

Il volume intende proporre una riflessione sullo stato delle ricerche riguardanti il nome commerciale inteso nella sua accezione più ampia di oggetto multiforme costituito da un segno denominativo creato ad hoc (il nome della marca o il nome del prodotto) che si accompagna ad elementi più specificamente figurativi (il logo e il simbolo). Ancora oggi lo statuto linguistico del nome commerciale rappresenta, in effetti, un argomento e un tema di dibattito vivo e aperto, proprio in virtù del suo continuo oscillare tra nome comune e nome proprio, un movimento, questo, che si accompagna a un potenziale di senso e a un patrimonio culturale da interpretare e trasmettere che sono insiti nella stessa designazione. Nello specifico gli articoli raccolti nel presente volume indagano l'aspetto denominativo di questa particolare categoria di nomi propri con l'obiettivo di evidenziarne le caratteristiche linguistico-pragmatiche in funzione delle specificità inerenti l'ambito specialistico e il contesto professionale. I contributi sono stati presentati in occasione del XXVII Convegno Internazionale dell'Associazione Italiana per la Terminologia-Ass.I.Term dal titolo *Il Nome del prodotto. Marchi, Termini e Professioni*, promosso dall'Osservatorio di Terminologia e Politiche Linguistiche (OTPL) e dal Dipartimento di Scienze Linguistiche e Letterature Straniere dall'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano, dall'Istituto per le Tecnologie della Costruzione del Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (ITC-CNR) -, tenutosi a Milano nei giorni 6 e 7 aprile 2017. La manifestazione ha permesso di costruire uno spazio di dialogo prestigioso in cui professionalità differenti come esperti del brand naming e rappresentanti di realtà commerciali e industriali italiane, studiosi di chiara fama e giovani ricercatori.

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## Il Nome del Prodotto. Marchi, Termini e Professioni

*a cura di*  
*Assunta Caruso*  
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## SPORTSWEAR BRAND NAMES ADAPTATION FROM ALPHABETIC LANGUAGES INTO MODERN STANDARD MANDARIN AND VICE VERSA

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**Abstract** – The augmentation of consumers and the development of the sports industry directly depends on the correct and successful coinage and translation of the sports products brands from foreign languages into Modern Standard Mandarin (MSM) and vice versa. This paper suggests a brief look at foreign and Chinese domestic sportswear brand names from a linguistic and cultural viewpoint. Foreign trademarks' adaptation process in MSM is formed by several different categories, phonemic loans being the most numerous one. Adaptations of this type can be faithful or deviant, and often convey not only phonemic similarities, but also semantic associations. Semantic and graphic analysis of Chinese domestic top brand names shows that the principle of the auspicious strokes numbers is accurately followed. When introduce their names written in Latin letters on international arena, Chinese brands usually employ phonological transcription of their original names, which is either faithful or deviant mapping of *pīnyīn*. In order to make successful naming decisions, it is important to understand how the recipient language interprets explicit and implicit linguistic information encoded in the different donor writing system. To avoid any possible gaffes in adaptation of names, acronyms or slogans, one must be familiar with cultural traditions, superstitions, symbolism, and frequent ambiguity of Chinese characters.

**Keywords:** branding; brand name; phonological adaptation; logographic writing; numerology.

名不正，則言不順；言不順，則事不成  
*Míng bù zhèng, zé yán bù shùn; yán bù shùn, zé shì bù chéng*  
“If names are not rectified, what is said will not sound reasonable;  
If what is said does not sound reasonable, efforts cannot culminate in success”  
(*Lúnyǔ* 論語, “Zǐlù” 子路: 194).



## 1. Introduction

According to the World Bank national accounts data, China's GDP increased by 6.7% in 2016 on a yearly basis.<sup>1</sup> The expenditure on sportswear and outdoor also increased in line, which, as Hu (2014, p. 11) points out, "mainly results from two stimulating factors, namely the high growth of disposable income and a substantial improvement in the living standards." The acceleration of economic growth will additionally stimulate clothing consumption and undoubtedly expand the prospects of China's sportswear market.

China's growth as a sporting superpower has been accompanied by a number of sports events held during the past decade, such as 2008 Běijīng Olympic Games, 2010 Asian Games in Guǎngzhōu, 2011 Universiade in Shēnzhèn and 2014 Youth Olympic Games in Nánjīng. The Formula One Chinese Grand Prix is held in Shànghǎi every year since 2004. Furthermore, currently China is the candidate for the 2022 Winter Olympics, 2019 FIBA World Cup, and will most probably bid for the 2026 or 2030 FIFA World Cup.<sup>2</sup> To some degree all these events stimulate the growth of sportswear market, where domestic brands intensely compete with international brands.

The great variety of brands, brand names, and trademarks that surround everyday existence of Chinese customers "poses practical questions not only in their daily decision-making, but also in language and mental processing/understanding of brands" (Mačura 2009, p. 58). The augmentation of consumers and the development of the sports industry directly depends on the correct and successful coinage and translation of the sports products brands from foreign languages into Modern Standard Mandarin<sup>3</sup> (MSM) and vice versa. This paper suggests a brief look at foreign and Chinese domestic sportswear brand names from a linguistic and cultural viewpoint.

## 2. Sportswear brand names' borrowings in MSM

China's pursuit of globalisation contributes to the increasing impact of English as the global lingua franca on contemporary Chinese language. This cross-linguistic interference is particularly noticeable in branding, as many borrowings (or loanwords) in MSM remain their original writing in Latin letters, phenomenon known as 'lettered words' (字母词 *zì mǔ cí*) (see Liu 2002, Riha 2010). However, despite this wide spread phenomenon, the most

<sup>1</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/country/china> (accessed 02.03.2017).

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.ytsports.cn/news-756.html> (accessed 23.12.2016).

<sup>3</sup> Modern Standard Mandarin refers to contemporary standard Chinese, i.e. from the 20th century onwards.

numerous category in trademarks' adaptation process in Chinese is formed by borrowings via transliteration, also known as 'phonemic loans' (音译词 *yīnyìcí*). Other categories include calques (意译词 *yìyìcí*), hybrids (混合词 *hùnhécí*) and graphic loans (借形词 *jièxíngcí*).

## 2.1. Peculiarities of Chinese writing system

The standard way to consider the connection between writing system and language is as follows: each system has a basic writing unit, which is mapped onto one unit of the language system. Alphabetic systems such as English or Italian are based on the association of phonemes with graphic units, also known as grapheme-phoneme mapping; alphabetic words have a linear structure. In contrast, the Chinese writing system is non-phoneme based, and called logosyllabic, when each character corresponds to one syllable and in most cases to one morpheme. In other words, it is based on the association of the meaningful morphemes with graphic units. Chinese speakers therefore do not rely on grapheme-phoneme conversion in reading development. Moreover, Chinese characters have a nonlinear configuration, but possess a number of strokes that are packed into a square-shaped spatial figure, so that the character forms a certain mental image that is perceived as a whole. This means that Chinese character presents pictorial characteristics and involves other brain areas in recognition tasks (more on this, see Hsiao and Cottrell 2009).

Modern English has about 2.756 *regularly* used distinct CVC syllables (Barker 2008), where C is a consonant, V is a vowel. Chinese lost over 50% of its syllables in the past 1,500 years, and MSM employs a very small inventory of 1,334 syllables (including tonal distinctions),<sup>4</sup> 200 of which are rarely used and probably on the way out (Duanmu 2008, p. 110). The majority of Chinese words are monosyllabic, with the maximal structure either CGVV or CGVC, where C is a consonant, G a glide, and VV either a long vowel or a diphthong (Duanmu 2008, p.72).

As regards the amount of Chinese characters, the latest edition of one of the most comprehensive contemporary Chinese character dictionaries, 汉语大字典 *Hànyǔ Dà Zìdiǎn* (lit. *Great Compendium of Chinese Characters*), published in 2010, contains 60,370 head entries (Wáng 2010).

According to Zhang et al. (2006, p. 273), 80% of the monosyllables from the Modern Chinese Dictionary correspond to more than one meaning,

<sup>4</sup> Chinese is a tonal language, uses four different suprasegmental tones to differentiate syllables with different meanings.



and 55% correspond to 5 or more homophones. In addition, some syllables represent a lot more morphemes than others do.<sup>5</sup>

“Given the large number of homophonous morphemes, many of which are independent words, it is not hard to imagine situations in which ambiguity arises” (Duanmu 1999, p. 10), which makes phonemic loans (音译词 *yīnyìcí*, lit. ‘sound-transliteration-word’) an uneasy task. “Mandarin speakers are not accustomed to multisyllabic phonemic loans, in which individual syllables are not indicative of the meaning of the whole word” (Miao 2005, p. 39). Adequate transliteration has undoubtedly a decisive impact on the brand acceptance by Chinese consumers.

## 2.2. Strategies and phoneme substitution patterns

In order to accommodate foreign syllable structures, the loanword phonology of MSM demonstrates a great variability in strategies and in phoneme substitution patterns. Usually, a foreign phoneme is mapped to its phonologically/phonetically closest correspondent in Mandarin. These mappings will be referred to as the *faithful* outputs (the term suggested by Miao 2005, p. 2).

However, phoneme mapping from a donor language to MSM often varies, so that the same foreign sound can have alternative substitutes in Chinese. Sometimes a chosen substitute may differ from the expected faithful match. These substitutes will be referred to as the *deviant* outputs (after Miao 2005, p. 2).

### (1) Faithful mapping

English	<i>Pīnyīn</i> 拼音 <sup>6</sup>	IPA	MSM	Gloss
a) Puma	<i>biāo-mǎ</i>	/pjəu-ma/	彪马	tiger.like-horse
b) Patagonia	<i>bā-tǎ-gē-ní-yà</i>	/pa-t <sup>h</sup> a-kɤ-ni-ia/	巴塔哥尼亚	python-tower-elder.brother-peaceful-Asia
c) Columbia	<i>gē-lún-bǐ-yà</i>	/kɤ-luən-pi-ia/	哥伦比亚	elder.brother-human.relations-be.near.to-Asia
d) Lacoste	<i>lā-kē-sī-tè</i>	/la-k <sup>h</sup> ɤ-sz-t <sup>h</sup> ɤ/	拉科斯特	to.pull-science-this-unique
e) Adidas	<i>ā-dí-dá-sī</i>	/a-ti-ta-sz/	阿迪达斯	mountain-to.follow-

<sup>5</sup> As Duanmu (1999, p. 10) notices, “[y<sup>4</sup>i] (/yi/ with the fourth tone) represents 63 common morphemes or about 90 morphemes if rare words are included”.

<sup>6</sup> *Hànyǔ pīnyīn* 汉语拼音 (‘Chinese spelling’) Romanization is the official spelling system for MSM in the People’s Republic of China, introduced in 1958.

f) Nike	<i>nài-kè</i>	/nai-k <sup>h</sup> ʎ/	耐克	to.reach–this endure– overcome
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These examples show variable adaptations of English plosives and nasal codas. In (1a) and (1b), English “p” in word-initial position is adapted into MSM as a voiceless bilabial stop /p/ (‘Puma’ > *biāo-mǎ* /pjɑu-ma/, ‘Patagonia’ > *bā-tǎ-gē-ní-yà* /pa-t<sup>h</sup>a-kʎ-ni-ia/). In addition, the example (1a) shows a term whose Chinese form conveys simultaneously phonemic similarity and semantic associations with the source form (‘Puma’ > *biāo-mǎ* /pjɑu-ma/ ‘tiger.like–horse’).

In (1e), English “d” is replaced by Mandarin voiceless alveolar stop /t/ (‘Adidas’ > *ā-dí-dá-sī* /a-ti-ta-sz/). In the examples (1b) and (1c), English “g” and “k” is replaced by a voiceless velar stop /k/, and the vowels “o” in coda are substituted by a mid central /ə/ (‘Patagonia’ > *bā-tǎ-gē-ní-yà* /pa-t<sup>h</sup>a-kʎ-ni-ia/, ‘Columbia’ > *gē-lún-bǐ-yà* /kʎ-luən-pi-ia/).

It might seem that foreign “co-” and “go-” have the same sound to Chinese speakers. However, when French “co-” in case of ‘Lacoste’ (1d) is not in the word’s initial position, and forms the CVCC syllable (“cost”), where the initial consonant is adapted into MSM as an aspirated velar stop /k<sup>h</sup>/ (cfr. (1f) ‘Nike’ > *nài-kè* /nai-k<sup>h</sup>ʎ/ and (2i) ‘Converse’ > *kuāng-wēi* /k<sup>h</sup>uɑŋ-uei/), combined with a mid central vowel /ə/, coda consonants are preserved through vowel epenthesis (‘Lacoste’ > *lā-kē-sī-tè* /la-k<sup>h</sup>ʎ-sz-t<sup>h</sup>ʎ/) (cfr. with (1e) above), and the last consonant becomes aspirated /t<sup>h</sup>/.

MSM no longer uses /m/ in syllable final position (Duanmu 2008, p. 110), the nasal /m/ in coda position is always replaced by alveolar /n/ or velar /ŋ/, because the structure of Chinese syllable requires only these two nasals in coda position, as in (1c) ‘Columbia’ > *gē-lún-bǐ-yà* /kʎ-luən-pi-ia/.

In the example (1f), the Chinese form conveys both phonemic similarity and semantic associations. The American sports brand Nike was named after the Greek goddess of victory, Ancient Greek Νίκη /nī:kɛ:/. Its Chinese equivalent is 尼刻 *Nikè* /ni-k<sup>h</sup>ʎ/ ‘nun–to.carve’, which preserves the original Ancient Greek pronunciation. However, the pronunciation of the sports brand Nike in English has been the great debate, until recently the Nike chairman officially confirmed that it should be pronounced as /naiki/, and not

/naik/ (“rhymes with ‘spiky’, not with ‘bike’”).<sup>7</sup>

Chinese translators respected the pronunciation difference between the name of the Greek goddess and the sporting brand, and did not automatically assign the same characters. The syllable “ni” needed to be changed into the syllable /nai/, available in Chinese inventory and encoded by 15 different characters (*Xiàndài hànyǔ cídiǎn* 2005, pp. 977-978). Moreover, the second syllable of the goddess name was not convincing either. Not related to sports, it was changed into a more suitable homophonous morpheme. All this resulted in 耐克 *nài-kè* /nai-k<sup>h</sup>ʌ/, “where the first character conveys the meaning of ‘sturdy and durable, proof against wear and tear’ (*jiāngù nàichuān* 堅固耐穿), while the second one recalls the expression ‘to beat enemy and be sure of victory’ (*kè dí bì shèng* 克敵必勝) (Liú 2009, p. 43), and does not coincide with the original name of the goddess of victory.

(2) Deviant adaptations of consonants

a) Kappa	<i>kǎ-pà</i>	/k <sup>h</sup> a-p <sup>h</sup> a/	卡帕	card-scarf
b) Lotto	<i>lè-tú</i>	/lɿ-t <sup>h</sup> u/	乐途	happy-journey
c) Reebok	<i>ruì-bù</i>	/zuei-pu/	锐步	vigorous-walk
d) Geox	<i>jiàn-lè-shì</i>	/tɕiɛn-lɿ-ʂʐ/	健乐士	healthy-happy- educated.person
e) Woolrich	<i>wò-ěr-lǐ-qí</i>	/wo-ə-li-tɕ <sup>h</sup> i/	沃尔里奇	fertile-2SG- inside-unusual
f) Timberland	<i>tiān-bó-lán</i>	/t <sup>h</sup> iɛn-po-lan/	添柏岚	to.add-cypress- mountain.haze
g) Under Armour	<i>ān-dé-ā-mò</i>	/an-tɿ-a-mo/	安德阿谟	safe-virtue- mountain-sword
h) Clarks	<i>qí-lè</i>	/tɕ <sup>h</sup> i-lɿ/	其乐	3PL-happy
i) Converse	<i>kuāng-wēi</i>	/k <sup>h</sup> uɑŋ-uei/	匡威	frame-prestige
j) Arena	<i>ā-ruì-nà</i>	/a-zuei-na/	阿瑞娜	mountain- auspicious- graceful
k) Rapido	<i>lì-pī-dào</i>	/li-p <sup>h</sup> i-tao/	雳霹道	thunderclap- thunderclap- way
l) Belstaff	<i>bèi-dá-fú</i>	/pəi-ta-fu/	贝达弗	shell-to.reach- correct

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/media/shortcuts/2014/jun/03/nike-how-to-pronounce-correctly-brand-names-audi-adidas-porsche-yvessaintlaurent> (accessed 23.02.2017).

As Duanmu (2008, p. 110) points out, MSM no longer uses [p, t, k] in syllable final position. This can be seen in the examples (2a), (2b), and (2c), where these plosives in coda are omitted. During adaptation, voiced plosives in initial position often become voiceless, as seen in (2a) and (2b).

In Geox (2d) (Italian brand name that was created from mixture between the Greek *geo* ‘earth’, and a letter-element ‘x’ symbolizing technology), an Italian onset “g-”, which is pronounced as a voiced post-alveolar affricate /dʒ/, is replaced by Mandarin voiceless palato-alveolar sibilant affricate “j” /tʃ/. In ‘Woolrich’ (2e), the English palato-alveolar affricate “ch” /tʃ<sup>h</sup>/ transforms into MSM voiceless palatal “q” /tʃ<sup>h</sup>/.

As regards the liquids [r] and [l], they are adopted into MSM either by deletion or liquid alternation. In MSM, the closest sounds to the English lateral [l] and approximant [r] are the two approximants, lateral /l/ and retroflex /ʁ/. While in the English pronunciation of brands, /r/ is realised as an alveolar approximant, in Mandarin /ʁ/ occurs as a retroflex approximant, where the tongue tip is curled up. In terms of place of articulation, the alveolar approximant and the liquid [l] have more in common than the retroflex approximant (Kenyon Johnson 2012, p.199). In an attempt to retain the original phonological features of foreign brands, Mandarin speakers opt for converting the English rhotic [r] (as in the case of (2e), ‘Woolrich’ > *wò-ěr-lǐ-qí* /wo-ʁ-li-tʃ<sup>h</sup>i/) and the Spanish trill /r/ (as in (2k), ‘Rapido’ > *lì-pī-dào* /li-p<sup>h</sup>i-tao/) into the dental [l] in syllable initial position. The Chinese form of the latter example, ‘Rapido’ > *lì-pī-dào* /li-p<sup>h</sup>i-tao/ 霹靂道 ‘thunderclap–thunderclap–way’, conveys not only phonemic similarity, but also semantic associations with the source form. The South Korean sportswear brand Rapido uses the Spanish word that means ‘fast, rapid’. In its Chinese adaptation, the first two constituents, in order to adapt to the phonemic similarity and embody the idea of ‘being as fast as a thunderclap’, form the metathesis of the disyllabic lexeme 霹靂 *pīlì* ‘clap of thunder, thunderbolt’ (BKRS).

When liquid occurs in medial or final position, it is usually deleted, as in (2f) (‘Timberland’ > *tiān-bó-lán* /t<sup>h</sup>iɛn-po-lan/), (2g) (‘Under Armour’ > *ān-dé-ā-mò* /an-tʂ-a-mo/), (2h) (‘Clarks’ > *qí-lè* /tʃ<sup>h</sup>i-lʂ/), (2i) (‘Converse’ > *kuāng-wēi* /k<sup>h</sup>uɑŋ-uei/) and in (2l) (‘Belstaff’ > *bèi-dá-fú* /pəi-ta-fu/). These examples also contain consonantal codas and consonantal clusters. For example, a monomorphemic syllable ‘Clarks’ (2h) contains two consonants

in the onset and three in the coda. It is important to remember that, “since the Mandarin syllable structure is more restricted than that of English, when English words are borrowed into Mandarin, the modification in syllable structure become necessary” (Guo 1999: 193). The resultant loan can therefore “conform to Mandarin phonotactics” (Miao 2005, p.46). Thus, as we see, coda consonants – [d] in ‘Timberland’ (2f) – and coda consonant clusters – [rks] and [rs] in ‘Clarks’ (2h) and in ‘Converse’ (2i) respectively – are deleted.

In addition, in the case of (2e) (‘Woolrich’ > *wò-ěr-lǐ-qí* /wo-ə-li-tɕ<sup>hi</sup>/), we see exactly that, although the pronunciation remains, the disyllabic brand is now trisyllabic due to liquids adaptation. The liquid [l] is realized as [er] /ə/. This adaptation occurs because Chinese codas allow for [ə] but not [l].

In the case of (2h) (‘Clarks’ > *qí-lè* /tɕ<sup>hi</sup>-lɿ/), the monosyllabic brand of the donor language is altered into disyllabic in the recipient language due to vowel epenthesis. English [k] is replaced neither by a voiceless stop /k/, nor by an aspirated velar stop /k<sup>h</sup>/, as could have been expected. Instead, it is adapted into MSM as a voiceless palatal “q” /tɕ<sup>h</sup>/. The character that embodies this syllable is nevertheless different from the homophonous – and, moreover, homotonous – morpheme 奇 *qí* /tɕ<sup>hi</sup>/ ‘unusual’ used in the adaptation of the ‘Woolrich’ (2e). The first syllable in the case of ‘Clarks’ is 其 *qí* /tɕ<sup>hi</sup>/, meaning ‘their, that, such’. The name of ‘Clarks’ in Chinese, 其乐 *qí-lè* /tɕ<sup>hi</sup>-lɿ/ ‘3PL–happy’, recalls associations with the set phrases 其乐无穷 *qí lè wú qióng* ‘boundless joy’ and 其乐融融 *qí lè róng róng* ‘joyous and harmonious’ (BKRS), becoming their truncated form.

In onset positions, the liquid [r] is adapted into MSM either by conversion into an [l], as we saw above, or is replaced by Mandarin voiced fricative [r] /z/. In addition, when followed by a long high vowel [i:] in the donor language, the syllables [re] and [ree] get altered into [rui] /zuei/, as in (2c) ‘Reebok’ > *rui-bù* /zuei-pu/ 锐步 ‘vigorous–walk’ and (2j) ‘Arena’ > *ā-rui-nà* /a-zuei-na/ 阿瑞娜 ‘mountain–auspicious–graceful’. In these examples we also see the two homophonous and homotonous morphemes, *rui* /zuei/ 锐 and *rui* /zuei/ 瑞. The former conveys semantic association with the source form, i.e. ‘light and vigorous walk in durable footwear’ (Lí 2009, p. 146), whereas the latter exudes feminine qualities. Moreover, the entire name, *ā-*



*ruì-nà* /a-zuei-na/ 阿瑞娜, attains the semantic effect of a female name, where the first and particularly the third morpheme (that contains the semantic determiner ‘woman’) are used in transliteration of foreign names.

(3) Adaptations of vowels

a) ASICS	<i>yà-sè-shì</i>	/ia-sʌ-ʂʐ/	亚瑟士	Asia–majestic– educated.person
b) Fila	<i>fēi-lè</i>	/fei-lʌ/	斐乐	elegant–happy
c) The North Face	<i>lè-sī-fēi-sī</i>	/lʌ-sz-fei-sz/	乐斯菲斯	happy–this– luxuriant–this
d) Gap	<i>gài-pú</i>	/kai-p <sup>h</sup> u/	盖璞	to.cover– unpolished.jade
e) Nautika	<i>nuò-dì-kǎ</i>	/nuo-ti-k <sup>h</sup> a/	诺帝卡	to.promise– emperor–card

“There is a high degree of variation in adapting English vowels into MSM as it is common to match the same English vowel with several different vowels” (Lin 2008, p.175). Foreign ‘i’ can be adapted to /i/, as in (1e) ‘Adidas’ > *ā-dí-dá-sī* /a-ti-ta-sz/ and (2k) ‘Rapido’ > *lì-pī-dào* /li-p<sup>h</sup>i-tao/, or the less faithful /sʌ/ as in (3a) ‘ASICS’ > *yà-sè-shì* /ia-sʌ-ʂʐ/, /ei/ as in (3b) ‘Fila’ > *fēi-lè* /fei-lʌ/, or through alteration into GV sequence and become /iɛ/ as in (2d) ‘Geox’ [dʒiouxks] > *jiàn-lè-shì* /tɕiɛn-lʌ-ʂʐ/ and (2f) ‘Timberland’ > *tiān-bó-lán* /t<sup>h</sup>iɛn-po-lan/.

“Deviation from faithful vowel adaptation can sometimes be attributed to individual users’ or translators’ preferences for particular characters based on semantic considerations or other factors” (Lin 2008, p.175). Thus, English ‘ei’ can have a faithful adaptation, as in (3c) (‘The North Face’ > *lè-sī-fēi-sī* /lʌ-sz-fei-sz/), or can be altered into glide-vocal sequence /ia/, as in (3a) (‘ASICS’ > *yà-sè-shì* /ia-sʌ-ʂʐ/). The name of this Japanese sportswear company was coined as an acronym for Lat. *anima sana in corpore sano*, ASICS (transcribed in Japanese *katakana* as アシックス *Ashikkusu*), that can be translated as “a healthy soul in a healthy body”. In its adapted form in Mandarin, *yà-sè-shì* /ia-sʌ-ʂʐ/ 亚瑟士 ‘Asia–majestic–educated.person’ stresses the idea that its products are made in Asia and are designed for people that can be referred to as ‘*shì* 士’, particularly successful transcription of the coda consonant cluster /ks/ (cfr. Geox (2d)). This polysemous morpheme conveys a wide range of positive meanings, such as ‘an educated person’, ‘a person trained in a certain field’, ‘a gentleman’, as well as ‘a



social stratum in ancient China, between senior officials and the common people' and 'literati' in imperial China (BKRS).

English [æ], as in (3d), is adapted as a diphthong [ai], combined by the low vowel /a/ with the high vowel /i/ ('Gap' > *gài-pú* /kai-p<sup>h</sup>u/), whereas the diphthong [au] is altered into the rhyme /uo/, as in (3e) ('Nautika' > *nuò-dì-kǎ* /nuo-ti-k<sup>h</sup>a/).

### 2.3. Calques

A calque (意译词 *yìyìcí*, lit. 'meaning-translation-word'), also known as 'loan translation', is a word that is adapted according to meaning. Calques can be divided into two types according to the method of creating the Mandarin form: 1) a morpheme-by-morpheme translation, 2) holistic translation, "when a native word is created in such a way that it captures the distinct features or functions of the foreign object or concept" (Miao 2005, p. 31). This method of brand names' adaptation is less productive.

#### (4.1) Morpheme-by-morpheme translation

a) The North Face	<i>běi liǎn</i>	/pei-liɛn/	北脸	north-face
b) Canada Goose	<i>jiānádà é</i>	/tɕianata-ə/	加拿大鹅	Canada-goose
c) Champion	<i>guànjūn</i>	/kuantɕyn/	冠军	Champion
d) Fjällräven	<i>běijí hú</i>	/pəitɕi-xu/	北极狐	North.Pole-fox
e) Old Navy	<i>lǎo hǎijūn</i>	/lɑu-xaitɕyn/	老海军	old-navy

The Mandarin forms in (4.1) consist of morphemes that are literal translations of the constituent morphemes in the words of the donor language, e.g., (4.1.d) 'Fjällräven' ['fjɛl:'rɛ:vɛn] (Swedish for arctic fox, *Alopex lagopus*) (Swedish company specialising in outdoor clothing) > *běijí hú* /pəitɕi-xu/ 北极狐 'North.Pole-fox'.

#### (4.2) Holistic renditions

a) Arc'teryx	<i>shǐzǔniǎo</i>	/ʂztsunjɑu/	始祖鳥	'Jurassic fossilized bird'
b) Jack Wolfskin	<i>láng zhuǎ</i>	/lɑŋ-tɕua/	狼爪	'wolf-paw'
c) Lacoste	<i>Fǎguó èyú</i>	/fakuo-ɣy/	法國鱷魚	'French-crocodile'

The calques in (4.2) are holistic renditions that express some unique features of the referent brands. E.g., (4.2.a) and (4.2.b) are the logo-referred translations. The name and the logo of ‘Arc'teryx’ (Canadian outdoor clothing company) (4.2.a) refer to the Archaeopteryx, the earliest known bird. The logo is inspired by the specimen of its most complete skeleton found up to date. The Mandarin form of ‘Jack Wolfskin’ (4.2.b) describes the company’s logo.

As regards French Lacoste, its name is adapted in MSM either as the faithful output (see the example (1d) above), or as the logo-referred translation (4.2.c). Lacoste has a long-time battle against a Hong Kong sportswear company Crocodile (鱷魚 *Èyú*) over the famous crocodile emblem.<sup>8</sup> In order to distinguish the two alligator-associated trademarks, the name of Lacoste brand has a calque variant that, resulting in ‘French Crocodile’, stresses its origin (4.2.c).

#### **2.4. Hybrids: the ‘New Balance’ case**

Hybrids (混合词 *hùnhécí*, lit. ‘blended words’), also known as ‘blends’, are words adapted from source languages using a combination of different strategies. “They usually consist of a phonemic and a semantic part, where the semantic part can be either an added native morpheme or a literal translation of part of the source form, or even both” (Miao 2005, p. 34).

Particularly interesting example that belongs to this category is the unique story of the New Balance trademark, American sports footwear manufacturer. New Balance registered its English trademarks in China in 1983<sup>9</sup> and entered the Chinese market through Hong Kong and Taiwan in the beginning of 1990s, when its name was adapted as a phonemic loan *Niǔ Bālún* /niou paluən/ 纽巴伦 (‘to.tie – python – human.relations’) (Yang 2015, p.36 – 37). It is worth noting that the first morpheme, *niǔ* 纽, is also used for transliteration of the New York city, *Niǔyue* 纽约, and therefore assigns a connotation with the manufacturing country.

In 2003 the company terminated the contract with the previous agent due to the infringement of its registered trademark and authorized New Balance Taiwan Company as the exclusive agency in charge of the business in the People’s Republic of China. New Balance was gradually recognized by Chinese consumers, by the year of 2006, there were over 300 shops in

<sup>8</sup> Lacoste’s right-facing logo and Crocodile’s left-facing logo are so similar that it has taken a generation and hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees to establish which crocodile has the edge over the other (<http://edition.cnn.com/2003/BUSINESS/10/31/crocodile.logo/>, <http://news.tvbs.com.tw/other/395913>, accessed 02.03.2017).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/1980639/new-balance-loses-appeal-over-copyright-violation-china> (accessed 02.03.2017).

China.<sup>10</sup> Very soon, however, the trademark experienced its second setback in the mainland China, as the counterfeit goods imitated the appearance of their shoes and used brand elements that looked very similar to the original brand, such as Niu Barlun. Despite the fact that New Balance provided the trademark ‘New Balance’ to the China State Administration, it did not register the transliteration *Niǔ Bālún* 纽巴伦 as a Chinese trademark. During that period, a company called “Hong Kong New Balance (USA) shoes company” used the *Niǔ Bālún* 纽巴伦 Chinese trademark to produce and sell shoes. The Hangzhou court requested that the “Hong Kong New Balance (USA) shoes company” should compensate 300,000 Chinese yuan for New Balance. However, the court allowed the “Hong Kong New Balance (USA) shoes company” to continue using *Niǔ Bālún* 纽巴伦 trademark thus making New Balance to give up the transliteration *Niǔ Bālún* 纽巴伦. The New Balance decided to use transliteration ‘*Xīn Bǎilún*’ as a Chinese trademark (Yang 2015, p. 38). The new Mandarin form is a hybrid, ‘New Balance’ > *xīn bǎilún* /çin pailun/ 新百伦 (‘new–one.hundred–human.relationships’), where the first morpheme, *xīn* 新, is a semantic constituent and the other two morphemes, *bǎilún* 百伦, form the transliteration of the word ‘balance’. The choice of the first morpheme, *bǎi* 百 ‘one hundred’, in the phonemic component is particularly successful. The matter is that East Asian people are very superstitious, especially as regards numbers, colours, homophones, etc. The number 100 in Chinese culture has a positive connotation, conveying the meaning ‘numerous’, ‘all kinds of’, as in famous Chinese idioms *bǎi fā bǎi zhòng* 百发百中 (lit. ‘one hundred shots, one hundred hits’) ‘shoot with unflinching accuracy’, *bǎi zhàn bǎi shèng* 百战百胜 (lit. ‘fight a hundred battles, win a hundred victories’) ‘to be victorious in every battle’ (BKRS).

Unfortunately for New Balance, the choice of this name turned out to be not very successful. In 2013 New Balance had to face the third setback in mainland China, this time it was taken to court by a Chinese businessperson Zhōu Lèlún 周乐伦, who claimed he had acquired the ‘*Bǎilún*’ 百伦 (‘one.hundred–human.relationships’) trademark from another company in 2004, and then applied to register another trademark ‘*Xīn Bǎilún*’ 新百伦 (‘new–one.hundred–human.relationships’), or ‘New Bailun’, in the same year and gained final approval in 2008.<sup>11</sup> In June 2016, The Guǎngdōng Higher People’s Court dismissed the US company’s argument that it was necessary to use ‘Xinbailun’ instead of ‘New Balance’, noting that ‘Xinbailun’ was neither the translation nor transliteration of ‘New Balance’. The New Balance must compensate 5 million Chinese yuan (around 688.000 euros) to Zhōu

<sup>10</sup> <http://moocgloba.skemapedia.com/?p=5113> (accessed 03.03.2017).

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.jiemian.com/article/713109.html> (accessed 05.03.2017).

Lèlún.<sup>12</sup> As regards the possible future scenario of this American trademark, most probably it will have to change its Chinese name again.

## 2.5. Graphic loans

When foreign words are borrowed from a language that uses a writing system similar to Chinese, such as Japanese, no serious problems occur in the process of their assimilation, as the words can be introduced to the lexicon in such a natural way that in some cases it becomes difficult for a Chinese native speaker to perceive a given word as a foreign (Tosco 2012, p.76).

Borrowing from Japanese meant a reversal of the direction of influence that had persisted since the 5th century, when the Japanese began to adopt Chinese characters to write their language (Spira 2017, p. 634).

The words of Japanese origin are referred to as ‘graphic loans’ (借形词 *jièxíngcí*, lit. ‘words with the borrowed shape’). It should be noted that the Chinese characters used in Japan have their non-simplified forms, whereas in the People’s Republic of China many frequently used characters have been simplified. When Japanese words are adapted, their source pronunciation is usually ignored; the characters are read in accordance with the MSM pronunciation rules.

As regards sportswear brands, this is the case of Mizuno, the surname of the founder, Rihachi Mizuno, written in Japanese as 美津濃. Adapted into Mandarin, it was altered into the simplified form 美津浓, and the pronunciation became *Měijīnnóng* /mèi-tɕin-nʊŋ/.

## 2.6. Variabilities

The use of different adaptation methods – such as a faithful adaptation for ‘Lacoste’ (1d) and its holistic translation as ‘French Crocodile’ (4.2.c), a phonemic loan for ‘The North Face’ (3c) and its morpheme-by-morpheme translation version (4.1.a) – or the choice of different characters may result in some variabilities.

Thus, ‘Adidas’, adapted as a quattrosyllabic form *ā-dí-dá-sī* /a-ti-ta-sz/ 阿迪达斯 ‘mountain-to.follow-to.reach-this’ (see (1e) above) in the People’s Republic of China, in Taiwan has a trisyllabic version *ài-dí-dá* /ai-ti-ta / 愛迪達 (simplified 爱迪达) ‘to.love-to.follow-to.reach’, where the fourth syllable of the source word is deleted, and the first syllable is adapted as a diphthong [ai].

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/1980639/new-balance-loses-appeal-over-copyright-violation-china> (accessed 05.03.2017).

‘Reebok’, known as *rùi-bù* /zuei-pu/ 锐步 ‘vigorous-walk’ (2c) in China, in Hong Kong and Taiwan has a version *rùi-pǎo* /zuei-p<sup>h</sup>au/ 銳跑 (simplified 锐跑) ‘vigorous run’.

‘Under Armour’ is adapted as *ān-dé-ā-mò* /an-tɤ-a-mo/ 安德阿模 ‘safe-virtue-mountain-sword’ (2g) in China and Taiwan, but in Hong Kong and Singapore has a trisyllabic version *ān-dé-mǎ* /an-tɤ-ma/ 安德瑪 (simplified 安德玛) ‘safe-virtue-agate’.

French brand ‘Le Coq Sportif’, officially adapted as a phonemic loan *lè-kǎ-kè* /lɤ-k<sup>h</sup>a-k<sup>h</sup>ɤ/ 乐卡克 ‘happy-card-overcome’, is also known as its holistic translation *Fǎguó gōngjī* /fakuo-kunŋtɕi/ 法国公鸡 ‘French-rooster’.

### 3. Creating Chinese brand names

As it was mentioned above (see section 2.1), Chinese character presents pictorial characteristics. Studies shown that “Chinese-speaking consumers judge a brand name based also on its visual *appeal*. In Chinese, the product-category image and the script of the brand must match” (Schmitt 1996), for example, as a masculine-looking name for ‘Reebok’ (2c) and a feminine-looking name for ‘Arena’ (2j).

#### 3.1. Superstitions

In the Far East societies (i.e. China, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan and Korea) it is strongly believed that “fate is predestined at the time of birth and that a person’s future is determined by the exact year, month, date, and hour of birth” (Chang and Lii 2008, p. 524). Any one numerical symbol refers to a whole complex of facts and pseudo-facts. Such doctrines as that of the two natural principles *yīn* 阴 and *yáng* 阳,<sup>13</sup> of the heaven–earth–man trinity, of the square as the ruling figure, of the five elements of ‘permutations’ (5E) *wǔ xíng* 五行,<sup>14</sup> and of the eight trigrams,<sup>15</sup> give rise to

<sup>13</sup> The twin concepts of *yīn* and *yáng* are peculiar to ancient Chinese cosmology. The terms denote two natural principles, male (*yáng*) and female (*yīn*), which were said to have originated from the Primeval One (*tàiji* 太极); from the union of these two principles arose the five elements, which then generate the ‘ten thousand things’ (*wàn wù* 万物) (a Chinese way of saying ‘everything’) (Eberhard 1994, p. 321). *Yīn* and *yang* figure in the two oldest Chinese Classics, the *Shījīng* 詩經 (*Book of Odes*) and the *Yìjīng* 易經 (*Book of Changes*).

<sup>14</sup> The term *wǔ xíng* is conventionally translated as the ‘five elements’ (water, fire, wood, metal and soil); the theory is also known as the ‘five phases’, the ‘five agents’, the ‘five movements’, the ‘five processes’, and the ‘five steps/stages’. Sinologists indeed can not agree on the best



endless numerological speculations. Geomancy also derives ultimately from a form of number mysticism (Eberhard 1994, p. 211).

Another superstition holds that an auspicious name can compensate for a lack of luck at birth. This name-giving tradition has been extended into Chinese business and, according to some studies (Chang and Lii 2008, Schmitt 1996), should respect the following five main principles: (1) the name should be meaningful (names representing wealth, health, or welfare are particularly popular); (2) it should be easy, smooth, and agreeable to read; (3) mathematical calculation can help construct a name that contains an appropriate combination of characters in terms of strokes and *yīn-yáng* balance; (4) the *yīn-yáng* balance must be harmonious; (5) every Chinese character incorporates a unique composition of the 5E; the arrangement of the 5E for a brand name also must harmonize with the industry to which it belongs, its product properties and its manufacturer's location.

It is worthwhile to take into consideration that Asians are very much attracted by the supernatural forces, “from face reading in China and healing techniques in the Philippines to ghosts in Japan” (Schmitt 1996, p.32). In particular, Chinese have a notable tradition of numerology that nowadays became a profitable consulting business. Some Chinese companies seek out such advice on product names, or which floor of a building to open an office, or whether the boss has a lucky telephone or a car plate number.<sup>16</sup>

Traditionally, odd numbers are associated with *yáng*, whereas even numbers are associated with *yīn*. This principle was extended to a number of strokes that a character contains, that is, the *yáng*-characters are those that have an odd number of strokes, while the *yīn*-characters are those that consist of an even number of strokes. According to Schmitt (1996, p. 32–33), “in a name consisting of two or three characters, the combination of *yīn/yáng* elements also matters. *Yīn-yīn-yáng* (female-female-male) is considered better than *yīn-yáng-yīn* (female-male-female)”. The total number of strokes is to be considered as well.

More than two decades ago, Taiwanese Lǐ Tiěbǐ 李鐵筆 published his *Database for auspicious naming of business companies* 公司行號命名資料庫 that very soon became a bestseller among the Taiwanese business community. Based on the arithmetic principles involved in luck-related

translation of the character *xíng* 行, the basic idea is one of ‘changing states of being’ (Eberhard 1994, p. 93).

<sup>15</sup> The basic forms of the *Book of Changes* are provided by eight trigrams. The lines forming these trigrams are either whole (male, *yang*) or broken (female, *yīn*). Each trigram consists of three male or female lines; and according to the make-up, the trigram symbolises heaven, earth, water, fire, dampness, wind, thunder or mountains. The trigrams can be superimposed upon each other, and this way  $8 \times 8 = 64$  hexagrams are obtained (Eberhard 1994, p. 298).

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/05/world/asia/05china.html> (accessed 05.03.2017).



naming theories, Lǐ claimed that the total stroke number of different auspicious/inauspicious categories that existed was 81. This number should be divided by 80, with the remainder then used to determine auspiciousness/inauspiciousness (see Table 1) (Chang and Lii 2008, p. 525).

1 (O)	2 (X)	3 (O)	4 (X)	5 (O)	6 (O)	7 (O)	8 (O)	9 (X)
10 (X)	11 (O)	12 (X)	13 (O)	14 (X)	15 (O)	16 (O)	17 (O)	18 (O)
19 (X)	20 (X)	21 (O)	22 (X)	23 (O)	24 (O)	25 (O)	26 (X)	27 (X)
28 (X)	29 (O)	30 (X)	31 (O)	32 (O)	33 (O)	34 (X)	35 (O)	36 (X)
37 (O)	38 (H)	39 (O)	40 (X)	41 (O)	42 (X)	43 (X)	44 (X)	45 (O)
46 (X)	47 (O)	48 (O)	49 (X)	50 (X)	51 (X)	52 (O)	53 (X)	54 (X)
55 (H)	56 (X)	57 (O)	58 (H)	59 (X)	60 (X)	61 (O)	62 (X)	63 (O)
64 (X)	65 (O)	66 (X)	67 (O)	68 (O)	69 (X)	70 (X)	71 (H)	72 (X)
73 (H)	74 (X)	75 (H)	76 (X)	77 (X)	78 (X)	79 (X)	80 (X)	81 (O)

Table 1  
Auspicious and inauspicious number of strokes  
(adapted from Chang and Lii 2008, p. 525)

In Table 1, auspicious numbers are marked with “O”, inauspicious ones are marked with “X”, while those “being incomplete lucky” are marked with “H”. Chang and Lii (2008) demonstrated that over 50% of the 1,202 surveyed Taiwanese brands contained lucky total stroke numbers.

It is worth noting that some of the (in)auspicious markings in the Table 1 and the traditional symbolism of numbers do not correspond. For example, ‘2’ is usually seen as a very positive number, the connotation of the *yīn/yáng* dualism. When give presents, Chinese tend to give the same kind of goods in the quantity of two, such as two bottles of the same wine or two identical house ware items. This conveys the idea of wishing the addressee always have a partner in life (Cháng 2009, p. 193). Like all even numbers in Chinese, ‘two’ is female. In ancient times, it was correlated with the earth, as ‘one’ was with the sun, and ‘three’ with man (Eberhard 1994, p. 301).

As a *yīn* number, ‘four’ can stand for the West and also for the earth, which was originally thought to be four-cornered (Eberhard 1994, p. 115). For many Chinese the words *sì* 四 ‘four’ and *shí sì* 十四 ‘fourteen’ are taboo, as the former is phonologically close to *sǐ* 死 ‘death’, and the latter is homophonous to *shí sǐ* 实死 ‘to implement death’ (Cháng 2009, p. 196) or to

*yāo*<sup>17</sup> *sì* ‘one, four’, which is homophonous to *yāo sǐ* 要死 ‘want to die’. This is the reason why many hotels and hospitals in China avoid marking any floor that contains the digit ‘four’ (see Figure 1).

Four is associated with death also in Korean and Japanese cultures due to the same phonological similarities. That is why in Japanese language there are two readings for the number four, *shi* and *yon*. Whenever possible, people refrain from using the latter one due to this inauspicious similarity.<sup>18</sup>



Figure 1  
Elevator panel at the Holiday Inn Express Shanghai Zhabei hotel  
(photo taken by the author in August 2016).

‘Six’, *liù* 六 is homophonous with ‘flow’, *liú* 流 and therefore is associated with smooth and successful flow of things and events. ‘Eight’, *bā* 八 in Cantonese has a pronunciation very similar to *fā*, the first syllable of the word *fācái* 发财 ‘to get rich’, ‘to make a fortune’. Chinese are obsessed with having the number eight for their storied buildings, units and door plates, licence plates, phone numbers, bank account numbers, etc. (Yáng 2001, p. 199). Thus, a regional Chinese airline reportedly paid about \$300,000 to have 8888-8888 for a telephone number. Chinese newspapers reported that some parents refused to let their children ride taxis with “unlucky” license plates en route to taking the national college entrance exam.<sup>19</sup> In addition, it was not a coincidence that the Summer Olympics in Beijing were open on August 8, 2008 (08-08-08) at 8.08 p.m.

<sup>17</sup> *Yāo* (幺) ‘one’ is unambiguous spoken form when spelling out numbers, especially on telephone or in military.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.lingualift.com/blog/lucky-unlucky-numbers-japan/> (accessed 05.03.2017).

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/05/world/asia/05china.html> (accessed 23.02.2017).

‘Nine’, *jiǔ* 九, is the highest among simple odd numbers, the square of three, a very potent male number (Eberhard 1994, p. 207), the symbol of the emperor and its power. ‘Nine’ is also homophonous to *jiǔ* 久 ‘long duration of time’, and is therefore associated with longevity and permanence (cfr. Cháng 2009, p. 200). Similarly to the number four, there are also two readings for the number nine in Japanese, *ku* and *kyu*. Pronounced *ku*, it becomes phonologically very similar to the word for ‘pain, suffering’, *ku* 苦. For these sensibilities, All Nippon Airways omits rows 4 and 9.<sup>20</sup> In Table 1, the number nine is also marked as an inauspicious number. Most probably, its Taiwanese author was inspired by the negative connotation of this number in Japanese, since Japanese language and culture has always had a great influence on Taiwanese society.

‘Ten’ in Chinese tradition is considered to be a symbol of completeness and perfection (Cháng 2009, p. 201). The number ‘thirteen’ is inauspicious in Shànghǎi area (Yáng 2001, p. 61).

The last number that deserves attention is ‘seventy-three’. This number is considered to be unlucky for elderly people due to the fact that Confucius (ca. 551–479 BC), an influential Chinese philosopher, is believed to have passed away at that age (Wáng 2011, p.215).<sup>21</sup>

Hence, traditional (in)auspicious connotations of the numbers two, nine, ten, thirteen and seventy-three do not correspond to those shown in Table 1. The examples analyzed below will show whether they followed the superstitious rules of number of strokes.

Visual symbolism is also fundamental for East Asians, and that is when colours and symbols together with their intrinsic messages come into play.

In Chinese culture, red is the most appealing and the most auspicious colour. It seems to have been regarded as a ‘life-giving’ colour since prehistoric times. It is also held to be the colour of wealth, as one of the three gods of good fortune, the one who confers high office and riches wears a red robe (Eberhard 1994, p. 248–249). Certain combinations are also particularly appealing, such as red and gold.

Yellow is looked upon very favourably, it is taken as symbolising fame, progress and advancement (Eberhard 1994, p. 322).

Dark blue is related to frustration, worries, and difficulties (Eberhard 1994, p. 42–43). This does not apply to light blue, cerulean colour. For

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.bjreview.com.cn/report/txt/2008-04/28/content\\_113299.htm](http://www.bjreview.com.cn/report/txt/2008-04/28/content_113299.htm) (accessed 23.02.2017).

<sup>21</sup> Simple calculations make one realise that Confucius was 72, not 73 (551 – 479 = 72). However, according to the traditional method of reckoning (i.e. the number of Chinese calendar years in which one has lived), a person’s age is one year at birth, and increases by one year at the beginning of the first solar term (*lì chūn* 立春) each year, rather than on one’s birthday (BKRS). Therefore, 73 is Confucius’ nominal age (*xū suì* 虛歲).

example, it is almost exclusively found in logos of Singaporean companies whose business is related to the sea (Schmitt 1996, p. 33).

It is often said that white is the colour of mourning in China. This is not quite correct: the word in question is *sù* 素, which refers to unbleached fabric, and mourning attire made of it was brownish-yellow rather than white (more on this, see Bogushevskaya 2016, pp. 231–232). However, “one should never wear anything white in one’s hair, as this is very unlucky” (Eberhard 1994, p. 313).

East Asians, except Japanese, value complexity of expression and decoration. In Chinese culture, symbols and displays of natural objects, such as mountains, dragons and phoenixes, prevail and are frequently found in packaging and advertising (Schmitt 1996, p. 33).

In the analysis of Chinese brand names to follow, numerology and symbolism are inevitable.

### 3.2. Phonological adaptations and calques

“Due to the successful hosting of the Beijing Olympic Games, the sports brand in China has entered a period of rapid development in the 2007-2010. In the past several years, the number of sporting goods stores goes up with an average annual rate of 10%, sales go up with an average annual rate of 10%” (Hu 2015, p. 473).

As regards the price segments of sportswear in China, they can be divided into three levels: Nike, Adidas, Kappa, Puma and other international brands occupy the high-end market, i.e., the market price of about 400 CNY (55 EUR) per piece. The mid-market is mainly taken by Anta and Li-Ning, the domestic first-line sporting goods brands, priced at around 200-400 CNY (27-55 EUR) per piece. The low-end consumer market is represented by domestic second-tier sporting goods brands, such as XTEP, PEAK, 361° and Erke (Hu 2015, p. 474).

When introduce their names written in Latin letters on international arena, Chinese brands usually employ phonological transcription of original Chinese names, which can be divided into faithful and deviant mapping of *pīnyīn*. Where applicable, I use both traditional and simplified versions of Chinese brands so that we can compare the total number of strokes (mentioned in Table 1) in both versions.

#### (5) Faithful *pīnyīn* adaptations

English	<i>Pīnyīn</i>	IPA	MSM	Strokes	Gloss
a) Anta	<i>āntà</i>	/an-t <sup>h</sup> a/	安踏	6 + 15 = 21 (O)	safe– to.step.on
b) Erke	( <i>hóngxīng</i> ) <i>ěrkè</i>	/xʊŋ-ɕiŋ-	simpl.: 鸿星 尔克;	simpl.: 11 + 9 + 5 + 7 =	swan–star– 2SG–



	$\partial\text{-k}^{\text{h}\gamma}/$	trad.: 鴻星 爾克	32 (O); trad.: 17 + 9 + 14 + 7 = 47 (O)	overcome
c) Li-Ning	<i>Lǐ Níng</i>	/li-nin/ simpl.: 李宁; trad.: 李寧	simpl.: 7 + 5 = 12 (X); trad.: 7 + 14 = 21 (O)	plum- peaceful

Anta's (5a) Chinese name, 安踏 'safe walk', conveys the semantic effect of sturdiness and reliability of this brand's sportive footwear and apparel. Red skyward-looking A-shape logo is perceived by Chinese consumers as the embodiment of the unity of strength, speed and beauty (Wáng 2012, p. 24). Its Chinese name consists of two characters, where the former one contains the *yīn* number of strokes (6), and the latter one contains the *yáng* number of strokes (15), so that the *yīn/yang* balance is well respected. The total number of strokes of Anta's name is 21, which in Table 1 is considered to be an auspicious number.

Adapted in English as Erke (5b), lit. 'you overcome', this brand's name is the shortened version of its original Chinese name written in *pīnyīn* as Hongxing Erke, 鸿星尔克 'swan-star- 2SG –overcome'. The name was inspired by the famous saying *hóng hú zhī zhì* 鸿鹄之志, lit. 'swan's ambitions', fig. 'high aspirations'. The brand specialises in producing sports footwear (Hu 2015, p. 474). The company's logo is a symbolic sketch of a swan of light blue colour, which conveys the symbolic meaning of a swan soaring in blue sky. Swan is associated with one's endurance and strong spirit, while blue sky symbolises the calm state of mind.<sup>22</sup> The total number of strokes corresponds to the interpretations given in Table 1.

One of China's leading local sportswear companies – in 2009 its income scale even exceeds the international sports goods giant Adidas, jumping to second in the sporting goods market in China (Hu 2015, p. 474) – Li-Ning carries a personal name of its owner, a former Chinese Olympic gymnast Lǐ Níng. Its original checkmark logo was very similar to Nike's "swoosh". Li-Ning claimed coincidence and maintained that its version was actually designed in a competition from 1990, and is meant to depict the letters "L" and "N" as well as a patriotic red flag. In 2010 Lǐ Níng introduced its company's new logo, which however preserved important elements of its old design, while also conveying a tougher, more energetic silhouette. It connotes human-oriented sportsmanship through a close resemblance to the

<sup>22</sup>[http://www.baike.com/wiki/%E9%B8%BF%E6%98%9F%E5%B0%94%E5%85%8B&prd=button\\_doc\\_entry](http://www.baike.com/wiki/%E9%B8%BF%E6%98%9F%E5%B0%94%E5%85%8B&prd=button_doc_entry) (accessed 02.03.2017).

Chinese character for ‘people’ (*rén* 人). The new logo also claims to resemble the “Lǐ Níng Cross,” a gymnastic pose closely associated with its founder, a national hero who won three gold medals at the 1984 Olympic Games.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, the brand’s old slogan—“Anything is Possible”—also drew criticism for its similarity to Adidas’ inverted tagline “Impossible Is Nothing.” Despite the fact that both slogans were presented in 2004, Li-Ning’s tagline was created first. The 2010 new slogan, “Make the Change”, was adapted from Li-Ning’s new brand manifesto, which encourages consumers to embrace change and make breakthroughs.<sup>24</sup>

(6) Deviant *pīnyīn* adaptations

a) Deerway	<i>dé'ěrhùi</i>	/tʂ-ə-- xuəi/	simpl.: 德尔惠; trad.: 德爾惠	simpl.: 15 + 5 + 12 = 32 (O); trad.: 15 + 14 + 12 = 41 (O)	virtue– 2SG– benefit
b) PEAK	<i>pīkè</i>	/p <sup>h</sup> i-k <sup>h</sup> ʅ/	匹克	4 + 7 = 11 (O)	be.equal.to– overcome

Regarding the case of (6a), originally there were suggestions to have it adapted into English as a hybrid form “Del Benefits”, where the first and the second morphemes of the Chinese name, *dé'ěr* 德尔, would have formed a phonemic part, ‘Del’, and the third one, *huì* 惠, would have become a semantic constituent, ‘Benefit’. All together, however, this English adaptation would have conveyed a negative meaning, that is, ‘to delete benefits’ (Wáng 2012, p. 25). Therefore, the third syllable underwent some phonotactic adjustments and was adapted as a deviated form ‘Deerway’. Deer is seen as an elegant, fast and strong animal, and is a symbol of riches (Eberhard 1994, p. 79). The logo is a stylised “D”, which can be observed in red, orange, grey, white, yellow and blue colours. Written either in simplified or in traditional characters, the name contains an auspicious number of strokes.

The case of (6) demonstrates a very successful phonological adaptation of the English word ‘peak’ (Lí 2009, p. 147) into Chinese *pīkè* /p<sup>h</sup>i-k<sup>h</sup>ʅ/ 匹克 ‘be.equal.to–overcome’, which is actually the truncated form of the Chinese for ‘Olympics’, *àolímpikè* 奥林匹克. The brand mainly targets at making professional basketball shoes and basketball products (Hu 2015, p. 474). The logo – that can be of red, white, black or light blue colour – is the triangle-

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.labbrand.com/brandsource/no-more-copypcat-li-ning-unveils-new-logo-and-slogan> (accessed 23.02.2017).

<sup>24</sup> <http://adage.com/china/article/china-news/chinese-sportswear-brand-li-ning-unveils-a-new-logo-and-slogan/144737/> (accessed 23.02.2017).



shaped line, interrupted in the right corner that can be of red, white or light blue colour. The three peaks of the triangle are associated with the Olympic motto “faster, higher, stronger”.<sup>25</sup>

#### (7) Calques

a) Xtep	<i>tè bù</i>	/tʰɤ pu/	特步	10 + 7 = 17 (O)	special–step
b) 361°	<i>sānlìuùyī dù</i>	/san-liou-yi- tu/	三六一度	3 + 4 + 1 + 9 = 17 (O)	three–six– one–degree

The method of adopting Chinese brands into English according to meaning is seldom used. The case of (7a) is a portmanteau that fuses the word ‘step’ with an “X” mark. In China, people use a cross rather than a check mark to check a square box. The brand’s logo is a styled “X” mark, usually of red colour, that expresses the idea of checking a square box of future victories. Xtep specialises in manufacturing sports footwear, which is the reason why the Chinese version of this brand is designed to convey the semantic effect of ‘special, unique and (by extension) comfort walk’.

There are 360 degrees in one complete circle around. The brand 361 Degrees (361°) (7b), which also launched the hashtag #onedegreebeyond on its website, ambitiously adds one extra degree in its name. The idea is to represent professional functionality plus an added degree of creativity and innovation.<sup>26</sup> Every number present in the name, that is, 3, 6 and 1, as well as the total strokes’ number (17) are considered to be auspicious (see Table 1). The logo, which is a simple writing of 361°, is usually of the colour orange. The brand is one of the main domestic suppliers of sportswear in China, and was an official supporter of the 2016 Summer Olympics and Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>27</sup>

## 4. The giants are not immune to gaffes

Given the limited number of sounds and the large number of homophonous morphemes, punning based on ambiguity arises very often. This could not be avoided even by such giants as Nike and Adidas.

### 4.1. Cultural blunder

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. [http://www.baike.com/wiki/%E5%8C%B9%E5%85%8B&prd=so\\_1\\_doc](http://www.baike.com/wiki/%E5%8C%B9%E5%85%8B&prd=so_1_doc) (accessed 03.03.2017).

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.baike.com/wiki/%E4%B8%89%E5%85%AD%E4%B8%80%E5%BA%A6%E5%9B%BD%E9%99%85%E6%9C%89%E9%99%90%E5%85%AC%E5%8F%B8> (accessed 05.03.2017).

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.361europe.com/about-361> (accessed 05.03.2017).

One common example is the custom of hanging up the character *fú* 福 ‘fortune’ upside down at one’s home entrance during the Chinese New Year festivities, due to the homophony of the phrases *fú dào le* 福倒了 ‘fortune has fallen upside down’ and *fú dào le* 福到了 ‘fortune has arrived’, or *fú fǎn le* 福反了 ‘fortune [has fallen] upside down’ and *fú fǎn le* 福返了 ‘fortune has returned’.

Inspired by this tradition, in early 2016, Nike released a pair of special edition trainers intended for the Chinese New Year. Sewn into the left shoe was the character (sewn in red and in traditional form) *fā* 發, which translates as ‘becoming wealthy’, and on the right shoe Nike placed the character *fú* 福 ‘fortune’ upside down, as the tradition requests. The message expected to convey the meaning ‘wealth and happiness arrive’. Unfortunately for Nike, placed next to each other, these characters form the euphemism for ‘putting on weight’. This fact was a source of mirth on Twitter’s Chinese equivalent, Wēibó 微博. Nike Store’s official Wēibó account has seen an influx of more than 2,550 comments that ranged from the mild (“Excuse me?! Get fat?!”) to the more acerbic (“What kind of misunderstanding do you have about Chinese culture? Surely you have one Chinese person in your company! Otherwise, you can simply look for one on the streets!”).<sup>28</sup>

## 4.2. Embarrassing acronyms

Latin letters have been fully absorbed into Chinese writing. As pointed out by Victor Mair, “this phenomenon is a natural consequence of the fact that all Chinese schoolchildren learn English and, perhaps more importantly, because of the fact that the vast majority of computer inputting and short text messaging is done via *pīnyīn*. As Chinese writers become increasingly dependent on *pīnyīn* to write characters, they become ever more familiar with the former and estranged from active production of the latter.”<sup>29</sup>

The use of *initialisms*,<sup>30</sup> such as HSK for *hànyǔ shuǐpíng kǎoshì* 漢語水平考試 ‘Chinese Proficiency Test’ or RMB for *rénmínbì* 人民幣 ‘Renminbi, Chinese yuan’, is widely spread in advertising, blogs, text messages, etc.

The presentation of Adidas’ new sneaker model NMD (abbreviation for English ‘Nomad’) in March 2016 caused an outburst on Chinese social

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.campaignasia.com/article/are-these-nike-shoes-telling-china-to-get-fat-update-not-really/405342> (accessed 05.03.2017).

<sup>29</sup> <http://languageblog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=21632> (accessed 05.03.2017).

<sup>30</sup> The process of abbreviation that derives from *pīnyīn* spelling of the relevant initial syllables or words (Riha 2010, p. 48).

media, as ‘NMD’ was seen as the initialism of the expletive *nīmāde* 你媽的 ‘your mother!’. Despite Adidas’ claiming that “any association with a Chinese term or phrase would be pure coincidence,”<sup>31</sup> the model faced a total failure in China.

Nike’s SB (abbreviation for English ‘skate boarding’) model was also heavily criticised by the Chinese internet community. The matter is that the initialism ‘SB’ in MSM corresponds to the extremely offensive *shǎbī* (傻屌, also written as 傻逼, 傻比, or 傻B), lit. ‘stupid – female genitalia (vulg.), (BKRS)’.<sup>32</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

Foreign trademarks’ adaptation process in Modern Standard Mandarin is formed by the following categories: calques, hybrids, graphic loans, and phonemic loans, the latter category being the most numerous; adaptations of this type can be faithful or deviant, and often convey not only phonemic similarities, but also semantic associations. Most alterations regard coda consonant clusters and liquids. The degree of variation in adapting English vowels is relatively high, from faithful adaptations, to alterations into glide-vocal sequences, diphthongs, or rhymes.

Far East societies have a very strong tradition in numerical and other symbolic superstitions, to the extent that even the number of strokes in a brand name can be considered (in)auspicious. Semantic and graphic analysis of Chinese domestic top brand names shows that this principle is accurately followed. When introduce their names written in Latin letters on international arena, Chinese brands usually employ phonological transcription of their original names, which is either faithful or deviant mapping of *pīnyīn*.

In order to make successful naming decisions, it is important to understand how the recipient language interprets explicit and implicit linguistic information encoded in the different donor writing system. To avoid any possible gaffes in adaptation of names, acronyms or slogans, one must be familiar with cultural traditions, superstitions, symbolism, and frequent ambiguity of Chinese characters.

<sup>31</sup> <http://us.fashionnetwork.com/news/Adidas-is-NMD-the-brand-s-Chinese-mistake-671635.html#.WM6Vl7jjgw-> (accessed 09.03.2017).

<sup>32</sup> <http://cn.fashionnetwork.com/news/a-di-da-si--nmd-fan-le.671107.html#.WM6WL7jjgw-> (accessed March 09, 2017).

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