

# A Database Study of Dynamics for Contemporary China's Translation and Publication\*

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**Abstract**—This is a data-based study of the dynamics for China's translation and publication from 1978 to 2007. Based on China's *National Bibliography* (1978-2007), the author sorted out the books translated from foreign countries and compiled a database. Drawing on this database, we have discovered: From the international perspective, the major factors that affect China's translation activities are the economic gaps between China and other countries, the relations between China and other countries, the cultural capital and cultural strategies of the source countries, of which the economic factor is overridingly important. Moreover, the powerful cultural strategy adopted by a foreign country, like ROK, was another important factor that resulted in the flow of Korean texts into China. From the domestic perspective, the key factors that impact China's translation activities are the state's administrative arrangements, the enforcement of international conventions in China, the country's economic transformation, intervention by government departments, and the state policy on the cultural industry. All these have exerted influence on China's introduction of foreign texts

**Index Terms**—data-based study, translation and publication, dynamics, international perspective, domestic perspective

## I. INTRODUCTION

After the adoption of the reform and opening policy in 1978, China entered a special period, in which it underwent constant reforms and changes. The ever-changing era provides the background for China's translation and publication for more than 30 years. To a great extent, this background will continue to determine China's translation and publication and their developmental orientation.

"The viability of a translation is established by its relationship to the cultural and social conditions under which it is produced and read" (Venuti, 1995, p. 18). The prerequisite for that is the flow of publications, i.e. the importation of publications from one culture into another. From the perspective of dynamics, this paper analyzes the flow and reception of translated publications. Based on China's *National Bibliography* (1978-2007), the author sorted out the books translated from foreign countries and compiled a database. Because the source countries of a small number of the translated books could not be identified, they were not included in the database. Drawing on this database and studying China's translation and publication from both the international and domestic perspectives, the author tried to identify the dynamics for China's translation activities from 1978 to 2007.

## II. DYNAMICS FOR CHINA'S TRANSLATION AND PUBLICATION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The international factors regulating the translation and publication include sovereign states and language communities participating in the exchanges and competition. The author examines the translation activities by placing them into the power relations between countries and their languages. According to the principle of dynamics, there are four main factors affecting the flow of texts.

The first factor is the uneven status of languages. Some languages, because they are widely used, enjoy a central place in the language market. For example, English has now become a global language. Some languages, like Chinese and Arabic, have a high status because of the large numbers of speakers. On the other hand, some languages are being marginalized because of the limited numbers of speakers. Generally speaking, publications flow from the globally central language(s) to marginal languages, and the communications between marginal languages have often to depend on the globally central language(s) as the inter-language. The second factor is the political and ideological relations between states. In the 1950s, for instance, China translated from the former Soviet Union large numbers of Russian texts—a result of the influence of politics on translation. The third factor is the gaps between the economic strengths of countries. A country's economic power plays a dominating role in its translation activities. The stronger a country's economic power is, the greater international influence it has, and the more culture it exports. Conversely, an economically weaker country has to import more cultures. The fourth factor is the cultural capital. If a country or region has a long history and advanced civilization, the literature written in its language has more cultural capital and is

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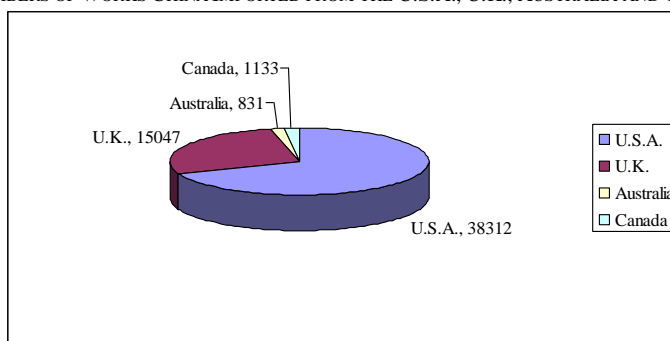
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therefore likely to be a target to be introduced and translated. The dynamics of the flow of publications is complex. Of all factors of social dynamics, the political, economic and cultural dynamics are competing with each other in an uneven way. Therefore, cultural exchanges are uneven, and there is a relationship of being dominating and being dominated. By applying those four factors of dynamics to study the translation and publication in China over the past three decades, the author explores motivation behind the works China translated.

#### A. *The Economic Factor vs. the Language Factor: Their Respective Influences on Translation and Publication*

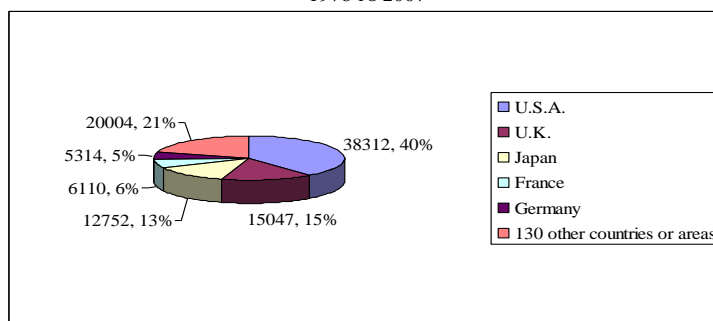
During the thirty years after the onset of China's reform and opening in 1978, China translated 55,323 works from English-speaking countries, accounting for 56.7% of its total translated works. This large proportion seems to suggest that language plays a decisive role in text flows. Studying the differences between countries, however, we can have new discoveries. In the 30 years, China translated 38,312 works from the U.S.A., 15,047 works from the U.K., 831 works from Australia and 1,133 works from Canada (See TABLE 1 below). The vast differences between the numbers of works China translated from different countries show that language is not a factor with great explanatory power. What is more important than the language factor is a country's overall strength featured by its economy.

TABLE 1.  
COMPARISON BETWEEN THE NUMBERS OF WORKS CHINA IMPORTED FROM THE U.S.A., U.K., AUSTRALIA AND CANADA FROM 1978 TO 2007



Over the three decades after 1978, China introduced 97,539 works from various countries and regions, but the main sources are five countries: the U.S.A., U.K., Japan, Germany and France. The number of the works translated from those five countries amounted to 77,535, or 79% of the total number of China's translated works, with the U.S.A. accounting for 40%, U.K. 15%, Japan 13%, France 6% and Germany 5% (See TABLE 2 below).

TABLE 2.  
COMPARISON BETWEEN THE NUMBER OF WORKS CHINA IMPORTED FROM FIVE POWERS AND THAT FROM 130 OTHER COUNTRIES AND AREAS FROM 1978 TO 2007



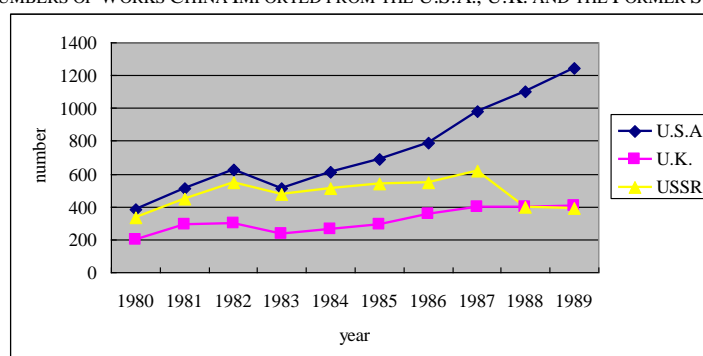
#### B. *The Economic Factor vs. the Political Factor: Their Respective Influences on Translation and Publication*

East European countries and developing countries in Africa and Central America also constituted the sources of China's translation and publication, but the total number was much smaller than that of the economic powers. This shows that China's relationship with other countries was also a factor affecting translation flows. Owing to their similar historical backgrounds and common tasks of development, China and other third-world countries are linked to each other in destiny. At all times, China regards it as her international duty to safeguard the interests of the developing nations, support their effort to develop their economy, and attach importance to the development of her economic and cultural exchanges and cooperation with them. The number of works translated from the source countries match well with China's diplomatic relations. For example, China established diplomatic relations with Bulgaria in 1949, but in the 1960s the bilateral relations cooled down, and then in the 1980s the relations gradually improved, and the two countries resumed the diplomatic ties in 1984. Consequently, in that year China translated 10 works from Bulgaria—the peak of annual translation publications. China has traditional friendship with Egypt, which was the first African country to recognize the People's Republic of China. In 1986 the governments of the two countries signed the *Plan of Action on*

*Cultural Cooperation.* As a result, China translated 34 works from Egypt that year, a 5.7-fold increase from the previous year. After China adopted the market economy mechanism, the factor of state-to-state relations declined in importance. Take Bulgaria as an example again. Prior to 1992, China introduced from that country a total of 52 works, a yearly average of 3.7. After 1992, China introduced only a total of 13 works, an annual average of 0.8. On the other hand, before 1992 China introduced an average of 685 works from the U.S.A. annually and after 1992 the average number per year reached 1,796. This indicates that, under the market economy mechanism, the economic factor exerted a greater influence on text flows across nations, while the factor of China's diplomatic and political relations with other countries became less influential.

Also influenced by the economic factor was China's introduction of the former Soviet Union's texts. In the 1960s the relations between China and the Soviet Union deteriorated, and then in the 1980s the tension began to ease. After the two countries normalized their relations in 1989, the number of works China translated from the Soviet Union, instead of increasing, dropped 27%. In fact, after 1987 the number of publications China introduced from the Soviet Union kept declining—a consequence of that country's continuous economic decline. After Gorbadev became General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party in 1985, the country launched a comprehensive reform, which, however, failed to reverse the economic downturn and eventually resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the epoch of China's reform and opening, the various factors compete with each other to influence translation flows, and the state-to-state friendship cannot compete with the economic factor. In other words, the economic factor plays the decisive role. During the Second World War, the Soviet Union suffered heavy losses. After the war, it started a new period of socialist construction. "Starting in the 1950s, the country developed its economy in a well-planned way. By the 1980s, the various indexes of its economic and social development registered tremendous progress and it became an economic power second only to the United States" (Li Yonghui & Hu Minmin, 1996, p. 158). Before 1987 the number of publications China introduced from the Soviet Union followed only that from the United States. After 1987, however, the reforms by the Soviet Union failed, leading to economic setbacks. Correspondingly, the number of works China translated from the Soviet Union plunged. Comparison between the number of works China translated from the Soviet Union and that from the United States of America and the United Kingdom clearly reveals the influence of the economic factor (See TABLE 3 below).

TABLE 3.  
COMPARISON BETWEEN THE NUMBERS OF WORKS CHINA IMPORTED FROM THE U.S.A., U.K. AND THE FORMER SOVIET UNION FROM 1978 TO 2007



### C. The Influence of the Cultural Capital Factor on Translation and Publication

If an economic analysis is made of the route of text flows across nations, the texts are then regarded as commodities, and translated works are treated as commodities of production and circulation according to the market logic. However, treatment of translated texts as ordinary commodities fails to show their unique property as cultural commodities. Translated texts not only exist in the form of commodities, but also have cultural contents. Cultural transmission has its inherent logic. Some cultures are endowed with cultural capital because of their high historical value, rich ideological contents, profound morals, or beautiful legends, thus becoming the targets of translation. Great thinkers such as Heracleitus, Socrates, Aristotle and Plato constitute the motive force behind China's repeated introductions and publications of ancient Greek texts, and even promoted the introduction of modern Greek works. Scholars such as Tertullian, Augustine, Cicero, Ovid, Tacitus and Seneca also provide motivation for Chinese publishers' introduction of ancient Roman texts. Thus, those great thinkers and their works are invested with cultural capital, and those works have motivated China's translation activities. Lebanese literary giant Kahlil Gibran's abundant works and their rich cultural connotations and oriental spirit have also driven China to translate Lebanese texts.

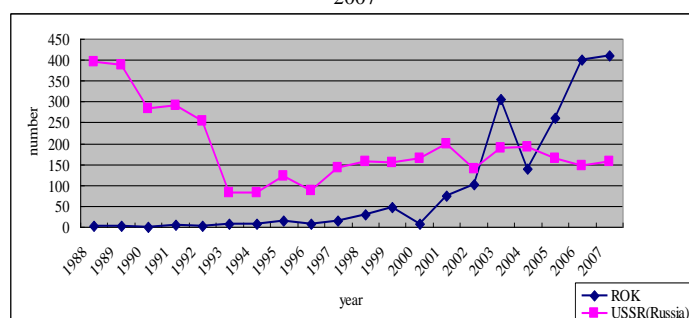
Winning a literary award also bestows symbolic cultural capital on the literary work. Chinese publishers often take overseas literary awards as the orientation and aesthetics of foreign literature. If the writer of a country wins the Nobel Prize, his/her work and other related works tend to become targets of Chinese publishers' translation. During the 30 years from 1978, China introduced an average of 1.5 works per year from South Africa. In 2003 South African writer John Maxwell Coetzee won the Nobel Prize of Literature. The next year China introduced 6 South African works, including 5 works by Coetzee. Of the South African works China introduced in 2006, four were written by Coetzee.

Since the start of China's reform and opening, almost all prize-winning and widely-sold works abroad have had their Chinese versions. Translated works series include the Nobel Prize-winning Book Series, the Series of Translations of European and American Prize-winning Novels, and the Series of Russian Booker Prize-winning books by the Lijiang Press; the Series of Children's Literature Prize-Winning Books Abroad, the North America Hugo Award-winning Book series, and Contemporary Prize-winning Book Series by the People's Literature Press; the Series of Famous Popular Books Abroad by the Yilin Press; the Series of Latest Japanese Mystery Novels by Shangdong Art and Literature Press; the Series of French Prize-winning Novels by the Baihua Art and Literature Press; the French Crime Fiction Award Book Series by Henan People's Press; Lifetime Achievement Award Book Series by the Shanxin Normal University Press; the Hans Christian Andersen Award Book Series by the Hebei Children Press; the International Award Book Series by the Xinlei Press; Edogawa Rampo Award Book Series by the Beiyue Art and Literature Press; the Dagger Award book Series and the Edgar Allan Poe Award Boos Series by the Mass Publisher; the Newbery Award Book Series by the North At ad Literature Press; the Canadian Prize-winning Book Series, etc. What is more, after 2000, Chinese publishers published 33 foreign prize-winning books in the form of single book. Because of a prize or award, foreign literary works have become influential cultural symbols and met Chinese readers' expectation for foreign literature.

#### D. The Influence of External Factors on Translation and Publication

The afore-mentioned factors affecting China's translation activities in the 30 years after 1978 are internal factors, which are concerned with China's internal motivation to introduce foreign publications. There are also external factors with the flow of Korean texts into China as an example. Large numbers of Koreans texts started to flow into China in 2001 as a result of ROK's strategy of invigorating the country by culture. Between 1978 and 1988, hardly any Korean texts flew into China. After 1988, however, with ROK's economic development and the enhancement of Sino-Korean cultural exchanges, China started to introduce Korean texts. From 1988 to 1992 when China and Republic of Korea (ROK) established diplomatic relation, China introduced from ROK a yearly average of 3 works. From 1992 to 2000, the number of works China translated from ROK increased slightly, reaching an annual average of 15—a quite normal number. In 2001 the number of Korean works entering China increased 840%. In 2002, the number increased 36%. The year 2003 witnessed another 200% increase. Not all the Korean works that flew into China were translated by Chinese; 53 works were done by Korean translators and then sold in China. That was the result of ROK's effort to promote its culture. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis made the Korean government realize that it would be difficult to rely only on the traditional economic mode and turned their eyes to the cultural industry. By invigorating Korean culture, it hoped to propel economic growth. In 1998 the Korean government put forward the strategy of "invigorating the country by culture". In the following year the Korean government adopted the *Act on Cultural Industry Promotion*, and formulated the Five-year Plan for Promoting the Cultural Industry. In 2001 the government launched the Korea Culture Content Agent, which set up representative offices in Tokyo and Beijing. ROK put forward the concept of "developing Asian culture" and tried to radiate its influence to various parts of Asia and occupy a greater market share. By 2004 ROK's cultural products had assumed 3.5% of the world market, becoming the world's fifth cultural power. After 2002, in terms of the foreign publications China introduced every year, ROK surpassed Russia, ranking sixth in China (See TABLE 4 below).

TABLE 4:  
COMPARISON BETWEEN THE NUMBERS OF WORKS CHINA IMPORTED FROM ROK AND THE NUMBER FROM THE FORMER USSR/RUSSIA FROM 1978 TO 2007



After the above survey of China's 30-year translation activities from the international perspective, we will further study the dynamics for foreign texts to enter China from the domestic perspective.

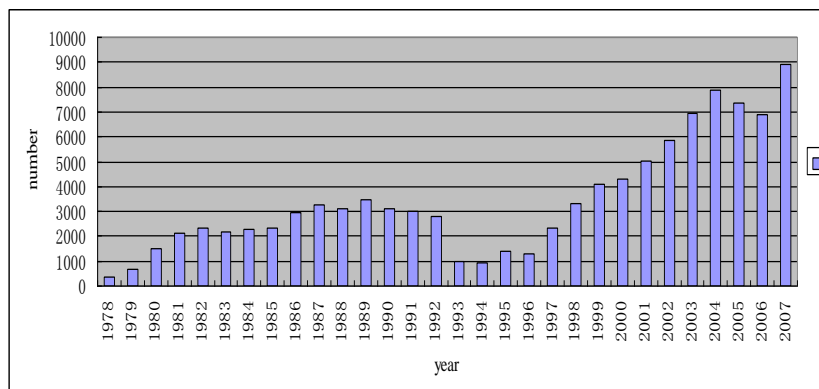
### III. THE DYNAMICS FOR CHINA'S TRANSLATION AND PUBLICATION FROM THE DOMESTIC PERSPECTIVE

The social attributes of translation determine that the occurrence and development of China's translation activities cannot be separated from China's social environment. The ups and downs of translation activities are closely related to the state's policies and developmental strategies. The transformation of China's social structure as well as the adjustments of the state's policies and developmental strategies certainly have an impact on translation activities. Specifically, during the 30 years' reform and opening, the state's administrative arrangements, the enforcement of

international conventions in China, the country's economic transformation, intervention by government departments, and the state policy on the cultural industry—all these have exerted influence on China's introduction of foreign texts.

Table 5 below shows that, in terms of the total number of translation publications, China's introduction of foreign works underwent a slow start in 1978, the prosperity in the 1980s, the recession in the mid-1990s, and the revitalization in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

TABLE 5.  
THE NUMBERS OF WORKS CHINA IMPORTED FROM OTHER COUNTRIES EACH YEAR FROM 1978 TO 2007



#### A. Translation and Publication Arranged by the Government

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the introduction and publication of foreign works in China were more or less due to the governments' administrative arrangements. To address the shortage of books in the early 1970s—a problem caused by the “cultural revolution”, the Publication Bureau of the Ministry of Culture organized a dozen provincial and state presses to re-print books on foreign politics, economy, literature and art that had been published in the 1950s and 1960s. The reprinting activities continued for two years, and some books which had been translated only for internal circulation were now openly published.

Beginning in the 1980s, China entered a period characterized by “emancipation of thoughts”, and translation activities resumed and developed rapidly. “In 1982 the central government approved publication of Chinese versions of world-famous works. This gave the publishers confidence” (Ma Zhuyi, 2006, p. 145). In the early 1980s the state resumed some presses (or publishing houses) and established some more. “The early 1980s marked the fastest development of presses during the three decades of reform and opening, and every year 30–40 new presses were added” (Hao Zhensheng, 2008, p. 75). The foreign Literature Press, Xinhua Press, Chinese Social Science Press and Peking University Press were all created during this period. By 1985 the annual number of translated works reached 2,425, a seven-fold growth from 1978. In addition, publications by domestic writers also shot up. Thus, by the mid-1980s, China had basically bidden farewell to the period of book shortage. In 1985 China established even more presses, with 76 presses added that year. Thanks to the decision made at the Third Plenary Session of the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress to conduct an all-round economic restructuring, domestic presses started a new-round of massive translation activities. The number of translated works in 1985 rose 10.6% compared with 1984, the year 1986 witnessed a year-on-year upturn of 15.4%, and the year 1987 saw another surge of 11.8, with the year's total number reaching 3,283.

#### B. Translation and Publication Governed by International and Domestic Publication Rules

During the 30 years of reform and opening, China's translation activities underwent two downturns. The first downturn occurred in 1993 and 1994. On October 15 and 30, 1992 the *Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works* and the *Universal Copyright Convention* became effective in China. From then on, importation of foreign works within their periods of copyright protection should not be done without first obtaining the owners' authorization. China was not yet accustomed to these international rules in the first two years, so its translation and publication plummeted. In 1993 the number of translated works was 965, and in 1994 the number was 958. The total number in these two years was only 55% of the number in 1989, which reached 3475. After 1994 the Chinese publishing industry gradually came to understand the international conventions on publications. Also, the aim of a socialist market economy was set in China. Consequently, the Chinese publication activities became active again and market-oriented development accelerated.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, an unhealthy tendency grew in the Chinese translation publication circles. Under the mechanism of the market economy, some publishers sought nothing but economic benefits. By falsely using foreign writers' names, they published “pseudographs”, which are mostly popular books in the fields of economy and management. By falsely using the names of foreign writers, collecting vogueish topics and content, counterfeiting comments by famous overseas media and personages, and faking good sales records abroad, they published the so-called translated works. “According to incomplete statistics, of all the 570 presses in the country, more than 30 participated in producing pseudographs. For a period of one or two years, more than 10 pseudographs were created

every month”(Yang Lei, 2005, p. 33). In early 2005, the phenomenon of pseudographs drew the attention of the General Administration of Press and Publication, and in February it issued the *Urgent Notice on Conducting Special Checks Publications Containing False Promotion Information*, demanding the various localities to crack down on pseudographs. Owing to the General Administration’s rectification efforts, the total numbers of translated works published in 2005 and 2006 fell slightly.

### C. The Influence of China’s Economic Transformation on Translation and Publication

In the second half of the 1990s, China’s tertiary industry grew rapidly and consumption structure changed, thus boosting the development of the cultural industry. Gradually, culture got rid of the traditional concept “ideology” and was regarded as an economic sector. As Connor pointed out:

It is no longer possible to separate the economic or productive realm from the realms of ideology or culture, since cultural artefacts, images, representations, even feelings and psychic structures have become part of the world of the economic.” (Connor, 1989, p. 51)

In 1996 the Sixth Session of the 14<sup>th</sup> Party Congress adopted the *Resolution on Important Issues Including the Strengthening of the Socialist Ethical and Cultural Progress*, which states that the Chinese people must observe the inherent laws of cultural development, give play to the role of the market economy, straighten the relations among the state, units and individuals, and step by step form the development pattern of the state guaranteeing the key projects and non-governmental sectors are encouraged to conduct cultural undertakings. Publication of translations as a component of the cultural undertakings must necessarily respond to the governmental policies, and in 1997 more achievements were made in translation and publication, with 2,307 translated works published, a year-on-year upswing of 77.6%. Under the guidance of the state policy, the Ministry of Culture launched the Department of Cultural Industry in 1998 and formulated the Five-Year Development Plan. These endeavors show that the cultural industry was put on the agenda of the state’s culture.

By the beginning of the 21st century, China had basically established the socialist market economy, and the people’s living standards had, on the whole, reached the goal of a relatively comfortable life. Starting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China entered the period of further developing this moderately prosperous society and accelerating the modernization drive. Along with the improvement of the living standards, people’s consumption structure changed from merely enough food and clothing to a relatively comfortable life, with cultural consumption assuming an obviously larger proportion in the total consumption. The change in the consumption structure necessarily led to changes in industry structure. The greater demand for cultural consumption promoted the development of China’s cultural industry. Moreover, under the market economy, the market played an important role in regulating the resource distributions. Since China wanted to merge into the globalization trend, it must improve its “soft strength” according to the laws of the market economy. In 2002, the Sixteenth Party Congress adopted the report of *Building a Society of a Relatively Comfortable Life and Creating a New Situation of the Socialist Cause with the Chinese Characteristics*. In terms of cultural development, the report points out that China should actively develop cultural undertakings and the cultural industry as well as deepen the reform of the cultural system. Thus, development of the cultural industry was taken as a national strategy. The intervention of the state policy in the industrialization of culture embodied the policy-makers’ wisdom in observing the laws of the market and guiding cultural development and prosperity in compliance with the market force. China’s publication of translated works as an integral part of the cultural industry would inevitably merge into the chain of cultural industrialization and contribute to the prosperity of China’s cultural industry. The share of the books introduced from abroad in the total retail market of books has rapidly expanded, which causes widespread concern of the publishing circle. The books introduced from abroad has not only promoted the growth of the book retail market, but also enlarged the book market as a whole. In 2000, China’s book retail market registered a year-on-year growth of 23.53%, within which 15.80% derived from the books introduced from abroad. In 2002, the books from abroad contributed to a 21.40% increase of the total market. The books introduced from abroad, which consisted overwhelmingly of translated books, effectively compensated the inadequacy of domestic books, sharpened the presses’ competitive edge, and promoted the development of the cultural industry.

After experiencing the pseudograph crisis in 2004 and 2005, the Party Central Committee and the State Council issued the *Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Cultural System* early in 2006 and set the aim and tasks of the cultural system reform. In March 2006, the Working Conference on the National Cultural System Reform was held to summarize the pilot projects on cultural restructuring and made arrangements for furthering the reform. Thus, the cultural system reform entered a new phase of development. In 2007 China’s publication of translated books made new headway, registering a year-on-year increase of 29.2% to 8,936 books.

The total number of books introduced from abroad reflected the influence of the state’s strategic decisions, and similarly the number of translated books in the fields of industry and technology were also sensitive to the state’s policy guidance. In the late 1990s the world’s science and technology developed by leaps and bounds, the competition among countries in terms of comprehensive strength based on economic and technological strengths became increasingly intense, presenting not only a serious challenge, but also new opportunities for China’s science and technology. The *Government Work Report to the Fourth Session of the Eighth National People’s Congress* in March 1996 put forward the strategy of revitalizing the nation through science and technology and achieving sustainable growth. China implemented the philosophy of taking science and technology as the primary productive force, regarding education as



the foundation, and putting science and education in an important position in the nation's economic and social development.

To strengthen the leadership over scientific and educational work, the Party Central Committee and the State Council set up the State Science and Education Leading Group with Premier Zhu Rongji as the leader and Vice Premier Li Lanqing as the deputy leader. For five consecutive years starting in 1998, the Central Finance invested a total of 2.5 billion yuan in key basic research projects. In the deepening of the reform and opening, science and technology have contributed significantly to the economic construction.” (PHRC, 2008, p. 369)

To implement the strategy of revitalizing the nation through science and technology, China must, while taking into consideration the actual domestic situation, learn experience from abroad. By combining its own technology with advanced technology from abroad, China can take the road of scientific progress with Chinese characteristics. Since “science is considered the primary productive force”, abundant translations of overseas scientific and technological achievements became inevitably necessary. After two years' preparations, starting in 2000, the number of industrial and technological books China translated from abroad spiraled up to 792, a yearly surge of 32%, while the total number of books China translated from abroad in that year rose only 5%. Then in 2001, the number registered a year-on-year rise of 13%. In 2002 the number exceeded 1,000 for the first time, or 26% over the 2001 number. For four successive years after 2002, the annual number was about 1150. The large numbers of industrial and technological books translated from abroad would certainly stimulate the development of China's science and technology.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Studying China's translation activities in the 30 years of reform and opening from the international perspective, we have found that the main dynamics behind foreign texts entering China was the economic gap between China and the source countries. However, the dynamics was complex. In addition to the economic factor, China's diplomatic relations and the strong cultural capitals that were attached to the texts also constituted important factors for cross-country text flows. When the economic factor competed with the state-to-state relationship factor, the former tended to play the leading role. Moreover, the powerful cultural strategy adopted by a foreign country, like ROK, was another important factor that resulted in the flow of Korean texts into China. All these show that China's introduction of foreign texts was driven by both internal factors and external factors. Studying China's translation activities in the 30 years of reform and opening from the domestic perspective, we have found that the translation activities were rooted in China's social development and were guided by the state policies like the state's administrative arrangements, the enforcement of international conventions, China's economic transformation, intervention by government departments, and the state policy on the cultural industry.

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