

# Current State of MTI Programs in China: Exploring Specialized Curriculum Designs

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**Abstract:** The world is currently undergoing unprecedented changes, driven by irreversible trends such as polarity in international relations, economic globalization, cultural diversification, and the informatization of society. While humanity faces a range of common challenges, these trends have also strengthened the connection and interdependence between nations. In the context of foreign language education, these global shifts present both new opportunities and heightened demands for the revitalization of language programs. Since 2007, China has established the Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) program, focusing on training translation professionals. After more than a decade of development, the current state of the MTI program merits further exploration.

**Keywords:** Curriculum Design, MTI, Path Exploration, Program Development.

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## 1. Introduction

The world is currently experiencing unprecedented changes, driven by irreversible trends such as polarity in international relations, economic globalization, cultural diversification, and the informatization of society. While humanity faces a range of shared challenges, these trends have also strengthened the connection and interdependence between nations. The concept of a “Community of Shared Human Destiny” signifies the emergence of a global value system focused on addressing common challenges, and it has gradually gained international support. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 further highlighted the importance of solidarity, with the principles of “working together” and “overcoming difficulties together” seen as the only correct approach to solving global problems. In light of this, it is essential to cultivate a large number of talented foreign language professionals who can serve as bridges for communication and promote mutual understanding between nations.

Over the years, foreign language education in China has flourished to meet the country’s growing demand for international communication. It has successfully trained many highly skilled professionals in fields such as diplomacy, foreign trade, and international communication, all of whom possess strong language skills and meet high professional standards. In 2007, China introduced the Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) program which sets itself apart from traditional translation tracks in fields such as foreign language literature, linguistics, and applied linguistics. MTI is a professional program designed to prepare high-level, application-oriented professionals for specific careers, unlike more research-focused graduate programs. Over the past decade, the MTI program has seen rapid growth. By 2020, 253 institutions were offering MTI programs, training professionals in translation and interpreting for 11 language pairs, such as Chinese-English, Chinese-French, Chinese-Japanese, Chinese-Russian, Chinese-German, Chinese-Korean, Chinese-Spanish, Chinese-Arabic, Chinese-Thai, and others. The *Basic Requirements for MTI Programs* clearly defines the goal of MTI education in China: to develop top-

tier, application-oriented professional translators who possess broad international perspectives, strong cultural awareness, solid work ethics, and exceptional skills in bilingual communication, cross-cultural communication, interpreting, translation, critical thinking, and innovation. The expansion of MTI programs aligns with the evolving demands of the times.

## 2. Current State of Curriculum Designs

Currently, MTI programs primarily focus on two areas: translation and interpretation, with further specialization in various language pairs. The current state of MTI programs after more than a decade of development is a topic worth exploring.

Curriculum design is a detailed and specific embodiment of educational objectives and training models. To evaluate the current state of MTI talent cultivation in China, it is essential to start with curriculum design. Cao (2012), in a study of 16 MTI training institutions, observes that despite the rapid growth of MTI education in recent years, challenges remain. These include a lack of clear distinction from academic graduate programs, poorly structured curricula, and an absence of distinctive features[1].

Chai (2012) considers curriculum design a major obstacle to the development of many institutions. He analyzes various issues in curriculum design from the perspectives of curriculum structure, duration, and organization[2].

Tong (2018) acknowledges the significant progress of MTI education over the years, noting its substantial contribution to producing a large number of translation professionals. However, he also points out that, due to the program’s relatively short history and limited experience in talent cultivation, the standards and pathways for training MTI professionals still need further refinement and innovation to meet the growing demand for skilled translators. Since the introduction of MTI programs, many institutions have exhibited a notable similarity in their training goals, particularly in terms of enrollment criteria, curricula, and course structures[3].

Chai (2019) further explores the development of MTI education, recommending that courses expand to include modern technologies (e.g., digital humanities, big data, and application of modern technologies), along with disciplines such as arts and humanities, science and technology, business and management, diplomacy, industrial manufacturing, and service industries. Although these areas are generally included in training programs across institutions, the absence of unified standards often makes course offerings and student internships superficial, with little practical or actionable content[4].

According to Mu (2020), among the 249 MTI institutions, a notable lack of specialization exists. For instance, while 38% of institutions are in the science and engineering sector, few leverage their strengths in these fields. Similarly, 21% are comprehensive universities, most of which lack a clear focus in their MTI training. Another 17% are teacher education universities that also lack defined training priorities. On the other hand, 4.8% are language-focused institutions, primarily emphasizing language skills, while 6.4% are business schools offering courses centered on economics and finance.

Agriculture and forestry universities make up 4.8%, providing courses relevant to their fields. Meanwhile, 2.4% are political and legal institutions specializing in training legal translators, and another 2.4% are ethnic minority universities, which are beginning to develop unique training features. Lastly, 2% are medical universities, which have distinctive programs but still fall short of meeting the growing demand for medical translators in the market[5].

In summary, after more than a decade of development, MTI programs have made significant strides in expanding the number of training institutions and scaling up talent cultivation. Universities from various fields have joined the effort to train MTI professionals, each bringing their specialized focus. However, in terms of course offerings, while many institutions have introduced programs designed to showcase their strengths, these courses often remain basic and lack diversity. Curriculum structures across institutions are largely similar, offering little innovation. Compared to the range of key courses designed to train translation and interpretation professionals in the U.S., as highlighted by Wang (2012), China's course offerings still lag far behind[6].

**Table 1.** Key Courses of Career-Focused Translation Programs in the US

Core Courses		Supplemental Courses	
Translation in Practice	Translation: Ethics and Ideology	Target Language Lessons	Cultural Positioning and Assessment
Business Translation	Brief History of Translation	Advanced Writing	Contemporary Literature
Diplomatic Translation	Translation Methods	Non-Fiction Writing	World Literature
Legal Translation	Mastering Translation: Issues and Approaches	New Media Writing	Comparative Literature
Financial Translation	Translation Reflection	Introduction to Interpreting	Modern Intellectual History
Audiovisual Translation	Translation Theory	Introduction to Computer-Assisted Translation Tools	Philosophy
Technical Translation	Translation Studies	Terminology Theory and Practice	History
Introduction to Sight Interpreting	Contemporary Translation Studies	Terminology and Computer Applications	Anthropology
Non-Literary Translation	Case Studies in Translation	Terminology Management	Cognitive Science
Integrated Translation	Translation Research Projects	Translation and Publishing	Psychology
Web Translation	Special Topics in Translation Studies	Linguistics	Project Management
Advanced Translation	Translation Workshop	Introduction to Pragmatics	Localization Project Management
Computer-Assisted Translation	Methods of Translation Criticism	Introduction to Semantics	Research Methods in Humanities and Social Sciences
Comparative Stylistics and Translation	Translation and Technology	Syntax for Target Language	Discourse Studies
Cultural Translation	Translation Technology	Stylistic Comparative Analysis	Cross-National Work Issues
Theoretical Foundations of Cultural Translation	Translation and Information Science	Multilingual Contextual Literature	Software Localization
Historical Framework of Cultural Translation	Translation and Writing	Cross-Cultural Communication	Web Localization
Translation and Cultural Policy	Thesis Research and Writing	Social, Political, and Cultural Studies	Introduction to Business
Translation and Intercultural Communication	Translation Project Management		

**Table 2. Key Courses of Career-Focused Interpreting Programs in the US**

Core Courses		Supplementary Courses
Principles of Interpreting	Business Interpreting	Foreign Language Lessons
Fundamentals of Interpreting	Public Service Translation	Language and Culture
Simultaneous Interpreting	Community Interpreting	Introduction to Foreign Cultures
Consecutive Interpreting	Monologue Interpreting	Audiovisual Translation
Note-taking Fundamentals	Educational Interpreting	Public Speaking in a Foreign Language
Interpreting Theory and Practice	Official Government Interpreting	Professional Standards in Interpreting
Interpreting in Practice	Interpreting for Hearings	Linguistics and Interpreting
Interpreting Skills	Legal Interpreting	Sociolinguistics
Interpreting Internship	Courtroom Interpreting	Cognition and Psychology
History of Interpreting	Medical Interpreting	Anthropology
Ethics in Interpreting	Medical Language Interpretation	Sociology
Interpreting Assessment	Clinical Interpreting	Journalism
Interpreting Projects	Healthcare Interpreting	Communication Arts
Discourse Analysis in Interpreting	Special Topics in Interpreting	Judicial Internship
Advanced Interpreting	Audiovisual Translation	Career Trends
Technical Interpreting	Communication and Translation	Research and Project Supervision
Conference Interpreting	Research Methods in Interpreting	

### 3. Reasons Behind the Problems of Current Curriculum Designs

Although universities with different specializations offer courses that highlight their unique focuses, the diversity often remains superficial, with a rigid, standardized training model and monotonous course structures. This issue can be traced back to both historical legacies in the development of academic disciplines and the new challenges brought about by contemporary changes.

In China, the training of MTI students heavily relies on foreign language colleges, programs, and instructors. Chai (2019) points out that, whether academic or career-oriented, most universities place translation programs within foreign language departments, treating academic translation studies (theoretical) and career-focused programs (practical) in the same way, without distinguishing between their teaching methods. This approach, according to Chai, fails to account for a key issue: throughout China's history of foreign language education, the goal of producing highly skilled professional translators has yet to be fully realized. As a result, university graduates have been unable to meet the societal demand for qualified translators. The root of the problem lies in the long-standing focus of foreign language programs on developing basic communication skills rather than specialized translation and interpreting expertise required for professional cross-cultural communication. Unless the current training system undergoes significant reform, the shortage of skilled professional translators will persist[4].

It would be unfair to place all the blame on university

decision-makers. Wang (2012), in his study on how the U.S. approach to cultivating translation talent could inform China's MTI education, emphasizes the need for national-level efforts to strengthen translation-related legislation and raise its strategic importance. He also highlights the need for educational authorities to improve the planning, oversight, certification, and evaluation of industry associations in the field of applied translation[6]. Similarly, Shu (2016) argues that the government, especially the education department, has fallen short in areas such as policy-making, curriculum standards, examinations, teacher training, and assessments. In some cases, these efforts have even been misaligned with the actual needs of the field. To address these issues, foreign language education across universities, regions, and disciplines needs a unified, top-level design, with a national strategy playing a central role. At the same time, the academic community must provide both theoretical insights and practical evidence to guide and strengthen this framework[7].

There is still a noticeable lack of effective planning and guidance from national policies, relevant authorities, industry standards, and those overseeing higher education planning. Addressing this long-standing issue is essential for advancing the reform of foreign language education in China.

The rapid development of society has introduced new challenges to curriculum design. As China's national strength and international influence grow, along with significant social progress, the demand for foreign language professionals across various industries has risen sharply. At the same time, the emergence of new sectors has led to higher expectations for graduates in the job market. The traditional teaching

model-where students passively sit in classrooms, listening to lectures delivered with chalk and textbooks-no longer meets modern needs. However, MTI programs at higher education institutions have struggled to keep up with these changes, falling short of addressing the evolving demands of the times. As Chai (2019) points out, developing translation professionals requires more than just language proficiency. It cannot be limited to teaching foreign and native languages alone. Instead, it demands a wide range of skills, such as expertise in translation, the ability to systematically gather and organize relevant knowledge, terminology management, the use of modern technologies, and proficiency in the terminology and writing styles of specialized fields. Additionally, it involves project management, communication skills, and the integration of interdisciplinary knowledge. These competencies cannot be fully cultivated within the traditional framework of language departments. To develop them effectively, collaboration across multiple related disciplines is essential. Moreover, these efforts should be centralized within a specialized platform to provide comprehensive and practical training[4].

Mu (2020) notes that universities currently place too much emphasis on developing students' general interpretation and translation skills, while neglecting industry-specific knowledge. As a result, many graduates struggle to manage translation tasks in specialized fields. In recent years, MTI programs have started to move beyond their traditional focus on general interpretation and translation. New specializations have emerged, such as localization, legal translation, media translation, business translation, medical translation, and technical translation. This shift reflects the growing need for diversity in training and the recognition that a one-size-fits-all approach is no longer sufficient. Looking ahead, Mu suggests that MTI programs may increasingly offer more specialized tracks, such as English legal interpretation, Japanese medical interpretation, German technical translation, or English localization. These tailored tracks would align with the rising demand for professionals with expertise in specific industries and languages[5].

In summary, there are several reasons for the current state, where curriculum designs are similar across institutions and student training does not fully align with market demands. While a detailed analysis would reveal many contributing factors, the core issue lies in the historical lack of guidance in the development of foreign language education. Moreover, the rapid changes in talent demand driven by societal progress have not been met with timely updates to the training models in educational institutions. This gap between evolving needs and outdated training frameworks is a major factor behind the existing mismatch.

#### **4. Possible Solutions and Countermeasures**

##### **(1) Developing distinctive professional specializations**

The *Guidance for MTI Programs*, released in 2011, encourages institutions to develop their own unique characteristics. It states that "each institution can determine elective courses based on their training goals and faculty expertise." Wang (2010) emphasizes that a well-structured curriculum is crucial for defining distinctive professional focuses in MTI programs. Both required and elective courses should emphasize career specialization and practical application[8].

Building on these principles, it is crucial to design a curriculum that aligns with the evolving needs of specific sectors, such as the media industry. In particular, with the growing demand for specialized translation professionals in this field, the curriculum should focus on training media interpreters who are not only active in the profession but also well-versed in both local and global media landscapes. These professionals should also possess a solid foundation in translation theory and techniques. To achieve this, the curriculum should ideally incorporate resources from various relevant fields, creating a comprehensive platform for developing specialized talent in media translation. However, practical limitations often make it challenging to merge foreign language teaching with other subjects. In such cases, the solution is to create a media-focused curriculum that delivers tangible benefits. Instead of offering foreign language and media courses separately, the course structure should combine them, allowing students to understand the intricacies of media language. Relevant courses could include media interpreting, media translation, specialized translation and interpreting, as well as hands-on workshops. Additionally, leveraging faculty expertise in the media field is essential. Elective and general education courses should be designed to further enhance students' knowledge and skills in the media sector. Moreover, it's crucial to strengthen collaboration between academic instructors and industry mentors. Experienced interpreters, foreign language experts with media backgrounds, and professionals from the industry should all contribute to the training process.

##### **(2) Building practical training bases**

Mu (2020) summarizes the current state of practical training bases, noting that 1,976 translation practice bases have been established across 216 MTI institutions. These bases vary in type, including research and teaching platforms, off-campus training bases, and international joint training bases. Of these, 1,371 off-campus training bases make up 69% of the total, encompassing organizations such as foreign affairs departments at various levels, translation and localization companies, and others. Furthermore, 65 MTI institutions have formed international joint training bases with global organizations and overseas universities, collaborating with entities like the United Nations, the European Union, as well as universities and organizations in the United States, Australia, and Japan. This collaboration facilitates the internationalization and modernization of translation talent development through an integrated approach of academic and practical training[5].

Training translation professionals with a focus on media requires not only advanced foreign language skills but also a deep understanding of the industry. To achieve this, practical training bases should collaborate with a wide range of media institutions. Building strong partnerships with local media organizations, foreign news agencies, cultural exchange bodies, and other relevant sectors can offer students more frequent and meaningful practical learning experiences. These activities extend beyond the classroom, complementing theoretical learning with practical experience. It's also worth mentioning that many films and TV series are currently being translated from Chinese into foreign languages. If students have the opportunity to participate in such translation projects, instructors and students can collaborate directly to complete these projects, providing valuable hands-on experience and helping students develop the essential skills needed for translating literature and

cultural content.

(3) Avoiding homogenization and implementing localization strategies

Mu (2020) points out that MTI students often lack knowledge of the language services and localization industries. Localization courses are scarce, and few institutions offer specialized programs in this field. As a result, students are typically unfamiliar with the translation process and its vital role in the language services sector. While there are many MTI graduates, the number of skilled professionals—especially those with interdisciplinary knowledge and expertise—remains insufficient. The quantity and quality of graduates are not enough to meet the growing demands of the economy[5].

To address this issue, it's crucial to explore and develop models for cultivating interdisciplinary talent. By analyzing the needs of the language services market, we can identify the key skills necessary to nurture this talent and create effective training programs. These programs should include a translation curriculum tailored to industry needs. Localization strategies should be employed to avoid producing one-dimensional talent. As China's global influence grows, the world's perception of the country is expanding beyond first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai. Cities like Yiwu (in relation to Europe and the U.S.) and Dalian (in relation to Japan and Korea) are gaining recognition internationally. Moreover, second- and lower-tier cities are attracting top talent due to the opportunities they offer. Training programs should similarly integrate localized strategies to support the spread of regional cultures, especially once first-tier cities have established their recognition.

In summary, potential solutions and strategies are proposed, with an example drawn from the perspective of talent development in the media field. It is recommended to establish specialized media-oriented curricula. In designing these curricula, it is crucial to integrate both academic faculty and industry mentors. Beyond translators, industry mentors should also include experts from other relevant sectors. In addition to advancing practical training through the establishment of practice bases, it is essential to incorporate localization strategies to prevent homogenization, thus enhancing the competitiveness of the talent pool.

## 5. Conclusion

MTI programs have been admitting students since 2008,

and over the past decade, they have evolved into a distinct professional degree within language studies. This has led to increasing recognition from students, parents, and society, with a steady rise in applicants. While foreign language programs have faced challenges, especially with the decline of philosophy and social sciences, which has raised questions about the relevance of foreign language majors, the growing global demand for cross-cultural collaboration has opened up new opportunities and heightened expectations for the revitalization of foreign language education.

In this context, it is essential to stay aligned with international trends and societal needs. Strategic planning, scientific research, and a focus on the sustainable development of foreign language talent are crucial to moving forward.

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