

English Translation of Political Terminologies with Chinese Characteristics: A Case Study of the 20th CPC National Congress Report

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The philosophies, thoughts, strategies, and measures introduced in the 20th National Congress report of the Communist Party of China chart the course for the nation's future development. The political terminologies with Chinese characteristics presented in the report form a crucial part of China's distinct political development model, while also presenting considerable challenges for translation. Drawing on a Chinese-English parallel corpus of political terminologies from the 20th Congress report, this study explores the translation of these terms with a focus on four-character patterns, numerical abbreviations, and idiomatic expressions. The goal is to develop effective translation strategies and contribute to research on translating political terminologies with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords: political terminologies with Chinese characteristics, 20th CPC National Congress report, terminology translation

Introduction

Language, as a form of discourse, can not only convey the meanings of English culture but also express the content of other cultures. It can help promote "Chinese-style discourse" globally, allowing China to present its views on the world, development, and civilization (Zhai, 2013). The English translation of the 20th CPC National Congress report plays a critical role in external communication, serving as a key medium to convey the CPC's development philosophies, strategic plans, and future directions to the international community. It helps global audiences gain a deeper understanding of China's development path, as well as its domestic and foreign policies.

Political terminologies with Chinese characteristics represent distinctive political theories and practical experiences developed under the CPC's leadership. Examples include terms such as "中国特色社会主义 (socialism with Chinese characteristics)", "四个全面 (Four-Pronged Comprehensive Strategy)", and "习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想 (Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era)". These terminologies encapsulate China's unique political development model, summarizing its socialist

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construction and governance theories while reflecting its cultural perspectives and values. As dynamic expressions rooted in political discourse, these terminologies evolve over time. However, linguistic and cultural differences pose significant challenges for their translation, as inadequate translations may lead to ambiguity or misunderstanding.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the English translations of political terminologies with Chinese characteristics in the 20th CPC National Congress report. Focusing on four-character expressions, numerical abbreviations, and idiomatic expressions, it explores the translation methods and techniques employed. The objective is to distill effective translation strategies and contribute to the expanding research on translating political terminologies with Chinese characteristics into English.

Classification and Translation of Political Terminologies in the 20th CPC National Congress Report

Translation of Four-Character Expressions

In Chinese, four-character expressions (四字格) refer to idioms or phrases composed of four characters, often used to convey specific meanings or emotions. Liu and Jin (2023) point out that these four-character structures can include idioms, proverbs, quotations, or other fixed expressions, often carrying deep cultural connotations and philosophical meanings. These concise phrases are capable of conveying rich meanings in a succinct form, making them widely used in both written and spoken Chinese.

Example (1) 天下为公

Translation: Pursuing common good for all

“天下为公” originates from *The Book of Rites*, where it is stated, “大道之行也，天下为公” (“When the Great Way prevails, the world is for all”). Originally, it meant that the world should belong to the people, and the emperor’s position should be passed to the most virtuous, not the son. It now refers to the idea of a political system owned by the people, reflecting a vision of an egalitarian and free society. Confucius quoted this phrase when explaining his political ideals, embodying his reverence for public interest and justice (Kong, 2018). The official translation adopts a free translation method, emphasizing the pursuit of public good for all people, while preserving the core idea of the original, making it easier for target-language readers to understand and accept.

Example (2) 革故鼎新

Translation: Discarding the outdated in favor of the new

The idiom “革故鼎新” originates from *The Book of Changes*, which explains it as “革，去故也，鼎，取新也” (“Reform involves discarding the old, while innovation entails embracing the new”). “革故” signifies the elimination of outdated systems or ideas, while “鼎新” emphasizes innovation and the implementation of new reforms. This idiom underscores the necessity of abandoning obsolete elements that no longer suit evolving circumstances and adopting changes to drive societal progress and development. The official translation employs a literal approach, pairing each Chinese word with a corresponding English term. This preserves the original meaning while maintaining a concise and straightforward structure.

Example (3) 自强不息

Translation: Ceaselessly pursuing self-improvement

“自强不息” originates from *The Book of Changes*, where it is stated: “天行健，君子以自强不息” (“As Heaven keeps moving with strength, so a gentleman should strive ceaselessly for self-improvement”). This phrase signifies the importance of continuously strengthening oneself and striving for progress, enhancing personal qualities and capabilities to achieve better results and reach higher levels. It highlights the values of self-motivation and perseverance in overcoming challenges, improving oneself, and realizing personal potential. The official translation employs a free translation approach, rendering “自强” as “pursuing self-improvement” rather than the more literal “self-strengthening.” This choice better aligns with English language conventions and idiomatic expressions, avoiding the awkwardness that a direct translation might entail. By focusing on the concept’s essence rather than its form, the translation ensures greater accessibility and resonance with an English-speaking audience.

Translation of Numerical Abbreviations

Numerical abbreviations in Chinese political terminologies serve as distinctive expressions with mnemonic and associative functions, showcasing the uniqueness of China’s political discourse and cultural confidence. These expressions condense political concepts and effectively convey political positions. When translating numerical abbreviations, the original form is often retained, with semantic compensation added as necessary.

Example (4) 十四五

Translation: The 14th Five-Year Plan

The term “十四五” in the 20th CPC National Congress report refers to the 14th Five-Year Plan, a strategic plan outlining China’s economic and social development goals for a five-year period. These plans typically include objectives, policies, and measures aimed at guiding national economic, social, and environmental development while promoting economic restructuring and social progress. As part of China’s long-term development strategy, the 14th Five-Year Plan follows its predecessor and plays a crucial role in shaping the country’s future. The official translation adopts a literal approach, preserving the structure and order of the original term. This method remains faithful to the source text while ensuring clarity and accuracy, minimizing potential semantic ambiguities. Considering that many political concepts are already familiar to the target audience, numerical abbreviations are often translated literally to maintain their original form.

Example (5) 四个自信

Translation: Confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics

The concept of “四个自信” represents a key development philosophy in China, referring to confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics. This philosophy reflects China’s firm belief in its development trajectory and serves as a manifestation of its confidence, openness, and inclusiveness on the international stage. The official translation combines free translation and amplification techniques, reorganizing and expanding the expression to clearly convey its specific meaning and connotations. This approach aligns with Huang’s (2004) three “getting-close-to” principle for translating external communication texts: translations should align with China’s development reality, meet the information needs of foreign audiences, and conform to their cognitive habits. Therefore, when literal translation cannot fully

achieve the intended communicative effect, the first appearance of a numerical abbreviation in a text can be elaborated using free translation for a comprehensive explanation, while subsequent references can simplify the term using literal translation.

Translation of Idiomatic Expressions

Chinese idiomatic expressions are the crystallization of folk wisdom and cultural traditions, used to convey life principles, philosophies of conduct, and societal trends. With their expressive and thought-provoking nature, these expressions often appear in the 20th CPC National Congress report, succinctly embedding complex political concepts and ideas into the language. They not only reflect the profound heritage of Chinese traditional culture but also demonstrate the vivid and humanistic nature of political language.

Example (6) 绿水青山就是金山银山

Translation: Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets.

The phrase “绿水青山就是金山银山” (“Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets”) embodies President Xi Jinping’s ecological civilization philosophy, emphasizing the significance of the environment in economic and social development. It suggests that a healthy ecological environment is a treasure as valuable as material wealth. The official translation renders “金山银山” (“mountains of gold and silver”) as invaluable assets, a common English expression, avoiding potential misunderstandings from a literal translation. This approach ensures that the translation is fluent and accurately conveys the original meaning, effectively delivering the underlying cultural connotations of the Chinese text.

Example (7) 打铁必须自身硬

Translation: It takes a good blacksmith to forge good steel.

The idiomatic expression “打铁必须自身硬” originates from Mao Zedong’s speeches. It means that one must possess strong qualities and abilities to achieve success in any work or struggle, highlighting the importance of self-discipline and competence. The official translation adopts free translation by transforming the Chinese idiom into an equivalent English saying. This method not only preserves the cultural uniqueness and style of the original text but also enables the target audience to understand the core meaning through a familiar expression in their native language. This enhances the comprehensibility, expressiveness, and fluency of the translation, achieving better communicative effects.

Conclusion

This paper examines the English translation of political terminologies with Chinese characteristics in the 20th CPC National Congress report, categorizing these terms and analyzing the translation methods used. The study finds that free translation is effective for four-character expressions, while literal translation works well for numerical abbreviations. For idiomatic expressions, free translation and amplification retain the cultural essence of the original text while enhancing the expressiveness of the translations. However, the study has limitations, such as its narrow focus on political terms from the 20th CPC National Congress report, and the potential lack of depth in the analysis. Future research could broaden the scope to include terms from other sources, explore additional methodologies, and delve deeper into the cultural and historical contexts to improve translation quality and international communication.

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