

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Case Study

University:

Hong Kong Baptist University

Unit of Assessment (UoA): **31 English Language and Literature**

Title of case study: Authentic Asian English Voices for the World (Tammy L-M. HO and L-H. WEE)

(1) Summary of the impact

Ho's and Wee's research on Asian Englishes and its literary expressions reconciles local speech identities with global communicative demands, which is vital to one's sense of self-worth. The literary (Ho's) and the linguistic (Wee's) strands converge to create and defend spaces of Anglophone literature through *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal* {asiancha.com}. Such a space raises the standing of Hong Kong (HK) literature globally, fosters greater sensitivity to free speech and social activism, and encourages Asian writers to express their own voices. Their project supports social collaborations through authentic narratives, changing how English writing is conceived and perceived locally and internationally.

(2) Underpinning research

Two strands of research, both receiving important grants, underlie this project: literary and linguistic. HK is currently situated in a peculiar historico-political timespace. After surviving one 'deadline' in 1997 (the end of British colonialism), HK is faced with another, more absolute deadline, in 2047 (when the 'One Country, Two Systems' policy expires). From a literary standpoint, Ho's research investigates how being located between these two 'extremities' and 'endpoints' impacts on the representation of HK in the literary imagination, and the preoccupations, confusions, questions and moments that particularly reveal themselves in post-1997 writings on the city. It probes the possibilities to speak of a 'Hong Kong subjectivity' through a continued study of poetry about HK published since 1997. The research enables and helps to grow the conversation between literature and the world grounded in HK's unique linguistic ecology, which is inventively bilingual.

An equally important and complementary linguistic strand comes from Wee's research on the linguistic character of Asian Englishes, in particular HK and Singapore. His focus is on their phonologies which most directly serve to give a society its distinctive voice and character. Even within the framework of World Englishes, most studies on Asian Englishes have been predicated, often tacitly, on an exonormative standard based on the British/American variety—scholars base their studies in terms of British or American phonological inventories. Wee's research departs from the predecessors' by taking the phonetic forms of Asian Englishes as basic. In the case of HK English (hereafter HKE) and Singapore English, Wee's approach is uncoloured by presuppositions of their Englishness or Chineseness (Wee 2008). Those before him are not invalidated, however. Wee's research offers an internally coherent methodology to establish accepted claims while providing new observations and evidence on the intricacies of consonantal and vowel alternations (Wee 2009) as well as the distinctiveness of syllabic organizations in varieties of Englishes such as HKE (Wee 2017), China and Taiwan Chinglish, Indian English, Filipino Taglish, Singlish, etc. Discoveries in Wee (2016) provided rigorous proof of the tonality of HKE (with implications for other Englishes), establishing that the melodic pitch contours are not simplistic adaptations of Chinese sources.

The linguistic realities that influence a society's expression and identities are illuminated in Ho (2018) where it can be seen how poets in HK can through their own English voices better portray their society while recognising the historical fact that has made English also a vital local language. Ho (2017) shows how that force and power could create poetry of greater social-political relevance which goes beyond political boundaries. The two strands of research—literary and linguistic—eventually converge in *Cha* (founded by Ho in 2007, with international recognition), which creates and defends spaces of Anglophone literature in Asia. On this platform, individuals and groups find their own voices in a language (English) that is at once international and local.

(3) References to the research

The project yielded a broad range of outputs including books, journal articles, book chapters, as well as

various lectures, invited presentations and conference papers. Key publications include:

- a) **Ho, Tammy L-M.** (2018) Writing Hong Kong's Ethos. In Jason S Polley, Vinton W.K. Poon and **Lian-Hee Wee** (eds.) *Cultural Conflict in Hong Kong: Angles on a Coherent Imaginary*. Singapore: Palgrave, pp. 179-208
- b) **Ho, Tammy L-M.** (2017) We Now, Now Now: On Writing Political Poems. In Tammy Lai-Ming Ho, Kaitlin Rees and Nhã Thuyên (eds.) *We, Here, Now, There, Together: A-Festival's 2016 Essay* (eds.). Hanoi: AJAR Press, pp. 9-31.
- c) **Wee, Lian-Hee** (2017) The Hong Kong English Syllable Structure. In Marc Zhichang Xu, Paul Deyuan He and David Deterding (eds.) *Researching Chinese English: State of the Art. Multilingual Education* vol.22. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 33-46.
- d) **Wee, Lian-Hee** (2016) Tone Assignment in Hong Kong English. *Language*, vol.92.2:e112-132.
- e) **Wee, Lian-Hee** (2009) Exploring the Dilemma of the Split-L Geminate Pattern in Hong Kong English. In Linda Uyechi and Lian-Hee Wee (eds.) *Reality Exploration and Discovery: Pattern Interaction in Language and Life*. Stanford: CSLI Publications, pp. 89-104.
- f) **Wee, Lian-Hee** (2008) Phonological Patterns in the Englishes of Singapore and Hong Kong. *World Englishes*, vol.27.3/4:480-501.

Research Funding

- GRF-HKBU12612817 *Interpreting Hong Kong Poetry: One City, Two (Language) Systems*, Tammy Lai-Ming Ho (PI) (Jan 2018 – present: HKD\$139,000)
- GRF-HKBU250712 *Illuminating the Structure of Syllables through Experimentation Using the Play Language (Verlan)*, Lian-Hee Wee (PI) in collaboration Liang Yuan (Co-I), Shenzhen University. (15 Nov 2012-15 Apr 2015: HKD\$386,313)
- Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Young Artist Award Funding, Tammy Lai-Ming Ho (PI) (2015-2016: HKD\$25,000)

(4) Details of the impact

The impact of this research is demonstrated through *Cha*, the first and only HK-based international English-language Asia-focused literary journal. *Cha* publishes creative works from and about Asia and raises global visibility of HK literature. *Cha*'s impact is recognized by many awards. It's reading series provides a platform for debate and activism. Its writing workshop series engages the public, serving particularly the underprivileged.

On Literary Scene and Societal Collaborations (Corroborative Source #1)

Cha, described by literary scholar Elaine Y-L Ho as 'the only online creative writing journal that claims a HK base' and 'instantiat[ing] HK's recognition of English as an inter-Asia creative medium and HK as an Asian platform of creative interactivity in words and images', is literary, social and global. *Cha* establishes and sustains a unique creative space of intervention in post-1997 HK, where writers—local and international—are drawn together. Established in 2007, *Cha*'s authors have earned publishing contracts, while others have won awards and become anthologized, or been translated, gaining wider international attention. *Cha* has published numerous HK-themed pieces by established and emerging writers, making the journal a valuable repository. It forms close connections between HK and Asia, and various groups (charity Health in Action; Peel Street Poetry, *Voice and Verse Poetry Magazine*, and AJAR Press, Vietnam) have collaborated with *Cha* on special features (e.g. Umbrella Movement, African Diaspora, and Asia's indie publishing houses). *Cha* has run over ten contests, e.g. Cha International Prize 2017, collaborating with PEN HK, with prizes provided entirely by donations.

On Social Activism (Corroborative Source #2)

Cha puts Hong Kong's literary circle into a global reading movement that celebrates freedom, compassion and democracy by organizing the reading "#WRITERSRESIST in HK" in tandem with the worldwide event started by the Berlin International Literary Festival (15-Jan-2017). The event, jointly organised with *Voice and Verse Poetry Magazine*, brought together 15 local writers with an attendance of more than 50 people. The "Cha Reading Series", started in Nov-2017, addresses a range of genres and

topics pertinent to literary expression in HK. The series takes the online journal out into the physical world and has found venue sponsors across HK. Readers, writers, translators and artists have since been drawn into this contact space. The series also fostered collaborations with other organisations, including consulates (Irish, Italian and Mexican), literary, artistic and advocacy groups (e.g. PEN HK, Swing a Cat gallery, Queer Reads Library, House of HK Literature, Italian Women's Association, One City One Book HK, Literature Across Frontiers [Europe], and Nose in the Books, the first public library of the humanities in HK), and the National University of Singapore Alumni, creating a unique literary space rarely seen in HK. *Cha's* reading "Liu Xiaobo Elegies" attracted broad attention and was featured on ARD German Radio and locally on Now TV, while its reading on Tiananmen to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the massacre gained media partnership with Hong Kong Free Press and was widely covered. In Jan-2018, *Cha* launched the citywide "Cha Writing Workshop Series" for those not often guided to creatively express their voices. More importantly, the series pays specific attention to disenfranchised groups, for example, Filipino domestic helpers (WIMLER Foundation HK), refugees (Christian Action Centre for Refugees), and asylum seekers (Justice Centre Hong Kong). We are working towards servicing inmates at the Lo Wu Correctional Institution.

On Asian Voices (Corroborative Source #3)

Phonological authenticity coupled with literary creativity, through globally accessible but indigenized Englishes, attracted worldwide submissions to the "Auditory Cortex Contest 2018". This contest celebrates the phonological varieties of Asian Englishes by inviting poets to submit their works read in their own English voices. It focuses on the validation of one's own voice when facing prevailing hegemonies. The contest attracted more than 230 entries from across Asia and diasporic Asian communities in Europe and America. "Auditory Cortex" returns in July-2019 as a special feature in *Cha* to once again celebrate Asian English voices. The writers also reflect briefly on their linguistic backgrounds; these notes are informative for researchers interested in indigenized Englishes.

The One-Day Literary Writing Lodge in Hong Kong Voices (15-Dec-2018), co-organized with *Cha* and PEN HK, attracted more than 120 nominations from about 40 secondary schools and was covered by *South China Morning Post* and a number of Chinese newspapers. The 35 students selected for the event were rigorously trained by 4 of HK's most well-known writers, with the best poems published in *Cha* (Jan-2019) and *Young Post*, three of which employ explicit HK linguistic elements.

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Corroboration for Impact on Literary Scene and Societal Collaborations

- a. List of awards, see <https://www.asiancha.com/wp/about/>
- b. Hong Kong Arts Development Awards 2015, *Souvenir Book* (2016), p. 88: 'Through editing and managing the *Cha* magazine, [Ho] provides a vibrant exchange platform for English writers from all around the world, garnering international attention for Hong Kong literature. Her global vision, rare among local writers, is worthy of commendation. Adding to her outstanding works of translation and academic writing, Ho's commitment to promote English creative writing through talks and editing is to be esteemed.'
- c. "On Neighbourhood" (May 2019) {<https://blog.bleakhousebooks.com.hk/2019/05/>}: Albert Wan, co-owner of Bleak House Books, an independent bookstore in Hong Kong, wrote: 'Last year Tammy [Ho] asked if we would host an event entitled Liu Xiaobo Elegies on behalf of the literary journal *Cha* and PEN Hong Kong. [... G]iven the present climate of fear and polarization that exists here in Hong Kong and beyond the neighborhood needs more not fewer forums for open and honest dialogue.'

2. Corroboration for Impact on Social Activism

- a. "How Poetry and Freedom Mix", *Philippines Graphic* (23 July 2018, Vol. 29, No. 09) {<https://philippinesgraphic.net/how-poetry-and-freedom-mix/>}: 'For Tammy, expression is as much about bringing the world home to Hong Kong as it is to share what Hong Kong's writers create with

the world—and to provide the writers in her vineyard with a safe space in which to express themselves as freely as possible.’

b. “Hong Kong poet Tammy Ho: Art in politics or politics in art?”, *Hong Kong Free Press* (24 October 2016) {<https://www.hongkongfp.com/2016/10/24/hong-kong-poet-tammy-ho-art-politics-politics-art/>}: ‘In this regard we can clearly discern Ms Ho’s political sympathies through her work as editor in specific sections of *Cha*. Most recently *Cha* included a section in commemoration of the second anniversary of the occupations titled “Umbrella Movement” (September 2016 – Issue 33) which included poetry, essays and photography about that subject. [...] What I found most helpful in that section is Tammy’s essay “Characters Under the Cantonese Umbrella” which speaks of the movement’s aesthetic smarts and the creative dynamic inherent in written Cantonese, where subtle variations of its characters (which already bear a relation to visual art, being a kind of pictogram) yield new and unintended meanings.’

c. “Hong Kong’s Literary Freedom Fighters”, *Zolima Citymag* (21 September 2017) {<https://zolimacitymag.com/hong-kongs-literary-freedom-fighters/>}: ‘Ho herself is an example of how blurry Hong Kong’s cultural and linguistic lines can be. She is now one of the leading voices in Hong Kong’s English-language literary scene, editing local journal *Cha* and teaching literature at Baptist University.’

3. Corroboration for Impact on Asian Voices

a. Letter from William Ng (Friday, 3 May 2018), a teacher at CCC Kung Lee College, on the impact of his students taking a *Cha* Writing Workshop: ‘To my students, this opportunity of attending a writing workshop run by a published writer and scholar proved to be motivating. Having asked several students after class about the workshop, I learnt that they found it “fun to try out something unusual” and would like to learn English in alternative ways such as this more often.’

b. Letter from Gino P. Paradela (Monday, 27 August 2018), a poet from the Philippines, on the importance of “Auditory Cortex” competition for him to express his own Asian voice: ‘When I first read that *Cha* was doing a competition to celebrate it, particularly Asian Englishes, through *The Auditory Cortex*, I hopped onto it right away. This was my chance, I thought, to let the world listen to how we made English a Filipino tongue.’

c. Selected feedback on the One-Day Literary Writing Lodge in Hong Kong Voices (15-Dec 2018). For example, one teacher wrote: ‘Language arts and creative writing have not been the focus of our school. But it is invaluable to have some creative experience with the language to motivate students to enhance their use of English and their identification with the languages that they employ in their everyday life.’ And in *SCMP (Young Post)*, 3-Jan 2019) {<https://yp.scmp.com/over-to-you/poems-and-short-stories/article/111534/typhoon-mangkhut-chinglish-winning-student-poets>}, one of the winning students, 14-year-old Charlotte Fong is quoted, “Finding the Hong Kong ‘voice’—and learning how to use our colloquialisms and the places that only locals would know—and trying to make it understandable to international readers was really interesting[.]” She said, according to the *Young Post* reporter, that ‘the workshop was useful as it encouraged her to step out of her comfort zone and write about something bigger than herself.’

d. Selected reflections from instructors of the *Cha* Writing Workshop Series {<https://chajournal.blog/category/cha-writing-workshop-series/>}. Kate Rogers, one of the poets who has provided workshops for female refugees and domestic helpers in the city, wrote. “I would say these workshops with female refugees and the workshops I have begun with the group “Minds at Wok” (with domestic helpers in Hong Kong) are the most rewarding I have developed and taught in several years.”