

Consumption Behavior and Money Sense: Gender Differences

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About two years ago, I read an interesting news article. It was about the results of a survey conducted on brand products by an international market research company. In the survey, approximately 70% of people in Hong Kong said that they liked trademarked items, namely brand items. I was impressed that the figure far surpassed that of those in other countries and regions who liked such items. Also, I read an article by a Hong Kong psychologist saying that “people in Hong Kong tend to prefer brand items and new products and, by having them, they are eager to feel a sense of superiority and satisfaction.”

When buying an item—whether a bag, accessory, clothing, electric appliance, automobile, or communication device—people in Hong Kong tend to select a product made by an internationally recognized company, even if it is more expensive. One of the recent examples of such a trend is the iPhone. Actually, I’m surprised that so many people have the product. I asked several young men and women in Hong Kong who had an iPhone why they had purchased the phone. Their answers included not only that “the product is convenient” but also that “the phone gives me a sense of satisfaction and superiority, making me feel that I’m in line with the trend of the times. So, even though it’s expensive, I don’t think it’s a waste of money at all.” Many people think that spending a lot of money on brand items and new products is not a waste. It seems that this leads to the consumption behavior exhibited by many people in Hong Kong.

Another form of consumption behavior displayed by many citizens of Hong Kong is treating others. Unlike in Japan, where it is not unusual to split the bill for dishes, it is common in Hong Kong for someone at the table to say that “Be my guest here” and then pick up the tab even if that person eats together with people of the same generation. Next time when they eat together, a person other than the one who treated last time pays, saying that “This time, it’s my turn to treat.” Thus, it is often the case that someone at the table pays for the other people’s food and drinks. There is even a case where a few persons at the table insist on paying the tab, with someone saying “Let me pay the bill” and another person saying “No, the tab should be on me.” It seems that they think “treating makes me feel that I was able to make a good use of money,” and “pleasing others makes me satisfied.”

The above pattern is observed especially when more than two persons eat together. However, this is not the case when a couple eats alone together. There is a big difference between the two people in terms of behavior. In such a situation, even if they are not a

couple, but a man and woman, the man almost always says “Let me pay” as if it were natural to say so, while the woman almost always behaves as if it were natural that such an offer is made for her. It seems that at this time the man is satisfied that “I pay for the woman. I’m a cool guy,” while the woman feels that “the man wants to pay for me. I’m like a princess.” This happens even between a man and a woman who are just friends, and of course, between a man and a woman who are a couple as well. Many men in Hong Kong spend money for their partner without any hesitation, presenting a brand item or a bouquet of flowers for their memorial days, or treating every time they eat together. This money sense is probably behind the reputation of Hong Kong men; namely, “they are gentlemen and kind to women.”