

Research on the Translation and Dissemination of Chinese Ceramic Terminology from the Perspective of International Discourse Power

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of increasingly intense competition for international discourse power, cultural communication has become a crucial pathway for enhancing a country's soft power and discourse influence. As an outstanding representative of China's fine traditional culture, the international dissemination of Chinese ceramic culture is not only an output of culture but also a process of discourse construction and power generation. However, it currently faces bottlenecks such as inconsistent terminology translation and ineffective communication. Based on the theory of international discourse power, this study systematically categorizes the terminology of Chinese ceramics into five types: Technical Terms, Material Terms, Terms of Forms, Decorative Terms, as well as Historical and Regional Terms. On this basis, three communication pathways are proposed: first, establishing a Chinese-English parallel corpus of ceramic terminology to promote standardization in English translation; second, improving the translation strategies for culture-loaded terms and culture-specific terms, advocating transliteration supplemented by explanatory annotations; and third, strengthening the translation of classical ceramic literature and leveraging Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI)-assisted translation practices. Through systematic translation and effective communication of terminology, the international recognition and discourse power of Chinese ceramic culture can be significantly enhanced, providing both theoretical and practical support for China's cultural "going global" strategy.

1. Introduction

Discourse is a form and crucial source of international political power; it not only reflects reality but also influences and constructs it [1]. International discourse power is a profound manifestation of a nation's dominance and influence in the world. China has repeatedly emphasized the need to focus on building its international discourse power, proposing to strengthen the construction of the discourse system, build a system of external discourse, and enhance the international discourse power. It is of great need to accelerate the construction of the Chinese discourse and the Chinese

narrative system, comprehensively enhance the effectiveness of international communication, and form an international discourse power that matches China's comprehensive national power and international status".

In this broader context, cultural communication plays a pioneering role in enhancing international discourse power [2]. As an outstanding representative of China's fine traditional culture and one of the most important cultural icons of ancient China, ceramic culture serves as a vital vehicle for constructing China's cultural identity and showcasing Eastern aesthetic spirit and achievements of civilization. The international dissemination of Chinese ceramic culture is not merely an output of culture, but also a process of discourse construction and power generation, functioning as a direct medium for enhancing China's international discourse power in this field. However, the current global communication of Chinese ceramic culture faces a fundamental yet often overlooked bottleneck: the translation and dissemination of ceramic terminology. Ceramic terminology translation is an endeavor that extends beyond mere literal equivalence. It requires an approach that faithfully encapsulates the cultural essence of the ceramics while adhering to the precision and conciseness characteristic of scientific discourse [3].

This paper aims to enhance the international discourse power of Chinese ceramics by establishing a Chinese-English parallel corpus of ceramic terminology to promote the standardization and dissemination of its English translation.

2. Overview of International Discourse Power Research

International discourse power is a new manifestation of a nation's comprehensive strength in the era of globalization, which reflects the discourse influence of sovereign states in safeguarding their values, interests, and developmental demands worldwide. In essence, it is a discourse manifestation of a sovereign state's international influence, while simultaneously exerting a reciprocal effect on national power, particularly on its international influence [4-6]. As Joseph Nye pointed out, the ability to shape others' preferences through attraction rather than coercion lies at the heart of soft power [2]. However, despite China's long tradition and abundant resources in ceramic history, it occupies a marginalized position in the contemporary international ceramic art and academic discourse system [7]. This misalignment—characterized as “abundant resources yet insufficient voice”—highlights the urgency of enhancing its discourse power. Thus, improving the international discourse power of Chinese ceramic culture must begin with the accurate translation and effective communication of its terminology, thereby seizing the initiative in cultural expression.

3. Chinese Ceramics Terminology and Its Classification

The terminology system of Chinese ceramics is complex and extensive, encompassing various aspects such as techniques, materials, forms, decorations, as well as historical and regional contexts. A systematic classification of these terms serves as an essential foundation for their transliteration and dissemination. Drawing on previous research, this study categorizes ceramic terminology into the following five types:

(1) Technical Terms

Technical terms refer to the specialized vocabulary used in the ceramic production process, such as “lapi” (wheel throwing [8]), “xiupi” (trimming), “shiyou” (glazing), and “shaocheng” (firing).

(2) Material Terms

Material terms encompass vocabulary related to ceramic raw materials, glazes, and auxiliary substances, such as “gaolingtu” (kaolin, internationally accepted mineralogical term), “cishi” (porcelain stone), and “qingyou” (celadon glaze).

(3) Shape Terms

Terms of forms refer to the names designating the shapes and styles of ceramic objects, such as “meiping” (prunus vase), “yuhuchunping” (pear-shaped vase), “wan” (bowl), and “pan” (plate). These terms possess strong visual referentiality and cultural identifiability.

(4) Decorative Terms

Decorative terms encompass the nomenclature of surface decoration techniques and patterns on ceramics, such as “qinghua” (blue and white, commonly adopted translation in international museums), “fencai” (famille rose), “kehua” (incised decoration), and “yinhua” (stamped pattern).

(5) Historical and Regional Terms

Historical and regional terms refer to proper nouns related to the history of ceramic development, kiln sites, and places of origin, such as “Jingdezhen” (Jindezhen porcelain), “Dehua” (Dehua white porcelain), “Ruyao” (Ru kiln), and “Guanyao” (official kiln).

4. Pathways for English Translation and Communication of Chinese Ceramic Terminology from the Perspective of International Discourse Power

To enhance China’s international discourse power, special efforts should be made to perfect the translation of ceramic terms, especially the terms loaded with profound Chinese ceramic culture; and it is of great significance to work out the appropriate pathways to communicate the translated terms to the world.

4.1 Establishing a Chinese-English Parallel Corpus Of Ceramic Terminology

In order to facilitate the translation of ceramic terms, it is urgent to set up a Chinese-English parallel corpus, and it needs efforts to continuously improve the corpus to better communicate Chinese ceramic culture to foreign readers.

4.1.1 Creating a Chinese-English Parallel Corpus as a Foundation for Translation and Communication

By collecting and compiling Chinese-English entries of ceramic terminology, a parallel corpus will be established. This corpus will then be developed into a mini-program and promoted through Internet and WeChat platforms, providing ceramic translators with direct, standardized, and timely reference resources. This initiative aims to enhance the accuracy of Chinese-English ceramic terminology translation, thereby laying the groundwork for promoting and disseminating Chinese ceramic terminology and strengthening the international discourse power of Chinese ceramic culture.

4.1.2 Promoting the Standardization of English Translation to Enhance Communication Efficiency

Currently, the translation of Chinese ceramic terminology lacks large-scale development and unified industry standards. Inconsistencies in the translation of many ceramic terms have posed challenges to the promotion of English translations in this field. Furthermore, some English translations of ceramic terms remain disconnected from the “Culture Going Global” strategy. Therefore, this project will promote the standardization of English translations for Chinese ceramic terminology, facilitate the overseas dissemination of Chinese ceramic culture, and contribute to the establishment of its international discourse power.

4.2 Improving the Translation of Cultural-Loaded and Culture-Specific Terms

Culture-loaded and culture-specific terms carry with them profound typical culture that belongs uniquely to a certain country. The translation of those terms should be handled with appropriate techniques and skills.

4.2.1 Enhancing the Communication Effect of English Translation for Culture-Loaded Terms

Culture-loaded terms in Chinese ceramic terminology carry substantial cultural information and traditional elements, constituting the core content of English translation in this field. Therefore, this study focuses on addressing the translation challenges of these terms. By comprehensively considering cultural connotations, acceptability among target audiences, and communication effects, the project aims to determine the optimal English equivalents for such terms. This effort seeks to enhance their communicative effectiveness and strengthen the international discourse power of Chinese ceramic culture.

Chinese ceramic terminology contains numerous culture-loaded terms, such as “kaipian” (crackle glaze, referring to the decorative effect of natural crackling on the glaze surface) and “yaobian” (kiln transformation, indicating the artistic effect resulting from unexpected glaze color changes during firing). These terms embody profound cultural aesthetics and philosophical insights into craftsmanship. Literal translation often fails to convey their true meaning. It is essential to fully understand their cultural context and technical characteristics and adopt a strategy of meaning-based translation supplemented by explanatory notes. For example, “kaipian” can be translated as “crackle glaze (intentional crackling effect)”, and “yaobian” as “kiln transformation (natural glaze variation).” This approach improves the acceptability and effectiveness of the translated terms in cross-cultural communication.

4.2.2 Promoting the Transliteration and Dissemination of Culture- Specific Terms

Transliteration is not merely a phonetic conversion but a translation strategy aimed at preserving the cultural heterogeneity of the source language. It serves as an important means of resisting cultural hegemony and asserting cultural identity [9]. For culture-specific Chinese terms, particularly in ceramic terminology, transliteration most effectively conveys the distinctive features of native culture. This approach also aligns with national standards. As stipulated in the Specifications for English Translation in Public Service Areas, “Pinyin spelling is an integral part of Chinese national culture and an English expression with Chinese characteristics”.

The feasibility of transliteration practice hinges on a key premise: the Pinyin scheme has been widely accepted internationally as the standard for transcribing Chinese proper nouns. For instance, the initial translation of “linglongci” as “rice-pattern porcelain”—though considerate of target readers’ comprehension—excessively domesticated the term, sacrificing cultural uniqueness and failing to convey its aesthetic connotations of “exquisite clarity and transparency.” In contrast, the transliterated term “linglong porcelain” has gained increasing acceptance among foreign ceramic experts and enthusiasts through ongoing promotion, successfully introducing this culturally specific Chinese ceramic term to the world.

Numerous culture-specific words have successfully “gone global” through transliteration, such as “Taijiquan” and “Qigong,” which have become common loanwords in English. These examples offer a successful paradigm for the transliteration and dissemination of ceramic terminology. Therefore, for semantically rich and untranslatable terms such as “Qinghua” (recommended transliteration: qinghua, with the explanation “blue-and-white”), “Fencai”, “Meiping”, and “Longwen”, transliteration should be adopted as the primary strategy.

As Chinese culture continues to gain global prominence, many transliterations with distinctive Chinese characteristics have been widely understood and accepted worldwide, forming established fixed usage. In particular, some terms represent specific craft techniques and should be regarded as translations of proper names. In contexts where they serve as identifying terms, transliteration can be adopted—such as “kaolin”, “doucai”, “guangcai”, and so on. When necessary, explanatory notes can be appended to the translated terms to provide detailed clarification. Alternatively, exhibition brochures may feature these terms as part of background knowledge texts, offering specialized supplementary introductions. This approach compensates for potential comprehension difficulties caused by transliteration and enhances target-language readers’ impression and understanding of these culturally specific expressions [10].

4.3 Strengthening Translation Practices

4.3.1 International Communication through the English Translation of Ceramic Classics

With the launch of the “Chinese Academic Translation Project” in 2010, numerous Chinese classics have been translated and introduced abroad, significantly promoting the east-to-west flow of Chinese learning. Meanwhile, these English translations have facilitated the translation and dissemination of culture-specific Chinese terms. It is therefore essential to vigorously advance the translation of ceramic classics. With rapid advancements in technology and artificial intelligence, retranslation efforts of ceramic canonical texts such as *Jingdezhen Tao Lu* (Notes on Ceramics of Jingdezhen), *Tao Shuo* (Description of Chinese Pottery and Porcelain), *Tao Ya* (The Ceramic Refined), and *Yinliuzhai Shuoci* (On Porcelain from the Yinliu Studio) should be carried out in a systematic manner. Through consistent English renderings of ceramic terminology in these foundational texts, the overseas dissemination of Chinese ceramic culture and the establishment of its international discourse power can be effectively promoted.

4.3.2 GAI (Generative Artificial Intelligence)-Assisted Translation Practice and Communication

Supported by AI technology, extensive efforts should be made to advance English translation across various fields of Chinese ceramics. Leveraging the resources of the porcelain capital Jingdezhen and ceramic-focused universities, translation talents specializing in ceramics should be cultivated to form a distinctive Chinese ceramic translation team. Meanwhile, an online trend should be created to promote Chinese ceramic culture and terminology, exerting an overwhelming influence on the translation output of Generative AI (GAI) regarding Chinese ceramic terms. This will help steer the overall direction of Chinese ceramic culture translation internationally and unify the English equivalents of ceramic terminology, thereby laying a solid foundation for the global dissemination of Chinese ceramic culture and the establishment of its international discourse power.

5. Conclusion

This paper systematically examines the issue of English translation and communication of Chinese ceramic terminology from the perspective of international discourse power construction. As an essential carrier of Chinese culture and craftsmanship, the accuracy of its translation and the effectiveness of its dissemination are directly linked to the position of Chinese ceramic culture within the international discourse system.

From a theoretical perspective, this research expands the scope of terminology translation studies by integrating translation practice with the building of international discourse power, thereby providing a theoretical reference and practical pathway for Chinese culture’s “going global” strategy.

On a practical level, it proposes measures such as corpus construction, translation standardization, transliteration strategies, and AI-assisted translation to enhance the international recognition and acceptance of Chinese ceramic terminology, thereby supporting national cultural dissemination and soft power building.

Looking ahead, continuous efforts should be made in terminology corpus development, promotion of transliteration, and talent cultivation to consolidate and strengthen the international discourse power of Chinese ceramic culture, so as to enable more effective cross-cultural expression and communication.

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