

# **A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF PRODUCT QUALITY: CHINESE PRODUCTS VERSUS NON-CHINESE PRODUCT**

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***Abstract:** In India Product quality always is a critical determinant of consumer satisfaction. The demand for a product depends upon the quality that a manufacturer is providing to their consumers. China, which is a growing economic power, exports its manufactured goods to the entire global markets and when we are talking about Indian Market, Chinese products is dominating every Size of the market. Chinese goods have been successful to capture market because of its competitive price strategy as compared to the products of other countries. The major problem with the Chinese products is that these are perceived as of relatively inferior quality in comparison to the products of other countries. This study is an attempt to assess the perceptions of customers regarding price and quality aspects of Chinese and non-Chinese products. To compare the relative effectiveness of price and quality, the concepts of perceived life and perceived value are used. It is found that the Chinese products are perceived as price effective but the area of product quality requires immediate attention because Chinese products are perceived as of low quality.*

**Key Words:** Consumer Perceptions, Product Quality, Perceived Quality, Quality Metrics

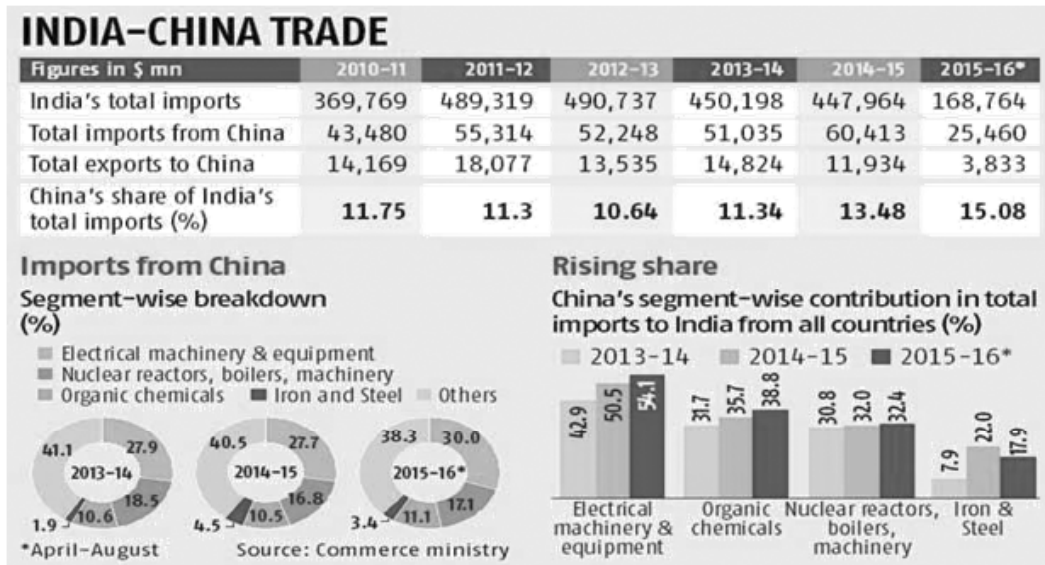
## **1. INTRODUCTION**

It is being observed that the sale of Chinese products is very common in the Indian markets around the globe and Chinese products such as home appliances, Electronics, stationary items, fabric, Clothes and hardware are dominating specially in the Indian Market. Below figure shows the import of manufactured goods from China following a consistently rising pattern till 2013-14 after that due to some initiatives by government of India Like Make in India, Single window clearance, rate cut in corporation tax etc.

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Indian consumers are usually attracted by low price of Chinese goods as compared to goods imported from other countries just because of high price but on the other hand they are skeptical about the durability of Chinese manufactured goods. Flaming and Smith (1999) observed that, a country's origin and its perceived quality can impact future purchasing decisions on customer mind. The quality of manufactured goods is an important factor for consumers and is considered as an important factor for the exports too. The importance of consumer perceptions of quality and country-of-origin has been emphasized in research papers. (Garlik, 1987; Thirston, 1987).

This study focuses on comparing the quality, durability and value of goods manufactured by China and other countries available in the markets of India as perceived by consumers. Such type of study has not been carried out in India but in other countries similar studies could be found. For example Schniederjans, Cao, and Olson (2004) and Schniederjans et.al (2011) have studied consumers perception about the quality and value of Chinese goods in U.S.A. Gary and Alain (1978) studied the perception of consumers about foreign products in France. Wall and Heslop (1986) studied consumer attitudes toward Canadian-made versus imported products in Canada. Durvasula *et al.* (1997) conducted a study about a cross-cultural ethnocentrism in US and Russia, while Apil, Kaynak and Todua (2008) studied the perceptions of customers in Georgia in regarding Turkish goods.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Schniederjans, Cao and Olson (2004) discussed U.S consumer perception of product quality of Chinese made goods. Schniederjans, *et al.*, 2004 studied consumer's

perception about quality of the items imported from China. Consumer Product Value was measured by a simple economic approach of indexation.

Schniederjans, *et al.* (2004) suggested that the Chinese manufacturers should prioritize their quality improvement programs by improving the material used in products and by improving their processes. Since the government is not taking interest to check low quality Chinese made products and allow their imports, Schniederjans *et al.* (2004) suggested that researchers should come forward and address this issue.

Schniederjans *et al.* (2011) used the same metrics as used by Schniederjans, Cao, and Oslon (2004) to measure the consumer current value. They also found that the average quality rating of Chinese products was 2.082 out of 10 (poor rating) supporting the hypothesis that Chinese manufactured products are perceived as having significantly lower quality than those imported from other countries.

Morjorie and Lousie(1986) studied Consumer Attitudes toward Canadian-made versus imported products in Canada. They collected data from 635 respondents regarding the attitude of Canadian consumers towards the quality of Canadian and imported goods, cost of making quality product and attitude of workers in making quality product in Canada They concluded that, in general, the attitude was positive, with 85.2% reporting that the quality of Canadian products had improved or stayed the same in the past five years and the attitudes about the next five years were equally optimistic.

Baumgartner, ConfTrences, Jolibert, and Assistant (1978) conducted a study about the perception of foreign products in France using the theory of perceived risk as a criteria for the choice of products to be studied. One theory in consumer behavior which seems particularly appropriate to the study of foreign product perception is the theory of perceived risk. Perceived risk related to purchase depends on two determinants (Cox, 1967). First is the degree of uncertainty concerning the suitability of the product and second is the importance which consumer affects to the possible adverse consequences of the purchase.

Both of these determinants could be intimately linked to foreign products. Along with these two determinants there is an additional uncertainty due to the origin of the product.

Tsiotsou (2005) investigated the effect of various perceived quality levels on product involvement, overall satisfaction and purchase intentions in Athens, Greece. This study was based on the idea that a better understanding of the relationship between perceived product quality and product involvement, consumer satisfaction and purchase intentions, may help academics to develop a model of consumer decision making for goods.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Data Collection**

To conduct this study, an online survey questionnaire is designed that targets the consumers belonging to various universities located in North India. Due to the

limitation of availability of E-mail addresses of consumers and other constraints, the target population is restricted to Business Institutes only. The items manufactured by China and other countries are available in the markets of Delhi and the items included in this study have been considered on the basis of a survey of different markets in Delhi.. Most of the items are as included by Schniederjans, Cao, and Olson (2004) and Schniederjans, Cao, Schniederjans, and Gu (2011). Few items that are available in Delhi have also been included in the list. The list of items included in this study comprises of 45 items. The items being included are placed in different categories named as Furniture, small appliances, electronic items, clothes and fabric products, Hardware items and General Miscellaneous as given in Appendix 2.

The questionnaire was forwarded to the consumers of the Chinese products belonging to Business Institutes of Delhi & Punjab. We received 290 responses, out of which 200 were found complete in all respect and have been included in this study. The demographics of the survey are presented in the Tables 1(a), 1(b) and 1(c).

**Table 1(a)**  
**Age groups of respondents**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid under 20	42	21	21	21.0
20 – 29	110	55	55	76.0
30-39	28	14	14	100.0
40 or above	20	10	10	100.0
Total	200	100	100	
Total	200	100		

**Table 1(b)**  
**Marital Status of respondents**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid Single	142	71.0	71.0	71.0
Married	58	29.0	29.0	100.0
Total	200	100	100	
Total	200	100		

**Table 1(c)**  
**Gender of respondents**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Male	148	74	74	74.0
Female	52	26	26	100.0
Total	200	100	100	
Total	200	100		

### **3.2. Measures**

Perceived product quality is perhaps one of the most important constructs in marketing. In recent years perceived quality has been the subject of considerable interest to both practitioners and researchers, mainly in services marketing (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman, Zethaml & Berry 1996). Indeed, the belief that perceived quality leads to repeated purchases is the bedrock of any business. Thus a better understanding of the relationship between perceived product quality and product involvement, consumer satisfaction, and purchase intentions may help academics to develop a model of consumer decision making for goods. (Rodoula Tsiotsou 2005) Products life or "durability" is equally important as price criteria to the consumer in a purchasing decision. For last several decades market research studies have consistently confirmed that product durability is a primary factor that influences repeat purchases (Wheatley, Chiu and Goldman, 1981), and Pisek (1987). Chase, Aquilano and Jacobs, (2000, 6) studied ratio of price and durability. Wheatley, Chiu and Goldman (1981) discussed the relation between Price, durability and satisfaction.

Consumer perceptions of price, quality and value are considered pivotal determinants of shopping behavior and product choice (Bishop 1984, Doyle 1984. Jacob and Olson 1985, Schlechter 1984)

Of particular importance is the fact that many research studies have shown that metrics based on customer knowledge about pricing and their perceptions of product durability are appropriate measures that can be used to reflect conditions of product quality or product value by the customers to determine consumer product purchase behavior (Schniederjans *et al.*, 2004).

Devaraj, Fan, and Kohli (2002) demonstrated that consumer satisfaction as related to quality service could be accurately measured with survey instruments.

Schniederjan, Cao and Olson (2004) have concluded that perceptions of consumer purchasing behavior can be accurately measured. Consumer product price and durability are primary factors in future consumer purchasing decisions. Also price and durability can be linked together to compute a consumer metric called "product value".

On the basis of the above mentioned references it can be concluded that Price and durability of a product make a customer satisfied about the product. Hence satisfaction of a customer about a product is related with the constructs perceived price and perceived durability, and it influences the purchase decision in future. As the consumer product price and durability are the primary factors for making decisions about future purchase, therefore the metrics based on customer knowledge about pricing and their perceptions about the durability of a product are suitable measures that can be used to reflect conditions of product quality and product value. Survey questionnaires are a primary means for collecting data of consumer perception of price, quality and value.

To achieve the objectives of this research several metrics will be developed to measure perceptions of respondents from business institutes of Delhi on product quality and purchase decision behavior.

### 3.3. Research Instrument

The research instrument for this research comprises of 18 questions. The questions are about age, gender, marital status, education, origin of the item in use, price of the item, expected age of the item in use, satisfaction level etc. As our research is also on the same line as of Schniederjans, Cao, and Olson (2004) and Schniederjans, Cao, Schniederjans, and Gu (2011) and the research instrument used in their researches is competent in capturing the required information related to Price, age of the item in use, quality of the item, therefore we have adopted most of the questions of these researches. In the questionnaire used in this study, the questions about perceived quality of item, satisfaction and purchase intention are same as of Cao, and Olson (2004), Schniederjans, *et al.* (2011) and Tsiotsou (2005).

The constructs of our research instrument was pretested with a focus group to determine, whether the questions are correctly understandable for extracting the required information and to determine whether the questions are valid or not. The results of this pretest revealed no misinterpretation of the questions. The questions used in this study are presented in Appendix.

## 4. PURPOSE AND HYPOTHESIS

The purpose of this research paper is to study consumer perception on the quality of products made in China. In this research we will concentrate about following two objectives:

1. To compare Business institutes consumers-based perceptions on the quality of Chinese made goods with the perceptions of non-Chinese goods.
2. To compare Business institutes consumer-based perceptions on the value of Chinese made goods with the perceptions of non-Chinese goods.

In the light of objectives of this research following alternatives have been stated to test their truthfulness.

H1: Chinese manufactured products are perceived significantly low in price as compare to products produced in other countries.

H2: There is significant difference between the mean perceived life of the products manufactured by China and by other countries

H3: There is significant difference between the mean perceived values of the products manufactured by China and by other countries.

H4: Chinese manufactured products are perceived as significantly low in quality as compared to the products produced in other countries.

H5: A significant paired difference exists between the prices of Chinese and Non Chinese products.

## 5. VARIABLE MEASUREMENT METRICS

In this research Simple Economic Indexation procedure has been used for comparing the perceived quality and value of Chinese manufactured goods and non-Chinese manufactured goods. The quality characteristics of the products used in this research are product price and product durability. The ratios for both the Chinese and non-Chinese products are:

$$\text{Product Value (Chinese product)} = \frac{\text{Mean price paid for Chinese products (in Rs.)}}{\text{Mean number of months product actually lasted}} \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Product Value (Non-Chinese product)} = \frac{\text{Mean price of fered for Non – Chinese products (in Rs.)}}{\text{Mean number of months product was expected to last}} \quad (2)$$

The lower the value of the index, the better the overall perceived quality of the product. Quality is defined as the duration of useful life relative to the price paid for the product (Schniederjans *et al.*, 2004).

The computation of net product value is based on the ratios in equations 1 and 2 given as under:

$$\text{Net product value} = \text{Product value (non-Chinese)} - \text{Product value (Chinese)} \quad (3)$$

The larger the product value, the greater is the price /cost of their use. As long as net product value is positive, the value of the non-Chinese products is better than the Chinese products, if net product value is negative, the Chinese products sampled in this survey are rated as more price /cost-valued than the non-Chinese products (Schniederjans *et al.*, 2004).

In order to compare the relationship of non-Chinese product value with that of Chinese product value is a simple price ratio index of the product values:

$$\text{Product value index} = \frac{\text{Product value(Chinese)}}{\text{Product value(non – Chinese)}} * 100 \quad (4)$$

A product value index less than 100 favors Chinese goods, while an index greater than 100 favors non-Chinese made goods (Schniederjans *et al.*, 2004).

Computation of Equation 1 is based on the responses to question 8 and 9 while computation of equation 2 is based on responses to questions 10 and 12. The responses are however based on the assumption that the respondent:

- 1) remember the price and
- 2) remember that it was a Chinese or non – Chinese product

## 6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The number of responses to each survey question from the total of 200 subjects is presented in brackets in Appendix 1. Based on the sample of 200 responses the mean price, mean durability, product value, net product value and product value index measures were computed and presented in Table 2. It gives comparative analysis of Product value and net product value for the Chinese and Non-Chinese product. It also gives the Product Value Index, the value of which can be interpreted with respect to the standard value of 100. If for any product, we get 100 as the Product value index, it indicates that the Product Value for both Chinese and Non-Chinese for that product is same. Any value less than 100 indicates that the product value of Chinese Product is greater as compared to the Non-Chinese Product. Similarly, if it has a value greater than 100, it favors the Non-Chinese Product in terms of Product Value Index. We can identify that travelling bags is the product having Product Value Index of 101.67 which is closer to 100, and it implies that for this product the respondents are indifferent regarding the product value of Chinese and Non-Chinese product. The items watches (10.40) and Phone set (228.99) have the lowest and highest Net Product Value Indices respectively.

In this research, a list of 62 items is included in the questionnaire but by studying the responses of 200 respondents it has been observed that they have used only 46 items in their responses. But out of 46 items, only 16 items contain 6 or more observations. Therefore the item-wise study to compare the price of Chinese products and Non Chinese products in this research is based on 16 items only.

The average quality rating (that is, question 7, Appendix1) on Chinese product is 3.1292, falling in the "Fair value" range, based on all 200 subjects. The product value index gives a mixed indication of the product of preference about Chinese products. The consumers have indicated a better perceptions ( 3 and above ) about Chinese products for the items Table & chairs, Phone sets, Shirts (Male), Table tennis Tables, Office chairs, Stationary and Travelling bags ( Table 2 ).

## 7. DIAGRAMMATICAL COMPARISON OF CHINESE AND NON-CHINESE PRODUCTS

**Table 5(a)**  
How do you feel about the quality of any similar non-Chinese product you experienced earlier?

	<i>Freuquency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Valid Per cent</i>	<i>Cumulative Per cent</i>
Valid Poor	1	.5	.5	.5
Average	6	3.0	3.0	3.5
Fair	34	17.0	17.0	20.5
Good	113	56.5	56.5	77.0
Excellent	46	23.0	23.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

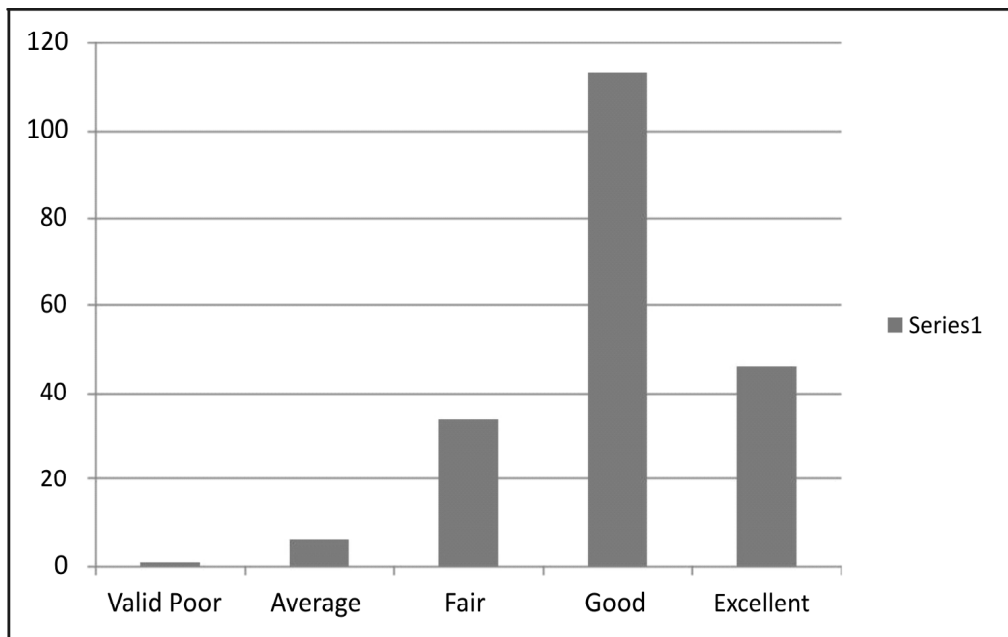


**Table 5(b)**  
**why do you feel about the quality of Chinese product you experienced earlier?**

	<i>Freuquency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Valid Per cent</i>	<i>Cumulative Per cent</i>
Valid Poor	7	3.5	3.5	3.5
Average	29	14.5	14.5	18.0
Fair	107	53.5	53.5	71.5
Good	53	26.5	26.5	98.0
Excellent	4	2	2.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

By comparing the percentage of perception about the quality of Chinese and non-Chinese products in the tables 5(a) and 5(b) , it is found that 53.9% consumers of Chinese products have rated the Chinese products as Fair where as 56.8% consumers have rated the Non-Chinese products as Good

By comparing the Figures 3(a) and 3(b), it can be observed that the diagram for perception about the quality of non-Chinese products shows negative skewness which indicates that consumers perceived non-Chinese products of better quality as compare to Chinese products.



**Figure 3 (a): How do you feel about the quality of any similar non-Chinese product you experienced earlier ?**

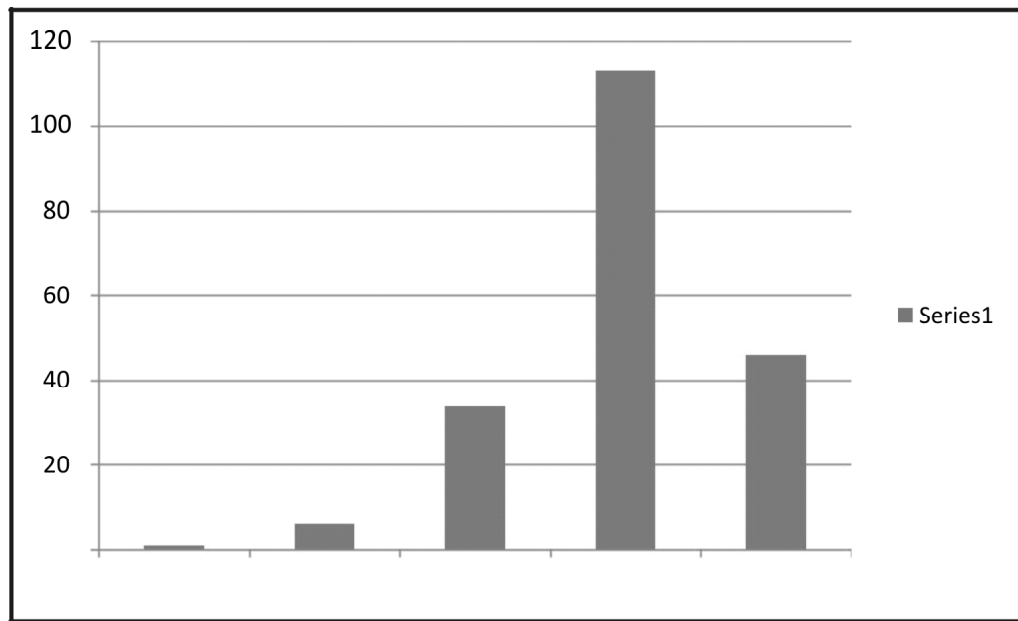


Figure 3(b): How do you feel about the quality of Chinese product you experienced earlier.?

## 8. CONCLUSION

This research is based on consumer survey where price and product durability has been used as measures to assess the perceived quality of Chinese and non-Chinese products. This research supports H1 and H4 therefore it may be concluded that the average price of Chinese products is significantly less than the average price of non-Chinese products while same is true for perception regarding quality of Chinese and non-Chinese products. However we did not find any significance difference between the average perceived life and average perceived value of Chinese products and non-Chinese products. Although Chinese products are dominating in the markets all over the world but Chinese manufacturer have to pay attention to improve the quality of their products in order to maintain this domination. Product quality is an aspect in which Chinese Products are lacking as consumers perceived the non-Chinese products as of better quality as compared to the Chinese products.

## 9. LIMITATIONS

Every survey may contain several biases arising due to various sources and may affect the analysis as well as the outcomes of the study. Following are the limitations of this research:

The observations about price and durability of the products in this research are related to the memory of the respondent. One can remember the origin of the product

but it is very difficult to remember the actual price of the product and the month of useful life of the product in the result bias arises in the observations. But this biasedness is reduced due the fact that this source of errors is for both types of products that is Chinese products as well as non-Chinese products.

The data have been collected through on line survey which also limits the findings this research to those who have access to that technology.

**10. APPENDIX**

**Appendix 1**

**Following are the questions related to this study. A list of items is attached here**

1.	Age:(200)	_____Years
2.	Gender: (200)	Male / Female
	Marital Status:	
3.	(20)	Single / Married
4.	Have you purchased recently and used an item made in China in the last four years? (If you answered <b>yes</b> proceed to the next question) (200)	Yes  /No
5.	Which Chinese products you purchase during last four years? (Check all that apply) (200) Which Chinese product did you purchase and used (write the item from the list attached,	
6.	also circle it in the list) (200)	_____
	Considering the price and the length of useful life of the Chinese made product, how would you rate the value of this product from what you might have expected from using the	1 I feel cheated 2 Poor value
7.	similar product in the past? (200)	3 Fine value 4 Good value 5 Great value
8.	Roughly, how much did you spend on this Chinese product? (200)	Rs._____
9.	Roughly what was its useful life? (Specify in nearest months) (200)	_____months
10.	How many months of useful life did you expect from this product? (Specify in nearest months) (200)	_____months
	Did you compare prices with other similar items at the time of your purchase of the Chinese	Yes
11.	product? (200)	/No
12.	Roughly what was the price of a similar item that you did not purchase? (200)	Rs._____
13.	What was the country of origin for the similar item which you did not purchase? (200)	_____

		1	Bad
	How do you feel about the quality of any similar non-Chinese product you used earlier?	2	Poor
14.	(200)	3	Average
		4	Good
		5	Excellent
		1	Bad
		2	Poor
15.	How do you feel about the quality of Chinese product you used earlier? (200)	3	Average
		4	Good
		5	Excellent
16.	How much did you spend on this Chinese product you identified in question no. 11? (200)		Rs. _____
			Workmanship
			Material
			Durability
			Other
			_____
	If you have to guess why your Chinese product failed which one of the following is your	1	
17.	guess?( Mark all that applies)		Design of a product
	(200)		Durability
			Other
18.	Is there anything you would like to comment concerning products made in China? (200)		_____

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