



US actress Maria Bello kisses a terracotta warrior sculpture as she presents her film *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* last month in Madrid. The movie by US director Rob Cohen is the third film of the saga after *The Mummy* and *The Mummy Returns*. PHOTOS: EPA

Will the new 'Mummy' flick hurt Maria Bello's hard-won reputation? Not to worry, she has a gold shoe to protect her

BY RYAN GILBEY
THE GUARDIAN, LOS ANGELES

At this year's San Francisco film festival, Maria Bello was honored for exemplifying brilliance, independence and integrity in her work. You couldn't argue with that, or with the festival catalogue's description of her as "the definition of fearless." Look at Bello's performance as Viggo Mortensen's complex, uninhibited wife in *A History of Violence*, in which she gets more than a little frisky over the thought that her husband might be a brutal assassin. Or her sassy waitress in *The Cooler*, where her scenes with William H Macy, as the schlub who represents her chance of happiness, were so explicit they made even non-smokers crave a post-coital cigarette once the lights came up. ("When you shake hands with her," warned a friend before I left to interview Bello, "just remember where those hands have been.")

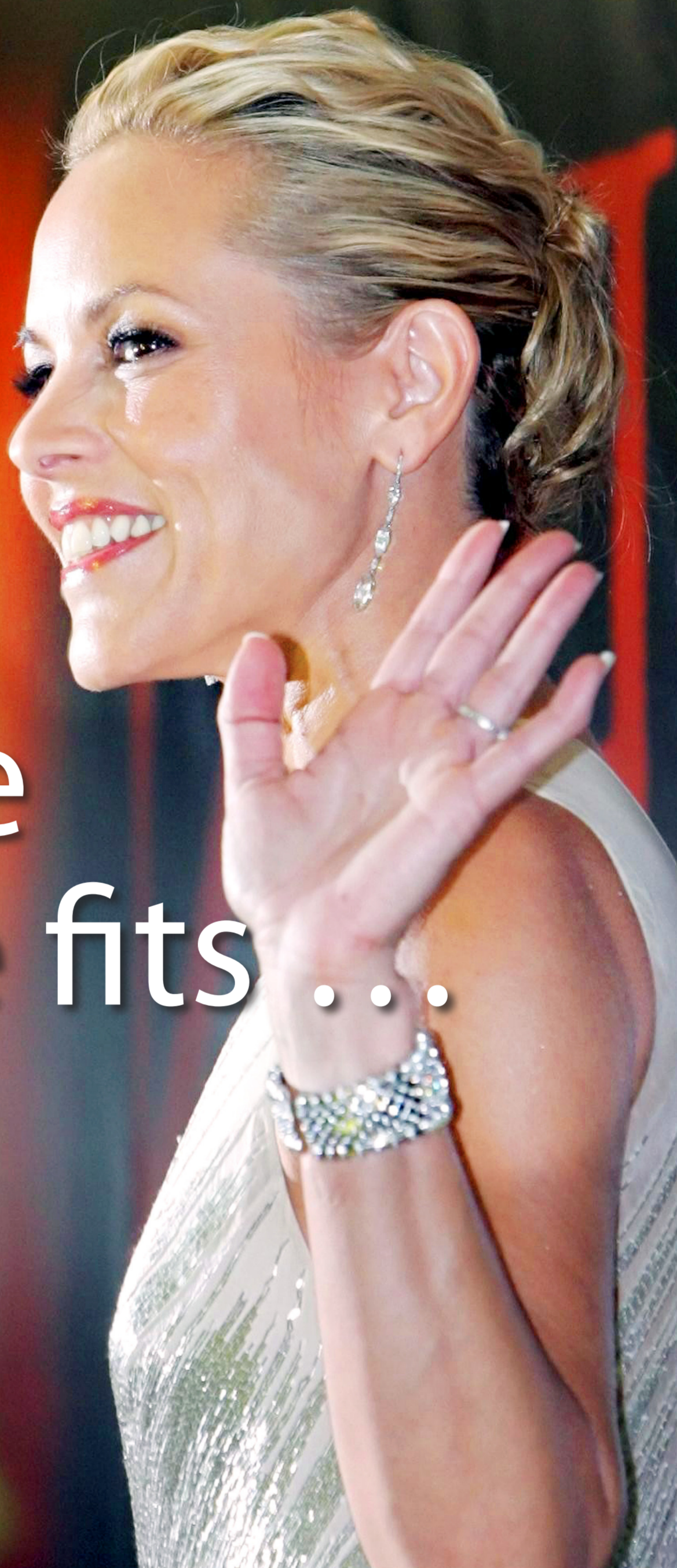
Anyone who has applauded the 41-year-old's uncompromising choices and tough-cookie persona will be puzzled by her latest role. But when you're known for being radical, perhaps the only way to wrongfoot people is to jump into bed with a Hollywood studio rather than with William H Macy. Bello has done that by starring as the adventurer Evie O'Connell in the new *Mummy* sequel, *Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*, in which she gets to wear some fetching hats, speak poppycock in a Virginia McKenna accent, and land a few punches on assorted reanimated ghouls.

"I've been telling my agent for years that I wanted an action movie, but no one saw me like that," she says when we meet in Los Angeles, her hair returned to blonde from the dyed black that she sports in the film. "Two weeks before my 40th birthday, I guess I'd given up. I mean, how many action roles are there for women over 40? Soon after that, I got a call to say they were considering me for the part."

The director, Rob Cohen, didn't even have Bello on his wish-list at first. "I said to her, 'You're so well respected. Why would you wanna do this giant popcorn movie?' She told me that after seeing *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, all her friends wanted to be Karen Allen, but she wanted to be Harrison Ford. I knew that was the way I wanted to go."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

If the shoe fits...



P14 Features 紅藍黃黑

[TECHNOLOGY REVIEW]

Organizing Chinese characters into a dictionary format is not easy. Radicals, stroke counts, phonetic sounds and of course the definitions themselves all compete for the right to bring order, and the unlucky recipient looking for a word or definition may need to be prepared to traipse between books looking for a satisfactory result. As a result, portable electronic dictionaries have become enormously popular and the available range is huge.

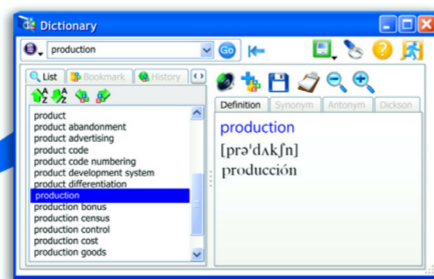
However, most are useless for people learning Chinese as a foreign language, since they are tuned for local learners. Luckily, the industry is increasingly taking note of this growing niche, and this article takes a look at two dictionary products that work as learning or reference aids.

XCome Dictionary
Pre-installed on Asus Eee PC
NT\$9,500 to NT\$20,000, depending on configuration
www.xcome.com

Well-specified dedicated portable electronic dictionaries are not cheap. Instant Technology's (快譯通) MD6700 runs in at just under NT\$10,000, and for more or less the same price Asus will sell you its Eee PC. "That computer with the funny name" is a full-fledged PC that wirelessly connects to the Internet, communicates with people with its integrated Web-cam and mic, and provides you with professional-grade

Microsoft-style software. Into this mix comes XCome's dictionary, which in Taiwan ships ready to solve your Chinese and English language problems.

XCome was invited by Asus to create dictionary and language reference software that comes pre-installed on all Linux versions of the Eee PC. As a study aid, it fits pretty well into the armory, sized as it is like a hefty paperback book. The 7-inch screen is small on the basic version and the keyboard a little pokey for those with sausage fingers, but that is what you get when you buy a small computer. Crucially, the unpainted plastic on the cheaper versions and tough solid-state disk drive encourage you to take it anywhere and treat it like a schoolbook.



XCome's Dictionary software.

PHOTO COURTESY OF XCOME

Opening the dictionary program is simple, though it is unexpectedly located in the "Work" tab of the operating system menu, rather than "Learn." The user interface is clear, and looking up a word is as straightforward as typing it into the search box. One of the software's best features is the ability to do "instant lookup" when working in other programs — including while instant messaging, browsing the Internet or working in the included Sun OpenOffice — a suite of free software that aims to challenge Microsoft Office. As you move your mouse over a word, a mini-definition pops up, and you can then jump into the full dictionary to explore more.

The dictionary works with both traditional and simplified Chinese

characters, and in most cases the English definition includes a "speak" function, where the word is read out loud, although unfortunately the same luxury is not afforded to the Chinese definition. The product is clearly more suited to learners of English, rather than of Chinese, although it is hard to blame XCome, as Asus specifies which dictionaries should be included and it would be an easy step to improve this.

This impression is reinforced when attempting to type in Chinese. The EeePC software allows typing of traditional characters in Zhuyin Fuhao (注音符號, or Bopomofo), but sadly restricts Hanyu Pinyin (漢語拼音) input to simplified characters.

Overall, the EeePC is a very impressive tool, but one that is tailored more for local learners of English, rather than for beginner-to-intermediate learners of Chinese.

Dr Eye — Han Easy 1.0
Microsoft Windows
US\$80

www.dreyc.com
Dr Eye, provider of the popular dictionary and translation program for Microsoft Windows, is probably also to blame for much of the poor English translation in Taiwan and over-enthusiastic thesaurus use. No matter — Dr Eye is now launching software aimed at learners of Chinese, so we can make the same mistakes too.

On the surface, it seems like Han Easy is a simple re-skinning of the standard Dr Eye software. The attempt at making the program appear Chinese by styling the interface like ancient scrolls of text — complete with fluted edges and antique buttons — is misguided, but you can't fault the enthusiasm.

However, the translations impress with their examples set in context, spoken output — and even animated illustrations of the strokes. Tourist attractions and local culinary specialties are proudly introduced, along with basic phrases for travel and survival. It's clear that Dr Eye is putting considerable effort into tuning this for "foreign" learners of Chinese. Guidebook and dictionary aside, instant translations are available when browsing the Internet or using instant messaging, as on the EeePC.

It seems as if that in trying to work out what foreigners need when learning Chinese, the target audience has become rather blurred, as it includes tourists, students and experts. One also might have to doubt the reality of pulling out a Windows laptop in a busy restaurant to order food. With feedback and time, the software will certainly improve and become less cartoon-like and eager to please. If you want some software for beginners, it is certainly worth a look, but otherwise the powerhouse of Wenlin is more suited to scholars and professional users.

There is more than one way to build a Chinese dictionary. By the same token, there is also more than one type of user. When selecting a dictionary, make sure you ask yourself what you need and choose accordingly. — JONATHAN BIDDLE



Dr Eye's Han Easy 1.0.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DR EYE

P14 Features

紅藍黃黑