

## **Shanghai Youth's Strategic Mobilization of Individualistic Values: Constructing Cultural Identity in the Age of Spiritual Civilization**

Ian G. Weber  
Queensland University of Technology

### **Abstract**

This paper examines Shanghai youth response to the Chinese Government's packaged ideal culture made available through the spiritual civilization program and broadcast on television. It focuses on how 'upwardly mobile' Chinese youth negotiate the discourses of collectivism and individualism through their interpretation of key television programming. The popular Chinese drama series 'Beijingers in New York', which incorporates both discourses, is used to reveal how these youth have woven individualistic values into their cultural identities and which manifest within their daily lives. The study found that these youth are strategic users of television. They absorb and mobilize individualistic values of ambition and progress, change, wealth, and materialism within a framework of collectivist values of filial piety, responsibility, harmony, and sacrifice for pragmatic purposes relating to personal, business, educational, and social goals.

### **Introduction**

Life for young urban Chinese has changed dramatically from previous generations. They face different challenges, embrace different dreams, and pursue different opportunities than their parents. Such differences are associated with China's move towards a freer market economy that encourages Chinese youth to follow Deng Xiaoping's edict that 'to get rich is glorious'. An important aspect of this freer society is youth exposure to a wider range of cultural experiences through television viewing.

A television survey of 285 Shanghai youth aged between 15 and 35 years<sup>1</sup> revealed the top 10 mentioned programming<sup>2</sup> among this group were foreign films (46%), domestic news (43.5%), foreign and domestic sport (both 38.5%), foreign music (34.5%), foreign news (32.5%), travel (31%), Chinese comedy (25%), culture (24%), and soap opera (23%). The lowest number of mentions for programming was traditional Chinese opera (4%). Clearly, the data reveals that Chinese youth prefer imported foreign programming or programs on the West (travel, music, and culture).

In response to concerns over the influence of western culture and values (individualism) on young Chinese, the Government has attempted to counter this trend by reinforcing the traditional Chinese cultural values (collectivism) and promoting western values it sees as promoting economic betterment. At the heart of this 'ideal' culture is the program of 'spiritual civilisation', which

focuses on the moral and ethical development of Chinese citizens. One key avenue for the dissemination of this ideal, packaged version of culture is through Chinese television programming. This programming is designed to fill the ideological void created by China's move towards a 'socialist economy with Chinese characteristics'.

This article examines how Shanghai youth negotiate the interplay between the value systems found within the spiritual civilization's discourses of individualism and collectivism. I provide background on the relationship between television and the spiritual civilization; examples of the television programs that exhibit spiritual civilisation, focussing on the popular program *Beijingers in New York*. Most importantly, youth provide their interpretations of the characters, the program, and youth values and the role of television in young people's everyday lives.

### **Role of television**

The dominant discourse of media control and cultural protection has endured throughout China's recent period of economic reform. However, significant shifts have emerged in the Chinese television ecology as the Government finds ways to balance the Communist Party's political and social objectives and its economic imperative to provide a structure that progress economic reforms. Despite changes to the television industry, the Party leadership continues to use the cultural technology to maintain its guiding role in Chinese society, albeit in a more subtle and sophisticated manifestations. As Huang (1994) suggests:

television [is one of] ... the most powerful and modern tools for the purpose of educating and inspiring the Party, the army, and the people of all nationalities to build a socialist material and spiritual civilization (p. 236).

The spiritual civilization program was adopted as a way to 'improve residents' ideology, ethics, education, legal sense .... social morals, [and] public order ...'. (*Shanghai Star*, 1996, p. 1) It is designed to counter what Rosen (1992) refers to as the 'decollectization of morality'. The trend away from the dominant value paradigm and towards the western individual value system raised concern among Party officials. The discourse of spiritual civilization attempts to counter this trend by re-emphasizing an essential national character; the importance of tradition, culture, and family; ritual issues; and the subtle demonizing of the West as immoral and decadent (McLaren, 1998). Thus, the spiritual civilization revives Confucianism as 'good medicine' to treat the 'crisis of morality' that has been blamed on Deng Xiaoping's market reforms. (Reed, 1995, p. 53)

For Communist Party leaders, the Chinese past is valued primarily because it is distinctive from the Western-dominated present. The state-sponsored revivalist movement is not a matter of nostalgia for past triumphs, but a crucial weapon against the 'cultural' (i.e. non-material) aspects of Westernisation .... The stated aims ... are to promote Chinese 'traditional' culture ... offer 'nourishment' for the promotion of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', strengthen the morals of the populace, stimulate patriotism, and facilitate the

establishment of a 'material and spiritual civilization'. (McLaren, 1998, p. 200) Television has become a key component in this campaign to remold a new ethical and moral spirit that is conducive to promoting the Government's vision of a socialist commodity economy. Because television has become the core propaganda vehicle in this struggle, television industry management, programming, and advertising has come under closer scrutiny. To gain the support from the television industry to produce spiritual products, the Government offers a range of incentives to those serials that combine artistic achievement with ideological content, such as spiritual products on television. These incentives include protecting and subsidizing politically correct dramas, awards, program exposure in the 'golden periods'<sup>3</sup>, and a share of advertising revenue (Keane, 1998, pp. 257-258). Thus, Television drama has been called to the cause of 'constructing' (*jianshe*) civic consciousness as well as instructing people in the modern ways of commerce and fair exchange. The private materialistic virtues of the 1990s are therefore to be counterbalanced by socialist ethics. This kind of double-checking mechanism is supposedly to assure that the spiritual mix is appropriate to propel the vehicle of reform. The problem for China's propagandists in the reform era has been to strike a balance between discourses of collectivism and individualism with the former being called upon to mould the moral subject, the latter to address the economic subject, the active consumer. (Keane, 1998, p. 260)

#### **Cultural values: Collectivism and individualism**

There is a close linkage between the cognitive mechanisms of individualist and collectivist orientations and assumptions and the notion of self-identity. The process of self-identity involves the relationship between the individual and the social surroundings in which that person is imbedded. As Reykowski (1994) suggests, the 'processes of cognitive separation and recognition of similarity between the self and others are interconnected with analogous processes concerning perceptions of the social world' (p. 279). Individuation and identification are two opposing processes that define this relationship between the individual and the social surroundings (Reykowski, 1994, p. 279). Individuation leads to cognitive separation of a person from his or her environment and provides the foundation for the acquisition of an individualist orientation. In contrast, identification leads the precondition for the development of collectivist orientation. A key point here is that these two facets of self-identity develop unequally in different social settings, depending on how they are fostered culturally.

The collectivist social structure, embraced by spiritual civilisation, has been explored extensively in the literature on intercultural communication (Hall, 1959, 1976; Hofstede, 1993, 1994; Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, Yoon, 1994; Lustig & Koester, 1996; Guo-Ming & Starosta, 1998; Samovar, Porter, & Stefani, 1998). In defining the communicative style of high context cultures (collectivist), Hofstede (1994) and Samovar, Porter, and Stefani (1998) compare 'we' culture societies with 'I' culture social structures.

Samovar, Porter and Stefani (1998) suggest that collectivist cultures are characterized by rigid social framework. People count on their in-group (family, relative, clan, or organization) for support (p. 68). Thus, the in-group becomes the major source of identity. Within this social structure, collective interests prevail over individual interests, identity is based on social networks, children learn to think in terms of 'we', harmony is maintained, and direct confrontation avoided (Hofstede, 1994, p. 67). Thus: A "we" consciousness prevails: identity is based on the social system; the individual is emotionally dependent on organizations and institution; the culture emphasizes belonging to organizations; organizations invade private life and the clans to which individuals belong; and individuals trust group decision. Collective behaviour, like so many aspects of culture, has deep historical roots. Look at the words ... of Confucius: If one wants to establish himself, he should help others to establish themselves at first." (Samovar, Porter, & Stefani, 1998, p. 68)

In traditional Chinese culture, the collective needs of the people are traditionally ranked higher than the autonomy and the self-actualisation of Chinese individuals. Thus, the Chinese notion of 'self' is constructed from historical Chinese culture, including the myths and narratives of society, the grammar of the language, the disciplinary power of the state, and the role of the family, guided by Confucianism.

In individualistic or 'I' cultures, the focus differs. For example, competition rather than cooperation is encouraged; personal goals take precedence over group goals; people tend not to be emotionally dependent on organizations and institutions; and every individual has the right to his or her own private property, thoughts, and opinions (Samovar, Porter, & Stefani, 1998, p. 68). Thus, 'I' cultures stress individual initiative, achievement, and value individual decision making. Consequently, people from individualistic cultures tend to value equality, materialism, science and technology, progress and change, work and leisure, and competition.

### **Spiritual civilization and television**

Despite substantive mapping of the spiritual civilization program by Keane (1998), the definition of a spiritual product remains an ambiguous concept. It has a multiplicity of meanings that is forged within a loose set of practices and negotiated meaning by television viewers. According to Keane (1998), the concept is closely associated in official cultural theory with that of 'mainstream melody' (*zhuxuanlu zuopin*) works or 'works that represents life in reform China'. However, he qualifies this understanding by suggesting that such works only have to embody a positive message to be considered part of the spiritual civilization. As Keane (1998) suggests:

The ambiguity implied in these understandings allows a degree of flexibility when it comes to actually adjudging what qualifies as mainstream melody [or spiritual civilization] works, given that critical anointment often greases the corridors of censorship (p. 253).

A number of Chinese drama series fit with the general focus of the spiritual civilization program and have achieved popularity. The 1995 program *The New World* (*Xin da lu*), directed by Zi Fan, examines the issue of students emigrating to foreign countries in the 1980s (China TV Program Agency, 1995B, p. 13). Another program *Living in Shanghai* (*Jia zai Shanghai*) is set in the background of the fast developing days of the early 1990s when Shanghai Municipal Council was renovating the shanty towns and constructing the metro and elevated highways. It traces the lives of six families and two women who grasp the opportunities the changing economic environment offers and become successful modern managers. A third program *Taxis in Shanghai* (*da Shanghai chu zu che*) shows the momentum of the reforming campaign and the lives of Shanghai citizens. Each episode explores social issues such as the stock market, unemployment, consumerism, and prostitution (Shanghai Television, 1996). However, the series *Beijingers* remains the most popular program and remembered program on Chinese television, despite its broadcast seven years earlier. Furthermore, *Beijingers* remains the most poignant example of how producers have attempted to popularize such drama series as well as meet government edicts on spiritual civilization messages.

#### **Negotiating ideological discourses: *Beijingers in New York***

The broadcasting of *Beijingers* on CCTV in October 1993 created great interest among Chinese audiences. The program became the most popular drama series, rating 55.9 per cent during its initial broadcast period (Keane, 1998, p. 302). The program was well received by the people in the street (*laobaixing*) and the educated. It was also popular among a Chinese youth in the 1996-97 television survey. Of these youth, 92% had heard of the program, while 76% had watched the program at least once. Another 31% had watched series twice. Reasons for watching the show varied considerably. For example:

*Li*

I was particularly interested in those people living in the United States, especially those in New York ... I am interested in life there, the culture, and the cultural collision between Chinese culture and American culture. This is the major reason [why I watched the program].

*Lu*

I watched the program because it [the program] shows what was happening around us ... the changes that were occurring. It seemed very realistic. It had no pretentious words, pretentious plot. And I think it showed us a very strange, a very new world of American travel to Chinese eyes. I feel this was shown to broaden our eyes to see how foreigners think about things, how they deal with things, and how Chinese can understand Americans. That's why I wanted to watch, to learn from the series.

*Feng*

I watched because my aunt lives in America. I have heard many things, but I wanted to know what it was really like there.

The program derived its popularity from the writers' contemporization of the narrative in which Chinese audience could identify issues confronting them

in their daily lives. Whereas other controversial programs (such as *He Shang*) dealt with the fascination for the West, *Beijingers* was popularized through its focus on China-US relations. The series not only dealt with America, generally defined by Chinese youth as encompassing all aspects of the West, but the changing mentality of Chinese society.

The program's release came at a crucial time for the country. China had just lost the right to hold the 2000 Olympic Games to Australia. Furthermore, there was wider international political tension with ongoing debate over China's 'most favoured nation' status, human rights abuses, and general anti-American sentiment on the rise.

From 1989 to 1997, there had been no formal visitation by Chinese or American diplomats to respective countries<sup>4</sup> (Zhang, 1998, p. 14). The four years since the Tiananmen Square Incident had also seen a loosening of the Party's control over cultural management. The resulting desire for western popular culture continued the Chinese fascination with the West, which had ebbed and flowed since the early 1980s.

Given the Government's spiritual civilization campaign and the television industry's new competitive consciousness, a growing diversity of western values had permeated the once tightly controlled management of culture. The propagandists had found it difficult to strike a balance between the discourse of collectivism and individualism. Furthermore, government initiatives of program protection, subsidies, awards, and exposure encouraged writers and production houses to explore 'politically correct' and popular themes within the same program.

The changing political and industrial situations and the tenuousness of the American-Chinese relationship encouraged script writers to embellish the narrative of the original *Beijingers* novel. They created a much more complex story line that reflected the contemporary cultural dialectic between Chinese and western cultural values, which encapsulates the socialist spiritual civilization program. As if the character's struggles to make a Western dream come true were not enough, a major role for a Westerner was inscribed. In this way the main protagonist could be seen to battle and overcome the Westerner, extracting some symbolic revenge for the 'national humiliation' inflicted on China by Western powers since the 1840's. Also, in this way a linking of binary oppositions could be inserted into the text: China-West, socialism-capitalism, love-hate, power-exploitation, male-female ... The series was embellished with roles for the main protagonist's wife and a de-facto lover. Such a re-writing allowed for a moral equation to emerge, shifting the emphasize from the original 'get-rich in America story' to a more complex drama about contemporary life (Keane, 1994, p. 37).

### **The Narrative**

The series begins with the theme of the program (in English): IF YOU LOVE HIM BRING HIM TO NEW YORK FOR IT IS HEAVEN. IF YOU HATE HIM BRING HIM TO NEW YORK FOR IT IS HELL. The opening scenes introduce the four main characters to the audience. The first character is

the American David McCarthy (Robert Daly). He is obviously a man of power, displaying his materialistic trappings and wealth openly to the Chinese viewer. He is the boss of a clothing factory in New York that employs Chinese workers. Even though David is stereotypically portrayed as an aggressive and ruthless westerner, he also speaks fluent *'putong hua'*. David's use of China's 'common language' allows the viewer to simultaneously identify with the program and also inscribe the character as the main adversary to be overcome on the business battlefield because of his capitalist exploitation of the Chinese immigrant worker.

The viewer is also introduced to Ah Chun (Wang Ji), a Taiwanese-born boss (*laoban*) of an up-market Chinese restaurant. She is confident, capable, and independent. In her first scene, she arrives at the restaurant and casually tosses the keys of her red convertible sports car to an attendant. She proceeds to reprimand a junior male cashier for his incompetence. Her confidence and independence at once inscribe her with a strong sexual attractiveness for males and a role model for young female viewers.

The last two main characters are introduced in the following scene. Wang Qiming (Jiang Wen) and his wife, Guo Yan (Yan Xiaopin) arrive at New York's Kennedy Airport feeling jet-lagged and confused. Wang is carrying a case containing a cello. He is an artist in search of fame and fortune in America. However, neither Wang Qiming nor his wife can speak English. As they attempt to understand the airport announcements, the frustration and pressure spill over into an argument. The audience identifies Wang Qiming as a common Chinese person (*putong de Zhongguo ren*) through his mannerisms and strong Beijing accent.

Wang Qiming and his wife are eventually met at the airport by an aunt and her husband and they are driven to their new home in a large American car. As the car winds its way through the labyrinth of New York's streets, the bright neon lights of the big city fill the screen. This provides the audience with a glimpse of the modern society that China is striving to capture. The New York Symphony begins to play and Wang responds by announcing his arrival (in Chinese): *'Meiguo! Niu Yue! Wo shi Wang Qiming. Wo dao le'* ('America! New York! I am Wang Qiming. I have arrived').

From difficult beginnings, negotiating the threatening streets of New York, the story traces Wang Qiming's journey from 'ordinary' Beijing artist to immigrant success. However, the journey comes at a great personal cost. To gain a foothold in American society, Wang Qiming sheds his values, his Beijing identity, and finally his role as husband by divorcing his wife. His success is derived from his ability to discard his Chinese cultural values for western values (individualism). However, the change in values leads to his eventual downfall. Clearly, the narrative has a moral underpinning that relates to the dangers of materialism and wealth. However, the pursuit of wealth is matched by Wang Qiming's desire to extract revenge upon David McCarthy, who has married his former wife Guo Yan. With the assistance of Ah Chun, Wang challenges his adversary in the business world. He manages to drive David out of business. The couple's daughter, Ning Ning, arrives in New York and is appalled by her

parents' divorce and her father's loss of values. Yet, she, too, falls into the maelstrom of American society and loses her Chinese identity. The final chapter in Wang's American odyssey sees his life unravel because he has failed to understand the basic logic of capitalism and his successes evaporate in the economic downturn of the late 1980s.

### Methodology

The article employs a qualitative methodology to explore youth interpretations of the discourse of individualism and collectivism and the integration of western values into their cultural identity. The examination is derived through a range of interviews with seven 'upwardly mobile' Shanghai youth (see Figure 1). I have drawn from the western categorisation of 'upwardly mobile' youth in name only. These youth do exhibit traits similar to those of their western counterparts such as career and consumer-orientation, affluence, and education. However, I use the term 'upwardly mobile' as a reference point to identify these youth's active engagement with, and creative appropriation of, western cultural values through television for the advancement of personal objectives. It is important to emphasize that these youth are *not* westernized but western-orientated. They embrace and exhibit individualistic values of materialism, individual initiative, desire for achievement, equality, progress and change, work and leisure, and competition. Yet, the articulation of these individualistic values in the every day lives of these youth manifests within a strong cultural heritage dominated by their collectivist value system.

**Figure 1 Profile of Study Participants**

Name	Age	Sex	Place of origin	Education	Occupation
Yu	22	Female	Jiangsu	Bachelor of English Literature	Secretary/interpreter
Lu	21	Female	Xi'an	Completing a Bachelor of Marketing and Tourism	Student
Kerry	24	Male	Beijing	Bachelor of Finance	Entrepreneur
Li	23	Male	Shanghai	Bachelor of English Literature	Student
Xiao Tong	28	Male	Shenyang	Bachelor of Finance	Financial Controller
Jun	26	Male	Beijing	Bachelor of Public Relations	Public Relations Manager
Feng	30	Male	Shanghai	High school certificate	Waiter

I provided a framework of seven open-ended questions to respondents to help them articulate their interpretation of the competing discourses of individualism and collectivism.

1. Why did you initially want to watch the series?
2. Which character in the series did you like the most? Why?
3. Did your opinion of the series and characters change from the first episode to the concluding episode?
4. Do you think the series was realistic of Chinese people and western society?
5. What is the main message of the series? What do the writers want to tell Chinese people?

6. Has the series changed your opinion about life in America or western society?
7. What did you learn from the series? How have you used the knowledge gained since the series was broadcast in 1993?

While the questions framed the discussion, these youth were encouraged to explore the topic through a semi-structured interview strategy. I employed a cross-case approach to the analysis of this data because responses from youth to interview questions were diverse and numerous. This structure, therefore, allowed me to group together the answers to a common set of questions and to analyse different perspectives on the central issue of negotiating the dominant individualist and collectivist discourse in *Beijingers*. The interview data, combined to provide the 'thick description' of the youth's television-related interpersonal experiences.

Because these youth actively seek contact with western culture, their negotiation of the series's key aspects of differences in social relationships, lack of a family reference point, and the differences between American and Chinese values are important on three levels. First, interpretations of *Beijingers* by these youth provide an insight into their negotiation of the discourses of collectivism and individualism. Second, the interpretations provide an avenue to understand how these youth generate meaning through a process of tensions between similarity and difference and the expected and the unexpected. Finally, these youth's interpretations provide an understanding of how they see individualist values as part of their everyday urban lives.

#### **Youth interpretations of the characters**

Even though the narrative predominantly follows the experiences of Wang Qiming in New York, the majority of youth did not identify with this character. Instead, five of the seven youth identified with the character Ah Chun. For example:

*Yu*

I like Ah Chun. This person could never get lost in herself. She was very confident. She always knew what she should do and what she should not do. And her personality was a clear contrast from the other female character, Wang Qiming's wife, very much a clear contrast.

*Lu*

The one I like the most was Ah Chun because she is a heroine of most Chinese people. And I think she has much stronger feelings than Wang Qiming. Sometimes she is more colourful and she can deal with her difficulties with her cleverness. As discussed in the previous section, the concept of moral values underpins the narrative. In particular, the narrative focuses on Wang Qiming as he sheds his Chinese values, and finally loses his Chinese identity, to western values of materialism and wealth. However, youth readings of the text focused on different and unexpected aspects. Youth interpretations of the characters

relate to the more positive aspects of Ah Chun and Wang Qiming by juxtaposing the less appealing traits of other characters. For example, both Yu and Lu identified with Ah Chun's confidence and strong personality as opposed to the weakness of character found in Guo Yan's personality. The identification of such traits as strengths are significant because women have been traditionally placed in subservient roles to men within Chinese society, based on the Confucian ideal of father-son lineage. However, Yu and Lu's identification with Ah Chun indicates that they see her as a much more positive role model for women to gain equality in Chinese society. As Lu suggests, Ah Chun was a 'heroine of most Chinese people'. This ability to identify with Ah Chun as a role model reflects both Yu and Lu's adoption of the individualistic value of equality into their cultural identities.

There are, however, even further re-positionings of traditional cultural values (i.e. sacrifice) by Yu within her more contemporary view of relationships. For example:

*Yu*

... when they [Wang Qiming and Guo Yan] decide to go abroad they are quite confident because they think their professions are quite good and they have an aunt there and they could get some financial help. But actually when they land in the United States, their aunt just picked them up at the airport and took them to a basement. Actually, the aunt did not give them any help, especially in finance. From that moment on they have a lot of disappointments ... So they complain and they quarrel and finally ... they decide to go back to China. But when they near the airport in the taxi, they change their mind. One reason is their fear of losing face when they go back to China. And they think, even though they return to China, maybe their marriage is still there but actually their love and their feelings have changed. They don't love each other any more. Even though they may save their marriage, they don't think this would be good for each of them. They decide not to go back and they separate. Before they are hesitant ... frightened to make such a decision. Because they came to the United States together they were dependent on each other. So when they separate they have to rely on themselves. I am very impressed by that plot. Suddenly, they cannot live together any more and they know they cannot save their marriage. The best choice they could make is to separate. It is about sacrifice.

Given that sacrifice is firmly entrenched within Confucianism and Chinese social relationships, clearly Yu has re-positioned her understanding of this concept within the individualist value system. Normally, a divorce would constitute a loss of face for the husband and wife and their families within traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, divorce would be avoided at all costs because it would bring shame and embarrassment to all parties. However, Yu agrees with the decision to separate, which would allow Wang Qiming and Guo Yan to go their separate ways. Clearly, Yu supports the individualistic value of independence over collectivist's notion of 'we' culture, which advocates harmony and emotional dependence. Therefore, this reading of the relational situation shows how Yu has incorporated individualistic values into her cultural

identity. This ability to mobilize individualist values can be linked to other television experiences as forms of social learning. For example, she has experienced similar relational issues and value transmissions found in the Japanese soap opera *All for Love*.

Yu's television experiences provide her with a forum to mobilize western values for resolving relational issues. This absorption of western values into her cultural identity also allows her to accept cultural contradictions and incongruence that emerge in *Beijingers*. For example, Yu choose not to identify the aunt's failure to observe the traditional value of obligation when Wang Qiming and Guo Yan arrived in New York. In a collectivist culture, people belong to extended families or other ingroups, which continue to protect them in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede, 1994, p. 67). Within this 'we' culture framework, the aunt would be obligated to assist a relative in a similar situation to that faced by Wang Qiming and his wife. However, the aunt's lack of adherence to these cultural mores is designed to highlight the selfish nature of the western value system or 'I' culture. Clearly, Yu's exposure to western values through her study, employment, and television experiences allows her to accept this cultural incongruence. For Yu, the aunt's display of individualistic values is not unexpected or dissimilar from what she perceives as a normal part of her own cultural identity. However, Lu finds the same situation culturally unsettling.

#### *Lu*

It [the program] showed us how a Chinese person lived in a capitalist country. It showed us the difficulty of living abroad, also the poor relationships that can develop abroad. It impressed me most when in the first episode the character Guo Yan flies with her husband to New York and her aunt picked her up. She dreamed that her aunt would give her a beautiful welcome, offer them some food and a job. But to her great surprise, when her aunt picked her up, she said: "Well since you came to New York some people said it is Heaven and some people said of New York it is Hell but this can only be found by yourself. So now I have finished my duty and now I lend you \$300. You must repay me two months later with profit." I think this situation is quite impossible because of the traditional values of the Chinese. It is your relative, the sister of your mother [emphasized with a tone of disbelief]. It couldn't be so difficult for you to help. If you fly thousands of miles across the Atlantic from Beijing to New York, I think your aunt should at least receive you, provide you with a big house, serve you and treat you with lunch. I think this is the lowest demand. But when I finished watching the show his aunt could not be criticized. I think she became this way because of the whole society.

Lu's expectation was for the aunt to display the collectivist values of protection of members of the ingroup (i.e. relatives). As Lu suggests, this situation was 'quite impossible'. For Lu, such a situation required the aunt to adhere to her collectivist values in order to maintain harmony within the family relationship and avoid confrontation. This commitment to Chinese values traverses geography and time, because 'it is your relative ... the sister of your mother' (Lu). However, Lu is also willing to relinquish her strong cultural

stance. As she suggests, 'when I finished watching the show his aunt could not be criticized. I think she became this way because of the whole society'. Therefore, Lu can ultimately identify with the aunt because she can see benefits in integrating western values into her own life. For example:

*Lu*

In many ways Chinese people, if they want to win at their jobs in China, must act like what Ah Chun told Wang Qiming. I think it is quite necessary to master this western sort of thinking. In some ways, western values stand for the latest way of thinking. Sometimes they have helped me to make decisions such as the decisions about career and education. In my career choice, many western people are very conscientious. They love their work. And they dedicate themselves to their work and sometimes disregard their families ... their own living conditions. I like these kinds of values.

As the data clearly demonstrates, Lu identifies strongly with collectivist values (i.e. maintenance of harmony and avoidance of confrontation) in relation to the aunt's behaviour. Yet, she can also mobilize individualistic values when required to achieve personal goals (i.e. career and education). For example, she sees no contradiction in shifting between 'we' and 'I' values, which stress individual initiative and achievement and personal goals take precedence over group goals (i.e. family or ingroup).

Male youth also identified with Ah Chun, but from a different perspective. Xiao Tong, Jun, and Feng's identification with Ah Chun was based on balancing sexuality with intelligence. All three felt that the actress Wang Ji was 'beautiful'. Yet, they also admired similar traits to those identified by Lu and Yu. For example, Xiao Tong moved beyond the superficiality of outward beauty to identify with her intellectual capacity as a business person (*laoban*).

*Xiao Tong*

I think I liked Ah Chun and Wang Qiming. But I think I like Ah Chun the most. She is very beautiful [nervous laughter]. The actress called Wang Ji, she played the part very well. She is the boss of a restaurant in New York, then she met Wang Qiming. Perhaps because she loves Wang Qiming, she sold the restaurant to help him open a garment factory. She is very smart, very clever. She does a good favour for Wang Qiming.

Even though beauty and intelligence are admired by these male youth, there are underpinnings of collectivist values. Clearly, the value of sacrifice is evident in Xiao Tong's interpretation of the character. Yet, his identification with Ah Chun differs considerable from that of Yu and Lu. Whereas the women identified with Ah Chun as leaders of women's rights for equality, Xiao Tong's interpretation focused on the woman's role to sacrifice for the man. He admires Ah Chun's decision to sacrifice to sell the restaurant in order for Wang Qiming to achieve his goals. This interpretation links more with traditional Confucian ideals than collectivist values, although there is an obvious link to family-ism or group orientation. For example, the Confucian ideal suggests that norms govern how people should act and behave in relationships that are hierarchical

(husband to wife) (Fan, 1995). Therefore, Ah Chun must sacrifice her business for Wang Qiming. This notion of sacrifice links into collectivist value of harmony, where prosperity comes from stability (Aufrecht & Li, 1995).

Other youth, however, focussed solely on Wang Qiming as their most favoured character.

#### *Li*

At first, I did not like the minor woman character Guo Yan. I think she is tender and loving, but she lacked the kind of courage to live abroad. She married an American in order to continue to live abroad, but not to work or to get some things for herself. As for the major male character Wang Qiming, I think he is good. He is a typical Beijingsese, although I don't like Beijingsese very much. But I think he has some courage at least. And I think that is very important and that counts in these situations of travelling abroad.

#### *Kerry*

Wang Qiming, because he is a man I am a man. He met a lot of troubles, but he had the courage to settle them. This is like me. I have met a lot of troubles and I have tried to find courage and be successful.

In a similar situation to the youth that chose Ah Chun, both Kerry and Li focussed predominantly on the positive personality traits of Wang Qiming. Significantly, references to Wang Qiming's loss of values or identity are absent from their interpretations. In fact, both Li and Kerry identify Wang Qiming's 'courage' as a positive personality trait. In Confucianism, courage<sup>5</sup> is counted as major virtue. Where these readings of Wang Qiming begin to diverge from one another is in the subtlety of their association with the 'ordinariness' of the character. Yet, both youth draw an association between the character and their own lives.

The positioning of Wang Qiming as an ordinary Chinese person is accounted for on a number of levels. On one level, Wang Qiming is identified as an 'ordinary' Chinese person through his gestures, mannerisms, and speech. Yet, he is far from a model or mature Chinese person, which is accentuated by his situatedness in New York and the associated pressures of dealing with culture shock. On another level, Wang Qiming is positioned as a 'native of Beijing'. This is instinctively recognisable for the viewer (especially the Shanghainese) through his speech, which defines him as an inhabitant of the Chinese capital. This aspect is evident in Li's comment on Wang Qiming as 'a typical Beijingsese'. Keane (1994) suggests that subjective orientation in relation to regional prejudices will always exist and will always influence readings of texts. If this orientation holds true, then the interpretations of Wang Qiming by Li (Shanghainese) and Kerry (Beijingsese) should be influenced by their 'regional prejudices'.

Wang Qiming's ordinariness is accentuated through his relative lack of power. He arrives in New York with the sense of worth drawn from his status as a musician. When his identity as a musician is eroded, the inevitability of his powerlessness in this situation is realised. In other words, he is nothing special,

just another Chinese immigrant in search of the American dream. It is not until he casts aside the ordinariness upon which the narrative rests to acquire the wherewithal to aspire to greater things.

It is this notion of 'ordinariness' within the narrative that aids Li's identification with Wang Qiming but inhibits his ability relates to Guo Yan. Li identifies with the realistic portrayal of Wang Qiming's negotiation of a foreign culture and the problems he faces. Wang Qiming's demonstration of 'courage' to realise his dream provides the point at which Li can identify with the character. Clearly, Li identifies with Wang Qiming's as a representative of an 'ordinary' Chinese person in the new world of the United States. As Li suggests, this demonstration of courage 'is very important and that counts in these situations of travelling abroad'. Li's identification with Wang Qiming is derived from his ability to empathize with the character's aspirations, because he too wants to travel overseas to study in the United States.

This linking into the notion of courage is derived from both collectivist and individualistic value systems. As mentioned earlier, courage is considered a virtue within the Confucian ideal. Lau (1979) suggests that courage becomes an indispensable virtue 'to see his moral purpose through, because he has to pursue that purpose fearlessly, and only "the man of courage is never afraid"' (p. 24). Therefore, Li's admiration for Wang Qiming to achieve his purpose and to be fearless is drawn from his traditional cultural values. However, Li's empathy for Wang Qiming's courage helps to fortify his own personal goal of travelling abroad to study. This identification with Wang Qiming's courage is derived through individualistic values of individual initiative and achievement.

Li's integration of 'I' culture values into his Chinese cultural identity is reinforced through his inability to identify with Guo Yan. For example, the divorce creates a situation whereby the wealthy boss (*laoban*) of the garment factory, David, preys upon Guo Yan. She is faced with few options. She cannot return home to China as this would be a loss of face for her family. With nowhere to go, Guo Yan marries David. Later in the series, this relationship disintegrates and she is left drifting aimlessly in New York.

Li finds it difficult to identify with this lack of courage displayed by Guo Yan. As Li's interpretation suggests, Guo Yan 'married the American in order to live abroad'. Given his individualistic aspirations to travel abroad, Li clearly sees this situation as an opportunity unrealised. Instead of pursuing her original dream, Guo Yan withdraws from the 'battle' and pursues financial security. This reinforces the moral motif of this series in relation to pursuit of wealth and materialism found in the arms of westerner David McCarthy. However, Li's inability to identify with Guo Yan is linked with her lack of ambition in this situation. As he suggests, Guo Yan should have continued on 'to work and get something for herself'. Li's interpretation indicates that individualistic values of ambition, individual betterment, and materialism have become part of his cultural identity.

On the other hand, Kerry identifies with Wang Qiming through another avenue. This ability to identify with the character does not emerge through living or studying abroad, but in relation to his life. As a former Beijing resident, it is

easier for Kerry to identify with Wang Qiming's 'ordinariness' because his mannerisms, speech, and gestures are familiar because of his time spent living in Beijing. However, Kerry's interpretations suggest a much closer identification with Wang Qiming as immigrant and businessman. For example, Wang Qiming has his status stripped away on his journey to realise his dream. The Wang Qiming the audience sees in episode one is far from the man they see in later episodes.

As the series progresses, Wang Qiming moves from artist to poor immigrant to businessman. In doing so, he becomes symbolically located in the discourses of national humiliation, exploitation, revolution and liberation, and finally individualism. As an artist in Beijing he was a respected person. However, he finds it impossible to obtain employment as a musician in New York. When Wang Qiming tells a man he meets at a gas station that he is an artist, the man ridicules and humiliates him. Without his ability to earn a living as an artist, he is reduced to performing humiliating, menial tasks in restaurants. Wang Qiming's life is turned around when his perseverance and inside knowledge from his estranged wife culminates in his first business success. This success liberates Wang Qiming from his situation of humiliation and exploitation. He vows on Mao Tse-Tung's name to become rich. In doing so, Wang Qiming casts aside the remaining remnants of his Chinese values and identity by achieving his dream of becoming a successful businessman by driving his adversary, David, out of business. By exacting revenge upon David, he wipes away the last grain of humiliation.

It is within a number of these discourses that Kerry can identify with Wang Qiming through his own life experiences. On a personal level, Kerry inhabits the character of Wang Qiming as Chinese immigrant. Kerry's decision to leave Beijing for Xi'an, and then to travel to Shanghai, links closely into the underlying metaphor that the series embraces - that of a journeyman in search of a dream. Moreover, Kerry can also identify with Wang Qiming's personal sacrifice of leaving his family and the loss of a 'loved one' during the journey. As Kerry recalled, he decided to leave his girlfriend in Xi'an in search of success as an entrepreneur in Shanghai.

On a business level, Kerry's arrival in Shanghai proved a liberating experience. He found an avenue to use the knowledge gained at university by investing in the stock market and realising his own dream of business success. However, a run of poor investments and financial losses contributed to Kerry's loss of 'face', bringing shame and humiliation. Yet, once the investment return improved, Kerry's life changed. This situation is similar to the situation faced by Wang Qiming. As soon as Wang Qiming gains the upper hand in his battle with David McCarthy, the subject positioning of ordinary citizen is considerably weakened. Like Wang Qiming, the stockmarket success experienced by Kerry shifts his position from ordinary itinerant worker (*putong de Zhongguo ren*) to businessman (or, in this situation, an entrepreneur). This shift is defined through the inspiration Kerry draws from Wang Qiming's courage when confronted by 'troubles'. As he suggests, Wang Qiming 'met a lot of troubles [and] this like me ... I have tried to find courage and be successful'.

In doing so, Kerry's interpretation fails to link in with the overall moral motif of the series, which emphasizes the dangers of wealth and materialism. Whereas the identification with newfound wealth and materialistic lifestyle is problematic for many Chinese viewers, these aspects fit comfortably with Kerry's own entrepreneurial identity. In fact, it is the desire to be successful and wealthy that drives Kerry's ambition to be an entrepreneur. He openly displays his wealth and materialism through his middle class lifestyle by living by himself in a two-bedroom apartment, which he secured through his contacts and relationships (*guanxi*).

This open display of wealth, materialism, and use of contacts, is not surprising considering Kerry's open rejection of the spiritual civilisation program. Therefore, Kerry's interpretation of the program, to a point, links with the characteristics inscribed in Wang Qiming's character but not with the moral motif of the narrative. Furthermore, Kerry's close linking of his own experiences to those of Wang Qiming's struggles reinforces how actively and creatively he appropriates television to achieve personal objectives. Ironically, it is the Confucian virtue of courage Kerry draws on to support his drive to achieve his individualistic goals.

Clearly, Kerry has the ability to fuse together collectivist values and individualistic values. However, more so than any other upwardly mobile youth in this study, Kerry embraces and displays 'I' culture values. His displays of materialism, individual initiative, progress and change, work and leisure (visiting student bars), competition, and rights to his own property clearly illustrates his adoption of 'I' values.

#### **Youth interpretations of the series**

The above discussion indicates that these Shanghai youth do not substantially link their interpretations of the characters to the moral motif of the television series. In fact, a number of the youth identify with a range of positive aspects that they in turn link to, or associate with, their own lives. More importantly, youth have integrated 'I' cultural values into their Chinese cultural identity and mobilize an individualistic consciousness for particular purposes. These purposes range from understanding relational issues to realising business success. As expected, though, there are underlying tensions existing within each of the youth's interpretations. These tensions occur as youth attempt to balance the contradictions when collectivist and individualistic values merge within socialist spiritual civilisation. This notion of balancing traditional and western values is explored further by focussing specifically on what youth consider is the main message of the program, and how their interpretations correlate with the processes of individuation and identification.

*Yu*

I think [the main message of the series] is to let people, especially those youth who have a lot of expectations about the future, know that the outside world is not like what they think, this is so beautiful and colourful. Though it is colourful, it is very, very cruel. As [the] series says, it can be "Heaven and it can

be Hell.” There are a lot of unexpected things that can happen if you are not well prepared. You just don’t know how to face it.

*Li*

I don’t believe Chinese society is as realistic as that of the Americans. When Chinese people live in the United States they have to be realistic ... because otherwise they would not make a living. By this I mean, a kind of adopting of western values. But they should not lose their own values and, therefore, do not lose themselves in the United States, otherwise this would not be a very exciting film .... I believe this [series] is trying to tell us something about the cultural collision between China and the United ... why Americans know little about the Chinese while the Chinese know a lot more about Americans. The problem lies in that the world, and the Chinese people themselves, introduced a lot of cultural material ... films, television ... to China and China exported very little in return. This makes it very difficult for Americans to understand Chinese, their values, living customs, everything. I think the director is telling the audience that the collision between China and the United States must be faced. But the problem is not in the one who blends Chinese culture with American culture. This is not bad. It is realistic to have these kinds of mixed characteristics.

*Jun*

I think they [the Government] were trying to persuade people, to give them the full picture that America is not Heaven and it is also not Hell. It’s a mirror with two faces. They [the Government] want us to hear about the kind of information that focuses on how Chinese can survive in any place. They are just saying that there is a better way to overcome our differences and be successful in our own country rather than leaving (contemptuous tone). This is the Government’s attempt to stop what is called the ‘brain drain’ [whereby students study abroad and then remain in that country]. As the data indicates, these Shanghai youth’s readings of the program do not directly focus on the moral motif of the dangers of materialism and wealth. However, youth do recognize that the program is attempting to address issues relating to the loss of one’s Chinese identity through the wholesale adoption of western cultural values. As Li suggests, ‘they [Chinese people] should not lose their own values and therefore do not lose themselves in the United States’. Because Li is considering studying abroad, his interpretation focuses on the situation when the cultures collide.

Both Yu’s and Jun’s interpretations of the program, however, are more sophisticated. They read the main message of the program as a warning but from different perspectives. Both youth reiterate the main theme of the series that New York can be ‘Heaven and it can be Hell’ to emphasize the program’s attempts to warn youth to be selective about their adoption of western values. For instance, Yu interprets the main message of the program as an attempt to balance youth’s ‘expectations of the future’ with the reality of individualistic society and culture. This situation is similar to her own life in which she attempts to balance

collectivist values with individualistic values. For example, Yu openly displays the 'I' cultural values of materialism and ambition. She embraces a western lifestyle through the clothes she wears, the music she listens to, and the television programs she watches. Yu is also ambitious and is comfortable with 'I' culture values of change and progress. She is planning to improve her career by joining the Hong Kong Bank as a secretary.

*Yu*

If I think something will benefit me, I will do it. If it doesn't then I won't. I think this is a good opportunity for me. After graduating from my undergraduate in English literature at Nanjing University, I wanted a job so I could use my English and this job I have now was good for that. Now I feel I want to move into something else.

Yu believes that despite her adoption of western values, she remains conscious of her Chinese cultural identity. However, she does not feel that Chinese youth are aware of the consequences of discarding one's cultural heritage.

*Yu*

Western influences affect a lot of Chinese youth in their ways of thinking and in some ways of doing some things, and in some of their decisions. I think my way of thinking is very traditional Chinese. But western things influence me too, through television, but I am still conscious of my Chinese tradition. I think though some youth are not conscious of their Chinese tradition. They admire and are excited about those outside things. They are excited about these things because they are new. They haven't taken the time to think about western values. They haven't taken the time to compare between western and Chinese values. So they don't know what they really like. But actually when they have to make an important decision they become conscious of their Chinese values.

Jun's interpretation, however, directly links into Government's propaganda strategies. His sophisticated reading is drawn from his knowledge of the Chinese Government and its relationship with the media through his position as a public relations practitioner. For him, the program represents a subtle way for the Government to dissuade youth from adopting a range of unapproved western values. Clearly, though, Jun has chosen not to accept the Government's warning in relation to materialism and wealth. This situation is reinforced through the contemptuous tone in which he spoke of the Government's spiritual civilisation program. Furthermore, Jun, like Kerry, has established a lifestyle that reflects the very aspects the series highlights as dangerous. He openly displays his materialistic lifestyle and wealth through his luxury one-bedroom apartment and its furnishings (two colour television sets, video recorder, 75 of the top 100 US movies on DVD and a player).

Even though these youth identify the moral motif of the series, their behaviours and attitudes indicate that they also embrace individualistic values and attempt to integrate these into their lives. The result is that a number of the

youth (Jun, Kerry, and Yu) openly embrace the very aspects the program's moral motif depicts as dangerous (ie. wealth and materialism).

Xiao Tong, on the other hand, has successfully achieved the amalgamation of individualistic values into his cultural identity without displacing his collectivist values. He directly links his interpretation of the main message of the series to his own life, although not in the same practical way Kerry did.

#### *Xiao Tong*

I think the program was telling me what American is about. The program is telling me of the problems Chinese people may have if they move to a foreign land. If you live in an American city you have to change. It is necessary. You must change to fit society. I think Chinese people must change now. China is developing so quickly. If you want to catch the development you must change. You must be able to adapt to new ways. Like me, I used to live in Shenyang and now I live in Shanghai. I had to adapt because it is very different.

Xiao Tong feels comfortable with the individualistic values of progress and change that 'I' culture embraces. He realises he has to 'adapt to new ways' so he can take advantage of opportunities and realise personal career goals. Yet, even though Xiao Tong displays individualistic values by pursuing his career away from his home (and his family), his ability to manage western cultural values in a way that complements his Chinese cultural values is significant.

On successfully securing a position with a Philippine beer producing company in Shenyang, Xiao Tong immediately planned his return home to his family. On one level, it could be argued that Xiao Tong's return home was predominantly driven by his adopted 'I' culture values of progress and change and ambition to secure a better position in a western company. However, this would not account for a range of deeper cultural values that play a significant role in Xiao Tong's everyday life. For example, his decision to travel to Shanghai to pursue his career is balanced by his unswerving desire to return home to his family in Shenyang. In fact, Xiao Tong gained enough experience, knowledge, and skills in early 1997 to give him the confidence to apply for positions with western companies close to home in Shenyang.

Xiao Tong's short-term individualistic-driven goal to improve his career in Shanghai is balanced by his long-term collectivist-driven orientation. First, Xiao Tong, by gaining a position as the Financial Controller in Shanghai and then Shenyang, has increased the status of his family within their community through his success. In this situation, the notions of success and status work seamlessly within a number of traditional cultural levels. His success in Shanghai and subsequent return to his home immediately upon securing employment, demonstrates his responsibility to his parents (filial piety). Furthermore, Norman's return to his home reinstates harmony within the ingroup by restoring the balance of the family unit. On another level, a higher paid position in a western company reinforces more contemporary Chinese values promoted through Deng's edict that 'to get rich is glorious'. This brings further status to the family.

Clearly, Xiao Tong has the ability to mobilize individualistic values and weaves these seamlessly into his collectivist identity. The mobilization of 'I' culture values (such as ambition, progress and change) are strategically embraced to complement the fundamental collectivist values of responsibility, harmony, sacrifice, and filial piety.

### **Chinese youth values and the role of television**

Drama programs designed to communicate the spiritual civilization program clearly attempt to provoke Chinese viewers to question the attractiveness of certain western cultural values while supporting others. Some youth see some western values depicted in foreign programming creating unrealistic expectations for youth, which in turn undermines traditional cultural values. For example:

*Li*

Mostly speaking, and let me be frank, Chinese youth are affected by those things that are not so good from films and television, rather than what is good, what is appreciable. Not necessarily the worst, but just not what is good. To make it clear. The living standards, living habits of western people differs a lot from Chinese people. But Chinese youth adapt to this very, every easily and become addicted to this kind of living. And this is, if not destructive, at least not good for China because China is not a wealth country. It creates expectations that cannot be met.

So they have substituted their Chinese values ...

yes, yes, for American values, which are not practical in China such as hedonism, materialism, yes. Sometimes, if we do not want to use a derogatory word, romanticism.

*Lu*

I think the greatest difference between the past two generations is responsibility. In the past generation, the people were very united in their hearts as Chinese. They regarded duty as very important and they take greater responsibility towards their family. They would regard divorce as a very terrible thing. If you married someone, you should follow him until death. If someone was divorced, then this was very surprising. So from that phenomena, you could say they [past generation] was very responsible. But now, the current generation has taken ideas that are more like western values from mediums like television and books. They are not willing to take responsibility for some things, especially those things that do not concern themselves.

The data, however, indicates how tensions have emerged because of the amalgamation of traditional Chinese values with western values within some youth's cultural identity. Both Li and Lu identify television as one of the main avenues for youth to adopt less beneficial western values of 'materialism' and 'hedonism', which they suggest undermine the Chinese value of responsibility to the family. Yet, while youth are criticising western values (i.e. materialism and hedonism) for their impact on cultural values, they are simultaneously

displaying other western values (ambition and individualism) which may lead to similar consequences. For example, Lu admires the kind of western values that involve those who 'dedicate themselves to their work and sometimes disregard their families ... their living conditions'. However, she found the lack of responsibility by the aunt in *Beijingers* as 'quite impossible'. While such statements appear to contradict, the reality of combining collectivist and individualistic values to achieve personal goals seems less problematic. These youth clearly have the ability to mobilize individualistic values in ways that complement their collectivist cultural identity.

Other youth believe that Chinese tradition remains a conscious part of young people's lives, even though they may have adopted a range of individualistic values into their Chinese identity. For example:

*Yu*

I think, in my opinion, Chinese youth thinking has become more and more independent ... but thinking is thinking. When they actually have to do something, they will perhaps be influenced by their family, their parents, even their grandparents, and the community in which they live. They cannot ignore this outside influence, they cannot. Even though they just want to be independent, they won't ignore those traditional habits, traditional manners. When they actually do something, make an important decision, they will consider the traditional values.

From the data, it is clear that Yu believes youth are tempted by western values, through television and subsequent western culture. As Yu has admitted, she is 'influenced by western things'. However, this does not indicate that she has abandoned their Chinese values. Yu draws a clear distinction between thinking and acting when it comes to youth values and their decision making on life issues. In other words, Chinese youth have the ability to mobilize individualistic values to achieve personal objectives (for example careers or relational needs). Yet, as the analysis shows, collectivist values (filial piety, responsibility, sacrifice, and family) continue to play a conscious role in the lives of these upwardly mobile youth's decision making.

### **Conclusion**

This article examined interpretations of *Beijingers*' moral motif through the cultural filters of selected Shanghai youth. Given that this television program is an example of the use of television drama to disseminate socialist spiritual civilization, the analysis revealed these youth responses to the language of the new socio-economic order (quasi-capitalism) combined with the cultural (morality and ethics) and ideological (political dictatorship) assumptions.

The research findings highlight propagandists' problem in balancing the discourses of collectivism and individualism. These youth clearly recognize attempts to simultaneously promote individualistic values that instruct them in modern ways of commerce and fair exchange and warn them of dangers of materialism and wealth. Clearly, these youth actively mobilize individualistic values to achieve success within competitive environment. Some youth (Yu,

Xiao Tong, Lu, and Li) have successfully managed to integrate and mobilize individualistic values (ambition and progress and change) to achieve personal objectives within the framework of collectivist values (filial piety, responsibility, harmony, and sacrifice). As Yu suggests, even though youth have become more independent in their thinking, they 'won't ignore those traditional habits, traditional manners ... they will consider their traditional values'. However, less desirable individualistic values of materialism and wealth, at least from a government perspective, have emerged more distinctly in the cultural identity of other youth (Kerry and Jun). Clearly, both youth recognize and reject the Government's persuasive strategies and sophisticated imagery as impediments to their individual success. Both youth have established lifestyles that reflect the very aspects the program *Beijingers* highlights as dangerous. They openly articulate their individualistic aspirations and display their materialistic lifestyles and wealth through their living conditions.

Theoretically, the study provides some interesting findings. The processes of individuation and identification can operate simultaneously. However, the perception of youth preference for western values over Chinese values supports concerns of erosion of tradition. Conversely, there is evidence to suggest that these youth can balance the two value systems within a pragmatic framework of personal objectives related to business, career, or social activities. Therefore, the concepts of individuation and identification are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The defining element, in this situation, is how those values are fostered within particular social settings. This situation provides an avenue for further research to test these findings across other social environments in China.

#### Footnotes

1. The survey was conducted between November 1996 and July 1997 as part of my PhD research on Chinese youth, television, and cultural identity (Weber, 1999).
2. The question recorded the number of mentions youth made against 27 program types across for the four programming genres of drama, sport, information, and light entertainment. This question was based on the original work of Lull and Sun (1990), which examined the viewing preferences of Chinese families in the mid 1980s.
3. The 'Golden Period' is prime time viewing (between 7-9 pm) on Chinese television.
4. In May 1989, Wan Li, chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, was invited to the United States. A reciprocal visit was not undertaken until March 24, 1997, when US Vice-President Al Gore was invited to visit China. During the visit, Chinese President Jiang Zemin put forward the three principles for handling the Sino-US relations – adherence to common interests, farsightedness, and proper handling of the Taiwan issue by observing the three Sino-US joint communiqués in the 1980s.

5. The following saying was attributed to Confucius in the *Chung ynung (The Mean)*: 'Wisdom, benevolence, and courage, these three are virtues universally acknowledged in the Empire' (Lau, 1979, p. 24).

## References

- Aufrecht, S. & Li, S. (1995, March/April). Reform with Chinese characteristics: The context of Chinese civil service reform. *Public Administration Review*, 5(2), 175-182.
- China TV Program Agency, (1995B). *Chinese TV programs*. Beijing: China TV
- Fan, X. (1995, Winter). The Chinese cultural system: Implications for cross-cultural management. *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, 14-20.
- Guo-Ming, C. & Starosta, W. (1998). *Foundations of intercultural communication*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Hall, E. (1959). *The silent language*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Hall, E. (1976). *Beyond culture*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books.
- Hofstede, G. (1993). The cultural relativity of organisational practices and theories. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 75, 223-245.
- Hofstede, G. (1994). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind. International cooperation and its importance for survival*. London: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Huang, Yu. (1994). Peaceful evolution: The case of television reforms in post-Mao China. *Media, Culture & Society*, 16(2), 217-242.
- Keane, M. (1994). China's new revolutionary role models: Television drama and urban consumerism. Unpublished paper. Brisbane: School of Modern Asian Studies, Griffith University.
- Keane, M. (1998, November). Television, the market, and state management of culture in urban China. Unpublished doctoral thesis presented to the School of Modern Asian Studies, Griffith University, Brisbane.
- Lau, D.C. (1979). *Confucius: The Analects (Lun yu)*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books.
- Lull, J. and Se-Wen, S. (1990). Agent of modernization: Television and urban Chinese families. In J. Lull. (1990). *World families watch television* (pp. 193-236). NewBury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lustig, M. & Koester, J. (1996). *Intercultural competence: Interpersonal communication across cultures (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- McLaren, A. (1998). Chinese cultural revivalism: Changing gender constructions in the Yangtze River delta. In K. Sen & M. Stivens (Eds.). *Gender and power in affluent Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Reed, S. (1995, May 29). China: move over Karl Marx – here comes Confucius. *Business Week*, 53.
- Reykowski, S. (1994). Individualism and collectivism: A theoretical approach. In U. Kim, H. Triandis, C. Kagitcibasi, S. Choi, G. Yoon. *Individualism and*

- collectivism: Theory, method, and application* (pp. 279-294). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rosen, S. (1992). Students and the state in China: The crisis in ideology and organization. In A. Rosenbaun (Ed.). *State and society in China: The consequences of reform*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Samovar, L., Porter, R. & Stefani, L. (1998). *Communication between cultures* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Shanghai Star*. (1996, December 10). Spiritual civilization emphasized, 1.
- Shanghai Television. (1996). *Television programs of STV*. Shanghai: STV Program Acquisition & Sales Center.
- Weber, I. (1999). Shanghai Youth, television, and cultural identity: An ethnographic portrait. A doctoral thesis submitted to Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.
- Zhang, L. (1998, June 29-July5). Chronology in Sino-US relations. *Beijing Review*, 14-17.