

Original Paper

A Corpus-based Study of Research Trend of Chinese Academic Translation Project (2010-2023)

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Abstract

As an important project funded by the National Social Science Foundation of China, the “Chinese Academic Translation” project has made great contributions to promoting the international dissemination of Chinese academic achievements and enhancing the influence of Chinese academics in the international academic community. This paper analyses the development dynamics of the “Chinese Academic Translation” project over the years by using corpus and statistical research methods. From a macro-perspective, the analyses mainly include the number of funded projects, the subjects of funded projects, language version of funded projects, and the topics of funded projects in “Chinese Academic Translation” project; from a micro-perspective, the analyses mainly cover work unit of initiators, multiple duplicate projects and funding distribution. The results of the research show that the current “Chinese Academic Translation” project needs to enhance the awareness of national translation of Chinese academic achievements, balance the imbalance in the development of subjects in the project, orient the translation of the target language, and cooperating with experts at home and abroad in selecting and choosing innovative topics.

Keywords

Chinese Academic Translation, corpus, analysis of funded projects

1. Introduction

In 2010, the National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences launched the “Chinese Academic Translation Project under the National Social Science Fund”, aiming to enhance the international influence and visibility of Chinese academic research. The initiative focuses on selecting representative and academically significant Chinese scholarly works for high-quality English translation, making these works more accessible and acceptable to international academic communities and readers. Serving as a crucial bridge for international academic dialogue and cultural exchange, the Chinese Academic Translation Project plays a vital role. This study employs corpus technology and statistical analysis methods to explore the developmental trajectory and existing issues of the Chinese Academic Translation

Project from 2010 to 2023.

2. Literature Review

Over the 14-year trajectory of the Chinese Academic Translation Project, its development has been shaped by the dual influences of national policy orientations and advancements across various academic disciplines. In research related to the Chinese Academic Translation Project, scholars such as Wang & Jiang (2011), Zhang (2015), and Ren (2018) have conducted comprehensive analyses of its project approval trends. However, their macro-level perspectives offer limited insights into the long-term sustainable development of the initiative. Scholars like Yang (2014), Li (2014), Yin (2018), Wu & Pan (2024), and Ge & Huang (2024) emphasize that, at the domestic level, the Chinese Academic Translation Project must prioritize innovative themes aligned with national policy agendas, address imbalances in language and disciplinary distribution, and focus on overseas dissemination, distribution, and publication. Collaborative models involving domestic and international experts are also proposed to advance the project's long-term strategic planning. In terms of research methodologies, previous studies predominantly rely on traditional statistical approaches, which struggle to provide in-depth analyses as the number of approved projects grows annually. A few scholars, such as Tan (2023), have adopted innovative tools like Excel, Python, and R to analyze the project's developmental trends, demonstrating methodological creativity and scientific rigor. As the Chinese Academic Translation Project expands, research on it has increased, though most studies remain confined to statistical analyses, with limited exploration of its systemic challenges. For instance, Li (2014) and He & Li (2021) have respectively examined the root causes of the project's "failure to achieve international reach" and summarized best practices for successful translation and dissemination.

This study adopts both macro and micro perspectives, utilizing corpus-based methods to comprehensively analyze the foundational aspects of the Chinese Academic Translation Project under the National Social Science Fund. It focuses on investigating the institutional affiliations of project leaders, recurrently funded works, and national funding allocations. Through data-driven analysis, the research aims to identify existing issues within the Chinese Academic Translation Project and propose actionable recommendations for its future development.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Data, Methods, and Tools

This study employs Excel and AntConc tools, integrating corpus-based methods and statistical approaches to analyze and visualize data. All data are sourced from the official website of the National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Sciences, covering detailed information on the Chinese Academic Translation Project from 2010 to 2023.

Within the Excel spreadsheet software, statistical tools were utilized to analyze data. The study leveraged Excel's statistical and search functions to process specific datasets, followed by manual screening to

exclude irrelevant data, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the results. Building on Excel's foundational analysis, the corpus analysis tool AntConc was further applied to conduct frequency analysis on the organized data.

3.2 Excel Statistical Analysis

The study initially standardized annual Chinese Academic Translation Project approval data into Excel spreadsheets to ensure uniformity and clarity for subsequent analysis. While the research primarily relies on corpus tools, Excel served as a supplementary tool for basic statistical tasks, including calculating the total number of approved projects and analyzing disciplinary distributions.

3.3 Self-Constructed Corpus

Based on Excel-processed data, a self-built corpus named "Chinese Academic Translation Project Corpus" was developed using AntConc to perform frequency analysis. This corpus includes four text files: "Language Distribution," "Thematic Distribution," "Repeated Approvals," and "Affiliation of Project Leaders."

3.3.1 Corpus Collection

From the National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Sciences website, 14 annual project approval lists were downloaded from the "Data Download" section. These files were converted into Excel format for streamlined processing. Data fields such as approved languages, work titles, and affiliations of project leaders were extracted and aggregated for analysis.

3.3.2 Word Segmentation Processing

A word segmentation protocol was established based on project title information to avoid redundant splitting of contextually critical terms. The Chinese word segmentation tool Corpus Word Parser was first used to automate the segmentation of the "approved languages" corpus. To address potential inaccuracies in automated segmentation, manual correction was applied using meaning-based units, refining the results into single-character or multi-character lexical units. Additionally, domain-specific terminology from the Chinese Academic Translation Project's disciplines was incorporated to ensure the segmented data accurately reflected linguistic and disciplinary characteristics.

3.3.3 Frequency Analysis

For high-frequency word analysis, the "approved languages" corpus was imported into AntConc. By clicking the "Start" button, the software generated a frequency-sorted keyword list in the "Keyword List" window. The same method was applied to analyze "works" and "affiliations of project leaders."

3.3.4 Word Cloud Generation

To create word clouds, the segmented and corrected "works" corpus was imported into AntConc. The "Keywords" tool generated a keyword frequency list, which was exported to Excel as "Keyword Corpus" for further processing. Finally, the "Word cloud" tool was used to visualize high-frequency terms, and the resulting word clouds were exported for analytical and presentation purposes.

4. Macro-Level Analysis

4.1 Quantitative Trends

Using Excel, statistical analysis was conducted on the collected data to summarize annual project approval quantities. Figure 1 clearly illustrates the cumulative total of 1,926 projects approved over the 14-year period since the inception of the Chinese Academic Translation Project. Although fluctuations in funded numbers occurred between 2013 and 2019, the overall trend demonstrates steady growth. This pattern underscores the extensive attention and recognition the project has garnered within academia. Furthermore, the upward trajectory highlights the Chinese government's strong commitment to advancing the “Chinese culture going global” strategy, as well as its increasing support and resource allocation to the project.

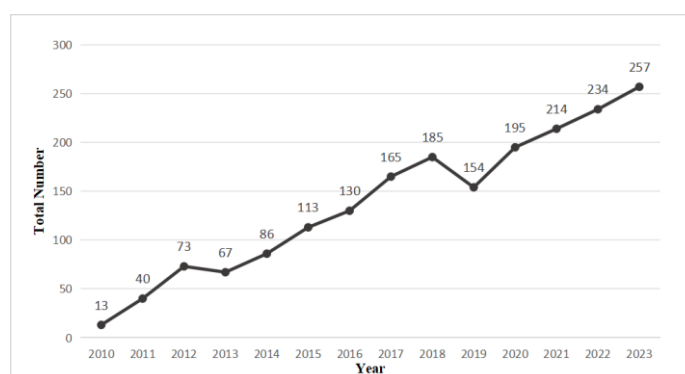


Figure 1. Number of Funded Projects (2010-2023)

4.2 Disciplinary Distribution

Over the past decade, the number of disciplinary categories supported by the project has gradually increased, rising from the initial 8 categories in 2010 (Philosophy, Marxism-Leninism and Scientific Socialism, Economics, Law, Chinese History, Political Science, Sociology, and Ethnology) to the current 26 categories. In addition to the original 8, the expanded list includes 17 new categories: statistics, Chinese literature, foreign literature, world history, religious studies, management science, education, art studies, law, demography, anthropology, linguistics, sports science, party history and party building, journalism and communication, international studies, and other series.

A comprehensive analysis of project approvals across all disciplines reveals that eight disciplines—Chinese History, Philosophy, Economics, Chinese Literature, Law, Political Science, Sociology, and Linguistics—have each exceeded 100 approved projects. Figure 2 clearly illustrates that these disciplines have consistently ranked among the top 15 in terms of funded numbers from 2010 to 2023. This finding underscores their critical status and extensive influence within the Chinese Academic Translation Project.

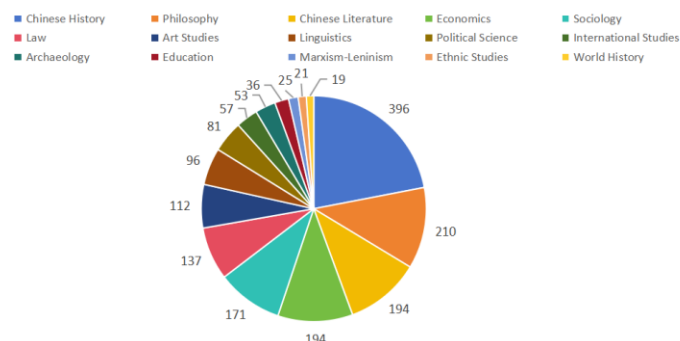


Figure 2. Subjects of Funded Projects (2010-2023)

The top five disciplines are Chinese History, Philosophy, Chinese Literature, Economics, and Sociology. These disciplines not only represent the pinnacle of Chinese social sciences and traditional academic heritage but also constitute the core components of the Chinese Academic Translation Project. Furthermore, the project prioritizes International Studies, delving into critical themes such as global economic governance and major-country diplomacy. This emphasis underscores Chinese scholars' macro-level vision and global strategic thinking.

4.3 Language Distribution

Table 1 (Language Distribution of Approved Projects in the Chinese Academic Translation Project (2010–2023)) summarizes the distribution of languages across all funded projects from 2010 to 2023, encompassing 31 languages. English ranks first with 1,118 approvals, followed by Korean (179 approvals), Russian (165 approvals), and Japanese (146 approvals), all exceeding 100 projects. Languages with over 10 approvals include German (70), French (69), Spanish (37), Arabic (29), and Italian (14). As a global lingua franca, English dominates international academic exchange. Meanwhile, languages such as Korean and Russian also hold significant influence, securing substantial approval opportunities within the project. This phenomenon vividly reflects the robust connections and collaborative efforts between China and these countries across economic, technological, cultural, and other domains.

Table 1. Language Distribution of Approved Projects (2010–2023)

Language	Number of projects
English	1118
Korean	179
Russian	165
Japanese	146
German	70
French	69

Spanish	37
Arabic	29
Italian	14
Vietnamese	8
Uzbek	6
Turkish	6
Kazakh	5
Persian	4
Portuguese	4
Kyrgyz	4
Polish	4
Mongolian	4
Indonesian	3
Hindi	2
Thai	2
Malay	2
Urdu	1
Bulgarian	1
Sinhala	1
Hungarian	1
Cyrillic Mongolian	1
Tajik	1
Hebrew	1
Swahili	1
Cambodian	1

4.4 Thematic Distribution

Given the extensive range of disciplines, the large number of projects, and the rich content covered by the foreign translation projects, this study conducted high-frequency word statistics on the collected project list to accurately present the trends, hot themes, and topic distribution. A word cloud diagram was generated to visualize the thematic distribution. In the high-frequency word list, the term “China” appeared most prominently with a frequency of 846 occurrences, followed by functional words such as “of”, “and”, and others. However, since the fundamental purpose of these translation projects is to disseminate China’s outstanding academic achievements, generic terms like “China,” along with other functional words such as “and”, “of”, “for” and others, were intentionally excluded. This filtering process ensured the selection of words that effectively highlight the core themes and hot topics of the projects, as illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Word Cloud of Thematic Keywords (2010–2023)

The word cloud diagram intuitively reveals the thematic preferences of foreign translation projects, highlighting key areas such as Chinese philosophy, cultural traditions, social studies, economic development, and historical exploration. These projects transcend mere linguistic conversion; they serve as a vital conduit for cultural and intellectual exchange, aiming to showcase Chinese scholarship, narrate China's stories, and foster cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. The selected themes reflect a dual focus: not only emphasizing the intellectual legacy of ancient Chinese humanities but also actively incorporating modern and contemporary achievements across disciplines, thereby constructing a multidimensional and holistic representation of China.

Based on the above analysis, the Chinese Academic Works Translation Project demonstrates robust development momentum, achieving significant progress and exhibiting promising prospects in multiple dimensions. For quantitative growth, the number of approved projects has shown steady annual growth, reflecting increasing recognition and support for the initiative. For disciplinary expansion, the disciplinary scope has expanded from a limited range (e.g., philosophy, economics) to a diverse array of 26 fields, including emerging areas like linguistics and international studies. In terms of linguistic diversity, the number of languages targeted by the project has increased, with a gradual rise in projects focusing on less commonly taught languages (e.g., Uzbek, Swahili) alongside dominant languages like English and Korean. Besides, in terms of thematic priorities, projects emphasize themes aligned with China's cultural heritage and contemporary societal frameworks, with a notable focus on Chinese philosophy, culture, history, and social development.

These trends underscore the project's role in fostering global academic dialogue and enhancing China's international scholarly influence.

5. Micro-Level Examination

5.1 Analysis of Affiliations of Project Leaders

This section investigates the institutional affiliations of project leaders through frequency analysis using AntConc. After data processing, results reveal 283 distinct institutions, predominantly higher education institutions, with a minority being research institutes. From the corpus data, 28 representative institutions with a project approval frequency of 20 or higher were selected (see Table 2). In terms of project quantity,

the top five institutions are: Shanghai International Studies University (61 projects), Beijing Foreign Studies University (55 projects), Peking University (33 projects), Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (32 projects) and Nanjing University (29 projects). The subsequent five institutions include: China University of Political Science and Law (28 projects), East China Normal University (25 projects), Sun Yat-sen University (24 projects), Wuhan University (24 projects) and Tsinghua University (22 projects).

The quantity and tier of projects serve as key indicators of an institution's research capacity and developmental potential. As shown in Table 2, all listed institutions are key universities directly under the Ministry of Education. Notably, institutions in Beijing and Shanghai dominate the rankings, highlighting the region's high concentration of research expertise in language and translation studies, as well as their leadership in the field. This further solidifies the role of Beijing and Shanghai as core hubs for China's linguistic and translational research capabilities.

Table 2. Affiliations of Project Leaders with Funded Projects Exceeding 15

Work Unit	Funded project frequency
Shanghai International Studies University	61
Beijing Foreign Studies University	55
Peking University	33
Guangdong University of Foreign Studies	32
Nanjing University	29
China University of Political Science and Law	28
East China Normal University	25
Sun Yat-sen University	24
Shandong University	24
Wuhan University	24
Tsinghua University	22ff
Xiamen University	21
Zhejiang University	21
Tongji University	20
Fudan University	20
University of International Business and Economics	20
Beijing International Studies University	19
Sichuan International Studies University	19
Shaanxi Normal University	18
Minzu University of China	17
Dalian University of Foreign Languages	17

Shanghai Jiao Tong University	15
Communication University of China	15
Ocean University of China	15
Nanjing Normal University	15
Nankai University	15
Yanbian University	15
Ludong University	15

5.2 Duplicate Approvals

During the compilation of project data, certain works were observed to appear multiple times in the approved project list. These duplicate approvals reflect the strategic priorities of foreign translation initiatives. By analyzing the frequency and disciplinary distribution of these repeatedly approved works, sustained academic interests and research focal points can be identified, offering insights into scholarly trends. Such duplication may signify the heightened research value and societal relevance of specific disciplines, potentially aligned with social demands, technological advancements, or policy directives. From 2010 to 2022, a total of 1,669 projects were approved, with 34% (Figure 4) categorized as duplicate approvals involving 229 distinct works. This substantial proportion underscores the academic and cultural significance of these works, serving as critical resources for scholarly reference and global knowledge dissemination.

Following a rigorous secondary analysis of the 229 repeatedly approved works, all percentage data were meticulously rounded to two decimal places to ensure precision. The ranking of duplication frequency revealed: Works approved 7 times ranked highest, followed by those approved 6, 5, 4, 3, and 2 times, respectively. Distribution Details: 159 works (69.43%) were approved twice; 50 works (21.83%) were approved three times; 16 works (6.99%) were approved four times; 2 works (0.87%) were approved five times; 1 work each (0.43% each) was approved six or seven times.

Notably, the singular works approved six and seven times—*Contemporary Chinese Social Construction* by Lu Xueyi and *The History of the Nanjing Massacre* by Zhang Xianwen—epitomize profound cultural value and academic recognition. Belonging to the domains of Chinese history and social development, these findings align closely with earlier analyses of thematic hotspots.

The History of the Nanjing Massacre, topping the list with seven approvals, highlights the enduring academic and societal focus on this pivotal historical event. Related works, such as *Research on the Nanjing Massacre: Critiques of Japanese Fictionalist Narratives* and *From Yale to Tokyo: Documenting the Nanjing Massacre*, further demonstrate scholarly engagement with this subject.

Meanwhile, *Contemporary Chinese Social Construction*, translated into multiple languages, provides theoretical frameworks and practical insights into China's social development, offering global audiences empirical perspectives on China's modernization. Its repeated approvals underscore its role in shaping international understanding of China's socio-political landscape.

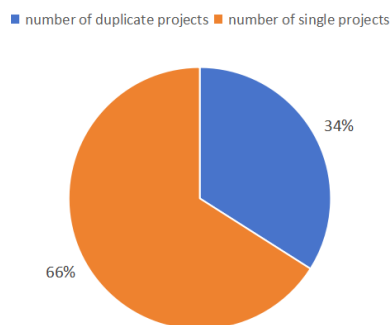


Figure 4. Distribution of Duplicate Projects (2010-2023)

Table 3. Statistics of Works with Duplicate Projects

Number of repeated projects	Number of Works	Percentage
7	1	0.43%
6	1	0.43%
5	2	0.87%
4	16	6.99%
3	50	21.83%
2	159	69.43%
Total	229	100%

5.3 Funding Allocation

The financial support for foreign translation projects reflects both national prioritization and academic engagement. Funding is primarily allocated to two categories: academic works and foreign-language academic journals, with academic works further divided into key projects and general projects, each subject to distinct funding tiers. Detailed funding criteria are summarized in Table 4.

2010 (Initial Phase): Funding guidelines were not explicitly defined due to insufficient publicity and documentation.

2011–2014: Funding standards were approximately 100,000 RMB per 100,000 Chinese characters, with total funding capped at 500,000 RMB per project.

2015–2018: Chinese academic works: ~10,000 RMB per 10,000 Chinese characters, capped at 500,000 RMB per title; academic series: Funding evaluated case-by-case; foreign-language journals: 400,000–600,000 RMB annually, renewable every three years.

2019–2023: General projects: 1,000–1,200 RMB per 1,000 Chinese characters; key projects: 1,300–1,500 RMB per 1,000 Chinese characters, both capped at 500,000 RMB per title; foreign-language journals: 400,000–600,000 RMB annually, renewable every three years.

The progressive refinement of funding structures across these four phases underscores the program's

institutional maturation. Clear funding categorization not only demonstrates the state's commitment to cultural export and academic exchange but also provides scholars with transparent guidelines for project planning and execution.

Table 4. Detailed Funding Support (2010–2023)

Year	Chinese works	Foreign journals
2010	N/A	N/A
2011-2014	100,000 yuan / 100,000 characters	400,000 - 600,000 yuan
2019-2023	General project 1,000 - 1,200 yuan / thousand characters	Key project 1,300 - 1,500 yuan / thousand characters

6. Challenges and Prospects for the Chinese Academic Translation Project

6.1 Strengthening National Awareness of Academic Translation

While the macro-level analysis indicates robust overall development of the Chinese Academic Translation Project, its influence within international academia remains limited. Enhancing holistic integration of China's academic achievements into global scholarship is imperative. Universities should leverage their role as primary hubs of education by introducing specialized courses that embed translation-oriented mindsets into curricula, fostering early-stage awareness of academic translation among students. Translation organizations and research institutions must consolidate talent resources, establish dynamic evaluation and training mechanisms, and maintain professional competency within teams. Concurrently, strengthening collaboration with international academic institutions and publishing platforms to align with their preferences and demands will enable targeted translation initiatives, thereby elevating China's academic influence and discourse power globally and advancing the "Chinese scholarship going global" strategy.

6.2 Promoting Multidisciplinary Development

Data on disciplinary distribution reveal significant imbalances in the Chinese Academic Translation Project's disciplinary coverage. Within existing projects, disciplines in the social sciences—such as Sociology, Economics, and Cultural Studies—and humanities—including History and Philosophy—dominate. In contrast, fields like Traditional Chinese Medicine, Art Studies, Psychology, Education, Linguistics, and Sports Science remain underrepresented, indicating substantial untapped potential. To address this, universities should dismantle disciplinary silos by encouraging interdisciplinary learning and research, such as offering cross - disciplinary elective courses that integrate foundational knowledge and translation practices across domains. Additionally, collaborative efforts between the government and society are needed to create diversified talent incentive mechanisms, attracting professionals from varied disciplinary backgrounds to contribute to translation efforts. This will drive comprehensive development of the Chinese Academic Translation Project across broader fields, better showcasing China's scholarly

achievements and cultural richness in diverse domains.

6.3 Emphasizing a Target - Language - Oriented Approach in Translation

The Chinese Academic Translation Project covers 31 languages and involves numerous countries, underscoring the necessity of prioritizing target - language audience needs to ensure high - quality translations. While Chinese academic works have been translated into English, their impact on international academia remains limited (Li, 2014). As Xie (2014) noted, this stems from a focus on "literal text conversion while neglecting the goal of fostering mutual understanding and exchange." Without considering how translated works can be accepted, disseminated, and influential in target - language contexts, the desired outcomes of translation are difficult to achieve. Chen (2014) similarly observed that awkward translations risk reinforcing perceptions of Chinese culture as "distant and strong." These issues arise from overlooking factors such as target readers' reading habits, aesthetic preferences, ideological frameworks, and poetic conventions, as well as translators' methodologies and strategies (He & Li, 2021). Therefore, Chinese translators must deeply understand foreign readers' cognitive patterns and preferences, preemptively addressing their receptivity during translation. Effective "translating China" requires ensuring foreign readers not only comprehend the content but also grasp the essence of the works.

6.4 Enhancing International Collaboration and Innovative Topic Selection

Thematic distribution reveals the Chinese Academic Translation Project's strong emphasis on philosophy, society, culture, economics, and history, with repeated approvals highlighting the importance of certain classic works. However, innovation and diversification in topic selection are urgently needed. Translation quality alone is insufficient; the strategic selection of source materials is equally critical. Selection criteria should prioritize overseas readability, marketability, and appeal, ensuring foreign readers not only understand the works but also develop an interest in similar Chinese scholarship and culture. Early in the project, Yang (2014) advocated for "selecting outstanding works with universal cultural significance," while Li (2014) emphasized "phased promotion of high-quality achievements to international audiences." Building on this, collaborations with overseas experts or diaspora scholars in topic selection can provide insights into target readers' interests, enhancing the global resonance of Chinese works. Additionally, innovative selection strategies should expand readership from specialized academics to broader international audiences. Introducing fresh topics will increase the appeal of translations, stimulate reader engagement, and inject vitality into the Chinese Academic Translation Project.

6.5 Expanding Translation Scope: From Ancient/Modern Classics to Contemporary Achievements

Statistical analysis shows that approximately two - thirds of translated works focus on China's ancient and modern periods, while contemporary achievements—primarily in economics and political science—account for only one - third. Since the Reform and Opening-up era, and particularly in the new era, China's comprehensive advancements in science, technology, medicine, sports, and defense have yielded remarkable achievements. Related works deserve selection, translation, and global dissemination to facilitate cross - disciplinary exchanges. As Huang (2022) stated, "Chinese translators are pivotal not only in cultural dissemination and shaping China's international discourse but also in promoting Chinese

products, technologies, and standards through initiatives like the Belt and Road.” To present a complete picture of Chinese scholarship, translations must extend beyond historical achievements to include modern accomplishments. Otherwise, international readers will remain familiar only with China’s past, lacking insight into its contemporary realities.

7. Conclusion

This study employs corpus-based and statistical analyses to examine the development of the Chinese Academic Translation Project over its decade-long trajectory. Overall, the number of approved projects has shown a consistent upward trend, with a cumulative total of 1,926 projects, reflecting the initiative’s growing international influence. Disciplinary coverage has expanded to 26 categories, with Chinese History, Philosophy, and Economics emerging as the most prominent fields. The project encompasses 31 languages, primarily English, Korean, Russian, and Japanese, while thematic focus remains concentrated on society, culture, and philosophy.

Micro-level analysis reveals that institutions such as Beijing Foreign Studies University dominate project approvals, underscoring the central role of Beijing and Shanghai as hubs for language and translation research. Repeated approvals highlight the project’s prioritization of Chinese historical and social themes. Funding guidelines have evolved from vague descriptions to detailed notifications, with defined criteria for different project categories.

However, the Chinese Academic Translation Project faces limitations requiring attention: enhancing national awareness of academic translation in disciplinary planning; addressing disciplinary imbalances and promoting multidisciplinary development; adopting a target-language-oriented translation approach that aligns with foreign readers’ preferences; strengthening international collaboration in topic selection and prioritizing innovative themes; expanding the translation scope to include modern Chinese achievements in science, technology, and other fields, thereby showcasing China’s contemporary contributions to global knowledge.

By addressing these challenges, the Chinese Academic Translation Project can better disseminate China’s intellectual legacy and modern innovations, offering Chinese wisdom to the world.

Fund Project

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