

Tekwa, K. & Li, M. (2022). Translation, politics, and development: A corpus-based approach to evaluating China's development aid discourse. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series: Themes in Translation Studies*, 21, 107–131. DOI available online.

## **Translation, politics, and development: A corpus-based approach to evaluating China's development aid discourse**

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### **Abstract**

China's rise to global prominence has been coupled with a development aid approach and narrative that contradicts long-standing Western-oriented models and discourses. Despite the existence of tangible development projects that bear testimony to Chinese aid to developing countries and which clearly espouse the principles upon which the aid is founded, critics continue to allege that the aid is a façade that enables China to advance its political ideology and vision. Using a corpus-based approach, we investigated the extent to which China's political discourse finds its way into the development aid discourse either by senior party officials or through a government-managed collaborative translation mechanism. To do so, we designed a monolingual corpus of the speeches of top-ranking CPC party officials presented at party-organized events and bilingual (Chinese–English) corpora of the discourse used by Chinese government officials during development aid exchanges. We extracted political terms, based mostly on their frequency of use, from the monolingual corpus and verified the extent of their presence in the bilingual corpora of the development aid discourse. Furthermore, we studied the terms and their contexts of use in the bilingual corpora to determine whether translation served as a medium through which China's political discourse was possibly being introduced into its development aid discourse. Our investigation led us to conclude that China's development aid discourse contains an insignificant amount of political terminology mirroring China's own development path. We also concluded that translation did not constitute, in any tangible way, a means by which the presence of China's political discourse in its development aid discourse could be enhanced. However, we uncovered issues related to terminology management, literal translation, and machine translation which suggest that China was struggling to cope with preserving source text and, presumably, target text linguistic and cultural elements, while taking advantage of current

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advances in translation technology. We propose both structural and translational modifications that could help China curb anti-development aid criticism while enhancing its development aid discourse.

**Keywords:** political terminology, development aid, terminology management, political discourse, development aid discourse

## 1. Introduction

The association of development aid with political ideology has been common in Western history, especially with reference to programmes such as the Marshall Plan of 1948 and successive aid programmes to Japan and developing countries predicated on sustaining liberal democracy. Russia, equally, provided aid to Eastern European and some Third World countries as a way of expanding its political ideology (Guan-Fu, 1983). Despite the stark differences between politics and foreign aid, this historical backdrop appears to shroud genuine development aid efforts by certain governments. While aid is rational, measurable, consensual, humane, and aimed at improving human society, politics is akin to ideologies, nationalistic impulses, passions, and conflicting goals, aspirations, and visions (Carothers & De Gramont, 2013). Therefore, a development aid discourse requires careful crafting to unveil the real intentions of governments. This positions translation right at the centre of development aid because of the linguistic and cultural challenges stakeholders regularly need to overcome (Marais, 2014). For governments to depoliticize development aid rhetoric, it is imperative that they construct a discourse that, where language barriers exist, does not get lost in translation.

China's aid to developing countries has increased over the years in tandem with unsparing international attention and criticism. Undoubtedly, scholars and analysts have mostly perceived China's development aid through the lens of politics and have questioned the political motives underpinning the aid. In this study, we attempt to answer two fundamental questions: Does China, via its development aid, attempt to impose its political ideology and vision on developing countries; and, if so, to what extent does translation serve as a vehicle for such an endeavour? The study, informed by the triadic relationship between politics, development aid, and translation, is attempting to contribute to this sphere in three fundamental ways. First, it offers a novel perspective on the relationship between China's political and development aid discourses. Second, it sheds new light on the interrelatedness of translation, politics, and foreign aid based on China's example. Scholarly conversations have focused on aid and occasionally hinted at criticisms by analysts and scholars, but little or no attention has been paid to the way in which China could respond to unsubstantiated criticisms. Third, the study contributes to the discourse on translation and development – an area that, from a translation studies perspective, deserves more scholarly attention.

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## **2. Overview of China's development aid discourse, political discourse, and institutionalized translation mechanism**

### **2.1. Development aid discourse**

China's attempt, over the decades, to structure and streamline its foreign aid has been widely documented (Cheng, 2019; Nowak, 2015; Welle-Strand & Kjøllesdal, 2010). In the 1990s, following the shift from ideological to pragmatic foreign aid and after several decades spent restructuring aid approaches and forms, China merged foreign assistance with investment and trade by launching the Grand Plan of Trade and Economic Cooperation through the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation and the Export-Import Bank of China (EXIM Bank). In 2012, China set up the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) to formulate strategic guidelines, plans, and policies ... [to] coordinate and offer advice on major foreign aid issues, advance the country's reforms in matters involving foreign aid, and identify major programs and supervise and evaluate their implementation (CIDCA, 2018).

Owing to China's centralized management system, the agency was placed "directly under the State Council, the country's highest administrative body ... [combining] the foreign aid branches of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce" (Cheng, 2019, p. 4). CIDCA has seven departments, including general affairs, policy and planning, regional affairs (two departments), supervision and evaluation, international cooperation, and party-related/personnel affairs. The general understanding is that CIDCA was designed in the "hopes of addressing a few intractable challenges that have long plagued the country's foreign aid policymaking processes" (Rudyak, 2019, p. 2).

Regarding development aid strategies, China has espoused clearly defined tenets in three White Papers (SCIO, 2011, 2014; Zhang, 2021) that have been the subject of comprehensive scholarly analysis and commentary (Bräutigam, 2011; Elmi, 2012; Nowak, 2015; Welle-Strand & Kjøllesdal, 2010). Particular emphasis, however, has been placed on the "five no" policy: no interference in the development path, no interference in internal affairs, no imposition of the will of China, no attachment of political strings, and no seeking of selfish political gains in developing countries (Zhang, 2017; Zhang et al., 2015). As Mohan and Power (2009) maintain, China's aid is "premised on non-interference and mutual respect rather than conditionality" (p. 27) and they argue that the practice of conditionality "undermines sovereign guaranteed human rights" (Mohan & Power, 2009, p. 27). The Chinese authorities have argued that China is a developing country helping other developing countries in their pursuit of a win-win development approach (Mohan, 2013) that is independent of the oversight of Western-oriented bodies such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), even though its strategy has been non-loquacious, characterized by the occasional release of information (White Papers) about their aid.

On the other hand, China's strategy has fuelled criticisms of its development aid. According to Bräutigam (2011), analysts disagree about the nature of China's official development aid, the

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countries that are its main recipients, the reasons for providing aid, the quantity of official aid, and its impact (p. 203).

The characterization of Chinese aid as “rogue aid” (Dreher & Fuchs, 2011; Mohan & Power, 2009; Naim, 2009) is founded on allegations that it strengthens autocracies and dictators, exploits developing nations, and sabotages efforts by the West to reinforce institutionalism and democracy (Corneliussen, 2021). Most criticism has, arguably, focused on the political intentions of China. For critics, Chinese aid is a platform from which to “dominate Asia and expand its influence on the global stage” (Albert et al., 2021), curry political favour with corrupt African leaders by investing “in areas where African leaders and politicians hail from, as opposed to marginalized regions” (Wan, 2018), orchestrate regime change (Chandran, 2017), and back China in international organizations (Dubinsky, 2021). Therefore, with or without empirical evidence, there is a general belief that China’s aid is a smokescreen to conceal its interests rather than “a model that impoverished and marginalized Africans’ need” (Mohan & Power, 2009, p. 2).

Despite the criticism, China’s aid continues to change millions of lives in developing countries. The transition from ideological to pragmatic aid (Bräutigam, 1994) has morphed into tangible projects in Latin America and the Caribbean (Gallagher et al., 2012; Jenkins et al., 2008; Li, 2007), Africa (Bräutigam, 2011; Nowak, 2015; Zhang, 2016), Central Asia and the Middle East (Hoh, 2019), and in other parts of the developing world (Bozzato, 2017). The aid has initiated or accelerated potable water provision (Wang et al., 2020) and numerous infrastructure projects, including roads, bridges, railways, stadiums, airports, hydropower plants, seaports (Bartosiewicz & Szterlik, 2019; Belova et al., 2019; Mullin, 2009; Swaine, 2015), technological development, health services and COVID-19 response, humanitarian aid, banking and finance, and talent training and scholarship (CIDCA, 2018). China’s aid is intended to be directly beneficial to the local population based on “incremental development practices [that] fit in well with local conditions for development .... It’s more effective and time-efficient, thus more conducive to poverty reduction and development” (Zhang, 2017, p. 80).

## 2.2. Political discourse

Ideological underpinnings dominate China’s political discourse, often packaged in a “language which overtly or covertly represents the nation’s ideals, goals, attitudes, and preoccupations, which may often not be shared by outsiders” (Wang & Xia, 2011, p. 65). The discourse is significantly influenced by Chinese traditional and Communist thoughts and is heavily dependent on formal ideologies and moral righteousness (Pye, 1992). To understand Chinese political discourse, Alvaro (2013) alludes to an old Chinese doctrine known as *zhengming* (正名) or “the rectification of names”, emphasizing nomenclature as a fundamental element of the proper functioning of society. The discourse also privileges political correctness, that is, the careful choice of words, the association of terms with numerals to simplify complicated political phenomena, and the use of formulaic expressions and figurative language (Alvaro, 2013; Magagnin, 2016). Informed by ideological shifts ever since 1949 when The People’s Republic of China was founded,

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Wang and Xia (2011) identify five key rhetorical and discoursal features of contemporary Chinese political discourse: the top-down approach in rhetorical practice; the positive representation of the regime; the use of ideological-loaded terminologies; the use of non-subject sentences and moral/ethical appeals.

For Delury (2008), political discourse, particularly that employed by the Communist Party of China (CPC), is well coordinated and scripted, and “it is this very scriptedness [that constitutes the] hermeneutic key to unlocking CCP discourse” (para. 3).

The desire for China to underscore its discursive prowess on the global platform is no secret, given that, in 2014, Xi Jinping exhorted his compatriots to enhance the country's cultural power as a way of reinforcing China's communication capabilities and constructing an external discursive system. Therefore, the coalescence of political and diplomatic discourses, of which development aid is a sub-discourse, could not be more evident.

### **2.3. China's institutionalized collaborative translation mechanism**

The literature on state-managed translation in China falls within the general and scholarly framework of institutional translation (Gouadec, 2007; Mossop, 1988) that examines translation undertaken by, for, and on behalf of the institution. According to Wang and Zhang (2017), institutionalized translation in China has mainly targeted two aspects: the translation of Chinese literature into English to promote China's soft power and prestige internationally and the importation of foreign literature into China, a process characterized by the “expurgation of foreign elements for political and cultural reasons” (p. 305). Tan (2015) has analysed more than 60 years of institutionalized translation in China since 1949 and concluded that certain foreign works have been unable to make their way into the country, while others have been partially translated or modulated to suit the recipient language and culture. Furthermore, in their study, Pan et al. (2020) have maintained “that the translators' decision-making process and resultant translations have consistently reflected the voice or goals of the institution for which they produce the translations” (p. 52).

In China, the translation of government documents is regulated and managed within an institutionalized collective mechanism with little flexibility for individual translators. As Wang and Xia (2011) maintain:

Translation of Chinese government documents is conducted by the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (CCTB), a standing translation institute for the external propaganda service. It was founded by the Central Committee of Communist Party of China (CCP) in 1961 with two major aims, one being compiling and translating works by the leaders of the Party and the State, the other being translating Party literature of the CCP. (p. 67)

Translation is undertaken by “government employees or approved professionals” (Wang & Xia, 2011, p. 68) from various government departments and publishing groups who work “together

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with two to three foreign sub-editors who correct the translated English" (Wang & Xia, 2011, p. 68). Wang (2008) maintains that translation is a "serious political task .... [It is] arduous work and always involves more than ten professionals to work [sic] together" (p. 45). As Youyi Huang, former director of the Foreign Languages Publishing Administration (FLPA), an institution also charged with translating Chinese government texts, has clarified:

The top criterion for translating political texts is faithfulness to the original, and it is not allowed [sic] to add anything personal. All one can do is to provide some background information out of the need for cultural transfer. Yet, this is done only when necessary but not always the case (Pan et al., 2020, p. 76).

Although perceived of as a product of China's collective effort, this institutionalized collaborative translation mechanism conflicts with the individual translator's agency, namely, their "willingness and ability to act" (Kinnunen & Koskinen, 2010, p. 6), and it leads to translations that have been criticized for emphasizing the source language and culture.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Data collection

The data analysed in this study were gathered from websites and research databases. The data were used to design a monolingual corpus of China's political discourse and bilingual corpora of China's development aid discourse. Whereas the monolingual corpus was analysed to determine the presence of any political discourse in China's development aid discourse, the bilingual corpora were analysed to determine the extent to which translators facilitated such a presence through their terminological choices. Therefore, while the monolingual corpus focused on the speeches of politicians, the bilingual corpora focused on the choices of translators. Given that the data were obtained from publicly available databases and websites, there was no need to obtain pre-collection authorization.

**Monolingual corpus of political discourse:** The corpus was designed using 285 speeches of top-ranking party officials downloaded from [www.12371.cn](http://www.12371.cn), an open-source learning platform for CPC members. Part of the data were obtained from the database of the Shanghai International Studies University (SHISU) Library. The database is a vast depository of CPC party literature for students and staff of the university. The speeches, all in Chinese, were delivered exclusively to CPC party members during various events in China between 2012 and 2020. The corpus contained 447,854 words, 17,860 sentences, and 544,014 tokens.

**Bilingual corpora of development aid discourse:** The data of the bilingual corpora were designed using speeches, press releases, working papers, and interviews of Chinese government officials during development aid exchanges (meetings, summits, conferences, business forums, aid deployment events, etc.) with authorities from developing countries. The exchanges from 2012 (the year CIDCA was founded) to 2021 were documented in Chinese, translated to English, and

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published on CIDCA's official website. The bilingual corpora included 116 documents (58 in Chinese and 58 in English).

To create the bilingual corpora, we had first to create two independent monolingual corpora. The first corpus comprised the development aid discourse in Chinese (117,928 characters, 5,001 sentences, and 141,951 tokens) and the second was the translation of the development aid discourse in English (155,482 words, 5,872 sentences, and 176,219 tokens). The Chinese and English corpora were uploaded to Sketch Engine to constitute the bilingual corpora analysed in this study.

### **3.2. Instruments**

The data obtained were processed using Youalign alignment software, the Sketch Engine corpus design tool, SPSS data analysis software, and MS Excel. We briefly introduce Youalign and Sketch Engine here.

Youalign is a web-based alignment tool designed by Logiterm, a Canada-based LSP. The translated texts (Chinese–English) were manually aligned in two Excel columns to ensure accuracy and then separated into two files before they were uploaded to Youalign. After alignment, a TMX-formatted file was downloaded for use in Sketch Engine.

Sketch Engine is a corpus design tool used in European Union countries and around the world for designing and exploring monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual corpora. It contains numerous tools, including Keyword (to extract terminology); Trends (for neologisms and diachronic analysis); Word Sketch (for collocations, word combinations, and comparison of collocations); and Wordlist (to search for words in context). In contrast, Sketch Engine's Concordance tool makes it possible to explore bilingual and multilingual corpora. The TMX files aligned using Youalign were transformed into bilingual corpora and analysed using multiple tools.

### **3.3. Data analysis**

Using the Keyword and Terms tools, we extracted the most frequently employed words (in Chinese) from the monolingual corpus of political discourse. The data included 20,512 single words and 30,074 multi-word combinations, including single and multi-terms, non-terms, randomly selected words, numbers, and names of places and people that occurred more than three times in the corpus. The extracted expressions were transformed into a sub-corpus, and then both single terms and multi-terms were extracted using Sketch Engine's Keyword and Term tools. Next, through a meticulous manual process of elimination, the terms were harmonized and reduced to 1,998 entries. A word or a group of words was considered a term if it referred to government-related concepts (policies, actions, organizations, functions) and the CPC Party (ideology, principles, organization, rules, and regulations).

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The next step was to determine the extent to which political discourse was present in the development aid discourse. To do so, we used the Frequency Wordlist tool of Sketch Engine to extract 1,002 single-word and 1,005 multi-word frequently used terms from the monolingual Chinese development aid corpus. The terms were extracted based on their frequency of occurrence, with the minimum frequency set at 7.

Using the Compare and Merge Workbook feature of MS Excel, duplicate terms on both the single-word and the multi-word lists were identified and deleted. Then the lists were combined, followed by a rigorous manual process to identify and delete non-terms. A development aid term was considered a word or a group of words that designated particular concepts (policies, actions, ideologies, humanitarian concerns, economics) within the framework of China's development aid exchanges with developing countries. A single list of 1,853 development aid terms were obtained after identification, harmonization, and deletion.

At this juncture, we had two lists (both in Chinese) to analyse further: one with 1,998 political discourse terms and the other with 1,853 development aid terms. We compared the two lists using the Compare and Merge Workbook feature of MS Excel to determine the presence of political discourse in the development aid discourse: in other words, the extent to which Chinese politicians employed political terminology in the development aid discourse. We also used the Concordance tool of Sketch Engine to study the translation of the political terms that were present in the economic aid discourse. Our analysis enabled us to determine whether translation served as a conduit to introduce China's political discourse into its development aid discourse. Finally, figures (context of use, number of omissions, replacements, additions, etc.) were numerically calculated and analysed using SPSS and MS Excel to obtain percentages, charts, and graphs that facilitated the data presentation.

Unfortunately, the study does not include a significant volume of untranslated development aid news published in newspapers and multiple websites. Furthermore, only frequently used terms were extracted, with the minimum threshold of occurrences of political terms in development aid discourse limited to three.

## **4. Findings**

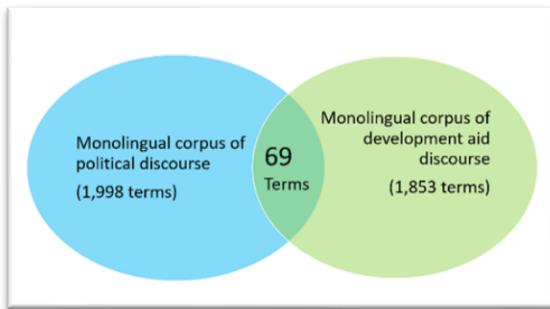
### **4.1. Determining presence of political discourse in development aid discourse: Analysis of monolingual corpus of political discourse**

#### **4.1.1. Development aid discourse: significantly low percentage of political discourse**

We extracted 1,998 terms from the monolingual corpus of political discourse and found that 69 (3.72%), listed in the Appendix to this article, were also present in the bilingual corpus of the development aid discourse. However, we found, despite their small percentage, that they were employed in as many as 932 contexts of use.

**Figure 1**

*Number of terms present in both political and development aid discourses*



Therefore, based on our analysis, we concluded that there was a very limited presence of political discourse in China's development aid discourse. Furthermore, the number of terminological occurrences was insufficient, in our estimation, to affirm that China's development aid is a pretext for spreading its political ideology and vision in developing countries.

#### 4.1.2. Overlapping terminology confirms proximity of political and development aid discourses

A significant number of extracted terms were used while discussing international cooperation and governance and foreign aid, within both political and development aid frameworks. Consequently, we assumed their employment in the development aid discourse had no significant political overtones. This finding further confirmed that China's development aid discourse is not influenced to any great extent by Chinese political discourse. In fact, we found that 9 out of 69 (13.04%) of the terms that overlapped appeared more in development aid discourse than in political discourse, suggesting that they may have found their way into political discourse, not vice versa.

**Table 1**

*Terms that appeared more in development aid discourse than in political discourse*

Term	Translation(s)	Contexts of use in development aid discourse	Contexts of use in political discourse
地区国家	- regional countries - countries of the region	23	12
政治互信	- mutual political trust	18	10
务实合作	- practical cooperation - pragmatic cooperation	69	37
和平安全	- peace and security	31	10
贸易畅通	- unimpeded trade - trade	25	8
安全合作	- security cooperation	26	11

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交流合作	- exchange and cooperation	76	65
(领域) 交流合作	- exchange and cooperation (areas of)	14	12
公共产品	- public product	23	19
	- public good(s)		

These findings concur with Carothers and De Gramont's (2013) perception that "international assistance has had an uncertain and uncomfortable relationship with politics" (p. 30), whether at the country-to-country level or between international aid agencies and recipient countries (Hout, 2012).

#### **4.1.3. Political discourse present in development aid discourse mirrors China's own development path**

Upon closer examination, we deduced that multiple terms which featured in both the political and the development aid discourse had a bearing on China's own development efforts. They have featured prominently in speeches by party leaders and reflect the governance mechanism of China over the decades (Xu & Hua, 2018).

**Table 2**  
*Terms that mirror China's development path*

Term	Meaning
传统友谊	traditional friendship
发展繁荣	development and prosperity
互利共赢	mutual benefit and win-win
交流互鉴	exchange and mutual learning
社会主义现代化（国家）	a modern socialist (country)
中国特色社会主义	socialism with Chinese characteristics
为小康社会奋斗	building a moderately prosperous country

The governance, founded on Confucian or socialist principles (Wang & Zhang, 2017; Zappone, 2018), calls for ingenuity, hard work, determination, and friendship based on Chinese characteristics. In other words, the evidence supports the notion that terminological choices may be informed by the fundamentals of Marxism that "take account of the specific historical, economic, and cultural realities of a country" (Boer, 2021, p. 8). However, we reckon that terminology which highlights China's struggles could lead to unsubstantiated allegations that Chinese leaders recognize that to achieve legitimacy as a responsible great power without democratizing – a prospect not welcomed by the developed West ... they must first popularize China's model in the developing world (Shullman, 2019).

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If China's intention is to teach by example, given that it was also an aid-receiving country a few decades ago, then there is a need to reshape its development aid narrative – for instance, through translation.

#### 4.2. Analysis of bilingual corpora of development aid discourse

In our assessment of the bilingual corpora of the development aid discourse we analysed the translation of political terms, including phrases and sentences, and the contexts in which they appeared. We examined 932 contexts of use and retained 527, including 50 terms, for further assessment. After analysing the contexts of use, we found no evidence suggesting that translation served as a conduit to introduce CPC political discourse into the development aid discourse.

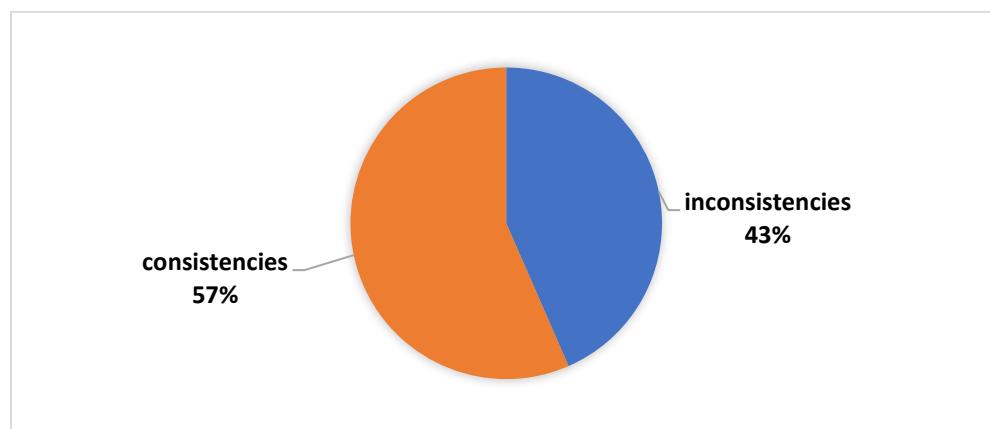
In contrast, we uncovered terminology management-related issues (inconsistency, omission, and addition) and literalness partially resulting from either inadequately edited or unedited machine translation (MT) output. Based on the findings, we discuss the ways in which China could refocus its development aid discourse by restructuring CIDCA and putting in place an alternative translation mechanism that improves the quality of development aid discourse translation, takes into account the TL linguistic and cultural realities, and curbs the volume of criticism founded on the interpretation of China's development endeavours.

##### 4.2.1. Inconsistencies in terminology use

Terminology management is the process of choosing, defining, storing, updating, and maintaining key terms for specific aims such as improving communication (Warburton, 2014). We analysed 527 contexts of use and found inconsistencies in 229 (i.e., 43%) of them. This means that translators employed several English terms to represent the same Chinese term.

**Figure 2**

*Percentage of inconsistencies in the bilingual corpora of development aid discourse*



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Admittedly, “terminological consistency over a large collection of thematic documents ... is hard to achieve even when only one language is concerned” (Tufiş, 2004, p. 1981), and not all inconsistencies negatively affect meaning. However, based on the high percentage of inconsistencies (56.5%), we determined the presence of terminology management issues, presumably due to the lack of qualified terminologists or terminology management resources in China's institutionalized translation mechanism.

**Table 3**

*Example of terminological inconsistency*

In this example, the translation of 政治互信 is inconsistent:

	Chinese ST	English TT
Sentence 1	<s>进入新世纪以来，中非政治互信不断加强，高层往来频繁。 </s>	<s> In the 21st century, China and Africa have enjoyed growing <b>political mutual trust</b> and frequent high-level exchanges. </s>
Sentence 2	<s>要摒弃零和博弈、保护主义，加强政策沟通，增进政治互信，逐步扩大战略共识。 </s>	<s> A zero-sum mentality and protectionism must be rejected in favour of more policy communication and <b>political trust</b> , so that we can expand our strategic consensus. </s>

The word 政治互信 occurred in 18 contexts of use and was translated as “political and mutual trust” in 12 contexts of use. However, in six contexts, it was either translated as “political trust” or replaced.

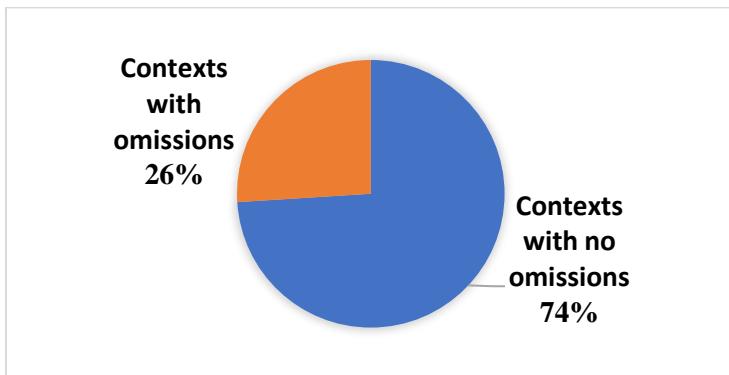
Meanwhile, in the context of COVID-19 assistance to developing countries, the term 人民生命安全, which occurred in 12 contexts, was rendered as “people's lives and well-being, people's safety and well-being, people's life and security” and “people's life”.

#### 4.2.2. Omissions

Our analysis of the 527 contexts of use revealed the non-translation of a significant number of Chinese political terms employed in the development aid discourse. The omissions, which had varying degrees of semantic implications, were identified in a total of 137 (26%) of the contexts of use.

**Figure 3**

*Percentage of omissions*



Omissions were either partial (part of the term was not translated) or complete (the entire term was omitted).

Examples of a partial omission include the term 非传统安全 (non-traditional security), as illustrated in the example below:

**Table 4**

*Partial omission*

Chinese ST	<s>保护主义、单边主义上升，世界经济受到严重冲击，多边贸易体制受挫，全球治理难题日益凸显，同时地区热点和非传统安全威胁此起彼伏，地缘政治风险加剧。</s>
English TT	<s> Protectionism and unilateralism have been on the rise, seriously impacting the world economy, challenging the multilateral trading regime and exposing the deficiencies in global governance. </s><s> All this is compounded by ongoing regional hotspots and <b>security</b> threats and growing geopolitical risks. </s>

The omission in this example, we presume, is not a deliberate intention to influence the target audience's target text (TT).

Besides term omissions, we also noticed the omission of adverbs of intensity (example: 十分 and 相当 in the expression 中国在自身财力十分紧张、物资相当匮乏的情况下, which is translated as “although it was short of funds and materials” instead of “although China significantly lacked funds and materials”), and entire sentences (中国政府首次就推进“一带一路”建设海上合作提出中国方案, 也是“一带一路”国际合作高峰论坛的领导人成果之一 in the expression 国家发展和改革委员会、国家海洋局联合发布《“一带一路”建设海上合作设想》 (以下简称《设想》)。这是自 2015 年 3 月 28 日发布《推动共建丝绸之路经济带和 21 世纪海上丝绸之路的愿景与行动》以来, 中国政府首次就推进“一带一路”建设海上合作提出中国方案, 也是“一带一路”国际合作高峰论坛的领导人成果之一,

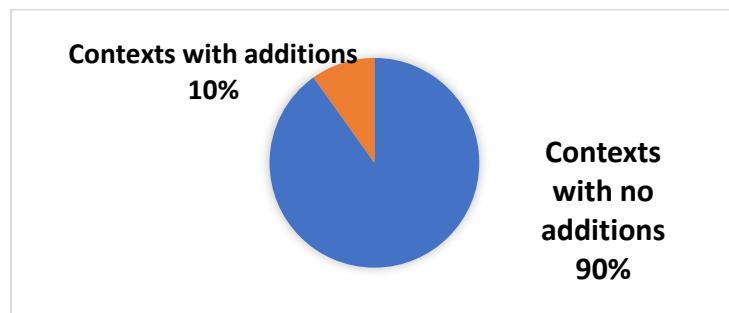
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which is translated as “The proposal is highlighted in a document titled Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, which was jointly released by the National Development and Reform Commission and the State Oceanic Administration. (Xinhua contributed to the article)”.

#### 4.2.3. Additions

This is a strategy “by which a translator adds something to the target text to provide additional information .... The addition could be cultural background or any other explanation” (Sin-wai, 2019, p. 79). In our analysis of the bilingual corpora of the development aid discourse we found non-cultural background or explanatory additions in 52, or approximately 10%, of the 527 contexts of use.

**Figure 4**  
*Percentage of additions*



We found instances where additions provided cultural background information about China in the TT. For instance, “Zhang Qian, a royal emissary ... Chang'an, capital of the Han Dynasty ... a daring undertaking” are added to the Chinese 公元前 140 多年的中国汉代，一支从长安出发的和平使团，开始打通东方通往西方的道路，完成了“凿空之旅”，这就是著名的张骞出使西域, which is translated as “In China's Han Dynasty around 140 B.C., Zhang Qian, a **royal emissary**, left Chang'an, **capital of the Han Dynasty**. He travelled westward on a mission of peace and opened an overland route linking the East and the West, a **daring undertaking** which came to be known as Zhang Qian's journey to the Western regions.”

However, we also found additions that were not culturally related and that tended to produce TL sentences lacking naturalness. For instance, the sentence 恪守互利共赢原则，在对发展中国家提供力所能及的帮助时，重视和照顾其他国家的利益需求，重义轻利、舍利取义 is translated as “Observing the principle of mutual benefit for **win-win outcomes**, it offers as much assistance as **it** can while taking into consideration **of** the interests and needs of other developing countries”, with the addition of the pronoun “it”, the preposition “of”, and the article “the” altering the natural structure of the TT, albeit without significantly eroding the meaning.

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In this example, the addition of the subject “it” instead of “China” in the translation has semantic implications. The sentences 在抗疫中关爱生命、关爱民生，雪中送炭、相互帮扶，携手佑护各国人民生命安全和身体健康，积极支持其他发展中国家公共卫生体系建设，帮助提升医疗卫生服务水平，保障人民生命健康, are translated as “In the face of COVID-19, we have cared deeply about life and livelihood, extended a helping hand to those most in need and made joint efforts to protect the life, security, and health of all our peoples. **It** has been supporting other developing countries in building their public health systems, improving their medical and healthcare services, and protecting people’s lives and health.” In the second sentence, it is difficult to determine what that added subject “it” refers to, given that the subject of the previous sentence is “we”.

#### 4.3. Literalness and machine translation use

Literalness has been identified as the main feature of China's political discourse translation (Cheng, 2016; Daoying, 2015). Li (2013) explains that translators tend to adopt the literal translation technique for political texts “to present the original meaning in the [source texts (STs)] by keeping the form and structure of the original Chinese speeches [as] unchanged as possible” (p. 6). In our analysis of the bilingual corpora of the development aid discourse we noticed multiple instances of literal translation. For instance, the expression 全面建成小康社会奋斗目标将如期实现 was literally translated as “building a moderately prosperous society in all respects within the set time frame”, just as it often appears employed in Chinese political discourse with reference to 小康 in the classic Confucius *Book of Songs* (Yi, 2022).

Other instances of literally translated terms and expressions that appeared to lack TL idiomticity included 廉洁之路, 开放之路, 发展是解决一切问题的总钥匙, 贸易方式创新进程加快, and 世界潮流浩浩荡荡. To investigate the source of literalness, we translated the terms and expressions using MT and found striking similarities, as illustrated in the table below:

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**Table 5**  
*Examples of literally translated words and expressions*

Source word/expression	Translation	Machine-translated word/expression
廉洁之路	a road of clean government	clean road
开放之路	a road of opening up	open road
发展是解决一切问题的总钥匙	Development holds the master key to solving all problems.	(No change)
贸易方式创新进程加快	faster pace of <b>trade model innovation</b>	The process of <b>trade model innovation</b> was accelerated.
世界潮流浩浩荡荡	The tide of world development rolls on.	(No change)
在经济全球化时代，各国要打开大门搞建设，促进生产要素在全球范围更加自由便捷地流动。	With economic globalization growing steadily, <b>all countries should keep their doors wide open in development</b> and allow factors of production to flow more freely and smoothly across the world.	<b>In the era of economic globalization</b> , countries should open the door to construction and promote the more free and convenient flow of production factors around the world.
在庆祝新中国成立 70 周年之际，我们专门向这位老朋友颁发了“友谊勋章”。	At the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, we specially presented our old friend Dr. Salim with a Friendship Medal.	(No change)

Therefore, based on the similarity of the translated outcomes, we speculated that the terms and expressions may have been translated using MT, the output of which was either inadequately edited or not edited at all. We also cannot completely rule out the fact that the literalness is the result of the translators' lack of native-speaker proficiency in the TL.

## 5. Discussion

Politics and international development are inseparable because development, especially at the country level, follows the contours of an agenda laid out by politicians in the pursuit of specific political objectives. Therefore, drawing demarcation lines to separate the intentions of various parties inherently poses significant challenges. That notwithstanding, our analysis of the political and development aid terms indicated that Chinese authorities tend to separate political party discourse and development aid discourse. This conclusion appears to align with China's development aid tenets that supposedly differ from the modus operandi of Western donors.

However, we argue, especially with regard to China, that simply differentiating political discourse and development aid discourse does not suffice. Given its non-traditional approach, China's aid

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endeavour tends to be misinterpreted, misunderstood, misrepresented, and misinformed. The spread of an anti-China development aid rhetoric is a significant cause for concern if China intends to keep a straight narrative. Development aid is still predominantly a Western concept; therefore, in developing its own “understandings or discourses of development, independent from Western historical, political and economic discourse” (Zhang et al., 2015), China needs to seek ways to counter the current and growing anti-aid discourse. Unfortunately, neither the current organization of CIDCA, the institutionalized collaboration translation mechanism, nor the translators have the potential to counter the criticism. That has led us to suggest the following: reorganize the structure of CIDCA; involve more TL native speakers in the translation process, and improve terminology management.

### **5.1. Reorganize the structure of CIDCA**

Currently, CIDCA does not appear to have a department that tracks criticisms, foreign or domestic, of its development aid actions. In addition, there appears to be no separate translation department, meaning that it is unclear whether the agency independently translates its own documents. The absence of these two units has far-reaching implications. First, the development aid discourse continues to align mainly with the position, objectives, and political and economic goals of the Chinese government. By implication, translation is “derived from and developed within the source culture” (Li, 2013, p. 2) and becomes a “source-culture-based act” with priority “given to the professional and cultural norms of the ST community” (Li, 2013, p. 2); from this, significant output-quality issues often arise. Second, depending on an institutionalized collaborative translation mechanism when translating political and development aid discourse could undermine the dichotomy of the two discourses. This lack is further compounded by the absence of translator flexibility or agency, defined by Buchanan (2010) as the “degree to which a subject is able to determine the course of their actions” (p. 10). China's development aid critics are not compelled to justify their claims, and the majority of them do not, which claims they express via predominantly unofficial sources. Therefore, we argue in favour of a translation mechanism that takes into account development aid-related criticism by making adjustments that reflect recipient countries' exigencies.

Such adjustments may not be possible without greater flexibility and a more enabling work environment for China's development aid translators. Given that it may be challenging, if not futile, for China to modify its development aid agenda, we propose a translation approach that educates TT audiences by, for instance, providing additional information or explanations – a translation strategy suggested elsewhere (Daoying, 2015; Pan et al., 2020) and considered “totally necessary to minimize the difficulty in reading for most receptors” (Cheng, 2016, p. 31). It is also perceived to be a strategy that eradicates ambiguity and the cultural gap (Cheng, 2016, p. 31).

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## **5.2. Involve more TL native speakers in translation process**

Based on our data analysis, we argue in favour of the greater involvement of TL native speakers in the translation of development aid discourse. Pan et al. (2020) have summarized the role of native speakers in the translation of political texts as follows:

The native speakers are able to refine the translations in order to conform to the target conventions, and allow them to be easier understood by foreign readers. But they may sometimes produce errors. Therefore, we have another procedure called “checking-over”. For important political texts, we have at least two revisers in this procedure, one for an initial checking, and the other for review. The first reviser is responsible for checking proper nouns and numbers and so on, and the second reviser is to finalise the translations and ensure that everything is correct. (p. 77)

We believe that the inclusion of TL native speakers at various levels of the translation process will ensure TT idiomaticity while taking into account the linguistic, political, and cultural realities of target audiences.

## **5.3. Improve terminology management**

Our data analysis suggests that the current collaborative translation mechanism has terminology management challenges that require specific attention. A management system is required that ensures consistency, integrates TL cultural elements in development aid discourse, and improves the output of CIDCA translators who are primarily non-native speakers of the target language. Therefore, CIDCA should begin by hiring in-house terminologists or staff with expertise related to terminology management to collaborate with translators in resolving terminological issues “either on a short-term basis, e.g., during text production or urgent translation, on a medium-term basis, e.g., during a large translation project, or on a long-term basis” (Chiocchetti & Ralli, 2013, p. 15). Terminology management may comprise term research, including related lexical and cultural connotations, term extraction, storage, updating, and eventual transmission to translators working on various projects. Terminologists could also investigate criticisms against Chinese development aid in various TL communities to inform translational choices. In addition, terminologists may create glossaries and terminology databases that include extensive notes on usage and TL cultural information. This is the more so because if China's development aid is based on equality, intends to be mutually beneficial to donor and recipient communities, and takes into consideration linguistic and cultural values, both related discourses and translational choices deserve to reflect that underpinning principle.

## **6. Conclusion**

The current study intended to investigate the relationship between China's politics, development aid, and translation against the backdrop of anti-aid criticism, including the allegation that China's aid is a façade to spread its political agenda among developing countries. Following a corpus-

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based approach, we examined the direct use, by senior CPC party cadres, of political terminology in their development aid discourse and the extent to which translation may have served as a conduit to introduce political discourse into the development aid discourse. We built a monolingual corpus of 285 political speeches delivered during CPC party-organized events from 2012 to 2021 and bilingual corpora of 116 (58 Chinese and 58 English translations) speeches, working papers, documents, interviews, etc., related to development aid published on the CIDCA website. Based on our analysis, we concluded that a non-significant percentage of China's political discourse is present in development aid discourse, overlapping terminology attests to the closeness of politics and development, and the political terminology present in the development aid discourse has a bearing on China's own development path. Therefore, we determined that China's development aid does not constitute a platform from which to spread its political ideology.

In addition, we analysed the bilingual corpora to determine whether translators introduced CPC party discourse in their terminological choices while translating the development aid discourse. Following our analysis of the bilingual corpora, we found no evidence to suggest that translators deliberately introduced political discourse into the development aid discourse. However, we uncovered terminology management issues, particularly inconsistencies, omissions, and inappropriate additions that tended to erode the naturalness of the TL. Furthermore, translators occasionally adopted a literal translation strategy and used MT, the output of which was either inadequately edited or not edited at all. The result was an absence of TL idomaticity and structurally defective English-language expressions.

Informed by our findings and based on the fruitlessness of tangible action to placate development aid critics, we argue in favour of the restructuring of CIDCA, China's development aid agency, to include a translation department uniquely focused on the translation of development aid discourse in a way that aligns with China's policy objectives. At the same time, translators should factor in both anti-aid rhetoric and the linguistic, historical, cultural, and political realities of recipient countries and communities. This may mean greater individual translator access to the knowledge of recipient countries and communities and also the adoption of terminological choices that reflect the local realities of these communities.

We suggest further that more TL native speakers should be involved in the translation process to reduce the number of errors and to ensure the naturalness of the TL. Finally, we call for better terminology management by hiring terminologists or staff with related experience, an endeavour that would significantly improve the employment of development aid terminology by guaranteeing consistency and reflecting the cultural and linguistic realities of China and those countries that are the recipients of aid.

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## Appendix

Sixty-nine (69) frequently used political discourse terms present in development aid discourse

	<b>Term</b>	<b>Translation(s)</b>
1	成员国元首	head of state
2	传统友谊	traditional friendship
3	地区国家	regional countries/countries of the region
4	地区组织	regional organization
5	缔约方大会	conference of the parties
6	共同发展	common development
7	发展权利	development right/right to development
8	非传统安全	non-traditional security
9	服务贸易	service trade
10	公平正义	fairness and justice/equity and justice
11	供应链安全	security of supply chains
12	沿线/发展中国家人民	people in participating/developing countries
13	国内国际双循环	domestic and international circulation
14	合作共赢	win-win cooperation/mutually beneficial cooperation
15	互利共赢	mutual benefit and win-win
16	交流互鉴	exchange and mutual learning
17	经济循环	economic activity/circulation
18	经济增长	economic growth
19	科技革命和产业变革	scientific (and technological) revolution and industrial transformation/reform
20	利益和重大关切	Interests and major concerns
21	全球公共产品	global public good(s)/product
22	人类卫生健康共同体	a global community of health for all
23	人民生命	people's lives
24	人民友谊	friendship between ... and ... peoples
25	社会主义现代化	a modern Socialist (country)
26	省区	provinces and regions
27	时代命题	the call of the times
28	中国特色社会主义思想	socialism with Chinese characteristics
29	统筹疫情	adopted a coordinated approach to control the virus
30	卫生健康共同体	a global community of health
31	文明交流	mutual learning
32	(为)小康社会奋斗	building a moderately prosperous country
33	新冠肺炎疫苗实施计划	COVAX Initiative
34	新兴市场国家(和发展中国家)	emerging market (and developing countries)

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35	专项贷款	special loan(s)
36	正义事业	just cause
37	正确方向	right direction
38	政治安全(合作)	political and security (cooperation)
39	政治互信	mutual political trust
40	高质量共建“一带一路”	advance/promote high-quality Belt and Road cooperation
41	治理体系变革	governance system reform/reform of governance system
42	重大传染性疾病	major communicable disease
43	务实合作	practical cooperation/pragmatic cooperation
44	和平安全	peace and security
45	贸易畅通	unimpeded trade/trade
46	安全合作	security cooperation
47	公共产品	public products/public goods
48	为小康社会奋斗	building a moderately prosperous country
49	廉洁之路	a road of clean government
50	开放之路	a road of opening up
51	创新之路	a road of innovation
52	中非命运共同体	China–Africa community with a shared future
53	国际社会	international community
54	政治经济活动	political and economic activities
55	现代化建设	modernization
56	民族独立	national independence
57	人民利益	people's interest
58	坚强领导	strong leadership
59	开放战略	opening up strategy/opening-up strategy/strategy of opening up
60	贫困人口	poverty/poor population
61	上海合作组织成员国	member states of Shanghai Cooperation Organization
62	交流合作	exchange and cooperation
63	强权政治	power politics
64	脱贫攻坚	poverty alleviation
65	体制机制障碍	institutional barriers/institutional obstacles
66	国家主权	national sovereignty
67	金砖国家	BRICS countries
68	重大战略成果	major strategic achievements
69	国家安全	national security