

# 環境広告における米中の比較研究～異文化の角度から

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A Comparative Study of The Environmental Advertising in China and U.S : A Cross-cultural Perspective

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## Abstract

This study analyzes environmental advertising in the United States and China within a cultural value dimension framework. A detailed content analysis shows that U.S. environmental advertising uses images of harmony or humor to appease a deep fear aroused by radical environmental rhetoric. Culture values reflected in the environmental advertising of the United States are of high individualism, anxiety-free, and are less emotional. In contrast, Chinese environmental advertising tends to arouse public anxiety so that due action can be taken. Culture values reflected in the environmental advertising of China are of high collectivism, arousing anxiety and aggressiveness, and are emotional.

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キーワード : environmental advertising, cultural dimension, content analysis

## 1. Introduction

Facing the challenges posed by emerging problems such as air pollution, climate change, and increasing transportation costs, the public is more concerned about the environment than ever (Chitra, 2007). They present environmental reform as a salient and prominent topic of discussion in the public sphere. In response to this concern, many business and government agencies have begun to modify their business practices to address society's concerns. This is now referred to as environmental advertising as a marketing strategy.

Companies continue to “go green” by marketing eco-friendly products and engaging in socially responsible initiatives. Many organizations promote environmental ideas through strategic communication, such as environmental advertising in print, on TV, and online. Advertising is an effective vehicle to inform the public of environmental issues and to stimulate action to protect the environment.

As the world's two largest consumer economies, China and the U.S. are both key contributors to the exhaustion of global resources and the pollution of the world environment. Thus they are crucial in deciding the future of the global environmental movement.

However, the approach these two countries take to environmental issues can be strongly influenced by culture values. China and U.S. are two typical representatives of the eastern and the western cultures respectively. As advertising is a cultural product in its own right, the role of cultural values in U.S. and Chinese advertising is at the heart of the issue. The cultural values reflected in commercial advertising have been well documented in research studies since 1962, while studies which examine the cultural

values in environmental advertising are relatively new and less documented. Contribution in this area would add depth to our understanding of environmental advertising.

In an attempt to investigate environmental advertising from a cross-cultural perspective, the study examines environmental advertising in China and the United States based on the theory of Hofstede's value dimensions. Hofstede's value dimensions is the frequently used model in explaining cross-cultural differences, and it provides a useful framework for an analysis of the cultural differences embedded in Chinese and U.S. environmental advertising.

## 2. Literature Review

To date, studies that examine the association between cultural values and advertising in Eastern cultures remain incomplete. One of the early studies (Singh and Huang, 1962) looked at the effect of the print media advertisements, and found that it was ineffective. The authors concluded that the failure of the advertisements is because their appeals run counter to indigenous cultural values.

In the 1980s, a limited series of cross-cultural studies specifically focused on the comparison of Eastern and Western cultures. For example, studies comparing U.S. and Japanese advertising strategies were conducted by Belk, Bryce, and Pollay (1985). Collectively, they found that, though Japanese advertisements were clearly becoming “Americanized” in style, deep-rooted Japanese cultural values remain strong in the advertisements. On the same theme, Mueller (1987) discovered that the cultural appeals used in Japanese and U.S. magazine advertisements tend to differ in degree rather than in kind. Similarly, Lin, C.A. (2001) examined cultural values reflected in U.S. and Chinese advertising appeals, and indicated that the

portrayal of traditional Chinese cultural values remained relatively stable, while subtle changes in cultural values and advertising strategies were visible. Similar findings also were reported by other studies that compare advertising appeals and strategies between countries that share similar cultural or linguistic origins.

Compared with commercial advertising, environmental advertising has received much less attentions.

Several studies have examined the use of environmental claims in magazine advertising (e.g., Carlson, Grove, & Kangun, 1993; Banerjee, Gulas, & Iyer, 1995; Peterson, 2005; Grillo, Tokarcayk, & Hansen, 2008). However, most of these studies were conducted in English-speaking countries, primarily the United States. Very few studies have looked at environmental advertising in other cultures (Frame & Newton, 2007). Environmental communication research in an international context is becoming more and more important because the new wave of environmental concern is much more global.

As the result, the comparison between China and the U.S. is essential not only because they are two of the biggest economies in the world but also because they represent two important yet hugely different cultures.

Ongkurtraksa (2002) examined environmental advertisements in newspapers in Japan, Thailand, China, and the U.S. and found that high-context cultures tended to use more emotional appeals in advertising.

Crigler, Cui, Gee, and Just (2012) extended the observation whether emotions were universal or particular to cultures by comparing environmental advertisements and emotional responses to these advertisements by students in the United States and China. And they found a substantial difference in the tone of advertisements between the two countries and in the emotional responses. Thus they argue that a constructionist approach explains the role that culture, ideology and experience play in the design of the advertisements and the emotional appraisal of them.

As mentioned above, many researchers have studied environmental advertising from different dimensions, mainly from the sociological and psychological perspectives. Limited research has been conducted on the content analysis of environmental advertising from cross-cultural perspective. But few content analysis researches on cultural values have been identified to probe into the environmental advertising in China, and even few cultural-specific measurements have been developed to study advertisements of this kind in China or other Asia countries. This study attempts to present a comparative analysis of environmental advertising, applying Hofstede's theory of Five Dimensions of Culture.

### 3. Research Model and Method

#### 3.1 Hofstede's Five Dimensions of Culture

Cultural Values are merits that tend to permeate a culture. They are the goodness or desirability of certain actions or attitudes among members of a culture. They are transmitted by a variety of sources (family, media, school, church, state and so on) and therefore tend to be broad-based, enduring and relatively stable.

According to Hofstede, culture is "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others." (Hofstede, 2010: 6). Although people convey greatly along cognitive lines, Hofstede states that there is a structure in this variety which can serve as a basis for mutual understanding. Cultural Value Dimensions is his model which helps to explain basic value differences. He distinguishes cultures in terms of four dimensions: power distance (PDI), individualism/collectivism (IDV), masculinity/femininity (MAS), and uncertainty avoidance (UAI). Later, he adds a fifth dimension which was originally discovered in cooperation with Michael Bond. This is the long/short-term orientation (LTO), and Bond called "Confucian Work Dynamism". The dimensions are measured on a scale from 0 to 100, and each country out of the 76 countries in his research is placed in a position on each scale or index.

This model is frequently used to explain the differences in work-related values, but here in this study, it is applied to advertising-related cultural values. Hofstede's dimensions are increasingly applied as independent variables for comparative cross-cultural studies. They provide many useful explanations of cross-cultural differences in advertising culture since each country's scores allow us to draw a cultural map for cross-cultural segmentation.

#### 3.2 Method

The author has conducted a comparative content analysis to measure environmental advertising in China and the U.S. Sample advertisements were selected from the internet with the majority from the archived website: advertisements of the world (<http://adsoftheworld.com/>).

The operational definition of "environment-related advertisements" in this study is based on Banerjee et al.'s (1995) definition. Three types of advertisements were identified:

- (1) Advertisements that address the relationship between a product/service and the biophysical environment.
- (2) Advertisements that present a corporate image of environmental responsibility
- (3) Advertisements that promote a green lifestyle.

A total of 148 advertisements were identified as environment-related advertisements, 100 of U.S and 48 of Chinese. Both verbal

and visual contents were analyzed and issues were classified into pollution, greenhouse gas reduction, solid waste, species/habitat protection, water conservation, energy independence, general environment, and combination.

Table 1 Category for analysis

Category	Percentage	
	U.S.	China
Pollution	20	38
Greenhouse Gas Reduction	12	5
Solid Waste	15	2
Species/Habitat Protection	25	30
Water Conservation	8	8
General Environment	19	15
Combination	1	2

#### 4. Discussions

The current study examines the environmental advertising in China and the United States to prove whether there is difference between the two countries in terms of environment-related messages and advertising characteristics in the Culture Value Dimensions framework.

##### 4.1 Collectivism and Individualism

Among the cultural dimensions differentiating western cultures from East Asian cultures, individualism versus collectivism seems to be one of the most frequently used dimension across disciplines, including content analysis of advertisements. The Individualism-collectivism dimension can be defined as “people taking care of themselves and their immediate family only in a loosely knit social structure, versus people belonging to in-groups to look after them in a tightly knit social organization” (Hofstede, 2010: 92).

In this dimension, China is considered to be a nation with a collectivistic culture, where people are “we”-conscious and identify themselves in accordance with the social system to which they belong. In contrast, the United States is often characterized as a nation with an individualistic culture, where people are “I”-conscious, express private opinions, and emphasize self-actualization.

This distinguishing characteristic could be recognized in the environmental advertisements as well.

Chinese collectivism emphasizes the importance of the “we” identity over the “I” or “you” identity, which is manifested in the personal pronouns used in environmental advertisements. In the Chinese environmental advertisements, the personal pronouns like “we” and its possessive determiner “our” appear more frequently than “I” and its possessive determiner “my” or “you”.

For example:

- 1) Save every personal item around, and love our home.
- 2) To protect the environment is to protect our own home.
- 3) If you were animal, what would you do? Please take care of us. We are one of the family, and we are equal.(Conservation of animal)
- 4) Don't let kids in the future see today's animal only in a museum.(Conservation of animal)

“We” and “Our” are routinely utilized in Chinese environmental advertisements. Besides, words like “home”, or “homeland” also appear frequently in them. This is essentially because that the Chinese people have very strong consciousness of family and most Chinese people place family ahead of the individual pleasure and accomplishment. That is the reason why harmony and conformity not only tend to govern all interpersonal relation, but also enjoy social and cultural approval in China.

On the other hand, the United States is universally known as a highly individualistic country, with the IDV index score of 91 (see Table 2), ranking the highest in individualism dimension among all participant countries and regions in Hofstede's study. This indicates that the American society holds a more individualistic attitude, emphasizing the goals of individuals rather than group concerns or needs. People in individualistic cultures pursue initiative and achievement and depend more on factual information for decision making as opposed to seeking group harmony and consensus. Consequently, the listing of facts (numbers, percentages) is much more than words to tell people what to do. Also, independence is an important term in the society. People are more self-reliant and expected to take care of themselves or their immediate family.

Table 2 Hofstede's Country Scores of Cultural Dimension for U.S. and China

Country	IDV	UAI	PDI	MAS	LTO
China	20	30	80	66	87
United States	91	46	40	62	26

Source: Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov (2010)

Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind, Third Edition.

Thus the concept of individualism is endowed with dominant value in the U.S environmental advertisements. In contrast to cultures which are characterized by self-sufficiency and interdependency, the so-called American rugged individualism means that one is not only self-sufficient in actuality but that one must strive toward this as an idea. Thus individualistic cultural traits can be found easily in U.S environmental advertisements. Examples are:

- 5) Preserve your world, preserve yourself.
- 6) The earth is yours. Save it!

The above slogans have selected the second person pronouns, to address the audience, emphasizing the fact that it is the responsibility of everyone to preserve the earth though. That is the nature and central concept of the individualistic culture, which means he/she controls his /her own destiny and that he/she does not need help from others. Thus, the individualistic cultural elements have become the common subject in the U.S environmental advertisements.

Also, the following examples of U.S advertisements try to persuade everyone to save energy in everyday actions.

- 7) If you don't preserve nature by using low-wattage bulbs, who will?
- 8) If you don't preserve nature by switching your television off stand-by, who will?

We can see from the above analysis, that environmental advertising, as a form of social communication, is particularly reflective and indicative of culture on this culture dimension. Individualistic cultural traits find themselves drawn into advertising appeals and become common themes in US environmental advertisements. Likewise, in the Chinese context, to live in harmony with the nature becomes a frequently adopted subject and persuasive strategy in Chinese environmental advertisements.

## 4.2 Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty Avoidance deals with the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid these situations (Hofstede, 2010: 188-189). Some people do not mind ambiguity, whereas others hate uncertainty or ambiguity and try to cope with it by making rules and prescribing behavior.

In cultures of strong uncertainty avoidance, there is a need for rules and formality to structure life and belief in experts. People are more interested in the process of how a product works than in the results.

We could see a high value placed on compliance with tradition and punishment of violation in the Chinese environmental advertisements though China, in the dimension of UAI, scores at 30, ranking 71<sup>st</sup> out of 76 countries (see Table 2.). As a tradition,

people feel threatened by uncertain situations and are eager for formal rules.

In contrast, weak uncertainty avoidance cultures, like U.S. feel that there should be as few rules as possible. They are more result oriented than process oriented. They believe more in generalists and commonsense, and there is less ritual behavior. Conflict and competition are not threatening in a society of weak uncertainty avoidance culture.

Here are some examples:

- 1) Don't let the last drop of water be our tear. (China)
- 2) It's easy being green. The earth will love you for it! ( the United States)

The first slogan appears in a Chinese environmental advertisement which shows us the impending crisis of water scarcity. The second one is a U.S. environmental advertisement, informing the public of the importance of recycling that is convenient and easily accomplished with less effort.

Both the verbal and the visual content resemble the same characteristic.

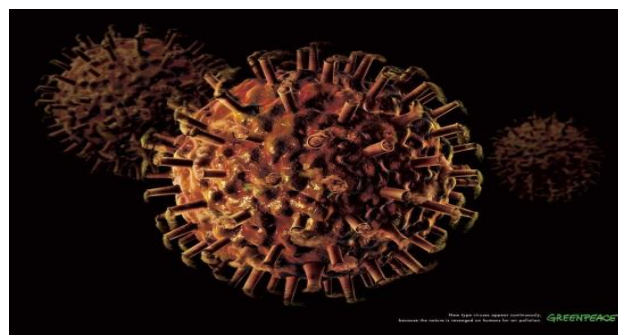


Slogan: Watch your waste

Caption: want a healthy planet? Stop feeding it junks. Recycle! Heal the bay

Source: <http://adsoftheworld.com/>

Figure 1



Caption: New types of viruses appear continuously because the nature is revenged on human for air pollution. GreenPeace

Source: <http://adsoftheworld.com/>

Figure 2

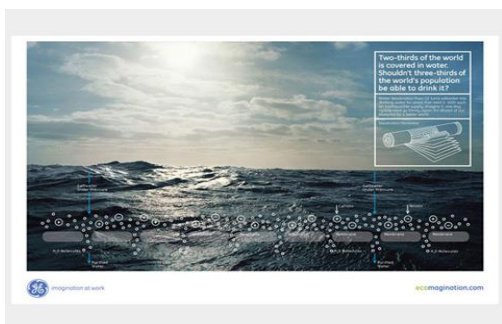


Slogan: Buddy, see you!

Caption: Destruction of the environment is committing suicide

Source: <http://adsoftheworld.com/>

Figure 3



Slogan: Imagination at work

Caption: Two thirds of the world is covered in water. Shouldn't three-thirds of the world's population be able to drink it? Water desalination from GE turns saltwater into drinking water for areas that need it. With such an inexhaustible supply, imagine if, one day, no one need go thirsty again. It's all part of our blueprint for a better world.

Source: [www.ge.com](http://www.ge.com)

Figure 4



Slogan: Watch your waste

Caption: want a healthy planet? Stop feeding it junks. Recycle! Heal the bay

Source: <http://adsoftheworld.com/>

Figure 5

Photo 1 is an advertisement with a traditional Chinese painting. It tries to inform the public that the pollution constitutes one of the serious environmental problems of the day.

Photo 2 & 3 describe a terrible scene when destruction of environment grows more serious, which shows a high level of anxiety and aggressiveness. The conflict among human and nature seems to be threatening in the advertisement.

In Photo 4 and 5, the U.S. advertisements are free of anxiety and aggressiveness and less emotional. We could also read the harmony and the humor which are applied in the advertisement, showing the positive attitude toward improving the destruction of nature as well.

### 4.3 Masculinity/Femininity

The dominant values in a masculine society are achievement and success; the dominant values in a feminine society are caring for others and quality of life. In masculine societies, performance and achievement are important. Status is important to show success. Being big and fast is beautiful. Societies that score low on the masculinity index are more service oriented, have a people-orientation, and regard being small as beautiful. There is a tendency to strive for consensus. Quality of life is more important than competition. Status is not important for showing success. Being a “winner” is positive in masculine cultures and negative in feminine cultures. In masculine cultures, children learn to admire being strength, whereas in feminine cultures children learn sympathy for the underdog. A consequence of this dimension is variation in the degree of role differentiation; narrow differentiation in feminine societies, wider differentiation in masculine societies (Hofstede, 2010: 138-140).

The masculine/feminine dimension discriminates between cultures particularly with respect to values related to winning, success, and status as used in advertising appeals.

Examples of values reflected in advertisements are winning and success as compared with modesty, as well as the role difference. However, the content analyses of the environmental advertisements show that quality of life seems to be more important than “winning” or “success”, and we can see the similarities in both Chinese and U.S environmental advertisements.

- 1) Be a Green Consumers, and enjoy the life. (China)
- 2) Keep your mother earth clean and green. (the United States)

Both of them show the inclination to better life pursuit, resembling the feminine characteristic.

### 4.4 Power Distance

Power distance can be defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 2010: 61). It is reflected in the value of both the less powerful and more powerful members of society. Different countries embody different degrees of power distance. It

influences the way people accept and give authority. There is salient difference between China and U.S in Hofstede's study, and thus we expect there will be great differences between the Chinese and U.S environmental advertisements as well.

In large power distance cultures, everyone has his or her rightful place in the social hierarchy, and as a result acceptance and giving of authority come naturally. One's social status must be clear so that others can show proper respect in high power distance cultures.

China, as a representative of high power distance cultures, shows strong dependency relationships between parents and children, bosses and subordinates, professors and students. Thus the recognition of authority could be seen from the Chinese environmental advertisement:

- 1) Preserve our home, from now on. 10 billions of people and 40% of surface of the land are influenced by desertification.

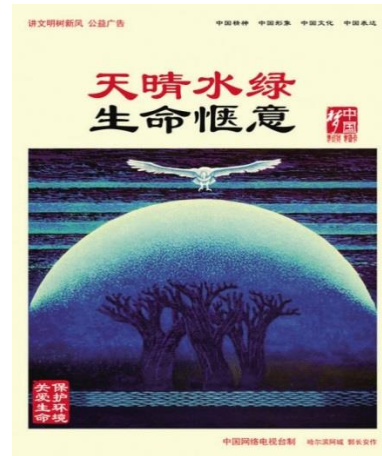
However, in the United States, a society with cultures scoring low on the power distance index, authority can have a negative connotation, and the focus is on equality in rights and opportunity. Children are raised to be independent at a young age. Americans will avoid becoming dependent on others, and they do not want others with the possible exception of immediate family members, to be dependent on them. Thus such kind of environmental advertisements appear as follows:

- 2) Protect it, protect yourself.

#### 4.5 Long-term and Short-term

Consequences of long-term orientation are that there is not one truth; there is perseverance, thrift, and pursuit of peace of mind, and elements of Confucian philosophy. The opposite is a short-term orientation in which spending now is more important than saving for tomorrow.

Most East Asian countries score high on this fifth dimension, particularly China. And the United States score low in Hofstede's study. We could also find a great difference between Chinese and American environmental advertisements along this dimension. For thousands of years, Confucian philosophy has been the prevalent culture in China, and as a result, Chinese environmental advertisements have the tendency to advocate traditional virtue in modern society rather than the need for the absolute truth, which is relevant in environmental advertisements of the United States. Compared to Chinese long-term planning, the environmental advertisements of U.S urges right-now-action instead of future plan.



Slogan: Sunny day, blue water, happy life.

Caption: Protection of environment, Caring of lives

Source: <http://adsoftheworld.com/>

Figure 6



Caption: We'll give them a sleepover they'll never forget

Source: <http://adsoftheworld.com/>

Figure 7



Slogan: Turn on the page, and deforestation continues.

Caption: Deforestation is the biggest threat to primeval forest, influencing 70% of the endangered forest. We are doing deforestation with an unprecedented speed.

Source: <http://adsoftheworld.com/>

Figure 8



Slogan: Turn it off now!

Caption: One thing that cause global warming is electrical pollution. Save the electricity and reduce global warming now, by turning off light when you leave a room, and using only as much light as you need. Source:

<http://adsoftheworld.com/>

Figure 9

## 5. Conclusions

In this study, culture is viewed as a process of cross-cultural communication that involves advertising message encoding and decoding. This research is an attempt to distinguish the cultural characteristic of the environmental advertising in China and the United States through content analysis.

By examining the content of environmental advertisements in Chinese and U.S., the present study has revealed the prominent differences between them based on the Hofstede's five dimensions of national culture.

The results show that U.S. environmental advertisements uses images of harmony or humor to appease a deep fear aroused by radical environmental rhetoric. In contrast, Chinese environmental advertisements tend to arouse public anxiety so that action can be taken immediately.

Moreover, both Chinese and U.S. environmental advertisements manifest cultural values of responsibility, and pursuit of quality of life. But Culture values reflected in the environmental advertisements of the United States are of high individualism, anxiety-free, and less emotional, while Culture values reflected in the environmental advertising of China are of high collectivism, arousing anxiety and aggressiveness, and emotional.

These views reveal the significant difference in the understanding of environmental advertising of China and the United States.

## 6. Limitations and Future research

While the study aims to distinguish the similarity and difference of environmental advertising in China and the United

States from a cross-cultural perspective, it has some limitations.

First, only a small number of advertising has been sampled in this study. Most of the Chinese and U.S. advertising samples are quoted from the website and could not stand for all types of environmental advertising. And the number of environmental advertising is limited.

Second, the main goal of this study is to conduct a quantitative content analysis of environmental advertising in China and the United States; however, in the future, discourse analytic strategies may help uncover the strategy and the effect of the environmental advertising. Recent call in environmental communication literature suggests the complicated relationship between media message content, message construction, and audience effects should be investigated, both in a frame analysis over time and in discourse analysis as well. Future research should be conducted on how it works in a more structural and practical way.

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