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ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS

Cultural Values Reflected in Chinese and Hong Kong Television Commercials

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Abstract / A content analysis of 1387 commercials broadcast in China and Hong Kong in 1993 and 1998 was conducted using Cheng and Schweitzer's framework of cultural values. The five cultural values that dominated Chinese television advertising were 'modernity', 'family', 'tradition', 'technology' and 'collectivism'. The five dominant cultural values in Hong Kong television advertising were 'quality', 'effectiveness', 'economy', 'enjoyment' and 'modernity'. Hong Kong commercials used more western values, whereas Chinese commercials used more eastern ones. Chinese commercials used more symbolic values, while Hong Kong commercials used more utilitarian ones. The pattern of cultural values reflected in Chinese commercials was more volatile than that of Hong Kong commercials. The use of a two-way ANOVA model indicated that product category had a greater impact on cultural values than the time dimension.

Keywords / advertising / China / content analysis / cultural values / Hong Kong

Introduction

At midnight of 30 June 1997, Hong Kong, the 156-year-old British crown colony, was returned to the People's Republic of China, becoming its Special Administrative Region. Although the reunification of these two parts of China² was completed overnight, their differences are far from disappearing due to the long-time separation which lies behind them. As Pan et al. (1999; 99) remarked, this historic event 'symbolized a host of imagined fundamental clashes such as colonialism vs. nationalism, capitalism vs. Communism and East vs. West'.

In addition to the two different political systems existing in the post-reunification China – a first social experiment of its kind in the world – the impact of cultural differences on the advertising messages in these two parts of 'Cultural China' (Frith and Tao, 1998) is still largely unknown. This article is, therefore, designed to pinpoint the cultural values reflected in the television commercials of China and Hong Kong of 1993 and 1998.

Literature Review

As a form of social and cultural communication, advertising is a carrier of cultural values (Leiss et al., 1990; Pollay, 1983, 1986; Pollay and Gallagher,

1990). There has been a continuous scholarly interest in the need for relating advertising to culture over the past four decades (Cheng, 1994, 1997). Although the investigation of the relationship between advertising and culture dates back to the early 1960s (Cheng, 1994), it was not until the early 1980s, when Pollay (1983) developed his seminal coding framework for measuring cultural values manifest in advertising, that analytical studies began to look at the cultural values reflected in advertising content.

Based on their focuses, these studies can be roughly categorized into four groups. Owing to the vast differences between eastern and western cultures (Porter and Samovar, 1997), the largest group of the studies was devoted to the comparison of advertisements from these two major types of cultures. Initially, Singh and Huang (1962) found that US advertisements were not effective in India for their appeal ran counter to indigenous cultural values.

Since the 1980s, more studies have focused on eastern and western cultures. Belk et al. (1985), Belk and Pollay (1985) and Belk and Bryce (1986) reported that although Americanization was clearly increasing in Japanese advertisements, deep-rooted Japanese cultural values still remain strong. Hong et al. (1987) observed that Japanese advertisements were more emotional and less comparative than their US counterparts. In the same year, Mueller (1987) reported that the cultural appeals used in Japanese and US magazine advertisements tend to differ in degree rather in kind. Zandpour and Qian's (1992) findings partly supported Mueller's results, whereas Han et al.'s (1992) results largely differed from Mueller's conclusion. Lin (1993: 46) found that 'certain commonalities in each's advertising approach are apparent' and suggested that 'there is a "commonground" rooted in modern materialism across cultures'. In a follow-up study, Lin and Salwen (1995: 63) reported that US commercials tended to seek 'the completeness and perfection of either a rational or an emotional appeal in their product information strategy', whereas Japanese commercials were prone to pursue 'the sophistication of either a physical or emotional embodiment'.

Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) identified eight cultural values dominant in either Chinese or US television commercials and reported that Chinese commercials resorted more often to symbolic cultural values while US commercials tended to use both symbolic and utilitarian ones. Similarly, Albers-Millers and Gelb (1996: 67-8) concluded that 'Even with a relatively homogeneous audience of business and professional readers, variation in advertising across culture is observable'. Zhang and Gelb (1996: 42) emphasized the need for matching advertising appeals to culture, 'especially in the case of sharply contrasting cultures, such as those of the United States and China'. Tsao (1997) reported that western cultural values have not been fully adopted in Taiwanese advertising.

The second group of studies on cultural values in advertising was focused on one selected country. Marquez (1975) found that Philippine advertising had reflected the western rather than the indigenous culture. Mueller (1992: 22) also predicted that 'Japanese advertising . . . may be becoming increasingly Japanese'. Mueller's findings agreed with Belk and Pollay's discoveries in the mid-1980s.

Srikandath (1991) found that 'high-technology', 'modernization' and 'consumerism' were three predominant cultural values transmitted through Indian advertising. Sengupta and Frith (1997) highlighted varying degrees of importance attached to different cultural values in advertisements of multinational corporations and solely Indian-owned businesses.

Cheng (1994) identified 'modernity', 'technology' and 'quality' as the most dominant cultural values reflected in Chinese magazine advertisements between the early 1980s and early 1990s. In a follow-up study, Cheng (1997) found that 'modernity', 'technology' and 'youth' predominated in Chinese advertising in the 1990s, while the predominance of 'quality' in the early 1990s was superseded by 'tradition' in the mid-1990s. Wang (1995) reported that pleasure seeking and consumption of modernity were the recurring themes in the multinational advertisements in two leading Chinese daily newspapers. McIntyre and Wei (1998) noticed that the frequency of utilitarian values used in Chinese advertisements was decreasing over time, while the use of certain western cultural values increased. Similarly, Dong et al. (1999) found a major value shift from utilitarian values to hedonistic values in Chinese magazine advertisements.

Tsao (1994) reported that time perspectives, western orientation and hard-selling appeals were increasingly emphasized in Taiwanese advertising, whereas a reluctance to use western models was also gaining strength. Chan (1999) found that the set of dominant cultural values used in Hong Kong's newspaper advertisements from 1946 to 1996 mainly consisted of western values. This set of values was also a combination of utilitarian and symbolic values that put emphasis on product benefits and product prestige.

The third group of studies was focused on the cultural values reflected in one particular product category or one particular cultural value reflected in advertising from different countries. Tansey et al. (1990) reported that values concerning work, leisure and urban life were evidently different in Brazilian and US car advertisements. In a study of fashion and food advertisements, Domzal and Kernan (1993: 1) argued, however, that 'certain consumers, apart from their resident cultures, regard these products in essentially equivalent, self-relevant ways'. But Frith and Sengupta (1991) found significant differences in the use of the value 'individualism' in the magazine advertisements from India, the UK and the US.

The last 10 years or so have seen an increasing scholarly interest in the cultural values reflected in advertising of regions that share a similar language and/or a similar culture (i.e. the fourth group of the studies). Tse et al. (1989: 457) found that

PRC ads emphasize utilitarian appeals, promise a better life, and focus on states of being as a consumption theme. Hong Kong ads stress hedonistic values, promise easier and American lifestyles, and focus on doing. Taiwan ads fall between these two extremes, but are converging toward Hong Kong ads in consumption appeals over time.

Pasadeos and Chi (1992) also reported that advertisements from both Hong Kong and Taiwan used more western than traditional cultural values.

Frith and Wesson (1991) discovered significant differences in the use of individualism, egalitarianism and direct speech in British and US magazine advertisements. Similarly, Mehta (1992) reported that advertisements in UK and US lifestyle magazines were more specialized than standardized. Katz and Lee (1992) further suggested that although cultural differences were important, product categories were more determinant for advertising formats used in UK and US television commercials.

Cultural Values and Advertising

Centrally placed in various definitions of culture (Giddens, 1989; Hofstede, 1990, cited in de Mooij and Keegan, 1991; Inglehart, 1990; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961; Rokeach, 1973), 'values are often offered as the explanation for the way in which people communicate' (Lustig and Koester, 1999: 81). Although each individual could have a unique set of personal values, *cultural values*, 'the governing ideas and guiding principles for thought and action' (Srikandath, 1991: 166), tend to permeate a culture.

Cultural values differ in valence and intensity from culture to culture. While *valence* refers to whether a cultural value is seen as positive or negative, *intensity* indicates the strength or importance of the value in a culture. As Lustig and Koester (1999: 82) exemplified,

... in some US American cultures, the value of respect for elders is negatively valenced and held with a modest degree of intensity. Many US Americans value youth rather than old age. In Korea, Japan, and Mexico, however, respect for elders is a positively valenced value, and it is very intensely held.

There can be wide variability in cultural difference due, in part, to the valences and intensities given to various cultural values. If we imagine such differences varying along a minimum–maximum dimension, the maximum differences go to those found between Asian and western cultures (Porter and Samovar, 1997). Thus, some cultural values (such as collectivism, respect for elders and tradition) are more typical of eastern cultures whereas other cultural values (such as individualism, youth and modernity) are more representative of western cultures (Cheng and Schweitzer, 1996; Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Chu and Ju, 1993; Frith, 1990; Mueller, 1987, 1992; Pan et al., 1994; Srikandath, 1991; Xu, 1990).

Many cultural values may also be differentiated as utilitarian and symbolic. In advertising, *utilitarian values* (such as convenience, neatness and quality) often highlight product or service features while *symbolic values* (such as collectivism, individualism and modernity) mainly suggest human emotions.

In his seminal research, Pollay (1983) developed a coding framework that enables researchers to measure cultural values manifest in advertising in a large-scale and systematic manner. With 42 cultural values suggested for measurement in advertising, Pollay's framework has proved to be applicable to all media.

In a further study of advertising and cultural values, Pollay (1986) developed his well-known metaphor of 'distorted mirror' for advertising. A few years later, Pollay and Gallagher (1990: 359) tested the 'distorted mirror' notion empirically. As a result, they identified 25 cultural values frequently depicted in North American advertisements, which showed 'high consistency over time and across media'. Once again, they asserted that if advertising is a mirror of cultural values, 'it is a distorted one' (Pollay and Gallagher, 1990: 370).

The mirror is distorted . . . because advertising reflects only certain attitudes, behaviors and values. It models and reinforces only certain life-styles and philosophies, those that serve seller's interests. It displays those values that are most readily linked to the available products, that are easily dramatized in advertisements, and that are most reliably responded to by consumers who see the advertisements. Advertising is, therefore, a selective reinforcement of only some behavior and values. (Pollay and Gallagher, 1990: 360)

Pollay's formulation shed much light on the nature of cultural values manifest in advertising messages. Since Pollay's framework for examining cultural values in advertising is largely based on a North American experience, Cheng (1994, 1997) and Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) applied it to Chinese advertising. They found that Pollay's 'distorted mirror' concept is equally applicable in the Chinese context because Chinese advertising also merely reflected those cultural values that could help sell products and ignored those that could not benefit advertisers.

Based on the unique social reality in China, they further suggested, however, that contemporary Chinese advertising³ is not only a 'distorted mirror' but also a 'double-distorted' one, which has a strong tendency to fit into the 'idiosyncratic' social reality in the country while reflecting advertising's commercial nature. In the meantime, they suggested that the cultural orientation in contemporary Chinese advertising is not a matter of being more 'Chinese' or more 'western'. Rather, it is truly emerging as a 'melting pot' of eastern and western cultural values. To a great extent, this 'melting pot' keeps abreast of the national trend of reviving 'good' traditional Chinese values and accepting 'good' western ones which support the ongoing 'Four Modernizations' program in the country. The openness of the 'melting pot' and the closeness of the 'double-distorted mirror' convinced the authors that advertising in China is still in a state of flux, which calls for constant monitoring and investigating. Part of the purpose of this study is, therefore, to continue and deepen such an intellectual exploration of the booming advertising industry in this fastest growing and largest potential market in the world.

Why Compare China with Hong Kong?

As indicated in the literature reviewed earlier in the article, it is of great significance to compare the cultural content of advertising in similar cultures because such studies are more effective in pinpointing the subtle differences between the influences of similar cultural contexts on advertising. So far, few studies have been done in this domain. The only study that directly involved both Chinese

and Hong Kong advertising (Tse et al., 1989) was conducted more than 10 years ago.

Since Hong Kong, with its unique strategic position in business, finance and information in the world, is a meeting point of eastern and western cultures, more in-depth studies of advertising in this part of the Cultural China have appeared important and necessary. Advertising in China grew and changed profoundly in the 1990s, so the timing also appears appropriate now to update Tse et al.'s (1989) study – with a broader scope. In the meantime, this study, with a five-year time span, between 1993 and 1998, is a continued effort to monitor the impact, if any, of the advertising law, first of its kind in Chinese history, which came into effect in 1995, on the western cultural values depicted in Chinese advertising, and the first attempt to examine the impact of the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, if any, on the advertising cultural content in both Hong Kong and China.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the considerations described, two research questions and three hypotheses were formulated for the comparison.

Research Question 1: What are the differences between the cultural values reflected in Chinese and Hong Kong television commercials.

Hong Kong was a British colony for a century and a half. Its social structure is basically modeled after the UK. As a capitalistic market that encourages consumption (Tse et al., 1989), Hong Kong boasts the largest number of regional headquarters for multinational advertising agencies in Asia. Its advertising creativity is heavily influenced by international client representatives. Therefore, the first hypothesis was formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Hong Kong's television advertising tends to use more western values than Chinese television advertising.

Leiss et al. (1990) investigated the evolution of advertising in the US and concluded that only in the early production-information stage, was the emphasis on the product itself. As advertising evolved into the later stages of product image, personalization and lifestyle, more and more emphasis was given to symbolic values. Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) found a partial shift from symbolic values back to utilitarian values in US television advertising in the 1990s. They attributed this shift to more 'mature' consumers and a more competitive market. As Hong Kong consumers are more 'mature' than Chinese consumers and the Hong Kong market is more competitive than the Chinese market, it is expected that Hong Kong advertising may carry more utilitarian values. Hence, the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Hong Kong's television advertising tends to use more utilitarian values than Chinese television advertising.

Advertising in China has grown and changed profoundly in the 1990s. It is moving from the early production-information stage to later stages of advertising development. As a result, the manifest of cultural values in Chinese television commercials may be more volatile than that in its Hong Kong counterparts. So, the third hypothesis was formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Cultural values manifest in Hong Kong television advertising are more stable than those reflected in Chinese television advertising.

Research Question 2: If there are differences in the cultural values reflected in Chinese and Hong Kong television commercials, what variables account for the differences?

Research Method

This section reports on how data were collected, coded and analyzed in this comparative study of Chinese and Hong Kong television advertising.

Sample Collection: Chinese Sample

Three television channels, Channel One of China Central Television (CCTV1), Guangdong Television (GTV) and Zhejiang Television (ZTV) were selected for the Chinese sample. While CCTV1 is broadcast nationwide, GTV and ZTV mainly serve Guangdong and Zhejiang provinces, two major consumer markets in China, respectively. The 1993 Chinese commercials were, based on data availability, a convenient sample with 28 hours of videotaped broadcast programs. The 1998 Chinese commercials were a systematic sample of 28-hours of prime-time television videotaped in June and November. The Chinese sample has a total of 56 hours of commercial broadcasting.

Sample Collection: Hong Kong Sample

Four channels (TVB Jade and Pearl, ATV Home and World) were selected for the Hong Kong sample. These four channels represent all free-on-air programming channels in Hong Kong. Twenty-eight broadcasting hours of prime-time television was videotaped in December 1993, and another 28 broadcasting hours of prime-time television was videotaped in June and November 1998. The Hong Kong sample has a total of 56 hours of commercial broadcasting, too.

Coding Frame

The unit of analysis was each complete television commercial. Any duplicate commercials for the same brand in the same language were excluded from the sample 'in order to eliminate any redundancies which may have skewed the results' (Stern and Resnik, 1991: 39). The current study adopts Cheng and Schweitzer's (1996) framework, which largely originated from Pollay's (1983) and Mueller's (1987, 1992) studies and contains the operational definitions of 32 cultural values.

Coding Procedure

The dependent variables in this analysis were the cultural values displaced. The independent variables were China and Hong Kong, which were hypothesized to indicate the cultural value differences. Product categories and the time dimension were employed as two control variables to help examine the cultural value differences.

A sample of 1387 television commercials, 727 from China (323 from 1993 and 404 from 1998) and 660 from Hong Kong (320 from 1993 and 340 from 1998), was coded by two pairs of trained coders. During the coding procedure, the coders attempted to identify the most dominant value in each commercial, which was decided mainly by the overall first impression or the key elements in the visual or audio messages. To check inter-judge reliability, 10 percent of the sample was systematically selected and respectively coded for the cultural value variables by the two pairs of coders. The inter-coder reliability for the Chinese sample was 87 percent and that for the Hong Kong sample was 88 percent. Both figures reached the minimum inter-judge reliability of 85 percent suggested by Kassirjian (1977). Thus, the coefficients of reliability obtained are satisfactory.

Findings⁴

Sample Profile

The Chinese sample contained mostly personal care/fashion, household appliance, food/drink and medicine commercials. The Hong Kong sample contained mostly household appliance, food/drink and service commercials. *F*-tests were conducted to examine the difference in product profiles of the two samples. Results indicated that the Chinese sample had a higher proportion of medicine advertising and personal care/fashion advertising. The Hong Kong sample had a higher proportion of service advertising. However, both samples had a high share of household appliance and food/drink commercials.

Change in Sample Profiles

Results of *F*-tests also indicated that the Chinese sample had an increase in food/drink as well as household appliance commercials and a decrease in medicine commercials between 1993 and 1998. In the Hong Kong sample, there was an increase in service commercials and a decrease in both household appliance commercials and personal care/fashion commercials in the same time period.

Differences in Cultural Values of Chinese and Hong Kong Television Commercials

The five values most commonly found in Chinese commercials were 'modernity' (20 percent), 'family' (9 percent), 'tradition' (7 percent), 'technology' (7 percent) and 'collectivism' (6 percent). The five values most commonly found

in Hong Kong commercials were 'quality' (15 percent), 'effectiveness' (12 percent), 'economy' (10 percent), 'enjoyment' (10 percent) and 'modernity' (5 percent). The two samples shared only one dominant value (i.e. 'modernity').

F-tests were conducted to examine the differences in the cultural values contained in Chinese and Hong Kong commercials. Among the 32 cultural values, 23 had significant *F* statistics. This finding indicates that Chinese and Hong Kong commercials differed much in the manifest of cultural values. There were 12 values that had been used significantly more often in Chinese commercials. These included 'collectivism', 'courtesy', 'family', 'modernity', 'naturalness', 'nurturance', 'patriotism', 'respect for elderly', 'technology', 'tradition', 'work' and 'youth'. There were 11 values that had been used significantly more often in Hong Kong commercials. These included 'adventure', 'beauty', 'convenience', 'economy', 'effectiveness', 'enjoyment', 'health', 'quality', 'safety', 'sex' and 'social status'.

The 12 values that occurred more frequently in Chinese television advertising represented a good mix of eastern values ('collectivism', 'family' and 'tradition') and western values ('modernity', 'technology' and 'youth'). However, values that occurred more frequently in Hong Kong television advertising represented mainly western values. In other words, Hong Kong commercials tend to use more western values than Chinese commercials. So, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Among the 12 values that occurred more frequently in Chinese commercials, none was utilitarian and all were symbolic. Among the 11 values that occurred more frequently in Hong Kong commercials, five ('adventure', 'beauty', 'enjoyment', 'sex' and 'social status') were symbolic and the other six ('convenience', 'economy', 'effectiveness', 'health', 'quality' and 'safety') were utilitarian in nature. Results indicated that Hong Kong commercials used more utilitarian values than Chinese commercials. So, Hypothesis 2 was supported, too.

Changes in Cultural Values

Of the 32 values in the Chinese sample, 10 had significant *F*-values. Of the 30 values with non-zero frequencies in the Hong Kong sample, only five had significant *F*-values.

Two of the five dominant values in Chinese commercials had significant *F*-values. The manifest of dominant values 'family' and 'technology' had been doubled in 1998 while the manifest of dominant values 'modernity', 'tradition' and 'collectivism' remained unchanged. On the other hand, none of the dominant values in Hong Kong commercials showed any significant change between 1993 and 1998. It is evident that the pattern of cultural values was more volatile in Chinese advertising than in Hong Kong advertising in the 1990s. This finding supports Hypothesis 3.

Cultural Values and Product Categories

F-tests were conducted to examine whether the manifest of cultural values would have anything to do with the types of products and services advertised. Results indicated that product categories had great influence on the values

manifest in advertising in both samples. In the Chinese sample, 14 of the 32 values, including all five dominant ones, had significant F -values. This finding suggests that a specific product category tended to use specific appeals. The 'modernity' value occurred frequently in service and automobile advertising. The 'family' value occurred frequently in household appliance advertising. The 'technology' value appeared mostly in commercials for industrial products. Both 'tradition' and 'collectivism' values appeared mostly in food and drink commercials.

In the Hong Kong sample, 15 of the 30 non-zero values had significant F -values. All five dominant cultural values had significant F -values except 'quality'. This result indicates that commercials for all types of products and services used the 'quality' value to a similar extent. The 'economy' and the 'modernity' values occurred most frequently in commercials for cars/motorcycles and for services. The 'effectiveness' value was found predominated in medicine advertising. The 'enjoyment' value occurred most often in food/drink commercials and in service commercials.

Product Categories and Time Dimension

As product category and year have influence on the manifest of cultural values, it is of interest to investigate which variable has greater impact. Two-way ANOVA F -tests were conducted to determine the individual as well as the combined effects of product category and year on the manifest of dominant cultural values in Chinese and Hong Kong television advertising. Partial F -values were compiled for the interaction of product category and year, the main effect of product category alone, the main effect of year alone, and the combined effect. The combined effect refers to an additive effect of the two main effects and the interaction effect.

Of the five dominant values ('modernity', 'family', 'tradition', 'technology' and 'collectivism') in Chinese commercials, 'modernity' and 'technology' showed significant interaction F -statistics, which indicates that there were changes in the use of these two values among specific product categories. A close examination of the data found that car/motorcycle commercials used the 'modernity' value more often in 1998 while personal care/fashion commercials used it less often in 1998. Household appliance commercials and personal care/fashion commercials, which seldom used the 'technology' value in 1993, heavily adopted it in 1998. Also, more industrial goods commercials used the 'technology' value in 1998 than in 1993.

The other three dominant values ('family', 'tradition' and 'collectivism') in Chinese commercials were mainly affected by the product category alone. The interaction of product category and year as well as year alone had no significant effect on the manifest of values. These findings indicate that there were changes in the use of these three values among specific product categories.

All five dominant values in Chinese advertising showed significant partial F -values by product category, and only one showed significant partial F -values by year. This result indicates that product category had greater influence on the manifest of cultural values than the time variable.

Of the five dominant values ('quality', 'effectiveness', 'economy', 'enjoyment' and 'modernity') in Hong Kong advertising, only 'economy' showed significant interaction *F*-statistics, which indicates that there were changes in the use of this value among specific product categories. A detailed examination of the data showed that food/drink and personal care/fashion commercials used the 'economy' value more frequently in 1998, while service commercials used it less frequently in 1998. Of the five dominant values in Hong Kong advertising, four showed significant partial *F*-values by product category, but none showed significant partial *F*-values by year. Again, this finding indicates that the product category had greater influence on the manifest of cultural values than the time dimension.

Discussion

Chinese and Hong Kong commercials shared only one dominant value – 'modernity' – which was also one of the two dominant values shared by Chinese and US television advertising (Cheng and Schweitzer, 1996). This similarity reiterates the argument that 'one of advertising's primal messages is a call for change' (Rotzoll et al., 1996: 16).

Despite the fact that 99 percent of the Hong Kong population is Chinese, Hong Kong television advertising is quite different from that of its motherland in two ways. Hong Kong commercials tended to use more western values and more utilitarian values. The westernized flavor of Hong Kong advertising is probably due to its product or commercial origin. As Hong Kong is the regional headquarters of many international advertising agencies, it carries a number of global advertising campaigns for international clients such as Coke, Nike, P&G and McDonald's. As these campaigns originated from the western world, they were more likely to endorse western values.

The difference in social system may also account for the differences in Chinese and Hong Kong advertising. Hong Kong is a capitalistic society that encourages the consumption of material goods whereas China is a socialist society that encourages the well-being of the nation as a whole. So, while showing its commercial nature, Chinese advertising has to fit into the 'idiosyncratic' social reality in China (Cheng and Schweitzer, 1996). The 'enjoyment' value is an interesting example for comparison. This dominant value frequently occurred in Hong Kong's food/drink commercials and service commercials to demonstrate the sensory-satisfying experience of consumers. However, food and drink in Chinese commercials frequently sell on the 'tradition' value through the historical image of the brand.

In 1996, Cheng and Schweitzer first observed that utilitarian values regained dominance in advertising appeals when a market became even more sophisticated. The current study has, again, provided such evidence. It is found that the appeals of Hong Kong advertising tended to go back to the basics in the 1990s and its emphasis tended to focus again on the tangible attributes about products. It is predicted, therefore, that as the Chinese consumer market becomes more sophisticated, Chinese advertising may also shift to the direction of using more utilitarian values. Future studies on the development of

advertising and its use of utilitarian and symbolic values could give further insight into this prediction.

This study also attempted to compare the influences of product categories and time span on the cultural values reflected in advertising messages. Unlike most previous studies in which at most merely the correlation between cultural values and product categories was investigated, this study also took the time dimension into consideration. As reported in the findings of this article, product categories were far more decisive than a five-year time span in terms of cultural values portrayed in advertising. While this finding supports previous studies in realizing the importance of product categories to cultural values depicted in advertising (Chan, 1999; Cheng and Schweitzer, 1996; Katz and Lee, 1992), it adds that the portrayal of cultural values in specific product categories may remain consistent over time. This new finding implies that even when a product has entered into different stages in its life cycle, the advertising appeals for the product may not change substantially. The change in cultural values over time may largely be determined by the change in products and services prominent in the market.

Although product categories help determine the cultural values portrayed in advertising, this study found that the correlation between product categories and cultural values is society based. For example, food/drink, the major product category advertised in both China and Hong Kong, had different value patterns. While Chinese food/drink commercials mainly employed 'tradition', 'collectivism' and 'family' values, Hong Kong food/drink commercials mainly displayed 'enjoyment', 'quality' and 'health' values.

The importance of product categories to the cultural values depicted in advertising may also, to a large extent, account for the more dynamic pattern of the cultural values portrayed in Chinese television commercials than that in Hong Kong television commercials in the 1990s. Since product categories are an important determinant in the cultural values used in advertising messages, the more significant changes in product categories advertised in Chinese commercials – as also found out in this study – naturally led to more noticeable changes in the cultural values carried in Chinese commercials.

It is found in this study that the frequency of western value 'technology' was significantly increased in the 1990s while another typical western value, 'modernity', maintained a similar frequency in Chinese commercials from 1993 to 1998. This finding may indicate that Chinese advertising law, which took effect in early 1995 (*China Advertising Yearbook*, 1996), did not affect much the western cultural values portrayed in Chinese television commercials. This finding also supports a similar result that Cheng (1997) reported in a study on Chinese television commercials of 1995. As the major targets of the advertising law are pufferies and deceptive advertisements, those 'good' western cultural values, which are regarded as both politically and culturally acceptable in the country, were even encouraged rather than checked after the law had been enforced.

The stable pattern of the cultural values reflected in Hong Kong television commercials between 1993 and 1998 suggests that the former British colony's handover to China in 1997 may not have directly affected the cultural content

portrayed in Hong Kong television advertising in 1998, either. This finding may also reflect, from one perspective, the functioning of the 'one country, two systems' policy that has supposedly been pursued in Hong Kong since 1997.

In sum, this study has found that Chinese and Hong Kong television advertising showed more differences than similarities. Hong Kong resembles the western world in the cultural values depicted in television advertising. It may be due to the sophisticated level of the consumers that utilitarian values are being emphasized in Hong Kong advertising again. The Chinese market is still in the process of a rapid development in the products and services available. Since product categories can exert decisive impact on the cultural values used in advertising, we may expect that the cultural values portrayed in Chinese advertising will continue to change with the introduction of more new products and services. Further studies are needed in the future to compare consumers' responses to television commercials using different value appeals. Such studies may further our understanding of what appeals are most appropriate and most effective for a product category or for a brand.

Notes

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An earlier version of this article was presented at the American Academy of Advertising's annual conference held in Newport, Rhode Island, USA, April 2000.

1. The authors contributed equally to this article.
2. In this article, 'China' refers to its mainland.
3. By 'contemporary Chinese advertising', we refer to the advertising in China since 1979 when advertising came back to life soon after the country reopened its door to the rest of the world.
4. To reduce the manuscript length, the eight tables in the original paper, including the operational definitions of the 32 cultural values coded in this study, were not included in this article. Should you have particular interest in those details, please feel free to contact us – the authors. We will be very happy to provide the detailed information to you.

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