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**A Comparative Analysis of Values and Shopping Patterns
Among Chinese and Thai Mall Shoppers**

*Randall Shannon, College of Management, Mahidol University, a.randall@gmail.com
Yuanfeng Cai, College of Management, Mahidol University, bonniecyf@yahoo.com.cn*

Abstract

Cross-cultural studies have shown few investigations of utilitarian versus hedonistic shopping motives in non-western contexts. This study explores shopping motivations in two Eastern cultures – Thailand and China. Based on the literature, it is hypothesized that Chinese shoppers will be more utilitarian, while Thai shoppers will be more hedonistic. The research findings support the hypotheses, in that Chinese shoppers do appear to be driven by more utilitarian motives than Thai shoppers. This means that while within a larger framework of Asian culture, there may be cultural differences between the two countries, affecting consumer behavior in ways that marketers should be aware of. Future studies might explore more details in terms of shopping motives, as well as explore consumer segmentation to see if more generalizations can be found.

Key words: Values, shopping motives, shopping patterns, comparative study,

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Introduction

The Kingdom of Thailand has roughly 65 million inhabitants, and has been among the world's fastest growing markets for modern trade food retailing for the past decade. This growth has mainly been within the capital, Bangkok, with a population of roughly ten million. Two of the five largest malls in the world were built in Bangkok, though they no longer hold that claim. Smith and Mandhachitara (2000) reported that by the early 1990's there were fewer than 50 supermarkets in Bangkok, which has increased to more than 400 in 2010. Deloitte Research's Thailand Investment Review, published in 2006, ranked Thailand third (out of nine) for the fifth consecutive year in terms of being a key Asian retail market, behind China and Taiwan, with a market value of US\$21.6 billion. Despite such rapid development, Thailand has been eclipsed by China, which has seen massive growth in both food retailing and shopping mall development. From a few dozen malls ten years ago (Marquand, 2004), there were roughly 850 by mid 2008. Unfortunately, the government has reported that more than 20% of them have failed, including the world's largest mall in 2009 (Mofcom, 2008). Several Thai retailers are expanding into China, thus understanding potential differences in consumer behavior would be beneficial.

It is proposed that cross-cultural testing is considered essential, since most behavioral theories are rooted in psychology, which, in turn, is heavily bound by cultural values (Triandis, 1982; Schiffman and Kanuk, 1994). Therefore, the present study seeks to investigate the relationship between personal values and mall shopping behavior in a non-western cross-national context. Of particular interest are two questions: how do personal values influence mall-shopping behavior; and how do the value-behavior relationships differ between countries? This paper focuses on utilitarian/hedonistic shopping motives.

Literature Review & Hypotheses

While a large number of motivation studies have been conducted at the store-level, mall-related research has been limited. The earliest research on shopping motivation can be traced back to the late-1940s, where researchers began to explore why people buy at certain stores (Heidingsfield, 1949). Studies were undertaken to develop shopping motivation typologies (Stone, 1954; Stephenson and Willett, 1969; Darden and Ashton, 1975), and eventually towards hedonistic versus utilitarian shopping (Tauber 1972, p. 48); Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Baker et al., 2002; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). Shopping malls were initially conceptualized as a community center where people would converge for shopping, cultural activity, and social interaction (Gruen & Smith, 1960). Nevertheless, today's newer versions of mega-malls have been designed to go beyond these basic expectations and make the shopping mall a place not just centralized shopping alternative, but a place that offers more varied choices to serve both functional and hedonic needs of shoppers (Feinberg et al., 1989; Bloch et al., 1994). Mall shoppers have

been found to visit a mall with diverse motives rather than single functional needs (Bellenger, et al., 1977; Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980).

Retail theories and research studies have mostly originated from 'Western' cultures, often focusing on utilitarian shopping motives, such as location convenience, time pressure, utility, and one stop shopping. Most of the cross-culture consumer shopping behavior research has examined differences between westerners and Asians (Schutte and Ciarlante 1998; Lee 2000; Fuan, et al. 2004). From a Western perspective, it is believed there are many similarities in consumer behavior within Asian cultural groups, because of similar cultures (Schutte and Ciarlante, 1998). However, differences exist within Asian cultural groups, which are often not recognized from a Western perspective (Warden, Chen and Caskey, 2005). This study aims to contribute to the literature by exploring shopping motivations among respondents in Eastern cultures.

According to Hofstede (1980), both Chinese and Thai cultures are collectivist in orientation. Collectivist cultures emphasize the roles of people as members of group, as well as the rules and principles concerning social shaming and social sanctions (Hofstede, 1991). In addition, it is suggested that collectivist culture possess qualities or values as prescribed by Confucian principles, including confrontation avoidance, face saving, high power distance, loyalty, family oriented, thrift, filial piety, and respect for authority (Ho, 1987; Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Triandis, 1995; Nakata and Sivakumar, 1996; Usunier, 1996; Schwartz, 1999; Carolyn, 2001). Traditional Chinese culture includes Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and a host of regional cultures. Among them, Confucianism is considered the most influential. It forms the foundation of the Chinese social and cultural value system (Zhang & Harwood, 2004), and provides the basis for the norms of Chinese interpersonal behavior (Fung, 1952; Liu, 1997; Pye, 1972; Tu, 1998).

In contrast, about 95 per cent of the Thai population is Buddhist, with the Theravada school being dominant. Ethnic Chinese constitute the most significant minority group in Thailand, making up about 15 per cent of the population (CIA World Factbook, 2004). As a result, Buddhism and Confucianism are two schools of thought that coexist and influence Thai culture. However, it is assumed that the effects of Confucianism may be stronger among the Chinese Thai rather than the Ethnic Thai group, whereas Buddhism plays a more important role to influence the majority Ethnic Thais.

A comparison between Chinese and Thai core cultural values indicates that except 'mai pen rai' (never mind), present oriented and 'sanuk' (fun) values, the rest of the ten Thai values seem to more or less overlap with the Chinese values. Those three values are specifically shaped by the Buddhist teachings, thus are represented as values unique to Thai society (Ovatsatit, 2007). The tendency of Thais to seek present or immediate gratification has been noted by several scholars (Skinner, 1962; Slagter and Kerbo, 2000). Ethnic Thais learn to enjoy life and to live life in the present and face little pressure to do otherwise. The present oriented value also has been influenced by the Buddhist concept of karma. The value of *mai pen rai* (literally, something doesn't matter) suggests that adverse outcomes will get better eventually, so one should not worry about them, while the value of *sanuk* (literally, fun and joy) reflects that Thais tend to view life as full of fun and joy and not to be taken too seriously, even in the context of work

(Warner, 2003). Chetthamrongchai and Davies (2000) proposed that hedonic shoppers score relatively high on present orientation, indicating that they are more concerned with what is happening now than in the past or in the future. Taken together, it is suggested that Thai shoppers will be more likely to shop for hedonic reasons.

This implies that while there are many similarities between the cultures, some behavioral differences may be expected due to differing values. Chinese shoppers are cautious about spending and are less likely to make purchase during their shopping trip (Fuan et al. 2004). The Chinese saying “never make a purchase until you have compared three shops” (*Huo Bi San Jia*) reflects the typical searching behavior of Chinese consumers, which is an example of how culture can shape consumer behavior and lead to differences between groups. China’s ruling party over the past four decades has also been extolling the virtue of thriftiness and discouraging a hedonic life style (which is viewed as self-indulgent and wasteful). As a result, it is socially desirable to save money and be a meticulous shopper in China (Wang and Rao, 1995). A review of literature suggests that Chinese mall shoppers are more likely to be utilitarian driven (Tse et al., 1989; Tse, 1996; Li et al., 2004). Utilitarian shoppers tend to view shopping a work/burden rather than fun (Rao and Monroe 1989; Sherry 1990; Nicholls et al. 2000), and they are more time conscious than recreational shoppers (Hansen & Deutscher 1977/78; Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980; Wilson and Holman 1984). Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: Chinese mall shoppers will have more utilitarian shopping motives than Thai shoppers.

Research Methodology

A self-administered survey was employed for data collection. Self-administered surveys require comparatively lower cost and have a low level of intrusiveness (Rundle-Thiele, 2005). Items to measure shopping motives were modified from the scale developed by Nicholls et al., (2000) and the result of a focus group. It consisted of three items to measure utilitarian shopping and seven items to measure hedonic/social shopping. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each item described their shopping motives based on six-point Likert-type scales anchored by not at all descriptive /very descriptive. A six-point scale was utilized to avoid the common problem of Asian respondents often answering neutral (Ayer, 1970). Questions were translated and back translated to attain measurement equivalence for constructs (Brislin, 1976; Douglas and Craig, 1983; Hui and Triandis, 1985).

The sample size for this study was determined with the use of multiple statistical guidelines. The rule of thumb suggested by Dillman (1978) and Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), requires a minimum cell size of 30 for the segmentation variable with the largest number of categories. A sample of 300 from each country was deemed to be suitable. The total number of returned questionnaires was 643, with 320 in China, and 323 in Thailand.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Differences in Shopping Motives between Chinese and Thai Shoppers

($n_{\text{China}}=305$, $n_{\text{Thai}}=308$)

	China ($n=305$)	Thailand ($n=308$)	F Value	Sig.
	Mean	Mean		
Utilitarian Motives (Cronbach's alpha = .452)				
To get ideas for future purchase	<u>4.43</u>	3.56	61.479	0.00
To make a specific purchase	4.37	<u>4.88</u>	27.319	0.00
To shop in a specific store	3.76	<u>4.51</u>	46.854	0.00
<i>Overall Mean</i>	<i>4.19</i>	<i>4.32</i>		
<i>Grand Mean (N=613)</i>		<i>4.25</i>		
Hedonic Motives (Cronbach's alpha = .768)				
To hunt for bargains	3.28	4.01	36.233	0.00
To look and browse	4.42	<u>4.52</u>	1.033	0.31
To hangout	4.19	4.22	0.1	0.75
To meet and spend time together with friends	4.09	4.25	1.695	0.19
Appointment with someone	4.08	4.38	6.584	0.01
To eat	3.61	4.42	54.404	0.00
To escape from routine life	3.37	3.37	0.001	0.98
<i>Overall Mean</i>	<i>3.86</i>	<i>4.17</i>		
<i>Grand Mean (N=613)</i>		<i>4.02</i>		

It can be seen that Chinese shoppers appear to be comparing or searching for information, confirming past studies. Thai shoppers were found to be more actively browsing, as well as making actual purchases. In terms of being labeled as utilitarian, the results are mixed, as the Thai sample gave higher scores on two of three variables. However, the Thai sample scored higher on hedonistic motives, with five of them showing statistical significance. Thailand established its first shopping mall in 1967 (Feeny, Vongpatanasin, Soonsatham, 1996), which is around 20 years earlier than in China. Arguably, the emergence of shopping malls may change consumers' shopping behavior significantly,

given their unique characteristics, which are structurally different from traditional shopping venues. A shopping mall is usually characterized with a large amount of stores and entertainment facilities and presents substantial variety and selection of products and services with pleasant atmosphere (Nicholls et al., 2003). The discrepancy in the mall development history may imply that Thai shoppers may have shaped themselves as modern shoppers in the mall to shop for fulfilling diverse needs rather than purchase alone. It may also be that Thais are more active shoppers, in aggregate, than Chinese, leading to them giving higher scores for both utilitarian and hedonic motivations. The issue may further be confounded by a consumer's underlying reason for shopping, as a shopping trip one day might be viewed as work, while another day a trip to the same location could be viewed as leisure. It should be noted that the utilitarian construct did not achieve a high reliability score.

Retailers should be aware that differences in consumer behavior may exist across cultures, especially when expanding into markets other than their own. Knowing that a consumer has more utilitarian motivations may lead to a retailer to adjust the layout and flow of a mall or merchandise, adjust the amount of information or even comparative information displayed or shared with consumers, or perhaps the importance of knowledgeable salespeople.

Future research could further explore hedonistic and utilitarian shopping motives and actual outcomes, to investigate differences in time and money spent, number of companions, and perhaps price or value consciousness. It is possible that the constructs used for measuring hedonistic and utilitarian motivations may require additional interpretation. A highly utilitarian shopper may derive hedonistic enjoyment from comparing prices or obtaining a good deal. It may also be worth exploring potential differences between groups based on age and education, or other psychographic variables.

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