



# Quantitative Analysis of Heroic Epic “Manas” Translation Research in China

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**Abstract.** Manas has attracted wide attention from academic circles at home and abroad for its high academic value on epic. It has been translated into multiple languages and spread around the world. There are not only translations in English, German, Russian and other foreign languages, but also several translated versions in Chinese, including Chinese minority language versions, showing its unique literary and artistic charm as well as its academic influence. This paper mainly reviews the theoretical application and research results of multi-language translations of “Manas”, and finds that the research on the translation of “Manas” in China covers the elaboration on its textualization and translation process, the relevant studies on criticism, transmission and translation comparison. Based on the analysis, research findings clarify the internal transformational logic of “Manas” from oral to written, from monolingual to multilingual, and also pay attention to the textual and formal characteristics of “Manas” as oral epic. The paper also discusses innovation on the inheritance mode of “Manas” in the new era. It is found that “Manas” has a wide range of research coverage, which enriches basic research into it. Yet influenced by the small number of Kirgiz speakers and the large volume of the epic, the number of translations is small. The research volume and perspective still need to be further increased and deepened. It is suggested to train bilingual experts in Kirgiz and Chinese to expand the professional team on translation practice and theoretical research, innovate research methods and theories for epic translation research. Besides, strengthen international cooperation to fully share academic resources, promote the development and the enrichment of multi-language translations of Manas are needed.

**Keywords:** “Manas”, Multilingual Translation, Translation Analysis.

## 1 Introduction

“Manas” is a famous epic that is widely spread among Kirgiz communities in China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan etc. Nowadays, “Manas” is considered as one of the most celebrated epic with amount of heroic poems in the world. At the turn of the new millennium, it was appointed a UNESCO 'Masterpiece in the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Mankind', signaling its global significance. [1] In China, “Manas”, “Gesar” and “Jangar” are called the three great

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epics of ethnic minorities, enjoying high popularity, academic status and prestige. Manasology is a vast scientific system, and as an epic masterpiece, it covers a large amount of historical and cultural information. As far as epic translation is concerned, Manas's translation versions contain research theories and results of translation studies, as well as its unique research perspectives and fields. The study of "Manas" translation is an external study of epic studies, which plays an important and complementary role in the overall development of "Manas" studies.

This paper explores the related studies on epic Manas translation in China, discusses the whole picture of different translated versions in multilanguages from different perspectives, such as number of publications, authors' backgrounds, research highlights etc. Based on the literature of Manas translation research on CNKI, the bibliometric analysis method is used to conduct data statistics and visualization analysis, so as to summarize the key fields and shortcomings of Manas translation research in China, explore possible innovation points, and provide ideas and suggestions for further research.

## 2 Research Background

Although the translation research of "Manas" is an external research in the whole research system of "Manas", the translation practice and the academic research have continuously enriched the research results, and constantly filled the research system of the epic "Manas".

As a living epic, "Manas" has gone through the process from oral singing, to textual recordings, and then to dissemination of translated texts. Different Manas singers showing their own unique styles, with quite different translated styles, making Manas translation research present a more diversified form. As one of the most famous Manas singer in China, Jusup Mamayi who can sing all eight parts of Manas. His first Chinese translated version was published in 2005. In 2021, the second Chinese translation of Manas was released. It includes eight parts of Manas epic in 18 volumes, and becomes the only complete version of Manas in the world.

Based on the data statistics and visualization analysis "Manas" translation studies in China, this paper presents a general overview of "Manas" translation studies specifically in China, discusses current studies as a whole, and tries to provide ideas and suggestions for further research.

## 3 Methodology

The data used for this study are taken from CNKI database. Through advanced search on "Manas" translation, a total number of 27 related studies have been found since 2008.

In this paper, the bibliometric method is adopted and the visualization analysis function of CNKI is used to carry out a statistical analysis of the research literature on the translation of "Manas" from three aspects: the number of annual publications, the author's cooperation network, and the keyword co-occurrence network, in order to

clarify the development of the translation of "Manas" research, hot spots, shortcomings and the next focus.

## 4 Quantitative Analysis

### 4.1 Number of Annual Publications

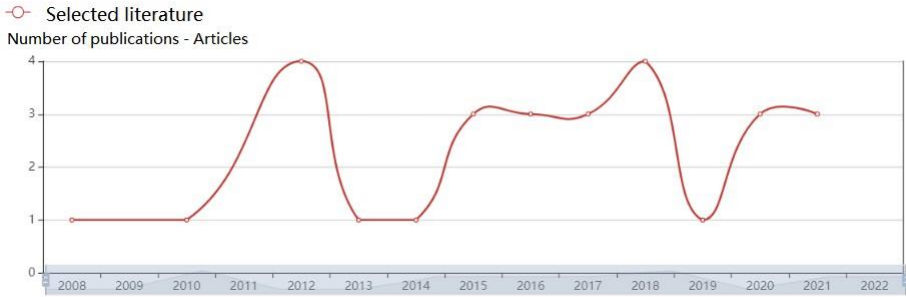


Fig. 1. Number of Annual Publications.

According to the number of annual publications shown in Fig. 1, the research on the translation of "Manas" started in 2008, with small peaks in 2012 and 2018, but generally speaking, the number of publications is stable and relatively small.

### 4.2 Author's Cooperation Network

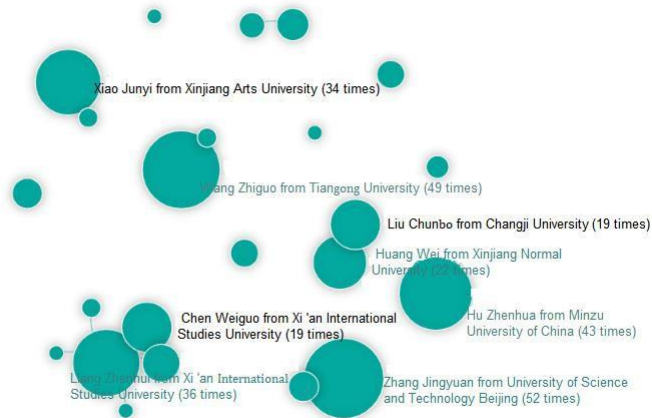


Fig. 2. Author's Cooperation Network.

According to the author's cooperation network shown in Fig. 2, the main authors and institutions concerned with the study of Manas translation are as follows: Zhang Jing-

yuan from University of Science and Technology Beijing (52 times), Wang Zhiguo from Tiangong University (49 times), Hu Zhenhua from Minzu University of China (43 times), Liang Zhenhui from Xi 'an International Studies University (36 times), Xiao Junyi from Xinjiang Arts University (34 times), Huang Wei from Xinjiang Normal University (22 times), Chen Weiguo from Xi 'an International Studies University (19 times), and Liu Chunbo from Changji University (19 times). From the perspective of the region of the scholars' institutions, the researchers are not completely concentrated in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, where "Manas" was produced and sung, and there is a trend of scattered expansion to other provinces throughout the country. The total number of scholars is not large, but most of them are devoted to the translation and the research of "Manas". Although the research is still mainly carried out by a few scholars in a few universities, it is of great significance for the protection and promotion of "Manas" to be carried out in multiple regions and with the participation of multi-ethnic scholars.

### 4.3 Keyword Co-Occurrence Network

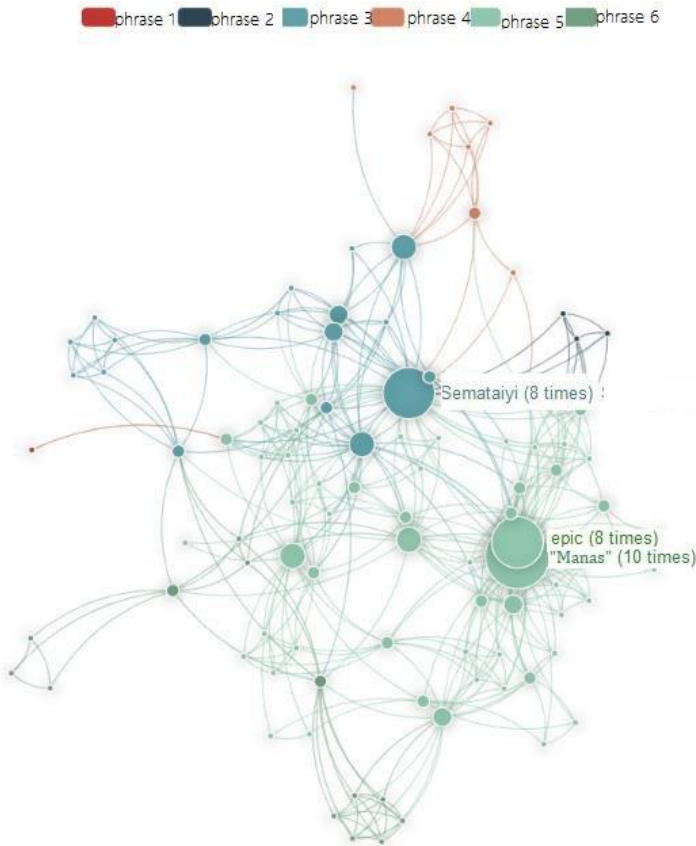


Fig. 3. Keyword Co-Occurrence Network.

Keywords reflect the main focus of the research topic and the attention of related topics. According to keyword co-occurrence network shown in Fig. 3, the keyword ranking in the research of "Manas" is as follows: "Manas" (10 times), epic (8 times), Semetaiyi (8 times), Liu Fajun (4 times), text form (4 times), living state (4 times), heroic epic (4 times), Seytek (3 times), ethnic literature (3 times), oral communication (3 times), communication studies (3 times), image culture (3 times). As can be seen from the ranking of keywords, the research mainly focuses on six fields, namely: the texts of Manas: "Semetey", and "Seytek"; Genre categories: such as epic, heroic epic, text form; Singing characteristics: epic's living state; Translator: mainly on Liu Fajun; Ethnic literature territoriality: ethnic minority literature; Transmission and modes: transmission research, oral transmission, image culture studies. It can be seen that the focus of the translation research on "Manas" highlights the characteristics of the epic, such as its epic features and oral performance features. It not only reflects the focus of translation study, which is to emphasize form of the text, but also shows the translation and transmission studies are closely linked. The purpose of a translation is transmission, and transmission cannot be separated from translation. Scholars have focused on the primary issues that should be considered in epic translation, such as how to translate the living epic, how to achieve better transmission effect with the help of translation. In view of the disadvantages of the interactive, performative, and on-site nature of living epics from the record book to the text, scholars also propose a scheme for protecting the most real and complete state of living epics by video means more completely.

Through visual data analysis, it can be seen that the researchers have done a lot of work on the translation of "Manas". Although the current quantity and scale need to be further expanded and extended, it basically involves relevant studies regarding the textualization and the translation of "Manas", as well as translation criticism, transmission and translation comparison. It clarifies the internal transformational logic of "Manas" from oral to written, from monolingual to multilingual.

## 5 Qualitative Analysis

There are many translations of "Manas". The traditional chapters, abridged versions or various fragments have been translated into more than a dozen languages and spread around the world. [2] In China, in addition to the Chinese translation, there are also Uyghur, Mongolian translations of Chinese minority languages. Worldwide, there are many foreign languages translations, such as German, Japanese, English and Russian versions, among which 10 English translations have been produced by different translators from different countries. There are not only original translations of "Manas", but also various compilations and transcreations, which provide resources for the translation research of "Manas". Therefore, the translation analysis of "Manas" has a broad perspective, and the scope of research basically involves the translation analysis of several major translated versions.

### **5.1 The Contents and Forms of “Manas” are Major Focuses of Translation Research**

In the study of translation content, researchers have noticed that translators focus on different contents. When translating words, the first part of "Manas", translated by Adil Jumaturdi (2009), uses transliteration of the people and horses' names, and some names of the horses are paraphrased based on the rhyme of the poem. The names of common animals, plants, daily expressions are paraphrased, and some of them are transliterated with the corresponding Chinese words. [3] When translating sentences, the adjustment of language difficulty in Zhang Tianxin's English translated version is mainly achieved through sentence pattern and vocabulary selection, avoiding the use of excessively long complex sentences and obscure words. [4] When translating paragraphs, the translators divide the text into paragraphs and explain the sequence of character relations, the scene and the region. [5] In the translation of cultural images, the English translation method of "Manas" is called "thick translation", which puts the text in a richer cultural and linguistic environment through various annotations. In terms of translating the forms, researchers analyze the presentation of different translations from specific aspects such as styles, examples, translation of poetic verses and rhetorical devices. In the use of annotations, a certain number of them used in different translations varies in detail. The notes in the Chinese translation by Adil Jumaturdi are relatively simple and the entries are limited. [6]

### **5.2 The Study of Translation Features, Difficulties and Breakthrough Points Runs through the Study of Translation**

From the perspective of the translation characteristics, the translation methods of "Manas" include intralingual transcription, mixed translation, back translation, etc., and the translation methods are diversified and complex. [7] From the perspective of translation difficulties, the comprehensive integrity of the living epic cannot be reflected in the translated text. Singers' facial expressions, body movements, intonation ups and downs, emotional changes and audience reactions, as well as performance venue and occasion, the interaction scene between singers and the audience, etc., need in-depth translation and interpretation. [8] The breakthrough point of translation studies is to pursue the transmission effect of translation. Therefore, the visual translation of the features of the oral performance in "Manas" can be realized by using video records, and the original scenes of oral epic performance can be truly displayed. [9]

### **5.3 The Study of Translation Background, Principles and Significance are Supplements and Explanations to the Translation Research**

The study of translation background explains the intrinsic motivation of translation style from the perspective of translator's translation motivation and academic background. Due to the different translation motives and the translator's academic background, the three important English translations of "Manas" show different text forms, which are summarized as academic translation, cultural translation and literary trans-

lation versions. [10] The translation principles of "Manas" in the 1960s were: adhere to "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance", focus on the pursuit of "faithfulness", pay attention to the original text, correspond accurately, and at the same time, ensure fluency and coherence. [11] Research on the Meaning of Translation: One of the ways of foreign translation of living literature is to start from the folk translation and translate it into a foreign language again through the Chinese translation intermediary, thus opening up the Chinese translation intermediary mode of national oral culture entering Chinese texts and then into world literature, and bringing new discourse space for the international dissemination of national culture. [12]

#### **5.4 Translation Strategies and the Comparative Evaluation of Translated Versions are the Ultimate Target and Foothold of Problem-oriented Translation Studies**

In terms of translation strategy research, the English translated version of Ashmat Menbetjusuf retained the original vocabulary (i.e., Latin transliteration) while adding necessary cultural notations. This processing method of "alienation + supplementary cultural annotation" enables the target language readers to understand better the specific culture and customs of the Kirgiz people. [13] In terms of evaluation research on translated versions, based on the literature, the problem was mistranslating "Ketai" into "China" and "Bie yi jing" into "Beijing" in the English version of Manas. In order to correct the cognitive bias and reduce the misdirection, it is suggested to use the method of "transliteration + annotation" in order to annotate the connotation and the geographical location of the two words in detail. [14]

## **6 Conclusion**

Based on the Manas translation research, the epic volume of the Manas, the relatively small number of people who have mastered the language of the singing script, and the text form of the Grammatical poetry also set a higher threshold for translation, so at present, there are only a few translations of Manas, especially the full translations were published, and more translators and translations are still needed in the future. From the perspective of translation research, the current studies of "Manas" cover the translation background, translation principle, word translation, translation evaluation, translation comparison, translation strategy, translation method, etc., but there are also areas that have not yet been covered: translator study, corpus study and reader acceptance research, etc. From the perspective of translation languages, studies on Chinese translations are relatively less compared with foreign language translated versions, especially English versions. At the same time, the lack of research on ethnic minority translations calls for more research to supplement the research field. It is also found that there are more studies on the first part of "Manas" than on the other seven parts. More complete translations of "Manas" need to be further supplemented to current studies.

The translation research of Manas mainly from textualization of the Manas to translation of Manas, and clarifies the translation process of Manas. Detailed analysis of the processing methods in the actual operation of translation, summarizes the deviation in the correspondence between translation theory and translation practice. Such process shows the path of modern new communication and interpretation, which takes value for the practical significance of translation, presents the uniqueness and practicality of epic translation research, covers internal and external research. It constructs its own discourse space and research logic for epic study. Although the overall quantity and diversification of research angles need to be further deepened, and multidisciplinary interpretation and multi-theoretical mutual verification need to be introduced. However, current studies have achieved a breakthrough in the study of the translation of Manas from zero to some, breaking the barriers in the study of epic translation, and playing a foundation role, it provided reliable experience for future studies and conditions for development and in-depth study of the epic translation of Manas.

At the same time, it should also be noted that the current research on Manas translation is still with fewer researchers, more achievements to be achieved. It is suggested to concern to the training of Kirgiz - Chinese translation professionals and promote the practice of Manas epic translation. Strengthen the theoretical construction of epic translation studies and fill the theoretical gap. At the same time, for preserving and inheriting a living epic, we as researchers should also pay attention to other fields, such as cultivation of Manas singers, promoting the communication with other Manas singing countries, integrating research with new media etc, to enhance the academic and artistic influence of Manas.

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