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## MOOCs Turn Local into Global

### insight

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Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have sent shockwaves through higher education by opening up course content to any learner with internet access, free of charge. While some fear that MOOCs might replace teachers and classrooms, our prize-winning MOOC<sup>[1]</sup>, “Hong Kong Cinema Through a Global Lens,” provides one example of a MOOC designed to run in conjunction with an on-campus course. Our course, the first MOOC anywhere in the world devoted to Hong Kong cinema, introduces on-campus students to an expanded virtual classroom. It serves as a case study for innovative, internet-enabled teaching methods, and demonstrates the necessity of new ways to measure the impact of such methods.

### Connecting the University to the World

A MOOC provides concrete analytics to gauge global reach through precise figures on learner demographics. However, the impact of inviting these online students, using local taxpayers’ money, to participate in educational activities with our on-campus students is difficult to quantify using the usual metrics of academia. Indeed, with the metrics available to us today, it is challenging to prove that MOOCs benefit Hong Kong’s university students,

research culture, and academic standing in ways more traditional courses cannot.



Geographical distribution of learners in “Hong Kong Cinema Through a Global Lens.”

For instance, demographic data on MOOC learners indicate that it is not viable to use the MOOC as a recruiting tool for promising undergraduate students. In our case, only one MOOC student has applied for our on-campus program; the vast majority already hold a first degree, with a sizable minority with advanced degrees, including doctorates. Many work in higher education, the media, research, or related fields. Although the value they contribute is unmeasurable using traditional metrics, these experienced online learners bring diversity into the classroom in more ways than one. Our experience with “Hong Kong Cinema Through a Global Lens” reveals the ways a MOOC connects HKU to the world at large.

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Not only have our open-access materials been used in classrooms and [educational media](#) inside and outside of Hong Kong, the course has also attracted interest from the local, [regional](#), and [global media](#). Several widely-circulated publications have featured the MOOC in reference to innovation in teaching screen studies.

#### Customizing the Course Experience to Enhance Local-Global Interaction

The question of the impact that this type of online learning has on campus, particularly in linking HKU students with peers across Asia and around the world, is an enticing new educational frontier. When we ran the course for the second time in September 2017, we devoted more attention to the local-global dynamics of the learning experience.

Over the course of the MOOC, we provided forum questions specifically designed to engage local students differently from our global learners. For

example, we included a question for Hong Kong residents to comment on what they felt people outside of the territory do not understand about Jackie Chan's star persona. In a parallel thread, we encouraged non-locals to consider what puzzled them about Jackie Chan—and Hong Kong cinema, more generally—that local people may be able to clarify.

While responses from locals ranged from taking pride in Jackie Chan to condemning his perceived arrogance and political positions, international learners, who identified themselves as coming from the United States, Japan, Singapore, and Hungary, discussed how Chan is received in their respective countries. A learner from Singapore made a perceptive comment about the relationship between Chan's martial arts choreography and Hong Kong's urban environment:

"I think a key difference [between Singapore and Hong Kong as depicted in his films] is the claustrophobic environments, especially in some of his action sequences, where he has to get creative in combat within a small and confined environment. This is something that a local from Hong Kong may [have] particular resonance with, being that the city is dense and compact."

Meanwhile, an American learner focused on the alterity of Chan's star persona and the cultural address of his films:

"[I] think it's interesting that ... I could watch American films of his like *Rush Hour* and hear a comment or a joke and wonder if someone from Hong Kong would understand the cultural insights ... Even when thinking about the "Other" in his films sometimes it's a bit blurry for me to decide that. In his HK films it's a bit more obvious that the Other is the West. But, when it comes to his American films it's clear that he's supposed to be the Other, yet he clearly has the identity flexibility to fit right in."

These sorts of comments encourage HKU students to think about the numerous ways in which a global star like Jackie Chan can be understood differently inside and outside of Asia.

#### The "Flipped" Classroom

In addition to reworking the forum discussion topics to provide opportunities for transnational discussion, we "flipped" one of our on-campus lectures devoted to Mabel Cheung's *An Autumn's Tale*. A "flipped" class requires students to digest lecture materials before coming into the classroom in order to create time for more face-to-face interactions with their instructors and peers. Rather than asking her on-campus students to read selections from her book before that week's lecture, as she usually does, Dr. Stacilee Ford instead asked them to watch the film and complete the MOOC unit on *An Autumn's Tale*.

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During the time usually allotted for lectures, tutors and students participated in open discussions. Students were encouraged to think about the ways in which their own experiences with migration were in conversation with the film. A flipped classroom allows more time for such micro-to-macro connections, and the discussion moved naturally onto the MOOC online forum, where Dr. Ford was able to engage more directly with students who were hesitant to speak up in a large lecture theater.

It is imperative to recognize the opportunity MOOCs provide to nurture virtual and on-campus discussions, and extend learning well beyond conventional frameworks and expectations. Nevertheless, it takes teachers who are seasoned in old-school approaches as well as those who are eager to embrace the new to provide the ideal MOOC enrichment experience.

MOOCs make learning with active researchers possible, but, beyond this, they open up opportunities for living globalization via interaction with learners around the world. Hong Kong benefits by reaffirming its status as a leader in higher education, the creative industries, and popular culture globally through the intimate connections forged between these engaged learners and their teachers online.

Join us in exploring Hong Kong cinema by registering for our MOOC "[Hong Kong Cinema Through a Global Lens](#)," which begins a new session on January 23, 2018.

[^1]The MOOC has been recognized with the Bronze Award in the 2017 MOOCr Awards in the category "Course Management and Promotion."

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