CO-TRANSLATION : The Writer's View

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I. Theory

An old Chinese proverb says: "Three stinking cobblers can make one Chu-Ko Liang." Nieh and Engle are only two, but we try, we try! Already co-translation begins. For the sake of the American reader who does not recognize Chu-ko Liang, should our footnote say, wise man, shrewd, clever, sagacious? As always, keep it simple; say, wise. Sometimes when we translate together, struggling to find what the original poet or novelist really wanted to tell us, we become so immersed in the text that we feel that the other writer is there in the room urging more care, more time, in taking out of his Chinese the emotionalized idea or image he put into it. Thus, the word "co" means three, rather than two.

We know the arguments against translation, that what falls on the page is only a shadow. We try to put blood in that shadow.

At once we must restrict our remarks to literature. Technical translation must be absolutely rigid and precise, for it is dealing with facts and formulas. Yet even formal translation can have its risks. Dale S. Cunningham, in 1970 President of the American Translators Association, wrote in The World of Translation, "Indeed, the very survival of civilization as we know it may some day come to depend on translation. It has been related that a short phrase in the Japanese reply to an Allied ultimatum towards the close of the Second World War could have several meanings. The translator selected one which sealed the door to further communication and dialogue. As a result, the first atomic bombs were dropped." It is our conviction that, for the rest of the lurid twentieth century, we translate well, or we all die.

In a letter to the Earl of Burlington, Alexander Pope, translator of the Greek Iliad into rigid rimed couplets (blood from the deadly swords had to fall into mud, not dirt or earth), wrote that translators are "the saddest

pack of rogues in the world." But are they worse than writers?

The world has always lived by translation. However one may feel that translation is distortion, it must be given its true power. When the Nazis conquered Poland, they banned all books in English translation. Imagine: that immense, mechanized army, the most powerful in history, frightened that an occupied people might read books in a foreign language.

We are today the result of our own language and of all translations into it. Mankind has been intensely altered by translations of Buddha, spreading out of India into China and Japan (the monk who put those polysyllabic Sanskrit words into monosyllabic Chinese characters committed one of the great intellectual acts in the world's history). Christianity moved over the moving earth because the Bible was translated into all languages. In 1603 King James met with his bishops at Hampton Court and ordered a new translation in which spirit and meaning were to be emphasized. Forty seven were appointed. The result of that massive co-translation was one of the greatest works in the English language.

Suppose that Karl Marx had remained in German, untranslated, those dense paragraphs. Consider what translating him has done to the twentieth century. Translation transforms cultures. Hundreds of millions of people are altered by words.

When Hsuan Tsang entered Ch'ang-an on his return with Buddhist texts, he walked on flowers, to music and incense (just the way we arrived at the Sheraton Hong Kong).

The old Italian phrase, "traduttore, traditore," the translator is a traitor, should be changed to read, "Chi non e traduttore, e traditore," who does <u>not</u> translate is a traitor. The American poet Robert Frost said that poetry was what is lost in translation. We believe that poetry is that strong substance which survives translation. An echo of a poet's voice on a page is better than an empty page. Chaucer and Shakespeare survived by translations. Great ages of literature, as Ezra Pound said, are great ages of

translation. When we read Aquinas in English translation, we are reading a powerful mind who used a Latin translation of Aristotle.

We admit all the risks of translation, by one person or by two. A Frenchman translated the name of that long American highway running along the Atlantic coast from Maine to Florida, US 1, as "US moi," mistaking the numeral "1" for the personal pronoun "I." Word for word may be error for error. James J. Y. Liu has a superb example of the many meanings of a translated word: "For instance, the sentence, 'I saw a man with a telescope' could mean either 'I saw a man who was carrying a telescope,' or 'Using a telescope, I saw a man,' but no one in his right mind would take it to mean 'I habitually use a telescope to saw a man,' although I am told that a computer actually produced all three possible meanings. In translating Chinese, one would do well to avoid emulating the computer!" That is what co-translations tries to prevent, by having one voice accustomed to the life of the language into which the text is translated.

Our primary point is that writing itself, the original poem or novel, is an act of translation, the writer transferring the intention in his head into the words on the page. The French poet Paul Valéry, as strict a writer as this century has read in any language, wrote: "Writing anything at all, as soon as the act of writing requires a certain amount of thought and is not a mechanical and unbroken inscribing of spontaneous inner speech, is a work of translation exactly comparable to that of transmuting a text from one language into another....The poet is a peculiar type of translator, who translates ordinary speech, modified by emotion, into 'language of the gods,' and his inner labor consists less of seeking words for his ideas than of seeking ideas for his words and paramount rhythms." We see Valéry as believing what we do--the translator of an original

work should be original himself, recreating the creation of the primary text, but in a form congenial to his own language. Waley himself experimented by translating some of Wordsworth's iambics into less restricted English. His comment was, "a great improvement, I assure you." Waley once flew from London to Paris and back one day in order to verify the translation of one word. That is translating at its highest.

One of the most curious examples of single person translation is that of Lin Shu, who understood no foreign language, but listened when a text he could not understand was read to him. When he was asked why he translated Dickens into ancient Chinese instead of modern speech, he said that "Because ancient Chinese is what I am good at." He also wrote, as Waley quoted him, "I have a number of friends who from time to time bring me Western books. I cannot read any Western language, but these friends translate them aloud to me and I have come to be able to distinguish between the different styles of writing as surely as I recognized the footsteps of people in my house." Lin Shu published some 160 translations, all of them "co" in that in each case he had another Chinese tell him what the original meant. He was like a blind person who describes a piece of sculpture by caressing it with his hands. In spite of the problems Lin Shu had because he did not know other languages, he succeeded. Waley refers to him as a "transmitter, revitalizing Chinese fiction with European versions. A translator should be someone "who delights in handling words." Without the "co" aspect of his work, he would have published nothing from other languages. Waley says he improved the original:

> It is perhaps by his translation of Dickens that he is best known. He translated all the principal Dickens novels, and I have compared a number of passages with the original. To put Dickens into classical Chinese would on the face of it seem to be a grotesque undertaking. But the results are not at all grotesque. Dickens, inevitably, becomes a rather different and to my mind a better writer. All the over-elaboration, the overstatement and uncurbed garrulity disappear. The humour is there, but is transmuted by a pre-

cise, economical style; every point that Dickens spoils by uncontrolled exuberance, Lin Shu makes quietly and efficiently.

It has been said that translations are like wives: the beautiful are unfaithful, and the faithful are ugly. A more exact rendering would be: faithfulness to each separate word found in a dictionary is to be unfaithful to the imaginative sense and feeling of the original. The range of English must honor the range of Chinese.

As writers, we believe that the tiny prefix "co" is an insight not only to translation, but to creativity itself. The poet has many voices inside arguing for one word against another word. There is a manuscript of a poem by Emily Dickinson at Harvard, complete save for a blank in one line. In the margin the poet wrote many alternative words. You can read them, or supply others, and make your own instant Emily. This is standard procedure for any poet, translating emotions into concepts and language.

D.S. Carne-Ross wrote about Fenellosa: "A Harvard-trained scholar of Spanish origin reads classical Chinese poetry with a couple of Japanese professors, his notes pass into (Ezra) Pound's hands." The Japanese professors had an outdated knowledge of Chinese, their versions of Chinese poems were heavily influenced by Japanese attitudes. Yet Pound made, from this astonishing "co" effort, "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter," one of the finest poems in American English. Waley himself translated the poem, but its language is softer, less rhythmical. This confirms our previous comment that writing is itself translation, and that translation is a creative act. The word translate itself is rich with meanings. It means to move holy Christian relics from one place to another, to transfer a bishop from one place to another. In the 17th century, Americans spoke of themselves as having been translated from England to the wild continent which was later to be called the United States. Still wild.

The conventional notion of translation is one person with

two languages. The most important is the language <u>into</u> which the text is translated, for the reader is wholly dependent on it. We use, in a sense, three languages: Nieh's Chinese, Nieh's English, and Engle's English. This is a modest "co" effort. In brief, the imagination of the poet must be answered by the imagination of the translator (s). A translation trying to be identical with the original in word and form will be a parody. Literal is important for linguistic interests, but what really matters is for the translators to reproduce the sense of the original in the sound of another language. As Waley said, in translating literature the feeling as well as grammatical sense must be represented: "The author puts his feelings--exasperation, pity, delight--into the original. They are there in his rhythm, his emphasis, his exact choice of words, and if the translator does not <u>feel</u> while he reads, and simply gives a series of rhythmless dictionary meanings, he may think he is being 'faithful,' but in fact he is totally misrepresenting the original." The translator is like a performer who "translates" a score into magical sound.

Thus, it is impossible to believe today that Herbert A. Giles, who knew so much about the Chinese language, should have submitted this stanza as a decent example of Chinese verse. It is quite simply boring English, disgracing Tu Fu:

The setting sun shines low upon my door
  Ere dusk enwraps the river fringed with spring;
Sweet perfumes rise from gardens by the shore,
  And smoke, where crews their boats to anchor bring.

What Giles needed was to work with an English poet or, as in the case of Waley, to be himself a poet. Curiously, the prose of Giles in his <u>A History of Chinese Literature</u> is supple and expressive. It is only when he

turns to verse that he becomes dull, trite, strained, distorting word order and committing dreadful rimes.

As writers, we believe that Asian literature loses so much in translation, we must try to replace it with the most vivid and meaningful English, even where we may add or omit some words for the sake of dramatizing what we feel is the intent of the whole text. We put our languages, our heads and our sensibilities together in an act of literary co-operation. Our hope is to make joint translations of the original, Nieh controlling the sense and Engle the English, with Nieh's own [illegible] English, in an effort to make the poem <u>sound</u> like poetry, rather than trying to make it sound like the Chinese lines.

We also believe that it is better to read the greatest works translated in the best versions from foreign literatures we do not know, than to read inferior or minor writing in English. One of the superb sonnets in English is that of John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer." A small red-headed Cockney youth who did not know Greek wrote the best English poem on a Greek poet because a fellow Englishman who did not write poetry had put Homer into admirable English. One of the most extraordinary examples of translation preceding the original is the title of Marcel Proust's series of novels, "A la recherche du temps perdu," which F. Scott Moncrieff did not translate directly. Instead, he went to the Elizabethan period and used Shakespeare's line, "I summon up remembrance of things past." This is to say that, when translating imaginative writing, an imagination is crucial. In our case, we feel that "co-imagination" is crucial.

We believe there are many ways of translating. Waley's way, transferring formal, rimed stanzas into free, rhythmical lines, is one. Robert Lowell's <u>Imitations</u>, in which the poet possesses the original poem and transforms it into his own voice, is another. In Lowell's case, so violent are the changes he makes, it is as if he tore down a mosque and built a cathedral. Still, it remains a religious structure.

There is also translation by committee, such as the nineteen Japanese and one Westerner who put <u>Manyōshū</u> into Eng-

lish; that one Englishman, however, was the poet Ralph Hodgson, who seems to have controlled the final versions. Waley commented: "The Japanese committee finds it 'regrettable' that Japanese literature has hitherto been translated by foreigners. I believe, on the contrary, that it is almost always better for the translator to be writing in his own language. It is in the highest degree improbable that a writer will command all the resources of a foreign language even as regards vocabulary, and when it comes to rhythm he is almost certain to be completely floored." We agree, which is why we believe that a person who not only knows the original language, but has written books in it, as Nieh has, should work with a person who has published books in the language used for the translation, as Engle has. As the Bengali poet Amiya Chakrvarty commented, one should translate into a language learned at his mother's knee, not at a professor's elbow.

Sometimes the original text has looked like a great, slippery jade mountain with no handholds anywhere. As Waley confessed: "Hundreds of times I have sat for hours in front of texts the meaning of which I understood perfectly, and yet been unable to see how they ought to be put into English in such a way as to re-emnody not merely a series of correct dictionary meanings, but also the emphasis, the tone, the eloquence of the original." We feel that two of us working together, connected by the rope of our common knowledge of English, may climb that mountain more readily than one person alone.

We have built co-translation into the activities of our "International Writing Program," bringing published writers, not students, from all parts of the world. If a poet in Hungarian, Polish, Amharic, French, Swedish wants to put into English his own work or poems from his own country, we assign a young American poet who does not know the original language to be sure that the versions are idiomatic, supple, rhythmical in English. By much discussion, by endless consulting of dictionaries, by trying many different

meanings for one phrase, one line, a final text is jointly created. Our Anthology of Postwar Japanese Poetry, to be published November, 1975, was done in this painful but effective way, a published Japanese poet sitting day after day with a young American poet (who knew some Japanese) beating out the final poem. The result is to avoid such a stilted sentence as one translator of the novel Monkey put in the clever animal's mouth when Tripitaka was shocked to see his own body floating downstream after his illumination: "It is none other than your own." "That's you" is not only more accurate, it is more attractive. Once again, it is the translator's power over his own language which makes translation good or bad. He strives always for that clear and direct American English (or British) which avoids the easy rhetoric which disfigures so many translations by those who know the original language but are not fluent in their own.

We end this section on translation as an art by quoting some passages from an article we wrote for the magazine Modern Poetry in Translation,*a double issue devoted to translations from many Asian and European languages done at the International Writing Program in Iowa City.

"The people of this gently, recklessly orbiting world must talk to each other. Poetry is an intense way of talking. Translation is a way of many countries talking to each other at the gut-intellect level. Beyond all social-economic systems there are women and men writing into words the sounds which represent their nerves, their minds and their finger-tips.

Translation once meant direct removal to heaven without an intervening death. That seldom happens in the translation from one language into another, when all too often the poem does indeed die....

The point here is that translation is not putting down in one language equivalent words from another language. That is not how the poem was written: not a literal version of the mind, but an imaginative one....The poet transmuted daily speech into the body and blood of his poem. The translator must try the same process.

*(London, Daniel Weissbort, Editor)

We also believe that from this day on each country will have two literatures: its own created books, and all the translations made into its language. Because of jet planes and because of translations now done so abundantly, readers know far more quickly than ever what was recently written all over the world....We can listen to the poetic voices of a people whose language we do not know. Future publishing may be equally divided between original work and translations. If countries more and more read each other's most intense utterances, they might know their likenesses. They might even stop that killing on an immense scale which is the most shocking and unforgiveable wound of the Twentieth Century."

Co-translation may become co-living, on which our survival depends.

II

Practise

Our method is to use constant dialogue and close criticism.

When we co-translate, Nieh first reads the original Chinese for its sound and verbal shape, sometimes more than once. Then she gives an English summary of what the poem is saying, followed by a character after character sequence of English meanings. Engle questions each one which seems obscure (usually all!), while Nieh explains the relationship of each character to the others, along with any cultural or literary references. Gradually Nieh shapes English sentences out of the primary characters, until the entire poem exists in English words. Engle reads this text aloud, asking for other possible meanings, for shorter words which will make a tighter and more rhythmical line. He often asks whether one Chinese character must be translated by several English words, making the version bloated as compared to the original (given the range, implications, subtlety, cultural and linguistic complexities of Chinese characters, there is often no single English equivalent in one word which can convey the whole meaning). Every line is questioned, looked at again and again, in that state of mixed delight and despair every translator knows.

The poem is then abandoned for an hour, several hours, or a day. Picked up again, awkwardness, crudeness of

rhythm, possible false interpretations by Engle of Nieh's primal translation. In brief, our first version is treated like the first version of an English poem, criticized by both of us in a dialogue very much like the self-quarrel of a poet worrying his own poem into shape. It is attacked, prodded, pinched, forced to give meanings Engle had not understood at the beginning. Nieh's Chinese imagination keeps the sense of the original always present to Engle. There are arguments, accusations of cultural chauvinism, a little bitterness about national traditions, a tense and lively confrontation of two imaginations.

The English version is never typed until both Nieh and Engle believe that they can no longer change the translation until it exists in cold type. As long as the many alternative readings are handwritten, they keep flexibility and readiness to change, but typing hardens the text. After the poem has mellowed in its typed version, the co-criticism begins again, as with an original poem. Yet there are those problems of language no English poem endures: the tense of a verb must be defined, there are those dreadful English articles, a, an, the, cluttering and weakening the line as compared to the tight Chinese original. How can we put the intense concentration of Chinese into discursive English, without writing pidgin, if accurate, English? Always the compromise, as the poet himself never perfects his poem; in desperation we agree to let the version stand. There is always the harsh fact that Engle is ignorant of Chinese, really shocking toward the end of the most international decades the world has ever seen. There is always the threatening knowledge that American poetry has been written for so few years and Chinese poetry for so terribly many centuries. We hope that makes for a healthy humility.

We try to give the Chinese poem another life in English. Perhaps we should call it a half life.

III

Poems

Time: Joy of Meeting 相見歡

Li Yü

(937-978)

NIEH: Li Yü was the last ruler of the Southern T'ang Dynasty. He married a beautiful talented woman. When she died, he married her younger sister. The first emperor of the Sung Dynasty captured Li Yü's capitol at Nanking, took him prisoner and sent him into northern exile. Even while his city was under siege he kept on writing poetry, as he also did in exile. He wrote much about his lost lands, so enraging the Emperor that he had Li Yü poisoned while he was writing and drinking on his birthday. Li Yü is to _tz'u_ what Li Po is to _shih_. _Tz'u_ has lines of irregular length, but with a regular musical rhythm. It was originally written to music, which has been lost, only the verbal pattern remaining. _Tz'u_ was more colloquial than _shih_.

ENGLE: But do these facts help explain the poem?

NIEH: Of course, the spirit of regret, the lyrical impulse.

Flowers fade and fall, just as Li lost a wife, a son, and his lands, so that the flowers really symbolize life itself. The first part of the poem is objective, describing the scene. In the first line, the meaning is that spring-red flowers are falling; _lin_ (林) could mean woods, trees, forest.

ENGLE: But are the flowers falling from branches of trees, or are the flowers blooming as densely as a thick woods?

NIEH: Literally--"Flowers in the woods, or flowers on trees, or flowers dense as trees."(林花) "Then the characters for dropped (謝了) and for spring-red (春紅).

ENGLE: Could it read, "Trees drop their spring-red flowers"?

NIEH: No, not poetic enough; the line means the risks and vicissitudes of life. It is sad, but the flowers must fall.

ENGLE: Here is the line as earlier translated by someone else:

"The flowered woods

have dropped their springtime rose festoon." I can't imagine a duller line, with that outworn "festoon."
NIEH: Even putting words down literally would be better.
ENGLE: I agree with you that flowers should be the main thing.
NIEH: But the flowers are not just on the trees. The line suggests that flowers have the richness or density of woods. Suddenly, that bright color is gone, as with life itself.
ENGLE: Can it go, "Flowers in woods drop their spring-red"?
NIEH: But that doesn't give a sense of masses of flowers. The richness of flowers. .
ENGLE: "Spring-red flowers drop in the dense woods"?
NIEH: No.
ENGLE: Always no!
NIEH: Try again. "Woods of flowers"?
ENGLE: Can we say, "Forests of flowers drop their spring-red"? Forests can mean larger areas than woods, there is an alliteration of "f" with flowers, and rhythmically it starts the line with a swinging sound, which woods does not.
NIEH: Good.
ENGLE: I never thought I'd hear it. At this rate we'll finish the poem in time for spring of next year.
NIEH: Next line(太匆匆) means "too soon."
ENGLE: Can it read, more rhythmically, "Soon, too soon"?
NIEH: The line really says, "Too soon soon."
ENGLE: That's better. Make it "Too soon soon."
NIEH: Should there be a comma between the two soons?
ENGLE: I like them to run on that way, although a comma would be normal usage. Why be normal?
NIEH: Third line literally: Cannot help cold rain coming in the morning, wind coming in the evening.(無奈朝來寒雨晚來風)
ENGLE: That will be too long a line in English. Besides, I see that if we made shorter lines we could have a balance which would be attractive, a parallelism.
NIEH: I dare you to try it. If it's no good, I'll tell you.
ENGLE: Nieh Hualing is really a tough character!
How about putting it this way:

"No help for it: morning the cold rain came,
evening, the wind came."

NIEH: Read it aloud....Not good. too many words. Take out "the" and change tense of "came."

ENGLE: I'm already tense. Too tense. Why change it?

NIEH: Past tense is too limited. A pure, present tense suggests the universality of life, the eternal condition of man, which the poet implies.

ENGLE: Look at this translation from the version I quoted before: "But night-blowing winds and the cold dawn rain were bound to be." That "bound to be" shows how much English can weaken the strong concentration of the Chinese characters. Let's try this:

"Can't help it:
morning, cold rain falling,
night, cold wind blowing."

NIEH: That's much better, closer to the Chinese, although you add a second "cold" which is not in the original. But it sounds good in English.

ENGLE: Read it again in Chinese; that sounds good too.

NIEH: In the second stanza the poet turns away from nature and turns inward to his own feelings and thoughts. This is the subjective stanza. The first line has only three characters(胭脂淚), meaning literally "rouged tears." Reading that, a Chinese has an immediate association with a woman's face.

ENGLE: I'm sorry, but it sounds a little phoney to me; a woman weeping through too much rouge is not beautiful.

NIEH: But to a Chinese, this is a classical image, a beautiful woman in tears.

ENGLE: I would rather see her in joy.

NIEH: Keep your mind on the translation.

ENGLE: I need to know the next line; everything in context.

NIEH: Literally, "Keep me drunk." (相留醉)

However, this character (醉) can mean either drunk with drink or drunk with something you enjoy. To keep me drunk really means to keep me rapt with joy at this sad but beautiful scene.

ENGLE: But in English, rouge is not a very pleasant word. We are dealing here with a classical Chinese convention. Do we keep the translation faithful to that, or do we try to make it faithful to the late twentieth century, as Pound would have done? Why not make a new interpretation?

NIEH: We aren't dealing with the twentieth century, but with the imagination of a tenth century poet writing within the images of his time. Now, let's compromise by trying to be clear to this century, but remain loyal to the poet in his century.

ENGLE: As always, I lose. Are the rouged tears the flowers?

NIEH: Of course. What else? Anyone knows that.

ENGLE: Any Chinese knows that, but not any American. Cultural civil war! The worst kind.

NIEH: But that is precisely our problem--you must try to understand our Chinese mind, not look at our poetry only as an American.

ENGLE: Yet we are not translating for the Chinese, but for westerners who know English. It goes back to our earlier remarks when we said that in poetry we do not translate merely language, but ideas, feelings, the culture.

NIEH: That's what I mean; this is a cultural concept, not a language matter.

ENGLE: OK. As usual, I give up to the Chinese. Is the purpose of the line to say that the poet is in a state of mind where he is enraptured (a fancy word of Latin origin, which I do not like) both with joy at the beauty of the scene and with sorrow that the flowers must fall, a sorrow he knew in his own life? Or in mankind's life?

NIEH: That's right. Now try.

ENGLE: Rain is on red flowers, like tears on a rouged face?

NIEH: Of course.

ENGLE: Now we make a typical compromise of the sort all translators know. We make the line read, "Rouged tears keep me drunk," but also write a footnote saying that it does not mean simply intoxicated with drink, but rapt with mingled joy and sadness. Next line. I accept my defeat.

NIEH: When again? 幾時重

ENGLE: Just right. Another translation says, "Then--who knows when again?" Look, three riming words in a short line, and extra words not only missing in the original but actually corrupting the English. Last line?

NIEH: Naturally, life always regrets, water always runs east.
自是人生長恨水長東

ENGLE: It sounds to me as if we should do what we did in the first stanza--make two short and balanced lines.

NIEH: Good, if it is actually good in English. The other translation says,"Our lives are sad like rivers turning always to the sea." The important thing is that the big rivers of China run east. Of course they run to the sea. They don't run to the mountains!

ENGLE: That is a soft version, too many little words compared to the tight Chinese characters. Can we say:

Life always regrets.
Rivers always flow east.

There we have the theme Li Yü was expressing, the sad theme proved in his own career: the inevitability of human experience. However lovely, brightly colored flowers fall under wind and rain. Rivers flow without choice in their destined channels. We accept this. Joy in sorrow.

NIEH: Now my job is done. Read the whole poem out loud and see if it is a real poem in English.

Forests of flowers drop their spring red.
Too soon soon.
Can't help it:
morning, cold rain falling,
night, cold wind blowing.

Rouged tears keep me drunk.*
When again again?
Life always regrets.
Rivers always flow east.

NIEH: Let these two stinking cobblers turn to a modern poem, "West Ch'ang-an Street," by Pien Chih-lin, written in 1932. Ch'ang-an was an ancient capitol of China in Shensi, now Sian. The street named for Ch'ang-an is in Peking. Both Peking and Ch'ang-an are symbolic of old China. When the poem was written, the Japanese had already invaded Manchuria, the Communists and Nationalists were already fighting. The poem is a monologue of the poet when he was twenty two years old, very much influenced by twentieth century French poetry. I read André Gide in his translation. Was it faithful to the original? I don't know, but I am faithful to his Gide. He taught a course in the art of translation.

ENGLE: Tell me what the poem is trying to tell me.

NIEH: The poem is a series of images, often without transitions, about the Chinese situation in the Thirties, with reference to old China. The pace is slow, casual, like a man looking up and down the street, which is really Chinese history.

ENGLE: Now we give our own version, which was reached by the same painful and joyful method we used in the previous poem.

NIEH-ENGLE: Here is our translation.

WEST CH'ANG-AN STREET

Long are the shadows, slanting, dim,
dead tree, old man walking under,
stick supporting him:
all are shadows on the wall,
that wall red in the setting sun.
Red wall is very long.
Blue sky beyond the wall,
blue sky of the North,
is long, very long.
Old man, you must feel this road is long,
this winter day is also long?
Yes, I believe.
Look, I am walking closer to you.
Let's talk on the way.
Let's talk.
But we don't make any sound.
We only walk with our shadows.
Walk, walk.
How many years have these shadows walked,
these long shadows?
On and on, on and on,
to the open fields
beyond the Great Wall.
There seem to be bugles,
bugles blown on horses,
a great cavalry marching
toward the big wheel of the morning sun.
That morning sun is everyone's red face.
Horse hooves raise golden dust
ten feet high, twenty feet high.

No, nothing there.
I am still here on the street,
but I don't see the old man.
A few soldiers in yellow uniform
stand in front of a gate.
Is it the Command Headquarters,
or a former royal residence?
They stand there like tombstones.
They don't make any sound.
They don't talk.
Do they think of their homeland,
their home under Manchurian skies?
Of course.
But no use to think now,
no use to think of Japanese horses
drinking from the well in the old home place,
of chickens running away into sorghum fields,
of a temporary place to stay.
Bang, bang.
What? Rifle shots.
From where?
Our Chinese-made guns,
our own guns.
Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid.
But the cry of crickets
has saturated the sorghum,
faded now like green gauze curtains.
You are thinking? No use.
Think tomorrow.
Now you can make no sound, no talk.
Just bend your heads.
Cars drive on this long asphalt street,
how "modern," how comfortable,
although not as imposing, not as powerful
as great flags out of the old times,
smiling like faces in the red sun.

If you don't believe this,
go ask those three big red doors over there,
now looking sadly at the autumn sun.
I have a friend under that setting sun,
living in an even older city.
How is he now?
Maybe also walking along an empty street,
with long shadows, slanting, dim.
Tell me your first impression of Chang'an.
I see your shadow by me here.
Don't be like that old man.
Let's talk, talk....

Peking, September, 1932

ENGLE: Is it alright to repeat "talk" in the last line, to suggest a yearning for talk?
NIEH: Yes. It sounds just like the original. Even your dots are in the original, which I didn't tell you. Now you are really in the spirit of the Chinese poet.

PIEN CHIH-LIN

WEST CHANG AN STREET

Long are the shadows, slanted and dim,
of the withered tree, of the old man
walking beneath it, and of his cane.
A red wall bathed in twilight holds them
and the wall is long. Beyond, the sky
is very long, the blue northern sky.
Oh old man, this lane, these winter days
must seem long to you. I believe so.
Look, I am approaching you. Perhaps
we could have a talk, a little talk,
yet we remain silent, following
each other's shadow only, walking
on and on. And these moving shadows,
How many years have these long shadows
been here? Shall they march onward, into
the wilderness, over the Great Wall
and beyond? Do I hear their trumpets
and is there a troop of cavalry
marching forward into the bright wheel
of the rising sun? There, each face
is a rising sun, and each sharp hoof
kicks up golden dust a hundred feet
high. Nothing is there. Still, I linger
on the street. The old man of the past
has disappeared. Two or three soldiers
in yellow stand guard by a large door.
Is this the headquarters? What royal
residence in the past, I wonder?

The soldiers stand upright like tombstones.
They no longer speak and are silent.
Are they thinking still of their homeland
under the northeast sky? Certainly.
It is useless, though, to do so now.
Even as they do, at this moment
several of the enemy's horses
are drinking water from the soldier's
well and a flock of chickens scurries
into the sorghum fields. They, too, wonder
where they might find shelter. And listen!
Are those gun shots? From where do they come?
No need to be frightened, they are ours.
And yet the chirping of the crickets
has already soaked through the faded
green guaze of the sorghum . And soldiers,
are you still thinking of your homeland?
Do so tomorrow, it is useless
now. Lower your heads and be silent
as you watch the autos speed over
their long asphalt roads. How comfortable
and modern. Glamorous as it seems,
there can be no true comparison
between all this and those huge red flags
which were ours in the past, and which seemed
to unfurl themselves like a smiling
face beneath the red sun. Do you not
believe this? Then you must ask those three

large red doors that gaze at the autumn
sun with disappointment and regret.
I have a friend under the setting sun.
He lives now in an older city.
What is he doing at this moment?
Walking, perhaps, along an empty
street accompanied by a long, slanted
shadow. Tell me your new impression
of our Chang An* upon arrival
(your shadow seems to be by my side.)
Let us not behave like the old man.
Let us not merely talk to ourselves.

September 11, 1932
from Han Yuan Collection

* Chang An was an ancient capital of China. It was for this capital that Chang An street in Peking was named. Hence the poem involves a contrasting of the old and new.