

# Review of the Study on Rhetoric Translation in China (1997-2021)\*

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**Abstract**—Rhetoric and translation help to promote language and cultural exchanges. Therefore, the study of the two fields can be traced far back. Scholars focused on the translation of rhetorical devices long before. In order to learn the trend and problem of the current study of rhetoric translation in China, this paper adopts the method of bibliometrics to analyze the relevant academic articles, theses and dissertations published from 1997 to 2021 on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (short for CNKI), a well-known academic website of China. The analysis goes through six dimensions, such as languages involved in the transfer, translation direction, text type, research perspective, rhetoric device and citation frequency.

**Index Terms**—rhetoric, translation, CNKI, bibliometrics

## I. INTRODUCTION

Rhetoric is an important part in a language and culture for any nation, (Cui, 2012). The study of rhetoric, both in China and the West, can be traced back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

In the West, the systematic study of rhetoric originated from Aristotle who indicated that rhetoric might “be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Stade, 2005, p.97) and he pointed out three ways of persuasion in which the first one depended on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof (ibid). From the period of Ancient Rome to the Middle Ages, scholars in the field of rhetoric, such as Cicero, Marcus Fabius Quintilian and Saint Augustine, promoted the study of traditional rhetoric. In the Renaissance period, since scholars had different views on rhetoric, three schools of rhetoric study were formed, which were traditionalists, Ramists and figurists. Rhetoric did not earn much concern in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the west but it started to rejuvenate in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Western new rhetoric developed in the 1930s and the study of it was based on Aristotle’s classical rhetoric but the research domain was expanded to cover rhetoric situation. And then the nature and function of rhetoric were elaborated anew.

In China, the origin of rhetoric can be traced back to *Yi Jing (The Book of Changes)* in which two Chinese characters “*Xiu*” (*modification*) and “*Ci*” (*speech*) first appeared together signifying that rhetoric should be based on sincerity. Being different from the western study, Chinese traditional rhetoric focused on the study of language. According to the concept and experience of rhetoric study in China, Chen (2020) classified rhetoric into two categories: positive and negative. Zhang (2014) explained the correlation between rhetoric device and linguistic elements in his book *Rhetoric of Modern Chinese*. Tan & Zhu (2008) focused their study on extended rhetoric and they argued the western rhetoric study was an extended one from the age of Aristotle. Luo (2008) claimed rhetoric in a narrow sense was restricted to the study of language aiming at exploration of rhetoric device and verbal skills. He further claimed that rhetoric in a broad sense expanded the study from perspectives of culture and mind. Obviously, the broad one has been beyond the limit of linguistic study.

Rhetoric has long been related to translation. Cicero, in ancient Rome, was a great scholar of rhetoric as well as a famous translator. Both rhetoric and translation concern the verbal communication and pursue the goal of exchanges and cooperation (Feng, 2012). Therefore, in recent years, scholars of rhetoric have started to consider the relationship between rhetoric and translation. In China, Feng (2012) stated that there were similar features in the study of rhetoric and translation, so theories of rhetoric could be adopted for solving the problems of translation systematically. Liu (2014) clearly stressed the correlation between rhetoric and translation. He viewed rhetoric as the theoretic foundation of translation and considered translation as a special practice of rhetoric. Peter France, a British scholar, wrote an article entitled with “*The Rhetoric of Translation*” in 2005 which explained translation and rhetoric played the same role of mediation (ibid). All of these demonstrate scholars have raised their interest in the relationship between rhetoric and translation. This paper focuses on articles, theses and dissertations on rhetoric translation cited from CNKI to probe Chinese scholars’ current study and problem in this field.

## II. THE STUDY ON RHETORIC TRANSLATION IN CHINA (1997-2021)

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In order to get a full picture of the study on rhetoric translation in China, this paper adopts statistical method to describe and explain the relevant articles, theses and dissertations sorted from the website of CNKI. “translation” and “rhetoric” are set as the subject and the key word respectively on the website to search for articles from journals, theses and dissertations. Finally, there are 529 articles, 385 theses (among which 135 theses are virtually research reports) and 19 dissertations available. In order to ensure the collected articles reliable and influential, these articles are further scanned by ticking the two options of “Core Journal” and “CSSCI” on CNKI to obtain 46 articles with relatively high standard (see table 1).

TABLE 1  
LITERATURE AND CLASSIFICATION

Literature	Classification		Total
Article	General Journal	483	529
	Core Journal/CSSCI	46	
Dissertation	Academic Paper	19	19
Thesis	Academic Paper	253	385
	Research Report	132	
			933

Among the sorted 529 articles, the earliest one was published in 1997 and the latest in 2021. The trend of publication from 1997 to 2021 can be observed from *Figure 1* which is downloaded from CNKI (see figure 1).

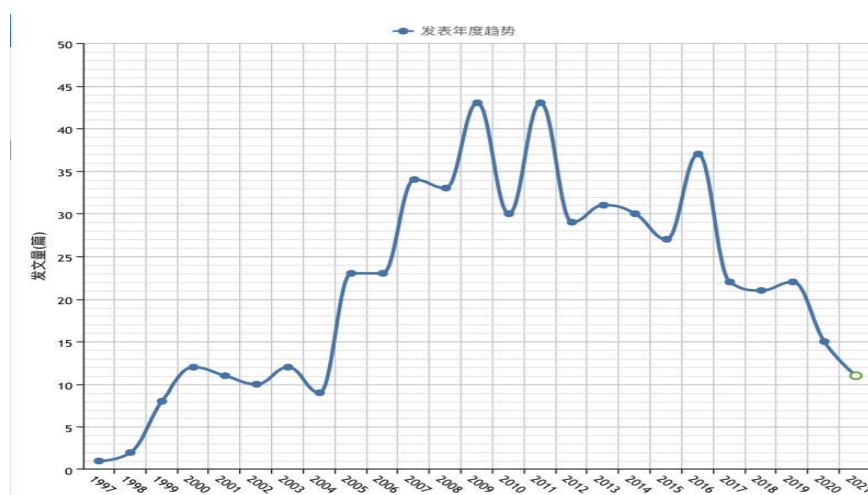


Figure 1 The Trend of Publication from 1997 to 2021  
(The curve stands for the number of articles published in the period.)

From figure 1, it can be found Chinese scholars have gradually focused on rhetoric translation since 1990s. Since then, the number of published articles has grown averagely. The curve shows 2009 and 2011 saw the publishing peak. After 2011, the trend once went down but it rose again in 2016. In the past four years, more than 10 articles were published in each year. Although the total number has been slashed compared with the previous years, the above statistics shows that Chinese scholars keep their interest in rhetoric translation.

The above literature sorted for the study of this paper shows that the current research on rhetoric translation usually focuses on the following six dimensions: discussion of languages involved in the transfer, translation direction, text type of the original text, research perspective, rhetoric device and citation frequency. Therefore, this paper tries to describe Chinese current study on rhetoric translation from the above six dimensions.

In order to ensure the sorted literature from CNKI to be highly relevant to rhetoric translation, a further analysis of the titles including subtitles, abstracts and contents of the theses and dissertations are approached. Ultimately, it is discovered that 13 theses and 9 dissertations are less relevant to the study of the paper. And since the research reports among the theses are not of high academic value, they are not analyzed in the paper. Among the 46 articles with relatively high standard, 3 of them are virtually beyond the academic focus of this paper. Finally, 240 theses, 10 dissertations and 43 articles with high standard are observed in the paper.

#### A. Languages Involved in the Transfer

After a further analysis of the 43 articles, it is found 39 articles deal with English and 4 articles focus on other languages, like Japanese, French, Russian and Uyghur (a language of minority nationalities in China). Examples can be cited: Meng (2018) studied Japanese translation of the report to the 19<sup>th</sup> national congress of the CPC from the perspective of reception theory; Wang (2012) analyzed Chinese translation of rhetoric device from French scientific and technological passages. After studying the 10 dissertations, it is detected that 9 involve English and only 1 is on another language, which is Thai. Due to the analysis of the abstracts and contents of the 240 theses, it is traced that 211 theses

deal with English and 29 involve other foreign languages (Japanese, Russian, Thai, French, Vietnamese) and Chinese ethnic languages (Uyghur, Tibetan, Mongolian and Kirgiz). The distribution of different languages in the literature can be seen in the following table (see Table 2)

TABLE 2  
DISTRIBUTION OF DIFFERENT LANGUAGES IN THE LITERATURE

Language \ Literature	E.	J.	R.	F.	Th.	V.	B.	Uk.	Uy.	Ti.	M.	K.
Article	39	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Dissertation	9	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Thesis	211	5	4	3	3	2	1	1	5	3	1	1
Total	259	23							11			

(E.=English, J.=Japanese, R.=Russian, F.=French, Th.=Thai, V.=Vietnamese, B.=Burmese, Uk.=Ukrainian, Uy.=Uyghur, Ti.=Tibetan, M.=Mongolian, K.=Kirgiz)

Table 2 shows the majority of Chinese current study on rhetoric translation focuses on the exchange between English and Chinese which covers almost 90% of the whole literature sorted for this paper.

**B. Translation Direction**

Translation direction in this paper refers to the translated direction of languages involved in rhetoric translation. According to the above literature, there are 3 different directions discussed in the paper. The first direction is from Chinese to a foreign or Chinese ethnic language; the second one is from a foreign or Chinese ethnic language to Chinese; the third is a complex that consists of translation both from Chinese to a foreign or Chinese ethnic language and vice versa. Among the 43 articles, 18 articles studied rhetoric translation from Chinese to another language, 15 articles analyzed translation of rhetorical expressions from a foreign or Chinese ethnic language to Chinese and 10 articles explored translation from Chinese to English and vice versa. As for the 10 dissertations, 7 of them focused on rhetoric translation from Chinese to English, 1 dissertation dealt with translation from English to Chinese and 2 dissertations involved the exchange between Chinese and Thai. Among the 240 theses, 120 theses analyzed rhetoric translation from Chinese to a foreign or Chinese ethnic language, 76 theses observed translation from a foreign or Chinese ethnic language to Chinese and 44 theses handled the complex covering the exchange between Chinese and English. The following table (Table 3) shows the distribution of the 3 directions in the literature.

TABLE 3  
DISTRIBUTION OF 3 DIRECTIONS IN THE LITERATURE

Direction \ Literature	C. → F/ CE.	C. ← F/ CE.	C. ↔ F/ CE.
Article	18	15	10
Dissertation	7	1	2
Thesis	120	76	44
Total	145	92	56

(C.= Chinese; F/ CE. = a foreign or Chinese Ethnic language)

**C. Text Type**

Through the discussion of translation direction, it is found that the study on rhetoric translation in China usually adopts the concrete texts as the corpus for the research. The most frequently analyzed text types are advertising discourses, literature works, classic works and publicity texts. Advertising discourses are persuasive and therefore they consist of many rhetorical expressions. Literature works also cover abundant rhetorical expressions, so scholars prefer choosing advertising discourses and classical literature works as the corpus for their analysis of rhetoric translation. “*Hong Lou Meng*” (A Dream of Red Mansions), one of the four classical novels in China, is found to be frequently cited for the analysis of rhetoric translation among the literature. Responding to the call of “Go global” for China, scholars have realized the importance of introducing Chinese classic works to the world. Among the literature for the study of this paper, there are 7 theses exploring rhetoric translation of “*Huangdi Nei Jing*” (Yellow Emperor’s Canon of Medicine), a classic work on traditional Chinese medicine. In recent years, publicity texts have gained the attention of scholars. As rhetorical expressions are pervasive in Chinese President Xi Jinping’s political discourses, scholars started to analyze rhetoric translation in President Xi’s speeches. This analysis can be found in the above articles, dissertations and theses collected for this paper.

All in all, various text types are involved in the study on rhetoric translation which means rhetoric is pervasive in language. Burk (1969), a significant scholar of western new rhetoric, even claimed language and rhetoric were symbiotic.

#### D. Research Perspective

It is accepted that rhetoric can be studied in a broad or narrow sense. Therefore, rhetoric translation can also be observed from two research perspectives: broad and narrow.

The research on rhetoric translation in a broad sense is found rarely among the literature of articles and theses sorted for the paper. Only 9 articles and 25 theses explored rhetoric translation from the broad perspective and they have almost been published in recent years. Typical examples are the study on the translation of publicity texts. Scholars tended to focus on rhetoric persuasion or adopt the new rhetoric theory to analyze translation strategies of this type of texts. The former study can be found in theses of Lin (2016), Luo (2017) and Hu (2018), while the latter in the works of Yu (2017) and Zhu (2019).

However, the situation is quite different in the sorted dissertations. The study on rhetoric translation in a broad sense can be easily found in dissertations. There are 7 dissertations exploring this phenomenon in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2018 and 2019, which demonstrates rhetoric translation in a broad sense has earned much concern and the research has made much progress in innovation and theory in the past ten years. The above dissertations made further explanation for rhetoric translation of literature works and publicity texts from the broad perspective. As for literature works, Pan (2011) analyzed the relationship between rhetoric and ideology in the translation of “*Joan Haste*” on the basis of rhetoric in a broad sense; Feng (2012) studied English translation of “*Hong Lou Meng*” (*A Dream of Red Mansions*) from the perspective of extended rhetoric. In the field of translation of publicity texts, Xue (2011) adopted theories from new rhetoric to construct appropriate rhetoric situation to solve major problems in soft news editing and translating in Chinese international communication.

#### E. Rhetoric Device

Rhetoric device, or figure of speech, is the focus of rhetoric in a narrow sense. Chinese scholars have classified rhetoric device into different categories according to various criteria. Chen (2020) divided rhetoric device into 38 kinds of 4 categories based on the structure and function of rhetoric, while Zhang (2014) claimed 24 kinds of 3 categories. Chen (2017) studied rhetoric translation from English to Chinese and differentiated rhetoric device into 3 categories which were lexical, structural and phonetic.

Two research perspectives of rhetoric translation have been elaborated in 2.4 of this paper. It is found that Chinese scholars preferred the study on rhetoric translation from the narrow perspective. They usually focused on translation of rhetoric device, which was demonstrated in 33 articles, 215 theses and 2 dissertations. Chinese scholars are also discovered to prefer to study translation strategies of particular kinds of rhetoric device in a concrete text. An explicit example is the dissertation completed by Chen Kefang in 2006. Chen’s dissertation analyzed translation strategies of 3 kinds of rhetoric device (Chinese folk wise cracks, euphemisms and imitation words) in “*Hong Lou Meng*” (*A Dream of Red Mansions*) on the basis of pragmatic principles and theories.

#### F. Citation Frequency

The sorted articles, dissertations and theses are ranked on CNKI according to the citation frequency. The article entitled with “*Translation of Rhetorical Constructs in Advertising Discourse between English and Chinese*” has received 233 times of citation, the highest one among 43 articles. This article was written by Tan Weiguo in 2003 and published in *Chinese Translators Journal*. Undoubtedly, Tan’s article has won the highest citation frequency due to the early year of publication. But the highest citation also proves rhetorical expressions in advertising discourse were once the focus of translation study. In the past 10 years, another article, “*Rhetoric: A Theoretic Foundation for Translation Thought*”, has earned 70 times of citation, the highest frequency during this period. The author of this article is Liu Yameng and it was published in *Contemporary Rhetoric* in 2014. The publication of the article clearly shows that Chinese scholars have started to observe translation from the perspective of rhetoric and they are interested in the relationship between rhetoric and translation. Among the sorted dissertations for the study of this paper, 3 of them have elaborated translation with some inspiration from rhetoric. The 3 dissertations were written by Chen Xiaowei (2011), Zhang Yu (2013) and Feng Quangong (2012) with the citation frequency of 40, 33 and 18 times respectively. As for theses, one of them got 16 times of citation, the highest one among the theses. It was written by Wang Zhimei (2011) with the title of “*Study on Translation of Ellipses in Huangdi Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor’s Canon of Medicine) from Perspective of Hermeneutic theory*”. Another thesis with 10 times of citation, a relatively high frequency, was completed by Liang Hu (2012). This thesis, from the perspective of scheme-mapping theory, observed translation of three kinds of rhetoric device by contrasting three translated versions of *Huangdi Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor’s Canon of Medicine)*. Obviously, the above two theses, both enjoying a high citation frequency, adopted *Huangdi Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor’s Canon of Medicine)* as the corpus for their study which means rhetorical expressions in Chinese classic works on traditional Chinese medicine have become an academic focus in the field of translation.

The above literature with high citation frequency has demonstrated that rhetoric and translation share some similarities. Owing to this, Scholars have tried to combine the two together for the study of translation.

### III. THE TREND AND PROBLEM OF THE STUDY ON RHETORIC TRANSLATION IN CHINA

Based on the statistical study of the above literature from CNKI, it is found Chinese scholars have started to study

rhetoric translation in a broad sense. They have reexamined the relationship between the writer, the translator and the audience from a perspective of rhetoric persuasion. The study of rhetoric in a broad sense has offered a new approach to describe and explain the complicated process of translation. Responding to the call of “Go Global” for Chinese culture after the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China which was held in 2012, the recent study on rhetoric translation usually focuses on literature works, classic works and publicity texts. In recent years, rhetoric translation in publicity texts, especially Chinese President Xi’s spoken and written works, has raised scholars’ interest.

Based on the analysis of the sorted literature, it is found that the recent research on rhetoric translation in China needs much room to be improved. Taking articles as an example, 529 articles are received by setting “translation” and “rhetoric” as the subject and key word. However, after further being scanned, only 43 articles with relatively high standard are accessed, which means most articles are still vulnerable in theory and analysis. In addition, this paper finds that a large proportion of the current research on rhetoric translation is repetitive and unworthy.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Because of the correlation between rhetoric and translation, scholars have made achievements in the translation of rhetoric device for several years. In this paper, 933 academic works including articles, dissertations and theses are searched from CNKI and finally only 43 articles, 10 dissertations and 240 theses are analyzed for they are academically valuable and highly relevant to rhetoric translation. Statistical analysis is adopted for the sorted literature from various dimensions including languages involved in the transfer, translation direction, text type, research perspective, rhetoric device and citation frequency.

It is found languages involved in the study on rhetoric translation are almost Chinese and English. In this paper, there are 39 articles, 9 dissertations and 211 theses which deal with rhetoric translation from Chinese to English or vice versa. This means 90% of literature collected for the paper focuses on the exchanges between Chinese and English. Other languages have been discussed but the proportion is small. Among the literature sorted for the paper, it is discovered that languages of Chinese minority nationalities, like Uyghur, Tibetan, Mongolian and Kirgiz, have been discussed in rhetoric translation. When translation direction is explored, it can be found the current study on rhetoric translation usually focuses on one direction that is from Chinese to another language. 145 articles are detected to deal with the translation of rhetorical expressions from Chinese to another language that is almost English. Through the study of this paper, it is found Chinese scholars prefer concrete texts as their corpus for the study on rhetoric translation and the major text types are literature works, classic works and publicity texts. Research perspective for the current study can be in a narrow or broad sense. In this paper, it is traceable that most sorted literature chooses the narrow perspective which only concerns translation of rhetoric device. Therefore, rhetoric translation from the perspective of a broad sense is rare and only 41 academic works (9 articles, 7 dissertations and 25 theses) adopt the broad perspective. Although the study on rhetoric translation from the broad perspective is in small numbers, the works with high citation frequency on CNKI in the past 10 years are the ones from the broad perspective.

On the basis of CNKI, this paper has reviewed the study on rhetoric translation in China from 1997 to 2021. Since the number and type of literature are restricted to articles, dissertations and theses on CNKI, this paper has not been able to review the published books on rhetoric translation. Therefore, it is meaningful to make further efforts to study the books on rhetoric translation in the future.

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