

# from **criticism** to **research**

*the 'Textual' in the Academy*

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When the first joint workshop on cultural research between the University of Western Sydney's Centre for Cultural Research (CCR) and the Department of Cultural Studies at Hong Kong's Lingnan University (LU) began in July 2002, I had to admit to a little uncertainty in opening the proceedings. It was a novel experience for me to speak in Sydney as a member of a foreign delegation, and I spent an anxious moment wondering how to pitch my remarks: should I be telling old friends from UWS about what we do at Lingnan, or introducing new friends from Hong Kong to the Sydney—no, the Parramatta-based environment where we would spend the next few days? Put like that, the moment quickly passed: despite David Simpson's provocative assertion that 'the methodological preference of cultural studies will almost always be for some narrowly national archive, since the thick description that it pursues almost demands that we stick to what we think we know best',<sup>1</sup> the accompanying imperative to situate and localise description in analytically scrupulous ways is more corrosive than affirmative of 'narrowly' national claims. I knew much less about Parramatta than I did about Hong Kong, and my knowledge gap has widened in the intervening years. Now as then, I will begin with what I think I know best, the Lingnan Cultural Studies program and our reasons for collaborating with the CCR in workshops on cultural research. My justification is that this relatively new local knowledge helps to clarify some older issues which I first encountered in another land.

Held under an Academic Cooperation Agreement between UWS and LU, the cultural research workshops initiated (on a modest scale) a new kind of 'transnational' research enterprise, not least because they brought together parties having little in common in certain important respects. Take the two Universities committed to the Agreement. Both UWS and

LU are new universities, facing all those problems of financing, organisation and (as we say in Hong Kong) brand definition that the term 'new' suggests, and both happen to be the youngest universities in their respective cities. However, while UWS is a huge, sprawling, comprehensive university created in part by the amalgamation of diverse older elements, LU is a small, compact, residential liberal arts university. Lingnan claims a tradition running back to 1888 in Guangzhou, where 'Lingnan University' was a progressive Protestant establishment distinguished for its pioneering initiative in employing Chinese teachers, but it has a more recent profile in Hong Kong as a Business-dominated College created in 1967. From 1995, under President Edward Chen, Lingnan College moved from Wan Chai in the heart of the city to Tuen Mun in the far western New Territories and began to develop new programs in the Humanities and Social Sciences, achieving University title in 1999.

In practice, the LU–UWS workshops involved only one small area of each university and here, too, there is an asymmetry: the UWS participants are based in a research *centre* while those from LU work in a teaching *department*. The CCR develops research contracts, trains postgraduates and orchestrates the work of post-doctoral and research fellows. Life at Lingnan is organised around close, intensive contact with undergraduate students. Our Department of twelve full-time staff delivers a full Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Studies, enrolling around 33 new First Year students annually. There is a small postgraduate group (four of whom actively participated in the workshops), but our MPhil and research PhD students work by thesis alone, in the old British way, and some are involved in undergraduate tutoring. Most staff must produce research as a condition of contract renewal (tenure is very rare and there are no 'continuing' positions), but we must do so on our own time. Funding is secured through external or internal grants but, in a key difference from Australian practice, those grants generally exclude the possibility of 'buying time off teaching'.

In Hong Kong as well as in Australia there is an insistently circulating argument for dividing the academic field into 'research' and 'teaching only' universities. This division is not yet an official reality, having been resisted so far by reformers with an understanding of the importance of research to pedagogy and, more rarely, of the importance of pedagogy to research. In both places, research universities run huge undergraduate programs while receiving the biggest chunks of research funding and the largest postgraduate enrolments, while the rest struggle as best they can to support what is often first-class research in selected areas. In other words, in both places the publicly-funded universities remain mixed, if unevenly so, and the universities that still matter most are public. Nevertheless, we all know that the research/teaching distinction has acquired internationally an active discriminatory force, and that within as well as between universities a real separation is informally well underway. So in combining staff *and* postgraduates from a research centre on the one hand and a teaching department on the other, our workshops moved against the tendency towards

divergence to create a new working relationship across a tense demarcation line in the contemporary academy.

In the permanent condition of instability installed in the Australian academy and now overtaking Hong Kong, we tend to overwork the word *new*. I have already invoked a ‘new’ transnational research enterprise, new research practices and a new working relationship: what will this really mean? Like many opportunities worth seizing in institutional life, the beginnings of this relationship were arbitrary to an extent—personal friendships, a little homesickness on my part, Ien Ang’s role as first External Examiner for the LU Department of Cultural Studies—but the challenge of the workshops was to extend those friendships to people from two very different societies who had never met before, and to develop a rationale and a practical basis for the relationship’s future development. The transnational does not have to be grandiloquent and our ‘enterprise’ is small, informal and experimental; with the first workshop we aspired only to get to know each other well enough to form an idea for the future, and at the second, two years later, we were still new enough to each other to spend time being surprised at the ease with which the conversation resumed.

I have a more concrete sense of what is ‘new’ from a Humanities perspective about the research practices developed by the CCR (and being explored by our own Kwan Fong Cultural Research and Development Program [KFCRD]) through its emphasis on seeking commissioned projects as well as applying for competitive grants, and on pursuing a mode of involvement with government agencies, community groups and organisations in Western Sydney that includes but is not limited by the cultural studies preoccupation with minorities and marginalisation. Such practices are not, of course, exclusive to the CCR; at Lingnan, the Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies (APIAS) has a very similar orientation. However, APIAS is a social research unit and I think it is fair to say that doing *cultural* research on this model—in particular, doing commissioned and contracted research—would have been hard to imagine for most Humanities-based scholars in the West some thirty or even twenty years ago. Certainly, many of us in those days worked for social movements, published beyond the confines of academic journals and tried to link scholarship with activism; there are important continuities in the West between the ‘radical’ ethos of the 1970s and the externally oriented ‘professionalism’ of research units today, continuities which may be concealed by an unreflective hostility to professionalism as such. Among the significant differences, however, the idea that the themes and priorities, indeed, the very substance and the *genres* of one’s academic research might be initiated as well as shaped by requirements determined ‘outside’ one’s personal field of interest would count for me as a major departure from the tradition in which I was trained. There is a real difference between spending a life-time deepening one’s knowledge of, say, Milton in order to generate scholarly books and articles (current options might be ‘sexual politics in Milton’, ‘queering Milton’, ‘Milton and

governmentality'), and spending one year writing a report for the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and perhaps the next running workshops for a Health Centre—all with, who knows, a little queering Milton on the side.

Then again, my old-fashioned training also came from an 'outside' which exerted a determining force (not least on the formation of 'my personal interests') no less than does a research brief today when it arrives from an art gallery, a town council, a media organisation or, in the case of the work discussed here by Po-keung Hui and Stephen Ching-kiu Chan, an Education and Manpower Bureau. We just did not think about it in quite those terms when a lecturer threw us at *The Faerie Queene*, *Religio Medici* or *The Pisan Cantos*, saying (more or less), 'deal with it', in the process leaving some of us with lasting quirks of temperament and taste. However, the training of a Humanist thirty years ago predicated a durability of vocation that is becoming unimaginable now. On the literary side, we were shaped by and for a thin community ('of scholars') ostensibly sharing an ethos ('criticism') and a discipline ('English', 'French'...) within an institution ('the University') that was assumed not only to exert somewhat ineffably a life-long influence on us, but also to command life-long *allegiance* from those who continued on to postgraduate work—a very small number of students by today's standards, I should add. The professionalism of a Stanley Fish, eloquently expounded in his book *Professional Correctness*, still conforms to this model, which, far from being in global decline—as academics struggling with Australian conditions sometimes wishfully suppose—is deeply entrenched in US research universities, which have been for years now undergoing a strong disciplinary backlash against 'studies' areas in general, and cultural studies in particular.<sup>2</sup>

In other countries, such a specialised *mode* of professionalism is too costly, too exclusive to sustain on the public purse. With casualisation and the rapid spread of fixed or renewable short-term contracts (the norm rather than the exception in Hong Kong), our time-frames of commitment have shrunk; there is no guarantee of ongoing academic work, and this alters in manifold subtle ways both the quality and the nature of a plausible subjective investment in scholarly or, in Fish's terms, 'interpretative' community, in disciplines, and in the University. What will become of the critical ethos in these conditions is an interesting question, and one that does not have to give rise only to sad or depressing answers. For while the *time* we may have for academic work is reduced, the 'spaces' in which our interests and trainings can be put to work are beginning to multiply; extra-mural activities that once signified special dedication in individuals are becoming ordinary, a mundane condition of employment. The CCR has an impressive record of generating such activity; read from Lingnan, its list of projects involving road safety issues, women's health, Asian-Australian art and the National Parks and Wildlife Service has an exotic utopian force.

Certainly, there is no good reason to romanticise this multiplication of spaces. ‘Mobility’ and ‘flexibility’ also mean insecurity and alienation, while ‘diversification’ can be a name for spreading yourself too thinly. All working academics understand this, I think: these clichés of the new academy regulate our everyday working lives, and they designate problems we need to deal with rather than offering (as blow-in pundits commonly suppose) magic solutions to need. Nevertheless, these are also the conditions in which that traditional critical ethos has to be reworked, and in which some aspects of older models of radical practice as ‘social engagement’ can be made to acquire new relevance. I tend to think that the most interesting contrast to draw within cultural studies in the West right now is not between a radical/critical past and a professional/co-opted present, but rather between two starkly divergent modes of professionalism, one of which is tenure-based and institutionally insular in its self-presentation (‘Stanley Fish’), while the other is contract-based, other-oriented and *socially* cosmopolitan (‘CCR’, ‘KFCRD’).

In this context, our shared enterprise has an intellectual foundation in Ien Ang’s working paper, ‘Who Needs Cultural Research?’.<sup>3</sup> First delivered at an annual conference of the US-based Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes held at the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, in July 1999 (*The Humanities, Arts & Public Culture in Two Hemispheres*), this paper detached from the usual polemics and legitimisation exercises buzzing about the Humanities by posing a genuine research question: who *needs* what we can do? With investigation it is possible not only to come up with answers to a question like that, but with a variety of context-specific responses that can give rise, on the one hand, to a series of local, practical initiatives, and, on the other, to a cosmopolitan or boundary-crossing reflection: our answers from Lingnan in Hong Kong will differ from those that arise for the CCR in Sydney, and together we can examine and then work with this difference, transnationally.

Legitimation exercises are necessary; I have written some myself.<sup>4</sup> They keep the Humanities involved in the renegotiation of academic life, and sometimes they make space for concrete projects to form. Arguably, one of the most influential books of the 1990s in Australia was one that few people read closely and many disliked when they did: *Accounting for the Humanities: The Language of Culture and the Logic of Government* (1991).<sup>5</sup> Disputed at every level from that of fact to morality, this text none the less succeeded in disseminating widely the idea that it was futile for the Humanities to maintain the ‘incalculable worth of reason and culture’<sup>6</sup> in the face of the determinedly economic restructuring of higher education that began in Australia with the ‘Dawkins’ reports of 1987–1988 and reached Hong Kong with the ‘Sutherland’ report (*Higher Education in Hong Kong*) of 2002.<sup>7</sup> A work of meta-legitimation, discrediting some defences while endorsing others, *Accounting for the Humanities* pointed a way towards further exploration of those ‘regular and reciprocal exchanges

between the academy and social administration<sup>8</sup> presupposed by an experiment such as the CCR, and it put forward some fascinating history to support a case for the 'always-already instrumental' value of Humanities research and teaching. However, its mode and above all its *tone* (if I may do a little lit-crit here) were 'critical' in the generic sense of that term. Heavy sarcasm about what soon began to figure as the doctrinal errors of others—'whole', 'well-rounded' persons and 'grand, oppositional gestures' were major targets for scorn—signalled an investment of the text in the postural extremism that it wanted to distance, but more importantly its rhetoric also encouraged inattention to some practical issues. Is a 'whole person' ideal always, in fact, illusory in a *pragmatically* significant way? Are grand gestures never necessary? Is 'opposition' in academics never quotidian, forever gestural, and, by implication, *always* hollow and absurd?

These are interesting questions to pose in a Hong Kong university framed by the wider context of the People's Republic of China. Under what is often called the 'minimal state' of the HKSAR and yet within (let me say as an outsider) a culture of maximal governmentality—where my local gym boasts a 'Headphone Sponge Use Policy' and on the beach a rock barely bigger than I am is smothered in signs warning 'DANGER DO NOT CLIMB!'—what would it mean to develop 'reciprocal exchanges between the academy and social administration'? I myself have little idea, although the question is fundamental to Hui and Chan's work on secondary schooling, to Chan, Ip and Leung's analysis of the micro-politics of cultural tourism in the 'seafood village' of Lei Yue Mun, and, in a mode strongly committed to the everyday living necessity of opposition for many older public housing residents, by Kit-ling Luk's research on the nexus between government, social movements and academic gerontology in Hong Kong's housing policy. Nevertheless, as a teacher I am very much aware that in this context I work for a university that wants to *niche-market* 'whole person education'. This liberal arts ideal was never explicitly affirmed by my education in Australia (the assumptions of which were meritocratic), and it is also a novel, exotic and precarious proposition in the Hong Kong system. Niche-marketing personality is a vocation that *Accounting for the Humanities* broadly attributes to cultural critics, but the interesting term here is 'whole'; what can *wholeness* come to mean as, first, the goal of a university-wide curriculum and a set of pedagogical practices, and, second, as the *product* of a degree in cultural studies 'with Hong Kong characteristics'?

Merely to sketch an answer here would take me beyond an article's scope, but let me say that the LU curriculum includes compulsory General Education components, distributed across degree programs in Business, Social Sciences and Arts, and a language policy that privileges English but fosters 'three speech' (English, Cantonese, Mandarin), bilingual training (in English and Chinese) for a student body that on entry reads little in any language and speaks only Cantonese well. Among the pedagogical practices are: easy access to close

contact with teachers, contrasting with a norm elsewhere of classroom overload and impersonality; hostel life away from home, eye-opening for young adults in a space-cramped, familial society; an international student exchange program, providing those who stay as well as those who go with an experience of diversity not otherwise easily available in an intensely homogenous (97% Chinese) and somewhat inward-looking environment; and a stress on creativity, problem-solving and, yes, *critical* thinking that contrasts with students' experience of a high school system where rote-learning and drilling still rule. This may sound like a recipe for 'multi-skilling' an elite in 'flexibility' and 'difference management', and I wish it could be: many of our students are the first generation to have tertiary education; quite a few are the children of new migrants (from the Chinese mainland in most instances); and most come to us with, in varying degrees, an entrenched sense of failure and low self-esteem (Lingnan is the least prestigious of Hong Kong's seven universities and few students 'choose' to come). My point, however, is that *wholeness* in this context minimally names a supplement offered in response to an actually existing deficit in educational opportunity that is damaging for a real social cohort of students.

What kind of 'whole personhood' may be produced by a cultural studies degree? This is where the *form* of Ien's question—*who needs* cultural research?—has a practical force for us which deconstructing the 'person' and the 'whole' of Western liberalism does not have, or does not unsupplemented by context-specific research. If we ask, for example, 'who needs whole persons in Hong Kong?', the University has an answer supported by findings in the USA: business does. Corporate managers seek that famous 'well-rounded personality' in potential employees, and by this they mean a mix of cognitive, presentational and social skills.<sup>9</sup> 'Cognitive' here covers critical *and* creative powers as well as a lasting aptitude for learning. 'Presentation' involves not only an ability to 'communicate' in speech and writing, along with a grasp of logic and composition ('coherence'), but also other semiotic knowledges—of metropolitan dress codes, say, or cross-culturally diplomatic manners—that sustain *persuasiveness* (rhetoric). Finally, social skills entail a pragmatic acceptance of difference ('to work with others ... regardless of race, gender and age') and internalised cosmopolitanism ('international experience and foreign language facilities are essential').<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, this is a condensed revision of an old Arts curriculum which adapts and generalises for the purposes of corporate globalisation some of the once specialised self-shaping procedures learned by 'reading literature'.<sup>11</sup> Of course, it does not follow that business in Hong Kong uniformly accepts that these *are* its 'needs', or that scholars are thereby constrained to disseminate or internalise corporate values any more than we already do. However, any public university today is obliged, if not duty-bound, to promote a viable, indeed persuasive account of its mission; UWS does no less when it posits and works to create its special importance to the economy and society of the Western Sydney region. In the militantly entrepreneurial,



low-welfare environment of Hong Kong, it makes sense to emphasise a business-culture nexus. The hard question for a cultural studies program is not, 'who needs critically trained, creative and difference-literate cultural studies graduates?'; we can plausibly say, 'cultural industries, institutions and organisations do', and foster awareness of these in our program. The hard question is how to integrate with or sustain alongside this mission those more contestatory, unsettling commitments to a politics of 'culture and society' that are distinctive to our discipline and constitute its heritage in Hong Kong as elsewhere.<sup>12</sup>

It would be presumptuous of any 'expat' without Cantonese to express strong views about this. I have access neither to the everyday life of 95% of the population nor to that large network of Chinese 'Societies' and 'Associations' which formed under British colonialism a majority-based yet 'alternative' mode of social governance, and still operates today.<sup>13</sup> Nor does an English-only speaker have access to the vibrant life of those non-governmental associations (NGOs) and bewilderingly numerous social movements that seem *formally* more familiar to an Australian. However, it is also a fact of Hong Kong life that well-remunerated members of elite cultural minorities like myself are lodged, as it were, in the social body, with a job to do that has consequences for that body. So rather than dodging the question of politics with an irresponsibly PC display of my humble marginality I will address it, but from a very narrow point of view—that is, through my own responsibilities as a 'textual' critic exercising power in the institutional and social context I've just outlined.

Of course I dislike saying 'textual' in this reifying way. I am doing it to be friendly. Widely used on the sociological side of our field, this term is both inaccurate and misleading as an invocation of either a method or an object; anti-'textualism' is, in fact, obstinately *literary* in its assumption that ethnography, historical research and cultural policy work are insignificantly textual activities. It also slyly predicates a realm of pure Practice which is greater (or lesser) in its immediacy than a fallen (or ideal) world of Text. But to rehearse even the preliminaries of a tired critique of this old and enduring fantasy buys into what we have unfortunately come to call the 'text-ethnography debate', a debate that strikes me as increasingly bogus for two reasons of relevance here. One is that as we replay through this debate the modern division of Humanities and Social Sciences (as if this particular 'great divide' were reparable by *fiat* in a utopia called cultural studies), we do so in interesting times that merit more of our attention; as cutbacks and restructuring in universities force the amalgamation of once distinct intellectual traditions, we find the textual and the ethnographic flung together in administratively unified but far from utopian Schools, Faculties and even Departments of 'Humanities and Social Sciences'. We may not be able to resist the overall contraction in resources that this 'interdisciplinarity' achieves, but we do have choices about how we handle the outcome. Ritualised hostility, particularly of the kind that rhetorically



aims to exterminate a neighbour's mode of expertise, is not clarifying of the potentials of this time or phase of choice.

My other reason for calling the text–ethnography debate *increasingly* bogus (for there have been and still are productive issues of contention at stake) is that there are many more polemics calling *for* ethnography or audience research to appear as 'cultural studies' than there are substantial achieved examples *of* such work. There is at least one simple reason for this: principled defences of ethnography and attacks on textualism (or vice versa) are much faster and cheaper to produce in our new conditions of labour than research of any kind. Research on the traditional model of 'field work' is becoming very rare, even in those fields where the work is in the archive or the library with texts; we have no time or resources to do it in a sustained and intensive way, and we are approaching a threshold where most academics may manage it once or twice in a lifetime after completing a PhD.<sup>14</sup> Tetchy or speculative essays fit much more easily into the rhythm of our working lives and as 'international refereed journal' items they meet the productivity requirements set by our employers and help us keep our jobs.

I do not mean to be cynical here, although I do think that most such essays are defensive operations in wishful thinking rather than the bold campaigns for renewal they represent themselves to be.<sup>15</sup> To the extent that I am calling *for* something (and meeting productivity requirements) myself right now, it is for the focused and collaborative exploration of the actual working contexts for cultural research which this issue begins to outline. So this seems the right moment to sketch the disciplinary mix and political involvements constituting the research fields of the realised cultural studies program which I inhabit and have had the privilege and the good fortune to help in shaping.

Teaching doesn't leave us time for internal text–ethnography debates, and I doubt that we would have them if it did. Several cultural studies staff have literary backgrounds, in both English and Chinese, but it would be a mistake for those of us educated only in English to assume that we can annex as *similarly* 'textual' the practices, traditions and ethos of Chinese literary scholarship. In fact, this is the first among many borders or differing lines of development constituting our Department. It is more complex than the Social Science/Humanities division which we also incorporate (having the benefit as we do of a political economist, a historian and an urban sociologist on staff), since only the 'Chinese' side of the English/Chinese *disciplinary* divide one is fully obliged to grapple with the difference—one that Western cultural studies arguments in English fail to admit or even to imagine. Yet it is crucial to recognise these little civilisational *différends* if we are ever to talk sensibly about transnational cultural studies. I have no choice but to do so, since it is part of my job to help colleagues trained in Chinese literature to submit their work to the conventions of refereed

journals in English, or write funding applications on ARC-style forms to the Research Grants Council (RGC), Hong Kong's much more sparsely funded equivalent of the ARC. Believe me, English as a *language* is the least of anyone's problems.

However, there are always third terms (and American connections) to mediate an English/Chinese split and, typically for a cultural studies program, few of us narrowly practise the discipline in which we were trained. In order to suggest what cultural research can mean and do in our environment, I will take as paradigmatic the typical *practices* of the Hong Kong contributors to this issue. Stephen Ching-kiu Chan studied Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong and UC-San Diego, but alongside his work in cultural education and policy his major research is in Hong Kong cinema and popular culture, especially as these have responded to the worldly questions of identity posed acutely to Hong Kong people in recent decades. The other major practice of this 'textualist' is as an institution-builder: as Director of the Programme for Hong Kong Cultural Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong from 1994 to 1998, he established a substantial *Hong Kong Cultural Studies* series with Oxford University Press (China), before playing a primary role in creating our program and our Department at LU; recently, he has been working on Hong Kong-wide, Hong-Kong-mainland, and East Asian-based regional networks for cultural research. In contrast, his collaborator in the 'school community' project, Dr Po-keung Hui, was trained as an economist, taking his BSc at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and doing a PhD with Giovanni Arrighi at SUNY-Binghamton. When he first came to LU, however, he worked in the Department of Translation and 'textually' co-edits a *Cultural and Social Studies Translation* Series for Oxford University Press (Hong Kong). Having a longstanding relationship with secondary teachers' groups, his community involvements also include projects on alternative economies with various NGOs and he contributes to media programs and newspapers such as *Apple Daily* and *Ming Pao*.

The Lei Yue Mun cultural tourism project also involves a researcher with textual skills. Dr Shun-hing Chan is Beijing-trained in Chinese literary history; she is Chairperson of the Association for the Advancement of Feminism (AAF), an important Hong Kong NGO, and her work on feminism and cultural studies draws on long involvement in social movements ranging across such issues as housing, sexuality, self-employment projects for women in local informal economies, and the lives of older women in Hong Kong. Her collaborators, Mr Iam Chong Ip and Dr Lisa Yuk-ming Leung, have Bachelor's degrees in Social Science. A teaching fellow who is completing a PhD with the Graduate Institute of Building and Planning at National Taiwan University, Ip practices ethnographic writing in his research with migrant workers in the Pearl River Delta, and historical writing in his studies of housing and the material formation of colonial Hong Kong; he also runs a website (in Chinese) well-known in Hong Kong for its uptake of social issues. Leung did her DPhil at the University of Sussex

(UK) and has working experience as a journalist; she studies the circulation and local uptakes of East Asian popular culture (Japanese TV ‘dramas’ and ‘Korean wave’), and through the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission she has long been involved in research on human rights sensitivity among journalists and on poverty in Hong Kong, networking with overseas human rights and labour groups.

Our postgraduates bring further paradigms of involvement to the program. Kit-ling Luk is a professional social researcher in ageing studies; she works full-time for APIAS at LU while she writes her PhD on representations of older women in policy, media and social movement discourse. Cultural studies with a textual inflection is new for Luk, and she has chosen it precisely to supplement her knowledge as a social worker and long-term activist for the housing and residents’ movements that arise at the very core of Hong Kong ‘culture and society’. Kimburley Wing Yee Choi is moving in the opposite direction. A composer and musician, with experience in women’s theatre and an Instructor in Creative Media at the City University of Hong Kong, Choi trained in Comparative Literature at Hong Kong University but her ‘as-it-happens’ study of the cultural insertion process attempted by Hong Kong Disneyland on Lantau Island is resolutely ethnographic.

As for me, it seems pertinent to emphasise that my training was not simply in English and French but more precisely as these were taught at the University of Sydney in the late 1960s and early 1970s—as drastically demarcated disciplines with a shared classical base. Studies of sexuality and family in the ancient world aside, most work in cultural studies pays little heed now to the latter. However, studying Latin, Hebrew and Biblical Studies in the late colonial atmosphere of pre-Whitlam Australia after a childhood spent watching Hollywood Biblical epics in the ‘old bush town’ of Tenterfield profoundly shaped my interest in action cinema, popular historiography and the work of Ernestine Hill. I have some experience in journalism and I, too, have acted as Chair of a small NGO, the Human Rights Council of Australia (HRCA). I have also done my share of institution-building; before gravitating to the multi-faceted work of the LU Cultural Studies Program in 2000, I did this mostly with journals and regional research networks such as those now focused by *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* and *Traces: a Multilingual Journal of Cultural Theory and Translation*. In different ways, these projects aim *materially* to sustain locally involved, regionally-oriented intellectual practices within and beyond the UK/US-based economy of academic publishing. As I see things, these journals are primarily professional in their politics, but no less political for that; they foster ‘socially cosmopolitan’ activities across our shared yet painfully differing situations as scholars and researchers in culture.

So what can a ‘textual’ orientation contribute to such institution-building? I remember when people who self-consciously worked with texts did not claim to do research; we read ‘closely’, we thought, we talked, we argued and we wrote *criticism*. (Many of the people who

taught me best did not even do the latter; they just gave wonderful lectures). Clearly, one consequence of the drastic changes in university funding in recent decades is the reshaping of Humanities research by a science-based model of knowledge production which forces us to claim to do *more* than read, think and write. One way of dealing with this is to fake it: the funding application becomes a genre one learns, like CV-writing, from which nothing follows for critical practice. That can work, although a problem is arising for new literary graduates who do not understand why their brilliant exercise in queering Derrida is not necessarily deemed 'research' by higher committees. A more interesting outcome, I think, is the recovery of older traditions of positive literary scholarship—historical and philological, for example—that were widely displaced from the mid-twentieth century by those practices and philosophies of close reading that did so much to professionalise the modern discipline of English. As cultural studies is reshaped transnationally by the force of *geopolitical* 'culture wars' today, the expansive, research-based scholarship modelled by Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, Curtius' *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* or Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic Imagination* acquires new relevance and power, all the more so for the creative effort it takes to think *past* its Eurocentrism; so, too, does the model for a formally precise, culturally 'thick' investigation of transnationally popular genres to be found in Peter Dronke's *The Medieval Lyric*.

So I would say (wouldn't I?) that text-based study provides not only an enriched but a sobering historical perspective on the politics of culture today.<sup>16</sup> More immediately, such study is a field of practice in which people learn to *do* things; text work hones skills that 'transfer' usefully to all sorts of endeavours, and the critique of the grandiose claims used to legitimise aesthetic education in the past has relatively little to say in this ongoing *practical* dimension. Significantly, the value of any such transfer depends on its purposes in the context in which it occurs: if mastering the genre of the 'funding application' may sustain but need not alter a given critical practice in Australia, securing such sustenance has a social and collective edge, indeed, a political resonance for, say, Chinese feminist literary scholars negotiating the hostility of colleagues as well as the demands of the globalising academy. When understood as an apprenticeship for doing something else, close reading has and always has had powerful uses—not least in fostering the basic literacy on which equal opportunity depends. Teaching cultural studies in what is for most of my students a poor second or third language leaves me in no doubt at all about that, and Choi's work in this issue on the use made by Cantonese-speaking parents of Disney language-teaching products lays out vividly the geo-political pressures making literacy a site of desperately *cultural* politics in Hong Kong today.

Beyond these life-supporting practices, textualism can make two modest but vital contributions to both the cultural research projects and the wider social ambitions of a locally implicated program such as ours. I have already mentioned one of these, an active

understanding of genre; to be able to *work with* given differences between a memo, a media report, a commissioned research report, a position paper, a personal essay, an essay for refereeing and an Internet chat-room message (the base-line genre in English that most of our students begin with) is a pre-condition not only for participating in the world of cultural work but for having any chance of making a difference within it, let alone beyond it. The other contribution we offer our students is a similarly active awareness of rhetoric; I mean arts of persuasion, yes, but primarily the capacity to ‘speak *to*’, rather than ‘at’ or ‘past’, those whom we hope to persuade. I have been harping about this for more than twenty years.<sup>17</sup> So let me just note that with rhetoric, too, the crucial thing is to help people deal with differences by learning to know how to *address* varying social bodies and contexts—which means being able to *recognise* new ones as they arise.

If we can establish an understanding that people practise rather than merely ‘identify’ genres or ‘analyse’ rhetoric, and if we can ground this understanding in a skills-based confidence to go out and *engage* in the many complex processes of ‘ordering and limitation’ that cultural practice entails in a ‘three-speech, two languages’ society undergoing a ‘one country, two systems’ transition towards a future as yet unknown,<sup>18</sup> then we will have gone a good way towards training students to work effectively across the varying institutions, industries and community groups, including NGOs, who need cultural research in Hong Kong. We may also be in a better position ourselves to imagine (in the midst of that same complexity) new ways of orienting our work towards shaping that unknown future, and finding practical ways to realise whatever plans we make.

Let me conclude by mentioning some concrete features of the near future that is taking shape around us at Lingnan now. Reading the Sutherland Report on *Higher Education in Hong Kong* gave me a strange sensation of having migrated to the past. I know what happens when a government decides to cut the higher education budget while expanding participation, to channel more resources to fewer institutions in the name of ‘excellence’, and to encourage ‘collaboration’ and ‘partnerships’ to make up the inevitable deficit—all in pursuit of that perverse dream of crumbling public sectors world-wide, the cut-price ‘World Class University’. There is a logic to these changes that is powerfully supra-cultural and unvarying in its unfolding. Nevertheless, no-one can know in advance how those changes will be taken up and dealt with in societies very different from those of Britain or Australia.

Here is one significant difference between Australia and Hong Kong. In the Humanities and Social Sciences, Australian academics feted for being able to raise substantial ‘external funds’ for their research programs and projects are very often (if not always) accessing money made available by other branches and offshoots of government; it is still public money, taxpayers’ money, being shunted around, but now people must compete for that money by spending less time on research and much more time pursuing the money over an ever more

complex obstacle course. This is not an option in a low-tax, minimal state environment like that of the HKSAR; nor, for that matter, are Hong Kong universities likely to raise significant funds by charging large fees to ‘international students from Asia’.

Intrinsic to the state of minimalism, however, is another difference with positive implications for a cultural studies program. Post-colonialism with Hong Kong characteristics includes that strong community sector, all those Societies, Associations, social movements and proliferating NGOs, with deep experience of how to thrive or at least survive in an entrepreneurial, self-help spirit rather than the ‘state-funded’ mode which became entrenched in Australia at the time of the Whitlam government and which allowed John Howard to dismantle so much of ‘the social’ so effectively. Many Hong Kong NGOs have an established regional or transnational base. One example is the Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA), with which some members of our Department are involved; ARENA’s activities stretch from the Philippines and Japan to India, and its research publications program has attracted support from Hong Kong University Press. Of course such entrepreneurialism is small-scale, grant-and good-will dependent, fragile in bad times; such organisations are hardly ‘sources of external funds’ that can save a University. But this is not the point, because it not *their* purpose to bring (in Ien Ang’s words) ‘a kind of dowry’ to the relationships they form with academic programs.<sup>19</sup> Rather, their social purposes can inflect and invigorate ours, and not the least of the benefits of this is the enhanced capacity it brings to conceive an intellectual life beyond the University (as we know it) in a temporal as well as a spatial sense.

Similarly, an Australian-style quest for matched funding is not the purpose of the Internship program that we have established for our BA Cultural Studies Major students, who spend a period of six to eight weeks over summer doing on-the-job training with a range of local institutions. Some of the NGOs I have mentioned are among the more than twenty media, artistic and community organizations that have taken part in this program; others are Oxfam Hong Kong, Greenpeace, Hong Kong Repertory Theatre, Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, Heep Hong Society for the Handicapped, Step Forward Multimedia Company, *Ming Pao* Daily News, Cattle Depot College (Ngau Pang Sue Yuen)—a community college which organises classes for the public and publishes a cultural criticism magazine called *E + E*—and the renowned performance group Zuni Icosahedron.<sup>20</sup> Do not mistake me; nobody sneers at funding. However, in the absence (at present) of a state-driven match-making scheme, collaboration is not forced by financial incentives. Instead it emerges in the business-like form of mutual consultation over what can be done, whether as training or as research, for the benefit of all parties; finding money, if needed, follows as part of the process.

This is a different if not necessarily better way of working than the Australian approach allows, and it pursues an interstitial rather than a 'heavy construction' logic of building support for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Certain restrictions follow from that logic; burn-out, ephemerality, over-dependence on key individuals and a sometimes disabling amateurism. But I love its inventiveness, and relative freedom from the dispiriting, credibility-sapping game of catch-up that Australians are obliged to play with the changing buzzwords of government, whereby head-kicking polemics for social engineering under one Prime Minister give way to private sector euphoria and corporate-burble under the next.

However, once again we have choices about how we deal with whatever conditions we face and, as I suggested at the beginning, the CCR at UWS strikes me as a model of inventiveness (perhaps I should say 'innovation') in the Australian context now, as well as a model of the enabling force of a socially critical professionalism. The task of redefining in practice what it means to do cultural research, how, and for whom, is one that all participants in the workshops on which this issue is based have shared, and we are merely at the beginning of our labours.

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1. David Simpson, 'Politics as Such', *New Left Review*, vol. 30, Nov–Dec 2004, p. 82.
2. Stanley Fish, *Professional Correctness: Literary Studies and Political Change*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995. Fish does not participate in this backlash against 'studies' but he brilliantly describes the conditions in which it arises.
3. Ien Ang, 'Who Needs Cultural Research?', CHCI Working Paper, Walter Chapin Center for the Humanities, University of Washington, Seattle WA 98195.
4. For example, Meaghan Morris, 'Truth and Beauty in Our Times', in John Bigelow (ed), *Our Cultural Heritage*, Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra, 1998, pp. 75–87; and (with Iain McCalman), 'Public Culture' in *Knowing Ourselves and Others: The Humanities in Australia—Into the 21st Century*, vol. 3, National Board of Employment, Education and Training, Australian Research Council, Canberra, 1998, pp. 1–20.
5. Ian Hunter, Denise Meredyth, Bruce Smith and Geoff Stokes, *Accounting for the Humanities: The Language of Culture and the Logic of Government*, Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, Griffith University, Brisbane, 1991.
6. Ian Hunter and Geoff Stokes, 'Introduction', p. 2.
7. See J.S. Dawkins, *The Challenge for Higher Education in Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, 1987; *Higher Education: A Policy Discussion Paper*, AGPS, Canberra, 1987; and *Higher Education: A Policy Statement*, AGPS, Canberra, 1987; and Stewart R. Sutherland, *Higher Education in Hong Kong*, University Grants Committee, Hong Kong, March 2002.
8. Denise Meredyth, 'Personality and Personnel' in *Accounting for the Humanities*, p. 188.



9. See *Liberal Arts Education: Institutional Visit Document for Submission to UGC*, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, September 2002, pp. 18–22. US evidence is cited from Steven Koblik and Stephen R. Graubard (eds), *Distinctively American: The Residential Liberal Arts College*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick and London, 2000.
10. *Liberal Arts Education: Institutional Visit Document for Submission to UGC*, p. 18.
11. See Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government: The Emergence of Literary Education*, Macmillan, London, 1988.
12. These concerns can be traced in local and/or regionally based journals and publications such as *Alternative Discourses* (Hong Kong), *Hong Kong Cultural Studies Bulletin, A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* (Taiwan), *Dushu* (Beijing, China) and *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*.
13. On the complex politics of colonialism and anti-colonialism waged through Chinese associations in British Hong Kong and the legacies of this today, see Fred Chiu, 'Combating the Double Processes of Decolonisation/Recolonisation in Hong Kong, or "Postcoloniality" as a Double-pronged Politics', *Cultural Studies Review* vol. 8, no. 2, 2002, pp. 33–61.
14. As this affects historians in particular, see Carolyn Steedman, 'Culture, Cultural Studies, and the Historians' in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (eds), Routledge, New York and London, 1992, pp. 613–22.
15. An example is the lugubrious, finger-wagging Introduction to Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding (eds), *Cultural Studies in Question*, Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, 1997, pp. x–xxvii.
16. I discuss this in more detail in 'On the Future of Parochialism: Globalization, *Young and Dangerous IV*, and Cinema Studies in Tuen Mun', in John Hill and Kevin Rockett (eds), *Film History and National Cinema: Studies in Irish Film II*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2005, pp. 17–36; and in 'Humanities for Taxpayers: Some Problems', *New Literary History*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2005, pp. 111–29.
17. See my *The Pirates Fiancée: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism*, Verso, London, 1988; and *Identity Anecdotes: Translation and Media Culture*, Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, 2006.
18. I borrow this emphasis on 'ordering' from the interesting and deeply un-literary work of Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham in their *Understanding Culture: Cultural Studies, Order, Ordering*, Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, 2001.
19. Ien Ang, 'Who Needs Cultural Research?', p. 7.
20. On Zuni, see Rozanna Lilley, *Staging Hong Kong: Gender and Performance in Transition*, Curzon Press, Surrey, 1998.