ChinaRxiv

AI translation · View original & related papers at
chinarxiv.org/items/chinaxiv-202304.00029

Analysis of the Development, Evolution, and Influencing Factors of Blue Books in China: Postprint

Authors: Zhang Yaqi, Ke Ping

Date: 2023-04-01T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Blue Books were introduced to China in the late Qing Dynasty and, after more than 100 years of development, have evolved into a form with Chinese characteristics. This study aims to comprehensively present the developmental evolution of Chinese Blue Books and the various factors influencing their changes. [Method/Process] Based on the developmental characteristics of Chinese Blue Books, their development history is divided into three stages: the introduction period (before 1985); the emergence period (1985 to 1999); and the prosperity period (after 2000). A brief overview of the morphological changes and thematic domains of Blue Books during these three stages is provided, along with relevant data visualization presentations. [Results/Conclusions] The term "Blue Book" carries different meanings in different countries and periods. Today, Blue Books have transformed from official documents in Europe and America into research reports in China. The publication of Chinese Blue Books is rooted in the entire social system, serving to record, analyze, and predict developments across multiple fields. The main factors influencing the development and changes of Blue Books in China include: political ideology, social conditions, publishing institutions, and historical choices and conventions.

Full Text

The Development and Evolution of Blue Books in China and Their Influencing Factors

Zhang Yaqi, Ke Ping Business School of Nankai University, Tianjin 300071

Abstract: **[Purpose/Significance]** Blue books were introduced to China in the late Qing Dynasty and, over the past century, have evolved into a distinctive form with Chinese characteristics. This study aims to comprehensively present

the developmental evolution of Chinese blue books and the various factors influencing their transformation. [**Method/Process**] Based on the developmental characteristics of Chinese blue books, their history is divided into three stages: the Introduction Period (before 1985), the Generation Period (1985–1999), and the Proliferation Period (after 2000). This paper provides a brief overview and relevant data visualization of morphological changes and thematic domains across these three stages. [**Result/Conclusion**] The term "blue book" carries different meanings across countries and historical periods. Today, blue books have transformed from official documents in Europe and America into research reports in China. Chinese blue book publishing is rooted in the entire social system to record, analyze, and predict developments across multiple domains. The main factors influencing the evolution of blue books in China include political ideology, social conditions, publishing institutions, and historical choices and conventions.

Keywords: blue book; publication; research report; China

As a type of document, blue books differ from other literature named after content characteristics, with their distinctiveness deriving from their blue covers. From a naming perspective, the content, format, purpose, and function of blue books are all ambiguous. In fact, since their inception, blue books seem to have "developed freely" across different countries and eras, resulting in phenomena where documents with varying content, formats, purposes, and functions are all uniformly called "blue books," making this category even more difficult to identify. Current discussions on blue books primarily focus on their basic conditions [1] and their role and value in social development [2–3]. These analyses and introductions are typically limited to specific blue book series or particular publishers, lacking systematic 梳理 of blue books as a whole and of the developmental history of Chinese blue books.

This paper attempts to present the historical trajectory of Chinese blue books from their emergence to their self-directed development through literature review and statistical data, exploring and summarizing the main factors influencing their reshaping and evolution. On one hand, this fills the gap in China' s blue book research field; on the other hand, it seeks to understand from a longitudinal temporal perspective why Chinese blue books did not develop into their original form as official documents but instead transformed into forms resembling research reports and development reports. Chinese blue books have become what they are today both through historical choice and driven by China' s developmental needs.

1 Related Concepts

Blue books (蓝皮书) are an "imported" document type that first emerged in European countries. Due to inconsistencies in function, purpose, publishing format, and compilation form, the term "blue book" has not yet been uniformly

defined. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) [7] only indicates the representative form of blue books as "books bound in blue covers, primarily one of the official reports of the British Parliament and Privy Council, and books containing officials serving in the U.S. government." According to Wikipedia (2018), blue books are specialized publications rather than serials, such as company information guides (e.g., Construction and Building Blue Book), standards (e.g., CD standards), specifications (e.g., Java Virtual Machine), and photo books (e.g., New York State adoption-themed photo services).

Blue books are used in different forms for different purposes, and certain usage conventions exist across countries. Most commonly mentioned are the official documents that continue the origins of blue books. According to the OED, the term "blue book" can be traced back to the 15th century when the British Parliament began extensively preserving records covered in blue velvet, first appearing in 1633 and being called blue books in 1715. Since then, blue books have been used to describe various forms of government manuals, statements, reports, and other official documents. For example, the *Blue Book on National Accounts* [8] published annually by the UK Office for National Statistics records and describes Britain's economic activities and serves as an important data source for macroeconomic policy. The *West Virginia Blue Book* is considered a comprehensive record of all levels of government in West Virginia, published annually by the State Senate since 1916. The *Wisconsin Blue Book* functions as an almanac containing the most comprehensive information resources about Wisconsin state government and citizens.

Similar publications to blue books include red books, green books, and white papers. One view holds that these are all official state documents, but because different countries adopted different colors for document covers, concepts such as "blue book," "white paper," and "green book" emerged. Lu Zhenjing [9] noted that "the general term for various published documents of the British Parliament is also called blue book because the cover is often blue, hence the name. In fact, brown and white are also used. Countries publishing official state documents mostly have fixed colors for identification." Another view suggests they are distinguished by different colored covers. A. Bullock and O. Stallybrass [10] argued that blue books should be distinguished from documents called white papers and green books, with the former containing government policy statements that may include announcements of government intentions and proposals for future legislation, while green books are used by the government as ideas and information for public debate and discussion. In China, white papers serve as government official documents, while other types such as blue books have developed into forms resembling research reports and development reports. The Social Sciences Academic Press treats these publications as a whole and collectively calls them "pi-shu" (皮书). Su Xinchun and Liu Rui [1] believe the reason for grouping these publications together is that as the number of groups and units involved in editing and publishing increases, the use of book colors becomes freely named according to each organization's understanding, gradually blurring the boundaries of these publications and making color distinctions less

meaningful. However, some suggest that the relationship between cover color and thematic content relates to color symbolism. For example, blue represents academic rigor and prudence, so blue books typically represent the views of research teams or professional institutions; green symbolizes life and the future, so green books mostly relate to environment, ecology, tourism, and rural themes; yellow symbolizes openness and inclusiveness, so yellow books often focus on international regional political and economic issues [3].

The term "blue book" originated from official documents and later derived multiple forms, indicating that the term lacks a clear definition and it is difficult to delineate all blue books. In practice, blue books may vary significantly depending on the author, publishing institution, and usage context across different countries, regions, and historical backgrounds. If "blue book" is regarded as a documentary concept, its identity is usually shaped by external forces, suggesting that "blue book" possesses various possibilities and development potential. Without these premises, the evolution of blue books in China and their developmental forms would be difficult to understand.

2 Data Sources and Analysis

To obtain statistical data on Chinese blue books from their origin to the present, the authors collected data through the online public access catalog of the National Library of China (http://opac.nlc.cn) and the Chaoxing Discovery Database (http://www.chaoxing.com/). The authors conducted database searches using the search term "blue book" from July 18 to 20, 2019. The National Library search yielded 5,978 blue books published between 1985 and 2018. After excluding translations, microfilm versions, and overseas blue books from the dataset, 5,708 blue books were obtained. Meanwhile, Chaoxing Discovery retrieved 430 foreign blue books published before 1984. Excluding announcements from the dataset, 374 items were relevant to this study. Additionally, to understand the relationship between blue books and related fields, the authors compiled and extracted subject keywords for blue books published each year. To reveal the primary focus of blue books, keywords describing the characteristics of blue books themselves—such as "research report," "white paper," "survey report," "research," and "analysis" —were excluded. Furthermore, classification numbers used for thematic area analysis were counted and grouped into corresponding subject categories. Given that some blue books have two or three classification numbers, each blue book was assigned to at least one subject category.

[Figure 1: see original paper] depicts the development trend of Chinese blue books. Translated versions of foreign blue books appeared in China in the late 19th century. In 1898, the *Wanguo Gongbao* (International Gazette) published articles titled "Translation of Key Points from the Sino-British Negotiations Blue Book" and "Translation of the British Parliamentary Blue Book," which are the earliest blue books found in China. From 1898 to 1910, a total of 365 blue book translations appeared, including 8 translated books (2.2%) and 357 arti-

cles published in diplomatic newspapers, commercial newspapers, etc. (97.8%), peaking at over 180 items in 1904. Some translated articles excerpted from blue books concerning diplomatic and economic issues were published in journals and newspapers such as *Diplomatic News* and *Business News*, with *Diplomatic News* publishing the largest number of articles (335 items) covering political issues from 1901 to 1910. The emergence and increase of translated articles and books during this period may have resulted from the Qing government' s call and organization. However, for over 70 years after 1912, the number of blue books declined sharply, with almost no relevant records found—a discovery that basically coincides with the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1912. The interruption of records may have been caused by war and social turmoil. In 1985, blue books written by Chinese scholars emerged. From 1985 to 1999, the number of blue books showed an upward trend, increasing slightly as government departments and researchers began paying attention to blue books. Many blue books during this period were produced for internal circulation or as reports submitted to the government. The growth rate stabilized in the early 20th century, with an average annual growth rate of approximately 23.1% thereafter and about 16.7% in the most recent decade, indicating that the growth rate is stabilizing and the market is expanding—a finding that basically aligns with the rise of the National Pi-shu Conference (in 2000). From 2016 to 2018, more than 600 blue books were published annually. These figures indicate that an increasing number of publishers, research institutions, and researchers are contributing to this field.

According to blue book search records, the *China Technology Policy: Blue Book of the State Science and Technology Commission* series, released in 1985, is the earliest modern blue book in the dataset. Subsequently, blue books have basically continued their research nature. The first National Pi-shu Conference was held in 2000, and since then, nationwide expert seminars have been conducted on blue books and similar publications. Moreover, [Figure 1: see original paper] also shows that after 1985, the number of published blue books increased, with accelerated growth entering the 20th century. Therefore, using 1985 and 2000 as temporal nodes, the evolution of Chinese blue books is divided into three stages: the Introduction Period (before 1985), the Generation Period (1985–1999), and the Proliferation Period (after 2000).

3 Development Stages of Chinese Blue Books

3.1 Stage One: Introduction Period (Before 1985)

The "blue books" that appeared early in China were not specialized works by domestic scholars but translations of foreign blue books. During the turbulent late Qing period, Chinese intellectuals launched the Self-Strengthening Movement, hoping to enlighten the populace and save the nation through translating Western books. Against this backdrop, Western blue books such as British "Blue Books" and French "Yellow Books," which recorded facts in official documents, became important channels for understanding and researching world conditions.

Blue books concerning Chinese historical events, local Chinese conditions, and international relations were translated into Chinese. For example, translations of the *British Blue Book* by Zheng Jun, Zheng Zhenlai, Huang Wenhao, and others were published through the Hubei Foreign Affairs Translation Bureau, including seven volumes of the *British Blue Book* (published in 1903) and investigation records or reports on Jiangxi and Yunnan provinces; *New Translation of the British Government' s Published Blue Book on the Chinese Revolution* (published in 1913); and *Selected Translations of the British Blue Book on the Xinhai Revolution* (published in 1984). Additionally, translated articles were serialized in *Diplomatic News* (1902–1911), which, as modern China' s first newspaper focusing on international issues commentary, used blue book translations as its main platform, demonstrating the political nature of blue books. Statistics show that from 1898 to 1984, 304 blue book translations were produced in the political domain, accounting for over 70% of the total.

While early domestic scholars translated foreign blue books, they also introduced the concept of "blue book" as a document type. Years of translation work gradually deepened Chinese scholars' understanding of blue books. By the mid-20th century, terminology overviews of blue books and brief descriptions of related types such as red books, green books, and white papers appeared in some Chinese pamphlets and reference books. For example, the *National Dictionary* (published in 1941) introduced British parliamentary blue books. In the 1970s, the *Dictionary of Library Science* (published in 1971), which aimed to "present terminology used in libraries," showcased the writing styles of blue books from Britain, France, Italy, and other regions. This record indicates that blue books were already considered relevant terminology in Chinese library science.

Due to the serious political situation, from the 1950s to the early 1980s, translation work shifted to another form. Blue books existed as translations of foreign literature, political, historical, and philosophical works. These books featured simple layouts and cover designs in blue, gray, white, or red, earning them the names blue books, gray books, white books, or red books based on their appearance. However, such books had distribution restrictions due to their special purposes, marked with "Internal Reference" or "Internal Publication" on their covers [12].

3.2 Stage Two: Generation Period (1985–1999)

Although translation work on English or Japanese foreign blue books began in the early 20th century, China did not publish some truly meaningful blue books until the late 1980s. After experiencing long-term social turmoil, the form of blue books changed. During this period, most blue books began with government initiatives. The economy was the most important social task of this period, and science and technology were considered the primary productive forces. Therefore, to promote scientific and technological development and accelerate the transformation of science and technology into economic growth, government agencies convened, organized, and authorized experts and scholars

from various fields to conduct relevant investigations and demonstrations. Researchers carried out surveys and studies based on government authority and power, organizing and writing related reports such as *China Technology Policy: Blue Book of the State Science and Technology Commission* and *Economic Blue Book*. As shown in [Figure 2: see original paper], blue books concentrated mainly in the economic domain, with approximately 80 volumes in economics, 20 in politics, 14 in culture, and 1 in social sciences. shows that blue books had initially formed a basic structure of "development," "forecast," and "trend," with analysis primarily focused on economic development. Moreover, the fluctuation presented in [Figure 2: see original paper] indicates that the blue book market was unstable, partly due to distribution restrictions—some blue books were limited to internal circulation. Therefore, this period also marked the transition of blue books from informal to formal publications.

In 1985, the State Science and Technology Commission released a series of blue books on technical policies for specialized fields, namely *China Technology Policy: Blue Book of the State Science and Technology Commission*. According to the State Council' s unified deployment, starting from January 1983, the State Science and Technology Commission, State Planning Commission, State Economic Commission, and other agencies jointly organized nationwide technical policy research covering transportation, communications, materials industry, machinery industry, residential construction, building materials, agriculture, consumer goods industry, integrated circuits, computers, urban and rural construction, and environmental protection. More than 2,000 government officials and experts from various professional fields participated in this work. The State Science and Technology Commission entrusted the China Center for Science and Technology Development to compile 13 technical policies into the China Technology Policy Blue Book, ultimately forming 11 volumes. This set of blue books included both national policy guidance documents—covering national policies, plans, important decisions, laws, regulations, and official announcements for specific professional fields—and fully leveraged the scientific nature of expert demonstrations, with each volume containing supporting materials from expert surveys and demonstrations required for formulating technical policies, providing references for relevant departments in researching and implementing technical policies. Subsequently, from 1988 to 1993, the State Science and Technology Commission organized and published blue books on technical policies including climate, intellectual property, and oceanography, each numbered sequentially. This series of blue books was called the "China Science and Technology Blue Book." Against this backdrop, local science and technology commissions and local government departments, together with experts and scholars, successively released blue books on local technical policies and economic and social development analysis and forecasting, summarizing, analyzing, and predicting economic development and proposing a series of alternative countermeasures.

Another example is the *Economic Blue Book* released in 1990. In 1990, the central government held a symposium with scholars from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. After the meeting, in September, the Institute of Quantitative

and Technical Economics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences submitted the *Report on Conducting Macroeconomic Forecasting*. The State Council' s Research Office required active implementation of this work. This led to the first economic situation analysis symposium in December 1990, and based on the forecasting results and on-site discussion outcomes, a book was produced to analyze and predict the economic situation [13]. This book was not officially published at the time but was wrapped in a blue cover, hence it was called the *Economic Blue Book* [14].

During this period, although the term "blue book" was primarily adopted at the official level, researchers gradually transformed from participants in officially organized compilation work into major stakeholders in commercial blue book compilation. The involvement of commercial publishers influenced the publication cycle and output format of blue books. Moreover, the annual publication format of blue books began to emerge. The *Economic Blue Book* may be seen as a microcosm of this evolution. Although the government authority and scholars' responsibilities in compiling the *Economic Blue Book* were similar to those for the *State Science and Technology Commission Blue Book* and *China Science and Technology Blue Book*, the former produced different effects in blue book publishing. Since the *Economic Blue Book* was officially published by China Social Sciences Press in 1992, new blue books have been produced annually to forecast economic conditions. Some scholars believe that this practice of inviting experts to conduct macroeconomic forecasts for China' s next-year economic development in the form of blue books will gradually become institutionalized [15].

3.3 Stage Three: Proliferation Period (After 2000)

As more publishers entered the blue book field, the number of blue books continued to increase (see [Figure 1: see original paper]). However, quality issues also gradually emerged and sparked relevant discussions. In 2000, the first National "Pi-shu" Conference was jointly organized by the Social Sciences Academic Press, Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences, and the CPC Huludao Municipal Committee and municipal government. This was the first specialized conference on blue books and similar publications. Participants believed that the creation and publication of blue books and similar works should standardize their form and content. This conference is considered to have promoted the development of "pi-shu" as a concept for presenting academic achievements, enabling it to enter and influence social development as a public discourse [3]. Since then, this annual conference has been held every year and has now been convened twenty times.

During this period, the fields covered by blue books expanded significantly (see [Figure 3: see original paper]), with blue books on various industries, sectors, disciplines, universities, and institutions emerging, involving geography, industrial economics, sports economics, humanities, medicine, journalism, oceanography, sociology, pharmacology, and multiple other disciplines. Statistics show

that blue book output across various fields during this period was roughly: economics (3,256), politics (985), culture (785), education (222), law (175), social sciences (174), medical and health sciences (117), environmental science (84), industrial technology (71), arts (53), history and geography (40), sports (36), transportation (36), literature (29), astronomy and earth sciences (29), philosophy (18), natural sciences (8), language (4), and agricultural science (4). Moreover, viewed by individual field, blue books all showed stable growth trends, indicating that the blue book market pattern has basically formed.

Social affairs and issues remain important themes for blue books. Most blue books still concentrate on economic, cultural, and social aspects, particularly the development of society, culture, economy, and politics at national and local levels. shows that compared with the previous stage, blue books continue to emphasize economic and social development while also paying considerable attention to multiple areas of social life, including the Internet, education, urbanization, service industries, and mass media. Some institutions are keen on social hot topics, tracking and monitoring developments in digital publishing, smart cities, WeChat, pharmaceutical logistics, nationwide reading, artificial intelligence, etc. Urban construction and local development are also key focuses —currently, all provinces have corresponding blue books for annual summaries and forecasts of provincial development.

As blue book content gradually covers all areas of society, author identities have become diversified, including government agencies, colleges, research institutes, social organizations, companies, journal editorial departments, consulting firms, associations, and societies. The most common form involves institutions and research groups collaborating to compile blue books, and cross-border cooperation between Chinese and foreign scholars on international issues is also a major trend. Among these, research institutes are one of the main producers, continuing the convention from the Generation Period where blue books originated from researchers. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is a typical representative of research institutions, with local academies of social sciences conducting research on problems existing in local construction processes to promote local development. Blue books are tools for expressing these research results and opinions, and as such, blue books serving as knowledge services and results promotion are considered outputs of think tanks [5].

4 Influencing Factors in Blue Book Development

4.1 Political Ideology

The evolution of blue books is influenced by ideology and reflects the administrative orientation of authorities. Since the late Qing Dynasty, blue books in China have existed in roughly three forms: translations of foreign blue books; translations of foreign literature and other works; and research and demonstration of practical problems. The Qing government regarded foreign blue books as diplomatic documents, storing them in the Talent Reserve Institute (a diplo-

matic personnel training institution) and translating them. In the early period of the People' s Republic of China, to adapt to the planned economic system, a planned and organized translation and publishing system was implemented. However, this system's problem was that translation and publishing content was strongly intervened by political factors, causing literary standards to be easily replaced by political standards [16]. To achieve political tasks, blue covers were used to bind literary and social science translations, forming so-called "blue books" for political purposes. After the Reform and Opening-up, government departments vigorously advocated "respecting knowledge, respecting talent, giving full play to the role of scientific and technological personnel, and promoting economic development through scientific and technological means" [17], enhancing researchers' status and emphasizing research and analysis functions. This created conditions for researchers to play a role in government decision-making and social development, and the blue book document type became a carrier for these research results, receiving attention and support from government departments, such as the *State Science and Technology Commission Blue Book*. Currently, most blue books continue this form with researchers as the main body and research analysis as the primary content.

4.2 Social Conditions

As a dependent variable, blue books are subject to various social factors, which are sometimes not independent. During the late Qing period, social turmoil triggered policy changes that affected blue book translation work. It can be said that during this period, social and political factors jointly influenced blue books.

Starting in the 1980s, when social issues became research objects of blue books, social factors directly impacted blue book development. Blue books are rooted in economic and social development needs, especially when economic construction became the nation' s fundamental task, leading blue books to focus on economic, social, and technological development. As society progresses and various fields and industries develop, new problems emerge continuously, resulting in more blue books being published to explore and summarize these issues, consistently following the trend of social problems guiding blue book topic selection. Statistical analysis of blue book keywords from the Generation and Proliferation periods also reveals changes in blue book themes following social development. Moreover, "development"and "forecast"are both important keywords, indicating blue books' role in tracking and monitoring their subjects.

Furthermore, the steady advancement of science, technology, and academic research has empowered blue books with the ability to forecast developments in their subjects. Various research methods, including questionnaires, interviews, case studies, and mathematical models, have been incorporated into blue books. Xu Mingjun and Mou Dai [18] believe that academic independence may be the most important characteristic distinguishing blue books from white papers, and that blue books should reflect independent expert positions. These results

demonstrate that various phenomena and problems brought about by social development provide research subjects for blue books, while scientific research and methods constitute the content support for blue books.

4.3 Publishing Institutions

Blue books are closely related to the development of the publishing industry. After the Reform and Opening-up, the publishing industry underwent adjustments in publishing policies, optimization of publishing structures, improvement of book quality, and reform of the publishing system. Most publishing houses transformed into independently operated enterprises [19]. Through systemic reform, the market' s role in resource allocation was strengthened, mobilizing the enthusiasm and creativity of publishing entities and forming a unified, open, competitive, and orderly modern publishing market system [20]. The number of publishing houses increased from 215 in 1985 [21] to 585 in 2018 [22]. The quantity of publishing houses and their autonomy in publishing choices laid the foundation for more blue books with diverse themes. According to the authors' statistics, from 1985 to 2018, a total of 302 publishing houses in mainland China have published blue books, with 132 publishing houses in Beijing accounting for 68.5% of the blue book market. Science Press, China Planning Press, Science and Technology Literature Press, and China Social Sciences Press were the earliest publishers of blue books. Currently, publishers and authors have become "co-authors" through cooperation, indicating that the role of publishers is changing and becoming increasingly important [23]. With this development, some publishers have made blue books their main product. The most prominent example is the Social Sciences Academic Press, which has published over 3,000 blue books from 1996 to 2019, accounting for nearly half of the blue book market. As an academic publishing institution of humanities and social sciences affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Social Sciences Academic Press is provided with abundant expert and scholar resources by the Academy. At the same time, by collaborating with researchers from other ministries, universities, and research institutions, it has expanded the research fields of blue books. Additionally, the Social Sciences Academic Press has adopted a series of measures to build its brand and promote the development and publication of blue books.

4.4 Historical Choices and Conventions

Blue books originating in Europe as official documents have continuously developed into another form in contemporary China. In addition to external factors such as social politics, the theory of "path dependence" in historical sociology may also explain this development. J. Mahoney [24] argues that "path dependence" characterizes those historical sequences in which contingent events set in motion institutional patterns or event chains with deterministic properties. In such cases, early events produce consequences with lasting effects [25], and once this process begins, it is almost irreversible or the cost of reversal is very high

[26].

The rise of blue books as a publishing convention conforms to three characteristics of path dependence. First, the blue book system is highly sensitive to events occurring in the early stages of the entire historical sequence (for example, the choice of book cover). When submitting national economic reports, blue rather than other colors was chosen for the report cover. The *China Technology Policy: Blue Book of the State Science and Technology Commission* series and the *Economic Blue Book* had obvious influences on subsequent publication decisions of various stakeholders. Early interest groups used blue as the cover color for this unofficial document, and all subsequent blue books continued this practice.

Second, critical junctures establish trajectories, marked by the combination of contingent events (the initial choice of blue cover). Regarding the *Economic Blue Book*, as Chen Zewei [28] stated, the blue cover imitated the form of foreign document releases. However, official documents in Britain, Italy, and Japan had different cover colors, all of which should have been potential choices at the time. Xie Shuguang and Wu Dan [3] believe that the color "blue" relates to academic rigor. In any case, these different speculations suggest that the naming at this stage seemed to have no practical significance—that is, early events as contingent events cannot be explained based on previous events.

Third, once contingent historical events occur, blue book production practices tend to align with early specific outcomes. In self-reinforcing sequences, there are mechanisms that reproduce specific institutional patterns over time, including functional, power, and legitimacy mechanisms proposed by historical sociologists. From a functional perspective, once blue books appeared in China as an unofficial form, the self-reinforcing process led to their rapid diffusion, including: increasing publications to occupy the book market; extensive promotion and establishment of blue book-specific norms. These actions can influence the awareness and subsequent actions of blue book stakeholders, strengthening the association between "blue book" and certain content while excluding other uses of blue books.

However, the blue book system is not a strict "institution" after all, or at least not an entity capable of adapting to changes. The system remains unstable with a loose network structure, limiting the applicability of path dependence. Nevertheless, path dependence theory provides a perspective to understand why Chinese blue books differ so significantly from British and American blue books. This explanation may be extended to other forms of "blue books" across different countries and historical periods.

Conclusion

Blue books have different connotations across countries and periods. The above investigation shows that blue books were first published in China in the mid-1980s. These government-commissioned research reports are entirely different from the first "blue books" mentioned in Chinese records from the late Qing

period. This demonstrates that understanding of "blue book" has changed over time. The late Qing government and officials labeled blue books as diplomatic documents and used them for reference, but "blue book" now more commonly serves as an informational publication focusing on social issues. Over more than 100 years, the form of blue books has not remained static. Starting with translations of foreign blue books, serving as political tools, and becoming a form for recording and forecasting national development, blue books have changed along with factors such as social conditions and political ideology, with influential publishers also positively affecting their development. Additionally, historical choices and practices are indispensable important factors in making "blue book" what it is today. Currently, Chinese blue books are rooted in the social system and meet emerging social development needs. Unlike official reports published under this name in Britain and the United States, Chinese blue books, as part of the publishing industry, are influenced by market behavior and research practices.

References

[1] Su Xinchun, Liu Rui. Language Use and Characteristics of Pi-shu [J]. Applied Linguistics, 2015(3): 22–32. [2] Wan Bin, Yang Jianhua. The Development and Significance of Chinese Pi-shu—A Case Study of *Zhejiang Blue Book* [J]. Zhejiang Academic Journal, 2002(5): 68–73. [3] Xie Shuguang, Wu Dan. Pi-shu and Contemporary Chinese Studies [J]. Publishing Wide Angle, 2016(13): 20–23. [4] Wu Shulin. Based on Innovation and Quality Improvement, Build a Good Publishing Platform to Disseminate Think Tank Results [M]//Xie Shuguang, Cai Jihui, Wu Dan. Twenty Years of Pi-shu Specialization (1997–2017). Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2017: 61–71. [5] Xie Shuguang. Pi-shu Research and Creation and Think Tank Construction [M]//Xie Shuguang, Cai Jihui, Wu Dan. Pi-shu Research and Creation and Think Tank Construction. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2014: 32–44. [6] Wang Zhending. The New Publishing Term "Pi-shu" [J]. China Terminology, 2009, 11(3): 58–59. [7] Simpson JA, Weiner ESC. The Oxford English Dictionary [M]. 2nd ed, Volume II. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989: 327. [8] Office for National Statistics. United Kingdom National Accounts [EB/OL]. [2020-05-29]. http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105230758/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/naa1-rd/united-kingdom-national-accounts/index.html. [9] Lu Zhenjing. Dictionary of Library Science [M]. Taiwan: Commercial Press Co., Ltd., 1971: 572. [10] Bullock A, Stallybrass O. The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought [M]. London: Fontana/Collins, 1977: 72. [11] Duan Fang. New Laws of the Guangxu Era of the Great Qing (Volume 3) [M]. Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1910: 22, 149. [12] Shen Zhanyun. Gray Books, Yellow Books [M]. Guangzhou: Huacheng Publishing House, 2007: Preface. [13] Pi-shu Museum. The Origin of Pi-shu [EB/OL]. [2020-07-20]. https://www.ssap.com.cn/c/2017-07-30/1058911.shtml. [14] China.com.cn. Social Sciences Academic Press and Dutch Brill Publishing Company: Chinese Pi-shu Goes Global [EB/OL]. [2020-05-29]. http://www.china.com.cn/fangtan/zhuanti/zgcbr/2007-

09/06/content_{8827340}.htm. [15] Li Xueji, Jin Feng. Cross-Century Leadership Cadres Work Treasure (Volume 2) [M]. Beijing: Jiuzhou Book Publishing House, 1998: 39. [16] Zou Zhenhuan. 20th Century Shanghai Translation Publishing and Cultural Changes [M]. Nanning: Guangxi Education Publishing House, 2000: 317-318. [17] Li Peng. Give Full Play to Scientific and Technological Advantages to Make Greater Contributions to Economic Construction—Speech at the National Science and Technology Work Conference (March 10, 1988) [J]. Shaanxi Sericulture, 1988(2): 1-4. [18] Xu Mingjun, Mou Dai. Compilation Mechanism and Originality of Blue Books in the Cultural Industry [J]. Publishing Friends, 2009(4): 28-30. [19] Wang Xi. 40 Years of Book Publishing in Reform and Opening-up [J]. Science-Technology & Publication, 2018(12): 13-24. [20] Zhou Weihua. 40 Years of China' s Publishing System Reform: History, Main Tasks, and Enlightenment [J]. Publishing Research, 2018(8): 5-14. [21] China Publishing Association. China Publishing Yearbook 1986 [M]. Beijing: Commercial Press, 1986. [22] National Press and Publication Administration. Basic Situation of National Press and Publication Industry in 2018 [N]. China Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television Journal, 2019-08-29(002). [23] Pinter F. The Academic 'Book' of the Future and Its Function [M]//Lyons RE, Rayner SJ. The Academic Book of the Future. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016: 39-45. [24] Mahoney J. Path Dependence in Historical Sociology [J]. Theory and Society, 2000, 29(4): 507-548. [25] Sewell WH. Three Temporalities: Toward an Eventful Sociology [M]//McDonald TJ. The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1996: 245-280. [26] Levi M. A Model, a Method, and a Map: Rational Choice in Comparative and Historical Analysis [M]//Lichbach MI, Zuckerman AS. Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure. 2nd edition. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 19-41. [27] Pierson P. Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis [M]. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004: 135. [28] Chen Zewei. The Selling Point of "Pi-shu" Lies Not in the "Skin" [M]//Xie Shuguang, Fan Guangwei, Cai Jihui. Pi-shu Studies: Theory and Practice. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2011: 39-42.

Author Contributions: Zhang Yaqi: Data collection and processing, paper writing and revision. Ke Ping: Topic selection and guidance on later paper revision.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv —Machine translation. Verify with original.