

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Overview Statement

University: Hong Kong Baptist University |

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 34 History |

Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 13 |

(1) Context

The Department of History of Hong Kong Baptist University (hereafter as “the Department”) sought to make a positive impact on society by conducting original and innovative historical research. While members of the department focus on a variety of seemingly unrelated geographical areas, fields, and periods, many of them are interested in socially relevant themes such as gender, urban development, business, public health, and war, and many focus on modern Hong Kong, China, and East Asia. To sharpen the focus and amplify the impact of the Department’s research on non-academic users, the Department has run the Modern History Research Centre (MHRC), which supports research, facilitates synergy of ideas, and provides additional resources to create impact. Because of this diversity of research areas and approaches, the department serves various non-academic users, including museum curators and administrators; heritage conservationists; archivists; government branches that are responsible for built heritage and civil engineering such as the Antique and Monuments Office (AMO), Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (that manages Country Parks in Hong Kong), and Civil Engineering and Development Department; local authorities such as District Offices and District Councils; departments of the Education Bureau (EDB) that are responsible for curriculum development and teachers’ training; the Examination Authority that prepares annual public examinations; teachers of secondary schools; textbook publishers; reporters and commentators; practitioners of creative industry such as producers, directors, screen writers, documentary directors, and essayists and novelists; public and private bodies related to tourism such as Tourism Commission and local tour- guide companies; and members of the public who are interested in history in general.

To serve this large variety of non-academic users, members of the Department engaged in various educational, consultancy, and professional training activities that are related to their academic research, in addition to disseminating their knowledge through academic publications. Of the many potential cases available in the Department, [REDACTED] work is chosen because his field of research ([REDACTED]) is a relatively new field of historical study, making his work influential both inside and outside the academy. His works also benefited all the above users during the period of assessment. The received wisdom about Hong Kong’s past, reproduced in many narratives about Hong Kong, characterized the city as nothing more than an international trade post, which suggested that strategic and military contexts mattered little in the transformation of the city. [REDACTED] work not only challenged this view but also led to changes in museum narratives, textbook contents, media portrayal, heritage conservation practices, and contents of creative media works.

(2) Approach to impact

Research conducted by members of the Department has changed the face of public history in Hong Kong. The Department, as an institution, has cultivated a close relationship with museums, the Education Bureau, schools, and other public or private bodies by organizing conferences and exhibitions, internship schemes, and encouraging members to take up in advisory positions. Members of the Department have served as advisers for various consultation committees and boards that work with government departments: three have served as Co-opted Members of the [REDACTED], and one has served as Specialist Advisor, [REDACTED]. The members of the History Sub-committee and the Specialist Advisor were responsible for giving advice and offering new knowledge to the history museums in Hong Kong, which attract more than 1,000,000

visitors per year. Two members served as members of [REDACTED], which is responsible for updating History and Chinese History textbooks used by the around 500 secondary schools in Hong Kong, and another two served in [REDACTED], that is responsible for reforming the curricula of both Junior Secondary Chinese History and History subjects. Members of the Department also interact with the non-academic users by engaging in commissioned projects and consultancy works. In addition, they participate in in-depth knowledge transfer activities such as training sessions for secondary school teachers or consultations with conservationists, archivists, and practitioners of creative industries, who then pass their newly acquired knowledge to a wider audience. In these capacities, members of the Department not only disseminate knowledge but also changed the users' ideas, practices, and sometimes pedagogies.

(3) Strategy and plans

The Department's strategy for having a lasting impact on non-academic users has been to cultivate long-term cooperative relationships with public and private organizations, particularly by encouraging its members to participate in consultancy projects and taking up advisory positions. In doing so, the Department also takes a broad view of impact, rather than adopting the narrow definition (such as number of grants or patents obtained) typically offered in assessments and reviews. This is because the Department recognizes that historical research (and humanities research in general) takes time to be developed and disseminated. Its impact often cannot be felt for a long period of time and is often difficult to measure in metrics. The Department also encourages colleagues to consider making impact an integral part of their research work, by taking into consideration the service of public offices such as advisory positions or consultancy projects during performance reviews. These strategies create an environment that treasures non-academic impact at the Department level, as works like serving as museum advisors or working on commissioned/consultancy work in order to transfer knowledge to non-academic users are not seen as a waste of time, even for junior faculty members. The Department also runs a liberal policy concerning outside-practice work, as long as the work in question is about making an impact based on the members' research. The Department also provided additional institutional support by sustaining and expanding its network and visibility by running a newsletter and by sponsoring and hosting the activities of the MHRC.

(4) Relationship to case studies

[REDACTED] case on the study of the military history of Hong Kong is selected because it showcases how the groundwork laid by the Department allows junior academics to make an impact and reflects the effectiveness of the Department's strategic measures to introduce its members' research to non-academic users in a sustainable manner. During the period assessed, the Department and the MHRC organized four conferences with the [REDACTED]; these conferences allow [REDACTED] to forge a close working relationship with the said museum and its sub-unit, [REDACTED]. These conferences were well-attended by more than 50 curators, educators, and conservationists in Hong Kong. It is based on the long-term productive interactions between the Department and these offices and non-academic users that [REDACTED] is able to work with them and create impact (see the Impact Case for detail). This case also shows how the Department incentivizes its members to make an impact. [REDACTED] benefits from the liberal outside-practice policy of the Department, as he engaged in various projects and programmes with the abovementioned public and private organizations.