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### Cultural Differences Behind University Admission Advertising Campaigns in China and the US

Every university intends to attract excellent students. Therefore, when it comes to the admission season, universities spare no efforts to advertise and “sell” themselves. However, different universities have different advertising strategies, especially universities within different cultures. Both well-known and acclaimed in their own country, Peking University in China and Yale University in the US can be two typical examples stand for two cultures’ admission advertising campaigns. At first glance, the two advertising campaigns both use the admission advertising videos and admission websites, which makes their advertising campaigns similar. However, the two admission advertising campaigns reflect different cultural values among which the modes of thinking, means of expression and ways of dealing with affairs are three conspicuous aspects represented in the campaigns. Although the two advertising campaigns have the same representations of videos and websites, the distinctions in culture values emerged by details makes them worlds apart which drives me to delve the two campaigns combining the ideas in Carolyn A. Lin’s article called “Cultural Values Reflected in Chinese and American Television Advertising” of which the main argument is stated in the title.

Universities’ admission advertising campaigns aim at attracting students who are akin to the consumers in a commercial and selling universities’ education resources which are equal to the products in an advertisement. Therefore, the admission advertising campaign can be regarded as a commercial advertisement. As a result, although Lin’s article writes the different cultural values

in China and the United States by analyzing commercial advertisements, the hypotheses, process of analyses and discussions are similar when delving Universities' admission advertising campaigns.

As Lin quotes and argues in her article, one of the six major differences between the cultural systems of China and the United States is "U.S. culture tends to be concerned with external experiences and the world of things, whereas traditional Chinese culture emphasizes inner experiences of meaning and feeling" (84). In the two advertising videos, Peking University pays more attention to passing its spirit of believing in dreams which is an inner experience for viewers while Yale University focuses more on the external experiences like facilities and activities. Peking University's advertising video represents viewers a story which is adopted from a true event about an excellent but poor student studied in Peking University. The hero in the video gave up his dream of studying astronomy and followed his father's will to study economy before coming to Peking University due to his awful family economy condition. When he studied in Peking University, with the edification from the professor and Peking University's spirit, he pursued his dream freely ignoring others' jeer, surmounted countless challenges and finally succeeded in astronomy. Peking University's advertising video uses "soft-sell" (86) strategy implying that Peking University believes in students' dreams and is an ideal place for students to chase and realize their dreams bravely without scruple. Peking University's faith in dreams evokes viewers' initial dreams deeply buried in their souls and gives viewers courage to regain and pursue dreams. On the contrary, by looking closely into Yale University from three aspects: the housing system, countless organizations and activities and the superb academic opportunity, Yale University's advertising video is like a "hard-sell" (86) commercial introducing merits of a product which provides viewers an overall understanding that Yale University is a world first class university.

Yale's video displays their world class facilities as well as their diverse activities in detail and narrates students' daily life and study in the university. Peking University uses the strategy of "soft-sell" (86) which attaches more significant to viewers' feeling rather than setting out every advantage, whereas Yale University uses the strategy of "hard-sell" (86) which states Yale's merits one by one clearly and logically. The distinction between two advertising strategies Lin assumes in her article as "U.S. commercials will have a higher ratio of hard-sell to soft-sell appeals as well as more product merit appeals than will their Chinese counterparts" (86) is an insinuation of Chinese emotional culture versus American rational culture.

Not only the admission advertising videos, but also the two admission advertising websites present the difference between Peking University's "soft-sell strategy" (86) and Yale University's "hard-sell strategy" (86). If looking closely enough to the titles of the introduction portions on the two websites, Peking University names its titles rhetorically as "Enter Peking University, Start A New Journey" and "Major Is an Attitude" which arouse viewers' curiosity and interests. In a more hard-sell way, Yale University simply uses "Learning at Yale", "Living at Yale", "Residential College" and "Financial Aid" to name the introduction parts which seems boring but makes Yale's introduction clear and concise. The different thoughts on titles also demonstrate Chinese culture represented by the website is more emotional and highlights the language art more than American rational culture combined in the webpage.

Furthermore, the language Peking University and Yale University use in the videos also tells the difference between Chinese and American language art. Lin points out that "In a high context culture like China, it is considered impolite to be direct or 'boastful'; a polite communicator is one who is rather indirect, modest, and vague. In contrast, in a low context culture like the United States, more information is typically included in advertising appeals" (86). In the advertising video

of Peking University, the language is well considered and polished. At the beginning, the hero says with depression that “I gave up my dream before coming to Peking University.” which is a contrast to what he says at the end of the video “All this time, Peking University has been quietly trying to tell me something important: ‘It is not reality that inspires your dreams, but your dreams that inspires reality’.” The transition of hero’s mentality implies that it is studying in Peking University that makes the hero a braver man with dreams. Meanwhile, the transition also shows Peking University’s spirit of “we believe in dreams”. Although “Peking University” is only mentioned in the video for twelve times during the fifteen-minute video, the advertising video still advertises and praises Peking University in an implicit way through the story. In a more direct way, Yale University applies straightforward language and a series of data to promote the merits of Yale. The actors in the video sings with pride “You will get a first-rate education, but also thrive on classmates’ conversation.” which delivers the merits of Yale directly without rhetoric polishing or implication. Also, in Yale’s video, there exists many sentences start with “It’s a place where you will/can...” or “I came to Yale because...” that state Yale’s strong points one by one in detail. Along with every sentence, the video will provide a vivid instance in residential college, laboratory or library. What’s more, Yale also employs twelve sets of data to show the wide variety of campus activities through which viewers can have an intuitionistic perspective on how brilliant the life in Yale is. The difference between Chinese veiled strategy and American direct strategy represented in the videos sheds light on the discrepancy of the implicit culture in China and the explicit culture in the US.

Lin only focuses on the advertising strategy while I think visual rhetoric and background music in the admission advertising videos can reveal cultural differences between China and the US as well. Peking University’s and Yale University’s advertising videos have completely

different styles. The colors and the background music used in Peking University's video are more peaceful while Yale's are more cheerful. However, the two different styles both fit their strategies well and hit the mark of attracting viewers. Peking University's advertising video aims at viewers' feeling and emotion so that the video makes its frames plain but beautiful with slow rhythm which is more implicative but can easily touch viewers' heart and inspire viewers to apply to Peking University. For the purpose of presenting the spirit of "believe in dreams", frames in Peking University's video are warmly colored which builds a reassuring atmosphere to captivate viewers' hearts imperceptibly. However, contrary to Peking University, Yale University intends to unfold all the merits to the viewers. Therefore, Yale's video reveals students' vigorous daily life in the university closely in bright hue with cheerful performances and upbeat music which is like an enthusiastic invitation for viewers to dance and sing together with characters in the video in Yale. Frames with high color saturation and rhythmical music are more direct and active to get viewers involved in comparison with Peking University's video. Different choices on visual rhetoric and background music hint that Chinese culture is more veiled while American culture is more open.

Lin also agrees on another statement "U.S. cultural emphasizes 'active mastery' in the person-nature relationship, whereas traditional Chinese culture emphasizes 'passive acceptance' of fate by seeking harmony with nature" (84). Although I disagree with much on the statement of Pan and Lin, I do endorse that U.S. cultural emphasizes "active mastery" while Chinese culture emphasizes "passive mastery". The difference is presented by the composition of the home pages of the two websites (see fig. 1 and fig. 2). The home page of Peking University (see fig. 1) is divided into two portions, the introduction about Peking University which allows students to explore by themselves only occupies one third of the website, whereas the requirements and admission policies of applying Peking University on which students have no choice but to accept takes up the remained

two thirds of the website. In contrast, Yale University utilizes nearly the whole website (see fig. 2) to introduce Yale from various perspectives but uses only five lines within ten words on the top of the home page to mention Yale's admission policy. The extreme imbalance on the home page of Yale University's website indicates that Yale allows students to be acquainted with Yale freely rather than providing students too many commands to follow. The different proportions of introduction and admission policy presented on the two websites reveals the cultural difference behind the admission advertising campaign that Chinese cultural tends to accept passively and American cultural tends to explore actively.

Due to the accelerated globalization, cultural fusion is inevitable which can be seen from the two advertising campaigns as well. I agree with what Lin points out in her article that "the cultural values are never fixed." (84), meanwhile, I also believe that the values can be assimilated are not the core values in the case of Peking University and Yale University's admission advertising campaigns. As the two admission advertising campaigns represent, Peking University and Yale University both use "modern appeals" (86) which indicate that the two cultures have a same cultural value of developing with the help of modernization. However, from my point of view, developing with the help of modernization is not a core cultural value which should have accumulated through the history because it has a specific condition of modernization. Peking University prepares the advertising video as a micro film which is a new artistic form coming into being in last ten years. Micro film is a product of modernization which means it not only bases on the traditional TV play and movie but also takes advantage of modern technology like the internet and social media. Since these new technologies are attractive and popular among modern people, Peking University employs the form of micro film which is just the "modern appeal" to catch viewers' eyes. The "modern appeal" of micro film is rather a tool instead of a form of core value

of culture. In the meantime, Yale University uses modern opera, a new artistic fashion born in the twenty-first century, which is only a development of traditional opera under the condition of modernization as well as the utilization of modern technology. Both the micro film and modern opera rely on the premise of modernization. If separating modernization out, the value of developing with the help of modernization will not exist. Therefore, combining the two campaigns' similar representation but different core cultural values, although modernization and globalization coalesce the cultural values, they only change the superficial values instead of the key cultural values.

A large number of people agree that Chinese and American cultures are assimilated because of modernization and globalization. However, Lin analyzes advertising campaigns which is in the economy system where the globalization is of the highest ratio and proves in her article that "Chinese and American television advertising reflects different cultural values". Holding the same opinion as Lin, I insist that Chinese and American cultures have their core values which can never be effaced. Universities represent the national education level which is tightly related to national culture. In the case of Peking University and Yale University's admission advertising campaigns, Chinese culture is more emotional, implicit and passive while American culture is more rational, explicit and active which are all the kernel values in the two different cultures. Therefore, University admission advertising campaigns reveal the differences between cultures, despite the representations of advertising campaigns turn out to be uniform.



Fig. 1. The Home Page of Peking University's Admission Advertising Website; Screen shot of gotopku.cn, 28 Nov. 2017, <http://www.gotopku.cn/>





Fig. 2. The Home Page of Yale University's Admission Advertising Website; Screen shot of admissions.yale.edu, 28 Nov. 2017, <https://admissions.yale.edu/>

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