

The Asian Dimension Reflection of Hofstede's Cultural Theory—Based on the Consumption Cognitive Characteristics of Chinese Post-90s College Students

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This article is based on Hofstede's cultural theory, taking the post-90s college students as the research object, and through a small-scale survey method, uses the cultural conflicts of the post-90s college students' cognition of "frugality" and "consumption" to explore the characteristics of their consumption outlook. The consumption behavior of post-90s college students presents a diversified structure, lacks planning, and has short-term orientation tendencies such as light luxury and impulsive consumption. At the same time, it displays an obvious living within its means and a wait-and-see attitude towards advanced consumption, focusing on the long-term orientation of its own investment in the future. The Confucian cultural characteristics of the contradictory but complementary consumption outlook of college students born in the 1990s provide Hofstede with a new perspective beyond the long-term and short-term dualistic orientation.

Keywords: Hofstede cultural theory, post-90s, consumption, thrift, Confucian culture

Introduction

The high integration of networking technology and the development of e-commerce platforms in China has promoted online platforms such as Alibaba, Didi Chuxing, Alipay, Tick Tock, and Xianyu, etc., to become a large part in daily lives of modern Chinese youths, giving birth to the postmodern consumerism of youth consumer groups. Internet jokes such as "post-70s saving money, post-80s investment, and post-90s debt" reflect the changes in the consumption concept of the different generations of Chinese youths in the past 30 years (Wu, 2008). The unique environment in the growth process of the one child generation of the post-90s makes the youths exhibit characteristics deviating from herd mentality, pursuing individuality in their consumption behaviors. The changes in the consumption environment and consumption patterns of youth have led to impulsive consumption, advanced consumption, symbolic consumption, and other bad tendencies (Lin, 2012; Zhu, 2017; Hou, 2019). The rapid development of the economy, the diversification of values, the influence of the mass media, and the effect of influencers have given birth to the "Guo Meimei-style show of wealth" (Tang, 2011). The academic circle has conducted extensive research on the consumer group of young people, especially college students, and found that consumption has evolved from physiological to

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self-fulfillment needs (Cheng & Zhao, 2015). Payment methods such as “Huabe”, “Jingdong Baitiao”, “Credit Loan”, and “Campus Loan” have created a great temptation for the advanced consumption of young people, especially college students. It can be said that the young people's consumption outlook and business operation model are interacting with each other. Banning the bad influence of online lending institutions, curbing the problem of “university loan sharks” (Dai, 2017), creating a good consumption environment, carrying out rational consumption planning education will guide college students toward forming a healthy consumption concept (Chen, 2018). Guide youth not to be “debtors” (Zhao, 2019). The calls to strengthen the prevention, response, and supervision of the consumption problems of college students and youth groups, and the establishment of a scientific and rational consumption concept all reveal concerns about the consumption of the youth groups, especially the blind consumption and impulsive consumption of the post-90s.

Wei Lili of Insert Credentials believes that the generational divide cannot fully explain the characteristics of the consumption outlook of the post-90s youth, that the consumption outlook of the post-90s youth has the characteristics of a transition from survival to development and enjoyment, and that there is a gradual convergence of consumption outlooks in the different youth groups (Wei, 2014). Lin Jiang and Zhao Jingping of Insert Credentials pointed out that the post-90s colleges students are living with irrational consumption structure and lack of planning, but the mainstream consumption is reasonable (Lin & Zhao, 2012). Through big data analysis, scholars such as Li Jing found that contemporary college students have developed the habit of “credit consumption”. When the post-90s generation uses credit consumption software such as Huabei, they unexpectedly value credit and make repayments on time (Li, Shen, Liu, & Tong, 2017). By 2020, the latest batch of post-90s has grown up, and the post-90s youth group has become the de facto working class of society. They are highly respected for their distinctive personality, but also controversial due to their departure from traditional thinking and behavior. The post-90s generation pays relatively little attention to money in consumption (Wei, 2016) and has the enthusiasm for future social development, but there are also historical limitations (Such as?) (Deng, 2016). The academic research on modern youth groups, especially those born in the 1990s, is showing a predominately positive consumption concept that requires guidance. However, the criticism of the “consumption” consciousness of the post-90s youth group has a tendency to criticize the “waste” and “undisciplined”. Although there is an advocacy to guide youth groups to return to “frugality”, the cognition of “frugality” among the post-90s youth groups has not been fully explored. Regardless of whether the post-90s' consumption outlook is rational or not, the post-90s, as an objective existence, represents the rise of a new generation of Chinese culture, shouldering the historical responsibility of inheriting traditional values and constructing new values.

Based on Hofstede's cultural theory, this article takes post-90s college students as the research object, and focuses on the cultural conflict between “consumption” and “frugality” cognition as the starting point to explore the characteristics present in the consumer values of post-modern Chinese college students seeking to meet China's cultural traditions.

The Asian Extension of Hofstede's Cultural Theory-Confucian Culture

Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede is not only a well-known scholar of organizational anthropology and international management theory, but also a well-known multinational enterprise manager. Beginning in the late 1960s, Hofstede relied on IBM, a well-known multinational company, to conduct two large-scale multilingual questionnaire surveys, with its employees and managers distributed in various countries and

regions as the research objects. In IBM's research, Hofstede obtained data on cultural values in 50 countries and three transnational regions. After statistical analysis, it is found that different countries have different solutions to common problems. The four basic problem areas are power distance, collectivism versus individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and femininity versus masculine temperament. Hofstede's four-dimensional culture provides a quantitative analysis method to investigate cross-cultural values. Power distance refers to the degree of uneven distribution of people's acceptance of rights in society or organizations, and is related to the forced violence used in national politics and income inequality. Collectivism versus individualism refers to individual interests or collective interests that society generally pays attention to. Additionally, individualism is related to national wealth and the mobility of social classes between two generations. Uncertainty avoidance refers to whether members in a society avoid and control uncertainty through formal channels when society is threatened by uncertain events or unconventional environments, which is generally related to religion and legal obligations. Masculinity versus femininity temperament culture mostly refers to the "male" or "female" values in the society, when "male" values dominate a society, the pursuit of material and achievement as well as competitive and dogmatic characteristics is preferred. In comparison, when "female" values dominate society, humility and caring for others are prevalent. Furthermore, masculinity is also negatively correlated with the government's share of GDP used to fund the development of third world countries (Hofstede, 2010). Four-dimensional culture provides a basic framework for measuring cultural differences. However, because the four-dimensional cultural model is based on the perspective of Western culture, it presents limitations in terms of universality and diversity. Moreover, the countries and regions where multinational companies are distributed are closely related to the development of the local economy, and the Asian cultural elements in developing countries are underrepresented in Hofstede's cultural theory as a result. The IBM research that underpins Hofstede's four-dimensional cultural theoretical model has geographic limitations. It was Professor Michael Harris Bond of the Chinese University of Hong Kong who had just completed a comparative study regarding the values of male and female students in the Department of Psychology that inspired Hofstede to realize the Western leaning values of the four-dimensional cultural model.

Professor Michael Harris Bond is Canadian and has a Western cultural background, but he has been living and working in the Far East since the 1970s, which gives him a deep understanding of both Eastern and Western cultures. Professor Michael Harris Bond invited Chinese social scientists from Mainland China, Chinese Hong Kong, and Chinese Taiwan to participate, and finally completed the Chinese Value Survey (CVS). The CVS took samples from more than 20 countries, and each country included 50 male and female students. Four dimensions are again produced by analyzing the survey results. Many countries have conducted CVS and IBM questionnaire surveys at the same time. These data points have three overlapping dimensions. CVS has not found the uncertainty avoidance dimension, but found the future, past, and present-oriented dimensions. This cultural dimension includes elements such as respect for tradition, perseverance, thrift, respect for seniors, reputation, and stability, which are deeply influenced by Confucian culture. Professor Michael Harris Bond refers to the positive side of this dimension as "Confucian Work Dynamism", while the negative side is oriented towards the past and the present.

Hofstede put the long-term orientation and short-term orientation as the fifth universal dimension into his cultural theory, forming the Hofstede five-dimensional cultural model. Hofstede's early cultural theory has strong Western leaning, and as a result, there are controversies about his methodology regarding the influence of past cultures and regional limitations, but his research thinking is still a foundational theory for studying

cultural values even in modern times. With the integration of Asian culture, it provides a new path for the reconciliation of Eastern and Western cultures and the search for commonality. Especially when China is becoming an important player in international economics, modern Chinese culture will be an important part of Hofstede's cultural theory.

Research Design

Research Framework

Research hypothesis: In the Hofstede cultural values survey, the long-term orientation of China's values has obvious cultural characteristics. Since China's Open Door Policy, the rapid economic development and social progress has prompted great changes in the values of Chinese youth, especially those born in the 1990s. Based on the representative Asian cultural orientation, that is, the long-term/short-term orientation cultural dimension, this article examines the consumption outlook of post-90s college students through the three dimensions of consumption behavior, consumption structure, and consumption attitude, and explores the characteristics of the short-term orientation cultural development of Chinese youth.

Research objects and research methods: This article uses a small-scale online questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews to combine research methods in order to obtain a total of 215 post-90s undergraduates from a Shanghai university in a survey questionnaire, 10 of whom were selected for an interview.

Quantitative Survey Results of Long-Term and Short-Term Cultural Dimensions

(1) Living within our means is the consumption attitude that the majority of students select; however the lack of consumption planning is also exceedingly common.

Basically, universities in our country implement an on-campus accommodation system, and most parents provide a fixed amount of living expenses for college students. In this survey, the disposable spending power of college students mainly comes from parents or relatives and friends (84.03%), part-time jobs or an internship (52.94%), online loans, credit cards, and Huabei account for less (14.6%). College students do not have a stable job; therefore their consumption expense generally is covered by their families. The use of credit is not the preferred consumption method of post-90s college students. In addition, college students already have a certain degree of professional knowledge and work ability, so they can also increase their income through internships or part-time. However, in this survey, fewer college students have the habit of keeping account of their expenses (11.76%). Among these college students, more than half (51.26%) usually check the bills through payment apps such as Alipay or WeChat. In this survey area, Shanghai has a relatively high degree of economic development and provides more work opportunities for college students. As a result, college students also actively participate in work and have a certain sense of economic independence. However, there is a lack of budget planning, the control of consumption relies on payment apps, and there is a tendency to reflect about their spending after purchases have been made.

(2) Diversification of consumption structure and shopping channels:

In the residential life of college students, the general tuition and accommodation fees are paid by the family in advance, and daily expenses are mostly catering, clothing, travel, entertainment, etc. In a multiple choice survey, the results of post-90s college students' consumption expenditure include food (96.64%), online shopping (76.74%), entertainment (35.29%), education (25.21%), and other consumption being around 5%.

Catering has changed from satisfying basic life needs to high-quality enjoyment. The rapid development and application of e-commerce models have changed the traditional in person consumption habits. The variety of products, convenient payment, and fast delivery are more in line with the current needs of contemporary youth.

And young people born in the 90s like to explore new experiences such as new forms of entertainment. Due to this, spiritual enjoyment and education investment expenditures will increase in the future. In this survey, the main shopping method for post-90s college students is e-commerce online shopping (65.55%), physical stores near homes and schools rank second, and shopping centers account for a very low proportion. When purchasing products, students will most often follow the reviews of the purchased products on the shopping platform (57.14%), recommendations of relatives and friends (34.45%), social media such as Xiaohongshu and Weibo (29.41%), or endorsements from celebrities (10.08) %. In addition, the most important factors when purchasing goods are, from high to low, product quality (78.15%), price (66.39%), practicality (60.5%), product design (36.97%), with the lowest being branding (13.45%). The pursuit of fashion and individuality is a common cultural phenomenon among contemporary youths, but college students born in the 1990s are not blindly following this. They are used to using various product evaluation apps and public accounts to obtain rich shopping information, which allows them to pay more attention to cost-effectiveness and practicality. Fewer people focus on branding and the effects of branding are proportional to the family's income level and the groups in which the student identifies with (Cheng & Zhao, 2015). Young people born in the 1990s have a clear tendency to shop, but this consumption is not exclusively wasteful as most students strive for the most reasonably priced option when purchasing goods. It can be said that this consumption has traces of frugality.

(3) Basic rationality of credit consumption behavior and attitude:

E-commerce platforms are racing to launch various shopping events and promote the use of credit payments to stimulate consumption. Even as a group of students with no income, the available consumption opportunities for these students are increasing. The survey found multiple payment methods frequently used by post-90s college students, with Ant Huabei accounting for 94.68%, Jingdong Baitiao accounting for 17.02%, and almost no campus loansharks. When paying back the Huabei loan, 47.83% of college students said they met payments expectations, and 28.26% said they were satisfied with their Huabei balance.

Post-90s college students using Anthuabai to pay are not only using it for credited consumption, but also for increasing credit points through Anthuabai consumption. In daily life, you can rent utilities, stay in hotels, and rent cars without deposit. Post-90s college students think that Anthuabai is a popular consumption method, and it also represents their own credibility. Most post-90s college students remain cautioned around borrowing such as Jingdong Baitiao. 51.26% of the students hold a wait-and-see attitude towards credited consumption, 33.61% believe that this consumption does more harm than good, and only 15.13% agree with credited consumption. Through the cross-analysis of credited behavior and attitude, it is found that more than half of people who take credit whether it is during shopping events or not hold a wait-and-see attitude. The post-90s college students' attitudes towards advanced consumption patterns are rational, but they are easily affected by the shopping events and payment methods, especially those who hold a wait-and-see attitude.

Qualitative Investigation and Inspection of “Thrifty” and “Consumption” Consciousness

Having a thrifty consciousness generally refers to living frugally and restrained. It has been a good traditional virtue in China since ancient times. In particular, the thrifty consciousness of the founders during the

creation of the People's Republic of China laid a solid foundation for economic development. With the rapid development of China's economy and the improvement of material life, consumption awareness and modern consumption patterns have gradually entered the public's consciousness. From criticizing "loans" to the acceptance of loan purchases, to the use of "huabei" and "Baitiao", the Western consciousness of "credited consumption" has a tendency to subvert the traditional "thrifty" consciousness. In particular, the post-90s, known as the "Internet Generation", is a generation that grew up with the Internet, and their consumption patterns and concepts are both influenced by traditional culture and Western culture. Their consumption is basically rational, within what their family can support, and their consumption structure is diversified, and their tendency towards saving is weak. In terms of consumption attitudes, although they hold a wait-and-see attitude towards credited consumption, they are easily affected by the consumption environment.

Interviewee B (female): "I don't feel like I'm spending money when shopping online. It's just a bunch of numbers. It doesn't seem to have much impact. I feel distressed to spend a hundred yuan bill when shopping offline. Maybe that's it, without thinking, I overspent! Although I feel that it is not good to have debts, as long as it is within the scope of my own repayment, I am still willing to spend it".

In addition, the post-90s college students' view of thrift is very different from that of their parents. Most interviewees perceive frugality as "spending less, saving money", and evaluate themselves that "I consume more, but I'm not wasting money".

Interviewee A (male): "For the parents born in the 1970s, it is a failure to struggle for a lifetime and not buy a house. For me, I spend all my savings to buy a house and then pay mortgage for it. It is unacceptable to live like a house poor. If my economic conditions permit, it is of course good to have your own house and car. If my economic conditions do not allow, then renting a house, renting a car, and sharing a car are also acceptable. In the future, maybe everyone will be like this!"

Post-90s college students live in a relatively prosperous era. Although they have family support, they are also under pressure in life and work. The concept of sharing can relieve stress and is accepted by young people born in the 1990s. And it is an important way to reduce waste. Several interviewees talked about their own understanding of thrift.

Interviewee J (female): "I usually do part-time jobs to increase my income and buy things I like. It decreases the burden on my parents. As a result, I don't think I'm wasteful or frugal. I feel that saving money is not as good as investing in myself. The later money is received, the less value it holds, so spending tomorrow's money is a very smart behavior".

Interviewee F (female): "I have become accustomed to the daily photo taking for social media. Generally, I post many things that are beautiful and happy. Most of them are going out with friends to visit destinations which are internet famous and we are very happy to get likes on social media. Because this is my way of making friends, my parents will not be too restrictive".

Interviewee D (male): "I don't think I'm frugal or wasteful. Buying popular brands of clothes should not be considered a luxury. We boys don't buy a lot of clothes like girls, but sports brand shoes are more expensive, and I prefer sports shoes. The other is that you need to pay money to play games, and I don't spend on much else".

Thriftiness is in the traditional culture of the Chinese nation. Both in family education and school education, post-90s college students have received good traditional education and understand and accept this. However, the abundance of material life and spiritual life has prompted significant changes in the way people understand and implement the concept of thrift. The tendency of post-90s college students to consume at the

individual level is obvious, but what defines their thrift is that consumption and thrift are no longer incompatible.

Hofstede's cultural theory model uses a quantitative methodology to describe cultural dimensions, and uses a dichotomy to distinguish cultural elements. On the other hand, Asian cultures influenced by Confucian culture coexist, merge, and complement each other. For example, long-term and short-term orientation all contain Confucian values. In modern China, post-90s college students not only respect the tradition (consumption is not wasteful), emphasize individuality (being themselves), care about their reputation (buying brand-name products), and respect other short-term orientation characteristics. At the same time, they also save resources (consciousness of sharing) and aim for other long-term returns such as education investment. It can be said that the consumption culture of post-90s college students has grown in short-term characteristics during the current period, but it is still more influenced by Confucian culture, and the long-term orientation cultural characteristics are obvious.

Conclusion

The formation of the post-90s college student youth group consumption consciousness is in its forming period, and it is also a critical transition period for generational inheritance. Recognizing the objective existence and change of the post-90s youth consumption outlook is the prerequisite for guiding the youth's consumption. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to many characteristics or problems such as hedonism, peer pressure, and eagerness to show off. First of all, at the level of family education, the virtues of the Chinese nation, such as thrift and respect for tradition, are still valuable assets passed down from generation to generation. Parents and young people resist each other due to the difference in consumption structure. They should jointly create the new concept of frugality in the new era and actively mend the gap in consumption structure. Young people born in the 1990s should be encouraged to raise their awareness of thrift. Frugality is a personal choice, as well as a social responsibility, and a virtue of personal self-discipline.

Secondly, at the school education level, there should be a variety of financial and social planning courses to actively guide young people to rational consumption. Schools should strengthen prevention of bad credit problems such as loansharks, cultivate a positive outlook on employment, and create a good cultural environment. Thirdly, at the societal guidance level, governments should create a good and safe consumer environment. Young people born in the 90s have distinct personalities, but their independent-thinking ability and social experience are still insufficient. The Internet shopping environment and multimedia have a huge impact. Young people's consumption concept should be guided towards rational planning and rational consumption. Steps should also be taken to improve media literacy in order to avoid blind pursuit and excessive consumption. Finally, at the level of national regulations, Governments should formulate and improve relevant laws, regulations and policies, and rectify the unhealthy atmosphere in social financial lending. Additionally, they should severely crack down on illegal lending, prohibit illegal lending organizations from carrying out illegal deception and advertisement, and protect the personal and property safety of young people.

The formation of the post-90s consumption concept is a critical for generational inheritance. National regulations, social leadership, and family education should be coordinated to recognize the changes in the consumption structure of the new generation, promote traditional values, and guide youth towards reasonable consumption attitudes. This will help to build a healthy consumption environment and cultivate a consumption culture that both adhere to Chinese culture and the characteristics of the new generation.

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