Visual Analysis of Translation-Related Thematic Projects of the National Social Science Fund of China (2002–2022) Based on Knowledge Map

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The projects of The National Social Science Fund of China indicate the government's policy support and address contemporary social concerns in philosophical research. Based on translation-related thematic projects, this article visually analyses the characteristics and themes of translation projects from 2002 to 2022 to reveal the change in national policy support for translation research. In doing so, the article shows that the number of translation-related projects funded by the National Social Science Fund of China has seen a gradual increase over the years, coupled with that of specific policy support for young scholars. Consequently, the study centers on visual knowledge map of translation-related thematic projects along with trends, disciplines, languages, regional distribution and research institutes. Moreover, by means of statistical data and analytical insights on the highest frequency words, this paper delineates the present-day direction of translation studies. Ultimately, this paper presents pertinent recommendations for the implementation of translation-related thematic projects of the National Social Science Fund of China.

Keywords: visual analysis, translation-related projects, the National Social Science Fund of China, knowledge map

The National Social Science Fund is the most prominent and influential research project in the field of humanities and social sciences in China (Geng et al., 2007). As the only national-level philosophy and social science research project, it provides funding to researchers who possess exceptional research conditions and research strength. The project aims to promote the development of frontier disciplines in the field of philosophy and social science. To ensure the scientific and innovative nature of the subject, the project is reviewed anonymously by experts. The national social science fund project reflects the latest trends in discipline research, and its strong representativeness and guidance make it highly authoritative (Zhang & Jin, 2012). The history of the National Social Science Fund could date back to the 1990s, and it covers 23 disciplines and three separate projects of education, art, and military. The wide scope, high specifications, and great

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difficulty make the project theme of social science in China a realistic demand of the state for social science research to serve social development and the dynamic trend of discipline development. Therefore, the project plays a crucial role in leading and guiding the trend of domestic research. This paper provides a comprehensive examination of Translation-related Thematic Projects of the National Social Science Fund of China from 2002–2022. The analysis delves deeply into the current state and trajectory of translation research in China, from both a theoretical and practical perspective. Furthermore, the paper puts forth a number of innovative concepts and recommendations for the advancement of translation research. Specifically, it aims to offer theoretical guidance and topic selection strategies for those seeking to apply for the National Social Science Fund. By doing so, it hopes to increase the likelihood of successful project application.

At present, the data analysis and research of the National Social Science Fund show that the disciplines mainly focus on social science (Ma, 2016), sports science (Li & Li, 2018; Zhang, 2022), theology (Pei, 2019), and library and information science (Gao, 2020). Currently, the research results of translation-related thematic projects focus on the

level of theoretical construction (Huang & Huang, 2017; Ma & Mu, 2019; Nian, 2013; Wang & Fan, 2020; Zhang, 2018). However, there is a dearth of studies that approach this topic from a practical perspective that would be useful for guiding project applications. To address this issue, an analysis of recently established translation projects has been conducted. The purpose of this analysis is to provide applicants with valuable insights that they can use to make informed decisions about topic selection. This research is expected to fill the gap that exists in the literature by presenting practical and applicable recommendations for translation project applicants. Consequently, this paper intends to employ a blend of qualitative and quantitative techniques to scrutinize visual knowledge map of translation-related thematic projects of the National Social Science Fund of China within the last two decades. The study aims to provide practical recommendations to the project candidates by comprehensively grasping the key terms and the tendencies of the project. This paper presents three inquiries in light of the aforementioned research objectives.

1. Is the quantity of projects associated with the translation of the National Social Science Fund on a consistent rise?
2. Is there a discernible pattern of diversification in terms of the research institutes, disciplines, translation languages, and regional allocation of the National Social Science Fund.
3. What are the distinctive features of the high-frequency words used in the translation projects of the National Social Science Fund?

Methodology

Data Collection

The data in this study were obtained from the National Social Science Fund project database and the National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences. The data included essential project details such as funding year, research topic, project leader, project organization, province, project category, discipline and translation language. In line with the research requirements, the project data were carefully analyzed and cross-checked to ensure that all translation-related thematic projects were included in the statistics. As a result, a total of 918 accurate and reliable sets of project information were collected and compiled into an Excel-based document, formally known as the "Corpus of Translation-related

Thematic Projects."

Methods and Tools

This paper incorporates both quantitative and qualitative research analysis through the use of the Python editing tool with its extended natural language toolkit, as well as Excel software. The aforementioned tools were instrumental in generating tables and histograms through data collection, algae removal, word segmentation, retrieval and statistics. Such methods increase the relevance and comparability of search results and data, and ultimately help to compare and analyses the projects established in the field of translation topics over the last two decades.

Data Analysis

Initially, the NSF project database was analyzed and the project information from 2002 to 2022 was entered into the database in batches. The fund project number was removed and the project year column was added to enhance the searchability of information in the future. Furthermore, the major projects, western projects, post-funded projects and foreign translation projects of National Office for Philosophy and Social Science were eliminated. It is worth noting that major and post-funded projects were not included in data statistics due to their small number, and there were years with no projects. Similarly, western projects, which are special programs for border provinces such as Xinjiang and Xizang, were not incorporated into the data statistics. Translation projects of Chinese humanities and social sciences, which mainly focus on textual translations, were also excluded from the data statistics due to their academic theoretical research. Finally, a database of youth projects and annual project approval information from 2002 to 2022 was created using Excel's automatic selection function.

Secondly, the project information in Chinese characters cannot be retrieved due to the absence of spaces between them. To accurately segment the Chinese text into words or characters, a word segmentation module in Python is utilized to create a specialized dictionary. The resulting word segmentation data is manually reviewed to ensure accuracy and efficacy in generating statistical data. An Excel table is created with words sorted by frequency of occurrence, serving as a "word corpus." High-frequency words lacking statistical significance are placed in a stop list to prevent double counting.

Furthermore, statistics on the total number of projects per

year, project categories, project disciplines, and research language are generated using Excel's statistical function. The generated histogram provides intuitive data support for research status and trend analysis.

Results

Number of Projects

After performing denoising, deduplication, and sorting

processes, a corpus database pertaining to translation topics was created. This database contains a total of 918 projects, all of which were downloaded from the National Office for Philosophy and Social Science Fund Project Database. Figure 1 illustrates the trend of translation-related thematic projects funded by the National Social Science Fund of China.

The information illustrated in Figure 1 highlights a notable pattern in the quantity of translation ventures spanning from 2002 to 2019. Throughout the years of 2002 to 2007, the yearly number of translation-related thematic projects stayed
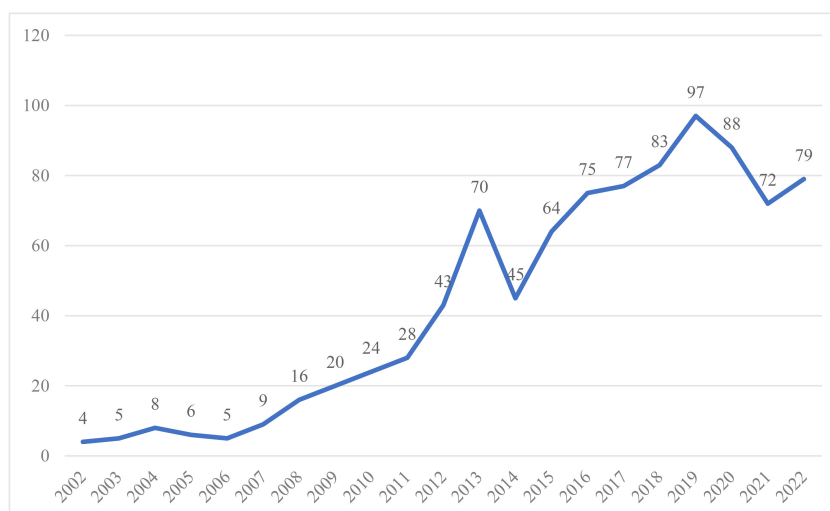

Figure 1. The Number of Trend of Translation-Related Thematic Projects Supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (2002–2022)
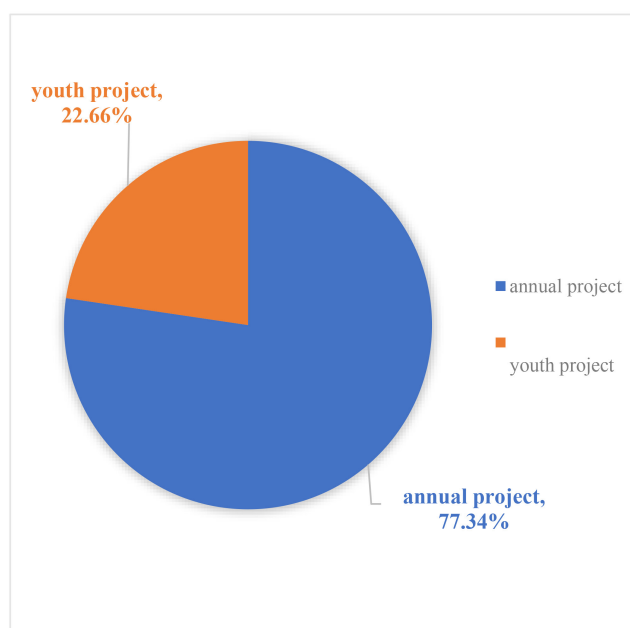

Figure 2. Percentage of Youth Projects and Annual Projects of Translation-Related Thematic Projects Supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (2002–2022)

in single digits. It can be ascribed to the limited attention and resources assigned to translation by domestic policy. It wasn't until 2006 that several universities began providing translation as an undergraduate discipline, and it was in 2007 that Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) was approved by Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. Consequently, the period between 2008 and 2013 witnessed a significant increase in translation-related thematic projects, primarily due to the introduction of translation majors in domestic universities and supportive policies from national education and administrative departments. From 2014 to 2019, the number of translation projects reached another peak after a period of decline, which was due to the substantial influence of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road on translation studies. Although the number of translation-related thematic projects has slightly decreased since 2020, it is still displaying an upward trend.

The number of projects funded by the National Social Science Fund of China can serve as a useful barometer for measuring the progress of a discipline or field. In the case of China's translation discipline and field, the respective rate of development is closely linked to discipline development, policy orientation, and scientific and technological advancements. The translation major's evolution from its inception to its present-day integrated structure of undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs has laid a strong foundation for the development of the translation discipline. This, in turn, has created more opportunities for the pursuit of research projects within the field of translation. Furthermore, the emphasis on translation and traditional culture is closely tied to Chinese policies. Given the implementation of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, interactions between Chinese and Western civilizations, as well as increased economic and trade activities, have become more frequent. In this context, the role of translation as an intermediary has become more pronounced. Lastly, the advancements in science and technology have provided translation research with greater technical support and research perspectives, which have been pivotal to the development of intelligent translation research.

Translation is now recognized as a crucial component of Chinese and Western civilization, as well as economic and trade exchanges. It has resulted in an increased awareness and focus on the subject, leading to a sustained growth in the number of translation-related thematic projects. Over the past two decades, translation has had a profound impact on humanistic study. As an academic term, the diverse research perspectives surrounding translation have garnered significant attention from both scholars and government policies.

In Figure 2, a comparison is presented between the number of youth projects and annual projects that are related to translation topics. Upon analyzing the annual project data, it has been determined that the number of projects executed on an annual basis has been on a consistent upward trend over the past two decades. In fact, the total number of annual projects is 710, which accounts for 77.34% of the total number of translation-related thematic projects. These statistics reveal that annual projects also hold great significance for translation-related thematic projects. The annual project provides a fair academic competition platform for scientific research, where all eligible applicants can apply and compete equitably.

Although the number of youth projects is lower than that of annual projects, a highly approval rate arises due to the limitation to the age of 35 for the young applicants. Over the past 20 years, the number of youth projects has shown a negative trend, with the total number 208 of youth projects and making up 22.66% of the entirety of the projects, still representing the largest growth in the National Social Science Fund of China. The National Social Science Fund's increasing support for young research teams is evident from the above statement. The basic principles of prioritizing and supporting young researchers as outlined in the Project Management of The National Social Science Fund have been effectively implemented (Wu 2015). This also indicates a positive trend of rejuvenation in China's translation team, with an increasing number of young scholars demonstrating their potential to undertake large-scale scientific research projects.

Disciplines of Projects

The application guide of the National Social Science Fund of China encompasses a diverse range of 24 subject categories spanning various disciplines such as philosophy, Chinese history, linguistics, Chinese literature, foreign literature, journalism and communication. To gain insights into the distribution of projects across different disciplines in the past two decades, this paper employs the automatic screening feature of Excel to tally the number of projects in each category. The resulting data is then utilized to create a histogram that effectively visualizes the distribution of projects across different disciplines, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3 illustrates that the disciplines that are associated with translation-related thematic projects funded by the National Social Science Fund of China include linguistics,
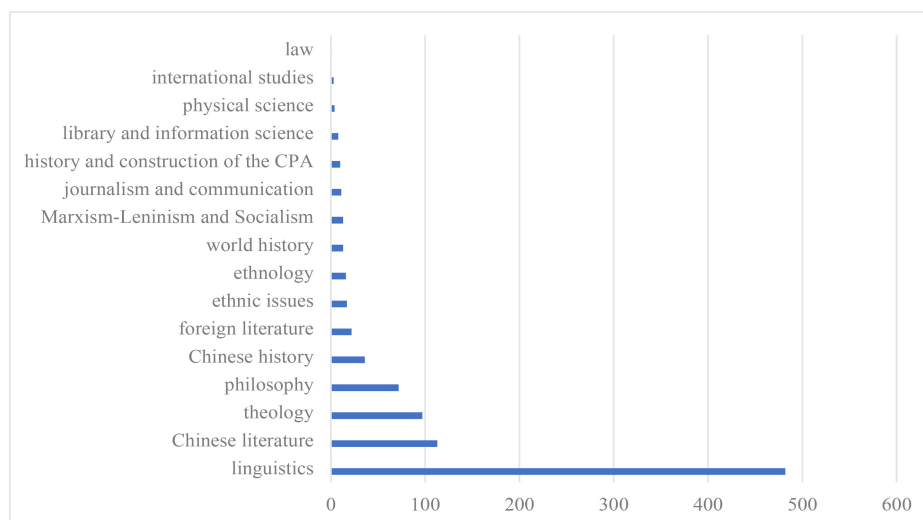
Figure 3. Disciplines of Translation-Related Thematic Projects Supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (2002–2022)
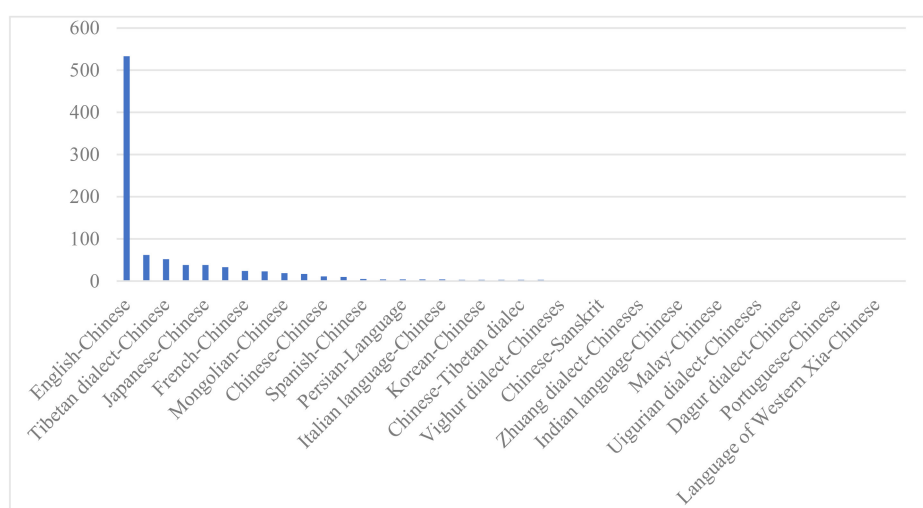

Figure 4. Statistical Distribution of SL and TL of Translation-Related Thematic Projects Supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (2002–2022)

Chinese literature, theology, philosophy, Chinese history, and foreign literature. The total number of translation-related thematic projects in these five disciplines was 822, accounting for 89.54% of the total number of projects, thereby making them the five areas most closely related to translation. Notably, the language discipline had the highest number of translation projects, which accounted for 52.5% of the total number of projects. This is primarily because research in translation studies is fundamentally linked to linguistics, and the current trend of research still predominantly relies on language as a carrier. Moreover, the numerous translation projects that are distributed across various disciplines, such

as Chinese literature, religion, and philosophy, underscore the interdisciplinary nature of translation studies. Thus, applicants are encouraged to consider applying for projects from other disciplines to avoid intense competition in the field of translation studies.

It is noteworthy that the preservation and continuation of China's rich traditional culture has resulted in a heightened focus on the study of ethnic classics. This focus is particularly evident in the translation of religious works (Liu & Wang 2016). Furthermore, the influence of Western translation activities has had a profound impact on modern Chinese literature. This has resulted in an increase in research attention

towards translation studies in the field of Chinese literature, as evidenced by the number of projects focused on this area of study (Liu & Zhu 2018).

Languages of Projects

Examining and evaluating various languages is a crucial component of translation-related thematic projects funded by the National Social Science Fund of China. As evidenced by Figure 4, a comprehensive investigation spanning the years 2002 to 2022 encompassed 918 projects, covering a total of 23 distinct languages, and it is important to note that Chinese includes Xizang dialect, Language of Western Xia, Yi dialect, Vighur dialect, Zhuang dialect, Naxi dialect, Buyi dialect, Dagur dialect and Uigurian dialect. Notably, the preponderance of these initiatives, comprising 64.81% of the overall number of approved projects, pertained to translation-related thematic projects, with a total of 595 projects. Additionally, 38 projects were dedicated to Russian and Japanese translation-related thematic projects.

English holds a significant position in China's education system and is considered as one of the most widely spoken languages in the world (Chen, 2006; Crystal, 2003). Therefore, it dominates an absolute advantage in the number of translation-related thematic projects funded by the National Social Science Fund of China. On the other hand, Russian and Japanese are the official languages of China's two important neighboring countries, and have a long history of mutual exchange and development (Feng, 2003). As a result, both languages become important languages for translation research in China beyond English. German and French, the languages of developed countries in Western Europe, have a wide range of applications worldwide. Due to the historical friendship and exchanges between China, Germany, and France, the number of studies on German-Chinese and French-Chinese related translation-related thematic projects has also increased. The research on German and French languages has increased from 33 and 25, respectively, indicating the diverse nature of language studies in the field of translation in China.

The projects related to translation-related theme are mostly carried out in languages other than English. These languages include Russian, Japanese, Sanskrit, Korean, Thai, Malay, and Vietnamese. It reflects the influence of geopolitics in the field of translation studies. The study of language translation in China's neighboring countries indicates the prosperous cultural and economic exchange between China and its neighboring countries since ancient times (Evans, 2000;

Liu & Yang, 2023). It is noteworthy that the relatively high proportion of translation studies in Chinese and Sanskrit indicates that China has been deeply influenced by the translation of Buddhist classics since ancient times (Meng & Zhang, 2023). This has had a profound impact on Chinese literature and lifestyle. Additionally, a relatively large number of translation projects between minority languages and Chinese in China signifies China's emphasis on the protection and research of minority languages and cultural classics. It is also an important demonstration of the cultural diversity of China (Fan, 2006).

Regional Distribution of Projects

To some extent, the productivity and level of development of social science in different regions can be inferred from the regional distribution of translation-related thematic projects supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (2002–2022) (Fan & Feng, 2006). In order to shed light on this issue, the present study has undertaken the task of classifying and counting the project provinces that relate to translation topics. The resulting data, which is displayed in Figure 5, provides an overview of the number of projects in different provinces.

The distribution of translation-related projects across the 31 provinces (mainly continental regions) in China over the past two decades has shown a clear regional concentration with a gradual decline from east to west. Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong Province, and Jiangsu Province have emerged as the top four in terms of the number of such projects, with Beijing leading the way by initiating 130 translation-related topics, accounting for 14.16% of the total number of translation-related thematic projects. The total number of projects in Beijing is 1.5 times that of Shanghai, which ranks second, and 2.16 times that of Jiangsu Province, which comes fourth. Interestingly, some provinces in the western region, such as Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, and Yunnan Province, have a considerably lower number of projects with only 27 in total. Even Heilongjiang Province has zero projects, which highlights the need for and correctness of the western project of the National Social Science Fund. On the other hand, some provinces not covered in the western region, such as Shaanxi Province, Hainan Province, Jiangxi Province, and Hebei Province, also have a less satisfactory number of translation-related projects. Therefore, it is recommended that relevant state departments should take necessary steps to increase
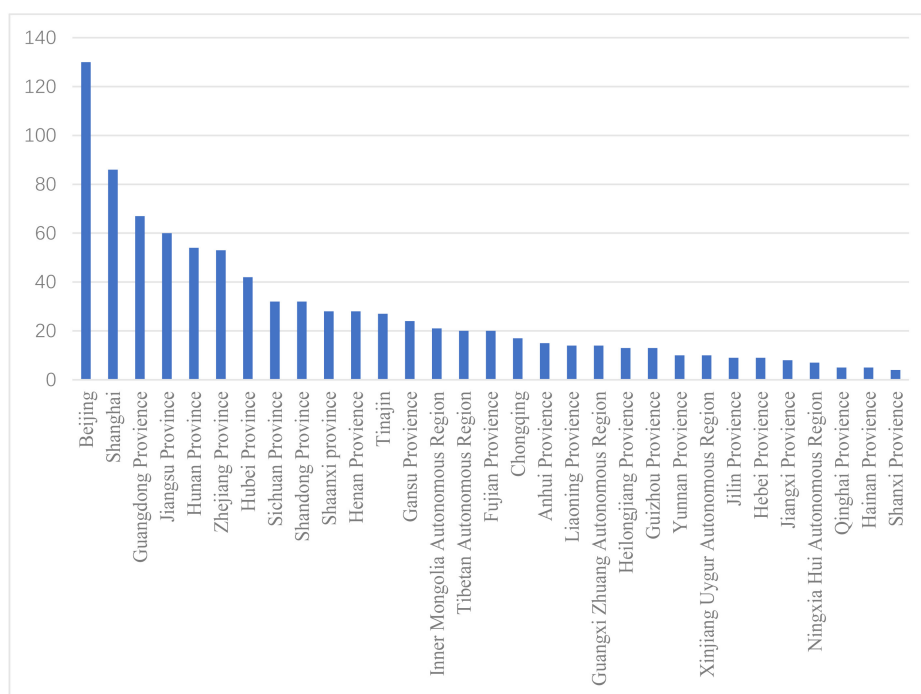
Figure 5. Regional Distribution of Translation-Related Thematic Projects Supported by the
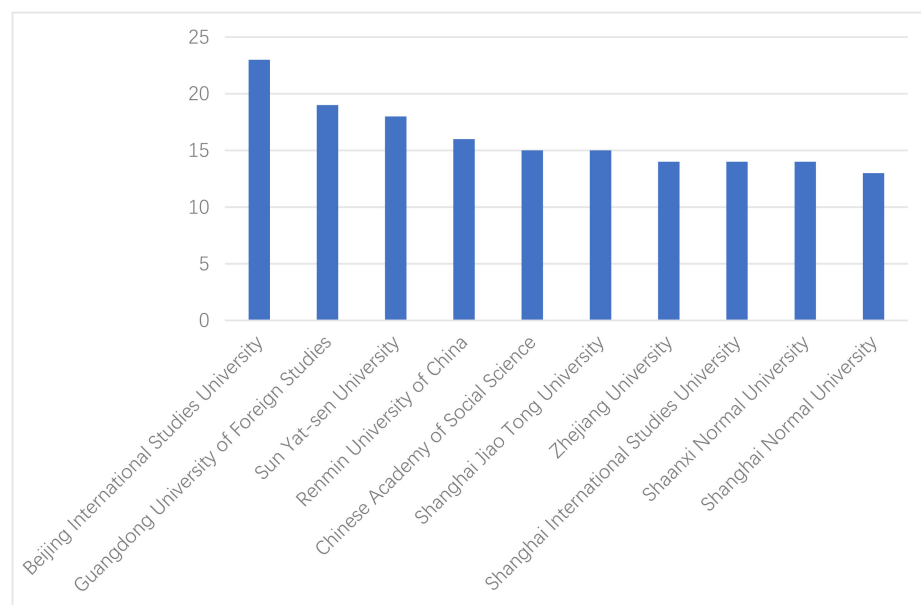National Social Science Fund of China (2002–2022)

Figure 6. The Top Ten Research Institutes of Translation-Related Thematic Projects Supported by
the National Social Science Fund of China (2002–2022)

support for scientific research projects in these areas (Li, 2021; Ma, 2022).

Research Institutes of Projects

To some extent, the scientific research ability, academic status, and level of scientific research management of a research institute can be reflected by the number of projects supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (Li, 2002). By analyzing the translation related thematic projects undertaken by various research institutions from 2002 to 2022,

this paper was able to generate a quantitative figure of the number of projects undertaken by the research institutes (The list of approved projects is contingent upon the issued notice, and it no longer includes the cumulative count of projects resulting from the merger of academic institutions.). Figure 6 demonstrates the top ten research institutes.

Based on the data presented in Figure 6, it is evident that Beijing International Studies University is ranked first with 23 projects, followed by Guangdong University of Foreign Studies with 19 projects, and Sun Yat-sen University with 18 projects. The top ten research institutes are predominantly foreign language universities, indicating that these universities are crucial in the realm of translation-related thematic projects. Additionally, Chinese Academy of Social Science specializes in humanities such as philosophy and theology, resulting in a relatively higher number of translation-related thematic projects. It can be concluded from the analysis of research institutes that normal universities excel in humanities and social science research, resulting in a higher number of translation projects. Furthermore, universities directly under the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China have a significantly higher number of approved projects compared to local universities, highlighting the disparity in scientific research capabilities between the two categories. Such trend also reflects National Office for Philosophy and Social Science' tendency to overly favor key universities, leading to an unbalanced distribution of academic resources.

Research Hotspots

In the database of translation-related thematic projects supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (2002–2022), the project names have been segmented, with the removal and cessation of words, followed by an analysis of their frequency statistics. The highest frequency words, which total 30, have been extracted and are presented in detail in Table 1.

The title of the National Social Science Fund of China provides a concise summary of the research topic, including crucial details such as the research background, object, content, and methods. By analyzing the project keywords, researchers can identify the latest trends and hot topics in the field of translation studies. The high-frequency keywords in Table 1 and project title suggest that recent research in this field has focused on the impact of translation on cultural communication, English translations of Chinese literature and culture, the study of translated works, English translations of Chinese classics, collection of translation materials, Chinese translations of western literature and culture, the development of a Chinese translation theory system, cultural and corpus translation. It should be pointed out that corpus-based translation studies have gradually become one of the hot topics in translation studies (Koehn, 2009). The frequency of the keywords demonstrates the strong subject consciousness and social awareness of translation researchers, whose research ideas emphasize the combination of text and reality, the blend

Table 1

Total 30 Highest Frequency Words of Translation-Related Thematic Projects Supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (2002–2022)

Keywords	Frequency	Keywords	Frequency
communication（传播）	118	cognition（认知）	33
English translation（英译）	113	interpretation（口译）	31
translation（译介、编译）	104	theory（理论）	28
classical literature（典籍、经典）	80	framework（体系）	27
collection（整理）	69	overseas（海外）	25
Chinese translation（汉译）	66	Japan（日本）	24
literature（文学）	66	contemporary（当代）	23
document（文献、译本）	64	philosophy（哲学）	22
culture（文化）	61	novel（小说）	22
construction（建构、构建）	58	terminology（术语）	20
corpus（语料库）	51	translator（译者）	19
acception（接受）	38	language（语言）	18
discourse（话语）	38	the Ming-Qing Period（明清）	16
foreign translation（对外、外译）	35	America（美国）	15
modern times（近代现代）	34	Chinese-English（汉英）	15

of historical and contemporary perspectives, the importance of translation effects, the development of translation theory and exchange of Chinese classical culture. Additionally, three high-frequency words - discourse, philosophy, and terminology - are noteworthy for their interdisciplinary and integrated development trend in translation studies, which distinguishes this field from other disciplines.

The research parameters are elucidated by the high-frequency keywords, which encompass the research object, research time, research purpose, and research methods. The research object comprises of novels, terminologies, and translators, while the research time spans from modern times to the contemporary era as well as the late Qing Dynasty. The aim of the study is to systematize, comprehend, and acknowledge the research material. The research techniques employed encompass English translation, Chinese translation, and a comparative analysis of English and Chinese (Guan, 2021).

Discussion

This paper employs Python and Excel software to perform text mining and map analysis on translation-themed projects, based on previous research. The study delves into the yearly distribution, disciplines of projects, translation language, regional distribution, and high-frequency words of these projects.

To begin with, as a whole, there has been a noticeable rise in the quantity of translation-related thematic projects supported by the National Social Science Fund of China. A closer examination of the temporal distribution of these projects reveals that progress was rather sluggish prior to 2009. However, since then, the number of such projects has grown rapidly, which can be attributed to the focus of national education policy (Chen, 2015). Following the establishment of translation major and the introduction of Master of Translation and Interpreting, the pursuit of translation as a major has remained a top priority for researchers, prompting a significant infusion of resources into scientific research endeavors.

Between 2014 and 2019, there was a notable increase in the number of translation-related thematic projects, signifying a golden age for translation studies. This upsurge is attributed to the Silk Road Economic Belt, the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road and the revitalization of traditional Chinese culture (Fu, 2022). As a result, translation research has diversified, with a focus on various fields such as linguistics, literature,

religion, and philosophy. This expansion has contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of translation, its field, and content. It has opened up new opportunities for translation research, providing a broader perspective on the subject.

Finally, after analyzing the high-frequency words of translation-related projects since 2020, it has been determined that the research frontier topics are highly intertwined with the advancement of science and technology as well as national policies (Hlavac et al., 2018). The areas of focus for translation projects are centered around corpus, translation documents, and theoretical systems. Among these, translation document is particularly noteworthy as it is considered to be an important area of research both now and in the future. The use of corpus in translation has made text processing more efficient and therefore, the application of digital technology in translation studies has gained much interests and attention, making it a trending topic in the field of translation studies in recent years.

Conclusion and Implication

Over the last two decades, the National Social Science Fund of China has made significant strides in enhancing the funding opportunities for young scholars. However, there still exists a conspicuous disparity in the number of funded projects among universities in various regions. To address this issue, this paper offers the following recommendations for the application process of the National Social Science Fund of China in the field of translation:

First and foremost, it is imperative that local colleges and young scholars focus on meticulous planning in advance. It is a widely known fact that obtaining funds from the National Social Science Fund is an arduous task for most universities and young scholars. Hence, standing out amidst the cut-throat competition during project declaration is a crucial challenge. The National Social Science Fund has increased its funding for youth projects since the 14th Five-Year Plan, which serves as a significant indication. Therefore, it is vital that local universities and young scholars lay emphasis on thorough research and writing while preparing project proposals. This will ensure the quality of project declaration and enhance the chances of receiving support from national policies, ultimately resulting in the successful approval of project funding (Ebadi & Schiffauerova1, 2016).

Furthermore, in order to conduct comprehensive and relevant research, it is recommended that researchers refer to

application guidelines of the National Social Science Fund and national policy documents to identify research hotspots. This approach should be supplemented by incorporating personal academic research and aligning it with national economic development planning (Hu, 2019). For an added global perspective, researchers should consider situating their research questions within the global cultural context, paying attention to new issues of translation and global research trends, and focusing on addressing international hot issues. By taking into account both domestic and foreign research attention, researchers can ensure that their research topic has both academic value and social application value.

Moreover, in conjunction with the categorization of translation fields both domestically and internationally (Holmes, 2000; Munday, 2016; Xu & Mu, 2009), by carefully examining the subject matter of translation-related projects, it becomes evident that the most prevalent areas of focus in translation are the study of translation history, the translation and communication, the study of literary translation, and the development of translation theory (Klaudia, 2021). As a result, it is crucial for scholars to remain vigilant regarding the most current and pressing issues and trends within the field of translation research. Such awareness will ensure that their research topics align with the priority areas of the National Social Science Fund.

Ultimately, apart from the prevalent topics currently being explored in translation studies, scholars can broaden their horizons by delving into interdisciplinary or unexplored areas. Interdisciplinary collaboration and integration with other fields of study can significantly contribute to the expansion of translation studies (Fu, 2018). Recent research funded by the National Social Science Fund has demonstrated the benefits of interdisciplinary integration. More specifically, it has highlighted the integration of translation studies with fields such as sociology, theology, folklore, and computer science. Interestingly, this integration has shown a trend of expanding from the humanities to the natural sciences. As translation studies continue to progress, new areas of research are emerging. For instance, the study of science and technology books, Chinese herbal medicine of ethnic minorities, and intelligent translation are gradually incorporated into the research field. These areas may soon be regarded as new hot topics in translation studies.

The National Social Science Fund Project holds significant value for academic researchers in China, and its impact and acceptance extend far beyond. This paper presents an impartial analysis of translation-related thematic projects that can serve as a reference for Chinese translation scholars during the project application. It enables scholars to highlight the strengths of their regions and institutions and to stay updated with the latest trends in translation research by analyzing the high-frequency words in the projects. With the guidance of national policies, scholars can produce high-quality declarations to secure funding from the National Social Science Fund.

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