

Cross-Lingual Adaptation and Mutual Translation of Chinese and Japanese Annual Buzzwords (2010-2025)

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Buzzwords reflect the changing trends of society and evolve with the passage of time. This paper takes 226 award-winning words from the Chinese and Japanese Buzzword of the Year Awards from 2010 to 2025 as its research object, analyzes the characteristics and distribution domains of buzzwords in both countries, and explores the reception, transformation, and mutual translation of these buzzwords between Chinese and Japanese. Through the research, commonalities and differences in the national conditions and cultural backgrounds of the two countries are summarized, which can help reduce conflicts and friction, eliminate barriers, and promote the smooth development of cross-cultural communication between China and Japan.

Keywords: China and Japan, buzzwords, award-winning words, reception and transformation, mutual translation

Introduction

Buzzwords are expressions that align with people's interests and focal concerns during a given period, carry a strong influential meaning, and are widely and abundantly used. Although many buzzwords are short-lived, some become ordinary vocabulary in long-term public use. In contemporary society, with the rapid development of mass media represented by the internet, interactions between countries and regions are growing ever closer, language contact is becoming more frequent, and the mutual influence among languages is increasingly extensive, leading to the continuous emergence of numerous new terms. Through buzzwords, we can perceive the needs of the populace, economic developments, and societal transformations. Each year, both China and Japan review and commend notable buzzwords. China's annual buzzwords are primarily published in *Yao Wen Jiao Zi*, a monthly magazine founded in 1995 by Shanghai Culture Publishing House. Japan's annual buzzwords are mainly selected through the 「ユーキャン新語、流行語大賞」 organized by Jiyu Kokuminsha. This paper takes 110 award-winning words from *Yao Wen Jiao Zi* and 116 award-winning words from the 「ユーキャン新語、流行語大賞」 between 2010 and 2025 as its research subjects, in order to conduct an analytical study of Chinese and Japanese buzzwords.

Characteristics of Award-Winning Buzzwords in China and Japan From 2010 to 2025

Timeliness

“Time does not stay, and the seasons flow like a stream.” Time continuously leaves its traces upon language.

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Buzzwords reflect the social landscape of a given era, as people living in a particular period create specific buzzwords. Both China and Japan have produced numerous buzzwords imbued with a strong sense of timeliness. For example, in 2015, a wave of innovation and entrepreneurship surged across various regions of China, and *chuangke* (“maker”) became an annual buzzword. In recent years, with rapid global economic growth, environmental issues, such as water pollution, the greenhouse effect, and air pollution have become increasingly severe, drawing widespread attention from all sectors of society. Environmentally related buzzwords like *ditan shehui* (“low-carbon society”) and “PM 2.5” subsequently emerged. During this period, China’s internet experienced unprecedented and vigorous development. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, WeChat, Weibo, and QQ gained immense popularity, giving rise to terms like *wanghong* (“internet celebrity”), *da V* (“verified big-name user”), *liuliang* (“web traffic”), and *dianzan* (“to like”). A term can become popular not only because it records major social events and meets the needs of the populace but, more importantly, because it aligns with the demands of the times and possesses distinct timeliness, thus being embraced and accepted by the public.

Innovativeness

Innovativeness is primarily manifested in two aspects.

The first aspect involves obsolete words that have been endowed with new meanings. Obsolete words refer to “terms once used in the past that have gradually fallen out of use.” Examples include *guangpan* (“to clean one’s plate”), *tuhao* (“vulgar tycoon”), *taolu* (“ploy; trick”), and *miaosha* (“flash sale; instant kill”). In Chinese dictionaries, *guangpan* refers to “an item that uses optical information as a storage medium for data.” As a buzzword, however, *guangpan* means “finishing all the food on one’s plate without waste or (in a restaurant setting) taking leftovers home.” *Tuhao* originally denoted a wealthy and influential family with local power or a large landlord who oppressed and exploited commoners. It now refers to “individuals who, despite lacking higher education and refinement, are exceedingly wealthy.” *Taolu* was originally a form in martial arts movements, but now signifies a carefully devised method or approach for dealing with a certain situation.

The second aspect pertains to newly coined words created to express changes in the social landscape. For example, young men who are gentle and reserved in character, fair and refined in appearance, as friendly and mild as herbivores in matters of love, and relatively passive in romantic relationships and social interactions are termed *caoshi nanzi* (“herbivorous men”). Various activities undertaken by elderly people in preparation for the end of life—such as writing wills, having memorial portraits taken, and visiting crematoriums—are collectively referred to as 「終活」. Statistics indicate that in the past decade, few buzzwords have maintained a lifespan exceeding three years. The rapid pace of innovation is astonishing, with trends arriving and departing like a gust of wind. Consequently, the drawbacks are also evident: as the speed of coinage accelerates, buzzwords—particularly internet slang—are becoming increasingly coarse and vulgar.

Diversity

Diversity primarily refers to “the variety of word-formation methods.” The creation system of buzzwords includes borrowing, compounding, and abbreviation.

Borrowing takes two forms: adopting loanwords from foreign languages and incorporating terms from dialects. Loanwords are predominantly from English. Examples include *miaosha* (“instant kill; flash sale”), *qichang* (“aura; presence”), *zheng nengliang* (“positive energy”), *chuangke* (“maker”), *da call* (“to cheer on”), 「ありのままで」 (“Just the way I am”), 「新型インフルエンザ」 (“Novel influenza virus”), 「ファストファッション」 (“Fast fashion”), and 「イクメン」 (“Hands-on dad”).

Compounding refers to “combining two or more words to create a new word.” Among these, adding prefixes and suffixes is the most common practice. Examples include prefixes, such as *shejianshang* (“on the tip of the tongue; A Bite of X”), *hulianwang+* (“Internet Plus”), *jiaokeshushi* (“textbook-style”), and *wei XX* (“micro-XX”). By appending a word to these prefixes, a new compound word can be formed.

Abbreviation refers to “omitting parts of a vocabulary item. Abbreviation is very common in both Chinese and Japanese.” Examples include *diaoyu* (“entrapment,” from *diaoyu zhifa*, “entrapment enforcement”), *ditan* (“low-carbon,” from *jiangdi eryanghuatan*, “reduce carbon dioxide”), *qin* (“dear,” from *qin'ai de*), *gaofushuai* (“tall, rich, and handsome,” from *gaoda*, *fuyou*, and *shuaiqi*), *shilian* (“lose contact,” from *shiqu lianluo* or *shiqu lianxi*), *gaodashang* (“high-end, grand, and classy,” from *gaoduan*, *daqi*, and *shangdangci*), 「女子会」 (“Women-only drinking get-together”), and 「帰宅難民」 (“People who are unable to return home because of a disaster and disrupted transportation services”).

Domain Distribution of Award-Winning Buzzwords in China and Japan From 2010 to 2025

To facilitate further comparative analysis, this paper summarizes the domain distribution of award-winning buzzwords in China and Japan from 2010 to 2025.

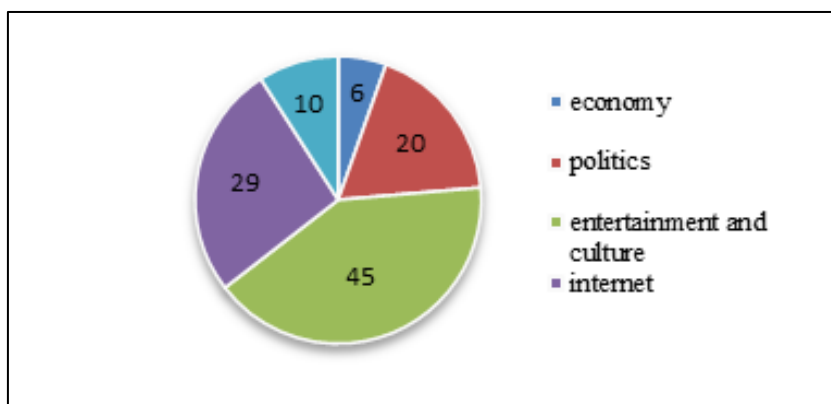


Figure 1. Domain distribution of Chinese buzzwords.

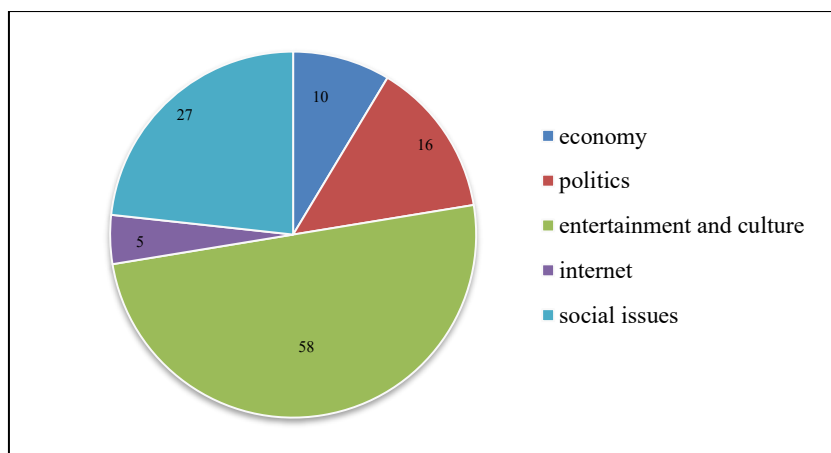


Figure 2. Domain distribution of Japanese buzzwords.

As illustrated in the statistical chart above (see Figures 1 & 2), the distribution spans five principal domains: economy, politics, entertainment and culture, the internet, and social issues. In China, buzzwords are most

prevalent in the domain of entertainment and culture, followed by the internet, and least prevalent in the economic domain. In Japan, buzzwords are most prevalent in the domain of entertainment and culture, followed by social issues, and least prevalent in the internet domain. Through an analysis of the domain distribution, two commonalities between Chinese and Japanese buzzwords are identified.

First, the entertainment industry exerts a significant influence on buzzwords. People's spiritual and cultural demands are steadily increasing. Consequently, the entertainment industry has developed rapidly in recent years, with films, television dramas, and variety shows gaining widespread popularity among the public, leading to a continuous rise in related buzzwords.

Second, buzzwords respond to social issues that command public attention, including economic and political matters. Buzzwords serve as a mirror of the times. Both in China and Japan, buzzwords reflect various facets of society, including its political, economic, and cultural dimensions.

Simultaneously, the domain distribution of Chinese and Japanese buzzwords reveals the following four differences:

First, compared with Japan, Chinese buzzwords are more profoundly influenced by the internet. These internet buzzwords are akin to footprints, representing all that has transpired and marking the inception of a culture of internet life.

Second, compared with China, Japanese buzzwords exhibit greater attention to sports. In the aftermath of World War II, Japan placed considerable emphasis on physical education and sports, achieving near-universal public sports education, with baseball and football becoming national pastimes. The Japanese populace demonstrates a high degree of interest in and participation in sports.

Third, compared with China, Japanese buzzwords display greater concern for social issues. As can be observed from the distribution, buzzwords pertaining to social issues account for half of the total. In the face of frequent social problems and a perceived lack of solutions, the Japanese populace may be using buzzwords to articulate their anxiety and unease.

Fourth, the focal points of entertainment-related buzzwords in China and Japan differ somewhat. In Japan, most such buzzwords are merely associated with entertainment per se. In China, however, buzzwords that originate from variety shows, television dramas, films, and similar media reflect social issues to a certain extent.

Reception, Transformation, and Mutual Translation of Award-Winning Buzzwords in China and Japan From 2010 to 2025

Through analysis, it is discovered that the following forms of reception and transformation exist between Chinese and Japanese buzzwords. On the one hand, ancient China exerted a profound influence on Japan. During the flourishing Tang Dynasty, Japan dispatched numerous envoys to China for study. Thereafter, Japan entered an era of comprehensive emulation of the Tang. Whether in institutions or language and culture, attire or living habits, the Japanese sought to imitate the Chinese as closely as possible. Some even declared outright that observing Japanese culture was akin to glimpsing a miniature reflection of the Great Tang. Upon entering the modern era, due to seclusionism and a backward, corrupt feudal system, China's national strength gradually waned, and the development of its cultural industries encountered difficulties. Meanwhile, Japan initiated the Meiji Restoration in 1868, comprehensively studying Western nations and thereby enhancing its overall national power. The export of Chinese culture to Japan diminished steadily. Since the reform and opening-up, under the

leadership of the Communist Party, China has developed rapidly, surpassing Japan to become the world's second-largest economy, and its influence over Japan has once again been steadily increasing.

On the other hand, it is widely recognized that Japan's cultural industries are relatively advanced. In particular, its tourism and animation industries hold a significant position globally. As Japan's close neighbor separated only by a narrow strip of water, China has also been influenced by Japan, a fact reflected in the award-winning buzzwords of recent years in China.

In the study of mutual translation, scholars have gradually shifted from pursuing rigid, text-level literal translation toward quantitative research on pragmatic functions. This shift is manifested primarily in two aspects:

The first aspect involves compensation strategies. In response to the frequent occurrence of abbreviations (such as “KY[can't read the room]” and “JK[High school girl]”) and ambiguous expressions in Japanese buzzwords, translation studies emphasize the addition of background annotations or contextual reconstruction to explicate the underlying culture of “reading the air” (「察し」).

The second aspect concerns functional equivalence. For emotive terms that defy direct translation (such as Chinese *neijuan* “involvement” and *tangping* “lying flat,” and the Japanese concept of “low desire”), researchers advocate seeking equivalent terms in the target language that possess similar socio-psychological functions, in order to preserve the original term's force of irony or self-deprecation.

Conclusion

Buzzwords possess unique characteristics of their own and are closely linked to the events they reflect. Whether in China or Japan, buzzwords mirror, to a certain extent, the changes and developments in society across political, economic, and cultural dimensions. By studying the distinctions and interconnections between Chinese and Japanese buzzwords, we can gain a deeper understanding of the differences in national conditions and cultural backgrounds between the two countries. This understanding is conducive to enhancing mutual comprehension, eliminating barriers, and facilitating comprehensive exchange and cooperation, thereby constructing a bridge of friendship between China and Japan.

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