

**Research Assessment Exercise 2020**  
**Impact Overview Statement**

**University:** The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

**Unit of Assessment:** 35-Area Studies, Cultural Studies and Other Arts/Humanities

**Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA:** 10

### **1. Context**

The Unit contains distinguished scholars, based in both the Division of Humanities and the Division of Social Science under the School of Humanities and Social Science, who work on aspects of Chinese culture and politics with a strong focus on the South China region. Their research activity has had *impact on policy, culture, the economy, and school and public education* in Hong Kong and mainland China for the following non-academic user groups and beneficiaries: *policymakers* dealing with intangible cultural heritage; *tourists and students* interested in Hong Kong history and traditional culture; *journalists, teachers, students, and the wider public* who seek to understand Hong Kong politics; members of *Muslim communities in Yunnan* who wish to better understand their own history; and members of the *Hong Kong public* who want to learn more about Hong Kong politics, the social impact of aging, and cutting-edge research in the humanities and social science more broadly.

### **2. Approach to impact**

The Unit has had a wide-ranging approach to achieving impact in the review period at each stage of research and knowledge transfer, as demonstrated in the examples below. This has involved collaboration with local policy-makers, NGOs, and funding agencies; use of the South China Research Center as a platform for research and public engagement; collaboration with amateur historians in mainland China and the Hong Kong Museum of History in Hong Kong; the use of non-academic publications; and public outreach involving exhibitions, talks, and media engagement.

i) *Inventories of Intangible Cultural Heritage*: One key platform for transmitting impact to the public is the South China Research Center, located in the Division of Humanities, led by LIU, staffed by CHEUNG and MA, and supported by a research associate and five research assistants. Its mission includes collecting cultural artifacts and recording events, particularly rituals, which are in danger of disappearing due to rapid social modernization. In 2009, the Hong Kong government, acting in accordance with the UN Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage, commissioned the Center to carry out a territory-wide survey of Hong Kong's cultural artifacts and practices for inclusion into a list of intangible cultural heritage. Following three years of intensive research, a list of 480 items was approved by the Hong Kong government in 2014. The Center and its members have also successfully assisted local communities in submitting applications for the national list of intangible cultural heritage.

ii) *Exhibiting Hong Kong heritage*: Yimtintsai Village, located on an island in the New Territories, was formerly an important Hakka village and Catholic missionary community in the mid-19th century. In 2007, the South China Research Center organized a team of 50 students to salvage over 1,000 artifacts from the deserted village and catalog them for future exhibitions. With the support of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, a non-profit organization was created in 2011 to restore the village and its saltpans and construct a Heritage Exhibition Center, completed in 2015. The project received the UNESCO 2015 Award of Distinction at the Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation. Since then, the Center has organized HKUST students as docents every academic year. In the past three years, approximately 25,000 tourists/year have visited the island.

iii) *Hong Kong politics*: Impact in this area has been achieved through extensive public engagement using multiple platforms. For example, SING runs the website "Classroom for Democratic Education in Hong Kong" (cdehk.org), built on evidence-based research, which focuses on debates about functional constituencies in Hong Kong's legislature and the effects of democracy in the world. It has been visited over 400,000 times since 2014. As an expert on Hong Kong politics, SING has been interviewed by numerous local and international media during the review period,

including the *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Time Magazine*, AP, AFP, BBC, Bloomberg, *South China Morning Post*, *Hong Kong Free Press*, RTHK, and *Asia Times*.

iv) *Stimulating interest in local history in Yunnanese Muslim communities*: Since 2009, the Unit's three anthropologists (CHEUNG, LIU, MA), together with a researcher in UoA 34 (DANIELS), have organized a collaborative team to study "Bazi basin society" in southwest China, especially in Yunnan. The venture was supported in part by a UGC Area of Excellence Project, "The Anthropological History of Chinese Society" (2010-18), whose PIs were LIU, David Faure (CUHK), and Liu Zhiwei (Sun Yat-sen University). MA's scholarship and mentorship of amateur historians in Yunnan has led to the rapid growth of interest in local history on the part of Dali's Muslim community. MA inspired and assisted members of the community to undertake research of stone stele inscriptions, resulting in important publications (2014 and forthcoming). MA's own research has been circulated by local imams and Hui research groups to educate their communities about their history.

v) *Raising awareness about aging and social care*: KU's prizewinning book, *Where Time Turns Black* (2017), addresses the subject of memory and aging from a sociological perspective. It has been the focus of public exhibitions at the Fringe Club, Hong Kong, and the 2nd Tianshui Photography Biennial Guest Exhibition in mainland China. KU has given numerous talks, including at local bookstores, libraries, the Institute of Active Ageing at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Future Camp of Hong Kong Council of Social Service, and media interviews (*Ming Weekly*, *HK01*, *Ming Pao Sunday*), to promote social and cultural awareness about aging in an urban environment.

vi) *Public humanities lectures*: Since April 2012, the Division of Humanities has organized a Public Humanities Lecture program in conjunction with the Hong Kong Museum of History. Its aim is to transfer knowledge from faculty research to the public and stimulate conversations about the multidisciplinary humanities. Members of the UoA in the Division of Humanities have delivered hour-long lectures on a topic of research to a general audience on a Sunday during the semester. Topics have included Confucian political thought (CHAN), Taoist alchemy (YIP), Chan Buddhism (WONG), modern Chinese social history (HO), villages in the Pearl River Delta (CHEUNG), religion and ethnicity in Yunnan (MA), Hong Kong's intangible cultural heritage (LIU), and paintings of Buddhist sacred sites (FU). A total of 898 visitors attended these lectures during the review period.

### **3. Strategy and plans**

Over the next six years, the Unit intends to further build on the strategies for maximizing impact that have served it well during the past review period. For example: LIU will continue to assist local groups in writing briefs to nominate Hong Kong intangible cultural heritage to national lists; MA is engaged in long-term collaborations to raise local awareness of Muslim history in Yunnan; SING remains a much sought-out commentator on Hong Kong affairs. New policies to stimulate the production of impactful research include a series of training sessions and one-on-one consultations, to be launched by the School's Associate Dean for Research in 2020, which aims to assist faculty to define and measure their impact, identify stakeholders and beneficiaries, and review impact statements from successful research proposals. These initiatives will be funded at the School level and monitored at the midpoint and conclusion of the six-year period by an external reviewer.

### **4. Relationship to case studies**

The case profiles the research impact of LIU, founding director of the South China Research Center, and a major figure in the study and promotion of intangible cultural heritage in Hong Kong. His scholarship on local religious practices has effected important policy outcomes concerning the safeguarding of cultural heritage, inspired younger Hong Kongers to study and maintain these traditions, and enhanced the awareness of local and non-local tourists and the public about the cultural attractions that Hong Kong has to offer, bringing cultural and economic benefits. His case demonstrates how the Unit leverages its research expertise to impact the lives and cultural memory of communities in Hong Kong and South China through extensive policy and community collaboration and public engagement before, during, and after research is completed, and by making use of platforms including the Center and media for his outreach.