The major objective of this study is to investigate the roles of transfer and the difficulty in Chinese background learners’ (CBLs’) use and acquisition of Japanese–Chinese cognates. In particular, under what condition and how do CBLs transfer Chinese words into Japanese counterparts is investigated. The results of an oral production test showed that CBLs frequently used first language (L1) words by adapting them into second language (L2) phonology both successfully and unsuccessfully when they had no prior knowledge of the L2 counterparts. In addition, negative transfer was detected even when CBLs had a correct knowledge of the L2 word. Additionally, it is suggested that CBLs might create different types of interlanguage (IL) depending upon the cross-linguistic semantic condition and relative frequency of the L2 input for each meaning of the partially deceptive cognates, which share the same orthography with partly the same and partly different meanings across languages. The findings indicate that the transferability of Chinese words into their Japanese counterparts is constrained by multiple factors.

關鍵字：cross-linguistic influence, cognates, Chinese background learners