

The Translation of Allusions in Political Discourse: An Intertextuality Perspective*

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Allusions drawn from ancient classics are the treasures of traditional Chinese culture. The allusions used in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* illustrate a distinctive feature of political discourse, and the publication of its English version provides a valuable opportunity for the study of allusions in translated political discourse. With the English translations of 241 allusions collected from two volumes of the book, we classified these allusions into three categories of history, culture, and literature based on their original sources. Then we analyzed the strategies used in translating the allusions, and provided typical examples to illustrate the use of such translation strategies for each category. Finally, we tried to account for the use of these strategies in light of the intertextuality theory.

Keywords: allusion, political discourse, intertextuality, translation strategies

Introduction

The Book series, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, contain a wealth of allusions. Therefore, the publication of its English version provides rich resources for studying the translation of allusions in political discourse. Huang (2018) pointed out that an area with increased demand from foreign audience is the current affairs of China, including the works of leaders. The study of allusion translation in this respect can promote the communication of Chinese culture and exchange among civilizations across the world.

The translation of allusions in political discourse is not an easy task. On the one hand, the translator needs to retain the original flavor of the source language. On the other hand, the translation equivalent must accommodate the linguistic and cultural schemas of the target language (Qin, 2006). Therefore, intertextuality, or more specifically schematic shift, cannot be avoided to attain faithful and expressive translation.

Literature Review

The term “intertextuality” was first proposed by French literary theorist Julia Kristeva in her 1969 book *Semiotics*. This theory holds that all contexts, whether political, historical, social, or psychological, can become intertextual. An intertext is not only a text with intertextuality characteristics, but should be formed jointly by the inherent schematic text in the human brain and external texts (Hu, 2014). Studies on intertextuality has been

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conducted in various domains. Salloum found that, in science textbooks, intertextuality entails two aspects: bridging everyday knowledge with science knowledge, and the intertextual links among the symbolic, mathematical, and visual-graphical representations of different modalities, which can support diverse students' learning (2021). Ngai and colleagues' study (2020) on the leaders' messages of Fortune Global 500 corporations in the United States and China indicates that, intertextuality is a prevalent feature of leader messages with intertextual references made to corporate information using indirect speech.

In recent years, the theory of intertextuality has been widely applied in translation studies. In his book *Study of Translation from the Perspective of Intertextuality* published in 2006, Qin pointed out that any text has intertextuality, thus making it impossible for a text to have a definite meaning. "Only differences and uncertainty are truly infinite existence, and thus translation without a definite text has become an indisputable fact" (Qin, 2006, p. 257). Cao (2012) believes that existing research has misunderstood and misused the theory of intertextuality in terms of text meaning certainty; Intertextuality, as part of hermeneutics, can be applied to translation theory, but it is limited to the analysis and criticism of the contexts of the source and target texts, with the aim of finding "definite meaning" and paying special attention to the comprehensive correspondence between the target and source texts.

In terms of the authority and certainty of political discourse, the strategies of allusion translation cannot be separated from specific contexts, or more specifically, intertexts. Exploring the definiteness of textual meaning required in allusion translation and the creation of schematic equivalence through intertextuality between the source and target texts can help the readers better understand the allusions, and achieving the goal of faithful and expressive translation.

Research Methodology

The allusions placed within double quotation marks in the original text of *Xi Jinping's: The Governance of China* (Vols. 1 and 2) are included in the study. The allusions in the Chinese version can be found in the corresponding translations in the English version, which embody the application of ancient wisdom to modern governance.

On the basis of the 241 allusions collected, we build a Chinese-English mini-corpus, and divide it into three categories according to the origin: philosophical allusions, historical allusions and literary allusions. The allusions were independently judged and classified by two college English teachers with doctoral degree in English language according to the principle of closest proximity. In case of inconsistency, the two engaged in heated discussion until a consensus is reached. No overlapping entries exist among different category of allusions. The statistical results of various allusions are as follows:

Table 1
The Number of Different Categories of Allusions

Category	Philosophy	History	Literature
Number	102 (42.32%)	68 (28.22%)	71 (29.46%)

Table 1 indicates that the number of the three categories of allusions is 102, 68, and 71, accounting for 42.32%, 28.22%, and 29.46% of the total respectively. Since philosophical allusion expresses the quintessence of

people's practical experience, it can best reflect the universality and truth of the expressed meaning. In the following Section, we will compare and analyze the allusion translation strategies, and further explore the underlying reasons for the differences in these translation strategies in light of the intertextuality theory.

Statistical Analysis of the Strategies for Allusion Translation

The allusions are laden with Chinese traditional culture. Due to stark cultural differences between China and the West, there are no complete equivalents in the two languages, making it difficult, if not impossible, to translate the allusions into English. At this point, considering the readability of the translated text, the translator needs to understand the local context and even the global context of the allusion to determine to what extent the original allusion can be retained.

Zhen (2004) proposed four translation strategies for allusion translation, namely literal translation, literal translation annotation, substitution, and recreation. Based on the characteristics of the collected allusions, we merged the two indistinguishable categories of substitution and recreation, and divided the strategies of allusion translation into three categories: literal translation, literal translation plus annotation, and liberal translation. Literal translation refers to translation based on the literal meaning of the original text. This method can convey the cultural characteristics of the literal meaning of the original text to the greatest extent possible. Literal translation plus annotation refers to the need to provide certain explanation to the literal translation when a simple literal translation cannot adequately convey the original meaning to the target language readers, thus integrating faithfulness with expressiveness. In addition, liberal translation is to coordinate between the reader and the article, and adjust the expression of the translation according to the overall meaning of the original text to facilitate the understanding of the target language readers (Nida, 1993).

Taking into consideration of the context of the allusions in the original Chinese text and the translated English text, we conducted a preliminary statistical analysis on the translation strategies of various types of allusions. The results are presented as follows (the percentage in the parentheses indicates the proportion of each translation strategy):

Table 2
Statistics of Allusion Translation Strategies by Category

	Philosophy	History	Literature
Literal	78 (76.47%)	35 (51.47%)	33 (46.48%)
Literal+annotation	17 (16.67%)	24 (35.29%)	22 (30.99%)
Liberal	7 (6.86%)	9 (13.24%)	16 (22.53%)

From Table 2, it can be seen that overall, literal translation is most commonly used in allusion translation, indicating the requirements for authority and certainty in political discourse translation. At the same time, there are significant variations regarding the percentage of translation strategies for each category of allusions. A preliminary comparison would reveal that the largest proportion of literal translation in philosophical allusion (76.47%), the largest proportion of literal translation with annotation in historical allusion (35.29%), and the largest proportion of liberal translation in literary allusion (22.53%). This is attributable to their inherent characteristics: philosophical allusions entail higher certainty of meaning, making literal translation more readily accepted by target language readers. The translation of historical allusions usually resorts to annotation to explain

the specific historical background. However, literary allusion involves more cultural imagery and context, to adapt to the needs of target language readers, the strategy use of literal translation plus annotation, and liberal translation is more common. This relies on the translator's accurate understanding and expression of the original meaning after balancing the determinacy of the text's original meaning and its equivalence to English texts.

Intertextuality and Allusion Translation

To better illustrate the interconnection of intertextuality and strategies for allusion translation, we will analyze and explain three types of allusions from the perspectives of translation strategies in light of schematic shift in this Section. Specifically, among the three examples under each category of allusion, Example (1) reflects the strategy of literal translation, Example (2) reflects the strategy of literal translation annotation, and Example (3) reflects the strategy of liberal translation which embodies the shift of schematic text, or the application of intertextual strategy.

Strategies for the Translation of Philosophical Allusions

Example (1)

Source Text (ST): 聰者听于无声，明者见于未形。(Vol. 1, p. 241)

Target Text (TT): A person with sharp ears can hear sounds others cannot, and a person with keen vision can see things others cannot.

In Example (1), “聰者 (a smart person)” is translated as “a person with sharp ears”, and “明者 (a wise person)” is translated as “a person with keen vision”, both of which are literal translation of their original meaning (i.e., in terms of ancient Chinese meaning) and can well fulfill the communicative purpose.

Example (2)

ST: 治大国若烹小鲜。(Vol. 1, p. 410)

TT: Governing a large state is like cooking a small dish. It must be handled with great care.

In Example (2), the first half of the English translation is a literal translation of the original text “governing a great country is like cooking small dishes”. The second half is a schema shift with annotation, which reveals the essence of the first half, that is, to govern the country with great caution.

Example (3)

ST: 入山问樵，入水问渔。(Vol. 2, p. 221)

TT: In our work we should apply different method to solve different issues, depending on the time, location and conditions.

The translation here deviates from the literal meaning of the original text, and emphasizes different scenarios or schemas. The literal meaning of “入山问樵，入水问渔 (asking for the woodcutter when entering the mountain, and asking for the fisherman when entering the water)” expresses a different situation. The English translation expresses that when facing different problems in work, a person should adopt different methods according to the time, location, and conditions. This rendering is rich in the significance of practical guidance.

Strategies for the Translation of Historical Allusions

Example (4)

ST: 水能载舟，亦能覆舟。(Vol. 2, p. 53)

TT: The same water that keeps a ship afloat can also sink it.

In Example (4), the English translation expresses the original meaning word-by-word. It should be noted that the translation uses an attributive clause structure instead of a double predicate structure, which is more compatible with the reading habits of English readers.

Example (5)

ST: 苟日新，日日新，又日新。(Vol. 1, p. 51)

TT: This is what Confucius meant when he said, “If you can in one day renovate yourself, do so from day to day. Yea, let there be daily renovation.”

In Example (5), the allusion in the original text is relatively concise. In order to facilitate the understanding of the target reader, the translator employs intertextual strategies to introduce the background information, and employs literal translation plus annotation to effectively illustrate Confucius’ intention in this utterance. Through intertextual expression, the certainty of meaning is heeded.

Example (6)

ST: 苟利国家生死以，岂因祸福避趋之。(Vol. 1, p. 405)

TT: Were it to benefit my country I would lay down my life; what then is risk to me?

In Example (6), the original text is a declarative sentence, while the translation is an interrogative sentence. Further analysis reveals that the original text “生死 (life and death)” and “祸福 (misfortune and fortune)” were not fully translated. Instead, the strategy of liberal translation was adopted, making the denotation more clear and the aim more prominent.

Strategies for the Translation of Literary Allusions

Example (7)

ST: 山重水复疑无路，柳暗花明又一村。(Vol. 1, p. 344)

TT: When one doubts whether there is a way out from the endless mountains and rivers, one suddenly finds a village shared by soft willows and bright flowers.

The English translation in this example is completely faithful to the original text, with the adoption of a literal translation strategy consistent with the context. Hence it can fully convey the original meaning to the target readers.

Example (8)

ST: 千磨万击还坚韧，任尔东西南北风。(Vol. 1, p. 21)

TT: We must be as tenacious as bamboo, as described by Zheng Xie: “In the face of all blows, not bending low, it still stands fast. Whether from east, west, south or north the wind doth blast.”

In Example (8), the translator adopted a strategy of literal translation and annotation. Compared with the original text, the annotation “We must be as tough as bamboo, as described by Zheng Xie” has been added, which serves as an intertext. The use of intertextual strategy here clarifies the implied resilient characteristics of bamboo in the original text, thus making it easier for the target readers to understand.

Example (9)

ST: 处江湖之远则忧其君。(Vol. 2, p. 318)

TT: Though living at grassroots level, one is concerned for his state.

In Example (9), the more difficult words to understand are “江湖 jianghu” and “君 jun”. For two words with different meanings, the translator used a liberal translation strategy, thereby translating them as “at grass roots level” and “state” respectively. The meaning conveyed, through schematic shift, is more consistent with the context and communicative purpose, thus achieving the unity of definite meaning and translation purpose.

It is worth mentioning that some allusions have more than one translation. For example, “落其实者思其树，饮其流者怀其源。” is translated into “When we eat the fruit, we think of the tree that bore it; When we drink water, we think of its source.” and “When you reap fruits, you should remember the tree; when you drink water, you should remember its source.” These variations reflect the translator’s concern for the application of intertextuality theory pertaining to the original context, which invariably involves the shift of schematic text, for the purpose of maximizing the transmission of the original message and achieving the goal of cultural exchange.

Conclusion

From the perspective of intertextuality, this paper explores the strategies of allusion translation, with analysis based on specific examples from each category of allusions. This can help us better perceive the rigor and importance of political discourse translation work, and contribute better to the promotion of exchange and communication among civilizations. The use of allusions is essentially “creating golden business cards of Chinese culture, telling the world wonderful Chinese stories” (Yang, 2015, p. 3). There are many four character idioms and other allusions that need further research in translation. In terms of methodology, techniques such as large-scale parallel corpora can be used for further research.

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