

Welcome Remarks at the HSUHK Global Humanities Initiative Colloquium “Shall we play? Cultural References for the Current Debate”

28 October 2021 Fung Yiu King Hall, S H Ho Academic Building, HSUHK

Good afternoon, Prof Luiz Oosterbeek, Prof PC Hsiung, Prof Gilbert Fong, Prof Desmond Hui, colleagues, students and friends,

Welcome to HSUHK! Most of the audience today has opted to attend this colloquium online. This new normal has largely reflected how time and technology have brought changes to teaching and learning, and also to “play”, which is the subject that our scholars are going to examine and share today.

The HSUHK Global Humanities Initiative (GHI) was established in 2017 as part of our commitment to implement our unique “Liberal + Professional” education model. The university is now offering more than 30 undergraduate and postgraduate programmes from 5 Schools. The GHI has been one of the University’s major initiatives that actively promote interdisciplinary research and studies. It has been growing steadily under the leadership of Prof P C Hsiung and Prof Gilbert Fong over the years.

The GHI helps connect HSUHK to the world, having collaborations with CIPSH (the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies) under UNESCO on innovative research projects, examining humanities issues from different and innovative perspectives. We do hope that staff and students from different disciplines will also gain access to new ideas and perspectives on global humanities issues.

The subject of the colloquium today is “Play”, which, in itself must be something interesting. For educators and parents, “play” is considered to be closely linked to early childhood development as well as to education for learners of different ages and in different contexts. There are academic sources pointing out the vital role of play in human evolution. School teachers often play games with students to help them learn and develop. I would like to hear from Prof Luiz Oosterbeek, who will explore the role of play for knowledge advancement and sustainability today.

It is also very interesting to look at “play” through a cultural perspective, as Prof Hsiung has been studying this subject and will share with us her analysis. It is human nature to want to play. People, regardless of their age, want the pleasure from play. Children play different kinds of toys, teenagers nowadays like online and theme-park games, adults buy sophisticated electronic games, some older people gather to play physical mah-jong and chess games, etc. We can also find in literatures and paintings what people in historical times played, for example, children in old China played games like cricket fight. How people from different cultures perceive “play” – the roles and the importance, is certainly a very interesting topic that would enlighten educators and parents to reflect on their own practice.

The unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic has caused the world off guard. Since the start of the pandemic in early 2020, lockdowns were implemented in many countries and social distancing has to be carefully observed. “Play” in many ways cannot be practised as in the past, but new forms of play, e.g. online gaming, have become more prevalent than ever. The impact of such kind of changes to society and human development should not be underestimated. It might be an issue to be examined under the GHI.

Finally, HSUHK will participate in “The Values of Play International Forum” co-organised by Hangzhou Normal University and Zhejiang University in November. Our Global Humanities Initiative will continue to work hand in hand with CIPSH to contribute to researches and studies in humanities in a global context.

Thank you.