



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM  
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

**CIB Centro Inter-Bibliotecario**

Viale Filopanti, 7 - 40126 Bologna - Italia



Documento redatto in data: 22/08/2019 Protocollo numero: 199699

## Catalogo Nazionale dei Periodici ACNP

### SCHEMA COMPLETO PERIODICO

Periodico online ad  
accesso libero  
proposto da

**UNITO**

Periodico/Rivista:

**\*Kervan (Online)**

Ente/Autore (Marc  
710):

Università degli studi, Torino. Facoltà di lingue e  
letterature straniere; Università degli studi, Enna

Altra Forma Ente  
(Marc 550):

Facoltà di lingue e letterature straniere dell'Università di  
Torino Università di Enna

Editore

Michele Vallaro;Dipartimento di studi umanistici,  
Università degli studi di Torino;Università di Torino e di  
Enna

Luogo pubbl.

Torino;Torino;Torino;Enna

Da anno - Ad anno

2005-

Lingua

MUL

Periodicità

ANNUALE

Paese

IT

ISSN:

1825-263X

Dewey:

892

Cod. CNR:

PT03196488

Fonte

TEMP

Supporto:

On-line (remote)

Accesso Pubblico alla  
rivista:

<http://www.ojs.unito.it/index.php/kervan/index>

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## Translating Xi Jinping's speeches:

China's search for discursive power between 'political correctness' and 'external propaganda'

Tanina Zappone

Assuming that politics is inseparably concerned with language, the paper provides some insights on the translation strategies adopted in western languages editions of the collection *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* (*Xi Jinping tan zhiguo lizheng* 习近平谈治国理政), and on their potential impact in the perspective of China's external propaganda.

The article collocates the editorial project in the perspective of China's discursive power strategy, as one of many current initiatives aimed to spread "China's voice" in the world.

Since the volume apparently focuses on the construction of a heroic narrative around Xi Jinping's figure, the paper questions China's ability to adapt the Chinese leader's message for foreign rhetorical tastes and to build up a discourse able to attract and influence international public opinion. In particular, through an analysis of the translation process of the Italian edition of the book - where the author was involved as a translator - the paper tries to assess to what extent target-oriented strategies have influenced the choice of contents and translation in the book, as well as their effectiveness in terms of external propaganda.

The release in 2014 of the collection of speeches, by China's current leader Xi Jinping, titled *Xi Jinping tan zhiguo lizheng* 习近平谈治国理政, represented not only an editorial event, supported by huge government economic and ideological investments, but also a political issue, related to China's capacity to enhance its outward representation.

In fact the 500 - 600 pages foreign language versions of this compilation - titled in English *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* and edited by the State Council Information Office of China, the CCCPC Party Literature Research Office and China International Publishing Group - can certainly be considered part of China's grand strategy to globally improve country's image abroad, since the book is explicitly targeted to "enhance the rest of the world's understanding of the Chinese government's philosophy and its domestic and foreign policies" and "to respond to rising international interest".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping (2014: v). The word "interest" here is the translation of Chinese *guanqie* 关切, literally "concern".

This article tries to examine the effectiveness of this editorial project as a means to reach international public opinion and clarify China’s position in the world, taking full advantage of the author's experience as a translator for the Italian edition.

The first part gives account of the promotional campaign of the book and its strategic implications. The second part summarizes the main contents of the collection, marking some notable differences with respect to previous political translation works and describes the main steps of the translating process, while the final section provides insights on the key translation strategies recently advocated by Chinese scholars and the ones specifically adopted in the book, pointing out elements of continuity and change. In the conclusion the author proposes a preliminary evaluation of the effectiveness of the translation project in terms of receptivity by western readers.

### 1. The book in the perspective of discursive power: the promotional campaign and the “strong” leadership of Xi Jinping

Since its release in September 2014,<sup>2</sup> *The Governance of China* has soon become object of a strong promotional campaign, which has produced significant outcomes in a relatively short time.

The volume was first launched during the Frankfurt book fair in October 2014, and afterwards in London and New York Book fairs (April and May 2015). In the following months ceremonies and seminars have been held in France, Russia, Cambodia, Pakistan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Egypt, the Czech Republic and elsewhere in order to present, review and comment the book.

A wide range of initiatives promoted by the publisher – the Foreign Language Press – has soon guaranteed a large distribution of the product on the international book market. According to Lu Cairong, vice president of the China International Publishing Group, in spring 2015 over 4 million copies have already circulated worldwide, including one tenth overseas.<sup>3</sup> Until March 2016, the book had sold more than 5.4 million copies, in more than 100 countries and regions, “setting a sales record at home and abroad for Chinese leaders' works since the reform and opening-up” (Gu Jianjun 2016).

Dozens of translation projects blossomed around the world. They have been giving support to the wide circulation of the volume. Nowadays the book is available in more than 15 languages, including “minor languages” such as Korean and Italian.

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<sup>2</sup> The volume was released in nine languages: Chinese, English, French, Russian, Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, German and Japanese.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Callahan (2015).

A whole multilanguage website, under the government portal [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), has been devoted to the promotion of the book. It provides detailed information about the book and gathers reviews, recommendations and news about the impact and distribution of the volume worldwide.<sup>4</sup>

The effects of this promotional campaign have not been long in coming: in December 2014 the appearance of a copy of the book on the desk of Mark Zuckerberg during the visit of the then head of the Cyberspace Administration of China, Lu Wei, at the social networks' California office, has not passed unnoticed, as well as the display of the book in international conferences (Callahan 2015).

Beyond the official figures about book's sales – which are allegedly influenced by the employ of the book as a learning resource in cadre study sessions – there is no doubt that the publication can boast some records in terms of contents, time and distribution.

First of all, neither Jiang Zemin's nor Hu Jintao's speeches have undergone such kind of compilation. Secondly, *The Governance of China* has been the first collection of Chinese political texts ever available in digital version,<sup>5</sup> and, what is more, no other large collection have appeared so soon, after the appointment of a Chinese leader.<sup>6</sup>

How to explain these changes in China's propaganda tradition on leaders' works collections?

The first answer to this questions comes directly from Chinese literature about the concept of “discursive power” (*huayuquan* 话语权). As Zhao Kejin argues, using this expression Chinese scholars refer to different kind of “power”: the “right to speak” in an international system dominated by the capitalist countries; the “power to speak” which is correlated to the enhancement of China's national strength; the power of media, determined by the country's capacity to control global media; the “soft power”, which depends on the ability to propagate the country's culture and values; the diplomatic skills related to political operation and ideas contributions (Zhao Kejin 2016: 541-544). All these definitions converge in the consciousness – widely shared after China's access to WTO in 2001 – that nowadays the country's development capacities are crucially related not so much to its availability to

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.china.org.cn/china/node\\_7214554.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/node_7214554.htm)

<sup>5</sup> It is available on Amazon website in kindle version from January 2015 in five languages, including French, Spanish and Portuguese; on Apple ibooks and iRead from May 2015 in Chinese and English languages (Cheng Jinming and Zhao Dongsheng 陈金明-赵东升 2016).

<sup>6</sup> *Mao Zedong xuanji - diyi juan* 毛泽东选集第一卷 (*Mao Zedong Selected Works - first volume*) were published in 1951, but contents regard the period 1925-1938; *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan - di er juan* 邓小平文选 第二卷 (*Deng Xiaoping Selected Works - second volume*) were released in 1983; *Jiang Zemin wenxuan* 江泽民文选 (*Jiang Zemin Selected works*) in 2006. *Hu Jintao Wenxuan* 胡锦涛文选 (*Hu Jintao Selected Works*) were published in September 2016, after almost four years from leadership turnover. The peculiarity of Xi Jinping's case is made even more evident by the fact that, just a month after the release of *Hu Jintao's works*, the popularity of the book has been clouded by the publication of a volume, containing a speech by President Xi Jinping himself about the study of works by his predecessor (Xinhua 2016).

continue to be a follower in the established political order, as to its ability to promote new models, in economic, social, cultural and political terms.

Although “discursive power strategy has been the fundamental principle of the Communist Party of China since its establishment in 1921”, its significance in China’s eyes has become increasingly evident since the 21st century, when the country became the world’s second largest economy and gradually dismissed the policy of “hide one’s capabilities and bide one’s time” (*taoguang yanghui* 韬光养晦) – adopted after the launch of the opening-up policy – in favor of the search of a “Beijing consensus” (Ramo 2004). In particular since Xi Jinping comes to power in 2012, discursive power acquires a strategic significance in governance and foreign policy. The new leader’s behavior marks a sharp distinction with his predecessors: he definitely gives up the previous low profile attitude in foreign affairs, and points to clearer targets. In 2014, during a study session of the CCCPC Politburo, Xi Jinping states: “To enhance country’s cultural soft power, it is necessary to enhance international discursive power, strengthen international communication capabilities, accurately build up an external discursive system” (*tigao guojia wenhua ruan shili, yao nuli tigao guoji huayuquan, yao jiaqiang guoji chuanbo nengli jianshe, jingxin goujian duiwai huayu tixi* 提高国家文化软实力，要努力提高国际话语权，要加强国际传播能力建设，精心构建对外话语体系 [...]; Xi Jinping 习近平 2014).

Even still sticking to the principle of “peaceful development”, Xi adopts a stronger position towards international community, placing China at the center of many multilateral initiatives<sup>7</sup> and highlighting domestic core interests in international disputes.<sup>8</sup>

The publication of *The Governance of China* is a gem perfectly encrusted in these new path aimed to spread “China’s voice” and promote China’s soft power resources. It is a part of a discursive power strategy, which involves many tools within different fields – from media and cyber affairs to economic and financial sectors, from cultural and educational initiatives to political and diplomatic practices – and which obviously entails a narrow focus on the figure of the President.

The factors which bring a country to the adoption of an authoritarian leadership are very complex. They include economic, political, social and cultural aspects, issues of governability and political legitimacy, whose assessment would go beyond the scope of this article. However, what is

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<sup>7</sup> According to analysts, RPC annual budget on external propaganda in the year 2014 was around 10 thousand billion dollars. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the New Development Bank, The Silk Road Economic Belt, and the Maritime Silk Road are some the main initiatives, which RPC has been leading in Eastern Asian region and beyond (Shambaugh 2015).

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, the disputes with Japan over the Diaoyu islands or to the establishment of an air defense identification zone over the East China Sea.

notable here is that, the focus on Xi Jinping's personality – who recently brought to define him as a “core leader” – is perfectly consistent with China's grand strategy on discursive power (Buckley 2016).<sup>9</sup> From a communication perspective, in fact, Xi Jinping represents the main voice in the outward chorus of China's voices: he is the one who should be heard louder and clearer in the orchestra of international politics, the one who must deliver the most incisive and direct message, to attract foreign audience's attention. The feeble voices of previous “collective leadership” (*jiti lingdao* 集体领导) have already proved to have scarce impact and to be hardly listened in the global fora.<sup>10</sup>

This partially explains the choice to put the President at the center of a huge multimedia campaign, which encloses his charming wife and resorts to traditional and innovative channels, such as music video, cartoon video, android apps etc. (Hernandez 2016).

This celebration of Xi's individual power and charm has spread concerns about the likely return to a personality cult. Actually many initiatives around the leader's figure recall the style of traditional propaganda and, at first glance, *The Governance of China* falls into this category. The book's cover reveals an evident continuity with the past: a portrait of the leader in a rounded frame stands out from a beige background, above a red letter title, which reminds Maoist publications. Moreover, browsing through the book, the reader's attention is easily drawn by three inserts, including 45 photographs of Xi. These photos portray the leader as a “man of the people”, who personally underwent national suffering and who embodies traditional Confucian values in family and community. They show a magnanimous and tolerant leader, who supports his people in time of suffering and in everyday life; a wise representative of his country abroad, able to be friendly with foreign media in informal contexts and to command respect by foreign leaders in formal occasions.

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<sup>9</sup> In October 2016, a communique, released after a four-day meeting of senior Communist Party officials in Beijing, for the first time referred to Xi Jinping as “the core leader”. The term goes back to late Eighties and was coined by Deng Xiaoping to try to strengthen the just-elected general secretary, Jiang Zemin, after Zhao Ziyang's deposition. Before Xi, it has been given only to paramount leaders: Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin. Xi's immediate predecessor, Hu Jintao, who has been a less assertive leader, never got or even sought for the title. Hence the return to the expression “core leader” has been interpreted as a significant strengthening of Xi's position and as a mark of his special stature, compared to the previous generation of leader.

<sup>10</sup> The formula “collective leadership” is generally linked to Deng Xiaoping's theory and practice of government, and has originally represented a response to Maoist authoritarian and individual leadership. By emphasizing the role and functions of the Politburo Standing Committee and promoting a system of internal division of responsibilities, Deng tried to prevent those past political mistakes, which had been caused by the arbitrary decision-making of a single top leader and had jeopardized the country's stability. This system, which makes the top leader a “primus inter pares”, has been prevailing during all Hu Jintao's era, but today – according to many analysts – it could be relinquished, due to the return of a “strongman” like Xi Jinping, who has re-centralized in his figure many political functions and has overcome constitutional limits (the term limit to presidential mandates, established by the PRC *Constitution*, has been abolished in 2018, before Xi's second term; Cheng Li 2016).

An appendix, edited by the publisher, further strengthens this heroic narrative around Xi Jinping, giving more details on his private life, and so contributing to the picture of a strong, hard working, cultured and decisive leader who has a great “affection for the common people” (Xi Jinping 2014: 481) and embodies the realization of China's dream (Callahan 2015).

Is the search for discursive power leading China back to old-style propaganda and personality cult? Or are the efforts to improve the country’s image contributing to a new set of discursive rules in external propaganda?

The following sections propose some preliminary considerations on the issue, in the perspective of the practice of political translation. Assuming that politics is inseparably concerned with language, and that discourse studies could bring new dimension to the comprehension of politics (Chilton and Schäffner 2002), the paper provides some insights on the translation strategies adopted for *Xi Jinping tan zhiguo lizheng*, and on their potential impact on the success of the book among foreign readers.

## 2. Translation project: contents and process

In the last three decades, “the translation of ‘China’s voice’ has played a vital part in communicating the messages of China to the world, and has become part of the discursive endeavour to construct positive Chinese representations abroad” (Li Jingjing and Li Saihong 2015). Translation is not only a literary or technical activity: “Although the translation is often invisible in the field of politics, it is actually an integral part of political activity” (Schaffner and Bassnett 2010: 13). The first “political decision” made in the translation process is which texts get translated, from and into which languages.

*The Governance of China* is composed of 79 pieces – delivered from November 2012 to June 2014 – including speeches, talks, interviews, instructions, and correspondence, arranged in 18 chapters, and covering a wide range of topics relating to Chinese governance, from domestic development policies to national defense, ecology, and the campaign against corruption within the Party. Five sections are wholly devoted to the main principles and policies, guiding China’s growing involvement in world affairs.<sup>11</sup>

While the order of the pieces in each chapter is merely chronological, the sequence of chapters evidently aims to build a national narrative: the first chapter, on socialism with Chinese

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<sup>11</sup> They are Peaceful Development, New Model of Major-country Relations, Neighborhood Diplomacy, Cooperation with Developing Countries, Multilateral Relations. Refers to Swaine 2015 for a detailed analysis.



characteristics, affirms the fundamental political theory, which drives the country's development; the second, on the "Chinese dream" (*Zhongguomeng* 中国梦), announces the goal of national pride and personal fulfillment, celebrated in the first slogan ever announced by Xi Jinping; the following chapters deal with economic reform and development, "for economic growth is the driver of the rejuvenation of Chinese nation", while rule of law, social undertaking, advanced culture, innovation capacity, ecological progress and national defense are the preconditions to a successful, unique and sustainable model of development (Xue Zhong 2016: 135). The chapters from XI to XV cover foreign affairs in the perspective of diplomacy and international cooperation, for globalization is the scenario in which China has been realizing its identity as a cooperative, stable, economically powerful and politically influential country. The book ends with three sections on the Party: the first treats the relationship between CPC and the masses, the second emphasizes the significance of the struggle against corruption within the Party, while the last one – entitled "The CPC leadership" ("Innalzare il livello della leadership del Partito", in Italian) – asserts the continuing ruling status of a party which strive to enhance and legitimize its power.

A diachronic analysis, comparing these topics to those in the *Selected Work* of previous leaders, gives some hints about the strategic goals of the book.<sup>12</sup> First of all, as Figure 1 shows, the number of pieces referring to narrowly political or defence-related themes has been steadily shrinking from Mao Zedong to Jiang Zemin's era, in favor of topics concerning economic development and reform, science and innovation and diplomatic relations. These changes can be considered as a natural consequence of the gradually opening up of China to the outside world and to the launch of economic reforms from Deng Xiaoping's government onwards. What is remarkable is that in *The Governance of China* the amount of articles associated to economic issues decreases for the first time, while diplomacy and foreign affairs become the most common themes in the book, along with politics. Moreover the figure reveals a trend to focus reader's attention on topics such as science, innovation and education, which have found little consideration in previous political works. Despite the methodological limits of this survey – which compares collections conceptually similar, but quantitatively and qualitatively dissimilar –<sup>13</sup> the data seem to confirm that the core objective of Xi

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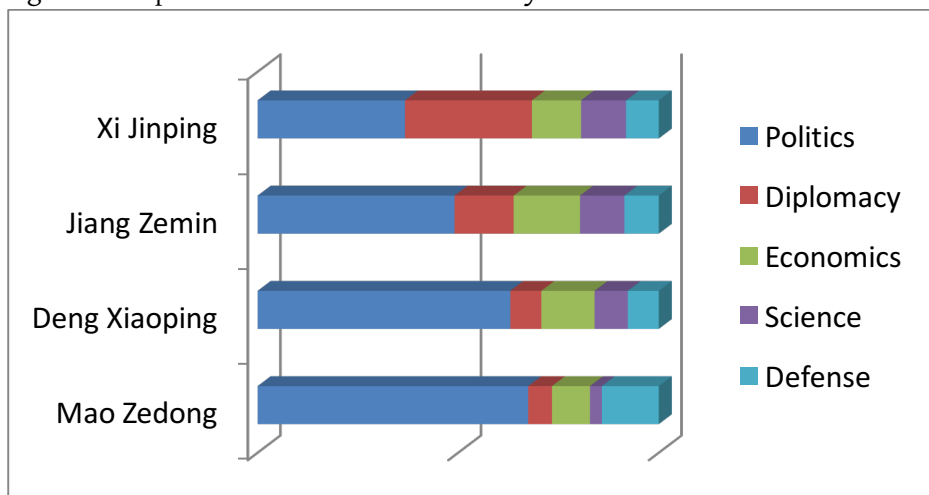
<sup>12</sup> Figures have been elaborated on the basis of a comparative analysis of the official documents published in the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (Volumes 1 to 5. 1977. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press), the *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Volumes 1 to 3. 1994. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press), and the *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin* (Volumes 1 and 2. 2012. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press).

The choice of volumes is motivated not only by their significance in the history of Chinese political translation, but also by their relevance in the elaboration of the policy making of individual leaders.

<sup>13</sup> Mao's works count 229 article, Deng Xiaoping's 208, Jiang Zemin's 140.

Jinping’s work is “to declare China’s commitment to peaceful development and demonstrates China’s image as a responsible major country” (Cai Mingzhao 2014).

Figure 1: Topics in collections of works by Chinese leaders



The translation of the chapters of *The Governance of China* has been a collective work, which – as always happens in China for the translation of political documents – has followed a set of highly regulated procedures.<sup>14</sup> Previous studies tell us that, since the translation of *Mao Zedong's Selected Works*, the procedure – basically secretive, due to the “closed” nature of China’s political system – includes at least three steps: preliminary translation, proofreading and finalising (Li Jingjing and Li Saihong 2015). Foreign experts are always invited to discuss the translation drafts to ensure that the target text not only faithfully conveys the original meaning, but also is idiomatic and can be well received by the target audience (Cheng Zhenqiu 程镇球 2002: 195).

In the case of the Italian edition of *The Governance of China* the process has been even longer and has implied four stages: rough translation by native Italian translators, first proofreading, second proofreading and finalising. The first proofreading has involved the foreign editor and native translators and has aimed to improve the Italian text. The second proofreading has involved also Chinese translators and the Italian editor; it has meant to reconnect the text to its original nature in terms of meaning and style; in the finalising stage senior Chinese translators have revised and

<sup>14</sup> In China the translation of political texts usually involves two specialized governmental bodies: the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau and the Department of Translation and Interpretation. The former is under the control of the CPC Central Committee and translate Party documents and government reports, the latter is affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and translates State leader’s speeches.

approved the final version; little space has been left to the foreign editor's advices, while Italian translators were not involved.

In this fully institutionalised process, the work of Chinese translators mostly seemed to follow principles of accuracy and faithfulness, which are traditionally considered governing norms in Chinese political translation (Cheng Zhenqiu 程镇球 2002, Guo Jiading 过家鼎 2002, Xu Yanan 徐亚男 2000, Zhang Yuanyuan 张援远 2004 et al.). After all, the majority of the professional Chinese translators are members of the CPC, and hold senior official positions in political and professional institutions;<sup>15</sup> they are mandated to work for the interest of the Party and, besides an excellent foreign language education,<sup>16</sup> they have received a political education, who brings them to follow a code of conduct, according to which the practice of political translation is “an officially sanctioned project of exporting literature and ideology since 1950” (Ma Shikui 2006: 17). What really influences the translation work, therefore, is not so much the original contribution of individual translators, but rather the programmed objectives – decided by top-level authorities – of the specific project, as well as the translation strategies adopted to pursue these objectives. Most of the times the ability of translators is confined to apply these strategies, by bending language to the needs of slogans and producing texts which sound often questionable on a formal level and empty on the substantial level.

In this regard, the following section examines the main positions recently taken by Chinese senior scholars and translators on political translation by shortly reviewing the relevant literature on the issue, with the aim of assessing their application to the case of *The Governance of China*.

### 3. The impact of the target-oriented strategies on *The Governance of China*

As Paolo Magagnin observes “[I]n scholarship focusing on China, whereas classical rhetoric has received extensive attention, the analysis of modern and contemporary political language and discourse is a comparatively recent field of research” (Magagnin 2016: 346). Only in the last years the interest of Chinese scholars on political language and its translation has been growing as a consequence of China's increasing integration into the global community. The number of studies devoted to the analysis and identification of effective and appropriate translation strategies has been

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, the senior translator, Huang Youyi, who worked on the English edition of *The Governance of China* is Standing Vice Chairman and Secretary General of the Translators Association of China, and a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (Aredy 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Take the example of Ding Hengqi, who translated Hu Jintao's speeches, and has been a professor and dean in the University of International Business and Economics, and a Chinese Consul General to San Francisco (Yong Zhong 2011: 801).

steadily increasing, also in the light of a broader knowledge of western translation theories, such as Toury’s descriptive translation studies and Nida’s functional equivalence theory.

Nowadays China’s official discourse better understands the “intricacy and ideological implications involved in the practice of translating political discourse” (Li Jingjing and Li Saihong 2015: 425). As a result, the traditional prescriptive view that political translation in China is a source oriented practice, totally dominated by the prominent requirement of “political correctness”, has begun to be questioned.

Through the years translation strategies have undergone a deep evolution, moving from the literal purpose-driven translation of Mao’s works – where formal equivalence prevails and most of the cultural elements were explained with footnotes – to the more idiomatic target/reader translations of today, which are mostly culturally oriented and based on the principle of dynamic equivalence.

Although “fidelity” is still considered the basic requirement of political translation, nowadays Chinese scholars maintain that the goal of political translation is “[O]n the one hand to ensure accuracy of the information and ideological correctness; on the other hand, (it is necessary) to ensure the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication” (*yi fangmian yao baozheng xinxi de zhunquexing yu yishi xingtai de zhengquexing; ling yi fangmian, bixu baozheng kuawenhua chuanbo de xiaoguo* 一方面要保证信息的准确性与意识形态的正确性; 另一方面, 必须保证跨文化传播的效果) (Xiong Zheng 熊正 2015:77). The translators’ work is thus considered not just as the act of faithfully transferring of a political message into the target language, but as the task of producing texts able to fit cultural and linguistic conventions and expectation of the target community. To achieve “the desired function of translation in external propaganda” (*duiwai xuanchuan fanyi de yuqi gongneng* 对外宣传翻译的预期功能) a text should be able, first of all, to draw the readers’ attention (Yuan Zhuoxi 袁卓喜 2013). Yuan Zhuoxi individuates the main factors which may influence the reception of a message among foreign public in: the “sense of identification” (*rentong gan* 认同感); the “respect of the target-language’s rhetoric conventions” (*xiuci xiguan* 修辞习惯) and of “rhetorical sensitivity” (*xiuci ganshou* 修辞感受) (*Ibidem*).

During a lecture given at a translation forum organized in September 2016 by the Translators Association of China (*Zhongguo fanyi xiehui* 中国翻译协会), Xu Mingjiang, who is a former chief editor at the Foreign Language Press and joined the translation of *The Governance of China* as a senior translator, pointed out that the key word in translation work should be “simplicity”. According to Xu, who quotes Joseph Devlin, the number of words used in translation should not exceed 2000 units, and translator must:

strive to use simple words, easy to understand and familiar to the readers, avoid less common words, words “with Chinese characteristics”, and also words too deeply correlated to Chinese context. [...] Pay attention to the different characteristics of the two languages, less use adjectives and adverbs, be proficient in using verbs. [...] In short, the language of the translation must be the simplest, plainest possible.

尽量用简单、易懂的词，用读者熟悉的词，少用不常见的词，少用我们经常说的有中国特色的词，还要少用中国背景太深的词。[...]注意两种语言的不同特点，少用形容词、副词，用好动词。[...]总之，译文要尽最大的可能用最简单、朴实的语言。  
(He Shan 2016)

On the same line, another senior translator of Xi’s works, Huang Youyi, on the sidelines of a conference in Shanghai in April 2015, states that while in the past the readers of Chinese translators were only professors, scholars and China watchers, “nowadays we are trying to reach 5.7 billion foreigners out there who have some kind of interest in China. They are not China experts. We should make our translated word more targeted toward their reading habits, their level of understanding China”. Huang goes even further describing the translator as a bold innovator, who should aim to change some of the old-fashioned Chinese way of speaking, through his work.<sup>17</sup>

Chinese translation experts are fully aware that transition from Chinese to foreign language “is not only a change from one language to another, but also a transition of two different cultures and values” as well as that neglecting cultural differences and reader’s response could lead to cultural misunderstandings, conflicts and even strengthen stereotypes and mutual distrust (Liu Daoying 2015: 18).

But did Chinese translators put their linguistics and communication knowledge to good use for the translation of *The Governance of China*?

A look at the English translation of the book title gives a preliminary answer to this question. The original title *Xi Jinping tan zhiguo lizheng* has undergone a deep adaptation in foreign languages. In fact a literal translation would have been *Xi Jinping talks of (tan 谈) governance (zhiguo 治国) and administration (lizheng 理政)*. The words *tan* and *lizheng* have been omitted, and the resulting shorter title has allowed to put the name of the leader in the foreground. This choice – as Xu Mingjiang

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<sup>17</sup> Huang takes the example of the word “comrade”, which still appears in Chinese political discourse, and that can be found somewhere in *The Governance of China*. It has been always translated into “friends” and – in Huang’s expectations – “[I]n the future, probably you will see less words like that” (Aredy 2015).

reveals – meant to respond to the marketing notion of the First Moment of Truth,<sup>18</sup> according to which a customer/user makes the decision to purchase a product in the first few seconds after he encounters that product for the first time on the shelf (He Shan 何珊 2016). In this case, therefore, translators not only have accurately employed translation techniques (reduction/adaptation), but have also taken in due account aspects of marketing strategy.

For the book title, the choice made for the English translation was maintained also in French and Italian editions - respectively *Xi Jinping: La Gouvernance de la Chine* and *Xi Jinping: Governare la Cina* - however this was not always the case. If we look at the chapters’ titles, for instance, the techniques of reduction and adaptation used in the English version have not been adopted in the Italian edition, which prefers a more literal translation. Here below an example from the title of chapter I:

CH:	<i>Jǐn jǐn wéirào jiānchí hé fāzhǎn Zhōngguó tèsè shèhuì zhǔyì</i> 紧紧围绕坚持和发展中国特色社会主义
EN:	Socialism with Chinese Characteristic
IT:	Perseverare nel socialismo con caratteristiche cinesi e nel suo sviluppo

In general the English edition deviates more from the redundant and repetitive style of the original, and apparently strives to apply the aforementioned translation strategies, while the Italian edition is much more faithful to the original.<sup>19</sup> That could be a result of preliminary evaluations made by the Foreign Language Press about different readership: on the one hand the much broader and various world of English-reading public; on the other hand the Italian readers, far less numerous and mostly composed by scholars and China’s experts. Nonetheless the Italian edition does not give up attracting common readers: the announcement of book’s release first appeared online under the title “Governare la Cina. Scritti e discorsi del presidente cinese (2012-2014)” (the Governance of China. Writings and speeches of the Chinese President), a title which evidently tries to attract the attention of non-experts, who could not know the proper name of the Chinese President. Moreover during the whole translation process, Italian native translators were recommended to adopt a plain style, in order to be understood and reach common people.

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<sup>18</sup> The term “Moment of Truth” (MOT) or “First Moment of Truth” (commonly FMOT) was coined by Procter & Gamble in 2005 to define the first interaction between a shopper and a product on a store’s shelf.

<sup>19</sup> A telling example comes from the maintenance in the Italian version of long classical quotations, which have been almost always omitted in the English edition. An excerpt from the *Classic of Songs* (*Shijing*), quoted in a speech held in 2014, does not appear in the English version, albeit it has been wholly translated in Italian (Xi Jinping 2016: 158).

The “indigenous concepts” (*benyuan gainian* 本源 概念) – namely those linguistic signs which are historically, culturally and socially connoted to a shared repertoire of a specific linguistic community – represent, without doubts, the hardest challenge of translation (He Yuajian 何元建 2010). Neologisms (*xin ci* 新词), political technical terms (*zhengzhi shuyu* 政治术语), quotation of verses (*shiju yinyu* 诗句 引语), four characters expressions (*sizi jiegou* 四字 结构), sayings and proverbs (*yanyu* 谚语) are notably present in *The Governance of China*, since Xi Jinping often resorts to classical quotations and cultural references, as sources of internal consensus and international prestige (Scarpari 2015). Different procedures have been adopted to translate them, ranging from adaptation/equivalence, omission and explanation to amplification, division and transformation of parts of speech. Thus the saying: 良药苦口利于病，忠言逆耳利于行。 *Liáng yào kǔ kǒu lìyú bìng, zhōngyán nì ěr lìyú xíng.* (literally “Good medicines are bitter to the tongue but beneficial to the disease, the good tips are hard to the ears but of benefit to a (good) behavior”) has been translated in Italian with the equivalent proverb “Il medico pietoso fa la piaga purulenta”.<sup>20</sup> Words politically sensitive, such as *xuanchuan* 宣传 (propaganda), *tongzhimen* 同志们 (comrade), or ambiguous, like *jingshen* 精神 (spirit), has been adapted – “comunicazione” (publicity), “amici” (friends), “principio guida” (guiding principle) – to avoid cultural misunderstandings. When possible, Chinese idiomatic expression have been omitted, to simplify and clarify the text.

But to what extent has the final translation benefited of these strategies of adaptation? Did it succeed in drawing readers interest and meeting their taste and sensibilities?

According to a survey conducted by Luo Yiling, Zhang Li and Ge Lingling on the English edition of the book, although translators made good use of procedures such as liberal translation (57,22%), reduction/omission (4,15%), equivalence (2,075%) or hybrid translation (24,9%), the majority of the indigenous concepts have been literally translated (177,67%) (Luo Yiling, Zhang Li and Ge Lingling 2016 – figure 2), so that target-oriented strategies – even if present – have had little impact on the overall work.

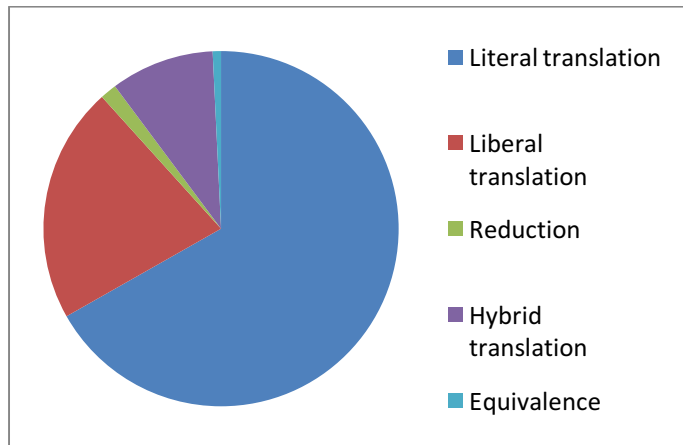
Apparently, political responsibility keeps being the priority of the translator, and only when the text is lacking political connotation a translation oriented to the target language is really admitted. The norm of adequacy prevails on that of acceptability, the translation fails to find a balanced point between the two poles. It produces a redundant and repetitive discourse, where obsolete expressions abound, and which sounds very far from common language. As a translator of the Italian edition, I witnessed how rarely the Chinese professionals, who have proofread the text, have been ready to

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<sup>20</sup> Xi Jinping (2016: 231).

accept objections by the Italian part to their corrections, although by so doing they have heavily reduced the readability of the book.

Figure 2: Translation techniques of indigenous concepts in *The Governance of China*



After all – as Yong Zhong argues in his critical analysis of the official translations of Hu Jintao’s works – in the Chinese context a “correct translation”:

- a. is structurally loaded with complex syntactic structures and difficult vocabularies including especially pedantic words and phrases;
- b. duplicates the original rhetorical features (e.g., symmetry, contrast, idiom and euphemisms) of the Chinese ST;
- c. covers up or dresses up those elements of the ST not intended for international readers;
- d. must have the quality required for enhancing the charismas of authors; and
- e. often looks maximalist and bulky as a result of having to achieve the above. (Yong Zhong 2011)

Even if, at the micro level, Chinese official translation adopts textual devices to meet readership expectations, however, at the macro level, political translation continues to be an institutionalized norm-governed practice. The governance of China succeeded in maintaining ideological correctness, but fails in achieving its external propaganda goal of “reassuring the world that China will continue to develop and that its rise will benefit everyone” (Swaine 2016). It has constructed a narrative too far from that to which the readers of liberal countries are accustomed.



#### 4. Conclusions

This paper has tried to examine the communicative effectiveness of the translation project *The Governance of China*, in the framework of China's search for discursive power. Specifically, the article has attempted to analyze to what extent the project challenges previous approach to political translation to increase the book's receptivity by foreign readers and hits the goal of enhancing "the rest of the world's understanding of the Chinese government's philosophy and its domestic and foreign policies".

After having detected some notable novelties in terms of time of publication (soon after the appointment of Xi), channels of distribution (digital versions available on Amazon and Apple iBooks and iRead) and selected contents (compared to previous leaders' collections, the amount of speeches associated to economic issues decreases, diplomacy and foreign affairs become the most common themes along with politics, while science, innovation and education find more consideration), the paper focused on the translating process, with special reference to the Italian language edition, for which the paper's author has been one of the translators. By witnessing that the whole project has been realized as a collective work, leaving very little space for individual initiative, we argued that the final text is the outcome of a "pyramidally based" process on guidelines and strategies, settled by the government for political purposes. The analysis of some examples from the English, French and Italian editions showed that, although somehow the translation beneficiaries of target-oriented strategies of adaptation such as liberal translation, reduction/omission, equivalence or hybrid translation, all strongly advocated by Chinese academic literature on political translation – this is especially true in the English version and for indigenous concepts – literal translation still prevails, therefore undermining the effectiveness of the translation project in terms of receptivity by western readers.

The translation of *The Governance of China* fully reflects the persistence of the old contradiction between political correctness and external propaganda in Chinese political text.

This study to some extent raises awareness for China, who is eager to spread its voice in the world and promote the country's soft power resources, but it is still far away from making PRC external propaganda attractive to foreign public. China's current aspirations to expand its discursive power, by projecting in the global discourse a positive image of its leader and of its national discourse, are still facing the contradiction of a leadership who is available to defy the political language of the past, but not to the point of questioning the existing political system.

In 2015 Xi clearly stated that the future competition in comprehensive strength among nations will definitely be determined by country's system ability to innovate, but the path to effectively

innovating China political communication and to making PRC external propaganda attractive to foreign public seems to be still a very long one.

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