

A Contrastive Analysis of the English and Japanese Translations of Chinese-Specific Terms in 2024 Government Work Report

ZHANG Yuling

China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing, China

This paper examines the Chinese terminology in 2024 Government Work Report and conducts a comparative analysis of its translation into English and Japanese. The study explores the challenges and strategies involved in translating these terms, taking into account differences in vocabulary, grammatical structure, and cultural context between the two languages. The findings reveal that the same term may be translated differently into English and Japanese due to the distinct linguistic and cultural characteristics of each language. The research emphasizes that understanding and respecting the unique features of each language and culture are essential for accurately conveying the meaning of Chinese terms. This is crucial for enhancing the international influence of Chinese discourse and promoting cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: 2024 Government Work Report, four-character expressions, translation strategies, English and Japanese translation

Introduction

Over the past four decades of Reform and Opening-up, China's rapid development has attracted global attention. As China's international standing continues to rise and its foreign exchanges become increasingly frequent, it is crucial for the world to better understand China and deepen its knowledge of the country. To achieve this, we must not only strive for greater international discourse power but also build a discourse system that bridges China and the world. This will provide more opportunities to showcase China to the world (Huang, 2022). Accurately translating China's distinctive terminology in government work reports has thus become an important research topic in both academia and the translation field.

The annual Government Work Report presented at the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference is an official document for China's government to promote its policies and ideologies to the outside world. It serves as a crucial medium for disseminating the ruling ideas of the Communist Party of China and the government's policy announcements, playing a significant role in enhancing Sino-foreign exchanges and promoting integration between China and other countries (Sun, 2022). The report covers various fields such as the economy, society, culture, and foreign affairs, containing numerous terms that reflect China's political and economic characteristics. In the translation process, these terms need to retain their unique cultural connotations while accurately conveying their practical meanings, ensuring that international audiences can fully understand them.

This paper takes the Chinese distinctive terms in 2024 Government Work Report as the subject of study, comparing English and Japanese translations to explore the challenges and strategies faced in the translation process. The significant differences in vocabulary, grammatical structures, and cultural backgrounds between English and Japanese may lead to different handling of the same term in translation. These differences are not only linguistic but also reflect distinct cognitive models in Chinese-Western and Chinese-Japanese cultural contexts.

Chinese-Specific Terms

Chinese distinctive terms refer to those words or expressions that have emerged within China's specific social, cultural, political, and economic contexts (Tang, 2019). These terms often lack direct counterparts in other languages or regions. They reflect China's unique historical background, cultural traditions, and social development model. Therefore, particular attention must be paid to accurately conveying their context and meaning during the translation process.

These distinctive terms encompass various fields, including politics, economics, society, and culture. They often carry the connotations of China's unique systems, policies, and ideologies, holding significant cultural and historical significance. For example, terms like "Four Confidences" and "Belt and Road Initiative" embody China's political and economic strategies and ideological directions during specific periods.

Chinese distinctive terms can be categorized according to the areas and content they involve. Specifically, they can be divided into four major categories: political, economic, cultural, and social terms. Each category not only reflects the development and status of China in that particular field but also carries its distinct historical background and cultural implications.

A Comparative Study of the English and Japanese Translations of Chinese-Specific Terms in 2024 Government Work Report

Based on the classification and linguistic characteristics of Chinese-specific vocabulary, the key Chinese terms in 2024 Government Work Report are categorized into three types for analysis: four-character phrases, parallel structures, and metaphorical expressions in their English and Japanese translations.

The English and Japanese Translations of Four-Character Chinese-Specific Terms

(1) Example 1

Original Text:

提高“一老一小”个人所得税专项附加扣除标准，6600多万纳税人受益。加强城镇老旧小区改造和保障性住房供给，惠及上千万家庭。

English Translation:

Over 66 million taxpayers benefited from an increase in special additional deductions for individual income tax, which cover children nursing expenses, children's education, and elderly care expenses.

Japanese Translation:

個人所得税の老人扶養・幼児保育控除額を引き上げ、6600万人以上の納税者がその利益を受けた。都市部老朽住宅地の改修と保障タイプ住宅の供給を強化し、1000万を超える世帯が恩恵を受けた。

In the original Chinese text, “一老一小” is a term commonly used in China's social security system. It refers to the elderly and children, and implies a social welfare context with a focus on care and support for these two groups. The term not only divides the population into two clear and symbolic groups but also

implicitly reflects social concern and welfare policy. The phrasing “老” (elderly) and “小” (children) forms a contrast that is concise, symbolic, and easily understood.

In the English translation, “一老一小” is not directly translated word-for-word. Instead, a more detailed description is used to convey the concept. This approach is typical in formal English policy documents and reports, which tend to provide comprehensive explanations rather than using a short, culturally-specific term. “Children nursing expenses” and “children’s education” refer to the costs of caring for children, encompassing both childcare and educational expenses, thus reflecting the concept of “one small” (children). “Elderly care expenses” directly translates the meaning of “one elderly”, referring to the costs associated with caring for the elderly.

The Japanese translation adopts the terms “老人扶養・幼児保育控除額”, where “老人扶養” refers to the elderly care support and “幼児保育控除額” refers to the tax deductions for child care. This translation, like the English version, does not directly use the phrase “一老一小”, but rather lists the groups involved and their corresponding tax deductions.

“老人扶養” directly corresponds to the concept of the elderly, while “幼児保育控除額” combines “children” and “childcare” to reflect the same welfare benefits for children. This echoes the Chinese expression “一老一小”. Although it does not employ a fixed phrase, the meaning of the elderly and children as two distinct groups is conveyed through the detailed tax deduction items. This four-character structure is concise, clear in meaning, catchy, and fluid, making the report highly expressive and impactful (Zhang, 2021).

Both the English and Japanese translations offer a clear understanding of the policy beneficiaries, though each does so by elaborating on the specific benefits associated with the elderly and children. The English translation provides more detailed expressions like “children nursing expenses” and “elderly care expenses”, whereas the Japanese version uses professional terminology such as “老人扶養” and “幼児保育控除額”. Despite the absence of a succinct, metaphorical phrase like “一老一小” in both languages, the essential message about the policy beneficiaries is effectively conveyed.

(2) Example 2

Original Text:

加快形成支持全面创新的基础制度，深化科技评价、科技奖励、科研项目和经费管理制度改革，健全“揭榜挂帅”机制。加强知识产权保护，制定促进科技成果转化应用的政策举措。

English Translation:

We will speed up efforts to establish basic systems for supporting all-around innovation, further reform the appraisal and reward systems for scientific and technological advances and the management system for research projects and funding, and improve the open competition mechanism for selecting the best candidates to lead research projects. We will bolster intellectual property rights protection and formulate policies and measures for better application of scientific and technological advances. Extensive efforts will be made to raise science literacy among the public.

Japanese Translation:

全面的イノベーション促進に向けた基本制度の早期策定をはかり、研究開発評価、研究開発インセンティブ、研究プロジェクトマネジメント・経費管理制度の改革を深化させ、「イノベーション牽引者公募」の仕組みを拡充する。知的財産権の保護を強化し、研究成果実用化促進の政策措置を策定する。

The Chinese expression “揭榜挂帅” refers to the process of selecting capable individuals to lead research projects through an open and transparent mechanism, often through public bidding or competition. This term

carries distinctive Chinese cultural and political connotations, typically used in administrative or political contexts, and emphasizes transparency, competition, and leadership selection.

In the English translation, the term “open competition mechanism” effectively conveys the idea of an “open election” or “open competition”, while “selecting the best candidates to lead research projects” clearly describes the process and objective of choosing a leader. This translation is direct, formal, and emphasizes a systematized, regulated competitive mechanism, highlighting the goal of “selecting the best candidates”. It reflects the English language’s preference for simplicity and precision.

The Japanese translation “イノベーション牽引者公募” introduces a slightly different nuance. The term “イノベーション牽引者” underscores the importance of leadership and the driving force of innovation. “公募” directly translates to “open recruitment”, conveying the notion of public selection. The Japanese term “牽引者” has some similarity to the Chinese “挂帅”, emphasizing the pivotal role of the leader in innovation and research. Compared to the English version, the Japanese translation places a stronger emphasis on “innovation” and “leadership”, and does not strictly adhere to the literal meaning, but rather integrates the cultural context, reflecting a particular focus on leadership expectations.

In the Chinese context, “揭榜挂帅” carries a significant symbolic meaning. It is not only a tool for administrative or policy purposes but also conveys a high regard for talent selection and leadership capability. The phrase “挂帅” symbolizes leadership, responsibility, and fair selection. The English translation provides a straightforward description, avoiding cultural ambiguities and explaining the mechanism’s function and purpose. The Japanese translation emphasizes respect for the role of innovation leaders, incorporating the cultural context of “牽引者” and using “公募” to convey the concept of open recruitment.

The English and Japanese Translations of Parallel Chinese Terms With Unique Cultural Significance

(1) Example 1

Original Text:

我们要坚持稳中求进、以进促稳、先立后破。稳是大局和基础，各地区各部门要多出有利于稳预期、稳增长、稳就业的政策，谨慎出台收缩性抑制性举措，清理和废止有悖于高质量发展的政策规定。

English Translation:

We should adhere to the principles of pursuing progress while ensuring stability, promoting stability through progress, and establishing the new before abolishing the old.

Japanese Translation:

われわれは安定を保ちつつ前進を求め、前進を以て安定を促し、「確立が先・廃止は後」という方針を堅持しなければならない。

This expression in Chinese conveys complex political or strategic concepts. When translating into English and Japanese, differences in language handling, expression focus, and cultural background impact the effectiveness of the translation.

The English translation is concise and direct. It uses parallel clauses to clearly express the relationships between the components, with a relatively flat grammatical structure and minimal subordination. This structure aligns with English’s preference for direct and clear statements. The phrases “promoting stability through progress” and “establishing the new before abolishing the old” effectively convey causal and sequential relationships in a straightforward and precise manner, highlighting rationality and logic.

In contrast, the Japanese translation adopts a more layered and complex structure, utilizing grammatical

constructions such as “つつ” and “を以て” to express the nuanced relationship between maintaining stability and promoting progress simultaneously. The sentence is longer, with more modifiers, making the meaning more implicit and delicate. For example, “安定を保ちつつ前進を求め” and “前進を以て安定を促し” use “つつ” and “を以て” to indicate a progressive logical relationship. Additionally, the phrase “しなければならない” expresses a strong sense of responsibility and obligation, emphasizing the mandatory and normative nature of the policy, whereas the English version uses “should adhere to”, which conveys a more moderate and advisory tone.

Overall, both the English and Japanese translations accurately convey the policy concept of “pursuing progress while ensuring stability, promoting stability through progress, and establishing the new before abolishing the old”. However, the distinct linguistic features and cultural contexts of each language result in different modes of expression. The English translation prioritizes clarity, simplicity, and rationality, reflecting English culture’s preference for directness and efficiency, while the Japanese translation emphasizes nuance, layering, and formality, aligning with Japanese conventions for formal discourse. Both languages, therefore, present this policy with distinct linguistic styles and structural nuances.

(2) Example 2

Original Text:

锚定建设农业强国目标，学习运用“千村示范、万村整治”工程经验，因地制宜、分类施策，循序渐进、久久为功，推动乡村全面振兴不断取得实质性进展、阶段性成果。

English Translation:

We will strive to build a strong agricultural sector. With this goal in mind, we will draw on and apply the experience from the Green Rural Revival Program in Zhejiang Province.

Japanese Translation:

農業強国づくりの目標を見据え、「千村モデル・万村対策」プロジェクトの経験を学習・運用して、現地の実情に即して類別に施策し、順を追って根気よく進め、農村の全面的振興において具体的な進展がみられ、中間成果が収められるように推進する。

The English translation avoids direct translation by borrowing the specific project name “Green Rural Revival Program”, thereby preventing potential cultural and conceptual misunderstandings. The term “千村示范，万村整治” refers to a highly localized policy initiative, and a literal translation might lead to difficulties in comprehension. By using the actual project name from Zhejiang Province, the translator provides a concrete and representative example, allowing the reader to better understand the practical implementation and outcomes of this policy.

In the Japanese translation, “千村モデル・万村対策” directly utilizes the Japanese terms “モデル” and “対策” to translate “示范” and “整治”, reflecting the localization of policy terminology in Japanese. The term “モデル” captures the concept of “demonstration”, while “対策” emphasizes “rectification” or “measures”. This approach allows Japanese readers to quickly grasp the policy’s essence, aligning with the linguistic and cultural conventions of Japanese expression. The Japanese translation does not strictly preserve the specific Chinese terminology for “示范” and “整治”, but instead employs more familiar expressions in Japanese, making the information more accessible to the audience.

The English translation focuses on adopting an existing internationalized project name (such as the “Green Rural Revival Program”) to ensure clarity and generalizability, summarizing the specific execution details of the policy. In contrast, the Japanese translation refines the policy content with more precise and nuanced

descriptions, retaining the details of the original Chinese text while adapting it to local cultural practices, reflecting the intricacies and complexity of Japanese expression.

Translation of Chinese Metaphorical Terms in English and Japanese

(1) Example 1

Original Text:

围绕扩大内需、优化结构、提振信心、防范化解风险，延续优化一批阶段性政策，及时推出一批新政策，打出有力有效的政策组合拳。

English Translation:

To expand domestic demand, improve the economic structure, bolster confidence, and prevent and defuse risks, we adopted a full range of robust and effective policies, namely, extending and improving a number of time-limited policies and rolling out a new batch of timely policies.

Japanese Translation:

内需拡大、構造の最適化、景況感の改善、リスクの防止・解消に関する一連の一時的政策を延長し、その内容を充実させ、一連の新政策を適時に押し出し、政策パッケージを強力で効果的なものにした。

In the original Chinese text, the verb “打出” carries a strong action-oriented and symbolic connotation. It not only describes the implementation of policies but also implies a decisive, forceful action, giving the impression that the policies are carefully crafted and strategically deployed, much like “weapons” to address complex economic challenges.

In the English translation, the phrase “a full range of” effectively conveys the broad scope of the “policy combination”, emphasizing the comprehensiveness and diversity of the policies. The terms “robust and effective” highlight the strength and efficacy of the policies, underscoring their capacity to produce tangible results.

The Japanese translation uses “政策パッケージ” as a direct translation of “policy combination”, while “強力で効果的なものにした” emphasizes the outcome of optimizing and reinforcing the policies. This phrasing effectively communicates the strength and effectiveness of the policies, though it lacks the vivid metaphorical image of “打出”.

While both the English and Japanese translations accurately convey the “strength” and “effectiveness” of the policies, they adopt a more rational and abstract approach due to linguistic structures and cultural norms. The English translation tends to focus on the “comprehensiveness” and “practical effectiveness” of the policies, while the Japanese translation emphasizes the process of optimizing and strengthening the policies. Both translations rely on systematic and formal language, rather than employing more concrete metaphors, which results in a loss of the vivid imagery present in the original Chinese. These differences reflect cultural and rhetorical variations in expressing policy in the three languages, particularly in emotional tone and stylistic preferences.

(2) Example 2

Original Text:

一些地方基层财力比较紧张。科技创新能力还不强。重点领域改革仍有不少硬骨头要啃。

English Translation:

China’s capacity for scientific and technological innovation needs to be further improved. There are still

many challenging issues concerning reforms in key areas that need to be addressed.

Japanese Translation:

一部地方の財政がかなりひっ迫している。科学技術イノベーション能力はまだ強くない。重点分野の改革は多くの岩盤に直面している。

The term “硬骨头” is used to refer to difficult or thorny problems or tasks. In both the English and Japanese translations, the basic meaning is preserved, but the translation approach differs due to cultural and linguistic variations.

The English translation tends to use the more general and abstract term “challenging issues”, which aligns with the English-speaking culture’s rational and direct handling of problems and challenges. The English version emphasizes the ability to resolve issues and the progress made in the process. The word “challenging” conveys a positive attitude towards difficulties, suggesting that obstacles can be overcome through effort. This is a common expression in policy documents or reports, implying that difficulties are surmountable with perseverance.

In contrast, the Japanese translation opts for a more concrete metaphor, using “岩盤” to represent “硬骨头”, emphasizing the unmovable, solid nature of the challenge. This choice not only reflects a linguistic difference but also highlights a cultural distinction. In Japan, when addressing reforms or issues, there is often an emphasis on the long-term accumulation of effort required to solve such problems, as well as the perseverance needed to face significant obstacles. The term “岩盤” carries the connotation of something “not easily broken”, making it more immediately apparent to the listener the formidable nature of the task and the difficulties faced during the reform process.

While both the English and Japanese translations accurately convey the meaning of “硬骨头” as a difficult or thorny issue, the expression reveals different linguistic and cultural conventions. The English translation uses “challenging issues”, a more abstract and universal term, to describe problems, conveying a sense of difficulty that can be overcome with effort. The Japanese translation, on the other hand, employs the more concrete and metaphorically strong term “岩盤に直面”, highlighting the immense difficulty and the seemingly insurmountable nature of the challenges faced.

Analysis of the Stylistic Differences in the English and Japanese Translations

Through a comparative study of the English and Japanese translations of Chinese terms from 2024 Government Work Report, we observe significant differences in the expression styles of the two languages. Not only do English and Japanese exhibit distinct translation strategies, but they also highlight differences in style, tone, and grammatical structure. These differences reflect the cultural tendencies and linguistic traditions of both languages when addressing political, economic, and social issues.

English Translation: Concise, Direct, and Logically Structured

English translation typically emphasizes conciseness, directness, and strong logical structure. As a global lingua franca, English translations, especially in policy documents or economic reports, prioritize the swift transmission of information and clarity. English readers tend to favor clear and straightforward language to grasp core concepts, which requires the translation to minimize redundancy and complexity, ensuring that information is conveyed quickly and accurately. The primary principle in English translation is to precisely understand the intrinsic meaning of the original term, while ensuring the translation is both accurate and easily

comprehensible. This helps project a positive national image of China in international communication and prevents misunderstandings due to improper or ambiguous translations (Zhu, 2021).

For example, the term “高质量发展” is commonly translated into English as “high-quality development”. The translation directly corresponds to the Chinese term without unnecessary elaboration. The term “high-quality” in English has a clear and precise meaning, effectively conveying the combination of “quality” and “development”. This concise and precise translation style aligns with the reading needs of English-language audiences for policy documents and reports. Even for non-native Chinese speakers, simple vocabulary and clear expressions enable them to quickly grasp the core ideas of the policy.

In addition to clarity, English translation also emphasizes logical structure and organization, ensuring that the information is well-organized and easy to follow. For instance, “一国两制” is often translated as “One Country, Two Systems”. The straightforward structure of this translation captures the basic framework of the concept while making it easier for foreign readers to understand its literal meaning. English tends to use parallel structures to express similar concepts, maintaining both compactness and logical flow in the translation.

Japanese Translation: Subtle, Implicit, and Emphasizing Hierarchy

Compared to the concise and direct style of English, Japanese translations are more delicate and implicit. When translating Chinese terms with specific cultural connotations, Japanese often favors more formal and detailed expressions, and may expand vocabulary or sentence structures to convey additional semantic layers. The style of Japanese translation not only focuses on conveying information but also places particular emphasis on the precision of the language and the depth of expression, ensuring that concepts are fully communicated with a higher degree of formality and rigor.

The term “高质量发展” (High-Quality Development) is translated into Japanese as “高品質な発展” or “質の高い発展”. Here, the term “高品質な” (high-quality) places a greater emphasis on refinement and a sense of hierarchy compared to the Chinese “高质量” (high quality), underscoring the high standards and specific requirements for quality. The word “発展” (development) in Japanese also appears more formal than its English equivalent, “development”, and is typically used in official documents or policy papers, carrying a stronger policy-related connotation. Therefore, Japanese translation often uses meticulous word selection and complex grammatical structures to convey more nuanced cultural and policy-related information.

Another notable feature of Japanese translation is its attention to tone and the use of honorifics. In many translations of national policies, Japanese tends to employ a more polite and formal tone. For example, the phrase “We will strengthen high-quality development” is translated as “私たちは高品質な発展を強化する予定です” (We plan to strengthen high-quality development). Here, the use of “予定です” (plan to) not only expresses the meaning of “plan” or “expectation”, but also carries a tone of politeness and humility, in accordance with Japanese linguistic customs, which adopts a cautious attitude when expressing policies. This form of expression is natural in Japanese, aligning with common grammar structures in formal reports and emphasizing the formality and authority of the policy.

A Comparison of English and Japanese Translation Styles: Directness vs. Subtlety

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that English translations tend to emphasize directness and conciseness, especially when dealing with highly abstract and policy-oriented language. English translations aim for clear and straightforward expressions that are easy to understand. This style aligns with the readers’ need for quick information retrieval, particularly in policy documents and official reports, where concise and

direct language helps enhance the efficiency of communication.

In contrast, Japanese translations tend to convey more complete cultural and semantic information through delicate embellishments and layered expressions. Japanese translations place greater emphasis on linguistic precision, formality, and hierarchy. Particularly in the context of policy and culture, Japanese translations often expand vocabulary or add modifiers to provide richer background information, ensuring that readers of the target language can grasp the deeper meanings behind the translation.

Through a comparative study of the English and Japanese translations of Chinese-specific terms in 2024 Government Work Report, we observe significant differences in the translation styles when handling these terms. English translations prioritize concise, direct, and logical expressions, aiming to convey policy information through simple structures. On the other hand, Japanese translations are more subtle and implicit, focusing on conveying the deeper meanings of policies through rich details and layered expressions. These differences not only reflect the structural characteristics of the two languages but also highlight the differing approaches to policy language within their respective cultural contexts, demonstrating the complexity and importance of language in cross-cultural communication. To enhance the effectiveness of external communication, translators must aim for equivalence in meaning between the source and target texts, striving to uncover the underlying significance of terms. From the perspective of the target language audience, the translator should consider the acceptability and readability of the translation, constantly revising and refining it to ensure that the core ideas of the original text are faithfully conveyed. The translation should be accurate and fluent, allowing target readers to easily comprehend the content while evoking the same appeal that the original text holds (Zhang, 2007).

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