

The Eventfulness of Translation: Temporality, Difference, and Competing Universals

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Abstract: The article seeks to develop a new angle for translation studies by rethinking its relationship to the political. It begins with the question “Can the eventfulness of translation itself be thought?” Since neither the familiar model of communication (translatable and untranslatable) nor the biblical model of the Tower of Babel (the promise or withdrawal of meaning) can help us work out a suitable answer to that question, the author proposes an alternative method that incorporates the notions of temporality, difference, and competing universals in the reframing of translation. This method requires close attention to the multiple temporalities of translation in concrete analyses of translanguaging practices, or what the author calls “differentially distributed discursive practices across languages.” The author’s textual analysis focuses on a few pivotal moments of translation in global history—chosen for their world transforming influences or actual and potential global impact—to demonstrate what is meant by the “eventfulness of translation.” These include, for example, the nineteenth-century Chinese translation of Henry Wheaton’s *Elements of International Law* or *Wanguo gongfa*, the post-World War II multilingual fashioning of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with a focus on P. C. Chang’s unique contribution, and the Afro-Asian writers’ translation project during the Cold War.

Imagine a poem fluttering down from the sky and somehow falling into your hands like snowflakes. You might think that this scenario comes from a surrealist movie, but I am referring to neither surrealist fantasy nor a writer’s delirium. It is related to one of the scandals of translation in modern history. The scandal gripped my attention when I first learned that the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States had prepared a Russian translation of T. S. Eliot’s poem *Four Quartets* and airdropped it onto the territory of the Soviet Union in the Cold War (see Stonor Saunders 2001, 248). This minor escapade quickly passed into oblivion, but the CIA’s and IRD’s (Information Research Department of the British spy

agency) worldwide promotion of post-War modernist art and literature appears singularly effective in hindsight—so effective, in fact, that Frances Stonor Saunders, who researched the CIA archives, came to the conclusion that the West won the Cold War mainly by conquering the world of arts and letters with weapons of the mind rather than with the arms race or economic sanctions that allegedly brought down the Socialist bloc.

Critics need not accept Saunders's conclusion to heed a few curious consequences of the cultural Cold War. One of them is that the majority of CIA-backed artists and writers—and there is a long list of them—have made their way into the modernist literary and artistic canon of the West and have systematically been translated as “world literature” around the globe where, for instance, George Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm* are read and taught in more languages than Michail Aleksandrovich Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*, even though the latter, in the opinion of a literary critic like myself, is a superior writer. And as we turn to twentieth-century poets, T. S. Eliot is perhaps taught in more languages of the world than are Pablo Neruda, Federico García Lorca, Nâzım Hikmet, and Bei Dao combined. It seems that the bets the CIA placed on Eliot, Orwell, abstract expressionists, and other writers or artists they favored—airborne or subterranean—paid off handsomely. Critics sometimes attribute their success to the sophisticated taste and foresight of CIA and IRD covert operators and their collaborators. There may be some truth to this, but taste or aesthetic judgment can be mystifying. It cannot explain, for example, the remarkable coincidence whereby many of the writers blacklisted by Senator McCarthy and disfavored by the CIA on non-artistic grounds during the Cold War have simultaneously been marginalized in contemporary literary studies or dropped out of the canon altogether after World War II (see, for example, Goldstein 2001, and, on blacklisting in the UK, Hollingsworth and Norton-Taylor 1988). Why is it, then, that aesthetic judgment takes a backseat when it comes to excluding certain writers but would play a decisive role when it comes to including other writers in the literary canon? This begs the further question of where politics stands in regard to literature, an old or perhaps not so old a question. Is the making of the literary canon fundamentally political? Or is it merely a case of politics interfering with literature? What role, if any, does global politics play in the

struggle over literary productions and their chances of survival in the modern world?¹ Can such politics throw fresh light on some of the blind spots in the field of translation studies?

These questions have prompted my study of translation as a political problem in this article as well as in my earlier work. The more I learn about the cultural politics of the Cold War, the less I feel inclined to treat global politics as outside interferences. Rather than closing off the boundaries of literature and politics and rendering them external to each other, I propose that, first, we examine the dynamic interplay of forces and circumstances that precipitate the act of translation as an act of inclusion and exclusion. Such forces and circumstances are not so much external to translation as prior to any translator's determination of texts to be chosen and translated while excluding other works. To anticipate my argument, the study of these processes can help illuminate the meaning of the political better than citing the intentions of writers and translators, or their idiosyncratic tastes.

Secondly, there is a formidable obstacle to overcome if we decide to undertake this line of investigation in translation studies. The obstacle, which often stands in the way of our understanding of the political, is the familiar mental image of translation as a process of verbal transfer or communication, linguistic reciprocity or equivalences, or an issue of commensurability or incommensurability. It is almost as if the promise of meaning or its withdrawal among languages were the only possible thing—blessing or catastrophe—that could happen to the act of translation.² I have critiqued these logocentric assumptions in translation studies elsewhere (Liu 1995, 1–42; Liu 1999, 13–41) and will not reiterate my position here. To do so would take us through another round of critiques of linguistics, philology, theology, the philosophy of language, and cultural anthropology which would take us too far afield. I should

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¹ Most scholars of literature who are familiar with Pierre Bourdieu's work would probably concur that canon formation cannot but be political. I find Bourdieu's notion of the literary field useful in a national setting but limited for thinking across national borders, especially when it comes to international politics in cultural life. See Bourdieu 1993.

² Although more sophisticated than that of other theorists, Walter Benjamin's conception of translation in "The Task of the Translator" ultimately endorses this manner of reasoning. In his notion of Pure Language, translation holds out a promise of meaning in messianic time, if not in secular temporality. See my critique, in Liu 1995, 14–16.

mention briefly, though, that when I proposed the idea of translanguaging practices twenty years ago, I was grappling with epistemological issues about how we study translation and deal with conceptual pitfalls in philological methods (see Liu 1995). One question I came very close to asking but did not ask in the mid-1990s was “Can the eventfulness of translation itself be thought?” This question, as it now appears to me, may lead to a more promising approach to the study of translation than either the communication model or the biblical model.³ And in the context of my essay in this special issue on translation and politics, such a question allows me to develop a new critical method for discerning and analyzing the political in regard to translation.

I have long felt that a new method and a new conceptual framework are necessary because the problem of translation troubles not only the study of language, literature, philosophy, and cultural anthropology but also cuts across other disciplines and fields. In molecular biology, for example, the idea of translation is ubiquitous and appears in the guise of a metaphor—unquestioned and under-theorized—that is used to conceptualize the biochemical processes of DNA and RNA. The mobility of this metaphor in the hands of scientists and social scientists has greatly outpaced our ability to think clearly about the idea, much less come up with a method to analyze its discursive behavior across the disciplines. In short, translation is no more just a linguistic matter than can linguistic differences be reduced to cultural differences. I believe we have reached the point where the eventfulness of translation itself must be interrogated.⁴

In the first section, below, I introduce my methodological reflections and try to develop some ideas about the multiple temporalities of translation in what I call *differentially distributed discursive practices across languages*. This analysis leads to a discussion of universalism and cultural difference in the second sec-

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³The story of the Tower of Babel has hitherto dominated our framing of translation as a theoretical problem. I am doubtful that an endless rehashing or deconstruction of this biblical story will get us any closer to a better understanding of translation. For earlier critiques of the biblical story, see George Steiner 1978; Paul de Man 1986, 73–105; and Derrida 1985, 165–208.

⁴In recent decades, new approaches have been developed here and there to open up the field beyond established translation studies. See, for example, Naoki Sakai 1997 and Liu 1995.

tion, which focuses on the multilingual making of one of the best-known documents of the post-War period: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (hereafter, UDHR) of the United Nations. Here I examine P. C. Chang's contribution as Vice-Chair on the Drafting Committee of the UDHR document—along with Chair Eleanor Roosevelt and other members—and analyze his philosophical contestation of parochial universalism at the UN in 1947–1948. I turn next to a remarkable vision of competing universalisms with a focus on Afro-Asian Writers, Conferences and their translation projects in the 1950s. The third section shows how some of these projects were organized and pursued in response to the post-War geopolitics of that time. I conclude with some final reflections on translation, and literary diplomacy and internationalism in the Cold War.

1. In light of my initial question—“Can the eventfulness of translation be thought?”—I would say yes, but not until we begin rethinking the relationship amongst text, interpretation, and event. If all acts of translation—and by extension, all textual work—take place within specific registers of temporality and spatiality, do all translated texts qualify as events? The answer hinges on how the idea of “event” is defined or philosophically worked out, but such is not the task of the present essay (I assume that the reader is familiar with Alain Badiou's rigorous philosophical work on the subject—see, especially, Badiou 2005 and 2009). Instead of indulging in exercises of pure thought or compulsive definitions which belong elsewhere, I choose to focus on the multiplicity of differentially distributed discursive fields as the site—spatiality and mobility—of any translated text and explore their temporalities as instances of events. For no event that is worthy of the name—as naming is always part of the process—could possibly exist outside of the discursive practices that organize it and make it emerge as such, much less the event of translation which always presupposes the multiplicity of discursive fields across different languages. The first step toward a fruitful understanding of the eventfulness of translation, therefore, is to develop a conceptual framework to analyze the interplay of temporality and discursive practices across languages.

Before we contemplate the possibility of such a framework, we must address a potential objection: What is to be achieved with the proposed study of the eventfulness of translation? Why not be

content with our good old philological methods? Is it not sufficient to analyze, say, a word for word rendering of a poem from English to Russian, or the case of a mismatched verb in translated text? I would not rule out the value of this kind of philological work so long as it does not limit our understanding of how a work of translation is brought into being in the first place and why a writer is deemed worthy of translation into foreign languages more than other writers. As a matter of fact, T. S. Eliot found himself compelled to address these issues when he accepted the Nobel Prize in Literature. In his acceptance speech at the Nobel Banquet in Stockholm in 1948, Eliot states:

If this were simply the recognition of merit, or of the fact that an author's reputation has passed the boundaries of his own country and his own language, we could say that hardly any one of us at any time is, more than others, worthy of being so distinguished. But I find in the Nobel Award something more and something different from such recognition. It seems to me more the election of an individual, chosen from time to time from one nation or another, and selected by something like an act of grace, to fill a peculiar role and to become a peculiar symbol. A ceremony takes place, by which a man is suddenly endowed with some function which he did not fill before. So the question is not whether he was worthy to be so singled out, but whether he can perform the function which you have assigned to him: the function of serving as a representative, so far as any man can be of thing of far greater importance than the value of what he himself has written. (Eliot 1948)

Eliot's disavowal of his unique accomplishment as a poet could have been motivated by real modesty but it inadvertently touches on the truth of what it means to "fill a peculiar role and to become a peculiar symbol" or to "perform a function" and serve "as a representative." And of what is he a representative? When the poem *Four Quartets* leapt over the spatial, linguistic, and ideological divide of the Cold War to fall from the sky—let's hope not directly into rivers—the Russian translation was probably taken by covert operators to represent good poetry from the Free World as opposed to the dogma of socialist realism. In that case, the poet could do very little about the idiosyncratic decisions of those operators who instrumentalized his work under the circumstances.

It is interesting that Eliot is keenly aware of his own passivity when it comes to being selected, being endowed, being singled out, being assigned by others, and so on. To emphasize his passive role is not to extricate him from the complicity with the CIA

but to point out that, in spite of himself, Eliot's name and poetry do indeed float around like a symbol, perhaps more mobile and airborne than other symbols, but nevertheless a symbol, which is often beyond his control but which he must live up to. Furthermore, the symbol called T. S. Eliot is assigned to function in a multiplicity of languages and discursive fields that inevitably mark a literary work for translation and international distribution. This preferential marking, I emphasize, holds the potential of turning a symbol into an event, or an event into a symbol, back and forth.

In this sense, the question as to which translated or translatable text qualifies as an event, or even a global event, depends very much on the ways in which we analyze the temporality and spatiality of its discursive mobility, hence its historicity. To bring the eventfulness of translation into critical view, one must stop thinking about translation as a volitional act of matching words or building equivalences of meanings between languages; rather we should start by taking it as a precarious wager that enables the discursive mobility of a text or a symbol, for better or for worse. The wager releases the multiplicity of the text and opens it up to an uncertain future, more often than not to an uncertain political future. The confluence of forces that enable the discursive mobility of a text or those forces that can mobilize the energy of translators or cause a poem to be airdropped from the sky should give us the first clue regarding the political in translation.

This is something I have learned from my previous study of the first Chinese translation of international law—Henry Wheaton's *Elements of International Law* (1836)—by the American missionary W. A. P. Martin and his Chinese collaborators in 1863–1864. In *The Clash of Empires*, I analyzed the military and political conflicts of the Second Opium War to understand who determined the selection of Wheaton's text and how its translation *Wangguo gongfa* (literally, “Public law of ten thousand countries”) was brought to fruition in 1863–1864 (see Liu 2006, Chapter Four). Reflecting on the temporalities of this translation and its dissemination, I was immediately struck by its peculiar eventfulness and realized that this translated text was by no means a singular event—I saw at least a triple event at the moment of its creation.

What do I mean, though, by the triple event of the *Wangguo gongfa*? The first and immediate event was the creation of the Chi-

nese text itself, a textual event that required a great deal of negotiation and compromise among the Chinese translators and the American missionary. Words and their meanings were made up, suspended, substituted, or banished in the course of translation. Next came the diplomatic event. As a matter of fact, the textual and diplomatic events became inextricably entangled before there was even a translated text. For example, the act of preferential marking in regard to which text of international law ought to be selected and which excluded from translation mirrored the diplomatic conflicts among the imperial powers in China. The timely interventions made by the American ministers William B. Reed and Anson Burlingame and by Sir Robert Hart—the second British Inspector-General of the Imperial Maritime Custom Service of the Qing—all played into the hands of Prince Gong and his Foreign Office *Zongli yamen* in Beijing, who agreed to sponsor the translation project. Even more interesting is the third aspect of this happening, which I have called the epistemological event, because the historical unfolding of the *Wangguo gongfa* was predicated on a certain view of the global that was yet to come. That process requires a somewhat different temporality—spanning the late Qing through the Republican era up to our own time—before the geopolitical consciousness could emerge among the Chinese elite. I attribute the rise of so-called global (and belatedly national) consciousness in East Asia to this triple event. In this sense, the multiple temporalities of the *Wangguo gongfa* as one of many translations of *Elements of International Law* vastly complicate our understanding of translation and its historicity. These temporalities were thoroughly embedded in the precarious wager I suggested earlier. Through the discursive mobility of the *Wangguo gongfa*, the wager in the realm of international politics unleashed the linguistic multiplicity of Wheaton's text from English to Chinese, then from Chinese to Japanese, and so on to open it up to an uncertain political future. That future, in hindsight, converged in the Japanese annexation of Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria, and other colonial enterprises, all worked out in the legal terms of the *Wangguo gongfa* or *Bankoku kōhō* (Japanese pronunciation for the *kanji* characters).

But what about cultural differences? Are cultural differences not more central to the work of translation than the problem of temporality and spatiality? Do these differences matter? My answer is yes, they do matter, but no more and no less than the uni-

versalist aspirations that inspire any acts of translation or epistemological crossings through languages in the first place. As I argued elsewhere (Liu 1999, Introduction), universalism thrives on difference; it does not negate difference so much as absorb it into its familiar orbit of antithesis and dialectic. The situated articulation of cultural difference has been embedded in the universalizing processes of past and present all along, which determine what counts as difference and why it should matter. Such processes can indeed tell us a great deal about *how cultural differences are differentially distributed through the eventfulness of translation and how these differences undergo discursive markings*—inclusion, exclusion, comparison, dispersion, cutting, abstraction, et cetera—before they appear as such from the vantage point of the universal. Indeed, it is the struggle over the universal where the political asserts itself persistently with respect to cultural differences. And as we turn our attention to the twentieth century, what could be more universal than the claims of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? In the next section, I discuss the drafting of this important document at the United Nations in 1947–1948 to illustrate how the dialectic of universalism and cultural differences is played out in translations where the struggle over words and concepts across languages becomes the very site of international politics.

2. The UN Commission on Human Rights began its discussion informally in the spring of 1947. John P. Humphrey (1905–1995), the first Director of the UN Secretariat’s Division on Human Rights, recalls that the Chairman of the Human Rights Commission, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, undertook the task of formulating a preliminary draft international bill of human rights, working with elected Vice-Chairman Peng-chun Chang (1892–1957) and the Rapporteur Charles Habib Malik (1906–1987) with the assistance of the Secretariat. On Sunday February 17, 1947, Mrs. Roosevelt invited Chang, Malik and Humphrey to meet in her Washington Square apartment for tea and discuss the preparation of the first draft of the UDHR by the Secretariat. Humphrey records a snippet of their conversation below:

There was a good deal of talk, but we were getting nowhere. Then, after still another cup of tea, Chang suggested that I put my other duties aside for six months and study Chinese philosophy, after which I might be able to prepare a text for the Committee.

This was his way of saying that Western influences might be too great, and he was looking at Malik as he spoke. He had already, in the Commission, urged the importance of historical perspective. There was some more discussion mainly of a philosophical character, Mrs. Roosevelt saying little and continuing to pour tea. (Humphrey 1984, 29)

This seems to be the uncertain first moment of what would become decades of conversations and intellectual debates that eventually gave birth to the International Bill of Human Rights in three landmark documents in the history of mankind: the UDHR (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966).

Malik was a Lebanese Christian and Thomist philosopher. He had studied philosophy in Europe before World War II working briefly with Heidegger before arriving in the United States to complete his doctoral degree in philosophy at Harvard University. Malik was a man of strong convictions, and his Christian personalism was the main source of his universalism, even though his lifelong passion was anticommunism.⁵ By contrast, Chang was a secular humanist, musician, and a man of letters. Educated in China and the United States, he was thoroughly bilingual and bicultural.⁶ Chang and Malik had different upbringings and were steeped in very different intellectual traditions, but they both were scholar-diplomats and hailed from the non-Western world. At the UN, they were joined by other non-Western members of the eighteen-member Commission on Human Rights, including Filipino diplomat Carlos Romulo, Indian feminist educator Hansa Mehta, and Latin American delegates who made important contributions to the conceptualization of the International Bill of Human Rights (see Glendon 2002, and Morsink 1999, 2245-2248).

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⁵ Malik was Edward Said's uncle by way of his marriage to Said's mother's first cousin. Said's reminiscences show some mixed feelings about Malik's politics and personality. See Edward Said 2000.

⁶ P. C. Chang (or Zhang Pengchun, in the pinyin Romanization system) was born on April 22, 1892, in Tianjin. He was the younger brother of P. L. Chang (Zhang Boling), who was the founder of Nankai University and one of the most preeminent educators in the Republic of China. Both brothers studied at Columbia University. For Chang's life, see Cui Guoliang and Cui Hong 2004, 615-710.

Upon his election as Vice-Chairman of the UN Human Rights Commission, Chang resolved to refashion the idea of “human rights” into a universal principle—more universal than ever before—and he envisioned the ground of that universalism somewhere between classical Chinese thought and the European Enlightenment. Records of the drafting processes involving the Declaration suggest that Chang was impatient with cultural relativism and engaged in a relentless negotiation of competing universals between Chinese and European philosophical traditions. His method was that of a translingual reworking of ideas across these traditions—a constant back and forth—to open up the universal ground for human rights. And he did so by crossing the conceptual threshold of linguistic differences in the face of an old conundrum of incommensurability: Does the idea of the “human” in English mean the same thing in a language that does not share its linguistic roots or philosophical traditions? On the one hand, Chang takes a pragmatic approach to the question of cultural difference and incommensurability in order to bring about consensus among member states on the Human Rights Commission and on the other hand—philosophically more interesting for us—he makes a wager of commensurability through a mode of intellectual persuasion and translation that required an unwavering commitment to his vision of universalism.

The numerous interventions Chang made in the drafting of the UDHR illustrate this commitment very well. Take Article 1, for example. The language of this article reads: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” This statement is deceptively straightforward; in actuality, the finalized words are the outcome of one of the most contentious debates on the Third Committee concerning God and religion. In what is known as the Geneva draft, which was produced by the Second Session of the Commission on Human Rights in the Geneva meetings on December 2–December 17, 1947, the draft article states: “All men are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed *by nature* with reason and conscience and should act towards one another like brothers” (italics mine; see Glendon 2002, 289). The words “by nature” in the Geneva draft were introduced by the Filipino delegate as a deistic

reference to natural law.⁷ While the Lebanese philosopher Malik wanted to substitute the words “by their Creator” for “by nature,” other delegates tried to introduce similar references to God in the UDHR (see Glendon 2002, 89). Johannes Morsink’s study shows that when the Third Committee began its meeting in the fall of 1948, two amendments were proposed to insert overt references to God in Article 1. The Brazilian delegation proposed to start the second sentence of Article 1 thus: “*Created in the image and likeness of God*, they are endowed with reason and conscience.” The Dutch delegation came up with a similar assertion of religious faith: “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family, *based on man’s divine origin and immortal destiny*, is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” These amendments led to intense debates. In the end, neither of the amendments was voted on, although the Third Committee did vote to remove “by nature” from Article 1 (the proposal was approved 26 to 4, with 9 abstentions—see Morsink 1999, 287).

Mary Ann Glendon has noted (2002, 146) that on that occasion it was Chang who carried the majority by reminding everyone that the Declaration was designed to be universally applicable. His intervention and reasoning were essential to the decision of the Third Committee to remove the phrase “by nature” from the Geneva draft. Chang’s argument was that the Chinese “population had ideals and traditions different from that of the Christian West. Yet [...] the Chinese representative would refrain from proposing that mention of them should be made in the declaration. He hoped that his colleagues would show equal consideration and withdraw some of the amendments to article 1 which raised metaphysical problems. For Western civilization, too, the time for religious intolerance was over.” The first line of Article 1, he suggested, should refer neither to nature nor to God. But those who believed in God could still find the idea of God in the strong assertions that all human beings are born free and equal and endowed with reason

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⁷ The same theological reference also framed the language of the Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776) and the American Declaration of Independence (1776), as well as numerous other documents on the rights of men which were promulgated before World War II and served as templates for the UDHR.

and conscience, but others should be allowed to interpret the language differently. (See Third Committee, Ninety-sixth meeting on October 7, 1948, 98 and Third Committee, Ninety-eighth Meeting on October 9, 1948, 114) Obviously, Mrs. Roosevelt was persuaded by his argument, for she adopted the same language when she had to explain to her American audience why the Declaration contained no reference to the Creator (Glendon 2002, 147).

Chang urged the Third Committee not to indulge in metaphysical arguments and succeeded in sparing the Committee from having to vote on theological questions. Rather than debating on human nature again, he asked the Committee to build on the work of eighteenth-century European philosophers and ancient Chinese philosophy. From this, Morsink (1999, 287) speculates that the motivation behind Chang's support for the deletion of "by nature" was that some delegates understood the phrase as underscoring a materialistic rather than a spiritual or even humanistic conception of human nature. I am inclined to think that Chang's argument is remarkably consistent with what he had termed the "aspiration for a new humanism" (Twiss 2009, 110). His new humanism goes so far as to attempt to overcome the conceptual opposition between the religious and the secular and that between spiritualism and materialism.

That vision emerged early on in one of the most interesting interventions Chang made to the Cassin draft of the UDHR. The Cassin draft was based on the first draft of the Declaration written by Humphrey the Secretariat. Article 1 of the Cassin draft was very different from what it has since become. It states: "All men, being members of one family, are free, possess equal dignity and rights, and shall regard each other as brothers" (consult "The 'Cassin Draft,'" in Glendon 2002, 276). In June 1947, when the French delegate René Cassin presented this draft to the Drafting Committee, the group revised the language of Article 1 to read: "All men are brothers. Being endowed with reason and members of one family, they are free and equal in dignity and rights." In the course of discussion, Chang found the implied concept of human nature limited and biased, so he proposed that Article 1 should include another concept as an essential human attribute next to "reason." He came up with a literal translation of the Confucian concept he had in mind, namely *ren* 仁 which he rendered as "two-man-mindedness"

(Glendon 2002, 67).⁸ Drawing implicitly on classical Chinese sources, Chang glossed this written character as a composite of the radical for “human” 人 and the written character for number “two” 二. Interpreting *ren* as “two-man-mindedness” through his epigraphic analysis of the discrete parts of the written character, Chang sought to transform the concept of “human” for human rights by regrounding that idea in the originary plurality of humanity rather than in the concept of the individual.

Yes, no equivalents of this classical Confucian concept existed in English or French to help Chang explicate the meaning of this important concept which can be traced back through the millennia-long philosophical tradition in China. That tradition, in my view, has produced an overly abundant discourse on the concept of “human,” its ethical being, and so on, but had almost nothing to say about “rights” until the second half of the nineteenth century.⁹ Chang, straddling both traditions, found himself in a strange, precarious situation of having to use words like “sympathy” and “consciousness of his fellow men” to convey what he had in mind (see Commission on Human Rights 20 June 1947). That effort misfired, and it certainly fell flat on Cassin, Mrs. Roosevelt, and all other members of the drafting committee who promptly accepted Chang’s proposal but agreed to let the word “conscience” translate the idea of *ren*. That word was added to the word “reason” to make the second line of Article 1 read: “They are endowed with reason and conscience...” With great insight, Glendon writes that “that unhappy word choice not only obscured Chang’s meaning, but gave ‘conscience’ a far from obvious sense, quite different from its normal usage in phrases such as ‘freedom of conscience’” (Glendon 2002, 67–68). Not surprisingly, the metropolitan languages were not about to surrender themselves to the Confucian term to produce a novel concept in English or French, thus missing an extraordinary opportunity to reimagine what it means to be “human” in other terms.¹⁰

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⁸ Chang’s epigraphic reading derived from the *Shuowen jiezi* (100 CE), the first dictionary of Chinese written characters compiled by the Han dynasty scholar Xu Shen.

⁹ The language of “rights” and “human rights,” like “sovereignty,” was first introduced to China via the 1864 translation of Wheaton’s *Elements of International Law* discussed above.

¹⁰ I used the word “surrender” in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s sense. In “The Politics

Perhaps all is not lost in translation. Anyone who has had the opportunity to peruse the Chinese version of UDHR prepared by the United Nations will be surprised to learn that the Confucian concept has somehow worked its way back into the document through the delegation of another term, *liangxin* (see <http://www.un.org/zh/documents/udhr/>). The word *liangxin* is made up of two written characters 良心, the character *liang* for “innate goodness” and the character *xin* for the “mind/heart.” This translation openly takes the place of “conscience” and interprets the English word back into Chang’s classical term *ren*, which articulates a more fundamental sense of what makes a human being moral than the idea of “conscience.”¹¹ The concept *liangxin* is closely associated with that of *ren* in Confucian moral philosophy, denoting the empathetic endowment of the human psyche toward another human being prior to the formation of individual conscience. In the Chinese version of the UDHR, Chang’s original explication of *ren* as “two-men-mindedness”—though lost to the English and French texts—is re-found through an associated concept.¹²

I have covered only one of numerous textual examples to be gleaned in the multilingual making of that historic document. In fact, a good number of languages besides Mandarin and classical Chinese contributed to the making of the UDHR, and these languages opened the document to the radical multiplicity and translanguagual plurality of the philosophies and cultures of the world, first in its moment of genesis and then in subsequent translations. If we but lend an ear to the plurality of voices and substitutions across numerous multilingual editions of this document, we are bound to encounter other temporalities and universals that are waiting to be rediscovered and mobilized for the benefit of future politics. The fact that Chang’s pluralist vision of the universal “human” fails to register in the texts of hegemonic metropolitan languages and

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of Translation,” she argues that the translator must “surrender to the [original] text.” See Spivak 1993, 179–200.

¹¹ The notion *liangxin* was elaborated by ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius (ca. 372–ca. 289 BCE) to explicate Confucius’s concept *ren* and was subsequently developed by Song dynasty philosophers for the Neo-Confucian theory of moral personhood.

¹² The official languages at the UN were initially English and French, while Russian, Chinese, and a couple of other languages were soon added to the list of official languages, rendering the linguistic landscape extremely variegated.

philosophical traditions suggests that it will take more than individual scholar-diplomats, no matter how resourceful they are, to overcome the tremendous odds of East–West or South–North disparity in the arbitration of moral discourse. Within less than a decade after the UN adopted the UDHR, however, self-determination or national independence movements swept across the globe and, suddenly, another extraordinary opportunity emerged whereupon the peoples of Asia and Africa began to stage their competing universals worldwide. Following the 1955 Bandung Conference, a number of worldwide events played a critical role in this episode of Afro-Asian solidarity to which we now turn.

3. I first developed an interest in Afro-Asian Writers, Conferences while researching the origins of the literary journal *Shijie wenxue* [World Literature] that began publication in the People’s Republic of China in 1959.¹³ As I was going through the past issues of Chinese translations of poets and writers from around the world, the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe’s name caught my attention immediately. His novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) was printed in the February issue of 1963 (select chapters) and was read in Chinese translation long before this novel became known to the mainstream readership of the West, and certainly long before Achebe’s works were relegated to so-called Anglophone literature. I was struck by the fact that Achebe had been recognized first as a distinguished *Afro-Asian writer* in China, Egypt, India, the Soviet Union, and other countries before he became a postcolonial Anglophone (African) writer, as he is currently known and taught in the English departments of American academia and elsewhere. And there is a world of difference between these two modes of recognition. To my mind, that difference lies mainly in the forgotten history of post-Bandung Afro-Asian writers’ interactions and solidarity in 1958–1970. I should emphasize that a great deal of its politics lies in the work of translation and its organization in the name of world literature.

The first of the Afro-Asian Writers’ Conferences—an offshoot of the newly formed Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organi-

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¹³ The journal was originally called *Yiwen* [Translations] when it was founded in 1953 and changed its name to *Shijie wenxue* in 1959 after the first Afro-Asian Writers’ Conference in Tashkent in 1958.

zation which had been inspired by the Bandung Conference and met in Cairo on December 26, 1957¹⁴—took place in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in Soviet Central Asia in October 1958. Asian and African delegates and Western observers flew in from all directions and landed in the new airport of Tashkent. Reporting on the arrival of these airborne poets and novelists, one journalist observed: “[W]e had come to meet the writers of Asia and Africa, gathering for the first time. A new airport; a smiling reception committee; a drive along avenues of acacia and poplar hung with coloured lamps and banners lettered in Chinese, Arabic, and Hindi” (Parker 1959, 107–111).¹⁵ The conference was attended by leading writers of thirty-six countries, including renowned Turkish poet Nâzım Hikmet, Yashpal, Mulk Raj Anand and Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay of India, Ananta Toer Pramoedya of Indonesia, Burma’s U Kyaw Lin Hyun, Cambodia’s Ly Theam Teng, Vietnam’s Pham Huy Thong, African American writer W. E. B. Du Bois, and Mao Dun and Zhou Yang who led a delegation of twenty-one members from China.

Interestingly, W. E. B. Du Bois and his wife Shirley were invited to Tashkent as the honored guests of the first Afro-Asian conference in October 1958. Long deemed a dangerous radical in the eyes of the US government, Du Bois drew the only standing ovation to an individual from the Asian and African authors at the conference. In an informal discussion of African unification problems with writers from Nigeria, Madagascar, Ghana, Somaliland, Senegal, and Angola, Du Bois told them that “a socialist Africa was inevitable” (Horne 1985, 321). Such was the optimism of the Tashkent conference.

Still, the Third World delegates represented a broad spectrum of literary and political persuasions. They came together not to debate about their national or political priorities but to discuss an agenda that concerned them all. First, what role would the development of literatures and cultures in different Asian and African countries play in the progress of mankind, for national independ-

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¹⁴ On the history of the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization and China’s role in it, see Neuhauser 1968.

¹⁵ For the day-to-day events, see the diaries of Guo Xiaochuan, who served on the preparatory committee of the Tashkent conference in Guo Xiaochuan in 2000. See also Sh ichi Kat ’s (1999) reminiscence of his representation of Japan on the same preparatory committee.

ence against colonialism, for peace and freedom throughout the world? Many writers commented on how colonialism has destroyed traditional cultural ties between Asia and Africa. Efua Theodora Sutherland, representing the Ghana Society of Writers, saw that occasion as “a step towards the reunification of the disrupted soul of mankind,” further remarking that

It is up to us to seek practical ways and means of strengthening our cultural links. There is a need to channel to our continent some of your best literary contributions. We need to know the works of Asian and African writers, to be in touch with the wider horizon which those works represent, and which have hitherto been unavailable in our country. (quoted in Parker 1959, 109)

Her enthusiasm was shared by all and it was decided that a Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian Writers would be set up for the purpose of maintaining future interaction and activities and that its headquarters would be located in Sri Lanka, then still known as Ceylon (these were moved to Cairo a few years later).

Unlike the scholar-diplomat P. C. Chang, who staged a lone battle at the UN to recast the moral concept of “human” on the basis of plurality (*ren*, “two-human-mindedness”) before granting universal validity to the concept of human rights, the Asian and African writers pursued a much more ambitious course of action. They mounted a full range of activities, forming international alliances, setting up transnational institutions, and creating journals to educate themselves and educate each other through translations, conversation, and so on. In the following decades, for example, the Bureau coordinated numerous meetings, translations, and publications. There were, no doubt, attempts made by the Soviet Union and China to set the political agenda, either for the purpose of pushing the world revolution or undermining each other when the relationship between the Kremlin and Beijing deteriorated. But, just as in the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization over the years, these attempts often met with resistance from the United Arab Republic (Egypt), India, and other Third World countries (on this history, see Shinn and Eisenman 2012, 60–61, and Larkin 1971). Clearly, no one wanted a USSR-front organization. Egypt and India played a central role in the Permanent Bureau. After the second Afro-Asian Writers’ Conference in Cairo, the Bureau started a quarterly called *Lotus* in Arabic, English and French and launched a

prize for African and Asian literature—named the Lotus Prize—to honor distinguished poets and writers from Asia and Africa. Novelists and poets honored by this prize include Chinua Achebe from Nigeria, Ousmane Sembène from Senegal, Ngugu wa Thiong’o from Kenya, Malek Haddad from Algeria, and Mahmoud Darwish from Palestine. It is often forgotten that that these Afro-Asian writers—now thoroughly canonized as Anglophone or postcolonial writers in English Departments across North America and elsewhere after the Cold War—first emerged within a global socialist intellectual network where their recognition by the West as “post-colonial” writers was neither necessary nor important. Instead, the Afro-Asian writers were striving toward a new humanism—a universalism about life and liberty—that was pitted against colonial violence.

This was unequivocally expressed by Mulk Raj Anand who led the Indian delegation to the second Afro-Asian Writers’ conference in 1962. In his speech, Anand elaborated the new humanism as follows:

Our literatures and arts are thus the weapons of a new concept of man—that the suppressed, the disinherited and the insulted of Asia and Africa can rise to live, in brotherhood with other men, but in the enjoyment of freedom and equality and justice, as more truly human beings, individuals, entering from object history, into the great history when there will be no war, but when love will rule the world, enabling man to bring the whole of nature under self-conscious control for the uses of happiness, as against despair. (Arora 2007, 17–18)

Interestingly, Garcia Lorca’s poem “Ode to Walt Whitman” was evoked to express the sentiment of the socially engaged writers from Asia and Africa:

I want the strong air of the most profound night
to remove flowers and words from the arch where you sleep,
and a black child to announce to the gold-craving whites
the arrival of the reign of the ear of corn.¹⁶

Anand states that the mission of the writer is to

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¹⁶ Here I have substituted a translation of this poem by Stephen Spender and J. L. Gili, in Lorca and Allen 1995, 135.

act as the conscience of the people aware of their pain. To have a creative vision of all that affords joy in life, to release the vital rhythms in the personality, to make man more human, to seek apperceptions of freedom from all forms of slavery and to give this freedom to other people throughout the world—in fact to awaken men to the love of liberty, which brings life and more life. (Arora 2007, 18)

This call for freedom was not empty rhetoric but was echoed by writers from the socialist bloc as well as from the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa. To those who had personally experienced slavery and racial and economic exploitation under colonialism, liberty had a specific meaning: it meant decolonization, national liberation, and world peace in the spirit of the Bandung Conference.

The Afro-Asian Writers' Conference in Tashkent made a tremendous impact on China. Almost immediately, the journal *Yiwen* (Translations), which used to predominantly feature Soviet and Western authors, began to shift focus and publish works by Iranian, Iraqi, Egyptian, and Mozambique writers. In January 1959, the journal was renamed *Shijie wenxue* [World literature] and began to devote its bimonthly issues to systematic translations of Afro-Asian writers, African American writers, and, later, Latin American writers. By 1962, more than 380 titles from over thirty Asian and African countries had been printed in its pages. Irene Eber's survey indicates that by 1964 and 1965, Afro-Asian and Latin American writers began to outnumber Western authors. The October 1964 issue was specifically dedicated to black literature, which included African writers as well as African American writers such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Margaret Walker (on this, see Eber 1994, 34–54).

Following the Tashkent conference, the Chinese Writers Union extended invitations to their Afro-Asian friends and, over the years, many of them visited China more than once. The great Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer made his second trip to China after the Tashkent conference. His interactions with Ding Ling, Mao Dun, Guo Moruo, Zhou Yang, and other Chinese writers were frequent and helped transform his ideas about what a writer's responsibility was toward society. Hong Liu's study suggests that Pramoedya's contact with the Chinese delegation and the Chinese embassy goes back to as early as the 1955 Bandung Conference. After that, Pramoedya began to follow the works of Chinese writers

and came to admire the social prestige enjoyed by socialist writers in the PRC, “where literature is considered to be one of the political and economic forces” and where writers were paid generously for their publications, in stark contrast with conditions in Indonesia (see Liu 1996, 124).

Pramoedya regarded Mao Dun and Lu Xun as the foremost writers of modern China, and he not only translated some portions of Lu Xun’s short story collection *Diary of a Madman* but also published his translation of one of Ding Ling’s long articles, “Life and Creative Writing.”¹⁷ Perhaps more than anyone else in Indonesia, Pramoedya took the socialist credo of “living with peasants and workers” to heart and fervently believed that writers should go into social life and live with the people. He himself “went down” to the countryside of the Banten area to investigate the lives of peasants and miners.

Conclusion

I began my discussion by trying to raise some new questions about translation and its relationship to the political. My approach has been to work through the ideas of event, temporality, difference, and competing universals as a conceptual alternative to the familiar model of linguistic communication or the theological model with which we are all familiar in translation studies. The alternative method I have developed involves analyzing the multiple temporalities of translation in differentially distributed discursive practices across languages. To bring such a method to bear on concrete analyses of the eventfulness of translation, I have taken the reader through the nineteenth-century translation of Henry Wheaton’s *Elements of International Law* in Chinese, the post-World War II multilingual fashioning of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with a focus on P. C. Chang’s contribution as well as the Afro-Asian writers’ collective translation projects during the Cold War.

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¹⁷ See “Duer Fanwen Ji” (An interview with Toer), *Hsin Pao* (Jakarta), November 17, 1956; cited in Liu 1996, 125. It is unclear if Pramoedya’s translation of Lu Xun’s short story collection (Catatan Harian Orang Gila) was published, although his translation of Ding Ling’s “Hidup dan Penulisan Kreatif” did appear in the journal *Indonesia* 7,3 (March 1956): 102-110.

Just as I was about to bring my reflections to a close, one of Benedict Anderson's observations about Pramoedya came back to haunt me. Anderson has been familiar with Pramoedya's work and communicated with this Indonesian writer on numerous occasions. One afternoon, as I was reading Anderson's discussion of Pramoedya in *Language and Power*, I was struck by this statement: "More broadly, Pramoedya gave me an inkling of how one might fruitfully link the shapes of literature with the political imagination" (Anderson 1990, 10). What could Anderson have meant by "the political imagination"?

This question has led me to speculate whether Anderson's personal correspondence with Pramoedya had touched upon the Afro-Asian Conference in Tashkent, where Pramoedya had been the leader of the Indonesian delegation. I wonder further if Anderson became aware of Pramoedya's extensive interactions with Mao Dun and Ding Ling and of his published translation of the Chinese writers. It is interesting that Anderson has translated Pramoedya for the English-speaking audience just as the latter had translated Ding Ling or Lu Xun for his Indonesian audience. These unexpected crossings of translations suggest that the future itself might be the ultimate preserve of multiple temporalities. I am hopeful that the legacies of the Afro-Asian Writers' Conferences— their political imagination, their encouragement to think differently about the future of universalism, their ambitious translation projects along with their reinvention of world literature— will live on through the temporalities of potential translations yet to come.

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