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A Study on the Characteristics and Japanese Translation Strategies of University Mottos in Shanghai

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A university motto is a highly condensed expression of its cultural spirit and an important cultural name card for its international communication. Taking the mottos of six universities in Shanghai (Fudan University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Tongji University, East China Normal University, Shanghai International Studies University, and University of Shanghai for Science and Technology) as research objects, this paper explores the challenges in their Japanese translation. Based on the "Three-Dimensional Transformations" theory of Eco-translatology, this paper categorizes the Japanese translation strategies of these six mottos into three types: "formal equivalence," "Kanbun Kundoku" (the traditional Japanese method of reading classical Chinese), and "semantic equivalence," followed by a detailed analysis of specific cases.

Keywords: Shanghai, university motto, Japanese translation strategy, eco-translatology, Sino-Japanese homographs

Introduction

A university motto is a highly condensed summary of a university's cultural spirit, a concentrated expression of its unique educational philosophy and governance spirit, and the basic code of conduct and moral norms commonly observed by teachers and students (Zhou, 2008). With the frequent development of international cultural exchanges and national cooperation, the translation of university mottos plays an important role in external publicity, attracting overseas students, promoting institutional cooperation, and disseminating national culture. Foreign-language mottos have become an important window for foreigners to understand the educational philosophy and cultural traditions of Chinese universities. As the "cultural name card" of a university's external communication, the translation quality of the motto directly affects the construction of the university's international image. However, there are significant differences in the linguistic forms of university mottos between China and foreign countries. English university mottos mostly adopt sentence, noun, or noun phrase structures and are relatively short in form; while Chinese university mottos are mostly eight-character antithetical parallelism, composed of verbs, citing classics, and rich in educational functions (Zhang & Elliot, 2021).

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This paper employs Hu's (2008) "Three-Dimensional Transformations" theory of Eco-translatology and Nida's (1964) functional equivalence theory for translation. The linguistic dimension is the core of translation practice, requiring translators to achieve precise transformation at the lexical, syntactic, and textual levels. The cultural dimension requires translators to deeply understand the cultural backgrounds of the source and target languages to ensure that the translation can accurately convey the cultural connotations of the original. The communicative dimension requires translators to focus on the communicative intention and function of the original text, ensuring that the translation can achieve the same communicative effect as the original. This paper first examines the characteristics of the mottos of six universities in Shanghai, analyzes the challenges in the Chinese-to-Japanese translation process, and explores how the translation can achieve the best effect in terms of linguistic form, cultural connotation, and communication. On this basis, this paper adopts three translation strategies—formal equivalence, Kanbun Kundoku, and semantic equivalence—for the Japanese translation of the mottos of these six universities, achieving good translation results.

Characteristics of University Mottos in Shanghai

As an important highland of higher education in China, Shanghai gathers a number of universities with long histories and profound cultural heritage. The motto of each university is a highly condensed expression of its educational philosophy, spiritual tradition, and value pursuit. It is not only an identifier of the school's cultural identity, but also an earnest expectation for the character cultivation and academic pursuit of teachers and students. The following is a detailed explanation of the mottos of the six universities—Fudan University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Tongji University, East China Normal University, Shanghai International Studies University, and University of Shanghai for Science and Technology—to gain a deeper understanding of their connotations and contemporary significance.

The Motto of Fudan University

The motto of Fudan University, "博学而笃志，切问而近思" (Extensive learning and firm will, earnest inquiry and close reflection), originates from the Analects of Confucius. Zixia, a disciple of Confucius, said, "Extensive learning and firm will, earnest inquiry and close reflection—benevolence is found therein." This motto closely combines scholarship with self-cultivation, reflecting Fudan University's comprehensive requirements for academic breadth, firm ambition, essential questioning, and practical thinking. "Extensive learning" emphasizes wide exposure and broad vision, requiring students not to be confined to one corner but to be inclusive in the ocean of knowledge; "firm will" emphasizes the firmness and single-mindedness of ambition, reminding people not to forget their fundamental goals while learning extensively, avoiding aimlessness and superficiality. "Earnest inquiry" requires questions to hit the vital point and stay close to reality, not indulging in empty talk; "close reflection" advocates in-depth thinking starting from specific issues around oneself, from near to far, from small to large. The four are complementary, serving as both a method of scholarship and a way of self-cultivation, reflecting Fudan's academic tradition of independent thinking, reverence for truth, and pursuit of excellence.

The Motto of Shanghai Jiao Tong University

The motto of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, "饮水思源，爱国荣校" (Remember the source when drinking water; love the country and bring honor to the school), is plain in language but profound in meaning. "Remember the source when drinking water" uses the metaphor of not forgetting the source when drinking water, emphasizing

gratitude and the spirit of not forgetting one's roots, requiring students to remember the school's cultivation, teachers' teachings, and social nourishment, and to understand how to repay and contribute. "Love the country and bring honor to the school" elevates personal emotions and responsibilities to the national and collective levels, emphasizing the transformation of patriotic feelings and the ambition to honor the school into practical actions, and closely combining personal growth with national development and school honor. This motto contains both the traditional virtue of repaying kindness and the sentiments of modern Chinese intellectuals who care for the country and serve it through industry, inspiring teachers and students to shoulder social responsibilities while pursuing personal development and contribute to the prosperity of the country and the glory of the school through practical actions.

The Motto of Tongji University

The motto of Tongji University, "同舟共济" (Crossing a river in the same boat), is taken from the allusion in *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu (5th century BC): "The people of Wu and Yue are hostile to each other, but when they cross a river in the same boat and encounter wind, they rescue each other like left and right hands." It has since become a classic expression of unity, collaboration, and overcoming difficulties together in Chinese culture. As a motto, it implies that teachers and students should be of one mind and one virtue, unite and help each other, and move forward hand in hand to overcome difficulties. At the same time, "crossing a river in the same boat" does not stop at interpersonal collaboration within the school, but extends to a mission pursuit of saving the world and rejuvenating the nation: serving society and benefiting the people with professional knowledge, and sharing hardships and seeking common development in national construction and human welfare. This motto reflects both the pragmatic and collaborative character of Tongji people and the school's responsibility of taking the world as its own duty.

The Motto of East China Normal University

The motto of East China Normal University, "求实创造，为人师表" (Seeking truth and innovation; being a model for others), closely follows the mission and pursuit of normal education. "Seeking truth" requires teachers and students to adhere to a down-to-earth academic attitude, respect facts, pursue truth, and avoid impetuosity and exaggeration; "innovation" emphasizes the spirit of pioneering and innovation, encouraging the exploration of new knowledge and the creation of new realms on a solid foundation. The combination of the two reflects an academic character that values both foundation and breakthrough. "Being a model for others" points out the fundamental responsibility of normal universities: Learning is the teacher, and integrity is the model, requiring teachers and students to become role models in both knowledge and morality, and to influence and cultivate the next generation with their words and deeds. This motto integrates academic attitude, innovative spirit, and teacher ethics, serving as both a criterion for normal education and a universal expectation for all teachers and students.

The Motto of Shanghai International Studies University

The motto of Shanghai International Studies University, "格高志远，学贯中外" (Noble character and lofty aspirations; mastering both Chinese and foreign learning), reflects the unique positioning and pursuit of foreign language universities. "Noble character" requires noble moral character and upright personality, focusing on the improvement of moral cultivation and spiritual realm; "lofty aspirations" requires lofty ambitions and a global vision, not satisfied with immediate utilitarianism, but planning life with a long-term perspective. "Mastering both Chinese and foreign learning" vividly reflects the disciplinary characteristics and mission of SISU: It is

necessary to deeply study fine Chinese culture and extensively absorb the achievements of human civilization, to be inclusive and learn from others' strengths in the integration of Chinese and foreign cultures, and to become a bridge for communication between China and foreign countries. This motto unifies character, ambition, and knowledge, inspiring students to establish themselves with noble character, lead with lofty ambitions, and serve the country's opening-up and cultural exchange with knowledge that connects China and foreign countries.

The Motto of University of Shanghai for Science and Technology

The motto of University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, "信义勤爱，思学志远" (Integrity, righteousness, diligence, and benevolence; pondering and learning with lofty aspirations), has a neat structure and rich connotations. "Integrity, righteousness, diligence, and benevolence" focuses on moral cultivation, corresponding to integrity, justice, diligence, and benevolence in traditional Chinese culture: establishing oneself with integrity, acting with justice, working diligently, and treating others with benevolence. Together, the four constitute the basic principles of being a person. "Pondering and learning with lofty aspirations" emphasizes academic methods and life attitudes, advocating the combination of thinking and learning—not only being diligent in learning, but also being good at thinking; learning without thinking leads to confusion, thinking without learning leads to peril; at the same time, establishing lofty aspirations and leading learning and practice with high goals. This motto places equal emphasis on moral cultivation and academic pursuit, reflecting the school's educational philosophy of having both ability and political integrity and integrating knowledge with action.

Although the mottos of the above six universities have different expressions and emphases, they all run through the nourishment of excellent traditional Chinese culture, emphasizing the unity of moral cultivation and academic pursuit, and the combination of personal growth and social responsibility. They are not only condensed expressions of the spiritual temperament of each school, but also jointly constitute a rich and profound spiritual map of Shanghai's higher education. These six universities belong to different types of universities, and their mottos reflect the characteristics of the mottos of six universities in Shanghai to a certain extent.

First, they are rooted in classics with profound cultural heritage. The wording of Chinese mottos is mostly not created out of thin air, but directly traced to or adapted from traditional Chinese classic texts, which is their most fundamental cultural characteristic. For example, Fudan University's "博学而笃志，切问而近思" comes from the Analects; Shanghai Jiao Tong University's "饮水思源" is adapted from a poem by Yu Xin; Tongji University's "同舟共济" originates from *The Art of War*. This high dependence on classics makes the motto carry a profound historical weight in just a few words.

Second, they emphasize both morality and learning, focusing on education. In terms of content orientation, the mottos of Shanghai universities generally emphasize the cultivation of personal character and the accumulation of knowledge. On the one hand, "learning" is the core, such as "学贯中外" of Shanghai International Studies University and "思学" of University of Shanghai for Science and Technology; on the other hand, "morality" is the foundation, such as "信义勤爱" of University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, which focuses on integrity, justice, diligence, and benevolence, and "为人师表" of East China Normal University, which emphasizes the exemplary role of teachers' ethics. This reflects the fundamental mission of "learning as the foundation" and the educational tradition of "morality first" in Chinese universities, embodying the educational philosophy of Chinese education that closely combines the pursuit of individual moral self-discipline with knowledge exploration.

Third, they have antithetical sentence structures and harmonious phonology. The mottos of Shanghai universities mostly adopt neat antithetical structures in form (Pan, 2014), such as "信义勤爱，思学志远" of University of Shanghai for Science and Technology and "格高志远，学贯中外" of Shanghai International Studies University. This structure is not only balanced in antithesis, concise, and powerful (Zhou, 2008), facilitating memorization and inheritance by teachers and students, but also constitutes a unique oriental formal beauty in vision and hearing.

Challenges in Translating University Mottos in Shanghai into Japanese

The mottos of six universities in Shanghai face unique challenges when converted into Japanese, specifically reflected in the following three challenges:

First, There Are Challenges in Translating Confucian Classics and Allusions

In response to the above characteristic of being "rooted in classics," the four-character structures widely used in mottos are condensed in meaning and neat in rhythm, representing Confucian culture. It is difficult for Japanese to reproduce the triple effects of "conciseness, rhythm, and metaphor" within the same length. If directly translated into modern Japanese, the cultural connotations carried by the allusions may be lost.

Second, It Is Difficult to Reproduce the Four-Character Antithetical Structure and Phonology With Equal Length

In response to the above characteristic of "antithetical sentence structures," such as "信义勤爱，思学志远" of University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, this structure has a distinct rhythm, and in the Fudan University motto, "志" (zhi) and "思" (si) also form a rhyme (Mai & Wang, 2011). However, the beauty of Chinese tones is completely different from the syllable beat of Japanese, and translators must accurately convey the meaning while maintaining formal beauty as much as possible.

Finally, Homographs Within the Chinese Character Cultural Sphere Can Easily Lead to "Taking Words Too Literally"

The Chinese character words widely used in mottos often have semantic differences in Chinese and Japanese. For example, "博学" (hakugaku) in Japanese focuses more on the noun "extensive knowledge," while in Chinese, we are more likely to associate it with the action of "learning extensively." Therefore, if translators take it for granted that Chinese character words can be directly interchanged, it can easily lead to serious cross-cultural misunderstandings.

Translation Strategies for University Mottos in Shanghai

Based on the above analysis, this paper categorizes the Japanese translation strategies for the mottos of six universities in Shanghai into the following three types.

First, Formal Equivalence

Formal equivalence emphasizes that in the translation process, without violating the basic grammatical norms of the target language, the literal meaning, rhetorical devices, and formal structure of the original text should be preserved as much as possible, pursuing a high degree of correspondence between the translation and the original in form. In the context of the Chinese character cultural sphere, China and Japan share a large number of homographic Chinese character words, which provides a natural advantage for the formal equivalence strategy.

The biggest advantage of this strategy is that it can preserve the visual impact and cultural heritage of the original text, allowing Japanese readers to directly evoke semantic associations through Chinese character shapes. For example, the motto of Tongji University, "同舟共济," can be directly translated as 「同舟共済 (どうしゅうきょうさい)」; the first four characters of the motto of University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, "信义勤爱," can be directly translated as 「信、義、勤、愛」. This translation method not only perfectly translates the Chinese four-character structure, but also preserves the solemn and concise visual beauty of the motto.

Second, Kanbun Kundoku (The Traditional Japanese Method of Reading Classical Chinese)

Kanbun Kundoku refers to "a translation method that, while maintaining the original structure of classical Chinese, uses annotation marks to indicate pronunciation, meaning, and word order." The advantage of this method is that it can preserve the original appearance of classical texts to the greatest extent while smoothly bridging the gap in word order and grammar between China and Japan. For example, the motto of Fudan University, "博学而笃志，切问而近思," if translated purely into modern Japanese, would lose the antithetical beauty of classical Chinese, while directly copying the Chinese text would not conform to Japanese habits. Using Kanbun Kundoku, it can be translated as 「博く学びて篤く志し、切に問いて近く思う」. Similarly, the last four characters of the motto of University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, "思学志远," can be translated using Kanbun Kundoku as 「学を思ひて遠くを志す」. This translation method is concise, intuitive, expressive, and easy to understand.

Third, Semantic Equivalence

Semantic equivalence refers to "the translation process that does not rigidly adhere to the literal meaning and sentence structure of the original text but prioritizes conveying the meaning and spirit of the original." Its advantage is that it can maximize the smoothness of cross-cultural communication and eliminate semantic misunderstandings. However, the impact is that it will inevitably lose part of the formal beauty and phonological rhythm of the source language. For example, the motto of East China Normal University, "求实创造，为人师表," can be translated using the semantic equivalence strategy as 「真実を求め、創造性を育み、世の人の模範となれ」. This translation method conforms to the reading habits of the target readers, and the translation is natural, fluent, free in form, and easy to understand.

Conclusion

From the perspective of the Chinese character cultural sphere, this paper explores the translation challenges of the mottos of six universities in Shanghai in the Chinese-to-Japanese translation process, which mainly include the difficulty in translating Confucian classics, the inability to translate four-character structures antithetically, and the tendency to take Sino-Japanese homographs too literally. In response to the above three translation challenges, this paper adopts three translation methods: formal equivalence, Kanbun Kundoku, and semantic equivalence, solving the challenges in the external translation of the mottos of six universities in Shanghai. This study not only provides a reference for the Japanese translation of Chinese university mottos, but also serves as a bridge for the external dissemination of Chinese culture.

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