

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Overview Statement

University: The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 37

Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 15

(1) Context

- i) **Our research has influenced the management and self-understanding of the religious institutions and organizations in Hong Kong.** With support from the local religious communities, our Department has five research centers (Buddhist, Daoist, Catholic, Christian & Islamic). These centers create a vibrant and optimal research environment, and better facilitate cross-disciplinary research in religious studies. Our program aspires to champion cutting-edge theoretical and religious studies in Hong Kong. In addition, we have systematically transferred knowledge from our research findings to management practices in religious organizations through the publication of a textbook, and through engagement in educational programs for the major religious institutions in Hong Kong and beyond.

One example of this is Rev. Prof. Lo Lung Kwong's co-authored textbook for church management, which was adopted by the pastoral leadership courses at various Chinese seminaries. This textbook, entitled *Church Management Make Sense: A Partnership of Pastors and Lay Leaders* (2009) has provided Hong Kong Chinese Christian churches with an adequate model of management. Prof. Lo was frequently invited to be an advisor and consultant on church development for different churches. This contributed to substantial **change and modernized management systems in local churches** based upon his research in church management. Another example in this regard would be Prof. Lai Chi Tim's popular 'Summer Session in Daoist Culture and Management for Leaders'. This event has been organized since 2006, and is based on his research on Daoist culture. Over two hundred Daoist religious leaders from different Daoist shrines from Mainland China have participated in this short course, which provides training on the micro-techniques of giving sermons, modern human resource management, western concepts of heritage conservation, and an academic approach to Daoist teachings. Prof. Lai aspires to **modernize and change the management styles of traditional Daoist temples in Mainland China**, something which has always been an aim of the Daoist temples in the Greater China region. Prof. Lai's research has provided a concrete model on the basis of Hong Kong's experience that has also obtained an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) on temple management.

- ii) Engagement with wider audiences through public lectures, study tours and other public events, addressing global and regional challenges and societal needs are important strategic themes in our research. Our research contributes to a deeper public understanding of religion and its role in human affairs, introduces new conceptual frameworks for understanding religion, and increases religious tolerance.

An important example in this regard is the public understanding of Islam. Given a widespread Islamophobia, our program is strongly committed to **promoting Islamic Studies and a better public understanding of Islam in Hong Kong**. An expert in Islamic Studies was recruited in 2015, and a Centre for the Study of Islamic Culture was established in the Research Institute of the Humanities under the Faculty, the first of its kind in Hong Kong. Through the Center we organize public lectures, Islamic cultural festivals, and public guided tours to mosques in Hong Kong. Positive feedback from participants has led us to believe that we have contributed to an **enhancement of greater religious tolerance and multicultural perspectives among the Hong Kong public**. Such understanding is indispensable for the social harmony of an international metropolis like Hong Kong.

(2) Approach to impact

Recognizing the importance of cooperative, constructive, and positive interactions between people of different religious traditions, our research aims to promote interfaith dialogue. The focus in this regard is Buddhist-Christian Dialogue, as our research strength is in the area of Buddhism and Chinese Christianity. We strive to **change public perceptions about, and reception of the different religions in Hong Kong** through research, publications and the cultural activities organized by our five research centers. In addition to the five research centers, the Department also has a project in Indian Religions and Culture, which facilitates interfaith dialogue and interaction between Hinduism, Jainism and other faith traditions in Hong Kong. The Department has successfully **organized interfaith dialogue between major religious leaders in Hong Kong**. With their help we have built a database for historical research on the Colloquium of Six Religious Leaders of Hong Kong within our Departmental website.

We have also achieved a **synergy of resources from different religions that contribute towards the spiritual well-being of people in Hong Kong**. This is done through workshops and seminars organized to promote spiritual exercises across traditions. One of the strengths of research shared by the Theology Faculty is the **contextual focus and public orientation of scholarship**. A belief in deep connections between personal and social transformation has led colleagues to feel compelled to **engaged spirituality**. This is a spirituality that promotes active engagement in the world in order to transform it in positive ways, and to **empower and speak up, and out for the disadvantaged, under-privileged minorities and marginal groups** in society. Our research has helped to influence the understanding of religious institutions and organizations on various issues, including but not limited to gender issues. Prof. Kung Lap Yan's research on gender equality issues, for instance, plays a pivotal role in engaging people who hold negative views on LGBT related issues in the 'spirituality of dialogue'. Prof. Kung's research promotes an inclusive church relative to gender justice.

(3) Strategy and plans

Creating research impact has been under-appreciated in the Hong Kong research community. Our program has taken advantage of RAE 2020 in order to **increase colleague's awareness of the importance of impact and to improve their skills to document and present their impact**. The Faculty of Arts has provided a Project Impact Enhancement Fund (PIEF) to reinforce the articulation of impact in our research. We have offered training opportunities for colleagues and have encouraged them to participate in these training activities. The Faculty has also arranged for external advisors to help departments develop their impact cases. We offer academic support through our research centers to all researchers who aspire to enhance the social impact of their research. An example in this regard is **Gender Studies research, which has sustained area of research interest** in the Department in theology, religious studies and cultural studies.

(4) Relationship to case studies

While concerned with the critical formation of normative judgement, there is a strong commitment for the Theology Faculty on engaged spirituality, to empower and speak for the disadvantaged, under-privileged minorities and the marginal groups in society through their research. Gender issues have a sustained area of research interest in the Department. We take advantage of the rich research on gender related issues by the Cultural Studies colleagues in the same department. Prof. Kung has engaged in debates and published several articles and books in order to enhance the Hong Kong Christian communities, and the publics' understanding and acceptance of people with different sexual orientations and gender identities. Prof. Kung's research has significantly increased both the quality and quantity of public discussions on gender and ethics-related issues through public debates, newspaper articles, books and surveys. More importantly, he was also invited to join the government Reorientation and gender identity, especially on the issue of the legislation of the Sexual Orientation Discrimination Ordinance.