The retranslation of Chinese political texts
Ideology, norms, and evolution

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The past three decades have witnessed an increase in research on retranslation. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis, this study examines the retranslation of political texts – specifically Work Reports by the Communist Party of China – as a special genre in its own right. By concentrating on the retranslation of a recurring set of Chinese political concepts, culture-specific items, and preferred usages into English from the early 1990s to the late 2010s, this study shows how and why the retranslations have been carried out, as motivated by the evolving ideologies of the original author – the Communist Party of China. The retranslations are shown to be influenced by the broader social, economic, and political dynamics within China, rather than by prevailing factors within the receiving culture or variables associated with the individual translators, as is commonly suggested in the literature. Our findings add to the existing body of research into retranslation by extending the genres and contexts of retranslation research.

Keywords: retranslation, Chinese political texts, ideology, norms

1. Introduction

Since 1978, China has launched a series of significant political and economic reforms with the aspiration of better integrating into the global community. Along with increasing international exchanges, China has realized the urgency of introducing itself to the global community and conveying its own voice in order to discursively build a positive self-image internationally. The translation of Chinese political texts has been adopted as an important means to accomplish this goal. Since the early 1990s, an array of prominent political texts has been selected for translation into English and other languages. Aside from their similar textual structures and some overlapping content, a multiplicity of political concepts and culture- and language-specific items are repeated across these texts. Between the
early 1990s and the late 2010s, a number of these recurrent items have been retranslated since their initial translations into English. Retranslation is understood here as the “subsequent translations of a text, or part of a text, carried out after the initial translation which had introduced this text to the same target language” (Susam-Sarajeva 2006, 135; emphasis added). Acknowledging that retranslation “occurs at all textual levels” (Brownlie 2006, 152; see also Baker and Jones 2020), the ‘part of a text’ considered in our study are those recurrent items across texts that have political or cultural connotations. The reasons behind these retranslations are of interest since political texts, which carry ideological and political connotations, are not typically included among genres prone to being retranslated (Tahir Gürçağlar 2009, 233). Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study aims to investigate how and why the same items in Chinese political texts were retranslated between the early 1990s and late 2010s.

The data for our study comprises six Work Reports of the National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and their corresponding English translations, produced in 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012, and 2017 respectively (i.e., the years in which the Congress was held, which is every five years by convention). Their contents mainly deal with the CPC’s guiding principles and policies on its governance. It is to be noted that the recurrent items under investigation do not always occur in all of the six Reports investigated. Whenever a specific item occurs in a Report and is translated for the first time, the translation is referred to as its ‘first translation’, and subsequent translation(s) in later texts as ‘retranslation(s).’ While identifying textual variations across the different translations, special attention is paid to how these variations may reflect changes in the Chinese socio-political context in which the (re)translation is initiated by applying an analysis of metadiscourse to the Chinese translation of political texts. In so doing, this study attempts to present a special case of the retranslation of political texts, “a field that has largely remained out of the scope of studies in retranslation” (Albachten and Tahir Gürçağlar 2019, 4).

1. The Reports in 1992, 1997, and 2002 were delivered by former President Jiang Zemin; those in 2007 and 2012 by former President Hu Jintao; and the one in 2017 by the current President Xi Jinping. They are referred to in this paper as Jiang (1992a), Jiang (1997a), Jiang (2002a), Hu (2007a), Hu (2012a), and Xi (2017a).

2. In this paper, ‘retranslation’ is used to refer to subsequent translation(s) after the first/initial translation while ‘(re)translation’ includes both first/initial translation and subsequent translation(s).
2. Studies of retranslation

Retranslation is a widespread translational phenomenon that has been receiving increasing attention from scholars, particularly since 2010. So far, the bulk of research on retranslation has focused on canonical literary works, sacred texts, and dramaturgical works, which continue to be the most frequently retranslated genres (Tahir Gürçağlar 2009, 233). The same interest in the retranslation of classic literary texts is also found in the Chinese context (e.g., Xu and Tian 2014; Tan and Xin 2017), and calls have been made for research into the retranslation of other genres where a different picture might emerge (e.g., Susam-Sarajeva 2006). Koskinen and Paloposki (2010, 295) have warned, however, that the findings and conclusions of retranslation research can only cautiously be extended beyond literary works. Scholarly interest in retranslation has recently been extended to new genres such as historical texts (Valdeón 2014), literary theory (Susam-Sarajeva 2006), songs (Greenall 2015), and musical notation (Haug 2019), as well as legal and academic texts (see Albachten and Tahir Gürçağlar 2019). Very few studies have examined the retranslation of the political texts of a particular country or political organization. One exception is Koskinen and Paloposki (2003), who investigate the retranslation of EU texts, and who describe retranslation as a redundant practice that is best avoided. However, according to Brownlie (2006, 146), “all kinds of texts are retranslated,” and therefore, more effort is required to explore and compare retranslation in a broader range of genres and cultural contexts (Koskinen and Paloposki 2019).

Among the most discussed issues in research on retranslation are the reasons or motivations for retranslation, and the differing textual profiles between (re)translations. As a result, researchers have identified a range of general motivations for retranslation. Yet, an overview of the literature reveals that the majority of reasons posited are based on the premise that (re)translations are facts of the target system, and that (re)translating is an activity conditioned by the goals set in and by the receptor system (Toury 1985, 19). One of the most widely known explanations formulated along these lines is the ‘retranslation hypothesis’, initially proposed in the field of literary translation (Berman 1990), which suggests that first translations tend to be assimilative in order to meet target contextual needs for better inclusion into the target literary or cultural system, while retranslations are in the advantageous position of being closer to the source texts and improving upon the deficient or flawed first translations. Berman’s ‘retranslation hypothesis’ also speaks to the issue of aging in terms of the target language (i.e., translations will age with the passage of time).

Besides language change, wider governing social forces in the receiving system are also said to determine whether and how retranslations will be done:
Susam-Sarajeva (2003, 5) compares retranslation to a multi-entry visa for foreign works, the grant of which “is totally at the discretion of the receiving authorities.” Up to now, the broader target-contextual variables that have been invoked as leading to retranslation include: The evolution of translational, literary, or linguistic norms (Du-Nour 1995; Venuti 2004; Van Poucke 2017), the needs of a different or new target readership (Koskinen and Paloposki 2003; Taivalkoski-Shilov 2015), and transformations in the socio-political situation, power dynamics, and/or forms of censorship within the receiving culture (Whitfield 2015; Kim 2018; Walsh 2019). Closely entangled with socio-political factors, shifting dominant ideologies of the target society at different periods of time have been highlighted by scholars as influencing retranslation activity, particularly that of ideologically significant texts, such as biographies of political figures (Özmen 2019), sexually sensitive texts (Walsh 2019), and/or historical books of political significance (Jones 2019). Research has suggested that certain works become prone to retranslation as a consequence of a changed ideological orientation, typically underpinned by a new socio-political regime. Beyond these broader social factors, the role of individual translators or agents, who typically “operate first and foremost in the interest of the culture into which they are translating” (Toury 1985, 19), in motivating or determining retranslation has also been identified and acknowledged. In this case, the motivations identified include a desire to set new translational norms or dissatisfaction with the translation strategy used in the previous translation (Pym 1998; Aaltonen 2003), financial benefits (Xu and Tian 2014), the influence of translators’ personal interests or ideologies (Koskinen and Paloposki 2003; Collombat 2004), aesthetic motivations (Venuti 2004), and the attempt to engage with an unfamiliar way of thinking through retranslation (Massardier-Kenney 2015).

While retranslation, like translation, is typically initiated in and by the receiving culture, it may also be motivated in and by the source culture. However, there are few studies that investigate retranslation from this perspective. Kujamäki (2001) provides an interesting case where the first translation of a Finnish novel into German was commissioned and published by the Finnish originating context and done by a German translator in Helsinki (where he served as a university lecturer) to promote Finnish national identity, while later retranslations were initiated by the German receiving context (see Robinson 2017, 170–176). In the same vein, the institutional (re)translation of Chinese political discourse that is fully initiated by the Chinese source culture and which is motivated by China’s unprecedented global aspirations, may be regarded as an outward propaganda or publicity-oriented activity.

A number of studies that adopt a discourse analysis approach to translated or interpreted political discourse within the Chinese context have been conducted, and reveal that translation and interpreting in political settings are a
fertile ground for ideological investment. On the one hand, translators’ or interpreters’ agency or their gatekeeping role (especially in institutional contexts) in mediating political discourse is well documented, and is typically conditioned by institutional demands (e.g., Wang and Feng 2018; Gu 2019; Pan, Kim, and Li 2020). Specifically, translators’ decision-making and possible stance-taking in political situations are found to never be neutral and are frequently underpinned by contextual constraints (e.g., ideology or power). On the other hand, most studies of translated Chinese political discourse have been framed from a synchronic perspective without taking into account diachronic changes, particularly the retranslation of the same text or textual elements. This is perhaps due to the common assumption that political texts, by virtue of their sensitive nature, are less susceptible to translation variations under a stable regime (see Section 3). Therefore, a diachronic perspective of retranslation stands to provide fruitful insights into the translation of political discourse.

3. Institutional translation of political texts in China

In order to promote international exchange, several institutions and departments have been set up by the CPC and the Chinese government to conduct various translation-related tasks involving Chinese and other languages, especially English. The Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (CCTB) is the institution that deals principally with written political genres. Since its foundation in 1953, the CCTB has been responsible for the compilation and translation of classic Marxist works into Chinese, as well as the translation of important Chinese political documents released by the CPC and the Chinese government. One of the most prominent collections among the latter are the CPC National Congress Work Reports, which are the texts under examination in this study. Normally, shortly after each Report is produced, the CCTB puts together a cross-departmental translation team (including, for example, the Department of Translation and Interpreting from the Foreign Ministry, the officially affiliated Xinhua News Agency, the Foreign Languages Publishing Administration) that comprises outstanding institutional translators who are government staff to carry out the task of translating the Report (Wang 2008, 50). This translation is performed on a collective basis and entails a strictly controlled process, which is generally organized into three stages. A draft English translation of the Chinese text is first produced by specialized translators; this is then handed over to English native speakers for language polishing; and thereafter it is finalized by senior institutional translation experts (Pan, Kim, and Li 2020). The resulting translated text, by virtue of the stringent procedures followed and expertise of the various actors
involved, is well formulated and of reliable quality. This also implies that each translated Report, down to every single translational choice, is thoroughly deliberated and officially sanctioned, and therefore not subject to alteration. If alterations do arise across time, then they are unusual and worthy of attention.

4. Ideology, power, translation, and CDA

Viewing discourse as a form of social practice, CDA aims to examine the ways in which social inequality, dominance, and ideology are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted in discourse. For CDA practitioners, discourse is not only determined by social structures, but also has effects upon them. By considering language as a major locus of ideology, and ideology as a mechanism of power in society (Fairclough 1989, 12), CDA is particularly concerned with “revealing structures of power and unmasking ideologies” (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 8). In other words, CDA aims to expose how power asymmetries and latent ideologies are enacted in discourse by investigating how discursive strategies and structures are employed in particular ways so as to perform certain social functions.

Apart from its application to monolingual discourse, CDA is also useful in examining the social and ideological significance of translation by viewing it as a socio-cultural practice that inevitably shapes and is shaped by power differentials between its participants (see Calzada Pérez 2003). Given the mediated nature of translation in political situations that are often characterized by asymmetrical power relations, CDA can be effective in revealing the imbalanced power relations and ideologies underlying those seemingly value-free, yet crucial, translational choices.

There are different approaches to CDA; however, this study is not confined to any particular one a priori. Instead, considering the bilingually and diachronically contrastive purpose of this study, a data-driven approach and critical attitude are adopted in examining textual variations across (re)translations and metadiscourse data of China’s political translation, in order to determine the actual decision-making processes of retranslation. Regarding the textual analysis, the translators’ treatment of ideologically salient elements, such as political concepts, culture-specific references, and preferred verbs that are indicative of the translator’s stance, is brought under scrutiny in order to identify translation variations that hold ideological potential. As illustrated by many discourse studies (e.g., Munday 2012; Wang and Feng 2018), the translation of political concepts and culture-specific references in political speeches usually involve a translator’s subjective evaluation and interpretation. Moreover, how various actions are represented and recontextualized into a new socio-cultural context through certain
verbs is also suggestive of a translator’s individual stance (e.g., Gu 2019; Pan, Kim, and Li 2020). With respect to metadiscursive analysis, the fact that some leading institutional translators have, at times, published articles or accepted interviews in which they state their translation decisions and considerations provides an important source of information about the metadiscourse of translation of Chinese political texts. These metadiscursive data will be critically reviewed in this study to complement the textual analysis.

5. Data analysis and discussion

In this section, we illustrate how the retranslation of Chinese political concepts is a result of the evolving ideologies on the part of the original author of the texts (the CPC), and how the retranslation of culture-specific items and preferred verbs is motivated by changing institutional translation norms. These institutional translation norms are in turn shaped by the shifting ideologies of the original author rather than by any prevalent social factors within the target culture or variables related to individual translators or agents, as is commonly suggested in previous studies on retranslation.

5.1 Retranslation of political concepts: Evolving ideology within a dynamic social-political situation

An analysis of recurrent political concepts across the texts in question and their English translations shows that retranslation occurs frequently. The variations introduced through retranslation are in keeping with the changing ideology of the CPC and the socio-political contexts in which the party is situated. Ideology, as it has been used in Translation Studies, refers to a “set of beliefs and values which inform an individual’s or institution’s view of the world and assist their interpretation of events, facts and other aspects of experience” (Mason 2010, 86). The focus of analysis in this article is the ‘view of the world’ of the CPC, as represented via the CCTB. Three instances are discussed below to illustrate how retranslation has been ideologically motivated and aligned with the original author’s dynamic stance that develops over time.

One case in point is the concept 台湾问题 Taiwan wenti, in which 问题 wenti is a general word in Chinese that refers to either a question, issue, or problem. This political term initially occurred in the 1997 Report and was consistently translated into English as ‘the Taiwan issue’ (Jiang 1997b). However, it was retranslated as ‘the Taiwan question’ in the 2002 Report (Jiang 2002b) as well as in the three subsequent Reports (Hu 2007b; Hu 2012b; Xi 2017b). While ‘issue’
means “an important topic that people are discussing or arguing about” and is thus implicitly endowed with a disputable nature, ‘question’ means “a matter or topic that needs to be discussed or dealt with,” and has no such implication. This translational shift parallels the evolving political situation across the Taiwan Strait and the CPC-led Chinese government’s ideology. From 1987 onwards, the standoff that had lasted for over thirty years between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait was ended and exchanges were resumed. Through the 1990s, when the Nationalist Party that is supportive of the ‘One China’ principle was in power in Taiwan, relations across the Strait were generally in restoration and possibilities were explored, marked by the orally formulated ‘1992 Consensus’ in which both sides agreed to uphold the ‘One China’ principle. The settlement of the Hong Kong and Macau issues in 1997 and 1999 respectively, by the application of the ‘one country, two systems’ policy introduced by the Chinese government, also showed promise for the solution of the Taiwan issue, which was then seemingly open to negotiation. However, the year 2000 saw a radical turn in the political orientation of the Taiwanese authority when the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party took power for the first time, and remained in power for the next eight years. With the growing tendency towards independence on the part of Taiwan, relations between the two sides began to deteriorate again, and the Chinese government adopted a firmer position on the issue by reiterating its ‘One China’ policy. This is reflected in the retranslation of the term ‘Taiwan issue’ into ‘Taiwan question’ in its political texts in an attempt to avoid any ambiguity or undesired associations such as ‘two Chinas’ or ‘one China and one Taiwan’ (Guo 2002, 60). As stated by institutional translator Guo, the “Taiwan affair is currently the most sensitive matter in our country’s political sphere, thus any expressions involving Taiwan in translation must be used with discretion” (ibid; own translation). He further explained that

台湾问题 Taiwan wenti should be translated as ‘the Taiwan question’ instead of ‘the Taiwan issue’. Taiwan is an inseparable part of China’s territory and will be united with the motherland in the end. This is inevitable and perfectly justifiable. Settling the Taiwan question is China’s internal affair that allows no external intervention. As ‘the Taiwan question’ is a question left over from history, we should use ‘question’ but not ‘issue’ to translate it since the latter word means ‘a matter that is in dispute between two or more parties’.

(Guo 2002, 60; own translation)

This ideological positioning towards Taiwan was crystallized by the promulgation of China’s Anti-Secession Law in 2005, which states unambiguously that Taiwan is part of China and can in no way be seceded from the latter. Since then, the rendition of the term as ‘the Taiwan question’ has become the standard translation and has been sustained in the English versions of all later Reports investigated in this study (i.e., Hu 2007b; Hu 2012b; Xi 2017b).

A similar ideological change on the part of the CPC is also manifested in the retranslation of the term 干部 ganbu, a Chinese political concept referring to (1) functionaries who work for state organs, the army, or people’s organizations, or (2) those who take leading or administrative positions. This term recurs repeatedly across all six CPC Reports we analyzed. While it was uniformly rendered as ‘cadres’ in Jiang (1992b, 1997b, 2002b) and Hu (2007b), it was retranslated as ‘officials’ in Hu (2012b) and Xi (2017b). For historical reasons, China’s rendition of texts into English since the 1950s has been heavily influenced by the Soviet Union’s translations of its government or communist party’s documents, and many Chinese texts that are translated into English are influenced by the Soviet Union’s translational choices, as noted by institutional translation expert Chen (2014, 9). After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the repercussions this brought to China, many linguistic usages borrowed from the former were gradually considered no longer suitable or applicable. Chen (2014), who participated in the translation of the 2012 Report, justified the retranslation of ‘cadre’ to ‘official’ as a response to this changed socio-political situation. His comments are as follows:

While the term ‘cadre’ is originally a French word, after it had been used by the Soviets, westerners have been using it to refer to those people who had ruled the Soviet communist party in Stalin’s period. The term has thus been tainted with a negative meaning. (Chen 2014, 9; own translation)

Thus, the retranslation was underpinned by a change in ideological positioning which was in itself framed by an altered political environment. The same applies to another term, 少数民族 shaoshu minzu, which refers to minority ethnic groupings. In the English version of the 1992 Report, the term was translated as ‘minority nationalities’ (Jiang 1992b), which, again, had been a usage borrowed from the Soviet Union since the 1950s (Wang 2002, 23). However, it was retranslated as ‘ethnic minorities’ in all five English versions of the Reports starting from 1997. This retranslation was once again motivated by the dynamic socio-political circumstances of the time and the correlating ideological stance of the CPC, as well as the CPC-led Chinese government, which by that time had become more alert

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to growing separatist activities among ethnic minorities in China. In 2002, as pointed out by institutional translation expert Wang (2002), “in recent years, due to the rampant activities of a few separatists, the ethnic problems have become very sensitive. Consequently, any translation of the term 民族 (minzu) into English must be very accurate and allow for no ambiguity” (23; own translation). He continues to explain that while the word ‘nationality’ can mean either ‘the legal right of belonging to a particular nation’ (国籍 guoji) or ‘ethnic group’ (民族 minzu), it can also mean ‘nationals’ or ‘nation’ and is sometimes substitutable with the word ‘nation’. Consequently, if 民族 minzu is translated as ‘nationality’ into English as it had been in Jiang (1992b), this may lead to misunderstandings on the part of foreign readers. This ideological consideration accounts for the retranslation of 少数民族 shaoshu minzu from ‘minority nationalities’ to ‘ethnic minorities’ in Jiang (1997b) and the subsequent Reports (Jiang 2002b; Hu 2007b, 2012b; Xi 2017b).

Apart from the three instances discussed in this section, a number of other political concepts were also retranslated in the English versions of the six Reports from 1992 to 2017 (see Section 5.3 for the list of concepts and a quantitative description). The identified retranslations of all these political concepts are found to be motivated by and closely in line with the changing ideology of the CPC, the author of the original Chinese texts.

5.2 Retranslation of culture-specific items and preferred verbs: Changing institutional translation norms within a new ideological milieu

In addition to political concepts, retranslation is also undertaken for a range of culture-specific items or preferred verbs in the Reports investigated. Compared with the initial or previous translation(s), the retranslations of culture-specific items and preferred verbs display a general tendency towards being more target-oriented (i.e., conforming more to the target-cultural and linguistic norms or conventions than to the source-culture norms). This is illustrated in Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 using concrete examples, while Section 5.2.3 shows how these changes have been brought about by altered institutional translation norms reflecting a new ideological milieu.

5.2.1 Retranslation of culture-specific items

In this article, culture-specific items refer to those expressions “whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem” as a result of “the non-existence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text” (Aixelà 1996, 58). In other words, they originate from and are used only within the source culture, which may not be
easily understood or accepted by target readers. In general terms, culture-specific items can either be foreignized or domesticated in translation. In this article, while the culture-specific items are mostly foreignized in the early translation(s) of the Reports by retaining the Chinese cultural elements, in later retranslations they tend to be naturalized by removing these elements in English.

One instance is the metaphorical and somewhat formulaic expression 血肉联系 xuerou lianxi, which has traditionally been used in Chinese political texts to compare the relation between the Party and the people as being as close as that between ‘flesh’ and ‘blood’. As such, the expression is politically culture-specific. In its first occurrence in the 2002 Report, the expression is translated into English literally as ‘flesh-and-blood ties’ (Jiang 2002b). However, in the English versions of the 2007, 2012, and 2017 Reports, it is retranslated as ‘close ties’ (Hu 2007b, 2012b; Xi 2017b) or ‘close bond’ (Xi 2017b), which erases the original Chinese cultural element. A major reason for the change is that the foreignized word-for-word translation ‘flesh-and-blood ties’ cannot deliver the original metaphorical message of ‘closeness’, because the expression ‘flesh and blood’ is also used in English with quite different connotations, (i.e., “a normal human with needs, emotions and weaknesses”). Taking this into consideration, more domesticated renditions are employed in the retranslations. These renditions deviate from the original cultural image but more directly transmit its intended meaning.

A similar translational shift is observed in the retranslations of法宝 fabao, which has its origin in fairy tales and, in its literal sense, refers to “a magic weapon that can subdue, wound or kill evils.” Today it is also used metaphorically in Chinese to mean instruments, methods, or experiences that work effectively to solve problems, and it is frequently used in this metaphorical sense across the six Reports. In the English translations of the 1992 and 2002 Reports, it is rendered as ‘a magic weapon’, thus retaining the original cultural image (see Example (1); items of interest in examples are underlined). No occurrence is found in the 1997 Report. However, in the 2007 Report, it is retranslated as ‘a magic instrument’, which partially reproduces the original cultural image by retaining the word ‘magic’. All such references to the original cultural image are removed from the English translations of the 2012 and 2017 Reports where it is retranslated as ‘a powerful instrument’ and as ‘an important way’ respectively.

(1) ST: 解放思想，实事求是，是建设有中国特色社会主义理论的精髓，是保证我们党永葆蓬勃生机的法宝。

Jiefang sixiang, shishiqiushi, shi jianshe you zhongguoteseshehuizhuyililun de jingsui, shi baozheng womendang yongbao pengboshengji de fabao.

(Jiang 1992a, 47)

TT: Emancipating our minds and seeking truth from facts are the essence of the theory of building socialism with Chinese characteristics and a "magic weapon" guaranteeing that our Party will always be vigorous.

(Jiang 1992b, 11)

ST: 高度重视和不断加强自身建设，是我们党从小到大、由弱到强，从挫折中奋起、在战胜困难中不断成熟的一大法宝。

Gaodu zhongshi he buduan jiaqiang zishen jianshe, shi womendang cong-xiaodaoda, youruobianqiang, cong cuozhe zhong fenqi, zai zhansheng kunnan zhong buduan chengshu de yi da fabao.

(Jiang 2002a, 17)

TT: Attaching vital importance to and strengthening Party building is a magic weapon with which our Party has grown from a small and weak force to a large and strong one, risen in spite of setbacks and matured gradually in surmounting difficulties.

(Jiang 2002b, 19)

ST: 解放思想是发展中国特色社会主义的一大法宝。

Jiefang sixiang shi fazhan zhongguoteseshehuizhuyi de yi da fabao.

(Hu 2007a, 1)

TT: Emancipating the mind is a magic instrument for developing socialism with Chinese characteristics.

(Hu 2007b, 1)

ST: 统一战线是凝聚各方面力量，促进政党关系、民族关系、宗教关系、阶层关系、海内外同胞关系的和谐，夺取中国特色社会主义新胜利的重要法宝。

Tongyizhanxian shi ningju gefangmian Liliang, cujin zhengdang guanxi, minzu guanxi, zongjiao guanxi, jieceng guanxi, haineiwai tongbao guanxi de hexie, duoqu zhongguoteseshehuizhuyi xin shengli de zhongyao fabao.

(Hu 2012a, 13)

TT: The united front is a powerful instrument for winning new victory for socialism with Chinese characteristics by pooling the strength of all quarters and harmonizing relations between political parties, ethnic groups, religions, social groups and compatriots at home and overseas.

(Hu 2012b, 29)
ST: 统一战线是党的事业取得胜利的重要法宝，必须长期坚持。

* Tongyizhanxian shi dang de shiye qude shengli de zhongyao fabao, bixu changqi jianchi.  
  (Xi 2017a, 30)

TT: The united front is an important way to ensure the success of the Party’s cause, and we must maintain commitment to it long term. (Xi 2017b, 34)

In this example the transition from ‘magic weapon’ to ‘magic instrument’, ‘powerful instrument’, and finally ‘important way’ from the 1992 to 2017 Reports indicates a visible shift from the initial foreignized translation to increasingly domesticated retranslations, such that the 2017 retranslation almost completely eliminates the original cultural elements. As commented by institutional translation expert Huang (2004, 27–28), for historical reasons Chinese political texts have traditionally preferred to borrow military expressions and use them metaphorically to serve as an encouragement to raise readers’ confidence. He argues that those terms with military connotations should preferably be rendered into common words in English in case they give rise to negative associations on the part of foreign readers, such as that Chinese people are warlike and aggressive. This consideration may partly account for the shift observed in Example (1).

Such shifts in translation strategies from early foreignized to later more domesticated retranslations are certainly not confined to the two instances discussed in this section, but are clearly visible in a myriad of other culturally-loaded items (see Section 5.3 for an overview).

5.2.2 Retranslation of preferred verbs

Besides culture-specific items, a set of Chinese preferred verbs have also been retranslated in the Reports to better conform to target-language conventions. As demonstrated by a number of contrastive studies, prevalent rhetorical conventions and discursive preferences in Chinese differ considerably from those in English (e.g., Kong 2005; Liao and Chen 2009; Hu and Cao 2011). More specifically, written English discourse tends to encourage the framing of ideas in adversarial terms, and emphasizes anticipating possible counterarguments or exceptions. Authors are frequently advised to avoid overstatements, to make claims with caution, and to leave room for readers’ feedback. In contrast, “Chinese rhetorical norms tend to encourage the framing of ideas in non-polemical terms” and Chinese written discourse is viewed more as “a venue for announcing knowledge and asserting truth” than “an arena for constructing knowledge and approaching truth” (Hu and Cao 2011, 2805). Consequently, authors writing in Chinese are more likely to “assume a tone of certainty so as to convey authority and credibility” (ibid). This is particularly true of Chinese political texts where
authorial certainty and conviction is purposely manipulated as political rhetoric to establish a writer’s authority over their audience. Such authorial authority is manifested, among others, in the preferred use of a certain set of verbs that convey certainty, such as 优化 youhua ‘optimize’, 规范 guifan ‘standardize’, 保障 baozhang ‘guarantee’, 完善 wanshan ‘perfect’, and 健全 jianquan ‘complete’. A comparison of the (re)translations of these Chinese verbs across the six Reports reveals a general tendency towards compliance with target-language rhetorical conventions.

As regards the verb 优化 youhua, it is consistently translated using its direct equivalent ‘optimize’ in the English versions of the 1992, 1997, and 2002 Reports. However, in the English version of the 2007 Report, two translational choices are used: ‘optimize’ is retained in a few cases, while ‘improve’ is used in other instances (see Example (2)). This inconsistency is obviously not dictated by the respective individual co-text of occurrence, since either translational choice is semantically justifiable in each instance with only minimal distinction. Despite the mixed translation choices in the 2007 Report, all subsequent instances of the verb in the 2012 and 2017 Reports are retranslated as ‘improve’, ‘improvement’, or ‘make... better’, which downgrades the absolute force conveyed in the original Chinese verb and its direct English equivalent, ‘optimize’.

(2) ST: 优化教育结构，加快高等教育管理体制改步伐，合理配置教育资源，提高教学质量办学效益。
Youhua jiaoyu jiegou, jiakuai gaodeng jiaoyu guanli tizhi gaige bufa, heli peizhi jiaoyu ziyuan, tigao jiaoyu zhiliang he banxue xiaoyi.  
(Jiang 1997a, 43)

TT: We shall optimize the educational structure, speed up the reform of the management system of higher education, and judiciously allocate resources for education so as to enhance the quality of instruction and raise the overall efficiency of schools.  
(Jiang 1997b, 12)

ST: 在优化结构、提高效益、降低消耗、保护环境的基础上，实现人均国内生产总值到二0二0年比二000年翻两番。
Zai youhua jiegou, tigao xiaoyi, jiangdi xiaohao, baohu huanjing de jichu shang, shixian renjun guonei shengchanzongzhi dao erling erling bi erling lingling nian fan liangfan.  
(Hu 2007a, 21)

TT: We will quadruple the per capita GDP of the year 2000 by 2020 through optimizing the economic structure and improving economic returns while reducing consumption of resources and protecting the environment.  
(Hu 2007b, 18)
ST: 优化资本市场结构，多渠道提高直接融资比重。
Youhua ziben shichang jiegou, duo qudao tigao zhijie rongzi bizhong.
(Hu 2007a, 29)

TT: We will improve the structure of the capital market and raise the proportion of direct financing through multiple channels.
(Hu 2007b, 26)

ST: 要加快转变对外经济发展方式，推动开放朝着优化结构、拓展深度、提高效益方向转变。
Yao jiakuai zhuanbian duiwai jingji fazhan fangshi, tuidong kaifang chaozhe youhua jiegou, tuozhan shendu, tigao xiaoyi fangxiang zhuanbian.
(Hu 2012a, 11)

TT: We should move faster to change the way the external-oriented economy grows, and make China's open economy become better structured, expand in scope and yield greater returns.
(Hu 2012b, 23)

ST: 加快国有经济布局优化，结构调整，战略性重组。
Jiakuai guoyou jingji buju youhua, jiegou tiaozheng, zhanluexing chongzu.
(Xi 2017a, 26)

TT: In the state-owned sector, we will step up improved distribution, structural adjustment, and strategic reorganization.
(Xi 2017b, 29)

A similar diachronic change in attenuated verb force in the retranslations is noted for 保障 baozhang when it collocates with ‘human right’. The Chinese verb initially occurs in the 1997 Report and is straightforwardly translated as ‘guarantee’ (see Example (3)), which means “to promise to do something or to promise something will happen” and thus has a strong force. The English version of the 2002 Report retains this literal translation. In the 2007, 2012, and 2017 Reports, the verb is retranslated as ‘safeguard’, ‘protect’, or ‘protection’, which mitigates the absolute force suggested in the Chinese verb and its direct English equivalent, ‘guarantee’. Part of the reason may also be that while ‘guarantee’ refers to a future certainty, ‘safeguard’ or ‘protect’ implies that something already exists.

(3) ST: 共产党执政就是领导和支持人民掌握管理国家的权力，实行民主选举、民主决策、民主管理和民主监督，保证人民依法享有广泛的权利和自由，尊重和保障人权。

As a ruling party, the Communist Party leads and supports the people in exercising the power of running the state, holding democratic elections, making policy decisions in a democratic manner, instituting democratic management and supervision, ensuring that the people enjoy extensive rights and freedom endowed by law, and respecting and guaranteeing human rights. (Jiang 1997a, 37)

It is essential to improve the systems of democracy, develop diverse forms of democracy, expand citizens' participation in political affairs in an orderly way, and ensure that the people go in for democratic elections and decision-making, exercise democratic management and supervision according to law and enjoy extensive rights and freedoms, and that human rights are respected and guaranteed. (Jiang 2002b, 37)

We must respect and safeguard human rights, and ensure the equal right to participation and development for all members of society in accordance with the law. (Hu 2007b, 31)

The rule of law should be fully implemented as a basic strategy, a law-based government should be basically in function, judicial credibility
should be steadily enhanced, and human rights should be fully respected and protected.  

(Hu 2012b, 17)

ST: 维护国家法制统一、尊严、权威，加强人权法治保障，保证人民依法享有广泛权利和自由。

Weihu guojia fazhi tongyi, zunyan, quanwei, jiaqiang renquan fazhi baozhang, baozheng renmin yifa xiangyou guangfan quanli he ziyou.

(Xi 2017a, 28)

TT: We should uphold the unity, sanctity, and authority of China’s legal system, and strengthen legal protection for human rights to ensure that the people enjoy extensive rights and freedoms as prescribed by law.

(Xi 2017b, 32)

The diachronic changes observed in the retranslation in Examples (2) and (3) are certainly not accidental or unconscious. As commented by institutional translation expert Chen (2014, 10):

In the English translations of political documents, a few Chinese verbs, such as完善 (wanshan), 合理化 (helihua), 优化 (youhua), 保障 (baozhang), had been translated into their direct equivalents which, however, constitute overstatements (own translation) in English. This problem needs to be addressed.

This indicates that the retranslations of the preferred Chinese verbs cited in this section have been underpinned by changing institutional translation norms regarding political texts, as is further illustrated in Section 5.2.3.

5.2.3 Changing institutional norms of translation

In the institutional translation of political documents in China, accuracy or faithfulness to the original has long been upheld as the dominant translation norm, due to the absolute authority of the original political texts which typically serve as national guiding principles or policies, as disclosed by various leading institutional translators (e.g., Cheng 1983; Wang 2008; Tong 2014). Governed by this norm, the translations of political documents have traditionally been expected to resemble the original texts as much as possible in terms of form and style (see Li and Li 2015, 425–426). The empirical findings reported in Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 regarding the generally foreignized and literal translation of CPC Reports in the early period (i.e., the 1990s), support the existence and functioning of this governing institutional translation norm.

Nonetheless, the dominant status of this norm has not been unchallenged over the past three decades. The deepening of China’s process to open up to the rest of the world and to accelerate globalization has nursed the greater aspiration
of being integrated into the global community as a key player in the international arena. This is most visible in its official introduction and implementation of 走出去 zouchuqu ‘going global’ as a national strategy at the 16th CPC National Congress in 2002. The strategy states that more effort should be made to participate in international economic cooperation and competition, in line with the growing trend of economic globalization. Framed within this novel political orientation, the institutional translation of political documents and speeches in recent years has been endowed with the responsibility of better integrating Chinese political representation within global discourse in order to strengthen China’s discursive influence internationally (e.g., Li and Li 2015; Pan, Kim, and Li 2020). At institutional level, the traditional ‘faithfulness first’ norm has been re-examined against this new political backdrop, and calls have been made to give greater attention to the target readers and their demands (Chen 2014; Wang 2014; Li and Li 2015). Although faithfulness remains the unbending norm, striking a proper balance between accuracy and acceptability has been proposed and accepted as the new additional institutional norm of translation, according to which translators are expected to exercise translation in a way that renders political texts more acceptable to the target readership while remaining loyal to the original’s ideological contents (see Pan, Kim, and Li 2020). For instance, senior official and translation expert Wang (2014, 8) comments:

In the past, we had always put absolute faithfulness to the original at the top place in translating political documents. However, we now believe that this practice can no longer accommodate the altered readership and their new demands... We should change the translation style in accordance with their thinking and reading habits, better tailoring translated texts to English norms and guaranteeing fluency in expressions and accuracy in opinions. Literal resemblance to the original Chinese need not be excessively pursued. (own translation)

The same viewpoint on the need to balance accuracy with acceptability has been expressed by other leading institutional translation experts in recent years (e.g., Wang 2008; Chen 2014; Tong 2014). In particular, Tong (2014, 94) and Wang (2014, 8) argue that Chinese political texts are typically characterized by metaphorical expressions that carry cultural connotations and are best transformed into plain language in English if improved international acceptance is desired. It is thus evident that the shift from foreignized and literal translation to more domesticated retranslation in tackling culture-specific items and preferred verbs noted in Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 has been governed by the reorientation of institutional translation norms. This institutional reorientation has in turn been shaped by the evolving ideological vision of the CPC and the Chinese government within a variable global context.
5.3 A quantitative overview

To provide a quantitative overview of retranslation occurrences in the CPC Reports, the basic statistics of retranslated elements examined in this study are listed in Table 1. It should be noted that the information provided here is only preliminary and should not be taken as a definitive list of all the retranslated elements across the six investigated Reports, despite our best efforts to do so. Table 1 summarises the political concepts, culture-specific items, and preferred verbs that we identified as having undergone retranslation over the years. This scale of retranslation points to something significant, both within and beyond translation in the Chinese context, as will be discussed in Section 5.4.

5.4 Discussion

In the above analysis, we have shown that the retranslation of certain features of Chinese political texts over the past three decades has been wholly initiated within and by the source culture. The picture presented in the analysis is thus quite different from existing cases studied in the literature, which typically suggest that retranslation, as a target-culture activity, is conditioned by goals set within the target culture. More specifically, unlike most studies of other contexts and genres which contend that retranslation, like translation, is motivated by the needs, attitudes, or ideologies prevailing in the target culture or by the individual translator’s “particular purposes, and ideological and/or poetological investments” (Brownlie 2006, 156), our study demonstrates that the retranslation of Chinese political texts is closely in keeping with and predominantly determined by ideological changes on the part of the original author (the CPC) and the translating institution (the CCTB) acting on the former’s behalf.

Indeed, on account of three distinctive features investigated, our study stands out as a special case not only of retranslation, but also of institutionally sanctioned self-translation, and as such could perhaps be more properly named ‘institutional self-retranslation’, whereby retranslations and the textual changes they introduce are the result of institutional demands that are constantly shaped by the ideological changes of the original author. Naturally, these ideologies have not evolved by themselves, but in tandem with broader social, economic, and political dynamics in China – the source society.

Firstly, the translation activity in question is a kind of ‘self-translation’ in which texts are translated by their author into another language (see Montini 2010, 306–308) – in this case, the CPC and its affiliated CCTB. The CCTB organizes and carries out the translations, and is located, institutionally, under the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retranslated elements</th>
<th>Instances in ST</th>
<th>Instances in TT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1992</strong></td>
<td><strong>1997</strong></td>
<td><strong>2002</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>政治国家</td>
<td>rule the country by law</td>
<td>rule the country by law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>干部</td>
<td>cadre</td>
<td>cadre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>各界爱国人士</td>
<td>patriots from all walks of life</td>
<td>patriots from all walks of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>基层民主</td>
<td>democracy at the grassroots level</td>
<td>democracy at the grassroots level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>科教兴国</td>
<td>the strategies of developing the country by relying on science and education</td>
<td>the strategies of rejuvenating the country through science and education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>民主党派</td>
<td>the democratic parties</td>
<td>the democratic parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>农民</td>
<td>peasants</td>
<td>peasants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>群众</td>
<td>the masses</td>
<td>the masses; ordinary people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>人民当家作主</td>
<td>the people as the masters of the country</td>
<td>the people are the masters of the country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retranslated elements</th>
<th>Instances in ST</th>
<th>Instances in TT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>少数民族 shaoshu minzu</td>
<td>minority ethnic nationalities</td>
<td>ethnic minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>社会阶层 shehui jieceng</td>
<td>social strata</td>
<td>social strata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>台湾问题 taiwan wenti</td>
<td>Taiwan issue</td>
<td>Taiwan question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>无党派人士 wudangpai renshi</td>
<td>persons without party affiliations</td>
<td>personages without party affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>小康社会 xiaokang shehui</td>
<td>a society leading a fairly comfortable life</td>
<td>a well-off society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>政治文明 zhengzhi wenming</td>
<td>socialist political civilization</td>
<td>socialist political civilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>走出去 zouchuaqu</td>
<td>going out</td>
<td>go global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>战斗堡垒 zhandou baolei</td>
<td>a powerful force</td>
<td>a staunch, powerful force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>法宝 fabao</td>
<td>a &quot;magic weapon&quot;</td>
<td>a magic weapon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>骨干企业 gugan qiye</td>
<td>“backbone” enterprises</td>
<td>key enterprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>阔步前进 kuobu qianjin</td>
<td>make big strides</td>
<td>stride forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>人心向背 renxin xiangbei</td>
<td>the trend of popular sentiment</td>
<td>popular support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>荣辱与共 rongruyuugong</td>
<td>sharing weal or woe</td>
<td>sharing weal or woe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>生命线 shengmingxian</td>
<td>lifeblood</td>
<td>lifeblood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retranslated elements</th>
<th>Instances in ST</th>
<th>Instances in TT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>史册</td>
<td>shiche</td>
<td>the annals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>首创精神</td>
<td>shouchuang jiangshen</td>
<td>initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>心连心</td>
<td>xinlianxin</td>
<td>with all hearts beating as one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>血肉联系</td>
<td>xuerou guanxi</td>
<td>flesh-and-blood ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>严惩不贷</td>
<td>yancheng budai</td>
<td>be punished without leniency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>保障</td>
<td>baozhang</td>
<td>guarantee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>规范</td>
<td>guifan</td>
<td>standardize</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CPC Central Committee. All institutional translators are staff or insiders of the Chinese government. Moreover, as suggested by institutional translation expert Wang (2008, 47), if translators encounter any uncertainties or ambiguities regarding the content of the original political documents in the translation process, they will revert to those who have actually authored the original texts for clarification. Therefore, the translation under scrutiny fits well into the category of self-translation (i.e., the author is the translator). This particular translation mode ensures that the ideology manifested in the (re)translated texts is that of the original author, and the original author’s ideological positioning inescapably finds its way into the (re)translations, rather than (re)translations being shaped or determined by goals set within or by the target society.
Secondly, the collective, anonymous, highly regulated and routinized nature of institutional translation (see Koskinen 2011, 54–60) would greatly subdue any individual “translator’s preferences, idiosyncrasies, and choices” (Brownlie 2006, 167) and ensure that the ideologies encoded in the original texts are transmitted to the target texts without compromise during the translation process, irrespective of the actual individual agents involved. In other words, any personal factors on the part of individual translators, be they aesthetic, idiosyncratic, or otherwise, are largely ruled out as impacting on the ultimate textual profiles of the translations. By virtue of such a mechanism, the retranslations of Chinese political texts, as well as the textual variations they bring forth, are bound to be in keeping with and reflective of the ideological changes of the original author.

Thirdly, Brownlie (2006, 150) suggests that “retranslations are undertaken because there has been a change in ideologies and/or norms in the initiating culture (usually the target culture).” Likewise, our study reveals that the retranslation of certain features of Chinese political texts is a result of changes in ideologies and norms in the initiating culture. In this respect, the examination of retranslations may indeed serve to provide a special angle to discern transformations in the norms and ideologies within a particular society. Yet, the initiating culture in our study is not the target, but the source culture. This implies that, given the complexity of retranslation in diverse cultural contexts and genres, retranslation should be looked at not only from the perspective of the receiving culture, but also from that of the source culture and the original author if a fuller picture of the discursive landscape is to be attained.

Lastly, although we have suggested that the retranslation of certain features of Chinese political texts results directly from changes in institutional norms and the original author’s ideologies, it should be highlighted that the retranslation arises as much, if not more, from actual changes in China in terms of politics, economic base, social structure, and international relations. Obviously, China’s improved financial conditions and economic weight (e.g., in terms of GDP) in the world, the profound transformations in its social structure (e.g., the steady transition from a peasant-dominant to a worker-majority society) and political orientation (e.g., the prevalence and naturalization of its ‘reform’ metadiscourse), as well as its rise as a hegemonic global power and concomitantly its relations with other countries or regions over the past decades, have greatly impacted on the ideologies of the original author. These, in turn, have shaped and are mirrored in China’s institutional (re)translation activities. For instance, the retranslation of the item法宝 fabao from the initial ‘magic weapon’ to the later ‘an important way’ (as discussed in Section 5.2.1) reveals an aspect of China’s evolving political reality whereby the early predominant revolutionary metadiscourse gradually gives way to a metadiscourse of ‘reform and opening up’. It can thus be expected that future macro-level
changes will similarly find their way into prospective translations – which calls for further (and future) enquiry.

6. Conclusion

In this article, we have shown how and why the retranslation of political concepts, culture-specific items, and preferred verbs in Chinese political texts from the early 1990s to the late 2010s have been carried out, as motivated by the evolving ideology of the original author – the CPC – within the source culture. Our findings are quite different from those reported in the literature which typically show that retranslations are motivated by prevailing factors within the target culture or by variables associated with individual translators. This points to the necessity of researching retranslation within a broader range of genres and cultural contexts. Our study also demonstrates that a CDA-informed approach to retranslated (political) discourse, through close textual comparisons and metadiscourse analysis, is useful in exposing the shifting and often latent ideologies, norms, power relations, as well as the broader social and political dynamics behind (re)translation. On the whole, our study lends support to the assertion that “retranslation can be a fruitful ground to explore various aspects of translation from a historical and cultural perspective” (Albachten and Tahir Gürçağlar 2019, 1) – aspects that may otherwise possibly be neglected.

Funding

This research was conducted as part of the project “A Study of the Construction, Translation and Dissemination of Chinese Diplomatic Discourse” (17ZDA319) funded by the National Office for Philosophy and Social Science, the People’s Republic of China.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to the anonymous reviewers and the editors for their constructive comments.
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Publication history

Date received: 17 April 2020
Date accepted: 3 January 2021
Published online: 12 February 2021