

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Case Study

University: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) |
Unit of Assessment (UoA): 34 History |

Title of case study: Ming dynasty thought for the 21st century: Influencing family and social life in Hong Kong |

(1) Summary of the impact

Informed by decades-long study of traditional Chinese culture, especially the intellectual history of the Ming dynasty, the work done by Professor Chu Hung-lam at the Department of Chinese Culture, PolyU has impacted on Hong Kong society through public lectures and appearances on radio programmes. These public activities reached an estimated overall audience of over 1000, including students, parents, and teachers of high schools, members of co-sponsoring organizations and of the public, and listeners of the radio programmes. The participants report a deepening of understanding of Chinese culture, prompting them to reflect on their outlook and worldview, and the meaning of family and social harmony. |

(2) Underpinning research

Prof. Chu Hung-lam is the Dean of Humanities of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU), having joined the University in 2009 as the Founding Head of the Department of Chinese Culture. Prof. Chu's work at PolyU involved engagement with Chinese intellectual history and the development of neo-Confucianism in the Ming dynasty with emphasis on probing into various facets of traditional Chinese thoughts and culture through scholarly endeavours of four decades. He has recently chosen to focus on the Chinese ethical tradition as a way to render impact on the family and social life in Hong Kong. The underlying thought is that the Chinese ethical tradition continues to be relevant to life in the twenty-first century and an awareness of its salient features will contribute to the well-being of Hong Kong society whose inhabitants are predominantly Chinese. Understanding aspects of Chinese culture bears consequences to self and society and will help build harmonious families and reduce social conflicts.

The research output listed in Section 3 below account for much of the research underpinning this Impact Case. The first piece [1] is a textual and contextual study of the literary collection *Zuijinglou ji* of Tang Boyuan (1541-1598)*; the second a textual-philosophical analysis of a key chapter in *Mingru xuean*, the indispensable sourcebook of Ming dynasty Confucian thought and intellectual history by the great scholar Huang Zongxi (1610-1695). The latter item [2] deals with the teachings of the greatest Confucian master, Wang Yangming (1472-1529), whose philosophical doctrines of the “unity of knowledge and action” and the “extension of innate good knowledge” have proved to be impactful to the present time. Tang Boyuan [1], on the other hand, was a severe critic of Wang Yangming's philosophy of the mind. Research on Huang and Tang brought new knowledge to the lives and thoughts of other Confucian masters in *Mingru xuean*. A grasp of these figures' sense of value, outlook of life, ways of moral cultivation and its relevance to good government and social behavior forms the very bedrock of the activities in this Impact Case, informing and substantiating the lectures that Prof. Chu gave to high school students and the wider audience.

The third piece [3], published in the influential intellectual magazine *Dushu*, discusses the political thought and governmental practice in the institution of community compact (*xiangyue*) in village and township neighborhoods in Ming and Qing China. Aimed at moral improvement and mutual social aid, though also for social control, the institution's promotion of family virtues via open, publicizing lectures inspired Chu's own public lectures. The last piece [4], an encyclopedia entry, reexamines

the guiding principles of state and government in imperial China manifested in Confucianism. Vital Confucian aspirations are discussed, such as the process of becoming a morally healthy individual and a caring community to be realized primarily by a sound education of future government officials and a smooth operation of social and political institutions. These last two pieces inform Chu's views in lectures, especially those on living a good family life and having a sound relationship of the self and the state.

(3) References to the research

1. 《醉經樓集》 (*Zuijinglou ji: the literary collection of the late Ming Confucian Tang Boyuan*) . Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company. 2014. (ISBN: 978-7-101-09517-3)
2. “《明儒學案·姚江學案》的文本問題” (Textual problem of the Yaojing School Chapter in Huang Zongxi's *Mingru xuean*) . 《國學研究》 (*Studies in Sinology*). 34 (2014.12): 305-361.
3. “一道德，同風俗” (Shared Moral Values and Social Customs: The Ideal and Practice of the Community Compact) . 《讀書》 (*Dushu*) . 10 (2016): 48-57.
4. “Confucianism.” In John Mackenzie, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Empire*. Volume 1. Wiley-Blackwell (February 15, 2016): 614-620 (ISBN: 978-1-118-45507-4)

(4) Details of the impact

The impact of the research work by Prof Chu has been realised through two series of public lectures and eight appearances in three different radio programmes. These activities brought about beneficial effects on society, culture and quality of life in Hong Kong.

The first lecture series, named Dean's Lecture Series: Chinese Culture and High School Students, consisted of 5 lectures. Diverse in scope, these lectures address a wide range of topics such as the relationship between pre-Qin philosophy and modern society, the human world and the world of nature, learning and one's moral goodness, ideals and emotional maturity, ways to appreciate the beauty of poetry and rhymed prose. Held on the Hong Kong PolyU campus from June to October 2018, these lectures targeted high school educators, students and their parents. Altogether, 31 high schools participated in this series, bringing an overall audience of 286 attendees.

The second lecture series, titled Dean's Lecture Series: Ethical Tradition and the Public, consisted of 7 lectures from June to December 2018. Primarily hosted by the Faculty of Humanities of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University but also co-sponsored by other organizations, they targeted the elderly, the parents, the Buddhist and Daoist believers, rural social leaders, women, and young people. The theme of the series revolves around the cardinal Confucian virtue of *xiao* (filial piety). Specifically referring to the ideal code of conduct that governs the interactions between parents and child, filial piety has in fact applications in other personal relationships and social settings. The social impact that these lectures produced soon drew the attention of many government and non-governmental organizations, including Fo Guang Vihara (Hong Kong), Sik Sik Yuen, New Territories Heung Yee Kuk, and the Family Council. As co-sponsors of different lectures in the series, these organizations further promoted the lectures to their respective members and constituents via their own channels, such as websites, Facebooks, newsletters and bulletins. Held in different venues to better reach the public, the lectures attracted a total of 784 on-site participants.

From September 29, 2018 to November 24, 2018, Prof. Chu also reached the wider public through his appearances in three radio programmes: 4 times in 第三齡接觸 of The Commercial Radio, and 2 times in 諸君有禮 and 2 times in 大學堂, both of Radio Television Hong Kong. Two of the longest-standing radio stations in Hong Kong, both The Commercial Radio and Radio Television Hong Kong have a broad base of listeners. In these broadcasts, Prof. Chu addressed various topics of the modern significances of traditional thoughts, such as cross-generation understanding and relationship in the light of filial piety, the remembrance and worship of ancestors, friendship in its many forms and ramifications and so on. The length of the program ranges from 10 minutes to 45 minutes each time [E9].

Against the perceived decline of the Chinese tradition and the worsening of generational relationship in society, Prof. Chu's lectures and radio broadcasts were met with positive responses. A participant of one of the lectures was grateful to Chu for pointing out facets of filial piety that has been misunderstood and neglected in Hong Kong. Heung Yee Kuk, a co-sponsor of one of the lectures, wrote to report that Chu's lecture served to "arouse [the listeners'] cultural awareness in preserving valuable traditions of the New Territories." Sik Sik Yuen, the co-sponsor of another, noted that "observance of filial piety is truly what we need in better the family", **while members of Institute Of Active Ageing find their knowledge of the issues "enriched from the roots."** [E1 E6 E8]. A participant from the Family Council was so affected by Professor Chu's lecture that she expressed the thought that "female filial piety in traditional ethics should be introduced in premarital counselling" [E2], while another made an effort to promote the second series lectures to high school students through her own channels [E5]. In a similar tone, other respondents spoke favourably of their experience, indicating that they learned of new ways of interacting with their children and found their understanding of Chinese culture enriched, especially in the sacrificial rituals [E3, E7].

Meanwhile, two of the underpinning research outputs also reach a wider public and therefore enhanced engagement with the entire society. *Zuijinglou ji* [1] saw a third printing since its publication in 2014, while *Dushu*, which published "Same moral standard and uniform social customs over the land" [3] prints over 100,000 copies per issue and is ranked third in a survey of Chinese magazines in China.

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

[E1] Letter of thanks from Heung Yee Kuk

[E2] Letter of thanks from the Family Council, Hong Kong government

[E3] Survey of opinion on Chu's lecture from Heung Yee Kuk

[E4] Survey of opinion on Chu's lecture from Institute of Active Ageing

[E5] Reflections on Chu's lecture from a listener

[E6] Letter of thanks from Sik Sik Yuen

[E7] Survey of opinion on Chu's lecture from Sik Sik Yuen

[E8] Letter of thanks from Institute of Active Ageing

[E9] Weblinks to broadcasts of Chu addressing various topics of the modern significances of traditional thoughts

<https://www.rthk.hk/radio/radio5/programme/etiquette/episode/538986>

http://www.rthk.hk/radio/radio1/programme/university_knowledge_platform/episode/525555

http://www.rthk.hk/radio/radio1/programme/university_knowledge_platform/episode/523642