

Editors' Page

In 1988 we brought to readers of *Renditions* the first ever anthology of Hong Kong writings in the form of a special double issue which, as it has sold out, is now something of a collector's item. The popularity of that first anthology is not, however, the main reason for our present offering, nor is the fact that Hong Kong is now a focus of world attention a major consideration. There is no denying that the impending change in Hong Kong's political status has brought considerably more exposure to all aspects of life here, including our literature. China's interest in Hong Kong's literary scene is certainly noticeable: whether as an effort to understand local culture or because of a need to define the place before it returns to Chinese rule, Hong Kong literary histories and Hong Kong authors' series have sprung up in China in the last few years. The quality of the books is variable, but one limitation is common: they have not taken into consideration the most up-to-date works. This would not have been a handicap if the literary scene were stagnant, but that is far from the case for Hong Kong of the 1990s.

The present special issue is designed to accomplish one simple goal: to present the most interesting new writers and new works to our readers. In producing an anthology of Hong Kong literature of the nineties at this point in time, we are not suggesting that the best work of the decade is over. Rather, it is an attempt to draw attention to the exciting developments which have taken place within a short span of some seven years. We hope this collection will serve as a road sign for further exploration; it is certainly not meant as a final summing up.

The nineties has been a period of intense soul-searching for the average Hong Kong man and woman; it is thus no surprise that one result of that soul-searching has been an outpouring of creativity. Events in China certainly have had a strong impact on Hong Kong, particularly in terms of the local population's perception of itself, but most local writers are agreed that ultimately it is what has happened in Hong Kong in the last decade which has shaped and informed their writing. It is this shared experience that makes it possible to talk of 'Hong Kong literature' despite the diverse origins of its authors.

The upsurge in activities related to creative writing has been manifest in various concrete ways. Old literary journals have been revived and new ones created; a second generation of locally born and educated writers has emerged; the newly

formed Arts Development Council has made possible a number of publishing projects by young writers as well as by more established ones. While the better known writers have all produced substantial work in the early nineties, it is perhaps the efforts of the younger generation—both as writers and as editors of new literary magazines and book series—which is particularly worth noting. Two names—Wong Bik Wan and Dung Kai Cheung—have caught the attention of critics outside of Hong Kong with their exploration of unusual themes and narrative angles. Less known but no less promising are the younger generation of poets. Experimentation in creative work is complemented by a new-found sense of history. The most important works of Xi Xi, Xin Qi Shi and P.K. Leung, excerpts of which are in this issue, all deal with individuals and society from a historical perspective. For writers who came to Hong Kong from China in the last two decades, their cross-border experience is always present as implicit or explicit contrast in their works. In parallel with this trend in creative literature, many writers and critics are also looking back to the fifties and sixties to trace the various stages in the development of Hong Kong literature, not in the form of literary histories but of personal accounts and meticulous compilations of basic data. So the jigsaw puzzle of Hong Kong literature and the Hong Kong experience is gradually being assembled.

One of the perennial problems for a literature collection is the limitation of time and space. Ultimately, one has to admit that whatever selection criteria are adopted are arbitrary and should be understood as such. The basic selection criterion for this special issue, besides that of literary merit, is that the work should be published between 1990 and 1996. This means that a number of notable but not prolific writers—such as Ng Hui Bun 吳熙斌—are either not represented here or, as in the case of Chan Bo Chen 陳寶珍, are represented in a genre they are not best known for. It was further decided that space should be given as much as possible to young writers who have not been translated previously. With the poetry section this became our paramount consideration: we only include the works of poets who have made their name since 1990. The advantage of a literary journal is that it is like a continuing anthology, and it is our sincere hope that readers will place this special issue in the context of the work *Renditions* has done since 1983 in terms of translating Hong Kong writing. In producing an anthology of literature of the nineties at this stage, we are not suggesting that the best work of the decade is over, but since we are at a political crossroads it is surely opportune to look back at the last stretch of road we have travelled, to get our bearings.

As is usual with the preparation of special issues, we have relied heavily on the generous help of many friends and colleagues, perhaps more so than ever before because here we are navigating totally uncharted waters. We owe a debt of gratitude

to every author, translator and artist whose work is included in this volume for their willingness to be involved, their speedy response to our various requests, and the trust they place in our editorial team. We cannot mention everyone by name, but special thanks should go to Chan Chi Tak 陳智德, who gave us easy access to the unpublished works of many young poets, and Patsy Kwan Lai Shan 關麗珊, who alerted us to the new work of young fiction writers.

A Note on Romanization

Contrary to our usual practice, this special issue does not use the *pinyin* system for all proper names. Since Hong Kong people and places have an official English name or a romanized name that follows Cantonese pronunciation, we have not denaturalized them by substituting *pinyin*, which is only used in the romanization of pen-names and the names of fictional characters. To avoid possible confusion for readers unfamiliar with the local system of romanization, the surnames of authors, translators and artists are printed in the upper case.

E.H., D.E.P.