

A World View of Good Technical Publications (MG2CC)

Management and Professional Development
Monday 10:30 am - 12:00 pm

Perspective on China

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Recent years have seen a rapid rate of positive change in the quality of technical publications from China. This is due to many factors: advances and availability of technologies, socio-economic changes, and the encouraging business climate for sharing know-how. As the rate of information exchange increases, more and more emphasis is given to common standards and improving capacity to implement a higher level of quality. But what makes a "good" design? What makes a "good" publication? Is the goal to create a "good" publication or to meet a publishing requirement? What resources are available? Who am I? How do "I" judge "good"? Graphics? Writing elements? Presentation? or All of these? What factors are psychological and/or culturally dependent? What is the purpose of the publication? Who is the audience?

The application and use of technologies is booming in China. The markets for computers, hand-helds, wireless and cellular phones, all manner of digital equipment, software and services are growing fast. Personal wealth is fashionable as are speaking English, pocket phones and computers. "Generation d" is a world phenomenon. International trade is booming and entrepreneurs are creating a new affluent generation. With the exception of a hugely accelerated pace, new technologies and new standards are being applied pretty much in the same way as everywhere else. Some industries are leaders; others are still working on it.

A story goes that an old man in Shanghai sat looking up at the sky one day. His grandson came out to sit with him. "In the old days," he told the boy, "to see a flock of cranes flying in the sky was fortunate, for the crane is a symbol of longevity and good fortune. Just, look at the sky now. There are more construction cranes than tall buildings! Now the construction crane is becoming a symbol of modern China."

1. Domestic documentation.

Is domestic documentation usually done in more than one language? In Canada, for instance, documentation must be published in English and French. Is this the case in your country? If so, does this pose any problems with things such as layout, indexing, or illustrations?

Translating from Chinese to any western language is a layout problem because of the increased volume of space required for the text. It is possible to compensate with font sizes and margin settings so that the space used is the same. Illustrations are often handled in the same way as in the US, by text association and numbering systems. Indexing is more a table of contents issue; I have not seen much use of indices.



With the exception of materials that are prepared for the tourist industry or the international market, most of what I have seen in China is published only in Chinese using the simplified characters (jianti)¹. Of the technical books and magazines I have seen, none has been fully dual language. Some materials would be published in China in English only, or English with Chinese notes. These would include some textbooks and other study materials. It is very common to see racks of shelves in a bookstore with various levels of "learning English" (and other languages) books. Materials prepared for export (e.g., legal documents, assembly instructions) would be translated and might be delivered as dual language as would any publication with a target market outside China.

Books and materials for the computer industry regularly contain mixed languages, especially when using programming terminology and acronyms. Mixing languages is becoming more and more common.

Even though proper names are not normally translated, a phonetic rendition into Chinese of western names is normal. This is not necessarily the case for brand names or company names any longer. Frequently, the romanized name is used in advertising and in text. Windows98 is Windows98, not 98. Hewlett-Packard is the same as are many of the big name companies. Name-brand items are very popular in China and Chinese people pay a lot of attention to brands.



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With the promotion of English language teaching and the advent of computers, more and more Chinese people have become comfortable with some English. On one hand, there are some who consider it hip and very popular to sprinkle a few English words around, whether or not the meaning is clear. On the other hand, many people in China are actively trying to learn English and simply want to practice using it.

Setup 程序。当在浏览器上访问应用程序时，除了已有的文件之外，其余所需的文件全部拷贝到用户的硬盘上。对用户来讲，在 Web 上安装和使用应用程序几乎没有区别。用 Web 浏览器（如 Internet Explorer）展开应用程序可为用户建立一个始终如一的环境。在 Web 上用户能从一个文档移到另一个文档，穿梭于 HTML 页和 ActiveX 文档之间。

11. 全局对象

为了简化可重用性代码库的建立，Visual Basic 5.0 允许将对象定义成全局的，以便引用其方法时不必建立全局对象的实例。

在 VB 5.0 中通过建立类模块的过程来实现一般的过程。将类模块的 Instancing 特性设置为除了 Private 和 PublicNotCreatable 之外的任何值，以便建立类的实例。一旦你设置类的 Instancing 特性值为 GlobalMultiUse，并建立了 project，随后不必明确建立类的实例就可调用类的属性和方法。全局对象的属性和方法被加在调用它的项目的 global name space 中。即在别的项目中可参照该组件，全局对象

The language issue for many technologies is that they are becoming world standard and with that comes a "world standard" vocabulary so that everyone can understand what everyone else is saying. With computers and computer languages based on ASCII and English, it became impossible not to mix languages.

2. International Documentation.

If you work on international documentation, what countries do you as a technical communicator generally deal with?

China

How is the translation done? Do you generally send text out to be translated or is it done within your company? Or does it depend on the situation?

One of the services our company provides is English/Chinese translation services, so we would do it in house. We might also contract with a translator for a particular project. As a general rule, material being translated to or from Chinese would likely be done by a Chinese company in-house, mostly because of language issues. That is, it is easier to find a native Chinese speaker who has learned English than it is to find a native

¹ Jianti is the simplified form of Chinese; fanti is the complex or traditional form. Jianti is used predominantly in the PRC while fanti is used by Chinese people living in other areas. Material published for mainland China would be published using jianti; for almost every other market, fanti would be used.

American English speaker who has learned Chinese. Service bureaus are less common in China and with many college graduates who manage English quite well, it is not too difficult to find someone who can translate. There are some problems with this that may result in difficulties with the finished translation. But these have more to do with how the translation itself is handled than with the business practice of who handles the job.

Do you use machine translation? If so, what has been your experience with it?

Yes. There are several types of machine translation, including full context and word/phrase. Full context would take the entire text in the source language and render it into the target applying an algorithm to handle the grammar. Word/phrase takes each word or phrase that it recognizes and renders that in the target, giving grammatical indicators and word choice options. Both present the problem of depending on the logic built into the program to render the text; when, in fact, what the logic expects is often not what is being presented.

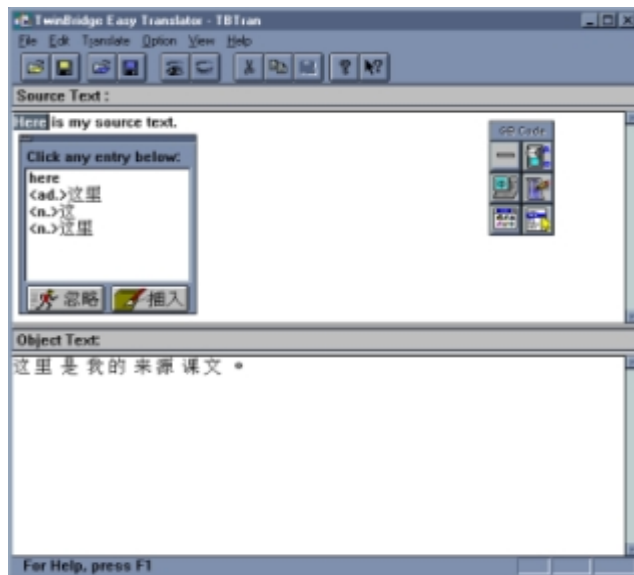
What machine translation systems do you use? What good experiences or problems have you had?

We currently use a product called Twin Bridge. There are several others that work in a similar manner. And there are others that run under the Chinese version of Windows. While there are various products on the market that are designed specifically for translation, many do not handle Chinese. We are still looking.



Twin Bridge uses word/phrase translation for its Easy Translator module, providing lists of comparable words or phrases in the target language. The user must then select the closest match. One of the problems is character recognition. In some cases, a single Chinese character makes up a word; in others, two or three may be grouped together to form the meaning. Sometimes, Twin Bridge

recognizes this correctly, sometimes it doesn't, and sometimes it does when it shouldn't. And lots of times, it GPFs with page faults. But it's also one of the best Chinese language packages that will run under the English version of Windows. (single/double byte issues)



What is your feeling about machine translation? (Mine experience leads me to believe that it isn't very good. We still need professional translators to review finished products.)

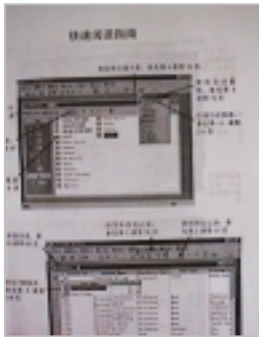
Depends on the use and the user. If the materials are consistently written in the source language (not usual), then it becomes possible to use software to store phrases and whole text blocks to be reused later. Someone has to do this to ensure the text blocks are correctly translated and stored. And, this only works if the source language usage is consistent (same phrases with the same meaning; same words with the same meaning). Without consistency in the original, the result of machine translation in the target will be choppy and inconsistent and may not make sense when the phrases are put in context.

Take the above example, the source text reads: Here is my source text; but there is a problem when the translation (which is not the source) is put into context. This is a trivial example, but it illustrates the need for applied judgment, understanding and adaptation with is still not reliable in our machine translation systems.

While using fully automated machine translation as an aide to speed up the translation process, for personal understanding and generally as a tool to help communication is fine, I would strongly recommend AGAINST anyone using only machine translation, even for something that may seem as simple as a business letter. The best situation is to have a bilingual human with tools. Tools to facilitate the process and a human to help ensure consistency, accuracy, and correct meaning in context.

3. Software

What software packages do you use to prepare your documentation?



Word '98 for print; Allaire's HomeSite 4.0 for online. Graphics are done in Paintshop Pro 6.0.

How is printing done? Do you send electronic files to the organization that prints your documentation?

Yes. "e" is good. There are issues for us with printing Chinese characters here in the US; ditto, printing English characters in China. Alignment, word spacing, and fonts are all issues. For GLESI and perhaps a number of other institutes in China, printing work is sent out to obtain better quality at a lower cost than can be achieved in house.

4. Publication Design and Typography

What is considered good design?

Good meaning popular? will people buy it? This IS criteria! Publication presentation styles are now heavily influenced by US and international standards.



Order, numbering, pages, headings as context references, nice white paper, a simple text typeface (i.e., song, a reasonable equivalent to times roman) all would be design elements.

(Lisa Li) For myself, since I am not a technician, I'm not interested in technical materials, unless they are practical so that I could apply them myself and use them in my daily life or work. I think people who major in different subjects have different opinions. And this also differs with the different subjects a magazine may be concerned with. In general, I think a good technical publication needs to have:

- a good cover (well-designed),
- a good guide (well-classified contents, so you know directly where to go),
- updated technology,
- practical techniques in a certain subject, and
- useful information relating to the subject .

How does the language affect design?

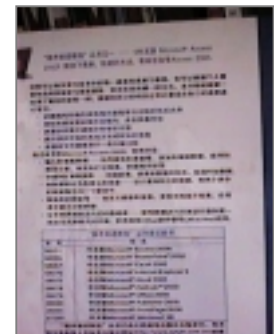
Spacing and alignment of characters. Characters should be spaced evenly in rows and columns, first character in the first line of a paragraph over the third character of the next

line. The number of characters, or word count, is a factor as it is here in the US. Calligraphy has been a design element in Chinese language for many hundreds of years. Titles may be displayed using a famous person's calligraphy rather than a picture or other image. Within text, the same elements as we have with typography are present.



Is it important that a design attracts attention and invites reading?

Yes, as for anything in a commercial market. Now many more books, magazines, and other publications are readily available. Technical publications are including advertising, a new phenomenon since previously technical publications would have been produced by state run and state funded processes that depended on whatever could be funded or might be available/possible. Now with technology prices down and privatization up, placing advertising in technical publications as a way of paying for the publication is the same as with trade publications in the US. Who wants to buy something that does not look appealing?



Or is your audience expected to read the documentation no matter what it looks like?

Sometimes, depending on the material and how available it is. It also depends on the material itself. If a technician needs information in a poorly done manual, he or she will get the information, regardless. It may be possible to request the author improve the manual, or it may not.

(Lisa Li) I have a friend who is a technician. Once when we talked about advertisements in magazines, he complained about the big volume of advertisements in a technical magazine he subscribed to. He said, "the ads are more than the articles which should be the main content of the magazine, I don't like the magazine on this point." I think this presents the opinion of most of the "pure" technicians who focus more on the new techniques or technology.

What does a typical page look like?

Does your audience prefer short or long blocks of text? Or does it depend on the subject?

Depends.

Do you use a lot of white (blank) space in your documentation, or is it more important to put as much on a page as possible?

Now, page design elements are about the same as in the US. Blank space is not used extensively as a design element in technical publications, but is in ads.

Do you use headings as part of page hierarchy? That is, does the general topic have the biggest heading, and the following paragraphs have smaller headings. Are headings supposed to help readers find and follow information?

Yes, but not necessarily by size.

5. Copy Editing

What is considered a good tone and style?

For technical materials, about the same as in English. Whether or not various literary devices might be inserted depends on when and for whom the material was written. Are instructions direct and to the point?

Depends on the type of document. Generally, yes.

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Do instructions focus on why something is to be done or do they emphasize how it is to be done. Or both?

How for the most part. But it would depend on the situation and what kind of instruction is needed.

I presume correct spelling, punctuation, grammar and capitalization are mandatory.

Yes kinda... for Chinese. Correct character, punctuation, grammar, no capitalization, add placement. For English within Chinese (e.g., systems manual), the word (s) may be a command or program descriptor so correct spelling and capitalization are essential. For other occurrences, the English may have some problems, including mis-spellings and typography problems. This is not the goal, but I've seen a few things that might not oughta escaped an editor's eye, preferably before they printed several thousand. (oops.) This is becoming less and less common in current publications.

I presume consistent use of terminology is mandatory

For commercial publications, yes. For internal publications, if terminology is required for correct technical reference, then yes, it is mandatory. Many translation dictionaries have been compiled for industry-specific terms. (chemistry, metals, manufacturing, etc.) With reference to standard Windows terms (e.g., title bar, menu, menu bar, tool bar, etc.), yes. MS publishes a translation guide with their preferred rendition in 18? languages)

Is it important that acronyms and abbreviations are spelled out and defined at first occurrence?

When working strictly in Chinese, this is not really an issue. If a short form is used, the long form will usually be presented first. When mixing Chinese characters and Western Alphabet acronyms it depends on usage, the same as for English.

How are acronyms handled in Chinese and Japanese?

In Chinese, by using the roman letters for the acronym, all caps or as appropriate. The acronym may be a standard one with an English interpretation or it could represent the pinyin romanization of the Chinese words. RMB (Ren Min Bi or renminbi, lit. People's Exchange) is the unit of currency in China. But DVD in China refers to digital video disk. hmmm...

6. Content and Organization

How much do marketing and sales considerations (i.e., benefits of product) affect the documentation?

(Lisa Li) As for our magazine "Die & Mould Industry," we mainly publish designs of a part of dies or moulds, some improvements or better designs of a part or mechanism, some descriptions of new technology in dies and moulds, and include a little information relating to the die and mould industry. The articles include drawings when needed. However, the magazine also contains a lot of ads. The editorial department is making money from advertisements. But they have another reason for making ads besides making

money. They say some people buy the magazine especially for the ads. It might be true to some extent. Because books usually contain no ads and there are very

few newspapers or magazines on a certain subject.

If you really have a plan to buy a machine or a tool for a special purpose, you might need to take our magazine as a reference because it contains all kinds of ads concerning dies and moulds.

How important is interesting and creative writing? Does it depend on what the topic is?

How does it relate to what I am doing? (magazine, journal, tech manual) Does it need to be sold? (computer reference books, learning English books, other books or magazines)

What is generally considered an orderly and logical development of subject matter? Is there a special style that your country prefers, such as starting with the smallest point and building up to the larger ideas and considerations?

Lists are a favorite organizing technique, with lists inside lists. An introduction, a list of what will be covered (possibly the table of contents, possibly a more expanded list with comments), the topics on the list expanded to an appropriate level, and a closing. In general, well-formed ideas (head, body, feet), same as in the US.

How important is it that writing is free of unnecessary bias, for example, that of gender or ethnic group?

The advertisement is for MICOM products, specifically highlighting their 'ClearVoice' (清晰语音) technology. It features a large image of a rotary telephone. The text is in Chinese and describes the benefits of their products, such as clear voice quality and integration with various communication systems. It also mentions a website for more information: <http://www.micom.com>.

This is a factor, but Chinese language and culture predate modern conventions by oh, 5000 years or so. Having recognized this, being politically correct according to the surrounding and current social climate has always been favored. Gender bias still exists as a social issue. China has it's own minority groups and then there are foreigners. At one time, it was required to include a certain political bias no matter what the subject. That is still the case in some situations; but to much less an extent.

Is this something that affects only Americans?



What is socially acceptable is different in general. As to ethnic groups, one interpretation is bias, the other is a recognition of ethnic group as a primary identifier (positive=heritage; negative=bias). Ethnicity is a factor for some preference programs.

As a foreigner (laowai; waiguoren) in China, I've sometimes been perceived as a foreigner first, an American second, a female third (sometimes second), and then usually my function (e.g., tourist) depending on the situation. In the US, we might meet someone who just arrived from China and not notice that person or might not consider that person any different than a person of Chinese ancestry who was born here. He or she would not be called a "foreigner" or necessarily labeled an "alien" (our term for a non-US citizen). Such a person would not stand out in a crowd in the US; we're a very mixed society. But in China, it's easy to spot someone whose coloring is a little different. And yes, distinctions are made; some not so flattering.

7. Graphics

What is considered a good graphic?

Depends on the purpose, again. If for advertising, the current trend is to use retouched and idealized images; for technical manuals, the image should illustrate something from the text. This is essentially the same as in the US.



Does your audience like lots of detail, or very little? Or does it depend on the situation?

Generally, more detail will be given, but this depends on the audience and situation. For a technical audience, this is the same as in the US. Most technical folks prefer more detail.

Do you generally use more graphics than words? Or does it depend on the situation?

This too, depends on the situation and availability of graphics and whether or not calligraphy is considered text or graphic. Modern Chinese publications are basically the same as in the US; marketing ads, etc. may be more graphical, journals may have more text; manuals will be about the same according to the level and type of audience

Are there specific graphics that have good or bad connotations?

2.2 模具结构

图3所示为模具结构。凸模3的作用是将毛坯弯曲成U形，弹簧2的弹力稍大于将毛坯弯曲成U形的弯曲力。调整块6通过导轨与横向凸模7连接。横向凸模7由凸轮8工作面(以cb长为半径的1/4圆弧)推动横向移动，弯曲c、b角。弯曲过程中，横向凸模的运动轨迹相同，因此材料与横向凸模无

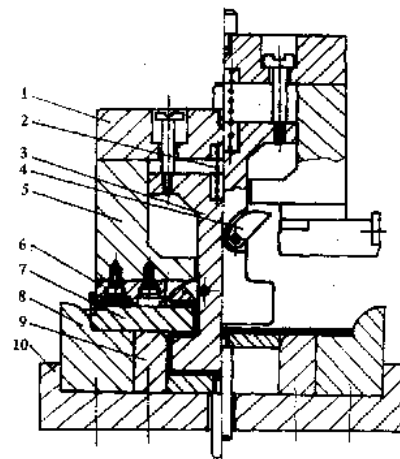


图3 模具结构

1. 上模座 2. 弹簧 3. 凸模 4. 模块
5. 压块 6. 调整块 7. 横向凸模 8. 凸轮
9. 凹模 10. 下模座

Sure. The dragon and tiger are both considered good symbols. The dragon has long been a benevolent symbol of spirit and energy in Chinese culture. The tiger is a symbol of strength. Chinese culture has many such images that are used in various forms of advertising to enhance the message. Many popular graphics use images of speed and light as well as nature scenes. These would all have good connotations. Putting double lines around a person's photo



indicates that the person is dead.

Are there specific colors that have good or bad connotations?

Yes. Several studies have been done and STC has published several lists for various countries. In China, White is a color for funerals and death; red is for weddings and celebrations.

8. What is the state of web-based, Internet documentation in your country?

Roll 'em out! Public access has exploded and "everyone" wants a PC, but use of the net as a tool for the average



company hasn't kept pace. The networks/infrastructure aren't in place, yet and many everyday people are wondering what to do with this new technology. In 1990, most Chinese people did not have home phones; now wireless rules. For the large companies and multi's, the situation is about the same as for the US.

How does it affect paper documentation? Are the production standards and formatting changing because of the world wide web?

Can you make it move? And play music at the same time? Many of these issues are the same as in the US.

Do you have to write differently, that is, in shorter paragraphs? Do you have to organize material differently because it will be uploaded onto web or Internet files?



These changes are about the same as for anywhere else. The net is it's own media and is limited or enhanced by the technologies we have available. Programming conventions, bandwidth, transfer rates and other issues affect the way materials are written and presented.

<http://www.haier.com> (right middle)
Haier Company makes and markets home appliances (refrigerators, washing machines, air conditioners, etc.)

<http://www.cjol.com> (left top)
Chinese Talent Hotline (a jobs search engine, like Monster)

<http://www.sohu.com> (left bottom)
A variation of Yahoo! (which has two Chinese language versions: one for GB (PRC) and one for Big5 (Taiwan).