

## ARTICLE

# On Status Quo, Problems, and Future Development of Translation and Interpreting MOOCs in China—A Mixed Methods Approach

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The release of *China MOOCs Action Declaration* signifies the strategic role of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in China's national education. Compared with traditional face-to-face instruction, MOOCs have distinctive advantages, such as their large scale, openness, accessibility, flexibility and convenience, so they have shown great development momentum since the very beginning. However, translation and interpreting (TI) MOOCs in China have started relatively late, with limited numbers and types of courses offered and only sporadic studies, especially in-depth empirical research, on existing courses. By adopting a mixed-methods approach involving both desk research of TI MOOCs on 10 major MOOC platforms and in-depth interviews of two teachers and 10 students with TI MOOC teaching or learning experience, this study explores the status quo, problems, and future development of TI MOOCs in China. It is hoped that this paper will shed some light on the research and development (R&D), and application of TI MOOCs, as well as on reforms and innovations of TI education in China and other similar contexts.

**Keywords:** translation and interpreting MOOCs (TI MOOCs); MOOC platforms; translation and interpreting education (TI Education); *China MOOCs Action Declaration*; Bachelor of Translation and Interpreting (BTI); Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI)

## 1. Introduction

With the development of the Internet, big data and cloud computing, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have quickly become a new and popular education mode around the world, bringing significant changes to global education. According to Shah (2019), by the end of 2019, over 900 universities around the world, excluding China, had offered over 13,500 MOOCs, 820 microcredentials and 50 MOOC-based degrees and had attracted 110 million learners. In China, the Ministry of Education (2019) reported that by the end of August 2019, there had been 15,000 MOOCs, covering almost all disciplines, with a total of 270 million registered learners. Because of their distinctive features of large scale, openness, flexibility, accessibility, and convenience (e.g. Chen & Wang 2013; Littlejohn et al. 2016; Wang, Zhang & Zhang 2013; Wang & Zhang 2014), MOOCs have enjoyed worldwide popularity since the very beginning (Jitpausarnwattana, Reinders & Darasawang 2019; Wang et al. 2019).

The year 2012 was called “The Year of the MOOC” in the US because of the emergence and rapid development

of MOOC platforms such as Coursera, Udacity and edX (Pappano 2012).

The year 2013 was called “The Year of the MOOC” in China because leading universities such as Tsinghua University (TSU), Peking University (PKU) and Shanghai Jiaotong University (SJTU) had either developed their own MOOC platforms, or joined the international MOOC Alliance (Guo 2014).

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the China MOOC Conference was held in Beijing with the theme of “Recognizing Changes, Knowing Changes and Seeking Changes”. At the conference, the *China MOOCs Action Declaration* was released, which emphasizes the application, construction, learning, and management of MOOCs and enshrines MOOCs in the national education development strategy. MOOCs have been vigorously advocated to promote educational equity and resource sharing and to bridge the gaps between regions, between urban and rural areas and between different education institutions; and to boost education and teaching reforms and innovations (Ministry of Education 2019).

As of April 2019, a total of 1,291 MOOCs have been recognized as “National Elite Open Online Courses” by the Ministry of Education. Among them, only two are TI MOOCs, namely, “The ‘Dao’ of Translation” by Prof.

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Qinghua Feng of Shanghai International Studies University (SISU) on [zhihuishu.com](http://zhihuishu.com); and “Translation Methods and Skills between English and Chinese” by Professor Yuan Yao of Nanjing University (NJU) on [icourses.cn](http://icourses.cn), showing that the numbers, types, and social influence of TI MOOCs are still very limited.

The development of TI MOOCs shows a sharp contrast to that of the Bachelor of Translation and Interpreting (BTI) and Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) programmes which were initiated in 2006 and 2007 respectively and aimed to train advanced, professional and practical translators and interpreters. By 2019, BTI and MTI programmes had been offered in 281 and 253 universities respectively in China’s mainland. The rapid expansion of BTI and MTI programmes has brought about the problem of insufficient numbers of competent TI teachers, especially in economically less developed regions and minor languages (e.g. Bao 2009; He 2007; Long & Liu 2018; Luo & Bao 2018).

One way to solve the problems of TI teacher shortage and limited course resources for some BTI and MTI programmes is to develop TI MOOCs, which are still under-developed and under-researched. For this reason, this paper explores the status quo, merits, shortcomings and future development of existing TI MOOCs in China with a mixed-methods approach, involving desk research of TI MOOCs on the ten most influential MOOC platforms which offer language courses, and in-depth interviews of two teachers and 10 students from two universities, who have engaged in TI MOOCs teaching and learning, for their personal experience and perceptions on such courses. The combination of the research methods has enabled the authors to present an objective picture of TI MOOCs in China and to allow individual voices to be heard at the same time, so the research findings are triangulated.

## 2. Review of literature on TI MOOCs

In recent years, with the rapid development of MOOCs and MOOC platforms domestically and internationally, MOOCs have become new research hotspots, with a surging volume of literature. China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), the most comprehensive and authoritative academic database in China, provides a good example. In CNKI, the search items of “慕课 (MOOC)/MOOC” as the topic hit 22,162 returns when accessed on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, covering almost all disciplines and various aspects of MOOCs. Similarly, language MOOCs have also received extensive scholarly attention in both Chinese and global contexts (e.g. Beaven, Codreanu & Creuzé 2014; Chen 2015; Dai 2015; Hu & Wu 2014; Jitpausarnwattana et al. 2019; Martín-Monje & Bárcena 2014; Martín-Monje, Castrillo & Mañana-Rodríguez 2017; Sokolik 2014).

However, because of the late start of TI MOOCs in China and other countries, relevant literature is still scarce. The authors used different combinations of search items in both Chinese and English such as “慕课/MOOC” + “翻译/口译/笔译/translation/interpreting” as topic, keyword or title in different databases and platforms such as CNKI, Google Scholar, Baidu Scholar, Blyun.com, Ebscohost and ScienceDirect and found 34 papers, three

written in English (Bao & Meng 2015; Beaven, Comas-Quinn & Hauck 2013; Jiang 2017) and 31 in Chinese. Only two of the Chinese papers have been published in Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) journals.

These 34 papers fall into different types, including two literature reviews, 27 conceptual argumentations, and five empirical studies. The themes include TI teaching, curriculum design, talent training, flipped classrooms, competences, translation technology, and platform construction. The subject fields include business, tourism, medicine and general topics. Twenty papers (approximately 60%) take MOOC as a research background or research perspective to discuss the deficiencies of current TI teaching modes or the feasibility and necessity of MOOCs, flipped classrooms or blended teaching; however MOOCs are not their research themes. The majority of papers are just simple listings of opinions or summaries of personal experiences, with little or no statistical support or argumentation processes. Except for the five empirical studies, which focused on individual TI MOOCs or platforms (Bao & Meng 2015; Beaven et al. 2013; Jiang 2017; Yu 2014; Yu & Chen 2014), the others make no mention of specific MOOC platforms or TI MOOCs.

The brief literature review shows that in sharp contrast to the numerous studies on MOOCs, those on TI MOOCs in China or other countries are still sparse, be they descriptive studies based on desk research of existing courses or empirical studies on specific MOOCs. TI MOOCs in China remain largely under-researched, which is not conducive to their further development and that of TI education. Therefore, this paper tries to answer the following research questions with desk research and interviews.

1. What is the status quo of TI MOOCs in China?
2. How are they perceived by teachers and students?
3. How should they develop in the future?

## 3. Data collection

Data for the current study have come from two sources, namely, desk research of TI MOOCs and semi-structured in-depth interviews of two teachers and 10 students, so both quantitative and qualitative data have been collected and analyzed. The data collection was completed in September 2019.

In order to have a panoramic view of TI MOOCs in China, the authors surveyed various MOOC platforms and chose the 10 most influential ones offering language courses (Zhao et al. 2017:41) for analysis. The courses have been determined by using keyword search of the Chinese characters “翻译”(translation and/or interpreting), “口译”(interpreting), “笔译”(written translation), and “译”(translation or interpreting) in course titles, the results of which are shown in **Table 1**. In order not to miss out any TI MOOCs, the authors searched other MOOC platforms as well, but found no relevant courses. The authors also registered in some courses and watched some of the course videos to gain a better understanding.

The second source of data is from interviews of two teachers and 10 MTI students from two universities. The two teachers were selected by purposive sampling from the authors’ colleagues, friends and acquaintances.

**Table 1:** Numbers of TI MOOCs on 10 major MOOC platforms in China.

	MOOC platforms	Total Nos. of TI MOOCs
1	mooc.chaoxing.com	10
2	icourse163.org	9
3	icourses.cn	9
4	xuetangx.com	3
5	mooc.cn	2
6	moocs.unipus.cn	2
7	chinesemooc.cn	2
8	zhihuishu.com	2
9	topu.com	1
10	cnmooc.org	1
	Total	41

The potential teacher participants should have either offered or used TI MOOCs in their teaching. Teacher 1 is an interpreting teacher and has been engaged in designing and teaching an interpreting MOOC from University 1, a prestigious foreign languages university. Teacher 2 is a translation teacher of a newly granted MTI program of University 2, a comprehensive university in an economically less developed city. He has not personally produced any TI MOOCs but has used translation MOOCs of other universities in his lesson preparation and teaching activities. With the help of the two teachers, five students were randomly selected from each university. Students 1–5 were from University 1, while Students 6–10 were from University 2. Before conducting the interviews, the authors explained clearly the intention of the interviews and the rights and interests of the participants, obtained their informed consent to use the interview data solely for the purpose of academic research and guaranteed to keep their institutions and identities anonymous unless they preferred them to be disclosed. The teachers and students are therefore referred to by numbers in this paper.

All the interviewed students were in their second year of MTI education. There were two male and eight female students, all in their early 20s. In University 1, the interpreting MOOC had been part of their course content; while in University 2, TI MOOCs were not part of their regular curricula, but had been recommended to the MTI students. All the interviews followed roughly the same interview guide (see Appendix), including asking the participants' reasons for teaching or learning TI MOOCs, their perceived merits and demerits, and suggestions for future development of such courses. The interviews were either done face-to-face or via Wechat (the most popular social media App in China) voice calls, each lasting about 20–30 minutes. With the permission of the participants, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were sent to the interviewees for checking. After that, the authors reached a consensus that both deductive and inductive codes would be used (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey 2011). Deductive codes were used in the first cycle,

in line with the interview questions. The transcriptions were then read independently for inductive codes. If there was any disagreement, the authors went back to the data and tried to recode it. This process continued until a conclusion was reached that convinced all parties.

#### 4. Results

This section will first present the results of desk research, including an overview of existing TI MOOCs and analyses of TI MOOCs on icourse163.org as an illustration, followed by the interviews of teachers and students.

##### 4.1. Overview of TI MOOCs in China

Table 1 above shows that there are 41 TI MOOCs on the 10 MOOC platforms, including repeated counting of some courses across different MOOC platforms, for example, the nine courses on icourse163.org and icourses.cn are the same; and the course “Principles and Practice of Computer Assisted Translation” of PKU is offered on four MOOC platforms, namely, mooc.cn, cnmooc.org, topu.com and chinesemooc.org. After excluding the repetitions, the actual number of courses offered is reduced to 29.

These 29 TI MOOCs can be roughly divided into seven types according to their content, which are respectively 13 translation courses, eight interpreting, three translation and interpreting, two translation technology, one translation accreditation tests, one translation for specific purposes, and one comprehensive course of listening, speaking and interpreting.

Of the 23 offering institutions, Shanghai Normal University (SHNU) ranks the top with three courses, followed by Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU), PKU, NJU and Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS), each with two courses; and the remaining ones offer just one course each. Most of the offering institutions are comprehensive or foreign languages universities. On top of that, there are also five vocational or polytechnic colleges and schools.

In terms of languages, 27 TI MOOCs are between Chinese and English, two between Japanese and Chinese, and none are between other language pairs. All the TI MOOCs are bidirectional, i.e., both into and out of Chinese.

In terms of registration requirements, the majority of courses set no threshold for admission so anyone with certain proficiency of the related foreign language can register for learning.

Information available on the MOOC platforms varies from one to another. Some just offer the course title without any detailed information. Some require registration before any preview is possible. Among them, icourse163.org and icourses.cn offer the most comprehensive information about the courses, including messages from the teaching team, overview of the course, target learners, syllabus, preparatory knowledge, certificate requirements and reference materials, as well as detailed records of registrations and learners' comments.

##### 4.2. TI MOOCs on icourse163.org

The icourse163.org is a quality MOOC platform co-constructed by the Higher Education Press (one of the top publishers in China) and Netease (a leading Internet

technology company based in China). The platform has a reputation for its high number of quality courses offered by prestigious universities. Because of the comprehensiveness of courses and course information, TI MOOCs on icourse163.org (see **Table 2**) will be used as examples to illustrate the overall situation in China.

#### 4.2.1. Course requirements

Compared with traditional face-to-face instruction within semesters, TI MOOCs' requirements are more flexible, allowing learners to take the lessons at their own convenience within a certain time range, but requiring them to take part in online discussions, submit their assignments and assess peer assignments. If they cannot accomplish the required tasks by the deadlines, they can still go on learning, but the assignment scores will be affected. If they just watch the videos without doing the required tasks, they cannot obtain the course certification.

#### 4.2.2. Course assessment and testing

The forms of course assessment of TI MOOCs are more or less the same and consist of assignments and final examinations. The assignments include watching pre-recorded course videos, participating in discussions, answering questions, and accomplishing TI practice. Upon completion of the course, learners have to take the final examination. The proportions of scores of assignments and final examination vary from course to course. Learners who

have completed all the assignments and passed the final examination will obtain the course certification. Some courses offer just pass certification, while others also offer distinction and merit.

#### 4.2.3. Teacher-student and student-student interactions

Most TI MOOCs have discussion zones for learners to publish their comments or responses to others' comments. There are also special assignment zones for peer assessment. Some TI MOOCs require the learners to assess a certain number of fellow learners' assignments each time, which serves as an important component of the assignment scores. On the other hand, the teacher(s) can address individual learners or the whole student group in the discussion zone, either synchronously or asynchronously.

#### 4.2.4. Registrations

Because of the differences in course history, TI MOOCs show great disparities in registered learners. For example, "Translation Methods and Skills between English and Chinese" of NJU has run four times and is one of the "National Elite Open Online Courses", so it has attracted 80,554 registered learners in total, far exceeding the other eight TI MOOCs on icourse163.org. Ranking second is "Consecutive Interpreting" of GDUFs, with 17,213 registered learners at the end of the fourth offering. The course has been readjusted and the contents enriched on the basis of the first three rounds and the number of lec-

**Table 2:** TI MOOCs on icourse163.org (as of Sept. 12th, 2019).

	Title	Offering uni.	Latest offering time	Rounds offered	Total reg.	Total comments	Nos. of teachers	Teachers' academic titles
1	Consecutive interpreting	GDUFs	Apr. 2–July 22, 2019	4	17213	433	5	2 Assoc. Profs 3 Lecturers
2	Translation Methods and Skills between English and Chinese	NJN	Feb. 12–May 28, 2019	3	80554	402	1	1 Assoc. Prof
3	English-Chinese Interpreting	SHNU	Mar. 7–June 14, 2019	3	3102	120	1	1 Lecturer
4	Translation between Chinese and English	SHNU	Sept. 16, 2019–Jan. 6, 2020	3	3651	178	1	1 Assoc. Prof
5	Professional Translation and Interpreting	Fujian Normal University	Sept. 10–Dec. 26, 2019	3	3688	185	5	1 Prof 2 Assoc. Profs 2 Lecturers
6	English Interpreting	Nanjing Normal University	Sept. 30–Dec. 30, 2017	1	1962	N.A.	2	1 Prof 1 Lecturer
7	An Introduction of Translation and Interpreting	Central South University	Apr. 15–June 30, 2019	1	6158	9	4	1 Prof 3 Assoc. Profs
8	College English Listening, Speaking and Translating Course	Henan Polytechnic University	Mar. 25–June 16, 2019	2	3115	330	7	2 Assoc. Profs 5 Lecturers
9	Business English Translation and Interpreting Skills	Jiangxi College of Foreign Studies	Sept. 16–Dec. 15, 2019	4	1786	50	9	2 Profs 3 Assoc. Profs 4 Lecturers

turers has increased from two to five in the fourth round. The registrations of the remaining seven courses range from over 1,000 to over 6,000. Eight of the nine TI MOOCs are for students of general higher education institutions while “Business English Translation Skills” of Jiangxi College of Foreign Studies is for students of vocational colleges and has the smallest registrations.

#### 4.2.5. Teachers

Three TI MOOCs have one teacher each; while the remaining six have two to nine teachers each. In terms of professional titles, there are professors, associate professors and lecturers, with the last making up the majority. “Professional Translation and Interpreting” of Fujian Normal University (FJNU) is the only course that has both university teachers and translation professionals as lecturers, embodying college-enterprise cooperation and the mutual complementarity of their respective strengths (Yue, Lin & Zeng 2018:64).

#### 4.2.6. Learners’ comments

These refer to learners’ voluntary comments on the course, the teacher(s), and their personal learning experience on the MOOC platform. In terms of identity, the learners include foreign language teachers at primary and secondary schools; university students of English, TI, or other majors; and university TI teachers. In terms of attitudes, there are both positive and negative comments, with the former making up the majority. In terms of content, there are comments on the courses, the teachers’ charisma, course content, design and presentation, technological support, and the learners themselves. All the comments are subjective rather than structured and quantifiable comments based on assessment criteria and principles.

### 4.3. Interviews of MTI teachers and students

This section reports the participants’ reasons for teaching or learning TI MOOCs, general comments, perceptions about the merits and demerits of existing TI MOOCs, and suggestions for improvement.

#### 4.3.1. Reasons for teaching/learning TI MOOCs

Teacher 1 was one of the main course designers and lecturers of an interpreting MOOC. In the first place, she was prompted by curiosity to know what MOOCs could do. With funding provided by her university, she and her colleague started the first trial and the course has proved a great success. Teacher 2’s University 2 did not have as many teaching resources as earlier established and more prestigious institutions; neither did it have any TI MOOCs itself. But Teacher 2 and his students had made use of TI MOOCs offered by elite teachers from elite universities. As the MTI program was new to him, Teacher 2 wanted to learn from the successful examples of other universities to enrich his own teaching methods and teaching content. The students of University 1 studied the interpreting MOOC offered by their teachers as part of their course requirements; while those in University 2 studied the TI MOOCs of other universities as recommended by their teacher as a supplement to their regular lessons.

#### 4.3.2. General comments

The interviewees had different comments on TI MOOCs. Teacher 1 thought their interpreting MOOC could tell learners what professional interpreting was like but that it could not train professional interpreters. Teacher 2 was grateful that the existing TI MOOCs offered him and his students the opportunity to learn from the advanced teaching philosophy and innovative methods of teachers of other universities. The students of University 1 thought TI MOOCs an extra burden because, apart from their regular classes, they had to invest extra time and effort to accomplish the teachers’ requirements related to the interpreting MOOC, while those in University 2 accepted TI MOOCs more readily because they were not subject to any compulsory requirements.

#### 4.3.3. Perceived merits of TI MOOCs

All interviewees agreed that, compared with traditional face-to-face instruction, TI MOOCs broke spatial and temporal constraints so that learners could take the courses at their own convenience. TI MOOCs also had the capacity to take in large numbers of learners, so they had the opportunity to enjoy the quality teaching resources of the more prestigious universities. The two teachers also thought that TI MOOCs saved them from repetitive work, especially when they taught parallel classes. Teacher 2 thought TI MOOCs a useful resource for his own teaching activities.

#### 4.3.4. Perceived demerits of TI MOOCs

Lack of teacher-student and student-student interactions was perceived as the biggest demerit of TI MOOCs by all participants. TI courses were practice-oriented, and demanded instant feedback of students’ performance, but as the courses were pre-recorded, teachers could not readjust their teaching methods, content or pace in accordance with students’ performance or their paralinguistic signals or cues, such as facial expressions or gestures. Student 8 explained, “Students take the course at different time, so it is not really convenient to have real time discussions with the teachers or fellow learners. I don’t like to have my questions unanswered for a long time.”

Another demerit perceived by Teacher 1 was the lack of screening of students. Once a MOOC was open on a platform, anyone could take it, so there was no way of knowing in advance their language proficiency, their prior knowledge and TI competence, or their motivation for learning TI MOOCs.

A third demerit was the limited availability of TI MOOCs. Both Teacher 2 and his students expressed disappointment at the limited number of courses available for them to choose from. “I do hope that those better established MTI programmes can offer more TI MOOCs for the newcomers to learn from,” wished Teacher 2.

Still another demerit was the inability to assess learners in an objective and comprehensive manner. If hundreds or even thousands of learners took the same TI MOOC, it was impossible to offer individualized feedback and authentic assessments. Teacher 1 explained:

*“In traditional offline teaching mode, I can listen to the students’ recordings and offer individualized comments and suggestions to them. But when hundreds or even thousands of students take my MOOC, it is simply impossible for me to do so. We can only design objective assignments or test items to save time and efforts in marking them. Of course, this is far from professional assessment. But before automatic scoring system is invented, we can only make do with it.”*

Student 1 also admitted, “Even if I didn’t watch the videos attentively, I could still guess the answers to the objective assignments or test items correctly, but of course, this does not mean that I have mastered the skills.”

There was also the problem of academic honesty when examinations were conducted online. It was not easy to verify the test takers’ real IDs. “Anyone can register with their QQ or Wechat account or mobile phone number and we have no way of finding out who they actually are. We don’t even know whether they take the exams themselves,” complained Teacher 1.

In addition, TI MOOCs had to rely heavily on professional MOOC manufacturing companies for shooting, editing and maintenance. Teacher 1 elaborated,

*“To achieve the best teaching effects, we had our course shot by professional MOOC manufacturing companies. We usually had to record a number of lessons in one go, which put teachers under great time and psychological pressure. We also had to rely on technicians for problem shooting after the course was open to learners.”*

#### 4.3.5. Suggestions for future development of TI MOOCs

All the participants acknowledged room for improvement for TI MOOCs and offered suggestions from their own perspective. Teacher 1 hoped that there would be more financial and technological support from the university and fellow teachers, as well as some preferential treatment in performance assessment and professional title promotion for teachers offering MOOCs. Teacher 2 hoped that there would be more varieties of TI MOOCs offered by elite teachers from elite universities. All the students hoped that TI MOOCs could be better integrated with their offline learning and that the credits they earned from TI MOOCs could be recognized by the university authorities so they did not have to take repetitive courses. Their suggestions will be further explored in the discussion section.

## 5. Discussion

Despite the great importance attached to MOOCs by national and local education authorities and higher education institutions in recent years, TI MOOCs are still at their fledgling stage, with some acute problems demanding serious attention and immediate resolution.

### 5.1. Major problems

According to the collected data, the authors sum up three types of problems of TI MOOCs in China, namely, numbers

and types; content and application; and R&D, management and operation.

#### 5.1.1. Limited numbers and types

Though all the 10 MOOC platforms have certain numbers of TI courses, the total numbers and types are still very limited and fail to form a complete course system of BTI and MTI programmes. For example, *The National Standards for the Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Programmes of Higher Education Institutions* released in 2018 by the Teaching Steering Committee of Higher Education Institutions under the Ministry of Education of China stipulates that the BTI core courses should include introduction to translation, translation from foreign languages into Chinese, translation from Chinese into foreign languages, applied translation, liaison interpreting, and thematic interpreting; while *The Guiding Training Plan for Master of Translation and Interpreting Programmes* formulated by the China National Committee for Translation and Interpreting Education in 2011 points out that professional compulsory MTI courses for the translation track should include introduction to translation, translation theory and skills, interpreting theory and skills; applied translation and literary translation; and for the interpreting track, consecutive interpreting and simultaneous interpreting. Comprehensive elective courses should include translation history of China and foreign countries, translation criticism and appreciation, computer-assisted translation, etc. Interpreting elective courses should include sight interpreting, thematic interpreting, conference interpreting, business interpreting, court interpreting, foreign affairs interpreting, interpreting observation and appreciation, and interpreting workshops.

Translation elective courses should include technical writing, technical translation, conference translation, business translation, legal translation, media translation, translation of Chinese classics, translation workshops, translation and localization, etc. The existing dozens of TI MOOCs are mainly general introductory courses, with few or none on TI theories, history, or technologies; or TI for various specific subject fields; or sight interpreting, liaison interpreting, or simultaneous interpreting; or other related courses.

At the time of writing this paper, only 23 universities and colleges offered TI MOOCs and only two TI courses had been recognized as “National Elite Open Online Courses”, though there were 281 BTI and 253 MTI offering institutions nationwide. Supply has failed to keep up with the increasing demand for elite TI MOOCs by elite teachers from elite universities.

Most of the TI MOOCs on the 10 surveyed MOOC platforms are between Chinese and English and few are between other language pairs, showing a great disparity with the tremendous demand for multilingual professional translators and interpreters in the language service industry and “the Belt and Road” Initiative (BRI) (Zhong & Xu 2016). The BRI is a global development strategy proposed by the Chinese government in 2013 which calls for cooperation between countries and international organizations in Asia, Europe and Africa for

infrastructure construction and investment. As of April 27<sup>th</sup> 2019, China had signed cooperative agreements with 126 countries to jointly build “the Belt and Road” (“the Belt and Road” website), which means that large numbers of professional translators and interpreters of languages other than English will be needed. However, MTI programmes of minor languages, be they offline or online, are very limited. This suggests that TI MOOCs of minor languages have great development space and potential, because the capacity of MOOCs to take in large numbers of learners can ease the pressure of offline training of translators and interpreters of minor languages and bridge the gap between supply and demand to some extent.

#### 5.1.2. Inadequate content and applications

Firstly, the course design and content presentation are not satisfactory. For example, some courses are not well designed, namely, the chapters or sections do not follow a linear progression according to difficulty so the courses are fragmented. Some courses are mere reproductions of offline versions. Some consist entirely of teachers’ monologues without any innovation in teaching methods, hence their lack of appeal to potential learners. Some are devoid of detailed and in-depth explanations or training in specific skills. Some presentation methods are not user-friendly enough, for example, not providing any preview or trial watching and listening; while some require special software to play the course videos.

Secondly, the need for objective and comprehensive learner assessments remains unsolved due to the large number of registrations and the inability to provide instantaneous feedback and real-time teacher-student interactions. Though teachers can come to know and handle some questions or doubts raised by the learners, they cannot offer individualized and well-targeted feedback and assistance to all learners, which affects the learning experience and its effects.

Moreover, the TI MOOCs are not well shared across the different platforms. Except for [icourse163.org](http://icourse163.org) and [icourses.cn](http://icourses.cn), which share their MOOC resources, the other platforms are isolated from each other. As a result, duplicated construction has resulted in a great waste of human and material resources, for example, consecutive interpreting has been offered by a number of universities, though the content is more or less the same. The limited registrations of the different TI MOOCs also suggest that they have not enjoyed enough popularity among the vast number of BTI and MTI students.

#### 5.1.3. Inefficient R&D, management and operation

At present, TI MOOCs are either offered by individual teachers, or by teaching teams of two to several members, and only one involves translation professionals from the language service industry, so the whole process of creating, running and maintaining the course is largely undertaken by the teachers themselves, lacking intra-college, inter-college and college-enterprise cooperation. This may be an important reason for the limited numbers and the unsatisfactory quality of TI MOOCs.

Understaffed and overloaded teaching teams have been unable to achieve more active engagement in the R&D of TI MOOCs. A typical teaching team consists of a course leader, lecturer(s), and teaching assistant(s) (Zhao et al. 2017:43). However, the majority of TI MOOCs are not equipped with teaching assistants(s) or with sufficient numbers of them. Furthermore, MOOCs are usually taken as an additional task rather than a replacement of teachers’ regular face-to-face teaching, so they have to spare extra time and effort for the TI MOOCs. According to Teacher 1, it took her a whole week or even longer time to prepare for the recording of a 20-minute lesson. As most teaching teams are not equipped with the necessary technological competence to independently create TI MOOCs, the lack of technological support is enough to prevent teachers from trying in the first place.

In addition, most of the TI MOOCs in China are free of charge, resulting in low marketization and unclear profit earning patterns, so learners may just register and drop out freely, instead of cherishing the learning opportunity; while the teachers who offer TI MOOCs see no apparent rewards. As Teacher 1 acknowledged, she had not gained any extra pay for running the interpreting MOOC. But MOOCs are vigorously advocated by the Ministry of Education and will be important criteria for assessing the universities and colleges concerned. Therefore, more in-depth discussions on how to guarantee the orderly, sound and sustainable development of TI MOOCs are needed.

#### 5.2. Future development of TI MOOCs

To address the above mentioned problems, joint efforts are needed from the leading authorities and all parties concerned. The following are some suggestions for the future development of TI MOOCs.

First, the national and local education authorities should play a greater role in supervising and promoting TI MOOCs by taking the following measures: 1) to carry out needs analyses of the different parties concerned with TI MOOCs so that more well targeted courses can be designed for and used by greater numbers of learners; 2) to encourage various stakeholders to jointly develop more high-quality TI MOOCs and to form a complete course system to make up for the insufficient TI teachers and teaching resources; 3) to enhance the leadership, standardization and coordination of TI MOOCs to avoid wastage caused by duplicated construction; 4) to develop more TI MOOCs of minor languages, especially those of “the Belt and Road” countries to satisfy the huge market demands; 5) to improve the assessment and accreditation of MOOCs to guarantee their qualities; and 6) to explore greater integration of MOOCs with degree education, such as recognition of MOOC credits to boost students’ learning enthusiasm and motivation.

Secondly, the universities concerned should try to do the following work: 1) to offer characteristic TI MOOCs in accordance with their advantageous disciplines and programmes. For example, universities renowned for medical science can offer medical TI MOOCs and those excelling in legal studies can offer legal ones; 2) to encourage their teachers, especially those with rich TI practice and

teaching experience to take part in the R&D, production and maintenance of TI MOOCs; 3) to formulate incentive measures in terms of performance assessment and professional title promotion to stimulate teachers' initiative in TI MOOC construction, teaching and research, otherwise few teachers will be willing to devote extra time and effort for something not worthwhile to them; 4) to form TI MOOC teaching and research teams for in-depth studies on MOOCs and their integration with other forms of computer-assisted and web-based TI teaching and learning, such as flipped classrooms or blended online and offline learning; 5) to explore the in-depth integration of TI MOOCs with high-tech offerings, such as using virtual reality technology to create real or simulated TI scenarios; and 6) to develop automatic scoring systems to assess learners' performance more objectively and comprehensively.

Thirdly, intra-college, inter-college and college-enterprise cooperation should be enhanced so that resources can be shared and strengths complemented, such as cooperation between TI teachers and computer teachers, between different TI education institutions, and between TI education institutions and language service providers. One successful example is the cooperation between FJNU and Eagle Eye Translation Service Co. Ltd. in developing and implementing the TI MOOC of "Professional Translation and Interpreting".

Fourthly, teachers creating new TI MOOCs can learn from the experience of successful examples in terms of course design, teaching methods and concepts, presentation and production, to enhance their appeal to potential learners. From the learners' comments discussed above, learners prefer TI MOOCs which are logically and vividly presented, with proper images and emphases on content. In addition, the teachers' charisma such as image, demeanor, intonation and pronunciation, and voice quality all affect the learners' learning experience.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has tried to present an overall picture of the status quo, merits, existing problems and future development of TI MOOCs based on desk research and in-depth interviews. It has found that TI MOOCs, though vigorously promoted by education authorities at various levels, are still at their primary stage, with limited numbers and types, inadequate content and application, and insufficient R&D, management and operation. To satisfy the market demand for large numbers of qualified translators and interpreters of various languages, to ease the pressure of offline TI education, and to fully exert the advantages of TI MOOCs, four suggestions have been offered in the hope of shedding light on the future development of TI MOOCs, related application and research, and of drawing more scholarly and professional attention to such courses, so that more high-quality TI MOOCs can be developed and more in-depth studies carried out.

This study has, to some extent, filled the research gap relating to TI MOOCs in China. However, it also has some limitations, such as the small sample size and representativeness of participants and MTI offering institutions involved; exclusion of other stakeholders; limited mention of TI MOOCs on other platforms and the possible threat

posed by TI MOOCs to TI teachers. All of these demand further study.

## Appendix

### Interview Guide

1. Why do you teach/learn TI MOOCs?
2. What are your general comments on existing TI MOOCs in China?
3. What are the major merits of existing TI MOOCs in China?
4. What are the major demerits of existing TI MOOCs in China?
5. What can be done to improve TI MOOCs in China?

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### Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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