

27y old Linda is well educated, articulate and suave – the face of new China. With a masters degree from the US she came to Beijing all by herself and now has a fast track career in a multinational consulting firm. As you get to know her you realize Linda comes from a seriously wealthy family from Ji Nan in Shandong province with no real need to move 2000 kms away from home and build her own life. She reflects, 'just a generation ago, girls like me would be just happy to enjoy their privileged background and marry into another rich family approved by their parents. Life would be one long shopping trip.' Then she hastens to add 'even if you are beautiful, wear the most fashionable dresses but having nothing in your brain, you will be seen as a flowery blockhead. I always wanted to prove that I am not only beautiful but intelligent and capable'.

Then there is Wang Yu, a 31y old man from a small town in Southern China. He came to Shanghai with very little in his pocket to get a slice of the Shanghai dream. Nearly 10 years of hard work and diligence has seen him climb to the post of department manager at a joint venture company. Today he says with a hint of pride in his voice 'I come from an average family and both my parents are workers. This meant I could only rely on myself. I went to a good university thanks to my grades and found a good job by my own efforts. Don't judge me by my family background. People should judge me for what I have achieved through my knowledge & skills'. Two very different lives in the new China. Linda used her privileged background as an opportunity to build her character to earn 'face' while Wang overcame his tough background and earned 'face' by building his character and climbing the corporate ladder.

Bates 141 China in partnership with Sina.com, Nielsen Online & Hylink Advertising recently undertook a nationwide online survey to understand the age old value of 'face' in the new changing China. Even as China modernizes and embraces new values, 'face' is a value Chinese people still hold dear to their hearts – Nearly 80% of the respondents feel 'face' is worth pursuing.

### **'Face' – a collective identity (me + my family + my country)**

68% of respondents agree the measure of 'face' is closely linked to the 'face' of their entire family not just them as individuals. And an even greater 71% agreed that the 'face' of China is closely linked to their 'face' as Chinese people. Olympics & Expo are two 'face' enhancers. As is building the worlds biggest, tallest, and fastest things right here in China. The recent controversy surrounding the Olympic torch relay has managed to unite the people of China in a show of support for their nation and thereby their own 'face'.

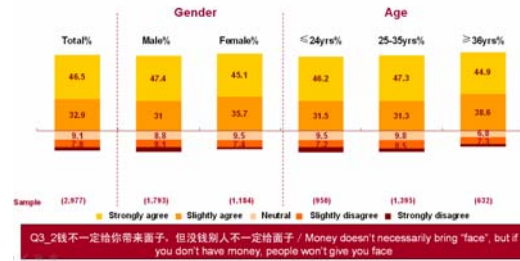


## No money no 'Face'

At a more personal level not surprisingly career success and the resulting money / wealth are crucial to earning face today. The race to climb the career ladder is on in full swing. A meaty bank balance is almost a hygiene factor in getting social esteem today

It is fascinating to follow the journey of a nation - once steeped in social classes on the basis of personal wealth; China went through a phase of leveling of society during the Cultural Revolution and is again re-organizing itself into classes based on personal wealth. Spending power is today defining their position in society.

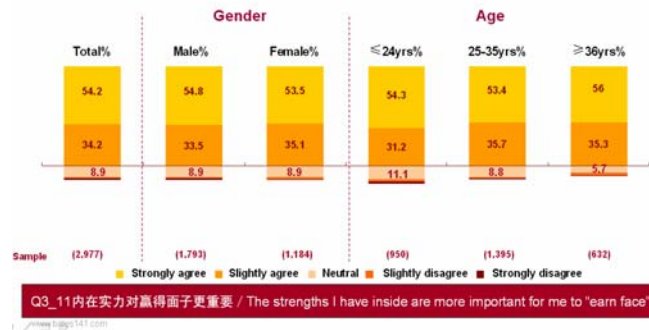
Almost 80% agreed that money & wealth is a pre-requisite to getting 'face'.



## A commitment to character building

But then there are Linda & Wang Yu people who believe in the cultivation of inner character and conscience.

Sure I may have made money but then after that my face will be evaluated on the strength of my character, my intrinsic values – 88% of respondents

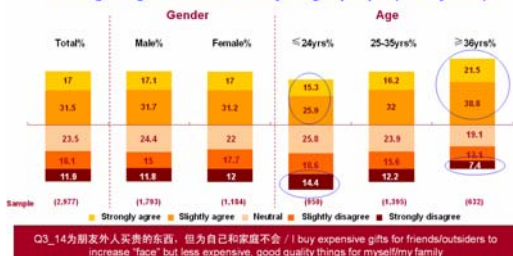


## 80s Generation – not a blind follower of societal norms

There are clear signs of change in thinking and behaviour amongst the younger people. The 80s generation is more self centered. They would rather treat themselves right than spend on buying expensive products for others to earn face. Younger people (at only 41%) are far less keen to spend more on face earning things for friends compared to older respondents (at 60%) a big 20% point difference.

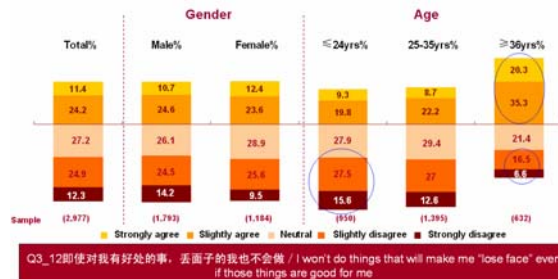
Depriving oneself to give expensive items for friends is still prevalent. But that is beginning to change with the 80s generation.

Older respondents (at 60%) are willing to spend more on face earning things for friends than younger people (at only 41%).



Take the case of Xiao Fei. A university student Xiao also works part time in a restaurant. Working in a restaurant has strictly been for the poor and no self respecting middle class Chinese would be caught dead working in one. Xiao though does it not because she needs the money to pay her tuition but because she enjoys the little extra cash and she believes she is picking up social skills that will one day help her at her place of work. The 80s generation is starting to feel that it is important to do things that are important or good for them and not be a blind follower of societal expectations

43% of young people (below 24y) disagreed they will put 'face' before what's personally good for them – almost double (23%) that of those over 35y

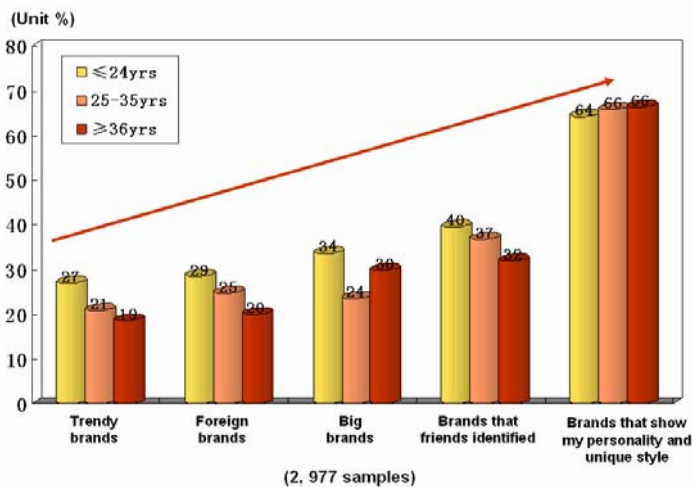


### The right brands can add 'Face'

After spending the better part of two hours Xu Dong closed the online shop window with a satisfactory smile on his face. He had just ordered a Graniph Tee at 245RMB on the net - a new Japanese brand making waves in Japan but not yet available in China. He says 'it is a new up coming brand, not very big or expensive...few people know about it. But, once you see it you will love it, it has good quality and its patterns are designed by good graphic designers from all over the world. I love its unique patterns, my friends will think I have different taste and I know I will look cool in front of them.'

Our survey clearly showed that just being 'foreign' or 'trendy' or even boasting being 'big' is not the best way that brands can bring 'face' to the buyer. Brands that get friends or peer approval earn more face – standing out within their own tribe. But a **staggering 65% of respondents agreed that brands that reflect or**

### Brands - Path to greater 'face'



**help bring out their unique personality will truly bring 'face' to them. Not just brands that is foreign or trendy.**

We met Chen Jie a brand conscious lady in her early thirties. Chen told us 'I care more about what hides behind the brand, e.g. its style and the feeling or temperament the brand will deliver. I make sure the brand matches my personality and reflects

the type of a person I am. If you are a more elegant and mature woman, then obviously, Mini Cooper would not be your right choice – see signed off’.

## Earning ‘Face’ – a motivator & a life long journey

At least for now nearly 68% (a strong majority) of the respondents are enjoying the journey to greater ‘face’. It acts as a motivator to do better or do more in life.

An equal number of respondents feel earning ‘face’ is a lifelong journey. 66% of the respondents agreed that they are continuously striving for the next big ticket to ‘face’.

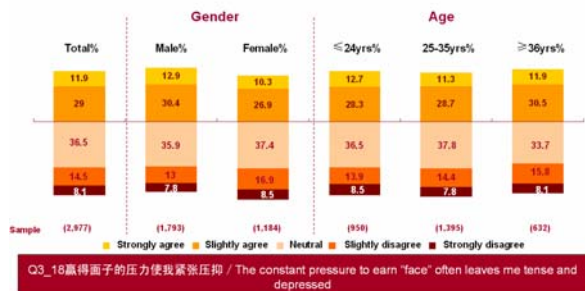


Li Xingqiang owns & runs a small-scale research field agency in Guangzhou. Although only 27, he is already worth a couple of million Yuan having started out with just 20,000 Yuan. The desire to earn ‘face’ has always been his greatest driver. But digging a bit deeper you realize that sometimes this constant rivalry between friends can lead to depression if they are unable to keep

up with expectations.

‘In most people’s eyes, I am already a high status person and I have earned ‘face’. I can afford a house, a car and live quiet well’. But then Li goes on to add - ‘my classmate Wei Qiang who inherited his father’s business & fortune has millions more to invest in real estate and he is my same age. We move in the same circles and I just feel pressured to achieve more’. And these expectations could sometimes weigh them down.

But it is beginning to affect people. 40% of the respondents feel tense or depressed if they are unable to keep up with earning ‘face’



Linda, Wang Yu, Xiao Fe, Xu Dong & Li have embraced an age old Chinese value but living it with a new attitude. An attitude that is both ambitious and pragmatic enough to help them achieve their life goals. Brand marketers - we either live this attitude with them or be left out.



Study Brought to you by -  
Bates 141 China in partnership with  
Sina.com, Nielsen Online and Hylink Advertising



National Online Survey – Sample Size 2977. Male – 1793 & Female – 1184. Age – Upto 24y – 950, 25y to 35y – 1395, 36Y above – 632  
Respondents names changed to protect their identity

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