

# Research on the C-E Translation of Museum Ceramic Artefact Names from the Perspective of Transknowletology

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## ABSTRACT

The names of museum ceramic artefacts carry rich cultural connotations, and their English translations play a crucial role in the international dissemination of Chinese ceramic culture. This study adopts the framework of the "Truth, Goodness, and Beauty" translation standard proposed by Professor Yang Feng, known as “以真求知、以善立义、以美行文” in Chinese, exploring the issues and optimization strategies of translating museum ceramic artefact names into English. The research finds that: "Truth" requires the accurate transmission of terminology to convey both craftsmanship and cultural information; "Goodness" establishes meaning through explanatory translations that bridge cross-cultural cognitive gaps; and "Beauty" in translation involves balancing linguistic artistry with the aesthetic preferences of the target audience.

**Keywords:** *Transknowletology, Museum ceramic translation, Translation strategies, Cultural dissemination.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ceramics, as a significant emblem of Chinese civilization, are invaluable cultural treasures that have developed over thousands of years, forming unique artistic styles and cultural meanings. They not only represent an important part of material cultural heritage but also serve as a key medium for China's cultural exchange with the outside world. In the context of globalization, museums, as vital platforms for the display and dissemination of ceramic culture, play a critical role in influencing international audiences' understanding and acceptance of Chinese culture. The accuracy and consistency of the names of ceramic artefacts in museum collections directly impact this recognition. However, issues such as inconsistent translation methods and the weakening of cultural connotations remain prevalent in current museum ceramic translations, hindering a comprehensive understanding of ceramic culture among international audiences. Therefore, unified translation standards are essential not only for improving the effectiveness of cultural

communication but also for enhancing cultural branding.

This paper takes the perspective of Transknowletology (Yue, 2022,03) to deepen the research on museum ceramic translation, exploring effective translation strategies for transforming local knowledge into global knowledge. Professor Yang Feng's three translation principles — “Truth, Goodness, and Beauty”—provide the theoretical foundation for this research (Yang, 2023). On the one hand, accurately conveying the professional connotations of ceramic artefact names helps highlight the uniqueness of Chinese culture; on the other hand, focusing on bridging cultural differences and enhancing aesthetic experiences contributes to increasing the global influence of Chinese culture. Therefore, guided by Transknowletology, this research examines the current status and challenges of English translations of museum ceramic artefact names and proposes optimization strategies, which are significant for advancing the international dissemination of traditional Chinese culture.

This study selects museums with extensive collections, such as the National Museum and the Shanghai Museum, as the research objects. Through qualitative analysis combined with theoretical exploration, the paper examines the characteristics, existing issues, and potential improvements in the English translation of ceramic artefact names in these collections. The specific research objectives include: 1) analyzing the linguistic and cultural characteristics of ceramic artefact names and clarifying the challenges in their English translation; 2) proposing specific strategies for optimizing the English translation of ceramic artefact names based on the "Truth, Goodness, and Beauty" principles of Transknowletology; 3) providing theoretical support and practical suggestions for the international dissemination of museum ceramic culture.

## 2. THE "TRUTH, GOODNESS, AND BEAUTY" TRANSLATION STANDARDS IN TRANSKNOWLETOLOGY

Transknowletology, known as “知识翻译学” in Chinese, a new translation theory proposed by Yang Feng of Shanghai Jiao Tong University in 2021, he defines translation as "a cultural phenomenon and social practice of cross-linguistic knowledge processing, reconstruction, and re-dissemination" (Yang, 2021: 2). "Translation is always a social act of globalizing localized knowledge; it is also a practical endeavor of seeking truth, goodness, and beauty in human life. Therefore, Transknowletology is not only concerned with the theory of truth and ethics but also has aesthetic value" (Yang, 2023). Thus, Transknowletology, when confronted with different knowledge paradigms such as scientific, humanistic, and social knowledge, especially in the context of symbolic meaning transformation, proposes the translation principle of "Seeking Knowledge through Truth, Establishing Meaning through Goodness, and Inspiring Truth through Beauty."

"Seeking Knowledge through Truth" emphasizes the scientific and accurate nature of translation, requiring knowledge to be transmitted completely and truthfully. "Establishing Meaning through Goodness" focuses on the ethical dimension and the needs of the target audience, promoting understanding and communication between cultures through appropriate supplementation and explanation. "Inspiring Truth through Beauty" is the globalizing requirement of

knowledge, emphasizing that the purpose of translation is to facilitate the acceptance and recognition of readers. The pursuit of aestheticism in translation ensures that the translation remains faithful to the original while conforming to the expression habits and aesthetic preferences of the target language.

The "Truth, Goodness, and Beauty" translation principle provides practical guidance for translation practice and represents a holistic, systematic approach to translation methodology.

## 3. TRANSLATION FEATURES AND EXISTING ISSUES IN MUSEUM CERAMIC ARTEFACT NAMES

### 3.1 *Translation Features of Museum Ceramic Artefact Names*

The translation of museum ceramic artefact names involves a rich array of terminology related to shapes, glazes, decorative patterns, and other specialized terms. These terms possess a high degree of locality-specific knowledge, embodying both professional and cultural characteristics. Examples include glazes (e.g., "祭红" [Jihong], "回青" [Huiqing], "天青" [Tianqing], "霁蓝" [Jilan], "甜白" [Tianbai]), ceramic shapes (e.g., "壶" [Hu], "尊" [Zun], "罍" [Lei], "洗" [Xi], "瓮" [Weng]), glaze decoration styles (e.g., "青花" [blue-and-white], "粉彩" [famille rose], "斗彩" [doucai], "珐琅彩" [enamel ware]), and decorative motifs (e.g., "云龙纹" [dragon among the clouds], "缠枝莲纹" [lotus scroll], "鱼藻纹" [fish and seaweed], "福祿寿纹" [Fu Lu Shou], "八宝" [eight treasures]) These terms require the translator to possess comprehensive knowledge and a commitment to truthfulness in accurately conveying their specialized meanings. Furthermore, ceramics, as a medium of cultural art, carry rich historical and cultural information, when translating, it is crucial to consider not only the precise technical terms but also the cultural background and the transmission of cultural imagery.

### 3.2 *Existing Issues*

#### 3.2.1 *Improper Handling of Culturally Loaded Terms*

Due to cultural differences between China and the West, traditional Chinese cultural elements often suffer from misinterpretation during the English translation process. Literal translations or direct dictionary-based rendering can easily mislead

the target-language readers and hinder the effective dissemination of ceramic culture.

Example 1:

- ST: "粉彩海水瑞兽纹花盆"  
景德镇窑  
清雍正 (公元 1723-1735 年) (in Chinese)
- TT: Flowerpot with waves and **beasts**  
Jingdezhen Famille Rose Ware  
Yongzheng Reign (1723-1735), Qing  
(Shanghai Museum)

Analysis: The term "瑞兽" (ruishou) typically refers to mythical or legendary auspicious creatures in ancient Chinese culture, such as the qilin or dragon, which symbolize the hopes of ancient Chinese people for peace and prosperity. The Oxford Dictionary defines "beast" as "an animal, especially one that is large or dangerous, or one that is unusual". Generally it refers to large or ferocious animals, or to unpleasant, dangerous people. Therefore, translating "瑞兽" as "beast" fails to convey the cultural symbolism and auspicious connotations of these creatures and instead misrepresents their significance in the target language, stripping away the original cultural meaning.

### 3.2.2 Overuse of Foreignization

Many terms that could have corresponding equivalents in the target language are often transliterated to preserve the essence of Chinese culture. For example, while many museums still use the transliterated term "fencai" for "粉彩", the widely accepted translation "famille rose" has been more readily embraced by the target audience. This approach not only fails to promote Chinese culture effectively but also creates confusion for the target language audience.

### 3.2.3 Inconsistent Translations

Since there is no official standard for ceramic terminology, and the same artefact may have different translations in different museums, which cause confusion for the target language audience. For instance, the term "梅瓶" (Meiping) may be translated as Meiping, prunus vase, or plum vase. Similarly, "唐三彩" (Tang Sancai) may be rendered as Tri-color glazed or Sancai glazed, and "高足杯" (Gaozu bei) may appear as high-footed cup and stemcup, "粉彩" (fencai) can be translated in

multiple ways, such as fencai, fencai polychrome enamels, or famille rose. These inconsistencies in translation create confusion and disrupt the clarity of communication in the target language.

## 4. TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR MUSEUM CERAMIC ARTEFACT NAMES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TRANSKNOWLEDGE

### 4.1 "Seeking Knowledge Through Truth": Accurately Conveying the Meaning of Terminology

The core concepts in the field of ceramics often reflect the fusion of scientific and humanistic elements. To ensure that audiences can effectively understand these concepts, a literal translation approach should be employed as much as possible, in order to convey the true meaning of the terms. This principle aims to communicate the essence of knowledge, presenting culturally-specific knowledge with Chinese characteristics in a more original and authentic form for audiences in other fields of knowledge.

Example 2:

- ST: 孔雀蓝釉陶三系瓶  
闽 (公元 909 年-945 年) (in Chinese)
- TT: **Peacock-blue-glazed** Pottery Vase with Three Lugs  
(National Museum)

Example 3:

- ST: 豇豆红釉瓶  
景德镇窑 清康熙 (公元 1662-1722 年) (in Chinese)
- TT: Jingdezhen **Cowpea-red Glazed** Ware  
Kangxi Reign (1662-1772), Qing  
(Shanghai Museum)

Analysis: "孔雀蓝釉" (peacock-blue glaze), also known as "法翠蓝" (facui blue), is a low-temperature glaze with copper as the coloring agent, which results in a bright blue color resembling the vibrant display of a peacock's feathers. In English, "peacock blue" accurately conveys this color. "豇豆红釉" (cowpea-red glaze), a high-temperature copper red glaze from the Kangxi period, is named for its uneven glaze that resembles the pinkish hue of cowpeas. In both cases, translating these terms

literally into "Peacock-blue-glaze" and "Cowpea-red glaze" preserves the cultural and technical knowledge while aligning with shared knowledge between the East and West.

Example 4:

- ST: 红彩缠枝莲纹瓶  
景德镇窑 清乾隆 (公元 1736-1795 年) (in Chinese)
- TT: Bottle with **Lotuses**  
Jingdezhen Ware with Overglaze Red  
Qianlong Reign (1736-1795), Qing  
(Shanghai Museum)

Example 5:

- ST: 青花缠枝莲纹三足炉  
明 正德 (公元 1506-1521 年) (in Chinese)
- TT: Blue-and-white Tripod Incense Burner with **Lotus Scrolls**  
(National Museum)

Analysis: "缠枝莲纹" is a traditional Chinese motif that depicts intertwining lotus flowers and vines, symbolizing continuity and good fortune. In Sample 4, the term "lotuses" simplifies the description, conveying the lotus element but omitting the stylistic emphasis on "scrolling branches." In contrast, Sample 5 accurately describes the "Lotus Scroll" pattern, reflecting the "scrolling" nature of the design and effectively conveying the true meaning.

#### 4.2 "Establishing Meaning through Goodness": Promoting Cultural Understanding

It is essential to provide appropriate explanations of the knowledge system, carefully considering the needs of the target audience. For culturally-loaded terms in ceramic artefact names, translators should provide detailed explanations of the ceramic terminology, cultural background, and historical context through footnotes or other forms of supplementary text to enhance the readability and acceptance of the translation.

Example 6:

- ST: 斗彩海水团花纹天球瓶  
清雍正 (公元 1723 年 1735 年) (in Chinese)
- TT: **Doucai (Contending Colours)**  
Porcelain Vase with Sea Wave and Floral Roundel Design

(National Museum)

Analysis: Doucai, also known as "逗彩", is a decorative technique that combines underglaze blue with overglaze colors. The name "Doucai" refers to the vibrant and competing colors in the design. While there is no direct English equivalent for "Doucai," the use of transliteration combined with literal translation (contending colors) preserves the unique, localized feature of Chinese ceramics, while allowing other audiences to understand its meaning.

Example 7:

- ST: 粉彩八仙图瓶  
景德镇窑  
清乾隆 (公元 1736-1795 年) (in Chinese)
- TT: Vase with **Eight Immortals**  
Jingdezhen Famille Rose Ware  
Qianlong Reign (1736-1795), Qing  
(Shanghai Museum)

Example 8:

- ST: 青花八仙云鹤图葫芦瓶  
明 嘉靖 (公元 1522-1566 年)  
此瓶饰有八仙图案, 寓意“八仙祝福”葫芦瓶是明清瓷器中较多见的造型。因“葫芦”与“福禄”音近, 故葫芦瓶寓意“福禄”, 具有“祝福”的含意. (in Chinese)
- TT: Blue-and-White Double Gourd Bottle with **Eight Daoist Immortals** and Cranes in Clouds

The bottle is adorned with the "Eight Daoist Immortals," symbolizing their sacred blessings. The double-gourd shape is popular among porcelain vessels made during the Ming and Qing (1368-1911). Because the Chinese words "hulu" for "double gourd" sound close to "fulu" for "good fortune and official emoluments," the shape is deemed to be auspicious.

(National Museum)

Analysis: Both examples use "Immortals" as the target language equivalent for "八仙" (Baxian), which refers to the Eight Immortals in Chinese folklore. The term "Immortals" is defined in Merriam-Webster as "the gods of the Greek and Roman pantheon," which differs significantly in religious context and symbolic meaning from the Daoist Immortals. Translating "八仙" simply as "Eight Immortals" might cause confusion. Sample 8 uses the modifier "Daoist" and includes a footnote

explaining the cultural significance of the “Baxian” and the gourd shape, helping readers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds better understand the original content and avoid misunderstandings.

#### 4.3 "Inspiring Truth Through Beauty": Expressing Knowledge in Line with the Aesthetics of the Target Culture

Individuals from different cultural backgrounds may have unique aesthetic preferences when receiving knowledge. This process can lead to differences or conflicts in the acceptance of knowledge or culture, creating what is known as the "knowledge conflict zone". (Meng, 2022, 03) To better communicate the knowledge of the original artefact, translators should consider the language and cognitive habits of the target audience, ensuring that the translation aligns with the expression norms and cultural aesthetics of the target language. This can be achieved through domestication strategies, where the translation conveys both the communicative power and aesthetic appeal, ensuring the effective transmission of cultural imagery.

Example 9:

- ST: 粉彩凤穿花纹**双联瓶**  
清嘉庆 (公元 1796—1820 年) (in Chinese)  
Qing, Jiaqing Period (1796-1820)
- TT: Fencai **Twin-bodied Vase** with  
Phoenixes Flying through Floral Scrolls  
Qing Dynasty, Jiaqing Period (1796-1820)  
(National Museum)

Analysis: The "双联瓶," also known as a "珠联瓶" (zhu lian ping), is named for its two interlinked vases symbolizing the idea of a perfect pair. The term "Twin-bodied vase" accurately reflects the vase's core concept, emphasizing the connection of two individual vases into one entity, with two mouths and two bottoms. The term "twin" resonates with the target language audience, not only describing the vase's physical characteristics but also conveying the special significance of its design in terms of both function and aesthetics.

Example 10:

- ST: 绿地粉彩**开光**花卉图题诗瓶  
清 乾隆 (公元 1736—1795 年) (in Chinese)
- TT: Fencai Vase with Flowers and Poems  
in **Panels** on Green Ground

Qing Dynasty, Qianlong Period (1736-1795)

(National Museum)

Analysis: In this example, "开光" (kaiguang) refers to the decorative framing of specific elements like landscapes, figures, and flowers on ceramic pieces. The term "Panel" is used to convey the closed border of these decorative elements, a concept that is also found in Western art and decoration. This translation retains the structural characteristic of the "kaiguang" while adhering to Western cultural understanding, facilitating easier comprehension and acceptance by the target audience.

## 5. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of Transknowletology, translation is a practice of cross-linguistic cultural exchange. Cultural mutual learning is not about foreignization or domestication, but about finding harmony in differences and optimizing disparities (Yang, 2024). In the translation practice of museum ceramic artefact names, it is crucial to adhere to the principle of "Seeking Knowledge through Truth," ensuring the faithful transmission of terminology and cultural meaning. Guided by the principle of "Establishing Meaning through Goodness," translators should bridge cultural differences by providing necessary background knowledge to help the target audience understand. With the goal of "Inspiring Truth through Beauty," translators should select appropriate expressions to make the translation aesthetically pleasing and easily accepted, promoting the globalization of localized knowledge.

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