

## A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS OF CHINESE ADVERTISING APPEALS: 1980 - 1995

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### ABSTRACT

This study is based on a content analysis of 1452 Chinese advertisements appearing in the Chinese edition of *The People's Daily* from 1980, when advertising was resumed, through 1995. It identifies which features and appeals are key in advertising products in China. It also examines the recent trends in these advertising appeals. Comparisons are made in ads appearing pre and post 1989, which not only marks the Tiananmen Square civil unrest but also China's move towards a more consumer oriented economy.

China represents a significant market opportunity for the United States. It is a nation of 1.2 billion people and its economy continues to grow at a 10 percent annual rate. The United States, however, is yet to fully capitalize China's potential. China's trade surplus with the United States continues to soar. To turn the U.S. China trade deficit around and to capitalize on the Chinese opportunity, U.S. companies among other things must develop and maintain an acute understanding of advertising in China.

About 41% of all advertisements appearing in *The People's Daily* over the last fifteen years were for products from major industry SIC group 3500; all machinery other than electrical. Nearly 17% was for products from major SIC group 3600; all electrical and electronic machinery except transportation equipment.

In the initial study, 1980 - 1989, the five most commonly featured traits in the advertising, were: "claims about product size or shape" (40.4%), quality (36.7%), "uniform, made to standards" (29.3%), dependability (26.4%), and "economy in operation" (17.6%). In the 1990 - 1995 sample, the use of traits in ads had increased but the ranking within the top five traits remained relatively unchanged. One exception, the trait "made in China" moved to the fourth most commonly used position from tenth.

Over time three major trends were observed in the advertising:

1. The move towards greater nationalism
2. Increased market competition and
3. The move towards a consumer society

The move toward an increasing nationalist identity in advertising was supported by increased reference to products being made in China. The increase in competition trend was evidenced by an increase in both the number of ads and the number of pages devoted to advertising in a single issue. The move towards a consumer based society is evidenced by a steady increase in the percentage of ads promoting consumer goods as opposed to industrial goods.

Those wishing to succeed in China must spend increasingly more on advertising. When advertising products in China it is important to use rational appeals. Most Chinese advertising contains many details regarding the features and functions of the product. Second, it is important not only to provide quality products but to inform buyers of the quality. The mention of quality continues to be the most frequently cited product trait in Chinese advertising. Third, when penetrating the Chinese market it is useful to have a Chinese connection. The rising emphasis on Chinese nationalism suggests that foreign businessmen should consider joint ventures to enter the market and emphasize the Chinese relationship through the advertising.