

FOREWORD

The ABAC Journal is highly honored to devote this issue to publishing papers from the 22nd International Congress of the FILLM, the International Federation for Modern Languages and Literatures. This organization has a worldwide membership within its constituent organizations of 40,000 scholars and in August of 2002, 33 member countries gathered at Assumption University's (AU's) new Bang Na campus to discuss the topic "Re-imagining Language and Literature for the 21st Century." Within this broad topic participants focused on the ethical, social, and technological dimensions of this re-imagining and the diversity of exciting voices truly affirmed the relevance of the title of one of the sections of the Congress: "East Meets West Meets North Meets South." In the midst of the geographically wide-ranging dialogue there emerged many insights, leading to the conclusion that the congress not only reflected on the current state of the art but actively influenced how language and literature studies would develop as the new century progresses. The Congress was one of the most exciting events to occur at Assumption University of Thailand in recent years.

A full set of proceedings will be published but it was thought that it would also be desirable to publish in a special issue of the ABAC Journal a number of papers that reflect the multicultural dimension of the teaching and study of languages. As an institution of higher education whose teaching takes place in English, a language which has to a great extent become the lingua franca of the business and academic worlds in the latter part of the last century, this theme is very important for the parent institution of the Journal, and our hosting of the conference certainly will play a significant role in our own development in the new century. We believe that this selection of the exciting work presented and discussed at the conference will be of great interest to our very varied readership.

As professionals employed in language and literature throughout the five continents, the authors of all of these articles must be concerned with the teaching of language, and this topic plays a central role in a number of the included papers. Professor Seiko Yasumoto, of the University of Sydney studied the varying cultural tendencies of Chinese, Korean, and English-speaking students enrolled in a third-year Japanese study course. Perhaps not surprisingly, each of these three groups had a specific set of strengths and weaknesses, suggesting that the initial cultural orientation of the students should be taken into account in language instruction.

The role of English as a business tool makes the teaching of a language more of a necessity, but this pragmatic character is not without its dangers, as is made clear by Dr. Devi Sarinjeive's reflection on the changes in English language instruction at Vista University in South Africa. In a partially English language country where the pressures of developing a national identity are great, the pull of practical concerns has forced a reorientation of language study from an emphasis on literature to one that seeks to teach the students the basics of communication. This concentration of resources on the economically useful is perhaps very understandable but it is also fraught with danger as the importance of language as a repository of cultural heritage, even a partial cultural heritage, is lost.

As Dr. Jennifer E. Michaels of Grinnell Iowa in the United States argues in her paper, literature can be an important resource in creating or recreating a national identity in a world in which almost every country is becoming more multicultural. Focusing on contemporary Austrian writers, the author shows how these writers are involved in a national effort of redefinition that encompasses not only traditional Austrian minorities but national groups who have only recently come to the country.

This is not to say that multicultural endeavors will necessarily lead to a utopia of tolerance; misunderstandings between members of various cultures are inevitable even in the small world in which we live. Dr. Maureen Mulligan, who teaches in Spain, investigates this through a close reading of travel books written by women. These books, she suggests, are concerned less with an attempt to understand another culture and more with the presentation of culture shock. The readers thus get less true insight than a sense of their own differentness.

The difficulties of cultural adjustment can be found within a culture as well as between them. Professor Shin-ichi Morimoto of Japan considers the effect of contact with the West on traditional Japanese values associated with a warrior culture. The article finds that the Japanese have not adapted Western values but that those values have had their effect, leaving Japanese culture less rooted than it had been before contact. On this view, the culture faces a challenge of self-definition in the present day.

People coming to terms with each other and themselves are in fact central themes of the early years of the new century, and Dr. Igor Saksida of Slovenia finds this coming to terms represented in the literature classroom itself. There is an ethics of teacher-student relationships in literature classrooms that uses literary texts as intermediary communications devices. Through these, gaps can be filled and relationships of integrity can be built up.

We do not live in a utopia and cultural problems will be with us for a long time. We will, however, begin to open up to each other as we learn to converse and thus understand each other. Such a conversation did very much take place in August 2002, and we are proud to present a small sampling of that conversation in this issue.

In presenting this summary presentation of this exciting international conference I would very much like to thank the members of the local organizing committee of the FILLM, almost all of them from Assumption University. Working to back up the excellent work of the FILLM to make certain that the Assumption University facilities could comfortably accommodate the gathered scholars was among the most satisfying of my activities as President of Assumption University. I especially appreciate the help of Advisors Chetana Nagavajara and Edward P. Vargo under the Chairman, Dr Bancha Saenghiran; Sompit Porsutyaruk, Vice Chairperson/Congress Program; Suthira Duangsamorn, Secretariat; Laura Brahmakasikara, Registration and Treasurer; Linchong Chorrojprasert, Paper Selection; Norranuch Paikaew, Hospitality and Banquet; Somboon Duangsamorn, Social and Cultural Events; Uraiphan Nawinprasert, Excursions; Narong Chomchalow, Publications; Apinya Pupat, Evaluation; Marlar Myint, Secretary; and Than Than Mu, Assistant Secretary. I would especially like to thank Dr. Suthira Duangsamorn for her dedicated work in helping to put together this special issue of the ABAC Journal and for writing the introduction to the FILLM which explains the acronym and the mission of the organisation.

The Executive Editor