

# HIERARCHIES OF VALUES IN CHINA'S EMERGING UNIVERSITY STUDENT GENERATION: APPLICATION FOR GLOBAL BUSINESS AND SHARING THE GOSPEL

*Karen H. Tangen*  
Bethel University (MN)

## ABSTRACT

Christians doing business in China need to build *guanxi*, or relationships, with Chinese business leaders and customers. They need to affirm the values their Chinese business associates and customers embrace that are consistent with the Gospel. Both traditional values and those of the new generation are important, and the emerging gender values are particularly significant. This study, conducted in a major Chinese university, uncovers contemporary Chinese values helpful in building trust and in forming a credible and appealing foundation for conducting business and presenting the gospel in China.

## INTRODUCTION

It is critical for foreign businesses and those who wish to share the gospel to develop insight regarding male and female values and the hierarchies that the Chinese youth generation places on these values. This is important information when considering the impact of cultural values on relationships, particularly when marketing products and services in China or sharing the salvation message. Knowing one's audience is vital to good communication. In Mark 12:30-31, Jesus reminds us of two commandments: one is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is to "Love your neighbor as yourself." How can you love your neighbor unless you get to know him or her better? Insight into the Chinese culture and values and an informed perspective on how Chinese men and women see the world can only promote understanding and build common ground for presenting the gospel. The great frontiers of Christian work reside in the big emerging markets of the world. China is one of those opportunities.

Gender values are changing in China, especially with China's emerging educated generation of leaders and consumers. The implications of these changes are profound within the Chinese culture and impact how marketers communicate their messages. "In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, leadership success may be unattainable without intercul-

tural competence" (Moodian, 2008, p. 3). Foreign business leaders must understand Chinese business leaders and consumers. Bhawak, Landus, and Mansamy (2008) stated that culture is the antecedent to all human behaviors. It also provides the complex cognitive and affective frameworks that organizations rely upon to support their behavioral systems. Therefore, it is incumbent upon global businesses to understand these cultural changes when creating the business plans for international operations.

The United Nations World Investment Report calculates there are about 21,500 multinationals based in the emerging world ("World Turned," 2010). The number of companies from Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC) on the *Financial Times* 500 more than quadrupled from 2006-2008, from 15 to 62. As developed markets become saturated, Western multinationals are looking more and more toward emerging markets as a source of economic growth. The emerging markets of India and China alone are expected to comprise at least 40 percent of the world's growth ("World Turned," 2010).

Americans like supersizes, and China hits the mark. It is a country that outsizes the United State's population by four times—1.3 billion which is one-fifth of the world's population. Of China's 1.3 billion citizens, 72 percent are between the ages of 16 and 64. In the past, missionaries viewed China as a billion souls to save;

whereas, marketers viewed it as a billion shoes or packs of gum to sell. But because China was poor, the marketers' view was never realized. That is rapidly changing. China's economy has grown about 9 percent a year for more than 25 years—the fastest growth rate for a major economy in recorded history. During this time it has taken 300 million people out of poverty levels and quadrupled the average Chinese worker's income (Zakaria et al., 2005).

China, through its membership in the World Trade Organization, has forced major free-market reforms in its economy and society. New markets reside within China that are highly competitive in their own geographical regions, and they are rapidly going global. The Chinese middle class is estimated to number between 100 million and 150 million people. Definitions of this middle-class vary—a household income of at least \$10,000 a year is one standard. Middle-class families tend to own an apartment furnished with foreign brand-name appliances and air-conditioning, have a mobile phone, own a car, eat out, take vacations, and are familiar with foreign brands and ideas (Chang, 2008).

Shanghai's second Millionaire Fair attracted over 11,000 guests—China's new class of conspicuous consumers. There are over 12 million privately owned cars in China, with an additional 1,000 cars on Beijing roads every day. China ranks number one in the hottest markets for Rolls-Royce (the most popular model sold at \$397,000), and the number of McDonald's drive-through restaurants went from one in 2005 to 115 in 2008 ("Car Crazy," 2008). The State's retreat from interfering with private life has left people free to choose where to live, work, and travel. Material opportunities expand year by year.

Foreign firms entering this market must be prepared to understand and respond to these amazing developments. Global companies that understand personal and cultural boundaries and know how to work with individuals, firms, and authorities have been successful and sustained their presence in China.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF GENDER VALUES: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Chinese cultural values encompass beliefs and traditions that have evolved in China over centuries. They serve as founding pillars upon which moral reasoning and decision-making are placed. In order to work within foreign cultures, it is essential to understand cultural differences and similarities.

Several models of cultural competence have emerged to help business leaders to understand traditional values in relation to recent value changes. Edward Hall's model of high and low context cultures increases this understanding. China has a high context culture according to Hall. The core element is *guanxi*, which represents taking time to develop permanent personal friendship and camaraderie between individuals, and to demonstrate the ability to exert influence. Chinese people are process-oriented rather than goal-oriented (Lee & Dawes, 2005). *Guanxi* is a strong process-oriented, relationship value. For the Christian businessperson, *guanxi* relates to the Biblical value of how to love your Chinese neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). This similarity opens the door to explaining the gospel to the Chinese in terms of a Chinese moral value. The Chinese value of *guanxi* and the Biblical value of friendship can be exemplified, for instance, in David and Jonathan's friendship (1Samuel 18: 1-5), or Proverbs 17:17: "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity," or Proverbs 18:24: "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

Chinese also value *mianzi*, which means face or reputation. Saving face, losing face, and giving face are all very important to the Chinese. The words "no" and "not" can cause loss of face, so they should be replaced with more indirect verbal interaction and phrases such as, "That would be inconvenient." Formal titles and adherence to hierarchy are highly valued. Group consensus and cooperation are emphasized over individualism and competition. Modesty is prized more than confidence, and the Chinese place great importance on family, group, and surface harmony. Here again, these values are cross-cultural bridges that can link Chinese and Biblical principles that are mutually beneficial in forming long-lasting business relationships and in sharing the gospel. The Chinese values of face saving, modesty, and reputation are consistent with many verses such as Proverbs 22:1: "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold," or Ecclesiastes 7:1: "A good name is better than fine perfume." Modesty is reflected in Proverbs 22:4: "Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life," and in James 4:6: "God opposed the proud but gives grace to the humble," or James 4:16: "As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil."

In addition to high and low context in understanding culture, the marketer might investigate how people process information in different cultures. Geert Hofstede

(1980, 1983, 1984, 1991, 1997) developed a framework to explain this. Over years of study with over 100,000 IBM employees worldwide, Hofstede attempted to identify value dimensions which differ from culture to culture. He offered the following five dimensions of culture:

1. PDI (Power Distance Index):  
China along with India has high scores in the PDI, meaning power is distributed unequally compared with the United States.
2. IDV (Individualism/Collectivism Index):  
IDV shows how group-oriented China and India are versus the individualistic orientation of the United States.
3. MAS (Masculinity/Femininity Index):  
MAS describes the distribution of roles between genders. China, India, and the United States are all fairly close in this measure, with China at the top and Chinese men having the most power.
4. UAI (Uncertainty Avoidance Index):  
UAI refers to a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. Here, China's tendency to control is revealed with rules, structure, and a low tolerance for risk, similar to India, with the United States scoring high in tolerance.
5. LTO (Long Term Orientation):  
LTO measures the importance a society attaches to the future versus the past and present. China, with its focus on status, saving face, and respect for tradition scores significantly above India and the United States.

Frons Trompenaars' research (1998, 2002, 2003) offers a seven-dimension model of culture. Some dimensions overlap with other models, but "Neutralist vs. Affective" is particularly relevant. Cultures which are affectively neutral do not express their feelings openly but keep them controlled and subdued. In these cultures, as in China, physical contact and obvious facial expressions are taboo, and emotions are strictly hidden. Calm, peaceful, and self-possessed conduct is admired. In cultures high in affectivity, people openly show their feelings by smiling, gesturing, laughing, and showing facial expressions. High affective cultures are transparent, expressive, and animated. Emotions flow easily, and physical contact is appreciated. The calm, self-possessed conduct the Chinese admire runs parallel to many Biblical concepts, especially that of peace. Note Isaiah 26:3: "You will keep in perfect peace whose mind is steadfast, be-

cause he trusts in you," and Isaiah 48:18: "If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the wave of the sea..." Or, Psalm 85:10: "Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other," and John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."

Cultural theorists help those seeking to participate in international business by increasing their preparedness for adapting to different cultures. Understanding the cultures and how one does business is extremely important, but many of the cultural imperatives are changing, as is the case in China. The Chinese government's one-child policy, for example, which went into effect in 1979, has produced a newer generation with expectations very different from those of previous generations. This newer generation is experiencing different pressures. Because parents have such high aspirations for their children, this youth generation (children without siblings,) is among the most pressured. Teenagers born since the 1980's are generally known as "little emperors" because they are only-children and doted on by parents and grandparents. This is a generation of individualists (Xinhua News Agency, 2003).

The traditional Chinese examination system chooses only a select few for higher education. The number of students entering college each year is equal to 11 percent of the college-freshman-age population, compared with 64 percent in the United States. The desire to foster well-rounded students has led to an explosion of activities—music lessons, English, drawing, martial arts classes, and so on. (English ability is graded on five levels stretching through college.) All activities are meant to raise the child's future competitiveness. Parents place all of their hopes on their children (Chang, 2008).

China's teenagers, however, hold positive and healthy attitudes toward life despite the mixed, and often conflicting, influences of traditional Chinese and modern Western cultures, according to a survey by Beijing Normal University. The survey, conducted by Professor Pei Dina, published in the China Education Daily, showed that 72.9 percent regarded health and friendship as most precious (Xinhua News Agency, 2003).

Human values are important to the understanding of cultures and the psychological make-up of individuals (Rokeach, 1968, 1973, 1979). Scholars have found the study of Chinese personality particularly interesting (Hsu, 1972). Personality studies are especially salient because Chinese society is rapidly modernizing.

Rokeach (1968, 1973) studied the values of Hong Kong Chinese university students (N=927). He divided them into two value lists: Terminal and Instrumental. Terminal Values are end-states of existence (e.g., freedom, equality), and Instrumental Values are personal modes of conduct (e.g., being honest, loving, and courageous). In the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS), respondents rank thirty-six values by importance. The four most important Terminal Values were true friendship, happiness, self-respect, and wisdom. The least important ones were social recognition, a comfortable life, salvation, and pleasure. The RVS found that the Hong Kong Chinese university students put greater emphasis on Instrumental Values. The four most important Instrumental Values were responsible, courageous, intellectual, and capable. The least important Instrumental Values were imaginative, polite, obedient, and clean. Males placed more importance on personal accomplishment and competency with regard to Instrumental Values (e.g., courageous, responsible, intellectual, and capable); whereas, females placed more importance on Instrumental Values relating to family, morality, and intrinsic values (e.g., responsible, courageous, intellectual, and broad-minded). This study is particularly valuable because of the large sample size. There are very few independent studies in mainland China focused on the values of China's emerging educated consumer generation.

## METHODOLOGY

### Purpose

Christians doing business in China need to understand both traditional and new generational values, of which gender values knowledge is particularly important. The purpose of this study is to help in the understanding of values necessary in building trust and forming a credible and appealing foundation for conducting business and presenting the gospel in China.

### Participants

The participants from the mainland of the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) in this research consisted of 161 students, 50 males and 111 females, enrolled in two well-regarded universities in Beijing. The subjects ranged in age from 19 to 21. Although the sample populations were not strictly randomly selected, they appeared representative enough to allow for meaningful considerations (having been students selected from throughout China to study at the universities based on their academic records

and test scores). They are the upcoming generation of China's educated leaders and consumers.

### Procedures

The author developed university contacts through a long-time friendship with a Chinese scholar (first met while the author was bringing university students from America to China). The concept of *guanxi* was extremely important, and the Chinese scholar went far beyond the usual relationship favors to arrange an invitation into the classrooms of two prestigious Beijing universities. The Chinese scholar was a trusted former student at one of the universities and was allowed to enter the other because of close relationships. Nothing substantial happens in China without *guanxi*. Friendships, once established, are loyal, sincere, and indispensable. It is highly unusual to be invited into the private classrooms of a Chinese university. The researcher and the Chinese scholar, under Chinese supervision, went into the classrooms, presented a short introduction on values and research, and asked all of the students to participate voluntarily in the cultural research. The questions were asked in several classes of undergraduate students, all of whom spoke in Chinese and English.

Both the male and the female students in the classrooms of each university were asked each question (in English by the researcher and in Chinese by the translator), then told to quickly write their responses in ten words or less (independently, anonymously, and without discussion), both in English and Chinese:

- What do you like most about males?
- What do you like least about males?
- What do you like most about females?
- What do you like least about females?

The papers were immediately collected. The responses were then translated by the Chinese scholar (a fluent speaker and writer of English who has studied extensively in England), comparing the Chinese answers with the English translations to ensure accuracy.

Only a few questions were not answered by some of the students. The responses were spontaneous, and the students were unaware beforehand of the questions they would be asked.

## RESULTS

What is unusual about this research is that the sample size was relatively large and represented not only students from throughout mainland China, but also the best and the brightest youth. The present study does not include a pre-designed ranking scale of what values were



important, as in the Rokeach Value Study, but uniquely asked the students to generate for themselves not only those values they liked in males and females, but also those they disliked. No value list was given to the students to prompt or bias their responses. They were simply asked to write what they liked and disliked in both males and females.

The present findings could be compared with only a few limited studies with a small sample size, as research on value orientations of Chinese students is very scarce, particularly for mainland China. This present exploratory research is breaking new ground. The Rokeach Value Survey, however, provided an interesting comparison because it was a profile that sampled a large number of Hong Kong male and female university students. In comparing the results of this study with the Rokeach Value Survey, there are a great many similar positive values. The section of the Rokeach Value Survey on Terminal Values (end-of-life goals) showed that students ranked true friendship, wisdom, self-respect, and happiness as the four values most important. The Rokeach section on Instrumental Values (personal values), which were the focus in the present study, showed responsible, courageous, intellectual, and capable as the top four values, in that order. The survey also found some gender differences. Male students noted more personal, accomplishment, and competency values. Female students show greater concern for moral and intrinsic values. Comparisons by year in school and field of study showed insignificant differences.

The Rokeach Value Survey is somewhat different in theoretical conceptualization and therefore limits absolute direct comparisons with the present study. Several values numerically counted ranked high in the present study, however, were similarly ranked in the Rokeach study; for example, males ranked high the male values of honesty, friendship, and courage. Males ranked high the female values of gentle and kind (represented in Rokeach's Survey as "loving"). Females ranked high the male values of courage, helpful, responsible, and intelligent and the female values of gentle and kind (represented in Rokeach's Survey as loving), honest, capable, and intelligent. These qualities all ranked high on the Rokeach Value Survey.

Trompenaar's (1998, 2002, 2003) study found the Chinese to be affectively neutral or subdued. The present study, consistent with Trompenaar's study, found that both females and males ranked gentle and kind as high values for females, arrogant and rude as qualities they

dislike in males, and garrulousness as unlikeable in females.

**Figure 1: Rokeach and Present Study Rankings**

<b>Rokeach Survey</b>	<b>Present Study</b>
Top Rankings:	Top Rankings:
Courageous	Honest—Friendship
Responsible	Courageous—Strong
Intellectual	Helpful
Capable	Responsible
Broad-minded	Intellectual
Independent	Broad-minded
Honest	Gentle—Kind
Helpful	Handsome/Beautiful

Friendship was ranked very high by males. Perhaps because of the impact of the one-child policy, lacking brothers, they fill this gap with significant friendships. This finding is consistent with the results found in Rokeach's study.

The present study found that both genders overwhelmingly favored strong character traits as most valued by both genders. Intellectual and physical traits were considerably less important as values for both males and females.

In summary as the tables below indicate: Males most like honest, courageous, intelligent, and strong men with whom they can have true friendships. Women like the same traits in men along with helpful and responsible. Males like gentle, kind, beautiful, and honest traits in women, and so do women. Males dislike arrogant, rude, cowardly, and dishonesty in men. Women dislike the same traits in men along with effeminate traits. Men dislike artificial, rude, and garrulous traits in women, and so do women. Women also dislike dishonest and mean traits in women.

This study was able to describe the gender values hierarchies of Chinese university students in mainland China. The Rokeach Value Survey has been shown to be a valid value measure, and the results of the present study also show that Chinese university students have great concern toward personal character-related values.

## DISCUSSION

One of the main constraints of the present study was the lack of available, reliable research regarding Chinese gender value studies in mainland China. The findings of the value preferences of university students in this investigation, however, are quite clear, if not conclusive. The

study indicates that male and female Chinese university students in the P.R.C. share similar gender value hierarchies. To somewhat varying degrees, the traits males like and dislike about men and women are similar to those women like and dislike about men and women. The same character traits are mentioned by both men and women, and both genders place less emphasis on physical and intellectual values than on strength of character. The reason may be that physical and intellectual traits are not as important when forming friendships—one does not deeply bond with friends at a meaningful level because of physical and intellectual traits. Knowing this information makes it easier for businesses to understand how the educated generation of China will respond to marketing campaigns and also helps in developing business relationships.

This type of research is invaluable to marketing and advertising firms in particular. Marketing is about understanding consumer wants, desires, needs, and also dislikes. Using this research helps agencies cater to these values in advertising. A marketer can use information about gender values to guide market decisions and redirect advertising, public relations, and business strategy. Understanding relationships is key to successful business. It is also valuable information in recruiting foreign students to U.S. universities.

In the business world, what could be more important than getting along with buyers and sellers? Research tells us that people do not buy or do business with people they do not like or with whom they do not share the same values. The present study tells what China's future leaders and consumers like and dislike about people. This study, therefore, provides insight into Chinese values and thus a sound background for developing *guanxi*.

Christians doing business and wanting to share the gospel in China need to build *guanxi*, or respectful relationships, with Chinese business leaders and consumers. To do this, both traditional and new generational values need to be understood. If foreign Christian businesspersons are to be successful in building necessary relationships, they need to reflect and affirm the values their Chinese business associates embrace and that are consistent with the gospel. Insight regarding male and female values and the hierarchies that Chinese place on these values is necessary in order to build trust and form a credible and appealing foundation for conducting business and sharing the salvation message. Commonalities between Chinese values and Biblical values can create a bond of trust and open the door to Christian discussions

with Chinese. There are so many parallels forming common ground for discussion!

As a case in point: to Chinese women, examples of gentleness, kindness, and love can be cited in: Proverbs 11:16: "A kindhearted woman gains respect . . ."; Colossians 3:13: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;" and 1 Corinthians 13:4: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. . . ." A woman of noble character is exemplified in Proverbs 31:10-31; or through the courage and love as exemplified in Ruth.

Chinese men will surely understand examples of friendship and courage such as with David, and his beloved friend Jonathan, or David's courage as exemplified with Goliath (1 Samuel 17 and 18), or the love and courage of Christ.

Since we share the world with a Chinese population of 1.3 billion people, the largest in the world, we need to understand them. Western multinational companies are investing their hopes in emerging markets. These companies regard emerging markets as sources of economic growth and brainpower, both of which they greatly need. They need to understand China's commerce, education, environmental issues, trade, marketing, faith, negotiation rituals, and so on. In order to have positive international relations, multinationals need to understand the mindset of the 75,000 people with higher degrees in engineering or computer science that China produces each year ("World Turned," 2010). The world's largest multinationals are increasingly investing in research and development in emerging markets. Microsoft's R&D centre in Beijing is its largest foreign facility. Populations in emerging markets are much bigger than in the developed world and growing much faster. In China hundreds of millions of people will enter the middle class in the coming decades. China will graduate 5 million people every year, four times the number a decade ago ("World Turned," 2010).

Opportunities abound in China for those desiring to do business and to share the gospel. Understanding Chinese gender values is an important bridge in that process.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Karen H. Tangen is a professor in the Department of Business and Economics at Bethel University (MN). She received her Ph. D. from the University of Chicago and has a distinguished career in industry with Fortune 100 companies. She serves on several boards of directors and also on editorial boards. Email: [tangenkaren@gmail.com](mailto:tangenkaren@gmail.com).

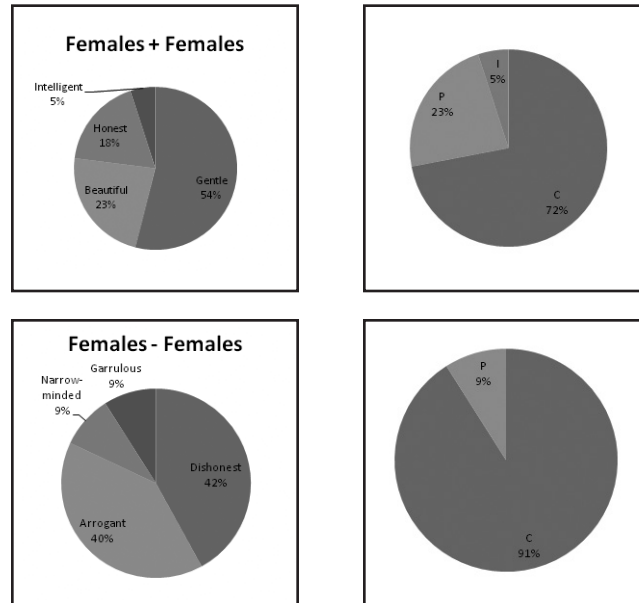
**Table 1: Results of Author's Survey**

	<b>Males Like Most</b>	<b>Females Like Most</b>
<b>Males</b>	40% *honest, * friendships 48% *courageous, strong 12% *intelligent (*broad-minded)	37% *courageous, strong 20% *helpful, considerate 19% *responsible 13% handsome 11% *intelligent (* broad-minded)
<b>Females</b>	72% gentle, kind (*loving) 14% beautiful 8% *honest 6%* intelligent (*broad-minded)	54% gentle, kind (*loving) 23% beautiful 18% *honest, *capable 5%*intelligent (*broad-minded)

*Note.* \* = Values also ranked high in Rokeach Value Study

	<b>Males Dislike Most</b>	<b>Females Dislike Most</b>
<b>Males</b>	40% arrogant, rude 30% cowardly, weak 16% dishonest, crafty 7% narrow-minded, stupid 7% unclean	45% cowardly, mean 29% arrogant, rude 14% dishonest 12% effeminate
<b>Females</b>	49% artificial 22% rude 15% garrulous, wordy 8% narrow-minded, stupid 6% ugly	42% dishonest, mean, rude 40% artificial, arrogant 9% narrow-minded, stupid 9% garrulous, wordy

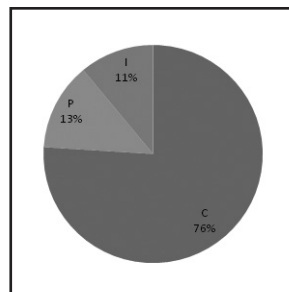
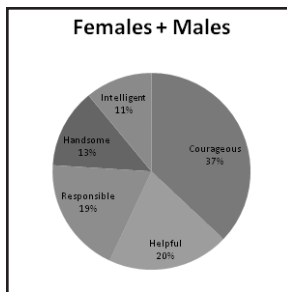
**Table 2: Female Value Preferences Regarding Other Females**



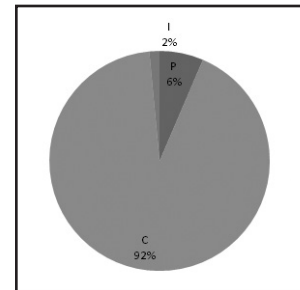
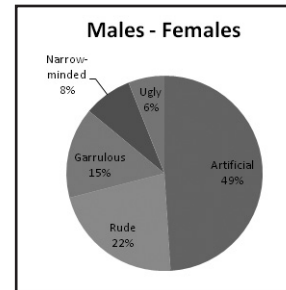
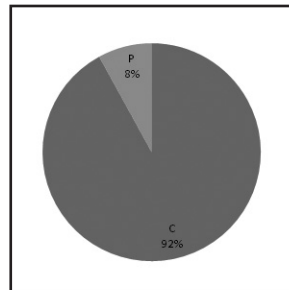
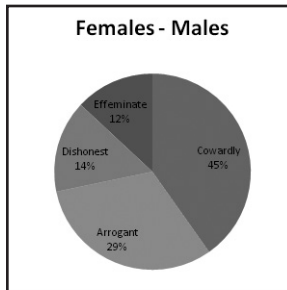
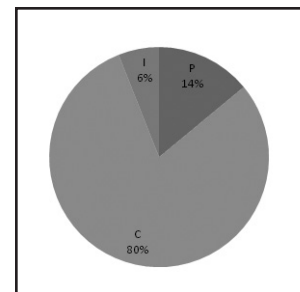
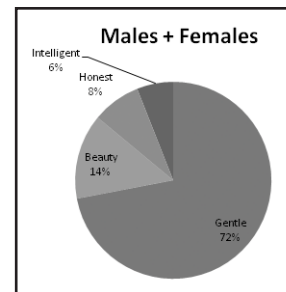
*Note.* + = Like; - = Dislike. C = Character traits; P = Physical traits; I = Intellectual traits.



**Table 3: Female Value Preferences Regarding Males**



**Table 4: Male Value Preferences Regarding Females**



**Table 5: Male Value Preferences Regarding Other Males**

