

# ARCHIVAL HONG KONG: PLACES, PRACTICES, PUBLIC CULTURE

*A Hong Kong Studies Symposium*

11–12 December 2025



## Zoom Access

### Day One Zoom Meeting:

<https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/95874599873>

Meeting ID: 958 7459 9873

Passcode: 895297

### Day Two Zoom Meeting:

<https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/99401766886>

Meeting ID: 994 0176 6886

Passcode: 002421

# Day One: Thursday 11 December 2025

Zoom Meeting: <https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/95874599873>

Meeting ID: 958 7459 9873

Passcode: 895297

**10.00–10.15**

Opening and housekeeping

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## Methodologies of the Archive (10.15–12.15)

*Zap Sang Design: An Archival Methodology of Improvisation and Resilience in Hong Kong*

Kit Chan

*Voices in the Shadows: Archiving Cantonese Voice Dubbing in Hong Kong Cinema, 1960s to 1990s*

Venus YM Lai

*Reconceptualizing Hong Kong's Musical Heritage: An Archival Approach to Cultural Policy Myths*

Ka Chun Lin

*From Newsstands to Databases to YouTube: New Pathways into Hong Kong's Early Twentieth Century Popular Print Worlds*

Sau-ming Lai

## Archiving Place (14.00–16.00)

*Imagineering the Modern City: Visuality, Colonial Urbanism and the Construction of Hong Kong*

Cecilia L. Chu

*Contesting Unrootedness: A Reimagination of Hong Kong's Urban Rural Periphery through an Examination of Tung Chung's Agricultural History from the 1950s to the 1990s*

Stephanie Kwong & Silvia Tse

*Mapping Donations in the New Territories: Reports and Reflections on a GIS Database*

Dexter Tse

*Monuments and Memories: Canonizing Representations of Sung Wong Toi in Hong Kong Art*

Fong-Fong Chen

## **Day Two: Friday 12 December 2025**

**Zoom Meeting:** <https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/99401766886>

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### **Archiving the Individual (10.00–11.30)**

*Finding Hong Kong in Archival Diaspora: A Case Study of Edmund Blunden's Papers*

Sze Wah Sarah Lee

*In His Own Words: New Insights into Fian Youwen's Guangdong Painting Collection at the CUHK Art Museum through Archival Discovery*

Shing-Kwan Chan

*Archiving the Ephemeral in Hong Kong: Helen Lai Dance Archive as a Case*

Dong Xianliang

### **Asian Art Archive (13.00–14.30)**

*Recollecting and Reimagining Hong Kong through Archives: The Reconstruction of an Ordinary Day*

Chan Huen, Isabella and Hazel Kwok

*Reframing the Archive: Ha Bik Chuen's Thinking Studio and its Posthumous Legacy*

Michelle Wun Ting Wong

*Page Labyrinth: Archival Activation as Cross Disciplinary Art Practice in Hong Kong*

Wong Ka Ying

### **Documentaries as Archives (14.45–15.45)**

*Alternative Archives of Memory and Space: Women Documentary Practices in Hong Kong*

Yolie Xinran Liu

*never brooklyn: (an)archiving Sham Shui Po between Precarity and Gentrification*

Rajat Sharma

# ABSTRACTS

## Day One: Thursday 11 December 2025

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### Methodologies of the Archive (10.15–12.15)

#### *Zap Sang Design: An Archival Methodology of Improvisation and Resilience in Hong Kong*

**Kit Chan**

This proposal presents Zap Sang Design (執生設計) as a vernacular Hong Kong design methodology worthy of archival study and theoretical framing. Derived from the local ethos of Zap Sang (執生), the art of improvising resourceful solutions within constraints, this methodology moves beyond formal design paradigms to document a grassroots and adaptive practice central to the city's identity. My research interrogates Zap Sang not merely as a survival tactic but as a sophisticated and embodied system of knowledge, an ongoing living archive of resilience in which citizens become designers by creatively repurposing existing objects and systems.

This work is based on ten years of observation and interaction with daily life across Hong Kong's varied territories. As Zap Sang flourishes in the cracks of the orderly city, I propose the concept of "negative space" as a means to decipher the intuitive and poetic creations of ordinary citizens, ranging from interior design and product design to everyday graphism.

This study also argues that the true archive of Hong Kong's creative resilience lies not solely within institutional repositories but within these everyday and often ephemeral practices of making do and reimagining. Through the lens of Zap Sang, this research contributes to Hong Kong Studies by offering a new framework for understanding how the city's spatial, social, and cultural features are continually negotiated from the ground up. It seeks to celebrate and reframe this crucial yet under appreciated aspect of Hong Kong's culture.

## ***Voices in the Shadows: Archiving Cantonese Voice Dubbing in Hong Kong Cinema, 1960s to 1990s***

**Venus YM Lai**

Every golden age carries a chorus of voices, some heard and others hidden. In Hong Kong cinema between the late 1960s and the 1990s, that hidden chorus belonged to voice artists, the professionals who re voiced on screen actors' performances and shaped not only how films sounded but also how they were imagined and remembered. Although scholarship has tended to privilege the visual dimensions of Hong Kong cinema, these voices have remained largely invisible in film histories.

This paper examines Cantonese voice dubbing as both a creative practice and a form of vernacular cultural archiving, tracing its rise, peak and gradual decline across three decades. The interplay between screen actor and voice artist fostered inventive and whimsical styles that became a defining feature of Hong Kong cinema's distinctive audiovisual culture. Drawing on archival materials, interviews with voice artists and close readings of selected films, this study documents professional routines, improvisational techniques, collaborative ethos and performative strategies. Case studies from popular genres and from experimental filmmakers illustrate the extent to which asynchronous voicing contributed to dynamic cinematic styles.

Far from a mere technical workaround, voice dubbing emerged as a signature strategy of Hong Kong cinema, reflecting the industry's flexibility and inventive spirit. The deliberate disjunction between voice and image, once criticised as awkward, became a hallmark of the territory's cinematic identity and created space for experimentation with tone, character and narrative form. Marked by improvisation, collaboration and technical agility, Hong Kong voice artists transformed dubbing into a site of creative and performative innovation long before the advent of AI driven tools.

The eventual decline of asynchronous voicing, shaped by the rise of synchronous sound and by international ambitions, underscores the urgency of documenting and preserving this intangible yet influential mode of filmmaking. To revisit the voices behind the screen is to return to a vanished soundscape preserved in fragments and in the knowledge of practitioners rarely made public. By framing voice dubbing as both artistic performance and living archive, this work foregrounds these hidden voices as central to Hong Kong's sonic history, allowing their echoes to resound anew.

## ***Reconceptualizing Hong Kong's Musical Heritage: An Archival Approach to Cultural Policy Myths***

**Ka Chun Lin**

This research employs comprehensive archival methodologies to challenge prevailing narratives concerning Hong Kong's cultural policy development and musical history. Through systematic examination of historical newspapers, government documents, concert programmes, musical scores, photographs and oral histories, the study reconstructs a previously obscured timeline of cultural intervention that antedates the commonly cited establishment of Hong Kong City Hall in 1962 as the beginning of formal cultural policy.

The archival evidence reveals that both British colonial and Japanese occupation governments actively implemented cultural policies through musical programming. British authorities utilised military bands and tattoos as instruments of cultural influence from Hong Kong's founding in 1841, including proposals for town bands and music academies. The Hong Kong Special Reserve Police Band exemplified early government led musical initiatives that served broader cultural objectives.

During the Japanese occupation (1941 to 1945), authorities deployed wind bands and orchestras as sophisticated tools of cultural assimilation, incorporating Western composers alongside Japanese aesthetics to appeal to Hong Kong's cosmopolitan population. Contemporary newspaper accounts and concert programmes show that these performances attracted substantial audiences, though attendance likely reflected wartime entertainment scarcity rather than genuine political enthusiasm.

This archival reconstruction challenges academic assumptions about Hong Kong's cultural beginnings while revealing the continuous thread of state sponsored musical activity across political regimes. By recovering these forgotten cultural practices through systematic archival research, the study demonstrates how historical materials can reshape understanding of Hong Kong's cultural development and the persistent role of music in governmental cultural policy across colonial transitions.

**Keywords:** Archival methodology, Cultural policy, Hong Kong music history, Musical heritage

## ***From Newsstands to Databases to YouTube: New Pathways into Hong Kong's Early Twentieth Century Popular Print Worlds***

**Sau-ming Lai**

This presentation traces a path from newsstands to databases to YouTube through the case of the Bilingual Database and Annotated Bibliography of Cantonese Popular Periodicals of the Early Twentieth Century (<https://cantonpp.com>), a digital archiving project that I co develop which preserves and re presents popular magazines from the early twentieth century to the 1950s. These magazines include illustrated tabloids, entertainment weeklies and commercial newspapers once sold at Hong Kong's newsstands. Centred on Hong Kong publications, they were nevertheless part of a broader Cantonese speaking print culture produced in, and circulated across, South China including Guangzhou and Macau.

Capturing serialised fiction, cultural commentary and everyday concerns, these works offer invaluable insights into popular reading culture, vernacular imaginaries and social practices. They also reflect the linguistic, literary and generic distinctiveness of Lingnan and Cantonese culture, as well as the transregional connections of Cantonese speaking communities, including those in Southeast Asia. Yet they remain underrepresented and marginalised within dominant narratives of Hong Kong's literary and media history.

The project reimagines these materials through two interconnected stages. It began with a bilingual digital database that digitises, annotates and contextualises magazines for scholarly research and broader public access, and subsequently expanded into a YouTube channel that visualises and narrates selected materials, extending its reach and experimenting with audiovisual storytelling as a form of archiving.

Taken together, these efforts demonstrate how ephemeral cultural artefacts, once remediated in new forms, may be both preserved and reactivated for contemporary audiences. The database provides a tool for preservation and scholarly access, while the YouTube channel experiments with visualisation and performance as modes of archiving. These endeavours also reveal the challenges of digital preservation, including fragile and incomplete source materials, scarcity and uneven survival, copyright limitations and restrictions on access and reproduction in libraries. They remind us that archiving is never neutral but shaped by practical limits and creative decisions. Viewed collectively, these opportunities and challenges open onto larger questions. What does it mean to “archive” when the process is shaped not only by data and video but also by the limits of surviving materials and the design choices embedded in digital platforms. How does visualisation transform, yet also constrain, our relationship to early popular media. And how might multimodal platforms foster more accessible, participatory and affective engagements with Hong Kong's cultural memory while making visible the negotiations involved in digital preservation.



## Archiving Place (14.00–16.00)

### *Imagineering the Modern City: Visuality, Colonial Urbanism and the Construction of Hong Kong*

**Cecilia L. Chu**

Since the early decades of British rule, countless artists, writers and photographers have depicted Hong Kong's cityscapes as emblems of the territory's remarkable transformation from a small fishing village into an international metropolis. Although the pairing of economic growth and urban expansion has long been a central theme of the "Hong Kong story", the repeated telling of this narrative through images of buildings and landscapes has also reinforced a particular visual regime of colonial urbanism. At the heart of this regime lies a persistent bifurcation between a European district of stately mansions and modern streets and a densely packed Chinese quarter resembling those found in Mainland cities. Although such dichotomous imagery obscured the flows of people and capital traversing the urban divide, it remained a popular subject in the periodical press. As urban development accelerated in the twentieth century, the East–West dichotomy gradually evolved into a new visual genre that juxtaposed modern architecture and infrastructure in urban areas with vernacular dwellings and villages in the still largely undeveloped countryside. These visual references have gained further resonance in recent years as images from various moments of the colonial past have come to serve as a treasured archive and as sources of collective nostalgia.

This paper examines the role of building images in mediating competing visions of, and sentiments about, Hong Kong between the 1880s and the 1930s, a period marked by the advent of new visual technologies and by major transformations of the city. By exploring the production, circulation and consumption of diverse types of building images, including early colonial buildings, modern architecture, engineering works and traditional dwellings, I discuss the ways in which these representations have shaped and reshaped urban discourses and the continual remaking of the city. Key questions include the following. How were specific buildings, landscapes and infrastructure depicted through evolving genres and formats. What historical and epistemological conditions influenced the production and dissemination of these images. How did image works generate new knowledge of urban space and cultivate senses of historicity and contemporaneity. And how did their meanings shift when these materials entered archives in private and public domains and were reproduced in different media.

## ***Contesting Unrootedness: A Reimagination of Hong Kong's Urban Rural Periphery through an Examination of Tung Chung's Agricultural History from the 1950s to the 1990s***

**Stephanie Kwong and Silvia Tse**

This paper examines the role of non institutional archiving in contesting the physical and mnemonic erasure of Tung Chung's agricultural history. Contrary to the official narrative of progress embodied by the area's ongoing urban expansion, the paper argues that Tung Chung's agricultural past persists as a "living, vernacular archive" in its rural villages, constituted through villager led practices of collecting, remembering and storytelling. As arable land and natural spaces diminish, the recovery of these traces, embedded in place, memory and material, becomes an urgent act of resistance. This community driven archiving offers a vital counter narrative to a linear development narrative, recasting Tung Chung's old town centre from a marginalised fishing village turned airport town into an interconnected hub with a rich agricultural history and economic relevance to Hong Kong. Archives and the archiving of non material networks enable Tung Chung to be seen as part of a broader system that linked North Lantau to the maritime routes of the Rambler Sea and the consuming markets of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island.

This study unfolds in three parts. First, it documents the self motivated archival practices of Tung Chung's residents and analyses a range of materials from undiscovered records within the Tung Chung Agricultural Cooperative Society to relics displayed in village restaurants and homes. Second, it undertakes a comparative analysis that contrasts official maps and accounts of agriculture presented in online tourism resources and at the Tung Chung Fort museum with villagers' vernacular histories preserved through oral accounts, as well as speculative archival projects led by new settlers after the construction of the Chek Lap Kok International Airport. Finally, the paper reframes communal cartography as an act of rerooting and archival resistance. By reconstructing historical sea-land networks through maps and oral histories, it re spatialises the agricultural and trade routes that once defined the area and directly contests their erasure from the modern landscape and collective memory. Taken together, these findings illuminate the precarious state of Hong Kong's rural memory and advocate for a preservation strategy that encompasses not only physical structures but also the complex human and material networks they embodied.

Methodologically, the paper addresses a critical archival gap by integrating pre 1990s official documents with the embodied memories and local narratives of surviving villagers. This approach advances the incomplete archival work that began during Tung Chung's initial New Town development and gains renewed urgency in light of the current Tung Chung New Town Extension. As a significant case study of ongoing urban rural negotiation, Tung Chung demonstrates how acts of archiving and rediscovery can subvert traditional core-periphery and rural-urban paradigms. The paper argues that engagement with its vernacular archives is indispensable, for they preserve a place based operational logic, a self understanding of socio economic networks that resists physical and epistemic erasure by standardised development. By safeguarding community intelligence, such initiatives offer a community centred alternative to grand narratives of linear progress and actively preserve and redefine collective identities in contemporary Hong Kong.

## ***Mapping Donations in the New Territories: Reports and Reflections on a GIS Database***

**Dexter Tse**

Until 1899, when the New Territories became part of the colony of Hong Kong, infrastructure and public works in rural Hong Kong were chiefly funded by village communities and private individuals. Only on rare occasions did officials offer limited donations to such projects. Even during the British administration, many local public works continued to be funded by the villagers themselves. Numerous footpaths, street lamps, bridges, temples, schools and clinics created through these efforts can still be found today.

This paper elaborates on the progress of a digital project that maps stele inscriptions in Hong Kong. The “Collection of Hong Kong Stele Inscriptions” project gathers inscriptions and their locations, prioritising post war, outdoor and donation steles in the New Territories. These steles record donations by local and overseas villagers to village public projects. In most of these inscriptions, the names and origins of patrons, together with the amounts donated, can be identified. Many villagers contributed to multiple projects in multiple villages during their lifetimes, and many who had migrated overseas also funded projects in their home villages from as far as Britain, the Netherlands, America and Australia.

This paper therefore argues that although ancient and pre war stele inscriptions have been well recorded and studied, post war steles also provide valuable information for understanding developments in the New Territories. Furthermore, mapping the locations of these steles enables historians to recognise the social networks of different villagers, since they reveal inter village, inter lineage and inter personal relationships within rural society, as well as connections between villagers and “outsiders”, including the government, public figures such as Sir David Tang and private organisations such as the Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Association and the Hong Kong Civic Association.

The paper also emphasises the urgency of this project, as many post war steles were made of concrete and, when erected outdoors and exposed to the elements, are at risk of becoming illegible with alarming speed. It seeks, in addition, to invite insights and collaborations to advance the project further.

**Keywords:** Stele inscriptions, the New Territories, District Offices, rural society, KAAA

## ***Monuments and Memories: Canonizing Representations of Sung Wong Toi in Hong Kong Art***

**Fong-Fong Chen**

Representations of Hong Kong's landscapes have historically been dominated by the seascapes and skylines of Victoria Harbour, depicted by artists from various cultural backgrounds since the city became a British treaty port and later emerged as Asia's world city. This paper examines the concept of place as a medium, drawing upon Carl Sauer's theory of cultural landscapes to explore the role of Sung Wong Toi in shaping art historical narratives related to Hong Kong's landscape paintings. Sung Wong Toi, a monolith inscribed with three Chinese characters meaning "Terrace of the Song Emperor", once stood atop Sacred Hill in Kowloon City and was recognised as both a monument and a physical landmark that attracted sojourners, locals and tourists in the early twentieth century. Representations of Sung Wong Toi, in paintings and printed materials, foreground the inscribed rock as a monument and a significant landmark. This emphasis continues even after the original site was transformed during the Japanese occupation, when the monolith was reduced to a smaller rectangular form and relocated to the newly established Sung Wong Toi Garden.

This paper investigates the human interventions involved in portraying the Sung Wong Toi site and examines how it has been imagined and reconstructed through textual and pictorial forms. In particular, it analyses the iconography of Sung Wong Toi that emerged and evolved before and after the physical disappearance of the site. By referencing diverse pictorial materials and photographs, the paper traces depictions of Sung Wong Toi in the first half of the twentieth century, including prints, ink paintings and oil paintings, in order to consolidate a pictorial tradition. It argues that the monolith, as represented in artistic depictions, serves as the canonical portrayal of Sung Wong Toi, encapsulating the historical and cultural memories associated with the vanished site and its local communities. These representations also reflect artists' negotiations in strategically depicting this historical landmark, and this body of artworks functions as a reservoir for the reimagining of Sung Wong Toi and its local history.

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### Archiving the Individual (10.00–11.30)

#### *Finding Hong Kong in Archival Diaspora: A Case Study of Edmund Blunden's Papers*

**Sze Wah Sarah Lee**

This paper illustrates the significant contribution that an individual's literary archive can make to the understanding of Hong Kong's history through the example of the British poet Edmund Blunden, who served as Professor of English at the University of Hong Kong between 1953 and 1964. As a well known public figure, Blunden's network in Hong Kong extended far beyond the University to a wide range of social sectors, including government departments and personnel, other educational institutions and various arts and culture associations. The wealth of material and correspondence from this period in Blunden's life is remarkably well preserved among his papers, which are distributed across numerous universities and research institutions worldwide, including the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, Columbia University, the University of Iowa, the University of Toronto and the University of Oxford, to name only a few. Beyond these overseas repositories, Blunden's life in Hong Kong can also be traced through local sources such as newspaper archives, print publications and library holdings. In addition, his former students at the University of Hong Kong, now in their eighties, offer valuable oral history accounts and memorabilia that enrich the picture assembled from the various archives.

Drawing upon research from this archival diaspora, the paper uncovers meaningful connections between Blunden and Hong Kong society and demonstrates that an understanding of his life in Hong Kong can illuminate the territory's history in several areas. These include the socio cultural contexts of the 1950s and 1960s, the development of higher education, the evolution of the arts and culture sectors and the growth of Anglophone literature in Hong Kong. Seen through the life of a highly esteemed individual, this study highlights the potential of accessing Hong Kong's past through literary archives dispersed across diverse locations.

## *In His Own Words: New Insights into Jian Youwen's Guangdong Painting Collection at the CUHK Art Museum through Archival Discovery*

**Shing-Kwan Chan**

The Art Museum of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (hereafter the CUHK Art Museum) houses a collection of Guangdong paintings with provenance from Jian Youwen 簡又文 (1896–1978). Jian was a collector, public official and intellectual best known for his pioneering research on the Taiping Rebellion and for his influential roles in government, education and cultural life across the United States, Mainland China and Hong Kong. Acquired by the museum in 1973, Jian's painting collection became the cornerstone upon which the CUHK Art Museum built its now extensive holdings in Chinese art. Although the artistic and historical value of these works has been studied and recognised, the motivations behind Jian's collecting practices remain largely underexamined. Even in Jian's own writings on Chinese art, little is disclosed about how, or why, he assembled his collection.

This paper explores how newly surfaced archival materials, generously donated by Ms Amy Pao and now held by the CUHK Art Museum, offer fresh insights into the formation of Jian's collection. These materials include annotated photographs of Guangdong paintings by artists such as Ju Lian and Su Renshan, handwritten notes of personal research and newspaper clippings, which together illuminate the personal, connoisseurial and affective dimensions of Jian's collecting process. Jian's comments on artistic quality suggest an effort to evaluate Guangdong art critically, while his reflections on paintings related to war and turmoil reveal deeper emotional resonances. Materials related to paintings by contemporaries such as Gao Jianfu, including personal anecdotes, writings and photographs with the artist and his family, further disclose an affective dimension and suggest an intention to support and cultivate the development of the Guangdong art scene. Drawing on Vimalin Rujivacharakul's (2011) notion of collecting as a "form of cultural production that always alters meanings of objects", this paper reveals how a collector's personal archive becomes a site of reconsideration and negotiation between the intimate act of collecting and the institutional work of preservation, between personal memory and public collection and between Guangdong and Hong Kong.



## *Archiving the Ephemeral in Hong Kong: Helen Lai Dance Archive as a Case*

**Dong Xianliang**

Archiving performance, particularly dance, is a continual philosophical practice of capture and escape. Recorded performances are often said to lack the presence or liveness of the original, unable to reproduce the ephemeral and collective nature of dance. Yet archives should not be regarded merely as imperfect replicas. Rather, they generate new layers of knowledge that contribute to, and at times reshape, the original art form.

In Hong Kong, there remains a striking gap in both the theory and practice of dance archiving, especially when compared with developments in Europe, the United States and Japan. Research on Hong Kong dance has often centred on particular artists, companies or projects, but the absence of comprehensive and accessible archival structures has produced fragmented knowledge. Production driven priorities within local institutions tend to devalue systematic archival work, treating documentation as secondary to artistic output. Oral history projects, invaluable as they are in recording individual experiences, cannot alone provide the historical breadth and diversity necessary to illuminate Hong Kong's dance ecology and its wider contribution to cultural history. Without robust archival infrastructures, communication among practitioners, scholars and the public remains limited, hindering a deeper understanding of the critical role that dance plays in society.

It is within this context that I initiated the Helen Lai Dance Archive (<https://repository.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/en/collection/helenlaidance>) in 2022. Helen Lai, one of Hong Kong's most esteemed choreographers, is celebrated for her cross cultural, multidisciplinary and poetic works that have shaped the city's modern dance landscape since the 1980s. The Archive, developed in collaboration with the Chinese University of Hong Kong Library, is conceived as an open access digital platform. It gathers materials relating to Lai's creations from the 1980s to the present, together with contextual documents that situate her practice within broader artistic and intellectual networks. What distinguishes this project is both its extensive dataset, which spans choreography, performance, documentation and reception, and its innovative archiving approach, which seeks to redefine how dance can be preserved and studied in Hong Kong.

Drawing on this practical experience, my presentation will consider how theoretical concerns in performance archiving may be translated into institutional and technical practice. I will outline the current state of dance archiving in Hong Kong, map the challenges of collaboration between artistic and academic institutions and reflect on how digital archives offer a viable form that can serve multiple stakeholders at once. By showcasing the case of the Helen Lai Dance Archive, I argue that digital platforms not only safeguard ephemeral art but also build bridges across communities, fostering interdisciplinary exchange and sustaining public engagement. Ultimately, this project demonstrates how new archival strategies may lay the foundation for future research and contribute to a more robust cultural infrastructure for Hong Kong's performing arts.

## Asian Art Archive (13.00–14.30)

### *Recollecting and Reimagining Hong Kong through Archives: The Reconstruction of an Ordinary Day*

**Chan Huen, Isabella and Hazel Kwok**

In early 2024, Asia Art Archive (AAA) organised *Another Day in Hong Kong*, a research led project and exhibition that mobilises archival materials, conceived expansively to include institutional holdings, personal records and oral histories, to reconstruct an ordinary day in the city's past. The project aims to generate new perspectives on contemporary art and history in Hong Kong.

AAA's Research and Archives team conducted a comprehensive review of its Hong Kong collections. By aggregating and analysing all date metadata within the database, the team identified a statistical "median day" of the collections, 19 October 1996. Researchers and archivists then investigated, collected and pieced together fragments of the past, bringing a bygone day into view and imbuing it with a significance and vividness beyond the ordinary.

Expanding beyond AAA's holdings, the team consulted public and private repositories, libraries, resource centres and cultural institutions and surveyed newspapers, magazines, moving images, audio recordings and personal testimonies relating to that date. This work sought to prompt reflection and imagination through diverse materials, to present a more comprehensive view of the day and to deepen understanding of Hong Kong's art scene at the time.

The team also interviewed over one hundred individuals from Hong Kong's art community, departing from conventional research methods to examine how shifting vantage points of micro narratives can yield a more vibrant art history. By recalling personal stories about an ordinary day, participants explored lived and divergent histories. Attending to "trivial matters", often absent from records, enabled identification with another time and place and infused history with humanity.

In this paper, Project Researcher Hazel Kwok and Assistant Archivist Isabella Chan outline observations from their research processes, discuss challenges encountered and share selected stories, thereby shedding light on AAA's research and curatorial work. They also reflect on surveying local archives and learning from others' archival practices during the project. We argue that *Another Day in Hong Kong* reframes history not as a bounded repository of documents but as a dynamic, ongoing conversation among infrastructures, records, individuals and imaginaries.



## *Reframing the Archive: Ha Bik Chuen's Thinking Studio and its Posthumous Legacy*

**Michelle Wun Ting Wong**

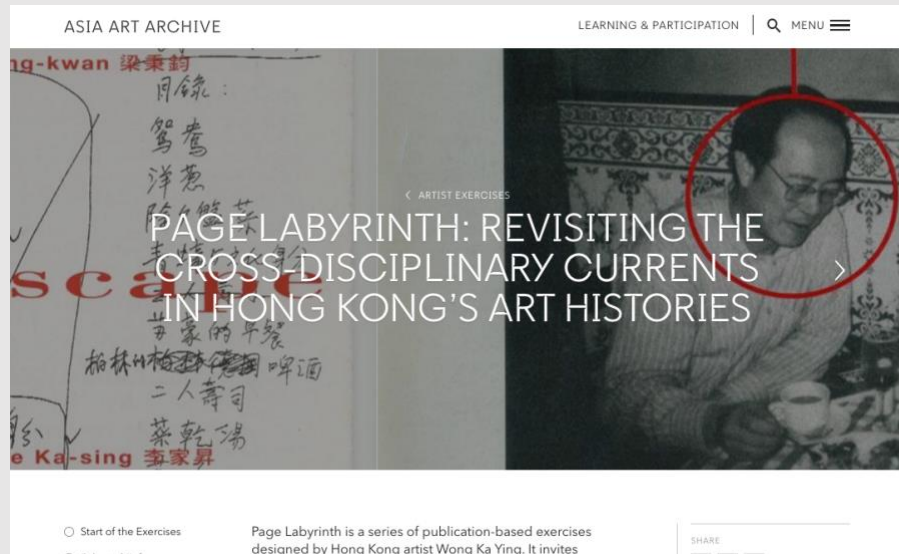
Born in 1925 in Guangdong, Ha Bik Chuen 夏碧泉 moved to Hong Kong via Macau in 1958 as a paper flower craftsman. He died in 2009 as a locally known artist working chiefly in sculpture and printmaking, whose aesthetic was at times described as rustic and “naïve” because of his use of textures, found materials and a simple figurative visual language. An artist who did not attend art school, Ha taught himself both artistic practice and ways of being in the social world of art by consuming the visual materials that circulated in mid to late twentieth century Hong Kong. From the 1960s until 2009, he amassed a substantial collection of printed matter and photographic documentation in a space he deliberately called his Thinking Studio, a strictly private arena in which he processed his ideas about art and produced artworks. Between 2013 and 2020, Asia Art Archive (AAA), a Hong Kong based non profit art organisation, organised and selectively digitised Ha's collection, transforming it into a physical and digital archive. During that period, AAA also advocated for the collection's permanent caretaking with multiple institutions, which led to the transfer of Ha's materials to M+, the University of Hong Kong, Baptist University and AAA. Ha has since become posthumously known as the artist who single handedly amassed one of the most significant resources for the study of Hong Kong art history.

This paper considers Ha's Thinking Studio as a contemporary archaeological site of Hong Kong's recent cultural history, one that opens up critical and urgent questions of historiography in the wake of recent political ruptures. Through a formal analysis of his collagraph plates, which Ha termed “motherboards” in his own self invented vocabulary and which have only been accessible since 2020, I argue that the objects Ha constructed inside his Thinking Studio mediated notions of labour and value and reflected Hong Kong's urban transformation in the 1970s, at a moment when the city stood on the cusp of large scale societal change. With reference to the photographic documentation that Ha produced, this paper interprets the evolving environment of the Thinking Studio as an overcompensating gesture born of a lack of material resources and of an anxiety over ownership that Ha experienced as a working class immigrant. His documentation of events such as the self organised vigils and art exhibitions following the 1989 Tiananmen incident, which retroactively runs the risk of diverging from state sanctioned narratives, further signals the increasing stakes of situating art practices within their contexts.

The current use of Ha's collection as a publicly available resource for art history writing, teaching and exhibition making differs markedly from its original purpose as a personal creative reference and as part of his carefully maintained artistic persona. By reconsidering the role of the Thinking Studio in shaping Ha's collecting and creative practice, this paper addresses the generative tension between Ha's artistic persona and his posthumous legacy that has emerged from the public transformation of his previously private collection. In doing so, it raises critical questions about archives, about how they are formed, how they acquire significance and how they continue to influence the writing of history.

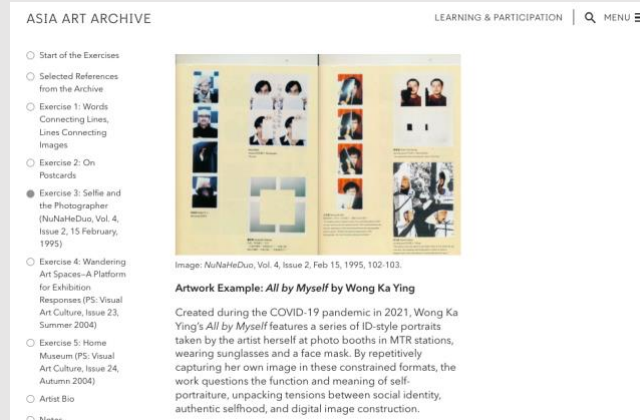
# *Page Labyrinth: Archival Activation as Cross Disciplinary Art Practice in Hong Kong*

Wong Ka Ying



This paper presents *Page Labyrinth* (2025), created by Wong Ka Ying, an artist led pedagogical and curatorial experiment that reactivates Hong Kong's art literary archives through participatory exercises and creative reinterpretation. Developed in collaboration with Asia Art Archive (AAA), the project proposes an alternative model of archival engagement that treats historical printed matter not merely as static documents or repositories of memory but as open ended sites for public re reading, creative reworking and collaborative knowledge production.

Focusing on key independent art and literary publications from the 1980s to the 1990s, such as *NuNaHeDuo* 《女那禾多》, *PS: Visual Art Culture* 《PS: 視覺藝術文化》 and *Foodscape* 《食事地域誌》, the project investigates how cross disciplinary art literary practices in Hong Kong created critical space for marginalised voices, intermedia experimentation and civic imagination. These publications were not simply passive vessels of information but active platforms that enabled artists, writers and editors to respond to rapidly shifting social identities, gender politics and urban transformations. The project reframes these archives through a series of game based and site responsive exercises, ranging from visual translation and collaborative mind mapping to reimagining the home as a museum and the zine as curated space.



This presentation offers both a conceptual framing and a practice based reflection on archival aesthetics in contemporary Hong Kong. Drawing on feminist archival theory, for example Eichhorn and Caswell, which emphasises the ways in which archives are deeply intertwined with feminist activism, memory and identity, and which approaches archives not simply as repositories of records but as dynamic sites of political, cultural and ethical significance, I argue that archival activation, particularly when situated within community based or educational settings, may function as a counter hegemonic tool. Instead of fixating on archival recovery or preservation alone, *Page Labyrinth* suggests that methodologies must be cultivated that acknowledge the value of fragmentation, incompleteness and intertextuality. The exercises do not aim to reconstruct a totalised narrative of Hong Kong's art histories but to stage generative encounters between past and present, image and text, self and collective.

Moreover, the project positions art archives as dynamic sites in which viewers become co creators and archival materials serve as scripts for affective, sensorial and epistemological engagement. It also explores the pedagogical potential of such engagements, considering how archival zines and critical writings from the 1990s, once distributed on the margins, may re enter public discourse through embodied reading, remixing and small scale publishing practices.

By shifting the archive from passive storage to an activated pedagogical environment, *Page Labyrinth* foregrounds the often overlooked labour of artistic publishing, the cross pollination of literary and visual languages and the role of minor media in shaping Hong Kong's cultural memory. It advances a curatorial mode that is processual, participatory and speculative, aligning with broader calls in Hong Kong studies and contemporary art discourse to rethink cultural institutions, narrate otherwise and remap public culture from the margins.

In doing so, this project contributes to ongoing conversations around archival justice, memory politics and the aesthetics of re reading, offering a working model of how artistic research might intervene in the historiography of Hong Kong art and visual culture.

## Documentaries as Archives (14.45–15.45)

### *Alternative Archives of Memory and Space: Women Documentary Practices in Hong Kong*

**Yolie Xinran Liu**

This paper explores the ways in which Hong Kong women filmmakers develop alternative forms of archiving through documentary practices that interweave memory, space and community. The discussion focuses on two works: *A Story of One's Own* (2022), an interactive docufiction created from oral histories of women born between the 1940s and the 1960s, and Anson Mak's *On the Edge of a Floating City We Sing* (2012), a reflexive essay film on independent music and cultural life in Kwun Tong.

*A Story of One's Own* reshapes forty three individual testimonies into five fictional figures, all embodied by the same actress. The characters engage in dialogue on screen while inviting viewers into a participatory mode of reception. This fusion of oral history, fiction and interactivity produces a non linear constellation of voices. By reframing private experiences as shared encounters, the work shows how women's life stories can form an archive of generational transformation and social change in Hong Kong. It also raises questions about the aesthetics of docufiction, including the ways in which fragment, repetition and tableaux may represent truth as both partial and multiple. Working through a different approach, Mak's film addresses the fragility of grassroots cultural spaces in a city shaped by developer led planning and government intervention. Using Super 8 imagery and an essayistic structure, the film situates the local music scene within the shifting landscape of Kwun Tong. It functions as a record of community practices that are otherwise marginal and easily erased. Its meditative tone and reflexive narration open space for critical reflection, linking sound and memory to resistance against homogenising urban narratives.

Together, these two projects show how women artists in Hong Kong transform documentary into a method of archiving that is situated, affective and resistant. They preserve memories excluded from official institutions while creating new possibilities for collective identification. Rather than presenting the past as fixed, both works treat archiving as an active process that negotiates between remembering and imagining. They reveal how personal testimony and cultural practice can generate counter histories that question dominant accounts of the city and propose other futures.

Keywords: documentary, female artists, alternative archive, memory, Hong Kong

## *never brooklyn: (an)archiving Sham Shui Po between Precarity and Gentrification*

Rajat Sharma

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3hmtaL2TLw>



This presentation develops my documentary *never brooklyn* (2021) as both a vernacular archive and a mode of critical engagement with Hong Kong's migrant and working class histories. As I rework *never brooklyn* into a journal article, I treat the film as both object and method, a means of exploring how counter archival practices may open towards more just urban futures in Hong Kong.

*never brooklyn* began as a documentary but increasingly functions as a counter archival project, capturing a grassroots neighbourhood at a moment of accelerated transformation. Centred on Sham Shui Po, the film records how South Asian migrants confront everyday precarities, including street raids, housing rejection and police surveillance, while also registering the neighbourhood's rapid gentrification, which overlays these histories with new narratives of trendiness and creative consumption. In recent years, Sham Shui Po has repeatedly been described as "the New Brooklyn", a label that sanitises its racialised geographies and obscures the longer histories of exclusion that shaped it. The film takes this phrase as its provocation, holding in tension the contradictions of a district celebrated for cultural reinvention while displacing the very communities that made it.



The reworking of the documentary into an article foregrounds archival absence: the absence of grassroots migrant voices in official narratives of Hong Kong's urban development and the absence of critical recognition of how gentrification overwrites those absences with marketable myths. Yet rather than documenting loss alone, the film suggests that these everyday negotiations of housing, selling on pavements, contesting evictions and refusing the stigma of illegality constitute, and demand, their own counter archival practice. Rather than offering a seamless ethnography, *never brooklyn* presents an alternative archive of neglected voices, silences, discontinuous fragments and abrupt encounters that aesthetically echo the instability experienced by migrant and grassroots communities unsettled by the machinery of urban development.

In relation to the symposium's concerns, *never brooklyn* demonstrates how artists may intervene in the politics of memory by producing affective, vernacular archives of contested neighbourhoods. In this sense, the paper becomes an extension of the film's archival work, an attempt to preserve not only the traces of a disappearing neighbourhood but also the methodological possibilities that arise from crossing between practice and theoretical critique. The article shows how power and belonging are contested not only through documents and repositories but also through affective negotiations in the everyday. These works contribute to a wider discourse on how artists and filmmakers engage the archive not simply as a place of storage but as a generative method for imagining futures for marginalised communities in Hong Kong.