

DAN WATERS, *One Couple, Two Cultures: 81 Western-Chinese couples talk about love and marriage*

Hong Kong, MCCM Creations, 2005. (Reviewed by Sansan Ching and Anthony Sweeting)

Dan Waters' latest publication presents a virtual treasure trove, filled to the brim — perhaps even overflowing — with riches. Among these are nuggets of knowledge, especially concerning Hong Kong folklore; pearls of wisdom, particularly involving intimate human relationships; sharply cut and freshly polished diamonds of historical insights; and, carefully mined gems of opinion from appropriate experience.

Folklore nuggets include an explanation of the origins of 'Lovers' Rock' on Bowen Road, together with the beliefs and customs it has generated, interesting examples of colloquial expressions involving manners, comments on the importance of food in Cantonese culture, a reasoned defence of slurping soup, plus informed discussions of bride money, filial piety, *feng shui* and the still quite widespread consultation by more elderly Chinese of the *Tung Sing* 通勝 for the identification of auspicious days. The author also briefly refers to the Chinese concept of Face, but possibly underplays its contribution to problems in relationships with non-Chinese.

Pearls of wisdom related to human relations appear in most chapters of Waters' book, both those that originate directly from his personal knowledge and those based on the knowledge and experiences of the individuals whom he surveyed. Although it may at first appear that many of the 'potentially irritating habits' he lists in his chapter on 'Customs and Habits' are quite trivial-sounding, further consideration is likely to convince readers of their minefield-qualities. The author also makes several very thoughtful observations about what he recognizes as characteristically Chinese thinking, describing it as 'complex, contextual, holistic, and all embracing', while relating it to typical Chinese landscapes, their concepts of time and attitudes towards medicine.

Historical insights are especially prevalent in the first couple of introductory chapters, where they are frequently accompanied by generalizations from sociological research or remarks derived from literary portrayals of mixed marriages. These include references to the 'dahnomers', army slang for downhomers or unofficial wives. Others can also be found



Surprisingly, the book also includes a few inaccuracies. For example, Waters claims that Robert Ho Tung was 'the first non-European to be knighted in Hong Kong, in 1915'. However, Sir Kai Ho Kai who, while not Hong Kong-born, was widely considered to be a Hong Kong citizen and became an early Chinese member of the Hong Kong Legislative Council, was knighted in 1912. He also remarks that 'the Diocesan Native Female Training School ... was closed down by the clergy *in the early 1860s*' when, in fact, it was taken under the immediate supervision of the Anglican Bishop in 1868 and renamed the 'Diocesan Home and Orphanage' in September 1869. A quite obvious typographical error appears on p. 61, where the dates '1948-1954' appear for the Governorship of Samuel Bonham, instead of 1848-1854.

These are, of course, very minor, as well as infrequent offences, as is the visually quite irritating use of 'side-notes', printed orthogonally to the text, instead of either footnotes or endnotes. To some readers, the book's title, with its oblique reference to Deng Xiaoping's famous aphorism, may appear a trifle cumbersome, especially since it is deliberately interpreted to exclude many 'other' sorts of couples, with two cultures and to include only middle class professional, heterosexual Western-Chinese married couples, in which the western member of the couple is white. And, despite the obvious humorous intention, it may seem a little overdone when one of the chapters in the book is entitled 'One Couple, Two Kitchens'!

Dan Waters, himself, describes his book as a 'labour of love'. Love, certainly and self-evidently, played a very major part in its creation and in both the inspiration and persistence of its author. And, for these, all readers should be very grateful. Not for a moment, however, does it give the impression of being laborious. Instead, it reflects several key aspects of Dan's own personality: in particular, his helpfulness, his informality, his humour, and his humanity.

later in the book, as the author comments on the responses made by the eighty-one couples to his often-provocative questions.

These responses, themselves, constitute the majority of what we have described as 'carefully mined gems of opinion based on appropriate experience'. The present reviewers, as two of the individuals who were consulted by the author, can confirm the care and depth of his mining, as well as the accuracy of his reportage. Amongst the gems are discussions about the characteristically greater fluency of the Chinese member of the couple in the non-Chinese language, differences in humour, examples of affability as well as problems between spouses and in-laws, the importance of oral and family history, thoughtful comments on the effects of globalization, and views about discrimination against mixed marriages.

We would, however, prove ourselves to be less than careful if we failed to explore some grounds for criticism. Perhaps the most important of these derive from our first impression that the treasure trove represented by the author's latest book is perhaps 'even overflowing' and may constitute an embarrassment of riches. This possible surfeit could be the outcome of an over-ambitious reach. In order to make his survey 'more manageable', Waters clearly defines and de-limits the couples he is prepared to survey to 'middle class professional, heterosexual, Western-Chinese married couples'. On the other hand, in the interests of historical comprehensiveness and comprehensibility, he incorporates quite detailed treatments of Hong Kong's 'protected women', concubines, and other *de facto* relationships. He also provides (admittedly, very interesting) information about the problems of the Eurasian offspring of mixed marriages, which are, of course, not necessarily a feature of all such relationships. He offers data about the 'Black and White Amahs' from the Sun Tak (Sunde) district of the Pearl River Delta, without showing how these reflect on the nature of 'Western-Chinese' marriages or even more informal, heterosexual or homosexual relationships. And his account of anecdotes concerning a Japanese husband and his Western wife, as well as of the fluency in spoken Chinese of the daughter of two Europeans do not seem to fit comfortably into the author's self-imposed de-limitations. Much the same might be said about his treatment of the miscegenation laws in the United States, Canada, and Australia. However fascinating this sort of information may be in its own right, in the context of this particular book, based on its own definitions, it is capable of reinforcing an impression of diffuseness and questionable relevance.