

MEMORY IN CHINA AS A SOCIAL ISSUE

USING AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH IN

MARKETING

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I. THE METHOD IS MADE OF TWO MAIN STAGES

1. Describing the social reality of memory in China. The goal is to build a social map of practices and representations in order to determine where a product's use would be **prescribed, permitted, or forbidden.**

2. Proposing a discussion on positioning the product. The postulate is that social scientists only bring new information or a new way of dealing with it. They know no more than the other members of the organization do; they only have a specific expertise, which is in moderating groups.

II. GATHERING, DESCRIBING, AND INTERPRETING DATA

1. A qualitative technique

- based on in-depth interviews of one and a half hours, if possible at the home or workplace of the interviewee, and on collective focus groups
- Interviews are not recorded. Notes are taken as fast as possible in the words of the interviewees without choosing or summarizing them.

2. A “double culture” method

- The field study is organized **with both Chinese** (under the direction of Zheng Lihua) **and French** researchers (Sophie Taponier, Dominique Desjeux).
- **Interviews are done in Chinese** then translated into French.
- **The most important Chinese words are written in pinyin**, tones being indicated by figures from 1 to 4.
- The report is **written in French**. One part is written in Chinese.

3. All interviews

- are **organized and presented by themes** (practices and representations),
- then the same themes are gathered together and **transformed into categories** (stages of the itinerary for practices and symbolic dimensions for representation), which are the base of the description.
- **Diversity more than regularity is sought** in the first stage. Regularity is found within each part of the diversity.
- **Internal interpretation** (how it works) more than external explanation (why it is like this) is constructed.
- It is an **inductive method** (even if we know our previous accumulated knowledge organizes our way of looking at reality). Hypotheses are made at the end of the study.

4. The report is made of 3 parts:

- a 30-page **synthesis**, transformed into **transparencies**
- a 250-page **analysis**, composed mostly of quotations
- an **appendix**, with the methodological tools (guides, bibliography).

III. SYNTHESIS

A. Social practices of memory

1. The functions of family memory
2. Training memory at school
3. Memory, a central tool in building a capital of social, friendly, and family relations
4. Memory and health, a holistic vision of struggle against disharmony that threatens mind and body

B. REPRESENTATIONS OF MEMORY

C. POSITIONING TANAKAN

INTRODUCTION

Memory is analyzed in two main dimensions: practices and representations.

- I. **Practices** are observed at a **micro-social scale** of social interactions, strategies, and uses of memory
 1. Memory is seen to be a **social construction throughout the life cycle**; it is taught first in the family, then in school and in professional life.
 2. At this scale, memory is integrated into a **world vision of “good health”** that comprises food behaviors, body practices, life rhythms, and memory.

II. **Representations** of memory are based on the **actors'** 4 scales of description

1. The **bio-medical scale**, that of cells and of the brain (storage)
2. The **micro-individual scale**, **close to** cognitive psychology (without the unconscious dimension) (memorization)
3. Memory is shown at **the micro-social scale** (construction) as:
 - a **social mechanism** depending on social interactions among family members, friends, and colleagues
 - a **social endeavor**: building a social capital of relationships

Memory is a **corporal, mental, and moral practice** that permits individuals to cultivate social ties; it is a source of social pressures and a requirement for social success.

4. At a **macro-social and macro-cultural scale**, the importance of harmony as a **balance** between opposite tensions and **of the life cycle in the evolution of the perception of** memory are shown.

EXAMPLES

I. THE FUNCTIONS OF FAMILY MEMORY: A MEMORY OF INTIMACY AND OF AFFECTIVE PROXIMITY

1. **Birthdays and gifts:** remembering a birthday is a sign of respect to one's parents and of affective proximity (father, mother, significant other, children, brothers, - sisters ? - intimate friends) (hierarchy of importance)
 - The gift is often money (cultural habit).
 - All members of the family are responsible for remembering the birthday (social interactions).
 - **New holidays:** wedding anniversary, mother's and father's days (**special occasions**)
2. Two main functions of family memories: **continuity of family and transmission of values**, by oral or written means.
 - Interviewees disagree on the importance of this transmission; for some, it is very important because it is a way of learning how to build their social network, their identity, and so on.
 - For others, it is an issue of the past.

Remark: This is a good example of diversity, which has to be taken into account in the strategy of communication.

3. Objects of memory

- The transmission of objects varies from family to family. (The Cultural Revolution broke down the importance of transmission in some families.)
- Objects have four values: moral, financial, affective, and as a condition of happiness (photos, small objects, family tablets)

4. The cult of ancestors (*ji4 zu3*):

- a surviving practice, but with great diversity, ranging from no practice at all to occasional practice (spring feast, death feast) to daily practice

Remark: There is a strong diversity of opinions and practices concerning memory that may be the sign of a hidden debate in China between tradition and modernity. What is at stake is the degree of importance given to memory and thus the choice of the topic of communication.

II. THE SOCIAL IMPORTANCE OF MEMORY

- Having a good memory is **highly valued socially**, which is why most of the school system is organized around training memory in order to succeed at school and in professional life.
- Having a good memory is a **sign of social integration**.
- **Social pressure depends on the position within the life cycle**: it is very strong in childhood and the beginning of the professional life, and less strong for old people.
- Training is based on **three main individual and collective exercises**: repetition (writing the same word several times), association (to help memorization), and the recitation of full texts.
- **Success in qualifying examinations** is based on having a good memory.
- **There is a difference** in the importance attributed to memory, depending on whether at primary school or university, in humanities or in scientific disciplines.

Memory is the ability to memorize, a tool for success, and a means of socialization.

III. MEMORY, A STRATEGIC TOOL IN BUILDING SOCIAL NETWORKS

- After school training, memory is **mainly a professional requirement**. The importance of building a social network varies — it is important for salespersons and service professionals.
- Memorizing depends on **three types of logic**: affective (family and friends), spatial proximity (colleagues), and utilitarian (professional activity)
- **All information** (family names, first names, nicknames, phone numbers, meeting dates, hobbies, and so on) **has to be retained by memorization**. Use of appointment books is unusual. Appointments are set one, two or three days before, not more.
- **Techniques of memorization** are designed to **reduce** the difficulties of memorization and to **minimize the cost of memorization** (association, mnemonic, remembering the easiest detail, such as the name of the person's work unit, then the person's name, facial shape...)
- **Objects of memorization** are not numerous: business cards, notepads, electronic organizers (used once before memorization).
- **Memorizing is of great importance**: avoiding losing face. There are thus many strategies to circumvent the problems (asking someone else for a name, calling people by their titles...)
- **For older people, having a bad memory is less damaging socially**. People in their environment help them find the right name.

POSITIONING TANAKAN

- To make a long story short, **Tanakan is a drug that helps the circulation of blood.**
- **Drugs have a bad** image for long-term cures, unlike fortifiers/tonics, soup, “hot” or “cold” foods...
- At the level of representations, memory is made of **three stages in the life cycle**: birth (infancy to childhood), optimum (childhood to adulthood) and decline (adulthood to elderliness). **What is at stake is the positioning of boundaries between these stages. Memory is thus a matter of moving objects.**

Avoiding the image of drugs and integrating the representation of health as a holistic practice

- Tanakan has a **double image** of drug and fortifier (herbal medicine giving strength). (Focus group analysis)

- **Positioning**
Memory has two functions: **improving social competition** or **minimizing the cost of loss of memory** (adulthood and older people). Tanakan can help with the second function.

- **Orienting communication**
stressing the benefits of good health and its natural origin

- **Setting the price**
Low price is linked to cheap products, high price to luxury or upscale products. If Tanakan can be positioned as a gift object, it may be possible to opt for a high price.

- Four more questions are raised: **taste sensitivity, signs of confidence** (packaging, color codes, and the aesthetics of Chinese characters), **the texture** of Tanakan (liquid seems acceptable), and the **social network of prescription on which base the communication beyond** the traditional medical prescribers (family).
(Corrected by Ray Horn, Paris/Tampa, 1999)