

## Original Paper

# A Study on the Sinicization of *The Communist Manifesto* from the Perspective of Cross-cultural Communication

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### Abstract

*The Communist Manifesto* represents Marxism and matters as a source of Communism. Since the first Chinese translation of *The Communist Manifesto* was published in 1920, there have been 8 translations according to research. This paper expounds changes in the translation of *The Communist Manifesto* from the perspective of cross-cultural communication, applying an interdisciplinary research method, and combining cross-cultural communication, translation studies and relevant subjects. This paper shows that the translation of *The Communist Manifesto* gradually indicates Chinese characteristics with the development of times and introduces three means of international communication of Marxism with Chinese characteristics, which is conducive to promoting translation, broadening the field of Marxism works on translations, strengthening ideal and belief of socialism with Chinese characteristics, constructing discourse system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and enlightening significance for the international communication of Chinese Marxism.

### Keywords

*The Communist Manifesto*, Cross-cultural communication, Translation, *The Communist Manifesto* with Chinese characteristics, Marxism

## 1. Introduction

Intercultural communication has existed since the time of primitive tribes and has continuously evolved throughout human history. Nowadays it still plays a vital role in interpersonal interactions and international communication, and as signs of life such as farming and trade. However, the term “intercultural communication” was only coined in 1959 by American anthropologist Edward T. Hall. It wasn’t until the latter half of the 20th century that it began to develop into a relatively independent discipline. Intercultural communication was deeply intertwined with other disciplines and not entirely

separate. But it has gradually formed a systematic and comprehensive framework by integrating theories from communication studies with anthropology, psychology, linguistics, cultural studies, and sociology. This multidisciplinary integration endows intercultural communication with diverse characteristics, signifying the diversity in culture and ideas. Effective intercultural communication through equivalently impactful translation can minimize these differences, achieving better communication. The currently prevalent translations of *The Communist Manifesto* are those translated and revised by Central Compilation and Translation Bureau. Studying these translations from an intercultural communication perspective helps to understand the essence of *The Communist Manifesto*, reveal the social and historical contexts of various revisions, comprehend the trend of the Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, and better solidify communist beliefs. It also lays a foundation for the international dissemination of Socialism.

## 2. Intercultural Communication in Translation

As the term suggests, intercultural refers to the interactions between individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds, while communication involves the transmission of opinions and expressions between groups or individuals through language or behavior to achieve certain social purposes. From a macro perspective, “intercultural communication” refers to the exchanges between different races, cultures, and ideologies among nations. From a micro perspective, it refers to interpersonal interactions among people of different regions or countries. Intercultural communication involves encoding, decoding, transforming, and re-translating intercultural content, relying on intercultural communication theories and content. Translation, in this context, refers to how the linguistic products of one language are converted into another language. Translation has driven cultural exchange and social progress worldwide. The Enlightenment periods in the histories of various cultures began with translation. Reviewing the history of translation globally, periods of active translation often coincide with times when significant differences or perceived inequalities existed between the cultures or languages of two nations, where one nation felt the need to learn advanced knowledge from another, including political, religious, and scientific knowledge. Xu asserts that translation is not merely a linguistic activity but also an important cultural exchange. The translation itself is both cultural act and communication, representing intercultural communication occurring within linguistic exchanges. As previously discussed, translation is not only the adaptation between two languages but also involves the negotiation of the cultures behind those languages. It is a form in both linguistic and cultural communication. Intercultural communication in translation involves communication between languages and their underlying cultures, between translators and authors, between readers and authors, and between readers and content. This communication encompasses a rich array of content, extensive fields, and numerous participants. Simple communication already faces certain barriers, let alone in intercultural communication, where similar and different cultural phenomena frequently arise. Thus, achieving equivalent communication in an intercultural context is worth studying. Achieving equivalent

translation in an intercultural context can enhance the effectiveness of intercultural communication and ensure content equivalence. Firstly, one must use intercultural communication theories to achieve equivalent translation and improve communication effectiveness and the readability of the translated content. Kim proposed the theory of communication and intercultural adaptation integration, suggesting that humans inherently need to adapt and develop cultural communication, and they do so through communication to fit into their social environment. Adaptation is a complex, dynamic process described as a tension-adaptation-progress sequence. In translation, language conversion also requires adapting to communication and intercultural adaptation processes. When dealing with non-equivalent vocabulary, choosing appropriate expressions based on the contextual background can help achieve highly equivalent intercultural communication.

### 3. The Communist Manifesto and Its Translations

The Communist Manifesto co-authored by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and published in 1848. As a piece of “world literature,” The Communist Manifesto serves as a benchmark for future world trends. The Communist Manifesto is not only the theoretical foundation of Marxism but also holds unique literary value. Thus, studying The Communist Manifesto is crucial for understanding the trend of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and exploring its literary merits. Existing translations of *The Communist Manifesto* were fragmented and scattered. The Chinese translation of *The Communist Manifesto* came from several languages, including German, English, Japanese, and Russian. Given different socio-historical contexts, some expressions were difficult to find corresponding versions for. The first complete Chinese translation, published in 1920, garnered significant attention. Subsequent translations and revisions led to a version of *The Communist Manifesto* with distinct Chinese characteristics. Historical records and social environments indicate that there are twelve translations of *The Communist Manifesto* in total. These translations can be divided into two phases: before and after the founding of the People’s Republic of China. Before the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the translations were as follows: 1920 Chen Wangdao’s, 1930 Hua Gang’s, 1938 Cheng Fangwu and Xu Bing’s, 1943 Bo Gu’s, 1943 Chen Shoushi’s, 1947 Qiao Guanhua’s, 1949 Xie Weizhen’s translation. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, a notable translation in November 1978 by Cheng Fangwu was followed by several translations and revisions handled by Central Compilation and Translation Bureau in 1958, 1964, 1978, 1995, and 2009. Due to the influence of various historical and environmental factors, the pre-1949 translations contain issues such as mistranslations, omissions, homophones, and repetitions. Additionally, the standardization of language and Chinese characters has led to differences in the translation of specific terms and historical events compared to modern standards.

#### 3.1 Overview of Translation Changes in *The Communist Manifesto*

In 1920, Chen Wangdao completed the full translation of *The Communist Manifesto* under extremely challenging conditions, meticulously refining the work. However, due to the translator’s own

knowledge limitations, language proficiency, and other factors, this version contained omissions and inaccuracies in specialized terminology. Cheng Fangwu's *The Communist Manifesto* translation underwent revisions. *The Communist Manifesto* played different roles in various social contexts, so the translation was continually updated to align more closely with the Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, established in 1953, is responsible for translating, collecting, and disseminating works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. The Bureau's 1958 translation of the *The Communist Manifesto* included adjustments in content and format, such as converting Chinese numerals to Arabic numerals and changing the text layout from vertical to horizontal. Although the Bureau's 1972 version is labeled a revision, it is actually a retranslation. After 1976, the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau was responsible for editing works. This revision focused on two main aspects: firstly, ensuring the wording was closer to the original meaning, and secondly, replacing outdated language structures with modern equivalents. For example, "Nationality" was translated as "国粹" by Chen Wangdao, influenced by the Japanese term. Later, it was correctly translated as "民族" to better reflect meaning and role of *The Communist Manifesto*. In the latest translation of *The Communist Manifesto*, terms were updated to be more accurate and logical. For instance, "小市民" was retranslated as "小资产阶级" "小市民" referred to residents with small amounts of productive property, such as artisans and small merchants. Over time, the term evolved to denote a broader social stratum, including petty merchants, minor officials, artisans, and urban residents. Adapting the translation vocabulary to be logical and precise ensures that the translation meets the demands of progress and environmental changes. Translation, a way of intercultural communication, requires adjustments in vocabulary and sentence structures to adapt to changing contexts. The more the translated content aligns with the era's context, the stronger the communicative efficacy of the translated text becomes.

### 3.2 The Trend of Sinicization in Translations of *The Communist Manifesto*

The translation of *The Communist Manifesto* lays the theoretical foundation for the Sinicization of Marxism. Translations from different periods reflect the various developmental trajectories of *The Communist Manifesto*. Below, we analyze the translations by Chen Wangdao, Cheng Fangwu and Xu Bing, and Central Compilation and Translation Bureau to understand the trend of Sinicization in the translations of *The Communist Manifesto*. In the various translations, the term "spectre" has undergone changes such as "怪物", "巨影", and "幽灵". Similarly, "haunting" has been translated as "徘徊着", "踌躇着", and "游荡着". According to Fang Hong, the phrase "spectre of communism" is not a subjective evaluation by Marx and Engels but rather refers to the underground currents of communism at the time and the attitudes of European rulers towards it. Therefore, the translation of these terms reflects the translator's assessment of the communist movement's trends. The shift demonstrates recognition and support of communism, highlighting a transition from initial skepticism to acceptance and integration of communism.

E.g., 1: The distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the

abolition of bourgeois property.

陈望道： 共产主义的特征不是废止一般的财产，只是废止资产家的财产。

成仿吾，徐兵： 共产主义的特征不是废除一般的财产，而是废除资产阶级的财产。

中央编译局： 共产主义的特征并不是废除一般的所有制，而是废除资产阶级的所有制。

In these examples, “bourgeois” evolved from “资产家” to “资产阶级”, and “property” from “财产” to “所有制”. Initially, “capitalists” referred to individuals owning production elements and profiting from businesses by hiring workers, contrasting with the working class. “Bourgeoisie” defines the class owning production means and employing labor, opposing the “proletariat”. The shift reflects a broader social class change. As Marxism developed in China, communists recognized the opposition to the proletariat as the bourgeoisie rather than just capitalists. The evolution from physical property to the concept of ownership system indicates a rational and mature understanding, integrating more deeply with Chinese characteristics.

E.g., 2: Working Men of All Countries, Unite!

陈望道： 万国劳动者团结起来呵！

成仿吾，徐兵： 一切国家的无产者，联合起来呵！

中央编译局： 全世界无产者，联合起来！

“Working Men” was eventually translated as “无产者”. “Working Men” originally meant “工人” or “劳动者”. In the Marxist context, the proletariat in capitalism is contrasted with the bourgeoisie, which includes capitalists, white-collar workers, and farmers, while workers and laborers are part of the proletariat. “Working Men” was translated as “工人” or “劳动者” would be logical linguistically but fails to capture the cultural nuances. When *The Communist Manifesto* was introduced in China, the agrarian economy was predominant, and most people were peasants. To mobilize a peasant revolution, the translation needed to highlight the peasants’ significance. “Working Men” is translated as “无产阶级”, which not only spurred revolutionary success but also achieved higher-equivalence translation, effectively realizing cross-cultural communication. These examples illustrate how the translations of *The Communist Manifesto* have evolved to incorporate Chinese characteristics, reflecting the growing integration of Marxism into Chinese society and culture. This trend of Sinicization in the translations ensures that the text resonates with the Chinese context and the revolutionary spirit.

#### 4. Sinicization in Translations of The Communist Manifesto under Cross-Cultural Communication

Translation, a communication, demonstrates a spiraling trend of improvement and enhancement as the quality of translated texts is continuously revised and elevated. The numerous translations and revisions of *The Communist Manifesto* highlight its significance and underscore the meticulous effort invested in perfecting its translations. Central Compilation and Translation Bureau has made substantial contributions to the popularization of the translated *The Communist Manifesto*. The frequent revisions of *The Communist Manifesto* reflect the integration theory of communication and cross-cultural

adaptation, indicating that the text has been modified to fit the changeable society, adjusting formats and words to present Chinese characteristics. This ongoing process of revisions aligns with the theory's emphasis on the tension-adaptation-progress dynamic, illustrating a spiraling upward trend. Currently, the version translated by Central Compilation and Translation Bureau is the most widely circulated and authoritative Chinese translation of *The Communist Manifesto*. This version is considered relatively complete and of high quality, aligning with contemporary changes and enjoying broad acceptance among the populace. The multiple translations of *The Communist Manifesto* exemplify the inheritance of unique cultural traits and communication. Its numerous translations and revisions have established a distinctive Chinese discourse system. By consistently refining the translations of *The Communist Manifesto*, the translators have managed to bridge the gap between Marxist theory and the Chinese socio-cultural context. This careful and deliberate adaptation process has not only made the text more accessible to the audience but also enriched the discourse of Marxism with Chinese characteristics. Thus, the translation exemplifies a successful cross-cultural communication endeavor, reinforcing the importance of adapting and evolving theoretical texts to resonate with Chinese condition.

## **5. Spread of the *The Communist Manifesto* of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics**

### *5.1 Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies for Effective Dissemination*

Interacting and communicating between countries is a direct and effective development approach, serving as a way to learn about and adopt other excellent cultures. Consequently, cross-cultural communication has become an indispensable discipline to facilitate international communication. Disseminating Sinicized Marxism globally helps other nations better understand Marxism and its distinctive features. The global cultural landscape benefits from diverse cultural exchanges, where different systems provide opportunities for learning and improvement. The spread of Marxism is an effective way to break through cultural cognition stereotypes and cognitive rigidity. It highlights China's openness to embracing various strengths and characteristics from other cultures. This fosters international communication with China, reflecting the significance of cross-cultural communication. Therefore, it is crucial to understand cross-cultural communication theories, identify patterns, and seize opportunities to promote the global dissemination of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. Expanding dissemination channels and employing multiple modes and methods to spread Sinicized Marxism can make it a model for presenting China's national image. Relying solely on textual translation and expression is insufficient. It is essential to fully utilize various media, including broadcasting, images, videos, texts, and live streaming, to encode and disseminate information. Additionally, establishing dedicated communication teams to handle the dissemination of cultural concepts and ideas related to Sinicized Marxism can enhance the effectiveness of this process. Respecting other countries' thought and language patterns and overcoming differences will help present Sinicized Marxism in a manner that is easily accepted internationally.

### 5.2 Appropriate Terms of Translation Facilitate Promotion

The Communist Manifesto originated in Germany and later spread to various parts of the world including Asia and Europe, during a time of turbulent environment. Translations of the *The Communist Manifesto* brought Marxism and communism to people worldwide, presenting new methods and perspectives for revolution. The role of translation cannot be underestimated; it allows readers to empathize with content, and accurate terminology ensures that readers maximize their understanding of the original meaning. Thus, achieving a consistent effect between speakers and listeners in determining the meaning behind the discourse. Sinicized Marxism requires precise terminology and balanced cultural differences to effectively convey the core ideas and concepts of Sinicized Marxism. This approach minimizes conflicts and misunderstandings caused by cultural differences, clarifying that the intent of dissemination is to promote cultural exchange rather than assert international sovereignty. Specific historical contexts determine the extent and scope of dissemination of different editions of the *The Communist Manifesto* across different periods. Nowadays, when facing complex challenges and crises, the promotion of Sinicized Marxism is beneficial for showcasing China's approach to addressing problems and crises, offering insights and strategies for reference.

### 5.3 Translation Promotes Interaction

When crossing into another culture, the comparison inevitably arises, highlighting differences between two or more entities, much like comparing two products of the same brand and functionality. Comparison serves to accentuate distinct characteristics. Lu Shuxiang once said, "The characteristics of one thing are brought out only by comparison with other things... language is the same." Only through comparative analysis can we gain a clear understanding of similarities and differences between different languages and cultures, thereby identifying factors that hinder cross-cultural communication and taking targeted measures to address them. In cross-cultural dialogic research, although comparison is a fundamental feature, it is not merely a simplistic or generalized process of comparison. Indeed, while the focus of study may adjust to a particular point, differences inevitably arise due to cultural traditions, differing historical backgrounds, value judgments, and modes of thought, resulting objectively in "similarity in form but difference in essence." Cross-cultural communication through translation similarly encounters situations of "similarity in form but difference in essence," where the translated text may align with the surface vocabulary of the original but diverge in actual meaning. This necessitates translators to enhance their cultural literacy and translation skills, employing translation strategies and techniques to minimize instances of "similarity in form but difference in essence," thereby maximizing the cross-cultural effectiveness of communication. Just as in *The Communist Manifesto*, where "Abolition of private property" is translated as "废除私有财产" reflecting domestication translation strategy, while "废除私有制" represents foreignization translation strategy. The choice between domestication and foreignization is influenced by multiple factors, but skilled translators adeptly grasp the context of the text and apply appropriate translation strategies, determining

their applicability accordingly.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has introduced the theory of intercultural communication, applying communication and cross-cultural adaptation theories to the translation and revision of *The Communist Manifesto*. It concludes that under the subtle influence of localization, *The Communist Manifesto* has formed socialism with Chinese characteristics in different stages. This exemplifies the application of intercultural communication theory. As globalization progresses and interactions between countries become closer, cross-cultural communication has become a universal phenomenon. How to effectively convey the cultural implications behind languages on an equal footing is a significant issue worthy of attention and research. With frequent exchanges and close interactions between nations, cross-cultural communication encompasses diverse fields. Translation, therefore, serves not only as a tool but as an embodiment of cross-cultural communication itself. *The Communist Manifesto*, witnessing different historical processes and developments, remains a guiding principle and treasure for China's revolutionary, reformatory, and socialist construction efforts. Adapted to Chinese national conditions, it has evolved into a document with Chinese characteristics, promoting the construction of Marxist discourse systems, the formation of Marxist Chinese theories, and the international dissemination of localized Marxism. This contributes to increased cross-cultural communication globally, mitigating misunderstandings and conflicts arising from cultural differences.

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