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A different smile, a different story:

Global advertising adaptation for Chinese consumers

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A different smile, a different story: Global advertising adaptation for
Chinese consumers

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Abstract

In the early 20th century (as well as today), global brands tend to adapt their global
advertisements for Chinese consumers. A corpus of USA ads and Chinese ads for
global brands of the early 20th century shows that ads originating in USA are seldom
used without alterations for the Chinese market. However, the ads made in the USA
do commonly serve as templates for the Chinese ad design. In these cases, there are
usually more substantial adaptations than a mere 'translation' of verbal parts. A
corpus of such obviously 'paired' advertisements enables us to study the
'construction' of the Chinese consumer in contrast to his or her contemporary
American peer. A rhetorical reconstruction of cultural readings of the ads shows that

the adaptations can be understood as being necessary to invite a reading that fits within the Chinese consumer's cultural system. If the USA template strongly invites an *informational* reading, or a *transformational* reading that merely relates to values of individual expression, a redesign is made that invites a *transformational reading* related to social values in China. If the original text form already allows for such a reading, only minor adaptations are made. We show that an in-depth reconstruction of cultural readings of the ads is required to explain the often minor but related adaptations that together invite a reading very different from that of the original.

Keywords: advertisement, global, local, adaptation, informational, transformational

1. Introduction

Advertisements can reveal a lot about the societies in which they are produced and received (Berman, 1981; Marchand, 1985). Advertising is an important force in the global construction of consumerism (Stearns, 2001). What is widely recognized in the globalization discussion is that a *global construction* is not the same as a homogeneous *construction* (Ger & Belk, 1996, Ritzer & Malone, 2000, Zhou & Belk, 2004). A global construction involves a far more complicated process of 'cultural hybridization' (Nederveen Pieterse, 1995), also referred to by the coinage 'glocalization' (Roberson, 1995). A good example of the analysis of the global but also localized construction of a Chinese consumer in the 1920s is presented by Wu Huaiting (Wu, 2008). Wu shows how a 'Foucaultian' analysis of the discursive knowledge produced in Shanghai advertisements enables her to construct a rich picture of the female Chinese middle-class consumer of the 1920s. In another study, Xin Zhao & Russell Belk used a method "based on theories of semiotics and visual rhetoric" to analyze *yuefenpai* - a popular local form of poster advertisements -, showing how in old Shanghai influence of advertising transformed traditional Chinese culture and was transformed by traditional Chinese culture (Zhao & Belk, 2008).

We follow this line of investigation in search of the construction of the Chinese consumer in the early 20th century, the first time in modern history that Western brands entered the Chinese market. We want to determine how this construction of the Chinese consumer is embedded in Chinese cultural characteristics. To articulate our insight into the specifics of the construction of the early 20th century Chinese consumer, we collected a corpus of advertisements in which the Chinese

consumer is provably constructed in a (contrastive) relation to his and her contemporary American peer. Having collected over 2000 Chinese advertisements published between 1900 and1937 from the *Shenbao* newspaper and *Liangyou* magazine and from on-line sources, focusing on global, American-based brands, we searched for American ads that obviously functioned as templates for a Chinese ad. We managed to build a small corpus of 20 pairs of advertisements. As we may have failed to find (or to recognize as such) USA consumer-directed counterparts that functioned as templates, we can say that this practice of taking the American ad as a template applies in a small but substantial proportion of at least 1%, but probably more, of the Chinese early 20th century ads. Our 20 pairs reveal the minimal adaptations that ad designers judged necessary in the complex process of searching for the local fit of a global brand.

The main purpose of our research is to find a convincing explanation for the adaptations made. *We will argue that the adaptations can be understood as necessary interventions to invite a localized reading that fits within the Chinese consumer's cultural system. On the basis of our analyses, we reject a model in which adaptations are merely made to facilitate a reading that is as equivalent as possible to readings of culturally different, American audiences (the 'translation model').*

We also discuss a methodological issue that we encountered and that is also implied in the research projects of Wu 2008 and Zhou & Belk 2008. In both studies, we see that the authors apply interpretative, qualitative methods to analyze the discourse, subsequently trying to systematize the results of their analyses. The material consists of relatively small-size text corpora of Chinese ads. Although we judge all their interpretations as being convincing and meaningful readings, we also observe that not much is said (and probably not much can be said in general terms; compare cognitive theories as in Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) about a systematic relation between text-formal elements and the reconstructed readings; we have to trust and, as far as possible, join the scholars in each particular process of educated analysis, without a protocol that would make the process replicable.

In strong contrast to this, we observe that in cross-cultural research on advertisements, a predominantly quantitative approach is practiced, using predetermined concepts to explain significant differences on often bi-polar variables in relatively large corpora. The predetermined concepts are derived from general theoretical frameworks in cross-cultural studies, such as Hofstede's cultural

dimensions (Hofstede, 2001). In this quantitative approach, we see great efforts being made to transpose concepts, for example the bi-polar scale *informational – transformational*, or the dichotomy *rational appeal – emotional appeal*, into more or less objective, countable text characteristics that generate data that can be statistically processed.

The methodological issue to be discussed briefly in this article is: when confronted with complicated dynamics of cultural hybridization, while at the same time acknowledging the fundamental insight that the meaning of discourse is co-constructed by the audience, what methodology is required to discover the specifics of a culturally embedded reading and to relate such readings to general theoretical frameworks that we find in cross- cultural studies?

Without wanting to revive and once more get into social science's methodological 'wars', we do intend to investigate a constructive confrontation of the two approaches, working on a (be it small) corpus that is optimally structured for a cross-cultural comparative approach. *We will argue that (a) even in our purposive corpus it is necessary to apply a qualitative, highly interpretative approach, and (b) that the often bi-polar variables that stem from general frameworks in cross-cultural studies can be used to systematize differences between invited readings, but only if one allows complex relations within (readings of) ads and if one accepts a culturally sensitive modeling of bi-polarity.*

We try to distinguish the arguments that are related to the object (cross-cultural adaptations) from those relating to the method (a qualitative reconstruction of readings), but in fact they are inevitably intertwined. While performing our analyses we discovered the need to apply a rather 'vulnerable', qualitative method. Applying this method we discovered that we could still relate our findings to the theoretical concepts that we were familiar with from the quantitative research, even adding to the explanatory power of these concepts, but only if we allowed complex relations and worked largely 'bottom up'.

In section 2, we critically review previous cross-cultural studies on the adaptation of global advertisements to local, that is to Chinese audiences. We insert this section because we need to account for the interpretative and somewhat toilsome method that we apply. Our method, in terms of 'objectivity' and in terms of the possibility of exact replication, is much 'weaker' than the dominant methodology applied in the reviewed quantitative cross-cultural studies. However, in these studies

the concepts *as determined* in order to make them 'countable' become so far removed from the theoretical concepts *as meant* that the statistically significant relations that are found can no longer be interpreted in terms of the general theoretical frameworks about cultural differences. This critical evaluation constitutes our main argument to opt for the interpretative, 'semiotic' and 'rhetoric' based methodology. In section 3, we describe the adopted methodology.

In section 4, we report and illustrate our findings. We will show that combinations of often marginal formal differences between the texts result in substantial differences in readings. We even encounter examples of almost similar texts (apart from translations of verbal elements) where the lack of adaptations can be explained from the fact that the model ad already allowed for different readings of American and Chinese consumers. We will show that most adaptations *cannot* be explained in terms of, for example, the replacement of a particular object with a culturally equivalent object, or as clarifications that fill in cultural gaps (the 'translation' model). Further, we will show how approaching basically bi-polar modeled theoretical variables in a bottom-up fashion when characterizing the differences between the ads, helps to reveal important characteristic of Chinese consumer culture, including a view on bi-polarity itself, and may enrich theoretical cross-cultural concepts.

In section 5 we reflect on the method applied and we place our findings in a broader context, also 'validating' them informally on contemporary advertisements.

2. A critical review of previous cross-cultural studies

Global advertisers have to deal with the issue whether or not they should change their messages from one culture to another, and if so, to what extent. It appears that local market conditions have a great influence on global brand image management. On the basis of managerial survey data, Roth (1995) concludes that *power distance* and *individualism* have a significant impact on the performance of brand image strategies. According to the managerial reports that are part of this survey, functional brand images that appeal to the benefits of a particular product are judged as being most appropriate for cultures characterized by a low-power distance and high individualism, such as the USA. Social brand images appealing to group memberships are judged most appropriate for high-power distance and low individualism cultures, such as

China. This may be a reason for adapting advertisements that are designed for the USA when they are to be used in a Chinese cultural context.

There is a long-standing debate on advertising standardization versus adaptation (e.g. Green & al, 1975; Hite & Fraser, 1990). Some scholars argue that global brand advertisements should be standardized across countries and cultures, using practical arguments related to economic scale advantages, but also theoretical arguments that concern developing a truly global identity: developing a truly global identity requires standardization. Other scholars argue that adaptations are necessary, even when attempting to establish a global brand identity. It has been recognized that simple standardization may oversimplify the way local consumers interpret global advertising (Hung, Li & Belk, 2007; Zhou & Belk, 2004, Zhao & Belk, 2008). An identical text in various cultural contexts may give rise to very different readings (Puto & Wells, 1984). Constructing a global brand identity (if possible and desirable) may require culturally 'translated' texts to invite more or less 'equivalent' readings in different cultural contexts. The model that pursues this objective is known as the 'translation'-model).

Another take on the issue is that with cultures being different, a completely standardized global brand identity is not desirable: 'glocalization'. This position is also complex where adaptations are concerned. Cultural diversification may be realized with one and the same text as long as the text permits readers to construct their own cultural readings. But a more plausible angle is one whereby one assumes that adaptations will invite different readings. As Zhao and Belk argue (2008), the cultural complexity of globalization in advertising still remains unclear and it requires more research to fully explore the fusion of the global and the local in advertising. Obviously, this 'advertisement' debate is related to the general debate on globalization mentioned in the introduction.

Previous studies on differences between Western and Eastern advertisements have tried to find out how experts match brand identity with cultural diversity and how audiences respond to ads across cultures. These studies predominantly apply categorical, often bi-polar distinctions on advertisements. In corpus-based research, the distinctions are used to register relative differences in the frequency of their appearance (e.g. Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999; Pae, Samiee & Tai, 2002). In user-response research, such distinctions are used to divide the stimulus materials into categories (e.g. Tai, 2004), based on relative differences in favorable attitudes.

Two distinctions (formulated in a variety of terms) dominate: the highly quantitatively determined distinction between *rational appeals* and *emotional appeals in ads* and the related, slightly more qualitatively determined distinction between *informational advertisements* and *transformational advertisements*.

The emotional/rational appeal framework has been used extensively in advertising research. The distinction stems from Copeland (1924), who claimed that people buy products for either rational or emotional reasons. *Rational appeals* then refer to brand attributes as product benefits that serve the audience's self interest. *Emotional appeals* refer to the emotional, experiential side of consumption (Kotler & Amstrong, 1994: 468). Sometimes a different terminology is used, but the basic distinction remains the same: rational appeal ≈ informational appeal ≈ factual appeal ≈ functional appeal, emotional appeal ≈ mood appeal ≈ transformational appeal ≈ social/sensory appeal.

Several studies report complex, invariably weak (though statistically significant) cross-cultural relations between appeal types and cultural variables. It is, however, extremely hard to interpret these results in terms of the informative theoretical framework about cultural differences that underlie these studies. This is due to a combination of the following flaws:

- the procedures to make the appeal types countable create too large a distance between the 'concept as meant' and the 'concept as determined'; it is difficult to connect the 'concepts as determined' to 'the concepts as meant';
- the very distinction itself between the appeal types is determined in a 'culturally biased' way;
- the actual relations with culture are weak; whenever one type dominates, there will still be a large proportion that is of the other type. The research design does not provide an explanation for this.

To illustrate the problems that we encounter when attempting to interpret the outcomes of this type of research, we describe in some detail one representative study (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999). In this corpus study, ads from six countries were compared, among which ads from the USA and from Taiwan. The research question was whether the number and the type of appeals, *rational* versus *emotional*, differed between cultures. The corpus contained a variety of advertisements from the six countries on two different product types, goods and services. Appeals in the ads were

identified and coded according to a list of 42 advertising appeals as distinguished by Pollay (1983). The coding was done by two native speakers of the language of publication (i.e., two coders for each language), which means there were different coders for the Taiwanese and the USA ads. Although the two coders for each language showed a fairly high inter-coder reliability, these reliabilities did differ per country, indicating that there were at least some differences in the coding processes, in spite of the fact that Pollay's descriptions are quite detailed. No inter-coder reliabilities over cultures (between countries) can be calculated. This means that the interpretation of Pollay's typology may have been different between coding teams.

Two American "PhD qualified individuals" (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999: 47) in the abstract divided the Pollay list into two categories, either rational or emotional. In this way, the number of rational appeals and emotional appeals for each ad was calculated and comparisons were made between cultures and between product types (goods versus services). In table 1 we summarize the results for the USA and Taiwan.

product type	type of appeal	USA	Taiwan
goods	rational	3.77	2.08
	emotional	1.91	1.63
services	rational	2.97	1.15
	emotional	1.45	2.10

Table 1 number of appeals per ad

We observe that, compared to Taiwan, the number of appeals per ad in the USA is higher, both overall and per product type. However, we are also aware of the fact that the juries that identified the appeals consisted of different people, which means that the differences can either be real or may be an artifact of the coding.

The interesting result is that where goods are concerned, the Taiwanese ads tend to be slightly more 'rational' than the American ones while regarding services the Taiwanese ad-culture relies much more appeals to emotions. However, the relations found are weak; in Taiwanese ads still more than 35% of all appeals are rational while in American ads a lot of emotional appeals occur as well. What is more important is that the two main categories are determined 'in an American way', in abstract terms, related to Pollay's 42 abstract appeal types. A *fear appeal*, to give one

example, is always categorized as being uniquely emotional, without any rational aspect. And lastly, all appeals – and there are invariably multiple appeals in each ad - are treated as entirely unrelated to other appeals in the same ad.

The crucial question now is: what do these results tell us? Can we interpret the results in terms of a theoretical framework underlying cross-cultural studies? In Taiwanese culture, do ad designers indeed assume that consumers purchase goods predominantly on rational grounds, and services on emotional grounds, while in the USA goods as well as services are sold first of all by employing lots of appeals, mainly rational? In terms of our research corpus: can we expect that rational appeals in the USA models in our pairs will be replaced by emotional appeals in the Chinese ads, particularly where services are concerned? And in the case of services, should we also expect a number of appeals, mainly rational ones, to be left out? And if so, do we understand why?

In fact, we do not expect to find any of this. Not only are the specific outcomes of this process of determining the theoretical variables questionable; what is more fundamental is that the process itself reflects an interpretation of this bi-polarity that is culturally determined. Lin (2009) shows convincingly that the Chinese way of dealing with polarities, including that between ratio and emotion, is not at all in terms of 'either-or', whereby the presence of one excludes the presence of the other In all other studies that we know of, (parts of) ads are uniquely determined as either rational or emotional, without a reference to their context or to surrounding appeals.

In sum: the figures found in the quantitative studies on rational versus emotional appeals do signal a cultural difference to be explained but lack the information to explain this difference, due to the fact that we are confronted with weak tendencies in culturally unarticulated categories 'as determined'. For us, this means that we will approach the theoretical polarity in as open-minded a fashion as we can, without restricting it in advance to a bi-polar scaling. We believe that there are interesting, functional relations between appeals within ads that construct specific readings, relations that remain hidden in the quantitative methodology.

Some studies define a more open opposition, often using the terms *informational* versus *transformational* advertisements. Puto & Wells define the categories with a reference to the cognitive processes of the audience (1984). They define *informational advertising* as "one which provides consumers with factual (i.e., presumably verifiable), relevant brand data in a clear and logical manner such that

they have greater confidence in their ability to assess the merits of buying the brand after having seen the advertisement". They formulate three characteristics that the consumer of the ad should immediately recognize: (1) factual, relevant information about the brand, (2) information which is immediately and obviously important to the potential consumer, (3) data which the consumer accepts as being verifiable. *Transformational advertising* is "one which associates the experience of using (consuming) the advertised brand with a unique set of psychological characteristics which would not typically be associated with the brand experience to the same degree without exposure to the advertisement". "It is the advertisement itself which links the brand with the capacity to provide the consumer with an experience that is different from the consumption experience that would normally be expected to occur without exposure to the advertisement" (Puto & Wells, 1984: 638-639). The characteristics: (1) the ad must make the experience of using the product richer, warmer, more exciting, and/or more enjoyable, than that obtained solely from an objective description of the advertised brand, (2) the ad must connect the experience of the advertisement so tightly with the experience of using the brand that consumers cannot remember the brand without recalling the experience generated by the advertisement.

Previous studies have found that transformational ads in this sense were used more in Eastern cultures than in Western cultures, and Chinese consumers exhibited (more) favorable attitudes to transformational ads of familiar brands (Pae, Samiee and Tai, 2002; Tai 2004). Although the definitions are more advanced than the rational - emotional opposition in the Albers-Miller & Stafford 1999 study, the question remains how to detail and how to explain these general, stochastic relations.

Among the emerging markets, China has a reputation of being a challenging culture for overseas organizations to explore. Its long history, different culture and unfamiliar language make it difficult to communicate efficiently (Melewar e.a., 2004). "Western outfits dress me, but my heart will always be Chinese." These words are from a famous Chinese patriotic song, *My Chinese Heart* (*wo de zhong guo xin*), written by Wong Jim in 1982. Fu & Chiu (2007) find that the Chinese tend to accept the status dimension of global culture, including such competence-related attributes as successful, competent, and intelligent, which is positively related to sociopolitical power, while at the same time holding on to the solidarity dimension of the heritage culture, including social, moral attributes such as trustworthy, friendly, kind, and benevolent, which is positively related to traditional moral values.

In sum, we observe that in the 'conventional' literature, one finds interesting significant quantitative relations, but that the studies do not provide detailed and insightful explanations. Probably due to the complex hybrid character of the process of glocalization, all the statistically significant relations that are found are weak. Further, the concepts as determined are far removed from the theoretical concepts. Chinese culture is complicated where bi-polarity is concerned (compare also Jullien, 2004). It is also recognized as being a complex culture with respect to (global) consumerism. This is the reason why we consider it necessary to adopt an alternative, qualitative approach based on an in-depth interpretation of the actual discourse. We need (a) an intervening level of analysis, much richer than that found in the dominant quantitative research and (b) we need to relate the findings to the theoretical concepts in an open-minded fashion. Of course, such an approach is not new. As we already mentioned in the introduction, Wu 2009 uses a Foucault-inspired in-depth analysis. In research on advertisements, Guidere (2001) in a qualitative, interpretative approach studied how advertisements were translated from French into English, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic. Zhao and Belk (2008) use an interpretative, 'semiotic' approach.

3. Dealing with the theoretical and methodological complications

Our critical review of the existing literature convinces us that we need to ground any relation between text characteristics and theoretical concepts on a plausible reconstruction of the ('holistic') reading that the advertisements invite its reader to make.

We decided to create a corpus of tightly related advertisements intended for two culturally contrasting audiences, thereby increasing the information available to support our process of reconstruction. Over 20 Chinese ads for global brands such as Coca-Cola, Listerine, GE, Colgate, Lux, Ponds, Ford, Kodak, Parker, Quaker Oats, Nestle, Gillette and Wrigley in the period from 1900 to1937 we could clearly connect to an American model.

These pairs of related Chinese and America directed advertisements were analyzed to come to understand the process of advertising adaptation. First a functional analysis was made of both ads in the pair, using a theoretical framework based on systemic functional grammar (Halliday & Hassan, 1985), as adapted and elaborated for multimodal analysis by Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006). This analysis of

semiotic modes and functions basically confirmed that the one ad had been the model for the other, an artifact of our purposive sampling.

The systemic analysis formed the basis for a strongly interpretative reconstruction of invited readings, which is necessary to grasp meaningful differences in the way the ads construct the consumer. Like Wu (2008) and Zhao & Belk (2008) we do not claim that all intended readers ended up in a reading that is similar to our reconstruction. However, we do refer explicitly and verifiably to forms in the discourse (framing, color, pose, attributes) that should account for our interpretation, making it controllable and open to debate. We claim that our reconstruction (a) accounts for all significant elements in the ads, not merely for an arbitrary selection, (b) is compatible with the functional systemic analysis (thus, a relatively large drawing is taken to be a locus of attention, and so on), (c) integrates all elements in one coherent reading and (d) takes into account the relation that the reader is supposed to create between the world presented in the discourse and the historical reality of the time and place in which the ad was used.

Paying close attention to both the differences and the similarities between the two ads in a pair, an attempt was made to reconstruct the invited readings for both advertisements, albeit with a biased emphasis on the Chinese version. The 'American' reading was reconstructed mainly to identify all the relevant contrasts and thereby the contrasting effects, and thus to reveal underlying intentions motivating the changes introduced. Two of the authors are native Chinese, experienced in the study of Chinese advertising. They immersed themselves in the historical contexts of old Shanghai going through a wide variety of literature, prior to their independent analysis of the selected advertisements. Reconstructions of readings were successively discussed in the team.

The last step in the process was to relate the contrasts between pairs of reconstructed readings to the theoretical concepts in an interactive way. By this we mean that we studied the literature, knowing the theoretical framework that the concepts come from. But we also tried to let the readings speak for themselves, leaving open any amendments to the theoretical framework and thus to the concepts.

4. Results
a. no 'translation' model

According to the Coca-Cola website, Coca-Cola opened their first bottling plants in Tianjin and Shanghai in 1927, and by 1948 Shanghai had become the first market outside of the United States to post annual sales of more than one million cases of Coca-Cola. In our corpus, we have at least two pairs of related ads (we are in doubt about a number of others). This is one of them.

According to a remark on Coca-Cola Conversation (coca-colaconversations.com), the left-hand poster was produced in 1936 for use in American Chinatowns, but has been widely used to address Chinese consumer communities elsewhere as well. The resemblance to the American poster on the right is convincing. Although we could not retrieve the exact production date of this ad, a systemic analysis makes it very plausible that the idea behind the American ad served as the model for the design of the Chinese ad. The resemblance in the details (the low table, the classy dress, and the two bottles with one extra glass) and the overall multimodal lay-out (minimal verbal text, place of the logo) and therefore similarity of the loci of attention and the basic narrative structure is striking.

A remarkable formal change is the introduction of the frame around the Chinese ad that is broken up by the (once more framed) board with the brand name in Chinese and the original Western brand name logo in small letters beneath it. The board replaces the insert with the brand name in the American ad, making the (extended) information a locus of attention. Contrary to what is common in ads for global Western brands, the global name and label are also 'transposed' into Chinese.

Coca Cola, 可口可乐. Pronouncing the characters yields the sounds Coca Cola, but the meaning is: "good to drink, will make you happy".

One may tend to explain the adaptations by means of the 'translation' model: obviously, the American lady has been replaced by a Chinese lady, and Coca Cola has been translated into Chinese. One might thus conclude that this pair is an example of global advertising in which the adaptations are made to invite an optimally parallel reading among both audiences. Certainly some adaptations can be explained this way, but we claim that in that case seeing the Chinese version as a mere translation of the American original fails to capture the essence of the adaptations. This can be revealed when we try to reconstruct coherent readings for both ads.

We take the Chinese ad as our point of departure. We see a Chinese model dressed in a traditional cheongsam, 旗袍. This we find more often in our Chinese corpus, as this 1938 example from our Chinese corpus illustrates.

Both Chinese ladies look at the audience with a friendly, be it controlled smile, not in the least provocative (or seductive) but decent. The dresses show decency and first and foremost an appreciation of tradition. The wristwatches both Chinese women are wearing, however, add another dimension to the pictures; both women know how to strike a natural balance between modern and traditional values or, from another perspective, they have the good and proper taste to select the right Western or global values that match with the important traditional Chinese values.

Obviously, the female audience will see that the pictures are 'staged' drawings; nevertheless the dominant intended relation will have been *identification*. For a male

audience the American ad may be seductive, the Chinese ad is not. For most Chinese (female as well as male) this will have been a bit of an idealized and 'wishful dreaming' kind of social group identification. In that case the discourse world related to the audience's 'reality' as an *idealized model*. The important point here is that both upper middle-class Chinese ladies - with the subtle differences between them - are acceptable identification objects for the majority of let us say 'middle class Chinese women open to the world'. The soft drink is advertised as a 'reliable drink', acceptable for decent Chinese women in middle class circles and for those who identify or associate with such women. We can summarize the Chinese identification as follows: *when you socially identify with the woman that you see, Coca Cola is a socially accepted drink for you*.

In the American ad, the process of identification is entirely different, almost the reverse. Obviously, here the woman does not represent a (slightly idealized) social class you identify with. We see an evening dress, a deviant playful, seductive and anyway most certainly inviting glance, décolleté, no bra. The dominant reading here is the reverse of the reading in the Chinese ad, a reading well-known in advertisements: *when you drink Coca Cola, you can feel a connection with the values that this woman stands for (or women like this)*. These values - a little bit magnified - are those of liberated women, of fun and freedom, self-determination, independency, and so on. The relation between discourse world and the audience's reality here does not invite potential female Coke drinkers to be prepared to behave as provocatively as the one in the picture; it does not even presuppose that they have a yearning, or a hidden desire to do so; all it requires is that they should want to associate with some of the core values that the behavior represents. So the relation between the discourse world and the audience's reality is that of a symbol, a social sign that stands for a set of values. By drinking Coke you express your affinity with that set of values.

In sum: the Chinese ads present a (slightly idealized) model you can identify with; the model drinks Coca-Cola; therefore you who identify with her should also feel free to drink Coca Cola. The American ads present a symbol of women's liberation and social freedom; part of the symbol is drinking Coca-Cola; therefore when drinking Coca-Cola, you associate with these lifestyle values.

The Chinese ad thus predominantly expresses a specific *transformational* reading, namely that drinking Coca-Cola is an experience that is compatible with the social group values that you want to maintain; to buy and drink the product is totally

acceptable behavior, not at all disrespectful to core social values. Besides this textually very dominantly presented reading there is a more 'classical' *informational* aspect to the ad that answers the still open question why one should drink Coca Cola. A specific locus of attention has been created that is absent in the American ad: the text board. Here the use of the brand is associated with an individual, positively valued experience. The "good to drink" product characteristic is almost *transformational* in the suggestion it creates. Together these appeals construct the narrative of the open-minded, modern but fully Chinese woman, decently enjoying modern life.

The American version predominantly communicates that drinking Coca-Cola is a means to express your individuality in relation to a set of values. In theoretical terms, this is *transformational*, tending in the direction of the *informational*: *using* the product 'creates' commitment to the values. The set of values is different from those in the Chinese ad, expressing *individual values* instead of maintaining *social (collective) values*.

This example illustrates how comparing single formal differences one by one may lead to a conclusion that suggests a translation model, but that an integrated reconstruction of invited readings results in an entirely different conclusion that may also shed a new light on seemingly even more closely related and seemingly 'merely translated' pairs such as the following.

The example also illustrates how a bottom-up process of relating the readings to the opposition *informational - transformational* is possible when allowing complex internal relations and an open-minded approach to the opposition. We elaborate on this in the next few examples.

b. complex internal relations

From 1921 until the mid-1970s, Listerine was marketed as remedy for colds and sore throats. In our corpus we have a pair in which this *informational* approach is dominant; the Western ad dates from 1931, the Chinese ad from 1932.

Again we see that in terms of a systemic functional analysis the ads are roughly equivalent and the Chinese ad is clearly modeled after the Western one. The headlines are slightly different: "stay home - and gargle with Listerine every 2 hours" in the Western ad, and "wash mouth with Listerine to ward off head cold and soothe sore throat" in the Chinese ad. The scene depicted in the Western ad is much more elaborated than that in the Chinese newspaper ad. The Western version is like a freeze-frame from a contextualized narrative; the doctor has come to the boy's home (his bag identifies him as such), he's taken off his hat and coat, and is examining the boy's throat, the dog is not barking but obviously trusts him, and naturally the doctor knows just what to do to cure the boy. In the Chinese version there is a context-free picture of a Chinese doctor dressed in Western-style clothes examining a boy's throat.

The body copy of the American ad is rather lengthy. It reads:

[stay home - and gargle with Listerine every 2 hours] THAT is what your doctor would probably tell you to do if you had an ordinary cold or simple sore throat. Combined with rest and warmth, it is an excellent treatment. Over and over again this has been proved in the past 50 years. These ailments are caused by germs multiplying by millions in the mouth and throat. They are continually striving to overcome the forces of health in your body. They often succeed when body resistance is lowered by such things as wet feet, fatigue, lack of exercise, exposure to draughts, cold, sudden changes of temperature. Their names are Streptococcus Hemolyticus (the streptococcus germ), Staphylococcus Aureus (pus), and Bacillus Influenzae. Reduces mouth germs 98%: And undiluted Listerine, used as a gargle, kills these germs—all germs— almost instantly. In 15 seconds to be exact—the fastest time science has been able to measure accurately. Repeated tests, similar to those employed at great universities, show that it actually reduces the bacteria on the surfaces of the mouth 98%. And at the same time soothes and heals inflamed membrane.

As a precaution against colds and irritated throat, gargle with undiluted Listerine every morning and every night. And when these have actually gained a foothold, increase the gargle to once every 2 hours, meanwhile consulting your physician. The wonderful thing about Listerine is that while a potent germicide, it is at the same time non-poisonous, safe to use, pleasant to taste, and healing to tissue. Keep Listerine in home and office and carry it when you travel. At the first symptom of trouble use it undiluted to get full germicidal effect. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A. KILLS 200,000,000 GERMS IN 15 SECONDS —HEALS TISSUE

The first sentence connects with the headline sentence and therefore with the highly contextualized narrative. But the remainder of the text elaborates rather technically on the causes of the ailments, gives strong arguments to support Listerine's efficacy, explains how Listerine is to be used and ends up assuring readers of its safety and efficacy. We quoted the entire text because, as we will see, this type of copy is typical of Western advertising of the time. This is a typical text *informational* ad, where the visual adds a *transformational* element.

The body copy of Chinese ad is much shorter.

The classroom is crowded; the weather is bad when children go to or leave school; take off their coats when they play games; lay on the wet grass. Any of the above is enough to cause head cold or sore throat. If you teach your children to wash mouth with original binding Listerine every morning and every night, many bad ailments can be prevented.

Listerine is the most effective [medicine] to kill germs. In 15 seconds, it kills all germs, including affection by cold and other dangerous ailments. And at the same time soothes and

heals inflamed membrane. It is actually the best antiseptic and bactericide for family use. As a precaution against colds and irritated throat, gargle with Listerine every morning and every night. And when these have actually gained a foothold, increase the gargle to once every 2 hours to stop germs multiplying. Keep Listerine in your home.

On the one hand it is very clear that the Chinese copy is a revision of the American original. It has been shortened by taking out much of the explanatory information. But at the beginning, everyday situations like a crowded classroom environment are inserted.

High-context advertising emphasizes a *transformational* aspect in the advertisement, making the reading more experiential. We see that the Western visuals are much more contextualized than those in the Chinese adaptation, probably due to that fact that the relation between traditional Chinese medicine and Western received medicine does not allow for such a contextualization. An explanation like this fits within the translation model. However, looking at the totality of the ad, there is another, complementary explanation. In terms of a systemic analysis, it is clear that, notwithstanding the much shorter text, the picture in the Chinese ad is far less dominant as a locus of attention. The highly *individualized* scene in the Western ad (one can almost add names to the protagonists), has been replaced by a prototypically *social* scene. We will encounter the same technique again in an ad for Listerine below. The verbal part in the Chinese ad, however, has been rewritten entirely, in a highly contextualized, *transformational* style, not on the doctor - patient relation, but on the parent - child family relation. Responsible Chinese parents are represented as enjoying the benefits of modern science, without being interested in the supporting rationale. So, *individualized contextualization* and *rational explanation* are replaced by *contextualized social emotion*.

In the American reading, the visuals merely cohere with the verbal part as a source of authority. The rationale given in the text is approved by the family doctor, being part as it is of his standard knowledge. In the copy this knowledge is conveyed to the consumer too. The Western ad is emancipatory, phrased in a highly *informative*, cognitive mode.

So even in this advertisement for a highly 'functional' consumer product, we see in the dominant part of the reading a relative shift from an *informative* reading to a more *transformational*, *social* reading. But again, it is a nuanced, 'holistic' difference

in readings; looking at formal characteristics of the visuals only may lead to the wrong conclusion that the American consumer is approached in a much more transformational manner than the Chinese consumer.

An interesting 'translation' detail is that the doctor in the Chinese ad has been 'corrected' for the ingrained bias against left-handedness in Chinese culture.

The same need for a holistic, nuanced approach, taking into account internal complexity, can be seen in another pair of Listerine ads. The American model is from 1923, the Chinese adaptation was reproduced in the 1930s in the *Shenbao* Newspaper.

The American version is strongly contextualized in its visuals, but with reference to highly individualized values. The first paragraph presents the story of "Edna" and expresses her feelings; often a bridesmaid but never a bride. After the story, an informational explanation of Listerine's efficacy against halitosis fills the remainder of the copy. In the Chinese adaptation, using the same opening line ("Often acts as a bridesmaid but when as a bride?"), dramatic Edna is replaced by a prototypical family scene, the girl now ready to get married standing between father and mother who solved her problem. The text speaks of "a girl".

In terms of the opposition informational - transformational, both ads are *transformational* in the narrative. But in the Chinese ad *social values* are contextualized, in the American ad *individual values*, with corresponding focalizations in the narratives, and the *informational* part having been deleted in the Chinese ad. Again, complex internal relations construct the differences in cultural readings, and it is only from these 'holistic' readings that we can explain the individual adaptations.

Of course certain adaptation should be explained in terms of the translation model: in the American, ad Edna is creeping "gradually toward that tragic thirty-year mark". In the Chinese ad, a girl is "close to 24 years old". These localizations are interesting, but as one can see, focusing only on such a single detail fails to capture the important adaptations that invite different readings.

Other brands illustrate a similar necessity to look at complex internal relations between adapted elements and show the same tendencies to invite *transformational* reading related to *social values* in the Chinese version. We give one more example.

General Electric became industry leader of refrigerators in 1920s with its top-mounted compressor and with innovations such as dual temperature control, which enabled the combining of separate refrigerator and freezer compartments into one unit. On the left we see an ad for a GE refrigerator in America, an on the right the Chinese version of the ad.

The illustration is almost identical except for a number of minor changes. The loci of attention, however, differ somewhat; the most important difference seems to be the different position of the headline. We are able to account for this difference in the multimodal graphic design, but only in relation to the copy of the ads. The combined differences in design and copy we can relate to the tendencies already observed, constructing a Chinese consumer in a *transformational reading* concerning *social values*.

Both headlines in the ads are interrogative sentences. The English headline ("Your children … is their food safe?") is a question which leads to rational and elaborated argument in body copy, elaborating on the question.

> *You, as a conscientious mother, buy the best food for your children, prepare it with scrupulous care and cook it correctly. Yet, in spite of all, you may be giving your children food which is unwholesome-even dangerous! For even the best food becomes unsafe to eat unless it is kept at the proper degree of cold, which medical authorities agree should be 50 degrees or less – always. [What follows is a lengthy rational elaboration]*

The Chinese headline, placed above the visual, translates: "Do you consider your family members' health?" This is a rhetorical question; obviously the answer is yes. The body copy does not explain technicalities, but advises the consumer what to do as a responsible mother.

> *There are four seasons in one year. Families can use the GE refrigerator to keep food safe. Since cold winter and hot summer go against food safety, it's appropriate to apply scientific method to health care perpetually. There is one refrigerator that assures you of your family's good health - the General Electric. You can use it with no trouble at all. The installment plan, by which payment for merchandise is made monthly over a long period of time, facilitates your payment. You'd better visit No. 96, Yi Zi, Nanjing Road for more details.*

The *informational* American advertising style with a *transformational* appeal in the visuals is again changed into a *transformational* ad style, focusing on *social values*. The American ad utilizes a mix of *functional* and *social* needs in its communication; the Chinese ad only selects *social* needs in developing the brand image. This again is fully compatible with tendencies that for example Roth (1995) has found in his quantitative survey study.

c. minimal adaptations, two transformational readings
In GE's early light bulb advertising campaigns, it was common practice to liken GE lights to the sun. The American ad for the GE Mazda lamp is from 1910, the Chinese adaptation from *Shenbao* in 1918.

At the top of the Chinese ad we find an exact replica of the GE ad in the US. With the help of GE, darkness can be dispelled forever and light need never set on earth. The Chinese translation of the GE brand and the slogan "his only rival" is in the middle of the copy. The product is further promoted as "the lightest, the most durable and the most energy-efficient". The bottom-part tells us where to buy GE lamps.

An analysis of the adaptations fits perfectly into the 'translation' model. Why do we not find more substantial combinations of adaptations that invite a different reading in this pair? The case of the GE lamp is not an isolated example. Gillette and Parker also have such cases.

Our answer needs to be evaluated in the light of the analyses of the entire corpus. We do not need a substantial set of related adaptations here because the American model already invites a highly *transformational* appeal and satisfies a single set of consumer needs that is entirely neutral towards *individual values* or *collective social values*. What the value of the richer, warmer, more exciting, and/or more enjoyable experience is (remember the definition of *transformational*) is not specified: the American reader can construct a more individual reading, the Chinese reader a more social one. If our explanation is correct then using these cases in reader's response research, eliciting rich verbal responses should result in different stories from American and Chinese readers, not in one equivalent global consumer's story.

Conclusions

Our analyses show that adaptation made in early 20th century Western ads to use them for a Chinese audience cannot be fully explained by means of a 'translation model'. This does not mean that there are no adaptations that can be explained by means of that model, but that essentially combinations of adaptations should be explained in terms of their inviting a reading that fits into the Chinese consumer's cultural system; the Chinese consumer as constructed in the discourse differs from the American consumers as constructed in the ads that served as a model for the Chinese adapted versions.

We showed that we could only reach this conclusion on the basis of a reconstruction of 'holistically' invited readings of both ads in a pair, departing from a functional analysis. Single adaptations do not reveal the rationale behind them.

The tendencies that we have found could be related to theoretical concepts that underly quantitative cross-cultural studies. Basically, we observed that if the USA model strongly invited an *informational* reading, or a *transformational* reading that merely related to values of *individual* expression, a redesign was made that invited a *transformational reading* related to *social values*. If the original text already allowed for such a reading only minor adaptations were made.

It is important to observe that our findings are fully compatible with the general tendencies that are the (unexplained) outcome of quantitative research (compare section 2). Both approaches can be related in a constructive way.

According to theories about glocalization (Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Lal, 2000; Santana, 2003), one should expect beliefs pertinent to social relationship and morality in local cultures to be relatively resistant to change (Fu and Chiu, 2007; Lin & Xue, 2010). In a high power-distance and low individualism culture like the Chinese culture, this may be particularly strong. The tendencies that we observe can be explained within this framework. Indeed, we find Chinese invited readings that highly value traditional Chinese views on social relations and morality (Confucian values) in ads that promote modern life and modern technology.

If this is the case one would expect that the *second* time in modern history that Western brands entered the Chinese market, namely in the recent years after China's economic reform, this would result in similar tendencies. We have not done any systematic research on this yet. However, we have the strong impression that some tendencies have indeed stood the test of time. To illustrate this, we end with just one intriguing example in the following, obviously related pair.

Leading up to and during the 2010 Soccer World Championship tournament, Louis Vuitton invited football legend Maradona to feature in one of its ads. On the left, we see the global website and on the right the China website. Both sites published Maradona's photo in a prominent position. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the two photographs are not the same! To select a different photo for the Chinese website must have been a very conscious decision on the part of one of the ad designers.

A possible explanation for the choice of a slightly different photograph might lie in the fact that Chinese culture defines basic human relations as harmonious but not competitive and that the picture was supposed to mirror this. Although Westerners might be hard put to interpret or even spot the differences between the photographs, the Chinese would describe Maradona's mouth in the picture on the left as decidedly hedonistic and showing a defiant and contemptuous smile, while his mouth in the picture on the right would strike them as being convergent and as showing a confident and tolerant smile.

If we are right in this observation, a coherent reading invited by the Chinese ad indeed is strongly social transformational, while the reading invited by the global ad tends more to an individual transformational reading; a different smile, a different story.

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