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CRACKING THE GLASS CEILING

HKU Takes on Gender Inequality



Maximising Biodiversity

The first urban park butterfly study in Hong Kong



Experiential Learning in Sri Lanka

Tracking maternal and child health on tea plantations



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CRACKING THE GLASS CEILING

Gender inequality is a problem in academic institutions around the world. The higher ranks remain dominated by men and concern is growing about the downstream effects on everything from women's promotions and tenure, to approval of teaching and research focussed on gender issues. HKU is tackling these problems within its own halls, as well as sexual harassment, and taking the lead among universities locally and globally through its participation in the UN Women's HeForShe initiative. The aim is to learn from each other and start to correct the imbalances.



GENDER ON THE TABLE

Like many universities around the world, HKU has a serious gender imbalance in its senior ranks. Its scholars and administrators are determined to address the problem.

Two figures stand out when talking about gender parity in Hong Kong academia. One is that among Hong Kong's eight institutions funded by the University Grants Council (UGC), fewer than 10 per cent of the 110 positions at Dean level or above are held by women. The other is that although more than half of HKU students are female, fewer than 20 per cent of full professors are female.

The reason these figures stand out is not because they are unique, but because they are the few pieces of data we have about women in academia in Hong Kong.

The first figure came from a study by Dr Sarah Aiston, Honorary Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education, who has produced important research about women in academia in Hong Kong and internationally. Her work in part propelled HKU's President, Professor Peter Mathieson, to sign the University up to HeForShe, the UN Women's movement for gender equality and empowerment of women.

The second figure emerged following a task force set up by the Dean of Arts, Professor

Derek Collins, in December, 2015 to look at gender inequality and related issues within his faculty. Arts was the first faculty to undertake such a study and its figures subsequently were found to echo across the University. Both the Arts Faculty and the University as a whole are now taking actions and planning further measures to address the problem.

All of this makes HKU not so much a leader in gender equity, but a leader in trying to redress the problem. Senior management, staff and students are all being brought on board to identify the solutions, as well as the problems themselves which have been laying under the radar. "Personally, I am impatient for change," Professor Mathieson wrote in the *HeForShe IMPACT 10x10x10 University Parity Report 2016*. "I hope to see rapid progress on this issue."

The nature of the problem

The challenge in defining gender imbalance has been firstly about data. Unlike places like the UK, Hong Kong does not keep detailed information about women in academia. Dr Aiston has produced the most thorough

information to date by digging into the details of each UGC institution, conducting interviews with their senior leaders, surveying women academics in Hong Kong in detail, and comparing the situation of women academics across five countries.

Among her findings was the fact that women held only eight of the 110 top-tier positions in Hong Kong universities as of 2014. "I also looked at the data longitudinally since the 1990s and there has been very little shift. Women are not progressing to senior ranks," she said.

"There is a dangerous discourse that says because 50 per cent of students are women, it's only a matter of time before they come through the pipeline. But the data shows that they are not going to get there without some interventions."

Professor Terry Kit-fong Au has made gender equality a priority since she became Vice-President and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Staffing and Resources) early last year. The statistics speak to the need for change. "Women hold a little under 40 per cent of assistant professorships, a little under 30 per cent



“There is a dangerous discourse that says because 50 per cent of students are women, it's only a matter of time before they come through the pipeline. But the data shows that they are not going to get there without some interventions.”

Dr Sarah Aiston

of associate professorships and a little under 20 per cent of full professorships. So you see this leaky pipeline feeding into the University. We have about half-and-half gender parity at the student level, but along the way we just keep losing women," she said.

Pinpointing the causes is not as easy as some have assumed. The conventional wisdom has been that women are held back by family obligations, but Dr Aiston's research shows this is not necessarily the case.

She did a comparative study involving academics in Hong Kong, Japan, Finland, Germany and the US and found that overall, women academics published less than men, but the situation was worse in Asia. She then looked closely at how women academics spent their time and found they had more teaching, administration and other duties that detracted from research time. Moreover, across the board, women with children and family responsibilities were not significantly less productive than women

without. Nor was the imbalance confined to STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics; it was also present in the humanities and social sciences.

The findings, published in 2015, caused a ripple throughout the academic world.

"This piece of research attracted a lot of attention on social media and was one of Routledge's most read articles in 2015 [Routledge published her findings]," Dr Aiston said. "People were saying, 'oh my god, it's not just about babies and the school run'. There are also systemic practices and structural problems."

Unconscious bias was also a problem, as she discovered in her Hong Kong research. Whereas women academics surveyed tended to cite numerous barriers to advancement, such as lack of mentors, lack of development opportunities and the gender stereotype that men were leaders, the senior university managers that she interviewed tended to talk first about family

obligations. Some even said that women wanted or were expected to spend more time at home.

"There was also this belief in the concept of a meritocracy, which assumes the system is unbiased and the best people for the job get chosen. This is another dangerous discourse. One president said gender was not a factor in promotion, which shows a complete lack of understanding of unconscious bias," Dr Aiston said. Other research has shown that when presented with identical CVs, but given different genders, both men and women are more likely to hire the male candidate.

Taking action

Given Dr Aiston's findings and issues raised on campus by women academics, the University on April 10, 2015, became the first university in the world to launch the United Nations' HeForShe initiative on campus and pledged to improve gender equality (see panel on page 6). "This is



About 300 HKU members participated in the launch event of HeForShe in Loke Yew Hall on April 10, 2015.



HKU hosted the Asia-Pacific Women in Leadership (APWIL) Policy Roundtable on Gender Equity in April, 2016.



“ A case could be made that more diverse leadership makes you more representative because the chances are greater that decision-making will work for the whole institution, not just a group or category of employees or students. ”

Professor Terry Kit-fong Au

not about women or men, it is about crafting a shared vision of human progress for all – about creating a solidarity movement between women and men for the achievement of gender equality,” the University said in a statement at the time. Since then, actions have snowballed, initiated from the centre as well as individual faculties, staff and students.

Arts was the first faculty to look at its own performance. Its Gender Task Force found that over at least the past two decades, the ratio of women receiving full professorships was virtually unchanged at less than 20 per cent. This affected women’s prospects of having retirement extended beyond the age of 60 and meant the Faculty was losing women at a faster rate than men at each level in the hierarchy. “There are stunning inequalities and a glass ceiling which have to do with hiring, promotion and tenure,” said Professor Gina Marchetti, who led the task force.

The task force recommended a number of actions on gender equality and diversity in regards to employment issues, sexual

harassment, leadership and professional development, research, curriculum and academic freedom; these were all accepted at a forum in June, 2016. The Dean also required with immediate effect that the composition of several key committees be changed to have more women and be more diverse, and started to oversee every hire to ensure there were sufficient female candidates.

These achievements inspired Professor Au, who has been working with the Arts task force and other groups across the University to consider how the recommendations can be scaled up to university level and what additional measures are needed. “If we can have more family-friendly policies, that may help women to have a more level playing field,” she said.

The initial output from this work is detailed in the discussion paper ‘Gender Parity Measures for HKU’ endorsed by senior management for wider consultation in late 2016, which outlines existing, planned and recommended actions. At an open forum in January, academic staff helped prioritise the recommendations.

So far, the University has increased the proportion of women at dean level or above from nine per cent to more than 20 per cent. Female representation has been mandated on all appointment and promotion panels. Maternity and paternity leave conditions have been improved, and breastfeeding facilities provided on campus.

Awareness activities have also been launched such as the ‘Lunch and Learn’ seminar series for women academics, ‘Ideathons’ in support of HeForShe to engage students in becoming agents of change, and the ‘3VPs and You in Conversation’ series involving senior leaders from HKU, CUHK and HKUST visiting the three campuses together to talk about gender-related issues. A gender parity symposium will be held this year to brainstorm strategies with staff from HKU and other UGC-funded institutions, and there will be a TEDxHKUGirls conference on gender.

Funding has been earmarked for the Women’s Studies Research Centre (WSRC), and HeForShe scholarships offered to female students from the

world’s more economically-deprived nations. Starting in September, a new online sexual harassment course will be offered to all HKU students.

The ‘Gender Parity Measures for HKU’ discussion paper also included more than 20 recommendations for new policies and practices, such as broadening the eligibility for tenure clock extension, establishing clearer criteria for promotion and career development, enhancing parental leave, and exploring dual career programmes, to provide options for spouses when hiring academics married to academics. These were presented to staff at a forum in January. Some measures will require approval of the Senate and University Council.

“It’s a pretty long list of things to do but we have thought very hard on this and aimed to be reasonable,” Professor Au said. “We are not trying to reach for pie in the sky, but thinking about what will make a difference in recruiting good people and keeping them here.”

The pay-off

Therein lies the institutional incentive for gender parity: it is starting to be seen as a performance indicator. Dr Aiston pointed out that in 2016, one of the questions asked in the QS World ranking survey was whether both men and women were allowed to realise their full potential.

“Gender inequality is difficult the world over, but Hong Kong in particular is lagging behind by a few decades. It needs to do something – if not for social justice, then because it will become a performance indicator,” she said.

Professor Au said she had also been looking for practical evidence to show why it benefited institutions to have more balanced leadership. She cited a study by PricewaterhouseCoopers, which found top corporations scoring highly on gender parity significantly outperformed their peers in terms of earnings, and the fact that other leading universities are taking steps to

address gender equality, such as Cambridge, Harvard and Oxford.

“We don’t want to just follow others,” she said. “But I think intuitively a case could be made that more diverse leadership makes you more representative because the chances are greater that decision-making will work for the whole institution, not just a group or category of employees or students. You have the benefit of more role models and come across as a more caring university.”

It is an example she hopes HKU and other universities can provide to the rest of Hong Kong. “We can build something that will be good for Hong Kong and serve as a model to demonstrate to other organisations that Hong Kong can be more gender-friendly and family-friendly,” she said. ■

HeForShe activities

HKU supports the UN Women’s HeForShe initiative by serving as an example to others. The University is a member of IMPACT 10x10x10, in which 10 heads of state, 10 global CEOs and 10 university presidents have pledged to formulate solutions to gender equality and empowerment of women.

HKU’s initiatives have included improving gender equity among staff, addressing sexual harassment, promoting gender research and

studies, and encouraging student involvement. In August, 2016, it organised an ‘Ideathon’ on gender equality – the first ever in Asia – in which teams of students brainstormed ideas and proposed solutions that were voted on by their peers. The three best were posted as two-minute pitches on the HeForShe Twitter account for voting by a worldwide audience. The ‘Ideathon’ was facilitated by the Head of HeForShe at UN Women, Elizabeth Nyamayaro.

In addition, HKU’s President Professor Peter Mathieson was invited to UN Headquarters in

September, 2016 to speak at the launch of the *HeForShe IMPACT 10x10x10 University Parity Report* and announce initiatives at HKU to promote gender equity and diversity that are described on these pages.



HKU academics talking about promoting gender equity and diversity with senior leaders from HKU, CUHK and HKUST in the ‘3VPs and You in Conversation’ series.



Students in the ‘Ideathon’ brainstorming creative solutions on breaking gender stereotypes on campus and in the community.



HKU is the first university globally to launch the HeForShe campaign on campus. (From right) Head of HeForShe Ms Elizabeth Nyamayaro, HKU President and Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Mathieson, the then Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission Chairman Dr York Chow and University Grants Committee Secretary-General Dr Richard Armour in the launch event.



Professor Peter Mathieson speaking on HKU gender equity measures at the launch of the inaugural HeForShe IMPACT 10x10x10 University Parity Report. It was the first progress report since 10 global universities publicly announced bold commitments to achieve gender parity by 2020.

KEEPING THE CAMPUS SAFE FOR WOMEN AND ALL

The University is stepping up efforts to identify instances of sexual harassment and reduce its occurrence.

Sexual harassment on campuses has been the subject of court cases and extensive media coverage in places like the United States. In Hong Kong the attention has been more muted, but that should not be read to mean it is any less of a problem here.

Incidents of peer-to-peer sexual harassment and assault, and supervisor to student or junior staff, have been reported formally to HKU's Equal Opportunities Unit (EOU), which receives about 10 such complaints a year, and more prolifically, through the grapevine.

A major issue in bringing the problem out in the open has been the lack of understanding about sexual harassment and the lines of reporting it.

Ms Mavis Yip Oi-ying, a postgraduate student in Sociology, conducted a survey and focus groups

on sexual harassment awareness among HKU students. The types of harassment included male on female and same sex harassment. The participants understood the obvious forms, such as rape or continued pestering to get intimate, but not the subtler forms, such as touching and sexual jokes.

"There is a fear of being seen as over-reacting if they report on their peers," she said. "And none of the participants were even sure where to report sexual harassment."

Addressing the gap

The University is trying to address that gap by developing a short online course on sexual harassment, with compelling video skits, challenging questions, and useful information all in 30 minutes. It will be offered to all students

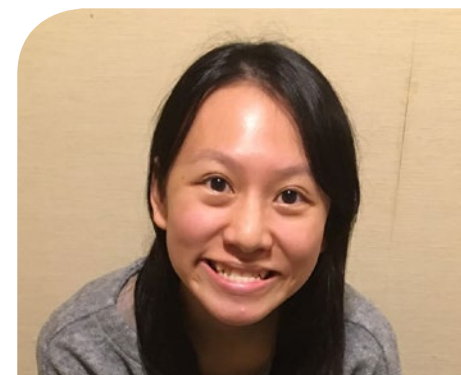
as of this September so they can learn to better protect themselves and their friends.

This will be in addition to the briefing the EOU gives students at inauguration to introduce its work, including its handling of sexual harassment complaints.

Meanwhile, Ms Yip's supervisor, Professor Karen Joe Laidler, is undertaking a climate survey to gauge students' understanding of sexual harassment, its prevalence, and other gender issues at HKU, and hopes to extend this effort with colleagues at two universities in the UK and Australia. She is also developing a massive open online course on sexual harassment and gender violence in developed and developing countries, which is expected to be launched this summer.

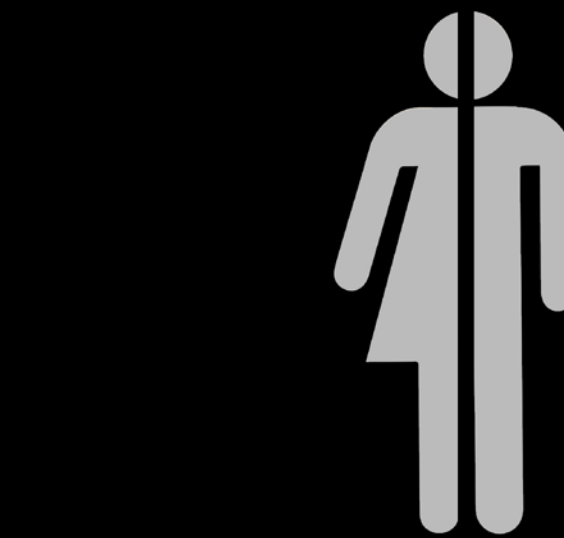
Ms Puja Kapai, Director of the Women's Studies Research Centre and member of the Faculty of Law, said while these measures were a good start, she would like to see greater visibility of responses, for instance, in keeping the complainant and accused separate when cases involve students in the same halls, or staff or PhD candidates and their supervisors. The EOU tries to make such arrangements when possible.

"Students or colleagues who make a complaint are often in shock when they have to confront the person because it doesn't occur to them that a university setting is so intimate," she said. "But we have some great momentum now to address these issues systematically. Let's see how it unfolds." ■



“There is a fear of being seen as over-reacting if they report on their peers.”

Ms Mavis Yip Oi-ying



HE, SHE, OTHER

Students are learning to question the stereotypes around gender and diversity, and the limitations they impose.

What happens when you challenge people on their ideas about gender? Students in the Common Core course 'Sexuality and Gender: Diversity and Society', taught by Professor Timothy O'Leary and Dr Brenda Alegre of the School of Humanities, tested that out last year by zoning in on the most obvious place of gender division – the restrooms.

Restrooms on four floors of the Centennial Campus were declared 'gender neutral' for an afternoon, the University community was informed in advance by email, and the students spent the afternoon standing outside the restrooms suggesting people try the toilet usually assigned to the opposite sex.

It was a simple concept and a number of people did as the students suggested. But there were also complaints and negative feedback (as there was when several 'all-gender' toilets were opened in the offices of the Centre of

Development and Resources for Students last spring), as well as suggestions such as ensuring hidden cameras were not installed in the women's toilets.

"What was interesting for us is that there's so much concern tied up with toilets," Professor O'Leary said. "We wanted our students to look at this with some kind of wonder about why there is this tension around a very simple bodily function that we all do."

Popular questions explored

Common Core courses are a good forum for these discussions because they include students from different disciplines, and gender-focussed courses are all very popular. Professor Karen Joe Laidler of Sociology co-teaches two such courses – 'Body, Beauty, Fashion', which looks at how beauty and body image for both men and women are shaped by social expectations, mass



The first 'all-gender' toilet at HKU was set up in the Main Building near to the Centre of Development and Resources for Students (CEDARS).



media, and globalisation and westernisation, and 'Girl Power in a Man's World', which covers the different aims of girl empowerment in developed and developing countries and the role of men and consequences for them.

"We are not just trying to get students to recognise women's issues, but also to show you can't really understand women's issues without understanding men's issues," she said.

Students are also exposed to gender themes in discipline-specific courses in the Arts, Business, Education, Law, Medicine, Science, and Social Sciences faculties. "Many of us hope at some point the University can realise a programme on gender studies. It would not take long to coordinate and organise these courses together," Professor Laidler said.

Meanwhile, Professor O'Leary has been asked by the University to write a guide for students on the use of non-discriminatory language when referring to people of different gender, disabilities and ethnicities. "There are some things that the University should be saying are not acceptable," he said. "There's no doubt these guidelines and policies are aimed at changing the way people write and think. That's what a university is about. We shouldn't be shy about doing that." ■



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Professor Karen Joe Laidler



Renowned educator and filmmaker Dr Jackson Katz was invited to run a workshop on his work of building a culture of prevention of harassment and violence on university campuses as part of HKU's HeForShe initiative.

GENDER RESEARCH AT HKU

The Women's Studies Research Centre has been operating since 1995 to promote gender research and translate the findings into benefits for the Hong Kong community. Recently, it has played an active role in HeForShe activities on campus, including publishing a directory on gender research expertise at HKU.

The Women's Studies Research Centre (WSRC) and its scholar-members have deep ties to gender issues in Hong Kong. In the 1990s, they provided advice and input on the drafting of anti-discrimination legislation and the setting up of Hong Kong's Equal Opportunities



“We are not afraid of being advocates as this is part of our knowledge exchange with the community.”

Ms Puja Kapai

Commission. “We really do see the birth of Hong Kong awareness of equal opportunities as coinciding with our own development,” Convenor Ms Puja Kapai said.

That development has gone through ups and downs. Until recently, the WSRC was fairly low-profile, despite organising academic events every year for International Women's Day, a spring workshop to bring together academics and NGOs, and other events peppered throughout the year.

Its fortunes started to change when HKU's President, Professor Peter Mathieson, committed the University to the UN Women's HeForShe initiative in 2015. The WSRC had the interest and expertise and so it was asked to provide support and expertise on gender issues. It was also invited to join a team producing a short online course on sexual harassment for new students.

Moreover, it received funding from the University in December, 2016 to support its work as a platform for gender issues. Previously, it was entirely self-funded through a small private donation.

Its activities in recent months have included co-organising talks on such topics as the gender gap in examination results and women in Hong

Kong politics, and helping to organise and promote the HeForShe Reading Group and the 'Gender Plus Series' of interdisciplinary seminars. Under the latter, for example, the 'Gender Plus Law' subset hosted visits by two Canadian Supreme Court justices, including its first female Chief Justice, the Right Honourable Beverley McLachlin.

Rich possibilities

Research remains the uppermost concern, though, because gender research is often not well recognised. On International Women's Day, March 8, the WSRC organised a forum for students, academics and senior management at HKU on 'Taking Gender Studies Research Seriously in Higher Education'.

“Gender-related research is challenging in general including at HKU. You don't attract large amounts of external funding like other disciplines, you might not have access to relevant mentors because colleagues or experts in this field are not grouped together, and colleagues and graduate students wanting to do this work get sidelined, particularly in disciplines where such work is not seen as 'real research'. So we discussed the issues around systemic barriers contributing to the invisibility of gender-related research output,” Ms Kapai said.

The WSRC has tried to show the rich possibilities of gender research by compiling an HKU gender expert directory, which includes research expertise, ongoing projects, recent publications and conference papers. It is also embarking on a more thorough audit of gender research here.

“Our ultimate goal is to have the Women's Studies Research Centre be the spine to hold together all the gender-related work happening at HKU. We also want students to feel free to come under our umbrella and do gender-related research or community outreach. We are not afraid of being advocates as this is part of our knowledge exchange with the community,” she said. ■



In the 2016 Annual Spring Workshop co-organised by the Centre for Comparative and Public Law and Women's Studies Research Centre, key figures advocating gender equality at the frontlines participated in a panel discussion.

Health and safety

Injustices at home for Chinese immigrant women in Hong Kong
Professor Petula Ho Sik-ying, English
Social Work and Social Administration

A cross-cultural understanding of depression among abused women
Dr Janet Wong Yuen-ha, Nursing

Women in culture

The 'Kong Girl' stereotype and gender ideologies in social media
Dr Katherine Chen Hoi-ying, English

Feminism, postfeminism and Hong Kong women filmmakers
Professor Gina Marchetti, Comparative Literature

Women and literary celebrity in the 19th Century
Dr Julia Kuehn, English

Wanton women in late-Imperial Chinese literature
Dr Wu Cuncun, Chinese

Social trends

Hong Kong single working women's negotiation of work and personal space
Ms Evelyn Ng, Women's Studies Research Centre

Late marriage among professional women in China and its consequences
Dr Sandy To Sin-chi, Sociology

The use of news narratives to learn about gender ideologies in contemporary China
Dr Aditi Dubey-Jhaveri, Applied English / Journalism

Examples of gender related research at HKU

Research on gender issues is pursued across a number of disciplines at HKU. The examples here are recently published or ongoing research mentioned in the WSRC's 'Gender Research at HKU: Scholars Directory'.

Legal issues

Drug sales, gender and risk from the perspective of gang-involved young adults
Professor Karen Joe Laidler, Sociology

Women's human rights in the HKSAR
Ms Puja Kapai, Law

Intersectionality and the law: the struggle of minorities for equal protection against domestic violence
Ms Puja Kapai, Law

History, politics and social engagement

Menstruation and the politics of the body in modern Japan
Dr Izumi Nakayama, Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences

Gender and cultural history in a transnational context
Dr Staci Ford, History / American Studies

Women, decision-making and sustainability in the Badi Foundation in rural China
Dr Lori Noguchi, Social Work and Social Administration

Learned women in mercantile lineages from Huizhou and their role in social ascendancy, 1700–1850
Dr Yang Binbin, Chinese

Gay, lesbian and other

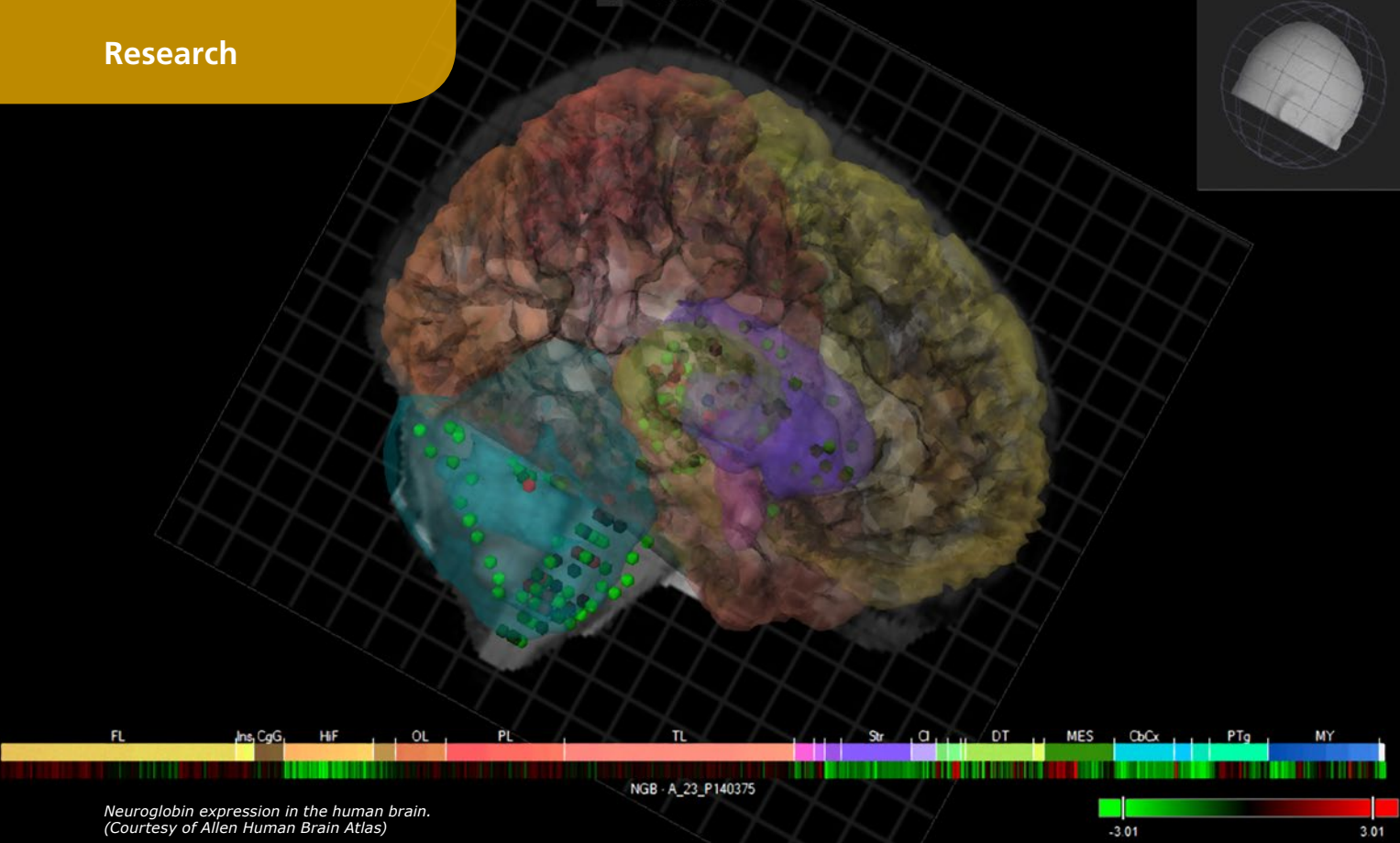
The processes and challenges of identity formation among young gay men in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan
Dr Travis Kong Shiu-ki, Sociology

Public opinion about gays and lesbians in Hong Kong and the impact of interpersonal and imagined contact
Ms Kelley Loper, Law

Sexual risks associated with the use of social networking apps in smartphones among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender populations
Dr Janet Wong Yuen-ha, Nursing

The list is by no means complete. Research topic descriptions have been abbreviated for space.

For a fuller directory of gender research and scholarship at HKU and WSRC's recent activities, please visit <https://womensstudiesresearchcentre.wordpress.com/>



FLICKING THE RIGHT SWITCH

A multinational team of biological scientists has opened the door to new possibilities for fighting Alzheimer's by discovering the switch for Neuroglobin, a gene known to play a role in protecting the human brain from neurodegenerative diseases.

Dr Tan-Un Kian Cheng from HKU's School of Biological Sciences led the team which made the discovery, working in collaboration with Professor Richard Festenstein at the Clinical Sciences Centre, Imperial College London, Professor Sjaak Philipsen at Erasmus University MC, Rotterdam and Professor Godfrey CF Chan, Tsao Yen-Chow Professor in Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine at Department of Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, HKU. Their findings were published in the journal *Nucleic Acids Research*.

Said Dr Tan-Un: "Finding the part of the human genetic machinery which switches on the Neuroglobin gene was a thrilling moment, and of paramount importance. It opens up opportunities such as paving the way for developing novel therapeutic treatments using gene therapy or drugs to target Alzheimer's. The global population is ageing and this disease is

affecting larger and larger numbers – currently it is incurable, so this discovery is critical.

"Research on mice has shown that Neuroglobin protects the brain and can reduce the severity of damage due to stroke and Alzheimer's. In humans, the two major risk factors for chances of getting Alzheimer's are age and being female, both of which are associated with lower levels of Neuroglobin."

Neuroglobin was first identified in 2000, but its function was unknown. In 2005, the link between Neuroglobin and Alzheimer's was made when it was discovered that the gene's presence prevents the formation of amyloid plaques, which is a hallmark of Alzheimer's.

Dr Tan-Un's team spent six years looking into the mechanism that controls the switching of the Neuroglobin gene. It was a long and

technically-challenging search. "Neuroglobin was a new discovery, and my group was the first to characterise the gene," she said. "We were asking questions such as how it would be regulated and what sequence could control the expression of Neuroglobin? Previous studies have established that distal elements are important in regulating cell-specific gene transcription and mutations in these distal elements are known to cause diseases such as thalassaemia. We therefore hypothesised that the novel elements located far beyond the Neuroglobin gene may be potential regulatory elements."

Her former PhD students Zhang Wei and Tam Kin-tung started working on the technically-challenging problem of searching for the distal DNA region. They carried out many experiments, including using a technique called chromosome conformation capture (3C).



“Finding the part of the human genetic machinery which switches on the Neuroglobin gene was a thrilling moment, and of paramount importance. It opens up opportunities such as paving the way for developing novel therapeutic treatments using gene therapy or drugs to target Alzheimer's.”

Dr Tan-Un Kian Cheng

"Zhang Wei identified the distal regulatory elements within two months," said Dr Tan-Un. "Tam Kin-tung then started working on it, asking questions such as whether the distal element controls Neuroglobin gene expression, and what transcription factors bind to this region?"

They narrowed down the region through further experimentation, and the breakthrough came when the team discovered a segment of DNA which interacts with the Neuroglobin gene by means of a protein called GATA-2 in human neuronal cells. The novel DNA segment proved to be powerful in switching on Neuroglobin expression. They further discovered that removing either the GATA-2 protein or the DNA segment from the cells led to a substantial decrease in Neuroglobin expression.

Passion to discover

"Research is all about passion to discover," said Dr Tan-Un, "but at times we were very down – a lot of tedious work for little progress. But it

was good to be working in collaboration with our colleagues from Imperial and Erasmus as we could do Skype conferencing to brainstorm problems. It was beneficial for keeping our spirits up."

Having discovered the 'switch', Dr Tan-Un said that gaining a deeper understanding of both the switch and the Neuroglobin locus is now critical in designing an efficient gene therapy system for the treatment of Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases.

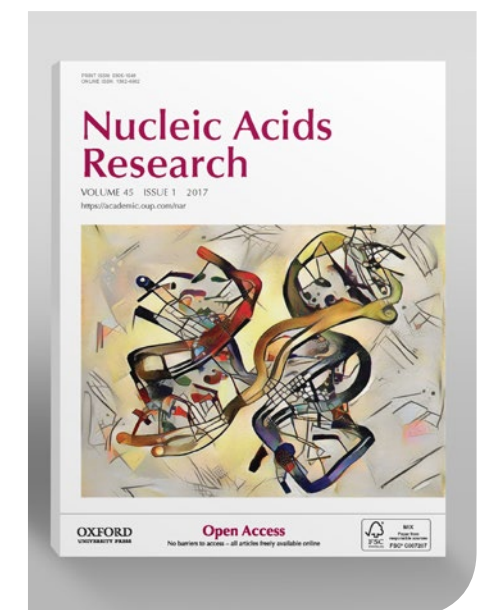
Since increased Neuroglobin expression helps protect against Alzheimer's, the next stage of the research will focus on identifying the factors that will enhance the 'switch' mechanism in the brain. "We will collaborate with Professor Godfrey CF Chan from HKU's Faculty of Medicine and Professor Richard Festenstein at Imperial College on the next stage," she said.

Dr Tan-Un added that the research is a continuous endeavour, pointing out that her own association with this area of biological

science is long-standing: her PhD study was on the identification of mutations in the beta globin gene and elucidating the molecular pathology of the mutations that caused the disease thalassaemia. The groundbreaking discovery of a distal locus control region (LCR) was made in 1987 by her former PhD mentor at the National Institute for Medical Research at Mill Hill in London, Professor Frank Grosveld [currently at the Department of Cell Biology at Erasmus University MC, Rotterdam]. "And, now that PhD students I am mentoring are making discoveries in this area, it feels like the connections are being made, so the search for distal regulatory elements or LCRs continues as the knowledge passes down from generation to generation," she said. ■



The working team from the School of Biological Sciences — (from left) Dr Gigi So, Dr Tan-Un Kian Cheng, Mr SK Chan, Dr Tian Zhipeng and Dr Tam Kin-tung.



Dr Tan-Un Kian Cheng and her team's findings were published in the journal *Nucleic Acids Research*.



Chilades pandava is commonly found in urban parks in Hong Kong.

UNVEILING THE SECRET LIFE OF BUTTERFLIES

In densely-populated cities public parks provide a much needed green lung for urban dwellers – and not only the human kind. Insects and butterflies make city parks their home and in recent years the importance of such areas as habitats for greater biodiversity has come to the fore.

PhD student Mr Toby Tsang recently conducted the first urban park butterfly study in Hong Kong, shedding light on the secret life of urban butterflies and providing insight into their



Cyrestis thyodamas is regarded as rare species in urban parks.

management. “Urbanisation is rampant, so their rural habitats are disappearing, but you still see many in urban settings,” he said. “We have to be pragmatic: it’s not just a question of saving the butterflies but saving them in a setting that exists now – urbanisation is not going away, so how can we maximise biodiversity within that setting?”

From April to November, 2014, he walked through the parks of Kowloon – chosen because it is Hong Kong’s most densely populated urban area – counting butterflies. There are more than 250 butterfly species in Hong Kong, of which Mr Tsang found 51 amid the total 1,485 individuals he counted. He noted that some species were common and could be seen almost daily, while others were rare. Of the latter, some were commonly found in more rural areas, while four of them are seldom seen anywhere in Hong Kong, e.g. *Jamides alecto*, which is classified by

the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department as very rare in Hong Kong.

Landscape configuration

“We looked at landscape configuration – that is, on a map, draw a one-kilometre circle around the urban park, then analyse how much of that circle is urban and how much green. Some species only do well in one habitat, so if the park is close to a green space they may survive. But rare species tend to die out when disturbance is high, which it tends to be in an urban park with lots of human traffic and regular vegetation management such as pruning and spraying insecticide. They don’t have chance to adapt between disturbances and so are unable to colonise and likely to die.

“Clearly, there is a conflict of interest here – between what humans want from their parks –



“ We have to be pragmatic: it’s not just a question of saving the butterflies but saving them in a setting that exists now – urbanisation is not going away, so how can we maximise biodiversity within that setting? ”

Mr Toby Tsang

nicely trimmed plants with a minimum of mosquitoes – and what is best to encourage biodiversity – namely the opposite, a variety of vegetation especially plants that attract butterflies and insects and minimum human traffic.”

One answer to the conflict that Mr Tsang advocates is introducing ‘Nature Corners’ – already in existence in the US and Singapore – where maintenance is minimised and vegetation allowed to grow wild – or, at least, ‘wilder’.

“For Nature Corners to work properly in Hong Kong, we need more empirical knowledge,” he said. “We know that if a park has nectar-providing plants it also has more butterflies, but only common ones. We want to investigate the effect of the disturbance that damages the biodiversity. We also need to do behavioural studies – right now we know what species of butterfly are in our urban parks, next we want to know what they are doing there – to investigate their secret life if you like.”

In the future Mr Tsang would like to compare his results with similar surveys on birds in urban parks. “We want to collect data on other species so we can get a picture of the whole ecosystem.”

Mr Tsang has been supervised in his PhD by Dr Timothy Bonebrake, Assistant Professor at the School of Biological Sciences and Head of the Global Change and Tropical Conservation Laboratory. Dr Bonebrake noted that: “The most important aspect of Toby’s research is that it puts urban parks in the landscape context, demonstrating that the butterfly species are in the parks because of the green spaces around the parks as much as the parks themselves. It is the broader context that is important – the butterflies commute from the country parks to the urban parks and back again so perhaps we can use urban parks as stepping stones for species to migrate from one place to another.

“Further encouraging butterfly establishment in Hong Kong urban parks will require careful

consideration of the surrounding landscape and greater numbers of nectar-providing flowers planted in urban parks.”

Mr Tsang has been studying Ecology at HKU for past seven years. As an undergraduate, his final-year project was a study on rocky shore snails, researching how when the rocks get too warm for them they can still survive. But for his PhD he returned to the terrestrial field and butterflies. Asked about environmental awareness within Hong Kong, Mr Tsang said he thinks young people know about the problems but awareness alone is not enough to prompt them to act. “It’s important to connect with nature,” he said. “If you do not connect, you won’t act, so we need to find ways to get people away from their computers and outside. One way to do that could be to have more biodiversity in our urban parks so people are tempted to go and look.” ■



Mr Toby Tsang spent several months walking through the parks of Kowloon and counted 51 species during his surveys, including some very rare species in urban parks.



PhD student Mr Toby Tsang (right) and his PhD supervisor Dr Timothy Bonebrake (left), Assistant Professor at the School of Biological Sciences.



Dr Tom McDonald (first from right) spent 15 months in a remote rural town in Shandong province to look into the impact of social media in China. (Courtesy of Gillian Bolsover)

THE SOCIAL MORES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Discussion rages daily about whether social media has in fact made us less social and more superficial. A global anthropological study has tried to dig deeper and find out how it has become woven into the fabric of our society, including that of rural Chinese communities.

Dr Tom McDonald spent 15 months in a remote rural town of 6,000 people in Shandong province examining the impact social media was having on the lives of the inhabitants. His work was part of a much larger project launched by University College London (UCL) – ‘Why We Post’ – an ambitious global anthropological research project on the effect of social media worldwide.

“It was the first ethnographic, comparative study of the use and consequences of social



Research participants in the field site. (Courtesy of Gillian Bolsover)

media around the world,” he explained. “We had nine anthropologists doing fieldwork in eight countries studying people’s relationship with social media – including Chinese factory workers, young Muslim women on the Syrian / Turkish border, IT professionals in India, and many more. The aim was to look at how average people use social media.” Other research studies were mainly concentrated on social media usage in the US.

‘Why We Post’ was unique for all those involved, not least because anthropology tends to be a very solitary pursuit. “You’re cutting yourself off from your own life and spending extended amounts of time in a faraway community,” said Dr McDonald. “This time, while we were physically alone – we were all doing the same research, asking the same questions, at the same time. We skyped regularly, and shared our findings. It was very ethnographic but also very cooperative. That continued when I returned to London, and when I came to HKU in September, 2015.”

58,000 downloads

The ‘Why We Post’ study is now nearing its end. “Books resulting from the study are all open access and published by UCL Press,” he explained. “Our main comparative volume, *How The World Changed Social Media*, has had over 58,000 downloads [as of January, 2017] – which is crazy for an academic book!” His own solely authored book, *Social Media in Rural China*, which was launched at HKU in September, 2016, has had over 5,000 downloads, and he is now writing journal articles examining specific issues in more detail. The book was accompanied by an exhibition at the University, well attended by groups of students from local secondary schools.

The main argument of his book is that rural Chinese internet users make use of social media to interact with not only friends, neighbours and colleagues, but also complete strangers. This is significant because traditional anthropological comprehension of Chinese societies has



“When it comes to Mainland China and social media, many scholars from outside China focus on issues of the censorship and state control. But for my own participants, online censorship was less of a concern than many other more pressing issues regarding the internet.”

Dr Tom McDonald

generally understood social relations to be organised around systems such as kinship, lineage or *guanxi*; all of which leave little room for strangers. However, his rural participants not only use social media to connect to strangers, but often form surprisingly intimate and trusting connections with them. “So, we have tried to

understand what happens when rural people try to cope with the juxtaposition of these two relationships,” he said.

Prior to this study, there has been lots of research into internet use in China’s main cities, but very little on rural China, so the research gives a glimpse of what communication is in areas that few outsiders visit. “I was very lucky in that I did it at the perfect time because little had been written about how rural people use the internet,” said Dr McDonald. “Traditionally anthropology focusses on rituals, marriage ceremonies *etc*, within a society, but this study was about using social media as it is a great way to see people’s lives from a different angle. When it comes to Mainland China and social media, many scholars from outside China focus on issues of the censorship and state control. But for my own participants, online censorship was less of a concern than many other more pressing issues regarding the internet.

“We looked at what people post, how many have their own profile pages, how frequently they post – and as we got to know the people involved through living with them, we could understand the data within the context of their own lives. The most popular posts among rural Chinese users are young mums putting up pictures of their babies and romantic memes by teenagers. In both cases they are putting forward idealistic pictures of what perfect family life and love are meant to be.”

As he got to know people in the community better he could contrast this with what they said to him privately, on condition of anonymity. “Older, illiterate people told me they use the internet to play cards or mahjong online. Villagers would tell me their secrets. For example, a middle-aged pharmacist liked to talk to strangers online and often shared with them his dissatisfaction with aspects of his own life.



Young mums putting up pictures of their babies is one of the most popular posts among rural Chinese users. (Courtesy of Gillian Bolsover)

It’s a release, he can’t say this to anyone in his home town as it’s a small local community and everyone would soon know. In this case, it is the contrast between the two pictures – the public idyll and the private dissatisfaction – that is interesting.”

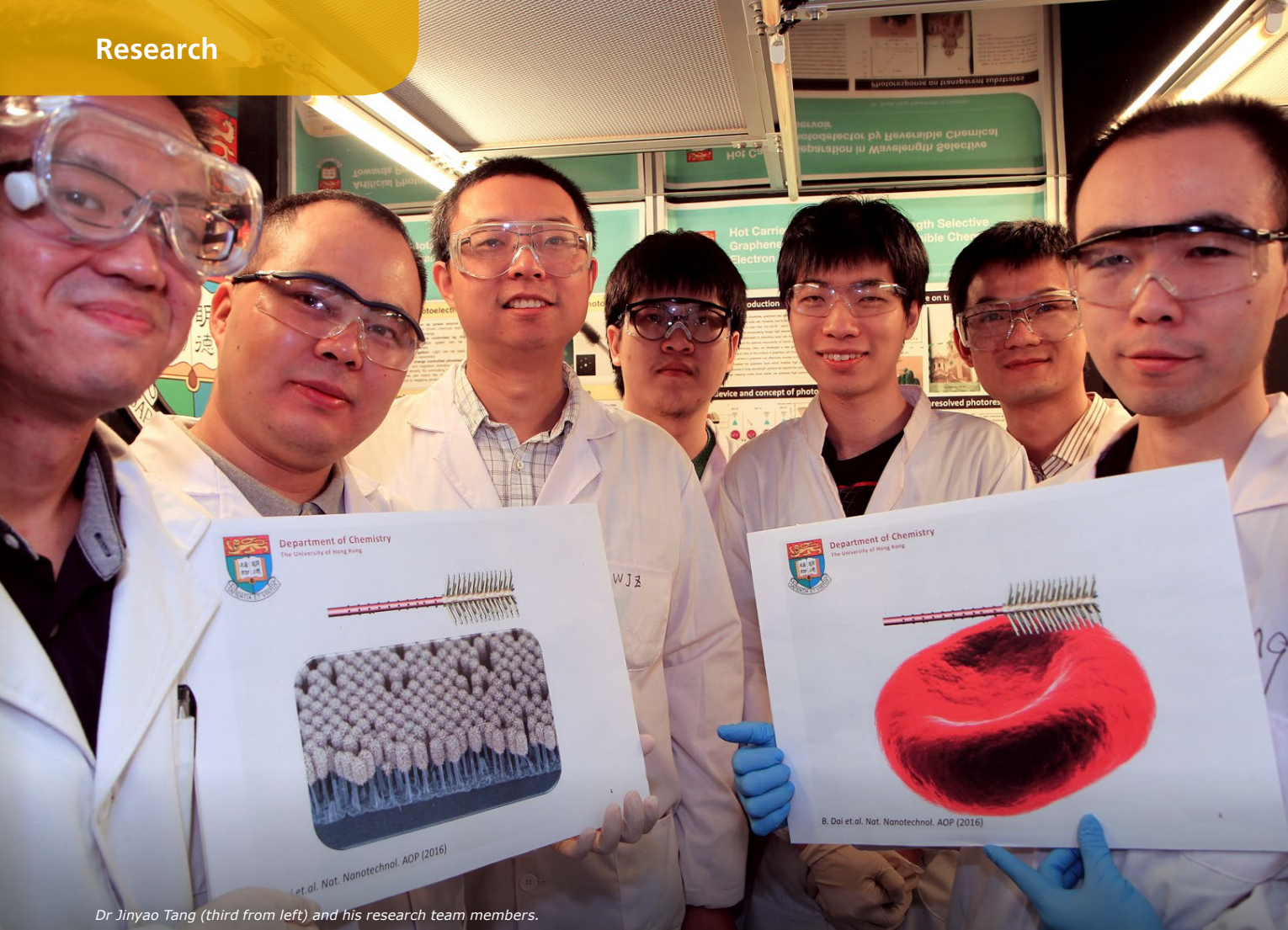
There has been widespread interest in the findings. “UCL’s study was featured in *The Economist*, for example, and I was interviewed by the BBC World Service,” said Dr McDonald. “When my own book launched, I did a lecture tour in Hong Kong and China. It was interesting because I had started writing the book while still in London and so had approached it with non-Chinese readers in mind, but there has been much interest from Chinese. Their reactions have been mainly positive. They are most interested in how a foreigner views China.” ■



How The World Changed Social Media (left) is a publication resulting from the study and has recorded over 58,000 downloads (as of January, 2017). *Social Media in Rural China* (right), solely authored by Dr Tom McDonald, was launched at HKU in September, 2016, and has had over 5,000 downloads.



The book launch was accompanied by an exhibition at the University and attracted groups of students from local secondary schools.



FROM SCIENCE FICTION TO SCIENCE FACT

It sounds like the stuff of science fiction – but a team of HKU scientists and engineers have developed a macroscopic robot that has the potential to be injected into a person to vanquish illness.

This scenario was used as a plot device for the 1966 classic *Fantastic Voyage*, where a submarine and its crew are shrunk to microscopic size and injected into a scientist's blood stream to save him, and again in 1987, in *Inner Space* when a cocky pilot taking part in a miniaturisation experiment is accidentally injected into a hapless store clerk.

Now those unlikely occurrences have moved a step closer to reality, thanks to a team of researchers led by Dr Jinyao Tang of the Department of Chemistry, who have developed the world's first light-seeking synthetic nanorobot, a device approximately the size of a blood cell. The implication is that surgeons will

be able to inject these minuscule robots into patients' bodies to fight tumours and enable more precise targeting of medications.

The team's findings have been published in the leading scientific journal *Nature Nanotechnology* and subsequently reported in the popular magazine *Scientific American*.

"This technology is hugely important and is going to have a very big impact," said Dr Tang. "It will be used to treat disease and to monitor health. It has been speculated about in science fiction for a long time and soon it will be a reality. Within the next 10 years we will have the engineering and scientific problems solved and

we will be doing chemical trials. We may be testing it on cancer by then.

"People are already using it to treat eye problems – because they are easy to penetrate – and also on cuts on the surface of the skin, which it can heal and leave no scar. But this is just demonstration stuff really – not practical. In 10 years it will be practical, and will be used for biomedical applications, and eventually for removing tumours and precisely targeting medications."

The development of tiny nanoscale machines for biomedical applications has been a key trend in scientific research in recent years – the 2016



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Dr Jinyao Tang

Nobel Prize in Chemistry, for example, was awarded to a team of scientists for 'the design and synthesis of molecular machines'. This particular fantastic voyage began three years ago, when Dr Tang and his team of fellow chemists and engineers embarked on research to develop and explore a light-guided nanorobot and to demonstrate its feasibility and effectiveness.

It was a big learning curve. They designed everything from scratch, including the laboratory and the novel nanotree structure itself, which looks rather like a bottle brush and is composed of two common, low-priced semiconductor materials: silicon and titanium oxide. During the synthesis, silicon and titanium oxide are shaped into nanowire and then further arranged into a tiny nanotree heterostructure. Inspired by natural green photo algae which seek light, each 'bristle' is a light sensor and reacts individually, so if light comes from the side it turns towards

it. "We can programme it to turn either towards or away from light," said Dr Tang. "We use a joystick to control where the light is coming from."

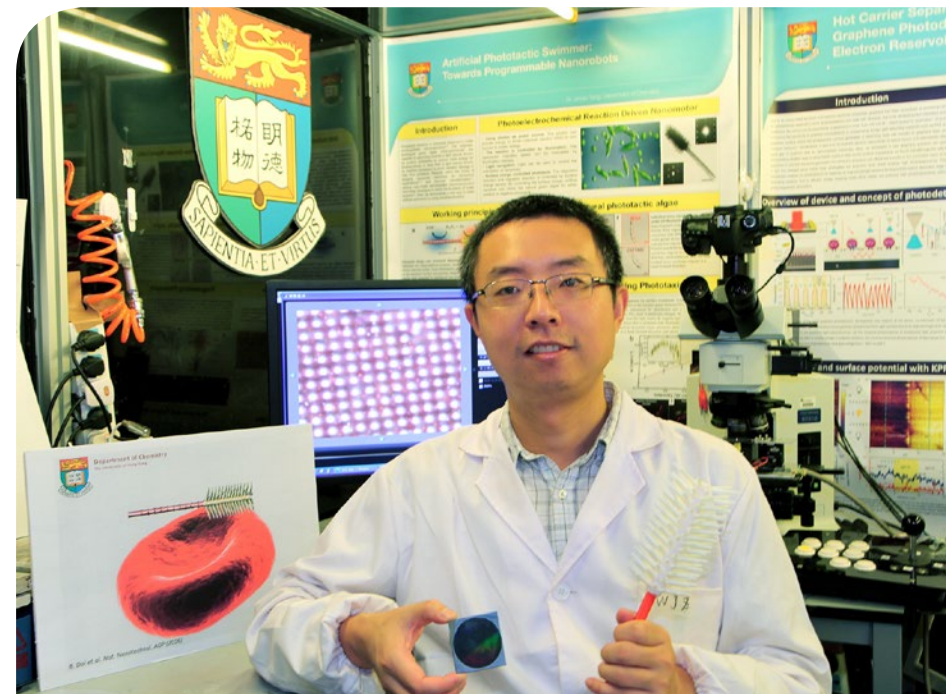
The team is made up of chemists and two people from Engineering. "The nature of the research is crossdisciplinary," said Dr Tang. "In fact, rather than chemistry this is really more material science which is a very important area in modern research. At HKU we already have academics from Chemistry, Science and Engineering collaborating on material science projects, and I think it would be good to make this officially an area of discipline in the near future, which means introducing Material Science programmes."

Biocompatibility

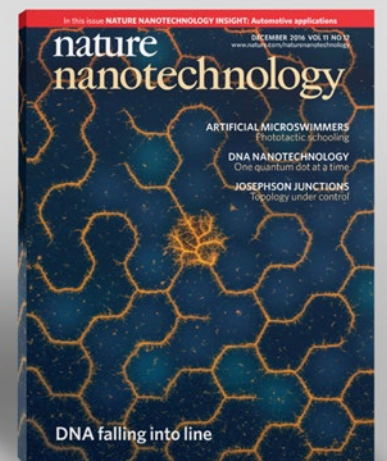
"The current nanorobot cannot be used for disease treatment yet," said Dr Tang, "but we

are working on the next generation nanorobotic system which will be more efficient and biocompatible. This model is for UV light which is harmful, so the team now wants to move to visible and infrared light – more biocompatible and less harmful. And it is not only the light which must be biocompatible, so must the media and the chemicals inside the structure.

"We are solving the problems one by one," he concluded. "Light is an effective option to communicate between the microscopic world and the macroscopic world, so we can conceive that we will be able to send more complicated instructions to nanorobots soon, which will get us one step closer to daily life applications." ■



Dr Jinyao Tang showing the disc which contains millions of synthetic light-seeking nanorobots.



The findings of the team led by Dr Jinyao Tang have been published in the leading scientific journal *Nature Nanotechnology*.

MEETING EVERYONE'S NEED

In September this year, the Hong Kong Government will extend free schooling from 12 years to 15, including three years of pre-school. Scholars at HKU used this as their deadline for putting into place a programme of special needs services for pre-schoolers.

Research shows that the earlier the intervention the better for children with special education needs (SEN), but lack of suitable services for pre-schoolers in Hong Kong, meant the waiting list for such intervention had grown to more than 6,000 in 2015.

"Parents were left in despair over what to do," said Professor Lam Shui-fong of the Department of Psychology, who recognised the need and worked with the Heep Hong Society to overcome the problem. They developed a model to bridge the gap between intervention services and pre-schools. It has undergone two extensive trial programmes and is now being evaluated and pending approval is likely to be introduced as a government-funded service for all pre-schools across Hong Kong.

"Funded by the Lee Hysan Foundation, we tested the initial model in 10 kindergartens involving 60 children in 2014. The Government was so impressed that in late 2015 it extended the model to 450 kindergartens for a two-year pilot project with lottery funding – a move which has already cut the waiting list for such service in half to 3,000 children.

The Government's interest has been encouraging. Mrs Carrie Lam, the then Chief Secretary of Administration, once attended a session at a kindergarten participating in the Lee Hysan project. "Several sets of parents of special needs children were there too," said Professor Lam. "Some of them were in tears because of the frustration they felt at receiving so little government help for their children. Mrs Lam had a very positive response to the evaluation report within 90 minutes of reading it, and indicated that she would try to persuade her finance colleagues to allow the model to operate on a permanent basis in the future."

The model they developed was created using the combined skills of and input from educational psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, special child-care workers, parents of special needs children and teachers. It adopts a two-pronged approach comprising both school-based support services and centre-based therapeutic training services. Individual Education Plans (IEP) for each child with SEN are devised, and special child care workers visit the kindergartens each month to coach teachers on-site on how to incorporate

IEP objectives in day-to-day classroom learning, and to demonstrate skills in behavioural management and emotional regulation for children with SEN.

Educational psychologists and therapists also pay quarterly visits to the kindergartens to conduct classroom observation, curriculum consultation meetings to advise teachers on IEP implementation, activity design, and in-class learning support. In addition, teachers are invited to attend training workshops on strategies for teaching children with special education needs and how to identify such children in the first place. At the end of the school year, the professional team conducts evaluation meetings with teachers to review the progress of the children.

To ascertain the effectiveness of the initial model, a research team from HKU conducted a longitudinal study that tracked the development of the 60 children in the pioneering project from September, 2014 to August, 2015 alongside a control group. "We found marked improvements in the language skills, cognitive skills, motor skills and self-direction capability in

the SEN children who had received the intervention," said Professor Lam.

"The results have been gratifying as we set out to develop a model that would offer both school-based support and centre-based therapeutic services. Indeed the model encompasses all stakeholders in the equation – the children and their parents, the teachers, and therapists. One of the main priorities was improving the link between pre-schools and the intervention services. Additionally, the model ensures that specialists not only provide therapy for the children, but also train the parents at their centres, and the teachers in the classroom.

"Before, services were segmented: there was no dialogue between therapists and kindergarten teachers for example, and parents did not know how their children were being dealt with at

pre-schools. We make sure the different elements meet. Some services are provided on-site at the kindergartens. It's a System Model, which takes into account the environment and the ecology of the child's situation, not merely a Remedial Model which focusses only on managing the issue."

The next step

The lottery funding allocated to the programme was for two years, ending this September, which dovetails with the change to Hong Kong's education policy to extend free schooling to include kindergarten services.

Accordingly, the pilot programme is currently being evaluated by Dr Anna Hui from the City University of Hong Kong. "We hope by September to have the go ahead," said

Professor Lam. "If it gets approval the Government wants to make the model a permanent service, and will fund it themselves so the service will no longer need to rely on the lottery fund.

"If it is introduced, this will have a big impact, providing permanent support for special needs pre-schoolers. I have been at HKU for 20 years, and in all the work I have done, this is the most gratifying to me and will accomplish the most. Those parents' tears affected me too. They were in despair and felt they had nowhere to turn. Now, we have come up with the right model – the parents trust it, the kindergartens trust it and both the children and the teachers are empowered by it – I feel we have accomplished something very beneficial." ■



“ Now, we have come up with the right model – the parents trust it, the kindergartens trust it and both the children and the teachers are empowered by it – I feel we have accomplished something very beneficial. ”

Professor Lam Shui-fong



Mrs Carrie Lam (second from right) joining the kids in finger play, an exercise that trains fine motor skills. This play is enjoyed by all kids disregarding special education needs.



Mrs Carrie Lam (fifth from left) and Professor Lam Shui-fong (fourth from right) visiting New Jade Elementi Kindergarten, one of the pre-schools that participated in the Lee Hysan project, and meeting with the Principal, teachers, therapists, social workers, and the educational psychologist.



DEEP SEA THRIVING

The first comprehensive review of Hong Kong's marine life in 70 years, shows that this relatively small place is punching above its weight where biodiversity is concerned.

A recent study by HKU's Swire Institute of Marine Science (SWIMS) and School of Biological Sciences, has yielded exciting results – Hong Kong accounts for around 26 per cent of the total marine species recorded in China, plus its biodiversity is comparable to many other regions even though its marine area is hundreds to thousands of times smaller than those regions.

"The numbers are impressive," said Dr Terence Ng Pun-tung. "The review, which was funded by the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) reveals that Hong Kong has more hard corals than the entire Caribbean Sea, hosts more mangrove tree species than the whole of East Africa and contributes to more than 30 per cent of the species records for several groups of organisms such as *polychaetes*, fish, *cephalopods* and *amphipods* in the South China Sea."

The study took 18 months to complete and is the first of its kind since the 1940s, when

marine science began in Hong Kong. It was recently published in *Biodiversity and Conservation*.

China signed the United Nations' Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1993 and it was

extended to the HKSAR in 2011, sparking the recent launch of Hong Kong's first Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP). "This felt like a unique opportunity for Hong Kong to 'keep up the pace' and prompted us to embark on this comprehensive survey," said Dr Ng. "The



The research team – (from left) Mr Martin Cheng, Professor Gray Williams and Dr Terence Ng Pun-tung.



“ Hong Kong has more hard corals than the entire Caribbean Sea, hosts more mangrove tree species than the whole of East Africa and contributes to more than 30 per cent of the species records for several groups of organisms... in the South China Sea. ”

Dr Terence Ng Pun-tung

five-year BSAP aims to help conserve marine life, but if you don't know what is there how can you know what needs protecting and how to prioritise what needs help first?"

The findings reaffirm Hong Kong's proximity to the Western Indo-Pacific region, the world's marine biodiversity hotspot. Hong Kong lies in a transitional geographic position between the temperate and tropical regions, and the mixing of the Kuroshio, Taiwan and Hainan ocean currents, plus a climate that blends temperate-like winters and tropical-like summers, bring together both tropical and temperate species to live here. In addition, complex geology, proximity to the Pearl River (which creates an estuarine environment in western waters), a relatively long 1,189-km coastline and diverse marine ecological habitats all contribute to the highly diverse marine life.

Dr Ng initially took on the role of Project Manager for a year, but compiling the data took longer than first estimated. The team discovered a long history of documenting local marine species, mostly in literature published during the 1980s and 1990s. These documents were among conference proceedings, government reports, student theses and text books. "Some of the data were incorrect or outdated," he said.

"There was no DNA testing then – scientists identified species based on their morphological characteristics and sometimes they got it wrong. For others, the names have changed or there are synonyms for the same species."

The team also sought help from the World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS), a global database which was launched because its Founder saw that some problems would be on a global scale. "We asked their advice on how to compile our study," said Dr Ng, "as well as to initiate our online platform, the Hong Kong Register of Marine Species (HKRMS), which is operated under WoRMS umbrella but is regional."

Dr Ng is now Chief Editor of HKRMS and has gathered biologists (locally and internationally) with specific knowledge to focus on each group of species. At the moment, it is simply a checklist comprising three bits of information: a classification of the species, pictures, and literature relating to said species.

"The study is a starting point for local biologists, environmental consultancies and government departments who can check any species they encounter against our database. In future the goal is to develop the database into a marine

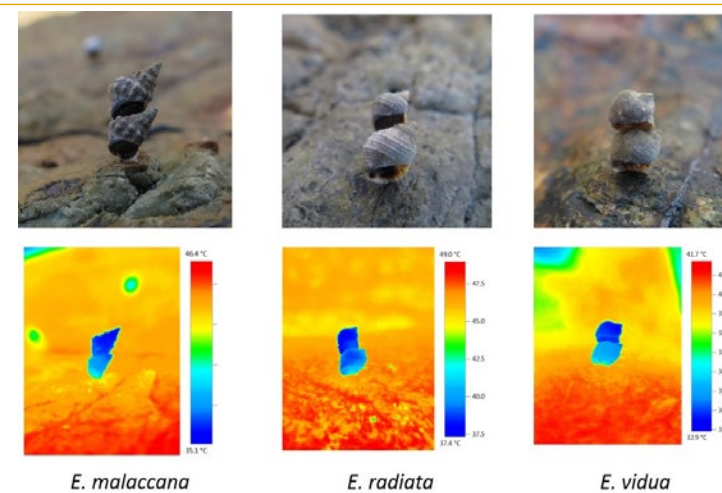
GIS [Geographic Information System]. Then if someone were studying, for example, impacts of any environmental stressors on the white dolphin, they could consult the GIS on where is it usually found, and compare with their own studies to extrapolate if there were any changes in dolphin distribution related to particular stressors."

Marine Biodiversity Centre

Following the survey, SWIMS' next plan is the establishment of a Marine Biodiversity Centre. "Hong Kong is lacking a natural history museum," said Dr Ng, "We have nowhere to keep specimens and disseminate data about local species, and so it's difficult to confirm the validity of past records and keep track of the status of our marine species. But now SWIMS is expanding its capacity to include storage and displays of local marine species. We will also link this to the GIS."

One aim is to use the Centre for education outreach and conservation programmes. "We're trying to help educate the public about the marine environment and the Government is keen to collaborate with us on this. We and many other local marine biologists and several green groups are urging the Government to create more marine parks and reserves – our aim is achieving at least 10 per cent marine protected area by the year 2020 (which is also a global target of the CBD).

"We are aware that it is us versus stakeholders such as developers, but we hope the survey's revelations on just how rich Hong Kong's marine biodiversity is will encourage people to want to protect it," added Dr Ng. "The Government is already becoming more positive on this and recently provided more than HK\$4 million funding for a mega project on marine biodiversity in Tolo Harbour that involves 25 marine biologists, and six universities. It's a step in the right direction." ■



Three common high shore snails.



A lot of women in Sri Lanka start to work as tea pluckers after finishing their compulsory education at the age of 18.

DOWN ON THE FARM IN SRI LANKA

Living conditions on a Sri Lankan tea plantation were the focus of an experiential learning project for 11 Social Sciences and Comparative Literature students, whose output supported the work of the Save the Children organisation.

The only exposure to malnutrition that most people in the developed world will have is through the media – typically, sad images of children with swollen bellies, stick-like limbs and

rib cages poking out. So when a group of HKU students ventured to Sri Lanka tea plantations last summer, they had to rub their eyes in disbelief.

They were told more than 30 per cent of the children there were malnourished – yet they had none of the supposedly tell-tale signs. Instead, many had hidden malnutrition in the form of Vitamin A deficiencies and anaemia that would affect their long-term health and development.

The students were so surprised by what they saw that they produced a short video to educate the public about this form of malnutrition. They also produced a booklet on the problem and recommended solutions.

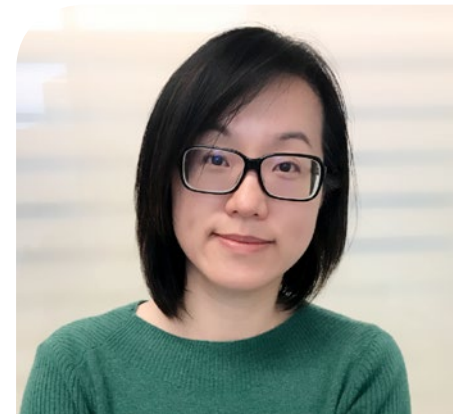
“Families living on tea villages are poor but the core factor leading to their malnutrition problems is that they are not equipped with the knowledge to effectively allocate resources, such as money, health supplements and food, to maintain health. They stick with traditional

health practices which are sometimes harmful and they do not eat nutritious meals regularly,” said third-year Bachelor of Social Sciences student, Harmony Chan Ying-tung.

Harmony and 10 other students spent seven weeks in Sri Lanka collecting information for a long-term project by Save the Children to improve maternal and child health on tea plantations, producing marketing materials on this including the video and booklet, and looking at ethical considerations of the fair trade certification of tea and the living conditions of workers.

Unusual combination

The programme was supported by the Gallant Ho Experiential Learning Fund and organised by Ms Elsa Lam in the Faculty of Social Sciences as part of its Social Innovation and Global Citizenship Internship programme, and Dr Jason Ho Ka-hang of the Department of Comparative Literature as part of its internship programme. It



“ The big take-away that all the students reported was the interpersonal bonding. Of course they learned a lot about fair trade and so on, but it was the bonding with a group of people they might not otherwise meet that stood out. ”

Ms Elsa Lam

was an unusual combination of disciplines for experiential learning but there was a need for both community outreach and story-telling abilities.

The students received one week of training, where they learned about all aspects of the tea trade including the business side, before heading to Sri Lanka. They travelled to different tea estates where they interviewed workers and their families, managers and other stakeholders. The interviews were videotaped and photographed.

“The most memorable part was doing interviews with the mothers,” Harmony said. “It reflected how big a difference knowledge could make. Families with mothers who were knowledgeable in healthcare obviously maintained better health than those whose mothers knew very little.”

Ms Lam said that across the board, “the big take-away that all the students reported was the

interpersonal bonding. Of course they learned a lot about fair trade and so on, but it was the bonding with a group of people they might not otherwise meet that stood out.”

Expectations and reality

The encounters also included people at the top of the tea trade. Sri Lanka’s tea board, which regulates tea practices in the country and includes industry representatives, invited the students to present the marketing materials they had produced. The board then screened its own marketing video, which was glossier than the students’ work and showed a more promotional side of the tea trade.

“We had to debrief the students afterwards to point out that after all, this is a commercial business. This was part of their learning, too, because there are always going to be expectations and reality,” Dr Ho said. “There are a lot of key stakeholders at play, so these issues are not as easy as you might think.”

Students also gained some skills, in particular how to ask questions – “when to ask open-ended questions, when to ask yes / no questions and when not to ask anything and just let people speak,” Dr Ho explained. A Journalism student in her final year helped her teammates in this.

Ms Lam said the project would continue this year, focussing this time on child protection and dental oral health. Students from the Faculty of Dentistry will be invited to join. “We will also gather data on the progress of the maternal and child health project. It will take years to see improvement,” she said.

In the meantime, the marketing materials produced by the students last summer are bearing fruit as they are used to help Save the Children raise funds for its work in Sri Lanka. ■



Students received one week of training learning about all aspects of the tea trade before heading to Sri Lanka.



Children under five years old are put in Child Development Centres (CDCs) during the day as a safe and secure place to stay when their parents are out for work.



Students interviewing the tea plucker with the help of the interpreter.



A guided tour led by HKU students introducing the Kinsey African American Art and History collection.

A TEACHING MUSEUM

UMAG – the University Museum and Art Gallery – is developing its role as a teaching museum and meeting point for HKU and the community.

Rising Above – a major exhibition of African American art and history – was staged outside the US for the first time at the University's own museum early this year. Not only was it a prestigious coup for UMAG involving international partners, it was also an opportunity to advance UMAG's mission of being a teaching museum.

The exhibition, which showcased the collection of Americans Bernard and Shirley Pooler Kinsey, was managed jointly by UMAG and the American Studies programme and included regular classes held in the museum, public

lectures, internships for students, and rich learning experiences for both students and the public. The students translated materials, promoted the exhibition through social media, and gave tours to the public.

"We have done individual events like this before but never a semester-long run," UMAG Director Dr Florian Knothe said. "It's a wonderful model that I hope we can follow in future with different departments."

The museum has previously organised smaller-scale collaborations with the European Studies

and Japanese Studies programmes and has ongoing training programmes with the Fine Arts and Architecture departments. Dr Knothe believes there is scope to involve even more disciplines and he has recently proposed a Common Core course with the Department of Physics that brings together the study of materials and art. He also lectures for the Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, is in talks with the Faculty of Education on internships and has started sending out feelers to the Faculty of Law.

"We are trying to build more of these connections with departments and develop projects that can offer insights into topics that students would otherwise only know from a book or a PowerPoint presentation," he said.

That vision of being a teaching resource is shared by other university museums and in October, 2016, HKU hosted the third Research Symposium on University Museums of the Association of Pacific Rim Universities, with the theme of museum teaching beyond traditional faculty courses and classroom settings.

External partners

Knowledge exchange comes in, too, because joint programmes such as *Rising Above* can be



“ We are trying to build more of these connections with departments and develop projects that can offer insights into topics that students would otherwise only know from a book or a PowerPoint presentation. ”

Dr Florian Knothe

delivered to the public through the museum, which offers guided tours, tailored tours for school groups and for those with disabilities, and workshops for professionals.

External partners are also part of the mix. M+ Museum and AXA Art Insurance have helped to fund conservation workshops and the Getty Conservation Institute, which signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UMAG in 2016, is collaborating on the creation of a database of tangible and intangible heritage in Asia. A grant from the Knowledge Exchange Fund is helping to support this initiative and develop UMAG as a resource and server platform to help other groups in Asia develop their own local heritage databases.

In addition, UMAG and the Faculty of Arts recently were awarded HK\$1.1 million by The Andrew W Mellon Foundation to expand museum and conservation studies and develop new courses in preservation.

"It's great to work with external partners but it's equally important for us to connect with different departments and faculties here at HKU," Dr Knothe said. "We want to become an

effective teaching museum and I think we owe that to the University. It's also a chance to distinguish ourselves from other museums in Hong Kong." ■



From left: Mr Bernard W Kinsey, Mrs Shirley Pooler Kinsey and Mr Khalil Kinsey, United States Consul General to Hong Kong and Macau Mr Kurt W Tong, HKU Dean of the Faculty of Arts Professor Derek Collins, HKU Vice-President and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Global) Professor John Kao and UMAG Director Dr Florian Knothe officiating at the opening ceremony of the *Rising Above* exhibition.



Woman Wearing Orange Scarf, circa 1940, Laura Wheeler Waring, oil on canvas.

Exhibitions to admire and learn from

The Kinsey African American Art and History collection, exhibited as *Rising Above*, was seen by more than five million people in 21 US cities before coming to HKU. Its 120-plus objects, including art, documents, artefacts and first editions, offer a material record of the experiences and achievements of African Americans since 1595. The objects range from the shackles used when transporting slaves to a 1773 book by the first African American poet, paintings from the 19th and 20th centuries, and a first edition of *12 Years a Slave*. As Dr Knothe explained, "*Rising Above* is about a community struggling with expectations in a way. There is all this positive aspect of their history that has been somewhat overlooked."

The American Studies programme is a partner in the project and has brought in visiting scholars from the US as well as its own academics to lecture in the museum about the history around particular objects. The lectures will result in a book, as well as a catalogue of the exhibition.

UMAG also collaborated with the European Studies programme on a smaller scale for an exhibition on the Holocaust in 2014 and is currently planning an exhibition later this year with the School of Chinese. "We do exhibitions of Chinese art all the time, but this exhibition is related to anthropology and history. We will work with other experts on campus and with students because it's something we couldn't do alone," Dr Knothe said.



The Association of Pacific Rim Universities' third Research Symposium on University Museums was hosted by the University Museum and Art Gallery at HKU, with the theme centred on museum teaching beyond traditional faculty courses and classroom settings.



Students watching the military parade on the streets during one of the field trips to North Korea.
(Courtesy of CK Lee)

LESSONS FROM THE LAND OF THE UN-FREE

Students are getting a first-hand glimpse into one of the world's most mysterious countries, with regular field trips to North Korea.

Winston Churchill once described Russia as 'a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma'. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) could be said to be the heir to that title, since self-imposed exile and conflicting accounts in the media and books make it very difficult to get a realistic picture of what daily life there is like.

Dr Victor Teo, Assistant Professor in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, has been visiting North Korea since 2008 for his own research, and for the past two academic years he's taken students there on field trips. "I noticed there is a disjuncture between what is written about the country and what is actually happening on the ground," he said. "Consequently, when I started teaching a course on North Korea for the Korean Studies programme, I felt the students would benefit immensely from seeing first-hand what it is like to live in a truly un-free country."

"DPRK is like a living laboratory in that it is probably one of the remaining countries in the world where the Communist way of life is still very much preserved. I have travelled with elderly Chinese scholars who tell me that for them it is like travelling back to 1950s China. Anyone with an interest in Communism should pay a visit to this country."

Hong Kong students are probably most surprised by how much North Koreans are similar to people anywhere in the world. "They have aspirations; they work and play hard and enjoy everyday life with family and friends, but without the rich material culture or opportunities people elsewhere have," said Dr Teo. "They are intensely curious about the outside world and are very friendly, and are extremely proud of their country, their nation and their leader."

"One of the most important aspects of the students' visits is for them to learn from their hosts as much as possible into daily life in DPRK. I ask them to learn about the way North Koreans perceive themselves, and their neighbouring countries, as well as the problems they face. This information is not easily available in books."

The students are also introduced to how North Koreans see history and current affairs through study tours of the Museum of the Liberation of



Dr Victor Teo (right) with Korea People's Navy Commodore Kim Jin Cheol, one of the last surviving officers who was instrumental in the capture of United States spyship Pueblo in 1968. The USS Pueblo (background) was a research ship attached to US Naval Intelligence and was seized by the North Koreans in 1968.
(Courtesy of CK Lee)



“The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is like a living laboratory in that it is probably one of the remaining countries in the world where the Communist way of life is still very much preserved. I have travelled with elderly Chinese scholars who tell me that for them it is like travelling back to 1950s China.”

Dr Victor Teo

Motherland (The Korean War Museum) to give them insights into how the Korean War and the Cold War are explained from the North Korean perspective. But the trips also go beyond the usual tourist staple diet of monuments, memorials and museums. "We have taken students to shooting ranges, amusement parks, shopping centres, bowling alleys and libraries. Most of which are off the standard tourist itinerary," said Dr Teo.

Surprising sophistication

Asked for his own impressions, Dr Teo said he is constantly surprised by how sophisticated the North Koreans are in terms of coming up with solutions to deal with the difficulties they face, and how attuned they are to regional and global developments despite the façade they put up. "Every so often, people I encounter there, such as the officials, minders or guides appointed to accompany us, surprise me with very frank questions such as what do you think of our nuclear weapons programme? Why do you think the Americans are doing this or that? How do the Chinese feel about our sanctions?"

"Also, in reply to a question I am constantly asked when I return from these trips: It would appear that the current leader does enjoy a lot of support from the people in Pyongyang, judging by the sense of optimism that the younger North Koreans have for the regime and the future of the DPRK. To put that into context, however, it is important to understand that the North Korean people do not have a lot outside references to compare him to. Those old enough can only compare the current leader to his father or grandfather."

Dr Teo described an interesting occurrence which happened on a student trip in October, 2015. After six months of negotiations with governmental departments, the HKU group had been given permission to be in the main stadium in Pyongyang to watch a military parade alongside North Korean elites. However at the last minute they were told that for

security reasons they had to watch the parade on the streets leading to the stadium alongside Pyongyang residents.

"While it was a disappointment not to be inside the stadium, it actually became a very interesting opportunity," explained Dr Teo. "We spent about six hours in the crowd alongside ordinary North Koreans, who were not usually allowed to interact with us. It turned out to be the best six hours of our trip. And it got even more interesting when I learnt from sources in Pyongyang later why the switch had been made. We were there just after the October 2015 protest on campus at HKU and news of the protest had been transmitted to Pyongyang via DPRK's Hong Kong consulate. The North Koreans were already wary of Hong Kong

students because of the Umbrella Movement in the preceding year. The authorities then decided to move the HKU delegation for fear that students would engage in some sort of protests in the stadium!" Upon their return, the students and staff members organised two very successful public photo exhibitions on the DPRK which were attended by well over 2,500 people in total.

Next, a longer summer field trip in conjunction with students from Oxford, Cambridge and Harvard, as well as HKU, is being planned. Dr Teo is also negotiating a possible summer institute involving more in-depth visits to Kim Il Sung University or at Pyongyang University of Foreign Studies. ■



HKU students interacting with students of the Kim Il Sung University at the pool.



The photo exhibition on 'Everyday Life in the DPRK' held at HKU in December, 2015 attracted more than 1,500 visitors.



OPEN ACCESS LIBRARY

HKU Libraries has been a leader in making the trove of university resources accessible to the wider community, including a recently-launched image database with thousands of historical photographs of Hong Kong.

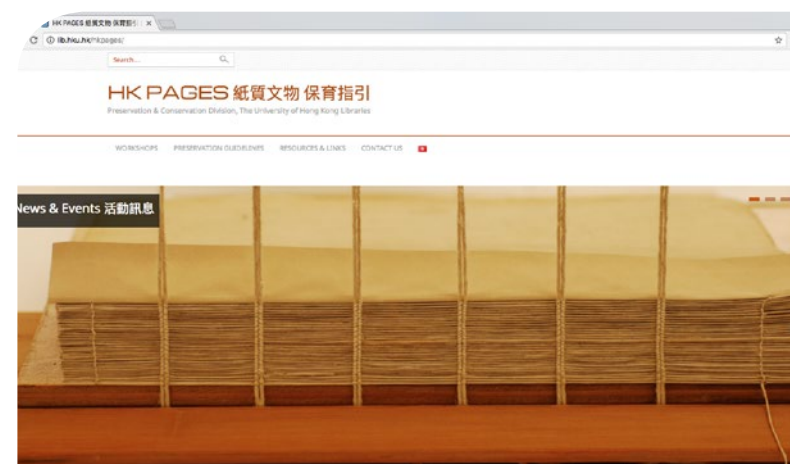
Publicly-funded universities in many countries typically open their library doors to the public. But in Hong Kong, the lack of space is such a major issue that it has been difficult to pull that off. So HKU Libraries (HKUL) has gone the digital route instead to open a virtual door to its stacks and holdings.

In recent years, HKUL has launched the HKU Scholars Hub, which has become a one-stop source of information about HKU academics and

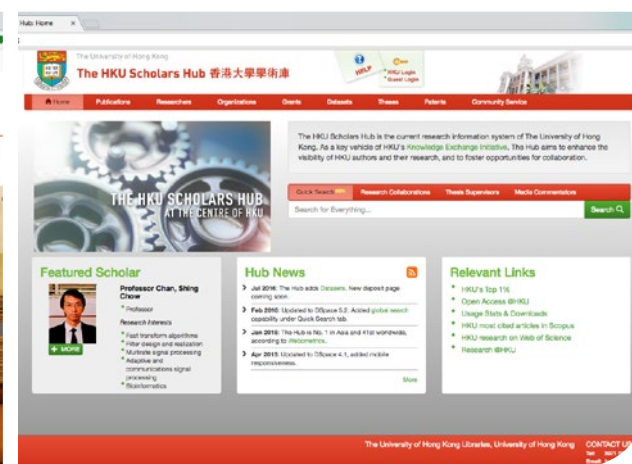
their research, and uploaded 30 digital databases featuring its own materials, those of individual faculties, and joint initiatives with other universities in the region. The databases cover such topics as a war crimes tribunal, oral history archives, rare books in Chinese, the drafting history of Hong Kong's *Basic Law* and, most recently, images of historical Hong Kong. The library has also launched HKPages, a website offering advice and awareness-raising on book preservation.

"One of our key objectives has been to support the community and engage in knowledge exchange," University Librarian Mr Peter Sidorko said. "We do exhibitions, we do book talks, and we've been more engaged in not just promoting ourselves but promoting the institution effectively, in particular our faculty and their output."

The jewel in the crown is the HKU Scholars Hub, which has evolved from being a collection of



HKU Libraries' new online initiatives: HKPages (<http://lib.hku.hk/hkpages/>) (left) offers advice and awareness-raising on book preservation whereas the HKU Scholars Hub (<http://hub.hku.hk/>) (right) acts as a one-stop source of information about HKU academics and their research.



“ Our overriding principle is to make the things that we digitise openly accessible, and to digitise those things that are complementary to our faculty research and that are unique to HKU Libraries' collection. ”

Mr Peter Sidorko

published faculty output into a wide-ranging searchable engine that includes information on each faculty member's publications, conference papers, presentations, grants, knowledge exchange activities, PhD supervision, contact details, and topics that they are happy to speak to the media about.

The Scholars Hub stores over 180,000 items and in 2015–2016 alone saw nearly two million downloads, a figure likely to expand under plans to include raw research data.

"The idea is that people can replicate the findings or, if the findings are questioned, we can then say here is the original data," Mr Sidorko said. "We are uploading this data selectively now but expect that by 2018, faculty will be putting forward a research data management plan when they submit grant applications which will specify how and where the data will be stored, whether it is accessible, and their justification."

"We're also requiring that postgraduate students place their data on the Scholars Hub, starting with the September 2017 intake."

Collaborating with faculties

The range of digital projects is also expanding. HKUL has started collaborating with faculties to showcase their research and other work. The Hong Kong War Crimes Trials collection, for example, is a collaboration with the Faculty of Law and includes the case files of 46 trials over war crimes committed during the Second World War. Another collaboration is the Dental Community Health Projects collection, which includes Faculty of Dentistry research of interest to the general public as well as community outreach projects.

Most recently, the HKU Image Database was launched with more than 5,000 images from HKUL collections such as those of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch, Land Use Survey Photos, 19th century costume portraits, and the earlier 20th century works of Hungarian photographer Dezső Bozóky, which were recently featured in an exhibition at the University Museum and Art Gallery. Mr Sidorko said there are thousands more photos but time is needed to identify the location, period and year as best as they can and match that with Google Maps.

Equally labour-intensive is an upcoming database on Hong Kong newspapers published from the 1840s to 1997. There are 866 unique titles and staff are digitising the inaugural and last issues of each one and anything significant in between. So far 2,200 issues have been digitised but there is still a lot more work ahead. The plan is to launch the database some time this year.

In the meantime, Mr Sidorko and his staff are occupied with a major system change that will join all eight of Hong Kong's university libraries into a single streamlined system this summer and, among other things, create the largest repository of Chinese-language material in the world.

"Our overriding principle is to make the things that we digitise openly accessible, and to digitise those things that are complementary to our faculty research and that are unique to HKUL's collection. We have a responsibility to bring that to the community and to the world at large, rather than keeping it under lock and key," Mr Sidorko said. ■



No 11, Po Tuck Street, Sai Wan, 1970s from the collections of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch. (Courtesy of Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch)



Photos by Hungarian photographer Dezső Bozóky were featured in an exhibition at the University Museum and Art Gallery and are now included in the HKU Image Database. (Courtesy of Dezső Bozóky)



PREPARING JUDGES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Judges today are expected to make decisions in cases giving rise to a whole swathe of emerging issues, from environmental protection and new technology to anti-terrorism and cross-border integration. How can they be expected to deal with such matters when their own prior experiences may have been limited to different, more traditional areas of the law? HKU has started to address that concern through its Judicial Studies Programme.

Professor Anselmo Reyes served as a High Court judge for nine years before joining HKU in 2012, after 14 years as a barrister. He is also a sitting judge of the Singapore International Commercial Court. These experiences have all given him an empathy for the challenges facing judges

today – and a concern for where judiciaries, especially in Asia, are heading.

“The demands on today’s judiciaries are such that one cannot expect judges, even those who had extensive legal practice before being

appointed judges, to be able to deal with the whole range of cases that are likely to come before the courts,” he said.

“Even in civil law jurisdictions, where judges receive training as they advance up the judicial ladder, judges will handle increasingly complicated cases and will likely handle cases with an international or global element. Where is the guarantee that a judge has the experience and capacity to decide such cases with sensitivity and perception? It is not a good idea for judges to learn new law at the expense of litigants.”

That insight inspired the Faculty of Law to found the Judicial Studies Programme (JSP) in 2013. The JSP aims to help build capacity among judges in Asia and elsewhere to deal with the complexities of contemporary life, and to provide workshops and public talks on matters pertaining to the judiciary and what judges do.

First Judicial Roundtable

Last summer the JSP organised its first Judicial Roundtable, modelled on an annual conference



“Judges need to be knowledgeable about issues affecting people’s daily lives in order that the competing demands of our global society can be properly reflected in and can inform their decisions.”

Professor Anselmo Reyes

for top constitutional lawyers at Yale University. Some 10 judges from various jurisdictions (including Hong Kong, Mainland China, Thailand, Myanmar, Bhutan, Singapore, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Mongolia) met to discuss four issues pertinent to Asia: environmental law, money laundering, national security (including anti-terrorism), and cross-boundary evidentiary issues.

The group was kept purposely small to encourage frank discussions. HKU Law professors led the discussions, while top students prepared briefing notes for each session and provided logistical assistance during the sessions. Visiting professors also participated in the discussions.

Apart from encouraging dialogue among judges from Asian jurisdictions, Professor Reyes said this was a good chance to showcase the talent within HKU’s Law Faculty and to motivate HKU academics and students to engage in practical research. It was also an opportunity for them to speak with judges and learn more about their everyday needs and concerns.

In addition to the Roundtable, the JSP also organises talks to enable the public to better

understand the work of the judiciary. “People have misconceptions of what judges are and what they do. Judges should be somewhat removed from daily life, in the sense of being detached from cases in order that they can give impartial judgement. But judges also need to be knowledgeable about issues affecting people’s daily lives in order that the competing demands of our global society can be properly reflected in and can inform their decisions,” he said.

Bridging the gap

A talk by the Honourable Justice Matthew Palmer of the New Zealand judiciary organised at HKU by the JSP in December, 2016 touched on this issue. Justice Palmer discussed the thesis advanced by Judge Richard Posner in the book *Divergent Paths: The Academy and the Judiciary* that there is a disconnect between legal academic discourse and the work of judges. “We are trying through the JSP to bridge whatever gap there may be between what academics and judges do,” Professor Reyes said.

Looking ahead, the second Judicial Roundtable is planned for later this year and it is hoped this will become an annual event, subject to funding.

Professor Reyes also hopes to develop interdisciplinary workshops for judges by tapping into the expertise in the Law Faculty on such contemporary issues as ecology and cybersecurity. Eventually, it is hoped that a Judicial Studies Centre can be established.

“This is a trend not just in Hong Kong but elsewhere. Many jurisdictions are developing judicial studies programmes and we can try to assist by designing bespoke capacity-building packages, especially for developing countries in Asia. That’s the long-term vision,” he said. “We want to assist in the effort currently underway in many Asian jurisdictions to get the best judiciary that people can have to meet the difficult challenges of the 21st century.”

There is possibly a more personal goal as well. “Judges tend to feel lonely and misunderstood nowadays. This is in some way an underlying theme behind this work. The message of support that the JSP would like to send out to judges is ‘you are not alone,’” he said. ■



Chief Justice of Canada the Right Honourable Beverley McLachlin was invited to give a lecture on ‘Equality and the Law: A Canadian Journey’.



The Judicial Studies Programme organised its first Judicial Roundtable in July, 2016.



Students assisting in the first Judicial Roundtable.



COURTING COLLABORATION

At a time when many universities around the world are staking their claim to be global institutions, the new Dean of Science Professor Matthew Evans believes that HKU is one of the few that really has the capability to achieve it.

"The University is in the process of transforming into a truly global player," Professor Matthew Evans said, when asked what had drawn him to take up his new role. "It has the capability to do it – the right world-view, the right mindset and the right attitude. It is a renowned institution in its own right, there is the legacy of the British within its foundations, it is on China's doorstep and it is within reach of Asia and Australia – all factors which stand it in very good stead to be a truly international institution."

Professor Evans comes to HKU from Queen Mary University of London where he was Head of the School of Biological and Chemical Sciences, and Professor of Ecology. Prior to that he founded the Centre for Ecology and Conservation at Exeter University's then new campus in Cornwall. He is also an accomplished scholar, specialising in ecology, evolutionary biology and conservation biology.

With both of their children now at university, Professor Evans and his wife felt the time was right to broaden their horizons and go outside the UK, and soon Hong Kong beckoned. "The attractions of HKU are many: not only is it one of the world's most important universities, but it is located in a fascinating place in what are very interesting times," he said.

Enhancing a strong reputation

One of his goals is to enhance the Science Faculty's already strong reputation in the region and globally, by building on existing international collaborations and facilitating new ones. He was at University College London and the University of Southampton over Christmas doing just that, namely: "Talking about future collaborations between the respective Biology and Chemistry departments. We need to be integrated with the rest of the world."

"The Science Faculty has many strengths, and is a source of well-trained people for government and businesses within Hong Kong," Professor Evans continued. "It also has a good reputation around the world, with the Chemistry department and individuals within it enjoying particular renown.

“ The attractions of HKU are many: not only is it one of the world's most important universities, but it is located in a fascinating place in what are very interesting times. ”

Professor Matthew Evans



Professor Matthew Evans at the alumni gathering in January, 2017.

"But there is some room for improvement – we want not only to be the best in Hong Kong and Asia, but to compete globally. Right now some of what we do does that – my job is to make sure all of it does."

Among the key things he will be addressing is the quality of the Faculty's infrastructure. "We need international standard, state-of-the-art equipment. And for that we need money. All universities face this – the sciences are expensive. It's important to have the instruments with which to move forward so our research can evolve and keep up with the latest developments in the field."

This brings us to that old chestnut, funding, towards which his approach is pragmatic. "You have to work out what funding there is and use it, but you also need to make people aware that

funding is required." To this end, Professor Evans has organised an alumni event – "the first of its kind for years, I understand" – to which around 50 alumni are coming.

Inviting alumni in

"I hope to make these events quarterly," he said. "In Hong Kong there is no problem with distance – many alumni still live and work here. I'm inviting them to come in and see what we are doing now, to learn how things have evolved since they were students here and to engage them in what we are doing today. The initial aim is not fundraising, it is retaining connections. But if, somewhere down the line, people also feel they are able to donate, that is good news."

Another area Professor Evans will be reviewing is taught programmes. "We need to think clearly

about what we are doing with our taught programmes, and to make sure our courses remain pertinent to what is needed now. The HKU model is more Americanised than I am used to – and that's very interesting to me, it's a learning curve. I feel the Faculty is doing really well in some sections – particularly in the Common Core courses we offer. We were also at the forefront of experiential learning, which is now standard practice across HKU. We can build on that."

In his first few months in the five-year term as Dean, Professor Evans has also been making connections within the Faculty. "I've been busy putting together a new team. I've held town hall meetings, as well as individual one-on-ones and I have gone out into the departments many times, simply getting to know people and inviting them to get to know me. It's also an opportunity to listen to their opinions on and ideas for the Faculty."

Finally, Professor Evans emphasises once more the importance he places on collaboration, whether between departments within the Faculty, between faculties within HKU, or with academic institutions and businesses across the world: "As a Faculty, we should have the confidence to say that we are the best at some things, but also be humble enough to admit that in some areas others are better. Then we can enter into the spirit of collaboration with the attitude that between us we can do even more." ■



Professor Matthew Evans meeting students at the tea reception after the Inauguration Ceremony for new students.



From left: Professor Che Chi-ming, Professor D Michael P Mingos, FRS, Emeritus Professor of Inorganic Chemistry at University of Oxford, Professor Vivian Yam and Professor Matthew Evans at a public lecture co-organised by Faculty of Science and Graduate School.



THE HAUNTED LIFE ON SET

Workers on film and television sets are often faced with stories about death and dying. Their real lives are not untouched by these encounters, as Dr Sylvia J Martin of the Department of Sociology reports in her new book about the Hollywood and Hong Kong media industries.

The film and television industries can be ruthless about the bottom line, but there is one expense they seemingly pay without question: the fortune teller's fee.

In Hong Kong, Bak Lung Wong, or White Dragon King, who died in 2013, was often asked to give his blessing to films such as *Infernal Affairs*. In Hollywood astrologer Joyce Jillson was on the payroll of Twentieth Century Fox Studios and helped to pick the opening date for, among other films, *Star Wars* in 1977.

Call it superstition or religion or, as some anthropologists prefer, enchantment, such beliefs and cultural practices are quite common in modern-day production, as Dr Sylvia J Martin discovered in her years researching on sets in Hong Kong and Hollywood.

Her interest in this area can be seen in the courses she teaches in the Department of Sociology, which include anthropology and modern culture and lifestyles, among others.

She started her research in 2003 by arranging an internship with the production company of a major Hollywood studio that allowed her to observe the happenings on set, where she spent hundreds of hours developing relationships and interviewing industry workers. To broaden her perspective, she also extended her research to Hong Kong.

"I started noticing death was a big story theme and the experience of filming death scenes or performing dangerous, death-defying stunts stayed with a lot of these media workers, not just actors but stunt workers, directors, camera

operators, make-up artists – anyone involved in the production of the image," she said.

Incense and medallions

How media workers coped with these situations is one of the foci of her new book, *Haunted: An Ethnography of the Hollywood and Hong Kong Media Industries*. "Death and dying are very powerful narratives and in both places there are engagements with various forms of enchantment," she said.

For instance, in Hong Kong the actors or stunt workers involved in death scenes are commonly given *lai see* [red packets] by the producer as acknowledgement and compensation for this work. Incense burnings and other offerings are sometimes made on set, especially at the start



“There’s this idea that audience members’ lives might be changed in some way by watching a powerful film or TV show, but the work of making these products can also transform the workers, whether they’re a prestigious director or a carpenter.”

Dr Sylvia J Martin

of a new film to solicit auspicious fortune. Not everyone believes in these practices, but they are generally accepted as part of the business of making film and television productions, she said.

In Hollywood, enchantment practices are less publicly ritualised, and less formal, but Dr Martin encountered a number of actors who wore religious medallions under their costumes, and collected icons of St Clare of Assisi, the patron saint of television. One film worker wrote bible verses on scraps of paper and stuffed them under his clothing. Studios have for decades observed avoidance beliefs: the number 13 is considered so unlucky that the Universal Studios backlot does not use even multiples of 13 in numbering its sets.

Performers also use the language of being haunted to describe their experiences when filming death-related scenes – of being ‘possessed’ by their character or having to ‘exorcise’ the character at the end of filming.

Impacts behind the scenes

"The studios like to put out a mostly secular narrative," she said. "And a lot of motion picture industries' scholarship focusses on the economics of media production and also assumes a rational secular world. But when you talk to people, you find it's a little more complicated than that. The assumption is not necessarily the reality for the people who perform the work."

"I'm interested in how their behaviours become patterned cultural practices that impact film schedules, economics, how people relate to one another, how people understand the material they are working with."

And how it affects their relationship to their work. For example, director Steven Spielberg told an interviewer that he could not work for months after completing *Schindler's List* because he was so depressed by the content.

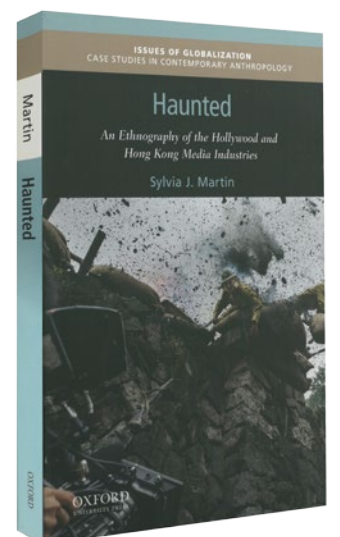


Incense burnings made on set has become a commonly seen cultural practice taken place at the start of a new film to solicit auspicious fortune.

"There's this idea that audience members' lives might be changed in some way by watching a powerful film or TV show, but the work of making these products can also transform the workers, whether they're a prestigious director or a carpenter," Dr Martin said. "We're not untouched by our work."

Adding a poignant backdrop to her work was the parallel decline of both Hong Kong and Hollywood as centres of production. A lot of the work has been offshored or outsourced – in the case of Hollywood to other American states or Canada, and in the case of Hong Kong to Mainland China. Dr Martin said there was no causal relationship with death and dying themes but it adds an extra layer to the story of globalisation and how personal and cultural practices persist.

Haunted: An Ethnography of the Hollywood and Hong Kong Media Industries was published by Oxford University in autumn 2016. ■





THE STORY BEHIND HONG KONG ODYSSEY

A landmark music production about Hong Kong history's from the 1840s to the present day, featuring four composers and nearly 100 performers, has been led by Professor Chan Hing-yan in the Department of Music.

When the Hong Kong Arts Festival approached Professor Chan Hing-yan in 2015 to compose a piece to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Hong Kong's handover and the festival's own 45th anniversary, it seemed a straightforward assignment: pick a theme, create a structure and compose around that. Little did he know.

Those initial talks gave way to a bigger vision of leading a group of young composers, advising on musicians and singers, incorporating modern pop music, working with a video artist – in effect, seeing the project through from conception to page to stage.

"It turned out to be a lot of work and preparation. I had to compile the text, make sure there was a good balance in the use of the

different performers and musicians, and manage things like the number of percussion instruments on stage," Professor Chan sighed. "I'd never done anything like this before."

Nonetheless, the task sparked his curiosity and passion. He sought inspiration from written works and dug through countless poems and literary writings, as well as old and new pop songs and political anthems, that all had a Hong Kong connection. These works created the structure around which Professor Chan and three young composers – Phoebus Lee, Daniel Lo (an HKU graduate) and Charles Kwong – composed their music.

The result is *Hong Kong Odyssey*, a 100-minute production in the form of a staged cantata

performed over three nights at City Hall in February that combines music and words to offer a lyrical re-telling of Hong Kong's history.

Poetic interpretations

An example of how the disparate components were brought together is a march called *The Fiery Years: Hail, the Steeds of Legend!* that takes its title from a 1964 poem by Kun Nan about being both Western trained and steeped in Chinese culture. The march recounts the turbulent 1950s and 1960s when Hong Kong experienced riots and unrest in the wake of revolution in China. It includes snatches of songs that were sung by both the Nationalists and the Red Guards, with the Chinese *pipa* and a spaghetti Western riff thrown in.



“There hasn't been anything done on such a scale before so we are making history.”

Professor Chan Hing-yan

"This is a good mixture to show Hong Kong was a combination of the West and China," Professor Chan said. "At that time, a lot of well-educated youngsters were very curious about their roots and their heritage. I composed this as a march to show their spirit. I didn't want it to be a sad song about the riots."

On the other hand, towards the end of *Hong Kong Odyssey* is a 'gloomy serenade' inspired by Chan Chi-tak's poem *The Ineffable Future*, and an epilogue based around two pieces: a poem by HKU Fine Arts Professor David Clarke, *A City Passing*, about protests over the Queen's Pier demolition, and the 1940s song, "So Long, Hong Kong, which has recently become an anthem for social activists. The lyrics say that we can't count on anybody to build and fight for Hong Kong. And that goodness grows in conflict and evil perishes," he said.

"I gathered all these poems because they have implications and you have to take time to understand them. Such work requires not only the creative mind of a composer, but also the acute mind of a scholar."

Other literary inspirations included poems by such figures as a Qing Dynasty diplomat, Sir Cecil Clementi who was Governor of Hong Kong in the 1920s, and Yasi (the late Leung Ping-kwan, who formerly taught at HKU), writings by novelists Eileen Chang, Lilian Lee and Lau Yee-cheong, and Cantopop songs such as Tat Ming Pair's *We Should be Very Happy Today* which became popular after the June 4 incident.

Paying tribute

The theme tying it all together is the tram, which acts as a refrain throughout the production. "I chose the tram because it is iconic in Hong Kong and it has the longest history here, and it moves along telling the story of Hong Kong. Many writers write about it," he said.

A large cast of performers was involved in the February production, including a 29-musician ensemble, children and adult choruses, local celebrities who provided narration, and an 80-year-old Hakka man who will sing a Hakka song with lyrics composed by himself.

Choreographer Helen Lai directed and Lio Kuokman was the conductor.

"The 16-section text of *Hong Kong Odyssey* encompasses more than 30 works from over 20 authors, and most songs are sung in Cantonese. This is a profoundly significant initiative that both the Festival and the whole creative team should be proud of. There hasn't been anything done on such a scale before so we are making history," Professor Chan said.

"It's meaningful to do a project like this about Hong Kong, and to pay tribute to all these Hong Kong writers," he added. And they have given him a gift. He has many leftover poems from his research which he hopes will inspire his future compositions. ■



Hong Kong Odyssey was held in the Hong Kong City Hall in late February as one of the programmes of the 45th Hong Kong Arts Festival. (Courtesy of Keith Hiro and Hong Kong Arts Festival)





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Pokfulam, Hong Kong

