



The Translation and Promotion of Chinese National Drinks Brands from the Perspective of Advertisement History

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Abstract

Chinese beverage brands have been faced with surmounting competition from both within and without since the very beginning. The present study, by qualitatively and quantitatively analyzing the publicity history of Coca-Cola, is intended to explore the strategies for translation and transmission of Chinese national drinks brands in the new era, with the aim to provide ideas and thoughts for promoting Chinese brands to go global and becoming part of the strengths for national competitiveness. By way of conclusion, it is suggested that Chinese beverage enterprises give their brands English names, translate their slogans by taking into account both the original language features or products and the cultural norms of the target language, and publicize their brands in a more dynamic and diachronic way, all of which would be helpful for promoting the image of the brands as well as their internationalization.

Keywords: Chinese National Drinks; brand image; diachronic advertising; going-global

1. Introduction

With economic globalization, enterprises are faced by surmounting competition from the same industry and different lines of businesses, both within and without the national borders. The Coca-Cola Company, for instance, took the first-mover advantage and dominated the beverage industry for hundreds of years, but is continuing to fight new rivals, such as its primary competitor Pepsi-Cola, and the later-comers out of its homeland, like Nongfu Spring of China. The same is true for Chinese national drinks brands that are making great efforts to go global. Therefore, advertisement and publicity are necessary and the successful story of foreign beverage brands offers lessons for others to learn. The present study, by qualitatively and quantitatively analyzing the publicity history of Coca-Cola, is intended to explore the strategies for translation and transmission of Chinese national drinks brands in the new era, and to provide ideas and thoughts for promoting Chinese brands to go global and becoming part of the strengths for national competitiveness.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous studies in China

Through searching “beverage” and “advertisement” as the keywords in CNKI, the largest Chinese academic database, we can find that 73.91% of the findings (a total of 362 papers) are addressing the principles and methods of beverage advertising and are published in periodicals belonging to trade economy, manufacturing industries and media, including how to craft an ad (Zhang, 1985), TV commercials, beverage ad and celebrities, homophonic advertising, and the overwhelming studies on creative advertisements in recent years. Also, the advertisements of Coca-Cola were introduced and explored in every aspect of China, with a complete publication of 350 papers between 1983 and 2021. However, merely 19 papers explored the translation of (food and) beverage ads, concentrating the translation of some best-known slogans from such translation theories as the Skopos Theory (Yuan, 2014; Zhang, 2018) or exploring the differences between Chinese and western cultures (Wang, 2021). One could move away from the micro-level and go further to identify the lacunae that await further investigation, such as the less considered similarities in beverage advertising. Not less obviously, big-data-driven strategies that can highlight the differences in eastern and western drinks ads have remained largely unanswered.

2.2 Related studies in the West

In the west, there was more research on this topic. By searching the exact keywords in Taylor & Francis Database, we can quickly get a total of 7000-plus findings, which moves toward more macro-levels, focusing on consumers’ attitudes toward, material effects of and racial issues in beverage advertisements. For instance, Angelini & Bradley (2010) explored the effects of homosexual imagery in print ads, and Wanjohi *et al.* (2021) presented a landscape analysis of sugar-sweetened beverage

policies in Kenya. Comparatively speaking, studies in the West are not only mainly done on the macro-levels, but also with a clear focus, which means that researchers either investigate further into the beverage products (the flavors, the additions, the targeted consumers and their acceptance) or the cultural aspects (i.e., modes of media, codes and policies, ethics and genders). Another feature of these studies lies in the methodologies that tend to be more holistic, triangulated and empirical. For instance, Ian (2009) gave a diachronic study of the advertising of alcoholic beverages in Australia through 1969-86.

To sum up, relevant researches in China are more likely to highlight the micro aspects and principles for crafting a beverage ad. In contrast, its equivalents in the West tend to focus on the more macro issues and be more empirical. As a result, it would be significant for Chinese researchers interested in this topic to expand their research vision and triangulate the research methods with an advertisement history view that has been less explored.

3. An Analysis of the Advertisement History of Coca-Cola

Coca-Cola is the most influential and valuable brand in the beverage field. According to the China Brand Power Index (C-BPI) done by Chnbrand in 2021, a total of 203 top brands have been surveyed in 100 Chinese cities and fall into 16 fine-grained lists or categories: Bottled Water, 100% Pure Fruit Juice, Fruit And Vegetable Juice, Energy Series, Tea Drinks, Instant Coffee, Herbal Tea, Soda Water, Carbonated Drinks, Lactic Acid Bacteria Drinks, Liquid Milk, Yogurt, Beer, Domestic Wine, High-end Liquor, and mainstream liquor. Among them, the Coca-Cola Company, with a total of 160 brands, dominates the List of Carbonated Drinks, Bottled Water, Fruit Juice, Energy Series, and Soda Water. Therefore, it would be significant for other companies to take a good look at the advertisement history of Coca-Cola and learn from it.

3.1 A brief history of the refreshing Company

John Pemberton founded Coca-Cola on May 8, 1886, and the name was given by Frank Robinson, the accountant of Jacobs' Pharmacy; then, Asa Candler acquired the formula of the drink and The Coca-Cola Company in 1888, and incorporated it as a Georgia Corporation in 1892. It was sold in every state of the United States in 1895 and bottled in Canada, Cuba, and Panama in 1906, 6 years after which the Company extended its business to the Philippines, its first expansion into Asia. During World War I, the Company began to establish a relationship with the Red Cross and bottling plants in Europe, first in Paris and Bordeaux in 1919, and in Belgium, China, Colombia, Germany, Haiti, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, and Spain in the late 1920s; it had operated in 100-plus countries by 1959. Some critical moments for the Company were 1928, 1976 and 1985, when it began its long-term cooperation with the Olympic Games in Amsterdam, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), Walt Disney Company as a sponsor, respectively. It re-entered the China market in 1978, after a nearly 3-decade absence, and it celebrated its 100th anniversary worldwide in 1986.

3.2 The expansion into different drinks

The Company expanded nationwide and worldwide, thanks to the increase in product series and efforts in the advertisement. If its expansion in space can be called horizontal development, then that in product variations should be seen as vertical development. The first new product created by Coca-Cola was Fanta, an orange-flavored soda launched in Italy in 1955 and entered American market in 1960; one year later, the Company acquired Minute Maid, and officially launched Sprite in 1961. When Coca-Cola re-entered China in 1978, it introduced the plastic packaging bottles; and more flavored series came out, with Diet Coca-Cola in 1982, CherryCoke in 1986, and vanilla-flavored Coca-Cola in 2002. Besides, Coca-Cola also walked its way into coffee and other drinks, for instance, it cooperated with Nestlé in 2001 and acquired Costa Coffee in 2018. Moreover, its operations in different countries worked hard to localize the drinks and adapt to the local cultures. For instance, the China leg of Coca-Cola developed the orange-flavored Minute Maid in 2011, making it become the 14th beverage brand with a brand value of over US\$1 billion. Another case was its R & D in Japan, where the Company launched a new fat-reducing and zero-calories cola targeted at the market in 2017 and Coca-Cola Clear in 2018. With the continuing development in flavors, packaging, bottling shapes, specifications and types of drinks, Coca-Cola was fully flourished and registered a total asset of US\$87.296 billion and a market value of US\$263.597 billion.

3.3 The history of advertisement

Coca-Cola was advertised the day it was created; namely, it first appeared in the newspaper and announced itself as a "Delicious and Refreshing Beverage" in 1886. Throughout its 135 years of publicity and promotions, many ads in different wording, modes, and for varied purposes have been created. By collecting 71 ad slogans and 53 pictures over the years, we have built the former into a small-scaled Coke-ad Corpus that has 495-word tokens and 236-word types, and the latter into a Coke-picture Corpus that is multimodal. The Company authorized a sum of \$11,000 for advertising budget, which was not a small sum in 1892, and increased it to \$100,000 in 1901 and \$1 million in 1911. Such expenditure on ads and promotions brought tremendous success for Coca-Cola, making its sales hit 1 million gallons in 1904, 3 million per day in 1917, and 6 million per day in 1925. The present study will explore its advertising history from the following aspects.

3.3.1 The lingual mode: wording

By counting the frequency of the advertising words, we find that Coca-Cola hits 22 times and Coke 13 times, and “You” (i.e., the potential customers) reaches 11 times (see Table 1), as it is important to publicize the name of the product, especially when imitators of the very name appeared. It is equally important to take the potential buyers as the addressees to draw them closer to the product. Another feature of lingual wording is the wide use of adjectives that ‘could help the products attract and influence the consumers, which in turn triggers their wants of buying’ (Zheng, 2021:382-3). This includes “refreshing”, “good”, “real”, “only”, “best”, “classic”, “cold”, “great”, “national”, “delicious”, “bracing”, “bright”, “crisp”, “delightful”, “discriminating”, “global” and “ideal” amongst others, all of which were used to highlight the refreshing function and delicious taste of the very drink. A third feature of the ads is the brevity or conciseness of the slogans, as the average sentence length of the total 71 ads is 6.97 words, and there are a few longer ones, such as the one in 1955 that has 39 words and goes like this: “50 million times a day at home, at work or on the way. There’s nothing like a Coke. 1. Bright, bracing taste. Ever-fresh and sparkling. 2. A welcome bit of quick energy. Brings you back refreshed.” Last but not least, many rhetorical techniques have been applied in crafting the ads. For instance, the adoption of personification in “Enjoy a Glass of Liquid Laughter,” “Thirst Knows No Season,” “The Best Friend Thirst Ever Had,” “Coca-Cola Goes Along,” “Coke knows no season,” and “Where There’s Coke There’s Hospitality” presents a positive image of the product to the buyers.

Table 1. A list of words with high frequency (the top ten)

Rank	Freq.	Word	Cases
1	22	Coca-Cola	The 1880s: Drink <i>Coca-Cola</i> .
2	13	Coke	1947: <i>Coke</i> knows no season.
3	11	You	1988: <i>You Can’t Beat the Feeling</i> .
4	9	taste	1957: <i>Sign of Good Taste</i>
5	8	refresh/ refreshes/ refreshed/ refreshment	1886: Delicious and <i>Refreshing</i> Beverage. 1924: <i>Refresh</i> Yourself. 1925: The Pause that <i>Refreshes</i> . 1939: When You Think of <i>Refreshment</i> , Think of Ice Cold Coca-Cola. 1959: Be Really <i>Refreshed</i> .
6	6	Good	1907: <i>Good</i> to the Last Drop
7	6	real	1969: It’s the Real Thing. <i>Coke</i> .
8	6	Drink/drink	1901: A delightful summer or winter drink
9	6	thirst/ thirsty	The 1910s: The Thirsty One’s Best Beverage 1922: Thirst Knows No Season
10	5	best	1930: The Best Friend Thirst Ever Had

3.3.2 The multimodal ads: pictures and programs

A pictorial ad was designed as early as 1891, when calendars were used for advertising, and this became a tradition in its publicity. Upon the top of an elegant lady, there was a message delivered: *A delightful summer or winter drink. For headache or tired feeling. Relieves mental and physical exhaustion*. From this, we can see that the product was still not free from its original nature of syrup, and it seems that the message fails to go well with the picture, but it indeed expanded the time range of the consumption to a year-round period. Then, celebrities did not become part of the advertising until 1900, a year when music performer Hilda Clark appeared in multiple ads that included trays, posters, and bookmarks, which was followed by athletes, Vivian the Coca-Cola Girl, illustrations of Santa, singers, and the like, and played the role of celebrity effects. Moreover, other multiple modes were added to the advertising mix, such as outdoor billboards were introduced as part of it in 1925, booklets on the flower in 1940, radio programs in 1951, radio and television programs in 1953, radio and television commercials in 1971, pavilions at World’s Fair in 1958, publicity on vans in 1978 (in Beijing), videos in the 2000s and Q & A narratives in 2011 (see the short history booklet on its official webpage, [coca-colas/coca-cola-a-short-history-125-years-booklet.pdf](http://coca-colas.com/coca-cola-a-short-history-125-years-booklet.pdf)). This has been done, due to the development of and the adaptation to media and advertisement.

3.3.3 The social-cultural networks: adjustment of the positioning

Coca-Cola has never been satisfied with its achievement but kept leading ahead by adjusting its positioning, which in turn, enlarged its social-cultural networks and range of influence/markets. Back to the year of its creation (1886), merely nine drinks were sold a day, but it hit 19,400 beverages every second on its 125 anniversary (2011). This remarkable volume should be contributed to the enlarging turf of the brand and constant adjustment of positioning. It started to focus exclusively on Coca-Cola in 1891, and only after nearly 70 years of concentration did it launch the new soda drink named Fanta (in Italy in 1955). However, in terms of publicity and promotions, it underwent several transformations, such as the early use of coupons

in 1887, the transition from a summer beverage to a year-round one in 1921 (via the slogan “Thirst Knows No Season”), the becoming of an international hit in 1971 (via the commercial “I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke”) and worldwide sponsorship of sports events. What’s more, charities also contributed a lot to the establishment of the social-cultural networks; for instance, it was recorded that it made a \$1 million donation to Atlanta’s Emory University in 1914. Furthermore, the constant changes in packages and packaging, flavors, and drink categories were also part of the adjustment. The trial and error method was also used in its adjustment. A well-known case in point was the big and mistaken move in changing its formula in 1985, when the new product, dubbed “New Coke” in contrast to the original one renamed “Coca-Cola Classic,” generated national protests, and was on the market for merely 79 days.

From what has been discussed above, we can say that the promotion and publicity history of Coca-Cola provides rules and lessons for other beverage brands to follow, especially in terms of monolingual wording, multimodal designing, and adjustments of positioning.

4. The Translation and Promotion of Chinese National Drinks Brands: Some Case Analyses

With the entry of foreign brands into the Chinese markets in the 1970s, new beverage companies mushroomed after that, though there were some Chinese brands established much earlier than Coca-Cola. According to *Report on Beverage Consumers (2016)*, the beverage industry was dominated by carbonated drinks before 2000, tea and function refreshments during 2001 to 2006; then, bottled water, juice, and protein drinks have come to the scene since 2007. In the following, we will focus on those top beverage brands with a focus on the ones in Guangdong Province that boasts of many brands and have produced the most immense amount of drinks for years (e.g., accounting for nearly 20% of the total produce in 2021). As mentioned above, Chnbrand provides 16 categories for listing beverage brands, among which Nongfu Spring ranks the first on the Bottled Water List, and Jianlibao and the following Nongfu Spring are the only two China brands on the Carbonated Drinks List. In what comes next, we will investigate the publicity of these two brands - one from Hangzhou and the other from Guangdong - to explore the space for translation practice and research.

4.1 The translation of brand names

David Ogiwy, the father of advertisement, came up with the concept of brand image and held that creativity is needed to name a product and build a positive image among the public. The brand name refers to a term, designation, sign, or design, or a sum coined to pronounce and publicize the product or service to the market. It, together with brand logos, ‘not only has cultural, aesthetic and interpersonal values that present a particular image and cultural identity, but also carries the product, corporate and even national inspiration on the part of the name givers’ (Hu, Yu & Pan, 2013:47). As for the translation of brand names, it paves the way for the going global of brands and would transfer the product, corporate and national inspiration to foreign consumers afterward.

Look at the name of Coca-Cola one more time. Robinson named it this way because the double “Cs” would read in rhyme and look well in ads, and therefore he penned it in Spencerian script font. Comparatively speaking, most Chinese beverage brand names were rendered simply in pinyin or Cantonese, including Jianlibao (健力宝), Jiaduobao (加多宝), Wahaha (哇哈哈), and Wong Lo Kat (王老吉); others were translated in “pinyin+ English” forms, such as Nongfu Spring (农夫山泉) and Huiyuan Juice (汇源), and only a few have an English name, like Uni-President (统一). This makes it difficult for foreign consumers to read and then remember these brand names, and therefore there is a must and the first step for these brands to go global by having an English name and then getting it registered. Compared with what comes next in 4.2 slogan translation and 4.3 multimodal translation, that of brand names, at the words level, seems easier but is not the case, because we believe that the rendering of brand names and logos is a creation or at least transcreation, one that has to be created based on creative ideas, designing and a good understanding of the laws, aesthetics of the target culture (Wang, 2019). Moreover, a lot of failed cases could be cited here to show how important and challenging it is in reality: Jinji Clock was translated into “Gold Cock” which was offensive to American markets, and lost the original meaning of “Jinji;” namely, diligent and timely alarming in the morning; another famous brand named Baixiang Battery in Chinese was also literally rendered as “White Elephant” (it is still used as the English name!), which shocked the English-speaking markets, as “white elephant” means good-for-nothing in their cultures.

4.2 The translation of ad slogans

Like brand names, the slogan is an invisible asset for enterprises, but the big difference from brand names lies in the changes in slogans. With great publicity, some slogans, especially the first or creative ones, become very popular so much that they, more often than not, are associated with the brands. Take those Chinese beverage drinks for illustration. As mentioned above, slogan translation is much easier than the rendering of brand names and logos. For the table, we

can see that some were rendered too directly, others with some creativity, and few are well translated.

Table 2 A list of drinks slogans and their translations

	Brand name	Slogan (Chinese)	Slogan (online translations)	My retranlations
1	Nongfu Spring	农夫山泉有点甜	Nongfu Spring, kind of sweet	<i>Cool Water, Crisp Taste.</i>
2	Jianlibao	您想身体好, 请喝健力宝	If you want to be in good health, please drink Jianlibao.	Have a Jianlibao and a full life.
3	Wong Lo Kat	怕上火就喝王老吉	A bottle of Wanglaoji keeps peeve away	<i>Think of refreshment, think of Wong Lo Kat.</i>
4	Jiaduobao	怕上火喝加多宝	A bottle of Jiaduobao keeps peeve away	<i>Think of refreshment, think of Jiaduobao.</i>
5	Uni-President	演进你的生活价值	Life Of Value Evolution (official)	Refreshes your life values.
6	Wahaha	健康快乐, 哇哈哈	Healthy and Happy, Wahaha	Enjoy the liquid laughter.

In the first case, the slogan of the first brand (i.e., Nongfu Spring) is rhymed, and if it is translated as the one on the Internet, it will provide a piece of false or misleading information, as the product is pure water, and therefore it is not “sweet” in any sense. Here, the original rhymed character tian (甜) was chosen to highlight the function or effect of the product, that is, it means “cool and refreshing,” the same as in the Coca-Cola slogan, so we may either retranslate it into “Cool Water, Crisp Taste” or “Nongfu Spring tastes cool” by learning from and adapting to foreign slogans. The second slogan of Jianlibao was also rendered word for word and sentence for sentence, with an impolite tone in the translation in that it implies that those who drink the product are not in good health. This makes it rather difficult to present a good image of the same brand. We would like to put it this way, “Have a Jianlibao and a full life,” by following the example set by Coca-Cola in 1980, namely, “Have a Coke and a smile.”

As for the second category of slogans, they were translated by imitating the grammatical construct of “An apple a day keeps the doctor away.” They do have reasons to do so, because the two brands, just like Coca-Cola, were produced with a medical significance in the very beginning, so it is appropriate to be translated as such; but what the present study finds inappropriate is the wording of “peeve,” as it brings a negative tone and is easy to put readers in a negative mood. It is this reflection on the translations that leads us to retranslate it positively, like “Think of full refreshment, think of Jiaduobao.” The same goes with the retranslation of the slogan of Wong Lo Kat, the oldest beverage in China, founded in 1828, as the two rivals employ the same slogan pattern.

The last two slogans give a positive impression both in Chinese and English versions. The first one of Uni-President emphasizes the advantage of the product from the stance of consumers. At the same time, its official English version is a literal translation, failing to foreground the refreshing effects of the products and the relationship between the product and the buyer “you.” Therefore, words like “refresh” and “You/Your” are used in our retranslation, “Refreshes your life values,” in which “Refreshes” is a pun that means refreshing you and your life values at once. When it comes to the last case, Wahaha passes on a laughing and happy tone, so it is a pun in the original slogan, referring to a peal of happy laughter and the brand name. In our version, we would like to retain the double meanings in the source slogan and therefore renders it as “Enjoy the liquid laughter.”

In a word, two things need to be taken into consideration in translating slogans: one is the transfer of the original features of language or products into the target culture, and the other is the reference to or meme of the slogan patterns of the same type brands to be adapted to the cultural norms of the target language.

4.3 A diachronic publicity of the brands

With the development of media, more and more forms of media come into being and are involved in advertising. From the history of Coke’s advertising mix, we know that the same brand was first advertised in prints (newspapers and magazines), and outdoor billboards (1925), aired through radios (1930) and broadcast on TV programs (since 1950), and commercial videos. Various media are also used in the publicity of Chinese beverage brands. In the case of Jianlibao, founded in 1984, it was selected as the official drink for the 23rd Olympic Games, where it got wide attention and the nickname of “Magic Water of China.” Afterward, the drink established the image of a beverage that had magic power for sportsmen, and it was widely advertised as such in newspapers, making it the first national brand in the following 15 years and starting the long history of cooperating with sports games. In 1989, sportsman Li Ning was invited as the brand’s spokesman. Jianlibao ranked on the top of China’s beverage brands in 1997, and has a long sponsorship of the Asian Games. However, it did not diversify its advertising mix but confined itself to sports, branding itself as a famous sports drink. It surpassed a budget of nearly 300

million yuan for advertising on different TV channels in 2013. Comparatively, Nongfu Spring created in 1996, adopts a more diversified ad mix.

Nongfu Spring started with its famous slogan, as analyzed above, and presented it with an image of natural water through another well-known slogan, “Natural and Healthy. We do not produce water, we are just porters of nature” (天然、健康 我们不生产水, 我们只是大自然的搬运工). It is the publicity of this “natural and healthy” philosophy that drives its advertising to closely connect with nature, especially the geography of water sources. Happily, it also markets several cases set for Chinese cultures and holidays, such as family reunions during the Spring Festival. First, Nongfu Spring boasts four primary water sources, namely, Qiandao Lake in Zhejiang, Changbai Mountain, Danjiangkou in Hubei Province, and Wanlv Lake (the largest lake in South China), which consists of the mineral spring water and deep-lake water, and is printed on the coating of Nongfu bottles. Second, the Company also manufactures a series of documentaries and programs to advertise its products, with foci on the water source, water quality, life quality and family reunion. For instance, on its official website, there are six videos on the advertisement page: half of them were designed for the New Year (the Tiger Year and the Bull Year), and the other half were documentaries for publicizing the quality of the water. High-tech is used to get shots of the growing moments of all beings in Changbai Mountain; numbers are given to record a total of 2806 kinds of flora and 1588 types of fauna, and words and background songs integrated into the scenes, which makes the documentary impressive and true to life by punching these lines: “Every Snowflake is an Unexpected Surprise in Changbai Mountain” and “Every Drop of Water is a Taste of the Soft Snowflake of Changbai Mountain.” In addition, ad commercials are launched by associating with the social themes of the day. One social reality in China is the migration of the youths with the continuing urbanization, leaving parents and the old generation in their hometown and thus generating a complex of homesickness. According to Report on Beverage Consumers (2016), 56.9% of bottled water consumers were aged between 20 and 29, and 28.2% were within the 30-39 age group, and this means that the lion’s share of bottled water buyers was the young generation in their 20s and 30s. Therefore, the commercial entitled “A Lunch of Family Reunion,” commissioned swimming athletes and their parents to publicize the meaning of family reunion, with a touching punchline, “For many reasons, you cannot be home, but only YOU can complete your parent’s lunch list.” Such multimodal advertisements with creative design and punchlines make Nongfu Spring successful, ranking No.1 in manufacturing bottled water.

5. Conclusion

From the perspective of advertisement history, we first reviewed the ads evolution and mix of Coca-Cola. By further analyzing the slogans and multimodal ads of Coca-Cola both qualitatively and quantitatively, we found the patterns in foreign beverage ads in wording, slogan and multimodal levels, which in return, was applied in translating Chinese brand slogans, and in reflection upon what had been done by Chinese drink companies. By way of conclusion, it is suggested that Chinese beverage enterprises give their brands English names, translate their slogans by taking into account both the original language features or products and the cultural norms of the target language, and publicize their brands in a more dynamic and diachronic way, all of which would help establish the image of the brands as well as their internationalization.

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