

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Overview Statement

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 |
Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 9 |

(1) Context

PolyU's mission statement calls for a commitment to pursuing "impactful research that benefits the world." We believe that area studies specialists can play an active role in dealing with some urgent problems Hong Kong, the nation, and the world are facing today, including the erosion of traditional values and cultural heritage, as well as the escalation of social, cultural and political conflicts. We endeavour to exert our influence on our non-academic user-groups, including religious groups, artist groups, teachers and students of secondary schools, the media circles, and the general public.

During the current assessment period, the area studies specialists at PolyU held public lectures and film premieres, appeared on TV programs, and wrote short articles for newspapers and online forums to share their knowledge and insights and to participate in public discourses. These activities covered a wide range of topics, including Chinese religions and philosophy, Chinese filmmaking and film studies, and Chinese literature and art, which were all related to the research the area studies specialists had conducted. The departments and the faculty provided support to enable our area studies specialists to participate in impact-generating activities.

Benefits to the target audiences and user groups have been in the following broad areas of impact:

1. Cultural life (e.g. sharing knowledge about the various disciplines with the general public)
2. Public discourse (e.g. media engagement)
3. Education (e.g. by providing counselling and advice)

Key target groups are the general public (public lectures, exhibitions, and film screening), secondary school teachers and students, religious groups, artist groups, and the media (e.g. lectures, training programs, filmmaking, interviews, newspaper articles).

(2) Approach to impact

The departments support impact activities by granting leave to staff and permitting them to use departmental and university facilities to engage in activities leading to impact on the wider society. We count these activities as community service so that the staff members get credit during annual appraisals and when applying for promotion and contract renewal. Specific activities undertaken by members of the group within the assessment period include:

1. Public lectures: Mark Meulenbeld delivered a public lecture on Daoism at the Taoist College of Singapore in 2016, which was the best attended public lecture ever organized by the college, with a crowd of approximately 200 people, most of whom were non-academics; Pan Lu was invited to give a talk at the Guangdong Times Art Museum, which was open to the public and attracted around 30 art students, art lovers, artists, and curators. She also gave a public lecture at the International Urban Images Festival; Chen Lang and her collaborators were invited by multiple institutes to present their studies, which also drew attention of the general public. She also gave lectures to some Buddhists in order to help them contextualize their faith; Jia Jinhua, Kevin Schoenberger Jr, and Wu Wanyi delivered public lectures on various aspects of Chinese culture at the Confucius Institute of Hong Kong (Impact areas 1, 2 and 3);

2. Counselling work: David Wan worked as an experienced certified (APPA) philosophical counsellor during the assessment period, and the position allowed him to apply his research on Confucianism to his professional practice (Impact area 3);
3. Engagement with the media: Mark Meulenbeld was interviewed by Lianhe Zaobao in 2016 about his research on Daoism. Lianhe Zaobao is the most popular Chinese language newspaper in Singapore, and it has many readers in the Chinese-speaking world; Pan Lu was involved in the making of a film that was premiered at the DMZ International Documentary Film Festival in South Korea and Guggenheim Museum in New York. She also participated in the production of a two-channel video work about colonial life in British Hong Kong, which was shown in the influential Shenzhen-Hong Kong Urban Biennale 2017-2018 for three months. The work has received positive feedback from its visitors from all over the world. Pan's activities are covered in detail in the case study (Impact areas 1 & 3).

(3) Strategy and plans

We will continue to offer support and assistance to our area studies specialists to enable them to initiate and participate in impact-generating activities. Specifically, we will continue to grant leave to staff and permit them to use departmental and university facilities to enhance the impact engagement of the unit with the wider society and will continue to count these activities as community service so that staff members can get credit for the service they provide. We will encourage the researchers to embed impact expectations in their research agendas and will consider allowing the area studies specialists to use their personal research grant to support their activities including impact engagement.

One specific plan is to launch a Chinese language journal entitled Environment, Culture and Engineering, which will focus on the interactions between environment, culture and engineering, and the targeted readers will be the local and non-local general public. The editorial team will consist of both the historians and the area studies specialists at PolyU plus colleagues from some other relevant PolyU departments.

Another plan is to launch a series of public lectures on Chinese culture catering to the general public, with the purpose of enhancing public understanding of the history and culture of China. This will be a joint project of the Department of Chinese culture and the Confucius Institute of Hong Kong, with support from both the faculty and the university. Both the historians and area studies specialists of PolyU will be involved in this project.

(4) Relationship to case studies

The impact case study relates to all three of the impact areas listed above, namely, cultural life, public discourse, and education. The public lectures and film premieres presented in the case study served to enrich cultural life, educate the public on the history and culture of Hong Kong and other places, and enhance the popular understanding of socio-cultural issues. The department and faculty supported Pan Lu's activities by granting her leave and by providing financial assistance to support her projects and to cover her travel expenses.