

## The Shift of Directionality in Translation Activities in China (2011-2020)

WANG Jinjun<sup>[a]</sup>; YIN Kexiu<sup>[b],\*</sup>; LIU Jingfang<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup> Professor, School of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou University, Guangzhou, China.

<sup>[b]</sup> Associate Professor, School of Foreign Languages, Guizhou Minzu University, Guiyang, China.

<sup>[c]</sup> MA Candidate, School of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou University, Guangzhou, China.

\*Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

Translation as an intercultural and interlingual activity is in the progress echoing synchronously the social, economic and cultural development of a country. In the long recorded history of China, translation has played an irreplaceable role in political, cultural and economic exchanges between China and other nations. By way of reviewing the long history of translation activities in China from the Han Dynasty to the 21st century, it is found that the directionality of translation from foreign languages into Chinese (FL-C) has kept over thousands of years until the late 10 years have witnessed the reversed directionality in translation. After perusing literature review together with quantified translation works and the comparative study, the four high tides with the dominant FL-C translation are periodized in the span of thousands of years and much focus is given to evidence and justify the shifted directionality of Chinese into foreign languages (C-FL) translation activities from 2011 to 2020. Aided by the quantitative and qualitative analysis, this article makes an in-depth exploration of C-FL translation activities from three major aspects, that is, main fields and target languages in translation industry, the government

funded projects for publishing C-FL translation works, and the major publishing houses for C-FL translation works, and it also has a further elaboration of the shifted directionality of translation under the framework of Pierre Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) sociological theories on the field and the capital.

**Key words:** The shift; Directionality; Translation activities; China; 2011-2020

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Translation, an interlingual and intercultural activity, has always been intertwined with human communication and its history is as old as that of human race. The translation activities can be found in a wide range of literature, as an illustration, Giovanni and Dirar (2015)'s examining a history of translation in two African nations, Eritrea and Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa by scrutinizing the nations' historical events. Similarly, translation activities along the history showcase a direction of translation, or directionality as a term defined as "whether translators are working from a foreign language into their mother tongue or vice versa" (Lonsdale, 1998/2004, pp.63-64). The translation of foreign languages into the first language (L1) has been regarded as the mainstream or the unmarked case by many theoreticians and translation practitioners due to the accessibility of quality, although the inverse translation has been practiced for ages (Obdržálková, 2018; Fonseca, 2015). Some literature has dealt with the quality of the inverse translation on the basis of empirical studies (Obdržálková, 2018; Fonseca, 2015; Pavlović, 2007).

However, the directionality of translation activities is not only concerned with the matter of translation quality, but also confined to and empowered by the social, economic and cultural development in a country. Comparatively speaking, the inverse translation is a much more active and intentional activity to transmit cultural and ideological values for the purpose of reciprocal understanding and intercultural communication.

In the long history of China, it is not difficult to notice that the unmarked directionality of translation into Chinese has undergone over thousands of years dating back to the Han Dynasty after a detailed literature overview. However, entering into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the far-reaching historical events have had tremendous influence on every aspect of China, including translation activities.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century, specifically speaking, the phase of 2011 to 2020, has witnessed China's rapid development and globalization. The first decade started with China's accession to the World Trade Organization, and the second decade spotlighted the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In 2011, China became the second largest economy, and Chinese government issued the decision on cultural restructuring for the development and prosperity of the socialist culture, stipulating that efforts should be made to implement the "Chinese Culture Going Global" project, to innovate ways of promoting Chinese culture, and to foster export-oriented cultural enterprises so as to enhance their dissemination force and competitiveness, and the influence of Chinese culture around the world. Under the context, BRI was proposed by President Xi Jinping in 2013, aiming at connecting Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks to integrate the region into a cohesive economic area through increasing economic and cultural exchanges.

The implementations of the "Chinese Culture Going Global" project and the BRI have a comprehensive and profound influence on translation activities in China, which can be observed in the changes in the directionality of translation. In accordance with *2014 Report on China's Translation Industry (2014 Report in brief)*, an official and authoritative report from the Translators Association of China (TAC), a shift in directionality is identified in that the amount of C-FL translations accounted for 54.4% of the total in 2011, exceeding that of the FL-C translations. Such a change in the direction of translation is worth academic attention, considering that translation into the mother tongue is conventionally and internationally preferred and attached with high priority (Picken, 1989; Newmark, 1988; Kelly, 1979), just as Lonsdale holds that the word "translation" is used in the unmarked way referring to translation into the mother tongue and there is no specific and agreed terminology for translation into the foreign language (1998/2004, p.64).

Research on the direction of translation in China,

nevertheless, seems to have just started. Previous studies on the history of translation in China (Tian, 2019; Xie, 2009; Xu, 2009; Ma, 1998, 2006) mainly focus on the FL-C translation, thus lacking a diachronic and detailed description of the C-FL translation in China. For another, most of the present studies on the C-FL translation hinge upon either the analysis of specific genre such as literary and political texts or the application of specific translation or communication theories into the translation practice (Qin, 2020; Yang & Yu, 2020; Gang & Glynn, 2019; Hao, 2018). Therefore, a global picture of translation direction in China, the C-FL translation in particular, should be made as it is significant for the holistic understanding of the development of translation activities in China.

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## 2. METHODS

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### 2.1 Identifying the Turning Point of Directionality of Translation Activities in China

As is indicated in *2014 Report*, C-FL translations (54.4%) surmounted FL-C translations in 2011 for the first time in the history, which clearly signifies the shift of translation directionality. After the identification of the turning point, a panoramic overview of the FL-C translation in the Chinese history is possibly made on the basis of historical landmark events as the periodizing standard, and the shift to C-FL translation is further illustrated and evidenced through the quantitative and qualitative analysis under the framework of the comparative study.

### 2.2 Periodizing the High Tides of the FL-C Translation in the Chinese History

Due to the long time span of the FL-C translation in China, the scrutinized literature review (Zhang & Peng, 2015; Xie, 2009; Xu, 2009; Ma, 1998, 2006) has helped to periodize the four high tides of FL-C translation activities in conformity with the historical landmark events and the amount of translation works as the benchmark, that is, the first high tide (the 1<sup>st</sup> century - the 12<sup>th</sup> century), the second high tide (the late 16<sup>th</sup> century - the late 18<sup>th</sup> century), the third high tide (the late 19<sup>th</sup> century - the 1940s), and the fourth high tide (1949 - 2010). As the fourth high tide covers the main historical periods from the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 to the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the further classification of four stages is made as Stage One (1949-1966), Stage Two (1967-1977), Stage Three (1978-1991), and Stage Four (1992-2010) (cf. Tian, 2019).

### 2.3 The Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis under the Overall Comparative Framework

As an overall methodological framework, the comparative study, together with quantitising and qualitisising (Riazi, 2016), tends to identify, generalize, and compare the directionality-based characteristics of FL-C and C-FL translation activities, to dissect and sift the periodization

and the four high tides of the FL-C translation, to delve into the outstanding differentiation between FL-C and C-FL translation activities with regard to the amount of translation works, and to highlight chronological changes of C-FL translation activities from 2011 to 2020 from three crucial aspects.

### 3. THE OVERVIEW OF FL-C-DOMINATED TRANSLATION IN CHINA BY 2010

Documented translation activities in China can be traced back to as early as 4,000 years ago. The first recorded dynasty is the Xia Dynasty (around 2,070 - 1,600 BC) in the Central Plains, which transformed China to a class society from a primitive one. In the historical record, the neighboring ethnic groups, specifically, two tribes of the Yuyi and the Fangyi, sent emissaries for celebrating the king's coming into throne (Ma, 1998, p.1). It can be inferred that the political and diplomatic interaction must involve interpreting or translating, since the two tribes spoke languages different from that of Central China. Offices for official translators or interpreters were set up in the Western Zhou Dynasty (1,046 BC-771 BC), the third dynasty, for communicating with ethnic groups and receiving the vassal states (Xu, 2009, p.17). By following the steps and the methods mentioned above, the translation activities in China are tentatively divided into four high tides by 2010, presenting a consistent and prominent feature of being FL-C-dominated in directionality.

#### 3.1 The First High Tide (the 1<sup>st</sup> century - the 12<sup>th</sup> century)

The first high tide, from the Eastern Han Dynasty to the mid-late Song Dynasty, is characterized by Buddhism translation. Buddhism was founded around the fifth century BC in ancient India, and Ashoka (304-232 BC), the Maurya emperor of India, started the promotion of Buddhism into the world (Ma, 1998, p. 18). Since the Han Dynasty (202 BC- 220 AD), the interaction between Central China and Western Regions (including the present-day Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and parts of Central Asia) became active via the ancient Silk Road. In 65 AD, China's Emperor Mingdi issued an edict to commend the King of Chu who prayed to the Buddha for the people (ibid, p.18), indicating the official acceptance of Buddhism in China. The surge of translating Buddhist scriptures in the Han Dynasty can be attributed to two factors. First, Taoism and Confucianism had developed into well-fledged schools of thoughts, and Buddhism could be a supplement rather than a threat. Second, faced with peasant revolts and other social unrest due to political corruption and natural disasters, the government found it effective to rule and comfort people by spreading Buddhist thoughts of peacefully accepting the impermanence and sufferings of life. Buddhism was then widely welcomed for it provided great relief in people's life and important

scriptures were translated such as *Dhammapada* and *Sutra Spoken by Vimallakirti* (in Chinese 《法句经》 *Faju Jing* and 《维摩诘经》 *Weimojie Jing*) (Zhang & Peng, 2015, p. 9).

The twelve centuries witnessed not only a large number of translated sutras but also diligent translators. Xuan Zang, renowned for his seventeen-year overland trip to India and back, is the prototype of the epic novel *Journey to the West* (in Chinese 《西游记》 *Xiyouji*). He translated 1,330 fascicles of scriptures into Chinese, of which his version of *the Heart Sutra* (in Chinese 《心经》 *Xin Jing*), a core scripture of Buddhism, is the basis for all Chinese commentaries on the sutra and remains the most popular version throughout China (ibid, p.19). The translation surge lasted until the Song Dynasty when Buddhism in India almost demised. A total of 5, 396 volumes of 1,335 Buddhist scriptures were translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by 194 translators from 67 AD to 1,111 AD (Xie, 2009, p.34).

#### 3.2 The Second High Tide (the Late 16<sup>th</sup> Century - the Late 18<sup>th</sup> Century)

The second high tide, from the late Ming Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty, is signaled by religion translation and science and technology translation. In the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, Europe experienced the religious reform and endeavored to expand the sea power. Troops and Jesuits arrived at Macau and other coastal cities. The military and cultural contact ignited China's desire to learn advanced science and technology of Europe to resist the foreign invasion. The Jesuits then found it a good way of fulfilling their missions by introducing science and technology to gain Chinese emperor's approval of staying in China. Translated works include *The Thirteen Books of Euclid's Elements* (in Chinese 《几何原本》 *Jiheyuanben*) jointly translated by Chinese official Xu Guangqi and Italian Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci and a book on machinery, architecture and metallurgy by Wang Zheng and Jean Terrenz (Zhang & Peng, 2015, p.25). Under the collaboration of Chinese learned officials and over 70 Jesuits from Europe, more than 300 books were translated into Chinese, of which 120 were about science and technology and the rest about religion, philosophy, and literature (Ma, 1998, p.261). Meanwhile, a small number of Chinese classics on Confucianism were translated into Latin, including the *Four Books* and *Five Classics* (in Chinese 《四书五经》 *Sishu Wujing*) to help Europe understand China and facilitate missions (Xie, 2009, p.228). In the second high tide, the FL-C translation overwhelmed the C-FL translation in both the amount and fields. The surge ended in the late eighteenth century when the Qing Dynasty, for fear that the frequent interaction with foreign powers would breed joint rebellion against its ruling, implemented the policy of seclusion, marked by Emperor Qianlong's order of shutting down most Chinese seaports.



### 3.3 The Third High Tide (the Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century - the 1940s)

The third high tide, from the late Qing Dynasty to the end of the Republic of China, saw a booming translation of natural sciences, social sciences, and literary works. The Opium War between Britain and China in 1840 marks the beginning of modern Chinese history. Since then, western powers had continued sending troops to China and turned it into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society (Xie, 2009, p.118). The experience of being invaded made China realize the urgency of learning from the western countries, hence the upsurge of translation in all fields. The historical period lasted till the end of 1940s, marked by the end of the Republic of China under Chiang Kai-shek.

The exact total number of translated works in the FL-C translation is hardly available due to the complexity in statistical standards and sources, but the translation outburst can be partly detected in the following records. As per the lists of the main translation institutes and publishing houses in 1911, the end of the Qing Dynasty, over 200 books in social sciences were translated by School of Combined Learning (Ma, 1998, p.339), more than 160 in natural sciences and technology by Jiangnan Manufacturing Bureau (ibid, p.343), and at least 400 in literature by Hanfenlou Press (ibid, p.405). Among the works, Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* rendered by Yan Fu (in Chinese 《天演论》 *Tianyan Lun*) can be regarded as the most influential, for its central tenet, the survival of the fittest, fit the realities of China under the control of foreign countries and the nationwide mentality of struggling for survival was becoming stronger (Zhang & Peng, 2015, p.44). Literary classics tended to be popular. For example, the plays of William Shakespeare translated by Zhu Shenghao have remained the most widely accepted version till now. By 1949, the Commercial Press had published at least 358 translations in literature, history, economy, and other disciplines for higher education (Li, 2010, p.28). In this period, translated newspapers and journals burgeoned. From 1895 to 1900, more than 30 newspapers were translated from Japanese and European languages (Ma, 1998, p.366), and from 1902 to 1911 over 23 newspaper offices and publishing houses were engaged in translation (ibid, p.389). However, only a few Chinese classics and literary works got translated into English, Russian and Japanese (Xie, 2009, pp. 234-248). During the third high tide, the C-FL translation is by no means comparable to the FL-C translation in the total amount, fields, and languages involved.

### 3.4 The Fourth High Tide (1949 - 2010)

The fourth high tide, from the founding of the PRC in 1949 till the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has encountered FL-C translation in full bloom. Statistics show that not only the total number but also the related fields and languages escalated exponentially. In

accordance with the vitality of translation and historical landmark events, this period can be roughly sub-divided into four stages.

#### 3.4.1 Stage One (1949-1966)

This stage, between the founding of PRC and the eve of the Cultural Revolution, featured a rapid development of translation, and the translation from Russian into Chinese in particular. The impact of diplomatic relations on translation is obviously discerned in the stage. The number of translation in natural sciences and technology reached 16,000 works (Ma, 2006, p.214), and 156 Soviet-aided projects were carried out during 1956 and 1968, leading to a huge amount of Russian-Chinese translation (Tian, 2019, p.129). A total of 5,356 literary works were translated, of which 3,526 were Soviet literary works (Xie, 2009, p.117). The prosperity of Russian-Chinese translation can be attributed to the good rapport between the Soviet Union and China. Apart from learning advanced technology, Chinese readers had great interest in the life and culture of the powerful neighbor. Yet, in 1960, the Soviet Union withdrew all the experts from China due to the ideological clash. The enthusiasm in Russian-Chinese translation henceforth began to wane, but the FL-C translation continued. In the stage, a total of 437 foreign literary classics and 2,796 works in philosophy, politics, laws, culture, education, history, and geography were translated (Tian, 2019, pp.118-119). In the C-FL direction, over 2,000 works on politics, economy, history, culture, education, foreign affairs, laws, and tourism were translated into 43 foreign languages (Li, 2010, p.30).

#### 3.4.2 Stage Two (1967-1977)

Translation in this stage was different from other stages concerning the productivity and directionality. The Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976 caused the nation's stagnation in economy and other fields. In the FL-C translation, large-scale projects suspended or stopped, and the number of the FL-C translated works in natural sciences and technology was only 766 (Ma, 2006, pp.231-239). In contrast, the C-FL translation was comparatively active to introduce Chairman Mao Zedong's political ideas and to gain the support from African and Asian countries. At least 4,028 books were published in foreign languages during the stage (Li, 2010, p.30). Between 1962 and 1977, the works of Chairman Mao were translated into over 30 foreign languages (Tian, 2019, p.128). In general, the translation in the stage gave prominence to the C-FL translation in politics, and Mao's works in particular.

#### 3.4.3 Stage Three (1978-1991)

Stage Three saw a fast growth of translation in science and technology, humanities, and literary works, with FL-C being the dominant direction. The year 1978 marked China's beginning of implementing the Reform and Opening-up policy, and in 1979 China established diplomatic relations with US, ending the diplomatic

impasse between the two countries over 30 years. In the FL-C translation, the number amounted to 28,500 works (Tian, 2019, p.174). During 1978 and 1987, the translation in natural science and technology reached 10,668 (Ma, 2006, p.247). Although a total amount of translation for technology projects is hardly available, two projects may provide a glimpse. The technology materials for the project of Baoshan Iron & Steel Co., Ltd (Phase 1) got translated into over 400 million Chinese characters, and the material translation for building Dayawan Nuclear Power Plant reached 275 million Chinese characters (Tian, 2019, p.170). The translation of foreign literary works between 1978 and 1985 totaled at least 3,000 (Tian, 2019, p.160). In the C-FL translation, the number of translations by the national key publishing houses was 7,958 between 1978 and 1989, and the annual number is more than 1,000 between 1985 and 1989 (Li, 2010, p.30).

### 3.4.4 Stage Four (1992-2010)

Stage Four continued the features of being FL-C dominated, flourishing in science and technology, humanities, literary works, and other fields, and presented a new trait of the booming translation market. Since the government's decision on the transition to socialist market economy in 1992, China had undergone the emergence and rapid development of translation as an industry. During 2000 and 2010, there were more than 30,000 companies providing language services (TAC, 2012). The FL-C translated works in natural sciences and technology reached over 24,000 and the number of large- and medium-scale projects increased drastically (Tian, 2019, p.210).

In the fourth high tide, translation grew rapidly. Despite a short stagnation in Stage Two, the number of translated works in the period exceeded that of any previous high tide, and definitely the direction, in general, is FL-C dominated.

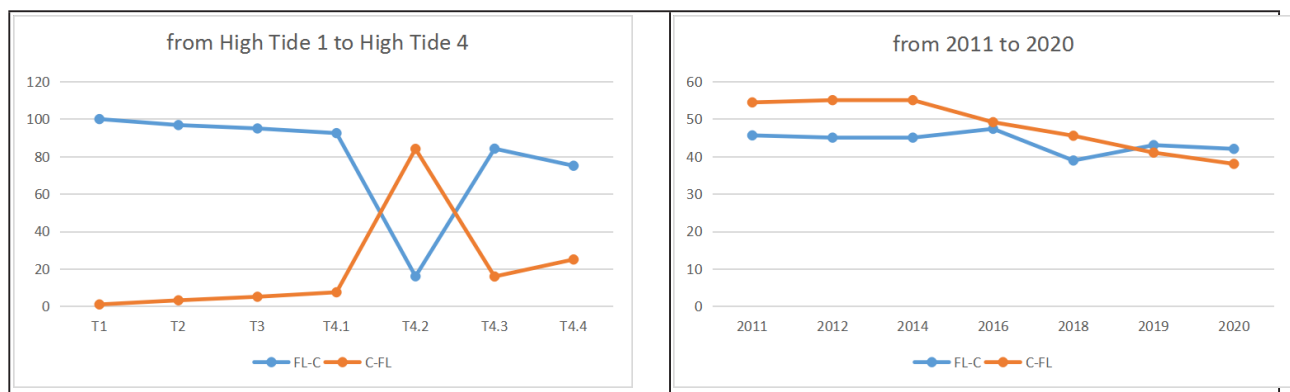
## 4. C-FL TRANSLATION ACTIVITIES IN CHINA FROM 2011-2020

The C-FL translation in the second decade of the 21st century under the BRI gained unprecedented development, underlined by a direction shift from the domination of the FL-C translation to the C-FL translation. The boom can be identifiable in three fields: the development of the translation industry, the implementation of state-supported publication projects, and the promotion of works by the main publishing houses.

### 4.1 The Translation Industry

The translation market in China took shape in the 1990s as the country started developing the socialist market economy. With the rocketing demand for international trade and for individual purposes such as going abroad for further education or sight-seeing, the number of enterprises providing the C-FL translation service ascended staggeringly. Yet, it is not until 2012 that a report-releasing mechanism was established. Reports on China's translation industry, or language service industry, are published every two years and then annually by TAC, the only national association for translating and interpreting and a member of International Federation of Translators (IFT). Working with other institutes, TAC released six reports on the translation industry from 2011-2020. For brevity, they are referred to as *2012 Report*, *2014 Report*, *2016 Report*, *2018 Report*, *2019 Report*, *2020 Report* and *Reports* as a whole below.

The Reports purvey comprehensive and authoritative data on the development of the C-FL translation. On the authority of those data and the above overview of China's translation activities since the first century, the general trend of the C-FL translation can be detected in Figure 1 after a comparison between the FL-C and the C-FL translation activities in China.



**Figure 1**  
**Proportions of the FL-C and C-FL translation activities in China**

\*Data are accessed from the above Overview and *2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020 Reports*.

Figure 1 consists of two charts. In the left chart, T1, T2, T3 indicate the three high tides, and the fourth high tide is represented by four sub-classified stages as T4.1,

T4.2, T4.3 and T4.4 in the above overview (henceforth Overview). The proportions in the left chart are either inferred or calculated in compliance with the description

and statistics in the Overview. For example, in High Tide 2, the number of the FL-C translation is 300 books (Ma, 1998, p.261), while that of the C-FL translation is unavailable except for the only description that the core classics of Confucianism *Four Books* and *Five Classics* were translated into Latin (Xie, 2009, p.228). Accordingly, it is estimated that the C-FL translation took about 3% of the total translation (i.e.,  $9/309 \approx 0.29$ ). The calculation becomes easier when statistics are available in the Overview and *Reports*. In the case of Stage One in High Tide 4 (1949-1966), the number of the FL-C translation is obtained by adding the individual numbers (see the Overview), namely, 16,000 works in natural sciences and technology, 5,356 literary works, 437 foreign literary classics, and 2,796 in other fields, which totals 24,589. Additionally the number of the C-FL translation is already provided in the Overview, that is, more than 2,000. Accordingly, the proportions of the FL-C and C-FL translations at the first stage of the fourth High Tide 4.1 are worked out as 92.5% and 7.5%, respectively, and the two percentages are presented in the left chart. In the right chart, accurate statistics on translation activities in the five years of 2011, 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020 are available in the *Reports*, namely, C-FL translation in the five years took up 54.4%, 49.1%, 45.5%, 41% and 38% respectively, and the FL-C translation constituted 45.6%, 47.4%, 38.9%, 43%, and 42% in succession<sup>1</sup>. The C-FL translations in 2012 and 2014 are generally reported as “above 50%” (see *Reports*), indicating the dominance of translation in that direction.

**Table 1**  
Main fields and target languages in translation industry from 2011-2020

Year	Fields	Target foreign languages
2011	IT, manufacturing industry	English, Japanese, Mongolian, Spanish, Russian
2015	legal documents, energy and chemical industry, mechanical manufacturing	English, Japanese, Mongolian, Spanish, Russian
2016	education and training, technology, legal documents, energy and chemical industry, mechanical manufacturing, construction, mining industry	English, Japanese, French, German, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Arabic
2018	IT, culture, entertainment, cross-border electronic commerce, tourism, legal documents, energy and chemical industry, mechanical manufacturing, construction, mining industry	English, Japanese, French, German, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic
2019	IT, education and training, government publicity materials, migration, tourism and transportation, mechanical manufacturing, cross-border electronic commerce, conference and exhibition, movie and television culture, intellectual property	English, French, Japanese, German, Russian, Spanish, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese, Belarusian, Polish, Mongolian
2020	IT, education and training, intellectual property, mechanical manufacturing, conference and exhibition, international projects, international publicity	English, Japanese, German, French, Russian, Italian, Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Thai, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Belarusian, Greek, Turkish, Polish, Mongolian, Burmese, Indonesian, Hindi, Tagalog, Malay

\*Data are accessed from 2012, 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020 Reports.

In Table 1, the main fields and target languages are sequentially arranged for their proportions in the *Reports*. The main fields consistently include industries closely related to people’s life and social production such as IT, education, and construction. Compared with the fields in the Overview of the previous four high tides which include religion, culture, natural sciences and technology,

Figure 1 presents a global picture of China’s translation activities throughout the history, and the remarkable shifted directionality from 2011-2020 with the rocketing development of the C-FL translation. In the left chart, the FL-C translation consistently overwhelmed the C-FL translation except in Stage Two of High Tide 4 (T4.2). Nevertheless, a further examination finds that the total number of FL-C translated books in T4.2 is smaller than 800, not even one third of Stage One, and the related fields are rather limited, indicating more of stagnation than normalized development. Thus, the inverse translation change is sporadic, and the general trend in the left chart is still FL-C dominated. Over centuries by 2010, the unmarked and dominant translation in China had been the FL-C translation.

In contrast, the right chart shows a remarkable consistent domination of the C-FL translation from 2011-2018, and in 2019 and 2020, the C-FL proportions were nearly the same as those of the FL-C. Moreover, according to the *Reports*, the gross value of translation industry kept increasing under BRI. For example, the gross value is 35.93 billion CNY in 2017 and 37.22 billion CNY in 2019, presenting a fast development of translation industry. In light of the above statistics, it seems safe to describe the general trend of translation from 2011-2020 as C-FL-dominated.

Apart from the increase in proportion, the C-FL translation during 2011-2020 under BRI also presented an expansion of the fields and target languages, as is shown in Table 1.

and literary works, the fields under BRI in the translation market are much more specific in that the industries in Table 1 can be regarded as subdivisions of culture and technology. For another, the table presents the remarkable increase in diversified languages of BRI countries such as Mongolian and Thai, and it also shows the unshakable status of English as lingua franca.

## 4.2 The State-Supported C-FL Publication Projects

Large-scale C-FL translation and publication projects, demanding comprehensive resources integration, are mainly organized by the state institutions. Below are six key projects implemented at the national and provincial levels, of which the first project is to be given a detailed description for its acknowledged influence in the academia of China and the other five projects are to be briefly introduced for their wide coverage of both popular

readings and academic works. The six projects may provide a picture of the C-FL translation and publication under the BRI context.

The C-FL Translation Project Supported by National Fund for Humanities and Social Sciences, approved by the National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences in 2010, aims at rendering important academic achievements in philosophy and social sciences of China to the world. The funding is based on the level of 100,000 CNY per 100,000 Chinese characters. Table 2 and Figure 2 present the implementation of the Project in the past decade.

**Table 2**  
**Target languages of the C-FL translation projects supported by National Fund for Humanities and Social Sciences (2011-2020)**

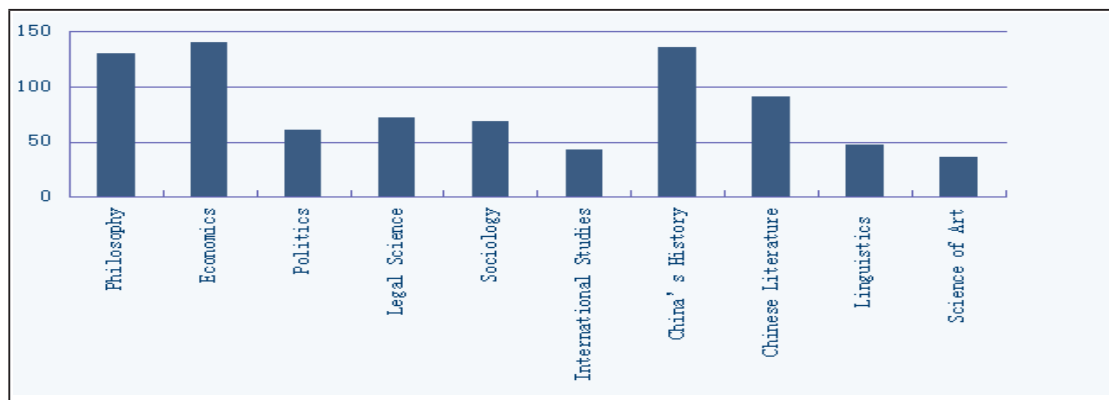
Year	Number of projects	Target languages and their numbers	
2011	40	English	1
2012	73	English, Russian, German, Japanese, Korean	5
2013	67	English, Russian, German, Japanese, Spanish, Korean	6
2014	86	English, Russian, German, Japanese, Korean, Arabic	6
2015	114	English, Russian, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, French, Arabic	8
2016	130	English, Russian, German, French, Japanese, Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Kazakh	9
2017	165	English, Russian, German, French, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, Turkish, Uzbek, Sinhalese, Mongolian, Bulgarian, Vietnamese	14
2018	185	English, Russian, German, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, Uzbek, Kirghiz, Polish, Hebrew, Kazakh	12
2019	154	English, Russian, German, French, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, Kirghiz, Arabic, Hungarian, Mongolian, Polish, Persian	13
2020	195	English, Russian, German, French, Japanese, Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Polish, Persian, Portuguese, Turkish, Uzbek, Vietnamese, Thai, Hindi	16
Total	1,222	English, Russian, German, French, Japanese, Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Kirghiz, Hungarian, Mongolian, Polish, Persian, Portuguese, Hebrew, Kazak, Turkish, Uzbek, Sinhalese, Bulgarian, Vietnamese, Thai, Hindi	23

\*Data are accessed from official website of National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences.

Table 2 indicates the increase in the number of projects and the target languages. The annual numbers of projects in the recent three years are all above 150, ten times that of 2010 when the Project was first implemented. The number of target languages also keeps burgeoning. In 2010 and 2011, English is the only target language of the funded projects. From 2012 to 2015, the target languages expanded to those of the developed countries, and since

2016, the languages of BRI countries have enriched the diversity of the target languages.

Apart from the total number of supported projects and target languages, the number of disciplines is also soaring. By 2020, a total of 25 disciplines have been covered in the project, including economics, sociology, demography, etc. The disciplines receiving the most fund are shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2**  
**Top 10 disciplines of the C-FL translation projects supported by National Fund for Humanities and Social Sciences (2011-2020)**

\*Data are accessed from official website of National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences.



Figure 2 showcases the top 10 disciplines in the funded projects from 2011 to 2020. Remarkably, philosophy, economics, and China's history are the most frequently funded disciplines. The ten disciplines can be grouped into three fields: economic construction (e.g., theoretical/applied economics), social governance (e.g., legal science, sociology), and Chinese culture (e.g., philosophy, China's history, Chinese literature, linguistics).

The second project, China Book International, is under the management of the State Council Information Office (SCIO) and the State Administration of Press Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT), introducing the books on Chinese culture to the world. By 2012, it had signed 341 funding agreements with 111 publishing houses in 29 countries (SCIO, 2013). Its upgraded version, China Masterwork International, is one of the key projects implementing "Chinese Culture Going Global". In 2012 alone, the project signed 23 funding agreements with 19 publishers in 10 countries (ibid, 2013). At present, the project continues exporting copyright to BRI countries, America and other countries, supporting the translation, publication, and promotion of quality series on Chinese culture.

The third and fourth projects are China Classics International (CCI) and Silk Road Books Project (SRBP), approved by the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee in 2009, fund Chinese academic masterpieces and famous translation series. CCI supports the translation and publication for developed countries in Europe and America, whereas SRBP encourages publishers to export copyright to and translate for the neighboring countries and BRI countries. Planned for 2014-2020, SRBP funds translations between Chinese and languages of countries along the Silk Road, international exhibitions, and the database of Silk Road publications. By 2018, the project had signed cooperation agreements with 36 countries and over 100 translations had been published (Lu, 2019, p.27).

The fifth project, Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture Translation and Communication Project, guided by the State Council in 2014, focuses on the key terms and concepts reflecting traditional Chinese culture and national way of thinking, and provides succinct, accurate interpretations and translations, so as to help the world learn about China. By 2018, the project has signed agreements on translating into more than 13 languages such as Albanian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Turkish, most of which are languages of BRI countries (Zhao, 2018).

The last project is Shanghai Translation Grant supported by Shanghai Municipal Press and Publication Bureau since 2015. The project differs from the above five projects in that it is implemented at the municipality level rather than the national level and it supports translators who are native speakers of the target language or who have lived or worked in the country of the target language

for a long time. The project invites foreign translators with competence and enthusiasm to join the C-FL translation surge. By 2019, a series of books have been translated into English, French, Kazakh, Bulgarian, and other languages (Shi, 2019).

### 4.3 The Main Publishing Houses for the C-FL Translation

A stable number of prestigious publishing houses are important for the C-FL translation. Since 2009, the number of publishers registered with the National Press and Publication Administration has remained steady around 550 each year. Major publishers for the C-FL translation include those directly under China Foreign Language Publishing Administration and the university presses.

China Foreign Language Publishing Administration, also called China International Publishing Group, is the largest state-owned institution for foreign-oriented publicity. Established in 1949, the Administration now runs seven publishers, five periodicals, and twenty-five cyber journals, mainly providing works in social sciences and humanities for a diversity of reading purposes, including academic research, economic activities, entertainment, learning Chinese as a foreign language and so on. Its publications include C-FL translation and works in foreign languages. The annual publication is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
Annual publication of China Foreign Language Publishing Administration (1952-2020)

Year	Number of publications	Number of languages
1952-1966	341	22
1967-1976	400	30+
1977-1989	663	20+
1990-2008	1100	20+
2009-2018	2000	30+
2019-2020	4000	40+

\*The symbol "+" means "over or above". Data on 1952-2008 are accessed from Li (2010, p.30); data on 2009-2020 from the official website of the Administration.

In Table 3, the annual publication of the Administration has multiplied since 1978. The estimated total number of publications between 2011 and 2020 is about 20,000. The number of target languages kept steady in general from 1952 to 2009, except the period between 1967 and 1976 when translating Chairman Mao Zedong's works into over 30 languages became a political task (Tian, 2019; Ma, 2006). Under the BRI, the number escalated remarkably from over 20 to over 40, and most of the new languages are spoken in the Belt and Road countries.

Meanwhile, university presses also provide quality C-FL translations. An exact example is Foreign Language



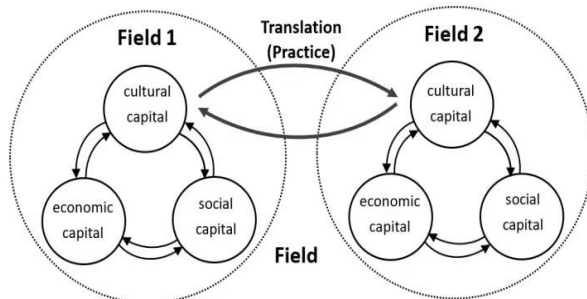
Teaching and Research Press, established in 1979, featuring works for language education purpose. While dominating China's domestic market of foreign language textbooks, the press also promotes excellent Chinese works to the world through the cooperation with Springer, Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press and other leading publishers.

On the basis of the examination of the language service industry, state-supported publication projects, and main publishing houses, it is ascertained that the C-FL translation under BRI presents four characteristics. First, C-FL translation activities got exponentially increased. Second, the proportion of the C-FL translation paralleled to or even exceeded that of FL-C translation consistently in general. Third, the language service industry highlighted the translation in technology and other economic activities, whereas the translation in social sciences and humanities was undertaken mainly by state-supported publication projects and key publishing houses. Fourth, the number of target languages ascended sharply, most of which are spoken in BRI countries.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The diachronic description of the translation activities in China, including both directions of FL-C and C-FL, indicates that translation is a social practice involving different resources of the social context. From this perspective, Pierre Bourdieu's theories on the field and capital, in particular on cultural capital, helps understand the causes behind the shift of translation directionality.

Informed by Bourdieu's formula of the field theory " $\{(habitus)(capital)\} + field = practice$ " (Bourdieu, 1984, p.101), we argue that translation can be regarded as the practice that different types of capital function in a specific field. Our proposed model in Figure 3 intends to interpret and analyze the occurrence of the shift to C-FL-dominated translation in China under BRI.



**Figure 3**  
**Functions of capital in translation**

The model manifests Bourdieu's field theory in two ways. First, as is pointed out by Bourdieu, capital presents itself in three types, namely, economic capital, cultural capital and social capital (1986, p.243), and they can convert from one type to another (ibid, p.252). Second,

the field is a social space with different types of capital functioning together (1983, p.164), and each field, though relatively independent, is open for interaction with other fields, thus forming a larger field. In this sense, translation, an interlingual and intercultural activity in essence, is a practice of the interaction of cultural capital convertible with economic capital and social capital between fields. Based on the model, the shift to C-FL-dominated translation can be attributed to China's strengths of cultural capital and its strategy of exporting cultural capital.

### 5.1 China's Strengths of Cultural Capital

Capital is accumulated labor which enables social agents to appropriate social energy in the form of reified and living labor (Bourdieu, 1986, p.241). Cultural capital can exist in the forms of cultural goods, such as pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments and machines (ibid, p.243). The shift of the directionality of translation in China is a marked trend in the translation history of China and can be regarded as the immediate outcome of China's capital strengths, the cultural capital in particular.

China has taken efforts to develop its cultural goods. For example, as Table 1 and Table 2 show, the number of target languages reached 23 in translation industry and state-funded academic translation projects from 2011-2020, and the number amounted to over 40 from 1952-2020 in the publication industry. This demonstrates China's achievements in language talent reserve, an accumulation in foreign language capital. Similarly, China's promising C-FL publication capacity is illustrated in Table 3. A surge of C-FL translation could not have been possible without these resources, which all contribute to the cultural capital and then yield cultural goods.

China's strengths of cultural capital also come from the conversion of economic capital and social capital. Economic capital is the capital that can be directly convertible to money, and social capital can be understood as the influence of an individual or a group in a community. Both types of capital can be seen in China's effort in the international cooperation. Since 1978, China has focused on economic development, and the need for advanced technology from developed countries boosted the FL-C translation during 1978-1991. Then, China established the socialist market economy in 1992, bringing about the emergence and boom of private enterprises and accordingly the translation market. After joining WTO in 2001, China accelerated its pace for economic development and its GDP outstripped that of Japan in 2011. The reports (see Table 1) on the language service industry show a distinct economic orientation in the C-FL translation service and China is playing an increasingly active role in the international economic cooperation, especially in exporting technology and copyright under BRI. Those cultural products are involved in economic activities and likely enrich the cultural capital. The

five major priorities defined by BRI, namely, policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and connecting people, are directly or indirectly intended for economic cooperation. This accounts for the large share of the C-FL translation on technology and other fields mentioned above and the increase in the number of target languages along BRI countries. In this way, China tries to exert its influence on the Belt and Road countries, thus increasing its social capital. Likewise, social capital can be converted into the cultural capital by cultural goods, namely, machines, manuals, books, etc.

Therefore, the convertibility of capital determines that in translation activity, the three types of capital are actually integrated and converted. It is the strengths of capital that provide the required conditions for the surge of C-FL translation.

## 5.2 China's Strategy of Exporting Cultural Capital

Since 2011, Chinese government has implemented the "Chinese Culture Going Global" as a strategy to proactively participate in regional and global governance, seek international understanding, and reduce frictions and resistance. The exported works representing Chinese culture, apart from those on the traditional culture, feature the ideological works in the new era.

Ideology forms an important part of a culture. A series of works on governance and politics under BRI in China got translated. As a rising power, China has drawn the world attention on its governance and the role in international affairs. The translation of works on Marxism-Leninism and Chinese leaders has been consistently undertaken by state institutions. For example, the two-volume *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* got translated in 2017 into 21 languages of 6.42 million copies and distributed to over 160 countries (Shi, 2017). Other works such as *Keywords to Understand China* and *Governance of China* have been translated into English, French, the languages of western countries, and the languages of BRI countries in particular.

A diversity of disciplines in humanities and social sciences can be found in either the C-FL publication projects or the language services industry. These translated works range from philosophy and cultural classics to geography and contemporary literary works, which is in essence to export the cultural capital to the world.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The shift of directionality in the development of translation in China from 2011-2020 showcases China's strengths in cultural capital and its strategy of exporting cultural capital to seek international understanding and cooperation. In today's world, solutions to economic and political problems may resort to cultural exchange. The shift of directionality of translation indicates that

China is mobilizing its different types of capital (the cultural capital in particular) to share its culture for the understanding of the world and acceptance for the extensive and multi-dimensional cooperation. Thus, the surge of translation from the mother tongue to other languages and the shift of directionality in translation cannot be treated as merely fortuitous considering many combined circumstances. The shift of directionality takes place in conformity with the realities of China and helps us revisit or reevaluate the traditional notion of referring to translation as rendering other languages into the mother tongue. The translation from the mother tongue should neither be labeled as "marked translation" nor "inverse translation". Instead, translation from mother tongue into other languages, especially into lingua franca, may become common with the intensification of international cooperation and communication, though much work should be done to make the once-marked translation less marked. Thus it is hoped that the article can shed some light on the study on translation directionality in China as well as international academia.

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#### (Endnotes)

- 1 The totals of C-FL and FL-C proportions in 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020 in Figure 1 did not make up 100%, for the Reports of the four years involve the third direction of translation, FL-FL. For example, the FL-FL proportion took up 20% in 2020.