

Singapore cartoonist picked to adapt HK novelist's work

HO SHEO BE

A YOUNG Singaporean cartoonist has landed a contract that promises access to markets in the region beyond Singapore, including the rest of South-east Asia, Hongkong, New Zealand and Australia.

Wee Tian Beng, 28, who already has nine original comic titles to his name, was commissioned by Asiapac Books recently to adapt Hongkong novelist Ni Kuang's works into comics. The company is a Singapore publisher specialising in bilingual titles.

Ni is one of the world's bestselling Chinese language writers, alongside Hongkong swordplay novelist Jin Yong (Louis Cha) and Chiung Yao, the Barbara Cartland of Taiwan.

Ni's adventure and science-fiction novels, whose characters such as Mu Lanhua, Wisely and Yuan Zhenxia have become household names, have also been adapted for numerous cinema and television shows.

The latest, now on SBC 8, is *The Legendary Ranger*, which features Hongkong star Leon Lai as Yuan Zhenxia.

The first Ni Kuang title Wee is working on is *The Extraordinary Man Underground* (*Di Di Qi Ren*), a Wisely story.

Part of an ongoing series about a hero who keeps running into extra-terrestrial beings, it has him falling in love with the heroine, Bai Su, who becomes his wife in later stories.

The book will first be done in Chinese and then serialised in *Sunday Weekly*, a Hongkong magazine, from next month to October.

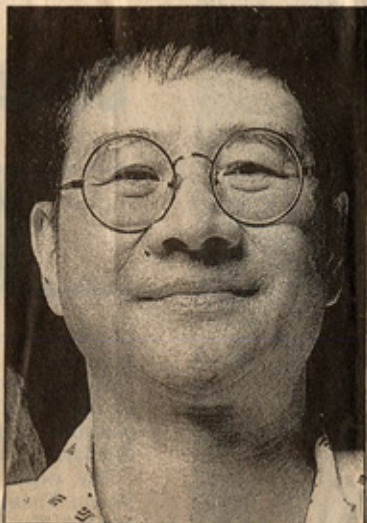
The story will also be translated into English later this year to capture a bigger market, says Ms Lim Li Kok, managing director of Asiapac.

Both the Chinese and English versions are slated to be launched in book form this December, says Ms Lim, who adds that she expects to sell at least 10,000 copies each.

She says that Ni, who has sold Asiapac the rights to adapt his works for an undisclosed sum, did not specify which titles, or limit the number of titles to be adapted by Asiapac in the next five years.

As for Wee, he says he will be paid a percentage of the royalties, but declines to reveal the exact amount.

Both he and Asiapac seem opti-



Ni Kuang ... one of the world's bestselling Chinese language writers.

mistic about their book, as there are now only a few Chinese comic book versions of Ni's novels available in the market. These were published mainly in Hongkong and Taiwan in the '80s.

Says Wee: "Doing a comic book is entirely different from writing a novel. All the descriptions made in a 600-page novel have to be retold in 160 pages of drawings with just a few words. I have to select and sketch the more exciting incidents."

He adds that drawing comics is more like directing a film. "I have to design the sets and costumes, and pay attention to ambience."

"To build up suspense, for instance, I paint two small figures overpowered by a dark background."

He adds that he feels the pressure of having to adapt a renowned author's piece as he has to stay true to the original.

One of his own titles, *Astronautic*, was serialised in a monthly comic magazine in Taiwan last year.

But, he says, on prospects in Singapore: "The market for Chinese comics here is still pretty small when compared to Hongkong, Taiwan and Japan, where the industry is more mature."

"Professional cartoonists in Singapore will just have to break into other markets."



Have brush will travel ... Wee Tian Beng says drawing comics is like directing a film. 'I have to design the sets and costumes, and create the right ambience.'