

## Japanese Words that Reshaped the Chinese Language – *Wasei-Kango* (Sino-Japanese Vocabulary)

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Good morning, everyone. I'm Langechuan Liu from University of Michigan. Today my speech will be about *wasei-kango*(和製漢語), *kanji*(漢字, Chinese character) words created by Japanese, and how it helps interlingual communication in an English-speaking country such as US.

I think someone might know about the term *wase-eigo* (和製英語). For example, *Naitaa* (ナイトー, *Nighter*, meaning night games as used in baseball), *Wai-Shatsu* (ワイシャツ, *White Shirt*, referring to the shirts worn under suits) and *Terebi-Geemu* (テレビゲーム, *Television Game*, usually known as video game in English-speaking countries). All of these are coined words by Japanese people. Although bearing an English flavor to Japanese ears, these words usually cannot be understood by native English speakers. Well then, has anyone heard of *wasei-kango*?

*Wasei-kango* is *Kanji* words made in Japan. For example, *Jidensha* (自転車, bicycle), *Yakyuu* (野球, baseball), *Denki* (電気, electricity), *Byouin* (病院, hospital), etc, they are all written in *Kanji* in daily life, however they are not loan words from the Chinese language as one would assume, but rather *Wasei-Kango*, which was native to Japan.

Let me have a brief introduction to the origin of *wasei-kango*. About two thousand years ago, when *Kanji*, the characters used to record Chinese language were first introduced to Japan, Japanese people did not reject it arrogantly, nor did they accept it without any thinking. Through hundreds and thousands of years, Japanese people gradually assimilated Chinese characters and created a new *Kanji* kingdom outside China. During Civilization Period after the Visit of *Kurofune*, lots of new things and knowledge flooded into Japan. With a strong curiosity towards and compatibility with other cultures, Japanese people translated names and theories into *Kanji* words with their understanding about *Kanji* accumulated through centuries, which are now known as *wasei-kango*. *Keizai* (経済, economy), *Suugaku* (数学, mathematics), *Kinyuu* (金融, finance), *Shihon-Shugi* (資本主義, capitalism), etc, too many to be counted. What is more interesting is that lots of these words made their way back to China and accounts for 30% of modern Chinese vocabulary. Especially in research fields such as natural and social sciences, the ratio can be up to as high as 60%.

As such, Chinese language went into great change upon the introduction of *wasei-kango* into China. Why *wasei-kango* gained so much popularity in China? Please let me illustrate *wasei-kango*'s convenience with an example. There is a branch of science called "psychology", which was translated into *Shinri-gaku* (心理学) by Japanese scholars during Meiji Period. Knowing the basic meaning of the three characters, anybody can have a general idea what this branch is about – namely, a branch of knowledge (*Gaku*) to understand (*Rikai*) human's heart/feeling (*Shin*). If psychology was merely transcribed into *Saikorogii*, everyone nowadays has to remember the foreign sound and the meaning it conveys via that sound. Thanks to the birth of *wasei-kango*, Japan made a great leap into the forefront of scientific research, and the general public gained much more exposure to science and technology.

I believe the reason why Japanese people can give birth to such a convenient invention as *wasei-kango* using *Kanji* (which was even a foreign script originally), lies behind the special philosophy Japanese people have toward elements from outside their own culture. Looking back upon history, numerous examples illustrate the point that Japanese people are good at renovation/innovation after taking in from other cultures, and bringing out new things with higher quality or more desirable features. Tea culture from China saw its rebirth as *Sadou* (Japanese Tea Ceremony); professional photography witnessed its application in pop-culture *Purikura* photo booth; noodles were revolutionized as convenient instant noodles; Chinese characters in cursive script were moderated into *Hiragana*, a script best suited to the tender and soft pronunciation of Japanese language.

After listening to the above, there might be some in the audience thinking I am a student majoring in Japanese linguistics. Actually I am a physics student researching in radiation oncology and I have never been to Japan. While I was introducing my major just now, I used at least three *wasei-kango* words - *Butsuri* (物理 Physics), *Housha-sen* (放射線 Radiation), *Shuyou-gaku* (腫瘍学 Oncology).

I was a physics student throughout the four years of my college life. After being admitted into graduate school, I found myself more interested in engineering, so I started my research in medical engineering. It was during that time that I benefited a lot from *wasei-kango*. While reading research papers in medical engineering, I was deeply perplexed at the endless new scientific terms. What is worse for a non-native English speaker, all the new words are as long as running trains. Even the explanatory text did not help much, which was also full of new terms. I was thinking of reading some Chinese research papers to gain a general overview of the field, but because this field was not fully developed in China as in the west, it was hard to find some up-to-date papers. At that point, research papers in Japanese came to a timely help. Although scientific English terminology is hard to follow for a layman, yet as for *wasei-kango* words used in Japanese papers, it is easy to grasp the meaning at first sight. At that time, I feel really lucky to know the Japanese language. In conclusion, *wasei-kango* can help not only scholars in social sciences and liberal arts, but also can benefit scholars in science and engineering.

Actually, most of Chinese people know nothing about *wasei-kango*, and treat those words as ones passed down from ancient Chinese language. Originating from China and brought to Japan, Chinese characters gained the second life through the making of *wasei-kango*. *Kanji* is a strong cultural bond between Japan and China. Although the Sino-Japanese relationship is hardly to be considered desirable at present, yet looking back to the two thousand years of mutual communication, the recent unpleasant decades was no more than a blink of an eye. If we can carry on the friendship dated back from thousands of years ago through the bond of Chinese characters, I believe we will witness the day when two countries cross the boundary of their misunderstanding. I will keep on wishing till the come of that day.

The biblical proverb goes, no one puts new wine into old bottles. However, after seeing the cleverness and skillfulness Japanese people pours into *kanji* during the creation of *wasei-kango*, wouldn't it be wise to give it a second thought?

That would be all. Thank you very much for your listening.

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