

Impact of Cultural Values on Consumption Behavior: A Survey of Contemporary Chinese University Students

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Contemporary Chinese university students, raised in an environment that is different from the previous generations, might hold different cultural values from those in previous generations. In the acquisition and development of their cultural values, acculturation may have taken effect. The main purpose of the survey is to investigate contemporary Chinese students' cultural values and consumption styles. Data have been collected mainly through questionnaires, involving 380 Chinese participants altogether. The findings show that similar to the previous generations, contemporary Chinese university students adhere to the core collectivistic values. Some examples include subordinating personal needs to collective welfare and the fundamental long-term values like perseverance, patience and thrift. Contrasted with the previous generations, they show a strong tendency towards individualism and slight divergence from the long-term orientation. For example, they are more self-centered, stress personal expressiveness and personal achievement, and put a premium on personal enjoyment. It can be concluded that in terms of their cultural values and consumption behaviors, contemporary Chinese university students are fundamentally stable and enduring with regard to the traditional Chinese culture. Meanwhile, they are taking on different cultural traits and consumption habits from the previous generations.

With the process of globalization, the world-famous advertising company Saatchi & Saatchi puts forward a hypothesis of "cultural convergence," arguing that consumers all over the world are becoming similar in their lifestyles, cultural values and consumption behaviors. This kind of international convergence is more obvious in young university students who are willing to experience new things (Cheng, 2003). The continuing progression, from a world of distinct national markets to one of linked global markets, is said to be fueling the homogenization of customer needs. Some scholars argue that "cross-border music channels such as MTV, greater travel, and better global communication have encouraged the notion of a 'global teenager,' that is, the notion that teenagers possess similar values, regardless of their country of origin" (Assael, 1998, as cited in Mooij & Hofstede, 2002, p. 61).

Culture is acquired (Davis, 1999; Hofstede, 1991; Hu, 1990; Jia, 1997; Samovar, Porter, & Stefani, 2000), and social setting and social events help shape people's cultural values (Inglehart, 1977). Furthermore, cultural values have evolved gradually and are embedded in the collective memory of the people of a particular society; and these values become a standard of conduct (Ali, Lee, Hsieh, & Krishnan, 2005).

Facing the waves of globalization, living in a world of unprecedented choices and a different social setting from that of their parents, and being constantly in contact with other cultures, contemporary Chinese university students might hold different cultural values and

consequently display different consumption behaviors from those of the previous generations. Therefore, the current research attempts to explore the following issues:

- (1) What are the core cultural values of contemporary Chinese university students?
- (2) How are they similar to or different from the preceding generations in terms of cultural values?
- (3) To what extent are contemporary Chinese university students influenced by their national cultural values in consumer behaviors?

Literature Review

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

In the study of cultural values, one of the most significantly established frameworks for understanding and measuring culture has been Hofstede's (1981, 1991, 2001) model of cultural dimensions, which offer an intuitive systematic framework for examining international differences (Carraher, 2003). To differentiate cultures, Hofstede has developed a Value Survey Module (VSM) with five primary dimensions, namely Individualism/Collectivism (IDV), Power Distance (PDI), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), Masculinity/Femininity (MAS), and Long-term Orientation (LTO), to identify fundamental differences in the way people in various countries perceive and interpret their worlds.

Hofstede's model has been widely accepted and quoted as a standard for measuring cultural values. However, the study was conducted in the 1980s and the Chinese samples were mainly those from Taiwan and Hong Kong. With the tremendous changes in recent decades, Chinese people (referring to mainland Chinese people, similarly hereinafter in this paper) have been living in a substantially different environment and have been in contact with different values from abroad. Therefore, Chinese people today might have different concepts from people in the 1980s. The diversification might be more salient in contemporary young people who matured in a distinct social setting.

The Key Features of the Chinese Culture

Hofstede (1991) points out that individualism prevails in developed and Western countries while collectivism prevails in developing and Eastern countries. The Chinese culture is a typical collectivistic one, where individuals from birth onwards are integrated into groups. People think in terms of "we," (a representation of strong and cohesive in-groups) and value a close and committed "group" membership. They are born to be and continue striving to be "in-groupers." The society fosters strong relationships where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of the "in-group." However, in the individualistic U.S. American culture, the ties between individuals are loose; everyone is perhaps expected to take care of him/herself and his/her immediate family. In the society, children learn to think in terms of "I" which is different from other people's "I." In IDV dimension, the United States ranks the highest in all the countries investigated, which indicates an individualistic attitude and relatively loose bonds with others. People in the society are more self-reliant. It is argued

that the IDV dimension is the most important factor in studying cultural differences (Triandis, 2004, as cited in Ali et al., 2005, p. 3).

In LTO dimension (see Hofstede, 1991), China ranks the highest at 118 while the United States has a low ranking at 29. The high LTO score of the Chinese culture indicates the society's time perspective and an attitude of persevering. According to Hofstede (1991), values associated with long-term orientation are perseverance and thrift, and values in relation to short-term orientation are reciprocation of greetings, favors, and gifts, and protecting one's "face." Individuals scoring high in LTO value planning, tradition, hard work for future benefit, and perseverance (Bearden, Money, & Nevins, 2006, p. 457).

In more recent research, some scholars (see Wu, 2002, as cited in Chan, 2006, p.126) also argue that China is a typical example of collective and long-term oriented culture. Chinese people have a clear distinction between those who are in the in-group and those who are in the out-group. Also, they are willing to practice perseverance and thrift in order to prepare for the future.

Cultural Values and Consumer Behavior

National culture feeds into business practice and influences marketing (see, e.g., Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). However, in studying Chinese consumer behavior, Sin and Ho (2001) their 1998 assessment points out studies between 1979 and 1997 that predominantly adopted a culture-free approach, either replicating a prior Western study in a Chinese context or contrasting North Americans with a group of Chinese on a number of behavioral or psychological dimensions. With the understanding of the limitations of the approaches, some scholars have validated and modified existing consumer research methodologies and measuring scales to suit the Chinese cultural context in later studies (see, e.g., Liu, 2007; Lu, 2005a, 2005b).

From the perspective of consumer-oriented segmentation, Liu (2007) has carried on an empirical study, combining a cultural value system and a geographic sub-culture, to investigate regional consumption characteristics in China. Based on a literature review of Chinese cultural values and observation of modern Chinese economic and cultural situations, Liu has constructed a consumption-related values scale – RDCCC (Scale of Regional Difference Characteristics of Chinese Consumption). Dimensions in the scale are summed up from the research results of scholars like, among others, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, Hofstede, Oliver, Parsons and Shils. To test the validity of the RDCCC scale, Liu has also constructed a corresponding lifestyle scale testing cultural-value-related lifestyles. By Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis, seven dimensions are confirmed and validated. These dimensions include: (a) long-term/short-term orientation, (b) man-nature orientation, (c) uncertainty avoidance, (d) materialism, (e) time-orientation, (f) collectivism/individualism, and (g) affectivity versus affective neutrality. Except for man-nature orientation, significant differences are witnessed on the other six dimensions. According to Liu (2007), such dissimilarities may be attributed to the imbalanced economic and cultural development among the different areas. Furthermore, based on the discovery, Liu points out that the differences among the new generation, consumers aged between 20 and 24,

are distinctly smaller compared to consumers of the previous generations. The regional consumption differences among the new generation, which well represents China's future consumption trend, are becoming smaller (Liu, 2007, p. 208). Liu's (2007) research provides a first comprehensive understanding of cross-regional differences of Chinese consumers. In addition, the model postulated and verified is a valid scale for measuring intra-cultural value and consumption in the Chinese context.

Another important line of research on consumer behavior is generational segmentation. Concerning generational segmentation, a key concept developed by Inglehart (1977) is the generational cohort theory. The theory maintains that historical incidents of national significance shake the foundation of existing social orders and value systems, and give birth to new generational cohorts.

German scholars Schutte and Ciarlante (1998) are the two Western scholars who first conducted systematic research into Chinese consumer behavior and who, for the first time, investigated the issue of the generational segmentation of Chinese consumers. Emphasizing that consumer behavior is strongly influenced by culture, the two scholars (Schutte & Ciarlante, 1998) made the first generational segmentation of Chinese consumers. With specific examples, the authors provided an analytical exploration of how the social and cultural environments affected the attitudes and behaviors of Asian consumers in broad terms and segmented Chinese consumers into three generations – the “socialist” generation (consumers born before 1945), the “lost” generation (consumers born between 1945 and 1960), and the “lifestyle” generation (consumers born after 1960). They have considered the material turbulence and transformation in China's recent decades, such as the “cultural revolution” during which education stagnated, and the “reform and opening policy” that boosted economy and improved people's living standard, and other events that posed prodigious impact on Chinese consumers' psychology and behaviors.

The segmentation has its scientific and practical value since it is based on an analytical exploration of the recent Chinese social and cultural environments (Liu & Zhou, 2002a). Furthermore, as the first attempt in segmenting Chinese generations, it ushers in the study of generational segmentation in China. However, as Westerners with little experience living in contemporary China, Schutte and Ciarlante do not possess a thorough and profound understanding of the drastic social, political, economic, and cultural changes that took place in China in the recent decades. Therefore, the segmentational criterion is not appropriate enough and the three-generational segmentation is not adequately nuanced (Liu & Zhou, 2002a; Lu, 2005b). For instance, the grouping of consumers born after 1960 into one generation is too broad. Teenagers and those in their twenties, thirties, forties and even those approaching fifties were all born after 1960. Nevertheless, these people experienced childhood in different social settings and hold diverse consumption behaviors. Thus, in terms of the Chinese consumer generations, it is necessary to make a further and more nuanced segmentation.

Liu and Zhou (2002a), on the basis of the aforementioned segmentation, have developed a five-generation model grounded on the different cultural surroundings in which consumers live and the corresponding dissimilar cultural values. The five-generation model is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Liu and Zhou's Generational Segmentation of Chinese Consumers

Time of Birth	Consumers
Before 1945	The "traditional" generation
Between 1945 and 1960	The "cultural revolution" generation
Between 1960 and 1970	The "lucky" generation
Between 1970 and 1980	The "transitional" generation
After 1980	The "E" generation

Their segmentation retains Schutte's first two generational segments, and then further subdivides Schutte's third segment into another three generations. During the second half of the 20th century, several distinct and momentous events occurred in China. For example, the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the Anti-Rightist and the Great Leap Forward movements in the 1950s, the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, and the Economic Reform since 1978. In Liu and Zhou's (2002a) opinion, these significant events have resulted in five generational cohorts of today's Chinese. They (2002b) further make a detailed elaboration on each generation's cultural values based upon Hofstede's first four cultural dimensions. By outlining the generation-shaping events that have occurred in recent China and how those events affect the cultural values and behaviors of each cohort, Liu and Zhou's (2002a, 2002b) model well represents the social settings and economic situations in contemporary China.

As indicated in their (Liu & Zhou, 2002a, 2002b) description, consumers of each generation do exhibit difference in their cultural values and consumption styles. According to Hofstede (1991), cultural values are acquired in people's early childhood. The youngest generation born after 1980 experienced substantially different events in their childhood, thus they might possess unique values and consumption styles. In their study, Liu and Zhou (2002a, 2002b) assert that consumers of the "E" generation, the youngest cohort among all the generations, are the strongest in individualism, lowest in uncertainty avoidance, lowest in power distance, and strong in masculinity. Due to the diversity in cultural values, they are different from other generations in consumption. However, Liu and Zhou's (2002a, 2002b) analysis is merely descriptive, without quantitative support. In addition, Hofstede's fifth dimension, LTO, was not touched in their study.

Basic Concepts and Theoretical Approaches

Acculturation is the learning of the ideas, values, conventions, and behavior that characterize a social group, and is also used to describe the results of contact between two or more different cultures. As a result of acculturation, a new, composite culture emerges, in which some existing cultural features are combined, some are lost, and new features are generated.¹

In recent decades, China has undergone a transitional period in which great changes have taken place. Chinese people have been increasingly exposed to different cultural products and values, among which the U.S. American culture exerts the broadest and strongest influence. Contemporary Chinese university students lived their childhood in the 1980s and 1990s during which the U.S. American culture began to penetrate into Chinese people's daily life. When they were growing up, contemporary Chinese university students were exposed to U.S. American food, drink, songs, films, and other products. Living in the Chinese cultural context while being in intensive contact with the U.S. American culture, contemporary Chinese university students may have learned the ideas, values, conventions, and behaviors that characterize both social groups and exhibit new cultural features, which are different from those of their parent generations (Zhang, 2005).

Theoretically, people born in the same historical period live in similar social, political, historical and economic environments and consequently share similar ideas and behaviors (Hawkins, 2003, p. 162). In particular, Inglehart (as cited in Abramson & Inglehart, 1995) points out that differences in values, attitudes, and lifestyles across cohorts tend to be the largest in countries that have experienced the highest rates of economic growth. Before 1978, economic changes in China were not substantial. However, according to the State Statistics Bureau's report, from 1979 to 2004, the annual growth rate of China's GDP reached 9.6%, while during the same period the annual growth rate of the world economy was only between 3% and 4%.² It indicates that contemporary Chinese university students, growing up in such a period when China was experiencing high rate of economic growth, might have acquired cultural values and consumption patterns that are different from the four previous generations. Among Liu and Zhou's (2002a, 2002b) five generations, the preceding four grew up in social and historical contexts that were not open to the world and that were not economically advanced. The "E" generation, to which contemporary Chinese university students belong, grew up in an era which exhibits a huge discrepancy from the previous decades. Therefore, the previous four generations are segmented as a whole to form a reference group in the study. By comparing contemporary Chinese university students' cultural values and consumption styles with those of the previous generations as a whole, this research aims to investigate young contemporary Chinese people's cultural value changes and their relevant consumption

¹ *The American Heritage® New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (3rd ed.). Copyright © 2005 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. Retrieved September 20, 2007, from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/acculturation>

² Retrieved August 28, 2007, from http://news.xinhuanet.com/fortune/2006-01/09/content_4028231.htm

styles, and to find out the reasons for such similarities and differences.

Research Design and Data Analysis

Instrument and Samples

The main instrument of the current study is a questionnaire mainly drawn on Liu's RDCCC scale (Scale of Region Difference Characteristic of China Consumption) (Liu, 2007). The questionnaire consists of three parts with part 1 testing respondents' individualism/collectivism (IDV) and long-term orientation (LTO) values, part 2 exploring their relevant consumption lifestyles, and part 3 asking about respondents' demographic information. Since the respondents were Chinese, some of whom did not know English at all, the questionnaires were distributed in the Chinese language. Items in the first two parts were measured in Likert scale of 1 to 5, with ratings of "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree" (5) as end points. The key items in part one are presented as QA1~8 while those in part two as QB1~8 in the data presentation and analysis section.

Guangzhou is the economic center of the Pearl River Delta and is the heart of one of mainland China's leading commercial and manufacturing regions³. University students in Guangzhou were chosen as respondents. For the reference group, consumers of the previous generational cohorts, people from different walks of life in Guangdong Province were picked.

To test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, two pilot studies were conducted. Teachers, undergraduate students and graduate students of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and South China Normal University were invited to respond to each item of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was face validated using exploratory interviews.

Data Collection

From mid December 2007 to mid January 2008, the questionnaires were administered to students of five higher education institutes of Guangdong: Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, South China Normal University, South China University of Technology, Guangdong Polytechnic College of Engineering, and Guangzhou Modern Information Engineering College. A total of 380 questionnaires were sent. Employing convenience sampling, subjects were selected and respondents were invited to fill in the questionnaire in class. Three-hundred and fifty-three questionnaires were returned, and those with incomplete responses were deleted, resulting in 316 usable questionnaires, the effective response rate being 83%. For the reference group, consumers of the previous four generational cohorts, questionnaires were sent by both copies and e-mails to a sample of 80 people from different walks of life, including housewives, retired people, free-lancers, and those who work in governmental or educational institutions, and state-owned and foreign-owned businesses. These people were chosen randomly by convenience sampling. Sixty-eight responses were obtained with 55 complete and effective ones, resulting in a 68% effective response rate.

³ Retrieved June 03, 2007, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guangzhou>

Data Presentation

In accord with the purpose of the current study, independent-samples t-test and frequency distribution have been utilized to analyze the data.

Demographic information. Among the 316 student respondents, 45.3% are male and 54.7% female. They are from 19 different provinces in China, including Guangdong, Jiangxi, Hunan, Guangxi, Fujian, Hainan, Xinjiang, Shandong, and others. College students comprised of 44.6% of respondents; the other 55.4% were university students. All of them were born after 1980, with a majority born in the late 1980s when the influence of economic reform became greater.

In the reference group, there are 49.1% male and 50.9% female respondents. These respondents are from 10 different provinces in China, including Guangdong, Hunan, Jiangxi, Hubei, Hebei, Inner-Mongolia, Anhui, Liaoning, Sichuan, and Zhejiang. Their educational levels range from junior high school or below to postgraduate or above. These respondents are from different walks of life, such as teachers from schools and universities, doctors and nurses from hospitals, civil servants from governmental departments, and employees from different forms of enterprises. In addition, there are also housewives, retired people, and free-lancers. The respondents comprise of consumers of the four previous generations: 3.6% of the respondents belong to the “traditional” generation, who were born before 1945; 20% the “cultural revolution” generation, born between 1945 and 1960; 36.4% the “lucky” generation, born during 1960 and 1970; and 40% the “transitional” generation, born in the period of 1970 to 1980.

Contemporary Chinese university students’ cultural values concerning individualism/collectivism (IDV). QA1~QA4 test respondents’ cultural values concerning individualism/collectivism (IDV), and QB1~QB4 reflect their lifestyles relevant to the cultural dimension. The t-test results show that in terms of IDV, contemporary Chinese university students exhibit great differences from the previous generations.

As shown in Table 2, contemporary Chinese university students are similar to the previous generations on QA3 and QA4. Some 70~85% of the two groups agree that it is obligatory to make contributions to a team’s success and serve their motherland.

Nevertheless, significant differences are spotted on QA1 and QA2. As indicated in Table 2, for item QA1, “all things go well when the family is harmonious,” almost all the respondents of the reference group (98.2%) state agreement, with 90.9% claiming “strongly agree.” The previous generations attach the greatest importance to family harmony. By comparison, although most of the university students (94.7%) also agree on the statement, the 80.1% of “strong agreement” is lower than that of the previous generations. For QA2, “nice things should be shared with others,” no disagreement is witnessed in the reference group’s responses.

Table 2: A Comparison on IDV

	T-test		Frequency distribution					
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means	Likert scale (percentage)					Group
	Sig.	Sig. (2-tailed)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	
QA1	.000	.060	0	0	1.8	7.3	90.9	PG
		.014	0	0.3	5.1	14.6	80.1	TS
QA2	.602	.011	0	0	16.4	20	63.6	PG
		.006	0.9	2.2	19.3	35.8	41.8	TS
QA3	.015	.669	1.8	7.3	7.3	20	63.6	PG
		.729	0	1.3	14.2	36.4	48.1	TS
QA4	.013	.611	5.5	5.5	20	16.4	52.7	PG
		.663	1.9	3.8	18.7	30.7	44.9	TS
QB1	.114	.000	7.3	5.5	30.9	16.4	40	PG
		.000	10.8	18.7	35.1	23.1	12.3	TS
QB2	.000	.000	3.6	1.8	5.5	5.5	83.6	PG
		.000	5.1	6.3	29.4	24.1	35.1	TS
QB3	.000	.000	0	1.8	7.3	16.4	74.5	PG
		.000	3.5	5.7	19.3	25.3	46.2	TS
QB4	.319	.006	0	20	18.2	29.1	32.7	PG
		.010	6.3	13.9	36.1	29.7	13.9	TS

*Note:

- (1) PG = previous generations (N=55); TS = contemporary Chinese university students (N=316)
- (2) 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree

Also, 63.6% of them strongly applaud the statement. However, in university students' responses, 3.1% denote disagreement, with only 41.8% indicating "strongly agree."

Items QB1~QB4 reflect respondents' lifestyles relevant to IDV dimension. As shown in the t-test part of Table 2, contemporary Chinese university students are substantially different from the previous generations in all the items. The frequency distribution part gives a detailed description of the differences. Forty percent of the reference group respondents strongly agree on the QB1 statement "I do not like wearing eye-catching or individualized clothes"; whereas for contemporary Chinese university students, only 12.3% of them show "strong agreement." That is, contemporary Chinese university students like to be dressed trendily and uniquely, to be "the one" out of the group. Nonetheless, the previous generations prefer to be "a one" of the group. For QB2, "I hate advertisements that try to seek popularity by ostentatious nonsense," 83.6% of the previous generations strongly agree with it while only 35.1% of university students state strong agreement. For QB3, only 1.8% of the reference group respondents disagree, but 5.7% of the contemporary Chinese university student respondents disagree on the statement "I think traveling with friends is more interesting than traveling on my own." More than 90% of the previous generations think traveling with others is more interesting, but a relatively smaller percentage, about 70% of the university students, think in the same way. No respondent of the previous generations fiercely denies the statement of QB4 "I will buy products which family and friends recommend," yet, 6.3% of the university students strongly disapprove of it. About 60% of the reference group respondents, but only about 40% of contemporary Chinese university students, would buy products recommended by relatives or friends.

Contemporary Chinese university students' cultural values concerning long-term orientation (LTO). As revealed in Table 3, in terms of their LTO dimension, the two groups show substantial similarities and minor differences on both values and related lifestyles.

For their cultural orientation toward LTO, there is great conformity between the contemporary Chinese university students and the reference group. On item QA5 "generosity and forgiveness always leads to positive results," QA6 "lack of patience in small matters will bring destruction to overall plans," and QA8 "where there is a will, there is a way," a material proportion of the two groups, some 70-80%, express their agreement. Both groups value generosity and forgiveness, patience and strong will. Yet on item QA7 "no pains, no gains," significant dissimilarity is discovered. As shown in Table 3, more than 70% of the previous generation respondents, while only about 50% of the contemporary Chinese university students, strongly agree on the statement; what is more, no one in the previous generations show strong disagreement whereas 1.3% of university students state strong disapproval.

Table 3: A Comparison on LTO

	T-test		Frequency distribution					
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means	Likert scale (percentage)					Group
	Sig.	Sig. (2-tailed)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	
QA5	.701	.073	0	7.3	14.5	29.1	49.1	PG
		.064	1.9	5.7	25.9	29.7	36.7	TS
QA6	.848	.102	0	1.8	14.5	27.3	56.4	PG
		.102	0	2.2	19	36.7	42.1	TS
QA7	.007	.011	0	1.8	5.5	20	72.7	PG
		.003	1.3	2.8	11.7	31.3	52.8	TS
QA8	.389	.126	0	5.5	9.1	25.5	60	PG
		.096	2.8	3.2	15.5	30.1	48.4	TS
QB5	.076	.052	16.4	16.4	23.6	21.8	21.8	PG
		.085	7	12.7	26.3	30.7	23.4	TS
QB6	.041	.919	5.5	3.6	30.9	21.8	38.2	PG
		.928	2.5	4.4	27.8	35.8	29.4	TS
QB7	.106	.943	5.5	1.8	7.3	23.6	61.8	PG
		.953	0.6	0.9	14.9	29.4	54.1	TS
QB8	.932	.141	5.5	5.5	21.8	14.5	52.7	PG
		.150	5.7	8.2	25.6	23.4	37	TS

*Note:

(1) PG = previous generations (N=55); TS = contemporary Chinese university students (N=316)

(2) 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree

For the four items exploring respondents' consumption lifestyles related to LTO, t-test results show no difference between the two groups. On items QB5 "in order to buy a

house/car, I can pinch and scrape,” QB6 “I will buy an expensive refrigerator with high quality,” and QB8 “I do not like consuming on loans,” some 50-65% of the two groups choose approval. Furthermore, on QB7 “it is necessary to spend more money on children’s education,” about 85% of them nod their heads.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Tendency toward individualism. Contemporary Chinese university students show a strong tendency towards individualism.

Firstly, compared with the reference group, contemporary Chinese university students attach less importance to the causal relationship between family harmony and success. As can be seen from Table 2, the percentage of contemporary Chinese university students who strongly agree that “All things go well when the family is harmonious” is lower than their parent generation (80.1% vs. 90.9%). The consumers of the previous four generations attach the greatest importance to family harmony, revealing their strong collectivistic values. Collectivism entails the preserving of the primary group harmony; and it might be expected that the more collectivistic a person is, the more he/she might prefer the traditional values of family and group harmony (Ali et al., 2005). Individuals belong to one or more “in-groups,” for instance, extended family, a clan, or other organization, from which they cannot detach themselves; and the “in-group” protects the interest of its members, and in turn expects their permanent loyalty. In the old days, Chinese people lived with an extended family — a large group consisting of several generations. Grandparents, parents, children, and even great-grand-parents or great-grand-children all lived together. Moreover, for each generation, there were usually several brothers and sisters. People were, from birth onwards, integrated into a “group” in which existed a strong familial bond. Members of the group emphasized a close and committed “group” membership and thought in terms of “we,” and everyone took responsibility for fellow members of the “in-group.” As for the previous generations, “group welfare, group goals, interdependence, and relationships take priority in their individual life and conduct” (Ali et al., 2005, p. 8). Consequently, consumers of the previous generations who lived their childhood in a typical collectivistic culture, deem that achievements can only be made with a harmonious family base. By comparison, in contemporary Chinese university students’ opinion, there seems to be a slight weakening of family value. Born after 1980, a majority of the students nowadays live in a nuclear family consisting of only three people due to the implementation of the Family Planning and the social changes that began in the late 1970s. There is a detachment in the young peoples’ relations with other family members and the familial bond is relatively looser. In addition, the U.S. American culture, highlighting personal effort and achievement, may also have exerted impact. In individualistic cultures, emotional detachment from in-groups is greater (Watkins & Liu, 1996, p. 75) and individualists are concerned with pursuing their goals and are not preoccupied with group welfare (Ali et al., 2005). Being influenced by individualistic cultures, ties between individuals of today’s contemporary Chinese university students are looser. They are primarily concerned with their own interests and the interests of their immediate family. They do not have such strong feelings for the extended family, and have a relatively loose bond

with others. They are more self-reliant, and accordingly tend to value personal effort and contribute one's success less than familial bond.

Secondly, contemporary Chinese university students place less value on sharing than the reference group. Only 41.8% of the investigated student respondents show strong willingness to share nice things with others, in contrast with 63.6% of the reference group. The previous generations lived their childhood in a time of inadequate material resources and in a family of several children, which fostered their awareness of sharing. Moreover, collectivists tend to be concerned about the results and impact of their behaviors on members of their in-groups, willing to share resources with in-group members, and typically go to great lengths to maintain harmonious relationships with in-group members. Even when the in-group makes extensive demands, the individual remains loyal (Watkins & Liu, 1996, p.75). Therefore, the previous generations are generous in sharing. However, contrasted with the previous generations, contemporary Chinese university students are not that willing to share nice things with others. These people spent their childhood time in years of increasing economic prosperity and in a family with themselves as the only child. They are the "king" or "queen" of their parents and grandparents who grant them whatever they request. As a result, the young people are becoming self-centered and emphasize their own benefits.

Adherence to collectivism. With significant tendency toward individualism, contemporary Chinese university students still adhere to the core collectivistic values. Similarities are found in values stating "it is obligatory to make contributions to a team's success" and "it is obligatory to serve a person's motherland." According to Watkins and Liu (1996, p. 75), a fundamental attribute of collectivistic cultures is that individuals are typically induced to subordinate their personal needs to the needs of one or (at most) a few collectives. Contemporary Chinese university students, though tending to be more individualistic, are still similar to the previous generations in this fundamental attribute. As displayed in Table 2, both groups value contributions to their team and country. In the Chinese context, the idea of subordinating personal needs to such collectives as one's country or work unit is highly emphasized in the family, school education and mass media. Therefore, even though they are comparatively more individualistic, contemporary Chinese university students still stick to the core collectivistic attributes.

Unique individualistic consumption lifestyles. As reflected in their IDV-related consumption lifestyles, contemporary Chinese university students are significantly different from the previous generations.

First of all, unlike the reference group, contemporary Chinese university students do not take a strong dislike for flamboyant dress with a proportion of them (10.8%) stating love for unique clothing. Secondly, compared with the previous generations, fewer contemporary Chinese university students (35.1% vs. 83.6%) loathe advertisements that try to seek popularity by ostentatious nonsense. Thirdly, different from the reference group, a relatively smaller percentage of the university students think "traveling with friends is more interesting than traveling by oneself." And finally, contemporary Chinese university students (6.3% vs. 0%), different from the previous generations, would definitely not choose to buy products which family and friends recommend.

Among collectivists, self-definition and self-esteem depend on success at belonging,

fitting-in, engaging in actions that are contextually appropriate, maintaining social harmony, and saving face for self and others (Watkins & Liu, 1996, p. 75). More importantly, collectivists incline to be conformists to primary group norms and beliefs and to assume responsibilities that sustain in-group relationships (Ali et al., 2005). Accordingly, for the previous generations, who were born to be and continue striving to be “in-groupers,” whether or not they belong to the same in-group is important. Therefore they do not like to be dressed differently from others, they do not like advertisements making unique statements, they like traveling with other in-group members, and they are induced to buy products recommended by members of the in-groups.

For contemporary Chinese university students, however, an individualist’s construction of self is relatively independent of social context and depends instead on success in being unique and in self-expression. They seek to maintain their independence from others by attending to the self and by discovering and expressing their unique attributes (Ali et al., 2005). As a result, the youth today tend to prefer unique clothing, flub-dub advertisements and traveling alone, and not to follow other people’s recommendation when making purchases.

Inheritance of long-term oriented values. In terms of their long-term orientation (LTO) dimension, contemporary Chinese university students show substantial similarities to the previous generations.

LTO has roots in Confucian values concerning time, tradition, perseverance, and saving for the future; and individuals scoring high in LTO value planning, tradition, hard work for future benefit, and perseverance (Bearden et al., 2006, p. 457). As revealed in the findings from this research, a substantial proportion of the two groups attach importance to generosity, patience and strong will. They believe that endurance, generosity and strong will lead to positive results and success, and they agree that impatience brings destruction to overall plans. In this respect, contemporary Chinese university students’ values are stable and enduring, relying on their own national culture.

Divergence from traditional virtue. Though there exists great similarity between the two groups in terms of LTO, significant difference is spotted on the item stating “no pains, no gains.” The previous generations (72.7%) believe that to gain success, one has to experience the hardest hardships, whereas contemporary Chinese university students (52.8%) do not relate gains so much to pains. Living in an era of abundant materials and plenty of opportunities, contemporary Chinese university students can gain things and achieve success more easily than their parents or grandparents did. They do not need to endure many hardships to gain benefits. There are lots of means, and sometimes shortcuts, for them to resort to.

The long-term oriented consumption lifestyles. With respect to the four items measuring their lifestyles in relation to LTO dimension, contemporary Chinese university students show no difference from the previous generations. Most of them would value quality, would save for the future, and would not spend money they do not yet have. Moreover, a great proportion of them think that it is necessary to spend more money on children’s education. Contemporary Chinese university students, like the previous generations, are future-oriented, look for good quality, and can live frugally for well being in the future. The great conformity

reflects contemporary Chinese university students' inheritance of LTO values from the previous generations.

Conclusion

Contemporary Chinese university students make up a segment that takes up an increasing proportion of the Chinese market. With university students in Guangzhou as subjects, this research attempts to gain an understanding of these peoples' cultural value changes and their consumption patterns by comparing their responses with those of the previous generations.

On the one hand, traditional Chinese culture is the ground-building base that forms the contemporary Chinese university students' cultural values and influences their consumption. Contemporary Chinese university students, like the previous generational cohorts, attach importance to a collectivistic ethos, willing to make contributions to and sacrifice for collectives. They also adhere to the traditional long-term oriented values such as generosity, forgiveness, patience, and strong will. Similar to the preceding generations, they can live frugally for future well-being, value investment in children's education, and do not like consuming loans.

On the other hand, with the progression of globalization and integration, contemporary Chinese university students are constantly hammered by different cultures. The multidimensional lifestyles and cultural consumption of products from other cultures construct part of their values and lifestyles. They exhibit traits different from the previous generations in some aspects of cultural values and consumption patterns. Firstly, there is a strong tendency toward individualism. Compared with the previous generations, contemporary Chinese university students do not attribute success so much to familial harmony, and are more self-centered with some of them not that willing to share nice things with others. They value personal effort and achievement, are inclined to wear eye-catching and individualized clothes, and accept advertisements that seek popularity via ostentatious nonsense. Fewer of them like traveling with others and will buy products recommended by relatives or friends. Secondly, there is a minor divergence from the traditional virtues. Living in a world of affluent materials and opportunities, contemporary Chinese university students are less willing to tolerate pain for gain. They do not believe so much in the idea that success can only be achieved through hardship-enduring.

Consistent with the predictions of generational cohort theory, intergenerational differences do occur between contemporary Chinese university students and the preceding generations. As a result of the acculturation effect, these young people, shaped in the Chinese cultural context and at the same time absorbing values from other cultures, have developed mixed cultural values combining features of foreign cultures.

Implications

Consumer behavior is influenced by many factors, some of which are cultural (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001, p. 172). Culture is generally accepted by marketing theorists (Garner, 2006; Kotabe & Helsen, 2005; Kotler & Armstrong, 2001; Lu, 2005a, 2005b; Qiu, 2005) as one of

the underlying determinants of consumer behavior. There is also empirical evidence supporting the general theory that cultural values do correlate with consumer behavior, and research results show that specific cultural dimensions are useful predictors of consumer behavior (see, e.g., Bao, Zhou, & Su, 2003; Henry, 1976). University students are big consumers in the present China. Therefore, an understanding of their cultural values and consumption style can help marketers achieve effective marketing strategies. The findings of the current study may provide a guide for marketers who are targeting or would like to target the group. Furthermore, being a segment of the Chinese consumers, the changes in their cultural values and consumption styles may, to a certain extent, help predict the trend of future Chinese consumption.

Limitations and Further Research

The research has two major limitations. Firstly, the samples are mostly from Guangdong province. It might not well represent the population in China as a whole. Future research might use more reliable sampling methods to cover a broader range of samples. Secondly, contemporary Chinese university students have been impacted by different cultures. For instance, in recent years, the influence of the Korean and the Japanese cultures is increasingly felt. Although the U.S. American culture is the one that exerts the strongest impact on contemporary Chinese university students, other cultures may play a role in their cultural values and consumption pattern development. Further research on the interaction of different cultures might be helpful in getting a deeper understanding of their cultural values and consumption styles. Continuing efforts should be made to trace their values development and consumption changes.

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Appendix I: The Original Version of the Questionnaire

问卷

尊敬的朋友：

您好！我们正在进行一项关于“文化价值观和消费者行为”的研究。您提供的信息仅用于此项科研课题，不会用作任何商业或其他有损您利益的用途。

本问卷采用匿名回答的方式，目的在于了解您对相关问题的个人看法、探讨观念与行为之间的关系，因此您的回答没有“好、坏、对、错”之分，您真实的回答就是最好的答案。

非常感谢您的积极参与和大力支持！

一、 以下句子反映了人们的文化价值观及生活方式，请圈出您赞同的程度（1分=非常不赞同，5分=非常赞同）(单选)。

二、

	圈一个最能代表您看法的数字 非常不赞同 ←————→ 非常赞同				
1. 家和万事兴	1	2	3	4	5
2. 好东西应该跟大家分享	1	2	3	4	5
3. 为团队的成功做出贡献是很应该的	1	2	3	4	5
4. 为祖国服务是应该的	1	2	3	4	5
5. 忍一时风平浪静，退一步海阔天空	1	2	3	4	5
6. 小不忍则乱大谋	1	2	3	4	5
7. 吃得苦中苦，方为人上人	1	2	3	4	5

8. 有志者，事竟成	1	2	3	4	5
9. 我不喜欢穿个性化的服装	1	2	3	4	5
10. 我讨厌哗众取宠的广告	1	2	3	4	5
11. 我觉得和朋友一起旅游比自己单独旅游更好玩	1	2	3	4	5
12. 我会买亲友们都认为好的产品	1	2	3	4	5
13. 为了买房子（车子），我可以省吃俭用	1	2	3	4	5
14. 我会买高价但质优的电冰箱	1	2	3	4	5
15. 为子女教育多花钱是很有必要的	1	2	3	4	5
16. 我不喜欢贷款消费	1	2	3	4	5

三、下表各项反映了人们消费购物决策方面的观点和/或行为，请圈出您赞同的程度（1分=非常不赞同，5分=非常赞同）（单选）。

四、

	圈一个最能代表您看法的数字 非常不赞同 ←————→ 非常赞同				
1. 拥有优质的商品，对我来说十分重要。	1	2	3	4	5
2. 在购买时，我会尽可能做出最好或最完美的选择。	1	2	3	4	5
3. 我通常会设法购得优质的商品。	1	2	3	4	5
4. 昂贵的品牌商品通常是我的选择。	1	2	3	4	5

5. 商品愈是昂贵，愈是代表优质。	1	2	3	4	5
6. 好的商场及专卖店为我提供最好的商品。	1	2	3	4	5
7. 我较为喜欢选购最畅销的商品。	1	2	3	4	5
8. 经常做广告的商品，通常是最好的选择。	1	2	3	4	5
9. 我通常会拥有一件或以上最流行的服装。	1	2	3	4	5
10. 我的衣柜里常添置流行的服装。	1	2	3	4	5
11. 时尚与吸引他人注意的打扮对我很重要。	1	2	3	4	5
12. 为求有更多的选择，我选购不同的牌子及到不同的店铺购物。	1	2	3	4	5
13. 购物是我生活中一项享乐活动。	1	2	3	4	5
14. 我喜欢购物因为它为我带来乐趣。	1	2	3	4	5
15. 我通常尽可能多购买一些减价商品。	1	2	3	4	5
16. 我会花多点时间审慎选购，务求购得物有所值的商品。	1	2	3	4	5
17. 在购物时，我不多加思索，属“冲动购物型”消费者	1	2	3	4	5
18. 我经常在不慎购买东西后觉得后悔	1	2	3	4	5
19. 众多的商品牌子选择，令我感到迷乱。	1	2	3	4	5
20. 有时候很难决定光顾哪一家店铺	1	2	3	4	5

21. 我愈是了解商品, 愈是难选出最好的。	1	2	3	4	5
22. 我会因为钟情于某品牌而经常重复购买该品牌的商品。	1	2	3	4	5
23. 在购买同类货品时, 我会经常转换不同的品牌。	1	2	3	4	5

五、 我们希望了解一些关于您本人情况的信息。由于问卷采取了保护性收集的方式, 我们不会知道答卷人是谁。请根据您的实际情况回答。

六、

1. 您的性别	_____
2. 您出生的地方	_____
3. 您的学历	初中或以下____ 高中/中专/技校 ____ 大专/非本科____ 大学本科 ____ 硕士研究生或以上 ____
4. 您的出生年份	1945 年以前____ 1945~1960 年____ 1960~1970 年____ 1970~1980 年____ 1980 以后(请标明具体年份, 如 1987 年)____
5. 您的职业	学生____ 教师/教职工____ 医护人员____ 政府机关____ 国有企业____ 私营企业/公司____ 外资企业____ 合资企业____ 家庭妇女____ 离退休人员____ 自由职业者____ 其他____
6. 您家庭月收入	1000~3000 元____ 3000~5000 元____ 5000~8000 元____ 8000~12000 元____ 12000~15000 元____ 15000 元~20000 元____ ____ 20000 元以上____

非常感谢您的支持与合作!

Appendix II: The English Translation of the Questionnaire

Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed for the purpose of a research on cultural values and consumption behaviors. Your name will not be needed. All the information you

provide will be kept strictly confidential, and will not be used for commercial purposes or in any other way that will be harmful to you.

There are no correct or incorrect answers, only different opinions. Your truthful responses are the best answers.

The following statements reflect people's cultural values and lifestyles. Please circle ONE number that shows the degree of your agreement with them.

(1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree)

	strongly disagree ← → strongly agree
1. All things go well when the family is harmonious	1 2 3 4 5
2. Nice things should be shared with others.	1 2 3 4 5
3. It is obligatory to make contributions to a team's success.	1 2 3 4 5
4. It is obligatory to serve a person's motherland.	1 2 3 4 5
5. Generosity and forgiveness always leads to positive results.	1 2 3 4 5
6. Lack of patience in small matters will bring destruction to overall plans.	1 2 3 4 5
7. No pains, no gains.	1 2 3 4 5
8. Where there is a will, there is a way.	1 2 3 4 5

9. I don't like wearing eye-catching or individualized clothes.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I hate advertisements that try to seek popularity by ostentatious nonsense.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I think traveling with friends is more interesting than traveling myself.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I will buy products which family and friends recommend.	1	2	3	4	5
13. In order to buy a house/car, I can pinch and scrape.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I will buy an expensive refrigerator with high quality.	1	2	3	4	5
15. It is necessary to spend more money on children's education.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I don't like consuming on loans.	1	2	3	4	5

The following statements reflect people's consumption decision-making/behavior. Please circle ONE number that shows the degree of your agreement with them.
 (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree)

	strongly disagree \longleftrightarrow strongly agree
1. Getting quality goods is very important	1 2 3 4 5

to me.					
2. When it comes to purchasing products, I try to get the best or perfect choice.	1	2	3	4	5
3. In general, I usually try to buy the best overall quality.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The more expensive brands are usually my choices.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The higher the price of a product, the better its quality.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Nice department and specialty stores provide the best products.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I prefer buying the best-selling brands.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The most advertised brands are usually very good choices.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I usually have one or more outfits of the newest style.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I keep my wardrobe up-to-date with the changing fashions.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Fashionable, attractive styling is very important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
12. To get variety, I shop different stores and choose different brands.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Going shopping is one of the enjoyable activities of my life.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I enjoy shopping just for the fun of it.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I buy as much as possible at sale prices.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I look carefully to find the best value for the money.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I am impulsive when purchasing.	1	2	3	4	5

18. Often I make careless purchases I later wish I had not.	1	2	3	4	5
19. There are so many brands to choose from that I often feel confused.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Sometimes it is hard to choose which stores to shop.	1	2	3	4	5
21. The more I learn about products, the harder it seems to choose the best.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I have favorite brands I buy over and over.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I change brands I buy regularly.	1	2	3	4	5

Please provide your factual information as below. Your name is not needed.

1. Gender	_____
2. Birthplace	_____
3. Education	Junior high school or below____ Senior high school/Secondary school/Technical and vocational school _____ Two/Three year college____ BA/BSc _____ MA/MSc/MBA or above _____
4. Year of birth	Before 1945 _____ 1945~1960 _____ 1960~1970 _____ 1970~1980____ After 1980 (please specify the year, e.g. 1987) _____

5. Occupation	Student _____ Teacher _____ Doctor/Nurse _____ Government department worker _____ State-owned enterprise worker _____ Private-owned enterprise worker _____ Foreign-owned enterprise worker _____ Joint venture enterprise worker _____ Housewife _____ Retiree _____ Freelancer _____ Other _____
6. Monthly expense	¥ 500 and below _____ ¥ 500- ¥ 1000 _____ ¥ 1000- ¥ 2000 _____ ¥ 2000- ¥ 3000 _____ ¥ 3000- ¥ 5000 _____ ¥ 5000 and above _____
7. Monthly family income	¥ 1000~ ¥ 3000 _____ ¥ 3000~ ¥ 5000 _____ ¥ 5000~ ¥ 8000 _____ ¥ 8000~ ¥ 12000 _____ ¥ 12000~ ¥ 15000 _____ ¥ 15000~ ¥ 20000 _____ ¥ 20000 and above _____

Thank you very much for your time and help!