

## Research Assessment Exercise 2020 Impact Overview Statement

**University:** Hong Kong Baptist University

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

**Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA:** 9

**(1) Context**—The Department of English Language and Literature integrates the disciplines of linguistics, literature, and comparative studies by pooling its members' scholarship towards the creation of Hong Kong's English literary voice. The linguistic foundation of this HK voice is World Englishes and Chinese linguistics. Over the past six years, much of the department's research has tended towards reconciling local language identities with global communicative demands. Such a reconciliation is vital to both individual and collective senses of self-worth. To this end, we have created and defended spaces of local Anglophone speech patterns and creative power, thus facilitating the process through which HK English articulations are international voices. Our primary non-academic beneficiaries are (i) writers who wish to find an authentic representation through the English of Hong Kong, (ii) ethnic minorities so that they may better create in and use English for greater global access, and (iii) the general HK community whose culture can only be globally accessed via English.

Our research into Hong Kong's language properties, literature, and culture speaks to the city's unique combination of local characteristics and cosmopolitan influences. This enshrines Hong Kong's English expressions as carriers of the city's identity. Our research impact types have two major prongs:

- English liberalization in Hong Kong: We create and sustain initiatives that (i) make accessible Hong Kong's English expressions to a global audience, e.g. Auditory Cortex poetry contest and special feature in *Cha: an Asian Literary Journal*; (ii) integrate local culture into Hong Kong's English, e.g. the Writing Lodge 2018; and (iii) engage schools and the general public in this historical process of language contact and change, e.g. *Hong Kong Budding Poets Anthology*.
- Public engagement and Policy initiatives: We reach out to marginalized populations and the general public through (i) literary platforms such as *Cha's Reading Series* and Writing Workshop Series, and (ii) direct collaboration with the government (e.g. HK Education Bureau) and NGOs (e.g. Teach Unlimited Foundation, and Consumer Council).

Our impact efforts uncover the real stories of Hongkongers inscribed in English. These stories facilitate understanding among Hong Kong's Cantonese-dominant society and its sizable minority populations (e.g. subaltern South Asian domestic helpers *and* affluent Global North expatriates) while enabling the international appreciation of HK culture.

**(2) Approaches to impact**—Our approach is to apply research insights into creating platforms and activities for locally authentic expression in English. Linguistic analyses yield objective descriptions of what is principled about HK English. In addition, comparative literary research offers pathways to understand and disseminate HK English affectively, thus safeguarding the genuineness of local voices. As we adopt a structured, participatory approach to interact with non-academic groups, we seek to achieve civic mobility, social engagement, and equal opportunity. To achieve our goals, we have worked to:

- be publicly available by becoming hand-held: Wee's 2015 'AV Phonetics' app (>80k downloads as of June 2019, excluding mirror sites in the PRC) and Wakefield's 'Bilingual Linguistics Glossary' app both facilitate self-learning. Ho's *Cha* Writing Workshop Series allows the public to engage writers for training sessions, and Ho's *Cha* Reading Series brings literature to various spaces across Hong Kong (including consulates, bookshops, galleries);
- proactively engage marginalized groups. E.g. Ho's *Cha* Writing Workshop Series includes writers in our department (Polley and Wee) and other local writers. Collaborations with NGOs such as

WIMLER, Justice Centre, Christian Action, and Stray Cat Jimusho create pedagogical spaces and methods designed to bring ‘at risk’ life experiences into narrative;

- be scalable in our efforts as we inspire appreciation for English-language arts. Ho, Lee, & Polley’s 2015-16 ‘Hong Kong Budding Poets Award’ involved a 9-month poetry workshop series in collaboration with the HK Academy of Gifted Education and the HKSAR Education Bureau. The program mobilized 50 international adjudicators to assess over 1380 entries from 126 primary and secondary schools. Beyond the writing workshops, it included an award ceremony with 1200 stakeholders and a half-day experiential learning activity involving over 60 participants at an outlying island. It culminated in the editing and publication of 56 student poems in the 108-page *Hong Kong Budding Poets Anthology: Words are Worlds--The Magic of Hong Kong’s Local*. What’s more, The ‘HKBU Century Club Citywide English Poetry Competition 2019’ grew out of the university’s internal contest and drew submissions from all HK universities to redefine the city’s voice in English poetry;
- be mindful of long-term relevance as we archive international varieties of Anglophone poetry in Asia. E.g. Ho & Wee are creating a corpus of Asian poets’ recordings of their own poetry read in their own voices to capture for posterity the authenticity of their English expressions.

**(3) Strategy and plans**—Our strategy for impact is essentially to translate research findings into a methodology for literacy skill acquisition, language learning, and creative and artistic expression through an indigenized but globally intelligible English. In the long run, we aim to establish and promote HK Anglophone literature as a language and a culture that captures the dynamism and multiplicity of the HK identity. E.g. Wee’s prose on Hong Kong kitchen script (‘Hong Kong Food Runes’) was the most-read piece in the Spring 2019 issue of *World Literature Today*, which contained a special Hong Kong feature (guest edited by Ho). Our public engagement efforts engender an English that is more equally available and accessible to all Hongkongers in their personal and professional communications so that the dominance of Chinese will not exclude the other ethnicities. Nurturing a bloom in HK Anglophone literature will feed constructively to Hong Kong’s language education policies.

Our department already has a strong presence in HK Anglophone literature through leadership in literary magazines (e.g. *Voice and Verse Poetry Magazine*) and societies (e.g. PEN Hong Kong). Leveraging these platforms, colleagues translate the theoretical findings of their research into actual literary pieces in service of the indigenization of English in Hong Kong. In addition, our department supports new avenues of experimental research through an upgraded Phonology Lab with technologies that promise also to uncover pathways for those suffering from speech-impairment to find their voice, physiologically, cognitively, and even metaphorically. We have instituted an impact coordination strategy across linguistics and literary scholarship areas in the form of an impact portfolio register. This tracks our frontline work so that we may build and evaluate departmental case studies. The portfolio register also allows us to incentivize impact-generating activities by embedding impact into annual reviews. Relating research to impact is now a key aspect of our hiring and recruitment strategies as well as integral to decisions about research postgraduate student projects.

**(4) Relationship to case study**—The case study demonstrates our attempt at English liberalization in Hong Kong through public engagement locally and distribution globally. The case study exemplifies our overall impact on (i) the local literary scene with societal collaborations, (ii) social activism devoted to the circulation of minority voices, and (iii) Asian voices overall through Anglophone expression.