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Research on the Composition of Communication Subjects and the Distribution of Discourse Power in English Ceramic Reports on the Belt and Road Portal

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ABSTRACT
Based on 145 English ceramic reports published on the Belt and Road Portal from 2017 to 2026, this study, drawing on Bourdieu's field theory and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis theory, explores the composition of communication subjects and the laws governing the distribution of discourse power in ceramic-related English reports on this platform. The research finds that the communication subjects are characterized by capital differentiation and hierarchical interaction, forming a structural pattern dominated by official bodies, supported by professional and industrial entities, and supplemented by international and emerging actors. Discourse power is materialized through such approaches as language selection, discourse organization, and macro-narration.

KEYWORDS
Belt and road portal; English ceramic reports; Communication subjects; Distribution of discourse power

1 Introduction

As a crucial strategy for advancing globalization, the Belt and Road Initiative has always placed cultural exchange and people-to-people connectivity at its core. As a symbolic carrier of Chinese civilization, ceramics, from being a treasure in trade along the ancient Silk Road to a cultural symbol for contemporary cultural exchanges and mutual learning, have always assumed the dual mission of connecting China with the world and facilitating global communication.

As an official information release and core platform for international communication of the Belt and Road Initiative, the English reports on the Belt and Road Portal serve as a key channel for conveying Chinese concepts, interpreting Chinese practices, and showcasing Chinese culture to the world. Their content production and discourse construction are directly related to the building of China's international communication capacity and cultural discourse power. Against this backdrop, this study aims to clarify the composition of communication subjects and the laws governing the distribution of discourse power in English ceramic reports on the Belt and Road Portal, so as to provide theoretical references and practical insights for the optimization of subjects and innovation of discourse in the international communication of ceramic culture in the new era, and promote Chinese culture to better go global.

2 Theoretical Foundations

This study mainly relies on the following two theories, which will provide direct theoretical tools and explanatory approaches for subsequent empirical analysis from different perspectives.

Proposed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, field theory regards social space as a dynamic network composed of various "fields" with their own logics, rules, and forms of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital). Actors engage in competition and cooperation based on their positions and the capital they possess. In this study, this theory is directly applied to define and analyze the core issue of "the composition of communication subjects". Specifically, we regard the international communication practice of ceramics on the Belt and Road Portal as a specific "international communication field". By applying this theory, we will systematically identify key actors in this field, analyze the capital on which they rely to occupy specific positions, and examine the structural relationships among different subjects, thereby deconstructing seemingly scattered communication subjects into a "map of subject positional relationships" that reflects the inherent power order.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory was formally put forward by British linguist Norman Fairclough in his 1989 book Language and Power. It points out that discourse is a form of social practice. It not only serves as a tool for communication but also a venue for the production, reproduction, and competition of ideology and power relations. The use of language is not neutral; it always explicitly or implicitly reflects, maintains, and reshapes the power structures in society. Therefore, critical discourse analysis aims to reveal how language is used to construct specific social realities,

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social relations (such as dominance and subordination), and social identities through detailed textual analysis, thereby "decoding" the logic of power operation hidden behind discourse.

3 The Composition of Communication Subjects in English Ceramic Reports on the Belt and Road Portal

Based on Bourdieu's field theory, this study defines the practice of publishing English ceramic reports on the Belt and Road Portal as a specific "international communication field". By identifying key actors in the field, analyzing their capital possession status and positional relationships, it deconstructs the compositional logic and practical characteristics of communication subjects. Taking 145 English ceramic reports as the research sample (retrieved with the keyword "ceramic", covering the period from January 1, 2017 to January 13, 2026), the coding analysis reveals that the communication subjects present the overall characteristics of "four-dimensional classification, capital differentiation and hierarchical interaction", which are detailed as follows:

Table 1

Categories of Actors	Typical Representative Roles	Main Forms of Capital	Typical Positions
Official Institutions and Authoritative Media	Chinese government officials, local governments (e.g., governments of Jingdezhen and Dehua), national-level media (Xinhua News Agency)	Political capital, institutional capital, symbolic capital	Rule-setters and narrative leaders
Professional Elites and Intellectual Authorities	Intangible cultural heritage inheritors, national-level master craftsmen of industrial art, museum and cultural relic experts, scholars	Cultural capital, professional authoritative capital	Meaning interpreters and value endowers
Industrial Representatives and Market Forces	Ceramic enterprises, industrial parks (e.g., Ceramic Expo City), trade representatives	Economic capital, market capital	Practitioners of verification and bearers of development narratives
International Actors and Voices of the "Other"	Foreign artists, media journalists, merchants, international tourists, governments and cultural institutions of co-construction countries	International symbolic capital, cross-cultural capital, third-party witness capital	Interactive participants and effect verifiers
Emerging Communication Nodes and Digital Actors	"Jingpiao" makers, cross-border live streamers, digital platform operators	Innovative capital, social network capital, digital technology capital	Narrative innovators and channel expanders

3.1 Capital Possession and Subject Positions: The Differentiated Generation Logic of Field Power

The positional ranking and discourse weight of each subject in the field are essentially determined by the types of capital they master and their capacity for capital transformation. Different forms of capital form a differentiated power base through adaptation to the rules of the field, which in turn affects the subjects' discourse expression methods and the boundaries of their influence:

3.1.1 Official Subjects: The Dominant Construction of Political and Symbolic Capital

By virtue of exclusive political capital (the right to formulate policies, the power to allocate administrative resources) and symbolic capital (endorsement of official identity, qualification of authoritative information sources), official subjects naturally occupy the core position in the field. The core characteristic of their discursive practice is the "monopoly of definition right" — setting the core topics and value orientation for ceramic communication by directly quoting policy statements and issuing conclusive judgments. For example, in Xinhua Headlines: China's "porcelain capital" fosters intercultural exchanges to preserve ceramic heritage, the statement of an official from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism that "ceramics are an important carrier of cultural exchanges among countries co-constructing the Belt and Road Initiative" directly becomes the core argument of the report, and the discourses of all other subsequent subjects are developed around this core for corroboration. This discourse model forms a narrative closed loop of "policy endorsement - practical response", enabling official subjects to achieve agenda dominance through capital advantages without relying

on diversified expressions. Their discourses are often placed in key positions such as the lead or the conclusion of reports to strengthen authority and guidance.

3.1.2 Industrial Subjects: Practical Transformation of Economic Capital and Discourse Alliance

The power base of industrial subjects stems from economic capital (production capacity advantages, market resources, cross-border cooperation projects), and their core function is to transform the official grand narrative into concrete practical cases. The discursive characteristics of such subjects are manifested as "case empirical evidence + benefit interpretation", demonstrating the compatibility between the ceramic industry and the Belt and Road Initiative through the achievements of specific projects. For instance, in Chinese ceramic manufacturer aiding Kenya's affordable housing, a Chinese ceramic enterprise presents the cooperation in affordable housing construction in Kenya as a "technology exporter", which not only demonstrates the practical value of economic capital but also echoes the policy orientation of "win-win cooperation". More importantly, industrial subjects and official subjects form a natural discourse alliance: the government provides policy legitimacy and communication platforms, while the industry offers practical cases and realistic support. The two sides strengthen communication efficiency through capital complementarity, making industrial discourse an indispensable practical footnote to official narratives.

3.1.3 Cultural Subjects: The Dependent Expression of Cultural Capital

Cultural subjects (intangible cultural heritage inheritors, scholars, artists) rely on cultural capital (the right to inherit craftsmanship, professional knowledge, artistic achievements) to undertake the function of in-depth interpretation of the cultural value of ceramics. Their discourses are mostly presented in the form of "craftsmanship demonstration + concept sharing", focusing on the historical inheritance and contemporary innovation of ceramics. For example, the interpretation of the "integration of traditional craftsmanship and modern art" by the international artist group of "Jingpiao" injects cultural warmth and cross-cultural resonance into the communication content.

3.1.4 International Actors: The Peripheral Supplement of Cross-Cultural Capital

Relying on cross-cultural capital (heterogeneous identity, international perspective, third-party stance), international actors have become the "credibility enhancers" of ceramic communication. Their discourses are mostly presented in the form of direct quotations and personal experience sharing. For example, the statement of a Turkish ceramic merchant about "obtaining development opportunities in China" is used to prove the inclusiveness and cooperation value of China's ceramic industry.

3.1.5 Emerging Communication Nodes: The Limited Breakthrough of Innovative Capital

The core capital of emerging communication nodes (e.g., "Jingpiao" makers, cross-border live streamers) is innovative capital and digital technology capital, and their advantage lies in the innovation of narrative forms — breaking the one-way communication mode of traditional reports through live streaming, cultural and creative product development, social media interaction and other new forms, endowing ceramic culture with youthful and contextual expressions.

3.2 Inter-subjective Structural Relations: The Hierarchical Synergy Mechanism of Field Power

The hierarchical "core-support-supplement" structure formed by various subjects through capital interaction in the field is not a simple hierarchical arrangement of power, but an efficient synergy system adapted to the international communication needs of the Belt and Road Initiative. Through precise functional positioning and resource integration, this structure maximizes communication efficiency, and its core operation mechanism embodies positive values in three aspects:

3.2.1 Core Leadership - Diversified Response Mechanism: Consolidating the Direction Consistency and Policy Adaptability of Communication

By virtue of the unique advantages of political and symbolic capital, official subjects assume the core roles of "agenda leader" and "direction controller", establishing a clear value orientation and strategic coordinates for ceramic communication. This leading role is not a single dominance, but provides a unified communication anchor for all types of subjects through the precise output of policy discourse: industrial subjects develop practical narratives around "unimpeded trade"; cultural subjects respond to the "cultural power strategy" for value interpretation; international actors focus on "win-win cooperation" to share practical experiences; emerging communication nodes closely follow "innovative inheritance" to explore expression forms. All subjects form a coordinated response with the official agenda as the core, which not only avoids the problems of fragmented topics and value deviations that may occur in cross-cultural communication, but also ensures a high degree of alignment between the international communication of ceramic culture and the core demands of the Belt and Road Initiative.

3.2.2 Diversified Synergy - Capital Complementarity Mechanism: Building a Combined Communication Force

with Authority, Depth and Practicality

The functional alliance formed by official, industrial and cultural subjects is essentially a resource integration practice with complementary advantages. Through the organic integration of different capital forms, it realizes the upgrading of communication efficiency with the effect of "1+1>2". The political capital of official subjects provides legitimate endorsement and platform support for communication, ensuring the authority and credibility of information; the economic capital of industrial subjects transforms abstract policy concepts into concrete cooperation cases, turning "win-win development" from a concept into perceptible practical achievements and enhancing the persuasiveness of communication; the cultural capital of cultural subjects injects historical heritage and aesthetic connotation into communication, improving the appeal and cultural resonance of content. The discourses of the three are nested and reinforced with each other.

3.2.3 Differentiated Supplement - Vitality Empowerment Mechanism: Enriching the Diversity and Cross-Cultural Adaptability of Communication

As the "characteristic supplementers" and "vitality enablers" of the field, international actors and emerging communication nodes inject diverse vitality into communication by virtue of their unique capital forms, effectively broadening the boundaries and adaptability of the international communication of ceramic culture. The cross-cultural capital of international actors builds a "third-party trust bridge", and their heterogeneous perspectives and sharing of personal experiences alleviate the cognitive barriers in cross-cultural communication with more empathetic expressions, enabling China's ceramic narratives to gain broader international recognition; the innovative capital and digital technology capital of emerging communication nodes break the expressive limitations of traditional official reports through new forms such as live streaming, cultural and creative products, and social media interaction, endowing ceramic culture with youthful and contextual modern expressions that accurately align with the cognitive habits and communication preferences of young audiences. The participation of such subjects is not a peripheral embellishment, but an important enrichment of the core communication system.

4 The Mechanism of Discourse Power Distribution

The realization of discourse power is not only reflected in the confirmation of subject qualification regarding who is entitled to speak, but also forms effective transmission through micro practices of how to speak and how speech is organized. This dynamic operational logic has constructed a clear discursive path and efficiency support for the international communication of ceramic culture.

As a fundamental link in the construction of discourse power, language selection achieves the positive transmission of power and anchoring of values through scientific lexical coding, modal application and syntactic positioning, laying a solid linguistic foundation for the international communication of ceramic culture. At the lexical level, the construction of a meta-discourse system is the core. Core vocabulary such as "cultural heritage" and "exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations" accurately elevates ceramics to a core carrier of cultural and civilizational exchanges, defining the core value orientation of the narrative. For example, defining the cross-border communication attribute of ceramics with the term "exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations" deeply aligns it with the core of the Belt and Road Initiative, which not only endows China's leading narrative with legitimacy and justification, but also provides a clear cognitive framework for international audiences to understand the cultural value of ceramics. The differentiated application of the modal system effectively enhances discursive authority and empathy: authoritative sources use high-modal assertions such as "must be regarded as" to clarify the strategic positioning of ceramics, and the definition of ceramics as a carrier of cultural exchanges by officials from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism establishes an authoritative benchmark for communication; in contrast, intangible cultural heritage inheritors and foreign figures share real experiences with low-modal expressions such as "think" and "feel", forming a positive interaction of authoritative guidance - emotional resonance. At the syntactic level, precise design of subjects and voices highlights the synergistic value of multiple subjects. Chinese enterprises and inheritors demonstrate their leading role with active expressions such as "driving technological output" and "innovating craftsmanship", while foreign artists and co-construction countries convey the value of cooperation as "beneficiaries", jointly building a communication subject relationship with clear rights and responsibilities and efficient coordination.

At the level of discourse organization, the hierarchical quotation structure serves as the core carrier for the efficient distribution of discourse power. By constructing a complete system of central meta-discourse - middle-level corroborative discourse - peripheral witness discourse, it realizes the orderly integration of diverse voices and maximization of communication efficiency. Official discourse, as the "meta-discourse", is placed in key positions such as titles and leads in the form of complete direct quotations, establishing the core framework and value direction for communication. Relevant reports take the viewpoints of officials from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism as the core of the lead, ensuring that

ceramic communication resonates with national strategies and providing clear guidance for subsequent content. Professional and industrial discourse, as "corroborative discourse", enriches the narrative dimension in the form of indirect reports: the interpretation of craftsmanship by intangible cultural heritage inheritors deepens the value connotation of "cultural inheritance", and cases such as Chinese enterprises supporting affordable housing construction in Kenya materialize the practical achievements of "win-win development", turning abstract concepts into perceptible practical cases and enhancing the persuasiveness of the discourse. The voices of the international "Other", as "witness discourse", provide third-party endorsement in the form of fragmented quotations; real feedback not only strengthens the objectivity and credibility of the narrative, but also demonstrates the inclusiveness and influence of Chinese ceramic culture, building a bridge of trust for cross-cultural communication.

Micro discursive strategies ultimately achieve value sublimation at the macro narrative level. Through two core strategies of integration of ancient and modern and mutual learning between China and the world, a narrative framework with both historical depth and international perspective is constructed, promoting ceramic communication to become a cultural bond carrying national strategies. The "integration of ancient and modern" strategy deeply connects the ancient history of ceramic trade with contemporary communication practices, endowing discourse power with profound historical legitimacy and cultural authority. Reports on Jingdezhen both trace its historical status as the "porcelain capital" and showcase innovative practices such as cross-border cultural tour exhibitions, enabling ceramic culture to achieve contemporary innovation in historical inheritance and strengthening international audiences' cognition of the continuity of ceramic culture. The "mutual learning between China and the world" strategy constructs scenarios of civilizational exchanges featuring equal dialogue, co-construction and sharing through such scenes as joint creation by the "Jingpiao" artist group and Chinese-foreign craftsmanship seminars. It effectively conveys the concept of openness and inclusiveness of Chinese culture, eliminates cognitive barriers in cross-cultural communication, and significantly enhances the international recognition of ceramic culture.

5 Conclusion

Taking the English ceramic reports on the Belt and Road Portal as the research object, this study systematically explores the laws of subject composition and discourse power distribution in ceramic international communication based on Bourdieu's field theory and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis theory, providing theoretical and practical references for the international communication of Chinese culture. The research finds that the communication subjects in the reports form a hierarchical structure of official leadership - professional and industrial support - international and emerging supplementation; the five types of subjects occupy corresponding positions in the field by virtue of differentiated capital forms, and construct an efficient communication system through collaborative interaction. The operation of discourse power is effectively implemented through a three-level strategy of language selection, discourse organization and macro narrative: relying on meta-discourse construction, hierarchical quotation, and the narratives of "integration of ancient and modern" and "mutual learning between China and the world", it achieves value anchoring and efficiency upgrading, and ultimately serves the national strategic expression of the "community with a shared future for mankind".

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