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Influence of Chinese Cultural Values on Consumer Behavior: A Proposed Model of Gift-Purchasing Behavior in Hong Kong

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SUMMARY. Gift giving is often a highly visible social behavior which individuals perform among family members and social or business friends. The importance of the symbolism of gifts would suggest that social referents may affect the purchase decisions for gifts. One’s social referents are often determined by one’s cultural background or affiliation. We propose that the behavior of gift giving among Hong Kong consumers is mediated by such Chinese cultural values as face saving, reciprocity and guanxi (relationship). This paper summarizes the literature on Chinese cultural values and then develops a more parsimonious model to explain the influence of Chinese cultural values on gift giving. Propositions are developed based on this comprehensive model for future testing. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: getinfo@haworthpressinc.com]

KEYWORDS. Chinese cultural values, model building, gift-purchasing behavior in Hong Kong

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Chinese are inveterate gift givers as gifts express friendship and can symbolize hopes for a good future relationship, a successful conclusion of an endeavor, generosity, or appreciation for a favor done. Because of the symbolic meanings of gift giving, it is important that gift givers select the most appropriate presents. Favors should be rewarded materially even though symbolic values, in terms of thoughtfulness, often weigh more than simple monetary value. That is, the most expensive gift is not always the appropriate gift.

Accepting or rejecting a gift that has been offered has also a symbolic meaning. The gift receiver may not want to be in the giver’s debt or have no intention of establishing a guanxi (relationship) with the giver. In most of the cases, if someone presents another one with a gift, the receiver is expected to reciprocate in kind or through a favor.

Hong Kong is an important trading and financial center located on the southern coast of China. Hong Kong is a sophisticated and highly educated society of 6.3 million people. After over 150 years of British rule, Hong Kong was reverted back to Chinese sovereignty as a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China on July 1, 1997. Ninety-five percent of the Hong Kong people are of Chinese descent. For most people in Hong Kong, Chinese cultural values are important influences over one’s behavior in life. Thus, relating Chinese cultural values to purchase behavior can be an effective avenue for understanding consumer behavior. The behavior of gift purchasing is among the most frequently mentioned social activities among Chinese people. But how do we explain the motivation behind gift purchasing? What factors affect the nature and value of a gift? How would guanxi (relationship) between giver and receiver of the gift influence the purchase decision? In an effort to understand better the gift-buying behavior, this study relates the Chinese cultural values of face, guanxi, and reciprocity with gift-purchasing behavior. The purpose of this study is to apply the theory of reasoned action in evaluating the influence of Chinese cultural values on the gift-purchasing behavior of Hong Kong consumers. A proposed model was developed to illustrate the issue. The behavioral modelling approach employed attempts to provide an opportunity to relate the strength and significance of different Chinese cultural values on the shopping behaviors.

CULTURAL VALUES AND GIFT GIVING

Culture can be defined as an evolving system of concepts, values and symbols inherent in a society—a learned system of behavior that organises
experience, determines an individual’s position within social structures and guides actions in a multitude of situations, both known or unknown. The usefulness of culture and other anthropological tools for analysing business systems is widely acknowledged in many international business studies.

A culture is a group of people sharing common beliefs, norms and customs. It influences one’s behavior toward family, friends, work, education, consuming and other important concepts and processes. The Chinese cultural values, as identified by Bond (1989), can be applied to improve understanding of Chinese consumer behavior. For instance, Chinese cultural values can be used as an effective basis for market segmentation and positioning (Yau 1994a). Social referent influence is significant in determining an individual’s shopping behavior (Ryan 1982). The visible nature of gift giving and the importance of social interaction implications support a proposition that cultural values are likely to influence shopping behavior.

Chinese cultural values can be used as strong predictors for shopping behaviors among Hong Kong people, such as gift purchasing and gift giving. Face involves an individual’s perception of social feedback on his/her self-presentation. The negotiation between an individual and the society may influence the person’s behavior due to the need for face. Face is a type of other-directed self esteem (Chow and Ho 1992). Because of the perceived threat of losing face, an individual might worry about his/her own goodness or self ego and thus have a feeling of ch’i (shame) (Yang 1991, Baumeister 1986, Tedeschi 1986).

The level of guanxi (or tie) in dyadic relationships is vital to understanding face and shame (Yang 1992). Guanxi influences the ability of an individual to reach an equilibrium where aspired face equals estimated face. Face gain or loss will influence an individual’s self image, resulting in improved or worsened guanxi. With improved guanxi, the relative strength of human obligation and moral values becomes greater, whereas when guanxi worsens, an individual’s perceived importance of materialistic values becomes greater. That is why doing favors can lead to indebtedness or reciprocity.

Gift giving is a form of reciprocity. When the giver is doing a favor, such as presenting a gift, the receiver becomes indebted to the giver if the gift is accepted. If the receiver reciprocates with a gift, the original giver will also be indebted (Sahlins 1965). Gift giving is also a type of face act, as gift giving is a tool for enhancing interpersonal relationships. When consumers are making the choice regarding gift selection and involvement in the product and the buying task (gift purchasing), face, guanxi, and reciprocity will all be playing important roles in determining behaviors.

In summary, the need to reciprocate often prompts the need for gift giving. The consumer decision process in a gift-purchasing situation (motivated by
the desire to gain face) may be influenced by the perceived risk of losing face and the level of guanxi between the giver and the receiver.

**CHINESE CULTURAL VALUES**

Researchers in the study of Chinese cultural values may find it surprising to learn that Chinese values form a clear and consistent system throughout generations (Kindle 1982, Hsu 1970). In terms of the ways Chinese cultural values are classified, various scholars have adopted different approaches. Wright (1970) describes the Chinese culture with a system of thirteen values while Yau (1988, 1994b) uses Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck’s (1961) classification and proposes a new classification of twelve Chinese cultural values. In fact, Wright’s approach is very similar to Yau’s. However, Yau’s approach is more structured and is connected to recent developments in management and marketing studies in the West.

There are other cultural value systems in the literature, which are mostly the result of Western observations. Parsons and Shils (1951) claim that all human action is determined by five cultural values such as effectively, self-orientation, universalism, ascription and specificity. Inkeles and Levinson (1954) summarize three cultural values that they label ‘standard analytic issues’: relation to authority, self-conception, and primary conflicts and the ways of dealing with them. Hofstede (1980) classifies related work-values into four dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity. His dimensions are quite similar to those of Inkeles and Levinson (1954). Hofstede’s classification has been widely used for cross-cultural comparison because of its readiness and ease for use. However, his classification is either too succinct to be used in studies that deal with consumer behavior and other micro-phenomena leading to managerial implications, or it lacks both face and content validation. For example, many authors argue that individualism is essentially alien to the Asian ethos (Ho 1976, 1979, 1988; Hsu 1971). The measure of individualism may then be invalid or its inclusion may be meaningless.

Definitely, there are more than four major values, which can be used to describe or interpret Chinese behavior. Omission of some other variables such as yuan (fate) and bao (reciprocity) makes the classification meaningless and irrelevant to the Chinese culture. Any attempt to adopt Hofstede’s dimensions in Chinese culture-related research will lead to biased and incomplete findings. Along the same lines, Bond and Hofstede (1989) added a fifth dimension, Confucian dynamics, to Hofstede’s original classification. Unfortunately, this addition does not contribute to the explanation of Chinese business behaviors or psychology according to Chinese poetry literature, as the items contributing to Confucian dynamics virtually do not pertain purely
to this dimension at all. This indicates their misunderstanding of the Chinese philosophies that provide the foundation for the development of Chinese cultural values. In this study, we therefore adopt some of the Chinese cultural values identified by Yau (1988, 1994a) that relate more directly to gift giving.

The Concept of Face (mien-tsu and lien). Chinese are acutely sensitive to having and maintaining face in all aspects of social and business life. Face can be classified into two types: lien and mien-tsu. Lien represents the ‘confidence of society in the integrity of the ego’s moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for him to function properly within the community’ (Hu 1944). Mien-tsu stands ‘for the kind of prestige life, through success and ostentation’ (Hu 1994). Those two types of face have a particular implication on gift giving. On the one hand, people will lose lien (du lien) when presenting a gift that does not match their status or the status of the recipient. On the other hand, people with mien-tsu are expected to receive or present gifts that match their prestigious status. People who wrongly behave in gift giving will end up having to break their relationships with the recipients.

The Concept of Guanxi. The word guanxi has literally the same meaning of “relationship” in English. In reality, it has a much more sophisticated meaning than “relationship.” It consists of two Chinese characters, guan and xi that mean “relating” and “bonding” respectively. Hence, guanxi virtually means the social relationship between two persons under a particular bonding. Originally, this bonding referred to one of Confucius’ five cardinal bonds (wu lun) which included the bonds between sovereign and minister, father and son, husband and wife, old and young, and friend and friend (Hchu and Yang 1972). However, these bonds have been further extended to include the following:

- Relatives in the same kinship system—these include uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces, etc.
- Townsmen—those who live in or come from the same town.
- Classmates—those who study together, but those in the same class or cohort have closer bonding.
- Colleagues—those who worked or are working in the same firm, or even in the same business unit.
- Heirs of friends for more than two generations.
- People with the same hobbies such as collecting stamps, fishing, writing, etc.
- Past superiors—those who had supervised oneself.
- Past subordinates—those who had worked under oneself.
- Those taught by the same teacher.
- Past students taught by oneself.
- Members of the same school or clan.
Acquaintances, friends or close friends—those who do not belong to the first eleven types but still remain contacts or close contacts with each other.

These bonds address the similarity between two parties in terms of origin and serve to remove doubt, create trust and form close relationships between parties (Hinde 1987). In the Chinese literature about Chinese cultural values, they are called the twelve commonalities.

These bonds have served effectively to control social behavior in society. The Chinese must observe and act according to the norm prescribed for each bond. Various bonds indicate different levels of guanxi. Normally, the level of guanxi between father and son is closer than that between friends. When asked about his response if he would bear witness when his father had stolen a sheep, Confucius explained, “the father conceals the misconduct of the son, and the son conceals the misconduct of the father” (Confucian Analects, XIII, Ch. 18). Confucius refused to whistle-blow because of the close relationship between father and son. A son is not in the position to bear witness.

As such, it is understood that a gift presented to someone with a close relationship tends to be different from that presented to someone with a distant relationship. For example, Kipnis (1997) in his study of Chinese gift giving observed that gift giving for celebrating the birth of a relative is two or three times more expensive than friends.

The Concept of Reciprocity (bao). Before we proceed to examine the Chinese concept of reciprocity, it seems necessary to define the concept in general terms. Reciprocity can be summarized by three interrelated aspects of social action between two individuals (Lebra 1976), bilateral contingency, interdependence for mutual benefit and equality of exchanged values. Firstly when a person does a favor for another person, he/she may oblige the recipient to repay. This is bilateral contingency. However, there is a difference between Chinese and Western cultures regarding the time when a favor should be repaid. Chinese believe that repayment should not be made immediately, but at the right time when both givers and recipients will be benefited. Westerners tend to repay more quickly to relieve their tension.

Second, the rationale for a person giving something to another person may be the intention to obtain something else that is needed from the recipient. Chinese givers often do not have an explicit and specific purpose at the time when gifts are presented. However, they may have a vague idea of establishing a good relationship with the recipient in the long term.

Third, the reciprocal process will eventually approach a converged value. In other words, what a person gives will be the equivalent to what he/she receives from the same recipient in the long run. These symmetric aspects of reciprocity, mostly emphasized by Western scholars, have been regarded as “sociological dualism” and “mutual legal obligations of repaying” (Malin-
owski 1959). In particular, Gouldner (1960) insisted on the equality of exchanged values in the pursuit of fair distribution of rights and duties.

In the Chinese cultural setting, reciprocity immediately suggests the concepts of un and qui as two complementary concepts of reciprocity (bao). Un literally means “gratitude” and qui as “hatred.” Un is produced when someone does us a favor; qui is created when there are grievances. Therefore, the creation of un and qui must be followed by the emotion of bao. This is indicated by the following Chinese proverbial sayings according to Confucius:

1. “if you have received, and never returned, a favor, you are not conforming properly to Li (propriety).”
2. “if there is gratitude, repay; if there are animosities, take vengeance.”
3. “we are not a gentleman if we don’t take revenge; we are not a man if we don’t return favor.”
4. “receive a peach and return a plum.”

These sayings also indicate that bao can be either positive or negative. Obviously, the presence of un will lead to the positive bao while the presence of qui will result in negative bao. Further, Chinese do not emphasize the symmetry of reciprocity. The value of a gift involved in reciprocal exchanges of favor never remains constant and will continue to grow. The following Chinese proverb indicates that the value of a favor returned is several times as much as the value received. “If you honor me a linear foot, I should in return honor you ten feet.”

Recipients face severe peer pressure when they return favors. Unless they repay a favor with greater value than what they have received, they will not be regarded as “gentlemen” and thus will not reach a state of psychological balance. An un relationship, once generated by giving and receiving a benefit, will not necessarily compel the receiver-debtor to repay un in order to restore balance. The common Chinese saying of “return good with evil” reflects this ungrateful situation.

The concept of reciprocity has particular implications on the practice of gift giving. First, gift giving is a way to establish and maintain a relationship with the gift recipients. Second, reciprocity differs from contractual relationships, in which the rights and obligations of two parties are specified in a legal document (Lebra 1976). Reciprocity is more informal and personal and its effectiveness is very much derived from other parties’ memories. Gift giving then serves as an activity to awaken these memories. The more frequent is the activity, the closer is the relationship. Third, Chinese gift givers, different from their Western counterparts, are not looking for immediate repayment of gratitude. Rather, they would enjoy maintaining such an imbalance that brings to them pride and luck. Hence, the Chinese say, “it is always
more fortunate to be a gift giver than a recipient.” However, the psychology of gift recipients tends to be different, yet still dissimilar to that of the Westerners. Gift recipients are usually eager to repay. Chinese tend to repay with a greater favor than they received. They do not intend to repay immediately as the Western counterparts who try to extricate themselves from the emotional entanglement. Instead, they prefer to wait for a better time to come. Hence, a good occasion will serve to magnify the value of a gift to a recipient.

PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF OCCASIONS

Evidence has shown that situations may exert influence directly on behavior (Sheth 1972, Triandis, Bearden and Woodside 1976a, 1978b). A situation may put restrictions upon a consumer who would emotionally respond according to his interpretation of the situation (Lutz and Kakkar 1974, Belk 1975). Using the same analogy, an occasion that can be considered as a situation may have significant impact on behavior such as gift giving. Belk (1973) examined the frequency of all gift giving and concluded that Birthday and Christmas are the two most important occasions for gift giving, followed by Mother’s Day/Father’s Day, Wedding Anniversary, Graduation, and others. Bussey (1967) reported similar findings for birthdays and Christmas in Britain except in the reverse order of prevalence. The reverse order of prevalence indicates a difference in the perceived importance of occasions for a gift-giving activity and may be attributable to cultural differences. In fact, occasions for gift giving may vary across cultures. Obviously, Chinese New Year is an important occasion for gift giving in the Chinese culture, but would not be one in the West.

SYMBOLISM OF GIFTS

There is meaning present in the consumption patterns of others (Belk, Bahn and Mayer 1982). Consumption symbolism is to make inferences about others based on their choices of consumption objects. In particular, symbols are potentially powerful communication devices in gift giving, but many symbols are culture-specific (Cohen 1996). Givers tend to look for gifts for two reasons. On the one hand, the gifts may reflect or symbolize their self-image or intention of giving gifts, for example, to show the recipients that they are generous. On the other hand, the gifts are indicative of the social status of recipients. When the recipient considers himself to be a renowned businessperson, an expensive gift may serve to match the recipient’s status.
Thus, gifts do not necessarily symbolize the self-image or intention of the givers but those of the recipients instead.

**GIFT-GIVING INVOLVEMENT**

Belk (1988) considered gift selection as a more involving activity than making a comparable selection for personal use. He classified involvement in gift giving into two types. One is item specific and the other is purchase situation-specific. Item-specific involvement has been labeled differently in the literature. Howard and Sheth (1969) named it as “importance of purchase,” Lastovika (1976) as “issue involvement,” Rothchild (1977) as “enduring involvement” and Clarke and Belk (1979) as “product involvement.” All these indicate that consumers are more concerned about the item and interested in the purchase outcome (Belk 1988). The second type deals with task involvement that arises from a consumer’s goal in a particular shopping or usage situation. For example, the goal may be “finding a sweater which is the least expensive in town.”

These two types of involvement tend to co-vary with each other. For example, if the gift giver has an important goal of getting an impressive ornament for his wife’s birthday, he will attempt to select a gift item that is high in involvement. This indicates the effect of gift-giving involvement on gift purchasing.

**AROUSAL TO GIFT GIVING**

In consumer behavior, arousal is always regarded as an important variable in information processing and persuasion (Assael 1992, Sanbonmatsu and Kardes 1987). Engel et al. (1993) defined it as a person’s degree of alertness to information in the persuasion process. In other words, the level of arousal may be subject to message elements other than the product claims in situations in which consumers receive persuasive communications. Using the same analogy, givers in gift giving may be aroused to purchase by gift-giving situations and the symbolism of gifts. In addition, the level of guanxi between the givers and recipients may serve as a moderating variable affecting the level of arousal to gift giving. That is, given a particular situation such as a birthday, the level of arousal may be further augmented if it is the birthday of the giver’s father.
**GIFT PURCHASING**

Gift purchasing refers to the purchase behavior of the givers. When a giver has determined to purchase a gift for a particular person, the following two decisions must be made:

- What are the brands/products that the giver prefers to purchase?
- Where does the giver purchase the gift?

The literature on brand choice reveals that there is a strong influence of family members on brand choice of cars (Day 1970). Monroe and Guiltiman (1975) reckoned that consumers select a store first and then determine the product to be purchased within the store. In addition, they also considered that store choice is affected by the attitude towards store which, in turn, is influenced by the store’s image. However, recent studies have seldom considered brand/store choice for a product that the purchaser buys for someone to consume or use. In a gift-purchasing situation, at least two parties, the givers and the recipients, are to be considered in many purchasing situations.

When making these decisions, the givers take into consideration whether the choice of brands/products and the purchase locations are consistent with the gift symbols to be associated and in parallel with the level of guanxi with the recipients.

**FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS AND FINDINGS**

An exploratory study was conducted using focus group interviews as the major data collection instrument. Twelve focus group interviews were conducted during 1997. Participants were drawn from all walks of life in Hong Kong but mainly in the age range of twenty to fifty-five. Except for two control groups made up of members from the same genders, all groups were well mixed.

There were eight participants in each focus group. They were recruited and selected through a process of “snowball type of sampling method” to ensure relative homogeneity. Individuals were screened based on their differences in perceptions, experiences, and verbal skills before being selected as participants at various focus group sessions. They were invited to the venue which was conveniently located in the city and all interviews were conducted after office hours. All interviews, except one which served as a demo, were moderated by the same moderator who had taken into account all the key qualifications for conducting focus groups as suggested by Churchill (1979). All the discussions were tape-recorded for later analysis. Each interview ran for about two hours.
Findings of focus group discussions in this study indicated that gift-giving occasions among the Hong Kong Chinese could be classified into four categories: achievement, special, recurring, and others. Achievement-related occasions refer to those events where the recipients have accomplished something in their career, leading to an honorable award. For example, we have been invited to a banquet to celebrate someone who has just received The Order of Grand Bauhinia from the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region; or your friends has just received the title of chartered accountant. Special occasions are unique events but have nothing to do with achievement. For example, a Chinese 60th year birthday is an extremely special and important event. According to the Chinese calendar, the name of a year repeats every sixty years. Thus, Chinese people believe that one is entering another cycle of life in the 60th year. Celebration is needed for at least two reasons. First, sixty years of age is regarded as old age, which is the time to enjoy the fortune one has accumulated. Second, Chinese people believe that starting a new cycle at the age of sixty makes one as weak and vulnerable as a baby. Having a banquet and receiving gifts and good words from friends and relatives serve as a booster to ensure longevity.

Recurring occasions refers to those situations which occur repeatedly at constant intervals. Examples of this category are Chinese New Year, birthdays, Christmas parties and wedding anniversaries, which may be celebrated every year. Other occasions refer to those not falling into any of these three categories. In particular, occasions in this “other” category are more causal and spontaneous in nature. For example, the giver purchases a gift because he came across something that the recipient, his good friend, may like or need.

As for the symbols of gifts, findings of the focus group interviews could be summarized into two categories:

- Givers: Meaningfulness, Good intention, and Generosity; and
- Recipients: Prestige, Success, and Expensiveness.

From the givers’ viewpoint, gifts serve various purposes. One of them is to associate with the good meanings for the particular occasions for which gifts are presented. For example, giving a turtle for a birthday of a mature person has a denotative meaning of long life. Gifts are also indicative of the good purpose that the givers would like to achieve. Sometimes, givers want to show that they care about the recipients by presenting gifts that are appropriate for those occasions. In the Chinese society, givers always want to show that they possess some particular virtue. Generosity tends to be a popular and common one.

A gift presented should be indicative of the giver understanding of the recipient personality traits or social status. Thus when the recipient receives the gift, he will be happy with the gift itself as well as its symbolic meanings.
From the recipients’ perspective, we have found three important symbols in gift giving in Chinese societies: prestige, success, and expensiveness. Recipients are looking for gifts with some prestige attached to them, perhaps because of the high quality or high social value of the gifts. Success is associated with gifts which symbolize some kind of achievement that recipients have been trying to attain. Gifts which cost a lot of money would fit the symbolism of expensiveness.

A MODEL OF GIFT PURCHASING

Sherry, McGrath and Levy (1993) typologized gift giving into three basic components, gifts, givers and recipients, and situational conditions. The above discussion indicates that these three components cannot serve to explain adequately gift-purchasing behavior in Chinese communities. In this section, we present a more comprehensive model that encompasses the following six components:

1. Chinese cultural values.
2. Perceived importance of occasion.
4. Involvement with recipients.
5. Arousal to gift giving.

The model of Chinese cultural values and gift giving is depicted in Figure 1. The first component is an independent variable while the last five components are dependent variables. Symbolism of the gift and arousal to gift giving are two major dependent variables. Symbolism of the gift is related directly to and is a mediating variable of gift purchasing. In this model, arrows that show the direction of postulated influence indicate causality between components. The model assumes that there is a one-way flow of causation. The solid lines together with the arrows hierarchically show how determinants cause or influence other determinants. As this paper reports on only the initial phase of a comprehensive study to explore Chinese cultural values and consumer behavior, the model does not address attitudinal or behavioral variables that will have an impact on Chinese cultural values. Hence, there is no feedback flow in the model. The model of propositions, as indicated by the links between the constructs, reflect a number of the potential relationships that are supported by the literature. Many of these relationships were generated from the focus group interviews which provided additional information and antecedents of the relationship between gift purchasing and certain Chinese rules.
Based on the literature review and focus group interviews, eight propositions are developed in three different categories as follows:

I. Chinese Cultural Values as Social Referents

P1: The greater the importance placed on Chinese cultural values (in terms of face, reciprocity and guanxi), the more concerned the giver is about the symbolism of the gift.

Higher enthusiasm about Chinese cultural values increases the givers’ consideration of the symbolism of the gift. Choosing the right gift which carries appropriate symbolism is linked to the outcome or consequences of the gift-giving and receiving behaviors. This is an area deserving special attention. A great deal of studies examined product choices and the criteria involved (Bettman 1989; Brucks 1985; Park et al. 1994). Many cross-cultural researchers agreed that it is essential to indigenize consumer behavior model to take into consideration the diversity of the cultural impact. The applicability of such on gift giving is therefore proposed.
P2: The greater the importance placed on Chinese cultural values (in terms of face, reciprocity and *guanxi*), the higher the level of involvement in gift purchasing.

Chinese cultural values influence the level of involvement of the givers in gift purchasing for the recipients. The more an individual respects and recognizes Chinese cultural values, the more they are likely to be attentive towards the intrinsic involvement of gift purchasing. Intrinsic involvement is basically the perceived link between the purchase and one’s self-concept (Johnson and Eagley 1990; Richins and Bloch 1986). It is the intrinsic importance to the giver of gift, which often ties in with the family, social, or business relations with the receiver.

P3: The greater the importance placed on Chinese cultural values (in terms of face, reciprocity and *guanxi*), the more concerned the giver is about the importance of gift-giving occasions.

Chinese cultural values may affect the perceived importance of gift-giving occasions. The importance placed upon Chinese cultural values enhances the gift-giving situation because of the belief that the effort will bring favorable outcomes in terms of face, reciprocity and *guanxi*. This is in line with the concept of situational involvement, dealing with the linkage between the gift-giving situation and the outcomes or consequences of the situation (Schmidt and Spreng 1996).

II. Arousal to Gift Giving

P4: Higher level of involvement in gift giving increases the arousal to gift giving.

The notion of consumer involvement was first introduced by Krugman (1965) and involvement is viewed as the perceived personal relevance of the situation (Celsi and Olson, 1988), in this case, gift giving. Consumer behavior theories suggest that consumers are more aroused when involvement is high (Engel et al. 1993; Hawkins et al. 1986). Therefore, the higher the level of involvement in gift giving, the higher the level of arousal.

P5: Greater perceived importance of the occasion increases the arousal to gift giving.

Greater perceived importance of the occasion enhances greater attention and information processing leading to increases in one’s motivation to give a gift. That is, the more important the occasion is, the higher the level of arousal to gift giving.
III. Gift Purchasing

P6: The higher the level of arousal, the greater the desire for achieving the optimal gift-purchasing decision.

The level of arousal has a positive effect on the gift-purchasing decision. The higher the level of arousal, the stronger would be the desire for an optimal gift-giving decision rather than just an acceptable one. Swan (1969) found that making the optimal decision required significantly more complex considerations. This would imply that the gift-purchasing decision would consider more products and brands in the evoked set, more prestigious brands to be purchased, and a greater number of types of retail outlets to be considered for patronage.

P7: The greater the emphasis placed on the symbolism of the gift, the greater the desire for achieving the optimal gift-purchasing decision.

Consideration of the symbolism of the gift may influence the gift-purchasing decision. That is, the more concerned the giver is about the symbolism of gift, the more products in the choice set, the more prestigious is the brand to be purchased and the retail outlet to be patronized.

P8: The more important a gift-giving occasion is, the greater the desire for achieving the optimal gift-purchasing decision.

Consideration of a gift-giving occasion may influence the gift-purchasing decision. That is, the more important a gift-giving occasion is perceived by the giver, the more prestigious is the brand to be purchased or the retail outlet to be patronized.

CONCLUSION

A model of gift-purchasing behaviour with Chinese cultural values as a major construct has been developed. In this paper, according to Yau’s work, three Chinese cultural values: face, guanxi and reciprocity were identified to have an impact on (product) involvement, gift-giving occasions, and the symbolism of a gift. A total of eight propositions were eventually stipulated for empirical testing. It is expected that in order to test the model and its propositions, a full factorial design that takes into consideration the gift-giving occasions, the symbolism of the gift and the level of guanxi between givers and recipients is necessary. Other cultural values such as face and reciprocity (Yau 1988), gift purchasing and arousal will then be operationalized accordingly. This paper shows a case of applying Chinese cultural values in explaining gift-purchasing behavior. However, Chinese cultural values can be extended to other areas in marketing as indicated by Yang (1991) and Yau (1994). These applications would be very unique and worth exploring espe-
cially in compatible situations across various cultures, despite difficulties in research methodologies.

Earlier cross-cultural research has been full of sweeping generalities that have often been misused to stereotype people and ended up being of little use in explaining or predicting social behavior in various cultures (Yang et al. 1989, Yau 1994b). Two important questions are raised:

1. Are there universal social behaviors or behavioral rules?
2. Are there direct relationships between cultural determinants and specific social behaviors?

In studying cultural influences on social behavior, antecedents and mediating variables are important to ensure solid concepts and theories. Cultural value systems always have their ecological and subsistent background and their historical development. Cross-cultural studies would only be useful if they were based on well-conceived hypotheses that are derived through a good understanding of how cultural determinants are derived and how they influence behavioral dispositions in general. Two major points are worth noting:

1. In cross-cultural studies, some scholars look at the culture of an ethnic group (or national cultural as it appears in many international business texts) as unique (Bond, 1991) while others reckon there are differences within a culture (Buckley and Brooke, 1992). Cross-cultural studies should take the approach of studying both the similarities and differences among cultures on relative and average scales.
2. For marketers, there is a tendency to assume cultural similarity among cultures unless it is proved otherwise as it is more cost and resource efficient to employ a set of global strategies. The concept of segmentation, the impact of multinational firms, and the influence of information technology are all supports to make particular segments in various ethnic groups homogeneous in terms of consumer behavior.

Unless the ambiguous concepts intrinsic to cross-cultural studies and their marketing implications are theoretically refined, adequately operationalised and tested with sound methodologies, the results may not benefit the body of knowledge in the literature.

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