

# 『履之泉』

## 時尚鞋履品牌工作坊



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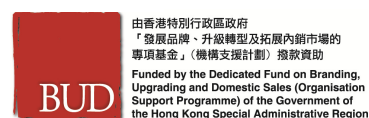
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**BRAND STRATEGY FOR HK FOOTWEAR ENTERING INTO MAINLAND:  
A SOCIOCULTURAL APPROACH**

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## SUBCONSCIOUS BRAND STRATEGY OF CULTURE

Given such an uneven, if not totally polarized, mainland China market and knowing the fact that economic cycle generally leads fashion trends<sup>10</sup> with about three years (van Baardwijk, Franses, 2010), causes product sales trends for the different genders to part ways<sup>11</sup> (see Table 2) and also defers necessity-based apparels<sup>12</sup> easily during a downturn (Mui, 2009), successful brand strategies (for either high or low-end products) should best seek to take advantage of the clashing forces between the ups and downs of the economic cycles and the intrinsic cultural forces of the society (e.g. demands created as a result of face-saving reasons during changes in the economy)(Cheng, 2015), particularly when regional differences obviously exist among the different provinces. To this end, we shall tackle it from the perspective of the different genders.

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Men's	84,862.4	96,217.5 (+13.4)	104,587.9 (+8.70)	114,837.5 (+9.80)
Women's	119,132.5	134,860.5 (+13.2)	153,735.8 (+14.0)	169,878.0 (+10.5)
Children's	26,096.5	28,973.2 (+11.0)	32,595.8 (+11.3)	36,181.3 (+11.0)
<b>Total</b>	230,091.5	260,051.1	290,919.4	320,896.8

**Table 2.** Footwear sales in 2010-2013 (in RMB, million). Source: Euromonitor.

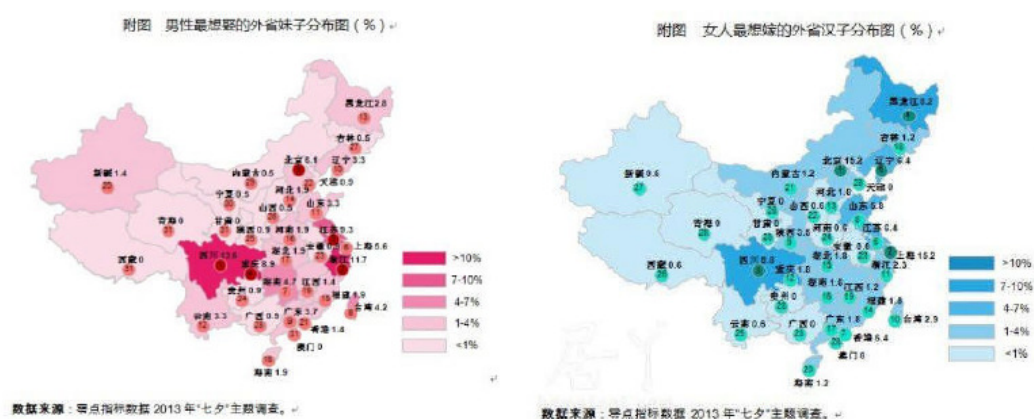
<sup>10</sup> See George Taylor's 1926 hemline index theory (Brayford, 2008; Lewin, 2008; Prast, 2005) suggests that hemlines on women's dresses rise along with stock prices in good economies resulting as miniskirts (as seen in the 1960s) or with long dresses in poor economic times as during the 1929 Wall Street crash when hemlines can drop almost overnight.

<sup>11</sup> Notice how the sales growth of men's shoes have quickly responded with the Chinese economy during the period 2011-2013 while the decline of sales growth of women's shoes took place almost a year later. Had it not been for such a masculine society (and the female gender is not as financially independent), the slowing down in female shoes sales in 2013 might not have been this obvious. Children shoes, meanwhile, are not affected.

<sup>12</sup> The men's underwear index is supposed to help detect the beginnings of a recovery during an economic slump. The premise is that men's underwear is a necessity in normal economic times and sales should normally remain stable. According to Mui (2009), during a severe downturn, demand for these goods changes as new purchases are deferred. Hence, men's purchasing habits for the underwear, and that of their spouse on their behalf, is thought to be a good indicator of discretionary spending for consumption at large, especially during periods of economic turnaround.

## CLASHING HELP: THE GENDER

By reverse psychology, one gender tends to care more above themselves when they get to receive more attention from other. Having said this, let us look at the ‘ideal partner index’ of China (see Figure 6 and Table 3) below. The map dictated the priorities of male (right) and female (left) of their provincial preferences in choosing their partners or spouses, if not local<sup>13</sup>.



Province	N/S	REG	GDP growth per capita						GDP per capita			EX15	D/C	D/S	I/G	I/B
			'08	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'12 (RMB)	'13 (USD)	'14 (RMB)					
Beijing	1	1	12.4	10.3	8.1	7.7	9.07	7.7	70251	15216.31	10.0855	7	208	12469	6.1	15.2
Shanghai	0	1	12.9	10.3	8.2	7.5	7.04	7.7	73297	14652.98	9.7561	7.5	639	34826	5.6	15.2
Zhejiang	-1	1	10.5	12.3	9	8	8.38	8.2	49791	11075.57	7.3033	7.5	639	34826	11.7	2.3
Jiangsu	0	1	14.1	12.7	11	10.1	9.44	9.6	51999	12061.51	8.1986	8	639	34826	9.3	6.4
Guangdong	-1	1	11.5	12.4	10	8.2	8.93	8.5	43596	9474.66	6.3691	8	182	11996	3.7	1.8
Tianjin	1	1	18.7	17.4	16.4	13.8	11.45	12.5	70402	16419.44	10.681	9	208	12469	0.9	0
Fujian	-1	1	15.8	13.9	12.2	11.4	10.45	11	37404	9374.26	6.3741	10	639	34826	1.9	1.8
Shandong	1	1	14.3	12.3	10.9	9.8	9.97	9.6	41147	9117.04	6.1057	8.5	639	34826	3.3	5.8
Laioneng	2	1	17	14.2	12.1	9.5	9.07	8.7	40003	9961.65	6.5209	6	164	9194	3.3	6.4
Mongolia	2	2	16.6	15	14.3	11.3	5.79	9	47032	10915.84	7.1135	8	208	12469	0.5	1.2
Hunan	-1	2	12.4	14.6	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.1	24210	5959.16	4.0425	8.5	195	12472	4.7	1.8
Chongqing	0	3	14.1	17.1	16.4	13.6	10.93	12.3	n/a	6939.37	4.8032	10	172	12156	8.9	1.8
Hubei	0	2	14.5	12.8	13.8	11.3	10.87	10.1	27614	6892.47	4.7193	9	195	12472	1.9	1.8
Anhui	0	2	13.2	14.6	13.5	12.1	10.61	10.4	20610	5133.87	3.4575	8.5	639	34826	0.9	0.6
Guangxi	-1	1	15.9	14.2	12.3	11.3	8.54	10.2	20645	4958.52	3.3212	8	182	11996	0.5	0
Hainan	-1	1	14.6	16	12	9.1	10.15	9.9	23665	5730.65	3.9114	8.5	182	11996	1.9	1.2
Henan	1	2	15.3	12.5	11.6	10.1	8.64	9	23398	5520.01	3.7118	8	195	12472	1.9	0.6
Sichuan	0	3	13.8	15.1	15	12.6	10	10	20645	5250.31	3.52	7.5	172	12156	13.6	8.8
Shaanxi	1	3	19.5	14.6	13.9	12.9	11.01	11	26847	6903.05	4.6998	9	152	7419	0.9	3.5
Jiangxi	-1	2	12.4	14	12.5	11	10.73	10.1	21170	5140.4	3.4738	9	639	34826	1.4	1.2
Yunnan	-1	3	15.3	12.3	13.7	13	13.69	12.1	15707	4062.13	2.7341	8.5	172	12156	3.3	0.6
Hebei	1	1	15	12.2	11.3	9.6	6.49	8.2	28108	6270.67	4.0122	7	208	12469	1.9	1.8
Shanxi	1	2	13.4	13.9	13	10.1	4.04	8.9	20391	5635.39	3.515	6	208	12469	0.5	0.6
Ningxia	1	3	19.1	13.5	12	11.5	11.06	10	26073	6486.74	4.2081	8	152	7419	0.5	0
Jilin	2	2	13.7	13.8	13.7	12	8.74	8.3	31232	7591.75	5.0177	6	164	9194	0.5	1.2
Heilongjiang	2	2	13	12.7	12.2	9.6	8.09	8	26101	6232.96	3.9216	6	164	9194	2.8	8.2
Guizhou	-1	3	10.1	12.8	15	14	16.86	12.5	13221	3710.78	2.6416	10	172	12156	0.9	0

**Table 3.** Economic data of China provinces, see footnote #15 (above).

Model Summary (ideal\_girls)

<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>
.61	.37	.04	3.47

ANOVA (ideal\_girls)

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance</i>
<i>Regression</i>	135.82	10	13.58	1.13	.39
<i>Residual</i>	228.86	19	12.05		
<i>Total</i>	364.68	29			

Coefficients (ideal\_girls)

	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Significance</i>
(Constant)	15.22	8.26	.00	1.84	.08
grow_08	-.54	.34	-.38	-1.60	.13
grow_10	.19	.77	.09	.24	.81
grow_11	-.53	1.24	-.28	-.43	.67
grow_12	.26	1.47	.13	.18	.86
gdp_12_rmb	.00	.00	.23	.11	.91
grow_13	-.17	.53	-.12	-.32	.76
gdp_13_usd	-.01	.01	-7.54	-1.26	.22
grow_14	1.05	1.52	.44	.70	.50
gdp_14_rmb	11.86	8.64	7.57	1.37	.19
goal_15	-1.82	1.09	-.66	-1.67	.11

**Table 4a.** Regression of GDP and growth rates with spouse preference of male respondents.

In fact, in addition to the mildly predictive significance, priorities of selecting spouses for the female does correlate significantly with both the GDP per capita (note: not growth) of the provincial economy from 2011 to 2014 (see Tables 4c and 4d), a phenomenon, again, clearly not statistically reflected in the male gender. The male gender, on the contrary, does not seem to react toward these economic factors when it comes to the provincial preferences in choosing their spouses. Not even the regression model for such is in any way significant (see Table 4a above), nor there is any correlation found (see Table 4c and Table 4d).

Model Summary (ideal\_boys)

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.78	.61	.41	3.19

ANOVA (ideal\_boys)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance
Regression	307.54	10	30.75	3.03	.02
Residual	192.75	19	10.14		
Total	500.29	29			

Coefficients (ideal\_boys)

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Significance
(Constant)	18.19	7.58	.00	2.40	.03
grow_08	.07	.31	.04	.23	.82
grow_10	-.93	.70	-.36	-1.32	.20
grow_11	.69	1.14	.32	.61	.55
grow_12	-.66	1.34	-.28	-.49	.63
gdp_12_rmb	.00	.00	2.56	1.57	.13
grow_13	.11	.49	.07	.23	.82
gdp_13_usd	-.01	.01	-8.46	-1.80	.09
grow_14	.88	1.39	.31	.63	.53
gdp_14_rmb	11.75	7.93	6.40	1.48	.15
goal_15	-2.15	1.00	-.67	-2.15	.04

Table 4b. Regression of GDP and growth rates with spouse preference of female respondents.

		gdp_12_rmb	gdp_13_usd	gdp_14_rmb
<i>ideal_girls</i>	Pearson Correlation	.25	.20	.22
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.18	.27	.24
	N	30	31	31
<i>ideal_boys</i>	Pearson Correlation	.55	.50	.51
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00
	N	30	31	31

Table 4c. Correlation between preferred spouse origin with GDP per capita of provinces.



		grow_08	grow_10	grow_11	grow_12	grow_13	grow_14
<i>ideal_girls</i>	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	-.35	-.11	-.20	-.17	-.08	-.12
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.06	.54	.28	.35	.67	.52
	<i>N</i>	31	31	31	31	31	31
<i>ideal_boys</i>	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	-.17	-.46	-.53	-.51	-.27	-.47
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.36	.01	.00	.00	.14	.01
	<i>N</i>	31	31	31	31	31	31

**Table 4d.** Correlation between preferred spouse origin with their provincial growth rates.

## FROM ECONOMY TO CULTURE: A TWIST

Yet when the preferences of the male gender (in the choice of their spouses) are not correlated to economic factors, we moved on to see if such could be in any way related to less economically related, or even cultural, reasons. Using Talhelm’s new cultural rice theory<sup>16</sup> (with China subdivided into several north-south ‘rice-versus-wheat’ regions as shown in Figure 7 below), provincial preferences of spouses among the male gender, i.e. ‘ideal girls index’ were compared across the regions using ANOVA. Results showed statistically significant differences across the wheat-versus-rice regions ( $F=2.89$ ,  $p<0.05$ ; see Table 5a and Table 5b). In terms of the order of preferences, female spouses from region ‘0’ (where both wheat and rice are grown) is the most preferred followed by region ‘-1’ (rice), region ‘1’ (wheat) and region ‘2’ (neither). The female gender, in this case, did not show any statistical significance in this respect.

<sup>16</sup> According to Talhelm (see link below), the psychological differences of southern and northern Chinese stem from their ancestors’ subsistence techniques – rice farming needs co-operation and planning while wheat farming requires little co-operation between neighbors. For details, see the article, ‘Rice theory explains north-south China cultural differences, study shows’ by Fariss Samarrai, dated May 8, 2014, accessible at <https://news.virginia.edu/content/rice-theory-explains-north-south-china-cultural-differences-study-shows>



### North-south divide

The 'rice theory' suggests that the history of subsistence farming, wheat and rice, explains psychological differences between Chinese living in the north and south



Figure 7. Rice Theory. Source: South China Morning Post<sup>17</sup>

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance
ideal_girls	Between Groups	96.49	3	32.16	2.89	.05
	Within Groups	299.97	27	11.11		
	Total	396.46	30			
ideal_boys	Between Groups	76.35	3	25.45	1.61	.21
	Within Groups	425.80	27	15.77		
	Total	502.16	30			

Table 5a. Difference between preferred spouse among different 'rice regions'.

<sup>17</sup> See the South China Morning Post article, 'Why China's wheat-growing north produces individualists and its rice-growing south is clannish' by Angela Meng, dated May 10, 2014, accessible at

<http://scmp.com/news/china/article/1508726/why-chinas-wheat-growing-north-produces-individualists-and-its-rice>

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
<i>ideal_girls</i>	-1	9	3.33	3.42	1.14	.70	5.97	.5	11.7
	0	6	6.70	4.84	1.98	1.62	11.78	.9	13.6
	1	10	2.53	2.98	.94	.40	4.66	.0	9.3
	2	6	1.42	1.35	.55	.00	2.84	.0	3.3
	Total	31	3.35	3.64	.65	2.02	4.69	.0	13.6
<i>ideal_boys</i>	-1	9	1.19	.83	.28	.55	1.83	.0	2.3
	0	6	5.77	5.60	2.29	-.11	11.64	.6	15.2
	1	10	3.39	4.80	1.52	-.04	6.82	.0	15.2
	2	6	3.03	3.36	1.37	-.50	6.56	.6	8.2
	Total	31	3.14	4.09	.73	1.64	4.64	.0	15.2

**Table 5b.** Descriptive differences between preferred spouse among different ‘rice regions’.

Now, given the fact that despite sex imbalance as a result of the Chinese government's long-time one-child policy (due to abortion, infanticide and neglect of girls<sup>18</sup>) and a historical cultural preference for boys in a male dominant society<sup>19</sup>, China still has a surplus of men and ‘leftover women’ and henceforth brand strategy involving the use of the opposite gender, unlike what Brad Pitt has done<sup>20</sup> for Chanel N 5 and which wasn’t quite understood by the public<sup>21</sup>, should work in the case of China, particularly when it is known that there has been a shifting of local brand awareness (Zhou & Hui, 2003) and consumers in mainland China have been showing a tendency to shift away from foreign products in preference for local offerings. Some speculate that this new market phenomenon is a result of government intervention of the free market, consumer ethnocentrism, and the attempted improvement in the quality of local products (p.37).

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.mercatornet.com/demography/view/12610>

<sup>19</sup> The latest census in 2011 showed there were twice as many single men born in the 1970s as women of the same age. See the article, ‘China's leftover women find love tough’, dated August 13, 2013, accessible at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/world/asia/9036617/Chinas-leftover-women-find-love-tough>

<sup>20</sup> See the article, ‘Brad Pitt's Chanel N 5 ad: the smell of disaster’, dated October 16, 2012, accessible at <http://www.theguardian.com/fashion/fashion-blog/2012/oct/16/brad-pitt-chanel-no-5-smell-disaster>

<sup>21</sup> See the article, ‘Don't understand Brad Pitt's Chanel N 5 ads? Neither does the guy who directed them’, dated December 13, 2012, accessible at <http://www.ew.com/article/2012/12/13/dont-understand-brad-pitts-chanel-ads-neither-does-the-guy-who-directed-them>

## CONCLUSION: THE STRATEGY

### MERGING GENDER, REGIONS & BRAND STRATEGY

In light of the above, we can now translate the above analysis into our grand generic brand strategy for Hong Kong shoe businesses entering mainland China. And instead of focusing on any specific region or province of China, our analysis is to introduce a ‘pull brand strategy’ – one that would be holistic, generic and systematic for the different provinces; one that could take advantage of the varying local cultures of the provinces and, still, be one that is feasible for various Hong Kong shoe businesses hoping to land into the market.

**The ideal boy (or man) provinces:** Regions included are: Heilongjiang, Liaoning, Beijing, Shanghai, Shandong, Jiangsu, and Sichuan. With relatively higher GDP per capita these provinces are the ‘prime targets’ of ladies. This means promotion should target on the male consumers within these provinces by leveraging the response of the opposite sex. Ladies shoes, on the contrary, can either be branded as purchases showing confidence of the female gender (as GDP is still relatively higher among the local population) or dear gifts from the male counterpart. With a relatively strong logistics network, these regions can support branded products at relatively higher margins and more flexible and responsive methods of delivery.

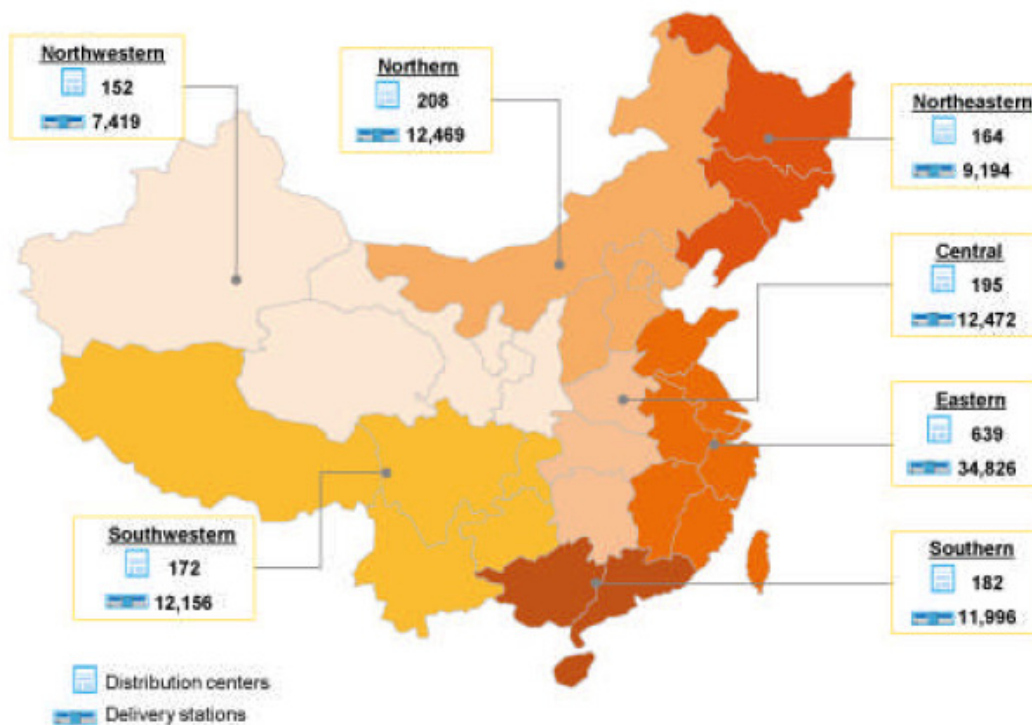
**The ideal girl (or woman) provinces:** First tier regions are provinces situated along the Yangtze River (see region ‘0’ in Table 4b), i.e. Sichuan, Chongqing, Hubei, Anhui, Jiangsu and Shanghai. Second tier regions are those south of region ‘0’ (region ‘-1’), i.e. Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan, Guizhou, Hunan, Jiangxi, Fujian. Tier three are those north of region ‘0’ (or region ‘+1’), including Qinghai, Hebei, Henan, Beijing and Qingdao. By moving from one region to another and depending on their relative GDP per capita, brand strategy should focus on the ‘symbolic value’ of the shoe as an inevitable sensational attraction to the male gender. And moving from high to low GDP per capita across these provinces, emphasis of the product (whether high-end or not) should shift from being a social signature, an extravagant display to quality products and eventually to casual comfort wear that makes the sex stand out.

**The less ideal boy (or man) provinces:** One reason why our analysis has steered into analyzing the ‘ideal partner’ is that from the statistics we can see that it is not the current GDP per capita or growth that counts in effecting changes of affinity toward a new market (in our case, people), but rather, the anticipated achievement of the upcoming economic trends (see Table 4b). It is therefore crucial that shoe marketers and brand specialists be alerted that for provinces showing relatively low GDPs per capita but with promising growths in the years to come, emphasis should be put on how to spot the ‘best available product with the highest potential’ (or even husband, as in our case). For instance, both Guizhou and Tibet are having their 2014 GDPs below 30 million RMB yet both of them are expecting 10% to 12% of GDP growth in 2015 (and which is already the highest across the entire mainland China), making them the best candidates for deploying brand marketing through ‘realizing potentials’.

**The less ideal girl (or woman) provinces:** And for provinces that are regarded as less preferred by the male gender, various brand techniques, including, but not limited to, careful penetration coupled timely with the economic downturn, just as in the case of the lipstick effect<sup>22</sup> (Hill, Rodeheffer, Griskevicius, V, Durante, & White, 2012), or times with a promising future growth can also be alternatives to building brands while struggling in economic environments with lower GDPs per capita. In fact, when these provinces with a lower ‘ideal girl index’ are often far southwest inland provinces like Ningxia, Qinghai and Guizhou, disposable incomes are actually surging. This is particularly promising, too, because online retail logistics network is quickly permeating into these provinces from far off the coastal areas (see Figure 8 below) where sales have already been saturating over the recent years.

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<sup>22</sup> The lipstick effect is the theory that when facing an economic crisis consumers will be more willing to buy less costly luxury goods. For instance, other than buying some very expensive fur coats, customers will choose some relatively expensive lipstick instead.



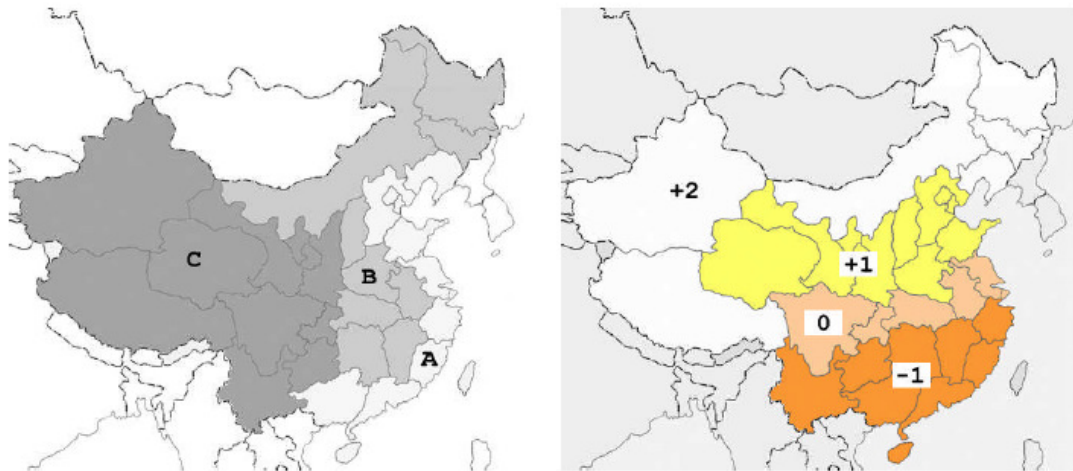
**Figure 8.** Alibaba and JD.com logistics spread. Source: Quartz<sup>23</sup>.

## IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

While the focus of our paper was originally to investigate and identify a brand strategy for Hong Kong footwear manufacturers to go into the China market, the intention was not to focus on any specific target or consumer segment in China and the study was meant to be as generic as possible. As a consequence, the paper adopted a cross-over approach and we hence studied the relationship of the GDP (from 2008 to 2014) as well as the ideal spouse indices among the three major economic zones (as defined by the Chinese government) as well as the north-south divide of China using Talhelm’s cultural rice theory. Using the t-test, ANOVA and regression techniques, we were able to identify, merge and redefine 12 (twelve) new ‘economic cultural zones’ of China according to their economic and cultural (in terms of spousal preference) differences (see Figure 9a and Figure 9b) with descriptions listed in Table 6.

<sup>23</sup> See the Quartz article ‘Alibaba and JD.com are battling for a huge emerging market: poorer, inland China’, see <http://qz.com/211959/alibaba-and-jd-com-are-battling-for-a-huge-emerging-market-poorer-inland-china/>





**Figure 9a.** China's economic regions (left) vs. Talhelm's cultural rice theory regions (right).



**Figure 9b.** Coupling China's three main economic regions with cultural rice theory.

Economic cultural zones	Provinces	Description
A Prime (A')	Shanghai, Jiangsu	Situated in the region with highest mean value (6.70) of ideal female index for male respondents (see Table 5b) and also the economic zone with highest GDP per capita where girls would also want to find their 'ideal men', brand strategies in this region should steer toward the mutual attraction between the opposite sexes as well as how the other sex can manage to make an extravagant display of their social status, exemplifying the 'symbolic value' of the shoe. Strategies in this region should also be coupled with high-end quality footwear products that are priced with skimming tactics.
B Prime (B')	Hubei, Anhui	As we move westwards along region '0' of 'ideal girls' (see Figure 9a), GDP per capita slowly decreases from province to province. In other words, even though female in this region (region A', B' and C') are just as appealing to the male, the male slowly loses their attractiveness toward the female gender as we move from region A' to C'. Brand strategy in these regions, hence, should be two-fold. First, stay focused upon the women – yet with a change (decrease) of GDP the focus should shift from the display of the social status to natural beauty. Second, for the man, the focus should move from being the 'competent professional with a status-showing symbolic product' to the 'warm, caring guy with the fully-functional brand'.
C Prime (C')	Sichuan, Chongqing	
A-1	Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang, Guangxi, Hainan	Brand strategies in these relatively more 'collectivist regions', namely, A-1, B-1, and C-1, should be focused upon the group buying behavior of the collectivist south provinces of China. But since an efficient logistics network generally works best with relatively lower profit margins products (and which is sold in substantial volume), brand strategies in these regions would become bipolar: either with an online brand that signifies low cost, functional brands supported with heavy and repetitive advertisement in the media; or a high-end brand that only serves at a few physical outlets with no online presence. In fact, it should be noted that both Alibaba and JD.com have the largest number of distribution centers and logistics stations in these regions, a clear business fact that immediately explains itself in terms of what kind of products sell best among the different regions (see Figure 8).
B-1	Hunan, Jiangxi	
C-1	Yunnan, Guizhou	
A+1	Beijing, Tianjin, Shandong	Quite the opposite to the '-1' regions, the '+1' regions, i.e. A+1, B+1, and the C+1 regions, are the more individualistic regions of China. Brand strategies here should focus on the individual uniqueness through the shoe design and its feeling of status and taste of the consumer of the brand. Similar to region A Prime (A'), the overall brand strategy should focus on the 'symbolic value' of the shoe as an inevitable self-identity. And moving from high to low GDPs per capita across these provinces, i.e. from the A+1 to C+1 region, emphasis of the product (whether high-end or not) should shift from being a social signature, an unique extravagant display of the self-image to the comfort-wear quality products that are appreciated by the seasoned, tasteful professionals who would be independent enough to make wise buying decisions.
B+1	Henan, Shanxi	
C+1	Qinghai, Ningxia, Gansu, Shaanxi	



A+2	Liaoning	Regions A+2 and B+2 are two very special regions because they exhibit two common characteristics. First, they are both not listed as provinces in which the ‘ideal wife’ could be found. Second, they are both far north provinces in which both Alibaba and JD.com, i.e. the two biggest e-business players in China, are rapidly expanding and competing against each other (see Figure 8). With these factors in place, it would mean that brand strategies in these northern regions be steered toward the e-business market in which the female gender is generally known to spend more than the male. Branded consumables would then ‘rewards’ for the self (female, in particular). The male market, in light of the above, would be geared toward self-image, pride and esteem.
B+2	Inner Mongolia, Jilin, Heijongjiang	
C+2	Xinjian, Tibet	While Xinjiang and Tibet are not among provinces of high GDPs or in any way favored by the male gender in terms of their spouse selection, these two provinces, surprisingly, are marked by the highest expected growth rates among the country <sup>24</sup> (see Table 3). With such high expected growth rates (which, according to our analysis above, would help predict provinces in which female would want to find their ideal partners; see Table 4b), brand strategy should steer toward building a ‘promising future’ of the consumers (in particular, the male gender) of the brands. Furthermore, logistics networks are expanding quickly in Tibet and which would give the province an additional edge in e-business (see Figure 8). To conclude, it is not the prestige of a brand that consumers would find appealing in this region, but rather, the outlook of a person when they consume the brand.

**Table 6.** The ‘twelve economic cultural zones’ in China.

By carefully matching the outputs and the strengths of the different manufacturers with the socio-cultural descriptions of the regions, local companies would be able to identify the ‘appropriate regions’ in which the company’s competitive advantage could match with the requirements of the characteristics of the footwear product in that particular region. For instance, a company that is strong in building symbolic values could possibly aim for regions A Prime (A’) and A+1 whereas one that is building a cost leader brand might aim for regions like C+2. In fact, it is not ‘how to go into a market’ but ‘where a given company should go’ that would eventually make sense in a truly successful marketing strategy.

<sup>24</sup>The 2015 expected GDP growth rate for Tibet is 12% whereas that for Xinjiang is 9%.

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