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International Dateline — A Brief Word in English

by **Jennifer Eagleton** (Department of Translation, The Chinese University of Hong Kong) <jennifereagleton@cuhk.edu.hk>

English (together with Chinese) is one of the official languages of Hong Kong, and until recently it was overwhelming used in schools and at universities. Yet despite over a century and a half of British rule and the presence of a large expatriate community which is on the whole fairly impervious to the Chinese language, English has not become a medium of cultural expression. For 98% of the population Cantonese remains the language with which they are the most comfortable. Thus publication in English holds an interesting niche.

Walk into a major chain bookshop and the English titles run like this: novels, textbooks, management and books on the economy, mostly imported and with a great markup in price. Tourist "Chinabilia" books are prominent, which reflect the still "orientalist" approach that some in the publishing world seems to have towards China—the exotic east, fengshui, tai chi and so on into inscrutability. Did you know the year of the dragon kicks off the new millennium? Food and phrase books, and glossy coffee table tomes of the sights and sounds of the region are also quite prominent. It is quite comforting really. But, if you live in but are not of this region, then the "exoticness" does wear off.

Oxford University Press (China) publishes high quality books on China and Hong Kong in addition to its educational books. Local university presses generally stick to academic and educational topics, with several of them hosting Asian studies institutes, which sees these publications travel far and wide to the international community of scholars and the dusty recesses of the library shelf. Actually many books that deal with Asia are published by international firms like **M. E. Sharpe** and other publishers with an international focus.

The English language textbook is king. Ditto dictionaries. **Addison-Wesley-Longman, Oxford** and **Macmillan** are leading this field. Recently "mother tongue" education has come into being, that is, in Chinese. Previously schools taught in English. Some still do, so this area is still important. It remains to be seen if the type of textbooks or number published will change. Whatever the case, the need to improve the English standard of local residents has been acknowledged by many local educational authorities.

Fiction? **Asia 2000** is probably the only publisher in Hong Kong to consider original English language fiction and non-fiction for publication. Expats were once the mainstay of this scene, but now they are slowly starting to publish more fiction by Hong Kong people. But it is hardly worth it. Only about 3,000-4,000 copies of a piece of fiction in English would be sold according to one publisher. There is a burgeoning literary scene for locals and foreigners, who turn up at poetry readings and book launches. Grants from the **Hong Kong Arts Development Council** help publishers like **Asia 2000** to publish non-profitable things like poetry.

Hong Kong Chinese who write in English, do so for a variety of reasons—they could be returnees from a lifetime of education abroad, where they have grown used to English as a

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Profiles Encouraged

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Current job: I now work at the Department of Translation at the **Chinese University of Hong Kong** (since September 1999) as a research assistant. There I organize our publications (of an academic nature) and edit/write other stuff that lands on my desk. I am also working on a **Chinese-English Translator's Dictionary**. Now I am at "S."

Other jobs: When I arrived in Hong Kong in October 1997 I worked at the same university as a editorial assistant at the **Research Centre for Translation**. This unit publishes a journal of Chinese literature in English. People sent in translations, then they were vetted. (Its URL is www.cuhk.edu.hk/renditions).

Education: In 1991 I decided to go to university to study Chinese (BA) at **Sydney University** (because I wanted to study something hard!) at the same time I was working from 4pm-12midnight five nights a week at a large **Sydney Hospital** as a radiographer. Actually, I worked as a radiographer for over 10 years before changing careers in Hong Kong. In September 1994 the **Chinese Education Commission** gave me a year's scholarship to study in Shanghai.

More education: I had an interesting time in Shanghai, going to Chinese opera, being interviewed on local television and radio and travelling around. I made friends with a local family and often did things with them. They taught me more than the language school that I attended! I returned to Sydney in August 1995 and in the following year started a MA in **Asian Studies** at the **University of New South Wales**. I worked parttime in medical centres while I was doing this. I found out about my first HK job after seeing a notice at my old university department.

In my spare time: I do freelance work to gain further experience. I edit stuff for a Website on Chinese history, edit a journal for the Centre of Asian Studies, the **University of Hong Kong**, write for a health Website. I have had a few articles published, including one in the **Asian Studies Association's** magazine "Education About Asia." I have started to do book reviews for one of the major English newspapers, *South China Morning Post*. I like freelance, but I also like a regular income to pay the rent. I am glad I got my start in publishing in HK—people say it is easier than their home country!

What else? I do not do so much reading now as when I worked in hospitals! I have been involved in a poetry group and I am in a walking group and usually go walking most weekends. People do not think of Hong Kong as a walking place, but there are many country parks (complete with monkeys that steal your food). Lots of hills to climb, and beautiful areas where you will not meet many people. I am vice-president of **Women in Publishing Hong Kong**. I joined this in January 1998 to meet other people and find out about publishing. We have monthly meetings with a speaker. I do voluntary editing for the charity Worldvision and organize a reading roster for a lady (a famous journalist, 87) who is losing her sight.

Other ambitions: My aim one day is to write a book! (need a good idea first!)

Piece of advice: If you want to do some esoteric subject and everyone advises you against it, do it anyway. I did my BA, primarily for interest, never imagining that it would end up in a job! 🐼

ATG Interviews Dr. Ravi Sharma

International Librarianship and Diversity in the Profession

by Ron Chepesiuk <110423.2656@compuserve.com>

Dr. Ravi Sharma has distinguished himself at the international level of the profession for nearly two decades as an administrator, teacher, scholar, and editor. Currently the **Director of College Libraries at West Virginia State College** in State, West Virginia, Sharma has held teaching and administrative positions at a number of American libraries since 1970. He is also author of nine books and more than 200 articles and has given numerous papers at library conferences in the U.S., India and Mexico. Perhaps his most important professional contribution has been as the publisher and editor of **Library Times International (LTI)**, a publication that has kept the international community informed about major library trends and developments since 1984. LTI is the world's largest circulating library newsletter. This past June, West Virginia State College, under Sharma's direction and initiative, received a \$200,000 United Negro College Fund grant to enhance the development of an international program at the college and to further expand its contacts with librarians in Benin, Africa. Sharma traveled to Benin in July to set up the program. —RC

ATG: Let's start off by talking about that big grant you got last year. How did it that come about?

RS: As you know, one of my lifetime professional goals has been to work to upgrade the qualifications of librarians from developing countries. I've actually been doing that for many years, but I thought it would be good idea to bring library directors from a Third World African country to the U.S. for training. Our African colleagues need help from us, and we should provide it because we are the leaders in librarianship. If we don't help, who will?

ATG: The grant was your idea?

RS: Yes, but you can't put a grant of this size together without wide support from your university community. Fortunately, the administration and faculty encouraged me to go after the grant.

ATG: What are you going to do with the grant?

RS: We have brought over six librarians over from Benin, and we will send six of our librarians over there as well. It's going to broaden the perspective of all librarians involved, which is good for the library profession. Our librarians will learn a lot about Africa, which is also good, because **West Virginia State** is an historically black college. Our institution also wants to reach out to Africa more. At the end of three years, our library is going to be the depository in this country for Benin materials, which means American and Canadian scholars won't have to fly all the way to Africa to do their research.

ATG: How difficult was it to get the grant?

RS: It took us almost six months. Only four grants were given out this year, and the other three recipients are a lot larger institutions than we are, so we feel fortunate to get the grant.

ATG: But you do have an African connection, which helped?

RS: Yes, our college offers African studies as a minor and we wanted to upgrade the courses we were offering. We also have a strong connection with the state library in Benin.

ATG: Are there are other grant opportunities for librarians who want to reach out to African libraries?

RS: Most definitely, but librarians have to keep an open mind. Most American librarians want to establish a connection with South Africa's libraries. It's kind of ironic because South Africa has the most developed library system in Africa, and many other countries on that continent need our help more. It's also important that the libraries have a genuine interest in Africa because the grant process is so long. Lastly, you also need a library staff that's willing to learn and are not afraid of new experiences.

ATG: In 1997 you won the **John Humphrey/OCLC/ Forest Press Award** for significant contributions to international librarianship. Is winning that award the high-

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means of expression. It is also the academic lingua franca of the region. English will help their work to move beyond the borders of the English world. A university publication that does not deal with the strictly educational work is **Renditions**, a journal of modern and classical Chinese fiction and poetry in English from the **Chinese University of Hong Kong**. By its very nature its audience is overseas, but at least it is local and at least it takes quality Chinese literature beyond the bars of language and gives us a taste of its riches. Speaking of translation, what does and does not get put into another language is a topic that most people reading a translated work do not consider even for a minute. It is a bit like what has been mentioned before—it fits to our preconceived notions of what China is like—you could call it the comfortable known

exotic--the horrors of the Cultural Revolution, struggles and doom and gloom, which is certainly common enough throughout Chinese history. Dissident work is valued, mainly because anything vaguely official is always bad, always propaganda. We like the bad boys (sic) of the Chinese literary word. **Renditions**, has belatedly started to have some local Hong Kong literature in Chinese translated into English. There should be more of this so those of us who do not speak Cantonese can partly understand this chaotic society of ours here as we try to make sense of it.

These rather general musings are not an in depth survey of the local publishing scene, but merely some thoughts on publication and language. Being in a commercial hub, pub-

lishers and printers in the **Special Administrative Region** are kept busy with government reports, commercial proceedings, annual reports and so on, which are all in English. But these hardly find their way to a bookstore near you. The bottom line is the bottom dollar, and material that is not strictly necessary for one's work and education has to compete in the marketplace like everything else. English is used widely in one sense—it's because one has to—for enjoyment one reads in the comfortable confines of their own language. And in Hong Kong that makes Chinese language publishers more numerous. I am sure the Chinese publishing scene has its own problems, for example, cheaper production costs on the Mainland, but I am really not qualified to say. 🌊