



# Cultural differences in consumer socialization: A comparison of Chinese–Canadian and Caucasian–Canadian children<sup>☆</sup>

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 1 March 2008

Received in revised form 1 May 2008

Accepted 1 August 2008

### Keywords:

Consumer socialization

Family communication patterns

Decision-making styles

## ABSTRACT

Based on the extant literature on the cultural/subcultural differences in socialization goals and parental practices in the childrearing process, this study compares Chinese–Canadian and Caucasian–Canadian families with respect to three issues central to consumer socialization – family communication patterns, children's consumer decision-making styles, and children's influence in family purchase decisions. Some significant results include: (1) Chinese–Canadian children perceived both of their parents as more socio-oriented than Caucasian–Canadian children perceived theirs whereas no significant between-group difference was found on the perceived level of concept-orientation for either parent; (2) Chinese–Canadian children, relative to their Caucasian–Canadian counterparts, exhibited more utilitarian and confused-by-overchoice consumer decision-making orientations but less social/conspicuous and impulsive orientations; and (3) Chinese–Canadian children exercised greater purchase influence than their Caucasian–Canadian counterparts for the adolescent 'convenience' product category but no difference was found for the adolescent 'durable' product category.

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## 1. Introduction

Although scanty, past studies of consumer socialization between different cultures (mainly between the United States and Far Eastern cultures) have revealed some noticeable differences in parental socialization practices and children's socialization processes. In terms of parenting practices, differences suspected or found are generally consistent with broader childrearing differences between individualist and collectivist cultures; parents in the United States are more likely to encourage individualistic and independent behavior in their children whereas Far Eastern parents put emphasis on interdependent behavior by fostering respect for parental authority and family harmony (Chao, 2000; Xu et al., 2005). With regards to children's socialization process, reflecting the different parenting practices, Far Eastern children, compared to U.S. children, acquire consumption/purchase autonomy in a more delayed timetable (Robertson et al., 1989; Rose, 1999).

Gradually, evidence is accumulating for the pervasive impact of culture on consumer socialization (Chan and McNeal, 2003; Rose et al., 2002b; Wang et al., 2007). However, given the vast range of significant issues related to the topic of cross-cultural consumer socialization, research in this area is still very much in the nascent stage. It is particularly surprising

to note that despite the broad interest marketers have in Chinese consumers and markets, there is a large gap in the marketing literature on consumer socialization in Chinese culture. As an attempt to address this void, the present study compares Chinese–Canadian and Caucasian–Canadian families with respect to family communication patterns, children's consumer decision-making styles, and children's influence in family purchase decisions. Using two Canadian subcultures to address cultural differences in consumer socialization is justified for the following two reasons. First, conducting this study within the Canadian context helps control the country-level contextual effects, as the consumer socialization variables examined here can be affected by both the society and the family. Second, it is generally believed the Chinese cultural traditions, such as those concerning respect for authority figures and parents, behavioral restraint and compliance, are so firmly entrenched in Chinese immigrant families, they are unlikely to change rapidly. A study by Wu (1996) lent strong support for this argument. Specifically, Chinese parents from Shanghai, Southern Taiwan, Bangkok, Singapore, Honolulu, and Los Angeles were found to share many basic traditional values, socialization goals and parenting practices, despite varying degrees of geographical and ideological differences.

## 2. Consumer socialization: China vs. West

### 2.1. Family communication patterns

Parent–child interactions play a critical role in children's consumer socialization. An aspect of parent–child interactions that has emerged

<sup>☆</sup> This research was supported by a grant to Chankon Kim from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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prominently is family communication patterns (Carlson et al., 1992; Rose et al., 1998). Family communication patterns in its original conceptualization by Chaffee and colleagues (Chaffee et al., 1971; McLeod and Chaffee, 1972) refer to the frequency, type, and quality of communication among family members (Carlson et al., 1992). In consumer socialization research, however, the concept is more closely identified as a characterization of parental messages to children or an aspect of parental socialization practice. Two dimensions characterize parental messages – socio-orientation and concept-orientation (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). Socio-oriented messages promote deference to parents and conformity on the part of the child to parental control whereas concept-oriented messages encourage children to develop their own views of the world and promote an open exchange of ideas and feelings in parent–child relationships (Mangleburg et al., 1997; Ritchie, 1991).

Child-rearing is commonly believed to reflect prevailing cultural values (Kelly and Tseng, 1992). Consequently, family communication patterns are suspected to vary across different cultures. Typically, American parents promote independent reasoning and skills, self-reliance, and assertiveness in their children by using reasoned control and encouraging their children to be self-expressive (Chao, 1995; Wilcox, 1998). These socialization goals are part of a more individualistic perspective (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). While there is no study (to our knowledge) comparing Chinese and American parents on the parent–child communication orientations, Rose and colleagues (Rose et al., 1998, 2002a) found that American mothers tend to be more concept-oriented in their communication with their children than Japanese mothers. In contrast, Chinese children are taught mutual dependence, self-discipline, obedience to rules, and adult authority (Kelly and Tseng, 1992; Xu et al., 2005). Therefore, collectivistic values are at the center of children's socialization in Chinese culture. Furthermore, the Confucian value, filial piety, is particularly related to Chinese parent–child communication. The notion of filial piety dictates that children obey their parents without question. Given this background, Chinese children are expected to be socio-oriented rather than concept-oriented. Based on the above discussion, we hypothesize in this study that:

**H1a.** Chinese–Canadian parents are more socio-oriented than Caucasian–Canadian parents in their parent–child communication, and

**H1b.** Caucasian–Canadian parents are more concept-oriented than Caucasian–Canadian parents in their parent–child communication.

## 2.2. Children's consumer decision-making styles

According to Sproles and Kendall (1986), a consumer decision-making style is “a mental orientation characterizing a consumer's approach to making choices” (p. 268). Their study identified eight consumer decision-making styles: (1) *perfectionism or high-quality consciousness*, (2) *price and “value for money” shopping consciousness*, (3) *novelty-fashion consciousness*, (4) *recreational, hedonic shopping consciousness*, (5) *brand status consciousness*, (6) *habitual, brand-loyal orientation toward consumption*, (7) *impulsiveness*, and (8) *confusion from overchoice*.

Based on her examinations of characteristics of each decision-making style, Shim (1996) classified the eight styles into three orientations: *utilitarian, social/conspicuous, and undesirable*. The utilitarian orientation is characterized by emphasis on finding the best quality or product benefits for a price as reflected in *perfectionism or high-quality consciousness* and *price and “value for money” shopping consciousness*. The social/conspicuous orientation has for focus the social meanings or value-expressive functions of consumption as reflected in *novelty-fashion consciousness*, *recreational, hedonic shopping consciousness*, and *brand status consciousness*. Lastly, *impulsiveness* and *confusion from overchoice* represent the undesirable orientation because they are often associated with poor decision making.

There has been a series of investigation aimed at testing the generality of consumer decision-making styles across different populations, including Korea (Hafstrom et al., 1992), Germany (Walsh et al., 2001), United Kingdom (Mitchell and Bates, 1998) and China (Bao et al., 2003; Fan and Xiao, 1998; Wang et al., 2004). Based on factor analysis of Sproles and Kendall's (1986) consumer style inventory (CSI), these studies confirm varying portions of the original decision-making styles while none of them reproduced all eight completely. Hence, the cross-cultural generalizability of the eight consumer decision-making styles is limited. As such, the CSI needs to be tested before being used in another country setting or a modified model of consumer decision-making styles may be necessary to more adequately account for the consumer behavior and retail environment of another culture (Bao et al., 2003; Walsh et al., 2001).

Some of the studies listed above also investigate decision-making styles of Chinese consumers. Bao, Zhou, and Su (2003) tested speculations that, compared to U.S. consumers, more face conscious and risk averse Chinese consumers would exhibit higher degrees of “brand-status-conscious” and “confused-by-overchoice” orientations but lower degrees of “novelty and fashion-conscious,” “price-conscious and value-for-money,” and “recreational and hedonistic” orientations. Results supported all of their expectations except for the “brand-status-conscious” orientation; contrary to the a priori expectation, Chinese consumers possessed a lower extent of “brand-status-conscious” orientation. Fan and Xiao (1998) proposed a modified five-factor Consumer Style Inventory for Chinese consumers, which included the dimensions of: *brand consciousness*, *time consciousness*, *quality consciousness*, *price consciousness*, and *information utilization*. Subsequent comparisons of the decision-making styles of their Chinese university student sample with those of the American high school student sample used in Sproles and Kendall's (1986) earlier study showed that American consumers scored higher on all five dimensions. These comparisons, however, contain several obvious methodological problems (e.g., differences in the data collection time and sample characteristics), lending the results low interpretability.

### 2.2.1. Cross-cultural differences: utilitarian orientation

As of now, little is known about cross-cultural differences in the consumer decision making styles of Chinese and North American consumers, let alone young consumers. However, fundamental differences in parental socialization philosophies that exist between these two opposing cultures amply allude to the potential differences in children's decision-making styles. It is widely believed that Chinese parents value thrift and encourage their children from an early age to put their pocket money in piggy-banks (Zhang, 2001). Frugality characterizes the consumption behavior of Chinese consumers in general and contributes to their price and value consciousness in particular (Weidenbaum, 1996). In the same vein, Ackerman and Tellis (2001) found that Chinese took more time to search per item purchased in grocery shopping, and examined more items per product purchased than Americans did. Several other researchers have observed a strong utilitarian orientation of Chinese consumers in purchase situations. Kim et al. (2002), for example, reported that Chinese consumers tend to focus more heavily on the price and performance attributes (vs. more hedonic or emotional image attributes) when making product evaluations and purchase decisions than their more affluent American counterparts. Consistent with this observation, Pan and Schmitt (1995) found that Chinese consumers use brands as an indicator of product function to a greater extent than U.S. consumers. Based on these observations, we hypothesize that:

**H2a.** Chinese–Canadian children employ utilitarian consumer decision-making styles to a greater extent than Caucasian–Canadian children.

### 2.2.2. Cross-cultural differences: social/conspicuous orientation

The social/conspicuous orientation in consumer decision making is seen in consumption/purchase situations that are affected by social

motivations. It is characterized as seeking well-known or expensive brands and being drawn to the recreational aspects of shopping (Shim, 1996). Because of the emphasis placed by North American parents on such socialization goals as early consumption independence, self-assertiveness, and expressiveness which are part of a more individualistic perspective (Markus and Kitayama, 1991), North American children are likely to use purchase and consumption situations to express self-image and values to a greater extent than Chinese children. We could also expect that North American children, with a more affluent economic background, have a stronger hedonistic orientation in consumption/purchase situations. There is some evidence that ideocentric consumers (consumers with an individualistic personality trait) are more brand status conscious than allocentric consumers (consumers with a collectivistic personality trait) (Dutta-Bergman and Wells, 2002) and that consumers from individualist cultures (U.S.A. and U.K.) are more brand status conscious than those from collectivistic cultures (China and Japan) (Sun et al., 2004). Furthermore, the finding of Bao, Zhou, and Su (2003) that the U.S. consumers possessed a stronger brand-status-conscious orientation than their Chinese counterparts offers additional evidence for this contention. Hence, we anticipate North American children's purchase decision-making styles to be more socially motivated:

**H2b.** Caucasian–Canadian children employ social/conspicuous consumer decision-making styles to a greater extent than Chinese–Canadian children.

### 2.2.3. Cross-cultural differences: undesirable orientation

With regard to the two 'undesirable' consumer decision-making styles – *impulsiveness* and *confused from overchoice*, the literature suggests that the differences in these two styles between Caucasian–Canadian and Chinese–Canadian children may be in opposite directions. Therefore, separate hypotheses are generated for the two undesirable styles.

The view that Chinese consumers tend to be more price- and value-conscious and more deliberate shoppers than their U.S. counterparts may be extrapolated to another conjecture that they may less likely engage in impulsive buying. A recent study by Kacen and Lee (2002) revealed that cultural differences at both the regional level (i.e., differences in collectivism–individualism) and the individual level (i.e., differences in independent–interdependent self-concept) influence impulsive purchasing behavior. They found that Asian consumers (Malaysians and Singaporeans) engage in less impulse buying behavior compared to consumers from the U.S. and Australia. At the individual level, independent self-concept was related to impulsive buying behavior only for the consumers from the U.S. and Australia. Impulsive buying can be an expression of self-identity among individualist-culture consumers (Sun et al., 2004) whereas in collectivist societies such as China, impulse buying is considered a hedonic desire and individuals are encouraged to suppress it (Kacen and Lee, 2002).

Furthermore, Chinese parents exhibit a high level of control over their child and are protective (Xu et al., 2005). These characteristics of Chinese parenting are likely to alert children to always try to “do things right,” such as making purchase decisions based on more deliberate information search and evaluation and buying the items parents tend to be happy with. Therefore, it is expected that:

**H2c.** Caucasian–Canadian children will engage in impulsive decision-making to a greater extent than Chinese–Canadian children.

The view that Chinese consumers have a stronger utilitarian orientation leads to yet another conjecture: Chinese consumers, compared to North American consumers, may likely experience greater confusion by overchoice in buying situations stemming from their more deliberate and extensive information processing behavior. Bao, Zhou, and Su (2003) contended that that Chinese consumers, being more risk averse than U.S. consumers, would conduct a more extensive information acquisition than their U.S. counterparts to decrease

uncertainty associated with purchases. However, they further went on to suggest that the large amount of information acquired may actually lead to greater rather than reduced perceived risk, leaving risk-averse Chinese consumers confused. Their results showed that risk aversion is significantly related to the “confused-by-overchoice” decision-making characteristic and also that Chinese consumers are indeed more risk averse and exhibit the “confused-by-overchoice” orientation to a greater extent than U.S. consumers. Hence, we expect that:

**H2d.** Chinese–Canadian children will exhibit the “confused-by-overchoice” orientation in decision-making to a greater extent than Chinese–Canadian children.

### 2.3. Children's decision-making influence

Mixed views are available on the question of which cultural socialization practices are more conducive to children's exerting greater influence in family purchase decisions. Some scholars believe that Chinese children have less influence than their American counterparts (Chan and McNeal, 2003) whereas others think the opposite would be true (Lau et al., 1990; Chen et al., 2000). Still others found that there is no difference in children's role across these two cultures (Wang et al., 2007). Those who think Chinese children play a less important role in family purchases than Americans examine this issue through considering power distance in Chinese society. The traditional Chinese family system values children's dependence on the family and unquestioned acceptance of parental authority. Given this power distance between parents and children, it is reasonable to expect that family decision-making power rests on the parents. In line with this reasoning, a study of mainland Chinese parents conducted by Chan and McNeal (2003) revealed that Chinese parents have strict control over the kinds of products children can or cannot buy while allowing their children some freedom in choice of brands of the permissible products. An even more recent study by Laroche et al. (2007) showed that as Chinese–Canadian children become more acculturated, they tend to exercise greater influence in family purchase decisions.

In another view, parental indulgence in Chinese families is regarded as a source of increasing children's power in family purchase situations. Since the Chinese government's institution of one-child policy in 1979, a phenomenon that has received particular attention in contemporary Chinese families and may have bearing on Chinese children's socialization is parental indulgence (Chen et al., 2000; Xu et al., 2005; Chan and McNeal, 2003). Some believe that as Chinese parents become preoccupied with satisfying their only child's desires, the old way that children's consumption was controlled and decided by parents has been fundamentally changed (Ying, 2003). Indulgent parents devote great attention to satisfying the child's desires, yielding to the child's demands, and exhibiting leniency toward wrongdoing (Kelly and Tseng, 1992; Chen et al., 2000).

The family purchase decisions of interest in this study include those that involve products for children's own use. Our hypotheses regarding Chinese–Canadian and Caucasian–Canadian children's influence in these family purchase decisions derive from both of these two views. We anticipate that Chinese parents' indulgence toward their children may be linked to their greater willingness to allow children's influence in purchase decisions, but only those involving less expensive adolescent 'convenience' products. However, in high risk purchase situations involving more expensive adolescent 'durable' products, we expect less desire on the part of Chinese parents to listen to their children. We hypothesize that:

**H3a.** Caucasian–Canadian children exercise greater influence than Chinese–Canadian children in family purchase situations involving (more expensive) adolescent 'durable' products for their own use, but

**H3b.** Chinese–Canadian children exercise greater influence than Caucasian–Canadian children in family purchase situations involving (less expensive) adolescent 'convenience' products for their own use.



### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Data

The Chinese–Canadian children's data used in this study come from a survey of Chinese–Canadian families conducted in an Eastern metropolitan city for a Chinese–Canadian children's socialization study. Parents of teenagers were contacted at Chinese church gatherings and other organization meetings and their participation in the survey was solicited. Those who agreed to participate took home a package of three questionnaires (two for parents and one for a teenage child in the family) and returned the completed questionnaires at the designated places. In total, the survey netted 107 completed children's questionnaires. The Chinese–Canadian children's sample contained slightly more male respondents ( $n = 57$ , 53%) than female respondents and had an average age of 14.5. Most of them ( $n = 81$ , 76%) were born in mainland China, some ( $n = 18$ , 17%) were born in Canada, and the rest in various places around the world, including Hong Kong, Taiwan, France, Germany, England, and the U.S.

The Caucasian–Canadian data used in this study come from a similar survey of families conducted in an Atlantic Canadian city. Students and their respective parents at two high schools and a sports club participated in the survey. Depending upon the number of participants from the same family, donations of different sums of money were made to the participating child's school or club. In total, the number of usable children's questionnaires was 510. This sample contained more males (55%) than females and the average age of the children (15.8) was more than one year older than the Chinese–Canadian sample.

#### 3.2. Measures

Each teenager assessed his/her mother's and father's degree of concept-orientation with an 8-item measure (e.g., My mother (father) asks me for advice about buying things) and socio-orientation with a 5-item measure (e.g., My mother (father) wants to know what I do with my money) (see Rose et al., 1998 for the whole measures). Both measures used a five-point scale ranging from *never* to *very often*. These two measures or slightly varied versions have been used extensively in the past research on consumer socialization (Carlson et al., 1990; Mangleburg and Bristol, 1998; Moschis et al., 1984; Rose et al., 2002a). As in most of these past studies, responses were summed across items in each scale and higher scores indicated higher levels of each orientation. Research has shown support for combining the items in each scale (e.g., Carlson and Grossbart, 1988; Moschis et al., 1984). Analysis based on the combined sample showed acceptable levels of reliability in capturing mothers' and fathers' communication orientations ( $\alpha = .88$  for fathers' socio-orientation,  $\alpha = .84$  for fathers' concept-orientation,  $\alpha = .87$  for mothers' socio-orientation,  $\alpha = .83$  for mothers' concept-orientation).

The assessment of adolescents' consumer decision-making styles involved a total of 30 items, 19 of which covered 5 of the 8 decision making styles originally proposed by Sproles and Kendall (1986) (*Perfectionism or high-quality consciousness*; *Brand status consciousness*; *Recreational, hedonistic shopping consciousness*; *Impulsiveness*; and *Confused by overchoice*) and 11 of which were drawn from the past studies of consumer socialization and adolescents' consumer behavior (see Mangleburg et al., 1997; Palan, 1998) tapping three additional adolescents' decision-making styles (*Careful and deliberate decision-making*; *Well-informed decision making*; and *Learning from product labels*). Since eight factors and varying levels of correlations among the factors were foreseen for the 30 items, factor analysis (principal component analysis) subsequently run involved extracting 8 factors and subjecting them to the oblique promax rotation. The 8-factor solution explained 69.33% of the total variance and the grouping of the items revealed in both the factor structure matrix and the pattern

**Table 1**

Results of factor analysis: consumer decision-making style items.

Factor	Statement	Factor loading
<i>Careful and deliberate decision making</i> ( $\alpha = .88$ ; $M = 3.50$ )		
	I shop around before buying something that costs a lot of money.	.89
	I carefully study the choices available before I buy something that costs me a lot of money.	.84
	I compare prices and brands before buying something that costs a lot of money.	.73
	I look carefully to find the best values for the money.	.72
	I compare prices to find lower-priced products.	.66
<i>Well-informed decision-making</i> ( $\alpha = .85$ ; $M = 3.41$ )		
	I know a lot about different brands of the products I buy.	.85
	I know a lot about choices available for things I buy.	.84
	I am usually well informed about what is a reasonable price to pay for something.	.77
	I know a lot about different types of stores.	.76
	I am a knowledgeable consumer.	.53
<i>Perfectionism or high quality consciousness</i> ( $\alpha = .86$ ; $M = 3.64$ )		
	In general, I usually try to buy the very best overall quality products.	.93
	When it comes to purchasing products, I try to get the very best or the perfect choice.	.93
	I make a special effort to choose the very best quality products.	.74
	Getting very good quality is very important to me.	.65
<i>Learning from product labels</i> ( $\alpha = .80$ ; $M = 3.01$ )		
	I carefully read most of the things they write on packages or labels.	.82
	I learn about brands by reading product labels	.79
	I sometimes read product labels before deciding which brand to buy.	.74
<i>Recreational, hedonistic shopping orientation</i> ( $\alpha = .92$ ; $M = 3.34$ )		
	Going shopping is one of the enjoyable activities of my life.	.92
	Shopping is a pleasant activity to me.	.92
	I enjoy shopping just for fun of it.	.91
<i>Brand status consciousness</i> ( $\alpha = .77$ ; $M = 2.98$ )		
	Nice department and specialty stores offer me the best products.	.95
	The more expensive brands are usually my choice.	.75
	The well-known national brands are best for me.	.64
<i>Confused by overchoice</i> ( $\alpha = .81$ ; $M = 2.64$ )		
	The more I learn about products, the harder it seems to choose the best.	.84
	Sometimes it's hard to choose which store to shop.	.81
	All the information I get on different products confuses me.	.76
	There are so many brands to choose from that I often feel confused.	.74
<i>Impulsiveness</i> ( $\alpha = .68$ ; $M = 2.75$ )		
	I don't spend much time shopping for best buys.	.80
	I am impulsive when purchasing.	.77
	Often I make careless purchases I later wish I had not.	.74

matrix was unambiguous and conformed closely to the a priori expectations. Shown in Table 1 are factor labels and items measuring each factor along with their factor loading values contained in the factor pattern matrix. Reliability estimates for all eight decision-making style measures are also presented in Table 1. They range from moderate to high levels with a minimum of .68 for the *impulsiveness* factor and a maximum of .92 for the *recreational, hedonistic shopping consciousness* factor. The mean scale values (also see Table 1) lie between 2.64 for the *confused by overchoice* factor and 3.64 for the *perfectionism or high-quality consciousness* factor.

Based on the reasoning Shim (1996) presents for her classification scheme, consumer decision-making styles labeled *careful and deliberate decision making*, *well-informed decision making*, *perfectionism or high-quality consciousness*, and *learning from product labels* are utilitarian oriented whereas *recreational and hedonistic shopping orientation* and *brand status consciousness* reflect a social/conspicuous orientation. The *impulsive* and *confused by overchoice* styles represent an undesirable orientation. This classification was empirically tested in

**Table 2**  
Results of factor analysis: children's influence in purchase decisions.

Factor	Purchase decision	Factor loading
Adolescent 'durable' products ( $\alpha = .83$ ; $M = 3.78$ )	Athletic shoes or sneakers for the child	.81
	Music CDs or DVDs for this child	.76
	Clothes for the child	.75
	An MP3 player for the child	.75
	The bicycle for the child	.73
	Books for this child	.52
Adolescent 'convenience' products ( $\alpha = .83$ ; $M = 3.16$ )	Snacks for the child	.80
	Breakfast cereal for the child	.80
	Toothpaste for the child	.80
	Soft drinks for the child	.77
	Shampoo for the child	.66

the subsequent stage. Specifically, items in each decision-making style scale were averaged, and the eight resulting mean scale values were factor analyzed. The analysis produced three (second-order) factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, explaining 68.9% of the total variance. This supported the *a priori* three-group classification for the eight decision-making styles. However, an examination of the factor pattern matrix revealed one anomaly; *perfectionism or high quality consciousness* loaded on the same factor ( $\lambda = .71$ ) with *recreational, hedonistic shopping orientation* ( $\lambda = .67$ ) and *brand status consciousness* ( $\lambda = .83$ ) which were *a priori* classified into the social/conspicuous type. A close look at the items tapping this decision-making style (e.g., In general, I usually try to buy the very best overall quality products.) revealed a content that can be easily construed as reflective of social/conspicuous shopping orientation. Based on the factor analysis results and the fact that Shim's classification was not empirically based, the decision-making style of *perfectionism or high quality consciousness* was included in the 'social/conspicuous' category.

Finally, children's influence in family purchase decisions was measured based on two types of product purchase decisions – one involving six adolescent 'durables' (Music CDs or DVDs, a bicycle, athletic shoes or sneakers, clothes, books, and an MP3 player for the child) and the other involving five adolescent 'convenience' products (toothpaste, breakfast cereal, snacks, shampoo, and soft drink for the child), both for children's own consumption. For each one of these products, children were asked "Between you and your parents, who decides what to buy?" (1 = *Your parents entirely*; 2 = *Mostly your parents*; 3 = *Your parents and you jointly*; 4 = *Mostly yourself*; 5 = *Yourself entirely*). Factor analysis (principle component analysis with promax rotation) forcing a two-factor solution explained 57.15% of the total variance. A look at both the factor structure matrix and the pattern matrix showed that the six adolescent 'durable' product purchase decisions loaded on the same factor ( $\alpha = .78$ ,  $M = 3.92$ ), and the five adolescent 'convenience' product purchase decisions loaded on the other factor ( $\alpha = .86$ ,  $M = 3.16$ ). Table 2 presents the factor loadings for the 11 items contained in the factor pattern matrix.

#### 4. Analysis and results

Cross-cultural differences in parental communication orientations (H1a and H1b), children's consumer decision-making styles (H2a, H2b, H2c, and H2d), and purchase decision influences (H3a and H3b) were tested with a series of multivariate analysis of co-variance (MANCOVA) and analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA). Our analyses incorporated two covariates. As was mentioned, between the two subcultural groups in this study, there was about 1.3 years of age difference. These groups also differed as to the portion that held a part-time job, and hence in their earned income. Of the 511 Caucasian-Canadian children, 43% (219) reported that they had a part-time job, whereas only 9% (10) of the 107 Chinese-Canadian children reported having a part-time job. In order to control for the effects these differences may have on the dependent variables, both the child's age

and reported monthly income from the part-time job (\$0 for those who did not have a part-time job) were incorporated as covariates in the between-group comparisons. MANCOVA was used to test H1a, H1b, H2a and H2b because each of these hypotheses involved correlated multiple dependent variables. H2c, H2d, H3a, and H3b, on the other hand, involved only one dependent variable each, and thus were tested with ANCOVA. Table 3 presents the mean values and standard deviations of all the dependent variables and multivariate and univariate test results.

#### 4.1. Cross-cultural differences in children's perceptions of parental communication orientations (H1)

MANCOVA results on the cross-cultural differences on the two communication dimensions show that a significant multivariate difference on children's perceptions of parents' socio-orientations (H1a confirmed,  $F = 11.83$ ;  $p = .00$ ) but the multivariate difference on children's perceptions of parents' concept-orientation was not significant (H1b unconfirmed,  $F = 1.53$ ,  $p = .22$ ). Univariate results for H1a reveal that Chinese-Canadian children saw both their father and mother as significantly more socio-oriented than Caucasian-Canadian children saw theirs ( $M = 2.58$  for Chinese-Canadian fathers' socio-orientation vs.  $M = 2.16$  for Caucasian-Canadian fathers' socio-orientation,  $F = 12.08$ ,  $p = .00$ ;  $M = 3.26$  for Chinese-Canadian mothers' socio-

**Table 3**

Results of MANCOVA/ANCOVA comparing Chinese-Canadian and Caucasian-Canadian children on parental communication orientations, consumer decision-making styles, and influences in family purchase decisions.

Variable	Chinese-Canadian		Caucasian-Canadian		Multivariate F-value	Univariate F-value	p
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
Parental communication orientations–socio-orientation:					11.83		.00
Father's socio-orientation	2.58	.80	2.16	.98		12.08	.00
Mother's socio-orientation	3.26	.83	2.65	.95		20.05	.00
Concept-orientation:					1.53		.22
Father's concept-orientation	2.54	.74	2.44	.86		.48	.49
Mother's concept-orientation	2.93	.70	2.99	.79		1.10	.35
Consumer decision-making styles with utilitarian orientation:					10.48		.00
Careful and deliberate decision-making	3.84	.83	3.43	1.02		15.61	.00
Well-informed decision-making	3.37	.85	3.43	.85		.01	.92
Learning from product labels	3.38	.90	2.94	1.01		16.24	.00
Social/conspicuous orientation:					10.70		.00
Perfection or high-qual. consciousness	3.66	.79	3.63	.92		.44	.51
Rec. or hedonistic shopping orientation	2.84	1.24	3.44	1.28		17.23	.00
Brand status consciousness	2.69	.90	3.05	.98		11.45	.00
Undesirable orientation <sup>a</sup>							
Confused by overchoice	2.92	.97	2.58	.90		10.00	.00
Impulsiveness	2.57	.94	2.79	.93		4.04	.05
Influence in family purchase decisions <sup>a</sup>							
Adolescent 'durable' products	3.65	.66	3.80	.92		.04	.84
Adolescent 'convenience' products	3.37	.83	3.11	1.10		6.64	.01

<sup>a</sup> Multivariate F-values and probabilities are not available because univariate ANCOVA was run for each variable in the group.

orientation vs.  $M=2.65$  for Caucasian–Canadian mothers' socio-orientation,  $F=20.05$ ,  $p=.00$ ). These mean values also reveal that mothers in both cultures are perceived to be substantially more socio-oriented than fathers ( $t=7.23$ ,  $p=.00$  for the paired difference between Chinese–Canadian mothers' socio-orientation and Chinese–Canadian fathers' socio-orientation;  $t=10.31$ ,  $p=.00$  for the paired difference between Caucasian–Canadian mothers' socio-orientation and Caucasian–Canadian fathers' socio-orientation). A particularly notable observation though involves Chinese–Canadian mothers' socio-orientation which was by far strongest among the four groups.

With regards to the concept-orientation, for which no significant multivariate cross-cultural differences were detected, significant between-gender differences still emerged, indicating a high level of concept-orientation in mothers' communication with children than in fathers' ( $t=4.97$ ,  $p=.00$  for the paired difference between Chinese–Canadian mothers' concept-orientation and Chinese–Canadian fathers' orientation;  $t=14.61$ ,  $p=.00$  for the paired difference between Caucasian–Canadian mothers' concept-orientation and Caucasian–Canadian fathers' concept-orientation).

#### 4.2. Cross-cultural differences in children's consumer decision-making styles (H2)

Based on the belief that frugality is still widely regarded as consumption virtue among Chinese consumers and that functional (vs. hedonic) attributes tend to carry greater significance to them than North American consumers in purchase situations, we hypothesized (H2a) that Chinese–Canadian children will use a more utilitarian approach to their purchase decision-making than Caucasian–Canadian children. MANCOVA Results (see Table 3) provide support for this hypothesis ( $F=10.48$ ,  $p=.00$ ). Univariate results show that of the three decision-making styles belonging to the utilitarian type, significant cross-cultural differences were found on two – *careful and deliberate decision-making* ( $F=15.61$ ,  $p=.00$ ) and *learning from product labels* ( $F=16.24$ ,  $p=.00$ ). On both of these decision-making styles, Chinese–Canadian children showed a significantly higher mean value than Caucasian–Canadian children ( $M=3.84$  for Chinese–Canadian children vs.  $M=3.43$  for Caucasian–Canadian children for *careful and deliberate decision-making* and  $M=3.38$  vs.  $M=2.94$  in the same order for *learning from product labels*).

Using the rationale that North American children are more likely than Chinese children to see purchase/consumption situations as opportunities for self-expression, we hypothesized greater use of social/conspicuous decision-making styles by Caucasian–Canadian (H2b). Here also, a significant multivariate cross-cultural difference was found ( $F=10.70$ ,  $p=.00$ ). Univariate results show a significant difference on two of the three decision-making styles belonging to this category. Caucasian–Canadian children exhibited a significantly stronger recreational or hedonistic shopping orientation ( $M=3.44$  for Caucasian–Canadian children vs.  $M=2.84$  for Chinese–Canadian children,  $F=17.23$ ,  $p=.00$ ) and brand status consciousness than Chinese–Canadian children ( $M=3.05$  vs.  $M=2.69$  in the same order,  $F=11.45$ ,  $p=.00$ ).

Extending the view that Chinese consumers may be more cautious and deliberate than their North American counterparts in purchase situations, we predicted that Chinese–Canadian children are less likely than Caucasian–Canadian children to engage in impulsive buying (H2c). Results (see Table 3) confirm that Caucasian–Canadian children tend to exhibit more impulsive and careless buying than their Chinese–Canadian counterparts ( $M=2.79$  for Caucasian–Canadian children vs.  $M=2.57$  for Chinese–Canadian children,  $F=4.04$ ,  $p=.05$ ). We also predicted that compared to their Caucasian–Canadian counterparts, Chinese–Canadian children are likely to experience greater confusion by overchoice in buying situations owing to their more deliberate and extensive information processing tendencies. Results support this as well ( $M=2.92$  for Chinese–Canadian children vs.  $M=2.58$  for Caucasian–Canadian children,  $F=10.00$ ,  $p=.00$  for *confused by over-*

*choice*). In sum, results provide support for all four hypotheses (H2a–H2d) involving cross-cultural differences in children's consumer decision-making styles, albeit at varying levels.

#### 4.3. Cross-cultural differences in children's influence in family purchase decisions (H3)

Our hypothesis regarding cross-cultural differences in children's purchase influence reflected two opposing views on Chinese parenting practices. Deriving from the widely held view that Chinese parents are less democratic and maintain an authoritarian family decision-making structure, it would be expected that Chinese–Canadian children would exercise much less influence in family purchase decision-making than Caucasian–Canadian children. But, also in view of the high levels of parental indulgence which according to many observers of modern Chinese families exist in Chinese families, we hypothesized that Caucasian–Canadian children would exercise more influence in purchase situations involving more expensive adolescent 'durables' (H3a), but in less expensive adolescent 'convenience' product purchase situations, Chinese–Canadian children would exercise more influence (H3b).

ANCOVA results indicate, however, that only H3b was supported by our data ( $M=3.37$  for Chinese–Canadian children vs.  $M=3.11$  for Caucasian–Canadian children for the purchase influence in adolescent 'convenience' products,  $F=6.64$ ,  $p=.01$ ). Caucasian–Canadian children showed a higher mean influence value ( $M=3.80$ ) than Chinese–Canadian children ( $M=3.65$ ), but the difference was not significant ( $F=.04$ ,  $p=.84$ ) to support H3a.

## 5. Discussion

It is only recently that researchers of consumer socialization have been following up on the long suspected link between culture and consumer socialization. It needs to be pointed out, however, that past cross-cultural research on consumer socialization has only involved a few cultures, with surprisingly little attention paid to Chinese consumers either in mainland China or in an ethnic Chinese cultural setting of North America. As an attempt to remedy this situation, the present study made a cross-cultural investigation involving Chinese–Canadian and Caucasian–Canadian children on three issues central to consumer socialization – parental communication patterns, children's consumer decision-making styles, and children's influence in family purchase decisions.

Given the popular view that Chinese culture exhibits a large power distance (or highly authoritarian) and highly collectivistic tendencies (Chao, 2000; Chen et al., 2000), we expected to find a significantly stronger socio-orientation and a weaker concept-orientation in Chinese–Canadian parents' communication to their children than in Caucasian parents'. While our results clearly indicated a stronger socio-orientation of both Chinese–Canadian mothers and fathers, neither Chinese–Canadian mothers nor Chinese–Canadian fathers showed a significantly different level of concept-orientation compared to their Caucasian–Canadian counterparts. Therefore, to a greater extent than Caucasian–Canadian parents, Chinese–Canadian parents emphasize conformity and obedience from their children in their communication about purchase/consumption. The relatively high scores of Chinese–Canadian mothers and fathers on concept-oriented communication were somewhat unexpected. On the other hand, when compared to the recent findings by Chan and McNeal (2003) on Chinese family communication patterns (using only a Chinese parents sample), the levels of socio- and concept-orientations observed in this study do not seem aberrant. These researchers found that Chinese parents engage in a high level of socio-oriented communication ( $M=3.59$  on a five-point scale), which was significantly higher than their hypothesized mean of the middle point on the scale (3.0). The level of concept-oriented communication reported by their Chinese parent respondents



was also higher than the middle point of the scale, albeit slightly (3.03). Given the large sample their study employed ( $n = 1665$ ), this mean value was significantly higher than their hypothesized mean of 3.0. The researchers concluded that contrary to their expectation, Chinese parents did not engage in a low level of concept-oriented communication.

The study by Zhang (2007) suggests that the present-day Chinese family communication patterns are more conversation-oriented than conformity oriented. Conversation orientation (conceptually similar to concept-orientation) refers to a family's encouragement of an open exchange of ideas and feelings whereas the conformity orientation (conceptually similar to socio-orientation) refers to parents' tendency to enforce child conformity (Ritchie, 1991). The parent–child relationship in Chinese families is going through a transformation under the changing macro societal conditions brought about by the nation's rapid modernization. Based on his findings, Zhang (2007) ventures that Chinese parents have shifted from conformity orientation to conversation orientation in parent–child interactions, and that this shift may actually reflect the transformation of Chinese culture from a highly hierarchical society to one that endorses equality and freedom (p.123).

Results from the comparisons of consumer decision-making styles between Chinese–Canadian and Caucasian–Canadian children were generally in line with the hypotheses. As anticipated, Chinese–Canadian children exhibited a more utilitarian orientation in their consumer decision-making styles, as indicated by their higher scores on *careful and deliberate decision-making* and *learning from product labels*. On the other hand, Caucasian–Canadian children, also as hypothesized, used the social/conspicuous approach to making purchase decisions to a greater extent than Chinese–Canadian children, as indicated by their higher scores on *recreational, hedonistic shopping orientation* and *brand status consciousness*. With regards to the two undesirable decision-making styles, comparison results were again consistent with the hypotheses. Whereas Caucasian–Canadian children were more impulsive and careless decision makers than Chinese–Canadian children, Chinese–Canadian children felt significantly more confused by overchoice than their Caucasian–Canadian counterparts. The finding that Chinese–Canadian children are less impulsive than Caucasian–Canadian children lends some degree of credence to the view that people in the collectivistic cultures learn to control their impulsive tendencies more than their individualist culture counterparts (Kacen and Lee, 2002; Gong, 2003). An alternative explanation for this finding may come from the view that limited financial resources available to Chinese consumers may have shaped their more price/value-conscious purchase orientation and such an orientation could easily have been inculcated into the buying behavior of their children. The finding indicating that Chinese–Canadian children feel more confused by overchoice in the market appears to be consistent with rather than contradicting the earlier result indicating a greater utilitarian orientation in their decision making styles in the sense that confusion is more likely to occur when children engage in more deliberate and extensive information processing in a purchase situation.

The final socialization issue investigated was children's influence in family purchase decisions. A significant difference was observed only for the adolescent 'convenience' product category; Chinese–Canadian children exercised greater purchase influence than their Caucasian–Canadian counterparts for this product category. A close look at the combined results for H3a and H3b shows that for both Chinese–Canadian as well as Caucasian–Canadian children, the mean influence level increases from the adolescent 'convenience' product purchase situations to the adolescent 'durable' product purchase situations, and that the increase is greater for the Caucasian–Canadian children (from  $M = 3.37$  to  $M = 3.65$  for Chinese–Canadian children vs. from  $M = 3.11$  to  $M = 3.80$  for Caucasian–Canadian children). A notable point revealed by these results involves the high levels of influence Chinese–Canadian children exert in family purchase decisions,

particularly those involving adolescent 'durable' category. The last few decades in China saw a fundamental change in the way that children's consumption was decided. Children play an increasingly important role in the family's purchase decision-making. Ying (2003) points out factors behind the rapidly increasing children's purchase influence in Chinese families. First, with the widespread improvement in the standard of living, people pay more attention to their children's education. Second, since the implementation of the one-child policy, the family lifestyle centering on the child has become the focus of family consumption. Lastly, a majority of parents experienced deprivation of basic necessities, but with the improvement in the standard of living, they hope their children could enjoy what they could not in their childhoods.

An issue of potential interest in the area of cross-cultural consumer socialization that stems from this study involves the effect of acculturation on children's socialization process. Acculturation refers to the acquisition of host cultural traits (Laroche et al., 1996), and as Chinese–Canadian children achieve a greater degree of acculturation toward the mainstream society (largely, the English–Canadian culture), they are expected to learn consumption-related attitudes and behaviors that more closely approximate those held by the children of the dominant culture. In an exploratory investigation, the Chinese–Canadian children's sample was split into two groups based on the length of residence in Canada and compared on two sets of socialization outcome variables, namely, consumer decision-making styles and their influence in family purchase decisions.

Results revealed a significant difference on only two of the eight consumer decision-making variables and none of the two purchase influence variables. Specifically, the group with a longer residence in Canada showed a significantly lower mean score on *brand status consciousness* and *impulsiveness*. However, when the mean values of Caucasian–Canadian children on these two decision-making styles are brought in for comparison, it became clear that the relationship between acculturation and the display of these decision-making styles may be more complex than that of a simple linear nature. Compared to Caucasian–Canadian children and their less acculturated counterparts, more acculturated Chinese–Canadian children exhibit the lowest levels of brand status consciousness and impulsive buying orientation. These exploratory results appear counterintuitive and suggest a need for future research aimed at understanding the impact of acculturation on children's socialization process, be that in the Chinese subculture or other ethnic minorities in North America.

As with most studies, this study has limitations that call for caveats in generalizing the findings to a wider context. First, an important concern in cross-cultural research involves equivalence of samples drawn from different cultures on key demographic features. There is much uncertainty particularly about the similarities of the two children samples employed in this study in terms of their parental and family background characteristics. Also, the Caucasian–Canadian children sample came from the Atlantic region of Canada that may not be representative demographically or even culturally of the ethnically diverse Caucasian–Canadian population in general. In addition, reliance on children's perspective alone in capturing dimensions and processes relating to consumer socialization may be inadequate. Children's consumer socialization encompasses interactive and dynamic family processes in which both children themselves as well as parents play key roles. Future studies should look for ways to incorporate measurement approaches utilizing multiple-informant perspectives. Lastly, as mentioned before, cross-cultural investigations of consumer socialization, especially those involving Chinese children's consumer socialization, face a wide range of significant issues warranting attention. Some of these issues involve parenting styles, parent–child communication about consumption matters, parental mediation in children's TV viewing or other consumption/purchase-related activities and their linkages with children's socialization outcome variables such as consumption/purchase autonomy, decision-making styles, attitudes

toward advertising, and influence and participation in family purchase processes.

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