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Athens to Shanghai in 365 days: A Translator's Journey

On the late evening of November, 29th, 2005, I, Li Wang, a doctoral student in the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University, boarded a plane from Beijing to Shanghai wondering how I would find the person who would pick me up at Shanghai airport. Although I had talked to him several times this past year, and had collaborated with him on a book translation project, I had not met him before, or seen his photos. As I anxiously alighted from the plane and walked out of the gate, I saw a man waiving a book whose blue, red, and yellow cover I instantly recognized. This book, *Combating AIDS: Communication Strategies in Action*, authored by School of Communication Studies Professor Arvind Singhal and the late Everett M. Rogers, was the reason why I was in Shanghai. Here I detail its journey from a classroom in Athens, Ohio to the bustling metropolis of Shanghai, China.

I read *Combating AIDS* the first time in Fall 2004, when I took Arvind's COMS 710 *Communication and Information Diffusion* class at Ohio University. The book opened my eyes about the role of communication in addressing issues of HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and support. Although I had read bits of information about HIV/AIDS here and there, I had not realized that HIV/AIDS was such a big public health and socio-cultural problem. I was shocked with the appalling figures, the direction my own country China was heading, and felt compelled to do something. This feeling haunted me for several days. Then I had an idea. I talked to Arvind and volunteered to translate his *Combating AIDS* book into Chinese and get it published in China.

Arvind was also very excited about this prospect, and we both sent out emails and made phone calls to our friends in China, exploring this book translation initiative. One of Arvind's former students, Min Wang, an alum of the Ohio University's Communication and Development Studies Program (1993) and now a highly successful and well-connected entrepreneur in Shanghai, responded enthusiastically to the translation idea. So, during the winter break of 2004-2005, when I was back to Beijing (in December 2004) for some medical treatment, I had an engaging and productive two-hour

conversation with Min over the phone. This was my first contact with Min. We discussed the prospect of getting the Chinese version of *Combating AIDS* published, including seeking a publisher, revising and customizing the book for a Chinese audience, translating the manuscript, as well as possible marketing strategies.

In early 2005, encouraging news began to come out of Shanghai. Min personally scoped out various potential publishers and possible collaborators in Shanghai. Meanwhile, in Athens, Ohio Arvind and I worked on revising and shortening the manuscript for Chinese audiences. By late Spring 2005, Min had found just the right publisher for the manuscript, Shanghai Scientific and Technical Publishers, a highly respected publisher in China. Min worked on all the technical issues of publishing, such as initiating a publishing contract, working with Arvind to secure copyright release from Sage Publications (the original publisher), and the like. Arvind signed off all royalties so that the book could retail at the lowest possible price. But there was an exciting and challenging catch: The publisher wanted to release the translated book on December 1st, 2005, World AIDS Day. A publishing deadline of six months.

Time was precious and the clock was ticking fast. Dr. Nagesh Rao and Dr. Claudia Hale, both Interim Directors of the School of Communication Studies, granted me a research assignment (on Arvind's request) in Spring and Fall 2005, respectively, for this book translation project. This arrangement provided valuable time for me to work on the translation and collaborate with Arvind in customizing the book's content for Chinese readers. I spent about five months (from April to September, 2005) to complete the translation of the revised manuscript. Then Min and I (he in Shanghai and I in Athens, Ohio) spent another month – going back and forth -- with the publisher's editors in revising the translated manuscript. The publisher set a deadline of November 7th for our final submission so that the book could be released on December 1st. We made that deadline, burning lots of midnight oil. After some copy-editing and formatting, on November 21st, a day before the book manuscript was sent for printing, the Chinese title was finalized. We went through several rounds of revisions on the title to capture the original theme of the book and also appeal to Chinese readers. Translated back from Chinese, we agreed on the following title: *Confronting AIDS in the Face: Communication and Media Strategies and the Total Mobilization of Condoms.*

Everyone involved – Min, I, Arvind, and others -- were amazed with the supersonic speed involved in getting the translated book published in China. Considering all the work that had been done in such a short time, especially obtaining the publishing bureau’s approval in China, the editor Jian Ye said, “It was a mission impossible.”

Two days before the book release, on November 29th, 2005, I found myself on the plane to Shanghai to join Min and other collaborators on this book project. Dr. Yifang Fang, one of the key editorial collaborators, picked me up at Shanghai airport waving Arvind’s original book at me. That evening, I met Min Wang, a fellow Ohio University Bobcat, in person for the first time.

The next day -- November 30th 2005 -- Dr. Fang and I attended a press briefing held by Shanghai government for the AIDS Day event. Our translated book, available in multiple copies, was one of the key features at the press conference. Two large posters of the book’s cover, about eight feet high and four feet wide, were displayed at the entrance of this press briefing room, with the images of two famous media celebrities, Ms. Gongru Yang and Mr. Liang Lv, Shanghai’s well-known AIDS Ambassadors (Photo 1).



Photo 1 Posters of the Book’s Cover at the Entrance of the Press Briefing Room with Images of Shanghai’s AIDS Ambassadors

The dozens of news reporters who were present received a copy of the translated book and a copy of the accompanying press release. I personally was introduced to several reporters, both the media celebrities, and key governmental officials at this event (Photo 2).



Photo 2 Editor Jian Ye, Mr. Liang Lv, Ms. Gongru Yang, Dr. Fang, and me at the Press Briefing Room

On December 1st, 2005, World AIDS Day, Min Wang, Dr. Fang, Editor Jian Ye, and I were invited as honored guests to attend the Shanghai AIDS Day event, held in the central square of downtown Shanghai. Several thousand people gathered to witness the event. Our book posters were again displayed prominently in the Shanghai central square.

When Min and I arrived at this location around noon (Photo 3), a reader was waiting for us and insisted on buying a copy with our signatures. We were touched and happily signed our names inside the cover. After all, we were both listed on the cover page as official translators. The launch was a great success but it was only a beginning (Photo 4).



Photo 3 Min and I at the central square of downtown Shanghai



Photo 4 Dr. Fang, me, and Min with Mr. Xiaodu Yang (first on the right), Vice Mayor of Shanghai at the central square of downtown Shanghai

Later in the afternoon, we arrived at Dr. Fang’s new restaurant in downtown, Shanghai. The first thing we saw when we stepped in were two large message boards, titled “STOP AIDS, KEEP THE PROMISE” (Photo 5). Also the larger-than-life cut-outs of the book’s cover were prominently displayed. Inspired by the Thai restaurant “Cabbages & Condoms” that Arvind and Professor Ev Rogers described in great detail in their original book, Dr. Fang launched this new restaurant, calling it the Combating AIDS Restaurant. It is the first restaurant of its kind in China, and represented a highly audacious move. The largest and most influential national newspaper, *People’s Daily*, as well as several of Shanghai’s newspapers covered its launch. The restaurant was proof that the book translation project was yielding concrete outcomes in China. I could not have been more pleased.



Photo 5 Message Boards at Dr. Fang’s new restaurant, titled “STOP AIDS, KEEP THE PROMISE”

The restaurant is a small part of a series of activities that Min and Dr. Fang plan to initiate for HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and support. In coming years, we have planned to undertake at least 10 more high profile activities to contribute to our AIDS mission in

collaboration with Shanghai's Centers for Disease Control, local entrepreneurs, and international organizations. These include publishing a series of books on AIDS, including a comic book with basic prevention and transmission information targeted to children and illiterates; launching an online gaming- community themed with AIDS prevention messages targeting the youth; establishing a Loving Cabin, a comfortable, non-stigmatized, and safe space for HIV/AIDS patients to obtain information and care; and others. All of these are directly inspired by Arvind's original *Combating AIDS* book. As Dr. Fang said, "We are learning from this book and putting what we've learned in practice."

I'd like to thank Arvind, Min, Dr. Fang, and other collaborators for partnering on this meaningful journey. During the translation process, I revisited my Chinese language skills. Further, this translation project clarified directions for my dissertation, academic research, and future career. What started as a kernel of an idea in a graduate classroom in Athens, Ohio, had come alive during my visit to Shanghai.

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