

**Research Assessment Exercise 2020**  
**Impact Overview Statement**

**University:** The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

**Unit of Assessment:** 30-Chinese Language and Literature

**Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA:** 6

### **1. Context**

The Chinese Language and Literature Unit of Assessment (UoA), located in the Division of Humanities, School of Humanities and Social Science (SHSS), comprises scholars working on literature as well as linguistics. Its research excellence in the study and practice of modern Chinese literature has translated into several highly visible activity programs that connect leading authors and critics with non-academic user groups. Literature faculty have won a wide audience outside academia, both in the Sinophone and Anglophone worlds, and have had impact on culture by helping to introduce readers to not only the literature, but also the major social and cultural issues of contemporary China. Drawing on their expertise in historical dialectology, the Unit's linguistic scholars have assembled openly accessible databases that facilitate the preservation and dissemination of historic Chinese texts, again achieving cultural impact for the wider society. Finally, through a popular public lecture series, all UoA members contribute to making Chinese literature and language a part of the cultural life of Hong Kong. The non-academic users include members of the Hong Kong community and both Chinese-language and English-language readers around the world.

### **2. Approach to impact**

One of the hallmarks of the Unit has been its efforts to bring leading authors to HKUST and make Chinese literature accessible and exciting to a broad non-academic audience. This underpins its approach to impact in the period of assessment. The UoA has pursued several institutional programs and multimedia initiatives to target audiences both in Hong Kong and the wider world. These include:

i) **Creative writing program:** The Chinese Creative Writing Program, directed by J LIU, was launched in 2013 in cooperation with the Division of Humanities, the School, and HKUST Jockey Club Institute for Advanced Study. It was designed to galvanize a select group of the world's top Chinese-language authors to excite public interest throughout Hong Kong in the dynamism of contemporary Chinese creative writing, while also nurturing HKUST's gifted students. The program has organized five international conferences on literature, and five public talks featuring renowned literary critic LIU Zaifu (visiting scholar since 2013) or acclaimed novelist YAN Lianke (writer-in-residence and visiting professor since 2013). Many celebrated writers-in-residence have participated in the program, including Nobel Literature Laureate Gao Xingjian, Yu Hua, Su Tong, Han Shaogong, Shu Ting, Chi Zijian, Li Er, and Liang Hong. Open to the public and advertised outside campus, public talks featuring these writers have drawn approximately 5,000 audience members over the period of assessment to reflect on and appreciate Chinese literature and poetry.

ii) **Chinese literature in the public sphere:** The Unit is distinguished by the presence of faculty members who leverage their literary expertise to reach wider audiences in their capacity as public intellectuals. J LIU's academic scholarship, which focuses on the interaction of cultural transformation and social change in modern China, as well as her institutional projects to bring contemporary Chinese creative writing to the public, have inspired large numbers of readers in Hong Kong and mainland China. She has been commissioned to write numerous pieces for non-academic Chinese periodicals and internet sites that convey her scholarly insights to the general public. The Chinese website of the *Financial Times* (FT 中文網) has published her contributions under their top-line headline three times. In 2011 she began a microblog at sina.com.cn 新浪網 that has subsequently gained 25,500 followers, who constantly discuss and exchange ideas with her online. YAN has published two acclaimed novels and a two-volume collection of lectures that have stimulated literary discussion, and reflection on contemporary Chinese society throughout the Sinophone and Anglophone worlds (see case).

iii) **Open online resources for Cantonese literature:** Since 2012, the Unit's linguistics faculty have run and maintained two online databases, Early Cantonese Tagged Database and Early Cantonese Colloquial Texts: A Database, which contain textbooks, dictionaries, and Bible translations in Cantonese published in the 19th and early 20th centuries. These openly accessible, searchable databases help preserve rare and valuable original sources, and provide a rich resource for users to explore Chinese dialect history and culture. The two databases have been visited over 20,000 times.

iv) **Public humanities lectures:** Starting from April 2012, the Division of Humanities has organized a Public Humanities Lecture program in conjunction with the Hong Kong Museum of History. Its aim is to transfer knowledge from faculty research to the public and stimulate conversations about the multidisciplinary humanities. Each member of the Chinese Language and Literature UoA delivers an hour-long lecture, at least once every two years, on a topic of research to a general audience on a Sunday during the semester. Topics have ranged from Chinese literature and modern photography (WU) to Chinese animation (DU), early Cantonese language (YIU and ZHANG), the utopian imagination in Chinese literature (J LIU), and the past and future of Chinese script (SUN). The distinguished writers-in-residence LIU Zaifu and YAN Lianke have also delivered public lectures as part of this program. A total of 641 museum visitors have attended lectures by UoA faculty during the period of assessment.

### 3. Strategy and plans

Over the next six years, the UoA intends to further build on the strategies for maximizing impact that have served it well during the past period of assessment. These include:

i) **New initiatives to bring Chinese literature to a wider audience**, e.g. co-sponsorship of the November 2019 International Poetry Nights in Hong Kong, which invited over 50 poets, translators, and musicians from around the world to stage public readings and events in Hong Kong, followed by additional engagements in 10 mainland Chinese cities.

ii) **Expanded online resources for Chinese literature**, through the Fall 2019 launch of a third online database, Early Chinese Colloquial Texts, which contains searchable texts as well as scans of original documents in five Chinese dialects published in the 19th and 20th centuries.

iii) **More impact support and incentive mechanisms**, including a series of training sessions and one-on-one consultations, to be launched by the School's Associate Dean for Research, in 2020, to assist faculty to define and measure their impact, identify stakeholders and beneficiaries, and review impact statements from successful research proposals. These initiatives will be funded at the School level and monitored at the midpoint and end of the six-year period by an external reviewer.

iv) **Continuation of the Public Humanities Lecture series**, which has demonstrated its success in engaging community stakeholders with the academic research carried out in the Unit.

### 4. Relationship to the case study

The Unit's case study, which focuses on the reception of YAN's literary publications, illustrates the major impact the Unit has made on contemporary Chinese literature and its global readership. Over the past six years as a UoA member, YAN has enjoyed an intellectual environment that has helped him cement his status as one of China's most acclaimed authors; pioneer new genres of literary composition; and introduce innovative methodologies for teaching creative writing through reflection on literary history, within and beyond the University. The Unit has facilitated activities whereby audiences throughout the Sinophone and Anglophone world have been able to engage with his novels and lectures to better understand the social and cultural challenges that are faced by mainland Chinese citizens, as well as the broader concerns that affect people around the world in an era of globalization.