

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Case Study

University: City University of Hong Kong |
Unit of Assessment (UoA): 30 - Chinese language & literature |

Title of case study: Changing Misconceptions about Chinese Culture and Promoting East-West Cross-Cultural Understanding |

(1) Summary of the impact

Professor Zhang Longxi lectured on East-West cultural encounters on Phoenix Satellite TV in their Century Forum series, which had an estimated audience of 20.2 million viewers worldwide. It was aired on Feb. 27, 2016 and rerun the week after. He also gave MOOC lectures on Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese culture with positive feedback from hundreds of audiences, mostly non-Chinese, who said that after the lectures they were rid of misconceptions and had a much better understating of Chinese culture and tradition. As China is on the rise, understanding of Chinese culture has become relevant and important for the world today. |

(2) Underpinning research

Professor Zhang Longxi's research career and many publications focus on East-West comparative studies of literatures and cultures. His book, *Unexpected Affinities* (University of Toronto Press, 2007), based on his Alexander Lectures delivered at the University of Toronto in 2005, puts emphasis on the validity and importance of cross-cultural understanding and offers many specific textual evidences to show the cultural affinities between China and the West. His essay on "Marco Polo and the East-West Encounter" (2008) points out that from Marco Polo, the first European coming to China in the 13th century with contributions to the expansion of geographical knowledge in Europe about the East, to Matteo Ricci, the Jesuit missionary who came to China in the 17th century and started intellectual encounters with China, the image of China was largely positive in Europe and Chinese culture was enthusiastically received by Enlightenment philosophers like Leibniz and Voltaire. His article on "The Complexity of Difference" (*Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 2010) examines differences on individual, communal, and cross-cultural levels and argues for paying attention to individual differences rather than cultural and cross-cultural ones. His article on "Mount Lu" (*History and Theory* 2010) argues that the best way to understand China is to have constructive interaction and cooperation between Western Sinology and native Chinese scholarship, the views from the inside and the outside. In his article "Re-conceptualizing China in our Time" (*European Review*, May 2015), he presents a critique and a corrective of some common Western misconceptions of China and again argues for the integration of knowledge from Western Sinology and native Chinese scholarship. His more recent publication, *From Comparison to World Literature* (SUNY, 2015) argues strongly for the necessity and the validity of East-West cross-cultural studies, and for the opportunities offered by the rise of world literature for the expansion of knowledge about China and the East in the world today. Professor Zhang is an expert in the history of East-West cultural encounters, Western Sinological scholarship, and the current situation of cross-cultural understanding between China and the West. He argues that cultures do not get into conflict with one another, only interests of nation states and social groups do, with cultural differences complicating the picture. He argues that the world should be multi-centered with each culture contributing to the richness of human culture as a whole, and therefore, for the future of humanity, we must

promote mutual understanding across cultures. Given the recent rise of nationalism, isolationism, even tribalism and racism in Europe, America and the other parts of the world, and the numerous conflicts, regional wars, and terrorist attacks, he strongly believes that cross-cultural understanding is in greater need today than ever before for the world we are living in. His research and publications bear evidence of his cosmopolitan perspective and have been well received internationally. His international reputation among scholars in comparative and world literature has had some remarkable influence and noticeable impact in the field of East-West comparative studies. |

(3) References to the research

R1 Zhang Longxi, *Unexpected Affinities: Reading across Cultures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

R2 Zhang Longxi, "Marco Polo, Chinese Cultural Identity, and an Alternative Model of East-West Encounter," in Suzanne Conklin and Amilcare A. Iannucci (eds.), *Marco Polo and the Encounter of East and West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 280-96.

R3 Zhang Longxi, "The Complexity of Difference: Individual, Cultural and Cross-Cultural," *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, vol. 35, nos. 3-4, London, December 2010, pp. 341-52.

R4 Zhang Longxi, "The True Face of Mount Lu: On the Significance of Perspectives and Paradigms," *History and Theory*, vol. 49, no. 1, Middletown, Conn., February 2010, pp. 58-70.

R5 Zhang Longxi, "Re-conceptualizing China in our Time: From a Chinese Perspective," *European Review*, vol. 23, no. 2, May 2015, Cambridge, pp. 193-209.

R6 Zhang Longxi, *From Comparison to World Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015). |

(4) Details of the impact

| Recorded in front of a live audience of high school and college students as well as more mature people, Professor Zhang's 40-minute lecture was first broadcast at 17:20-18:00 on Phoenix TV on Saturday, February 27, 2016, and was repeated the following week, attracting an estimated audience of some 20.2 million viewers worldwide. It was later made available online at the website of the lecture series at <http://www.jzxia.com/sjdt/2016/1700.html>, where it was watched by more than 5,000 viewers. The lecture discussed East-West cross-cultural understanding and offered a corrective of some misconceptions about China and Chinese culture, making an eloquent case for greater cultural tolerance and understanding. Given the nature of global politics today, these themes are of great contemporary relevance, particularly to an audience like that of Phoenix TV, with a large number of expatriate viewers living in other cultural environment.

Professor Zhang also gave lectures in CityU's MOOC course on "Virtual Hong Kong: New World, Old Traditions," which was run on FutureLearn, a UK-based MOOC platform with 8.7 million learners, 3 times between April 2017 and May 2018. A total of 5,749 learners from 129 countries and regions registered to the course, with 3,788 (66%) started learning. Professor Zhang lectured on "Confucianism as Social Program," "Taoism and the Idea of Nature," and "Chinese Philosophy and Modernism," for which a total of 415 comments were

received in the 3 runs.

The following are some samples of learners' comments:

“Very interesting connection between Confucianism and the Enlightenment!” “That was a stunning and lucid explanation of the differences between Confucianism and Greek Philosophy. I now understand why there is so much emphasis on education and learning within the Chinese community.” “Thank you, Professor Zhang, for explaining why Chinese students of all ages have such a strong work ethic, I found it fascinating to learn that Confucianism has many similarities with Plato’s *Republic*, a book that as a teenager I found deeply thought provoking. I wonder if all rulers were chosen on merit, what impact this would have in the world today.” “I see there are a few people who have completed the course. The European discovery of China which was very interesting! Just to say, I am enjoying everyone’s comments here, as much as the course!” “It has been my favourite course so far.” “Very interesting video. This course is giving me so many different ideas to think about. I am really enjoying it.” “This introduction to Confucianism by Prof. Zhang was a good start for those like me who know very little about Asian philosophy.” “To Professor Zhang Longxi. Excellent, clear, concise and accurate.” “These are all new ideas to me. It was a stimulating talk.” “I cannot tell you how very much I am enjoying this course. The things I have learned; the things I can relate to. Thank you.” “Can’t praise Professor Zhang enough for his explanation of these key concepts of Taoism. This is so interesting and thought provoking.” “I found Professor Zhang’s explanation of Taoism very clear and logical and it makes a lot of sense. I can understand why it is growing in popularity and in fact much of its philosophy the whole world would do well to need.” “Would Prof. Zhang please do a MOOC course on Taoism? This is the best explanation I have ever heard. I am very intrigued and want to learn more.” “I was so thrilled for having learnt a bit more about Confucianism and Taoism in such an effective and interesting way that Professor Zhang presented!” “Professor Zhang puts these different perspectives quite succinctly and easy to understand and comprehend. He has a lovely style of speaking and not filling the space with any complicated ideas, it’s very enjoyable.” “Thank you Professor Zhang for such a clear overview of the Taoist view. I am intrigued to go deeper into this and Confucianism.” “This is fascinating and I am learning lots here. Made me think about Genetic engineering and the rights and wrongs of this approach to farming in today’s world.” “Professor Zhang’s talks have given me much food for thought not only about Chinese religion but about Western religion, too, as I’ve never seen it from outside the ‘box’ of a Western perspective before.” “Thank you. Best talk I have heard in a long time.” “Excellent discussion of Taoism. Clarified some things I had already ‘learned’ but not absorbed.” “I would like all world leaders to be made to sit through a series of Professor Zhang’s lectures before every important meeting. It might help them make some sensible decisions for the good of all of us.” “Professor Zhang Longxi was fascinating and deserves his own course! I loved his videos.”

Learners’ feedback was collected via online survey conducted by FutureLearn. |

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

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- Audience figures for the Century Forum lectures
<http://www.jzxia.com/sjdt/2016/1700.html>:
20.2 million audience worldwide. This figure was provided by a colleague familiar with the Phoenix TV
- Downloads of the online lecture:

I do not have information about downloads, but for the online MOOC lectures, there are three feedback files. These are comments on my three MOOC lectures on Confucianism, Taoism, and China and the modern society. The three files are feedback to my three lectures.

- Public feedback/comments/discussion on social media, press reviews, any reaction to the documentary:

I provide book reviews for the two books included in the above references. Three reviews of *Unexpected Affinities* are by Sabrina Knight of Smith College, published in *Comparative Literature Studies* 45:4, 2008; by Steven Shankman of the University of Oregon, published in *China Review International* 15:2, 2008; and by Lionel M. Jensen of the University of Notre Dame, published in the *Journal of Asian Studies* 69:2, May 2010. Three reviews of *From Comparison to World Literature* are by Gerald Gillespie of Stanford University, published in *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* 32, Summer 2016; by David Jasper of the University of Glasgow and by Steven Chang of Soochow University in Taiwan, published in *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies* 2019.

The files of the 10 references are as follows:

1. <http://www.jzxia.com/sjdit/2016/1700.html> (English)
2. [Comments_1st_run_VHK.pdf](#) (3739 KB) (English)
3. [Comments_2nd_run_VHK.pdf](#) (2311 KB) (English)
4. [Comments_3rd_run_VHK.pdf](#) (1754 KB) (English)
5. [Sabina Knight review of Unexpected Affinities, CLS 4 2008 \(ref 5\).pdf](#) (129 KB) (English)
6. [Shankman-Review of Unexpected Affinities China Review Int. 2009 \(ref 6\).pdf](#) (50 KB) (English)
7. [Jensen on ZhangLongxi \(ref 7\).pdf](#) (51 KB) (English)
8. [Gillespie Review in Recherche Littéraire \(Ref 8\).pdf](#) (92 KB) (English)
9. [David Jasper review \(ref 9\).pdf](#) (32 KB) (English)
10. [Steven Chang review \(ref 10\).pdf](#) (530 KB) (English)