

PALAC 2022

Global Climate Change Research and the Liberal Arts

Anthropocene Studies at HKBU



Kwai-Cheung LO
Hong Kong Baptist University

Anthropocene Studies

Anthropocene Studies is one of the Arts Faculty Niche Research Areas. Using the geological term “Anthropocene” which designates significant human impacts on ecosystems, our research group aims to examine how humanities such as philosophy, literature, cinema, and arts respond to climate change, environmental politics, human-nature interactions, interspecies relationships, global competition for resources, effects of fossil fuel consumption on the Earth as well as other related socio-cultural transformations.



WHO ARE WE?

Prof Kwai-Cheung Lo, Head of Department of Humanities and Creative Writing (anchor)

Dr Jessica Yeung, Department of Translation, Interpreting and Intercultural Studies (co-anchor)

Dr Howard Choy, Department of Chinese Language and Literature

Dr Wai-ping Yau, Department of Translation, Interpreting and Intercultural Studies

Dr Emily Zong & Dr Dorothy Tse, Department of Humanities and Creative Writing; **Dr Jason Lee**, Department of English

With partners from other faculties, and local and international universities as well as postgraduate students



WHAT DO WE STUDY?

- Humanity in the environment
- Human understanding and representation of what is happening to the environment
- What Humanities Studies can do in the present state of the environment
- With a demographic focus on the Sinophone regions, but not restricted to them

WHAT ARE WE WORKING ON?

2 ongoing externally funded GRF projects:

Minority, Ethnicity, Environmental Cinema in China: In Search of Different Imaginaries of Ecological Civilization (Prof K.C. Lo)

Literature in the Time of Coronavirus: Online Diaries by Chinese Women Writers from Wuhan and New York (Dr Howard Choy)

1 ongoing internally funded FRNA project:

History and Translation: A Uyghur/Turki and Chinese Corpus (Dr Jessica Yeung)

1 Book Series published by Brill:

African and Asian Anthropocene (Dr Howard Choy as series chief editor)

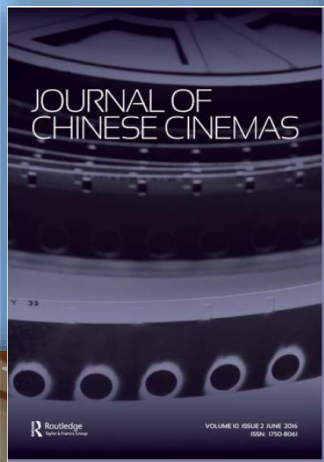
WHAT HAVE WE DONE SO FAR?

7 international academic conferences

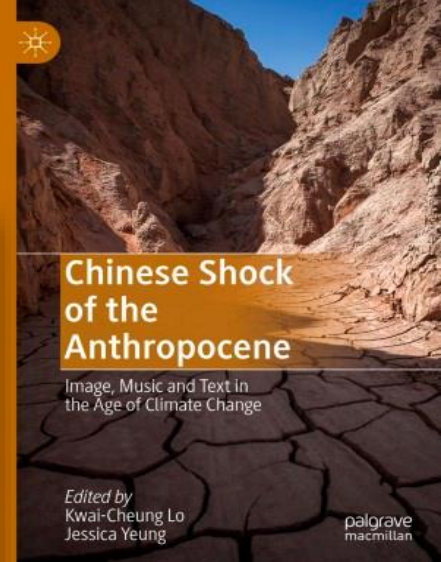
1 essay collection

1 journal special issue

1 film collection with 200 films



Special issue on the Tibetan cinema of Pema Tseden
Kwai-Cheung Lo & Jessica Wai Yee Yeung



碧波押電影平台
Green Wave Art Film Platform

Partner: Department of Film Studies, King's College



International Symposium on

CLOUD, HEAT, SEA, WIND

in the Light of Ecological Civilization

Date : 30 April 2022

Zoom link : <https://hkbu.zoom.us/j/94659950484>

A CCL recognised activity



International Symposium on

CLOUD, HEAT, SEA, WIND

in the Light of Ecological Civilization

SPEAKERS

Kiu-wai Chu

Victor Fan

Kwai-cheung Lo

Carlos Rojas

Enoch Yee-lok Tam

Chuen-fung Wong

Wai-ping Yau

Winnie L. M. Yee

Zimu Zhang

Emily Yu Zong

Date : 30 April 2022

Time : 9:00 - 17:00

Venue : Online

Zoom link : <https://hkbu.zoom.us/j/94659950484>

A CCL recognised activity

Co-organisers:

The Anthropocene and Contemporary Chinese Cultures Research Consortium

Department of Humanities and Creative Writing

Department of Chinese Language and Literature

Department of Translation, Interpreting and Intercultural Studies

Cultural Literacy Programme

Program on 30 April (Saturday) Hong Kong Time

9 am Welcome and Introduction

Panel 1: Activism, Exoticism, and Multispecies Imaginations

Moderator: Kwai-cheung Lo

9:05 am (9:05 pm, Friday, East Coast Time) Carlos Rojas, "An Ecological Analysis of Environmental Activism in China"

9:25 am (8:25 pm, Friday, Central Time) Chuen-Fung Wong, "Rethinking the Nature in China's 'Minority' Musical Exoticism"

9:45 am Emily Yu Zong, "Of Meat, Plant, and Soil: Multispecies Imaginations of Hong Kong"

10:05-10:35 am Discussion

Panel 2: Air, Wind-Water, Sound, and Space in Ecological Crisis

Moderator: Howard Yuen-fung Choy

11:00 am Winnie L.M. Yee, "Breathing and Singing in the Air: Some Preliminary Thoughts on Literary and Visual Narratives of Air in Post-socialist China"

11:20 am Kiu-wai Chu, "Feng Shui and the Civil Alternative Eco-civilisation: Geomancy and Ecology in Chinese Cinema"

11:40 am Enoch Yee-lok Tam, "The Sound Ecology in Hong Kong Ethnographic Documentaries"

12:00 noon Wai-ping Yau, "Chinese SF in the Anthropocene"

12:20 – 1: 00 pm Discussion

Panel 3: Governmentality and China's Ecological Civilization

Moderator: Jessica Yeung

3:30 pm (9:30 am, Central Europe Time) Zimu Zhang, "Green Elegies: Ecofeminist Reading of Toxicity and Trauma in the Making of Chinese Ecological Civilization"

3:50 pm (8:50 am, UK Time) Victor Fan, "Ecology: From Governmentality to Interdependencies"

4:10 pm Kwai-Cheung Lo, "China's Cloud Control in the Shadows of Ecological Civilization"

4:30-5:00 pm Discussion

The History of Energy and the Environment in the Anthropocene

Date: 25 April (Thursday) 2019

Time: 3-5pm

Venue: RRS 628, 6/F, Sir Run Run Shaw Building, HSH Campus
Language: English

Speakers:

Dr. Niccolò Pianciola, Associate Professor, Department of History, Lingnan University

Dr. Jenny Leigh Smith, Associate Professor, Division of Humanities, The University of Science and Technology

Dr. Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, Assistant Professor, Department of History, The University of Hong Kong

Dr. Niccolò Pianciola's research focuses on the social and environmental history of Tsarist and Soviet Asia.

Dr. Jenny Leigh Smith is an environmental historian and a historian of science and technology, she researches famines and refugee camps, and she has a book on the environmental impact of agricultural industrialization in the Soviet Union, and has co-edited a book on the environmental legacy of international development.

Dr. Oscar Sanchez-Sibony is author of *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (2015), winner of the Marshall Shulman Book Prize in International Relations.

Mr. Lam Chiu Ying on the Anthropocene and Hong Kong 林超英談「人類世」與香港

Mr. Lam Chiu Ying is a famous social commentator, meteorologist, bird-watcher and conservationist. Having been the director of Hong Kong Observatory from 2003 to 2009, Lam since then actively observes and criticizes the government policy in relation to the environment, and has given many talks on the issues of climate change.

Date: 5 March 2019 (Tuesday)

Time: 4:00 - 5:45pm

Venue: RRS 905, 9/F,
Sir Run Run Shaw Building, HKBU

Speaker: Mr. Lam Chiu Ying

Language: Cantonese



CLIMATE MODELLING & DATA PRACTICES AFTER COVID19 (ZOOM SEMINAR)

Date: 30 June 2020 Tuesday

Time: 3:00-4:30 p.m. (HKT)

Zoom ID: 957 0163 6097 (password required)

Speaker: Dr. Bogna Konior (NYU Shanghai)

Language: English



Registration

Bogna Konior is a postdoctoral research fellow at NYU Shanghai, where she teaches a class, 'After Us: Posthuman Media.' She was previously a Lecturer in New Media and Digital Culture at the University of Amsterdam, a Research Fellow at the International Research Institute for Cultural Techniques and Media Philosophy at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar and a visiting researcher in Media and Culture at the ICON Centre for the Humanities at the University of Utrecht. Her recent work appeared in *Symplekx*, *Transformations*, *Parthesia*, and is forthcoming in *Paradoxa*, and in *Mapping Crisis: Participation, Datafiction and Humanitarianism in the Age of Digital Mapping* (University of Chicago Press). www.bognamk.com

Could the Covid19 pandemic foreshadow possible responses to climate change? What kind of data modelling, collection and governance practices emerged during the period of pandemic regulation, and what insight do they give us into the future of climate management internationally? As the pandemic brings to light diverse models of prediction and governance of "natural" disasters, questions arise about the fracturing of global geopolitical order alongside varied ideologies of environmental modelling and governance. This talk zooms in on the similarities and differences between pandemic and climate models and discourses, which bring together human geopolitical activities, zoonotic transfer, philosophical matters of contingency, epistemological status of digital simulations, globalisation of industrial capital and trade routes, and the social consequences of quarantine approaches to disasters.

Curriculum Development for Undergraduate Students

Some new courses offered under the category of “Health and Environmental Humanities”:

- Environmental Humanities: Key Concepts
- Climate Change Literature and Culture
- Health and the Humanities
- Posthuman Futures
- Disability, Culture & Technology

HOW DO WE MAKE IMPACT IN COMMUNITY?

80 film screenings with “meeting the director” in art venues and cinemas

1 film festival “focus on director”

1 public lecture at Asia Society

1 special issues in a Hong Kong flagship literary magazine

1 website and 2 social media channels

Numerous newspaper articles and media interviews

Future Plan: Workshop with High School Students in the summer

WHAT DO WE DO WITH NON-LOCAL PARTNERS?

Joint conferences and events with:

King's college, London

Columbia University, New York

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul

Agnes Scott College, Atlanta

Soochow University, Suzhou

Some of my recent related research topics:

- **Ecologizing Ethnic Minority Cinema in the Chinese Nation-Building Process**
- **China's Distant Water Fishing Fleet and the Overfishing Issue**
- **Water Supply and Management in Hong Kong-China Relationship during the British Colonial Era**
- **Cloud Control: Weather Modification Program and Cloud Computing Industry in the Shadows of China's Ecological Civilization**



China's Cloud Control in the Shadows of Ecological Civilization

Kwai-Cheung LO

China's Geoengineering : weather modification programs

- For decades, China has been investing heavily in this technology, resulting with owning one of the world's most advanced weather modification programs
- However, the efficacy of cloud seeding, rainmaking, rain-suppression, or hail-suppression remains undetermined
- The State Council has announced in late 2020 to launch an extensive scheme to expand its rainmaking capabilities to cover sixty percent of the country's territories by 2025

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关键词:

国务院办公厅关于推进人工影响天气工作高质量发展的意见

国办发〔2020〕47号

相关报道

· 国务院办公厅印发《关于推进人工影响天气工作高质量发展的意见》

解读

· 中国气象局负责人解读《关于推进人工影响天气工作高质量发展的意见》

各省、自治区、直辖市人民政府，国务院各部委、各直属机构：

近年来，我国人工影响天气工作快速发展，作业能力和管理水平不断提升，在服务农业生产、支持防灾减灾救灾、助力生态文明建设和保障重大活动等方面发挥了重要作用。为推进人工影响天气工作高质量发展，经国务院同意，现提出以下意见。

一、总体要求

(一) 指导思想。以习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想为指导，深入贯彻党的十九大和十九届二中、三中、四中、五中全会精神，认真落实以人民为中心的发展思想，贯彻新发展理念，准确把握定位，完善体制机制，强化能力建设，加快科技创新，发展，为防灾减灾救灾、国家重大战略实施和人民群众安全

(二) 基本原则。

坚持以人为本，服务发展，把保障人民群众生命财产、主体功能区等重大战略，积极开展人工影响天气作业。坚持政府主导，统筹协调，落实地方政府属地责任，主导、部门联动、军地协同、齐抓共管的人工影响天气工作合力。

HOW CLOUD SEEDING WORKS

Cloud seeding is a weather modification process where silver iodide boosts precipitation, thereby causing rain



Source: Reuters

Graphic by Tian Chi

- Weather modification seems only a **modest and inexpensive program** with limited social consequences
- Chinese goals of the weather modification has for long been restrained: getting more precipitation in arid areas, reducing hail destructive to farming field, and ensuring blue sky in significant national events
- Beijing's ambition to weather the weather even only within its territorial sovereignty inevitably arouses the **suspicious from its neighboring countries**
- The **absence of proper international coordination** of weather modification activity, even if confined to be domestic, could lead to "charges of rain stealing between neighboring regions"




Weaponizing Weather

- The American military has heavily supported the development of weather sciences for meteorological research after WWII
- In the **Vietnam War**, the White House was actively involved in directing the secret mission in cloud seeding over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in order to flood the communist supply route
- **Climate geoengineering**, which is mainly defined as the technology of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, is getting its momentum in the twenty-first century
- Some argues that it is technologically easy to stop global warming by injecting reflective particles of sulphuric acid into the upper atmosphere where they would scatter a fraction of incoming sunlight back to the space, creating a sunshade for the earth beneath
- Uncertainties about the **potential side-effects** and the practical deployment of such specialized aircrafts and dispersal methods

- China's geoengineering endeavours do not only reveal the authorities' plans to control the clouds in order to regulate the weather, but also their desire **to take the form of the clouds** by assuming a privileged, transcendent vantage point up in the sky over the world
- A fantasy of political elites who want to play god by seeing the world in its entirety objectively, understanding the real and explaining all
- By no means is the desire to be the clouds up above confined to authoritarian regime





建设生态文明
共创美丽中国

- The state-led ecological civilization project is meant to monopolize and control the discourse and discussion of China's environmental issues while **unintentionally generating new kinds of ecological imaginary from its highly repressed and censored civil society**
- Even though ecological civilization endeavours to maintain the impossible balance and reconcile tensions between unending economic growth and environmental protection, the burdens economic development imposes on ecology may overturn the official discursive description of "harmony" and heighten the social expectations for transformations of the status quo

- a primarily home-grown idea of sustainable growth, appears as a top-down model built upon the socialist ideologies with the emphasis on the **mutual compatibility of economic growth, environmental sustainability**, social justice and quality of life
- The idea has been introduced to Chinese society through local government and NGO projects as well as academic discussions
- In 2018, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) wrote **the goal of building an ecological civilization in the national constitution** as the guiding principle for its development



生态文明



- The state-led ecological civilization campaign remains predominantly a top-down, nontransparent, and non-participatory project that single-mindedly pursues the stipulated objectives and may possibly **create second-order problems and unintended consequences**
- Because relatively little consultation has been done with local communities and the existing hierarchies **reproduce urban-rural disparities** as well as **reinforce inequalities between central state powers and marginalized ethnic minorities**
- As the regime's legitimacy primarily depends on its economic performance, ruling elites who are not directly held accountable to the society could still be constrained in its ecological governance when its sustainability objectives have to succumb to political mission of continuously creating wealth
- The **contradictory priorities and different goals are usually in conflict.**

The image of the clouds is also manifested in China's determination to monitor the cloud computing industry

- For competitive and governance reasons, Beijing is eager to bolster the capabilities of Chinese cloud companies, not only the big firms like Alibaba Cloud, Huawei and Tencent, but also some unknown newcomers, such as Baosight, Maxscend, Sangfor, Supcon, or YoueData
- New investment and migration have been reoriented from wealthy coastal cities to poorer interior landlocked provinces where the state is heavily nourishing and subsidizing thousands of new tech companies focusing on A.I., cloud computing and robotics
- Cracking down on the tech giants recently in order to assert the supremacy of the CCP and to redistribute wealth for his common prosperity campaign, Xi also aims at moving away from soft tech development and producing China's home-grown hard technologies for achieving self-sufficiency from the unfriendly Western world

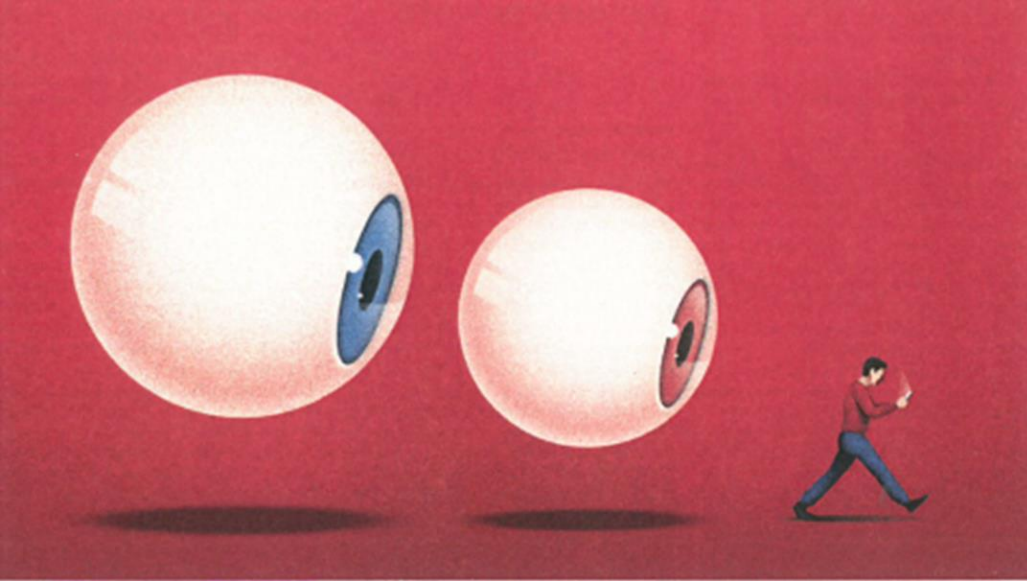


- China shows strong signs of inward looking and of leaving behind its successful collaborative model with foreign companies that bring in capital and high tech gears over last three decades
- The **inward orientation** of hi-tech development in China may reflect how the nation-state envisions to establish an alternative to the post-war Western, liberal global order and to carve up the world into different spheres of influence
- it seems to be the dream of an authoritarian state to become an isolated cloud over its **sphere of influence**, if put it metaphorically. An isolated cloud is named cumulus.
- **Cumulus clouds** are detached, individual, cauliflower-shaped clouds often described as puffy or cotton-like and usually spotted in fair weather conditions
- But cumulus clouds won't remain detached for long. They can later develop into towering clouds accompanying with powerful thunderstorms



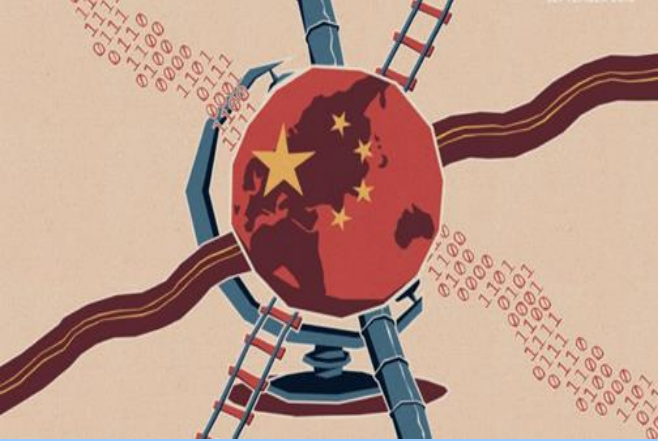


- The association of clouds with freedom, mobility, unrestricted circulation and interconnection also camouflages the operation of **cloud computing**.
- Cloud computing is a kind of computation that covers up the distinction between software and hardware by naturalizing the computer as integral part of the environment
- While cloud computing promises the dematerialization of data storage and the ubiquitous connectivity of frictionless computation in all spaces, its nature and **infrastructure cannot be obfuscated as shapeless, amorphous clouds but remains as stratified grid-network constructions and data hubs** at some real locations that require immense amounts of power to keep them running and are simultaneously emitting carbon dioxide.



- An efficient cloud system enables **China's surveillance mechanism and digital security** function seamlessly and creates an all-round atmospheric power control.

- However, such atmosphere control also runs into another **paradox**. In order to monitor and screen the information flows in the nation's digital networks, all messages sent on China's platform, for example, WeChat, the most widely used messaging application, are required to pass through central servers unencrypted so that authorities can filter and censor them according to the official criteria.
- Such mandate makes those servers weak in security and **vulnerable to any foreign intelligence agency that wants to spy on Chinese citizens**.
- As the Chinese (digital) surveillance system is an entrenched mechanism built on censoring and monitoring its own people, the contradiction between security against enemies within and those without will prolong.
- **The more the operation of the authoritarian state relies on the security weakness in its civil society, the harder the existing loophole can be fixed or removed**



- The cloud image eliminates the representation but not the existence of **the grid-structure of computation**
- It may be true that the ruling elites do want to associate with the cloud image in order to emphasize their celestial power and privilege, but at the same time they also like to foreground the **grid** they have built on the ground so as to glorify the **magnificent infrastructure** that has united the big nation and reconfigured the world as a network or a web of connectivity in which **China becomes the central hub**.
- The infrastructure refers to China's three-decade infrastructure investment and urbanization boom and **the Belt and Road Initiative**.
- But these mega construction projects have also created their own serious problems, like the **environmental risks** that undermine the ecological civilization campaign. Many of these infrastructure investments are neither productive or well managed, becoming a **drag to the economies** of China and other nations participating in the BRI

- China serves as a good model, not only given its sheer size, growth rate and volatile situation, to examine how the combination of geoengineering and digital technologies impacts on cloud control
- Clouds could mean both connection and isolation, as if China wants global trade and economic self-sufficiency at the same time. President Xi has vigorously promoted the mechanism of double circulation, while it may have risks to become **inner loop (nei xunhuan)** or even **involution (neijuan)**
- But involution does not mean failure, from the perspective of control. Because it is a situation where new input has been brought in but there are no real changes in social structure and the same pattern or cycle continues.
- **Etymologically, control means stopping the roll or the wheel. Hence, stagnation may imply the success of control**
- As long as there's no way to stop cloud rolling, control can never succeed but is self-motivated to perpetuate

