
MAICS CONNECT

2023-2024 Alumni Newsletter

inaugural issue

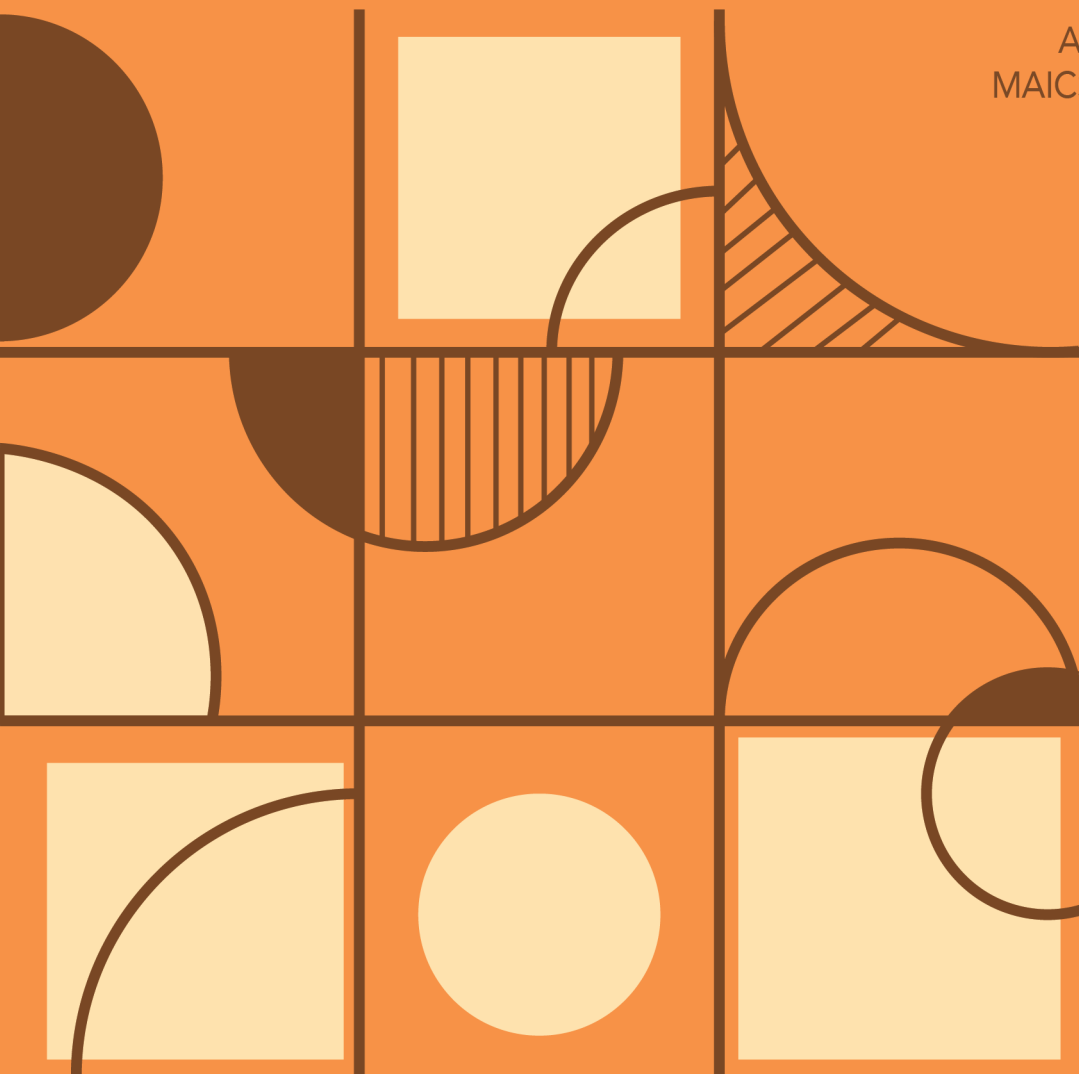
#01

May 2024

Professor Feature
Interview with
Prof. Stephanie DeBoer
Q&A with
Prof. Shoan Yin Cheung
& Prof. Xuenan Cao

TA Feature
A Conversation with
TA Zowie Li

Alumni Sharing
MAICS Happenings



CONTENTS

- 01** | **Foreword**
Words from Directors

- 02** | **Faculty Sharing**
Connect and Support

- 03** | **Professor Feature**
Research, Curate, Representation:
Interview with Prof. Stephanie DeBoer

Medicine, Technology and Society:
Q&A with Prof. Shoan Yin Cheung

What Could AI Bring to the Study of Humanities?
Q&A with Prof. Xuenan Cao

- 04** | **TA Feature**
From Wuhan to Hong Kong: Search of Cultural Identity
– A Conversation with TA Zowie Li

- 05** | **Alumni Sharing**
Patrick Lo: Escape Out of the Box, Reimagine the World
Post-Graduation: On the Path to Academics and Career

- 06** | **MAICS Happenings**
Events and Memories

- 07** | **Afterword**
Editors' Notes

Foreword: Words from Directors

01

MAICS Programme Director

Prof. Elmo GONZAGA

A big congratulation to Alison, Andy, and their team for putting together the remarkable first issue of our long-awaited alumni newsletter!

The MAICS programme has always distinguished itself with its rigorous courses and passionate teachers, but graduates have tended to go their own ways as soon as the Spring semester is over. We are hoping that this newsletter can provide a platform for updating you, our alumni, about the latest news and developments in the programme. Our vision is for it to enable us to keep in touch with each other, and to help grow our community.

Enjoy reading this inaugural issue, and please consider contributing to future issues! Wishing everyone all the best.

MAICS Associate Programme Director
Dr. LI Tiecheng

I still remember how I told my students at the beginning of the semester: everytime I rush through the tunnel to school as the sun slowly sets, I am always filled with warmth and excitement. After 12 years of teaching at ICS, my anticipation for our lessons has never waned. The podium has given me the happiest moments in my life, which I am grateful for. Despite my own sensitivity, the understanding, forgiveness, and support from my students put me at ease. Former students lovingly call me "Tiege", and I hope to always maintain my passion so that my podium remains a temporary rest station, from which I can witness everyone soaring freely towards the sea. Congratulations to the official release of the inaugural issue of our e-Newsletter, so we could stay in touch no matter where we are, what we are doing, to look back and connect with our lovely ICS. I wish everyone can come back to visit someday.

Faculty Sharing: Connect and Support

02

Dr. PANG Ka Wei
Janet

In the midst of life's ever-changing landscapes, I hope that your time in MAICS has nurtured within you the seeds of **Integrity, Compassion, and Self-care, which shall blossom with loving-kindness and resilience into beautiful qualities that will guide you through the ups and downs of life.** Integrity will be the unwavering beacon illuminating your path, guiding you towards righteousness. Compassion will enable you to understand and empathise with others, spreading kindness and understanding. Self-care will teach you the importance of nurturing your own well-being, allowing you to thrive and flourish. May these qualities bloom within you, enriching your journey with grace and strength.

Prof. TAN Jia

The world we find ourselves in today is facing numerous challenges. We witness the rise of right-wing ideologies and authoritarian politics on a global scale. Economic uncertainties and precarious labour markets add to the complexity of our times. Cultural polarisation persists, and we continue to experience setbacks in crucial movements such as feminism and anti-racism. Perhaps the most alarming issue of all is the ecological impact that human activities have on our planet, leading to devastating consequences such as the climate crisis, pollution, and the loss of biodiversity.

As members of the MAICS community, we do not have all the answers or solutions to these complex issues. However, we are united in our commitment to **"stay with the trouble,"** as Donna Haraway suggests. Together, as students, alumni, and teachers, we can navigate these challenges by raising questions, seeking answers, and developing creative solutions in our classrooms and beyond. Let us come together, supporting and inspiring one another, as we **embark on this journey of study, critical thinking, and action.**

03

Professor Feature

Research, Curate, Representation: Interview with Prof. Stephanie DeBoer

interview /Alison & Nancy text /Alison photo /Charlie



Hong Kong has a cityscape full of illumination from various sources, ranging from LED screens, nightly projection shows, to neon signs. As the city develops, the media and forms of illumination vary along. Some find their ways to flood every corner, while some fade away from the facade. As an expert in media infrastructure, Profes-

sor Stephanie DeBoer has been contributing to the research in the comparative studies of urban screens. In her recent project, she studies the public screens in Hong Kong and Shanghai, comparing their relationship with the cities' histories, politics, and their people. This academic year, she is residing at CUHK as a visiting scholar.

Before she got into media studies, DeBoer studied Comparative Literature in the US, where she was introduced to Chinese and Asian cinema. She went on to study film and media academically, and published her first book *Co-Producing Asia, Locating Japanese-Chinese Film in Media*, in which she delved into the historical problems behind negotiations of the co-productions, and their globalised relationship in the post-war to contemporary period.

This paved the way for DeBoer's research direction. A strong background in the comparative perspective led her to study multi-regional urban spaces relatively, "I am really interested in this particularity of one city versus another, the ways in which urban screens operate, and people operate relative to them. And various stakeholders, from the political to the urban planner to the artist, to the advertiser, all these different negotiations that take place across these screens."

In 2018, DeBoer arranged a field trip for her students in Indiana University to Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Shanghai. Other than taking the opportunity to observe public screen cultures in these cities, they also visited various stakeholders including out-of-home advertisers, urban planning technologists, LED screen manufacturers, LED designers, media artists and tourists, all taking a different part in the matter of public screens and spaces. It is partly reflective of how DeBoer conducts her research. Other than conducting archival and periodical research to lay down the historical groundwork, DeBoer's research also relies on communica-



tion quite heavily. She first began talking to stakeholders during her sabbatical in Shanghai during 2015, where her research really kicked-off. "Just seeing all of that helps me understand the larger ecology of screens." She continued to communicate with various stakeholders throughout the years, until the pandemic put a pause to global transportation, and set a barrier to her plans. This contributed to her decision to come to CUHK as a visiting scholar.

"There are a lot of reasons why I came, one of them is that I need durational time here to think about this project; during COVID I was far away from here, I was doing other things - administrative things at the university, and that took my attention away from it. So being here for a more extended period, as opposed to just coming in here occasionally, it's re-



"On Waiting with Screens in Transit", on display at the Tongji University College of Design and Innovation from May 6-17, 2019.

ally important to me. And it's important to have conversations with people, to share my work with people."

In addition to her own project, DeBoer is often looking to collaborate with people, old and new. She often shifts between research and curatorial work, as she enjoys creating opportunities with media artists and technologists to give new meaning to screens. For large public screens, their predominant use is advertising, public service announcements, and sometimes propaganda. "But there are moments when art gets put on these screens. And I find those moments very interesting because those are the moments when you can see what else this screen could be. And maybe it's not only about being as bright and colourful as it can be to gain your attention. Maybe it's about a slower pace. Maybe it's bringing

a different temporality into the public space. Maybe it's giving you a moment to contemplate." During July 2019, DeBoer and her research-based art trio, Screens Collective,¹ brought the concept to life with an exhibition, "On Waiting with Screens in Transit"² to Tongji University.

For the first semester, DeBoer taught a course on "Critical Media Infrastructures." "I really enjoy the conversations that I'm having with the students, and it is a framework that has helped me to think about screens, so it has helped me to think about my own project. I've benefited from teaching it, I've really benefited from the conversations and the projects and ideas that students bring to the topic." Whether it's research or curatorial work, it is exciting to see how DeBoer's time in Hong Kong will affect the direction of her future projects.

¹ Screens Collective was established in Shanghai in December 2015, which is a research-based arts collective that addresses fundamental questions concerning the potential of urban screens as sites of public contact.

² The exhibition makes visible and known the movements, sensations, and temporalities that craft our contemporary moments of waiting. As screens of all sizes are present in our spaces of transit, how do we wait with (and without) screens?

What Could AI Bring to the Study of Humanities?

Q&A with Prof. Xuenan Cao

interview
/ Andy

“Extrapolation” means going beyond what has been learned. We often assume that AI models only make decisions based on what they have learned from their training data. This new research points out that a considerable amount of AI decisions have extended beyond a model’s own training set. Imagine a doctor with lots of experience treating heart problems and suddenly presented with a case completely outside his training (i.e. beyond his training set), how would you feel about the doctor’s decisions in this case? In some extreme cases of AI extrapolation, **AI models can make important decisions when they are clueless.** You would want to know the impact of that decision, right? The new research examines the social and cultural impact of AI extrapolation.



Q1

Would you talk about your newest research, what is “AI Extrapolation“?

Q2

What is your new course on “AI culture” about?

AI culture is a fascinating topic, but rife with misconceptions. **Maths and Computer Science PhDs at Google and Microsoft have been working on problems such as can AI understand logical and mathematical reasoning, which are more realistic versions of whether AI can beat humans in the future.** Legal scholars and social scientists have been questioning the bias and social consequences of AI infusion in daily life. These questions can be traced back to topics in digital studies. In short, this course is a more updated version of the previous course on digital culture.

Q3

Any memorable moments during your time at CUHK you'd like to share?

Many memorable moments. A group of students brought an art installation to the class for their photo project. They even brought their own lighting from home to show us their images pasted on a beautiful paper-cut cylinder.

Q4

Any words or messages to MAICS alumni?

Go out — do not sit at the desk.

Medicine, Technology and Society: Q&A with Prof. Shoan Yin Cheung

interview
/ Andy

Q1 Can you talk about your newest research?

I'm currently working on my book project on the **reproductive politics surrounding the hormonal birth control pill in Japan**. The Pill in global discourses tend to be viewed as a technology for liberation, promising sexual and economic empowerment for women who use it. The recent Nobel Prize winner, Claudia Goldin,¹ for instance, attributes women's ability to enter the male-dominated professions to the Pill. Science & Technology Studies (STS) scholars like myself wince at the simplification of complex social issues to technology, especially as this characterization only applies to a narrow stratum of privileged Western women. In my work, I turn this around to suggest that what the Pill does is extend women's labour in a slowing economy. In Japan, where the Pill is used therapeutically for hormonal management, **women's bodies get transformed into "productive" forces that benefit patriarchal capitalism**.

¹ Claudia Goldin, an American economic historian and labour economist, who was awarded a Nobel Prize in Economics in 2023. She published her research with Lawrence Katz on "The Power of the Pill: Oral Contraceptives and Women's Career and Marriage Decisions" in 2002.

Q2 About your new course “Media, Medicine, and Justice,” why did you open this course? Is there anything you hope students could achieve after taking it?



I was trained as a medical anthropologist, so teaching in the medical humanities is actually my forte. I started back in 2013, as a TA. At the time, the US medical school admissions test started requiring knowledge of ethics, so there was sudden demand for these courses and lots of opportunities for me to train. I’ve taught hundreds of pre-medical students since those early days, so when I came to Hong Kong last year, it was only natural that I launch a similar course here.

The areas of medical humanities that I’m most excited about—medicine’s intersection with power—only started to enter into the academic mainstream after the social unrest of 2020 and the pandemic. I was living in DC at the time, so I not only witnessed in real-time how the media shaped public perception of disease threat, but how the pandemic laid bare social cleavages.

It’s especially exciting to teach this course in Cultural Studies, a field with deep intellectual roots in critical analysis and dissent. In the course, we’ll ask questions about why and how medicine occupies such a place of authority in our contemporary society, and I hope to show students that medical knowledge and institutions are also part of broader systems of power and control. Studying health and illness in their cultural contexts reveals how the very same mechanisms that cause social suffering also contribute to, for example, the dismissal of women’s health concerns, and the adverse health outcomes of marginalised social groups. I hope to give students more tools for dissecting how power operates in areas that are not typically covered in Cultural Studies as we continue to live through uncertain times.

Q3

From literature to science and technology - you have an academic background in subjects that are on the two ends of a spectrum. Are there any reasons behind the shift, and how do they help you in your current field, cultural studies?

The separation of “science” from “society” is more a consequence of the divisions of knowledge in our modern research university than reality, and STS is about restoring the place of science/technology/medicine in culture and society. Scientific innovation doesn’t happen in a vacuum: there are people, institutions, and funding streams that shape which projects become reality, and what gets to count as “knowledge.” I see both STS and Cultural Studies as asking similar types of critical questions, although I was exposed to classic CS theories like Foucault, Baudrillard, and Bourdieu very early, as a teenager.

As the daughter of Hong Kong Chinese migrants who settled on the Canada/US border, I moved through multiple social worlds. On one hand, my immediate community were migrants (mostly from the mainland) in rural Canada; at the same time, I did all my schooling in America since first grade. **Very different sets of social rules governed each space, and these texts helped me make sense of my very jumbled reality.** In university, I was interested in postcolonial critiques of knowledge, for example the role of literary canons in national identity formation. I didn’t discover STS until my last year, when I took courses on race, science, the body, and medicine, and my professors invited me to apply to the PhD program. I always thought that “pure” theory was perhaps too abstract for me, so I wanted the empirical training that STS offered.

Now, I love being able to put together the interpretive elements of Cultural Studies with the everyday “stuff” of our contemporary world, which is so deeply shaped by science and technology. I would say that **CS allows more space for social critique than mainstream STS**, but I generally see my work here as a continuation of what I’ve always done rather than a pivot to something new.

TA Feature

From Wuhan to Hong Kong: Search of Cultural Identity - A Conversation with TA Zowie Li

04

interview
/Alison & Andy
text /Alison
photo /Charlie

Before the interview began, we agreed to conduct it in Putonghua. But during the conversation, Cantonese slipped out of my mouth and to my surprise, Zowie responded fluently in Cantonese. Coming from Wuhan, her interest in the language started from an early obsession with Hong Kong movies, gangster and crime films in particular. Over her five-year stay in Hong Kong, she stepped out from Law into Literary and Cultural Studies, leaving the confines of the workplace to delve into the complexities of identity amidst social upheaval. Eventually, she joined MAICS as a Teaching Assistant, bringing her unique perspective and experiences to the classroom.

Zowie studied English for her bachelor's degree. Due to career considerations, she came

to Hong Kong for a Master's in Law. After graduation, she onboarded China Labour Bulletin¹ with a media position. "Though I've graduated from Law school, I was sure I must not choose a position related to law, what could I do then? Basically media related industries. I joined the company with interviewing as my main duty." Three years at China Labour Bulletin brought her precious experiences and a new perspective. One of the interviews was particularly memorable



¹ China Labour Bulletin, a non-governmental organisation based in Hong Kong that advocates Chinese worker rights.



for her, “It was a pretty delightful interview with Yifan Li, director of “We Were Smart” (Shamate I Love You). Though I’ve worked there for one to two years, I felt that I wasn’t familiar with China’s labour issues. Yifan Li got straight to the point and said, his film was about the issues with China’s second generation migrant workers. I’ve never thought about it so insightfully.”

The time where Zowie stayed in Hong Kong was across the Anti-ELAB Movement, COVID-19 pandemic and China’s White Paper Movement. Looking back to Wuhan, her situatedness led to an awkward feeling of detachment. “I felt a bit, though I do not wish to, I did feel distanced from Mainland China. I’ve never done any PCR tests, other than having to quarantine after returning from the US. I

could not imagine how life was like, doing PCR tests every 48 to 72 hours. **But, weirdly I had a collective memory which I was absent from. It was collective, but I didn’t actually feel it.**” At the time, work fulfilled her emptiness. “During the start of the pandemic, I did interviews for a few days. They were friends I’ve known of, some of them I didn’t know...I now think the job had provided huge mental support for me at the beginning of the pandemic. Though limited, I could still do something related, instead of completely withdrawing... **It made me feel that though I’m in Hong Kong, I’m not distant to China.**”

After consideration, Zowie left her workplace and applied for the Comparative Literature program at HKU. “Perhaps I’ve never considered that one could

study literature, films, or popular culture professionally... **I first took interest in Cultural Studies, where identity in literature made me realise there is a discipline, or a methodology where the issue could be explored or expressed.**" The program gave her unlimited space to study Hong Kong films she loved. She reconsidered her career path after graduating, "I still really wanted to stay in school, or maybe I wanted to teach. And you know, how many vacancies are there in Hong Kong if you only lock onto Comparative Literature, English Studies and Cultural Studies? That was when I saw the job advertisement for TA here and applied."

On her first semester in MAICS, all of Zowie's most memorable moments came from students, **they surprised her with their out-of-the-box thinking.** A group of students did a presentation on the imagined communities in Wuxia. She

expected them to use Shaw's movies as an example to discuss issues with diaspora or the Chinese identity, but instead they talked about the serialisation of Jin Yong's Wuxia stories in early newspapers. "I've never thought of serialisation as the means to bring audiences together and form an imagined community." For Zowie, **the characteristics of MAICS lies in its diversity.** She remembers one of the reasons why a student applied here, "They found the program inclusive. **I think inclusiveness may not be a trait of Cultural Studies, but it is one for MAICS.**"

Of all the Hong Kong films she has watched, *Exiled* by Johnnie To is her favourite. Actors run and fall, seek and fail, seemingly without destination and purpose. **Perhaps the "exiles" resonated with her, on her journey in search of answers for identity.**



05

interview
/Alison & Nancy

text
/Nancy

translation
/Alison

photo
/Charlie

Alumni Feature

Escape Out of the Box, Reimagine the World - A Conversation with Patrick Lo

Discussions surrounding “Hongkonger” as an identity have surfaced amidst the turmoil in Hong Kong’s society. Patrick Lo, who has spent years in Social Work, decided to study a part-time MAICS degree in 2021, in search of the meaning of a “Hongkonger.”

Under the influence of social movements, followed by the pandemic, economic reces-

sion, and waves of migration, many relationships fell apart. As someone who decided to stay, Patrick found himself at a state of confusion.” I had to sort out one thing. **If I stay here in Hong Kong, I have to untie the knot in my heart.** The knot being that I identify as a Hongkonger, but I find the need to broaden my view. After studying in MAICS, things have become clearer.”





His time in the course, Concepts of Contemporary Culture, has given him answers to questions about his identity, even though he joked about his bad grades. "The identity of a 'Hongkonger' has been everchanging. What is my conviction? As I continue to live in Hong Kong, where is my bottom line? How do I live out my beliefs?" At the same time, he recognised the fluidity of identity. "The professor reminded me that **one could have multiple identities**. I can be a Hongkonger, and a world citizen at the same time."

Patrick sees the study of culture as "half of philosophy, half of daily, practical culture." Cultural Studies sounds unrelated to the work of a social worker,

who provides practical support to underprivileged communities. But, Patrick found the skills of multi-perspective thinking to be important for both. "As social workers, we should expand our viewpoints to explore more possibilities within the limits of social welfare. **One of the keys to social work is critical thinking.** Cultural Studies allowed me to think critically and objectively about the issues our users are facing."

It was surprising for Patrick to explore topics in his work through courses. The environmental issues examined in the course, Culture and Politics of Anthropocene, were connected to ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) sustainability.

He also studied Digital Culture and Society during the launch of ChatGPT, which led to discussions on AI and work. One of his duties at work is to offer career planning advice to the youth, "My job requires me to observe possible job vacancies and the development of industries. If you learn to work with AI, it is easier for you to look for jobs, no matter which position." He believes that once people recognise the fetishisation of AI, they would be able to scrutinize the digitalised world more objectively. However, he is still concerned about the many unknowns that the society will soon face.



After studying in MAICS, Patrick finds himself to be able to give holistic life planning advice and view his work at a broader level. In the past, youths were asked to fit into molds, changing themselves in favor of a job nature. "We are standing at the

front line of the generations; the world is changing rapidly, but are we adapting quick enough? I have my set of skills for survival, but I have to consider if I have another set, or what skills are on trend. I should further seek and explore, expand my mind, just like in Intercultural Studies."

It is important to stay open-minded to youths in need of help, and the same applies to educating his own son. As a father, Patrick finds Cultural Studies helpful in expanding his world view, which helps him believe in the unlimited possibilities for the next generation. For instance, how should he react if his kid came out to him? Through Gender, Love and Sexuality in Intercultural Studies, he treats issues of sexuality and gender expressions with respect and understanding. MAICS covers an array of topics including environment, gender, history, technology and politics, which kept reminding Patrick of a quote "It's a big world we live in. The width of my own worldview will limit how my kid understands the world." He wishes to tell his son, "It's okay to wear pink. It's okay to be environmental. It's okay to embrace identity as you wish to."

"MAICS made me a better world civilian."



Junlin MA

PhD Candidate in Comparative Literature at HKU. Interested in modern Chinese literature and culture, Sino-phone studies, and Hong Kong cinema. Currently working on actresses and screenwriters in 1950s Hong Kong.

interview
/Andy

Alumni Sharing

Q1 When did you decide to pursue PhD? How did your year at MAICS influence you for your further studies?

When I became a junior student, I had to decide whether to pursue a higher degree or find a job. This led me to consider studying in mainland China or elsewhere, and during that time I became aware of postgraduate programs in Hong Kong. Eventually, I developed an interest in the MAICS program at CUHK and the MALCS program at HKU. When I was browsing the official websites of both programs, I was captivated by the introduction of the faculty members' research. This sparked my idea of pursuing a PhD in Hong Kong after completing a master's program.

Reflecting on the courses that influenced me most, I realized that it is so difficult to choose just one. Memories from the autumn of 2019 to the spring of 2020 flooded back, reminding me of the profound influence that the one-year experience had on me. For my PhD application, it was directly influenced by Professor Elmo Gonzaga's course on "Viral Memory". Although my research topic was not directly related to memory research, the theoretical framework of my research proposal drew heavily from the theories of memory studies that I encountered in that course.

The two courses on film studies were also incredibly valuable. Professor Song Hwee Lim's course "Cultural Studies in Film and Video" and Dr. Li Tiecheng's course "Chinese Independent Film Studies" took me from having no background in film studies (coming from a literature background) to having a solid foundation.

One course that I highly recommend to students who would like to apply for a PhD is the "MA Research Paper". The course provides students with the opportunity to discuss research topics, share and develop writings together, and practice presenting and defending their projects through seminars with professors and classmates. Our instructor, Dr. Janet Pang, was approachable and knowl-

edgeable, always providing us with helpful advice on ideas and writings.

It is worth mentioning that during my year in MAICS, I also audited Professor Leo Ou-fan Lee's course on modernity in twentieth-century China. That was the last course before his retirement. As taught master students, encouraged by Dr. Li Tiecheng and Dr. Li Siyi, we had the opportunity to audit this undergraduate course. After attending Professor Lee's final lecture, my master's program came to a complete end. Listening to the lectures of such a great scholar and witnessing his brilliance was a deeply moving experience for me. **It became a strong motivation for me to continue pursuing academic research.**

Q2

Can you talk about the planning and timeline for your application?

I entered MAICS in September 2019 and finished all the courses, including the MA research paper, in May 2020. I started to work as a part time research assistant in June. In July, I reached out to my dream supervisor and got a positive response. From July to the end of 2020, I was busy writing and revising my re-

search proposal, securing recommendation letters, preparing all the required documents, and finally submitting my applications. From January to June 2021, I communicated with professors and admission offices, conducted interviews, received offers, and obtained visas, all in preparation for the next phase.

Q3

What was your thesis about? What do you find interesting or challenging in doing archival studies?

My thesis focuses on three controversial figures who relocated to Hong Kong in the 1950s: actress/singer Li Xianglan, newspaper editor/lyricist/screenwriter Chen Dieyi, and writer/screenwriter Zhang Ailing. The most challenging part of this top-

ic for me is the complex context of the 1950s Hong Kong and the intricate nature of the three individuals. I need to trace their paths from Manchuria/Shanghai to Hong Kong while also explaining Hong Kong's unique position during the Cold War. One interesting and challenging part of archival studies for me is to find connections between different texts. As materials are often limited yet complex, it is crucial to build a network around the texts.

Q4

Due to a lack of experience in thesis or research, ICS students might feel unsure while pursuing PhD. What are your suggestions?

When applying for a PhD program, the focus should be on two aspects. One is to raise clear research questions and to show that we are ready to delve deeper into it during our PhD journey. The other is to find a program that matches us most.

For MAICS students seeking to pursue a PhD, it is vital to make full use of the whole academic year to **expand our disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge, determine our research direction, and strengthen our theoretical understanding in the field.**

While publications or other research achievements at the master's level are valuable, they are not the sole determining factor when we apply for a PhD program. Unpublished writing samples, such as an MA research paper, a multi-polished course paper, or results of the continuous research, can also be our valid assets.



Bingyu LIAO

Graduate of MAICS 2021.
Occasionally watches
movies, often reading,
always gaming.

Q1 What was the biggest difference in your shift from Journalism to Cultural Studies?

I remember writing this in my personal statement to ICS, "I want to tell China's stories well." This is my own thought after studying in China's Journalism academy and doing internships in several media corporations.

Compared to my time in Journalism, the biggest inspiration that ICS has given me was that I've stopped considering how to "tell China's stories well", but instead the reason behind media having to tell China's stories well. How is nationality and the self represented in a "well-told" China story? Moreover, who is being emphasised, and who do they marginalise?

To put it simply, the unconventional, quiriness of ICS encouraged us and taught us how to view the world critically.

Q2

Can you talk about your career path in these two years? Has ICS helped you in any way?

I had been working as an AI Product Manager at an internet unicorn.

The classes lead me to question the media. Also, Professor Wu Ka Ming gave a speech at a tea time chat - she said, we shouldn't refuse to look at the world outside of the ivory tower, just because we kept staying at school. There are lots of possibilities - become a cook, or go travelling, try different careers. She invited us to talk to her if we wish to study for a PhD afterwards. I suddenly realised, media was not the only way to go. Thus, I decided to try something different.

A thing to note was my interest towards “workplace gender” issue during Autumn Recruitment, and not blindly adoring every big company and their capitals. I owe this to ICS. There’s usually a session where I get to ask questions, **which is where I’d ask the interviewers their views**

towards women in work, and the gender structure in their department. I eliminated several companies with serious gender discrimination problems, and got quite some good points from my boss.

Working in this field has allowed me to witness AI development closely for these two years. But, **the sensitivity nurtured by ICS made me aware of capital’s intrusion of technology, and technology’s invasion towards humanity - especially when I’ve utilised AI to create dehumanising products under the pressure of capital.**

I tend to believe that technology is neutral. The development of technology itself has no fault. Now then, how do we make better use of it? A lot of people are making efforts – a professor named Huang Zhi Sheng applied AI in identifying members with suicidal tendencies online, and created an NGO called “Tree Hole Action” to save and provide mental support to those in need. Joining them has been one of the happiest things I’ve done after graduation. Though it requires a lot of time and energy with no economical return, it rewards me with greater fulfilment than working.

After I got laid off, I decided to apply for a second master degree in Psychology. On one hand, I’ve grown aware of my lack of systematic knowledge in Psychology. On the other hand, I wish to explore the cross-dimension areas in Psychology and AI – to help users with technology, instead of dehumanising them.

Q3

Why did you leave your previous field? What do you plan to do next?

interview
/Andy



Cheng CHEN

Graduate of MAICS2021, also called Jetson or CC.
Currently working in the field of human resources
at a Chinese-funded investment bank.
Enjoys travelling, photo-taking and outdoor sports.

Q1

What is the greatest difference between your undergraduate degree and intercultural studies?

Translation is a career-directed profession. Courses emphasised on practical aspects, training students to build a reflex through repeated practices. ICS consolidates one's cognitive abilities, where most classes nurture our ability in critical thinking, relatively similar to General Studies during Bachelor's. I did not choose ICS out of career consideration, but rather to build theoretical knowledge.

Q2

Which courses were the most memorable?

Prof. Tiecheng's course in Chinese Independent Films was the first time I've ever learnt of Chinese independent films systematically. I learnt about many directors with distinctive styles, and through their films, I vividly understood the troubles that a speedy development has brought upon the 21st century of China. The course had the most guest speakers, including filmmakers such as Bao Hongwei, Wenhui and Gu Tao. **From queer to nationalist imagery and documentaries, we deeply understood the director's mental process, and gained a comprehensive understanding of their works.**

Another one was Prof. Tan Jia's Cultural Studies in Film and Video. Her course horizontally covers the production to release of a film, and vertically explains the social consciousness and issues reflected from movies, television series and even video games, through the perspective of film history. She has a doctorate degree in film studies from the University of Southern California, and contributed a lot in feminist and queer video works. Speaking with her during or after class made me attracted to her knowledge. She is a gentle person that makes people feel like spring breeze.

Finally Prof. Wu Kaming's course on the Anthropocene. Prof. Wu is a strict teacher with high expectations from us, but this course made me realise the richness, urgency and necessity of environmental issues. **Through "We Have Never Been Modern", Bruno Latour's ecological philosophy and Rob Nixon's slow violence were two core values that connected the lesson, and showed us how contamination is not short-term and one-off, but instead it accumulates, lingers and tends to shift towards less developed areas.**

interview
/Andy

I'm working in finance and human resources positions in Hong Kong from previous internships; for advices in seeking a job in Hong Kong, look for more opportunities through channels such as JobsDB, LinkedIn and public recruitment accounts on WeChat; and when you received offers, if the salary isn't too far from expectations, the personality of your boss and the team atmosphere is more important.

Q3

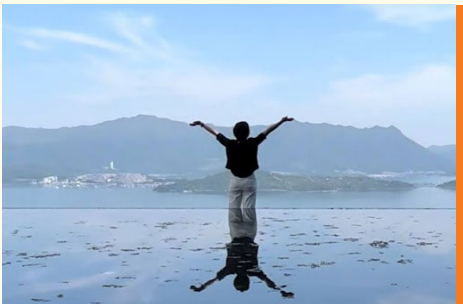
**Can you talk about your career for these two years?
Any advice for alumni and graduates?**

Li TAN

Graduate of
MAICS 2015.

Perhaps I would never forget my experience in ICS. It changed me, **allowed me to think from the perspective of others, taught me to criticise with logic and show understanding with compassion.**

The longer I've worked, the more I feel thankful towards teachers and CUHK. Now that I'm also a teacher with a class of students who will soon step into the world, I wish that I could gradually influence them to become curious, knowledge-hungry, and good-hearted people who care for the weak.



Lea

Graduate of MAICS 2022.

A bachelor of Arts, just jumped in the journalism industry. Believed in the realistic power of words and images.

translation
/Alison

It's been a blink of an eye since I've left school and become a "labourer" (打工人). A huge part of the reason for joining the journalism industry comes from an insight I've gotten from MAICS - to interject reality with the self as a method. It sounds cliché, but I've learnt how the ideal is separate from the reality after I've started working.

On one hand, there is displacement between the grand scheme of the industry, and the pursuit of an individual. ICS teaches us to see what others can't, and to care for the "minority" as an opposition towards the overpowering normativity. But in the news

industry, especially for traditional media, we chase hot topics, speak to the mainstream, and tell stories that cover the majority. While being asked "What's the meaning behind your topic of choice?" I find it difficult to convince them, knowing that the meaning would be small and insignificant for others.

On the other hand, it is hard to balance between work and interest. Even as a person who enjoys the moments where words are woven into stories, I've experienced unenjoyable moments in writing, as news writers often compromise the quality of writing for the need for speed.

Meanwhile, reality has not been a complete disappointment. I try to make space for myself. For instance, I've had authentic conversations during interviews, where we shared our personal experiences with each other, talking as friends instead of an interviewee. I also spend effort in telling stories in a more empathetic way, instead of following the standardised templates of storytelling... **In the end, these practices are not unwelcomed, but they take a lot of time and effort, which are often eliminated under tough competition. Still, these "dumb" practices are reflections of my ideal.** I don't know how long I can keep it up, perhaps I might give up to catch up with efficiency, but as long as there is still passion in me, I won't hesitate. **Though it feels good to be appreciated by others, I find it most important to do what I think is right.**

A lot of people tell me not to dedicate passion and meaning to work. But I do believe there is such work in the world, that allows you to explore your full potential, without exploiting your enthusiasm. Perhaps I am still seeking, or, perhaps I'm already on the right path.

I don't have any practical advice for others, as I believe everyone lives their own way. Even after the hardships, whenever I get asked if I regret joining this industry, my answer is always "no." The regret would be deeper if I've never stepped foot into the field I longed for. I wonder if your answers would be the same.

Finally I'd like to say, **"Believe in your preciousness. Love what you love. Continue your own path, regardless of its direction."**

06

MAICS Happenings: Events and Memories 2022-2023

2022/

Sept / Oct

Guest Lecture

#menstruationmatters,
why menstruation matters?



Guest Lecture

Independent Films of Ethnic Minorities

Visit to Hong Kong City Gallery

Visit to Tai Kwun

Minority Voices: Gender Equality
and Social Inclusion



Nov / Dec

2023/

Jan / Feb / Mar

**MOVIE MOVIE Extra Festival
Community Screening**

CUHK Section: *The Handmaiden*

Field Trip to Sha Lo Tung



**Visit to Para Site
and Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum**

Academic Exchange

at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

Academic Exchange

at University of California, US

Student Documentary

Screening and Project Showcase

MAICS Alumni Gathering 2023



Apr / May / June

Fascinating History: Exchange in Bangkok, Thailand

text /Nancy
translation /Alison

On May 4th to 6th, ICS and Cultural Management students joined Prof. Elmo Gonzaga and Prof. Benny Lim on a cultural exchange trip with Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. With “Cultural Politics of Creative Spaces” as the theme, students discussed and exchanged ideas on the cultural spaces of Hong Kong, China and Thailand.

The trip kicked off with a local bus experience that transported us to Chulalongkorn University. The campus, with its harmonious integration of buildings and nature, reminded us of CUHK. Everywhere we looked, we were greeted by lush greenery and the warm glow of sunlight.

The seminar started with an introduction to Talad Noi, a creative district where Thai and Chinese cultures converge. Home to ethnic Chinese communities since Bangkok's foundation, Talad Noi symbolises the intertwined nature of these two cultures. Throughout the day, students presented on var-

ious cross-cultural topics, ranging from the influence of Thai horror on the Chinese online community to the perception of Bangkok as a creative city for Chinese Gen Z travellers, and the creation of creative villages in Hong Kong, China and Thailand. These presentations showcased the students' intercultural perspective and fostered insightful conversations.

The second day started with an early bus ride to the historic city of Ayutthaya. Despite the scorching summer heat, we persevered and immersed ourselves in the rich historical sites. An Ajahn (a term of respect for teachers in Thai) from Chulalongkorn University explained how Ayutthaya, the second capital of the Siamese Kingdom, came to its end in ashes.

During the 18th century, the Burmese army attacked and raided the city. Buddha heads were taken as spoils, leaving many headless statues behind. One of the heads found its way near a Banyan tree, and as time went



on, the tree roots grew and wrapped the Buddha head into the trunk, leaving a fascinating scene for visitors to see. We showed utmost respect and courtesy as we kneeled or crouched to take photos near these Buddha statues.

The day concluded with a visit to the Jim Thompson House Museum and Art Center. The Thai teahouse of Jim Thompson, known as the “Silk King,” amazed us with its remarkable designs and Southeast Asian art collections. At the Art Center, we gained valuable insights into the contemporary Thai cultural scene.

Apart from the enriching experiences and visits to captivating sites, there are two standout memories from this trip. **First, the heat!** Electric fans and umbrellas became our trusty companions. **Second, Thai cuisine!** Thanks to the courtesy from Chulalongkorn University, we’ve had two incredible meals, one even enjoyed with a riverside view. These culinary experiences will remain etched in our hearts.

Travelling Through Events: Exchange at University of California Irvine

text
/Andy

translation
/Alison

A journey across the Pacific followed our Thailand tour: on 10 May 2023, we landed in Los Angeles for a conference titled “Thinking Through Events: Media, Power and Everyday life”, co-organised by MAICS (Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies) of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and Department of Anthropology of University of California, Irvine (UCI). After a flight of over 10 hours, we stepped outside the LAX airport late at night and were greeted by a drop in temperature reminiscent of our time in Bangkok. People stroll outside the LAX airport. Lights were twinkling in the distant hills. We made our way to the hotel via an Uber taxi, gliding through the flatland in the cool night breeze. To me, the experience felt like a real-life version of the game Grand Theft Auto V.

After a restful night, we made our way to the conference. UCI, established in 1965, stands as

the 7th largest public university in the US. Along the way, we encountered interesting sights including the UCI mascot Peter the Anteater, a lovely long-nosed furry mammal.

The conference kicked off at around 9:30 am with opening speeches from Prof. Kaming Wu and Prof. Mei Zhan of UCI: **Shall we re-imagine the fast-changing world in an anti-realism way, given the myriad events shaping our present, such as wars, post-pandemics, and the saturation of media images?** In the morning session, Master and PhD students presented their papers on eco-art, game studies and Hong Kong-Taiwan cinema. We were thrilled by discussions on the disposal of post-covid medical waste, the representation of disease in the documentary *Miners*, the *Horsekeeper* and *Pneumoconiosis*, along with the polyphony narratives of the Chinese novel *Blossoms*.

During the tea break, we wandered around the campus and discovered a lively scene near the Faculty of Social Sciences. As we crossed a bridge, we encountered a bustling crowd of students browsing second-hand book stalls, bakeries, and even enjoying pancakes with crepes from Shandong. The campus became vibrant and cheerful once again. In the nearby library, there was an exhibition commemorating the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's anthology. Afterwards, we took a stroll to the lawn behind the library, where people were greeted by the sight of late spring cherry blossoms. We took a group photo there ending this memorable tea break.

On the second day, we were amazed by the presentations from our fellow students at UCI: topics ranged from transsexual identities in Sino-American geopolitics to the intertextuality between modern literature and film arts, and the cultural emotions of victim families after the Sewol ferry accident, all of which were backed up by solid ethnographic interviews and textual analysis. Finally, the conference drew to a close with our productive discussions: how Cultural Studies is rich in cross-disciplinary dialogues.



During the two-day conference, we were fortunate enough to explore the stunning geography of California. From the awe-inspiring sunsets at Newport Beach to the avant-garde postmodern art at the Orange County Museum of Art (OCMA), and the renowned Universal Studios with its Hollywood symbols, we were able to immerse ourselves in the diverse experiences that California has to offer. It is as our journey came to a close that we truly delved into the significance of events: in Julia Sonnevend's words, each event encompasses "occurrence," "witness," "media," and "travel." Looking back, we crossed oceans, gathered unforgettable memories, and truly embraced the adventure that California had in store for us. Isn't the journey itself a memorable event?

07

Afterword: Editors' Notes

Alison
Chi Ching CHAN

It has been a year since I left MAICS, no longer immersed in the academic environment. The direction of my journey has shifted, both before and after the program, and I am still navigating the resulting changes. I wonder if others have experienced something similar. Intrigued, I embarked on this e-Newsletter project.

Engaging in conversation and reading about the experiences shared by our teachers and alumni gave me a chance to reflect on my own journey, and I hope you will enjoy reading the interviews as well. Huge gratitude to the team - Andy, Nancy, and Charlie - and to everyone in the department for making this endeavour possible. I eagerly anticipate hearing more of your stories in the year to come!

Andy Ke ZHU

Everyone arrives at MAICS with their own purpose. Whether it be to collect a degree, take a different break from the rat race, or explore the city of Hong Kong, the journey at MAICS holds different meanings for each of us. As I embarked on this path to brighten up my resume, I found that my year at MAICS would be profoundly transformative. The classes ignited my curiosity for cultural studies, while the intellectual spirit of our mentors illuminated the essence of humanities: to reveal something in our age of uncertainties.

I believe that every MAICS graduate has a story to tell. This inaugural issue of the MAICS alumni newsletter is crafted for those who have transitioned into their professional lives (or not) but find themselves reminiscing about their days spent at MAICS. In this issue initiated by Prof. Elmo Gonzaga, our

editorial team has worked with faculty members to share their teaching at MAICS; we have interviewed seasoned graduates to offer career and academic guidance. While some of their lives are full of a series of successes, it is important to acknowledge that moments of uncertainty and failure are also part of the journey, as one of our interviewees pointed out. Through these narratives, we do not aim to provide definitive answers on right or wrong, but rather to emphasise that there is no “well-trodden path”. Instead, there is only your unique path, one that you are deserving of living.

Thanks to our editorial team Alison, Nancy and Charlie, and all contributors. As we reflect on cherished memories, I invite you to read this issue and savour the stories shared within. Enjoy your reading and may our paths cross in the future!

Editorial Team

Andy ZHU

Alison CHAN

Charlie CHEUNG

Nancy WONG



香港中文大學
The Chinese University of Hong Kong



MA in
Intercultural Studies
文化研究

/ layout & cover designed by Charlie Cheung