

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Case Study

University: **The University of Hong Kong (HKU)**

Unit of Assessment (UoA): **UoA 35, Area Studies (e.g. Japanese studies, European studies, etc.), cultural studies and other arts/humanities**

Title of case study: **Engaging with and Raising Awareness of Hong Kong Filmmakers Locally and Internationally**

(1) Summary of the impact

The research on Hong Kong film conducted by three members of the Department of Comparative Literature (Professor Gina Marchetti, Dr. Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park, and Dr. Winnie Yee) has had a significant impact on the work of Hong Kong filmmakers, particularly Hong Kong women filmmakers, and has raised awareness of the importance of Hong Kong film both locally and internationally. This has been achieved in two ways: firstly, through the setting up of a unique, English-language website dedicated to Hong Kong women filmmakers that champions their interests and challenges their under-representation in the industry; secondly, through an extensive programme of public talks and advisory roles to local and international film festivals that have helped bring Hong Kong cinema to new audiences worldwide and had an impact on the way filmmakers present their work to new publics.

(2) Underpinning research

The Department of Comparative Literature has been researching and championing Hong Kong film and filmmakers since its establishment in 1989. According to Ackbar Abbas, an internationally renowned scholar, the Department was the first to study in a critical way the new Hong Kong cinema that emerged in the 80s and 90s. This pioneering research was continued by incoming members to the Department, notably Dr. Esther Cheung, who sadly passed away in 2015. Cheung made enormous contributions to Hong Kong cinema studies and raised awareness of New Wave filmmakers such as Ann Hui, lauded Second Wave luminaries such as Wong Kar-wai and Stanley Kwan, and championed emerging independent filmmakers such as Fruit Chan, Evans Chan and Tammy Cheung. Hong Kong film continues to be a major focus of the Department's research.

Marchetti joined the University of Hong Kong in 2004. She has written on film, gender and sexuality, critical theory and cultural studies, with an emphasis on women filmmakers in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), China and world cinema, and on contemporary trends in Asian and Asian American film culture. She has published extensively on Hong Kong and Chinese cinema, including several anthologies [3.1, 3.2, 3.5]. She is Series Editor for the Hong Kong University Press's New Hong Kong Cinema Series, to which she contributed the title *Andrew Lau and Alan Mak's Infernal Affairs – The Trilogy* in 2007. Her General Research Fund (GRF) project, "Hong Kong Women Filmmakers: Sex, Politics and Cinema Aesthetics, 1997-2010," examined the major role women filmmakers have played in local, regional, and global motion picture culture since Hong Kong's return to China in 1997. Her research, which was showcased in the November 2016 issue of the Research Grants Council (RGC) Newsletter, focused on key films by established and emerging women directors, producers, and scriptwriters in order to explore the ways in which these women highlighted specific issues involving gender, sexuality, politics, and aesthetics [3.3, 3.4]. This research forms the basis of the Hong Kong Women Filmmakers website, a unique English-language resource documenting currently active Hong Kong women filmmakers. Marchetti is now undertaking research for the new GRF project, "Gendered Screens, Chinese Dreams: Women Filmmakers and the Rise of China in the Twenty-First Century," that broadens the scope of her earlier work to women filmmakers in China and looks at how female filmmakers are approaching China's changing social and cultural landscape.

Magnan-Park joined the Department of Comparative Literature in 2013. His research centres on poly-Asian cinema with a focus on Hong Kong action and contemporary South Korean cinema. He is co-editor, along with Marchetti and Tan See Kam, of *The Palgrave Handbook of Asian*

Cinema [3.5]. He engages with film aesthetics, culture, theory, history, and sound from an Asian-centric perspective. Magnan-Park and Marchetti, together with Dr. Stacilee Ford from the HKU Department of History, carried out extensive research for a massive open online course (MOOC) dedicated to Hong Kong film, “Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens.” This is currently the only course on the subject available worldwide.

Yee joined the Department of Comparative Literature in 2013. Her research interests are in contemporary Chinese literature and film, Hong Kong culture, independent cinema, Chinese diaspora, and eco-criticism. She is co-editor of *Narrating Hong Kong Culture and Identity* (Oxford UP China, 2003), and has published on Hong Kong independent cinema. Her current research expands the scope of Chinese film studies by including the spheres of everyday life, the renewed relationship with the non-human world, and urban culture [3.6].

(3) References to the research

- 3.1 Marchetti, G. “Feminism, Postfeminism, and Hong Kong Women Filmmakers,” in Cheung, EMK, Marchetti, G & Yau, ECM, eds. *A Companion to Hong Kong Cinema*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell Press, 2015, pp. 237–264.
- 3.2 Cheung, EMK, Marchetti, G & Tan, SK, eds. *Hong Kong Screenscapes: From the New Wave to the Digital Frontier*. Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2011. (320 pages)
- 3.3 Marchetti, G. “The Feminine Touch: Chinese Soft Power Politics and Hong Kong Women Filmmakers,” in Paola Voci and Luo Hui, eds. *Screening China’s Soft Power*. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018, pp. 229–251.
- 3.4 Marchetti, G. “Hong Kong as Feminist Method: Gender, Sexuality, and Democracy in Two Documentaries by Tammy Cheung,” in Yiu-Wai Chu, ed. *Hong Kong Culture and Society in the New Millennium: Hong Kong as Method*. Singapore: Springer, 2017, pp. 59–76.
- 3.5 Magnan-Park, AHJ, Marchetti, G & Tan, SK (Eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Asian Cinema*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. (743 pages)
- 3.6 Yee, WLM. “Green Activism in the City: Hong Kong Independent Ecofilms in the Post-2008 Era.” *Situations: Cultural Studies in the Asian Context*, 2018, v. 11 n. 1, p. 39–57.

RGC GRF Grants

Grant Awardee: Gina Marchetti

Title: Gendered Screens, Chinese Dreams: Women Filmmakers and the Rise of China in the Twenty-First Century Period of Grant: 2019–2021 Value of Grant: HK\$338,560

Title: Hong Kong Women Filmmakers: Sex, Politics and Cinema Aesthetics, 1997-2010

Period of Grant: 2012-2015 Value of Grant: HK\$571,346

Grant Awardee: Winnie Yee

Title: The Politics of Ruins and Everyday Life: Studies of Chinese Urban Texts in the 2000s

Period of Grant: 2017–2019 Value of Grant: HK\$247,000

(4) Details of the impact

During the assessment period, research in the Department of Comparative Literature has engaged with and contributed to raising awareness of Hong Kong filmmakers locally and internationally in two significant ways: an online resource dedicated to Hong Kong women filmmakers and engagement with audiences through public talks and the media.

Hong Kong Women Filmmakers Website

The Hong Kong Women Filmmakers website (<https://hkwomenfilmmakers.wordpress.com/>) is a unique English language resource that collects and disseminates information on women filmmakers working in or associated with Hong Kong since the establishment of the HKSAR in 1997. There are currently 55 full biographies of women filmmakers on the site, as well as notes on a further 17 that feature short descriptions of their work to date and specify their relevance to Hong Kong. The website, and the accompanying Facebook page, are updated regularly and include news items, filmographies, bibliographies and clips, as well as Internet links to film reviews, articles, and related

websites. The website is used as a resource by scholars, festival programmers, film producers, teachers and others in need of current information on women working in Hong Kong commercial, independent, documentary, experimental, and hybrid motion pictures. Julia Lesage, co-founder and co-editor of *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, writes that the website includes important information that “we might not otherwise get to know.” An Associate Professor at Hong Kong Baptist University states that she reads the website’s Facebook page regularly and “check[s] out the women film makers mentioned for [her] own academic research and teaching. Sometimes [she] use[s] posts from [the page] as material for [her] students to translate [...] to raise their awareness of women's situation in industries.” An Associate Member of the Hong Kong Studies Initiative at the University of British Columbia has used the website as a resource to compile a short film programme in Vancouver [5.1]. The website has had over 39,400 page views since its launch in late 2014, with 40% of viewers from Hong Kong and most of the remainder from the U.S., the United Kingdom, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, Indonesia, Australia and Taiwan [5.2].

Filmmakers featured on the website have commented that they have been looking at their own work in new ways after seeing it in relation to that of other women filmmakers in Hong Kong. The website is instrumental in highlighting the active, and often overlooked, part Hong Kong women filmmakers play in the region through their participation in co-productions with China and the transnational connections they establish at international film festivals such as Venice and Berlin. Filmmaker and producer Maria Tran states that, prior to the website, she was “more focused on male works in the HK genre, but the website has opened [her] up to other amazing talent that should have more recognition in the industry” [5.3]. Marchetti’s research has highlighted the under-representation of women in film production in Hong Kong, and she is working to bring this issue to the attention of cultural leaders and policymakers in her role as a Committee Member of the HKU Women’s Studies Research Centre. She co-organised a 2018 women’s summit on film in higher education that brought together 30 women involved in teaching, research, and administration related to film production and cinema studies in Hong Kong [5.4].

Championing Hong Kong Filmmakers

The dissemination and promotion of the work of Hong Kong filmmakers has been at the heart of a rich programme of public talks in Hong Kong and overseas, as well as the impetus for advisory roles for film festivals, media interviews and educational outreach. During the assessment period, Marchetti, Magnan-Park and Yee have given over 30 talks on Hong Kong film aimed at non-academic audiences, such as public dialogues with acclaimed Hong Kong filmmakers Ann Hui, Mabel Cheung, Alex Law, Peter Chan Ho-sun, Fruit Chan, Herman Yau, and Derek Yee – all to capacity audiences of 300-plus. Marchetti collaborated with the University of Nottingham to bring Mabel Cheung and Alex Law—the director and producer of *Echoes of the Rainbow*, which won the Crystal Bear for Best Film Award at the 2010 Berlin International Film Festival—to the Nottingham International Microfilm Festival in 2018. According to Cheung and Law, Marchetti’s research on their films “has opened up [their] works to a lot of new audiences overseas and has aroused interest in Hong Kong films as a whole.” Commenting on their visit to Nottingham, Cheung and Law stated that “it provided an excellent platform for [them] to directly communicate with film scholars, students and audience there. The workshops were most rewarding, and led to a better understanding and appreciation of Hong Kong films” [5.5].

Others filmmakers attest to the impact the researchers’ work and efforts to promote Hong Kong cinema have had on public awareness of their films. Hong Kong filmmaker Evans Chan, who directed *To Liv(e)* and *Raise the Umbrellas*, states that their research has helped open his work to new audiences and exposed “[him] to new talent, creating connections with students and more junior film professionals — a good example is Nora Lam, director of *Lost in the Fumes*, who became [his] assistant director through their research” [5.6]. Hong Kong-born filmmaker Quentin Lee, who directed *Shopping for Fangs* and *The People I’ve Slept With*, calls Marchetti “a tireless champion and pioneer on Hong Kong and global independent films. [...] [Her] research and activism truly expose and illuminate the more marginal media and culture that mainstream global culture would have otherwise overlooked” [5.6]. Yee hosted the “bc sunday x Hong Kong Female

Filmmakers Master Class” in March 2016. Marchetti and Magnan-Park are frequently sought out by the press on issues relating to Hong Kong film. Marchetti was interviewed on women in the Hong Kong film industry for TVB Pearl’s *Money Magazine*, which was broadcast free of charge to over two million Hong Kong households in April 2018, and participated in a dialogue on women in Hollywood and Hong Kong film on public broadcaster RTHK Radio 3 in 2017.

The researchers have raised the profile of Hong Kong film through advisory roles to local film festivals and organisations. Magnan-Park was academic consultant to Metroplex Cinemas and B&E Productions in 2014. Yee has been an advisor and Board Member of Reel Women Hong Kong (RWHK) since its establishment in 2013. RWHK is a group of scholars, advocates, and filmmakers devoted to promoting female-created art, gender awareness and equality. RWHK organised the first Reel Women Hong Kong Film Festival in 2015–16 and the first Hong Kong Women’s Festival in 2018. The Festivals’ director, Sonia Wong, praised Yee’s contributions: “For both the Reel Women Film Festival and the Women’s Festival Hong Kong, Dr. Yee’s background and research on feminism and cinema also provided us with the guidance we need when curating our film programs” [5.7]. Yee participated in public talks in conjunction with RWHK at venues such as Broadway Cinematheque. Mr. Roger Garcia is the former Executive Director of the Hong Kong International Film Festival Society and the Asian Film Awards Academy. He refers to Marchetti as his “guru” and calls her “a pioneer and leader in studies on globalisation of cinema especially on issues of race, feminism and Asian American and Asian representation on the screen.” Most recently, her work contributed to his “Odd Couples” programme at the 2019 Far East Film Festival in Udine, Italy, which he describes as “a revelation to European audiences who were unaware of such issues in Hong Kong and global cinema” [5.8]. Academy Award® nominee and triple Sundance award-winning Asian American filmmaker, Arthur Dong, also cites Marchetti’s research as an invaluable resource for several of his projects, including his 2019 book, *Hollywood Chinese*, a companion to his documentary about the 100-year history of the Chinese in American feature film. “[Marchetti’s] expert knowledge on the topic was vital, particularly her approach on the intersection of political, historical, cultural, sexuality, and gender issues” [5.9].

The MOOC has succeeded in raising awareness of Hong Kong filmmakers and their work on a global scale and had an impact on the work of women filmmakers featured on the website. Filmmaker and Producer Maria Tran states, “My female-led film production company Phoenix Eye have found the online study of Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens insightful and was used as a team bonding training experience for the members of Phoenix Eye earlier this year. This has inspired us to implement our knowledge in creating our own fight choreography and scenes to further understand the genre. This had led us to collaborate on an Australian network ABC’s series called ‘Nightwalkers’ as well as myself undertaking a role as a Fight Director for a prominent Australian theatre company; Bell Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* which will be played at the Sydney Opera House” [5.3]. The researchers have received requests from other institutions to use the MOOC materials, most recently from Dr. Jin Haina from the Communication University of China, a public university in Beijing. The MOOC led to a request from the Five Flavours Asian Film Festival in Warsaw for Marchetti and Magnan-Park’s involvement in a leaflet for the 2019 festival [5.10].

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Feedback on the HK Women Filmmakers Website / Facebook Page.
- 5.2 Statistics for the Hong Kong Women Filmmakers Website.
- 5.3 Statement from Maria Tran.
- 5.4 Report by Marchetti on the “Women’s Summit on Film in Hong Kong Higher Education.”
- 5.5 Statement from Mabel Cheung and Alex Law.
- 5.6 Statements from Evans Chan and Quentin Lee.
- 5.7 Statement from Sonia Wong.
- 5.8 Statement from Roger Garcia.
- 5.9 Statement from Arthur Dong.
- 5.10 Email from Five Flavours Asia Film Festival programmer.