

Translation Strategies for the Chinese Four-Character Structure Into German: The Case Study of Stories From *Xi Jinping Erzählt Geschichten Über Die Kommunistische Partei Chinas*

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In the context of globalization, cultural exchanges among countries are becoming increasingly intimate. As we embark on a new era, the external promotion of the red culture of Party history has emerged as a crucial avenue for conveying the good voice of China, showcasing Chinese wisdom, and enhancing China's image. *Xi Jinping Erzählt Geschichten Über Die Kommunistische Partei Chinas* includes over 80 stories narrated by General Secretary Xi Jinping, providing readers worldwide with a deeper understanding of the revolutionary spirit of the Communist Party of China. This paper systematically categorizes and analyzes the four-character phrases found in *Xi Jinping Erzählt Geschichten Über Die Kommunistische Partei Chinas*, employing the theory of cultural translation to explore translation strategies for these phrases in the context of Party history literature. This research aims to promote the global dissemination of China's red culture and foster a greater understanding of China in the world.

Keywords: Party history stories, cultural translation theory, the Chinese Four-Character Structure

Introduction

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasizes the need to enhance exchanges in the humanities between China and the rest of the world, guided by our own culture while incorporating others. It also stresses the importance of strengthening international communication capabilities, telling China's stories well, presenting a true, multi-dimensional, and comprehensive image of China, and improving the country's cultural soft power. As one of the key materials for external promotion of the Party's red culture, *Xi Jinping Erzählt Geschichten Über Die Kommunistische Partei Chinas* contains stories that are emotionally touching, ideologically rich, and easy to understand. These narratives closely follow the Party's struggle to bring happiness to the Chinese people and rejuvenation to the Chinese nation, reflecting the unique values pursued by Chinese Communists. The book helps readers grasp why the Communist Party of China succeeds, why Marxism works, and why socialism with Chinese characteristics is effective. As an informational text, the source material is concise and forceful, with a high frequency of the Chinese Four-Character Structure. Due to their unique syntactic structure and expressive style, these structures often feature rhyme, parallelism, and

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cultural richness, making them a distinctive phenomenon in the Chinese language. They are linguistic units composed of four syllables and are frequently used in Chinese expressions.

Research on the Translation Strategies of the Chinese Four-Character Structure

The Chinese Four-Character Structure is defined by linguists as follows: Whether it is a word or a phrase, as long as it consists of four characters, it qualifies as a Four-Character Structure (Lu, 1956). Chen and Li (2005) proposed that four-character expressions in Chinese, sometimes referred to as four-character phrases or simply as the four-character format, represent a unique lexical phenomenon in the Chinese language. Building on this, Zheng (2013) added that in Chinese phrases, a category of expressions containing function words, such as “的” (de), “不” (bu), and “地” (di) cannot be classified as four-character expressions, as they cannot form fixed phrases with other Chinese characters. With the increasing internationalization of Chinese discourse, research on the translation strategies and methods for the Chinese Four-Character Structure has expanded across multiple perspectives and disciplines. For example, Hu and Li (2022), drawing on Liu Miqing’s theory of translation aesthetics, highlighted the significant artistic tension evident in the translation of phonetic reduplication, alliteration, rhyme, and Four-Character Structures in the Chinese version of *A Song of Ice and Fire: Game of Thrones*. Xie (2009) examined interpretation strategies for Four-Character Structures in press conferences and proposed five translation methods: literal translation, free translation, a combination of both, abridged translation, and direct borrowing. However, most research in this area remains focused on English, with limited attention to German. The concept of the Four-Character Structure does not exist as a linguistic form or lexical unit in German, nor are there well-developed translation strategies for rendering them into German.

The translation strategies for Four-Character Structures can be traced back to the cultural approach introduced in *Translation, History and Culture*. It argued that translation is not merely a linguistic process but one deeply embedded in the culture surrounding the language. According to them, translation serves as communication both within and across cultures, and equivalence lies in the cultural functions of the source and target texts. They outlined several principles:

1. Translation should treat culture, rather than the text, as the basic unit of translation;
2. Translation is not just a process of decoding and reassembling, but also a communicative act;
3. The goal of translation is to achieve functional equivalence within the target culture rather than merely describing the source text. Different historical periods apply different principles and norms to meet the diverse needs of various cultural groups (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990).

Building on this cultural translation approach, many scholars have conducted productive studies. Wang (2009) and Su (2014) demonstrated the guiding role of cultural translation theory in poetry translation, particularly in managing both the content and form of poems. Mu (2013) argued that subtitling Chinese films into English requires treating culture as the core unit of translation, with source-language content and cultural elements deconstructed and reconstructed through strategies of domestication or foreignization, depending on the cultural context. This approach ensures effective cultural transmission. R. Lin and D. Lin (2016) applied cultural translation theory to explore the English translation of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, analyzing the principles, strategies, and cultural tendencies in translating political documents, providing valuable insights for political translation.

Translating Four-Character Structures in Party history texts presents distinct challenges due to their political connotations. The primary difficulties include: (a) Four-Character Structure with distinctive Chinese discourse features; (b) Four-Character Structure in poetry; and (c) proper nouns.

Translation Challenges

Four-Character Structure With Distinctive Chinese Discourse Features

The historical context of the source text spans from the New Democratic Revolution to the New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. The earlier period is characterized by a strong revolutionary and political tone. For example, political terms like “赤色分子” and “南陈北李” are deeply rooted in the political landscape of the time.

Four-Character Structure in Poetry

In the source text, many linguistic styles, particularly during the May Fourth period and before the founding of the People’s Republic of China, are written in classical Chinese or poetic forms. This linguistic phenomenon in Chinese culture does not have a one-to-one equivalent in German. For instance, Mao Zedong’s famous poem, “独立寒秋，湘江北去，橘子洲头。看万山红遍，层林尽染；漫江碧透，百舸争流。鹰击长空，鱼翔浅底，万类霜天竞自由……” or his powerful declaration, “与天奋斗，其乐无穷！与地奋斗，其乐无穷！与人奋斗，其乐无穷！” contains numerous examples of four-character phrases.

Proper Nouns

In the translation of this text, numerous military and political terms, as well as various historical proper nouns, are encountered. These include organizational names or significant political concepts. Translators must ensure they reference multiple official translations to accurately convey the specific meaning and political background of the original. This accuracy principle is crucial for translating proper nouns. However, due to the limited availability of Party history literature in German, extensive cross-referencing is necessary. Examples include “孙越会谈”, “古田会议”, and “九月来信”.

Translation Strategies

As research on the Chinese Four-Character Structure deepens, the criteria for its classification continue to evolve. Given the distinct structural and political significance of the Chinese Four-character Structure in *Xi Jinping Erzählt Geschichten Über Die Kommunistische Partei Chinas*, this paper classifies these structures based on their features into two primary categories, with further subdivisions: fixed phrases and flexible phrases. Fixed phrases primarily refer to four-character idioms, which possess a rigid structure that cannot be altered, split, substituted, or rearranged. In contrast, flexible phrases are formed temporarily according to contextual needs. These phrases are not bound by a fixed structure or set usage and may include variations or derived forms of idioms. The specific classifications are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1
The Classification of the Chinese Four-Character Structure

Fixed Phrases	Chinese Discourse With Distinctive Characteristics	赤色分子、南陈北李
	Poetic Style	书生意气、挥斥方遒
	Proper Nouns	孙越会谈、古田会议
Free Phrases		神色自若、从容就义

Fixed Phrases (Chinese Discourse With Distinctive Characteristics)

Chinese: 马林是一位国际共产主义运动老战士，有被欧洲一个国家警察局拘捕的“案底”，获释后，作为“赤色分子”，受到欧洲一些国家警察局的监控。

German: Maring war ist ein Veteran der internationalen kommunistischen Bewegung und hatte eine „Vorstrafe“, ...als „Revolutionär“ überwacht.

Translation strategy analysis: Based on cultural translation theory, an analysis from a cultural perspective is required—赤色分子 was a term used by the Kuomintang during the domestic revolutionary war to refer to Communist Party members and their followers who believed in communism. It cannot be directly translated as Rotes Molekül in German. It is more accurate to translate it as Revolutionär; the translation should instead be adapted to the equivalent meaning in German. Since translation is fundamentally cultural exchange, in which the translator reproduces the cultural context of the original text in the target language, the domestication strategy, specifically free translation, was employed here.

Fixed Phrases (Poetic Style)

Chinese: 他坦然回答说: “正所谓‘君子之泽, 五世而斩’ ‘富贵不佐三代’, 也包含了先生你讲的这些道理。”

German: Er antwortete gelassen: „Wie das Sprichwort sagt: Ein Gentleman mit edlem Verhalten und herausragenden Fähigkeiten hat hart gearbeitet, um eine Karriere zu erreichen, und die Segnungen, die zukünftigen Generationen hinterlassen wurden, sind nach mehreren Generationen erschöpft...“

Translation strategy analysis: From a cultural perspective, the phrase “君子之泽, 五世而斩” originates from 《孟子·离娄章句下》 (*Mencius, Li Lou*, Chapter 2), meaning that a gentleman with noble character and outstanding abilities works hard to achieve success, but the blessings he leaves for his descendants are exhausted after several generations. This is a classical Chinese saying, and it cannot be translated literally due to its cultural and historical significance. Based on the principle in cultural translation that “different historical periods have different principles and norms, and the aim is to meet different needs”, this phrase was translated using the domestication strategy, specifically amplification, to convey the underlying meaning. The fixed phrase with poetic elements can be translated into German as: „Wie das Sprichwort sagt: Ein Gentleman mit edlem Verhalten und herausragenden Fähigkeiten hat hart gearbeitet, um eine Karriere zu erreichen, und die Segnungen, die zukünftigen Generationen hinterlassen wurden, sind nach mehreren Generationen erschöpft...“.

Fixed Phrases (Proper Nouns)

Chinese: 李大钊多方努力, 促成冯玉祥率部“五原誓师”。

German: Li Dazhao setzte sich intensiv dafür ein, dass Feng Yuxiang mit seinen Truppen das „Wuyuan-Versprechen“.

Footnote: Das Wuyuan-Versprechen bezieht sich auf den Vorfall vom 17. September 1926, als die Nationalarmee unter Feng Yuxiang der Nationalregierung im Kreis Wuyuan, Sonderregion Suiyuan, die Treue schwor und im Rahmen der Nordexpedition ein Bündnis mit der Nationalen Revolutionsarmee bildete.

Translation strategy analysis: First, analyzing from the cultural level, “五原誓师” refers to the event on September 17, 1926, when Feng Yuxiang’s National Army swore allegiance to the National Government in Wuyuan County, Suiyuan Special Region, and allied with the National Revolutionary Army during the Northern Expedition. Based on the principle in cultural translation that “translation should not be confined to describing the source text but should achieve functional equivalence in the target culture”, a footnote was added in the translation to provide readers with the necessary cultural information and background knowledge to understand the event. The translated text is the product of translation activities conducted within specific historical conditions and cultural contexts, marked by distinct characteristics of the era. The cultural and historical dimensions of

translation involve situating both the original work and its translation within their respective historical and cultural contexts, examining the background in which they were created and the differences between them.

Conclusions

The Chinese Four-Character Structures are a typical example of culturally loaded terms, and under the guidance of cultural translation theory, they can be more effectively conveyed to foreign audiences. Culture, as the framework for translation studies, shows that translation is an exchange of culture within a specific social context, rather than a mere linguistic decoding or restructuring of language. Cultural translation theory offers a new perspective for translating Chinese Four-Character Structure. These phrases are rich in cultural connotations, and rigid translations that neglect cultural factors only lead to greater barriers in cross-cultural communication. From the perspective of cultural translation theory, the transmission of culture should be considered the foundation and premise of textual transformation.

In this regard, the translation of Four-Character Structure in Party history documents should shift from the traditional pursuit of equivalence to one of interpretation, deconstructing the source language's information and cultural elements to achieve both informational transformation and cultural transposition. Unique linguistic structures that are deeply rooted in national culture often lack direct equivalents in other languages. The meanings they convey are inseparable from their cultural origins.

From the standpoint of translation strategies, translators aiming to translate four-character structure must not only maintain the structural features of the phrases, but also employ the necessary cultural recognition and cross-cultural communication to meet the needs of the target audience. Cultural translation theory presents a new opportunity to address cultural challenges in translation and provides theoretical guidance for translating four-character phrases into other languages. When handling cultural elements in the text, especially in cases where the source and target cultures differ significantly, as is the case with Chinese Four-Character Structure, the translator should be guided by cultural translation theory. This requires not only recognizing the differences in historical, social, political, and cultural backgrounds, but also considering factors, such as the author's intent, text type, translation purpose, and audience needs. Translators should strive to retain the original language and cultural characteristics as much as possible, so that the readers of the translation can experience the unique charm of Chinese Four-Character Structure.

In summary, this study categorized the Chinese Four-Character Structure in *Xi Jinping Erzählt Geschichten Über Die Kommunistische Partei Chinas* and analyzed them based on cultural translation theory, applying different strategies to demonstrate the significance of Party history in international communication. This paper emphasizes that translators should aim not only to convey the literal meaning, but also to transplant the unique cultural connotations and achieve functional equivalence in a cultural sense. In this era of globalization and cultural diversity, cultural translation theory remains a key theoretical framework for studying the translation of culturally specific terms. There is still significant potential for further exploration of the translation of the Chinese Four-Character Structure in Party history documents within the German-speaking academic world.

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