

## “Jixue” and Modernization of Chinese Economic Thoughts<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

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Westernization and Europeanization have long been witnessing the modernization of Chinese economic thoughts in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Meanwhile, it was also featured by the intertwinement between Chinese traditional economic thoughts and Western ones. Therefore, this paper tries to posit Yan Fu’s “jixue” within dual stratifications, namely, the traditional Chinese economic thoughts and the intertwinement between Chinese and Western economic thoughts, to disclose the understanding, comprehension and orientation of economics as a discipline in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and further to reveal the formation of the fundamental economic concept and the modernization of Chinese economic thoughts embedded therein.

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**Keywords:** economic thoughts, modernization, jixue, economics

### I. Introduction

“When we carry out research on translation history, we face a choice...is translation the object of our research, or is it the lens through which we research our historical object?”<sup>1</sup> It has long been a dilemma for the study of translation history. The disciplinary integration and supplement between translation and historical study remains a neutral zone.

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Theoretical assumption on both historical study from the perspective of translation or translation study from the perspective of history implied in one way or another the passive role translation has been playing, namely translation as a supplement to historical interpretation or translation manipulated by specific historical context.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, research concerning translation history, whether general study or monographic study, demonstrates a nostalgic trend from Leopold von Ranke which "enters political history mainly relying on interpretation of archive, particular official archive".<sup>3</sup> Translation study would incline to focus on "translation in certain country, period or time,"<sup>4</sup> in which traditional methods in historical study such as biographical history, chronicle and history of a particular country etc. Also "conspicuous is its particular stress on literary discourse".<sup>5</sup> The fact that abundant historical material and themes should come into the sight of historical needs an intensive exploration of culturally constructive role of translation in history, that is, the constitution of knowledge in certain period of history. Moreover, translation study should include other discourse besides literary ones in order to obtain a panoramic view of both disciplines. "Translation history, in essence, is a history of cultural communication...in which cultures competing with each other".<sup>6</sup> As an important part of cultural communication, knowledge and its construction, among which economic thought is an indispensable one, require "an archaeological way to re-examine the construction process of presently-accepted knowledge, thoughts and beliefs".<sup>7</sup>

## **II.Strategic Construction of Western Economic thoughts in Modern China**

"The introduction of Western economic ideas into China began in the nineteenth century and accelerated in the last decade of that century".<sup>8</sup> "The early introduction of western economic idea into China can clearly be decomposed into a 'push' component and a 'pull' component. The 'push' involved the efforts to westerners to spread mainstream economic doctrines...the efforts of Chinese intellectuals to understand, transmit, and adapt western economic ideas. Four major figures in Chinese intellectual history were leading participants in the 'pull' of western economic ideas into China..."<sup>9&10</sup>. As two words "push" and "pull" indicates, the introduction of western economic ideas into China could be filled with competition between the Western and the indigenous. Ge Zhaoguang commented on the three acceptance strategy of Chinese indigenous intellectual:

“First, for an integral comprehension, seeking to integrate Western knowledge into Chinese knowledge for intelligibility, and familiarity; second, to tap historical resources, seeking to trace similarity in knowledge between West and China; third, to confine the application of Western knowledge into its own sphere”.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the introduction of Western economic thoughts would be a process of influx and infusion in which Chinese indigenous economic thoughts, instead of being a passive receiver, actively participated in the process.

Re-examination of construction process of basic economic concept would be the starting point because “the change in basic concept and category of human knowledge symbolizes the fundamental transformation and implies the expansion of knowledge and the intensification as well”.<sup>12</sup>

“*Yuan Fu* (Yan Fu’s translation of *The Wealth of Nations by Adam Smith*) is the first Western economic works translated by Chinese intellectual who expected to seek theoretical strength from the West to save China...the comment from Yan Fu in his translation set an model for the future exploration into Western knowledge”.<sup>13</sup> according to the four phases of modern Chinese economic thoughts proposed by Ma Bohuang (the development of modern Chinese economic thoughts can roughly be divided into four phases: the first is from 1840s to 1860; mid-1860s to mid-1890s is the second phase; Jiawu War to May Fourth Movement is the third which witness the launch and failure of the Hundred Day’s Reform, the Boxer’s Rebellion and Xinhai Revolution. The turbulent period does not undermine the development of Chinese capitalism and capitalist thoughts. The following years until the foundation of People’s Republic of China marks the fourth phase<sup>14</sup>) Yan Fu translated *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith at a widespread time of capitalist thoughts in China while Chinese economic thoughts, in contrast, are featured with inadequacy in “stipulating basic categorical system, theoretical paradigm and analytical technique”.<sup>15</sup> Thereby, stipulation of basic economic concept would be the pivot of exploring the modernization.

The aggressive global expansion of Western economy since the seventeenth century marked the modernization of other areas including China in the world the trace of Westernization or Europeanization. "Chinese economic thoughts before seventeen century hold a lead in the world compared with Western economic thoughts ... Chinese economic thoughts from seventeen century to nineteenth century has stagnated... While the first half of nineteenth century witnessed Chinese economic thoughts being confined to the paradigm of vulgar economics".<sup>16</sup> Stagnant development in Chinese economic thought and national crisis in the nineteenth century "urged Chinese intellectuals to introduce various ideas to accelerate the Europeanization and Westernization in China".<sup>17</sup> "Economic and social reality proved that capitalist economic theory and administrative experience cannot resolve the diverse the diverse impediment... Chinese indigenous thoughts still plays a significant role in modernizing China."<sup>18</sup>

Obviously, Ma Bohuang, primarily focusing on the importance of indigenous economic thoughts in modernizing China, hold identical idea with Ge Zhaoguang on the necessity to base modernization in China on the infusion of both the West and the indigenous. "Research on the development of economic thoughts in modern China should consider its historical origin and historical conditions. Historical origin, by offering a retrospect of infusion process, could avoid insularity while historical conditions, by specifically locating infusion, could consolidate the basis for research".<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is essential to construct the mutual ground for both history and translation study on modernization of Chinese economic thoughts by locating "Jixue", the fundamental concept of economics, in specific historical conditions to re-examine it culturally constructive significance.

### III. "Ji"—Scientization

As transliteration of a Greek word-oikonomia (oikos is 'house' while nimein is 'manage')<sup>20</sup>, economics or economy implies "house *management*". Aristotle in his *Politics* defines 'economy' as skill to make a livelihood and politics in reality is nothing but pursuing income. It is not until the nineteenth century that economic integrated into a separate disciplinary including the basic livelihood and materialistic production.<sup>21</sup> The beginning phase of economics as house management in the West coincides with the rudimentary concept of management for economics in China before Jixue. In terms of "jixue", Yan Fu annotated that "jixue", economy in Greek with "eco" indicating house while "nomy" management.

Thereby, it indicates “house management”. By extension, it refers to the eight essential skills in administrating country and expanding its connotation corresponds with nourishing the civilians. Due to its extensiveness, it is translated into “jingji” in Japan while into “licai” in China. The former would be a term too extensive while the latter would be a term too narrow. Therefore, I proposed to translate into “jixue” with conspicuous indication of traditional skills of Chinese official. “Jixue” also corresponds with the connotation of management. Therefore, *The Wealth of Nations* is a book for “jixue”.<sup>22</sup>

Yan Fu believes that “jingji” is too extensive a term for economics because “jingji”, as a traditional sense, implies administrating the states and cultivating the civilians.

“夫贞廉之士，未必能经济世务。是以齐桓忘管仲之奢僭，而录其匡合之大谋；汉高舍陈平之污行，而取其六奇之妙算”

(Intellectuals, who are staunch and incorruptible, are not necessarily experts in administrating states and cultivating civilians. For example, Duke Huan of Qi in Spring and Autumn Period who forgave Guan Zhong’s overstepping his rank to seek extravagance, designated Guan Zhong as a Legalist chancellor and reformer to conquer other warlords; Liu Bang, Emperor Gaozu of Han, overlooked Chen Ping’s corruptness and valued his strategic insightfulness)<sup>23</sup> Four characters above are unexceptionally experts in administration and cultivation. Therefore, “jingji” with its political and economic implication in classical Chinese, is much broader term for translation of disciplinary economics. However, “ji” in “jixue”, by extending to demonstrate eight administrative skills of being an expert in states affairs and by expanding to indicate the theory of nourishing the civilians. In other words, “ji” implies the both the practical and theoretical aspects of economics. The transformation of “ji” from expostulation with the superior, mostly the emperor, to national economic strategy and guidance supplements the basic skill in state affairs. Moreover, “jingji in classical Chinese generally underlines the political implication”.<sup>24</sup> Yan Fu rid the excessive political implication in “jingji” by adopting “ji”. On the other hand, “licai” would be too parochial a term for economics because “licai” in classical Chinese signifies state revenue and expenditure.

“特科约以六事：一内政，凡考求方輿险要邻国利病民情风俗者；二外交，凡考求各国政事条约公法律例章程者；三理财，凡考求税则矿务农功商务者”<sup>25</sup> (Six specific subjects besides the regular ones in entrance examination: First, domestic affairs such as geography, geopolitics, civilian and customs; second, diplomacy such as foreign affairs, treaty, legislation and regulations; third, finance ‘licai’ such as taxation system, mining industry, agriculture and business...). In contrast, in terms of economics in *The Wealth of Nations*, it covers the theoretical framework of modern economics. Yan Fu realized that “ji” integrates a wider signification than the skill of Minister of Revue and measures to stabilize the price, however, “kuaiji”(official in charge of property or treasury), “jixiang”(official in charge of state finance and tax) and “jixie”(official in charge of registration and records) all implies management which is similar with “nemein” in Greek. In fact, the tendency for “integral comprehension” to integrate Western knowledge into Chinese knowledge for intelligibility, and familiarity is obvious.

Integration of the West and the indigenous arises from Yan Fu’s insightfulness on the distinctive feature between Western knowledge and the Chinese one. “Those who interpret second hand materials sometimes would be confined and belittled; moreover, misinterpretation would arise from diverse perspective on an individual basis. It is the unexceptional acceptance of misinterpretation that those who study the phenomena of nature would abstain from. Also uncountable are those who rely on old interpretation finding themselves be immersed in abyss of confusion.”<sup>26</sup> As a result, the introduction of Western knowledge should be in the light of specific social and historical conditions. Translation of economics should integrate classical signification with modern one. Finally, the uniqueness of “jixue” can be found in the extension and expansion of its classical signification and also in the succession of both the West and the indigenous disciplinary paradigm.

#### IV. “Xue”—Disciplinarity

The other key to conceptualization of “jixue” is the interpretation of “xue”. Since it is named as “xue”, it connotes disciplinarity to contain theoretical implication. In the illustratory notes to Yuan Fu(translation of *The Wealth of Nations* by Yan Fu), “this book signifies the independence of economics-‘shihuo’- as an discipline”.<sup>27</sup> The time when *The Wealth of Nations* was published was the initial stage of capitalism and factories have taken root in major cities in the UK, which was followed by the transition from handicraft factory system to massive production.

Based on the refinement of scattered economics, economics becomes an independent discipline. Likewise, “knowledge of taxation and revenue in ancient China is not regarded as a discipline and is found scattered in the works of scholars”.<sup>28</sup> “Shihuo”, “as defined in *Book of Han* by Ban Gu: ‘shi’ indicate farming section and agricultural products while ‘huo’ includes textile, monetary issues such as distribution and logistics. Both are the fundamental aspects of cultivating people”.<sup>29</sup> Three areas of agriculture, industry and business are contained in “shiwu”, which in turn demonstrates the modernization of economic concept. Furthermore, the independence of “shihuo” also extricates itself from the confinement of traditional economic connotation. Fang Weigui illustrates the transition of the translation of economics from 1870’s to 1930’s in China.<sup>30</sup>

Year	Translation	Source
1872	Shengjixue	<i>Shengjixue</i> <sup>1</sup>
1875	Strategy for Wealth of Nations	<i>On the relationship between China and the West</i> <sup>2</sup>
1878	Methods for Finance Management	<i>Diary at London and Paris</i> <sup>3</sup>
1880	Strategy on National Wealth	<i>A Manual of Political Economy</i> <sup>4</sup>
1880	Business Strategy	<i>Yiyuan</i> <sup>5</sup>
1881	Business Strategy, House Management, Finance Management	<i>Tetsugakujii (A Dictionary of Philosophy)</i> <sup>6</sup>
1886	Strategy on Nation Wealth and Cultivating Civilians	<i>Primer of Political Economy</i> <sup>7</sup>
1886	Strategy on Administrating Country, Government System, Administrating Country and Cultivating Civilians	<i>Nederlandsch-Chinese Woordenboek met de Transcriptie der Chinese Karakters in het Tsiang-Tsiu Dialekt</i> <sup>8</sup>
1890	Finance Management, Strategy on Administrating Country and Cultivating Civilians	<i>Chronicles of Japan</i> <sup>9</sup>
1894	Business Strategy, Strategy on Enriching Nation, Finance Management	<i>Annals of Zheng Guanying</i> <sup>10</sup>
1896	Strategy on National Wealth	<i>Journey by Li Hongzhang to Europe and America</i> <sup>11</sup>
1897	Strategy on Administrating Country and Cultivating Civilians	<i>Japanese Scholars Comment on Jingjixue</i> <sup>12</sup>
1897	Finance Management,	<i>Code of Nanyang Public School</i> <sup>13</sup>
1899	Strategy on Cultivating Civilians	<i>On Benefits of Learning Japanese</i> <sup>14</sup>
1902	Jixue	<i>The Wealth of Nations Translated by Yan Fu</i> <sup>15</sup>
1902	Jixue	<i>On Liberty Translated by Yan Fu</i> <sup>16</sup>
1902	Methods on Stabilizing the Price	<i>History of Economics</i> <sup>17</sup>
1903	JingjiJixueJingjixueLicaixue	<i>New Erya</i> <sup>1</sup>
1903	Jingji	<i>On Economic Competition</i> <sup>19</sup>
1903	Jingjixue	<i>General Interpretation of Economics</i> <sup>20</sup>
1905	Jingji	<i>Ambassador to Nine Countries</i> <sup>21</sup>

1907	Jingjixue	<i>Chinese Dictionary on Law and Economics</i> <sup>22</sup>
1908	Jixue, Shengjixue	<i>Essences on Politics in Nations</i> <sup>23</sup>
1908	Jingjixue	<i>On Debate</i> <sup>24</sup>
1911	Jingjixue, Jixue	<i>General Encyclopaedia Dictionary</i> <sup>25</sup>
1912	Jiazheng, Licaixue, Jingjixue	<i>Tetsugakujii(A Dictionary of Philosophy)</i> <sup>26</sup>
1913	Jingjixue, Shitaidu	<i>Chinese New Terms and Expressions</i> <sup>27</sup>
1913	Jingjixue	<i>Chinese Dictionary on Japanese Law and Economics</i> <sup>28</sup>
1916	Jingjixue, Licaixue, Jixue, Minshengzhuyi	<i>English-Chinese Dictionary of the Standard Chinese Spoken Language and Handbook for Translators</i> <sup>29</sup>
1922	Licaixue	<i>Donald MacGillivray, A Mandarin-Romanized Dictionary of Chinese. Including New Terms and Phrases.</i> <sup>30</sup>
1927	Shengjixue, Licaixue, Jingjixue	<i>French-Chinese Dictionary</i> <sup>31</sup>

From the table, translation of disciplinary aspect of “economics” in China since 1870’s witnesses the translation from “mou”, “fa” and “ce” (which lay particular emphasis on skill, method and strategies to administrate countries) to “xue” (synthesized strategies of administration), then to “xue” (stress the disciplinary feature of economics). “Jixue” signifies the translational stress on a systematic disciplinary construction. In addition, in the 1890’s particularly more Chinese intellectuals participated in the translation and interpretation of Western economics. The disciplinary connotation in “jixue” can also be found in Yan Fu’s orientation of economics in Chinese paradigm. “Jixue, as an inductive discipline, attaches importance to observation and change, and with proper comprehension of all relevant material, it can be upheld as a regular law”.<sup>31</sup> It is therefore clear that “jixue” is an independent discipline and also the production of “jixue” can be divided into three aspects based on the binary properties of each discipline, namely those of practical application and those of theoretical significance.

“The former can be designated as those disciplines of arithmetic, triangle, chemistry, electronics and botany; while the latter focuses on discovering and establishing the regular laws for both nature and society. It is particularly true for the latter discipline that the production of certain knowledge requires observation, examination, thorough comprehension, and finally law can be founded”.<sup>32</sup> The Wealth of Nations, based on observation and examination of capital, labour, economic policy, economic theories and governmental revenue, intends to infer the general rule in economic development and the ways to seek and guarantee national wealth. In other words, the inference of a general economic law from particular instances of d periods of capitalism which coincides with Yan Fu’s orientation on “jixue” --- the law based on interpretation of instances.

Therefore, "Adam Smith enlightens China to find the righteous way in new century and provides fundamental rule for the worlds, which qualifies his work as a definite reference for the national crisis".<sup>33</sup> Besides, more than three hundreds pieces of comment by Yan Fu in his translation, through assiduous examination of economic and social reality, demonstrates indigenous influence from Chinese paradigm on Westernization in China. "The prospective contribution of economics consists of two, to feed the civilians and to accumulate wealth for our nation".<sup>34</sup>

## V. Marketizing Fundamental Economic Concept

"Jixue" demonstrates the influx and infusion between Western economic concept and Chinese indigenous one to correspond the familiarity, intelligibility and acceptability in modern China, and Yan Fu's revolutionary interpretation of Western economic thoughts can also be found in his reconstitution of the four sectors of economy, namely agriculture, industry, commerce and logistics and their internal connections. The economy in China since the beginning of feudalism operates on the principle---agriculture as the fundament of national economy while commerce as the unessential. On the contrary, Yan Fu firmly believed that "The key to national crisis and poverty is the comprehensive development of industry",<sup>35</sup> which revolutionizes the fundamental principle of national economy. However, revolution in operation principle of economy does not lie in the cancellation of dominant position of agriculture ("as four components of national economy, agriculture, industry, logistics and commerce are in nature sequenced according to its contribution. Our ancestors would not necessarily misapprehend on that"<sup>36</sup>) but in the commercialization of agriculture as an integral part of national economy instead of the reclusive, self-sustaining one in feudalism China. Commerce in economic history of China prospered with the development of diverse devices such as Jiaozi in Song Dynasty (the world's first paper money) and trade overseas in Ming Dynasty. The First Opium War accelerated the disintegration process of feudalism economy in China. Yan Fu's interpretation of the role of agriculture in economy undermines the foundation of feudalism. Likewise, Kang Youwei, one of the initiator of Hundred Day's Reform, expostulated to Emperor Guang Xu on the importance of commerce, commenting "agriculture as the fundament of national economy corresponds with peaceful time while the world full of competition requires commerce as the fundament".<sup>37</sup> The revolutionary interpretation and reconstitution of agriculture on the other hand by Yan Fu manifests the wish of national capitalist.

Furthermore, grounded on disintegration of dominant role of agriculture in feudalism economy, Yan Fu also points out the importance of comprehensive development of four sections. The fundamental role of agriculture arise from its ability to base human production on; and the Development of agricultural productivity and surplus products provides the prerequisite and basis for the existence and development of commerce and industry. Four sectors are interdependent; and demise of any sector will cause the demise of the other three.

Disorder of any sector can cause disorder of other three. If people do not invest in agriculture, then agricultural production will decline, and the people will not have enough food; and the other three industries will eventually be abandoned. If people do not invest in the industry, you can only rely on man power for agricultural production, then the production will drop and the same is with demand. Agricultural production will also be eventually extinct. Even if there is no need to invest in agricultural labor, but the price will inevitably inflated. If people do not invest in commerce, raw materials and products are then trapped instead of being in circulation in the country. Then, trade cannot exist. Finally, if people do not invest in the business, the production of raw materials and products would undermine the division of labor, causing a waste of resources".<sup>38</sup> Also "individual pursuit of profit would not undermine the social welfare as a whole and in contrast the former would generate beneficial competition for reasonable progress".<sup>39</sup>

## **VI. Conclusion**

Georges L. Bastin and Paul F. Bandia propose in *Charting the Future of Translation History* that "Should history of translation draw much more on history and historiography?...should the field develop its own methodology and research techniques? From microhistory, archaeology and periodization to subjectivity and postmodernism, methodological blank spaces are being filled".<sup>40</sup> Thereby, Yan Fu also highlights the significance of promoting commerce because its development can satisfy the requirements of people's life and production by transporting material for livelihood and manufacture and circulating products around the country, and accelerates the process of financing for other sectors. Meanwhile, development of commerce also generates beneficial competition to prosper the overall social welfare. It indicates the harmonious relationship between individual pursuit of benefit and public welfare, which hold a progressive modulation of traditional view of righteousness in benefits.

Diversification of historical material needs to interpret history from diverse perspectives among which translation would shed light on the re-examination of certain historical material while translation study also absorb nutrients from history study, and continue to historicize translation study by positing translation under certain social and historical context and further exploring the communicating function of translation.

By positing “jixue” in the specific social and historical context, the archaeological feature of translation is fully exposed, which illustrates the reconstitution of modern economic concept. The disciplinarity and scientization of indigenous “economics” in “jixue” demonstrate the urge of Westernized intellectuals and national capitalists to stimulate modernization in China. In addition, “jixue” retains the paradigmatic characteristics of traditional Chinese economics by affirming the fundamental position of agriculture in national economy. As Yan Fu concluded “jixue” has a direct bearing on the economy of China in the short run while on the survival of Chinese in the long run”.<sup>41</sup>

## Notes

1. Christopher Rundle, “History Through a Translation Perspective” *Between Cultures and Texts: Itineraries in Translation History* (2011):33
2. Translation as supplement to history study or posited in certain social and historical context that would constrain translator and translation practice.
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