

Individualism and Collectivism in Chinese and American Advertisements

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the different values in TV advertisements targeting younger Chinese (13-29), Older Chinese (55 or above), Younger Americans (13-34), and older Americans (55 or above) using Hofstede's (1984) individualism-collectivism dimensions. With the open door policy imposed in China, younger Chinese became Westernized. A content analysis of 566 TV ads was examined to test the degree of individualism, collectivism, modernity themes, and traditional themes in TV ads among the four target groups. Three hypotheses and one research question guiding this study proposed that TV ads targeting younger Chinese would score higher in individualism and modernity; TV ads targeting older Chinese would score higher in collectivism and tradition; and TV ads targeting Americans in general would score higher in individualism and modernity than TV ads targeting younger Chinese. These hypotheses were partly supported. Results showed that TV ads targeting younger Chinese score high in individualism, but not modernity. Also, TV ads targeting Americans score higher than TV ads targeting younger Chinese. Moreover, the study also found that there is no value difference between the two target groups in the U.S. The findings and future research are discussed.

Key Terms: individualism, collectivism, modernity, tradition, TV advertising, Chinese, Americans

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## Introduction

Advertising plays an important role in society. Everyday, people are exposed to thousands of advertisements. Richards 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). Advertisements are designed to persuade, which means that designs should be made in a way that they appeal to the intended audience. Lin (2001) stressed that advertisements also portray cultural values. Culture may be defined in a variety of ways. Kluckhohn (1954) said that culture represents and defines the society. Triandis (2001) mentioned that “elements of culture are shared standard operating procedures, unstated assumptions, tools, norms, values, habits about sampling the environment, and the like” (p. 908). On the other hand, a value, as defined by Rokeach (1973) is:

An enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end state of existence.

A value system is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end states of existence along a continuum of relative importance. (p. 5)

Kluckhohn’s (1961) definition of value is slightly different:

A value is a selective orientation toward experiences, implying deep commitment or repudiation, which influences the ordering of “choices” between possible alternatives in action. These orientations may be cognitive and expressed verbally or merely inferable from recurrent trends in behavior. (1961, p. 18)

Values encompass what people believe to be preferable and therefore practice. Values vary among different cultures, which lead to different advertising approaches to persuade people within different cultures. This study compares advertisements in the United States and in China.

Not only do advertisements reflect cultural values, with the influence of advertising, people's cultural values and consumption values are also shaped (Chang & Schweitzer, 1996, Tse, Belk, & Zhou, 1989). Pollay (1983) pointed out that the design of an advertisement is meant to bring out the habits that are associated with the product. Sometimes, advertisements not only bring the audience's attention to the products, but also cultivate certain values in order for the audience to get attached to the brand and the company promoting it.

Hofstede (1984), one of the most well-known scholars who has studied cultural values, said, "In studying 'values' we compare individuals; in studying 'culture' we compare societies" (p. 23). There are four cultural dimensions in Hofstede's original framework. This study focuses on the third dimension, which is individualism/collectivism. This dimension "describes the relationship between the individual and the collectivity which prevails in a given society. It is reflected in the way people live together...[and] is intimately linked with societal norms" (pp. 148-149). According to Hofstede's study, which included 40 countries, the United States scored the highest in individualism, and Chinese cultures, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, scored higher on collectivism.

The United States has been a leading country in terms of consumerism and advertising. Economically and technologically, the United States has been a successful country for many years. Recently, another country has drawn much attention from the world. That country is China. Experts' views on China indicate that China is becoming a giant player in the world economy. The Magazine of International Policy (2010) compiled views from 50 experts on the growth of China. C. Fred Bergsten, the director of Peterson Institute for International Economics said that "China is clearly in a position to become a major locomotive for global growth" (p. 12). Jim O'Neil, head of Global Economic Research at Goldman Sachs International, said, "China is

the biggest strategic development of our lives” (p. 13). Steve H. Hanke, professor of Applied Economics, Johns Hopkins University Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute and Contributing Editor of TIE, said “China is wide awake and shaking the world” (p. 36). Undeniably, China is one of the fastest growing countries economically; thus, a study of advertising in China can provide insight for advertisers to better target this audience in the future.

### **The Chinese Market**

The economy in China, the world’s largest country, is growing very rapidly, which has led to changes in advertising. According to Chan and Chan (2005), China’s advertising industry started to grow after the open door policy was implemented in 1979, at which point many capitalistic ideas and principles were applied by Chinese businesses. According to Huan (2001), there are six major strategies for the open door policy. First, “the Chinese government has decentralized its foreign trade institutions” (p. 5). This means that businesses are allowed to trade with non-domestic businesses without going through the government. Second, the Chinese government had loosened the rules for technology advancement and importation. Third, the government “established four special economic zones (SEZs) – Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen, and Shantou...to attract foreign direct investment” (p. 6). Fourth, China has opened up for international economic and financial organizations, such as joining the World Bank and the IMF. Fifth, China has encouraged people to study abroad, so that these people can bring knowledge and training back to China. Sixth, China has “rapidly expanded its tourist industry and made efforts to export its labor services to the international market” (p. 8). After the open door policy was instituted, China then joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), which accelerated the economic growth and generated more competition, since foreign and international brands are now allowed to enter the Chinese market. While China’s market economy was growing during

the 1980s, as Weber (2000) mentioned, the government did not begin to see advertising as a major economic contributor until the 1990s. As television became popular, the Chinese government faced the problem of controlling the content and controlling the competition in the television industry. However, with the growth of this industry, the Chinese government started to use this medium to promote its policy and products, so that China would be able to sell its products to other countries as well as domestically. Because China is a large market, its open door policy helped the advertising industry to grow so fast that the government had trouble keeping up controlling the content. Chan (1995) mentioned that people in China were no longer content with the limited information they would get from the television commercials due to the lack of advertising skills within the industry. A growing desire among the Chinese people to improve their quality of life became evident, which in turn had led to further growth of the Chinese economy.

Although Hofstede's (1984) study shows that Chinese culture incorporates more collectivistic values, recent studies have shown that China's culture is greatly influenced by Western values. Zhang and Shavitt (2003) found that magazine advertisements targeting the younger generation stressed modernity and individualistic values, while television advertisements targeting the general public placed less emphasis on individualistic values than magazine ads. Also, "Confucian and collectivistic values dominate society, and people tend to be humble or moderate. This still holds true for China and the Chinese in general, that is, for the mass market" (p. 24). Although China is a country undergoing change, the older generations still hold to the traditional values. However, the younger generation, having grown up in a more open China, which is coming increasingly globalized, has embraced values that are deemed more

modern because of the change. The differences in the Chinese generations led the researcher of this study to focus specifically on advertisements' target audiences.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study compared advertisements in China to advertisements in the U.S. because U.S. advertising is by far the most influential in the world (Zhang & Shavitt, 2003). Because the U.S. culture incorporates very strong individualistic values, comparing Chinese advertisements to U.S. advertisements provides an opportunity to gauge how individualistic the values of young Chinese people have become in the eyes of advertisers.

From a theoretical basis of individualism and collectivism, the purpose of this quantitative study was to analyze the cultural values embedded in advertisement messages in commercials in China and in the U.S. Specifically, this study focused on the advertisements targeting different generations in China to test the degree of individualism and collectivism reflected in advertisements with different target audiences.

The next chapter includes the literature review, which discusses theories of cultural variability specifically individualism, collectivism, as well as advertising theory and previous research.

### **Literature Review**

Cultural differences do not only make people think differently, but also cause people to communicate differently. From previous research, it is known that China has a collectivistic culture (Triandis, 1990) and that United States has an individualistic culture (Hofstede, 1984). With this in mind, many people assume that Chinese and Americans always act according to their cultural values, even though cultural values do not predict individual behavior all the time. In addition, with societal changes, it is possible for cultural values to shift over time. Hofstede (2001) said that “cultures, especially national cultures, are extremely stable over time...change comes 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). With the economical and technological changes in China after the open door policy, the younger generations in China have made a gradual shift to become more individualistic than the older generation (Zhang & Shavitt, 2003).

In this literature review, background information on advertising is provided. Also, Hofstede’s individualism-collectivism dimension and Triandis’s individualism and collectivism theory will be discussed. Furthermore, the literature review will look at how China’s cultural values have been changing since the open door policy in 1979. The open door policy has not only affected the economy in China, but also the advertising industry and people’s values in general.

This literature review will also take a look at the global market. Western countries had been leaders of the global market for a long time, which means that many products, commercials, and lifestyles are being influenced by Western values. Under the influence of Western values,

many Eastern countries are slowly changing their values to correspond more closely to those of the West.

Lastly, this literature review will examine the studies that were conducted by other researchers on the effects of individualism and collectivism on advertising. By reviewing these studies, we will understand better why some collectivistic cultures are embracing the individualistic values in their advertising.

### **The Role and Function of Advertising**

While the origin of advertising dates back to ancient times, modern advertising started to develop during World War I (Ulanoff, 1977). White (1959) said that some people see advertising as a tool to influence audiences' knowledge about and desire for a product. He also argued that "the function of advertising is to help to organize and modify the basic perceptual process of the consumer, so that he is guided toward seeing and feeling a product in a given predictable way" (p. 8). Ulanoff (1977) defined advertising in a practical way. First, he said, "[A]dvertising is a selling tool that usually employs paid space and paid time in the media that carry it to the market" (p. 17). Money has a direct correlation on the publicity of an ad. This means that the more advertisers pay, the more exposure an ad will get. Secondly, "advertising, in most cases, makes known the advertiser; publicity often hides the identity of its creator" (p. 17). Thirdly, advertising reaches a larger audience than direct selling. Lastly, "advertising is but a part of the broader sales effort which is called promotion" (p. 17). Combining the four points, advertising is defined as:

A tool of marketing for communicating ideas and information about goods or services to a group; it employs paid space or time in the media or uses another communication

vehicle to carry its message; and it openly identifies the advertiser and his relationship to the sales effort (Ulanoff, 1977, p. 17).

After many years of development, advertising has become an inseparable part of all businesses. In order to meet specific goals, businesses are trying different ways to attract consumers with advertisements. Strategies such as targeting and branding are used very often in commercials. Ringold (1995) defined target marketing as “the intentional pursuit of exchange with a specific group through advertising or other marketing activities. Targeted marketing activities are designed and executed to be more appealing to the target market than to people in other segments” (p. 580). In TV advertising, scheduling and sequencing can be used by advertisers to target specific market. A study done by Sudha, Lakshmi, Shalabh, and Sridhar (2008) found that advertisements played during the break of a specific TV program could be used effectively in order to achieve the desired goal. Meyers (2010) said that consumers’ perspective toward a product could also affect their feeling toward an ad.

Branding is another widely used strategy in advertising. McDivitt (2003) said, “[B]rands are no simpler to maintain than relationships. It is useful to think about branding as more than just labeling or advertising...Building a good relationship requires time, authenticity, and consistency in words action over time” (p. 11). Branding has also evolved over time. During the early 70s, the cognitive aspect was seen as most important, which Holt (2004) called “mind-share-branding” (p.13). During the 1990s, the mind-share model was expanded to incorporate emotional and relational aspects of branding. In recent years, the Internet has become so popular that advertisers have started to use “viral branding” (Holt, 2004, p.13). These three models are what many advertisers use in their commercials today.

When advertisers use targeting and branding appropriately, the chance for an ad to succeed in meeting the advertiser's goals increase greatly. Meyers (2010) also found that culture is an important element of consumers' attitude toward an ad: "The way that a consumer views an ad is therefore affected by elements within the ad and how these elements are seen and used within their own cultural context. In other words, a cultural lens is used to view the different elements in order to find significance" (pp. 6-7). While many researchers (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Lin, 2001; Zhang & Shavitt, 2003; Zhang, Song, & Carver, 2008; Jin 2010) have conducted studies on how advertisements reflect cultural values, Petit, Zakon (1962) and Sissors (1978), in particular have researched the direct effects advertising has with cultural values. Although many people blame advertising for changing people's values, Petit and Zakon (1962) have different views upon this issue. Petit and Zakon (1962) said that:

Advertising must be compatible with the values of the consumer if it is to influence behavior. Advertising is an educating and not a forcing process. It interprets the want-satisfying qualities of the product for the consumer. To do this, it must relate product characteristics and consumer benefits to values the customer has already learned. The surest way to lose a sale and a customer is to go against the tide of what people think is right and wrong (pp. 15-16).

Advertisers develop commercials based on what the audiences want. If the advertisements are not giving a positive feeling to the audiences, the audiences are not likely to have a positive response to the advertisements. Petit and Zakon (1962) continued:

It would be impossible for advertising to be in conflict with the value system. It is the value system which determines the nature and significance of social institutions like advertising, not the other way around. The value system is the most precious possession

of society. It is protected against conflicting values coming in from other societies and from internal rebellion with society by institutions of social control (p. 16).

Similarly, Sissors (1978) argued that advertising cannot really change a culture's values; instead, it reflects the value system of society. Jin (2010) compared banner ads among four different countries and found that banner ads were different across cultures based on the country's cultural values. Jin (2010) concluded based on the study that "advertising designers should pay attention to the distinctive cultural characteristics of the audiences they want to reach" (p. 260).

China's advertising history started at the end of the 1800s, and "[b]y the beginning of the twentieth century, window displays, billboard advertisements, and even neon signs were being used on the streets of China" (Erevelles, Morgan, Buke, & Nguyen, 2002, p. 92). However, the use of advertisements became highly regulated when the Communist party took over the government. Advertising agencies became state-owned and "censorship of advertising reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976" (Rice & Lu, 1988, p. 44). At the end, advertising was prohibited except for political use. The advertising industry began to see the light when Deng Xiopeng became the leader in 1970: "Deng started an ambitious economic development program known as the 'Four Modernizations' in 1979. This economic renewal included the reinstatement of advertising as a legitimate business communication method" (Rice & Lu, 1988, p. 44). On January 28, 1979, Shanghai Television Station (STV) broadcast a commercial for a new medicinal wine, the first advertisement to appear on the 'socialist screen'" (Hong, 1994, p. 328). STV also played the first foreign commercial weeks after the first TV commercial was broadcasted. The China Advertising Association (CAA) was founded in 1982; "It, along with private and public institutions, moved the industry into a more prominent

position” (Hong, 1994, p. 328). In 2009, the money invested in advertisements reached about US \$73.5 billion, which was a 15% increase compare to 2008 (*China TV Rating Yearbook*, 2010).

As the economy in China improved, people no longer made purchases only to survive, but began making purchases for pleasure as well. A new Chinese middle class was seeking to build their social status. With this change, advertisements in China became more people-centered. Consumers started to look for quality in products, so that they could find enjoyment and happiness in the products and services they use. Also, the open door policy increased the product choices for people in China. In essence, a large segment of Chinese society has evolved from having barely enough to eat into a wealthy society. On the other hand, even though it is hard for the Chinese government to control the advertising industry, there are still more censorships of advertisements in China than many other countries (Chan & Chan, 2005). The degree of censorships usually varies from TV station to TV station, but advertisers are expected to ensure that their ads are “conductive to good physical and mental health and comply with social morality, thus fitting with the government’s spiritual civilization program” (Chan & Chan, p. 269).

### **Individualism – Collectivism**

Hofstede (1984) distinguished between different cultures by using four dimensions; “Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity-Femininity, and Individualism-Collectivism” (p. 212). In response to criticism of a Western bias, the study was replicated with Chinese culture more broadly represented and a fifth dimension was added labeled “long-term versus short-term orientation” (Hofstede, 1993). However, the original four dimensions emerged from the study as well.

In Hofstede's (1984) study, the United States scored the highest in individualism, while Chinese cultures, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, scored toward the lower end indicating these cultures are high in collectivism. Likewise, in Triandis, McCusker and Hui's (1990) study, Chinese cultures scored higher on collectivism and lower on individualism.

Gudykunst (2003) said, "Individualism-collectivism incorporates cultural norms and rules related to group identities and the differentiation between members of ingroups and outgroups" (p. 10). Ingroups are defined as "groups that are important to their members and groups for which individuals will make sacrifices" (p. 9). Outgroups are made up of individuals who do not belong to the ingroups.

In Hofstede's (1984) model, individualism and collectivism are distinguished the following ways: (1) People in individualistic cultures make decisions based on their own thinking, while people in collectivistic cultures make decisions based on their own in-group; (2) "I" is the center of people in individualistic cultures and "we" is the center of people in collectivistic cultures; (3) "Nuclear family structure" in individualistic cultures and "extended family or tribal structures" is the primary unit in collectivistic cultures; (4) the economy is better developed in individualistic cultures and is less developed in the collectivistic cultures.

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) also argued that individualistic cultures tend to be associated with low-context communication and collectivistic cultures tend to be associated with high-context communication. People from low-context cultures typically believe that direct communication is most effective. On the other hand, people from high-context cultures typically view group harmony as more important than personal feelings, which means that direct communication is not being used very much since it can hurt the group's harmonious relationship. People in low-context cultures communicate with "clear description,"

“unambiguous communication,” and “high degree of specificity.” On the other hand, people from high-context cultures integrate information from “the environment, context, situation, and nonverbal cues” (Gudykunst, 2003, p. 83).

Triandis, McCusker and Hui (1990) have also studied individualism and collectivism, suggesting that idiocentrism corresponds to individualistic cultures and allocentrism corresponds to collectivistic cultures. They argued that individualism and collectivism could blend within a culture, but for an individualistic or collectivistic culture, the following attributes should be present in that culture: (1) Collectivistic cultures emphasize the value of ingroup much more than the individualistic cultures; (2) Individualistic cultures contain both ingroups and outgroups. But people see no big differences between these two groups; (3) People from collectivistic cultures make decisions according to the ingroup values and people from individualistic cultures make decision based on individuals; (4) Hierarchy is more important to the collectivistic cultures than the individualistic cultures; (5) Group decisions are homogeneous in collectivistic cultures and heterogeneous in individualistic cultures, because harmony is important to the people in collectivistic cultures; (6) “Self Reliance” means that “I am not a burden on the ingroup” in the collectivistic cultures and means “I can do my own thing” in individualistic cultures (pp. 1006-1007).

Triandis et al. (1995) argued that ingroup is the main element that distinguishes individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Collectivists classify or associate themselves with family and ethnic group much more than individualists. There are many ingroups in collectivistic cultures that can affect people’s decisions, such as family, friends, colleagues, and religious groups (Gudykunst, 2003, p. 9).

In the most recent comprehensive study of cross-cultural variability, *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies* (2004), which focused mainly on implications for leadership and organizations, the individualism and collectivism dimension was divided into “institutional individualism/collectivism” and “in-group individualism/collectivism” respectively. (p. 463) The *GLOBE* (2004) study also measured values and practices separately for each dimension. Values reflect what people believe they should do and practices reflect what people actually do. According to the *GLOBE* (2004) study results:

It is evident that across all cultures, values and practices scores are higher for In-Group Collectivism, as compared to Institutional Collectivism. Second, it is interesting to note that for both the In-Group Collectivism and the Institutional Collectivism scales, scores are higher for values than they are for practices. (p. 466)

In the *GLOBE* study, Taiwan scored higher in institutional collectivism values than China. Both Taiwan and Hong Kong scored higher in in-group collectivism values than China (p. 470-471). However, China scored higher in both institutional collectivism practice and in-group collectivism practice than Taiwan and Hong Kong (p. 468), which indicates that Mainland China is still more collectivistic in it they does than the Western-influenced former colonies.

According to Triandis (2001), individualism/collectivism operate on two dimensions, resulting in four categories:

Horizontal Individualism (HI), where people want to be unique and do ‘their own thing;’ Vertical Individualism (VI), where people want to do their own thing and also to be ‘the best;’ Horizontal Collectivism (HC), where people merge their selves with their in-groups; and Vertical Collectivism (VC), where people submit to the authorities of the in-group and are willing to sacrifice themselves for their in-group. (p. 910)

China is a traditionally collectivistic country, and one would expect that commercials in China would lean toward the collectivistic side. However, throughout the last 20 years, the advertising industry in China has changed drastically, which means that the cultural values portrayed in advertisements may be different as well. A study conducted by Cheng (1997), titled *Toward an understanding of cultural values manifest in advertising: A content analysis of Chinese television commercials in 1990 and 1995: Update*, found that “both Eastern and Western cultural values were frequently depicted in Chinese television commercials.” Cheng’s (1997) study included three individualistic values, “competition,” “enjoyment,” and “individualism,” and three collectivistic values, “courtesy,” “patriotism,” and “tradition.” The study also found that “modernity” was portrayed the most in Chinese television commercials. However, as a result of the regime of Mao Zedong, who tried to alter the traditional values in China, television commercials from 1990 and 1995 had a tendency to show more traditional values.

Another study of television commercials in the U.S. and in China revealed that “modernity,” “youth,” “family,” “technology,” and “tradition,” were the most common themes in Chinese television commercials. The study also showed that Chinese television commercials tend to use some Western values while ignoring others, because the commercials aimed at selling products to consumers. However, imported products and joint venture products did show more use in individualism and modernity in their advertisements than regular products (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996). With the Eastern and Western values combined, China’s advertisements are blended with both individualistic and collectivistic values. Also, with the economic growth, Chinese advertisements are designed to sell more products rather than focusing on maintaining traditional values.

Individualism and collectivism are seen as opposite values; however, Watson and Morris (2002) said that individualism and collectivism values should not be conflicting with each other, which means “[o]ne set of values could have been mediated by the other.” They concluded in their study, “An individualistic commitment to pleasure, for example, might rest upon a collectivistic dedication to self-discipline” (p. 268). What they mean here is that people can do things for other people based on their personal pleasure.

### **Change of Cultural Values and Within-Culture Differences**

Hofstede (2001) argued, “Cultures, especially national cultures, are extremely stable over time” (p. 34). Even though cultures tend to remain stable, it does not mean that cultures cannot change: “Changes comes from the outside, in the form of forces of nature or forces of human beings: trade, conquest, economical or political dominance, and technological breakthroughs (Hofstede, 2001, p. 34). The world as a whole has moved into an informational age. With the development of technology, people are seeing more similar products and information. Some researchers have suggested that the world will eventually become very similar (Hofstede, 2001). Hua (2010) suggested that the use of language could also change culture: “Cultural norms and values do not remain static; they are constantly being constructed and negotiated through interactional processes” (p. 200). Sun and Wang (2010) said, “[F]rom a cultural and historical perspectives...cultural values change overtime” (p. 79). People can have different experiences and religious beliefs may shift over time, which leads to cultural differences among different generations.

One of the characteristics of collectivistic cultural values is that the economies in these countries are less developed; therefore, people tend to depend on each other more (Hofstede, 1984, p. 172). With China’s economy growing so rapidly, the culture may be shifting from

collectivistic values toward increasingly individualistic values. Cao (2009) found in his study that as the economy in China gets better, people have more choices. He argued that the more choices one has, the more individualistic that person will be. In China, people can make their own decisions based on their education, the resources they have, and the media. With all the information available now, people have many more alternatives than before. Although people in China still want to be known as collectivistic people due to the traditional background and due to individualism being associated with selfishness, they are in fact becoming more individualistic in their practices. Also, despite the collectivistic ideal that no one should stand out in an in-group and everyone needs to share what they have, Chinese are still becoming more individualistic, especially those who are born after the 1980s.

As China opened up their country, many foreign companies came to China for investment. The foreign companies did not only bring in new products, but also new policies. The traditional collectivistic working environment no longer exists. People have to compete and need to stand out in order to be promoted. Apart from the work place, education was also influenced. Students started to learn how to study according to their individual needs (Cao, 2009, p. 46). Gregory and Munch (1996) stressed that individualism-collectivism can shape an individual's beliefs, attitudes and behaviors, but it cannot determine what he or she will believe and think. With the collectivistic cultural background, the younger Chinese will still hold on to their collectivistic ideals, but with all the available information and resources, they do not practice these collectivistic values anymore. Sun and Wang (2010) found in their research that the younger Chinese generations (14-34 year-old) "have already shifted from traditional (collectivism and ideology orientation) values to modern values (individualism and secular orientation), largely due to their own life experiences in the recent social transformation process"

(p. 78). Also, younger people aged 19-34 are the most secular Chinese among all generations. Ralston's (1999) study shows that younger managers in China incorporate more individualistic values in their management style. Moore (2005) focused on the use of slang terms among the younger generations in China to compare their view of their lives and their parents' lives. Results show that younger generations in China view themselves as having more freedom than their parents. Freedom is highly associated with individualistic values, than their parents.

The presence of cultural values such as individualism and collectivism are well established in research, but the individual differences within a culture are also important to consider (Forbes, Zhang, Doroszewicz & Hass, 2009). Many studies categorize people into a one national culture, which may confound the result. Lee and Lim (2008) agree "marketers must be aware of not only the obvious differences between vastly distinct cultures, but also the finer variations among consumers from different regions in the same market" (p. 79). The Chinese market is vast with multiple subcultures and segments. Targeting old people is different than targeting young people. McDonald's for example, produces many advertisements for Chinese consumers. These commercials all serve the same function of promoting McDonald's products, but they convey different messages to different target customers. Different commercials toward different individuals serve different purposes, and researchers must take this information into account. People of different generations are most likely to use different products, which means that the values portrayed in the commercials could be very different also.

### **Advertising in the Global Market Place**

Because technology has made communication so easy, advertisements may reach audiences around the world in seconds (Frith & Mueller, 2003). However, in order to get the

desired message across to targeted customers, companies often need to modify commercials in other countries. Frith and Mueller (2003) explained global advertising as follow:

Advertisers frequently use the signs and symbols of their own locality to build brand awareness. In the case of global advertising, instead of validating the overseas “local” culture many multinational advertisers use the same basic campaign worldwide that validates their “home” culture. Thus, since most multinational corporations and their advertising agencies are headquartered in the West, critics contend that the overuse of Western signs and symbols in advertising privileges Western culture over foreign cultures. (p. 20)

The West and the East have very different perceptions on values and the way of life. For example, according to Rokeach (1973), the U.S., Canada, and Australia, which are some of the Western countries, see freedom and being independent as most important, while the Eastern country of Israel see collectivistic values such as being helpful, obedient, and polite, as more important. This shows that the use of Western symbols and messages may not be the most effective way to advertise. Gram (2007) found in his study that the global markets are seen as Western. Many advertisements capture people’s interest because they are Western, which is indicative of the desire for people in the East to acquire a Western lifestyle. Koeman (2007) also found that individualistic values seem to dominate commercials in both individualistic cultures and in collectivistic cultures.

Korea has a collectivistic culture, however, Wolburg’s study showed that commercials in Korea promoted both individualistic values and collectivistic values. Wolburg (2000) said that American commercials often show self-enhancement, which fits in with the individualistic values in the U.S., while in Korea, one can find commercials that promote all kinds of values.

Some of the advertisements from Korea are dominated by collectivistic values; some of the advertisements incorporate both collectivistic and individualistic values; and some of the advertisements are dominated by individualistic ideals much like advertisements in the U.S.: “These ads politely offer a way of self-enhancement without appearing offensively self-indulgent or lacking in humility. Many Korean ads offer dual interpretations of enhancing the individual for his or her own sake, or enhancing the individual for the good of the group” (p. 74). Even though the individualistic values were interpreted in different ways, the direction of the advertising industry in Korea still promotes much more individualism than the researcher expected. Cho, Kwon, Gentry, Jun, and Kropp (1999) also compared American and Korean commercials and found that American commercials are more individualistic, while Korean commercials are not more collectivistic.

Koeman’s (2007) study involved five different cultures; Dutch, Flemish, American, Turkish, and Chinese. The study reported that there is a trend towards globalization in commercials, especially in the value of hedonism. He argued, however, that globalization does not equal Americanization, because the Dutch and the Flemish commercials promoted stronger individualistic values in certain areas, such as achievement and self-direction than the American commercials, thus Westernization should not be over-generalized to mean simply American.

These different studies show that in the global market, companies in many countries, including the countries that are traditionally collectivistic, are using many Western elements in their advertisements. Gram (2007) concluded in his study that many advertisements in Asia are promoting Western brands, because Western brands are more popular. Even when advertisements are promoting local brands, the advertising styles lean toward Western styles.

### **Individualism-Collectivism in Chinese and American Advertising**

Tsai and Wei-Na (2006) used Triandis' horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism, and vertical collectivism as the categories of their study of television commercials in the U.S. and China. In this research, vertical individualism, which includes "self fulfillment, self development, benefits to an individual, and competition with others" (p. 96), was dominant in the U.S. television commercials. On the other hand, horizontal individualism, which includes "individuality, independence of audience, uniqueness or originality, and reflection of self-reliance or hedonism" (p. 96), were also found frequently in the U.S. television commercials. Horizontal collectivism values including "interdependent relationships with others," "sharing a joy with others," and "collaboration with group members" (p. 99) were common in the Chinese advertisements. Surprisingly, this study also found that vertical and horizontal individualism appeared frequently in the Chinese television commercials as well.

While the researchers were expecting to find collectivistic values in the Chinese television commercials, this study showed that rare vertical collectivistic values, which include "conformity to family or social group, achievements of the family or social group, and benefits to families or group members," were found, because most ads were dominated by vertical individualism. Cardon (2008) reported that even though Chinese displayed slightly more collectivistic values and Americans more individualistic values, the vertical collectivistic value was rarely displayed in either the U.S. and in China. The findings in these studies strongly contradicted previous research about China's traditional values. Tsai and Wei-Na (2006) concluded that the reason the Chinese commercials were highly individualistic could be the many foreign advertising agencies in China. Also, as more and more investments are coming from the Western countries, the cultural values in commercials can be strongly affected.

Lin's (2001) study revealed different findings from Tsai and Wei-Na's (2006). Lin took product categories into consideration and found that different products could affect the way one advertises. She also found traditional Chinese values were dominant in Chinese television commercials and individualistic values were dominant in U.S. television commercials. Also, there were still many commercials about groups and respect toward older people in the Chinese television commercials. However, even though Lin (2001) found much evidence of traditional values in Chinese television commercials, she also found "modernity" and "youth" appeals in many of the Chinese commercials. Compared to the American commercials, Chinese commercials actually used more appeals to "modernity" and "youth" in their ads. According to Pollay (1983), "modernity" means "new," which includes "contemporary, modern, new, improved, progressive, advanced, introducing and announcing" (p. 80). On the other hand, "traditional" means "old," which includes "classic, historical, antique, old, legendary, time-honored, long-standing, venerable and nostalgic" (p. 80). One of the explanations Lin (2001) gave for this finding is that some products are not culturally bound, and so the commercials for these products may be more similar in the U.S. and China.

Another reason Lin (2001) gave was that the younger Chinese generation spends much more on brand names, including brands from other countries, which may explain the more Westernized approach in commercials. As many American businesses have localized in China, the culture has changed, but the core value may still remain the same. This study was significant, but the time frame should be taken into consideration. During the last ten years, the Internet has become very popular in many countries, including China. People all over the world are getting more information now than ten years ago. With more and more information available on the Internet, Chinese people may become more willing to make their own decisions because they are

digesting information on the Internet by themselves. Considering the emphasis on “modernity” and “youth” appeal, Lin (2001) found in her study that these appeals might even be more common in Chinese commercials now.

Zhang and Shavitt (2003) conducted a study entitled *Cultural Values in Advertisements to The Chinese X-Generation*. In this study, the X-generation referred to people aged 18-35. The results suggested that modernity and individualistic values are more dominant in magazine ads and traditional collectivistic values are more dominant in television commercials. Also, the researchers suggested that ads for products that are for personal use would promote more individualistic values while products that are for group use appeal more to collectivistic values in commercials. Zhang and Shavitt (2003) found that both modernity and individualism were the predominant values in Chinese advertising. Moreover, they found that products for personal use do show more individualistic values than products for group use. The study concluded:

Even though China is an Eastern traditional society with a collectivistic culture, social changes, such as economic growth, urban expansion, higher disposable income (especially among the X-Generation), and the influence of global marketing and mass media on affluent lifestyles, push advertising to introduce a new set of values (individualism, modernity) in China. (p. 31)

The findings clearly showed the influence of the younger generation in China, which lends support to the notion that people from different age groups may hold different cultural values, particularly as a cultural shift is taking place. Zhang’s (2009) study showed that the older generation found ads with collectivistic values more persuading than ads using individualistic values. Zhang (2009) said in his study that “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” (p. 69).

In summary, the literature review introduced Hofstede’s (1984) dimension of individualism and collectivism, which is the fourth cultural dimension in his theory of cultural variability. The degree of individualism and collectivism is based heavily on the economic situation of a country. The more developed the economy, the more individualistic a culture will be. Triandis’s (2001) individualism-collectivism model is not the same as Hofstede’s (1984). Triandis emphasizes mostly how in-group influence differs between an individualistic culture and a collectivistic culture.

Previous studies showed that collectivistic values are still more dominant in China when compared to the U.S., but there is much more individualism portrayed in commercials in China than had been found before. Previous studies found that “modernity” and “youth” appear to be increasingly dominant values in Chinese television commercials. China’s economy has grown rapidly, which has provided a very different environment for younger generations in China. The younger generation has not had to go through tough times like their parents did. For the younger generation, buying is for pleasure. Because of that, advertising strategies are changing according to the market. The changes indicate a shift in cultural values portrayed in commercials as well. Research should therefore take this into consideration and separate the markets carefully. This is accomplished in the present study, the methodology of which is discussed in the next chapter.

### **Methodology**

The literature review discussed the cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism. According to Hofstede's (1984) theory, people from collectivistic cultures make their decisions based on their in-group, while people from individualistic cultures make decisions based on "I." Also, people from collectivistic cultures tend to focus more on others and place less emphasis on personal achievements than people from individualistic cultures. The literature review also discussed individualistic values in the American culture and collectivistic values in the Chinese culture. Although research has shown that advertisements targeting Generation X in China are starting to lean more toward individualism (Zhang & Shavitt, 2003, p. 31), no study to date has compared the individualistic and collectivistic values in Chinese advertisements targeting different age groups. Individualistic values are more pronounced in the younger generation because of the change in consumerism in China after the open door policy was instituted. This study analyzed individualistic and collectivistic values in advertisements in China and in the U.S. with a specific emphasis on the younger generations (13-29 for China and 13-34 for the U.S.) and the older generations (55 or above for both China and the U.S.). As mentioned in the literature review, in addition to individualism, modernity is also seen as a dominant value that correlates with individualistic cultural values (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996). On the other hand, tradition is seen as a dominant value that correlates with collectivistic values.

### **Hypotheses and Research Question**

This study tested the notion that advertisements in China targeting the younger generation promote individualistic values and modernity themes to a greater degree because Westernized values are becoming more accepted within this generation in China. The older generation, by contrast, is more likely to preserve traditional Chinese values, thus advertisements targeting this

generation should be more collectivistic. Moreover, even though the younger generation in China is becoming Westernized, the individualistic values should still be less dominant in advertisements in China than in advertisements in the U.S. A content analysis of television commercials was conducted to test three hypotheses:

**(H1)** Individualistic values and modernity themes are more prominent in television advertisements targeting the 13-29 year-old age group in China than are collectivistic values and traditional themes.

**(H2)** Collectivistic values and traditional themes are more prominent in advertisements targeting people who are over 55 years old in China than are advertisements targeting the 13-29 year-old age group, while individualistic values and modernity themes are more prominent in ads targeting the younger Chinese.

**(H3)** Advertisements targeting the 13-29 year-old age group in China promote collectivistic values and traditional themes to a greater degree and individualistic values and modernity to a lesser degree than advertisements in the U.S. targeting both the 13-34 year-old group and those 55 years and older.

Although it was not expected that there would be a difference between the younger and the older generations in the United States, this research question was explored:

**(RQ1)** Is there a difference in the values and themes prominent in ads targeting the 13-34 year-old age group and ads targeting those 55 and older in the U.S., respectively?

### **Audience Demographics in China and the United States**

According to the *China TV Rating Yearbook* (2010), the younger generations who have different preferences for TV programs are the post-80s and the post-90s generations. The post-80s were born between 1981 and 1990, and the post-90s were born between 1991 and 2000. The

people from these two groups are between 10-29 years old. However, in order to limit the size of the target group and have a similar sample with the American market, only teens and young adults (13-29 years old) were included in this sample. China's open door policy was imposed in 1979; people who grew up under this policy experienced a different culture than the people who grew up before then. The *China TV Rating Yearbook* (2010) offered three reasons why the post-80s and the post-90s generations have different preferences on what they watch on TV: First, they like topics that are entertaining and light. Students and young workers in China are facing extremely heavy pressure everyday. Programs that are easy and light can help them relieve their stress. Second, they are much more interested in celebrities. People from the older generations tend to focus on patriotism and heroism, but the younger generations focus much more on trendiness. Third, the younger generations pay more attention on brand names. Some TV channels in China highly emphasized "image." These TV channels tend to have a more trendy style and positioning, which attracted many young audiences: "Audiences aged between 15-24 watched more film, ... sports, ...music, and variety shows" (p. 50). People between 55-64 watch more drama, and people over 65 watch more programs in the law, education, news, and drama genres. According to the *China TV Rating Yearbook* (2010) "Older audiences watch more finance, law, education, life service, drama, news, and special topic TV shows more than the younger audiences, but younger audiences put more time in film, youth, foreign language and variety shows" (p. 50).

Audience demographics in the U.S. are very different. Storey (2010) said in his report that the 18-49 year-olds are the most important audiences, because they are the advertisers' primary targets. The younger target group in the U.S. market is defined as the 13-34 year-olds in this study. However, for the sake of comparison, teen audiences were taken into consideration in

this study, which made the younger group in the U.S. 13-34 years old. The five major broadcast TV networks in the U.S. are ABC, CBS, the CW, Fox, and NBC. In the AC Nielsen report (2010), CBS, NBC, and ABC were the most popular broadcast TV channels in August and in November of 2010. Gorman (2010) used AC Nielsen's data and calculated the broadcast network prime-time season ratings on most current DVR viewing (season 2010-11) and found that "CBS maintains its season lead in primetime adults 18-49 ratings for the season averaging a 3.2 rating. Fox is in a second place with a 2.9 adults 18-49 ratings average. ABC and NBC are tied in third with a 2.8 rating average." This indicates that ABC, CBS and NBC are very popular networks among the 18-49 year-old group in both TV viewing and time shift DVR viewing. On the other hand, people who are 50 plus tend to spend more time on watching news on TV than any other age group. According to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press's report (2008), 64% of the 50-64 year-olds and 74% of people 65 and older watch TV news. Eighty percent of the 50-64 year-olds and 74% of the 65+ age group get their news in the morning. Gorman (2010) quoted AC Nielsen's TV ratings and showed that Fox News and CNN remain the top two news channels in the morning programs, during primetime, and in the evening news.

### **Sampling**

The research sample for this study consisted of advertisements targeting the younger generation (age 13-29 in China and age 13-34 in the U.S.) and advertisements targeting the older generation (above 55 in both countries). There is no evidence of a generational shift in values in the U.S., but rather that American advertisements are dominated by individualistic values; the American sample was nonetheless divided according to different target age groups to match the Chinese sample and to control for differences related to age and program preferences. This study

also examined if there is a generational shift in values portrayed in advertisements targeting the younger and older American generations, respectively.

In the Chinese market, advertisements before, during, and after various TV programs were recorded in order to represent different audiences. According to the *China TV Rating Yearbook* (2010), *The Happiness Camp* is an extremely popular show among the younger generation. Advertisements were recorded during the show from Hunan TV, which broadcasts nationwide. Advertisements associated with *Who's Saying* and *The Music Show*, programs that are very popular among the younger generation were recorded from Beijing TV Youth Channel. The post-80s and post-90s are interested in TV shows with more relaxing and lively topics, and also shows that are involved with young celebrities (*China TV Rating Yearbook*, 2010). Young celebrities were involved in *Sunny Happiness* and *Three Daughters of the Xia Family*, which were popular TV shows from Anhui TV, and thus, advertisements were recorded from both of the shows. Lastly, advertisements from *iPartment*, a show targeting the younger people in China, were collected from Shanghai Dragon TV.

The older Chinese target (55 or above) tend to watch the CCTV channels. Also, they spend more time watching law, finance, dramatic programming, drama, and news channels. Moreover, people who are 55 or above watch much more TV from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. than any other age group. Furthermore, the variety shows played in the CCTV-4 channel are the most popular among the older age group in China (*China TV Rating Yearbook*, 2010). Based on the research, advertisements were recorded from CCTV-1, the National News Channel, CCTV-4, the China International Channel (Asia), CCTV-7, the Military and Agriculture Channel, CCTV-8, the Drama-programming Channel, CCTV-11, the Drama Channel, and CCTV-12, the Society and Law Channel during the 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. period. TV programs used to record

advertisements for this study were *News* (CCTV-1), *China Art and Literature* (CCTV-4), *Military News* and *Military Documentary* (CCTV-7), *Media Update* and *Eight Gods Cross the Sea* (CCTV-8), *Learn with Me* (CCTV-11), and *Psychology Talk*, *Seeing the Law*, and *The First Line* (CCTV-12).

After online research on different TV programs, advertisements were recorded from ABC, CBS, CW and the Teenick channel for the younger American group. TV programs used to record advertisements for this study were *Degrassi* (Teenick), *How I Met Your Mother* (CBS), *Big Bang Theory* (CBS), *Vampires Diary* (CW), *One Tree Hill* (CW), *Hellcats* (CW), and *The Bachelor* (ABC). *Degrassi* is a show that targets teens according to the Teenick (2010) web site. *Big Band Theory* is highly popular among the 18-34 years old (The Big Bang Theory Absolutely Explodes In The Ratings, 2009, para. 9) *The Bachelor* (ABC) ranked number one among the 18-34 years old, especially for women (*The Bachelor Wins with Women 18-34*, 2011, para. 5); *How I Met Your Mother* is “CBS's highest-rated series among adults 18-34” (*How I Met Your Mother suits up for another 2 years*, 2011, para. 2). *One Tree Hill* had the best adults 18-34 rating for almost a year while *Hellcats* “matched time period high for the (most recent) season in adults 18-34” (*One Tree Hill and Hellcats pair for the CW’s most watched Tuesday night in more than a year*, 2011, para. 3-4). Lastly, the *Vampire Diaries* ranked number two with women 18-34 in January 2011 (*Viewers catch The Vampire Diaries*, 2011, para. 2)

For the older American group, advertisements were recorded before, during, and after the morning news from Fox and CNN. TV programs used for recording advertisements were *America’s News Room* (Fox) and *CNN News Room* (CNN).

Commercials shown before, during, and after the chosen programs were recorded in each country between the last week of January and the third week of February of 2011. All Chinese

advertisements were recorded through the CNTV web site, which plays all CCTV channels and all city TV channels live. Advertisements for the American samples are captured directly from the channels during the chosen programs' show time. A DVR and a camcorder were used for recording. Repeated advertisements for one of the four groups were counted only once.

However, ads were excluded when they appeared in both generational groups in a country, because these ads may target both age groups, which would confound the results of the study.

Advertisements without any conversations or narratives were also excluded, because according to Neuendorf (2002), "[P]roperties of the text (both words and images) are crucial" (p. 5).

Advertisements without text or words are more difficult to code accurately. Moreover, this study sought to explore how advertisements reflect cultural values; therefore, advertisements that were not produced domestically in each respective country were excluded as well. For example, if a product from Italy was advertised in China and the ad obviously was produced in Italy, the ad would be excluded, because it would not reflect the Chinese cultural values. The same principle was applied for the American sample. Lastly, any ads deal with special occasion or season such as Chinese New Year and Valentine's Day were excluded.

A total of 1,103 TV advertisements were collected for the four groups, and total number of 566 ads were analyzed in this study. There were 182 ads representing the younger American group; 134 ads representing the older American group; 136 ads representing the younger Chinese group; and 114 representing the older Chinese group.

### **Coding Scheme**

This study used a previously established coding scheme, the reliability of which had already been tested. Zhang and Shavitt (2003) developed a four-category coding scheme based on previously established theoretical framework. The four-category scheme includes four values;

they are “individualism,” “collectivism,” “modernity,” and “tradition.” According to Zhang and Shavitt’s coding scheme, individualism in advertisements show the importance of “self” and “being different from others” (p. 28). An example for this category will be advertising message like “you are not you when you are hungry,” which put the emphasis on self. Advertisements that are collectivistic emphasize “relationships,” “conformity,” and “focus on others.” An example will be an advertisement showing a family eating together and taking care of each other. Advertisements show modernity when “technology,” “revolution,” “professional,” “fashion,” and “leisure” are emphasized (Zhang and Shavitt, 2003, p. 28). An example with modernity in advertisement can be seen when a new product or new technology comes out and shows all the new features to the audiences. The last value in the scheme is tradition, which includes “long history,” “closeness to nature,” and traditional elements.” Traditional values can be seen in advertisements with message like “60 years of experience, it’s original.” Most of the time, advertisements will show more than one value or one item from the coding scheme, but to a varying degree. The coding schema is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Coding Scheme for Individualism, Collectivism, Modernity, and Tradition in Advertising*

<b>Values</b>	<b>Description</b>
Individualism	
Self	Self-decision or choice of product. All is up to you. Individual pressure or enjoyment (hedonism-oriented). Satisfy consumer’s (your) own specific needs. Be nice to yourself, self-improvement or self-realization. Attention focus or look cool. Leadership; ambition Personal success or personal goal achievement.
Being different from others	Unique personality or individuality; being independent. Risk-taking.

Collectivism	
Relationship focus	Take care of family. Concern about others or support of society, group goal. Harmony with others, enjoying goods with others. Enhance relationship.
Conformity	Product enjoys certain popularity. Following social consensus.
Other focused	Others' happiness. Pay attention to the views of others.
Modernity	
Technology	Provides you with "good quality product" (as claimed in the ads), such as reliable, effective, trustworthy, and safe. Empowers you to control your surroundings. Provides you a convenient and easy lifestyle. Laboratory ingredients or chemical elements showing scientific evidence (e.g., it can enhance xx by 57%)
Revolution	Revolutionary force, challenges or changes old perceptions, values, stereotypes, and customs. Things change quickly. Keep up with what's new.
Professional	Professional resources to get recommendation for product or brand, such as from dermatologists or dentists.
Fashion	Changing style or updated model. Stay young forever.
Leisure	Freedom to have more leisure.
Tradition	
Long history	Enjoy the heritage since long ago. Enduring or timeless; being historical and legendary.
Closeness to nature	Natural ingredients in product. Close to natural environment.
Traditional elements	Long-respected traditions, such as "adapted from ancient prescription."

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### **Coding Procedure**

The researcher of this study coded the advertisements collected from both countries.

Krippendorff (2007) explained in his book, *Content Analysis – An Introduction to its*

*Methodology*, that “familiarity denotes a sense of understanding that coders must bring to a content analysis. But the sharing of similar backgrounds – similar histories of involvement with texts, similar education, and similar social sensitivities – is what aids reliability” (p. 128). The researcher of this study is a bilingual Chinese student with five years of intercultural experience in the U.S.

After the researcher finished the coding process, 10% of the advertisements from each of the four groups was randomly chosen and analyzed by a second coder. This coder is also a bilingual Chinese student with significant intercultural experience in the U.S. This coder received basic training on the coding scheme and the concepts of individualism, collectivism, modernity, and tradition. This coder’s analysis was used to calculate the intercoder reliability, using Holsti’s (1969) formula. The intercoder reliability coefficient was 75.4%.

When coding the sample advertisements, the coders assigned a number for each category in the scheme following Zhang and Shavitt’s (2003) example. If the coder found an advertisement to portray a certain value or theme strongly or prominently, he/she would assign a 2 for the category. If the coder thought that the advertisement showed the value to some degree, he/she would assign a 1. Lastly, if the coder found that a certain value was not emphasized at all, a 0 was assigned to the category. For example, if an ad shows a young woman share a product with another person in order to enhance their relationship, the coder would assign 2 for collectivism and 0 for the remaining categories.

### **Data Analysis**

The four values/themes (individualism, collectivism, modernity, and tradition) were correlated. Mean scores for each value/theme were calculated for each demographic. Next, t-tests, one-way and two-way ANOVAs were used to determine differences among the groups. A

multi-way ANOVA was used to test for interaction effects between country, age group and product categories.

This chapter provided an overview of the research design for this study, including the three hypotheses and research question that guided this study. The study intended to explore the different cultural values emphasized in advertisements that target different generations in two different cultures. Also, the study aimed to test the degree of individualism by comparing advertisements from China and the U.S. The chapter also discussed the sample used in this study, which included advertisements recorded from various shows in China and in the U.S. The coding scheme was also introduced in this chapter. There are four categories in the coding scheme, they are: individualism, collectivism, modernity, and tradition. The last part of this chapter discussed the coding procedure of this study as well as the statistical tests used to test the hypothesis and answer the research question. Next, the results will be presented, followed by a discussion.

## **Results**

The coding was done according to Zhang and Shavitt's (2003) coding schema with four categories: individualism values, collectivism values, modernity themes, and traditional themes. A total of 1,103 TV ads were collected, generating a sample of 566 usable TV ads from both countries. The TV ads were gathered to represent the sample of younger Chinese, older Chinese, younger American, and older American. In order to see if product categories have effects on cultural values, samples were divided into different categories according to World Advertising Research Center (WARC, 2011). This chapter will report the statistics on the coding result in relation to the three hypotheses and research question.

### **Product Categories**

From all the ads collected in the Chinese market, more than 80% of the brands in the ads are from China, while very few are from the Western countries. The products advertised in the whole sample used for this study represent 16 of WARC's 17 products categories (WARC, 2011). These categories are listed in Table 2 below. The business and industrial category included advertisements for business-to-business, employment, recruitment, staff, industrial, information technology, high-tech, legal and professional services, property and construction. The government and non-profit category included advertisements such as PSA's for charities and voluntary organizations, educational, universities, government, social policy, political organizations, public health, and services in the armed forces and law enforcement. In the household and domestic category, advertisements such as batteries, cleaners, gardening, appliances, home improvement, pet care, kitchen products were included.

Under the leisure and entertainment category, one could find advertisements about photography, film, video, gaming consoles, computer games, music players, gambling,

museums, attractions, computers, restaurants, sports, and toys. Directories, magazines, books, newspapers, radio stations, TV channels, Web sites and online services were ads in the media and publishing category. Advertisements under the retail category included clothing and fashion, department stores, electrical, florists, leisure and entertainment, loyalty and rewards cards, motor and auto accessories, pharmacies and health, restaurants, retail research, marketing, and trends, shopping centers, malls, supermarkets, and grocery stores. The telecoms category included advertisements such as call services and accessories, general and Internet service providers, mobile providers, and cell phones. The distributions of product categories across the samples are shown in table 2.

Table 2 shows that in the younger American sample, food, retail, toiletries and cosmetics were the most prominent product categories. In the older American sample, financial services and media publishing were the most prominent categories. Drink and beverage, pharmaceutical and healthcare, and toiletries and cosmetics were the most prominent ads in the younger Chinese sample. In the older Chinese sample, drink and beverage and retail were the most prominent categories.

A one-way ANOVA test was also used to compare the mean scores for the cultural values in each product category across the four samples. Results showed that individualism was prominent in the business and industrial, media and publishing, and the toiletries and cosmetics categories ( $F(15,550) = 6.5, p < .001$ ). Collectivism scored the highest in the government and non-profit category ( $F(15,550) = 2.6, p = .001$ ). Modernity was prominent in business and industrial, financial services, motor and auto, and toiletries and cosmetics ( $F(15,550) = 8.3, p < .001$ ). Lastly, while none of the product categories scored very high in traditional themes, the highest were drink and beverage and travel, transport and tourism ( $F(15,550) = 6.6, p < .001$ ).

Although there were main effects for product across all four cultural values, when three-way interaction was tested for country, age group and product category using ANOVA, there was no significant interaction with product category.

Table 2

*Product Categories in the TV Ads in Each Target Group*

Product Categories	N	AY	AO	CY	CO	Percent of all ads
Business and Industrial	6	2	4	0	0	1%
Drink and Beverage	69	5	5	24	35	12.1%
Financial Services	45	15	26	3	1	8%
Food	57	21	12	17	7	10%
Government and Non-Profit	15	3	3	0	9	2.6%
Household and Domestic	29	5	12	6	6	5.1%
Leisure and Entertainment	22	9	1	2	10	3.9%
Media and Publishing	39	14	20	1	4	6.9%
Motor and Auto	37	9	8	15	5	6.5%
Pharmaceutical and Healthcare	64	11	15	26	12	11.3%
Retail	71	27	17	8	19	12.5%
Telecoms	26	16	5	5	0	4.6%
Tobacco	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Toiletries and Cosmetics	72	44	4	20	4	12.7%
Travel, Transport, and Tourism	7	1	1	4	1	1.2%
Utilities and Service	2	0	1	1	0	0.4%
Apparel/apparel	5	0	0	4	1	0.8%

*AY: Younger Americans; AO: Older Americans; CY: Younger Chinese; CO: Older Chinese*

Thus, it is evident that certain products tend to be advertised in such a way that certain values are emphasized, but this does not explain the differences among audience groups discussed below.

### **Relationships Among the Four Values**

A correlation analysis showed that, as expected, individualism and collectivism scores were negatively correlated ( $r = -.19, p < .001$ ), modernity and tradition scores were negatively correlated ( $r = -.24, p < .001$ ), individualism and tradition scores were negatively correlated ( $r = -.25, p < .001$ ) and collectivism and modernity scores were negatively correlated ( $r = -.15, p < .001$ ). Collectivism and tradition scores were also negatively correlated ( $r = -.09, p < .05$ ), which was not expected. There was no significant correlation between individualism and modernity scores. All correlations were low, which suggests that each value or theme is unique and can be treated as a separate dimension.

The mean scores for the four values, coded on a 0-2 scale, are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

*Means of Individualism, Collectivism, Modernity, and Tradition in Chinese and American Ads*

Audience Group	N	Individualism	Collectivism	Modernity	Tradition
American Younger	182	.85	.26	.83	.07
American Older	134	.82	.34	.80	.09
Chinese Younger	136	.51	.43	.37	.21
Chinese Older	114	.20	.36	.30	.30

**Degree of Individualistic Values and Modernity Themes in Chinese TV Ads**

The first hypothesis predicted that individualistic values and modernity themes would be more prominent in ads targeting the younger Chinese group than collectivistic values and traditional themes. As shown in Table 3, individualism is the most prominent value in ads targeting the younger Chinese group, followed by collectivism and modernity. Traditional themes are least prominent in the younger Chinese group's sample advertisements. Hypothesis one was thus partially supported in that individualism is more prominent than collectivism, and modernity is more prominent than tradition. However, collectivism is more prominent than modernity, which was not expected. When individualism and modernity scores combined were compared to collectivism and tradition scores combined, a one-sample t-test showed a significant difference between the two pairs ( $t(135) = 2.39, p = .02$ ).

**Degree of Collectivistic Values and Traditional Themes in Chinese TV Ads**

The second hypothesis predicted a difference between the younger and the older demographics in China, specifically that collectivism and traditional themes would be more prominent in ads targeting the older generation, while individualism and modernity themes would be more prominent in the ads targeting the younger demographic. The hypothesis was partially supported. A t-test revealed that ads targeting the younger Chinese group scored higher on individualism ( $t(248) = 4.9, p < .001$ ), while differences in the scores for collectivism, modernity, and tradition were not significant.

**Cultural Values and Themes in Chinese Ads Compared to American Ads**

To test the third hypothesis, the scores from the ads targeting the 13-29 year-old age group in China were compared with the two American audience groups combined. A t-test revealed significant differences in all four categories. As predicted, the mean scores for

individualism ( $t(281.1) = -5.3, p < .001$ ) and modernity ( $t(282.6) = -7.1, p < .001$ ) were higher in the American ads, while the mean scores for collectivism ( $t(450) = 2.3, p = .02$ ) and tradition ( $t(450) = 3.9, p < .001$ ) were lower. Hypothesis three was thus supported.

### **Differences between Ads Targeting Younger and Older Americans**

The research question guiding this study aimed to explore if there are any differences in values and themes in ads targeting 13-34 year-old Americans compared to ads targeting Americans 55 and older. A t-test showed that there were no differences in values and themes portrayed in ads targeting the two American demographic groups.

### **Discussion**

The main focus of this study was to compare individualism and collectivism in TV ads targeting younger and older people in China and America. The premise behind this study was that culture affects audience attitudes towards ads (Meyers, 2010) and that ads, therefore, reflect cultural values (Cheng, Schweitzer, 1996; Lin, 2001; Jin, 2001; Zhang et al., 2008). The researcher of this study analyzed 566 TV ads from China and the U.S. to test the degree of individualism, collectivism, modernity themes, and traditional themes in the younger and older target markets in both countries. Three hypotheses were tested and one research question was used to guide this study. Although this is the first study of its kind, previous studies have suggested that individualism and modernity themes would be more dominant in Chinese TV ads targeting younger generations because of the cultural shift taking place in China, while collectivism and traditional themes would be more dominant in Chinese TV ads targeting older generations. This chapter will discuss the result on how certain values are more dominant in each culture.

When individualistic values and modernity themes were combined, they were more prominent than collectivistic values and traditional themes combined in the ads targeting the younger Chinese sample. This finding is consistent with the researcher's expectation. The open door policy implemented in China in 1979, "altered China's development strategy from one based on self-sufficiency to one of active participation in the world market" (Huan, 2001, p.1). Because people now have more choices on products from all over the world, China has become more individualistic (Cao, 2009). Although Hofstede (2001) maintained that cultures tend to remain stable over time, Hua (2010) and Sun and Wang (2010) argued that cultural values may shift over time. The results of this study indicate that a cultural shift has taken place in China and

that this is reflected in advertisements. As Petit and Zakon (1962) and Sissors (1978) argued, people's values are not based on what they see in advertisements; instead, advertisers tailor their messages according to people's values.

An interesting finding in this study is that if the four values are treated separately, collectivism was the second most prominent value in the TV ads targeting the younger Chinese group. Collectivistic values being prominent in TV ads in the younger Chinese group can be explained by bicultural appeal. In Lau-Gesk's (2003) study, bicultural is defined as "an individual with equally developed...dispositions" (p. 301) from two different cultures. Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) found in their study that when an individual absorbs another culture, it does not mean that he or she is replacing his original culture with the second culture he or she learns. Zhang's (2009) study focused on China's Generation-X's (age 18-35) bicultural values and found that the younger group in China sees both individualism and collectivism ads as equally appealing. Zhang's (2009) finding explains why collectivism is the second prominent value in TV ads targeting younger Chinese. Gregory and Munch (1996) also stressed that younger Chinese will still hold the collectivistic ideals, but with the change in economy, society, and technology, they do not practice collectivistic values anymore. Cardon (2008) found in his study that younger Chinese are less individualistic than Americans, but in different social contexts, younger Chinese do show individualistic values while making decisions. Because the younger Chinese do not practice collectivistic values like the older Chinese do, it is easy to conclude that younger Chinese have become individualistic in practice, but still believe in collectivism; therefore advertisements with collectivistic values still have great appeal among the younger Chinese. This finding is similar to that of Wolburg (2000), who reported that individualistic and collectivistic values were combined on Korean advertising.

The results showed that individualism was the only value that was significantly more emphasized in the TV ads targeting younger Chinese compared to the ads targeting the older Chinese. Although previous studies predicted that modernity would be prominent in Chinese ads more so than American ads (Lin, 2001; Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996), individualism was the only prominent value in TV ads targeting younger Chinese. Tasai and Wei-Na (2006) found in their study that vertical individualism, which is similar to the descriptions of individualism in this study, dominated the TV ads in China. Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) explained “Chinese leadership has always tried to draw a line between the two notions, with a clear preference for modernization without Westernization” (p. 40). However, with the popular usage of Internet nowadays, preventing China from being Westernized seems impossible. Westernized values includes “adventure,” “competition,” “enjoyment,” “individualism,” “leisure,” and “sex” (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996). People become more open toward Western values through the use of Internet, which could lead to advertisers using more Western values, such as individualism, and thus the degree of modernity decreases in advertisements in the Chinese market. They also explained “the external reason for the predominance of ‘modernity’ in Chinese television commercials is the influence from the transnational advertising agencies which mainly run the campaigns for imported and joint-venture products in the Chinese market” (p. 40). The open door policy has been implemented for 32 years now. The Chinese do not only have more experience with international trading, but also more experience on how advertising works. At the beginning of the open door policy, most of the businesses may still have been foreign or relied on transnational advertisers to promote their products due to a lack of experience. However, as time goes by, Chinese have the opportunity to develop their own local advertising agencies that

know more about the Chinese culture, which can lead to a decrease in degree of modernity in the Chinese advertisements.

Another noteworthy difference is that in Cheng and Schweitzer's (1996) study, ads for imported products and joint-venture products were included. This study included some ads for imported and joint-venture products; however, if the TV ads were not produced by and in China, they were excluded. The different criteria of sampling in this study may have caused the link between individualism and modernity themes to become less significant.

Although individualism was the dominant value in TV ads for the younger Chinese group, TV ads targeting younger Chinese still emphasize more collectivistic values and traditional themes and less individualistic values and modernity themes compared to the TV ads in the United States.

Traditional themes appeared the least in TV ads targeting younger Americans, older Americans, and younger Chinese. Although traditional values are still common in China, Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) suggested that some traditional themes simply do not help advertisers to sell, which explains why traditional themes did not appear much in TV ads overall. Cheng (1997) also supported Cheng and Schweitzer's (1996) suggestion that "Chinese television commercials also merely reflected those cultural values that help sell products and ignored those that cannot benefit advertisers...[t]hat is, it favored certain Western cultural values and disfavored other" (p. 790).

Gram (2007) and Koeman (2007) also argued that Western and individualistic perspectives dominate in global advertising. Zhang (2003) mentioned in his study "even though China is an Eastern traditional society with a collectivistic culture, social changes...push advertising to introduce a new set of values (individualism, modernity) in China" (p. 31).

However, when targeting a mass audience, “collectivistic and traditional values continue to be reflected and reinforced to the mass market” (p. 31). The social change in China has definitely shifted the cultural values among younger Chinese towards more individualism. But with the long history of collectivistic and traditional values, Chinese culture will remain less individualistic when compared to American culture, which has always been individualistic.

The results showed that there is no difference in values among the younger and older Americans. Unlike China with the open door policy, the United States has never had an obvious shift in cultural values throughout history; it is therefore reasonable to expect that there would be no difference in ads targeting the younger and older groups in the U.S.

In previous studies, product categories usually have had an impact on what values are portrayed in advertisements (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Lin, 2001; Zhang et al., 2008). In this study, although product categories did explain differences in the four values that were examined in the TV ads, these effects did not explain the overall effects of culture and age group. The way the researcher classified the products into 16 categories according to WARC (2010) was different from Zhang and Shavitt’s (2003) study, where products were placed into two categories: personal use (individualism) and shared use (collectivism). With only two categories corresponding to two cultural values, it is much easier to see the interaction between the product and the cultural values. Lin’s (2001) study also divided the products into seven categories based on different values and not based on what the product was, which led to a correlation between product categories and values.

### **Limitations**

In discussing the result of this study, certain limitations must be recognized. First of all, the sample ads from China were limited due to accessibility. While recording the advertisements

from CNTV, certain TV programs were not shown through the Internet, which limited the number of ads the researchers could gather for this study. Live streaming TV channels were also limited through CNTV, although many of the popular channels were available.

Secondly, the target markets for both countries were difficult to distinguish. Although research showed that the TV programs used to gather sample ads in this study generally fit into the chosen target groups, there were still other audiences watching the same programs that were not taken into consideration. For example, some TV programs are extremely popular among younger adults in China; however, there are still many audiences from other age groups who watch the same TV shows. For the Chinese group, people over 45 years old watch TV more than people under that age among most of the channel in general (*China TV Rating Yearbook*, 2010). Advertisements may already target toward the older generation in all major TV channels, which was proven in a previous study (Zhang & Shavitt, 2003). The blended audiences may have distorted the results of the study. In the American sample, due to the importance of the 18-49 year-old audience to advertisers, targeting people 18-34 year-old was very challenging. Again, the same problem occurred in the American sample. The TV shows that were chosen for recording were the most popular shows among the 18-34 year-old audiences, but it still does not mean that only the 18-34 year-old audiences were watching the shows.

The third limitation in this study is the recording time. All the ads were recorded between the last week of January 2011 and the third week of February 2011. All the ads were recorded during these four weeks instead of using a more longitudinal sample that may provide a more accurate reflection of the pattern of TV ads in both countries. Also, the recording time covered the Chinese New Year and Valentine's Day. Any ads with the themes of these two occasions

were excluded, which made the sample size smaller than would have been the case during non-holiday seasons.

Lastly, although the sample size was large enough to generate significant results, a larger sample size could possibly have provided more detailed results. Forbes et al. (2009) and Lee and Lim (2008) stressed that there is variation in values within cultures as well as between cultures. With a larger sample size, more nuanced findings about the influence of different product categories may have emerged.

### **Future Research**

Individualism, collectivism, modernity, and tradition (Hofstede, 1984; Triandis et al., 1995) were useful values to study. Replicating this study with samples from different cultures may provide additional information on how advertisers create their messages to appeal to different audiences in different cultural contexts. With the availability of technology, advertisers can reach people all over the world in a very short period of time (Frith & Mueller, 2003). Mastering the unique cultural values in different countries can help advertisers to communicate more effectively and efficiently.

China is still one of the fastest growing economies. Because of that, there are many business opportunities available for companies all over the world. A similar study can be done with Hofstede's (1984) and Triandis's (1995) other cultural dimensions. Correlation between each cultural dimension may explain the Chinese culture more thoroughly. Useful insights could be developed to help new businesses and advertisers to invest in China.

The instrument used in this study was from Zhang and Shavitt (2003). Different instruments can be used for coding, which may generate dynamic results. Zhang and Shavitt's (2003) instrument was quite simple, which makes the coding easier to manage. However, if

different instruments are used, future researchers can compare results and find details one instrument could not cover. Also, they can compare results and see which instrument is more appropriate in a certain study.

A larger sample size gathered from a longer period of time is highly recommended. With a larger sample size, the researcher can generate more reliable results. Also, a more longitudinal sample could provide more consistent findings. The researcher can even record ads during different seasons on purpose to study the differences of cultural values during different occasions in different countries.

Finally, an exploratory study can be done with ads from different media to compare the cultural differences. Studies have been done comparing magazine ads and TV ads (Zhang & Shavitt, 2003), but since more and more people are using the Internet, studies comparing Chinese TV ads and Chinese Internet ads should be conducted as well.

### **Conclusion**

Since the open door policy in China was implemented in 1979, China has become one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Because of the growth of the economy, the advertising industry has started to grow also (Chan & Chan, 2005). On the other hand, the U.S. had always been one of the most influential countries in advertising in the world (Zhang & Shavitt, 2003). This study aimed to study TV ads from these two powerful countries in order to provide useful insights.

Advertising can be dated all the way back to ancient history (Ulanoff, 1977), but has become sophisticated in modern times. Carefully planned advertisements for specific target audiences are often more effective (Ringold, 1995). Advertisements in different countries do not change the cultural values, rather, they reflect the cultural values of the country, so that the

messages in advertisements can be maximized and not conflict with people's values (Petit & Zakon, 1962; Sissors, 1978). The basic assumption of this study is that China's cultural values have changed since the open door policy. Although cultural values stay stable overtime, "trade, conquest, economical or political dominance, and technological breakthroughs" can change a culture (Hofstede, 2001, p.34). Due to the change in culture in China, people who were born after the implementation of the open door policy were influenced more by globalization than the people who were born before 1979, and thus, the younger Chinese act more individualistically than the older Chinese. At the same time, different cultural values emerged between advertisements targeted toward the younger and the older people in China. The U.S. market played the role of being a reference point in a way that although younger Chinese are more individualistic, they are still not as individualistic as Americans in general. Based on previous studies indicating that modernity is often associated with individualism and traditional themes are often associated with collectivism (Zhang & Shavitt, 2003), these two values were added to the design of this study.

Because younger Chinese still hold collectivistic values, individualism was more prominent in TV ads targeting younger Chinese than modernity themes. Although the younger Chinese have grown up under the influence of the open door policy, the traditional Chinese values are still widely accepted by the younger generation in China. Straubhaar (1991) said that advertisers do localize modern values, which means ads for global brands could still reflect the cultural values where the ads are shown rather than just reflecting the cultural values on where the brands are from. Two interesting questions to ask at the end of this study would be: First, how do the younger Chinese comprehend Chinese traditional values and Western values at the

same time? Second, would the traditional Chinese values still last when the “post 80s” become the older generation?

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