

Chinese localized packaging design strategies for African agricultural products: The case of the “Sugar Loaf” pineapple from Benin

Okuola Zadig Gerard Ladekan, Siyuan Lai*

Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, College of Arts and Design

*Corresponding Author

Received: 26 Jul 2026,

Received in revised form: 22 Aug 2026,

Accepted: 27 Aug 2026,

Available online: 31 Aug 2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by AI Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Keywords— Benin pineapple, packaging design, Chinese localization (在地化设计), African agricultural products, Chinese market, interculturality

Abstract— Since 2023, Benin's "Sugarloaf" pineapple has benefited from official access to the Chinese market, confirmed by its remarkable presentation at the China International Import Fair (CIIE) in Shanghai in 2024. This white-fleshed fruit, with an atypical club-like shape and a very sweet taste, is the first Beninese product to be certified by a geographical indication recognized at the African level. While the logistical, phytosanitary and commercial circuits are being structured quickly, no packaging design strategy truly adapted to Chinese aesthetic and cultural codes has yet been developed for this product. This article offers an analysis of the current packaging of Beninese pineapple for export, a reading of the Chinese consumer's aesthetic expectations for premium imported fruits, and then formulates four axes of localized design strategy (color, narrative, visual symbolism and functionality) to strengthen the perceived value and competitiveness of the product on the Chinese market.

I. INTRODUCTION

Agricultural trade between Africa and China is expanding rapidly, driven by bilateral customs and phytosanitary facilitation agreements as well as China's desire to diversify its sources of supply of tropical products. In this context, the Beninese pineapple, known locally as "Sugarloaf", occupies a unique position: it is a distinctive variety, club-shaped, white-fleshed and low-acid, grown mainly in the Allada region of southern Benin. This fruit is the first Beninese product to have obtained a geographical indication certification issued by the African Intellectual Property Organization (Reece-hermine, 2021).

Access to the Chinese market, long hampered by the lack of a phytosanitary protocol, became a reality in 2023 with the signing of a bilateral agreement between China and Benin. The following year, the Beninese pineapple was presented at the CIIE in Shanghai, where it was welcomed as a "star product". The Beninese authorities now have an ambitious goal: to reach 300,000 tonnes of annual exports to China,

compared to a current total production of around 400,000 tonnes from all destinations (CNR, 2026; Economic Daily, 2026).

However, this market opening raises a crucial question, which is still little addressed in the design literature: while phytosanitary and logistical standards (fumigation, cold chain, calibration) have been rigorously adapted to Chinese requirements, the dimension of packaging design – an essential vector of perceived value, trust and loyalty among Chinese consumers – remains largely under-exploited. The current packaging of Beninese pineapple remains mainly functional and logistical (export cartons), without a strategy of sinicization (中国化) or localization (在地化) of its visual identity.

The question of this article is therefore the following: how to design a packaging design strategy that adapts the visual and narrative identity of the Beninese pineapple to the aesthetic and cultural expectations of the Chinese

consumer, while preserving the authenticity and uniqueness of the African product? To answer this question, we mobilize a qualitative methodology based on comparative case analysis: study of the current packaging of Beninese pineapple for export, comparison with the localization strategies already implemented by other premium imported fruits on the Chinese market (durian, blueberry, kiwi), then formulation of strategic recommendations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Localization of design (本土化设计) as an intercultural strategy

According to the principle of design localization, a product created for a market of origin needs to be reinterpreted rather than only translated in order to satisfy the functional, symbolic, and visual codes of a target market. This strategy entails redesigning colors, shapes, materials, and the brand narrative in accordance with the target consumer's cultural reference, going beyond the straightforward language modification of the label. strategy is especially important in the Chinese market since the visual codes linked to the prosperity, quality, and authenticity of origin are highly valued.

(Hofstede, 2001; Robertson, 1995; Wang Shouzhi, 2015).

2.2 Cross-Cultural Packaging Design (跨文化包装设计)

The study of how an object-packaging moves between systems of various cultural signs is known as cross-cultural packaging design. It is predicated on striking a careful balance between two potentially conflicting demands: maintaining the authenticity markers (origin, exoticism, terroir) that support the added value of the imported product and incorporating enough well-known codes to avoid confusing the local customer. The most successful tactics, according to case studies of imported food items entering China, combine a small amount of visual exoticism with customarily Chinese indicators of confidence (certification, seal, calligraphy, traceability QR code).

(Ambrose & Harris, 2017; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996).

2.3 Previous Cases of Successful Localization of Imported Fruit in China

A number of exotic fruits have had impressive packaging localization efforts in the Chinese market in recent years: Peruvian blueberries, Thai and Malaysian durian, and New Zealand Zespri kiwifruit are examples of products whose packaging frequently incorporates a discourse of origin (terroir, know-how), graphic elements evoking freshness and luxury (gold, red, minimalism), and a strong presence

of QR codes allowing traceability—a crucial criterion of trust for the Chinese consumer following the food scandals.

(De Mooij, 2022; Jean-Claude Usunier, 2013). Beninese pineapple, a recent product on this market, can draw inspiration from these trajectories while building its own distinctive positioning.

III. STATE OF PLAY: THE BENINESE PINEAPPLE SECTOR AND ITS CURRENT PACKAGING

3.1 A product with high potential but still not very visually enhanced

Grown on more than 6,000 hectares, pineapples are one of Benin's primary agricultural exports, with an annual yield of about 400,000 tons. The two most popular types are "Smooth cayenne," which is more in line with international standards, and "Pain de Sucre," a unique local variant with white flesh. In the past, outlets were mostly restricted to regional markets in West Africa and the European Union; Chinese access was only approved in 2023.

(Reece-hermine, 2021).



Smooth cayenne



Sugar bread

The industry has made significant investments in logistical upgrades in anticipation of this opening, including the implementation of stringent fumigation procedures against pests, careful fruit selection (intact crown, golden epidermis, absence of black spots), and adaptation to Chinese phytosanitary protocols, particularly with regard to seven regulated pests. This effort illustrates the industry's capacity to swiftly adjust to the demands of a new market; this expertise might potentially be applied to a comparable modification of packaging design.

3.2 Current packaging: an approach that is still essentially functional



With the stated goal of enhancing the fruit's export brand image, a sector support program has made it possible to subsidize more than 64,000 packages for twelve exporters, split between flat cartons for the Pain de Sucre variety and cube cartons for the smooth cayenne variety (Reece-hermine, 2021). Nonetheless, this kind of packaging is still primarily intended as a tool for logistical protection and

quality standardization, with a minimal graphic identity: references to the product's place of origin and perhaps an exporter's logo, but little to no brand narrative, digital traceability, or esthetic codes tailored to a particular target market.



This observation validates the gap in our problem: although the Beninese sector has overcome the logistical and regulatory obstacles to enter the Chinese market, it has not yet used design thinking to specifically target the esthetic and cultural expectations of the Chinese end consumer, whether for sale in supermarkets, delicatessen, or through cross-border e-commerce, a channel that is nevertheless expanding quickly for premium imported fruit in China.

IV. CHINESE CONSUMER AESTHETIC AND CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS FOR PREMIUM IMPORTED FRUITS

The analysis of the location strategies already observed on other fruits imported into China allows us to identify several recurring expectations, structured here in four dimensions (Insik Jeong. & Shufeng Xiao, 2008; Makiko Ozawa & Takashi Akiyama, 2026; Mengmeng et al., 2024).

Table 1: Aesthetic and cultural expectations of the Chinese consumer and potential applications to Beninese pineapple

Dimension	Waiting for the Chinese market	Possible application to Beninese pineapple
Color	A combination of golden, red or deep green hues, signalling prosperity, quality and freshness	Enhance the natural golden hue of the fruit's epidermis; incorporate a discreet red as a brand accent
Original story	Storytelling of the terroir, of know-how, sometimes of the China-Africa relationship	Highlighting the Allada region, the specific climate, the African GI certification
Trust / traceability	QR code, certification, official seal, quality control notices	QR code referring to the traceability of the plot and the Sino-Beninese phytosanitary protocol
Format & use	Suitable for gift (送礼文化), e-commerce, photogenic unboxing	Unique fruit gift box, individual format for delivery, neat "unwrapping" design

The quantity and form of fruits are highly valued in Chinese culture as fortunate symbols, so it is important to emphasize

a methodological caution (Insik Jeong & Shufeng Xiao, 2008). To avoid any negative connotation associated with

visual non-conformity, which is especially evident in Chinese gift culture, the Sugarloaf pineapple's unusual club-like shape must be presented as a positive distinguishing sign (rarity, varietal authenticity) rather than as a departure from standards.

V. PROPOSED LOCALIZED PACKAGING DESIGN STRATEGIES

5.1 Localized Color Strategy (色彩本土化)

It would be beneficial to incorporate a golden or burgundy red accent as a brand touch into the present export package palette, which is dominated by brown kraft and generic green, without sacrificing the natural hues associated with tropical authenticity. By avoiding an artistic compromise that would weaken the two identities, this double palette would enable the simultaneous signaling of African origin (soil, green, sunny yellow tints) and the quality codes valued in China (gold, red).

(Makiko Ozawa & Takashi Akiyama, 2026).



5.2 Localized narrative strategy (叙事本土化)

A layer of African authenticity (Allada terroir, agricultural know-how, seasonality) and a layer of China-Africa dialog, based on already-available factual elements, such as the fruit's presentation at the CIIE in Shanghai, the bilateral phytosanitary agreement's signing, or the technical cooperation that has enabled the sector's upgrading, should be combined in the product's storytelling. This kind of story, which has already been effectively used by other African agricultural sectors exporting to China, forges a relationship of trust and places the product in a partnership dynamic as opposed to just importation.

(McCracken, 1986; Xiong Shasha, 2018).

5.3 Visual Symbol Merge (视觉符号融合)

The packaging could use graphic patterns reminiscent of traditional West African weaving on a subtle border or

background without going overboard, along with a clean layout that adheres to Chinese premium minimalism codes (white spaces, fine typography, and clear visual hierarchy). This deliberate blending preserves an instantly recognizable indicator of authenticity while avoiding the danger of total cultural detachment.

(Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996).

5.4 Functional Localization and Usage Scenarios (功能与场景本土化)

Given the shape and rarity of the fruit, the packaging format should be differentiated based on the distribution channel: a reinforced export carton for mass distribution and wholesale markets; an individual box with protective cushioning for the gift segment; and, lastly, a format tailored to cross-border e-commerce, designed for the unboxing experience promoted on Chinese sales and social sharing platforms, with the integration of a traceability QR code referring to the plot of origin and the quality control stages.

(Million pack, 2025; Spruit & Almenar, 2021; Xia jun, 2020; Xinlu Yuan, 2025).

VI. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the four previous axes, we propose a synthetic specification for a Beninese pineapple brand targeting the Chinese market:

- Two-tone palette: natural dominant (kraft, green, golden yellow) + red or gold accent as a brand marker
- Bilingual brand name using the sound "Sugar Loaf" and a Chinese translation evocative of sweetness (甜面包 already used in the Chinese press, to be kept as a recognized name)
- Recurring graphic element inspired by West African textile patterns, in border or filigree
- Traceability QR code systematically integrated, referring to a dedicated page (origin, cooperative, quality control)
- Variation of gift box for the Chinese New Year and holiday periods, a highlight of the culture of the premium fruit gift
- Visible mention of the African Geographical Indication certification as a guarantee of authenticity and rarity

These suggestions are still carefully calibrated: the goal is not a complete westernization or sinicization of the product, but rather a focused hybridization that enhances the fruit's legibility and desirability without changing its identity of

origin—a crucial prerequisite for establishing a reliable and long-lasting African brand on the Chinese market. This strategy is based on prior experiences in other Chinese agri-food export industries, where it has been feasible to increase the perceived value of foreign-origin products by carefully including Chinese cultural characteristics into their packaging.

(Gao Ying, 2024).

VII. CONCLUSION

The "Sugarloaf" pineapple from Benin serves as a prime example of the difficulties and possibilities encountered by African agricultural goods that are recently brought to the Chinese market. Although the logistical, phytosanitary, and regulatory aspects have been meticulously modified, the packaging design aspect is still a work in progress with a lot of room for improvement. Chromatic, narrative, symbolic, and functional localization are the four suggested techniques that provide an operational framework that can be applied to various African agricultural products involved in an export dynamic to China. It is important to draw attention to the limitations of this study, which are based on a qualitative examination of instances and documentary sources rather than a direct poll of Chinese customers or A/B testing of packaging approaches. In keeping with the work already done on the potential and obstacles of Sino-African agricultural trade, future research could benefit from a quantitative survey measuring the actual impact of the suggested strategies on purchase intention as well as a comparative extension to other African agricultural sectors exporting to China (mango, cocoa, cashew nuts) in order to identify packaging localization principles that can be transferred to the continental level.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ambrose, G., & Harris, P. (2017). *Packaging the brand: The relationship between packaging design and brand identity*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- [2] CNR. (2026). *Discussing New Opportunities for China's Economy: Benin's "Sweet Bread" Pineapple Opens a New Track for Overseas Expansion*.
- [3] De Mooij, M. (2022). *Global marketing and advertising: Understanding cultural paradoxes*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- [4] Economic Daily. (2026). Benin Pineapple Expands into China. *China International Import Expo Bureau*.
- [5] Gao Ying. (2024). *Agricultural product transformation and value-added processing*.
- [6] Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations*. Sage Publications.
- [7] Insik Jeong., & Shufeng Xiao. (2008). *Consumer Attitude Toward Global Brands - The Perspective of Chinese Consumers*. *International Business Review*. <https://doi.org/10.21739/IBR.2008.03.12.1.1>
- [8] Jean-Claude Usunier. (2013). *Marketing Across Cultures 6th Edition*.
- [9] Kress, G. R., & Van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*.
- [10] Makiko Ozawa, & Takashi Akiyama. (2026). Product appearance design that realizes innovation of meaning: focusing on the impact of color changes on product meaning. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-03-2025-0422>
- [11] McCracken, G. (1986). Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(1), 71-84.
- [12] Mengmeng, X., Hongyan, J., Tian, L., & Jiayin, S. (2024). The impact of the descriptiveness of traditional cultural elements in food packaging on perceived healthiness. *Foreign Economics & Management*, 46(06), 112-133. <https://doi.org/10.16538/j.cnki.fem.20240118.301>.
- [13] Million pack. (2025). Mind Reading in Food Packaging Design: Using Psychology to Encourage Consumers to Make Purchases Proactively. *Western Wind and Eastern Charm*.
- [14] Reece-hermine. (2021). Benin: export of pineapple to the international market — the Benin label preserved. *Belgian Development Agency*.
- [15] Robertson, R. (1995). Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity. *Global Modernities*, 2(1), 25-44.
- [16] Spruit, D., & Almenar, E. (2021). First market study in e-commerce food packaging: Resources, performance, and trends. *Food Packaging and Shelf Life*, 29, 100698. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fpsl.2021.100698>
- [17] Wang Shouzhi. (2015). *History of Modern World Design (2nd Edition)*. China Youth Publishing House, Beijing.
- [18] Xia jun. (2020). *Research Report on the Development of Cross-border E-commerce for Agricultural Products Nationwide*. Information Center of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, China International E-Commerce Center Research Institute.
- [19] Xinlu Yuan. (2025). Cross-border E-commerce: The Process of China's E-Commerce from Entering the Other Market to Mature. *Advances in Economics Management and Political Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2754-1169/2024.26782>
- [20] Xiong Shasha. (2018). Cultural Mixing Phenomena in the Localization Adaptation of Multinational Brands: A Review and Outlook. *Foreign Economics and Management*. <https://doi.org/10.16538/j.cnki.fem.2018.07.009>