

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Case Study

University: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) |

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

Title of case study: Bridging Urban Studies Research and Artistic Practices: Changing Perceptions on Greater China in History |

(1) Summary of the impact

Research undertaken at the Department of Chinese Culture (DCC), PolyU by Pan Lu into urban culture and cultural memories has led to several art and film projects such as “Ode to Infrastructure,” “Many Undulating Things,” “Traces of An Invisible City” and “Miasma, Plants, Export Paintings,” which gave rise to screenings, media interviews, exhibitions, invited presentations in Hong Kong, Mainland China, South Korea, the US, the UK, Japan, Germany, Switzerland and Taiwan. Together, these activities produced an impact on bridging the academia and the international art world. They attracted an estimated total viewers and participants of over 9000, allowing transfer of research findings and knowledge from DCC (PolyU) to various audiences in Hong Kong, the UK, Japan and other parts of the world, thereby enriching their understanding of such matters as urban history and culture, memory, and film culture. |

(2) Underpinning research

PAN Lu joined the Department of Chinese Culture (DCC) at PolyU as Assistant Professor in August 2015 to strengthen the research output and impact of the department. Research by Dr Pan coalesce around the topic of cultural and cross-cultural analysis of various textual forms including specialism in topics concerning film, visual culture and art, urban culture, cities, modernity theories and cultural memory in modern and contemporary Greater China and East Asia.

Dr Pan has been focusing on issues of memory and space [1], visual politics in public space [2, 3] and Hong Kong’s history of urban space [6]. Hong Kong, with its rich history of colonialism, large flows of migration, effects of war, political changes, globalization and rapid changing urban form, represents a unique case in global urban history. Studies on Hong Kong and its historical transformations may shed light on issues of spatial justice, population flow, class conflicts, identity politics, the environment and visual representations of cities in various places. Dr Pan has also focused on materials in visual archives (particularly those of export paintings) and their relationship with spatial configuration [4, 5].

The research work conducted by Dr Pan has impacted on the cultural life of Hong Kong and other places with the co-production of three films that examine a variety of urban landscapes in Hong Kong and illustrate the tension between visual existence, function and ownership. These films, “Traces of an Invisible City” (2016), “Miasma, Plants and Export Paintings” (2017) and “Many Undulating Things” (2019), which constitute the major vehicles with which this impact case study is narrated, examine the peculiar dynamics between imperialism, scientific research, space, capitalism, race and visual representation from the 19th-century Canton to the present day Hong Kong. They are built upon previous research findings by Dr Pan on how our visual memory controls and manipulates the writing of the city’s history. While existing research focuses on one of the aspects –

export painting, bio-economic empire of the UK, racism, spatial segregation, etc --- the films thread all the seemingly unrelated or loosely related histories into one mapping. Thus, not only scholars in various disciplines but also non-academic audience including artists, film makers, and curators find it interesting and inspiring to see history presented from this particular perspective and in such a multi-media format.

Dr Pan's other forms of public engagements, public presentations and lectures, media appearances, interviews and curatorship are similarly underpinned by the scholarly work listed in Section 3. Some of them came in the wake of the screening of the films co-produced by Dr Pan and others were generated by the excitement over her scholarly publications. |

(3) References to the research

1. *In-Visible Palimpsest: Memory, Space and Modernity in Berlin and Shanghai*. Bern: Peter Lang, Eurosinica Vol.15, Bern: Peter Lang, 2016.
2. *Aestheticizing Public Space: Street Visual Politics in East Asian Cities*. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect/University of Chicago Press, 2015.
3. "The Kitschy, the Shanzhai and the Ugly: Creating Architectural Utopia in Contemporary Chinese Cities" in *Politics and Aesthetics of Creativity: City, Culture and Space in East Asia*, co-edited with Dixon H.W.Wong and Karin Ling-Fung Chau. Los Angeles: Bridge 21, 2015, pp153-176.
4. "The Making of Gòng/Kyō – Visual Archive and the Common in Contemporary East Asia." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 19.3 (2018): 431-48.
5. "Translating visual archives: on the Making of the New through Three Cases of Hong Kong", in *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, Vol. 16, Issue 3 (2017), pp. 1-18.
6. "Traces of an Invisible City", co-authored with Bo Wang, in *Landscape Architecture Frontiers*, Volume 5, Issue 2 (2017), pp146-153. |

(4) Details of the impact

Pan's impact can be summarized under three headings:

1. Increase the understanding of urban history and culture in Hong Kong and Mainland China

The film "Many Undulating Things" that Dr Pan co-directed demonstrates research at DCC on urban space, memory and visual culture. The films garnered attention from journalists and film critics during its World Premiere in Visions du Reel Film Festive in Nyon, Switzerland. It was screened twice to full-house, with an estimation of 500 audience. Antoine Duplan, movie specialist, describes the film as "beautiful, rich and deep" [E1] in "Le Temps." Karin Chien, producer and founder of dGenerate Films, Matthew Barrington, curator of Essay Film Festival in London and jury member at Visions du Reel, and Elena López Riera, director and producer, also appreciate the film's complex reflections on the relationships between landscape, nature, urbanization and society [E2]. Steffanie Ling, artistic director at Images Festival in Toronto, remarks on the innovative way that the film uses to present Hong Kong's colonial history, linking it to the present pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong [E3] These feedbacks have helped the European film circuits learn about the developments of Asian research-based films and gained a better understanding about urban history and culture in Hong Kong and Mainland China.

2. Contribute to cinematic culture

The film “Miasma, Plants, Export Paintings” that Dr Pan co-directed was widely selected in film festivals and art exhibitions around the world. Between 2017 and 2019, the film was screened in Russia, Japan, UK, China and Hong Kong. The total estimated number of attendants was 2000, excluding on-line viewers. One reviewer calls it “a revelation: history, art, geography and colonialism mixed in an aesthetically challenging piece of work” [E7]. The film won the Award for Excellence at 32nd Image Forum Festival, which praises the film “for contributing to the cinematic culture of today by its outstanding innovativeness and originality” [E5].

Scholars in other fields, artists and curators have also taken note of Dr Pan’s films, which have inspired new projects such as art exhibition, students’ research and creative writing. A recent exhibition titled “Hot Smoke” on a very similar topic with that of the Miasma film was held. A creative piece was written by an inspired journalist in OCAT Art Center journal (27-09-2018) [E6].

In one recent review, the reviewer regards “Many Undulating Things” as being innovative for the documentary genre, saying, “The film glides from subject to subject with ease, unburdened by the documentary conventions of strict and detailed linear timelines.” The same review praises the film as having “a philosophical and even mythic quality which permeates the fantastic breadth and width of the subjects it encapsulates.” ([E4])

3. Introduce new research methodologies and topics to non-academic audience

The film “Traces of An Invisible City,” co-directed by Pan, was premiered at the DMZ International Documentary Film Festival, South Korea in 2016, and subsequently screened in Hong Kong’s independent film program Autonomous Cinema and at Guggenheim Museum, New York in 2017. The estimated number of audiences is 1000. The screening of this and the second film she made in Guangzhou’s art/project space SJT in August 2017 and in Shantou in 2018 was followed by a spirited debate among the audience. Many in the audience were impressed by the films (e.g. a review from the audience on the Miasma film see [E7]).

Dr Pan appeared in the TV programs “On the New: about Translating Boris Groys’ Über das Neue” produced by Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China (September 2019) and the popular program “學人串社科 on Monument” produced by RTHK, Hong Kong (May 2019), where she talked about the memorial spaces in her research on WWII monuments. The YouTube count (19/08/2019) is around 4000 viewers [E8]. The Hong Kong newspaper Mingpao published a special feature interview on Dr Pan’s research on collective memory and monuments on June 2, 2019 [E9].

Between February 2017 and May 2019, Dr Pan gave eight featured talks on her research and films at art museums and universities in various cities in China, Taiwan and the UK. The estimated total number of non-academic audience members in all the talks is 500. Positive feedback such as “it opens a new window to space studies” and “the methodology is a bold endeavor to bridge art practices and academic research” were heard from the audience about Dr Pan’s new methodologies and topics. The total views of the YouTube video of the talk she gave in Taiwan University of the Arts is around 400 [E10].

Between October 2016 and October 2018, Dr Pan curated two art exhibitions: “Ode to Infrastructure” (curator and artist), META Project Space, Shanghai, China (Oct. 2016), and Kuandu Biennale, “Seven Questions for Asia,” Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts, Taipei, Taiwan (Oct. 2018). These exhibitions are related to Dr Pan’s research on art archive in Asia and urban infrastructures and visual representation. The estimated total visits of the exhibitions are 1000. Art review in Taipei Times on Kuandu Biennale stresses the exhibitions’ approach to Biennial from a non-Western approach. |

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

[E1] Link to the newspaper review on *Many Undulating Things* in *Le Temps*

<https://www.letemps.ch/culture/planete-panse-plaies-visions-reel>

[E2] Link to review on *Many Undulating Things*

<https://www.visionsdureel.ch/en/2019/film/many-undulating-things>

[E3] Link to the review on *Many Undulating Things* by Steffanie Ling

https://opencitylondon.com/news/open-city-documentary-festival-2019-focus-many-undulating-things-be-water/?fbclid=IwAR2fdvV7DiKdkiVJ_2Wf7z9_AoBsRhSJJrwaZLIRfpzQZV0Wq_AVPxHEDYU

[E4] Link to the review on *Many Undulating Things* by Clara Strachan

http://takeonecinema.net/2019/many-undulating-things/?fbclid=IwAR1ZHw533xTcxo1YkQ9-xYYDna9JLlzQhggxG_BV3A8Q1Gus5J1eR5YGxGQ

[E5] Certificate of Award of Excellence, Image Forum Festival, Tokyo, Japan 2018, see supplementary file.

[E6] link to article inspired by the Miasma film:

<https://tinyurl.com/y55tsx4u>

[E7] Link to film review on Miasma film:

<https://storiadocgiappone.wordpress.com/category/southeast-asian-documentary/>

[E8] Link to RTHK TV Program

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klYjeL6q7so&feature=share>

[E9] Mingpao Report

<https://tinyurl.com/y3kzmqeu>

[E10] Link to Dr. Pan Lu's lecture at National Taipei University of Fine Arts

https://www.tad-lab.net/post/2018series-i-02-nature_and_artificiality_of_visual_spatial_empire |