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A Study on Differences in Commercial Effects of Chinese Translation Methods for Japanese Film Titles

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Abstract: *The translation of film titles has become a crucial commercial tool in China's growing imported film market. This study examines 134 Japanese films released in the Chinese mainland between 2015 and 2025, analyzing their Chinese title translations which are categorized as conventional, adaptive, or a combination of both methods. Using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), the study compares the box office performance of these categories and finds significant differences. The combined method yields the highest average box office, followed by the adaptive method, while the conventional method brings in the lowest revenue. The study attributes this gap to three factors: the conciseness of the Chinese titles, the preservation of the original title structure and core film theme, and the impact of intellectual property. To address issues such as information loss in purely phonetic translations and rigid literal translations that obscure the theme, targeted optimization strategies are proposed. These strategies take into account the linguistic and expressive differences between Chinese and Japanese and advocate for a flexible combination of translation methods. The goal of this study is to provide empirical evidence and practical guidance for translating Japanese film titles into Chinese.*

Keywords: *Japanese Film Titles, Chinese Translation Method, Commercial Effects, Box Office Revenue, Analysis of Variance*

1. Introduction

China's film market has experienced consistent growth in recent years, with imported films playing a significant role in its content. In particular, Japanese films have gained a stable and devoted audience, spanning across various genres such as animation, drama, and suspense. The number of imported Japanese films and their combined ticket sales have both shown a steady increase, as illustrated in Figure 1. This trend highlights the strong potential of the market.

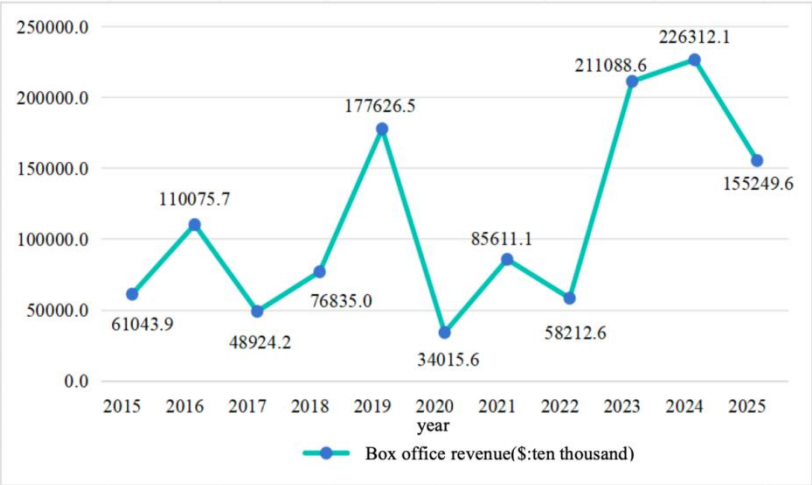


Figure 1: Trend of box office revenue for Japanese films released in Chinese mainland from 2015 to 2025 (Data source: Maoyan Movie Pro, as of January 14, 2026)

Many researchers agree that a film's title is closely tied to how well it does at the box office. Lü

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(2011) sees films as cultural products that are bought and sold around the world. He points out that box office earnings are the main way to judge a film's commercial success [1]. For imported films, the way a title is translated directly shapes how the market receives it. Li (2002) treats film title translation as a type of advertising translation [2]. Its main job is to promote the film. Its final goal is to make more people want to watch it and to bring in higher ticket sales.

Later studies have focused on understanding the mechanisms behind these commercial effects. According to Wang et al. (2006), the translation of film titles should aim to strike a balance between profitability and artistic integrity [3]. A well-crafted title can enhance promotional efforts and increase the efficiency of marketing. Xu (2008) also emphasizes the crucial role that a well-translated title plays in the success of a film at the box office [4]. These translations are instrumental in facilitating a film's quick entry into the market and expanding its reach to a wider audience.

Researchers now look at how film titles affect business in three main areas. The first area is information. Zhang (2024) points out that audiences pick up key details about a film from its title [5]. A good translation reaches the right audience. It helps turn their interest into actual ticket sales. The second area is culture. Li (2020) finds that adding local cultural touches to a title raises its commercial value [6]. At the same time, it makes viewers feel a stronger cultural connection. The third area is visual and sound appeal. This, in turn, helps the film spread more widely and sell better.

For analytical frameworks, Wang and Kuang (2008)put forward a conception called the "Source Process and Sink" [7]. This framework makes clear that information and aesthetics are the main channels through which a title performs its commercial role. It offers a clear theoretical base for studying how film titles create their commercial effects.

Most scholars agree that film title translation affects a film's box office results. But the research so far is mostly based on theory and description. It fails to provide clear empirical conclusions regarding the differences in commercial effectiveness across various translation methods. Also, most commercially focused studies look at English film titles. Very few studies take a close look at Japanese film titles. To fill these research gaps, this study focuses on Japanese films. It collects box office data from 134 Japanese films released in the Chinese mainland. A one-way ANOVA is used to test, with numbers, how commercial effects differ across translation methods. These quantitative results are combined with qualitative analysis. The goal is to find the translation methods that lead to the best commercial outcomes.

2. Data and Methodology

2.1. Data source

This study utilizes final box office data from Maoyan Pro for each film released in the Chinese mainland. These data serve as the measure of commercial impact. The original Japanese titles, official Chinese translations, and release dates are obtained from Douban Movies. This information is then used to categorize the films into different translation method groups. All data used in this study are official and publicly available on both platforms, ensuring the reliability of the dataset and the trustworthiness of its sources. The sample includes Japanese films released in the Chinese mainland from 2015 to 2025. Films without public box office records and those with limited screenings are excluded from the study. The final valid sample consists of 134 films.

2.2. Classification Criteria for Translation Methods

This study uses a classification system for translation methods. Guan (2013) proposed the system [8]. It is based on how the source and target languages match up. The system also takes into account the translation features specific to Japanese film titles. It divides all sample translations into three main groups. Appendix 1 gives the full details. This grouping captures the key differences between translation methods. It also makes sure each sample group meets the statistical requirements for analysis of variance. This allows a reliable test of how commercial impact differs across translation strategies.

(1) Conventional methods: These method uses only literal translation. It keeps the translated title exactly the same as the original in structure, meaning, and form.

(2) Alternative methods: These methods use other techniques such as conversion, adaptation,

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transliteration, and restructuring. One or more of these techniques may be applied. Literal translation is not part of this group.

(3) Combined methods: These method mixes literal translation with at least one alternative technique. It balances staying faithful to the original language and making the title work for the audience.

2.3. Applicability of Research Methods

R. Fisher (2006) first proposed analysis of variance (ANOVA). It tests whether the means of two or more groups differ in a statistically meaningful way. The core idea is simple. The total variance in the data is broken down into two parts: variance between groups and variance within groups. Then these two parts are compared. This comparison tells us whether the differences seen between groups can be explained by the single factor being studied [9]. This study checks whether average box office revenue differs significantly across the three translation method groups. This is a standard case of comparing means across several groups. Translation method is the only independent variable here. So, one-way ANOVA is the right statistical tool for this research.

3. Empirical Analysis of Variations in the Commercial Impact of Translation Methods

3.1. Data Preprocessing

(1) Normality Test

This study first converts the box office revenue data using logarithms. This transformation reduces the impact of extreme values. It also makes the data's shape look more like a normal bell curve. After that, a test is run to check whether the converted data really follows this normal pattern. This step helps make sure that all later analysis results are reliable.

The null hypothesis (H0) states that film box office revenue is normally distributed. Two rules help decide if this is true. The first rule uses the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. A p-value above 0.05 means the data follows a normal distribution. The second rule comes from Finney et al. (2006). It says that data can be treated as normal when kurtosis is under 7 and skewness is under 2 [10].

As presented in Table 1, the ln_box office revenue records a kurtosis of −0.433 and a skewness of −0.166. Table 2 and Figure 2 show that the histogram exhibits characteristics consistent with a normal distribution. The K-S test returns a p-value of 0.200, which exceeds the 0.05 threshold. All evidence collectively confirms that the logarithm of box office revenue follows a normal distribution.

Table 1: The K-S test for box office revenue

Variables	Mean	Median	SD	Kurtosis	Skewness	K-S test
ln_box office revenue	8.067	8.0182	0.136	-0.433	-0.166	0.200

Table 2: The distribution range of ln_ box office revenue

ln_box office revenue range	Frequency
4.00<	0
4.00~4.50	3
4.50~5.00	1
5.00~5.50	3
5.50~6.00	7
6.00~6.50	7

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6.50~7.00	10
7.00~7.50	20
7.50~8.00	16
8.00~8.50	13
8.50~9.00	11
9.00~9.50	18
9.50~10.00	12
10.00~10.50	5
10.50~11.00	4
11.00~11.50	4
11.50~12.00	0
>12.00	0

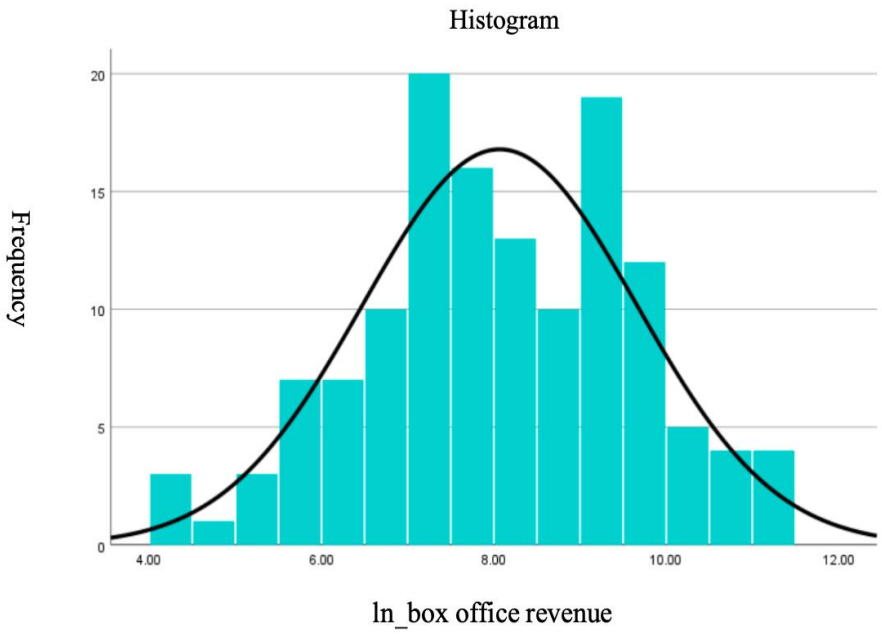


Figure 2: Frequency histogram of ln_box office revenue

(2)Homogeneity of Variance Test

The homogeneity of variance test is used to verify whether variances are uniformly distributed across sample groups. Its null hypothesis (H0) states that variances are equal across all groups. When the test returns a p-value above the conventional significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. As shown in Table 3, the test yields a p-value of 0.573, which is notably higher than the 0.05 threshold. The null hypothesis is therefore retained, confirming that the data satisfy the homogeneity of variance assumption.

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Table 3: Homogeneity-of-variance test

ln_box office revenue	Levene Test	Redom1	Redom 2	p-value
Base on the Mean	0.559	2	131	0.573

3.2. Result of one-way ANOVA

This study conducts a one-way ANOVA on ln_box office revenue across the three translation method groups. The results are presented in Table 4. The analysis yields an F-value of 6.543 and a p-value of 0.002, well below the 0.05 significance threshold. This finding confirms that at least one translation method group differs significantly from the others in commercial impact.

Table 4: One-Way ANOVA test

Variables	ln_box office revenue	F-value	p-value
Conventional methods	7.23±1.551	6.543	0.002
Alternative methods	8.15±1.643		
Conventional methods+Alternative methods	8.45±1.423		

3.3. Post-hoc analysis

Post-hoc analysis further elucidates the specific direction of intergroup differences. With a sample size exceeding 50, the LSD method is employed for post-hoc multiple comparisons, as shown in Table 5:

Compared with the Alternative methods group, the Conventional methods group shows a statistically significant difference in box office performance ($p = 0.011 < 0.05$), with the commercial impact of the alternative methods significantly higher than that of the Conventional methods. Furthermore, when the conventional methods group is compared with the combined Conventional and Alternative methods group, the p-value is significantly lower than 0.05, indicating a substantial difference in box office performance; the combined methods group demonstrates markedly superior commercial effectiveness compared to the Conventional methods group alone.

Compared with the Conventional methods + Alternative methods group, the Alternative methods group shows no significant difference in box office revenue ($p = 0.328 > 0.05$), nor are there notable differences in commercial impact between the two translation methods.

Thus, the commercial effectiveness ranking of the three translation methods is as follows: Conventional methods + Alternative methods > Alternative methods > Conventional methods. Among these, the combination of Conventional methods and Alternative methods demonstrates the best commercial performance, whereas Conventional methods exhibit weaker commercial efficacy.

Table 5: Three translation methods for multiple comparisons after ANOVA of ln_box office revenue

Classification of Translation Methods(I)	Classification of Translation Methods(J)	SE (I-J)	p- value
Conventional methods	Alternative methods	-0.923*	0.011
	Conventional methods＋Alternative methods	-1.122*	<0.001
Alternative methods	Conventional methods	0.923*	0.011
	Conventional methods＋Alternative methods	-0.298	0.328

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Conventional methods＋ Alternative methods	Conventional methods	1.122*	<0.001
	Alternative methods	0.298	0.328

4. Analysis of Underlying Causes of Commercial Impact Variations

4.1. The Conciseness of Chinese Translations

Existing research notes that title translation should rely on concise lexical expressions rather than complete sentence structures [11]. Japanese film titles often contain long syntactic structures, function words, particles and relational markers, and these elements are typically omitted in Chinese rendering. Instead of using strict literal translations, translators can choose their own words. They balance keeping the meaning accurate and giving the title a sense of depth. This method helps audiences quickly grasp the film's main theme. It also cuts down on confusion. Strict literal translations keep every original element. But they often become too long. That length makes the title harder to spread. By contrast, a condensed translation removes non-essential details. It keeps the core IP content and the key words. This makes the translated title much more concise. For example, the Chinese translation of "劇場版プロジェクトセカイ 壊れたセカイと歌えないミク" as "世界计划：无法歌唱的初音未来" drops the equivalents of "剧场版" and "破碎的世界". The main message stays the same, and the translated title becomes shorter and smoother to read.

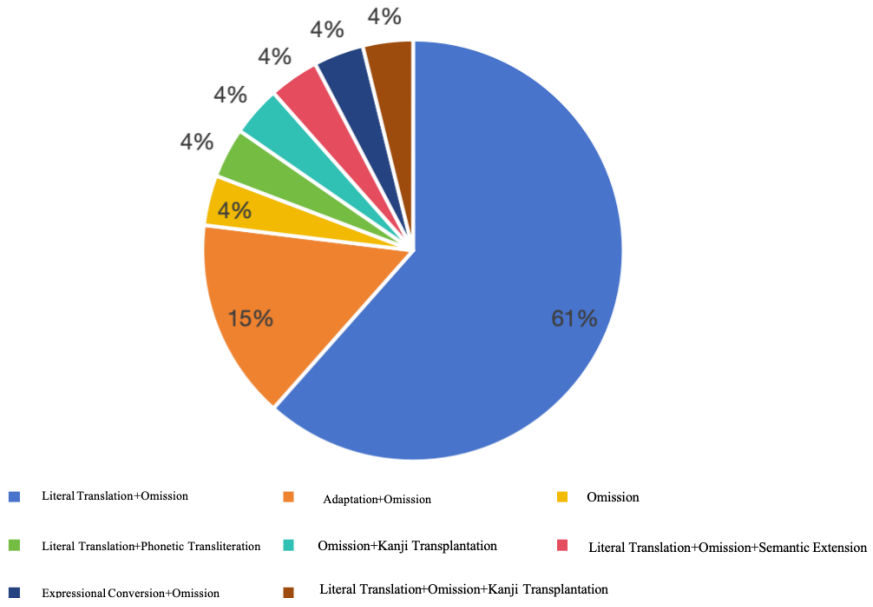


Figure 3: Translation method that emphasizes concise Chinese expression

Figure 3 shows this clearly. A total of 26 Japanese films use this shortened translation method. These films make up 18.7% of the full sample. Together, they earned $317,113.7 at the box office. That amount equals 25.5% of the total box office revenue brought in by all Japanese films in the study.

4.2. Preservation of Original Title Form and Thematic Essence

Delivering information well is a key goal of film title translation. How clearly a translated title communicates directly shapes how well it fits the target audience. Strict literal translation sticks closely to the original words. This often makes the message twisted or vague. It fails to really connect with viewers. Alternative translation, on the other hand, may stray too far from the source text. It can lose the core appeal that draws the audience in. The combined method keeps the original heart of the title. It also makes the message clearer. So, it gives the best overall communication.

Take "劇場版 Spy x Family Code: White " as an example. Its Chinese translation "间谍过家家 代号：白" integrates three techniques: literal rendering, abbreviation and extended interpretation, representing a blend of Conventional and Alternative methods. Specifically, "Spy" and "Code: White" are translated literally to retain core original elements, while the "劇場版" label is omitted to enhance conciseness. The

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word "过家家" is rendered through its metaphorical meaning, which accurately captures the film's plot of building a simulated family to complete a mission.

The literal parts are designed for core audiences. These include fans of the original work and people who watch spy films. The adaptive parts highlight the family and playful sides of the story. They widen the film's appeal beyond its main audience. They attract female viewers, families, and younger people. Table 6 shows that 32 films use this translation method. It keeps the original title's visual form and also conveys its theme. These films make up 23.9% of all Japanese films in the sample. Together, they brought in $271,552.2 at the box office. This amount accounts for 21.9% of the total box office for the sample.

Table 6: A translation method that emphasizes the original film title's format while reflecting the movie's core theme.

Translation methods	Number
Literal Translation+Omission	16
Literal Translation+Semantic Restoration+Adaptation	3
Literal Translation+Title Reconstruction	3
Literal Translation+Amplification	3
Literal Translation+Semantic Extension+Romaji Transplantation	1
Literal Translation+Semantic Extension+Phonetic Transliteration	1
Literal Translation+Expressional Conversion	1
Literal Translation+Omission+Semantic Extension	1
Literal Translation+Semantic Restoration	1
Literal Translation+Omission+Kanji Transplantation	1
Literal Translation+Adaptation	1
Total	32

4.3. Focus on the IP impact

IP means intellectual property. In the film business, companies with strong IP assets can earn high returns at every stage of the industry chain [12]. For well-known IP series like "名侦探柯南""樱桃小丸子""哆啦 A 梦""宝可梦", translators use the same title translation strategies each time a film is released in Chinese mainland. This practice ensures the full commercial value of IP. Table 7 and Figure 4 show that 56 IP-based films are in the sample of Japanese films released in the Chinese mainland. They make up 42% of the total. Table 8 then breaks down how translation methods are distributed among these IP films. 37 of them adopt the combined Conventional and Alternative methods. Another 13 IP films use only adaptive translation methods, representing 23% of IP films and 9.7% of all Japanese films in the sample.Japanese films with IP-focused title translations generate a total box office revenue of $554,291.1, contributing 44.5% of the total sample box office.

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Table 7: Japanese film series and non-series films

Film Genre	Series	Non-series
Number	56	78

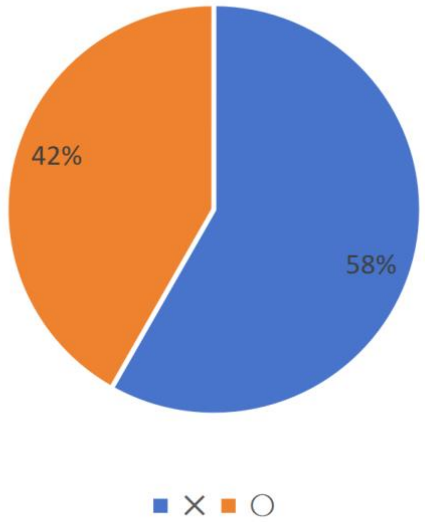


Figure 4: The proportion of Japanese film series released in Chinese mainland from 2015 to 2025

Table 8: Classification of Chinese translation methods for film titles in the Japanese film series

Classification of Translation Methods	Conventional methods	Alternative methods	Conventional method+Alternative methods
Number	6	13	37

5. Limitations and Recommendations for Chinese Translation of Japanese Film Titles

5.1. Information Loss Caused by Pure Phonetic Transliteration

A translation that only copies the sound of the original title keeps nothing but the pronunciation. It tells you nothing about the film's genre, theme, or style. Most viewers cannot pull any meaningful information from such a title. This dampens their interest in watching, and it weakens the title's ability to promote the film. Take the film "プロメア" as an example. Its Chinese sound-based title "普罗米亚" copies the original sound but nothing else. It fails to communicate the core idea: characters who control fire and carry out firefighting rescues. So, viewers outside the core fan base find it hard to form an intention to watch. By contrast, the Hong Kong release title "The Flame of Prometheus" adds extra context. It makes the central theme much clearer. The same problem appears with "ダンダダン", which is turned into "当哒当" using only sound. This title delivers no key information about the film. As a result, its promotional value is limited.

5.2. Stiff Rendering and Inadequate Thematic Conveyance Caused by Strict Literal Translation

Some Japanese film titles contain cultural meanings or abstract ideas. When translated literally, the Chinese versions often sound stiff and unclear. They don't follow natural Chinese expression habits. This can even cause viewers to misunderstand the film.

For example, the literal translation of "紅の豚" is "红猪". This easily makes viewers think the film is about animals. It fails to convey the core premise of a transformed pilot and the film's chivalrous tone. In contrast, the Hong Kong release title "飞天红猪侠" adds extra meaning. It explains who the character

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is and what he stands for. This method greatly improves how accurately the information reaches the audience.

Another example is "夜明けのすべて". Its literal translation "黎明的一切" comes across as abstract and vague. It fails to express the film's central themes of suffering and redemption. So, it does not connect with viewers on an emotional level.

5.3. Recommendations for Chinese Translation Strategies of Japanese Film Titles

When translating Japanese film titles, translators must first consider the language differences between Chinese and Japanese. They should choose methods that are suitable for the target audience, taking into account differences in sentence structure, omitted information, and overall style. Chinese follows an SVO word order, placing emphasis on the subject and prioritizing conciseness. In contrast, Japanese adopts an SOV structure and often omits the subject. Japanese expressions also tend to be more subtle and indirect. Therefore, translators should avoid a mechanical, literal translation and instead fully understand the nuances of the Japanese text. This will allow them to make changes that align with natural Chinese language habits. Different types of title expressions may require specific adjustments. For Japanese titles that omit information, adding extra words can sharpen the meaning. For vague or abstract titles, the message can be conveyed more directly to lower the barrier to understanding. Additionally, long modifier phrases should be shortened to match the concise and clean style of Chinese film titles. Only when a translated title fully reflects the language and thinking habits of the target market can it effectively communicate and deliver real business value. Secondly, translators should be flexible and combine different translation methods. Relying on just one method can have clear commercial downsides. A mixed strategy, on the other hand, can lead to the best business results. In practice, translators should not be bound by a single method and should adapt their approach to suit the unique features of each film. This allows them to balance four important factors: accurately conveying information, fitting the cultural context, creating an appealing title, and achieving strong box office returns.

6. Conclusion

This study analyzed 134 Japanese films that were released in the Chinese mainland. The purpose of the study was to use one-way ANOVA to determine how different translation methods impact box office performance. The data clearly shows that combined methods have the best performance, followed by alternative methods, with conventional methods ranking last. The study identified three factors that contribute to these differences in commercial success. Firstly, concise titles reduce the mental effort required for audiences to understand the film, making it easier for the title to spread. Secondly, finding a balance between the original form and core theme of the film ensures that the messaging is accurate and appeals to a wider audience. Lastly, strategies that focus on intellectual property (IP) help to stabilize a film's baseline revenue. However, the current translation practices still have significant flaws. For example, translations that only use sound leave out important information, while literal translations can come across as awkward or vague. These issues weaken the mass appeal of the film and ultimately hurt its box office returns. The solution is to acknowledge and respect the differences between Chinese and Japanese languages and to use a flexible combination of translation methods to maximize the commercial success of a film.

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Appendix 1 Classification of methods for translating Japanese film titles into Chinese

Classification of Translation Methods	Detailed Classification of Translation Methods	Definition	Case Example	Application of Translation Methods
Conventional methods	Literal Translation	Literal translation fully aligns with the original title across syntactic structure, semantic meaning, expressive style and linguistic context. It preserves both the form and content of the original title as completely as possible. This method is suitable for titles with high semantic consistency between Chinese and Japanese.	Original Title: 聲の形 Chinese Translation: 声之形 Original Title: 未来のミライ Chinese Translation: 未来的未来	Only literal translation is adopted.
Alternative methods	Expressional Conversion	These adjustments cover various forms of linguistic conversion. Specific types include part-of-speech conversion, affirmative-negative conversion, sentence pattern conversion, tone conversion, tense conversion and intonation conversion. Adjustments to the grammatical number of nouns and pronouns also belong to this category.	Original Title: 君と 100 回目の恋 Chinese Translation: 与君相恋 100 次	One or more Alternative methods are adopted.
	Semantic Extension	Make moderate extensions and expansions based on the original semantic meaning to enrich its connotation.	Original Title: 涙そうそう Chinese Translation: 泪光闪闪	
	Adaptation	Adaptation shifts the translation perspective. It reinterprets the original meaning with target-language vocabulary and replaces vague literal renderings.	Original Title: となりの怪物くん Chinese Translation: 邻座的怪同学	
	Amplification	Amplification adds necessary information while preserving the original core content. It effectively reduces audience comprehension effort.	Original Title: 一休さん Chinese Translation: 聪明的一休	
	Omission	Omission removes non-essential modifiers from the original title. It aligns the translation with the concise expressive style of Chinese film titles.	Original Title: まほろ駅前多田便利軒 Chinese Translation: 多田便利屋	
	Semantic Restoration	Semantic restoration downplays the formal features of the source language. It restores the underlying cultural connotations and core semantics of the original title. This method mainly covers	Original Title: PU-PU-PU Chinese Translation: 打工疯神榜	

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Classification of Translation Methods	Detailed Classification of Translation Methods	Definition	Case Example	Application of Translation Methods
		cultural information and metaphorical expressions that lack equivalent expressions in the target language.		
	Kanji Transplantation	Kanji transplantation retains the original written form of Japanese kanji terms from the source title.	Original Title: 世にも奇妙な物語 Chinese Translation: 世界奇妙物语	
	Romaji Transplantation	Romaji transplantation directly preserves the romanized spelling of the original title.	Original Title: ドラゴンボール Z Chinese Translation: 龙珠 Z	
	Phonetic Transliteration	Phonetic transliteration retains the phonetic features of the original title in translation. It is mainly adopted for proper nouns such as character names.	Original Title: コナン Chinese Translation: 柯南	
	Title Reconstruction	Title reconstruction abandons the original linguistic form entirely. It reshapes the translated title according to the film's core message and the characteristics of target audiences, standing as the most radical adaptation strategy.	Original Title: となりのトトロ Chinese Translation: 龙猫	
Conventional methods+Alternative methods	Literal Translation+N (N∈Alternative methods)	Literal Translation + Adaptive Variants retains partial formal features and semantic correspondences of the original title. Meanwhile, it adopts flexible adjustments to satisfy the expressive norms of the target language and audience comprehension demands.	Original Title: 8 年越しの花嫁 奇跡の実話 Chinese Translation: 跨越 8 年的新娘 (Literal Translation+Omission)	This method simultaneously applies literal translation and no less than one alternative method.