

Article

National Research Funding for Sustainable Growth in Translation Studies as an Academic Discipline in China

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Received: 27 July 2020; Accepted: 1 September 2020; Published: 4 September 2020



Abstract: Global changes in both the current economic climate and political priorities have posed significant challenges concerning government spending on research, which undermines the survival and development of a number of academic disciplines, especially those in arts and humanities. This article reports on an inquiry that examines whether and how national research funding has supported the development of translation studies as an academic discipline in China, employing the example of the National Social Science Fund of China (NSSFC) subsidy, as allocated to the field of translation studies. Firstly, we accessed the NSSFC database for all programs featuring translation and translation studies between 2010 and 2019. Secondly, we coded, categorized, and processed the data in a quantitative manner. Our examination of the number of grants, research focuses, and frequently examined issues of these programs has led us to conclude the fact that NSSFC has facilitated the increase in translation studies as an academic discipline in China. Further investigation into the positive relationship between NSSFC funding policies and mechanism and the growth in academic translation studies has also identified the ways NSSFC boosts translation studies as an academic discipline in China: to promote and increase the market, interdisciplinary, and multimodal applicability of the research output. The findings also suggest that revisions may be needed to further refine the NSSFC mechanism so that translation studies will develop into a balanced, continuously innovative discipline.

Keywords: national funding; research programs; translation studies

1. Introduction

Public funding is an important element of research regulation across universities in a number of national, political, and cultural settings [1]. Multiple reports concerning research policy [2–5] have revealed a correlation between financial incentives provided by the government and the sustainable production of disciplinary knowledge (such as numbers and quality of research publications). Through structuring subsidies into specific academic focuses, disciplinary fields and social/industrial sectors, government sponsors can steer national research towards a particular direction [2,3].

However, due to the changing economic climate and political priorities of the twenty-first century, many countries are facing challenges when it comes to government spending on research, including budget constraints and changes in the funding mechanisms. For example, in EU countries, the gross domestic expenditure on R&D has not experienced any significant increase over the previous two decades, with the share of direct government funding gradually declining since the 2008 global financial crisis [6]. In England, UK, research grants have offered only 24% of the total funding allocated to

the tertiary educational system [4]. In addition, Nordic countries (e.g., Sweden) and Australia have paid more attention to the market applicability of research output. As a result, they have raised the proportion of research funding allocated to non-collegial organizations, and simultaneously reduced subsidies for universities [2]. A consequence of this changed funding mechanism is that it hinders the sustainable development of research in the field of arts and humanities [2], which have less market applicability compared to science and engineering. Furthermore, despite an annual total of nearly USD 10 billion for theoretical and applied research being allocated by the National Science Foundation (NSF) [7], some research disciplines in the USA have currently received disproportionately low funding, such as health research [8] and again, arts and humanities [7].

The Chinese government has, by contrast, devoted a number of financial resources in recent decades into university research particularly on arts and humanities. For example, the funding of research in the field of arts and humanities has been facilitated by the National Social Science Fund of China (NSSFC), which has been administered by the State Council since 1986. University research programs supported by NSSFC “contribute to government policy-making in regard to China’s economic and social development”, and “legitimately represent the highest level and frontiers of research” in the field of arts and humanities [9]. Against this backdrop, it is necessary for researchers to examine whether research funding in China contributes to the sustainable growth of disciplines in the field of arts and humanities.

Viewing the organization and institutionalization of knowledge of disciplines as a systemic structure, Munday sees translation studies as an academic discipline “existing at the intersection of longer-established disciplines” in the field of arts and humanities, and having elements of “comparative literature, linguistics, modern language and language studies, cultural studies, philosophy, sociology, and history”, etc [10]. We therefore selected translation studies to represent the field of arts and humanities, and explored NSSFC funding allocations to this specific academic discipline to answer: Does national research funding contribute to the sustainable growth of translation studies as an academic discipline in China?

Furthermore, in order to depict the relationship between contemporary Chinese research funding system and the most recent development of translation studies in China, we restricted the time span to the previous decade, i.e., between 2010 and 2019.

The following sections commence with an overview of the developmental history of translation studies as an independent discipline, both globally and in China. Then we report on our inquiry, followed by its results unveiling the current development of translation studies as an academic discipline in China. Finally, we further discuss in what ways the NSSFC funding policies and mechanism contribute to the sustainable development of translation studies as an academic discipline in China, and locate the limitations of the current funding system.

2. Development of Translation Studies as an Academic Discipline: A Historical Perspective

Translation was traditionally regarded as a means of foreign language teaching [10]. As an independent discipline, translation studies was first recognized during the second half of the twentieth century [10] and was officially established in China in the early 1980s [11]. Since this recognition, translation studies has witnessed a number of dramatic developments. The initial focus was on establishing linguistic equivalence [12] and equivalent effect [13], through shifts [14] as well as different strategies and procedures [15] during intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic code-switching [12]. Furthermore, to develop the disciplinarity of translation studies, Holmes [16] put forward a systemic framework describing the areas translation studies should cover, which was subsequently developed by Toury [17]. The framework is known as the “Holmes–Toury Map” [17] today. In view of the disciplinary history of translation studies, the Holmes–Toury Map, and its revision by Chesterman [18] are the most extensively used frameworks for the creation of disciplinary descriptions and analyses of translation studies. Nonetheless, it should be noted that neither are sufficiently inclusive to capture the most recent interdisciplinary changes impacting translation studies [10].

From the late 1980s, many theories and approaches from various disciplines in the field of arts and humanities were imported into translation studies, including: (1) mass-communication theories [19]; (2) the Hallidayan influence of discourse analysis and systemic functional grammar [20,21]; (3) the concept of the literary polysystem [22–24]; (4) postcolonial philosophy [25,26]; (5) ethics in sociology [27,28]. This cultural turn of the discipline led translation to be viewed in a sociocultural context, resulting in an ever-increasing number of investigations into cross-cultural activities. Developments continued into the new millennium, which has been characterized by globalization [29] and the development of new technologies [30–32]. Furthermore, the reach of this discipline has expanded considerably, coupled with strategic research on cultural diplomacy [33] and image building [34,35] in both China and the rest of the world. In conclusion, as pointed out by Munday in the previous section, translation studies, as an academic discipline, has an interdisciplinary nature and is still embracing continued emergence of perspectives and technologies in other disciplines [10].

3. Inquiry

To examine whether research funding from NSSFCC contributes to the sustainable development of translation studies as an academic discipline in China, our inquiry drew methodology from previous studies based on both research programs in receipt of national funding [5,8,36,37] and on journal articles and monographs of a given discipline [38–41]. These studies have used at least three common dimensions to describe the development of an academic discipline, consisting of the total number of program/publication entries, the research focus of each study, and the frequently examined issues during a particular period: (1) the number of research programs and publications forms an direct indicator of the importance attached to a specific academic discipline [5,8,40]; (2) the research focuses map the research territory of an academic discipline [38,39,41]; (3) the frequently examined issues indicate what is trending within that disciplinary scope over a particular time span [36,37]. For these reasons, we employed the procedures outlined below to demonstrate the number of grants, research focuses, and frequently examined issues of NSSFCC programs related to translation studies.

3.1. Data Collection

NSSFCC annually releases separate lists of “major subsidized projects”, along with “basic subsidized programs” and “specialized programs for young scholars”. As the highest proportion is made up of basic subsidized programs, which also have the longest history of funding, we decided to focus this current inquiry on grants for translation studies within the list of basic subsidized programs.

We commenced by conducting a search of the annual indexes of basic subsidized programs via the NSSFCC official database (<http://fz.people.com.cn/skygb/sk/index.php/Index/seach>), between the fiscal years 2010 and 2019. In recognition of the interdisciplinary nature of translation studies [10], we reviewed in depth each item in the ten indexes, in order to identify any possible program involving translation practice and translation studies, regardless of what research field NSSFCC originally categorized it into. For example, NSSFCC categorized *On Localization History of Terms in Marxism Classics in China* (Jin, S., 2012) into Marxism sociology, despite its publication stating that it set out to write the translation history of Marxism terminology in China. We therefore counted the program as one of our study objects. Moreover, we took translation in its broadest sense in terms of both source and target languages [12], including all programs involving intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic code-switching. For example, the program *On Translated Poetry in Classical Chinese Writing between the Late Qing Dynasty and the May Fourth Movement* (Cai, J., 2019) examined texts of poems in which ancient Chinese was translated into modern Chinese, along with a comparison of the versions in ancient and modern Chinese. According to its definition [12], interlingual translation takes place even when no foreign language is involved, enabling us to count this as one of our study objects. This exhaustive identification strategy gave us a complete pool of all the translation-related programs granted by NSSFCC throughout the previous decade. In addition, we collected meta-data of these programs via the NSSFCC database, including details of levels of funding, information of the researchers

of each translation-related program, etc. The data were subsequently stored in Excel 2010 spreadsheets for easy access, calculation, graphing and qualitative analyses.

3.2. Coding and Processing

The collected data were then coded and processed for the analyses of the number of grants, research focuses, and frequently examined issues of translation-related NSSFC programs.

In order to capture the changes in the number of grants, we calculated the annual growth rate of translation-related NSSFC programs, as well as the ratio of translation-related programs to NSSFC programs of all disciplines of arts and humanities. Additionally, we charted the overall variation tendency of the number of translation-related NSSFC programs over the previous ten years to visualize the changing importance and place of translation studies among all the disciplines in the field of arts and humanities.

In order to analyze the research focuses of the programs, we employed a coding structure. The coding structure was developed based on the most commonly used frameworks for disciplinary descriptions and analyses of translation studies, i.e., the Holmes–Toury Map [17] and its revision [18] introduced in Section 2. Since the previous frameworks failed to include the latest perspectives and changes impacting on the development of translation studies, we integrated as many new topics as we were able to find in the literature review into the basic structures of the Holmes–Toury Map and its revision. A final version is presented in Table 1. The codes reflect the six main research focuses of translation studies as an academic discipline (theoretical, linguistic, textual, specialized, applied, and strategic translation studies) and their key descriptors. With this coding structure, we were able to identify the research focus of each translation-related NSSFC program, and categorize them into six different groups. For those programs which had potentially ambiguous research focuses, we searched the publication(s) of the programs and their researchers' academic backgrounds as references, in order to decide their thematic emphases. For example, Chinese–Korean Translation Corpus and China's National Discourse in China–South Korea Communication (Lu, X., 2018) appeared, from its program title, to entail two key thematic descriptors: (1) corpus-based translation studies and (2) national discourse and global communication. However, the program publication stated that the ultimate purpose of that research was to give strategic advice in relation to China–South Korea communication with corpus featuring China's national discourse used as a tool. Furthermore, the researcher's previous studies and publications accessed on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database (<https://kns.cnki.net/>) had all focused on mass communication. We therefore classified the program into strategic translation studies. After checking each individual program in this systematic manner, we were finally able to calculate the proportional distribution of the programs of the six main research-focus categories, and also to present their respective variation tendencies over time.

Table 1. Coding structure for research focus of translation studies.

Main Research Focuses	Definition	Key Descriptors
Theoretical translation studies	Establishment and development of principles explaining and predicting translation phenomena.	Theoretical innovation and development; disciplinary development; etc.
Linguistic translation studies	Descriptions of linguistic features and maneuvers in translation.	Linguistic/micro-level description and Generalization; ontological studies, etc. Genre specific; subject-matter specific; textual work/publication specific; writer specific; translator specific; literary-school specific; period-specific/history review; classics translation; translation strategies and procedures; reception and influence of translation in different literary systems; canonization; comparative literature, etc.
Textual translation studies	Descriptions of translation phenomena in written texts.	Translation and interpretation for specific purposes; interpreting studies; signed language interpreting; terminology; lexicography; etc.
Specialized translation studies	Descriptions of translation phenomena in professional and specialized areas.	Translator and interpreter training; evaluation and testing; machine translation; computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools; multimodality and multimedia; translation criticism; translation policy; translation and language service industry; translation ethics; etc.
Applied translation studies	Investigations into translation-related real-life problems in society.	Cultural output and exchange; transnational and global communication; national discourse; national image building; national and global governance; etc.
Strategic translation studies	Applications of translation practice to national policy and strategy making.	

When it came to the analysis of the frequently examined issues, we further extracted high-frequency words from the titles of translation-related NSSFC programs between 2010 and 2019. In doing so, we initially segmented the titles using the text segmentation system “segtag” (Xiamen University, China). Following this, we manually deleted those words irrelevant to the research focus (e.g., “study” and “view/perspective”), as well as all the functional words. We then calculated the frequency of each individual word with WordSmith 6 and manually combined synonyms (e.g., “China” and “the People’s Republic of China”), followed by adding together their frequency. This enabled us to draw up a word list in terms of frequency, which included 463 words with frequency being one. We used Donohue’s mathematical formula (in which n stands for a critical point of high-frequency words in a given text; I_1 stands for the number of words with their frequency being one [42], as set out below:

$$n = (-1 + \sqrt{1 + 8I_1})/2 \quad (1)$$

to calculate the critical point of high-frequency words in our word lists. This was found to be approximately 29.93. We then extracted all words with a frequency value above 29.93, and finally drew up the high-frequency word list for the titles of translation-related NSSFC programs that we could employ to discuss the frequently examined issues in translation studies.

4. Results

With the above inquiry exploring NSSFC subsidy allocated to translation-related programs, we have determined that national research funding contributes to the sustainable growth of translation studies as an academic discipline in China. In this section, as inquiry results, we elaborate on the sustainable growth of translation studies with NSSFC funding from the perspectives of the number of grants, research focuses of the programs, and frequently examined issues.

4.1. Number of Grants

The NSSFC allocation mechanism has two levels of funding (level 1 and level 2). The fund for each program at the same level is fixed and equal. Prior to 2014, this was CNY 300,000 (about USD 43,000) for each level-1 program and CNY 180,000 (about USD 25,800) for each level-2. Following 2014, the amount became CNY 350,000 (about USD 50,170) and CNY 200,000 (about USD 28,670), respectively. As shown in Table 2, a total of 787 programs involving translation practice and translation studies have received funding from NSSFC over the past decade, including 69 rated level 1 and 718 level 2. This indicates an annual average of 79 programs, consisting of seven level-1 grants and 72 level-2 grants. Thus, the Chinese government can be seen to have invested approximately CNY 160 million (about USD 23 million) through NSSFC into the research on translation studies between 2010 and 2019. At the same time, the total number of translation-related programs in each year can be seen to have practically quintupled between 2010 and 2019, as illustrated in Figure 1. Furthermore, the average annual growth rate of translation-related programs in terms of numbers (19.26%) outpace that of all NSSCF programs (10.86%). In addition, there is an overall augmentation in the proportion of translation-related programs to programs of all disciplines of arts and humanities.

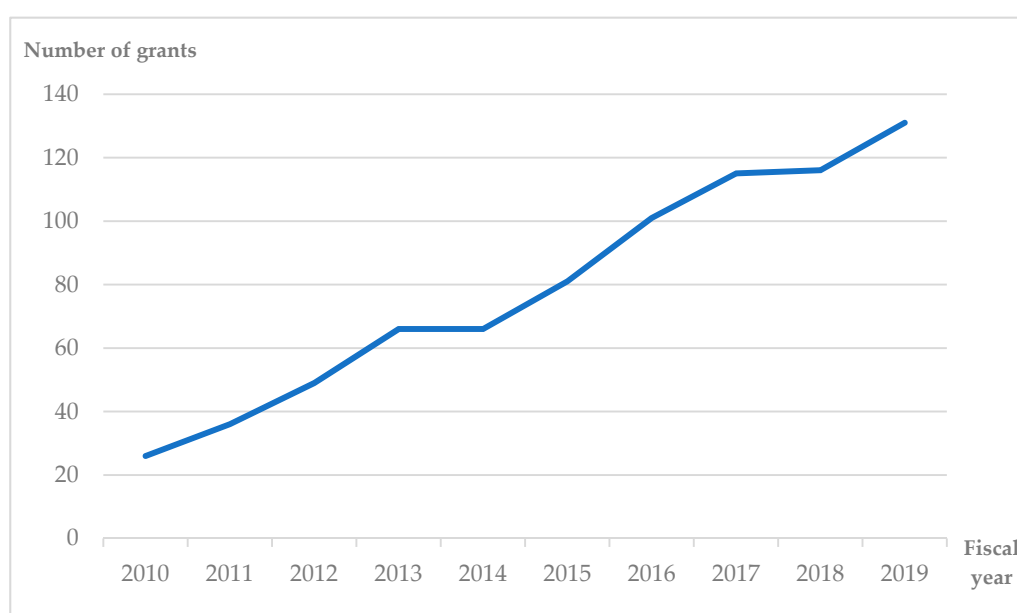


Figure 1. Variation tendency of the number of translation-related National Social Science Fund of China (NSSFC) programs over time.

These statistical patterns lead us to contend that there has been a growing emphasis on the importance and place of translation studies among arts and humanities in China, resulting in increased national funding. It should also be pointed out that the ratio of translation-related programs to all the research on arts and humanities remains limited at less than 10%, suggesting a potential for the continued growth of translation studies as an academic discipline.

Table 2. Number, growth rate, and ratio of NSSFC programs: translation-related and of all arts and humanities.

Fiscal Year	Total Number of Translation-Related Programs	Annual Growth Rate (%) ¹	Number of Translation-Related Programs: Level-1	Number of Translation-Related Programs: Level-2	Total Number of Programs of all Disciplines of Arts and Humanities	Annual Growth Rate (%)	Ratio of Translation-Related Programs to Programs of all Disciplines of Arts and Humanities (%)
2010	26	–	2	24	1430	–	1.81
2011	36	27.78	2	34	1761	23.15	2.04
2012	49	36.11	3	46	1965	11.58	2.49
2013	66	34.69	7	59	2295	16.79	2.88
2014	66	0.00	5	61	2774	20.87	2.38
2015	81	22.73	11	70	2750	–0.87	2.95
2016	101	24.69	7	94	2857	3.89	3.54
2017	115	13.86	13	102	3196	11.86	3.60
2018	116	0.87	13	103	3505	9.67	3.31
2019	131	12.93	6	125	3534	0.83	3.71
Grand total	787	–	69	718	6067	–	–
Annual average	78.70	19.26	6.90	71.80	–	10.86	2.87

¹ The percentage values are rounded to two decimal places in the article.

4.2. Research Focuses

With all the NSSFC programs relating to translation studies between 2010 and 2019 systematically categorized according to our coding structure for research focus (see Table 1), we can identify the proportions of the six categories (theoretical, linguistic, textual, specialized, applied, and strategic translation studies) as presented in Figure 2, as well as the variation over the ten-year time span of each category, as in Figure 3. These two figures provide an overview of the importance of, and changes in, the six main research focuses of translation studies based on NSSFC programs. The detailed analyses of the six main research focuses (in descending order by proportion) are as follows.

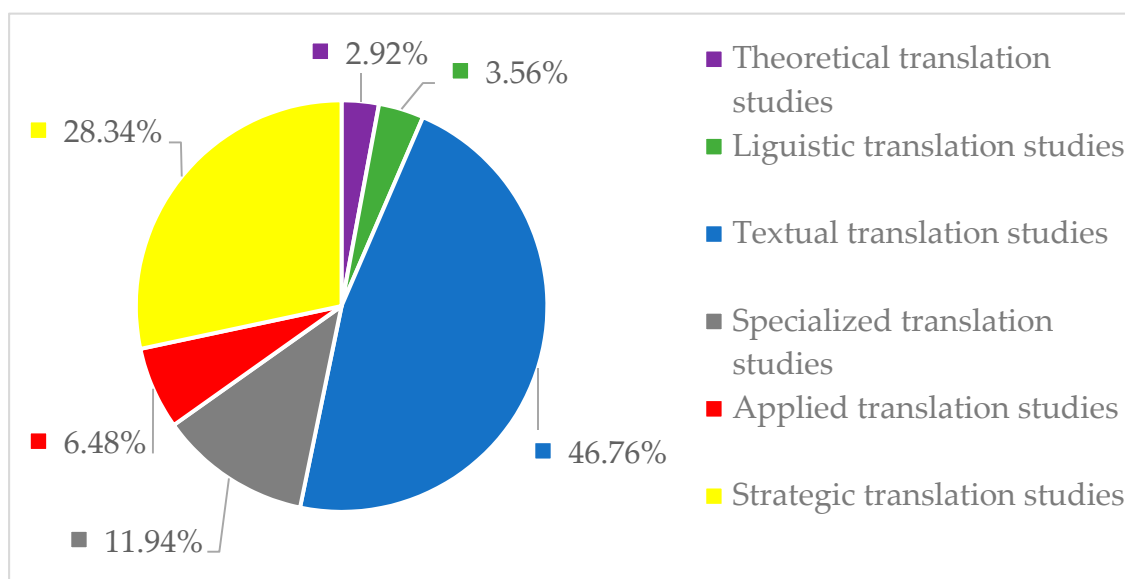


Figure 2. Proportional distribution of the six main research focuses of translation studies.

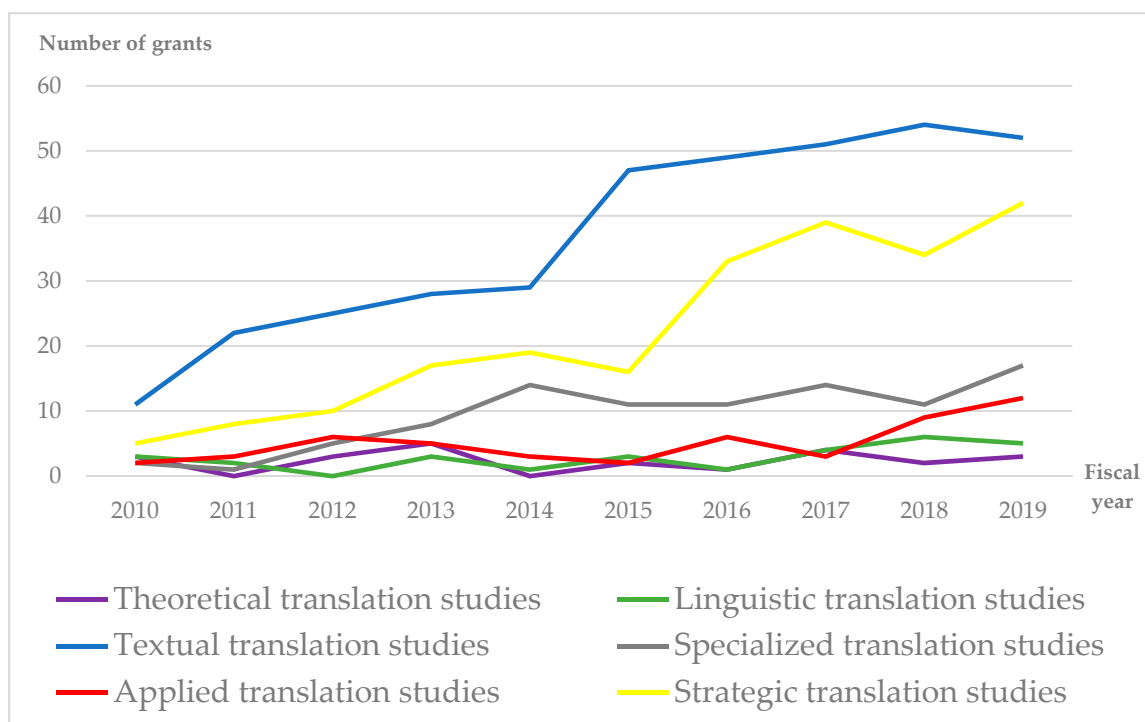


Figure 3. Variation tendencies of the six main research focuses of translation studies over time.

4.2.1. Textual Translation Studies

Written texts, especially literary texts, form traditional research objects of translation studies. Over the previous ten years, there have been 368 (46.76%) NSSF-FC-granted programs falling into the category of textual translation studies (see Figure 2), showing that textual studies remains the most dominant research focus among translation studies to be funded. At the same time, textual studies continues to rise (see Figure 3).

Some programs with this research focus select a specific textual genre, including: (1) poetry (e.g., poetry of the Tang Dynasty, modern free verses, local epics in ethnic regions, Tibetan poetry, and Uyghur poetry); (2) novels (e.g., the Four Great Classical Novels in China, science fiction, and Web fiction); (3) plays (e.g., ancient Greek Tragedies, Shakespearean plays, and poetic dramas of the Yuan Dynasty); (4) ancient classics (e.g., Confucian books, Taoist books, and Graeco philosophical literature); (5) religious scriptures (e.g., the Bible, and the Buddhist sutras); (6) historical documents of a special event or period (e.g., the May Fourth Movement, and the Second World War). Others select writings of (7) a particular writer or translator (e.g., Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Francis Bacon, George Bernard Shaw, Marianne Moore, Lu Xun, and Mo Yan); or (8) a literary school (e.g., the naturalistic poetics, feminism, the New Moon School, and the July School). Based on these various texts, scholars focus on (1) translation strategies and procedures (e.g., covert/overt translation, re-translation, and self-translation); (2) historical reviews of the introduction of literary works to another culture; (3) the interactions between different literary systems through translation. For example, *On Translation Strategies of Ancient Books and Records: A Case Study on "Library Series of Chinese Classics"* (Wang, H., 2013) and *A Comparison between Chinese and Western Schools of Ancient Poetry Translation Studies* (Zhang, B., 2011).

Our inquiry determines that 67.85% of existing researchers focusing on textual studies originate from literary and linguistic circles. There are also a number of researchers from other academic backgrounds (e.g., philosophy, history, ethnology, anthropology, and religious studies) which have successfully introduced new perspectives and approaches to textual translation studies. For example, *On Translated Bible and Language Movement in Late Qing Dynasty* (Zhao, X., 2011).

When it comes to languages, we can find an almost equal number of foreign-Chinese translation programs (156) and Chinese-foreign (154). This suggests that China has, over the previous decade, encouraged national academic investment in (1) bringing in and learning about overseas cultures and mindsets, and (2) exporting well-regarded Chinese literature and traditional arts. For example, *On Outward Translation of Chinese Science Fictions Impacted by China's "Go-Global" Plan* (Li, H., 2017). Furthermore, there are over 40 programs focusing on the languages of Chinese ethnic minorities (e.g., Tibetan, Uyghur, Mongolian, and rare tongues such as Hmong and Yi), indicating the importance attached to local and ethnic cultures.

4.2.2. Strategic Translation Studies

The second dominant research focus of translation studies granted by NSSF-FC is strategic studies, with a total of 223 (28.34%) programs having been undertaken between 2010 and 2019 (see Figure 2). Likewise, our inquiry identifies an increasing trend of strategic translation studies (see Figure 3), with a surge of interest taking place particularly after 2015 (see Figure 3). These patterns suggest the emerging compatibility of arts and humanities with China's national strategic orientation.

Programs with this research focus are generally on developing translation practice for (1) Chinese multimedia products (e.g., movies, documentaries, and radio programs); (2) Chinese cultural heritage (e.g., traditional Chinese medicine, martial arts, tea ceremony, and folk customs); (3) the construction of China's national discourse, global communication, and image building in the international community.

Scholars specializing in journalism, communication studies, and international relations all provide perspectives of and advice on different steps of the translation process, including the source text selection, choice of translator, development of communicative channels, and global marketing, thus contributing more to the interdisciplinary nature of translation studies. For example, *On Translation, Communication,*

and Reception of Chinese TV Programs Overseas (Liu, Y., 2016). At the same time, ethnologists and specialists in regional and country-specific studies from China's frontier areas (e.g., Northeast China, Northwest China, and Yunnan Province) explore improvements in the ways translations can be applied to cultural exchanges between multiple ethnic groups, or with China's neighboring regions (e.g., Central Asia, Korean Peninsula, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the Ryukyu Islands). For example, *On Strengthening the Cultural Translation and Communication between China and Central Asia* (Zhu, X., 2018).

When it comes to languages, the great majority of translation activities in these programs (193) contain mandarin Chinese and minority languages in China (Uyghur, Mongolian, and Yao) as source languages, as well as rich target languages from the rest of the world (e.g., English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Japanese, and Korean). The language distribution thus reflects China's policy, as proposed in the new millennium, of "go-global".

4.2.3. Specialized Translation Studies

Research on translation for particular purposes from all walks of life tend to bridge the gap between pure academic output and market demand [10]. Of all the translation-related programs with the NSSFC support undertaken during the previous decade, there are 94 (11.94%) specialized translation studies, making translation for special purposes the third dominant research focus (see Figure 2). Nevertheless, the number of programs focusing on specialized studies has fluctuated over the previous ten years, and only recently reached its peak (see Figure 3).

Our inquiry identifies a wide range of social, scientific, and industrial areas demanding translation studies, including economy/finance, trade, tourism, law, politics, diplomacy, medicine, natural sciences, engineering, and military affairs. Discussions tend to center on parallel term compiling, translation standard setting, and translation techniques, all of which are practice motivated. For example, *On Standard Setting in Translating China's Law and Regulations* (Dong, X., 2014). In addition, five programs examine oral translation/interpreting and signed language translation from corpus-based and cognitive angles. For example, *On Cognitive Mechanism in Interpretation* (Wang, J., 2019).

These quantitative and qualitative descriptions indicate that the territory of translation studies is expanding, along with an emerging practical need for language services focusing on specialized areas. However, it should be noted that special studies have still not been scaled up.

4.2.4. Applied Translation Studies

In a number of countries, including the UK, translation studies have long been "colonized" by departments placing a higher value on pure academic publications than applications of translation studies to solve real-life problems in society [10]. The research focus analysis of NSSFC-funded programs reveals that this is also the case in China, where, over the previous ten years, there have been only 51 (6.48%) programs focusing on translation (see Figure 2).

However, this has increased since 2017 (see Figure 3). Firstly, the success of the language service industry in China has resulted in a need for additional numbers of well-trained translators and interpreters, leading to research emphases on teaching methods, testing techniques, and curriculum design for translation and interpreting. For example, *On Corpus-Based Pedagogy for Chinese-Uyghur Translation* (Hu, C., 2018), Secondly, the emergence and proliferation of new technologies, originating from computational linguistics, computational science, and cognitive neuro-psychology, have transformed the mode of translation practice. These include multimedia technology, corpus technology, speech recognition, artificial intelligence, neural network simulation, and eye-tracking technology, hence the development of audiovisual translation, machine translation and interpreting, and computer-assisted translation (CAT). A case in point is *On Chinese-Russian Translation Assessment Based on Artificial Intelligence* (Liu, M., 2018).

In addition, a few programs focus on translation criticism and translation policy. The former thematic emphasis includes reviews of published translations and evaluative system development

for translation practice, while the latter includes national translation policies in China (e.g., outward translation policy in the late Qing Dynasty) and other countries (e.g., the U.S. outward translation policy after the Second World War).

It is worth noting that as one of the topics in applied studies, translation ethics lacks any discussion in any of the programs, suggesting a possible national neglect of effective regulation, supervision and management of the translation industry and language service market in China.

4.2.5. Theoretical and Linguistic Translation Studies

Following the rapid development of translation studies after the opening up of China in 1987 [11], substantial numbers of notions, theories and approaches have been imported into China's theoretical and linguistic translation studies from overseas intellectual movements including functionalism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism and post-modernism [11]. However, altogether, only 51 (6.48%) of the translation-related programs developed with the aid of grants from the NFFSC are found to belong to the theoretical and linguistic branches (see Figure 2). In addition, there is no clear sign of further increase when it comes to these two research focuses (see Figure 3).

Most programs of theoretical translation studies set out to undertake an intensive literature review of a given theory, including the ways it has been introduced to China and its subsequent impact. For example, *On Spivak's Post-Colonial Translation Theory and Politics of Translation* (Guan, R., 2010). Another research paradigm relates local translation phenomena in China to western theories and approaches (e.g., eco-criticism, and Marxism), in order to verify their local feasibility. Nonetheless, localized theorization and theoretical innovations of translation studies are extremely few in China. Only ten programs propose novel sub-disciplines or develop existing theoretical structures, including translation rhetoric, translation stylistics, translation relations, translation writing, and translation geography. For example, *On Disciplinary Construction of Translation Rhetoric for National Diplomatic Discourse* (Chen, X., 2017).

There is a similar lack of originality in linguistic translation studies. Programs are conducted only (1) in lexical contexts (focusing on changes in the translation of a particular notional word in another language, and translation patterns of functional words), and (2) at syntactic levels (focusing on translation patterns of tense, grammatical characteristics of translated texts, and chunking and parsing in translation). A case in point is *On Semantic Orientation of the Adverbial Constitutes in Japanese and Their Translation into Chinese* (Fei, J. 2018). This fact led us to the conclusion that linguists applying for NSSFC funding are more interested in examining translated texts from micro angles than advancing translation studies relating to linguistic theories.

4.3. Frequently Examined Issues

As noted in the inquiry design, frequently examined issues (represented by high-frequency words of academic programs and publications) over a given time span reflect the aspects both highlighted and frequently examined in a research field for that period [36,37]. When it comes to NSSFC-granted translation studies, as demonstrated in Table 3, almost all the high-frequency words fall into textual and strategic translation studies, which, as discussed in the previous section, are also the two most dominant research focuses of translation studies. This coherence therefore justifies our findings concerning research focuses.

Table 3. High-frequency word list for the titles of translation-related NSSFC programs.

Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
communication	252	introducing translated products	39
culture	136	the Belt and Road Initiative	38
translation into English	74	cross-cultural	37
China	70	Marxism	36
literature	48	corpus (-based/driven)	36
translation into Chinese	46	localization in China	33
(national) discourse	42	acceptance of translated products	32
global	42	strategy	30
(national) image	40		

Additionally, the frequent occurrences of China's latest policies and strategies among NSSFC-granted translation studies (such as the Belt and Road Initiative) indicate considerable and increasing attention to national planning from Chinese researchers in the field of arts and humanities in the previous decade. Compared to traditional translation studies, the combination of particular academic outcomes with national planning is likely to assist in resolving a number of specific practical problems [43]. One example in point is *On Translation and Communication of Taoism in Countries along China's Belt and Road* (Zhao, P., 2016), which explores the ways of promoting cultural communication and exchanges via translation between countries throughout the Belt and Road initiative. Thus, there is a clear overlap between the strategic research focus and the frequently examined issues in translation studies.

It is also noticeable that corpus is widely employed in translation-related programs with all kinds of research focuses, ensuring that the corpus-based/corpus-driven paradigm is now flourishing. For example, *On Construction and Application of Large-Size, Open-Source Chinese-English Corpus for Interpretation* (Zhang, W., 2018). Such an open-source corpus not only facilitates translation practice with parallel data, but also fosters applications of quantitative techniques in translation studies (e.g., the calculation of frequency, the clustering of combination algorithms, and correlation analysis) [20,31]. Thus, the "buzzword" corpus in NSSFC-granted programs may indicate a possible methodological transformation in translation studies from qualitative to quantitative.

5. Discussion

The significance of the above findings, unveiling the sustainable growth of translation studies as an academic discipline in China, is to help us to understand the influence of national research funding on disciplinary development in the field of arts and humanities. Based on the inquiry results discussed previously, in this section, we further explore the specific ways that NSSFC funding policies and mechanism contribute to the quality of academic production of translation studies, as well as the limitations of current funding policies and mechanisms on the sustainable development of translation studies as an academic discipline.

5.1. Contribution of NSSFC Funding: Bridging the Gap between Academic Production of Translation Studies and Market Needs

Previous reports concerning research policy [2,3,43] have stated that research funding agencies' responses to the current global knowledge economy, as characterized by science-society interaction (i.e., market applicability of academic production), has been to allocate a large share of the total subsidy into specific areas currently considered more socially relevant and applicable.

When it comes to NSSFC, its funding system focuses on the improvement in and implementation of China's strategic policies. According to NSSFC grant application instructions [9], research on arts and humanities that are capable of contributing to China's soft power will be given the highest priority for government assessment. These include those programs featuring the Belt and Road Initiative, the "go-global" plan, etc. As NSSFC plans [9], such programs will be greater in number in the coming

five years. Influenced by this funding mechanism, market and social needs have constituted an integral aspect of many translation-related NSSFC programs, in response to the globalized interaction and integration between people, companies, and governments of different nations. The increasing need for communication and exchange of information in economic and cultural sectors has necessarily resulted in more translation practice. In this changing context, it is natural to conduct additional studies to improve translation to meet the broadening of global connections (e.g., studies developing methods of presenting translated texts in a reader-friendly manner, of training translators and interpreters for specific purposes in an appropriate manner, etc.). The current translation studies funded by the NSSFC can therefore help to realize China's will to strengthen its soft power for long-term national development, promoting translation studies into an ascending disciplinary position among all the disciplines in the field of arts and humanities.

5.2. Contribution of NSSFC Funding: Increasing Interdisciplinary and Multimodal Applications of Academic Production of Translation Studies

Since there remains no fixed relationship between translation studies and other disciplines, scholars are always able to anticipate the future of translation studies in interdisciplinary and multimodal applications [10]. As discussed in the preceding sections, shifts in translation studies have taken place over time, moving from a traditional emphasis on linguistics and comparative literature to the present focus on cultural studies, involving the participation of researchers from a wide range of disciplines. In addition, new technologies and new media have, as previously noted, transformed translation practice and introduced new concepts to its theorization.

NSSFC both captures and highlights these new directions, stating that no restriction is to be imposed on academic backgrounds of the applicants [9]. Instead, researchers from various disciplines are encouraged to study the same important issue (e.g., the improvement of a particular government initiative), so that it can be examined in a thorough and integrated manner [9]. These facts thus lead us to conclude the interdisciplinary and multimodal impact of this funding mechanism. Facilitated by this funding mechanism, for example, NSSFC programs focusing on the training of translators and interpreters typically involve knowledge input concerning various areas (e.g., law, finance, medicine, and natural sciences) to enhance specialized translation practice, as well as professionals in information technology to address the complex interaction between machines and translators. These elements and personnel, in turn, contribute to the interdisciplinarity and multimodality of translation studies.

5.3. Limitations of NSSFC Funding

It should be noted that our findings imply a number of limitations of translation studies sponsored by current NSSFC funding system.

Firstly, there is a lack of balance in the research focus distribution of translation-related programs. In contrast to the dominant textual and strategic translation studies, studies in the theoretical branch are unexpectedly poor. Chinese scholars of translation studies have, over the previous decades, had the benefits of theories and ideologies from all over the world, while at the same time witnessing the emergence of issues specific to China remaining unexplained [11]. This reaffirms the lack of localized theorization of translation studies in China. Furthermore, theoretical progress forms the basis of the academic status of a discipline [38], inferring the need for continuous theoretical innovation to ensure the growing disciplinary position of translation studies. The recent limited attempts of NSSFC programs to embody novel theoretical subjects have been insufficient to contribute to the sustainable growth of translation studies as an academic discipline.

Secondly, current researchers applying for NSSFC grants tend to be primarily scholars within educational institutions. This absence of practitioners from translation-related industries (e.g., language services, foreign affairs, global trade, and international news) may hinder academic research on translation studies in the following ways: (1) without knowledge input from practitioners in these industries, scholars alone may prove less sensitive to locating actual, real-life problems in

translation and interpretation practice; (2) the newest techniques and tools from translation-related industries may not be instantly introduced to and employed in research; (3) it may take longer to apply research outcomes to practice, due to the confined exchanges of information between the academic circle and the market.

6. Conclusions

This article explores current development of translation studies as an academic discipline supported by NSSFC, in order to answer whether national funding contributes to the sustainable growth of disciplines in the field of arts and humanities in China. Firstly, it has determined the current growth of translation studies facilitated by NSSFC funding in China, as demonstrated by the number of grants awarded, program research focuses, and frequently examined issues. Further examination of the positive connections between NSSFC funding policies and mechanism and the growing academic interest in translation studies has led us to conclude that NSSFC boosts translation studies in China by promoting and increasing market, interdisciplinary, and multimodal applications of the research output.

However, our inquiry also implies a need to ensure future revisions of the national research funding mechanism, in order to allow translation studies in China to develop as an academic discipline that is both balanced and continuously innovative. Based on our findings and discussion, we have concluded the following suggestions for revising the current NSSFC funding system. Firstly, while market and social relevance of translation studies are valued and encouraged by the NSSFC in response to national policies and long-term plans, it is needed to increase funding for relatively “weak” research focuses of translation studies, in order to ensure that this academic discipline develops as a balanced whole. Secondly, it is crucial to allow scholars from a wider variety of disciplinary and professional backgrounds to apply for NSSFC subsidies, especially practitioners from translation-related industries, in order to broaden the ongoing development of translation studies with the assistance of new perspectives, theories, methodology, technologies, and real-life applications.

It should be noted that our inquiry has only selected translation studies as an academic discipline to illustrate the relationship between national research funding and the sustainable growth of disciplines in the field of arts and humanities in China. This could potentially cause a partial discussion on the importance of national research funding to disciplinary development. For this reason, it is hoped that future studies will examine the programs of other disciplines accessing national research funding in China, so as to verify or modify our findings. Furthermore, for scholars in the field of arts and humanities from other parts of the world, it is necessary to (1) expand our findings and discussion into other political, and cultural contexts, and see whether there are other ways national research funding contributes to the development of arts and humanities, and (2) examine the efforts made by governments of other countries to overcome their funding limitations. Future studies in these two directions will help to support the sustainable growth of arts and humanities globally.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Z.J.; data curation, Z.J.; formal analysis, Z.J.; funding acquisition, Y.W.; investigation, Z.J.; methodology, Z.J.; project administration, Y.W.; resources, Z.J.; software, Z.J.; supervision, Y.W.; validation, L.T.; visualization, Z.J.; writing—original draft, Z.J.; writing—review and editing, Y.W. and L.T. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: Our gratitude goes to our dear editors and the anonymous reviewers who took time out of their busy schedules to help with our manuscript revisions.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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