From us to me: Cultural value changes from collectivism to individualism in Chinese commercials

by

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Abstract

China's society has been changing since 1979, when the open-door policy was implemented. Many great events in politics, economy and culture have brought lots of diversities to the Chinese younger generation who were born after 1979. These diversities have led to a cultural value change from collectivism to individualism among this generation (Cao, 2009; Sun & Wang, 2010; Moore, 2005). Cultivation analysis theory may be appropriate to explain this phenomenon as the open-door policy allowed American and European TV programs and other media products come into China. Effective advertising should cater to its audience in order to effectively persuade them to purchase its merchandise or service (Zhang & Harwood, 2004; Chang, 2006). If the cultural value of the Chinese younger generation has changed, it may be reflected in the commercial content of successful advertisers.

This research conducted a content analysis of Chinese commercials, comparing the commercial contents in recent years to approximately ten years ago. It examined if the individualistic factors were more frequently showed in the commercials in recent years than approximately ten years ago, with the consideration to merchandise type and production place. Research results exhibited an increase of individualism revealing in Chinese commercials from approximately 2006 to 2016.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Effective advertising should cater to its audience in order to effectively persuade them to purchase its merchandise or service. According to Zhang and Harwood (2004), advertisers should appeal to customers' cultural values reflected by their common interests, wants, goals, and problems.

Chinese cultural value is regarded as collectivism (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis & Hui, 1990; Triandis, 2001; Lin, 2001; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Cao, 2009), however, several scholars pointed out that individualism, which commonly exists in Western countries, has already manifested in China, especially among the Chinese younger generation due to the social changes after 1979 (Cao, 2009; Cheng &Schweitzer, 1996; Sun &Wang, 2010; Zhang & Shavitt, 2003).

How does the cultural value of the Chinese younger generation changed after 1979? As cultural changes happened after a turning point that the open-door policy allowed American and European TV programs and other media products come into China, the Chinese younger generation, who were born after 1979, might have been cultivated by the values delivered by these media products. Then cultivation theory might be appropriate to explain this phenomenon.

If the cultural value has changed, what kind of change has happened among Chinese commercials? Has the cultural value of commercial content already changed?

The purpose of this study was to examine if individualistic factors were more frequently used in the commercials in recent years than approximately ten years ago with the consideration to merchandise type and production place.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Individualism VS Collectivism

A fundamental framework in cross-cultural research is individualism and collectivism, although various ways could be used to interpret cultures such as high-low context, value orientations, power distance and uncertainty avoidance (Neuliep, 2012).

"In individualistic cultures, people tend to view themselves as independent and autonomous, and they usually give personal goals priority over collective goals. In contrast, in collectivistic cultures, one person's self is defined as an aspect of a collective group, and group objectives are generally considered to be of more significance than individual ones" (Li, Kalyanaraman &Du, 2011, p. 578). Hofstede (1980) explained that in individualism people made decisions on the basis of their own preferences, whereas people in collectivistic cultures made decisions based on the group that they belonged to, "a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 225).

According to Oyserman et al. (2002), individualism encouraged a worldview that focuses on personal goals, personal uniqueness, and personal control. "Feeling good about oneself, personal success, and having many unique or distinctive personal attitudes and opinions are valued" (Oyserman et al., 2002, p.5). In individualistic society, the ties between individuals are loose (Hofstede, 1991), "personal behavior is regulated largely by individual likes and dislikes and cost-benefit analyses" (Triandis & Hui, 1990). "Personal fate, personal achievement, and independence are emphasized in individualistic culture" (Triandis & Hui, 1990, p.1007). Western countries are considered to be with individualistic cultures, while Eastern societies are viewed with collectivistic ones (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis & Hui, 1990; Triandis, 2001; Lin, 2001; Oyserman et al., 2002; Cao, 2009). The United States is often regarded as a "typical

individualistic" country (Tsai &Lee, 2006, p. 93). In Hofstede's (1980) research, the United

States, Australia, and Great Britain ranked the highest in individualism. American people are

more "self-oriented (e.g., they value individuality and uniqueness)" (Li, Kalyanaraman &Du,

2011, p. 576). Lin (2001) also identified self-reliance as an outcome of American individualism,

in addition to freedom and equality.

On the contrary, China is generally taken as a society with strong collectivism (Hofstede,

1980; Triandis & Hui, 1990; Triandis, 2001; Lin, 2001; Oyserman et al., 2002; Cao, 2009).

According to Hofstede (1980), people in a highly collectivistic society, like in China, exhibited

strong emotional attachment and loyalty to collective groups, such as their families and social

organizations. "The core element of collectivism is the assumption that group bind and mutually

obligate individuals"(Oyserman et al., 2002, p.5). Group membership is a centralized identity

and personal traits reflected group goals are emphasized (Oyserman et al., 2002). Collectivistic

society generally requires social harmony, achieving on the basis of personal conformity to the

social environment during which personal interests are usually sacrificed for the sake of group

benefits (Cheong, Kim, & Zheng, 2010). And the person who makes this sacrifice feels

honorable about that. "This norm suggests inverse relationships between family, community, and

popular appeals and the degree of individualism in a given society" (Cheong, Kim, & Zheng,

2010, p.6).

Cultural Value Changes

Cultural value tends to remain stable over time (Hofstede, 2001), but this shouldn't be

taken as it cannot change under any circumstance (Sun &Wang, 2010). Hofstede (2001) said,

"Changes come from the outside, in the form of forces of nature or forces of human beings: trade,

conquest, economical or political dominance, and technological breakthroughs" (p. 34). Even

using language could also change cultures. "Cultural norms and values do not remain static; they are constantly being constructed and negotiated through interactional processes" (Hua, 2010, p. 200).

In China, the open-door policy of 1979 allowed international business; the Chinese government established four special economic zones (SEZs) to attract direct foreign investment (Huan, 1986). Restoration of legitimate seat in the World Bank in 1980, joining the World Trade Organization in 2001, the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 and many other great events in politics, economy and culture gave China another push to the outside world, and opened the country even more widely to the whole world. More and more western companies established branches in China and cooperated with Chinese domestic companies. They did not only bring in new products, but also brought multiple choices. Cao (2009) argued that people had more choices than before, which tended to promote individualism.

In Hofstede's (1980) original framework, individualism and collectivism were viewed conceptually as two opposites that constitute a single continuum. However, many cross-cultural scholars (Oyserman et al., 2002; Oyserman & Lee, 2007; Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1996) have suggested, "individualism and collectivism are better understood as domain-specific, orthogonal constructs, instead of a single continuum" (Li, Kalyanaraman &Du, 2011, p. 578). Individualism and collectivism coexist within people's mind with varying levels of the two dimensions among persons (Li, Kalyanaraman &Du, 2011). Therefore, it is possible that a particular individual is high in individualism and low in collectivism or vice versa (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Graetz, 1999).

The generation that grew up after 1979 beyond all doubts embrace more choices than older generations. Sun and Wang (2010) reported that the younger Chinese generation, who in

this case were Chinese people from 14 to 34 years old, "have already shifted from traditional values (collectivism and ideology orientation) to modern values (individualism and secular orientation)" (p. 78). They also pointed out the reason was "largely due to their own life experiences in the recent social transformation process" (p. 78). Moore (2005) described that younger people in China view themselves as experiencing more freedom – which is highly associated with individualism – than their parents.

Moore defined a Chinese generation as the *ku* generation, who are the children of the Cultural Revolution generation. The word "*ku*" is a slang term derived from English word "cool". It highlights that Chinese young people identify themselves as distinct from their forebears. "Largely because of globalization, their viewpoints and attitudes are profoundly different from those of their parents. A central feature of these attitudes is a kind of individualism that stands emphatically opposed to the collectivist spirit promoted during the Cultural Revolution, an individualism that is influenced by Western pop culture" (Moore, 2005, p. 357).

A study about cultural value transformation through decades among Chinese educated youth conducted by Liu in 2008 showed that, they "have become individualized so clearly and prominently that no other previous generations would ever have imagined" (p.137). Liu (2008) expressed that Chinese people concentrated more on individual affairs rather than collective since the mid 1990s, and the trend was even more manifest by the turn of the century. "A new individual-centered society has replaced the former collective-centered society, and individualism with a few Chinese characteristics, has become the mainstream, though not yet official ideology" (Liu, 2008, p.56).

Cultural value change of the Chinese younger generation mainly happened after the open-door policy as mentioned above. Wang and Chang (1996) reported that by 1990, China was

importing movies, drama series, children's programs, sports, and documentaries, which comprised 30% of total programming. "Along with the economic reform, the volume and diversity of imported television programs have increased. Among the imported television programs, nearly three fourths are from capitalist countries (e.g., the U.S.)" (Zhang & Harwood, 2002, p. 257). Therefore, cultivation analysis, designed to assess the contributions of television viewing to people's conceptions of social reality (Morgan & Signorielli, 1990), may be appropriate to explain this cultural value change phenomenon.

Cultivation Analysis

The Cultural Indicators project was launched in 1967-1968 with a study for the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence to examine violence in the society, including violence on television (Morgan &Signorielli, 1990). Cultivation analysis was the third prong of the Cultural Indicators approach, following the institutional process analysis and message system analysis (Gerbner, 1998). Gerbner gave the definitions of the three areas:

> Study of the composition and structure of large bodies of mass-mediated messages is the analysis of message systems. Study of the organizational forms, functions, and decision-making that compose and structure these systems is what I called institutional process analysis in mass communications. And study of the relationships between institutional processes, message systems, and the public assumptions, images, and policies that they cultivate is what we may call cultivation analysis (Gerbner, 1970, p.71).

"Cultivation analysis explores the independent contribution of television viewing to audiences' conceptions of social reality" (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010, p.339). It "states that the more television people watch, the more likely they are to hold a view of reality that is closer to television's depiction of reality" (Zaharopoulos, 1997, p.31) The heavy television viewers tend

to give the "television answers" about the reality while light viewers depend on various sources of information (Morgan &Signorielli, 1990; Gerbner, 1998).

Cultivation analysis focuses on general consequences of the impact of mass communications rather than other typical research concerns about individual messages, programs, episodes, series, or genres. Besides, cultivation analysis emphasizes pervasive influences not the immediate influence or linear "stimulus- response" model between media content and audience that conducted by other researchers (Morgan & Signorielli, 1990). Cultivation doesn't equal effect, although cultivation testing based on the program preferences and short-run exposures which might reveal the effect of mass media (Gerbner, 1998). Cultivation is not a unidirectional flow of influence from mass media to audience as "effect" means, but rather part of a continual, dynamic, stable and gradual process of interaction which could lead to stable and widely shared conceptions, images and assumptions of the society (Morgan & Signorielli, 1990; Gerbner, 1998). "It looks at those messages as an environment within which people live, define themselves and others, and develop and maintain their beliefs and assumptions about social reality" (Morgan & Signorielli, 1990, p.18).

This theoretical framework is useful for any dominant form of communication; however, most cultivation analysis focused on television because of its "uniquely repetitive and pervasive message characteristics and its dominance among other media in the United States" (Morgan & Signorielli, 1990, p.16).

According to Gerbner (1998), "Television is a centralized system of story-telling. Its drama, commercials, news, and other programs bring a relatively coherent system of images and messages into every home"(p.177). Television is just one device that serves to explain what the world is; yet what makes television unique is its ability to standardize, streamline, amplify, and

share common cultural norms with virtually all members of society. In other words, television has the ability to socially construct the version of reality as it transcends historic barriers of literacy and mobility, which met by other media (Morgan &Signorielli, 1990; Gerbner, 1998).

The similarity of television and religion in terms of social functions lies in the continual repetition of patterns such as myths, ideologies, "facts", relationships, etc. which help the publics to define the world and legitimize the social order (Gerbner, 1998). "Exposure to the total pattern rather than only to specific genres or programs is what accounts for the historically new and distinct consequences of living with television: the cultivation of shared conceptions of reality among otherwise diverse publics" (Gerbner, 1998).

It could be supposed that the contents on TV should be greatly varied as TV provides a total pattern about the world. These contents should cover almost everything about our life. However, Gerbner (1998) claimed that most TV programs are designed for large and heterogeneous audiences in a relatively less selective model for the commercial benefit. The media contents have always been controlled or at least influenced by industries as most of them never stop even one second trying to persuade as many heterogeneous audience as possible to purchase their merchandise and service (Gerbner, 1998). What's more, the most popular program materials, which have been proven to make contributions to profit, will be represented continually and consistently (Gerbner, 1998). Thus the frequent recurring features provided by television cut across all types of programming and the increasing number of TV channels can't help (Gerbner, 1998). "What is most likely to cultivate stable and common conceptions of reality is, therefore, the overall pattern of programming to which total communities are regularly exposed over long periods of time" (Gerbner, 1998, p.179).

Cultivation analysis covers the influence of television towards the conceptions of violence, gender roles, race, occupations and other aspects of life (Morgan &Shanahan, 2010). Besides that, researchers conduct surveys to examine if cultivation analysis also impacts cross-cultural situations. Pingree and Hawkins (1981) analyzed questionnaires and diary data of Australian students; Weimann (1984) conducted a research of 461 high school and college students in Israel; Wober (1978) finished another research in England.

A cross- cultural comparative cultivation, which analyzed the gender role stereotypes among adolescents in the United States, Argentina, South Korea, and China was conducted by Morgan and colleagues from 1987. In the research of China, it mainly examined the attitude toward different countries and the role of television in the context of everyday Chinese family life (Morgan, 1990). The researcher concluded that adolescents in the four countries showed tremendous differences in their views about sex roles. However, in general heavy viewers of television tended to support traditional stereotype of gender roles (Morgan, 1990). The result strongly confirmed the cultivation theory could apply to China that Chinese people could be cultivated by television.

Jun Yang (2012) conducted a cultivation research about the cultural value impact of a popular Chinese TV drama *Naked Marriage Age* to Chinese young people in 2012. Based on items of the questionnaire of *The Cultural Value of Chinese People*, he interviewed 20 young people and identified the values that repeated in the drama again and again. According to these values, he developed a questionnaire and sent it to respondents. To make sure his respondents were in different ages and education backgrounds, he sent the questionnaire to young people who were in middle school, high school and college. Finally, he concluded that how long the respondents watched *Naked Marriage Age* and how much they involved had a significant

difference to the cultivation impact respectively. The longer they watched this drama the more they agreed with the values manifested in the drama, and the more significant the impact was.

Yang's research could lead to that TV dramas can cultivate the Chinese younger generation, but as *Naked Marriage Age* is a Chinese drama, even though some values there are promoting Western culture. It encourages young people to get married without caring too much about economic foundation and emphasizes enjoying cakes and ale. Nevertheless, Chinese culture is still the main topic of this drama, like sacrifice for the family, be responsible for work and be loyal to friends. Therefore, the cultivation may only happen when the TV contents contain lots of cultural values that are consistent with the one the audiences keep.

However, the cultivation research conducted by Haobo Zhou (2011) pointed out that the TV drama that contains cultural values different from Chinese collectivistic culture could also cultivate Chinese young people. According to his research, as early as 1992 when *Growing Pains* was played in China, its American style of education caused a big stir in China due to the huge difference compared with Chinese traditional education (Zhou, 2011). Besides, *Friends*, *Prison Break*, *The Big Bang Theory* and other popular American dramas also had their impact to Chinese people (Zhou, 2011). Zhou approached a focus group to analyze how Chinese college students understood the values contained by *Gossip Girls*. His conclusion expressed that the attitude of Chinese college students toward *Gossip Girls* was acceptation as a whole, or they accepted it under negotiation with their own value background, and at the meantime, the audiences took the country and their own life as reference (Zhou, 2011). Zhou also mentioned, most of the respondents had emotion involvement when they decoded this American drama, and there was a good chance that they were impacted by the drama (Zhou, 2011). In other words, the

media products that contain cultural values different from Chinese culture can also cultivate the Chinese younger generation gradually and unconsciously.

Pan and Wei (1997) examined the relationship between cultural value change in China and media exposure and pointed out that exposure to imported films and television programs was related to lower level of collectivism and higher level of individualism.

Similar conclusion was draw by Zhang and Harwood in 2002. Their study "revealed a significant negative association between total viewing of imported television and interpersonal harmony values (collectivism)" (Zhang & Harwood, 2002). They also expressed that this conclusion may be a reflection of the cultural value change in China has undergone since 1980s (Zhang & Harwood, 2002).

Cultural Value Changes in Chinese Advertising

Richard and Curran (2002) defined advertising as "a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, now or in the future"(p. 74). Effective advertising should cater to its audience in order to effectively persuade them to purchase its merchandise or service. According to Zhang and Harwood (2004), advertisers have to appeal to customers' cultural values reflected by their common interests, wants, goals, and problems. Chang (2006) also pointed out that advertising messages were more effective if they contained the cultural value that is consistent with the audiences'. Meyers (2010) furthered, "The way that a consumer views an ad is therefore affected by elements within the ad and how these elements are seen and used. In other words, a cultural lens is used to view the different elements in order to find significance" (pp.6-7).

Since audiences interpret ads within their own cultural contexts, advertisements must be guided by cultural values to serve the goal of promotion. If the cultural value of the Chinese younger generation has changed, what kind of changes can be found in the commercial content of successful advertisers?

While Chinese culture is regarded as collectivism, the content of Chinese commercials may be consistent with collectivistic values. However, China has changed drastically since the open-door policy as discussed before. It has led to a gradual change in cultural values, and the change in advertising has already been recognized in Chinese ads (Hsu &Barker, 2013). Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) and Cheng (1997) figured out that not only Eastern but also Western cultural values were portrayed in Chinese television advertisements frequently. "Imported products were correlated with greater levels of individualism and modernity than domestic products" (Hsu &Barker, 2013, p. 700). Similarly, Zhang and Harwood (2004) also found that more modern values (emphasized on personal enjoyment and individual success) were applied in imported than domestic product commercials, while more Chinese traditional values (emphasized on family, responsibility and patriotism) were used in domestic product commercials.

Hsu and Barker (2013) proposed the hypothesis that Chinese commercials reflected a cultural value change caused by the open-door policy implemented in 1979. They conducted a content analysis of 566 television ads, including ads in China and in the United States, and rated the degree of individualism and collectivism, as well as the prominence of modern and traditional themes. As predicted, individualism scored higher than collectivism in ads whose target was the Chinese younger generation. Also, individualism in ads targeting the younger

generation rated higher than the ones targeting the older demographic and no significant differences in the other three dimensions.

"The consensus among advertising and marketing practitioners as well as scholars is that this younger crowd represents a sharp contrast with older generations in many ways, economically and, importantly, culturally"(Zhang, 2010, p. 69). In a study conducted by Shao, Raymond, and Taylor (1999), 61 managing directors of advertising agencies in Taipei, the largest city of Taiwan, were personally interviewed. These directors ranked appeals based on traditional Chinese values (collectivism, respect for the elderly, etc.) and Western cultural values (individualism, youth/modernity, etc.) and the extent to which each appeal impacted their advertising campaigns. They agreed that Western cultural appeals were more used in their advertising campaign in Taiwan. Besides, most directors were tending to use Western cultural values to promote.

Western media products fulfilled with individualism flowed into China since 1979 when China began to apply the open-door policy, and the cultural value of the Chinese younger generation has changed gradually from collectivism to individualism. As the cultivation analysis is designed to understand and explain gradual, long-term change and transformation in the way generations are socialized, it might be useful to explain this phenomenon. Since advertising should be consistent with the cultural values of its targeting market, the cultural value change may be reflected in the commercial contents.

This study conducted a content analysis of Chinese commercials, comparing the commercial contents in recent years to approximately ten years ago. It examined if individualistic factors were more frequently shown in the commercials in recent years than

approximately ten years ago. As commercial contents may differ between the individual usage and collective usage merchandise, and between goods that are domestic and imported from the United States or Europe, the comparison of the cultural value within these two groups respectively was conducted as well. Collective usage merchandise referred to the goods that a customer would consider if the goods could also be beneficial to his or her family or friend. In contrast, individual usage merchandise was the one that customer only took his or her own satisfaction into consideration when made the purchasing decision.

Thus, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

H1: There are more collectivistic factors in Chinese commercials for collective usage merchandise than for individual usage merchandise regardless of time period.

H2: There are more individualistic factors in Chinese commercials for individual usage merchandise than for collective usage merchandise regardless of time period.

H3: There are more individualistic factors in Chinese commercials for individual usage merchandise in recent years than ten years ago.

H4: There are more individualistic factors in Chinese commercials for collective usage merchandise in recent years than ten years ago.

H5: There are more individualistic factors in Chinese commercials for imported merchandise than domestic merchandise ten years ago.

RQ1: Is there a difference among Chinese commercials for imported and domestic merchandise about individualistic factors in recent years compared to ten years ago.

Chapter 3 - Method

This study employed a content analysis as the research methodology. It analyzed two major groups of Chinese commercials both in recent years and approximately ten years ago. The products selected were divided into collective usage merchandise and individual usage merchandise. Each group had two different kinds of goods. Each goods category had two subdivisions of imported and domestic merchandise and each subdivision chose one brand. Each brand randomly chose 8 commercials each in recent years and ten year ago. In this way, this study had two different merchandise categories, one collective usage, one individual usage, and one imported and one domestic brand in each category. A total of 128 commercials were analyzed in the study. For a breakdown on how and why they were selected, see Figure 1.

Figure 1. Sampling procedure
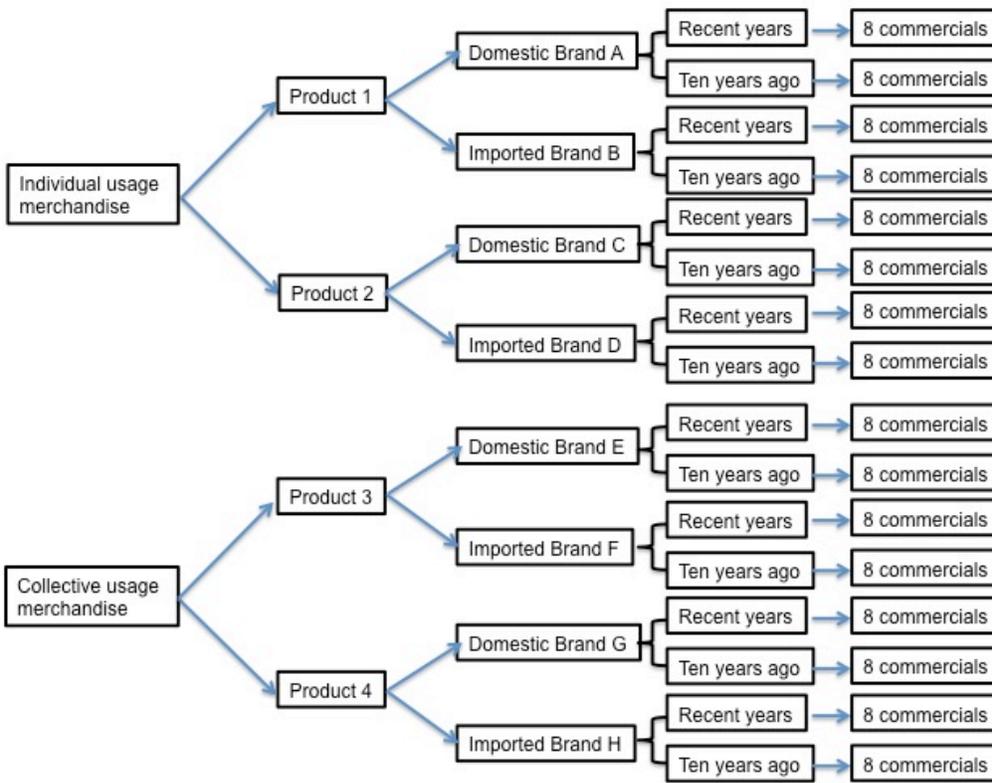
The targeting market of each selected brand was the younger generation in China who were born after 1979, but before 2000. In other words, the products selected were those targeted to a market with an age range of 17 to 36.

The FCB chart (Figure 2) classified products according to rational/emotional and high/low involvement when customers make purchasing decisions (Rossiter, Percy, & Donovan, 1991). Based on these criteria, 18 different products were selected for second round choices. Some of them were listed in this FCB chart, some were not, but were chosen in accordance with the criteria of FCB chart. 9 of the 18 products were individual usage merchandises; the other 9 were collective usage merchandises according to the researcher's opinion.

Figure 2. FCB chart
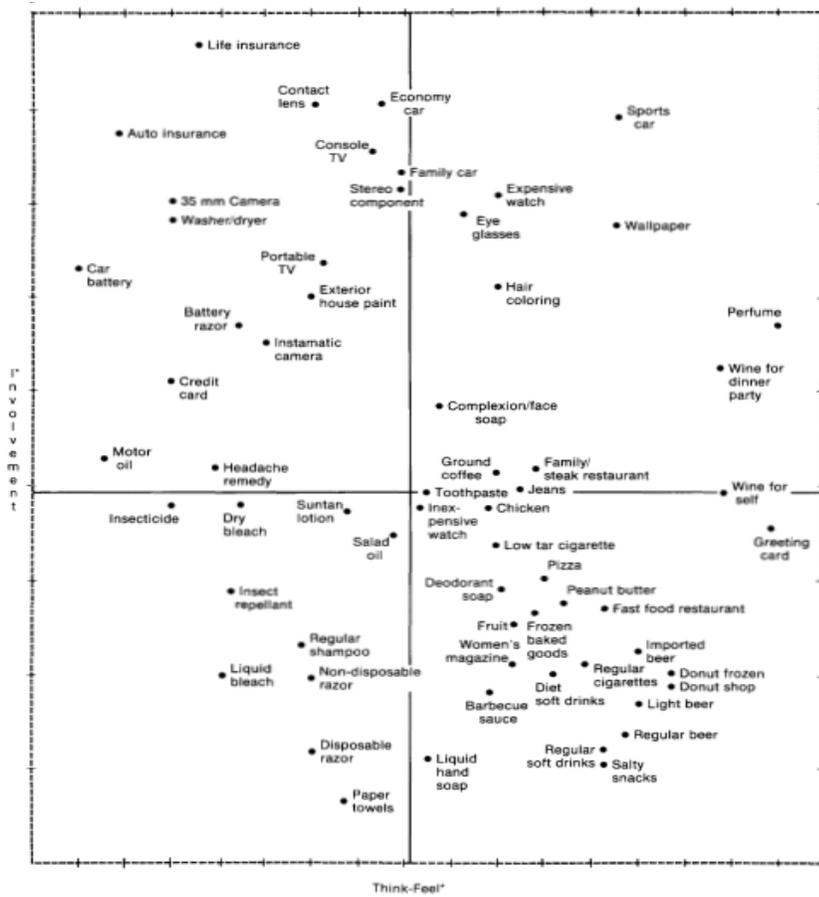
To eliminate the bias of researcher, 20 Chinese young people who were in the research age range were interviewed to classify these 18 products into two groups: individual usage and collective usage. During the interviews, these participants were not told the researcher's merchandise classification. However, the definition of individualism and collectivism, difference between individual and collective usage merchandise were explained. Their responses showed 78.33% and 73.33% agreement toward the classification of the researcher toward individual usage and collective usage merchandise.

According to FCB chart and the interview, health and life insurance, kitchen tools, non-disposable razors and laptops were selected as the four product categories. However, due to a lack of commercials for non-disposable razors, commercials for sneakers were used instead before all the coding work began.

This research also paid attention to product brand. All selected brands were national brands, instead of local brands, whose commercials were shown across the whole country.

All the commercials were collected online. Ten years ago the Internet in China had already begun to develop and almost all the commercials from 2006 to 2016 could be found. The commercials found online were all originally aired on television, which has been popular in China since the 1990s.

Youku.com (Chinese version of Youtube.com), Iqiyi.com, Vqq.com, Tudou.com, Vku6.com and 56.com are the largest video websites in China. They were used as the platform to collect commercials. Additionally, the official websites of the selected brands was another resource for collecting commercials. Some of the official websites had links to the commercials they aired on television each year; some of them listed the names, key words and screenshots of

the commercials they aired and the commercials also could be found online accordingly. Duplicated commercials found from different sources were treated as one commercial.

The commercials selected each ran less than one minute in length. Some Chinese commercials had a complete version online, which were 3 to 5 minutes long. These longer videos were often only seen by very narrow and specific targets who visited a sponsored website. These commercials were excluded. However, versions of the same commercial that were cut to one-minute or less in length and aired nationally were included in the study.

After collecting all of the qualified commercials, the 8 samples for each brand were randomly selected from these commercials. This study numbered all the commercials for each brand in each time period, and used random.org to randomly select 8 commercials from each group. For example, there were 19 commercials for laptops in 2016, the researcher used "random integer generator" on random.org to randomly select 8 out of 23, and the website gave the random numbers 11, 19, 17, 6, 2, 14, 16, 4. The commercials marked by these numbers were selected as the samples for coding.

The two coders both had proficiency in both Mandarin and English. They were instructed on how to use the codebook before coding work began. After coding independently, they negotiated with each other about the disagreement of some items to reach a consensus.

Intercoder reliability was analyzed first using Cronbach's Alpha after coding. According to the results, there was 100% agreement on merchandise category, the merchandise was imported or domestic, and length of the commercial. Agreement toward the overall spirit of the commercial (individualism or collectivism) was .921. Additionally, agreement of percentage of individualism revealed in the commercial was .951, which was noteworthy as the option was a ten-point scale from 10%, 20% and so on to 100%.

For other variables that had more than two options, the agreement between two coders was also acceptable. They were .993 for how many main actors were in the commercial, .857 for how long the key spot was, .944 for the site that the commercial happened, .848 for the role of the main actor, .875 for the relationship between the main actor and other actors, and .972 for actors' action before merchandise usage.

All of the above comparisons revealed a high intercoder reliability of the data set, thus increasing the reliability of the following analysis.

Before beginning the analysis, the data set was cleaned using SPSS 19.0. Health, life insurance and kitchen tools were combined into collective usage merchandise according to the interviewees' feedback that they would consider if these goods could also benefit people they care, while laptop and sneaker were classified as individual usage merchandise because customers only consider their own satisfaction when make the purchasing decisions.

In fact there were more items in codebook than the ones were chosen to compare intercoder reliability and to test hypotheses. However, as variables "actors' action after merchandise usage", "actors' line" and "overall spirit of the commercial" were each composed of ten or twelve attributes that revealed as individualism and collectivism, they concluded attributes like "if the main actor felt welcomed", "enjoyed himself or herself", "if the main actor worked hard for family", "sacrificed for other people" and other latent attributes and these variables became concrete variables that can be used for testing hypotheses. Therefore, for intercoder reliability and data analysis, not all the columns coded were used, instead this study only focused on the variables that summarized these attributes and the manifest factors. These latent variables and attributes could be used in future researches.

Chapter 4 - Results

Prior to hypotheses testing, the relationship between percentage of individualism used in commercials and two time periods was analyzed by *t*-test. Results revealed that the mean percentage of individualism used in 2016 was 72.97% – a marked increase over the usage of individualism more than ten years ago, which was 56.41%, *t* (127)= 2.330, p< .05. Therefore, there was a significant increase of individualistic factors in Chinese commercials now compared to ten years ago in terms of all the merchandise categories in this study (see Table 1).

Table 1. The relationship between percentage of individualism and two time periods

Variable	Then (*N*=64)		Now (*N*=64)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	*t*-Value	*p*
Per of IND*	56.41	42.997	72.97	37.233	-2.330	.021

Note. *Per of IND = Percentage of individualism

Analysis for the hypothesis below utilized a coding scheme in which commercials were assigned a percentage of what portion of the content included individualistic vs. collectivistic factors. However, to further validate the findings below, a secondary test mechanism was also utilized.

According to the percentage of individualism and collectivism in a single commercial, the commercials were classified into two groups: commercials with overall spirit of individualism and commercials with collectivism. For commercials whose percentage of individualism less than 50% were collectivistic commercials and higher than 50% were individualistic commercials. For the commercials whose score is 50% individualism and 50% collectivism, the researcher made the classification according to the value that expressed by the

commercial content. Thus, one commercial's overall spirit is individualism meant this commercial used more individualistic factors than collectivistic factors, and vice versa.

A Chi-square test was used to test the amount difference that if more collective usage commercials used more collectivistic factors and if more individual usage merchandise commercials promoting more individualism. According to the results, there were more commercials using collectivistic factors than individualistic factors (44 versus 22) among collective usage merchandise regardless of time period (N=128, $\chi^2 = 49.001, p< .001$) (see Table 2). 60 commercials used more individualistic factors and only 4 commercials employed more collectivistic factors in individual usage merchandise. There was a significant difference between individualistic and collectivistic factors in individual usage merchandise commercials regardless of time period (N=128, $\chi^2 = 49.001, p< .001$).

Table 2. Overall spirit in individual and collective usage category

			Product category		Total
			IND Usage***	COL Usage****	
Overall	IND*	Count	60	22	82
		Expected Count	41.0	41.0	82.0
		% within Overall	73.2%	26.8%	100.0%
	COL**	Count	4	42	46
		Expected Count	23.0	23.0	46.0
		% within Overall	8.7%	91.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	64	64	128
Chi-Square test		DF	Value	p	
Pearson Chi-Square		1	49.001[a]	.000	

Note.*IND=Individualism; **COL=Collectivism; IND Usage***= Individual usage merchandise;

COL Usage****= Collective usage merchandise

H1: There are more collectivistic factors in Chinese commercials for collective usage merchandise than for individual usage merchandise regardless of time period.

A *t*-test was employed to test H1. Consistent with H1, the mean percentage of collectivism in individual usage merchandise was slightly above 10% (10.16%), but in collective usage merchandise it was 60.47%, the difference was significant, *N*=128, *t* (127)= 8.807, *p*< .05 (see Table 3). Therefore, H1 was supported.

Table 3. The relationship of percentage of collectivism between individual usage and collective usage merchandise regardless of time period

Variable	Individual Usage (*N*=64)		Collective Usage (*N*=64)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	*t*-Value	*p*
Per of COL*	10.16	21.858	60.47	40.136	-8.807	.000

Note. *Per of COL = Percentage of collectivism

H2: There are more individualistic factors in Chinese commercials for individual usage merchandise than for collective usage merchandise regardless of time period.

For H2, the result of a *t*-test showed that the mean percentage of individualism in individual usage merchandise was as high as 89.84%, but in collective usage merchandise it was only 39.53%. The difference was significant, *N*=128, *t* (127)= 8.807, *p*< .05 (see Table 4). Thus, H2 was also supported.

Table 4. The relationship of percentage of individualism between individual usage and collective usage merchandise regardless of time period

Variable	Individual Usage (*N*=64)		Collective Usage (*N*=64)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	*t*-Value	*p*
Per of IND*	89.84	21.858	39.53	40.136	8.807	.000

Note. *Per of IND = Percentage of individualism

H3: There are more individualistic factors in Chinese commercials for individual usage merchandise in recent years than ten years ago.

For H3, as high as 96.88% of content was individualism in individual usage merchandise commercials recently, comparing to 82.81% ten years ago. So there was a significant increase of individualistic factors in individual usage merchandise commercials between 2006 and 2016, *N*=64, *t* (63)= 2.699, *p*= .009, (see Table 5). H3 was supported.

Table 5. The relationship of individualistic factors used in individual usage merchandise between now and then

Variable	Then (*N*=32)		Now (*N*=32)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	*t*-Value	*p*
Per of IND*	82.81	28.651	96.88	6.927	-2.699	.009

Note. *Per of IND = Percentage of individualism

H4: There are more individualistic factors in Chinese commercials for collective usage merchandise in recent years than ten years ago.

For H4, the difference for the mean percentage of individualistic factors in Chinese commercials for collective usage merchandise between recent years and ten years ago was 30.00% versus 49.06%, *N*=64, *t* (63)= 1.941. Although H4 was not supported, the p-value (*p*= .057) approached significance (see Table 6).

Table 6. The relationship of individualistic factors for collective usage merchandise between now and then

Variable	Then (*N*=32)		Now (*N*=32)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	*t*-Value	*p*
Per of IND*	30.00	38.688	49.06	39.867	-1.941	.057

Note. *Per of IND = Percentage of individualism

H5: There are more individualistic factors in Chinese commercials for imported merchandise than domestic merchandise ten years ago.

For H5, the average percentage of using individualistic factors in imported merchandise was 62.81%, more than 50.00% in domestic merchandise. However, as the p > .05, the relationship of individualistic factors used in Chinese commercials for imported merchandise and domestic merchandise ten years ago was not significant (*N*=64, *t* (63)= 1.196, *p*= .236) (see Table 7). Therefore, H5 was not supported.

Table 7. The relationship of individualistic factors used in imported and domestic merchandise ten years ago

Variable	Imported (*N*=32)		Domestic (*N*=32)		*t*-Value	*p*
	M	SD	M	SD		
Per of IND*	62.81	39.938	50.00	45.579	1.196	.236

Note. *Per of IND = Percentage of individualism

RQ1: Is there a difference among Chinese commercials for imported and domestic merchandise about individualistic factors in recent years compared to ten years ago.

The analysis of the difference of individualistic factors usage in Chinese commercials of imported and domestic merchandise regardless of time period was conducted. The result shown that the average percentage of individualistic factors in imported commercials was 68.44%, and in domestic commercials was 60.94%, *t* (127)=1.037, *p*= .302. This finding was not significant. The difference of individualistic factors used in imported and domestic merchandise in commercials from ten years ago (*N*=64, *t*= 1.196, *p*= .236), and the difference in recent years (*N*=64, *t*= .233, *p*= .816) (see Table 8) were both not significant. As we have seen in other variables in this study, there has been an increase in the usage of individualistic factors as time has progressed. However, even though we see an increase in the usage of individualistic factors

in commercials for both domestic and imported products, we can not state that the differences are significantly different.

Table 8. The relationship of individualistic factors for imported and domestic merchandise

Per of IND*	Imported (N=32)		Domestic (N=32)		t-Value	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Regardless of time period	68.44	38.057	60.94	43.561	1.037	.302
Ten years ago	62.81	39.938	50.00	45.579	1.196	.236
Recent years	74.06	35.818	71.88	39.139	.233	.816

Note. *Per of IND = Percentage of individualism

Chapter 5 - Discussion

Prior research has assumed that Chinese culture is traditionally taken as collectivism (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis & Hui, 1990; Triandis, 2001; Lin, 2001; Oyserman et al., 2002; Cao, 2009). China promotes collective values that people shall keep a group thought rather than focusing on an individual's self. However, recent scholarly work also points out that members of the Chinese younger generation, who were born after 1979, have gradually changed their cultural value from collectivism to individualism due to the cultivation by imported media from Western culture (Cao, 2009; Sun and Wang, 2010; Liu, 2008; Zhang & Harwood, 2002; Yang, 2012; Zhou, 2011). The Chinese younger generation have more personal attitudes and opinions than their parents. They tend to pursue freedom, to emphasis on individual, and to be unique. This study aimed to explore what kind of changes has occurred among Chinese commercials along with the change of their target. It examined if individualistic factors were more frequently used in the commercials in recent years than approximately ten years ago with consideration of merchandise type and production place.

Summarizing results above, there was an increase in individualism in Chinese commercials in 2016 compared to 2006. The percentage of individualistic factors, like "enjoy himself/ herself", "be different from others", "emphasis I as an individual", and "freedom", were more employed in Chinese commercials than the factors promoting collectivism, like "don't let them down", "pay back", "responsibility", and "feel honorable for family/ group". This finding supported the conclusion of Hsu and Barker's study in 2013 that the level of individualism was higher than collectivism among Chinese commercials whose target was the Chinese younger generation.

The cultural value change of commercial content also offered a picture that how the Chinese advertising industry has changed during the past decade. Lin Gan, the Director of the State Administration for Industry and Commerce said, "China has already developed to be the second largest advertising market in the world" (Chen, 2014). It has been expanding rapidly during 2004 to 2014, and advertising practitioners actively improved their professional skill to cooperate and compete with international counterparts (Chen, 2014). As the Chinese younger generation has attempted to become more Western and international, Gan also pointed out, "Chinese advertising should be more international" (Chen, 2014). The content value changes from collectivism to individualism from 2006 to 2016 exactly reflected that the Chinese advertising market has already perceived the cultural value changes among Chinese younger generation and advertising executives in charge have actively and continually modified commercials to adjust to new flavor and interests of their targets.

Cheng (1997), 20 years ago, discovered that imported products had more individualistic factors than domestic products. Zhang and Harwood (2004), 12 year ago, also pointed out that more individualistic values were used more in imported than domestic product commercials. However, in this study, there was no significant difference between imported and domestic merchandise of using individualistic factors, no matter whether around 2006, in 2016, or regardless of time periods. Even though this finding did not support the proposed hypothesis, it was still an important finding. Twenty years ago, even though it had been almost two decades since China implemented the open-door police, domestic merchandise commercials still used more collectivistic factors. But things changed gradually in Chinese society during those years. As far back as ten years ago, the Chinese advertising industry had already begun to make an adjustment to the cultural value changes among younger generation with the consideration of

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different production places. <mark>This represents another important aspect that how the Chinese advertising industry has developed—advertising agencies do not only focus on the business relationships with domestic producers, but also keep learning the way that international producers used to create commercials.</mark> The study result stood that the cultural gap between commercials of imported and domestic products were getting smaller throughout these years. With fewer disagreements, it will become an advantage for imported merchandisers to cooperate with Chinese domestic advertising agencies to produce more effective commercials.

This research also expanded on previous researches with the consideration of product type. The merchandise usage type affected the percentage of individualistic and collectivistic factors used in commercials. There were more individualistic factors in Chinese commercials of individual usage merchandise than collective usage merchandise, and more collectivistic factors in commercials of collective usage merchandise than individual usage merchandise. Although the cultural value of Chinese younger generation has changed into more individualistic, collective usage merchandise such as health and life insurance and kitchen tools still employed more collectivistic factors regardless of time period. On the contrary, for individual usage merchandise, like laptop and sneaker commercials, advertisers have begun to apply more individualistic factors than they did ten years ago.

<mark>From the perspective of commercial amount, more individual usage commercials used individualism, and more collective usage commercials employed collectivistic factors. Therefore, Chinese advertising practitioners are aware of the product category of individual and collective usage, and have begun to apply different cultural values accordingly.</mark>

As individualistic factors were used more in recent years, we can tell time mattered in this cultural value changing process in the Chinese advertising industry. The individual and

collective usage category was an important factor of the cultural values employment in commercials. In addition, advertisers have fewer disagreements toward employing individualistic and collectivistic factors between imported and domestic brands. This conclusion may help advertising practitioners to effectively persuade their consumers in the market, and also promote the cooperation of Chinese advertising agencies with international brands.

Limitations

Due to the time constraints and resource limits, even though this study advanced previous research, it still had limitations. This study only focused on four categories of merchandise, two for each cultural dimension. For future research, more categories should be taken into account in order to make the results more reliable.

As this research took lots of aspects into consideration (i.e. time period, product category, imported or domestic, factors of individualism or collectivism, and length of commercial), at the mean time, it had to sacrifice the depth of each demission. This study only analyzed manifest variables and the ones summarized latten variables, which may have resulted in less profound of research results. However, fortunately, the variables this study analyzed were enough and concrete to give a big picture of how the cultural value change of commercial changed these years. The latent variables this study coded can be used in future research.

The lack of commercials in 2006 was another limitation. Commercials in 2006 for each product category were not enough for an extensive analysis. The researcher had to take commercials in 2004 and 2005 into account. This might impact the research results.

Future area research

This study made a comparison of broadcasting commercials in approximately 2006 and 2016. As the Internet has been developing in China for decades, it will be interesting to see the

difference between commercials online and on television in a same period. Also, as Chinese older generation might change slower than the younger generation, the cultural factors used in commercials for older generations might be different than the ones for younger generations. Therefore, the comparison of the cultural values revealed in commercials for different targets should also be conducted in the future.

This study included four different product categories to make the results more reliable as one particular product could not accurately represent a larger trend of changes. For other scholars, it may be useful to just focus on one product, such as beauty products, auto, food and clothing, to further examine the cultural values among one product category.

Previous studies analyzed how television programs work with people's mind in order to cultivate the Chinese younger generation. Then how do the commercials promoting individualism aired on television cultivate people's mind? Do commercials have smaller or larger power than other genres of television programs? It will be interesting to see the cultivation impact of individualistic commercials toward Chinese people.

In addition, almost all of the related research employed content analysis as research method and only focused on the commercial content. Researchers tried to figure out what decisions the advertisers made according to social changes. However, information about how the audiences think about these commercials was unknown. Does the Chinese younger generation prefer the change from collectivism to individualism in commercials? Do they enjoy the individualistic factors in individual usage products commercials? Or do they also want to see more individualistic factors in collective usage merchandise commercials? Accordingly, to effectively get feedback from customers, a survey or an experiment may be more appropriate for future studies.

Conclusion

This research validated previous studies that the Chinese advertising industry has been modifying messages along with cultural value changes observed in the Chinese younger generation. Commercials targeting Chinese younger generation involved more individualistic factors than collectivistic ones in recent years. In addition, the result furthered some conclusions of previous research that the difference between cultural factors employed in imported and domestic merchandise decreased through 2006 to 2016. Moreover, this research also examined the impact of merchandise category. Results showed that, for individual usage merchandise, individualistic factors were used more in recent years than ten years ago. These results contribute to not only the academic scholars, but also to the Chinese advertising industry that it could help executives to create more effective commercials for the Chinese younger generation.

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Appendix A - Code book

Basic information of commercials:

AD number				
AD aired year	2004	2005	2006	2016
Product category	Insurance	Kitchen tools	Sneaker	Laptop
Imported or domestic	Imported	Domestic		
How many main actors in the commercial				
How long is the spot				
How long is the key spot				
Where is the key spot	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Final quarter
The time when the scene happened	A special day (holiday, birthday, anniversary etc.)		Non a special day, common life	
The site that the scene happened	No background/vitural background; business; park,jam,race course; daily life, home, kitchen, road; supermarket, shopping mall, restaurant			
The actor's role in the AD	Individual; couple/boyfriend and girlfriend; family members; athlete; friends; leader; other			
What's the relationship between the main actor and other actors	Individual; couple/boyfriend and girlfriend; family members; athlete; friends; business relationship; other			
Actors' reaction before using this merchandise	Not shown; boring; unsatisfied; worried; lonely; tired; helpless; other			

Variables for counting numbers:

Actors' reaction after using this merchandise	
Individualistic factors	Feel welcomed/Enjoy the sights from surroundings
	Be different from others
	Enjoy himself/herself/ have fun
	Others admire or jealous
Collectivistic factors	Feel happy; happiness
	Enjoy getting together
	Praise; they feel gratified
	Sacrifices are deserved
Both	
I don't know	
Other	Specify

Actors' lines	
Individualistic factors	Emphasize I, as an individual
	Success
	Be unique
	Don't care about others' criticism
	Nerve
	Independence/ freedom
	Not afraid of failure
Collectivistic factors	Don't let them down
	Work hard for them
	Do something good for them/care about somebody
	Pay back
	Responsibility
	Feel honorable for family/group
	Sacrifice
Both	
I don't know	
Other	Specify

Overall spirit that the actor/ actress has	
Individualistic factors	Brave
	Strong mind
	Independence/ freedom
	Get success after endeavor
	Enjoy himself/herself
Collectivistic factors	Responsible
	Improvement of relationship
	Feel happy with others
	Be thankful for others' help
	Pay back
Both	
I don't know	
Other	Specify