

## Germanisms in modern Chinese

### 1. Introduction

Research into cultural exchange between the German-speaking and Chinese-speaking *Kulturkreise* has seldom focused on linguistic exchange. To date, Chinese borrowings in German have only seen limited research in the German-speaking world (cf. Best 2008; Liu 2014). Likewise little attention has been paid by Chinese linguists to loan words and foreign words in connection with cultural exchange. After the first monographs on loan words into and out of Chinese were published in the 1950s (Luo 2009; Gao/Liu 1958), there was no further research until a new, comparable study was published in the 21st century (Shi 2000). Since 2000, interest in borrowings into Chinese has increased greatly in China (Wang 2009), although none of the monographs on loan words and foreign words in Chinese has specialized in borrowings from a specific foreign language so far. In comparison with loan words and foreign words from English, scholarly interest in Germanisms in Chinese has been low although words of German origin played an important role in the consolidation of modern science and research in China, particularly in the natural sciences, technology and philosophy, in the 20th century.

This paper focuses on Germanisms in modern Chinese in relation to their status as well as to when and how they were adopted. The influences of German on developments in Chinese are explored as manifestations and effects of cultural encounters in a Chinese-German context. Following Best's definition of "Chinese-isms" (2008, 87), this study uses the concept of "Germanisms" in the sense of loan words and foreign words of German origin, covering both borrowings with German as the language of origin and borrowings from other languages which were introduced to Chinese via German, ignoring, however, the fine, but not entirely undisputed, distinction between foreign words and loan words. The migration of languages can certainly be seen as a dynamic process of interculturality, defined as the result of "permanent interaction scenarios" (Bolten 2007, 138) in recent discussions on intercultural communication. A synergistic "interculture" (ibid.) arises in which the "pragmatic feats [of a culture] exist [...] in the ability to link and undergo transition" and "opportunities to link up [...] can be developed and extended" (Welsch 1997, 3, quoted in Bolten 2007, 145). When observing the hybridization of cultural phenomena, not only interpersonal negotiation processes should be contemplated but also interlingual occurrences as emphasized by the concepts of transculturality or interculturality in the sense of hybrid cultures in interaction. Based on this premise and aided by quantitative statistical methods, we attempt to answer the following research questions: can external influences from German on the development of modern Chinese be seen as evidence of interlingual or intercultural interaction? If so, to what extent has it occurred?

### 2. Germanisms and their use in modern Chinese

In order to be able to answer the research questions stated above, it is first necessary to gain an overview of Germanisms in Chinese by ascertaining their actual number. Two representative dictionaries were used as sources, namely "A dictionary of loan words and

hybrid words in Chinese” (1984), the only dictionary of foreign words to have been published in the country since the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949, and the largest explanatory dictionary of modern Chinese, the 6th edition of the “Modern Chinese Dictionary” (2012). An analysis of the (1984) etymological dictionary revealed 330 entries identified as direct (50) or indirect (280) loan words or foreign words from German. Most of the German words which came into Chinese indirectly did so via English while Japanese was the second most important intermediary language. The 330 entries also included a few loan words and foreign words which we believe to have been dubiously or even falsely attributed to being of German origin, such as *bang* (£), *bu ding* (pudding), *chi* (foot), *hao lai wu* (Hollywood), *ke li jia* (cracker), *ke li mu lin gong* (Kremlin), *lu tou she* (Reuters), *na mo wen* (number one), *nai xi* (milkshake) and *shi dan* (stamp). This will be disregarded in the frequency calculations in our study. It should also be noted that the synonyms “Röntgen-Strahl” (roentgen ray) and “X-Strahl” (x-ray) occur in three borrowings in modern Chinese, namely *lun qin she xian*, *lun qin* and *ai ke si she xian*.

Out of the 330 recorded Germanisms, 159 (48%) can be assigned to the natural sciences, technology and medicine while 76 (23%) come from the social sciences, humanities or arts, 73 (22%) refer to everyday objects and the rest (22, or 7%) relate to other fields. Moreover, 71 of the 330 Germanisms are included in the “Modern Chinese Dictionary” (2012), suggesting that they are firmly established in everyday modern Chinese. These words make up around 1‰ of the 69,000 entries in the 6th edition of the dictionary. Although a second set of Germanisms like *bao hao si* (Bauhaus), *bi yi* (Nasenflügel/nasal wing), *chai you* (diesel), *ci xuan fu* (Magnet-Schwebbahn/magnetic levitation train), *de biao* (DIN), *shi dai jing shen* (zeitgeist), *xi bao* (Zelle/cell), *xian xiang xue* (Phänomenologie/phenomenology) and *you er yuan* (kindergarten) were not included in the (1984) dictionary of loan words, they have been proved to be Germanisms in other studies (cf. Shi 2000; Li 2010). All in all 143 words of German origin appear to be Germanisms which are used relatively actively in everyday language. With just two exceptions, all of the Germanisms made their way into Chinese in the first half of the 20th century; *ci xuan fu* (magnetic levitation train) appeared in the second half of the 20th century and *de fu kao shi* (Test DaF, a standardised language test of German proficiency) was introduced after 2000.

Germanisms in modern Chinese generally have the following characteristics: firstly, a large number are used for professional communication in mathematics, chemistry, physics and other natural sciences as well as in technology. Secondly, the next largest field of application is in the humanities and social sciences, including philosophy, ethics and religion, whereby most of the terms from philosophy came into Chinese via Japanese. Finally, the fact that almost all Germanisms found their way into Chinese in the course of the 20th century attests to the chronology of German influence on technical, social and also ideological developments in China.

It is important to point out that a large proportion of the Germanisms have undergone major changes in connection with their use in everyday language over time. Not uncommonly, Germanisms in Chinese originally appeared as transliterations, to be gradually superseded by paraphrases. In order to verify just how actively they are used in everyday Chinese, the frequency of the 143 chosen loan words and foreign words of German origin was investigated in a corpus-based study. The sources in the analysis are authentic texts written in standard Chinese taken from the publically accessible corpus of the CCL (Center for Chinese Linguistics at Peking University) without preprocessing it for modern Chi-

nese, supplemented by the corpus of the IAL (Institute of Applied Linguistics of the Chinese Ministry of Education) for modern Chinese and the online database of the *People's Daily* newspaper (including the *People's Daily Overseas Edition*) covering all texts from January 2006 to August 2015 as indicators for the current use of Chinese.

Out of the 143 Germanisms on our list, 135 were found in at least one complete sentence in our corpus and can therefore be seen as “living” Germanisms. The following categories could be identified in relation to the active use and development of Germanisms in Chinese. Firstly, as already mentioned, almost all of the Germanisms used in modern Chinese were introduced during the 20th century, especially in the first half. Secondly, with only a few exceptions, the Germanisms in active use are nouns, which in quantitative terms mostly occur in the natural sciences, technology, mathematics and medicine and are used as loan words for objects, substances and materials which were previously unknown in China. Finally, in qualitative terms, the most active use of Germanisms today, accounting for around half the total number, is in relation to the social sciences and humanities, largely introduced in relation to world views, explanatory perspectives and culture-specific features.

### 3. **Conclusions and summary**

In contrast to Chinese loan words in German, where the date of introduction is mostly unknown, the point at which almost all Germanisms appeared in Chinese can be ascertained more precisely thanks to their close association with the technical and scientific modernization of China. German influences on technical, social and cultural developments in China mostly occurred in the first half of the 20th century, a time in which Chinese intellectuals were endeavouring to counteract hardship in China and modernize the country, both before and after the collapse of the imperial dynasty. It does not make much sense, however, to analyse the chronology of adoption of Germanisms in Chinese because there is hardly any documentary evidence for words of German origin being borrowed in the 19th or 21st centuries. This is why no attempt was made to carry out a quantitative analysis of developmental trends relating to Germanisms in Chinese. Despite this limitation, the study at hand does illustrate German influences on (technical) vocabulary in Chinese and their current manifestations.

Particularly in the fields of philosophy, mathematics, natural sciences and technology, Germanisms, or rather the influence of Germany on the consolidation of science and research in China in the modern day and age, have had a major effect. The large-scale introduction of Western (technical) terms began in the 1860s with the foundation of the “School of Combined Learning (*tong wen guan*)” (1862) and the “Jiang Nan Machinery Manufacture Arsenal (*jiang nan ji xie zhi zao zong ju*)” (1865) in the course of the so-called “National Self-Strengthening Movement” (*yang wu yun dong*) of the Qing dynasty. The second half of the 19th century saw the first boom in the development of new words in Chinese before modern times; these were either borrowed from Western languages (particularly English and French) or coined from them. In the first half of the 20th century there was a second peak in vocabulary of Western origin due to the adoption of loan words from Japanese written in Chinese characters which were introduced into Chinese in great numbers. This is particularly true for technical terms in medicine and philosophy. In this phase, German loan words which were introduced into Chinese via English or Japanese also boomed.

In comparison with other sources of Chinese loan words, those foreign words which were introduced via Japanese are characterized by creative combinations of Chinese characters. Here it is mostly a case of paraphrasing the foreign terms. In contrast to words of Chinese origin introduced into German, the Germanisms which were introduced to Chinese via Japanese are rarely phonetic representations of the original word. Instead in most cases it is a question of transferring the meaning of words with Germanic roots which were written in Japanese with the help of Chinese characters and which found their way to China via the media or exchange of personnel. As Chinese characters form the basis of Japanese writing and the wealth of words borrowed from the West after the Meiji restoration in Japan were normally written in accordance with Chinese grammatical rules, from a Chinese perspective Japanese is not only seen as an intermediary language for loan words but also as one co-producer of the vocabulary of modern Chinese (cf. also Shi 2000).

In the second half of the 20th century, the role of Japanese as an intermediary language for linguistic contact between Chinese and German declined radically. Instead linguistic and cultural encounters between China and Germany have been taking place to mutual advantage over the last few decades thanks to an intensification of bilateral relations in which intercultural occurrences arise thanks to the immediate communication between both cultures. Both sides can profit directly from these mutual influences.

A series of words and concepts going back to Marxist doctrine lies at the heart of the adoption of Marxist ideas in China and the revolution led by the Chinese communist party since it was founded in 1921 and they still exert a very strong influence on the political landscape of the People's Republic of China today as well as on the expansion of Chinese ideological discourse. After 1949, newly borrowed foreign words in relation to Marxism-Leninism mainly entered Chinese from the Soviet Union, while the German Democratic Republic wielded hardly any influence. Traces of German in modern Chinese have continued to appear in the form of commonly adopted words from the works of the German philosophers Karl Marx, Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, amongst others, which are not only firmly established in specialist vocabulary but also in everyday language use.

As an important phenomenon and outcome of interculturality, the exchange of loan words and foreign words between different cultures and languages is likely to continue in the foreseeable future. Etymological analyses are an important method but certainly not the only way to explain linguistic developments. The migration of language can be investigated on many levels, not just on the level of borrowings.

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