

China's Changing Culture: Rural and Urban Consumers' Favorite Things

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Abstract

Following the upheavals of the revolutionary era, the People's Republic of China's consumer culture is somewhat over twenty years old. In this research, we aim at discovering and thus better understand what Chinese consumers value most, among their possessions. In turn, this finding should help us better understand the contemporary Chinese culture.

All data were collected through at-home, in-depth personal interviews, following established guidelines outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Wallendorf and Belk (1989). A snowball sampling (Doran 1997) resulted in the participation of 20 rural and 20 urban households.

Participants' demographic profile ended up matching well the national profile in terms of income, and the gender and age make-up of the rural and urban samples were not significantly different.

Four categories emerged to comprehensively represent all the favorite products identified by the participants: entertainment, functional, hedonic, and mementos. In addition, a numerically significant number of participants could neither think of a favorite product nor possess one. As developed in the paper, conventional typologies, such as Hostede (1980) and Triandis' (1995) collectivism-individualism do not account well for the results observed in this study. Rather, we turn towards Lu's research (1998) and suggestion that using instruments developed by Western cultures suffer from methodological defects when applied to Chinese behaviors. This research then defines the Yi, a Confucian value related to benevolence, morality, righteousness, and the Li, a Mohist/Legalist value related to utilitarianism and profit, and suggests that the two better help understand the findings and support observations.