The Wandering Little Brook of Hogwarts*  
Rosie Zhu (Keystone Class of 2035)  
Acrylic paint and watercolor

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*Panda and Her Friends*  
Katie Pei (Keystone Class of 2037)  
Watercolor



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*Panda's Daydreams*  
Ethan Guo and Lele Shen (Keystone Class of 2032)  
Medium: Collage art



*Panda Artist's Watermelon Party*  
Jade Wu (Keystone Class of 2035)  
Acrylic, Marker



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*The Panda Equestrian*  
Apple Shen (Keystone Class of 2033)  
Dunhuang's earth, air-dried xuan paper, ink, and mineral pigments



*Dreamscape of Light, a Sanctuary of Freedom*  
Tao Sun, Primary School Visual Arts Teacher  
Digital painting



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*The Rhythm of Dream's Breaths*  
Tao Sun, Primary School Visual Arts Teacher  
AIGC





*Panda Speaks*  
Abigail Shang (Keystone Class of 2036)  
Watercolor

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*Creating a Rainbow*  
Tantan Gao (Keystone Class of 2035)  
Acrylic paint



*The National Treasure*  
John Wang (Keystone Class of 2036)  
Print on paper

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*A Train Rushing to Beijing*  
Duncan Deng (Keystone Class of 2034)  
Video with bamboo flute performance, color, 1 min 45 sec



*Homecoming*  
Muqi Dong (Keystone Class of 2027)  
Acrylic paint

When time becomes a response to history,  
Can art reflect time back to us?

The Keystone Student Visual Arts Calendar

2026

We search for “truth” beneath layers of disguise,  
Find the “other” within the self,  
Trace the “known unknown” through shifting time,  
Speak with nature—  
And link the flat with the three-dimensional.

## Dialogues

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of

Young artists are unafraid to share how they see today’s world. For them, technique and experience are not barriers but tools to explore and express. This special curation, the Keystone Student Visual Arts Calendar 2026, brings together selected works from our students across all divisions—from Primary School to our most recent graduating cohort, the Keystone Class of 2025. Whether through painting, calligraphy, or installation, these student artists show the wide range of what art can be: muted and mysterious, bold and unfiltered, free-flowing, experimental, and even avant-garde.

Each page of this memento captures a moment. Revisited later, these works might stir memory or spark new ideas. That emotional shift—from the artist’s brush to the viewer’s experience—is what makes the artwork alive.

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Edited by Siyue Li

## Temporality

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Maybe this is what a dialogue across time looks like.



*This is a tear-off calendar. Feel free to use or shape it. Make it your own.*



Annual Reading List

# Word Spread the Word

Keystone's "Be a Bookworm"  
recommends  
great annual reads

Keystone Academy encourages making reading more than a habit, but to become part of the culture. Through the popular “Be a Bookworm” column in Keystone’s weekly *In the Loop* newsletter, the Keystone Libraries recommend books tied to current events or that explore history, culture, education, or the future of technology. Still, other picks simply open a door to somewhere unexpected.

The Keystone Libraries invite selected authors of these publications to Keystone, where they cultivate deeper dialogues and deliver lectures within the community. Through these encounters, the essence of written works connects with students’ academic journeys and daily lives, yielding concrete and meaningful influences.

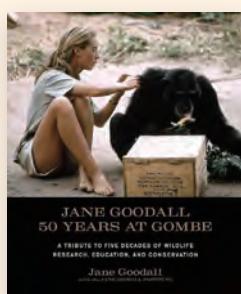
Keystone students dedicate themselves to creation. Through the written word, published volumes, the composition of musical albums, and the creation of artworks, they give voice to their inner worlds while thinking about the broader aspects of society. This becomes another pathway linking them with their immediate surroundings and the world beyond.

In this edition of *The Keystone Magazine*, we launch a new column, “Spread the Word”, with the top recommended “Be a Bookworm” titles from the academic year 2024-2025, as well as some of Keystone students’ original books and music, into a single list. It’s our invitation to anyone—student, parent, teacher, or friend—who wants to spend time immersed in reading and listening.



I

## ◎ *Jane Goodall: 50 Years at Gombe*



By Jane Goodall with the Jane Goodall Institute

The Keystone Libraries team recommends a book with a mix of gratitude and reflection: *Jane Goodall: 50 Years at Gombe*. This work is a tribute to Dr. Jane Goodall and her extraordinary legacy, which feels especially poignant following the news of her peaceful passing on October 1, 2025. Dr. Goodall’s life was a testament to the power of patient and passionate inquiry. Her groundbreaking discoveries at Gombe—which revealed that chimpanzees make tools, have emotions, and possess unique personalities—forever changed how we define ourselves, as human beings, and how we see the animal kingdom. This book encapsulates five decades of that revolutionary wildlife research, education, and conservation.

Dr. Goodall visited Keystone on November 12, 2019, as part of her trip to China to commemorate the 25th anniversary of her Roots & Shoots Program in the country. Dr. Goodall’s visit to our school was a living example of her mission: to inspire action. May her story in *50 Years at Gombe* ignite a deeper love for reading and nature and propel our community to continue and expand the vital work she began. Her message now rests in our hands.



### *The Bird Friends Around Us: A Bird Journal*

By Yaya Yu

With the arrival of spring, life begins anew. The Middle School Library invited natural artist, author, and illustrator Mr. Yaya Yu for the first semester's inaugural author talk. Here, Mr. Yu shared amusing birdwatching anecdotes with Grade 6 and Grade 7 students and community members. He discussed how to observe details through drawing and shared experiences from other natural observers.

In his newly published book, *The Bird Friends Around Us: A Bird Journal*, Mr. Yu introduces 24 impressive bird species he has observed, recounting his thoughts during birdwatching, such as how birds forage, court, build nests, and raise their young. He also spreads scientific knowledge about birds and guides beginners on how to start birdwatching. In the book, Mr. Yu vividly showcases the grace and beauty of commonly seen birds around us.

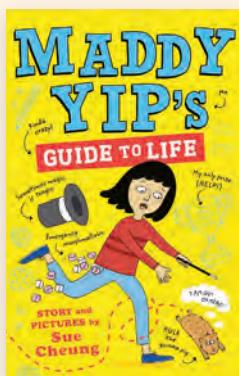


### *The Last Garden*

By Rachel Ip (author), Anneli Bray (illustrator)

Keystone kicked off the annual “Love of Reading Month” in April 2025 with a title written by an award-winning picture book author Rachel Ip, whose stories often came from real-world events or experiences. Her first picture book, *The Last Garden*, tells the tale of a girl who lovingly tends to the last surviving garden in a city shattered by war. When the violence forces everyone to flee, she has to abandon her cherished plants. Yet, even in her absence, the garden’s seeds scatter across the broken streets. Over time, roots take hold, and when people finally return, they find their home slowly blooming back to life. The girl, too, comes back to discover that her plants have endured even in the darkest times.

The book was inspired by true events in Syria and war gardens around the world and throughout history. With wars still raging in different corners of the world, this book reminds us that even when everything seems lost or ruined, nature (and humanity) has a way of regrowing.



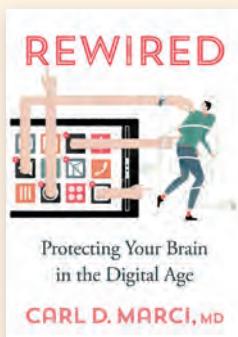
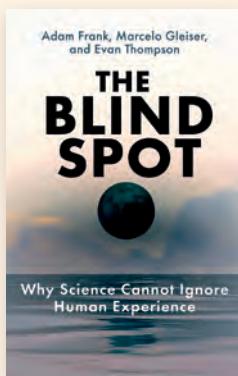
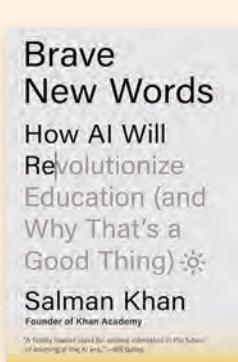
### *Maddy Yip's Guide to Life*

By Sue Cheung

Sue Cheung, winner of the Diverse Book Award, brought her books to third- to fifth-grade students. One of her best books is a hilarious and heartwarming story about self-discovery in *Maddy Yip's Guide to Life*. The titular character thinks she's perfectly happy until she realizes everyone around her has an exceptional talent... except her! She finds her talent and tries many things, like breakdancing, playing the recorder, baking, and even magic tricks. But everything goes wrong in silly ways, like a runaway guinea pig! With the help of her chaotic brothers, bewildered grandad, and loyal best friend, Maddy learns an important lesson about being herself. Cheung's witty writing celebrates individuality, family, and the messy, wonderful process of finding your place in the world.

### III

## Technology and Daily Life



### Brave New Words – How AI Will Revolutionize Education (and Why That's a Good Thing)

By Salman Khan

In "New Language of Education," Khan Academy founder Salman Khan delves into the profound transformation that artificial intelligence (AI) is poised to bring to education. The book's core argument is the importance of the Socratic teaching method, emphasizing the significance of questioning in learning. He views AI as a Socratic tool that will enable the democratization of education.

Keystone Executive Head of School Dr. Emily McCarren was invited to write a foreword for *Brave New Words*. In her foreword, Dr. McCarren analyzes the current educational landscape and the attitudes of various institutions towards AI. She urges us to approach emerging technologies with a prudent and cautious attitude, while maintaining an optimistic mindset.

### The Blind Spot: Why Science Cannot Ignore Human Experience

By Adam Frank, Marcelo Gleiser, Evan Thompson

"What is the relationship between personal experience and knowledge?", "What counts as knowledge?", "Should some knowledge not be sought on ethical grounds?" The Theory of Knowledge (TOK) Exhibition by Keystone juniors in the last semester showcased how Diploma Programme (DP) students not only acquire subject-specific knowledge but also delve deeper into exploring and reflecting on the nature of knowledge itself and the process of knowing.

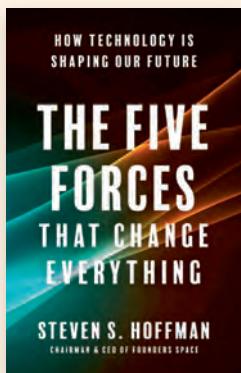
For readers fascinated by such intellectual challenges, the recently published and widely acclaimed book *The Blind Spot: Why Science Cannot Ignore Human Experience* is a must-read. Co-authored by Adam Frank (astrophysicist and Carl Sagan Award winner), Marcelo Gleiser (theoretical physicist and Templeton Prize laureate), and Evan Thompson (philosopher of cognitive science and Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada), the book offers a dual perspective from science and philosophy. The authors, who are also interdisciplinary scholars, critically examine how scientific knowledge, despite its rapid advancement and remarkable achievements, has become disconnected from experience, creating a "blind spot". Rich with real-world examples—from our perception of temperature and color to global challenges like climate change and artificial intelligence—the book guides readers back to science's most fundamental questions. It invites us to reexamine modern science and, in turn, rethink our everyday experiences.

### Rewired: Protecting Your Brain in the Digital Age

By Carl D. Marci

We feel more disconnected than ever in our "always on" digital world. Harvard neuroscientist Dr. Carl D. Marci reveals in *Rewired: Protecting Your Brain in the Digital Age* why smartphones and social media are physically rewiring our brains. They hijack neurological reward centers meant for meaningful relationships, replacing deep connections with ephemeral digital interactions.

Whether you're concerned about family screen habits or overwhelmed by digital overload, this book provides evidence-based insights into tech's effects on cognition and emotion and practical strategies to restore balance.

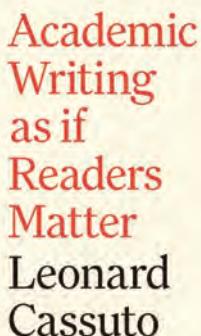


### *The Five Forces That Change Everything: How Technology is Shaping Our Future*

By Steven S. Hoffman

On November 26, 2024, Steven Hoffman, Silicon Valley venture investor and CEO of Founders Space, visited Keystone Academy for a Thought Lab episode and initiated inspiring discussions with an audience of Primary and Secondary students, their parents, and staff. While showcasing the cutting-edge technologies of today's world, he also posed one question after another to the audience. Much of the content presented on-site originated from Hoffman's 2021 book, *The Five Forces That Change Everything: How Technology Is Shaping Our Future*, or its continuation and evolution.

The five core forces revealed in the book — “massive connectivity”, “biological convergence”, “human expansionism”, “deep automation”, and “intelligent explosion”—have remained relevant and continue to impact the current and future world significantly. For readers, especially students at the primary and secondary levels, the book provides detailed references for these technologies, making it easy to explore areas of particular interest further. More importantly, Hoffman encourages readers to bravely face the unknown, unleash their passion, and contemplate the ethical concerns and challenges these five core forces may bring.



### *Academic Writing as if Readers Matter*

By Leonard Cassuto

Be a Bookworm rarely recommends reference books or books closely related to courses, for we believe it is the subject teachers' job. However, there is always an exception: *Academic Writing as if Readers Matter* is closely aligned with our educational goals, and it is about a crucial skill that our students need: academic writing.

Leonard Cassuto is an English professor at Fordham University and an award-winning journalist. His published works span various fields such as education, science, history, sports, and criminology. *Academic Writing as if Readers Matter*, published by Princeton University Press in September 2024, has been hailed by educators as “elegant, eloquent, useful, and necessary.” Last semester, Professor Cassuto visited Keystone as a guest speaker of the Thought Lab series, where he shared with the community the content of *Academic Writing as if Readers Matter*, providing more students with new perspectives in academic writing.

Within the Middle Years Programme (MYP) and DP, the first of Approaches to Learning (ATL) skills is “Communication”, which includes specifics like “us[ing] appropriate forms of writing for different purposes and audiences”. The term “communication” is precisely emphasized by the author because “A writer who does a good job forges a connection with the reader”. When the author was finishing this book, artificial intelligence (AI) abruptly arose as a ‘frightening specter on the writing landscape’. As an educator, Cassuto astutely captures its impact on academic writing. In the final chapter of this book, he analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of artificial intelligence in academic writing.



## Zhou Lian's 100 Western Philosophy Lessons

By Zhou Lian

Professor Zhou Lian from Renmin University of China delivered a vivid and insightful philosophical lecture titled “Philosophy Is a Verb” to the Keystone community on May 7. We highly recommend his book *Unlocking*, first published in 2019 and revised in 2025, which embodies the same core idea as his lecture—that philosophy is an active practice. With the verb “unlock” as his reference, Professor Zhou acts like a tour guide, helping readers unlock the door to Western philosophy. Through 100 lessons, he leads us on a journey to appreciate, perceive, and trace the contours of Western philosophical thought.

From the spirit of ancient Greece to the Enlightenment, from the death of Socrates to Nietzsche’s proclamation that “God is dead”, he not only demystifies complex philosophical concepts but also connects them to our daily lives. If you wish to put the idea that “philosophy is a verb” into practice after the lecture, *Unlocking* is the gateway—an extension of the intellectual feast offered on May 7.

## V

## From the Classroom to the Great Outdoors

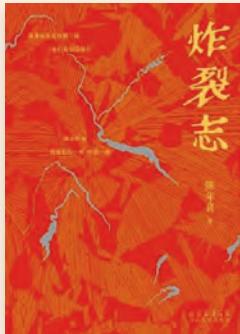


### Encountering Lu Xun

By Qian Liquan

The Keystone Chinese Department launched “Lu Xun Month” for ninth graders on October 19, 2024, to mark the 88th death anniversary of Lu Xun. For this occasion, the MS Library set up a special “Lu Xun Exhibition” where students will get to know the esteemed Chinese writer through the works studied in Chinese class. At the same time, the exhibition also allows young readers and the community to understand, research, and feel Lu Xun from multiple perspectives, including history, culture, drama, and philosophy.

Mr. Qian Liquan, known in academia for his studies on modern Chinese literature, especially Lu Xun, is an unavoidable figure during the research and study process. Mr. Qian was one of the most popular professors at Peking University (or colloquially called “Beida”). As he bid farewell to Beida’s lecture platform in 2001, Mr. Qian launched a series of lectures about Lu Xun’s final moments, taking everyone back to the historical scenes and the atmosphere of the times, examining the ideological context and life traces of the famed novelist during that period. The recording of his “last lessons” was compiled into the book, *Encountering Lu Xun*, where the eponymous figure is no longer seen as a distant statue or a historical personality far removed from reality, but as a real friend or a respected elder. Mr. Qian also emphasizes in the book that “Lu Xun needs the most genuine friends; he does not need others to follow trends or watch the show as bystanders.”

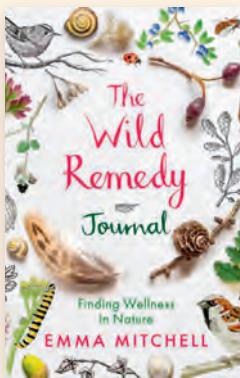


### Demolitions Mark

By Chen Nianxi

*Demolitions Mark*, the poetry collection and first book of Chen Nianxi, documents his journey as he left the countryside to become a demolitions worker. This book contains 153 poems depicting his hardships and struggles in the mining life and his survival experiences in the city. Chen Nianxi's words strike at the heart, penetrating through the paper, as every word and every sentence seems like an internal explosion.

Chen Nianxi is the winner of the first Worker Poetry Award, listed in *Southern People Weekly* as one of the “100 Faces of China 2021”. He has been invited to lecture at Harvard, Yale, and Columbia University. Despite his success, he is clear-eyed about the limits of art to change reality, whether society's or his own. The selection of his poetry as study material reflects the profound implications of Keystone's Chinese Thread. The contribution of his works to education, as he expressed in an interview, aims to provide more contemplation for this era and broaden people's understanding of the world.



### The Wild Remedy: How Nature Mends Us

By Emma Mitchell

Psychological research has advanced our understanding of how time in nature can improve mental health and sharpen cognition. In Emma Mitchell's richly illustrated book, *The Wild Remedy: How Nature Mends Us*, she beautifully articulates the profound healing power of nature. Drawing parallels with Keystone's annual Outdoor Education Program (OEP) in September 2024, Mitchell's work resonates deeply with students' transformative experiences during their wilderness camping experiences.

Mitchell's moving and candid account of her year is a powerful testament to how reconnecting with nature may offer some answers to today's mental health epidemic, especially for teenagers and young adults who have admitted they compulsively want to either look at WeChat or other social media apps. She also explains the science behind such changes, calling on new research into such areas as forest bathing and how our bodies and minds respond to wildlife.

## VI

## New Keystone Library Collection



### Visualizing Dunhuang: The Lo Archive Photographs of the Mogao and Yulin Caves

Edited by Dora C. Y. Ching

The Chinese Thread at Keystone has a central place in the school's curriculum and our sense of Keystone as a “world school”. Since its founding, the Keystone Libraries have utilized various opportunities to collect special books that express this theme to support reading, learning, exploring, and appreciating the Thread.

In 2022, the Malcolm McKenzie Reading Room, named in honor of our founding Head of School, was purposefully set up for the Chinese Thread Special Collection. Recently, another batch of books was added to this special collection, including a significant set: the nine-volume *Visualizing Dunhuang*, published jointly by the Tang Center for East Asian Art at Princeton University and Princeton University Press.

The arrival of *Visualizing Dunhuang* at Keystone was also a moment in time, as Dr. Emily McCarren mentioned in a previous letter to the community. She wrote of the Chinese Thread: “Yes, it is a curriculum that we have documented and continually revise, but the Chinese Thread is also an invitation to facilitate a series of magical moments like this one. It is a feeling that defies a simple definition, and a journey for which there can be no recipe book or step-by-step instruction manual.”

## VII

# Keystone Original Student Publications



### *Sit and Sip: My Reflections on Chengdu Teahouse Culture*

By Mia Cheng (Keystone Class of 2026)

Publisher: Sichuan Literature and Art Publishing House

Chengdu's traditional teahouses function as vibrant folk museums, connecting the city's past and present. While history museums display the monumental achievements of elites, these grassroots establishments rooted in local communities document the political, cultural, and economic reflections and daily lives of ordinary people.

Starting with her Personal Project in Grade 10, Mia Cheng, a Keystone student from Chengdu, began a journey to rediscover her city's cultural roots. Her personal experiences visiting teahouses throughout the city for over thirty times culminated in this collection of locally inspired reflections. *Sit and Sip: My Reflections on Chengdu Teahouse Culture* comprises thirty bilingual essays in both Chinese and English. From renowned century-old establishments like the Heming Teahouse and the Guanyin Pavilion Teahouses to humble neighborhood stalls at Haijiaoshi Street, and the serene, Zen-inspired Xiang Garden Teahouse in Wenshu Monastery, Chengdu's teahouses embody the city's most authentic way of life: relaxed, leisurely, and unburdened by societal pressures. This work offers a chronicle of local customs that bridges history and contemporary life, representing a young author's attentive observation and sincere engagement with regional culture through thoughtful documentation.



### *Poet, Traveler*

By Oscar Chen (Keystone Class of 2026)

Publisher: National Language Publishing House

*Poet, Traveler* is a poetry collection by Keystone student Oscar Chen. It contains over one hundred poems and short pieces written between 2019 and 2020. These works explore themes of love, death, memory, and forgetting. More importantly, they capture fleeting emotions and moments of inspiration from countless experiences. These writings allow Chen to reach the hazy place where past dreams and present reality intertwine. He hopes readers may find courage within these pages to understand themselves better or confront life's challenges. “That would be my greatest fortune”, Chen says.



### The Myth Breakers – Phys Birds Comic Collection

By Julia Zhou (Keystone Class of 2025)

Publisher: China Machine Press

The first book featured in last school year's "Be a Bookworm" was *The Myth Breakers – Phys Birds Comic Collection*, written by Julia Zhou, an alumna from the Keystone Class of 2025. Officially published in June 2025, the book is a comic-style popular science reader designed for children and young audiences.

In Grade 10, Zhou completed a bilingual Chinese-English comic collection, *The Myth Breakers*, as her MYP Personal Project product and presented it to the Keystone community at the Personal Project Exhibition. Her work's fresh perspective, innovative content, and unique format caught the strong interest of publishers, especially given that a high school student created it. However, transforming a Personal Project product into a publishable book required further work. During her busy DP years, Zhou continued to revise the manuscript and delivered the finished version before graduation.

Through this book, we believe that young readers will not only feel the author's passion for learning itself but also be inspired to pursue their own passions with the same dedication.



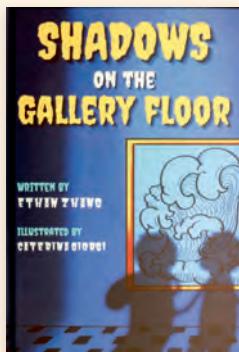
### What Is Philosophy

Compiled by: Little Stepbooks

Illustrated by: Phoebe Zheng (Keystone Class of 2024)

Publisher: Dolphin Books

Compiled by Little Stepbooks, *What Is Philosophy* explains to children the meaning of philosophy, its subjects of inquiry, and its connection to daily life in simple, accessible language. This philosophical primer aims to help children "enter the charming yet serious field of philosophy". As a children's educational resource, illustrations are vital in this philosophical primer. Phoebe Zheng, a Keystone Class of 2024 student, created the illustrations for this work. With imaginative and creative artistry, she vividly interprets philosophical concepts through images, helping young readers better understand how philosophy relates to their lives. Internationally renowned brand designer and veteran art mentor Qi Zhang praised Zheng's illustrations: "The illustrator extensively employs a flat-design approach, emphasizing compositional aesthetics and visual impact while adding depth and playfulness to the artwork."



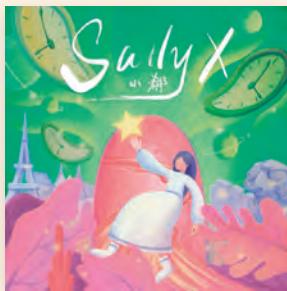
### Shadows on the Gallery Floor

Author: Ethan Zhang (Keystone Class of 2032)

Illustrator: Caterina Giorgi

An Asian art exhibition is about to open at a private art gallery in San Francisco. Just before the opening, several valuable artworks mysteriously disappear. Who stole the artworks—the gallery owner Jason, his best friend and assistant Bob, the new employee Greg, and the security guard Max?

Inspired by the famous children's book *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, Keystone student Ethan Zhang brings readers a suspenseful yet lighthearted and humorous story with a childlike perspective and sincere narration. This story, written in English, showcases his English proficiency and ability to captivate readers with seemingly simple language in a short time. His narration, combined with illustrations by Italian illustrator Caterina Giorgi, presents a captivating "gallery mystery" that you won't be able to put down.



### Sally X

Artist: Sally Xi (Keystone Class of 2025)

Release Date: January 5, 2024

Record Label: Go East Music Entertainment Consulting Limited

“X” represents an unknown adventure called “music”; “X” is a passionate journey of youth toward “music”.

Singer-songwriter Sally Xi, a Grade 12 student at Keystone from the post-2005 generation, officially released her debut all-original extended play (EP), *Sally X*, on January 5, 2024. Xi composed and wrote the lyrics for all three tracks, weaving authentic reflections on growing up and whimsical musings about life into her vocals to create captivating, story-driven works. These three songs resonate with distinct emotions, reflecting Xi’s journey through adolescence and youth. The album explores themes of the passage of time, the bittersweet nature of friendships, the confusion of growing up, and the innocence of youthful emotions, like chapters in a novel, inviting us to turn each page and immerse ourselves in the experience.

Her musical sensibilities surpass those of her peers, revealing Xi’s talent and dedication, and introducing us to a surprising new voice from the post-2005 generation.



### The Echo

Artists: Keystone Student Band VITAMIN

Release Date: December 25, 2023

Record Label: Taihe Red Star

Band Members (all from the Keystone Class of 2023):

Victor Ding (guitar), Sonic Liu (drums),

Dlency Zheng (lead vocals/bass), Ella Zhu (keyboard)

Band Style: Jazz and Pop

Year of Formation: 2016

VITAMIN is a student band founded at Keystone in 2016, composed of Class of 2023 students Victor Ding, Sonic Liu, Dlency Zheng, and Ella Zhu. Except for drummer Liu, the other three members were founding students of Keystone. As one of the school’s earliest student bands, VITAMIN ignited the spark of music within many students here.

“Echo” was the band’s original name when it formed in 2016. This name means a lot to the members, allowing them to revisit memories of their student days. The creation of *The Echo* spanned the final years of the band members’ high school experience.

This is VITAMIN’s debut EP and their final collaborative work before dispersing for university. The band envisions this EP as a tribute to their shared six-year journey and their hopeful outlook for the future. Within its notes, listeners may likewise recall their own youthful days and the precious friendships of adolescence.



## Road Signs

Artists: The Rolling Keystones

Release Date: September 16, 2023

Record Label: ShowStart Release

Band Members (from the Keystone Class of 2022):

Brady Ding (guitar), Andrew Li (lead vocals), Yutong Wen (drums), Eric Zhu (keyboard),

Chloe Xu (*guzheng*), Jamie Zheng (saxophone)

Band Style: Rock, Jazz, and Pop

Year of Formation: 2018

The Rolling Keystones was officially formed at Keystone in September 2018. The founding members included lead vocalist Andrew Li, drummer Yutong Wen, and keyboardist Eric Zhu. Later, saxophonist Jamie Zheng and guitarist Brady Ding joined, completing the band's lineup.

However, the band's composition need not be static, as members constantly pursue innovation and growth. Through relentless exploration and experimentation, they discovered richer avenues for musical expression. Following a fruitful collaborative performance, Zhu invited *guzheng* virtuoso Chloe Xu to rehearse a song with the band. Her exceptional contribution led to a formal invitation to join The Rolling Keystones, making it Keystone's first rock band to incorporate traditional Chinese instruments. This bold experiment made The Rolling Keystones unique and innovative.

During their time at Keystone, The Rolling Keystones composed numerous original songs. In 2023, they officially released their debut musical anthology titled *Road Sign*. Within the consciousness of The Rolling Keystones members, road signs subtly guide travelers, or perhaps it is the travelers who guide the road signs. On the journey, one encounters familiar faces, cities, and moons, or alternatively, strangers, towers, and stars. The narratives encompass those driven by madness, fleeing into the butterfly's dream; those overwhelmed by helplessness, doctors mistaken for patients; and those filled with indignation, sinking into the ocean alongside glaciers. It is an abyssal ocean, boundless and growing ever murkier. Or perhaps, in the ocean's depths lies a tranquil utopia, where its inhabitants say they were guided there by road signs. Within this album, we can sense The Rolling Keystones' philosophy of life.

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