



香港大學

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# BULLETIN

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## STATE OF THE UNION

Marriage and Divorce in Modern Hong Kong and China



**Mission  
Lai Chi Wo**  
Revitalisation  
of rural  
communities



**Archaeological  
Astronomy**  
New technique  
aids study of  
planetary nebulae





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## STATE OF THE UNION

The economic and political changes experienced by China, Hong Kong and to a wider extent Asia in recent decades have had an impact on intimate affairs, too. While traditions remain strong, marriage is starting to take on new forms and divorce is on the increase. HKU scholars have been tracking the changes and examining the repercussions from sociological, anthropological, economic and legal perspectives.



*In traditional Chinese weddings, paper cutouts and other ornaments featuring a Chinese character denoting double happiness are displayed around the house of the groom and bride.*



# MARRIAGE IN TRANSITION

Marriage in China today can come in a rainbow of permutations: fake or naked, arranged or for love, delayed or early. But traditional values still persist and underpin even the newfangled options, says anthropologist Dr Gonçalo Santos.

Marriage and families in China today are being pushed and pulled by conflicting signals that would seem to herald the decline of traditional hierarchies. Whereas people's identity used to be linked to membership of a collective, be it family or work unit, and intimate relations were largely mediated by parents and elders, today 'individualisation' has taken hold – people have individual identity cards, more freedom of movement with many moving away from home, and more say in their daily lives. Moreover, since 1979 the State has had a presence in the bedroom, dictating reproductive freedom and the number of children a couple can have.

But do not dwell too long on the unconventional aspects of that picture, cautions Dr Gonçalo Santos of the Hong Kong Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, for even the

most unusual marriages still retain an element of traditional Confucian values.

Dr Santos has co-edited an upcoming book *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* that among other things explores the nature of marriage in modern China.

"A lot has been written that individualisation and deinstitutionalisation point to the loosening of the marriage form so it becomes a private issue. But I think this has overemphasised the degree to which various kinds of freedoms have emerged in China," he said. "Individuals continue to be constrained by social and moral expectations. This is true in other societies as well as in China. In China younger generations do have more say nowadays when it comes to marriage, they are dating and having premarital

sex, but in their choices, they also work really hard to please their parents."

## Money concerns

The desire to strike that balance has led to variable approaches to marriage, however. A common trend is for young people to delay marriage in the face of all the pressures – although in the end, many still turn to their parents for support. Men in particular often require parental help to pay the 'bride price', usually a flat.

"The process of getting married involves making a huge amount of money that would not be possible to accumulate without the help of parents," Dr Santos said. "In Communist times, people who lived in cities were able to acquire



“ In China younger generations do have more say nowadays when it comes to marriage, they are dating and having premarital sex, but in their choices, they also work really hard to please their parents. ”

Dr Gonçalo Santos

property at very cheap prices. To buy a house today is very expensive, so you are dependent on your parents. It's not just a matter of ethics, of wanting to be a good filial son, but also a matter of economic constraints."

Economic concerns may also be fuelling an opposite trend, towards early marriages. Dr Santos speculated these couples may want to tap into parental resources as soon as they can, but it was too early to tell if this was an effective and sustainable strategy.

Alternatively, some couples are shirking the money focus altogether and entering into 'naked' marriages, without bride prices or wedding banquets. These have parallels with European civil ceremonies, which are minus all the bells and whistles of a full church wedding.

"In China there are anxieties emerging that we marry because of property and economic

considerations. This reminds us of something that has happened in the last three decades and that is the 'love' revolution, which holds that marriage is about love, not about being a match. There has been a love revolution in India, too, but one thing we have to understand is that love in this context still remains strongly connected to more practical traditions," he said.

## Compelled by tradition

Often love marriages are still negotiated by parents and friends who look after the economics and other details of getting married. "One should not underestimate the power of a much older cultural tradition in handling these issues," he said.

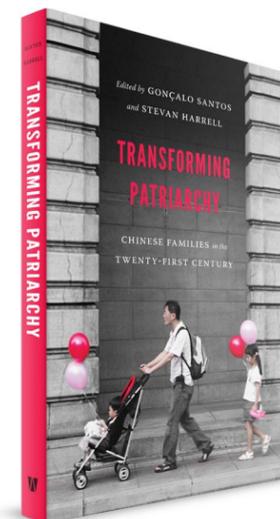
Yet another type of marriage is the fake marriage between gay men and lesbians, who use it as a front to keep their parents happy. "This is a good example of how the normative

model of marriage is very strong and even people with completely different interests and desires feel compelled and pressured to marry."

Traditions, then, die hard. Dr Santos believes arranged marriages may still be happening in China today, but even if parents are not arranging marriages, they work hard to make them happen – in some public parks they gather with signs listing their child's attributes, hoping to find a perfect match.

"Patriarchy may no longer be the default model of Chinese families but that does not mean that strong hierarchies both at the generational and gender level do not remain in place, because they still do," he said.

*Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, co-edited by Dr Santos and Stevan Harrell, will be published by the University of Washington Press in November 2016. ■



Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will be published in November, 2016.



A babysitting grandfather in Northern Guangdong.



# THE DOWRY DEBATE

Dowries may be scorned as old-fashioned and even harmful to women. But economist Dr William Chan argues that in some circumstances they may actually be beneficial.

For centuries, marriage in Asia has been accompanied by a substantial exchange of wealth, typically paid to the family of the future spouse before the marriage can go ahead. But



“It’s very difficult to stop these transactions when there is both supply and demand.”

Dr William Chan

there are nuances in these exchanges, as Dr William Chan of the School of Economics and Finance has discovered.

Dr Chan has studied dowries in Taiwan and India and the different forms they take. Bride prices are paid to the groom’s family (typically the case in India) or groom prices to the bride’s family (more common in Chinese societies), and what anthropologists formally call dowries are given by parents to their daughters as a kind of nest egg for the future. He set out to see what impacts they had on women’s welfare.

First, in the late 1990s, he looked at Taiwan. “My theory was that a higher dowry put women in a better bargaining position in terms of their future life with their husbands, which was measured by the share of household chores men were involved in. It turned out that men were indeed more likely to be involved if the wives had a higher dowry,” he said.

The finding attracted much criticism in India, where dowries (in reality, groom prices) have led to violence and other injustices against women and to campaigns and weak laws to stop the practice. However, the critics offered mixed empirical support for their arguments so Dr Chan decided to test the case himself using data gathered by World Bank economist Vijayendra Rao.

## Having more say

That data included information on how much of the marital transfer – in formal terms, the dowry – remained in the daughter’s control and how much was given to the groom’s parents, and how much say the brides had in household decisions ranging from educating children to household purchases to even what to cook for dinner. The data included responses from both the wife and husband.

“I found that women with more dowry do have more say in many household decisions. In a narrow way, the dowry benefits them,” he said. “The main lesson I derived from the Indian exercise is that given there are economic forces driving all these observations, it would be much easier to work with them than try to go against them.”

In the case of India, an unenforced ban against dowries means there are no legal channels for settling disputes, which leaves women vulnerable when they marry into families unhappy with the dowry arrangements.

“It’s very difficult to stop these transactions when there is both supply and demand,” Dr Chan said, so it may be better to keep these entrenched practices out in the open since they show no sign of going away. ■



# ‘LEFTOVER’ WOMEN SPEAK OUT

Successful single women in China can have difficulty finding a partner, but the media calls them ‘leftover’ and blames them for being picky about partners or lacking genuine interest in marriage. Sociologist Dr Sandy To has been listening to the women’s side of the story.



“These women are discriminated against because of their high educational levels and career achievements and because they don’t fit into the stereotype of being feminine and accommodating.”

Dr Sandy To

Imagine being a lawyer and being told by your boyfriend that he likes you but he wants to marry someone who is more docile and easier to control. Or being asked by your boyfriend to quit your well-paying job. Or being advised by your parents to step down from running the family firm to improve your marriage prospects.

These were all stories Dr Sandy To encountered in her PhD research and subsequent publications on China’s ‘leftover’ women – women who are successful and want to marry, but keep getting turned away.

“These women are discriminated against because of their high educational levels and career achievements and because they don’t fit into the stereotype of being feminine and accommodating,” she said. “There’s a Chinese saying that the man achieves outside and the woman belongs inside, doing housework and bringing up children. That tradition has never changed, but the educational chances of women have and the culture has lagged behind.”

Dr To conducted in-depth interviews with 50 single professional and business women from different parts of China to analyse their situation and also see how she could help.

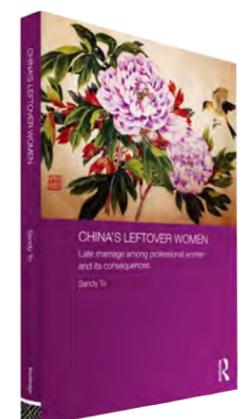
## Four categories

She studied their views on marriage, economic values and gender role perceptions, and came up with four categories that provide a theoretical basis for understanding the responses of high-achieving women in China to the patriarchal demands of marriage. The categories could also help the women themselves in better understanding where they stand and what their options might be.

She identified ‘traditionalists’ who are desperate to get married and hold conservative economic values, meaning they do not mind playing the homemaker role and taking a back seat to their husband. ‘Maximisers’ are proactive about finding a husband and may conceal their achievements (such as having a PhD), but they are also flexible in their partner choice and willing to go for older men or even Western men.

‘Satisficers’ have even more relaxed economic values – they are willing to marry men of lower economic status. And ‘innovators’ do not see marriage as the ultimate goal, although they do not reject it. They are prepared to be alone and some have started scouting nursing homes to see which are best able to look after them in old age.

Dr To said the women she interviewed did not oppose marriage. On the contrary, they wanted companionship and to keep their parents happy. “But they are finding difficulties because of their status. With these core partnership strategies, they can see what type or types fit them and maybe have a better understanding of their options,” she said. ■



China’s Leftover Women: Late Marriage among Professional Women and its Consequences was published by Routledge in 2015.

# THE BATTLEGROUND OF DIVORCE

Most divorces in Hong Kong can be settled with talk and mediation, but when they aren't, children and the court system suffer.



'Blameless divorce' has been the guiding principle in UK law and by extension Hong Kong since the 1970s: let couples divorce, do not ask why, and focus on the legal division of assets and custody of children. It is meant to take some of the pain out of a marriage breakup, but as Dr Keith Hotten of the Department of Professional Legal Education explains, "the devil is in the details".

Dr Hotten wrote the leading textbook on Hong Kong marital law and, as a barrister of 25 years in Hong Kong and the UK, has seen divorces mushroom here, with the number of petitions granted more than doubling since the mid-1990s to about 23,000 a year. He has also been at the sharp end when it all goes wrong.

"Judges would like agreement and the vast majority of cases are agreed. But the problem is that matrimonial law, unlike nearly all other types of civil proceedings, is highly emotional. You have cases where husbands and wives hate each other and won't give an inch. They fight over the dog, over a worthless piece of pottery, they will fight over everything. Some of them also have lots of money and use the courts to litigate. And there's the rub," he said.

When there is an unwillingness to back down and the case goes to trial, it can take 18 months to two years to get a few days in court to hear the case – such is the backlog in the courts. By contrast, couples willing to go through mediation can have their Decree Absolute granted by the court within a few months,

although even that overburdens the judicial system because of the sheer number of divorce petitions each year.

Those who insist on getting their day in court must be willing to pay. "People who don't have a lot of money can't afford to litigate," Dr Hotten said. "Middle class couples may have more to argue about and one of them might get legal aid, but it will still cost a lot of money. You've got family lawyers charging HK\$6,000 an hour, and you can see people fighting over HK\$20 million, which is not much given the price of homes in Hong Kong. You could spend HK\$10 million on lawyers if you spend two years litigating to trial. Multimillionaires with money to burn don't care about the costs, but they are clogging up the courts."

## Children pay the price

Spending that kind of money also deprives children of inheritable assets. "The courts are alive to these issues. Family court judges will be pulling their hair out saying 'Settle!', but at the end of the day, with the Bill of Rights, people have the right to a fair trial. If two parties are determined to litigate, there is nothing a judge can do about that," he said.

When children are involved, the fallout can be particularly severe. In the UK, a Children's Act was adopted in 1989 to ensure children's welfare was the foremost consideration in things like custody battles (historically parental rights had predominated). While Hong Kong tends to follow UK law in practice, it has been particularly slow in adopting this principle in law. In 2012, legislation was reformed so the courts would regard 'best interests of the minor' in custody cases. But a children's law that would give courts clearer authority to protect children is still pending. It was proposed as long ago as 2005 but is unlikely to be adopted until 2018 or later – and even then it does not include reforms incorporated into the UK children's law in 2006.

"In a sense, Hong Kong is muddling through. It's applying the principle, but it's not enshrined in statute," Dr Hotten said.

There is good reason to sort this out as early as possible, given custody cases can drag through

the courts for years if the children were young at the time of divorce – terms have to be continually renegotiated as they grow. This leaves children caught in the middle. Dr Hotten said in extreme but unfortunately not rare cases, parents have defied court orders pertaining to children to get back at their ex-partner – he has even seen a mother medicate her children with Calpol and Prozac so they were disoriented during court-ordered visits with their father.

"Ultimately no law can stop warring parents fighting over children," he said. "There is no

magic answer. But a children's law will make things better and give powers to judges that are not currently enshrined in law." And hopefully, help to reduce some of the collateral damage that can arise from divorce in Hong Kong. ■



“Judges would like agreement and the vast majority of cases are agreed. But the problem is that matrimonial law, unlike nearly all other types of civil proceedings, is highly emotional.”

Dr Keith Hotten



Dr Keith Hotten is one of the authors of the leading textbook on Hong Kong marital law – Hong Kong Family Court Practice.



# A CLASS DIVIDE: DIVORCE AND CROSS-BORDER MARRIAGES IN HONG KONG

Hong Kong has one of the highest divorce rates in the world but it is concentrated disproportionately among the poorer classes. At the same time, cross-border marriages have skyrocketed. Professor Richard Wong Yue-chim explains the links.

Hong Kong has the seventh highest divorce rate in the world. It hasn't always been that way. Forty years ago, with a population of about five million, fewer than 2,000 divorces were granted each year. Today, with seven million people, the figure hovers around 23,000 a year.

Professor Richard Wong Yue-chim, Philip Wong Kennedy Wong Professor in Political Economy and Chair of Economics, has been looking at the impact on families, the housing market and society as a whole. One of the most striking features is the heavy concentration of divorce among poorer people. Census figures from 2011

show 46 per cent of the 226,400 divorced households were in the bottom income quartile. Divorced households also made up the vast majority of single-parent households – more than half of these lived in public rental housing and 40 per cent received Comprehensive Social Security Assistance. As a consequence, more than 100,000 children were living in single-parent households, mostly with their mothers.

How did these imbalances come about? Divorce is common in most modernised societies and Hong Kong's divorce laws have become more relaxed since the 1970s. But Professor Wong

sees another factor behind this trend: the opening of China and the growing number of cross-border marriages.

Cross-border marriages date back to the late 1970s, when China started to open its borders and the British colonial government practised the 'reach base' policy that granted refugees from the Mainland full residential rights if they made it to Hong Kong.

"Over 18 months, 300,000 people came, mostly men, and due to the gender imbalance here they returned to China to find brides. Elderly or



“With the rule change to get entry into public housing, it created an incentive to divorce their local wife. They could marry their girlfriend from across the border and she could come to Hong Kong.”

**Professor Richard Wong Yue-chim**

semi-elderly men from Hong Kong who were poor and single also looked for spouses across the border,” Professor Wong said.

## Housing impacts

One-way permits were subsequently provided to let up to 150 brides join their husbands in Hong Kong permanently. However, housing was an issue. The couples could only qualify for public housing if 'more than 50 per cent' of the household was a Hong Kong permanent resident – which was not the case when one of them was from the Mainland. This rule was relaxed in the late 1990s to 'more than or equal to 50 per cent' and subsequently divorce and remarriage rates jumped.

"It was likely quite a lot of married men in Hong Kong had mistresses across the border," he explained. "With the rule change to get entry

into public housing, it created an incentive to divorce their local wife. They could marry their girlfriend from across the border and she could come to Hong Kong.

"In low-income households, the divorced wife probably stayed in the public rental market with the children. The man went into the private sector as an interim measure before marrying his mistress, creating demand for subdivided units. This drove rapid demand for public sector housing and in the private sector to subdivide units to increase yields, which added pressure to private rents because the number of whole units in the market was reduced."

The data support this interpretation. The number of remarriages involving a spouse from across the border started to increase sharply, from less than 2,000 in the year 2000 to more than 12,000 by 2012. "The number of

remarriages with Hong Kong brides and Hong Kong grooms has remained stable at 4,000 to 5,000 a year. But cross-border remarriages are skyrocketing," he said.

## Children disadvantaged

Since it is mostly men who remarry across the border, there are far more divorced women in Hong Kong (although more Hong Kong women are remarrying to Mainland men) – in 2011 there were more than 90,000 divorced men against more than 170,000 divorced women.

This brings Professor Wong to the question of the longer-term impacts of divorce. Since divorce is concentrated among the poor and children usually stay with their mother, more and more children are growing up disadvantaged.

"In all societies, children that grow up in low-income, single-parent households and in poor neighbourhoods are far more likely to develop all kinds of problems. They become less motivated in learning, have no positive role models, set low aspirations, have no discipline, and have higher incidents of drug use, teenage pregnancies and criminal activity."

He said more research was needed to understand the problem in Hong Kong, but the evidence elsewhere was that investing in pre-school education could help to mitigate the damage. Otherwise these children will continue to be disadvantaged and pass that onto their own children. "Intergenerational mobility is more and more worrying because if you are disadvantaged at an early age, it is difficult to catch up," he added. ■

Year	Divorce decrees granted	Crude divorce rate (The number of divorce decrees granted in a calendar year per 1,000 mid-year population of the year)
1991	6,295	1.11
1996	9,473	1.48
2001	13,425	2.00
2002	12,943	1.92
2003	13,829	2.05
2004	15,604	2.30
2005	14,873	2.18
2006	17,424	2.54
2007	18,403	2.66
2008	17,771	2.55
2009	17,002	2.44
2010	18,167	2.59
2011	19,597	2.77
2012	21,125	2.95
2013	22,271	3.10

The number of divorce decrees granted in Hong Kong surged from 6,295 in 1991 to 22,271 in 2013. (Source: Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics, January 2015)



## AFTER THE SPLIT

The psychological and social impacts of divorce linger long after the final papers have been signed, as the Director of the Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention Professor Paul Yip Siu-fai explains.

No one wants to stay in an abusive marriage, or even a simply unhappy one, but disentangling from such a situation can come at a personal and social cost, as research by Professor Paul Yip Siu-fai and his team has shown.

Starting with the worst outcome, they have found that divorce increases the risk of suicide based on a meta-analysis of studies of divorce in 11 countries in Europe, North America, Australia and Asia that took into account culture and gender.

“Across populations, it doesn’t matter if it is East or West, the suicide rate is higher among the divorced compared to the married,” he said, “and it seems to have a higher impact in collective societies like Korea, Japan and Hong Kong. Unlike in Western countries where divorce seems to be quite acceptable, there is a stigma that you’re a failure, you can’t hold your marriage together, and so on.”

On average, divorced men were found to be 3.49 times more at risk of suicide and divorced women 3.15 times more at risk. But among Asian men, the risk ranged from 4.81 in Japan to 5.90 in Taiwan, with Hong Kong coming near the top at 5.80. Among Asian women it ranged from a very low 1.96 in Japan to 8.00 in Korea where child custody used to be granted to the father; the ratio for Hong Kong women was 4.30.

The suicide risk may also filter down to the next generation. Professor Yip is Chairman of a Hong Kong government committee looking at student suicides and in at least half the cases studied, the students came from broken families or homes with serious family strife.

### Poverty risk, too

But suicide is not the only effect. Divorce also increases the poverty risk and with that, the

demand on government welfare services. While about 14.5 per cent of Hong Kong households live below the poverty level, including government subsidies and other assistance, among single divorced parents the rate is 30 per cent.

Moreover, the city’s tough housing conditions mean divorced couples can be forced into complex and difficult situations when it comes to finding somewhere to live. Half the population lives in subsidised housing and cannot afford the high costs in the private market.

“Sometimes even after divorce, couples are forced to stay together in public housing for the interim because there is nowhere else to stay. Of course it’s not ideal. If they can stay happy together, then why would they have divorced?” he said. “But domestic violence is not that uncommon and tragedies do occur.”



“If the marriage is beyond repair, there is no point in having an unhappy marriage, but they should try to make it a happy divorce.”

Professor Paul Yip Siu-fai

All of that is not to say divorce is bad in general. “It can be a good thing for individuals, especially if there is an abusive spouse. It used to be that Asian women in particular would swallow problems for the family or were not financially independent, so they had to stay. Nowadays women are better educated and more independent. But at the population level divorce is not such a good thing as family support is weakening in the community,” he said.

### How to ease the pressure

Professor Yip believes the Government and other institutions could help ease the pressures by providing more support for families going through divorce. Children should be protected, particularly from being used by their parents in divorce proceedings. Schools should work at de-stigmatising divorce so children don’t feel

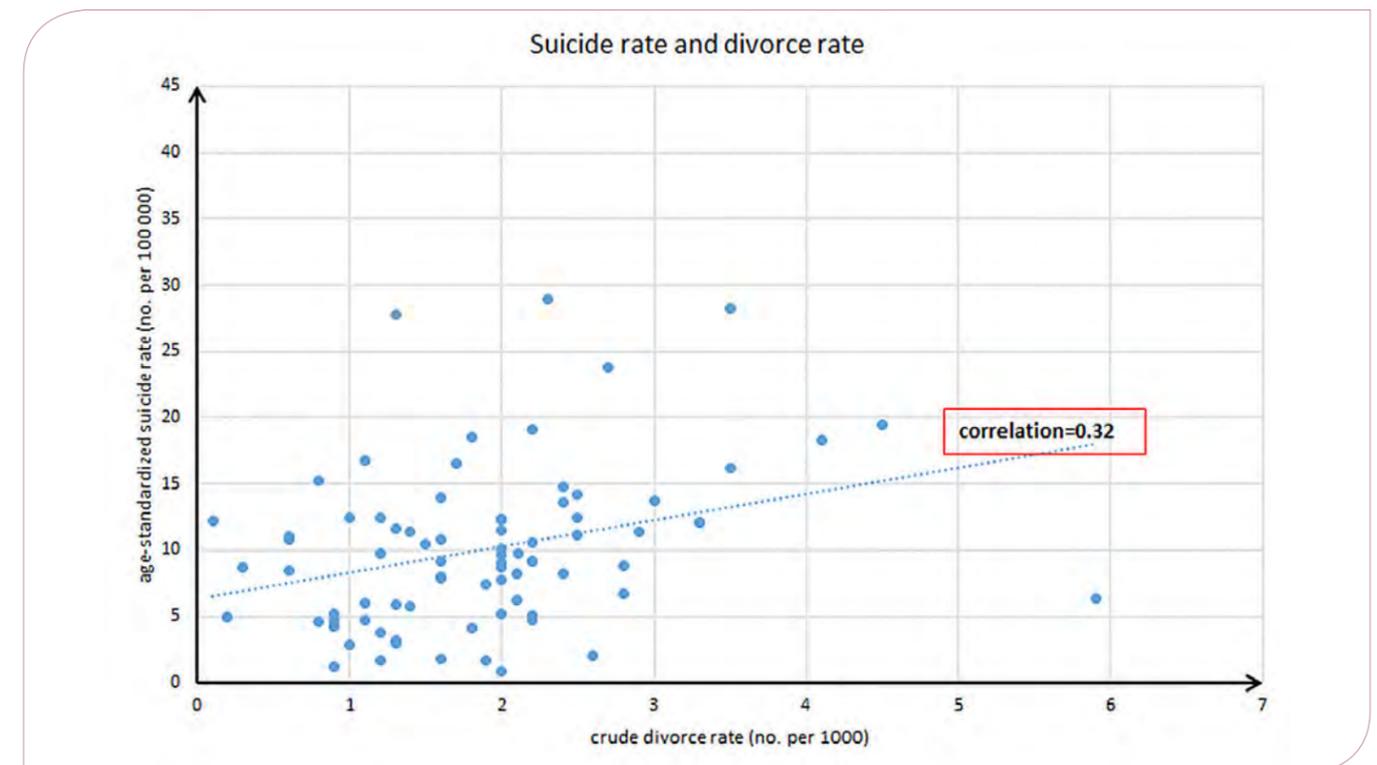
discriminated against, and they should be more sensitive to the rapid changes in family structures – about 23,000 couples divorce each year and about one-third of marriages are remarriages.

“When people talk of student suicide, they tend to mention academic pressure, but actually academic pressure doesn’t directly link to suicide – otherwise the situation would be much worse. However, it does seem that social support can be weak for divorced families or remarried families,” he said, adding: “We need to enhance resilience and induce hope to our young people.”

“If the marriage is beyond repair, there is no point in having an unhappy marriage, but they should try to make it a happy divorce.”

Professor Yip also believes more should be done to address some of the causes of divorce. Long working hours and long separations due to the need to travel for work are not conducive to family life. Short-term work contracts also create unstable conditions for starting and maintaining a family.

But he stops short of advocating policies to encourage marriage, pointing to Singapore where the divorce rate has risen steadily despite inducements such as priority for married couples in housing allocation. Hong Kong’s divorce rate in contrast has levelled off as people delay marriage until they are older. “In our studies, we have found that the older you marry, the less the chance of divorce,” he said. ■



The correlation between the age-standardised suicide rate and the crude divorce rate.



# THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF ARTIFICIAL TURF

Artificial turf is a low-maintenance option for keeping playing fields green and readily available for use, especially in hot, wet climates. But work by Professor CY Jim is adding to the evidence that artificial turf can be hazardous to both health and the environment.

Can artificial turf get hot enough to fry an egg on? Chair Professor of Geography CY Jim decided to test that out during his research on the heat effects of artificial turf.

Professor Jim spent two summers taking detailed measurements on artificial and natural turfs to compare their solar and terrestrial radiation and heat regimes at different times of the day and at different heights. His results were

shocking. When air temperature reached 35 degrees Celsius, the surface of artificial turf spiked to close to 70 degrees – compared with 38 degrees for natural turf. Even at 50 centimetres above ground, the temperature at the artificial turf site remained higher although the difference was less dramatic.

“The very hot artificial surface can heat up human bodies by infrared radiation, conduction

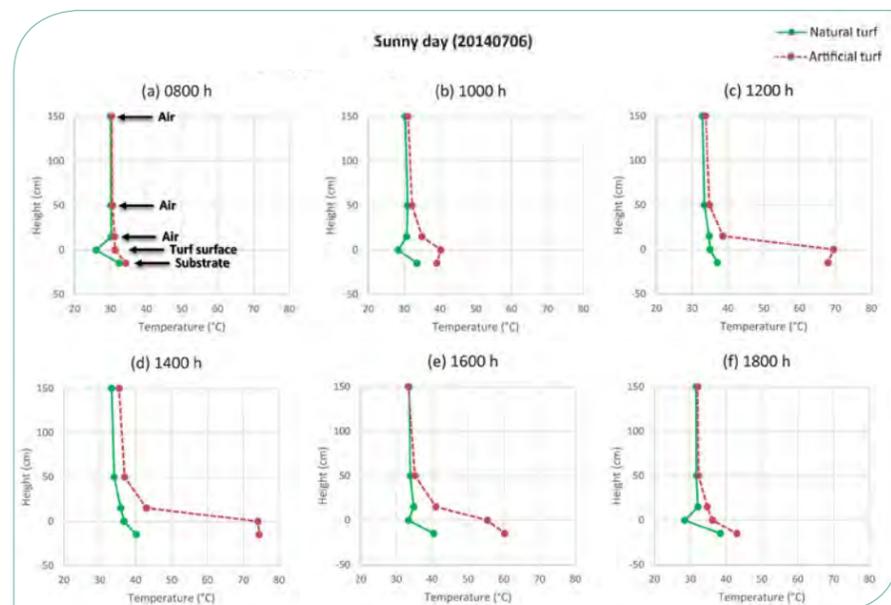
and convection,” he said. “It’s not healthy to the athletes playing on such fields because there’s a danger of heat stroke. And it’s particularly harmful to children who are short, which means a larger proportion of their body would be exposed to such high temperature. As children’s heat-regulation physiology is less able to cool their bodies, it means a double jeopardy to their health.

“I actually tried to cook an egg on the artificial turf,” he continued. “It was pretty well-cooked I must say.”

## Urban heat island effect

The high temperatures are more than a health problem. Professor Jim’s concern about artificial turf stems from his interest in urban greening and the urban heat island effect, which causes city temperatures to be higher than those in the countryside. As more places seek to replace natural grounds with artificial surfaces, he is keen to raise awareness about the contribution this makes to urban heat.

In Hong Kong, for instance, the Government has already replaced nearly half of its soccer pitches with artificial turf, which is cheaper and easier to maintain. Even HKU has jumped on the artificial bandwagon, with three of its four sports grounds using artificial turf. However, this also provided an ideal setting for conducting



Vertical temperature profiles of the natural and artificial turf sites on a sunny day at six two-hourly daytime sampling points.



“It’s not healthy to the athletes playing on such fields because there’s a danger of heat stroke. And it’s particularly harmful to children who are short, which means a larger proportion of their body would be exposed to such high temperature.”

Professor CY Jim

experiments and the Manager was happy to rearrange schedules so Professor Jim could take measurements on both the artificial and natural turfs in the summers of 2013 and 2014.

The results, published this year in the scholarly journal *Applied Energy*, provide a comprehensive thermal-cum-radiation profile for both types of surfaces so definitive comparisons can be made. “Most previous studies of artificial turf have only looked at daytime temperature. I looked at the 24-hour cycle and the microclimatic situation under different weather conditions,” he said.

Interestingly, at nighttime artificial turf lost temperature far more quickly and to a greater

extent than natural turf, indicating the wider extremes of temperature related to artificial turf. Artificial turf also did not offer the cooling effect of water evaporation that comes from natural turf, because water runs off and is not absorbed by the surface and synthetic substrate material.

## The smell

In fact, water pollution is another concern with artificial turf, although not directly related to Professor Jim’s research. The turf substrate is made of rubber granules and as the water seeps through it can release toxic substances that contaminate surface and ground water. The

rubber is also a problem when the sun shines on the surface because this can release harmful gases called volatile organic compounds. Waste rubber tyres are so harmful to the environment that some landfills in other countries refuse to accept them.

“When I conducted my study at the HKU fields, I hated the smell, it was awful. I was there for hours on end and it smelled of heated rubber. I feel pity for the athletes playing on such fields,” he said. “By the way, some countries advise people not to sit or lie on artificial turf, only to run or step on it. Why? Because it is so harmful to health.”

Some places are starting to move away from artificial turf. Tokyo, for instance, has converted many sports fields to natural turf to combat the urban heat island effect. Professor Jim hopes his research will inspire similar changes locally and elsewhere, especially because it is consistent with the loftier goal of protecting the environment.

“The Hong Kong Government has pronounced that it is doing things to deal with climate change on the one hand, but on the other hand you have a government department converting natural turf to a synthetic turf that aggravates climate change. It’s a failure of coordination,” he said. “Hong Kong’s urban temperatures have been rising, particularly over the past two decades. We don’t want to rub salt into the wound by converting more turfs to artificial.”



The microclimatic sensors and dataloggers installed at the field at HKU’s sports centre for the artificial turf study.



*Paratopula bauhinia*, the new ant species described from Hong Kong by HKU biologists.

## CITY LIFE

It seems only fitting that a new species of ant discovered in Hong Kong was not found in a rural setting but in the city's urban jungle – just a short distance from the HKU campus.

The ant was discovered by Ms Ying Luo, a research assistant with the Insect Biodiversity and Biogeography research group led by Dr Benoit Guénard at the School of Biological Sciences. It was found in Lung Fu Shan Country Park which is Hong Kong's smallest park and is set close to urban surroundings on Hong Kong Island.

"We were doing a nighttime field trip, part of the Insect Ecology course," said Dr Guénard. On the way back Ms Luo noticed a really cool ant – unusually large at about 7mm long and golden in colour. We went straight back to the laboratory to examine it more closely."

They realised that the specimen represented the first record of the ant genus *Paratopula* for

Hong Kong and southern China, as well as a new species. What marks the species apart from others is the shape of its spines; the number of teeth on mandible (10); and the properties and shape of the thorax.

A new species is a new species for science, while a new record is a species or genus already described but not found in this location. Here the genus has been described before but not this species. The research team's new discovery represents the 22<sup>nd</sup> ant species described from Hong Kong since 1858. The last one was in 2000 and all the previous ones dated back from 1928 and earlier.

"It is an exciting discovery," said Dr Guénard. "Most people will never find a new species in

their life. When you describe a new species you have contributed to the catalogue of life on Earth. In research, sometimes findings may later be shown to be inaccurate or are superseded, but naming a species is eternal. It's also a fantastic contribution for Hong Kong. We are working on producing the first inventory of ants in the city – presenting their diversity, distribution and commonness in the region; and naturally this new species will be included within this larger benchmark."

The new species has been given the scientific name *Paratopula bauhinia* in *Asian Myrmecology*, a peer-reviewed, yearly journal dedicated to the study of Asian ants. The species part of the name, 'bauhinia', is a reference to the flower which is the symbol of



“ Hong Kong is heavily urbanised and most people might assume that everything is known about our surroundings, but many species are still unrecorded or unknown. It seems strange to me that a virtual game like Pokémon Go encounters such success when it is really just a light virtual version of what we ecologists do. We search for new creatures (organisms) and study them. ”

Dr Benoit Guénard

Hong Kong and also a reference to the arboreal nature of the species which seems to live on trees and forage only at dusk and at night.

There are other implications for the discovery. "When you describe a new species, usually you don't know anything about this new organism," said Dr Guénard. You need to study it, work out its ecology – it could be indicative of a disturbed development, or play an important role within the ecosystem. There may be so much more to discover – it may produce a specific molecule that could have incredible medical properties – who knows?

"Taxonomy is only the first stone of a wall that could be much larger – further study is required

to find out how large, but the point is you're the first to study it. With a new discovery, at the very least what has changed is that you have clearly set its description, which later on will allow it to be differentiated from all other species, which we have done by updating the taxonomy key of the genus."

### The real game

He goes on to explain that while the *Paratopula bauhinia* is just one example and taken alone is not that significant, what it signifies is how little we know about our environment. "Around the world new species are found every day, about 18,000 species of plants or animals are described annually, and millions are still to be

found and described. Hong Kong is heavily urbanised and most people might assume that everything is known about our surroundings, but many species are still unrecorded or unknown. It seems strange to me that a virtual game like Pokémon Go encounters such success when it is really just a light virtual version of what we ecologists do. We search for new creatures (organisms) and study them.

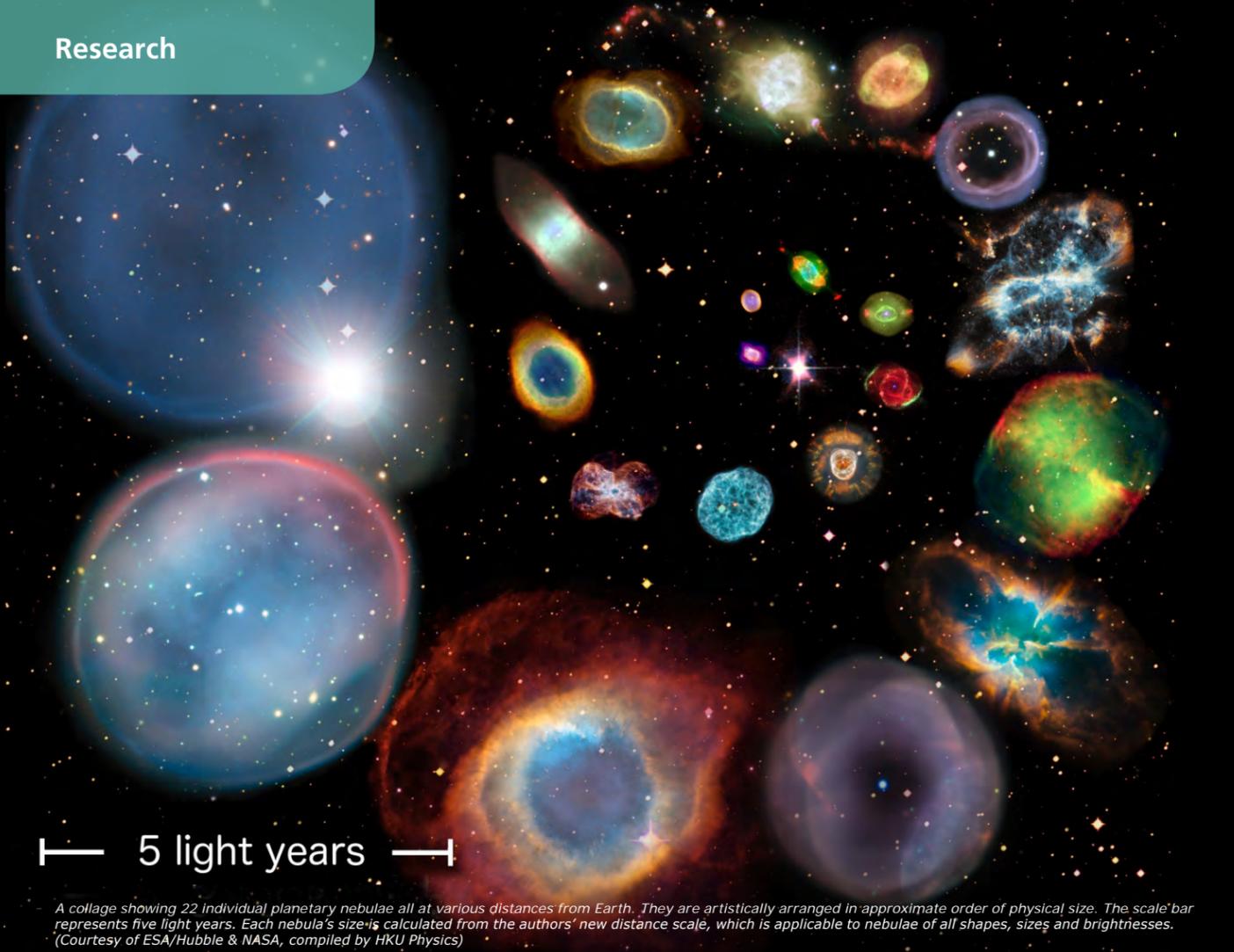
"The difference is we are playing the real game. Maybe this discovery will inspire Pokémon players and others to realise they can do the same thing in the real world and make a useful contribution to science while feeling proud of their own true discovery. And we must hurry because major parts of natural habitats are disappearing, so describing new species before they disappear is particularly important."

In 2016, the Insect Biodiversity and Biogeography research group has described four new species in all – *Paratopula bauhinia* in Hong Kong and three in Singapore, another heavily urbanised area, though unlike Hong Kong it still has small remnants of primary forest. The group also has several other specimens that potentially represent new species – but will require more work to describe them.

"This is the first one, but it's just the tip of the iceberg," said Dr Guénard. "Several laboratories at HKU are describing new species – be they insects, crustaceans or plants. As a scientist I understand the excitement of finding life on new planets, however we need to be pragmatic and realise that the emergency is right here on Earth. Around 80 per cent of life on this planet is estimated to still be unknown. While species are disappearing at an alarming rate, some most likely before we can even describe them, actions to describe, study and protect this incredible potential have to be taken very seriously." ■



Ms Ying Luo (left) and Dr Benoit Guénard (right) at the Lung Fu Shan site where the Golden Tree Ant *Paratopula bauhinia* was first discovered.



A collage showing 22 individual planetary nebulae all at various distances from Earth. They are artistically arranged in approximate order of physical size. The scale bar represents five light years. Each nebula's size is calculated from the authors' new distance scale, which is applicable to nebulae of all shapes, sizes and brightnesses. (Courtesy of ESA/Hubble & NASA, compiled by HKU Physics)

# DISTANCE LEARNING

A new technique to estimate distances between Earth and planetary nebulae accurately will give them a more meaningful place in astronomical research.

Planetary nebulae potentially offer a wealth of information about dying stars, but astronomers have been unable to tap into that wealth fully because ascertaining their distance from Earth has been problematic.

Based on the culmination of 10 years of research work, a team of three astronomers in HKU's Department of Physics – Dr David Frew, Professor Quentin Parker and Dr Ivan Bojičić – has come up with a more accurate technique to measure that distance. The implications of their new method, could enable a new era in our ability to study and understand the fascinating final stages of the lives of low- and mid-mass stars.

Planetary nebulae (or PNe) have long held the imagination with their distinct colours and

complicated shapes, which range from soap bubbles, to butterflies. The name planetary is actually inaccurate, but came about because early astronomers such as William Herschel in the 1780s thought they resembled planets when in fact they are from dying stars. It wasn't until the 1860s that the first spectroscope revealed they were not solid objects but gas. They are interesting to astronomers because they also offer a brief glimpse into the history of stars' lives, but their scientific potential has been considerably reduced because it was so difficult to estimate their distances.

"Planetary nebulae are valuable tools for astronomers seeking a better understanding of how stars evolve and die, and of the nuclear processes acting in old stars and producing elements such as carbon and nitrogen," said

Dr Frew. "We want to know how and what elements are being recycled back into the Galaxy.

"Over the history of the Milky Way, the gas between the stars has become richer in heavy elements over time. If it hadn't we humans wouldn't be here – we're mainly carbon, which wasn't produced in the Big Bang. Material that once was in planetary nebulae is almost certainly in you and me.

"Measuring distances to Galactic planetary nebulae has been an intractable problem for many decades, because of the highly diverse nature of both the nebulae themselves and their central stars. However, knowing their distance is crucial to understanding their true nature and physical characteristics."



“Over the history of the Milky Way, the gas between the stars has become richer in heavy elements over time. If it hadn't we humans wouldn't be here – we're mainly carbon, which wasn't produced in the Big Bang. Material that once was in planetary nebulae is almost certainly in you and me.”

Dr David Frew

The solution the team has come up with is a robust statistical distance indicator, using three sets of data. First, the size of the object in the sky taken from the latest high resolution surveys; second, an accurate measurement of how bright the object is in the red hydrogen-alpha emission line; and third, an estimate of the dimming toward the nebula caused by so-called interstellar-reddening. From these quantities, an intrinsic radius is calculated, which when combined with the angular size, yields the distance directly.

"The resulting surface brightness to radius relation has been calibrated using more than 300 planetary nebulae whose accurate distances have been determined via independent and reliable means – such as trigonometric parallax measurements of their central stars," said Dr Frew. "It is not the technique that is new but the development of more accurate and reliable

measurements means that this method is far more reliable than what has gone before."

## Weeding out mimics

The new technique has also enabled the research team to weed out the 'doppelgangers', or mimics – that is, forms that resemble nebulae but are not – which in the past have contaminated PNe catalogues, by adding extraneous scatter to previous statistical distance scales.

It will also aid Dr Frew in his ongoing compilation of a far more accurate census of all the PNe in our Galaxy, work he began in 2006 at Macquarie University in Sydney.

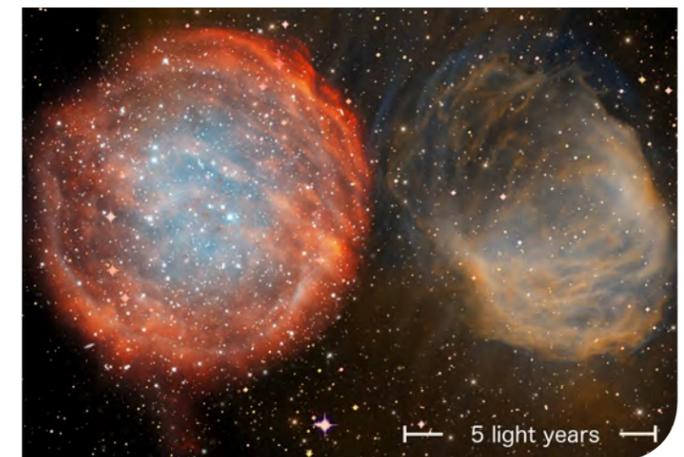
"Currently the number of known PNe is wrong by a huge factor," he said. "But when we have an accurate census we can work out the number

of stars that are dying. If we know how many are dying we can see how much gas they are producing and what it is made of. It's archaeological astronomy. We are looking at a cycle, a galactic ecosystem. We need to find out how far away these nebulae are, their age, the time they live for and the amount of material they are putting back into the Galaxy."

So far, the three astronomers have used their new technique to create a catalogue of statistical distances for over 1,100 galactic PNe, the largest such compilation in the literature to date. Over the last 10 years, the team has more than doubled the number of known PNe in the Milky Way. For the past two centuries about 1,200 to 1,500 had been recorded – now 3,300 are known. ■



The new method to estimate more accurate distances between planetary nebulae and the Earth was developed by Dr David Frew (right), Professor Quentin Parker (left) and Dr Ivan Bojičić.



The physical sizes of two of the largest planetary nebulae, presented at a common scale based on the authors' new distances. Older distance scales underestimated the distances and hence sizes of these very old nebulae. (Courtesy of NOAO/AURA/NSF, compiled by HKU Physics)



# NATURE'S ANSWER TO THE RAIN DRAIN

Feasibility study reveals the advantages of introducing environmentally-friendly and sustainable drainage systems for stormwater.

Before the days of concrete drainage systems, rainwater would infiltrate deep into the ground, be cleansed by soil as it filtered through the earth and gradually be dispersed back into streams, rivers and eventually the sea. Concrete and non-porous roads and pavements changed all that. Now storm water gushes down concrete gulleys, sometimes causing flooding, before cascading straight back into the sea.

Dr May Chui, Assistant Professor in the Department of Civil Engineering, is seeking ways to return to more natural, more sustainable and more useful ways to deal with storm water. She recently completed a feasibility study on introducing Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) into Hong Kong.

"The problem at the moment is our drainage systems focus mainly on controlling floodwater, but not on environmental issues," she said. "We mostly use concrete drains, which are not sustainable and hold water in buried storage tanks which are not good for the environment."



Conventional, non-sustainable, concreted-lined drain.

"Ground water is naturally quite clean, as soil itself can be a natural filter, so with SuDS water is absorbed into the ground, naturally treated, then slowly dispersed into rivers and canals, and

eventually the sea. This slow dispersal also reduces the risk of flooding during peak flows into the drainage system. In addition, the quality of the water going back into the environment is better.



“ One of the major advantages of Sustainable Drainage Systems is that they work with nature rather than against it. ”

Dr May Chui

"One of the major advantages of SuDS is that they work with nature rather than against it."

Other advantages include aesthetics. One of the easiest methods of introducing SuDS involves building flowerbeds over current drainage troughs, with a side drainage entrance, another involves decking an open nullah with a green channel cover. Both use current facilities, but look nicer and are better for the environment.

Challenges in Hong Kong include the limited space in our crowded city, high annual rainfall and public perception – in short, people may not want to pay the extra money it will take to convert to SuDS. However, Dr Chui was pleased to find that in a survey of 600 people told about sustainable drainage, around 90 per cent of those interviewed said they would support its implementation, with most citing reducing the greenhouse effect and environmental enhancement as their main reasons.

Similar systems have already been introduced in Singapore – where Dr Chui began her work in this area – as well as in the US, where these systems come under the heading of low impact development, and China, where new urban developments using SuDS are simply called 'sponge cities'.

The feasibility study covers the costs involved, the survey about people's perception of the concept in Hong Kong, as well as how SuDS work and the benefits these systems would bring.

## Multiple benefits

According to Dr Chui, those benefits are environmental, economic and social. "From the environmental viewpoint, SuDS improve water quality, introduce more plants which are good for human health, and can protect or restore wildlife habitats," she said. "Economically, they can reduce energy consumption and costs, and they even increase land and property values simply because they are more aesthetically pleasing.

"And socially, the introduction of SuDS could create more attractive street-scapes and rooftops which will enhance urban green spaces, and will help ventilate the city landscape thereby mitigating against urban heat problems."

Dr Chui's feasibility study has been partly funded by the Central Policy Unit and she is working closely with some government departments on getting SuDS up and running in

Hong Kong. "This crosses the remit of several government departments, such as the Drainage Services Department, the Civil Engineering and Development Department, the Highways Department and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department," she explained.

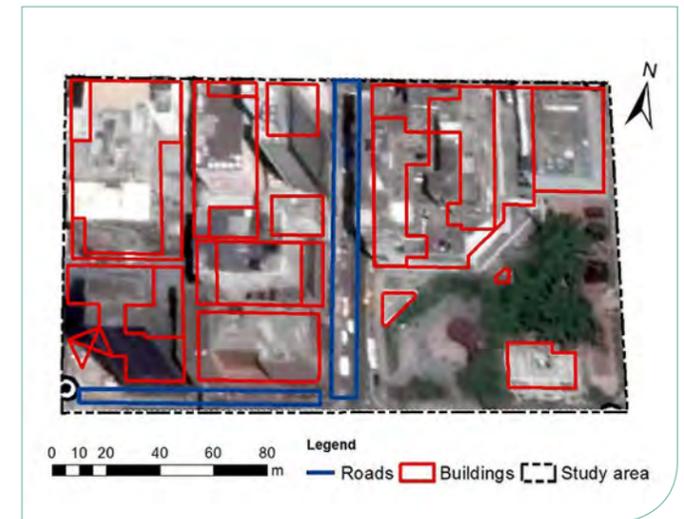
"If it is to be implemented in Hong Kong we need large-scale planning. The Government would probably have to come up with incentives for private developers to utilise SuDS rather than just focussing on their own facilities."

The bioretention systems required can reasonably easily be built over current drainage systems and under existing green areas – such as planted roundabouts and plant beds currently used as central dividers on major roads. Green roofs are another perfect location for them, and the gradual introduction of porous pavements – rather than non-porous concrete – could be done gradually over time as and when existing pavements require repair.

"The way forward now is to identify areas for SuDS implementation, from individual field trials to large-scale implementation in urban developments, and to promote SuDS to the public and educate them about its benefits." ■



Potential application of Sustainable Drainage Systems in Hong Kong, converting existing plant beds to bioretention systems.



Large scale planning of Sustainable Drainage Systems.



Dr Xuechen Li (second from left in the first row) and his teixobactin project team at the Department of Chemistry, including three PhD students and four undergraduate students.

## FIGHTING THE RESISTANCE

As more and more infections grow resistant to existing antibiotics, an HKU team led by Dr Xuechen Li, Department of Chemistry, is at the forefront of developing the next generation of antibiotics.

The introduction of penicillin in the 1940s started the era of antibiotics and marked a great advance in therapeutic medicine. Antibiotics are compounds produced by bacteria and fungi which are capable of killing, or inhibiting, competing microbial species. After its discovery by Alexander Fleming in 1929 and its development into a widely available medicine by the 1940s, penicillin as the first antibiotic was able to take on previously life-threatening infections such as streptococcus, meningococcus and the diphtheria bacillus.

Due to rapid evolution, once an antibiotic enters widespread human use, its effectiveness becomes limited and bacterial resistance to it is just a matter of time. This has led to further problems such as overuse of antibiotics. In the fight against bacterial resistance, new antibacterial drugs need to be developed all the time.

Generally there are two approaches for the development of antibacterial drugs. One, the discovery from nature of new types of antibiotics, such as streptomycin, cephalosporin, erythromycin, tetracycline, vancomycin, and daptomycin; and two, modifications on the structure of ineffective antibiotics to reactivate them, for example, nafcillin, oxacillin, ampicillin, amoxicillin, carbenicillin, ticarcillin and piperacillin, all of which are derivatives of penicillin and developed from its structural modifications.

### Potential game-changer

Recently, scientists discovered just that in teixobactin, a compound which is being described as a potentially game-changing antibiotic. Dr Li and his research team, working in collaboration with scientists from the

University of Central Florida and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, have become the first to chemically synthesise teixobactin. Their studies on the synthesis were published recently in *Nature Communications*.

"Teixobactin was discovered just a year ago and is considered a breakthrough antibiotic. Its structure and antibacterial mechanism are different to those of existing antibiotics. It will be many years before it is actually turned into a drug, but we have taken the first step towards that by synthesising the compound.

"Teixobactin is so hot that many groups of chemists around the world are working on the molecule. Everyone wanted to be the first. We were the first to report a total synthesis, but we are still developing a better teixobactin derivative. Using this strategy we want to go



“ I feel so strongly that it is up to us in academia – in non-profit-driven institutions – to take responsibility in conducting antibacterial research. We chemists must play our part. ”

Dr Xuechen Li

one step further – make multiple analogs – up to 100 over the next two years. Then we will screen them for the best one – the one which will be sent to clinical trials to be a drug.

Asked how his team managed to be first, Dr Li said: “We used our own in-house strategy... and we worked harder!”

The implications for what Dr Li describes as “a very hot molecule” are potentially huge. “Teixobactin has displayed an interesting property in the laboratory – there is no resistance to it,” he explained. “Of course, we don’t know yet if that will translate to the drug when it is properly developed, but it’s a promising start.”

Dr Li has made the development of antibacterial compounds a focus for his laboratory because

bacterial resistance has now become such a critical problem. “There is a public need. People are dying of bacterial infections resistant to all available drugs. The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that the situation is now critical and new antibiotics need to be developed.”

He feels that the big pharmaceutical companies are not doing enough. “They are not doing Research and Development (R&D) in this area because of profit-driven considerations,” he said. “Unlike drugs for heart disease or diabetes, which have high profit margins, antibiotics are not a big money-maker. That’s why I feel so strongly that it is up to us in academia – in non-profit-driven institutions – to take responsibility in conducting antibacterial research. We chemists must play our part. I came to HKU in 2009, and in the seven years

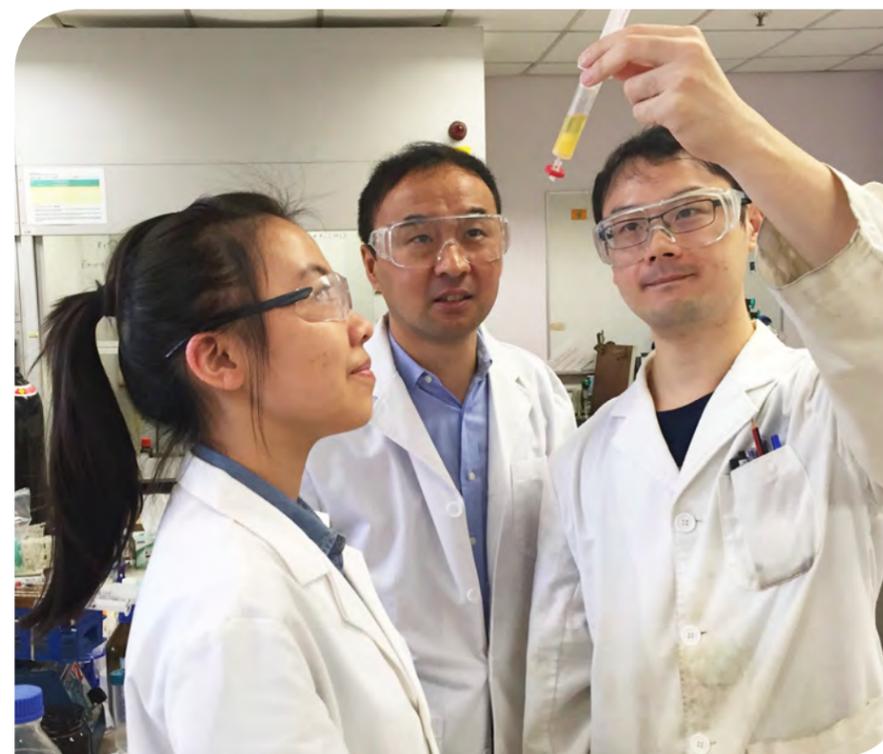
since, one of my main areas of focus has been antibacterial drug research, particularly applied research.”

In the case of teixobactin that means making derivatives and analysing them to improve the compound’s chemical properties, and seeking to modify the structure via chemical synthesis to make different analogs.

Teixobactin is the second antibacterial compound Dr Li’s team has worked on. In 2013 they began studies on daptomycin, and have since synthesised more than 100 analogs, from which they have identified a daptomycin-better version. “Now, teixobactin is our focus,” he said, “so we hope it will be the next generation of antibiotics. And, since pharmaceutical companies have already shown interest in doing R&D to take our daptomycin-better molecule further, we think they will be very interested in teixobactin. I want to further advance both molecules, and continue our focus on medicinal chemistry.”

Both nationally and internationally, there is huge interest in the teixobactin research. “To my knowledge, there are more than 30 national and international media reporting our teixobactin story,” he said. “It is indeed attracting a lot of attention.”

But while acknowledging this is an exciting area to work in, Dr Li also warned: “This kind of research requires a lot of work and it does not always render results. We are the first to publish paper on teixobactin synthesis, so that is a success but it is a risky field – you have to hope to find the best compound, but that doesn’t mean that you will find it. We have spent four years on daptomycin-based next-generation antibiotic research, and we will spend the next few years on the medicinal chemistry of teixobactin – and we have made good progress with each of them, but there is still a long way to go.” ■



Dr Xuechen Li working in the laboratory with his research team.

# NET LOSSES

The adage ‘there’s plenty more fish in the sea’ has become a misnomer as marine life continues to decline in our oceans. Despite appearances, many marine fish that gather and spawn in massive and often spectacular numbers have undergone serious declines in their populations.



Twinstot snappers spawning aggregation in Palau, Pacific. (Courtesy of Tony Wu)

Research by Professor Yvonne Sadovy, marine scientist in the School of Biological Sciences and Swire Institute of Marine Science, suggests that aggregating spawners face very specific threats



“It’s hard to get across the message that you need to manage this when the fish numbers still appear healthy. People see an abundance and think there is no problem, but this is an ‘illusion of plenty’ – it is that very abundance that needs protecting.”

Professor Yvonne Sadovy

which are leading to alarming falls in their numbers, but because they are generally seen and caught in large groups their declines are going unnoticed. These fishes include many that we eat regularly, including cod, pollock and grouper.

“It’s hard to get across the message that you need to manage this when the fish numbers still appear healthy,” said Professor Sadovy, whose findings were published recently in the journal *BioScience*. “People see an abundance and think there is no problem, but this is an ‘illusion of plenty’ – it is that very abundance that needs protecting.”

“The perception is that the sea is so big, if the fish decline in one place you can just go elsewhere and catch them. But we’re reaching a global limit with our fisheries. This is particularly so if we catch fish while they are spawning – the bottom line is if they don’t breed, the population will decline and many fish species need to breed in large numbers to be most productive. Because breeding fish numbers are declining, what we are now seeing is not a slow decline, but populations that appear to be healthy suddenly crashing.”

“Also, people believe that seafood production is somehow under control – there is an assumption for example, that fish farming will solve the problem. But as farming increases, fishing continues; fishing does not replace farming, we do them both. Spawning fish aggregations are not seen as a priority for management. If you look at fisheries

‘management tools’ such as quotas, fishing licences *etc*, none specifically address spawning aggregations – they are falling through the cracks of fisheries management and conservation actions.”

The problem goes beyond the large numbers being caught in aggregations (lethal effects); there are also non-lethal side effects to this kind of fishing. When a trawling fleet interrupts a spawning aggregation the fish scatter. They may gather again to continue mating, but this means that reproduction time is cut so not as many eggs are produced. Further, these aggregations are not just about breeding, they occur for other reasons – fish have complex social systems and aggregations are used to communicate and to teach younger fish, so this is being disturbed as well.

Professor Sadovy first realised there was a potential problem back in the 1980s when she was doing research in Puerto Rico and local fishermen told her they had regularly fished grouper spawning aggregations which had since vanished. She then discovered that the Nassau grouper and reef fishes in the Caribbean were disappearing because of this habit. Since 2000 she has documented these effects more globally. “Cod, haddock, pollock, *etc* were all being harvested during spawning and many declined. For fishermen, the practicality is that it’s easier to catch fish if they are all in one place – therefore spawning aggregations are easy pickings. The harsh reality is that, without management, such fishing practices can wipe out fish populations.”

As a result she co-founded the organisation Science and Conservation of Fish Aggregations (SCRFA) with the aim of ensuring that spawning aggregations are regularly included on fisheries management and marine conservation agendas globally ([www.scrfa.org](http://www.scrfa.org)).

“In Hong Kong too, which used to be a major fishing port, we have lost spawning aggregations of many species, from large and giant yellow croakers to mackerel and grouper. The Pearl River Delta used to be a particularly important and productive spawning area. But now we import almost all the fish we eat as so few remain in our own waters because we never managed our fish stocks properly,” she said.

## Safety valve gone

The situation is worsened because the ‘economic safety valve’ has gone. “Before, when numbers of a certain kind of fish declined, it was

no longer economically viable for fishermen to go after it, so they would target something else and as a result the numbers of that fish would increase again. But now consumption patterns have changed and customers can and will pay a high price for something they want. Indeed, the rarer some species become, the higher they are valued.”

Professor Sadovy is calling for more regulation and closer monitoring of the situation. “We need to factor spawning aggregations into our fisheries management globally,” she said. “The Marine Stewardship Council could integrate it into their international sustainability standards. Guidelines on aggregation fishing need to be part of the fabric of how we assess and utilise these species.”

There is some good news. Some fish companies, including Hong Kong company Hoi Kee, have recognised the problem and are not selling

fish taken during the spawning season, and websites exist promoting the stewardship of spawning fish.

Professor Sadovy has collaborated with SeaWeb and the Fiji Department of Fisheries in developing the [www.4fj.org.fj/](http://www.4fj.org.fj/) campaign to protect the grouper populations there, which have declined by 70 per cent over past 30 years. More than 8,500 people have signed a pledge not to eat grouper during spawning season to protect their traditional (fishing) way of life.

More needs to be done, however. “While your average fish may not be as cute as a panda, the decline in their aggregations and populations is just as serious as our disappearing mammals – not only for reasons of seafood but also because of the role they play in the biodiversity of our oceans.” ■



Hundreds of sharks prey on spawning groupers and many are eaten or die from injuries during their reproductive season. Above, a camouflage grouper being followed by a diver-photographer. The fish has narrowly escaped predation by a shark; the bite left a large wound on the side of the body.



Corvina (croaker) in Mexico. So many are caught during the brief spawning season that many are wasted and prices plummet due to market gluts. (Courtesy of Octavio Aburto)



## 紧跟伟大领袖毛主席奋勇前进!

Propaganda poster from the period of the Cultural Revolution.

# CHINA'S COLOUR REVOLUTION

Having autopsied the early years of Communist Party rule and the Great Leap Forward to much acclaim, historian Frank Dikötter has now turned his sights on the Cultural Revolution – a period he divides into ‘red’, ‘black’ and ‘grey’ years and where, surprisingly, he finds the seeds of China’s economic reforms. Meanwhile, journalism students have been gaining insights into this period in Chinese history by studying newspapers from the time.

The Cultural Revolution has been written about by countless scholars, who have picked apart a period that seemed both chaotic and organised – of Little Red Book-waving Red Guards running amok, destroying the old and denouncing counter-revolutionaries, and of labyrinthine backroom politics with Mao at the centre. But if anyone can shed new light on the period, it is Chair Professor of Humanities Frank Dikötter.

Professor Dikötter’s two previous books, *Mao’s Great Famine* and *The Tragedy of Liberation*, drew extensively on Party archives that were newly-opened in the late 1990s and contained reports that the Central Government had otherwise kept out of view. He unveiled cruel directives, such as killing quotas, an official disregard for lives lost, and the impacts on ordinary Chinese.

He returned to these sources for his latest book – albeit probably for the last time because the Government has started to pull down the shutters on its archives – and has again lifted a veil on a period that many might have thought was exhausted of new insights.

“There are books and books written about the ‘court politics’ of the time, some of them very



“ The punchline is, the people are as usual far ahead of their own government. The people are the true architects of economic reforms, not Deng Xiaoping. ”

Professor Frank Dikötter

### Professor Frank Dikötter’s division of the Cultural Revolution

Red years	1966–1967
Black years	1968–1971
Grey years	1971–1976

good, others not so convincing, but in the end very few have anything to say about what the Cultural Revolution actually meant to people of all walks of life,” he said.

His narrative starts with the aftermath of the failed Great Leap Forward of 1958–1961, which killed at least 45 million people and left Mao in a precarious position. Mao was determined to protect his position and his legacy and by 1966 he was ready to move – or at least, to get others to move for him.

### One thing after another

At Mao’s urging, the Red Guards rose up in 1966–1967 – what Professor Dikötter calls the ‘red years’ of the Cultural Revolution, when students attacked teachers and ordinary people attacked Party members. “These are the years of willed chaos, where the Chairman uses the people at large to unsettle Party members, including his close colleagues in the higher echelons of power,” he said.

This turmoil was followed by the ‘black years’ of 1968–1971 when a military dictatorship restored order. Soldiers fanned out to factories, schools, government units and other areas of daily life. Purges affected up to one in 50 ordinary people. The planned economy, which in the countryside had been relaxed during the red years, came back with a vengeance.

But none of that sufficiently soothed Mao’s paranoia about his legacy. He turned against the

military, which was allied with Mao’s number two Lin Biao, who died mysteriously in a plane crash in 1971. The internal chaos in the Communist Party that ensued led to a period that Professor Dikötter calls the ‘grey years’, from 1971 to 1976.

Here is where Professor Dikötter’s archival work is revelatory. He found reports compiled by the Party’s own investigators that revealed the Cultural Revolution was failing in its aims – it was not overturning the old culture or capitalism, but quite the opposite.

“The Cultural Revolution started off as an attack against the Party itself, unleashed by the Chairman himself. Now that the army is gone, ordinary people realise that the Cultural Revolution has badly damaged the organisation of the Party, that Party members no longer have the clout they once had.”

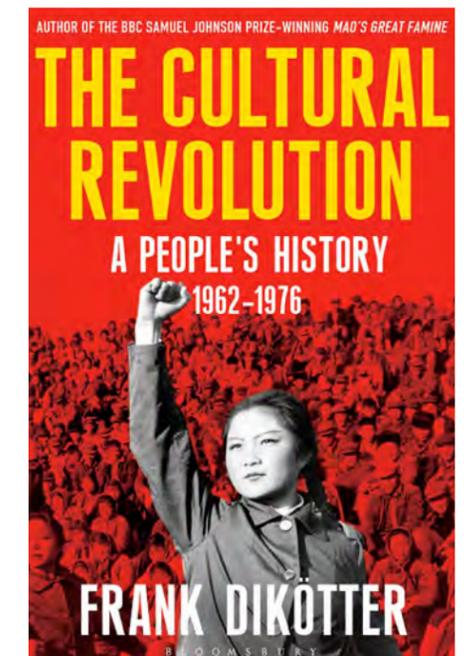
### People take things into their own hands

And so they embark on a ‘silent revolution’, in which whole villages turn capitalist by setting up markets and trading on the black market. “This was the biggest discovery of the archives,” he said. “The pretence of the collective economy is maintained because farmers give a share of their private crop to the local cadres who can then deliver what they have to deliver to the State. They keep the State off their back.”

All of this happened some years before Deng Xiaoping came to power and heralded economic reforms – it was even starting to happen during the Cultural Revolution, when there was a thriving black market in aluminium badges of Mao. “The punchline is, the people are as usual far ahead of their own government. The people are the true architects of economic reforms, not Deng Xiaoping,” Professor Dikötter said.

In that sense, the Cultural Revolution was a period of transition from the experimentation and terrible collectivisation failures of the first 17 years under Communist rule, to the market-oriented economy that persists today. But it has also left a darker legacy, he said: “As ordinary people were able to wrench basic economic freedoms away from the State, the Party became even more determined to repress their political aspirations.”

Having pulled the roots of modern China into the light, Professor Dikötter’s next project is to look at how dictators, such as Mao, Hitler, Stalin and Kim Il Sung, forge their image and build up a cult of personality. “You cannot truly understand the machinery of repression without looking at the cult of personality. They go hand in hand,” he said.



The Cultural Revolution: A People’s History, 1962–1976 is published by Bloomsbury.



A group of Chinese children in uniform holding Mao Zedong's 'Little Red Book' during China's Cultural Revolution.

### Historic perspective

If Twitter had been around during the Cultural Revolution, what would Chairman Mao have tweeted? A project by the Journalism and Media Studies Centre seeks to provide an answer.

Fifty years after the start of China's Cultural Revolution, students and alumni of the Journalism and Media Studies Centre (JMSC) found new angles and insight into the historic event when they compiled new articles based on the original reporting in papers dating back to their parents' birth dates.

Director of the JMSC's China Media Project Mr Qian Gang said the thinking behind the exercise was to give students insight into the lives and socio-economic conditions in China as it would have been experienced by their forbears. The 'Birthday Papers Project' began as a class assignment for which students were asked to research news reports which were published on the day their parents were born and to use them as a basis for analysis of the historical period.

Such was the interest in the assignment that it grew into a full-blown project, drawing information not only from national and local newspapers but also on video and audio recordings from the time. Qian Gang also teaches at Peking University Shenzhen Graduate School, and his students there did a Birthday Papers Project too. Some contributors have even travelled back to their hometowns to search the archives of local newspapers.

The JMSC students have been producing two or three of these 'newspapers' a week since January. The first ones focussed on events leading up to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which began on May 16, 1966, with a public notification from Chairman Mao Zedong warning the country that enemies of communism had infiltrated the Party and needed to be purged.



“ Students are challenged to sort out the truth from the propaganda and work out which materials are valuable. ”

Mr Qian Gang

One paper that received a lot of attention was written by Master of Journalism student Lei Feifei, who considered what Mao might have 'tweeted' in the run-up to and during the Cultural Revolution. Her imagined tweets included: "I'm a Party member and I'm a citizen. You [referring to Deng Xiaoping] don't allow me to participate in the Party conference and that is a violation of Party rules. You [referring to Liu Shaoqi] don't allow me to speak and that is a violation of the Constitution."

References and links to Lei Feifei's article appeared briefly on social media inside Mainland China, but have since been removed by government censors.

### Returning to the scene

Qian Gang said that studying the birthday papers enabled the students to "return to the scene and to seek historical evidence, truth and interest in the written record of the time. Students are challenged to sort out the truth from the propaganda and work out which materials are valuable. Through this method, they learn how to turn journalism history into personal narratives. In the end, they get a better idea of the context around important historical points."

Students felt the project gave them a better idea of the ongoing power struggles within the Communist Party, foreign policy issues and how disasters such as the Great Famine of 1960–1961 occurred. The papers also revealed much about how people suffered through the Cultural Revolution. Some of the students wrote about actors and actresses who were purged for their involvement in the arts.

The Birthday Papers Project has also attracted press attention within Hong Kong, gaining coverage in several local papers. ■



Mr Qian Gang teaching students how to 'read newspapers' in a different way during one of his classes.



Reimagined in a class exercise – tweets from Mao: "I'm a Party member and I'm a citizen. You [referring to Deng Xiaoping] don't allow me to participate in the Party conference and that is a violation of Party rules. You [referring to Liu Shaoqi] don't allow me to speak and that is a violation of the Constitution."



An alumni reunion dinner in celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of HKU's Master of Social Sciences in Criminology.

# CRIMINAL PASSIONS

Hong Kong's only postgraduate programme in criminology – whose alumni include senior police and customs officers and judges – celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year with retrospectives of the trends and peculiarities of Hong Kong crime.

What do cigarette smugglers of the 1990s have in common with the parallel traders of today? A whole lot, says Professor Karen Joe Laidler, who has co-authored a paper on insights gleaned over 30 years from dissertations by students of the Master of Social Sciences in Criminology – students who have come from legal and law enforcement backgrounds and had access to data that is out of reach of ordinary researchers.

The output of these students reveals the trends of crime in Hong Kong where, unsurprisingly, economic crime has predominated, including the cigarette smuggling explored in a paper by Ho Shi-king in 1994.

Cigarette smuggling had begun to boom in the early 1990s when the Government increased the retail tax by 50 per cent. Cigarettes were sent

across the border as exports – which were not taxed – then smuggled back to sell at half the market price or less. The public expressed little concern about this activity, instead focussing complaints on the smuggling of luxury goods aboard *tai fei* (speedboats).

Fast forward to the present day where cigarette smuggling continues – 1.4 million cigarette sticks seized at the border on just one day in July 2016 with a market value of about HK\$3.8 million and duty potential of about HK\$2.6 million – and so does public unconcern about this activity. Instead, protests focus on parallel traders who take Hong Kong-sourced goods across the border in suitcases and trolleys.

“With cases like this, we’re able to showcase the development of the criminology field as it relates to our students who have been practitioners,” Professor Laidler said. “The patterns of smuggling and the associated response in the past are an important context for understanding cross-border smuggling of everyday commodities today.”

## ‘Cultural flavour’

The insights from the dissertations also extend across a range of other issues relating to crime and law enforcement in Hong Kong – from juvenile delinquency, gender and the cultural

landscape behind crime to correctional services and police and policing. More importantly, they highlight the particular nature of Hong Kong crime, and at particular times in the city’s history. “The crimes themselves that the students write about are not unique, it’s the way they are done that gives them a kind of cultural flavour,” she said.

Apart from cigarette smuggling, the students report on such phenomena as the infiltration of triads into the interior decorating business in the late 1990s, counterfeit credit cards (Hong Kong and Malaysia accounted for nearly one-third of counterfeit losses globally from 1989 to 1991), the outcomes of imposing British and Western correctional methods in an Asian society, and police sub-culture, which is characterised by such things as regular curry lunches to establish

bonds and communication channels and the fact that triads and police worship the same god, *Kwan Ti*.

Professor Laidler’s retrospective of the students’ work was co-authored with her colleague in the Department of Sociology Professor Maggy Lee, and published in a special edition of the *Hong Kong Sociological Association Journal* as part of the Criminology programme’s 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations (see panel).

“This remains the only taught postgraduate programme on criminology in Hong Kong. These are more than dissertations, they illustrate the role this kind of work can play in documenting history and helping to explain why things are the way they are today,” Professor Laidler said. ■



“ These are more than dissertations, they illustrate the role this kind of work can play in documenting history and helping to explain why things are the way they are today. ”

Professor Karen Joe Laidler



Professor Karen Joe Laidler (second from left) and alumni of 2015, celebrating the journal publication of findings from their dissertation group project on parallel trading and policing.

## A gruesome gallery

Anniversary commemorations for the Master of Social Sciences in Criminology had the usual and the unusual – including a gruesome art show on the theme of famous Hong Kong crimes.

The usual included an exhibition, *HKU Criminology Through the Years*, that was held on campus in April and consisted of informative panels about the interesting findings from student dissertations, research by HKU academic staff, and related artwork.

There were also film screenings in March, organised with Anti-480 – Anti Sexual Violence Resource Centre, an alumni reunion attended by 150 people, and a symposium on the development of the criminology field in Hong Kong.

Out of the ordinary, though, was the Victoria Crime art exhibition co-presented with Artify



Artist Dragon Ken, Tang Tsz-kin at the Victoria Crime exhibition co-presented by the Department of Sociology and Artify Gallery.

Gallery. The exhibition had been pulled together for an earlier show and was re-mounted specially for the Master of Social Sciences in Criminology anniversary in March. Artists used paintings, 3D models, photographs and comic strips to give vivid interpretations of four

notorious Hong Kong crimes: the ‘jars’ murder, Hello Kitty murder, strawberry milkshake murder and the parent killer case. Horrific but fascinating, the artworks and other events illustrated the darker side of Hong Kong life and the efforts to contain it.



Historical documents on the founding of the Master of Social Sciences in Criminology programme.



Dr Wong's team running dance training workshops for the elderly.

# BALANCING ACT

Balance impairment among the elderly often leads to serious issues such as falls, broken bones, and long convalescences in hospital. A new initiative hopes to improve the situation through dancing.

An unusual experiential learning course run earlier this year saw students learning how to do balance assessments while running dance training workshops for the elderly to see if dancing could contribute to geriatric rehabilitation, specifically fall prevention.

Funded by HKU's Gallant Ho Experiential Learning Centre and conducted in collaboration with the St Stephen's Church Elderly Group, 'Improving Balance and Preventing Falls in Elderly People through Dancing' was run by students doing Rehabilitation Science as part of their Bachelor of Science in Exercise and Health.

Project Coordinator Dr Thomson Wong from the Division of Behavioural Science, School of Public Health, said the course was designed to benefit both the students and the elderly. "One of the objectives was to enhance students' understanding of the application of rehabilitation science by giving them hands-on experience," he said. "If they don't practise balance assessment in a real setting they may not understand properly the difficulties older people have."

Before the main dance training sessions began the students attended workshops to learn two assessment techniques, the Berg Balance Scale

and the Tinetti Balance and Gait Evaluation. They then underwent basic dance training, so they would be able to dance with elderly in the main workshops and give them encouragement.

## Multiple dance styles

For the elderly participants, there were 12 dance training sessions – two hours each once a week – led by Jacky Mo, President of Hong Kong Western Dance Council. He taught them seven different dance styles – cha-cha, jive, rumba, salsa, waltz, tango and macarena – all modified to fit the age of the dancers.



“Students got hands-on experience in the field of geriatric rehabilitation and elderly fall prevention. They also had the chance to develop their problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, which in the long term will make them capable of developing similar health care programmes for the larger community.”

Dr Thomson Wong

“Jacky moderated the dance moves to match the older people's abilities,” said Dr Wong. “The different dances require different skills – some such as the waltz are slow and dignified, other like the salsa are faster and require frequent turns. The macarena uses more upper body movements, while the cha-cha uses more lower body. The group also did warm-up exercises, stretches and cool-downs.”

All the students attended about four of these, dancing along with the participants and then conducting the balance assessments. The Berg

Scale and Tinetti Evaluation involve marking participants on their ability to do tasks such as standing unsupported with eyes closed, picking an object up off the floor from a standing position, turning 360 degrees and standing on one leg.

Assessment after all training sessions enabled the students to see how their balance improved – as well as their dance technique.

“Students got hands-on experience in the field of geriatric rehabilitation and elderly fall

prevention,” said Dr Wong. “They also had the chance to develop their problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, which in the long term will make them capable of developing similar health care programmes for the larger community.

“The elderly participants gained too,” he added. “Not only did they have fun learning the dances and improving their technique but they also learned about their own balance abilities and limitations. It is hoped this may motivate them to continue to pursue recreational physical activities as a way to lessen their risk of falling.”

An unexpected bonus for both groups was the cross-generational camaraderie. “Both the elderly and the students got a lot out of meeting each other and working together,” said Dr Wong. “There was great interaction between the two age groups, and both sides came away from the programme feeling they would be happy if these workshops continued.”

Asked why the older participants were so keen, Dr Wong answered simply: “Fun. Sometimes exercise can be a chore, but dancing and moving to the music is enjoyable, it makes you feel good. Instead of the more traditional physiotherapy programmes, we thought physical recreation such as dance could be a good way to improve balance in older adults.”

The aim now is to get more funding to develop styles of dance training tailored specifically to improving balance in older people. For those who are reluctant to do exercise in the conventional sense, this could be a way forward.

The next step is to develop a programme of dance exercises designed specifically to help improve balance. “In tai chi, for example, there are 24 styles which target different parts of the body,” said Dr Wong. “With new funding we would like to design different styles of dance to improve specific balance problems.” ■



Students performing balance assessment for one of the elderly participants.



The coming November marks the fifth anniversary of the HKU-Shenzhen Hospital.

# A PIONEER FOR HEALTHCARE REFORM IN CHINA

The eyes of the world are on the HKU-Shenzhen Hospital, which was conceived as a model for reforming and modernising China's healthcare system. Five years since its establishment, the Hospital is well on its way to fulfilling its mission.

On November 14, 2011, the HKU-Shenzhen Hospital was formally established as a bold experiment to bring modern medical practices into China. Under HKU's management with Shenzhen Government support, the pressure was on to act quickly and make an impact. By all sorts of indicators, the enterprise has been a great success to date.

Doctors from all over China and from Hong Kong have come to work at the Hospital and some have come from the UK. Patient numbers have risen steadily to more than 4,000 per day. Thousands of media articles in China have reported on the Hospital's successes, as have overseas outlets such as the *Wall Street Journal*

and specialist health journals. All of this has been achieved in just a few short years, since the Hospital's opening on July 1, 2012.

"We have been going really fast and people in the field say it has never happened that a hospital can reach this kind of magnitude in such a short time," the Hospital's Chief Executive, Professor Grace Tang Wai-king said. "It's tough work but I believe it is something we should do."

The task is about far more than numbers, though. The HKU-Shenzhen Hospital is changing culture. Doctors are not expected to find much of their own funding – unlike other parts of

China, red packets, queue jumping and doctor shopping are not permitted, and the Hospital management system meets international standards. Both healthcare workers and patients are expected to be respectful towards each other.

## New ways make an impact

"Ultimately, we want to have a positive impact on the rest of China," said Professor Patrick Chu, who had been in the UK for 32 years before he came here for a three-year posting as Chief of Service of Medicine in 2012. He continues to shuttle back and forth between Shenzhen and his family in the UK. "This is such a far-sighted, visionary project that HKU has undertaken."

It is happening with the full blessing of the Shenzhen and National Governments, which are starting to extend the Hospital's practices to the rest of their healthcare systems.

Top of the list is the appointment system. People can book through the Internet, app, phone or as walk-in patients. No favours for friends or others – "for nobody else, including myself," Professor Tang said, "we want to keep it very honest and fair." Health bureaus across China are starting to implement a similar system. "We used to say we are the only one, now we say we are the first," she said.



Accompanied by Professor Grace Tang (second from left), Dr Margaret Chan (centre), Director-General of the World Health Organization, paying a visit to the HKU-Shenzhen Hospital.



“ We are trying to bring the best of the University here, with our traditional emphasis on doing work based on strong science and accurate data and on the integrity of the investigators and patient confidentiality. ”

Professor Patrick Chu

The Hospital also has a primary care system that directs patients to general practitioners, rather than going to specialists for everything as is typical in China. Patients are treated through team consultations, rather than cherry-picking their doctors.

Primary care payment is also novel to the Mainland. Patients pay one single fee that includes medicine, and doctors are properly compensated so they do not need red packets. There is a Patients' Charter outlining rights and responsibilities and a Patient Relations Office to build up trust. Extensive training is also offered to healthcare staff to ensure everyone upholds the same standards.

## Teaching and research benefits for HKU

The HKU-Shenzhen Hospital benefits HKU, too. Academic staff attend regularly, attracted by the opportunity to see novel or unusual clinical cases and to enrich their research. Already, they have received some RMB23 million for 35 projects. HKU medical students do short attachments and benefit from exposure to a wider variety of cases – this year more than 700 students will visit the Hospital.

"We are trying to bring the best of the University here, with our traditional emphasis on doing work based on strong science and accurate data and on the integrity of the investigators and patient confidentiality," Professor Chu said, adding: "Without HKU, this Hospital would not exist in its present form. It would become another big hospital in China."

The Hospital will be expanding its research capability. A clinical trials centre will soon open and approval has been received to build a stand-alone research institute. Academics from around China and around the world are also visiting regularly, keen to pursue collaborative research.



Guangdong Party Secretary Mr Wang Yang (centre) led delegation to visit the HKU-Shenzhen Hospital in 2012.



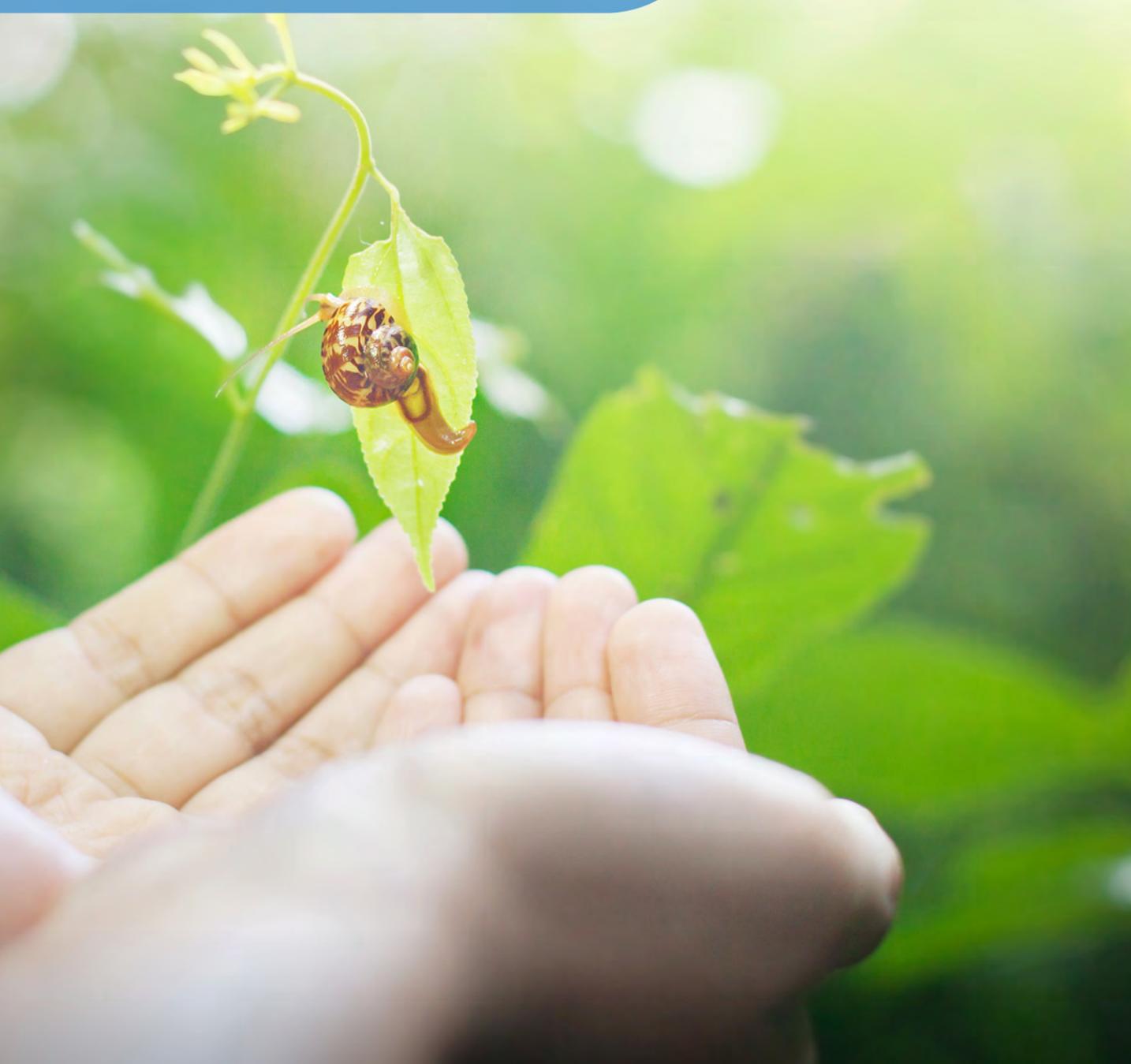
The HKU-Shenzhen Hospital, as a teaching hospital, has introduced Hong Kong's medical system into Shenzhen and serves as a reference for medical system reform in the Mainland.

Professor Tang, who will retire later this year (see page 47), can step down knowing the HKU-Shenzhen Hospital has fulfilled the first stage of its mission. This has required hard work and persistence by all involved and in another

context, she summed up the task poetically: "Rainbows may emerge after the rain, but the path of reform is never paved with flowers." The achievements so far, however, have planted seeds for a promising future. ■

# FIGHTING ON ALL FRONTS

Psychosocial intervention programmes provide vital support in fighting some of life's biggest battles.



“ The focus on spirituality is important, and this is part of a global trend... How we conceptualise spirituality is key, and it is important to note this is not religiosity – people who are not religious can be spiritual and have spirituality. ”

**Dr Celia Chan Hoi-yan**

The Department of Social Work and Social Administration (DSWSA) has been working for around 20 years on developing a Mind-Body-Spirit approach to coping with illness, or serious stress-inducing situations.

Two of the leaders in the field are Dr Celia Chan Hoi-yan and Professor Cecilia Chan Lai-wan, Si Yuan Professor in Health and Social Work. Most recently their techniques have been used in two experimental approaches, both backed by Knowledge Exchange funding: a lung cancer fighter course and a programme designed to help couples going through the stress of in vitro fertilisation (IVF) procedures. While clearly disparate problems – both are times when people are under extreme duress.

Dr Celia Chan Hoi-yan, Assistant Professor at DSWSA, has been collaborating with HKU's Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in developing a self-help psychosocial support exercise called the Body-Mind Wellness Intervention Programme, tailored for women undergoing IVF treatment. Dr Chan's work is taking the research to a new level of

sophistication, and she is seen as a leader in the fertility and women's health fields.

The programme was developed based on the findings of a study carried out between 2013 and 2015 by Dr Chan's team. It was the first longitudinal study in Hong Kong to examine anxiety and depression levels among infertile women whose IVF cycles were unsuccessful, and the results indicated women benefited from the intervention.

Participants were divided into three groups: the first received spiritual contents and behavioural techniques; the second were given the spiritual contents only; and the third got only the health information.

The hypothesis was that those women receiving spiritual contents and practising behavioural techniques during their waiting period after IVF treatment, will have a more significant reduction in anxiety, depression and psychosocial distress than the two other groups, and the findings confirmed this.

“More and more research is confirming the positive effects of psychosocial interventions,” said Dr Chan. “Psychosocial interventions refer to a range of non-drug therapies including individual counselling, group activities, relaxation training, and education on symptom management.”

The programme includes a series of exercises participants can do at home. The Mind and Body aspects include acupressure exercises, qigong, taijiquan and the Spirit part includes reflective exercises.

“The focus on spirituality is important,” Dr Chan said, “and this is part of a global trend. Spirituality looks at how we deal with suffering, be it physical or emotional pain. How we conceptualise spirituality is key, and it is important to note this is not religiosity – people who are not religious can be spiritual and have spirituality.”

## Taboo subject

For women having IVF, stress is often worsened by not being able to talk about what they are going through. “Infertility is still a taboo subject in Chinese society and in Hong Kong there is insufficient recognition of, and support for, the needs of infertile women within both their social and familial networks,” said Dr Chan.

“Undergoing IVF is a life-changing experience. In most cases it fails – the success rate is under 30 per cent – so for most there will not be a happy outcome. Also, the IVF process itself is demanding both physically and mentally.”

IVF begins with hormonal treatment, followed by egg retrieval, then egg transfer, after which there is a two-week waiting before doctors can confirm if the process has been successful and pregnancy has been achieved.

“We start briefing the women before the process begins, so they know what to expect and can get into a positive frame of mind,” said



The self-help 'Body-Mind Wellness Intervention Programme' is a self-administered psychosocial programme designed specifically for women undergoing IVF treatment. Every participant receives a booklet of self-help body-mind techniques.



Professor Cecilia Chan (sixth from left), Dr Celia Chan (seventh from right) and the Body-Mind-Spirit team.

Dr Chan. “The most stressful time for them is the two-week waiting period.”

Based on the 2013–2015 study’s results, the team developed a pilot psychosocial intervention exercise attended by 42 participants. “The initial reaction from some women was, ‘why should I do this – this is private’,” said Dr Celia Chan. “But those who came said it really helped. It also offers most of them a unique opportunity to meet other women in the same situation. It is a chance to share what they are going through.

“We hope it will help bridge a gap in psychological services in Hong Kong. In other countries counselling is mandatory for women undergoing IVF. The UK, for example, already has self-help programmes. There is no tradition of counselling in this area in Hong Kong, despite the fact that there are so many psychological, social and ethical issues associated with IVF. Part of the problem is lack of resources – we need more funding for this kind of counselling.

Dr Chan’s team is currently recruiting a second group of participants for the next set of workshops. They come from both public and private hospitals, and are told about the programme by doctors, nurses and embryologists.

Since 2010, Dr Chan has also been working with the Hong Kong Society for Reproductive Medicine, collaborating on running training courses for medical staff and social workers to give them the psychosocial mindset to provide more holistic care for their patients. Thirty healthcare professionals have attended each of

the four courses run so far – attending 10 lectures and a personal growth workshop.

Additionally, Knowledge Exchange funding also supports people who miscarry after IVF treatment has resulted in pregnancy. “This is a very traumatic experience, and services such as bereavement counselling can help,” said Dr Celia Chan. “For women undergoing IVF, we want the intervention programme to help them look at their life as a whole, and see that it has worth whether or not it includes children.”

### Living with lung cancer

Professor Cecilia Chan is another key pioneer in psychosocial intervention, having first worked in this field in 1993 in collaboration with Stanford University’s Department of Psychology, which developed psychosocial groups to help patients with end-stage breast cancer. She published the first edition of her Body-Mind-Spirit training manual back in 2001. The book, entitled *An Eastern Body-Mind-Spirit Approach*, is currently undergoing a third update.

She currently heads up the DSWSA’s research team working in collaborating with the Hong Kong Cancer Fund on the Lung Cancer Fighter Course. “Research findings have confirmed the positive effects of psychosocial interventions as a complementary therapy to medical treatments,” said Professor Cecilia Chan. “In the case of lung cancer, patients today have a better chance of a cure or prolonged survival than ever before, but they still need to be able to cope with intense stress of living with and fighting this illness.

“We have developed a holistic approach to dealing with the challenges that lung cancer patients and their family caregivers face on their journey with this cancer. Previously, intervention was done with patients alone, but when someone has cancer the whole family is effected by their illness. Often the family is more stressed by it than the patient. If the family can learn to cope they can help the patient deal with the illness, so these courses have mutual benefits.”

The course teaches patients and caregivers about the disease itself and related symptoms, such as pain, fatigue and shortness of breath, as well as the physical side-effects of treatments like chemotherapy. Then it explores with them the mental effects such as depression, lack of sleep and anger.

“Cancer releases many different emotions within the family,” said Professor Cecilia Chan. “It can enhance relationships, bringing people closer in a time of strife, but often it also sparks disputes, especially when difficult decisions have to be made. In extreme cases, feelings can become so entangled that one person’s illness ends up becoming a disaster for the whole family.”

### Positive outcomes

Results after the first programme, which was undertaken by 65 pairs of patients and caregivers, have been very positive. Participants said they felt better able to cope after the course, happier in themselves and often relationships had improved.



“Our work aims to ascertain the value of psychosocial intervention as a tool in the battle to cope with life-changing events.”

Professor Cecilia Chan Lai-wan

This is in keeping with international studies which have also shown that when patients’ coping capacity is enhanced after intervention, not only their health indicators improve, but the quality of life of their caregivers also improves. The research by the HKU team has demonstrated that, after participating in psychosocial interventions, patients showed improved immunity, reduced pain and depressive symptoms, better sleep quality, a slowing down of disease progression, a lower rate of recurrence and prolonged survival. Their self-efficacy and skills to cope with disease symptoms were also enhanced.

In the early sessions, patients are put in one group and caregivers in another. Senior Research Assistant Michelle Tam Yi-jun explained: “This is because patients often can’t talk explicitly about their illness to family as they don’t want to burden them, but they find they can talk with other cancer sufferers.

“And it is equally important for the caregivers, who tend to put their own lives on hold while

caring for a family member with cancer. The caregivers also find they can say things they can’t say to the patients – including expressing anger. Often they find the illness harder to accept than the patient does – they can get angry at the patient’s stoicism. Further, both the patient groups and the caregivers say they felt it was OK to cry in the group, which was a relief as they didn’t want to cry in front of each other.”

Some exercises the pairs are asked to undertake during the course are specifically aimed at encouraging them to talk about what is happening – in fact some of their homework necessitates it. A mother and son who participated said before the intervention sessions they couldn’t bear to discuss her illness. But then because of the assignments they had to start talking, and now they are able to discuss it openly. “Even though the mother has been diagnosed as stage four cancer,” said Miss Tam, “they are using the time remaining to create happy experiences, and it has brought them closer.”

Professor Cecilia Chan, concluded: “Our work aims to ascertain the value of psychosocial intervention as a tool in the battle to cope with life-changing events. For patients who have been diagnosed with end-stage lung cancer we want to help them to learn to treasure every moment. Don’t waste time on worrying or being angry, channel energy into enjoying life. The intervention encourages them to share their values, to think about what is important in life and to pass those thoughts on to their families. This is more valuable than leaving them money.”

Dr Celia Chan and Professor Cecilia Chan have worked – together and separately – on psychosocial research for some 15 years. “We want to develop evidence-based practices,” said Dr Celia Chan. “That is in keeping with global trends, and under Professor Cecilia Chan’s leadership, Social Work at HKU is moving in this direction.” ■



A mock group therapy session.



# IT TAKES A VILLAGE

A team that encompasses local residents, academia and the private sector has joined forces to embark on a long-term programme to develop a blueprint for the revitalisation of villages and rural communities in Hong Kong and other Asian cities in ways that are both innovative and sustainable.

This impactful project, entitled ‘Living Water and Community Revitalisation – An Agriculture-led Action, Engagement and Incubation Programme at Lai Chi Wo’, aims to put the life back into a wilting village community by implementing sustainability initiatives and innovations in farming, training, education and research.

Located in the remote northeastern part of the New Territories, Lai Chi Wo is a traditional Hakka village which declined because of changes in economic circumstances, including China’s open-door policy that made it difficult for Hong Kong’s rural communities to compete with supplies from the Mainland. “Many of the inhabitants moved elsewhere to make a better living,” explained Dr Winnie Law, Principal Lecturer from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Principal Investigator on the Lai Chi Wo project. “We hope to put the life back into this community through reviving its agriculture, as well as conserving it as a valuable part of our rural heritage.”

Originally initiated by the Kadoorie Institute, the multi-faceted project is now housed under the Faculty of Social Sciences’ Policy for Sustainability Lab. Because of its cross-disciplinary nature, support comes from many sectors. These include: from academia – HKU’s Department of Civil Engineering, Department of Geography, School of Biological Sciences and Division of

Landscape Architecture; from the government – the Environment Bureau and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department; and from the private sector – HSBC, which has been involved with this pioneering venture from the start.

Asked why Lai Chi Wo was chosen, the Faculty of Social Sciences’ Ms Katie Chick, who is the Project Manager in charge of the development and implementation of the project, said: “It is rich in both ecological and cultural value. Even though the population has been diminished there is still a strong community feel – a sense of ownership and

belonging. The residents are open-minded about introducing change.”

In addition, the village needed help. “The farmland once comprised active paddy terraces, but these had been abandoned since the late 1970s,” Ms Chick continued. “The project is re-introducing farming with more consideration given to eco- and environmentally-friendly methods. The hope is to establish a new mutually beneficial relationship between nature and culture.”

Sustainability is key and the team is introducing a whole slew of measures.



Dr Winnie Law (left) leading overseas visitors to explore the Hakka culture in Lai Chi Wo.



“ We hope to put the life back into this community through reviving its agriculture, as well as conserving it as a valuable part of our rural heritage. ”

Dr Winnie Law

They cover 13 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals suggested by the United Nations in its Transforming our World agenda.

## Long-term initiative

The revitalisation programme will take place over several years. Initial preparations began in 2013, including leasing the land, building relationships and trust with the villagers and finding interested community groups – such as the Hong Kong Countryside Foundation, the Produce Green Foundation and the Conservancy Association – to help prepare the six hectares of farmland surrounding the village for the new agricultural initiatives.

“For the living water aspect of the programme, these include the introduction of a ‘whole catchment management approach’ where freshwater/wetland habitats are understood and monitored through hydrology and ecological research conducted by University members,” said Dr Law. “The data collected will be used to formulate a holistic plan to manage the freshwater and biodiversity resources of Lai Chi Wo in a sustainable manner,” she continued.

Research initiatives encompass many areas including: hydrological modelling; testing and evaluating a variety of eco-friendly and low-carbon farming methods; monitoring biodiversity; reviewing the feasibility of re-introducing species such as the rice fish (*Oryzias*); managing artificial wetlands; experimenting with social enterprises, and carrying out an oral history study.

The programme is a major educational undertaking across the community – at large, as well as in Lai Chi Wo – and the number of people who are getting involved is substantial. “We have trained 60 people to be community revitalisation leaders, and more than 3,000 visitors have gone on ecotours of the village and its surrounding land,” said Dr Law.

More than 3,000 students have also joined the initiative. “From HKU, the opportunities to participate include via university internships, General Education and Leadership programmes, PhD and MPhil research study and undergraduate and taught masters programmes,” said Dr Law. “And in addition to university students getting involved, we also

have secondary school students doing curriculum-based education projects, and primary and kindergarten children taking part in environmental art initiatives.

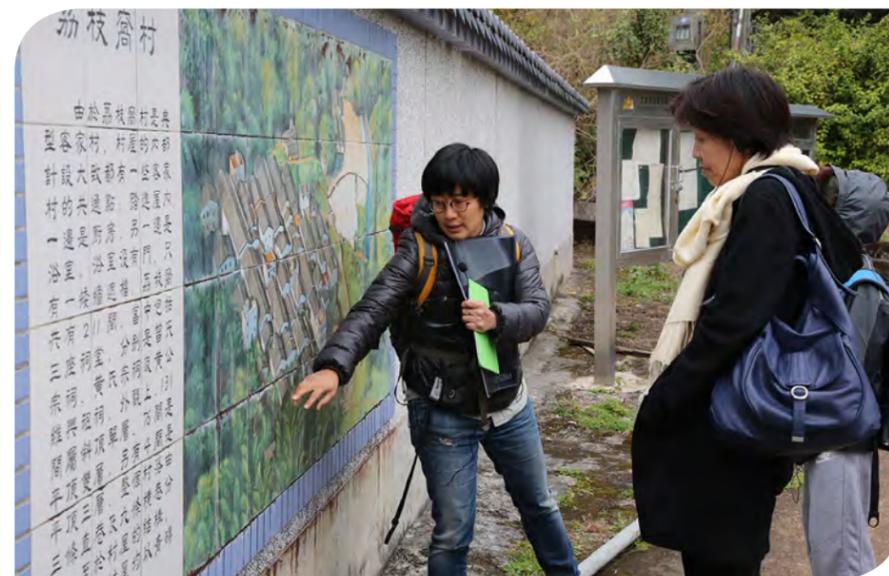
“There are options for teachers too. So far, 150 have participated in our sustainable rural development training scheme for senior high school teachers in Geography, Liberal Studies and Biology. And, we also do volunteer projects which corporations can get involved in.”

Another programme offers training to people who are interested in setting up small farms and local businesses in Lai Chi Wo, and it has attracted emigrated villagers and city-dwellers. As well as reviving the traditional rice paddies in a more sustainable form, the village’s farmland is now set to eco-friendly organic farming of over 10 kinds of produce. ■

## Policy for Sustainability Lab

The programme is now part of an even larger undertaking by the Faculty of Social Sciences, namely the launch of its Policy for Sustainability Lab (PSL). Associate Dean (Innovation) Professor Danny Lam Wai-fung, who is Director of the PSL, said that its mission is to contribute to the attainment of sustainability and specifically to incubate novel solutions to the challenges set out in the United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This includes developing innovative solutions to inform policy on environment sustainability, as well as raising people’s awareness, facilitating collective action and fostering civic engagement.

“In short, the PSL looks at innovative solutions for sustainability challenges,” he said. “The Lai Chi Wo project – the whole of it – is a social innovation that delivers integrated sustainability well-being. It is also an action project that delivers strong knowledge exchange value to society.”



Ms Katie Chick (left) explaining the village orientation to the representative of the Consulate-General of Japan in Hong Kong.



At one of the capacity building workshops for students in nursing and medical school.

# DISASTER-PRONE ACADEMIC HELPS OTHERS TO HEAL

By both fate and design, Dr Christian Chan has found himself in the wake of natural disasters, observing and helping communities cope with the psychological after-effects.

From Kobe to Hurricane Katrina to Sichuan to Tacloban, Dr Christian Chan has encountered the effects of natural disasters on communities.

First, in 2005, he was living in Kobe, Japan during the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations of the Great Hanshin earthquake and saw the lingering impact it had on the city. Then during graduate school, he worked with his advisor on

pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina data from Louisiana that tracked psychological well-being, among other things. And before his studies were over, in 2008, the Sichuan earthquake struck and he gave up a promising internship to spend the summer there working with survivors.

"Kobe planted a seed, Katrina gave me a lot of important training, and Sichuan taught me a lot

because you are facing immense suffering head-on and you have to do something about it," he said. "I was just a student and I had very little to offer at the time, at least that's how I remember it. But it was a very important experience for me and it also planted a seed."

However, when he subsequently took up an assistant professorship in the Department of



Two of the vessels that were pushed ashore by the storm surge in Tacloban.



“If you just go in for the short term, we know from the literature that it can be detrimental. People have established a trusting relationship with you and then you disappear – it can do more harm than good. If you really want to make an impact, then commitment is necessary.”

Dr Christian Chan

Psychology in 2012, he thought those seeds would never sprout, given Hong Kong is relatively disaster-free. He put disasters behind him and proceeded to work on other projects, such as the psychology of apologies. But in November 2013 the Philippines was struck by Typhoon Haiyan, the 25<sup>th</sup> typhoon that year, which was immediately followed by a tsunami-like storm surge that devastated the community of Tacloban.

## Long-term relationship

Dr Chan knew he had both knowledge and experience to offer the survivors and within a month he was in the Philippines. He connected with a non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Manila and was brought to Tacloban where, to his surprise, he discovered he was the only psychologist on site.

"I came somewhat prepared, but I didn't expect to be the only one," he said. "So I started partnering with church pastors and other relief providers focussing on not just physical needs and necessities, but also trying to take care of people psychologically and spiritually."



Dr Christian Chan (first from right), with his local collaborators, Drs Meredith Labarda and Melba Maggay, and one of the workshop participants.

He made the most of scarce resources and began to train the trainers – something he quickly decided needed to be a long-term project.

"Usually by the fifth or sixth month after a natural disaster, all the big NGOs are gone," he said. "But with disaster mental health, if you just go in for the short term, we know from the literature that it can be detrimental. People have established a trusting relationship with you and then you disappear – it can do more harm than good. If you really want to make an impact, then commitment is necessary. So I've been focussing on long-term relief and rehabilitation."

He has made 10 trips to the Philippines, partly with Knowledge Exchange funding, to train 'wounded healers' like doctors, pastors, nurses, teachers and social workers who have direct contact with the community. He partners with pastors who provide a spiritual focus to the training while he focusses on psychological needs.

## Meeting needs

"We've developed a model that is quite promising," he said. "First we do focus groups and assessments, then we put together modular workshops that are framed around things people can relate to. For instance, when you

mention depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, most people don't know what you're talking about, but everyone cares about sleep. So we say, let's first talk about your sleep. We also have workshops on stress and coping, grief, and reconciliation between groups."

The model was developed through surveys that were conducted each time service was provided, to ensure it was meeting people's needs.

While the model is not 'one-size-fits-all', Dr Chan was able to draw on the experience to provide before-and-after training to volunteers who went from Hong Kong to Nepal after last year's earthquake.

"The long-term work may not be very sexy but it is extremely important and there's definitely a void in both the scientific literature and the psyche of society at large," he said. On that note, he hopes to address the gap by developing his work on disaster mental health in the Philippines into research projects. A former doctor from Tacloban has enrolled as his PhD student, which will help to get the ball rolling.

"I do think Hong Kong people owe the Philippines a lot. We have two generations of Hongkongers brought up by Filipino domestic helpers," Dr Chan added. ■



Dr Christian Chan (centre) provided before-and-after training to volunteers who went from Hong Kong to Nepal.



## HKU'S PEOPLE PERSON

Professor Terry Au Kit-fong's cheerful personality and expertise in psychology make her a perfect fit to be the new Vice-President and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Staffing and Resources) and deal with the high aspirations and high emotions of the University's human resources issues.

“ The really exciting part of my job is that there's a lot of engagement and I can try to come up with good ideas to make HKU better, to raise our standards and then make sure that colleagues are reasonably happy and feel that this is a caring environment. ”

Professor Terry Au Kit-fong

Professor Terry Au Kit-fong well understands the impact of good mentoring and sympathetic managers. As a bright student from a modest background (her father had only six years of schooling, her mother had none and they ran a small shop in Tsuen Wan), she benefited from teachers and scouts who spotted her potential and helped her in her path to Harvard and Stanford universities. As a professor at UCLA, she learned a great deal from her Department Chair who helped lift the department's research ranking into the top five in the United States, from below 10<sup>th</sup> place.

Now she is the mentor of mentors herself, in charge of academic staffing and resources at HKU, and she is bringing the lessons she learned to the University as a whole.

“My strategy is to take a leadership role in getting other senior colleagues, like professors, to mentor other colleagues. This is really about mobilisation and engagement, so the senior colleagues have a greater sense of ownership and care more about what's going on, and the colleagues who benefit from their mentoring can feel that HKU is a caring place,” she said.

To achieve that, she is encouraging staff to share knowledge about how to set and achieve high standards, and make those standards transparent. In the spring, she organised a forum where academics with top-rated research offered tips on how to develop internationally-excellent and world-leading research. She also held a leadership workshop to help department heads and high-flyers develop their mentoring and people management skills. “We want them to make sure colleagues are reasonably happy so that we can be happily productive,” she said.

### Gender gap and family life

An important aspect of that happiness is addressing gaps. The gender gap is a big concern – women comprise about 40 per cent of assistant professors but only 20 per cent of full professors. Professor Au has organised lunch talks with women academics to develop policy ideas for consideration by the Senior Management Team that could start to right

some of the imbalances, particularly in leadership roles.

She is also very keen on issues related to family life. “I'm a developmental psychologist so when I think about gender policy, I also think about the well-being of the family and the children – what is good for the family and what is good for the people we care about instead of just making it a gender issue,” she said.

This means introducing policies that address all aspects of family life, including fatherhood and caregiving to ailing relatives. HKU has done well in some areas, not so well in others, she said. For example, it allows both mothers and fathers to extend their tenure-clock if they have a baby in that period, but does not have a University-wide policy to provide teaching relief to new mothers (although some individual departments do this, including the Department of Psychology which Professor Au headed before taking up her new post).

Retirement age is another contentious issue. The current official age is 60, which almost everyone agrees is too young, but suddenly increasing the

retirement age across the board is not financially feasible. She said the University was trying to offer more flexibility so productive members of staff could continue to work in some form, as full-time professors or in more specialised roles including Professor of Practice (already in place for several years), Professor of Teaching or Professor of Research (the latter two have been recently approved).

### Seeking happy solutions

While Professor Au is visibly energised at the prospect of finding solutions to these issues, one thing does drain her: having to handle complaints. “Dealing with complaints is very time consuming and it's also very emotionally draining. Most colleagues don't file a complaint unless they really have a grievance and they're really unhappy,” she said.

The current system requires interviewing both parties at the departmental and faculty level and often at the University level, and going through a back-and-forth process of written submissions. She hopes to bring mediation into the process as early as possible and she is also in the midst of organising a conflict management workshop for department heads, on how to defuse problems and avoid escalating them.

“The really exciting part of my job is that there's a lot of engagement and I can try to come up with good ideas to make HKU better, to raise our standards and then make sure that colleagues are reasonably happy and feel that this is a caring environment. If I could move HKU even just a little bit more in that direction, I would consider I have done a good job,” she said. ■



First 'Lunch and Learn' series for women academics featuring Professor Helen Siu (left) from Yale in June, 2016.



## THE WRITE STUFF

With more than 30 years of covering international news under his belt, the new head of the Journalism and Media Studies Centre Professor Keith Richburg brings a global vision to the role.

“When we have the ability to do live crossovers, I would like us to become the place in Asia that TV companies come to for opinions and interviews – and that is across the faculties. If they need an expert to talk to, I want them to think of HKU first.”

**Professor Keith Richburg**

“Throughout my career, Asia has kept calling me back,” said Professor Keith Richburg, the new Director the Journalism and Media Studies Centre (JMSC), when asked about the path that brought him to HKU.

American by birth, Professor Richburg has spent much of his journalistic career with the *Washington Post*, including three separate stints for them in Asia. In that time, he has covered several coup attempts in the Philippines, the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia, the collapse of the Suharto regime in Indonesia, the Asian financial crisis and the handover of Hong Kong’s sovereignty in 1997. And, when he wasn’t covering Asia, Professor Richburg’s overseas career also spanned France, Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan.

He now brings his extensive international experience to the JMSC, taking over the job of Director from Professor Chan Yuen-ying, who founded the Centre – initially working from a couple of rooms – in 1999. “I call it the House that Ying Built,” says Professor Richburg. “She did an extraordinary job, over the years she has developed its reach and reputation. I want to continue her vision, as well as taking the Centre in new directions.”

### Punching above our weight

He’s particularly keen to build up the JMSC’s overseas connections via his extensive international contacts, both from his career on the *Washington Post*, and his academic network in the United States. “Outreach is a big part of what we can do. I would like to forge links with other universities – to leverage what we have. There is so much interest worldwide in what is going on in China that we can punch above our weight. Overseas students would welcome

opportunities to come here and experience that first-hand.

“It’s a very interesting time to be in Asia, given the political changes across the region – especially in Thailand and the Philippines, the democratisation of Myanmar and, of course, Mainland China’s new place in the world – all those things are on our doorstep. And the world is watching.”

He has ambitions for the Centre’s standing within the region too. “I want the JMSC to be the premier institution for the next generation of journalists in Asia. In the US, if you want to do journalism, your first choice is Columbia, I want JMSC to be the first choice in Asia.”

But, initially, what he wants to do is listen – with academics, teachers, students and administrative staff within the JMSC – to find out what is going well and what could be better. “I am going to listen and learn, and say to people ‘tell me what you want’,” said Professor Richburg. “I’m a great believer in identifying problems and then figuring out how to go about solving them. As Roosevelt put it, ‘bold, persistent experimentation’.”

First steps will be to improve the physical environment of the JMSC. “I would like to introduce more TV screens throughout the building so that we have news channels on all day. We’re already making improvements to the radio studio, and I want to do the same with our TV studio.

“We should be able to do live TV crossovers. While here as a Visiting Professor I had to turn down invitations to do on-air interviews with the BBC and Al Jazeera because we don’t have the right facilities. But when we have the ability

to do live crossovers, I would like us to become the place in Asia that TV companies come to for opinions and interviews – and that is across all faculties. If they need an expert to talk to, I want them to think of HKU first. We have the experts.”

He has already made some changes: “We are revising the basic news writing and reporting class, and looking at the rest of the curriculum too. We are not changing everything, but we are questioning everything to make sure we are covering all that we should be.”

Taking up the role of head of the JMSC brings Professor Richburg’s career full circle. When he first graduated from the University of Michigan he was torn between which way his career should go – academia or journalism. He chose the latter then, but when he retired from the *Washington Post* three years ago, began to reconsider his options and decided the time was right to switch to academia.

“I taught a study group on China at Harvard for one semester in 2013, then in 2014 did a spring semester at Princeton on international journalism. Basically, I got the teaching bug, and started to wonder how I could combine journalism and teaching.” Then last year he came to HKU as a Visiting Professor, and colleagues suggested he apply for the directorship.

“I’m very excited to be here,” he said. “I’m particularly thrilled that one-third of our students are Mainland Chinese who want to learn international reporting techniques. The opportunity to teach the next generation of journalists in Asia is too good to miss. And their reporting experience will start here – I would like the JMSC to be a place that generates great journalism as well as trains great journalists.” ■



Professor Grace Tang and the first baby born at the HKU-Shenzhen Hospital.

# “FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION”

Professor Grace Tang Wai-king has been in the hot seat for some of HKU’s biggest challenges – in particular, reforming a century-old medical curriculum and getting the HKU-Shenzhen Hospital off the ground. As she prepares to retire, she reflects on her achievements.

When Professor Grace Tang was elected Dean of the Faculty of Medicine from 1998 to 2001, she was handed the controversial task of revamping a medical curriculum that had been largely unchanged since 1887. The plan was to edge away from didactic teaching and the need to memorise masses of information, towards problem-based learning (PBL), which asked students to work together on cases, draw on what they knew collectively and then try to fill the gaps.

Detractors worried students would not learn the necessary knowledge. Reformers worried students were being crushed by rapidly-expanding advances in medical knowledge and the need to memorise it all. Since the new curriculum had been approved under her predecessor, Professor Chow Shew-ping, Professor Tang saw no need for further debate. Her job was to make it work.

It was then that she uttered a phrase many colleagues still associate with Professor Tang, a phrase that also sheds light on her iron will: “Failure is not an option”.

If it sounds like a military command, it comes from a place of sound practicality. “I said this because students cannot start all over again. You can’t say, let’s do it like this, perhaps I give you three years to learn by yourself and then you come back for two years and then you graduate as a doctor. That’s very dangerous. So it cannot be like a scientific trial to see which one is better. Once you start on something like this, it must work,” she said.

## Making it work

With that kind of determination, Professor Tang and the Faculty managed to do a magnificent job of transitioning to PBL – other medical schools around the region came to regard HKU as a model for their own curricula and the Asian Medical Education Association was established under HKU’s chairmanship.

But the mantra was not forgotten. Professor Tang has put it to use again as the first Chief Executive of the HKU-Shenzhen Hospital, a project that has also had its share of detractors and challenges but which, like PBL, has been chalking up successes (see page 33).

She came to that role in a roundabout way. After her deanship, she took up the presidency of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine in 2005

and initiated training workshops for health professionals from Mainland China. (She also acquired a law degree during this period – her energy is boundless.) At the end of her term, in 2008, she went to Beijing to bid farewell to the Minister of Health and brought with her a request from the then-Dean of Medicine, Professor Lee Shum-ping, for a hospital. The HKU-Shenzhen Hospital was granted soon after. After some deliberations, Professor Tang agreed to be its Chief Executive in 2011.

By her own reckoning, she was an unusual choice, given she had no experience running a hospital. “But I am not intimidated at all because I have support at HKU and I have assistance from a general manager, a finance manager, human resources manager and so on. And most importantly, this is a public hospital. Ever since I entered medical school, I have been in public hospitals, I know what they ought to be like. And I never cease to ask, I never cease to learn,” she said.

## Pulling out the stops

Under her watch, the Hospital has gone from zero patients to more than 4,000 a day, attracted doctors from Hong Kong and the UK who want to help China to develop its healthcare system, and seen its practices, such as its booking system, adopted by other hospitals in China.

At the same time, Professor Tang has been fierce in insisting the Hospital’s practices and finances are ethical and above board – an effort that is driven by a desire to protect the reputation of both the Hospital and HKU, where she has spent her entire academic professional life. “For this Hospital, ‘failure is not an option’ is really about the name of HKU and its reputation,” she said.

Her own reputation as tough, principled and uncompromising remains unshaken, but there is also another side, said Professor Patrick Chu, who joined the Hospital as Chief of Service of Medicine in 2012.

“Grace takes no prisoners, but the other thing about her is she doesn’t hold grudges. And she may say failure is not an option, but if you are about to fail she will pull all stops out to help you. She has a good and kind heart,” he said.

And one that, after a 50-year long association with HKU as student and staff member, will be earning a well-deserved break. ■

“ Ever since I entered medical school, I have been in public hospitals, I know what they ought to be like. And I never cease to ask, I never cease to learn. ”

**Professor Grace Tang Wai-king**



From left: Former Dean of Medicine Professor Grace Tang, President and Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Mathleson, Dean of Medicine Professor Gabriel Leung and Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Paul Tam at the Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine’s Spring Reception 2016.



Professor Grace Tang (third from left in the first row), the first Chief Executive of the HKU-Shenzhen Hospital, arranged a tour of the Hospital for HKU Council members and Deans.



Teapots celebrating the repeal of the Stamp Act, produced in England for sale to the American colonies in 1766 or after, suggesting the importance of the American export market for British manufacturers. Tea was a popular drink, not yet politicised at the time.

# THE POLITICS OF TEA

The Boston Tea Party is an enduring symbol of American independence, as the founders of the modern-day Tea Party showed when they named their political movement. The thing is, it was a far more self-serving and ramshackle affair than most care to acknowledge.



Philip Dawe, The Bostonian's Paying the Excise-man, or Tarring & Feathering, London, 1774.

John Adams, signatory to the Declaration of Independence and future American President, forgot one thing before heading to the Continental Congress in 1774. He forgot about tea. At the Congress, Adams would support resolutions by the 13 colonies to boycott British goods (including tea) and implement other resistance efforts. But just before launching his journey there, he decided to stop at an inn for refreshments where he ordered his usual cup of tea.

Such mixed signals about tea are the subject of research by Dr James Fichter of the European Studies programme, who is putting finishing touches to the book *Tea's Party: The Politics of Tea in the American Revolution, 1773–1776*.

The famous Boston Tea Party occurred when patriots dumped the tea of the East India Company in the harbour in late 1773 to protest against the lowering of the British tax on tea. This seemingly beneficial act was regarded as sinister because the 100 per cent tax at the time had inspired a thriving underground business that smuggled in tea from The Netherlands to

avoid paying tax. If the tax were lowered, it would make legal imports more attractive and drive out local business.

"The fear was that a tax would push out smugglers and the [British-backed] East India Company would come in and be granted a monopoly over the tea trade. And once the principle of taxation was accepted, then taxes could be raised again in future. This led to the idea of no taxation without representation," he said.

## The British over-react

Parliament responded to the Boston Tea Party with the Coercive Acts, which closed the entire Boston port as punishment. It was an over-reaction to a protest that, as Adams' actions showed, was not so fully embraced by the colonists, but it added fuel to the patriots' fire and led directly to the Continental Congress.

"The tea boycott was symbolic but stupid. They were just depriving themselves of the tea that they owned. People moved to more satisfying



“ The tea boycott was symbolic but stupid. They were just depriving themselves of the tea that they owned. People moved to more satisfying symbols of protest, but the idea of tea as a symbol has endured. ”

Dr James Fichter

symbols of protest, but the idea of tea as a symbol has endured,” Dr Fichter said.

Much of Dr Fichter's research looks at tea in the wider society, where he found newspapers of the day carrying tea advertisements while in the same editions running editorials that advocated a boycott of tea. Propaganda was put out that tea would, among other things, cause stillbirths. It was also “vaguely genderised,” he said, with women portrayed as weak-willed in controlling their tea drinking, leaving it up to the men to be firm in their resolve.

Symbolic burnings of tea could be half-hearted or have ulterior motives. One tea importer whose ship was burned in part at the urging of rival merchants was forced to publish a declaration that he had burned the ship of his free will. Meanwhile, his rivals continued to sell their own tea to American revolutionaries. In a separate case, a shipment of smuggled tea

landed near a small town in New Jersey and patriots seized and burnt it. One patriot, however, was caught with sacks of tea in his pants – he had joined in to get free tea. The man was a neighbour of the patriots and the case was laughed off.

## Higher expectations

Despite these stories, “the British response to the Boston Tea Party was ridiculously over the top,” Dr Fichter said. “This was a private matter – the East India Company's property was destroyed. Why involve the government in punishing a whole population? But Parliament's attitude was that these people needed to obey.”

One question that interested him was why the 13 American colonies protested and other nearby British colonies did not. Present-day Canada stayed out because the French population had been promised freedom of

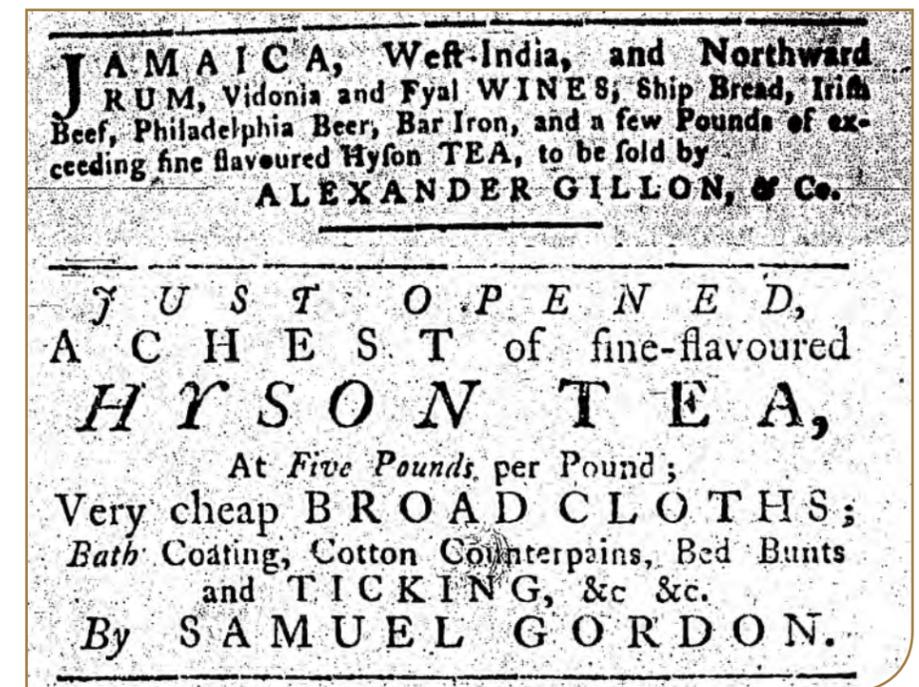
religion after Britain defeated France there in 1763. Jamaican colonists needed military protection from restless slaves. Neither place saw an urgent need for change.

“The patriots had higher expectations because Britain was the freest society at the time. By comparison, there was more cause to protest among the Spanish or French colonists. And Russian peasants didn't have any expectations so they didn't rise up,” he said.

The tea boycott itself was short-lived. By the end of 1775, people were openly consuming tea more or less as before. Thomas Jefferson was even served tea while he wrote the Declaration of Independence in 1776. But the myth of tea as a symbol of protest has endured. ■



Though not actually a sermon, this piece of anti-tea propaganda was printed in both South Carolina and Pennsylvania in 1774.



Tea advertisements from Alexander Gillon (top, from South Carolina Gazette, November 29, 1773) and Samuel Gordon (bottom, from South Carolina Gazette, November 1, 1773).



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