

# Translation of Chinese Characteristic Vocabulary from the Perspective of the Third Space Theory

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**Abstract:** *Chinese characteristic vocabulary has strong expressive power and rich cultural connotations, so the translation of characteristic cultural vocabulary is an important way to tell a good Chinese story, showcase a three-dimensional China, and enhance international discourse power. Guided by the third space theory and combined with the heterogeneity of Chinese culture, the article constructs the third space and adjusts negotiations in the third space, to create different Chinese English, reflect the characteristics of Chinese culture, and make contributions to the dissemination of Chinese culture and the improvement of China's international discourse power.*

**Keywords:** *Chinese Characteristic Vocabulary, Third Space, Translation, International Discourse Power*

## 1. Introduction

China has become the second largest economy internationally. In the contemporary world, we should vigorously promote the construction of international communication capacity, strengthen the construction of discourse system, focus on creating new concepts, new categories, and new expressions that integrate China and foreign countries, tell the story of China well, and spread the voice of China. With the continuous improvement of China's comprehensive national strength and increasing international influence, China should further establish a good international image, enhance its international discourse power and cultural soft power. However, it must be acknowledged that our current comprehensive national strength does not match our international discourse power. Why is this situation happening? Firstly, it is due to the dominance of Western culture, and some Western countries unjustly accuse and maliciously defame China in order to curb its development. [1] Secondly, there are significant differences in language expression, thinking styles, cultural background, and other aspects between China and the West, resulting in poor reception effects. The former reason is complex and ever-changing, but we can firmly grasp the latter reason.

In recent years, foreignizing translation has gradually gained popularity. However, blindly foreignizing can cause difficulties for foreign readers to understand, hinder cultural dissemination, and hinder the enhancement of discourse power. The Third Space theory proposed by Homi K. Bhabha, a representative of the postcolonial translation school, can effectively explain this issue and help build a bridge for the dissemination of Chinese culture. Through the strategy of foreignizing translation, China can "go global" and enhance its international discourse power, providing a solid guarantee for the realization of the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

## 2. The Third Space Theory

Homi K. Bhabha proposed concepts such as "third space", "heterozygosity", and "foreignness of culture", as detailed in Table 1. Homi K. Bhabha opposes binary opposition and believes that the "third space" exists in the "interstitial space" in the process of cultural translation, where national identity, social interests, and cultural values overlap, making it an invisible and intangible fuzzy space. In other words, cultural translation is an intercultural act, which is not simply the addition of two cultures or languages, but the construction of new cultural forms on the basis of hybridity. [2] Therefore, the culture in the third space is a new culture with distinctive connotations, different from the original language and the target language, but a hybrid of the two. [3] In fact, the author believes that the third space has always existed, and the development of globalization and the trend of diverse cultures have further made people aware of this. Because there are inherent differences between cultures, and some

characteristic vocabulary is "untranslatable", cultural heterogeneity arises. Bhabha aims to highlight this heterogeneity in the third space, allowing two cultures to encounter and collide, highlighting differences. The translator uses boundary negotiation to engage in dialogue and exchange between the two cultures, generate new interpretations, and initiate new cultural reconstruction and identity recognition. The entire process is no longer static and limited, but dynamic and open, which gradually weakens the authority of hegemonic culture and enhances discourse power [4].

*Table 1: Theoretical Concepts Proposed by Homi K. Bhabha*

<b>Third space</b>	In the process of cultural translation, it opens up an 'interstitial space' and a temporal nature of filling gaps, which opposes both returning to a self-consciousness that originated from 'essentialism' and indulging in an endless division of the subject in a 'process'.
<b>Heterozygosity</b>	A sign of the productive forces of colonial power, representing its constantly changing forces and stabilizing factors, as a strategic way to resist the process of repression.
<b>Foreignness of culture</b>	Describing the specific characteristics of new things, this drifting 'fresh thing' is the 'third component' that lies between the two and has the main characteristics.

### 3. The Characteristics and Classification of Chinese Characteristic Vocabulary

Chinese characteristic vocabulary refers to a vocabulary with Chinese national characteristics and rich cultural connotations. These words cannot directly find corresponding equivalents in other languages and are a special form of expression in Chinese, vividly showcasing the three-dimensional image of China. Chinese characteristic words not only include cultural loaded words such as idioms, allusions, sayings, etc., but also include new words that have emerged with the development of the times to reflect various aspects of current social, political, and economic life. They have rich connotations, vivid images, and have the characteristics of keeping up with the times.

The main characteristics of Chinese characteristic vocabulary are its wide coverage, strong contemporaneity, uniqueness, and politicalization. The broad coverage is mainly reflected in the Chinese characteristic vocabulary, which includes social, economic, cultural, ecological, life, and other aspects, and can directly reflect the development status of various fields in a reasonable manner. Strong contemporaneity refers to each Chinese characteristic vocabulary representing the social development situation at that time and reflecting the ideological and thinking characteristics of the people. Politicalization refers to the use of Chinese characteristic vocabulary in speech that reflects the relevant policies and guidelines of the country. Uniqueness refers to the common four-Chinese-character idioms and allusions in discourse articles, which have rich cultural connotations and are unique to China.

Chinese vocabulary can be roughly divided into four categories: political culture, institutional policies, social life, and traditional culture, as shown in Table 2:

*Table 2: Classification of Chinese Characteristic Vocabulary*

<b>Political Culture</b>	put the people first; dual circulation; dynamic zero-COVID policy; small yard with high fences; decouple with others, sever supply chains; political mutual trust; zero-sum game; pursue progress while ensuring stability
<b>Institutional Policies</b>	the battle against corruption; the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025); Seek Common Ground While Setting Aside Differences; one country two systems; Shanghai Spirit; the principle of shared growth through discussion and collaboration; South-South Cooperation; the principle that Hong Kong should be administered by patriots
<b>Social Life</b>	neither feasible nor sustainable; act in unison and with great motivation; no longer in want of food or clothing; Heroes in harm's way; Fangcang shelter hospitals; riding the wave; harmony in a family brings success
<b>Traditional Culture</b>	Pressing ahead with unwavering commitment and perseverance; With one heart and one mind, we can accomplish everything we aspire for; Intensive Cultivation; heroes are cultivated from young age; Those who shun the easy way will succeed, and those who take challenges head-on will progress.

#### **4. Translation of Chinese Characteristic Vocabulary Guided by the Third Space Theory**

Chinese characteristic vocabulary involves various aspects, containing Chinese philosophical thinking, cultural values, and strategic policy considerations. It is an important component of foreign publicity translation, a key point to truly convey the breadth and depth of Chinese culture, and a lever to enhance China's international discourse power. Through the interpretation and transformation of Chinese characteristic vocabulary through the third space theory, the fixed thinking of foreigners' incomplete and incorrect understanding of China is gradually transformed, and the false slander rumors are broken. Only in this way can we better spread Chinese culture, let the world see beautiful China, and share the cultural feast.

##### ***4.1 Grasping the Heterogeneity of Chinese Characteristic Vocabulary and Highlighting Chinese Characteristics***

Chinese characteristic vocabulary is a part of culture, and even a representative of culture, each with Chinese characteristics. But precisely because they all have Chinese characteristics, they often cannot find equivalent words or even "untranslatable" when translated. Therefore, when translating Chinese characteristic vocabulary, when different cultures encounter and collide, there will be "heterogeneity", which will have an influence and impact on the original cultural structure, and generate some uncertain factors, thus entering the third space. [5] Translators use certain translation techniques in the Third Space, and on the basis of grasping the heterogeneity of Chinese characteristic vocabulary, engage in dialogue and exchange between the two cultures, creating new "third elements" to highlight Chinese characteristics and demonstrate discourse power. Therefore, translating Chinese characteristic vocabulary may appear to eliminate heterogeneous differences, but in reality, it seeks innovation and uniqueness.

For example, "South-South Cooperation", "one country, two system", "Shanghai Spirit", and so on are condensed expressions of some things. Although they are in English, they are unique to China and have distinct Chinese characteristics. They are a new "third element" between Chinese and English, and are accepted by both Chinese and foreign readers.

It can be seen that the heterogeneity of Chinese characteristic vocabulary is the fundamental motivation for cross-cultural communication and an important node in highlighting Chinese characteristics. We all know that contradiction is the source and driving force for the development of things, and contradiction is the unity of opposites. Its universality and particularity require us to analyze it concretely. From this perspective, is "heterogeneity" not exactly a contradiction in the translation of Chinese characteristic vocabulary? Isn't this also consistent with the theory of breaking binary opposition in Bhabha's third space? Should we analyze specific issues and appropriately express cultural differences when translating, in order to promote the complementarity and integration of heterogeneous cultures? Therefore, grasping the heterogeneity of Chinese characteristic vocabulary in translation can become the best assistance for spreading Chinese culture and enhancing international discourse power.

##### ***4.2 Adjusting Negotiations to Achieve Heterozygosity Integration in the Third Space***

The translator should grasp the heterogeneity of Chinese vocabulary, establish the third space, and then adjust negotiation in the third space to achieve translation heterozygosity. Simply put, adjustment negotiation is the use of translation strategies to achieve appropriate cultural expression, and the final translation is the heterozygosity we achieve. Heterozygosity has never been a simple textual transformation, but a rather a complex way of interaction and coordination between two cultures in the "third space", ultimately achieving results with cultural characteristics. [6] Chinese scholar Han Ziman also believes in heterozygosity, which refers to the mixture of multiple languages and cultural characteristics formed by the exchange and collision of different languages and cultures. [7] Through such dialogue and consultation, we can cross the differences in regional cultural thoughts, reexpress our own culture, explain other cultures, establish new cultural identities, achieve hybrids, and enhance the tension of language and cultural expression and communication.

In fact, in the history of translation in China, adjusting negotiations and achieving heterozygosity have long been nothing new. In the translation of Buddhist scriptures from the Eastern Han Dynasty to the late Tang Dynasty, the translators introduced many vocabularies that were not found in Chinese, such as translating "Bodhisattva", "Buddha", "Buddha's warrior attendant" into "Pusa", "Futu",

"Jingang" with Chinese characteristics. This is actually through dialogue, communication, and negotiation, explaining the culture of others appropriately, and forming a complex with its own cultural characteristics. On the other hand, the English version of the hospitals established during the current global epidemic period is "Fangcang shelter hospitals", rather than "mobile cabinet hospitals" or "alternative care sites". The expression of "Fangcang hospital" directly uses Chinese *pinyin*, achieving Chinese and English adjustment and negotiation, reflecting Chinese characteristics. Moreover, foreign media also use "Fangcang shelter hospitals" to report, completing the promotion of heterozygosity, enriching the English world, and revealing discourse tensions. China has always advocated "peace is precious". Upon careful consideration, isn't mediation and negotiation in the third space also pursuing "harmony", and isn't the final translation with Chinese characteristics, a manifestation of "harmony"? This further conveys the wisdom of China.

### 4.3 Creating Chinese English in the Third Space

To truly enhance international discourse power and showcase the tension and characteristics of Chinese discourse, it is necessary to create Chinese English. Chinese English is actually a variant of English, which, like Canadian English, Australian English, and Indian English, is a localized phenomenon. [8] Chinese English is an English language that utilizes the unique thinking patterns and cognitive styles of Chinese people, integrates Chinese culture, values, and unique things in accordance with English standards, and has typical Chinese characteristics. Chinese characteristic vocabulary represents Chinese characteristic culture and values, showcasing China's unique social reality and things. We should seize this opportunity and strive to create more Chinese English. On the one hand, it can strengthen China's communication with other cultures around the world and continuously enhance China's influence, in order to better establish China's image, spread Chinese culture and stories, and demonstrate the confidence of Chinese culture. [9] On the other hand, it can enrich English vocabulary, promote the development of cultural diversity, provide new perspectives for people around the world to see the world, and create new forms of expression for people [10].

Before that, we have created some Chinese English, which has been included in the Oxford dictionary, such as Taoism(*daojiao*), Dim sum(*dianxin*), Cheongsa (*qipao* or *changshan*), paper tiger(*zhilao*), kungfu(*gongfu*), etc., which are unique to China and reflect the cultural characteristics. Correspondingly, in the context of cultural globalization, fresh Chinese characteristic vocabulary is constantly emerging, such as: form exclusive blocs, a small yard with high fences, dynamic zero COVID policy, serving the will of the people, Xiaotangshan Hospital, etc. (see Table 3). These vocabularies are not found in the English speaking world, so translators need to grasp cultural heterogeneity, establish a third space, negotiate and dialogue in the third space, and create Chinese English with Chinese characteristics without losing expressiveness.

In general, since the purpose is to promote Chinese culture, translators should try their best to preserve the cultural images in the target language, rather than using methods such as synonyms, limited globalization, absolute globalization, assimilation, deletion, and self-creation to "replace" the images. [11] Only in this way can readers around the world know that these are Chinese vocabulary and perspectives. Gradually, these words will be accepted by increasingly people, and spreading Chinese culture and enhancing China's international discourse power will become a natural result [12-13].

Table 3: Chinese English (Partial)

Accepted Chinese English	New Chinese English
Taoism	form exclusive blocs
dim sum	a small yard with high fences
Cheongsa	dynamic zero-COVID policy
paper tiger	Serving the will of the people
kungfu	Xiaotangshan Hospital

## 5. Conclusion

Faced with unprecedented changes in a century, it is crucial for us to spread Chinese culture, tell Chinese stories well, enhance cultural soft power, and elevate our international discourse power. Chinese characteristic vocabulary best reflects the philosophical wisdom and cultural ideas of the Chinese people, and is the most infectious and resonating secret weapon for foreign readers. The

cultural differences between China and the West have brought obstacles, but Homi K. Bhabha's theory of the Third Space has broken this binary opposition, established a third space for the two, built a bridge for communication and negotiation, thus ultimately preserving a distinctive culture, producing an appropriate and independent hybrid, and clarifying cultural identity. For modern translators, word-by-word translation cannot effectively spread the breadth and depth of Chinese culture. Only by continuously creating Chinese English, allowing foreign target readers to feel a culture with Chinese characteristics, and allowing Chinese English to take root and thrive, can we better spread Chinese culture and enhance China's international discourse power [14-16].

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