

## Flashback

### Eva Hung

joined *Renditions* in 1986 and is its longest-serving Editor.



Mae Soong (left) and Eva Hung, 1997.

In 1975 a freshman majoring in Translation at Hong Kong University came across a literary translation journal in the library, and as she read it, a strange idea began to take shape: 'I'd like to work there some day.'

Strange ideas sometimes lead to strange consequences. A little over a decade after that fateful encounter in the library, the student became the journal's editor. Dreams, it seems, sometimes do come true. We don't know as yet whether there will be a happily-ever-after for the erstwhile student, but we have established beyond doubt that she has been made to work very hard ever since her dream turned into reality. Life, I suppose, *is* a bed of roses—cut from the bush, thorns and all.

The student was myself, the journal *Renditions*. I now look back on the intrepid—or rash?—young woman who assumed the editorial burden in late December 1986 with considerable puzzlement: I know what she thought and did, but have little recollection how she felt. Perhaps there was no time

for feelings—there was just too much work to be done. *Renditions* was publishing almost three years behind schedule, and she had her teaching duties as well.

The past becomes more fascinating as one gets older. Editorial experience is not just about untangling words on paper—far from it. The best and worst I remember are all about people and interaction. Perhaps I should try and recapture some of the most vivid images from the last sixteen years, and see what they tell us.

New Year's Eve, 1986. I sat in my office and thought about mountains. The Centre was full of them, or so it seemed to me. There was the metaphoric one of the publication schedule, then there were the tangible ones: each of them seven or eight feet high and made up of dusty second-hand books destined for another place; they filled up all the space in our offices. When confronted with mountains, the British are tempted to climb them while the Chinese, in the tradition of the proverbial foolish old man, are tempted to move them. Being in between cultures, I resolved to climb the metaphoric one and move the tangible ones.

Spring 1987. The Centre's lone computer, purchased in late 1986, had a flickering monitor. This was a machine with a 10-meg hard disk(!) and I, who until then had relied on my own machine which had no hard memory, approached it with gloved hands. After weeks of tinkering with it the technician suggested that this venerable machine did not like its location. We moved it to another room, and it worked. Oh, *feng shui!* I said to Cecilia, and we proceeded to computerize our production process.



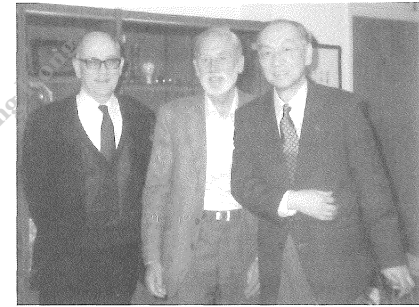
The *Renditions* team with  
Burton Watson, 1990.

A hot and humid day in 1988. I opened the door of my office to see two colleagues engaged in a noisy tug-of-war, each pulling at a corner of a carton containing duplicates of old documents. One insisted the carton should go to the rubbish tip, the other that it should stay in her filing cabinet. I closed the door and retreated to my desk, confirmed in my preference for the company of the written word.

A sunny winter afternoon, 1990. I went with Burton Watson to see Stephen Soong and David Hawkes at Stephen's home. I took out my camera and captured three smiling faces: my role model, the hero of my youth and my fairy godfather. If only George Kao could have been there too!

Christmas, year uncertain. Wine, cheese, crisps, a red tablecloth, and a cat named Cato. In the home of Janice Wickeri the *Renditions* team had its Christmas gathering every year from 1987 till her return to the US in 1998. I am just too much of a hermit to continue this tradition. Shame on me.

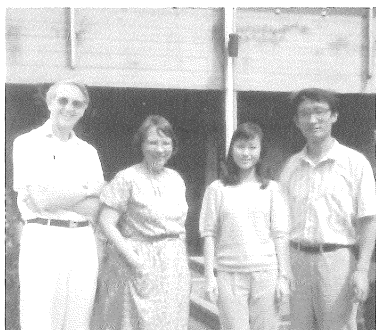
A dull day, 1994. I was at home when the phone rang. Chu Chiyu, who had been with *Renditions* for ten years, and who had just tendered his resignation to take up a lectureship in another university, called to say he had cold feet. He wanted his letter of resignation back. For a minute I thought: our problems are solved! Then I took a deep breath and said 'No'. He had much better prospects at the new place, so I told him I could not do him and his family such a disfavour. My predictions came true: in a few years he rose to be head of the translation programme at his new university, and as far as *Renditions* was concerned, we never found anyone else with his strengths.



Three smiling faces: Burton Watson (left), David Hawkes and Stephen Soong, 1990.



Christmas gathering, 1997.



Renditions' dream team recreated through computer techniques.

Late autumn, 1997. It must have been a gloomy day. I came back after five weeks' research leave to discover that *Renditions* had lost almost everything in its editorial archives, including all edited manuscripts as well as correspondence with contributors. Someone decided in my absence that these were rubbish. I should have been mad—I'm sure I *was* mad—but that didn't help us retrieve anything. We had to find a way to rebuild our archives from scratch.

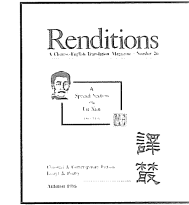
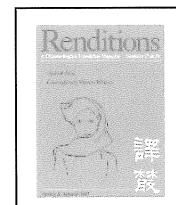
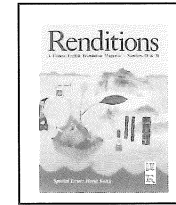
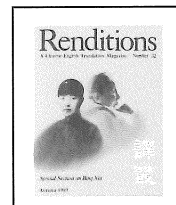
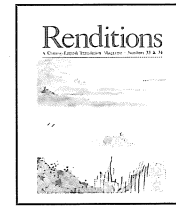
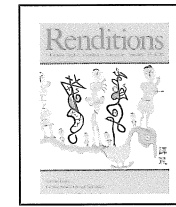
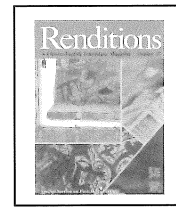
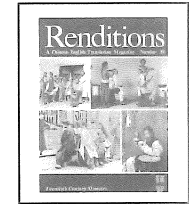
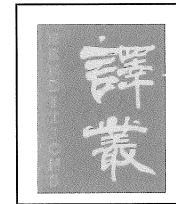
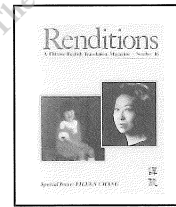
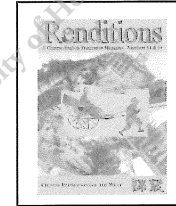
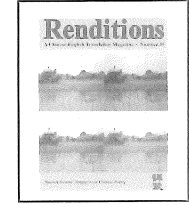
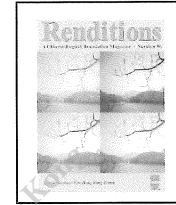
The year 1998 was a slow progress towards a lonesome existence. Long before the phrase 'dream team' became a cliché, *Renditions* had an editorial dream team of four. It all came to an end with the departure of Janice Wickeri and David Pollard in the same year. After years of intellectual companionship that I took for granted, I was left to work alone. Though they have maintained close ties with the journal, their physical absence created a tangible void.

From 1999 onwards, I see only a blur of deadlines, conferences, exhibitions and urgent e-mails. The greatest drawback of the Internet and e-mailing is the way they make time spin out of control. For the first time, a sense of exhaustion crept in ...

More than anything else, what links up the years for me is a parade of faces: translators and writers whom I have met over the last sixteen years, and others whom I have worked with but never met. (We tend to put imaginary faces to names, don't we?) As the young ones grew old and the older generation retired and moved on, new faces appeared. I, who in 1986 was the youngest person at the Centre, am now the oldest. At some point I

started to think about *Renditions* after me, and my life after *Renditions*. Will it be more akin to a death or a rebirth? Daunting though the thought may be, the day will come. Meanwhile, the years, experiences and books continue to pile up. ☒

*Eva Hung*



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