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Outward Translation of Chinese Academic Books and Translator Education: A Project-based Route to Professional Competence

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Abstract

Academic translation from Chinese has become more and more prominent as a tangible point of convergence of knowledge dissemination, international publication, and translator education. Nevertheless, in many professional programmes book translation remains to be seen as a mere consequence of personal accomplishment of individual teachers, not as a teachable and repeatable process of training. Building upon the existing research on translator education, situated learning, translation competence, and language service-based training, this paper argues that academic translation with a view to publication is a valuable way to train professional translators due to its educational potential which does not only lie in a quantity of words translated, but also includes reading, terminology management, revision, editorial discussion, metadata preparation, and post-publication reflection. This article first gives an overview of relevant literature both from China and internationally; it then discusses educational potential and shortcomings of university-industry translation collaboration; finally, it presents a multi-step model which covers topic selection, team building, translation, evaluation, publication and classroom reutilization. Thus, it is concluded that academic outward translation can serve as an effective competence-building tool if properly arranged as a supervised project instead of loose extracurricular activity.

Keywords

Academic book translation; outward translation; translator education; situated learning; university-enterprise cooperation

1. Introduction

The process of international distribution of academic books by Chinese scholars usually gets investigated through the prism of cultural communication or publishing strategy and relatively little attention is paid to the aspect of educational importance. However, in the case of translator education this issue is highly relevant. Professional academic translation implies continuous reading, conceptual evaluation, systematic research and documentation, terminological consistency, diligent revising and attention to the target audience. All these criteria coincide perfectly with the list of competencies, developed by professional translator education but it is rather difficult to measure them through traditional classroom tasks.

The development of MTI (Master of Translation and Interpreting) education in China created a strong institutional basis for professional translator education. At the same time, the conflict between academic and professional

translator education still exists. Ma (2017) states, while discussing translation education and translation studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University, that the development of the discipline has to be connected to the formation of a translator who will satisfy social and professional needs. Tao (2017) from the perspective of MTI education at a comprehensive university states that professional degree education has to go beyond the logic of academic postgraduate education. This observation is still valid since many programs base their activities on short-text exercises, simulations and internships which are not always properly controlled.

This article approaches academic book translation as a form of project-based translator education. It does not suggest that every student should be made to translate a monograph. Rather, it argues that well-selected outward translation projects can serve as an organising framework through which teachers, students and language-service enterprises jointly experience the full chain of professional translation. The central question is therefore pedagogical: under what conditions can academic outward translation become a mechanism of competence formation rather than merely a publication outcome?

2. Literature Review: From Translation Competence to Situated Practice

International research on translator education has long moved beyond the assumption that translation competence is simply an extension of bilingual ability. Empirical research conducted by the PACTE Group understands translation competence as a complex structure involving knowledge and skills including decision-making strategies and the ability to produce target text that can be considered acceptable despite constraints (PACTE Group, 2009). The research by Hurtado Albir et al. (2020) shows that translation competence requires a longitudinal approach toward developing procedural, strategic and problem-solving skills among trainees. This research is valuable in that it moves away from declarative knowledge towards performance in solving translation problems.

Situated learning provides a second theoretical lens. Kiraly (2006) argues for project-based learning in translator education, challenging transmission-oriented classrooms and emphasising authentic or near-authentic tasks. González-Davies and Enríquez-Raído (2016) define situated learning in translator and interpreter training as exposure to real-life or highly simulated professional environments in which learners gradually learn to think and act like professionals. Risku (2016) extends this discussion to research training, showing that academic research skills can also be learned through situated, practice-oriented processes. Taken together, these studies justify the use of publication-facing translation projects as more than supplementary practice.

There is similar evidence produced by Chinese scholars within the sphere of both language services and professional degrees. Men and Li (2018) propose a comprehensive framework for training scientific and technical translators against the backdrop of the modern language service industry, emphasizing sustained collaboration between universities and professional market institutions. Li and Peng (2025) further develop the above discussion with respect to cognitive aspects of translation technology competence, which is particularly relevant to long-term translation projects associated with term management, information search, and revisions control. While varying in scope, the above studies agree with each other in one thing – professional translator training must be based on practice, context, and responsibility, not just classroom explanation.

Recent SSCI-indexed studies on artificial intelligence and translator/interpreter education provide an additional caution. Han, Lu and Fan (2025) examine the use of large language models in consecutive interpreting assessment, while Jiao, Hu and Zhang (2025) discuss whether large language models can provide useful feedback in translation education. Zou et al. (2026) also report on the potential of ChatGPT in developing gisting skills among interpreting students. Such work confirms that AI tools are becoming part of the translation-learning environment. Yet it also indicates that technology cannot replace the pedagogical work of explanation, revision, judgement and accountability. In academic book translation, this is particularly clear: machine output may assist drafting or terminology retrieval, but it cannot assume responsibility for conceptual interpretation, scholarly style or publication ethics.

3. Why Academic Book Translation Matters for Translator Education

The translation of academic books as education is valuable for imposing the duration to the translational activity. Weekly excerpts used in many translation classes are chosen to demonstrate a specific technique and are helpful but still inadequate. The duration is imposed by the book-length translation, which requires translators to use consistent language across all chapters, create the logical thread, learn the specific terminology of the discipline, and make revisions after seeing the next chapter. Students therefore encounter translation as a process rather than as a sequence

of isolated sentences.

In addition, the method develops the discipline of reading. In order to be able to translate scholarly books, translators need to understand the subject field, reconstruct author's system of thoughts, and know the conventions of the target discipline. It is especially relevant when one translates an outward text from Chinese into English when the translator acts as an intermediary between Chinese academia and the expectations of the international scientific community. The task is not simply to make the text grammatical; it is to make the knowledge intelligible, credible and usable for readers who may not share the source context.

Yet another advantage of the method is that it allows students to familiarize themselves with the publishing process. Class translation is limited by the professor's evaluation, while the publishing translation continues into the process of revising, editing, citation checking, metadata creation, and even library distribution. Thus, students get to understand that the quality of the translation does not lie only in the translation itself but in the surrounding workflow. The names, titles, citations, captions, abstracts, and keywords affect the translatability and credibility of the work. All of these are often ignored in typical assignments, although they form the core of professional translation.

Lastly, academic book translation allows to collect reusable teaching resources. A project leaves behind bilingual terminology, parallel passages, revision records, translator queries and editorial decisions. If these materials are systematically archived, they can be transformed into classroom cases. Students in later cohorts can compare first drafts with revised versions, analyse why certain terms were changed, and learn how quality control operates in actual projects. This is where a single translation task becomes a durable pedagogical asset.

4. University-Enterprise Cooperation: Educational Promise and Practical Limits

University-enterprise cooperation is often invoked in professional-degree education, but its quality varies considerably. At its weakest, it consists of a formal agreement, a plaque and occasional lectures. At its strongest, it creates a division of labour in which the university provides disciplinary knowledge and student development, while the enterprise provides project management, publishing experience, client communication and quality assurance. Academic outward translation requires the latter form of cooperation.

In general, a substantive project usually begins with topic selection. Universities are better positioned to judge whether a source book represents disciplinary value, local academic strength or cultural significance. Enterprises are better positioned to evaluate translatability, copyright feasibility, target readership and publication channels. When these two judgements are combined, the chosen project is more likely to be both academically meaningful and professionally viable. Without this selection mechanism, the translated initiative will either be academically important but unreadable outside the university or convenient for business but educationally insignificant.

Secondly, the problem of team creation arises. A publishable academic translation should not depend on one enthusiastic teacher working in isolation. A more reliable structure includes a chief translator or academic adviser, student translators, peer reviewers, terminology coordinators, professional editors and project managers. Each role should have written responsibilities. Students need to know whether they are translating, checking references, building a glossary, preparing summaries, comparing editions or assisting with copyediting. Defined roles transform participation into training rather than casual labour.

Several limitations have to be mentioned as well. First, existing projects often concentrate on humanities, local culture and management topics, while scientific, medical, engineering and agricultural subjects remain relatively underrepresented. Second, the participation of students is frequently shallow. They may help with preliminary translation or formatting but rarely experience the full cycle from preparation to revision. Third, post-publication tracking is weak. A book may be published abroad, but little is known about library acquisition, readership, reviews or citations. Fourth, project knowledge is often lost after delivery because glossaries, revision files and editorial comments are not converted into teaching materials. These limitations show that publication alone does not guarantee educational value.

5. A Staged Model for Publication-Oriented Translator Training

A more accountable model may be organised in seven stages. The first stage is project selection. Source texts should be evaluated according to academic value, target-reader relevance, copyright status, length, terminology density, availability of supporting materials and compatibility with the programme's training goals. The student involvement is necessary at this stage for developing the understanding of the nature of professional decision making prior to

translation.

The second stage is preparatory research. It includes the construction of the source-text, author, target-reader profiles, reference list, and the initial glossary. A sample translation needs to be performed before starting a full-scale project. This stage is crucial in that it highlights the problems of unstable names, vague conceptual categories, culture-specific elements, illustrations or tables that need to be handled separately, and references to be checked and translated.

The third stage is controlled drafting. Student translators may work on assigned sections, but their work should be guided by a style sheet and a shared terminology database. At the same time, translators' notes, where students note down difficult decisions, alternative versions, and unresolved questions, should be kept. Such notes are pedagogically important because they make the student's reasoning visible. They also provide material for later discussion and assessment.

The fourth stage is peer review and instructor review. Peer review encourages students to read each other as professionals rather than as competitors. Instructor review provides disciplinary, linguistic and ethical supervision. Finally, there comes professional-endeavor review, which connects the classroom to publication standards. It is important to perform these steps in this order since if the professional editors only correct the draft, the students might see only the result without the underlying reasoning. If revision is staged, they can understand why certain choices fail and how a publishable version is gradually produced.

The fifth stage is concerned with quality assurance. It involves terminology consistency, names, quotations, bibliographic information, tables, captions, permissions, formatting and the use of AI-assisted tools. The AI tools can be used for reference retrieval, comparison or draft checking, but its use should be documented. Students should realize that the technological aid does not remove human responsibility; it increases the need for verification.

The sixth stage is publication preparation. Abstracts, keywords, author biographies, book descriptions and metadata should be written or checked in the target language. These paratexts are not administrative leftovers. They determine how a book is presented to publishers, catalogues, distributors, libraries and readers. Involving students in this stage helps them understand the relation between translation and international discoverability.

The final stage is classroom reuse and evaluation. After publication, the team should prepare a short project report and teaching cases. Indicators may include student roles, translated word count, revision cycles, typical errors, terminology entries, publication channel, library holdings where available and follow-up use in courses. This converts the project into a resource for curriculum development and teacher training.

6. Implications for Curriculum, Teachers and Assessment

First, when it comes to curriculum design, translation programs need to reserve enough space for long-term, project-based work. Short exercises are still useful for building basic skills, but they alone are not enough to fully develop habits like sustained work, proper documentation, and professional accountability. So, programmes may therefore develop elective workshops, publication translation modules or capstone projects in which students participate in real or near-real academic translation tasks under supervision.

Second, teacher development is also worth thinking about. Professional-degree education requires teachers who understand not only translation theory but also translation workflow. If teachers can get involved in academic outward translation themselves, they can sharpen their practical skills, get familiar with publishing requirements, and bring more credible cases to the classroom. This does not mean that all teachers must become full-time professional translators. It does mean that professional translator education should value documented translation practice as a legitimate part of academic work.

Third, assessment methods should be adjusted. Rather than relying on a single final exam, it makes more sense to use a portfolio to document each student's contribution to a project. The portfolio may include translated passages, revision records, terminology work, translator's notes, peer-review comments and reflective essays. Such evidence shows how the student develops over time, responds to criticism and makes decisions under constraints. This approach aligns better with the competence-based assessment model that's widely advocated in international translation education.

Finally, the success of university-enterprise cooperation should never be judged by the number of formal agreements signed, but by the real, tangible quality of collaborative work. A truly valuable partnership features jointly researched project topics, fully integrated operational processes, clear role responsibilities for participating students, rigorous professional evaluation standards, ethical and responsible application of technologies, and the

transformation of project achievements into actionable teaching resources. With all these key components in place, enterprises can grow into genuine educational partners for universities, instead of merely serving as simple internship venues for students.

7. Conclusion

For Chinese academic books to be translated outward in a way that truly benefits translator education, the process needs to be structured as a deliberate pedagogical exercise. Its value does not lie merely in producing a translated volume. It lies in the sustained experience of disciplinary reading, terminology management, drafting, revision, quality assurance, publication preparation and reflective reuse. In this sense, academic book translation is not simply a service to knowledge dissemination; it's a demanding training ground where professional competence can take shape.

Looking ahead, there are three areas to focus on. First, more attention should be given to science, technology, medicine, agriculture and other knowledge-intensive fields, where the demand for outward academic translation is substantial but training resources are limited. Second, student participation should be deepened through clearly defined roles and portfolio-based assessment. Third, post-publication evidence should be collected more systematically, including library holdings, reviews, citations and classroom reuse. If these conditions are met, academic outward translation can become a practical bridge between Chinese scholarship, international publishing and the reform of professional translator education.

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