

Global interplay and irony

In recent times *ET* has received many articles on English in China, and published as many as feasible, but the sheer volume has led to a strangely serious question: How many such articles can we publish without *ET* becoming *English in China Today*? Inevitably, therefore, we have been publishing only some of the *publishable* submissions received. It is therefore ironic to bring out the cover article for this issue, whose subject matter looks Chinese but is about something happening to English *outside* China. The article is not about English in China or Chinese in a world dominated by English, but describes the work of a Chinese artist in effect playing Sinocentric games with the global language.

As a result, we have what *look like* Chinese characters on the cover of this issue. In one sense they *are* Chinese characters, or at any rate characters inspired by Chinese, yet they relate only indirectly to Chinese. The characters are in effect a culturally Chinese game ironically, and challengingly, played with English. The artist who creates such quasi-Chinese English had no knowledge until recently of *ET*, and has not read its debates on English taught in China, Chinese use of English, Chinglish, or China English. In a parallel universe, as it were, he crafts not the letters of English so that they look like Chinese characters but whole words of English turned into Chinese characters. It is hard to think of a more fittingly ironic tribute to the on-going, and increasing global, interplay between the Chinese and English language complexes.

Such a development, it seems to me, is culturally apposite. There is certainly a place for an artist's ironic humour regarding the doings of the world's two largest and most influential languages. Maybe somebody somewhere has been doing something comparable with English and Spanish, the world's third largest language. Certainly, in my own recent experience the nature of the world's three largest languages and the kinds of intercourse among them has become increasingly significant. I hope that future issues of *ET* will address such matters more fully and from as many perspectives as possible.

Tom McArthur

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