Influence of Design, Workmanship, and Familiarity on Consumer Perceptions
of Country-of-Origin Apparel Brands: A Study of U.S., China, and Japan

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Research Background and Hypotheses. The country-of-origin (COO) concept addresses the increasing complexity of the global market and widening geographical boundaries of brands (Roth & Romeo, 1992). Consumers use COO to evaluate brands and product attributes (Han, 1989) and COO image is influential in purchase decisions (e.g., Roth & Romeo, 1992). Consumers from various countries hold differing opinions of COO brands and products. This study examines how consumers from the three largest world economies (U.S., China, and Japan) perceive two apparel brand image dimensions (design and workmanship) in conjunction with brand familiarity for apparel brands originating from five countries (U.S., France, Italy, China, and Japan). According to the summary construct theory, consumers recode and abstract individual information which is then stored in memory as a general evaluation from the elements of information (Han, 1989). The general evaluation is recalled from memory and applied in future contexts. Brand names or particular images of brands can serve as powerful summary constructs where multiple meanings or pieces of information are associated with a particular brand name (Jacoby, Szybillo, & Busato-Schach, 1977). Similarly, country image related to workmanship and design can be viewed as a summary construct that consumers abstract about a country's products based on the rationale that brands with the same COO may have similar attributes; thus they can be evaluated in a similar way. Brand familiarity may also affect evaluation of COO brands. Rosenbloom, Haefner and Lee (2012) found that the familiarity with a COO brand increased purchase intent.
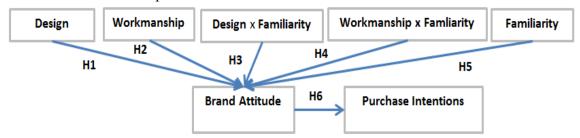

Figure 1. Proposed hypothesized relationships among constructs

Based on the literature, Figure 1 illustrates the hypotheses developed. Past studies have examined consumer perceptions of COO brands across product categories. Although studies

have mentioned individual brands, focused empirical research on the relationship between COO apparel brand image and consumer perceptions of COO apparel brands is limited. This study rigorously tests relationships of two unique brand image constructs (design and workmanship) and familiarity with brand attitude and purchase intent for COO apparel brands.

Method and Data Analysis. A convenience sample of female university students from the Eastern U.S. (n=212), Tokyo, Japan (n=209), and Shanghai, China (n=208) participated. A questionnaire was developed in English, translated into Japanese and Chinese languages and back-translated. Perceptions of COO brands were assessed using measures adapted from Roth and Romeo (1992). SPSS 21 and AMOS 21 were used for data analysis. All analyses were conducted separately across consumer groups and COO brands. Confirmatory factor analyses validated the measurement of multi-item constructs for all three consumer groups across the five COO brands; fit indices, factor loadings, construct reliabilities, AVEs, and Cronbach's alphas were all acceptable. The hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling. Standardized scores were used for testing. All hypotheses illustrated in the model were tested concurrently; the model was modified to improve goodness-of-fit based on initial results and modification indices.

Results and Implications. For most COO brand models, results showed perceptions of design to be strong predictors of attitude toward COO brands across the three consumer groups. Also, familiarity had direct influence on brand attitude as well as purchase intentions, indicating that those familiar with COO brands had positive impressions. Results also showed how COO brand dynamics differed by country. For example, for U.S. consumers, the more familiar they were with U.S. COO brands, the higher the ratings for design. However, U.S. consumers who were more familiar with Italian brands had lower perceptions of designs from Italy. In addition, design was a major factor in purchase intent for Italian brands. For Japanese consumers, workmanship was a significant predictor of purchase intent for Chinese brands. For Chinese consumers, design directly predicted purchase intent for many country brands. Also, for several COO brands (U.S., Italy, Japan), perceptions of workmanship did not influence brand attitude indicating that variation in workmanship may no longer be an important factor. For each of the three international markets (U.S., China, and India), the level of exposure and reputation of COO brands somewhat differed. Results offer a renewed perspective on how COO brands from five countries have conveyed impressions in the three largest economies. Individual model results for each of the markets offer strategic directions for marketing and introducing brands.

<div align="center">*References*</div>

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