The background of the slide is black with several glowing green, abstract, circular lines that overlap and create a sense of motion and depth. In the upper left corner, there is a dark square containing the Firefly logo.

**firefly**

MILLWARD BROWN

# THE EVOLUTION OF CHINA'S ROLE MODELS

JULY 2012. SHANGHAI, CHINA

While sophisticated advertisements are universally appreciated, advertisements that truly resonate with consumers are those with elements that align with consumers' values, aspirations and ideals.

One way to identify the elements is finding out the role models of consumers—understanding their embodiment of success is often a useful starting point to learn what resonates with consumers.

Every generation has its own role models - people who, in the eyes of many, embody the subjective concept of success. An examination of these role models sheds light on the value systems, aspirations and the unique development backgrounds of each generation. Furthermore, changes of models often reflect the changes in consumer psychology.

We examine how the role models of three generations differ and how these role models have evolved over time.

### Who are the role models for the post 70s, 80s and 90s generations?

Post 70s

Post 80s

Post 90s

Jackie Chan

Yun-Fat Chow

Emil Chau

Maggie Cheung

Yaping Deng

Brigitte Lin

Karen Mok

Shu Qi

Fan Bing-bing

Small S

Steven Jobs

Han Han

Jay Chou

Cecilia Cheung

Han Geng

Wang Xiao Jian

Sheldon Cooper

Mario Barwuah

Zeng Yi-Ke

Angela Baby

Post-70s: Orthodox heroes who are masters of their respective trade

Post-80s: Pioneers that are independent and do not follow the norm

Post-90s: Alternative achievers who look for a different way of living

## Post-70s: Orthodox hero who is the master of his trade: focused and very specialized

The post-70s generation role models often have one thing in common—they are usually very focused and do not deviate from their field of specialization.

- Some people are acting specialists e.g. Chow Yun Fatt, Ling Qin Xia
- Some people are hosting experts e.g. Yang Lan .
- Some people are sporting experts e.g. Deng Ya Ping.

They are very positive and are extremely good at what they do but will often not try out anything different.

They work very hard within the boundaries of what is socially acceptable and usually will not challenge conventional norms because they know their place in the world, and also their limits.

Their success and potential comes from their relentless striving in their own area of specialization.

*Jackie Chan in Canon EOS*

*commercial:*

*Represents professionalism and quality*

*Maggie Cheung in Pt*

*commercial:*

*Elegant and intellectual, two elements that characterizes the traditional Chinese conception of feminine beauty*

We need to consider the socio-economic backdrop of the development post 70s generation in order to understand their choice of role model

**Influenced by traditional culture—hence very traditional and reserved**

A lot of post-70s consumers are similar to those of the post-60s generation. They are influenced by traditional culture and events, like the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, they are more traditional, rule abiding and moderate.

**Collective mode of living; image conscious**

Since they lived in a time when the social norms and ideals were changing—their attachment to communal living is very deep. Consequently, many do not have a mature sense of self so image is very important. They are bothered by other people's opinion of them.

**Tough; pragmatic attitude towards life**

They have been through resource shortages and the oppression of life, they know that things don't come easily.

They understand that diligence and talent can help them attain material comforts.

→ Do things according to rules

→ Pursue social recognition

→ Believe that diligence and talent trumps all

## Post-80s: Pioneers are independent and do not follow

Unlike the more traditional and conservative post 70s generation, the post 80s generation appreciates role models with individuality and style

- Han Han: Sharp, insightful writing style that challenges norms and takes responsibility for his words
- Fan Bing Bing: Flashy personality, independent, ambitious. These qualities have earned her the name "King Fan".
- Steve Jobs: Innovation was his catchphrase and he spearheaded innovation

They seek freedom, they are not bound by societal expectations and they actively seek and do what they think is correct.

They do not conform, they have the courage to seek breakthroughs, tread on new paths and not limit themselves

They have their own understanding, opinions and they will not blindly follow in other people's footsteps

They are independent and take responsibility for their actions.

Han Han: Nestlé Commercial  
Live out your courage

Han Han: Subaru  
I walk my own path with nothing to fear

Karen Mok: Cadillac commercial  
Release the glow of your courage

Fan Bing Bing: Nokia N9 commercial  
Do not follow

The development of the post 80s generation is characterized by big changes such as birth control policies and the liberalization of China. These types of big cultural changes made people think that the post 80s generation is very "rebellious" and "beaten down". But the post 80s generation, as the predominant working force in current society, have proven that they are able to drive social change in China.

Plan to conceive; going into the small family model and awakening their subjective sense of self

The predominant mode of living is in small families. They no longer live in communal quarters. As the sole daughter or son of the household, they care more about their own needs and less about what other people think.

→ Walk their own way

Liberalization caused clash of many opposing cultures; acquaintance of other value systems

With liberalization, China was able to become acquainted with cultures of developed countries. They started to accept cultural influences from Hong Kong, Europe, Japan. These influences gave them a new perspective towards traditional Chinese culture.

→ Seek breakthroughs

After watching an epoch of struggle and strife of the Chinese people, they strive on courageously

Witnessing the awakening and growth of China, how China changed from a country plagued with social problems to the glorious China of today, helped them cultivate a strong sense of responsibility.

→ Independent, take responsibility

# Post-90s: Alternative achievers who look for a new way of living: uncompromising subversion

Unlike the distant role models of the post 70s and 80s generations, the role models of the post 90s generation are closer to our concept of a “normal” person. Although not perfect, they have their shining points.

- Sheldon Cooper: High IQ, child like, unable to smoothly conduct daily affairs
- Zen Yi Ke: Was mocked for having a “sheep like voice” but composing talents have been widely affirmed by the public

They are imperfect but they will never stop in the pursuit of their dreams.

These imperfect role models subvert our concept of the perfect role model with their success.

They are uncompromising and they will not allow the aggressive competition and pressure of society bury their voices.

## Who are the Post 90s?

Why does the post 90s generation admire alternative achievers? An examination of their profile will prove useful.

The lifestyle of the post 90s generation is very different from that of other generations. They have not been through major societal, historical or political changes nor poverty. They have been exposed to a wide variety of international influences, hence they are extremely different from the previous two generations.

Because of the gap between the post 90s generation and their earlier counterparts, the post 70s and 80s generations often do not relate to these youths and find the “Yaoi fangirl” culture “unique” and “strange”. The post 90 generations have declared that the previous two generations do not understand them.

## Post 90s: subversion and inclusiveness are defining features

**Subversion:** If the post 70s generation lives within convention and the post 80s strive to redefine convention, then the post 90s generation wants a jump on social convention.

- When others look down on the underdogs, the 90s generation hopes that the underdogs will turn the tide. They do not believe there is a set of rules that everyone must follow- there are only dreams they can achieve with hard work.

**Inclusiveness:** They have lived in a multicultural society from a young age and are not particularly influenced by any culture. Even if a cultural clashes with theirs, they will be inclusive and tolerant.

- They do not think that the world exists for perfect people; it’s a place where many different cultures can co-exist.

Their philosophy is that “radical” is better than “moderate” and that “results” are more important than “process”.

*“Yaoi fangirls are not into handsome guys. They like Yaoi (homosexuals) because they are so tolerant. They subvert, they challenge, they tolerate. But most importantly- they convey the importance of freedom to express your individuality and being tolerant to different value systems”*

This “speech of a Yaoi fangirl” is a good reflection of the psyche of the post 90s generation

Post 70s

Post 80s

Post 90s

The way of a moderate

*Moderation is the essence of Chinese philosophy. It means that one should not step beyond one's boundaries but live within that circle*

Process is important

*They care about self cultivation and being real. They want to achieve success through their own hard work*

The way of a radical

*The philosophy of the post 90s generation is very different- they want to jump out of the circle of convention as far as possible so as to escape the pluralistic society*

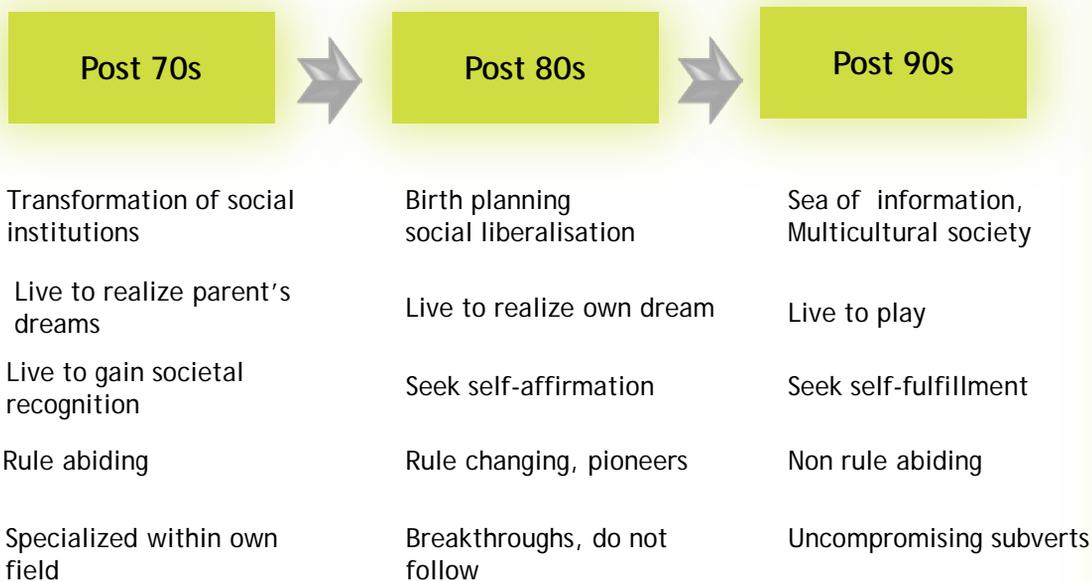
Results are important

*They care more about the results and not the process nor the method. For instance they embrace man-made beauty through plastic surgery*

## Conclusion

### The evolution of China's role models: from the orthodox hero to the alternative achiever.

*Through understanding the role models of different generations, we see which elements can truly resonate with consumers. As the post 90s generation makes their headway into society, we must consider how to "touch" them with elements that their role models' embody.*



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