Editor’s Preface to Volumes I and II

The Confucian tradition in education, which formed the basis of the imperial examination system in China, holds to the ideal that the opportunity for social advancement should be available to all, according to their hard work and ability, and regardless of their birth. More than 2,000 years after Confucius, the 17th century Czech theologian Comenius (Jan Amos Komensky\(^1\)), considered to be one of the fathers of modern European education, advocated universal education and equal opportunity for all regardless of their birth or gender. Another ideal advocated by Comenius was international cooperation between governments and educational institutions, to bring about social justice and equal opportunity.

In recent history, in the 20th and 21st centuries, increasingly the ideals of Eastern and Western traditions have converged. What Comenius foresaw has now become commonplace – international organizations, multinational corporations, and widespread international cooperation between scholars and academic institutions. Mechanisms like standardised international exams are now in place to ensure that students can move across borders and take advantage of the best opportunity available to them. And in the sphere of academic teaching and research, there is a plethora of international journals, conferences, exchanges and partnerships.

The International Conference on English, Discourse and Intercultural Communication was established to help nourish the internationalisation of teaching and research in Macao S.A.R. (Special Administrative Region) and Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China. The guiding vision of the conference is twofold.

Firstly, it arises out of the academic partnership between the Macao Polytechnic Institute and Xinjiang Normal University, a partnership which has resulted in the establishment of the Xinjiang Teacher Training Programme at the MPI-Bell Centre of English and the founding of the Macao-Xinjiang English Centre. This partnership is multilateral, involving not only the Macao Polytechnic Institute and Xinjiang Normal University, but also the international non-profit organisation Bell Educational Trust, based in Cambridge, UK, as well as the Secretariat for Social Affairs and Culture of Macao S.A.R. and the Education Bureau of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Secondly, the conference was established according to the vision of the importance of the nexus of English, Discourse and Intercultural Communication as topic areas for current academic research. The conference is interdisciplinary in spirit and fosters new perspectives on and approaches to English Language Teaching, English as an International Language, Applied Linguistics, Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis, Translation and Interpretation Studies, Intercultural and Cross-cultural Communication, and Comparative Cultural Studies. Broadly speaking, this nexus of topics reflects the dynamics of education and communication in today’s globalised world.

The 1st International Conference on English, Discourse and Intercultural Communication was held on July 8th-14th 2007 in Macao S.A.R. and Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. There were altogether over 260 participants.

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including approximately 100 local and international presenters representing 60 different academic institutions and organisations from Australia, China’s Mainland, Hong Kong, Hungary, Japan, Macao, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, the UK and the US.

The articles included in the two volumes of Selected Papers were chosen with a view towards their contribution to the interdisciplinary nexus of topics articulated above. They represent substantive and diverse insights and approaches that are based on in-depth research, analysis and reflection. The articles were selected through an extensive peer-review editorial process.

The Selected Papers are divided into two volumes, which contain papers presented, respectively, in Part I of the conference in Macao and in Part II in Urumqi. This division was retained so as to provide an accurate reflection of each part of the conference, as the two parts of the conference were to some extent separate entities, with fewer than half of the presenters having taken part in both.

Each volume is in turn divided into three sections, corresponding to the three general topic areas of English, Discourse and Intercultural Communication. Many of the articles are interdisciplinary and could have fallen under more than one of these topic areas, but the classification envisaged in the conference has been retained for the sake of simplicity. Especially valuable are contributions of a synthetic nature, which present a broad overview of education in an internationalised world – the reader is referred in particular to Ron White’s article “ELT: Present and Future in the Global Context” and Robert St. Clair’s synthesis of the implication of cognitive linguistics for cultural education, “The Renaissance of Metaphorical Thinking and the Implications for Cognitive Models of Cultural Language Education”, both based on plenary addresses given in Part II of the conference.

One of the chief characteristics of the conference was its intercultural nature. The focus on intercultural communication arose naturally out of the academic cooperation between the two localities of the conference, Macao and Xinjiang. Each is, in its own way, a special locality within China. Macao Special Administrative Region, handed back to China in 1999, is a former Portuguese territory, with the history of the Portuguese settlement reaching back to the 16th century. Long before the birth of Hong Kong as an international center, Macao was an established crossroads of maritime trade, and a commercial and cultural gateway to China. The locality of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region has a long history, going all the way back to ancient times, of being the crucial part of the Silk Road, where merchant caravans travelled over the high mountain passes of the Hindu Kush, Pamir and Tian Shan. In today’s era of globalisation and instantaneous communication, the intercultural contact is digital as well as physical, academic as well as commercial.

In the spirit of the recently coined expressions “glocal” and “glocalisation”, and the associated motto, “Think globally, act locally”, perhaps nowhere is the contact and interaction between the local and the global more apparent than in Macao and Xinjiang. The populations of both localities are multiethnic; both localities have a historical heritage that encompasses more than one culture; both localities are increasingly open to international contact. At the same time, their multiethnic and internationalised character has created hybrid local identities, which are strongly local in spite (or perhaps even because) of their hybridity. This hybrid sense of local identity “sucks in” the visitor, who
is made to feel at ease and at home, adapting his/her own identity into the hybrid mix. As part of the greater national and political entity of China, Macao and Xinjiang draw their inner strength from their strong sense of local history; yet this history, which has formed their identity, is an internationalised one.

In today’s era of globalization, China has opened up and looked outward, becoming a player on the world stage economically, politically and culturally. In their history of already having been “glocal”, Macao and Xinjiang are poised to assume leading positions in China’s own “glocalisation”. In consideration of their historical position, Macao and Xinjiang are optimal venues for a conference that focuses on intercultural communication. It is hoped that the bi-annual tradition of this newly established international conference will continue to witness a fruitful and joyous exchange of teaching experience and research ideas.

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