#### **Accessing Asian trade mark information:**

## China





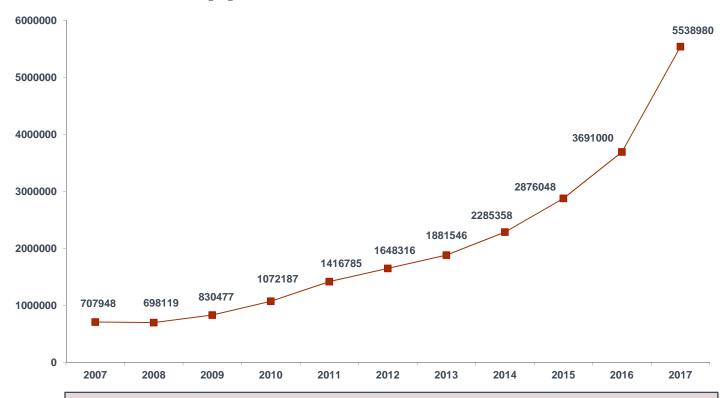


- > Introduction: Facts, figures & recent law amendments
- > The registration procedure
- > Special challenges with trade mark registration in China
- Searching Chinese trade marks



## Introduction: Facts, figures & recent law amendments

#### **Trade mark applications in China**



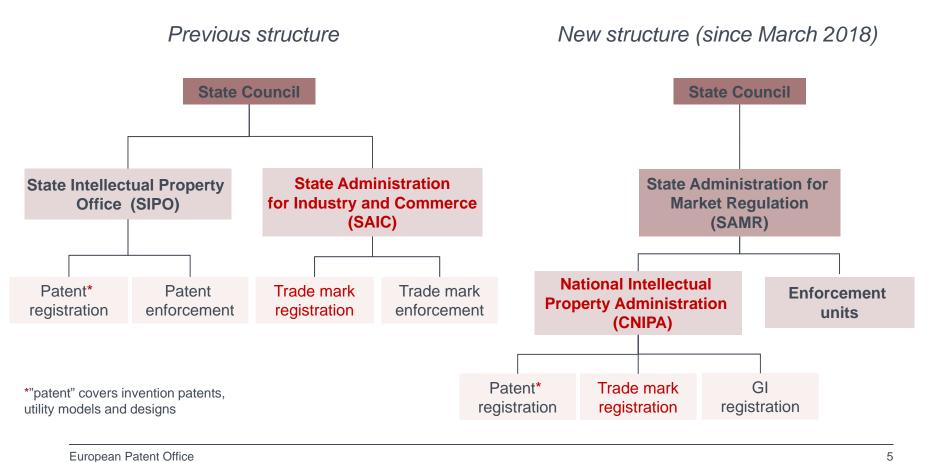
**2017**: Chinese trade mark applications cumulatively reached 27.842 million applications / 17.301 million registrations, ranking worldwide number 1 for consecutively 17 years!

European Patent Office Source: official statistics 3

#### Recent government restructuring – IP autorities

- previous registration authority: China Trademark Office (CTMO) under the State Administration for Industry & Commerce (SAIC)
- restructuring in March 2018: State Intellectual Property Office (SIPO) also in charge of trade marks and geographical indications
- August 2018: State Intellectual Property Office (SIPO) re-named to China
   National Intellectual Property Administration (CNIPA)
- new URLs: www.cnipa.gov.cn and english.cnipa.gov.cn
- supervised by newly-established State Administration for Market Regulation
  - key regulator in supervising market order (business registration, market regulation, product and food safety, quality inspection etc.)

#### Recent government restructuring



#### **Evolution of the Chinese trade mark law**

- research has shown that in 2700 BC, pottery in China was already marked with the manufacturer's identity
- complete brands existed since the Song Dynasty (960-1127); earliest surviving complete brand in the world white rabbit; used by needle manufacturer Master Liu, purpose: better recognition (widespread illiteracy)

another famous mark: "Tongrentang" TCM, dating back to the Qing Dynasty

(1644-1911); Tongrentang brand still exists until today



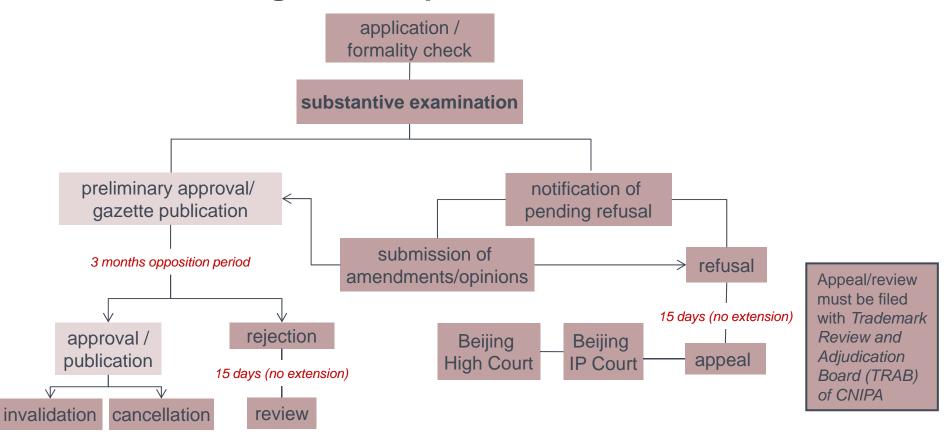
#### **Evolution of the Chinese trade mark law**

- 1950: Provisional Measures for Registration of Trade Marks
- 1963: Trade Mark Administration Rules
- 1982: first complete Chinese Trade Mark Act
  - first modern piece of legislation with respect to intellectual property in China
- major reforms 1993 and 2000/2001
- key issues of latest revision in 2014:
  - aimed at improving efficiency, protection and enforcement
  - general principle of good faith ("honesty and credibility") introduced into law
  - measures to counteract bad faith registrations/trade mark squatting
  - time lines for preliminary examination, opposition, cancellation etc. prescribed
  - possibility of filing multiple-class applications introduced

## The registration procedure: life of a Chinese trade mark file

#### **Background information**

- first-to-file principle
- valid for 10 years, indefinitely renewable for subsequent 10-year periods
- application for renewal must be made within 6 months before expiration



#### Registrable trade marks in China

- must not be identical or similar to marks registered by another party
- types of trade marks:
  - sound marks (since 2014)
  - collective marks
  - certification marks
- geographical indications may be registered as collective or certification marks
- scent and taste marks cannot be registered
- "well-known mark": known widely by public, enjoying high reputation in China
  - mark by any party from any country can be recognised
  - registered or unregistered (evaluated on case-by-case basis)
  - status acquired via TRAB cases, administrative infringement, civil litigation

- foreign applicants: legally registered trade mark agency necessary
- priority period: 6 months (copy of certificate required within 3 months from filing)
- if trade mark is in foreign language, Chinese translation must be provided
- no series marks allowed (application of trade marks which resemble each other)
- formal examination (completeness, fee payment)
- substantive examination
  - legality, distinctiveness and non-functionality
  - identity/similarity with other approved/registered marks
- preliminary approval and publication:
  - within 9 months from application date (time limit prescribed since 2014)
- total processing time from filing to registration: approx. 18 months

- opposition:
  - within 3 months from preliminary approved publication
  - by anyone based on absolute grounds (e.g. lack of distinctiveness)
  - by interested party on relative grounds (e.g. existence of prior registration)
  - > no (or unsuccessful) opposition: trade mark is registered and validity starts
- opposition review:
  - opposition may only be appealed by applicant
  - at Trademark Review and Adjudication Board (TRAB)
  - time limit: 15 days
  - opponent must request invalidation, if not satisfied with outcome of opposition

- invalidation:
  - by any party at any time based on absolute grounds
  - by pre-existing rights holders / interested parties based on relative grounds within 5 years from registration date (if well-known mark was registered in bad faith, genuine owner not restricted by 5-year limitation!)
  - to be filed with Trademark Review and Adjudication Board (TRAB)
  - in case of invalidation, right is considered non-existent from the beginning
  - > TRAB decision may be appealed at People's Court within 30 days

- cancellation:
  - request filed at CNIPA
  - by any entity or individual
  - if trade mark has not been used for uninterrupted period of three years (filed later than 3 years from registration)
  - if trademark has become generic (filed at any time)
  - partial cancellation possible
  - ➤ CNIPA's decision may be appealed at TRAB within 15 days

### TM registration in China: Special challenges Classes and sub-classes

- Nice classification: 45 product and services classes
- CNIPA: further division into sub-classes (unique system!)
  - products in same sub-class: identical/similar
  - products in different subclasses (despite of same bigger class): dissimilar
- Example: class 41 (education; providing of training; entertainment; sporting and cultural activities) divided into the following sub-classes:
  - Subclass 4101 education
  - Subclass 4102 organising educational, cultural, and recreational activities
  - Subclass 4103 library services
  - Subclass 4104 publishing services
  - Subclass 4105 sports and entertainment services
  - Subclass 4106 animal training
  - Subclass 4107 otherwise uncategorised services
- 7 identical trade marks held by different entities could coexist in class 41!

### TM registration in China: Special challenges Classes and sub-classes

- in the EU, a trade mark will cover all products in one Nice class
- in China, it will depend on the designated subclass(es)!
- international route:
  - CNIPA examiner selects sub-classes (errors; over- or underinclusiveness...)
- national route:
  - if not selected, CNIPA examiner will decide on sub-classes
  - registrations should be made in each relevant sub-class
  - applicant cannot select all sub-classes by default (will be refused)
  - companies often register in sub-classes which are marginally relevant, to avoid infringers from registering a similar mark in the sub-class

- translation of the mark in Chinese characters
  - registration in foreign language does not protect against use or registration of same or similar trade mark written in Chinese!
  - public will find "nicknames" for foreign language trademarks
  - trade mark more likely to be adopted by locals (easily pronounced and more memorable)

- various options:
  - literal translation, ex.: 苹果 pingguo Apple, disadvantage: sounds
     different from original trade mark
  - elegant paraphrasing, ex.: "La Mer" not simply rendered as "ocean"大海
     but "secret of the blue sea" 海蓝之谜 suitable for high-class cosmetics
  - phonetic translation, ex.: 麦当劳 mai dang lao McDonalds,
     disadvantage: sound may have undesired meaning, e.g. in dialects

■ ideal: combination of literal and phonetic, ex. – Coca Cola 可□可乐 (pronunciation: *kekou kele*, meaning: tasty & happy)

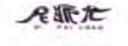


■ example of failure: German beer brand "Warsteiner", translated phonetically as 沃斯乐 wò sī lè; no specific/negative meaning, but pronunciation similar to 我死了 wǒ sǐ lè - "I am dead"

- in China, word marks and figurative marks are examined separately (for combined marks, both elements treated separately)
- trade mark squatters register sequences of Chinese characters as word marks, using a shape which gives the visual impression of another (figurative) mark
- proposed measure currently under discussion: treating such stylised word marks as "composite marks" and examine both elements together



















# Searching Chinese trade mark information

#### Trade mark numbering system

- application number 申请号 and registration number 注册号 are identical
- running serial number
- 6 digits (1980s) to 8 digits (since 2012)
- examples: 135112, 6307001, 28817014
- no kind codes, type of right indicators, years, ...
- other numbers included in the trade mark database:
  - case numbers of CNIPA/TRAB decisions: example: 2017000002897

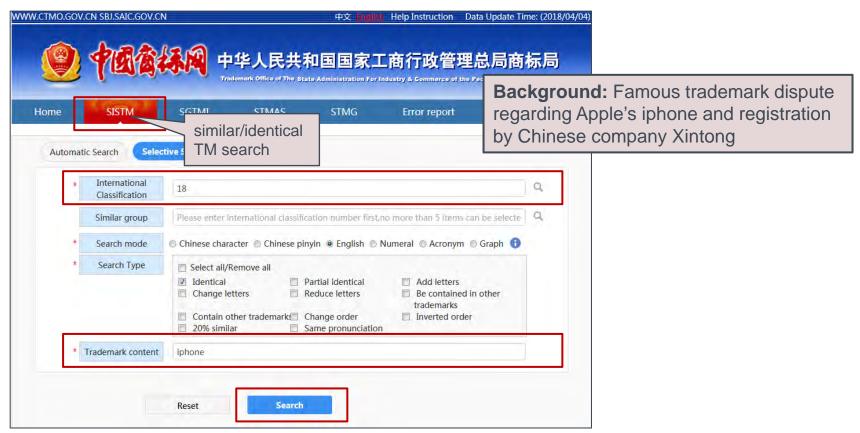
#### Official source: CNIPA trade mark search portal



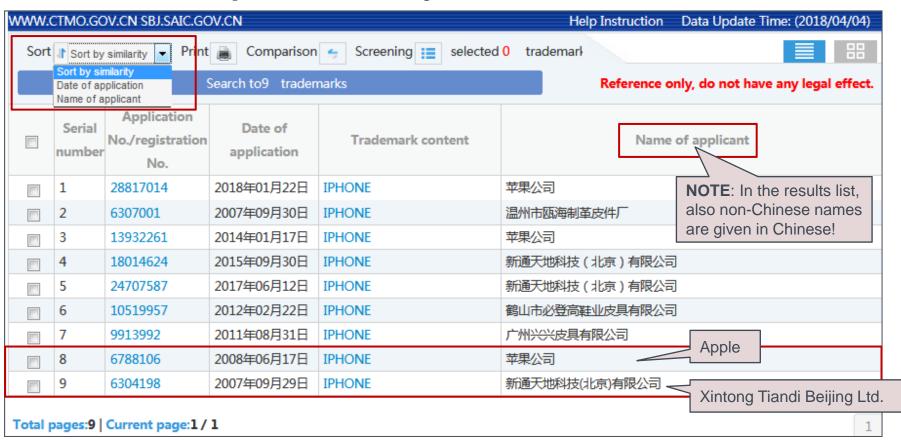
#### Official source: trade mark search portal



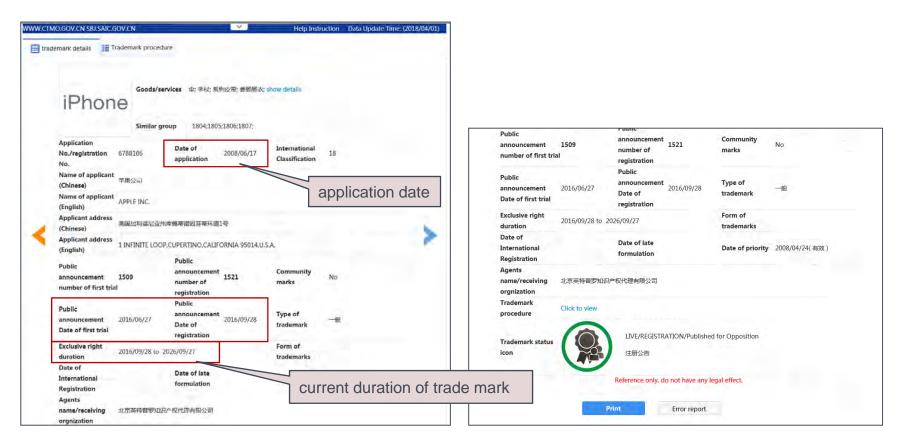
#### Search example: Similarity search, iPhone case



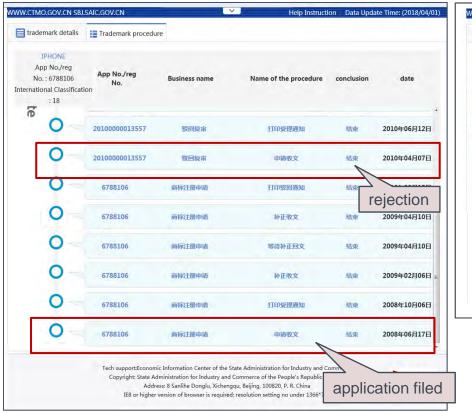
#### Search example: Similarity search, iPhone case



#### Details of database entry – Apple's iPhone



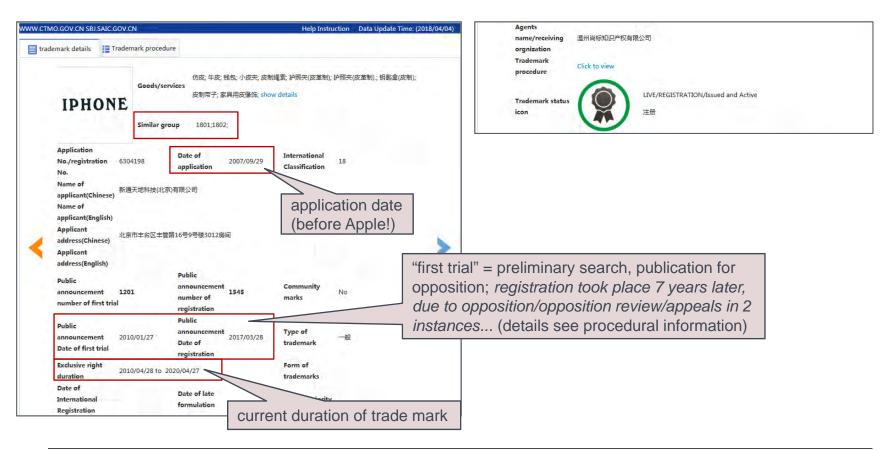
#### Detailed procedural information – Apple's iPhone





**Note**: details in Chinese only, but can be copy/ pasted into a machine translation tool

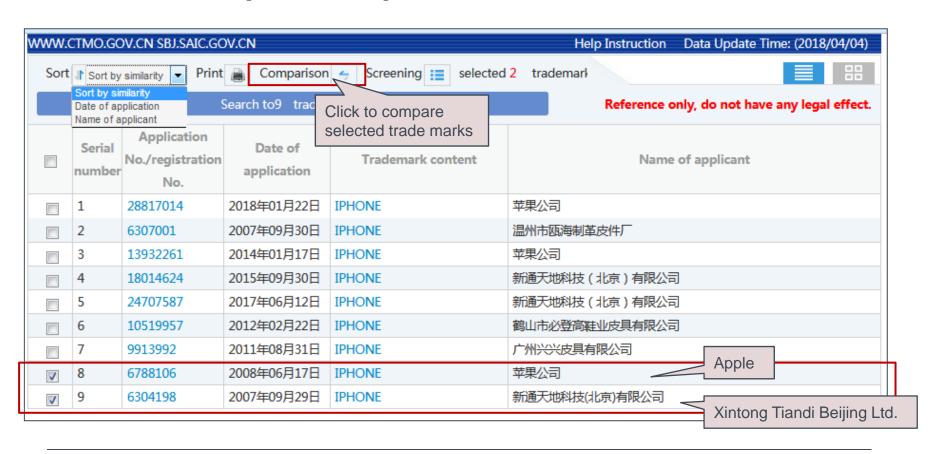
#### Details of database entry – Xintong's IPHONE



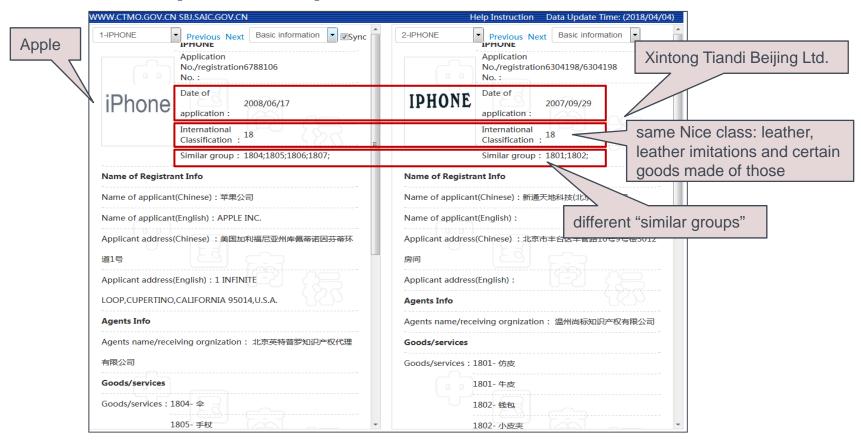
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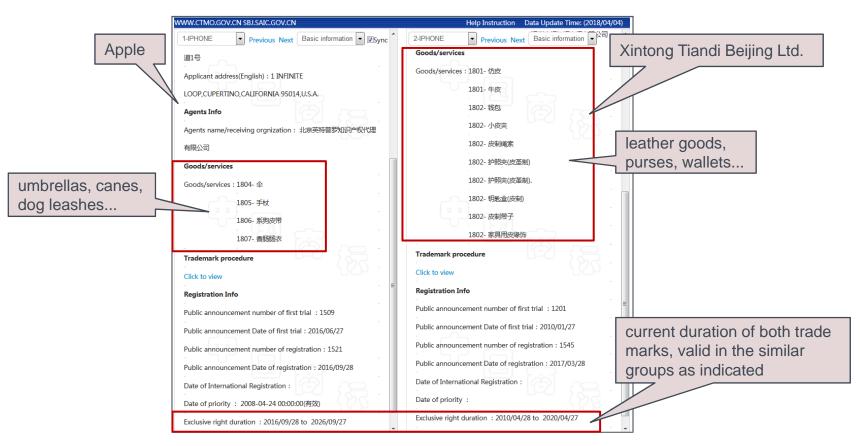
#### Search example: Comparison feature, iPhone case



#### Search example: Comparison feature, iPhone case



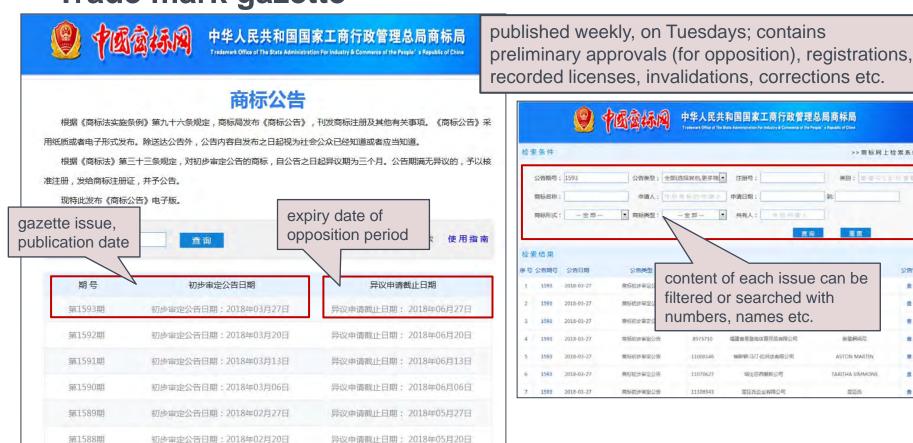
#### Search example: Similarity search, iPhone case



#### Official sources: Trade mark gazette



#### **Trade mark gazette**



新星網項尼

TABITHA SIMMONS

类别:

#### **Trade mark gazette**



#### TRAB decision database: iPhone invalidation case



#### TRAB decision database: iPhone invalidation case



#### **Input? Questions? Feedback?**

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