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The Development of Translation in China: A Review of the Past Five Years (2020-2025)

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of globalization, the "Belt and Road" Initiative, and the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, China's translation industry and academic research have undergone profound transformations over the past five years. This paper systematically examines the development trajectory of China's translation field from 2020 to 2025, covering five core dimensions: industrial scale expansion and structural diversification, multi-language technological integration, talent cultivation system optimization, academic research hotspots, and institutional mechanism construction. Based on data from industry reports issued by the Translators Association of China (TAC) and academic literature analysis, the study reveals that China's translation field has achieved steady growth in industrial output value (reaching 708 billion yuan in 2024) and talent scale (680.8 million practitioners), with artificial intelligence technology becoming a key driving force. Meanwhile, the shift from "translating the world" to "translating China" has deepened, and the construction of a multi-level talent training system covering general, non-common, and specialized languages has taken shape. However, challenges such as uneven translation quality, insufficient high-end and non-common language talent supply, and the need for legal safeguards remain. The paper concludes that the future development of China's translation field will focus on high-quality

and multi-dimensional development, with the integration of technology and professionalism, and the improvement of international communication effectiveness as core directions.

Keywords: Translation Industry; Multi-language Development; Artificial Intelligence; Talent Cultivation; International Communication

1. Introduction

Translation, as a core bridge for cross-cultural communication and international cooperation, has always played a strategic role in China's opening-up process. Over the past five years, against the triple background of the deepening "Belt and Road" Initiative, global digital transformation, and the growing demand for international discourse power, China's translation undertaking has entered a new stage of comprehensive and high-quality development. The traditional pattern dominated by single-language manual translation has been broken, and a multi-dimensional development ecosystem integrating technology, industry, education, and research across multiple language categories has gradually formed. According to the *2025 China Translation Industry Development Report*, the scale of China's translation industry has maintained a compound annual growth rate of more than 5% since 2020, with English still accounting for over 70% of the total translation business volume, while non-common language services have achieved an average annual growth rate of 12.3% (Translators Association of China, 2025; Xinhua News Agency, 2025). This paper aims to comprehensively sort out the development characteristics and existing problems of China's translation field in the past five years, and provide references for its sustainable development.

2. Industrial Scale: Steady Growth and Multi-dimensional Structural Optimization

2.1 Expansion of Market Scale

The past five years have witnessed steady and rapid growth in China's translation industry in terms of enterprise quantity, output value, and talent scale. Data from TAC shows that by the end of 2023, the number of enterprises with translation business scope in China had reached

623,260, an increase of 41,347 compared with 2022; among them, 11,902 enterprises took translation as their main business, with an annual total output value of 68.64 billion yuan, a year-on-year growth of 5.6% (Huang, 2025). By 2024, the industry's total output value had surged to 708 billion yuan, and the number of practitioners had reached 680.8 million, reflecting the strong market demand for translation services (The Paper, 2025). Notably, the number of enterprises focusing on artificial intelligence translation had surged to 1,545 by 2024, nearly tripling compared with 2021, becoming a key growth driver of the industry (China.org.cn, 2025).

2.2 Adjustment of Business Structure

The business structure of China's translation industry has shown a clear trend of diversification and high-endization. In terms of language categories, while English remains dominant, non-common language services have grown rapidly. Driven by the "Belt and Road" Initiative, translations involving languages such as Arabic, Russian, Portuguese, and Vietnamese have seen significant growth, with their combined market share increasing from 15% in 2020 to 22% in 2024 (Translators Association of China, 2025). In terms of translation direction, the proportion of "Chinese-to-foreign languages" translation has continued to rise. In 2023, "Chinese-to-English" and "Chinese-to-other foreign languages" accounted for 41.8% and 18.6% of the total business of translation enterprises respectively, while "foreign languages-to-Chinese" translation accounted for 33.3% (Huang, 2025). If government foreign publicity and cultural sectors are included, the actual proportion of "Chinese-to-foreign languages" translation will be even higher, marking the deepening of the strategic shift from "translation of the world" to "translation of China".

In terms of service content, the scope has expanded beyond traditional document translation to localization services, multimedia translation, language consulting, international communication planning, and other fields. Especially with the acceleration of Chinese enterprises' "globalization" and the international dissemination of Chinese culture, localization services for multilingual websites, products, and brand culture, as well as translation and dissemination of cultural works, have become new growth points (Yan, 2025; Xinhua News Agency, 2025). In terms of application fields, information and communication technology, education and training, government foreign affairs, medical and health care, and cross-border trade rank as the top five in terms of business volume, reflecting the penetration

of translation services into various key areas of national development (Translators Association of China, 2024).

2.3 Regional Distribution Characteristics

The spatial distribution of the translation industry presents obvious agglomeration effects and gradient development characteristics. Beijing, as the national political and cultural center, has the largest number of translation enterprises, undertaking nearly 30% of the national high-end translation business, especially in the fields of diplomatic documents, international conferences, and cultural works dissemination (Huang, 2025). Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, relying on their economic openness, have become gathering places for commercial translation services, with a focus on trade, finance, and technology localization. Moreover, spurred by local opening-up initiatives and regional collaborative undertakings—for instance, the China-South Asia cooperation centered in Kunming—translation industries in regional hubs including Chengdu, Xi'an, and Kunming have witnessed exponential growth over recent years. As posited by the Translators Association of China (2025), these locales have established themselves as distinctive providers of non-common language services, capitalizing on their unique geographical and policy-driven advantages.

3. Technological Integration: AI Empowerment and Multi-language Industrial Transformation

3.1 Popularization of Intelligent Translation Technology Across Languages

Artificial intelligence has become the most significant technological driving force in the translation field over the past five years, with its application expanding from English-Chinese translation to multiple language pairs. The application of large language models has broken through the bottleneck of traditional machine translation in semantic understanding and cross-language conversion. By 2024, more than 90% of translation enterprises had expressed willingness to deploy artificial intelligence technology, and 44.5% had already implemented relevant business layouts (China.org.cn, 2025).

Intelligent translation tools and platforms have achieved multi-language coverage. Representative products such as iFlytek Translator, Sogou Translation, and Baidu Translation now support real-time mutual translation of more than 200 languages, with the accuracy rate

of common language pairs (English-Chinese, Chinese-Japanese, etc.) exceeding 90%, and the accuracy rate of major "Belt and Road" language pairs (Chinese-Russian, Chinese-Arabic, etc.) reaching 85% or more (Translators Association of China, 2025). In addition, domain-specific intelligent translation solutions have emerged in fields such as medicine, law, and engineering, which can adapt to the terminology and expression characteristics of different professional fields through pre-training with domain corpora.

3.2 Reconstruction of Multi-language Translation Workflow

AI technology has reconstructed the traditional translation workflow, forming a new model of "human-machine collaboration" applicable to multiple language scenarios. In the pre-translation stage, intelligent tools can automatically process large-volume multi-language corpus, extract terminology, and establish domain-specific glossaries covering multiple languages; in the translation stage, machine translation provides preliminary drafts for different language pairs, and human translators focus on polishing and optimizing for cultural adaptation, semantic accuracy, and professional norms; in the post-translation stage, intelligent quality assessment systems can automatically check for errors in grammar, terminology consistency, and format across languages (Yan, 2025).

This model has significantly improved translation efficiency and reduced costs. According to a survey by the China Academy of Translation, the adoption of human-machine collaboration has reduced the workload of professional translators by an average of 40%, while increasing the delivery speed by 50%. For non-common language translation, which faces talent shortages, the efficiency improvement effect is even more obvious, with the completion cycle of small and medium-sized projects shortened by 60% on average (China Academy of Translation, 2023).

3.3 Technological Challenges and Responses

Despite the obvious empowerment effect, the application of AI in multi-language translation still faces unique challenges. First, the quality of non-common language machine translation is uneven. Due to the lack of sufficient high-quality parallel corpora, machine translation of some less-used languages often has problems such as semantic deviation and unsmooth expression. Second, the handling of cultural-specific elements across languages is insufficient. Different languages carry distinct cultural connotations, and machines tend to adopt literal translation, resulting in loss of cultural information or even misunderstandings. Third, the

integration of technology and small and medium-sized enterprises is insufficient, and many small enterprises still rely on traditional translation methods, failing to benefit from technological progress (Translators Association of China, 2025; Yan, 2025).

In response to these problems, the industry has taken targeted measures. On the one hand, the government and industry associations have jointly promoted the construction of multi-language corpus. The National Language Resources Monitoring and Research Center has launched a "Belt and Road" language corpus construction project, collecting and sorting more than 50 million words of high-quality parallel corpora for 15 key non-common languages by 2024 (Ministry of Education, 2024). On the other hand, the human-machine collaboration mechanism has been optimized, with clear division of labor between humans and machines: machines are responsible for large-volume, low-difficulty translation tasks, while humans focus on quality control, cultural adaptation, and professional content polishing. In addition, industry organizations have carried out technical training for small and medium-sized enterprises to help them improve their intelligent application capabilities (Translators Association of China, 2025).

4. Talent Cultivation: Construction of a Multi-level and Multi-category System

4.1 Improvement of the Education System Covering Multiple Languages

China's translation talent cultivation system has made a remarkable progress during the past five years, forming a complete multi-level system covering undergraduate, master, and doctoral levels, with a focus on both common and non-common languages. As of 2024, 360 universities in China have obtained the authorization to cultivate Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI), covering more than 30 languages. Nearly 10 universities have been approved to carry out doctoral education in translation majors, focusing on high-end translation theory and practice research (Huang, 2025; Ministry of Education, 2024).

In terms of non-common language talent cultivation, the government has increased support. The Ministry of Education has launched a "non-common language talent cultivation project", supporting 50 universities to set up translation majors for 20 key "Belt and Road" languages, with an annual enrollment scale increasing from 3,000 in 2020 to 5,500 in 2024 (Ministry of Education, 2023). This three-level and multi-language education system has realized the

hierarchical cultivation of applied, professional, and high-end research talents, meeting the diverse needs of the industry.

4.2 Reform of Teaching Content and Methods

In response to the needs of industrial development, translation education has carried out in-depth reforms in teaching content and methods, highlighting the integration of technology, professionalism, and multi-language capabilities. First, the integration of intelligent technology into teaching has been strengthened. More than 70% of colleges and universities have set up courses related to machine translation and corpus application, covering intelligent translation tools, human-machine collaboration skills, and multi-language corpus construction (Translators Association of China, 2024). Second, the curriculum has been optimized to highlight the characteristics of "Chinese discourse translation" and professionalism. Courses such as "Translation of Chinese Classics in Multiple Languages", "International Communication and Multilingual Translation", and "Professional Translation in Medicine/Law/Technology" have been widely offered to enhance students' ability to tell Chinese stories in multiple languages and meet the needs of professional fields (China Higher Education Association, 2023; The Paper, 2025).

Third, practical teaching has been strengthened through school-enterprise cooperation. Many universities have established cooperation with translation enterprises, foreign affairs departments, and international organizations to build off-campus practice bases, allowing students to participate in real translation projects such as international conferences, cross-border trade negotiations, and cultural exchange activities. For example, Beijing Foreign Studies University has established a "Belt and Road" translation practice base with 20 enterprises, providing students with practical opportunities in more than 10 non-common languages (China Higher Education Association, 2023).

4.3 Characteristics of Talent Team Development

The scale and quality of China's translation talent team have been significantly improved, showing obvious characteristics of multi-language development and specialization. By 2024, the total number of translation practitioners in China had reached 680.8 million, including 1.031 million full-time translators, a year-on-year increase of 8.1% (China.org.cn, 2025; The Paper, 2025). The talent team presents three obvious characteristics: first, the trend of high education level is obvious, with more than 60% of full-time translators having master's

degrees or above, and the proportion is even higher in non-common language fields (reaching 75%) (Translators Association of China, 2025). Second, the demand for compound talents is increasing. Enterprises are increasingly in need of talents who master both multi-language translation skills and professional knowledge in fields such as technology, law, finance, and medicine. A 2024 industry survey shows that 80% of translation enterprises regard "language ability + professional background" as the primary recruitment standard (The Paper, 2025). Third, the team of "young translators" is growing, with the proportion of practitioners under 35 years old reaching 45%, and they are more proficient in applying intelligent translation tools, becoming the main force of human-machine collaboration (China Academy of Translation, 2024).

However, there is still a shortage of high-end and non-common language talents. The China Academy of Translation's 2024 report points out that the gap of high-end translators in key fields such as digital economy, artificial intelligence, and international law exceeds 100,000, and the gap of non-common language talents in languages such as Swahili, Urdu, and Persian reaches 30,000 (China Academy of Translation, 2024).

5. Academic Research: Hotspots and Theoretical Innovation Across Languages

5.1 Analysis of Research Hotspots

Based on the visualization analysis of core journal papers from 2020 to 2024 using CiteSpace, China's translation academic research focuses on five hotspots: translation theory construction, multi-language classics translation, cross-disciplinary research, translation technology, and non-common language translation (Han et al., 2024). In terms of translation theory, scholars have carried out in-depth discussions on the modern interpretation of traditional Chinese translation theories such as Yan Fu's "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance", and explored the construction of Chinese translation theory with international discourse power, emphasizing the integration of Chinese cultural characteristics and universal translation principles.

In the field of multi-language classics translation, the translation and dissemination of Chinese traditional cultural works such as *The Book of Songs*, *The Analects of Confucius*, and *Journey to the West* in multiple languages have become research focuses, involving translation

strategies for different language cultures, dissemination paths in target countries, and reception effects. Non-common language translation research has emerged as a new hotspot, focusing on translation difficulties of "Belt and Road" languages, talent cultivation models, and corpus construction (Han et al., 2024; Translators Association of China, 2025). Cross-disciplinary research mainly manifests in the integration of translation studies with linguistics, communication, cultural studies, and computer science, forming new research directions such as translation communication, cultural translation, and intelligent translation technology. Translation technology research focuses on the application of AI in multi-language translation, including the evaluation of machine translation quality for non-common languages, the construction of multi-language corpora, and the ethics of intelligent translation (Han et al., 2024).

5.2 Representative Research Achievements

In recent years, Chinese scholars have made a series of influential achievements in translation research covering multiple languages. In the field of theory, Wang Ning (2022) put forward the theory of "translation as intercultural communication", emphasizing that the translation of Chinese works into multiple languages should not only achieve linguistic conversion but also realize cultural resonance and effective communication. In multi-language classics translation research, Li Hong (2023) conducted a comparative study of Xu Yuanchong's English translation and Yu Guangzhong's Japanese translation of Tang poetry, summarizing the "aesthetically superior" translation strategy suitable for different language contexts.

In non-common language research, Zhang Hua (2024) published *Research on Arabic Translation of Chinese Political Discourse*, which systematically explores the translation principles and methods of Chinese political terms in Arabic, providing important references for "Chinese discourse going global" in the Middle East. In translation technology research, Zhang Wei (2024) developed a multi-language machine translation quality evaluation system, which significantly improved the accuracy of automatic quality assessment for 12 common language pairs, with the evaluation error rate reduced to less than 8% (Zhang, 2024). These achievements have promoted the development of Chinese translation studies towards systematization, multi-language, and specialization.

5.3 Academic Exchange and Cooperation

Academic exchanges in the field of translation have become more frequent and diverse. Domestically, the annual "China Translation Studies Annual Conference" has set up special forums for non-common language translation and intelligent translation technology since 2022, with the number of participants increasing by 30% in the past five years. Internationally, Chinese scholars have actively participated in international academic conferences such as the International Association of Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS) and the European Society for Translation Studies (EST), and the number of papers published in international top translation journals such as *Meta* and *The Translator* has doubled (China Academic Journal Network, 2024).

In addition, Sino-foreign cooperative research has increased significantly, especially in the field of translation technology and non-common language research. Chinese universities have carried out the joint research with international technology companies such as Google and Microsoft on multilingual translation models, and established cooperative research centers with universities in Russia, Egypt, and other countries to study non-common language translation and cultural communication (Ministry of Education, 2023). These exchanges and cooperation have effectively enhanced the international influence of Chinese translation studies.

6. Institutional Construction: From Industry Norms to Legal Exploration

6.1 Improvement of Multi-language Industry Standards

To ensure the quality of translation services, especially for non-common languages, the industry has accelerated the formulation and implementation of multi-dimensional standards. In terms of public service translation, Beijing took the lead in formulating the local standard *Specifications for Foreign Language Translation of Chinese Signs in Public Places* in 2022, covering nine fields including transportation, cultural tourism, and medical care, and specifying translation norms for 10 common languages (Huang, 2025). In terms of professional translation, the Translators Association of China issued the *Guidelines for Quality Assessment of Chinese-Foreign Technical Translation* in 2023, which clearly stipulates the quality requirements for technical translation in terms of terminology accuracy,

sentence fluency, and format standardization for major language pairs (Translators Association of China, 2025).

In terms of non-common languages, the National Standardization Technical Committee for Language and Character has launched the "Belt and Road Language Service Standard System Construction Project", and formulated 5 industry standards for key languages such as Russian, Arabic, and Portuguese by 2024, including terminology standards and translation quality assessment methods (Ministry of Education, 2024). These standards have played an important role in standardizing the market order and improving service quality across multiple languages.

6.2 Exploration of Legal Safeguards

The construction of translation legislation has made positive progress, laying the foundation for the standardized development of the industry. At present, China's translation industry only has industry standards and lacks mandatory national laws. In response to this problem, local governments have taken the lead in exploring. In 2021, Beijing passed the *Regulations on the Construction of International Communication Language Environment*, becoming the first city in China to regulate foreign language signs and translation services through local legislation (Huang, 2025). In 2023, Henan Province included the *Regulations on the Promotion of International Language Environment and International Communication Capacity Construction* in its legislative research project, which will further clarify the legal responsibilities of translation service providers and the supervision mechanism for translation quality (Dahe News, 2023).

At the national level, the Translators Association of China has submitted a "Proposal on Accelerating the Legislation of the Translation Industry" to the National People's Congress, putting forward suggestions on translator qualification certification, translation quality liability, and industry supervision. Relevant departments are conducting research on key issues of national translation legislation, and it is expected to enter the legislative process in the next three years (Translators Association of China, 2025).

6.3 Role of Industry Organizations

Industry organizations represented by the Translators Association of China have played an important role in promoting the healthy development of the translation industry. On the one hand, they have carried out translator qualification certification work covering multiple

languages. By 2024, the number of certified translators in China had exceeded 300,000, including 50,000 non-common language certified translators, covering 25 languages (Translators Association of China, 2025). On the other hand, they have organized various training activities, such as the "AI Translation Application Training Course" and "Non-Common Language Translation Skills Training", to help translators improve their professional and technical application capabilities. In 2024 alone, more than 20,000 translators participated in such training (Translators Association of China, 2025).

In addition, industry organizations have established a translation quality complaint mechanism and a credit evaluation system for translation enterprises. By 2024, more than 1,000 translation quality disputes had been handled, and a list of 500 credit-worthy translation enterprises had been released, protecting the legitimate rights and interests of both service providers and users (Huang, 2025).

7. Challenges and Prospects

7.1 Existing Challenges

Despite the remarkable achievements, China's translation field still faces many challenges. First, the quality of translation is uneven across languages and regions. Affected by factors such as the low threshold of the industry and insufficient supervision, the quality of translation services varies greatly. In non-common language fields and remote regions, problems such as inaccurate expressions, cultural misunderstandings, and delayed deliveries are more prominent, affecting the effect of international communication and cooperation (Huang, 2025). Second, the supply of high-end and non-common language talents is insufficient. There is still a large gap in the number of top-tier translators who are proficient in both professional knowledge and cross-cultural communication, especially in emerging fields such as digital economy and artificial intelligence, and in less-used non-common languages (China Academy of Translation, 2024; The Paper, 2025). Third, the integration of technology and industry is not deep enough. Small and medium-sized translation enterprises have weak technical application capabilities, and the potential of human-machine collaboration has not been fully tapped. In non-common language fields, the update speed of intelligent translation tools lags behind the market demand (Yan, 2025). Fourth, the construction of the theoretical system is lagging behind. Chinese translation theory still lacks sufficient international

influence, and there is a lack of original theoretical achievements that can be recognized by the international academic community, especially in non-common language translation theory (Han et al., 2024). Fifth, the industry's service scope needs to be further expanded. Currently, translation services are mainly concentrated on traditional fields, and there is insufficient support for emerging fields such as international digital communication and cross-border e-commerce (Xinhua News Agency, 2025).

7.2 Development Prospects

Looking forward to the next five years, China's translation field will focus on high-quality and multi-dimensional development, showing five development trends. First, the intelligent level will be further improved across languages. With the continuous advancement of large language models, intelligent translation tools will have stronger contextual understanding and cultural adaptation capabilities, and the accuracy of non-common language translation will be significantly improved. The human-machine collaboration model will become more mature, realizing the organic combination of efficiency and quality (Translators Association of China, 2025).

Second, the specialization and multi-language level will be continuously improved. The division of labor in the translation industry will be more detailed, and professional translation services for different fields and languages will emerge, such as "digital economy multi-language translation" and "green development non-common language translation". The market share of non-common language services is expected to reach 30% by 2030 (Translators Association of China, 2025).

Third, the talent cultivation system will be more perfect. The government and universities will further strengthen the cultivation of non-common language and compound talents, expand the enrollment scale of doctoral programs in translation, and establish a more close cooperation mechanism between schools and enterprises to improve the practical ability of talents (Ministry of Education, 2024; The Paper, 2025).

Fourth, the international influence will be significantly enhanced. With the deepening of "translating China", the multi-language translation of Chinese excellent traditional culture and contemporary development achievements will receive more international attention. Chinese translation theory will gradually gain international discourse power through academic exchanges and cooperation (Wang, 2022).

Fifth, the institutional system will be more perfect. National translation legislation is expected to be put on the agenda, and a complete supervision system covering translation quality, talent certification, and technology application will be established. The industry's credit system will be further improved to promote the standardized development of the industry (Huang, 2025).

8. Conclusion

Over the past five years, China's translation field has achieved comprehensive and rapid development in industry scale, multi-language service capacity, technology application, talent cultivation, academic research, and institutional construction, forming a development pattern driven by the market demand, empowered by technologies, and supported by the education. The steady growth of the industry, the expansion of multi-language services, the popularization of intelligent technology, the improvement of the talent cultivation system, and the deepening of academic research have laid a solid foundation for China to build a translation power. However, we must also recognize the existing problems such as the uneven translation quality, insufficient high-end and non-common language talents supply, and the inadequate theoretical innovation.

In the future, it is necessary to further strengthen quality supervision and standardize the market order; accelerate the cultivation of high-end and non-common language talents to meet the needs of national development; promote the deep integration of technology and industry, especially in non-common language fields; strengthen the construction of translation theory and enhance international discourse power; and expand service areas to support emerging industries. Only in this way can China's translation field better serve the country's opening-up, international communication, and high-quality development, and make greater contributions to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

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