



# Study on the Translation of China Time-Honored Brands in Shanghai from the Perspective of Multimodal Positive Discourse Analysis

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## Abstract

This study applied multimodal positive discourse analysis to investigate the current state and prevailing challenges associated with the English translations of China's time-honored brands in Shanghai. Employing a comprehensive analysis that integrates both language and image, the study proposes translation strategies suitable for the nomenclature of these China time-honored brands in Shanghai. These strategies aim to preserve the brands' uniqueness and traditional styles while navigating potential linguistic and cultural challenges. The research findings indicate that multimodal positive discourse analysis serves as an effective tool in fostering cross-cultural communication for China time-honored brands in Shanghai. Through this approach, there emerges a promising avenue for facilitating the adaptation of these heritage brands into the international market sphere. Furthermore, it presents an opportunity to elevate brand recognition and facilitate broader cultural diffusion.

## Subject Areas

Culture, Sociology

## Keywords

China Time-Honored Brands, Shanghai, Multimodal Positive Discourse Analysis, Language, Image

## 1. Introduction

The influence of Chinese culture stands as a paramount objective for social and

economic development during the “14th Five-Year Plan” period. As a precious heritage of Chinese excellent traditional culture, China time-honored brands play an important role in promoting Chinese culture to the world and realizing the goal of building a culturally strong nation. According to the “Brand Finance Global 500 2023” list released in January 2023 [1], there are 23 Chinese brands on the list, and among the top 100 brands, only two China time-honored brands, Maotai and Wuliangye, are mentioned. Taking China time-honored brands in Shanghai as an example, this paper uses multimodal positive discourse analysis to explore the current situation and existing problems of their translated names and proposes appropriate translation strategies to assist their international promotion and overseas dissemination in the context of globalization. The objective is to showcase the confidence of Chinese culture, enhance its global influence, and foster a better global understanding of the commercial ethos, exceptional craftsmanship, and distinctive quality of China time-honored brands in Shanghai, thereby facilitating their evolution into global brands.

## **2. Status Quo of Translated Names of China Time-Honored Brands in Shanghai**

### **2.1. Status Survey**

As of 2022, there are a total of 180 enterprises in Shanghai that have been awarded the title of “Chinese Time-honored Brand” by the Ministry of Commerce, accounting for 63.3% of the total number of trademark registrations in Shanghai (there are 180 China time-honored brands and 104 local time-honored brands in Shanghai). In the same year, 105 Chinese time-honored brand names were included in the Shanghai Time-Honored Brands Digital Museum. This paper conducts research and analysis on the current status and translation strategies of the names of the aforementioned 105 China time-honored brands in Shanghai that have been included in the Shanghai Time-Honored Brands Digital Museum, using various sources such as brand websites, the National Trademark Office, product packaging, and e-commerce platforms.

### **2.2. Compilation and Analysis of Corpus**

Among the 105 Chinese time-honored brand names included in the Shanghai Time-Honored Brands Digital Museum, 26 lack an official English translation, as they do not appear on their official websites, product packaging, or trademark designs, and are therefore classified as having no official translation. Among the remaining 79 China time-honored brands in Shanghai with official translations, 46 employ phonetic transcription (including Hanyu Pinyin or Wade-Giles) such as 余天成(Yutiancheng) and 中华牌(CHUNG HWA); 19 use literal translation such as 双钱(DOUBLECOIN) and 新世界(New World); 9 use meaning-based translation such as 虎嘯(1<sup>st</sup>) and 采芝斋(A LEGEND OF DELICACIES); and 5 use neologism or creative translation such as 正广和(Aquarius), 美加净(Maxam), and 培罗蒙(BAROMON). Based on the compilation of the afore-

mentioned time-honored brands and their translated names, four main issues with the English translations of Chinese time-honored brand names in Shanghai emerge: lack of translation, limited brand information dissemination, incongruity with cultural cognition, and low correlation between text and image.

### **2.2.1. Lack of Translation**

Among the 105 China time-honored brands in Shanghai, 26 lack an official translation, constituting 24.8% of the total. In contrast to well-established foreign time-honored brands like Marlboro and Disney, which have been localized in China and seamlessly integrated into Chinese daily life [2], the lack of translated names for China time-honored brands in Shanghai impedes the formation of intuitive brand recognition among overseas consumers. Consequently, they fail to evoke cultural and emotional resonance, thus falling short of meeting consumer demands. This deficiency may hamper the international visibility and market influence of these brands. Furthermore, easy-to-identify and memorable brand names and their translations are crucial for attracting consumers and shaping brand image. Therefore, the lack of translated names may put China time-honored brands in Shanghai at a disadvantage in domestic and international market competition and hinder their ability to enter and expand into international markets and achieve cross-cultural communication.

### **2.2.2. Limited Brand Information Transmission**

Among the existing 105 China time-honored brands in Shanghai, there are 15 that use literal translation such as 龙虎 (Dragon Tiger). As one of China's early national pharmaceutical industry enterprises, known for its widely recognized Cool Oil and Rendan series products, it is considered an essential medicine for daily use and travel. The name “龙虎” is derived from the meaning of “loong as an auspicious mascot in China, and tiger as the king of beasts,” symbolizing its ability to overcome all difficulties in market competition and stand invincible. However, its official English translation “Dragon Tiger” shares the same name as a card game abroad, which may lead to misunderstandings among consumers about the brand's attributes. Another Chinese time-honored brand in Shanghai, “三枪” was born in the 1930s, named after the founder's three consecutive victories in shooting competitions, reflecting the patriotic sentiment of advocating Chinese-made products. Since its inception, it has been imbued with national sentiments and patriotic fervor, embodying the spirit of being first-class and striving for the best. However, its official English translation “Three Gun”, with “Gun” in singular form, deviates from English grammar rules. Furthermore, there already exists a 3-Gun Nation (3GN) club series abroad, focusing on 3-Gun shooting, complicating the intuitive understanding of the origin and cultural connotations of the time-honored brand “三枪” for overseas consumers.

### **2.2.3. Incongruity in Cultural Cognition**

In different contexts, vocabulary carries rich cultural information, directly reflecting cultural differences. In addition to literal meanings, vocabulary also car-

ries deep-seated cultural connotations, such as associative meanings, metaphorical meanings, symbolic meanings, and evaluative meanings. Cross-cultural translation of time-honored brand names also needs to take into account the differences in national psychological characteristics and modes of thinking among overseas consumers to avoid mismatches between their English translations and English language culture. For example, the official English translation of the time-honored brand “白象” is “White Elephant”, but in English, “white elephant” usually refers to “something that is useless and unwanted, especially something that is big and/or costs a lot of money.” Such a translation may lead to negative perceptions among overseas consumers who are not familiar with the Eastern cultural context, making it difficult to stimulate their consumption desires and intentions. Similarly, the brand “凤凰牌” bicycles, originating from the auspicious image of the Fenghuang in traditional Chinese culture, adopts a literal translation strategy for its official translation, “phoenix”. In Christian culture, “phoenix” symbolizes physical resurrection and eternal soul, implying independence and immortality, which does not align with its positive connotations such as auspicious and happiness in the Chinese cultural context. Therefore, misunderstandings about the cultural connotations of the traditional Chinese image of the “Fenghuang” may limit the brand recognition and acceptance of the time-honored brand in international markets during its international promotion and cross-cultural communication.

#### 2.2.4. Low Correlation between Text and Image

Visual elements constitute the most immediate and attention-grabbing aspects of brand logos, and the relationship between text and image within brand logos is paramount for the recognition and dissemination of time-honored brands. However, not all brand logos effectively align with the brand image they represent. A low correlation between text and image within brand logos, or the inclusion of graphic elements unrelated to the brand’s history or values, can result in inconsistent consumer perceptions and emotional responses to the brand. For instance, consider the prominent brand in the Shanghai textile industry, “老介福” as an example, its official English translation is “LAOU KAI FOOK”, with a trademark consisting of irregular shapes outlined in red and white lines (See **Figure 1**). This lack of correlation among graphic elements may befuddle consumers’ perceptions of the brand, rendering it challenging for them to comprehend or embrace the product information conveyed by the brand. Additionally, layout and color selection also have a significant impact on the correlation between text and image in brand logos. For instance, the official English translation of the time-honored brand “金枫” is “JIN-FENG”, with the overall logo color being red (See **Figure 2**). The lack of consistency and recognizability between the brand name and color may make it difficult for the brand logo to attract consumer attention and recognition during the dissemination process, thus affecting the shaping and dissemination effect of the brand image.



Figure 1. Logo of LAOU KAI FOOK.



Figure 2. Logo of JIN-FENG.

### 3. Multimodal Positive Discourse Analysis

#### 3.1. Multimodal Discourse Analysis

The theory of multimodal discourse analysis originates from Halliday's assertion that "language is a social semiotic" [3] and is rooted in the development of social semiotics and systemic functional linguistic theory. Since the 1990s, scholars have been discussing the overall analytical framework, research methods, and application insights of multimodal research in various fields. Kress and Van Leeuwen [4] as well as O'Toole [5] applied the concept of multimodal functions to the field of images, proposing the concept framework of visual grammar for analyzing the communicative significance of visual discourse. This framework includes representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning, corresponding to the three metafunctions in systemic functional grammar. [6] Visual grammar provides an authoritative theoretical framework for the discourse analysis of multimodal discourse. For example, movie posters, as a form of multimodal media combining images, colors, and text, collectively construct the overall meaning of the discourse. In recent years, there has been an increasing number of studies on multimodality involving visual imagery, mathematical symbols, architecture, and space. Additionally, Kress, G. and Van Leeuwen, T. [4] [7] [8] researched the relationship between mode and media, exploring the phenomenon of meaning being systematically expressed in multimodal phenomena, including visual images, color grammar, newspaper layout design, and the role of different media. Lemke proposed the multimodal characteristics of hypertext, namely, the various relationships such as consistency, complementarity, and connection between language and images in conceptual meaning. O'Halloran [9] [10] [11] [12] not only studied the theoretical construction of multimodality but also applied the theory to the study of language,

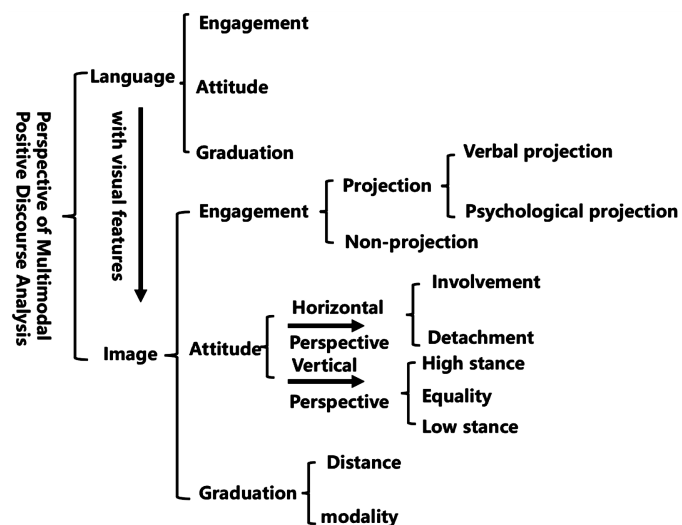
images, and mathematical symbols in mathematical discourse. Jewitt [13] believes that there is an increasing trend of integrative perspectives in the field of multimodal studies, which is inseparable from social semiotics. These integrative perspectives contribute to a more effective analysis of multimodal interaction.

The research on multimodal discourse analysis by domestic scholars originated from Li Zhanzi's introduction to the foreign "visual grammar". [14] Since then, domestic scholars have deeply analyzed and discussed multimodal discourse from multiple perspectives, covering systemic functional visual grammar, multimodal metaphors, multimodal corpora, multimodal critical discourse analysis, and multimodal literacy. In the research path based on systemic functional linguistics, Zhang Delu, Mu Zhigang [15], and Lei Xi [16] have been devoted to the construction of theoretical frameworks for multimodal functional stylistics. This series of studies has expanded the theoretical basis of multimodal discourse analysis and provided solid theoretical support for further research. In addition to theoretical framework construction, many researchers focus on applying visual grammar theory to analyze diverse types of discourses. Through case studies, these researchers repeatedly validate the applicability of multimodal discourse analysis theory, offering support not only for the enhancement of theoretical frameworks but also for demonstrating the efficacy of multimodal analysis in real-world discourses.

### 3.2. Positive Discourse Analysis

In 1999, Martin proposed the method of Positive Discourse Analysis as a counterpoint to Critical Discourse Analysis. Compared to discourse analysis under traditional critical theory, Positive Discourse Analysis focuses more on the evaluative function of other modes of meaning expression. Unlike Critical Discourse Analysis, which primarily exposes and criticizes social issues with a negative attitude, Positive Discourse Analysis aims to explore how to promote harmonious coexistence among humans, rather than just focusing on criticizing hegemony or ideology. [17] In terms of analytical patterns, Positive Discourse Analysis interprets discourse scope, tone, and style based on discourse semantics, subsequently elucidating the underlying socio-cultural motivations. Consequently, the Positive Discourse Analysis model encompasses three pivotal dimensions: an analytical dimension centered on the vocabulary and syntax of multimodal discourse, an interpretive dimension focusing on discourse semantics and contextual factors, and an explanatory dimension centered on socio-cultural and cognitive patterns. [18] Positive discourse exhibits characteristics of "multi-mode, multi-level, and multi-functionality". Positive Discourse Analysis not only involves studying the role of the language symbol system itself but also examines the influence of non-verbal symbol systems such as pictures, photos, and background music on ideology. It also conducts comprehensive analysis of discourse at different levels such as phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, and semantics. [19]

The multimodal Positive Discourse Analysis framework comprises two components: language and images, each containing three subsystems: the attitude system, the engagement system, and the gradation system. [20] The evaluation system is centered on the attitude system and is subdivided into three subsystems: emotion, judgment, and appreciation. The emotion system expresses human emotions, the judgment system evaluates human qualities, and the appreciation system evaluates the value of things. The gradation system categorizes attitudes into language strength and focus. Language strength is used to enhance or weaken the attitude expressed in language, while attitudes that cannot be graded through language strength require grading through focus, which can be clear or vague. In the same text, images and language interact with each other in three overlapping ways, expressing consistent or inconsistent attitudes. In cases of expressing consistent attitudes, the overlap between images and language is repetition, emphasis, or partial relationship with the overall attitude. In cases of expressing inconsistent attitudes, the overlap between images and language is to highlight a certain attitude. The Chinese and English names of time-honored Chinese brands serve as significant identifying features, directly affecting the domestic and international purchasing and dissemination of brands. Consumers' cognition of China time-honored brands is comprehensive, involving visual, auditory, and memory aspects. The internet age of information explosion provides a platform for the application of multimodal theory. Whether various symbol resources can be effectively utilized to construct meaning is crucial for discourse communication success and attractiveness. Therefore, the comprehensive design of time-honored Chinese brands is particularly important, directly affecting the brand image of these brands and even the country's external publicity. Based on the multimodal Positive Discourse Analysis framework (see **Figure 3**), this paper explores various issues in the translated names of China time-honored brands in Shanghai and provides feasible translation strategies for their English translation and cross-cultural communication. [21]



**Figure 3.** Multimodal positive discourse analysis framework.

## 4. Multimodal Positive Discourse Analysis in the Translation of China Time-Honored Brands in Shanghai

In semiotics, language and images demonstrate a high level of coherence and mutually influence one another within multimodal texts. The evaluative resources in language manifest as evaluative vocabulary, while images also fulfill their evaluative function through the selection of meaningful expressions. This suggests that multimodal positive discourse analysis can scrutinize the positive sentiments conveyed in images, amalgamating with the analysis of positive discourse in language to establish a framework for multimodal positive discourse analysis. Through a functional examination of the dual-modal resources of text and images pertaining to China time-honored brands in Shanghai, with an emphasis on the social attributes of discourse, readers are steered towards interpretations anticipated by the creators. This approach aims to elicit emotional or ideological resonance and foster the global dissemination of these brands.

### 4.1. Language Section

#### 4.1.1. Language

The official English translation of the Chinese time-honored brand “白象” as “white elephant” may lead to misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. Translating “白象” as “Bijoy” not only considers the phonetic translation of the source language, transplanting the pronunciation of “白象” into its English translation, which is conducive to the consistency of the brand in the market. In addition, the prefix “bi-” in “Bijoy” carries the meaning of “double”, giving “Bijoy” the meaning of “double joy”, which corresponds to the auspicious cultural connotation of “白象” in Chinese, thus creating a positive external publicity image for the “白象” battery brand. The spelling of “Bijoy” is also similar to “Bijou” in French, meaning jewelry or exquisite items, which also reflects a positive attitude.

The Chinese early national pharmaceutical industry enterprise “龙虎” is officially translated into English as “Dragon Tiger”. Both “龙” and “虎” are auspicious symbols in traditional Chinese culture, symbolizing overcoming all difficulties in the market competition and standing firm. In the Western cultural context, “dragon” is a mythical creature that combines features of snakes and lizards, symbolizing evil and terror, different from the auspicious image of dragons in traditional Chinese culture. Translating “龙虎” as “Loonghoo”, “loong” is both phonetic and pictographic, with two “o”s representing the two eyes of the dragon, echoing the meaning of longevity for the brand and corresponding to the Chinese brand meaning of standing undefeated. The word “hoo” corresponds to “loong” in word formation, not only with pictorial beauty, but also reads smoothly, which can resonate emotionally with the target audience.

Translating China time-honored brands into Chinese pinyin names has become a fundamental translation strategy, whereas innovative translation practices can better convey the characteristics of China time-honored brands, therefore fully displaying China’s unique allure. This distinctive Chinese style will



pique the curiosity and interest of Western consumers, prompting them to pay closer attention to and delve deeper into the profound cultural connotations of Chinese time-honored brands.

#### 4.1.2. Linguistic Features of Images

Established in 1938, Life Fun, a venerable brand enterprise, enjoys a distinguished reputation in Shanghai, its surrounding provinces, and even overseas, owing to its extensive assistance and Shanghai-style characteristics. The brand not only epitomizes its distinctiveness through a unique linguistic layout but also exhibits significant features in its imagery (see **Figure 4**). In the Life Fun logo, “立丰” “SINCE 1938”, and “Life fun” are arranged in a positive and equal manner from a horizontal perspective, reflecting the positive attitude of the brand; from a vertical perspective, the words are arranged horizontally, reflecting the brand’s use of an equal attitude. In particular, the emphasis on “SINCE 1938” utilizing the AD calendar to underscore the time-honored brand’s extensive history. This translation imbues the content of this esteemed brand with a dual significance of content and history. By employing red, the emblem astutely juxtaposes against the white background, accentuating the evaluative function of language. The utilization of red in this English rendition, a warm color tone, conveys joy, festivity, and auspiciousness in Chinese culture, thereby enhancing the positive demeanor of the time-honored brand. At the same time, “立丰” and “Life fun” utilize distinct fonts and are arranged in a more fluid manner, presenting a humble posture from a vertical perspective, thereby illustrating the brand’s affinity with consumers and accentuating the delight that Lifeng food bestows upon life.

#### 4.2. Image Section

Kenned suggests, “Verbal representations and visual images often merge together and are presented to readers as a whole. They are indispensable because the process of elucidation cannot proceed independently or self-sufficiently.” [22] The “回力” (Warrior) logo of Shanghai Zhengtai Xinji Rubber Factory fully embodies this concept. Registered officially in 1935, “回力” symbolizes the product’s everlasting invincibility, also homophonous with “万里” (Jiangyin dialect, in Jiangsu Province), representing product performance. Simultaneously, “WARRIOR” originally denotes a warrior, depicting an image of a robust man pulling a bow (see **Figure 5**), amalgamating elements from the ancient Chinese legend of “Houyi Shooting the Sun” and the imagery of ancient Greek warriors.



**Figure 4.** Logo of Life Fun.



Figure 5. Logo of WARRIOR.

This portrayal exhibits a robust and majestic stance, embodying the brand's indomitability and unstoppable momentum, and conveying the heroic ethos of the Chinese populace. This imagery encapsulates the notion of "invincible colossal power", resonating with the admiration for the warrior ethos prevalent among Chinese youth at the time. By opting for a male portrayal, it accentuates attributes of strength and character to underscore the product's endurance, resilience, and elasticity. The English component of "WARRIOR" can also be interpreted as a facet of the psychological projection within the image, aligning with the attitude conveyed in the image. This projection mirrors the brand's stance, lending authenticity and reliability to the attitude expressed in the image, while also reinforcing the attitude conveyed in the image through language.

In the 1930s, China's predominant soda manufacturer, "正广和", adopted "AQUARIUS" as its official English name. This translation also resonates with the astronomical term for the eleventh house on the zodiac, commonly referred to as "Aquarius" or "Water-Bearer". In ancient Babylonian depictions, the Aquarius constellation portrays a celestial being pouring water from a jug. Hence, the logo incorporates a motif comprised of the twelve constellation symbols of Aquarius (see Figure 6), symbolizing the filling of a precious vessel with sacred water, thereby offering refreshing and delightful soda for consumers. The vivid sky-blue hue intensifies the emotive value of the image, connoting purity and simplicity, while also reflecting the product's high quality and the enterprise's excellence. The English rendition "AQUARIUS" aligns with the sentiment conveyed by the image, rendering the attitude expressed therein more credible, with the image serving to fortify positive connotations.

The Chinese time-honored restaurant "大富贵" symbolizes auspiciousness, prosperity, and wealth. Its official English translation is "DFG". The logo design draws inspiration from the imagery of a copper coin, encircled by the English inscription "DFG" (see Figure 7), symbolizing affluence and prosperity. The deep golden hue accentuates the brand's luxuriousness and magnificence, while also underscoring its status as the oldest and grandest Hui cuisine restaurant. The composition of the English translation within the image conveys a congruent sentiment as "大富贵", hereby enhancing the authenticity and reliability of the conveyed attitude, with the image serving to bolster positive connotations. The square-shaped font "DFG" can be regarded as an aspect of psychological projection within the image, aligning seamlessly with the attitude expressed therein and contributing to the reinforcement of positive meanings.



**Figure 6.** Logo of AQUARIUS.



**Figure 7.** Logo of DFG.

“金枫”, as a renowned and enduring brand of Huangjiu (Chinese rice wine) brand in the Shanghai market, its official English translation is “JIN-FENG”. Its logo features a depiction of a red maple leaf (see **Figure 2**), which lacks congruity and product association with the brand name and overarching image. Conversely, modifying the logo to incorporate a warm yellow hue not only better highlights the esteemed status of “金枫” as the oldest time-honored brand of Huangjiu but also ensures coherence with the brand name, thereby realizing the intended dissemination effect. It is noteworthy that such alterations also harmonize with the raw materials and color palette of Huangjiu, thereby amplifying the genuineness of the brand’s portrayal. By accentuating positive connotations, the revamped logo design will contribute to fortifying the brand’s communicative efficacy.

In the course of brand external promotion and international dissemination, brand proprietors are urged to meticulously address the conception and refinement of brand logos. The symbiotic relationship between textual and visual elements plays a pivotal role in the identification and propagation of time-honored brands. Hence, during the design phase, paramount importance should be attributed to fostering coherence in visual representation to augment brand recognition. Such endeavors not only facilitate brand differentiation amidst intense market rivalry but also substantiate the attainment and perpetuation of enduring commercial prosperity.

## 5. Conclusion

The perspective of multimodal positive discourse analysis offers robust support for China's time-honored brands in Shanghai across various dimensions including the English translation of brand names, cultural communication, product attributes, and historical lineage. Through a comprehensive examination of both the visual components of brand logos and the linguistic aspects of brand terminology, a deeper comprehension and effective dissemination of the brand's characteristics and cultural significance can be attained. Multimodal analysis facilitates the precise translation and transmission of the fundamental information and ethos inherent in time-honored brands. By scrutinizing both linguistic and non-linguistic symbols, optimal translation strategies can be devised, resonating with the target audience of the intended language while preserving the distinctiveness and traditional essence of the brand. Moreover, it is imperative to acknowledge that the translation of brand names for China's time-honored brands in Shanghai serves as a significant manifestation of China's national soft power and image. The employment of multimodal positive discourse analysis enables a more precise conveyance of the brand's core essence and unique values, thereby accomplishing the objective of international brand promotion and external publicity.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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