

**“Cooperation”, “True Power” & “Maintaining Virtue”:
Translation Methods and Brand Personality in
Finnish–Chinese Brand Name Translation**

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Tämä kandidaatintutkielma tutkii suomalaisten brändinimien kiinankielisiä käännöksiä, ja tarkemmin niissä käytettyjä käännösmenetelmiä sekä niistä ilmeneviä brändipersonallisuuden piirteitä. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää, millaisia brändipersonallisuuden piirteitä suomalaisten brändinimien kiinankielisissä käännöksissä esiintyy, ja millainen vaikutus valitulla käännösmenetelmällä on siihen. Tutkielmassa käsitellään kuuttatoista brändinimikäännöstä, jotka on kerätty eri verkkolähteistä ja joiden yleinen hyväksyntä Kiinan markkinoilla on tarkistettu kiinalaisen sosiaalisen median alusta Xiaohongshun hakutoiminnon avulla. Brändinimikäännökset luokitellaan neljään eri käännösmenetelmään, jotka ovat foneettinen (phonetic), semanttinen (semantic), foneettis-semanttinen (phonosemantic) sekä täydellinen uudelleenluonti (complete recreation). Brändipersonallisuuden tutkimiseen käytetään kiinalaisen brändipersonallisuuden viitekehystä.

Tutkielmassa tulee ilmi, että tutkituissa brändinimikäännöksissä yleisin brändipersonallisuuden piirre on länsimaalaisuus, jota ilmenee yhdeksässä kuudestatoista käännöksestä. Valitun käännösmenetelmän havaitaan vaikuttavan siihen, millaisia brändipersonallisuuden piirteitä käännettyissä brändinimissä ilmenee. Foneettisesti käännetyt nimet ilmaisevat enimmäkseen vain brändin länsimaalaisuutta, kun taas fonettis-semanttisesti käännettyissä tai täysin uudelleenluoduissa nimissä esiintyy monipuolisempia ja tarkempia brändipersonallisuuden piirteitä, kuten luotettavuutta, yltäkylläisyyttä, kauneutta ja vastuullisuutta. Lisäksi huomataan, että brändin tuotekategoria vaikuttaa käännösmenetelmän valintaan ja siten myös brändipersonallisuuteen, ja että käännösmenetelmän valinta heijastaa brändin markkina-asemointistrategiaa. Useimmat foneettisesti käännetyt brändinimet edustavat design- ja lifestyle-brändejä, jotka myyvät kiinalaisille kuluttajille länsimaalaisuutta ja eksoottisuutta. Kuluttajilta erityistä luottamusta tarvitsevia tuoteryhmiä, kuten teollisuusteknologiaa tai elintarvikkeita, edustavat brändit taas suosivat foneettis-semanttista käännöksiä ja täydellistä uudelleenluontia, sillä näillä käännösmenetelmillä kiinankieliseen brändinimeen voidaan sisällyttää positiivisia ja kuluttajissa luottamusta herättäviä merkityksiä. Tämän tutkielman löydökset merkitsevät suomalaisille yrityksille sitä, että kääntäessä brändinimeä kiinaksi on tärkeää valita sellainen käännösmenetelmä, joka soveltuu parhaiten brändin tuotekategoriaan, tavoiteltuun brändipersonallisuuteen sekä brändin tavoitteisiin Kiinan markkinoilla.

Key words: brand name translation, translation method, brand personality, Finnish brands, Chinese brand names

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1 Introduction

On the 27th of January 2026, Petteri Orpo, the Prime Minister of Finland, visited China and met with Xi Jinping, the President of the People's Republic of China. According to a press release by the Finnish government, the aim of the visit was “to continue dialogue with the Chinese leadership and to promote business opportunities for Finland in China” (Finnish government, 2026). In his speech to Orpo, Xi stated that he welcomes Finnish companies to come and “swim in the vast ocean of the Chinese market” (Li, 2026). Even before this, many Finnish companies had already jumped in the waters and put out their products on the Chinese market. This thesis examines sixteen (16) Chinese translations of Finnish brand names and aims to answer the following questions: 1) Which brand personality characteristics are found in these Finnish–Chinese brand name translations? 2) How does the selected translation method affect which brand personality traits are found in the translated brand names?

This study is significant for the field of Finnish–Chinese translation studies as it will provide an original analysis of Chinese translations for Finnish brand names and the brand personality traits conveyed in those translations. It has practical significance for Finnish companies that are looking to sell their products on the Chinese market and are considering how to translate their brand names into Chinese. The translation of a brand name should be given earnest consideration, because brand names are essential for the image of a brand and its appeal to customers (Gîță et al., 2017). Therefore, a well-translated brand name is vital for the success of a brand in a foreign market, especially in the case of Finnish brands entering the linguistically and culturally unfamiliar arena of the Chinese marketplace. Brand personality is an important aspect of brand name translation, because the perceived personality of a brand has been shown to strongly influence consumers' brand preference, attitude, loyalty, and buying intent (Zhang, 2007).

There are several key concepts in this thesis that should be defined. *Brand name* refers to a name that “identifies and represents a specific product” (Shi, 2017, p. 15). A company's name can sometimes also function as a brand name, as is the case in many of the Finnish brands examined in this thesis. *Brand personality* refers to “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). *Translation method*, in the context of Finnish–Chinese brand name translation, refers to whether the brand name is translated by sound (phonetic translation), by meaning (semantic translation), by both sound and meaning

(phonosemantic translation), or by creating a completely new name that doesn't resemble the original in either sound or meaning (Zhang & Schmitt, 2001; Schmitt & Zhang, 2012).

In this thesis, *Finnish brand name* refers to a brand from Finland, not necessarily a brand whose name is derived from the Finnish language. While some of the brands examined in this thesis have Finnish names (e.g. Kone, Valio, Marimerkko), many of them use English names (e.g. Moomin, Finnair, Angry Birds). Therefore, the focus of this thesis is not how the Finnish language translates into Chinese in the context of brand names, but rather how brand names from Finland are chosen to be translated into Chinese, and what kind of messages the chosen translation methods communicate about Finnish brands.

The translation of English brand names into Chinese has been studied quite extensively. Research angles such as the Chinese consumer market (Dong & Helms, 2001), communicative purpose (Sang & Zhang, 2008), the establishment of images in Chinese brand name translation (Cui, 2017), and brand name localization in multilingual Chinese markets (Zhang & Schmitt, 2001) have been featured in previous studies. However, the translation of Finnish brand names into Chinese has not specifically been studied. This thesis aims to address this gap by analyzing Finnish brand names' Chinese translations from the viewpoint of translation methods and brand personality. Although Finland is a Western country as are the countries from which the English brands in previous studies originate, patterns diverging from English–Chinese translation may emerge. For example, some Finnish–Chinese translated brand names may emphasize the Finnish origin of the brand by including characters such as 芬兰 (fēnlán, 'Finland') or 北欧 (běiōu, 'Northern Europe').

This thesis is a qualitative study on sixteen Finnish brand names and their Chinese translations, with descriptive quantification to identify patterns across the sample. The brand names for this thesis are compiled from various internet sources, and the list is narrowed down by a test of popularity of the Finnish brands' Chinese names on the Chinese social media platform Xiaohongshu. The translated brand names are first categorized into the four different translation methods, and then the brand personality traits and dimensions of the translated brand names are analyzed by considering things like character meanings, connotations, and cultural associations.

The study employs Cui's (2019) Chinese brand personality framework for categorizing the translated brand names into different brand personality traits and dimensions. The five dimensions in Cui's framework are Competence, Joyfulness, Sophistication, Trendiness, and

Aesthetic. For defining the translation methods used in the brand name translations, this study will use Zhang & Schmitt's (2001) categorization of *phonetic* (translated by sound), *semantic* (translated by meaning) and *phonosemantic* (translated both by sound and meaning) translations, also adding a fourth category of "an entirely new name that does not resemble the original name in either sound or meaning" (Schmitt & Zhang, 2012), for which the term *complete recreation* will be used.

This thesis is organized in the following way. Chapter 2 reviews existing research on Chinese brand name translation and brand personality, while also presenting the theoretical frameworks chosen for this thesis in more detail. Chapter 3 explains the methods used for the study, including brand name selection and analysis methods. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study, i.e. which brand personality traits are found in each translated brand name. Chapter 5 discusses the findings, presenting and analyzing found patterns and exploring theoretical and practical implications. Chapter 6 offers conclusions and recommendations for future research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing research on translation methods in Chinese brand name translation as well as on brand personality – in general and in the Chinese context – and presents the theoretical frameworks chosen for this thesis in light of the existing research. Additionally, the concept of country-of-origin is introduced and research on its effects on the Chinese market is reviewed.

2.2 Translation Methods in Chinese Brand Name Translation

When translating a brand name from a phonographic language like English or Finnish into a logographic language like Chinese, there are several possible ways to go about it. Zhang and Schmitt (2001) studied how English brand names are translated into Chinese and developed a framework for the brand name decision process for multilingual markets. The framework includes a three-way categorization of translation methods – the first being phonetic translation, where the sound of the original brand name is carried on to the translated name; the second being semantic translation, where the meaning of the original name is carried on to the translation; and the third being phonosemantic translation, where both sound and meaning are carried on to the translated brand name.

In a later study by Schmitt and Zhang (2012), they added a fourth translation method on to the three already mentioned: “an entirely new name that does not resemble the original name in either sound or meaning.” This kind of translation type, where the Chinese name doesn’t resemble the original in its sound, nor is the meaning the same as the original name, was already taken into account in the earlier study by Zhang and Schmitt (2001), but it was considered to be a part of the semantic translation category. It was called a “nonpure” semantic approach, in which the translated Chinese brand name includes associations for the product. An example of a “nonpure” semantic translation given by the authors is the Chinese name for Sprite, which is 雪碧 (xuěbì) and means ‘snow and green’. On the other hand, in a “pure” semantic translation, the translated brand name has the same meaning as the original brand name. An example of “pure” semantic translation given by Zhang and Schmitt is the Chinese name for Microsoft, 微软 (wēiruǎn), which means ‘micro/tiny soft’. (Zhang & Schmitt, 2001)

Francis et al. (2002) compared the English and Chinese brand names of Fortune-500 companies and investigated the brand name adaptation strategies used by those companies. The authors approached the issue of international branding from the viewpoint of standardization versus localization. In this case, standardization means a company using the same name for its brand across markets and not adapting it to fit the local language, whereas localization means translating the brand name into the local language. The authors present four options for brand name localization: (1) translating the brand name while maintaining semantic equivalence, (2) translating the brand name while maintaining phonetic equivalence, also known as transliteration, (3) creating a new name that is neither a transliteration nor a (semantic) translation of the original name, and (4) brand names that represent combinations of these options.

Interestingly, Francis et al. (2002) use the term *translation* on its own to refer to semantic translation, i.e. translating by meaning. They use the term *transliteration* to refer to phonetic translation, and the term *creation* to refer to creating a new name that is not phonetically or semantically equivalent to the original. The fourth option they present for brand name localization, namely brand names that represent combinations of the three other options (semantic, phonetic, and creation) could be linked to the phonosemantic translation method presented by Zhang and Schmitt (2001). Thus, although they use different wording and terminology, the scholars mentioned above seem to agree that there are four different ways of translating brand names from English (or any phonographic language, Finnish included) into Chinese. Therefore, the categorization into phonetic translation, semantic translation, phonosemantic translation, and complete recreation is also used in this thesis.

2.3 Brand Personality

The main aspect of brand name translation, which will be examined and analyzed in this thesis, will be the brand personality traits seen in the translations. Brand personality has been defined as human personality traits attributed to a brand (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). The pioneering theoretical framework of brand personality dimensions was created by Aaker (1997), who drew on research on the “Big Five” human personality structure and made it workable in the context of brands. The “Big Five” structure contains five personality dimensions: (1) Extraversion, (2) Conscientiousness, (3) Agreeableness, (4) Neuroticism, and (5) Openness to new experience (John & Srivastava, 1999). To find out what brand personality dimensions exist in consumers’ perceptions, Aaker (1997) sent out a questionnaire

asking participants which human characteristics they would associate with specific brands. Then, she used facet identification to determine the defining traits of each dimension. Finally, the reliability of the dimensions was confirmed by further testing. The brand personality dimensions in Aaker's framework are (1) Sincerity, (2) Excitement, (3) Competence, (4) Sophistication, and (5) Ruggedness, which all include two to four defining traits, as seen in Figure 1.

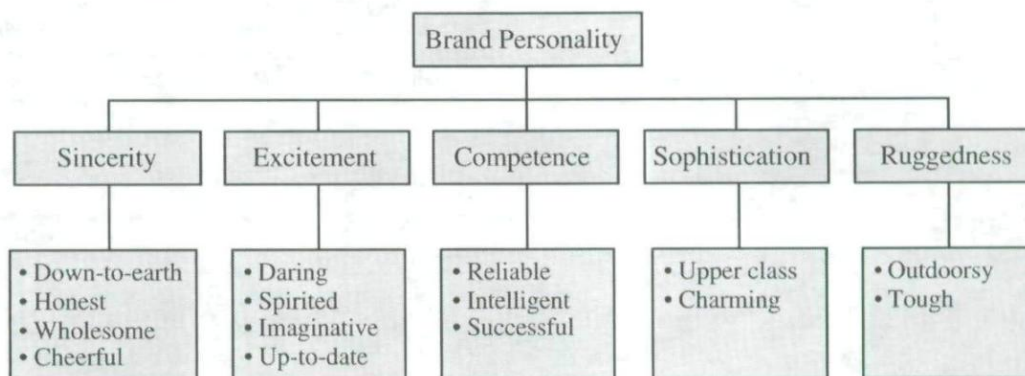


Figure 1. Brand personality framework by Aaker (1997, p. 352).

Although Aaker's framework has been utilized extensively in brand personality research, it has also been criticized for not measuring brand personality alone but incorporating many other dimensions of brand identity (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). This can be seen in the definition of the term itself – Aaker (1997) defined brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated to a brand”, which Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) found too broad of a definition, as it could “embrace concepts beyond those of brand personality”. Huang et al. (2012) noted that although Aaker's scale uses a five-factor structure, only three of its factors (Sincerity, Excitement, and Competence) appear in human personality scales, showing that the structure does not exactly mirror those of human personality.

The critics of Aaker's approach have thus called for a stricter definition of the term brand personality and a scale for it which mirrors human personality scales. Huang et al. (2012) contributed to this by analyzing the discrepancies of brand personality and human personality scales and by conducting their own study. Among other things, the authors studied whether the two “Big Five” personality dimensions missing from Aaker's and most other brand personality frameworks, namely Neuroticism and Openness to new experience, could be applied to brand personality. Through in-depth interviews of eleven under-graduate students, the authors found that those two dimensions are indeed also relevant for brand personality.

Besides different theoretical conceptions, the practical implications of brand personality have also been researched. An important basis for brand personality is the theory of self-brand congruence, according to which consumers attribute human characteristics to brands and prefer brands that they perceive to have similar characteristics as themselves (Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). Therefore, the personality of a brand perceived by consumers is a crucial aspect for the performance of the brand on the market.

However, it is not always simple for a company to get its message across correctly when it comes to giving its brand a certain personality. Mälär et al. (2012) studied the relationship between intended brand personality and realized brand personality and found that consumers often do not perceive a brand's personality the way the company had intended it. According to the study, factors such as the singularity of an intended brand personality, the competitive differentiation of a brand, and credibility in advertising can encourage successful brand personality implementation. These things should thus be considered when building a brand's image and choosing which brand personality elements to embed in the translated brand name.

2.4 Chinese Brand Personality

Some research has been done about brand personality in the Chinese context specifically. The purpose of this section is to review relevant research to brand personality in the Chinese context and to present the Chinese brand personality framework that will be used for analyzing the Chinese translations of the chosen Finnish brand names.

Most studies regarding Chinese brand personality have used Aaker's (1997) framework as their basis. This has been validated by Zhang (2007), who studied consumers' perceptions of the brands Nike and Sony in China, using the same set of 42 personality traits used in Aaker's (1997) research. Zhang concluded that Aaker's brand personality framework is valid for Chinese markets, although the main objective of the study was not to review brand personality frameworks. Rather, the primary finding of Zhang's (2007) research was that the perceived brand personality of a brand strongly influences the consumers' brand preference, attitude, loyalty, and buying intent.

The pioneering study of brand personality traits and dimensions in the Chinese context was done by Chu and Sung (2011). They studied 18 commercial brands, of which 12 were global and six were Chinese. The participants of the study were Chinese consumers recruited from an online panel. They were each given three brands and asked to rate how well 58 different

personality attributes described those brands. The results of this study showed that three brand personality dimensions were shared by both China and the USA (Aaker 1997): Competence, Excitement and Sophistication. The authors also defined three other dimensions that were more specific to the Chinese culture, namely Traditionalism, Joyfulness and Trendiness. Thus, the Chinese brand personality framework by Chu and Sung (2011) includes six dimensions: (1) Competence, (2) Traditionalism, (3) Excitement, (4) Joyfulness, (5) Sophistication, and (6) Trendiness. These dimensions and their defining traits can be seen in Figure 2.

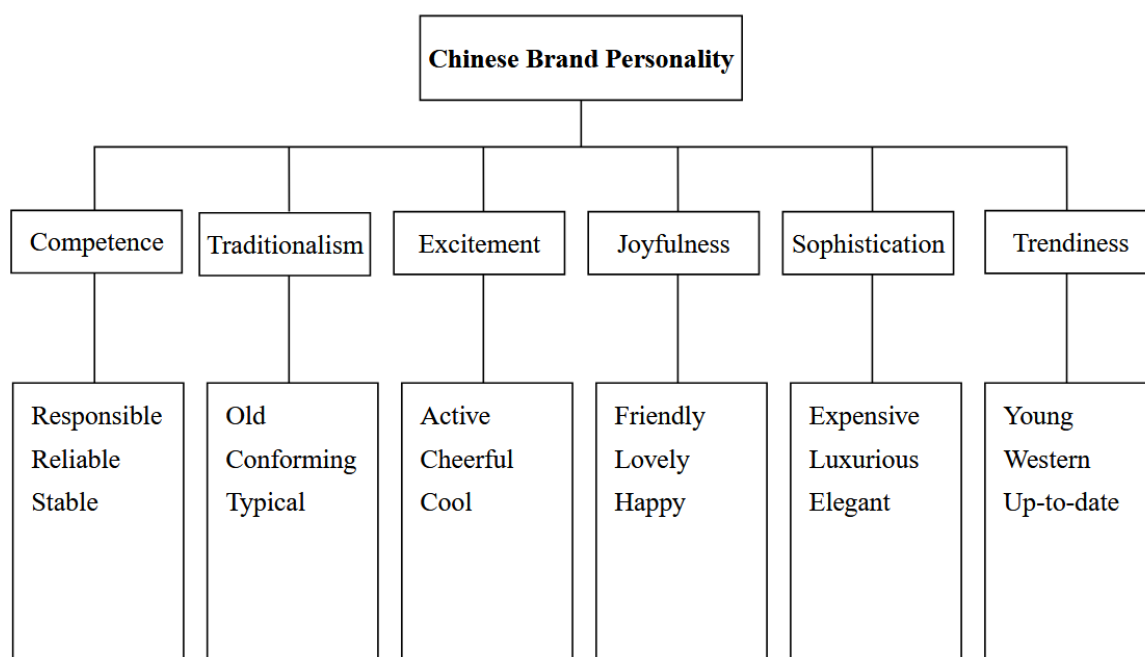


Figure 2. Chinese brand personality framework by Chu and Sung (2011, p. 176).

None of the research mentioned above studied Chinese brand personality in the context of brand name translation specifically. However, a study by Cui (2019) did this by using a corpus of 282 English brand names with Chinese translations and reviewing it against Chu and Sung's (2011) framework. By analyzing the corpus, Cui found that the Traditionalism dimension was not prominent, with only five examples out of 282 alluding to such traits. She also concluded that the removal of Sincerity and Ruggedness dimensions in Chu and Sung's framework was justified, because the traits attributed to them in Aaker's (1997) framework could be incorporated into the Competence dimension. Cui noted that the categorization of dimensions in brand personality frameworks is not clear-cut, and that there is overlap within the dimensions. Still, based on the previous frameworks and the analysis of the corpus, she

proposed a revised framework for Chinese brand personality, which contains the five following dimensions: (1) Competence, (2) Joyfulness, (3) Sophistication, (4) Trendiness, and (5) Aesthetic, as seen in Figure 3.

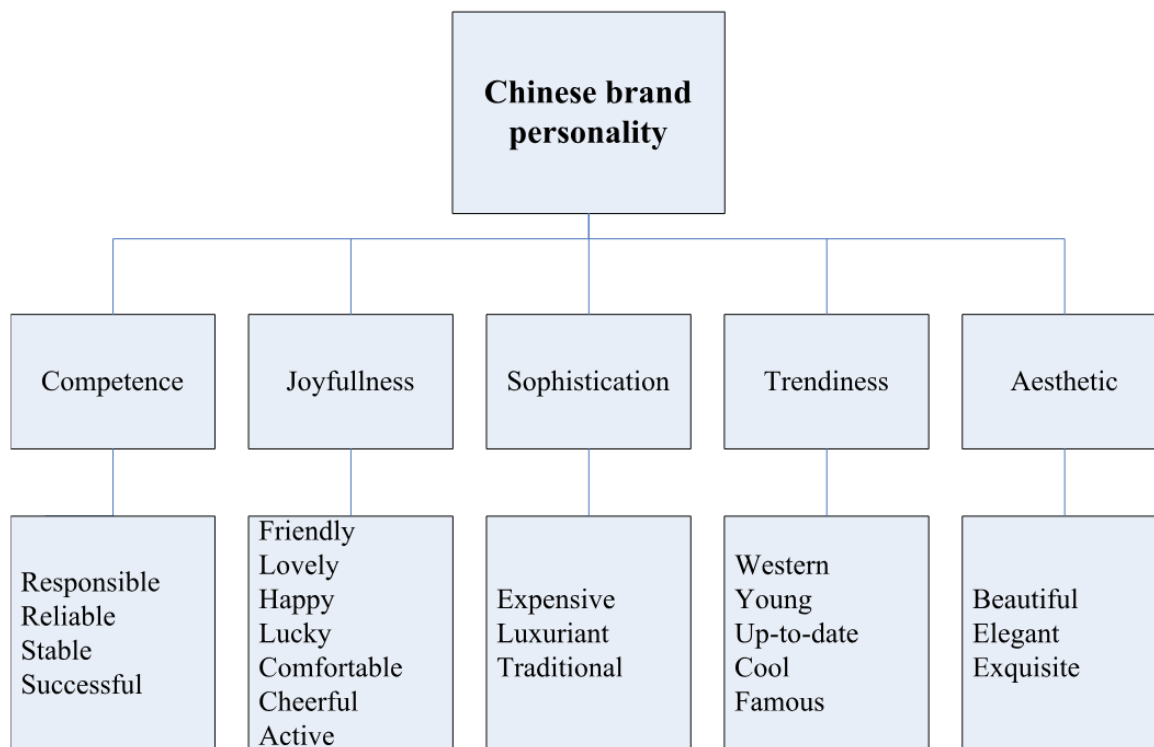


Figure 3. Chinese brand personality framework by Cui (2019, p. 42).

Cui's (2019) framework was chosen for this thesis, because it is the most relevant for studying Chinese brand personality in the context of brand name translation, since it was developed based on a corpus of Chinese brand name translations. While Cui's framework is based on English–Chinese translations, and not Finnish–Chinese translations, it is still applicable for this study. Cui notes that by 'English brands' she does not necessarily mean their geographic origin, but that brands originating in other countries that are "used in English-speaking communities and well-received in the Chinese market" are also included. Whereas in this study, the geographic (Finnish) origin of the brands was a criterion for their selection, and not the language. Some of the Finnish brand names in this thesis are linguistically Finnish, while others are English. Some of the Finnish brands in this study could even fit into Cui's definition of 'English brands', for example Angry Birds and Nokia. Therefore, Cui's framework should be quite fitting for the study of Finnish–Chinese brand name translation, as it is understood in this thesis.

2.5 Country-of-Origin Effects on the Chinese Market

Other than translation methods and brand personality, which are the main focus of this thesis, another aspect of Finnish–Chinese brand name translation that will be analyzed is whether the Finnish or Nordic origin of the brands are expressed in the Chinese names. With this, the concept of country-of-origin comes into play.

Country-of-origin (COO) can be defined as the country that is associated with a company or a brand, also referred to as the “home country” (Samiee, 1994, p. 581). Research has shown that country-of-origin “has a considerable influence on the quality perceptions of a product” (Bilkey & Nes, 1982, p. 89). The concept of country-of-origin is relevant for this thesis, because it is another aspect alongside brand personality that influences consumers’ perceptions of brands.

Research on country-of-origin effects began with a study by Schooler (1965), who studied how 200 Guatemalan university students evaluated products that were otherwise identical, but had different (fictitious) origin country labels. The findings showed that the respondents gave lower ratings to products labelled as being from Salvador and Costa Rica than those labelled Guatemalan or Mexican, and that this was related to the respondents’ attitudes towards the people of those countries. Country-of-origin effects have been researched extensively since then (see Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Al-Sulaiti & Baker, 1998; Rezvani et al., 2012; Samiee et al., 2024).

Country-of-origin effects on the Chinese market have been studied from different viewpoints and in various industries. Research has indicated that Chinese consumers tend to prefer foreign products and brands to domestic ones. For example, Hu et al. (2008) studied Chinese consumers’ wine purchasing behavior in relation to country-of-origin effects, and found that Chinese consumers are more likely to buy foreign wine brands instead of domestic ones for the purpose of gift giving or drinking wine in public. Hu et al. attribute this finding to the concept of “face” in Chinese culture, which refers to a person’s social standing being recognised by others and to the prestige that is gained by performing social roles successfully (Wong & Leung, 2001). According to Hu et al. (2008), purchasing wine from foreign brands maintains the positive reputation and the “face” of Chinese consumers.

There are also other studies indicating Chinese consumers’ preference for foreign products. Zhang et al. (2020) studied how country-of-origin affects Chinese consumers’ evaluation of

imported milk, and found that Chinese consumers are willing to pay higher prices for milk from foreign countries (New Zealand, Australia, Germany, and France) compared to domestic milk. Liu et al. (2006) studied Chinese consumers' attitudes towards store signs, and found that the participants generally preferred a bread shop sign in both Chinese and English with the country-of-origin (USA or Australia) noted, when compared to a sign in only Chinese or a sign in Chinese and English with no country-of-origin mark. Zhuang et al. (2008) studied the effects of brand origin confusion in China, and found that Chinese consumers show a greater preference for local brands that are misperceived to be of foreign origin, and a lower preference for foreign brands that are misperceived to be local, which supports the notion that Chinese consumers generally prefer foreign brands.

Country-of-origin has also been researched in relation to brand personality. Wang and Yang (2008) studied how brand personality, country-of-origin image and purchase intention relate to each other in China's auto market, and had the following findings: a favourable country-of-origin image can enhance the positive impact of brand personality on purchase intention, while a negative country-of-origin image can significantly hinder the positive impact of brand personality on purchase intention. They also found that for a brand with weak brand personality, even a very positive country-of-origin image does not make consumers' purchase intention high, and that "companies with both weak brand personality and a negative COO image achieve a higher purchase intention than those with weak brand personality, yet a positive COO image" (Wang & Yang, 2008, p. 458).

These findings apply to the Chinese auto market, and Wang and Yang (2008) note that both country-of-origin and brand personality effects differ considerably between product categories. However, the findings of their study indicate that a strong brand personality and a good country-of-origin image are both important for a brand's success on the Chinese market, and that while a positive country-of-origin image can help a brand to succeed, developing a strong and a favourable brand personality may be even more essential.

When it comes to Chinese consumers' perceptions of Nordic country-of-origin in brands, there is quite limited research on this specific topic. However, some studies have addressed this. In a Master's Thesis, Tan and Shen (2025) studied Chinese consumers' perceptions of Nordic brands and how the country-of-origin effect and consumer ethnocentrism influence brand attitudes and purchase intention. They found that Chinese consumers generally perceive the country image of Nordic countries as positive and that this has "significantly positively

influenced their attitudes towards Nordic brands” (Tan & Shen, 2025, p. 72). Furthermore, the results showed that Chinese consumers’ positive attitudes towards Nordic brands also increase their purchase intention.

Tan and Shen (2025) found that with Nordic brands, the ethnocentrism of Chinese consumers does not significantly affect the influence of country image on brand attitude, which was a finding not fully consistent with previous studies on consumer ethnocentrism. For example, the abovementioned study by Liu et al. (2006) found that highly ethnocentric consumers’ attitudes towards bilingual (Chinese & English) store signs, which communicated the foreign origin of the store, were significantly more negative than the attitudes of consumers with low ethnocentrism. According to Tan and Shen (2025), a possible explanation for their finding is that because Chinese consumers generally perceive Nordic countries in a positive light and because Nordic countries are associated with “positive images such as high quality, environmental protection and social responsibility” (p. 67), this counteracts the influence of ethnocentrism, which otherwise may lead consumers to reject foreign brands.

Another Master’s Thesis by Hiltunen (2018) studied Finland’s country image in China. Some one thousand citizens from major Chinese cities were surveyed and asked questions about their awareness of Finland, their travel history and travel intentions in relation to the Nordic countries, what things they associate with the word “Finland” and whether they rate these associations as positive, neutral, or negative. Key findings of this study were that Chinese citizens had predominantly positive perceptions of Finland, and that they mostly associated Finland with nature-related things, such as cold weather, Northern lights and beautiful sceneries. The respondents also described Finland and Finnish people as developed, elegant, natural, and honest, among other things.

These two Master’s Theses indicate that Chinese consumers’ attitudes towards Nordic brands and Finland as a country are generally positive, and this leads Chinese consumers to respond well to Nordic brands and be willing to purchase their products. For this current thesis, these findings signify that it can be highly beneficial for Finnish brands to convey their Nordic or Finnish origin in their brand names. Furthermore, the studies introduced earlier in this section that demonstrate Chinese consumers’ preference for foreign and Western brands compared to domestic ones, suggest that Chinese consumers are also likely to respond positively to brand names conveying a more general Western origin.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This thesis is a qualitative study on Finnish–Chinese brand name translations and their brand personality traits. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to interpret the semantic and cultural connotations of translated brand names, which requires close reading and contextual analysis rather than statistical measurement. However, descriptive quantification will also be used to count how many of the sixteen brand names fall into each category of translation methods, and how many translations apply to each of the brand personality dimensions. Therefore, an element of quantitative approach will be utilized to support the primary qualitative nature of this study.

3.2 Data Collection

A list of Finnish brand names and their Chinese translations was compiled from various internet sources, including the websites of Finland-China Business Association, the Economic and Commercial Office of the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Finland, and Xiaohongshu. The initial list included about 40 Finnish brand names and their Chinese translations. The list was then narrowed down to 16 brand names. As for the ethical considerations for this research, no human participants were involved and all data was collected from publicly available sources.

3.3 Brand Name Selection

To narrow down the list of names to a smaller amount for this study, a test of popularity was carried out with the Xiaohongshu search engine. Xiaohongshu (also known in English as RedNote) is a popular Chinese social media platform, which in July of 2025 was recorded to have more than 200 million monthly active users (Ngu, 2025). On the platform’s own website, it is described as a lifestyle platform for young people (*Xiaohongshu – Guanyu women*, n.d.). Many Xiaohongshu users search the platform for product reviews left by other users and make purchase decisions based on those reviews, “with surveys indicating that approximately 78% of users have made purchase decisions based primarily on Xiaohongshu reviews” (Ngu, 2025). This is why Xiaohongshu specifically was chosen to test how well the Chinese names of Finnish brands are received by Chinese consumers.

The Finnish brands were typed into the search engine by their Chinese name. Although it is possible that a foreign brand is more widely known to Chinese customers by its original name rather than the Chinese translation, and thus searching by the original Finnish name could yield more results in some cases, it was seen that searching by the Chinese translated brand name would give more relevant results for this study. This is because the purpose of this thesis is to examine Finnish–Chinese brand name translation, rather than how popular Finnish brands are on the Chinese market in general.

The brand name selection could also have been done by using other criteria rather than popularity, for example by choosing brand names based on their product categories to ensure diversity of the chosen brands. However, as an initial overview of the list of about 40 brands showed the product categories to already be diverse, and furthermore, the narrowed down list of 16 brands also represents many different categories, such as cosmetics, games, aviation, banking, electronics, interior design, technology, etc. it was seen as a valid and relevant selection of brands.

The Chinese names of the Finnish brands were typed into the Xiaohongshu search engine on the 23rd of February 2026. Upon typing the keyword into the search engine, a text appeared next to it saying how many notes are posted containing that keyword. In Xiaohongshu, “notes” refer to user-generated posts, which can contain photos, videos, and text (Hau, 2025). Based on the results, all searched brand names that had at least a thousand (1000) notes were listed in order from most to least notes, as seen in Table 1. Sixteen brand names had more than a thousand notes, and they were chosen to be analyzed in this thesis.

3.4 Data Analysis

The sixteen chosen Finnish brands and their translated Chinese names were organized in an Excel sheet. They were categorized into four different translation methods: phonetic, semantic, phonosemantic and complete recreation. Then the translated brand names were analyzed one by one to find out which brand personality characteristics they convey. Character meanings, connotations, and cultural associations, among other things, were considered in deciding which brand personality traits a name conveys. For instance, if a translated name contains the character 美 (beautiful), this may point to the Aesthetic dimension in Cui’s framework. Or if the character 力 (strength) is included, it may suggest the Competence dimension.

Table 1. Finnish brands with their Chinese names and number of notes on Xiaohongshu (as of February 23rd, 2026).

	Brand	Product category	Chinese name	Pinyin ¹	Notes
1.	Moomin	Entertainment	姆明	mǔmíng	242 k+
2.	Brawl Stars	Gaming	荒野乱斗	huāngyě luàn dòu	165 k+
3.	Nokia	Electronics	诺基亚	nuòjīyà	89 k+
4.	Angry Birds	Gaming	愤怒的小鸟	fènnù de xiǎoniǎo	58 k+
5.	Tikkurila	Paint	芬琳漆	fēnlín qī	34 k+
6.	Suunto	Outdoor sports electronics	颂拓	sòngtuò	27 k+
7.	Finnair	Aviation	芬兰航空	fēnlán hángkōng	17 k+
8.	Kone	Elevators	通力电梯	tōnglì diàntī	16 k+
9.	Nordea	Banking	北欧银行	běiōu yínháng	12 k+
10.	Valmet	Industrial machinery	维美德	wéiměidé	8 k+
11.	Genelec	Audio equipment	真力	zhēnlì	5 k+
12.	Stora Enso	Forest materials	斯道拉恩索	sīdàolā ēnsuǒ	5 k+
13.	Marimekko	Design	玛莉美歌	mǎlì měigē	3 k+
14.	Iittala	Design	伊塔拉	yītālā	2 k+
15.	Lumene	Cosmetics	优姿婷	yōuzīting	2 k+
16.	Valio	Food (Dairy)	蔚优	wèiyōu	1 k+

To analyze the meanings of the characters in the Chinese brand name translations, two online dictionaries were utilized: MDGB Chinese Dictionary (<https://www.mdbg.net/chinese/dictionary>) and Pleco, which is a Chinese dictionary mobile app.

3.5 Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the initial list of Finnish brands and their Chinese translations was compiled from multiple sources and is therefore not comprehensive, which means that the final list of sixteen brand names could also be lacking a Finnish brand name that would have had more than a thousand notes when searched on Xiaohongshu and would have been relevant for this study.

¹ Pinyin, the standard romanization system for Mandarin Chinese, is included to show pronunciation.

Second, the method of searching the brand names on Xiaohongshu is also not without limitations. A look at the search results showed that in some cases, searching by the Chinese name of a Finnish brand also generated posts that talked about other topics, such as another international brand with a similar Chinese name. This means that the number of notes might not be entirely accurate in depicting how many posts refer to the intended Finnish brand but may include posts about other brands or topics. However, a glance at the search results showed that each brand included in the final list of sixteen was at least featured in the top posts when searched by its Chinese name.

Third, this study only examines the brand personality traits seen in the translated brand names and the translation methods used, and thus the analysis mainly stays at a theoretical level. This study does not for example provide real-life information of what Chinese consumers think about the translated brand names (other than the Xiaohongshu search indicating a certain level of popularity or acceptance of the name), or whether the original brand name or the translated Chinese name is more well-received by Chinese consumers. However, it is a first step into examining Finnish–Chinese brand name translations and lays out a solid basis which further research can build upon.

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of this thesis, which analyses sixteen Finnish brand names and their Chinese translations. The findings are presented in relation to the two research questions guiding this study:

- 1) Which brand personality characteristics are found in these Finnish–Chinese brand name translations?
- 2) How does the selected translation method affect which brand personality traits are found in the translated brand names?

To best support the examination of these research questions, the findings are grouped into the four different translation methods in Finnish–Chinese brand name translation: Phonetic translation in Section 4.2.1, Semantic translation in Section 4.2.2, Phonosemantic translation in Section 4.2.3, and Complete Recreation in Section 4.2.4. While the lines between these translation methods are not always clear, and it is not always obvious which one a translated brand name belongs to, the categorization is made by thoughtfully considering which method seems to have most dominantly influenced each brand name translation.

Finally in Section 4.3, the findings of this study are summarized. Two tables are presented, one showing the distribution of brand personality dimensions across translation methods, and the other detailing the distribution of brand names across brand personality dimensions and traits. Major patterns regarding the relationship between translation method and brand personality are identified.

4.2 Presentation of Findings

4.2.1 Brand Personality in Phonetic Brand Name Translations

First, we will look at how brand personality is communicated in the brand names that were translated phonetically. Phonetic translation means that the brand names were translated by carrying over the original sound of the Finnish brand name into Chinese characters and sounds. Six of the sixteen brand names were translated phonetically into Chinese. These brand names and their translations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Phonetic Finnish–Chinese brand name translations.

Finnish brand name	Chinese phonetic translation	Pinyin
Moomin	姆明	mǔmíng
Nokia	诺基亚	nuòjīyà
Suunto	颂拓	sòngtuò
Stora Enso	斯道拉恩索	sīdàolā ēnsuǒ
Marimekko	玛莉美歌	mǎlīměigē
Iittala	伊塔拉	yītālā

While Chinese characters are logographic symbols that carry meaning, in some cases individual characters can lose their meaning and only function as phonetic symbols when they are taken from their original contexts and put into sequences. Phonetically translated brand names often contain characters like these, which communicate sound but have lost their meaning (Zhang & Schmitt, 2001). Because of this, the brand names in this category cannot directly point to most of the brand personality traits and dimensions of Cui's (2019) Chinese brand personality framework, such as Competence or Sophistication. However, there is one brand personality dimension which can be seen in these phonetically translated brand names, namely the Trendiness dimension, and more specifically the trait of Westernness.

Phonetically translated brand names imply foreignness because they often have no apparent meaning besides the pronunciation, while also using Chinese characters that are often used in translating foreign names. This is what makes them read 'foreign' to Chinese consumers. In Cui's study, she connects phonetic translations to Chinese consumers' "pursuit of trendiness and preference for western brands" (Cui, 2019, p. 40). Therefore, all of the phonetically translated brand names here are seen to convey the Western trait in the Trendiness dimension.

Besides characters that communicate sound but have lost their meaning, sometimes characters with positive meanings are also used in phonetic translations. A common example is the character 美 (měi, 'beautiful'), which is used in Marimekko's Chinese name 玛莉美歌 (mǎlīměigē). Because of this character, this specific brand name translation doesn't only convey the Western trait in the Trendiness dimension, but also the Beautiful trait in the Aesthetic dimension. However, Marimekko is still grouped into the phonetic translation category because the translated brand name closely follows the sound of the original name, and the character that expresses a specific pleasant meaning is a character often used in phonetic translations.

To summarize, the brand name translations for Moomin (姆明), Nokia (诺基亚), Suunto (颂拓), Stora Enso (斯道拉恩索), Marimekko (玛莉美歌), and Iittala (伊塔拉) all convey the Western trait in the Trendiness dimension. Additionally, the translated name for Marimekko (玛莉美歌) also conveys the Beautiful trait in the Aesthetic dimension.

4.2.2 Brand Personality in Semantic Brand Name Translations

Next, we will look at which brand personality traits are found in the semantically translated brand names. Four of the sixteen brand names in this study were semantically translated, which means that the meaning of the original brand name has been carried on to the Chinese translation. These brand names and translations are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Semantic Finnish–Chinese brand name translations.

Finnish brand name	Chinese semantic translation	Pinyin	Meaning of Chinese name
Brawl Stars	荒野乱斗	huāngyě luàn dòu	Battle in the wilderness
Angry Birds	愤怒的小鸟	fènnù de xiǎoniǎo	Angry small birds
Finnair	芬兰航空	fēnlán hángkōng	Finland aviation
Nordea	北欧银行	běiōu yínháng	Nordic bank

As can be seen in Table 3, the meanings of the semantically translated brand names are not word for word exactly the same as the original brand names, but all four translations have almost the same meaning. The biggest change in meaning is perhaps in the translation for Brawl Stars, a fast-paced multiplayer battle royale game (*Brawl Stars*, n.d.), whose name is translated to 荒野乱斗 (huāngyě luàn dòu), which means something along the lines of ‘battle in the wilderness’. The element of ‘star’ in the original name is replaced with ‘wilderness’ in the translation, pointing more to the environment of the game rather than the players/characters. However, ‘brawl’ is kept in the translation, with 乱 (luàn) meaning ‘disorder’, ‘upheaval’, or ‘riot’, and 斗 (dòu) meaning ‘to fight’ or ‘to struggle’. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, ‘brawl’ means ‘to quarrel or fight noisily’ (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), and the characters 乱 and 斗 together carry a similar meaning.

The other translations are even closer in meaning with the original names. Angry Birds is translated to 愤怒的小鸟 (fènnù de xiǎoniǎo), which literally means ‘angry (small) birds’ or ‘angry birdies’. Finnair is translated to 芬兰航空 (fēnlán hángkōng), meaning ‘Finland

aviation’ or ‘Finland Airlines’. Almost all Chinese airline names – both domestic and international airlines – end in ‘航空’, for example 中国国际航空 (Air China), 美国航空 (American Airlines), and 英国航空 (British Airways). Therefore, 芬兰航空 is a very straightforward semantic translation for ‘Finnair’, since it follows the industry convention and maintains the two central meanings: that it is Finnish and an airline.

Nordea’s case is very similar to Finnair’s – the first part of the translated name is the place of origin (北欧, běiōu, ‘Northern Europe’) and the latter part points to the specific industry (银行, yínháng, ‘bank’). It is also a very straightforward semantic translation, although not the exact same in meaning as the original name. The original name ‘Nordea’ only points to the Nordic background of the bank, but does not include a word such as ‘bank’. However, it is also industry convention in China for bank names to end in ‘银行’, and Nordea’s translated Chinese name follows that convention.

The brand personality traits of the translated brand names in this section fall into a few different dimensions. Finnair’s Chinese name 芬兰航空 and Nordea’s Chinese name 北欧银行 both point to the Western trait in the Trendiness dimension, with 芬兰航空 containing the word ‘Finland’ and 北欧银行 containing the word ‘Northern Europe’.

The brand personality of Brawl Stars’ Chinese name 荒野乱斗 is not as clear, as it does not neatly fit into any dimension in Cui’s framework. It could perhaps point to a few different traits such as Successful, Active or Cool, which are under the dimensions of Competence, Joyfulness, and Trendiness, respectively. The mention of ‘rioting’ and ‘fighting’ (乱斗) could point to being successful, if a consumer interprets it that way. The whole name 荒野乱斗 (‘battle in the wilderness’) can sound cool to a consumer who enjoys games with those elements. It is certainly a name that sounds active, but since in Cui’s framework the Active trait is under the Joyfulness dimension, it would not be the most accurate categorization in this case.

The brand name 荒野乱斗 would actually fit more neatly in one of the dimensions in Aaker’s (1997) brand personality framework, namely the Ruggedness dimension, which includes the traits Outdoorsy and Tough. It could also point to the Excitement dimension which is lacking from Cui’s framework, but found both in Aaker’s (1997) and Chu and Sung’s (2011) frameworks, and which includes traits such as Daring, Spirited, Active, and Cool. Therefore,

we can see that Cui's Chinese brand personality framework is not the best fitted for analyzing this specific brand name, but for the sake of a consistent analysis, it will be put into the Competence and Trendiness dimensions with the most accurate traits for this brand name translation in Cui's framework being Successful and Cool.

The Chinese name for the game brand Angry Birds, 愤怒的小鸟, also does not neatly fit into any of the brand personality dimensions in Cui's framework. The closest one is probably the Trendiness dimension, which includes the traits Young and Cool. The mention of 'small/young birds' (小鸟) points to the Young trait, and as with Brawl Stars' Chinese name 荒野乱斗, the name 愤怒的小鸟 for Angry Birds could also give an impression of sounding cool to consumers.

To summarize, the brand name translations for Finnair (芬兰航空) and Nordea (北欧银行) convey the Western trait in the Trendiness dimension. The brand name translation for Brawl Stars (荒野乱斗) conveys the Successful trait in the Competence dimension and the Cool trait in the Trendiness dimension. The brand name translation for Angry Birds (愤怒的小鸟) conveys the Young and Cool traits in the Trendiness dimension.

4.2.3 Brand Personality in Phonosemantic Brand Name Translations

This section will examine the phonosemantic brand name translations and their brand personalities. Phonosemantic translation means that the sound of the original brand name is preserved to some extent while adding a positive meaning to the translated brand name. Three out of the sixteen brand names examined in this study were phonosemantically translated, and they are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Phonosemantic Finnish–Chinese brand name translations.

Finnish brand name	Chinese phonosemantic translation	Pinyin	Meaning of Chinese name
Valmet	维美德	wéiměidé	Maintain virtue
Genelec	真力	zhēnli	True power
Valio	蔚优	wèiyōu	Luxuriant and excellent

All of the brand name translations in this section resemble the original name in sound. In the Chinese name for Valmet, the first character 维 (wéi) loosely corresponds to the first syllable 'val'. The second and third characters 美 (měi) and 德 (dé) together sound similar to the

second syllable ‘met’. However, there are closer phonetic equivalents in the Chinese language that could have been used if this brand name was translated phonetically, but the meaning of the chosen characters was prioritized. The meaning of 维美德 is quite favourable and can attract customers, with 维 (wéi) meaning ‘to maintain’ or ‘to safeguard’ and 美德 (měidé) meaning ‘virtue’. Therefore, the brand personality traits that this name conveys are the Responsible and Reliable traits in the Competence dimension, as well as the Traditional trait in the Sophistication dimension.

The Chinese name for the audio equipment brand Genelec (真力, zhēnli) also somewhat resembles the original name in sound, especially if the name Genelec is pronounced the way it would be in English. The English pronunciation of the syllable ‘gen’ sounds similar to 真 (zhēn), and the second character 力 (li) somewhat corresponds to the syllable ‘lec’, with the [l] sound being maintained. The pronunciation of the original name and the translated name is not the same, but it maintains a level of similarity for the translation to be considered phonosemantic. The meaning of the translated brand name 真力 (zhēnli) is appealing, as 真 (zhēn) means ‘true’ or ‘real’ and 力 (li) means ‘power’ or ‘strength’. The brand personality traits that this name conveys the most are the Reliable and Stable traits in the Competence dimension.

The Chinese name for the dairy and food brand Valio is 蔚优 (wèiyōu). The sound of the translated name is similar to the original, but just as in the cases mentioned above, a closer phonetic equivalent would have been possible. It seems that in this translation the meaning of the Chinese characters was prioritized while also maintaining a similar sound. The character 蔚 (wèi) means ‘luxuriant’, ‘grand’, or ‘colourful’ and the character 优 (yōu) means ‘excellent’ or ‘abundant’. Together they give an impression of grandeur, abundance, and high quality. Therefore, the brand personality traits that best apply to this brand name translation are the Luxuriant trait in the Sophistication dimension and the Exquisite trait in the Aesthetic dimension.

To summarize, the brand name translation for Valmet (维美德) conveys the Responsible and Reliable traits in the Competence dimension, and the Traditional trait in the Sophistication dimension. The brand name translation for Genelec (真力) conveys the Reliable and Stable traits in the Competence dimension, and the brand name translation for Valio (蔚优) conveys

the Luxuriant trait in the Sophistication dimension and the Exquisite trait in the Aesthetic dimension.

4.2.4 Brand Personality in Complete Recreation Brand Name Translations

The final category of brand names we will look at are the names translated with the complete recreation method, which means that they don't resemble the original name in either meaning or sound. Three out of the sixteen brand names of this study were complete recreations, and they are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Completely recreated Finnish–Chinese brand name translations.

Finnish brand name	Chinese recreation	Pinyin	Meaning of Chinese name
Tikkurila	芬琳漆	fēnlínqī	Finland + beautiful jade + paint
Kone	通力电梯	tōnglì diàntī	Cooperate + elevators
Lumene	优姿婷	yōuzītíng	Excellent + appearance + graceful

The Chinese name for the paint brand Tikkurila is 芬琳漆 (fēnlínqī). The first character of the name, 芬 (fēn), is a shortened version of the word 芬兰 (fēnlán), which means Finland. The second character 琳 (lín) means 'beautiful jade' or 'gem', and the third character 漆 (qī) means 'paint' or 'lacquer'. Thus, the name communicates multiple meanings: it points to the Finnish origin of the brand, conveys an image of beauty and exquisiteness, and informs consumers that it's a paint brand. The brand personality dimensions that apply to this brand name are the Trendiness dimension with the Western trait, the Aesthetic dimension with the Beautiful and Exquisite traits, and the Sophistication dimension with the Expensive trait, as the mention jade or gems can give an expensive image.

The Chinese name for the Finnish elevator engineering company and brand Kone is 通力(电梯), tōnglì (diàntī). The main part of the name is 通力 (tōnglì), but the word 电梯 (diàntī), meaning 'elevator' or 'escalator', is sometimes added after it in the Chinese marketing of the brand. The brand name 通力 (tōnglì) is a Chinese adverb which means 'to cooperate' or 'to put in a concerted effort', while the original Finnish name Kone means 'machine'. In the Chinese translation, the virtue of working together in cooperation is expressed and connected to the brand. The brand personality dimension that this name conveys is the Competence dimension, with traits like Responsible, Reliable and Successful.

The Chinese name for the Finnish cosmetics brand Lumene is 优姿婷 (yōuzīting). It communicates a meaning that is fitting for a makeup and cosmetics brand – the first character 优 (yōu) means ‘excellent’, the second character 姿 (zī) means ‘beauty’ or ‘appearance’, and the third character 婷 (tíng) is often used in female names and means ‘fair and graceful’. Therefore, the brand personality traits that this name expresses the most are the Beautiful and Elegant traits in the Aesthetic dimension.

To summarize, the brand name translation for Tikkurila (芬琳漆) conveys the Western trait in the Trendiness dimension, the Beautiful and Exquisite traits in the Aesthetic dimension, and the Expensive trait in the Sophistication dimension. The brand name translation for Kone (通力) conveys the Responsible, Reliable, and Successful traits in the Competence dimension. The brand name translation for Lumene (优姿婷) conveys the Beautiful and Elegant traits in the Aesthetic dimension.

4.3 Summary of Findings

This section summarizes the findings of this study in relation to the research questions. The first research question asked which brand personality characteristics are found in the brand name translations examined in this thesis. Brand personality traits from four of the dimensions in Cui’s (2019) framework were identified (Competence, Sophistication, Trendiness, and Aesthetic), while none of the sixteen brand name translations expressed traits from the Joyfulness dimension. Table 6 presents the distribution of brand personality dimensions across translation methods, while Table 7 presents the findings in more detail, including the specific brand personality traits that apply to each name.

Table 6. Brand personality dimensions by translation method.

	Translation method					
Dimension		Competence	Joyfulness	Sophistication	Trendiness	Aesthetic
	Phonetic	-	-	-	6	1
	Semantic	1	-	-	4	-
	Phonosemantic	2	-	2	-	1
	Recreation	1	-	1	1	2
	Total	4	0	3	11	4

Table 7. Distribution of brand names across brand personality dimensions and traits.

	Phonetic	Semantic	Phonosemantic	Recreation
Competence	0	1 荒野乱斗	2 维美德 真力	1 通力
Responsible			维美德	通力
Reliable			维美德 真力	通力
Stable			真力	
Successful		荒野乱斗		通力
Sophistication	0	0	2 蔚优 维美德	1 芬琳漆
Expensive				芬琳漆
Luxuriant			蔚优	
Traditional			维美德	
Trendiness	6 姆明 诺基亚 颂拓 斯道拉恩索 玛莉美歌 伊塔拉	4 荒野乱斗 愤怒的小鸟 芬兰航空 北欧银行	0	1 芬琳漆
Western	姆明 诺基亚 颂拓 斯道拉恩索 玛莉美歌 伊塔拉	芬兰航空 北欧银行		芬琳漆
Young		愤怒的小鸟		
Cool		荒野乱斗 愤怒的小鸟		
Aesthetic	1 玛莉美歌	0	1 蔚优	2 芬琳漆 优姿婷
Beautiful	玛莉美歌			芬琳漆 优姿婷
Elegant				优姿婷
Exquisite			蔚优	芬琳漆

The second research question asked how the selected translation method affects which brand personality traits are found in the translated brand names. As shown in Table 6, phonetic and semantic translations showed the most traits from the Trendiness dimension, with many of those names pointing to the Western origin of the brand through a phonetically translated brand name, and others using markers such as ‘芬兰’ and ‘北欧’ to signal Finnish or Nordic origin more specifically.

Phonosemantic translations showed most traits from the Competence and Sophistication dimensions, with the brand name 真力 (Genelec) conveying Competence and the brand name 蔚优 (Valio) conveying Sophistication, as an example. The brand personality traits in completely recreated brand names were spread out quite evenly through four different dimensions.

The most prominent dimension was the Trendiness dimension, with eleven out of sixteen brand names conveying relevant traits. In Table 7, we can see that while the traits in the other dimensions were equally prominent, in the Trendiness dimension that is not the case. The most popular trait is clearly the Western trait, with 9 out of 11 names in the Trendiness dimension conveying Westernness, rather than the other traits (Young & Cool). The Trendiness dimension and the Western trait within it collecting such a majority of the brand names of the sample indicates an interesting pattern in Finnish–Chinese brand name translation. This pattern and its implications, alongside other insights from these findings will be presented in Chapter 5.

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to the research questions, highlights patterns seen in the findings and analyses them in further detail, and explores the implications for Finnish–Chinese brand name translation. The discussion features following themes: how translation method reflects brand positioning strategy, how geographical origin is signaled in the translated brand names, and the role of product category in translation method choice. The brand personality dimensions and traits of Finnish brands on the Chinese market are also discussed, and an adapted framework for Finnish–Chinese brand name translation is proposed.

5.2 The Role of Translation Method in Brand Positioning Strategy

5.2.1 Foreignness or Function?

As seen in the findings in Chapter 4, phonetic translations mostly signaled foreignness, while the phonosemantic translations conveyed richer and more specific brand personality traits, such as competence and sophistication. The answer to why some brands choose a phonetic and others a phonosemantic translation method may be found in their product categories. The brands that chose phonetic translations included Moomin, Nokia, Marimekko, and Iittala, which are fashion, design, lifestyle, and entertainment brands. Meanwhile, the brands that chose a phonosemantic translation methods were Valmet (an industrial machinery brand), Genelec (a professional audio equipment brand), and Valio (a food/dairy brand).

There seems to be a pattern where lifestyle and design brands keep the foreign sound, because the main selling point is the foreignness of the product. For these brands, the name doesn't need to directly refer to the quality or reliability of the product, because the foreign sound communicates trendiness and exoticness. When it comes to more functional products, the trustworthiness and quality of the product matters more, and it makes sense for such qualities to be embedded in the translated brand names.

Valmet produces heavy machinery, Genelec professional audio equipment, and Valio sells food for people to consume. This means that the safety and good quality of the products are essential, and only sounding foreign does not suffice. When these brand names are translated into Chinese with a phonosemantic method, we see meanings that reassure customers: 真力

(true power), 维美德 (maintain virtue), 蔚优 (luxuriant and excellent). This can also be seen in the complete recreation translations, for example with Kone's Chinese name 通力 meaning 'cooperate'. These brand names all work to persuade consumers of the brands' trustworthiness.

Therefore, we can see that the chosen translation method reflects brand positioning strategy. While lifestyle brands sell foreignness, functional brands sell trust. This is why it may make more sense for a lifestyle or design brand to choose a phonetic translation method, while more industrial brands can benefit from choosing the phonosemantic or complete recreation method which embed meaning to the translated Chinese brand name.

However, it should be noted that in our sample there are some exceptions to this pattern: Suunto and Stora Enso are both translated phonetically, although Suunto is a brand that focuses on professional navigation, diving and sport technology and Stora Enso a B2B brand focusing on renewable packaging, wood products and biomaterials. It could be expected that these brands might also benefit from conveying traits of trustworthiness and quality in their translated Chinese names, but they have chosen the phonetic route.

A possible explanation for this may be related to brand audience: a specialized outdoor sport technology brand like Suunto may have a more established user base internationally and thus have less need to embed a certain meaning in its Chinese name. Stora Enso's B2B nature means that its audience is other businesses and not individual consumers, and its marketing needs may be different.

Thus, based on the sample of this study it seems that while functional brands generally prefer a phonosemantic translation method to a phonetic one, a more specialized functional brand (Suunto) and one of the B2B functional brands (Stora Enso) chose the phonetic method. This means that the pattern explained above is not absolute, but still offers an explanation for why some brands might choose a phonetic translation method, while others choose a phonosemantic or complete recreation translation method.

5.2.2 Product Category is Key

When it comes to the semantic translations in this study, it was noted that the two game brand names in that category, namely 荒野乱斗 (Brawl Stars) and 愤怒的小鸟 (Angry Birds) did not fit Cui's (2019) framework well, but suited the Ruggedness and Excitement dimensions in

Aaker's (1997) framework better. The reason for this can also be found in product category – game brands sell customers an experience, not simply a product to use or consume. Therefore, the name of a game brand should promise action, emotion, and adventure.

荒野乱斗 means ‘battle in the wilderness’ and 愤怒的小鸟 means ‘angry little birds’, both giving consumers a vivid image of how they will feel when they play the game. It is no coincidence that these game brand names are translated semantically, because the meaning of the name is key in describing the playing experience that the game offers. If the name Angry Birds, for example, was translated phonetically into meaningless sounds, it would lose the whole essence of what makes a good game brand name.

From this example, we can clearly see that the product category of a brand shapes not only the translation method choice but also which brand personality dimensions are relevant. While traditional consumer goods need personality traits like reliable, sophisticated, or elegant, game brands need promises of playing experience like exciting, daring, and wild. Cui's (2019) framework was built on traditional consumer products, and may need adaptation for entertainment brands.

5.3 Signaling Western and Finnish Origin

At the beginning of this study, it was anticipated that Finnish–Chinese brand name translations may show a pattern of indicating the Finnish or Nordic origin of the brands. In the country-of-origin section in Chapter 2, previous research was reviewed showing that Chinese consumers prefer foreign brands and have favourable attitudes towards Nordic brands and Finland as a country. The findings of this study show that Finnish–Chinese brand name translations do indeed communicate geographic origin, and that there are two different ways that this is done: the first and more prevalent way being to signal foreignness through a phonetically translated name, and the second way being to use characters such as 芬, 芬兰, or 北欧 in the name.

Phonetic brand name translations communicate foreign origin to Chinese consumers, and there are strong incentives for brands to employ this translation strategy. Due to China's fast economic growth in the last few decades and the increase of consumer spending, Chinese consumers have been drawn to the material prosperity of Western cultures and have started to prefer global brands (Chu & Sung, 2011). This is why emphasizing the Westernness of a brand can be beneficial for its attractiveness to Chinese consumers. In Cui's (2019) study,

25% of the brand names in the corpus were phonetic translations, which she deemed as confirmation for Chinese consumers' "pursuit of trendiness and preference for Western brands" (Cui, 2019, p. 40). The findings of this study showed a similar pattern to Cui's, with six out of sixteen (37.5%) brand name translations being phonetic. This shows that the popularity of phonetic translations does not only apply to English–Chinese brand name translation, but also to Finnish–Chinese brand name translation.

The second way of indicating geographical origin in Finnish–Chinese brand name translation is using Chinese characters that refer to it, such as 芬/芬兰 ('Finland') or 北欧 ('Northern Europe'). This was seen in two different types of translated brand names: the first being the semantic translations 芬兰航空 (Finnair) and 北欧银行 (Nordea). In the case of these two brand names, it is not surprising that the Chinese names of these brands include regional markers because the original brand names do, too. Thus, these translations may just reflect a straightforward semantic translation approach as well as adherence to industry conventions.

The other – more interesting – case is the translated Chinese name 芬琳漆 for the paint brand Tikkurila, which is a complete recreation translation. It is more distinctive because, firstly, it is not a convention for consumer products like paint to signal geographical origin in their names, and furthermore, because the original Finnish brand name does not directly point to the Finnish origin of the brand but the Chinese name does. "Tikkurila" is the name of a city district in Southern Finland, so the original brand name does indicate geographical location, but in the Chinese translation it is widened to Finland as a whole by using the character 芬 ('Finland'). By doing this, the Chinese name clearly communicates the Finnish country-of-origin of the brand to Chinese consumers.

The reason why this paint brand might want to signal Finnish origin to Chinese consumers could have to do with the image that 'Finland' or 'Finnish' evokes in the minds of Chinese consumers. According to experts in Finland's country branding work, the strengths of Finland include clean nature, safety, strong educational expertise and functional infrastructure (Hytönen, 2012). Similarly, the Master's Thesis by Hiltunen (2018) showed that Chinese citizens associated Finland with words like 'beautiful', 'safe', 'natural', 'clean', 'honest', and 'developed', among many others. Many of these traits, especially cleanliness and safety, are important for products that consumers choose to use in their homes. Therefore, it makes sense for a paint brand like Tikkurila to point to its Finnish origin in its Chinese name, because

doing so can give consumers a positive image of the product and improve their purchase intention.

5.4 Brand Personality Dimensions of Finnish Brands

As noted in Chapter 4, all brand personality dimensions of Cui's framework except for the Joyfulness dimension were present in the brand names analyzed in this thesis. None of the sixteen brands conveyed any traits from the Joyfulness dimension. This could be due to the composition of this study's sample (only one children's brand, no confectionery brands, etc.) or it could reflect a tendency of Finnish brands to prioritize projecting competence and aesthetic over playful warmth on the Chinese market.

Other than the Joyfulness dimension being absent, there were a few other ways in which Cui's framework did not completely fit the brand names in this study. First, the framework lacked relevant dimensions for the game brand names 荒野乱斗 (Brawl Stars) and 愤怒的小鸟 (Angry Birds). Second, because the framework was developed based on English–Chinese brand name translations, it included the trait of Western in the Trendiness dimension. However, three of the sixteen brand name translations in this study directly pointed to the Finnish or Nordic origin of the brand, which is more specific than being 'Western'. Thus, a framework adapted for Finnish–Chinese translation could include more specific traits like 'Finnish' or 'Nordic', alongside the broader 'Western' trait. This would better capture the geographic specificity observed in this study.

Based on the observations made in this study, an adapted brand personality framework for Finnish–Chinese brand name translations could look something like this: it would keep the Competence, Sophistication, and Aesthetic dimensions with the same traits as Cui's framework. The Joyfulness dimension would be discarded, but instead an Excitement dimension similar to the ones featured in Aaker (1997) and Chu and Sung's (2011) frameworks would be brought back. This dimension could include traits such as Active, Daring, and Wild. The Trendiness dimension would be kept, but the traits within it would be changed: the Young, Cool, and Western traits would still be included, but the traits Finnish and Nordic would also be added.

These changes would make a brand personality framework more fitting for Finnish–Chinese brand name translations by including relevant traits and dimensions missing in Cui's framework, taking into account entertainment brands alongside traditional consumer products,

and incorporating geographically specified traits (Finnish and Nordic). See Figure 4 for an illustration of this framework.

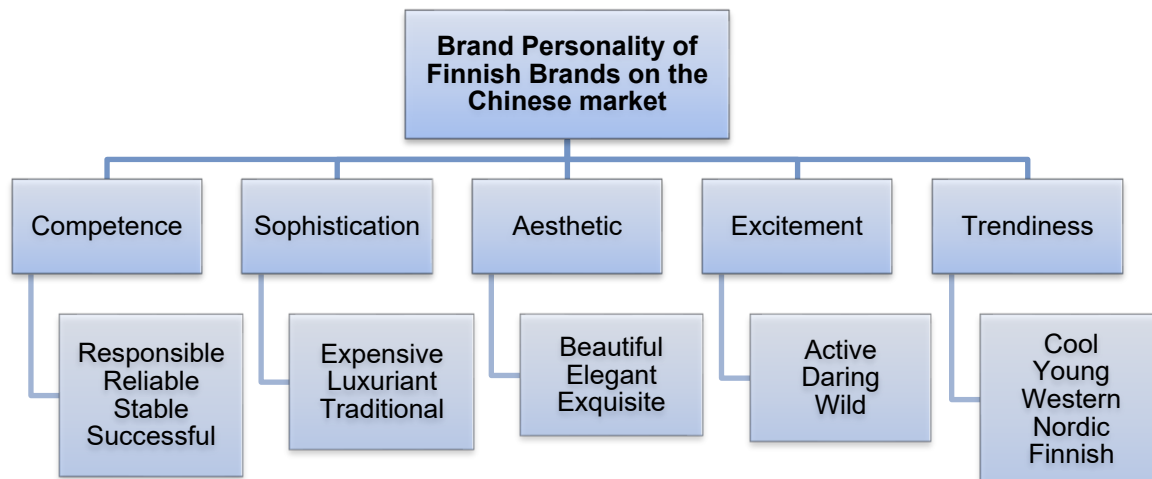


Figure 4. An adapted brand personality framework for Finnish–Chinese brand name translation.

It is important to note that this is a tentative framework proposed for future research that is based on the observations made in this study, but not yet empirically validated. Sixteen brands is a small sample, and this proposed framework would need testing on a larger dataset to determine its validity and applicability for research on brand personality in Finnish–Chinese brand name translation more broadly.

5.5 Implications

The findings of this study carry several implications, both theoretical and practical. They offer valuable insights for Finnish companies wanting to venture out to the Chinese market and to show their brands in the best possible light in the eyes of Chinese consumers. As we have discussed, the selected translation method affects the brand personality traits seen in the brand name. For a brand that wants to emphasize the foreign and Western air in its Chinese name, a phonetic translation is best. This can be a good choice, because research has indicated that most Chinese consumers prefer foreign brands and are positively affected by foreign brand names (Kai, 2009; Li & Murray, 1998; as cited in Villar et al., 2012). Finnish lifestyle, design and entertainment brands can choose to go this route.

Products that require more trust from the customers, such as food products or heavy machinery, can benefit from choosing a phonosemantic or a complete recreation translation method. With these kinds of translations, the Chinese name of a brand can convey more than just foreignness and trendiness – it can include positive meanings like trustworthiness and quality, which can attract consumers to choose a product that holds “higher stakes” than just style or entertainment.

The concept of brand personality should also be considered when translating a brand name into Chinese. With the Chinese logographic writing system, where characters hold both sound and meaning, there is a unique opportunity to embed positive meanings into a brand name while still maintaining a similar sound to the original name, as seen in the phonosemantic translations examined in this study. Consumers have been shown to attribute human characteristics to brands and to prefer brands that they perceive to have similar characteristics as themselves (Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). By choosing Chinese characters that say for example ‘active’, ‘cool’, or ‘elegant’, a brand can present itself in a positive light to consumers that appreciate such qualities.

Besides offering implications for Finnish companies seeking to enter the Chinese market, the findings of this study also have broader academic implications. For the field of translation studies, the findings show that brand name translation is not just a linguistic choice, but a strategic decision tied to product category and market positioning. This indicates that research on brand name translation can be enriched and deepened by employing a category-aware approach.

5.6 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is not without limitations. One limitation is the sample size – sixteen brand names cannot provide a comprehensive picture of Finnish–Chinese brand name translation as a whole, and the findings of this study can only point to patterns that may or may not be apparent when analyzed on a larger scale.

The analysis methods of this study are also limited, as the Chinese brand names are analyzed by a student of Chinese who is not fluent, and therefore subtle nuances in the meanings of some characters can be lost. Furthermore, the relevant brand personality traits are assigned based on the analysis of a single non-Chinese person, which makes the analysis subject to

interpretation and possibly lacking in observations that someone native to the Chinese language and cultural background would have made.

The scope of this thesis also brings limitations, because brand personality is only studied in the context of brand names, while logos, slogans, advertising campaigns, etc. which all contribute to forming a brand's image in the minds of consumers, are not taken into account. When it comes to the theoretical framework used in the study, Cui's (2019) framework was designed for English–Chinese translations and applying it to Finnish–Chinese data is not entirely straightforward. This can be seen in some of the translated brand names not fitting neatly into the brand personality dimensions of Cui's framework.

Despite these limitations, the findings offer an insightful analysis of sixteen Finnish–Chinese brand name translations that all have an actual presence on the Chinese market. They indicate which translation methods might be chosen for different types of brands according to how the brand seeks to position itself on the Chinese market and in the eyes of Chinese consumers. This study complements previous research on English–Chinese brand name translation by offering a new geographically specified perspective.

To gain deeper insights into the brand personality traits of Finnish–Chinese brand name translations, it would be valuable to study what kind of brand personality traits Chinese consumers themselves see in translated names of Finnish brands. This could be done through surveys or interviews, and would offer an opportunity for richer analysis of realized brand personality in the Chinese brand name translations of Finnish brands.

Another direction for future research could be to study the translation awareness of Finnish companies when it comes to translating their brand names into Chinese. For instance, representatives of Finnish brands could be asked whether they are aware of the different options for translation methods, what aspects they have chosen to emphasize and prioritize in their Chinese names (and why), who they have consulted in choosing their Chinese name, and how they hope their brand to be perceived by Chinese consumers. This kind of research would shed light on the brand naming and translating processes of Finnish companies, and perhaps identify areas where being more informed could enhance Finnish–Chinese brand name translation and boost the performance of Finnish brands on the Chinese market.

6 Conclusion

This thesis analyzed the brand personality characteristics found in the Chinese names of sixteen Finnish brands, and how the selected translation method affected which brand personality traits were found. A list of Finnish brands with Chinese names was collected from the internet, and the sample was narrowed down to sixteen brands through a test of popularity on Xiaohongshu. The brand name translations were categorized into four translation methods: phonetic, semantic, phonosemantic, and complete recreation. The brand personality of the translated brand names was analyzed according to Cui's (2019) Chinese brand personality framework.

The findings showed that various brand personality dimensions and traits were present in the brand names, with the most prominent dimension being Trendiness and the most prominent trait Westernness. Phonetic translations showed the Western trait most, while phonosemantic, semantic and complete recreation translations yielded richer brand personality traits such as reliability, sophistication and elegance. The central finding was that product category affects the selected translation method and the relevant brand personality traits. For instance, lifestyle brands use phonetic translation, because their selling point is foreignness, while functional brands use phonosemantic or complete recreation, because they need their name to assure consumers of the product's reliability and quality.

This study contributes to the field of Finnish–Chinese translation by offering an insightful analysis of how Finnish brands are presented in their translated Chinese names, and the impact that translation methods have in brand name translation. It also contributes to the field of brand name translation more broadly by showing that translation method choice is fundamentally a brand positioning strategy shaped by product category, and not merely a linguistic consideration. The findings imply that Finnish brands looking to translate their name into Chinese should choose the translation method that best fits the brand's product category, marketing goals and desired brand personality.

In future research, larger samples of Finnish–Chinese brand names translations should be analyzed to confirm if the findings of this study apply on a larger scale. The brand personality dimensions and traits of Finnish brands on the Chinese market should also be studied in more detail to provide a revised brand personality framework that is supported by solid empirical evidence. Additionally, aspects such as Chinese consumers' attitudes towards Finnish–

Chinese brand names translations and the translation awareness of Finnish companies could be included in future research to provide further insights in these areas.

Brand name is an integral part of every brand, and many international brands are faced with the challenge of translating their name to cater to foreign markets and audiences. The successful translation of a Finnish brand name into Chinese can prove itself to be a challenging, but also a very rewarding task: the Chinese language offers Finnish brands an opportunity to communicate various favourable meanings in their Chinese brand names to attract customers and establish a presence on the Chinese market. This thesis explored how brand personality and translation methods can be used by Finnish companies to take meaningful steps towards this goal.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: AI Use Declaration Form



UNIVERSITY
OF TURKU

Mandatory AI Use Declaration

BA Dissertation Proseminar (CHIN0012) — Department of Chinese, University of Turku

Name: Annika Mattila Student ID: _____
 Dissertation title: "Cooperation", "True Power" & "Maintaining Virtue": Translation Methods and Brand Personality in Finnish-Chinese Brand Name Translation Date: 16.5.2026

1. Which of the following did you use AI for? (Tick all that apply.)

- Brainstorming or narrowing my topic / research question
 Finding or summarising sources, or replacing reading I did not do
 Drafting paragraphs, sentences, or transitions that appear in the final text
 Translating my own writing between languages (Chinese / English / Finnish)
 Paraphrasing or rewriting passages from sources
 Generating or coding data, examples, tables, or quotations
 Proofreading grammar, spelling, and punctuation only
 Structuring or restructuring chapters / the argument
 Other (specify below)

2. List every AI tool you used (ChatGPT, Claude, DeepSeek, Gemini, Grammarly, Quillbot, DeepL Write, humanisers, etc.):

ChatGPT

3. Approximately what percentage of the final text was produced with AI assistance in any form (drafted, rewritten, translated, or substantially edited)?

0% 1–10% 11–25% 26–50% 51–75% more than 75%

4. Did you use an AI humaniser, paraphraser, or any tool designed to make AI text sound human or evade detection (e.g. Undetectable AI, StealthGPT, Quillbot humanise, manually inserting errors)?

Yes No If yes, which tool and for which sections: _____

5. Can you, without AI, explain every argument, source, and analytical decision in your dissertation if I ask you in the viva?

Yes, all of it Most of it Some parts I would need to revisit

6. Open response. Describe honestly how AI shaped your dissertation — what it helped you understand, where you relied on it more than you should have, and what in the final text is most clearly your own thinking. Vague answers ("only grammar") tell me nothing; specific answers build trust.

I used ChatGPT occasionally for these two purposes:

- Giving me suggestions of synonyms for words when I could not think of the right word myself or when I wanted to explain another study without quoting it directly. I did not give ChatGPT whole sentences or passages to paraphrase, and I did not copy-and-paste anything from ChatGPT besides singular words or phrases that I found appropriate to use in my text.
- Giving me ideas on how to translate certain terms from English to Finnish when writing my Abstract. For example, I wasn't sure how to translate the four translation methods (phonetic, semantic, phonosemantic, complete recreation) into Finnish, so I asked ChatGPT for suggestions.

Overall, I asked ChatGPT for help with some words and phrases to keep my work flow going, but I wrote all of the sentences in my thesis myself and made all linguistic and content-based decisions independently and with thoughtful consideration.

Declaration. I confirm that the above is a complete and honest account of my AI use, and that the arguments, analysis, and critical engagement in my dissertation are my own work.

Signature: Annika Mattila Date: 16.5.2026