

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Overview Statement

University: The University of Hong Kong (HKU)

Unit of Assessment (UoA): UoA 34 History

Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 11

(1) Context

The Department of History (UoA) has research strengths in modern Chinese, Asian, European, American, and Russian history with strategic areas of interdisciplinary concentration, notably in colonial and imperial history, childhood and youth, heritage, gender, and the history of medicine and health. We have a sustained record of translating this research into impact across different areas of activity, including: the hosting of public events, exhibitions, outreach education programmes, media engagement, and consultancy. Impact projects have targeted the general public, secondary school students, teachers, policymakers, and the media. Members have convened public lectures and seminars, written blogs, contributed to exhibitions, advised the media, and consulted on historical documentaries. Our researchers have been recipients of the Faculty's Knowledge Exchange (KE) Award, which recognises outstanding outreach projects. In 2017, Schencking received the award for his project 'The Great Kantō Earthquake and a New Understanding of Response to Natural Disasters.' Cunich was the recipient of an award from the HKU Interdisciplinary KE Project Fund for a joint project with the Faculty of Architecture on 'Historic Lighthouses in Hong Kong' (2015–16).

(2) Approach to impact

The Department fosters impact through staff mentoring, and impact is integrated into HKU's staff appraisal, recruitment and tenure and promotion mechanisms. We facilitate partnerships and funding opportunities through centres such as the Centre for the Humanities and Medicine (CHM). During the review period, we promoted impact in four key areas:

Public Engagement: members organised numerous public lectures, round-table events, and conferences that promoted historical awareness to the broader Hong Kong and international community. We have been successful in securing funds from alumni to support outreach events, including the public lecture series 'History in the Making.' These impact activities draw on our research strengths. For example, an international conference held in 2018 on *Children and Youth in a Global Age* (Pomfret) involved a partnership with the Children's History Society—a UK forum for historians, teachers, and members of the public interested in the history of children and youth—and the Society for the History of Children and Youth, the largest global organisation in the field. We have also partnered with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra to deliver historical lectures that are woven into educational concerts in 2016–17 (Sanchez-Sibony) and 2018 (Pomfret). Members have also disseminated their research at literary festivals, including the Edinburgh International Book Festival, the Oxford Literary Festival (where Dikötter gave the Chancellor's Lecture), and the Hong Kong Literary Festival (LaCouture). Leung organised a public forum with the novelist Amitav Ghosh in 2016. Xu's memoir was published to acclaim in China and launched at the Hong Kong Book Fair (2017). LaCouture gave a talk as part of the exhibition 'Performing Society: Violence and Gender' at the Tai Kwun Centre for Heritage and Arts (2019).

Exhibitions: researchers have worked with museums, galleries, and other public bodies to promote history to the public. Schencking served as a strategic consultant for the exhibition 'Aftershocks' at the University of Melbourne (2015) at which he gave a keynote address. Peckham was an advisory board member of 'Contagious Cities,' a Wellcome-funded international initiative that supported local conversations around the global challenges of epidemic preparedness and anti-microbial resistance (2018–19). Projects included artist residencies, the exhibition 'Far Away, Too Close' at the Tai Kwun Centre, interactive storytelling experiences, and broadcasts on BBC Radio 3. Carroll was an advisor to the 2015 exhibition 'Made in Hong Kong: Our City. Our Stories' at the Hong Kong Maritime Museum. In conjunction with CHM, we sponsored the exhibition 'Fever: The

History of Malaria in Hong Kong,' held at the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences (2015). The event was widely covered in the media, and secondary school educational activities were integrated into the exhibition. CHM curated an exhibition of photographs by Charles Briggs entitled 'Tell Me Why My Children Died' (2019) aimed at the general public, which chronicled the impact of a rabies epidemic on an indigenous community in Venezuela.

Education: our research expertise has influenced the content of secondary school education. In 2017–18, members (Carroll, Cunich, Pomfret, Tsang) were commissioned by Hong Kong's Education Bureau (EDB) to produce a learning and teaching resource pack on 'The Rise and Development of Islamic Civilisation up to the 19th Century' to support the revised junior secondary history curriculum. The materials are made available to teachers through the EDB website and four lectures were delivered at the EDB's headquarters (2018). The team encourages student involvement in history impact projects. As part of the research-led course 'History Without Borders,' HKU students have gone into the community to deliver talks in schools, and they have invited secondary school students to the Department to address historical issues. Schencking's website www.greatkantoearthquake.com, which contains an image and document repository, has been used by scholars and laypeople around the world, with 228,000 visits since December 2013.

Media and consultancy: members have been invited to contribute to leading newspapers, including the *Washington Post* (Bowes), the *South China Morning Post* and *The Independent* (Peckham). They have participated in public forums convened to broach contemporary challenges. Peckham gave a keynote talk at the *Emerging Trends in China* tech conference hosted by the *Financial Times* in Shenzhen (2017). Members are regularly called upon to speak to the general public about their research on radio and television. Schencking was an advisor for and featured in the 2016 Discovery Channel documentary 'Japan: Designed for Recovery,' which reached 2.7 million viewers in Asia. Dikötter has been interviewed by Andrew Marr on BBC Radio 4, BBC World News, Deutsche Welle Television, and ABC Radio. In 2017, Dikötter was appointed Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, one of America's most respected public policy research centres. Pomfret was interviewed by the Shanghai-based journal *The Paper* (澎湃), in the context of the *Children and Youth in a Global Age* conference. Xu has been interviewed by *The Economist* and *The Atlantic*, and for the BBC World Service's *Newshour*. His research has been profiled in the *History News Network*, *The Paper*, and *Lifeweek* magazine (Beijing).

(3) Strategy and plans

Going forward, we will focus on developing impact through our cross-disciplinary collaborations with CHM and the Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Initiatives under development at CHM include the art exhibition 'Animal Humans' as an impact component of the major collaborative research project 'Animal Humanities: Redesigning One Health.' History is home to the new Gender Studies programme and its Director is working with the HKU Women's Studies Research Centre on initiatives to promote gender equality in Hong Kong. We recently appointed an Impact Coordinator to extend collaborations with schools, coordinate events with community stakeholders, and advise members on best practices and evidence collection. We will continue to make use of funding opportunities, such as HKU's KE Impact Fund, to design and deliver impact projects through engagement with media partners and external stakeholders.

(4) Relationship to case study

The submitted case study exemplifies how the Department's innovative research creates far-reaching, sustainable impacts on public discourse and education. Dikötter's pioneering archival-based research has shifted public discussion around post-1949 China and raised public awareness of historical issues. His work has transcended the English-speaking world to reach a global audience with translations into Chinese, Korean, Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, German, Danish, Swedish, Finnish, and Polish. *Mao's Great Famine* alone has sold over 100,000 copies in English and Dikötter's work has been reviewed by many of the world's leading media outlets, such as the *New York Times Review of Books*, *Sunday Times*, and *India Today*.