

# How to Enhance China's International Discourse Power

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**Abstract:** At a time when the world is facing a major change that has not been seen in a century, the competition among countries, especially among great powers, is not only a competition for such hard power as science and technology, the economy and the military, but also a competition for such soft power as national culture and international discourse power. In addition, China has entered a new journey- a new era. In the face of enormous changes in the domestic and international environments, it is crucial to build and enhance China's international discourse power in order to successfully realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This paper will introduce discourse power and language policy, enumerate the opportunities and challenges that our country facing on the way to the enhancement of the international discourse power and put forward some suggestions accordingly and explore its enlightenment for Chinese translation. It is hoped that in the future, China can accelerate the construction of China's discourse and China's narrative system to tell Chinese stories well, disseminate Chinese voices well, and present a credible, lovable and honorable image of China and the great achievements of China's development to the people of the world.

**Keywords:** Discourse; International discourse power; Language policy; Translation.

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## 1. Preface

Lenin once emphasized that when the bourgeoisie was overthrown, the struggle for discourse power remained one of the most acute forms of class struggle. And in the age of globalization and information technology with diversified dissemination means, every countries have the power to disseminate discourse, but the importance of each one is not the same. China's further development also requires the improvement of the strength and quality of its communication in various ways and the enhancement of its international discourse power. General Secretary Xi Jinping also proposed in the report of the 20th Party Congress that *china need to enhance the dissemination and influence of China's civilization, need to adhere to the position of Chinese culture, and need to refine and display the spiritual symbols and cultural essence of Chinese civilization. Meanwhile, China need to form an international discourse power that matches China's comprehensive national strength and international status.*[1] Therefore, China should both strengthen its international discourse and pursue the maximization of its discourse power.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1. Discourse

Discourse is a product of social interaction, and usually refers to the verbal tools people use to communicate and express their views in a particular social context. The concept of discourse is distinct from language in that it is not merely an instrument of expression, but also implies a hidden relationship of power and identity. Post-Modernist scholar, Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and scholar of critical discourse analysis, revealed the constructive function and rightful character of "discourse" which allows discourse to be considered not simply as a tool for people to communicate, but as a means of constructing things, events, and even the world.

### 2.2. Discourse power

Discourse power refers to the influence generated through the conceptual connotation, theoretical logic, core values, ideology and other factors contained in the discourse. Michel Foucault was also the first to explicitly formulate the concept of discourse. He explicitly used discourse as a tool for studying macro-social issues in order to study the theory of power. And the biggest difference between discourse and language and speech is the property of rights that discourse has. Discourse is both rights and can confer rights at the same time. Based on this, Michel Foucault was also the first person to link "discourse", which is a linguistic concept, with "power", which is a political concept and lead to the concept of discourse power. Since then, academic research on discourse power has abounded, covering various fields such as politics and economics, culture and communication.

As for the definition of "discourse power", some scholars in China define it as the influence formed by the ruling class or group in a country in a certain cultural tradition, social and historical context and background through the use of certain channels of communication, such as the spoken word, the written word, visual images, film and television materials, the electronic media, speech and action and other forms of discourse to disseminate values, guide public opinion, support the social system, and extend the power of the class. And other scholars define it as the ideological dominance of the country's survival. It argues that discourses power require certain channels for their dissemination, that social institutions are an extension of discursive power, and that increasing the dissemination and consumption of discursive texts contributes to the enhancement of discourse power. And international discourse power is the embodiment of national soft power, a sign of national spirit and cultural influence, and an important indicator reflecting a country's international status and measuring a country's comprehensive national power, international influence and appeal of cultural values. So the struggle for international discourse power is a battle without smoke between countries in political games, economic and military rivalry and cultural soft power.

### 2.3. International discourse power

The deepening of economic globalization and the struggle for discourse power in international politics have given rise to the concept of “international discourse power”. International discourse is an extension of the concept of discourse with the state as the subject of discourse. It refers to a country’s ability to influence other international behaviors or perceptions through its own external discourse, usually based on national economic and military power. *It is also an important part of the overall power of the State in international relations, and today it has become a form of power in which the world’s leading countries compete.*[2] The rights-relationship theory holds that international discourse is a combination of rights, which embody the right of the subject of the discourse to be able to speak out in the international arena, and power, which embodies the essence of international discourse. International discourse is aimed at the pursuit of generating influence, with national interests at its core, essentially reflecting a power relationship between countries, and therefore the power relationship theory holds that the struggle for international discourse is essentially a struggle for interests between countries. And at present our country in general is still at the stage of striving for a basic discourse power. Academics generally categorize international discourse into opinion-based discourse, institutional discourse, and academic discourse. In this regard, opinion-based discourse refers to the attractiveness, influence and appeal of a country’s discourse in the international community; Institutional discourse refers to the power of a country to guide and shape international standards, rules and mechanisms; academic discourse is essentially an extension of opinion-based discourse in the academic world.

### 2.4. Language policy

Language policy, issued by governmental departments and covering education, administration, law, business, social work, etc, is a major decision of a country. It aims at solving the problems that arise in language life, prompting people to make efforts to manage their own language practices and those of the people around them, to effectively contribute to the orderly functioning of the linguistic ecosystem.

According to statistics, *there are 197 sovereign States in the world today, with more than 2,000 nationalities and more than 7,100 languages in use, belonging to nine language families.*[3] The unification of language policy features much importance because it cultivates the national common language, and manifests national attributes of the language serving to strengthen national cohesion, promote national identity, and safeguard the unity and stability of the country. China has been a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country since ancient times. The language policy of “national common language” pursued by successive dynasties in order to maintain the dominance of the State has an irreplaceable and important impact on strengthening national identity, safeguarding national security and enhancing national capacity in the development of China. The inter-constructive relationship between the national common language policy and the construction of the nation-state is reflected in the fact that a common language is a fundamental and important element in the construction of the nation-state cause language has become a symbol of national and ethnic identity, is a core resource for enhancing national capacity and is a strategic weapon for national security.

Since language has the functions of communication and

national identity, and is the basis of identity for maintaining the legitimacy of the nation-state, national language is an important tool for enhancing national identity. Reaching a consensus on the language within the country can enhance the international influence of the national language, which is Chinese in China, further improve China’s international status, and strengthen the national pride and sense of identity of Chinese people.

The rise and fall of a language is closely linked to the strength of a nation, and the strength of a nation is reflected in the influence of its language. The international influence of a language is accompanied by cultural attraction and appeal, economic competitiveness and development, political manipulation, scientific and technological dominance and international discourse power. The global extension of communication and influence of a language is not only a manifestation of national strength, but also an international expansion of national interests. Thus, the world’s great powers are basically accompanied by the supranational status of language. For example, the English language became the world’s lingua franca after the successive rise of the United Kingdom and the United States, and has become the most important vehicle for the dissemination of the modern knowledge system. In recent years, the international status and influence of the Chinese language have increased significantly along with China’s comprehensive strength, but at present, China’s national common language, writing system and international discourse power has not achieved an international status commensurate with the country’s strength.

Discourse research is an important direction of language policy, and it is an inevitable product of the diversified development of language policy in terms of research paths and methods. Attention need to be paid to think about, from the internal perspective, how to build a discourse system that promotes the popularization and standardization of the use of the State’s common language and writing system, and how to use discourse strategies to create a discourse space, so as to achieve the purpose of forging a strong sense of community among the Chinese nation, and from the external perspective, how to enhance the communication power and influence of Chinese language and culture and how to tell the Chinese story well and spread the Chinese voice well, so as to achieve the enhancement of China’s international discourse power.

## 3. Opportunities and Challenges

In recent years, the significant increase in China’s comprehensive national power, the profound changes in the international system, and the fusion of diverse cultures have created important opportunities for the enhancement of China’s international discourse power.

### 3.1. Opportunities

First of all, China has abode by international morality and fulfilled its responsibilities as a great Power, and has adhered to the principle of seeking common ground while reserving differences in order to broadly forge a consensus of ideas. The “One Belt, One Road” initiative, the “a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind”, poverty reduction strategies and environmental governance programs, etc. proposed by China have been highly praised and recognized by the international community. Therefore, China’s international political influence continues to grow which provides a favorable international environment for China to grasp the initiative of discourse power construction and enhance the explanatory

and persuasive power of Chinese discourse.

Second of all, the international system is undergoing profound changes, providing a favorable external environment for enhancing China's international discourse power.

Third of all, the convergence and integration of multiple civilizations is conducive to strengthening the comprehensive understanding of and support for China of people worldwide, and providing a peaceful and stable international environment and a lasting period of opportunity for the comprehensive building of a strong modern socialist country.

Finally, with the overall growth of China's strength and increasing international influence, it has brought about a passion for learning Chinese in countries all over the world. From with Korea's adoption of Chinese as a foreign language for basic education in 1955, to by the end of 2021, the number of countries worldwide that have incorporated Chinese into their national education systems reaching 76, the international status and influence of the Chinese language has been greatly enhanced which is conducive to the enhancement of China's international discourse power.

### 3.2. Challenges

Every coin has two sides. So there are also challenges on the process to the enhancement of China's international discourse power which are the phenomenon of "English language hegemony", negative international image created by China's modern history, discourse misinterpretation due to cultural differences between China and the West, the limitations of international discourse rules and the limitations of communication.

First of all, it is known that there are four pillars of American hegemony which are military hegemony, financial hegemony, scientific and technological hegemony, and cultural hegemony. But in fact there is another hegemony that has long been neglected, namely, the hegemony of the English language. The colonial expansion of Britain in the 19th century and the world dominance of the United States in the 20th century made English the main language of international commerce and international politics, the first global lingua franca, and deservedly the most important language in the world today. *Currently, 3/4 of the world's mail, more than half of the world's scientific and technical journals are in English, and 80% of computerized information is stored in English.*[4] So the hegemony of the English language can be said to permeate various fields, such as the economy, international governance, academia and so on. Singapore, for example, as a "small country", has a high level of discourse power in the world, despite its small size. And one of the most important reasons for this is that the country uses English language as a communication tool. Of course, countries with English as their official language do not necessarily have international discourse power, but the truth is that countries with a strong international discourse power usually have English as their official language, or their official language at least are cognate with English. Meanwhile Chinese would not have the advantage of English. Although Chinese is the most spoken language in the world, it is currently difficult to become a tool of communication between different ethnic groups in the world.

Second of all, the limitations of international discourse rules hinder the effective dissemination of China's international discourse. The unprecedented changes that have led to the development of the international order in a more

equitable, democratic and just direction which creates a unique development space for enhancement of China's discourse power. China actively participates in global governance, gradually increases its contribution to world development, and increases its leadership in key areas of the international community, but Western countries have long held the reins of international discourse and rule-making in favor of their own interests. At the same time, the hostility of countries with discourse hegemony has been incurred, with malicious slander, economic sanctions, development containment and discourse space exclusion coming one after another, which has posed a serious challenge to the enhancement of China's international discourse power.

Third of all, After being drawn into the Western-dominated world system, modern China experienced an unprecedented economic decline and a crisis of cultural disruption, which led to the loss of national discourse power. This has also led to the fact that for a long time afterward, China's image in the world was largely "other-created" rather than "self-created".

Fourth of all, when people in different environments and cultures receive the same information, they will interpret it differently and produce different results. That's what cultural differences do. For example, in terms of expression, Chinese people are used to expressing their attitudes and positions euphemistically in simple, subtle and introverted language while Western people are the opposite. And Chinese and English belong to high-context culture and low-context culture languages respectively, which greatly increases the difficulty for other countries to understand China's discourse, and may even lead to misinterpretation or misunderstanding, thus affecting China's international discourse construction and enhancement.

lastly, in the construction of China's discourse, there is a phenomenon of convergence in both the content and the form of communication, characterizing with programmed framework setting, homogenization of **content**, and repetition of cultural elements.

## 4. Suggestions

With the peaceful rise of China and the continuous improvement of the country's comprehensive national power, which opens up a broad space for the enhancement of China's international discourse. The enhancement of China's international discourse is required in order to effectively respond to the violence of international discourse by clearly explaining China's path of development, its value concepts and its contribution to the world through Chinese discourse, Chinese voices and China's stance. However, it should be noted that national strength does not automatically bring about the enhancement of international discourse power, but requires a series of strategies to be implemented. Spreading China's voice well and telling China's story well requires a set of effective discourse system and narrative structure. To this end, the author hereby puts forward the following four suggestions.

First of all, china need to broaden communication channels and strengthen communication pathways. Letting the world better hear China's voice and read China's story not only rely on the official media, but also opening up such new channels of external communication as individuals, civil society and public diplomacy. In this way, a new pattern of all-round, multi-level and wide-ranging communication system will be formed, and the digitalization and networking of communication will be promoted. For example, *TikTok, the*

*overseas version of China's social media, has actively implemented its internationalization strategy, and has a huge user base and influence in the United States, Brazil, Japan, and some Southeast Asian countries, attracting a wide range of attention to Chinese culture from overseas audiences by virtue of its unique strengths.*[5] And China also need to publicize the importance of international discourse through various channels, especially to raise our awareness of the importance of mastering the right to speak in key areas, and to build up cultural self-awareness and linguistic self-confidence, for example China need to actively explore the development mode of vocational and technical education plus international Chinese language education. It should also innovate the way of education, and utilize "Internet plus" and intelligent technology to promote online international Chinese language education. International Chinese language education is the most direct, effective and reliable carrier and medium to promote Chinese language worldwide. In addition, the Confucius Institute can be used as a vehicle to build a bridge between China and the world through international Chinese language education, so that the world can learn about the truth of China and China can go to the world, in order to promote mutual understanding and harmonious coexistence among different countries.

Second of all, China need to innovate the communication methods of new forms of human civilization with online media as a vehicle and enhance the communication power of Chinese discourse. China need to make up for the shortcomings of communication, promote the deep integration of traditional media and emerging online media, and complement the advantages of official mainstream media and private media so as to display China's image and disseminate China's voice from a new perspective, to expand the radius of China's discourse, and to continuously improve the influence of China's international discourse power. And China need to intelligently pushes positive information related to China to international platforms, seizes the high ground of online public opinion, and creates a favorable discourse environment for relying on the advantages of "algorithms" and "big data" so as to continuously improve the influence of China's international discourse power. China need to make good use of major international conferences to create issues based on the Belt and Road Initiative and a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind, make clear the basic connotations and value logic of the new form of human civilization in Chinese discourse, and actively contribute Chinese wisdom to the challenges of global governance. In addition, China need to break through the western hegemonic discourse with the "Four Confidences" which are confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics and enhance the influence, radiation and credibility of China's discourse in the international community.

Third of all, China need to actively engage in international discourse competition, establish and improve the institutional system, and provide all-round institutional guarantee for the construction of China's international discourse power. Development is the first driving force. In international exchanges, China must increase its resources for discourse through its own high-quality development, and actively engage in competition for international discourse on the basis of win-win cooperation. China should dare to fight, be good at fighting, actively respond to the misinterpretation of Western countries, clarify rumors in a timely manner and

break the siege.

In terms of the construction of the domestic system, it is necessary to to construct an academic system, a theoretical system and a discourse system for the construction of the Chinese system, and to innovate the system of institutional construction based on the actual situation in China so as to construct a fully functional, structurally complete, scientific and effective discourse system to open up space and provide all-round institutional guarantee for the construction of China's international discourse power.

From an international perspective, China should actively participate in promoting the establishment of international organizations and the revision of their rules and regulations, and incorporate more Chinese elements, contribute more Chinese wisdom and make more Chinese voices heard in the formulation and revision of the rules of international discourse so as to promote the rules of international discourse to be more fair, just and reasonable, and strive for more favorable discourse and rule guarantees to enhance China's international discourse power.

Lastly, China need to strengthen the cultivation of top-notch and high-quality talents and providing support for the talent team to enhance China's international discourse. Talent is the first resource of innovation drive and the first power of discourse construction. In addition, the report of the twentieth CPC National Congress states that cultivating a large number of high-caliber talents who are both virtuous and talented is a major plan for the long-term development of the country and the nation. Talent is an important resource for enhancing the power of public opinion and discourse, and linguistic talent is an important resource for bridging the gap between Eastern and Western cultures. Language is the basis of communication between countries, and it also builds a bridge for political, economic, cultural and social exchanges between different cultural subjects. For example, the State should continue to reform the education mechanism and improve the construction of "small language" specialties or build more overseas Confucius Institutes. And attention needs to be paid to stockpiling linguistic talent, improving foreign language skills, participating in international competition and continuously upgrading the country's linguistic capacity. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the cultivation of top-notch and high-quality talents and providing support for the talent team to enhance China's international discourse power so as to allow the Chinese talents contribute to improving the status of Chinese language in the international discourse.

## **5. Enlightenment for Translation**

When translating national discourse, it is necessary to seek common ground while reserving differences, and to build China's international discourse under the perspective of cross-cultural communication. For example, when translating and disseminating Chinese current political discourse like a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind, translators need to pay attention to below points: (1) When translating current political discourse, it is important to disseminate Chinese values and ideas as appropriately as possible, and to maintain the consistency of the translation to avoid any misunderstanding and misinterpretation, or even malicious distortion, by foreign media and audiences due to inconsistencies in the translation; (2) A database of Chinese current political discourse should be established, and authoritative foreign propaganda organizations should standardize the translation of key words and core concepts in

current political discourse and publish the corresponding official translations immediately; (3) It is important to focus on the popularization and acceptance of the audience of the translated text, and to conform to the language expression habits of the readers of the translated language.

In the face of the bottleneck problem of translation, “how to balance naturalization and alienation”, the former great translator Yutang Lin took “telling Chinese stories to Westerners” as the fundamental purpose and the highest pursuit. And nowadays, as a student major in translation, I should do the same as Lin. In addition, it should also be pointed out that localizing the Chinese classics to the world, and “going out” of Chinese translation requires not only the excellence of the literature and discourse itself, but also the outstanding translation ability of the translators. It must also undergo an infinitely iterative process of research, translation and re-research before it can reach the point of dissemination and even acceptance. This process is not a quick fix, but a slow process of exchange of ideas and cultural integration.

The road of “going out” for Chinese translators is a long and arduous one, and I will always keep the following words in my heart. Translation, as a linguistic act, is by no means limited to the language itself; it stretches infinitely into the deepest recesses of human life, and while the ideal of translation is to make one thought, culture or life understood by another, in practice it tends to change one into the other.

## 6. Conclusion

Since the birth of the nation, language and the nation have been inseparably linked. Since the emergence of the nation-state, language has played an even more important role, and a common language has become the basis and an important element in the construction of the nation-state, and the political principle of the nation-state of “one nation, one state, one language” has been developed. Contemporary China’s role as a great power is rooted in the logic of modernization

that embodies Chinese wisdom. Seeking common ground while holding back differences among all nations have always been China’s world sentiment and its great power wisdom, rooted in the intrinsic attributes of the socialist system, so as to demonstrate and present Chinese values to the world in a clearer and more effective manner, and to provide practical and effective Chinese solutions for world development. On the whole, China can enhance its institutional discourse power by establishing the image of a responsible great power, which is also a relatively direct and effective path to realize it. Telling China’s story well and spreading China’s voice well will promote China’s international discourse power and in turn the enhancement of China’s international discourse power will allow the world to witness the true China.

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