

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Overview Statement

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

Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 23

(1) Context

The UoA draws researchers from the School of Modern Languages and Cultures and the Department of Comparative Literature in the School of Humanities. We promote collaborative and interdisciplinary research across several areas of study, including Comparative Literature, African Studies, American Studies, China Studies, European Studies, Global Creative Industries, Japanese Studies and Korean Studies. Our research centres on five themes: i) transnational networks; ii) film studies, with a focus on Asian cinemas; iii) collective memory and traumatic histories; iv) gender, sexuality and the politics of identity; and v) histories of medicine, science and technology. Key areas of impact include preserving Hong Kong's unique cultural heritage by creating repositories of shared stories and collective memories, showcasing Hong Kong film on a global stage, and promoting a greater understanding of other cultures to the Hong Kong community. We collaborate extensively with external partners, such as consulates, cultural organisations and corporations to support our initiatives. Beneficiaries include primary and secondary school students; commercial, governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs); working-class and marginalised Hong Kong communities; filmmakers, programmers and cultural producers; and the general public.

(2) Approach to impact

We provide members with mentoring on pathways to impact, funding opportunities such as the HKU Knowledge Exchange (KE) fund, and impact measurement and evidence gathering. We capitalise on our geographical and cultural affiliations to foster collaborations with external partners, such as consulates and corporations. Our approach to impact focuses on two key areas:

Promoting Hong Kong's Heritage and Culture

Our researchers have made significant contributions to the preservation and promotion of Hong Kong's heritage and culture. Szeto's research on Hong Kong identity politics and collective memory led to her involvement in the Blue House preservation project, which has had tangible effects on the local community. Szeto worked with a consortium of four NGOs to set up the "Hong Kong House of Stories" (which opened in 2014) at the Blue House Heritage Revitalisation project in Wanchai and pioneered a new approach to living heritage preservation. The project saved the Grade I working-class building from redevelopment and involved existing tenants in its reconfiguration as a residential and community space. It was the recipient of the Award of Excellence in the 2017 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation. Yau secured KE funding in 2014 to create a website (<https://www.complit.hku.hk/hkncma/>) that shared stories and connected non-Chinese and non-native Cantonese-speaking groups in Hong Kong.

The UoA has raised awareness of the contributions made by Hong Kong – and Mainland Chinese – films to the global film industry. Marchetti, Magnan-Park and Yee, in particular, have highlighted the cultural significance of Hong Kong films through their public talks and advisory roles to local and overseas film festivals, such as the Hong Kong International Film Festival and the Far East Film Festival in Udine, Italy. Marchetti's research on Hong Kong women filmmakers produced the first and only English-language website on this subject, now a valuable resource for local and international filmmakers and producers, which has had over 39,400 page views since 2014 (<https://hkwomenfilmmakers.wordpress.com>). Yee is an advisor to Reel Women Hong Kong (RWHK) and was a consultant for the RWHK Film Festival 2015–16. Marchetti and Magnan-Park have commented in the media on issues related to the Hong Kong film industry, such as the lack of Asian representation in Hollywood films. These activities have highlighted the under-representation of women in film production in Hong Kong and connected filmmakers to new audiences.

Enhancing Cross-cultural Appreciation and Understanding

Members collaborate with consulates and organisations to promote a greater appreciation of other cultures in Hong Kong. Gruenewald's research on memory and difficult histories was instrumental to his collaboration with the Kinseys to exhibit part of their collection at the HKU Museum and Art Gallery in 2016–17. The exhibition, which drew over 15,000 visitors, raised awareness of African American history and the contributions of minorities to national historical narratives among local audiences. European Studies collaborates with the HK Holocaust and Tolerance Centre (HKHTC). Vogt is a Director of the Centre, which is a voluntary organisation dedicated to Holocaust education, and has supported exhibitions, film screenings and talks connected to his research. In 2018, HKHTC arranged talks and visits that benefited over 6,000 secondary school students and teachers. Members work with local consulates, particularly those of the U.S., France, South Korea and Mexico, to support cultural diversity initiatives. Nakano worked with Japan Airlines (JAL) on the 60th anniversary of the launch of its services to Hong Kong in 1955. She advised on commemorative activities, including an exhibition, events at the airport and articles in JAL's in-flight magazine. Tesfaye served in an advisory capacity to the Leisure and Culture Services Department's month-long "Vibrant Africa" festival, which included 109 activities and attracted audiences of over 70,000. Chong collaborated with schools and secured three rounds of KE funding to support the promotion of German language and culture at secondary level. Forty-five workshops were held, reaching over 2,000 students from 28 schools in Hong Kong and Mainland China.

Raising Public Awareness through Media Engagement

Members are regularly contacted by the press to provide comment based on their research expertise. Teo's research on North Korea has led to him being interviewed by the Straits Times, CNBC, Al Jazeera, Reuters and ABC (Australia). Borland's work on natural disasters and post-disaster reconstruction in Japan led to her inclusion in the Discovery Channel documentary, "Japan: Designed for Recovery", which was broadcast to an estimated audience of 2.7 million. Max Wong, whose expertise is in the creative industries and law, is the current host of the Chinese-language Now TV programme, "News Magazine", which is broadcast to 1.3 million. Vogt and Auer from European Studies have given interviews to the BBC, CNBC, TRT World, TV JOJ (Slovakia), Vima (Greece), Hong Kong Economic Journal, South China Morning Post, and n-tv (Germany).

(3) Strategy and plans

The UoA plans to further capitalise on cross-disciplinary collaborations, such as existing partnerships between American Studies and African Studies, and Gender Studies and Comparative Literature. Building on our connections with the media, and our longstanding ties to consulates through such programmes as the Fulbright and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), we are formalising collaborations with external partners and identifying sources of financial support. In his role as Jean Monnet Chair in EU Interdisciplinary Studies, Auer has received funding from the European Union to develop a new Massive Online Open Course. Our new hire in Latin American studies is planning public workshops and screenings in collaboration with museums in Chile. We recently established guidelines to ensure that impact is included in training for grant applications, such as the RGC's Research Impact Fund, and in staff recruitment and mentoring.

(4) Relationship to case studies

The two case studies articulate to key research themes (film studies, gender and identity politics, and collective memory) and exemplify the major components of our approach to impact. The presentation of the Kinsey Collection in Hong Kong involved collaborations with external partners to promote a greater understanding of African American history and educate the public about the effects of institutionalised racism and the importance of diversity. Our championing of Hong Kong filmmakers, and Hong Kong women filmmakers in particular, has raised the profile of Hong Kong film internationally and is evidence of our commitment to the preservation and promotion of local heritage and culture. Both studies demonstrate our engagement with the media and our success in securing funding from government and corporate sources.