

**Research Assessment Exercise 2020**  
**Impact Case Study**

**University: Lingnan University**

**Unit of Assessment (UoA): 31 - English Language & Literature**

**Title of case study: Literary adaptation as a social practice: enriching the local cultural environment through English drama study and performance**

**(1) Summary of the impact**

Professor Michael Ingham has been with the UoA for over twenty years and has creatively adapted a range of English literary and dramatic works for the Hong Kong context, attracting new audiences and enriching the local cultural environment. Drawing on an extensive body of research in literary adaptation, intermediality, and drama education, Ingham has worked closely with local cultural organisations and schools in staging performances, organising play readings, giving lectures, and exploring new ways of teaching literary texts. His research has achieved impact by enriching the cultural environment, building the capacity for creative expression and intercultural reflection, extending public discourse and informing educational practices.

**(2) Underpinning research**

The underpinning research explores the many dimensions of adaptation, including its inter-cultural and inter-medial elements. With its central focus on making dramatic works relevant for contemporary audiences, this research has received support from government funding agencies over the years, including the RGC (**G1**). Among the specific publications arising from this body of work are Ingham's monographs on intermediality and adaptation (**1**) and documentary film in Hong Kong (**2**), and journal articles on intermedial Shakespeare (**3**), Shakespeare in Asia (**4**), increasing the relevance of drama in educational settings (**5**), and addressing the difficulties of Shakespearean syntax for second-language audiences and performers (**6**).

Ingham's 2017 monograph (**1**) focuses on intermedial adaptation and hybridization, and sets out the critical and theoretical background to his approach. This book provides new insights into the ways in which film and theatre influence each other and communicate dramatic performances. A strong practice-based orientation makes the research highly relevant for drama practitioners (writers, directors and performers), as well as informing teaching and learning. A similar orientation can be found in Ingham's 2014 monograph on documentary film for Edinburgh University Press (**2**). This book challenged the perception that Hong Kong lacked its own tradition in the genre, and highlighted the multiple dimensions along which local practitioners had adapted it to the local context.

The themes of intermedial and cross-cultural adaptation are also visible in work exploring the reception and performance of Shakespeare in Hong Kong (**3**) and Japan (**4**). A focus on audiences for whom English is a second language is also visible in Ingham's work on drama education. A journal article (**5**) focused on the ways in which a work that is potentially distant in historical and cultural terms – Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* – could be made more relevant for students in Hong Kong. Another journal article (**6**) addressed a specific aspect of Shakespearean drama, namely the difficulties posed by certain syntactic structures. The article and its related RGC grant (**G1**) analysed some of these features in Shakespeare's plays and identified their semantic dimensions. The overall objective of this project was to enhance the teaching, performance and reception of Shakespearean drama by identifying relevant syntactic and stylistic features, allowing actors and directors (especially those with English as a second language) to achieve

greater insight into the plays and increase the scope for contextually-relevant adaptations.

### (3) References to the research

1. *Stage-play and Screen-play: The Intermediality of Theatre and Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge (2017). ISBN 9781138841031.
  2. *Hong Kong Documentary Film*. Co-authored with Ian Aitken. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (2014.) ISBN 9780748664696.
  3. Shakespeare and the Theatre Broadcast Experience: A View from Hong Kong. In Aebischer, Greenhalgh & Osborne, Eds. *Shakespeare and the 'Live' Theatre Broadcast Experience*. London: Bloomsbury (2018). ISBN 9781350030466.
  4. 'Come You Spirits': An Alternative Afterlife to Shakespeare's Macbeth and Othello as Mediated through Japanese Classical Noh and Kyogen Theatre. Co-authored with Kaoru Nakao. *Asian Theatre Journal* 35, 112-132 (2017).
  5. 'Drama in Education, Education in Drama: A Student-Centred Historical Perspective for Studying Alan Bennett's "The History Boys"'. In DeCoursey, C. (Ed.) *Language Arts in Asia 2: English and Chinese through Literature, Drama and Popular Culture*, pp. 90-109. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing (2014).
  6. 'Now no way can I stray': Interpreting Syntactic and Semantic Role Ambiguity in Shakespeare's Dramatic Verse with Nonnative Performers and Readers. Co-authored with Richard Ingham. *Shakespeare Studies* 46, 163-184 (2018).
- G1. GRF, as Principal Investigator General Research Fund, RGC Hong Kong: 'Shakespeare: A Study in Syntax and Style for Teachers and Performers in a Second Language.' (With Richard Ingham, University of Westminster, UK as Co-I).

### (4) Details of the impact

Ingham's outreach work has **enriched the cultural environment** and **built the capacity for creative expression and intercultural reflection** by organizing public performances and discussions, attended by a broad cross-section of the local public. By exploring the contemporary and local relevance of the themes raised in literary works, these events have also **extended public discourse**. Additional pedagogical impacts have been achieved by outreach activities in local schools such as Yan Chai Hospital No. 2 Secondary School. These have included including drama training workshops for teachers and a knowledge transfer project aimed at **informing educational practices**. In evaluating these activities, it must be appreciated that English is a second language in Hong Kong and that awareness of English drama and performance, whether in education or cultural life more generally, is limited.

'A Voice Apart', written by Piers Gray, concerns Ivor Gurney, a prolific poet and composer who served with British forces during the first world war. The play was co-directed by Ingham in 2015 and played at the Hong Kong Fringe Club, having powerful cognitive and affective impacts. Building upon the various strands of underpinning research identified above, Ingham's awareness of the historical and intercultural dimensions of adaptation, together with his professional expertise in staging drama productions, were indispensable in making the play relevant to local audiences. Evidence of this can be seen in comments from the producer, Karina Zabihi, who observed that 'Mike Ingham played a vital and invaluable role in bringing this important production to a wider audience' (source 1)

Evidence of the play's ability to encourage intercultural reflection among this audience comes from a local broadcaster, who in an interview with the *South China Morning Post* noted that the identity-related themes of the play 'are relevant to Hong Kong as it seeks to carve out its place in the nation under Chinese sovereignty' (source 2). The play ran for four days and attracted a total audience of c.220 (box-office data), which is highly creditable for a literary work that might not appear to be of interest for local audiences. Summarising the contemporary relevance and local resonance of the play, the newspaper article has the subtitle 'A stage production about the torments of a writer 100 years ago touches on themes of belonging that have a new relevance in today's Hong Kong' (source 2).

The same goals – of making English literature relevant for contemporary audiences in Hong Kong, and of building local capacities in reception and performance – are also visible in Ingham's facilitation of monthly English play readings at the Hong Kong Fringe Club, in association with the English-Speaking Union. These events were first initiated in 2008 and attract an audience of up to 36 people (source 3). Ingham draws on the different strands of his underpinning research to select plays and interpret them for local audiences. The August 2019 event featured Mike Bartlett's *Wild*, chosen for its contemporarily relevant themes of identity and its contextual associations with Hong Kong (source 4). The administrator of the Fringe Club notes how Ingham 'willingly and enthusiastically shares his knowledge and expertise on drama and performance with those who attend the monthly play readings' (source 5).

Drawing on his research concerning intermedial Shakespeare and Shakespeare in Asia, in 2018 Ingham co-founded the Complete Shakespeare Group as a way to engage local people in discussion and appreciation of Shakespeare's works. Group members mainly include professionals and retired professionals in the fields of law, education, medicine and the arts. The group meets on a monthly basis with a typical attendance of 10-15 people (source 6). The convenor of the group mentions Ingham's sharing of his research with the group, and notes how this has extended public discourse by helping them to 'discuss the historical background and the present-day coded meanings of Shakespeare's plays in different sociopolitical contexts', including Hong Kong (source 6).

In addition to these regular events aimed at a general audience, individual lectures have brought research insights to more specialised audiences. In May 2015 Ingham and a research collaborator gave a lecture on Hong Kong documentary film to an audience of 45 at the Royal Asiatic Society of Hong Kong. The president of the Society, who has long experience of organizing and evaluating similar events, noted that the proceedings overran considerably and that the audience found these 'fascinating and compelling' (source 7). These activities have enriched the local cultural environment as well as building local capacities for creative expression.

The UoA's concern with impact in the sphere of educational practices can be seen in Ingham's various outreach activities. In October 2018 he conducted a drama workshop for 30 local teachers as part of the Hong Kong Schools Music and Speech Association's 70th Anniversary Speech Festival and Music Festival. The aim was to open teachers' eyes to the art form and enable them to apply the skills they learnt in the actual training of students (source 8). The festival's commemorative publication provides evidence of success in achieving these aims by observing how 'participants enthusiastically exchanged comments on how they could improve in their performances and train their students more effectively' (source 9).

Ingham has further applied his knowledge of adaptation and performance by exploring new ways of teaching literature in secondary schools. He obtained an internal Knowledge Transfer grant in June 2017 to explore the use of simulation technology. The project involved a facilitator and student tutors, who worked closely with 25 students at Yan Chai Hospital No. 2 Secondary

School. As Hong Kong students often find the study of Western literature challenging, the project aimed to stimulate their imaginations via the more visually concrete world of Second Life. Characters visualized in the form of avatars allowed students to engage with the text (in this case, Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*) and with filmic adaptations of the original text in ways that would have been impossible without the assistance of the virtual learning environment. Evidence of impact comes from an evaluation report on the project, which found benefits including increased confidence and interest in English, with perceived gains in all four language skills (source 10).

#### **(5) Sources to corroborate the impact**

1. Statement from Karina Zabihi.
2. Chou, O. (2015). Story of troubled British wartime poet Ivor Gurney comes to Hong Kong stage. *South China Morning Post*, 20 May 2015.
3. Statement from Margaret Leung.
4. Publicity materials for monthly play readings.
5. Statement from Catherine Lau.
6. Statement from William Wong.
7. Statement from Michael Broom.
8. Statement from Annie Chan.
9. Hong Kong Schools Music Festival & Speech Festival 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Publication.
10. De Jesus, J., Gabayan, R., Li, J., Aston, M. & Wong, A. (2018). Written report on Virtual Pioneers Project.