

On the Translation of “Association” in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*

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Abstract: There are many Chinese versions of *The Communist Manifesto* and all of them had problems with the translation of foreign concepts and words, which triggered debates for years. One of the most interesting questions in the debates on the translation of the Manifesto is how to translate (Ger.) Assoziation / “association” and how Marx understood this concept.

Keywords: Manifesto of the Communist Party, old bourgeois society, association, *kyoudou syakai*, *lianhe ti*.

The year 2018 not only marks the 200th birthday of Karl Marx, but also the 170th anniversary of the publication of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, co-authored by Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Half a century after the *Manifesto*, in 1899, Chinese readers could acquaint themselves for the first time with some passages of it in the Shanghai monthly *The Review of the Times* (*Wanguo gongbao* 万国公报). In the following fifty years, apart from different partial translations, a total of seven complete translations of the *Manifesto* were published in China: in August 1920, Chen Wangdao 陈望道 completed the first complete Chinese translation, based on a Japanese version (Ishikawa, 1999: 14-17), which was published by the “Shanghai Socialism Study Society” (*Shanghai shehui zhuyi yanjiu she* 上海社会主义研究社); in 1930, the Huaxing book company (*Huaxing shuju* 华兴书局) published Hua Gang’s 华岗 translation, which was based on the English translation; in 1938, the Liberation Press (*Jiefang she* 解放社) in Yan’an followed with a translation based on the German original, done by Cheng Fangwu 成仿吾 and Xu Bing 徐冰; in August 1943, the same Liberation Press published a new version of Cheng’s and Xu’s translation, revised by Bo Gu 博古 on the basis of a Russian translation; in April 1945, Commercial Press (*Shangwu yinshu guan* 商务印书馆) published Chen Shoushi’s 陈瘦石 translation,

again based on the English version; in October 1947, Cheng’s and Xu’s 1938 translation was revised by Qiao Guanhua 乔冠华 (better known as Qiao Mu 乔木) and published in its revised form by China Press (*Zhongguo chubanshe* 中国出版社) of Hong Kong. Finally, in 1948-9, Moscow Foreign Language Publishing provided a new translation by Xie Weizhen 谢唯真 et al., based on the German original and the former works of Chen Wangdao, Chen Fangwu, Xu Bing, and Bo Gu. This was the famous “100 year edition” and the last complete translation published since then in the People’s Republic of China.

The Communist Manifesto exerted a huge influence on the Chinese revolution. In the subsequent period of “reform and opening” and development of the market economy, however, the interpretation of the contradictions between the Chinese reality and the Marxist classics, including the *Manifesto*, posed considerable problems. It was proposed, for example, that the phrase (Ger.) *Aufhebung (des Privateigentums)* / “abolition (of private property)”, originally translated as *xiaomie* 消灭 (“elimination”), should actually be translated as *yangqi* 扬弃 (“sublation”). After some debate, the official ruling was that, based on the historical background of the *Manifesto* and after examining the French and English translations (the latter one having been revised by Engels himself), the translation as *xiaomie* was fine (Yin, 2011: 29-31). For the famous last phrase of the *Manifesto*, Gao Fang 高放 has counted 74 different translations into Chinese since 1903 and pointed out that, in the 1888 English translation approved by Engels, the last sentence was given as “Working men of all Countries, Unite!” instead of the German *Proletarier aller Länder...* / “proletarians of all countries...”. Gao thought that *wuchanzhe* 无产者 (“proletarians”) in the Chinese version also did not accord with the realities of the present and should be changed to *laodongzhe* 劳动者 (“workers”), similar to Engel’s translation (Gao, 2008: 5-11). Yu Keping 俞可平, who at the time was deputy director of the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, argued that this was absolutely unnecessary, as in the special context in which the *Communist Manifesto* was written, “proletarians” and “working men” had the same meaning (Yu, 2006: 4-10).

Maybe one of the more interesting questions in the debates on the translation of the *Manifesto* is how to translate (Ger.) *Assoziation* / “association” and how Marx understood this concept. It appears at the

end of the second chapter of the *Manifesto*, “Proletarians and Communists”:

An die Stelle der alten bürgerlichen Gesellschaft mit ihren Klassen und Klassen-Gegensätzen tritt eine Assoziation, worin die freie Entwicklung eines Jeden, die Bedingung für die freie Entwicklung Aller ist (Marx, 1848: 15) .¹

The now current Chinese translation is based on *Makesi Engesi quanji* 马克思恩格斯全集 (The Complete Works of Marx and Engels) from 1958 and reads as follows:

代替那存在着各种阶级以及阶级对立的资产阶级旧社会的, 将 是一个以各个人自由发展为一切人自由发展的条件的联合体 (Zhonggong zhongyang Makesi Engesi Liening Sidalin zhuzuo bianyiju, 1958: 491)

Marx thought that, after having gone through the contest between classes, what would replace the “old bourgeois society” is the “association”. This word stems from the Latin *associatio*, its root is (lat.) *socius* or “partner”. Before he wrote the *Manifesto*, Marx had already discussed “association” in other writings; one can say that the phrase “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” in the *Manifesto* is a continuation of earlier ideas of Marx. However, translating *Assoziation* into Chinese is not an easy task.

In 1904, the famous Japanese socialist Sakai Toshihiko 堺利彦 translated the *Manifesto* almost completely (he did not translate the last chapter); in 1906 he provided a full translation in collaboration with Kōtoku Shūsui 幸徳秋水. They rendered the end of the second chapter (see above) as follows:

要するに、吾人は階級と階級対立とより成れる旧紳士社会を廃し、之に代ふるに、各人自由に発達すれば万人亦従つて自由に発達するが如き、協同社会を以てせんと欲するなり。(Sakai, 1904: 7)

In his introduction, Sakai Toshihiko specifically mentioned how difficult it was to translate “old bourgeois society”, as he could not really find an equivalent term and come up with anything better than *kyushinshi*

syakai 旧紳士社会; for “association”, they chose *kyoudou syakai* 協同社会. Their translation was based on the 1888 English version of the *Manifesto*, in which “association” appeared in five different grammatical forms and word combinations that were rendered as *dan tai* 团体, *kumi ai* 組合, *kyou ryoku* 協力, *kyoudou* 協同, and *kyoudou syakai* 協同社会, respectively. The Meiji era Japanese had already very early translated “association”: in Inoue Tetsujirō’s 井上哲次郎 *Tetsugaku jii* 哲學字彙 it was rendered as *rengou* 聯合 and *tougou* 投合 in the 1881 edition (Inoue, 1881:8), and as *kaidou* 会同 and *kessya* 結社 in the 1884 edition (Inoue, 1884:12). Sakai Toshihiko’s decision to render it as *kyoudou syakai* makes clear he put a lot of effort to convey the full meaning of “association”: *kyoudou* refers to the joining together of humans to become “partners”; the loan word *syakai*, in contrast to the Japanese word *seken* 世間, made clear it is not a natural connection, but an organisation consciously created by humans, for and among themselves (Abe, 1995). In 1920, when Chen Wangdao translated the text into Chinese, he followed the Japanese rendering:

总之：我们要废去阶级对抗和阶级所组成的旧式资本家社会，换上各个人都能够自由发达，全体才能够自由发达的协同社会。(Chen, 1920: 36)

The Chinese *xietong shehui* and the Japanese *kyoudou syakai* are identical; *kyushinshi syakai* 旧紳士社会 was replaced in the Chinese translation by *zibenjia shehui* 资本家社会, which also was a Japanese loanword and reflected later changes in the Japanese translation. It needs to be emphasized that, although the loanword *shehui* 社会 (“society”) in Chinese was ambiguous in meaning, it was identical with the Japanese *syakai* insofar as it referred to a man-made organisation, in contrast to the naturally formed *qun* 群 (Vogelsang, 2012:155-192). After Chen Wangdao, “association” was translated in the following ways:

xietong shehui 协同社会 (Hua Gang, 1932)

jiti shehui 集体社会 (Cheng Fangwu & Xu Bing, 1938)

xin de shehui 新的社会 (Chen Shoushi, 1945)

tuanti 团体 (Bo Gu, 1948)

xiehui 协会 (Xie Weizhen, 1953)

If one considers these renderings carefully, one will find that there are subtle differences in meaning, but on the most general level they all refer to the same: an organisation created by and between humans. Nonetheless, as in China there are different kinds of organisations referred to by the same terms and confusion easily arises, the 1958 official translation *lianhe ti* 联合体 was created to clearly distinguish “association” from the other terms. What is more important, Marx explicitly pointed out that, for an “association”, the free development of each individual is the precondition for the free development of all. If this condition is not met, an “association” cannot be established, and there is no way to replace the “old bourgeois society”. Thus, there is an individualist side in Marx as well as a collectivist one.

Notes

Trans. by Stefan Christ, Department of Chinese Language and Culture, University of Hamburg.

¹ The English translation reads as follows: In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. (Marx, 1888: 22)

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