

# A Linguistic Overview of Brand Naming in the Chinese-speaking World

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**Abstract** Brand names are a crucial component of marketing strategies, since they influence brand perception. Chinese consumers seem to be very sensitive to brand names, and thus the choice of an effective brand name is very important for the acceptance of a particular product or service by the public. Generally speaking, there seems to be a tendency towards localization of brand names: foreign brand names undergo adaptation to various degrees in order to meet the needs of the Chinese consumers. A good knowledge of the Chinese language and culture is essential to understand brand naming practices in the Chinese-speaking world and to create suitable Chinese versions of foreign brand names. Here the main linguistic strategies adopted for the creation of Chinese brand names and for the translation of foreign brand names into Chinese are discussed, also highlighting some cultural factors which affect brand naming creation.

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**Keywords** Brand names. Word formation. Translation. Localization.

## 1 Introduction

Brand names play a crucial role in marketing strategies, since they may significantly contribute to the success or failure of a new product or service (Armstrong, Kotler 1997). Assigning a name to a brand means characterizing a product or service in order to make it attractive for the potential consumer. A brand name should suggest positive connotations and the relevance of the product, be short, distinctive and easy to memorize (Robertson 1989; Kohli, LaBanh 1997).

In order to make a brand successful both on the local and on the international market, different aspects should be taken into account. A crucial

aspect to consider is the linguistic component, which is the essence in branding (Chan, Huang 2001a), since it directly affects the function of brand names. In choosing a brand name one should take into account phonological, morphological and semantic aspects (see Chan 1990; Chan, Huang 1997, 2001a). The linguistic characteristics of brand names may differ according to the language at issue; for example, Chinese brand names differ greatly from European ones, due to the typological distance between Chinese and European languages and to the different writing systems. Moreover, cultural differences, social values, beliefs and attitudes, which vary greatly among societies, also significantly influence brand perception. Thus, standardized brands generally seem not to be suitable in China, and Western companies tend to localize their brand names, adapting them to the needs of the Chinese consumers (see e.g. Schmitt, Pan 1994; Francis, Lam, Walls 2002).<sup>1</sup> A further difficulty is creating a 'universal' Chinese brand name working in all the Chinese-speaking world (here meant to include the PRC, Hong Kong/Macau and Taiwan), given the linguistic and cultural differences among different regions.

The main aim of this paper is to provide a linguistic overview of brand naming in China, both of original Chinese brand names and of foreign brand names adapted to Chinese. The paper is organized as follows. In the first part, we will make a brief historical excursus on brand naming in China. We will discuss the linguistic characteristics of Chinese relevant for brand naming, and we will then show the main strategies for the creation of Chinese brand names. In the second part, we will discuss the strategies adopted in the translation of foreign brand names into Chinese and we will provide an analysis of the top 100 best global brands 2014 according to the *Interbrand classification*.<sup>2</sup> We will also provide a brief overview of

1 A 'completely standardized' brand is one which has «one name that is used in all countries and therefore has one variation» (Alashban et al. 2002, p. 31). In contrast, an adapted brand name may have different variations throughout the world. The issues of brand standardization and of the opposition between standardization and adaptation have attracted the attention of scholars (see de Chernatony, Halliburton, Bernath 1995; Theodosiou, Leonidou 2003). Advocates of the standardization strategy highlight some advantages of this strategy: e.g. significant economies of scale, greater identification of the product from market to market, ease of coordinating the promotion, message consistency, cost savings (see e.g. Alashban et al. 2002; Theodosiou, Leonidou 2003; Backhaus, van Doorn 2007). However, the adoption of a 100% standardization strategy is quite rare and may lead to cultural problems (Burton 2009). Advocates of adaptation stress that, despite increasing globalization, there are still too many differences in customers needs, purchasing power, culture and traditions, law and regulations; thus firms must adapt their marketing strategies to the circumstances of different markets. Yet others propose a contingency perspective: standardization and adaptation should be considered as the two ends of a continuum, in which companies' marketing activities fall between the two extremes (see Alashban et al. 2002; Francis, Lam, Walls 2002; Theodosiou, Leonidou 2003).

2 <http://www.bestglobalbrands.com/2014/ranking/> (2016-03-30).

the main factors which sometimes make it difficult to find a single translation effective in the whole Chinese-speaking world, providing examples of different brand name adaptations in the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

## 2 Brand Naming in China

As highlighted by Jaw, Wang, Hsu (2011, p. 641), «although the concept of branding has been considered extensively in products and services, branding in Chinese is a relatively emerging phenomenon». It is often assumed that brands were introduced into China from the West at the beginning of the nineteenth century (see Wang 2000) and, according to some, Mao Zedong's Communist rule disrupted the presence of brands, which were introduced again later, in 1979, under the economic reforms promoted by Deng Xiaoping (known as 改革开放 *gǎigé kāifàng* 'reform and opening' in China), which allowed foreign branded goods to enter the Chinese market (see the overview in Tian, Dong 2011). However, some works challenge this view (see Gerth 2003, 2008; Hamilton, Lai 1989), stating that brands were not introduced into China from the West, but were already present in late imperial China (tenth to nineteenth century). In what follows we summarize the different stages of the introduction of brand names in China presented by Tian and Dong (2011).

In late imperial China, brands were used in a variety of products to facilitate their distribution beyond their place of production. Hamilton and Lai (1989) highlight that 'famous products' were listed in different sources: for instance, local gazetteers devoted a section to 'famous local products', and government officials reported to the throne on the variety of products available in local markets. The mark of the selling firm became an important indication of quality, prestige and reliability. It is interesting to note that even at that time there were cases of brand pirating: the mark of a successful brand was used to confer high-quality associations to lesser-known goods (Hamilton, Lai 1989).

The Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860) and the Treaty of Nanking (1842), the first of the so-called 'unequal treaties', marked the beginning of confrontations with the West. In this period, imported goods entered port cities such as Shanghai and gradually spread to other areas of the country (Zhao, Belk 2008). Thus, Chinese consumers had considerable exposure to Western brands, such as *Kodak*, *GE*, *Colgate*, *American Standard* and *Quaker Oats*, as well as to Western-made products, often new products of which consumers had no previous experience (Tian, Dong 2011, p. 40). These goods were clearly marked as foreign, adding the morpheme 洋 *yáng* 'foreign' (also, 'modern') to the names of products, but they were promoted with advertising tied to Chinese folklore and local culture (Tian, Dong 2011, p. 40).

During this period China lacked tariff autonomy; the 'unequal treaties' made China unable to restrict imports by raising tariffs (Gerth 2003). According to Gerth (2003, 2008), this led to what he calls 'National Products Movement', which divided consumer goods in China-made, deemed 'patriotic', and foreign, deemed 'treasonous' (Gerth 2008, p. 3). The patriotic habit of consuming China-made goods was advanced through advertisements, exhibitions and other activities, and campaigns educated people to visually distinguish 'pure' Chinese products from foreign ones. Besides, the movement suggested that Western countries and Japan already established product nationality as the dominant consumption criterion (see Tian, Dong 2011). This movement aimed at discouraging the consumption of foreign goods, seen as an 'immoral act', and at promoting the consumption of domestic goods, the 'national blood'; there was thus cultural continuity between this period and the Communist period under Mao, which is apparent in the practice of dividing products into domestic and foreign, attaching respectively positive and negative meanings to them (Tian, Dong 2011). This challenges the common assumption that the Communist Revolution and Mao's rule represented a total cultural break with China's former capitalist period (Wang 2000).

However, in Mao's China the demonisation of 'foreignness' was based on different premises: it was to be understood in a frame of reference in which the West was equated with capitalism, the source of all evil, and thus always associated with negative concepts and feelings. As Ji (2004, p. 279) puts it, «in the discourse of the Cultural Revolution, China was a model for the rest of the world», whereas «the world could teach China nothing».

As some scholars suggest, brands did not exist in China between 1949 and 1978, and even after the economic reforms the Chinese market was dominated by state-owned trademarks rather than brands (see Croll 2006). In line with this view, Tian and Dong (2011) argue that the concept of 'brands' was not meaningful to some Chinese consumers until after the economic reforms, as shown in this excerpt from an interview to a participant to their survey on brand naming:

INTERVIEWER Were there branded cosmetics?

PARTICIPANT I do not remember if there were brands at that moment.

Even if there were we did not talk of them by using the brand names. We tended to mention products by their function more often than by manufacturer or the name the manufacturer had given it. Even Tiger Balm, at that moment we called it *qing-liang-you* [meaning 'cooling oil']. Nobody called it 'Tiger cooling oil' though we did see this tiger printed on the box. The first time I made the connection between the product and its brand was later when I started to work in Shenzhen in 1986 with those people from other countries. They asked me where to

get Tiger Balm so as to bring some souvenirs back to their countries. I was lucky because my reaction was quick enough to immediately think about the tiger image on the box. Cosmetics for make-up were generally named by *yan-zhi* (to make red), *fan-shi-lin* (to prepare the face for or clean up after make-up, like Vaseline). (Tian, Dong 2011, p. 43)

As Croll (2006) highlights, in the three decades after the economic reform, the emphasis shifted from production and work to consumption and lifestyle. This process was facilitated by the rising incomes of foreign joint ventures' employees.

Croll identifies three waves of consumption. The first one took place during the 1980s, when consumers started to purchase goods other than food, like bicycles, colour television sets, refrigerators, washing machines, etc. At that time, some important changes happened: the introduction of Western brands, the emergence of retail stores and of the awareness of fashion. Western firms, encouraged by the success of global brands in Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan and Singapore, started to promote heavily their brands in China. In that period, leading fashion designers shops such as *Louis Vuitton*, *Christian Dior* and *Gucci*, as well as less expensive stores like *Benetton*, *GAP* and *Giordano* appeared in China. The first KFC opened in Beijing in 1987, while *McDonald's* appeared in the early 1990s in Shenzhen. Promotion of Western brands was facilitated by advertising and other TV programmes on fashion, make-up and home furnishing. The West was no longer seen as an exploiter but, due to the modernization bid of the government, it became a desired destination (Croll 2006). This first wave of consumption was characterized by movements aimed at containing the new trends too, such as the 'Anti-spiritual pollution campaign' (清除精神污染 *qīngchú jīngshén wūrǎn*, 1983-1984) and the anti-bourgeois movement, which to a degree echoed the anti-Western spirit of Maoist China (see above). Anyway, by the end of the 1980s, the government started to stimulate more directly consumption with new policies aimed at encouraging spending (Croll 2006).

The second wave of consumption ran from the early to the late 1990s, when economic reforms aimed at elevating living standards were promoted by the government (Croll 2006). In this period people began to purchase more consumer goods, including mobile phones, air conditioners, microwave ovens and the like, and new public spaces were devoted to the display of retail goods. Western brand retailers with storefronts included *B&Q*, *Carrefour*, *Metro*, *Walmart* and others.

Despite the policies aimed at stimulating consumption, Tsui et al. (2004) highlight that other economic reforms threatened jobs and pensions in the state sector and increased the cost of health insurance and education. These reforms lead to higher unemployment and uncertainty among the employees, and thus the result was a tendency to save rather than to con-

sume (for details see Tian, Dong 2011). As a result, many Western brand retail centres closed and enthusiasm for Western lifestyles began to wane. At the same time, Chinese brands offering comparable quality at lower prices, as e.g. *Qingdao* beer, *Forever* (bicycles) and *Legend* (computers), emerged to compete with Western brands (Croll 2006).

The third wave of consumption started between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new century and continues today. This phase saw active effort to promote the size of China's consumer market to the West, in order to facilitate China's negotiations to enter the World Trade Organization (WTO). At the same time, other governing practices aimed at promoting national brands and at highlighting their prospective success as global brands (Croll 2006; Tian, Dong 2011). After joining the WTO in November 2001, China needed to open its markets, which resulted in strong foreign competition, and reduced tariffs on imports and exports. However, most markets remained local or regional, as it is apparent from registered names, which typically begin with a city or province name, as e.g. *Shanghai Baosteel*, *Qingdao Haier* (Tsui et al. 2004); Chinese brands started to compete directly with international brands on a large scale but, as highlighted in the 2007 China Brand Report (Yu 2007), among the top 100 brands in the world, there was no Chinese brand.<sup>3</sup> Thus, there were efforts aimed at creating national brands for global markets and at stimulating brand innovation. Differently from the past, these practices were not a way to reject and vilify Western brands, but nonetheless China's national brands were seen as a source of cultural pride that people can support with their consumption choices (Tian, Dong 2011).

Some claim that taste among the Chinese upper-middle class is increasingly converging towards that of the Western consumer (Garner 2005), and that there is a tendency to imitate Western lifestyle by choosing Western brands, driven by a desire to display sophistication (see Tian, Dong 2011). Reports reveal that the demand of some Western products exceeds that for domestic brands (e.g. skin care brand *Olay* and *Coca-Cola*) and that the sales of Western-brand automobiles are double those of Chinese ones (Garner 2005). Actually, Tian and Dong (2011, p. 51) show that Western brands are a meaningful category of consumption to Chinese consumers, with a set of defining characteristics: 1) 'Western otherness', as conveyed by perceived country of origin<sup>4</sup> and through translation practices (see section 5); 2) international fame; 3) guaranteed quality; 4) technologically

3 We will see in section 5.8 that in the *Interbrand best global brand 2014* classification there is just one Chinese brand listed among the top 100 brands.

4 Tian and Dong (2011) show that foreign brands were considered only those perceived as having ties to Western developed countries and with Japan, through which China learned about the West and which started to participate in the global economy before China (Gries 2004).

advanced designs or production; 5) high price. These attributes, except for high price, are generally positive.

However, despite these positive attributes, Chinese consumers attach not only positive, but also negative meanings to Western brand names, using Western brands to assert their idea of national identity. Tian and Dong (2011) show that some of the participants to their survey see Western brands as instruments of 'freedom': they free Chinese consumers from restrictive ways of thinking and introduce them to new practices and ideas. Several of the interviewees also highlight the irrationality of expressing 'nationalist emotions' by rejecting Western brands. However, other interviewees deem the West as an imperialist oppressor and Western brands as instruments of domination, which can damage Chinese culture and undermine national identity. For instance, Tian and Dong (2011) highlight that the 2009 China Brand Report described *Johnson&Johnson's* acquisition of *Dabao*, a Chinese skin-care brand since 1985, as a case of a national brand «falling into enemy hands» (Yu 2009, p. 44). Yet other fantasize scenarios of restoring national pride; they envision a «national industry that learned and then ultimately beat Western brands in the global market with the introduction of successful, high-quality, and technologically sophisticated China-made brands, thereby elevating the Chinese economy» (Tian, Dong 2011, p. 91). Finally, others would like West and East to be economic partners, with foreign corporations wilful to share technology and to adopt Chinese ways. Accordingly, Western brands are ideally seen as harmonious partners of Chinese national brands (for details on the different views on Western brands see Tian, Dong 2011).

### 3 Linguistic Aspects in Chinese Brand Naming

As we mentioned in the introduction, Chinese brand names have some particular features that make them very different from brand names in Western languages. These differences are due to the considerable structural distance between Chinese and European languages; in order to understand them, we will briefly discuss the linguistic features of Chinese relevant for the creation of brand names.

Modern Chinese is characterized by a quasi-perfect correspondence between syllable, character and morpheme, as e.g. 猫 *māo* 'cat',<sup>5</sup> 雪 *xuě* 'snow', 买 *mǎi* 'buy'. However, since in Modern Chinese most morphemes are bound (70% according to Packard 2000), the majority of words are complex, formed by a combination of two or more morphemes (either free

5 The glosses follow the general guidelines of the *Leipzig Glossing Rules* with the addition of the gloss PREF (prefix) and SUFF (suffix).

or bound), corresponding to two or more syllables/characters. In particular, there is a strong preference for disyllabic words, as e.g. 电脑 *diàn-nǎo* 'electricity-brain, computer', 斑马 *bān-mǎ* 'stripe-horse, zebra', which, according to some estimates, account for 80% of the Modern Chinese lexicon (Shi 2002, pp. 70-72).

Thus, as words are mainly formed by combining meaningful units rather than meaningless sounds, Chinese names tend to be more transparent than names in European languages. This difference is reflected in writing systems: European languages are written with a phonographic alphabet, while Chinese makes use of a logographic writing system, in which graphemes (almost always) have a meaning. Thus, in Chinese you cannot dissociate meaning from sound: whereas in a language like English, where syllables do not necessarily correspond to morphemes, one can make up a word without any meaning, in a Chinese made-up word like, say, 肺哄 *fèi-hǒng*, each component has a meaning of its own, respectively 'lung' and 'fool, coax', despite the fact that the word we created as a whole does not make any sense. These differences deeply affect the process of brand naming: in European languages such as English, brand names mostly rely on sound appeal (see e.g. Cohen 1995), while in Chinese semantics plays a key role, and the meaning of the constituents in a name must be chosen wisely. Zhang and Schmitt (2001, p. 323) highlight:

When processing Chinese words, people appear to rely more on visual and/or semantic cues. The opposite is true for English, which is more likely to be processed phonologically. As shown in prior research, these qualitative processes of different writing systems can significantly affect brand recall [...], temporal memory [...], and brand attitudes [...]. In the present research, these qualitative differences in writing systems are shown to affect evaluations of name translations.

An emblematic case in this respect is that of the Chinese translation of the brand name *Coca-Cola*. As highlighted by Li and Shooshtari (2003), in the 1940s the *Coca-Cola* brand name, upon first entering Chinese-speaking markets such as Hong Kong and Shanghai, used to be translated phonetically, with little or no care about the characters used: shopkeepers advertised the drink using characters that sounded similar to *Coca-Cola* but had nonsensical meanings (see Li, Shooshtari 2003; Alon, Littrell, Chan 2009; Fetscherin, Alon, Chan 2012), such as e.g. 可口可蜡 *kě-kǒu-kě-là* 'can-mouth-can-wax', which can be literally translated as 'tasty and "waxable"'.<sup>6</sup> The result was phonetically perfect but the weird and inap-

6 The prefix 可 *kě* 'can' has about the same function as the English suffix *-able/-ible*; see e.g. 可吃 *kě-chī* 'can-eat, edible'; 可笑 *kě-xiào* 'can-laugh, funny, ridiculous, laughable'; 可口 *kě-kǒu* 'can-mouth, tasty, palatable'.



appropriate meaning did not help making the new product attractive. *Coca-Cola*, then, entered the Chinese market again in 1979 with a revised and unified name, i.e. 可口可乐 *kě-kǒu-kě-lè* 'can-mouth-can-happy', which can be translated as 'tasty and enjoyable (= can make you happy)'. This name combines a phonetic adaptation of the original name with a suitable meaning, suggesting that the soft drink has a delicious taste and can make you happy: the pronunciation and the physical and emotional benefits associated to *Coca-Cola* made this name a model for the Chinese rendering of foreign brand names.

Quite to the contrary, the leading Chinese soft drink company 健力宝 *jiàn-lì-bǎo* 'healthy-power-treasure', very successful in China and in Southeast Asia, was not really welcomed in the USA, where the company chose to use the *pinyin* transcription *Jianlibao*. The product was marketed in the USA in 1998 as part of a sport sponsorship campaign, selling only 200,000 cases (Li, Shooshtari 2003). These two examples show that linguistic features and writing systems directly affect brand naming.

Another aspect which should be taken into account is the problem of homophony. Chinese has a very limited number of distinct syllables: if we consider only the segmental level, syllables are around 400; factoring in the tones, syllables reach the number of about 1,200. This number is very limited if compared to English, where there are more than 8,000 different syllables (DeFrancis 1984, p. 42). As a consequence, homophony and near-homophony (as for example homophony at the segmental level) are very common. Take for example 四 *sì* 'four', which is very close to the verb 死 *sǐ* 'die' (same syllable, different tone); unsurprisingly, four is considered to be a very unfavourable number in China. This is a common phenomenon, since the same syllable in Chinese can bear a number of meanings; for example, if we take the syllable *ma* (without considering the tone), some of its possible meanings are: 妈 *mā* 'mother', 马 *mǎ* 'horse', 麻 *má* 'hemp', 骂 *mà* 'curse'. True homophony is also very widespread; a single syllable may correspond to a quite large number of morphemes, as e.g. 力 *lì* 'power', 立 *lì* 'stand', 励 *lì* 'encourage', 历 *lì* 'experience', 梨 *lí* 'pear'. Homophony and near-homophony are less common for disyllabic words, but not rare, as in the case of 马路 *mǎlù* 'road', 马鹿 *mǎlù* 'red deer', 马陆 *mǎlù* 'millipede'. Therefore, in the process of brand naming it is very important to choose characters/morphemes with an appropriate meaning and which do not sound like characters/morphemes with an unpleasant or vulgar meaning. This is important not only for the creation of Chinese brand names, but also for the translation of foreign brand names into Chinese (on the latter, see Chan, Huang 1997; Francis, Lam, Walls 2002; Hong, Pecotich, Schultz 2002; Arcodia, Piccinini 2006). Take for example the brand name *Fanta*, which in Chinese has been translated as 芬达 *fēn-dá* 'fragrance-reach/arrive', a name which somehow recalls the sound of the original name, while providing a positive meaning connected to the taste of the soft drink: with

*Fanta* 'fragrance arrives'. However, by choosing other characters with the same or a similar pronunciation, a completely different result could be obtained, as in 酚达 *fēn-dá* 'phenol-reach/arrive', 坟大 *fén-dà* 'grave-big', 粪瘡 *fèn-da* 'excrement-pimple'.

For these reasons, as said above, standardized brand names usually do not succeed in China, so that companies that want to market their product in China are more or less forced to adapt their name. Even when companies choose not to change their name, there is a strong tendency by the local distributors to find out a Chinese translation by themselves (Li, Shooshtari 2003). In a sense, this can be linked to the creation of Chinese neologisms to translate words from European languages: 'Western' (lexical) modernity is recast in Chinese morphemes, creating «tropes of equivalence in the middle zone of interlinear translation between the host and the guest languages» (Liu 1995, p. 40). Just as any other 外来词 *wàiláicí* (lit. 'word from abroad'), the Chinese version of a brand name is at the same time 'native' and 'foreign', introducing something culturally alien in a captivating fashion, making the brand palatable and digestible for the Chinese consumer.

#### 4 Chinese Brand Names

Languages with a phonographic system allow to form names in a number of different ways, as for example by creating a phonological string, usually relying on the sound appeal (e.g. *Kodak*, *Bref*), by forming acronyms (e.g. *Ikea* 'Ingvar Kamprad Elmtaryd Agunnaryd'), by compounding (*Red Bull*), by borrowing existing words (e.g. *Skipper*), by blending (e.g. *Exencial*, i.e. *executive* + *financial*) or clipping (e.g. *Cat* which stands for *caterpillar*), etc.

In Chinese, brand names are formed mainly by borrowing an existing term, through abbreviation or compounding (see Chan, Huang, Wu 2009).<sup>7</sup> Examples of brand names based on existing terms include common words, such as 解放 *jiěfàng* 'liberation' (trucks), 双喜 *shuāngxǐ* 'double happiness' (electrical equipment), and geographical names (including places of cultural or historical meaning and places where the company is headquartered), as e.g. 珠江 *Zhūjiāng* 'Pearl river' (beer), 中南海 *Zhōngnánhǎi* 'Zhongnanhai' (cigarettes), 哈尔滨 *Hā'ěrbīn* 'Harbin' (beer).

Examples of brand names formed through abbreviation are: 中国一汽

7 Chinese brand names used in this paper mainly come from 品牌汇 *pǐnpái huì* 'brand collection' (<http://www.21sb.org> [2016-03-31]). We also consulted the online database of registered trademarks Searchtmr (<http://www.searchtmr.com/> [2016-03-31]) and the China Patent Trademark Office Trademark Search (<http://www.chinatrado.com/> [2016-03-31]). Other Chinese brand names are drawn from the relevant literature as well as from web searches.

*Zhōngguó yī qì* (from 中国第一汽车集团公司 *Zhōngguó dì yī qìchē jítuán gōngsī* 'Chinese automobile factory No. 1'), 津一 *jīnyī* (from 天津第一机床总厂 *Tiānjīn dì yī jīchuáng zǒngchǎng* 'Tianjin machine-tool industrial complex No. 1').

#### 4.1 Brand Names Formed Through Compounding

Corpus-based studies have shown that the preferred means of brand name formation is compounding (e.g. Chan, Huang 1997, 2001a; Chan, Huang, Wu 2009), which is also the most productive means of word formation in Chinese. See the examples below:

- (1) 白貓 *bái-māo* 'white-cat' (detergent)  
 金威 *jīn-wēi* 'gold-power' (beer)  
 吉康 *jí-kāng* 'lucky-healthy' (flasks and kettles)  
 五粮液 *wǔ-liáng-yè* 'five-grain-liquid' (liquor)

The most common type of compounds found among brand names are modifier-head compounds (Chan, Huang 1997, 2001a; Chan, Huang, Wu 2009), though other compound types can be found too, such as the above mentioned 吉康 *jí-kāng* 'lucky and healthy', a coordinate form.

The types of brand names illustrated above do not exhaust the range of possibilities; other strategies are used as well, as, for instance, derivation: 思想者 *sīxiǎng-zhě* 'thought-SUFF, thinker', where 者 *-zhě* is an agentive suffix; 超美 *chāo-měi* 'super-beautiful', where the prefix 超 *chāo-* is used. Some brand names are based on reduplicated forms:

- (2) 大大 *dà-dà* 'big-big' (doors)  
 加加 *jiā-jiā* 'add-add' (foodstuff)  
 露露 *lù-lù* 'syrup-syrup' (fruit juice)

In some cases, brand names are formed by a combination of reduplication and compounding, such as:

- (3) 笑笑教育 *xiào-xiào-jiàoyù* 'smile-smile-education'  
 (child training institution)  
 贝贝猫 *bèi-bèi-māo* 'shell-shell-cat' (home textile)

In the last example above, the reduplicated form 贝贝 *bèi-bèi* aims at imitating the English word *baby*, so that the name is to be understood as *baby cat*. As a matter of fact, the brand name is accompanied by the English

name *Baby Cat*. In some cases triplicated forms can be found too, as in 伞伞伞业 *sǎn-sǎn-sǎn-yè* 'umbrella-umbrella-umbrella-enterprise' (umbrellas).

Furthermore, some brand names have the form of (pseudo-)phrases:

- (4) 安达 *ān dá* 'security reach/arrive, security arrives' (doors)  
 家家笑 *jiā-jīā xiào* 'family-family smile, every family smiles'  
 (garbage processing equipment)  
 我爱我家 *wǒ ài wǒ jiā* 'I love I family/home/house, I love my home'  
 (clothes-racks)

We may remark that the verb 达 *dá*, usually suggesting some sort of benefit brought by the product or service, is very common in Chinese brand names, as well as in Chinese translations of foreign brands (see Arcodia, Piccinini 2006).

Generally speaking, names made of two syllables, which are easier to memorize and recall, are the most common, followed by three-syllable names (see Lü 2005; Chan, Huang, Wu 2009); note that the disyllable is not only the preferred word form in Modern Chinese, as said above, but also the minimal prosodic word (see Feng 1998). Longer forms can be found too, such as 浪漫一生 *làngmàn yīshēng* 'romantic life' (clothes racks), 快乐主妇 *kuàilè zhǔfù* 'happy housewife' (clothes racks). In contrast, monosyllabic brand names are not common at all. If a monosyllabic name is chosen, it is usually followed by the word 牌 *pái* 'brand' (see Lü 2005), forming a disyllabic name, as in 红牌 *hóng-pái* 'red-brand' (electrical equipment), or 虎牌 *hǔ-pái* 'tiger-brand' (beer); since the disyllable is the minimal prosodic word, as said above, a single syllable is prosodically deficient, which means that it cannot constitute a prosodic word of its own and is, thus, dispreferred.

#### 4.2 Modified *chéngyǔ*

We will now focus on brand names based on *chéngyǔ* (成语). *Chéngyǔ*, usually translated as 'idiom(s)', are four-character set phrases. In some cases their meaning can be inferred from their constituents, as in the case of 半信半疑 *bàn-xìn-bàn-yí* 'half-believe-half-doubt, doubtful', but many of them originate from historical incidents, legends, the classics or literary works, so that in order to understand their meaning one must know these sources, as with 朝三暮四 *zhāo-sān-mù-sì* 'morning-three-evening-four, hoodwink the gullible, play fast and loose, be fickle'.<sup>8</sup> *Chéngyǔ* are widespread in Chinese and are very important from the cultural point of view. In syntax,

<sup>8</sup> This *chéngyǔ* originates from *Zhuangzi* 莊子, where it is narrated the story of a monkey trainer who went to his monkeys and said: «What about if I give you three acorns in the morning and four in the evening?». On hearing this the monkeys got angry. Thus, the monkey

they behave as common lexemes, but are more vivid and expressive; as highlighted by Ji (1982, p. 56), *chéngyǔ* are «a widely favoured and highly flexible rhetorical device very typical of Chinese phraseology».

Some brand names are formed by borrowing existing *chéngyǔ*, such as 不亦乐乎 *bùyìlèhū* 'extremely, awfully (orig. 'isn't that a joy?')' (children home textile). However, here we want to focus on another way of using *chéngyǔ* in brand naming, i.e. the use of modified versions of *chéngyǔ*, creating puns. This strategy is quite widespread in advertising (see Cao, Gao 2009) and consists in replacing one or more characters of a *chéngyǔ* with one or more homophonous characters, usually connected with the advertised product. For example, see the slogans below (Cao, Gao 2009, pp. 166-167):

- (5) 一箭如故, 一箭钟情  
*yī-jiàn-rúgù, yī-jiàn-zhōngqíng*  
 one-arrow-be.as.before, one-arrow-fall.in.love  
 天尝地酒  
*tiān-cháng-dì-jiǔ*  
 sky-taste-earth-wine

The first slogan in (5) for the chewing gum 箭牌 *jiàn-pái* 'arrow-brand' (the Chinese version of the brand name *Wrigley*) immediately recalls two *chéngyǔ*, i.e. 一见如故 *yī-jiàn-rú-gù* 'feel like old friends at first meeting, take to each other at once' and 一见钟情 *yī-jiàn-zhōng-qíng* 'fall in love at first sight', which are pronounced exactly as the two expressions in the slogan, the only difference being that the character 见 *jiàn* 'see, meet.with' has been replaced by the homophonous character 箭 *jiàn* 'arrow', i.e. the name of the advertised chewing gum. The aim is to make this product very attractive: even though it is the first time you come into contact with it, you will fall in love with it (Cao, Gao 2009). In this way, the original meanings of the *chéngyǔ* are preserved and linked to the product. The second slogan, which advertises a brand of spirits, recalls the *chéngyǔ* 天长地久 *tiān-cháng-dì-jiǔ* 'everlasting and unchanging'. In this *chéngyǔ* two characters have been replaced by homophonous characters: 长 *cháng* 'long, lasting' is replaced by 尝 *cháng* 'taste', while 久 *jiǔ* 'for a long time' is replaced by 酒 *jiǔ* 'wine', making reference to the product. In this way the slogan stresses the long history of these spirits and, at the same time, expresses the wish of the company to establish a long lasting friendship with consumers (Cao, Gao 2009).

This strategy is sometimes used in brand naming too, as shown in (6).

trainer said: «What do you think if I give you four acorns in the morning and three in the evening?». The monkeys were satisfied, though the total number of acorns was the same.

- (6) 食全食美 (foodstuff)  
*shí-quán-shí-měi*  
 eat-whole-eat-beautiful
- 一步到胃 (medicine)  
*yī-bù-dào-wèi*  
 one-step-arrive/to-stomach

The first brand name is modelled after the *chéngyǔ* 十全十美 *shíquánshíměi* 'perfect in every way', in which the character 十 *shí* 'ten, complete', appearing twice in the *chéngyǔ*, is replaced by the homophonous character 食 *shí* 'eat', connected to the products. In this way the name stresses the quality of these products, which are 'absolutely perfect'.

The second example in (6) is the brand name of a medicine for stomach trouble. The name recalls the *chéngyǔ* 一步到位 *yībùdàowèi* 'complete a task at one time; finish doing something that would take a long time at one time'. The character 位 *wèi* 'place' was replaced by 胃 *wèi* 'stomach', i.e. the organ which this medicine is supposed to heal. Thus, the idea conveyed by the name is that this medicine will help your stomach very quickly.

During the Cultural Revolution, which aimed at destroying everything of old (i.e. pre-socialistic) China, *chéngyǔ* were reframed in the new contexts of usage of the period (e.g. public criticism meetings) and commonly used as formulaic language; Mao himself was fond of traditional Chinese formulae, and even created a *chéngyǔ* as 不破不立 *bù-pò-bù-lì* 'no-broken-no-erect, without destruction there can be no construction' (Ji 2004, pp. 166-167). This shows that *chéngyǔ*, despite being set phrases, can be used creatively and reframed in new contexts, which is what happens when they are used in advertisements and brand naming.<sup>9</sup>

9 Note, however, that recently the Chinese government has banned the use of modified *chéngyǔ* in the media. On 27 November 2014 the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television issued the document «关于广播电视节目和广告中规范使用国家通用语言文字的通知» (Notice on Regulating the Usage of the National Common Language and Script in Radio and Television Programs and Advertising), in which it is said that practices such as distorted usage of idioms are not in compliance with basic requirements of laws and regulations, such as e.g. the 中华人民共和国国家通用语言文字法 (National Common Language and Script Law), and are contrary to the spirit of transmitting and promoting outstanding traditional Chinese culture. The use of modified *chéngyǔ* may mislead the public, especially minors, and therefore must be resolutely corrected ([http://www.sarft.gov.cn/art/2014/11/27/art\\_113\\_4781.html](http://www.sarft.gov.cn/art/2014/11/27/art_113_4781.html) [2016-01-31]).

### 4.3 Acronyms and Initialisms

Some Chinese brand names are formed by using letters of the Latin alphabet. The first group is formed by acronyms/initialisms (see Basciano 2015), as e.g.:

- (7) DMTG (machine-tools)
- LZ (road construction machinery)
- BYD (cars)

DMTG is the name of 大连机床集团 *Dàlián jīchuáng jítuán* (*Dalian Machine Tool Group Corp.*). The name is formed from English, taking the first sound/letter of the words *Dalian Machine Tool Group*.

As for the name LZ, apparently it derives from the romanized Chinese name of the company, i.e. 辽阳筑路机械有限公司 *Liáoyáng zhù-lù jīxiè yǒuxiàn gōngsī* 'Liaoyang build-road machine limited company', choosing the first letter of 辽阳 *Liáoyáng* 'Liaoyang' and the first letter of 筑路 *zhù-lù* 'build-road'. The initialism LZ is accompanied by a Chinese name formed by the characters 辽筑 *Liáo-zhù*, which is the abbreviation of 辽阳筑路 *Liáoyáng zhù-lù*. In a similar way, the name BYD can be traced back to the romanized name 比亚迪 *bǐ-yà-dí* 'compare-Asia-enlighten'. However, in this case, we may hypothesize that the initialism BYD was created first and then matching characters were chosen; as a matter of fact, the meanings of the characters chosen apparently have no connection with the kind of company and its products. Moreover, the characters composing this name do not seem to have any particularly appealing meaning; the name sounds like a phonetic translation of a foreign brand name (see 5.2). In addition, it is worth noting that the English slogan of the company is *Build your dreams*; thus, possibly, the initialism was created from this slogan (but the reverse could also be true, i.e. that the slogan was created starting from the name BYD). It appears that the aim of the company was to create a foreign-like name (see 4.5), possibly with the aim of entering foreign markets. As a matter of fact, the BYD company currently has branches in Asia, Africa, Northern Europe and in the USA.

There are some special cases too, which consist of acronyms/initialisms whose origin is not clear (see Basciano 2015). See the examples below:

- (8) LINIX (electrical machinery)
- ZOJE (sewing machines)
- SORL (auto parts)
- PLC (auto systems)

The name LINIX may be considered an acronym-like name. However, it is not clear what it stands for; actually, the name of the company is 横店集团联谊电机 *héngdiàn jítuán liányí diànjī*, thus the first part of the name LINIX, LI, could be traced back to the first part of the syllable 联 *lián*, composing the word 联谊 *liányí* 'friendship ties', while NI could stand for the last part of the word 联谊 *liányí*, but we have no clues as to the origin of the X. Hence, this could also be regarded as a creation of a foreign-like name (see 4.5), possibly taking somehow into account also the Chinese name of the company.

As for ZOJE, all the letters composing the name can be traced back to the first two syllables of the name of the company, 中捷缝纫机 *zhōngjié fèngrènjī*, but their selection does not follow any obvious pattern along the initial/rhyme boundaries within these syllables. In SORL, 'R' and 'L' possibly stand for the initials of the first two syllables of the name of the company, 瑞立集团 *ruìlì jítuán*, but they are preceded by two other unrelated letters, 'S' and 'O', the origin of which is unclear. Finally, we have no hint as to where the initialism PLC (PLC 集团 'PLC Group') comes from.

Thus, some brand names are modelled after acronyms/initialisms, but they cannot be considered as true acronyms/initialisms, since they are not (completely) based on a specific group of words, picking up some of its phonemes/syllables.

In some cases, the brand name is formed by an initialism followed by Chinese characters, forming a hybrid form similar to those found in the translation of foreign brand names into Chinese (see 5.6), as e.g. ZTE 中兴 *Zhōngxīng* (telecommunications), where ZTE stands for Zhongxing Telecommunication Equipment (中兴通讯 *zhōngxīng tōngxùn*), while 中兴 *zhōngxīng* is the Chinese name of the company.

Different is the case of abbreviations formed on the basis of the romanized Chinese name, as e.g. HSK or RMB (see the case of LZ, from 辽筑 *Liáo-zhù*, seen above). Kim (2012) highlights that despite the fact that these words look like all the other words formed only by Latin letters, in that they are read with English pronunciation, they are different because they were created in China and they can be explained only starting from Chinese. These words are considered as graphic loans by Kim (2012), and hence they are included in the same category as Japanese graphic loans (see 5.4).

The brand naming strategy considered in this section seems to be mainly adopted by companies interested in exporting their products, since acronyms/initialisms may be easily used in foreign markets; as a matter of fact, most of the companies in our sample market their products abroad. This kind of names seems to reflect the opening of Chinese markets and the resulting strong competition; Chinese brands started to compete directly with international brands, and therefore struggled to create brand names that look global (see section 2).



#### 4.4 Alphanumeric and Other Brand Names Containing Digits and Letters

Besides acronyms/initialisms, in China we find alphanumeric brand names too, as e.g.:

- (9) 5A (toothbrushes)  
 OK8 (liquid crystal glue)  
 555 (batteries and cigarettes)

There are also brand names formed by a combination of Chinese characters and Latin letters or digits, as e.g.:

- (10) 三A *sān A* 'three A' (playing cards)  
 男露888 *nán-lù 888* 'man-dew/nectar 888' (personal hygiene products)  
 美美BB *měi-měi BB* 'beautiful-beautiful BB' (rechargeable batteries)  
 A家家具 *A jiā jiājù* 'A home.furniture' (home furniture)

As highlighted by Boyd (1985), alphanumeric brand names can be chosen for different reasons: a short life cycle for the product, making the costs for researching and identifying suitable brand names excessive; emergence of technology; lack of new words; variation in product models; need for a brand name that can be used also in foreign markets (see also Ang 1997). It has been observed that certain letters appear more frequently as the first letters of the top brand names than others (Schloss 1981) and that alphanumeric brand names are considered to be more fitting for technical rather than non-technical products (Boyd 1985; Pavia, Costa 1993; Ang 1997).

The choice of numbers in Chinese brand naming takes into account their cultural significance. Numbers had an important role in ancient Chinese culture:

numbers in ancient Chinese culture consisted of Xiangshu (philosophical image numbers) and Shushu (divination numbers), which had three intermingled basic functions – calculation, divination and philosophical interpretation – to intertwine perception and intuition with emotion, space with time, heaven with earth, *yang* with *yin* (Han, Wang, Xue 2011, p. 69).

In the *Yìjīng* 易經 'Books of Changes', one of the Five Classics, which is an essential source of the Chinese cosmological thought, odd numbers 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 are *yáng* 阳 (masculine), while even numbers 2, 4, 6, 8 are *yīn* 阴 (female); the interaction and combination of these two forces (*yīn* and *yáng*) constitutes the continuous transformations of the whole world (Han,

Wang, Xue 2011). Thus, when a number is formed by more than one digit, a balance of *yīn* and *yáng* is preferred (Ang 1997).

The meanings associated to numerals, and thus their perception as positive or negative, are connected to several different sources (see e.g. Tao 2013). Furthermore, numerals are perceived as auspicious or ominous according to their pronunciation, which can recall homophonous words or words with a similar pronunciation (see section 3 above). Thus, for example, number 8 (八 *bā*) is considered as an auspicious number since it sounds similar to 发 *fā* 'to prosper' (see e.g. the New Year's greeting 恭喜发财 *gōngxǐ fā-cái* 'wish you great fortune; wish you prosperity'; lit. 'congratulations/greetings make-money').<sup>10</sup> To give an example of the importance of the number 8, the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympic games in Beijing began on August 8 (08-08-08) at 8 minutes and 8 seconds past 8 PM. A combination of more than one 8 (see the example in 10 above) is particularly auspicious, as it can be connected to 发发发 *fā fā fā* 'get richer and richer'. Other lucky numbers are 3 (see e.g.: 三代 *Sān-Dài* 'Three dynasties', i.e. Xia, Shang and Zhou, the most ancient dynasties; 三教 *Sān Jiào* 'Three Doctrines', i.e. Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism), 5 (see e.g.: 五行 *wǔ-xíng* 'Five elements/phases/agents', i.e. wood, fire, earth, metal and water; 五德 *wǔ dé* 'Five virtues'), 6, 9 (it sounds like 久 *jiǔ* 'for a long time, everlasting').

In contrast, number 4, as mentioned above, is an ominous number, since it is a near-homonym of 死 *sǐ* 'die' (see section 3); in buildings, hospitals, etc. the number 4 is often missing (no fourth floor or bed no. 4, for example).<sup>11</sup> Another unlucky number is 7: in choosing auspicious dates, 7, 17 and 27 are avoided. According to Tao (2013) one of the reasons for this has to do with the tradition of offering sacrifices to dead people every day until the 49th day (seven times seven); among these days, the most important ones are the seventh day (the first seven), the 21st day (the third seven) and the 49th day (the seventh seven). Liu and Dong (2007) highlights that the number 7 is traditionally connected to death (see the source for examples). Moreover, Liu and Dong (2007) and Han, Wang and Xue (2011) point out that the number 7 (七 *qī*) is considered unlucky because it is close to 气 *qì*

<sup>10</sup> Ang (1997) highlights other reasons why the number 8 is considered a lucky number: for example, standing in the centre of the universe, one can face eight directions, i.e. North, Northeast, East, Southeast, South, Southwest, West, and Northwest, thus suggesting omnipotence. Eight can also refer to the legendary Eight Immortals, who are said to have achieved immortality through meditation. Furthermore, Chinese also believe that the personality and fate of people can be interpreted based on the eight characters attached to their own year, month, day and time of birth.

<sup>11</sup> Other unpleasant associations with the number 4 include the four bad habits of wine drinking, women chasing, money chasing, and smoking, and the four kings who were of ill-repute before being converted to Buddhism (Ang 1997).

'get angry'.<sup>12</sup> However, Tao (2013) points out that 7 is considered a good number in hospitals, possibly because it sounds similar to 祛 *qū* 'dispel, remove', thus having the meaning of 'get rid of the illness'. Furthermore, Liu and Dong (2007) remark that 7 is also considered a mystical number in ancient Chinese culture: for example, according to Chinese mythology, the goddess *Nüwa* 女媧 completed her creation work in seven days, and the Jade Emperor had seven fairy daughters (for further examples see Liu, Dong 2007). We may add that the seventh day of the seventh month of the traditional lunar calendar is the 七夕节 *qīxījié* 'double seven festival', that celebrates the annual meeting of the cowherd and the weaver girl in Chinese mythology,<sup>13</sup> and it is considered as the Chinese Valentine's day.

Providing a detailed picture of the cultural meanings of numbers is far beyond the scope of this paper. However, what we want to stress is that, given the Chinese concern with fortune and luck, and the meanings attached to numbers, it is very important to carefully choose numbers within brand names: numbers influence brand perception, and favourable perception of a number is defined in terms of whether it is considered to bring good fortune or not (Ang 1997). Furthermore, it should be noted that combinations of single-digit numbers may convey different meanings. For example, in idioms a combination of seven and eight is generally associated with chaos and disorder (see Tao 2013): e.g. 乱七八糟 *luàn-qī-bā-zāo* 'in disorder-seven-eight-messy, at sixes and sevens, in a mess', 七手八脚 *qī-shǒu-bā-jiǎo* 'seven-hand-eight-foot, everyone pitching in, too many cooks spoil the broth'. Thus, in the creation of brand names one must also take into account the meanings borne by number combinations.

Chan, Huang and Wu (2009), basing on their analysis of 5,089 Chinese brand names, show that the nine numbers which are used most often in brand naming are, in order of frequency: 三 *sān* 'three', 双 *shuāng* 'two/pair', 万 *wàn* 'ten thousand', 五 *wǔ* 'five', 九 *jiǔ* 'nine', 八 *bā* 'eight', 一 *yī* 'one', 百 *bǎi* 'hundred', 七 *qī* 'seven'.

While Chinese are influenced by numbers, the same cannot be said about letters, which are conceptually very distant from Chinese logographic writing. Ang (1997), basing on an experimental study, shows that Chinese consumers are indeed more influenced by numbers than by letters. However, as we have shown above, brand names formed with letters are found too. In her study, Ang (1997) shows that A and S are considered to be lucky letters, while F and Z are regarded as unlucky letters. As for the letter A, the reason seems to be quite intuitive: it is the first letter of

12 Note, however, that the original meaning of 气 *qì* is 'vital/material energy'.

13 This is the story of 织女 *Zhīnǚ* (the weaver girl) and 牛郎 *Niúlánɡ* (the cowherd). Their love was not allowed and they were banished to opposite sides of the Silver River. They can meet only once a year, the seventh day of the seventh lunar month.

the alphabet and an A grade for students means excellence (Ang 1997). In contrast, F is the last grade and stands for failure in the educational system, while Z is the last letter of the alphabet. Ang shows that brand names with lucky letters and numbers are perceived more favourably than those containing unlucky letters and numbers: consumers make inferences about products on the base of their brand names, and brand names with lucky letters and numbers are perceived as being auspicious, successful and having superior quality.

In (9) and (10), we have examples of combinations of lucky letters and numbers (5A and 三A *sān A* 'three A'). We also find the letter A to signify excellence in A家具 *A jiā jiājù* (furniture for excellent houses). Latin letters can be chosen for other reasons too; in OK8 we find the English colloquial word *ok*, which conveys assent, agreement or acceptance. In the name 美美 BB *měi měi BB* (batteries), built playing on reduplication patterns, instead, the letter B recalls the first letter of the English word *battery*.

Since, as said above, Chinese are more easily influenced by numbers than letters, Ang (1997, p. 229) suggests that a name will be perceived more favourably if letters are associated to numbers: «a restaurant called Paradise can be perceived more favourably if it were called Paradise 8».

However, Ang also shows that Chinese favour proper brand names over alphanumeric ones. This could be the reason why we often find characters combined with numbers or letters (as in the examples in 10).

#### 4.5 Foreign and Foreign-sounding Names

Among Chinese brand names we can find foreign-sounding names. As highlighted by Tian and Dong (2011, p. 59), in China there is «a proliferation of domestic goods branded to convey Westernness and capitalize on presumed positive associations». Examples of such names are: 诺菲娅 *nuò-fēi-yà* 'promise-luxuriant-brother.in.law' (women shoes), 爱丽丝 *ài-lí-sī* 'love-beautiful-silk' (jewelry). These names are not structurally analysable, since they are built as if they were the phonetic translation of a foreign name. Furthermore, as can be seen from the glosses, these names do not suggest the function and quality of products, nor do they make reference to fortune, but seem to aim at attracting consumers, especially young women «with a connotation of exoticism, stylishness, romance, richness, or uniqueness» (Chan, Huang, Wu 2009, pp. 9-10). As a matter of fact, Tian and Dong (2011) highlight that the perceived technological advantage of Western brands is linked not only to electronic goods but also to cosmetics and beauty aids, which are recognized as based on modern science. Furthermore, according to Croll (2006), after the economic reforms, Western clothing, jewelry and cosmetic brands provided a sense of freedom and movement and were used to construct a new gender identity in contrast with the Mao-era 'iron girls'

in the unisex blue suits. Also, they were an instrument to move towards becoming more progressive, cosmopolitan or global.

However, while usually the characters forming these names are neutral and do not make reference to the product, as in the above mentioned 诺菲娅 *nuò-fēi-yà* or in 欧兰特 *ōu-lán-tè* 'Europe-orchid-special' (household appliances),<sup>14</sup> in some cases characters are selected to suggest positive meanings: for example, in 爱丽丝 *ài-lí-sī* (see above), the characters belongs to the semantic area of beauty and intimacy, very common for female products (see Chan, Huang, Wu 2009).

The process for the formation of these brand names seems to be as follows: companies first choose a foreign or foreign-sounding name and then look for matching characters, forming a Chinese brand name which looks like a translation of a foreign brand name into Chinese (see 5.2 and 5.3). This seems to be confirmed by the children clothing brand name *Paclantic* (a blend of *Pacific* and *Atlantic*), created by a Taiwanese business man, which is accompanied by the Chinese name 派克兰帝 *pài-kè-lán-dì* 'send-gram-orchid-emperor' (phonetic adaptation of *Paclantic*). The Chinese name appears in all marketing activities. That the brand plays up Westernness is apparent by ads where Caucasian children are used as models (see Tian, Dong 2011, p. 127). Another example, is 纳爱斯 *nà-ài-sī* 'receive-love-this', the brand name of a manufacturer of cleaning products, which is clearly a phonetic adaptation of the English word *nice*; indeed, this word is used as the English version of the brand name. Sometimes the choice of a foreign-sounding name seems to be part of a strategy connected to the aim of the international orientation of the company, as in the case of the just mentioned 纳爱斯 *nà-ài-sī* (*Nice*); indeed, many of the company's goods are marketed in several countries in Europe, USA, Oceania, Southeast Asia, Africa.<sup>15</sup>

When a company chooses a foreign-sounding brand name, usually the name has both a version in Latin letters and in Chinese characters, as e.g. *Orlant* (欧兰特 *ōu-lán-tè*), *Paclantic* (派克兰帝 *pài-kè-lán-dì*), *Yinlyps* (英利菩 *yīng-lì-pú*), *Nuofeya* (诺菲娅 *nuò-fēi-yà*) and *Alice* (爱丽丝 *ài-lí-sī*) seen above. Other examples are shown below:

- (11) *Victor* 维可陶 *wéi-kě-táo* 'preserve-can-pottery' (sanitary fixtures)  
*Solid* 索力得 *suǒ-lì-dé* 'rope-power-obtain' (welding wires)

<sup>14</sup> We may remark that 兰 *lán* 'orchid' is a nature-related character, often used in Chinese brand names (see next section) as well as in the adaptations of foreign brand names (5.7). The character 特 *tè* 'special' too is commonly chosen in the adaptations of foreign brand names and it is related to prestige and excellence. Finally, 欧 *ōu* 'Europe' is a recurrent character in the translation of foreign brand names.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.cnnice.com/about/about1.htm> (2016-03-31).

*Onda* 昂达 *áng-dá* 'hold (one's head).high-reach/arrive' (electronics)

In the examples above, it clearly appears that the Chinese version of the name is simply the phonetic adaptation of the foreign or foreign-sounding name. In the case of *Onda* 昂达 *áng-dá*, apparently the source is the Spanish/Portuguese/Italian noun *onda* 'wave'. The characters chosen are often neutral and not related to the kind of product or to the company. However, sometimes reference to the product, to its characteristics or qualities is made. For example, in the name *Solid* 索力得 *suǒ-lì-dé*, 索 *suǒ* means 'rope' (possibly referring to wires), while 力 *lì* 'power, strength' seems to evoke the solidity of these welding wires, which is suggested by the English name too.

There are also instances of brand names modelled on foreign names lacking a Chinese counterpart, as e.g. *Allwell* (floors). Another example is *Mymo* (which stands for *my moments*), a women clothing brand aimed at fashionable urban women from the age of 22 to 40, whose design team is composed from experts from France, Portugal and China.<sup>16</sup> Again, the choice of a foreign-sounding brand name seems to be connected to one of the two main reasons highlighted above: 1) international orientation of the company;<sup>17</sup> 2) targeting a particular group of consumers, especially young women.

In yet other cases, Chinese and foreign language (near-)equivalents of a brand name are used side by side, as e.g. *Susino* 梅花 *méihuā* (umbrellas),<sup>18</sup> where 梅花 *méihuā* means 'plum blossom' and *susino* is an Italian word meaning 'plum tree'. This strategy is avoided when the translated name could be associated to a negative image in Chinese culture: for instance, a Cantonese leather goods brand chose an English name, i.e. *Fortune Duck*, which is reminiscent of the Italian brand *Mandarina Duck*.<sup>19</sup> The English name was not translated into Chinese as 幸运鸭 *xìngyùn yā* 'fortune duck': according to Zhao (2007), this is due to the fact that duck is regarded as a negative symbol, alluding to a man who lives off a woman (Zhao 2007). Therefore, the name 科春得 *kē-chūn-dé* 'discipline-spring-reach' was cho-

16 <http://vip.china-ef.com/web/MYMOMENT/> (2016-06-21).

17 For instance, export represents 99% of *Allwell's* trade: [http://allwell.co.chinafloor.cn/Index\\_base.htm](http://allwell.co.chinafloor.cn/Index_base.htm) (2016-03-31).

18 *Susino* umbrellas are exported in more than 100 countries and territories: <http://www.susino.com/en/about.asp> (2016-03-31).

19 The story of this brand name is as follows: in 1998 Mr Benjamin Tam, the creator of the brand, went to Italy with his wife. When the trip was about to finish, she chose for him a leather belt as souvenir. He was fascinated by the drawing of a little duck on the belt and decided to use a duck as the symbol of his leatherware trademark (<http://fortuneduck2011.cn.makepolo.com/corp/corp.html> [2016-01-31]).

sen, probably because these characters are pronounced as *fo1-ceon1-dak1* in Cantonese, thus being a phonetic adaptation of the original word.

A different strategy has been chosen for the name *Lianovation* 联创光电 *lián-chuàng-guāngdiàn* 'unite-create/initiate-photoelectricity' (LED-technology products). *Lianovation* is apparently a blend of *lian* (the Chinese romanization of 联 *lián* without the tone marker) and *innovation*. In this respect we may suppose that 创 *chuàng* in the Chinese name is the abbreviation of 创新 *chuàngxīn* 'innovation'; thus, *Lianovation* would be formed by blending part of the Chinese name (i.e. 联 *lián*) with the English translation of 创新 *chuàngxīn* 'innovation'.

The origin of some foreign-sounding names, like those in (12), is unclear. They are apparently formed by simply scrambling letters, approximately matching the pronunciation of the characters used in the Chinese version of the name, or some of its sounds.

- (12) *Dsland* 迪士兰 *dí-shì-lán* 'enlighten-scholar-orchid' (baby products)  
*Fotile* 方太 *fāng-tài* 'square-excessively' (kitchen appliances)  
*Vatti* 华帝 *huá-dì* 'China-emperor' (kitchen appliances)

There are two possible routes to the creation of such names: either the foreign-sounding name is created first and then matching characters are found, or the other way round; normally, we have no way of knowing which of the two was chosen for each of them. However, in some cases, like *Fotile* 方太 *fāng-tài* or *Dsland* 迪士兰 *dí-shì-lán*, we may hypothesize that the foreign-sounding name was created first: the characters are neutral, not connected to the type of product, and without any auspicious meaning; they resemble phonetic adaptations of foreign brand names (see 5.2 and 5.3). In particular, it can be noted that the first part of the name *Dsland* 迪士兰 *dí-shì-lán* is strongly reminiscent of the Chinese version of the American brand name *Disney* 迪士尼 *dí-shì-ní* 'enlighten-scholar-Buddhist nun'.<sup>20</sup>

In some cases the Chinese name and the foreign-sounding name are completely independent of each other, as e.g. *Caml* 加枫 *jiā-fēng* 'add-ma-ple' (bathrooms). This name does not match the Chinese name either from the phonetic or from the semantic point of view. Furthermore, *Caml* has a difficult pronunciation due to the final *ml*, unless it is read as an initialism.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that there are some attempts to name Chinese brands after famous foreign brand names (both phonetic adaptations in Chinese and original names in Latin letters), for different kinds of products, as e.g. 路易威登 *lù'yì wēidēng* (blowtorches), 古驰 *gǔchí* (household

20 It can be further observed that the pronunciation of 迪士兰 *dí-shì-lán* also recalls the name *Disneyland* (in Chinese 迪士尼乐园 *díshìní lèyuán* 'Disney park').

appliances), *Ralph Lauren* (paints), *Apple* (machinery oil). The registration of these trademarks is not always successful and often controversies arise. China is a first-to-file country: all else being equal, whoever applies for a trademark first, will obtain the registration. It is important to register trademarks in all the appropriate product classes to ensure protection. As a matter of fact, according to the Trademark Law of the People's Republic of China,<sup>21</sup> the exclusive right to use a trademark is limited to the classes of products for which the trademark has been approved.

#### 4.6 Further Remarks

Semantically, Chinese brand names tend to have a positive connotation, though names formed by characters with a neutral connotation can be found too, especially in some categories of products (see Chan, Huang 1997, 2001a) or in foreign-sounding brand names, as discussed above. In order to understand Chinese brand names, it is important to take into account the cultural background and the importance given to symbolic implications of good wishes and fortune (Chan 1990, Schmitt, Pan 1994). Chan, Huang and Wu (2009, p. 13), relying on their corpus-based study found out some recurring words in Chinese brand names, which can be classified into five groups according to their meaning (see also Basciano 2015):

- a. nature-related words such as 山 *shān* 'mountain', 天 *tiān* 'sky', 花 *huā* 'flower', 松 *sōng* 'pine', 龙 *lóng* 'dragon', 马 *mǎ* 'horse'. Nature symbolizes strength and power, and in some cases reflects perfection;
- b. fortune-related words, such as 吉 *jí* 'lucky', 福 *fú* 'fortune', 瑞 *ruì* 'auspicious', 发 *fā* 'to prosper' (see 4.4). These words reflect the importance of auspicious symbols in Chinese culture;
- c. beauty and intimacy related words, as e.g. 爱 *ài* 'love', 美 *měi* 'beauty', 丝 *sī* 'silk', 香 *xiāng* 'fragrant', 雅 *yǎ* 'elegant'. These words suggest positive images, and are elegant and appealing. They are quite common, for example, in cosmetics and products for women;
- d. colours, as e.g. 红 *hóng* 'red', 绿 *lǜ* 'green', 青 *qīng* 'green', 黄 *huáng* 'yellow', 蓝 *lán* 'blue'. In Chinese culture, yellow represents richness and power; red stands for happiness; green represents youth and freshness; white symbolizes purity and elegance;<sup>22</sup> and blue stands for peacefulness (Chan, Huang, Wu 2009, p. 13);
- e. numerals (see 4.4 above).

21 Article 51: <http://www.chinatradeoffice.com/about/laws1.html> (2016-03-31).

22 Note, however, that white also symbolizes mourning in China.



Furthermore, brand names often contain characters that allude to the characteristics and qualities of the products or services: for example, bicycle brand names (13) often make use of words related to strength and speed (as e.g. names of animals), while names of drinks (14) often contain characters related to water and/or coldness (Chan, Huang 1997, 2001b; Huang, Chan 1997).

- (13) 野马 *yě-mǎ* 'wild-horse'  
 金狮 *jīn-shī* 'gold-lion'  
 飞鸽 *fēi-gē* 'fly-pigeon'
- (14) 冷泉 *lěng-quán* 'cold-spring'  
 冰飘山 *bīng-piāo-shān* 'ice-float-mountain'  
 雪洋 *xuě-yáng* 'snow-ocean'

To give another example, in our sample names of products such as clothes racks often have characters referring to women, wives, housewives, such as:

- (15) 快乐主妇 *kuàilè-zhǔfù* 'happy-housewife'  
 吉祥太太 *jíxiáng-tàitai* 'lucky-madam/wife'  
 乖媳妇 *guāi xífù* 'well-behaved, daughter-in-law'

According to Schmitt and Pan (1994), names formed by more than one character must be analysed at different levels, e.g. the meaning of the name as a whole, of its constituent characters and of the semantic components of each character, to create an appropriate name and avoid negative associations.

Lastly, corpus-based studies have shown that in Chinese brand naming there is a strong preference for disyllabic names in which the second syllable has a 'high' tone (first or second tone). According to Chan and Huang (1997, 2001a), high-toned syllables have a high pitch and, thus, are more sonorous and are also easy to pronounce: Chinese people seem to have a strong preference for names that can be pronounced sonorously, as sonority can result in a pleasant pronunciation, and this may enhance memorization and help generate a favourable perception of the brand (Chan, Huang 2001a, 2001b; see also Wu, Lu, Su 2010).

## 5 Translation of Foreign Brand Names into Chinese

As proposed by Hong (et al. 2002), there are five brand naming strategy options to enter the East- and Southeast Asian markets (see Jaw, Wang, Hsu 2011, p. 647):

1. entering the market with a global (original) brand. This strategy may take advantage of the positive associations connected to Western products, such as the perceived higher quality;
2. entering the market with a transliterated brand. This strategy allows to recall the original sound of the brand adapting it to the characteristics of the host language;
3. entering the market with a directly translated brand. This strategy emphasizes the meaning of the brand;
4. entering the market with a combination of the original brand and a transliterated name;
5. entering the market with a combination of the original brand and the directly translated name.

As already discussed in section 3, standardized brand names are generally not well accepted in the Chinese market, due to linguistic and cultural differences. According to Schmitt and Pan (1994), the choice of Western firms of keeping their original name with Western spelling, adopting a one/single brand name strategy (i.e. only one name all over the world)<sup>23</sup> may be appropriate in Japan, where consumers are familiar with the Latin alphabet, but not in the Chinese market, where only a minority of consumers knows the Latin alphabet. Thus, choosing a localized brand name to enter the Chinese market appears to be a very wise strategy. Despite of this, some firms still prefer to enter the market using their original brand names. Besides, Jaw, Wang and Hsu (2011) point out that some fashion brands used a Chinese name when they were first introduced in Taiwan (e.g. *Prada* chose the phonetic adaptation 普拉达 *pŭlādá*), but they now use their original names in advertising and marketing activities, since these brands have become familiar to Taiwanese consumers. Furthermore, Schmitt and Pan (1994) highlight that alphabetic names seem to work for names that are short and catchy, such as 3M, IBM, M&M, etc. These names become visual symbols or logos and are remembered for their graphic qualities rather than as linguistic units. As a matter of fact, this kind of names are sometimes chosen by Chinese companies too, as seen above (4.3).

Translating a brand name into Chinese requires not only a good understanding of the product and of the target consumers, but also of their

23 This strategy may work well if the global brand name can be pronounced easily and it does not have negative connotations in different markets.

linguistic and cultural background (Yang 2008).

A good translation should possess the same characteristics highlighted above for Chinese brand names. First of all, the translated brand name should be short, preferably composed of two syllables/characters (see above). Also, characters containing too many strokes or uncommon characters should be avoided: «if uncommon characters are used, uneducated consumers will fail to recognize them or will mispronounce them, which will inevitably impair the effectiveness of the brand name in use» (Yang 2008, p. 402). Secondly, the translated name should be sonorous, since, as we already mentioned above, this may enhance memorization and help generate favourable brand perception. From the semantic point of view, as highlighted by Li and Shooshtari (2003), brand names as linguistic symbols bear certain culture-specific meanings and values, and «native Chinese consumers prefer and expect visual images provoked by linguistic symbols». Many foreign brand names are meaningless and are difficult to memorize for Chinese speakers; therefore, in the translations of foreign brand names into Chinese, characters with a positive meaning are preferred: characters with auspicious meanings, especially those related to good luck, fortune, longevity, wealth, happiness, etc., are often used, as they can evoke favourable associations and, thus, can favour the acceptance of the product by the public (Schmitt, Pan 1994; Yang 2008). Besides, characters homophonous or near-homophonous to words with an ominous, vulgar or negative meaning must be avoided.

At the same time, translated Western brand names should also be able to convey foreignness, in order to enhance positive associations with Western brands, their exoticism and their perceived quality. The research conducted by Tian and Dong (2011, pp. 56-58) highlights that designation of 'Western otherness', one of the positive characteristics associated to Western brands (see section 2), depends more on whether the brand name translation reveals deviations from norms of Chinese language and culture rather than on actual recognition of the country of origin of the product. They identify three types of deviations. First of all, there are brand names that do not sound Chinese, such as 摩托罗拉 *mótuōluólā* (*Motorola*). Secondly, there are brand names that may sound as Chinese but do not possess product-relevant meaning, as e.g. 卡夫 *kǎ-fū* 'card-husband' (*Kraft*). Third, names composed of an unusual combination of words, as e.g. 固特异 *gù-tè-yì* 'solid-outstanding-different' (*Goodyear*), formed by three fourth tone (falling) syllables: this sound combination is very unusual and thus considered foreign. However, not all brand names that show these deviations are considered as Western: some names show a lack of knowledge of Chinese language and culture, suggesting foreignness, but are also considered to be too strange; this makes them lose credibility as famous global brands. This supports Zhang and Schmitt (2001), who state that meaningful translated brand names are more effective.

Tian and Dong (2011) also point out that some translated brand names look so Chinese that they are not recognized as foreign. For example, they highlight that some participants to their research do not include 潘婷 *pāntíng* (*Pantene*) among foreign brands: «I knew Lux is an American brand, but I didn't know Pantene is one too. Pan-ting is a very traditional original Chinese girl's name, and the first celebrity who appeared in the Pantene commercial was the movie star Ms Pan Hong. So I thought the Pantene brand was her brand». (Tian, Dong 2011, p. 57). Brands like this, which look very Chinese, forgo any presumed positive associations with Western brands.

Yet, other brand names are able to convey foreignness and to capture, at the same time, nuances of the Chinese language and culture. For example, Tian and Dong (2011) make the examples of *Safeguard* (soap), which in Chinese has been translated as 舒服佳 *shūfú-jiā* 'comfortable-fine', a name which is able to convey the attributes of the product, consistent with Chinese brand naming practices (see section 4). As observed by one of the participants of the research conducted by Tian and Dong (2011), the name is able to explain the features and usage of the product and has some Chinese flavour in it, but it is formed by an atypical combination of characters. Thus, the name conveys foreignness but also shows affinities with Chinese language and culture (see section 2).

The picture sketched above shows that adapting a foreign brand name in Chinese is a very demanding task. In what follows, we will illustrate the main linguistic strategies adopted in the translation of foreign brand names into Chinese. We will mainly focus on the adaptation of Western brand names, but we will make reference to Japanese and Korean brand names too, which are present in the sample we analysed (5.8).

## 5.1 Literal Translation

One of the possible strategies adopted in the translation of foreign brand names into Chinese is word-for-word translation, as in the examples below:

- (16) *Red Bull*: 红牛 *hóng-niú* 'red-bull'  
*Microsoft*: 微软 *wéi-ruǎn* 'micro-soft'  
*Credit Suisse*: 瑞士信贷 *ruìshì-xìndài* 'Switzerland-credit'  
*Nestlé*: 雀巢 *què-cháo* 'sparrow-nest'

Note that when the morphological structure of the original word is different from that of the target language, the translated word is built according to the rules of the target language. Thus, for example, the translation of *Credit Suisse* shows the Chinese modifier-modified structure.

As for *Nestlé*, at first sight 雀巢 *què-cháo* 'sparrow-nest' would seem to be the translation of the *Nestlé* logo, i.e. a sparrow in its nest, rather than a translation of the name. However, *Nestlé* is the name of the founder of the company, Henri Nestlé, born as Heinrich Nestle.<sup>24</sup> *Nestle* in an Alemannic German dialect means 'small nest' (and, indeed, his family escutcheon was a bird feeding its babies in the nest, as in the first company logo). Thus the Chinese name, besides recalling the logo, is also a translation of the brand name.

As in the case of Chinese brand names (see section 4), when the translation is formed by a monosyllabic name, the word 牌 *pái* 'brand' is generally added (as e.g. 壳牌 *ké-pái* 'shell-brand' for *Shell*), forming what can be considered as hybrid forms (see 5.6).

In the case of meaningful names, a simple translation may look like the best option, since it can preserve the original meaning of the brand. However, it is very difficult to retain also the cultural meaning of the original, since social values, beliefs and attitudes vary greatly among societies; thus, something that evokes a certain image in one culture does not necessarily evoke the same image in another culture (and actually sometimes can evoke opposite images). Given these implications, this strategy is not widely adopted and is avoided when the translation can be associated with a negative image in the Chinese culture (see Zhao 2007). Sometimes, the translation of the foreign brand name is not plainly literal, as in the case of *Oracle*, translated as 甲骨文 *jiǎgǔwén* 'oracle-bone inscriptions'. As a matter of fact, 甲骨文 *jiǎgǔwén* more precisely refers to oracle-bone inscriptions of the Shang dynasty (fourteenth to eleventh century B.C.), used for

24 Heinrich Nestle was a German pharmacist. When he moved to Vevey, a French-speaking area of Switzerland, he changed his name to the more French-sounding Henri Nestlé.

divination, which are the earliest source of Chinese writing. Thus, a word able to convey the meaning of the original name was recast in a word laden with cultural significance for the Chinese public.

A further example of an 'adjusted' non-literal translation is that of the Chinese version of *Mr. Muscle*, 威猛先生 *wēiměng xiānshēng* ('brave mister'); the word *muscle* is replaced by a word more appealing for the Chinese public (see Li, Shooshtari 2003), i.e. 威猛 *wēiměng* 'brave', which provides suggestions similar to the original. Besides, the word 先生 *xiānshēng* 'mister' follows the word 威猛 *wēiměng* 'brave', since, differently from English, in Chinese any title like 'mister' follows the proper name (see Arcodia, Piccinini 2006).

## 5.2 Phonetic Adaptation

One of the strategies adopted in translating foreign brand names into Chinese is phonetic adaptation. This strategy is not easy to adopt given the great differences among the phonological system of Modern Chinese and those of the major European languages: as said above, in Chinese the number of distinct syllables is comparatively low, syllable structure is simple and consonant clusters are not allowed.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, in the process of phonetic adaptation, the foreign name is divided into syllables and then the closest Chinese syllables are chosen. The result is a name which is phonologically close to the original one; in the written form, characters with a neutral meaning are usually chosen.<sup>26</sup> See the examples below:

- (17) *Ferrari*: 法拉利 *fǎ-lā-lì* 'law-pull-benefit'  
*Ferrè*: 沸雷 *fèi-léi* 'boil-thunder'  
*Kraft*: 卡夫 *kǎ-fū* 'card-husband'

The examples in (17) apparently make use of characters without any relevant meaning.<sup>27</sup> In applying this strategy, syllables have to be carefully chosen in order to avoid associations with homophones bearing a negative or irreverent meaning (see Francis, Lam, Walls 2002; Chan, Huang 1997).

<sup>25</sup> In contrast, English, for example, has syllables with very complex structures, such as CCCVCC, with an initial three-consonant cluster, as e.g. *splint* (see Chan, Huang 1997).

<sup>26</sup> For a list of characters commonly used in the phonetic adaptation of foreign words, see Xing (2006, p. 122).

<sup>27</sup> Though, in the case of *Ferrari*, the last syllable 利 *lì* 'interest, benefit' is also found in 意大利 *Yìdàlì* 'Italy'.

Being meaningless, these names are not particularly easy to memorize and do not convey positive suggestions. However, it can be observed that names formed through pure phonetic adaptation immediately identify the products as foreign, thus they may result attractive in a way (especially for some kinds of products), at least for particular groups of consumers. For example, some participants to the research conducted by Tian and Dong (2011) suggest that a stronger Western-oriented brand name translation seem appropriate for hi-tech products, in order to highlight their Western origin, since the West is considered as a place where technologically superior goods are produced. Chinese companies too, as we have seen (4.4), can choose to adopt a foreign-sounding name without any relevant meaning either because they are internationally-oriented or because they target a particular group of consumers.

Generally speaking, semantic loans in Chinese have often been preferred to phonetic loans. Starting from the second half of the nineteenth century, some neologisms entered the Chinese lexicon as 'transliterations' of foreign words, or at least ran parallel to the European-Japanese<sup>28</sup> loan translation of the same word; eventually the transliterations mostly became obsolete (see Masini 1993; Liu 1995).<sup>29</sup> However, as pointed out by Kim (2012), phonetic loans are actually increasing in number. According to Kim, this is due, first of all, to the exposure to new technology, brand names and company names, which have flooded into Chinese since the 1970s; semantic loans are not an effective method to borrow proper nouns, for which a phonetic adaptation is usually preferred. Secondly, English education is becoming increasingly popular in China, thus many Chinese people are familiar with English and can accept phonetic loans more easily.

### 5.3 Phonetic-semantic Adaptation

Phonetic-semantic adaptation too is based on the phonetic adaptation of the foreign name (either the whole name or part of it); however, here the characters chosen are either auspicious characters or characters suggesting the characteristics, qualities or function of the product (see Wang, Zhang 2005; Arcodia, Piccinini 2006; Alon, Littrell, Chan 2009). This is the case, for instance, of the brand name *Coca-Cola* discussed in section 3.

28 On Japanese graphic loans, see section 5.4.

29 One example is the Chinese word for *democracy*. For some time the phonetic adaptation 德莫拉克西 *démòlākèxī* coexisted with the loan translation (from Japanese) 民主 *mínzhǔ*. Eventually only the loan translation survived and it is still in use today. The word 民主 *mínzhǔ* is actually a return loan, since Japanese borrowed it from Chinese, where it had the meaning of 'people rule', and then was reintroduced into Chinese with the new meaning it has acquired in Japanese, i.e. 'democracy' (Masini 1993, Liu 1995).

Other examples are provided below:

- (18) *Tefal*: 特福 *tè-fú* 'special-good.fortune'  
*Avon*: 雅芳 *yǎ-fāng* 'elegant-fragrant'  
*Vileda*: 微力达 *wēi-lì-dá* 'minute/profound-power-arrive/reach'

There are also cases like that of 香奈儿 *xiāng-nài-r* 'fragrant/perfume-what-SUFF' (*Chanel*), in which the first part is a phonetic-semantic adaptation (the first character makes reference to the product), while the second part is a pure phonetic adaptation.

Sometimes phonetic adaptation takes into account only some of the syllables or of the phonemes composing the foreign name, as e.g.

- (19) *Logitech*: 罗技 *luó-jì* 'net-skill'  
*BMW*: 宝马 *bǎo-mǎ* 'treasure-horse'  
*Pampers*: 帮宝适 *bāng-bǎo-shì* 'help-baby-suitable'

In the case of *Logitech*, the Chinese name is a phonetic adaptation of the first two syllables, *lo* and *gi*. For the brand name *BMW* (*Bayerische Motoren Werke*), only the first two letters of the German initialism have been taken into account; the Chinese name suggests that this car is like a precious horse (see 4.6). As pointed out by Tian and Dong (2011), 宝马 *bǎo-mǎ* 'precious-horse' is a metaphor for vehicles, since precious horses run reliably fast for a long time, and thus the translation chosen by *BMW* shows nuances of Chinese culture. However, they further point out that using 'precious horse' for an automobile brand name is new in China, and thus this name is obviously foreign; Chinese brands in the same category often have some elements revealing their domestic origin or political alignment, as e.g. 红旗 *hóng qí* 'red flag' and 东风 *dōng fēng* 'Eastern wind' (Tian, Dong 2011, p. 58).

As for *Pampers*, the Chinese phonetic adaptation aims at rendering the first syllable and the initial and final sounds of the second syllable. The characters chosen suggest that these diapers are suitable (适 *shì*) for helping (帮 *bāng*) babies (宝 *bǎo*) (see Arcodia, Piccinini 2006). The character 宝 *bǎo* suggests the idea of something precious and makes also references to babies (宝宝 *bǎobǎo* 'darling baby').

Phonetic-semantic adaptation may be considered as the ideal brand name translation strategy, since it is able to recall the sound of the original name, providing, at the same time, positive suggestions. However, creating such names is not an easy task. Fetscherin et al. (2012), basing on their research on 100 multinational brands, show that less than a quarter of the companies they studied achieved this «branding nirvana».



## 5.4 Graphic Loans

Japanese companies can choose to adopt graphic loans<sup>30</sup> (see Masini 1993, Liu 1995). Take, for example, the following translations of Japanese brand names into Chinese:

- (20) *Toyota*: トヨタ (a toponym): 丰田 *fēng-tián*  
*Honda*: 本田 (a surname): 本田 *běn-tián*  
*Nintendō*: 任天堂: 任天堂 *rèn-tiāntáng* 'leave.everything.to-heaven'

The brand name *Toyota*, from the name of the city where the company is headquartered, is usually written in *katakana*<sup>31</sup> (トヨタ); the Chinese character version is 豊田 (simplified characters: 丰田). Thus, the Chinese version keeps the original name (in characters), however following Chinese pronunciation; the same goes for *Honda* and *Nintendo*.

Graphic loans are often chosen for Japanese brand names, which is very convenient due to the shared script, while in Western countries the romanized Japanese name is usually adopted.

Something similar happens with Korean names as well;<sup>32</sup> see the examples below:

- (21) *Samsung*: 삼성: 三星 *sān-xīng* 'three-star'  
*Hyundai*: 현대: 现代 *xiàndài* 'modern'

**30** Graphic loans are Japanese words written in *kanji* (Chinese characters), which have been borrowed into Chinese and are read as if they were ordinary Chinese words (e.g. 社会 *shèhuì* for Japanese *shakai*). This strategy was widely adopted to introduce Japanese terms into Chinese during the second half of the nineteenth century; many of these Japanese words were translation of European words, mainly English (see Masini 1993, Liu 1995). Thus, graphic loans played a key role in transferring Western knowledge into China.

**31** *Katakana* and *hiragana* are the syllabaries which, together with Chinese characters (*kanji*), are used to write Japanese. *Hiragana* is used for grammatical words and some content words, while *katakana* is mostly used for the transcription of loanwords. Sometimes the Latin alphabet (*rōmaji*) is also used. According to Schmitt and Pan (1994), *katakana* is most appropriate for foreign products and products associated with foreign lifestyle. For example, they state that *kanji* may be appropriate for tea products but not for high-tech products, for which *katakana* is preferred. As to *hiragana*, it is frequently used for beauty products, hair salons and kimono stores.

**32** Korean too borrowed Chinese characters (한자 *hanja*), which were incorporated to the language assigning to them Korean pronunciation. In 1440 한글 *hangul*, the Korean alphabet, was created, but Chinese characters were still used up to the end of the nineteenth century. Nowadays Chinese characters are not used anymore, neither to write native Korean words nor to write words of Chinese origin, however a good working knowledge of Chinese characters is still important for reading older texts and scholarly texts in the humanities.

The *hanja* (Chinese character) version of these two brand names are respectively 三星 and 現代 (simplified characters: 现代). Thus, as in the case of the Japanese names discussed above, Chinese retains the original names, read as if they were Chinese.

### 5.5 Creation of Original Names

Sometimes the strategy chosen is not adaptation but *ad hoc* creations describing the characteristics/qualities/benefits of the product, its function or, in any case, containing characters with a positive connotation (see Wang, Zhang 2005; Arcodia, Piccinini 2006, Basciano 2015). Original names are generally created following the same principles used in the creation of Chinese brand names, with a preference for disyllabic names (see section 4). See the examples below:

- (22) *Bref*: 妙力 *miào-lì* 'wonderful-power'  
*Ariel*: 碧浪 *bì-làng* 'jade.green-wave'  
*Sprite*: 雪碧 *xuě-bì* 'snow-jade.green'  
*Energizer*: 劲量 *jìn-liàng* 'strength-quantity/capacity'

All the names aim at suggesting positive connotations about the product. For example, *Bref* 妙力 *miào-lì* (cleaning products) suggests that these products are very effective; *Energizer* 劲量 *jìn-liàng* (batteries) emphasizes that the batteries are long-lasting. In the case of *Ariel* 碧浪 *bì-làng* and *Sprite* 雪碧 *xuě-bì*, the character 碧 *bì* 'jade.green' recalls the colour of the packaging. Note also the character 雪 *xuě* 'snow' in the Chinese version of *Sprite* (a soft drink), which is very common in Chinese brand names for drinks (see 4.6). In some cases existing Chinese words are borrowed, as e.g.:

- (23) *Citi*: 花旗 *huāqí* 'United States, Star-Spangled Banner'  
*Kit Kat*: 奇巧 *qíqiǎo* 'intriguing/ingenious/exquisite'

*Citi* is an American multinational financial services corporation headquartered in New York City. The Chinese version of the name makes reference to the country where the corporation is based.

As for *Kit Kat* (a chocolate-covered wafer biscuit), the Chinese name 奇巧 *qíqiǎo* not only conveys positive suggestions, but also preserves the alliteration of the initials of the two syllables of the original name. Furthermore, note that 巧 *qiǎo* is the first syllable of the word 巧克力 *qiǎokèlì* 'chocolate' (Basciano 2015).

## 5.6 Hybrid Forms

Sometimes different strategies are combined, creating hybrid forms, as in the examples below:

- (24) *Starbucks*: 星巴克 *xīng-bā-kè* 'star-hope.for-overcome/gram'  
*Oil of Olay*: 玉兰油 *yùlán-yóu* 'magnolia-oil'  
*Best Buy*: 百思买 *bǎi-sī-mǎi* 'hundred-think-buy'  
*Moët & Chandon*: 酩悦香槟 *mǐng-yuè-xiāngbīn* 'dead.drunk-happy-champagne'

The Chinese version of the brand name *Starbucks* is formed by 星 *xīng* 'star', which translates the first part of the name, and 巴克 *bākè*, i.e. the phonetic adaptation of *bucks*.

The Chinese translation of *Oil of Olay* (*Ulan/Ulay/Olaz*)<sup>33</sup> is able to convey some Chinese flavour: the first two syllables of the name, 玉兰 *yùlán* 'magnolia', are a phonetic adaptation of *Ulan* and, at the same time, convey a very positive meaning: magnolia is both a very popular flower in China and a symbol of nobility and elegance (Lü 2005); the last part of the name, 油 *yóu*, is the translation of *oil*. The Chinese translation retains the Chinese modifier-modified order, thus 油 *yóu* 'oil' is placed after 玉兰 *yùlán* 'magnolia'.

Sometimes this strategy can lead to a humorous effect. In the case of *Best Buy*, 百思 *bǎi-sī* 'hundred-think' is the phonetic adaptation of *best*, while 买 *mǎi* translates *buy*. However, the whole translated name seems to suggest something like 'think one hundred times before buying' (cf. 三思而行 *sān-sī-ér-xíng* 'three-think-then-go, look before you leap').

As for *Moët & Chandon*, the Chinese name is formed by a phonetic-semantic translation of *Moët* (the characters 酩悦 *mǐng-yuè* approximately reproduce the sound of the original name, and have a meaning related to the kind of product) with the addition of a semantic component, 香槟 *xiāngbīn* 'champagne' (a phonetic loan), which specifies the kind of product.<sup>34</sup>

Another type of hybrid consists in the combination of Latin letters and phonetic adaptations or semantic elements (literal or non-literal translations), which Kim (2012) calls 'hybrids of foreign letters'. See the examples below (from Kim 2012, p. 47):

33 *Olay* originated in South Africa. *Oil of Olay* was originally a thick pink liquid marketed as an anti-ageing beauty fluid. The brand was known as *Oil of Ulay* in the UK, as *Oil of Olaz* in other European countries, and as *Oil of Ulan* in Australia. In 1999, the name was unified under the global name *Olay*, except for German-speaking countries and Italy (<http://www.theguardian.com/fashion/fashion-blog/2012/mar/12/brief-history-of-olay> [2016-03-31]).

34 Cf. hybrid words, as e.g. 啤酒 *píjiǔ* 'beer (phonetic adaptation)-alcoholic.beverage, beer', 摩托车 *mótuō-chē* 'motor (phonetic adaptation)-vehicle, motorcycle'.

(25) *UTStarcom*: UT 斯达康 *sīdákāng*

*W.W. Grainger*: W.W. 格雷杰 *géléijié*

*W.B. Sanders Company*: W.B. 桑德斯出版公司 *sāngdésī chūbǎn gōngsī*

In the first two examples Latin letters are combined with a phonetic adaptation of the name. The last example combines Latin letters with the phonetic adaptation of *Sanders* plus a semantic part, 出版公司 *chūbǎn gōngsī* 'publishing company'. As we have seen in section 4.3, some Chinese brand names too are formed by using both Latin letters and Chinese characters (as e.g. *ZTE* 中兴 *Zhōngxīng*).

## 5.7 Common Semantic Areas

As in the case of Chinese brand names seen above, in the translations of foreign brand names, excluding pure phonetic adaptations, we can find some recurring constituents. Basing on their sample of 131 translations of foreign brand names into Chinese, Arcodia, Piccinini (2006) single out some recurring semantic areas (see also 4.6 above):

- a. Symbolic characters related to Chinese tradition and other terms related to wealth, happiness, etc., such as: 吉 / 吉利 *jílì* 'auspicious, propitious, good luck', as e.g. *Cadbury* 吉百利 *jí-bǎi-lì*, where between the two characters composing the word 吉利 *jílì* the character 百 *bǎi* 'hundred' is inserted, suggesting abundance; 福 *fú* 'good fortune', as e.g. *Tefal* 特福 *tè-fú* 'special-good.fortune'; 乐 *lè* 'happy', as e.g. *Carrefour* 家乐福 *jiā-lè-fú* 'home-happy-good.fortune'.
- b. Names of traditional plants and animals which bear a positive connotation (see 4.6), such as: 龙 *lóng* 'dragon' (e.g. *Athlon* 速龙 *sù-lóng* 'fast/speed-dragon'), 马 *mǎ* 'horse' (e.g. *BMW* 宝马 *bǎo-mǎ* 'treasure-horse', ex. 19), 兰 *lán* (e.g. *Lancome* 兰蔻 *lán-kòu* 'orchid-cardamon').
- c. Characters related to prestige and excellence, such as: 特 *tè* 'special', which emphasizes the excellence of the product (e.g. *Tupperware* 特百惠 *tè-bǎi-huì* 'special-hundred-benefit'; see *Tefal* 特福 *tè-fú* above); 宝 *bǎo* (e.g. *Hasbro* 孩之宝 *hǎi-zhī-bǎo* 'child-DET-treasure', i.e. 'child's treasure'; see *BMW* 宝马 *bǎo-mǎ* and *Pampers* 帮宝适 *bāng-bǎo-shì*, ex. 19); 百 *bǎi* 'hundred', meaning abundance (e.g. *Budweiser* 百威 *bǎi-wēi* 'hundred-power').

There are also recurring characters for specific kinds of products. For example, in the names of cosmetics, one often finds characters describing oils, creams or liquids, such as 露 *lù* 'dew, syrup', used in particular for products such as shampoos or body lotions (e.g. *Revlon* 露华浓 *lù-huá-nóng* 'dew-magnificent-dense', *Colgate* 高露洁 *gāo-lù-jié* 'high-dew-clean'). Other common characters used for cosmetics are those referring to elegance

and beauty, such as 雅 *yǎ* 'refined, elegant' (e.g. *Nivea*: 妮维雅 *nī-wéi-yǎ* 'girl-join/maintain-elegant'; see also *Avon* 雅芳 *yǎ-fāng*, ex. 18) and 美 *měi* 'beautiful' (e.g. *Maybelline* 美宝莲 *měi-bǎo-lián* 'beautiful-precious-lotus').

For house cleaning products recurring characters are those related to cleanliness and strength, such as 力 *lì* 'power, strength', 洁 *jié* 'clean': e.g. *Cillit Bang* 奇力洁 *qí-lì-jié* 'marvellous-power-clean'; *Vileda* 微力达 *wēi-lì-dá* (ex. 18).

In the names of electronic products one often finds characters related to energy, strength and speed, as e.g. *Athlon* 速龙 *sù-lóng* (see b. above), *Energizer* 劲量 *jìn-liàng* (ex. 22).

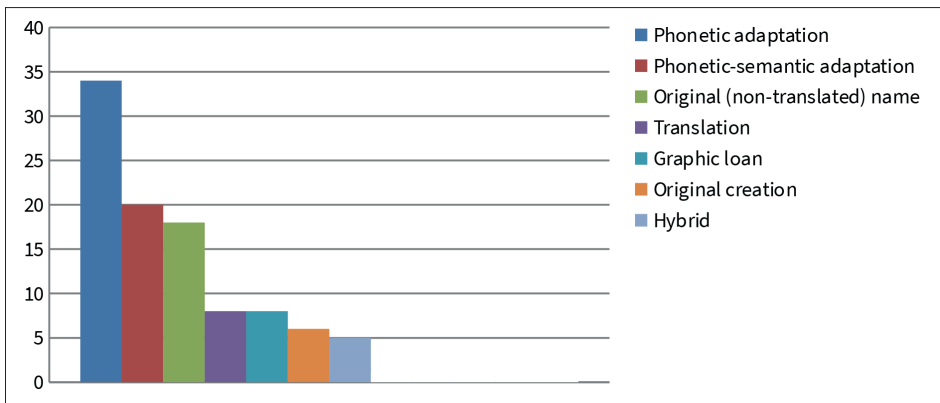
Finally, in the names of foodstuff characters related to flavour, taste and pleasure are commonly used, as e.g. 味 *wèi* 'flavour, taste' (e.g. *Barilla*: 百味来 *bǎi-wèi-lái* 'hundred-flavour-come') and 乐 *lè* 'happy, pleasure' (e.g. *Ritz* 乐之 *lè-zhī* 'happy-this').

## 5.8 The Chinese Translation of the Best Global Brands 2014

In order to assess brand name translation tendencies in Chinese, we analysed the Chinese version of the top 100 global brands listed in the *Interbrand best global brands 2014* classification (see the appendix).

The results are shown in graphic 1:

Graphic 1. Translation tendencies of the top 100 global brands listed in the *Interbrand best global brands 2014* classification in Chinese



Among the top 100 global brands, one is Chinese (and thus is not included in the graphic), i.e. *Huawei* 华为 *Huá-wéi* 'China-be'.

Out of the remaining 99 brand names, 34 are phonetic adaptations of the original brands. We included here also cases of partial adaptations,

such as 肯德基 *kěndējī*, which is the phonetic adaptation of the first part of the name, i.e. *Kentucky (Kentucky Fried Chicken, KFC)*. This confirms what Kim (2012) pointed out, i.e. that despite the fact that semantic loans are preferred, phonetic adaptations are growing in number (see 5.2). As a matter of fact, there are only 8 translations in this list, including not plainly literal translations, like *Oracle* 甲骨文 *jiǎgǔwén* (see 5.1). This reflects the difficulties of retaining the cultural meaning of the original name, given the differences between China and the West as to social values, beliefs and attitudes (see 5.1).

Only for 20 names (less than a quarter) a phonetic-semantic strategy was used. We included here only those brand names which display characters referring to the characteristics, properties or benefits of the product, or which display a combination of characters bearing positive or auspicious meaning, including cases where the phonetic adaptation is partial, such as 宝马 *bǎo-mǎ* (see 5.3, ex. 19). We excluded brand name translations such as 吉列 *jí-liè* 'lucky-arrange'; though 吉 *jí* is an auspicious character, the combination chosen does not seem particularly meaningful. Besides, 吉 *jí* is one of the characters commonly chosen for the phonetic adaptation of foreign words into Chinese. Thus, even though phonetic-semantic rendering seems to be the ideal translation strategy, it is not adopted as much as phonetic adaptation in our sample. This result, which is akin to that reached by Fetscherin et al. (2012) in a similar research, confirms that this translation strategy, though preferable, is not easy to achieve (see 5.3).

Almost all the Japanese and Korean brand names (with the exception of *Sony* and *Canon*), 8 in total, are translated by means of graphic loans; as for *Panasonic*, the graphic loan comes from the former name of the company, 松下 *Matsushita*. This supports the hypothesis that, due to the shared script, graphic loan is the most convenient strategy. It is worth noting that both *Sony* and *Canon*, the only two Japanese names for which a phonetic and a phonetic-semantic adaptation, respectively, have been chosen, are written in *katakana* and not in *kanji*.<sup>35</sup>

Hybrid forms are only 5 out of 99. We already discussed *Shell* 壳牌 *ké-pái* 'shell-brand' in section 5.1, where we have a translation of the original name followed by 'brand', to make the name disyllabic, and *Starbucks* 星巴克 *xīng-bā-kè* 'star-hope.for-overcome/gram' in section 5.6. As for the other two hybrids, *Santander* 桑坦德银行 *sāngtǎndé yínháng* and *Corona Extra* 科罗娜特级 *kēluónà tèjī*, they are formed by a phonetic adaptation and a translation; in the case of *Santander*, 银行 *yínháng* is the translation of *banco* from *Banco Santander*, which does not appear in the original brand

35 The name *Sony* originates from a blend of two words, *sonus* 'sound', and *sonny* 'boy' (<http://www.sony.co.jp/SonyInfo/CorporateInfo/History/> [2016-03-31]). The name *Canon*, instead, comes from the name of the *Guanyin Bodhisattva*, a Buddhist deity, in Japanese 観音 *kannon* (Sisk Noguchi, 2009).

name. Finally, *Mastercard* 万事达卡 *wànshì-dá-kǎ* 'everything-reach/arrive-card' combines an original creation with the translation of the word *card*, suggesting that with this card you can get whatever you want or that it brings myriads of possibilities.

We also find 6 original creations: we have already discussed *Sprite* 雪碧 *xuě-bì* 'snow-jade.green' and *Citi* 花旗 *huāqí* 'United States, Star-Spangled Banner' in section 5.5. As to *Land Rover* 路虎 *lù-hǔ* 'road-tiger, tiger of the road', it suggests that the car is fast, agile and powerful. The brand *Pizza Hut* 必胜客 *bì-shèng-kè* 'certainly-win-guest', besides suggesting a positive meaning, 'the costumer certainly wins', also has some phonetic similarities with the original name (*pizza* and *bìshèng* have some similar sounds). As for *Kleenex* 舒洁 *shū-jié* 'relax/comfortable-clean' it gives positive suggestions related to the products (facial tissues, hand towels, dinner napkins and wet wipes). Finally, in 金霸王 *jīn-bàwáng* 'gold-overlord', 金 *jīn* 'gold' recalls the packaging of *Duracell* batteries, while 霸王 *bàwáng* 'overlord' suggests the power of these batteries.

Finally, 18 out of 99 brand names retain their original name. Many of these names are short and catchy, such as IBM, GE, H&M, SAP, UPS, MTV, DHL, 3M, GAP<sup>36</sup> (see Schmitt, Pan 1994 and section 5 above). They are mostly acronyms/initialisms, but we find also a blend, *FedEx* (from *Federal Express*) and short names such as *Visa*, *Zara*, *Ebay* and *Adobe*. As we have seen, this kind of names are found among Chinese brand names too (4.3); thus, they appear to be effective global brand names. *Visa*, for example, decided to adopt a one brand name strategy, using the same name worldwide; in this way it has been able to keep a consistent image and to take advantage of the positive associations with reliability, security, and convenience attached to the brand (see Dull 2002). At the same time, the name was carefully chosen in order to be short, easy to pronounce and to recall; the meaning of the word *visa* too, i.e. an authorization that gives you permission to enter, pass through or leave a foreign country is suited for a credit card (see Hackett, Kamery 2004).

As for *Ebay*, we decided to choose the name used on the website; however, along with the name *Ebay*, the company also registered in China<sup>37</sup> the trademarks 易贝 *yì-bèi* 'easy-shell' (phonetic adaptation) and *Ebay* 易趣 *yì-qù* 'easy-interesting', which is also a partial phonetic adaptation. A special case is that of HSBC (abbreviation of *Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation*), which in Chinese is 汇丰 *huìfēng*. It is a British multinational banking and financial services company, headquartered in London, whose origins lie in Hong Kong and Shanghai, where branches were first opened

36 GAP has a phonetic adaptation registered in different classes of products, 盖璞 *gàipú* (see China Patent Trademark Office).

37 Data from the China Patent Trademark Office.

in 1865 with the aim to finance trade between Asia and the West. Thus, 汇丰 *Huìfēng*, which comes from 香港上海汇丰银行有限公司 *Xiānggǎng Shànghǎi huìfēng yínháng yǒuxiàn gōngsī* (Hong Kong and Shanghai Huifeng banking corporation limited) is part of the original Chinese name of the bank.

*Facebook*, the access to which is reportedly blocked in mainland China, is also translated as 脸谱 *liǎn-pǔ* 'face-table', 脸书 *liǎn-shū* 'face-book' and 面(子)书 *miàn(zi)-shū* 'face-book' in the Chinese-speaking world. Actually, according to the data in the China Patent Trademark Office, the company tried to register these trademarks too. As for *Ralph Lauren* and *Hugo Boss*,<sup>38</sup> it seems to be quite common among fashion brands, or other well-known brands, to use their original name. Even when they have chosen a phonetic adaptation, some brands decide to retain their original names in their websites and advertising, as in the case of *Burberry*, *Prada* and *BMW*, possibly because they have already become popular as such among Chinese consumers. As for *Prada*, judging from the data available on the database of the China Patent Trademark Office and Searchtmr, the company has not renewed the registration of the trademark 普拉达 *pǔlādá* (phonetic adaptation). The tendency to use the original name in visual communication seems to be an effort towards standardization of an international brand name.

Thus, it seems that, perhaps unsurprisingly, well-known global brands show a stronger tendency to retain their original name or to adopt a phonetic adaptation, possibly playing on their fame and good reputation. The single brand strategy enables companies to keep their values and image globally.

## 5.9 Regional Variation in Brand Names

A further difficulty which companies have to face in the process of adapting their brand names to the Chinese market has to do with the great linguistic and cultural differences that exist also within the Chinese-speaking world, making it very difficult to create a universal Chinese name.

In section 5, we listed five options for introducing a brand name to the East- and Southeast Asian market. Apart from those, two more possibilities come into play when entering Chinese-speaking markets, namely (Jaw, Wang, Hsu 2011, p. 648):

1. Use in Mainland China a Chinese brand name first adopted in Taiwan or Hong Kong, as e.g. 摩托罗拉 *mótuōluólā* (*Motorola*) or 麦当劳 *mài-dāng-láo* (*McDonald's*).
2. Use different Chinese brand names for different linguistic regions (see the examples below).

<sup>38</sup> Actually, *Hugo Boss* has some phonetic adaptations registered for different classes of products, as e.g. 雨果博斯 *yǔguǒ Bósī*, 雨果舶式 *yǔguǒ Bóshì* (see China Patent Trademark Office; Searchtmr).



From a linguistic point of view, in China there are at least seven language groups (Mandarin, Yue/Cantonese, Wu, Hakka, Min, Gan, Xiang), each of which comprises a number of dialects. Even though they all share a common written language (with the partial exception of Cantonese), there are significant differences among different dialects, and very often even dialects belonging to the same group are not mutually intelligible. Although the Chinese government strongly promotes the use of 普通话 *Pǔtōnghuà* 'common language', commonly known as Mandarin Chinese, local linguistic preferences and customs still prevail (Alon, Littrell, Chan 2009). Since Chinese characters can be pronounced differently in different dialects,<sup>39</sup> companies should find a name which sounds pleasant and easy to pronounce in all major language markets for the brand, avoiding characters whose pronunciation in a given dialect has homonyms with a negative meaning (Alon, Littrell, Chan 2009).

As highlighted by Schmitt and Pan (1994), it is possible, for example, that name awareness and positive associations may be established with a Cantonese name in Southern China but, as the company expands to Northern China, one finds out that the name has negative associations in Mandarin. This adds to the complexity of the whole process of branding adaptation. For example, when the brand *Johnson&Johnson* entered the Hong Kong market, it was rendered as 莊生 *zhuāngshēng* 'an official or lord during feudal times'. This association with upper-class membership was seen as inappropriate in the PRC, thus the name was later changed into 強生 *qiángshēng* 'strong-life' (see Schmitt, Pan 1994). This name combines a positive meaning (strong life) with a pronunciation which partly recalls the sound of the original word. In Taiwan yet another name was chosen, i.e. 嬌生 *jiāoshēng* 'delicate/lovely-life', meaning also 'spoiled child'. This could reflect a difference in parents' expectations towards children: because of the one-child policy, parents in the PRC hope to have a strong child, not a lovable, tender and delicate child', and neither a spoiled one (Fan 2005). Another example of brand differentiation due to cultural factors is that of the brand *Lux*, which in mainland China has been rendered as 力士 *lìshì* 'strong man', while in Taiwan as 麗仕 *lìshì* 'beautiful official'. The two names are homophonous, but the meanings conveyed by the characters forming the names are completely different. The mainland China name 'strong man' is in contrast with the image of a young lady portrayed on the packaging; however, as Fan (2005) highlights, the Taiwanese name, based on the attribute of beauty, was not acceptable during the era of forceful Communist doctrines, as it could be seen as a form of capitalistic

39 Take for example the character 火: in Mandarin it is pronounced as *huǒ*, in Southern Min (Xiamen) as *he*<sup>53</sup>, in Eastern Min (Fuzhou) as *huoi*<sup>33</sup>, in Gan (Nanchang) as *fo*<sup>213</sup>, in Xiang (Changsha) as *xo*<sup>41</sup>, in Hakka (Meixian) as *fo*<sup>31</sup>, in Yue (Cantonese, Canton) as *fo*<sup>35</sup>, in Wu (Shanghai) as *φu*<sup>55</sup>.

degeneration (Jaw, Wang, Hsu 2011). In other cases, differences arise from different consumer attitudes. For example, L'Oréal Paris had a common name in all the Chinese-speaking markets, i.e. 欧莱雅 *ōu-lái-yǎ* 'Europe-radish-elegant', but later in Taiwan the name was replaced by 巴黎莱雅 *bālí lái-yǎ* 'Paris radish-elegant', forming a hybrid (translation + phonetic adaptation), because surveys conducted by the company showed that consumers perceived a low correlation between the Chinese name and L'Oréal Paris. In order to enhance brand recognition and highlight the uniqueness of the Parisian brand, thus, the name was changed (Jaw, Wang, Hsu 2011).

Sometimes the differences in brand naming among different regions seem to be due to phonological reasons: for example, in the Hong Kong market, where Cantonese is still the main language despite the efforts to promote Mandarin, a different name from that used in the PRC may be chosen, just to make it sound closer to the original name in Cantonese.

Examples of different Chinese translations in the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan are shown below:<sup>40</sup>

Table 1. Examples of different Chinese translations in the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan

Brand name	PRC	Hong Kong	Taiwan
<b>Mercedes Benz</b>	奔驰 <i>bēnchí</i> 'run quickly'	平治 <i>píngzhì</i> 'put in order' (Cantonese: <i>peng4zi6</i> )	賓士 <i>bīnshì</i> 'guests' (TSM: <i>pínsū</i> )
<b>Voltaren</b>	扶他林 <i>fú-tā-lín</i> 'support-him-forest'	服他靈 <i>fú-tā-líng</i> 'take(medicine)-he-spirit/clever/effective' (Cantonese: <i>fuk6-taa1-leng4</i> )	服他寧 <i>fú-tā-níng</i> 'take(medicine)-he-peaceful/tranquil' (TSM: <i>hòk-thann-líng</i> )
<b>Heineken</b>	喜力 <i>xǐ-lì</i> 'happy-power'	喜力 <i>xǐ-lì</i> 'happy-power' (Cantonese: <i>hei2lik6</i> )	海尼根 <i>hǎi-ní-gēn</i> 'sea-nun-root' (TSM: <i>hái-ní-kin/kun</i> )

As for *Mercedes Benz*, the name adopted in the PRC is a phonetic-semantic adaptation: it recalls the pronunciation of the original name (*Benz*), and at the same time it suggests that these cars are very fast. The Hong Kong version of the name apparently is not as felicitous as that of the PRC: the pronunciation, indeed, is not as close to that of the original name; furthermore, from the semantic point of view, it makes use of characters without any relevant meaning. However, the Cantonese pronunciation of the characters 平治, i.e. *peng4zi6*, is an even better rendering of *Benz* than

40 We provide the Cantonese transcription for the Hong Kong version of the name and the Taiwanese Southern Min (abbreviated in TSM; the most widely spoken dialect in Taiwan) transcription for the Taiwanese version of the name. We use *Jyutping* for Cantonese, while for Taiwan Southern Min we use the *Taiwanese Romanization System* (*Tâi-lô Phing-im*).

奔驰 *bēnchí*. Thus, this name can be regarded as a phonetic adaptation based on Cantonese, rather than Mandarin. The Taiwanese version of the name is a phonetic adaptation without relevant meaning as well.

As to *Voltaren* (an anti-inflammatory drug), the Chinese name used in the PRC is a pure phonetic adaptation. In Hong Kong a different name was chosen: the phonetic adaptation 服他靈 *fú-tā-líng* works well both in Mandarin (*fú-tā-líng*) and in Cantonese (*fuk6-taa1-leng4*). Moreover, the meaning of the characters chosen are related to the product: the character 服 *fú* means 'to take a medicine' and the character 靈 *líng* suggests that the drug is effective. In Taiwan yet another name was chosen, 服他寧 *fú-tā-níng* 'take(medicine)-he-peaceful', in which only the last character differs from the Hong Kong version of the name: it can be considered as a phonetic-semantic adaptation, since the character 服 *fú*, as we have just said, means 'to take a medicine' and the last character conveys a positive meaning.

Finally, *Heineken* has the same name both in the PRC and in Hong Kong. The name appears to be a phonetic-semantic adaptation based on Cantonese, as 喜力 *hei2lik6* is much closer to *Heineken* than *xǐ-lì*; moreover, the characters chosen have a very positive meaning. In contrast, in Taiwan a pure phonetic adaptation was chosen, which works fine both in Mandarin and in Taiwan Southern Min.

## 6 Discussion

In this paper we have tried to provide a detailed and comprehensive overview of linguistic aspects relevant for Chinese brand naming practices, supported by statistics on the translation strategies adopted by foreign firms to adapt their brand names to Chinese.

This paper, thus, also provides suggestions for those firms who want to enter the Chinese market and wish to understand the nuances of Chinese language that are relevant to brand naming practices, which are essential in order to cross language barriers and to choose an appropriate brand naming strategy.

As already shown in previous research, this study has highlighted that linguistic and cultural differences make it difficult for firms to adopt a one-brand name strategy, standardizing brand names globally; firms display a strong tendency to localize their brand names when expanding to the Chinese market. The preferred strategy seems to be phonetic adaptation without relevant meaning; this strategy makes the foreign name pronounceable and, at the same time, has the advantage to recall (even though approximately) the original brand name, in the attempt to make the brand name, sounding the same all around the world. The phonetic shape of the name, together with the choice of 'neutral' characters forming a meaningless combination, characterizes the name as foreign and,

thus, this strategy has the advantage to play on the positive associations connected to Western brands. However, the lack of product-related meaning or of characters with an auspicious meaning can make the name less attractive to some Chinese consumers.

We suggest that literal translation, aimed at preserving the meaning of the brand name rather than at maintaining the sound, is used only when it is possible to retain the cultural meaning of the original name or, in any case, when the meaning of the original name is compatible with Chinese social values, beliefs and attitudes. Since this is very difficult to achieve, companies tend to avoid this strategy: among the best global brands 2014, only 8 chose this strategy. Sometimes a compromise is made by partially adapting the translation, resulting in translations that are not plainly literal.

The most effective strategy seems to be one which takes into account both meaning and pronunciation (phonetic-semantic adaptation), since it is able to recall the sound of the original brand name and, at the same time, to provide a positive connotation. This kind of adaptation is closer to Chinese brand names, which are generally more meaningful than, e.g., English ones and often contain reference to the benefits of the product or have positive connotations; however it seems not to be easy to achieve and it is not as widely used as expected (only 20 out of 99 in our sample).

Even though a one-brand strategy is not recommended, this can work for well-known brand names, as e.g. luxury goods: retaining the original name has the advantage to play on their good reputation and fame, to stress the positive values associated to them and to convey a consistent image. Even though they are not easy to pronounce, the target consumers recognize the superior quality associated to the brand. In any case, we suggest that it is important to consider the target consumer and the possible impact that the non-translated name has on him. Furthermore, the one-brand strategy works better for short and catchy names and it is not recommended for long names or names which may be difficult to pronounce for Chinese native speakers.

As for Japanese and Korean firms, the graphic loan strategy seems to be the most convenient to adopt: it has the advantage of maintaining the original name, while associating to it the Chinese pronunciation. The 10 Japanese and Korean firms in the best global brand names 2014 all adopted the graphic loan, except from *Sony* and *Canon*, which however are written in *katakana* (see 5.8 and fn. 35). The common scripts make very convenient to retain the original brand name, at least visually.

Finally, we have stressed the fact that it is not always easy to find an adapted name which works in all the Chinese language markets due to cultural and linguistic differences within the Chinese-speaking world. Thus, firms should carefully take into account regional differences and find a name easy to pronounce in all major language markets, avoiding characters which sound like homonyms with a negative meaning in a given dialect.

## 7 Concluding Remarks

In this paper we tried to offer a general overview of the linguistic strategies adopted in Chinese brand naming creation. As to original Chinese brand names, they are mostly close to the prototypical word, i.e. disyllabic and bimorphemic; the meaning of the constituent parts usually suggest positive associations and/or refer somehow to the benefits associated with the product itself or to its potential consumers. Names which reinterpret the Chinese tradition, i.e. those based on a modified *chéngyǔ*, can also be found.

We showed how the typological distance between the languages of Europe and Sinitic languages, the different writing systems, as well as significant cultural differences, often 'force' Western companies that want to enter the Chinese market to adapt their brand names to various degrees. Moreover, linguistic and cultural differences matter even within the Chinese-speaking world, and thus in some cases different brand names are chosen for different sub-areas (here we considered Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan).

Generally speaking, it appears that meaning is more important than faithfulness in Chinese brand naming: a nice sounding name with a positive meaning seems to be a better translation than an accurate phonetic rendering of the original name, as meaningless sequences of characters are more difficult to memorize. However, even though a translation that combines a suitable meaning with a good approximation of the foreign brand name is obviously a plus, as in the case of *Coca-Cola*, this is not easily accomplished, and indeed just less than a quarter of the top 100 global brand names we analysed adopted this translation strategy (see also the results in Feschterin et al. 2012). Phonetic adaptation is the most frequent choice for brand name translation in our sample, and meaningless foreign-sounding names are indeed a hint for foreign product identification, often associated with high quality, as we have seen. Interestingly, some Chinese brand names are made to sound foreign, often using the Latin alphabet together with a Chinese 'translation', following the same principles as those used in the translation of real foreign brand names.

A special case is that of brand names based on acronyms/initialisms. Acronyms/initialisms are typically used by Chinese companies which market their products abroad, where an alphabetic name can be easily understood, or anyway try to present themselves as 'international'; as a matter of fact, many foreign brand names which are not adapted for the Chinese market are also acronyms/initialisms, thus attesting to the 'globalness' of such names.

In sum, a good understanding of the Chinese linguistic and cultural background is essential in order to understand brand naming in the Chinese-speaking world and to create suitable (and effective) Chinese

versions of foreign brand names. Given the great importance attached to names by Chinese consumers and the consequent impact of names on brand perception, companies should be very careful in choosing a name for the Chinese market.

Despite the fact that this overview is relevant for marketing studies, this paper is above all interesting from a strictly linguistic perspective, since it highlights the word formation strategies employed in brand naming in Chinese, confirming the close link between socio-cultural transformations and lexical change.

## Appendix

### The Top 100 Global Brands According to the *Interbrand 2014* Classification and Their Chinese Version

Brand	Chinese version	Translation strategy
Apple	苹果 <i>píngguǒ</i> 'apple'	Translation
Google	谷歌 <i>gǔ-gē</i> 'valley-song'	Phonetic adaptation
Coca-Cola	可口可乐 <i>kěkǒu-kélè</i> 'tasty-enjoyable'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
IBM	IBM	Original name
Microsoft	微软 <i>wéi-ruǎn</i> 'micro-soft'	Translation
GE	GE	Original name
Samsung	三星 <i>sān-xīng</i> 'three-star'	Graphic loan
Toyota	丰田 <i>fēngtián</i>	Graphic loan
McDonald's	麦当劳 <i>mài-dāng-láo</i> 'wheat-undertake-work'	Phonetic adaptation
Mercedes Benz	奔驰 <i>bēnchí</i> 'run quickly'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
BMW	宝马 <i>bǎo-mǎ</i> 'treasure-horse'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
Intel	英特尔 <i>yīng-tè-ěr</i> 'brave-special-you'	Phonetic adaptation
Disney	迪士尼 <i>dí-shì-ní</i> 'enlighten-scholar-nun'	Phonetic adaptation
Cisco	思科 <i>sī-kē</i> 'think-discipline'	Phonetic adaptation
Amazon	亚马逊 <i>yà-mǎ-xùn</i> 'Asia-horse-abdicate'	Phonetic adaptation
Oracle	甲骨文 <i>jiǎgǔwén</i> 'oracle-bone inscriptions'	Translation
HP	惠普 <i>huì-pǔ</i> 'benefit-general'	Phonetic adaptation
Gillette	吉列 <i>jí-liè</i> 'lucky-arrange'	Phonetic adaptation
Louis Vuitton	路易威登 <i>lù-yì-wēi-dēng</i> 'road-easy-power-ascend'	Phonetic adaptation
Honda	本田 <i>běntián</i>	Graphic loan
H&M	H&M	Original name
Nike	耐克 <i>nài-kè</i> 'endure-overcome'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
American Express	美国运通 <i>Měiguó yùn-tōng</i> 'America transport-go. through'	Translation
Pepsi	百事 <i>bǎi-shì</i> 'hundred-thing'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
SAP	SAP	Original name
Ikea	宜家 <i>yí-jiā</i> 'suited-home/family, suited to bringing harmony to a family'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
UPS	UPS	Original name
Ebay	Ebay	Original name
Facebook	Facebook	Original name
Pampers	帮宝适 <i>bāng-bǎo-shì</i> 'help-baby-suitable'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation

Brand	Chinese version	Translation strategy
Volkswagen	大众汽车 <i>dàzhòng qìchē</i> 'people motor.vehicle'	Translation
Kellogg's	家乐氏 <i>jiā-lè-shì</i> 'home-happy-clan/family'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
HSBC	汇丰 <i>huì-fēng</i> 'gather-abundance'	Original name
Budweiser	百威 <i>bǎi-wēi</i> 'hundred-power'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
J.P. Morgan	摩根 <i>mó-gēn</i> 'rub-root'	Phonetic adaptation
Zara	Zara	Original name
Canon	佳能 <i>jiā-néng</i> 'beautiful-ability'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
Nescafé	雀巢咖啡 <i>què-cháo kāfēi</i> 'sparrow-nest coffee'	Translation
Ford	福特 <i>fú-tè</i> 'good.fortune-special'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
Hyundai	现代 <i>xiàndài</i> 'modern'	Graphic loan
Gucci	古驰 <i>gǔ-chí</i> 'ancient-speed'	Phonetic adaptation
Philips	飞利浦 <i>fēi-lì-pǔ</i> 'fly-benefit-riverside'	Phonetic adaptation
L'Oréal	欧莱雅 <i>ōu-lái-yǎ</i> 'Europe-radish-elegant'	Phonetic adaptation
Accenture	埃森哲 <i>āi-sēn-zhé</i> 'dust-forest-wise'	Phonetic adaptation
Audi	奥迪 <i>ào-dí</i> 'profound-enlighten'	Phonetic adaptation
Hermes	爱马仕 <i>ài-mǎ-shì</i> 'love-horse-official'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
Goldman Sachs	高盛 <i>gāo-shèng</i> 'high-prosperous'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
Citi	花旗 <i>huāqí</i> 'United States'	Original creation
Siemens	西门子 <i>xī-mén-zǐ</i> 'West-door-son'	Phonetic adaptation
Colgate	高露洁 <i>gāo-lù-jie</i> 'high-dew-clean'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
Danone	达能 <i>dá-néng</i> 'reach/arrive-ability/energy'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
Sony	索尼 <i>suǒ-ní</i> 'rope-nun'	Phonetic adaptation
AXA	安盛 <i>ān-shèng</i> 'peaceful-flourishing'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
Nestlé	雀巢 <i>què-cháo</i> 'sparrow-nest'	Translation
Allianz	安联 <i>ān-lián</i> 'peaceful-unite'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
Nissan	日产 <i>rì-chǎn</i> 'Japan-produce/product'	Graphic loan
Thomson Reuters	汤森路透 <i>tāng-sēn-lù-tòu</i> 'soup-forest-road-penetrate'	Phonetic adaptation
Cartier	卡地亚 <i>kǎ-dì-yà</i> 'card-earth-Asia'	Phonetic adaptation
Adidas	阿迪达斯 <i>ā-dí-dá-sī</i> 'PREF-enlighten-reach-this'	Phonetic adaptation
Porsche	保时捷 <i>bǎo-shí-jie</i> 'guarantee-time-fast'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
Caterpillar	卡特彼勒 <i>kǎ-tè-bǐ-lè</i> 'card-special-that-bridle'	Phonetic adaptation



Brand	Chinese version	Translation strategy
Xerox	施乐 <i>shī-lè</i> 'bestow-joy'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
Morgan Stanley	摩根士丹 <i>mó-gēn-shì-dān</i> 'rub-root-scholar-red'	Phonetic adaptation
Panasonic (Matsushita)	松下 <i>sōngxià</i>	Graphic loan
Shell	壳牌 <i>ké-pái</i> 'shell-brand'	Hybrid
3M	3M	Original name
Discovery	探索 <i>tàn-suǒ</i> 'explore, explorations'	Translation
KFC	肯德基 <i>kě-n dé-jī</i> 'be.willing-virtue-foundation'	Phonetic adaptation
Visa	Visa	Original name
Prada	普拉达 <i>pǔ-lā-dá</i> 'common-pull-reach'	Phonetic adaptation
Tiffany & co.	蒂芙尼 <i>dī-fú-ní</i> 'stem.of.fruit-lotus-nun'	Phonetic adaptation
Sprite	雪碧 <i>xuě-bì</i> 'snow-jade.green'	Original creation
Burberry	博柏利 <i>bó-bǎi-lì</i> 'abundant-cypress-benefit'	Phonetic adaptation
Kia	起亚 <i>qǐ-yà</i> 'arise-Asia'	Graphic loan
Santander	桑坦德银行 <i>sāng-tǎn-dé yínháng</i> 'mulberry-flat-virtue bank'	Hybrid
Starbucks	星巴克 <i>xīng-bā-kè</i> 'star-hope.for-overcome/gram'	Hybrid
Adobe	Adobe	Original name
Johnson&Johnson	强生 <i>qiáng-shēng</i> 'strong-life'	Phonetic-semantic adaptation
John Deere	约翰迪尔 <i>yuē-hàn-dí-ěr</i> 'approximately-writing.brush-enlighten-you'	Phonetic adaptation
MTV	MTV	Original name
DHL	DHL	Original name
Chevrolet	雪佛兰 <i>xuě-fó-lán</i> 'snow-Buddha-orchid'	Phonetic adaptation
Ralph Lauren	Ralph Lauren	Original name
Duracell	金霸王 <i>jīn-bà-wáng</i> 'gold-overlord'	Original creation
Jack Daniel's	杰克丹尼 <i>jié-kè-dān-ní</i> 'hero-overcome-red-nun'	Phonetic adaptation
Johnnie Walker	尊尼获加 <i>zūn-ní-huò-jīā</i> 'honor-nun-obtain-add'	Phonetic adaptation
Harley-Davidson	哈雷戴维森 <i>hā-léi-dài-wéi-sēn</i> 'exhale-thunder-wear-preserve-forest'	Phonetic adaptation
Mastercard	万事达卡 <i>wànshì-dá-kǎ</i> 'everything-reach/arrive-card'	Hybrid
Kleenex	舒洁 <i>shū-jié</i> 'relax/comfortable-clean'	Original creation
Smirnoff	斯米诺 <i>sī-mǐ-nuò</i> 'this-rice-promise'	Phonetic adaptation
Land Rover	路虎 <i>lù-hú</i> 'road-tiger'	Original creation
FedEx	FedEx	Original name
Corona Extra	科罗娜特级 <i>kē-luó-nà tè-jí</i> 'discipline-net-graceful special-grade'	Hybrid
Huawei	华为 <i>huá-wéi</i> 'China-be'	Chinese name
Heineken	喜力 <i>xǐ-lì</i> 'happy-power' (Cantonese: <i>hei2lik6</i> )	Phonetic adaptation (from Cantonese)

Brand	Chinese version	Translation strategy
Pizza Hut	必胜客 <i>bì-shèng-kè</i> 'certainly-win-guest'	Original creation
Hugo Boss	Hugo Boss	Original name
Nokia	诺基亚 <i>nuò-jī-yà</i> 'promise-foundation-Asia'	Phonetic adaptation
GAP	GAP	Original name
Nintendo	任天堂 <i>rén-tiāntáng</i> 'leave.everything.to-heaven'	Graphic loan

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