

ICDM Thesis Summary

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Summary of "A Theoretical Model for Research in Intercultural Decision Making" by Ralph C. Ennis (189 pages)

Overview: Ralph C. Ennis's thesis, submitted in June 2002 to the McGregor School of Antioch University, proposes a culture-general Intercultural Decision Making (ICDM) model designed to facilitate research in intercultural relations. The model integrates insights from decision-making science, consumer behavior, and intercultural literature to create a framework that accounts for the complexities of decision-making processes across diverse cultural contexts. The thesis is structured into six chapters, each addressing different aspects of the model's development, context, and applicability.

Key Points by Chapter:

1. Introduction (Chapter 1):

- Emphasizes the critical role of decision-making in intercultural relations, where decisions shape interactions and relationships across cultures.
- Proposes that a culture-general model can enhance understanding and improve intercultural relations by addressing differences in decision-making processes.
- The research question focuses on constructing a model suitable for intercultural decision-making research, with a specific application to Chinese and American university students.

2. Methodology (Chapter 2):

- The methodology involves a critical review of literature from decision-making, consumer behavior, and intercultural fields, supplemented by the author's prior qualitative research in multiple countries (USA, Russia, China, Jamaica, Bulgaria).
- The ICDM model is not an absolute description but a synthesis of existing elements, designed to be culture-general and applicable to research, particularly between Chinese and American students.
- Philosophical assumptions include the constructed nature of human knowledge, the intercultural enterprise as a panhuman system, and the value of mixed research methods for balanced intercultural insights.

3. Literature Review (Chapter 3):

- Reviews models from three domains:
 - **Decision-Making Literature:** Includes models like Expected Utility, Constraints, Expectancy-Value, Health Belief, Prospect Theory, Social Judgment, Self-Regulation, Reciprocal Causal Models, and concepts like interdependency and negation of super-logic. These provide abstract theoretical foundations but lack cultural specificity.

- **Consumer Behavior Literature:** Includes models like Engel-Kollat-Blackwell, Howard-Sheth, Nicosia, and others, emphasizing practical decision-making processes but often neglecting internal value-based decisions.
 - **Intercultural Literature:** Covers models like Anxiety/Uncertainty Management, Violation of Expectancy Values, Identity Negotiation, and Cross-Cultural Adaptation, which address cultural influences but do not fully articulate decision-making processes.
- Identifies applicable factors for the ICDM model, such as morality, continua of decision quality, emotional influences, and cultural value differences.
- 4. **Intercultural Context for Decision Making (Chapter 4):**
 - Establishes a conceptual framework for decision-making in intercultural settings, detailing:
 - The decision-maker(s), influenced by cultural and individual factors.
 - Types of decisions (sensory perception, self/other assessments, belief/emotional integration, change assessments, behavioral communicative decisions).
 - The flow of decision-making, including inputs, outcomes, and feedback loops.
 - The impact of cultural traditions and group dynamics on decisions.
 - Highlights the importance of recognizing cultural differences to improve intercultural interactions.
- 5. **ICDM Model Construction (Chapter 5):**
 - Constructs the ICDM model as a process model with three intersecting three-dimensional axes:
 - **Logic of Intellect:** Includes continua of powerful-powerless, good-evil, and accuracy-intuition, with "space" as the central construct.
 - **Logic of Emotion:** Includes trust-fear, honor-shame, and freedom-bonding, with "jealousy" as the central construct.
 - **Imagined Outcomes:** Includes desired-undesired identity, surviving-thriving, and meaningful-meaningless, with "creative harmony" as the central construct.
 - Argues for the culture-general nature of these continua, supported by literature and the Japanese concept of *amae* as a case study.
 - Assesses the model's scope as descriptive, explanatory, predictive, and developmental, suitable for guiding intercultural research.
- 6. **Applicability of the ICDM Model (Chapter 6):**
 - Demonstrates the model's utility through a proposed research design comparing decision-making preferences of American students (University of Tampa) and Chinese students (Shanghai International Studies University).
 - Suggests differences in decision-making:
 - **Logic of Intellect:** Americans emphasize accuracy and good-evil distinctions; Chinese prioritize intuition and moral good over evil.

- **Logic of Emotion:** Americans value unearned trust and freedom; Chinese emphasize honor-shame and social bonding.
- **Imagined Outcomes:** Americans focus on short-term thriving and desired identity; Chinese consider long-term survival and avoiding undesired identity.
- Proposes implications for improving American-Chinese intercultural relations, such as understanding emotional differences (e.g., shame/honor for Chinese, freedom for Americans) and balancing fact-based and relational trust.

Additional Components:

- **Appendix:** Outlines sample qualitative research questions aligned with the ICDM model's axes for studying Chinese students, focusing on cultural values like goodness, power, honor, and harmony.
- **Bibliography:** Extensive references from decision-making, consumer behavior, intercultural, and Chinese-American studies, grounding the model in established scholarship.
- **Figures:** Visual aids like diagrams of decision-making processes, cultural impacts, and the ICDM model's axes, enhancing conceptual clarity.

Analysis:

1. Strengths:

- **Comprehensive Integration:** The ICDM model synthesizes diverse theoretical perspectives, creating a robust framework that bridges abstract theory and practical application.
- **Culture-General Approach:** By focusing on universal continua (e.g., trust-fear, surviving-thriving), the model avoids cultural specificity while remaining adaptable to various cultural contexts.
- **Practical Application:** The proposed research design for Chinese and American students illustrates the model's utility in real-world intercultural research, making it relevant for theorists, researchers, and practitioners.
- **Emphasis on Emotion:** The inclusion of emotional logic (e.g., jealousy, honor-shame) addresses a gap in existing decision-making models, enriching the intercultural perspective.
- **Philosophical Grounding:** The model's assumptions about human knowledge, cultural diversity, and research balance provide a thoughtful foundation for its development.

2. Weaknesses:

- **Limited Empirical Validation:** The thesis does not conduct actual research to test the model, relying instead on a proposed design and literature-based assertions, which may limit its immediate applicability.

- **Complexity:** The three-dimensional axes and multiple continua may be conceptually dense, potentially challenging for researchers to operationalize without further simplification.
 - **Cultural Examples:** While the model claims to be culture-general, its primary application to Chinese and American contexts may raise questions about its applicability to other cultures without additional examples.
 - **Underdeveloped Constructs:** Concepts like “jealousy” as a central emotional construct or “space” in the logic of intellect are intriguing but underexplored, potentially requiring further theoretical justification.
3. **Significance:**
- The ICDM model fills a gap in intercultural research by providing a structured, culture-general framework for studying decision-making, which is often underexplored in intercultural literature.
 - Its focus on both intellectual and emotional dimensions acknowledges the complexity of human decision-making, particularly in cross-cultural interactions.
 - The model’s potential to inform training and improve intercultural relations (e.g., between Americans and Chinese) highlights its practical value in fostering mutual understanding.
4. **Recommendations for Further Research:**
- Conduct empirical studies using the proposed research design to validate the model’s predictive and descriptive capabilities.
 - Expand the model’s application to other cultural groups to strengthen its culture-general claim.
 - Simplify or refine complex constructs (e.g., jealousy, space) to enhance accessibility for researchers and practitioners.
 - Explore quantitative methods to complement the qualitative approach, aligning with the model’s call for mixed methodologies.

Conclusion: Ennis’s thesis presents a well-constructed, theoretically grounded ICDM model that addresses the need for a culture-general framework in intercultural decision-making research. By integrating intellectual, emotional, and outcome-oriented dimensions, it offers a nuanced approach to understanding how decisions shape intercultural relations. While its complexity and lack of empirical testing are limitations, the model’s potential to guide research and improve cross-cultural interactions, particularly between Americans and Chinese, makes it a valuable contribution to the field of intercultural studies