

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Case Study

University: City University of Hong Kong |

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 34 - history |

Title of case study: Globalizing South China: Informing policy and increasing public knowledge about history and heritage |

(1) Summary of the impact

Professor May Bo CHING has shared the outcomes generated through her research with the public via a number of channels, notably by converting professional knowledge into public lectures and local and international media programmes accessible to wider audience. She has also used her expertise to help shape the policy and activities of a number of heritage organizations, government bodies and cultural venues through her positions on Hong Kong Government advisory bodies including the Antiquities Advisory Board, the Urban Renewal Fund, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee, the History Sub-committee of the Museum Advisory Committee, and the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee.

(2) Underpinning research

Ching has produced a series of related research outcomes on subject matters that have a more material, physical and sensory nature (such as export paintings produced by Cantonese craftsmen, gastronomical experiences at port cities, history of Cantonese opera, music and their relations with the language), demonstrating cross-cultural material and knowledge exchanges over a long period of time. She has edited, translated and compiled, and contributed articles to three monographs on Canton export arts (2014, previously in 2001 & 2003). Her articles “The Flow of Turtle Soup from the Caribbean via Europe to Canton, and Its Modern American Fate” (2016) and “Chopsticks or Cutlery? How Canton Hong merchant entertained foreign guests in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (2012) demonstrate a trans-national/regional approach to the history of culinary tastes. Two of her recent publications, namely, “‘Nga Lan Tai’ (*Grana*): a trace of Qing Sino-foreign trade survived in vernacular literature (2017) and “The ‘English Experience’ Among the Humblest Chinese in the Canton Trade Era (1700s-1842)” (2017), assess how global commercial and material exchanges might have left an impact on the daily lives of people in South China. Her latest publication, “Itinerant Singers: Triangulating the Canton-Hong Kong-Macau Soundscape” (2019), traces a Cantonese-speaking world in motion between Hong Kong, Canton, and Macau, a triangle of port cities situated at different ends of the vast Pearl River estuary.

Building on her previous researches Ching has been working on a project entitled “Drawing Nature: Botanical and Zoological Illustrations in Canton from the Late Eighteenth through the Mid-Nineteenth Century” (January 2017 to June 2020). Supported by HKSAR General Research Fund (HKD 578,960), this project is developing new methodologies for studying Sino-Western cultural and material exchange through a close examination of botanical and zoological paintings done by Chinese craftsmen under the instruction of British naturalists stationed in Canton in the pre-Opium War days. She is demonstrating through this project that a comparative and global perspective covering a longer period of time will help distance historians from the often over-politicized debates on modern China.

Her knowledge of using archival materials of UK makes her a competent consultant for museum projects concerning Anglo-Chinese relations. She is coordinating two collaborative

research projects with museums in Guangzhou and Hong Kong in 2018 and 2019. They are (1) the study of the Chinese Flag Collection of National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK (NMM), and (2) Mapping Hong Kong in the Maritime World in the Ming and Qing Period". The former is supported by the Guangdong Museum of Revolutionary History (GMRH) in Guangzhou, which is invited by the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich to study this special collection. Having known that Ching used to be a research fellow at NMM Greenwich, GMRH invited her to be the advisor and coordinator of this project. An agreement between City University of Hong Kong, GMRH, and Ching, has been signed. The agreement entrusts Ching to coordinate the project funded by GMRH (RMB 450,000). A symposium entitled "Symbols of Authority: Symposium on the Chinese Flag Collection held by the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK" was held in December 2018 at City University of Hong Kong. The second project is entrusted to Ching and her colleague Dr. FAN Ka Wai by the Hong Kong Museum of History (HKD 251,395), and has been completed in July 2019. |

(3) References to the research

|Ching, M B (2019). "Itinerant Singers: Triangulating the Canton-Hong Kong-Macau Soundscape". In Eric Tagliacozzo, Helen F. Siu, Peter C. Perdue (eds.), *Asia Inside Out: Itinerant People*. Cambridge [Mass.]: Harvard University Press.

Ching, M B (2017). "The "'English Experience' among the humblest Chinese in the Canton Trade Era (1700s-1842)". *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*, 34 (4), 208-313.

Ching, M B (2017). "'Nga Lan Tai' (*grana*): a trace of Qing Sino-foreign trade survived in vernacular literature". *Xueshu Yanjiu* (Academic Research), 2017 (11), 122-128 (in Chinese).

Ching, M B (2016). "The Flow of Turtle Soup from the Caribbean via Europe to Canton, and Its Modern American Fate". *Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies* 16 (1), 79-89.

Ching M B (2014, trans. and ed.). *Created in Canton: Chinese Export Watercolours on Pith* (authored by Ifan Williams). Guangzhou: Lingnan Arts Publishing House (bilingual).

Ching, M B (2014). "水の民の引水: 16-19 世紀のマカオ水上居民の海洋世界" (Risks and Opportunities in Enclaves/Exclaves: Life Experiences of Plebeians in Macau from the 16th to the 19th Centuries), *華南研究* (South China Studies, Tokyo), 1, 33-46 (in Japanese). |

(4) Details of the impact

|Professor Ching's research on global material and knowledge exchanges, and on the history and heritage of South China (with a focus on the Canton-Hong Kong-Macau triangular alignment) has had acknowledged relevance to public policy-making in Hong Kong. Since joining CityU, she has been invited to contribute her expertise to a number of Hong Kong Government advisory bodies, notably the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB), the Urban Renewal Fund (URF), History Sub-committee of the Museum Advisory Committee, the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee, and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee. Both the AAB and the URF are decision-making bodies. Consisting of 21 members with expertise in various relevant fields, the AAB is a statutory body established to advise the Antiquities Authority on matters relating to antiquities and monuments. Together with two other historians on the Board, Prof. Ching offers advices concerning heritage value and dating for grading historic buildings, antiquities and monuments. The URF, with HK\$500 million endowed by the Urban Renewal Authority (URF), provides an independent funding source to

enable social service teams to provide assistance for residents affected by urban redevelopment projects implemented by the URA, to support social impact assessments and other related studies, and to support heritage preservation and district revitalization projects to be proposed by non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders in the context of urban renewal. Among the 15 URF board directors, Prof. Ching is the only historian recruited to the Board to offer advice concerning heritage preservation and district revitalization funding.

Her impact on cultural venues stems from the two collaborative projects she is coordinating with museums. Research on the Chinese flags collection held by the National Maritime Museum Greenwich is expected to lead to a substantial visiting exhibition of flags and other objects from the collection to be held in 2022 at a branch museum of the Guangdong Museum of Revolutionary History, which had an attendance of 1.85 million in 2018. After the symposium, Ching has had regular meetings with GMRH, advising them on the preliminary exhibition plan to be discussed with NMM Greenwich. By contrast, the Hong Kong Museum of History (HKMH) is currently in the process of renewing its permanent exhibition and is looking to the collaborative project led by Prof Ching to provide solid topical research to inform the content of the new display. With a gross floor area of 17,500 square meter, the main museum of HKMH has an attendance amounting to 1.5 million in 2017/18.

In addition to these official advisory roles, Professor Ching has actively pursued opportunities to share her knowledge with the public through a range of channels. In the spring of 2018 she contributed one day of filming resulting in a 10 minute appearance in a 3x60 minutes television documentary series entitled “Empire of Silver” made by Matchlight Productions (UK) in collaboration with Ei-China/Ei-Asia. The series gives a previously unseen insight into how China’s demand for silver has influenced global geopolitics through history. It will be broadcast worldwide, with deals already signed for Australia, the Middle East and North Africa and interest from the Americas, Asia and Europe. Her interview for the programme drew heavily on her recent research, particularly the articles on local material cultures shaped in the period of Canton Trade (1700s-1842).

In the process of collecting source materials for her research, Ching has been paying particular attention to the Cantonese-learning kits compiled by westerners as well as English-learning kits compiled by Chinese in nineteenth-century Canton. She selected some of these primary materials to present in an easily accessible manner through a series of 6-minute radio programmes titled “Casual Talks on Cantonese” produced by Radio Hong Kong. The series was aired every Friday afternoon from the autumn of 2016 till the spring of 2018 (altogether 77 episodes), and is still accessible on Facebook and Podcast. According to recent statistics, RTHK had approximately 3.3 million listeners in 2017.

Ching’s impact also extends to non-academic audiences via more interpersonal means. Having listened to the RTHK programme, an amateur history society in Hong Kong invited Ching to give a talk at their dinner meeting in July 2017. In April 2017 she collaborated with a few musicians to give lecture and performances on early Cantonese operatic songs (attended by an audience of around 70 people). In the winter of 2017, she worked with an experienced Cantonese operatic singing master holding a workshop on nineteenth-century Cantonese ballads for 25 participants. In November and December 2017, she was invited by the Joint Publishing (Hong Kong) Co Ltd. and the Antiquities and Monuments Office to give public lectures. The audiences numbered 50 and 86 respectively. In June 2018, she was invited by the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in HKSAR to offer a talk on Hong Kong history to more than 150 cadres working there. In December 2018, she delivered a talk to local secondary school teachers in a lecture series jointly organized by CityU’s Department of Chinese and History and the Education Bureau of HKSAR. The lecture achieved high level of

audience satisfaction. In May 2019, she was invited by the Project Citizens Foundation, a local NGO for promoting civic participation, to join two other speakers to give a talk on issues relating to the status of Cantonese language in the Pearl River Delta Region including Hong Kong. Held in the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, the forum was attended by 385 audiences. The live video of the talk broadcast carried by a local media (the Stand News) and “Project Citizens Facebook” recorded a total of 17,000 number of views. Uploaded on Youtube channel, her speech attracted around 2300 views. |

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

(in chronological orders except Items 9 and 10)

- 1) Email correspondences with Dr. Vincent Tam who was in charge of an amateur history society in Hong Kong, July 2017. He invited Prof. Ching to give a talk to their members after listening to the RTHK programme.
(Links to Radio and Television Hong Kong programme, Episode 1
<http://gbcode.rthk.hk/TuniS/app3.rthk.org.hk/special/pau/article.php?aid=2104>)
- 2) Email correspondences with Antiquities and Monuments Office which invited Prof. Ching to give a talk on 2 December 2017, reporting that the talk was attended by 86 public audiences.
- 3) Thank you letter from Matchlight Productions (UK) and screenshots, saying that the interview conducted with 22 Jan 2018 drew on the research that Prof. Ching has been conducting, particularly on articles she has published in the last couple of years.
<https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/international/empires-of-silver/5133451.article>
- 4) Thank you letter from the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for the talk given by Prof. Ching on 27 June 2018, saying that the talk was attended by more than 150 staff of the Office, and that the talk was helpful for enhancing their understanding of Hong Kong history and society.
- 5) Thank you letter from the Education Bureau, HKSAR for the lecture given by Prof. Ching on 5 December 2018 and three others given by CityU History members between May 2018 and May 2019. The letter states that “the insightful sharing of the historical knowledge sure enhances teachers’ professional knowledge for further enriching their teaching in lessons for the benefits of students.” According to the survey conducted by the Education Bureau, the four lectures achieved high level of audience satisfaction.
- 6) Letter of acknowledgement from the Guangdong Museum of Revolutionary History granting extension of the project and the poster of the symposium entitled “Symbols of Authority: Symposium on the Chinese Flag Collection held by the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK”, organized by Prof. Ching on 6-7 December 2018.
- 7) Poster and email correspondence by the Project Citizens Foundation reporting the number of participants (385) and online views (17000 views of the event as a whole, 2300 views of Ching’s speech) of the talk given by Prof. Ching on 18 May 2019.
- 8) Thank you letter from the curator of Hong Kong Museum of History, Leisure and Cultural Services Department, for the completion of the project commissioned to Prof. Ching and Dr. Fan Ka Wai.
- 9) Letters of Appointments to Hong Kong Government advisory bodies (pdf 14-19).
- 10) Selected posters of other public talks and lectures (8 April 2017; 16 Nov, 2017; Nov-Dec 2017; 17 Nov 2018). |