

WU Xiaoding

Jilin University /School of Business
#95, No. 4 Xin-xiang-qun, No. 7 Qianwei Road
130012 Changchun P. R. China
Tel: +86 431 8516 8902
Email: xiaoding_wu@126.com

ZHANG Shu

Northeast Normal University / Department of E-commerce
No. 2555 Jingyue Street
130117 Changchun P. R. China
Tel: +86 431 8452 4500
Mobile: +86 135 788 996 01
Email: Zhangs027@nenu.edu.cn

Distribution Research in the Evolution of Marketing: the Renaissance of Society's Perspective

Summary Early in its origin, marketing studied the distribution of goods from producers to consumers from the society's perspective. With the shift of marketing paradigm, the studies on distribution from society's perspective gradually waned in the mainstream of marketing research, when marketing shifted to serve managers in business. This results in less explanation, by marketing, to the movement of products from the society's perspective. Marketing studies the exchange of offerings (AMA definition 2007), so it should be able to explain the exchange of products from all levels of aggregation, including the society and the firm. Solely focusing on business perspective might lead to the deficiency to the explanatory power of marketing and incompleteness to the scientific content of marketing. This paper first reviews the development of marketing theory and marketing schools of thoughts and the evolution of marketing research mainstream, and then explores the distribution studies covered by marketing research. It concludes that marketing research does and should conclude the studies from society's perspective in achieving the explanatory power and completeness that are indispensable to scientific research.

1 □ Background

With specialization of labor, production sector supplies a great variety of goods and services to satisfy the needs and wants of consumption sector. These goods and services are flowing from producers to consumers, which is created through the transactions and transvections (Alderson 1965) between sellers and buyers. Since it is impossible for infinite sellers and infinite buyers to trade directly with each other (Ishihara and Kato 2004), distribution is needed to connect the sellers and buyers. Distribution is not a well-developed discipline lacking theoretical hard core (Imre Lakatos 1978). Therefore, it is easy to reach the misunderstanding that no academic research is conducted on distribution. However, immature discipline does not necessarily mean that there are no distribution researches. Distribution, as the bridge between production and consumption, is indispensable to social economy. Distribution issues in any society deserve and should deserve attention from academic scholars. The following article will explore the

distribution status in the academic field.

The content and context of distribution theory should be clarified in exploring whether distribution is being studied. Distribution is defined as the flow of tangible products from producers to consumers, viewed and studied from macro- and society's perspective (Wu 2005). It covers the following research aspects. First, the product studied in distribution is tangible goods, such as the classification of consumer goods to convenience goods, shopping goods, and specialty goods. Second, the function of distribution is bridging the gap in space, time, information, ownership and value separating original producers from final consumers in the marketplace. Third, title flows, physical flows, information flows and cash flows overcome separations between production and consumption in performing distribution functions, the transfer of title, information, risks and physical goods. Fourth, distribution functions are performed by different types of distribution institutions, including retailers, wholesalers and other middlemen, resulting in the different structure of distribution channel. Fifth, the marketplace studied in distribution is a concept of product collection. Distribution investigates the process of delivering varied and interrelated products to consumers (Ishihara and Kato 2004).

It is easy to find that the AMA definition of marketing in 1935 is closely related to the issues listed above. American Marketing Association defined marketing as the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producers to consumers. It is similar to the societal flow of products from producers to consumers in distribution definition, since the first AMA definition focused significant attention on the distribution functions (Wilkie and Moore Fall 2007). The scope of marketing should be clarified in order to answer the question of whether marketing researches cover distribution research. However, the scope of marketing is rather broad, thus Hunt (1976) proposed Three Dichotomies Model to frame the scope of marketing. Three categorical dichotomies (profit sector / nonprofit sector, micro / macro, and positive / normative) are used to classify the marketing phenomena, topics and issues. As illustrated in Figure 1, all marketing phenomena are grouped into eight cells.

Figure 1 Three Dichotomies Model

	Positive	Normative
Profit sector	Micro	Micro
	Macro	Macro
Nonprofit sector	Micro	Micro
	Macro	Macro

Adopted from: Shelby D. Hunt (1976) The Nature and Scope of Marketing, Journal of Marketing, ...

In Hunt's three dichotomies model, the positive researches on profit sector from macro perspective cover certain distribution issues, including problems, issues, and theories concerning the institutional and commodity approach to marketing, the efficiency of marketing systems, marketing functions, and power and conflict relationships in channels. In addition, the normative researches on profit sector and distribution researches overlap in issues of distribution cost, vertical marketing system, retailing and wholesaling. Therefore, distribution studies are included in Hunt's three dichotomies model. It could be interpreted that there exist distribution researches in U.S.A, which are concluded in marketing researches. The following section will explore the position of distribution-related researches in marketing framework.

2□Development of Mainstream of Marketing Study

Since its origin in U.S.A in early 1900s, the content of marketing keeps evolving. Reflected by the AMA definitions in different periods, marketing researches began with the study on the flow of goods from producers to consumers in the society and gradually shifted to the managerial solutions to business organizations. The study from society perspective waned out of the marketing mainstream while the focus changed from macro and society perspective to micro and individual perspective. Therefore, it is usually deemed that distribution researches were absent in U.S.A. Nevertheless, issues of distribution are found when reviewing the history of marketing research. In the next section, marketing research development will be divided into periods, based on which the mainstream of marketing will be summarized, and

further the position of researches on distribution issues will be explored.

2□1 Marketing Research Stage

In dividing the historical period of marketing research, attempts were made by different scholars. Based on the dominant marketing school, Sheth and Gross (1988) divided the marketing research into four periods, classical marketing, managerial marketing, behavioral marketing, and adaptive marketing. The most widely cited and accepted is the attempt by Wilkie and Moore (Wilkie and Moore 2006; Wilkie and Moore 2003). The development of marketing thought is divided into four eras, founding the field of marketing (1900-1920), formalizing the field (1920-1950), a paradigm shift (1950-1980), and the shift intensifies (1900-present). The division of period by Shaw and Jones (Shaw and Jones 2005) are roughly paralleled to that of Wilkie and Moore, but differs in the pre-academic marketing thought prior to 1900, traditional approaches from 1900 to 1955, the paradigm shift from 1955 to 1975, and the paradigm broadening from 1975 to 2000.

According to the summary of marketing definitions by Ringold and Weitz (Ringold and Weitz 2007), the definitions in marketing textbooks before 1950s were centered on the flow of goods from producers to consumers. Schools of marketing thoughts studied the transfer of goods from society's perspective instead of individual firm's perspective. Moreover, the dominant logic of marketing research prior to 1950s were tangible goods orientation (Vargo and Lusch 2004). With the prosperity of the academic research from individual firm's perspective, intangible and managerial orientation started to emerge. Differentiated from marketing research, distribution research focuses on the social transfer of tangible goods, which is identical with the marketing research before 1950s and distinct from that after 1950s. To portray the distribution research in the marketing evolution, this study concludes the development of marketing into three stages:

Stage I: Traditional Paradigm of marketing (1900-1950)

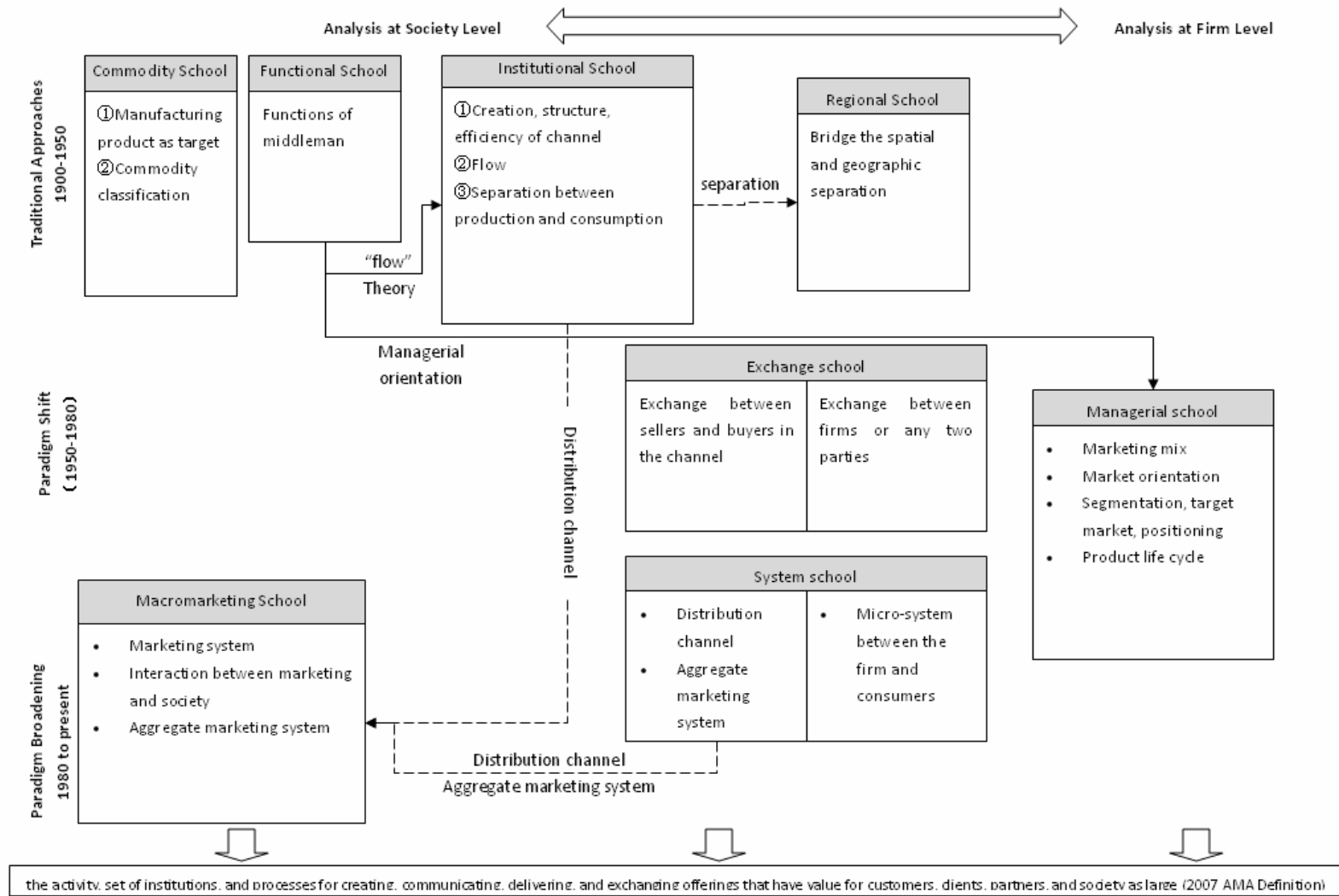
Stage II: Marketing Paradigm shift (1950-1980)

Stage III: Marketing Paradigm broadening (1980 to present)

Marketing scholars during these stages assigned their attention to the different marketing issues and problems, forming the various schools of marketing thought. Sheth, Gardner, and Garrett (1988) sketched and evaluated 12 schools of marketing thoughts. The evolution of these schools is presented in figure 2.

By reviewing the social and economic environment, the following section will focus on the roadmap of schools development, scholar's research perspective, and the mainstream of marketing research in each stage.

Figure 2 Roadmap of Marketing Schools Development



2.2 Mainstream of Marketing Research in 1900-1950: Social Perspective in Traditional Paradigm of Marketing

Many scholars (Wilkie and Moore 2003, 2006; Shaw and Jones 2005; Sheth and Gardner 1982; Vargo and Lusch 2004) agreed that marketing emerged as a science and an independent discipline in early twentieth century. In the 1900s, agriculture played an important role in the economy, drawing the attention of the society and university to the distribution of agricultural products. When the new courses were developed to study the “distributive and regulative industries” (in University of Michigan), “the marketing of products” (in University of Pennsylvania) and “methods of marketing farm products” (in University of Wisconsin), the marketing field began to take on its own distinct identity (Wilkie and Moore 2003). It is believed that marketing is emerged as a branch of economics. This result in the heritage of macro perspective by early marketing scholars and the distinct area of research interest in flow of tangible goods in the channel linking the production sector and consumption sector.

Industrial Revolution brought tremendous change to the society and economy in the twentieth century. Firstly, the aggressive progress in production and technology improved the manufacturing system by employing which standardized goods could be produced in batch efficiently. Meanwhile, the demand for consumer products radically increased due to the immigration, migration to the city center and the increase in disposable income. Therefore, it is necessary to understand mass distribution to service mass consumption (Shaw and Jones 2005). Furthermore, according to Wilkie and Moore (2003), the improvement in transportation and storage as well as in production and technology change the state of marketplace dramatically. Distribution system grew and developed apace. Rural farmers connected the urban citizen through their agent and brokers, while producers connected consumers through their wholesalers and retailers. The changes requested the economist of the time to further incorporate distribution system into their research scope and to explain the phenomena in this new field. Focusing on the implementation of ownership and physical transfer of goods, marketing academic researchers answered “who”, “what”, “how”, and “where” questions to explain different types of distribution institutions were taking diverse functions to distribute

certain commodity within the space gap that separated sellers from buyers, forming the school of institutions, school of functions, school of commodity and school of region, respectively.

Given that marketing is concerned with the movement of goods from producers to consumers, the commodity scholars concentrated on the products itself (Sheth et al. 1988). Commodity school studied the object of transactions, i.e., the means to marketing different types of products. Commodity scholars classified the products by varied dimensions. For instance, Copeland (1924), the most influential scholar in the school, made a clear distinction between industrial goods and consumer goods against the usage of goods and the part that purchased the goods. Although other commodity scholars employed different criteria in classification, their researches actually concentrated on the products flowing from producers to consumers in the society. Functional school focused on the activities needed to execute marketing transactions (Sheth et al. 1988), i.e. the marketing functions. Both five distribution functions of middlemen proposed by Arch Shaw (1912) and the distribution functions taken by middlemen together with producers and consumers recognized by L.D.H. Weld (1917) are substantially marketing functions in the society. Institutional school studied the organizations that fulfilled the marketing functions and distributed the various types of products from producers to consumers. The institutional scholars concentrated on the description and categorization of wholesalers, retailers, agents, brokers and other marketing institutions, and further attempted to explain the interactions in the channel of distribution, which is substantially an analysis of the societal role played by marketing institutions. Even if it was not a mainstream school at its time, regional school concerned marketing as an economic activity that bridging the spatial gap separating producers from their consumers. Represented by Reilly (1931) and Converse (1949), the regional school explained the trade between two cities from the macro perspective.

Generally speaking, marketing scholars before the 1950s explored the business activities that direct the flow of goods from producers to consumers (AMA definition in 1935) from the perspective macro society. Focus was strongly on the distribution sector, with stress directed at explicating the economic rationales for the development of these enhanced and more complex systems evolving in the society of the time (Wilkie and Moore 2003).

2.3 Mainstream of Marketing Research in 1950-1980: Marketing Paradigm Shift

After the 1950s, American economy was booming which is indicated by the deregulation of restriction on consumer goods supply in the state of war, population explosion, baby booming, movement of population from town center to suburb, the massive penetration of new media like TV, and the improvement of distribution infrastructure like interstate highway. The social and economic progress enlarged the marketplace to a national scope, providing the producers with substantial opportunity and creating necessity for marketing managers to adapt to the decision making in national-wide market. On the other hand, the mass market encouraged firms to implement mass production to lower the cost under the pressure of competition, which gradually formed oligopoly market. Firms serving the oligopoly market faced the difficulties in selling mass products by mass production. Middlemen who distributed the products for producers were neutral to each producer and would never sell more products for a particular producer than others. Therefore, middlemen were not feasible and reliable for reducing the difficulties in mass selling (Wu 2005). Business institutions began to involve in marketing activities and concerned the movement of their products to consumers from the firm's perspective.

In the academic field, marketing scholars in the 1950s-1980s proposed, from the firm's perspective, new marketing concepts to service the firm involving in marketing activities. Marketing management, marketing myopia, segmentation, marketing mix and other new concepts were strategic solutions to business institutions. Therefore, marketing research of the time bore two distinguishing characteristics, (1) an overt marketing-as-management orientation and (2) an overt reliance on the behavior and quantitative sciences as means of knowing (Wilkie and Moore 2006). This resulted in the shift of marketing paradigm from traditional approaches to modern managerial approach, from society's perspective to firm's perspective, and from macro to micro. The active schools of thought in this stage are school of management, school of system, school of macromarketing, school of consumer behavior and school of exchange. Managerial school focuses on the practice of marketing viewed from the sellers' perspective (Shaw and Jones 2005) as the most comprehensive school among the

galaxy of marketing schools of thought and has had tremendous influence on the marketing profession (Sheth et al. 1988). Rideway (1957), a scholar of system school, reckoned that the systems consisted of manufacturer and its dealers. This indicates the perspective of firm in viewing marketing system. In 1960 Keith (Keith 1960) argued in his article *the Marketing Revolution* that the marketing philosophy were shifting by degrees from production concept to consumer concept. This gave impetus to examine marketing activities from consumer behavior's perspective. In assisting the marketer to make proper decisions and develop strategy, consumer behavioral school started to investigate the various behavior and characteristics of consumers in the marketplace. Therefore, behavioral science was introduced to the marketing research in stage II. In general, marketing schools of the time served the marketing manager in the firm by employing the research approaches in management science and behavioral science.

However, it is the priority (Wilkie and Moore 2003) of marketing research changed in this stage and there exist studies from society's perspective. Commodity scholars continued to study the classification based on Copeland's work. Influenced by Wroe Alderson, institutional school furthered their research on marketing channel and channel structure using economics principles. As such, Alderson (1965), a scholar in exchange school recognized by Sheth et al (1988), studied the transaction between sellers and buyers and further concluded the series of transactions as transvection in the distribution channel of a society. The marketing school whose works cover the macro system in the society is the school of system. School of macromarketing, the most important school, questioned the profit maximization as the principal and superior objective and marketing and discussed the long-term benefits and social responsibility of the firm. The research from society's perspective by macromarketing will be stated in section 3.

As stated above, marketing research in this stage covered with both micro and macro aspects, and served for both firms and the society. Nonetheless, the proportion of study on macro issues of the society against total marketing research decreased sharply. Marketing evolved from traditional paradigm to a new era with knowledge-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004) and management orientation.

2.4 Mainstream of Marketing Research in 1980 to present: Marketing Paradigm broadening

Since the 1980s the world economy and society experienced overwhelming changes. The collapse of Soviet Union challenged the state-owned and planned economy. On the other end of the world, the U.S.A, with free market economy system, put its eye sights on the developing countries for new opportunities under the trend of globalization, which is due to the cost reduction on international communication by Internet. Firms serving the domestic market pursued short-term profit with the impact of leveraged buyouts and other financial strategies. These forces negatively influenced the marketing's role in business, causing that role to shrink, shift, and synthesize with previously distinct functional domains (Wilkie and Moore 2003). Consequently, AMA modified in 1985 the marketing definition raised thirty years ago and defined it as the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotions, and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives. The 1985 change was a significant one, turning attention squarely toward the manager's tasks (Wilkie and Moore Fall 2007).

In addition, globalized business education brought American marketing researchers with new ideas and concepts. Academic journals were more specialized. With the improvement of science, new methods and complex concepts were introduced to marketing research. Hence, marketing paradigm was further developed in stage three. Many scholars believed that marketing thought was becoming more fragmented (Vargo and Lusch 2004). Marketing theory is featured by fragmented concepts including market orientation, service marketing, relationship marketing, and quality management, etc. However, firm's perspective study can be identified as the characteristics shared these diverse concepts. In 2007, when AMA realized the marketing as a managerial system impact on and be impacted by the society, it modified the 2004 definition as "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society as large". Although the 2007 definition emphasizes on the role of marketing in the society and views marketing as a broader concept, the distribution issues are not clearly stated.

The study on flow of products from producers to consumers at the society level is immersed in the flood of diverse marketing concepts. It seems that macromarketing school is the only active school in macro study by explaining social marketing system.

Generally speaking, with the shift and broadening of marketing paradigm and the change of research perspective from macro and society to micro and firm, the study on distribution issues altered from mainstream to branch of marketing research. The distribution studies are not shaped into an integrated research framework and system.

3 □ Explanation on Distribution Issues in Marketing Research

3 □ 1 Distribution Studies in Marketing Research Prior to the Forming the Macromarketing School

Macro marketing thought already existed before school of macro marketing was formed in the 1970s. Sheth and Gardener (1982) reckon that the macromarketing thought origins from the concern on the societal role played by business. As stated in the above section, marketing researches in traditional paradigm including those done by commodity school, institutional school, and functional school are explaining the object of distribution, institution implementing distribution, and functions fulfilled by distribution related to the flow between production sector and consumption sector at the society level. As argued by Wilkie and Moore (2006), writings on marketing and society were quite central to the thinking of the macromarketing field in 1900 – 1950.

Distribution theory depicts that the tasks of distribution institution are to accomplish and facilitate the functions of title, information, risks and physical transfer, to link the separation in space, time, information, ownership and value which further forms physical flow, title flow, information flow, and cash flow that bridge the gap between producers and consumers. With respect to macromarketing studies, as summarized by Shaw and Jones (2005), market separation (McInnes 1964) was raised to explore the relations between makers and users of goods. It is the social specialization of labor that separates sellers from buyers, which creates

market offering middlemen the opportunities to bridge the gap. Vaile et al (1952) and Fisk (1967) explain the market performance of middlemen by employing flow theory. Moreover, distribution theory concerns the allocation of distribution functions among wholesalers, retailers, and other institutions, which results in the distinct channel structure with certain level of outputs. Macromarketing scholars Bucklin (1965) and Alderson (1965) explored the inventory control and coordination and distribution tasks allocation by members in distribution channel, and the channel structure as a whole, developing Theory of Postponement and Speculation and Theory of Transaction, Transvection and Assortment, respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that marketing studies the social distribution issues from the perspective of institutions, functions, object, and channel before macromarketing school was born.

3.2 Origin of Macromarketing School

When marketing researches gradually were directed to the business perspective in micro level, the managerial perspective within a firm does not need to consider some broader questions in order to act in that firm's interest. Thus, these questions go unaddressed precisely, leading to the incompleteness of marketing research resulted from the sole focus on the firm. As Cox et al (1965) argued, in our enthusiasm for the mathematical and other mechanisms of decision making, we may have begun to lose sight of the fact that marketing is not only a very important managerial responsibility but also a social institution of great significance. Therefore, some marketing scholars began to re-focus on the relationship between marketing and society and to answer the questions of marketing associated with macro society. In 1977, the first macromarketing seminar was held in University of Colorado and the Macromarketing Association was established. In 1981, the pioneer macromarketing scholar George Fisk edited the first Journal of Macromarketing. Fisk, heavily influenced by the thinking of Wroe Alderson and Reavis Cox, shaped macromarketing thought in his capacity and understood the role of marketing in the society from the system's perspective. Therefore, much attention has been drawn to the marketing system at the beginning of macromarketing school and the researches on marketing system in the 1960s are considered as the fundamentals of macromarketing.

However, the research topics of macromarketing are rather intensive. Journal of

Macromarketing conclude the topics into (1) competition, market, and marketing system, (2) marketing ethics and distributive justice, (3) global policy and environment, (4) marketing and development, (5) marketing history, and (6) quality of life. Facing the diversified contents of marketing research, scholars began their endeavor in the topic convergence, because an eclectic approach without a unifying focus was hindering the progress of macromarketing (Peterson 2008). When they attempted to apply theoretic approach to unify the macromarketing theory in finding the central topic of macromarketing, Meade and Nason (1991) think that macromarketing is developed as the study of the complex coordination and control process underpinning growth, evolution, and design of exchange system. In reviewing the history and prospect of macromarketing, Layton and Grossbart (2006) found that past macromarketing research concentrated on the input and output of marketing system while the future of macromarketing should concern marketing system at differing levels of aggregation. Further study by Layton (2007) suggests the marketing system as core concept of macromarketing. Although macromarketing scholars have not reached an agreement on the central issue of macromarketing, marketing system study is dominant in the thought of macromarketing school. The dominance of marketing system and the origin from system approach determine the scope of macromarketing includes the study on flow of products from society's perspective, i.e. distribution.

3.3 Explanation on Distribution Issues Using Marketing System Theory

In his effort in defining marketing in the textbook between 1971 and 2005, McCarthy, a macromarketing scholar, continuously distinguished the macromarketing from micromarketing. He defines macromarketing as the concern on designing an efficient (in terms of use of resources) and fair (in terms of distribution of output to all parties involved) system which will direct an economy's flow of goods and services from producers to consumers and accomplish the objectives of the society (Ringold and Weitz 2007). Two facets could be derived from this definition, one of which is macromarketing does cover distribution researches, and the other of which is macromarketing studies distribution by analyzing marketing system. Many macromarketing scholars (Hunt 1976, Layton 2005 2007, White 1981,

Meade and Nason 1991, Dixon, Wilkie and Moore 1999 2003 2006, Shaw 1995, Wilkinson 1990, Moyer 1972) paid their attention to marketing system. For instance, Moyer (1972) considers macromarketing as one of the elements in social economy system while Hunt and Burnett (1976) view marketing system as the core of macromarketing and the fundamental factor in distinguishing macromarketing from micromarketing. As such, White (1981) and Layton (2007) deem marketing system is a key concept in differentiating macromarketing and constituting the core of macromarketing, respectively.

Macromarketing researches on marketing system could be conducted at differing level of aggregation (Layton and Grossbart 2006). In the social economy level, Wilkie and Moore (1999) proposed Aggregate Marketing System referring to the dynamic system that provides consumers with value, creates wealth for society, and consists of flows of goods, materials, services, information, and cash among participants in the system. In the level of certain marketing subsystem (for instance, vertical marketing system), according to the research conducted by Layton and Grossbart in 2006, researches on marketing system includes Redmond's domesticated markets and Layton's trade flow. The different approaches employed in marketing system research are exemplified by the empirical research by Ingene on spatial marketing system and the mathematical approach applied by Wilkinson in developing abstract models of channel growth and change. Roughly speaking, macromarketing researches on marketing system in differing levels are rather diverse and complex.

In 1982, Hunt and Burnett proposed Taxonomical Model based on the Three Dichotomies Model (Hunt 1976) to identify which marketing phenomena are included in macromarketing. After empirical test on taxonomical model, the authors summarized the varied macromarketing using three criteria, level of aggregation, perspective of, and consequences on. The macromarketing researches include:

- (1) Studies in the level of total marketing system and total consumption system
- (2) Studies on total marketing system, intermediate marketing systems, individual-organization marketing systems, total consumption system, household

consumption systems, individual consumer behavior from the perspective of total social system and nonmarketing societal subsystems

- (3) Studies on the consequences of total marketing system, intermediate marketing systems, individual-organization marketing systems, total consumption system, household marketing systems, and individual consumer behavior on total social system and nonmarketing societal subsystems
- (4) Studies on the consequences of total social system and nonmarketing societal subsystems, intermediate marketing systems, individual-organization marketing systems, total consumption system, household marketing systems, and individual consumer behavior on total marketing system
- (5) Studies on the consequences of total social system and nonmarketing societal subsystems, total marketing system, intermediate marketing systems, individual-organization marketing systems, household marketing systems, and individual consumer behavior on total consumption system

In addition, studies in the level of intermediate marketing system and studies on the consequences of total social system and nonmarketing societal subsystems, total marketing system, individual-organization marketing systems, total consumption system, household marketing systems, and individual consumer behavior on total marketing system on intermediate marketing systems are both macro and micro marketing studies. In this macromarketing definition by Taxonomical Model, total marketing system is parallel to the distribution sector that links the production sector and consumption sector, and intermediate marketing systems are homologous to distribution channel in distribution researches. Therefore, macromarketing explains distribution issues focusing on the marketing system at different levels.

4. Conclusion

Distribution, as the bridge between production and consumption, is indispensable to social

economy. Distribution issues in any society deserve and should deserve attention from marketing scholars. When the content and context of distribution theory and marketing theory are clarified, we found that there are distribution studies and it is exactly marketing that explaining distribution issues. With the shift of research perspective of marketing from society to individual firm, the distribution issues waned out the mainstream of marketing research. There is no integrated and systematic framework for distribution studies. This results in the viewpoint of no-distribution-research. Reviewing the history of marketing researches, many marketing scholars put their effort on distribution studies. At its beginning stage, marketing is exploring the distribution issues at the society level. In the stage of paradigm shift, the proportion of distribution researches from society's perspective, compared with the researches with managerial orientation, declined sharply. However, the absolute number of distribution researches was increased due to the improvement in academic infrastructure, i.e. the number of academic researchers, literatures, and journals. This proved that the distribution researches in society level developed in this stage (Wilkie and Moore 2003). With the broadening the marketing paradigm, macromarketing scholars concentrate their eye sights on the distribution-related topics from the perspective macro and society. They explore the distribution institutions and distribution channels from the society's perspective in varied level of aggregations. In a word, although no integrated and systematic framework is formed in distribution research field, distribution studies played an important role in marketing researches. As described by Wilkie and Moore (2006), distribution studies serves as a pillar in the development and evolution of marketing. It is the studies on distribution issues that made the marketing a complete scientific discipline with explanatory power.

References

Alderson, Wroe and M.W. Miles (1965), "Toward a Formal Theory of Transactions and Transvections," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 2 (May), 117-27.

Cox, Reavis, Charles S. Goodman, and Thomas C. Fichandler (1965), *Distribution in a*

High-Level Economy: Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Fisk, George (1981), "An Invitation of Participate in Affairs of the Journal of Macromarketing," *Journal of Macromarketing*, Spring, 3-6.

Hunt, Shelby D. (2002), *Foundations of Marketing Theory: Toward a General Theory of Marketing*. New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc.

Hunt, Shelby. D. (1981), "Macromarketing as a Multidimensional Concept," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 5 (Fall), 17-31.

Hunt, Shelby D. (1976), "The Nature and Scope of Marketing," *Journal of Marketing*, 40 (3), 17-28.

Ishihara, Takemasa and Tsukasa Kato (2004), *Distribution Theory* (Wu Xiaoding and Li Wang, Trans.). Beijing: China Renmin University Press.

Jiang, Yan (2005), "The Retrodiction and Prospect of Marketing Paradigm Evolution," *Beijing Business and Adiminstration University Press*, 20 (3), 72-76.

Keith, Robert J. (1960), "The Marketing Revolution," *Journal of Marketing*, January, 35-38.

Lakatos, I., *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programme*, vol. 1, Cambridge Univ. Press. Cambridge, 1978. 35

Layton, Roger A. (2007), "Marketing Systems: A Core Macromarketing Concept," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 27 (3), 227-42.

---- (2008), "The Search for a Dominant Logic: A Macromarketing Perspective," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 28 (2), 215-27.

Layton, Roger A. and Sanford Grossbart (2006), "Macromarketing: Past, Present, and

Possible Future," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 26 (2), 193-213.

Meade, William K. and Robert W. Nason (1991), "Toward A Unified Theory of Macromarketing: A Systems Theoretic Approach," *Journal of Macromarketing*, Fall, 72-82.

Peterson, Mark (2006), "Focusing the Future of Macromarketing," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 26 (2), 245-49.

Richard, Lewis J. and Leo G. Erickson (1969), "Marketing Functions and Marketing Systems: A Synthesis," *Journal of Marketing*, 33 (3), 10-14.

Ringold, Debra J. and Barton Weitz (2007), "The American Marketing Association Definition of Marketing: Moving from Lagging to Leading Indicator," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 26 (2), 251-60.

Shaw, Eric H. and D.G. Brian Jones (2005), "A history of schools of marketing thought," *marketing theory*, 5 (3), 239-81.

Sheth, J. N. and D. M. Gardner (1982), "History of Marketing Thought: An Update," in Faculty working paper: College of Commerce and Business Administration, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Sheth, Jagdish N. and David M. Gardner (1982), "History of Marketing Thought: An Update," *faculty working paper No. 857, College of Commerce and Business Administration, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

Sheth, J. N., D. M. Gardner, and D. E. Garrett (1988), *Marketing theory: evolution and evaluation*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Sheth, Jagdish N. and Barbara L. Gross (1988), "Parallel Development of Marketing and Consumer Behavior: A Historical Perspective," in *Historical perspective in marketing: Essays in honor of Stanley C. Hollander, Terence Nevett and Ronald A. Fullerton*, Eds. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Vargo, Stephen L. and Robert F. Lusch (2004), "Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing," *Journal of Marketing*, 68 (January), 1-17.

Weld, L.D.H. (1917), "Marketing Functions and Mercantile Organization," *American Economic Review* (June), 306-18.

White, Philip D. (1981), "The Systems Dimension in the Definition of Macromarketing," *Journal of Macromarketing*, Spring, 11-13.

Wilkie, William L. and Elizabeth S. Moore (2006), "Macromarketing as a Pillar of Marketing Thought," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 26 (2), 224-32.

---- (2006), "Macromarketing as a Pillar of Marketing Thought," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 26 (2), 224-32.

---- (1999), "Marketing's Contribution to Society," *Journal of Marketing*, 63 (Special), 198-218.

---- (2003), "Scholarly Research in Marketing: Exploring the "4Eras" of Thought Development," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 22 (2), 116-46.

---- (Fall 2007), "What Does the Definition of Marketing Tell Us About Ourselves?," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 26 (2), 269-76.

Wu, Xiaoding (2005), *Fundamentals of Distribution*. Beijing: Science Press.

www.ama.org (2008), "The American Marketing Association Releases New Definition for Marketing." Chicago: American Marketing Association.