

# The Influence of Foreign Languages on the Languages of China and Japan

## -- The Example of Film Translations

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### Abstract

The development of any language undergoes a process of constant expansion, and as intercultural communication grows, so does the number of exonyms in various languages. In this paper, we analyse the translations of Oscar-winning films in Chinese and Japanese, and find that Japanese translations focus on the fidelity of the original text, while Chinese translations focus on the localisation of meaning. The three main reasons for this phenomenon are the language itself, psychology and culture of the two countries. At the same time, the incorporation of foreign languages into the Japanese language has facilitated communication and expression of emotions and promoted internationalisation on the one hand, but on the other hand has caused damage to traditional culture and barriers to communication at home and abroad. It is therefore important that we respond to the absorption of foreign languages in an open and tolerant manner, while at the same time paying attention to the preservation of the mother tongue.

### Keywords

Foreign Language; Naturalization; Alienation.

## 1. Characteristics of Chinese and Japanese Film Translations at the Present Stage

Due to the huge differences in economic, political and cultural factors between the East and the West during their long historical development, their linguistic expressions have different characteristics. The translation of a foreign film is not just a word-for-word translation of each word, but a correct identification of the cultural connotations of the film's original title and a search for the corresponding information in the local language, in order to accurately convey the film's connotations and assist the audience to better understand the film.

In his book *On the Method of Translation*, the famous translator Schleiermacher mentions that there are two methods of translation, "one is to let the author settle as still as possible and lead the reader to the author; the other is to let the reader settle as still as possible and lead the author to the reader." According to American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti's definition, the former is naturalised translation and the latter is alienated translation. Similarly, when film titles are translated into Chinese, there are two broad categories of naturalisation and alienation, and under these two broad categories there are three specific ways.

Phonetic translations: Historically, in the 1970s and 1990s, there were more direct phonetic translations of film titles, mostly of names of people or places, such as *Rocky* and *Gandhi*. However, since the beginning of the 21st century, the direct phonetic transliteration of film titles in Chinese has begun to decline, and has almost disappeared from the translations of films in the last five years in particular. As can be seen from the films nominated for the Academy

Awards for Best Picture from 2012 - 2018, only three films, *Lincoln*, *Nebraska* and *Roma*, take this translation, while other films with English names of people or places as titles, such as *The Martian* and *Brooklyn* do not take this approach.

The direct translation method is still an important method of translating film titles into Chinese, with *Les Miserable*, *American Sniper*, *Call me by your name*, *Darkest Hour* all adopting this method.

Literal translation: The initial film translations were very literary-oriented, mostly using or imitating Chinese four-character idioms, such as *Cimarron*, *Cavalcade*, *You Can't Take It with You*, *From Here to Eternity*, the original meaning of the film can be conveyed more faithfully and elegantly by adopting this translation approach. In addition, in the process of translation, the translators have adopted the strategy of adding words as well as harmonisation.

Adding words: e.g. *Southern Beasts*, *Post*, *Argo*, *Room*

Harmonies: e.g. *Amour*, *Vice*

Similarly, Japanese translations of films at this stage also present two main categories of naturalisation and dissimilation, which can also be divided into three main approaches.

Phonetic translation: Phonetic translation is one of the most common methods of translating films into Japanese. The vast majority of films are translated directly into English using katakana with similar pronunciations, and within this translation, there are two specific types - one that uses only katakana for expressions, such as *Lincoln*, *Argo*, and *Le Miserable*. It is worth noting that in the translations of films such as "Bridge of Spies" and "The Shape of Water", the entire phrase is directly transliterated, and even the preposition "of" is translated as "The other is to combine the katakana with the kanji, using the latter part of the kanji to modify the previous kana, as in *World Silver Linings Playbook*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *A Star is Born*, etc.

Direct translation: There are few direct translations in the Japanese translation, e. g. *Django Unchained*, *Amour*.

Translation: Like Chinese, there are a number of film titles in Japanese that are not translated faithfully from the original English title, but rather reflect the main plot of the film, e.g. *The Favourite*, *The Post*, *Hell or High Water*.

## 2. Comparison of the Characteristics of Chinese and Japanese Foreign Languages

From the above analysis of film translations, it is easy to see that the use of exonyms is much more frequent in Japanese than in Chinese. Apart from the quantity dimension, the use of exonyms in Chinese and Japanese has different characteristics.

Firstly, when translating foreign languages, most of the phonetic translations are of things or concepts that are lacking in the original language, except for unavoidable parts such as names of people and places, whereas many of the words that appear in the Japanese translation can be found in the Japanese language. When confronted with a concept in a foreign language that is already present in the native language, Chinese will tend to use the original word. The Japanese language, on the other hand, uses katakana to translate many concepts that can be translated using native Japanese vocabulary, such as the borrowed word "of" mentioned above, and in the case of words like road and dream, the original Japanese words are often discarded in the translation of corresponding words. The translation of such terms also tends to discard the original Japanese words. Even *America* and *American*, a grammatical phenomenon unique to English, are reflected in the translations.

Secondly, Chinese places great emphasis on the localisation of words when translating foreign languages. In order to avoid confusion over the ideographic system caused by direct phonetic

translation, Chinese often adds one or several Chinese characters after the phonetic translation to convey the meaning of the phonetic text, for example, "Titanic" followed by The name of the ship, the addition of "Weng" after "Shakespeare" to represent its image in people's minds, and the addition of "Mission" after "Argo" to explain the main character's "mission". "to explain the actions of the protagonist, Argo, in the film. Examples in everyday life are "beer", "truck" and "card". Another way is to translate phonetically and select Chinese characters with specific meanings, such as "Coca-Cola", "TOEFL" and so on.

Thirdly, Chinese hardly ever translates entire sentences directly phonetically, as is the case with Japanese. Most of the phonetic translations of foreign languages are vocabulary, and there are almost no translations of phrases or whole sentences.

Fourthly, the Chinese language rejects the direct combination of foreign words with local words. Although there are words in Chinese that combine English and Chinese like "IT industry", "E era" and "5G communication", such words do not appear in the translation of film titles. In contrast, in Japanese there are titles such as Darkest Hour that combine the katakana with the original phrase. In addition, foreign languages have little or no impact on the original grammatical system of Chinese, as only one of the different lexical forms of the same word will be translated, and the variations will follow the original grammatical rules of Chinese. For example, "Britain" will be phonetically translated as "Britain", but there will never be a phonetic equivalent of "British" in Chinese.

### 3. Reasons for This Difference

#### 3.1. The Language Factor

Japanese is a sticky language that relies on adding prefixes and suffixes to a root word to express different meanings. Most of the foreign words borrowed from foreign languages are nouns, and by adding suffixes after the noun root, they can be easily converted into verbs and adjectives to express different meanings.

In addition, English and other European languages use long and short sounds to distinguish the meaning of words, and Japanese also has both long and short sounds, which correspond to the long and short sounds in English, making English words easier to spell in kana.

Moreover, Japanese uses three systems of writing - kanji, hiragana and katakana - to distinguish between the phonetic and ideographic systems, and the same word is written in three ways. In Japanese, foreign words are written in katakana, a phonetic script, to distinguish them from native words, to avoid ambiguity, and to avoid the need for the same kind of textual effect as in Chinese, which greatly facilitates the entry of foreign words into Japanese. In contrast, Chinese uses only one set of ideographic characters, and the characters used to indicate the pronunciation of exonyms sometimes carry other real meanings, which not only makes it difficult to understand but also makes the translation process more difficult.

#### 3.2. Psychological Factors

As a maritime civilisation, Japan has been a pioneering and learning nation since ancient times. From studying China in ancient times to imitating Europe and the United States after the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese have an inherent "foreign" attitude in their psyche, full of curiosity and willingness to accept new things, and always modestly learning from rivals who are better than them. After the Second World War, the economic and political centre of the world shifted to Europe and America, and Japan did not resist the European and American powers that had defeated it, but spared no effort to learn from them, so that in the mid to late 20th century, Japan began to shift from absorbing Chinese culture to that of Europe and America. Foreign languages soon became popular in the Japanese language as a vehicle for the spread of Western culture.

The Chinese attitude towards the West has always been one of rejection, as China is a typical agrarian civilisation and is naturally introverted and conservative in its mentality, while the dominant Confucian tradition advocates the "Zhong Yong", making the Chinese people accept stability and unwilling to make excessive changes. Even in modern times, Chinese translators would add a series of Chinese words before and after the foreign words to explain them. Therefore, while Japan was rapidly adopting European and American foreign languages in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Chinese translators were still troubled by how to translate English with Chinese characters in an elegant manner.

### 3.3. Cultural Factors

Chinese culture has been a stronger culture throughout the ages. Chinese culture has a long history and a brilliant history. Throughout history, Chinese culture has been an export-oriented culture and has formed a distinctive Chinese cultural sphere in East and Southeast Asia. China has long led the world in literature, art, economics and politics, and has been an important contributor to the development of world history. Throughout Chinese history, even in the face of foreign invasions, China has been able to transform and assimilate foreign cultures with its powerful Chinese culture. This is why Chinese culture is inherently closed.

In contrast to China, Japanese culture has always been an imported culture. Having started late in life and not having a strong culture like China, and being in the sphere of influence of the developed Chinese cultural sphere, its own culture has been marginalised. Culturally speaking, Japanese traditional culture has been a process of learning from other cultures, so they are not worried about the impact of foreign culture on their own traditional culture.

## 4. Conclusion

Globalisation is an irreversible trend and the mutual openness of countries will only expand over time, as will the exchange between cultures. Foreign languages are an inevitable product of cultural exchange, social openness and the progress of the times, and the number of foreign languages in various languages will only increase in the future. On the one hand, we should learn from Japan, humbly learn from the best parts of other countries and cultures, and respond positively to the absorption of foreign languages with an open and tolerant attitude; on the other hand, although foreign languages bring many new ways of expression, the national emotions and values embedded in traditional vocabulary cannot be replaced. In the light of the above analysis, I believe that in the translation of foreign languages, when translating things or concepts that already exist in the mother tongue, we should try to use native words; when transliteration is unavoidable, we should pay attention to the correct expression of the meaning and avoid ambiguity; and try not to translate whole sentences with various components. The assimilation of foreign languages should be carried out on the basis of the protection of the mother tongue, so that foreign languages can be used for Chinese, rather than being westernised and allowed to overwhelm the national language.

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