



EXPLORING THE GIFT-GIVING EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG CHINESE CONSUMERS

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- Large-scale research project
 - Funded by an Australian Research Council Industrial Transformation grant and Mondelēz International
 - Aims to develop understandings of cultural influences on consumer behaviours in Asian markets such as China (e.g. gifting behaviours), to provide insights for industries looking to export overseas



- A continuum of social ties (Joy, 2001)
 - Family, romantic partners, close friends, good friends, just friends and passing friends
- Chinese cultural values (Yau, Chan, & Lau, 1999)
 - Social connections (*guanxi*), favour (*renqing*), face (*mianzi*), reciprocity (*bao*)
- Current theoretical framework: Relational models theory (Fiske, 1992)
 - Communal sharing, equality matching, authority ranking, market pricing





Some possible cultural differences in gift-giving

Feature of gift-giving	North America	East Asia	References
Reciprocity	Reciprocity not necessarily expected but likely to happen soon after. Emphasis on equal value in the reciprocated gift.	Reciprocation not immediate, wait for suitable opportunity. Reciprocated gift usually equal or greater in value to that received.	(Shen, Wan, & Wyer Jr, 2011; Yau et al., 1999)
Relationship with recipient	Reciprocity encouraged in families. More willing to accept small gifts from acquaintances, focus less on need to reciprocate and feel less indebted to giver.	Reciprocity less encouraged in families. Less willing to accept small gifts from acquaintances, focus on obligation to reciprocate and feel more indebted to giver.	(Joy, 2001; Shen et al., 2011)





Some possible cultural differences in gift-giving

Feature of gift-giving	West (mainly North America)	East Asia	References
'Face' and luxury gifts	'Face' interpreted differently in western settings. Luxury consumption generally motivated by personal preferences or materialism.	Maintaining the 'face' of the giver and recipient is important. Luxury products as gifts can symbolise respect for the esteem of the recipient, and maintain the 'face' of the giver.	(Qian et al., 2007; Shanka & Handley, 2011; Wang, 2006; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998)
'Dark side' of the gift economy	The gift economy can evoke strong feelings of obligation and pressure to reciprocate. Individuals can escape the gift economy by resorting to a market economy approach.	Strong obligations to reciprocate cause anxiety, given the emphasis on <i>guanxi</i> as a social institution. In one study, Chinese living in the US reported enjoying being able to escape their <i>guanxi</i> obligations	(Marcoux, 2009; Sherry Jr. et al., 1993; Wang, 2006)





Aim of the current study

To explore the gift-giving experiences of young
New to Australia Chinese consumers

Research questions

1. What motivates the gift purchases of young
New to Australia Chinese consumers (<2 years)?
2. What kinds of gifts are purchased?
3. How do these consumers feel about gifts they
have received?



- Qualitative approach
 - Semi-structured interviews (30 - 60min)
 - Experiential, exploratory
 - Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
- Participants
 - 20 Chinese international students at the University of Melbourne
 - 14 females and 6 males
 - Aged 19 to 30 (M = 22)
 - Time in Australia: 2 weeks – 14 months





- Showing I care
 - “Gift giving is a good way to express how I care about you and know you”
 - “I know my grandmother, her joints are not very good, sometimes it pains, that’s why I brought back some like glucosamine”
 - “it’s kind of just a symbol that I remember them, I put them in my heart”
- Matching value
 - “if you scale this relationship from zero to 10, so 10 is you value the relationship the most, so you will buy the most expensive present”
 - “If on my birthday one of my friends gave me a very treasured gift, for example it’s \$100, on her birthday I will give her things that is around \$100. If I give her a cheaper gift, maybe she will think “oh that’s unfair”

- Sharing the cost
 - “if we combine the money we can buy the better one”
 - “my friends are more like they would go out together for dinner and we will buy a big cake for her. We don’t really like buy gifts, like everyone bring a gift - I don’t think so.”
- ‘Safe’ gifts
 - “only if you know what kind of things that person would like you pick that thing, but if you don’t know, you pick like the most safe one”
 - “I don’t exactly know what they want, so I think if I just bought a no good gift and I believe they will want to re-gift me, but if my gift is no good I don’t want to re-gift, so we just have a dinner”

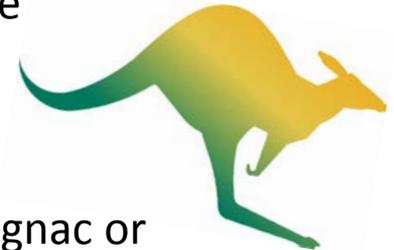
- Expressing appreciation
 - “because they helped us before it’s a social expectation ... when you go back you bring something as a return because everybody knows you study abroad and you’ve got a chance to ... touch the good stuff”
- Showing respect
 - “the gift it must be expensive, fancy-looking ... the package of the gift must be fantastic or some really valuable items of the gift to show what we call respect ... of that relationship.”
- Building relationships
 - “you respect those important people and you want to get acquainted or build a relationship with them, if you give them gifts ... they will know you know how to appreciate things, and you’re concerned about them”



- Personalization
 - “something that is unique, personal, even just some mug with our picture on it, it will be a great gift that I want to keep”
- Sharing experiences
 - “I think the meaning of when we bring our food together to share is celebrate a friendship”
- Feeling burdened by obligation to reciprocate
 - “sometimes gift giving will be a burden for the people who are concerned because you need to evaluate the value of the gift and also you need to think about ‘OK how can I just give back to them’ “
 - “sometimes I don’t want gift and re-gift, it might cause some trouble”



- Safe, clean, healthy
 - “I brought some supplementary products like vitamins because of how the Chinese consumers don’t trust the Chinese market for those products”
 - “there is a website called Taobao or Alibaba... but it is not official website for this milk factory, so we have to ask our friends - students overseas - to post this milk powder but it’s very expensive for the postage”
- Changing trends
 - “in the past people in China would like to send the wine, cognac or cigarette... but now people tend to provide some healthy product... food, or the Swiss liver detox kind of product, so the fashion has changed”





- Market segmentation strategies
 - ‘Rules’ for gifting differed significantly between different relationships.
 - Western snacks and sweets were seen as ‘safe’ gifts for younger consumers. For older consumers, the healthiness of imported food products could be a focus.
- Product development
 - It is useful to consider the symbolism of a product and how it is used as a gift during product development. For example, participants stated that in business relationships it was important to have elaborate packaging and multiple sets.
- Labelling and place
 - Consumers were seeking guaranteed safety controls as indicators of food integrity, and were seeking official online supply channels for Australian food products.

- Theoretical contributions:
 - Gifting experiences exhibited characteristics of communal sharing, equality matching and authority ranking relational models (Fiske, 1992)
- Limitation of the research
 - Lack of generalizability, sample characteristics, potential regional differences
 - Language of interviews, interviewer characteristics
- Future research
 - Experiments to conduct cross-national comparisons of gifting norms



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For more information: www.foodvaluechain.unimelb.edu.au

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