

Rethinking the Significance of Ma Jianzhong's *Proposal on Establishing a Translation Academy*: From the Perspective of ESP Translation Teaching in the Twenty-First Century



Ping Peng and Yuxiao Liu

Abstract This chapter aims to make a detailed analysis of Ma Jianzhong's ideas of translation in his article *Proposal on Establishing a Translation Academy* 拟设翻译书院议 written in 1894 to find out how it is instructive to today's ESP translation. Through a detailed study of Ma's opinion on what is a good translation (善译), what kind of translators were urgently needed by the country at that time and how such translators should be trained, and in particular the proper courses as well as the standard qualifications of teachers, the chapter finds that all his thoughts about translation teaching and translator cultivation were oriented towards the practical needs of the country and society and that his ideas about translation, including needs analysis, translation of materials of practical genres, and cultivation of comprehensive qualifications of translators, are of enlightening significance in the twenty-first century to the ESP translation teaching of China, in which the needs of both students and society should be taken into consideration, so that it can be decided what courses should be provided and what qualifications ESP translation teachers are supposed to have.

Keywords Ma Jianzhong · *Proposal on Establishing a Translation Academy* · ESP translation teaching

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1 Introduction

Ma Jianzhong 马建忠 (1845–1900) was a scholar and diplomat in the late Qing Dynasty. He was also a patriot, demonstrated in his concern about the country's destiny when China was suffering from the invasion by the Western powers and from the lagging behind of its technology. He wrote an article entitled *Nishe Fanyi Shuyuan Yi* 拟设翻译书院议 (*Proposal on Establishing a Translation Academy*) to call for the training of translators, who would then be able to translate Western documents of various topics and genres into Chinese so that China could develop its technology and industry and thus help itself out of the crisis of being invaded by learning from the West. His suggestions about translator training and education in *Proposal on Establishing a Translation Academy* are still thought-provoking today when ESP translation teaching is highly valued because of the need of the country's development in science, technology and economy, since we can boldly say that today's translation is not only translation of literature but also translation of different fields, such as economy, business, science and technology, politics, and diplomacy, which indicates that today's translation teaching is more of ESP translation.

There are only a few studies of Ma Jianzhong's theories on translation. They focus on his opinion on "good translation" (Gu, 2007), historical background for his translation theories (Wang, 2007), and cultural interpretation of his thoughts on translation (Xin & Ma, 2011). There has been no study of Ma's translation theories from the perspective of ESP. Therefore, this chapter will make a detailed study of Ma Jianzhong's ideas of translation in his article *Proposal on Establishing a Translation Academy*, trying to find out what ideas on translation teaching he illustrated in that article is instructive to today's ESP translation and how they are related to ESP translation. It is hoped that the study will be of some reference to ESP translation in the twenty-first century, when ESP translation has become a major part of translation teaching.

2 A Brief Introduction to Ma Jianzhong and His Experience as a Scholar, Translator, and Patriot

In 1845, Ma Jianzhong was born in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province. As he grew up, thanks to the education he received and his diligence, he became good at both classical Chinese and more than one foreign language, for instance, French and Latin, which enabled him to later become a scholar in both classical Chinese learning and new learning from the West. He was sent by the Qing Court in 1876 to study international laws in France, where he also worked as the translator/interpreter for Guo Songtao 郭嵩焘 (1818–1891), the Chinese minister to France at that time. During his 3-year stay there, he travelled many parts of Europe, visiting factories, schools, and military camps as well as families, scholars, and statesmen. All the visits broadened his horizon and helped him to realize the gap between China and the West. He

even realized that the West could get on with China in equality, which showed that he had thrown away China's centralism and the overconfidence prevailing among the Chinese at that time. In this respect, his idea was similar to that of Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857), who also held that the Chinese must learn merits from the foreign countries in the preface to his *Haiguo Tuzhi* 海国图志 (*An Illustrated Gazette of Overseas States*). Ma then proposed the ways of developing the country in his articles or letters to the Qing Government. He also criticized the focus of the Yangwu Pai 洋务派 (the group of officials advocating self-strengthening) on weapon manufacturing, which, in his eyes, should not be taken as the only way of building up China's self-reliance. This manifested his long-term view in helping the country out of the crisis and then rejuvenating it.

In 1880, Ma returned to Tianjin after his study in France, where, at the request of Li Hongzhang 李鸿章 (1823–1901), he threw himself into the *Yangwu Yundong* (Self-strengthening Movement in 1860s–1890s)¹ and showed his talent in developing industries. Later he acted as a diplomat for a few years and showed his talent in diplomacy, but he could not get rid of his ideas of developing manufacturing and the navy of China with loans from other countries, so he offered his suggestions on the setting up of factories and mines, ship manufacturing, railways building, and business and trade development. He even worked as Executive Officer of Shanghai Textile Bureau.

His talent was also shown in his understanding of the Chinese linguistics. In 1898, his *Mashi Wentong* 马氏文通 (*Ma's Study of Chinese Grammar*) was published as the first grammar book of Chinese, laying the foundation for later studies of the Chinese grammar with reference to the Latin grammar system. His work *Shikezhai Jiyan Jixing* 适可斋记言记行 (*Shike Study's Record of Words and Acts*) embodies his ideas of developing trade and new forms of industry and agriculture and obtaining the taxation autonomy, showing his anxiety about how to develop the country and make it prosperous.

Ma's contribution to China's technical and industrial development and diplomacy as well as to the Chinese grammar showed that he was a very important figure in China's diplomacy and reform and in Chinese linguistics. Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873–1929) pointed out in the preface to *Shike Study's Record of Words and Acts*, "Those who talked about technical Westernization years earlier had failed to realize what Ma said; What Ma has proposed is what the rulers of China will not change in the coming scores of years. If what he has said could have been adopted before, how could China be like this today? If it could be adopted today, why should we worry about China in the future?" This showed that how Liang valued Ma's ideas, which are still valued by some of today's scholars, as Xin and Ma (2011, p. 115) point out, "Ma Jianzhong was a pioneer in seeking truth from the West in order to make China prosperous. He lived in the circle of *Yangwu Pai*, but his thought was as high as that

¹ *Yangwu Yundong* (洋务运动) has been translated into Westernization Movement by some translators, but I think it is not so correct. *Yangwu Yundong* in the mid-nineteenth century did not mean total Westernization, but the introduction of advanced technologies from the West.

of the *Weixin Pai* 维新派 (the Reformists in 1890s) and he was one of the most progressive social reformists at that time.”

It was out of Ma’s concern about the crisis that China was faced with at that time that he wrote in 1894 the article entitled *Proposal on Establishing a Translation Academy*, in which he illustrated the importance of translation and proposed the standard for a “good translation.” By “good translation,” he meant, “Before translation, the translator should read the source text again and again to grasp the ideas and style, and then try to convey the ideas and style faithfully and fluently, so that the reader can benefit from the translation as if they were reading the source text” (Ma, 2009, p. 192). The concept “good translation” involves the whole process of translation, from the preparation to the strategy and then to the acceptance of the readers. Thus, Ma Jianzhong is still famous today in the translation circles of China for his idea of “good translation,” for this was not only the standard for assessing the quality of a translation but also the objective of translator training at that time. In the article, he pointed out the deficiency in the translation act by Jiangnan Manufacturing Bureau (江南制造总局) set up by Yangwu Pai. More importantly, he suggested what translators were urgently needed by the country and how such translators should be trained. Today’s study of Ma’s translation theory focuses on this “good translation” as the standard, and more details about the translator training are ignored, but in today’s view, Ma’s thought illustrated in *Proposal on Establishing a Translation Academy* is of thought-provoking in ESP translation teaching, including needs analysis, advocacy of translating materials of practical genres and emphasis on cultivation of comprehensive qualifications of translators, which will be illustrated in detail in the following part.

3 Significance of Ma Jianzhong’s *Proposal on Establishing a Translation Academy* to ESP Translation Teaching in the Twenty-First Century

The popularity of ESP teaching, especially ESP translation teaching, reminds us of the article *Proposal on Establishing a Translation Academy* that Ma Jianzhong wrote more than 100 years ago, because what he mentioned in that article can be taken as pioneer views in ESP translation teaching when we take a close look at it or make a study of it, especially his emphasis on needs analysis, translation of materials of practical genres and cultivation of comprehensive qualifications of translators.

3.1 A Brief Introduction to ESP Development and Characteristics

ESP, the short form for English for Specific Purposes, refers to English teaching related to a profession, a discipline or any other specific purpose. The learner's interest and learning purpose are highly valued in ESP.

ESP emerged as a branch of English teaching in the 1960s as science and technology was witnessing rapid development, with its focus on science and technology, so it was regarded as identical with EST (English for Science and Technology) (Hutchinson & Waters, 2002, p. 7). Later, with English used in more and more areas in the world, ESP was no longer limited to science and technology, but expanded to other areas like business, law, medical science, and publishing, since English learners would use the language in different fields afterwards. So far, according to Hutchinson and Waters (2002, pp. 9–14), ESP has undergone and is undergoing five stages of development, namely register analysis, rhetorical or discourse analysis, target situation analysis, skills and strategies, and a learning-based approach. This categorization is based on teaching content of ESP. If categorized by time of research, it has undergone three stages, namely 1962–1981 (from text-based counts to “rhetorical devices”), 1980–1990 (broadening the scope/introducing central concepts) and 1990–2011 (new international journals, genre, and corpus studies take center stage) (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013, pp. 7–18).

Generally speaking, ESP has its own characteristics. First, it is aimed to meet specific needs of learners and the function for which English is required, i.e. the need of both the learner and society. Thus the syllabus is designed accordingly, and it may be language-centered, skill-centered, or learning-centered. Second, ESP has its own methodology and activities of discipline it serves. It combines subject matter and English teaching, so the materials used for teaching do not only contain English language points but also knowledge of different fields, such as science, medicine, trade, and law. Third, it is centered on the language appropriation in the specific field, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre. All these are closely related to the context and function of the text, especially in the workplace, just as M. Marra points out, “Understanding the role and practice of English in the workplace is a key concern in English for specific purposes (ESP)” (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013, p. 176).

With the development of China's economy and the increase of its national strength, ESP has become an important part of English teaching throughout the country. Especially, to meet the specific need of different sectors for talents with high English proficiency, universities have put or are putting more emphasis on ESP. Thus, business English, legal English, tourism English, medical science English, science and technology English, and so on have been put into the curriculum of English teaching in universities. Translation, one of the core subjects for English majors, is no longer mostly centered on literature translation as was the case in the past, especially before the end of the twentieth century, but involves more materials concerning different fields. Besides, the subject is aimed to improve the

learner's skill of translating materials of different fields and of different genres, so we can take today's translation teaching as one of the subdisciplines of ESP teaching as it has the characteristics of ESP mentioned above.

3.2 *Views Concerning ESP Translation Teaching in Ma's Proposal on Establishing a Translation Academy and Their Significance to the ESP Translation Teaching in the Twenty-First Century*

3.2.1 Needs Analysis in Translator Training

One of the focuses of ESP is the needs analysis, which is a distinct and necessary phase in planning ESP educational programs. As for needs analysis, Hutchinson and Waters (2002, pp. 55–56) point out that we have to know the need determined by the demands of the target situation and what the learner knows already, so that you can then decide which of the necessities of the learner lacks as well as what the learner's needs are. Needs analysis is quite obvious in Ma's article *Proposal on Establishing a Translation Academy* when he talked about translator training.

First, Ma realized the necessity and urgency in training translators by analyzing the situation. In other words, he realized the national and social need to produce translators. According to Ma, it was urgent to produce translators to deal with the situation facing China at that time. He said,

It is a pressing demand to translate from other languages, so more translators should be produced right now. I am getting old, and in my life, I have witnessed foreign invasion and civil conflicts, and the country's southeast's falling to enemy occupation, but I've got no opportunity to take the imperial examinations. (Ma, 2009, p. 193)

From what he said, we know how he was wishing China to produce more translators, who could translate other languages into Chinese, though he himself had not got the opportunity. He also mentioned, "When I look around, I find how hard the times is, so I would like to try all my best to list the difficulties of translating as well as the purpose and curriculum of the translation academy to be established in the following part. Hopefully there are officials who will agree to my proposals and put some of them into action, and if so, it will be good to China" (Ma, 2009, p. 193). Ma's realization of the necessity and urgency in training translators was similar to that of some other scholars and officials at that time, including Lin Zexu 林则徐 (1785–1850), Wei Yuan, Feng Guifen 冯桂芬 (1809–1874), and Guo Songtao. Among them, Wei put forward the idea of "learn merits from the foreign countries to conquer them" in the preface to his *An Illustrated Gazette of Overseas States*,⁷ as has been mentioned above, and Feng regarded translation as "the most important administrative matter" (Chen, 2000, p. 76). Obviously, in Ma's opinion, the very first motivation for translation should be to resist the bully and occupation of foreign powers and to defeat them (Wang, 2007, pp. 72–73).

Today, China is trying to realize its goals of different stages and the Chinese Dream, and translation plays an important role in realizing the goals and the Dream. Against this backdrop, we should analyze what kind of needs of the present times for translators. For example, the country is in need of more Chinese–English translators to introduce the Chinese culture and Chinese experience in the past 40 years of reform to the world and to help more Chinese enterprises and other organizations to “go out”; meanwhile, China still needs translators to translate materials about science and technology and economy to facilitate its development in these fields. Therefore, our ESP translation teaching should be aimed to cultivate such translators to meet the national and social needs.

Second, Ma realized what to be translated by analyzing the situation. Since China was in a disadvantageous situation in his time, he categorized the materials that should be translated into Chinese into the following: (1) diplomatic documents, including letters, treaties, diplomatic conference minutes; (2) administrative, military, legal, and financial reference books as well as those necessary for diplomacy; (3) required readings for foreign students, covering history, mathematics, geometry, physics, biology, and so on (Ma, 2009, pp. 194–195). Ma listed these materials to be translated because he thought that China, first, should maintain good relationship with other countries, so it should learn something from them; second, the country should establish and develop its political, economic, financial, and legal systems by referring to these systems in other countries, since it did not yet have the complete systems; and it should cultivate more talents with basic knowledge of different fields, so that they could help make the country better after their graduation. Ma was anxious that some books which should have been translated were not completely translated yet or even were mistranslated.

As is said in the previous part, more aspects of China's long-lasting culture should be introduced to the world today, and its experience in the development of economy, politics, science and technology, diplomacy, and so on as well as its experience of the reform of its economy and politics should be introduced to other countries, who are also eager to know about all those aspects to develop their own. Therefore, in today's ESP translation teaching, materials about the Chinese culture, economy, politics, science and technology, diplomacy, and so on should be adopted for the students' translation practice, so that they will be qualified translators in these fields in their future career, thus contributing to the development of and communication between China and the world.

Third, Ma realized the needs of the translation learners. In view of the shortage of translators and the qualifications of the students in the academy to be established, Ma gave his opinions based on the students' needs. Since translation involves at least two languages, he suggested that the students should improve both their Chinese and foreign language(s). According to him, the students should first improve their proficiency in Chinese and then learn foreign languages, so a supervisor who was good at both Chinese and English and who would also act as a foreign language teacher, and four or five people who were good at classical Chinese should be employed to do proofreading for translated works and act as teachers of Chinese (Ma, 2009, p. 194).

Ma also categorized the students to be enrolled into two kinds and suggested different curriculum for them. For those who were already proficient in English and French and who had the potential above the average, foreign language reading courses should be offered in accordance with their foreign language level, besides readings of Chinese classics from the Tang and Song dynasties. Those who were intelligent by natural endowments were supposed to read English and French materials while being asked to learn Latin and Greek (Ma, 2009, pp. 193–194). This suggestion of different courses was obvious based on the students' potential needs.

From Ma's suggestions, we conclude that today, the students who are learning translation should, of course, be proficient in both English and Chinese. But for a long time, English majors or translation majors as well as their teachers have been putting more emphasis on their English proficiency, ignoring their proficiency in Chinese. This has resulted in their failure to understand some Chinese expressions and thus their mis-conveying of the meaning in Chinese–English translating and their poor expression in English–Chinese translating. Moreover, with the rise and the coming rejuvenation of China, translation learners in the country should be proficient in classical Chinese, since much of Chinese culture is contained in and conveyed by classical Chinese. Besides, some materials to be translated may contain more than one foreign language in some fields. For example, in Switzerland, a country with four working languages, namely French, German, Italian, and Romansh, some materials about Swiss tourism contain English and German, sometimes some paragraphs followed by one or two paragraphs in German or French. Therefore, ESP translation teaching should involve not only English but also another foreign language. In this regard, Ma was a visionary man in language and translation teaching.

3.2.2 Advocacy of Translation of Materials of Practical Genres

Ma's view about the objective of the translation academy was very clear. In his opinion, to establish the translation academy meant to produce qualified translators for China helping itself out of the crisis of being bullied and invaded before catching up with the powers in the world. Ma (1968, p. 214) once said, "I think today's China's is seriously bullied by some other countries." Therefore, he proposed three categories of materials to be translated, as mentioned above. These three types of materials could also be taken as the teaching materials for the students in the translation academy. Since they involved diplomacy, politics, administration, nature, society, humanities, history, military affairs, law, economy, and the subjects taught in the West, we realize that he was suggesting translation of materials of practical genres and teaching translation of such materials. Especially, the textbooks that should be translated were about arithmetic, thermology, optics, acoustics, electrolgy, zoology, botany, sphragistics, physics, and study of principles and rules (Ma, 2009, p. 195). Actually, all the content and materials were urgently needed by China, due to the urgency at that time for the country to adopt technology to develop its industry and administrative, political, and legal mechanisms and systems to reform

its own mechanisms and systems so that it can develop in an all-round way to get rid of the invasion by other countries. This was a visionary idea at that time, which, to some degree, embodied not only the thought held by *Yangwu Pai* but also the thought held by the *Weixin Pai*, since the two schools had different opinions on the materials to be translated. The former advocated introducing Western technology, such as military technology and ship manufacturing technology because their purpose was to use this technology to enhance the national strength. Their opinion on selection of source texts to be translated was characterized by pragmatism guided by the principle of “Chinese Learning as the Fundamental Structure, Western Learning for Practical Use.” The latter, represented by Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858–1927), Liang Qichao, and Yan Fu 严复 (1854–1921), realized that introduction of Western technology and natural science had failed to help China safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

They began to criticize and correct the technical westernization advocates' translation, so they no longer focused on translation of technical and scientific documents, but of Western systems, i.e. superstructure and ideology. During 1896–1910, foreign history, laws, politics, economics, sociology, logic, etc. were translated into Chinese. (Peng, 2010, p. 323)

According to Ma, the two groups of students to be enrolled by the Academy would be able to do translation after 1 or 2 years of study, and their translations would be published on newspapers. That was also a practical idea, which suggested that learning and translation should be connected with the industry and society; thus what to be learned and what to be needed could facilitate each other. This idea is enlightening in two ways. First, this is something we should adopt today in translation teaching, because when we connect the students' translation with publication or application, or in other words, if their translation can be published or applied in society, the students will be highly motivated and they will try their best to improve their translation quality. Second, ESP translation teachers should bring the latest materials about different fields into class, so that the students will find them interesting and practical and thus show interest in translating.

3.2.3 Emphasis on the Cultivation of Comprehensive Qualifications of Translators

Ma emphasized the cultivation of comprehensive qualifications of translators, which is apparent in the curriculum he suggested. It is generally believed that anybody who is proficient in the source language and the target language can be a translator. But translators themselves do not think so since different translations involve different fields. As Lü Shuxiang pointed out, to translate well, the translator should be equipped with *zaxue* (general knowledge of different fields) (Lü, 2009, pp. 593–597). This means that a translator should equip him/herself with some general knowledge, so that he/she can do translation of different fields well. At least, he/she can make the right choice of expressions in the field that the translation involves. Ma, based on his own experience of learning both at home and abroad, and of his translating,

suggested that the students in the Academy should learn foreign languages (English, French, Latin, and Greek) and Chinese (especially classical Chinese, classical Chinese, in particular, adopted in the essays from pre-Qin period to the Tang and Song dynasties), and should know something about science, politics, and law. Since Greek and Latin played an important role in the origin of Western civilization, to know better about the West and to do better translation from Western languages into Chinese, the students had to master Greek and Latin. What is noteworthy is that Ma did not directly mention science, politics, and law when talking about what was important to the students of two groups, but he talked about his own experience in the previous part, which could be taken as a hint for the necessity of knowing about other fields.

Not only comprehensive knowledge of the students was suggested by Ma, but also their competence of combining what they learned with practice. The comprehensive qualifications of the translation learners in Ma's opinion can be illustrated in the following chart (Fig. 1):

This chart can be referred to in today's ESP translation. The twenty-first century is witnessing the rapid development of technology and economy as well as the unprecedented cooperation among countries. For the purpose of the development and cooperation of the world, translators, of course, should be proficient in both the foreign language(s) and the native language and acquire knowledge of different fields. But it is observed in translation classes that some Chinese students are not so proficient in modern Chinese, not to mention classical. For example, some students' writing in Chinese is not so fluent when they translate from English into Chinese and some have a wrong understanding of Chinese sentences and thus twist the meaning in Chinese-English translation. Reading more classical Chinese can help the students to better master the skills of wording and phrasing, so to add some classical Chinese courses to their curriculum or to let them read some classical Chinese

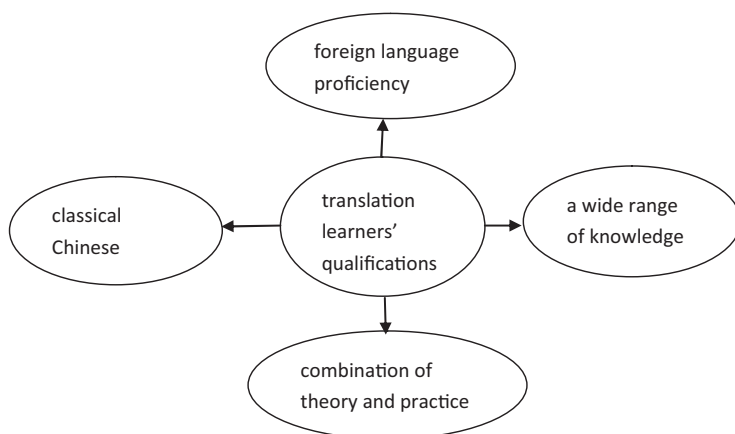


Fig. 1 Comprehensive qualifications of the translation learners in Ma's opinion

in translation class can help them to improve their proficiency in Chinese, to improve their comprehension competence and thus to improve their translation ability.

3.2.4 Qualifications of Translation Teachers

In his *Proposal on Establishing a Translation Academy*, Ma also suggested the employment of two groups of teachers: one proficient in both Chinese and English and the other proficient in classical diction. The first group could act as foreign language teachers and the second as teachers of Chinese and proofreaders of the students' translation (Ma, 2009, p. 194).

But, today, we have only translation teachers from China, and some of them may not be quite proficient in English though they are English majors, because after all, they are not English speakers; and some may not be quite proficient even in modern Chinese, not to mention classical Chinese, though they are native speakers, because they have not attached so much importance to Chinese in their previous education. Some even do not have any educational background in translation but have majored in linguistics or literature (Bao, 2009). That's why sometimes even translation teachers cannot tell what is Chinglish in Chinese-English translation. Presumably, they are less likely to become good translation teachers. Therefore, it is suggested that Chinese translation teachers improve their English and Chinese (modern and classical) by reading more or by accepting some further training in both languages. It is also suggested that foreign teachers be employed as immediate staff to work together with Chinese teachers as writing teachers, or even translation teachers if they are proficient in Chinese, so that they can help each other to improve their foreign languages, and writing and translating skills by holding teaching discussions, in which Chinese teachers, in particular, can improve their foreign language proficiency through their communication with foreign teachers. When their foreign language proficiency is improved with the help of their foreign colleagues, they can be better translation teachers. Or, foreign teachers can be asked to do some proofreading of the students' translation assignments since in most universities there are some foreign teachers.

Although Ma failed to mention other qualifications of translation teachers, from his idea of the students' qualifications, we realize that translation teachers should also be equipped with a wide range of knowledge, since what they teach in translation involves different fields, especially ESP translating. They should acquire the knowledge in both English and Chinese to meet the demand of their profession.

4 Conclusion

Ma put forward his proposal on establishing a translation academy to meet the demand of the country at a certain time, but from the detailed analysis that has been made above, it can be concluded that there is no denying what he mentioned is still

provoking today. In particular, it is still of significance in ESP translation teaching of the twenty-first century, including his ideas about needs analysis (covering national and social needs and the learners' needs) in translator training, choice of materials of practical genres to be used in translation teaching, cultivation of comprehensive qualifications of translation learners, and qualifications of translation teachers. Admittedly, he failed to talk directly about the importance of the students' and teachers' acquirement of a wide range of knowledge, which was indicated in his constructive ideas. From what he discussed, it can be concluded that today, in the fast-growing economy and society, more attention should be paid to the translation learners' needs and the society's needs, the learners should be provided with materials of practical genres for their practice of translation, and both the translation learners and teachers should be equipped with a wide range of knowledge, so that ESP translation teaching will better meet the demand of today, when ESP translation is the major part of translation teaching.

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Chinese Translation Activities from the Perspective of Ethics (2008), and *Translation between English and Chinese in Tourism* (2010) as well as over 40 papers on translation studies, cultural studies, and ESP. She has also translated more than ten books like *China Internet Development Report 2017* (Springer, 2019), *World Internet Development Report 2017* (Springer, 2019), and *The General History of China Vol. V & VI* (2014) into English and *Visual Arts in the Twentieth Century* into Chinese.