

<b>Institution: University of Bolton</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: 27 English</b>		
<b>Title of case study: Empowering Marginalized Communities Through Literature and Partnership: Writing the Community</b>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> Sept 2010-Dec 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr. Evan Jones	Lecturer (English and Creative Writing)	01.09.2012-Present
Dr Jill Marsden	Senior Lecturer (English)	01.01.1993-Present
Mary Cooper	Senior Lecturer (Creative Writing)	03.04.2002 - 06.10.2017
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> May 2015-Jul 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research in creative writing and nineteenth-century literature enabled cultural organizations in the north of England to improve participation in the arts among under-represented groups. Chinese communities benefited through creative writing and audience development workshops connected to the play <i>From Shore to Shore</i>, which consolidated partnerships with local educational organizations and increased understanding of migrant narratives in mainstream culture. Research-informed local heritage workshops with socially marginalized women, asylum seekers, refugees and residents in disadvantaged areas led to improved community cohesion and wellbeing in Bolton. This also enabled community partners, The Big Local and Bolton at Home, to develop literary outreach provision.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>This study comprises two community outreach projects: <i>From Shore to Shore</i> and "Literary Landscapes". Both aimed to improve cultural participation for socially marginalized groups through literature and both were underpinned by research expertise concerning "connection to place".</p> <p><u><i>From Shore to Shore</i> (Mary Cooper)</u></p> <p><b>Research insights:</b> The stories of Chinese-UK communities need to be voiced in order to consolidate community belonging and to improve awareness of migrant stories in the cultural mainstream.</p> <p>The underpinning research on the Chinese diaspora began in 2010 when Mary Cooper was leading The Writer's Pathway, a course for emerging Chinese writers run by the Chinese Arts Centre in Manchester, the Arvon Foundation and the University of Bolton. The extraordinary stories she heard made Cooper realise how little was known of Chinese communities in the UK despite being the fastest growing ethnic group. Working with writer and linguist MW Sun (a student on the pathway) Cooper spent three years interviewing Chinese residents in Leeds to produce a booklet of stories, photographs, and the 75-minute drama <i>From Shore to Shore</i>. Some people spoke for the first time about events which had shaped their lives, revealing stories previously untold to their families. The play explores these stories of displacement, family and</p>		

belonging and whilst characters' journeys reflect common themes from the research, they are not based on any one person.

A distinctive insight of the research was the role that food played as a metaphor for longing and hope in the Chinese migrant narrative. Fittingly, words from one of the interviewees became the last line of the play: "You see, because I know what it's like to be starving, I know what it's like to be fed". This gave rise to the idea that the drama should be staged in Chinese restaurants, to encourage the exchange of experiences whilst sharing food. The final course of the meal is served at the end of the play, giving the audience an opportunity to discuss their own experiences of finding "home".

Literary Landscapes (Jill Marsden, Evan Jones)

**Research insights:** Community well-being is improved through connection to place.

Jill Marsden's research in to how self-identity is forged in relation to place was explored in her work on Emily Brontë and Friedrich Nietzsche ("Landscapes of Solitude", 2019) and was developed in relation to community in her work on Walt Whitman, which proposed that the sharing of poetry can impact community well-being ("Poetic Connections", 2020). A unique feature of this research insight is that it was informed by engagement with community groups when working with Evan Jones on the delivery of a series of "Literary Landscapes" workshops offered to socially marginalized groups in the Bolton area. Drawing on his work on how literary history can be infused with contemporary relevance (*Later Emperors*, 2019), Jones encouraged participants to write and perform poetry to express a relation to place. The project was supported by two University Jenkinson awards: "Poets for Bolton: Writing the Town" (2017), which involved creating a digital map as a local literary heritage resource and "Whitman 200" (2018) which capitalized on Bolton's unique connection to Walt Whitman and culminated in an international conference in May 2019.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Cooper, Mary, M.W. Sun  
*From Shore to Shore/Piao Yang Guo Hai*  
iv.) Performance (2017)

The play received positive reviews when it toured the UK in 2017. Harriet Mallion described it as "a powerful piece of marginal theatre which explores the difficulties people face when relocating to a different culture. The production is performed in a mixture of English, Mandarin and Cantonese fashioning a dynamic script which flows seamlessly and is perfectly accessible while remaining gracefully poetic." [From Shore to Shore – Yang Sing, Manchester - The Reviews Hub](#)  
The text has subsequently been published by Aurora Metro (2019) ISBN 98-1-912430-25-3 and adapted for BBC Radio 4 [BBC Radio 4 - Drama, From Shore to Shore](#)

2. Marsden, Jill  
"Landscapes of Solitude: Some Reflections on the Free Spirit"  
i.) Part of book  
in *The Philosophy of Creative Solitudes*, edited by David Jones, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, pp. 179-192  
Available in hardcopy and PDF

The editor of this volume refers to the "superlative cast" of contributors (p.2). Gerhard Richter, Professor of German Studies and Comparative Literature, Brown University, USA writes that the volume 'brings together a stellar group of thinkers'. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/the-philosophy-of-creative-solitudes-9781350077874/>

3. Jones, Evan  
*Later Emperors*,  
i.) Book [Poetry collection]  
Carcanet 2019.  
[Listed in REF 2]

Benjamin Myers writes: “Jones’s spare, evocative, and imagistic verse offers, through half-glimpsed narratives of ambition and loss, a rumination on the transience of things in this world [...] *Later Emperors* is a lyrical book, somber yet lovely. Rare among works of poetry today, it offers not only beauty but also a wisdom rooted in time and timelessness”. [Later Emperors by Evan Jones | World Literature Today](#)

4. Marsden, Jill

“Poetic Connections: Community and Sympathy in Whitman’s *Song of Myself*”

ii.) journal article

*Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 53.3, September 2020, 23-38

[Available as PDF and at [Mosaic Journal \(umanitoba.ca\)](#) Last assessed 31/12/20]

This is an international, peer reviewed journal of original research in the interdisciplinary study of literature. One peer reviewer remarked: “I loved the paper and was impressed by all the research—the huge number of apt criticisms that the author finds his/her way through, still managing to rescue their own Walt.”

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

*From Shore to Shore* (May 2015-Oct 2017)

Informed by interviews with Chinese residents in Leeds (1) and funded by Arts Council England, *From Shore to Shore* was given a “work in progress” performance in October 2015 to packed audiences at the Oriental City Restaurant, Leeds. As one audience member commented, “At last someone begins to tell our stories” (1). With further ACE funding, the play toured nine UK cities in 2017 with 21 performances in total, 17 of which were sold out (16.5.17-10.6.17). A multilingual theatre event (English, Mandarin and Cantonese), the play paired a Chinese restaurant with a theatre at each location. A bilingual audience development worker collaborated with each theatre to foster relationships with Chinese communities and organisations including Confucius Institutes.

The play received universally positive audience feedback. Colin Ling, Chief Executive Officer of the Chinese Wellbeing Centre, Liverpool said how well “the writing captured the essence of what it is to be part of the story of the Chinese migrant community” whilst Jenna Ng said “It was so beautifully written and terrifically acted, and particularly in these tense times, really important to have channels for community voices to be heard” (2). Of 670 questionnaire respondents from a total audience of 1,260, 22% had never seen a play before and 9.5% had attended the theatre only once in the past year (3.) Via Liverpool Everyman, Oxford Playhouse and Northern Stage in Newcastle, contacts were made with leading Chinese organisations, developing strategies to build and sustain long term relationships with the British Chinese community (3).

The University of Leeds Confucius Institute partnered with the project from its inception, supporting research, workshops and making contacts within the Chinese business community. They declared *From Shore to Shore* a “perfect fit” for the organisation, helping them to bridge “the gap between China and the UK and increasing people’s understanding of Chinese culture [...] The team’s work to give a voice to a community that can be overlooked and misunderstood has deeply moved people and brought people together” (4). This sentiment was echoed by the Manchester Confucius Institute who said that the play enabled “those people who may not be familiar with the lives of Chinese immigrants to develop and deepen their understanding of this particular group and their lives in the UK” (5).

From February-September 2017, Mary Cooper ran 16 bilingual writing workshops with 185 participants, aided by Chinese writer facilitators (3). The workshops were connected to the themes of the play: finding “home” and telling your story. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. The Leeds Confucius Institute said that the workshops created a “space for people from different backgrounds and cultures to express themselves and communicate in a way that they might not usually have a chance to do” (4).

Other indicators of reach and significance include Cooper’s interview on the BBC 4 Front Row programme (17<sup>th</sup> March 2017) and strong reviews in a range of news media (6). The *Asia*

*Times* applauded Cooper's depiction of the "struggle of forging a new life in a foreign land" which will be "familiar to millions of Chinese who made this journey" (6).

#### Literary Landscape Workshops (September 2018-July 2020)

Marsden and Jones drew on their respective research on authors and place and poetry writing expertise to engage three communities lacking a creative voice and sense of belonging: asylum seekers and refugees (The City of Sanctuary, February-April 2019); women suffering from social isolation and low self esteem (The Wonder Women (February – July 2020); and residents in a socially disadvantaged area (Tonge with The Haulgh Big Local, June-July 2020). The team introduced the first two groups to local literary heritage, using the Whitman bicentenary as a focus for writing and performing poetry. The third initiative with Bolton Big Local focused on improving community cohesion through online research skills and literary heritage workshops.

Bolton City of Sanctuary commented that in sharing poetry in the workshops participants increasingly found their "voice" and that involvement in the research added to "the feelings of wellbeing in the group and relief from the stresses and pressures of the everyday life of an asylum seeker or refugee" (7). BCS also noted a strengthened sense of community, forged through performing poetry, a finding echoed by the Bolton at Home Wonder Women group (8). Women from both groups performed poetry at the Whitman 200 conference, an experience which greatly improved their self-confidence (7,8). Bolton at Home, a charitable Community Benefit Society that supports the Wonder Women group, said the project changed the way that the organization developed community arts projects, which previously had not involved literary studies or joined with other groups to maximize reach (9). Bolton Big Local echoed this, commenting on how the team's research expertise showed that "exploring the literary heritage of the area can build communities, enhance people's relationship with their local area and build civic engagement" (10). Furthermore, "the work has impacted on how the organisation moves forward with community development through community engagement", specifically through partnership. One of the legacies of the project is that Bolton at Home partnered with the UoA to deliver a follow-up literary arts project, Bolton "Cotton Queens".

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. *From Shore to Shore: Stories of Chinese people from Leeds and West Yorkshire* (2015) PDF Also available at [Poems & Stories — From Shore to Shore](#) (Last accessed 31/12/20). [Provides evidence of the impact of the research on the Chinese community leading to the work in progress performance in 2015].
2. Audience quotations relating to the 2017 tour are available at [From Shore to Shore tour highlights experiences of Chinese migrants in the UK : The Business Confucius Institute at the University of Leeds](#) (Accessed 31/12/10). PDF. The page can be accessed by searching "from shore to shore 2017 at the leeds confucius institute".
3. From Shore to Shore/Piao Yang Guo Hai – GFTA – 00025272, Additional Evaluation Information, Mary Cooper and Deborah Dickinson PDF [Provides evidence of positive impact of workshops on participants, audience development data, success of partnerships]
4. Testimonial from Ellen Wang, Business Confucius Institute, University of Leeds [Provides evidence that the partnership with *From Shore to Shore* helped the organisation to achieve its goal of increasing people's understanding of Chinese culture and that the play and workshops brought value to the Chinese community].
5. Testimonial from Karen Wang, University of Manchester Confucius Institute. [Provides evidence that the partnership with *From Shore to Shore* helped the organisation to promote Chinese culture in an accessible way to a wider audience and was beneficial to Chinese writers in finding their voice.]
6. Media reviews of *From Shore to Shore* 2017 tour including <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08q314h> BBC Radio 4 *Front Row*, [Shore to Shore - Oriental City Restaurant, Leeds - The Reviews Hub](#) [Shore-to-Shore, a drama of three Chinese families in the UK - Asia Times](#) [Provides evidence of impact of the play on the cultural mainstream].

7. Testimonial from City of Sanctuary committee [Provides evidence of the positive impact on wellbeing that the Literary Landscapes project had on the Sanctuary Storytellers group, particularly on their participation in the Whitman 200 conference].
8. Web link to “Walt Whitman and Wonder Women” youtube <https://youtu.be/cM5DLD6MF3k> [Provides evidence of the positive impact on wellbeing of Literary Landscapes on the members of the “Wonder Women” group]
9. Testimonial from Christine Fitton, Project Officer for Bolton at Home [Provides evidence of the impact that the Literary Landscape workshops had on the Wonder Women group and on the organization's engagement with the university].
10. Big Local Impact statement from Joanne Schofield, Project Officer for Tonge with The Haulgh Big Local [Provides evidence of the impact that the Literary Landscape workshops had on the Big Local, particularly in terms of widening community reach through partnership with the UoA].