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Brands Crossing Borders: Cross-cultural Issues in Brand Localization in and from China

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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

**“Brands Crossing Borders: Cross-cultural Issues in Brand
Localization in and from China”**

written by

Molly Catherine Bowman

and submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for completion of
the Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

Dr. Rebecca Jones, thesis director

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As China continues to play a more integral role in the global economy, the ability to do business in, with, and from China is of the utmost importance. With the country's nascent transformation from a manufacturing economy to a value-added hub of innovation, Chinese companies face new challenges in communicating their brands and values abroad, and their Western counterparts face equal if not greater challenges in maintaining their market share on a global scale.

Communication will be the key to success in this dynamic environment. This paper will explore some of the unique China stories of prominent global organizations — how they have succeeded in localizing both their products and brands in and from China, what factors play a critical role in cross-culture consumer behaviors, and what the future may hold for the evolving international business marketplace.

A China Dream

For the last quarter of a century, modern China has been on the cusp of becoming an economic superpower, with an increasing number of Western corporations crossing borders hoping to grab the attention and business of its 1.3 billion inhabitants.

My original interest in Asia, however, was not to raise a company's global presence or international assets. I had more personal reasons. I have always been interested in culture and communication, very aware and curious from a young age about the differences between people from various backgrounds.

At just 8 years old, I begged my parents for a trip to Guatemala, forfeiting my Christmas gifts in exchange for an international experience. My parents finally conceded, not knowing that this maiden voyage would begin an annual trend that would shape my life. Each summer between the ages of 8 and 18, I spent at least two weeks in Guatemala, Honduras, or Peru,

soaking up the intricate cultural details of each Hispanic experience. As I grew older, my interest in these differences expanded beyond neighboring Latin America to societies even more culturally removed from my home country.

In high school, I became interested in politics and journalism, and the occurring presence of China in the media sparked within me an interest in the East. Hearing a speaker at a conference (who would later become a mentor of mine) share her own experience of living in Beijing convinced me that God had given me this interest in China as a precursor for what would become a huge component of my life.

As a university freshman, I applied for a campus ministry program for one year of service and Mandarin language study in Beijing, China. When selected for the program, I made the proper arrangements to put my degree at Ouachita Baptist University on hold, pack up everything I would need into two suitcases, and book a flight to Beijing.

When I arrived in China the following fall, I became completely enthralled with the surrounding cultures. I discovered that Beijing is truly an international hub, creating a unique conglomeration of cultures. Though I was immersed in Chinese language and culture while living on the outskirts of one of the world's largest cities, my classmates and colleagues were from all around the world.

This sparked in me an appreciation for the art of building relationships with people from differing backgrounds. It became essential for me to ascertain the most effective ways to communicate between cultures. I began to self-teach through books about cultural psychology and through informal interviews with my new friends about their habits and outlooks on various aspects of life.

When I returned to Ouachita Baptist University the following year, I sought out opportunities to continue these studies. Through the Carl Goodson Honors Program, I was able to create a unique Directed Study program. The study took a concentrated look at the major behavioral difference among cross-cultural consumer markets, specifically comparing American business communication strategies with those of its Eastern counterparts through the analysis of cultural and psychological distinctions.

This study, directed by Dr. Christopher Long who has extensively studied psychology and consumerism, opened my mind to the fundamental aspects of culture and the implications those have within the realm of strategic marketing and branding. I returned to Beijing the following summer to intern at a Christian publishing company, which helped me put the theories I had studied into practice.

To continue this study even further, I was awarded the Ben Elrod Award through the Carl Goodson Honors Program, which included an international travel grant, that allowed me to attend the Global Marketing Conference in Singapore, July 2014. The conference theme was directly related to my topic of interest, "Bridging Asia and the World: Globalization of Marketing & Management Theory and Practice," and many of the academic papers presented at the conference are included as support within this paper. The conference gave me with the most recent research available within Asian consumer studies and provided me an opportunity to have conversations with some of the top marketing and branding professionals in the world.

It was not until the beginning of 2015, however, that I truly began to see these theories applied daily within a successful business model. I finished my degree program at Ouachita in December 2014, and received a job as a Marketing Trainee at CSOFT International, Ltd., a global communications provider based out of Beijing. In January, I made the move back to

chaotic metropolitan area that is Beijing. Within the first three days on the job, I received a (albeit, strange) promotion to the role of Executive Assistant to Shunee Yee, the President and CEO of CSOFT, International and Forbes' Most Powerful Woman Entrepreneur 2012.

Through managing accounts, meetings, speeches, and marketing materials for this multi-million dollar corporation, I received a crash-course on the realities of doing business in and with China. Our entire company revenue is based on value-added services that help companies localize their products within new markets. I experienced firsthand the evolution of China as a "Made In China" exporter of goods to a "Made for China" innovation center. As I share in more detail later in this paper, I expect this progression of innovation will continue until China becomes the source of many of the world's most innovative products. This transition creates a growing need for China to localize their products to markets throughout the world. Many of the interviews and insights included in this paper are from direct interactions with industry colleagues I met during my time at CSOFT.

The biggest challenge I faced in this international workplace is the reality that it is impossible NOT to communicate. Though not all scholars agree with this idea, it seems that every word, action, or facial expression shown is communicating SOMETHING to the world, even if the communicator is unaware of the implications at the time. The business implications of this truth are huge and require organizations to become sensitive to their actions and to take an investigative approach to their markets' needs in order to communicate in ways that align with their brand identity.

The Emerging East

If it only took business acquisitions to make a successful brand, then Chinese companies would have easily done it years ago. China owned a record amount of \$3.8 trillion in bonds in

other countries' treasuries by 2013, and its appetite for acquiring foreign companies shows no signs of weakening. A recent example of China's expansion abroad is the acquisition of British electric-vehicle startup Emerald Automotive by Chinese carmaker Geely in 2015. A year ago, the Zhejiang-based company also acquired Manganese Bronze Holdings—the manufacturer of London cabs—and Sweden's Volvo Car Corporation in 2010.¹

China's growing importance on the world stage can be attributed in part to its decade-old "go global" policy. The country's outbound investment in 2014, for example, soared to \$102.9 billion, an increase of 14.1 percent from the previous year. "Judging from the current speed, China will soon become a net outbound investor," China's Vice Commerce Minister, Zhong Shan, was quoted as saying by the BRICS Post early 2015.² According to Interbrand, the total brand value of the top 50 Best China Brands in 2015 increased 22 percent when compared to the total value of the 50 Best China Brands in 2013, representing the largest increase in overall brand value since the inception of Best China Brands.³

Ctrip.com, China's biggest travel website, recently acquired a majority stake in TravelFusion, a London-based air ticket and hotel booking website. In the past, the company invested heavily in Hong Kong and Taiwan, but founder James Liang Jianzhang said that he will start investing only in foreign companies to accelerate the company's global expansion.⁴

Dalian Wanda Group, China's largest property developer, has recently acquired Swiss Sports marketing firm Infront Sports & Media. The purchase came a few weeks after the

¹ <http://thebricspost.com/china-global-investment-rises-to-102-9-bn-in-2014/#.VPEylSxAspA>.

² Ibid.

³ <http://interbrand.com/en/newsroom/16/interbrand-releases-best-china-brands-report>

⁴ Forbes, "Ctrip Eyes Greater Share of China Outbound Travel: Buys Majority Stake in TravelFusion," Jan. 7, 2015. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2015/01/07/ctrip-eyes-greater-share-of-china-outbound-travel-buys-majority-stake-in-travelfusion/>.

company announced a major investment in Spanish soccer champion, Atletico Madrid. Wanda, which also owns AMC Entertainment, said it plans to acquire more overseas companies this year to deepen its push into sports and entertainment.⁵

Xiaomi, the world's third biggest smartphone maker, currently sells its devices in Asia, but the company said it plans to break into the US market in the next few months. Global Vice President Hugo Barra said a US version of Xiaomi's online shopping site is in the works, but it will not be selling its main products. The new site will instead be selling accessories such as headphones, fitness band and power banks. In late December 2014, the four-year-old company raised \$1.1 billion in funding, making it one of the world's most valuable startups.⁶

China's largest privately owned conglomerate, Fosun International, Ltd., recently acquired US-based Meadowbrook Insurance Group for about \$433 million. Since 2010, the Shanghai-based company has spent billions of dollars buying up foreign firms including a Hollywood movie studio, a Portuguese insurer, and a New York tower. In the near future, CEO Liang Xinjun told FinanceAsia that the company is eyeing one or two more acquisitions in Japan and Europe. These acquisitions are seen as success stories, but in reality there are far more failed cases of overseas business endeavors than successful ones. Unfortunately, it takes much more than deep pockets to grow a successful global brand.

Zhao Zhongxiu, Vice President of University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, was quoted in China Daily as saying that most failed cases are not disclosed to the

⁵ Wall Street Journal, "Dalian Wanda to Buy Swiss Sports Group Infront," Feb. 10, 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/dalian-wanda-to-buy-swiss-sports-group-infront-1423540058>.

⁶ Bloomberg Business, "Xiaomi Plans to Open Online Store in U.S.," Feb. 10, 2015. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-02-12/xiaomi-plans-to-open-online-store-in-u-s-but-won-t-sell-phones>.

public because people love to flaunt successful cases and avoid talking about failures.⁷

Companies inspired to go global need to have a clear strategy and a thorough understanding of the target language and culture.

Many companies in China are seeing an increased opportunity for growth globally, yet are limited in their success due to weak international consumer brand recognition. James Wang, General Manager of Interbrand Beijing, offered his reflection. “The reason why Chinese brands face so many challenges and are operationally big, while fundamentally weak, lies in the gap of authenticity, relevance and differentiation compared to world’s most influential and powerful global brands,” said Wang. “Many Chinese enterprises are still in the early stages of brand development, or what Interbrand calls the Age of Identity. However, with every great challenge there lies a great opportunity.”⁸

Many Chinese companies are still figuring out what identity they want to portray to the world. Like teens, they go through phases of identity, unsure of what they want to communicate and often sending mixed messages to a very confused audience. Just like the typical response to an angsty teen, this action results in the audience, or “target market,” feeling as if they cannot take the company, or anything it says, seriously.

West to East -- East to the Rest

Though Chinese companies going global struggle with localizing their brands abroad, global companies in China have other issues in localization. For many, their brand is internationally recognizable, but a brand is only as strong as the products it represents. To grow a more stable global identity, many international corporations are restructuring their China-market approach by better localizing their products.

⁷ CSOFT International’s HQ Magazine, “China Lacks One Thing,” 2014.

⁸ <http://interbrand.com/en/newsroom/16/interbrand-releases-best-china-brands-report>

In an interview in China Daily, the CEO of 3M Inge G. Thulin shared that the company's mantra is "In China, for China," which has helped the company successfully localize its operations.⁹ There has been a natural evolution from simply importing goods to locally adapting products, to finally fueling local, on-site innovation within their Chinese business unit. Due to investing in proper localization, 3M has experienced incredible growth in the world's largest emerging market. The company's tagline, "Innovative Technology for a Changing World," captures its dedication to understanding its changing markets and meeting the needs of the consumers.¹⁰

Honeywell International, Inc. is another corporation that had a fresh growth approach in China. Though the original structure was supported by "West to East" shipment of products, the company decided in 2004 to identify China-specific needs around them and offer innovative solutions. Now, nearly 30 percent of the company's revenues stem from these new "East to East" products, and Honeywell is transferring these products into an "East to Rest" strategy – taking Chinese innovation to the rest of the world.

In 2015, it is not enough to export products, and it is no longer enough to just localize product documentation. Huawei Technology Co. Ltd., the largest telecommunications provider in the world, has maintained an in-house translation services center since 1996, but at that time, it was just a small venture, translating from Chinese into English, French, and Russian, in order to localize their products to new markets.

Today, the Shenzhen-based company's translation center has over 400 full-time employees that produce a great volume of multilingual content on a daily basis. In 2014 alone, it

⁹ China Daily USA, "Retooling for Sustained Business Growth," March 30, 2015. http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2015-03/30/content_19951818.htm.

¹⁰ 3M Global Gateway, <http://www.3m.com>.

translated over 500 million words, 450 million of which were Chinese to English. In total, the company has translated nearly 4 billion words in the last 18 years.¹¹

Though translation is an important aspect of selling your brand abroad, Huawei's Bill Chen says that good branding requires much more than just making content available in the consumer's native tongue. "You've got to export your culture, and you have to package it in a way that appeals to your target audiences around the world," said Chen. "How we handle our brand is the next major challenge. And this has implications both internally and externally as an organization."¹²

The importance of this brand consistency has led to Huawei restructuring the way their translation services center functions. While 80% of the daily workload is still product localization (translating packaging, software, manuals, etc.), the company has designated the other 20% specifically for corporate branding-related communications, including internal projects and marketing.¹³

AMD, the world's second largest provider of microprocessors, has also faced many of these challenges in developing a successful global strategy. This company has created the processing power behind gaming systems such as XBOX One, PS/4, and the Nintendo Wii. Ron Myers, Corporate Vice President of Digital Marketing, has played a defining role in rebranding AMD through all of its digital assets. Through this process, he has accumulated unique, in-depth insight into the challenges and opportunities in the China market.¹⁴

¹¹ Huawei, <http://www.huawei.com/us/about-huawei/corporate-info/index.htm>.

¹² LocWorld27 Shanghai, "Ali-blah-blah-blah: Speaking the Language of China," April 15, 2015.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Interview, Ron Myers. April 12, 2015.

“A few years ago, we were kicking off a new marketing campaign called ‘Never Settle’ with the overarching idea being ‘Never Settle for anything less than the quality provided by AMD,” explained Myers. “We were in the proofreading section of the translation process right before releasing the campaign when we discovered that this phrase did not convey what we wanted it to across cultures. In China, we found it meant ‘Never Get Married’ while in other cultures, we discovered it meant ‘Never Sit Down’ or ‘Never Buy A House.’ Needless to say, we found that localizing our brand was more difficult than we originally imagined.”¹⁵

The Digital Revolution

As Corporate Vice President of Digital Marketing, Myers realizes that involvement on social media platforms is no longer a luxury but rather a necessity for a modern company to succeed. “The digital sphere provides endless opportunities, both good and bad, for a company. While it gives you new ways to interact with clients and customers, it also means you need that much more man-force to make sure you are localizing your message well.”¹⁶ A recent study by Forbes reported that 92 percent of business owners indicate that their involvement on social media platforms directly affects their business, a 6 percent increase from the same study conducted in 2013.¹⁷ This ubiquity of usage increases the importance of using and monitoring social media wisely due to its ability to make or break a brand’s identity.

Companies can use social media as a tool to help develop a positive brand identity, build brand awareness, and promote goods. They can also use these applications to conduct audience research and measure brand engagement. A quest for individuality, increased mobility, market convergence, sensory overload, and globalization are creating new issues for companies, making

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Interview, Ron Myers. April 12, 2015.

¹⁷ Jason DeMers, *The Top 7 Social Media Marketing Trends Dominating 2014*, July 23, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jaysondemers/2014/07/23/the-top-7-social-media-marketing-trends-dominating-2014/>.

it harder to control their brand identity throughout the global marketplace.¹⁸ The challenge is to “translate” concepts, repackage them in a way that makes sense, and do it virtually in an instant, which has become the standard in the virtual world.

Brand identity management in the digital age has become as much public relations and crisis communication as it is advertising. In a simple Google search of a business, news articles of product malfunctions and customer reviews with personal testimonials of customer experience trickle in beside a company’s well-crafted website. Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook are leading networks for this negative PR. Due to the existence of free websites and blog programs like Weebly, Wix, Blogger, and WordPress, every customer can be a published critic. The chart below highlights some of the changes the digital age has created in the way businesses market.

Then	
One-to-many (Mass Communication)	One-to-one (Personalized attention)
Targeted primarily by Demographic	Targeted primarily by Behavioral Segmentation
Marketing decisions based on intuition	Decisions based on data-based automization
A few, isolated channels	Exploding, integrated channels (social media)
WOM from authoritative impersonal network	Word-of-mouth primarily from personal network
Company generated content	User-generated content
Company controls power over brand	Consumer controls power over brand

¹⁸ Jean-Noel Kapferer, *The New Strategic Brand Management: Advanced Insights and Strategic Thinking, 5th Edition*. (Great Britain: Kogan Page Limited, 2012).

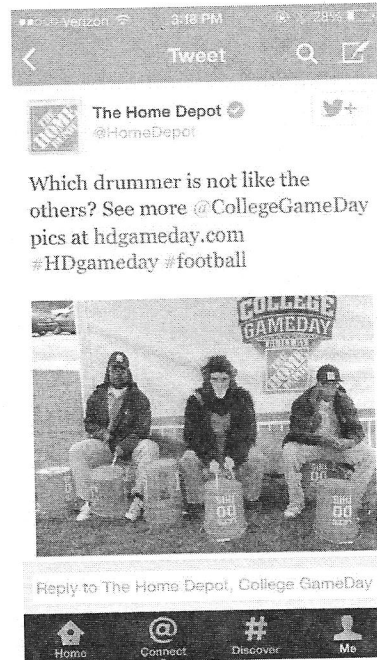
With such a rapidly evolving customer-to-customer communications environment, every business should make efforts to demystify the ways in which they utilize social media and realize the power of the “digital chatter” associated with the business’ brand.

Brands must be exceptionally aware, however, of negative power “digital chatter” can hold. While trying to engaging and stand out from the rest of the messages on worldwide web careless mistakes can be made. Home Depot learned the hard way of the permanence involved this type of mistake.

The home supply store has long been a supporter of ESPN’s College Game Day. A manager of the store’s twitter account posted a photo of two African-American men alongside a third man in a gorilla suit beating on buckets at Home Depot College Game Day station with the caption, “Which drummer is not like the others?” Though the comment was most likely harmless, the slight hint of racial profiling made the company appear insensitive, creating a negative reaction from consumers worldwide. Home Depot removed the tweet immediately and sent out a public apology, but as is true with most things on the Internet, the image was captured by a quick screenshot and dispersed widely throughout social media platforms.

One critical factor in brand management is learning how to respond to these cases in a way that is sensitive yet effective. Home Depot responded well and therefore overcame the negative public reaction.

One World, Many Markets



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My first week at CSOFT International was an exciting time of transition within the company's human resources department as we welcomed a new executive to our team of leadership. Will Knight, formerly of SMB of Sales for Microsoft's Asia branch, became our new Executive Vice President of Global Growth and Operations. One of Knight's first undertakings in his new position was to coordinate a meeting with the marketing team to take a "health check" of our current status and to discuss potential future projects.

As Knight inquired about our perception of the company's marketing strategy, it became evident that several people had noticed a common weakness within our strategy plan. CSOFT International had two different taglines, "One World, One Market" and "Opening World Markets Together," that were being published regularly on marketing materials. These were born out of differing preferences of two executives but resulted in a lack of brand consistency. As we began to discuss the possibilities of rebranding, we created a pro-con list for both taglines.

It was then I realized the implications one little word can have in the way a company is perceived. Though "One World, One Market" was imagined with good intentions (most likely inspired by the "One World, One Dream" theme of the Beijing Olympics in 2010), I quickly realized it conveyed exactly the opposite of our corporation's intent.

"The only reason we have a job right now is because there are MANY markets in the world... We want our customers to understand the language and cultural difference between these markets and how we can help them bridge those gaps," I shared. "By moving away from ONE market, we will better communicate the need for our services." The company has since determined a new tagline that will be officially released at the CSOFT Summit event in August 2015. The idea that multiple markets exist shows the increasing need for localization if companies desire to tap into those markets.

The word “quality” is another example of how one word can change the entire meaning you are tying to the word. For Americans, “quality” means something that works, is well-built, and durable. In Korea, “quality” means “brand new,” while in Japan, it means “perfect and flawless.” Traditionally, Chinese people attach great importance to one’s social status; therefore, in China, a high quality product does not have to be especially well-built or durable, as long as it raises your social status—thus increasing your perceived “quality.” If a company uses this word in a campaign, they need to be aware of the cultural perception the word held in their target market. With so many different meanings attached to any given word, it is no wonder so many businesses have failed in their efforts to expand overseas and integrate both staff and business models across cultures. Practices that work brilliantly in your home country might completely flop in another country.

For many companies, the traditional approach of localizing products was merely through translation services. This created an increase in automated translation technology development, hoping that the new automated process would make the localization process cheaper and more efficient. Many companies, however, discovered that straight translation services in and of themselves were not enough for effective market entry, requiring a more recent move toward creative cross-cultural branding and localization services.

Translation vs. Transcreation

Although localization and translation are often used in similar contexts, they are actually not the same thing. Put simply, localization is the process of not only translating the words of, but also preparing all aspects of a product or service to meet the needs of a foreign market. When a product or service is localized, the source text is transformed into a linguistic equivalent, with

local-linguistic semantics and culture at the forefront making the product specifically tailored for the target market.

A translation, no matter how good it is, may still fall flat in a different cultural context. That is why good marketers know, when adapting messages for an international audience, they have to do more than just translate. They need to perform “transcreation,” the process of adapting the message, design and overall package to cater to a differently cultured audience. This process is crucial in a setting where cross-cultural communication is involved.

In the movie industry, for example, film titles have often been poorly translated. In some countries, some titles are not even translated, but are changed into another English-title. For example, “Never Been Kissed” was promoted as “Because She’s Ugly,” and in France, the movie “The Hangover” is given the title “Very Bad Trip.” In other countries, some translations are too literal or don’t make sense at all. In China, for example, the movie “G.I. Jane” is translated as 魔鬼女兵 (móguǐnǚdàbīng), which literally means, “Satan Female Soldier,” and the movie “Army of Darkness” in Japan was released as “Captain Supermarket.”¹⁹

While a poor title translation may or may not affect the success of a movie, in the world of politics, a mistranslation can be quite unforgiving and lead to long-lasting embarrassment. A recent article published by BBC Culture details an incident in which President Jimmy Carter appeared to express carnal desire for Poland in 1977. He meant to say that he wanted to learn about the Polish people’s “desires for the future.” His interpreter made so many other translation blunders during that trip that he became the punch line to many Polish jokes.

There are some messages that simply do not communicate to the same depth when they are translated from their original language. Chinese Nobel Prize winner Mo Yan’s newest novel

¹⁹ Jordan, John-Erik. “25 American Movies With Hilarious Foreign Titles,” *Babbel Magazine*, 2014.

“Frog” is currently facing these translation difficulties. The story of “Frog” tackles the controversial issue of forced abortions in China in regard to the country’s single-child policy, but critics say that Mo Yan’s stylistic elements are lost in the English translation.

Yan uses the metaphor of a frog’s lifecycle – embryos, tadpoles, bullfrogs – to explain human development and connections between love and life. The main character, Gugu, is the Chinese village’s obstetrician and is haunted by frogs throughout the story. The word frog in Chinese is 蛙 (wā), while the word for child is 娃 (wá), providing an intricate metaphor for the guilt Gugu feels for aborting thousands of lives.²⁰

The novel’s translator Howard Goldblatt decided not to alter the content in a way that intrudes into the story, preferring straight translation over transcreation. “What the reader has in her hands is a facsimile of the original work,” said Goldblatt. However, without understanding this linguistic connection, critics say the use of frogs throughout the novel seems strange and forced.²¹

Even with proper translation, a lack of cultural understanding on how the language is presented can also create a lack of effective cross-cultural communication. For example, Luxury fashion brand Burberry released a scarf in 2015 with the Chinese character 福 (fu), which means happiness and good fortune, embroidered on the edge. An advertisement for the scarf quickly circulated to over 13,000 people on Chinese social media sites but not for the right reasons. Chinese consumers said the design “looked cheap” and lacked an understanding of Chinese culture. For Chinese New Year, the character 福 (fu) is normally presented upside down in order

²⁰ Yan, Mo and Howard Goldblatt. *Frog: A Novel*. New York, NY: The Penguin Group. (January 2015).

²¹ Moore, Steven. “Book review: ‘Frog,’ by Mo Yan,” *The Washington Post* (March 2015).
http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/book-world-frog-by-mo-yan/2015/03/23/cc5e8834-cc01-11e4-8a46-b1dc9be5a8ff_story.html

to symbolize the arrival of good fortune. This tradition stems from a phonetic similarity between the Mandarin words for “upside down” and “arrived.”²²

A Splash of Color

Proper brand and product localization moves beyond proper translation and transcreation. In the twenty-first century, consumers expect messages to be visually engaging. Of the five human senses, sight most influences consumer perceptions. A study by Lindstorm revealed that when consuming messages, 83% of people rely on sight over the other four senses as their primary receptor.²³

Studies have shown that colors can account for 60-70% of a consumer’s acceptance or rejection of a product or message.²⁴ Colors, which are formed by light, are one way that the human mind processes solar energy. This energy can generate certain subconscious emotional reactions. Colors with long wavelengths, such as vivid reds and oranges, tend to work as stimulants. On the opposite end of the spectrum, colors with shorter wavelengths like blues and grays, tend to create a calming effect.²⁵

In choosing colors to represent a brand identity, it is vital that the color selection is cohesive with the corporate identity. Chang and Lin suggest that customers are aware of corporate brands through emotions evoked by color. For example, a test group responded to the rich blue associated with IBM with an expectation for a stable, reliable product. The yellow

²² Rui, Zhuang. “Burberry’s Chinese-themed scarf mocked by netizens,” *China Organization*. (January 27, 2015) www.china.org.cn.

²³ M. Lindstorm, *Brand Sense: Build Powerful Brands through Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight, and Sound* (New York, NY: Free Press: A Division of Simon and Schuster Inc., 2005).

²⁴ Wei-Lun Chang and Hsieh-Liang Lin, “The Impact of Color Traits on Corporate Branding,” *African Journal of Business Management* 4, no. 13 (November 2010): 3344-3355.

²⁵ Alex Simonson and Bernd H. Schmitt, *Marketing Aesthetics: The Strategic Management of Brands, Identity, and Image* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1997).

related to McDonald's golden arches connected a test group with sunshine, warmth, and happiness, underscoring the company's slogan, "I'm lovin' it."²⁶ These perceptions, which are made even more concrete by repeated exposure, create expectations within consumers, whether or not they are conscious of the change.

In *Before the Brand: Creating the Unique DNA of an enduring Brand Identity*, Perry and Wisonm explore how cultural and personal experiences affect an individual's interpretation of color.²⁷ A country's history and cultural tradition play a major role in how its inhabitants respond to color.

For example, in Western tradition, the color purple is often associated with royalty. Historically, the elements used in making purple dyes were in short supply, creating a deficiency that meant only the wealthiest people could afford the luxury of purple textiles. However, in China, royalty and wealth are represented by a shade of golden yellow. This specific shade of yellow was exclusive to the emperor's garments, symbolizing a level of social distinction out of reach of the common man.

Pepsi was the primary market holder of carbonated beverages in Southeast Asia until it re-branded, changing its originally dark royal blue vending machines to a new icy-blue "cool" approach in the 1990s. The lighter blue color is often associated with death and mourning in the targeted market and, due to the difference in the colors cultural meaning, the consumer brand

²⁶ Wei-Lun Chang and Hsieh-Liang Lin, "The Impact of Color Traits on Corporate Branding," *African Journal of Business Management* 4, no. 13 (November 2010): 3344-3355.

²⁷ A. Perry and D. Wisonm, *Before the Brand: Creating the Unique DNA of an enduring Brand Identity* (McGraw-Hill, 2003).

loyalty to Pepsi-Cola tapered off until the company lost its position as the top beverage company in Asia.²⁸

Another example of contrasting reactions is the color red in India and the United States. In India, the color red represents a sense of religion and purity, which is often associated with Hindu practices. The United States, however, sees red as a passionate color that often evokes an appetite, which is why it is often used in marketing fast-food restaurants.²⁹ The irony of these conflicting interpretations is apparent in that one protects its cattle due to religious ideas of reincarnation, while the other tries to sell cattle to the masses in the form of hamburgers.

Independent vs. Interdependent

Brand managers cannot deny the influence home cultures have on the actions of consumers. For this reason, branding strategies that communicate well in one culture may not appeal in the same way to consumers in different cultural contexts.³⁰ In their book "Clash!," cultural psychologists Hazel Rose Markus and Alana Conner highlight social divides that curve the psychological development of human beings, directly effecting the choices they make. These divisions are organized through economic structure, race, geographic location, sex, organizational ties, and religion.³¹

One primary division that scholars observe is the difference between independent and interdependent cultures. These terms are often used in describing essential distinctions between a

²⁸ Fromowitz, Mike, "Cultural blunders: Brands gone wrong," *Campaign Asia*. (October 7, 2013). <http://www.campaignasia.com/BlogEntry/359532,Cultural+blunders+Brands+gone+wrong.aspx>

²⁹ Satyendra Singh, "The Impact of Color on Marketing," *Management Decision* 44, no. 6 (2006): 783-789.

³⁰ Alexandra Aguirre-Rodriguez, "Cultural Factors That Impact Brand Personification Strategy Effectiveness," *Psychology & Marketing, Special Edition: Brand Personification* 31, no. 1 (January 2014): 70-83.

³¹ Hazel Rose Markus and Alana Conner, *Clash!: Eight Cultural Conflicts That Make Us Who We Are* (New York, New York: Hudson Street Press, 2013).

range of cultural groups, including East Asia vs. Americans and Eastern vs. Western Europeans.

32

In independent cultures, individualism is praised. Uniqueness and freedom are key values. Mainstream America tends to nurture an independent culture among its people, as can be observed by its media and entertainment.³³ Na suggests that independent cultures tend to have a lower sensitivity to social cues, often expressing indifference to “breaking the rules.”³⁴ In independent cultures, students process information through sharing their personal opinions, mothers mature their children by giving them options, and bosses offer direct critique to their employees.

People in independent cultures are very proud of their uniqueness and self-sustainability and are often looking for ways to affirm their perceived selves. In relation to brands, these cultures are loyal to brands that confirm who they perceive themselves to be. In the same way, these cultures expect brands to be true to their own selves, unchanged by surrounding situations or outside influences.

In contrast, interdependent cultures tend to be more cohesive and relational.³⁵ They place high value on tradition, similarity, and social ranking. Asian cultures, like those found in China, Korea, and Japan, are common examples of countries demonstrating interdependent cultural behaviors.

³² Information in this paragraph is supported by the following sources: S Kitayama, K Ishii, T Imada, K Takemura and J Ramaswamy, "Voluntary Settlement and the Spirit of Independence: Evidence from Japan's 'Northern Frontier'," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (American Psychological Association) 91 (2006): 369-384. A Norenzayan, I Choi and K Peng, "Cognition and Perception," ed. S. Kitayama and D. Cohen, *Handbook of Cultural Psychology* (Guilford Publications), 2007: 569-594. M. E. W. Varnum, I Grossmann, D Katunar, S Kitayama and R. E. Nisbett, "Holism in a European Cultural Context: Differences in Cognitive Style Between Central and East Europeans and Westerners," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 8 (2008): 321-333. Na, 2.

³³ Markus, xii.

³⁴ Na, 2.

³⁵ Markus, xii.

The organization of independent and interdependent cultures has been well established in the social science community.³⁶ However, analyzing these variables can sometimes prove challenging. Stereotyping and holding limited data as “concrete truths” about a culture is dangerous and should be avoided. One common problem is that broad generalizations that must occur in order to provide workable data, without taking into account that nonconformity exists in every culture.³⁷ While there are many experiments that show individuals tested do correspond directly with the general decisions of their cultures, the idea that this will always reap consistent results is flawed.³⁸ Strategies developed solely from broad assumptions can be hurtful to a brand, creating public enemies from vocally rebellious minorities that disagree with the generalization.³⁹

Another concern in the observation of independent and interdependent cultures is the reality that these two concepts are not black and white. They coexist in every individual in every society on a scale. Individuals can often portray symptoms of one orientation while still holding to values of the opposing view.

For example, even in the independently minded United States of America, subcultures with interdependent tendencies exist. This can often be determined by other culture-shaping factors in the Clash! construct. While being Western, and therefore holding to

³⁶ S Kitayama, S Duffy and Y Uchida, "Self As Cultural Mode of Being," *Handbook of Cultural Psychology* (Guilford Press), 2007: 6-8.

³⁷ Atieh Bathee, "Consumer Culture at Individual Level: Proposing a Two-Stepped Model, Comparing Iran and Germany," *Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science* (Routledge) 24, no. 3 (2014): 311-338.

³⁸ Na, 12-13.

³⁹ Jinkyung Na, Igor Grossmann, Micheal E. W. Varnum, Shinobu Kitayama, Richard Gonzalez and Richard E. Nisbett, "Cultural Differences Are Not Always Reducible to Individual Differences," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (HighWire Press) 107, no. 14.

independent values, Americans from the southern portion of the country will display more interdependent traits.

Part of this grey area in the psychological theory is due to economic divisions. In a study conducted by researchers at the National Academy of Sciences observed these two concepts, the researchers found that the group of Americans which identified with the working-class was more interdependent in seven out of ten social orientation measures than the test group which identified with the middle-class.⁴⁰

“Brands across geographies have reached a pivotal point in terms of their development,” said Jez Frampton, Interbrand’s Global Chief Executive Officer.

“They are entering what Interbrand has defined as the Age of You—and they are working to develop truly personalized and curated experiences around the individual consumer that this forthcoming age demands. Brands from all categories and sectors are getting ‘smarter’ – with products and devices working in concert with one another, across supply chains and in tandem with our own individual data sets.”

Your Brand. Your Values.

While we must appreciate the economic outcome of a brand, I argue that a brand is more than just the measurement of its effects on a quarters’ bottom line. In order to have a healthy, successful brand, a company or person must produce longevity. A good brand is responsible for creating community. The goal is to create something that invokes respect, trust, passion and evolvment from their audiences. Brands can help audiences feel they are part of something. This process is not immediate, but rather, takes a long period of time. Just like an interpersonal human relationship, trust must be accumulated, which is rarely an immediate process. Because we live in a society that is overrun with messages, a good brand must cut

⁴⁰ Jinkyung Na, Igor Grossmann, Micheal E. W. Varnum, Shinobu Kitayama, Richard Gonzalez and Richard E. Nisbett, "Cultural Differences Are Not Always Reducible to Individual Differences," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (HighWire Press) 107, no. 14.

through the static. In order to do this, brands must communicate emotion, and they must do so on a personal level.

The brand must be timely, and yet, it must maintain a sense of flexibility that is timeless. By creating a loyal customer base that sees your brand as something superior to that of your competitors, brands help to secure long-term affinity among consumers in the marketplace. This can be accomplished through allowing your market to see that their values align with your company culture.

In an international company such as Huawei, language mishaps and cultural gaps are serious communication barriers. When managing across many different cultures, it is essential to convey accurate and engaging messages. Chen says the challenge for Huawei is communicating the brand with the right messages, while keeping true to the internal culture of the company.

“For example, when we’re selling our products in Africa, we not only have to make the product useable and enjoyable, which are aspects of user experience in which language plays a huge role; We also have to make sure that intent, strategy, logistics, and social responsibility are aligned across cultures and borders in order to truly engage with local markets,” shared Chen. “Environmental protection is a huge deal in developing countries, so it’s a huge deal at Huawei too.”

This alignment can also be created through a method called “Brand Personification”, a “human-like portrayal of a product or brand that is designed to associate the brand with certain human characteristics.”⁴¹ This may be achieved through fictional, animated characters. “High need for affiliation can increase anthropomorphic reasoning tendencies by increasing the accessibility of knowledge about social characteristics and behaviors, and triggering search for sources of social connection,” says Aguirre-Rodriguez.⁴² This connection is especially important

⁴¹ Alexandra Aguirre-Rodriguez, "Cultural Factors That Impact Brand Personification Strategy Effectiveness," *Psychology & Marketing, Special Edition: Brand Personification* 31, no. 1 (January 2014): 70-83.

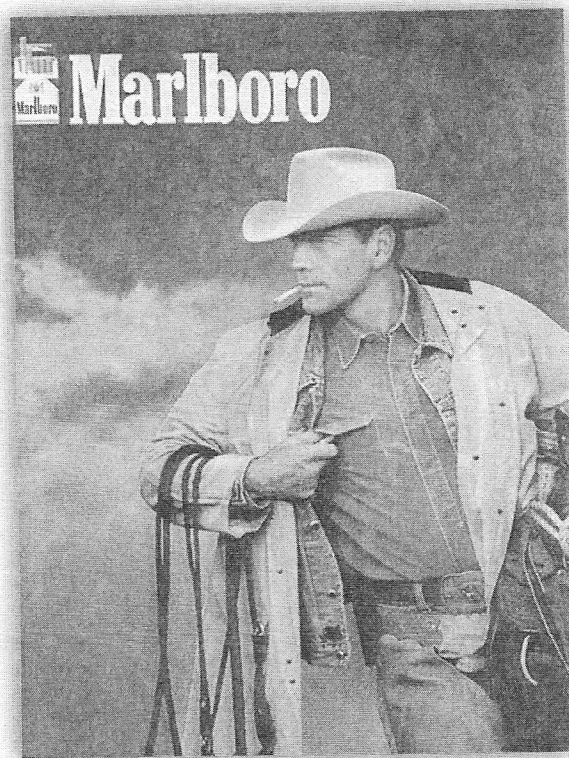
⁴² Ibid.

in individualistic cultures due to their need for a purchase to reaffirm their unique understanding of themselves.

One successful example of a company utilizing brand personification is Mr. Clean. Through the burly mascot of Mr. Clean, the company portrays itself and its products as capable and strong, something the individualistic consumer will associate with their own personal perception.

This is not always an easy task, however. Brands must represent culturally relevant personality traits in order for the personification to be relatable to the consumer for self-expression. In the United States, iconic brand personifications are reflective of the values of the independent American consumer.

For example, the outdoorsy Marlboro man represents a sense of ruggedness and hard work. The image of a cowboy works well with the common American idiom, "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps," which to many is the very essence of the opportunities granted by United States capitalism. This association could offer American consumers an opportunity for self-expression through the use of Marlboro.



However, the Marlboro man may not be as effective in East Asian cultures such as Taiwan, where traits like nonaggression, politeness, and cleanliness are exemplary.

In fact, a study conducted by leading consumer psychology academic, Dr. P. L. Chan, discovered that the idea of ruggedness was completely absent from brand perception in China. The exclusion of this idea is not limited to Asia. In a study of Ford owners and non-Ford owners in Brazil, ruggedness was not found to be a relevant factor in the local consumers' expressed brand association.

The Marlboro man's image can be redeemed in Asia if the overarching concept is extracted and translated into a slightly different personification. The brand identity the Marlboro Company desires to portray through their mascot is what they consider to be the epitome of manliness. Translating the Western rugged masculinity into a form of masculinity understood by Easterners can create a bridge over the cultural-divide. Eastern cultures relate masculinity with competence and authority. By simply removing his chaps and putting a suit on the Marlboro man, the brand personification could be as relevant and iconic across borders as it is within the United States.

Brand personification does not always have to be self-verifying in order to create brand loyalty. Sometimes, the only thing necessary is for the consumer to feel a relationship with the personality. The consumer does not have to have a self-perception of a rugged cowboy, but if they see the Marlboro man as a like-minded friend or desirable companion, effective brand loyalty can be established.

The Brand Champions

Ultimately, developing strong brands in 2015 is about uniting people and making them feel that they are part of a collective experience. Patrick Hanlon, a Forbes contributor, used the

following words to explain the importance of brands: “Brands are powerful things. When they work correctly, brands create trust, empathy, advocacy, and zealotry. They create community and people feel they belong within that community. And there’s nothing like someone from the other side telling you you’re wrong to harden your beliefs. Best of all, your advocates stick with you through bad times.”⁴³

Starbucks, which was ranked 76 on Interbrand’s “Top Global Brands of 2014” list, rose 22% in the last calendar year.⁴⁴ Part of the key to the company’s success is its “Meet Me at Starbucks” campaign, which takes the emphasis off the product and sales and instead focuses on personal experience. The campaign went global, shooting video inside 58 coffee shops in 28 countries, all highlighting the feel-good stories of Starbucks customers. The company is even using worldwide social media platforms, Twitter and Instagram, promoting the #HowWeMet tag in correspondence to the campaign.⁴⁵

The emotional, relational aspect of the promotion creates a cheerful tone in the “digital chatter” affiliated with the coffee provider, creating positive brand exposure, which can lead to brand-loyal customers. By highlighting individuals and personal experiences, the company has found the strategy to be effective in independent cultures. However, the relational aspect of “Meet Me at Starbucks” offers a sense of community to the company’s more interdependent groups. Overall, the mantra rises above the limitations of the cultural divide, nurturing the values of the majority of its targeted consumers.

⁴³ Hanlon, Patrick. “Branding the (Un)Brand,” *Forbes*. (November 27 2012). <http://www.forbes.com/sites/patrickhanlon/2012/11/27/branding-the-unbrand/>.

⁴⁴ Interbrand, *Best Global Brands 2014 - Starbucks*, October 8, 2014, <http://www.bestglobalbrands.com/2014/starbucks/> (accessed October 11, 2014).

⁴⁵ “Meet Me at Starbucks” Campaign, Starbucks, 2014, <http://www.trulydeeply.com.au/madly/files/2014/10/Screen-Shot-2014-10-06-at-4.57.48-pm.png>.

Another brand that has successfully used emotions to overcome the cultural difference in their target markets is Interbrand's #3 Top Global Brand, Coca-Cola.⁴⁶ The drink distributor is globally associated with "happiness in a bottle" due to extensive cross-cultural advertising. The company strives to sell sentiments like celebration and inclusiveness, like in the "Share a Coke" campaign. By offering personalized packaging, the company successfully tunes into channels that are relevant to the independent consumers need for their product to be as unique as they are.

This technique also bridges a generational gap, communicating well to millennials as a target-market. The excitement over the adapted labeling led to a consumer-initiated social media eruption. With over half a million photos posted to Instagram alone, the #shareacoke campaign was one of the most social media prolific marketing campaigns to date.⁴⁷

"A testament to Coca-Cola's ability to create experiences that unify and engage people across social, cultural, and geographical divides, the brand has increased sales volume by two percent, Facebook followers by 25 million, and servings to 1.9 billion per day-despite less than optimal economic environments." Another way the company sells this emotional message is by sponsoring major worldwide events like the Olympics and the 2014 FIFA World Cup, heightening the brand's global customer base. At these events, Coca Cola aligns with the joyous climax of an athlete's career. For the FIFA World Cup, the soft drink distributor hired Brazilian street artist Speto to create the brand identity for the campaign. The company "built a visual identity system that is authentically Brazilian but tells a story of togetherness and optimism, with the underlying connection of football."⁴⁸ After the event, Millward Brown surveyed more than

⁴⁶ Interbrand, *Best Global Brands 2014 - Coca-cola*, October 8, 2014, <http://bestglobalbrands.com/2014/cocacola/> (accessed October 11, 2014).

⁴⁷ IconoSquare, *Share A Coke Statistics*, 2014, <http://iconosquare.com/search/shareacoke>.

⁴⁸ Patrick Burgoyne, "How a Brazilian Street Artist and Leeds Design Studio Created Coke's FIFA World Cup Identity", *Coca-cola*, May 22, 2014, <http://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/world-cup-identity>.

5,000 consumers to determine the effect that the Coca-Cola FIFA campaign had on brand recognition. Of those surveyed, 92% of consumers in Brazil and 81% in the UK recognized Coca-Cola as the official sponsor of the competition, showing that the marketing campaign was effective in its goal for increased exposure. Sarah Walker, global director at Millward Brown's neuromarketing practice responded, "The post-event wave of research showed that by its conclusion, consumers had intuitively grasped who was a genuine sponsor. It was these sponsors who then gained the most in terms of feelings of positivity."⁴⁹

Conclusion

As the examples included have shown, international branding is a challenging issue. In order to successfully maintain a brand on a global scale, companies must be both proactive and reactive, adjusting as the target market requires. A few key findings to remember are:

- A brand is only as good as its product. If the product or service does not translate well to the target market, branding does not help. Observe the needs of the target market and localize the product to meet those needs.
- Language is complex. Do not rely solely on translation services but rather fully localize both the product and the company's brand in order to reach full market capacity.
- Color choices are important. Even though one color may be effective in marketing in one culture, it might indirectly communicate something different in other culture.
- A brand is associated with values. Proactively work to align the company's values with the consumer's values through corporate branding and outreach.

- Speak to the commonalities, not the differences. The best global brands bridge the gap between cultures by targeting the emotional areas that are shared amongst every human rather than highlighting the factors that set cultures apart.

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