

Column No.20

Naming in Chinese Characters for Chinese Market Seen in Successful Cases by Overseas Companies

Considered in the Aspects of Appearance, Pronunciation, and Concept

Chinese Trademark Strategy (1)

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When advancing into the Chinese market for business transactions such as manufacturing and selling products, it is firstly important for Japanese companies to file an application for a trademark registration. In the case where Japanese companies are going to sell a brand in China in Katakana notation, or brand name products in English (or Romanized Japanese) notation, it will be necessary to newly prepare a name in Chinese characters to make the mark easily acceptable to the local consumers. It can be said that this conversion of naming in Chinese characters is a very important part in the trademark strategy in China. In practice, identity or similarity of trademarks is determined by comparing appearances, pronunciations and concepts. Particularly for the appearance, when a label is in Chinese characters, the meaning is sometimes understood by Chinese people, but attention must be paid to the fact that there are cases where the meanings of the characteristics differ greatly between the two countries.

Now, let me introduce some successful cases of brand names and naming by overseas companies in the Chinese market, from my standpoint as a person familiar with the Chinese trademark situation and companies' trademark strategies.

1."三得利" (Suntory)



"三得利" is the Chinese brand name for "Suntory China".

This name is a typical masterpiece of a Japanese company brand. Conceptually, "三得利" implies that the product brings in profits to three sides, that is, to Japan's Suntory, to the Chinese subsidiary of the Japanese company, and to consumers. The word "三得利" itself offers a favorable impression to Chinese consumers, and its appearance raises feelings of familiarity.

With respect to its pronunciation, the Chinese pronunciation of "三得利" is "san de li", which is similar to the Japanese pronunciation "san to ri". This also gives it an advantage of being easily memorable for Chinese consumers.

Once, when I went to have a drink with a Chinese friend, the topic of conversation came up that "三得利" is a product manufactured from Japan. My friend told me that she had believed since long ago that "三得利" was a Chinese beer. Therefore, the name "三得利" does not cause any unfamiliar feelings to Chinese people, and is quite natural. This is indeed profitable to all three sides of Suntory!

Incidentally, Japan's "サントリー株式会社 (Suntory Kabushiki Kaisha)" is written as "日本三得利株式会社(Japan Suntory Co. Ltd.)" in Chinese. The Chinese notation corresponding to "サントリー中国ホールディングス有限公司" is written as "三得利 (中国) 投資有限公司".

2. "家乐福" (Carrefour, カルフル)



"Carrefour" (家乐福) is a French enterprise with supermarket chains all over the world. With respect to its appearance and concept, "家乐福" is associated with "home", and this word may be interpreted as, when we go to a Carrefour shop, we will get a good feeling which brings us "good luck." Therefore, the name means fortune, and this is very popular among Chinese people. Concerning the pronunciation, "家乐福" is pronounced "jia-le-fu" (similar to Carrefour), which sounds like the original pronunciation. Again, like Suntory, it is a brand name that Chinese consumers easily get familiar with.

3. "奔驰" (Benz, ベンツ)



"奔驰" is an abbreviated name of a Chinese brand of "メルセデス・ベンツ(Mercedes-Benz)" which is a brand owned by the German automobile manufacturer, Daimler.

In regard to its appearance and concept, "奔驰" has a strong impact on people as a brand name,

giving people a sense of speed in a luxury automobile, just as the Chinese characters show. Along with the feeling of high speed, we also receive an image of durability as a secondary feeling. This naming is multifaceted, and benefits from it.

Regarding its pronunciation, the Chinese pronunciation of "奔馳" is [ben-chi] (ベンツ), which is similar to "Benz" in English. The result is a naming which can be described as perfect and exquisite.

4. "宝馬" (BMW, ビーエムダブリュー)



"宝馬" is a Chinese brand of BMW (Bayerische Motoren Werke AG: Bayerun Motor), a German automobile manufacturer.

Regarding its appearance and concept, "宝馬" is a treasure horse. "宝", that is, "treasure" communicates an image of sophistication and luxuriousness, and "馬", meaning "horse", demonstrates an image of a vehicle, altogether letting the consumer imagine a "sophisticated and luxurious horse". It is indeed a well-considered naming. Its pronunciation is also characterized in that, though it is not close to the English pronunciation of BMW, the Chinese pronunciation of "宝馬", pronounced [bao-ma] has a good sound.

5. Others

Other examples, such as the French cosmetics brand "L'Oréal", a global brand also famous in Japan, has the Chinese brand name "欧莱雅". "欧莱雅" is derived from the Chinese notation "欧仁·舒莱尔" of Eugène Schueller, the founder of "L'Oréal. This appearance and concept let consumers imagine high-quality cosmetics, and its elegance is revealed from "欧莱雅".

The Chinese brand name of "Pizza Hut", the biggest pizza chain in the United States, is "必勝客". This is pronounced like "piza hut" in Cantonese pronunciation, and together with the appearance and concept of the Chinese characters "必勝客", this naming gives off a very auspicious impression. This is a "Hong Kong-born" naming in Chinese characters.

The ingenuity in the naming of the Chinese brand name "可口可樂" for "Coca-Cola" is also quite famous in Japan. "可口" implies "pleasant to the taste and delicious" and, moreover, because the Chinese pronunciation of "可樂" is "ke-le" (Cola).



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