



# Modernization and Tradition in an Age of Globalization: Cultural Values in Chinese Television Commercials

By Yan Bing Zhang and Jake Harwood

*The authors analyzed commercials (N = 496) shown on three Chinese TV stations in the summer of 2000 to uncover the dominant value themes and identified 13 value themes as applicable in the current sample. This study found that the most dominant value themes in the Chinese commercials were product quality/effectiveness, family, modernity, beauty/youth, and pleasure indicating the prevalence of utilitarian values and the coexistence of both traditional and modern values in the world of Chinese advertising. Value themes identified in this study are compared with previous conceptualizations, and discussed in the context of globalization and Chinese cultural change.*

The essence of globalization is the “conjunction of different forms of life” (Robertson, 1992, p. 27). “Think global and act local” has been appropriated from the environmental movement and has become the axiom for today’s global marketing (Kotler, 2003, p. 666). Using content analysis procedures, research examining cultural themes in advertising has increased due in part to a pragmatic concern for the success of multinational firms in foreign markets (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Lin, 1993, 2001; Mueller, 1987, 1992) and in part to a concern for advertising’s socio-cultural effects (Pollay, Tse, & Wang, 1990). As multinational corporations seek broader markets, they attempt to foster a consumerist emphasis on material desires, immediate gratification, and new lifestyles in cultures where those values are not the norm—“Coca-colonization” or “McDonaldization” (Lin, 2001; Ji & McNeal, 2001; Wong, 2000).

With 1.4 billion people, China is the “fastest growing and largest potential market in the world” (Chan & Cheng, 2002, p. 389). Western scholars familiar with China’s socialist rhetoric against capitalist (consumption-related) activities consider advertising in China as a “total reversal of value judgment” that may foster

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“materialistic fever” and jeopardize traditional values (Pollay et al., 1990, pp. 85–86; Stross, 1990). Although this doomsday perspective on globalization is common, it is also possible that shifts in values are subtle. Examining salient values in advertising provides some indication of the current value dynamics in a particular society. Adopting a content analysis perspective, this study adds to the growing body of research on advertising in Eastern cultures. Specifically, this study examines the presence of traditional, utilitarian, and modern values in Chinese TV commercials and gauges the impact of modernization and globalization.

### *Modernization, Globalization, and Advertising in China*

Globalization has occurred in tandem with, rather than as a consequence of, the rise of modernity (Robertson, 1992). During the last couple of decades, China has undergone significant internal changes along with the external globalization movement. Lull (1991, p. 59) stated that the development of television “may be the single most important cultural and political development” in China since the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. The dramatic change is reflected in the increase in number of Chinese TV stations from 12 stations in 1965 to 3,240 stations in 1997 (Hazelbarth, 1997), and also in the qualitative form and content of TV programming (74% of imported programming comes from developed capitalist countries; Wang & Chang, 1996). For decades after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, advertising was almost nonexistent in China. After Mao’s death in 1976, Deng Xiao Ping adopted an “open door” policy to improve the Chinese people’s living standard. Deng’s economic pragmatism advocated a change from a planned economy to a market economy and modernization (Chang, Wang, & Chen, 1994; Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Wang & Chang, 1996). Hence, China has established a consumer market to allow private entrepreneurship, as well as to encourage joint ventures with foreign capital (Wei & Pan, 1999). These economic reforms and the desire to join the global economy have legitimized TV advertising as a tool for developing a “socialist market economy” (Zhang & Gelb, 1996). In late 1990s, the characteristic of Chinese TV is “no longer excessive state control but overmarketization” (Zhao, 1999, p. 302). According to one estimate, Chinese media advertising increased 35-fold between 1981 and 1992, and TV revenues totaled about \$2 billion in 1995 (Hazelbarth, 1997). As a result, the national China Central Television (CCTV) earned nearly \$150 million in advertising revenue and covered almost 90% of its operational costs. To compete domestically and globally, Chinese television industries are eager to increase their appeal to the audience and secure a better share of advertising revenue.

### *Advertising and Values*

The term “value” has been defined as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to alternate modes of conduct or end-state of existence” (Rokeach, 1968, p. 160). According to Sillars (1991), “all arguments are warranted by stated or implied values and are effective because the receiver of the message holds those values” (p. 129). In order to motivate consumer action, advertisers must appeal to consumers’ common interests, wants, goals, and problems, which often reflect their cultural values



(Hong, Muderrisoghi, & Zinkhan, 1987; Marquez, 1975; Mueller, 1987; Pollay & Gallagher, 1990). These scholars insist that cultural values are the core of the advertising message. Pollay (1983) went one step further by stressing that advertisers intentionally present certain values as being more important than others. In short, the values displayed in advertisements offer consumers rationales for the purchase decision. As a result, the television industry has become a major institution teaching social values because viewers are able to identify with, or aspire to, the images, values, and new lifestyles portrayed either in the commercials that sponsor the program or in the program itself (Gitlin, 1986; Pollay, 1983). Therefore, the social function of advertising is not only to protect long-established values, but also to precipitate changes in behaviors as well as standards for behavior (Pollay, 1983).

*Research on values in TV commercials.* Most research examining cultural values in TV commercials has used content analysis (Cheng, 1994; Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Lin, 1993, 2001; Muller, 1992). The literature supports Pollay's (1983) seminal coding framework measuring culture values in advertising. Pollay's list consists of 42 common cultural appeals manifest in advertising content. Later research on values in TV commercials was largely built on Pollay's widely used coding scheme (Belk et al., 1985; Belk & Pollay, 1985; Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996). Using a modified version of Pollay's framework, Srikandath (1991) found that Indian television advertising often promoted the values of technology, modernization, and consumerism. Using the same framework, Cheng (1994, 1998) found that modernity, technology, quality, and youth were the predominant themes in Chinese magazine advertisements in the 1980s and 1990s. Using a case analysis approach, Wong (2000) studied television commercials for banking services in Hong Kong in the 1970s. Results indicated the emergence of a consumer society where traditional values of saving and hard work were altered, replaced, or recombined with materialistic desires of immediate spending and gratification.

Pollay's (1983) framework has also been used in cross-cultural research focused on Eastern and Western cultures. Both Belk et al. (1985) and Belk and Pollay (1985) found both traditional and modern value themes in Japanese advertisements when compared with advertisements in the U.S. Findings from Muller's (1992) research on Japanese and American magazine advertisement were consistent with Belk et al. that deep-rooted Japanese cultural values were strong. Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) analyzed 1,105 television commercials in the PRC and U.S. They found that, whereas some traditional Chinese values (e.g., family and tradition) still dominated TV advertising, modernity and youth were two dominant themes that were shared by both the Chinese and the U.S. commercials. Using similar coding schemes, Lin (2001) found that the use of individualism/independence and product merit appeals was featured more prominently in U.S. than Chinese commercials. Ji and McNeal (2001) found the coexistence of both traditional and Western values in Chinese TV advertising aimed at children and that Chinese commercials emphasized product features more than those in the U.S. Recently, Chan and Cheng (2002) found that Hong Kong commercials tended to use more Western values and more utilitarian values than Chinese commercials.



Three themes emerge from the above literature review. First, modernity, which is rooted in Western materialism and capitalism, is a universal theme. Second, traditional values are still common in advertising in non-Western cultures. Third, the interaction of modern (Western) and traditional (non-Western) values is a site of struggles associated with globalization. The extent to which traditional values are challenged by modern values, or interact with them in a more “hybrid” fashion is of importance to cultural theorists and advertising executives.

Although these studies have contributed significantly to the understanding of advertising and cultural values, two primary limitations emerge from a review of the current literature on values in television commercials. First, an excessive number of value items are used in many studies (e.g., 42 common cultural appeals in Pollay, 1983; 33 value items in Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996). Whereas these studies seek comprehensiveness and provide a useful reference point, the large number of value items leads to analytical problems and results in a number of categories that are very infrequent in the Chinese context (e.g., convenience, neatness, adventure, safety, uniqueness, and economy). The current study deals only with Chinese commercials; therefore, developing an applicable coding instrument with a limited number of value themes is necessary. Second, previous research has paid little attention to the origin of the ads being studied (beyond the fact that they are broadcast in a particular country). Two factors concerning the origin of the ads are important for those interested in issues of globalization and modernization. First, the extent to which the products advertised are domestic or imported is crucial. A naïve hypothesis might suggest that imported products would emphasize modern values whereas domestic products would be advertised using traditional values, but the processes of cultural value change and globalization are almost certainly more complex than this. Second, scholars need to pay more attention to where within a country particular products are being advertised. National advertising, particularly in highly regulated markets like China, might be expected to display values more consistent with overall government philosophy. In contrast, local advertising might be expected to conform to local mores. Specifically in the current study, we are predicting less use of traditional and government-supported values in local advertising in a cosmopolitan, coastal city in China, which has had extensive links to international business.

#### *Values to Examine*

As the primary traditional Chinese ideology, Confucianism has guided the behavior of Chinese people and remains at the core of the Chinese social and cultural value system. Confucianism reflects four conditions—humanism, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom—from which human conduct arises. These traditional values have been examined in detail by previous research (e.g., Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). As a competing ideology to traditional Chinese values, modernism has been introduced into contemporary China as a result of social and political movements (e.g., the “Four Modernizations” campaign) and economic reforms (e.g., the adoption of a market economy). Television advertising, as a modern phenomenon, frequently presents nontraditional themes (e.g., consumerism, pleasure, hedonism, beauty/youth, etc.) (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Zhao,



1999). Although values are important in advertising, advertisers never totally abandon the utilitarian aspects of their products (e.g., Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Mueller, 1987, 1992; Pollay, 1983). At times, the most important message of a commercial is that a product does what it is intended to do, and symbolic appeals that go beyond the product's features and functions may interfere with that message. One goal of our research was to examine the presence of traditional, utilitarian, and modern values in Chinese TV commercials and thus to gauge the impact of modernization and globalization.

RQ1: What are the dominant values presented in Chinese TV commercials?

Research has suggested that particular value themes are associated with product categories. Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) found that US clothing commercials have predominantly used the value of "youth" (75%). They also found that "modernity" was mainly associated with automobile and household appliance commercials in China. Our second research question examined the relationship between values themes and product categories.

RQ2: Are specific values associated with particular product categories in Chinese TV commercials?

As noted earlier, product origin (domestic versus imported) may be associated with value themes in commercials. Studies indicate that exposure to Western media (e.g., films, television programs) is related to a higher degree of hedonism and reduced concern for fulfilling one's family responsibilities (Pan, Chaffee, Chu, & Ju, 1994; Pan & Wei, 1997). This suggests that foreign media may present values and lifestyles that are in opposition to Chinese values. However, it is also possible that imported products are advertised using traditional values in order to enhance their acceptability and to be viewed as "accommodating" to local norms.

RQ3: Do domestic product advertisements rely on traditional values more heavily than advertisements for imported products?

Currently, mass media in China have become "less of a class ideologue and more of a state manager" (Wang & Chang, 1996, p. 196). Chinese TV stations are more autonomous because they host advertising and seek sponsorship for TV programming. As in the West, some Chinese corporations and organizations (private or government owned) are directly involved in the production and distribution of Chinese TV shows in exchange for promotional considerations.

Three Chinese television channels were selected for this analysis: Channel One from China Central Television (CCTV), Shandong Television (SDTV), and Yantai Television (YTTV). CCTV is a state-run national network. Using local stations to carry its signal, CCTV broadcasts nationwide. CCTV is available 24 hours a day for all Chinese who own a TV set, although local stations are required to broadcast only some of its programming (e.g., news broadcasts). SDTV mainly serves the viewers in Shandong province (population: 86.4 million) where the economic



development and living standards are above average in the nation. YTTV broadcasts to Yantai district (population: 6.35 million) from Yantai city, a coastal city in Shandong that was one of the first 14 cities opened to international business in early 1980s.

As TV stations continue their efforts to retain control over their output, the Chinese government faces a dilemma. It would like the state-run media to be financially self-sufficient rather than a drain on government resources, but it recognizes that self-sufficiency can lead to greater autonomy (Zhao, 1999). In order to regulate and standardize Chinese advertising and to protect Chinese consumers from malpractice in advertising, the Chinese government released the Advertising Law of the People's Republic of China in 1995 (Cheng, 1998). According to Cheng (1998), the new advertising law was less ideological and more consumer-oriented. Given that central government control is likely to be exercised more fully with national media, we were interested in whether the values portrayed in advertising would exhibit the effects of such control when we compared advertising at the national, provincial, and local level.

RQ4: Do values in commercials differ on stations with differing geographical reach?

## **Method**

### *Sample*

Approximately 28 hours of television programs for Channel One from CCTV, SDTV, and YTTV were taped in a 2-week period during July–August of 2000. Two-hour blocks of programs were recorded between 6:30 p.m.–8:30 p.m., 8:30 p.m.–10:30 p.m., and 10:30 p.m.–12:30 a.m. on each day. This is the time when most commercials are aired in China. Channels were assigned to time slots on a random and rotating basis. This resulted in approximately 84 hours of programming, which yielded 664 commercials. Because of the limitations with previous schemes described earlier, the first step was to develop a coding system.

### *Development of the Coding Scheme*

To develop the coding scheme, we familiarized coders with a list of value items derived from previous research (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Mueller, 1987; Pollay, 1983). The first author and two bilingual graduate students viewed randomly selected commercials from each channel to identify the dominant value in each commercial until an exhaustive list had emerged (56 commercials from each channel were used and excluded from the later coding process). Thirteen value themes were identified (see Table 1). The dominant value in each commercial was decided based on the three coders' discussion and consensus regarding their overall impression. We then developed operational definitions for each of the values based on previous research (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Mueller, 1987; Pollay, 1983) and discussions with coders. The 13 values identified in the first phase were compared with the Chinese Value Survey (CVS:



**Table 1. Definitions of the Identified Values in Chinese TV Commercials Traditional Values**

**Traditional Values**

Family: The product is good for the family (e.g., enjoying product with other family members).

Health: Use of the product will make individuals free from disease or enhance physical vitality.

Tradition: The product is historical, time-honored, and legendary; the commercial suggests nostalgia, respect for the past, customs, and conventions.

Patriotism: The product is associated with love of, or loyalty to China as a country.

Filial piety: Commercial presents a positive model of old age, and/or suggests that the product should be purchased for elders to show love and respect.

Education: The product improves knowledge or wisdom, including improved school performance.

**Modern Values**

Modernity: Emphasis is placed on the product being new, contemporary, or up-to-date. The commercial may present the sophisticated technology used in manufacturing.

Beauty/Youth: Use of the product will make individuals appear attractive, elegant, or handsome.

Pleasure: The product will provide enjoyment (e.g., the fun experienced by beer drinkers).

Success/Status: Use of the product will elevate users' social position/rank, make individuals feel in control of their lives, or enable them to achieve their life goals.

Materialism: The product is associated with financial or material acquisition.

Environmentalism: The product is associated with environmental protection – purchasing suggests environmental concern.

**Utilitarian Values**

Quality/Effectiveness: The excellence, durability or effectiveness of the product is emphasized.

Chinese Culture Connection, 1987), a widely used questionnaire measure of traditional values, in order to categorize them as traditional Chinese values, modern values, or utilitarian values. This determination was achieved by consensus (see Table 2 for categorization).

*Coding*

Two bilingual Chinese coders (one from the first phase of this study) independently coded the rest of the commercials ( $N = 496$ ). Coders were instructed to identify the dominant theme in each commercial. They were asked to make their decisions based on a Gestalt impression (e.g., Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996) and to watch the commercial more than once if needed. When a commercial could not

**Table 2. Frequencies of Value Themes in Chinese Television Commercials**

Value themes	Frequency (N = 481) <sup>a</sup>	%
Traditional values		
Family	58	11.7
Health	38	7.7
Tradition	23	4.6
Patriotism	15	3.0
Filial piety	14	2.8
Education	11	2.2
SUBTOTAL	159	31.5
Modern values		
Modernity	56	11.3
Beauty/youth	46	9.3
Pleasure	45	9.1
Success/status	26	5.2
Materialism	10	2.0
Environmentalism	8	1.6
SUBTOTAL	191	38.5
Utilitarian values		
Quality/Effectiveness	131	26.4

<sup>a</sup> Fifteen commercials (3%) could not be coded into any of the values categories and were included in the "other" category. This category is not considered further.

be coded into any of the available value categories (for example, a simple mention of a brand name), it was placed in the "other" category. Two coders coded the same 48% (i.e., 240 in total and 80 from each channel) of the commercials, and inter-coder reliability was good (90%, Scott's  $\pi = .87$ ). The remaining commercials were coded by one of the coders. The commercials were also coded by product category (e.g., clothing, automobiles; percent agreement: 99%, Scott's  $\pi = .97$ ) and product origin (domestic or imported; percent agreement: 98%, Scott's  $\pi = .96$ ). Products made jointly by domestic and foreign concerns were coded as imported. There were almost equal numbers of commercials from each TV station (165 from CCTV and YTTV and 166 from SDTV). Repeated commercials for the same product were included in the sample because this represents the reality encountered by viewers (Roy & Harwood, 1997; Swayne & Greco, 1987).

## Results

### *Overall Frequency of Value Themes*

Table 2 presents the frequencies of the 13 value themes found in the Chinese television commercials (15 commercials falling into the "other" category were not considered further). As shown by the table, modern values were most frequent in





**Table 3. Frequencies of Value Themes in Chinese Television Commercials coded by Television Stations**

Value themes	CCTV (National) (N = 160)		SDTV (Regional) (N = 160)		YTTV (Local) (N = 161)		$\chi^2$ <sup>a</sup> (df = 2)
	N	% <sup>a</sup>	N	% <sup>a</sup>	N	% <sup>a</sup>	
Family (T) <sup>b</sup>	14	8.5	17	10.2	27	16.4	4.79
Health (T)	13	7.9	12	7.2	13	7.9	.05
Tradition (T)	5	3.0	13	7.8	5	3.0	5.57
Patriotism (T)	10	6.1	1	.6	4	2.4	8.40*
Filial piety (T)	6	3.6	5	3.0	3	1.8	1.00
Education (T)	3	1.8	5	3.0	3	1.8	.73
Modernity (M)	40	24.2	10	6.0	6	3.6	37.00***
Beauty/youth (M)	11	6.7	9	5.4	26	15.8	11.26**
Pleasure (M)	14	8.5	18	10.8	13	7.9	.93
Success/status (M)	8	4.8	10	6.0	8	4.8	.31
Materialism (M)	2	1.2	5	3.0	3	1.8	1.40
Environmentalism (M)	7	4.2	1	.6	0	.0	4.50*
Quality/effectiveness (U)	27	16.4	54	32.5	50	30.3	9.73**

<sup>a</sup>  $\chi^2$  values indicate differences in the frequencies of each value theme across TV stations.

<sup>b</sup> (T) indicates traditional values, (M) indicates modern value, (U) indicates utilitarian value.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

the commercials (38.5%;  $n = 191$ ), followed by traditional values (31.5%,  $n = 159$ ), and utilitarian values (26.4%;  $n = 131$ ). Ranking the 13 specific value themes manifested in the commercials by frequency, the most frequent values were quality/effectiveness, family, and modernity and the least frequently presented values included education, materialism and environmentalism.

#### *Value Themes Coded by TV Stations*

Table 3 shows that five of the values were portrayed in different proportions on the three stations. Modernity, patriotism, and environmentalism were used significantly more in CCTV commercials than SDTV and YTTV. Beauty/youth was significantly more frequent in YTTV commercials than in CCTV and SDTV. Finally, the regional/local stations emphasized utilitarian functions and features of their products more than the CCTV did. This may be a simple reflection that local advertising tends to be lower budget and more direct than national ads.



#### *Value Themes Coded by Product Categories*

Table 4 presents frequencies of the 11 product categories found in the commercials. Food and drink were the most frequently advertised products, followed by household appliances, medicine, and cosmetics. The less frequently advertised products included games and toys, automobiles, and farm fertilizer/pesticides. As shown in Table 4, the beauty/youth value was most common in commercials for cosmetics, education in game/toy ads, modernity was reflected predominantly in computer/telephone and appliance commercials, and pleasure in ads for food and drink. Effectiveness and family appeared in commercials for many products.

#### *Value Themes Coded by Product Origin*

Most commercials were for domestic products ( $N = 435$ , 90%), which led to very low frequencies in cells when the data were analyzed using all 13 value themes. Therefore, value themes were collapsed into the three superordinate categories (traditional, modern, utilitarian) for this analysis. No differences (proportionally speaking) emerged between domestic and imported products for the utilitarian value. However, a strong pattern emerged showing that traditional values were used more in domestic ( $N = 146$ ) than imported ( $N = 2$ ) product ads, whereas modern values were used (proportionally speaking) more in imported ( $N = 35$ ) than domestic ( $N = 167$ ) product ads,  $\chi^2(2) = 26.72$ ,  $N = 481$ ,  $p < .001$ .

## **Discussion**

This study showed that modern, traditional, and utilitarian values are all pervasive in Chinese TV commercials. The specific patterns with which these values appeared are discussed below in the context of traditionalism, modernization, and globalization/"hybridization"—the melding of modern and traditional values and products. Before the discussion on these themes, implications of the prevalence of the utilitarian values in Chinese TV advertising are addressed.

#### *Utilitarian Values in Chinese TV Advertising*

As a category, the utilitarian values were the least frequently used values (26.4%,  $n = 131$ ) in comparison with the symbolic values (72.6% = modern values + traditional values) in Chinese TV advertising. However, since quality/effectiveness was the only value under the utilitarian value category, it also constitutes the most frequently used specific value revealed in this study. Quality/effectiveness is a product-oriented utilitarian value emphasizing quality and effectiveness based on performance. This value theme was associated with many products and was used more frequently by the two local television stations than by the national television station. These findings indicate that among many available advertising strategies, Chinese TV advertising still favors stressing product features and performance directly, especially in local contexts in which commercials may be less sophisticated and more straightforward than in national broadcasts.

It is generally believed that the U.S. is a low context culture that emphasizes explicit verbal messages, and China is a high context culture that values indirect

Table 4. Percentages of Value Themes Coded by Product Categories (N = 481)

Value themes	FD <sup>a</sup>	HA	ME	CP	SE	CL	AU	CT	GT	ML	FP	$\chi^2$ (df = 10)
Family (F) <sup>b</sup>	16.0	9.8	12.1	10.1	8.5	14.8	7.1	20.0	14.3	11.1	0.0	31.01**
Health (H)	12.0	1.1	17.6	10.1	2.1	3.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	39.79**
Tradition (T)	8.0	0.0	5.5	0.0	14.9	11.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	51.28***
Patriotism (P)	5.0	4.3	3.3	1.4	2.1	0.0	0.0	6.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.21
Filial piety (F)	0.0	3.3	6.6	2.9	2.1	7.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.97
Education (E)	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	64.3	0.0	0.0	132.22***
Modernity (M)	1.0	40.2	0.0	0.0	4.3	11.1	35.7	46.7	0.0	0.0	33.3	173.38***
Beauty/Youth (M)	0.0	0.0	8.8	50.7	2.1	7.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	193.64***
Pleasure (M)	30.0	10.9	1.1	0.0	2.1	3.7	0.0	0.0	14.3	0.0	0.0	198.64***
Success/Status (M)	8.0	2.2	4.4	0.0	4.3	14.8	7.1	13.3	7.1	22.2	0.0	30.65**
Materialism (M)	5.0	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.1	13.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	48.08***
Environmentalism (M)	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.5	0.0	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	60.78**
Quality/Effectiveness (U)	11.0	26.1	40.7	24.6	46.8	25.9	35.7	0.0	0.0	66.7	0.0	60.26**
Total Count	100	92	91	69	47	27	14	15	14	9	3	
%	20.8	19.1	18.9	14.3	9.8	5.6	2.9	3.1	2.9	1.9	0.6	

<sup>a</sup> Food/drink = FD, Household appliance = HA, Medicine = ME, Cosmetics/personal care = CP, Service = SE, Clothing = CL, Automobile = AU, Computer/telephone = CT, Games/toys = GT, Miscellaneous = ML, Farm fertilizer/pesticide = FP.

<sup>b</sup> (T) indicates traditional values, (M) indicates modern value, (U) indicates utilitarian value.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Overall  $\chi^2(120) = 749.40, p < .001$



and implicit messages (Hall, 1977). Several studies on advertising support this theory. Lin (2001) compared cultural values reflected in Chinese and American television advertising and found that “hard-sell and product merit are traditional U.S.-style commercial appeals” (p. 90; see also De Mooij, 1998), whereas Chinese advertisers tend to motivate consumer action through symbolic appeals.

The current study does not compare cultures; however, one explanation of the heavy use of product-oriented appeals (i.e., quality/effectiveness) may be a reflection of the current stage of Chinese advertising. Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990) suggested that the early stage of advertising in the United States emphasized product information and later stages focused on symbolic functions of the products (image orientation and lifestyle). China is still a less developed country, and its advertising has not reached the levels of sophistication found in the West (Zhang & Gelb, 1996). Therefore Chinese commercials emphasize basic product features heavily (see also Ji & McNeal, 2001), especially on local television stations. Future study should compare the effectiveness and perceptions of the direct or “in your face” advertising techniques versus the less direct messages in the Chinese market.

#### *Traditionalism*

Family, a traditional value, was the second most frequently used value and was distributed evenly across product categories and TV stations. The importance of this value to Chinese society has been noted in previous research (Chu & Ju, 1993), and it can be considered the basic and fundamental unit in the social structure in China. Family harmony, the prototype of interpersonal relations in China, is regarded as essential for maintaining social integration and stability (Chu & Ju, 1993).

Many of the traditional Confucian values (e.g., sincerity, humility, patience, thrift) as represented by the CVS (Chinese Cultural Connection, 1987) were not used in TV advertising, despite being highly regarded by Chinese people (Zhang & Harwood, 2002). These results indicate that if television advertising is a mirror of the Chinese society, “it is only a distorted one” (Pollay & Gallagher, 1990, p. 370). One explanation is that the very nature of advertising is to create needs and wants in the audience and certain traditional values may contradict. For example, Confucianism preaches being contented with one’s position in life, having few desires, and keeping oneself disinterested and pure—not ideal bases for selling products! Other traditional values that might seem more amenable to advertising were also not particularly common (e.g., tradition, patriotism, filial piety, education). The infrequent use of these values may indicate the shift away from ideology in Chinese advertising practice as precipitated by changes in the law of Chinese advertising (Cheng, 1998).

#### *Modernization*

Modernity was the third most frequent value theme. It was predominantly used in household appliance, computer, and telephone commercials. The favor given to modernity fits the political reality (i.e., modernization and economic reform) in China. Results indicated that the state-run TV station (CCTV) used the modernity value significantly more often than the two local stations. This study showed that



CCTV commercials especially emphasize the notion that the product is new, trendsetting, and often ahead of its time. CCTV is the only national state-run station. As discussed earlier, changes in Chinese political reality in recent years have emphasized modernization as an important goal, and this is reflected in the state-level advertising. The fact that this value was less common in the local stations indicates the extent to which such stations are operating independently from national policy considerations.

Other modern values, however, were common in the provincial advertising, and these tend to be more Western values. Pleasure was the fifth most frequently used value in the commercials and was mainly associated with food and drinks (50.7%). The seeking of pleasure is in sharp contrast to some traditional values, such as having few desires or keeping oneself disinterested and pure and being thrifty (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). These food and drink commercials, where the value of pleasure was most strongly presented, encourage people to develop wants and needs, to enjoy themselves and to have more fun in their lives. Beauty/youth was the fourth most frequently seen value in the commercials. It was used more on YTTV than the other two TV stations, and was particularly common in imported product commercials (especially cosmetics). Like other coastal cities in China, Yantai is on the cutting edge of fashion trends because of the level of international business in the area. An emphasis on beauty/youth indicates a shift toward image consciousness among Chinese advertisers (and presumably consumers). In recent years, the central government has attempted to advocate modernization without Westernization. The predominance of pleasure and beauty/youth values at the local level indicates that the central government may be losing the battle against Westernization in some provinces.

#### *Globalization/Hybridization*

Although it is possible to view traditional and modern values as competing value systems engaged in a zero-sum game, the reality is probably somewhat less antagonistic. Advertisers are drawing on whatever values serve their purposes, and in the long run it seems unlikely that any individual value system will be discarded from the arsenal. Hence, from a true globalization perspective, it is important to look at our data and understand ways in which value systems are beginning to overlap and be used in mutually complementary ways.

First, it is interesting to note that the traditional value of family is being used in promoting new, modern products. Because family is an enduring value in China, new advertising techniques may capitalize on the flexibility of this value. Specifically, some advertisers may adopt an ultratraditional approach to family (e.g., featuring the traditional extended family eating a meal together). In our data, an advertisement for cereal, considered a new, modern product in China, featured two grandparents, two parents, and the only child savoring the Western breakfast together. The family harmony and happiness were obvious through their blissful expressions and the loving looks they gave each other. This happened while the background voice declared cereal a necessity for a happy family. In contrast, other ads may emphasize newer family styles or structures. In our data, an advertisement portrayed an urban family with two working parents and the only child



enjoying their new washing machine. The scene included the entire family bustling around the washing machine working on a chore that was traditionally the job for women. Thus, the family value may be sufficiently flexible as to gain “modern” meanings. Indeed as well as being common in these Chinese data, our impression is that family values are commonly invoked in Western advertising, too; certain values appear to have the flexibility to achieve a certain universal status and hence to be used for cross-national marketing campaigns. Campaigns that appeal to multiple cultural audiences will become particularly important as many geographical spaces become increasingly culturally heterogeneous.

A related point is the use of the education value. This was highly associated with commercials for games and toys (66.7%). Chinese culture has valued education for centuries because of the influence of Confucianism. Recently, China’s one child per family policy has fueled a game and toy boom, as parents seek to give their little “emperors” or “empresses” every possible advantage. Typical Chinese parents sacrifice greatly for their children’s education, for example, by spending a few months’ salary on an electronic game. In our data, an advertisement for a video game console took advantage of this by claiming that the product benefits student performance in school. The scene showed a proud father cheering for his son during a math competition. The capacity of the games to enhance education was articulated in a simple assertion that your child would be better educated if you bought the game console.

Not only may cultural values be manifest in rhetorical assertions, they may also appear in the imagery of TV commercials. The capacity of a Game Boy or other computer game to enhance education can also be presented by using children as models endorsing the products or by putting children in an academic environment, for example, math contest, where the children who used the products demonstrate better performance. This value-revealing process relies on association, through which a desirable image or object is associated with the product. When traditional values such as education are used to promote modern products (e.g., Game Boys), they often are being used in the service of promoting modern views and lifestyles (e.g., there are easy ways of learning, hard work is not the only way to learn). The process of using a traditional value to promote modern products may result in reconceptualizing what traditional values mean as they become embedded in a new system of beliefs. We do not see clear evidence that these values are being abandoned, but rather that they are being appropriated into a reshaped cultural reality. It will be interesting to trace whether, and which, traditional values withstand the dramatic transitions occurring in Chinese society and what they will look like down the line. Again, although education is a traditional value, the purpose served here had a distinctly Western flavor—that of competition, achievement orientation, and seeking status. A traditional value appears to have been coopted for somewhat less than traditional purposes.

In contrast, there are indications in our data of modern, Western values being used in a hybrid fashion, such as in the contrast noted above. The use of but beauty and youth themes is common in local ads is also informative here. Clearly, at both levels, modern values are being used, but they are being used selectively and in accord with the specific context. The national administration in China



eschews Western values and focuses on modernization without Westernization. Locally, in contrast, issues of “modernity” qua modernity have less salience, whereas modern Western values (e.g., *image*) are of particular interest. Also notable here is the fact that modern values are used extensively in the marketing of domestic products. Although proportionally modern values are more common in the marketing of domestic products, our data identified 167 instances of a modern value being used to advertise a domestic product.

These findings suggest that Chinese television commercials are involved in the dynamic process of change in cultural values, functioning both to represent new directions for society and to maintain the status quo. In other words, current television commercials reflect and project the interaction of traditional and modern values in Chinese society. Cheng (1998) used the “melting pot” metaphor to describe the nature of Chinese advertising. In his view, “Chinese advertising is not a matter of more Chinese or more Western” (p. 791); to a great extent, it is a blend of both Eastern and Western cultural values. The process of using a traditional value to promote modern products may result in reconceptualizing what traditional values mean as they become embedded in a new system of beliefs. We do not see evidence that these values are being abandoned, but rather that they are being appropriated into a reshaped cultural reality. Hence, the overall picture is one of a dynamic cultural mix in which certain values are being shaped and expressed in the context of others. This mix can be linked to specific local conditions (e.g., Yantai’s status as an “open” coastal area results in more emphasis on beauty and fashion), and government-driven cultural change (e.g., an emphasis on “modernity” or technology).

#### *Future Research*

First, this study suggests modification of current measures of Chinese values. The Chinese Value Survey (Chinese Cultural Connection, 1987) represents only the traditional side of current Chinese values. By incorporating some of the modern value themes identified in this study, a more comprehensive measure of Chinese values could be generated. Second, future research should attend to the viewers of these ads and surrounding programs, for instance, using cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1990). Research should investigate whether heavy TV viewers tend to endorse the values portrayed in these commercials (Zhang & Harwood, 2002). To understand the true implications of developing globalization, we need to see more of the ways in which traditional and modern elements interact with one another. Such research would reveal the promise of a globalization perspective on media and cultural change.

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