In 1913 the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore won the Nobel Prize for Literature. In its award, the committee cited Tagore’s 1912 *Gitanjali: Song Offerings*, a collection of English-language versions—created by Tagore himself—of his Bengali poetry and published from London in 1912. Even though Tagore was best known for his copious writings in the Bengali language, the prize was widely seen as indicative of the beneficial effects of Britain’s worldwide rule. After all, Tagore’s collection of free verse poems had been framed for publication by a preface from another British colonial subject, the Irish poet W. B. Yeats (1865–1939); furthermore, the poems in *Gitanjali* had first appeared to the public a few months earlier, published in the new U.S. magazine *Poetry* thanks to the Anglophile poet Ezra Pound (1885–1972).¹ Both Yeats and Pound, in their own ways, had praised *Gitanjali* for what it brought not only to poetry but specifically to the English language. In reading Tagore’s volume, Yeats hears “our own voice as in a dream,” while Pound finds “that sort of metric which we awhile predicted or hoped for in English.”² In citing Tagore’s *Gitanjali* collection to award his Nobel Prize, as I demonstrate, the committee signaled Tagore’s pivotal role in the worldwide literary sphere that we now call the global Anglophone.

“The global Anglophone” is now a fairly common term in U.S. literary studies, albeit a frequently disparaged one. The successor in many
regards to terms like “commonwealth literature” or “postcolonial literature,” “the global Anglophone” replaces those terms’ explicit acknowledgment of the political legacy of the British Empire by instead foregrounding that empire’s linguistic legacy. It is, however, almost always overshadowed by the well-established term “postcolonial,” which boasts both theoretical and political credentials. A special issue of the postcolonial studies journal *Interventions* in 2018, “From Postcolonial to World Anglophone,” concludes with a response titled “Postcolonial, by Any Other Name?”;3 a special issue of the Americanist journal *Post45*, “Forms of the Global Anglophone,” ends with a response titled “Postcolonial, Still”;4 while a panel slated for the Modern Language Association’s (MLA) annual conference in 2020, itself organized by the forum named Global Anglophone, declares its intentions of “decolonizing global Anglophone literature.”5 While I am informed by these widespread concerns about the global Anglophone as a depoliticizing classification, my account of the global Anglophone in this chapter more closely resembles the small but growing body of scholarship that argues for its conceptual utility.6

Whereas another twenty-first-century competitor, “world literature,” traces its ancestry to the concerns of nineteenth-century German intellectuals in an increasingly connected and market-driven world, “the global Anglophone” is of more recent coinage. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “Anglophone” originated in the imperial and linguistic specificities of early twentieth-century Canada. Because French speakers, following the French term for language users outside France itself, were termed “Francophones,” their fellow Europeans who were English speakers came to be called “Anglophones.” The term was thus useful in distinguishing between the language spheres marked by French and British colonialism, and this led to its expanded usage with the advent of decolonization. Thus, in the 1960s, what used to be termed “French Africa” and “British Africa” became a variety of independent postcolonial nations; when these regions nonetheless were described in their linguistic and historical commonality, they would be called “Francophone Africa” and “Anglophone Africa.” As this shift suggests, a history of European colonialism was thereby signaled by highlighting the main European language in use: the “Anglophone” in this sense did not erase colonialism but, rather, highlighted its lasting effects. The word “Anglophone” thus evolved from a noun (“an Anglophone in Canada”) to an adjective (“Anglophone Canada”). Within U.S. literary studies as indexed by the MLA International Bibliography, the term
began to appear in the 1970s, with its utility as a linguistic modifier of a regional name—“Anglophone African literature”—transforming into an adjective that could modify literature itself—“Anglophone literature” (perhaps from Africa). In this shift, the adjective “Anglophone” came to stand in the place of the national descriptor—as in the phrases “British literature” and “American literature”—and, through a kind of self-authoring, a new noun form was born—“the Anglophone.” Unlike the original noun, however, this one meant not an individual who speaks English but a region, real or imagined, where English is spoken. An additional modifier—usually “global,” but sometimes “world”—was added to differentiate the older regional usage, making the regional a subset of a larger linguistic sphere. Thus, for instance, “Anglophone South Asian literature” is part of “the global Anglophone.” As U.S. English departments in the late twentieth century increased their research, teaching, and (if modestly) hiring in English-language literatures beyond the United States and the United Kingdom, this broad category of “the global Anglophone” became increasingly prevalent in describing these literary interests. As this institutional utility indicates, it was defined by the absence of certain regions (the United States and the United Kingdom), but it nevertheless suggested expansiveness in its terminology rather than lack. In 2014, for instance, the MLA converted the “Division for the Study of English Literatures Other Than British and American” into a “Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies” forum called “Global Anglophone”: a shorter name, and a contested one.7

In claiming “the global Anglophone” as central to this monograph, I thus approach a category that has a robust administrative and institutional life within literary studies, but less of a conceptual or scholarly purchase. “The global Anglophone” as I use it denotes an elastic space of discussion and exchange: thus, for instance, it includes writers from the Anglophone countries usually excluded (such as the then-U.S.-based W. E. B. Du Bois) as well as Anglophone writers from decidedly non-Anglophone regions (such as the Chinese intellectual Liang Qichao). To use “the global Anglophone” as I do for the early twentieth century is to commit a serious anachronism—and I do so in order to evidence what we may have already known. The linguistic dominance of English may seem a foregone conclusion only in the twenty-first century, but signs of its global reach, and the consequent global possibilities, were vibrant and varied even in the early twentieth century.

The study of the emergence of the global Anglophone, moreover, is particularly relevant to scholars concerned with the history of White
supremacy. Anglophone colonies, and not Francophone, Hispanophone, or Lusophone ones, decisively spawned the concept of “White men’s countries” and thereby created a strictly binarized White supremacism that became particularly influential in the twentieth century. Unlike the elaborate racial gradations of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism, or the evolué status selectively offered within French colonialism, Anglophone imperialism explicitly articulated a divide between White people and the rest of humanity. The Anglophone settler colonies (and later countries) of Canada, Australia, South Africa, and the United States became increasingly insistent on this division in their immigration and citizenship policies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These countries, which remain central to the global Anglophone, consolidated Whiteness as a criterion of citizenship and, crucially, as a unifying category, alleviating conflicts between settlers of different European ancestry and enabling a rapprochement between British and U.S. imperialisms.

In naming the current global dominance of the English language as a literary conceit, the global Anglophone thus recognizes in name what Tagore’s 1913 prize announced in practice. The Nobel Prize, after all, may recognize authors working in any language and do so under the auspices of the Swedish Academy, yet its first recognition of non-European literature was of Tagore’s translated collection: it only occurred once that literature was circulating in English. As a pioneering institution in the literary field, the Nobel Prize transformed the terrain of literary production into one of competition on a worldwide scale. With its conceit—that a worthy litterateur might be found every single year, through a process of worldwide comparison—the Nobel Prize rearticulated literature itself as a kind of sporting contest among nations, not unlike the sporting competitions of the Olympic Games, revived in 1894. Its advent in 1901 was contemporaneous with worldwide cultural expos like the World’s Fair, but those stupendous demonstrations of the world’s varied populations served a different purpose. Even as they assembled various peoples side by side for convenient comparison and imperial observation, the World’s Fairs nonetheless championed cultural particularity and authenticity, usually through a focus on folk arts and popular forms. The Nobel Prize for Literature, by contrast, asserted that literature was a universal activity at its most rarefied level. Consequently, even as the prize celebrated individual authors, it showcased them as representative of a common human capacity for literature, transcending their cultural particulars precisely through their exemplarity for all. In
1913, the awarding of the prize to Tagore marked its transformation into a truly international competition: all of the dozen prior recipients had been European. Because Britain still ruled over India, however, Tagore’s prize was regarded not only as an award to a British subject but also as evidence of the cultural and civilizational benefits of British rule in India. In this confusing juncture, his Nobel Prize made both British imperialists and Indian nationalists very proud. This vexed reception foreshadows the analogous contradictions in Tagore’s subsequent embrace of an Asianist print internationalism.

Born in 1861 to a wealthy and influential family in an increasingly restive Bengal, Tagore soon became politically active, playing a crucial role in the Swadeshi movement against the partition of Bengal (1905–8). This agitation was successful in its demands and profoundly influenced later all-India campaigns—yet it marks the apex of Tagore’s career as an anticolonial nationalist leader rather than its opening triumph. The Swadeshi agitation between 1905 and 1908, Tagore later lamented, was coercive in its methods even as it championed liberation. Whether in fiction or in prose, Tagore dramatized his disillusionment with Indian nationalism, and he did so in the colloquial Bengali of ordinary life, disclaiming any dreams of linguistic or cultural purity. When he won the Nobel in 1913, however, he had not yet committed his criticism of the West to print. In 1913, then, observers may have concluded that Tagore had abandoned anticolonialism along with political agitation. In 1916, King George V anointed Tagore a Knight of the British Empire, and that same year he delivered English-language lectures about—or, rather, against—nationalism in Japan and the United States, publishing them the following year in book form. His novel Ghare Baire (The Home and the World), also published in 1916, appeared in English translation the following year, and it was widely read, in India as in Europe, as a critique of Indian nationalism. In conjunction, these events of 1916 suggested a clear moral: Tagore, critical of nationalism, had embraced instead the worldwide ambit of the British Empire.

“Sir Rabindranath,” however, would not prove a sustainable persona, for Tagore soon articulated a trenchant anti-imperialism. In 1919, British troops massacred hundreds of unarmed Indian civilians who had peacefully congregated in Jallianwala Bagh, a walled garden in the northern city of Amritsar. Tagore protested, in part, by returning his knighthood. In a letter to the viceroy explaining his decision, Tagore’s dissent was patriotic and his concerns partly national. In the published version of the letter, which appeared in the leading Indian periodical the
Modern Review, Tagore wrote of “the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India,” claiming an undifferentiated colonial subjection as his own. His role, he argued, required “giving voice to the protest of the millions of my countrymen, surprised into a dumb anguish of terror.” Thus assuming both solidarity and spokesmanship, Tagore returned his knighthood and declared: “I for my part wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen who, for their so-called insignificance, are liable to suffer a degradation not fit for human beings.” Even during this explicitly patriotic action, however, Tagore grounded his nationalist commitment within humanist universals. His countrymen deserve his companionship in this particular crisis, but not simply because of their shared nationality. Rather, his actions reflect the nature of the violation: not simply the oppression of his fellow Indians, but “a degradation not fit for human beings.” Commenting approvingly on Tagore’s published letter, the editor of the Modern Review, Ramananda Chatterjee, drew two “lessons for us”: that we should “acquire the power of helping ourselves” and simultaneously cultivate “a feeling of true brotherliness towards all.” Tagore’s politics reflected this twofold structure, for he simultaneously rejected both of the era’s reigning ideologies—anticolonial nationalism, with its privileging of “ourselves,” and imperial globalism, with its false claims of including “all.” Whether in print and in person, he instead developed an internationalism that could recalibrate the relations between the universal and the particular. He did so through a print internationalism that emphasized Asia, both in rhetoric and in practice, even as it operated through the English language.

I propose that Tagore can be positioned as the originator of a disruptive model for what we now know as “the global Anglophone”: not only because of his 1913 Nobel Prize, which cited his English translation of his poetry, but also through his use of English to build an emphatically non-Eurocentric internationalism. In a global Anglophone that foregrounds Tagore’s gitanjali, English is revealed as a conduit for other language cultures that can work through English to build a better—and not necessarily, in the end, Anglophone—world. In this recentering of the global Anglophone, moreover, I hope to displace its less flattering associations, as for instance its parallels to the literary usage of “the Francophone.” The concept of “Francophone literature” originates in racial and geographical marginalization: it refers, within French-language literature, to writing in French by those outside continental France. Given this unpleasant act of boundary demarcation signaled
in the term, “Francophonie” is often decried by the most celebrated of “Francophone” authors, many of whom would prefer to work within a linguistically and regionally unmarked remit like “Littérature-monde.”

The global Anglophone as I conceive it, however, reflects the difference in writing in English outside that language’s imperial centers. Instead of naming, as in the Francophone model, the persistent desire for an isomorphism of language and nation, as in the confusing term “English literature”—from England? or in English? or both?—the global Anglophone can visualize the imperial continuities across the modern world. Whereas terms like “postcolonial literature” frequently necessitate distinctions between colonialisms old and new, the term “global Anglophone” emphasizes the effects of Anglo-American hegemony without demarcating its historical contours. The now-extensive scholarship on Tagore’s *Nationalism* (1917) and *The Home and the World* has yielded a sophisticated understanding of Tagore’s critique of nationalism. By attending instead to his lesser-known texts, both published and unpublished, I theorize what he championed in nationalism’s place: an Asia-centered print internationalism. Given Asia’s linguistic diversity, this internationalism relied of necessity on the English language, even as it acknowledged that language’s inextricability from Western imperialism. Consequently, this print practice reoriented the English language by using it for pan-Asianist purposes—creating, as I demonstrate, a vision for the global Anglophone in the process.

Tagore created an Asia-centered print internationalism within the global Anglophone by articulating interpretive protocols that he coded as quintessentially Asian. These protocols crystallize most powerfully, I argue, in the curious neologism that Tagore uses as the title of his famed 1912 poetry collection, *Gitanjali: Song Offerings*. Tagore’s term “gitanjali” melds the Sanskritic Bengali words for song (geet) and religious offering (anjali) to invent a new, particularly literary and emphatically international, form of devotional practice. *Anjali* is a religious term, but “gitanjali”—Tagore’s neologism—is not religious in any familiar sense. While Tagore’s writings draw heavily on Hindu and folk forms of addressing the divine, his offerings, ultimately, are not to any divinity but to a humanist universalism—what he will describe in a 1927 preface to a Chinese poem as “an offering to the universal feast of mind.” The word *gitanjali* thus frames cultural particularity as an object of aesthetic contemplation—rather than, for instance, anthropological investigation or historical analysis. Through such contemplation, Tagore suggests, one can produce perceptual, and thereby political, transformations,
using the offerings of widely different cultures as they circulate across the global Anglophone. *Gitanjali’s* openly religious phrasing deploys the assumed ancient wisdom of the spiritual East, and its usage of an untranslated foreign word for its title likely suggested to its readers a text that would be authentically different. Importantly, Tagore’s volume retains its untranslated neologism even in its existence as a translated collection of English-language texts.

The performance of linguistic recalcitrance in the bilingual title—*Gitanjali: Song Offerings*—is thus reaffirmed by what Tagore undertakes between *Gitanjali’s* covers. The poems that he presents as translations of an original Bengali collection are not, on closer inspection, what we would consider translations at all. Yet the collection’s poems proclaim an original that has been translated even as it refuses to maintain fidelity or even consistency in that act of translation, thus becoming, as William Radice puts it, a work “conceive[ed] in translation without a precisely defined source.” As I demonstrate, the kinds of literary interpretation championed by Tagore, which he coded through the neologism crowning this collection, were uniquely suited to his conception of the global Anglophone as a vehicle for a liberatory print internationalism. I use the conceptual work thus undertaken by *Gitanjali*, both collection and neologism, to explore the intersection through which Tagore’s print internationalism operated.

**Creating the Ideals of the East**

Tagore’s interest in the liberatory potential of Asia, and what he valorized as the essentially spiritual nature of Eastern civilization, is often attributed to his immersion in Western discourses of the exotic Orient. Tagore certainly associated the West with industrialization and mechanization, and he frequently denounced Western civilization as prizing the efficiency of the machinic over the magnitude of the spiritual. Yet Tagore’s description of Eastern civilization is not simply that of an alternative to the West, wherein “the East” primarily names an inversion of Western priorities: feminine rather than manly, spiritual rather than materialistic, collectivist rather than individualistic, and so forth. His vision of Asia, rather, made specific claims of commonality, generated through his conversations with other Asians (and, in some key instances, non-Asian converts to Asian religions). Tagore deployed many of the existing stereotypes of Eastern mysticism and spirituality, and his Asianism
can be justly criticized for its reification of these tropes. He built on these
tropes, however, to situate Asia’s legendary spirituality in interpretive
practices rather than in embodied instincts. Through this process, the
tropes became the evidence of practiced skills, for Tagore emphasized
the aesthetic as a means of international transformation. This project
was facilitated, in Gitanjali as elsewhere, by his deployment of Sanskrit
words within Anglophone texts. These untranslated words, which in-
cluded existing terms as well as the key neologism “gitanjali,” served as
metonymic representations of Asia’s shared religious inheritance.

Tagore’s approach to pan-Asianism was shaped by an Anglophone
manifesto of political aesthetics called The Ideals of the East, written in
Kolkata (then spelled Calcutta) by the Japanese art historian Okakura
Kakuzō and published in London with a preface by the Irish-born Hindu
leader Sister Nivedita. Shaped by Okakura’s expertise in Japanese art
and Nivedita’s knowledge of reformist Hinduism, this 1903 text would
define the emphases of Tagore’s print internationalism. Making Oka-
kura’s and Nivedita’s emphases his own, Tagore located the fundamen-
tal unity of Asia in our ability to interpret, across borders, the values of
seemingly disparate aesthetic signs. To set up this chapter’s analysis of
the print internationalism signaled in Tagore’s neologism “gitanjali,” I
will first discuss the one created by Okakura and Nivedita.

Although this print internationalism is now remembered in associ-
ation with Asian men, it was crucially facilitated from its very incep-
tion by a seemingly unrelated demographic: White women. In 1900,
the Japanese art historian Okakura Kakuzō (岡倉覚三, also known as
Okakura Tenshin, 1863–1913) gave a series of lectures on Asian art at
his Tokyo home. In the audience was an American convert to Hin-
duism, Josephine MacLeod, who had moved to India in 1898. After
the talk, McLeod invited Okakura to India to meet her guru, Swami
Vivekananda (née Narendranath Datta, 1863–1902), the Kolkata-based
champion of a muscular Hinduism marked by nationalism, evangelism,
and a theory of nondualism called advaita. Okakura arrived in Kolkata
on January 6, 1902, and stayed in India for nine months, residing for
most of that time at the Tagore family home. He struck up what would
become an extended conversation with Rabindranath Tagore, and their
friendship has often been credited for the versions of pan-Asianism es-
poused by both thinkers.

Tagore’s Asianist internationalism, much like Okakura’s before him,
was not a narrative of native expression, whether Bengali, Japanese,
or simply “Asian.” Rather, it embraced the possibilities of reinvention,
wherein for instance a simple book of poems in English translation could become a gitanjali: an aesthetic act of transcendental devotion. While Tagore was undoubtedly influenced by Okakura, his print internationalism equally suggests the influence of Okakura’s most sustained collaborator in India: Sister Nivedita (1867–1911). Born Margaret Elizabeth Noble to a Scottish family in what is now Northern Ireland, she worked as an activist and educator in the United Kingdom before moving to India in 1898. A devotee of Vivekananda, she assumed the name “Sister Nivedita.” In person and in print, Nivedita powerfully expressed the ideal of India as more a civilizational principle than a racial inheritance. Asian by conversion if not by descent, Nivedita dreamed of a spiritually enlightened Asia, one in which India, Japan, and China would delight in their commonly defined religious inheritance. Although this commonality lay in the connections between Hinduism and Buddhism, as a fervent Hindu, she named it simply Hinduism. Nivedita’s nonracial yet Indian essentialism was crucial for Okakura’s vision of pan-Asianism, and it would come in turn to decisively shape Tagore’s print internationalism. While the dominant narrative of a private friendship between Okakura and Tagore suggests a reassuring authenticity in these influential Asians’ expressions of pan-Asianism, it does so by ignoring the copious contributions of Nivedita. Such elision may be in keeping with the biases of both cultural authenticity and transcultural patriarchy, but it jars uncomfortably with the priorities of the Asianist vision under discussion. Both Okakura and Tagore, after all, labored to demonstrate that the values they attributed to Asia were transmitted not through blood but through cultivation. This emphasis informs my decision here to highlight Nivedita’s contribution, for she was after all that which both men encouraged: Asian by choice, not simply by birth.

During Okakura’s yearlong residence in Tagore’s Kolkata home, his close collaboration with Nivedita resulted in two book-length manuscripts. Only one of these, The Ideals of the East, would be published in either of their lifetimes. (Their second manuscript, now known as The Awakening of the East, was “discovered” only in 1938 and circulated primarily in the context of aggressive Japanese expansion in Asia.) The Ideals of the East was published from London in 1903 under Okakura’s name, with an introduction by Nivedita. The publisher, John Murray, added his own prefatory note: “Mr. Murray wishes to point out that this book is written in English by a native of Japan.” As this note suggests, the authorship of this text was itself a prized performance. As an English-language text “by a native of Japan,” The Ideals of the
East promised both authenticity and accessibility, much as Tagore’s self-translated Gitanjali would a decade later.

Yet whereas Gitanjali expressed its print internationalism through its approach to inhabiting the global Anglophone—in the untranslated neologism of its title, for instance, or its iconoclastic approach to poetry translation—The Ideals of the East hewed to the existing practices of English-language writing. It was written from the start in English, which it used in an accessible and conventional fashion: no translation, disruptive or otherwise, was required. Consequently, the print internationalism of The Ideals of the East was easily obscured, evident only to those who knew to look for it, perhaps because they knew of Okakura’s Indian sojourn and his collaboration with Nivedita. For all other readers, however, the text could easily serve, as John Murray prominently claimed, as a text “in English” by a Japanese “native.”

My reading makes that latent print internationalism evident, highlighting the print internationalism of Okakura’s text by delineating Nivedita’s crucial contributions. Nivedita’s introduction asserts that an understanding of Asia’s transcendent wholeness can have immediate effects, for instance in one’s ability to effectively preserve cultural heritage. To prove her point, she narrates Okakura’s trip to the Ajanta caves in western India, famed for their Buddhist sculptures. Likely made between the second century B.C.E. and the sixth century C.E., these Indian sculptures found their salvation in this Japanese visitor, for Okakura’s acquaintance with the art of the same period in Southern China enabled him to see at once that the stone figures now remaining in the caves had been intended originally merely as the bone or foundation of the statues, all the life and movement of the portrayal having been left to be worked into a deep layer of plaster with which they were afterwards covered.21

Okakura, according to Nivedita, can thus distinguish “the bone or foundation” of an artwork from its “life or movement”: through his familiarity not only with his native Japan but also the neighboring country of China, he can travel to yet another Asian location, India, and immediately apprehend the essential forms of Asian art from earlier millennia. Because he understands, as the title puts it, “the ideals of the East,” he can “see at once” what “had been intended” by Asian artists now long dead.
The superior perception of Asia can thus overcome divides of space and time, and it has lasting consequences as well. Approaching these sculptures in India as though they were exclusively a part of Indian art would have led to their damaging misrecognition, resulting in what Nivedita describes as “an unfortunate amount of ‘cleaning’ and unintentional disfigurement.” But thanks to his internationalist sensibility, Okakura recognizes the true forms of art and thus saves the artwork from a disastrous fate, not only for Indians but for Asians everywhere.

Whether in Nivedita’s introduction or in Okakura’s main text, The Ideals of the East thus posits a perception that bridges the sacred and the secular. This explicit embrace of religious modes makes their print internationalism decisively different from the operations of print nationalism. The emergence of print nationalism, in Anderson’s formulation, required the supersession of the singular languages of religious communities by the interchangeable languages of the imagined communities of nationalism. The emergence of this Asianist internationalism, however, posits the sacred as immersive, essential to print internationalism’s interpretive community. This is a singular semiotics that can interpret the remnants of an Asia that once was, thereby rendering evident an Asian unity yet to come. Such an explicit melding of the sacred and the secular becomes a key aspect of Tagore’s print internationalism. We find this melding signaled in the sacral tones of Tagore’s gitanjali, whose guiding notion of devotional aesthetics Tagore drew from Okakura and Nivedita. Gitanjali, with its iconoclastic linguistic sensibility, enables the formation of communities at once more extensive than the nation and still immediate in their concerns.

Tagore’s gitanjali further builds on The Ideals of the East in invoking its reshaping of a continent into a conceptual geography. Whether in Nivedita’s introduction or Okakura’s main text, The Ideals of the East embraces a flexible geography for Asia, suggesting that it is at once oceanic, in their repeated use of aquatic metaphors, and terrestrial, as in Okakura’s famous opening paragraph:

ASIA is one. The Himalayas divide, only to accentuate, two mighty civilizations, the Chinese with its communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of the Vedas. But not even the snowy barriers can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and Universal, which is the common thought-inheritance of every Asiatic race, . . . distinguishing them from those maritime peoples of
the Mediterranean and the Baltic, who love to dwell on the Particular, and to search out the means, not the end, of life.\textsuperscript{23}

The commonalities of “every Asiatic race” distinguish them from another collective category, the “maritime peoples of the Mediterranean and the Baltic.” Despite their presently limited political power and lack of military prowess, \textit{The Ideals of the East} suggests, their love of the “Universal” and the “Ultimate” is superior to the latter’s pursuit of the “Particular” and the expedient. Before dividing East and West, however, we are first told of the divide within that single Asia, separating two civilizations—Chinese and Indian—marked by “communism” and “individualism,” respectively. Okakura refers to them later as “the two great poles of Asiatic civilization,”\textsuperscript{24} thus spreading out a single Asia without splitting it apart. Whereas Gandhi would write, six years later, of exactly two civilizations—Indian and Western—Okakura’s innovation, heavily informed by Nivedita’s Hindu faith, is to assert that civilizations can be binarized but not enumerated. This claim is maintained in Tagore’s Asianist enthusiasms, and it enables a productive fuzziness at the center of his conception of Asia. Much as premodern dynastic societies were defined around a radiating center of power rather than through the demarcated borders of nation-states, so too this Asia has “two great poles” and a “broad expanse” surrounding them—another crucial difference from the imagined spatial consistency of Anderson’s print nationalism, where borders define the imagined community’s shared geography. The text moves from this assertion of singularity and dualities to a description of various racial migrations. These remarks culminate in the text’s articulation of Asia’s racial linkages: “For if Asia be one, it is also true that the Asiatic races form a single mighty web.”\textsuperscript{25} As the web metaphor suggests, the inter-Asian connections are multiple and often discontinuous, even as the final reality is “a single mighty” unity across races. This is not quite the network metaphor so prevalent in our twenty-first-century moment, but it possesses many of its conceptual strengths, enabling the gaps between its various nodes (in this case, races) to be constitutive of an apprehensible whole.

In creating a “web” model of Asia’s interconnected differences, moreover, both Okakura and Nivedita rely on an eclectic understanding of Asia’s religious inheritance, combining Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Hinduism. Okakura explains in his opening pages that “we forget, in an age of classification, that types are after all but shining points of distinctness in an ocean of approximations, false gods delib-
erately set up to be worshipped, for the sake of mental convenience.”

This vivid image of light glinting on water renders cultural variation at once stunning and insubstantial: an optical illusion manifesting itself on a surface that betokens unfathomed depths. In understanding nations as merely “false gods,” moreover, Okakura draws on nineteenth-century Bengali debates around the essential monotheism of Hinduism’s lived polytheism, debates in which Nivedita herself had participated.

These religiously informed discussions reveal Nivedita’s most substantial contribution to the book: the nondualist school of Hindu philosophy known as *advaita*, which constitutes just a minor strain in Japanese Buddhism but nonetheless became essential to Okakura’s Asianism. In *advaita* philosophy, the recognition that the differentiation experienced in daily life was an illusion (*maya*) enabled an individual to seek greater unity with the universe. As Okakura glossed the concept in his diary from Kolkata in 1902:

> The word *advaita* [sic] means the state of not being two, and is the name applied to the great Indian doctrine that all which exists, though apparently manifold, is really one. Hence all truth must be discoverable in any single differentiation, the whole universe involved in every detail. All thus becomes equally precious.27

The *advaita* framework of *The Ideals of the East* led to a marked conceptual difference between Nivedita’s and Okakura’s, and later Tagore’s, Asia-centered print internationalism and the pan-Asianisms of their contemporaries. Whereas other versions of pan-Asianism in the same period would draw on linguistic history (such as that of classical Chinese), or on the Confucian and Daoist notion of the kingly way (*wang-dao* 王道), the Asianism spawned by Nivedita and Okakura and, as I discuss in the following pages, spread by Tagore would always emphasize the single entity that merely appears to be multiple. This Asia is a “united breathing organism” in Nivedita’s introduction, and “a single mighty web” in Okakura’s text: it is an “ocean of approximations” that is “divide[d] only to accentuate” its unity.

Most importantly, *The Ideals of the East* produces an interpretive matrix which will come to animate Tagore’s sustained interest in East Asian art and literature. The difficulties of distinguishing between the good and the bad of modernity can be resolved, Okakura suggests, through a distinction between technique and ideals. This claim
echoes Okakura’s famous 1882 disagreement with the painter Koyama Shōtarō (小山正太郎, 1857–1916), who claimed, in a manifesto of this title, that “calligraphy is not art.” Okakura intervened to defend one of Japan’s most esteemed art forms, and he did so by shifting the emphasis away from the methods of artistic expression—such as calligraphy, painting, or sculpture. Rather than debate how Japan’s calligraphic tradition would fit within the genre taxonomies of Western art, Okakura argued that art should be judged not by how it is made, but by the ethical vision expressed in the final work. Twenty years later, writing from India for all of Asia, Okakura would repeat this move in *Ideals of the East*, presenting the difference between technique and ideals as a widely available route for cultural revitalization. He explains: “Technique is thus but the weapon of artistic warfare; scientific knowledge of anatomy and perspective, the commissariat that sustains the army. . . . Ideals, in turn, are the modes in which the artistic mind moves, a plan of campaign which the nature of the country imposes on war.” By establishing this distinction between the techniques of art and its substantive ideals, Okakura laid the groundwork for much of Tagore’s project. His division authorized Tagore’s later investment in the global Anglophone as the medium for his Asia-centered print internationalism. Nivedita’s work with Okakura, written and published in English, demonstrated that *The Ideals of the East* could, quite literally, deploy “the weapon” of the English language in service of Asia’s “artistic mind.” Despite the European origins of the English language, the global Anglophone thus became a legitimate “weapon of artistic warfare,” expressing an Asian-centered vision of the future by Okakura and Nivedita, and by Tagore as well. *Gitanjali*’s more complex inhabitation of the global Anglophone would thus fulfill the articulation that Okakura and Nivedita’s text had expressed, giving that vision an aesthetic form.

**Sanskrit for the Global Anglophone**

Why did Tagore reach through English to Sanskrit to accomplish his print internationalism, as he did with his collection’s title, *Gitanjali*? While this strategy may seem at first glance designed chiefly to appeal to the Western reader, we find Tagore using the same method in his most crucial *Indian* discussion: his published disagreements with M. K. “Mahatma” Gandhi. Even as Tagore moved from nationalism to internationalism in the second decade of the twentieth century, the Indian
Chapter 1

anticolonial movement expanded massively in its scale and its ambitions during this same period—a shift often attributed to Gandhi’s return to India in 1915. Gandhi had invented his methods of nonviolent resistance, known as satyagraha, while in South Africa, and on returning to India he led several smaller protests on the same model. Tagore was both a friend and a comrade, an interlocutor and an admirer, of Gandhi’s, but as Gandhi’s politics evolved, Tagore’s admiration came to be accompanied by skepticism. In 1919, Gandhi organized his first all-India satyagraha, and in 1920, fusing the energies of the Khilafat movement and the outrage against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, he launched an all-India satyagraha campaign called the noncooperation movement. Centering on the boycott of all things foreign, the noncooperation movement particularly advocated the mass abandonment of British institutions of education and the public immolation of foreign fabrics. Whereas the first two tactics had been used with some success in the Swadeshi movement of 1905 to 1908—which, as we saw earlier, Tagore had prominently supported—Gandhi added a new component that came to decisively distinguish his mobilizations from earlier Indian protests. The Swadeshi agitation of 1905–8 had asked its supporters to replace their foreign fabrics with those made in Indian textile mills. Gandhi’s noncooperation movement of 1920 to 1922, by contrast, asked its supporters to abandon industrial mills altogether, regardless of the mill’s ownership or location. Instead, supporters were told to make and wear the homespun fabric known as khadi.

As Gandhi’s noncooperation movement gained in strength and influence, Tagore launched a public critique of Gandhi’s political strategy. In a series of published exchanges in 1921 and 1925, Tagore and Gandhi engaged in an increasingly acrimonious debate, one interrupted only by Gandhi’s imprisonment from 1922 to 1924 and by Tagore’s trip to China in 1924. Despite both leaders’ preference for Indian languages—Tagore for Bengali, and Gandhi for Gujarati—their much-publicized debate took place within the language of English. The irony was considerable: Tagore began this debate, for instance, with a salvo that dismissed nationalism on the basis of linguistic evidence. He proclaimed: “We have no word for ‘Nation’ in our language. When we borrow this word from other people, it never fits us.” Lexicographers may or may not concur with Tagore’s philological assertion, yet the phrasing of his objection only generates more questions. Who comprises Tagore’s imagined collectivity of “us,” for which the word “nation” cannot serve? The plural pronoun “we” is undefined, and it is further confused by the confident
use of the singular noun with the plural possessive, for he writes of “our language” in reference to a subcontinent that is famously multilingual.

For Tagore, even the repackaging of nationalist concepts under Indic names is insufficient: “However we may delude ourselves with the phrases learnt from the West, Swaraj is not our objective.”32 The simplicity of Tagore’s sentence belies its strategic obfuscation: what, exactly, are “the phrases learnt from the West” that would lead to the adoption of “Swaraj,” an ostentatiously non-Western word, as “our objective”? Leaving this ambiguity unresolved, Tagore continues to dismantle the term “Swaraj,” a key term in Gandhi’s version of anticolonialism, which is usually translated as “self-rule,” and which Gandhi preferred to terms like “swatantra,” a common competitor with a more obvious emphasis on governance. Tagore argues, in this English-language essay, that “swaraj” is just “maya,” a Sanskrit word with cosmic significance that indicates the illusory nature of what we perceive as reality.33 He thus provides Sanskrit to Sanskrit translation, but within the language of English. This is a nexus of linguistic interchange that defies our existing theorizations of the translated and the untranslated.

As these examples suggest, even when debating his compatriots, Tagore relied on the strategy of linguistic interruption through untranslated words that he had first devised in his print internationalism. In these debates with Gandhi, the English language serves Tagore as both a medium and a metaphor. For instance, Tagore asserts that whereas previous nationalist leaders had deluded the country with their inflated rhetoric, Gandhi communicated in a substantial fashion that exceeded elite language:

> Previously, the vision of our political leaders had never reached beyond the English-knowing classes, because the country meant for them only that bookish aspect of it which is to be found in the pages of the Englishman’s history. Such a country was merely a mirage born of vapourings in the English language. . . . At this juncture, Mahatma Gandhi came and stood at the cottage door of the destitute millions, clad as one of themselves, and talking to them at last in their own language. Here was the truth at last, not a mere quotation out of a book.34

The transformation here is both of medium and of language: rather than a country represented by “a mirage born of vapourings in the English
language” and praised by “a mere quotation out of a book,” Gandhi presents “the truth at last” and does so to “the destitute millions” in “their own language.” The linguistic reference is metaphorical—India’s millions, after all, speak many different languages—as is the framing device of Gandhi standing “at the cottage door.” Yet with this metaphor Tagore praises Gandhi as embodying “the truth at last,” through clothing and perhaps through speech.

Tagore’s contributions were all published in the Modern Review, a Kolkata-based monthly periodical edited by Ramananda Chatterjee whose content, circulation, and cosmopolitan sensibility register it indubitably, I would suggest, as part of the global Anglophone. Widely regarded as the premier English-language periodical of late colonial India, it served as both a literary revue and a political newspaper. Tagore’s views consequently appeared in volumes of well over a hundred pages in length, amid features that varied widely across politics, literature, science, archaeology, and the arts; a smattering of full-page advertisements; and a cover image of strikingly original contemporary art.

Tagore first published his misgivings about the noncooperation movement in May 1921, and he did so in an intimate first-person voice explicitly addressed neither to Gandhi nor to his readers. He published, instead, three letters that he had written, while in Chicago and then New York, to the Anglican priest and anticolonial activist Charles Freer Andrews (1871–1940). Tagore’s opening salvo in the debate thus mimicked the format of an epistolary novel, appearing under the minimalist title “Letters from Rabindranath Tagore.” He opened the first letter by explaining that he has been unable to “tune my mood of mind to be in accord with the great feeling of excitement sweeping across my country,” so he has turned instead to poetry, “playing with inventing new metres.” This seemingly trivial artistic activity has wider political significance, he explains, because inventing metres is akin to a social principle that he terms “the law of co-operation.” Tagore writes that this law “was what the metre is in poetry, which is not a mere system of enclosure for keeping ideas from running away in disorder, but for vitalising them, making them indivisible in a unity of creation.”

Gandhi’s movement of noncooperation to which Tagore objects is thus a violation of laws both social and aesthetic: by severing the ordering principles of human existence, it yields not politics but chaos. It creates poetry bereft of meter—which, as Tagore suggests, lacks any “unity of creation” that would give it meaning. As elsewhere in his print internationalism, Tagore’s understanding of Indian politics remains animated
by gitanjali: poetry, not practicality, is a guiding principle. He consistently advances a musical understanding of anticolonialism, writing of “the music of this wonderful awakening of India by love.”39 In trying to join this awakening, though, he discovered a “mighty volume” of “shouts”:

And what is this noise about me? If it is a song, then my own sitar [stringed instrument] can catch the tune and I join in the chorus, for I am a singer. But if it is a shout, then my voice is wrecked and I am lost in bewilderment. I have been trying all these days to find in it a melody, straining my ear, but the idea of non-cooperation with its mighty volume of sound does not sing to me, its congregated menace of negation shouts.40

Despite Tagore’s perception of a “congregated menace of negation,” the noncooperation movement did mark a significant positive moment of collaboration, as non-Muslims rallied around the Muslim-identified Khilafat cause. The “negation” of British goods, moreover, was paired with the emphatic affirmation of homespun khadi fabric, as Gandhi encouraged not only the wearing of khadi but its creation within the home. By spinning on the charkha (spinning wheel) to make khadi—a practice that would become iconic of Gandhi himself—any individual could join Gandhi’s agitation, without even leaving home.

And yet, Tagore’s advocacy of a musical and poetic project of anticolonial liberation could not incorporate the advocacy of hand-spinning. Much like Okakura and Nivedita, who argued that the final vision in a created work was more important than its techniques of creation, so too Tagore condemned Gandhi’s advocacy of spinning as the advocacy of a mere method, no matter how indigenous, rather than the expression of ideals through an appropriate creative means. Gandhi called on all Indians to spin for half an hour every day, regardless of their aptitude, disposition, or profession. Tagore was a champion of the folk arts, yet he vehemently refused to spin, much to the dismay of his contemporaries. The spinning of khadi failed to qualify for him as a form of worshipful aesthetic activity: that is, as a gitanjali that might contribute to collective advancement. In his published disagreement, Tagore described Gandhi’s followers as at once “immensely busy” and “intensely afraid,” motivated by “an unquestioning obedience” to what he termed Gandhi’s magical formula: boycotts and spinning.41 Spinning, in Tagore’s opinion, provided a distracting “relief” from the difficulties
of anticolonial liberation, enabling Gandhi’s followers to ignore “the defects of character and the perversions of social custom” that are the real obstacles to meaningful liberation.\textsuperscript{42} He argued that “the whole attention is concentrated on home spun thread, no surprise is felt but rather relief.” Tagore laments that Gandhi’s politics, while opposed to the standardizing impulses of modernity in its intentions, retains an impersonal standardization in its message: “To one and all he simply says: Spin and weave, spin and weave.”\textsuperscript{43} Spinning creates thread, but is not a creative act, “for in turning the wheel man merely becomes an appendage of the \textit{charkha}; that is to say, he but does himself what a machine might have done: he converts his living energy into a dead turning movement.”\textsuperscript{44}

Spinning thus marks the limits of the devotional aesthetics that Tagore championed as gitanjali. Instead of producing various forms that figure an underlying unity of spirit, as in his approach to Asian literature, spinning produces a single product—the thread that becomes the homespun fabric \textit{khadi}—through a single activity. It thereby dulls the individual spirit into a mechanical or animalistic uniformity, rendering humans akin to bees, spiders, and “mill-turning bullock[s].”\textsuperscript{45} This criticism of Gandhi’s agenda can help us to understand the particularity of Tagore’s Asianist aesthetics, not only in comparison to his Indian contemporaries but also in relation to Western aesthetic theory. In Western philosophy, art has long been defined by the value of purposelessness, a criterion that distinguishes the useful realm of craft from the valorized realm of art, whether in the cherished disinterest of Immanuel Kant’s critique of aesthetic judgment or the championed autonomy of Theodor Adorno’s work of art. Tagore’s critique, however, concerned monotony and consistency, not utility or necessity. The aesthetic for him required humans’ reshaping of the material world in the process of creation, regardless of the nature of the original materials. His advocacy of Asian aesthetics could, consequently, accommodate works that were poorly made, or even made using foreign materials, as long as they still expressed ideals—perhaps, we might say, expressed \textit{The Ideals of the East}. Tagore’s Asianism could not include the indigenous monotony of \textit{khadi} cloth, no matter how much it enabled Asia’s political liberation, nor how faithfully it used the Asian mechanism of the \textit{charkha}.

As these two Indian icons debated Indian politics in the Anglophone public sphere, they resorted to quoting extensively from the language that leveled regional differences but magnified those of caste, class, and religion: Sanskrit. Through these Sanskritisms, they created within their English-language debate a frisson of the secretive knowledge of a Brah-
min past. Whereas Tagore inserted untranslated Sanskrit to suggest that his quotidian objections would enable the consideration of ultimate ideals, Gandhi incorporated Sanskrit quotations only to transform those abstractions into concrete commandments. For instance, Tagore concluded his essay “The Call of Truth” (August 1921) with a quotation from Sanskrit verse: it is transliterated into Roman script but not translated into English, and is devoid of any attribution:

Yo ekōvarno vahudā shakti yōgāt
Varnānanekān nihitārthodadhāti
Vichaiti chānte vishwamādau
Sa no buddhyā subhayā samyunaktu!46

As only the most elite of his readers would have recognized, Tagore’s entirely unexplained culminating quotation is taken from the Shvetashvatara Upanishad, one of a set of ancient texts composed in the first and second millennia B.C.E. Intended for careful recitation, these verses were preserved primarily through oral transmission and only secondarily through textual inscription. The verse in its most conventional form reads:

य एकोऽवणो बृहो शक्तियोगाद्वारणाननकःश्रीहितात्र दधाति।
विचैति चात्मन्ते विश्वमादौ च देव: स नो बुद्ध्या शुभमया संयुनक्तु॥
(Shvetashvatara Upanishad 4.1)

Who alone, himself without color, wielding his power creates variously countless colors, and in whom the universe comes together at the beginning and dissolves in the end—may he furnish us with lucid intelligence.47

Given this Upanishad's focus on a theistic argument for the unity of the divine, Tagore’s deployment of this verse, untranslated, moved his essay from a concrete discussion of contemporary nationalism into the epochal contemplation of divinity itself. As this example demonstrates, even Tagore’s most explicitly political publications culminate in a chant of prayer. There is no form of truly creative writing, it seems, that does not in Tagore’s hands become a form of gitanjali.

Tagore quotes scripture again in 1925, this time to argue for an internal vision of liberation that will be more than the “heaps of thread and piles of cloth” that he dismisses as Gandhi’s platform.48 Instead of a single activity that can be replicated individually across all of India, Tagore
champions the initial fulfillment of a comprehensive ideal for what liberation would mean, even if only on a limited scale. Tagore declares:

That which we would achieve for the whole of India must be actually made true even in some small corner of it. . . . Then only shall we know the real value of self-determination, \textit{na medhaya na bahudha srutena}, not by reasoning nor by listening to lectures, but by direct experience.\textsuperscript{49}

The “small corner” thus serves as an inspirational example, enabling Indians to generate a vision that is positive in its aspirations, not merely anti-Western in its goals. This ideal, once realized, can reverberate through “the whole of India.” In making this pragmatic suggestion, Tagore quotes from the \textit{Mundaka Upanishad}, which is known for its attack on ritual and its valorization of an internal approach to the divine.

Whereas Tagore in his earlier quotation from the Upanishads presented a verse in its entirety without any explanation, in this later instance he includes only part of the line and also provides a faithful gloss of its contents. The original verse reads:

\begin{quote}
नायमात्रा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो
न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन
\end{quote}

\textit{(Mundaka Upanishad, 3.2.3)}

This self cannot be grasped,
by teachings or by intelligence,
or even by great learning.\textsuperscript{50}

In both instances, Tagore chooses one of the later verses in the Upanishads, and in each he quotes a section which transformed his worldly discussion of political strategy into a metaphorical image for a larger spiritual process. The passage in which this quotation occurs valorizes a self that is cosmic, whose transcendental connections Tagore associates with “the real value of self-determination,” more so than mere political autonomy.

\section*{Tagore’s China}

Toward the end of these debates with Gandhi, Tagore undertook a trip of which he had long dreamed: to China. China was a sustained interest for Tagore, one that culminated in his establishment of an institute
for Chinese studies (Cheena-Bhavana) at his Visva-Bharati University in 1937. Whereas his travel diaries for his other Asian voyages, such as his trips to Japan and to Indonesia, would be published in Bengali, for his China trip Tagore published his talks in English, a choice which makes that volume particularly apposite to our discussion. Tagore emerged on the Chinese literary scene amid discussions of India as a cautionary tale of Asian decline, for instance in the work of the reformer Kang Youwei (康有為 1858–1927). Yet Tagore’s international celebrity generated considerable interest, with some Chinese reformers wondering if he might serve as a cultural exemplar and potential model for a rapidly changing China. His work was first published in China in 1915; less than fifteen years later, he had been the subject of at least 350 essays and eighteen book-length translations, not to mention a considerable number of shorter published translations.51

To take Tagore in China seriously, we must first dismiss an assumption commonplace in much contemporary criticism—that translation, via the circuit of the global Anglophone, delimits all future reception. Even though Tagore’s works were mediated through English, in Asia as in Europe, they were often differently understood in those two continents. *The Home and the World*, for instance, was read in diametrically opposite ways by Western and Chinese Marxists. Georg Lukács’s polemical review of *The Home and the World*, which he published in 1920 under the title “Tagore’s Gandhi novel,” famously condemned it as a libelous pamphlet, understanding it as a long attack on Gandhi and describing Tagore as England’s “intellectual agent in the struggle against the Indian freedom movement.”52 Chinese readers, by contrast, read Tagore’s works only to conclude that his politics were synonymous with those of Gandhi.53 Chinese-language readers of *The Home and the World* might have read any one of three different Chinese translations, but all three translators worked from the translation (into English) that Tagore and his nephew Surendranath Tagore had generated. Whereas recent scholars have worked to reconcile Chinese understandings of Tagore’s novel with Bengali ones,54 what is more interesting, for our purposes, is the divergence enabled through multiple moments of translation. As this example demonstrates, translation not only creates equivalences across languages but also, and simultaneously, generates new forms of incommensurability. This is not the incommensurability of untranslatability, wherein a term or concept cannot find its equivalent in another language world, but an incommensurability born of the unpredictable consequences of translation: an effect of translation,
and perhaps a history of untranslatability, but not an impediment to it. When it comes to Tagore in China, activities of translation produce not standardization but a seemingly endless multiplication of possibilities (a pattern evident as recently as 2013, when Feng Tang’s new Chinese translation of Tagore’s *Stray Birds* generated outrage and controversy). The translation of Tagore from English into Chinese sometimes echoed the choices made in the earlier translation of Tagore’s Bengali manuscripts into the English language. For instance, much as *Gitanjali* had been untranslated in the title of its English text and transliterated phonetically into the Roman alphabet, it was similarly untranslated for the Chinese edition and transliterated as *Jitanjiali* 吉檀迦利. In this instance, moreover, the process of transliteration offered its own resources for shaping meaning and conditioning reception: the title was transliterated through the method used for transporting Buddhist terminology into Chinese. Because of these nontranslational methods, Chinese-language readers, perhaps even more than their English-language peers, approached *Gitanjali* anticipating, from its very title, to read a spiritual text.

The most significant Tagore collection in China, however, was neither the *Gitanjali* of his Nobel Prize citation, nor the novel *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*, 1916), which has received so much attention in recent U.S. scholarship. The greatest literary impact of Tagore in China was made by *The Crescent Moon* (*Xinyue ji* 新月集) poetry collection of 1913, with the 1916 collection *Stray Birds* (*Feiniao ji* 飛鳥集) a close second. These two collections, unlike *Gitanjali*, circulated in Chinese under translated titles (and not transliterated ones). Both *The Crescent Moon* and *Stray Birds* were only modestly successful in the West, and they are relatively unknown outside China even today. Unlike the more somber and explicitly theological *Gitanjali*, *The Crescent Moon* contained what the subtitle termed “child-poems”: brief prose poems, usually centered around a single evocative image or a simple narrative about two characters. Like *Gitanjali* the previous year, these poems were translated by Tagore himself, yet they were conspicuously devoid of the archaic English diction (such as the use of “thou”) and the direct address to the Divine found in the performed anachronism of Tagore’s *Gitanjali*. Whereas the English-language *Gitanjali* included an influential preface by the Irish poet W. B. Yeats, the English-language *The Crescent Moon* collection lacked any framing by other writers. It did, however, contain eight color illustrations by Nandalal Bose (1882–1966), Asit Kumar Haldar (1890–1964), Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951), and Surendranath Ganguly (1885–1909). These paintings were
all in the Orientalist style of the Bengal School of Art, which rejected Western styles of perspective and mimesis in favor of a flat plane of representation and the figural methods of Japanese wash painting. In picking up *The Crescent Moon*, the Chinese reader of Tagore’s Anglophone volume would have found a book that, despite its use of English, was at once distinctively new and recognizably Asian. Through the inclusion of these images, Tagore once again positioned his English-language poetry within the global Anglophone even as it pulled readers outside it: much as the untranslated title, anachronistic phrasing, and iconoclastic translations of *Gitanjali* performed the disruptive presence of other languages, elsewhere, so too the Asianist illustrations of *The Crescent Moon* disturbed its pages of otherwise conventional English-language usage.

Sisir Kumar Das has described in detail the relations between the English poems of *The Crescent Moon* and its Bengali sources, foremost among them the 1903 collection *Shishu (The Child)*, where one finds the originals for thirty-five of the forty poems. This divergence reflects, in part, the considerable temporal gap between these poems’ composition and their translation into English. *Shishu* was written in 1903, shortly after the death of Tagore’s wife, and it was intended to console his twelve-year-old daughter, who herself was sick with an illness that would prove fatal. A decade later, Tagore was working at the height of his worldwide acclaim, translating thirty-five of these poems for entry into the global Anglophone, at a time when U.S. and U.K. publishers were clamoring for his material.

While *Shishu* is a text suitable for reading aloud to children, *The Crescent Moon* is intended for an adult reader, its complete sentences inviting solitary and silent contemplation. The Bengali poems frequently rely on the consistent rhythmic patterns typical of children’s poetry, in keeping with Tagore’s sustained interest in the improvisational women’s genre known as *chhara*. The English poems, by contrast, provide the reassuring repetition of assonance, not the steady patter of children’s rhyme. An indicative example can be found in the poem “Birpurush” (literally, “Valiant Man”) in *Shishu*, translated as “Hero” in *The Crescent Moon*:

মনে করো যেন বিদেশ ঘুরে
মাকে নিয়ে যাচ্ছি অনেক দূরে।
তুমি যাচ্ছ পালকিতে মা চড়ে
দরজা দুটো একটুকু ফাঁক করে।
আমি যাচ্ছি রাঙ্গা ঘোড়ার ‘পরে
টগবিয়ে তোমার পাশে পাশে।
The simple rhyme scheme unfolds in eight even lines, usually a trochaic pentameter but with the occasional dactyl or spondee thrown in. The overall effect is that of a galloping horse, with the nontrochaic feet occurring on onomatopoeic or descriptive words (ektuku, togbagiye). In *The Crescent Moon*, however, Tagore removes the rhyme scheme entirely, creating a poignant opening passage marked by fear. Whereas the meter of his Bengali poem places us in the action, the complete sentences of his English poem, combined with an early introduction of images that occur later in the Bengali, relay a languid scene instead:

Mother, let us imagine we are travelling, and passing through a strange and dangerous country.
You are riding in a palanquin and I am trotting by you on a red horse.
It is evening and the sun goes down. The waste of Joradighi lies wan and grey before us. The land is desolate and barren.
You are frightened and thinking—“I know not where we have come to.”
I say to you, “Mother, do not be afraid.”

Whereas the Bengali poem can be easily read to, or even read by, a child, the English poem is intended for an adult reader, who might from that position contemplate the fantasies of childhood. Joradighi is simply the name of a particular place in Bengal, but by italicizing its name for the Anglophone reader the unfamiliar word gains the potent resonances of a mysterious and perhaps mythical wasteland.

It was this adult-oriented poetry about childhood, and not the child-oriented poems of *Shishu*, that captured the Chinese imagination in the
early twentieth century. *The Crescent Moon* is the only one of Tagore’s English-language poetry collections in which all of the poems are titled, including several poems originally published (in different forms) in *Gitanjali*. The modifications of poem 62 in *Gitanjali*, which becomes “When and Why,” the ninth poem in *The Crescent Moon*, are indicative of the pattern of revisions. Whereas the opening lines of *Gitanjali*’s poem 62 read:

> When I bring to you
> What the pleasure is that streams
> What delight that is which the summer breeze brings

*The Crescent Moon*’s “When and Why” begins:

> When I bring you
> What pleasure streams
> What delight the summer breeze brings

As this example indicates, *The Crescent Moon* frequently simplified the style of the earlier *Gitanjali*, removing the articles and pronouns that so impressed early readers and so frustrated that text’s later audiences. This shift in style, however, was poorly received in the West: the *Times Literary Supplement*, for instance, described the collection as “more childish than childlike.”59

Whereas the child focus in *Shishu* suggests possibilities for performance and play, the childlike focus in *The Crescent Moon* generally opens out onto larger spiritual and political considerations. Whatever the motivations behind his translation choices, Tagore’s pattern of translation into English fortuitously encouraged *The Crescent Moon*’s positive reception in China, for Tagore’s choices shifted the poems away from the genre of children’s literature to a register reminiscent of that associated with the Neo-Confucian philosopher Li Zhi (李贄, 1527–1602). Li Zhi had championed the “childlike heart-mind” (*tongxin* 童心) as an innate human talent whose sincere expression authorized political and religious dissent. Tagore was likely unfamiliar with Li Zhi’s work, but at a time when the legitimacy of revolution was a key concern, Tagore’s “child-poems” may have struck his Chinese audience like a similar resource: a performed simplicity that critiqued corruption and ostentation, and that was simultaneously ethical and political.
The resemblance to Li Zhi’s philosophic ideal was almost certainly inadvertent, but the consequences were significant: by embodying in the English-language *Crescent Moon* collection the Chinese ideal of the childlike heart-mind, Tagore’s poetry became associated with Li Zhi’s stance, wherein the succinct expression of ostentatious naïveté could express a trenchant call to political revolution. Li Zhi concludes his most famous essay on the childlike heart-mind (*tongxin shuo* 童心說) with an anguished exclamation, itself a reworking of a line from the third century B.C.E. Daoist text *Zhuangzi* 莊子: “Oh! Wherever can I find a genuine great sage who has not yet lost his childlike heart-mind and have a word with him about writing?” Chinese readers of *The Crescent Moon* may well have found in Tagore an answer to Li Zhi’s query.

*The Crescent Moon* had an extraordinary career in China, where it was widely read and admired by the elite, many of whom read it in English while studying in Japan, England, or the United States. For this reason, it is an exemplary instance of how print internationalism can work within the global Anglophone, for its effects were enabled by Anglo-American hegemony and yet not reducible to its politics. As Gal Gvili has demonstrated, Chinese readers found in Tagore’s works the potential of poetry to unify society, while religion, refracted through Tagore’s spiritual aesthetics, came to be seen in sentimental terms. Consequently, while British and American readers generally understood *gitanjali* as a spiritual aesthetics that might remedy the ills of Western civilization, Chinese intellectuals usually understood *gitanjali* to describe aesthetics and poetics deployed as a transcendent offering to the universal. In 1923, in admiration and emulation of Tagore’s collection, Xu Zhimo (徐志摩, 1897–1931) founded the *Crescent Moon Society* (xinyue she 新月社) to promote the Chinese new poetry (*xin shi* 新詩). The society’s members included literary luminaries like Hu Shi (胡適, 1891–1962), Wen Yiduo (聞一多, 1899–1946), and Shen Congwen (沈從文, 1902–88), and it sought to create a new poetry marked by an attentiveness to form. In their approach to poetic form, rhythm, and not rhyme, was the key distinction between poetry and prose, a vision within which Tagore’s even cadences worked perfectly. Their understanding of *gitanjali* is manifest, for instance, in Xu Zhimo’s 1923 poem “Tai shan richu” 泰山日出, which Gvili describes as “a song of prayer completely devoid of divine presence.”

Tagore’s considerable print presence in China was soon enhanced by his physical arrival. Tagore went to China in 1924, giving a series of lectures on the invitation of the prominent reformer Liang Qichao
Tagore’s talks in China, both in their original occasion of address and in their later publications, were in English, yet only in the published version did they have much chance of finding an audience who might follow every word. Tagore’s lectures in China, as he repeatedly lamented, were English-language addresses to audiences who largely knew no English at all. The talks themselves might thus best be understood as a kind of site-specific performance, with the linguistic component operating in concert with other elements of Tagore’s presentation. His words were anticipated by many but understood semantically by few. Those who could not understand him, however, seemed delighted simply to see him, often dressing up for the occasion in costumes that they imagined would match Tagore’s Indian robes.63

While in China, Tagore traveled with a notable entourage: an internationalist ensemble of two Indians (the artist Kalidas Nag [1892–1966] and the Sanskrit scholar Kshitimohan Sen [1880–1960]), one British agriculturist (Leonard Elmhirst [1893–1974]), and two Chinese translators (the poets Lin Huiyin [林徽因, 1904–55] and Xu Zhimo). On their return to Bengal, Elmhirst typed, edited, and arranged the talks for publication; Tagore and Nag were heavily involved in this process of selection and revision. That collection of talks given in Japan and in China, heavily revised and shorn of any markers of their occasion of address, were published later that year as *Talks in China*.64 The published volume was intended primarily for fluent readers of English, and they appeared with all dates and locations removed. Through this reframing, the book *Talks in China* evokes and yet does not fully represent the “talks in China” that it promises to print.

The book version of *Talks in China* opens with a title page that includes Chinese characters, followed by a page glossing those characters: and then, yet another title page, this time without any Chinese. From the first edition in 1924, *Talks in China* includes an introduction by Liang Qichao (credited as “Liang Chi Chao”), taken from “a speech of welcome” he delivered for Tagore in Peking (Beijing).65 The 1925 edition adds a publisher’s note that serves to introduce both the primary text and its introducer. Relying heavily on a long footnote from the British scholarly volume *Gems of Chinese Literature* (attributed here to Herbert A. “Iles” rather than Giles), the “Publisher’s Note” describes Liang-chi-chao as “one of the most brilliant of the band of reformers who succeeded in establishing the Republic [of China].”66

Liang Qichao begins his introduction by disclaiming that it is “but my own impression as a historian and a Buddhist.”67 Noting that Tag-
ore has “receive[d] a tremendous welcome” all over the world, he then explains that “the peoples of Europe and America” were motivated by “the meaningless idolatry of hero-worship.”68 By contrast, the Chinese welcome in Liang’s estimation is linked to “the one great central idea, that he comes to us from the country which is our nearest and dearest brother,—India.”69 According to Liang, “In ancient times China . . . suffered from the disadvantage of being shut up in one corner of eastern Asia without any means of communicating with other great races and cultures.”70 With “savages” to the east and south and “barbarous and ferocious races” to the north and west, he explains, ancient China had but one source of assistance.71

But across our south-western boundary, there was a great and cultured country, India. Both in character and geography, India and China are like twin brothers. Before most of the civilised races became active, we two brothers had already begun to study the great problems which concern the whole of mankind. . . . India was ahead of us and we, the little brother, followed behind.72

In contrast to the civilizations and races of the West, who “have come coveting our land and our wealth,” the “two brothers” India and China were motivated by “the cause of universal truth” and “the destiny of mankind,” devoid of “any motive of self-interest.”73 Liang concludes by celebrating “our Buddhistic heritage,” through which “Indian thought has been entirely assimilated into our own world of experience and has become an inalienable part of our consciousness.”74

For the readers of Talks in China, as for the audience at Tagore’s reception in Beijing, Liang Qichao thus introduces Tagore as the spiritual fulfillment of a long-standing historical legacy: “In the personality of Rabindranath Tagore, as well as in his poetry, we find that exemplification of those principles of absolute love and absolute freedom, which form the basis of Hindu culture and civilisation.”75 Even as Liang’s English-language introduction emphasizes Tagore’s Hindu attributes, the cover of the book within which it appears performs Chineseness instead. The cover of the 1925 version (fig. 1) inscribes the title—the English words “Talks in China”—in a stylized font that runs top to bottom, as was conventional for writing Chinese, rather than left to right, as one would expect for writing English. The stylized letters are framed within a scroll-like rectangle, with Tagore’s name in the Roman alpha-
bet written from left to right at the bottom. Tagore’s name also appears in another place on the cover, but this time it is a Chinese name, given to Tagore by Liang Qichao, presented only by its Chinese characters. To understand what these Chinese characters mean, one has to open the book and flip several pages to find an explanation, in which the publisher addresses both how that name “was translated” and how it “may be Englished.” *Talks in China* is thus, once again, a global Anglophone text that disrupts the very English that it utilizes. The title is in English,
but it is printed in letters that resemble Chinese characters; the author’s name is Bengali, but on the same cover it appears only in its English-language and Chinese-language incarnations.

This volume was, in many respects, more successful than the talks from which it drew, and the first talk in the published collection explicitly stages the difficulties of internationalism that unfolds in person rather than in print. In that talk Tagore begins by discussing the coverage of his trip in an unspecified Chinese newspaper. He recounts that the paper explained that he was late to a meeting because he is out of date with “this modern age.” In response to this Chinese allegation of his essential anachronism, Tagore notes his

own countrymen’s angry remonstrances that I was too crassly modern, that I had missed all the great lessons from the past, and with it my right of entry into a venerable civilization like that of India. For your people I am obsolete, and therefore useless, and for mine, newfangled and therefore obnoxious.

This opening anecdote suggests that a straightforward, linear temporality is inaccurate, or at least irrelevant. Tagore disproves this idea, however, not by asserting the value of his contrarian position, but by revealing both modernity and antiquity as seemingly universal concepts that have nonetheless been created through culturally specific interpretations.

As we see in his later correspondence, Tagore became increasingly reluctant to take on the mystical role that was inevitably demanded of him by Western readers, audiences, and interlocutors. We can only imagine his response when this demand was thrust upon him even within “the East” to which he proudly belonged. What distinguishes his travels within Asia, however, is that in those instances the Eastern spiritual wisdom that was desired from Tagore by his audience was similar to that which he expected to receive from them. The ancient Eastern civilizational inheritance of spirituality, which all parties agreed they shared as “Asiatics,” became, in the moment of encounter, that which they earnestly sought in the Asiatic most different from themselves.

Tagore’s reception in China was frequently hostile, with revolutionaries like Lu Xun (1881–1936) protesting him as a dangerous antimodernizing influence. Yet in his published Talks in China, Tagore repeatedly inscribed his experience in China as one of continuity and similarity, devoid of “any undue sense of race feeling, or difference of
tradition.” This sense of commonality, he reports, was enhanced by the natural environment yet undercut by linguistic difference, for, as he explained: “Your hills speak the same language as ours, your lake has the same smile as our lakes, . . . but] as human beings, we have no common language through which we can come close to one another.” In the absence of a common language, Tagore spoke to audiences who believed he was a poet because, as he joked in one lecture, “I have a beautiful grey beard.” Instead of ascribing his large Chinese audiences to his worldwide celebrity, Tagore attributed it to the ancient Asian commonalities he had first discovered through Okakura and Nivedita. Tagore proclaimed:

I know that many of you do not understand me, but something has drawn you to come and look at me. It is not because you expect any message from me, but, as I believe, because of some memory of that glorious time when India did send her messengers of love to this land.

The act of “look[ing] at me” may seem trivial in most English-language texts, but here it invokes the two-way gaze known as *darshan*, crucial in South Asia as both a devotional and a political form of reciprocal vision. They come to look at him, even as he speaks in a language they cannot understand: his English words may not carry “any message” to them, but his *darshan* can nonetheless evoke “some memory” in them. The “glorious time” that is recollected, moreover, dates to the beginning of the Common Era: as with Okakura’s perception of the Ajanta sculptures in *The Ideals of the East*, the visual apprehension of Tagore by his Chinese audiences can trigger recollections that are Asian rather than individual.

This notion—of linguistic incomprehension superseded by the commonality of shared Asianness—is crucial to understanding Tagore’s print internationalism. In this project, English operates as the mediating language, but it does not supersede other linguistic regimes. Tagore, for instance, encourages his Chinese audience to learn the Bengali language. He warns them that they cannot truly enjoy his poetry in translation, for

languages are jealous. They do not give up their best treasures to those who try to deal with them through an intermediary belonging to an alien rival. You have to court them
in person and dance attendance on them. . . . You cannot receive the smiles and glances of your sweetheart through an attorney, however diligent and dutiful he may be.83

Though he is speaking fluently in his nonprimary language, Tagore nonetheless warns that he cannot give them the “best treasures” of his literary talents. The fault, notably, lies not in the skill of the language user, “however diligent and dutiful,” but in the nature of language itself. In Tagore’s eroticized vision, languages exist in a state of rivalry, but for emotional reasons, and not geopolitical ones, in keeping with his dismissal of political considerations in favor of social concerns.

Yet Tagore’s disregard for courtship by attorney does not prevent him from engaging in depth with Chinese works in translated form: rather than question the intermediary language of these translations, he confidently derails conventional translations in search of the intimate connections of shared Asianness. Much as he had argued, in his English-language criticisms of Gandhi, that “swaraj” was simply “maya,” here he reaches once again through English to translate Asian words, working this time between classical Chinese and Sanskrit rather than solely within Sanskrit. His “Civilisation and Progress” lecture in China uses the Sanskrit term “dharma” as “the nearest synonym in our own language” for “civilization,” then explicates it using the words of “the great Chinese sage, Lao-tze” (now usually Laozi 老子).84 English is the “diligent and dutiful” attorney who introduces him to the sixth-century B.C.E. treatise Tao Te Ching (Daode Jing 道德經), a text attributed to Laozi that Tagore read in the 1913 English translation titled The Canon of Reason and Virtue. Although the word dao 道 had served as an early Chinese translation of the Pali dhamma (Sanskrit dharma), and it was still occasionally used to translate “dharma” in the sense of “teachings,” “dao” and “dharma” had long ago bifurcated from a primary association. By the time of Tagore’s lecture, “dharma” in Chinese was almost always rendered as fa 法, which also means “law.” Tagore’s lecture thus revived a relatively rare and explicitly nonlegalistic usage, and in the process he created commonality across Asia.85 This Chinese wisdom comes to Tagore through the global Anglophone, in a translation by the German American editor Paul Carus and the Japanese scholar D. T. Suzuki that was first published in the United States. He then delivers his understanding of this wisdom back to the Chinese, once again in the medium of English, but with a metonymic kernel of a shared Asianness—the Sanskrit word—now carefully connected (or,
as he might insist, reconnected). Although commentators today, both scholarly and popular, frequently describe “dharma” as untranslatable, for Tagore it is anything but: for him “dharma” serves as the vehicle for associations of equivalence, in a manner similar to the desires of translation but irreducible to its laws of interchange.

This interpretive relationship to the global Anglophone would be epitomized three years later, in 1927. While aboard a ship docked in Singapore, then part of the British colony known as the Straits Settlements, Tagore wrote an introduction to a new translation by Lim Boon Keng (林文慶, 1869–1957) of the classical Chinese poem known as the *Li Sao* 離騷. The *Li Sao*—a title sometimes translated as *Encountering Sorrow*—narrates in the first person the quest of a noble hero unjustly dismissed from the court. It is the longest and best-known of the anthology of rhymed, metrical works known as the *Chu-ci* 楚辭 (*The Lyrics of Chu*), which originated in southern China around the fourth century B.C.E. The poem is shamanistic, and it “has been traditionally read as the authentic voice of Qu Yuan” (屈原, c. 340–278 B.C.E.).

While the *Li Sao* had been translated into English before, it had never been translated by anyone of Chinese ancestry. Its translator in the early twentieth century was a Singaporean intellectual of Hokkien-Malay descent (sometimes called *baba* or Straits Chinese), Lim Boon Keng, who discovered ancient Chinese culture while attending medical school in Scotland. His subsequent advocacy of Confucianism would alienate him from the most influential of his mainland contemporaries, and it would also result, in the later twentieth century, in his celebration as a cosmopolitan visionary. Through projects like the *Straits Chinese Magazine*, which he edited from 1897 to 1907, Lim propagated a modern identity for Southeast Asians of Chinese ancestry, then mostly living under European colonialism, and he did so by foregrounding their connections to ancient China. In the process, he rejected missionary and imperial narratives of diasporic degeneracy, for these “Straits Chinese,” he argued, belonged perfectly within a larger Asian geography. Because of this political Asianist project, Tagore’s Asianist internationalism resonated with the efforts—antiracist and revivalist alike—of ethnically Chinese intellectuals living under British colonialism in Southeast Asia. The Chinese diaspora boomed after the forced opening of China to Western powers in 1842, and by the late nineteenth century Chinese emigrants, now called *huaqiao* 華僑 (“overseas Chinese”), were no longer seen as traitors to the mainland. In the tumultuous decades between the fall of the Qing dynasty (1911) and the establishment of
the People’s Republic of China (1949), the elite among these overseas Chinese jostled to position themselves within a changing global order. Lim Boon Keng, for instance, argued that the Straits Chinese could serve as bicultural interpreters between China and the West, a position welcomed by British colonial officials. Much as Tagore at Visva-Bharati aimed to teach a shared Asian inheritance without knowing any non-Indian languages, Lim worked to restore Confucianism without ever mastering modern spoken Chinese. Linked not only by these views but also by their shared British subjecthood, Tagore and Lim met during Tagore’s 1924 tour of China, when Lim Boon Keng, then the president of Amoy (now Xiamen) University in southern China, sought his guidance on creating a position in Indian culture and history.89

In providing his preface to Lim Boon Keng’s translation of his cultural patrimony, Tagore paralleled W. B. Yeats’s prefatory work for Tagore’s translations of his own poems in Gitanjali. In excavating these nested connections, we unearth an alternate geography, shaped—but not defined—by British and U.S. imperialism. Ireland to Bengal, and then Bengal to Singapore: this is a literary cartography particular to the global Anglophone. In writing a preface for Lim Boon Keng’s translation, Tagore intervened not only within the British Empire but also within a rapidly changing China. Lim’s volume, published from Shanghai in 1929, opens with an introduction by Hugh Clifford, a British official writing from Singapore, who explains that Lim’s traditionalism should be read as “in accordance with modern ideas,”90 for Lim “inhale[s] with equal ease the atmosphere of modern China and that of the country [Singapore] of his birth.”91 Tagore’s preface appears between a preface by the British sinologist H. A. Giles and another by the Chinese economic historian Chen Huan-Cheng. While Giles, praising the Li Sao as “a pindaric ode,” proclaims that Lim’s work “go[es] far to leave the British Empire precisely where it was,”92 Chen Huan-Cheng, in keeping with his Confucian revivalism, inscribes his text within the newly devised Confucian calendar. Tagore’s preface, by contrast, provides no specific historical comparisons.

Tagore’s preface may be short, but his contribution plays a substantial role in establishing not only this translation but the Li Sao itself. As Lim Boon Keng explained in his “Translator’s Preface,” he “felt the need for the advice of one of the literati, a poet and a Sinologue of recognized authority.”93 Whereas both Western and Chinese sinologists had compared the Li Sao to the literature of classical Greece, Tagore situates it within contemporary poetry. He thus proves Lim’s suggestion
in his “Translator’s Preface” that he would highlight “some aspects of Sinological studies often overlooked,”94 and he also affirms Lim’s argument that the poem registers the voice of a surprisingly modern individual, Qu Yuan. Tagore proves the literary value of the *Li Sao* and, by extension, all of Chinese literature, not through scholarly comparisons but because as “a genuine poet” Tagore can perceive true art in all of its varied manifestations. Lim explains that while “European critics . . . are inclined to follow the pioneer Sinologues . . . in disparaging not only ‘The Li Sao’ as a mediocre work but also the genius of the whole Chinese nation,”95 this judgment merely reveals their misunderstanding of the Chinese approach to genre. He explains that

the Chinese use poetry solely as the medium for the expression of the disharmony of the emotions. . . . If the Chinese are so minded, there is no obvious reason why their poets may not, like Virgil or Milton, imitate the methods of Homer. But the fact is that the Chinese prefer to relegate romance, myth, or religion either to history or fiction.96

The problem, Lim politely suggests, lies not in Chinese poetry but in the narrow conception of poetry prevalent in the West. Because Western critics, in his view, associate poetry with the epic tradition of Homer (c. eighth century B.C.E.), Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.), and John Milton (1608–74), they have lost the capacity to appreciate poetry properly. Their literary perception, he gently implies, has been fatally damaged by their Eurocentrism. Lim concludes his introduction by explaining how one must understand poetry: through an aesthetic sensibility for which Tagore is the exemplar.

To appreciate the beauty of a poem, the reader must be in a position to place himself *en rapport* with the proper environment, and must fully understand the psychology of the poet and the times. We must confess that “The Li Sao” does not lend itself readily to the appreciation of its readers, but whoever will persevere in meditating over the problems involved will, sooner or later, come to appreciate its peculiar style and beauty, such as Dr. Tagore, a genuine poet, has at once done. Dr. Tagore’s just and eloquent tribute shows an instinctive perception of the true character of Chinese poetry, which will be duly appreciated in the East.97
“Dr. Tagore” does “at once” what others will do “sooner or later”: his genius is unique in its rapidity but potentially universal in its skills. Like Okakura in the Ajanta caves or the Chinese spectators at Tagore’s talks, Tagore here immediately apprehends Asia’s ancient treasures and thereby facilitates their transmission into the wider world. Rabindranath Tagore and Lim Boon Keng thus participate in a relationship of reciprocal recognition: Tagore recognizes “the true character of Chinese poetry,” and Lim recognizes him as “a genuine poet” in return. Whereas mainland Chinese audiences had rebuked the Indian poet as both foreign and anachronistic, Lim celebrates Tagore’s “instinctive perception,” or what he describes as his ability “to place himself en rapport with the proper environment.”

By bestowing this ability to understand China on a Bengali subject of British India, Lim Boon Keng shores up his own claims to reliably present China to non-Chinese persons, without undermining the necessity of his intermediary role. He suggests that the Li Sao translation will be “of some slight use to those who desire to understand the ‘Chinese mind’” through what he describes as “the wonderful language of Shakespeare and Milton destined now to be the world’s language of commerce and diplomacy.” Tagore may have renounced his knighthood and his loyalty to the British Crown, yet in enabling this diasporic Chinese publication he allied himself once again with a politics that subsumed the needs of Asians to the ostensible wisdom of the British Empire. Much as Tagore’s nominalism gitanjali indicated both a specifically Asian cultural inheritance and a devotional approach to the aesthetic that could be practiced by anyone, Lim Boon Keng here argued “that Chinese values were not only timeless but recoverable by all.”

The marked difference between Tagore’s reading of the Li Sao and the contemporary scholarly consensus registers the extraordinary changes that have happened at the intersection of poetry and multiculturalism over the course of the twentieth century. Whereas the sinologist Stephen Owen argued in an academic publication in 1996 that the Li Sao was complicated, contested and may never be fully understood, Tagore in 1927 told his nonscholarly readership that the Li Sao offered “transparent simplicity and directness.” Tagore began his preface with an optimistic assertion:

To-day most of the classical poets of China have passed through the narrow, tortuous passages of scholarship into the intimate assembly of living letters. They, like the ancient
Chinese art, have won their recognition from the creative minds of the West, offering to them a new source of inspiration in their transparent simplicity and directness. Undoubtedly, the time has come when some Chinese writers, to whom the spirit of their native language readily yields her subtle secrets, should gather the best fruits of their literature, not for the pigeonholes of archaeological classification, but for the universal feast of mind.102

Tagore’s assertion here—of the utilities of “some Chinese writers” to “gather the best fruits of their literature”—affirms Lim’s racial claim to Chineseness even as he misrecognizes the powers of the “native language.” The classical Chinese of the Li Sao, after all, was a literary language and not an everyday idiom; therefore, it was not the ordinary linguistic medium for anyone, Chinese or not. Much as Yeats, Pound, and other Anglo-American modernists exoticized the language from which Tagore had translated his Gitanjali, Tagore here stakes much on those who are racially Chinese possessing “the spirit of their native language,” so that they can “gather the best fruits of their literature” for worldwide enjoyment. Fusing race, language, and literary inheritance, Tagore’s arrangement of the “intimate assembly of living letters” and the “universal feast of mind” relies on English to make a transregional literary community appear. The “subtle secrets” that might exist in poetry are now transmuted onto the language itself, and these secrets yield “readily” to the “Chinese writer” who seeks to translate such texts. This linguistic claim, moreover, collapses “the classical poets of China” from earlier centuries with “some Chinese writers” of the current moment. By passing both groups at once “through the narrow, tortuous passages of scholarship”—including the scholarship of the very preface that Tagore is writing—he brings “Chinese literature,” shorn of temporal markers and authorial identities, into this universal realm.

Whereas scholars today generally read the Li Sao for its exploration of individual subjectivity, Tagore positions it as a political lament with a generalizable social sentiment. As he explains, “The verses of this poem carry in them a lament, political in character, which makes vivid to us the background of a great people’s mind, whose best aspiration was for building a stable basis of society founded upon the spirit of moral obligation.”103 China thus provides the past of a great civilization for this Indian intellectual, Tagore, prefacing a Chinese publication in the global Anglophone, much as India indicates an ancient greatness for
the Chinese intellectual Liang Qichao, who prefaced Tagore’s global Anglophone volume *Talks in China*. By describing Lim’s work on the *Li Sao* in this manner, Tagore converts it into a gitanjali: a “song offering,” from both Lim Boon Keng and Qu Yuan, to the “universal feast of mind.” The *Li Sao* is famously unlike any other text of ancient Chinese literature in the intensity of its imagery and emotions, yet Tagore signals it as representative precisely because of this intensity, his enthusiasm perhaps enhanced by its reliance on floral symbolism. Lim Boon Keng, as a Chinese person outside mainland China and the Chinese mainstream of his time, may well have chosen the *Li Sao* because it predates the standardization of the Qin and Han dynasties; Tagore, likely unfamiliar with these subtleties of Chinese literary history, perceives the *Li Sao* solely as an exemplary work of Chinese literature. This volume thus enters global Anglophone literature through Tagore’s mode of print internationalism, which laminates the text not only with spiritual and civilizational claims but also with prefaces from distant admirers, which in turn connect otherwise culturally particular texts to vastly different parts of the global Anglophone.

In this chapter, on Rabindranath Tagore’s gitanjali, we have witnessed the power of the global Anglophone to facilitate a print internationalism opposed to Anglo-American hegemony. The key innovation that enabled Tagore’s subversive use of the global Anglophone was not only his deployment of a beguiling neologism but also his elucidation, through that neologism, of an interpretive method for those who were desired to share his apprehension of new worldwide possibilities. By following the devotional understanding of aesthetic activities that Tagore named gitanjali, Asian internationalists who wished to utilize English without perpetuating its guiding regimes could approach other Asian cultures in their translated forms, and find in them both new insights and a reassuring commonality. Perhaps if we, following Tagore’s lead, approach the global Anglophone sphere with new methods of interpretation, we too can subvert its circulations toward our destabilizing dreams.

The approach to the global Anglophone developed in this chapter will be further developed in the next, where we turn our attentions to Gandhi and his neologism “satyagraha.” While Gandhi, like Tagore, finds Sanskrit useful for the global Anglophone, he diverges greatly from Tagore in emphasizing the replicability of his practices in any location, rather than enabling their divergence, as in Tagore’s understanding of translation. This difference is evident, for instance, in the debates with Gandhi
discussed earlier in this chapter, including in how Gandhi himself used Sanskrit for this English-language yet entirely India-related disagreement. Gandhi’s rejoinders to Tagore’s criticisms appeared in Young India, a weekly journal edited by Gandhi himself and published out of his ashram in Gujarat. Appearing in slim issues of eight pages, featuring only such spiritual and historical material as relevant to the current political agitations, with no advertisements and little visual ornamentation, Gandhi’s rejoinders, like the journal in which they were published, argued for the value of a concrete political focus. Gandhi’s criticisms of Tagore were frequently personal. He explains that Tagore “lives in a magnificent world of his own creation—his world of ideas” and “presents the world with new and attractive things from day to day,” for “the Poet is an inventor—he creates, destroys and recreates.”  

Gandhi, by contrast, “is a slave of somebody else’s creation—the spinning wheel,” and he “can merely show the hidden possibilities of old and even worn out things,” for “I am an explorer.” Declaring that “the Poet’s criticism is a poetic license,” Gandhi announces that Tagore had “denounced what he has imagined.”

Yet despite his trenchant objections to Tagore’s methods, Gandhi too turned to scripture even as he dismissed, in general, the value of poems and songs: “I have found it impossible to soothe suffering patients with a song from Kabir. The hungry millions ask for one poem—ininvigorating food.” Whereas Tagore translated the iconoclastic fifteenth-century poet Kabir from Hindi to English in 1915, using poems collected from traveling mendicants and from source manuscripts, Gandhi in 1921 describes those poems as irrelevant to the “hungry millions,” for whom the only desired poem is “invigorating food.” Yet Gandhi followed this dismissal of poetry with a long quotation from a different poem: the Bhagavad Gita. The Edwin Arnold translation that Gandhi read and admired had been published under the title The Song Celestial: it seems that for Gandhi, “a song from Kabir” is useless, but a Sanskrit song is vital. Whereas Kabir lived around the fifteenth century, the Bhagavad Gita was likely composed in the first century of the Common Era. It forms a central part of the long epic poem known as the Mahabharata, and it is a central component of Hindu theology, connecting the social emphasis of earlier texts with the interpretive individualism of modern Hinduism. Despite its nomination as a “geet” (a song or a lyric poem), it is best categorized in generic terms as a philosophical dialogue rendered in verse. Whereas the Hindi-language poems of Kabir were mystical and syncretic, outraging both the Hindu and the Muslim orthodoxies of his time, the Sanskrit verses of Gita, here untranslated and presented
in Nagari script, are located firmly within doctrinal Hinduism. Moreover, whereas Kabir’s poetry, much like the Upanishads quoted by Tagore, comprised mystical verses necessitating careful contemplation, the *Bhagavad Gita* is comparatively easy to read, with clearly defined characters and a strong narrative arc.

In this 1921 publication Gandhi quotes verses 8–16 from the third teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*, “Karmayoga,” which has been translated variously as “Virtue in Work” and “Discipline of Action.”

Gandhi’s long quotation celebrates necessary action as a kind of sacrifice toward the divine, and it concludes with a verse about turning a wheel:

एवं प्रवर्तितं चक्रं नानुवर्तयतीह यः।
अघायुिम्रयारामो मौधं पाथं स जीवितति॥

* (Bhagavad Gita 3.16)

He who fails to keep turning
the wheel here set in motion
wastes his life in sin,
addicted to the senses, Arjuna.

The verse thus explicitly invokes the cosmic wheel (*chakra* चक्र) that was frequently associated with the spinning wheel (*charkha* चरखा), a semantic and phonetic association that Gandhi deployed to great effect. Within Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the *chakra* was a model for understanding both time and space, indicating at once the recursivity of the universe and the path toward enlightenment. By the twentieth century the *chakra* had come to represent a continuous inheritance from Indian antiquity, even as, within Hinduism and Buddhism, it indicated an epochal temporality, not a historical one.

The wheel reference in this portion of the *Bhagavad Gita* is clearly cosmological in its implications, yet Gandhi, leaving the quotation untranslated, encouraged a confusion between the *chakra* and the *charkha*: between the cosmic wheel of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the spinning wheel of his political program. In replying to Tagore, Gandhi thus facilitated an associative form of interpretation that blurred the literal with the metaphorical. Instead of a gloss, he writes only that “in these verses is contained for me the whole truth of the spinning wheel as an indispensable sacrament for the India of to-day.”

Gandhi’s quotation of this extended passage in Sanskrit, unexplained and untranslated within his English-language essay, seems not to have
had its intended effect. In the following week’s issue of *Young India*, Gandhi published an initial section titled “The Charkha in the Gita,” providing therein the entire portion quoted earlier, but this time in English. He quoted, as he put it, “Edwin Arnold’s rendering of the verses from his Song Celestial,” and his long quotation had the following final verse:

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He that abstains
To help the rolling wheels of this great world,
Glutting his idle sense, lives a lost life,
Shameful and vain.¹¹⁴
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After this quotation, Gandhi provided a decidedly unconventional gloss:

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Work here undoubtedly refers to physical labour, and work by way of sacrifice can only be work to be done by all for the common benefit. Such work—such sacrifice can only be spinning. I do not wish to suggest, that the author of the Divine Song had the spinning wheel in mind. He merely laid down a fundamental principle of conduct. And reading in and applying it to India I can only think of spinning as the fittest and most acceptable sacrificial body labour.¹¹⁵
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Gandhi thus literalizes the metaphorical, whereas Tagore, as we have seen in this chapter, repeatedly metaphorizes the literal, from landscapes to languages.

This was only one instance of the strong associations that the Gandhian *charkha* forged with the *chakra*, both on the page and in daily life, yet it is particularly egregious for Gandhi’s central critic.¹¹⁶ Tagore, after all, believed in the epochal that resided within the symbols of the literal (much as the words “dao” and “dharma” could be found, through his careful interpretation, to contain the same universal truth). In choosing instead to encourage an interpretive practice that literalized the metaphorical, Gandhi thus reified the quotidian as the universal through its widespread replication, in direct contrast to Tagore’s interpretative unification of seemingly discrepant things. In dismissing Gandhi’s call to the *charkha* as a magical formula, Tagore was invoking, in part, this desired collapse in Gandhi’s politics between the *chakra* and the *charkha*: between the wheel as a cosmology and the wheel as an implement for spinning.
This distinction in their interpretive methods will result, as we shall see in the following chapter, in a very different trajectory for Gandhi’s print internationalism. Whereas Tagore moved from a nationalist politics to an internationalist one, Gandhi began his political career in an internationalist frame from South Africa, only to turn to a purely nationalist politics later in his career. In between his disagreements with Tagore, however, Gandhi wrote the narratives of South Africa that would serve as the interpretive grid for his nationalism. As we find in the following chapter, Gandhi thereby created a print internationalism with a similar emphasis on interpretation but with a marked difference in its understanding of representation. Whereas Tagore demonstrated how the most apparently local of experiences could serve, through proper interpretation, as a form of print internationalism, Gandhi would argue that even an international experience, when properly regarded, was essentially transportable.