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A complete framework for reviewing the literature of all examination areas can be found by referencing to a Venn diagram (see Appendix A —figure 1, on page 8) of three intersecting circles, which is derived from the previous discussions on formulating my doctoral dissertation topic.

### **Comp Area 3: Cross- Cultural Comparison: cultures, values, and the Chinese consumers**

*The Chinese cultures, values and peoples studied in a cross-cultural marketing and consumption context is explored in this examination area. It consists of two main sections. First, by focusing on the cultural roots of behavior, both in society and business, the similarities and differences between people in the West (mainly North America) and the East (China, and covering Japan as a supplementary reference) are revealed in comparative analyses. A brief review of methodological issues involved is also noted. In section two, I pay close attention to the Chinese North Americans and Chinese Diasporas. The impact of culture on the behavior of consumers is examined with the debate of globalization, modernization versus Westernization of Chinese consumer behavior.*

#### **Section 1: Cross-cultural comparison: culture, society and business**

In history, a major progress of Sino-Western cultural contact can be tracked back to the journey of Macro Polo. The Jesuit missionaries who arrived in China after Macro Polo should be honored as the pioneers of intercultural communication experts. In contemporary era, perhaps the global managers of the TNCs are the culturally sensitive ones.

We cannot deny that we shall never fully understand the 'others'. Yet finding ways to increase our *cross-cultural competence* is a correct action to lessen the communication gap between others and us. As an ideal case, for maximum 'effectiveness' of doing business or doing social research, the businessman or the researcher should be able to perceive and think in both cultural directions. And it is also critical to know that our own culture and language affect the ways in which we think, feel, respond and organize our society. And the greatest challenge is learning not to apply our own value system to people of other cultures.

In the first part of this exam, I propose to address the cultural diversities between the East and the West in general, the cultural differences between the North Americans and the Chinese in particular. The majorities of research and examples of cultural characteristics, value orientations and consumer behavior are drawn from the American, Canadian, Chinese and Japanese social and cultural context. (such as Merry White 1993; Tse, Francis & Walls 1994; Skov & Moeran, 1995; John Clammer 1997; Swee Hoon Ang 2000).

The fascination of cross-cultural studies lies in its complexity and applicability. In order to give focus to our Sino-Western comparison, several

themes will be discussed as follows:

- i. underlying cultural dimensions such as tradition, philosophy, the concept of self and family or collective group, interpersonal relationships, communication styles;
- ii. basic dimensions of cultural values (Hofstede) and value orientations (Trompenaars); beliefs and attitudes towards actions such as needs, motivation and aesthetic sensibility of consumption behavior
- iii. the transferability of Western consumer behavior theory in the Chinese cultural context (see Yau 1994; Schiitsee & Cialnte 1998)
- iv. the cross-cultural implications for marketing , such as possible marketing 'mistakes' and the adaptation strategies;
- v. debates and issues in the context of comparative consumerism<sup>1</sup>, ethnoconsumerism<sup>2</sup> (Venkatesh 1995) and cross-cultural consumption<sup>3</sup> (see Howe, 1996)

Another part of this section is dedicated to the major theoretical issues of cross-cultural communication and applied (methodological) issues of doing cross-cultural comparison. (such as Kincard 1988; Edelstein 1989; Kim 1995; Ting-Toomey 1999). The term **cross-cultural comparison** used here simply implies "comparisons that are attempted between cultures, which may transcend national boundaries, and cultures rather than nations are of focal interests" (Dant & Barnes, 1988).

## **Section 2: Understanding Chinese N. Americans and the Chinese consumers**

The increase in ethnic (Chinese or Asian) research interest in social sciences in general, in marketing communication in particular is a result of the changing ethnic landscape of North America. Especially in the cities of Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto of Canada or in states of California and New York in the United States we can find a high population of Asian and Chinese immigrants. Clearly, the elevated volume of funding for this research topic is partly driven by economic opportunities. With a population of more than 1.2 billion, 'Greater China' is the world's largest consumer market. In terms of purchasing power, Mainland China's economy is the third largest after the U.S. and Japan (I.M.F. 1994). There is no denying that the Chinese economies will be more significant in the future.

In my examination of the literature in this part (such as Lee & Tse, 1994a; 1994b; Peter Li, 1998) I have chosen to analyze the socialization and

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<sup>1</sup> The general theme of comparative consumerism pursuing (i.e. cross-cultural studies of marketing and consumerist-oriented developments of developing countries) is how different societies are adopting Westernized consumeristic lifestyles while trying to keep their traditional or indigenous value systems.

<sup>2</sup> Ethnoconsumerism is the study of consumer behavior in different cultures, from the native's point of view. My own interest of comparative consumerism and ethnoconsumerism is on the Chinese and ethnic Chinese (or overseas Chinese). The reference point is those cities where the Chinese are densely populated such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Shanghai and Vancouver. As we know, in certain cases, cities have developed a strong cultural identity that it transcends the traits of the country.

<sup>3</sup> The study of cross-cultural consumption, or what happens to commodities when they cross cultural borders, has raised some ethical issues about the globalization of consumerism.

acculturation process of the ethnic Chinese in North America. My focus is to explore the forces that underlie the formation of migrant parents' identity and their children's identity as well as their consumption behavior. What does being a (1.5- or second-generation) overseas Chinese (e.g. a Chinese Canadian or a Chinese American or a Chinese British) mean? What do consumer identities in a multicultural N. American society mean? What are the impact of environmental influence and cultural relevancy on their daily activities?

Further along the inquiry, the uniqueness of the Chinese market and the influence of global culture on the Chinese consumers will be explored. As Schiitsee & Cialante (1998) point out, perhaps as a fallacy, "when common people talk about 'global consumer culture', what is actually meant is the global presence of Western culture" (p. 197). With this premise, I would like to examine how the Chinese societies learn to consume in the last two decades. What are the logics in which Western goods are received (understood and consumed) in Chinese societies? (Watson 1997) And to what extent, the Chinese consumers are different from the Western counterparts? Could we use the high level of consumption of Western (or global) goods as an argument for the loss of Chinese culture in favor of Westernization or Americanization thesis?

These questions and plausible observations lead me back to the debate of globalization and consumer behavior as well as the issues of cross-cultural marketing and consumption, which play an important "role" in the section one.

#### **Examples of suggested question:**

1. The application of Western categories such as "individuals", "individualism", "materialism" and so forth, risk imposing a conceptual confusion on those who attempt to offer an interpretation of a particular non-Western culture. Why? Use this as one of your illustrations, outline the major caveats in comparative analysis. On the other hand, what can comparative studies, such as cross-cultural research of consumption, tell us that we need to know and can learn in no other way?
2. As some researchers told us, no imported commodities are completely immune from localization or domestication. In the case of the Chinese societies, what happens when the culture of production and the culture of consumption are not the same? What are the major features of the Chinese consumers? To what extent the Western model of consumer behavior could be applied to the Chinese context?

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## Framework of Comps

Comp 1-- "globalization and youth marketing" (Debates on consumer culture is the theoretical foundation of comp 1)

Comp 2 --"youth consumerism and identities" (Debates on youth culture is the theoretical foundation of comp 2)

Comp 3-- "cross-cultural issues and Chinese consumption" (Issues on comparative methodology, Chinese values and cultural practices are the theoretical foundation of comp 3)

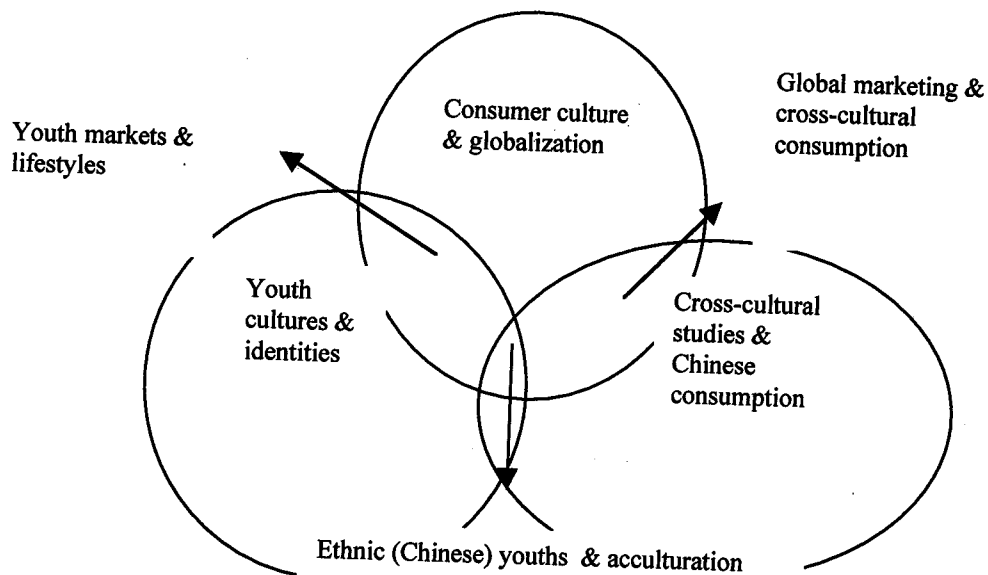


Fig.1 Venn diagram guide to the literature review