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**CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON CHINESE TEENAGERS' VALUES**

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## **KULTTUURIN VAIKUTUKSET KIINALAISTEN TEINI-ikäisten arvoihin**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Thousands of years of tradition have shaped Chinese society and values. However, since mainland China was taken over by the communists in 1949, the traditional Chinese culture has experienced big changes. The communists left their mark, especially during the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1969, on the society and culture, and therefore made China greatly different when compared to countries with the same origins such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. Later on, Chinese culture has faced more changes since the more open policy was introduced in 1978. The government changed the country closed from outside world by introducing an idea of a communistic market economy and allowing foreign enterprises gradually to enter. Since opening the borders, China has slowly started to adopt its old culture again. Some changes made by the communists might prevail but more changes are to change the culture further.

Communism has left its mark to the Chinese society and culture. However, the traditional values are still present. It is also profound to say China is looking to its history now to find the traditional values again. What these traditional values are and how they apply in the modern society are important questions. There are also several factors that have turned upside-down in the environment Chinese find themselves in.

Many studies have been released to understand better the ways in which People's Republic of China has changed during these years of open foreign policy. Enterprises want to better understand China to be able to take advantage of the huge market of over 1,3 billion Chinese, and not anymore only the huge production machine in this rapidly developed economy. To understand this marketplace and to better answer to its needs, the culture has to be understood. Therefore values, the building blocks of culture, have to be understood.

## **1.1 Research Topic and problems**

The topic of this bachelor's thesis is: "Cultural influences on Chinese teenagers' values". The aim of this paper is to better understand the teenagers, and the issues are studied in the light of consumer behavior theory. To be more specific about the group of people studied, Han Chinese teenagers are introduced as the focus group. The focus is on culture so that its effects are studied from the point of values that are always present in culture.

In the research problems part, factors that have effect on values of Chinese teenagers are divided in three different groups: traditional, communism related and emerging values. The main problem is therefore composed of these three components that are focused in more detail in the sub-problems part.

The main problem is:

What are the values of Chinese teenagers?

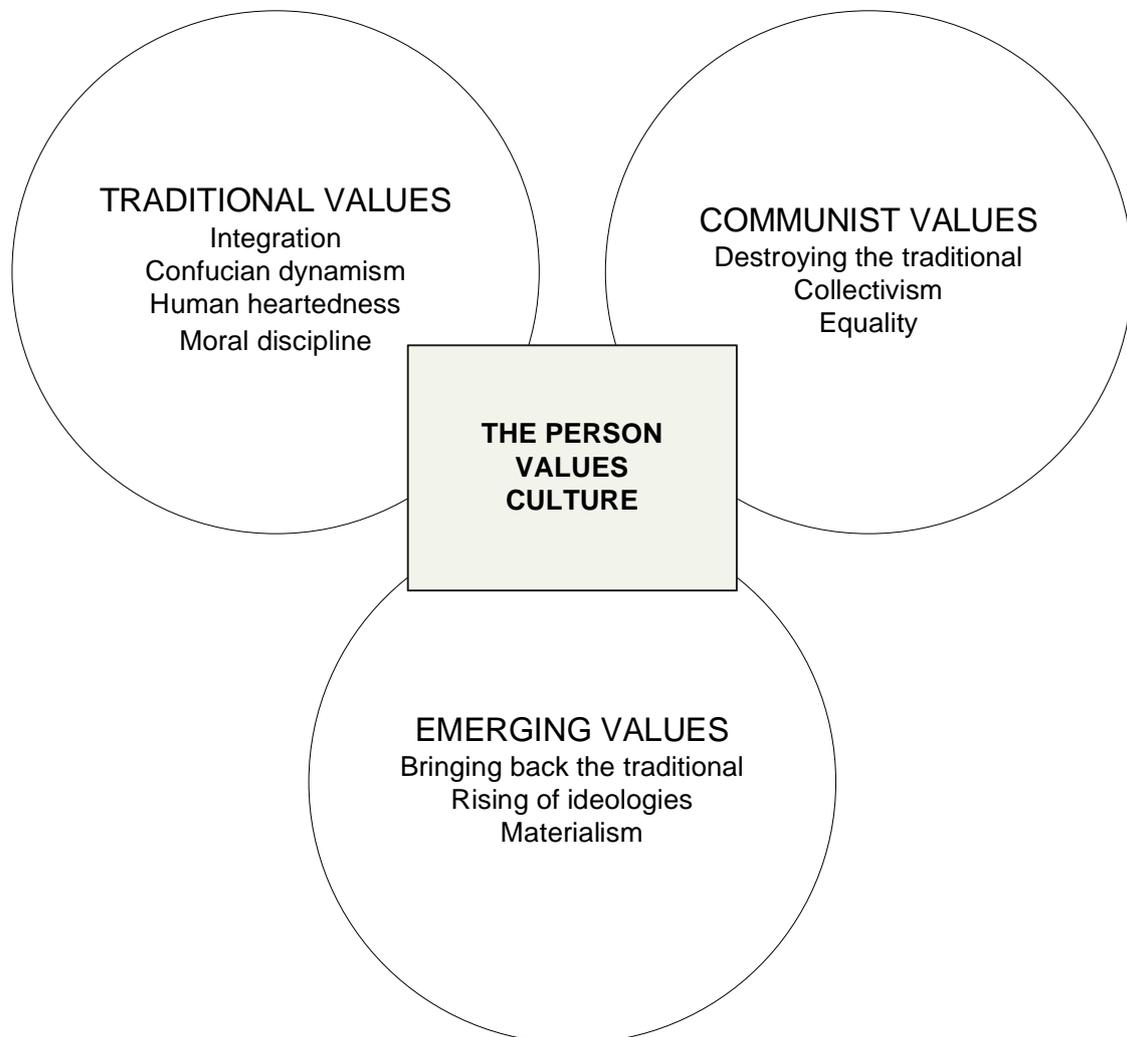
Sub-problems are:

What are the traditional values?

How has communism shaped the values?

What emerging values are there?

## 1.2 Theoretical frame



**Table 1.** Theoretical research frame.

In this frame Chinese teenagers are presented in the middle. According to Mooij (2004) the person, presented in the middle, has in addition to personal factors, values of different kinds that are influenced by the culture. According to Salo-Lee (2006) there are three sets of values that affect the personal values of Chinese people. Traditional values are the Confucianism-originated values, communist values are the heritage of a policy with goals to revolute the society, emerging values present the new set of values that has emerged with opened foreign policy and its effects on modern teenagers.

### **1.3 Research methods and limitations of the study**

This research is descriptive: key factors and elements are described to gain better understanding of Chinese teenagers. First, in the theoretical part, some descriptions are made to point out what the target group of the study is like. Then, in the empirical part, a qualitative analysis is done based on two interviews to understand further what the target group is like.

The qualitative empirical part is connected to the theoretical part to gain better understanding of the topic. Furthermore, as the basis of the empirical part, one interview was made with an American teacher who has worked with Chinese students and is therefore qualified to observe the teenagers. The teacher provides an outsiders view. As the teacher interviewed is not Chinese and not a teenager, the information collected focuses on Chinese teenagers compared to teenagers and cultures on broader perspective. The other interview was made with Chinese exchange students who are qualified for the interview because they are members of the Chinese society but have experienced living in other culture. The exchange student are also not members of the focus group but have observed the teenagers with their own criteria. The interview made with them provides comparison between ages within Chinese society. The people interviewed were selected so that they are outsiders. This is done to ensure better objectivity (Eskola, Suoranta 1998).

This research focuses on Chinese in China. The Han Chinese teenagers aged between 12 and 17 are the target group. Teenagers are chosen as the focus group because the changes in the society are represent the best when studied teenagers. North China is chosen as geographical area. North China presents the population well for its geopolitical position. Han Chinese culture can be said to originate in this area (Cui & Liu 2000). Other parts of China are left outside this study.

#### **1.4 Structure of the research**

First chapter serves as the introduction to the study. The topic, problems, methods and limitations are given and literature review helps to understand better what has been studied about this field.

The second chapter is a theoretical chapter that brings light to what culture and values are, regarding studies made before. The cultural dimensions presented in earlier studies are explained here. Based on the cultural dimensions, culture and values in China are explained on more specific level. Some important factors are explained further and specific information found about Chinese values is presented. In the end of the second chapter more detailed study of Chinese teenagers is made. Better understanding for specifically teenagers' values is provided. However, the study is more focused on what there is to be found in the background, when studying the teenagers.

The third chapter is an empirical research that serves as evidence for different values found within Chinese teenagers. This brings understanding to what modern Chinese teenagers actually are like. Third chapter has the backgrounds in two interviews made: one for Chinese exchange students and the other for a teacher who has worked with Chinese teenagers. Based on the interviews, there are some findings and analysis.

The fourth chapter, conclusions, serves as the collection of what has been studied in this paper. Results of the analysis are presented and research questions are answered.

#### **1.5 Central concepts of the study**

The important concepts are culture and values. The study specializes in Chinese culture,

and teenagers as the focus group. Hofstede (1980) describes mental programs using two concepts: values and culture.

Culture refers to “*values, ideas, attitudes, and other meaningful symbols that serve humans to communicate, interpret and evaluate as members of society*” (Engel et al. 1986). Hofstede (1980) however treats culture as “*the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another*. Throughout this study Hofstede’s definition of culture is used to describe culture in this context. Moreover, culture is seen to include systems of values (Hofstede 1980).

Schwartz & Bilsky (1994) presents common features of values found in literature and divide the found features into 5 categories. According to Schwartz & Bilsky (1994): “*values are concepts or beliefs, are about desirable end-states or behaviors, transcend specific situations guide selection or evaluation of behavior and events and are ordered by relative importance*”. Hofstede (1980) has a more simple approach to define value as “*broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others*”.

## **1.6 Literature review**

Social and cultural influences in consumer behavior have been studied a lot. The culture studies have backgrounds all the way to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Thomas & Zaniecki (1958) conducted empirical research with Polish peasants. However, after this first empirical value study, much has changed. Idea of six values presented by Spranger (1928) serves as background theory for studies by Schwartz and Bilsky (1994) where relations between values and personality are studied.

In Solomon (2002) Consumers are studied as individuals and decision-makers. Motivation, values and involvement are studied in more detail. Also the ABC model of attitudes and hierarchies of effects is introduced to understand attitudes’ components.

Culture's effects are also explained but Solomon (2002) model cannot be applied to gain total understanding of culture. A model that would explain culture's effect in Asian cultures is not given as Solomon (2002) focuses on the European perspective of consumer behavior.

Engel et al. (1986) introduces a model that includes family buying, social influences and stratification, cultural influence and global and ethnic influences. These factors can be seen in more detail in the later book by Engel et al. (1993) where consumer decision process is divided into environmental factors: culture, social class, human influence, family and condition; and individual differences between people: resources, motivation and involvement, knowledge and attitude, personality and value and lifestyle. However the decision process leaves culture as an environmental factor, which can be heavily argued.

In Mooij (2004) culture is not only seen as an environmental factor. Instead, Mooij (2004) studies culture as influences on the minds of the people, their self and personality. Culture is therefore seen as a factor that influences both as the environment and an individual factor. Hofstede (1980) has had influence on this approach. Hofstede (1980) studies values as building blocks of culture and introduces a model to measure differences between different cultures.

## **2 VALUES IN CHINESE CULTURE**

In this chapter, the theoretical backgrounds are provided to better understand value dimensions in a culture. The theory is then taken further to study Chinese more carefully, and finally the Chinese teenagers are studied more carefully to understand the values on more personal level.

### **2.1 Value dimensions**

There are different ways to measure people's values and differences between cultures. Hofstede (1980) presents a method that is used most commonly to measure these dimensions of cultures. However, Hofstede (1980) model can be criticized for being designed by western scholars. To make the model more Asia-oriented, according to Lee (2003), Bond (1987) released results of a survey with four dimensions of Chinese values.

#### **2.1.1 Hofstede's dimensions**

Hofstede (1980) defines 4 different dimensions that can be used to define differences between cultures. The value dimensions are: power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede (2001) brings in the fifth dimension that is based on Confucian ideas and designed by Chinese scholars. The fifth value dimension is called long-term orientation and it has its roots in Bond's research (Lee 2003). These dimensions are measured with scale 0 – 100 giving a score on each dimension on each country being measured. Following are the brief definitions of each dimension.

Power distance defines how people accept and expect power being distributed. It

represents inequality on a scale more vs. less (Hofstede 1980). Big power distance means unevenly distributed and small power distance means evenly distributed power (Mooij 2004).

To understand if a culture is individual or collectivist, individualism dimension is introduced. In individual cultures, people take care of themselves, and on the contrary in collectivist countries, people rely on their reference groups such as family (Hofstede 1980). Individual culture gets a high score here.

This refers to the role distribution between males and females. Hofstede (1980) claims masculinity means hard male-like values - such as competitiveness - and femininity means softer female-like values like caring. Masculine cultures get a high score on this dimension.

A culture has a certain tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. Uncertainty avoidance index explains how comfortable people feel when they have to operate in unstructured situations. High uncertainty is explained by high score on this dimension.

According to Hofstede (2008): “*Values associated with Long Term Orientation are thrift and perseverance; values associated with Short Term Orientation are respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, and protecting one's 'face'*”. This dimension measures how Confucian a society is (Mooij 2004). However, it can also be used to explain similar behavior in cultures that don't have Confucian influence. High score is given to long-term oriented cultures.

### **2.1.2 Bond's four Chinese value dimensions**

Lee (2003) introduces Bond's dimensions to explain Chinese values as following: integration, Confucian dynamism, human heartedness and moral discipline. These values

reflect Confucian value system and virtues presented in many articles by: Chiu et.al. (1998), Wong & Ahuvia (1998), Cheung et.al. (2006), Luo (2007).

Bond claims the meaning of integration can be divided into elements mentioned by Lee (2003) as following: *“tolerance; solidarity; harmony; non-competitiveness; trustworthiness; contentedness; being conservative; a close, intimate friend; filial piety; chastity in women”*. These values are the collective cultural values.

This Bond’s dimension - Confucian dynamism - is very similar to what Hofstede (2001) presents. The elements are described by Lee (2003) as: *“ordering relationship, thrift; persistence; having a sense of shame; personal steadiness and stability; reciprocation; protecting your “face”; respecting tradition”*. This value setting describes the hierarchy and Confucian systems pairing of people so that one is always dominant (D’Souza 1996).

Human heartedness according to Bond means responsibility towards others. It’s divided in Lee (2003) as: *“kindness; patience; courtesy; sense of righteousness; patriotism”*. These are the kind of values that define how people deal with each others.

The moral discipline elements listed in Lee (2003) are: *“moderation; having a few desires; adaptability; prudence; keeping oneself disinterested and pure”*. These values mean strict moral and control over oneself.

## **2.2 Chinese cultural environment**

To understand what Chinese teenagers are like, deeper understanding of Chinese culture is needed. In this chapter some culture specific aspects of mainland China are explained further. Later on in this chapter, the forces that have made mainland China different compared to other countries with backgrounds from the same origins, are also introduced briefly.

Confucian hierarchy and system of stratification have strongly influenced Asian cultures. These cultures have very fixed communication methods and hierarchy, often dictated by the “guanxi” -system. In Confucianism, family and other networks are important. Therefore they are also important factors when trying to understand the Chinese culture. Confucian system also explains Chinese concept of self and most of all, it serves as a background when looking at the Chinese time orientation (Wong & Ahuvia 1998; Hofstede 2008). It is agreed (Hofstede 1980; Mooij 2004; Wong & Ahuvia 1998) that Chinese are a collectivist culture, as many other Asian cultures are. However, Chinese and other Asian cultures have huge differences. Even Chinese and Taiwanese cultures – two cultures with the same background can be seen very different now, after geographical and political separation since 1949 (Chang, L. & Huang, C. 2005).

### **2.2.1 Confucianism**

Confucianism is an old Chinese societal system. It has influenced Chinese society since the sixth century b.c. when Confucius lived and educated people, but was tried to push away during the communist rule (D’Souza 1996). Economist (2007) claims it is making a comeback in everyday Chinese life. The main idea in Confucianism is to give role to every person. In the moral system, the roles are given to everyone according to 5 cardinal role selections: emperor-suspect, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger brothers and friend-friend. This is a strict hierarchy where every citizen has a role. The leader is above others and acts as a strict authority and in each of these pairs presented, a leader is present. The leader however can be described as a father who has a responsibility. In general, Confucianism emphasizes order, balance and harmony (Economist 2007). It teaches respect for authority and concern for others. Moreover, it is a core system that provides ways for member of groups (even on society level) to co-exist and act as members of different groups. This basic Confucian moral system has prevailed in Chinese society and it explains collectivity in Chinese culture. (Wang et.al. 2005; Luo

2007)

### **2.2.2 Guanxi**

Guanxi is a practice of cultivating and valuing relationships (McClenahan 2004). Davies (1995) has described guanxi as following: “*the social interactions within the network place and its members in the equivalent of an infinitely repeated game with a set of people they know*”. The dictionary version defines guanxi simply as connections but connections can mean quite much.

For Chinese guanxi might be simple to understand, but for people not acquainted with Chinese culture, it is relevant to say guanxi is an essential part of the collectivism. It is related to basic family and group value settings.

### **2.2.3 Traditional values**

Chu & Ju (1993) present a list of traditional values (see endorsement and rejection of traditional values in China below) that are partly still valid, and partly not valid (indicated negative) in Chinese society. The values listed here are values derived from the study conducted by Bond (Lee 2003). However Hofstede (2001) also mentions values very similar to these.

The endorsement and rejection of traditional values in China. Listed in Lee (2003):

1. *Long historical heritage* 89.7%
2. *Diligence and frugality* 86.2%
3. *Loyalty and devotion to state* 67.5%
4. *Benevolent father, filial son* 48.0%

5. *Generosity and virtues* 39.8%
6. *Respect for traditions* 38.5%
7. *Submission to authority* 33.2%
8. *Harmony is precious* 29.5%
9. *Tolerance, propriety, deference* 25.3%
10. *Chastity for women* -13.5%
11. *Glory to ancestors* - 23.8%
12. *A house full of sons and grandsons* - 35.5%
13. *Farmers high, merchants low* - 43.3%
14. *Pleasing superiors* - 48.9%
15. *Discretion for self-preservation* - 55.9%
16. *Differentiation between men and women* - 59.2%
17. *Way of golden mean* - 59.6%
18. *Three obediences and four virtues* - 64.0%

In the list values and their meaning for Chinese people are listed in order: strongest endorsement being in the beginning of the list, marked with the percentage of people endorsing it and strongest rejection being in the end of the list indicated negative. The research which results are presented in this list, describes the early 90's values and their importance. In the following chapter focusing on the modern culture, and in the empirical part that explains the present values further, this list can be seen as a reference of how traditional values are present in the society.

#### **2.2.4 Influencing forces on modern culture in mainland China**

Mainland China became a communist state in 1949. Since that, the traditional values were tried to abolish. Especially during the culture revolution everything traditional was seen as something to be destroyed (Lee 2003). Separation of families, reforms of the education system, sending intellectuals to countryside and massive population sifting

movements left a mark on the people's values. However, different areas are more alike than before and standard Mandarin Chinese is widely spread.

Communist market economy has allowed Chinese to practice business since 1978. Also foreign enterprises were allowed to enter Chinese market in 1979. There is still great diversity between different areas. Generally speaking, west is poor compared to east and urban areas are rich when rural areas experience extreme poverty. There are more free-market-zones in the east and the whole eastern coastal area has developed much faster than areas located more in the west. (Lieberthal & Lieberthal 2003)

### **2.3 Values of Chinese teenagers**

In this chapter the group of new generation teenagers is introduced. The group in question is characterized by its age, region, race and occupation. The selected age cohort is 12 to 17 -year-old, they are Han Chinese and students by their occupation. To choose a representative area, North China region is selected. This region includes Beijing, Tianjin cities, and Hebei and Shandong provinces. See the Table 2 for details.

North-China region's economy has experienced fast growth and investments especially in telecommunications, computer technology and pharmaceutical industries have been made. Economically, according to GDP count, the richest cities in China are Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin – of which Beijing and Tianjin are in North-China region (Pauku 2005). Shandong is a big agricultural province. It's also been said to have flourishing township enterprises. North-China region is populated by Chinese that treasure traditional values and are relatively conservative. Confucianism originates in this region and people also see Confucian values there very valuable. (Cui & Liu 2000)



**Table 2.** Regional map of China. (Cui & Liu 2000)

### 2.3.1 Cultural dimensions of Chinese

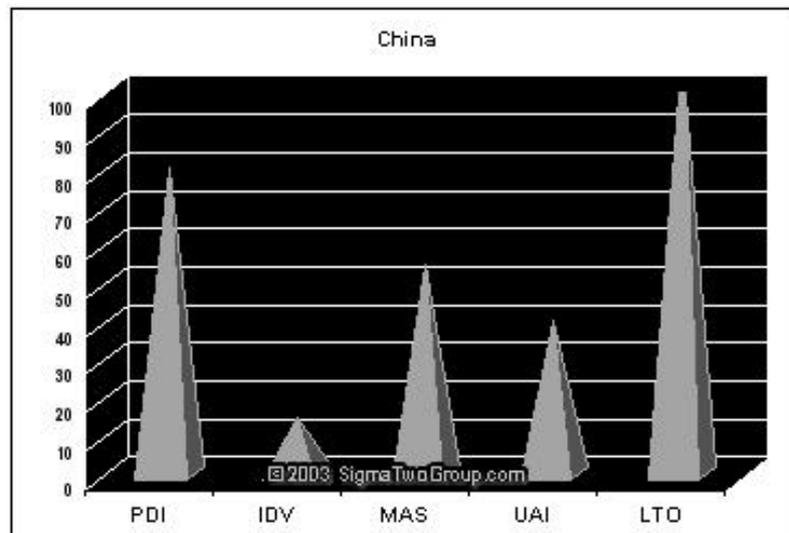
Long-term Orientation that is based on the teachings of Confucian, gets the highest score (118) of any cultures (Hofstede 2008). Asian cultures score high but China beats all other cultures clearly (see Table 4 and Table 5). Chinese, according to this analysis, have the attitude to persevere. It doesn't matter if something takes time. Obstacles can be overcome by waiting, will and strength. See LTO in Table 3.

The Chinese score very low in the individualism ranking. This can be explained by the collectivist society model and by the Communist rule. Collectivism can mean here commitment to a member group such as family. Relationships are very important and everyone has to take responsibility for also other members of the group. See IDV in Table 3 for details. (Hofstede 2008)

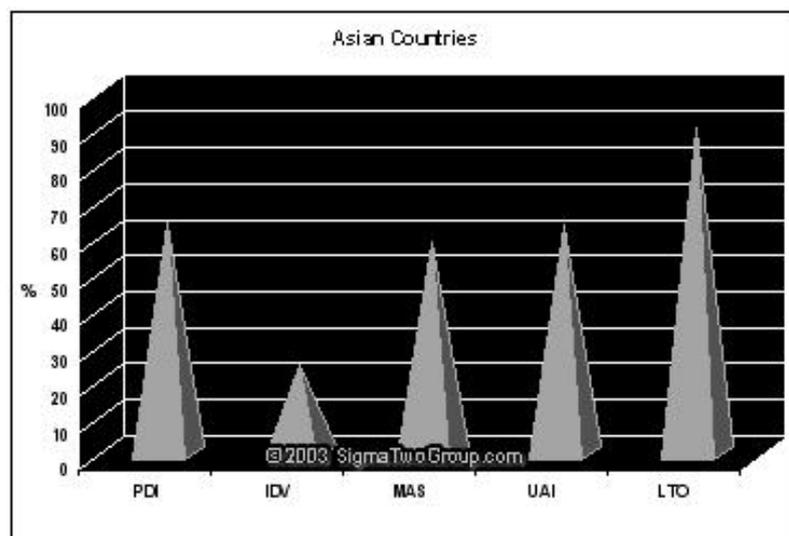
Power distance ranking of 80 means high level of inequality of power within the society. Also big differences in wealth can be an explaining factor. Power inequality is not necessarily personally significant. However it is part of the cultural heritage and has its roots in the long history of difficult power structures. See PDI in Table 3 for details. (Hofstede 2008)

Masculinity doesn't play an important role as a Chinese value. See MAS in Table 3 for more details. This is interesting when looking at woman's position in Confucian hierarchy explained earlier in cardinal role selection part. Husband-wife is one of the role pairs described. However the effects of Communist rule might have had an effect on how equal the sexes are in China these days. Chairman Mao (1955) claims: *"Men and women must receive equal pay for equal work in production. Genuine equality between the sexes can only be realized in the process of the socialist transformation of society as a whole."* Equality of men and women was an important issue during the communist years. This is also noted by Wang (2001). To look at masculine values and feminine values, it can also be noted that traditional Chinese values are not especially hard masculine type. The Asian values (see Table 4) also do not include hard values as such an important element of the culture.

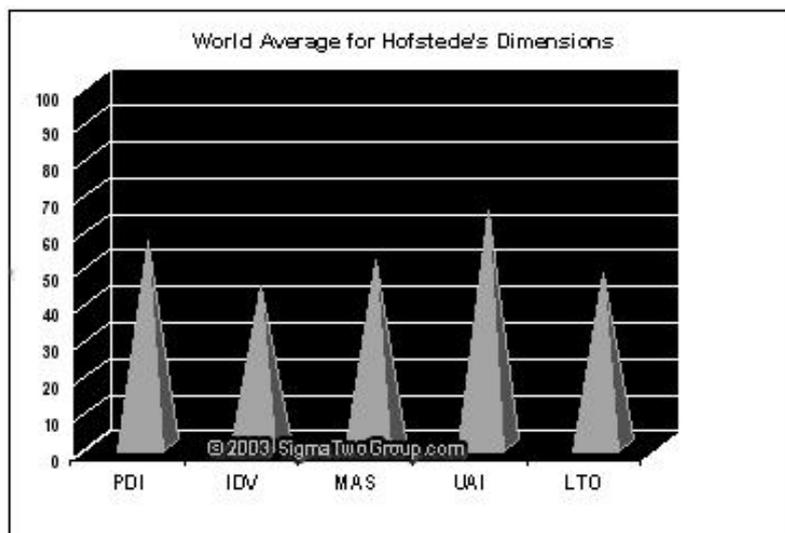
Uncertainty avoidance, UAI in Table 3, as reaction to uncertain environment is only a little lower than the world average (see Table 5) and Asian countries' average presented in Table 4. No implications are to be made because China proves to be quite an average country regarding this dimension.



**Table 3.** Hofstede's cultural dimensions, China. (Hofstede 2008)



**Table 4.** Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Asia. (Hofstede 2008)



**Table 5.** Hofstede's cultural dimensions, world average. (Hofstede 2008)

### 2.3.2 Sub-culture of 12 to 17-year-olds

Sub-culture can be based on: age, region, race, occupation and sex (Chang & Huang, 2005). In this chapter the sub-culture of 12 to 17 year old Chinese is described. These members of the sub-culture in question are typically Han-Chinese teenagers from urban areas, their families can be categorized into the middle class, and they are students of primary or secondary level schools. To specify the education stages in China, it has to be made clear the education system divides primary and secondary education to primary, junior secondary and senior secondary stages (Ministry of Education – The People's Republic of China 2008).

Chinese teenagers are said to be rediscovering their Confucian values. They are said to be modern in many ways, yet they are very traditional in some ways (St-Maurice & Wu, C. 2006). Teenagers have a set of values that are very traditional but they have adapted to the changes that come from outside.

One child policy has created some phenomenon in Chinese culture that gives some twist

to the Chinese family concept. The children that develop to teenagers have been referred as the “little emperors” (Cutler 1988). Another phenomenon called the “six-pocket syndrome” describes how as many as six adults are paying attention only to one child (Goll 1995). Implications from this can be made: the Chinese child gets access to 6 people's budget, and the amounts people spend on the “emperor” increases as the child gets older. To define further, according to a research made by St-Maurice & Wu, C. (2006), families spend annually 60 billion Renminbi in pocket money and 230 billion Renminbi directly on their teenage children. There is a conclusion to be made related to this: Chinese teenagers have learned how to consume. Luxury items consumption, as mentioned by Wong & Ahuvia (1998), fits Chinese teenagers if they follow the Confucian values in similar ways other Asian cultures have developed. Luxury consumption could be a way to show off with publicly visible possessions. This would differ from individualistic cultures' values where luxury goods would rather be sources of own enjoyment (Wong & Ahuvia 1998).

Not only because of the one child policy but also because the more open borders to outside world, is Chinese teenager now more fashion conscious (Parker et.al. 2004). However, when compared to American and Japanese teenagers, Chinese teens are still remarkably less conscious of fashion trends. Regarding sex differences however, Chinese males and females were found quite similar in this respect (Parker et.al. 2004). Maybe communist reforms have influenced the culture so that sexes are similar up to some extend.

### 3 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS ON CHINESE TEENAGERS' VALUES

When values are observed, it is important to understand the culture works as a filter. People cannot observe their own values without being influenced by their own culture. For example democracy and recent development in Tibet can be seen in different ways: Chinese people, according to the Chinese exchange students, regard China democratic but from the teacher's point of view, China is not democratic. Chinese culture here is also influenced by what the party teaches to Chinese – and for an individual it is very hard to make statements for Tibet. The empirical study was conducted using interviews (see the appendix 1 and 2) of people with different cultural background to ensure objectivity and better reliability of the results (Eskola, Suoranta 1998). This was done regarding culture's effect as a filter that could create bias when interviewing only members of a certain group. Interview questions were also asked in differing ways for more exact approach on the topic studied (Eskola, Suoranta 1998). The concepts that were part of the interview questions and essential to understand were clarified during the interview. However, it can be argued that people with different cultural and language backgrounds understand the concept in differing ways. Also for this reason two interviews were conducted with differing approaches. Regarding the people interviewed, the questions that have more abstract concepts, would not be suitable if the target group was interviewed directly.

In this chapter the interviews (see the appendix 1 and 2) conducted on April 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 2008 are analyzed combining two perspectives on Chinese teenagers' values. The two Chinese exchange students, interviewed on April 16<sup>th</sup> 2008 in Finland, are students of Beijing area, located in North-China region describe earlier (see table 2). The Chinese exchange students focus on North-Chinese teenagers in the interview. They provide information from their perspective – the perspective of students that are over 20 years old. The Chinese exchange students are old enough to see a difference between their own and teenagers' values but young enough to understand the teenagers and the life teenagers live. The teacher interviewed on April 19<sup>th</sup> 2008 is originated in USA, and has lived in Finland for over 10 years. The reason for interviewing the teacher is the experience of

teaching English in China for 2 years and working everyday with Chinese. Interviewing a non-Chinese brings in a more global context: Chinese teenagers can be regarded different from teenagers of other nationalities'. The area where the teacher has worked is Jinan city in Shandong province, which also is located in the targeted North-China area (see table 2). When referring to the interviews made, they are referred to as *the Chinese exchange students* and *the teacher*.

### **3.1 Hofstede's dimensions applied to Chinese teenagers**

The values of Chinese teenagers are studied in this chapter by analyzing an interview of Chinese exchange students and an English teacher. The interviews provided some clarification to what Chinese teenagers are like. Here the study focuses on analysis of power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation. (Hofstede 1980, Mooij 2004)

The teacher sees that Chinese teenagers expect power being distributed unequally and unexpectedly. The trend is that increase in freedom of speech has created an ideological burst in the teenagers' age cohort. The Chinese exchange students have a similar view on Chinese teenagers. They seem to be very ideological, and even directly contact decision makers via mail if they find there is something wrong in the society that could be made better. In general, modern teens are more aware of inequality and they don't have to go through the life their parents had to. However, older teenagers grow, the more they start to accept inequality an unequal power distribution in their lives. Realities in life have not yet reached teens when they are under 17 years old (The Chinese exchange students, the teacher).

China is a very collectivist culture and society. Chinese society fits Hofstede (1980) collectivist definition. In addition, the teacher claims Chinese have a hard time trying to understand what individualism might mean in western countries. Many people regard

individualism a lonely value: individualism leaves you alone in life. People might be afraid of individualism in that sense. The Chinese exchange students see individualism as a trend that teenagers are more involved with these days. Teenagers could be more individually oriented and facing a more competitive environment in their lives now than before. However the change towards more individually orientedness is just a slight change from an outsider's point of view. Though, the Chinese might see the change more clearly as a change within their society. An example of what collectivism actually means in Chinese culture was mentioned by the teacher: *"It's so damn hard for them to go against what their government says – Like in this Tibet issue."* Collectivism therefore means going with the flow. If one presents differing ideas, immense pressure is put upon the individual from others who feel the power of crowds backing up their idea.

The teacher sees China slightly as a masculine country. Pre-communist China was an extreme example of a masculine country. Communists however leveled the field and brought up the equality issue. However, the change might have had more effect on competitiveness: women can be seen more competitive now, and this can be regarded as something communists had changed (the teacher).

About uncertainty avoidance, the teacher states that China is clearly an uncertainty avoidant culture, especially when it comes to what the government says. Hofstede (2008) describes a typical uncertainty avoidant culture with the truth concept: *"there can only be one Truth and we have it"*. When it comes to Communist party in China, it in the teacher's opinion replaced religious truths. Party is the truth for people. Minimizing the possibility of unstructured situations by strict laws and rules is done in China up to some level. Since Mao has left the position of a person that can give the truth to people, China might now be less uncertainty avoidant. The teacher sees China an uncertainty-avoidant culture on country-level. However, economic growth should have opened Chinese to be more tolerant to uncertain situations and therefore the change on any level should be to direction of less avoidant toward uncertainty than before.

The value dimension of long-term orientation fits Chinese people well. However some of

the short-term orientation values seem to describe Chinese as well, according to the teacher. Protecting one's face seems to be as strong as it ever was. Globalization has made it possible for Chinese to communicate more with the outside world. As Chinese teenagers are quite patriotic and respect their own culture very much, it is obvious they face the situation of hearing criticism from other nationalities. Face is a concept that especially in these situations is strongly present. Chinese would defend their country for the country's and for their own face's sake. (The Chinese exchange students, the teacher)

### **3.2 Traditional values in Chinese teenagers' society**

Here Bond's values are taken as the setting for studying Chinese teenagers' traditional values more carefully. The topics for these values are: integration, Confucian dynamism, human heartedness and moral discipline.

In general, the impression is that the core values have not changed that much in China even though big societal changes took place. The Chinese exchange students claim traditional Chinese values are still important. Most of all, family is still seen as the core for everything and teamwork is an important element. The teacher states some differing ideas and claims some issues are not as simply explainable as it seems when looking at researches made. It seems Chinese traditional values are still valid. However, it can be argued whether Chinese teenagers respect traditional values more or less than same age cohort before.

#### **3.2.1 Integration**

Integration-categorized values are tolerance, solidarity, harmony, non-competitiveness, trustworthiness, contentedness, being conservative, a close and intimate friend, filial piety and chastity in women.

Tolerance is still considered important. Both the Chinese exchange students and the teacher see that Chinese people are tolerant towards each other. However, teenagers live a protected life and they might not be in situations where this kind of tolerance would be needed. They have different idea of what life in general is like and tolerance plays a more important role when teenagers grow older (the Chinese exchange students). Maybe teenagers in general are not very tolerant people but society brings them to understand it as a value gradually. The teacher adds that Chinese might not be that tolerant towards people from non-Chinese origins.

Solidarity and harmony as values, according to the teacher and the Chinese exchange students, are important to Chinese teenagers. The Chinese exchange students claim 1998 flood was an event that brought solidarity into Chinese people's consciousness again. News was full of people who were there for each other and would give their lives for the others. If such news stories were spread, it is obvious that the government wants also solidarity to be a strong value. Harmony might be a value that teenagers don't see that important on personal level. However, on society level Chinese see the importance of it. Especially the government, that wants to maintain the status quo, finds harmony important.

Trustworthiness is clearly an important value in the context of looking at what the Chinese find important. They want trust to be part of their society (the teacher). The teacher argues that trustworthiness is not a value that would be present in China yet. However, Chinese society has experienced hardships, such as the Culture Revolution, during which trustworthiness was lost. The Chinese exchange students believe trustworthiness is gaining foothold again. They believe it is possible to trust people again. The Chinese exchange students back their opinion up with a story of a big sum of money in an envelope with the owners name on it. The envelope was lost on a busy street near the university where the owner of that money studies. The money was soon returned, by a stranger, to the teacher of the person whose money was lost.

The Chinese exchange students and the teacher do not see non-competitiveness as a value of modern teenagers. The school environment at least is a very competitive one. The teacher and the Chinese exchange students all state there is strong competition in the school environment of teenagers. In addition, the teacher claims there is also clearly jealousy toward other students when looking at a typical class of Chinese students. Chinese exchange students also do not agree non-competitiveness would be a valid Chinese teenager's value. The Chinese exchange students believe competition brings changes and betters the society. Contentedness is not such an important value either. The teacher states that students are actually quite stressed, not content. Even though people might be happy with what they have, they are striving to achieve more (Chinese exchange students). About conservatism, the teacher claims it is the easy choice for a teenager in China to be conservative, but the Chinese exchange students make the point that teenagers are less conservative now: they are exploring everything new. Both the teacher and the Chinese exchange students conclude that changes especially in sexuality have taken place: teenagers are better educated but not conservative when it comes to experimenting with sex. Again there are differences between people. However, in general Chinese teenagers are much less conservative than older people.

Chinese exchange students point the importance of intimate friends to Chinese teenagers. Not only is family still worth great importance, Chinese teenagers also consider having close friends very important. As mentioned earlier, individualism is a scary value for Chinese because they are afraid there would not be room for this close friendship. Filial piety brings up different reactions within the Chinese exchange students interviewed. On one hand, filial piety is a value that is deeply inside people's sub-consciousness. On the other hand, teenagers might be too young to practice filial piety in their lives. However, the Chinese exchange students conclude that the traditional families do make it sure that filial piety and the practices are passed forward to the children as values of importance.

Chastity in women is a value that could have lost its importance. Some people regard it very important but for some, it has no meaning any more. Chinese exchange students claim there is a big difference between families regarding home education. However

one's age cohort has influence as well. When it comes to chastity, modern teenagers are more open-minded about sex than same age cohort 5 to 10 years ago would have been. The teacher presents an example of a university student tutoring a much younger student and being terrified of the fact that all the class mates of the tutoree – the teenagers – would already have girl and boy friends. The teacher explains the Chinese girl's reaction to younger students' open-mindedness towards girl-boy relations was: *“No one could have a boy friend or girl friend when we were in 8<sup>th</sup> grade”*. In addition the teacher states that experimenting with sex is more and more common for women in China but men are quite upset about this. She continues explaining about Chinese men: *“They want to marry a virgin”*. For teenagers, chastity in women is an important value for men but less important for women.

### 3.2.2 Confucian dynamism

The teacher agrees – the values listed by Bond as following: ordering relationship, thrift, persistence, having a sense of shame, personal steadiness and stability, reciprocation, protecting your “face” and respecting tradition – are still all important values for Chinese, for the teenagers as well. However, the teacher's feeling is that Chinese teenagers talk about these values and would like to have them in their life. An example she presents is about people who cheat in school but want to be honest. The teacher states Chinese teenagers want to be honest and great people but it might mostly be “lip service”. An important note is that the society still doesn't really allow teenagers to be what they want to be. However many of the values listed here are still being applied, not only talked about, by the teenagers.

About ordering relationship, the Chinese exchange students say that it is something Chinese teenagers dislike. Again it is hard to believe that teenagers anywhere would like hierarchies where orders are given and obeyed. The teacher, as well as the Chinese exchange students, all agree that ordering relationship is very much present in Chinese

society. However, it is very difficult to say whether it would be an important value for teenagers. The Chinese exchange students find it less important than before.

Thrift is an interesting value when focusing on the Chinese teens that are brought up in an increasingly wealthy society applying one-child-policy. The Chinese exchange students point out that teenagers have a lot of money now, and they use the money. The Chinese students bring up a topic of a gift-giving habit that Chinese teenagers have adopted: They can easily give very expensive gifts to their close friends. Reciprocation, as a value still found important by the Chinese exchange students, is related to this: when teenagers receive any gifts, they also give gifts back – but it doesn't matter if the value of the gift is less. Thrift is not seen as a part of gift-giving by the Chinese exchange students: their conclusion is that Chinese teenagers can still be very stingy, and find thrift quite important. Chinese exchange students explain that modern teenagers are very aware of what is theirs. Communist idea of sharing possessions has turned upside-down: teenagers don't share – instead they treasure what is theirs.

To be more detailed about reciprocation, it is important to mention the connection of the concept of “guanxi” and reciprocation. Guanxi, as practice of cultivating and valuing relationships, includes also offering favors and gifts back as exchange (McClenahan 2004). This value – and guanxi, according to Chinese exchange students, have not disappeared. Instead teenagers might value it even more.

Values such as persistence, personal steadiness and stability are not really found important values of teenagers. Chinese exchange students conclude that these don't really define teenagers in the best way. Maybe as people grow older, values such as these are more important, but for teenagers they are not yet important. Maintaining one's “face”, that the teacher finds still very important for teenagers as much as for others, Chinese exchange students claim it is losing importance for younger people. However, they see modern Chinese teenagers much more straightforward than ever before.

### **3.2.3 Human heartedness**

Bond's values categorized as human heartedness are: "kindness; patience; courtesy; sense of righteousness; patriotism" (Lee 2003). The teacher agrees these values are still true Chinese values and do apply to teenagers as well. Especially kindness is a nice value that truly describes what Chinese teenagers are like to each other (the teacher). Patience, even if it might be patience of only what people see from outside, also defines what they are like. However patience, as something in larger society when people interact with each other and take the bus for example, doesn't belong to the patience concept. In situations where cueing would have made everything easy, the teacher mentions, people in general are not patient but instead very impatient. This applies to teenagers as well. They have to follow the patterns learned everyday when interacting with people. Chinese teenagers have patience when it comes to people they know (The Chinese exchange students). Maybe patience doesn't show when larger society is observed.

Courtesy, according to the teacher, describes what Chinese teens are like. It's an important value and not only empty talk. People truly seem to be courteous. The teacher also mentions sense of righteousness as an important value. Not only as a value that people feel strongly about, teenagers tend to be quite frank when it comes to a matter they feel is not right. Patriotism also applies to teenagers. They feel proud to be Chinese: the culture, history, language; everything that has shaped their country to be what it is now and what China is – every day (the Chinese exchange students). Some issues such as the Culture Revolution are not seen as that positive but teenagers do regard China's history as something magnificent (the Chinese exchange students). They are patriotic and this surely is a value the party would like the teenagers to have. Interestingly the Chinese exchange students claim that modern teenagers express their patriotism also by criticizing directly to decision makers.

### **3.2.4 Moral discipline**

The moral discipline elements listed in Lee (2003) are: “moderation; having a few desires; adaptability; prudence; keeping oneself disinterested and pure”. In general, the teacher feels these values are changing, and especially within young people. Teenagers that are influenced by the pop culture, who watch movies and see what teens are like around the world question why they should follow the traditional Chinese moral discipline category values (the teacher). Especially interesting is to see that young people of different age cohorts have different ideas about the moral discipline values: 12 to 17 – year-olds don’t follow these values but people who are 5 to 10 years older still find these values important (the teacher). It seems there is a generation gap within youth.

Chinese exchange students agree that teenagers now are more radical than before. However it is difficult for the Chinese exchange students to evaluate the teenagers because teenagers of each generation might have certain radicalism. In general, the Chinese exchange students point out that modern Chinese are less restricted from doing things. Therefore they are not happy with what they have, but want to achieve more and easily complain if they feel something is not right: teenagers want more from life. However, the Chinese exchange students, claim adaptability plays a more important role. The teacher agrees this by explaining the difficulties of being an individual: group pressure forces an individual back to formation. This doesn’t prevent teenagers from expressing themselves more openly. Keeping oneself disinterested and pure is not a value that could be applied to the teenagers: teenagers easily start arguing about issues that they don’t agree with (The teacher, The Chinese exchange students).

### **3.3 Value changes brought by communists**

China was a collective society before it was communist. Group had meaning before the time of the communists. Communism changed what group was like but there was still group. The changes were big but it can be argued if changes were really made on person-level. Tradition lives in people even though society changes. Communists destroyed a lot

but maybe they couldn't change what's deep inside people (The teacher).

The teacher sees that communism didn't truly have big value changing impact. Communists seemed to take a lot from the traditional values when emphasizing their values. However, tearing down the old was put to place during the Cultural Revolution and lot was changed: Especially when it comes to Confucian values, these values were under the attack. However, communists took some values to emphasize that were there in the Confucian society model. Moreover, the changes made should not be as deep as on people's emotional level. Changes brought by the communist government, especially during the Cultural Revolution, couldn't truly reach the peoples' core. It seems the communist also utilize the traditional for their own use. Especially now, in modern China, the old is brought back again and being reutilized. (The teacher)

The changes made by communists are clearly visible in the society. The teacher states: "communism has structured the whole country". However, what communists once changed, has already bounced back to the society – and to teenagers' values – after communists started letting go and China started to open up. Some things never changed: Confucian idea of the emperor as one and only power to look up to was replaced with Mao Zedong, collectivism of Confucian concept was replaced with collectivism of communist concept (The Chinese exchange students). The teacher comments on equality between men and women in China and regards it merely "*lip service*". People talk about "*nan nü ping deng*" - equality of men and women, but mostly it's just empty words. Also hierarchical system was tried to be leveled totally but it seems with only little success, when looking at the society now (The Chinese exchange students). The process of change is very slow. Confucius' teachings had been the guidelines in the society for thousands of years. It would have taken much longer to change society on people's person-level than communists could possibly do.

### 3.4 Emerging values

The opening of China and globalization make it easier for Chinese youth to find information they had no access to before. The Chinese exchange students claim Chinese teenagers can now use internet quite freely when people not longer than 5 years ago were restricted more heavily when using the net. The freedom to get more information has created awareness of societal issues and it is said that teenagers now are more idealistic. Education also plays an important role here. Education, that Chinese teenagers find important, provides them with the opportunity to learn about new ideas and therefore gives teenagers the tools for finding ways to improve the society (The Chinese exchange students). According to the Chinese exchange students, modern Chinese teenagers would like to be more creative and therefore they are asking more from the education system. Moreover, the teenagers are challenging their society (The teacher). Collectivism is still strong but changes have taken place. It's impossible to predict but at the moment it seems the teenagers values are changing into more individual direction as communism becomes less and less (The teacher).

In general, the teacher claims that values categorized as integration-values are going through a big shift. Also, compared to what the Chinese exchange students point out about family as the core of Chinese people's values, the teacher has differing view of Chinese teenagers now trying harder and harder to break free from the family to live like they wish. The Chinese exchange students do point out that more and more people see it more important to be able to live the life one wants, not the life family orders.

Materialism, mentioned by the teacher, describes somehow an emerging value. However the time for materialism might have passed. Before opening the borders and society, people didn't have anything; everyone was poor. After reforms made starting in 1978 it was possible to earn money again. The teacher states: "*A modernizing society sees wealth overly important*". There is wealth now in China so it might be less important now to be rich than it was just after opening the borders. Deng Xiaoping has said: "*To get rich is glorious.*" (Roberts & Balfour 2006). This describes what people felt like when it was

possible to earn again. Now, money might be important for some people but certainly not for everyone.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to better understand the Chinese teenagers' values. To understand the values, they are divided into three different settings. Therefore, the research problems were presented as following: What are the values of Chinese teenagers? What are the traditional values? How has communism shaped the values? What emerging values are there?

Traditional values defined earlier are mainly influenced by the teachings of Confucius. The value sets were categorized as: integration, Confucian dynamism, human heartedness and moral discipline. Teenagers were found different from how the traditional values would explain their values.

Values of the integration category are: tolerance, solidarity, harmony, non-competitiveness, trustworthiness, contentedness, being conservative, a close and intimate friend, filial piety and chastity in women. The modern teens differ from these values mainly in the areas of non-competitiveness, contentedness and chastity in women. Competitiveness was found as a value that defines the school environment: that would mean teenager have to compete more to survive. Contentedness also doesn't apply anymore to modern teenagers as they want to achieve better things in life. Chastity in women is not a value that would define female teenagers' behavior anymore. They are exploring much more and only the teens brought up in traditional families might see chastity as something worth importance.

The value set of Confucian dynamism can be divided into: ordering relationship, thrift, persistence, having a sense of shame, personal steadiness and stability, reciprocation, protecting your face and respecting tradition. The general implications made are that these values are something teenagers would like to have in their lives. Ordering relationship, persistence, having a sense of shame, personal steadiness, stability and face are values of less importance; thrift and reciprocation were found to exist. Again,

respecting tradition might depend greatly on what the family upbringing is like. Differences between families exist.

Human heartedness category holds the following values: kindness, patience, courtesy, sense of righteousness and patriotism. These values are found to apply with teenagers. Especially kindness and courtesy are values that describe teenagers. Chinese appreciate their culture, history and language: they are quite patriotic.

Moral discipline elements are: moderation, having a few desires, adaptability, prudence and keeping oneself disinterested and pure. These values are found to have changed and still changing. It seems there is a generation gap within youth when focusing on this value group. Age difference of 5 to 10 years might mean a totally different perspective. Teenagers are more radical because they are less restricted. They are not happy with what they have, but want to achieve more. They also tend to criticize easily if they find reason for that. Teenagers, in general want more from their lives. However, group pressure makes teenagers, who are expressing themselves openly, often follow the crowds with their opinions.

Of the effects of communist rule to the teenagers' values there are some valid points to make. Firstly, China has been a collective society before it was communist and during the communist era. However, now the collectivism might be facing some changes. Secondly, the revolting forces led during the Culture Revolution had change-making impact but the changes on person-level should be little when observing the society now: traditions are still strongly present in China. Thirdly, Communists have utilized and still utilize some traditional values for their own use. Fourthly, what was changed, can easily emerge in the society again. This has happened with some traditional values communists wanted originally to destroy: especially hierarchy has reappeared after it was tried to destroy during the Culture Revolution.

Reasons behind the emerging values lie in the greater freedom to get access to more information and awareness of societal issues. These are the reasons why teenagers are, in

general, more idealistic. Education partly contributes and provides teenagers with idealism to improve their society. In addition, Chinese teenagers would like to be more creative. This leads to more demands towards the Chinese education system. To conclude, the teenagers are challenging their society. Collectivism is a strong force but the values are found here to be changing into a more individual direction.

Family is still seen as an important value but breaking free from the chains of the family is clearly leaving an impact on the basic family concept. Some teenagers want to break free from the chains to live their own lives.

It can be argued if materialism is an emerging value. The wealth might be worth importance for some teenagers but it is surely not the issue for everyone. Economic growth and effects of six-pocket syndrome have brought wealth to teenagers' hands.

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### **Interviews:**

The Chinese exchange students. Beijing University of Chemical technology students. Lappeenranta. April 16<sup>th</sup> 2008.

The teacher. English teacher. Lappeenranta [Telephone interview]. April 19<sup>th</sup> 2008.

## APPENDIX 1

Interview of the Chinese exchange students.

April 16<sup>th</sup> 2008.

Questions:

1. How do you understand values?
2. What in general is important to you in life?
3. What do you think is important in life for 12 to 17 year-old Chinese?
4. What does it mean to you to be Chinese?
5. What would it mean for 12 to 17 –year-old Chinese teenagers, in your opinion, to be Chinese?
6. Could you discuss which of the following values would describe Chinese 12 to 17 year-old teenagers? What is different when you compare the teenagers to yourselves?
  - tolerance; solidarity; harmony; non-competitiveness; trustworthiness; contentedness; being conservative; a close, intimate friend; filial piety; chastity in women
  - ordering relationship, thrift; persistence; having a sense of shame; personal steadiness and stability; reciprocation; protecting your “face”; respecting tradition
  - kindness; patience; courtesy; sense of righteousness; patriotism
  - moderation; having a few desires; adaptability; prudence; keeping oneself disinterested and pure

## APPENDIX 2

Interview of the teacher.

April 19<sup>th</sup> 2008.

Questions:

1. Could you explain what Chinese 12 to 17 –year-old teenagers are like, related to each category?

Power distance

Individualism

Masculinity

Uncertainty avoidance

Long-term orientation

2. Could you discuss which of the following values would describe Chinese 12 to 17 year-old teenagers?
  - tolerance; solidarity; harmony; non-competitiveness; trustworthiness; contentedness; being conservative; a close, intimate friend; filial piety; chastity in women
  - ordering relationship, thrift; persistence; having a sense of shame; personal steadiness and stability; reciprocation; protecting your “face”; respecting tradition
  - kindness; patience; courtesy; sense of righteousness; patriotism
  - moderation; having a few desires; adaptability; prudence; keeping oneself disinterested and pure
3. What effect do you think Communism has had regarding Chinese people’s values?

