

SENSORY RESEARCH IN CHINA

ARE THE CHINESE JUST "DIFFERENT"?



ANOVAX
Research Consultants
for Strategic Marketing

“looking behind
language”

THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE!

HEATY (热) AND COOLING (凉)??

Perhaps the most fundamental difference between Chinese approaches to the senses and that of Caucasians is that the Chinese culture simply has its own unique framework of evaluation. Yes, the Chinese will use all the descriptive terms we would associate with Western taste perceptions, but overriding that is a simple classification of all foods and drinks into “heaty” and “cooling”!

The root of these ideas lies in the concept of Yin and Yang. Yin and Yang are representations of the fundamental duality of the universe for Chinese, a duality that ideally should be unified. Harmony is sought between Yin and Yang qualities - and any imbalance avoided. Yin is related to matter like blood, fluids and tissue in the body whereas Yang is the action potential, or Qi, and related to heat in the body. Chinese medicine attempts to balance Yin and Yang and aims to build these qualities in the body when they are deficient. Most foods (and quite often herbs) play an essential role in this balancing process and this is why sensory evaluation for Chinese goes well beyond the mere senses of taste, sight and smell.



Most Chinese know which foods are hearty or cooling and will choose them for their suitability on any occasion. Certain food or drinks will just carry with them impressions of being cooling or hearty, so smell, taste and even looks can be indicators of being cooling or hearty.

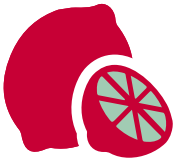
For the Chinese the consumption of any food or drink item is implicitly related to health issues and a person's state of health - and taking the wrong hearty or cooling food is believed to have potential short term and long term effects on health.

For example, the Chinese believe certain foods will create “feng” (风) or an internal “wind” that can remain in the body, unless released, causing some obvious symptoms. Everything from sexual dysfunction, to pimples, to rashes, headaches, migraines, sweating, joint pains, poor healing of cuts - and over the long term - arthritis and cancer will be attributed to a lack of balance between the hearty and cooling state.



Wonder how many research designs from International clients include a “heaty” and “cooling: question?”

OTHER EXAMPLES OF CHINESE SENSORY DIFFERENCES AROUND ...



Chinese are apparently more sensitive to some sensory delivery, especially taste attributions. Those who have lived in Chinese communities will have noticed a **heightened awareness of freshness and quality**. So getting the taste and smell right in China is possibly more critical in Chinese cultures. The Chinese consumer may just be more aware about some sensory dimensions!



Some of the favourite foods of the Chinese are amazingly smelly – and have to be to appeal to the Chinese food consumer. These smells, often based on fermentation processes, are almost unapproachable to Westerners, but to the Chinese have high appeal. These are not the Western “blue cheese” smells which many Chinese find abhorrent! Your Chinese target simply has a **different set of aromatic acceptance criteria** than Caucasians.



And even the look of something can be a big issue with the Chinese especially in the health area, and such products simply have to have certain characteristics in place e.g. perceptions of bitterness or significantly darker colouration! This may present problems for Western products that lack those expected markers. Sometimes brand development in China cannot go against an **established underlying taste or visual expectation**.



Another difference between Chinese and Caucasians is their reactions to taste textures. There are some Western products, especially creamy or “gluggy” taste textures, that can be a major challenge to the Chinese consumer. **Any taste-based product introduced in China that does not run a texture evaluation process is running major risks.**



There is a fascination in China about skin whiteness, especially amongst women. Despite this strong desire for whiteness there is also a developed awareness of textural and aromatic issues with these products. Consumers in China treat texture and aromatics as strongly related or “bundled” in the evaluation process of perceived effectiveness. **Treating sensory research as a process of just evaluating a series of attributes rather than on a more holistic basis can be dangerous in some sensory categories.**

MANAGING SENSORY RESEARCH IN CHINA

ARE THERE ANY DIFFERENCES?

The Test Environment

Controlling the test environment for sensory work is a given internationally, but it is even more critical in China because the chance for something uncontrollable is so high. China is all about **sensory overload** – smells, noise and motion! After all there are 1.36 billion people here - and as many vehicles!!

Respondent Issues

Dealing with respondents to sensory testing is an even more controllable imperative in China. The chance to earn a few extra “Renminbi” can be so appealing that respondents may not be truly honest in their claims of product usage. China's **collective culture** also means that respondents both want to share opinions and also look to others for direction. Controlling this is critical and is best achieved with experienced test environment supervision.

Project Control

One major respondent management issue in China is the potential for **loss of control** of in-home placement and extended use testing. As we have noted, this is a collective society and the tendency to want to share and even give a collective opinion is high. Avoiding this is one of the key control issues that needs to be managed outside of a controlled test environment.

Test Product Controls

Test products and test sample management can also be more critical in China. Potential for theft and product deterioration can be a big issue. The humidity in China is very damaging in most cities in summer and winters can be very severe, often below freezing. Ensuring good **storage quality and security** for test products is a major issue, often forgotten when test materials are sent months ahead of the actual study.

WHY IS ALL THIS IMPORTANT?

The answer is obvious! Your sensory research partners in China need to be researchers who have a foot in both worlds – the West and East. You need a research team in China that understands the design and control requirements of international sensory research, but also one that offers skilled management that can “hand-hold” you through market-specific sensory research issues in China.

WHY ANOVAX?

Well, we have been carrying out sensory research in China for over twenty years now – and we have learned a lot along the way!! Our extensive areas of sensory research experience cover **all types of “blind” taste testing** with an emphasis on taste testing of beer, spirits, juices, cigarettes and even coffee. We have also been heavily focused on sensory evaluation of female and male skincare products and also household hygiene products, based on everything from ethnographic and “shop-along” studies to extended in-home placement research. The range of experiences Anovax can bring to your sensory research requirements in China are outlined in more detail in our website – see the link below!

We believe Anovax is the sensory research partner you need in China!



www.anovax.com



Unit 610-612,
D1 International Creative Zone
909 Tianyaoqiao Road,
Shanghai, P.R.China, 200030



+86-021-3126-1236



+86-021-6456-8176



research@anovax.com

Facebook



LinkedIn

