



Embracing Change,
Realizing Dreams



China is old.

In fact, like the ladies in the senior citizens' home on the left, she is very, very old. Chinese civilization originated in various city-states around the Yellow River in the Neolithic era, around 9500 BC. A good 8000 years later, they had learned how to write, but even that was 3500 years ago.

Fast forward to today. If you bundled all of the 60-plus witnesses to the Cultural Revolution, once allowed to wear only Mao-suits generation, into one place, they would be the world's 9th most populous nation. 143 million¹, give or take a few million who don't remember their age. That's more than the entire population of Russia. Marketers who're thinking about how to sell in a belligerent Russia that blocks oil to its neighbors, we tell you – forget BRIC. Think BICC+ +. Sure it sounds like a computer programming language most common folks do not understand. Neither do China's senior citizens. But they were trading stocks over the internet until the markets collapsed, and they said, why didn't we trust our instinct instead of following what these young kids were doing?

Pardon the frivolity. But we think it is necessary to drive home a point.

'Embracing Change, Realizing Dreams' is as much a study into the psyche of a large group of people who have witnessed tumult and lived through a dream, as much as an appeal to our youth-obsessed, technology-possessed colleagues and clients: ignore China's active seniors at your own peril. The question we ask is:

Would you rather spend your marketing dollar or renminbi on a group of people who change their preferences every few months, sometimes on every shopping trip, or would you rather invest in building a relationship with someone who is unlikely to change brand choices, ever?

So, this is about thinking in the long-term. We have to find the marketing opportunity in the seniors market beyond herbal remedies for arthritic joints and health supplements. We must go beyond thinking that says 'old people are slow to respond to trends'. Quite timely too. Because that number of 143 million, currently comprising 11% of the population, is forecast to double by 2025². China will be older, much older. So will we. We can then spend our grey years reminiscing if we did the right thing by re-orienting our targets 'way back in 2008', or ruing over a missed opportunity.



WHY SENIORS MATTER IN CHINA

Pre-modern or traditional Chinese society placed elderly people on a pedestal. They were valued for their accumulated knowledge, their position within the extended family, and the sense of history and identity which they helped the family to develop. Respect for elderly people was an integral part of Confucian doctrine, especially for the family patriarch.

That position has not changed much. China's future is charted, and kept on course by the Politburo, a core group of powerful party leaders. Seven out of nine members of the Politburo are above 63. Even retired members of the Politburo and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) retain great power by serving as members of shadow advisory bodies. The CCP itself has a tradition of elderly active within its power structures, and its great leaders, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, worked to a very great age, into their eighties. Citizens refer to the more approachable of the Chinese leaders, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, as Grandpa Wen, a sobriquet he lived up to when he personally supervised the rescue efforts during the Sichuan earthquake (shown in the above picture).

The bulk of China's industrial landscape continues to be led and shaped by those at the helm of state-owned enterprises. Path-breaking entrepreneurs such as Haier's Zhang Ruiming and Lenovo's Liu Chuanzhi are above 55 and continue to play powerful roles in their organizations, indeed, their industry. In the private sector, even as the second generation gradually takes charge, the founders of the companies remain influential,

using their contacts, influence and power to swing decisions. These are the people who have, in the era of Opening Up, have shaped China. And they haven't been forgotten.

This group also believes in looking after their ilk. It was once part of the filial duties imposed by Confucianism to care for one's parents when they were old, so that when you too were old your children would in turn care for you. In the new China, that old order and sense of duty is breaking down, and the increased migration to cities of younger people, leaves the elderly as a residual population in smaller towns and villages, and dislocating, literally and figuratively, the traditional links between generations. So the elder leaders stepped in. In 2006, when the 11th Five Year Plan for the aged population was passed, it promised to establish 10000 senior citizens universities and schools, add 800000 nursing home beds, and open parks, museums, and libraries that would provide free or discounted services to senior citizens. In addition, private and foreign capital was invited to serve senior citizens, not only in the fields of medicine and finance, but also entertainment, tourism and legal services. The leaders know that at 65, it was quite possible that you'd want to splurge a bit of your lifetime's savings on a beach holiday, as it was that one of your kids would like to wangle his or her inheritance out of you sooner.



That opportunity is being wholeheartedly embraced by China's seniors. Go to a park in any city in the morning, and you will find it full of energetic elders engaged in activities as diverse as playing paddleball and pingpong, flying kites and crocheting mobile phone holders, singing an operatic piece or playing the erhu. On the grounds of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, we must have counted at least twenty-five such activities.



As these pictures show, theirs is not a gray world. It is a world that is filled with color and life.

Some of this color also comes from the fact that it is they who look after China's little emperors and empresses. With the parents off to work, the responsibility of minding the toddler falls on the grandparents. While many societies may complain of a generation gap, there's a bridge being built between generations in China. But this change is as confusing for the elder as it is for the child. The transition from being a doting grandparent to becoming the disciplinarians and main caregivers is challenging. Since the child's parents are still in the picture, chaos can sometimes ensue in the relationship – it's difficult when the parents come in on occasion and try to discipline the kids on a part-time basis.

The overall associations with old age and retirement are positive. Although the legal retirement age in China is 60 for men and 55 for most women, many employees of state-owned enterprises have been allowed to retire in their late 40s or early 50s to make openings for new graduates and others. That leaves a lot of active years left in these people: life expectancy currently runs at 71.8 years. In a study by the insurance company AXA³, 66% of retired people surveyed had positive associations, such as a feeling of having more time to devote to oneself, freedom, being able to enjoy life, being able to do things they liked, traveling, indulging in sports and leisure activity and having time for others – including taking care of their grandchildren. Those who were working had an even more positive outlook; with 76% believing that life after retirement would be good.

Half that number of retired people was pessimistic, citing poor health, financial difficulties and loneliness as associations with life as a senior citizen. If significant majority of a demographic segment are feeling good about themselves, why should we feel sorry for them?

This is the unlabelled generation that shaped contemporary China, and we have a responsibility to give them the opportunity and the means to make the most of their remaining lives.



Senior citizens have as much time on their hands, as are they eager to give their opinion about every subject under the sun.

STUDYING SENIORS – WHAT A PLEASURE !

As research subjects, seniors are a pleasure to work with. They are garrulous; they are as open as they are opinionated. They aren't usually rushing off for meetings, even though they might sometimes have to collect their grandkids from school – when they're happy to take you along. They are eager that you meet their circle of friends, mahjong or taichi partners.

Our study spanned China's megalopolises – Shanghai and Beijing, a relatively big city, Chengdu, and a small town in Guangdong province, Foshan. Using a mix of video and photo ethnography, and quantitative methods, we spent time with them, as much as we measured their opinions and preferences. We didn't bundle them into conference rooms. Rather, we had conversations with them in their natural habitat: parks, teahouses, their homes (or those of their children), old age homes, public libraries. That experience itself was heartwarming.

Our exploration spanned a range of subjects:

- how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with what life had to offer them
- to understand their views about changes they'd witnessed in Chinese society
- to get a deeper appreciation of their relationships with their family: their children and grandchildren; the challenges faced in and expectations from those relationships
- to understand which channels they sought and received information and news from
- to understand the relevance of various products and services for them, as well as get a sense of their unmet needs
- their attitude towards retirement homes.

That apart, we also were keen on exploring the representation of senior citizens in the media, particularly marketing communications; since we believed that much of the time, they were depicted as the ones who stood in the way of progress and modernization, as if their negative or outdated opinions had to be overcome in order to get ahead.

For those interested in the numbers, our quantitative sample comprised 1100 men and women in equal proportions, with a minimum of middle school education, and distributed across high, middle and low income groups. Our video ethnography sample comprised four individuals each in Beijing, Chengdu and Foshan. The views of an entire range of seniors - those living with their children and their families, old couples, living alone and those living in senior citizens homes are represented in our analysis.

This monograph is accompanied by a DVD containing a documentary. We urge you to spend the 52 minutes that would be required to view it.

Embracing and Adapting to Change



Sixty-eight year old Wu Yi is affectionately called hiphop granny by her friends, and now by the Chinese and international media. “I had the idea of setting up a hiphop dancing team in 2003, when I happened to watch a national hiphop dancing competition on TV. At that time, I thought, why not establish a hip hop dancing team of old people?” she said, her eyes twinkling. Wu Yi infected four of her friends with her enthusiasm. The old women donned red T-shirts and camouflage trousers, wore their sports shoes and colorful headbands and got going in a park. It was only a matter of time before sixty women joined the dancing team. Initially, some of their friends and relatives thought they were crazy and disapproved; now they’re stars on TV shows themselves and have started off a movement in several cities.

“Don’t get in the way of change.”

Over their lifetime, China’s seniors have seen their vast nation being lifted out of poverty and transformed into a glittering example of economic progress. In the cities, they have seen average per capita incomes rise nearly thirty times since 1978, the year economic reforms were introduced. The per capita spending power of senior citizens is expected to rise from \$1620 in 2005 to \$4112 in 2015⁴. These people have lived through and participated in that incredible transformation.

They have shed beliefs that they’d had been indoctrinated with in their youth. They’ve gone from having to stand in queue for food and kerosene rations to having the most incredible choice of local, national and international brands on the shelves of their local supermarket.

But within that change, they have held on to their family values and traditions. A majority of seniors – 51% lived with their children, and this number increased to 61% when we went to a smaller town like Foshan. Certainly finding more living space is not a problem in a smaller town, but the seniors or their families aren’t looking for it. 40% of the seniors were empty-nesters, living with their spouse, and 8% lived alone. However, what was common among the empty-nesters is that they chose to live in close proximity to their child’s home.

What is paramount in the family is the need to maintain a harmonious relationship, and that translates into financial, emotional and care interdependence. Intergenerational solidarity is very strong, across the city tiers. 91% of the seniors believed that living together, or regular visits were a way by which the young supported their parents; 73% considered material means (other than financial) as a way of support, while 63% had financial expectations of support. In smaller towns such as Foshan, grandparents feel more obligated to help with childcare, because they are more dependent on their children for old age support.

The key here is interdependence, and both sides making physical and emotional adjustments. Seniors describe the younger generation as one that is more open-minded,

independent, westernized, fashionable and impulsive, and they accept the change.

Overall, 57% of our respondents felt that western culture had a positive impact, allowing China and its residents to internationalize, learn from advanced technology, and enabled an upgrade in living standards. Among the 43% who felt the negative impact, the main concerns were about society becoming 'too open', and the young forgetting Chinese traditions. The 'worship of all things foreign', without a proper evaluation of if it is really good for them, is a cause for worry too. In the past decade, instances of living together before marriage are much more common among the young, and their parents accept it as the fallout of westernization. They do draw the line, however – having a baby before getting married still remains a taboo. Some, like Zhao Zhonghua in Beijing, believe that “young people frequenting karaoke bars, girls wearing miniskirts and sex before marriage all represent a certain stage of social development, and this is unstoppable.”

On their part, young people know that they must keep their parents on their side. They're the ones who will pay for the wedding, but more importantly, they're the ones who will look after the children when they arrive. Many old parents dip into their retirement savings to help their son or daughter take the first step towards buying a home. As these couples settle down into their jobs and begin earning well, the philosophy of reciprocity demands that they demonstrate their gratitude through gifts. Many seniors remain dismissive of such material returns: “I don't bother. To me, if my son does well in his job and achieves more than what I have is enough. It is more important than gifts or money.”





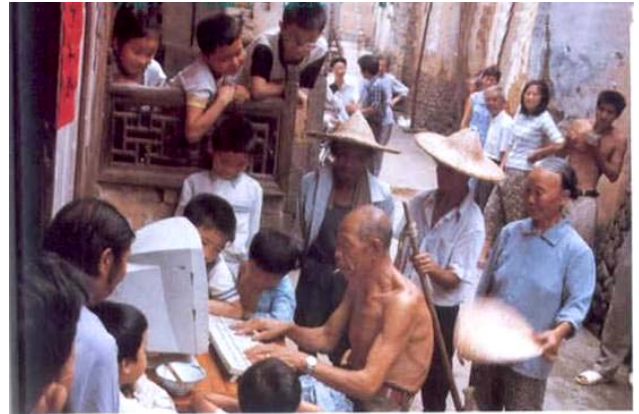
A significant number of senior citizens have embraced the opportunities that modern China has thrown up. If the old lady above, with a karaoke microphone, in the common entertainment room in an old age home in Beijing, is any indication, new technologies must be embraced with gusto. You only have to look at their spend patterns: after food, daily necessities and paying for utilities, their highest spend is on telecommunications – even more than their medical bills. New technology allows them to keep in touch, not only with their family, but also with their friends. 85% of our respondents said they kept in touch with friends through email; 68% emailed their relatives, and 53% emailed their children. The internet also enables them to have fun; and for the few who have the stomach or the spare cash, to trade in stocks online.

Main Spending Categories	
1	Food
2	Daily care
3	Public utilities
4	Telecommunications
5	Medical
6	Nutritional supplements
7	Apparel
8	Transportation

In Shanghai, over 200000 seniors hit the web every day. The ‘Old Kids’ website contains information on tai chi and hip hop classes, subway services, investment and legal advice and an ‘ask the doctor’ service. Through the personals column on the site, five couples have even got married, well after their respective spouses passed away. Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, of course, has his own Facebook page.

Senior citizens in Shanghai are now able to take distance learning courses close to home as almost all local community centers have been equipped with Web-based learning facilities. The Shanghai Education Commission, which runs the seniors

distance learning university had set up 213 schools and 4,261 teaching centers in communities throughout the city. Each of the community teaching centers can hold 20 to 50 people for TV or computer-based learning programs. About 887,000 seniors have taken the distance learning courses since university was set up four years ago. Web-based courses range from health care, arts, news, tourism, sports, literature and history, as well as foreign language skills. “We’ll continue to offer more interesting courses to enrich senior citizens’ lives and encourage them to keep learning,” said Li Junxiu, the commission’s director. He went on to add that the city government wants to raise the percentage of distance learning course attendants to 20 percent of the city’s 2.6 million citizens above the age of 60.



Seniors have also embraced the modern shopping formats of the supermarket, and cite the clean, hygienic environment as well as the diverse choices and reliability that the format offers. This is of course more true for Shanghai and Beijing, where 84% and 96% of our respondents, respectively, shopped regularly at supermarkets, compared with 47% in Foshan and 50% in Chengdu. In the latter cities, seniors remain accustomed to buying at wet markets, believing that food and groceries are fresher and cheaper than at supermarkets.



With traditional care systems breaking down, indeed reversing, and in the absence of a social security system, seniors find that they must invest in taking care of their health. 76% of our respondents said they did some kind of exercise; 39% took dietary supplements and vitamins, 23% believed it was important to remain active. With hospitals overcrowded, they would rather spend time taking preventive measures. While they believe in the efficacy of traditional Chinese medicine in curing and preventing most common illnesses, they find the modern modes of delivery, in the form of pills, capsules and suppositories much more convenient than having to grind and boil a druid’s (sorry, TCM practitioner’s) magic potion. It is also in the healthcare category that seniors tend to be brand conscious. Calcium supplements such as Gaizhong Gai and Caltrate, ‘brain’ tonics such as Naobaijing, and nutritional additives such as Angli

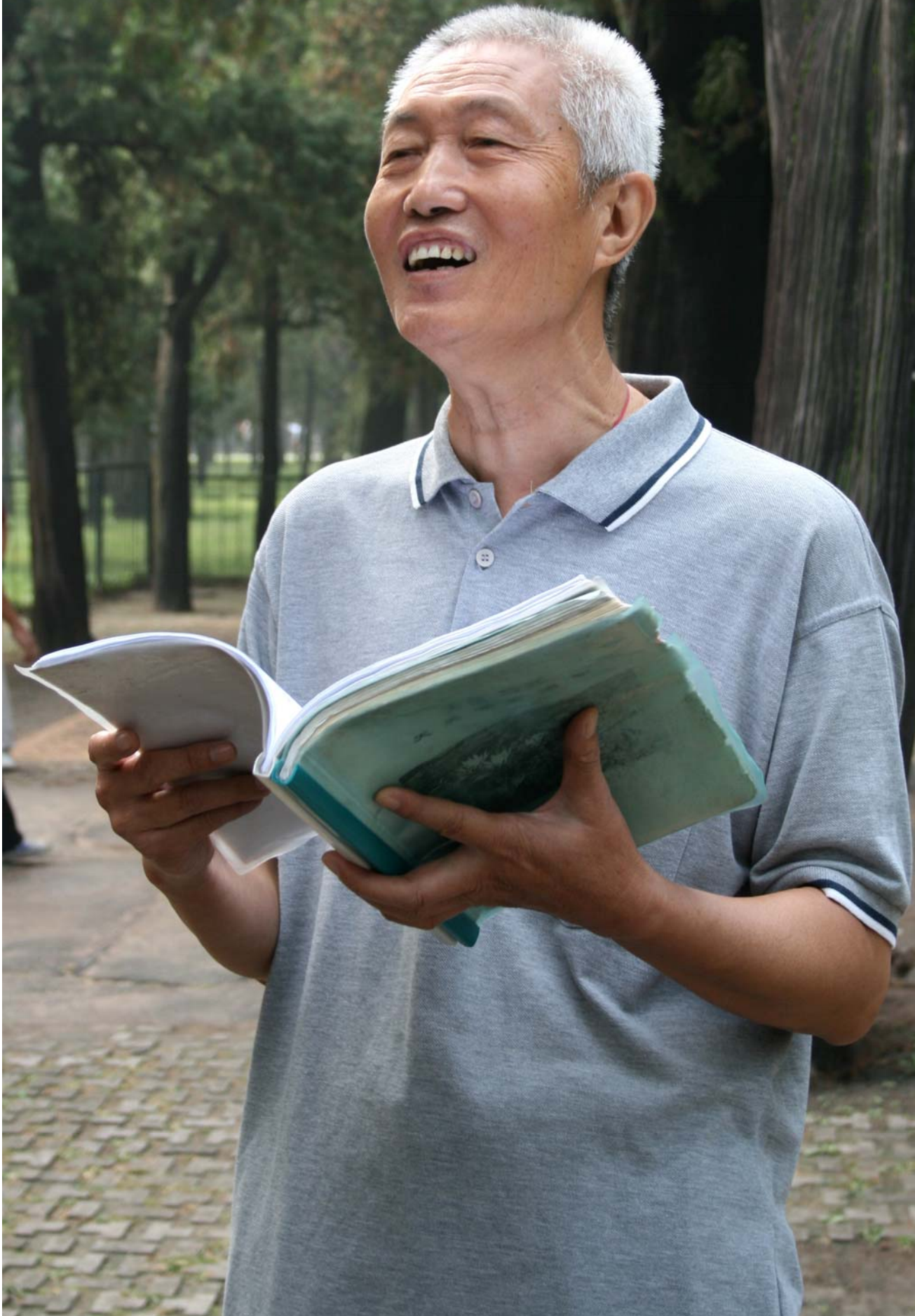


featured among their favourite brands; apart from milk brands like Mengniu, Sanyuan, Guangming and Yili.

One area of impending change is in the notion of living in a retirement home. Even though very few of the seniors we met lived in one – we had to make the conscious choice of studying the residents of one, 26% of our respondents said yes to the idea of living in one. 74 year old Jin Hongyin explained, “My children are very busy with their work; they have their own lifestyles and I enjoy my own. Living together may cause hassles for both of us.” Jin’s husband passed away several years ago and her three sons are all married. Two years ago, Jin rented out her house and moved to the retirement home. Sitting on a park bench with one of her fellow-residents, she said, “I can chat and play cards with my friends, and sometimes I watch TV programs. Life here is interesting and colorful.” Jin does not think that her children are not filial, instead she feels proud that she now lives on her own. She earns 1,000 yuan a month from leasing her former residence, more than enough to pay the monthly fees of 560 yuan. But it wasn’t easy. “When I decided to live at the retirement home, my sister-in-law cried for me, saying that I’m pitiful and she criticized my sons for letting me go,” she told us.

The lesson for us is evident: **old people in China have changed faster than our beliefs about them.** There is immense opportunity in the ways they lead their lives currently. Brands, corporations, government agencies can either choose to treat ageing as a problem, or they can view the optimism and adaptation capacity of this generation as an opportunity. But wait a minute: there are many seniors who have not only adapted, but are also living out a dream.

Realizing Dreams



In the sprawling grounds of the Jingshan Park, in the north of Beijing's Forbidden City, 62 year old Chen Shuqin, who you see on the previous page, gives his vocal chords a workout. Until ten years ago, the retired government official never had the opportunity. He was too busy implementing government programs in his district, and his passion for music remained confined to catching an occasional performance. No longer. He joins a



group of enthusiasts, who call themselves the Ziguang Chorus Group, sings songs mainly from the 1950s and 1960s. During each gathering, 'The Ode to the Motherland' is always the second last song they sing, and it is followed by 'Unforgettable Evening' when all the members wave their hands for farewell. The singers are of different levels of competence, and this affects the overall effect of chorus. During each performance, some semi-experts, all in their sixties, volunteer to be chorus conductors. Chen Shuqin prefers to stay away from centre-stage. "I enjoy singing, not making others sing," he says.

In another shaded corner of the park, a couple – the man playing the erhu, the lady crooning an operatic piece, give flight to their own fancy. They aren't looking for appreciation; they're merely living out a dream of togetherness. They don't expect applause from bystanders, but if someone does, they acknowledge it gently.



After retiring in Shanghai in 1994, Jeffrey Wong (pictured on the left), became concerned about the rapid pace of demolition and lack of protection for historic architecture in the area. From this concern, Wong cultivated an extensive collection of threatened architecture in the area. With his first architectural purchase in 1998 of a Qianlong era house from Suzhou, Wong created his own formula for historic preservation. "I took it apart, brick by brick,

tile by tile, pillars and all," recalls Wong. "Then I shipped it over to a piece of land I had acquired earlier in the Qingpu district of Shanghai where I had a workshop. I hired old craftsmen from the Suzhou area and started to repair and rebuild the house there." Over the past seven years, Wong has collected over 150 architectural

structures across China, rescuing them from certain demolition, including mansions from the Ming Dynasty, historical houses, tea houses, pagodas, bridges, and temples like Shanghai's original Jing An temple. With no plans of starting a new hobby anytime in the near future, Wong spends his retirement days reading, studying Chinese history and culture, and practicing his Chinese calligraphy.



But Li Yuze, pictured above right, takes his calligraphy very seriously. An array of brushes hangs on the wall of his small living room in Beijing, and sheet after sheet of text lie stacked on a table. Every morning, he gets out of his apartment for a walk up Jingshan Hill. It is where he meets his old friends, as they share their opinions about what's happening in China and in the world over glasses of green tea. After that, it is back to his parchment, brushes and ink. "Retirement give me the mental space and time to perfect my strokes," he tells us. The profusion of stationery and artist material stores near his home, as well as in faraway Chengdu tells us that calligraphy is a vibrant art form that has stood the test of time, and seniors are the bearers of the flame. Youth-market obsessed folks, why not a calligraphy talent show for seniors on national television?



Or a group dance / drumming contest, for that matter?

The enthusiasm of these women, seen on a rainy morning on the Bund in Shanghai, is hard to beat. But the pink, clad, stick-wielding grandmas aren't an anomaly. There are hundreds of such groups across cities big and small. Every morning, they wake up, pile into a bus and arrive at a park, riverside or square, and stage a symphony of sound and movement. Now and then, a store or a





restaurant or the management of an apartment block invites them to perform at the opening ceremony. They've found a way to monetize their passion. Brands could make them famous and earn their gratitude and commitment!

Senior citizens, like those everywhere, are remarkably passionate in preserving the traditions of China's past. As contemporary China embraces the spirit of revivalism (as our past explorations into creativity have indicated), their role as carriers of that tradition, ought to be recognized. Will the intricate, fluid swordplay of the group above or the pondering associated with a mahjong move be lost in the din and frenetic shooting of an X-Box game?



Again, like seniors in every part of the developed world, those in China love to travel. A majority of them cannot afford to travel far and for long, so they end up frequenting nearby destinations. It is usually when their children gift them a holiday, or take them along on their vacations, that they get to visit some of their dream destinations. It doesn't take much to conclude that there is an enormous opportunity out there, for inland tours by train or bus – to keep costs affordable.

But China is full of surprises. In Qufu, Confucius's home town, we encountered a group of fifteen 60 year old men and women who were on a 500 km cycling trip across Shandong province. Kitted out by bicycle company Trek, wielding backpacks and supremely fit, they'd have put any twenty-five year old, 'I work out at the gym three times a week' city dandy to shame. Red Bull, are you reading this?



If your minds have been, by now, stretched like the limbs of the ladies pictured overleaf, let's get back to some marketing / demographic nitty-gritties.

Statistics show that in China, the population over 60 is increasing at an annual rate of 3 percent, while the population over 80 is increasing at an annual rate of 5 percent. This means that each year, China will have 3.8 million more elderly over 60 and 500,000 more elderly over 80. The combined annual income of the elderly population is between 300 billion and 400 billion renminbi (between 42-57 billion USD). This includes their pension, income from re-employment and endowment from relatives and friends. Between 2025 and 2050, the potential purchasing power of the elderly is expected to be as high as 5 trillion renminbi, which will make the market catering to elderly consumers a large part of the future national economy.

With the economic case made, how could you possibly connect better with this demographic?

1. Give up the bias against senior citizens

Many, many brands we work on seem to come to us with one of the two problems: my user profile is aging, or my brand has a dated feel to it. It is always a problem, never an opportunity. The inevitable solution that is sought 'please help me make my brand younger'. If there's a significant proportion of the brand's current user base that is old, their needs, aspirations and beliefs are glossed over by a simple statement: 'they're old, but they feel young at heart'.

Pitiful.

In marketing communications, seniors are either shown as the ones who represent outdated values, and therefore the need for change and progress must be proven to them; or as the recipient of gifts (usually the brand itself) which their children think is good for them. These depictions, again, place the seniors at an inferior position.



Countless health supplement brands such as Guansheyuan keep on airing TVCs that show old couple smiling in gratitude upon receiving the gift of a really big pack. Remember what we said about seniors *not* wanting material returns from their children, but time? The underlying problem with such branding and communications is this: they are based on the needs of the *gifter*, who is making up for not spending time with his parents, rather than the need of the *user*. If the same brand

changed its approach to one where the promise was about enhancing the physical or mental agility of the seniors, it would perhaps be much, much more effective.

In other communications, we have observed seniors being shown as being disapproving of, or wondering about the behavior of the young. In our own TVC for M-Zone done a few years ago, two young boys who do a breakdancing routine while polishing a glass door straighten up at the approach of an old man. He runs into the door, of course – so is the butt of the whole joke, but our point is: do we have to drive a wedge between the generations?

2. Create lifetime value at 50

It was pretty straightforward to figure out the brand choices of senior citizens through our quantitative study. We know that their favourite soap brands are Lux and Safeguard, they like using White Cat, Omo and Libai detergents to do their washing, and wash their hair with Rejoice shampoo. Li Ning is a favorite sportswear brand, popular in both Beijing and Chengdu (possibly the fact that its owner is a man in his 50s and got himself wired up to light the Olympic torch creates affinity); though Chengdu residents have a fair liking for Nike as well. As a category, technology products with their high-techiness totally alienate seniors – at a time when these people spend so much on telecom?

The question to ask is: are these brands doing anything at all to keep their senior buyers?

Probably not. The detergent brands would continue to woo young homemakers, the soap brands would go on using film stars immersed in suds and earning admirers on the red carpet (or in college), and the sports brands would spend fortunes signing up NBA stars.

Keeping existing buyers stuck on your brand is not about communications alone. It is as much about designing the right products. We all know that seniors have special needs. Fewer features on a mobile phone, for instance. Just enough to make calls, store phone numbers and send text messages. It might be worth educating them to do voice dialing. They don't need the other forty features packed in. It confuses them. Fewer megapixels on a digital camera would do just fine. In a wired China, why can't the idea of One-Laptop-Per-Child be translated into One-Laptop-Per-Retiree?

Government statistics⁵ point out that there are 58 million seniors engaged in regular sports and fitness activities in China. Isn't that such a huge market? For most of these folks, a sports shoe doesn't have to be a piece of high-technology. Adequate cushioning for their arthritic knees and ankles would be adequate. To endorse the brand, you wouldn't need Shaquille O'Neal. A well-known Chinese athlete from the 1970s would do.

Seniors have to *feel* you're thinking of them. Not as has-beens or by-the-ways, but as

important, valuable customers with unique needs. Not as people who need doles, handouts or price-offs all the time. They've saved up for their golden years. Let us give them the privilege of enjoying themselves.

3. Ride upon the group behavior of the older generation

For seniors in the west, loneliness is one of the biggest problems they face. Research has shown that due to role changes caused by retirement, and deliberate attempts to prune their social networks to include only people they feel close to, older adults typically do not have as many people in their social circles as younger people do. They feel emotionally lonely, left out and lacking in close companionship. The implication of loneliness for brands is that i) you reach these people when they're alone, and ii) they take decision in isolation and independently – one of the key factors why this age cohort tends to stay with choices already made ten or twenty years ago.

This, as we've seen, is far from the case in China, where seniors have a far more stimulating social network than their counterparts in the west, and sometimes even the younger generations in China. Seniors typically have a set of overlapping social circles: from their past workplace, from the neighbourhood they reside in, the immediate and extended family. Through these networks, they are constantly being exposed to new ideas. Moreover, because seniors hang out together, in places that we can map, it is possible to engage them collectively. So, if Amway (one of the brands which seniors in China have a liking for) were to promote its Glucosamine caplets, the best place to do so would be at a park in the late morning, where you would surely find huddles of seniors clutching their sore knees. Because old people love to talk and share experiences, motivating satisfied users of a brand could well be integral to a WOM (word-of-mouth) strategy.

The propensity of seniors in China to gather, discuss and spread the word can well be used to reach other people who the seniors are connected with. One of the more interesting gatherings of seniors that takes place in parks across China, especially on Sundays, centres



around matchmaking. Young people, busy with their careers do not always find the time for romance and finding a mate. That's where their fifty or sixty something parents come in: as they throng these parks, put up posters advertising the qualities of their daughters and sons, and arrange for dates between potential partners. It is here that you also find representatives of banquet halls and wedding photography studios handing out business cards! There are plenty of other categories that can ride on this phenomenon, and involve seniors in spreading the word – amongst themselves, and to the groups they're affiliated with.

THE SHIFT THAT'S NECESSARY

The average age of employees at our agency is around 27. Many brand and marketing managers that we meet are around the same age, especially those who live in the digital world. Overwhelmed by change, keeping up with it, it is hard for us all to bring in the senior outliers into mainstream marketing thought and action. Even academic literature is thin on senior citizens, barring medical science.

Through this monograph and the accompanying video, we hope we've been able to bring the voices of our seniors into the boardroom. They fervently hope you're listening.

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ENDNOTES

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