

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Case Study

University: **The University of Hong Kong (HKU)**

Unit of Assessment (UoA): **UoA 30, Chinese Language and Literature**

Title of case study: **Bringing Poetry in Translation to Transnational Audiences**

(1) Summary of the impact

Dr Lucas Klein's research in and practice of translation has had an impact on poets, translators, and popular audiences by creating meaningful relationships between these groups. Consequently, his research has contributed to an increase in awareness of international poetry in translation in Hong Kong and greater penetration of Chinese poetry worldwide. Klein's prize-winning translation of Xi Chuan in *Notes on the Mosquito* has brought the works of an important contemporary Chinese poet to the attention of global audiences, facilitating the poet's engagement with a wider readership and further enhancing his international reputation and esteem. Furthermore, Klein's active involvement with cultural organisations such as the biannual festival International Poetry Nights in Hong Kong and *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal* has resulted in the dissemination of international poetry in translation to audiences within Hong Kong and abroad through public talks, readings, and editorial work, thereby raising awareness of both contemporary world poetry and issues of translation amongst literary translators and the general public.

(2) Underpinning research

Klein has been in the School of Chinese at HKU since 2013. His academic research focuses on literary translation between English and Chinese and on the impact of translation on the poetry and poetics of these and other languages, both in the premodern and the modern or contemporary eras. Klein's monograph, *The Organization of Distance: Poetry, Translation, Chineseness*, was published in July 2018 by Brill as part of its Sinica Leidensia Series. The book analyses the translation of contemporary and Medieval Chinese poetry using the concepts of foreignisation and nativisation—namely, the translated work's engagement with Chinese historical heritage on the one hand, and foreign literary texts and contexts on the other. It argues that these two concepts are both always in play in translation and in translated works, and that the analysis of this dynamic leads to insights about the 'Chineseness' of Chinese poetry as itself a product of translation, from forces both abroad and in the past [3.1]. In his 2018 article for the *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*, Klein writes that translation is interpretation. Drawing on his experiences translating contemporary Chinese poets Xi Chuan and Ouyang Jianghe, as well as Tang dynasty poet Li Shangyin, he argues that while one can never get past the issue of the translator's subjective interpretation, the baseline for translating contemporary Chinese poetry into English is weak interpretation, and the baseline for translating premodern Chinese poetry into English is strong interpretation [3.2]. His research and translation of the works of Li Shangyin and Xi Chuan have also led to discussions of what it means to translate across space and time in the context of the history of poetry translation from Chinese into English, of distinctions in the translation of different genres, such as poetry, prose poetry, and expository prose, and of the translator's need to match a writer's style in its development over time [3.3, 3.4]. Klein's scholarship and criticism have appeared in *Comparative Literature Studies*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Jacket*, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, and Reviews (CLEAR)*, *PMLA* (journal of the Modern Language Association of America), and other publications.

Klein's research is manifested in and symbiotically tied to his practice as an award-winning translator. His translations of Li Shangyin have been published in the poetry collection *Li Shangyin* (New York Review Books, 2018). His translations of Xi Chuan's poetry in *Notes on the Mosquito: Selected Poems of Xi Chuan* (New Directions) won the 2013 Lucien Stryk Asian Translation Prize awarded by the American Literary Translators Association [3.5]. He has also translated contemporary poetry by Mang Ke for the collection *October Dedications* (Zephyr and Chinese University Press, 2018), which is shortlisted for the 2019 Lucien Stryk Asian Translation Prize

[3.6]. His forthcoming translation of Duo Duo (*Words as Grains*, Yale University Press, est. 2020) received the 2019 PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant.

Klein's research underpins the impact in several ways. Most obviously, the translations he has produced have put his theoretical reflections on translation into practice, while at the same time raising awareness of contemporary Chinese poetry in translation by disseminating these works to transnational English-speaking audiences. In addition to this, the multitude of awareness-raising activities resulting from Klein's involvement with International Poetry Nights in Hong Kong (IPNHK) and *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal* have provided a platform for him to share his theoretical research interest in translation and its practice – by engaging with the public and the media on issues of translation, facilitating the translations of international poetry into English for publication (i.e. through the IPNHK book series), or selecting translated works for awards.

(3) References to the research

- 3.1 Klein, Lucas. *The Organization of Distance: Poetry, Translation, Chineseness*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.
- 3.2 Klein, Lucas. "Strong and Weak Interpretations in Translating Chinese Poetry," *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 14, no. 2-15, no. 1 (Winter 2017–Summer 2018): 7–43.
- 3.3 Klein, Lucas. "Dislocating Language into Meaning: Difficult Anglophone Poetry and Chinese Poetics in Translation—Toward a Culturally Translatable Li Shangyin." *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures* 70, no. 3 (September 2, 2016): 133–42.
- 3.4 Klein, Lucas. "Same Difference: Xi Chuan's *Notes on the Mosquito* and the Translation of Poetry, Prose Poetry, & Prose." *Translation Review*, 93, no. 1 (March 2016): 41–50.
- 3.5 Xi, Chuan. *Notes on the Mosquito: Selected Poems*. **Trans. Lucas Klein**, New Directions, 2012.
- 3.6 Mang, Ke. *October Dedications: Selected Poetry of Mang Ke*, **Trans. Lucas Klein**, Huang Yibing, and Jonathan Stalling, Zephyr / Chinese University Press, 2018.

Grants:

Project: Translation, Poetry, Tang Dynasty, Cultural Commensurability, Ambiguity
Research Grants Council (RGC), 2015–2019, HK\$396,912

(4) Details of the impact

Klein's impacts on poets, transnational audiences, and translators have resulted from two main types of activity: firstly, his own translations of Chinese poetry into English; and secondly, his active involvement with Hong Kong cultural organisations.

Klein has made previously untranslated works by Chinese poets available to English-language readers around the world through his acclaimed translations. His translations of Xi Chuan in *Notes on the Mosquito* represent the first appearance of the work of one of China's most celebrated living poets in book form in English. Klein has also disseminated the work of other Chinese poets through his translations. *October Dedications* focuses on previously untranslated work by poet Mang Ke. *Li Shangyin* features 20 poems by the Tang dynasty poet, with multiple English versions placed side by side to highlight issues of translation. *Endure: Poems by Bei Dao* was translated in collaboration with National Book Awardee, Clayton Eshleman. Klein's translations of works by contemporary poet Duo Duo (*Words as Grains*) is forthcoming in 2020.

Klein has been actively involved in events and publications for International Poetry Nights in Hong Kong (IPNHK), an award-winning biannual poetry festival first established by poet Bei Dao in 2009 (<http://www.ipnhk.com>). The Festival brings contemporary international poets – all of whose works are delivered in translated versions – to Hong Kong, and in so doing raises awareness of world poetry and issues of translation. There have been three, four-night festivals of multilingual poetry recitations and open panel discussions during the period under review (2013, 2015 and 2017), featuring a total of 62 international poets from 27 countries and regions. Klein moderated talks and discussions at all three. Since 2011, Klein has been closely involved with *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal* (*Cha*), the first and only Hong Kong-based, free-access, Asia-focused international

literary publication (www.asiancha.com). Klein has contributed translations, reviews and original works to the journal, and served as guest editor for two issues during the review period. Since 2019, Klein has been *Cha's* Translation Editor and is responsible for curating translated pieces, recommending translation titles for review, and editing translation submissions. Klein has also given public talks on poetry and translation at the Hong Kong International Literary Festival (2017).

Contributing to Artist Recognition and Esteem

Klein's translations of Xi Chuan have resulted in greater worldwide critical and popular recognition of the poet's aesthetic and cultural contributions, impacting on the artist and his career. *Notes on the Mosquito* was awarded the Lucien Stryk Asian Translation Prize in October 2013. According to the Prize Committee, "Klein's volume [was] the most deserving of the prize by virtue of the quality of many of the translations and the caliber of the poems they represent. Judging from this collection, Xi Chuan is clearly a major poetic voice whose formal versatility and relentlessly unswerving insights [...] represent a significant contribution to Chinese letters and are well-deserving of a Western readership" [5.1]. The book was also shortlisted for the American 2013 Best Translated Book Award. A popular review of the book on Amazon states that it is "worth reading and re-reading. [The] English translations of Xi Chuan's poems are fine poems in their own right [...] I certainly find myself rereading passages and sharing them with friends. Xi Chuan is an acclaimed poet, and this volume will allow those who do not read Chinese to understand why" [5.2]. In 2018, Xi Chuan was awarded the Cikada Prize by the Swedish Institute. According to Xi Chuan, "reading [Klein's] translations has given me new eyes with which to observe myself. *Notes on the Mosquito* is not just my book, but is our book, mine and Lucas's together" [5.3].

Connecting Poets with New Audiences around the World

Klein's acclaimed translation work has resulted in connections between poets and new transnational audiences. Xi Chuan has said: "Translation gives my poetry a much wider flight radius, and with the help of Lucas's translations, these poems were able to find a greater number of active brains" [5.3]. The critical recognition of Xi Chuan has led to poetry readings around the world, with some co-attended by Klein, in which Klein's translations are presented to English-speaking audiences. In February 2015, Xi Chuan was invited to read Klein's translation of "Bloom" to at least 300 attendees at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. With reference to a poetry event he attended in Beijing in 2015, Australian poet John Kinsella described the same poem as "the tour de force with which Xi Chuan and Lucas Klein finished the reading." Kinsella added: "...the poem built and built and snowballed through the rhythms of being" [5.4]. Xi Chuan read Klein's translations for a 2017 event in New South Wales hosted by Australian Poetry. In October 2018, the Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing selected Xi Chuan as author of the month, hosting a talk with Xi Chuan at the University of Leeds and interviewing Klein for their "Talking Translation" series. Xi Chuan also spoke at the 2018 Manchester Literature Festival, where he read from Klein's translation of his work. Weng U Pun of the *Manchester Review* wrote that it "was enlightening to hear both versions" of the poems and the "captivating engagement of the languages in terms of sound and meaning," as well as "to observe [...] translation's role in allowing the poems to reach a larger audience" [5.5]. In a 2014 article for *Time Out Doha* in which Chinese publishers were asked to choose five Chinese books worth reading that year, Klein's translation of Xi Chuan in *Notes on a Mosquito* was selected by Canaan Morse, editor of *Pathlight* magazine. Praising Xi Chuan's "aesthetic achievement and scope," and *Notes on a Mosquito* as "marvelously translated," Morse claims the "poems within changed how [he] understands China" [5.6]. These events and reviews speak to the transnational reach of Klein's translations and their continuing impact on audiences.

In 2015, poets participating in the IPNHK festival travelled to four major Chinese cities for readings and conversations with local poets. Klein accompanied Song Lin (China), Ghassan Zaqtan (Palestine), Anne Waldman and Eliot Weinberger (USA) to Hangzhou, where they gave two readings to maximum-capacity audiences and participated in two round-table dialogues with local poets. In 2017, Klein went with Bei Dao (China / USA), Hirata Toshiko (Japan), Shuntarō

Tanikawa (Japan), and Javier Bello (Chile) to Xiamen, where they gave a reading in a 400-plus-seat auditorium, with tickets selling out in just two hours. Bei Dao has been nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature multiple times. The event was recorded and made available online where it has already been viewed 223,000 times [5.7]. Klein has created a blog on Xi Chuan and Chinese poetry in translation, www.xichuanpoetry.com, which has received 31,805 views during the review period.

Since 2013, Klein has been in charge of the production of box sets of multilingual poetry volumes published by Chinese University Press in connection with the IPNHK (three box sets during the impact period). Each box set contains a small volume of poetry for each of that year's participating poets (62 during the impact period). Klein both edits and translates poetry for these publications. Poets who write in Chinese have their works published in new English translations; those who write in English or other languages have their works published in new Chinese translations. Six thousand box sets were printed during the impact period (2,000 for each festival). As publications director, Klein helps to create new audiences for poetry in translation and establishes links between poets and translators. South African poet, Gabeba Baderoon, who participated in the 2017 IPNHK, writes that, "the refined attention given to our poetry by Lucas as editor and organizer of translations was manifested in a striking publication. [...] I learned from conversations at the festival that the Chinese versions of our poems were subtle and evocative." She further notes that, "[the IPNHK volume] also gives my work an entirely new audience in Asia. To me, the project of expanding the relationship between African and Asian cultures is a promising and very important project." Another participating poet, Julia Fiedorczuk from Poland, writes that, "Participating in [IPNHK] was an unforgettable experience, as it was one of the best poetry festivals I have ever attended. [...] Spending time with poets from all over the world – but especially from Asia and the Pacific – contributed to my understanding of contemporary world poetry and my own place within this vast and diverse landscape" [5.8].

Raising Awareness of Translation Issues and the Practice of Translation

Klein has shared his theoretical reflections on translation with a wider audience, including local poets and translators, through his work for *Cha*. Klein helped to conceive and establish the *Cha* Reading Series, which aims to provide a public forum for writers and translators. He has featured in nine events with a focus on translation between December 2017 and September 2019. In 2017, Klein was the judge of *Cha*'s international poetry prize – organised in collaboration with PEN Hong Kong – in which participants were asked to submit translations or adaptations of poems about Hong Kong or China. The winners were published in *Cha*'s December 2019 issue. According to *Cha*'s Founding Co-editor, Tammy Ho Lai-Ming, "Klein's contribution to *Cha* is most notable in his raising the awareness of the importance of translation in the creation, circulation and dissemination of literary works as well as its role in cross-boundary understanding—this not only benefits the journal but the rest of the community. He has introduced works by important and emerging Chinese writers to an English-language audience, helped connect translators and readers, and contributed to the recognition and appreciation of translators' works in the city" [5.9].

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Quote by the Prize Committee for the 2013 Lucien Stryk Asian Translation Prize in a press release.
- 5.2 Amazon review by Eric Miller, November 11, 2014.
- 5.3 Interview in 2013 with Xi Chuan for the U.S. literary magazine *The Normal School*.
- 5.4 Blogpost by John Kinsella, "How Many I-s in the Hotel of Xi Chuan?" August 17, 2015.
- 5.5 Statement by Weng U Pun, *The Manchester Review*, October 2018.
- 5.6 Statement by Canaan Morse, *Time Out Doha*, February 26, 2014.
- 5.7 Video of IPNHK event with Bei Dao and Lucas Klein in Xiamen, 2017.
<https://zhibo.ifeng.com/video.html?liveid=112587>
- 5.8 Statements from Gabeba Baderoon and Julia Fiedorczuk.
- 5.9 Statement from Tammy Ho Lai-Ming, Founding Co-editor of *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*