

『履之泉』

時尚鞋履品牌工作坊



講義(二)

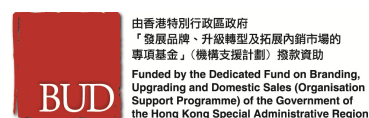
主辦單位



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**BRAND STRATEGY FOR HK FOOTWEAR ENTERING INTO MAINLAND:
A SOCIOCULTURAL APPROACH**

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CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND OF STRATEGY

WHAT SHOE GIVES – HISTORICAL & CULTURAL

High heels are now considered to be a modern feminine symbol and it helps exaggerate, particularly, some parts of the feminine aspects. While there are both men and women who might endure high heel fetishes, high heels were actually popular among men in seventeenth century France and it was men who first wore heels (Lehman, 2013). The high heels were originally thought to be a symbol of social status (Hémard, 2010; Semmelhack, 2008) and was considered (in some cases) to help make the men look taller (which would be the practical ‘use values’ of the shoe, of course). Just as King Louis XIV posed in a painting (see Figure 1) with his long hair, intricately patterned dress (which is now mostly associated with girly fashion), tights (which except for girls are probably only worn today by those imaginary super heroes except for Iron Man), and on the high heels, the high heels were there to symbolically show off his opulent wealth¹ and social status, yet basically none of these once fashionable items is still considered cool for the modern masculine gender of today. The only value left for this, if any, would be the cultural and historic value of the object itself – the heels that were once wore by the French royalties. Yet, had high heels been advertised and marketing in seventeenth century France, it would have likely targeted at the ‘surface symbolic values’ instead of the ‘practical use value’ of the shoe as protection for the feet, let alone its functions. After all, it was not the shoe that people have always wanted (as a mere commodity), but the ‘symbolic value’ in terms of social signature, the extravagant display of one’s status and being sufficiently affluent to enjoy such luxurious material that people were once after. In fact, none of this seemed to have changed over the centuries because even nowadays people tend to focus more on the ‘symbolic value’ of the product, for instance, the vain display of superiority over the other gender with a pair of leather shoes in 2009 (see Figure 2a) or a pair of trousers from the 1970s (see Figure 2b).

¹ Linguistically, ‘well-heeled’, a term now considered to be synonymous with ‘opulent wealth’, was thought to have originated from the same concept (Hémard, 2010).



Figure 1. King Louis XIV posing (left) in Rigaud's painting² and leg details (right).



Figure 2a. Max Shoes advertisement, Switzerland (2009).

² This is the oil on canvas painting, Louis XIV, by Hyacinthe Rigaud in 1701 and King Louis XIV died 14 years after this painting, see <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/monarchy-enlightenment/baroqueart1/france/a/rigaud-louis-xiv>



Figure 2b. Mr. Leggs Dacron ‘slacks’ advertisement³ (1970).

³The description on the advertisement says, ‘Though she was a tiger lady, our hero didn't have to fire a shot to floor her. After one look at his Mr. Leggs slacks, she was ready to have him walk all over her. That noble styling sure soothes the savage heart! If you'd like your own doll-to-doll carpeting, hunt up a pair of these he-man Mr. Leggs slacks. Our new automatic wash wear blend of 65% Dacron® and 35% rayon—incomparably wrinkle-resistant, about \$12.95 at plush-carpeted stores.’

SALES IN THE POLARISED CHINA

With a dominantly masculine, collective, large power distance, inequality-bearing (see Figure 3) and unequal society (see Figure 4a) with relatively high Gini coefficients along the past few decades since the 1990s (see Figure 4b), footwear sales figures in China seem to have exhibited peculiar ‘symbolic synchronicity’ and jived nicely with the various income levels (see Table 1 below). Apart from the fact that shoes can merely be a simple commodity for the average low income public, per capita shoe consumption does go up with rising income levels. It is thus important to understand the demographics and the related trends of China (as well as its supporting logistics infrastructure) for any branding strategy to become truly feasible, especially when retailing seems to have already saturated all around the coastal areas (see Figure 5).

INCOME LEVEL							
Lowest	Low	Lower Middle	Middle	Upper Middle	High	Highest	National Average
1.99	2.89	2.75	3.04	3.25	3.60	4.12	3.01

Table 1. Per capita annual shoe consumption of urban residents by income level, 2012⁴

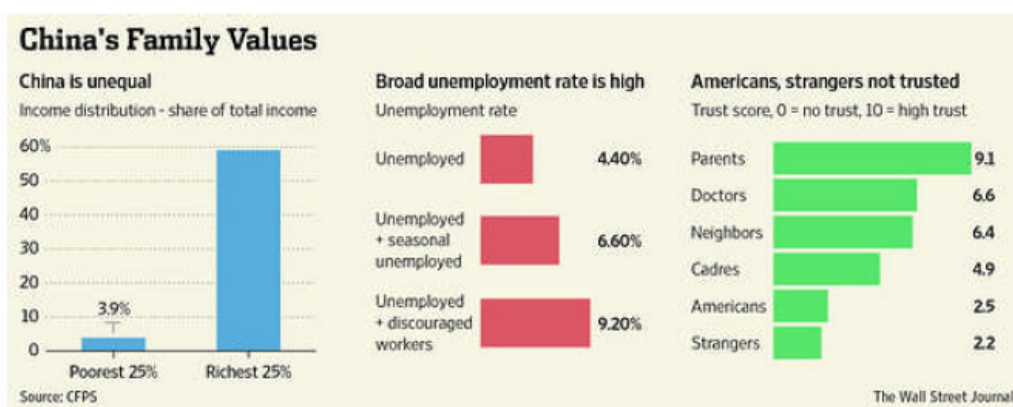


Figure 3. China’s family values. Source: China Realtime⁵

⁴China Statistical Yearbook, 2013.

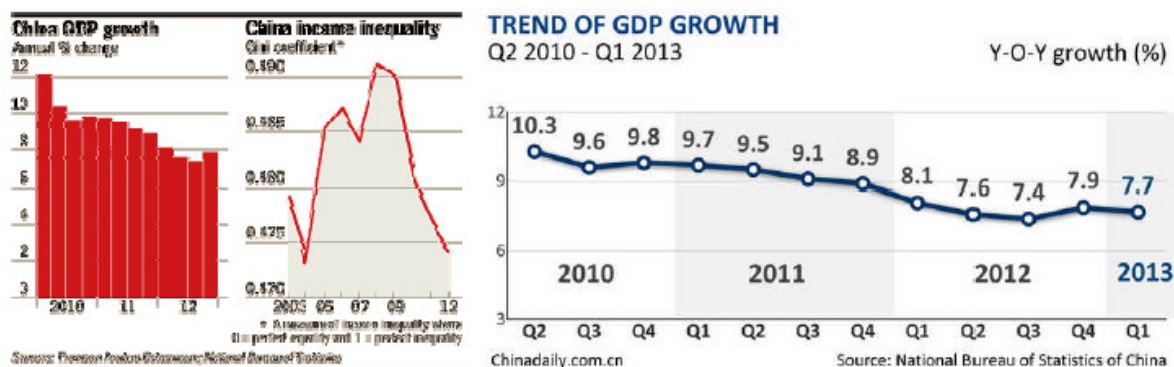


Figure 4a. GDP growth, Gini coefficient. Source: Financial Times⁶ and China Daily⁷

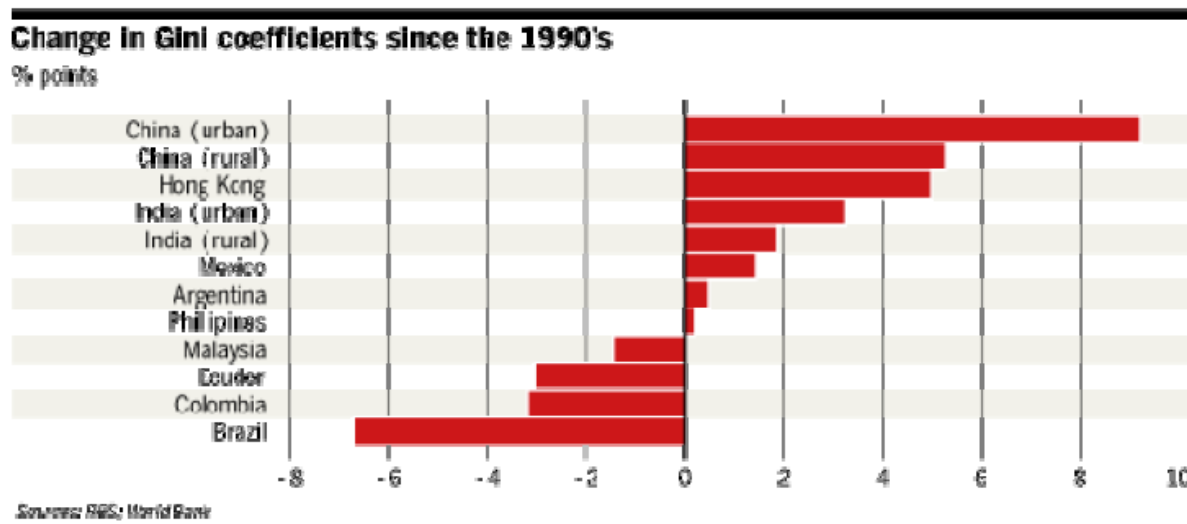


Figure 4b. Change in Gini coefficients since the 1990s. Source: Financial Times⁸

⁵ See the article, 'New Survey Finds China Unequal, Unemployed and Untrusting', dated July 26, 2013, accessible from <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2013/07/26/survey-casts-doubt-on-chinas-jobless-data/>

⁶ See the FT article, 'China wealth gap data stoke scepticism' by Simon Rabinovitch, dated January 18, 2013. Accessible from <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/1feb0128-614a-11e2-957e-00144feab49a.html>

⁷ See China Daily: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2013-04/15/content_16401728.htm

⁸ See the FT article, 'Chart of the week: inflation stoking inequality in China and India' by Andrew Whiffin, dated May 24, 2011, accessible from <http://blogs.ft.com/beyond-brics/2011/05/24/chart-of-the-weekinflation-stoking-inequality-in-china-and-india/>

Retail Market Saturation Index

Aggregate Tmall.com sales and physical store locations for Gap, H&M, Uniqlo, and Zara across China

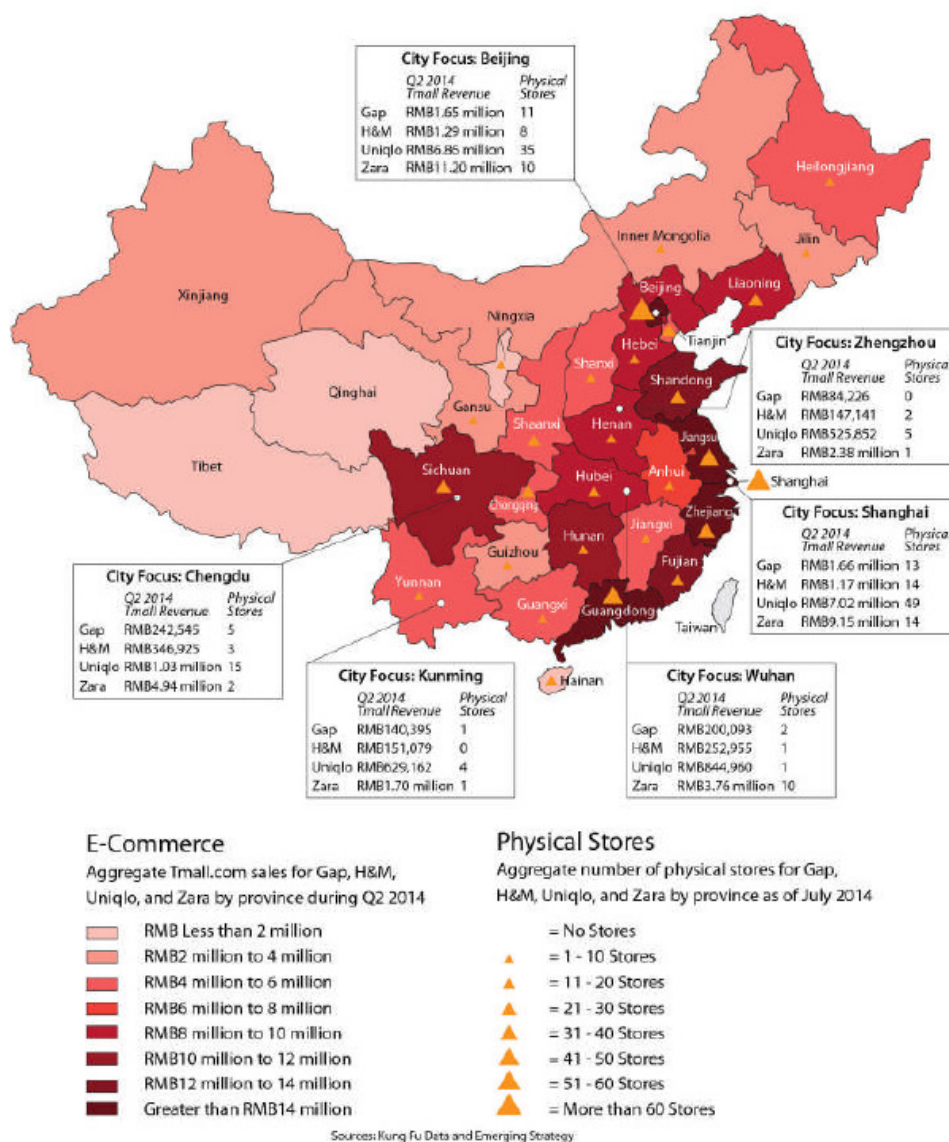


Figure 5. Retail market saturation in China. Source: Emerging Strategy⁹

⁹ Please refer to the ‘retail market saturation index’ dated December 30, 2014 by Emerging Strategy. Extracted from Emerging Strategy’s publication ‘Service providers’ perspective: retail in China’, the infographic shows the importance of e-commerce to mass apparel brands. Through the help of e-commerce, apparel brands can reach consumers far away from their respective physical presence. The heat map shows the growth potential in western China. Increasing internet penetration coupled with e-commerce-savvy consumers indicates that less developed and less densely populated parts of China will also be prioritized for growth. See <http://www.emerging-strategy.com/infographic/market-saturation-in-chinas-retail-industry/>