

Mr Chan Cheuk-ming

Mr Chan Cheuk-ming, or “Sham Shui Po Ming Gor,” became a household name when his initiative to distribute meals to the poor and homeless in Sham Shui Po first received coverage in *Apple Daily* in 2011. But since 2008, as restaurateur and chef, he has been collaborating with the Society for Community Organization selling meal vouchers at an affordable price to locals. Today, with the help of many volunteers, he gives out free meals to the homeless, the elderly, and refugees, at a rate of around 400 meal boxes a day, 4 days a week. His beneficiaries include homeless people in Tai Kok Tsui and Cheung Sha Wan and the elderly in Nam Cheong, Yuen Chau Street, Fu Cheong and Lai Kok Estate, who will either receive meal boxes directly from Ming Gor’s team, or queue up at his café. As news of his benevolence spread, sponsors flocked in, allowing him to set up a social enterprise called “Bei Ho Together” to organise the food giveaways. With the sponsorship, he collaborated with the charity group “Equal Share Action,” giving out meal boxes at his Sham Shui Po eatery.

Dubbed the “Good Samaritan of Sham Shui Po,” Mr Chan attributes his selfless benevolence to his humble beginnings. Born in the mainland in the 1950s, he had to start working in a restaurant after his parents died, when he had just finished primary school. He came to Hong Kong as a stowaway in 1979, and soon after landed in a kitchen in Sham Shui Po, where he has lived ever since. He became owner of the Bei Ho Barbecue Restaurant in ‘97, when his then-boss retired and emigrated. Business slumped but his heart went out to the poor and homeless who went days without a proper meal, which inspired him to sell meals at a much more affordable price, even at a net loss. “I remember what it felt like to be poor,” he said, smiling a little.

Besides having a big heart, Mr Chan’s strength lies in his drive to attend to his clients’ needs and his will to solve problems. Whenever single elderly residents complain about the leaks, or homeless people about a lack of shelter, he quickly comes up with remedial plans and mobilises his volunteers to carry them out. His hands-on approach has since earned for him the name of “Mr Fix it of Sham Shui Po.” Besides efficiency, Mr Chan strives for perfection by regularly evaluating effectiveness and finding ways to improve on different projects. For example he carries out yearly bi-annual review of the system of meal box distribution as the numbers of elderly residents, homeless people keeps soaring in different housing estates across Sham Shui Po. He also devises new meal plans with his young volunteers to cater to homeless people of south Asian descent. He insists on direct contact with the elderly and homeless he is serving so as to understand possible problems they face, filling the gap left by government bureaucracy. The social enterprise that he founded receives no government funding, just to avoid unnecessary red tape and administrative wrangling so that all

the money could go to the people who need it most. He is not afraid to go head to head with District Board members and government departments about the gaps in government measures and social services through which people fall, as he believes in the motto “if you are selfless you are fearless.”

His compassion was repaid when he was nearly forced out of business because of soaring rent. When the news raged through Facebook, Mr Chan’s fans expressed concern that his charity work would have to end. Fortunately, some property owners learnt of his plight and quickly lent their support by offering him a larger shop space at a much cheaper rent. In 2016, he re-opened his restaurant under a new name, “Bei Ho Together,” in Tai Nam Street to continue offering affordable meals in the neighbourhood.

But meal distribution is only part of his multifaceted work. He spends half of his time educating young people by sharing his own experience in seminars to try to encourage youngsters in Hong Kong who might be depressed by the general malaise. He feels for the young people who feel hopeless due to skyrocketing property prices and “linkreitization”. His message for them is clear: there is always a silver lining. Although he did not finish high school, he firmly believes in the importance of education to helping young people today solve their problems themselves. He has received funding from overseas Chinese communities to invest in the tutoring of children from poor families. He is working with seven NGOS to provide classes to children from poverty stricken areas in the Mainland, so as to elevate their chances for higher education and a better life. He would constantly remind himself of the words his teachers taught him in primary school, i.e.: “We should put other people first in all the things we do.” He lives by the motto that “one for all” should come before “all for one.”

Mr Chan, the unsung hero of Sham Shui Po, has received numerous awards for humanitarianism, for example, in 2013, he beat famous celebrity and philanthropist Andy Lau to be elected as “ambassador of positive energy.” In the same year his news was also voted by *Apple Daily* “the most heart-warming newsworthy individual of the year”. His boundless compassion and utmost giving despite his humble means provides unfailing inspiration to us all that it is better to give than to receive.

Mr Chairman, for his compassion and selfless benevolence to the poor and needy, and his extensive contribution to making society better and fairer for all, may I now present Mr Chan Cheuk-ming to you for conferment of an honorary fellowship.

Citation written and delivered by Professor Lisa Leung