

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Case Study

University: Lingnan University

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 30 - Chinese Language & Literature

Title of case study: Promoting Chinese Literature and Culture to the Global, Regional, and Local Communities and Across Generations

(1) Summary of the impact

The Chinese department has engaged in several knowledge transfer (hereafter KT) projects over the past decade, with a unified focus on sharing its research in Chinese literature with local, regional, and global communities to promote it throughout the world and foster in-depth dialogues between Chinese and Western cultures. This KT endeavor is distinguished by rigorous underpinning research, breadth of KT recipients, institutionalization of KT undertakings and a transforming impact on both institutions and individuals. Through these activities, the department has had a significant cultural impact in Hong Kong, China and throughout the English-speaking world.

(2) Underpinning research

Because high quality underpinning research is a crucial factor for any KT success, researchers in the Chinese department have pursued KT work in their strongest areas of research, often as an outgrowth of their GRF-funded projects.

Professor Zong-qi Cai's KT project, *How to Read Chinese Literature*, is based on his two outputs from two GRG grants: GRF (Project No. 13400014, 2014) and HSSPS (Project No. 33000215, 2016). The first is his edited volume, *Sound and Sense of Chinese Poetry* (Duke UP, 2015), which probes the primacy of sound in Chinese poetic art. The second is his monograph (over 370K words) *Grammar and Poetic Vision 語法與詩境* by Beijing Zhonghua shuju, the most prestigious publisher in traditional Chinese studies (accepted, 2019; forthcoming, 2020). This is the first ever systematic anatomy of Chinese poetic language and its aesthetic power. All of its chapters have appeared in top-tier journals in Asia. [R1, R2]

Xu Zidong's underpinning insight was best demonstrated in his book, *Xu Zidong on Modern Chinese Literature 許子東現代文學課* (2018), published by the renowned Shanghai Sanlian. This book reconstructs modern Chinese literature from a new humanistic perspective. It provides a rereading of literary works, challenging the academic, educational, and ideological rigidity that had so far been hindering people from fully appreciating modern Chinese literature. He imbued into his reevaluation a strong sense of humanistic engagement, creating a vividness and compassion that was rare in contemporary scholarship of modern Chinese literature. [R3] [R4]

Mary Wong Shuk Han and Grace Lau Yin Ping's research focuses on literary productions in Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s, Cantonese Opera, and Hong Kong writers. Their project was supported by two GRF grants: "Hong Kong Literature and Culture of the 1950s" (Project No. 340910) and "The Making of Hong Kong Modernism: Hong Kong Literature and Culture of the 1960s" (Project No. 1340114), and one KT fund. Their books *Leung Ping Kwan and His 1950s: A Collection of Critical Essays on Hong Kong Culture and Literature 也斯的五〇年代：香港文學與文化論集* and *The Happiness and Sadness of the Decade: A Study of 1950s Hong Kong Culture 痛苦中有歡樂的年代：一九五〇年代香港文化* argue that the 1950s Hong Kong culture goes beyond a cold war model. With its specific socio-political context in Asia, it has its cultural

specificities vividly shown in popular culture and arts, as well as refined literature, cinema, Chinese opera and paintings. [R5, R6]

(3) References to the research

[R1] Cai, Zong-qi. *Grammar and Poetic Vision: An Anatomy of Chinese Poetic Art* 語法與詩境：漢詩藝術之破析. Beijing: Beijing Zhonghua shuju 北京中華書局 (accepted, May 2019; forthcoming, 2020).

[R2] Cai, Zong-qi, ed. *The Sound and Sense of Chinese Poetry*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2015.

[R3] Xu Zidong: *Xu Zidong on Modern Chinese Literature* 許子東現代文學課. Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian 上海三聯書店, 2018.

[R4] Wong Shuk Han, ed. *Leung Ping Kwan and His 1950s: A Collection of Critical Essays on Hong Kong Culture and Literature* 也斯的五〇年代：香港文學與文化論集, Chung Hwa Book Co. 中華書局, May 2013.

[R5] Leung Ping Kwan and Wong Shuk Han eds. *The Happiness and Sadness of the Decade: A Study of 1950s Hong Kong Culture* 痛苦中有歡樂的年代：一九五〇年代香港文化. Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Co., 2013.

[R6] Lau Yin Ping, co-authored. 《粵劇與改編》論唐滌生的經典作品 *Cantonese Opera and Adaptation—The Work of Tong Dik Sang*. Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Co., 2015.

(4) Details of the impact

The Breadth of Targeted KT Recipients

Cai's KT project [How to Read Chinese Literature](#), a ten-volume series with Columbia UP, aims to make cutting-edge scholarship available to general English-speaking Western readers. So far, he has completed a poetry trilogy, which has reached a wide audience: to date, more than 7,000 copies have been sold in 16 countries, including all continents except Africa (Data 1). In the small field of China studies, these sales figures are significant. As Jennifer Crewe, the director of Columbia UP, noted, this series "has begun to take on significance as a game-changing undertaking in Chinese literary studies" (Data 1). Moreover, these books have come back to exert their influence in China. Thanks to an extensive media coverage, Cai's KT work has won nationwide recognition, with a nomination for the National Award for Outstanding Achievement in Publishing and an invitation by a top Chinese publisher to produce a Chinese version of the series (Data 2).

In contrast, targeting general readers in mainland China, Xu's book *Xu Zidong on Modern Chinese Literature* has generated interest in the subject because it offers new insights into the dynamic relationship between literature and China's contemporary political/cultural conditions. The book launch in Beijing (June 2018) was attended by over 500 select people (from over 2,000 who had applied). It was estimated that about two million people watched the book launch online, setting a record for the number of people participating in this type of cultural activity. Douban, one of the most influential websites devoted to book and film reviews in China, ranked the book as the fifth best nonfiction literary book of 2018. Together with Xu's lectures broadcast online, it has attracted the attention of millions of viewers (Data 5).

In extending coverage all over the world, these KT projects have reached a broad and diversified audience across the Cantonese-speaking, Mandarin-speaking and English-speaking regions.

Institutionalization of KT Undertakings

The establishment of the Lingnan Chinese Culture Program (嶺南國學堂 LCCP) in 2018, made possible by a Tin Ka Ping Foundation award of \$1 million, marked the institutionalization of our KT undertakings. Less than two months after the award, LCCP got off the ground, with a series of six public lectures. These lectures drew a sizable audience (425 for the first 5 talks) and received enthusiastic feedback in audience questionnaires (more than 90% of participants were “satisfied” or “extremely satisfied”). In addition to high ratings, many attendees wrote to tell us how the lectures changed the ways they viewed Chinese culture and led them to reflect on their own individual lives. (Data 10)

Transforming Impact on Individuals and Institutions

Cai’s pedagogical innovations, born of his KT project, have practically revolutionized the ways Chinese literature and culture are taught and learnt in the Western institutions of higher learning. This transforming impact has been noted by both China specialists and scholars in Western literary studies. Professors Paula Varsano (UC Berkeley) and Michelle Yeh (UC Davis) who are currently teaching with Cai’s books testify that their students’ “perspectives on the world” are changed “once and for all”; “their understanding—not just of Chinese poetry, but of the potential behind language writ large—was utterly transformed, making them think differently about the way they practiced their own professions.” (Data 4)

Further, Cai’s project has produced life-changing effects on general readers faced with challenges. A classic example is Merrill, a freelance writer working for the Grammy Award. He grew so fascinated with Cai’s KT project that he became a devoted fellow promoter of Chinese poetry. For the last ten years and more, right up to the present day, he has been volunteering editorial services and writing Wikipedia entries on Chinese literature. It was Merrill’s suggestion that led Cai to expand his KT project into a grand book series. (Data 3)

The impact of Xu’s project is equally important. It turned many reluctant readers into readers of literature; it changed their “perspectives on life” and “way of thinking.” Some readers commended his uniquely humanistic style of reading literature and its “soul-changing” effect. His book has prompted an airing of views on social and cultural problems in today’s China. A reader spoke of experiencing an “enlightenment” from reading Xu’s book and lamented the spiritual loss of modern times. (Data 6). Leading scholars Leo Ou-fan Lee and David Der-wei Wang testify to its “vividness” and “liveliness,” which has reshaped readers’ views on modern Chinese literature. (Data 7)

Through a set of lectures, radio talks and exhibitions in 2015, Wong and Lau’s KT project “1950s and 1960s Hong Kong Literature” has enlightened the younger generation on Hong Kong’s cultural connections to and differences from other Asian cities in the mid-20th century. By making available numerous old films, literature and music, they have changed the local population’s understanding of Hong Kong history and culture. As some participants wrote, “The talks have simply changed my view of the old Hong Kong”; “I never knew these wonderful films before and now I have a different view on Hong Kong cinema.” (Data 8) The publication in 2015 of their talks by a Macau culture department further amplified their project’s reach, and indicates the significance of its impact (Data 9).

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

Data 1. Letter from Director Jennifer Crewe, University of Columbia Press

Data 2. Book Contract with Sanlian Publishing House

Data 3. Letter from Philip Merrill

Data 4. Testimonial letters from Paula Varsano and Michelle Yeh

Data 5. News release “What Lu Xun Said 100 Years Ago Still Sounds like Comments on Today’s Newspapers.”

Data 6. Netizens’ comments on Xu’s book on Weibo.com and Douban.com

Data 7. Testimonial letters from Leo Ou-fan Lee (CUHK) and David Der-wei Wang (Harvard)

Data 8. Questionnaires gathered by the organizers

Data 9. Publication by Macau Civil and Municipal Affairs Bureau

Data 10. LCCP statistics gathered by the organizer