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Original Paper

An Overview of *Engineering Translation Bulletin*: A Key Carrier of "Saving the Nation through Technology" in the Republican Era

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Abstract

Taking Engineering Translation Bulletin in the Republican period as the core research object, this paper systematically examines the historical role of this journal in the translation and introduction of Western traffic engineering technologies, localized transformation, and social impact, centering on the historical theme of "saving the nation through technology" and adopting the methods of literature collation and historical analysis. The research focuses on the journal's publication information, content introduction, knowledge dissemination, and domestic acceptance, revealing how it constructed a technology dissemination mechanism of "introducing Western knowledge to aid China" under the concept of "saving the nation through engineering". This journal fills the research gap in the history of engineering translation in the Republican era and provides a new perspective for the interdisciplinary integration of technology dissemination history and translation history studies.

Keywords

Engineering Translation Bulletin, history of engineering translation, saving the nation through technology

1. Introduction

Since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China put forward the strategic goal of "accelerating the construction of a country with strong transportation capacity", this major national development strategy has been continuously deepened and advanced, and its strategic position has been repeatedly emphasized in the 14th Five-Year Plan and the report of the 20th National Congress of the

Communist Party of China (Yang, n.d.). Professional journals represented by *Engineering Translation Bulletin*, founded in 1930, constructed an early engineering knowledge dissemination system through large-scale translation and introduction of European and American traffic engineering documents. These documents not only cover professional technical fields such as road engineering and municipal planning, but also reflect the selective absorption and creative transformation of Western modernity by technical elite groups under the concept of "saving the nation through engineering". This cross-temporal academic dialogue is not only a tribute to the century-long history of China's transportation construction, but also provides ideological resources for the strategic needs of building an independent knowledge system in the new era.

This paper focuses on the translation and introduction of foreign traffic engineering scientific knowledge in the Republican era, a topic that has been barely explored so far. The investigation of this translation and introduction process is of certain complementary value for both the overall history of Chinese translation and the specialized history of traffic engineering translation. It can reveal how Republican-era technical elites constructed a discourse system of "technological modernity" through translation practice, and provide the long-neglected dimension of "engineering translation" for the study of modern translation history. Meanwhile, a systematic review and introduction of this journal can provide rich historical data support for the interpretation and historical tracing of current engineering terminology, and offer guidance for translation practice in traffic engineering. Based on the academic stance of "taking history as a mirror and saving the nation through technology", this paper provides historical experience and enlightenment for the construction of a country with strong transportation capacity in the new era. In addition, the discussion on issues such as technological ethics and interdisciplinary collaboration in the research can also provide ideological resources for policymakers to coordinate scientific and technological innovation and social benefits.

This paper interprets and organizes the foreign engineering technical contents in *Engineering Translation Bulletin* of the Republican era into three major categories: municipal engineering, architectural engineering, and civil engineering, and further subdivides them into 13 subcategories under the three categories: municipal engineering (including road planning and traffic management, regional planning, water supply and drainage systems, land valuation and utilization, waste disposal), architectural engineering (including housing construction, antenna towers, chimneys and other structures), and civil engineering (including bridges, civil engineering technologies, seaports, highways, railway tunnels, manpower). By constructing a structured knowledge map, this paper comprehensively understands what advanced Western technologies China absorbed in the engineering field during the Republican era. Based on abundant textual materials and historical data, this paper sorts out and analyzes the history of

engineering translation in the Republican era around *Engineering Translation Bulletin*, summarizes the characteristics, laws and effects of engineering translation in this period, and takes history as a mirror to provide references for the international exchanges and mutual learning of engineering civilization in the present. For example, combining the *Work Bureau Work Report* and *Municipal Gazette* collected in the Shanghai Municipal Archives, this paper places the translation and introduction activities in the historical context of the implementation of the "Greater Shanghai Plan" (1927-1937) and the highway construction led by the National Economic Commission, and examines the interactive relationship between technology selection and national strategy (Zhou, n.d.).

2. Founding and Publication: The Mission of Saving the Nation and the Historical Background of *Engineering Translation Bulletin*

2.1 Publication Information

Engineering Translation Bulletin was founded in January 1930, at the beginning of the "Golden Decade" (1927-1937) of the Nanjing Nationalist Government. During this period, China's municipal construction accelerated, and Shanghai, as the largest metropolis in the Far East, undertook the exemplary function of "promoting people's livelihood through public works". The journal was initiated and founded by the Public Works Bureau of the Shanghai Special Municipality, directly serving the Nationalist Government's strategy of "saving the nation through industry" and conforming to Sun's *The International Development of China* regarding the planning of transportation modernization (Zuo, 2021). As an agency directly under the Shanghai Municipal Government, the Public Works Bureau possessed administrative authority and technical expertise. Leveraging Shanghai's unique urban context of coexisting foreign concessions and Chinese-administered districts, the journal drew on resources from Western engineers residing in Shanghai and became a crucial medium for the dissemination of Western learning to the East within Republican era engineering circles. Its discontinuation in 1932 was likely related to the turbulent situation in Shanghai and the downsizing of the Public Works Bureau following the outbreak of the January 28th Shanghai Battle. As documented in *Shen Pao* during the same period, numerous Shanghai newspapers and periodicals ceased publication due to warfare in 1932, and the Public Works Bureau also suffered fiscal setbacks, which indirectly led to the journal's termination. Although it existed for only two years, the journal frequently translated and introduced European and American technical literature, filling a knowledge gap in domestic transportation engineering (Shen Bao, 1932).

2.2 Publication Details

Each issue of the journal contained about 70,000 to 80,000 Chinese characters, adopting a model of "thematic translation and technical commentary". Its columns included: Foreign Engineering News,

Translated Technical Series, Engineering Charts and Diagrams, Editor's Notes, and others. The three surviving volumes reflect a clear tendency among Republican era Chinese engineers to "take the United States as a model". Content shows that the Chinese engineering field in the Republican period prioritized the introduction of emerging technologies from the 1930s, such as traffic flow statistics and fatigue tests of reinforced concrete. Meanwhile, some translations are accompanied by "Chinese adaptation suggestions", such as adjusting Western automotive road standards, to accommodate the mixed streets of rickshaw and horse-drawn carriages in China.

2.3 Aims of the Journal

The establishment of the Engineering Translation Bulletin is deeply rooted in the practice of Sun Yat-sen's modernization philosophy. The first issue was guided by Sun Yat-sen's idea of "catching up" from the very beginning, emphasizing that technology introduction should follow the principle of "taking the highest as an example", and advocating direct alignment with the latest scientific and technological achievements of the West rather than step-by-step imitation. Under this framework, the magazine focuses its mission on "narrowing the knowledge gap and serving the country's self-strengthening".By following the path of "from rapid translation, absorption, assimilation to localized innovation", efforts are made to reverse the predicament where domestic engineering education relies on outdated Western textbooks from the 19th century.Its content is closely matched with the demands of major national projects.Through systematic knowledge sharing, engineers have been promoted to transform from traditional artisans to modern professional communities, and an "imaginative community" for technological innovation has been constructed.

At the practical level, the Engineering Translation Bulletin shoulders the distinct mission of "saving the country through engineering". Editors support technological nationalism and call for "revenge for national humiliation and strengthening the country through engineering." They elevated the construction of infrastructure such as roads and Bridges to the strategic height of "recovering the administrative management rights of the concessions" and "resisting the economic aggression of foreign powers". This idea is not only reflected in the translation of cutting-edge technologies from Europe and America, but also in the editors' active exploration of localization. The magazine also advocates engineering ethics, criticizes the erosion of bureaucratic corruption in municipal construction, and showcases the ideal of the technical elites in the Republican era to reform society through scientific rationality. This dual pursuit of technological enlightenment and social transformation has enabled the Engineering Translation Bulletin to transcend the status of a mere professional journal and become an important carrier of the idea of "saving the country through science and technology" in the process of China's republic modernization.

3. Content and Outline: Introduction of Engineering and Technical Knowledge and Textual Practice of "Saving the Nation through Technology"

3.1 Overview of General Situation

3.1.1 Foreword

During the tumultuous years of the Republic of China, Mr. Shen Yi, adhering to the belief that "learning is like rowing against the current; if you don't move forward, you will fall behind", founded the Engineering Translation Bulletin. This maxim opens up the preface and clarifies the purpose of the publication. Mr. Shen Yi keenly realized that in the tide of historical change and technological innovation, complacency will only lead to elimination. Only by actively absorbing advanced international engineering technologies can the Chinese engineering community make progress and develop. Therefore, the Engineering Translation Bulletin came into being. Its clear mission is to introduce major engineering works from all over the world under the guidance of Western science, broadening the horizons and updating the knowledge of engineering scholars in the Republic era. Mr. Shen Yi hopes that the Journal of Engineering can serve as a bridge connecting the engineering academic circles at home and abroad, enabling domestic professionals to have access to the most cutting-edge theories, technologies and methods, thereby promoting the leapfrog development of Chinese engineering during this special historical period.

3.1.2 Editor's Notes

The "Editor's Note" section of the *Engineering Translation Bulletin* mainly explains the subsequent additions or deletions of columns, including the reasons, main contents and expected purposes of the additions or deletions, so that readers can have a clearer understanding. Examples include the reasons for listing in sections such as "Traffic Conditions in Moscow".

3.1.3 Proposals for Developing China's Economy

This section of the Engineering Translation Bulletin mainly addresses the problems encountered in the development of engineering in China at that time and proposes corresponding solutions. Engineering construction is confronted with severe challenges such as shortage of funds, backward technology and weak industrial foundation. The government's finances are tight and unable to support large-scale engineering construction. In response to these difficulties, the texts proposed a series of innovative solutions. For instance, taking economic benefits and other factors into comprehensive consideration, they discussed drawbacks of highway construction materials then used in China and recommended appropriate alternatives, and listed priorities for transportation methods under different conditions. Implementation of these strategies alleviated economic constraints on engineering development to a

certain extent and laid a solid foundation for the government to swiftly suppress rebellions and advance peaceful nation-building.

3.1.4 Administrative Report of the Public Works Bureau of the Special Municipality of Shanghai

The "Administrative Report of the Public Works Bureau of the Special Municipality of Shanghai" published in *Engineering Translation Bulletin* mainly recorded the annual work of the bureau during the journal's founding period, systematically summarizing its annual plans and achievements in administration, design, engineering, and other fields. The report covered engineering details such as road system planning, revetments and wharves, bridges, road widening, and drainage system improvement. It also briefly described recent undertakings, including the construction of municipal government buildings and transport wharves. This report not only documents the technological innovations in urban engineering during the urbanization process of modern Shanghai, but also reflects the phased efforts made by Chinese cities during the Republic of China period to reshape local Spaces and promote social transformation by applying Western modern engineering concepts. It holds both historical and practical value.

3.1.5 International Conferences

This section mainly introduces the international engineering exhibitions held during the founding period of this journal, including the dates, locations, purposes and special topic arrangements, aiming to enable domestic engineering scholars to understand the latest developments in international academia. In addition, it also provides records of international conferences in fields such as road engineering, including dates, locations, participants and outcomes. These achievements provided valuable references for the engineering development in China at that time, especially in terms of technical and economic guidance in aspects such as highway construction funds, road traffic management, and cement and crushed stone pavement.

3.2 Civil Engineering

3.2.1 Bridges

The bridge special issue of the *Engineering Translation Bulletin* systematically deconstructs the mechanical principles and technological innovations of modern bridge engineering. *Dynamic Problems in Bridge Construction* theoretically analyzes the influence of wind load, vibration and material fatigue on structural stability, and advocates optimizing the bridge form through model tests. The "Three-chord Truss Bridge" focuses on the design of lightweight trusses, optimizing the force distribution of components through geometric structures to balance span length and material savings.

3.2.2 Harbors

Three special articles on harbor engineering in *Engineering Translation Bulletin*, which are “Principles of Harbor Design”, “The Relationship between Harbors and Ships”, and “Modern Harbors”, systematically explained the scientific logic and practical trends of port construction in that era. The first, “Principles of Harbor Design”, outlined several principles: “unrestricted future expansion”, “economic balance between engineering and management costs and revenues”, “integration of new and existing sections”, “separation of commercial and industrial designs”, “flexibility for special-purpose layouts”, “straight and unobstructed access channels for seagoing vessels”, “short routes and ample berths for inland watercraft”, and “minimized internal roads for pedestrians and vehicles”.

3.2.3 Highways

The highway engineering section of the *Engineering Translation Bulletin* focuses on material innovation and process optimization, systematically exploring various technical approaches and adaptability in modern road construction. This magazine conducted an in-depth analysis of the construction details of traditional asphalt and apron pavements, and also widely introduced international best practices, such as the durable reinforced concrete pavement from Germany, the improved low-temperature asphalt paving from Sweden, the environmentally adapted subgrade drainage design from France, and the fast-drying concrete technology that shortens the construction period.

3.2.4 Railways and Tunnels

The *Engineering Translation Bulletin* has made breakthrough progress in transportation infrastructure through domestic technological exploration and the introduction of international experience. It elaborates on the method of laying tracks on concrete slabs originated from the United States to replace traditional ballast and reduce vehicle resistance and wear. These contents provide technical blueprints and case references for China’s railway and tunnel engineering, reflecting the ambition of modern engineers to reshape the country's connectivity with technology.

3.3 Architectural Engineering

3.3.1 Building Construction

The content of the *Engineering Translation Bulletin* on construction focuses on the scientific exploration of residential space design. It introduces international standards and technological innovations in the field of architecture, adopts functionalism, optimizes layout based on factors such as family structure, lighting, and ventilation, records the overall hoisting and foundation reinforcement techniques of traditional wooden structures, and showcases the protection of cultural heritage based on engineering. The balance between building density and public space configuration in urban planning was analyzed, advocating a row layout to enhance the livability of the community. International updates have highlighted

breakthroughs in technical standards and materials, promoting the transformation of Chinese architecture from evidence-based construction to standardization and industrialization, addressing residential needs, and providing technical references for urban modernization.

3.3.2 Radio Towers, Chimneys, and Other Tall Structures

In response to the technical challenges of high-rise structures such as radio towers and chimneys, the *Engineering Translation Bulletin* systematically explores innovations in material selection, foundation design and construction techniques. In terms of materials, the full construction process of reinforced concrete chimneys is expounded. In response to the common problems existing in high-rise structures, emphasis is placed on scientific basic design. These contents combine Western structural mechanics with local engineering experience, reflecting the transformation of modern Chinese architecture from empirical practice to quantitative calculation, and from single materials to composite technologies.

3.4 Municipal Engineering

3.4.1 Road Design and Traffic Management

The section on road design and Traffic Management in the Municipal engineering section of the *Engineering Translation Bulletin* conducts an in-depth analysis of the core issues of modern urban traffic governance. Regarding “urban traffic issues”, the magazine investigated the congestion and accidents caused by the mixed traffic of cars, trams and rickshaws, and proposed some basic improvement measures, such as widening main roads and increasing sidewalk dividers. It draws on the design of the early Paris roundabout, advocating a radial road network to separate vehicles by speed. International cases reflect contemporary characteristics, emphasizing cross-improvement, manual management and simple application of technology. These contents reflect the practical efforts of the engineering community during the Republic of China period to transition urban transportation from disorder to initial systematization under limited conditions.

3.4.2 Regional Planning

The regional planning content of the *Engineering Translation Bulletin* closely follows the global urbanization wave of the 1930s and systematically translates the emerging urban planning concepts of Western Europe and the United States. Starting from domestic needs, it is advocated to strictly separate industrial and commercial areas, draw on the experience of Germany, obtain fragmented plots, and uniformly plan roads and public facilities. It emphasizes transportation-oriented development and elaborates on an integrated strategy of widening roads, increasing parks and installing underground pipelines. International cases have balanced colonial and national backgrounds, abandoned utopian blueprints, and provided a theoretical framework for the transformation of Chinese cities from traditional districts to functional areas, reflecting the pragmatic path of the engineering circle in the Republic of

China era during turbulent times.

3.4.3 Land Valuation and Utilization

The *Engineering Translation Bulletin* systematically introduces the technical framework and institutional experience of modern Western scientific land valuation and utilization. Taking cities such as New York and Cleveland as examples, this paper expounds the theory of land value assessment based on local conditions, including mathematical assessment methods. Several cases of land zoning and expropriation in Japan are introduced, providing references for balancing public interests and private property rights in domestic land planning.

3.4.4 Water Conservancy

The water conservancy section of the *Engineering Translation Bulletin* focuses on introducing domestic engineering practices and advanced Western experiences. It elaborates on the emergency rescue techniques that use reinforced concrete and stones to combat embankment breaches. In rural areas, it is advocated to make use of the natural terrain and adopt a simple drainage system combining open ditches and seepage Wells, and detailed solutions are provided.

4. Translation and Dissemination: The Discursive Transformation of Western Technology as the "Key to National Salvation"

4.1 Research on Translators

As one such translator, Chen Shoupeng is rarely mentioned in existing works on translation history. His experience — graduating from the Foochow Naval Academy, studying in Britain and France, founding the *Qiushi Bao*, and translating more than ten high-level works, which demonstrates his important role in the dissemination of Western learning in the late Qing period. His high translation standards stood in sharp contrast to the rampant careless and arbitrary translations prevalent at the time. He stated that he "devoted meticulous care to this book, not daring to translate roughly sentence by sentence or word by word", and insisted that "everything in the original is retained, without perfunctory treatment, fabrication, or omission". Thus, his translations, "though not perfect compared with the original, may confidently be said to capture eight or nine parts of its meaning…". (1989) In translating scientific and technological works such as the *Illustrated Records*, Chen Shoupeng excelled in language proficiency, professional knowledge, understanding of translation, and practical translation. Compared with most translators of his time, he openly pursued economic benefits yet was not solely material oriented; he strictly observed his duties as a translator while proactively advocating for translators' rights and interests. Although he cannot be called a full-time professional translator in the strict sense, he effectively possessed the essential qualities of one.

4.2 Research on Translation Methods

The translation practice of the *Engineering Translation Bulletin* represented an organized and strategic movement of knowledge introduction under the banner of "saving the nation through technology". It employed free translation and domestication to localize foreign knowledge, transcreative translation to construct a Chinese engineering terminology system, and abridged and adapted translation to maximize the efficiency of knowledge dissemination. Each of these choices served the journal's mission: "to rapidly spread new knowledge, enlighten the people, revitalize industry, and rescue the nation from peril". Far from a simple collection of translations, the *Engineering Translation Bulletin* was a bridge carefully constructed through translation methods, one end connected to advanced Western engineering technology, the other deeply rooted in impoverished and weak China, ultimately oriented toward the grand ambition of "national salvation" for which countless patriots of the era strove.

Free translation was the core strategy of the Engineering Translation Bulletin. Instead of mechanically literal translation, translators fully considered the knowledge background and reading habits of Chinese readers, and "restated" the text in authentic, slightly classical Chinese. The goal was to lower the reading threshold and ensure that technical concepts could be understood and absorbed to the greatest extent by the Chinese intellectual and engineering circles (Zhang, 2025). Meanwhile, faced with numerous new concepts and devices absent in China, translators acted as terminology creators (Sun, 2022). Drawing on the ideographic nature of Chinese characters, they coined a large number of precise and expressive engineering terms, many of which have become standard expressions in modern Chinese. This itself was a practice of "national salvation", laying the linguistic foundation for China's modern engineering discipline. For instance, the term lantu (blueprint) in the journal not only accurately described the blue color of the drawing but also endowed it with the profound cultural connotation of "planning and future", a masterstroke of coinage. This creative process was inherently a form of transcreation.

The translation methods adopted by the Engineering Translation Bulletin were by no means accidental; behind them lay the heavy historical mission of "saving the nation through technology". "National salvation" could not remain a slogan, and knowledge had to be made understandable and applicable. Through free translation and terminology creation, Western engineering technology was given a Chinese "form" and "soul", allowing it to spread and take root in Chinese cultural soil and truly serve China (Zhang & Nie, 2023). This solved the problem of how to "receive" knowledge after it had been "introduced". The use of a semi-classical style catered to the reading habits of mainstream intellectuals, ensured the journal's authority and influence among elite circles, and precisely conveyed complex engineering concepts. It was a strategic linguistic choice under specific historical conditions to achieve the broadest and most efficient knowledge enlightenment.

5. Repercussions and Legacy: Domestic Reception and Influence of the *Engineering Translation Bulletin*'s Ideology of Technology for National Salvation

5.1 Communication Network and Academic Influence

Relying on the official background of the Public Works Bureau of the Special Municipality of Shanghai and academic resources from universities, the *Engineering Translation Bulletin* built a multi-level communication network covering the national engineering community. At the level of the academic community, it promoted the local construction of modern engineering disciplines through terminology standardization and knowledge systematization. For example, theories such as "traffic flow statistics" and "concrete mix experimental standards" systematically translated and introduced in the journal reshaped the content framework of domestic engineering education (Liu, 2024).

Notably, the reception of the journal showed significant regional differences and technological selectivity. Engineers in coastal treaty ports (such as Tianjin and Guangzhou) paid more attention to municipal planning cases, while those in the central and western regions (such as the Hunan Highway Bureau) focused on road engineering technologies (Yu & Liu, 2004). These differences reflected the unbalanced regional development in the Republican period and highlighted the editorial group's strategic consideration of national overall needs in technological selection.

5.2 Practical Transformation and Engineering Application

The technological translations of the *Engineering Translation Bulletin* were deeply embedded in major engineering projects of the Republican era, achieving a closed-loop transformation from "knowledge to practice". In municipal engineering, the "radial road network" design in the 1932 Nanjing Capital Plan (Gu &Yan, 2010) drew on Principles of Berlin Urban Traffic Planning, compiled and translated in the same issue of the journal. A deeper influence was that the journal reconstructed the cognitive paradigm of engineering practice through technological dissemination.

The reception history of the *Engineering Translation Bulletin* reveals that the effectiveness of technology introduction depends not only on the advancement of knowledge itself, but also on the coordination of localized transformation mechanisms and institutionalized communication networks. Its collaborative model of "government leadership, academic participation and industrial response" provides a historical reference for building an integrated innovation system of "government-industry-university-research-application" in the current construction of a China with strong transportation capacity (Wang & Zhang, 2023). China's current global leading position in high-speed rail and intelligent transportation systems can be traced back to the century-long continuation of this technology development path rooted in national conditions and open innovation (Li, 2023).

6. Conclusion

This paper takes the Engineering Translation Bulletin, a professional journal of the Republican period, as its core research object, and systematically examines its founding background, publication history, content structure, and historical value in the dissemination of engineering knowledge in modern China. As a rare professional engineering translation journal of the Republican era, the Engineering Translation Bulletin not only filled the technological information gap in domestic transportation engineering, but also embodied strategies such as “critical selection” and “local adaptation” in its compilation and translation activities, making it a typical example of absorbing Western scientific and technological civilization and an important historical source for tracing contemporary China’s “technology for national salvation”. Although this journal was founded only two years ago, it has provided valuable original materials for the study of the history of municipal construction, engineering translation, and technology dissemination during the Republic of China period. It has irreplaceable historical value in terms of terminology construction, engineering education reform, and the formation of industry norms. The limitations of this study include the lack of some original archives. Future research can integrate digital humanities technology to deepen the quantitative analysis of knowledge dissemination and expand comparative studies with other engineering journals during the Republic period, thereby presenting a more comprehensive view of the history of modern scientific and technological translation.

Project

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