

HOW TO UNDERSTAND CHINESE IDEAS IN EU-CHINA COMMUNICATION?

A Translation Study of Three Chinese Political Concepts

[Jian Shi](#), [Ping Liang](#)

Centre international de formation européenne | « L'Europe en Formation »

2020/2 n° 391 | pages 67 à 77

ISSN 0014-2808

Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

<https://www.cairn.info/revue-l-europe-en-formation-2020-2-page-67.htm>

Distribution électronique Cairn.info pour Centre international de formation européenne.

© Centre international de formation européenne. Tous droits réservés pour tous pays.

La reproduction ou représentation de cet article, notamment par photocopie, n'est autorisée que dans les limites des conditions générales d'utilisation du site ou, le cas échéant, des conditions générales de la licence souscrite par votre établissement. Toute autre reproduction ou représentation, en tout ou partie, sous quelque forme et de quelque manière que ce soit, est interdite sauf accord préalable et écrit de l'éditeur, en dehors des cas prévus par la législation en vigueur en France. Il est précisé que son stockage dans une base de données est également interdit.

How to Understand Chinese Ideas in EU-China Communication?

A Translation Study of Three Chinese Political Concepts

Jian SHI & Ping LIANG

Prof. Dr Jian SHI is Jean Monnet Chair Professor in European Culture Studies and EU studies (2008-), and director of the Centre for European Studies/Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence (2011 -) at Sichuan University, China. He has his PhD from Lehigh University, USA, and his research focuses on EU Studies, European Culture, European Integration and European society studies. Prof. Dr Shi is active in promoting China-EU people to people dialogue.

Dr Ping LIANG is a staff member at the International Office and assistant research fellow at the Centre for European Studies, Sichuan University. She holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from Free University of Brussels (VUB), Belgium. Her research deals with the translation of Chinese political texts for international communication, and she has published her doctoral dissertation in September 2020. Dr Liang has her MA degree in English Language and Literature from Sichuan University. She has also studied EU Studies at the Faculty of Political Science, Ghent University.

Abstract

In the study of Sino-European relations, translation remains an under-researched area, despite its importance in facilitating people-to-people dialogues and mutual understanding between China and Europe. The translation of our exchanged ideas matters, especially in the political communication between the two parties. By investigating the changes made to the Chinese official translation of three key political concepts in their international publicity in recent years, this article argues that variance in translation and lack of cultural contexts may ultimately result in different understandings of the key ideas. It aims to draw attention to the role of translation in effective international communication and the necessity to combine translation studies with international relations research.

Résumé

Dans l'étude des relations sino-européennes, le domaine de la traduction demeure peu exploré. La traduction joue pourtant un rôle important dans la facilitation du dialogue entre les peuples et pour la compréhension mutuelle entre la Chine et l'Europe. La traduction constitue le socle de l'échange d'idées dans la communication politique entre les deux parties. En examinant les changements apportés à la traduction officielle chinoise de trois concepts politiques clés dans leur diffusion internationale au cours des dernières années, cet article soutient que la variance de la traduction et le manque de contextes culturels entraînent des compréhensions différenciées de ces idées clés. Il s'agit d'attirer l'attention sur le rôle de la traduction dans l'efficacité de la communication internationale, ainsi que sur la nécessité de combiner les études de traduction avec la recherche sur les relations internationales.

KEYWORDS

EU-China communication, Chinese political concepts, Translation

Introduction¹

In the joint statement following the 5th EU–China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue on 10 November 2020, the EU and China have “agreed to continue and enhance this cooperation in order to progress further towards a level playing field on which *the exchange of ideas* and mobility can take place”². The exchange of ideas, in most cases, needs to be realized through communication. While there is non-verbal communication such as art and music, more ideas are carried verbally by words in speeches and talks, or written in communiqués, books, newspapers, scientific articles and research papers. As people in China and Europe speak different languages, a majority of such verbal and written communications rely on translation. Translation plays a key role in reaching mutual understanding of ideas when they are communicated from one language to another; however, it may also delay understandings or even cause misunderstandings, especially if the idea is specific to a certain culture and political environment.

In recent years, China has been trying to communicate its political ideas more effectively with the EU through the improvement of its official translation. For example, President Xi Jinping’s *The Governance of China* has been translated into multiple European languages. As China aims to tell the world its stories, official translation in China also endeavours to make China’s ideas more understood by its European and international audiences. The translations of some Chinese political phrases have been changed several times to be better received. This paper will discuss three such cases, i.e. “The Chinese Dream”, “The Belt and Road Initiative”, “The Community of Shared Future”. When these ideas were first introduced by China, different understandings occurred because of their translations. In the following we will approach the differences from analysing the official Chinese discourses and academic debates, in our exploration of the reasons behind the changes in translation.

Case 1: From the “China Dream” to the “Chinese Dream”

Tracing the initial English translation of “中国梦” (*zhongguo meng*) in President Xi’s speech at the museum exhibition, we find that the official version published by Chinese state media *Xinhua News* on 23 December 2012 was the “China Dream”, as Xi stated in his speech: “*Nowadays, everyone is talking about the China Dream... In my view, realizing the great renewal of the Chinese nation is*

1. This work was partly supported by China’s National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science [Grant number: 18AGJ008]; and Jean Monnet Activity [Grant number: 619906-EPP-1-2020-1-CN-EPPJMO-CoE].

* The authors would like to thank the editor and reviewers for their valuable suggestions and comments

2. European Commission, “Joint Press Statement following the 5th EU-China High-Level People-to-People dialogue,” Statement/20/2080, 10 November 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_20_2080.

the Chinese nation's greatest dream in modern history.”³ Another article in *People's Daily* on 4 December 2012 was entitled “Beautiful ‘China Dream’ requires hard work”.⁴ Similarly, *China Daily* had an opinion piece on 27 June 2013 titled “China Dream Concerns Happiness of All Chinese Individuals and the Nation as a whole”⁵. One interpretation for the use of the “China Dream” is that the Chinese concept mainly denotes a dream of resurgence of the Chinese nation as a whole. It is essentially different from the American dream, which is a dream for individuals. This also rejects the American inspiration of the term by differentiating from it linguistically. However, the other version, the “Chinese Dream”, was also used in some official media reports. In fact, at the time the Chinese English-language media went back and forth between the two translations.⁶ After President Xi elaborated on the concept in his speech on 17 March 2013 at the meeting of the 12th National Congress, in which he emphasized that it is the dream of the Chinese people, the translation was officially changed to the “Chinese Dream”. As one comment noted, it thus subtly accentuates “the people over the nation”.⁷

Subsequently, a CNN television debate in July 2013 invited Wu Jianmin, former Chinese Ambassador to the UN, Evan Osnos, former Beijing Correspondent, and Jing Ulrich, Chairman of JP Morgan China, to discuss what the phrase meant. One question by the host was about the translation of the term, whether it is the “China Dream” or “Chinese Dream”, and the guests all opted for the latter.⁸ It was also around this time that Chinese state media started using the term “Chinese Dream” more often in their English newspapers and reports. A corpus study on the frequency of the two translation versions shows that from the second half of 2013 onwards, Chinese media generally switched from “China Dream” to the “Chinese Dream”. As for the Chinese government, a new campaign to promote the “Chinese Dream” abroad was launched by Liu Qibao, Head of the

3. Yang Lina, “Xi Jinping Advocates Reform, China Dream,” *Xinhua News*, 23 December 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-12/23/c_132058740.htm. Also cited in Chen Guohua, Cheng Lixia, “Is Zhongguo meng ‘China dream’ or ‘Chinese dream’? – A study of China and Chinese used as nominal modifiers,” *Foreign Language Teaching and Research* 47, no. 6 (2015).

4. *People's Daily*, “Beautiful ‘China Dream’ requires hard work,” 4 December 2012, <http://en.people.cn/90785/8043961.html>.

5. Cited in Manoranjan Mohanty, “Xi Jinping and the ‘Chinese Dream’,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 48, no. 38 (2013): 34–40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23528539>.

6. *The Economist*, “Chasing the Chinese dream,” 4 May 2013, <https://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21577063-chinas-new-leader-has-been-quick-consolidate-his-power-what-does-he-now-want-his>.

7. *Ibid.*

8. CNN, “On China, Episode 10 transcript: The Chinese Dream,” 17 July 2013, <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/16/world/asia/on-china-transcript-chinese-dream/index.html>.

China's Central Publicity Department, to "help the international community better understand it".⁹

There are several possible interpretations of the reason for the official switch to the "Chinese Dream". From a strategic viewpoint, the version "China Dream" could be misunderstood by the international community as China's dream in seeking global hegemony, exacerbating the existing "China threat" portrait by the West accompanying China's rise. He Wenzhao et al. traced how the "China Dream" was used in a corpus of Western English newspapers from 2002 till 2013.¹⁰ They find that the phrase is used either to refer to the dream of foreign investors interested in doing business with China, or China's "strong-army dream" of becoming the world's biggest military power. The latter usage is supported by the example of Chinese Colonel Liu Mingfu's celebrated nationalist book *China Dream: The Great Power Thinking and Strategic Positioning of China in the Post-American Era*, in which the veteran military scholar examines conflict in China-US relations and argues for a national strategy for China to deter the US through its military rise. The book is perceived by Western observers as China posing an open challenge to the US's role as world leader.¹¹ The "China Dream" also appeared as the name of Chinese American Peggy Liu's environmentalist movement for her NGO JUCCCE, which aims to introduce a sustainable lifestyle in Chinese cities by promoting green technologies and reducing waste. Another Chinese study compares the use of the "China Dream" and "Chinese Dream" in *The New York Times* and *The Times* from 2004 to 2014. It confirms that the "China Dream" was often used to refer to the business ambitions of foreigners in China, whereas after 2012 Xi's slogan was phrased as the "new China Dream" and often appeared in quotation marks.

From a communicative viewpoint, the "Chinese Dream" is arguably a more target-oriented translation than the "China Dream" since the international audiences are already familiar with the American dream. "It sounds good. It has a nice ring to it", commented Jing Ulrich in the TV debate. "Perhaps it evokes some similarity with the American dream", which is a positive term.¹² Although the connotations of the two concepts are different, the "Chinese Dream" reduces the sense of strangeness and resonates better with the readers. According to Chen & Cheng, most news articles from their corpus after 2013 involving the term

9. Raymond Li, "Beijing unveils fresh campaign to promote 'Chinese dream' abroad," *South China Morning Post*, 9 July 2013, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1278258/beijing-unveils-campaign-promote-xi-jinpings-chinese-dream-abroad>.

10. He Wenzhao, Li Defeng and He Yuanjian, "The Diachronic Evolution and Synchronic Variation of English Translation of 'Zhongguomeng': A Web-as-Corpus Approach," *Journal of Sichuan International Studies University* 33, no 1 (2017): 110-118, <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1674-6414.2017.01.017>.

11. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liu_Mingfu. [Article as of 1 October 2020].

12. CNN, "On China, Episode 10 transcript: The Chinese Dream," 17 July 2013, <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/16/world/asia/on-china-transcript-chinese-dream/index.html>.

“Chinese Dream” were about the lives of common Chinese people and individual dreams coming true.¹³ It is more aligned with Xi’s statement that the “Chinese Dream” is “the dream of a people” as well as “the dreams of each Chinese person”.¹⁴ In addition, syntactically speaking, ‘China’ as a nominal modifier means things “from China” or matters “concerning China”, while ‘Chinese’ can mean “Chinese people”, “Chinese language”, “Chinese origin” or things with “Chinese features or characteristics”. Therefore, compared with “China Dream”, “Chinese Dream” has an extra connotation that it is “a dream with Chinese characteristics” which can only happen in China.

The change of translation from “China Dream” to “Chinese Dream” shows that the official translation of the term went through a process of negotiation between delivering its correct political connotation and being better understood linguistically by the international audience. The translation process accompanies the discursive construction of the concept. A word change from “China” to “Chinese” has considerable strategic and communicative considerations behind it. Even though the “Chinese Dream” might risk losing its Chinese originality since it can be seen as a Chinese version of the American dream, it is chosen as the official translation because it is important that the concept is not misinterpreted as indicating some kind of “China threat”, but rather a dream of Chinese people pursuing prosperity and happiness.

Case 2: From “One Belt One Road Strategy” to “The Belt and Road Initiative”

China’s “project of the century”¹⁵ was originally coined as One Belt One Road Strategy (OBOR), translated literally from its Chinese original “一带一路” (*yī dai yī lù*). Since there are no letters in Chinese, acronyms cannot be used for terminology purposes; instead, the term takes pieces of words from its two components: one is continental (Silk Road Economic Belt), and one is maritime (21st Century Maritime Silk Road) to package them together in one phrase. The literal translation caused confusion on several occasions for foreign audiences. First, it is not clear what the “belt” and the “road” mean. Without any explanation, some objected that the word “belt” initially projected an image of a belt for clothes

13. Chen Guohua & Cheng Lixia, “Is Zhongguo meng ‘China dream’ or ‘Chinese dream’? —A study of China and Chinese used as nominal modifiers”. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research* 47, no.6 (2015): 909-922, <http://gb.oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?filename=WJYY201506010&dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFD2015>.

14. Kirk A. Denton. “China Dreams and the ‘Road to Revival’,” *Origins* 8, issue 3 (December 2014), <http://origins.osu.edu/article/china-dreams-and-road-revival>.

15. Charles Clover, Sherry Fei Ju and Lucy Hornby. “China’s Xi hails Belt and Road as ‘project of the century’,” *Financial Times*, 14 May 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/88d584a2-385e-11e7-821a-6027b8a20f23>.

in their mind.¹⁶ The term “road” can also be confusing because in the name it actually refers to sea routes, while in English “road” is mainly used for roads on land. Cambridge Dictionary defines “road” as “a long, hard surface built for vehicles to travel along”¹⁷. The Chinese “lu”, however, can signify all kinds of route or path, be they concrete or abstract, and also has other meanings depending on its collocations.¹⁸

Second, the number “one” in the phrase triggers suspicion of China’s intentions. It can lead to the misunderstanding that China has the ambition of rebuilding the world and pushes everyone to go on board, leaving no room for alternatives. Supposedly, “the perception of a single road as a limited offer can drive the regional partner into competition mode”.¹⁹ One belt and one road, in fact, do not mean a single economic belt and a single maritime road. According to the conceptual framework in the 2015 official document, it is a systematic network consisting of multiple routes. There are also linguistic and cultural differences. In Chinese, one (yi) is not only a number. It also has a philosophical meaning. ‘Yi’ is the beginning of things. In Daoism it is said that “The Tao produced one; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things”²⁰. Yi can also be used as an adjective, meaning “whole” or “full”.²¹ For example, “yi xin yi yi” means to put one’s whole heart and soul into something. Therefore, the Chinese name can suggest the open and inclusive spirit of the proposal. Stylistically the Chinese original *yi dai yi lu* is a four-character expression with a VOVX construction. It is typical in Chinese political discourse to give slogans a certain rhythm, adding a poetic touch.

Third, the word “strategy” attached to the name is prone to cause misinterpretations of China’s purpose with the initiative. Originated from Greek “stratēgos” (generalship), “strategy” is defined as “a detailed plan for achieving success in situations such as war, politics, business, industry, or sport, or the skill of planning for such situations”.²² It is a neutral word, but could have a connotation of manoeuvring, as it is “the process of planning something or putting a plan into operation in a skilful way”.²³ The Chinese original “zhan lue” refers to the

16. Locatran, “Will poor translation mislead China’s Silk Road Initiative?” http://www.locatran.com/eng/news_display.asp?p_id=503. [Article as of available on 11 September 2020].

17. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/road>. [Article as of 4 September 2020].

18. http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/trans/2014-12/11/content_19065980.htm.

19. Una Aleksandra Bēzina-Čerenkova. “BRI Instead of OBOR-China Edits the English Name of its Most Ambitious International Project”, *Latvian Institute of International Affairs*, 28 July 2016, <http://www.lai.lv/viedokli/bri-instead-of-obor-china-edits-the-english-name-of-its-most-ambitious-international-project-532>.

20. Lao tzu, *The Tao-te Ching*. Translated by James Legge, Chapter 42, <http://classics.mit.edu/Lao/taote.2.ii.html>.

21. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/chinese-english/一>. [Article as of 4 September 2020].

22. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/strategy>. [Article as of 5 September 2020].

23. <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/strategy>. [Article as of 5 September 2020].

overall planning for achieving a long-term goal.²⁴ It is very close to the meaning of ‘strategy’, but the Chinese context stresses the tactical side of it less.²⁵

In a time of a “China threat” as portrayed by the West, China is cautious about its global image and international communication. The discourse of BRI focuses on the theme of soft power. “Strategy”, which can be associated with geopolitical ambitions, does not fit in China’s narrative of the programme. To avoid any possible misunderstanding through translation, the Chinese government started to look for a more appropriate phrasing to name the programme in its international publicity. In May 2015, in her speech in the US, former Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Fu Ying referred to the programme as “land and maritime Silk Road program”.²⁶ This version was applauded by critics, saying “it reflects the essence of the initiative” and “the foreign audience is able to catch what it means upon hearing it”, since it directly mentions Silk Road as a collective cultural symbol. However, as a term it is not short and concise enough.²⁷ Another suggestion, “New Silk Road Initiative” also bears “Silk Road” in its name, but it was criticized because it could be misidentified as America’s New Silk Road strategy in central and west Asia.²⁸ Kevin Rudd, the former Prime Minister of Australia and a China expert, offered his version of translation as “Pan-Continental Infrastructure Agenda”. His opinion was that the foreign audience is not so familiar with the history of the Silk Road as the Chinese. He suggested “pan-continental” because it could remind them of the ‘pan-continental railways’ in the 19th century, especially for Americans, so that they could understand the concept of the initiative easily.²⁹ Having removed the “Belt” and “Road”, the most characteristic Chinese elements from the name, Rudd’s version became too target-oriented. It was not well received by Chinese critics not only because BRI is more than infrastructure building—it is connectivity at all levels—but also because the word “agenda”, like “strategy”, could be misleading.

With all the different translation possibilities in mind Xinhua, China’s state news agency, published an article in June 2015 entitled “Will poor translation mislead China’s Silk Road Initiative?” to solicit the opinions of its readers on the

24. <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/战略>. [Article as of 6 September 2020].

25. Ren Jie, “‘一带一路’ 倡议需正确定位” [The Belt and Road Initiative Needs to be Correctly Positioned], *New West*, no. 2 (2018): 4-5. <https://d.wanfangdata.com.cn/periodical/ChlQZXJpb2RpY2FsQ0hJ/TmV3UzIwMjEwNDE1Egx4eGlyMDE4MDIwMDIaCDh4cXI4b2Uz>

26. Fu Ying (Madam), “China’s Growth and the Debates on Order”, Speech at the University of Chicago, 19 May 2015, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/chinas-growth-and-the-debates-on-order>.

27. *China.com*, “Why the English translation of yi dai yi lu does not keep ‘One?’” [Translated], 7 May 2017, http://m.china.com.cn/wm/doc_1_3_358633.html.

28. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Silk_Road_Initiative. [Article as of 9 September 2020].

29. Hu Shuli & Wang Ling, interview with Kevin Rudd, 15 May 2015, <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2015-05-15/kevin-rudd-answering-the-peaceful-rise-question-101052931.html>.

translation of the initiative.³⁰ Three months later, two years into the BRI, the National Development and Reform Commission of China, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce, issued a document specifically to standardize the English translation of the initiative. It states that *Yi Dai Yi Lu* should be translated as “the Belt and Road” (B&R) in official documents; It is an “initiative”, and other words such as “strategy”, “project”, “program”, “agenda” should not be used. Apart from “the Belt and Road Initiative”, on unofficial occasions it can be translated as “the land and maritime Silk Road initiative” depending on the context, while other versions of translation are not recommended.³¹

We can see from the new Chinese official translation that the number “one” was ultimately abandoned to avoid potential criticisms over “China-centred institution building”, even though “One Belt, One Road” had already by then become a “catchy, trending brand name” and “widely recognized within both traditional and social media, as well as the professional circles”.³² The use of “initiative” to describe the proposal reflects how China wants to portray it to the outside world, as “something that’s more inclusive, that’s more open, and that everybody can appropriate in some way”.³³ The change of the official translation suggests that China does not want to be misinterpreted by the international community. It tries to take away elements in communication that might counteract its efforts in promoting the initiative. When preserving Chinese characteristics conflicts with being correctly understood, China compromises through translation. However, the most important concepts “Belt” and “Road”, despite criticism of them, are still irreplaceable in translation. That might be the reason why the official translation did not use the most favoured version “the land and maritime Silk Road” and chose “The Belt and Road Initiative” instead.

Case 3: From “a Community of Common Destiny” to “the Community with a Shared Future”

Another key Chinese political idea, 命运共同体 (*mingyun gongtongti*), has also gone through several changes in its official translation in the course of its international communication. Initially translated as “a community of common

30. XINHUANET, “Will poor translation mislead China’s Silk Road Initiative?,” [translated], 30 June 2015, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/english/test/index.htm>.

31. *China Daily*, “‘一带一路’ 官方译法[The Official Translation of *yi dai yi lu*],” 24 September 2015, http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/2015-09/24/content_21970378.htm.

32. Wang Yiwei, “How to translate Yi Dai Yi Lu? It is no small question,” *Chinareform.org.cn*, 10 Oct 2015, http://www.chinareform.org.cn/open/view/201510/t20151010_235640.htm.

33. Nadège Rolland & Brad Carson, “The Geo-Economic Challenge of China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” *War on the Rocks*, 05 March 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/03/jaw-jaw-the-geo-economic-challenge-of-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/>.

destiny”, it appeared in President Hu’s Congress report in 2012, and then made its international debut in President Xi’s 2013 speech in Russia. The translation was occasionally changed to “a community of shared destiny” in the following year in high-profile diplomatic speeches by Chinese leaders. For instance, President Xi’s speech in Brazil in July 2014 was entitled “Build a Community of Shared Destiny for Common Progress”³⁴, while the title of his speech at the Boao Forum several months later was “Towards a Community of Common Destiny and A New Future for Asia”.³⁵ Both versions are literal translations from the Chinese, although a more literal one should be “a community of destiny”.³⁶

When the concept was proposed at the UN General Assembly in 2015, the word “renlei” (human beings; mankind) was added to the original phrase because of its global implications. The new official translation became “a community of shared future for mankind”. This version was also published around the same time on the website of a national translation project of key Chinese political terms – “China Keywords”³⁷. An interview with a senior translator and editor of the project, Professor Bao Chuanyun, shows that the concern is over the use of “destiny”. In his opinion, destiny conveys a sense of passiveness in English. It is associated with fate that is controlled by God’s will, “a predetermined course of events often held to be an irresistible power”. It means that destiny can usually not be actively changed or controlled. However, *mingyun* in the Chinese phrase is held in the hands of all countries that seek cooperation and development together.³⁸ Similarly, Feng Jianzhong, a professor in international relations, also argues that destiny has a religious and spiritual sense in English that does not correspond to its meaning in Chinese. He searched both “common/shared destiny” and “shared future” in the British National Corpus and found that “common destiny” is mostly used in religious settings, such as with reference to death; whereas “shared future” appeared more in political settings, often in English official documents.

34. Xi Jinping, “Build a Community of Shared Destiny for Common Progress”, Speech at China-Latin American and Caribbean Countries Leaders Meeting on 17 July 2014, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1184869.shtml.

35. Xi Jinping, “Towards a Community of Common Destiny and A New Future for Asia,” Speech at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2015 on 28 March 2015, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1250690.shtml.

36. A literal translation of *mingyun* into English is “destiny”, *gongtongti* is “community”.

37. See http://keywords.china.org.cn/2014-11/18/content_34085221.htm. [Article as of 2 August 2020].

38. Yang Ping, “从 ‘中国关键词’ 看中国特色政治话语的对外传播——专访美国明德大学蒙特雷国际研究学院鲍川运教授 [The International Communication of Political Discourse with Chinese Characteristics from the Perspective of ‘China Keywords’—An Interview with Prof. Bao Chuanyun, Monterey Institute of International Studies, Matilda University, USA]”, *International Communications* 4 (2017): 22-25, https://www.zhangqiaokeyan.com/academic-journal-cn_international-communications_thesis/0201258557480.html.

He thus concluded that “a community of shared future” is the most accurate translation that also fits the pattern of English idiomatic expressions.³⁹

Subsequently the new official translation was used repeatedly in President Xi's speech entitled “Work Together to Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind” at the UN Headquarters in Geneva, as well as in other official speeches and publications on the concept including the 19th CPC National Congress Report. Internationally—when it was endorsed by the UN at the 55th Commission for Social Development in Feb 2017—, it was phrased in the resolution rather freely as “to create a shared future, based upon our shared humanity”.⁴⁰ The following two draft resolutions on the prevention of an arms race⁴¹, approved at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly in Nov 2017, both adopted the idea of shaping “a community of shared future for mankind”, citing the exact words of China's official translation. However, the earlier version of the translation “a community of common destiny” was still widely used in Chinese and foreign news media. For example, UN General Assembly President Peter Thomson, during an interview with Xinhua, used “a community of common destiny for mankind” when commenting on the concept.⁴² In fact, according to statistics on the frequency of the two translation versions occurring on the official website of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2015 to 2017, the most commonly used one is still “a community of common destiny” (101 times), double the number of “a community of shared future” (42 times).

Conclusion

From our case study of the changes made to the official translation of three key Chinese political concepts, it can be concluded that translation affected the understanding of the concepts, and different understandings in turn affected the translation. Although many of the changes only surround one word in the translations, the connotations conveyed may appear very different to its audiences. This may seem obvious, but in practice the role of translation is often neglected in IR research. When we study the implications of certain policies, we tend to forget the political documents or speeches we analyse are mostly translations that

39. Feng Jianzhong, “How to Translate ‘Mingyun Gongtongti,’” 2 May 2017, https://www.sohu.com/a/137787699_488902. [Article as of 5 August 2020].

40. UN Commission for Social Development (CSocD), E/CN.5/2017/2. “Social Dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development,” 22 November 2016, 12-13, <https://undocs.org/E/CN.5/2017/2>.

41. UN General Assembly. A/C.1/72/L.53, “Prevention of an arms race in outer space: no first placement of weapons in outer space,” 12 October 2017, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/C.1/72/L.53. ; UN General Assembly. A/C.1/72/L.54 “Prevention of an arms race in outer space,” 13 October 2017, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/C.1/72/L.54.

42. XINHUANET, “Interview: Building community of common destiny the only future for mankind: UN General Assembly president,” 30 Jan 2017. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/30/c_136020956.htm.

may not be fully identical to the information presented in its original languages, thus misunderstandings of the original meanings may occur.

In China's communication with Europe and the world, different translations of the exchanging ideas can lead to different understandings. This applies not only to official diplomatic communication, but also to people-to-people dialogues in general, especially in verbal and written communication when words are involved. To improve the mutual understanding of China and the EU, we need to draw attention to the potential barriers caused by language and translation. To build mutual trust of both sides, we need to count on each other's words, therefore every word we use in our communication counts.