

**Why are we sometimes uncomfortable with alien terms?  
Problematizing the concept of cultured reading**

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The basic hypothesis in the study of the transnational or transcultural communication of terms is that the semantic loss in translation takes place in their cross-cultural communication, because when terms travel into an alien national or cultural space, they will be transformed in the targeted national or cultural environment as translations or translators are conditioned by their respective national or cultural traditions. It is claimed that when they travel in transcultural or transnational space, terms are subject to cultured readings, for instance, supposedly there is a Chinese reading of democracy, liberty, etc. or a French of reading of Mo Yan. It seems that it has been taken for granted that the basic receptive unit for a term is either a nation or a culture.

While not denying the national or cultural boundaries, I argue that the claim that there is a cultured reading of a term may be not well-founded if we follow Anderson's hypothesis that a nation is an imagined community, and it has covered up or blurred much complexities of the receptive experiences within a culture when an alien term travels into its space. For one, although translation is subject to the semantic constraints of the target language, there are many other factors that work together to perform the Procrustean semantic operation in the process of translation. For the other, the decision is communal rather than cultural, granted the diversity of interests within one culture. Hence a cultured reading which implies that there is only one valid way of a national or cultural reading lends much legitimacy to the politicized decision of the dominant group that acts through appropriation.

