

**Book**

Suzanne Choo and Chin Ee Loh (eds.) *Literature education in the Asia-Pacific: Policies, Practices and Perspectives in Global Times*. Routledge, 2018?)

**Chapter title:**

**Literature in English language learning in China in tertiary education**

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## **Literature in English language learning in China in tertiary education**

The uses of literature in English language education in China have been rather limited to date. This chapter offers a survey of the field with primary reference to tertiary education with some historical background necessary for an understanding of the current situation and prospects for China in the new global age.

### **1. Historical Background**

There has been little use of literature in formal English language teaching (ELT) in China until recently, though some conventional uses can be detected before the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 and there are some hesitant green shoots now appearing. Some language learners in China, as elsewhere, have always found literary texts helpful for developing their knowledge and feel for the English language and this continues and may even grow, as sketched later in this chapter. A historical perspective nevertheless helps to explain the current weak showing in more formal teaching and learning, though globalisation and associated developments in more recent times suggest a possibly more promising future for literature in language education in China as literature reading comes to be valued as an experience more than a body of alien knowledge.

ELT in China began in a systematic sense only in the 19<sup>th</sup> and more especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the growth of educational provision as contacts with the western world became more frequent, marked by suspicion and anxieties on both sides. Critically for this report, Chinese suspicion often related to the potentially pernicious effects of western culture. This suspicion, even at times a positively unwelcoming attitude, was to continue uneasily into modern times.

Predictably, China and the west did not meet on happy terms as the 19<sup>th</sup> century gunboats of the imperial powers enforced the gradual opening of China to western trade and exploitation through the 'treaty ports' after the Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860). But as contacts grew there was increasing realisation in China that the technologies of the west were of real value and could not practically be ignored if China was to survive as an independent nation and civilisation. The basic question then arose, to haunt China ELT through to the present day in one form or another, How to use the technologies of the west, including the modern English language and wider cultural and

scientific knowledge associated with it, for the benefit of China without losing the distinct cultural identity and heritage of China? (Lo Bianco et al., 2009). The interest was in the uses of English, rather than any wish to engage with its culture or civilisation. In such a perspective there was no obvious value in studying literary texts, and some perception of hazard.

The 1850s resistant nationalist scholars' 'Self Strengthening Movement' proposed a slogan which has stuck and is still widely quoted: 中学为体, 西学为用 'zhong xue wei ti, xi xue wei yong' – 'Study China for essence (culture/ identity), study the west for utility.' The slogan is often abbreviated in professional discussions of education and other modernisations in China to the 体用 'ti-yong' (culture-utility) dichotomy and found of some value. (Compare discussion in Lo Bianco et al., 2009; also Feng, 2011; You, 2010).

The first mainland Christian mission school was set up in Ningbo in 1844 (Spence, 1999). In 1861 Beijing Interpreters' College was established with another in Shanghai from 1863 to train experts in modern European languages, with students sent abroad from 1872. From the 1920s Nationalist governments suspicious of Christian missionary schools increasingly widely introduced state teaching of English. Adamson summarises his study of English language teaching textbooks in 20<sup>th</sup> century China as 'a policy of controlled and selective appropriation, to use English for the purposes of state building, while maintaining cultural integrity.' (Adamson, 2004, p. 231).

## **2. English as a Foreign Language in China.**

Official English learning policy in China throughout its history has undergone significant changes with pronounced and predictable real effects on everyday English learning. The policies have been determined by the state, though driven or restricted by both external and internal factors (e.g. the missionaries, the two world wars, the 'self-strengtheners', the Great Cultural Revolution, Reform and Opening-up, and more lately globalization).

Over centuries, the orientation of English education ideology has been officially developed from 师夷长技以制夷 ('shi yi chang ji yi zhi yi') in the mid-1800s, ('to learn the merits of the foreigners to compete with them'), to a more nuanced learning English to 'meet the need for social development and international exchanges' (DHE *English Curriculum Requirements for University Students*, 2007).

Throughout, however, the core principle of English learning has steadfastly remained patriotic (Pan, 2015), to strengthen and maintain the state power in the international arena, though in more recent years arguably in a more open and co-operative manner.

Since its Reform and Opening up through the 1990s in particular, China has seen tremendous development in economy and increasingly active engagement with the international community. Along with the economic achievement and increasingly intense globalization, English is highly valued in Chinese society with 400 million learners by 2010 (from the third grade in the primary school to the second year of college) (Pan, 2015; Wei & Su, 2012). Accordingly, English language teaching curricula have been updated under the guidance of the state foreign language education policy to meet perceived state construction needs in different periods.

While the English language was purely seen as a tool rather than a matter that prompted cultural implications, the English language classroom was characterised by Chinese as the language of instruction using grammar-translation teaching methods, where English was presented as an instrument that provided necessary access to the advanced knowledge of the western world rather than a living communicative language. Thus reading skill was solely emphasized without any attention to the students' speaking competence. This tradition continued until recent times, so that even today, grammar-translation method and concentration on written uses of English is still adopted commonly in EFL classrooms typically dominated by exams. Classrooms of English are driven by Senior High School Entrance Examination, College Entrance Examination, National College English Test band 4 and 6 for university students and so on. Assessment is itself dominated by written language use, isolated sentences and lexical item testing often through multiple choice exercises. Consequently, most schools are inevitably involved in the culture of exam-driven 'washback' which largely excludes uses of literature since literature is not explicitly examined in any way. 'Intensive reading' is widely used at all levels for reading classes and consists of slow and careful word by word translation and teacher elaborations of word meanings and uses (Yang, Dai & Gao, 2012).

In China one's English proficiency, intended to be evaluated in those exams, is still largely valued as one element of getting into a better school, a higher ranked university, ensuring a better job and

perhaps more chances of getting promoted rather than in any sense an end in itself or its own reward. (See Kipnis, 2011, on ideologies of education in China.) English remains firmly a ‘foreign’ language.

## **2.1 National Educational documents and reforms for College English (CE)**

The **educational document** ‘Some Suggestions on Strengthening the Cultural Quality of College Students’ enacted by the Ministry of Education of China in 1998 claimed that cultural quality was the fundamental part of college students’ ‘quality’ 素质 (‘suzhi’). Higher education should enhance students’ cultural taste, aesthetic taste, humanistic quality and scientific quality through strengthening their education in literature, history, philosophy and arts. The College English Curriculum enacted by the Ministry of Education of China issued in 2004 and revised in 2007 defined CE as ‘not only a language course that provides basic knowledge about English, but also a capacity enhancement course that helps students to broaden their horizons and learn about different cultures in the world. It not only serves as an instrument, but also has humanistic values.’ A space for literature might seem to have been created from the late 1980s by this official emphasis on 素质教育 ‘suzhi jiaoyu’, a well-rounded education, but in truth there is little actual evidence of any except incidental or tokenistic use of the idea through to the present for the mass of English learners with individualism and creativity still subordinate to exam scores and conventional performances (Bregnbæk, 2016).

Tsinghua University offers a good model of more contemporary perspectives, as it currently runs a system of CE combining general English (various optional modules of English literature, culture, art, history etc.) and ESP (optional modules like business English, Legal English, English for Science of Technology etc.) as well as EAP (compulsory modules Academic Reading and Writing, and Academic Listening and Speaking) for all undergraduates (Zhang, 2016). Peking University also runs a variety of optional literature modules for non-English major undergraduates, which has received favorable response from both teachers and students (Huang & Yang, 2014). How far the affordances of literature for language learners are being fully exploited (compare, e.g., Hall 2016) remains a moot question requiring more detailed classroom studies than are currently available. It is however notable and probably indicative that English teachers in preparation experience very little literature teaching themselves, so that they lack confidence in this area (Qian, 2012). No observable

time is given in teacher training syllabuses or timetables in universities to foreign language literature teaching as a distinct and specific skill. Thus, while there are some interesting examples of English Education Reform in some top Chinese universities, teachers and students at such universities are not typical of the majority. It is widely agreed that across the range of Chinese universities, reform efforts are still in urgent need from the educational authorities, publishers, schools, professionals and teachers. Sentiments in official documents regarding intercultural competence and humanistic aims remain more of an aspiration than a reality.

## **2.2 Literary texts in College English EFL textbooks.**

Before the establishment of the PRC in 1949, English and American literature study had played a crucial role in the English teaching and learning of institutions of higher education as outlined below. (You, 2010). Most of the texts in textbooks were excerpted from the literary classics. With the turn to more instrumentalist English language learning and growing suspicion of ideological motivations for such choices and the way they were taught, English and American Literature, or even English language teaching and learning were largely prohibited from then till the mid-1970s. From the 1980s, ELT in Chinese universities gradually became better informed by pedagogical and linguistic research, and with the prevailing communicative approach, more emphasis was put on the practicality of ELT. An overview of the successive five generations of ‘College English’ (CE) curricula since the PRC was founded, respectively issued in 1962, 1979, 1986, 1999, and 2004 (revised in 2007), reveals that both the structural approach and communicative approach understood as a functional-notional method of language teaching, relegated literature to oblivion as it was seen as an old fashioned tool and lacked communicative value. The 2007 version highlights the importance of enhancing students’ cultural awareness, which might have given some slight place to literature in CE teaching and learning. Effectively, however, with utilitarianism and related exam-domination, generations of CE textbooks have rarely included any literary texts even generously defined (Han, 2013).

An examination of the text-type was made on the two currently approved and widely used CE textbooks (Qian, ) and the result was that literary texts (excerpts, abridged or completely rewritten normally) account for 7.5% of the total in both *New Horizon College English (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) (NHCE)* (Dong, 2006), and *College English Intensive Reading (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) (CEIR)* Zheng, 2008) (see Table

1). The percentage is computed according to the text classification, a dichotomy of texts into literary texts and informational texts, by the English Language Art Standards from the Common Core State Standards, the US educational standards (NGA, 2010). Except an excerpted drama, all these literary texts are of the same genre, short stories, with many of them not high in complexity in terms of meaning, structure, language, and life experience, cultural or literary knowledge demands, in accordance with the Text Complexity Qualitative Measures Rubric on Literary Texts (CCSSO, 2013); and no literary classics even in excerpt are used. Ethical lessons seem to be prompting the type of literary text chosen rather than the kind of cognitive and linguistic challenge and engagement a more authentic selection could have offered.

Name	Total Number of texts	Number of Literary texts	Proportion
NHCE (2 <sup>nd</sup> Edition)	80	6	7.5%
CEIR (3 <sup>rd</sup> Edition)	80	6	7.5%

Table 1 The Proportion of Literary Texts in Two Key College English Textbooks

Zhang (2014) reports similarly low though not identical figures from his review of two key textbooks. Renandya et al. (2015) survey purportedly extensive reading materials used in Chinese universities and conclude they ‘are linguistically too demanding’ with ‘tasks that are cognitively and affectively unappealing’ – more of the same intensive reading in fact.

### 3. English Literature in China

The role played by literature in English language teaching in China thus shows some parallels with developments elsewhere, being moved to the margins as modern ‘communicative’ ideas of language teaching were institutionalised, but with a particularly utilitarian stance tending to be taken until very recently, where culture has arguably been resisted even more actively than in some other educational traditions around the world. English language is foregrounded as a language of international information exchange rather than for cultural, personal or interpersonal purposes. There has nevertheless been a more or less shadowy presence of literatures in English in China in modern times.

The Christian Bible was one of the earliest and most widespread instances of western literature to be introduced into China. It was translated into Chinese in 1823 and propagated by missionaries increasingly through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was a wider growing tide of translations of literary classics by the end of the 19th century.

For some missionaries and others the aim of introducing western literature was explicitly and deliberately assimilative or ‘Orientalist’, rather as with Macaulay’s notorious 19<sup>th</sup> century statement about the uses of English in India, to train ‘natives’ into English ways of thinking and to value western culture more highly than their own. English literature was to be used to teach the lesson that ‘we are not so different’:

‘If the Chinese are being interested in western storybooks they are learning to appreciate our way of looking at things. It will no longer be true that the mind of the Orient is so dissimilar to the thoughts of the Occident that these two must always remain incomprehensible to one another’. (Darroch, 1905, in Guo 2001)

Efforts were in fact made by Chinese national translators and editors as well as foreigners ‘to save China through literature’, by giving readers this supposed access to freedom, democracy, science, and the universal ‘rights of man’. The Bible, then later excerpted canonical English Literature, was being used in American and British missionary school readers from 1843, even though the numbers were only ever relatively small in such a vast and populous country: (1921 – 13, 637 missionary schools, 358, 518 students; 1926 – 15,000 such schools with 600, 000 students.) Notably, and non-traditionally, increasing numbers of young women were in missionary schools by the early 20th century. By the end of the 19th century all teaching was through the medium of English in missionary schools. English speaking teachers promoted the celebration of western festivals and other cultural symbols, dominated by U.S. personnel (e.g. Pearl Buck and family).

About 25% of teaching hours in such schools were given to English language taught largely through literature. Most frequently taught texts were: *Tales from Shakespeare*, C & M. Lamb; *Treasure Island*, Stevenson; *Selections from the Sketchbook*, W. Irving; *Autobiography*, Benjamin Franklin; *David Copperfield*, Dickens; *Vicar of Wakefield*, Goldsmith; *Ivanhoe*, Walter Scott; and *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe (Guo, 2001). This was an ambitious curriculum by modern standards, largely taught

by grammar-translation method, line by line, with recitation and learning of passages by heart much favoured. There must be a real question over how many of the students mastered this demanding reading list. *Robinson Crusoe*, the first 'reader' in India, was also a favourite of teachers in China, raising obvious questions around the teaching of culture as ideology to children (and helping explain later negative reactions). Through the 1920s and 1930s there was a flood of influential translated western literature (see also Lin, 1935). Realist models for literature and increasing respectability for the novel and prose as literature in China were one consequence. By 1949 most western literature was available in translation, increasingly filtered by political and social concerns. Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' was reportedly widely known and quoted by many who looked to a better future: 'O wind, / If winter comes/ Can Spring be far behind?' Reading between the lines is a tradition in reading classical Chinese literature here carried over. Some found literary text, including foreign language literary texts, of value in difficult political times.

More politically correct realist and socialist literature, often read in translation, was becoming available through the early years of the Chinese republic: Raj Anand *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) – Lao She/ Lau Shaw *Rickshaw Boy* 1945. These were comparable to Lu Xun's (Chinese language) tales of ordinary real people, school masters in rural villages etc. Bleak, Russian-influenced tales appeared (especially Gogol). Many are still now part of standard middle school and other school curricula. Blending of Chinese themes and literature and European realist models took place. There was little or no reading of western literature from the mid 1960s to late 1970s due to the Cultural Revolution.

Rates of literacy in China before the establishment of the PRC in 1949 were low (about 20% according to Zhang, 2005). Literature until recent times was for the highly educated scholar and not a concern of any large audience of ordinary readers, unlike the mass audiences established through the 19<sup>th</sup> century for literature in England and much of northern Europe and north America. Something of this mystique and reverence for literary language remains in China today, where classic literary fictions like *Dream of the Red Chamber* are mostly reading material for scholars only. This may partly explain resistance to or unfamiliarity with ideas of 'literature with a small 'l' (McRae, 1991)

as propagated by western advocates of literature in foreign language education, where questioning of canonical classical norms has become more routine.

Similarly, literature teaching assuming the ability to read original English language texts mainly begins in 3rd and 4th year of a typical Chinese ‘English’ first degree. Mostly a fairly conservative canon is taught in those few hours as facts or canonical interpretations, through lectures rather than discussed or analysed or any individual ‘response’ or personal relevance looked for. Literary history still predominates for those few who study literatures in English, mostly British and US literature. Surveys are often genre-based, for instance, the 18<sup>th</sup> century novel, 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry; and historical, from Anglo-Saxon period up to the 1960s. Literature is ‘advanced’ and to be treated with deference.

Following on from such teaching, testing of literature which would require the ability to read the literary text aesthetically rather than as just another reading text, is not known.

A representative example is South West China Petroleum University, Chengdu (from Guo 2001; current authors’ emphasis):

- ‘To have a knowledge of the major literary schools and movements and their developments.
- ‘To have a knowledge of major writers and their works
- ‘To understand the importance of [drama/novel/poetry] on [British/ American] literature as a whole

There is no suggestion in these aims of personally experiencing, never mind enjoying the literary reading experience for oneself. These aims could be met by reading a literary history written in Chinese or attending a series of lectures and never opening the actual works themselves. Yet there is a neglected tradition of such active appropriations as our next section shows.

### **3.1. Literature in the lives of English language learners in China.**

Some interesting counter-indications of the importance of literature to at least some Chinese language learners pop up in more subjective literature and are worth reporting to give a fuller picture. These accounts also indicate that readers made meaning for themselves, not always as their teachers had intended. As Kramsch (2009), Pavlenko (2007) and others have argued, the subjective stories of

language learners can offer important insights into second or foreign language learning experience which more mainstream scientific research has sometimes tended to neglect. US Peace Corps teacher Peter Hessler (2002), reports more interesting features of the landscape if possibly rather exceptional not least in involving a foreign native speaker teacher. His ‘Shakespeare with Chinese characteristics’ (p. 201, Ch. 2) is a personal record of Shakespeare and other canonical literature texts being appropriated in a Chinese teacher college classroom in Sichuan for China purposes but also provoking real learning, cultural interchange and reflexivity. Thus one of his students clearly recognises something she knows in the experience of a classic British 19<sup>th</sup> century heroine:

I like Jane [Jane Eyre]. I think she is a very common women [sic], but she has an uncommon seeking. She dared to resist wife of mother’s brother and brother of cousinship. She is a progressive lady.

Acting of Shakespeare in Hessler’s chapter is reported as ‘release’, a space where behaviours that would not normally be experienced in the college are explored and valued. Exaggerated, stylized even histrionic acting is reported as in a society where emotions were rarely open. Similarly, Chinese students taking English language creative writing classes in China frequently mention that the classes are much appreciated as spaces where they can express themselves and think in ways not normally allowed in more mainstream Chinese education.

Elsewhere diaspora writer YiYun Li, in an interview printed in *The Guardian* (13. 04. 2012) reflects on her own experience of reading English literature as a teenager: ‘I remember reading *Women in Love*... It was very disturbing. And *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, my goodness, was just incredibly disturbing, but I think it’s good to be disturbed at that age, to be taken out of your mould and dazzled a little. I could not understand Lawrence when I was 16, but could not stop reading him either.’ It has been a surprise to the first author of this chapter that *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* has been a popular staple for literature classes with undergraduates in Ningbo, but perhaps it should not be. Certainly a small group once expressed their gratitude to the first author for being able to discuss questions of sexual desire and knowledge in an open way through a reading of that Lawrence novel. This small group of young female students said that this area was important to them but something they rarely had a chance to discuss elsewhere.

In *Beautiful English* (Zhang, 2004), the experience of reading *Jane Eyre* is again fondly remembered: 'I was moved by the original, as if hearing the echo from the nineteenth century – the call of a British woman which was not strange to me. I could understand the call from the bottom of her soul.' Zhang quotes Jane Eyre's confession of love to Mr Rochester "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? ... It is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal – as we are!" Tears came to my eyes: I felt for her; I saw myself in her; momentarily I felt I was the poor girl about to lose her love...' (Zhang 2004, p.193)

English language life writing classes are reported in demand in Hong Kong City University and elsewhere. Creative writing in another language is one way to explore one's identity, affect, and to develop self-expression (compare Pratt, 1991, on autoethnography and 'contact zones'). Such writing classes are booming in Hong Kong, at Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangzhou and others on the mainland, including University of Nottingham at Ningbo (Dai, 2015). There is no doubt that informal reading and writing of literature in English in China continues, though certainly it is a minority activity. (See for example two English language internet literary magazines, *Pathlight* (Beijing, government sponsored), or *Chutzpah* (Guangzhou, private press); also Hockx, 2015). Increasing activity and recognition of China diaspora writers using English includes international prize-winners Ha Jin, Xinran or Xiaolu Guo.

### **3.2. Pedagogical stylistics**

Pedagogical stylistics emerged in the UK in the 1970s, with Widdowson and then Carter as its leading proponents. The pedagogical stylisticians believed this modern form of 'close reading' could be useful to both native and EFL students. The approach aims 'to search for the aesthetic value of literature and get access to the meaning by exploring the language and form of the literary text' (Van, 2009), and can provide students with a method of scrutinizing texts, opening up practical starting points for fuller interpretation, which motivates students and enhances their confidence to make sense of language input. Since a stylistic approach was initially proposed in 1986 in Brumfit and Carter's *Literature and Language Teaching*, it has been given increasing attention by many scholars (Carter & Long, 1991; Carter & McRae, 1996) and put into practice by some teachers (examples in

Lazar, 1990; Rosenkjar, 2006; Badran, 2007. See Hall, 2014 for a fuller account.). However, in China, literary stylistics, despite its presence in university level research, and although frequently discussed in its application to the English major curriculum, has been far less frequently applied to EFL teaching at grass roots levels, with some rare and incidental exceptions.

In China, pedagogical stylistics has attracted EFL scholars and practitioners who mainly report on the following questions: 1) whether stylistics can substitute the integrated reading course for EFL of the higher grades in college; 2) how to apply a stylistic approach to the learning and study of the texts excerpted from various themes and genres, including non-literary type and literary type; 3) how stylistics learning might improve EFL students' language proficiency by means of enhancing their competence to cope with words, sentences, paragraphs and texts (Xu, 2000). There is little interest in such approaches in affordances for cultural learning or personal development.

### **3.3. Stylistics and language based approaches to literature in China.**

While still unusual, where literature reading is more committed to its uses for language learning, rather than treated as cultural knowledge, linguistic approaches rather than humanistic response-based teaching are more widespread and acceptable to teachers, students and parents in China. A language-based approach to literature reading and teaching is here broadly designated 'stylistic' without any assumption of more advanced academic or technical understandings of stylistics.

For some readers, stylistics may be thought of as a western approach to literature study, but the tradition is as old as rhetoric, and just as well known in a different tradition in China, which may have helped with its acceptability to Chinese learners and teachers (Shen, 2000).

Modern western stylistics was introduced to the scholars of foreign languages in China in the 1960s, soon after its booming in the west, though the academic activity in China withered away in the 1970s due to the Cultural Revolution. Chinese study of modern stylistics re-emerged in the 1980s and began to thrive in terms of both research and teaching since then, when a number of influential publications came out, with more and more scholars engaged in research on stylistics, and an increasing number of colleges offering modules of stylistics for the English major under the guidance of the *National Teaching Syllabus for English Majors* (1985) (Xu, 2000; Shen, 2000). According to

Shen (2000, p. 183), by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ‘thousands of Chinese students had benefited from various stylistics courses, and numerous research students have completed their MA and PhD in various areas of stylistics’. One of the first academic visitors to China as opening began was Mick Short of Lancaster University (UK), one of the ‘godfathers’ of modern stylistics, who taught in Nanjing and Beijing in 1981 and 1982-3 respectively, the latter visit in particular making a great impact. Beyond this, there has been a detectable minor trend of integrating stylistic approaches into CE teaching, with a measurable modest rise in its use (Liu & Zhang, 2012). According to statistics from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), the number of publications in stylistics has been steadily rising in the past three decades, in 2011 about 255, 2.6 times that in 2000. Generally the meeting of western and Chinese research into stylistics, variation and rhetoric has meant that linguistic approaches to literature can meet in principle with ready reception when introduced into Chinese teacher training classrooms or even into the classrooms themselves as ‘pedagogical stylistics’ but even this approach has yet to make a significant impact on everyday CE teaching.

#### **4. Conclusion – Summary and emerging counter-indications.**

China is increasingly globalised, with more and more Chinese professionals, educators and students showing increasing awareness of their international identities, and the importance of intercultural communication, with English largely accepted for now as the global language that can serve them to be linguistically, intellectually and culturally well-prepared and qualified global citizens. Garrett (2010) reported the most favourable international attitudes towards globalization from students in China where all other nations investigated reported more reservations or suspicions.

Some recent attention has been given to literature teaching in EFL classrooms deriving largely from education of teachers at universities where stylistics is taught and from attendance at workshops. The popularity and very positive evaluations of a module on MA Applied Linguistics ELT running since 2007 on ‘Literature and Language Teaching’ at University of Nottingham Ningbo may be indicative but is still unusual. Literature remains for most an optional extra where provision is available at all. In the absence of training on how best to use literature with language learners, approaches can be

limited to (at best) using the literary text as just another source of English language input. Videos are used with subtitles, cribs and internet study guides or simply translated versions are used as elsewhere, generally not to the real advantage of the learner as a learner of language. Tokenistic extracts or simplifications of canonical texts with po-faced notes or glosses in textbooks are unlikely to fire the interest of many young readers who seem likely to discover literature if at all despite such approaches rather than because of them. The picture is not all grim however.

In 2005, for example, relative autonomy was given to Shanghai, Zhejiang and other relatively wealthy areas with more developed educational infrastructure to design and produce their own English teaching materials. There has been increasing marketisation and commercialisation in education country-wide since then with more diversity following. Again, the increasing use of EMI English as Medium of Instruction in ‘good’ and/ or private Chinese universities in recent times has been popular. Limited opening and expansion of foreign universities such as Nottingham, Liverpool at Suzhou or NYU Shanghai continues apace for now at least. Such institutions promote explicit bilingual and international educational aims. At expensive private schools where the next generation of leaders study there is increasing demand for wider curricula, including the more humanistic International Baccalaureate qualifications which prompt study of ethics, art, culture and literature in at least some streams. There is increasing use in everyday life of English, however macaronic-bilingual signing, bilingual instructions, packaging, internet, travel, contacts and so on. Increasing opportunities exist to work in as well as outside China for foreign enterprises, joint ventures and multinationals where English is a medium of the workplace and the largest salaries are earned. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese students are still studying in English overseas each year. There is a growing perception in professional publications, conferences and the like in China, that English in China has been seen too exclusively as an instrument for scientific and economic advancement. With growing affluence there seems to be developing more interest in the humanities and personal fulfilment beyond wealth as an end in itself. Imagined and real international, cosmopolitan, global identities are widely found. In 2009 Lo Bianco suggested English was no longer a ‘foreign language’ in China at least for many middle class students. That development has quickened. You (2010) explores Chinese nationals writing ‘our own language’ in English (also Gao, 2012).

There is a mixed picture and one not wholly in line with official policies. How things proceed from here remains to be seen, but there is evidently scope for intervention if those who advocate uses of literature in language education really have something to offer in moving literature in ELT from foreign cultural knowledge to appropriated personal resource.

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