

Impact Case Study

University: Hong Kong Baptist University

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 35 area studies (e.g. Japanese studies, European studies, etc.), cultural studies and other arts/humanities

Title of case study: Research Hub in Chinese-language Creative Writing: Enriching the Literary Arts in Hong Kong

1. Summary of the impact

This research hub in Chinese-language creative writing in the Department of Humanities and Creative Writing (HMW), home to Hong Kong's first and only bilingual Creative and Professional Writing Programme, involved collaboration with local artists and arts organizations to advance the cultural life of citizens through civic engagement with social issues. The practice-led research by HMW creative writing staff Dr. WONG Kwok Kui (黃國鉅), Dr. TONG Yui (唐睿), Dr. TSE Hiu Hung (謝曉虹), and Dr. CHOW Yiu Fai (周耀輝) enriched Chinese literary arts in Hong Kong.

2. Underpinning research

The practice-led research outputs below advanced public intellectual discussion on pressing social issues, strengthened artistic collaborations, and significantly promoted literary arts among Hong Kong youth.

WONG Kwok Kui (黃國鉅) (appointed as Assistant Professor in 2007 and now Associate Professor) is a playwright who composed *Luting (廬亭) / Century-old Dreams of a Fishing Harbour 1-3 (漁港夢百年)* (2014-18), a tetralogy that explored Hong Kong's colonial history from the perspective of Luting, a folkloric "merman" figure (3.1). Critic Gareth K. Vile described *Luting* as "a political parable" with "the energy of a ritual, or a community performance reminding the audience of their own heritage;" it received a 5-star review in *The List* (UK). A scholar of philosophy, **Wong** engaged Hong Kong politics through dramatic action and historical context infused with Chinese theatrical traditions, such as his play *No News Is True News* (2018) about press freedom in Hong Kong (3.2). This practice-based research was awarded prizes for best playwright, best production, and best actress in the 2019 Hong Kong Drama Awards.

TONG Yui (唐睿) is an award-winning Chinese-language writer (appointed to the Language Centre in 2012 as a Lecturer, and to HMW as Assistant Professor in 2015) whose short story "Between the Cliffs and Shore" (崖岸一線), based on his visit to an island community, was the catalyst for a visual arts adaptation at the "Islands' Narrative: Literature x Visual Art" exhibition (2016) (3.3). **Tong** also conducted research on creative writing pedagogy for secondary school students, such as exploring the relationship between "literary walking tours" and the construction of Hong Kong identity (3.4). **TSE Hiu Hung (謝曉虹)** is an internationally-recognized Chinese-language fiction writer (appointed as Assistant professor in 2013 and promoted to Associate Professor in 2019) who adapted absurdist devices to examine the extremities of human experience.

Commissioned by Oil Street Art Space (HK), her collection *Two Fairy Tales* (童話兩則) (2017) was featured in a visual arts exhibition (3.5). Joyelle McSweeney, University of Notre Dame's Creative Writing Program Director, noted that "Tse joins the ranks of artists currently remaking the world, from Yoko Tawada to César Aira." Tse's research on modernist Hong Kong literature reframed the city's literary tradition as more unorthodox than commonly understood.

CHOW Yiu Fai (周耀輝) (appointed as Assistant Professor in 2011 and now Associate Professor) is an award-winning song lyricist, memoirist, and cultural studies scholar whose co-authored article "From Handover to Leftover: Tatming, Umbrellas, and the Postcolonial Ruins of Hong Kong" argued that the experimental music group Tatming Pair's concerts in 2012 prefigured the 2014 pro-democracy Occupy Hong Kong movement (3.6). The essay reimagined the relationship between contemporary music and political mobilization. **Chow** also examined Tatming's queerness in the context of "an ethics of possibility" that gestured toward utopian longing. His original song lyrics were featured in a collaboration with the artists in 2017.

3. References to the research

1. Wong, Kwok Kui (2014-2018) *Luting* (盧亭) (4-9 August 2014) Edinburgh Fringe Festival (UK) & *Century-old Dreams of a Fishing Harbour, Parts 1-3* (漁港夢百年) (2014-18) Directed by Chan Chu-hei (陳曙曦), 4-13 March 2016, Cattle Depot Artist Village (HK).
2. Wong, Kwok Kui (2018) *No News Is True News* (新聞小花的告白) (25-26 May & 2-3 June 2018) Directed by Chan Chu-hei (陳曙曦), Windmill Grass Theatre (HK).
3. Tong, Yiu (2017) "Between the Cliffs and Shore" (崖岸一線) *Hong Kong Literary* (香港文學) No. 385, 84-92.
4. Tong, Yiu (2017) "Identity Consciousness in Literary Landscapes: From Literary Walking Tours to Building Literary Landscapes" (文學地景中的身份意識 --從文學散步到地景書寫). *Sino-Humanitas* (人文中國學報) No. 25: 169-192.
5. Tse, Hiu Hung (2017) *Two Fairy Tales* (童話兩則). Hong Kong: 油街實現 Oi!.
6. Schmidt, L., Chow, Y.F. & De Kloet, J. (2017) "From Handover to Leftover: Tatming, Umbrellas, and the Postcolonial Ruins of Hong Kong," *Situations* 10 (1): 119-145.

Grants and Awards

- **Tse** received \$20,000 HKD from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council to produce the chapbook *The Door* (門), and to attend the OzAsia Festival in Adelaide, Australia (2017).
- Translated by Nicky Harman, **Tse's** *Snow and Shadow* was long-listed for the University of Rochester's Best Translated Book Award (2015). This collection was the first of ten books by Hong Kong authors translated into English by the Hong Kong Atlas project, funded by the HK Arts and Development Council's inaugural Translation Fund of 1.77 million HKD.
- **Tse** received an Early Career Scheme grant in the amount of \$460,160 for her research project "City and Fiction: A Study of Hong Kong's Modernity in the 1930s" (2015-2018).
- **Chow** received a General Research Fund grant for \$256,096 HKD to study single women in creative fields in Shanghai (2018-2019) and an Early Career Scheme grant for \$295,296 HKD

to research “creative brain drain” from Hong Kong to mainland China (2014-2015).

4. Details of the impact

The collective impact below extends from the Research Hub’s strategy to engage the public in Chinese literary arts and to connect the practice of writing with civic engagement. The work noted in Section 2 had a major impact on the advancement of Hong Kong’s cultural life by enlarging and deepening the quality of cultural enrichment in the city. **Wong’s** award-winning play *No News Is True News* (新聞小花的告白), for instance, premiered in 2018 at the Windmill Grass Theatre (HK). It drew more than 7,500 audience members over 10 shows in the 852-seat Kwai Ching Grand Theatre, a singular achievement for a non-comedy, non-musical performance. Of the play, *Stand News* wrote, “it is very rare for Hong Kong theatre to stage a play about politics in media” (5.1). In collaboration with Theatre Horizon (HK), **Wong’s** earlier play *Luting* was performed as *Lu-ting the Mermaid* at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (UK) in 2014. Audiences in the UK and Hong Kong for the 4-part series (*Luting / Century-old Dreams of a Fishing Harbor*) totaled more than 3,500 people. Noting the societal importance of the series, the scholar LAW Wing Sang described the play as a “breakthrough” that uniquely avoids both a colonialist and a Chinese nationalist perspective as it offers a “reassessment” of Hong Kong’s colonial past (5.2). The production played a significant role in the popular re-emergence of the Luting figure in films such as Stephen Chow’s *The Mermaid* (2016) and Fruit Chan’s *Three Husbands* (2018).

Besides **Wong’s** collaboration with theater companies in Hong Kong, **Tong** and **Tse** worked closely with local artists to create new forms of artistic expression in relation to city culture. **Tong’s** nonfiction essay on Po Toi island, for example, was adapted by photographer South Ho (何兆南) for a well-received art exhibition (2016) (5.3). An inquiry into Japan’s occupation of Hong Kong, **Tong’s** essay and Ho’s work shed light on a rarely-known period in Hong Kong history. Stories by **Tse** pushed the boundaries of surrealist fiction and impacted audiences and Hong Kong artists through adaptations, including a visual arts exhibition inspired by her story “The Door” (from *Two Fairy Tales*) in “Sparkle! Room for a Book” (花火！只是看書) (2017) (5.4). **Tse’s** lectures and writing workshops also furthered Chinese-language writing in the community, such as her talk for secondary school students in which she used work by the Hong Kong writer Xi Xi (西西) to illustrate techniques of defamiliarization to see the city anew (5.5).

Tong introduced secondary school students to international writers in a regular column (2015-2018) in the student edition of *Sing Tao Daily* (星島日報). He conducted 10 outreach activities, including lectures and workshops at The House of HK Literature, HK Central Public Library, and HK Academy for Gifted Education, where one student noted: “Dr. Tong is vastly knowledgeable, and has inspired me a lot with his teaching. His classes are lively, and my passion for Chinese literature has deepened even further.” Another student explained, “It’s a precious opportunity to learn in a public setting, without the pressure of exams. It’s been a valuable learning experience” (5.6). His scholarly research on “literary walking tours” that teach secondary school students about

Hong Kong neighborhoods through historical and literary texts enlarged the value of creative writing beyond the university classroom (5.7). Tse judged numerous literary contests, including the Annual Youth Literary Awards in fiction (2015; 2016), The Chinese University of Hong Kong's Essay Competition (2016-2017), and HKBU's Intervarsity Creative Writing Competition (2015). She is also the co-founder and board member of *Fleurs des lettres* (字花), Hong Kong's leading literary journal (2006-present). As media profiles demonstrate, Tong and Tse's talks were a significant form of cultural enrichment in the local community (5.8).

Chow's academic research led to an artistic collaboration with Tatming Pair (達明一派) on its concerts in 2017 for which he contributed lyrics to six songs heard by 30,000 audience members. These songs, notably the concert's theme song "1+4=4," resonated with concerns regarding a "post-truth" society and ideological tensions between Hong Kong and mainland China. News accounts noted the song's connection to George Orwell and the rise of authoritarian rule (5.9). Chow's work opened the door for a richer discourse between the music industry, popular music, and contemporary politics in Hong Kong (5.10). In addition, his short story collection *One Body, Two People* (一個身體，兩個人) (2015), which investigates the politics of gender and the body, was voted by secondary school students for inclusion in the "Best Ten Books" of 2016.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Review of Wong's *No News Is True News* (2018):
<https://thestandnews.com/art/新聞小花的告白-政治性強/>
2. Scholarly article on *Luting* series in the Taiwanese journal *Router: A Journal of Cultural Studies* (2017): http://routerjcs.nctu.edu.tw/router/issueArticle.asp?P_No=43&CA_ID=418
3. Review of a visual arts exhibition based on Tong's nonfiction essay "Between the Cliffs and Shore" (崖岸一線) (2016): <https://www.thestandnews.com/art/文學與視覺藝術的想像可能/>
4. News article on a visual arts exhibition based on Tse's short story "The Door" (2017):
<https://www.hk01.com/藝文創意/133670/從書本思考-家-的存在>
5. Article on Tse's guest lecture for the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) and *Ming Pao's* "Little Writer Project" (小作家培訓計劃):
https://www.writerstraining.com/pastevents/pastevents_detail2/30/2014
6. Testimonials from students at the HK Academy of Gifted Education on Tong's teaching
7. Video of Tong's Literary Walking Tour: "Reading and Writing My City: The Archeology of Memory (讀寫我城 - 記憶的考古學) hosted by the Hong Kong Literature Research Centre:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-2SnYtSD2s&t=19s>
8. Profile of Tong in *Hong Kong Daily News* (15 May 2014)
9. Hong Kong media on Chow's theme song for Tatming's 30th anniversary concerts (2017):
<http://bit.do/eTDVY>
10. Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong media on Chow's role in Tatming's 30th anniversary concerts (2017)