**Course Outline**

**Programme Title** : Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Language Studies Programme
(Three-year Full-time)
Bachelor of Education (Honours) Programmes
(Four-year Full-time)
Bachelor of Social Sciences (Honours) in Global and Environmental Studies Programme
(Three-year Full-time)

**Course Title** : Pictures of the Past
照片與過去

**Department** : Department of Social Sciences

**Credit Points** : 3

**Contact Hours** : 39

**Pre-requisite(s)** : Nil

**Level** : Nil
**Synopsis**
Photography began around the time the colony of Hong Kong was created and have become increasingly predominant in modern culture. Pictorialism helped this visual form find a place in art. But given the belief that photographic processes are objective, realism in photography began early worldwide and parallels can be found in post-War Hong Kong. Consequently in the last few decades photographs are widely used to represent the past of Hong Kong. But the tensions between pictorialism and authoritative realism are symptomatic of the artistic conventions behind and power structures surrounding all forms of photography. Awareness of these issues is an essential part of cultural literacy because the ability to critically read photographs are important not only for artistic pleasure and knowledge of the past, but especially for a citizen’s general ability to critically engage with a most ubiquitous visual form in everyday life and the media.

The choice of subject matter, the decision of the “moment,” framing and cropping, emphasis and concealment, evaluation by angle and other means, and the interpretative caption all shaped the kind of “reality” conveyed by historical photographs. The photographer’s formal choice among “pictorial art,” “objective” truth and options in-between and beyond, and the inclusion or exclusion of the gazes of those being gazed, provide meta-messages and condition the work’s subsequent adoption as historical photograph. The artistic elements are often influenced by restricted access to the tools (E.g. who had cameras or money to pay for photographs?) and the power of outside audiences (E.g. who bought postcards and served as referees for awards?) in earlier periods, and the awakening of local identity among commercial photographers. Publicly available photographs of Hong Kong have often been re-used without critical scrutiny and comment in relation to these factors since the anticipation of 1997.

On the mainland and in Taiwan, similar issues were given more attention, the potential of “old photographs” for democratic histories is better exploited, and their more accessible relevant literature will help illuminate the material in Hong Kong and prepare students to explore relevant scholarly works on the juncture of photography and Hong Kong history. The rich local material, including more than a dozen picture books and three documentary videos, provides ample opportunity to try out the analytical techniques introduced with such scholarly work. One or two guest speakers will be invited to talk about the personal lives and works of individual artists in the context of the larger issues pursued in the course. Creative ways to use photography to reinterpret existing representations of the past in sculpture and museum displays are also explored. Recent debates such as the one surrounding photographers’ “invasion” of an old housing estate facing demotion provides another opportunity for critical discussion. The conflicting interpretations of the Hong Kong material by scholars also provides opportunity for students to come up with their own informed and evidence-based evaluations.

**Course Intended Learning Outcomes**

**CILO1.** Ability to evaluate photographs for artistic pleasure as well as contemporary media literacy

**CILO2.** Awareness of the broader cultural issues of visual representations, important given the prominence of visual culture in modern society

**CILO3.** Creative engagement with society (especially through photographically reinterpreting existing representations of the past in visual forms) to encourage and enrich social participation and foster creativity

**CILO4.** Respect for and community with “others” (especially the voices of those represented in pictures) – to prevent exploitation for “art” and to increase civic awareness

**CILO5.** Increased critical thinking abilities through the topic-specific activities
### Content

| CILOs 1,2,4,5 | a | The materiality, conventionality and gazes of “real” and “direct” images – cases to introduce formal and cultural perspectives on photography |
|--------------|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
| CILOs 1,2,4,5 | b | Convention and power– Orientalism in early Hong Kong pictorialism up to the post-War period |
| CILOs 1,2,4,5 | c | Realism: American and European precursors and left-wing patriotic photography in post-war Hong Kong |
| CILOs 1,2,5  | d | Realism without authority? Ho Fan and his foreign contemporaries |
| CILOs 2, 5   | e | “Old Photographs” and popular history: Recent mainland and Hong Kong developments. |
| CILOs 1, 2, 4, 5 | f | From realism to nostalgia? Re-presentation by/of Chan Chik and his contemporaries |
| CILOs 1, 2, 5 | g | Hybrid art and its discontents: conflicting perspectives on recent Hong Kong photography’s relationship with the past |
| CILOs 1, 2, 3, 5 | h | Photography meeting other visual representations of the past |
| CILOs 1, 2, 4, 5 | i | Socially responsible photography today: Ngau Tau Kok and beyond |

### Teaching and learning activities
- In class students will gain understanding of formal elements and critical skills through the examination of material drawn from the text and photography components of more than 15 very relevant pictorial books and online sources.
- Students will choose and explore a small selection of the material mentioned above for their own projects.
- Guest speakers will be invited to talk about the personal lives and works of individual artists in the context of the larger issues pursued in the course.
- Three documentary videos on the topic in the Hong Kong context will be presented and discussed critically.
- Student will experiment with photographic reinterpretation of existing representations of history such as sculpture and museum displays.
- Students will discuss the ethics of photography in relation to recent debates surrounding photography in Hong Kong

### Assessment
- CILOs 1, 3, 4, 5: Exercise in the critical examination of historical photos (15%) drawn from a publications specified or approved by the instructor.
- CILOs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5: Exercise in evaluating visual representations of the past using photography, optionally combining critical evaluation and creative social participation (15%). Students could choose between photographic reinterpretation of a few related sculptures or museum displays with written justification, and a written evaluation of the use of photographs in a museum exhibition selected by the instructor.
- CILOs 1, 3, 4, 5: A 2000-word critical essay on a pictorial book or similar representation of history with photography to consolidate and further develop abilities (70%).
Required Text
A reading packet consisting of the following articles and chapters, equivalent to one book in length:

Clarke, David J. “Photography and Social Reproduction,” in his Art & Place: Essays on Art from a Hong Kong Perspective (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Press, 1996), 132-137.


郭立昕 《書寫攝影--相片的文本與文化》 (台北: 元尊文化出版, 1998). (excerpts)

鮑昆 “雪月風花近百年” 載於中國攝影出版社 編《中國國際藝術攝影高級論壇論文集》 (n.p.：中國攝影, 2005). [Text available online.]

苗延威, “從視覺科技看清末未足” 載《中央研究院近代史研究所集刊》55 (2007 年 3 月)頁 1-45 [Excerpt. Also available online].


趙靜蓉 《抵達生命的底色 -- 老照片現象研究》 (桂林市：廣西師範大學出版社, 2005). (Excerpts)


Recommended Reading

[*Before an item signifies availability of Chinese translation(s)]


Clarke, David J. “Varieties of Cultural Hybridity,” Hong Kong Art : Culture and Decolonization (Hong Kong : Hong Kong University Press, c2001).


*Krebs, Edward “The Old in the Newest New China: Publications on Private Memories as Sources for Unofficial History,” Modern Chinese Historiography and Historical Thinking workshop held at the University of Heidelberg, May 23-27, 2001. [Chinese translation only.]


鮑昆《觀看再觀看·當代影像文化》中國文聯出版社, 2009. (excepts)

陳傳興《銀鹽熱》(台北市:行人文化, 2009).


曾藍瑩《圖像再現與歷史書寫：趙望雲連載於大公報的農村寫生通信》，載黃克武編，《畫中有話:近代中國的視覺表述與文化構圖》（台北: 中央研究院近代史研究所，2003 ），頁 63-122. [Also available online.]