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Global Advertising Adaptation for Chinese Consumers in the Early 20th Century: A Semiotic Approach^{*}

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Abstract: From the early 20th century until today, global brands have tended to adapt their global advertisements for local consumers, and global advertisers have encountered issues about how they should change their messages from one culture to another. This study explores the “construction” of Chinese consumers, in contrast to their contemporary American peers, based on a focused corpus of “paired” advertisements. Typically, more substantial adaptations than a mere “translation” of verbal and pictorial elements are conducted. A semiotic reconstruction of cultural readings of the ads shows that the adaptations can be understood necessary to invite a reading that fits within the Chinese consumer’s cultural system. If the American 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 the social values of China. If the original text form already allows for such a reading, only minor adaptations are made. An in-depth reconstruction of the cultural readings of the ads is required to

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explain the often minor but related adaptations that together invite a reading very different from that of the original.

Keywords: advertisement adaptation, semiotics, informational, transformational, consumer construction

20 世纪初全球广告的中国化：一个符号学研究

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摘要：20 世纪初期跟当今一样，全球品牌倾向于将它们的全局广告本地化来迎合当地消费者，但全球广告商一直面临着该如何在不同文化中传达不同信息等问题。本研究分析了特选配对的中英广告，探讨广告是如何在文案中构建中国消费者和相对应的当代美国消费者的。在这些广告中我们发现除了文字和图片元素的翻译外，往往还有很多细微的顺应。我们有必要对这些广告进行符号学重构式的文化解读，从而揭示这些顺应是如何引起广告在中国消费者文化系统内的解读的。如果美国广告原文案属信息型或者仅体现个人主义价值观的转换型，其在中国化的过程中通常会被重新设计，以产生跟中国社会价值相关的转换型的解读。如果原文案已经能够提供跟中国价值相关的解读，则只需要细微的顺应。本研究阐述和证明了对广告的深入文化解读重构的必要性，这种方法可以解释那些虽然细微却通常引起跟原广告非常不一样解读的顺应。

关键词：广告顺应，符号学，信息型，转换型，消费者构建

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I . Introduction

Advertisements can reveal much about the societies in which they are produced and received (Berman, 1981; Marchand, 1985), and advertising is an important force in the global construction of consumerism (Stearns, 2001). Since the emergence of international commerce and global economies, international advertisers have faced the challenge of how they should change their messages from one culture to another. Studies of the differences among

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advertisements in various cultures have attempted to identify how experts match brand identity with cultural diversity and how audiences respond to ads across cultures.

In strategic global brand management, it is widely recognised that a global brand construction is not the same as a homogeneous brand construction (Green, W.H. Cunningham, I.C.M. Cunningham, & Unwin, 1975; Quelch & Hoff, 1986; Hite & Fraser, 1990; Lee & Green, 1991; Sandler & Shani, 1993; Roth, 1995; Ger & Belk, 1996; Ritzer & Malone, 2000; Zhou & Belk, 2004; Keller, Apéria, & Georgson, 2012). Keller, Apéria and Georgson (2012) claim that in marketing global brands a uniform strategy is rarely best because the various entities that may be linked to a brand may take on very different meanings in different countries. Therefore, creative strategies in advertising must be adapted and translated for local markets. Even attempting to construct a globally standardised brand identity, if considered possible and desirable, requires culturally “translated” texts to enable more or less “equivalent” readings in different cultural contexts. Elements of verbal text elements need to be translated, and symbolic elements may require adaptation and so on. The model that aims to achieve this equivalence is known as the *translation* model.

From another perspective, a completely standardised global brand identity is not desirable, as all cultures are different. Basic standardisation may oversimplify local consumers’ interpretation of global advertising (Hung, Li, & Belk, 2007; Zhou & Belk, 2004). A global construction involves a complex process of “cultural hybridisation” (Nederveen Pieterse, 1995) is also referred to by the term “glocalisation” (Roberson, 1995). Cultural diversification may be realised with one and the same text if it enables readers to construct their own cultural readings. An identical text in different cultural contexts may give rise to different readings (Puto & Wells, 1984). However, a more plausible perspective is to assume that adaptations are required to invite different readings. We refer to this model as the *transformation* model.

In this study we analyse the construction of the Chinese consumer in the early 20th century, when American brands first entered the Chinese market,

to explore whether the *translation* model or *transformation* model predominantly applies. If the *transformation* model applies, how are Chinese consumers reconstructed differently from their contemporary American peers?

We collected a corpus of advertisements in which Chinese consumers are demonstrably constructed in relation to their contemporary American peers. We collected over 2000 Chinese advertisements published between 1900 and 1937 from the *Shenbao* newspaper and *Liangyou* magazine and from on-line sources that focus on global, American-based brands. We then searched for American ads that obviously functioned as the “available design” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000) for Chinese ads. The perceived relation between the American “original” and the Chinese “adaptation” needed to be obvious enough to assume a semiotic process of *available design*, *designing* and *the redesigned* as the core of the meaning-making process. Meaning making is a dynamic process, reproducing and changing the socially and culturally embedded conventions present in the available design (Fairclough, 1995; Kalantzis & Cope, 2000). From the large dataset, we built a focused corpus of 20 pairs of advertisements for global brands such as Coca-Cola, Listerine, GE, Colgate, Lux, Ponds, Ford, Kodak, Parker, Quaker Oats, Gillette and Wrigley, from 1900 to 1937. The pairs reveal adaptations that ad designers judged necessary in the complex process of searching for the local fit for a global brand.

We conduct semiotic analysis to reconstruct the meaning of these minimal adaptations. In addition to providing a reconstruction of the early 20th century Chinese consumer as viewed by the ad designers of the time, we intend to illustrate the value of semiotic analysis in the type of cross-cultural research. Although not popular in advertisement research, a semiotic approach is certainly not new. An analysis of the global but also localised construction of a Chinese consumer in the 1920s is presented by Wu (2008), who showed how a “Foucaultian” analysis of the discursive knowledge produced in Shanghai advertisements enabled her to construct a rich picture of the female Chinese middle-class consumer of the 1920s. Zhao and Belk (2008) drew on theories of semiotics and visual rhetoric to analyse *yuefenpai*, a popular local form of poster advertising, and demonstrated how the influence of this old Shanghai form of advertising transformed traditional Chinese culture and was

also transformed by traditional Chinese culture. We follow this line of investigation, applying a semiotic approach informed by systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

In the next section, we describe the interpretative methodology used, fitting the results of a semiotic approach into a theoretical framework that has been used in predominantly quantitative research on cross-cultural advertising. In the section describing a semiotic reconstruction of adaptations, we illustrate our findings and report on three typical cases. In the final section we formulate our conclusions and place our findings in a broader context.

II . Methods of Analysis

An interpretative reconstruction is required when confronted by the complex dynamics of cultural advertisement hybridisation, while also acknowledging that the meaning of discourse is co-constructed by the audience, to discover the specifics of a culturally embedded reading and to relate it to general theoretical frameworks found in cross-cultural studies. The tools used in a semiotic approach are required to achieve this reconstruction. Our semiotic approach focuses on the social meaning of signs and the discourse constructed by signs (Halliday, 1978; Hodge & Kress, 1988). The approach was originally proposed for the study of linguistic resources, but was extended by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) to the study of images, which makes it suitable for analysing multimodal advertisements. Discourse meaning is constructed via interactions of semiotic resources such as language, images, shapes and colours.

Social meaning is considered to result from the simultaneous realisation of three metafunctions: *ideational*, *interpersonal* and *textual* metafunctions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In extending the framework to visuals, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) used the corresponding terms *representational*, *interactional* and *compositional*. We follow the terminology of Halliday and Matthiessen. The *ideational* metafunction is concerned with signs conveying experiences and the logical relations between them in the discourse world (i. e., what is in the discourse world?). The *interpersonal* metafunction is concerned with signs enacting social relations (i. e., how do elements in the

discourse world relate to the audience?). The *textual* metafunction is concerned with signs conveying information by means of their coherent and cohesive organisation (i. e., how are textual relations in the discourse valued?).

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) attempted to develop a “grammar” of the three metafunctions as realised in the visual mode. We summarise the elements that are important in our analyses. The ideational meanings of an image are realised with either *narrative* or *conceptual* representations. Narrative processes present “unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements” (p. 79), while conceptual processes present “participants in terms of their more generalized and more stable and timeless essence, in terms of class or structure or meaning” (p. 79). Interpersonal meanings are realised via a system of *contact*, *social distance* and *attitude*. Contact is realised via the semiotic resource of gaze, with gazing at the viewer as demanding information and the absence of gazing at the viewer as offering information. Social distance is realised via the length of shot: a close shot suggests intimate distance, a medium shot normal social distance and a long shot impersonal distance. Attitude is realised via the resource of angle: a frontal angle suggests involvement of the reader while an oblique angle suggests detachment; a high angle endows power on the viewer’s side; a low angle empowers the represented participant and an eye-level angle gives equal status to the viewer and the represented participant. Textual meanings are realised via the system of *information value*, *salience* and *framing*. Information value is realised via the meaningful placement of information based on three primary oppositions: top-bottom, left-right and centre-margin. Salience is realised via elements that draw attention to different degrees compared to other elements, through size, colour, tonal values, sharpness, foreground versus background placement and so on. Framing is realised via the use of elements such as frame lines, empty space, colour and shape and pictorial framing devices, suggesting the connections and disconnections between components on the page.

The social semiotic approach provides tools for analysing the meaning potentials of semiotic choices and the discourse they realise. We conducted

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semiotic analysis of ad pairs from the corpus to examine how the three metafunctions were realised through systemic choices. We focused on salient adaptations in the Chinese ads, which were visible because we had the American ads to refer to. The systemic analysis formed the basis for an interpretative reconstruction of invited readings, which is necessary to grasp meaningful differences in the way the ads construct their consumers. Like Wu (2008) and Zhou and Belk (2004), we do not claim that all intended readers should arrive at a reading similar to our reconstruction. However, we do refer explicitly and verifiably to forms in the discourse that can account for our interpretations, 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, (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.

By closely considering both the differences and similarities between the ads in a pair, we attempted 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, thus revealing the 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 by examining a wide variety of literature, before their independent analysis of the selected advertisements. Reconstructions of the readings were discussed within the team.

The last step in the process was to fit the results of the semiotic analysis into the framework based on the distinction between *informational* and *transformational* advertisements. This framework is used in predominantly quantitative research on cross-cultural advertising. Puto and Wells (1984) defined these categories with reference to the cognitive processes of the audience. They defined *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”. *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”, and “[i]t 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, pp. 638–639).

Studies have shown the relevance of this distinction for Chinese advertisement adaptation. Transformational ads were found to be used more in Eastern than in American cultures, and Chinese consumers exhibited (more) favourable attitudes to transformational ads of familiar brands (Pae, Samiee, & Tai, 2002; Tai, 2004). Using managerial survey data, Roth (1995) concluded that power distance and individualism had a significant impact on the performance of brand image strategies. According to the managerial reports that are part of the survey, informational brand images that illustrate the benefits of a particular product are judged as being most appropriate for cultures characterised by a low-power distance and high individualism, such as the US. Transformational brand images that appeal to group memberships are judged most appropriate for high-power distance and low individualism cultures, such as China.

In this study we attempt to understand the contrasts between pairs of reconstructed readings in terms of this theoretical framework. If the transformation model applies, do we see a shift then from informational to transformational advertising, or the other way around (which would be surprising in light of the outcomes of quantitative research)? If the shift occurs from one transformational set of values to another set of values, can we identify the domains these values belong to?

III . A Semiotic Reconstruction of Adaptations

In this section, we present semiotic reconstructions of three cases from the focused corpus to explore how adaptations were made in the early 20th century American ads for Chinese consumers. These include a paired ad of Coca-Cola and two paired ads of Listerine.

Case No. 1: The Coca-Cola Adaptation

According to their website, Coca-Cola opened its first bottling plants in Tianjin and Shanghai in 1927, and by 1948 Shanghai had become the first market outside the US to post annual sales of over a 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). Figure 1 shows one of them. The following analysis reveals how consumers of Coca-Cola are constructed with a combination of global and local appeal.



Figure 1a



Figure 1b

The Coca-Cola ad in Figure 1a was designed in the 1930s for US

consumers, but we were unable to locate the exact year. According to a remark on Coca-Cola Conversation (coca-colaconversations.com), the ad in Figure 1b was produced in 1936 for use in American Chinatowns, but was also widely used to address Chinese consumer communities elsewhere. Systemic analysis suggests it is very plausible that the American ad served as an available design for the Chinese ad. The resemblance in image details (the low table, the classy dress and the two bottles with one extra glass), the overall multimodal layout (minimal verbal text, placing of the logo) and therefore the similarity of the loci of attention are striking.

A remarkable formal *textual* change is the introduction of the frame around the Chinese ad, which is broken up by the (once more framed) board with the brand name in Chinese and the original American 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.

The adaptations could be explained 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. This pair could then be regarded as 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 seeing the Chinese version as a mere translation of the American original fails to capture the essence of the adaptations. This is confirmed when we attempt to reconstruct coherent readings for both ads, using semiotic analysis.

Ideationally, the American ad conveys a narrative process, representing an unfolding action of drinking Coca-Cola. The lady is leaning backwards on the sofa. Her head bows slightly forwards and her hand is holding the glass. This creates a vector towards her mouth, indicating the action of drinking. Her left hand is pointing to the Coca-Cola bottle on the table, a vector reinforcing the action of drinking. Using a long shot, her whole body is shown in its environment, contextualising the narration. She is wearing an evening ball gown. Together with her slanting figure, this suggests a casual occasion. The image, if paraphrased with language, reads “A charming lady is drinking Coca-Cola in her boudoir”. *Interpersonally*, the lady gazes at the

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viewer with a frontal angle, engaging the viewer and demanding the attention. She is empowered by being presented at a slight low angle. *Textually*, the brand name is placed at the top left of the poster as given information, and the lady drinking with leisure on the right as new information. The glass is highlighted by being positioned in the centre of the poster.

In the Chinese ad, the lady sits straight on a chair with a glass of Coca-Cola in her hand. No vector is found for any action. *Ideationally* the ad conveys a conceptual process, representing the participant in stable and timeless essence. She is dressed in a Qipao (旗袍), a design combining Chinese traditions and American style. This dress was popular among women of higher social classes and is frequently found in ads from the early twentieth century (Zhao & Belk, 2008). We see this posture often in our Chinese corpus with this style of dress. The dress first and foremost demonstrates decency and an appreciation of tradition. The wristwatch (in 1936), however, adds another dimension: the lady knows how to strike a natural balance between modern and traditional values or, from another perspective, she represents good and proper taste, and can select the right American values to match the important traditional Chinese values. *Interpersonally*, the Chinese lady gazes at the viewer to demand attention, with a frontal angle to engage the viewer, presented by a long shot and an eye-level angle to suggest a relatively distanced but equal status with the viewer. *Textually*, the composition of the poster is different from the American one, as Chinese in the 1930s was read from right to left. Contrary to what is common in ads for global American brands, the global name and label are also transposed into Chinese. Coca-Cola in Chinese is read from right to left as “可口可樂”. Pronouncing the characters produces the sounds of “Coca Cola”, but the meaning is “good to drink, will make you happy”. The lady is presented on the right, before the brand name, indicating that she is given information and the brand name of Coca-Cola is new information. She is positioned slightly off-centre, but the frame behind compensates for her prominence. Her head is connected to the smaller frame where the brand name is placed. The brand name as a frame within a frame is given strong prominence.

The two ads, although they have similar smiling ladies, promote the Coca-Cola product with different strategies. For the American ad, the brand name is given information, as Coca-Cola was a well-known product at the time. This is new: when you drink Coca-Cola, you associate yourself with the values that the lady stands for. We see an evening dress, a deviant playful, seductive and most certainly inviting glance, décolleté, no bra, suggesting the values-albeit somewhat magnified-of liberated women, of fun and freedom, self-determination, independency and so on. The relation between the discourse world and the audience's reality invites potential Coke drinkers to associate with some of these core values her behaviour represents. The relation between the discourse world and the audience's reality is thus 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.

The Chinese lady looks at the audience with a friendly albeit controlled smile, not in the least provocative (or seductive) but decent. She displays the decency of upper middle-class Chinese, whose images are very similar to the portraits of modern women on the cover of the famous *Liangyou* Magazine (the first Chinese publishing company to specialise in and impress readers with photography). Her personality provides an acceptable identification object for the majority of, let us say, "middle-class Chinese open to the world". For most Chinese at that time (female and male) this would have represented a somewhat idealised and "wishful dreaming" kind of social group identification. The discourse world relates to the audience's "reality" as an *idealised model*. Readers are first identified with the social class of the lady as given information, and then the brand name of Coca-Cola comes as new information. 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 summarise the promotional message as follows: when you socially identify with the woman you see, Coca-Cola is a socially accepted drink for you.

In summary, the Chinese ads present a (slightly idealised) model of the open-minded, modern but fully Chinese woman, decently enjoying modern life in harmony with Chinese social values. The model drinks Coca-Cola;

therefore, those 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 American version predominantly communicates that drinking Coca-Cola is a means to express one's individuality in relation to a set of values. In theoretical terms, this reading is *transformational*, tending in the direction of the *informational*: using the product "creates" commitment to the values. The values expressed are typically *individual* values.

The Chinese ad predominantly expresses a specific *transformational* reading, namely that drinking Coca-Cola is an experience compatible with the social group values that you want to maintain; to buy and drink the product is totally acceptable behaviour, not at all disrespectful to core social values. In addition to this dominant textually presented reading is a more "classical" *informational* aspect to the ad, which answers the still open question of why one should drink Coca Cola. A specific locus of attention has been created that is absent in the American ad: the text board. The seemingly casual insertion of "please drink" (請飲) before "Coca-Cola" in the Chinese version invites readers into a social gathering. The "good to drink" product characteristic is *transformational* in the suggestion it creates.

This case 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, based on a semiotic analysis, results in a different conclusion: the transformation model applies, transforming a transformational-informational ad expressing *individual* values into an even more transformational ad expressing *social (collective) values*, and transforming "drink to identify" into "identify to (be socially justified to) drink".

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

Case No. 2: The Listerine Adaptation

From 1921 until the mid-1970s, Listerine was marketed as a remedy for colds and sore throats. In our corpus we have a pair in which this *informational* approach is dominant; the American ad (Figure 2a) dates from 1931, the Chinese ad (Figure 2b) from 1932.



Figure 2a



Figure 2b

The layouts of both ads and the images of a doctor diagnosing a child patient show that the Chinese ad is clearly designed after the American one. The headlines are slightly different: “Stay home—and gargle with Listerine every 2 hours” in the American ad, and “君宜教子女用李施德霖藥水以漱口以防傷風以治喉痛 (You should teach your kids to wash their mouth with Listerine to ward off head colds and soothe sore throats)” in the Chinese ad (the Chinese again is read from right to left). The English headline presents the product of Listerine as a method of fighting against colds or sore throats, presented by a doctor in an imperative mood. The Chinese one is directed at parents and informs them that Listerine is the solution to their children’s

problem.

The images in both ads convey a narrative process, representing the action of the doctor's diagnosis. However, the scene depicted in the American ad is much more elaborated than that in the Chinese newspaper ad. The image in the American ad is taken with a long shot, in which contextual information is included. The doctor has come to the boy's home (his bag identifies him as such), has taken off his hat and coat and is examining the boy's throat. The dog is not barking so obviously trusts him, and naturally the doctor knows just what to do to cure the boy. Unlike the American image presenting a full figure of the doctor in a long shot, the Chinese doctor is framed in a middle shot, excluding contextual information. This creates an intimate relationship with the viewer and situates the reader as a parent, who is right next to the child being examined by the doctor. This remarkable difference in framing is coherent with the shift from the patient (Figure 2a) to the child's parent (Figure 2b). We need to read the Chinese ad from right to left, so the information value also differs from the American ad. In the Chinese ad the child presents a problem to be identified by parent readers, and the doctor is the solution. It is not plausible that we have over-interpreted this textual difference, as the order in the Chinese image is the result of thoughtless copying from the order in the available American picture. The image seems carefully redesigned, as revealed in the interesting "translation" detail that the doctor in the Chinese ad has been "corrected" for the ingrained bias against left-handedness in Chinese culture.

The visual part of the American ad provides *transformational* contextual information, but the verbal part is predominantly *informational*:

[... 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 by 98%. And at the same time it 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 contextualised narrative. However, the remainder of the text elaborates somewhat 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. Information is presented mainly via either material (76%) or relational (20%) processes. Material processes are used to give instruction on using Listerine (e. g., "gargle with Listerine every 2 hours") or show the effect of Listerine (e. g., it reduces mouth germs by 98%). Relational processes mainly evaluate the product (e. g., "it is an excellent treatment") or discuss attributes of the disease (e. g., "their names are Streptococcus[...]"). Mood adjuncts can be found but are not prevalent at all in the text. The first sentence ("THAT is what your doctor would probably tell you to do if you had an ordinary cold or simple sore throat") uses a modal verbal (would) and a modal adjunct

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(probably) to negotiate a distanced and non-authoritative relationship with the reader. As the persuasion progresses, the speaker gets increasingly more authoritative and less negotiation is allowed towards the end of the text. In the last sentence, three imperatives are used to order readers to be a customer of Listerine: keep, carry, use. The impersonal mood adopted in the text emphasises its informational nature.

The Chinese image has been highly decontextualised, but the verbal text provides more contextual information than the American one:

The classroom is crowded; the weather is bad when children go to or leave school; they take off their coats when they play games; they lie on the wet grass. Any of the above is enough to cause a head cold or sore throat. If you teach your children to wash their mouths 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 those of colds and other dangerous ailments. And at the same time it soothes and heals inflamed membranes. It is the best antiseptic and bactericide for family use. As a precaution against colds and an 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. (Our translation.)

The text begins with the everyday situation of a crowded classroom environment, highlighting the commonality of occasions in which children can get sick, to draw parents' attention. The text then moves on to provide Listerine as a solution to the daily problem and explains its effectiveness, similar to, though much shorter than, the American text. A prominent difference between the two texts lies in the interpersonal metafunction. Unlike the dynamically progressing interpersonal relationship between the writer and the reader in the American text, the Chinese version does not reveal any negotiation of interpersonal relationship. Throughout the text, the writer is constructing a distanced and respectful relationship with the reader by using the honorific address (君, which means "you" in honourable form, and

府中, which means “home” in honourable form) and modal verbs (should, could).

The reading is made more experiential through the high-context advertising, which emphasises a *transformational* aspect in the advertisement. The American visuals are much more contextualised than those in the Chinese adaptation, probably because the relation between traditional Chinese medicine and American received medicine does not allow for such a contextualisation. An explanation like this fits within the translation model. However, by looking at the totality of the ad, another complementary explanation can be found. 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 focus of attention. The highly *individualised* scene in the American ad (names can almost be given to the protagonists), has been replaced by a prototypically *social* scene. The verbal part in the Chinese ad, however, has been rewritten entirely, in a highly contextualised, *transformational* style. It focuses on not the doctor-patient relationship, but the parent-child family relationship. Responsible Chinese parents are represented as enjoying the benefits of modern science, without being interested in the supporting rationale. The *individualised contextualisation* and *rational explanation* are thus replaced by *contextualised 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 of his standard knowledge. In the copy, this knowledge is also conveyed to the consumer. The American ad is emancipatory, phrased in a highly *informative*, cognitive mode.

Even in this advertisement for a highly “functional” consumer product, a relative shift from an *informative* reading to a more *transformational*, social reading can be seen in the dominant part of the reading. However, it is again 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.

Case No. 3: Another Listerine Adaptation

The same need for a holistic, nuanced approach that takes into account internal complexity can be seen in another pair of Listerine ads. The American model (Figure 3a) is from 1923, the Chinese adaptation (Figure 3b) was reproduced in the 1930s in the *Shenbao* newspaper.



Figure 3a



Figure 3b

The American version is again strongly contextualised in its visuals, with reference to highly individualised values. The first paragraph presents the story of “Edna” and expresses her feelings; she is 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 marriage scene, the girl acting again as a bridesmaid stands beside the bride and bridegroom, changing

the narration from a personal event to a public one. In the verbal narration, the individual Edna is changed into a general reference of “a lady” (某女士風姿楚楚. 秀麗動人: a lady is charming and beautiful). In terms of the opposition *informational*—*transformational*, both ads are *transformational* in the narrative, but the focus on *individual values* in the American ad is changed to a focus on *social values* in the Chinese redesign. Again, complex internal relations construct the differences in cultural readings, and it is only from these “holistic” readings that the individual adaptations can be explained.

Of course, certain adaptations 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 lady is “年界花信 (almost 24 years old)”. These localisations are interesting, but focusing only on such a single detail fails to capture the important adaptations that invite different readings.

IV. Discussion and Conclusions

Our analyses show that the adaptation of early 20th century American ads for a Chinese audience cannot be fully explained by means of a “translation model”. This does not mean that no adaptations can be explained by this model, only 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 constructed in the ads that served as a model for the Chinese adapted versions.

The tendencies we find may be related to theoretical concepts that underlie quantitative cross-cultural studies. If the available American design strongly invited an *informational* reading, or a *transformational* reading that was merely related to values of *individual* expression, a redesign was made that invited a *transformational reading* related to *social values*. We reach this conclusion based on a reconstruction of “holistically” invited readings of both ads in a pair, departing from a semiotic approach informed by systemic functional linguistics. Single adaptations do not reveal the rationale behind

them. A detailed semiotic analysis enables analysts to build coherent interpretations and to reveal the meaning of the adaptations made in the Chinese redesign.

According to theories of glocalisation (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Lal, 2000; Santana, 2003), beliefs pertinent to social relationship and morality in local cultures are expected to be relatively resistant to change (Fu & Chiu 2007; Lin & Xue, 2010). In a high power—distance and low individualism culture like Chinese culture, this resistance may be particularly strong. Benson (1996) finds parallels between commercialism in the 1930s and in today's China. Our results confirm this persistency of values, and are consistent with the findings of Fu and Chiu (2007) and of Zhao and Belk (2008a). These authors found that Chinese people tended to accept the status dimension of global culture (including competence—related attributes such as success and intelligence, which is positively related to sociopolitical power) while holding on to the solidarity dimension of the heritage culture (including social and moral attributes such as trustworthiness, friendliness, kindness and benevolence, which are positively related to traditional moral values). Indeed, the tendencies we observe can be explained within this persistent framework. Also, in the early 20th century, we find that the Chinese invited readings that valued traditional views on social relations and morality (Confucian values) in ads that promoted modern life and technology.

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