

## One Country, two systems

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**One Country, Two Systems:  
Cultural Values Reflected in Chinese and Hong Kong  
Television Commercials**

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**One Country, Two Systems:  
Cultural Values Reflected in Chinese and Hong Kong  
Television Commercials**

**Abstract**

A content analysis of 1,387 commercials broadcast in *China*<sup>1</sup> and Hong Kong in 1993 and 1998 was conducted using Cheng and Schweitzer's (1996) framework of cultural values. The five cultural values that dominated Chinese television advertising were "modernity," "family," "tradition," "technology," and "collectivism." The five dominant cultural values in Hong Kong television advertising were "quality," "effectiveness," "economy," "enjoyment," and "modernity." Hong Kong commercials used more Western values whereas Chinese commercials used more Eastern ones. Chinese commercials used more symbolic values while Hong Kong commercials used more utilitarian ones. The pattern of cultural values reflected in Chinese commercials was more volatile than that of Hong Kong commercials. The use of two-way ANOVA model indicated that product category had greater impact on cultural values than time dimension.

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, *China* refers to its mainland.

## Introduction

At midnight of June 30, 1997, Hong Kong, the 422-square-mile, 156-year-old British crown colony with a 6.5-million population, was returned to the People's Republic of China, becoming its Special Administrative Region (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 2000). Although the reunification of these two parts of China was completed overnight, their differences are far from disappearing because of the long-time separation behind them. As Pan and his collaborators (1999) remarked, this historic event “symbolized a host of imagined fundamental clashes such as colonialism vs. nationalism, capitalism vs. Communism and East vs. West” (p. 99).

**In addition to the two different political systems existing in the post-reunification China - a first social experiment of its kind in the world, the impact of cultural differences on the advertising messages in these two parts of the “Cultural China” (Frith and Tao 1998) is still largely unknown.**

This article is, therefore, designed to pinpoint the cultural values reflected in the television commercials of China and Hong Kong from 1993 and 1998.

## Literature Review

As a form of social and cultural communication, advertising is a carrier of cultural values (Leiss, Kline, and Jhally 1990; Pollay 1983, 1986; Pollay and Gallagher 1990). There has been a continuous scholarly interest in the need for relating advertising to culture over the past four decades (Cheng 1994,

1997). Although the investigation of the relationship between advertising and culture dates back to the early 1960s (Cheng, 1994), it was not until the early 1980s, when Pollay (1983) developed his seminal coding framework for measuring cultural values manifest in advertising, that analytical studies were devoted to the cultural values reflected in advertising content.

Based on their focuses, these studies can be roughly categorized into four groups (see Table 1). Owing to the vast differences between Eastern and Western cultures (Porter and Samovar 1997), the largest group of the studies was devoted to the comparison of advertisements from these two major types of cultures. Initially, Singh and Huang (1962) found that U.S. advertisements were not effective in India for its appeals had run counter to indigenous cultural values.

Since the 1980s, more studies have focused on Eastern and Western cultures. Belk, Bryce, and Pollay (1985), Belk and Pollay (1985), and Belk and Bryce (1986) reported that although Americanization was clearly increasing in Japanese advertisements, deep-rooted Japanese cultural values still remain strong. Hong, Muderrisoglu, and Zinkhan (1987) observed that Japanese advertisements were more emotional and less comparative than their U.S. counterparts. Also in 1987, Mueller reported that the cultural appeals used in Japanese and U.S. magazine advertisements tend to differ in degree rather in kind. Zandpour and Qian's (1992) findings partly supported Mueller's results, whereas Han et al.'s (1992) results largely differed from Mueller's conclusion. In 1993, Lin found that "certain commonalities in each's advertising approach are apparent" and suggested that "there is a 'common ground' rooted in modern

materialism across cultures” (p. 46). In a follow-up study, Lin and Salwen (1995) reported that U.S. commercials tended to seek “the completeness and perfection of either a rational or an emotional appeal in their product information strategy,” whereas Japanese commercials prone to pursue “the sophistication of either a physical or emotional embodiment” (p. 63).

In 1996, Cheng and Schweitzer identified eight cultural values dominant either Chinese or U.S. television commercials and reported that Chinese commercials resorted more often to symbolic cultural values while U.S. commercials tended to use both symbolic and utilitarian ones. Similarly, Albers-Millers and Gelb (1996) concluded that “[e]ven with a relatively homogeneous audience of business and professional readers, variation in advertising across culture is observable” (pp. 67-68). Zhang and Gelb (1996) emphasized the need for matching advertising appeals to culture, “especially in the case of sharply contrasting cultures, such as those of the United States and China” (p. 42). Tsao (1997) reported that Western cultural values have not been fully adopted in Taiwanese advertising.

The second group of studies on cultural values carried in advertising was focused on one selected country. Marquez (1975) found that Philippine advertising had reflected the Western rather than the indigenous culture. Mueller (1992) also reported that “Japanese advertising is still far from being westernized. In fact, there are indicators that it may be becoming increasingly Japanese” (p. 22). Mueller's findings agreed with Belk and Pollay's discoveries in the mid-1980s.

In 1991, Srikandath found that “high-technology,” “modernization,” and “consumerism” were three

predominant cultural values transmitted through Indian advertising. Sengupta and Frith (1997) highlighted varying degree of importance attached to different cultural values in advertisements of multinational corporations and solely Indian owned businesses.

In 1994, Cheng identified “modernity,” “technology,” and “quality” as most dominant cultural values reflected in Chinese magazine advertisements between early 1980s and early 1990s. In a follow-up study, Cheng (1997) found that “modernity,” “technology,” and “youth” predominated Chinese advertising in the 1990s while the dominance of “quality” in early 1990s was superseded by “tradition” in mid-1990s. He also found that symbolic values from both Eastern and Western cultures occurred more frequently in mid-1990s. Wang (1995) reported that pleasure seeking and consumption for modernity were the recurring themes in the multinational advertisements in two leading Chinese daily newspapers. McIntyre and Wei (1998) noticed that the frequency of utilitarian values used in Chinese advertisements was decreased over time, while the use of some Western cultural values increased. Similarly, Dong, Day, and Cao (1999) found a major value shift from utilitarian values to hedonistic values in Chinese magazine advertisements. Based on the facts that both Eastern and Western cultural values were widely used in Chinese television commercials and the insignificant changes of Western cultural values and Western cultural indicators in the 1990s, Cheng (1998) suggested that the notion of dependency theory should be applied to the situation of Chinese advertising with caution.

In 1994, Tsao presented that time perspectives, Western orientation, and hard-selling appeals were



increasingly emphasized in Taiwanese advertising, whereas a reluctance to use Western models became strong. Chan (1999) found that the set of dominant cultural values used in Hong Kong's newspaper advertisements from 1946 to 1996 mainly consisted of Western values. This set was also a combination of utilitarian and symbolic values that put emphasis on product benefits and product prestige.

The third group of studies was focused on the cultural values reflected in one particular product category or one particular cultural value reflected in advertising from different countries. Tansey et al. (1990) reported that values concerning work, leisure, and urban life evidently different in Brazilian and U.S. car advertisements. In a study of fashion and food advertisements, Domzal and Kernan (1993) argued, however, that "certain consumers, apart from their resident cultures, regard these products in essentially equivalent, self-relevant ways" (p. 1). But Frith and Sengupta (1991) found significant differences in the use of the value "individualism" in the magazine advertisements from India, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The last 10 years or so have seen an increasing scholarly interest in the cultural values reflected in advertising of regions that share a similar language and / or a similar culture (i.e., the fourth group of the studies). Tse, Belk, and Zhou (1989) found that

PRC ads emphasize utilitarian appeals, promise a better life, and focus on states of being as a consumption theme. Hong Kong ads stress hedonistic values, promise easier and American lifestyles, and focus on doing. Taiwan ads fall between these two extremes, but are converging toward Hong Kong ads in consumption appeals over time. (p. 457)

Pasadeos and Chi (1992) also reported that advertisements from both Hong Kong and Taiwan used more Western than traditional cultural values.

In 1991, Frith and Wesson discovered significant differences in the use of individualism, egalitarianism, and direct speech in British and U.S. magazine advertisements. Similarly, Mehta (1992) reported that advertisements in U.K. and U.S. lifestyle magazines were specialized than standardized. Katz and Lee (1992) further suggested that although cultural differences were important, product categories were more determinant for advertising formats used in U.K. and U.S. television commercials.

[ TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE ]

### **Cultural Values and Advertising**

Centrally placed in various definitions of culture (Giddens 1989; Hofstede 1990; Inglehart 1990; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961; Rokeach 1973), “values are often offered as the explanation for the way in which people communicate” (Lustig and Koester 1999, p. 81). Although each individual could have a unique set of personal values, *cultural values*, “the governing ideas and guiding principles for thought and action” (Srikandath 1991, p. 166), tend to permeate a culture.

Cultural values differ in valence and intensity from culture to culture. While *valence* refers to whether a cultural value is seen as positive or negative, *intensity* indicates the strength or importance of the value in a culture. As Lustig and Koester (1999) exemplified,

in some U.S. American cultures, the value of respect for elders is negatively valenced and

held with a modest degree of intensity. Many U.S. Americans value youth rather than old age. In Korea, Japan, and Mexico, however, respect for elders is a positively valenced value, and it is very intensely held. (p. 82)

There can be wide variability in cultural difference due, in part, to the valences and intensities given to various cultural values. If we imagine such differences varying along a minimum-maximum dimension, the maximum differences go to those found between Asian and Western cultures (Porter and Samovar 1997). Thus, some cultural values (such as collectivism, respect for elders, and tradition) are more typical of Eastern cultures whereas other cultural values (such as individualism, youth, and modernity) are more representative of Western cultures (Cheng and Schweitzer 1996; Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Chu and Ju 1993; Frith 1990; Mueller 1987, 1992; Pan et al. 1994; Srikandath 1991; Xu 1990).

Many cultural values may also be differentiated as utilitarian and symbolic. In advertising, *utilitarian values* (such as convenience, neatness, and quality) often highlight product or service features while *symbolic values* (such as collectivism, individualism, modernity, and tradition) mainly suggest human emotions.

In his seminal research, Pollay (1983) developed a coding framework that enables researchers to measure cultural values manifest in advertising in a large-scale and systematic manner. With 42 cultural values suggested for measurement in advertising, Pollay's framework has proved to be applicable to all media.

In a further study of advertising and cultural values, Pollay (1986) developed his well-known

metaphor of “distorted mirror” for advertising. A few years later, Pollay and Gallagher (1990) tested the “distorted mirror” notion empirically. With randomly selected samples of 2,000 mass-circulated advertisements from 1900 to 1980 and 250 television commercials from 1970 to 1980, they content analyzed cultural values reflected in North American advertising. As a result, they identified 25 cultural values frequently depicted in the advertisements, which showed “high consistency over time and across media” (p. 359). Once again, they asserted that if advertising is a mirror of cultural values, “it is a distorted one” (p. 370).

The mirror is distorted . . . because advertising reflects only certain attitudes, behaviors and values. It models and reinforces only certain life-styles and philosophies, those that serve seller’s interests. It displays those values that are most readily linked to the available products, that are easily dramatized in advertisements, and that are most reliably responded to by consumers who see the advertisements. Advertising is, therefore, a selective reinforcement of only some behavior and values. (p. 360)

Pollay’s formulation shed much light on the nature of cultural values manifest in advertising messages. Since Pollay’s framework for examining cultural values in advertising is largely based on a North American experience, Cheng (1994, 1997, 1998), and Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) applied it to Chinese advertising. They found that Pollay’s “distorted mirror” concept is equally applicable in the Chinese context because Chinese advertising also merely reflected those cultural values that could help sell products and ignored those that could not benefit advertisers.

Based on the unique social reality in China, they further suggested, however, the *contemporary*

*Chinese advertising*<sup>1</sup> is not only a “distorted mirror” but also a “double-distorted” one, which has a strong tendency to fitting into the “idiosyncratic” social reality in the country while reflecting advertising’s commercial nature. In the meantime, they suggested that the cultural orientation in contemporary Chinese advertising is not a matter of being more “Chinese” or more “Western.” Rather, it is truly emerging as a “melting pot” of Eastern and Western cultural values. This “melting pot,” to a great extent, keeps abreast of the national trend of reviving “good” traditional Chinese values and accepting “good” Western ones, which are supported to benefit the ongoing “Four Modernizations” program in the country. The openness of the “melting pot” and the closeness of the “double-distorted mirror” convinced them that advertising in China is still in a state of flux, which calls for constant monitoring and investigating. Part of the purpose of this study is, therefore, to continue and deepen such an intellectual exploration of the booming advertising in this fastest-growing and largest potential market in the world.

### **Why Compare China with Hong Kong?**

As indicated in the literature reviewed earlier in the article, it is of great significance to compare the cultural content of advertising in similar cultures because such studies are more effective in pinpointing the subtle differences between the influences of similar cultural contexts on advertising. So far, few

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<sup>1</sup> By *contemporary Chinese advertising*, we refer to the advertising in China since 1979 when advertising came back to life soon after the country reopened its door to the rest of the world.

studies have been done in this domain. The only study that directly involved both Chinese and Hong Kong advertising (Tse, Belk, and Zhou 1989) was conducted more than 10 years ago. Since Hong Kong, with its unique strategic position in business, finance, and information in the world, is a meeting point of the Eastern and Western cultures, more in-depth studies of advertising in this part of the Cultural China have appeared important and necessary.

Advertising in China has grown and changed so profoundly in the 1990s, so the timing appears also appropriate now to update Tse, Belk, and Zhou's 1989 study – with a broader scope as designed in this article. In the meantime, this study is the first attempt to examine the impact of Hong Kong's handover in 1997, if any, on the advertising cultural content in both Hong Kong and China.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Based on the above considerations, two research questions and three hypotheses were formulated for the comparison.

**Research Question I:** What are the differences between the cultural values reflected in Chinese and Hong Kong television commercials?

Hong Kong was one of the British colonies for a century and a half. Its social structure is basically modeled after the United Kingdom. As a capitalistic market that encourages consumption (Tse, Belk, and Zhou 1989), Hong Kong boasts the largest number of regional headquarters for multinational advertising

agencies in Asia. Its advertising creativity is heavily influenced by international client representatives.

Therefore, the first hypothesis was formulated as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** Hong Kong's television advertising tends to use more Western values than Chinese television advertising.

Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990) investigated the evolution of advertising in the United States and concluded that only in the early production-information stage, the emphasis was on the product itself. As advertising development entered into later stages of product image, personalization, and life-style, more and more emphasis was given to symbolic values. Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) found a partial shift from symbolic values back to utilitarian values in U.S. television advertising in the 1990s. They attributed this shift to more "mature" consumers and a more competitive market. As Hong Kong consumers are more "mature" than Chinese consumers and the Hong Kong market is more competitive than the Chinese market, it is expected that Hong Kong advertising may carry more utilitarian values. Hence, the second hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** Hong Kong's television advertising tends to use more utilitarian values than Chinese television advertising.

Advertising in China has grown and changed profoundly in the 1990s. It is moving from the early production-information stage to later stages of advertising development. As a result, the manifest of cultural values in Chinese television commercials may be more volatile than that in its Hong Kong counterparts. So, the third hypothesis was formulated as follows:

**Hypothesis 3:** Cultural values manifest in Hong Kong television advertising are more stable than those reflected in Chinese television advertising.

**Research Question II:** If there are differences in the cultural values among Chinese and Hong Kong television commercials, are there any variables that can account for the differences?

### **Research Method**

The following section reports on how data were collected, coded, and analyzed in this comparative study of Chinese and Hong Kong television advertising.

*Sample collection: Chinese Sample.* Three television channels, Channels One of the China Central Television (CCTV1), Guangdong Television (GTV), and Zhejiang Television (ZTV) were selected for the Chinese sample. While CCTV1 is broadcast nationwide, GTV and ZTV mainly serve Guangdong and Zhejiang Provinces respectively. The two provincial television stations represented the major consumer markets in China. The 1993 CCTV1 commercials were a convenient sample videotaped in June and November, and the 1993 GTV and ZTV commercials were convenient samples videotaped in November and December. Two weeks' worth of prime-time television was taped in 1993. The 1998 Chinese commercials, also two weeks' worth, were a systematic sample of prime-time television videotaped in June and November. Two hours a night of commercial broadcasting were collected for each taping day. The Chinese sample consisted of a total of 56 broadcasting hours of commercials.

*Sample collection: Hong Kong Sample.* Four channels (TVB Jade and Pearl, ATV Home and World)



were selected for the Hong Kong sample. These four channels represent all free-on-air programming channels in Hong Kong. Cable television was not selected as the amount of subscribers and advertising volume was low at the period of survey. Twenty-eight broadcasting hours of prime- and fringe-time television was videotaped in Hong Kong in December 1993 and another 28 broadcasting hours of prime-time television was videotaped in June and November 1998. The Hong Kong sample consisted of a total of 56 broadcasting hours of commercials, too.

*Coding frame.* The unit of analysis was each complete television commercial. Any duplicate commercials for the same brand in the same language of channel were excluded from the sample “in order to eliminate any redundancies which may have skewed the results” (Stern and Resnik 1991).

The current study adopts Cheng and Schweitzer’s (1996) framework used to analyze Chinese and U.S. television advertising. Largely originated from Pollay’s (1983) and Mueller’s (1987, 1992) studies, their operational definitions of 32 cultural values are presented in Table 2, with minor modifications in wording.

[ TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE ]

*Coding procedure.* The dependent variables in this analysis were the cultural values displaced. The independent variables were China and Hong Kong that were hypothesized to indicate the cultural value differences. Product categories and the time dimension were employed as two control variables to help examine the cultural value differences.

A sample of 1,387 television commercials, 727 from China (323 from 1993 and 404 from 1998) and 660 from Hong Kong (320 from 1993 and 340 from 1998), was coded by two pairs of trained coders. During the coding procedure, the coders attempted to identify the most dominant value in each commercial, which was decided mainly by the overall first impression or the key elements in the visual or audio messages. To check inter-judge reliability, 10% of the sample was systematically selected and respectively coded for the cultural value variables by the two pairs of coders. The inter-coder reliability for the Chinese sample was 87% and that for the Hong Kong sample was 88%. Both figures reached the minimum inter-judge reliability of 85% suggested by Kassirjian (1977). Thus, the coefficients of reliability obtained are satisfactory.

### **Findings**

*Sample profile.* Table 3 shows the distribution of the samples among different product categories. The Chinese sample contained mostly personal care/fashion, household appliance, food and drink, and medicine commercials. The Hong Kong sample contained mostly household appliance, food and drink, service, and miscellaneous commercials. F-tests were conducted to examine the difference in product profiles of the two samples. Results indicated that the Chinese sample had a higher proportion of medicine advertising and personal care/fashion advertising. The Hong Kong sample had a higher proportion of service advertising and miscellaneous advertising. However, both samples had a high share of household

appliance and food and drink commercials.

*Change in sample profiles.* Results of F-tests also indicated that the Chinese sample had an increase in food and drink as well as household appliance commercials and a decrease in medicine commercials between 1993 and 1998. In the Hong Kong sample, there was an increase in service commercials and a decrease in both household appliance commercials and personal care and fashion commercials in the same period of time.

[ TABLE THREE ABOUT HERE ]

*Differences in cultural values of Chinese and Hong Kong television commercial.* Table 4 shows the cultural values contained in the sampled commercials. The five values most commonly found in Chinese commercials were “modernity” (20%), “family” (9%), “tradition” (7%), “technology” (7%), and “collectivism” (6%). The five values most commonly found in Hong Kong commercials were “quality” (15%), “effectiveness” (12%), “economy” (10%), “enjoyment” (10%), and “modernity” (5%). The two samples shared only one dominant value (i.e., “modernity”).

[ TABLE FOUR ABOUT HERE ]

F-tests were conducted to examine the differences in the cultural values contained in Chinese and Hong Kong commercials. Among the 32 cultural values, 23 had significant F statistics. This finding indicates that Chinese and Hong Kong commercials differed much in the manifest of cultural values. There were 12 values that had been used significantly more often in Chinese commercials. These included

“collectivism,” “courtesy,” “family,” “modernity,” “natural,” “nurturance,” “patriotism,” “respect for elderly,” “technology,” “tradition,” “work,” and “youth.” There were 11 values that had been used significantly more often in Hong Kong commercials. These included “adventure,” “beauty,” “convenience,” “economy,” “effectiveness,” “enjoyment,” “health,” “quality,” “safety,” “sex,” and “social status.”

The 12 values that occurred more frequently in Chinese television advertising represented a good mix of Eastern values (“collectivism,” “family,” and “tradition”) and Western values (“modernity,” “technology,” and “youth”). However, values that occurred more frequently in Hong Kong television advertising represented mainly Western values. In other words, Hong Kong commercials tend to use more Western values than Chinese commercials. So, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Among the 12 values that occurred more frequently in Chinese commercials, none was utilitarian and all were symbolic. Among the 11 values that occurred more frequently in Hong Kong commercials, five were symbolic (“adventure,” “beauty,” “enjoyment,” “sex,” and “social status”) and the other six were utilitarian. Results indicated that Hong Kong commercials used more utilitarian values than Chinese commercials. So, Hypothesis 2 was supported, too.

*Changes in cultural values.* Table 5 summarizes the results of the F-tests conducted to investigate whether the manifest of cultural value changed over time within each sample. Of the 32 values in the Chinese sample, 10 values had significant F-values. Of the 30 values with non-zero frequencies in the

Hong Kong sample, only 5 values had significant F-values.

Two of the five dominant values in Chinese commercials had significant F-values. The manifest of dominant values “family” and “technology” had been doubled in 1998 while the manifest of dominant values “modernity,” “tradition,” and “collectivism” remained unchanged. On the other hand, all dominant values in Hong Kong commercials did not show any significant change between 1993 and 1998. It is evident that the pattern of cultural values was more volatile in Chinese advertising than in Hong Kong advertising in the 1990s. This finding supports Hypothesis 3.

[ TABLE FIVE ABOUT HERE ]

*Cultural values and product categories.* Tables 6 and 7 summarize the manifest of cultural values for different product categories in Chinese and Hong Kong commercials respectively. F-tests were conducted to examine whether the manifest of cultural values would have anything to do with the types of products and services advertised. Results indicated that product categories had great influence on the values manifest in advertising in both samples. In the Chinese sample, 14 of the 32 values, including all 5 dominant ones, had significant F-values. This finding suggests that specific product category tended to use specific appeals. The “modernity” value occurred frequently in service and automobile advertising. The “family” value occurred frequently in household appliance advertising. The “technology” value appeared mostly in commercials for industrial products. Both “tradition” and “collectivism” values appeared mostly in food and drink commercials.

[ TABLE SIX ABOUT HERE ]

In the Hong Kong sample, 15 of the 30 non-zero values had significant F-values. All five dominant cultural values had significant F-values except “quality.” This result indicates that commercials for all types of products and services used the “quality” value to a similar extent. The “economy” and the “modernity” values occurred most frequently in commercials for cars and motorcycles and for services. The “effectiveness” value was found predominant in medicine advertising. The “enjoyment” value occurred most often in food and drink commercials and in service commercials.

[ TABLE SEVEN ABOUT HERE ]

*Product categories and time dimension.* As product category and year have influence on the manifest of cultural values, it is of interest to investigate which variable has greater impact. Two-way ANOVA F-tests were conducted to determine the individual as well as the combined effects of product category and year on the manifest of dominant cultural values in Chinese and Hong Kong television advertising. Partial F-values were compiled for the interaction of product category and year, the main effect of product category alone, the main effect of year alone, and the combined effect. The combined effect refers to an additive effect of the two main effects and the interaction effect. The results are presented in Table 8.

Of the five dominant values in Chinese commercials, the “modernity” and “technology” values showed significant interaction F-statistics, which indicates that there were changes in the use of these two

values among specific product categories. A close examination of the data found that car and motorcycle commercials used the “modernity” value more often in 1998 while personal care/fashion commercials used it less often in 1998. Household appliance commercials and personal care/fashion commercials, which seldom used the “technology” value in 1993, heavily adopted it in 1998. Also, more industrial goods commercials used the “technology” value in 1998 than in 1993.

The other three dominant values (“family,” “tradition,” and “collectivism”) in Chinese commercials were mainly affected by the product category alone. The interaction of product category and year as well as year alone had no significant effect on the manifest of values. These findings indicate that there were changes in the use of these three values among specific product categories.

All five dominant values in Chinese advertising showed significant partial F-values by product category, and only one showed significant partial F-values by year. This result indicates that product category had greater influence on the manifest of cultural values than the time variable.

Of the five dominant values in Hong Kong advertising, only the “economy” value showed significant interaction F-statistics, which indicates that there were changes in the use of this value among specific product categories. A detailed examination of the data showed that food/drink and personal care/fashion used the “economy” value more frequently in 1998 while service commercials used it less frequently in 1998. Of the five dominant values in Hong Kong advertising, four showed significant partial

F-values by product category, but none showed significant partial F-values by year. Again, this finding indicates that the product category had greater influence on the manifest of cultural values than the time dimension.

[ TABLE EIGHT ABOUT HERE ]

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Chinese and Hong Kong commercials shared only one dominant value – “modernity,” which was also one of the two dominant values shared by Chinese and U.S. television advertising (Cheng and Schweitzer 1996). This similarity reiterates the argument that “one of advertising’s primal messages is a call for change” (Rotzoll and Haefner 1996, p. 16).

Despite the fact that 99% of the Hong Kong population is Chinese, Hong Kong television advertising is far different from that of its motherland in two ways. Hong Kong commercials tended to use more Western values and more utilitarian values. The Westernized flavor of Hong Kong advertising is probably due to its product or commercial origin. As Hong Kong is the regional headquarters of many international advertising agencies, it carries a number of global advertising campaigns for international clients such as Coke, Nike, P&G, and McDonald’s. As these campaigns are originated from the Western world, they are more likely to endorse Western values.

The difference in social system may also account for the differences in Chinese and Hong Kong



advertising. Hong Kong is a capitalistic society that encourages the consumption of material goods whereas China is a socialist society that encourages the well-being of the nation as a whole. So, while showing its commercial nature, Chinese advertising has to fit into the “idiosyncratic” social reality in China (Cheng and Schweitzer 1996). The “enjoyment” value is an interesting example to compare with. This dominant value frequently occurred in Hong Kong’s food and drink commercials and service commercials to demonstrate the sensory-satisfying experience of consumers. However, food and drink in Chinese commercials frequently sell on the “tradition” value through the historical image of the brand.

In 1996, Cheng and Schweitzer first observed that utilitarian values resumed dominance in advertising appeals when a market became even more sophisticated. The current study has, again, provided such evidence. It is found that the appeals of Hong Kong advertising tended to go back to the basics in the 1990s and its emphasis tended to focus again on the tangible attributes about products. It is predicted, therefore, that as the Chinese consumer market becomes more sophisticated, Chinese advertising may also shift to the direction of using more utilitarian values. Future studies on the development of advertising and its use of utilitarian and symbolic values could give further insight into this prediction.

This study was also attempted to compare the influences of product categories and time span on the cultural values reflected in advertising messages. Unlike most previous studies in which at most merely the correlation between cultural values and product categories was investigated, this study also took time

dimension into consideration. As reported in the findings of this article, product categories were far more decisive than a five-year time span in terms of cultural values portrayed in advertising. While this finding supports previous studies in realizing the importance of product categories to cultural values depicted in advertising (Chan, 1999; Cheng and Schweitzer 1996; Katz and Lee 1992), it adds that the portrayal of cultural values in specific product categories may remain consistent over time. This new finding implies that even when a product has entered into different stages in its life cycle, the advertising appeals for the product may not change substantially. The change in cultural values over time may largely determined by the change in products and services prominent in the market.

Although product categories help determine the cultural values portrayed in advertising, this study found that the correlation between product categories and cultural values is society-based. For example, food and drink, the major product category advertised in both China and Hong Kong, had different value patterns. While Chinese food and drink commercials mainly employed “tradition,” “collectivism,” and “family” values, Hong Kong food and drink commercials mainly displayed “enjoyment,” “quality,” and “health” values.

The importance of product categories to the cultural values depicted in advertising may also, to a large extent, account for the more dynamic pattern of the cultural values portrayed in Chinese television commercials than that in Hong Kong television commercials in 1990s. Since product categories are an important determinant in the cultural values used in advertising messages, the more significant changes in

product categories advertised in Chinese commercials - as also found out in this study - naturally led to more noticeable changes in the cultural values carried in Chinese commercials.

It is found in this study that the frequency of Western value “technology” was significantly increased in the 1990s while another typical Western value “modernity” maintained a similar frequency in Chinese commercials of 1993 and 1998. This finding may indicate that the Chinese advertising law taking effect in early 1995 (*Chinese Advertising Yearbook*, 1996) did not affect much the Western cultural values portrayed in Chinese television commercials. This finding also supports a similar result that Cheng (1997) reported in a study on Chinese television commercials of 1995. As the major targets of the advertising law are pufferies and deceptive advertisements, those “good” Western cultural values, which are regarded as both politically and culturally acceptable in the country, were even encouraged rather than checked after the law had been enforced.

The stable pattern of the cultural values reflected in Hong Kong television commercials between 1993 and 1998 suggests that the former British colony's handover to China in 1997 may not have directly affected the cultural content portrayed in Hong Kong television advertising in 1998, either. This finding may also reflect, from one perspective, the functioning of the “one country, two systems” policy that has supposedly been executed in Hong Kong since 1997.

In sum, this study has found that Chinese and Hong Kong television advertising showed more differences than similarities. Hong Kong resembles to the Western world in the cultural values depicted in television

advertising. It may be due to the sophisticated level of the consumers that utilitarian values are being emphasized in Hong Kong advertising again. The Chinese market is still in the process of a rapid development in the products and services available. Since product categories can exert decisive impact on the cultural values used in advertising, we may expect that the cultural values portrayed in Chinese advertising will continue to change with the introduction of more new products and services. Further studies are needed in the future to compare consumers' responses to television commercials using different value appeals. Such studies may further our understanding of what appeals are most appropriate and most effective for a product category or for a brand.

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Table 1

## Four Main Groups of Studies on Cultural Values Reflected in Advertising

Researchers	Years	Research Focuses
<b>(1) Focused on Eastern and Western Cultures</b>		
Singh and Huang	1962	Indian and U.S. advertising
Belk, Bryce, and Pollay	1985	Japanese and U.S. advertising
Belk and Pollay	1985	Japanese and U.S. advertising
Belk and Bryce	1986	Japanese and U.S. advertising
Hong, Muderrisoglu, and Zinkhan	1987	Japanese and U.S. advertising
Mueller	1987	Japanese and U.S. advertising
Han, Schweitzer, Bates, and Smith	1992	Taiwanese and U.S. advertising
Zandpour and Qian	1992	Taiwanese and U.S. advertising
Lin	1993	Japanese and U.S. advertising
Lin and Salwen	1995	Japanese and U.S. advertising
Albers-Millers and Gelb	1996	Advertising in eleven countries
Cheng and Schweitzer	1996	Chinese and U.S. advertising
Zhang and Gelb	1996	Chinese and U.S. advertising
Tsao	1997	Taiwanese and U.S. advertising
<b>(2) Focused on one selected country</b>		
Marquez	1975	Philippine advertising
Srikandath	1991	Indian advertising
Mueller	1992	Japanese advertising
Cheng	1994	Chinese advertising
Tsao	1994	Taiwanese advertising
Wang	1995	Chinese advertising
Cheng	1997	Chinese advertising
Cheng	1998	Chinese advertising
Sengupta and Frith (1997)	1997	Indian advertising
McIntyre and Wei	1998	Chinese advertising
Chan	1999	Hong Kong advertising
Dong, Day, and Cao	1999	Chinese advertising
<b>(3) Focused on one product category or one cultural value</b>		
Tansey, Hyman, and Zinkhan	1990	Brazilian and U.S. auto advertising
Frith and Sengupta	1991	Individualism in Indian, U.K., and U.S. advertising
Domzal and Kernan	1993	U.S. fashion and food advertising
<b>(4) Focused on similar cultures</b>		
Tse, Belk, and Zhou	1989	Chinese, Hong Kong, and Taiwanese advertising
Frith and Wesson	1991	U.K. and U.S. advertising
Katz and Lee	1992	U.K. and U.S. advertising
Mehta	1992	U.K. and U.S. advertising
Pasadeos and Chi	1992	Hong Kong and Taiwanese advertising

**Table 2**  
**Operational Definitions of Cultural Values**

Adventure <sup>a</sup>	This value suggests boldness, daring, bravery, courage, or thrill.
Beauty	This value suggests that the use of a product will enhance the loveliness, attractiveness or elegance of an individual.
Collectivism <sup>b</sup>	The emphasis here is on the individual in relation to others typically in the reference group. Individuals are depicted as integral parts of the group.
Competition <sup>b</sup>	The emphasis here is on distinguishing a product from its counterparts by aggressive comparisons. While explicit comparisons may mention the competitor's name, implicit comparisons may use such words as "number one" or "leader."
Convenience <sup>a</sup>	A product is suggested to be handy and easy to use.
Courtesy	Politeness and friendship toward the consumer are shown through the use of polished and affable language.
Economy <sup>a</sup>	The inexpensive, affordable, and cost-saving nature of a product is emphasized.
Effectiveness <sup>a</sup>	A product is suggested to be powerful and capable of achieving certain ends.
Enjoyment <sup>a</sup>	This value suggests that a product will make its user wild with joy.
Family <sup>a</sup>	The emphasis here is on the family life and family members. The commercial stresses family scenes: getting married, companionship of siblings, kinship, being at home, and suggests that a certain product is good for the whole family.
Health <sup>a</sup>	This value commends that the use of a product will enhance or improve the vitality, soundness, strength, and robust of the body.
Individualism <sup>b</sup>	The emphasis here is on the self-sufficiency and self-reliance of an individual or on the individual as being distinct and unlike others.
Leisure <sup>a</sup>	This value suggests that the use of a product will bring one comfort or relaxation.
Magic <sup>a</sup>	The emphasis here is on the miraculous effect and nature of a product, e.g., "Bewitch your man...;" "Heals like magic."
Modernity <sup>a</sup>	The notion of being new, contemporary, up-to-date, and ahead of time is emphasized.
Natural	This value suggests spiritual harmony between man and nature by making references to the elements, animals, vegetables, or minerals.
Neatness <sup>a</sup>	The notion of being clean and tidy is stressed.
Nurturance <sup>a</sup>	This value stresses giving charity, help, protection, support, or sympathy to the

	weak, disabled, young, or elderly.
Patriotism	The love of and the loyalty to one's own nation inherent in the nature or in the use of a product are suggested here.
Popularity <sup>a</sup>	The focus here is on the universal recognition and acceptance of a certain product by consumers, e.g., "Best seller;" "Well-known nationwide or worldwide."
Quality	The emphasis here is on the excellence and durability of a product, which is usually claimed to be a winner of medals or certificates awarded by a government department for its high grade or is demonstrated by the product's excellent performance.
Respect for the elderly <sup>b</sup>	The commercial displays a respect for older people by using a model of old age or asking for the opinions, recommendations, and advice of the elders.
Safety <sup>a</sup>	The reliable and secure nature of a product is emphasized.
Sex <sup>a</sup>	The advertisement uses glamorous and sensual models or has a background of lovers holding hands, embracing, or kissing to promote a product.
Social Status <sup>a</sup>	The use of a product is claimed to be able to elevate the position or rank of the user in the eyes of others. The idea of prestige, trend-setting, and pride in the use of a product is conveyed.
Technology <sup>a</sup>	Here, the advanced and sophisticated technical skills to engineer and manufacture a particular product are emphasized.
Tradition <sup>b</sup>	The experience of the past, customs, and conventions are respected. The qualities of being historical, time-honored, and legendary are venerated, e.g., "With eighty years of manufacturing experience"; "It's adapted from ancient Chinese prescriptions."
Uniqueness <sup>a</sup>	The unrivaled, incomparable, and unparalleled nature of a product is emphasized, e.g., "We're the only one that offers you the product."
Wealth	This value conveys the idea that being affluent, prosperous, and rich should be encouraged and suggests that a certain product or service will make the user well-off.
Wisdom <sup>a</sup>	This value shows respect for knowledge, education, intelligence, expertise, or experience.
Work	This value shows respect for diligence and dedication of one's labor and skills. A typical example is that a medication has regained a desperate patient his or her ability to work.
Youth <sup>a</sup>	The worship of the younger generation is shown through the depiction of younger models. The rejuvenating benefits of the product are stressed, e.g., "Feel young again!"

<sup>a</sup> Adapted from Pollay (1983)<sup>b</sup> Adapted from Mueller (1987, 1992)

**Table 3**  
**Profile of Chinese and Hong Kong Commercial Samples**

Product Categories	China		Hong Kong		China Total %	Hong Kong Total %	F-stat.
	1993 %	1998 %	1993 %	1998 %			
Cars and Motorcycles	3	6	3	2	5	2	5.6*
Food and Drink	16	23	16	21	20	19	.4
Household Appliances	19	27	28	19	23	23	0
Medicine	28	12	4	4	19	4	82.6***
Personal Care & Fashion	24	22	13	8	23	10	40.2***
Services	2	5	14	21	4	18	81.6***
Industry Products	7	3	1	2	5	2	13.6***
Properties	0	@	4	5	@	5	33.8***
Miscellaneous	1	2	18	17	1	17	117.7***
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	
No. of commercials	323	404	320	340	727	660	

@ less than .5%

\* Significant at .05 \*\* Significant at .01 \*\*\* Significant at .001

**Table 4**  
**Manifest of Cultural Values in Chinese and Hong Kong Commercials**

Cultural Value	China		Hong Kong		F-stat.
	N	%	N	%	
Adventure	2	@	18	3	14.8***
Beauty	12	2	28	4	8.3**
Collectivism	43	6	3	1	32.9***
Competition	27	4	18	3	1.1
Convenience	6	1	21	3	10.1**
Courtesy	15	2	3	1	7.0**
Economy	3	@	66	10	70.6***
Effectiveness	17	2	79	12	51.6***
Enjoyment	12	2	65	10	45.7***
Family	66	9	10	2	39.2***
Health	5	1	26	4	16.9***
Individualism	22	3	11	2	2.8
Leisure	17	2	20	3	.6
Magic	14	2	11	2	.1
Modernity	146	20	34	5	71.7***
Natural	7	1	1	@	4.0*
Neatness	2	@	2	@	0
Nurturance	11	2	1	@	7.5**
Patriotism	24	3	1	@	19.6***
Popularity	26	4	31	5	1.1
Quality	29	4	97	15	49.7***
Respect for elderly	25	3	0	0	23.5***
Safety	3	@	20	3	14.7***
Sex	7	1	20	3	7.8**
Social status	10	1	23	4	6.7**
Technology	50	7	12	2	21.0***
Tradition	53	7	13	2	21.9***
Uniqueness	7	1	14	2	3.1
Wealth	6	1	6	1	0
Wisdom	7	1	4	1	.6
Work	10	1	0	0	9.2**
Youth	42	6	2	@	43.5***

@ less than .5%

\* Significant at .05    \*\* Significant at .01    \*\*\* Significant at .001

**Table 5**  
**Change of Cultural Values in Chinese and Hong Kong Commercials**

Cultural Values	China					Hong Kong				
	1993		1998		F-stat.	1993		1998		F-stat.
N	%	N	%	N		%	N	%		
Adventure	1	@	1	@	0	4	1	14	4	5.1*
Beauty	5	2	7	2	0	12	4	16	5	.4
Collectivism	20	6	23	6	.1	2	1	1	0	.4
Competition	6	2	21	5	5.6*	13	4	5	1	4.2*
Convenience	3	1	3	1	.1	7	2	14	4	2.0
Courtesy	7	2	8	2	0	2	1	1	0	.4
Economy	1	@	2	1	.2	25	8	41	12	3.3
Effectiveness	8	2	9	2	.1	39	12	40	12	0
Enjoyment	5	2	7	2	0	32	10	33	10	0
Family	20	6	46	11	5.9*	3	1	7	2	1.4
Health	2	1	3	1	0	12	4	14	4	.1
Individualism	10	3	12	3	0	6	2	5	1	.2
Leisure	7	2	10	2	.1	8	3	12	4	.6
Magic	7	2	7	2	.2	1	0	10	3	7.0**
Modernity	69	21	77	20	.6	16	5	18	5	.0
Natural	3	1	4	1	0	0	0	1	0	.9
Neatness	1	@	1	@	0	1	0	1	0	0
Nurturance	4	1	7	2	.3	0	0	1	0	.1
Patriotism	4	1	20	5	7.8**	0	0	1	0	.1
Popularity	22	7	4	1	18***	17	5	14	4	.5
Quality	25	7	4	1	22***	55	17	42	12	3.1
Respect for elderly	18	6	7	2	8.0**	0	0	0	0	0
Safety	1	@	2	1	.2	11	3	9	3	.4
Sex	3	1	4	1	0	15	5	5	1	5.8*
Social status	9	3	1	@	8.6**	9	3	14	4	.8
Technology	14	4	36	9	5.9**	8	3	4	1	1.6
Tradition	21	7	32	8	.5	9	3	4	1	2.3
Uniqueness	7	2	0	0	8.9**	10	3	4	1	3.0
Wealth	2	1	4	1	.3	1	0	5	1	2.5*
Wisdom	3	1	4	1	0	2	1	2	1	0
Work	4	1	6	1	.1	0	0	0	0	0
Youth	10	3	32	8	7.7**	0	0	2	1	1.9

@ less than 0.5% \* Significant at .05 \*\* Significant at .01 \*\*\* Significant at .001



**Table 6**  
**Cultural Values by Product Categories of Chinese Commercials**

Cultural Values	CM	FD	HA	ME	PC	SE	IP	PR	MI	F-stat.	Sign. Level
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
Adventure	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	1.8	N.S.
Beauty	0	1	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	4.3	.0001
Collectivism	6	14	4	6	4	4	0	0	0	2.9	.005
Competition	17	5	4	1	1	19	0	0	0	6.0	.0001
Convenience	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	.6	N.S.
Courtesy	0	1	2	1	1	19	5	0	0	5.7	.0001
Economy	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	100*	0	47.7	.0001
Effectiveness	0	0	5	5	1	0	3	0	0	2.0	.05
Enjoyment	0	3	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	.4	N.S.
Family	0	10	19	8	4	8	0	0	0	4.4	.0001
Health	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	2.7	.01
Individualism	3	2	2	1	7	0	0	0	0	1.8	N.S.
Leisure	3	4	5	0	1	0	0	0	0	1.6	N.S.
Magic	0	0	2	5	2	0	0	0	0	1.5	N.S.
Modernity	31	7	22	11	30	35	30	0	30	5.4	.0001
Natural	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	20	5.8	.0001
Neatness	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	.4	N.S.
Nurturance	3	2	1	3	1	0	0	0	10	1.3	N.S.
Patriotism	9	4	4	4	1	0	3	0	0	.9	N.S.
Popularity	3	5	5	2	1	4	5	0	20	1.7	N.S.
Quality	6	2	5	2	5	4	5	0	0	.7	N.S.
Respect for elderly	0	1	3	11	1	0	0	0	10	4.0	.0001
Safety	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	1.2	N.S.
Sex	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	10	1.6	N.S.
Social status	0	1	0	4	1	0	3	0	0	1.7	N.S.
Technology	9	1	7	7	7	0	32	0	0	6.3	.0001
Tradition	3	22	1	10	1	4	8	0	0	9.1	.0001
Uniqueness	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	.5	N.S.
Wealth	3	0	2	0	1	0	3	0	0	1.0	N.S.
Wisdom	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	1.8	N.S.
Work	0	1	2	4	1	0	0	0	0	1.0	N.S.
Youth	3	7	0	1	18	0	0	0	0	8.5	.0001

CM – Cars and Motorcycles FD – Food and Drink

HA – Household Appliances



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Youth	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	.7	N.S.
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CM – Car and Motorcycles	FD – Food and Drink	HA – Household Appliances
ME – Medicine	PC – Personal Care & Fashion	SE – Services
IP – Industry Products	PR – Properties	MI – Miscellaneous

**Table 8**  
**Two-Way ANOVA of Effects of Product Category and Year**  
**in the Manifest of Dominant Values**

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Dominant cultural values	Number of occurrence		Sign. of interaction of product and year	Sign. of product category	Sign. of year	Full Model	
	N	%				Sign. level	R square (%)
<b>China</b>							
Modernity	146	20	.05	.0001	N.S.	.0001	8.0
Family	66	9	N.S.	.0001	N.S.	.0001	6.4
Tradition	53	7	N.S.	.0001	N.S.	.0001	10.3
Technology	50	7	.005	.0001	.005	.0001	11.1
Collectivism	43	6	N.S.	.005	N.S.	N.S.	3.6
<b>Hong Kong</b>							
Quality	97	15	N.S.	N.S.	.05	N.S.	2.9
Effectiveness	79	12	N.S.	.0001	N.S.	.0001	13.9
Economy	66	10	.0005	.05	N.S.	.0001	7.4
Enjoyment	65	10	N.S.	.0001	N.S.	.0005	6.4
Modernity	34	5	N.S.	.0001	N.S.	.01	5.1

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Full model is an additive model of the main effects of product category and year, and their interaction.

N.S.: not significant at .05 level

**ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS:  
CULTURAL VALUES REFLECTED IN  
CHINESE AND HONG KONG TELEVISION COMMERCIALS**

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*ABSTRACT*

As a form of social and cultural communication, advertising is a carrier of cultural values (Pollay 1983, 1986; Pollay and Gallagher 1990). There has been a continuous scholarly interest in the need for relating advertising to culture over the past four decades (Cheng 1994, 1997). Although the investigation of the relationship between advertising and culture dates back to the early 1960s (Cheng, 1994), it was not until the early 1980s, when Pollay (1983) developed his seminal coding framework for measuring cultural values manifest in advertising, that analytical studies were devoted to the cultural values reflected in advertising content.

These studies can be roughly categorized into four groups according to their research focuses: (a) comparing Eastern and Western cultures, (b) focusing on one culture, (c) focusing on one product category, and (d) focusing on similar cultures. It is important to compare the cultural content of advertising in similar cultures because such studies are effective in pinpointing the subtle differences between the influences of similar cultural contexts on advertising. Since Hong Kong, with its unique strategic position in business, finance, and information in the world, is a meeting point of the Eastern and Western cultures, more in-depth studies of advertising in this part of the Cultural China have appeared important and necessary. In the meantime, this study is the first attempt to examine the impact of Hong Kong's handover in 1997, if any, on the advertising cultural content in both Hong Kong and China.

A content analysis of 1,387 commercials broadcast in *China*<sup>1</sup> and Hong Kong in 1993 and 1998 was conducted using Cheng and Schweitzer's (1996) framework of cultural values. The five cultural values that dominated Chinese television advertising were "modernity," "family," "tradition," "technology," and "collectivism." The five dominant cultural values in Hong Kong television advertising were "quality," "effectiveness," "economy," "enjoyment," and "modernity." Hong Kong commercials used more Western values whereas Chinese commercials used more Eastern ones. Chinese commercials used more symbolic

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, *China* refers to its mainland.

values while Hong Kong commercials used more utilitarian ones. The pattern of cultural values reflected in Chinese commercials was more volatile than that of Hong Kong commercials. The use of two-way ANOVA model indicated that product category had greater impact on cultural values than time dimension.

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