Conceptions of the Spring Festival and Christmas of Shanghai's Young and Middle-aged People: A Qualitative Study of Similarities and Differences

Sha Yang, Shanghai International Studies University

The recent years have witnessed the decreasing traditional flavor in the way Chinese people celebrated the traditional Chinese festivals, including the Spring Festival - the most influential traditional festival in China. In contrast, Christmas seemed to be more welcome than the Spring Festival. The change in the positions of the two festivals reflected the change in the young generations' conceptions. To seek the similarities and differences in the conceptions of two festivals between the 20-year-old generation and middle-aged generation in Shanghai as well as the reasons, two groups of Shanghai natives were personally interviewed about their conceptions of the Spring Festival and Christmas. The paper found that the two generations were similar in their conceptions of home, alienation from their relatives, eating, and the Spring Festival's position. Family ties, identity, and recognition of tradition and modernity accounted for their similarities. They had different conceptions in family reunion, personal relationships, and over-all feelings on the festival, effect of familial economic condition, and Christmas. The reasons for differences were social development, generation gap, and social responsibility.

The decline of the Spring Festival and rise of Christmas in the Chinese mainland became increasingly manifest in recent years. This phenomenon formed part of the public's concern over the Chinese culture and social development. It was even seen as a Chinese cultural crisis. Articles from electronic versions of print newspapers and magazines described this phenomenon. "The New Year Flavor Has Reduced and Some Customs Have Been Forgotten" reported some people's attitudes toward the Spring Festival and a few remaining customs among them (Shi, Feng, Zhuang, & Rao, 2006). "As the Spring Festival Begins to Go Overseas, Do We Need to Resist Foreign Festivals" encouraged cultural exchanges between China and other countries rather than the building of cultural defenses ("As the Spring Festival," 2007). "Analysis of 'Western Festivals Fever' among Chinese Middle School Students" investigated the students' attitude towards foreign festivals, especially Christmas ("Analysis of," n.d.). Some papers found on databases went deeper into this topic. "Embarrassment and Way Out for Traditional Chinese Festivals" discussed what a good transition of the Spring Festival from tradition to modernity could be (Zhang, 2006). "Preservation of Traditional Chinese Festivals" called for the preservation of traditional festivals as non-material cultural heritage which was equally important with material cultural heritage (Wang, 2006). "Survey into the Status of Cognition of Our traditional Festivals among the Present Middle School Students" indicated the middle school students' alienation from traditional Chinese festivals and emphasis on foreign festivals (Chen, 2004). "Analysis of the Survey into the Influences of Western Festivals on Chinese Undergraduates ─ Example of Tsinghua University Undergraduates" stated the young people's knowledge of and attitudes toward Western festivals and traditional Chinese festivals (Li, 2005). However, little

was known about the conceptions of the middle-aged generation as well as the similarities and differences in the Chinese young and middle-aged generations' conceptions.

When I thought of writing about festival and noticed this gap, the idea of comparing two generations' conceptions of a Chinese festival and a western festival, combing their controversial situations in the city where I am staying naturally came to my mind. I could hear the other people's conceptions of these two festivals. Empirical studies were necessary and would make this paper more lively and nearer to reality. The first section of this introduction reviews the influences of modernization worldwide. The next section discusses Chinese people's behavioral reaction in China's modernization process. The third section very briefly compares the Spring Festival and Christmas from their origin, time and celebrations.

<div align="center">Shift in Values under Modernization Worldwide</div>

"Modernization" is a widely used word in the present society, usually indicating progress in humans' lifestyle, science and technology, and regional development. Ronald Inglehart (1997) defined modernization as follows:

> Modernization is, above all, a process that increases the economic and political capabilities of a society: it increases economic capabilities through industrialization and political capabilities through bureaucratization. Modernization is widely attractive because it enables a society to move from being poor, to being rich. Accordingly, the core process of modernization is industrialization; economic growth becomes the dominant societal goal, and achievement motivation becomes the dominant individual-level goal. (p. 5)

Modernization integrates with industrialization, urbanization, westernization, Americanization and globalization. It includes not only material or objective changes, but also subjective or perceptional changes. Modernization of the objective world has influence on the subjective world, like regional culture, traditions, and people's values. Ji (2006) stated that there has been a pervasive and accelerating influence across the world in the last few centuries when western culture, namely capitalist culture, has monopolized the world. The capitalist world market has absorbed almost all of the countries into it and has exerted its influence on those countries in politics, economy, science, technology, philosophy, art, and literature (p. 93). The extent to which a place is influenced by modernization and westernization is in proportion to how much a place is exposed to the outside world. Obviously, certain cultural changes are aroused by modernization and westernization.

Modernization has developed in the West for about 300 years, and some advanced industrial countries have entered post modernization phase. The core of a postmodern society is to enhance human happiness and improve their lives rather than to accelerate economic growth (Inglehart, 1997, p. 6). Since 1970s, there has been a fundamental change in the path developed countries follow, leading from modernization phase to postmodernization phase. World Values Survey is a professional website about the influences of moderation worldwide (http://www.worldvaluessurvey.com/). Inglehart initiated World Values Survey (WVS) in 1981 based on the European Values Survey (EVS). It was a series of intercultural studies on

the basis of detailed questionnaires on work, health, the economy, the family, the environment, politics, morals and religion on representative population samples from some 60 countries. The world cultural map reflected the fact that a large number of basic values were closely correlated and they could be depicted in just two major dimensions of cross-cultural variation. One dimension of cross-cultural variation was linked with the transition from industrial society to post-industrial societies, which brought a polarization between survival and self-expression values. The unprecedented wealth that had accumulated in advanced societies during the past generations meant that newly grown up population has taken survival for granted, Thus, priorities have shifted from an emphasis on economic and physical security toward an increasing emphasis on subjective well-being, self-expression and quality of life. That website also told that Inglehart and Baker found shifted orientation from Traditional toward Secular-rational values in almost all industrial societies.

Chinese People's Behavioral Reaction under Modernization

China's modernization is a process of transformation from a traditional agricultural society to a modern industrial society. According to *China Modernization Report 2006* (2005) conducted by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, in 2003, China entered the developing period of the first social modernization, just as the interim period of urbanization, and China's social modernization level was lower than the world average level and the average level of medium-income countries. China's Hong Kong, and Macao and also Taiwan completed the first social modernization; the first social modernization index of Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai exceeded 90%, and largely realized the first social modernization; and Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Beijing and Shanghai had already entered the second social modernization ("China Modernization," 2005). From the end of the Qing Dynasty to the present primary stage of socialism, China's level of westernization has been increasing as many great changes have taken place. Nowadays, apart from part of our conceptions and emotions, everything of our daily life has been westernized (Ji, 2006, p. 93). Due to Shanghai's history, it became one of the most modernized and the most westernized cities in China. The natives of Shanghai contact greatly with western culture, so they are more tolerant of western cultures and even reject traditional cultures. According to some scholars, it cannot be simply understood as blind worship of westerners, but the social significance behind these customs is important. Their behavior actually displays their agreement on conceptions of modern life and active pursuit of modern lifestyle since modernization is based on western cultures. The contemporary western customs can better suit the modern society than the Chinese traditional customs. This is why the Shanghai natives can accept them in transitional period (Cai, 2001, p. 35).

In the modernization process, contradictions cannot be avoided between modernity and traditionalism. China has a long history and its own cultural tradition. Does it change easily during its modernization process? Hwang (2003) said: "As Yang (1993, p. 11) indicated, some components of traditional culture may change under the impact of Western culture, but some core values of a given culture may be robust and resistant to change." For example, family is a very important component of the Chinese values. Several Chinese traditional festivals like the Spring Festival, the Lantern Festival, and the Mid-autumn Festival share a common theme: family reunion. Going back home and staying with family during the legal

holiday has been the most typical tradition of the Spring Festival. Filial piety is another stable value in the Chinese society. Yang (2004, p. 98-99) stressed that, even in Taiwan which is experiencing rapid changes, filial piety is the most important life value or moral development. Nevertheless, as modernization is associated with improvement of life quality for most people, some values have changed to some extent. For most middle-aged and old people, the happy memories of the festivals when they were children were related to the scarcity of food and other goods. With material things already so abundant in every day life, people seek more leisure and interpersonal communication on holidays instead of abundant and delicious food. Traveling with family or friends during the Spring Festival holiday is a newer trend.

As for how the general Chinese adapt themselves to the trend of modernization in their daily life, Hwang (2003) explained the theory of compartmentalization:

> For Western countries, most microworlds of scientific knowledge, as well as the philosophy of science for constructing the microworlds, have evolved from the interior of the civilization through a process of rationalization in every aspect of the cultural tradition. But, for non-Western countries, most scientific knowledge is transplanted from the exterior of the civilization. As a consequence, the coexistence of modernity and traditionalism has become apparent in many non-Western countries. …Knowledge from different origins with different natures becomes mixed in their cognitive systems, and helps them to deal with problems in different situations of their lifeworlds….This phenomenon can be termed "compartmentalization" as suggested in Yang's (1988, p. 5) later works.

In his book, Yang (2004, p. 345-349) analyzed 3 categories of compartmentalization: concept and behavior, behavior and function, and utensils and function.

Modernization greatly accelerates people's tempo of life and imposes much pressure on them. People usually adjust and relax themselves through the use of pop culture. Christmas's popularity is an example. Kottak (2005, p. 274) stated that people liked to draw on popular culture to express resistance. Through their use of popular culture, they could symbolically resist the unequal power relations they face each day—in the family, at work, and in the classroom. Forms and readings of popular culture could express discontent and resistance by people who felt oppressed. The socialization process of those who were born in the 1980s was concurrent with China's increasing openness to the outside world and its rapid economic growth. The Internet and explosive information had extensive influence on post-80s individuals' values and lifestyles. The values of the post-80s generation are directed by self-expression, gradually changing from being ambitious and hard-working to subjective well-being and happiness (Hua, 2007, p. 150-152). This result was coherent with Inglehart's WVS, which showed the shift of values of post-80s when China sped up its modernization.

A Brief Comparison between the Spring Festival and Christmas

The Spring Festival, the most significant traditional Chinese festival with a very long history, was originally January 1 in the lunar calendar. Since post-1949, China has adopted the Gregorian calendar, and the lunar Spring Festival is around the beginning of spring. Traditionally, the Spring Festival lasts fifteen days, but the most important days are Spring

Festival Eve and the first three days. The Chinese government now stipulates people have seven days off for the Chinese Lunar New Year. It has no religious background since it originated from either the customs of offering sacrifices to gods who helped with agricultural harvest or the celebration of human beings' victory over a fierce wild beast named "Nian" (year). Christmas is a Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. It is observed on December 25 and usually ends on January 1, so it comes before the Spring Festival in a year.

Traditionally, the Spring Festival couplets, New Year pictures, the Chinese character "Fu" (Gook Luck), firecrackers and fireworks, dinner on New Year's Eve, staying-up, visiting, lion and dragon dances, stilts-walking shows, and symbolic food form the customs of the Spring Festival. Red is the symbolic color of this festival and is believed to bring bliss. From one or two days before the festival, relatives begin to have family reunion feasts, and before a meal they fire firecrackers. The family reunion feast is very important, meaning harvest, reunion, and removal of diseases. After the feast, one family or all of the relatives watch TV, have talks, play chess, poker or mahjong, drink wines, and have refreshments. On the beginning of the New Year, adults and children wear new clothes, stay at home treating guests, or visit their relatives or friends. Relatives, friends and neighbors wish each other Happy New Year when they meet. However, at present, "New Year's visiting" is not so popular as before, and greeting by sending mobile messages became very popular a couple of years ago due to its convenience, rapidness and cheapness. Children usually receive red packets from their parents, grandparents, and relatives, who wish them safe, healthy and fortunate. Tang yuan, jiaozi, won ton, noodles, nian gao, and eight treasures rice pudding are foods that symbolize reunion, prosperity, completeness, and health. Assorted candies, red dates, peanut candy, cumquat and red melon seed are popular refreshments during the festival.

For Christmas, bright fires, yule-logs, the holiday feasts, visiting friends, decorating Christmas trees, sending Christmas cards and exchanging gifts, parades with floats and cartoon characters, carolers, and the church processions form Christmas celebrations. Christmas feasting is an important part of the Christmas celebration throughout the world. Today, roast turkey is the most popular main course in the West. Fish is the feature of Christmas Eve dinner in a number of countries. Vegetables, relishes, hot breads, and a variety of other dishes accompany the main course of the Christmas everywhere. Favorite desserts include mince pie or pumpkin pie, plum pudding, and fruitcake. Eggnog is a popular Christmas beverage in many homes. Most families have feasts at home because restaurants are generally closed for several days. Until today, Christmas feasts were much richer than daily meals. People may hold secular parties at homes with different themes (Michael H. Prosser, personal communication, March, 2007). Many people attend church services on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning. The traditional colors of Christmas are green and red. The customs of sending Christmas cards and giving gifts to relatives and friends are part of their year-end celebrations. In recent years, Christmas has become commercialized and secular, but it is still a time for celebrating Jesus' birthday, reunion with family and friends, and having sumptuous food and great fun.

Method

Participants

My interview subjects include two groups of Shanghai natives—10 aged from 17 to 25 and 10 aged from 42 to 60. The number of males and females in each group was nearly the same considering gender differences. Among the young informants, nine were graduates from five universities, and one was senior high student. One majored in management, one majored in English, one majored in psychology, three majored in civil engineering and three majored in marketing. Most of the young people were my friend's friends; three were my classmate's students, and one was my classmate. I randomly found the middle-aged people in a park near my school. Some of them were reading newspapers or books on a bench, which indicated that they were at least literate and might be well-educated as well as having time for an interview. Some of them still worked while some were retired. I didn't know any information about them until I began to talk with them, and I chose those whose background matched the requirement of diversity and criteria of my research.

Procedure

I chose qualitative method according to the nature of the research problem. This topic tended to find out what people were doing and thinking. "[Q]ualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). This methodology is very likely to make the author's work have direct relations with nonacademic and academic audiences (Strauss & Corbin, p. 6). As regards the research methods, one-to-one, open-ended interviews were preferred to collect data. Considering little research had been done on this topic, open-ended interviews were more helpful to fuller development of information. Since my focus was changes of values from the perspective of festivals, I designed my own open-ended questions according to my research questions. I did five pilot interviews in all, and had something to modify after each pilot interview. I adjusted the order of the questions and narrowed the number of questions from 22 to 18. Every time before my interview started, to make my informants feel it wouldn't take too long, I told them that it took about 20 minutes. Some interviews finished around 20 minutes, and some lasted 30-40 minutes due to the informants' offer of detailed information. After I interviewed a couple of young and middle-aged informants, I found that what the informants in each group said didn't have much difference! My supervisors said that it was good because the consistency in their answers showed the research could be done and it helped generalize their answers to a large population. Therefore, it is justifiable to assume that the values reflected from the two festivals found in this study are convincing.

Detailed analysis of data began with a coding process, which was rather labor-intensive. First, I created two files: one was for young people and the other was for middle-aged people. In each file, I transcribed the recordings and listed everyone's statement to each question together. Secondly, issues relating to my research questions were highlighted, and I analyzed the similarities, differences and other useful information from the transcription. Thirdly,

summaries concerning every issue were made. Fourthly, these summaries were further incorporated into a whole story and inclusive theories came into being, and the research questions were answered.

Apparatus

All of my interviews were conducted face-to-face, and I was allowed to record the interviews with my MP3. The interviews with the young people were conducted either in quiet corners on campus or a quiet dorm. The interviews with the middle-age people were conducted in the park close to my campus where I found them. No money was paid, nor was a small gift given to the informants, but their participation in and contribution to the study was deeply appreciated.

Results

Similarities

Home. Having family reunion feasts at home has been a tradition in Shanghai; almost all of the informants had family reunion feasts at home though many restaurants were open. The two groups of people all accepted that, and only one or two young people said that it would be convenient to have feasts in a restaurant. Some big families dismissed after the reunion feast, while some had follow-up reunion activities at home. Most people liked to stay at their own homes or their relatives' homes rather than in public places.

Sense of Alienation. The two groups of people both felt cooling relationships with their relatives. When they were all children, more relatives joined the family reunion. As they grew older, some relatives failed to join the family reunion due to residential place, work, marriage or relationship. The young people felt that they could not play with their cousins as they did before, since their cousins also have grown up and had their own activities. For the middle-aged people, their children were busy with their studies or work, and their relatives had to work and take care of their own families, so they seldom got together during other times of the year.

Taking Eating for Granted. Cost of food was no longer prominent during the festival. Eating during the Spring Festival was no longer a big thing. It didn't have to be a feast, but what they wanted to eat. Meeting people and chatting during meals were top priorities. The dishes for family reunion meals at home were generally simple, even though there were a little more than usual in variety, and a family usually cooked how much they could eat rather in large amount. Those who had get-together feasts in restaurants during the festival were attracted by its convenience. Most people ate food on a regular basis that surpassed the Spring Festival feasts.

The Spring Festival's Position. All the informants thought the Spring Festival the most important festival in China. In their views, it was ok whether celebrating Christmas or not. Popularity of Christmas reflects China's opening to the outside world and open-mindedness, as well as the need for relaxation of the present Shanghai people. It was about seeking fun rather than appreciating the nature of Christmas that prompted the young people to "celebrate" it.

Differences

Attitude toward Family Reunion. Reunion with family and relatives during the Spring Festival meant more to the middle-aged people than to the young people. For the young people, the significance of the Spring Festival lay in having holiday. The middle-aged people, especially those who retired, realized the importance to reunion with their children and relatives. For the two groups of people, how much family reunion was emphasized was closely related to how traditional a family was and the relationship within it. The more traditional and intimate a family was, the more family reunion was valued, and the more traditional the forms of their family reunion.

Involvement of Personal Relationships. For the young people, reunion with their former classmates or friends was really a happy thing. They valued the opportunity to get together and know something new about each other. Some young people preferred to stay with their classmates and friends than to stay with parents and relatives, and their parents and the middle-aged informants were very positive about their children's socializing with their peers. Moreover, the young people were exposed much more to the Internet, which was another way of contacting with their peers. The middle-aged people generally had some reunions with their colleagues or friends, but they were not as active as the young people in the building and strengthening of personal relationships. Some middle-aged people took this opportunity to visit some leaders from whom they may seek help, sending them expensive gifts or a large sum of money in a red packet.

Over-all Feelings on the Spring Festival. Some young people preferred the Spring Festival in the past years, which was more lively and excited. Some said that they had no special feelings on it, and it only meant to them that they were one year older. A few young people from traditional and harmonious families still liked it. The middle-aged people's answers fell into two categories. One was that they have taken it for granted since they had experienced so many "Nian." One woman said that she began to take it for granted after she became a mother. The other was that they preferred the present way of spending the festival. Some people mentioned that the life was poor when they were children, and they just had delicious food, new clothes and red packets at the Spring Festival. Now the life has greatly improved after China's reform and opening.

Effect of Familial Economic Condition. Some middle-aged mentioned the familiar economic condition affected the way a family celebrated the Spring Festival, while the young generation hardly mentioned it. In the minds of the older generation, the familiar economic condition decided how often family reunion was, whether eating in a restaurant, whether traveling, whether the young people "celebrated" Christmas and how much money was given as red packet. For the young interviewees, who were low-level consumers, money didn't play an important role in Christmas celebrations. "[T]he emphasis is on how even minimal consumption allows one to participate in the 'democracy of consumption'" (Sigley, 2007, p. 101). They could just feel the Christmas atmosphere while spending no money.

Celebrating Christmas or Not. Although Christmas was already a household name in urban China, the informants didn't know much about the origin of Christmas and how it was celebrated in the West except for one who was an English major. The young knew more about it than the middle-aged informants, who knew little about it. Even if some young people celebrated Christmas, they didn't pursue its background. The middle-aged generation

knew of Christmas, but they didn't celebrate it at all. A young person didn't celebrate it when staying alone or staying with his or her parents at home, but when a young person was invited by his or her peers, they had some activities such as going out to have a feast, going shopping and singing Karaoke. Few families celebrated Christmas together. Those who had boyfriends or girlfriends in Shanghai possibly celebrated it as another Valentine's Day.

Discussion

Reasons for Similarities

Family Ties. Family members usually have more mutual trust than friends. As people's socialization goes on, they value family ties more than friendship and romance. Genetic reasons make the children inherit some characteristics from their parents. They look similar and sometimes think alike. Secondly, they may also assimilate each other in personality and values through living together for so many years. Sometimes the distinctions in their conceptions can be covered by their intimate relationship (Sun, 1997, p.132). As the young generation's socialization, they come to better understand and care for the older generation as well as learn from their wisdom. The middle-aged generation tries to accept new ideas from the young generation, understand them and keep pace with the time. No matter how much parents and their children have in common, love, care, and understanding bind them together.

Identity. "One of the most important responsibilities of any culture is to assist its members in forming their identities. Through countless interactions you discover who you are" (Samovar & Porter, 2004, p. 84). They explained:

[T]he identities that mean the most to people are gained through deep structure institutions. That is, at some point in your life you move from identities based on "I" to identities linked to "we". You begin to see yourself as part of a larger unit. (p. 84)

Based on their studies, the identity that people of a nation value most is their nationality. The national culture helps create and shape one's identities as well as determines how one defines the world and interacts in that world. Despite of conflicts and complaints inside a country, citizens of a country tend to reunite and fight against criticism, humiliation, and invasion from the outside world. This is sense of national identity. The family, school, workplace, community and mass media can all play a role in maintaining ethnic and national identities among citizens. The young and middle-aged informants still valued the Spring Festival more than Christmas, which displayed their sense of national identity. They refused to celebrate it as it was celebrated abroad consciously or unconsciously.

Recognition of Tradition and Modernity. Young people recognize tradition, but they like to view modern problems with modern concept. The senior people also recognize tradition, and they support change in traditional things, but they are deeply rooted in traditional culture. The middle-aged people try to be a mediator between them with an attitude of compromise, taking in both traditional culture and modern cultures (Sun, 1997, p. 158). Firstly, in a country's modernization process, all traditional ideas, concepts, and behaviors don't change or disappear at the same speed, nor do all modern ideas, concepts, and behaviors appear or increase at the same speed. There is no middle point, before which is traditional psychology

and behavior, and after which is modern psychology and behavior. Secondly, it has been shown by some research that not all traditional cultural characteristics or values will be replaced by modern cultural characteristics or values. That is, part of tradition will co-exist with part of modernity, and they do not contradict each other (Yang, 2004, p. 368). Since all of the informants experienced the transitional period when China was transferring from tradition to modernity, the two generations recognized both traditional and modern cultural characteristics.

Reasons for Differences

Social Development. Cognitive differences between different age groups of people firstly mean social development, and then mean diversity (Sun, 1997, p. 4). In a country's development, individual is a basic factor. A country cannot be modernized unless its citizens are modernized, according to Alex Inkeles (as cited in Sun, 1997, p. 20). Individuals' modernity adds to a country's modernity, and a country's modernity influences individual's modernity. Fang and Wang (2006) stated that in the modernization process, new conceptions of life emerge, directly or indirectly influencing and shaping people's lifestyle (p. 49). Festivals are part of social culture, and thus they are inevitably influenced by the social change. Generally, change of festivals mainly happens in number and content. In terms of number, some festivals disappear and some new festivals come into life. In terms of content, customs in some festivals have been simplified and their cultural meanings are also simplified; some festivals have new customs and their cultural meanings are enriched; some festivals have been given completely new cultural meanings (Fan & Zhang, 1988, p. 54-55). According to Zhao (2002, p. 26-27), the human society constantly moves forward and changes, and its corresponding culture of festivals must have changes in time of need. Besides, the ways of entertainment in festivals keep pace with the times.

The middle-aged people grew up in a conservative and close social environment, while the young people grew up in a respectively modern and open environment, so the young people are more modern and open to receive new information from home and abroad. They are practitioners of fashion, pop culture, advanced technology, and new products. The middle-aged people are not so sensitive to these things. Even if they know, they consider them "properties" of young people. Since the post-80s grew up in a comparatively well-being environment, they didn't have memories of a lack of food and clothes, and now they haven't realized the importance of money in celebrating festivals since they were still supported by their parents.

Generation Gap. Generation gap is quite natural in the development of society. The term generation gap refers to differences in consciousness, conceptions, values, behavior, attitude toward life, interests and hobbies or the lack of understanding between young people and older folks. For the developing countries that are moving forward to modernization, due to great social change, the intergeneration distinction is prominent (Sun, 2007, p. 4). Some of the middle-aged informants and their parents thought and behaved alike, but there were some distinctions between the middle-aged informants and their children. As discussed previously, the values of post-80s generation are directed by self-expression, subjective well-being and happiness. They are more individualistic than their parents and grandparents, who are more obedient and collective-oriented. Sun (2007, p. 125) found out that interaction with relatives

is more valued when one gets older. That's why the middle-aged generation valued family reunion more than the young generation.

Age and Social Responsibility. Sun introduced the Age-Stratification Theory proposed by American sociologist M.W. Riley in 1971. Age directly or indirectly influenced the role one plays in the society. The standard of values of a society can be seen from the social standard of distributing roles based on age. When people played their roles, they inevitably considered their age. Even if some roles were not limited by age, age still affected people's conception of what they could do, and this effect lead to small distinctions in people's fulfillment of their responsibilities (as cited in Sun, 1997, p. 34-35).

The middle-aged generation acted as the backbone of a family, connecting the young and the elderly of the family. Therefore, the middle-aged people had more familial and social responsibilities. They had to plan how to spend the festival and care about the feelings of their children, their parents and relatives. During the festival, the middle-aged people's friends or colleagues all had their own family reunions and activities, so they had little time or chance to get together, while the young people had more freedom to get together with their peers. The middle-aged generation spent money mainly on necessary food and red packets, and the young generation spent money on their own entertainment and interests. Besides, their different ages led to their slightly different feelings of the same festival.

The result will probably be different if the post-90s informants are involved. Further research in this area could also explore how the two events were celebrated in Taiwan and Hongkong, as well as among Chinese in other countries.

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