

Institution: University of Leeds		
Unit of Assessment: D26		
Title of case study: Chinese Literature in translation: widening publication and embedding literature into the UK school curriculum.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003 to date		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Frances Weightman	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Associate Professor in Chinese Studies	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2001 to date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 to present		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>This case study demonstrates the ways in which the research activities of Weightman's Writing Chinese project (now The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing), have directly impacted groups within the UK and globally. The key beneficiaries are the publishing industry around Chinese literature in English (including authors, translators and readers) and the secondary school sector in the UK (including teachers, pupils and educational policy-makers). The Centre's work, led by Weightman, has boosted publication by advising publishers, introducing new materials, fostering new translators, and engaging new audiences. It has also been pivotal to the implementation of educational policy regarding the expansion of Chinese in schools, through its development of new approaches to embed literature within the curriculum.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>The research underpinning these impacts relates to the framing, or presentation, of Chinese literature to readers. Originating in a two-year, Leverhulme-funded project, "Why Chinese Writers Write: Authorial prefaces and their implications", it explored how Chinese authors of all time periods constructed their images in the prefaces to their fictional works. The project posited that these prefaces, privileged in Chinese tradition, provided a unique forum for exploring the relationship between author, reader and text, and a rich source of information on how fiction was historically 'marketed' to readers [3, 4, 5]. In 2014 Weightman's new AHRC-funded project, "Writing Chinese: Authors, Authorship and Authority" explored how the work of modern and contemporary Chinese authors was framed by the authors or their agents/publishers, particularly in English translation, and how it was received by readers [1, 6]. It established a research network of academics and practitioners in the field of contemporary Chinese literature, to foster dialogue and create synergies. It also sought to identify and address obstacles to the reception of Chinese literature, and to develop effective ways of framing new Chinese writing in the English-speaking world.</p> <p>The work of the Writing Chinese network established that engagement with contemporary sinophone literature has been slow to match the global surge of interest in Chinese language and culture over the last decade. The following obstacles to its reception within the publishing industry were identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • risk-averse behaviour by publishers, notably regarding any 'untested' genre • a lack of understanding by publishers of some key presentation issues • publishers lack expertise in China, or know China but not the UK market • lack of online presence/reviews, especially reviews from lay people • reliance of western audiences on author events, book clubs and book festivals. 		

The project also identified obstacles to the incorporation of literary texts into the school Chinese language curriculum. 2013 DfE guidelines established a strong top-down drive, followed by investment of £10 million since 2016 in the Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP), yet teachers faced practical difficulties. A project survey of over 200 teachers yielded 84 responses, revealing that:

- less than a third felt confident about finding suitable Chinese literary works
- over 80% would find an online resource useful for this
- teachers lack time to identify suitable literary texts or create resources on them
- they were concerned about the language levels required to read texts in the original language, and felt they would need texts with published English translations

While research has been conducted on the incorporation of European literature into language teaching, little scholarship exists on how this might apply to East Asian languages. The majority of European language teachers in UK schools have taken degrees which include significant study of the target literature, but their equivalents in Chinese have normally trained in China as English teachers and lack experience of teaching literature. The classical or 20th century texts studied in Chinese schools are also mostly unsuited to language teaching at this level. In response to these findings a new strand of the project established a body of literature suitable for teenagers and explored how these texts could enhance the teaching of Mandarin in schools [2].

The Writing Chinese project led to the establishment of The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing (2018), led by Weightman. The Centre's website (<https://writingchinese.leeds.ac.uk>) is a research resource, featuring symposia recordings, interviews with key figures in the field, and links to our open access peer-reviewed journal (*Writing Chinese: a Journal of Contemporary Sinophone Literature*) and a special issue of *Stand* magazine on 'Chinese journeys' guest-edited by Weightman and Dodd. It also uses the project's expertise in framing to present Chinese literature effectively for both schools and general readers. It hosts supporting resources for teachers, the world's largest full-text open access database of translated Chinese fiction and over 200 contemporary fiction book reviews. A related Twitter account has over 2,000 followers.

3. References to the research

1. Weightman, Frances, "Authorial self-fashioning in a global era: authorial prefaces to translated editions of twentieth century Chinese fiction", in *Prism: Theory and Modern Chinese Literature* 17.1: pp. 57–78 (Duke University Press, 2020). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/25783491-8163801>
2. Weightman, Frances, "Literature in Non-European Languages", in Diamantidaki, F., ed. *Teaching Literature in Modern Foreign Languages*, pp. 79–96 (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).
3. Weightman, Frances, "Authoring the Strange: The Evolving Notions of Authorship in Prefaces to Classical Chinese Supernatural Fiction" in *East Asian Publishing and Society*, 8.1, pp. 34–55 (Brill, 2018).
4. Weightman, Frances "无心插柳：小说自序中的创作论 [Inadvertent creativity: authorial responsibility in the Chinese preface]" in Zhang Hongsheng 张宏生 and Qian Nanxiu 钱南秀 (eds) *中国文学：传统与现代的对话 [Chinese Literature: dialogue between tradition and modernity]* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji cbs, 2007) pp. 79–91.
5. Weightman, Frances, "Marketing Chinese children's authors in an age of celebrity" *JOMEC Journal* 15: pp. 1–17 (2020). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.18573/jomec.199>
6. Weightman, Frances "Constructing an authorial identity: some features of early twentieth century Chinese authorial prefaces" in *From National Tradition to Globalization, from Realism to Postmodernism: trends in modern Chinese literature*, Oglobin, Rodionov, Serebryakov, Speshnev and Storozhuk (eds.) (St Petersburg, 2004), pp. 266–280.

Research Grants (all awarded to Weightman as PI)

- Oct 2019, Sino-British Fellowship Trust, for genre fiction symposium, £1,700
- Dec 2018-Jan 2020 Ko Foundation (HK) grant for “Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing”, £35K
- Oct 2018 University of Leeds Strategic Research Development Fund, “Marketing Chinese Literature: Practicalities and Challenges”, £876.70
- Sept 2017 Princeton University Library Fellowship, “Imagining the Author: Paratextual Elements of Chinese Children’s Books,” \$1,788
- 2017-2018 AHRC (Follow on Funding for Impact and Public Engagement) “Reading Chinese: Engaging New Audiences” c £90K
- 2014-2016 AHRC (WREAC) “Writing Chinese: Authors, authorship and authority” c £25K
- 2002-2004 Leverhulme Fellowship: Why Chinese Writers Write: authorial prefaces and their implications c £31K

4. Details of the impact**Publishers/publications**

Weightman and The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing are often approached by publishers in the UK and China, and have facilitated rights transactions and book contracts. The ex-head of North Asia for Random House, who attended our first symposium, comments that we are “leading the way on sustained engagements around Chinese literature and translation internationally”, [A.1] and the CEO of Silk Gauze Audio stated: “The Centre played a fundamental role in helping me establish a new audiobook imprint focused on translated modern Chinese fiction.” [A.2] Following our Marketing Chinese Fiction workshop, Silk Gauze Audio is now in negotiations with ACA Publishing to develop their first series of audiobooks. Balestier Press produced a sales report showing that almost a third of the sales for two of their popular titles from May 2017 to July 2019 were directly attributable to Centre-based events/activities. [B]

Notwithstanding their experience in China business publishing, ACA are new to the UK literary market. They followed our advice on presentation, book design and author events and linked it to a positive impact on sales. In their view the success of one recent title “is because of how you guys have been helping us.” [C] The company’s marketing rep reported that, through our work, they had learned the importance of ‘live’ author events, which were “going to become a really big part of what we are going to do into the future.” [C]

Translators/authors

21 of the 46 authors featured in our monthly book club have visited Leeds, often citing the experience as a stepping stone in their career development. One multi-award-winning author, who is hugely successful in China, had [her first English-language story published in the Irish Times](#) in 2017. The story itself is set around the Leeds workshop she attended, while she described The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing as providing “stimulating and insightful exchanges on contemporary Chinese literature”, adding that it was from there that she started her “journey as an English writer.” [D] A leading translator credits the Leeds Centre with “kick-starting” the career of one of their authors of the month with schools in the UK and with inspiring another to conceive a book on language and translation. [E]

Since 2013 our annual translation competition has bolstered Chinese-English translation in the UK. [H] The competitions, attracting over 400 entrants, have spawned publications, including two bilingual books (by UK school pupils). The author of one of these attests to the linguistic and publishing skills she developed as a result in her published forward [F]. Four winners were awarded bursaries to attend a week-long translation summer school at City University in London. One, who has gone on to establish a successful career as a translator, states that winning the 2015 competition and attending the summer school “changed everything... In the four years since, I have translated four books... and numerous short stories for a whole range of publications.” [G] After working together at our 2016 symposium,

a leading translator and two collaborators established the web resource, [Chinese books for young readers](#) and went on to win an award for “increasing (the) visibility” of Chinese children’s literature. [E]

Schools: Educational policy

Weightman has influenced the structure and content of the UK Chinese school curriculum by working with government and exam boards. In 2015, the Minister of State for Schools invited her to be the sole Mandarin specialist on the three-person assessment panel for the MEP tender, and thereafter to chair the Expert Panel overseeing the programme’s implementation and to join the Programme Management Board (on-going). [K] She helped to design the original shape and strategic goals of the programme and has since continued to monitor its delivery. As a result, Leeds were contracted to form a support hub for MEP schools in the North of England. Four schools’ events on the subject of incorporating Chinese culture into the curriculum, including ‘Meet the Author’ and literary translation workshops, have been held since 2018. Over 550 Y7 and Y8 pupils have attended and teachers have commented on increased pupil motivation. [H, I.1] Weightman also helps to steer the UK curriculum in Chinese language and culture by working with exam boards. She joined the Stakeholders Advisory Group for Edexcel in 2016 to review curriculum revisions to GCSE and AS/A2 level Chinese, and has worked extensively on the Pre-U curriculum.

Schools: Pedagogical Practice

Teaching materials based on [2] were created and used for workshops for 130 Y10 pupils in London and 450 Y7 pupils at three MEP northern hub days in Leeds. These have also been shared with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages and used for workshops at the Manchester Literary Festival and the Asian Festival of Children’s Content in Singapore (2019). The materials now inform the largest PGCE (Mandarin) teacher training programme in the UK, at the Institute of Education [H]. The Leeds network of teaching ambassadors, set up to promote literature within the Chinese curriculum, provides training which one teacher commented “has changed the way I look at literature for secondary language classroom.” Her school has now timetabled hours specifically for S1 pupils to read Chinese literature in translation. [I.2]

In response to teachers’ difficulties in locating suitable texts on the Paper Republic website for Chinese literature (<https://paper-republic.org/>), the Leeds Centre engaged with teacher focus groups to develop more user-friendly framing and provided research officer support to the head of Paper Republic to redesign the database and search facility. Teachers testify that this is a major time-saver. [I.3]

We established a network of thirteen Reading Chinese book clubs in schools across the UK [H]. Book reviews from pupils and reports from teachers are uploaded onto the Centre’s website [J], prompting one school to start a Mandarin mini-library [I.4.ii]. Moreover the network has encouraged Chinese programmes to integrate more with English or other MFL departments; one primary school told us they will be using our books on English literacy during Chinese New Year. [I.4.iii] Teacher comments: “Students get lots of joy from reading and discussing about the book” [I.4.ii]; “[The book club] helped to re-engage some disengaged students, ‘open-up’ the Mandarin classroom and increase literacy amongst certain students.” [I.4.i]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[A] Two statements from publishers, March 2018 and August 2019.

[B] Statements by Balestier Press, inc sales figures, August 2019.

[C] Transcripts of interview with Alain Charles Asia Ltd (publishers), July 2019.

[D] Statement by a multi-award-winning author, July 2019.

[E] Statement from a leading translator and current Marsh Award holder (global prize for children's lit in translation), August 2019.

[F] Published translator's foreword (2018) and video interview (2020) with the 2019 school pupil translation competition winner.

[G] Statement by the 2015 translation competition winner on impact since her win, August 2019.

[H] Transcript of interview with Director of Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP), July 2019.

[I] Statements from teachers, including emails on residential weekend, resources, translation competition and school book clubs.

[J] Teacher blogs about school book clubs and samples of school book club reviews.

[K] Documents confirming Weightman's role within the Mandarin Excellence Programme, 2016 to present.