

# On the English Translation of Chinese Culture-Loaded Four-Character Expressions in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China III* From the Perspective of the Adaptation Theory

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The Adaptation Theory holds that language use is a process of continuous selection. The translation activity is a kind of interactive selection involving various factors. The Adaptation Theory has the forceful explanatory power for exploring the translation from contextual correlates of adaptability. This paper, from the perspective of the Adaptation Theory, studies the translation of the Chinese culture-loaded four-character expressions in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China III*. This study can not only contribute to the translation study of the Adaptation Theory and the translation of Chinese culture-loaded four-character expressions, but also contribute to the construction of a systematic translation model of political terms with Chinese characteristics.

*Keywords:* the Adaptation Theory, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China III*, Chinese culture-loaded four-character expression

## Introduction

With the in-depth development of economic globalization and the rapid rise of China's economy, China has exerted an increasingly strong influence on the world. As is known to all, foreign publicity plays an important role in promoting communications with other countries. Therefore, publicity translation becomes an essential part to display China to the world. *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China III* vividly records the ideology and the viewpoints of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, focusing on the strategies of the Chinese nation and the great changes that the world has not seen in a century. It is an authoritative work that comprehensively and systematically reflects Xi Jinping's thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era and contains many major ideas of originality, topicality, and guidance, which are of great significance in guiding all aspects of work.

As the research material of this paper, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China III* has practical significance and innovative value. In this book, Chinese culture-loaded four-character expressions appear frequently, which are words that reflect the essence of Chinese culture. Hu (1999, p. 64) thought that "Culture-loaded words or expressions load with specific national cultural information and indicate deep national culture. They are the direct or indirect reflection of national culture at the structure of lexemes". As a unique form of expression in

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Chinese language, the Chinese culture-loaded four-character expressions in political publicity materials are not only unique in form, but also rich in cultural connotation and political color in content. Through the study of the C-E translation of Chinese culture-loaded four-character expressions in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China III*, it is helpful for the international community to have a more comprehensive and objective understanding of China's development and China's domestic and foreign policies.

The Adaptation Theory emphasizes the point that language use is a process of continuous choice between the speaker and the addressee. It holds that translation is a process of choice-making as well. This paper attempts to use the Adaptation Theory to guide the C-E translation of Chinese culture-loaded four-character application in foreign publicity from the aspect of the context correlates of adaptability and attempts to identify some useful strategies for future use.

### **An Overview of the Adaptation Theory**

Adaptation is originally a concept in biological evolution. Darwin (1859) put forward that the biological evolution process is a process of natural selection and species must adapt themselves to the natural environment for survival in his book *The Origin of Species*. Similarly, human beings must choose the proper expressions to adapt to environmental changes, so as to achieve the purpose of communication.

From the perspective of adaptation, language use is seen as a process of continuous choice between the speaker and the addressee. Choice occurs both at the level of linguistic structure and at the level of strategy. The process of choice is a dynamic process of mutual compliance between context and language choice, in which the degree of awareness of the communicative process by the language user is highlighted through language choice. Making choices is a two-way process which requires the choice in the process of producing and interpreting an utterance.

Because of three properties of the language, language users can make proper choices in the use of languages. There are three properties in the language: variability, negotiability, and adaptability. Ge (2002) mentioned that the choice of word meaning can be translated scientifically through the perception of the context.

Verschueren (1987) proposed the Adaptation Theory. Verschueren (2000) further explained the Adaptation Theory to make the readers better understand from the four interrelated angles of pragmatic studies, namely contextual correlates of adaptability, structural objects of adaptability, dynamics of adaptability, and salience of the adaptation processes. Therefore, adaptation is to make the translation meet the needs of target readers so as to achieve the intention of communication. The four angles of the Adaptation Theory have guiding significance for publicity translation. The following part is mainly from the contextual correlates of adaptability to explore the application of the Adaptation Theory in the English translation of Chinese culture-loaded four-character expressions in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China III*.

### **Application of the Adaption Theory in the English Translation of Chinese Culture-Loaded Four-Character Expressions in the Book**

Context can be divided into two kinds: communicative context and linguistic context. This paper explores the adaptation of translating Chinese culture-loaded four-character expressions in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China III* from the communicative context and linguistics context.

### **Adaptation to the Communicative Context**

Communicative context includes three exponents: the mental world, the social world, and the physical world. Thus, the C-E translation of culture-loaded four-character expressions should be accordance for the cultural background, government system, and social development. In the following part, we will discuss how to conduct the translation of Chinese culture-loaded four-character expressions by using communicative context adaptation.

### **Adaptation to Mental World**

The mental world means the inner world, which consists of personalities, briefs, desires, motivations, and intentions of the communicator. It can be divided into two parts: cognitive element and emotional element. In Verschueren's (1987) view, language interaction is a psychological activity and communication. To achieve successful communication, the speaker should understand the mental world and precisely convey their emotion, cognition, and intention to the readers.

In the C-E translation of culture-loaded four-character expressions, Chinese people who have the Chinese culture and cultural background have no difficulties in understanding the words with Chinese characteristics and can easily form the linguistic image in their cognition, while foreigners with different cultures are strange to Chinese culture and they may have difficulties in understanding the words with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, translators shoulder the responsibility to apply cognition adaptation to the translation practice, so as to make the target readers better understand the connotation of the words with Chinese characteristics.

Example 1:

ST: 任何时候任何情况下都要坚定中国特色社会主义道路自信、理论自信、制度自信、文化自信, ……。

TT: ... maintain confidence in the Chinese socialist path, theory, system and culture at all times and in all circumstances. ...

The same expression “Zi Xin” is frequently used and the translator adapts the translation strategy called omission to conduct the English translation. “Zi Xin” is translated only once here, thus meeting the aesthetic expectations of target readers.

Example 2:

ST: ……站得稳、靠得住，最重要的就是要牢固树立“四个意识”，自觉在思想上政治上行动上同党中央保持高度一致， ……。

TT: ... A purposeful and trustworthy official must have the Four Consciousnesses, keeping in line with the Central Committee in thinking, action and political orientation, ...

“四个意识” is a typical expression with Chinese characteristics, which refers to maintaining political commitment, thinking in terms of the general picture, following the core leadership of the CPC Central Committee, and acting in according with its requirements. Foreigners with different cultures are strange to Chinese culture and they may have difficulties in understanding this expression. Thus, the translator should apply cognition adaptation into the translation practice so as to make the target readers precisely understand the connotation of this Chinese culture-loaded expression.

### **Adaptation to the Social World**

The social world means social setting and institution, specific social convention and cultures, which have a

great impact on the thinking pattern. Language is a kind of special communication in which the human community's social customs and social convention are clearly reflected. From this aspect, translation is a process of cultural exchange.

As we all know, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China III* has been translated into many different languages. Due to the target readers coming from all over the world with different social systems, political patterns, national conditions, it is necessary to translate accurately to ensure the interpretation. Because of the uniqueness of Chinese culture, tradition, history, and political system, foreigners may have the difficulties in understanding the political words with Chinese characteristics.

Example 3:

ST:把坚持以人民为中心的发展思想贯穿到“五位一体”总体布局和“四个全面”战略布局之中。

TT: The people-centered approach should be integrated into the Five-Sphere Integrated Plan and the Four-Pronged Comprehensive Strategy.

As for the target audience, they are unfamiliar with political campaigns. Therefore, translating these terms literally will easily cause misunderstanding and cannot convey the intended cultural information accurately. In Chinese political environment, it refers to China's overall plan for building socialism with Chinese characteristics, that is, to promote coordinated progress in the economic, political, cultural, social, and eco-environmental fields. To draw the attention and arouse the interest of readers, after generalizing the numbers, the ST uses annotations. Similarly, the translators provide detailed and explanatory information in annotation, conveying the accurate meanings and make up the cultural background knowledge and communication gap.

Example 4:

ST:“四风问题”具有顽固性反复性，纠正“四风”不能止步，作风建设永远在路上。

TT: The “‘four forms of decadence’: formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism, and extravagance” has a stubborn and recurring nature, correcting the “four forms of decadence” cannot stop. Work style construction is always on the road.

Because of different culture, there exists different definition and understanding towards the “feng”. If we translate “风” literally as “air” or “wind”, it will make the target readers puzzled and they cannot understand what meaning the policy wants to convey. Therefore, the translator uses the literal translation plus embedded translation to adapt the social world, by explaining content of decadence, including formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism, and extravagance.

Example 5:

ST:营造良好政治生态是一项长期任务，必须作为党的政治建设的基础性、经常性工作。

TT: Fostering a healthy political environment is a long-term task that must be made a basic and regular activity in reinforcing our Party's political foundations.

“政治生态” is a typical political Chinese culture-loaded four-character expression put forward by General Secretary Xi Jinping in 2013. Political environment refers to the environment and state for the survival and development of all kinds of political subjects, the result of the interaction of political system, political culture, political life and other elements, and the comprehensive reflection of the Party style, political style, and other social ethos. Because of different social system between China and western countries, translation is a process of cultural exchange.

### Adaptation to the Physical World

Physical world consists of two parts: temporal deixis and spatial deixis. When we analyze the physical world, we should take this two important element, time and location, into consideration. Chinese culture-loaded four-character expressions can be seen as the product of the special historical period and social environment. However, because of lacking the understanding of historical cultural background and different country conditions, the target readers cannot be aware of the political vocabularies in source text. Therefore, the translator should adapt to target readers' physical world to make them understand the Chinese policies.

Example 6:

ST: 我们党领导人民进行社会主义建设, 有改革开放前和改革开放后两个历史时期。

TT: The process by which people build socialism under the leadership of the Party can be divided into two historical phases—one that preceded the launch of reform and opening up in 1978, and a second that followed on from that event.

“改革开放” is a typical Chinese culture-loaded four-character expression and it refers to the policy adopted by China from 1978 for the economic and social development of China. Although the specific time is not mentioned in the original text, Chinese knows it clearly, while foreigners may have difficulties in understanding the sequence of the events. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator adds the time and translates this expression into English as “reform and opening up in 1978”, which adapts the time in the context.

Example 7:

ST: 共建“一带一路”倡议源于中国, 但机会和成果属于世界。

TT: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) may be China's idea, but its opportunities and outcomes are going to benefit the world.

“一带一路” refers to the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road of the 21th century. As a new expression with Chinese characteristics, many foreigners have difficulties in understanding this expression. The translator uses literal translation and explains the specific meaning, so as to help the target readers to comprehend this expression.

### Adaptation to the Linguistic Context

Linguistic context mainly includes contextual cohesion and intertextuality. Cohesion is an important linguistic term. It means a kind of linking relationship, which can enhance the relationship among sentences and make a whole text compact. Grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion are the two kinds of the cohesion. The grammatical cohesion includes the structure of content, while the lexical cohesion is in relation to the lexicon of content and its background information. There are various means to make a text cohesive. Intertextuality is a literary device which can shape the meaning of texts by other text. Its function is to connect one text with others. In the linguistic choice-making, that the choice of target language adapts to the intertextual dimension of linguistic context will make the target readers understand the political text more easily.

Example 8:

ST: 空谈误国, 实干兴邦。

TT: Empty talk misleads the country, and practical work builds the nation.

These two expressions are parallel structures, but the former is in sharp contrast to the latter in meaning. In

the translation process, the translator uses the proper nouns with coordination to convey the emphasis the ST wants to convey. That is to emphasize the importance of the hard work.

Example 9:

ST: 不忘初心，牢记使命，就不要忘记我们是共产党人，我们是革命者，不要丧失了革命精神。

TT: To remain true to our original aspiration and founding mission, we must never forget that we are Communists and revolutionaries and we must never lose our revolutionary spirit.

In this example, “不忘初心，牢记使命” can shape the meaning of text by other text, which can enhance the relationship between each expression. In the translation, that the choice of target language adapts to the intertextual dimension of linguistic context will make the target readers understand the political text more easily.

### Conclusions

According to the Adaptation Theory, to make contextual adaptation in the C-E translation of Chinese culture-loaded four-character expressions in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China III*, translators can use various translation methods and translate techniques. To be specific, when there are some language similarities in English and Chinese, it can help translators find out equivalent expression. At that time, translators can adopt literal translation, which avoids misunderstanding and preserves the flavor of Chinese culture in the TT. While free translation is used to translate the metaphorical words. In this situation, only free translation can help to convey the accurate meaning of ST.

In this language choice-making process, the translator should give full play to the translator's subjectivity and respect the source text, ensuring the equivalence between the source text and target text. The Adaptation Theory can be used in the translation criticism and it can offer a different standard to judge whether one translation work is good or not. With the guideline of the Adaptation Theory, many translation methods and translation strategies can be further explored in the translation of Chinese culture-loaded four-character expressions in the political texts.

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