

A Way With Words

A survey probes the popularity of Chinese words in English-speaking countries By Pan Xiaoqiao

Recent years have witnessed the use of an increasing number of Chinese words in the English language. A study carried out by the Beijing-based Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies (ACCWS) sheds light on how well Chinese expressions are recognized outside of China.

Researchers calculated the number of references to some 300 Chinese words in the online reports of 50 leading media outlets in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, the Philippines, South Africa, Canada,

Singapore and India. Based on the outcome of these calculations, they chose 150 words for a survey. The survey was conducted in the above countries among people over the age of 18 who had attained a higher education, with a total of 1,260 responses collected.

Pinyin popularity

In a report released on Feb. 17, ACCWS, a research institute affiliated with the China International Publishing Group (CIPG), revealed

the most recognized Chinese words overseas. Its findings showed that Chinese words are increasingly used in their *pinyin* form, as native English-speakers develop a greater understanding of their associated concepts.

Pinyin is the commonly used system for Romanizing standard Chinese characters, and it is a unique form of the language. Compared with Chinese characters, *pinyin* boasts an advantage in its ability to facilitate the spread of Chinese culture around the world.

According to the report, words related to culture make up a majority of the 100 most recognized *pinyin* words, including traditional festivals such as *chunjie*, the Spring Festival, and *chongyang*, the Double Ninth Festival. The former is China's holiday to celebrate the Lunar New Year, while the latter falls on the ninth day of the ninth month in the lunar calendar and is a time for autumn excursions. It is also a day on which Chinese people pay respect to the elderly as well as their ancestors.

Other popular culture-related words include *kongzi*, the *pinyin* name of preeminent ancient philosopher Confucius; *shaolin*, as in the Shaolin Temple of Chinese martial arts; and *gugong*, the *pinyin* spelling of the Forbidden City.

One particularly striking detail of the report is that some Chinese words that used to be translated into English are now being replaced by *pinyin*. The giant panda is now known not only by its English nomenclature but also as *xionghao*, its Chinese name. Another example is *jiaozi*, long known as "dumplings" in the lexicon of English speakers, but nowadays the *pinyin* term is being favored by those overseas. The latest installment of the *Oxford English Dictionary* even includes *jiaozi* in its comprehensive record of the English vocabulary.

Globalized concepts

"Not only are we seeing a rise in words related to culture, but concepts from China's science and technology, economy and politics are also being absorbed into the pool of Chinese words used in other countries in the form of *pinyin*," said Wang Gangyi, vice president of CIPG.

The study reveals that since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, political phrases, such as *zhongguomeng*, the Chinese dream; *yidaiyilu*, the Belt and Road Initiative; and *mingyungongtongti*, a community with a shared future, are better recognized and understood in other countries, which implies greater recognition of China's direction.

All three phrases are key proposals made by Chinese President Xi Jinping. The Chinese dream of national rejuvenation is a commitment to bringing greater prosperity to the country and a better life to the Chinese people. The Belt and Road Initiative seeks to enhance connectivity along and beyond the routes of the ancient Silk Road, while a community with a shared future for mankind represents a vision of an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security and common prosperity.

The ACCWS report is evidence of ever-stronger communication and integration between the Chinese- and English-speaking worlds, a natural result of globalization.

"Globalization calls for enhanced cultural exchanges between different countries," Yang Ping, deputy director of ACCWS, told *Beijing Review*. "These exchanges are also necessitated by efforts to build a community with a shared future."

Zheng Yongnian, director of the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, said in an interview with China Central Television that China previously existed as a vague concept for many people around the world. But now that these countries have more diverse forms of exchange with China, ranging from trade and investment to tourism, learning Chinese and using the language have the potential to boost people's personal prospects. China has become a part of their everyday lives, he added.

The ACCWS survey also discovered that China's economic and technological developments are enriching the world's glossaries. Fifteen associated words found a place on the top-100 list, with yuan and renminbi, terms for China's currency, in both the top 10 and the latest edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

This phenomenon is related to the ongoing internationalization of the renminbi, and it hints at the expanding global influence of the Chinese economy, with both terms—yuan and renminbi—now commonplace in the English-language media. To date, more than 60 countries and regions, including Singapore and Russia, have adopted the yuan as a foreign exchange reserve currency.

Linguistic innovations

New words such as *zhifubao*, the Chinese name of online payment service Alipay, and *wanggou*, online shopping, are particularly well recognized among younger generations outside of China, having become popular in part due to China's booming internet economy built on a foundation of e-business and mobile payment.

Terminology from the world of science and technology, including *Wukong* and *gaotie*—high-speed rail—are also featured on the list. *Wukong* is China's Dark Matter Particle Explorer. The satellite is named after the famous Chinese mythological figure Monkey King.

Although the *pinyin* phrase *zhonggu-ozhizao* ranked 79th on the list, its English translation, "made in China," is instantly recognizable to many around the world. In

Top 10 Most Recognized Chinese Words in English-Speaking Countries

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|----|--|
| 01 | Shaolin (Name of a famed temple of martial arts) |
| 02 | Yin and Yang (Chinese philosophical concepts) |
| 03 | Yuan (Chinese currency) |
| 04 | Gugong (Forbidden City) |
| 05 | Nihao (Hello) |
| 06 | Wushu (Martial arts) |
| 07 | Qi (Vital force) |
| 08 | Qigong (Traditional Chinese exercise) |
| 09 | Renminbi (Chinese currency) |
| 10 | Majiang (Mahjong, a four-player game) |

(Source: The Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies under the China International Publishing Group)



Wushu enthusiasts perform in celebration of the Spring Festival in Madrid, Spain, on Feb. 11

the past, this was a phrase characterized by mass manufacture and low-cost production, but today the phrase is taking on a new meaning, one built on innovation and creativity, which is redefining "made in China" around the world.

Shisanwu, the 13th Five-Year Plan, China's social and economic development program from 2016 to 2020, also made its way into the top 100, a sign that the world is increasingly turning to China for new opportunities.

According to the Global Language Monitor, since 1994, Chinese loan words in the English language have outnumbered those of all other languages.

"The world's languages are open to words borne of Chinese economic and technological innovations. Not only should China keep contributing words to other languages, but it should also act as a front-runner in innovation for the good of the world," Yang said. ■



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