Made for China: Global Collaboration and Understanding in Advertising Design

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Abstract: With a burgeoning economy and one of the world’s largest populations of consumers, the growth and opportunities for graphic design in Mainland China seem endless. Western design and advertising agencies are eager to capture the imaginations of the Mainland audience. The visual communications strategies proposed by western advertising agencies however, often display an inadequate understanding of the historical relevance of symbols and long held value sets of the Chinese consumer. Some agencies take the viewpoint that the Mainland audience wants a copy of things ‘western.’ This can be observed in the shopping districts of most major cities in China where billboards displaying oversized images of Caucasian models dominate the visual environment. Another commonly used strategy is to use a mix of visually interesting Chinese symbols without understanding the full meaning and implication of those symbols. The above illustrates that design educators must begin the process of cross-cultural awareness at the undergraduate level to assure that more effective creative strategies can be achieved in the future. This paper explores cultural confusion in design and the possibilities of overcoming these misunderstandings through cross-cultural collaboration.

Keywords: China, Cross-Cultural Design, Advertising, Value Sets

A Historical Review of Advertising in Mainland China

VISUAL COMMUNICATION USED in a commercial sense in China is centuries old and stretches back to at least to the Zhou Dynasty of the 11th century when elite manufacturers of wine created banners to promote their products (Cheng, 1996). Primitive forms of commercial advertisements such as signboards, lanterns, and simple printed advertisements were in existence during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and continued on throughout subsequent dynasties (Ibid). As Wang (2000, p.10) recounts: “westerners introduced mass media into China after the Sino-British Opium War (1842) when China was thrust into an international economic system.” In the wave of western intervention, advertising and western communication strategies disseminated into China, first in the form of advertising in journals exclusively for westerners in China and spreading eventually to Chinese produced newspapers and magazines (Ibid).

With the introduction of modern communication strategies in the middle of the 19th Century, the Chinese began to see a profound transformation of their material culture. The first modern advertisements in China featured foreign products in Chinese settings (Ibid). Western advertising agencies run by foreign investors started emerging in the early 20th century (Cheng, 1996). These agencies promoted western products and utilized media such as billboards, magazines, and newspapers to convey their message (Ibid). Billboards were seen to be especially effective due to the largely illiterate population (Wang, 2000). Cheng (1996, p.167) notes, “Modern advertising media practices and skills, introduced by the westerners were well received by the Chinese.” Western style magazines such as Eastern
Miscellany, Saturday, Happy Home, Young Companion, Women's Pictorial, and Shopping News appeared in Shanghai (Ibid). These magazines introduced the Chinese not only to various new products, such as cosmetics and western style fashions, but also to new ideas of design aesthetics.

The Treaty of Nanjing (1842), drawn up at the end of the Opium War, specified that Shanghai was one of the few zones where foreigners were initially allowed to live in China (Gerth, 2003). Because of this direct contact with western culture, Shanghai soon became a hot bed for the creation of a new Chinese design aesthetic (Minick and Ping 1990). A specific ‘Shanghai Style’ emerged in graphic design which borrowed many motifs from the western Art Deco aesthetic and blended them with traditional Chinese design sensibilities (Ibid). Wang (2000) explains that foreign advertising and agencies hired local Chinese graphic artists so that they could accurately represent the ideals and aesthetics of Chinese consumers. During this time there was a conscious rejection of the traditional Chinese narrative illustration with its emphasis on literal depiction (Minick and Ping, 1990). The design of the period focused on a synthesis of color, shape, pattern and an incorporation of abstract symbols in typography as part of the character itself (Ibid).

Cheng (1996) describes the 1930s as the golden age for China’s modern advertising industry. During this time there were over 100 advertising agencies (both foreign and Chinese) operating in Shanghai (Ibid). The Japanese invasion (1937-45) and the ensuing entry into World War II, all lead to the downfall of this burgeoning advertising empire (Ibid). When the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took control of China in 1949, the Chinese government allowed advertising to exist, though foreign participation was virtually ended (Ibid). Mao Zedong, the leader of the CCP, discouraged consumption and advocated the end of foreign trade altogether (Wang, 2000). The role of advertising and graphic design was therefore transformed into a propaganda machine, promoting and spreading the Communist ideology (Ibid).

Under the leadership of Mao Zedong (1949-1976), the CCP implemented a distinct aesthetic philosophy, one that drew heavily from regional folk design and traditions (Minick and Ping, 1990). Minick and Ping (1990, p.92) describe that “(Mao) encouraged artists to reject the direct and unquestioning importation of foreign images in favor of a genuine artistic language responsive to China’s own condition and people.” Graphic design during this period was focused on delineating the new class distinctions of Peasant-Worker-Soldier through realistic portrayals of China’s land and its people (Ibid). Mass poster campaigns utilizing imagery of youth in minority costumes, traditional paper cuts, and China’s abundant workforce engaged in modernization were employed to unite the masses through “revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism (Ibid).” Wang (2000, p.10) stresses that in addition to the poster: “outdoor advertising was the first casualty of the Cultural Revolution; commercial messages on billboards were replaced with political propaganda.” The use of both mediums heightened during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when Mao exploited the poster and billboard to create a cult of personality (Minick and Ping, 1990).

Visual communication was the main medium for promoting the party under Mao, it communicated the style and rigid social ideology of the Cultural Revolution (Minick and Ping, 1990). Essentially it created a distinct way of viewing society with images that stressed the unification of the proletariat, the strengthening of co-operative labor, and above all the need to eliminate bourgeois (i.e. foreign) influences from society by any means possible (Ibid). These images all revolved around the central image of Mao as a ‘National Hero’
The contrived social values, evident in imagery during the Cultural Revolution, have had a profound effect on the Chinese people. According to Khun (2000), The Cultural Revolution “destroyed traditional Chinese moral principles.”

“To get rich is glorious” was Deng Xiaoping’s, Mao’s successor as leader of the CCP, slogan for the re-emergence of China into the world economic forum (Cheng, 1996). This re-entry into a world of conspicuous consumption has made a great impact on the Chinese society and continues to change social behaviors and material desires in profound ways (Ibid). With the economic reform, retail outlets that had been state subsidized providers of basic goods under the leadership of Mao became hosts of exotic new products from the West (Davis, 2000). Finkelstein (2000, p.233) states: “[in western consumer societies] each product comes with a tag, an address, a lifestyle.” Along with western goods, western advertising agencies quickly set up practices in order educate the new Chinese consumer in the meaning of these goods (Jones, 2000).

Concepts of modern communication had been evolving in the West during the thirty years that China was under Mao’s centralized government distribution of all media messages (Minick and Ping, 1990). Wang (2000, p.9) explains that: “Advertising has evolved from presenting simple, straightforward information about goods and services to representing a ‘choreographed’ vision of life. It depicts not how we actually behave in our everyday life but how we think we should behave.” Therefore, when China was re-opened in the late 1970s views of life presented by western advertising were radically different from what the Chinese had known for the past thirty years under Mao and presented them with new cultural identities to explore. In the re-construction of consumer culture in China, western advertising has played an important role in communicating new societal roles (Ibid).

The influence of modern advertising in China since 1979 has been widespread. According to Cheng (1996, p.259), “Since late 1979, advertising in China has experienced substantial and sustained growth.” The number of international advertising agencies in China grew from 17 joint ventures in 1992 to 280 in 1993 (Ibid). Currently, all of the established international agencies have a presence in China. China is now said to be practicing ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ which is, in effect, central planning with a market mechanism (Cheng, 1996). In this problematic dichotomy, many aspects of society have had to be re-defined to fit the new ideology (Ibid). Raymond So, chairman of J. Walter Thompson China, in Wang (2000, p.95), explains that the main difficulty of advertising in China is “the struggle between the country’s socialist ideology and its drive towards capitalism.” This is evident in Title I, Article III of the advertising law of the PRC that states that: “advertising should be in accordance with the demands of a socialist spiritual civilization.” According to Cheng (1996), “[despite this regulation] western cultural values...have been found to be depicted even more often in Chinese television commercials.” Before joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the CCP had absolute control over advertising content and freely censored all foreign advertising that was perceived as a threat to the ‘socialist spiritual civilization.” However, when entering the WTO in 2001, the CCP stated that they would loosen restrictions on advertising to allow for more open competition from multinational corporations (Li and Shoooshtari, 2007). As a result, more controversial advertising has gone to air without government interference, especially in print advertising which is considered ‘below the line’ and therefore not as subject to scrutiny.

Within seven to ten years China is expected to become the second largest consumer market after the U.S. (Li and Shoooshtari, 2007). According to Li and Shoooshtari (2007, p1), “Ad-
Advertising spending in China grew to an estimated US $31 billion in 2005.” Established transnational advertising agencies such as Leo Burnett and Saatchi & Saatchi have an established presence in China (Jones, 2000). These agencies aid in the creation of campaigns pitched directly to the Chinese consumer for multinational companies such as Nike, Toyota and Nissan. However, even these seasoned veterans of the advertising game have caused public uproar due to the improper use of Chinese cultural symbols in their campaigns (Gao, 2007).

Rapid economic growth in China has created a new consumer elite and a vast opportunity for luxury brands. These brands often pitch a blanketet worldwide campaign with western models and symbols indicative of the individualist values of the west. As a result of the economic reform, Chinese consumers have become obsessed with becoming ‘modern’ a term that they ascribe to the economically developed West (Croll, 1997). ‘White’ and ‘western’ have become synonymous and have led to various design strategies employing Caucasian models (Ibid). Croll (1997, p.9) states: “the image of the West serves as a foil deployed to illustrate all that China is not.” These symbols can often be confusing and detrimental to a society based on collectivist principles (de Mooij, 2005). The use of western imagery and models indicates that with no established design format the seductive and overpowering media messages from the West are having a great impact on Chinese design and culture (Wang, 2000).

The above illustrates that the contemporary Chinese advertising industry is a continual and complex dialogue between a historically collectivist society with a powerful centralized government and the tactics of contemporary western advertising practice. According to Gao (2007), “Inadequate attention [by Western advertising professionals] has been given to the unique historical context in which the Chinese [advertising] institution has been evolving.” There is an apparent misunderstanding of Chinese culture and politics in many advertising strategies created by western advertising agencies, practicing both in China and overseas. This paper reviews advertising campaigns that use confusing cultural symbols and campaigns that use predominately Caucasian faces to sell products with a focus on how they are interpreted by the Chinese public. Moreover, it explores problems inherent in the western advertising strategies created for China and seeks a better understanding of advertising for this market. Methods for teaching cultural awareness through educational collaboration between western and Chinese universities are suggested as one solution to this problem.

**Designing the Dragon: Misuse of Chinese Symbols in Design**

To understand the misuse of Chinese symbols in design, this section focuses on two recent advertising campaigns that have been pulled for offensive use of the dragon symbol. The meaning of this important Chinese cultural symbol and its misinterpretation in Leo Burnett’s 2004 campaign for Nippon paint and Weiden & Kennedy’s 2004 campaign for Nike are discussed.

Whereas the dragon is the most recognized cultural symbol of power throughout Chinese history, it has also become one of the most frequently misused symbols in contemporary advertising campaigns. The image of the mythical dragon stretches back to the early origin of Chinese culture. A dragon made of mussel shells was unearthed in 1987 in a grave in Henan dating back 6,000 years (ChinaCulture.org, 2003). Chinese people closely associate their national identity with the dragon. According to Sleeboom (2000, p.302): “The ‘descend-
ants of the dragon’ is a metaphor referring to Chinese nationals, [and] is meant to root the powerful spirit of the Chinese people firmly into the past.” Historically, dragons were seen as the protectors of ancient rulers and were for the exclusive use of the ruling classes. From the Yuan dynasty until the fall of the Qing dynasty, common people were forbidden to use the dragon symbol in design and decoration (Ibid). Sleeboom (2002, p.303) notes: “only since the 1970s have ordinary people begun to identify themselves with the dragon.” Today, dragons are an integral part of the visual language of China and adorn monuments, clothing, buildings, decorations, and displays all over China. The dragon symbol, therefore, is used by many western advertising agencies, as they perceive it to have high salience in the Chinese community (Li and Shooshtari, 2007). Li and Shooshtari (2007) explain: “though [the dragon] might be likely to get attention and might be perceived by the foreign user as a quick way to communicate with the local culture, they carry a high degree of risk because they may be unknowingly misused or interpreted in ways unforeseeable to those outside the culture.”

In a 2004 print advertisement for Nippon paints, Leo Burnett Shanghai created a print campaign that depicted a dragon attempting to climb a pillar but ending up in a heap at the bottom, un-able to hold it’s grip on the freshly painted surface (Gao, 2007). The advertisement, published in the September issue for the Chinese publication International Advertising, was widely criticized by the readers as being highly offensive (Ibid). The advertisement was seen as representing the symbol of China as weak in comparison to a Japanese product. Saul Gitlan executive vice president of international marketing agency Kang & Lee, in New York Times (4 October, 2004), called the advertisement a “political faux-pas” as it failed to recognize the link between the imagery and the deep historical wounds between Japan and China. The Sino-Japanese war (1937-45) and the subsequent sack of Nanking, in which Japanese soldiers killed 100,000 civilians, is still a raw point in the Chinese psyche (Hsu, 1995). This is evident in recent protests (2005) by thousands of people in major Chinese cities when the Japanese omitted these events from school textbooks (CNN.com, 17, April 2005).

According to a 2003 survey by Ogilvy & Mather, in the Sydney Morning Herald (20 January 2004), 34% of young people in southern China found patriotism to be “extremely important” Ogilvy’s managing director Joseph Wang, in the Sydney Morning Herald (20 January 2004) states, “Young people are indoctrinated from very early on in school to be patriotic.” When advertising for foreign products or services, agencies must be very careful in avoiding uses of Chinese symbols that may be interpreted as demeaning. As discussed above, the dragon is a symbol that is associated with the national identity of the Chinese people. Any reference to the dragon as being weak, therefore, is interpreted as the Chinese people as a whole being weak. This is especially relevant in advertising Japanese products and services due to the complex history between China and Japan (New York Times, 4 October, 2004).

The symbol of the dragon in western cultures has long been associated with the Christian legend of ‘St. George Killing the Dragon’ in which the dragon is portrayed as a fire breathing evil demon (Gosset, 2007). In China, the dragon while possessing great power, is seen as good-natured. Gosset (2007) notes: “In the Chinese context, the dragon is a ubiquitous and highly positive symbol.” The misuse of a dragon as an evil spirit is apparent in the Weiden & Kennedy’s 2004 campaign for Nike. In the commercial, which aired throughout China on China Central Television Station (CCTV), the American basketball star Le Bron James is seen beating a series of Kung fu masters and dragons in a basketball game. The dragons in the advertisement are portrayed as sinister looking ‘red-eyed spirits’ (Li and Shoostari,
2007). After initially airing the advertisement, the Chinese broadcast regulator quickly pulled it after receiving “an indignant response from Chinese viewers (cca.ca, 2004).” In defending the advertisement, representatives for Nike, in cbc.ca (2004), stated: “The idea for the advertisement came from Hong Kong’s kung fu movies of the 1970s. Nike hoped it could encourage Asian youth to face their fears in basketball.”

Although Nike explained that its advertisement promoted overcoming fears, as illustrated above, it failed to recognize that the dragon in Chinese culture is not a character to be feared. Using a dragon symbol is synonymous with using a national icon, one must understand fully what that symbol represents and how it is perceived by the public. The western interpretation of a dragon as an ‘evil demon’ in China is incorrect and is similar to portraying the Australian national symbol, the kangaroo, as an evil protagonist. According to an executive with a Sino-Japanese advertising agency, in Hon (2004), “If you wanted to use an image of Mickey Mouse, you can always check with Disney’s management. But the dragon doesn’t have a manager, so it’s always going to be tricky.”

The above case studies illustrate that using Chinese symbols without fully comprehending their meaning can lead to outrage in the Chinese public. The dragon, despite being a highly recognizable and therefore salient symbol to the Chinese, is a symbol that must be used with caution and careful consideration to its use in context. According to Li and Shoostari (2007), “Cultural key symbols [in China] are not only characterized by frequent appearance but by high saliency in the minds of locals [they have] prescriptive or restrictive uses (i.e., must be used with respect or may not be used by some at all), and a tendency to be elaborated in response.” The misuse of the ancient dragon symbol in foreign advertising may also be interpreted as xenophobic. In the Nike advertisement, an American basketball star defeating the dragon implied that the Chinese culture as a whole was being dominated by American culture. Similarly, in the Nippon Paint advertisement, the dragon sliding down a pillar painted with Japanese paint suggested Japanese products and/or culture dominating the Chinese. Therefore, if one is not aware of all of the deep meanings and idiosyncrasies associated with Chinese cultural symbols, avoid using them in an advertising campaign pitched to individuals familiar with their meanings.

The Effects of Western Luxury Advertising in China

According to the Economist (14 July 2004) the luxury industry estimates there are now around ten to thirteen million Mainland Chinese customers for luxury goods. Western luxury brands from Armani to Zegna are eager to capture this lucrative market (Ibid). In Shanghai, Mainland China’s showcase city, the presence of luxury branding is becoming ever more apparent. At first glance one of the most obvious features of the fashion advertisements that dominate the high streets of downtown Shanghai is that most of the models are Nordic Caucasians or very westernized Eurasians. The products are positioned in western situations in which the models are shown as distinct individuals in a society of excess. The concepts that the advertisements are promoting are divorced from the traditional Confucian ideals of design and aesthetics that promote a more modest society based on a collective whole. According to Frank Yu (2002): “The raw message [of western advertisements] states that foreign products and foreign people are better - local products and local people are worse.” As western luxury brands weave their way into the fabric of Chinese society, one has to wonder how their visual communication strategies will affect the Chinese culture.
Contemporary western fashion is coded with multiple meanings revolving around an idea of individuality and self-invention (Kaiser, 1990). Therefore, as fashion reflects our self-concepts and how we individuate ourselves from others, the constant flux of trends in contemporary fashion leads to a continual re-invention of the self (Ibid). Kaiser (p.148) explains: “Individuals use clothes to communicate desired aspects about the self to others, and those others, in turn, respond to this self-symbolizing and provide new insights to others about themselves.” Davis (1992, p.24) explains that “dress comes easily to serves as a kind of visual metaphor for identity and as pertains in particular to the open societies of the West, for registering the culturally anchored ambivalences that resonate within and among identities”. Research by de Mooij (2005) supports the above and suggests that identity has distinctly different meanings between eastern and western cultures. According to de Mooij (2005), people in western cultures tend to see themselves as an individual with particular personality traits and base their identity on age and occupation, as well as on material symbols. In collective cultures however, people are more likely to view themselves in terms of their harmonious relationships with others. De Mooij (2005, p.110) explains that: “in western marketing practice and theory, identity and personality are used as metaphors to define brand positions...these are] metaphors from individualistic cultures that are less understandable and less useful to collectivistic cultures.”

To establish how western fashion advertising is affecting young people in mainland urban China, the author carried out a study in 2007 that analyzed print advertising of Western fashion labels. Observation of outdoor and magazine print advertising in widely available local and international publications in Shanghai was carried out over a period of a year (2007). Observation established that fashion advertising in Mainland urban China disproportionately features western models. To establish the effects of this form of advertising, online survey of 109 participants in the 18 to 35 age group and 46 personal interviews of participants in Shanghai was taken. The 18 to 35 urban demographic was selected as this group has been defined as a force that will determine the cultural orientation of China’s future (China: The “X” Generation Study, 1996). Interview and survey participants were shown advertisement selected from popular Mainland Chinese magazines, which portrayed both Asian and Caucasian models. “The survey and interview questions were based on methods of assessing cultural values in advertising by Zhang and Shavitt (2003) and Cheng and Schweitzer (1996).

Survey response indicated that images utilizing Asian models were seen to reflect values that were more closely related to the participants’ value sets than images that used western models. Interview responses, however, indicated that this group relates strong negative connotations to Asian models. Asian models were described as being ‘too traditional’ and ‘too conservative’ whereas western models were seen to be ‘open minded’ and ‘full of thoughts and innovations.’ Participants also felt that western body shapes are ‘better’ and ‘more attractive’ than Asian body shapes. In general, Asian models were seen to be ideal to show ‘conservative,’ ‘pure’ and ‘natural’ feelings. Western models, in contrast, were seen to be able to show a gamut of ‘strong feelings’ such as ‘confidence,’ ‘power’ and ‘glamour.’ Western models were also described as giving connotations of luxury to goods whereas Asian models were said to make products look ‘cheap.’ The above indicates a reflection of negative self-image. Interview data also established that images with western models had greater salience as the images had a more evocative response. Overall survey and interview data established that imagery which features Asian models, specifically images that use familiar local stars as well as natural themes, show a more attainable and realistic viewpoint.
to this group. Fashion advertising imagery in Mainland urban China, as evidenced by 2007 observation in Shanghai, rarely depicts this image.

The 2007 study highlights the need for a more culture specific form of advertising messages for fashion advertising in Mainland China. Survey and interview data suggests that the majority of visual communications strategies employed by luxury fashion brands in Mainland urban China are having a negative effect on the way that Chinese youth view themselves and their traditional culture. De Mooij (2005) notes: “Considering the fact that approximately 70% of the world population is more or less collectivistic and many global advertising campaigns reflect individualistic values, it is fair to assume that much global advertising is only effective for a small part of the target audience.” Overall, the 2007 study illustrates that the social connotations of fashion advertising cannot be over-looked. Fashion advertising and communications are global concerns with local implications. The next section will offer solutions to this issue in the form of cross-cultural collaboration at the undergraduate level.

Collaborative Projects for Cultural Understanding

As illustrated above, advertising in China poses many challenges to foreign advertising agencies. Using cultural symbols incorrectly as well as using generic campaigns with white faces can be detrimental to establishing western brands in China. Cheng (1996, p.281) notes: “[The Chinese advertising market] calls for specially planned approaches.” According to Steiner and Hass (1995, p. 9) “the goal in cross cultural design should be to achieve a harmonious juxtaposition; more of an interaction than a synthesis. The individual character of the elements should be retained, each maintaining its own identity while also commenting on and enriching the other.” To achieve more informed advertising strategies for the Chinese market, the author has proposed a course called ‘Global Design Strategies: China’ for third year design students in Australia. The course aims to establish an understanding of the Chinese market and the inherent differences between western and eastern value sets to bridge this gap. An overview of the course and its objectives are outlined below.

Two case studies, Collaborat8 (C8) and ‘Garbage Architecture’ have informed the course structure of ‘Global Design Strategies: China’. C8 was created by the Omnium Research group at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, to establish a basis for collaborative online art and design projects between universities in Australia and China. Though an 8-week wholly online course, participants work together in teams to design graphics for contemporary, environmentally friendly and sustainable ceramics, textiles products and environments (www.omnium.net.au, 2008). The overall objective of the project was to “identify the potential opportunities for collaboration between design education and industry (Ibid).” ‘Garbage Architecture’ was a project created to facilitate international exchange of views, knowledge and practice between DongHua University, Shanghai and Willem De Kooning Institute in Amsterdam. Students from Rotterdam traveled to Shanghai from 12 to 16 October 2008 and were paired with students from the DongHua University industrial design department. Students had one week to collaborate in creating a meeting place from found materials. The final solutions were exhibited in the Shanghai Creative Industry Week (15 to 18 October 2008). Both C8 and ‘Garbage Architecture’ represent effective methods of encouraging cross-cultural exchange. ‘The goal of ‘Global Design Strategies: China’ is to draw from these two examples and create a fusion of online collaboration, practical projects and cultural exchange.
‘Global Design Strategies: China’ is a proposed twelve week course for Deakin University graphic design students which gives an in-depth exploration of Chinese culture, history and design with the goal of establishing effective and innovative advertising design strategies for the Chinese market. The first nine weeks of the course will be theory based, with participants exploring the concepts of collective values, Chinese symbols, contemporary Chinese advertising policy and a survey of Chinese culture and history with a focus on historic art and design movements. During this period, students will be given minor briefs to explore and apply these concepts. Examples of the briefs include but are not limited to: creating an advertisement for a modern product that reflects a historical Chinese design movement (i.e. the ‘Shanghai Style’ of the 1920s), designing a typographic layout using Chinese characters, and re-designing a contemporary western fashion advertisement to reflect collective values. The final assignment will be a group project in which Australian design students will create a brand identity and advertising concept for a hypothetical western product positioned to the Chinese market. Australian students will be paired with ‘design mentors’ from the graphic design course at DongHua University in Shanghai. The ‘design mentors’ will be contacted, via email and on a specially designed web interface, to give the participants advice and review final solutions. The course will culminate in a study tour to Shanghai where design students from Deakin will meet with DongHua students and participate in a project for ‘Shanghai Creative Industry Week.’

With continued economic growth in China, it is suggested that the Chinese advertising industry will further develop into a powerful creative force (Cheng, 1996). It is therefore essential that western designers form an understanding of Chinese culture. ‘Global Design Studies: China’ aims to educate Australian design students in the unique characteristics of the Chinese market so that they can create more effective campaigns for this market in the future. The proposed course, however, is only one solution to creating an awareness of the complexities of this market.

Conclusion

In summary, the Chinese consumer market offers many exciting opportunities for foreign advertising agencies, however, this market is unique and often misunderstood. Chinese symbols, such as the dragon, have rich historical meaning and must be used with caution. Although the dragon symbol appears frequently in the urban Chinese landscape, and is therefore seen to be highly salient with the local public, foreign advertisers must understand all of the idiosyncrasies and meaning associated with the symbol before placing it advertising material. Mainland China is a collectivist culture based on Confucian principles therefore advertising that uses blanketet campaigns created for western audiences to market their products to the Chinese consumer may cause cultural confusion. This paper illustrates that an understanding of this unique advertising market needs to be established in order to avoid offending the Chinese consumer. ‘Global Design Studies: China’ is a course conceived to create a foundation of knowledge about the Chinese market at the undergraduate level of design education. The course offers one solution to this issue by informing Australian design students of the unique characteristics and history of Chinese design and advertising. Continued research into the Chinese market and cross-cultural collaboration, however, will uncover further solutions. This paper hopes to inspire research into culturally sound advertising
practices to this market as well as encouraging design schools to introduce courses on global design strategies with a focus on China.

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**About the Author**

*Dr. Lisa Scharoun*

Lisa Scharoun is an artist and lecturer in graphic design at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia. Lisa completed a Bachelor of Arts in graphic design at Florida Southern College in Lakeland FL, USA in 2000 and subsequently worked in the advertising industry in the US before commencing a Masters in design studies at The University of the Arts London, Central St. Martin’s College in 2001. On finishing her studies, Lisa continued working in the advertising and design industry in London from 2002-2003, specializing in branding and visual identity. From 2003-2005 Lisa lectured in the visual communications department at Raffles Design Institute in Shanghai. During her experience in Shanghai, Lisa was especially intrigued by the presence of western fashion advertising and its affect on the youth of Shanghai. She has just recently completed a PhD entitled ‘Western Fashion Advertising in Mainland Urban China and its effects on the Self Image of Youth’ at Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Australia in March 2008. Lisa has exhibited extensively notably a collaborative multimedia work at the Xhibit group show in London, UK in 2001, a solo show of oil paintings at the Room with a View Gallery in Shanghai (2004), acrylic paintings in Women’s Work group exhibition (Room with a View Gallery) in 2005, and photographic work in Foreigner Focus Shanghai at the Meiyuan Arts Center in 2005. Most recently, she staged ‘Visions of Utopia’ a collaborative exhibition with Photographer Frances Tatarovic at Shang Gallery, Shanghai which reflected on the parallels between Maoist propaganda art with contemporary advertising in Urban China in November 2008.
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