Background

The Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, established in 2001 at HKU, has a mission to promote innovative, multi-disciplinary research and teaching in the humanities and social sciences. Focusing on China in Asia and in the world from both historical and contemporary perspectives, it supports diverse platforms for a critical community of scholars to share experiences across the globe.

From a modest beginning, the Institute grew steadily under the leadership of its founding Honorary Director Professor Helen Siu. An important milestone was the migration of the staff, students, and projects of the Centre of Asian Studies into the Institute, approved by the University Senate and Council for the purposes of intellectual and programmatic synergy, on July 1, 2009. The enhanced Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (incorporating the Centre of Asian Studies), is committed to provide an ever more robust platform for Asian and China studies well connected at The University of Hong Kong and with global academic partners. Following a successful international search, Professor Angela Ki Che Leung was appointed as the Institute’s first full-time Director to take forward the development of all academic programs of the Institute from January 2011.
Our Establishment

In 2001, the Institute began with a focus on comparative regional studies of China, historical and contemporary. A number of multi-year research training clusters were commissioned in its first five years with a focus on historical preservation, lineage formations, religious and rituals of local communities, on the northwest and southwest regions. Some other research training clusters were later developed centering on coastal cities (especially on Yangzi and Pearl River deltas), inquiring contemporary social science issues such as urbanization, migrant health, and modern public sphere.

The Institute’s core programs, including lecture series, advanced training workshops, multi-year research clusters, commissioned projects, outreach programs and bilingual publications, are interlocked to produce multiplier effects on our targeted academic, business and policy communities. It gathered a critical mass of young scholars and advanced graduate students from Hong Kong, China and North America who subscribed to the Institute’s training workshops and seminar series. It also leveraged key academic partners in China such as Sun Yat-sen University, Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University, Fudan University, Tsinghua University and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Since 2006, the Institute has broadened its agenda to explore China’s global engagements and a dynamic Asia. While deepening existing comparative regional studies of China, the Institute also developed new strategic alliances in the United States, Europe, Singapore, India, and the Middle East. Key partners include Yale University, the Harvard-Yenching Institute, National Singapore University, and the Social Science Research Council. The Institute’s “Asian Connections” agenda included multi-year research clusters centering on historical trading empires and contemporary finance flows, urban ecologies in Asia’s mega-cities, colonial medicine and global public health, indigenous charities across cultures, and Chinese-African diasporas. More research clusters are being generated.

In 2009, the Centre of Asian Studies, a long-standing research unit at The University of Hong Kong, became part of the Institute. The unit was restructured and enhanced, with some programs of the former CAS incorporated.

A global search was launched in 2010 to look for a full-time director. On January 1, 2011, Professor Angela Ki Che Leung, a leading historian of the medical and social history of late Imperial and modern China, joined the Institute as its first full-time Director. While Professor
Helen F. Siu concluded her conscientious and voluntary service as Honorary Director for the first ten years, she remains the chairperson of the Institute’s Executive Committee. She continues to work closely with Professor Leung to develop the Institute’s programs, and to line up new partners for the Institute in Asia, US, Europe and beyond.

Since then, the Institute has grown in size and research power driven by three research clusters that bring together local and global scholars, as well as public and private resources: Science, Technology, and Medicine in Asian Societies; Hubs, Mobilities and the Asian Urban; Rethinking Spirituality and Religion in Asia. With a growing group of scholars supported by an efficient administrative team, it looks forward to the next phase of development with new research strengths emerging out of the existing programs. To know more about the Institute, please click here.

Our Focus, Mission and Vision

Being small and autonomous, the Institute enjoys exceptional flexibility in academic programs and organizational design. The Institute makes up for its small faculty size by forging solid local and global academic networks based on shared interdisciplinary agenda. It provides a quality intellectual platform for global partners in the humanities and social sciences to engage with local colleagues. This mode of collaboration is much needed in Hong Kong because it provides exceptional opportunities for intense intellectual fermentation, cutting-edge collaborative research and innovative teaching across the disciplines and professional schools. With research synergies and institutional networks well established and still expanding, and a growing graduate program based on the Institute’s research strength, the Institute will lead in research on the humanities in East Asian science, medicine and technology, Hong Kong / China in the world, and changing spirituality in Asia. We are committed to work closely with University colleagues, our overseas partners, and local and global graduate students to build this program.

In 2012, the Institute moved into renovated May Hall, a historic building constructed in 1915 on the main campus of the University. This beautiful structure not only provides the Institute with the necessary space for expansion, but is also emblematic of a humanistic tradition that the Institute works hard to preserve and revitalize. We are confident that, in this new home, the Institute will continue to find the inspiration and strength to integrate productively with the rest of the University, to have relevance for communities in the region, and connect ever more creatively with the world.

Vision

The Institute aims at promoting innovative, multi-disciplinary, and inter-institutional research and teaching in the humanities and social sciences related to China in the world, with special focus on the humanities in science, technology and medicine, hubs, mobilities and the Asian urban, China/Africa, and changing spirituality in Asia. It creates multi-layered platforms for a critical
community of scholars to share experiences across the globe. Its outreach programs and commissioned projects connect with policy and business professionals.

**Mission**

- To train graduate students and nurture young scholars eager to cross disciplinary and institutional boundaries in their research on China in Asia and in the world.

- To develop strategic academic alliances in Asia and the rest of the world.

- To engage local and global partners in research projects relevant to our intellectual pursuits.

- To engage our students, colleagues, and community to rethink national, regional, and disciplinary boundaries.

- To use critical thinking in humanistic and social science research to promote innovative academic dialogue, to enrich open, civil policy debates, and to inform an educated public on important issues in the Asian region.