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Čínsky znak na obálke znamenajúci 'východ', pochádzajúci od Liu Xie 劉解 (1781–1840), bol vyrytý do nefritu podľa vzoru zo začiatku nášho letopočtu. · The Chinese character with the meaning 'east' employed on the cover is cut as a seal by Liu Xie, on the basis of models from the beginning of our era.

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# Ten Steps for Translation as a Tool of Language Revitalization: The Case Study of Taiwanese

WU Meng-Ju

*Abstract* The revitalization of Taiwanese, the largest local language in Taiwan, has seen significant progress in recent years, but remains hindered by multiple problems including the lack of a standard, insufficient terminology planning, and enduring social stigma. This paper evaluates the current status of the language through the lens of translation, which serves as a vital tool for expanding linguistic resources and legitimizing the language in all domains including high-prestige ones. Using Guillem Belmar's (2017) ten-step model as a structural framework, this study assesses multidimensional challenges ranging from standardization and translator training to the reduction of source-language dominance. By analyzing these steps, the paper highlights both the successful strategies and the critical gaps in current revitalization efforts. The findings suggest that while bottom-up translation initiatives are thriving, stronger institutional support and corpus planning are essential for Taiwanese to become a fully self-sustaining language in the modern era.

*Keywords* *Tâi-gí* 台語 (Taiwanese), translation policy, language revitalization, marginalized language, diglossia

## *Introduction*

After World War II, the Kuomintang (KMT) 國民黨 [Chinese Nationalist Party] came to Taiwan and initiated a systematic and radical transformation of Taiwan's

linguistic landscape, enforcing a Mandarin-only<sup>1</sup> policy to better control the island that had previously been ruled by Japan. While Taiwan has formally abandoned this repressive policy, the resulting linguistic dominance of Mandarin remains. Despite the Development of National Languages Act of 2019 formalizing the rights to use local languages, this legislative act has yet to dismantle the significant structural barriers that have created a deeply hierarchical linguistic order (Fujii 2021, 2).

Taiwanese,<sup>2</sup> the largest local language in Taiwan, continues to face challenges common to minoritized languages, including insufficient institutional support, lack of standardized terminology for modern domains, and enduring social stigma. Translation is not a secondary cultural activity in Taiwan but a primary mechanism through which Taiwanese reclaims functional and symbolic parity in high-prestige domains. This paper therefore evaluates translation as a central instrument of language revitalization rather than as mere linguistic transfer.

- 1 The Mandarin spoken in Taiwan is not the same as that used in China, despite the mutual intelligibility. Their differences are largely due to the fact that since 1949, people in Taiwan, who back then did not understand Mandarin, have been forced to learn and use this new language. As a result, they have blended in local elements from their native languages, notably borrowings and even syntax assimilation from Taiwanese. Although it is sometimes referred to as *Taiwan huayu* 臺灣華語 [Taiwan Mandarin], Mandarin-speakers in Taiwan often call it *Zhongwen* 中文 [lit. Chinese script].
- 2 The author adopts the term Taiwanese, the most common term for the language. However, it has many names, each of which carries significant ideological weight. For example, native speakers often call it *Tâi-gí* or *Tâi-gú* 台語 (Taiwanese) or *Tâi-uân-uê* 臺灣話 (Language of Taiwan). There are scholars who prefer more academic yet arguably sinocentric terms such as *Tâi-uân Bân-lâm-gí* 臺灣閩南語 (Taiwanese Hokkien; lit. Taiwan Southern Min) or simply *Bân-lâm-gí* 閩南語 (Southern Min)—framing it as a Chinese dialect rather than a language. Hoklo 河洛話 is yet another name that suggests this language might have originated from the center of ancient China, implying a connection to millennia-old Chinese ancestry that has not been definitively proven. Interested readers are encouraged to reference relevant sources such as *The Phonetics of Taiwanese* (Fon and Khoo 2024, 1-6) or *Kok-ka gí-giân huat-tián pò-kò* 國家語言發展報告 [Report on Development of National Languages] (Ministry of Culture 2025, 9-10).

Currently the revitalization of Taiwanese is more driven by bottom-up, grassroots initiatives than top-down governmental policies. Consequently, much of the primary data regarding translator training, neologism creation, and community debates is found in dynamic digital spaces, rather than traditional academic journals or government reports. This study therefore draws significantly from social media platforms, podcasts, and independent blogs, as these mediums currently serve as the de facto archives of the Taiwanese language movement.

## 1 *Methodology*

This study adopts a qualitative approach rooted in digital ethnography to assess the current status of Taiwanese revitalization. As the revitalization is driven primarily by grassroots activity, this study collects data primarily from digital media platforms including Facebook, YouTube, and podcasts, which currently serve as the de facto living archives of the Taiwanese language movement as they capture the immediate coinage of neologisms and authentic register shifts often absent in static, printed dictionaries. Furthermore, they provide a transparent window into community validation processes, where prominent activists such as Tēnn Sūn-tshong<sup>3</sup> 鄭順聰 and Lâu íng-sîng 劉盈成 actively negotiate language use consensus and navigate diglossic challenges in real time.

The analysis focuses on textual and audio-visual content produced between 2020 and 2025, a period marking significant digital activism following the Development of National Languages Act of 2019. All citations of social media content follow proper guidelines for digital sources, ensuring that these informal texts are treated with the same academic rigor as traditional scholarship. By treating these digital interactions as primary texts, this study validates the premise that for endangered languages, the internet is not merely a medium of

3 While names of people from Taiwan mentioned in this paper have Han characters, some of them are Taiwanese or Hakka names instead of Chinese ones. To respect each name owner's right to be called in their own language, this author has tried to reach out to them personally, and subsequently used their preferred romanizations in this paper. For those who were unreachable, romanized names that have appeared in English news are adopted.

communication but a critical domain of language planning and policy formation (Hatoss 2013, 2).

## 2 *Theoretical Framework: Adapting Belmar's Ten-Step Model*

To assess how translation has been used to revitalize Taiwanese, this paper utilizes Guillem Belmar's 10-step model, which provides a theoretical framework that examines how translation can serve as a language revitalization tool in 10 aspects (Belmar 2017, 51-52). Originally developed for the Basque language, this framework provides a comprehensive roadmap for utilizing translation to achieve linguistic empowerment.

However, for post-colonial languages like Taiwanese, it is important not to adopt a strictly linear interpretation of this model. The strategic reality of Taiwanese revitalization is a recursive cycle. In established European contexts, a language might be standardized before it is applied to technical translation. In Taiwan, the urgency of language loss necessitates a "building-while-flying" approach. The author concludes that steps such as standardization, terminology planning, and high-level translation must occur simultaneously. The act of translating a complex text (Step 6) often leads to the creation or adjustment of the very standard (Step 1) and terminology (Step 2) that the language currently lacks.

### 2.1 Establishing foundations: standards and professionalization

A stable linguistic foundation is the prerequisite for any high-quality translation effort. Without a recognized standard, the target language is perceived as incapable of expressing modern life. To achieve this, language standard, terminology, translation training and revitalization policies are all essential (Steps 1, 2, 3, and 4).

#### 2.1.1 Step 1: establish a language standard

Each of the following sections begins with a quotation from Belmar (2017) laying out the steps in his model. Step 1 is as follows:

Establish a standard language which translators can use as a model. This standard, however, cannot be content with just formal languages. It has to encompass different registers and levels that enrich the language. It is necessary to study the current usage

of the language, analyze its registers and establish stylistic recommendations according to registers. (Belmar 2017, 51).

Efforts to standardize Taiwanese have made progress but remain incomplete, leading to ongoing challenges for translation. Taiwan's Ministry of Education (MOE) has made strides by developing the “*Tâi-uân Tâi-gí lô-má-jī phing-im hong-àn*” 臺灣台語羅馬字拼音方案 [Taiwan Taigi Romanization Scheme], “*Tâi-uân Tâi-gí thui-tsiàn iōng-jī*” 臺灣台語推薦用字 [Taiwan Taigi Recommended Characters], and “*Kàu-iok-pōo Tâi-uân Tâi-gí Siōng-iōng-sû Sû-tián*” 教育部臺灣台語常用詞辭典 [Dictionary of Frequently-Used Taiwanese Taigi] (Ministry of Education n.d.-b).<sup>4</sup> The romanization system, recommended Han-character list, and the dictionary serve as foundational tools for linguistic consistency across different registers (Yoshida 2023, 34-59). As minoritized languages have often been excluded from many social situations, they frequently lack a natural system of registers. While they may have many colloquial dialects, they often lack a formal register until one is created through standardization (Belmar 2017, 40-41).

However, these tools are neither perfect nor accepted without any objection. For instance, the Dictionary of Frequently-Used Taiwanese Taigi, as its name suggests, is currently limited to common words and hence does not comprehensively encompass the various registers and technical levels required for a standardized literary language. It is worth noting, however, that in addition to this one and only official Taiwanese dictionary, there are other semi-official and civilian resources being created to fill the gap to enable Taiwanese in different registers.

In fact, Taiwanese exemplifies a familiar dilemma in minoritized language revitalization: the absence of a standard impedes guidance, while the presence of

4 Just like the word “English” can refer to a language, culture or country, the term “Taiwanese” sometimes leads to ideological disputes as it can be used to refer to Taiwan instead of just one of its many languages. In an attempt to resolve such controversies, Taiwan's Ministry of Culture (MOC) has collected scholars' widely diverse opinions and suggested new terms such as *Tâi-uân Tâi-gí* 臺灣台語 (Taiwan Taigi or Taiwanese Taigi) (Ministry of Culture 2025, 57-68). Although many native speakers find the newly coined names redundant and unnatural, these government-recommended names have started to appear in some official language resources such as the MOE's Dictionary of Frequently-Used Taiwanese Taigi (Ministry of Education n.d.-b).

one provokes resistance. Competing orthographic systems fragment an already limited linguistic space (Yoshida 2023, 34-59).

Indeed, the lack of a unified, comprehensive language standard has led to concerns within the grassroots community. For instance, Tēnn Tshing-hông 鄭清鴻, the editor-in-chief of Vanguard Publishing House 前衛出版社, a local publisher specialized in Taiwan's languages and cultures, has pointed out practical difficulties in his series of posts entitled "Tâi-bûn Tshut-pán 50 Mn̂g" 台文出版 50 問 [50 Questions on Taiwanese Publishing] (T. Tēnn 2024a). This work-in-progress series collects questions on these challenges and then answers them with dos and don'ts based on his first-hand observation, aiming to share professional expertise and experience in Taiwanese editing. Specifically, around one third of these posts list "standardization" as the keyword. For instance, even for the most rudimentary proofreading, an editor of Taiwanese often struggles to decide if the writer's choice of word is "acceptable". In the case of roman scripts, the Taiwanese word for the first-person pronoun can be romanized as "guá" or "goá". In the case of Han characters, the word for "person/people" can be "人" or "儂". In addition to multiple romanization systems and different Han character variants, what further complicates the issue is that mixing the roman script and Han characters is not uncommon, although at the moment no consensus has been reached on when to romanize and when to use a Han character (T. Tēnn 2024).

Civilian efforts, such as the dictionary platform *ChboeTaigi Tâi-gí Sû-tiân ChboeTaigi* 台語辭典 [Look up Taiwanese Dictionary Plus], which collects various linguistic resources, demonstrate the community's attempt to bridge this gap (Tâi-bûn Ke-si Mî. n.d.). Although the platform itself does not unify different Taiwanese language standards, it collects written Taiwanese corpora that help users to check how Taiwanese has been written in the past.

Despite the apparent chaos caused by competing systems, some believe that the revitalization work of Taiwanese is not and should not be impeded by these limitations. In fact, Tēnn Sûn-tshong 鄭順聰, a renowned Taiwanese writer, poet, and an enthusiastic activist behind many Taiwanese translation projects, maintains that the language is nonetheless ready to be used to express all domains of modern life (S. Tēnn 2024).

In a broader sense, disputes about what should be standard and what shouldn't be not unique to Taiwanese. As Romaine (2007) points out, even highly

elaborated standard languages like English and German are not completely standardized, and any established standard is subject to change or challenge. Therefore, the ideology of standards and language standardization should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a static result (685). For Taiwanese, the continuation of this process is critical for building the stable linguistic foundation necessary to support translation into new and technical domains.

#### 2.1.2 Step 2: create and maintain terminology

Belmar's second step is:

Create and maintain organisms of terminology planning (such as Euskalterm for Basque). These can establish and regularize new specialized terms from any field. (Belmar 2017, 52).

While it is not difficult to find speakers of Taiwanese, the decades-long Mandarin-only policy has significantly marginalized and left all local languages disconnected from the modern world. Hence, it is common to hear Taiwanese-speakers switch to Mandarin when they talk about modern inventions such as computer science, social issues, and international relations. Such frequent code-switching reflects the fact that Taiwanese has become a “low language” as Mandarin has become a “high” one due to policy enforcement in the past decades.

Despite the official and civilian educational resources created for language standardization mentioned in Step 1, the lack of language commission makes standardizing Taiwanese a difficult step, particularly so for terminology planning. Though there are commissions for other local languages such as the Hakka Affairs Council (HAC) and Council of Indigenous Peoples, there is yet no central governmental agency responsible for revitalizing Taiwanese. The Ministry of Culture (MOC) and the MOE currently do facilitate revitalization projects, but there has been a call for establishing a council dedicated to revitalizing Taiwan's biggest local language (Pan 2025).

Although the lack of a national agency makes it difficult to plan terminology, there have been non-centralized governmental as well as civilian efforts to do so. For example, the government has promoted terminology planning through initiatives like the development of corpora and online linguistic resources, notably via the MOE and the *Kong-sī Tâi-gí Tâi* 公視台語台 [Public Television Service's Taiwanese Channel, hereinafter PTS Taigi]. These tools, such as the *Hak-kho sut-*

*gí tsbà-sûn* 學科術語查詢 [Academic Terminology Search] (Ministry of Education, n.d.-a) and the *Tâi-gí sin-sû sû-khòo* 台語新詞辭庫 [Taigi New Word Database] (PTS Taigi, n.d.), have begun to address the need for a systematic approach to neologisms and specialized terms, although the mere size of the vocabulary available suggests that they are still under development.

This highlights the deeper, non-lexical challenges of corpus planning. Fishman (1983, cited in Antia 2000, 12) warns that it is a devastating mistake to assume corpus planning only requires linguistic and technological expertise as it also requires “cultural expertise” to ensure new terms are accepted, liked, learned, and used. Indeed, this is similar to the case of many indigenous languages where “the main argument of the policy’s detractors being that indigenous languages could not express educational concepts” (Antia 2000, 29).

During a podcast interview, Tân Kiàn-tiong 陳建中, the researcher of *Tâi-gí sin-sû sû-khòo*, mentions just how difficult it is to create new terms. Often, even learned scholars and experts who are well-versed in Taiwanese find it difficult to decide, and sometimes they must resort to voting. It is also common to receive criticism from the public, who argue, “There are no such terms [in Taiwanese]!” or “[Taiwanese-speakers] won’t understand these terms!” (PTS Taigi 2025).

In addition, there are a few other official online dictionaries such as *Tâi-uân Tâi-gí Kang-gē sû-khòo* 臺灣台語工藝詞庫 [Taiwan Taigi Craft Glossary] (National Taiwan Craft Research and Development Institute 2025) as well as the trial version of *Tâi-uân Tâi-gí Sin-sû ú Hak-sut Sû-luī Tui-ik Bāng* 臺灣台語新詞與學術詞彙對譯網 [Taiwan Taigi New Words and Academic Terminology Translation] (National Academy for Educational Research 2025). There are also similar websites that exist due to civilian efforts such as *Tâi-uân Sīt-būt Tōo-kām* 台灣植物圖鑑 [Taiwan Plant Atlas] (Tâi-uân Sīt-būt Tōo-kām n.d.) and *Hêng Góa Tâi-oân Chiáu-á Miâ* 還我台灣鳥仔名 [Reclaiming Taiwan’s Bird Names] (Siau n.d.), and *Tâi-gí STEM piau-tsún-huà kè-uē* 台語 STEM 標準化計畫 [Taigi STEM Standardization Project] (TaigiSTEM, n.d.). Although they are lesser-known and restricted to specific fields, these resources might gain popularity as the increasing demand of Taiwanese translation calls for such specialized dictionaries. It should also be noted that while most of these examples are about reclaiming Taiwanese names that have been used before, the last one is more about creating modern translations for new technologies such as computer science.

In addition to dictionaries or corpora, there are also initiatives that respond to the lack of modern vocabulary by suggesting possible words for modern concepts. These efforts include Taiwanese YouTube video series such as *Tâi-gí Thiann-û-bô* 台語聽有無 [Do You Understand Taiwanese?] by Mirror News (Mirror News n.d.) as well as *Tâi-gí Kóng Sê-sū* 台語講世事 [Everything in Taiwanese] by Formosa TV Taiwan Lecture Hall 民視台灣學堂 (Formosa TV Taiwan Lecture Hall n. d.). Although these programs are no longer in production, the terms they have created or promoted remain as free, online resources readily available for translators who need to find Taiwanese equivalents for modern terms.

### 2.1.3 Step 3: create translation schools and promote studies

Belmar's third step is:

Form translators so that theirs is quality work. The creation of translation schools, or the presence of these studies in universities is important. (Belmar 2017, 52).

Despite the growing number of learning resources as well as degree programs devoted to Taiwanese, there is no comprehensive program for training translators in Taiwanese. This is in sharp contrast to graduate-level translation and interpreting programs for Mandarin-English (e.g. National Taiwan Normal University and National Taiwan University) and Mandarin-Japanese (e.g. Fu Jen Catholic University).

Currently, the closest thing to formal translation training for Taiwanese is perhaps courses such as “*Tâi-gí huan-ik*” 臺語翻譯 [Taiwanese Translation], a one-semester, optional course offered at the Taiwanese department at National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU). It should be noted that “Taiwanese” departments in Taiwan often need to also allocate resources to other local languages such as Hakka (Department of Taiwan Culture, Languages and Literature 2021).

On occasion, certain university faculty members might invite Taiwanese translators to share their hands-on experience. One such example was the “*Ài-ní-lân Bûn-hak Huan-ik Kang-tsok-hong*” 愛爾蘭文學翻譯工作坊 [Irish Literature Translation Workshop] organized by the Department of Translation and Interpreting, Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages. Lâu Îng-sîng, who translated James Joyce's *Dubliners* (Lâu 2024b), was invited to give a talk and share his thoughts on Taiwanese translation (Lâu 2024a).

Outside of college-level education, there are some workshops that might involve training associated with Taiwanese translation. Examples include news voice-over workshops organized by PTS Taigi,<sup>5</sup> where Ông Chiau-hôa 王昭華, a Taiwanese writer and language consultant who has also translated children's books from Mandarin into Taiwanese, was invited to give a talk on Mandarin-to-Taiwanese translation (PTS Taigi 2024).

Yet another example is the HAC's workshops that offered interpreting training between Hakka and other languages including Taiwanese. However, this initiative that started in 2018 stopped after only a few years. One participant reported that it was an intensive interpreting training that lasted for one month, during which participants met over weekends for the training (Huilynnnnn 2020).

In addition to these official programs and semi-official workshops, civilian initiatives also came about. Among the most notable ones are those by Lâu, who since the publication of his Taiwanese translation in 2024, has organized several Taiwanese translation workshops. In these private, online programs, he shared his tips on how to translate from Mandarin or English into Taiwanese, drawing on his own literary translation experience of Dubliners (Lâu 2025).

#### 2.1.4 Step 4: include translation in language revitalization policies

Belmar's fourth step is:

Include translation in language revitalization policies and not understate its importance. It is necessary to subsidize translation with public funds and to give it institutional support and promotion. (Belmar 2017, 52).

Since 2019, translation and interpretation have been deemed necessary for national languages including Taiwanese, Hakka, Amis and other ethnic group languages. Specifically, Article 11 of the Development of National Languages Act clearly says,

Nationals may elect which national language they wish to use when involved in administrative, legislative, and judicial procedures of government agencies. Government agencies shall, when necessary, provide interpretation services in

5 A.k.a Chen Po-wei. For an explanation on why many Taiwan citizens whose Taiwanese names are still romanized as Mandarin, please refer to Step 9.

any/all national languages and shall cultivate interpreters in national languages. (2019, Art. 9).

While the act demonstrates the government's commitment to institutionalizing interpretation as a means of preserving and revitalizing Taiwanese, the reality does not seem to align with this ambition. In addition to the lack of formal training programs mentioned in Step 3, there have been incidents that show that even when interpreting services of local languages are provided, they might not always be taken well. As an example, in 2021 during parliamentary interpellation Tân Pik-uî 陳柏惟,<sup>6</sup> a then law-maker, questioned Chiu Kuo-cheng 邱國正, the then Minister of National Defense. Tân spoke Taiwanese and had applied for simultaneous interpreting services in advance. Nevertheless, the Mandarin-speaking Minister refused the readily available simultaneous interpretation services, insisting that Tân should use the common language, Mandarin (PTS Taigi 2021).

Another more recent example occurred during parliamentary questioning in 2024, when Hung Mong-kai 洪孟楷, a KMT lawmaker, asked Gu Show-faye 古秀妃, the Minister of the HAC, what she thought of the naming of Taiwanese. Hung stated that allowing Taiwan's biggest local language to be called "Taiwanese" might mislead foreigners into thinking that Taiwan did not have any other language. He went on to express his sympathy for his Hakka friends, stressing the importance of acknowledging the Hakka language. As the highest-level government official in Hakka affairs, Gu started to respond in Hakka. However, Hung, who had expressed his eager support for the Hakka language seconds ago, stopped Gu short and asked in disbelief, "Do you actually want me to put on this earpiece [in order to make use of this simultaneous Hakka-to-Mandarin interpretation service]?" Gu then gave up speaking Hakka and switched to Mandarin as requested by another KMT lawmaker (NOWnews 2024). Anecdotes like these remind us that how language rights laws are practiced and enforced is yet another battlefield for minoritized languages.

Lastly, it should be noted that while the struggle of Taiwanese largely comes from the dominance of Mandarin, the government's plan to promote English

6 A.k.a Chen Po-wei. For an explanation on why many Taiwan citizens whose Taiwanese names are still romanized as Mandarin, please refer to Step 9.

might compete for linguistic resources as well. Although the Mandarin-only policy ended in 2003, the Bilingual Nation policy has since been proposed, which essentially aims to designate English as an official or semi-official language in Taiwan, “building on our advantage as a Mandarin-speaking nation” (Fujii 2021, 1). Scholars have pointed out that granting English such an official status not only self-colonizes Taiwan but also pushes Taiwan’s local languages into a corner. As Ferrer and Lin (2021, 12-13) argue, the bilingual policy’s narrow focus on English and Mandarin ignores Taiwan’s true multilingual reality, marginalizing the crucial role of mother tongues in a multi-ethnic society.

## 2.2 Strategic curation: breaking the vassalage to the dominant language

Choosing what to translate, how to translate, and whom to translate for carefully helps revitalizing and empowering the weaker language via “detachment” (Steps 5, 6, and 7).

### 2.2.1 Step 5: include translation in language revitalization policies

Belmar says that Step 5 is:

Choose the texts to translate for their literary worth, but also for their potential as cultural referents. These new cultural referents will help detach the language from its vassalage towards the dominant language. In order to do so, it is necessary to avoid reading translations already available in the dominant language, and especially stay away from them to solve translation problems. (Belmar 2017, 52).

Currently, literary works translated into Taiwanese are predominantly those that already possess established translations in dominant languages, notably Mandarin. In this respect, the trajectory of Taiwanese translation appears to mirror the footprint of the Mandarin publishing market. This phenomenon is driven by pragmatic market constraints, as translation is a capital-intensive sector of the publishing industry. Beyond the intellectual labor, the process involves securing copyright permissions and navigating complex contract negotiations. Once rights are secured, a publisher typically operates within a three-to-five-year window to commission a qualified translator, edit, proofread, and market the final product. Given the shrinking base of active readers in the current media landscape, publishing houses exercise extreme caution when selecting titles for translation.

These economic factors explain why classic world literature often serves as the vanguard for translation into minoritized languages. As these works typically reside in the public domain, they allow publishers to bypass licensing fees and negotiation. Furthermore, the existence of multiple previous translations in dominant languages provides a convenient reference framework for translators working into the target minority language.

However, simply translating from the dominant language is not enough to “detach the language from its vassalage towards the dominant language” (2017, 52). Perhaps that is why we have started to see cases where Taiwanese is the primary language of texts that can serve as a cultural referent that facilitates detachment from Mandarin. One compelling case of this attempt at detachment is the newly released trilogy, *Tâi-uân ê kòo-sū: Siá hōo lân ê tó-sū* 台灣ê故事——寫予咱ê島嶼 [Taiwan’s Stories: Written for Our Island] (Lī 2025). While the trilogy was originally drafted in Mandarin and then translated into Taiwanese, the physical publication is exclusively in Taiwanese, making this local language the primary medium of literacy.

#### 2.2.2 Step 6: translate works from all genres

According to Belmar, Step 6 is:

Translate works from all genres: prose, poetry, essays, novels, tales... (Belmar 2017, 52).

While it appears simple, Belmar presents this as a distinct mandate to ensure a marginalized language develops the capacity to function across all modes of literary expression, rather than being confined to a specific niche. Step 6 underscores that a revitalized language must function across all genres rather than being confined to symbolic or artistic niches.

Classic short story collections like *Dubliners* or renowned poetry such as Rabindranath Tagore’s *Stray Birds* (Un 2023) are now available in Taiwanese. However, prose and essays remain underrepresented in Taiwanese translation. This disparity likely stems from the fact that minoritized languages often lack the formal register required for essays and discursive prose, having historically been excluded from administrative and high-level social situations. Unlike poetry or fiction, which can sometimes rely on colloquial or oral traditions, essays often demand a standardized “referential variety” and specialized terminology that the

language may not yet have generated due to its subordination to a dominant language.

Consequently, producing these translations requires not just literary creativity but active terminology planning to break the “vicious circle” in which the language lacks the vocabulary for modern domains because it is never used in them. Without such efforts, readers continue to rely on the dominant language for intellectual or scientific content, viewing the minority language’s attempt at such genres as “artificial” or lacking credibility.

Moreover, frequent emphasis on artistic and cultural values often reinforces the impression that these minor languages are not “useful”. For instance, the general public might not see the value in translating essays into a marginalized language, as essays are meant for conveying ideas and thoughts, a task at which a dominant language usually performs much better. Hence, there might be much less motivation for translating works belonging to genres of lesser artistic or cultural value.

### 2.2.3 Step 7: balance translations for children and adults

Belmar’s seventh step:

Achieve a percentage of works translated for children which is not excessively higher than that of works for an adult public. We have observed that it is quite normal for translations aimed at children to double or even triple the offer available for adults. This results in a lot of children consuming translated and dubbed products in the minority language but, once they grow up, the offer diminishes and they have to start consuming products in the dominant language. The offer should, therefore, be constant for all viewers. (Belmar 2017, 52).

This step separates potential readers into children and adults. However, in the context of Taiwan, children speaking Taiwanese before and after entering formal education are met with different language issues.

While Taiwanese-speaking children are increasingly exposed to translated materials, the scarcity of adolescent content produces a well-documented attrition effect. Activists repeatedly note that without sustained literacy beyond early childhood, Taiwanese remains symbolically valued but functionally abandoned once formal education begins.

Meanwhile, as an increasing number of world classic literary works are being translated into Taiwanese such as *Dubliners* as well as *Lá-sioh-bóng: Kài-tshuan Liông-tsi-kài té-phinn sió-suat suán I (Tâi-gí huan-ik pán)* 羅生門：芥川龍之介短篇小說選 I（台語翻譯版）[Rashomon: Selected short stories of Ryunosuke Akutagawa I (Taiwanese translation)] (Lîm 2024), the lack of translation targeting adults is expected to be addressed, albeit that the quantity and quality of translation can still be improved upon.

2.3 Dismantling hegemony: direct translation and cooperation to achieve linguistic sovereignty

#### 2.3.1 Step 8: balance translations for children and adults

This is Step 8 according to Belmar:

Lower the percentage of translation that has the dominant language as their source language. The literary worth of the translation is important, but it is also essential to import new literary models. (Belmar 2017, 52).

Currently, most of the Taiwanese media content derives from Mandarin. However, when Taiwanese appears primarily as a translation of a Mandarin source, it reinforces the diglossic hierarchy where Taiwanese is subordinate to Mandarin. Furthermore, bilingual readers, who are often more fluent in the dominant language, might feel less motivated to read a translation in their mother tongue.

Hence, it is important for Taiwanese translators to reduce the reliance on Mandarin by increasing the volume of direct translations from global dominant languages as well as other marginalized languages (discussed in Step 10).

In Taiwan, English and Japanese serve as two primary foreign languages alongside the dominant language, Mandarin. By translating directly from English or Japanese into Taiwanese, revitalizers can disrupt the established linguistic hierarchy. While Mandarin and Taiwanese often appear in a diglossic relationship (High vs. Low), the alignment of Taiwanese with globally prestigious languages such as English or Japanese is unconventional. Such pairings challenge the stereotype of Taiwanese as a “local” or “uneducated” dialect.

Recent publications illustrate this strategy. The Taiwanese translation projects of Joyce’s and Akutagawa’s short stories, which were initiated and aided by writers (e.g. S. Tênn) and editors (e.g. T. Tênn), demonstrate that the local

language is capable of processing world literature without Mandarin mediation. For instance, the translation of *Dubliners* established a direct literary link between Taiwan and Ireland, bypassing the Mandarin sphere entirely. In fact, Lâu was even invited to Ireland to give a talk on his Taiwanese translation of *Dubliners* (Lâu 2024c). Such international events strengthen direct links between Taiwanese and English (or, as in the case of Lâu, Irish English) literature.

Although Japanese is not as globally influential as English, translating from Japanese into Taiwanese motivates people to recall how Japanese played a part in shaping Taiwanese. Indeed, one of the major distinctions that have set Taiwanese apart from Hokkien spoken in Singapore, China, or Malaysia is that Taiwanese absorbed numerous words from Japanese during Japan's occupation of the island from 1895 to 1945. Even now, Taiwanese dictionaries created in this colonial period are still considered valuable corpora and are heavily relied on for language revitalization work including but not limited to Japanese-to-Taiwanese translation. In fact, many of these resources are collected in *ChhoeTaigi*, which is a comprehensive, open-source online dictionary and search engine that aggregates over a million entries from historical dictionaries, literature, and modern media to help users verify and study Taiwanese terms.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that translating from other minoritized languages is just as important as translating from other dominant languages, although it is by its nature much more challenging. This topic will be covered in the final step, Step 10.

### 2.3.2 Step 9: avoid indirect translation

Belmar's ninth step:

Try to avoid indirect translation, especially those that use translations in the dominant language. It is therefore necessary to form translators to cover the language combinations with more demand. (Belmar 2017, 52).

While the previous step emphasizes the risk of using the dominant language as a main source, this step argues that this alone is insufficient. Even if the source languages are expanded to include English or Japanese, utilizing Mandarin as a pivot language introduces significant issues. While direct translation is the ideal, indirect translation via Mandarin remains prevalent, particularly in educational contexts. To mitigate this, it is important to prioritize the production of original

works in Taiwanese rather than relying on translations from Mandarin. This initiative is vital to dismantle the linguistic hegemony of Mandarin and promote an independent Taiwanese literary scene.

However, in practice, strict adherence to this ideal presents challenges. In interviews with the author on December 7 and 14, 2025, Lâu argued that referencing the Mandarin translation is not inherently negative if done with caution. Lâu posits that: 1) Most Taiwanese translators are bilingual and fluent in Mandarin; 2) Renowned works like *Dubliners* have established Mandarin translations that serve as valuable resources; and 3) The risk of "contamination" from the Mandarin text can be mitigated by cross-referencing the original English text. Both Lâu and the author agree that while early reliance on the Mandarin text may exert subtle influences, high-quality Mandarin translations can serve as effective "checkpoints" for verifying meaning. Thus, the question is perhaps not whether to reference Mandarin translations, but how to do so critically (Gôo 2026).

One example that illustrates how indirect translation might interfere is the *Fairy Tales in Taiwanese* series of picture books, available in Taiwanese and English. Published by Taoyuan's local government, these books aim to educate Taiwanese children about their own culture. Names of local places as well as gods from Taiwan's local religions frequently feature in these reading materials. However, in the English version, names are often romanized using their Mandarin pronunciations instead of their original Taiwanese ones. For instance, in the digital book entitled *Tsáu-tshuē Kuan-tè-iâ ê Kha-jiah* 走揣關帝爺的跤跡 [In Search of Guan Gong] (Qiu n.d.), the fighting god *Kuan-kong* 關公 becomes Guan Gong, and the local mountain *Hóo-thâu-suann* 虎頭山 becomes Hutoushan. Despite the Taiwanese/English bilingual nature of the book, cultural terms such as names of gods and local places tightly coupled with local language and culture are transliterated based on the sound of their Chinese names instead of that of their more commonly used and familiar Taiwanese ones.

One final example of indirect translation, which deviates from textual translation, is how names in Taiwanese or any other local languages are transliterated (i.e. romanized) in official documents such as passports. Prior to the Development of National Languages Act, Taiwanese names had to be romanized as Mandarin names in passports. For instance, the author's name 吳孟儒 was

romanized as Wu Meng-ju (using the Wade-Giles Mandarin romanization system) instead of the Taiwanese equivalent Gôo Bīng-jū. Although using Han-character names, which are often identical in Taiwanese and Mandarin, interchangeably, is usually perfectly acceptable for official purposes within Taiwan, it is quite a different matter when Taiwanese scholars have papers published in international journals that require romanized names. There have also been reports suggesting that applicants face resistance when attempting to register non-Mandarin romanized names (A-Guân 2024).

Even though the Development of National Languages Act officially restored Taiwanese nationals' rights to romanize their names according to their own language, a name change often comes with costs. For children, romanizing their Taiwanese names using Taiwanese pronunciation might result in their having a different transliterated family name from that of their parents. For adults, a name change involves producing all the necessary documents and certificates. Taiwanese nationals who live overseas and have chosen to change their names according to their own language might have to prove they are still the same person, or deal with the risk of being denied access to healthcare, immigration or other services.

### 2.3.3 Step 10: promote translation between minority languages

Belmar's final step is:

Promote translations amongst minority languages in order to internationalize their diverse literary expressions and mutually contribute to the development of their own, solid literary system. (Belmar 2017, 52).

One area that remains critically underdeveloped is translation between Taiwanese and other minority languages, specifically those within Taiwan such as Hakka and indigenous Austronesian languages. This lack of direct interchange is significant; when translation occurs exclusively between a dominant language and a marginalized one, the dominant language acts as a necessary pivot or "relay". Consequently, if every minoritized language must rely on Mandarin to communicate with another local language, the hegemonic position of Mandarin is further reinforced.

In Taiwan, bilingual resources involving local languages are predominantly paired with Mandarin. While using the dominant language is a pragmatic tool for

revitalization, it is equally important to foster a more interconnected linguistic ecosystem where different minority languages support each other's growth through direct cross-translation.

A rare and illustrative example of this approach is the project *Tâigael: Stories from Taiwanese & Gaelic*. This initiative bypasses major colonial languages (English and Mandarin) entirely. It features newly created stories in Taiwanese translated directly into Scottish Gaelic, and conversely, new Gaelic stories translated into Taiwanese (Wind&Bones n.d.). While funding for such experimental projects exists, illustrating institutional support, questions regarding their reception remain. The readership for such bilateral minority-to-minority translation is inevitably niche, raising the issue of whether such projects can achieve market viability or if their value remains primarily symbolic within the revitalization movement.

### 3 *Discussion*

While Belmar's ten steps towards a theoretical model for translation as a tool of language revitalization provides insightful general guidelines for assessing how translation can help a minoritized language, the Taiwanese experience documented and discussed in this paper reminds us that: 1) Non-linearity is not an exception, as the ten steps can happen concurrently and influence one another; 2) Resistance to standardization is common; and 3) Translation functions simultaneously as corpus planning, status planning, and identity work.

#### 3.1 Recursive nature as structural necessity

In the Taiwanese context, translation, standardization, and terminology planning operate as a single recursive system rather than sequential stages. While a theoretical ideal might suggest standardizing a language before training translators to use it "properly," Taiwanese activists are proving that these processes can—and must—occur simultaneously. This interplay between bottom-up grassroots efforts and top-down governmental campaigns is essential for the survival of Taiwan's largest local language, potentially paving the way for other local languages such as Hakka, Amis, and Paiwan. In a sense, translation in Taiwanese does not merely

follow language planning but actively produces it, collapsing the analytical distinction between corpus planning and implementation.

### 3.2 Resistance to standardization

Resistance to standardization—whether toward official forms or coined vocabulary—is hardly surprising. However, it does not necessarily imply failure. In fact, it can be interpreted as evidence of active language ownership. In postcolonial contexts such as Taiwan, standardized forms are often perceived as reproducing state authority, making non-compliance a form of linguistic agency rather than inertia.

### 3.3 Comparative perspectives

The opposition against the emerging, unified official language standard is not unique to Taiwanese. Indeed, similar challenges have been observed in marginalized languages such as Irish (Dorian 1994). There, efforts to coin “pure” terms for modern concepts often compete with the widespread anglicized borrowings used by fluent speakers. This suggests that the friction observed in the Taiwanese context is a common feature of post-colonial language revitalization, rather than a failure of the specific translation strategies employed.

Unlike Basque, where standardization was institutionally centralized early on, postcolonial languages such as Taiwanese and Irish encounter resistance precisely because standardization arrives after a history of linguistic delegitimization. This temporal inversion helps explain why translation-led standardization remains contentious in Taiwan.

## 4 *Conclusion*

This study has evaluated the current status of Taiwanese language revitalization through the lens of Belmar’s ten-step model. Through this assessment of the language’s development using this theoretical framework, several critical insights have emerged regarding the interplay between translation, policy, and sociolinguistic survival.

First, the revitalization of Taiwan's biggest local language does not follow a strictly linear trajectory. As the discussion has highlighted, waiting for full standardization (Step 1) or a complete modern lexicon (Step 2) before engaging in literary and technical translation (Step 6) is a luxury that dying languages can hardly afford. In the case of Taiwanese, these processes are recursive: translators act as *de facto* terminologists, coining words and stabilizing usage through the act of translation itself. This building-while-flying approach validates the resilience of the grassroots community, even in the absence of a centralized language commission.

Second, this paper identifies the hegemony of the pivot language as a major obstacle to the autonomy of Taiwanese. As observed in Steps 8, 9, and 10, the pervasive reliance on Mandarin—whether as a source text for literature or a relay language for interpreting—reinforces the diglossic hierarchy it aims to dismantle. The analysis of projects such as the *Dubliners* translation and the *Tâigael* initiative demonstrates that true revitalization requires “triangulating” Taiwanese with global languages (English, Japanese) and other minority languages directly. Bypassing the Mandarin filter, translation acquires a strategic function: it proves that Taiwanese is not merely a dialectal variant of Chinese, but a distinct language capable of direct engagement with the world.

Finally, while the legal framework for revitalization has improved along with official efforts such as the Development of National Languages Act, the wide gap between policy and practice remains. The resistance to interpreting services in legislative settings and the looming pressure of the “Bilingual 2030” policy (which prioritizes English and Mandarin) exemplify that institutional support is still fragile. Consequently, the burden of revitalization continues to fall heavily on the private sector and civil society.

In conclusion, the case study of Taiwanese once again reminds us that translation is far more than a mechanism for textual transfer; it is an assertion of modern viability. To ensure the language's survival, future efforts must move beyond preservationist nostalgia and embrace translation as a productive tool. By expanding the scope of translation into all genres—from prose and science to children's literature—and establishing direct links to the global literary system, translators are not just preserving the past; they are securing a functional future for marginalized languages including but not limited to Taiwanese.

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# Challenges in Foreign Language Teaching in the Age of LLMs: Designing an Electronic Textbook for Chinese

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*Abstract* This article examines the use of an electronic textbook in foreign language teaching (FLT) in the context of natural language processing (NLP) and large language models (LLMs). It focuses on the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language and points to several limitations of traditional textbooks, such as slow updating, limited use of corpus-based data, and insufficient adaptation to smaller language communities, including Slovak learners. The paper presents GouBook, an electronic textbook designed primarily for the Chinese-Slovak language pair. The application offers Chinese word segmentation, *Hanyu pinyin* transcription, part-of-speech (POS) annotation, shared and personal glossaries, tooltip-based lexical information, dictionary import and export, and the export of learning materials. It also allows teachers to distribute texts and enables students to work with them both online and offline. The paper argues that such tools cannot replace systematic language learning, but they can make teaching materials more flexible, context-sensitive, and better adapted to actual language use.

*Keywords* Foreign language teaching, Large Language Models, Chinese language teaching; electronic textbook, NLP, GouBook, Chinese-Slovak language pair

## *Introduction*

Foreign language teaching (FLT) has recently been undergoing significant changes. Traditional approaches to teaching are, in many respects, being challenged by the use of technologies based on natural language processing (NLP). From this perspective, the emergence of Large Language Models (LLMs) appears to be one

of the decisive developments. What, then, do these technologies bring, and how can they be actively—and perhaps effectively—used in FLT? This paper attempts to address these and related questions from the perspective of a teacher who actively uses these technologies not only in FLT, but also in linguistic research.

The emergence of LLMs initially appeared to be a revolution that would transform many areas of both professional and private life. After the initial enthusiasm, however, it has become clear that these expectations, sometimes excessively emphasized by technology giants, have been fulfilled only partially, and in some areas not yet at all. At the same time, it cannot be denied that there are areas in which the use of LLMs has brought about a minor revolution.<sup>1</sup> One such area is the study of foreign languages, or translation in general, where LLMs demonstrate considerable potential. Let us therefore take a closer look at the “traditional” approach to teaching a foreign language—in this case, Chinese. Due to space limitations, the discussion will focus only on teaching materials in the Chinese-Slovak language pair.

Teaching experience over more than two decades suggests that, despite being regularly updated (e.g. in five-year cycles), teaching materials still tend to follow traditional design principles and rarely incorporate quantitative indicators such as findings from corpus-based research. What is meant by this? One example is the selection of vocabulary and syntax based not on frequency distributions, but rather on selected thematic units. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that such topics need to be pedagogically relevant as well as engaging for students. On the other hand, first-year textbooks very often contain vocabulary that is not frequent in everyday communication, and some syntactic constructions do not reflect the current state of language use. It should also be added that quantitative data, such as frequency distributions, are available from various sources, including large language corpora, frequency dictionaries, and similar resources.

Another question that naturally arises in connection with the electronic textbook is why other available solutions, such as Wenlin and Pleco, are not used

1 Our internal data from the past two to three years also indicate declining student interest in these fields.

instead. There are several reasons for this. First, these tools are not available in Slovak (or in other languages with a relatively small number of speakers). Second, they do not allow sufficient customization to meet the specific needs of teaching in the department. In addition, the collected language data will serve as a basis for further refinement of the teaching process. Finally, this approach enables students to be actively involved in the entire process, for example through data collection in corpus linguistics courses or through the development of an electronic Chinese-Slovak dictionary.

Moreover, the preparation of a textbook itself often takes several months, more than a year, or even longer. To put it very simply, a textbook may already be outdated by the time it is published. If we also take into account the fact that a relatively large number of textbooks are produced for languages such as English, German, or Korean, while the situation is much more complicated for languages with a smaller number of speakers, such as Slovak, the problem becomes even more apparent. For this reason, the only available solution is often to use textbooks designed for native speakers of English<sup>2</sup> or to prepare *ad hoc* texts.<sup>3</sup> How, then, can these and related problems be addressed? An electronic textbook may therefore represent a partial solution, although certainly not the only one, to these difficulties. It should also be emphasized that even the best teaching material cannot work miracles by itself, and the hard work involved in memorizing, for example, Chinese characters or sentence patterns remains the responsibility of students.

## 1 Word-Level Processing and Metadata

In order for an electronic textbook to help overcome the problems mentioned above, it should meet certain basic requirements. On the basis of previous experience gained from the development of the CAT-based instructional

2 We will not discuss in detail here the problematic nature of such an approach, since it is very often the only available solution.

3 This approach is common especially in courses that respond to current topics or to new vocabulary and syntactic phenomena. Examples include Colloquial Chinese or the reading of journalistic texts.

application Goucat,<sup>4</sup> the following section provides an overview of the proposed and implemented solutions.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.1 Tokenization and POS Annotation

In the NLP processing of Chinese, one of the key operations is tokenization, that is, the segmentation of continuous text into individual words.<sup>6</sup> Subsequent text processing is often based precisely on the results of this operation. The tokenization procedure relied on two tokenizers: one based on open-source HSK data, and a second based on the Jieba library, specifically its Rust implementation, Rjieba.<sup>7</sup> The same modules were also employed for POS annotation. Experience from translation-oriented courses indicates that students tended to show little interest in this feature in Goucat and used it only rarely. Similarly limited use of this feature in FLT is therefore expected.<sup>8</sup> The functionality is included essentially because the results are already available during tokenization and are therefore available at no additional computational cost.

<sup>4</sup> For more details, see Gajdoš, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Since the application is written in Python, the solutions discussed here are available for this language. At the same time, most of the open-source libraries mentioned are also available for other programming languages.

<sup>6</sup> It should be recalled that Chinese texts do not contain spaces between words. For this reason, tokenization is a relatively trivial operation in languages written in the Latin alphabet, but a considerably more complex task in the case of Chinese character-based writing.

<sup>7</sup> Dictionary-based tokenization tools, such as Jieba, rely primarily on predefined dictionaries. As a result, especially in the case of neologisms, the output may sometimes be unsatisfactory, although it is also possible to use a custom dictionary. Other solutions provide more accurate results, but they are often very large libraries. A future extension of the system will include tokenization using a locally running LLM, for example by processing the text directly at the point of input by the teacher.

<sup>8</sup> The classification of words into parts of speech is a complex issue, not only linguistically but also didactically. However, due to the different focus of this paper, it will not be discussed here.

### 1.2 Phonetic Annotation

Among the available libraries for phonetic transcription, Pypinyin was selected on the basis of previous experience with Goucat, primarily due to its simplicity and relatively high accuracy. The input consists of tokens obtained through tokenization, for example with *Rjieba*.

### 1.3 Adding Comments

This functionality was inherited from Goucat. It provides additional information for a selected word or part of the text. The comment is displayed automatically when the cursor hovers over the given text. Highlighting of comments can be enabled in the graphical user interface. Text with a comment is then underlined, similarly to the way text is underlined in a word processor.

### 1.4 Collocation Search

The availability of empirical data from the Hanku<sup>9</sup> corpora made it possible to include collocation search as one of the application's functionalities. For reasons of simplicity and efficiency, the application uses quantitative data, partly produced as outputs from courses in corpus linguistics. These data are downloaded from a web repository and subsequently stored locally. At present, this function is available only for verbs and nouns.

### 1.5 Tooltip Functionality

A key difference from Goucat is the use of tooltip functionality rather than an original-versus-translation interface. This means that when the user moves the mouse over the text, the application automatically displays the word, its phonetic transcription in *Hanyu pinyin*, POS annotation, the user's own translation if available, the user's own comment if available, and entries from the shared dictionary, hereafter referred to as the glossary. This function can also be disabled, and the results can instead be displayed in the lower part of the graphical user interface. See figure 1.

9 For more details, see Gajdoš et al., 2016.

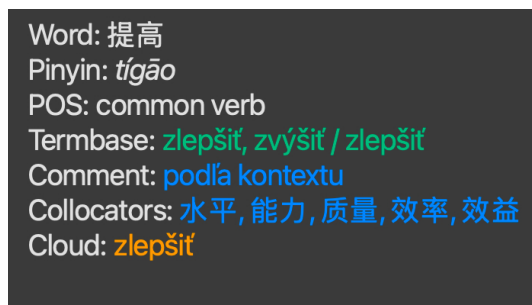


*Figure 1*  
*Tooltip overview.*

#### 1.6 Color Highlighting in the Text

Student feedback from the use of Goucat led to the inclusion of color highlighting as a text-annotation functionality. This feature essentially simulates the highlighting of text in a printed publication.

#### 1.7 Translation

The application also provides online translation of selected text passages. This function can be disabled by the teacher for individual texts. Although Goucat included automatic online word translation, the results proved inadequate, and the function was therefore used only minimally. For this reason, automatic online word translation was not incorporated into the application.

#### 1.8 Text-to-Speech

A simple aid for students is reading the text aloud, using the built-in text-to-speech functionality of the operating system.

## 2 *Application Functionality*

### 2.1 Sharing of Language Data

During instruction and use of the application, some language data are shared in a private cloud.<sup>10</sup> These language data are not accessible to third parties and are used only for didactic and linguistic research conducted at our academic institution. The shared data include texts and selected vocabulary.

### 2.2 Import and Export of a Personal Dictionary

Since no electronic Chinese-Slovak dictionary was available as of spring 2026, students are encouraged from the beginning of their studies to build their own electronic dictionary, for example in a spreadsheet application. For this reason, the option to import a personal dictionary is available as a basic functionality. The application then allows users to add new vocabulary to their personal dictionary and subsequently export it in a spreadsheet format, typically ODS or XLSX. It is also possible to use a dictionary from the previously mentioned Goucat tool.

### 2.3 Export and Printing

Although most students prefer to create notes in electronic form, the option to export language material into a printable format remains important. For this reason, the application supports the export of texts and selected vocabulary into PDF, HTML, ODT, or DOCX format. The exported material may include a frequency-ranked vocabulary list, with the most frequent lexical items appearing first. Slovak equivalents are provided for words included in the personal dictionary. In addition, vocabulary can be categorized according to HSK levels.

<sup>10</sup> The application allows users to disable this option.

## Text

## 加入世界贸易组织之后

近日，中国经济景气监测中心与中央电视台《中国财经报道》互相协助，就中国加入世贸组织五年内生活质量、思想观念、就业水平等方面的问题，对600余位居民进行了问卷调查。调查中，近六成居民预测在未来五年内，生活质量将比现在有明显提，从多数居民对中国加入世贸组织后的五年的生活预期良好中，看出人们对中国经济在此时全面参与世界抱有信心，并认为国家经济水平上升，必然对国民有益与此同时，38.5%的居民预测自己或家庭的生活质量与现在基本相当，认为更大的发展在后面取有2%预测生活会不太令人满意。对于社会服务水平，91.5%的居民预测未来五年社会总体服务水平将会提高。逐步兴起的现代服务行业的竞争局面使绝大多数人为之欢喜，看到了希望，人们期待着服务方面有更多更好的选择，期待着国际标准服务随处可见。

我国已于2001年12月正式加入世贸组织，这意味着我国将在更大范围参与世界竞争与合作，得到好的发展机遇，享受多边协定的成果，获得进入其他国家市场的机会。从长期来看，它将对我国经济增长和对外贸易产生积极的影响，给我国传统的劳动密集型产品和技术成熟且已具有一定规模的轻工产品出口带来大量机会。据世界银行估计，加入世贸组织后五年内，我国贸易量在世界上所占的比重将从目前的4.5%提高到6.5%。加入世贸组织以后，我国企业将面临外国企业的致竞争，我国经济发展的状况将主要取决于我国企业在国际竞争中的地位与实力，而我国现行的经济体制还存在着不少不足，使本来就因为生产力发展水平仰万而缺乏国际竞争力的我国不少企业更难以应付国际竞争的挑战。

但对老百姓来说，则是有益无害。就业总量增加，就业结构发生改变俄国的消费者将面对更多的消费选择和更便宜的商品。

加入世贸组织之后，我国的国有企业和国有银行都将面临的一个突出问题这就是专业人才的缺乏和流失。所以，我国高等教育的主要任务之一，就是要尽快地培养各种专业人才，尤其是建立社会主义市场与对外开放所急需的法律人才。（字数统计：824）

## Vocabulary

| Word / Phrase | Transcription | Translation | Note |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|------|
| 我国            | wǒguó         | Čína        |      |
| 加入            | jiārù         | vstúpit     |      |
| 经济            | jīngjì        | ekonomika   |      |
| 发展            | fāzhǎn        | rozvoj      |      |
| 之后            | zhīhòu        | potom       |      |
| 世界            | shìjiè        | svet        |      |
| 国家            | guójiā        | krajina     |      |

Figure 2

*Example of export to HTML format.*

## 2.4 Controls and User Interface

The current generation of students has grown up with smartphones and often carries these usage habits over to desktop applications. In other words, they often prefer simplicity over a greater number of functions. They also tend to prefer interfaces similar to those used on smartphones.

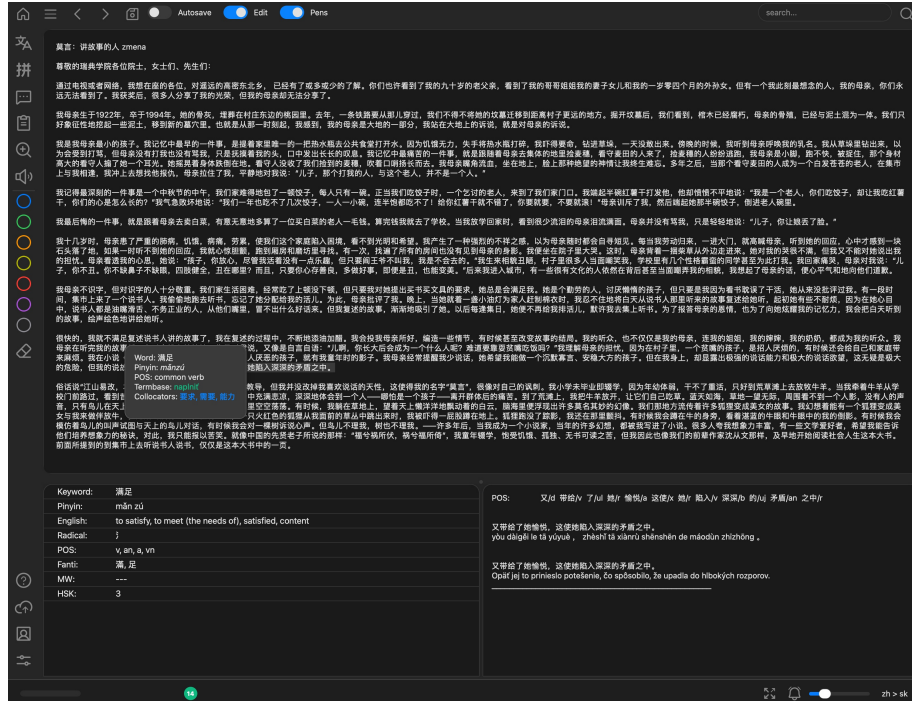


Figure 3  
Application interface overview.

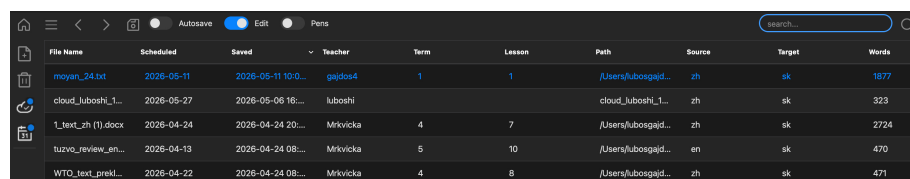
For this reason, PySide6 was selected as the basis of the interface,<sup>11</sup> since it offers greater flexibility than, for example, the simpler and visually less modern Tkinter.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the interface is designed not to rely on a GUI layout that separates the original text from its translation in parallel columns, nor on

- 11 Working with PySide is considerably more complex than working with Tkinter. In this respect, the alternating use of GPT-5.4 and Gemini 3.1 was of great help, although it must also be noted that this was far from what is often described as *vibe programming/coding*.
- 12 Tkinter is Python's standard library for creating simple graphical user interfaces, such as windows, buttons, and forms. It enables quick development of basic desktop applications without external tools. <https://docs.python.org/3/library/tkinter.html>

sentence-level segmentation. Compared with a CAT tool, this approach places greater emphasis on context, since the text often takes the form of a dialogue or another continuous structure.<sup>13</sup>

### 3 *Workflow from the Teacher's Perspective*

The workflow is fairly simple. The teacher uploads a text and assigns a teaching date to it. This process may be automated, for example by sending the text as an email attachment or, more simply, by uploading it directly to the cloud. After launching the application, the file is then downloaded automatically for the student,<sup>14</sup> or the student can add it manually by opening it directly from the local drive of their computer. When adding the file manually, the student then enters the metadata manually: teacher, teaching date, semester, and lesson number. These data can subsequently be used to filter the display of the history of taught texts.



| File Name          | Scheduled  | Saved              | Teacher   | Term | Lesson | Path                | Source | Target | Words |
|--------------------|------------|--------------------|-----------|------|--------|---------------------|--------|--------|-------|
| moyan_24.txt       | 2026-05-11 | 2026-05-11 10:0... | gajdos4   | 1    | 1      | /Users/lubosgajd... | zh     | sk     | 1877  |
| cloud_luboshi_1... | 2026-05-27 | 2026-05-06 16:...  | luboshi   |      |        | cloud_luboshi_1...  | zh     | sk     | 323   |
| 1_text_zh (1).docx | 2026-04-24 | 2026-04-24 20:...  | Mirkvicka | 4    | 7      | /Users/lubosgajd... | zh     | sk     | 2724  |
| tuzvo_review_en... | 2026-04-13 | 2026-04-24 08:...  | Mirkvicka | 5    | 10     | /Users/lubosgajd... | en     | sk     | 470   |
| WTO_text_prekl...  | 2026-04-22 | 2026-04-24 08:...  | Mirkvicka | 4    | 8      | /Users/lubosgajd... | zh     | sk     | 471   |

*Figure 4*  
*Overview of files and translation tasks with key metadata.*

<sup>13</sup> The menu includes an option to display each sentence on a separate line.

<sup>14</sup> The metadata for the text are also added automatically, for example the teacher, teaching date, group, course, and so forth.

#### 4 *Overview*

The GouBook tool enables the teacher to distribute the text to be covered in class with little effort. Teachers can also set various parameters for the text, for example whether the text will be editable, that is, whether students will be able to make notes directly in the text, whether an online translator will be available, and so forth.

Students, on the other hand, receive a tool in which they can read the text, display their own or a shared dictionary, attach notes to words or parts of the text, view phonetic annotation, and so on. They may also use color highlighting in the text. The application also works in offline mode, although some functions require an online connection.

GouBook is primarily designed for the Chinese-Slovak language pair, but it is also intended to support other European languages, such as Czech, Hungarian, German, and English. With minor modifications, it can also be used for other language pairs.

The application is written almost entirely in Python and uses available open-source solutions. GouBook is designed as an application for Windows 10 and 11.<sup>15</sup> JSON is used as the basic format for data storage.<sup>16</sup>

#### 5 *Future Functionalities*

The original project envisioned the use of a local LLM at the academic institution. This model would serve as an aid for the teacher in designing exercises focused, for example, on practicing the syntactic specifics of vocabulary from a given text. At the same time, it would also serve as an aid for students, for example in the linguistic analysis of texts, including the previously mentioned tokenization, explanation of sentence structure, and similar functions. Given the currently high hardware costs associated with prompting, the implementation of this functionality has been deferred to future development.

<sup>15</sup> Since the application is written in Python, compilation for Linux or macOS is also possible.

<sup>16</sup> JSON was selected as the data format because it is easily readable by humans and because linguistic data can be extracted from this format relatively easily.

In the future, word search in the Hanku corpora is planned as an online extension complementing the existing basic collocation search functionality.

### *Conclusion*

The most important question remains whether this type of textbook can support the acquisition of Chinese, or foreign-language acquisition more generally. The answer, as is often the case, is not entirely straightforward. Teaching experience over the past two decades suggests a gradual shift in priorities in foreign-language learning, with real-time dialogic communication increasingly coming to the foreground at the expense of monologic forms of communication. This shift may be attributed to several factors, and the development of LLMs is likely to further accelerate this tendency.

Indeed, LLM-based translation between Chinese and other languages has reached a relatively high level of quality, gradually repositioning the student or translator in the role of a linguistic proofreader rather than a primary producer of the target text. It may therefore be concluded that learners now have access to an unprecedented amount of linguistic information; the remaining challenge lies in critically evaluating and applying it effectively.

Table 1  
*Overview of Key Libraries Used*

| Functionality                                                    | Library / Module Used                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| GUI framework (widgets, signals, graphics, printing, networking) | PySide6 (The Qt Company, 2026)                                          |
| Font Awesome icons                                               | Qtawesome (Spyder Project Contributors, 2026)                           |
| HTTP requests / web APIs                                         | Requests (Reitz & Requests Contributors, 2026)                          |
| Working with tabular data                                        | Pandas (The pandas development team, 2020)                              |
| Word documents                                                   | Python-docx (python-openxml contributors, 2026)                         |
| Language detection                                               | Simplemma (Barbaresi, 2024)                                             |
| Chinese – word segmentation                                      | Rjieba (messense, 2026), custom tokenizer based on open-source HSK data |
| Chinese – Hanyu pinyin                                           | Pypinyin (mozillazg, 2025)                                              |
| Text translation                                                 | Deep_translator (deep-translator contributors, 2023)                    |

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# Translanguaging and Recontextualizing: Evaluating the Textbook Series Chinese for Tourism—Traveling through Central and Eastern Europe

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*Abstract* This study examines how a series of Chinese for Tourism textbooks create conditions for learners to draw on their local languages and to express their cultural identities within a translanguaging pedagogical framework. Using content analysis and critical discourse analysis, the research investigates the degree to which the materials support multilingual meaning-making, represent local cultural contexts, and reflect learners' perspectives. The study also evaluates whether the textbooks incorporate essential tourism-service knowledge needed for interactions with Chinese visitors. A comparison with the Chinese Language Proficiency Standard for International Tour Guides shows that while four out of five primary task domains are included, several sub-tasks—such as material preparation, peer communication, and lost-and-found procedures—are omitted. The textbooks localize socio-cultural content through common Slovak personal names, well-known tourist attractions, and practical guiding tips; however, translanguaging opportunities remain limited, with English largely restricted to grammar explanations and task instructions. The study concludes that future textbook development should more fully integrate learners' linguistic resources and incorporate broader cultural representations to better support identity expression and align with translanguaging pedagogy.

*Keywords* translanguaging, textbook evaluation, Chinese for tourism, Central and Eastern Europe

## *Introduction*

Textbooks are a fundamental component in language pedagogy, acting as the primary interface between the curriculum and the learner (Sarem, Hamidi, &

Mahmoudie, 2013, 373). Considering the importance of good textbook design, there remains a significant research lacuna in the study of how Chinese language textbooks are designed and produced, particularly regarding the processes of localization and recontextualization.

In the last few decades, the concept of translanguaging has emerged as a transformative framework within second language acquisition (SLA) and sociolinguistics (Cenoz 2019, 73). Unlike traditional monolingual approaches, translanguaging emphasizes the strategic activation of a learner's full linguistic repertoire and prior lived experiences—a methodology that has demonstrated significant cognitive and affective advantages across various educational contexts (Han 2024, 1437; Teng and Fang 2024, 1479). Because of these advantages, the importance of incorporating translanguaging into materials development has been increasingly emphasized (Fang et al. 2022, 11).

Building on the theoretical foundations of translanguaging, this paper evaluates a specific series of Chinese for Tourism textbooks. Distinct from the general teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, the teaching of Chinese for Tourism requires learners to interpret their indigenous cultural and tourism resources for Chinese audiences. This career-led objective necessitates a translanguaging approach which actively mobilizes learners' prior knowledge and entire linguistic repertoire. By investigating how local culture and identity are represented through translanguaging practices, this study provides empirical insights into how teaching materials can be effectively recontextualized in the field of Chinese language teaching and learning.

## 1 Literature Review

### 1.1 Translanguaging and language education

Despite the continued dominance of monolingual policies in foreign and second language education, multilingual pedagogical approaches have gained increasing scholarly attention, particularly with the rise of translanguaging (Cenoz 2019, 73). Translanguaging was first used to describe bilingual classroom practices in Welsh education, where learners alternated languages across receptive and productive tasks (Williams 1994, quoted in Lewis Jones and Baker 2012, 663). Subsequent

theoretical developments have extended the concept beyond classroom techniques to a broader understanding of language use. Garcia (2011) situates translanguaging within sociopolitical debates on linguistic inequality, particularly in the U.S. context, emphasizing its role in challenging deficit perspectives toward minoritized bilingual learners (Lewis, Jones and Baker 2012, 657). Wei (2018, 10), by contrast, conceptualizes translanguaging as a practical theory of language, foregrounding the dynamic, flexible deployment of multilingual repertoires in everyday communication, especially among migrant and diasporic communities. Building on these foundations, Cenoz (2019, 79) advances the notion of pedagogical translanguaging, highlighting the importance of intentional, systematic, and well-designed instructional strategies that integrate learners' linguistic resources into classroom practice.

Distinguished from code-switching or translation, which treat languages as separate systems and emphasize the boundaries between them,<sup>1</sup> translanguaging conceptualizes language as a dynamic, integrated repertoire that multilingual speakers strategically mobilize, using their full linguistic resources and prior experiences for meaning-making, problem-solving, and knowledge construction (Wei 2018, 13). From this perspective, language learning is understood not as the acquisition of discrete linguistic systems, but an ongoing cognitive and social process which involves negotiation of meaning, reasoning, and interaction, processes that naturally draw on learners' existing linguistic resources (Garcia and Wei 2014, 47).

Empirical research across diverse educational contexts has demonstrated that translanguaging can enhance learner participation, comprehension, and agency by legitimizing prior knowledge and linguistic experience (Lin 2015, 84; Liu Lo and Lin 2020, 13; Seals et al. 2020, 126; Sobkowiak 2022, 69; Wang 2019, 81). Much of this research has been conducted in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. For example, Sobkowiak (2022, 70), in a study conducted in Poland, employed classroom observations and interviews to examine teachers' and students' attitudes toward the use of learners' first languages and other semiotic resources in EFL classrooms. Although translanguaging was found to support learning and interaction, teachers were often reluctant to incorporate it systematically due to limited institutional recognition and restrictive top-down

1 See, for example, a case of baihua/wenyan Chinese in Benická and Ye 2025.

language policies. Beyond classroom-based research, Al Masaeed (2020, 252) investigated translanguaging practices in Arabic as a Second Language study-abroad contexts, focusing on interactional practices outside formal instructional settings. The study demonstrates that learners and interlocutors deliberately employ translanguaging to facilitate communication, negotiate identity, and construct new knowledge, thereby highlighting the relevance of translanguaging for language learning beyond the classroom.

In the field of Chinese as a Foreign/Second Language (CFL/CSL), translanguaging research has primarily focused on classroom pedagogy, teacher attitudes, and instructional practices (Wang et al. 2025, 3). For example, Zhang et al. (2020, 368) report that teachers frequently utilize English and other shared languages to explain grammar, manage interaction, and scaffold learning; however, such practices often remain constrained by institutional expectations and limited pedagogical resources. While the prevailing monolingual mindset and restrictive language policies increase the difficulty of applying such frameworks, Han (2024, 1439) investigates how bilingual teachers utilize their own, as well as their students', linguistic repertoires to enhance learning within Australian schools. The study found that following targeted teacher-researcher training, bilingual teachers' translanguaging practices exhibited a strong pedagogical purpose. This was notably evident in the increased levels of learner motivation and engagement achieved through the intentional design of classroom instruction, learning materials, and activities (Han 2024, 1449).

While existing studies confirm the pedagogical relevance of translanguaging in CFL/CSL classrooms, they have largely concentrated on teacher practices, learner interaction, and language policy. Teaching materials are typically treated as background resources rather than as primary objects of analysis. As a result, relatively little is known about how translanguaging principles are reflected—or constrained—at the level of textbook design. Given that textbooks structure learning content, interactional patterns, and cultural representation, examining them from a translanguaging perspective constitutes a necessary extension of current research.

### 1.2 Translanguaging in Chinese textbook design

With the rapid global expansion of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, research on textbook development has grown substantially. Chinese scholars such as Li Quan (2004, 60), Liu Lening (2010, 21), and Wu Yinghui (2013, 123) have established influential frameworks addressing textbook design principles, content organization, and pedagogical sequencing. These studies consistently emphasize that effective teaching materials should be systematic, learner-centered, and aligned with communicative needs. Since the 2010s, increasing scholarly attention has been directed toward the localization of Chinese language textbooks, particularly in non-target-language contexts where learners' backgrounds, learning purposes, and sociocultural environments differ markedly from those assumed in globally produced materials (Cui 2023, 9; Liu 2010, 23; Zhou et al. 2018, 83). In the field of Chinese for Specific Purposes (CSP), where instructional objectives are intrinsically linked to immediate professional outcomes, the demand for recontextualization is especially pronounced. Because these learners are career-led, seeking to fulfill specific professional tasks within limited timeframes, the sequencing of linguistic items, material authenticity, and cultural appropriateness are recognized as central design criteria (Tian and Li 2025, 131).

Translanguaging-oriented approaches further this recontextualization by foregrounding learners' linguistic repertoires, cultural experiences, and identities as valuable resources for learning, thereby extending localization beyond surface-level contextual adaptation (Fang Zhang and Sah 2022, 306). From this perspective, textbooks are understood not merely as neutral carriers of linguistic content, but as ideological and semiotic artefacts that shape how learners position themselves linguistically and culturally.

Empirical support for translanguaging-informed materials design can be found in a study by Seals et al. (2020, 120-121) conducted in New Zealand, which examines the development of children's books guided by translanguaging principles in multilingual educational settings. By drawing on the natural translanguaging practices of multilingual communities, these reading materials enabled children to engage with multiple languages and cultures in meaningful ways. The findings suggest that translanguaging-oriented texts can foster enhanced cultural competence and empower learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoires, contributing to long-term advantages in both language development and intercultural awareness (Seals et al. 2020, 127).

Empirical research on translanguaging in Chinese textbooks remains limited. Notably, Yasasri's (2024, 505-510) corpus-based study of *Hanyu Jiaocheng* 汉语教程 and *New Practical Chinese Reader (Xin shiyong Hanyu keben)* 新实用汉语课本 reveals that globally circulated CFL textbooks largely maintain monolingual and assimilationist orientations. English serves as the sole mediating language between learners and Chinese, while learners' local languages are excluded. Cultural representations similarly privilege Chinese norms, positioning learners as peripheral observers rather than active cultural agents. Such design choices restrict opportunities for multilingual meaning-making and identity expression.

Synthesizing current scholarship, there is an increasing recognition among textbook developers and scholars regarding the imperative to reflect learners' diverse linguistic backgrounds, cultural identities, and local contexts within instructional materials. However, the pedagogical mechanisms to effectively achieve this integration remain insufficiently discussed.

Translanguaging, which strategically mobilizes learners' prior knowledge and experiences, offers a pathway in this regard. In the field of career-led Chinese for Specific Purposes, such as Chinese for Tourism, intercultural mediation and professional output within a limited time are the main learning objectives. Therefore, evaluating materials based on a professional standard—rather than isolated linguistic items—provides a more rigorous benchmark for pedagogical efficiency. Within this framework, investigating negotiation between local and Chinese cultures offers a direct lens into how translanguaging enables students to recontextualize tourism-service skills within the Central and Eastern European landscape.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent do the selected textbooks fulfill the professional work tasks defined in the *Chinese Language Proficiency Standard for International Tour Guides* (hereafter the Guide)?
- 2) How do these textbooks leverage translanguaging practices to represent local and Chinese cultures and learner identities within a professional tourism context?

## 2 Research Design and Methodology

### 2.1 Material: the Chinese for tourism textbook series

*The Chinese for Tourism in Central and Eastern Europe* series is a three-volume pedagogical set published in 2022 by Comenius University Bratislava. The series was developed as a core component of the “Belt and Road Initiative: Local Chinese Language Tourism Talent Training Program for Central and Eastern Europe”, sponsored by the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation. Notably, the curriculum was designed to support a joint major at the University of Primorska (Koper, Slovenia) and an optional Business Chinese course at Comenius University (Bratislava, Slovakia). Consequently, the pedagogical activities in Volume 1 are tailored specifically for Slovenian learners, whereas Volume 2 adopts a more geographically neutral approach.<sup>2</sup>

Each volume is structured into two chapters, comprising four primary lessons and one review unit. Lessons follow a bifurcated structure (Parts A and B). In Volumes 1 and 2, both sections consist of dialogues between tour guides and tourists. However, in Volume 3, Part A maintains the dialogue format while Part B transitions into narrative prose.

### 2.2 Research methods

#### 2.2.1 Evaluative framework: Chinese language proficiency standard for international tour guides

The primary framework for this evaluation is the *Chinese Language Proficiency Standard for International Tour Guides* (hereafter the Guide), officially released on November 16, 2025 by the International Society for Chinese Language Teaching. The Guide represents a multi-sectoral collaboration involving academic institutions (e.g. Xiamen University, Nankai University), language testing organizations (e.g. Fudan-CTI Innovation Center), and industry stakeholders (e.g. Tunisia National Tourism Office in Beijing, Shanghai Jiushi Group), ensuring that its benchmarks are grounded in both pedagogical rigor and real-world career requirements.

<sup>2</sup> Ding 2022 (volume 1), and Guo 2022a and 2022b (volume 2 and 3).

Although the Guide categorizes proficiency into elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels, this study focuses specifically on the elementary level. This scoping decision aligns with the linguistic complexity of the textbook series under investigation, which corresponds to HSK levels 1 through 3 and selected components of HSK 4. By adopting the Guide's defined "Work Tasks" and "Sub-work Tasks" as the benchmark, this study interrogates the extent to which the materials prepare learners for the professional communicative demands of the tourism sector.

#### 2.2.2 Analysis methods

Textbook evaluation is a critical process that extends beyond initial selection; it is essential before, during, and after pedagogical implementation (Cunningsworth 1995; Tomlinson 2003). The current study focuses on pre-use evaluation through systematic content analysis. In the context of language materials, content analysis allows researchers to identify not only the explicit linguistic input but also notable omissions, providing insight into the underlying pedagogical priorities and socio-cultural meanings (Krippendorff 2018, 27-31). The Work Tasks and Sub-work tasks defined by the Guide (see Table 1) were utilized as the coding scheme. The researcher performed a granular, word-by-word examination of the dialogue sections to cross-reference textbook content with these professional standards. Following established coding procedures in content analysis, a presence/absence marking system was employed: a sub-work task was recorded once upon its initial appearance within a dialogue, regardless of its frequency within that specific unit, to ensure a focus on thematic coverage rather than mere repetition. Due to structural and format variations, Volume 3 is excluded from the current evaluation.

Table 1

*Work Tasks and Sub-work Tasks*

| Work tasks          | Sub-work tasks                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Service preparation | 1) Be familiar with the trip itinerary and the group's information.<br>2) Be able to prepare necessary documents, and necessities. |

|                      |     |                                                                                                             |
|----------------------|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Departure<br>welcome | and | 3) Be familiar with local traditions, customs, laws, and other necessary information.                       |
|                      |     | 4) Be able to contact and communicate with the crew.                                                        |
|                      |     | 5) Be able to wait and pick up the group in advance and check information with the group.                   |
| En-route service     |     | 6) Be able to guide the group with necessary information and organize the group according to the itinerary. |
|                      |     | 7) Be able to offer traffic information and organize commuting activities.                                  |
|                      |     | 8) Be able to offer accommodation service and introduce related facilities.                                 |
|                      |     | 9) Be able to introduce food information and change according to the group's special requests.              |
|                      |     | 10) Be able to talk about weather, places, arrangements, special information about the trip.                |
| Departure service    |     | 11) Be able to offer shopping suggestions if asked.                                                         |
|                      |     | 12) Be able to introduce entertainment service and accompany if needed.                                     |
|                      |     | 13) Be able to announce departure information and organize properly.                                        |
| Deal with emergency  |     | 14) Be able to see off, express gratitude, and wishes.                                                      |
|                      |     | 15) Be able to help with lost items.                                                                        |
|                      |     | 16) Be able to organize under emergency such as accident, fire, etc.                                        |

Following the quantitative content analysis, the study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine selected excerpts from the linguistic input and exercise segments. CDA in educational research serves to uncover how textbooks—often perceived as neutral—construct specific representations of identity, nationality, and power dynamics (Rogers 2011, 1). Given that this series is situated within the “Belt and Road Initiative”, CDA is particularly suited for investigating how the relationship between the local (Central and Eastern European) and the target (Chinese) identities is negotiated.

### 3 Textbook Analysis Results

#### 3.1 Guide work tasks and sub-tasks

The word-by-word content analysis reveals a comprehensive, yet uneven, distribution of professional competencies across the series. As illustrated in the comparative analysis (see Table 2), four of the five primary work tasks defined by the Guide are addressed within the first two volumes. Notably, the final work task—Dealing with Emergencies—is entirely absent from the analyzed material.

Table 2  
*Work Tasks, Sub-work Tasks, and Presence*

| Work tasks               | Sub-work tasks                                                                                              | Presence |          |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|
|                          |                                                                                                             | Volume 1 | Volume 2 |
| Service preparation      | 1) Be familiar with the trip itinerary and the group's information.                                         | none     | 2        |
|                          | 2) Be able to prepare necessary documents, and necessities.                                                 | 1        | none     |
|                          | 3) Be familiar with local traditions, customs, laws, and other necessary information.                       | none     | 8        |
|                          | 4) Be able to contact and communicate with the co-workers.                                                  | none     | none     |
| Get together and welcome | 5) Be able to wait and pick up the group in advance and check information with the group.                   | 1        | 2        |
|                          | 6) Be able to guide the group with necessary information and organize the group according to the itinerary. | 1        | 5        |

|                     |                                                                                                |      |      |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| En-route service    | 7) Be able to offer traffic information and organize commuting activities.                     | 1    | 3    |
|                     | 8) Be able to offer accommodation service and introduce related facilities.                    | 2    | 6    |
|                     | 9) Be able to introduce food information and change according to the group's special requests. | 2    | 2    |
|                     | 10) Be able to talk about weather, places, arranges, special information about the trip.       | 6    | 9    |
|                     | 11) Be able to offer shopping suggestions if asked.                                            | 1    | 5    |
|                     | 12) Be able to introduce entertainment service and accompany if needed.                        | none | 1    |
| Departure service   | 13) Be able to announce departure information and organize properly.                           | none | 2    |
|                     | 14) Be able to see off, express gratitude, and wishes.                                         | none | 1    |
| Deal with emergency | 15) Be able to help with lost items.                                                           | none | none |
|                     | 16) Be able to organize under emergency such as accident, fire, etc.                           | none | none |

Regarding the distribution of sub-tasks, Volume 2 demonstrates broader coverage, with most sub-tasks associated with the first four work tasks appearing at least once. Despite this breadth, the sub-tasks categorized under Service Preparation show the lowest frequency of occurrence, with internal communication protocols between the tour guide and co-workers being notably underrepresented. In contrast, Volume 1 exhibits more significant limitations; in addition to the

absence of the emergency task, it does not cover the Departure Service work task, restricting its thematic focus to the remaining three categories.

### 3.2 Representation of identity and nationality

The analysis indicates that the *Chinese for Tourism* series incorporates elements of local identity primarily through multilingual lexical support. The inclusion of Slovak and Slovenian translations for new vocabulary items serves as the most direct linguistic representation of the learners' national backgrounds. Regarding grammatical and phonetic instruction, English is the predominant medium of explanation; however, a specific instance of cross-linguistic comparison occurs in Volume 1, Chapter 1, Lesson 1.1, where the Chinese pinyin initials “zh, ch, sh, r” are contrasted with the Slavic phonemes “dž, č, š, ž”. Beyond linguistic markers, local culture and identities are integrated into the pedagogical framework through task-based activities. These exercises require students to perform the role of a local guide, necessitating the introduction of regional landmarks and the provision of essential tourist information. Quantitatively, however, the proportion of these activities is limited.

### 3.3 Chinese culture and identities

Chinese culture and identities are mainly represented by the characters, related preferences and non-linguistic resources. The character profiles within the series evolve in complexity from Volume 1 to Volume 2. In Volume 1, the narrative features four main characters, three of whom are Chinese. However, these characters lack detailed biographical backgrounds, such as specific information regarding their hometowns, professions, or ages. In Volume 2, the character set expands to include six new individuals alongside the recurring guide, Anna (a typical Slavic female name). Of these, five are Chinese, and more detailed demographic information is provided. These characters represent specific traveler profiles: a family unit where the son is employed in Slovenia and joined by his parents for a vacation, and a young mother traveling with her son from Shanghai.

Furthermore, Chinese cultural identity is reflected implicitly through the characters' specific requests, preferred leisure activities, and evaluative comments within the dialogues. In contrast to these subtle textual cues, the non-linguistic resources—specifically the photographs and illustrations—serve as a direct

representation of Chinese cultural competency, visually grounding the pedagogical content in recognizable cultural contexts.

#### 4 Discussion

From the findings, it is evident that translanguaging strategies have been integrated into the textbook series, providing a bridge between the learners' existing linguistic resources and the target language. However, as Fang Zhang and Sah (2022, 310) conclude, adapting translanguaging into formal textbooks remains a significant challenge due to the historical prevalence of monolingual ideologies. Analysis of the collected data reveals a distinct contrast in how identity is constructed within the series: local identity is explicitly reinforced through the strategic use of the students' first languages (L1), regional landmarks, and localized vocabulary. In contrast, Chinese identity and culture are presented more implicitly and with less frequency, primarily surfacing through specific dialogue cues.

In the following sections, detailed extracts are presented to demonstrate how translanguaging practices are operationalized within the text and to highlight critical areas for consideration in the development of future Chinese language learning and teaching materials.

##### 4.1 Guide work tasks and sub-tasks

In the evolution of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the conceptualization of the first language (L1) has shifted from a source of "interference" to a vital cognitive asset. Modern research emphasizes the strategic activation of a learner's full linguistic repertoire to facilitate the acquisition of a new language (Cenoz and Gorter 2022, 351). This is particularly evident in the *Chinese for Tourism* series, where the use of L1 (Slovak or Slovenian) serves as a tool for semantic precision.

As Wu (2013, 118) notes, relying solely on English translations in Chinese pedagogy can lead to lexical ambiguity. For instance, the Chinese verbs *zhidao* 知道 and *renshi* 认识 are both frequently rendered as "to know" in English. However, the use of L1 Slovak provides a clearer distinction through the separate terms *vedieť* (to know factual knowledge) and *poznať niekoho* (to know someone), thereby reducing cognitive load and conceptual confusion for the learner.

The representation of local landmarks also highlights a tension between linguistic authenticity and professional utility. In Volume 1, Lesson 2.1, the Slovenian poet Prešeren is introduced by his original name rather than a Chinese transliteration.

Extract 1:

李闯: 左边的这个雕像是谁?

Li Chuang: Who is the statue on the left?

安娜: 他是斯洛文尼亚的著名诗人 Prešeren, 所以这个广场也叫 Prešeren 广场。

Anna: He was Prešeren, a famous Slovenian poet. So the square is called Prešeren Square.

While this preserves local identity, it may overlook the professional needs of a tour guide, who must establish a “communicative bond” between the Chinese visitor and local history. By Volume 2, the series shifts toward this professional reality by providing Chinese transliterations for sites such as the High Tatras (*Gaotatelasban* 高塔特拉山), Levoča (*Laiwoqia* 莱沃恰), and Spiš Castle (*Sipishichengbao* 斯皮什城堡). These translations are primarily phonetic, allowing learners to bridge the phonological gap between their L1 and Chinese. A notable exception is the Hrad Červený kameň (Red Stone Castle), translated semantically as *Hong shi chengbao* 红石城堡, and the famous Čumil statue in Bratislava, identified by his profession as *Shuiguan gong* 水管工 (The Plumber), which provides students with functional vocabulary in a tourism context.

However, the analysis suggests that learners’ linguistic repertoires remain underutilized in pedagogical activities. For instance, in Volume 1 (Lesson 2.2), a task requiring students to translate a menu primarily utilizes English alongside images. Since the dishes are already visually represented, the cognitive and communicative value of a simple English-to-Chinese translation is limited. In a real-world tourism context, menus are typically presented in the local language and often lack pictorial aids. A more effective recontextualized exercise would involve providing local authentic menus and requiring students to use the basic Chinese vocabulary learned in the lesson (e.g. fried, roasted, chicken, beef, lamb) to explain the categories and cooking methods to Chinese visitors. Such a task would transition from a “word-to-word” translation model to a translanguaging-oriented mediation, better aligning with the professional skills to negotiate meaning across linguistic boundaries.

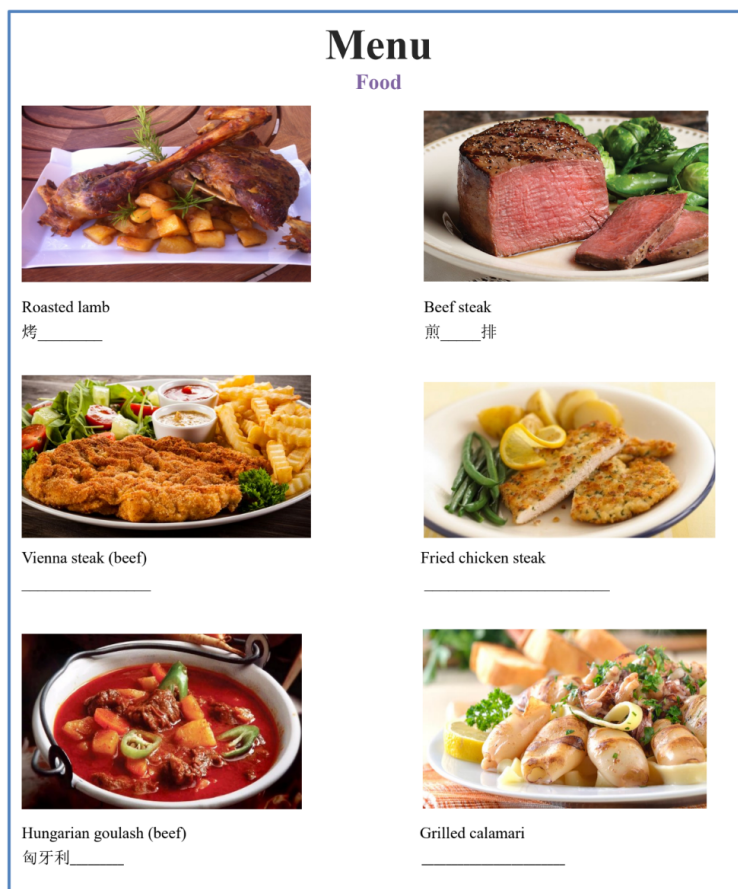


*Figure 1*  
*Menu from Volume 1 and Menu from a local restaurant.*

#### 4.2 Translanguaging as a strategy for pedagogical recontextualization

A significant challenge in the series is the structural divergence between Chinese and Slavic languages, which often complicates the learner's grasp of specific grammatical functions. The data suggests that while the series utilizes English as a bridge, the reliance on dense linguistic metalanguage—specialized jargon rarely used in daily life—can create barriers to learner autonomy. For instance, in Volume 1, the introduction of “sentences with nominal predicates” may cause conceptual confusion for students whose English proficiency is not advanced. To

mitigate this, Volume 2 demonstrates an evolution toward a more accessible pedagogical design. Aligned with the principles of pedagogical translanguaging, the series increasingly replaces complex theoretical explanations with simple functional formulas and multimodal resources (Cenoz and Gorter 2022, 346), effectively recontextualizing unfamiliar grammar into the learners' existing cognitive frameworks.

In Volume 1, Chapter 3, the introduction of “sentences with nominal predicates” utilizes professional terminology that is rarely encountered in daily life. For a non-native English speaker, such specialized jargon can lead to conceptual confusion and the subsequent misuse of the grammar structure. In such instances, a more effective pedagogical approach—aligned with the principles of pedagogical translanguaging—would be to simplify the input into functional formulas. For example, replacing complex terminology with clear structural patterns such as:

- Subject + age/date/time
- Subject + *bushi* 不是 (not) + age/date/time

The series demonstrates an evolution toward this simplified approach in Volume 2. Complex theoretical explanations are increasingly replaced by non-linguistic structural forms that allow learners to easily identify and swap components during self-directed review. A clear example is found in Chapter 2 with the conditional structure “*ruguo* 如果 (if) ... *jiu* 就...” (if... then...).

◇ 假设复句: (如果 *rúguó*) .....的话 *dehuà* / 如果 *rúguó*.....就 *jiù*.....

**If clause:** (如果 *rúguó*) .....的话 *dehuà* / 如果 *rúguó*.....就 *jiù*.....

“(如果) .....的话, 如果.....就.....” are commonly used to express “if... then...” in Chinese. In a sentence of “如果.....就.....”, “如果” tells a condition, while “就” leads to the result of that condition. The structure is:

**(如果) + Clause 1(condition) + 的话, Clause 2 (result).**  
**如果 + Clause 1(condition), 就 + Clause 2 (result).**

For example:

|              |                             |                                        |
|--------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <i>Rúguó</i> | <i>nín xū yào de huà</i>    | <i>wǒ kě yǐ qù wèn yí xià qián tái</i> |
| 1) (如果)      | 您需要的话,                      | 我可以去问一下前台。                             |
| <i>Nín</i>   | <i>rú guó xū yào de huà</i> | <i>wǒ kě yǐ qù wèn yí xià qián tái</i> |
| 2) 您 (如果)    | 需要的话,                       | 我可以去问一下前台。                             |

*Figure 2*  
*Explanation of ruguo 如果... jiu 就....*

In Volume 2 (Lesson 4.2), for instance, the exercise focusing on the modal verb *hui* 会 incorporates a question in the students’ L1 within an accompanying image. This strategic use of L1 explicitly establishes the communicative context for the question “安娜会不会说汉语?” (Can Anna speak Chinese?), serving as a scaffolding tool that grounds the abstract linguistic structure in a recognizable situational reality.

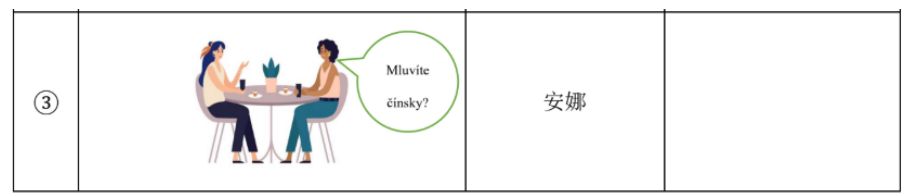


Figure 3  
L1 in exercise.

Furthermore, Volume 2 significantly increases the use of imagery to explicitly explain grammar while creating “pedagogical spaces” for practice. For example, when teaching adjective predicates (Figure 4), a concise two-line explanation is followed by a structure and diverse images—such as a famous Chinese model and a local Christmas market. These visuals do not just illustrate the word; they create a space for students to activate their multimodal repertoire, allowing them to express their own feelings and cultural opinions (Cenoz and Gorter, 2022, 348).

Subj. + 很/不 + adjective.

For example:

Jintiānrèrè  
1) 今天很热。

Jíekèhěnhǎowán  
2) 捷克很好玩。

Jintiānbúrè  
3) 今天不热。

Jíekèbùhǎowán  
4) 捷克不好玩。

Pay attention: In the affirmative sentence, you need to put 很 before the adjective predicate.

Question: “吗” or use the affirmative-negative question.

JintiānrèmaJintiānrèbúrè  
5) 今天热吗? / 今天热不热?

JíekèhǎowánmaJíekèhǎowánbùhǎowán  
6) 捷克好玩吗? / 捷克好玩不好玩?

Exercise: Make affirmative-negative questions with the given words according to the pictures and then give the proper answers.

|      |                                                                                     |                 |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| E.g. |    | 今天热不热?<br>今天很热。 |
| ①    |   |                 |
| ②    |  |                 |
| ③    |  |                 |
| ④    |  |                 |

Figure 4  
Sentence with an adjective predicate.

Similarly, abstract concepts like adverbs of degree (*bu* 不, *hen* 很, *feichang* 非常) or directional complements (*lai* 来/ *qu* 去) are clarified through visual scales and arrows (Figures 5 & 6). These non-linguistic materials explicitly indicate spatial relationships and intensity levels that are difficult to convey through text alone.

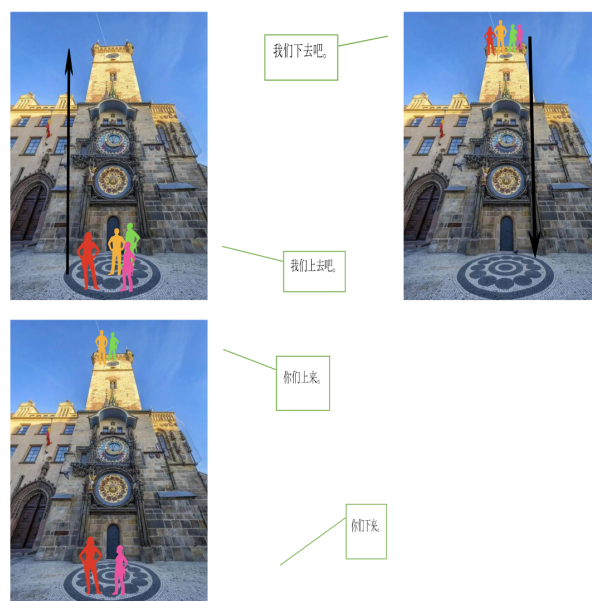


*Figure 5*  
*How simple complement of direction is illustrated.*

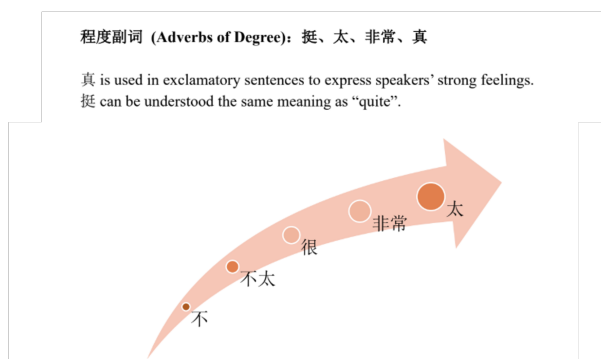


*Figure 6*  
*Degree of adverbs.*

This multimodal approach extends to the section of recommended activities, such as designing a one-day trip itinerary (Figure 7). By providing pictures of travel options rather than long text descriptions, the textbook empowers students to draw on their previous experiences and personal beliefs. As Cenoz and Gorter (2022, 345) emphasize, such practices enable students to benefit from their own multilingual and multimodal resources, fostering a more authentic and personalized learning experience.

• Recommended class activities

Please offer two choices for the one-day tour of the following tourist attractions and make a detailed itinerary. Try to use as many new words and structures as possible.

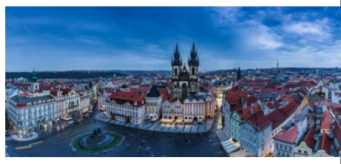
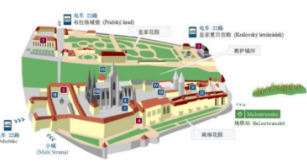
|                                                                                     |                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |    |
| ① 滑雪还是参观?                                                                           |                                                                                      |
|  |  |
| ② 游览老城广场还是爬城堡山?                                                                     |                                                                                      |

*Figure 7*  
*Options for one-day trip.*

#### 4.3 Recontextualizing local and intercultural representations

As established in the literature review, recontextualization—the kind that necessitates reflecting learners' cultural identities and local contexts within the curriculum—is a pivotal trend in contemporary materials development. In the specific domain of Chinese for Tourism, learners, who are expected to interpret their own cultural and tourism resources for native Chinese speakers, are enabled to recontextualize their prior experiences and professional tour-guiding skills. In

this series, CEE contexts are prioritized; for instance, Volume 1 introduces the names of these countries and their capital cities within the first three units. Volume 2 further distinguishes itself from general Chinese textbooks by including a localized lexicon specific to the region, such as regional hubs like Poprad (*Bopulade* 波普拉德) and České Budějovice (*Bujiyueweicai* 布杰约维采), significant landmarks like Hrad Devín (*Dewen chengbao* 德文城堡) and the Cerkev Marije pred Týnom (*Tai en jiaotang* 泰恩教堂), and traditional culinary items like pečené bravčové koleno (*kao zhu zhou* 烤猪肘).

Beyond vocabulary, the textbook design utilizes “space” to allow learners to project their own identities into the learning process through a translanguaging approach. In Volume 2, activities transition from being area-specific to being more inclusive of the entire region. A prime example is found in Lesson 3.3 (Figure 8), which focuses on Czechia but prompts students to introduce “special dishes and the most attractive town” of their own respective countries using the provided linguistic structures. By avoiding the imposition of a singular “correct” town or food item, the activity enables students to integrate their personal culture into the curriculum.

• Recommended class activities

1. Get familiar with food introduction, especially the special dishes of your country.

- Possible words: 特色菜 便宜 可能 烤 不错 味道 满意 挺 太 有点儿
- Possible structures:  
A 比 B + Adj. (一点儿/一些/多了/得多)  
A 跟 B 差不多。
- Supplementary vocabulary

|           |           |         |           |
|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| suān<br>酸 | tián<br>甜 | là<br>辣 | xián<br>咸 |
| sour      | sweet     | spicy   | salty     |

2. Group work. Introduce the most attractive town in your country to other students and the teacher. Try to use as many vocabulary and structures we have learned as possible.

Figure 8

*Activity to introduce special dishes and the most attractive town of your country.*

A similar principle is observed in the Lesson 3.4 activity involving statues of famous figures (Figure 9). Notably, the figures selected—such as Sándor Petőfi and Mozart—are well-known to Chinese audiences. This selection facilitates a

subtle understanding of Chinese perspectives; students represent their own heritage while simultaneously learning how that heritage is perceived by the target culture. This is crucial for tourism education, where understanding the customer's cultural background is as vital as linguistic proficiency.

- **Recommended class activities**

Please introduce the name, nationality of these famous people and what they have done.



*Figure 9*  
*Famous people statues.*

On the other hand, the Chinese gaze is represented in dialogue cues, for example:

Extract 2:

安娜：大家以前来过布拉格吗？有没有听过一首歌叫《布拉格广场》？

Anna: Have any of you been to Prague before? Have you ever heard the song “Prague Square”?

In this example, the guide Anna initiates a conversation by asking if the tourists have heard the song “Prague Square” (*Bulage guangchang* 布拉格广场). This song is a cultural touchstone for Chinese travelers born after the 1980s—the demographic most likely to engage in the various forms of European travel represented in the book. Similarly, Lesson 3.2 captures specific Chinese tourist habits through the characters’ inquiries about hotel amenities:

Extract 3:

王磊：请问，酒店有免费的无线网络吗？

Wang Lei: Does the hotel offer free Wi-Fi?

安娜：这是酒店无线网络的密码。您如果有问题就问我。

Anna: This is the password. If you have any questions, please ask me.

王磊: 好的, 另外, 房间里有热水壶吗?

Wang Lei: Ok. Additionally, is there a kettle in the room?

安娜: 一般没有, 您需要的话, 我可以去问一下前台。

Anna: Usually not, but if you need it, I can ask the reception.

By highlighting requests for Wi-Fi and a kettle for hot water—items of high priority for Chinese travelers but perhaps less frequently requested by locals—the text alerts future guides to cultural differences and encourages a comparison of habits.

Furthermore, the series employs comparative tasks to deepen this intercultural understanding. In Lesson 4.3, students compare their local cities to Chinese metropolises like Beijing or Shanghai, while Lesson 4.4 asks them to compare shopping advantages and categories between Europe and China, including the practice of gift-buying. Through these comparisons, learners are forced to look more deeply at their own culture through the lens of the “other”.

Finally, non-linguistic materials—specifically imagery—serve as a dual-representation tool. Local identity is reinforced through pictures of the Hero Square (for *guangchang*) or prices in Euros (for *jiage*), while Chinese identity is represented through images of Chinese coins (*yingbi*), Mount Huangshan (*shanfeng*), and High-Speed Rail (*huoche*). However, Volume 1 shows less intentionality in this regard; for example, using Mount Rushmore to illustrate “statue” or English signage for “toilet” misses an opportunity to reinforce either local or Chinese identity. Utilizing a Slavic statue or LI signage would have more effectively validated the students' identity and the specific professional context of the series.

## 5 Conclusion and Implications

By conducting a granular, word-by-word comparison with professional standards and interrogating the manifestation of translanguaging in the materials, this study demonstrates that a translanguaging approach in developing teaching materials does more than facilitate linguistic acquisition. It fosters a dual awareness of the distinctions and interconnections between the self (local) and the other (Chinese). This reflexive consciousness, in turn, empowers learners to achieve a sophisticated

recontextualization of both their professional tour-guiding functions and their linguistic expression within the local landscape.

A significant pedagogical lacuna in the series is the absence of explicit paratextual guidance, such as a preface, or pedagogical introduction. Without a formal articulation of the underlying translanguaging framework, the materials place a considerable cognitive and instructional burden on instructors who possess a monolingual mindset or adhere to a target-language-only ideology. This often leads to the neglect of the positive influence of students' linguistic capital and previous experiences, which are vital for fostering inclusive education and recontextualization (Wei 2018, 19).

While the series aligns with Chinese-published professional standards, it exhibits a lack of systematic integration with local (CEE) tour-guiding regulations, a significant lacuna for materials designed for cross-cultural vocational mediation. Additionally, although many instances of translanguaging were observed, its pedagogical implementation remains fragmented rather than systematic. The potential of the learners' L1 as a strategic cognitive tool for explaining complex grammatical contrasts or negotiating nuanced cultural meanings is often underutilized.

Ultimately, while the series marks a significant advancement in career-led CSP, future development should aim for a more balanced and systematic synthesis of both Chinese and local professional standards. Embracing a more explicit and structured translanguaging framework will be essential for fostering the authentic recontextualization of professional skills in globalized tourism settings.

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# One Character, Multiple Meanings: Drivers and Mechanisms of Character-Level Sense Emergence

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*Abstract* A recurrent phenomenon in the Modern Chinese lexicon is that the semantic content of a disyllabic word is often borne by one of its monosyllabic constituents, and that this monosyllabic character can recombine with other characters to form new words and phrasal expressions. Some scholars refer to this pattern as “*bìng hé zào cí fǎ*” (并合造词法, Incorporation Word Formation). This paper investigates the driving forces and operative mechanisms that give rise to novel, character-level senses in this context. We argue that the principal driving force is a tendency toward linguistic concision—i.e. the pressure of the principle of linguistic economy—and that the mechanisms at work comprise at least three interrelated processes: (1) prototype effects, whereby a constituent is cognitively construed as the semantic prototype of the compound and is thereby abstracted into a reusable semantic core; (2) prosodic suppression, namely the constraint imposed by a disyllabic prosodic frame that favors monosyllabic realization and thus promotes the truncation of polysyllabic units; and (3) semantic infiltration and shift, in which frequent co-occurrence and conventionalization cause the compound’s holistic meaning to migrate to the character level and become lexicalized. On this basis, we contend that 并合 (*bìng hé*, incorporation) leads to the creation of new senses for characters; analytically, 并合造词法 is best understood as a specialized pathway of compounding. Furthermore, when characters acquire such new senses and reassemble with other characters, they may give rise not only to neologisms at the lexical level but also to novel phrasal constructions, thereby yielding downstream effects on the lexical system and constructional patterns.

*Keywords* Chinese character, character-level sense, *bìng hé zào cí fǎ* 并合造词法 (Incorporation Word Formation), linguistic economy, prototype effect, prosodic suppression, semantic shift

### Introduction

It is commonly held that Classical Chinese was predominantly monosyllabic, whereas Modern Chinese is chiefly disyllabic. In practice, however, aside from nouns (including event nouns), which tend to be disyllabic in contemporary Mandarin, many high-frequency lexical items remain monosyllabic:

- verbs (e.g. “吃 *chī*” – eat, “喝 *hē*” – drink, “打 *dǎ*” – hit, “看 *kàn*” – see, “走 *zǒu*” – walk),
- adjectives (e.g. “大 *dà*” – big, “小 *xiǎo*” – small, “多 *duō*” – many, “少 *shǎo*” – few, “高 *gāo*” – tall, “矮 *ǎi*” – short),
- classifiers (e.g. “个 *gè*”, “只 *zhǐ*”, “本 *běn*”, “匹 *pǐ*”),
- pronouns (e.g. “你 *nǐ*” – you, “我 *wǒ*” – I, “他 *tā*” – he/him, “这 *zhè*” – this, “那 *nà*” – that),
- numerous function words (e.g. “的 *de*”, “着 *zhe*”, “了 *le*”, “吗 *ma*”).

As Shen (2019, 216) observes, the character remains the basic unit of Modern Chinese: although disyllabic word-forms have become prominent, monosyllabic characters continue to be highly active.

This paper focuses on a phenomenon in Modern Chinese whereby the meaning of a disyllabic word is borne primarily by one of its syllables (a single character), and that monosyllabic character is especially productive, readily recombining with other characters to form new words and phrasal expressions. For example, consider the following cases:

(1)

**a. 现金 (*xiànjīn*) → 现 (*xiàn*) — cash**

Derivatives:

“变现 *biànxian*” (to convert into cash),

“提现 *tíxiàn*” (to withdraw cash),

“付现 *fùxiàn*” (to pay in cash),

“取现 *qǔxiàn*” (to withdraw cash),

“收现 *shōuxiàn*” (to receive cash),

“兑现 *duìxiàn*” (to cash [a check/voucher]),

“贴现 *tiēxiàn*” (to discount).

**b. 警察 (*jǐngchá*) → 警 (*jǐng*) — police**

Derivatives:

“民警 *mínjǐng*” (community police officer),“武警 *wǔjǐng*” (armed police),“乘警 *chéngjǐng*” (railway police),“警车 *jǐngchē*” (police car),“警服 *jǐngfú*” (police uniform),“警械 *jǐngxiè*” (police equipment),“警棍 *jǐnggùn*” (police baton).**c. 电报 (*diànbào*) → 电 (*diàn*) — telegram/telegraphic, also “electric” in other contexts**

Derivatives:

“急电 *jídian*” (urgent telegram),“贺电 *hèdiàn*” (congratulatory telegram),“唁电 *yàndiàn*” (condolence telegram),“通电 *tōngdiàn*” (to inform by telegram),“电告 *diàngào*” (to send a telegram/telegraphic notice),“电令 *diànlìng*” (telegraphic order),“电汇 *diànhuì*” (telegraphic transfer/electronic remittance).

In the examples above, the semantic content of 现金 *xiànjīn* (“cash”) is carried by the single character 现 *xiàn*. Consequently, 现—which originally meant “the present moment”—has developed a new character-level sense, roughly corresponding to “cash”, and can now productively combine with other characters to form numerous new words and phrasal expressions. The cases of 警 *jǐng* and 电 *diàn* are analogous: each single character has likewise acquired a new, productive sense as a result of its occurrence in compounds.

This paper therefore addresses three principal questions: (1) whether the linguistic unit that emerges when a monosyllable replaces a disyllabic expression should be analyzed as a morpheme or as a word; (2) what the driving forces and operative mechanisms behind this phenomenon are; and (3) whether the recombination of a character that has acquired a new sense with other characters constitutes a distinct type of word-formation.

1 *A Morpheme or a Word?*

The indeterminacy of the boundary between morpheme and word is a well-known fact in Chinese linguistics (Yang 2003, 9; Wu 2021, 78). Lü Shuxiang (1962, 6) pointed out that a given character may function as an independent word in some contexts but not in others; this raises the question of whether such an element should be treated as a free morpheme or as an affixed (bound) morpheme. Consider the following examples:

(2)

- a. 误会 *wùhuì* (misunderstanding) — 误 *wù* (wrongly; by mistake): 误吃 *wùchī* (eat sth. by mistake)
- b. 总理 *zǒnglǐ* (prime minister) — 总 *zǒng* (always): 总看 *zǒngkàn* (always look at)
- c. 拉面 *lāmian* (ramen noodles) — 拉 *lā* (to pull): 拉车 *lāchē* (pull a car)
- d. 提纲 *tígāng* (outline) — 提 *tí* (to lift/raise): 提水 *tíshuǐ* (water lifting)
- e. 小吃 *xiǎochī* (snack) — 小 *xiǎo* (a little; awhile): 小坐 *xiǎozuò* (sit awhile)

In example (2a), the character 误 *wù* in 误会 *wùhuì* cannot occur independently; it appears only together with 会 *huì* to form the lexical item 误会 *wùhuì* (misunderstanding), and thus functions as a bound morpheme (语素 *yǔsù*). By contrast, in 误吃 *wùchī*, 误 *wù* occurs independently as an adverbial modifier (状语 *zhuàngyǔ*) qualifying 吃 *chī* (to eat) and thereby behaves as a free word. The remaining examples in (2) can be analyzed in a similar fashion, illustrating that many monosyllabic Chinese characters may function either as morphemes or as words, depending on their syntactic and contextual environments.

Yang Xipeng (2003, 9) argues that in Chinese, the smallest sound-meaning units that can both participate in word formation and function independently as words constitute an “intersection” between the categories of morpheme and word. In other words, many monosyllabic Chinese characters are simultaneously morphemes and words. Furthermore, there also exist certain character groups in Chinese that themselves function both as words and as phrases.<sup>1</sup> For example:

1 One of the most prominent representatives of Western scholarship, Jerome Lee Packard, challenges the traditional morpheme-first model common in Indo-European linguistics and argues that it does not adequately describe Chinese. Instead of treating morphemes as independent building blocks, he suggests that in Chinese their identity and behavior are often

(3)

“鞠躬 *jūgōng*” (to bow),“游泳 *yóuyǒng*” (to swim),“睡觉 *shuìjiào*” (to sleep),“离婚 *líhūn*” (to divorce).

(4)

“东西 *dōngxi/dōngxī*” (things/ east and west),“先生 *xiānsheng/xiānsbēng*” (Mr.; husband; teacher/born earlier),“兄弟 *xiōngdì/xiōngdi*” (brother/elder brother and younger brother),“地道 *dìdao/dìdào*” (authentic/tunnel; underground passage).

The items in (3) are what are known in Chinese linguistics as separable compounds (离合词, *líhéci*). They are generally regarded as words when the two characters occur together, but as phrases when the components are separated (Siewierska et al. 2010, 465; Wu 2023), e.g.

“鞠了一躬” (made one bow),

“游一小时泳” (swim for one hour),

“睡一觉” (take a sleep),

“离了两次婚” (divorced twice).

In example (4), each character group is pronounced with a neutral tone on the final syllable when lexicalized as a word, but with a non-neutral tone when realized as a phrase.

The above examples illustrate that the indistinct boundary between morpheme and word in Chinese further results in an ambiguous boundary between compound and phrase. It is precisely because of this lack of a clear demarcation between morpheme and word that determining whether a newly

determined by the words in which they occur. His claims can be also summarized as that Chinese morphology is best understood as word-based: words, not morphemes. Morphemes are typically bound and context-dependent, and they do not function as autonomous combinatorial units in the same way assumed in classical morphological theory. Packard argues that Chinese grammar requires a framework in which the word is the main unit of lexical, syntactic, and morphological organization, with morphemes playing a secondary role. However, this position is debated, with critics such as Duanmu (2012) questioning whether the notion of “word” in Chinese is sufficiently well-defined and suggesting that more flexible, non-binary models may be more appropriate.

developed meaning of a Chinese character should be classified as a non-lexical morpheme or as a lexical (word-forming) morpheme has become a theoretical challenge.

Before discussing the emergence of new meanings for Chinese characters, it is necessary to distinguish these new meanings from the characters' original lexical senses. For example:

(5)

**a. 学生 *xuéshēng* → 生 *shēng* — student:**

“该生 *gāishēng*” (this student),

“招生 *zhāoshēng*” (student recruitment),

“尖子生 *jiānzishēng*” (top student),

“差生 *chāishēng*” (academically poor student),

“研究生 *yánjiùshēng*” (graduate student),

“留学生 *liúxuéshēng*” (overseas student).

**b. 朋友 *péngyǒu* → 友 *yǒu* — friend:**

“男友 *nányǒu*” (boyfriend),

“女友 *nǚyǒu*” (girlfriend),

“笔友 *bǐyǒu*” (pen pal),

“校友 *xiàoyǒu*” (alumnus/alumna),

“票友 *piàoyǒu*” (opera enthusiast),

“网友 *wǎngyǒu*” (online friend),

“学友 *xuéyǒu*” (schoolmate).

**c. 客人 *kèrén* → 客 *kè* — guest; visitor:**

“拜客 *bàikè*” (pay a visit to someone),

“访客 *fǎngkè*” (visitor),

“常客 *chángkè*” (frequent visitor),

“接客 *jiēkè*” (receive guests),

“来客 *láikè*” (incoming guest),

“拉客 *lākè*” (solicit customers),

“会客 *huìkè*” (meet visitors).

At first glance, the elements 生 *shēng*, 友 *yǒu*, and 客 *kè* in examples (5a)–(5c) appear to resemble the cases of 现 *xiàn*, 警 *jǐng*, and 电 *diàn* discussed earlier in example (1), in that they likewise occur as the remaining constituent of a disyllabic compound. In fact, however, there is an essential difference between the two sets.

The items in example (1) represent cases of newly developed character-level meanings, which are the focus of this paper, whereas the items in example (5) involve the inheritance of pre-existing meanings.

The character 生 *shēng*, according to oracle bone inscriptions, depicts the image of plants sprouting from the ground. *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (“Sheng” section/ 生部)<sup>2</sup> glosses it as:

“生，進也。象草木生出土上。”

*shēng, jìn yě. xiàng cǎomù shēng chū tǔ shàng.*

“*Shēng* means ‘to advance, to grow’. The graph depicts vegetation sprouting from the earth.”

Its original verbal sense was “to grow or sprout”, while its nominal sense denoted “life”.

In (5a) 学生 *xuéshēng* (student), the meaning of 生 *shēng* most likely developed from its later sense “門徒 *méntú* (disciple)”, “弟子 *dìzǐ* (follower/pupil)”, or “生員 *shēngyuán* (student)” (see Gu 2023, 178-179). For instance:

(6)

“諸生不師今而學古，以非當世，惑亂黔首。”（王充《論衡》）<sup>3</sup>

*zhū shēng bù shī jīn ér xué gǔ, yǐ fēi dāng shì, huò luàn qián shǒu.*

“The students (諸生) do not follow the teachings of the present age but study the doctrines of antiquity, thereby condemning the present world and confusing the common people.”

(7)

“殷、周以前，頗載《六經》，儒生所不能說也。”（王充《論衡》）<sup>4</sup>

*yīn, zhōu yǐ qián, pō zài Liù jīng, rú shēng suǒ bù néng shuō yě.*

“Before the Yin and Zhou dynasties, much of the *Six Classics* was already recorded; even Confucian scholars (儒生) could not fully explain them.”

These examples indicate that by the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), 生 *shēng* already carried the meaning “student”, and thus it cannot have acquired this sense secondarily through the fusion of 学生 *xuéshēng*.

2 *Shuowen jiezi* (Xu Shen 2025), Vol. 7, “Sheng 生部 (‘生’ entry)”. Accessed November 7, 2025. <https://ctext.org/shuo-wen-jie-zi/sheng-bu/zh # 3856>.

3 *Lunheng* 論衡 (Wang Chong 2025), “Yu Zeng Pian” 語增篇. Accessed November 7, 2025. <https://ctext.org/lunheng/yu-zeng/zh # 35>.

4 Ibid., “Xiao-li”. Accessed November 8, 2025. <https://ctext.org/lunheng/xiao-li/zh # 3>.

Likewise, 友 *yǒu* (friend) and 客 *kè* (guest) both had their respective meanings long before the formation of 朋友 *péngyǒu* (friend) and 客人 *kèrén* (guest) as disyllabic words. The character 友 *yǒu*, according to oracle bone inscriptions, depicts two right hands clasping each other, symbolizing mutual cooperation and fellowship. *Shuowen jiezi* (section 友 又) glosses:

“友，同志為友。從二又，相交友也。”<sup>5</sup>

*yǒu, tóngzhì wéi yǒu. cóng èr yòu, xiāng jiāo yǒu yě.*

“Yǒu’ refers to ‘companions who share common aspirations.’ The graph is composed of two instances of 又 (‘hand’), depicting the act of joining hands in friendship.”

Its original meaning was “to cooperate or assist”, and it later generalized to mean “friend”, that is, someone of shared purpose and interest (see Gu 2023, 71).

The character 客 *kè* in oracle bone script is composed of “宀” (a roof, representing a house), “人” (a person), and an inverted “止” (indicating entering). It conveys the idea of a person coming from outside to be a guest. *Shuowen jiezi* (section 客 宀部) glosses:

“客，寄也。從宀，各聲。”<sup>6</sup>

*kè, jì yě. cóng mián, gè shēng.*

“Kè means ‘a guest or lodger’. The graph combines 宀 (‘roof’) with the phonetic element 各, suggesting a person arriving and dwelling under a roof.”

Its original sense was “guest” or “visitor”—a person who arrives from elsewhere to pay a visit or to be received as a guest (see Gu 2023, 1028).

The above discussion demonstrates that monosyllabic Chinese characters remain highly active in Modern Chinese and continue to serve as the basic grammatical units of the language (Shen 2019, 27; Shen 2023). Given this, a question arises: when a single Chinese character, as in example (1), develops a new meaning by replacing a disyllabic expression for communicative efficiency, should this character be regarded as a new morpheme or as a new word?

In this paper, it is argued that such a character is neither a morpheme nor a word, but rather represents a case of “one and the same character acquiring a

5 *Shuowen jiezi* (Xu Shen 2025), Vol. 4, “You bu 又部 (‘友’ entry)”. Accessed November 8, 2025. [#1919](https://ctext.org/shuo-wen-jie-zi/you-bu/zh).

6 Ibid., Vol. 8. “Mian bu 宀部 (‘客’ entry).” CTEXT edition. Accessed November 8, 2025. [#4586](https://ctext.org/shuo-wen-jie-zi/mian-bu/zh).

different meaning.” The motivations and mechanisms underlying the emergence of such new meanings will be discussed in detail in the following section and will therefore not be elaborated here.

The remainder of this section will instead focus on the issues arising from the introduction of the concept of the morpheme into Chinese linguistic analysis.

In Classical Chinese, the character (字, *zì*) was the basic grammatical unit, and the categories of “character” and “word” were essentially identical. In Modern Chinese, however, many characters can no longer function independently and instead serve merely as morphemes (Lü 2001a, 288-289).<sup>7</sup> In the early stages of the Chinese language, there existed only the notion of the *character* (字, *zì*) and not that of the *word* (詞, *cí*). The later introduction of the concept of “word” into Chinese linguistic studies has given rise to a number of unnecessary complications.

According to Lü Shuxiang (2001b, 2-3), it was Zhang Shizhao (1907, 1) who first introduced the concept of *word* into Chinese linguistics. In contrast, Gao Gengsheng and Wang Hongqi (1996, 75) argue that the term first appeared in the Japanese scholar Kojima Kenkichirō’s *Kokubunten* (translated into Chinese by Ding Yongzhu and published by Shanghai Scientific Book Company).<sup>8</sup>

Zhao Yuanren (2002, 892) observes that the Indo-European category *word* has no precise equivalent in Chinese. In his *Grammar of Spoken Chinese*, Zhao (1979, 101-102) treats units that are conventionally distinguished in Chinese—such as bound morphemes, free morphemes, words, and phrases—as corresponding functionally to what English grammar designates as *words*. As a result, the English notion of *word* has effectively become a heterogeneous amalgam when applied to

7 It is unclear on what empirical grounds Lü (2001a) based his conclusion that “many characters in Modern Chinese cannot be used independently.” In our view, monosyllabic characters in Modern Chinese are not inherently incapable of independent usage; rather, they remain highly productive whenever the discourse context permits. For example, it is generally assumed that 校 *xiào* (school) cannot occur on its own and must appear in combinations such as 你们学校 (your school) or 我们学校 (our school); yet it functions independently in expressions like 家校联动 (home-school collaboration). Similarly, 厂 *chǎng* (factory) appears freely in 厂房 (factory building), 厂址 (factory site), and 我厂员工 (employees of our factory); 眼 *yǎn* (eye) in 左眼 (left eye), 右眼 (right eye), and 他的眼睛瞎了 (his eye has gone blind); and 桌 *zhuō* (table) in 桌腿 (table leg), 桌面 (table surface), and 我买了一张大桌 (I bought a large table). Comparable cases are numerous.

8 Erdao Xianjilang 1905. Cf. Li and Zhang 2022, 162-172.

Chinese, leading to persistent theoretical confusion—namely, the blurring of the boundary between morpheme and word, and between word and phrase (Wu 2021: 70-73).

Shen Jiaxuan (2023) clearly points out that in English, the word constitutes the basic linguistic unit. Apart from root words, most affixes—including prefixes and suffixes—cannot be used independently, which gives rise to the intermediate grammatical level known as the morpheme. The units in Chinese that correspond to English morphemes generally align with individual characters, which, in spoken language, correspond to syllables. Because the monosyllabic Chinese character has long functioned as the basic grammatical unit, it has remained highly active from ancient times to the present.

At the same time, since disyllabic character groups have become the dominant structural units in Modern Chinese, many of these groups exhibit a high degree of semantic cohesion (凝固度, *nínggùdù*)—their overall meaning cannot be reduced to the simple sum of their parts. Functionally, such disyllabic compounds operate in much the same way as single characters. In other words, in Classical Chinese, one meaning typically corresponded to one character, and character formation was largely constrained within the scope of a one-to-one correspondence (Xu Tongqiang 1997, 295-297). With the rise of disyllabification in Modern Chinese, however, the process of word formation has surpassed this one-character limit, leading to the proliferation of disyllabic compounds whose meanings and grammatical functions correspond roughly to those of single characters in earlier stages of the language.

Nevertheless, not all disyllabic compounds exhibit the same degree of semantic unity or grammatical functionality as single characters in Classical Chinese. Accordingly, character groups differ in their degree of cohesion. Moreover, beyond disyllabic compounds, trisyllabic and quadri-syllabic groups in Chinese also display variation in their degree of fixedness. In addition, because many trisyllabic groups are composed of a mixture of individual characters and smaller character groups, Chinese compounds also vary systematically in their degree of structural complexity.

In sum, the static grammatical units of Chinese consist only of characters and character groups, with the latter varying in both semantic cohesion and structural

complexity. The Chinese language, therefore, requires neither the grammatical level of “word” nor that of “morpheme”. The reasons are as follows:

(1) It is generally held that a morpheme is “the smallest combination of sound and meaning” (Lü 1979, 13)—or, in the terms of Construction Grammar, the minimal form-meaning pairing [F, S]. However, when Lü (1979, 14) discusses the relationship between morpheme and character, his analysis is based solely on meaning.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, the morpheme appears to have been redefined as a semantic unit rather than a form-meaning unit.

(2) Lü (1979, 13) further states that a morpheme may have several meanings, and as long as these meanings are related, it remains a single morpheme. This, however, seems to contradict the very definition of the morpheme. If a morpheme is the “smallest combination of sound and meaning,” then how many meanings can such a combination include—one or several? Does it represent one form corresponding to one meaning, or one form corresponding to multiple meanings? If the latter, can it still be regarded as the *smallest* sound-meaning unit? In this sense, the morpheme begins to resemble a formal unit rather than a semantic one. While it is reasonable to say that one form may be polysemous, it is conceptually awkward to claim that one sound-meaning combination can be polysemous.

(3) In Chinese, the same character is sometimes treated as a morpheme and sometimes as a word, which violates the principle of theoretical economy. For instance, when discussing 锁 *suǒ* (lock) in 一把锁 *yībǎsuǒ* (a lock) versus 锁门 *suǒmén* (to lock the door), Lü (1979, 14) suggests that “a single morpheme may be used in two-word classes.” Yet the idea that “a morpheme is used in two-word classes” is problematic in itself: the classification of morphemes should yield morpheme classes, not word classes. This confusion likely arises from the fact that in Chinese, most characters function simultaneously as both morphemes and words. As Yang Xipeng (2003, 9) observes, there is substantial overlap between the categories of morpheme and word in Chinese. If so, why employ two distinct terms—*morpheme* and *word*—to refer to what is, in essence, the same grammatical unit, when a single term, *character*, would suffice?

9 Such cases are comparable to homographs and homophones (e.g., *huā* 花 in *huāduǒ* 花朵 “flower” vs. *huāqián* 花钱 “to spend money”) and polyphonic or polysemous characters (e.g., *xíng* 行 in *xíngzǒu* 行走 “to walk” vs. *háng* 行 in *yínháng* 银行 “bank”).

(4) Although in English the morpheme-word boundary is generally well defined, with little overlap between the two, the introduction of these categories into Chinese has led to considerable confusion. As Wu Huaicheng (2021, 70-73) notes, the distinction between free morphemes (i.e., words) and bound morphemes (i.e., affixal components) cannot be consistently maintained in Chinese, regardless of whether one relies on syntactic independence (单说, *dānshuō*) or contextual independence (单用, *dānyòng*) as the diagnostic criterion. In most cases, both so-called free and bound morphemes correspond to monosyllabic characters, which have remained highly active grammatical units throughout the history of the Chinese language.

Based on the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that the monosyllabic characters 现 (*xiàn*), 警 (*jǐng*), 电 (*diàn*), 生 (*shēng*), 友 (*yǒu*), and 客 (*kè*) in examples (1) and (5) are all monosyllabic Chinese characters that function as basic grammatical units, yet are neither morphemes nor words.

The difference lies in that 现 (*xiàn*), 警 (*jǐng*), and 电 (*diàn*) each represent cases in which *one and the same character has developed a new, distinct meaning*; whereas 生 (*shēng*), 友 (*yǒu*), and 客 (*kè*) simply inherit the original meanings of their corresponding characters from Classical Chinese and therefore do not belong to the category of newly emerged senses.

As for whether 现 (*xiàn*), 警 (*jǐng*), and 电 (*diàn*) in example (1) should be classified as polysemous characters or as homographic and homophonic forms, that issue requires separate discussion.

## 2 The Emergence of New Character Senses: Drivers and Mechanisms

The phenomenon discussed in the preceding section—where a single Chinese character develops a new meaning in communicative contexts—constitutes an inevitable outcome in the natural course of language development. Lexical evolution is generally understood to involve three interrelated processes: the emergence of new words and disappearance of old ones, lexical replacement, and semantic change. The phenomenon examined in this study essentially belongs to the domain of semantic change, in which one and the same character acquires a new meaning.

Semantic change can typically take three forms: semantic broadening, semantic narrowing, and semantic shift. Strictly speaking, the linguistic phenomenon under discussion here involves both broadening and shift. For instance, the character 现 *xiàn* (to appear; the present moment) did not originally carry the meaning of “cash,” yet it has now developed precisely that sense. Both the *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* (*The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, 7th edition)<sup>10</sup> and the *Hanzi Yuanliu Dazidian* 汉字源流大字典 (*Dictionary of the Etymology and Evolution of Chinese Characters*)<sup>11</sup> explicitly include “cash” (现款 *xiànkǎn*) as one of the senses of 现 *xiàn*. From this perspective, the development of the “cash” sense in 现 *xiàn* constitutes an instance of semantic broadening.

However, semantic broadening has traditionally been analyzed as a type of semantic extension, typically achieved through metaphor or metonymy. For example, the character 深 (*shēn*, “deep”) originally denoted spatial depth (“deep water”) and was later extended to temporal depth (夜深人静 *yèshēnrénjìng*, “late at night”) and subsequently to abstract degrees such as 颜色深 *yánsèshēn* (“dark in color”) or 道理深 *dàolǐshēn* (“profound in reasoning”). In such cases, the connections among different senses remain relatively transparent.

In contrast, the development of the “cash” meaning of 现 *xiàn*—from its original senses of “the present moment,” “now,” or “before one’s eyes”—exhibits no clear semantic link with its new sense. From this perspective, the evolution of 现 *xiàn* thus represents a case of semantic shift rather than mere extension.

The question that follows, then, is this: What are the underlying motivations and mechanisms driving this type of semantic shift that simultaneously results in semantic broadening?

This paper argues that the fundamental driving force behind language evolution ultimately lies in language use itself. In example (1) above, the meaning of a disyllabic word is carried by one of its constituent characters. The underlying reason for this phenomenon is that Chinese expression traditionally values conciseness—whenever possible, speakers tend to minimize linguistic material while maximizing communicative efficiency. As long as the context allows, using

<sup>10</sup> In *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* (2016, 1,423), the fifth sense of the character “现” (*xiàn*) is defined as “cash” (现款 *xiànkǎn*).

<sup>11</sup> In *Hanzi Yuanliu Da Zidian* (Gu 2023, 581), the fifth sense of the character 现 (*xiàn*) is defined as “cash” (现款 *xiànkǎn*).

fewer symbols to convey more meaning accords with the principle of linguistic economy, and in essence, this process is no different from the formation of abbreviations.

Professor Guo Rui 郭锐 has also suggested (personal communication) that the phenomenon of new meanings emerging in Chinese characters discussed here may, in fact, be viewed as a kind of abbreviation process.

Since this type of semantic change does not arise through metaphorical or metonymic extension, a question naturally arises: what mechanisms govern its development?

This paper proposes that at least three mechanisms are at work:

- (1) **prototype effects**,
- (2) **prosodic suppression**, and
- (3) **semantic infiltration**.

Each will be briefly discussed below.

## 2.1 Prototype effects

In this paper, the term prototype effect refers to the inherent *prototypicality* of individual Chinese characters as the basic linguistic units of the Chinese language. This prototypical property enables monosyllabic characters, within actual language use, to trigger the compression and reversion of multisyllabic units back into monosyllabic forms.

Xu Tongqiang (2008, 38) points out that the basic structural unit of Chinese is the character (字, *zì*), which possesses the following properties:

- (1) **Availability**: characters are ready-made, usable as they are;
- (2) **Discreteness**: characters are discrete and self-contained, easily distinguishable from other structural units;
- (3) **Psychological reality**: characters have a tangible cognitive presence within the linguistic community.

These three properties of the Chinese character identified by Xu correspond precisely to what is referred to in this paper as the prototype effect of monosyllabic characters. This effect can lead to the morphemization (or, more precisely, characterization) of syllables that were not originally morphemic (Yang 2003, 87). This process manifests in two primary ways:

(1) **Reanalysis of historical disyllabic compounds:** in the historical development of the Chinese lexicon, certain syllables of *liánmiáncí* (连绵词, “non-morphemic binomes”) were retrospectively reinterpreted—often through *folk etymology*—as if they carried independent meanings. For instance, in 鸳鸯 (*yuānyāng*, “mandarin ducks”), 鸳 *yuān* came to represent the male and 鸯 *yāng* the female.

(2) **Reinterpretation of foreign loanword syllables:** syllables in transliterated compounds have similarly been treated as meaningful, as in 美利坚 (*Měilìjiān*, “America”), where 美 (*měi*, “beautiful”) has come to denote “the United States”, and in 奥林匹克 (*Àolínpǐkè*, “Olympic”), where 奥 (*ào*, “profound”) is now used independently in 奥运会 (*Àoyùnhuì*, “Olympic Games”).

Zhang Yisheng and Zhao Yu (2019, 46-47) further argue that in the disyllabic word 尴尬 (*gāngà*, “awkward”), originally a *liánmiáncí* (连绵词, “non-morphemic binomes”), the second syllable 尬 (*gà*) has evolved from a meaningless phonetic element into a meaningful morpheme or word. They describe this process schematically as:

Syllable → Morpheme;

Non-lexical → Lexical;

Bound → Free.

When discussing the motivation for the morphemization or lexicalization of 尬 (*gà*), Zhang and Zhao (2019, 46-47) invoke what they call the principle of inherent motivation, namely the one-to-one correspondence among character, syllable, and concept in Chinese (Xu 1991, 38-42, 1997, 295-297). It is precisely this underlying motivated correspondence that constitutes what this paper terms the prototype effect of Chinese characters.

This prototype effect, moreover, is not only grounded in the intrinsic properties of characters themselves but also related to the continuing vitality of monosyllabic characters in Modern Chinese. As Wu Huaicheng (2023) observes, this vitality is reflected in several empirical findings:

- (1) According to Yuan Chunfa and Huang Changning (1998, 8), among 6,763 commonly used Chinese characters, there are 17,470 morphemic items, which merge into 10,442 distinct morphemes. Of these, single-character morphemes account for 93.0% of the total. Consequently, Yang Xipeng (2003, 108) concludes that the vast majority of Chinese morphemes are monosyllabic in phonological form.
- (2) Shen Xiaolong (1990, 4) points out that although it is commonly believed that

the development of the Chinese lexicon has tended toward disyllabification, computer-based statistical analysis shows that monosyllabic words constitute about 61% of daily vocabulary. For instance, in the sentence 你不是有一支很好的笔了吗? (“Didn’t you already have a good pen?”), all twelve words are monosyllabic.

- (3) According to Chen Mingyuan (1981: 468-469), in written Modern Chinese, monosyllabic words account for approximately 49% of the vocabulary in disciplines such as the social sciences, natural sciences, and technology, and for about 61% in literature, the arts, and daily life.
- (4) Sun Yinyan (2023, 22-25), through an analysis of compositions written by international students and of an elementary school composition corpus, found that among the top 100 high-frequency words, monosyllabic words constitute 59% and 71%, respectively.

## 2.2 Prosodic suppression

Although monosyllabic characters constitute the basic linguistic units of Chinese, it must be acknowledged that disyllabic forms have become the dominant structural units in the language. The term prosodic suppression as used in this paper refers to the fact that this dominant disyllabic structure has developed into a stable prosodic frame—a metrical foot consisting of two syllables (Wang Hongjun 2008, 124; Feng Shengli 2013, 133).

Following the notion of constructional blocking in Construction Grammar, this paper proposes an analogous concept of prosodic blocking or suppression, whereby the disyllabic prosodic frame *imposes constraints on its constituents, requiring that each constituent be a single Chinese character*. This results in the compression of multisyllabic units into monosyllabic forms.

It is precisely this strong prosodic motivation that has given rise to the proliferation of disyllabic words in Modern Chinese. As the language adapts to the demands of social development, new entities and phenomena call for new linguistic expressions that conform to the disyllabic prosodic pattern. For example, both 招学生 *zhāoxuéshēng* (“to recruit students”) and 招生 *zhāoshēng* (“student recruitment”) are grammatically acceptable; however, only 招生 *zhāoshēng* can occur in 招生简章 *zhāoshēng jiǎnzhāng* (“admissions brochure”), while 招生简章

*zhāoshēng jiǎnzhāng* is excluded because it violates the [disyllabic + disyllabic] prosodic frame.

Similar constraints can be observed in the following examples:

(8)

取现金/\*取现金时间<sup>12</sup> → 取现/取现时间

*qǔxiànjīn/\*qǔxiànjīn shíjiān* → *qǔxiàn/qǔxiàn shíjiān* (“cash withdrawal time”)

来电报/\*来电报须知 → 来电/来电须知

*láidiànbào/\*láidiànbào xūzhī* → *láidiàn/xūzhī* (“notice for telegram reception”)

(9)

进学校/\*进学校通知 → 进校/进校通知

*jìn xuéxiào/\*jìn xuéxiào tōngzhī* → *jìnxiào/jìnxiào tōngzhī* (“notice for entering the school”)

会朋友/\*会朋友地点 → 会友/会友地点

*huì péngyǒu/\*huì péngyǒu dìdiǎn* → *huìyǒu/huìyǒu dìdiǎn* (“meeting place with friends”)

As these examples demonstrate, whether a character that has acquired a new sense (such as 现 *xiàn*, 警 *jǐng*, 电 *diàn*) or an inherently meaningful character (such as 校 *xiào*, 友 *yǒu*) is used, its occurrence is governed by the disyllabic prosodic frame of Modern Chinese.

Huang Mei (2012, 85-92; 2015, 42-48) classifies 校 *xiào* and 友 *yǒu* in examples (9) as instances of “embedded paired words” (嵌偶词, *qiàn'ǒu cí*), which exhibit the properties of syntactic freedom but prosodic dependency. The present study argues that the single characters that have developed new meanings also display these same properties of syntactic independence and prosodic attachment. From the perspective of Chinese linguistic structure, rather than labelling such characters as semi-free morphemes or *embedded paired words*, it is more accurate to call them simply characters (字, *zì*)—their distinction lies only in being more tightly constrained by prosodic requirements during actual use.

### 2.3 Semantic infiltration

When two components form a compound unit, their frequent co-occurrence may lead to mutual semantic infiltration, or what may also be described as reciprocal activation. Under the influence of prosodic suppression or pragmatic abbreviation,

12 Phrases marked with an asterisk (\*) indicate expressions that are ungrammatical in Chinese; the same applies below.

For instance, 学校 (*xuéxiào*, “school”) is a compound formed by 学 (*xué*, “to study”) and 校 (*xiào*, “school” or “institution”). As an integrated unit—what may be termed a character group (字组, *zìzǔ*)—the meaning of 学校 *xuéxiào* cannot be compositionally derived from the meanings of its components; rather, the compound as a whole exhibits semantic non-compositionality and opacity. Such tightly fused character groups can also be described as character knots (字结, *zìjié*, a semantically opaque character group) (Chen Baoya 2006, 104-106; Wu Huaicheng 2023).

(10)

Nóngmín hé shōugōng yèzhě de zìdì hěn shǎo yǒu tiáojiàn rùxué.

(II)

13 <http://cc.l.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccLcorpus/search?q=%E5%86%9C%E6%B0%91%E5%92%8C%E6%89%8B%E5%B7%A5%E4%B8%9A%E8%80%85%E7%9A%84%E5%AD%90%E5%BC%9F%E5%BE%88%E5%B0%91%E6%9C%89%E6%9D%A1%E4%BB%B6%E5%85%A5%E5%AD%A6&startTime=&xiandaiStartTime=&endTime=&xiandaiEndTime=&dir=xiandai&start=0&num=50&index=FullIndex&outputFormat=HTML&encoding=UTF-8&maxLeftLength=30&maxRightLength=30&orderStyle=score&LastQuery=&scopestre=>

14 <http://cc.l.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccLcorpus/search?q=%E5%89%8D%E9%9D%A2%E8%AF%B4%E8%BF%87%E5%8C%97%E7%BE%8E%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%A6%E5%85%A5%E6%A0%A1%E5%AE%B9%E6%98%93%E5%87%BA%E6%A0%A1%E9%9A%BE&startTime=&xiandaiStartTime=&endTime=&xiandaiEndTime=&dir=xiandai&start=0&num=50&index=FullIndex&outputFormat=HTML&encoding=UTF-8&maxLeftLength=30&maxRightLength=30&orderStyle=score&LastQuery=&scopestre=>

*Qiánmiàn shuō guò, Běiměi dàxué rùxiào róngyì, chūxiào nán.*

(“As mentioned earlier, in North American universities it is easy to enter but difficult to graduate.”)

The *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* lists 入学 *rùxué* (“to enroll”) as an established word, whereas 入校 *rùxiào* (“to enter school”) has not yet been included. Zhang Bo (1999, 130) and Tang Ziheng (2006, 139) have respectively referred to this phenomenon as compound assimilation and horizontal semantic convergence between morphemes. Zhang Bo (2019, 197-198) further cites the case of 背 (*bèi*), which developed from the sense “back (of the body)” in 后背 (*hòubèi*), to the sense “to memorize”, as another example of semantic infiltration. In the collocation 背而诵之 *bèiérsòngzhī* (“to recite from memory”), 背 *bèi* originally meant “to recite aloud from memory,” and the compound 背诵 *bèisòng* (“to recite”) subsequently underwent lexicalization, coming to mean “to utter aloud what one has memorized.” In this process, the original meaning of 背 *bèi* (“back”) and its derived sense (“to memorize”) became semantically disconnected. As the range of collocates expanded (e.g., 背单词 *bèi dāncí* “to memorize words,” 背公式 *bèi gōngshì* “to memorize formulas,” 死记硬背 *sǐjìyìngbèi* “to memorize mechanically”), 背 *bèi* gradually lost its earlier sense of “reciting aloud” and came to focus exclusively on the meaning of “memorization.”

In short, frequent co-occurrence within compounds fosters semantic infiltration, creating conditions under which one constituent can stand for the entire composite unit. Combined with the effects of prosodic suppression and pragmatic abbreviation, this mechanism provides a robust explanation for the phenomenon described in this paper—one and the same character acquiring a new meaning—a process distinct from traditional patterns of semantic extension in Chinese.

### 3 *Is Incorporation a Word-Formation Process?*

Zhang Bo (2017, 1-2; 2019, 194-195) elevated the phenomenon in which a constituent element (a single character) substitutes for an integrated compound unit (a character group) and subsequently combines with other characters to form new groups to the level of word formation, proposing that this constitutes a new word-formation process in Chinese, which he terms *incorporation word formation* (并合造词法, *bìnghé zàocí fǎ*).

This section argues from two perspectives:

(1) that Zhang's so-called "incorporation word formation" is, in essence, still a subtype of compounding; and

(2) following Wu Huaicheng (2023), that so-called compounding in Chinese is fundamentally the combination of Chinese characters, where highly integrated character groups may more appropriately be termed character knots (字结, *zìjié*) rather than words.

It is well known that Chinese is an isolating language, in which genuine affixation is rare. Lü Shuxiang (1962, 6) noted that compounding is virtually the only productive word-formation mechanism in Chinese. Ge Benyi (2014, 83–84), in his discussion of Chinese word-formation, distinguishes two major structural types:

- (1) the combination of root morphemes with affixal morphemes; and
- (2) the combination of root morphemes with one another—subdivided into coordinative, modifier-head, complementary, verb-object, subject-predicate, and reduplicative patterns.

These two types correspond to what is generally known as affixation and compounding, respectively.

If we acknowledge that many affixes in Chinese are historically derived from roots, and given that genuine affixation is exceedingly limited, it is reasonable to conclude that compounding constitutes the sole core mechanism of Chinese word formation. From this perspective, a Chinese compound (合成词 *héchéng cí*) is essentially the combination of two characters, each representing an independent semantic and phonological unit. Hence, to form a compound, a single Chinese character must serve as the minimal combinatory unit, out of which larger structural units—character groups—are composed.

Accordingly, Zhang Bo's "incorporation word formation" may be more accurately interpreted as a process of abbreviation (简称 *jiǎnchēng*), in which an existing disyllabic expression is reduced, and the retained character acquires a new sense. This is precisely the phenomenon discussed in this paper: one and the same character developing a different new meaning. Such a newly meaningful character

becomes a new element that can subsequently enter into novel combinations with other characters.<sup>15</sup>

However, when such characters combine with others, the resulting character groups are not always compounds—some may instead function as phrases. For example, the character 现 (*xiàn*), which developed a new “cash” sense from the disyllabic expressions 现金 *xiànjīn* (“cash”) and 现款 *xiànkǎn* (“ready money”), can combine with 提 *tí* (“withdraw”) or 付 *fù* (“pay”) to form 提现 *tíxiàn* and 付现 *fùxiàn*, both of which are listed as dictionary entries in the *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* (2016). Yet other combinations such as 取现 *qǔxiàn* (“to withdraw cash”) or 收现 *shōuxiàn* (“to receive cash”) are not recorded therein.

This indicates that a newly meaningful single character derived through abbreviation does not necessarily serve only word-formation purposes (造词 *zàocí*); it can also function syntactically (造句 *zàojiù*). Such characters share the properties that Huang Mei (2012, 85-92; 2015, 42-48) attributes to embedded paired words (嵌偶词, *qiàn'ǒu cí*)—namely, syntactic freedom and prosodic adhesion.

Huang (2012, 85-92; 2015, 42-48) analyzes forms such as 校 (*xiào*), 友 (*yǒu*), 园 (*yuán*), 额 (*é*), and 颈 (*jǐng*)—traditionally labeled *semi-free morphemes* or *bound morphemes*—as cases of *embedded pairing*. These classifications, however, stem from the application of Indo-European morphological theory to Chinese. In Indo-European languages, the word is the basic unit: some words consist of roots, while others combine roots and affixes; hence, non-word elements are treated as morphemes.

By contrast, the basic grammatical unit in Chinese is the monosyllabic character. Since the Indo-European notion of *word* has no precise counterpart in Chinese (Zhao Yuanren 2002, 892), imposing such a structure inevitably blurs the distinction between morpheme and word, as well as between word and phrase (Wu Huaicheng 2021, 70-73). It also produces an unnecessary problem: scholars have expended great effort to prove that certain meaningful yet prosodically constrained units—so-called “embedded paired words” are actually *monosyllabic words* rather than *semi-free morphemes*.

15 Traditionally, whether termed *cí sù* (word morpheme) or *yǔ sù* (morpheme), both refer to the notion that a word is a higher-level grammatical unit composed of morphemes or word elements. However, this paper adopts a character-based perspective, arguing that it is the same Chinese character that develops a new meaning.

From the present perspective, those monosyllabic units arising through incorporation (并合 *bìng hé*)—that is, instances of “one and the same character with a different meaning” should be regarded simply as characters that have acquired new senses. These characters may combine with others to form new character groups. If the resulting combination is semantically compositional and transparent, it corresponds to what is traditionally termed a phrase; if it is non-compositional and opaque, it corresponds to a character knot (字结, *zì jié*)<sup>16</sup>—that is, what is traditionally regarded as a compound word.

In conclusion, what Zhang Bo terms “incorporation word formation” is, in essence, not a new word-formation mechanism at all. Rather, incorporation functions as an abbreviation process, whereby a character acquires a new meaning—traditionally labelled a *morpheme* or *word element*—which can then participate in further character combinations to produce compounds or phrases. Thus, the so-called Incorporation Word Formation does not constitute an independent morphological process in Chinese.

#### 4 Conclusion

This paper has examined a phenomenon in Modern Chinese whereby a single Chinese character develops a new sense in actual usage as a result of linguistic abbreviation. When such a newly meaningful character combines with other characters to form new words or expressions, some scholars have referred to the process as the Incorporation Word Formation (并合造词法, *bìng hé zào cí fǎ*).

Adopting a character-based perspective (字本位立场, *zì běn wèi lì chǎng*), this study argues that what arises from such incorporation is neither a new morpheme nor a new word, but simply a Chinese character that has acquired an additional sense.

The paper has further analyzed the motivating forces and mechanisms underlying this phenomenon. It maintains that the primary driving force lies in Chinese’s intrinsic preference for brevity—a manifestation of the principle of linguistic economy in actual language use. The emergence of new meanings for

16 The term “字结 *zì jié*” (character knot) is adopted from Chen Baoya 2006.

Chinese characters is thus not random but reflects a natural tendency toward economy and efficiency in expression.

Three key mechanisms have been identified as operating in this process:

(1) **Prototype Effect**—the cognitive tendency for monosyllabic characters, as the prototypical structural units of Chinese, to attract or absorb semantic functions;

(2) **Prosodic Suppression**—the influence of the dominant disyllabic prosodic frame that constrains or compresses larger units into monosyllabic ones; and

(3) **Semantic Infiltration**—the mutual activation and semantic blending that occur between high-frequency co-occurring components, allowing one constituent to take on the meaning of the whole.

Finally, this paper contends that the so-called Incorporation Word Formation (并合造词法, *bìng hé zào cí fǎ*) does not constitute an independent morphological process. What incorporation fundamentally accomplishes is the creation of a new meaning for an existing character. Moreover, a character that has acquired such a new sense can function not only in word formation but also in phrase construction.

From a character-centred linguistic perspective, if we set aside the imported notion of *word*—which lacks a precise counterpart in Chinese—the static grammatical inventory of Chinese consists only of two fundamental units: the single character (字, *zì*) and the character group (字组, *zìzǔ*). Among character groups, those that are highly integrated and semantically non-compositional or opaque may be termed character knots (字结, *zìjié*).

In summary, what appears to be “word formation” through incorporation is, in essence, the semantic renewal of a Chinese character. This process not only exemplifies the dynamic vitality of the character-based structure of Chinese but also reaffirms that the character—not the word—is the fundamental grammatical unit of the language.

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# The Development of Onomastic Translation Strategies in Oldřich Král's Czech Translations of Classical Chinese Novels

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*Abstract* This study examines the development of onomastic translation strategies in Oldřich Král's Czech translations of classical Chinese novels. It is based on an analysis of five key works spanning the approximately sixty-year period of his translation activity, and traces the evolution of his approach to rendering proper names in relation to text type, scope, and the narrative function of names. The study identifies three principal strategies—transliteration, semantic translation, and combinations of those two—and demonstrates how their application changes over time in Král's work. Particular attention is paid to cases at the boundary between proper names and cultural allusions, which illustrate both the limitations of traditional onomastic approaches and the need for flexible translation strategies. The analysis also takes into account the broader linguistic and cultural context, especially the role of the standard Czech transcription system and the gradual adoption of pinyin. The findings show that the translation of proper names in classical Chinese prose does not follow a single unified strategy but rather constitutes a dynamic decision-making process in which the translator actively shapes meaning in accordance with textual function and the expectations of the target readership.

*Keywords* Oldřich Král, onomastic translation, proper names, classical Chinese literature, transliteration

## *Introduction*

Classical Chinese novels from the Ming and Qing dynasties are characterized by their exceptional length—often extending to several thousand pages—which naturally results in a vast cast of both major and minor characters, often including

multiple protagonists. When translating these novels into Western languages, translators face a fundamental challenge: how to handle proper names. Essentially, there are two options—either translate the names and thus convey their meaning and often poetic tone to the reader, or use transliteration, which preserves the original phonetic form of the name and thus the authenticity of the source text, while losing the semantic layer.

This, however, presents certain complications—proper names in classical novels and short stories often carry hidden or specific meanings, reflecting character traits, narrative functions, or broader cultural and symbolic associations, and as Zhou Hao (2015, 2) believes, “both oriental and western writers fancy endowing characters’ names with these special meanings.” Even native Chinese readers would struggle to grasp the connotations of individual names if they primarily encountered them in transliteration. And even more so for foreign readers, whose linguistic background, cultural knowledge, or aesthetic sensibilities are often limited in this regard. As a result, phonetic transcription can never provide readers with the link between the names and their hidden meanings or imagery. This is why some translators prefer the strategy of translation to compensate for this shortcoming of the transliteration method.

A supplementary practice also exists—one that can be described as a “compromise”—such as elaborating the name’s meaning within the text or providing footnotes. However, this cannot be applied consistently throughout the entire work, and Zhou Hao (2015, 5) amply explains the reasons why: “This method itself has certain drawbacks in practice. If a translator keeps annotating names every time they show up, it may block the whole reading process. But if the translator only explains the names in the first place, readers would easily forget their connotations in the following context.”

Nevertheless, transliteration has gradually become the dominant method in both international and Czech translations of classical Chinese novels. Conversely, translation tends to be used where the name carries a clear poetic or semantic value—particularly in the case of female characters or male nicknames, while the names of main protagonists are usually rendered by transliteration.

This pattern can also be observed in the translations of classical Chinese prose by Oldřich Král (1930–2018), one of the most important Czech translators of classical Chinese literature. Král studied sinology under Jaroslav Průšek, whose

influence significantly shaped his approach to classical Chinese literature and translation. His work represents one of the most extensive contributions to the translation of classical Chinese fiction into Czech, particularly through his complete and unabridged translations of major novels such as *Rulinwaishi* 儒林外史 [The Scholars], *Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢 [Dream of the Red Chamber], and *Jinpingmei* 金瓶梅 [The Plum in the Golden Vase or The Golden Lotus], as well as shorter narrative works including *Xiyoubu* 西遊補 [A Supplement to the Journey to the West] and *Rouputuan* 肉蒲團 [The Carnal Prayer Mat].<sup>1</sup> As such, Král's work therefore provides a particularly valuable case for examining the application and combination of translation strategies in practice. At the same time, the temporal scope of his translations, spanning nearly six decades of continuous translation activity from the 1960s to the late 2010s, makes it possible to trace the development of his translation strategies over time and to consider the influence of broader historical and cultural contexts.

Building on this foundation, this paper focuses on five selected works of classical Chinese narrative fiction translated by Oldřich Král and applies relevant translation theories by Jiří Levý (2011) and Lawrence Venuti (1995). It examines how the choice between transliteration and translation varies across different texts and contexts, and how these strategies shape reader comprehension and aesthetic experience.

## I Theoretical Framework and Corpus

Chinese scholar Qi Lintao (2018, 36) points out that personal names in classical Chinese fiction function as complex semiotic and cultural units, carrying linguistic, ethnic, historical, and symbolic meanings. This culturally embedded perspective is further supported by linguistic approaches that explore the multifaceted nature

1 In addition to his translations of classical Chinese prose, Oldřich Král also translated a wide range of philosophical and literary texts, including *Lunyu* 論語, *Daodejing* 道德經, *Yijing* 易經, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Liuzutanjing* 六祖壇經, and *Wenxindiaolong* 文心雕龍, as well as selected works of classical poetry and modern Chinese fiction. He also translated a collection of thirty-one Tang dynasty *chuanqi* 傳奇 stories. For a more comprehensive overview of his work, see the bibliography in Filipský et al. 1999, 272-273; Olivová 2020, 397-412.

of proper names, including their semantic, pragmatic, and cultural functions (see, for example, Harvalík 2021).

According to Jiří Levý (2011, 84–85), literature expresses the “specific” rather than the “unique” or the “general”, and proper names in literary texts rarely serve as mere neutral identifiers. Instead, they tend to carry culturally and historically specific meanings, pointing to a particular environment, mentality, or even the “taste” of a given era. In translation, it is precisely such culturally embedded elements (including proper names) that tend to present the greatest challenge. As Levý says (2011, 103):

Such items are usually treated in the literature on translation as isolated translation problems (*cruces translatorum*); however, in practice they intersperse the text and so may have an impact on a number of its attributes. The *realia* themselves are components of wider contexts in the living environments of particular cultures; the world we live in is made up of objects and phenomena which assume different manifestations in their respective cultural regions.

Levý (2011, 67–68) further argues that translation is always a hybrid construct—it contains elements from both the source text and the target language and culture, which inevitably interact and sometimes even come into tension or contradiction. This tension becomes especially evident in the treatment of proper names, which are often deeply rooted in the source culture. The reader may perceive this discord when there is a clash between the linguistic form of translation and the cultural context of the original work.<sup>2</sup> As Levý points out (*ibid.*, 68), there is no universal rule to follow—each case requires an individual decision on the part of the translator, who must carefully balance clarity, atmosphere, and linguistic naturalness.

Much depends on “the translator’s *habitus*”—that is, the translator’s background, including the knowledge of both source and target cultures, personal competencies, and literary experience (Qi 2018, 33). From this perspective, translation will always entail certain limitations: ultimately, it remains a transfer of a source text into a target text, and even the most skilled translator is bound to encounter “*cruces translatorum*”—problematic or untranslatable elements—that

2 There are also practical grammatical issues, such as inflection: some foreign names cannot be easily integrated into Czech morphological structures.

must be resolved through some degree of compromise. Each translator finds their own way of negotiating and resolving such challenges.

In onomastic translation, the fundamental dilemma lies in the choice between transliteration and semantic translation. When a name contains a hidden metaphor or cultural reference, this decision crucially affects whether the metaphorical or symbolic meaning becomes immediately accessible to the reader, or remains obscured behind the foreign form. This brings us directly to Lawrence Venuti's (1995) influential distinction between domestication and foreignization. Domestication refers to the strategy of adapting a text—including names—to fit the norms and expectations of the target culture, often at the cost of reducing its cultural otherness. In contrast, foreignization deliberately preserves traces of the source culture, maintaining linguistic or cultural difference even at the risk of reduced reader accessibility. In this sense, semantic translation of proper names can be understood as a form of domestication, as it renders their meaning accessible to the reader, while transliteration aligns more closely with foreignization, preserving the original form but often obscuring its semantic content.

The corpus consists of five works of classical Chinese narrative fiction translated by Oldřich Král: *Rulinwaishi* 儒林外史 (1962), *Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢 (1986–1988), *Xiyoubu* 西遊補 (2009), *Rouputuan* 肉蒲團 (2011), and *Jinpingmei* 金瓶梅 (2012–2018). These works cover a broad temporal range within Král's translation career. As such, they provide a suitable basis for examining how translation strategies related to proper names vary across texts of different scope, genre, and complexity, as well as how these strategies change across different stages of a single translator's work. The translated works are analyzed in chronological order, following the sequence of their publication. In addition, particular attention is given to one borderline case that lies at the intersection of proper names and culturally embedded expressions, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the limits of onomastic translation.

## 2 *Rulinwaishi*

The novel *Rulinwaishi* 儒林外史 (hereafter RLWS), *The Unofficial History of Confucian Scholars*, was written by Wu Jingzi 吳敬梓 (1701–1754) and completed

around the year 1750, although the oldest surviving edition dates from 1803 (Rolston 1990, 245). This social satirical work uses its characters to present a generalized portrayal of the entire social class of literati and bureaucrat scholars (Král 1965, 48).

The unabridged Chinese text was translated into Czech by Oldřich Král in 1962 under the title *Literáti a mandaríni: Neoficiální kronika konfuciánů* [Literati and Mandarins: An Unofficial Chronicle of the Confucians], representing one of the earliest complete translations of a classical Chinese novel into Czech (see Wu 1962; 1995).<sup>3</sup> The work occupies a central place in Král's early scholarly and translational activity, as it formed the basis of his doctoral research and later informed his monograph *Umění čínského románu* [The Art of the Chinese Novel, 1965].

Upon examining the Czech translation of the novel, it becomes immediately apparent that Oldřich Král, in most cases, opts for a purely transliterative strategy when rendering Chinese names. The names of main characters in RLWS, such as Wang Mian 王冕, rendered as Wang Mien; Du Shaoqing 杜少卿, rendered as Tu Šao-čching; and Ju Shenfu 蘧駟夫, rendered as Ěü Šen-fu, are transcribed using the standard Czech system of Chinese transcription, without any attempt at semantic translation. This standardized system was developed by Oldřich Švarný in the early 1950s and has become the dominant method of rendering Chinese names in Czech translations of sinophone fiction, as it provides a close phonetic approximation of the original pronunciation for Czech readers (see Švarný 1967; Švarný and Uher 2001). At the same time, however, it foregrounds the foreign form of proper names, often leaving their semantic content inaccessible.

Most male character names in the novel are thus rendered through transliteration. In rare cases, however, Král employs hybrid solutions that combine elements of transliteration and semantic translation. This approach is used primarily in the case of nicknames, such as Qian Mazi 錢麻子, rendered as Poďobaný Čchien (Pockmarked Čchien). Another illustrative example can be found in Chapter 34, which introduces two literati described as having pale, powder-like complexions (*mianrufufen* 面如傅粉), red lips (*zhen ruo tu zhu* 唇若塗

3 Following earlier translations of late Qing fiction, such as Jaroslav Průšek's rendition of *Laocanyouji* 老殘遊記, published in 1960.

朱), delicate features, and a subtle fragrance (*fanglanjingti* 芳蘭竟體). One of them is referred to as Yu Meiren 余美人, rendered as “Krasavec Jü” (Handsome Jü), while the other is called Xiao Guniang 蕭姑娘, translated as “Slečna Siao” (Miss Siao) (Wu 1995, 412).<sup>4</sup>

These two nicknames also suggest a degree of visual deviation from conventional gender norms, at least from the perspective of other characters, most notably in the case of Xiao Guniang, where this effect is especially pronounced both in the original and in the translation. At the same time, such figures are not exceptional, but rather form a recurring element of characterization in classical Chinese fiction, as will be further illustrated in the analyses of other works. Therefore, in these cases, a purely transliterative approach would obscure the descriptive and characterizing function of the names, which directly reflect the physical appearance or stylized qualities of their bearers. This observation resonates with Levý’s view of translation as an inherently hybrid process shaped by a tension between the preservation of formal features and the transmission of meaning. In this sense, the semantic rendering of such names can be understood as a form of domestication, making their meaning accessible to the target reader, whereas transliteration aligns more closely with foreignization, preserving the original form but often at the expense of interpretive clarity.

By contrast, semantically translated forms appear only sporadically and are primarily reserved for minor or episodic female characters, whose names lend themselves to clear and often poetic rendering. Examples include the names of maidservants such as Hehua 荷花 rendered as “Kvítek” (Little Blossom) and Cailian 採蓮 as “Lotosový květ” (Lotus Flower), where the choice of semantic translation contributes to the poetic and stylistic effect of the text. However, female characters who play more significant roles in the novel are again rendered through transcription — for example, Lu Xiaojie 魯小姐 as “paní Lu” (Mrs. Lu), Shen Qiongzhi 沈瓊枝 as “Šen Čchiung-č” or “slečna Šen” (Ms. Šen), and Wang Taitai 王太太 as “paní Wang” (Mrs. Wang).

Hybrid solutions can also be observed in the case of female characters’ nicknames. A notable example is the nickname Hu Qi La Zi 胡七喇子, which Král renders as “Chuová Dryáčnice” (Hu the Shrew), retaining the surname in

4 這兩入，面如傅粉，唇若塗朱；舉止風流，芳蘭竟體。這兩個名士獨有兩個綽號：一個叫「余美人」，一個叫「蕭姑娘」。(Wu 2002, 354).

transliteration while translating the rest of the nickname semantically. A similar approach is used for the matchmaker Shen Dajiao 沈大腳, translated as “Šenová Velká noha” (Shen Bigfoot). In these cases, the hybrid strategy again allows for the preservation of cultural specificity while making the descriptive function of the nickname accessible to the reader.

However, since female characters are relatively scarce in RLWS and the novel focuses primarily on the lives of male protagonists, transliteration prevails as the dominant strategy, and the scope for deeper analysis of onomastic translation remains limited. Taken together, the examples discussed above nevertheless provide a representative insight into Král’s early translation practice, encompassing major and minor characters as well as a range of naming types, including personal names and descriptive nicknames.

### 3 *Honglouloumeng*

A more complex and revealing case is provided by Král’s translation of *Honglouloumeng* 紅樓夢 (hereafter HLM), one of the most important works of classical Chinese fiction, traditionally attributed to Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (1710–1765). Unlike RLWS, where transliteration largely prevails, HLM presents a far greater density of semantically charged and symbolically meaningful names, making it a particularly suitable case for examining the interplay between transliteration and translation.

Král’s work on this translation must also be understood within its specific historical context. Following the Prague Spring of 1968 and the subsequent period of so-called “normalization”,<sup>5</sup> his academic career was interrupted, and he was forced to leave the Charles University in 1971 (Olivová 2020, 7). He subsequently found a position at the National Gallery in Prague, where he continued his engagement with Chinese art and culture, and he did not return to the university until 1990 (Filipský et al. 1999, 271). During this period, he

5 “Normalization” refers to the period following the Prague Spring of 1968, during which the Czechoslovak regime reasserted strict political and ideological control, accompanied by the removal of reform-oriented intellectuals from academic and public life.

devoted himself more intensively to the translation of classical Chinese literature, including, alongside philosophical texts, his translation of HLM. The Czech translation was published in three volumes between 1986 and 1988 under the title *Sen v červeném domě* (see Cchao 1986; 1988a; 1988b).

HLM is commonly regarded as a vast family saga depicting the rise and fall of a prominent aristocratic household and the intertwined fates of its members. At the heart of the narrative lies a love triangle involving the young heir Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉 and his cousins Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 and Xue Baochai 薛寶釵. Spanning 120 chapters, the novel offers an intricate portrayal of the lives of both the immediate and extended family, as well as numerous other characters connected to them. Unsurprisingly, according to Zhou Hao's calculations (2015, 2), HLM features a total of 975 characters, 732 of whom have distinct personal names. This sheer scale, both in terms of its length and the number of characters, significantly amplifies the complexity of onomastic translation compared to works such as RLWS.

As Zhou Hao further observes (2015, 2), “the majority of names in this novel contain words referring to different types of germs<sup>6</sup> or flowers, and at the same time, many characters' names are suggestive of the destiny or personality of the characters.” This is particularly evident in the case of female characters, whose names often carry rich symbolic meaning. Such naming practices are not unique to HLM, but reflect a broader literary convention found in other works of traditional Chinese fiction, including *Jinpingmei* and *Rouputuan*, discussed in subsequent sections.

In contrast to RLWS, where transliteration prevails, Král in HLM frequently employs semantic translation for both male and female characters. The main protagonists, however, are once again rendered using the Czech standard transcription system,<sup>7</sup> as in the case of the central trio—Jia Baoyu as “Tia Pao-jü”;

6 The term “germs” is used here in the sense of less favorable or pejorative elements embedded in certain names.

7 At the time of Král's translation in the 1980s, the standardized Czech transcription system remained the dominant convention, while *pinyin* had not yet been widely adopted even in scholarly contexts. Although *pinyin* had already been established internationally, its integration into Czech sinological and literary practice was gradual, and the coexistence of multiple transcription systems persisted well into the late 20th century (Tříšková and Sehnal 2013).

Lin Daiyu as “Lin Taj-jü”; and Xue Baochai as “Süe Pao-čhaj”. This contrasts with characters such as the servant Mingyan 茗烟, rendered as “Čajík” (Little Tea);<sup>8</sup> Wang Xifeng 王熙鳳<sup>9</sup> as “snacha Fénix” (daughter-in-law Phoenix); and the maid Hua Xiren 花袭人<sup>10</sup> as “Aroma”. Král thus does not restrict semantic translation solely to household maids<sup>11</sup> and male servants,<sup>12</sup> but extends it to certain higher-ranking female characters and even to women outside the Jia household, such as Buddhist or Daoist nuns, thereby implicitly marking differences in social status.<sup>13</sup>

However, this approach is not the only model available in the English translation tradition. As Zhou Hao (2015, 5) notes, the earlier translation by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (see Cao 1978) relies more heavily on transcription, compensating for the loss of semantic meaning through annotation rather than in-text translation. David Hawkes, by contrast, combines transcription, annotation, and more liberal semantic rendering, supplemented by an appendix explaining the meanings of characters’ names and their kinship relations.

Against this background, it is worth considering whether Král may have been influenced by the model established by David Hawkes and John Minford (1973–1986), as notable similarities can be observed. In their English translation, the names of the main characters are preserved in pinyin, while those of maids and servants are rendered semantically. In addition, certain groups of characters are

However, in the translation of literary texts, especially prose and poetry, the Czech transcription system continued to hold a privileged position (Třísková 1999, 122). Only from the 2000s onwards did *pinyin* begin to gain broader acceptance in Czech academic and literary contexts. This shifting landscape provides an important background for understanding Král’s translational choices across different stages of his career.

8 Originally named Mingyan, Jia Baoyu renames him Beiming 焙茗 in Chapter 24.

9 Literally “Wang Glorious Phoenix”.

10 Literally “Flower that Captivates People”.

11 Poetic maid names such as “Azura” (Azura), “Labutěnka” (Swanette), “Kvítko” (Blossom), “Mráček” (Cloudlet), “Věrná” (Faithful), and many more.

12 Except Čajík (Little Tea) also servants named Tichošlápek (Softstep), Indigo, Bylinkář (Herbalist), and others.

13 Though this clearly does not apply in the case of Wang Xifeng, who is not lowborn and holds considerable power in the family.

rendered using distinct stylistic conventions, such as Latinized names for religious figures (e.g. Adamantina, Benevolentia, Sapientia) and French-stylized names for actresses (e.g. Charmante) (Cao 1974).

Král's translation appears to align more closely with Hawkes's approach, a connection further supported by the fact that he explicitly engages with Hawkes's work, citing it in the afterword to the third volume of the Czech translation (Král 1988, 643). This affinity is also reflected in a number of identical or closely corresponding renderings, as seen in the case of Hua Xiren 花袭人, rendered as "Aroma" in both Hawkes's and Král's versions; Cuilü 翠缕, translated as "Kingfisher" in Hawkes's and "Ledňáček" (literally Kingfisher) in Král's version; and Wan'er 萬兒, rendered as "Swastika" in Hawkes's and "Svastika" in Král's version. At the same time, Král does not follow this model uncritically, as evidenced by cases such as Wang Xifeng, whose name is retained in transcription by Hawkes but rendered semantically as "Fénix" in the Czech translation.

An illustrative example is the nun Miaoyu 妙玉, rendered as Adamantina in Hawkes's translation and as "Mystérie" in the Czech version. While both translators opt for a semantic rather than a phonetic rendering, Hawkes employs a Latinized stylistic convention, whereas Král uses a Czech abstract noun, resulting in different cultural resonances. A particularly revealing contrast can be observed in the case of two other Buddhist names Zhishan 智善 and Zhineng 智能, rendered by Hawkes as "Benevolentia" and "Sapientia". These translations retain the semantic components of the original names—*shan* 善 (benevolence), and *neng* 能 (ability)—while adopting a Latinized stylistic form. Král, by contrast, renders these names as "Džnánasa" and "Džnánašak", drawing on Sanskrit elements associated with Buddhist terminology. While this solution effectively reinforces the religious context and introduces a distinct stylistic layer, it simultaneously obscures the original semantic content of the names. The result is a form of mediated foreignization, in which the original Chinese cultural reference is replaced by a different, though functionally related, cultural framework.

A clear divergence can be observed in the case of theatrical names. While Hawkes renders Fangguan 芳官 as Charmante, adopting a French-stylized stage name, Král retains the Czech transcription "Fang-kuan", preserving the original form without stylistic adaptation. This suggests that, although Král's translation shares certain features with Hawkes's model, it does not replicate it systematically.

but rather adapts selected elements in accordance with different translational priorities.

A further variation can be observed in the treatment of maidservants. While Xueyan 雪雁 is rendered as “Labutěnka” (Swan), preserving the avian imagery of the original, the name Yingge 鸚哥 (Parrot) appears as “Linduška”, a domesticated diminutive form.<sup>14</sup> While the initial element “Lin-” may evoke an association with Lin Daiyu, this connection is not explicitly motivated by the narrative (see chapter 3), and the name can also be understood more generally as a Czech diminutive derived from the personal name “Linda”. In either case, the translation abandons both the phonetic and semantic components of the original in favor of a culturally familiar and stylistically marked form.

A particularly interesting example in the Czech version concerns two minor schoolboy characters who are mentioned in Chapter 9, in a scene set in the Jia household academy:

又有兩個多情的小學生，亦不知是那一房的親眷，亦未考真姓名，只因生得斌媚風流，滿學中都送了兩個外號：一個叫香憐，一個叫玉愛。（Cao and Gao 2005, 134).

There were also two charming little schoolboys, and no one really knew from which family they came, nor did anyone bother to find out their real names. Because of their loveliness and playful elegance, the whole class gave them nicknames: one was called Xianglian, and the other Yu'ai (verbatim translation).

Oldřich Král rendered these nicknames as follows: Xianglian 香憐, lit. “Fragrant Pity”, as “Miláček” (Sweetheart); and Yu'ai 玉愛, lit. “Jade Love”, as “Drahoušek” (Darling)<sup>15</sup> (Cchao 1986, 156). These are the affectionate forms by which the boys are addressed throughout the rest of the text; their real names are never disclosed—nor is there any expectation that the reader should seek them out.

The above examples suggest that Král may have intentionally used differing translation strategies for names to visually and stylistically distinguish main characters from secondary ones, and to subtly indicate their social or narrative hierarchy. A comparable reasoning is found in Luo Junjie's (2012, 69) analysis of Clement Egerton's 1939 translation of *Jinpingmei*, where Egerton transliterated

14 In Hawkes's translation, the same characters appear as “Snowgoose” (雪雁) and “Nightingale” (鸚哥).

15 In Hawkes's English version, Yu'ai is also rendered as “Darling”.

male characters' names while translating female ones into meaningful English terms—a practice that, as Robert Hegel (2011, 19) observed, served to accentuate gender and narrative distinctions between character groups. Taken together, these examples demonstrate that Král's approach to the translation of personal names in HLM is highly flexible and context-sensitive, combining elements of semantic translation, transcription, and stylistic adaptation in ways that both resonate with and diverge from existing translation models.

This is why some translators prefer the strategy of translation to compensate for this shortcoming of the transliteration method.

#### 4 *Xiyoubu*

Following his translation of HLM, Král devoted much of the 1990s and the period after 2000 primarily to the translation of philosophical texts (see Olivová 2020, 398–400). However, some of these works—particularly his translation of the *Yijing* and several Buddhist texts—can be understood as preparing the ground for another major engagement with narrative literature. This took the form of his translation of *Xiyoubu* 西遊補 (hereafter XYB) by Dong Yue (1620–1686), published in 2009 under the title *Vsuvka do putování na západ: román na přidanou* (see Dong 2009).

XYB is a relatively short narrative (16 chapters) inserted between Chapters 61 and 62 of the much more extensive hundred-chapter novel *Xiyouji* 西游記 (hereafter XYJ). Commonly known as *Journey to the West*, XYJ is an early example of the Chinese fantasy novel, traditionally attributed to Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩 and regarded as one of *Sidaqishu* 四大奇書, or “the four masterworks of Ming fiction” (Plaks 1987, 3). Although Dong Yue 董說 spent a significant part of his life under the Qing dynasty, XYB itself can still be considered a Ming novel, as it was published in 1641, shortly before the fall of the dynasty (Dong 2009, 7).

Dong Yue was influenced by both Confucianism and Buddhism, and became a respected thinker during his lifetime (Král 2009, 13–14). In XYB, he draws on the narrative tradition of the Monkey King, whose roots, according to Král, lie primarily in oral storytelling, which “brought the Monkey King into being in all his richness” (ibid., 12), while at the same time developing the world known from XYJ in a distinctive way. Unlike the original novel, however, this is not a

straightforward continuation of an adventure narrative, but rather an experimental work that “bears clear traces of inspiration from Zen stories, dialogues, and kōans” (ibid., 16). The text thus reconfigures the original material into a more allegorical and introspective mode, foregrounding questions of illusion, identity, and knowledge.

In the Czech context, XYJ has been relatively well known, particularly through Zdena Heřmanová-Novotná’s 1961 translation under the title *Opičí král* [Monkey King] from an abridged adaptation for children<sup>16</sup> (see Wu 1961) and its later popularization through television adaptations. Owing to its fantastical and often fairy-tale-like character, the Czech translation of XYJ tends to render character names semantically, as these frequently convey key traits, humor, and symbolic meaning.

Compared to HLM, XYJ features a considerably smaller number of characters, but it exhibits a high degree of variation in the naming of its central figures. The protagonist Sun Wukong 孫悟空, for instance, is referred to by a range of names reflecting different aspects of his identity, such as “Opičák” (the Monkey, *houzi* 猴子), “Opičí král” (Monkey King, *hou wang* 猴王), “Krasavec” (Handsome Monkey King, *mei hou wang* 美猴王), or “Velký světec rovný Nebi” (Great Sage Equal to Heaven, *Qitiandasheng* 齊天大聖), all of which correspond to designations found in the Chinese original.

In the Czech translation of XYJ by Zdena Heřmanová-Novotná, these names—as well as those of other characters—are consistently rendered semantically. This applies not only to other major figures such as Zhu Bajie 豬八戒 rendered as “Čuník” (Piggy) and Sha Seng 沙僧 rendered as “Písečný mnich” (Sand Friar), but also to various side characters, for example Niu Mowang 牛魔王 “Býčí démon” (Bull Demon King). At the same time, alternative strategies are occasionally employed: some names appear in Czech transcription (e.g. “Mistr Čen-jüan” for Zhen Yuanzi 鎮元子), while others, such as “Tripitaka” for Tang Seng 唐僧, reflect different translation traditions.

This established pattern of semantic rendering forms an important background for understanding the treatment of proper names in XYB. While XYB draws on the narrative and stylistic conventions of its source text, Král’s

16 *Xiyouji gushi* 西游記故事 from 1957.

translation both draws on and departs from this convention. On the one hand, he adopts—fully or partially—some of the solutions found in the earlier Czech translation by Heřmanová-Novotná. On the other hand, XYB marks an important turning point in his translational practice.

In contrast to his earlier translations, Král here adopts *pinyin*, marking a clear departure from the established Czech transcription system that had long dominated both scholarly and literary practice. While his 1999 translation of *Sunzi bingfa* (published by Maxima) still employs the traditional Czech transcription system, his later works consistently adopt *pinyin*. The first instance of this shift in his translations of premodern texts can be observed in his 2000 translation of *Wenxindiaolong* (published by Brody). Subsequent translations, including *Xiyoubu* (2009), *Rouputuan* (2011), and *Jinpingmei* (2012–2018), published by Maxima, use pinyin consistently.

A comparison of the translation strategies employed by Zdena Heřmanová-Novotná and Oldřich Král in rendering the main characters suggests itself, since XYB, functioning as a hypertext, draws on XYJ and adopts its principal figures. It is therefore pertinent to ask to what extent Král sought to maintain continuity with the existing Czech translation in order to facilitate reader orientation—and the answer is only partially affirmative.

In the case of the main protagonist Sun Wukong, Král in XYB employs a range of designations, such as “Opičák Sun” (Monkey Sun), “Velký poutník” (Great Pilgrim), and “Velký světec” (Great Sage), while the symbolic meaning of the name is further elaborated in a footnote (Dong 2009, 43, n. 2). By contrast, Heřmanová-Novotná in her translation of XYJ predominantly uses the designation “Opičák” (the Monkey), occasionally complemented by the Czech transcription “Sun Wu-kchung.”

A similar variability can be observed in the case of Zhu Bajie. Whereas in XYJ he is consistently rendered as “Čuník” (Pigsy), with the exception of the initial introduction of the name in Czech transcription as “Ču Wu-neng,” Král in XYB combines semantic translation with elements of transliteration, producing forms such as “Čuník Bajie” (Pigsy Bajie) or simply “Bajie,” and at times also employs the monastic (Buddhist) name “Wuneng” (悟能).

Even more pronounced differences can be observed in the case of Xuanzang 玄奘. In XYJ, the conventional designation “Tripitaka” predominates, occasionally accompanied by the Czech transcription “Süan-cang”. In contrast,

Král in XYB works with a broader range of expressions, including “Tangský mnich Tripitaka” (Tang monk Tripitaka), “Tangský mnich Xuanzang” (Tang monk Xuanzang), and “Mistr Tripitaka” (Master Tripitaka), thus combining different translational and transcriptional strategies. These examples demonstrate that while Král builds on the established solutions of Heřmanová-Novotná, he simultaneously modifies them and combines them with additional strategies. The result is a more variable and less standardized system, oscillating between continuity and innovation.

At the same time, XYB does not introduce a large number of new secondary characters (in terms of both length and number of characters, XYB is comparable to Král’s later translation Roupoutuan). Historical figures (such as Qin Shihuang, Xiang Yu, Qin Gui, or Yue Fei), as well as many other characters, are typically rendered in pinyin in Král’s translation. In the case of certain fictional characters, however, the translator adopts a different approach and renders their names semantically.

For instance, the figure *Qingqing shijie tianwang* 青青世界天王 is translated as “Nebeský král Zezenozeleného světa” (Heavenly King of the Green-Green World), while his alternative name *Xiaoyue wang* 小月王 appears as “Král Měsíček” (Little Moon King) (Dong 2009, 182). Similarly, the names of three blind singers—*Ge qiang hua* 隔牆花 (lit. flower beyond the wall), *Mo tanlang* 摸檀郎 (lit. touching the fragrant young man), and *Bei zhuan pingting* 背轉娉婷 (lit. gracefully turning [beauty]) —are rendered by Král as “Popínavá” (Rambling / Clinging), “Dotýkává” (Touching), and “Vábivá” (Alluring), thereby emphasizing their aesthetic and seductive qualities.

In such cases, Král employs a partial semantic translation that suppresses the formal structure of the original names in favor of their functional and stylistic effect. From the perspective of translation theory, this approach can be understood as a form of domestication in Venuti’s sense, as the names are adapted to the expectations of the target reader and primarily fulfill a characterizing function.

5 *Rouputuan*

Li Yu 李漁 (1611–1680) was a prose writer, playwright, poet, and essayist from an official family who failed to obtain a degree in the imperial examinations and remained, in many respects, at odds with the conventions of his time. He authored a number of erotically charged works of fiction and drama, among which the novella *Rouputuan* 肉蒲團 (hereafter RPT), originally published in 1657, occupies a prominent place. This twenty-chapter work was translated into Czech by Oldřich Král under the title *Meditační robožky z masa* [The Carnal Prayer Mats] in 2011 (see Li 2011). From an onomastic perspective, this translation differs markedly from Král's earlier work, as it adopts a substantially different approach to the rendering of personal names.

In this respect, RPT represents—for the first time—a notable departure from Král's usual reliance on transliteration, as the names of nearly all protagonists are rendered through semantic translation. The sole clear exception is the character Ruyi 如意, whose name is preserved in *pinyin*. A partial exception is represented by her lover “Pocivka Quan” (Righteous Quan / Honest Quan), whose original name Quan Laoshi 權老實 combines transliteration and translation: the surname Quan 權 is retained in *pinyin*, while the given name Laoshi 老實 (honest, upright), rendered in Czech as “Pocivka”, is translated.

Apart from the protagonist *Weiyang sheng* 未央生, rendered as “Student Večerka” (Student Nightfall), and his companion *Sai kunlun* 賽昆侖, translated as “Malajec” (the Malayan), particular attention may be drawn to the names of Weiyang sheng's servants, *Shu si* 書笥 (“Tubička”, Little Tube) and *Jianqiao* 劍鞘 (“Pochvička”, Little Sheath).<sup>17</sup> These examples represent highly precise semantic translations, as 書笥 literally denotes a “book case” and 劍鞘 a “scabbard”.

The novel also features a number of poetically stylized personal names, such as the male name *Tiefei Daoren* 鐵扉道人, rendered as “Pán železných věřejí”

17 Král explains his rendering of the names “Tubička” and “Pochvička” in a footnote (Li 2011, 166), where he derives them from the forms *shutong* 書筒 and *jianxiao* 劍銷. However, in the Chinese editions consulted for this study, the corresponding names appear as *shusi* 書笥 and *jianqiao* 劍鞘. As Král himself notes, his translation was based on the 1885 edition *Huixiang xie pu yuan quanzhuan* 繪像邪蒲緣全傳 (Li 2011, 442). This discrepancy may therefore be due to a different textual version used by Král or to an editorial inconsistency.

(Master of the Iron Door Leaf), as well as female characters named “Nefrita,” “Aroma,” “Flora,” “Listra,” or “Jadeita”.<sup>18</sup> These names are semantically associated with fragrances, precious stones, or flowers, reflecting a pattern of typically feminine euphemistic naming. The translated forms often carry a distinct poetic quality and, in some cases, also convey the satirical undertone present in the original. From a theoretical perspective, Král’s approach in RPT can be understood as leaning toward domestication in Venuti’s sense, as the names are adapted to the expectations of the target readership at the expense of preserving their foreignness.

Král thus employs a strategy broadly comparable to that used in his translation of HLM, but with a crucial difference: in RPT, he extends semantic translation even to the names of the main characters, whereas in HLM these remain largely transliterated. Whether such an approach would be feasible in novels featuring hundreds or even thousands of characters remains open to question. RPT contains only 27 named characters—a number that is both manageable for the translator and readily accessible to the reader. By contrast, devising consistent and meaningful translations for several hundred names would represent a formidable challenge, even for a highly skilled and experienced translator.

In this respect, the scale of RPT more closely resembles that of a stage play than that of a large-scale novel—a parallel that is hardly surprising, given that Li Yu was primarily a playwright. One might therefore argue that RPT can be read as a kind of stage comedy cast in the form of a novella—an erotic grotesque.

## 6 *Jinpingmei*

The anonymous novel *Jinpingmei* 金瓶梅 (hereafter JPM), or *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, is widely regarded (Plaks 1986; 1987; Rolston 1990; Hsia 2015) as the latest of the “Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel” and remains one of the most important works of classical Chinese fiction. The novel is closely related to *Shuibuzhuan* 水滸傳, from which it draws its central narrative premise. In

18 I.e., Yanfang 艳芳, Xiangyun 香云, Ruizhu 瑞珠, Ruiyu 瑞玉, etc.

particular, the episodes from Chapters 23–27 appear to have served as the primary source for the plotline of JPM, albeit substantially reworked and expanded (Hanan 1963, 29–33; Král 2012, 364; Lem 2016, 2; Lu 2010, 107).<sup>19</sup>

As Král himself notes, he had already begun preparing for his translation of *Jinpingmei* while working on *Rouputuan* (Li 2011, 442). He first came into closer editorial contact with the text through his 1992 reissue of the abridged Czech edition *Přívabné ženy: Čin Ping Mei* [Graceful Women], originally translated by Sína Drahorádová-Lvová and published in 1948. This version was translated from German and ultimately based on a free adaptation derived from the Chongzhen edition of the novel (1630s–1640s),<sup>20</sup> via Franz Kuhn's 1930 German rendering.<sup>21</sup> Before undertaking the full translation of JPM, Král translated the first half of Chapter 12 under the title *Jinlian se zaplete se sluhou a utrpí hanbu* [Jinlian Becomes Involved with a Servant and Suffers Disgrace], published in the anthology *Klenoty čínské literatury* (Král 2006, 218–227).

For his complete translation of JPM, Král had to choose between the two extant unabridged editions: the earlier Wanli (1617) recension, and the later Chongzhen edition (1630s–1640s). He ultimately opted for the Wanli version, in part because he had acquired a copy of this edition during a visit to Japan in 1988 and thus had direct access to the text (Král 2012, 377). While most scholars agree that the Wanli edition represents the earliest extant version and is more complete, particularly in terms of its poetic content, its superiority over the Chongzhen recension remains a matter of debate (see Tian 2002; Vicher 2024).

The first volume of Král's complete and unabridged translation based on the Wanli edition was published in 2012 by his own press, Maxima, under the title

19 The episode in question, found in Chapters 23–27, recounts the story of Wu Song 武松, his brother Wu Da 武大, Wu Da's wife Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮, her lover Ximen Qing 西門慶, and the matchmaker Madam Wang 王婆, culminating in Wu Song's revenge for his brother's murder. As Tina Lu (2010, 107) explains, the novel as a whole may be understood as an expanded reworking of this episode from *Shuibuzhuan*, which is redistributed across the opening chapters of JPM, with its resolution postponed until much later in the narrative.

20 The Chongzhen edition later served as the basis for Zhang Zhupo's 張竹坡 annotated version of the novel (1695), which played a significant role in shaping its subsequent reception and interpretation.

21 *Kin Ping Meh Oder Die Abenteuerliche Geschichte Von Hsi Men Und Seinen Sechs Frauen* (1930)

*Jinpingmei aneb Slivoň ve zlaté váze*. From the outset, the translation aimed to reproduce the original text as faithfully as possible, without omissions. This project became Král's final major undertaking; he completed seven of the planned ten volumes before his sudden death in 2018. The remaining three volumes were subsequently completed by Lucie Olivová and Ondřej Vicher.<sup>22</sup>

As Keith McMahon (2023, 73) observes, the language of JPM “challenges every translator, as well as the limits of the language the translator is working in.” This complexity is closely reflected in the novel's system of personal names, which are often crafted in a highly inventive manner and convey key aspects of a character's personality, social role, or narrative function (Luo 2012, 67; Roy 1990, 200). As the early commentator Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡 (1670–1698) already noted, the meanings of characters' names are frequently connected to specific events or situations within the narrative. In some cases, this relationship is even reversed, with narrative developments giving rise to names that retrospectively reflect or reinterpret them (Gu 2005, 139–141).

The basic onomastic metaphor involving the three most prominent female protagonists is embedded in the very title of the novel. Three characters extracted from their names form a kind of acronym which is a poetic play on words that was also mentioned by contemporary commentators.<sup>23</sup> Character *jin* 金 (gold) refers to

22 The eighth volume was published in 2022, the ninth in 2023, and the tenth is projected to appear in 2026, according to information provided on the official website of the publishing house Maxima.

23 I.e., Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 (1570–1626) in *You ju shi lu* 游居柿錄 (Zhang and Zhang 1999, 6) and in anonymous preface to JPM titled *Dongwu nong zhu ke xu* 東吳弄珠客序 (Lanlingxiaoxiaosheng 1998, 20/1). For Yuan Zhongdao's influence on literary language proposed in modern China (i.e. Lin Yutang), see Benická and Ye 2025.

Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮,<sup>24</sup> *ping* 瓶 (vase) to Li Ping'er 李瓶兒,<sup>25</sup> and *mei* 梅 (plum) to Pang Chunmei 龐春梅.<sup>26</sup>

The combination of characters 金 and 瓶 evokes the image of a valuable “golden vase”, suggesting both material luxury and confinement—akin to a gilded cage. The character 梅, in turn, points to the broader symbolic status of women in the decadent milieu of the novel, where they are often portrayed as ornamental objects—flowers in a vase, decorative items, or objects of pleasure (Král 2014; Plaks 1987; Qi 2018; Roy 1993). As Qi Lintao (2018, 119) notes, this metaphor underscores how the title encapsulates the objectification of women in traditional society. Significantly, Král retains even these semantically rich names in transliteration, occasionally supplementing them with a translated equivalent at their first occurrence. This applies not only to major characters but also to servants, whose names are no less poetic than those of their masters—a marked departure from his practice in HLM.

JPM shows a striking similarity to HLM in terms of its scope and the sheer number of characters. According to Qi Lintao (2018, 35), JPM contains over a thousand figures. Many of them are introduced through one-off nicknames or names based on wordplay. Although such names often appear only once or twice, they carry considerable metaphorical weight: they succinctly convey a character's traits, social role, or the narrator's ironic stance, and may even foreshadow future developments, thereby shaping narrative causality. As such, wordplay functions

24 Pan Jinlian is the fated lover of novel's protagonist Ximen Qing, renowned for her beauty and especially for her tiny bound feet—the so-called “Golden Lilies” is a direct reference to her name, Jinlian 金蓮. Just as Luo Junjie observed (2012, 67), this name “can refer to the bound feet of Chinese women in ancient China” and “the bound feet were often regarded as a symbol of sexual appeal in traditional Chinese society.” As Oldřich Král further noted (2014, 74), the adjective “golden” carries a double symbolic load—simultaneously referencing sexual allure and the entrapment of women in luxurious but restrictive roles.

25 Li Ping'er is Ximen Qing's sixth wife and the mother of his first-born son, and probably his only true love. Luo Junjie (2012, 68) explains again the symbolics in her name, stating that “the fragility of the vase suggests Ping'er's vulnerability within Ximen's house and foreshadows her untimely death.”

26 Pang Chunmei is a maidservant who holds a rather unusual position in the household and also maintains an intimate relationship with Ximen Qing.

not merely as ornament but as a structural device guiding the reader's perception of characters. The core cast includes the protagonist Ximen Qing, his six wives, their relatives, more than twenty household servants and their families, as well as numerous friends and acquaintances (Hou and Wang 1986, 3-5). Alongside these recurring figures, the novel also features many minor characters, some of whom share identical names—a result of the limited pool of possible name combinations and the homophonic nature of Chinese, particularly when rendered in Latinized transliteration.<sup>27</sup> Numerous further instances of onomastic metaphor can be found throughout the novel, for example among Ximen Qing's cronies, prostitutes, and various servants. Král, however, consistently renders these names in transliteration, only occasionally providing a translated equivalent at their first occurrence or offering a more detailed explanation in a footnote.<sup>28</sup>

As with the previous two titles (XYB and RPT), Král adopts *pinyin* as the sole system for rendering Chinese proper names. This choice was facilitated by the fact that he published the translation through his own press, which allowed him to determine his preferred translational conventions (Olivová and Vicher 2022, 216). The framework he established—including the treatment of proper names—was subsequently followed by his successors in the final three volumes. While these conventions remain largely fixed, a limited degree of flexibility is still possible in the rendering of newly introduced characters.

In the 1948 adaptation *Graceful Women*, character names are predominantly rendered in an unofficial transcription system influenced by the German version, as Švarný's standard Czech transcription had not yet been established. By contrast, Král, in his complete translation, also relies primarily on transliteration, but tends to avoid semantic rendering, except occasionally at a character's first appearance when the meaning is contextually relevant. This approach can be observed, for

27 This includes, for example, the case of two different servants named Antong, both written with the same characters 安童 in the original; or two different girls named Jin'er—one written as "golden" 金兒, the other as "brocaded" 錦兒. There are also three minor servants named Laiding 來定, and most notably, two characters named Yingchun—one male 應春 and one female 迎春 (see Olivová and Vicher 2022, 221–222).

28 The translation of proper names in JPM was also to some extent discussed by Olivová and Vicher (2022).

instance, in his treatment of several key female figures: Wu Yueniang initially appears as “Paní Luna” (Moon Lady); Pan Jinlian as “Zlatý lotos” (Golden Lotus); and Li Ping’er as “Vázička” (Little Vase). In *Graceful Women*, both translated and transliterated forms are attested, though the latter generally prevail; notably, Wu Yueniang appears exclusively as “Paní Luna”. Table 1 summarizes these patterns:

Table 1

*Comparison of the rendering of selected character names in two Czech translations of Jīnpíngmèi*

| 金瓶梅<br>漢字 | Slivoň ve zlaté váze<br>[Plum in the Golden Vase]<br><i>Pinyin</i> |                                    | Přívabné ženy [Graceful Women] |                         | Standard Czech transcription |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
|           |                                                                    | Translation variant                | Unofficial transcript          | Translation variant     |                              |
| 西門慶       | Ximen Qing                                                         | -                                  | Hsi Men                        | -                       | Si-men Čching                |
| 吳月娘       | Wu Yueniang                                                        | Paní Luna (Moon Lady)              | -                              | Paní Luna (Moon Lady)   | Wu Jüe-niang                 |
| 李嬌兒       | Li Jiao’er                                                         | -                                  | Li Kiao’rl                     | -                       | Li Ťiao-er                   |
| 孟玉樓       | Meng Yulou                                                         | Nefritový pavilion (Jade Pavilion) | Mong Ju Lo                     | -                       | Meng Jü-lou                  |
| 孫雪娥       | Sun Xue’e                                                          | -                                  | Sun Hsüe O                     | -                       | Sun Süe-e                    |
| 潘金蓮       | Pan Jinlian                                                        | Zlatý lotos (Golden Lotos)         | Pan Čin Liän                   | Paní Lotos (Lady Lotos) | Pchan Ťin-lien               |
| 李瓶兒       | Li Ping’er                                                         | Vázička (Little Vase)              | Paní Ping (Lady Ping)          | Paní Váza (Lady Vase)   | Li Pching-er                 |

|     |                 |                                  |         |   |                     |
|-----|-----------------|----------------------------------|---------|---|---------------------|
| 龐春梅 | Pang<br>Chunmei | Jarní slivoň<br>(Spring<br>Plum) | Čun Mei | - | Pchang<br>Čchun-mej |
|-----|-----------------|----------------------------------|---------|---|---------------------|

The use of translated name variants for the main female characters can be observed in another Czech rendering of JPM, namely an excerpt from Chapter 29 translated by David Uher, which was published in the book *Čína z antropologické perspektivy* (see Uher 2005, 262). In this passage, the names of three female protagonists appear in translated forms: Pan Jinlian as “paní Lotos” (Lady Lotus); Li Ping’er as “paní Váza” (Lady Vase); and Pang Chunmei as “Meruňka” (Apricot). Ximen Qing, by contrast, is presented in standard Czech transcription as “Si-men Čching” (compare with the above table):

Po chvíli, když *Si-men Čching* dojedl, objal Meruňku kolem ramen a společně tak došli až k postrannímu vchodu ložnice paní Lotos. *Si-men Čching* pak odhrnul závěs a vstoupil dovnitř, kde spatřil paní spící na nově koupeném loži vykládaném perletí. Jakmile totiž paní Lotos zjistila, že v pokoji paní Vázy je široká postel s baldachýnem zdobená perletí, hned chtěla, aby jí *Si-men Čching* za sto dvacet lotů stříbra také takové lůžko se zábradlčkem koupil. (Uher 2005, 262).

After a while, when Ximen Qing had finished eating, he put his arm around Apricot and together they walked to the side entrance of Lady Lotus’ bedroom. Ximen Qing then pulled back the curtain and entered, where he saw Lady Lotus sleeping on a newly purchased bed inlaid with mother-of-pearl. As soon as Lady Lotus discovered that Lady Vase’s room had a wide bed with a canopy decorated with mother-of-pearl, she immediately wanted Ximen Qing to buy her a similar bed with a railing for 120 taels of silver (verbatim translation).

A similar comparison can be made between two versions of Král’s translation of Chapter 12: the earlier excerpt published in *Klenoty čínské literatury* (Král 2006, 218–227), and the version included in the complete Czech edition (Lanlingxiaoxiaosheng 2013, 92). Both contain a maid named Qiuju 秋菊, whose name is rendered differently in each case. In the 2006 excerpt, Král translates the name as “Chryzantéma” (Chrysanthemum). In the later version, however, he uses

a transliterated form instead, thereby eliminating the semantic dimension of the name for the Czech reader.<sup>29</sup>

1) Zároveň poroučel Chryzantémě, aby připravil něco k jídlu a přistavila stůlek, aby se mohli napít. (Král 2006, 227).

At the same time, he ordered Chrysanthemum to prepare something to eat and bring a table so they could have a drink. (verbatim translation).

2) Druhé služce Qiuju poručil, aby hleděla připravit něco k jídlu a prostřela jim stůlek, aby se mohli pohodlně napít. (Lanlingxiaoxiaosheng 2013, 92).

He ordered the second maid, Qiuju, to prepare something to eat and set the table so that they could drink comfortably (verbatim translation).

Some characters in JPM are referred to by multiple names. For example, Wu Da 武大, the elder brother of the famous tiger-slayer Wu Song, is also called Wu Dalang 武大郎 or Wu Zhi 武植, and is given the derogatory nickname *Sancundinggushupi* 三寸丁谷樹皮, rendered by Oldřich Král as “Skrček Kůže morušová” (Mulberry Skin Midget) (Lanlingxiaoxiaosheng 2012, 57). In *Graceful Women*, by contrast, two different translation variants are attested: “Třícoulový mužíček” (Three-inch Manikin) and “Kůra zakrslého stromku” (Bark of a Dwarfed Tree). While in the complete Czech translation the nickname appears only in the opening chapters, in *Graceful Women* such derogatory designations recur throughout the text. This example illustrates how nicknames function as onomastic metaphors, highlighting physical appearance and social status, while also demonstrating Král’s tendency to use semantic rendering selectively, primarily at the point of introduction.

## 7 The Case of Long Yang

One particular case nonetheless deserves separate attention, even though it does not concern the name of a primary or secondary character and instead lies on the boundary between a proper name and a conventionalized cultural allusion. As such, it represents a special case that tests the limits of onomastic analysis. The name in question is one that Oldřich Král encountered repeatedly in his translations—

29 A literal translation “Podzimní orchidej” (Autumn Orchid) appears only in the list of characters.

first in HLM, then approximately twenty years later in RPT, and finally in JPM. This name is Long Yang 龍陽.

This name constitutes a well-established cultural allusion that, within the Chinese tradition, came to function as a synonym for male homosexuality or a male homosexual lover (Hinsch 1992, 32; Crompton 2003, 214; van Gulik 2009, 45). It refers to the historical figure of a favorite of the King of Wei during the Warring States period. According to an account preserved in the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, an episode describes how Long Yang, while fishing with the king, suddenly bursts into tears. When asked for the reason, he explains that whenever the king catches a larger fish, he wishes to discard the smaller ones, and Long Yang thus fears that he himself may one day be abandoned in favor of someone more attractive (Hinsch 1992, 32; Crompton 2003, 214). This story became so well known that expressions such as *longyang pi* 龍陽癖 (the passion of Long Yang) or *longyang zhi hao* 龍陽之好 continue to function as euphemisms for male homosexuality, while the term *longyang jun* 龍陽君 was used to denote a male lover or a young man in such a role (van Gulik 2009, 45; Xu 2006, 670).

Expressions containing the name Long Yang occur not only in JPM (once in Chapter 56), but also in Li Yu's RPT (five times, in Chapters 7, 17, and 18), as well as in the story *Cuiya lou* 萃雅樓 from the collection *Shi'er lou* 十二樓. The expression also appears in Chapter 9 of HLM. In total, there are seven instances in which Král engages with this euphemistic expression. Let us first consider an example from JPM (Chapter 56):

又有幾個伏侍的小廝，也一個個都標致龍陽的。

Kromě toho tam sloužilo několik mládenců, taky jeden půvabnější a přitažlivější než druhý (translated by Oldřich Král; in Lanlingxiaoxiaosheng 2017, 288).

Besides, there were several youngsters serving there, one more charming and attractive than the other (verbatim translation).

Moreover, there were also a number of page boys, each and every one of which was a good-looking catamite. (translated by David Roy; in Lanlingxiaoxiaosheng 2006, 392).

In David Roy's English version, the reference is rendered as "catamite,"<sup>30</sup> a direct lexical substitution that conveys the homosexual connotation explicitly. In the

30 Derived from the Latin word *catamitus*, it was a young male homosexual lover of an older heterosexual gentleman who was usually financially well-off.

Czech translation by Oldřich Král, although Czech offers an equivalent term “katamita”, this option is avoided in favor of the neutral “mládenec” (youngster), with the original connotation only indirectly suggested through the surrounding description. While Roy makes the implicit meaning explicit, Král attenuates the culturally specific reference, opting for a more neutral and context-dependent rendering.

Let us now consider five examples from RPT, which demonstrate a wider semantic range of expressions derived from Long Yang:

### Chapter 7

#### 1. 只有那些年少的龍陽

sem tam nějaký ten mládeneček (translated by Oldřich Král; in Li 2011, 145).

occasionally some youngster (verbatim translation).

Here, Král adopts the same strategy as in the JPM example, rendering the expression as a neutral reference to youthful attractiveness while omitting its homoerotic connotations.

#### 2. 我自己少年時節也曾做過龍陽

a když jsme to zamlada dělali se stejně starými spolužáky (translated by Oldřich Král; in Li 2011, 145).

and when we were younger, we used to do that with classmates our own age (verbatim translation).

In this case, the homosexual implication is retained only implicitly through contextual phrasing “with classmates our own age,” without explicit lexical marking.

### Chapter 17

#### 3. 聳起後庭，與男子幹龍陽之事

vystrkuje zadeček a evidentně provádí s nějakým mladým mužem to, čemu se říká anální styk (translated by Oldřich Král; in Li 2011, 354)

she is sticking her buttocks out and is clearly engaging in what is known as anal intercourse with a young man (verbatim translation).

Here, the expression *longyang zhi shi* 龍陽之事 no longer refers to a homosexual identity but rather to a specific sexual act. Král replaces the euphemistic expression with an explicit descriptive formulation.

#### 4. 婦人聳起後庭與男子幹龍陽的套數

[dívka] na kartě zrovna ochotně vystrkovala zadeček a mládenec jí evidentně strkal svůj penis do análu (translated by Oldřich Král; in Li 2011, 364)

[the girl] was happily sticking her buttocks out, and the young man was clearly penetrating her anally” (verbatim translation)

A similar strategy is employed here, again replacing the euphemistic expression with an explicit description of the act.

### Chapter 18

5. 相處了幾個龍陽？<sup>31</sup>

...kolikrát si užívali... (translated by Oldřich Král; in Li 2011, 382).

...how often they had indulged... (verbatim translation).

In this instance, the original expression is highly ambiguous, potentially referring either to homosexual encounters or to anal intercourse more broadly. Král resolves this ambiguity by generalizing the expression into a neutral formulation, thereby eliminating its specific semantic and cultural connotations.

These examples demonstrate that in RPT the expression derived from Long Yang undergoes a semantic shift from a designation of a male homosexual to a more generalized reference to specific sexual practices. Král’s translation reflects this shift by alternating between neutralization, implicit contextualization, and explicit descriptive rendering, depending on the narrative context. Rather than applying a single consistent strategy, he adapts his approach to the evolving function of the expression within the text, moving along a spectrum from omission to explication.

Finally, an example from HLM (Chapter 9) illustrates a markedly different approach:

原來薛蟠自來王夫人處住後，便知有一家學，學中廣有青年子弟，不免偶動了龍陽之興，因此也假來上學讀書。

<sup>31</sup> A broader context here is: 到家之後，少不得三位佳人替丈夫接風之後，就問一向在外，嫖了幾個女客？相處了幾個龍陽？比在家的時節快活多少？Král: “Po návratu se dostalo všem od jejich krásných žen toho nejvřelejšího přijetí a po něm samozřejmě i takových těch intimnějších otázek, jak bylo tam venku, kolik měli milenek a kurtizán,olikrát si užívali a jestli a jestli a jak se to dá srovnat s tím doma.” (Li 2011, 382). “Upon their return, they were all given the warmest welcome by their beautiful wives, followed, of course, by those more intimate questions: what it was like out there, how many mistresses and courtesans they had, how often they had indulged, and whether—and if so, how—it compared to life at home” (verbatim translation of Král’s version).

Také Süe Pchan brzy poté, co se usadil v domě paní Wang, se dozvěděl o existenci domácí školy, v níž byl samozřejmě široký výběr jinochů. Toto zjištění znovu oživilo zájem o „služby Lung Jangovy“, a tak začal prohlašovat, že by také rád chodil do takové školy (translated by Oldřich Král; in Cchao 1986, 156).

Xue Pan, not long after settling in Madam Wang's household, learned of the existence of a private school with a wide selection of young boys. This discovery rekindled his interest in "the services of Long Yang," and he began expressing a desire to attend the school as well. (verbatim translation of Král's version).

When Xue Pan learned, some time after moving into his aunt's place in the capital, that the establishment included a clan school plentifully stocked with young males of a certain age, his old enthusiasm for "Lord Long-yang's vice" was reawakened, and he had hastened to register himself as a pupil. (translated by David Hawkes; in Cao 1974, 207).

Now Hsueh Pan had not been long in the Jung Mansion before he learned of this school, and the thought of all the boys there appealed to his baser instincts. So he enrolled as a student. (translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang; in Cao 1978, 136).

In this case, the phrase *longyang zhi xing* 龍陽之興, rendered by Král as "the services of Long Yang," remains largely opaque without prior knowledge of the cultural allusion. Unlike in his later translations, where similar expressions are either neutralized or explicated, here the transliteration preserves the formal structure of the expression but fails to convey its semantic and cultural significance. As a result, the reference risks becoming unintelligible to the target reader unless supplemented by additional explanation.

While Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang render the passage through paraphrase—making the underlying meaning accessible, though at the cost of eliminating the onomastic allusion itself—David Hawkes adopts a solution that is, at first glance, closer to Král's in that it preserves the reference to Long Yang. However, Hawkes complements the transliteration with explicit semantic clarification "Lord Long-yang's vice", thereby making the sexual connotation closely accessible to the reader. By contrast, Král's rendering "služby Lung Jangovy" (Long Yang's services) retains the formal structure of the expression but fails to convey its underlying meaning, resulting in an opaquer and potentially misleading interpretation. The two solutions thus differ not in their formal strategy, but in the degree to which they successfully transmit the semantic and cultural function of the original expression.

This example thus highlights a paradox in Král's translational practice: whereas in his later work he tends to use semantically motivated or contextually adapted solutions for expressions involving Long Yang, here the use of transliteration proves less effective, as it obscures rather than preserves the function of the original expression. This difference may be related to the conditions under which the translation was produced, particularly the limited availability of relevant reference materials and scholarly resources at the time when Král was translating HLM.

## 8 Conclusion

This analysis of translation strategies for proper names in Czech translations of classical Chinese fiction demonstrates that names in these texts serve not merely an identificatory function, but constitute semantically rich units carrying poetic, symbolic, and cultural connotations. The way they are rendered into the target language therefore significantly affects not only the intelligibility of the text, but also its interpretative and aesthetic impact.

From the perspective of translation practice, three principal strategies emerge in both the Czech tradition and the analyzed texts: transliteration; semantic translation; and various combinations of the two. Transliteration preserves the formal and cultural foreignness of the name but tends to suppress its semantic dimension. By contrast, semantic translation makes the meaning and imagery of names accessible to the reader, often at the expense of their cultural specificity. In practice, hybrid solutions are frequently employed, including partial translation, contextual explanation, or the use of footnotes.

A key finding of this study is the marked variability of Oldřich Král's translation strategies over the course of his career. In his early phase, represented by the translation of *Rulinwaishi*, transliteration clearly predominates. In his translation of *Rulinwaishi*, his approach expands to include semantic rendering, particularly in the case of secondary and female characters, thereby enhancing the accessibility of the names' semantic dimension. In certain respects, this approach shows a noticeable affinity with the solutions adopted by David Hawkes, especially in the combination of transliteration and semantic translation across

different groups of characters. These parallels, however, should not be understood as systematic imitation, but rather as a selective adaptation of individual strategies within Král's own translational framework. In *Xiyoubu*, a shift toward pinyin is accompanied by greater variability in strategy, while in *Rouputuan*, Král significantly departs from transliteration and, for the first time, systematically applies semantic translation even to main characters. In the final phase of his work, represented by the translation of *Jinpingmei*, he returns to consistent transliteration (in *pinyin*), employing it as a systematic tool for managing an exceptionally extensive and complex text. However, in the Czech environment, the long-standing dominance of the standard Czech transcription system over *pinyin* has also played a significant role.

Particular significance is attached to the case of Long Yang, which occupies a boundary position between a proper name and a conventionalized cultural allusion. This example demonstrates that a translation strategy cannot remain uniform even within the work of a single translator but must be flexibly adapted to the function of a given expression in context—ranging from neutralization through implicit suggestion to explicit description. At the same time, this case reveals the limits of transliteration, which in certain instances fails to convey the key semantic value of the original expression. As such, it should not be seen as an isolated anomaly, but rather as a revealing example of the broader flexibility required in onomastic translation.

The findings of this analysis confirm that no universal solution exists for the translation of proper names in classical Chinese literature. Each individual case requires a specific decision that takes into account the function of the name within the text, its semantic load, the scope of the work, and the expectations of the target readership. The translator thus operates between two poles: the effort to preserve the cultural specificity of the original, and the need to make the text accessible to the reader. The examples discussed in this study are therefore illustrative in nature and aim to identify typical translation strategies rather than to provide a quantitative evaluation.

In line with Jiří Levý's conception, translation can be understood as a creative process in which the translator acts as an active co-creator of meaning. The present findings further support Levý's view of translation as a decision-making process, in which the translator selects among alternative solutions depending on the function of the text and the expectations of the reader. This role is particularly

evident in the translation of proper names, where individual choices significantly shape the interpretation of the work as a whole. At the same time, translation strategies are not determined solely by individual decisions, but also by the broader linguistic and cultural context. In this aspect, Oldřich Král's translations have significantly contributed to the mediation of classical Chinese literature to Czech readers and have helped shape the domestic translation tradition. Onomastic translation thus represents not a marginal issue, but one of the key sites where the overall character of the translation is formed.

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