Edited by
Chua Beng-Huat

The New Rich in Asia

CONSUMPTION IN ASIA

Lifestyles and Identities

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Consumption in Asia

From the 1960s until 1995, East and Southeast Asia experienced tremendous capitalist economic growth, through which emerged a new urban middle class with a greatly improved material life. This book examines the processes that have transformed underdeveloped countries into full-blown consumer societies.

The essays in this collection challenge conventional ideas about consumption and consumerism. For example, instead of engendering political passivity, the emergence of KTV in Taiwan in fact reveals how popular cultural practices can influence political change under an authoritarian regime. The ways in which a McDonald's hamburger is marketed in Singapore show that the symbolism of the 'made in America' label is not serviceable at a site which is ideologically non-Western. *Consumption in Asia* considers the differentiation among the middle class in Hong Kong around the concept of 'taste'; the changing symbolic position and significance of the US in Japan; and the preference in the Malaysian royalty for Harley Davidson motorcycles.

This is the first book to analyse consumerism in the region in detail, and will provide fascinating insights for students and researchers in Asian studies, economics, politics and cultural studies.

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The New Rich in Asia

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London and New York

First published 2000 by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2002.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Chua, Beng-Huat.
Consumption in Asia: lifestyles and identities/Chua Beng-Huat.
p. cm. —(New rich in Asia)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-415-21311-8 (alk. paper) —ISBN 0-415-23244-9 (pbk.: alk. paper)
1. Consumption (Economics) —Asia. 2. Lifestyles—Asia.
3. Social change—Asia. I. Title. II. Series.

HC415.C6 C48 2000 99–059924
306.3′095–dc21
ISBN 0-203-46756-6 Master e-book ISBN
ISBN 0-203-77580-5 (Glassbook Format)

Contents

Tables

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Preface

This book project, along with the other volumes in the New Rich in Asia series, was conceived at a time when East and Southeast Asia had been experiencing unprecedented sustained, annual high capitalist economic growth. The growth had greatly improved the incomes of the population across the region as a whole. In spite of the inevitable unevenness in distribution of income in the Asian capitalist economies, the rapid economic growth had lifted a very significant proportion of the region's population out of poverty, promoted others into a new middle class and transformed a small minority into the rich and famous. Hitherto, the same region had been characterised largely by material deprivation because of underdevelopment, with massive unemployment and underemployment, like all Third World nations, postcolonial or otherwise.

Unprecedented social mobility in each nation in the region, at different points in the past four decades, released pent-up energies not only for employment but also consumption. Beginning with the acquisition of household durables, from gas stoves to rice cookers to refrigerators, from bicycles to sewing machines, the propensity to consume kept expanding to keep pace with increased incomes. Once these basic durables were obtained, other items became desirable. The list of desirable goods was limited only by the combination of disposable income at hand and available credit facilities. The emerging middle class in every nation began to acquire status, or positional, goods, such as imported fashion, cars and foreign education for their children. The regional expansion of consumption coincided with the rapid globalisation of the marketing of 'designer' consumer goods, which flooded the regional market. Everyone was transformed into a 'walking billboard' of luxury brands: DKNY teeshirts, Lacoste polo-shirts, Rolex watches, Mont Blanc pens, Versace jeans, Nike shoes and Calvin Klein fragrances. Every act of consumption was by way of an anouncement that the buyer had 'arrived'.

Housing consumption also expanded, with property purchase doubling up as an investment. With little know-how and few opportunities to invest in productive economic sectors and enterprises, real estate became the most obvious 'investment' for those who had cash to spare and/or who aimed to 'get rich quick'. Indeed, in every country in the region, there were 'success' stories of individuals who did make millions simply by buying and selling contracts to properties under construction, with each transaction, each change of hands, inflating the price of each piece of property. Everywhere among the new middle class, overconsumption of housing was evident. The inflation in the residential and commercial real estate sectors gave rise to the idea of the 'bubble' economy. It is in the nature of bubbles to burst, and burst this one did.

However, before it did, the will to consume seemed inexhaustible, and appetites insatiable. This rage to consume, particularly products imported from America and Europe, was both celebrated and feared by political leaders and other social/moral gatekeepers, who began to condemn the process as 'Westernization' or even 'westoxification'. They called for the re-education of the population in 'wholesome', 'traditional' 'Asian' values. However, much like the parents who condemned their children's spendthrift ways and yet provided the means for their consumption as evidence of their own economic success, the governments concurrently prided themselves on their management of the national economy; economic growth and the expanding material life of the population were necessary to their legitimacy as authoritarian but 'efficient' governments.

The bubble finally burst in Japan in the late 1980s, but the effects were at first contained within Japan itself. The next instance was July 1997 in Thailand. This time it was contagious. Immediately, falling like dominoes, the currencies of South Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia were devalued in rapid succession. The economic consequences have been disastrous and will continue to be so for several years to come. The economic crisis was also responsible for exposing the unholy alliances between politicians and 'crony capitalists' in most countries in the region. Indeed, that such unholy alliances characterised in large part the economic growth in these nations was an open secret, but it took the economic downturn to expose the extent and depth of conspiracies. The worst case was that of Indonesia.

Once the veil of legitimacy, built on the 'ability' to generate economic growth, was torn away, the suppressed anger and alienation of the people who had endured the corruption returned with a vengeance.

The blatantly corrupt and much-hated regime of Soeharto finally came to an end with his 'resignation' in May 1998. Ensuing social revolution and sporadic localized violence severely tested the Indonesian military's will and ability to control the nation. In fact, it became clear that the much-feared forces of military repression of the pre-crisis days could not control the political mobilization of the entire population. The hunger and poverty that resulted from massive unemployment caused by the economic crisis continue to put great strain on whatever social goodwill assisted in keeping the multi-ethnic and multireligious nation together, leaving Indonesians in a state of sustained insecurity, afraid not only for what little property is left but also for their lives.

This book is going to press at a time when some stability has returned to the economies of most countries in the region, but economic recovery is still nowhere in sight, and nor is the political crisis in Indonesia nearly settled. It is a time when everyday life remains a struggle for those whose livelihoods are affected by the crisis, such as laid-off wage earners and bankrupt business owners. It is also, presumably, a time when public concerns about the moral implications of consumerism have somewhat subsided in the face of more pressing concerns. Across the board, the confidence of the region's population has been badly shaken by the crisis, and saving for the future, and for the possibilities of unemployment and bankruptcy, has become the major concern. The desire to consume has dwindled, leading to severe constriction of the retail sector: department stores have sustained large annual losses and are down-sizing, restaurants are closing and intra-Asia tourism has slowed to a trickle. It would seem appropriate, therefore, to rethink the issues of consumption under the present crisis conditions.

The first chapter has been recast to give an overview of the impact of the regional economic crisis on the issues of consumption discussed in the individual contributions. In addition, some of the contributors have also added further thoughts and new research to their respective chapters. However, it should be noted that not all the issues discussed are subject to the immediate impact of the economic crisis, particularly those which are historical and theoretical in character, concerning specific objects of consumption. These include the discussions on McDonald's in Singapore, the historical-cultural emergence of KTV in Taiwan, the changing perspective on America as a cultural object in Japan and the linkage between fashion and cultural formation. The chapters that cover these analyse specific moments in the issues of history of consumption and should be read in this light.

Finally, despite the current economic crisis, the accumulated wealth of the region's population has not been completely wiped out (with the possible exception of Indonesia, which was among the poorest countries in the world even before the crisis, and therefore had an extremely small middle class). The savings rates in the region remain very high relative to the developed countries in Europe and America. The savings rate in crisis-hit Malaysia, for example, was reportedly 40 per cent in January 1999 and total private savings, excluding compulsory social security savings, in crisis-affected Singapore stood at approximately US $55 billion. It is obvious that the crisis has not, and will not, lead to a regression to the days before the 'miraculous' growth of the 1960s. When recovery comes around, and as confidence expands, the 'consumption of lifestyles' will surely begin again. Perhaps the current self-imposed deprivation among those who still hold wealth may later spur them on with even greater force, taking consumption in Asia to new levels.

Indeed, we may not have to wait for too long. Even at the height of the crisis, the South Korean government encouraged those who were still in secure employment to continue to consume normally so as not to damage further the retail sector in the domestic economy by unnecessary saving. And, as some stability returns to the economy, the Malaysian government has allowed its civil servants to have one Saturday off every month to spend money on leisure activities within the country. It has taken to encourage people to 'show' some confidence in the government's effort in reviving the economy by spending money rather than save 'excessively' for the future. Thus, in spite of the current economic crisis which has understandably displaced issues of consumption in public discourse, the analytic value of the current book has not by this fact been erased at all.

Chua Beng-Huat
Singapore, December 1999

Acknowledgements

This volume of essays emerged out of a workshop held at the Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University, in September 1996. It was one of a series of six workshops that constituted The New Rich in Asia series, organised by and held at the Centre. All but three of the essays here—namely, those on Singapore, Indonesia and the People's Republic of China—were first presented in the workshop. In addition to the financial assistance for making the workshop possible, members of the administrative staff at the Centre were essential to the production of this text. I am indebted to the following individuals at the Centre: Director, Richard Robison, who is also the general editor of the New Rich in Asia Series, for chairing the workshop; Garry Rodan for his valuable comments during the workshop and support throughout the project; Del Blakeway for preparing and organising local facilities before and during the workshop; and past publication co-ordinator Mandy Miller for the first round of editing and formatting of the entire text. I would like to thank David Goodman for flying the 'red-eye' from Sydney to attend the workshop and providing the paper writers with valuable comments. It would have been impossible to bring out a volume on 'consumption', conceived in the triumphal days of rapid economic growth, in the midst of the most severe economic and political crisis in East and Southeast Asia for the past 30 years, were it not for the persuasive work done by the editorial staff at Routledge, and for this I am grateful. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the hardships that my wife and children had to bear during the intermittent periods of intense work that had to be put into this collection. This book is for them.

1 Consuming Asians: Ideas and Issues

Chua Beng-Huat

…and, above all, crowds of Asian consumers at McDonald's or with the ubiquitous mobile phone in hand.[1]

Since mid-1997, most of the hitherto rapidly expanding economies of East and Southeast Asia have been brought down to different stages of economic recession and crisis; the possible exceptions being Taiwan, which continues to enjoy economic growth, and the People's Republic of China (PRC), which is experiencing an economic slowdown not amounting to recession. Starting with the tumultuous devaluation of the Thai currency, the currency crisis spread to other Asian economies in quick succession, particularly those of South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia. Until this point, the first impression of foreigners and the first expression for locals, of the benefits of rapid economic growth in these countries had been the same: sustained economic growth had translated into a rapid expansion of consumerism as part of daily life, as illustrated by the opening quote which describes a street-scene in pre-crisis Asia. Undoubtedly the economic crisis has now decreased the level of consumption throughout the region.

However, it should be noted that not only have the effects of the crisis been unevenly distributed spatially, both within a given nation and across nations, they have also been unequally distributed across class divisions and in relation to the economic positions of individuals. Thus, even in the midst of economic crisis there were individuals, all over the region, who were able to capitalise on the radical price reductions brought about by the crisis and to accumulate desirable goods and services at a fraction of the prices during boom times. For example, in Indonesia, the worst-affected economy in the crisis, the radical devaluation of the Indonesian currency against the US dollar enabled individuals who had dollars either to pay off their mortgages outright or to sharply reduce the period of payment. To the extent that the crisis favoured those with either external incomes and/or cash, the purchasing of goods, particularly positional goods, continued, and the symbolic value of such goods was preserved among their owners. With the progressive stabilisation of the affected economies, beginning in early 1999, the sharp decline of consumption in the early days of the crisis will undoubtedly recover in step with economic recovery in each country.

Indeed, by the time of the 1997 economic crisis in Asia, the broad-based expansion of consumption had already been established in most of the affected locations in industrialised East and Southeast Asia, with the possible exception of Indonesia. However, the expansion had been unevenly distributed. Thus, with the exception of those who were rich enough to afford everything they desired, all social strata struggled to keep up with acquisition of objects which were within their respective 'normative' horizons of expectation. These horizons kept changing and expanding, adding new 'needs' and 'desires', and bringing additional stresses to everyday life. Daily life had been transformed into different 'lifestyles' by the consumer goods and services which marked out the new rich in Asia, a group constituted by the new class of businessmen and the emergent middle class of professionals and bureaucrats (Robison and Goodman 1996). Desire for a new lifestyle of consumerism among the new middle class was a phenomenon spawned not only by rapid economic growth in contemporary Asia but also by the global expansion of consumerism.

This collection of writings on consumption in different Asian countries has, therefore, three explicit aims. First, to provide empirical analysis of the changing objects and levels of consumption practices in various Asian countries, which are at different stages or levels of economic development and integration into global capitalism, from such low-income countries as the People's Republic of China and Indonesia to high-income ones like Japan and Singapore. Second, to examine the cultural/ideological discourse that the expansion of consumption engendered in different locations in Asia, across class, generational and ethnic divisions. Third, to engage conceptually the very extensive and continuously expanding social science literature spawned by the global expansion of consumption. The empirical instances analysed will provide opportunities to examine many of the prevailing concepts. For example, different facets of the idea of 'globalisation' are confronted in different chapters: 'globalisation as Americanisation'; the tension in the 'global/local' cultural development; the 'indigenisation' of globally marketed products. The entry point into this collection is, therefore, through a review of the extensive literature on consumerism, teasing out some of its themes and concepts which engage, explicitly or implicitly, the contributors to this collection. This global phenomenon is reflected in the explosion of social science literature on consumption as a field of investigation.

The phenomenon of consumption

By the late 1970s, with the vast expansion in globalised capitalism, consumption as a phenomenon could no longer be subsumed under the mantle of production (Friedman 1994:4–11). Consumption expansion had by then generated fundamentally different ways in which advanced capitalist societies were organised. This ‘reconfiguration’ has been conceptualised, in rather exaggerated manner, as a ‘new’ mode of domination: ‘the substitution of seduction for repression, public relations for policing, advertising for authority, needs-creation for norm-imposition. What ties individuals to society today is their activities as consumers, their life organised around consumption’ (Baumann 1987: 168 quoted in Warde 1994:59), Or in more modest terms:

> consumption is not a by-product of industrial production but a self-generating economy and way of life no longer limited to the ‘family unit’ but now characterised by highly fluid and heterogeneous channels of consumption that, in turn, are symptoms of important changes in the very conception of ‘production’ and ‘market’.
>
> (Chambers 1990:47–8)

Arguably, it is in the context of its effects and changes to capitalism that consumption as a subject for analysis in its own right finally emerged within the social sciences.

Pioneering works in the field of consumerism research were often grounded within the conceptual boundaries of specific social science disciplines and traditions.[2] Rapid developments in the field, as part of the investigation of popular culture, were aided by the emergence of a loosely conceptualised discipline of ‘Cultural Studies’, which spawned numerous journals in rapid succession.[3] Cultural Studies itself blossomed rapidly from its beginnings—in the English speaking world, from the pioneering works of Raymond Williams through the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies—with the popularisation of several ‘post-phenomena’[4]: postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism.[5] From mid-1970s, writings on consumption have proliferated and they continue unabated.

This proliferation is determined in part by the 'idea' of consumption as a phenomenon. Visually it is ubiquitous and indubitable, but conceptually its 'unity' is highly problematic. Each item in the constantly expanding array of goods and services which modern urban individuals and households have to consume routinely in order to reproduce their everyday life is surrounded by its own systems of production, distribution, marketing, procurement and, finally, consumption. Each of these systems is in turn constituted by its own multifaceted and segmental economies in an increasingly globalised capitalism.

Take the manufacturing of clothes, for example. The production of a particular garment is no longer located at a site within its local market catchment area but may be dispersed across different sites around the globe: an American clothing company may buy cotton from Africa, transform it into fabric in Switzerland, design the garment in New York, cut and sew it in one of an increasing number of locations in Asia. The finished garment is re-exported and distributed to its global market locations, including relatively affluent Asian ones. At these market locations, internationally organised marketing and advertising agencies work with local media and direct retailers to move the item to its final destination, that is, consumption by a particular individual or household. It is possible to analyse every point in this circuit from production to consumption. Multiplying these possibilities with the seemingly endless items of consumption will explain why social science literature on consumption continues to proliferate now that it has emerged from the dominance of production analysis.

The difficulties of examining every item of consumption on its own terms is one reason why much of the analysis has moved to the more generalised level of examining particular industries related to consumption. For example, the different ideological effects of the advertising industry and its techniques of interpellating individual consumers have been subjected to feminist, semiotic and psychoanalytic analysis (Williamson 1978; Wernick 1991; Nava, Blake, MacRury and Richards 1997). The retail sector as a whole has been studied through analyses of 'shopping' as a social, cultural and economic activity (Falk and Campbell 1997), of shopping mall as a location of consumption of dreams and desires, abetted by architectural designs and display technologies,[6] and of the interactions between sales-person and customers in the realisation of sale (Peretz 1995). All these retailing processes may be studied at a generalised level as part of the economy or examined through the routes travelled by specific items of consumption.[7]

A central concern of the analysis of particular items of consumption is the place of these objects in the identity construction of its consumers.

At its most elementary level, as found in market research literature, this concern is conceptually expressed in the idea of the 'investment' of self in objects (Belk 1998). At a more complex level, the concern is with broader cultural strategies 'of constitution of meaningful existence' (Friedman 1994:1), such as in Baudrillard's (1981) conceptualisation of consumption of the 'sign-value' of objects as an element in the process of identity formation in postmodernity.

The positive spin on the idea of consumption as identity formation contrasts sharply with earlier writings on consumption. For example, social scientists had been inclined to adopt the 1950s' (Packard 1957) image of consumers as easily manipulated, hoodwinked into buying products, useful or otherwise, by false promises emblazoned in advertisements; consumers were conceived as 'the malleable wax to the thumbprint of either commerce or the law' (Hebdige 1993:83). Such, for example, had been the Marxist tradition, which saw mass consumption as the instrument of capital which transformed working individuals into consumers in order to further its own interest—capital accumulation (Ewen 1976; Haug 1986). The classic statement for such an argument has to be, 'The man with leisure has to accept what the culture manufacturers offer him', from Horkheimer and Adorno of the founding generation of the Frankfurt School ([1944] 1972:124).[8]

In contrast, postmodernist writers project a different image of the consumer as one who actively uses mass-produced and mass-marketed commodities in ways other than those desired or dictated by the producers as projected through advertisements. Consumption is to be treated 'as a process by which artefacts are not simply bought and "consumed", but given meaning through their active incorporation in people's lives' (Jackson 1993:209). The innovative ways of using undistinguished mass-production goods are conceptualised as 'styles' which are expressive of the individualities/identities of the users. In the construction of lifestyles, the use-value of an object of consumption is secondary to the object's signifying effects, to its 'sign-value', organised around what Hebdige calls, 'a theology of appearances' (1993:89). Usages that go 'against the grain' are particularly highlighted as 'subversive' or 'aestheticised', as part of the 'cultural politics' of everyday life. Within this cultural politics, beyond the individual styles, social collectives are deemed to be constituted of a 'series of narrowly defined markets, targets, consumption, taste and status groups' (Hebdige 1993:88).

Significantly, the reconceptualisation of the consumer from 'passive automaton' to 'active creator' of new cultural meanings has not eliminated debate on 'morality' of consumption. Among the many forms that this morality debate take are those that turn on the, by now, old distinction between 'high' and 'low' cultures, between the moral 'spirituality' of 'high' art that often implies an asceticism in the face of material plenty against the immorality of the unquenchable 'materialism' of 'low' art. Promoters of high art conceive Art as a medium of intellectual/ spiritual reflection, a process that requires a long period of specialized training, of 'cultivation', both in its production and appreciation/ critique. According to Miller, such a stance is based on a Kantian perspective which 'is one of refusal, a foregoing of the immediate pleasure of the sensual and the evident in favour of a cultivated and abstracted appropriation through an achieved understanding' (1987:149). The best, if not the only, concession that these promoters of Art are willing to offer to popular culture is that it is not entirely devoid of aesthetic qualities, but its aesthetic is borrowed from Art and in the re-presentation of the appropriated aesthetic to the 'masses', the original Art is devalued (Macdonald 1957). Popular culture is thus seen as Art emptied of its 'intellectual/spiritual' elements the better to provide it with new meanings so as to re-embed it in the various media of mass consumption: product design, advertisement and other modes of 'entertainment', i.e., the 'capitalist cultural industry'. It should be readily apparent that the argument against the mass circulation of Art is one which privileges what Bourdieu calls the 'happy few' (1984:31), while the masses are condemned to the consumption of objects of 'vulgarised' aesthetics (Whiteley 1994), which depend only on immediate sensory perceptions. Acquisition of the unending proliferation of objects of consumption, repackaged with borrowed and devalued Art, is then conceptualised as the unreflective, excessive materialist orientation of modern life—'a preference for immediate entertainment, pleasure, the gut feeling, a regard for the sensual and the representational' (Miller 1987:150)—at the cost of tradition, spirituality and other supposed moral high grounds.

On the contrary, defenders of the popular inevitably invoke, amongst other things, critical class analysis of the rhetoric of Art (Bourdieu 1984). Against the background of electronic mass circulation and its effects, 'cultivated' artists and critics are seen as insignificant and impotent:

> What artist can compete with advertising when it comes to visual impact, ubiquity, effect and general exposure? What use is critical interpretation of a text or a semiotic reading of an image in a world where information never stays in place, where information, communication, images are instantly produced, transformed,

> discarded in a process of endless complexification, polyphony, supercession and flux?
>
> (Hebdige 1993:83)

Thus, against the view that mass circulation is a process of aesthetic degeneration, defenders of the popular conceptualise the embedding of artistic elements in everyday life—the mass circulation of Art itself—as a process of 'democratisation'. The consumer is in turn reconceptualised as active participants in the creation of social and cultural meanings; the consumption of lifestyles becomes a process of 'aestheticisation' of everyday life. An explicit formulation of this defence of consumerism is the configuration of what Warde (1994:69) characterised as a 'heroic consumer': 'consumer culture uses images, signs and symbolic goods that summon up dreams, desires and fantasies which suggest romantic authenticity and emotional fulfilment in narcissistically pleasing oneself' wherein 'people open themselves up to a wider range of sensations and emotional experiences' (Featherstone 1991:27 and 24).[9] Again, spirituality and consumerist materialism are drawn together. However, instead of being diametrically opposed orientations where consumerism is the death of spirituality, consumerism is rendered as the facilitator of spirituality.

This brief explication of the literature on consumption and consumerism in late capitalism in the developed West has resonance in the globalised economies and societies of Asia. However, local conditions in Asia will undoubtedly impact on the phenomenon, giving it new accents, meanings and nuances.

Consumption in the Asian context

> It is as consumers that the new rich of Asia have attracted an interest of almost cargo-cult proportions in the West. They constitute the new markets for Western products: processed foods, computer software, educational services and films and TV soaps. They are the new tourists, bringing foreign exchange in hard times.
>
> (Robison and Goodman 1996:1)

This statement was made before the mid-1997 economic crisis. Undoubtedly, the crisis has seriously hindered further expansion, even reversing the existing level of consumption as a significant proportion of the population in the region has become unemployed and risked sinking into poverty. In Singapore, an economy that had largely withstood the regional economic devastation, unemployment was 4.5 per cent in the third quarter of 1998, while in Indonesia, 50 per cent of the total population of 230 million was poverty stricken by the end of 1998. Yet there is no denying that there had been rapid economic growth in East and Southeast Asia in the past two to three decades. In every nation, the new industrial wage-earning, urban population could not avoid consuming mass-produced goods as they continued to increase their labour power. Every urban individual and household, whatever the income level, was likely to consume a range of what might be called 'discretionary' consumption goods that had become constitutive elements of their everyday life. For example, in Singapore, low-income families living in one-room rented public housing flats were rarely without such household durables as TVs, VCRs and telephones. However, the roots of the culture of consumerism remained relatively shallow in the region, unlike the situation in the developed West or Japan. Reflecting this shallowness was the fact that many Asian governments, before the economic crisis, were still using as measures of their respective administrative achievements, the number of TV sets, telephones and refrigerators in the households, i.e., goods that have become taken-for-granted 'necessities' in developed nations. This shallowness was significant in several ways.[10]

First, tangible improvement in the material conditions of the population had been, to varying degree, a cornerstone of governments in the region; it constituted the 'performance' criterion for political legitimacy. Second, class divisions, an emergent phenomenon because of late industrialisation, were becoming increasingly apparent, as evidenced by differing capacities to consume (Chua and Tan 1999). Third, in each nation, there remains a significant population segment who have lived through underdevelopment, whose collective memories of material deprivation and thrifty ways are still fresh. Their moral/ideological position on savings has made them resistant to the rapid expansion of consumerism. In addition, this group often sees the arrival of consumerist culture as the consequence of the penetration and contamination of traditional cultural practices by 'Western', particularly American, cultures. Thus, the moral debate on consumption has often been characterised as a 'generational conflict', supposedly between the deprived generation who embody thrift as a traditional value and the affluent and fast-spending, 'Westernised' generation.

Before the economic crisis, each of these three elements had received much public attention and generated its own social and political discourse on consumption in East and Southeast Asian nations. Together they framed the then prevailing public discourse of consumerism in these countries.

State and consumerism

Until the late 1980s, the governments of East and Southeast Asia were all at best semi-democratic, if not authoritarian. In all instances, one 'covenant' between the governments and their respective peoples was that of improved standards of living in exchange for restraints on political freedom; the more authoritarian the regime the more essential is high-economic growth to rationalise it, if overt repression were to be avoided. It was, therefore, in the interests of these governments to encourage expansion of consumption, as evidence of their successes in generating and maintaining economic growth.

Yet, ironically, with the exception of Hong Kong where the flaunting of wealth in conspicuous public display was a regular affair drawing little public approbation (*Asia Magazine,* 19–21 January, 1996),[11] the same Asian governments concurrently emphasised the need for restraint on consumerist lifestyles for several reasons. The first and most immediate reason was that these governments encouraged high savings among their respective populations as part of the process of capital formation and reduced dependency on international borrowing. For example, Taiwan and Singapore are among the nations with the highest capital reserves in the world. In Singapore, stringent conditions for issuing of credit cards and unsecured personal loans are still in place; for example, credit cards are not issued to any individual whose monthly income is less than Singapore $2000 (in the current economic downturn this is equivalent to the salary level of young professionals with several years of working experience). Thus, it is important to note here that excessive borrowing of foreign funds by private-sector enterprises, which is a significant cause of the current economic crisis, has little to do with private individuals' debts resulting from excessive consumption.

Second, consumerist culture might lead to 'excessive' materialistic orientation, generating insatiable demands for which a government might be held responsible if it were unable to provide. A manifestation of this was people's complaints against ever-increasing costs of living while simultaneously expanding and upgrading their consumer choices. For example, in Singapore, in the election year of 1996–7, cost-of-living increases were capitalised on by opposition parties and turned into a political issue (*Straits Times,* 7 August, 1996).

Third, 'excessive' consumerism of those who were economically successful inevitably served as a reminder to the lower-income groups of their own deprivations, thus exposing and emphasising class divisions, potentially generating social disunity and class conflict. For example, in the aftermath of the riots on 27 July, 1996 that followed the government's storming of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) headquarters in Jakarta, a political scientist suggested that the rioters were partly made up of unemployed urban youth. According to him, these youths were 'living in an urban environment increasingly impregnated by market advertising and consumer lifestyles' and had therefore acquired 'a cumulative sense of severe deprivation' that could be 'easily exploited, motivating them to acts of desperation and destruction'. He further suggested that it was this concern that prompted the then highly authoritarian Soeharto government in Indonesia to appeal to its rich citizens to adopt 'simple lifestyles' (Juwono Sudarsono quoted in *Straits Times,* 8 August, 1996).[12] For the above reasons, among others, a moral/ ideological discourse against 'excess' was generated and circulated by governments, particularly in Southeast Asia and Korea, with the hope of keeping demands in check.

Finally, many of the Asian countries maintained an anti-welfarist administrative stance either because of economic underdevelopment or explicit ideological commitment. This stance acted to restrain expansion of consumption. Without consumption subsidies through welfarism, individuals and households were forced to purchase at substantial costs certain goods and services which are often provided as a public service in developed nations. For example, in the absence of adequate publicly-funded child-care and elderly-care facilities, affluent middle-class families often engaged live-in domestic maids from poorer neighbouring countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia to take care of the young and the old, along with other domestic chores. These services could consume a substantial portion of a family's disposable income, significantly reducing its discretionary expenditure. For many families the cost of such services meant they had to take on additional paid work, such as doing overtime or moonlighting in supplementary employment. In turn, these additional work commitments were hailed by the governments concerned as signs of 'Asian' ethics of hard work, in contrast to growing dependency in the welfare states of the West. With the current economic crisis, the hiring of foreign maids has become less affordable. This has led to wage cuts and lay-offs, which often also means the maids being sent home. Thus, those who were already among the lowest-paid workers in the region suffer the most. In one instance, for example, an employment agency transferred its placement fees entirely onto the Indonesian women who were seeking employment in Singapore, in contrast to the 'normal' practice of charging the employer.

In sum, official discourses on consumption were always ambivalent: concurrently promoting expansion of consumption as the basis of political legitimacy and also exhorting restraint for fear of political and social disquiet. However, this ambivalence had very identifiable outer limits. Discouraging consumerism among local citizens could potentially undermine the viability of the extensive retail sector which had been directly encouraged by several of the governments, i.e., through land-use allocations for shopping centres, which was most apparent in the cases of Singapore, Hong Kong and Bangkok, Thailand. Although supposedly aimed at tourists, these shopping centres inevitably also stimulated, and catered to, the desires of the local population. With the tourist dollar shrinking, particularly after the burst of the Japanese economic bubble in the early 1990s, the retail sectors throughout major tourist cities in Asia have been in recession for the past several years.[13]

The retail-sector recession has, of course, deepened as a result of the economic crisis that has afflicted the entire region since mid-1997. In addition to the absence of tourist dollars, the respective domestic populations have also drastically reduced their discretionary expenditure because of actual unemployment or the fear of it. As the extensive retail sector constitutes a very significant part of the domestic economy, the need to prop it up has led all the governments in the region, with the possible exception of Indonesia, to encourage those who still have steady employment to spend their money rather than save excessively, albeit with varying levels of success (the private savings rate in Malaysia stood at 40 per cent in the midst of current economic crisis (*Straits Times,* 18 December, 1998)). To stimulate consumption, the Singapore and Hong Kong tourist boards and their retail organisations intensified the promotion, throughout Asia, of their respective annual month-long 'Great Sale'. While in Malaysia, the government had reduced the minimum level of monthly credit card payment from 15 to 5 per cent (*Straits Times,* 18 December, 1998). In general, the crisis-stricken economies need to stimulate consumption to kick-start the domestic economy which may, in turn, provide, at least symbolically, a sense of confidence in the economies themselves. The epitome of the need to stimulate consumption is to be found in the insistence that Japan must aggressively 'stimulate' domestic consumption in order to help the ailing economies of Asia, including its own. Indeed, one of the obstacles to recovery has been the high level of intra-Asian trade, as the ailing economies have no financial means to continue to import and consume each other's products (Park 1998). Thus, across the region, the 'traditional' morality of savings is to be sacrificed in order to save capitalism in Asia! And government exhortations and administrative strategies to restrain consumption have given way to a drive to stimulate consumption among those who have not been adversely affected.

The 'curse' of Westernisation

Whereas the political Other of Taiwan, and now of Hong Kong, continues to be the PRC, the official discourse of Southeast Asian countries, especially in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, has long been a trope of being 'anti-West' in general and anti-American in particular. The primary motivation behind this anti-Westernism is political. The emphasis on liberal democracy based on individual rights in Western developed nations constitutes an ideological challenge to the authoritarian and semi-democratic states in Asia. The political differences are often discursively formulated, in Asia, in terms of the 'Otherness' of the West; thereby creating the space for a discourse of cultural 'difference' between the 'East' and the 'West', in which the latter is criticised as an 'unhealthy' cultural penetration into 'wholesome' cultures of the former (Chua 1996). The bridgehead of this 'insidious invasion' is supposedly in the 'Western culture' that is inscribed in products imported from the West. This 'Asian' cultural critique can be gleaned from the difference with which goods from Japan and the West, particularly America, are ideologically treated in the importing nations.

Asia is the market not only for Western but also, very significantly, for Japanese consumer goods. Yet, with the exception of Taiwan (Ching 1994), there is no anti-Japanism in the consumer cultural discourse, as there is anti-Americanism. The difference in attitudes is due only in part to the 'cultural' contents of the goods imported from the two countries.

In general, the bulk of Japanese imports to the rest of Asia are identified with 'technology' items, for example, household goods such as cars, TVs, refrigerators, radios and other electronic goods. Japanese technological 'superiority' is recognised in these consumer goods. However, they are seen as instruments without 'cultural' substance. For example, as in the case of TV or different kinds of audio-receiving or audio-recording instruments, the substantive TV and music programmes for these instruments, in which cultural contents are embedded, are overwhelmingly dominated by American products, not only in Asia but globally.[14] It is to the 'cultural' contents that the anti-Western and anti-American sentiments are ideologically directed.

Mass-entertainment programmes are seen as the carriers and harbingers of Western/American 'liberal' values, especially that of individualism. The programmes are deemed to reflect the moral 'laxity' of liberalism, where individual rights and self-interest rule, with such disastrous consequences as high divorce rates, legal protection for criminals over the rights of crime victims, sexual promiscuity and drug abuse. While these may be common themes of films, TV programmes and popular music from the West, and particularly America, they are read as reflecting the 'reality' that is America; i.e., a land where criminals are sometimes turned into folk heroes and promiscuity is celebrated. The official fear is ostensibly that liberal individualism will make inroads into the cultural sphere of local Asian populations, leading them away from local 'traditional' values and undermining local social cohesion. The discourse of value conflict reached an apogee in its being reformulated as a 'clash of civilisations' by the American professor of political science Samuel Huntington (1993; see also, Mahbubani 1994). In this mutually 'demonising' discourse on cultural difference, 'America' has a central symbolic place. It is, on the one hand, a place of attraction for populations which are deprived of democratically guaranteed freedoms. On the other hand, it is a place of 'moral decadence' for governments which are reluctant, even afraid, to institutionalise the same freedoms. 'America' is thus both an object of attraction and repulsion.

That the anti-West/anti-American discourse in Asia *vis-à-vis* the critique of consumerism has been somewhat self-serving on the part of local governments, regardless of economic conditions, is quite obvious. The conservative values that these governments juxtaposed against liberalism have the potential effect of generating support for the political status quo, thus benefiting the government.[15] While such official readings of Western/American popular cultural products obviously do not give serious consideration to the complex character of local reception (Chua 1998), they are not without public resonance, otherwise their ideological efficacy will be very limited indeed. Until the economic crisis that has engendered in the entire population in the region a sense of economic uncertainty, support for official condemnation of emergent 'decadence' in the cultural sphere had come largely from the generations who had just emerged from economic underdevelopment themselves, and the target of their criticism was the later generations who grew up in conditions of relative prosperity. However, current economic uncertainties and the difficulties of finding and keeping employment may have given the hitherto 'affluent' generations the same sobering lessons of the need to be thrifty, much to the detriment, as mentioned earlier, of the domestic retail sector.

Generational divide: the consuming youth

Against the background of economic deprivation of the period before rapid economic growth in the nations in question and until the recent economic crisis, the youth of East and Southeast Asia had been, relative to their elders, 'children of affluence'. Their exposure to and participation in globalised consumerism had, in the eyes of the elders, transformed them into exemplars of lifestyle consumers, inscribed with 'Western decadence'.

Generally speaking, the period between teenagehood and marriage —'youth' —is a window for unlimited consumption, constrained only by financial circumstance. Without concerns for 'big' ticket items like a house and unburdened with familial concerns, one can freely spend on oneself. The body thus emerges as the primary locus of consumption, with body adornment its primary modality. Consumption patterns of youth are thus highly visible and make an easy target for criticisms. There is a tendency to criticise youth for excesses in their 'yuppy' lifestyles; togged out in 'designer' or 'branded' clothes and accessories and spending time and money in discos and expensive foreign restaurants, a condition only aggravated by stints of living and studying in foreign lands in the case of returned students.

This criticism of 'excesses' was at the same time both economic and moral/ideological. The older generation was inclined to suggest that they were 'frugal' by attitude or character in contrast to the profligacy of the new youth. Yet, the fact is that the older generations lived in underdeveloped conditions in which 'poverty' and 'frugality' were indistinguishable phenomenon; frugality was the only response to poverty, to force of circumstance. The critique of the old was thus a classic case of ideology formation: 'naturalising' the historical response of being frugal, making a virtue out of necessity. The question, of course, remains: Would they have been frugal if they had the relative wealth of the younger generations?

Under the cloud of moralising criticisms, the question remains unanswered as to just how spendthrift were the new wage-earning populations in Asia. As an empirical question it requires serious research. For example, in two newspaper-financed national surveys, Singaporeans as a whole and youths in particular were found to be more responsible about money than the popular image of 'excessive' consumption promoted by the media itself would suggest. In one survey, it was found that if Singaporeans desired a consumer item but had no money at hand: 67 per cent would save up money before making the purchase; 53 per cent would forget about buying altogether; no more than 20 per cent would borrow from family members, friends or banks to make the purchase or pay by instalments (*The New Paper,* 15 May, 1994). In another, it was discovered that among the most popular jeans among Singaporean youth were not the high-priced designer jeans but the low-end Gordiano jeans made in Hong Kong (*Straits Times,* 31 July, 1995). In one survey of South Koreans, more than 90 per cent of respondents thought that excessive consumption was a serious social problem in Korea, but more than 80 per cent of the same respondents said that they were not excessive consumers themselves![16] At an abstract level, applicable to all the Asian nations investigated in this book, the question concerns the actual rate of change of people's attitude towards money: How quickly do people move from being frugal, an attitude borne of economic underdevelopment, to being spendthrift in newly industrialising nations? It would appear from the Singapore example that the frugality has more staying power than is assumed by the gatekeepers of social morality, from government to media.

The ideological/moral criticism of excesses had a 'cultural' as well as an economic element, directed at the supposed 'Westernisation' or 'Americanisation' of Asian youth. This can be best illustrated by examining youth fashion. At a very general level, a perennial question regarding youth fashion is: Why do youth always dress to 'shock' their elders, without any apparent understanding that 'shock' is a mechanism through which teenagers define themselves against their parents, thus acquiring identity as 'youth'? A second issue is parents' scepticism regarding youth's claim to 'individuality' through the way they dress; they point out that the latter in fact wear similar clothes and are thus conforming to a code rather than breaking away with individual styles. Such criticism fails to engage with a central characteristic and dynamic of 'fashion'. In fashion, consumers' desire to be different is a limited desire of individualising *within* a trend. Few desire to be totally different from the others, because this would mean reducing oneself to being 'weird' rather than 'fashionable'. Fashion is necessarily a trend, which is constituted by mass participation. To be 'fashionable' is to be with the trend, with the crowd. Individuality is expressed through the way fashionable items are configured on one's own body rather than by breaking with the fashionable crowd.

Regarding 'Americanisation', to the extent that the fashionable items are largely derived from 'styles' found in the US-dominated globalised popular culture industries, such as TV, movies and popular music, youth has been criticised for 'aping' the West. Evidence of this 'mimicking' is still readily found in the easy availability in stores that specialise in a wide spectrum of items of what may be called 'American street fashion'. One reading of this mimicking, preferred by the older generations, is that it is symptomatic of cultural confusion of youth who are lost in terms of their own essential identity as 'Asians'. However, there is little to suggest this supposed 'confusion' outside the fashion sphere. Indeed, youth in Asia seem always to have been very stable and socially responsible.

In most of the Asian nations in question, youth delinquency rates have been never particularly high, while rates of passing stringent examinations in the highly competitive education systems have remained high, if not increased over recent decades. Even in Indonesia, where there were persistent high unemployment rates among youth, public order was not routinely disrupted by confused and disgruntled youth. Their wrath was apparently stored and reserved for corrupt politicians, being unleashed during the economic crisis to bring down the Soeharto regime, and instead of being confused, they constitute the moral force in the sustained agitation for fundamental political change.

An alternative interpretation of the lifestyles of youth, including fashion consumption, may be offered here. The 'identity confusion' argument is intelligible only against a background assumption that identity formation and stability is entirely dependent on a notion of unchanging 'tradition'. However, the youth are drawn elsewhere. Youth in Asia, as in other parts of the world, draw from an 'image bank' that is internationalised through popular mass media. The reference point in the imaginary is, therefore, a globalised image of youth rather than local cultural images. It is the global rather than the local that provides their identity as 'youth'. However, consumption of this global image unavoidably passes through local cultural and political conditions.

Thus, in particular instances, where the spaces of everyday life are institutionally highly administered within reinvented local 'traditions' aimed at eliciting conformity from the populations, as is the case in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Taiwan (Chun 1996), America can and has been transformed in the local ideological Imaginary as an icon of 'freedom'; the land of freedom, where individuality and differences rule, and are indeed celebrated. The attractiveness of American street fashion continues to be filtered through the suppressed desires of the Asians in question. In this sense, debates on 'Americanisation' in the cultural sphere have more to do with ideological contests within the Asian states themselves than with what is 'really' going on in America. Consumed through local semiotics, American products have been used to express resistance to local repressions. 'America' as an imaginary terrain is but a metaphor in the contest for freedom versus restraints in the body politics of Asian nations.

The impact of the economic crisis

As a result of the economic crisis that began in mid-1997, the three features discussed above have been focused on somewhat less in public discourse as individual citizens turn their attention to actual or possible unemployment and affected countries become preoccupied with macroeconomic deflation and prolonged recession. The much-touted ‘performances’ of many governments in the region have been exposed as a veneer laid over massive corruption and nepotism leading, as the veneer was stripped away, to political change, even crisis. For example, in the year between mid-1997 and mid-1998, South Korea elected the veteran opposition party into the presidency for the first time; Thailand changed its prime minister from an ex-military general associated with corruption and economic incompetence to a civilian leader with popular support; Japan went through changes of prime ministers and finance ministers and, in the worse case of Indonesia, the more than 30-year reign of Soeharto ended abruptly, realising a popular desire that was, nevertheless, unimaginable until the event actually took place on 14 May, 1998. In countries with relatively clean governments, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, the ability of the existing governments to avoid sliding into economic crisis, let alone to sustain previous growth has been severely tested.

The boundaries of the emergent class divisions, noted earlier, have also been blurring as unemployment, or its likelihood, affected every rank of wage earners and bankruptcy threatened owners of enterprises of all sizes. In the latter case, luxury goods that were acquired to announce business successes in good times often had to be unloaded at fire-sale prices before being ‘repossessed’ by the finance companies or banks. Symbolically, the most dramatic of such sales must have been the weekend ‘flea/flee’ market for the once wealthy in Bangkok, where goods ranging from expensive items of self-adornment, such as expensive watches, to private modes of luxurious transportation, such as imported cars and private aeroplanes, were placed on sale for a fraction of their purchased prices. In Hong Kong and Singapore, the respective property bubbles burst, causing inflated prices to plunge by up to 50 per cent in both private and public housing. The differing financial experiences across generations have also been narrowed by the economic crisis. Individuals who had experienced only the affluence of the past two to three decades have been made to face, directly or indirectly, the anxieties and hardships of unemployment and other kinds of economic uncertainty. They have become more frugal and are thus now closer to the older generation in attitudes towards money.

However, it is important to note that the effects of the crisis have fallen unevenly on the middle classes and the rich. The selling-off of property by a segment of relatively wealthy consumers has, simultaneously, eased the entry into property ownership for those who have hitherto been propertyless and provided opportunities for others who, with secure and continuing employment, have been looking to upgrade their accommodations, buying properties that would have been unaffordable before the crisis.[17] The crisis conditions thus favour those with cash; as the saying goes, 'Cash is king'. Commodities, including real estate, which had been exorbitant and out of reach of the many have become available at bargain prices for those with cash.

It is also interesting to note that, rather than diminishing in times of recession, the symbolic value of consumption becomes all the more important. The need to 'maintain' a lifestyle is all the more necessary for one of the newly rich to communicate to the world that is falling apart around him/her that he/she remains 'unaffected' and continues to be doing well economically, in hope of retaining the confidence of colleagues and business associates. Thus, even in the worst case of Indonesia, one still needs to make the rounds of the bars and other popular haunts at regular intervals in order to be seen to be able still to afford the time and the price, even if one is drinking and eating at a much reduced rate (*Straits Times,* 2 May, 1998). If at all possible, one should buy a new house and/or a new car to demonstrate both the soundness of one's financial position and business savvy in buying when prices are down. So, in Singapore, in December 1998, in the midst of the economic downturn, 200 new Mercedes were sold in the first week of the annual car show![18] The concern, therefore, is not abstinence but rather manipulating the symbolic value of consumption.

Finally, the softening of public focus and discussion on consumption expansion and emergent consumer culture notwithstanding, the centrality of consumption expansion to the political legitimacy of the respective governments continues to render consumption a privileged site for analysing both 'escapes' from and 'resistance' to their respective domination. In general, as a mode of privatisation of everyday life, material consumption is a sphere of activity that is largely beyond state regulation. Where consumption activities are subject to direct policing by the state, such as in censorship of movies, reading material and popular music, these activities can emerge as sites of ideological contestation and resistance.[19]

Again in general, the politics can be analysed at two levels: the first and most obvious level, is in terms of the ways which consumption as a social phenomenon produces and reproduces class relations and privileges in the societies examined. The second level is in terms of how specific sites of consumption constitute moments of ideological escape from or contestations of the official discourse in the polities examined. Contestation may be analysed through either the political processes in the consumption sites themselves or by offering alternatives to official discourse on a particular object of consumption. The case studies in this volume will exemplify the politics of consumption both at a regionally generalisable level and at the level of specific privileged objects at specific locations.

The chapters

The chapters in this collection may be placed within the discursive space delineated by the interaction of the conceptual developments in the study of consumption and the three features of the public discourse on consumption prevailing to different degrees in various countries in Asia. The outline of this discursive space and the location of the chapters may be marked in the following manner. First, it should be apparent that the discourse on consumption in the countries of East and Southeast Asia is still very much tied to issues of their respective political economies. This serves as a corrective to the overemphasis on the symbolic and the personal in the conceptual concerns of contemporary European and American studies of consumption, where the context of an already developed economy is implicitly assumed. The embeddeness in political economy also places the discussion on consumption closer to the ideological and political contests in the respective Asian countries analysed. Thus, in most of the chapters, the level of economic and political development of the country in question is examined not only as part of the context but also as a determining element in issues of consumption. Second, as expansion of consumption is a relatively recent phenomenon throughout most of industrialised Asia, the moral/ideological discourse remains one of 'traditional' thrift against 'excesses' in consumption, rather than a debate on high art versus degenerate art. This thrift/excess debate is examined in the chapters on South Korea and Malaysia. The translation of this debate into actual social divisions constituted by differences in personal attitudes towards consumption is explored in the chapter on the internal differentiation of the new middle class in Hong Kong. In many Asian countries, the 'excesses' were supposedly imported from the 'West' or specifically 'America'; the 'degeneracy' laid not in the aesthetics of the consumer goods but in the 'West'/'America', rendering the latter an ideological Other in public discourse on consumption. This discursive/ ideological position has been turned into an object of analysis in its own right in the chapters from Singapore and Japan, which take up the question of 'America' and 'Americanisation' directly. Third, the national specificities of Asian countries do not render invalid the conceptual formulation of an active consumer who uses consumer goods and services to resist and contest the constraints of the normative and to fashion different symbolic universes in which self and group identities may be realised. The chapters on Taiwan and Indonesia address these issues in their respective locations. In this context, the Indonesian case is particularly ironic, as the issue of 'lifestyles' seems to have sprouted in the very infertile ground of an economically poor country. Even before they sink further into abject poverty in the face of the current economic crisis, the consumption situation of the overwhelming majority of the population was more concerned mostly with meeting daily survival needs than any idea of 'lifestyling'. For a sense of the uplifting of a whole population from a very low income base into higher rungs of consumption, we have the case of the People's Republic of China, where the primary consumption concerns are still at the level of accumulating household goods.

A certain shift in analytical framework is necessary for the inclusion of a chapter from Australia. Australia, geographically a continent unto itself and the immediate neighbour of Southeast Asia, has historically been culturally and economically oriented towards Europe and America. In recent years, however, largely because of the ascendancy of capitalism in Asia, and despite the current economic decline, Australia has become increasingly 'Asian'-oriented, seeking greater economic co-operation, if not integration, and greater regional political dialogue. However, reflecting both its developed economic context and its Western intellectual orientations, the chapter from Australia is located squarely in contemporary theoretical debates on popular culture and consumption, in contrast to those from within Asia, thus making apparent the distance between Australia and Asia both in intellectual orientation and in economic and political development, thereby illustrating the actual and conceptual difficulties of 'Asianising Australia' (see Ang and Stratton 1996 and Chen 1996).

Let us discuss the chapters in greater detail. Until the recent economic downturn, Asia had been an important destination for the global marketing of consumer goods. The emergent culture of consumption of the new rich in Asia undoubtedly contains several general and generalisable features. However, any discursive delineation of this emergent culture would be unable to account for the different paths through which consumerism is culturally expressed in the different countries, since local/national patterns might be expressed through particular modalities or objects of consumption. Examination of locally privileged modalities and objects may, therefore, provide better insights into their respective cultural spheres. For example, street-food is ubiquitous in all Asian cities, and is a key component of their informal atmosphere. However street-food provides a privileged entry into the cultural hybridity of everyday life of multiracial

Singapore, in particular, which official insistence on racial categories tends to gloss over (Chua and Rajah 1996). Analysis of locally/nationally privileged objects of consumption within a discernible generalised pattern across nations is thus necessary, not as a supplementary piece but as a central component in any serious attempt to understand the patterns of consumption among Asia's new rich.

A general pattern of consumption among Asia's new rich can be gleaned from the case study of Malaysia. The obvious objects of consumption among the emerging Malaysian middle class were housing, cars and children's education. That same range of goods and services was in demand across Asia, although not explicitly mentioned in all the chapters. There was, therefore, a certain level of homogenisation of lifestyle among the emergent new rich in Asia. In economically good or bad times, all three items are both symbolic and functional. Children's education has always been both an investment in their future and a symbolic display of the parents' ability to pay. Similarly, houses are always functional and simultaneously one of the best media for conspicuous display of wealth. And, perhaps more specific to Asia, anyone who calls the latest model Mercedes, purchased at inflated prices and maintained at high cost, merely a 'car' clearly misses the symbolic point of such a possession. Obviously, these large items of consumption contribute much to the 'identity' of their owners/consumers.

Even under favourable economic conditions, the high costs of housing, car and education account for a very large proportion of the incomes of professionals in Asia, thereby limiting their expenditure on other consumption items. Take Singapore, which ranks within the top ten wealthiest countries globally,[20] as an example. The Prime Minister noted that 'for the middle-income Singaporeans, there [was] not enough money' (*Straits Times,* 28 April, 1996) because of the high cost of property and cars.[21] The fact that the Singaporean middle class had been willing to 'impoverish' itself in cash just to own a house and a car only reinforced the generalisable claim that these two items of status, or positional goods, were central to the lifestyle of Asia's new rich. With the economic crisis, every middle-class household's ability to maintain all these 'big ticket' items is being severely tested. Children who had been in boarding schools or universities overseas have been called back, as the spiraling fall in the relative value of Asian currencies has made their continuing maintenance overseas difficult, especially during the early days of the crisis in mid-1997. Meanwhile, status goods such as cars and houses have been sold off quickly to reduce debt and avoid bankruptcy. Not everyone succeeded in rescuing themselves financially; many have seen their houses repossessed and sold in public auctions. However, as suggested above, such selloffs also create opportunities for those who are cash-rich to accumulate much-desired durable assets or ostentatious items of self-adornment.

As suggested in the introductory remarks, the general expansion of consumption in Asia had taken place against a historical background whereby collective memories of material deprivation of the recent past were very much alive. The memories in turn framed a moral discourse against this expansion in general and the consumption by youth in particular. This discourse is examined, among other things, in the case study on South Korea, which is Chapter 3 in this volume. Not surprisingly, attitudinal surveys in South Korea on consumption expansion appeared to be full of contradictions. As noted earlier, while more than 90 per cent of the respondents in a national survey agreed that 'excessive' consumption was a social problem, only 4 per cent of the same respondents considered themselves excessive consumers. Who then was doing all the 'excessive' consumption? The moral, or perhaps more accurately 'moralising', discourse is thus best read as an ideological discourse that emerged at a point of changing attitudes, when perception was as significant as actual change itself.

The younger generations appear to have perceived themselves to be more consumerist than their elders, thus apparently accepting the latter's moral disapproval. Beyond South Korea, such an admission can still be easily drawn from youth anywhere in industrialised Asia. For example, it is common to hear, in Singapore, that the younger people of today are much more materialistic and consumerist than previous generations. Furthermore, this can be 'empirically verified' by the sheer number of consumer goods the younger generations possess in comparison to those owned by their elders in their youth. However, it should be noted that such simple 'verification' misreads and confuses the 'ability' to consume with 'attitude' towards consumption. The question remains: Had the elders not been economically deprived because of economic underdevelopment and had been instead as affluent as the youth of today, would they have been less consumption-oriented? I very much doubt it.

Significantly, memories of past deprivations need not be experienced as 'generational differences' in Asia. There are throughout newly industrialised Asia an abundance of individuals who lived through the period of social and economic transition. They embody in their own lives the differences between the two eras of deprivation and affluence. Their biographies are inscribed by these differences and the past continues to express itself in their attitudes to the present. The persistence of past attitudes to money and consumption is examined in Chapter 5 on the Hong Kong middle class. Here the social origins of members of the new rich are shown to have a significant effect on their attitudes to the aesthetics of consumption. These social origins, expressed through consumer 'tastes', serve as markers in the internal differentiation of the new middle class itself.

In contrast to Singapore, South Korea, Malaysia and Hong Kong where a new middle class has already been established, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Indonesia remain at the other end of the continuum, where the middle class is barely emerging and even now is apparent only in urban areas. With the current economic crisis in Indonesia, the ranks of the middle class, which was sparse to begin with, have been severely depleted, as more and more people sink into poverty. However, as the case studies of the PRC and Indonesia in this volume show, even under conditions of relative underdevelopment, identity construction and status display through consumer products seem unavoidable, as goods become loaded with social meaning. This can be examined at two levels: the household level and the individual level. The former enables the analyst to capture the general consumption patterns of the society as a whole, bringing into relief the presence of widely maintained normative standards in consumption, while the latter provides information on the strategy of individual identity construction under conditions of deprivation.

The household level is examined in Chapter 4 on the PRC. Given its relative economic underdevelopment, the primary status goods at the household level in the PRC were far more modest than in the industrialised Asian countries. Consumption practices evinced an interesting 'collective' phenomenon, reflecting the general economic condition. Advancement in consumption appeared to move in terms of 'clusters of goods'. The 'big four' items of sewing machines, watches, bicycles and radios in the days before economic reform was introduced in the late 1980s gave way to the 'big six' of colour TVs, refrigerators, electric fans, washing machines, cameras and tape recorders. Conceptually, each rung of the 'consumption ladder' was constituted by a discrete cluster of goods. A family would likely attempt to climb up the next rung up when it was in possession of all the items that constituted a lower rung. These are the stages that many of the currently relatively affluent countries in Asia would have gone through on their own road to development.

Take the case of the sewing machine, for example. Up to the late 1970s, one of the skills that many female Singaporeans acquired was dress-making. In addition to commercial dress-making 'schools', community centres all over the country had dress-making classes to cater to this demand. Every household either owned or strove to own a sewing machine; it formed part of the bride's dowry in marriage. Dresses were largely home-made. By the late 1980s, it was rare to find any female Singaporean under 30 years of age who could sew. Clothing, reconfigured as fashion, is now purchased off-the-peg, according to one's consumption capacity, in stores of all sizes. The sewing machine trade is a dying trade and a sewing machine repair person is now a rarity. I know of two individuals who have switched trade from selling and repairing sewing machines in Singapore to re-exporting industrial sewing machines from textile industries in Singapore to less-developed countries such as Pakistan and Vietnam.

Even before the current political and economic crisis, Indonesia was already the poorest of the countries analysed in this volume. For the purposes of examining consumption practices, there is, ironically, a certain analytic advantage in studying Indonesia. The generally low level of consumption in the population as a whole served to bring into relief the symbolic aspect of consumption. Certain commodities, which signified an imagined 'lifestyle' of the 'middle class' were found to be prominently displayed in the home or worn on the body. However, these displayed items would often be considered 'insignificant' and 'unworthy' goods by wealthier individuals. The items displayed in the home included plastic icons that signified distant lands but could be obtained without having to travel, while bodily adornments of clothes and inexpensive jewellery were usually borrowed or owned collectively by those who pooled their meagre resources to buy them. Reflecting the underdeveloped economic conditions, no credit facilities were available for making personal purchases in Indonesia. The 'overemphasis' of the 'symbolic' in the Indonesian instance is nicely captured by turning the noun 'lifestyle' into a verb, 'lifestyling'. As 'style' was more important than 'life', the specific consumption practices might be properly labelled 'postmodern', in a socio-economic context where modernity and modernisation are still far off in the distance.

The chapters on Malaysia, South Korea, Hong Kong, the PRC and Indonesia collectively examine a set of interrelated aspects of the generalised phenomenon of rapid expansion of consumerism as a way of life of Asia's new middle class. However, as suggested earlier, for a more comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon, certain locations are best examined through particular and privileged objects of consumption, which embody the conditions of emergence, reproduction and change of both the locations and the objects. The specificity of both the sites and the objects provide insights into the differentiation of lifestyles across national boundaries and dispels any easy conclusion regarding the cultural 'homogenisation' of Asia and its new middle class. The analysis on the cultural significance of KTV in Taiwan in Chapter 7 bears this out.

As an indigenous cultural product which emerged out of the specific context of Taiwan in the 1980s and subsequently spread globally, KTV is more than just a mode of entertainment. It represented the historical moment in which the economic, cultural, political and social forces in Taiwan coalesced into a specific object of consumption. The list of constitutive elements included traces of different indigenous and successive colonial—particularly Japanese and Han Chinese—cultures, that is, the cultural heritage of singing in public; post-War American popular cultural influence; the rise of consumerism in the newly industrialising economy; the need to 'escape' from regulations of the military state and, in the case of youth, from the surveillance of families; and, finally, the entrepreneurial acumen of operating in cultural margins with the collusion of corrupt government officials and agencies. All these elements played their respective roles in the creation of the KTV. However, as soon as it crossed cultural and national boundaries and became just one of many alternative modes of entertainment its cultural significance was lost, as the new locations appropriated it into their local cultural contexts.

For ideological reasons, recognition that the cultural meanings of an object change when it crosses boundaries may be intentionally suppressed. This is the case with the ideological thematisation of 'American' cultural products in different parts of Asia because, as mentioned earlier, 'America' occupies a symbolically central place in the culture/ ideology of these locations. Indeed, given the overwhelming dominance of America in the global popular culture industry, the ideological thematisation of 'America' is much more widespread than Asia. This is reflected in the marketing of American products in one of two ways: the 'celebration' of 'America' or the suppression of 'America', depending on the ideological context of the country in question. In Chapter 8 this either/or process is analysed through a comparison of the marketing strategies of McDonald's in Singapore and in European locations, thus highlighting the tension between global products and local culture.

Being one of the most aggressive promoters of 'Asian' values as the cultural underpinning of capitalism in Asia, the political leadership of Singapore has been very explicit in its condemnation of 'American' decadence.[22] Against this ideological background, to sell McDonald's via selling 'America' would have incurred the wrath of the state. Therefore, in seeking to insert itself into the daily life of Singaporeans, into their daily diet, McDonald's continually invokes in its advertisements the government-sponsored ideological markers of 'local' culture; this is in contrast with its invocation of 'freedom' in its French advertisements. The result, at the ideological level, is an attempt to 'Singaporeanise' McDonald's rather than 'Americanise' Singaporeans via McDonald's. The Singaporean instance, shows that, ultimately, for all capitalist enterprises which market their products globally, profit is the strategic interest and cultural marketing is merely tactical.

The 'Singaporeanisation' of McDonald's notwithstanding, the symbolic place of 'America' remains an important cultural phenomenon in Asia. The Asian country that has the longest history of ideological entanglement with 'America' is, perhaps, Japan. This depth of history makes Japan the ideal place for examining the trajectory of change in the cultural appropriation of the idea/image of 'America'. As Chapter 9 demonstrates, the symbolic 'America' that occupied a central place in the Japanese psyche in the 1920s became a culturally ambivalent object—simultaneously an object of admiration/desire and repulsion— in the 1950s. By the time Disneyland, the quintessential 'American' cultural product, arrived in a suburb of Tokyo in 1983, its cultural impact was, arguably, minimal because the retail spaces of Tokyo had already been 'Disnified' —a process by which the 'foreign' and 'exotic' is domesticated through its shallow representation as signs inserted into a local site. Whether this pattern will be reproduced in other Asian locations or elsewhere on remains, of course, an open question.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, despite the so-called 'Asian turn', the chapter from Australia signifies the cultural and historical distance between the two continents and their respective component cultures. However, in the consumption sphere, both Australia and Asia have been absorbed into the market and 'suffer' similar advertisement-effects of goods that have achieved truly global distribution, as in the fashion trade where all major players are global producers and distributors. The 'imaginary' or 'notional' community into which these products are inserted constitutes a 'globalised' reference point for the consumers; suppressing, even erasing, the latter's local identities. An example can be seen in the way that youth in Asia draw on the globalised image-bank, provided by all consumption outlets, including fashion, for constitutive components in the construction of their identity as part of the 'global' youth culture and community, in contrast to local, 'traditional' identities of past generations. The erasure of multiple local identities and their replacement by a global notional identity and community constituted by consumers of similar globally marketed products render the notional identity unstable, as it is permanently caught in the unending changes of fashion. The consumer, as a result, is delivered into a sustained state of anomie, if not schizophrenia.

The analysis of the anomic world of the high consumer brings the volume back to the issue of the globalisation of consumption, where local conditions often constitute something of a hindrance but not, ultimately, a serious obstacle to market penetration. As the hyperreality of fashion, not only in terms of clothes but in the more general idea of 'trends' and 'trendiness', absorbs us all, the only relevant location is the world of the global consumer. The analysis of what may be called the 'dark side' of the global fashion industry serves at least two purposes in this volume. First, it draws our attention to the parallel between the moral discourses that have been circulating around issues of consumption in contemporary Asia and the ongoing debate in the West, particularly in the nineteenth century, which was also a period that saw rapid expansion of consumerism. This shows that such debates cut across time and space and that, perhaps, the moral anxieties around consumption will always be part of the dialectic of social life. Second, by drawing out the frenetic character and destabilising effect of consumption on identity, the last chapter provides a glimpse into the future for consumers in Asia. As such, it serves as a warning to an Asia which is pinning its hopes on a future of material plenty achieved by catching up with global capitalism.

Conclusion

As a result of the currency and economic crisis that plagued the economies of East and Southeast Asia, beginning in mid-1997, much of the accumulated public and private wealth of these nations has been radically devalued. Consequently, the rapid expansion which was so very noticeable during the growth years has declined sharply. In these countries, with the exception of Indonesia, destabilised consumer confidence has probably contributed equally to the shrinking of consumption, as have actual increases in unemployment and personal bankruptcies, as evidenced by the very high savings rates of up to 40 per cent in the midst of the crisis. Undoubtedly, as the currencies stabilised, as they did by January 1999 in most of the affected countries, confidence will return and economies will correspondingly recover and expand, albeit the process may take several years. If, as mentioned above, the symbolic dimension of consumption gained in importance during the crisis and consumption has been sustained among those with cash, then, consumption will undoubtedly increase again as the economies of the region recover. While expansion of consumption which follows economic growth may 'naturally' draw the attention of social scientists, it is precisely because the symbolic importance of consumption does not diminish, even under economically adverse conditions, that it emerges as a sphere of analytic interest in its own right. In this sense, the current economic crisis and the overall decline of consumption in affected East and Southeast Asian countries might have marginalised concern with issues of consumption and consumerism in the respective local public discourses but it certainly has not reduced their analytic importance to the ongoing understanding of these countries.

This volume has three main foci. First, to examine several aspects of the rapid expansion of consumption among the emergent new middle class and bourgeoisie, thrown up by the economic growth of the past three decades in the East and Southeast Asia. It may be said that a relative homogenisation of consumption in certain goods and services gives to these emergent social groups a coherent identity as the 'new middle class'. However, in drawing together eight countries in Asia at different stages of capitalist economic development, the chapters together provide a 'big' picture of how the lifestyles of the respective 'middle classes' change and develop as society reaches various stages of development. They provide information not only on how the middle classes dress, spend, and live, what they buy, drive and eat, but also on their anxieties about maintaining their lifestyles.

Second, to examine the ways in which consumption has been a site for ideological contests across generational and national divisions within these countries in Asia. These contests constituted part of the discourse on values in these nations; a discourse which has come to be characterised as a contest between 'Asian' versus 'Western' values. In this context, consumer products sourced from Europe and America were seen as already culturally inscribed, i.e., they embodied the cultures of their site of design and conception, if not production. Consumers of such products thus risk being 'infected' by these values, leading to possible moral decline of the Asian population. Such an ideological construction of the politics of consumption as a contest of values was often promoted by the governments in Asia as a veil over the politics of class and unequal distribution. However, such constructions have clearly not been without public resonance, for they have not been ineffective. Public support was at the very centre of the cross-generational construction of contemporary Asian youth as 'materialistic', 'consumerist' and 'Westernised', hence 'morally' wanting. Whereas, on the part of the youth, consumption of certain cultural products constituted means of escape and resistance to the domination of both their elders and often authoritarian governments.

Third, to the extent that consumption is a field of academic analysis in its own right, these essays also engage in and contribute insights to wider theoretical discussions in the field. In this context, it bears reiterating that the case studies in this volume bring back into focus the political and economic conditions that underpin consumption as a social cultural phenomenon, at a time when these conditions have been often neglected by many analyses which are focused on consumption purely as a form of identity politics. Obviously, as the chapters in this volume show, the types and practices of consumption that go into identity politics are determined very significantly by the level of political freedom and economic development of the location in question. In addition, a note should be made of the various methodological stances taken in the different chapters. About half the chapters are quantitative in character, using largely survey and other aggregate quantitative data. The other half are closer to a Cultural Studies framework, currently the more popular approach to the study of consumption. The inclusion of the quantitative essays is important for they set out the base-lines of societal attitude and more widespread consumption practices. In this way they provide the wider frame within which to analyse the privileged products taken up in other chapters. The two halves are therefore to be read complementarity. Thus, in accord with the fragmented character of consumption as a social phenomenon, each chapter should be read both in terms of its own contribution to the thematic concerns of the collection as a whole and as a stand-alone piece that offers specific information, insights and reading pleasure.

Notes

1 From the opening paragraph of Robinson and Goodman's (1996:1) introduction to the first volume in this series on the New Rich of Asia.

2 The list is too long to compile. Some of the notable ones are Grant McCracken (1988) on the history of consumption in Europe, Stuart Ewen (1976) on the rise of advertising industry in the US, Haug (1986) on the manipulative aesthetics of advertisements, B.Miller (1981) on the history of the department store in Paris, Daniel Miller (1987) on the place of material culture in the thoughts of various nineteenth-century thinkers and their application to mass consumption, Douglas and Isherwood (1979) and A.Appadurai (1986) on anthropology of material culture.

3 The more notable among these journals are *Cultural Studies, Theory, Culture and Society* and *Public Culture*.

4 As a reflection of its success, there are now competing claims to the origin of Cultural Studies, see Wright (1998), McNeil (1998) and Tomaselli (1998).
5 For a comprehensive review of this body of literature as it relates to Marxism, see Lee (1993).
6 A very extensive review of this literature is provided by Goss (1993).
7 A valuable example of an attempt to look at the retail economy via specifically two items of consumption, fashion and food, is Fine and Leopold (1993).
8 For a history of American and European workers' struggle for expansion of leisure and consumption between the two world wars, see Cross (1993).
9 A similar 'heroic' conceptualisation of TV reception/consumption is provided by Fiske (1987). An alternative postmodernist formulation of the figure of contemporary consumer is as a 'psychotic' or 'schizophrenic' consumer (Hebdige 1993:83), one must add, without irony or negative connotations.
10 For detail theoretical discussion on the difficulties of making the distinction between necessary consumption as 'needs' and discretionary consumption, see Lee (1993).
11 Whether this will change under the rule of the People's Republic of China is anyone's guess.
12 Professor Juwono Sudarsono was Dean, Faculty of Political Science, University of Indonesia and rose to be the Minister of the Environment in the last days of the Soeharto regime. He was retained and redeployed as the Minister of Education, under the new government of Dr B.J.Habibie.
13 For details of the generalised slump in retail trade in Singapore and Hong Kong see 'Retail Blues', *Asia Magazine,* 2–4 June, 1995.
14 This is in part because the Japanese cultural industry 'does not actively export cultural products' (Iwabuchi 1994), as the Japanese 'find it a strange notion that anyone can "become Japanese"' (Hannerz 1989:67, quoted in Iwabuchi) and are, therefore, more inclined to emphasise Japan's 'uniqueness' and 'difference' from others.
15 For discussion on the similarities between conservative traditions in Western political thought and what is known as 'Asian values' see Rodan and Hewison (1996).
16 See Kim Seung-Kuk in Chapter 3 of this volume.
17 In the meantime, the post-handover Hong Kong administrative authority's ambitious plan to build and encourage public housing ownership among the low-income groups is being placed on hold for unspecified period.
18 As Singapore remains the wealthiest nation in Southeast Asia, Singaporean banks have been acquiring troubled financial institutions in the region, and Singaporean upper middle-class and elites have been acquiring real estate, especially in Malaysia.
19 An example, which is significant in the development of the cultural sphere in Singapore, is the debate on 'forum theatre' which is now banned by the government (see Krishnan *et al.,* 1996).

20 United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Index 1996, reported in *The Economist,* 20–26 July, 1996, p. 94.

21 The Prime Minister's statement may be read as inadvertently substantiating an earlier comment by Singaporean political scientist, Bilveer Singh, that most Singaporeans live a 'hand-to-mouth' existence; a statement for which he was publicly chastised and which he was later forced to withdraw unconditionally from the public press.

22 This does not preclude it from publicly suggesting that the United States of America is the world's most 'benevolent' superpower and that the continuing presence of the US military might act as a safeguard for continuing peace in the Asia Pacific (Acharya and Ramesh 1993).

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2 Malaysia: Power Shifts and the Matrix of Consumption

Rokiah Talib

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the evolving patterns of consumption among the new middle class in Malaysia, which includes professionals and individuals who either manage their own businesses or are employed as trustees for 'Bumiputra[1] firms'. This group emerged in the 1970s out of a deliberate government policy to engender a class of rich Malays in order to reduce the economic 'dominance' of non-Malays, particularly the Chinese. It is, therefore, necessary to begin with a brief examination of the role of the Malaysian state and its policies in the formation of the new middle class.

Partly as a result of continuing uneven economic development since British colonial days, among its constituent ethnic population of Malay, Chinese and Indians, peninsular West Malaysia experienced its worst race riot on 13 May, 1969. This incident marked a watershed in Malaysian ethnic relations. As a remedial action, the government imposed a 'social contract' between different ethnic groups in the interests of national unity. This social contract was institutionalised in the Second Malaysia Plan 1971–1975, as the New Economic Policy (NEP). Under the NEP, a major social restructuring programme was set up to create more balanced growth and redistribution between Malays and non-Malays to be achieved in a 20-year period, 1970–1990. The redistribution and restructuring strategy aimed both to eliminate ethnic-based control of particular economic activities and to eradicate poverty regardless of race.[2]

From the non-Malay viewpoint, this meant essentially an 'enforced' wealth-sharing with the Malays, because the NEP specified that a quota of 30 per cent was to be allocated to Malays and other natives of the soil, the Bumiputra, by way of equal distribution of employment, business opportunities and wealth. Consequently, the so-called 'social contract' came under heavy criticism from both locals and foreigners. However, the NEP was vigorously executed and, in 1980, it was linked up with the policy of privatisation of state enterprises. Under this combined approach, assets accumulated by the government on behalf of the Bumiputra, under the auspices of the NEP, were redistributed to individual Bumiputra or Bumiputra institutions through the public listing of the companies, that is, through 'privatisation'. With privatisation, Bumiputra were then appointed to head the privatised companies and national projects (Adam and Cavendish 1995:136). Thus, by 1996, there were apparently as many Malays as non-Malays who were living comfortably as the 'new rich', positioning themselves in the upper middle class or millionaires in the corporate world of joint ventures between Malays and non-Malays in multi-million-dollar national projects.

Not surprisingly, the main beneficiaries of the privatisation process were people who had close ties with the political elite of the ruling National Front, led by the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) since 1969. These 'chosen' Malay businessmen often had more business opportunities than actual management know-how. However, this was largely overlooked by foreign banks, which were hooked on the hitherto sustained economic growth of Malaysia and were only too ready to lend the money needed to propel the chosen men into uncritical expansion and acquisition. Those who benefited, of course, included the politician's close relatives (Gomez 1994:141). This lends substance to the idea of 'cronyism', 'corruption' and 'nepotism', the three vices which account for much of the current economic crisis in Malaysia and elsewhere in Asia. With the economic crisis, the easily obtained equities have turned into negative assets and individuals and firms who borrowed heavily to finance their acquisitions have been struggling to stay afloat in the market, often surviving only after massive direct or indirect infusions of funds from the state coffers.[3] However, the crisis notwithstanding, it cannot be denied that more than two decades of sustained economic growth produced an emerging Malay middle class which had build for itself a lifestyle that many may now find it increasingly difficult to maintain.

Lifestyles of the new rich middle class

There is a paucity of empirical information regarding the lifestyles of the new middle class in Malaysia. As would be expected, the official 1993/4 household expenditure survey showed that households at higher income levels spent a lesser portion of their income on basics like food and more on other things such as furniture, recreation and transport;

Table 2.1 Composition of household expenditure by quintile income group, Malaysia, 1993/94

Expenditure	*Quintile income group*				
	First 20%	*Second 20%*	*Third 20%*	*Fourth 20%*	*Fifth 20%*
Food	33.2	31.2	27.7	23.6	17.6
Beverages and tobacco	3.9	3.7	3.2	2.6	1.8
Clothing and footwear	4.4	4.5	3.9	3.6	3.0
Gross rent, fuel and power	21.9	20.9	20.6	20.7	21.4
Furniture, furnishings and household equipment and operation	4.9	5.7	5.1	5.4	6.0
Medical care and health expenses	1.5	1.2	1.6	1.8	2.3
Transport and communication	8.7	11.2	16.2	19.0	21.6
Recreation, entertainment, education and cultural services	4.2	4.5	5.1	5.7	6.7
Miscellaneous goods and services	17.3	17.1	16.6	17.6	19.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Government of Malaysia (1995).

that is, a higher proportion of their expenditure was on luxuries than on basic needs (see Table 2.1). However, it is impossible to get a clear picture of the different lifestyles of the five income brackets covered in this survey. Nevertheless, an insight into the lifestyles of the new rich middle classes in Malaysia can be gleaned from the sorts of consumer goods and consumption practices that were common among them.[4]

Geographically, the super-affluent and famous were concentrated in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur and its satellite, Petaling Jaya (PJ) in the Kelang Valley, although signs of fast economic growth were spreading beyond these boundaries. Indicators of opulent lifestyles could be gleaned from the conspicuous symbols of wealth: the kind of houses; modes of transport; the parties thrown, especially during festivals and weddings, at five-star hotels; memberships of exclusive clubs, children's enrolment in expensive private schools at all educational levels; shopping in up-market malls.

House as an indicator of status

Mansions of the rich

In the pantheon of conspicuous consumption, the house is probably the most ostentatious and effective display of the owner's wealth. And the most expensive and ostentatious multi-million-dollar houses for the rich and famous in the Malaysia capital are to be found in Bukit Tunku, an area named after the country's first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman. This district was formerly known as Kenny Hill and was once the preserve of British colonial administrators. Since political independence, it has become the exclusive residential location of former government ministers, diplomats and business tycoons. The fencing, gates and electronic security systems alone of some of these houses would equal the cost of a common terraced house (around RM100,000 to 200,000). To the familiar eye, a quick glance at the ornate electronically controlled gates could tell one much about the status and prosperity of the owners and the lifestyles they led.

Apart from Bukit Tunku, the other upmarket housing areas were Pantai Hill, Damansara Height and areas skirting some of the golf courses, such as Kelana Jaya, in Petaling Jaya and Taman Tun Razak near Ampang, Kuala Lumpur. A 1976 study by Nordin Selat showed that 62.26 per cent of his 105 civil servant respondents would have liked to own a house in Damansara. Obviously it was considered a choice location by the Malay administrative elite. In 1996 house prices in these areas were advertised at between RM1.5 and 2.5 million Besides these exclusive areas, Sections 14, 16 and 17 of Petaling Jaya were also dotted with luxury mansions in the lower price range of RM1–2 million during the boom market before the current crisis. In all these areas were to be found mansions of businessmen, top government executives, bankers and corporate figures who had either built a new house on an existing lot or renovated their houses over the years, commensurate with their economic success. Inside, these houses would be adorned with imported furniture from Italy—a very popular choice judging from casual surveys of such houses—as well as Chinese rosewood, Persian carpets, antiques and such expensive artefacts as paintings, vases and other *objets d'art,* all taken as signs of 'culture' and being 'cultured'.[5]

The compounds of these houses would be used to hold sumptuous parties to commemorate religious festivals, anniversaries and birthdays. On such occasions the roads leading to the host's house would be lined with expensive cars, reflecting the status of the invited guests. 'Open house' parties catering for 200–300 guests were often held to celebrate Hari Raya, at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, as the Malays are Muslim by religion. For one who circulated in such social circles, it would be common to receive up to five invitations for the same day. Such parties used to be held by the King and Queen, government ministers, politicians, corporate leaders, businessmen, top civil servants and other professionals, but have now filtered down to become a ‘tradition’ emulated by the ‘not so rich’ as well.

There would be plenty of food, of course. However, for Malay/ Muslim homes no alcohol would be served, even though the host might be a social drinker. A shift in attitude to alcoholic drinks should be noted here. In the 1970s, the study by Nordin Selat mentioned earlier reported that drinking alcohol and offering alcoholic drinks to guests was part of the ‘custom’ of the civil servants (1976:236). In fact, the then middle class felt there was much prestige in having a bar in their house as an indicator of being ‘modern’ and ‘Western’. Even the names chosen for children used often to have a ‘Western’ ring to them, such as Rosie, Rozita, Alina, Liza. It was also a common practice to mix the parents names to create a name for the newborn. Beginning in the 1980s, with the strong Islamic resurgence both in Malaysia and globally (see Chandra Muzaffar 1987), the old ways lost their lustre; and by the 1990s most Malay parents selected names for their children after having consulted the respective meanings in Arabic. Thus, instead of drinking, parties were often accompanied by recitations of the Qur’an and/or other religious blessings. This was ironic, as Islam is supposed to inculcate moderation, and a party which could cost between RM2,000 and 5,000 was anything but modest.

Parenthetically, in the context of Islamic values, even more jarring is the *berbuka puasa* (breaking fast) at hotels, which continues to be popular during Ramadan, despite the economic downturn. Five-star hotels, like the Hilton in Petaling Jaya, were among the most popular, and reservations had to be made about a week in advance. The high cost per head appeared to be no deterrent for the new rich Malays, and it was common for some Malays to invite extended family and friends. This practice has become so common that even restaurants and fast-food outlets have joined in offering *berbuka puasa* packages for the less well-off.

In both instances of the *berbuka puasa* and the Hari Raya party, we have seen the commercialisation of a religious festival passing off as ‘tradition’; indeed, some observers of Islam have even said that consumerism undermines the religious sphere far more effectively than any other modernising processes (Turner 1994; Clammer 1997:7–8).

Condominiums of the new middle class

Returning to the issue of housing, below the ‘superrich’, a change in taste and lifestyle also took hold among the middle class. If a bungalow was the ideal home of the middle-class civil servant in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the trend by the early 1990s was to opt for apartments and condominiums, which came with a plethora of recreational facilities, such as squash, badminton and tennis courts and swimming pools. Prices ranged from RM200,000 to 1 million, depending on location, height and facilities. Furthermore, during the days of asset inflation, before the bubble burst in 1997, capital gains on these properties had been excellent. An apartment bought for RM180,000 in 1993 was valued at RM350,000 after three short years, and could garner a monthly rent of between RM3,000 and 3,500 if fully furnished.

The demand for apartments and condominiums among the Malays came largely from the group that politicians referred to as the *Melayu baru,* the 'new' Malay. In the 1980s, there was such a mushrooming of condominiums in Kuala Lumpur that it provoked Malaysia's famous cartoonist, Lat, to dub Kuala Lumpur 'Condo-Lumpur'. It was the vogue among the new rich to own condominiums or apartments around Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya or in such holiday resort areas as Port Dickson, Penang, Langkawi or Genting Highlands, (see Abdul Rahman 1995). Some of these condominiums, especially those outside the Kuala Lumpur area, were professionally managed as 'resort-hotels', thus generating income for the owners; otherwise, flats can serve as weekend recreational spaces for family or friends.

With good public security, readily available maintenance services and recreational facilities at hand, condominiums became very attractive to different categories of urban families, from young couples to older or retired middle-class individuals and families. In the eight years in which I served as a local councillor for Petaling Jaya, I saw a sharp increase in the number of properties changing hands or being renovated by ageing folks who opted for smaller apartments, when their children left home. The popularity of high-rise apartments and condominiums from the 1980s onwards was the result of several changes in the lifestyles of the Malay middle class. First, it was a reflection of changes in family size and composition. The size of urban middle-class families had shrunk, largely due to working wives, loss of 'volunteer' childminders from extended family and increased investment in pensions, making children less of an investment in terms of caring for their aged parents. Furthermore, reliable and affordable local domestic helpers or 'maids', who were in abundance in the 1960s, became increasingly difficult to engage. (Like the middle classes in Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan, the domestic work of middle-class Malaysians has been increasingly undertaken by maids from the less-developed Asian countries, such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.)

Second, a deeper shift in cultural attitudes to homes and environment appeared to have taken place. Malays, being rural in origin, and latecomers in the urbanisation process relative to the Chinese, took some time to adapt to the clustered and cloistered living in high-rise flats. The typical middle-class Malay had, until the 1980s, expressed a desire to 'have their feet on the ground'. A 1966 study of squatters indicated their unwillingness to move into flats, primarily because of the 'need for a house compound' in which to plant vegetables and rear poultry, in addition to lack of privacy and noise that they felt would be a problem living in a flat (Adnan Ma'arof 1966:31). Furthermore, for these slum-dwellers the low-cost high-rise flats were notorious for vandalism, noise and poor amenities. For both groups, there was also the fear that the dead would have to be carried down standing up in the lift (see Azizah Kassim 1985:45–6; Adnan Ma'arof 1966:31). In fact, Adnan Ma'arof, a social science student, suggested that Malays had better get used to living in small apartments if they wanted to remain in Kuala Lumpur or face the prospect of being marginalised, since other ethnic groups, and especially the Chinese, were more flexible with regard to surviving amidst the din of city life. Now, however, after more than a decade of urbanisation, the Malays appear ready to trade land for air space, moving from solid ground to homes in the sky, which in their minds constituted a shift from peasantry to modernity. One upmarket apartment complex in Petaling Jaya was even advertised with the slogan 'living above the clouds', with a picture of clouds entering the bay windows, far away from the crowded streets below.

Third, the Malays' acceptance of high-rise living was also politically important to the ruling government, which was concerned to fulfil the 'ethnic quota' under the social restructuring policy of the NEP. The unwillingness or inability at first of the Malays to buy and live in modern city centres had sometimes caused delays in property transactions which affected the development of the property sector. In fact, the government had tried, as far as possible, to put a lid on the runaway property market to protect local Malaysians, particularly the Bumiputra, from being ousted by foreign buyers. It feared that the local Malaysians would not be able to keep up with the rising prices, which would in turn jeopardise the restructuring policy. The then Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, had shown his displeasure at the fact that some developers were not responding to the government's call to provide low- and medium-cost housing, since the more upmarket properties in the Kuala Lumpur area were overwhelmingly owned by non-Bumiputra, including foreigners. On the other hand, developers complained that they were seriously negatively affected by the government's demand that 15 to 30 per cent of each development to be reserved for Bumiputra because, if prices were steep or the location of a development was poor, the Bumiputra take-up rate would be low, yet the developers were not permitted to sell the flats to other non-Bumiputra buyers.[6] In any event, their initially low take-up rate of high-rise developments fueled the fear that the popular electoral support for UMNO, the ruling Malay party, would be seriously affected in future elections. In this respect it could be said that the government was keen to promote high-rise living to the Malays.

However, for urban middle class, who were nostalgic for *kampong* (village) life, a popular property acquisition was the orchards on the fringes of the city. Although some of these orchards, which were sold in 3–5 acre lots, were bought by speculators to convert into houses, many of them were retained for the owners' private use as weekend retreats for family, friends and clients. For the businessman, this was a way of entertaining clients and government officers. Luscious durian served fresh from the day's taking, the joy of plucking mangoesteen fruit from the trees, a cooling dip in the river, all these would soothe the nerves of a busy executive. According to one senior executive, 'a weekend away from the hustle of city life can rejuvenate one's energy and zest for the fast track again'. As an aside, it is interesting to note that such phenomena were rather common among senior-ranking university staff. For example, one former academic had converted his seaside resort into a training-cum-motivation school. Another claimed that he had spent about RM300,000 to spruce up his three-acre orchard complete with running stream and garden, where he now welcomes friends to spend a day at his private 'resort'. Another, with a businessman husband, regularly entertained at their orchard 'hideout', which was only about 40 minutes' drive from Kuala Lumpur.

By the early 1990s, some market analysts and realtors were already pointing to the danger of the possibility of oversupply of properties in the urban areas, especially in condominiums. However, with the expectation of inflated financial gains from buying and selling properties, prices continued to rise until the second half of 1997. The crisis in the Malaysian currency and, subsequently, the economy, brought the real estate sector to a halt, leaving many unfinished projects dotting Kuala Lumpur's skyline, taking the wind out of what was to be the glorious celebration of a city that had 'arrived' with its twin Petronas towers, which at the time of completion were the highest towers in the world. With the onset of the crisis the tariffs that were imposed earlier on foreigners to slow down their entry into the speculative property market in Malaysia were immediately removed and foreign investors were given a month in December 1998 to once again ‘seize the opportunity’ to invest in what were by then already much devalued assets. Within that month, however, it was reported that Singaporeans bought one hundred million Malaysian dollars worth of property! As stated earlier, the crisis favours those with cash. However, even this was not sufficient to absorb the results of overbuilding engendered by the euphoria of growth in the past decade. So, in January, 1999, the government imposed a ban on all bank loans for property development, including hotels, resorts, offices, golf courses and shopping malls, except for low-cost housing for low-income families.

Of cars and Harley Davidsons

As in other Asian countries, in Malaysia the car is a potent symbol of social status and identity. Without competition from US manufacturers, who remain reluctant to produce right-hand drive cars, the cars for the rich and the upper middle class are largely European made, such as Mercedes, BMW and Volvo, or high-end Japanese brands. These different brands were further used to create differences among the high-end segment of the middle classes. Thus, businessmen favoured Mercedes, highly educated and younger professionals desired the BMW, and the civil servants wanted the Volvo—in part because these were the cars given to them by the state as part of their remuneration. With heavy tariffs of about 200 per cent, all of these cars cost more than RM200,000 each, about three to four times the price of the same car in Western developed nations and equivalent to the cost of a house for a middle-ranking civil servant in Malaysia. Car prices thus express the structure of social stratification. Those which cost between RM100,000 and RM150,000 were more common for those, such as middle-ranking civil servants, who were entitled to low-interest car loans provided by their employer. Further down the line were locally produced ‘national’ cars, which at the cost of between RM26,000 and RM29,000, were on a par with the government-controlled price, RM25,000, for a low-cost house. The popularity and affordability of one of the two locally produced cars, the Proton, was reflected in its market share of about 70 per cent before the economic crisis.

What was perhaps unique to Malaysia in the world of vehicles, relative to other Asian countries, was the emergence of the ‘superbikes’ as a new form of conspicuous consumption, particularly of American made Harley Davidsons among Malays. Table 2.2 shows the number of superbikes that were registered by Road Transport Department

Table 2.2 Number of superbikes registered, Malaysia, 1990–6

Year	*Number Registered*		
	501cc to 1000cc	*More than 1000cc*	*Total*
1990	412	151	563
1991	373	158	531
1992	582	265	847
1993	719	398	1,117
1994	432	218	650
1995	1,863	374	2,237
1996 (to August)	2,593	317	2,910
Total	6,974	1,881	8,955

Source: Computer Division, Road Transport Dept, Malaysia, 30 August 1996.

(RTD); the data show that there was a sudden increase in registration in 1995 and 1996.[7] Since such superbikes could cost up to RM90,000 to RM190,000, their owners were usually businessmen, top-level professionals and executives, a few royals and a small minority of children of the rich. According to one supplier interviewed, the popularity of superbikes began in the early 1990s and the owners were mainly Malays and Chinese, in almost equal proportion. While the younger owners were inclined to use the bikes as an everyday vehicle, the older owners, who were also car owners, rode only for leisure.

An interview with a group of superbikers drew this self-characterisation, ‘We are the yuppies, although some of us are not so young’. When asked why they preferred superbikes to cars, since they all claimed to also own cars, their response was, ‘It is more fun. You feel free’. When asked whether there was an element of ‘self-identity investment’ in the bikes, the leader of the group interviewed said, ‘Maybe, you have a point’. If that were the case, then in spite of the expressed desire for ‘freedom’, the identity derived from ownership was most closely aligned with the identity of the group rather than the individual.

Group activities for the superbikers were normally organised by clubs or motorcycle companies. There are four associations: the Motorcycle Association of Federal Territory and Selangor; the Superbikers Club of Malaysia; Kuala Lumpur Choppers Club and Harley Davidson Owners Club (HDOC). As I had the opportunity to interview the Public Relations Officer (PRO) of the HDOC and his wife and later to join the members for the official launching of the club, officiated over by the Minister of International Trade, this club will be used as an example of the processes of constructing and maintaining the group identity of Harley owners.

The HDOC was formed in 1993. At the time of interview in 1997, it had a membership of 200, although there were 650 Harley owners in the country, mostly located in and around Kuala Lumpur. According to the PRO, the owners and/or members included royals, CEOs, executives, businessmen and professionals. Indeed, the Patron of the HDOC was none other than the Regent of Selangor, an avid biker himself. Another royal who was a bike enthusiast was the Sultan of Johor, who was the Agung (King) between 1984 and 1988. Both the PRO and his wife gave the impression that they were closely associated with the Regent.[8] According to the PRO, it is as important for the HDOC to cultivate togetherness as to sell bikes.

Thus, it is a common sight to see a group of Harleys roaring along the highways on weekends, riding from Kuala Lumpur north to Penang and the hill resorts or south to Johore. While the superbikes may be a symbol of ultimate freedom, the HDOC members, however, have a strong sense of brotherhood and bonding. They usually ride in packs of 20 to 30 whenever they roam the highways, en route to Penang, Singapore or Haadyai in southern Thailand. Their regular hangout in Kuala Lumpur in the evenings used to be the Hard Rock Café, where two Harleys were on loan as part of the decor. The selection of this site was not accidental; the Cafe is next to the Concord Hotel, where the Harley 'boutique' used to be located.

During the interview, the HDOC's PRO agreed with the dealer quoted earlier that ownership of superbikes in general were equally distributed between Chinese and Malays, except for Harleys. He told us that 70 per cent of Harley owners in Malaysia were Malays. He smiled and said, 'Now there are a lot of rich Malays, you know'. Incidentally, the owner of Harley distributorship in Malaysia was also a Malay entrepreneur who was determined to bring Harleys to the country. A publicity flyer for the club proclaimed, 'The Harley Davidson of Malaysia Sdn. Bhd (HDM) is the result of one man's dream of one day owning the legendary Harley Davidson motorcycle and bringing these motorcycles into Malaysia for Malaysians to experience the joy of riding them'. A modern marketer had apparently found his perfect market among the newly rich Malays.

The PRO concurred that a Harley superbike 'is a rich man's toy'. He suggested that up to 20 per cent of the owners bought the bike merely for display. However, according to the PRO, the rest were serious bikers. While agreeing that it is a rich man's hobby, his wife claimed that a small proportion of about 20 per cent of the owners were not rich and had to save for years before they could afford the cheaper range at about RM37,000. According to the PRO, although one could get one of the Harley Sportster family for that price, the accessories to the bike could double the cost. He pointed to his own bike and claimed that he had spent well over RM20,000 on accessories.

The Club's premises in Petaling Jaya was, at the time of fieldwork, impressively stocked with all kinds of accessories, ranging from gadgets and spare parts for the bikes to such 'fashion' items as rings, arm bands, head bands, watches, jackets and boots. It even had a 'kids corner' where children's clothing enticed the parents. A glance at the prices of accessories confirmed what the PRO said. For example, at RM300 to RM600 each, the tyres cost more than for most makes of car. To foster and reinforce a collective identity, some of the items were sold only to members. By purchasing these the symbolic goods, the owners/members projected with pride their sense of comradeship and brotherhood (there are only four female bikers). Watching and listening to them discussing their bikes, it was clear that there was a subculture among the members. The few individuals on that occasion who were not clad in any Harley products, myself included, were subjected to raised eyebrows among the Harley jackets, helmets and T-shirt wearing men and women. However, any illusion that one is being transported, however briefly, to America was immediately dispelled by the PRO. The HDOC bore no resemblance to any Hell Angels' chapter in US nor to any negative social elements in Malaysia. Indeed, the club, as with Harley associations elsewhere, had even adopted the local Muscular Dystrophy Association Malaysia (MDAM) as their chosen charity. The HDOC appeared determined to realise the promise of its publicity flyer: 'After buying a Harley, it becomes a part of your life!'

But why do the Malays prefer Harley-Davidson motorbikes? When I was discussing the demographics of ownership of Harleys to a superbiker, who was a non-Malay and who swore that an Italian bike he was importing was superior to the Harley, he said, 'Harley has that image, you know, and Malays like image-building now that they have the money'. He added, 'There's a lot of hype about the Harley being legendary and American which fits in well with the Malay psyche'. This comment is perhaps more significant for its disclosure of how non-Malays see the Malay as an Other than for its cultural veracity.

Commercialisation of marriage

The cost of getting married in Japan is notorious, so much so that young Japanese couples may escape from their own home to hold their wedding ceremonies elsewhere; for example, many major tourist sites in the Asia Pacific region (Nitta 1992:205), including hotels in Singapore, have

Japanese wedding packages to cater to such 'eloping' couples. Malay weddings have also undergone similar process of commercialisation, itself a result both of urbanisation and expanding wealth among the Malay middle class. Through the 1950s and 1960s, usually a Malay wedding would be held in the village of the parents or grandparents of the newly-weds. Food would be cooked and served by relatives, friends and neighbours, in a pooling communal resources and spirit *(gotong royong)*. By the mid-1980s, however, only the religious ceremony would be held in the house as this ceremony would be attended largely by close relatives. For the rich even this ceremony could be turned into a spectacle. In such instances, fancy tents with chandeliers and scalloped edges would be set up outside the house for the significantly expanded number of guests, who would be able to witness the unfolding ceremonies in the house via TV monitors. In either case, the ceremony would be followed by a reception at a hotel in the city, partly because of the limited space in the urban house and its compound. That some relatives from villages would still feel awkward having to sit formally at the hotel and being served rather than serving guests was a good indicator of how recent the cultural changes had been.

A 'pecking order' of rent-spaces reflected the status of the families of the newly-weds. The receptions of the new rich were likely to be held in hotels, while the less wealthy would use community halls of various sizes, according to the family budget. Whatever the venue, reservations had often to be made more than six months in advance of the date of the wedding. Generally, Malays prefer large weddings and it is not uncommon to have up to 1000 guests. (Interviews with several hotels in town revealed that, in contrast, a Chinese wedding usually cater for about 200–300 guests.)[9] A wedding is a public announcement of one's social status: the bigger the crowd, the higher the status and respect the community accord to the family. Consequently, only five-star hotels would have ballrooms to accommodate such numbers, whereas most community halls could accommodate only about 200–400 guests and would of course be altogether less grand. Based on the price quoted by the hotels around Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, the cost for a wedding banquet in a hotel would be approximately three times that of having the same celebration at a community hall. The cost of a lavish wedding would, therefore, dig deeply into the family's life savings and often involve the sale of other assets, a practice long established in Malay culture (Kratoska 1975). To help defray the costs, there has been an emergent trend of guests to the wedding giving money instead of gifts to the family; this is an adoption of the Chinese practice of giving of 'red packages', which contain cash.[10]

There appears to be a tacit understanding that one has to give bigger 'packages' if the venue is a five-star hotel rather than a community hall. Close friends and relatives would also give larger sums, or offer honeymoon packages to the newly-weds. The total receipts from guests would of course depend on their social and economic positions and the venue.

Often, in Kuala Lumpur, dignitaries would grace the high table, including sultans, prime ministers and other cabinet ministers and their respective spouses. The ultimate marker of 'arrival' was to have the King and Queen seated next to the newly-weds during dinner. The dignitaries would confer their blessings to the newly-weds seated at a specially decorated dais. To ensure proper protocol and avoid mispronunciation of the names and titles of the dignitaries, which could cause offence, often a professional master of ceremony would be engaged. The entire atmosphere at such a wedding would be a mixture of contemporary Western culture, the traditional culture of the Malays and Islamic religious practices. For example, the couple would be in Malay traditional costume, or Western coat and tails and wedding gown, they would be accompanied by flower girls and the traditional drum beats, there would be the religious blessing and public announcement of the status and academic achievements of the couple. Such hybrid cultural performance and practice belies the often heard public discourse of the wholesome East versus the degraded West.

Liberalisation of education

Much like the Taiwanese and South Korean cases reported in this volume, education is rated highly as a social value among the Malaysian middle classes. University education is seen as the sure ticket to a better future. Indeed, education is the only cultural capital that middle-class parents can bequeath to their children. Thus, Malaysian parents have been willing to spend a great deal of money on education, from pre-schools to universities. Competition for a place in the local universities appears to start at the pre-school level, where classes in reading might begin at as young as 3 years. While the earlier discussions have highlighted the consumption of the new rich Malays, in the case of education, the anxieties and consumption apply to all ethnic groups, if not even more so to the Chinese. For example, in the numerous expensive private primary and secondary schools in the Kuala Lumpur area, the oldest being the Sri Inai, there were as many Malay students as there were Chinese, with a sprinkling of Indians, they being the

Table 2.3 Distribution of private institutes of higher learning (PIHLs) by state, Malaysia, July 1996

State	*PIHL*
Johor	21
Kedah	6
Kelantan	4
Melaka	7
Negri Sembilan	8
Pahang	6
Perak	18
Penang	29
Sabah	12
Sarawak	17
Selangor	67
Terengganu	3
Federal territory	95
Total	293

Source: Ministry of Education.

Table 2.4 Distribution of students according to Bumiputra and non-Bumiputra grouping in PIHLs, Malaysia, June 1996

Type of group	*Total*	*Percentage*
Bumiputra	35,127	27.53
Non-Bumiputra	91,141	71.43
Foreign students	1,326	1.04
Total	117,594	100

Source: Ministry of Education.

smallest ethnic population. At the tertiary level, there had been a mushrooming of private schools and colleges that was widespread throughout the nation (Table 2.3 and 2.4) in the 1980s.

An illustrative example is the new Tengku Jaafar Kolej, located near the new Kuala Lumpur international airport, an ambitious edifice conceived and built during the triumphal days of high economic expansion. The Kolej was started in 1989 by the royalty of the state of Negri Sembilan. The college's formal affiliation with Oxford and Cambridge Universities lends it academic prestige. It accepts both international and local students, with fees of about US $7,000 (at the frozen exchange rate of RM3.80 to US $1) which cover lodging, tuition, uniform and recreational facilities. This is about double the cost of studying at a local university. Taking 1996 as an 'average' year, one quarter of student enrolment was Malays, some of whom were sponsored by big firms while others were financed by their parents. This school, dubbed 'the Eton of Malaysia', was trying to eradicate its image of cashing in on the new rich parents whose children were not motivated to study; as in its early days, enrolment was based on parent's ability to pay rather than academic merit. Discipline was tightened: no more mobile phones, fancy clothes, parents were even discouraged from visiting the school unless absolutely necessary. Entry is now based on both merits and ability to pay.

There were two obvious reasons for the expansion of colleges and distance-learning programmes. First, with an annual student intake capacity of between 2,600 to 2,900 each, the seven national universities apparently could not cope with the rising demands for tertiary education.[11] Second, the spawning of private colleges was a means of preventing a portion of the unsatisfied demand from going abroad, thus reducing a financial drain on the national economy. The private colleges generally offer twinning programmes with universities in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and Australia, including such famous institutions as Oxford and Cambridge, because this can be a lucrative source of income. Indeed, before the current regional economic crisis, all of Southeast Asia had been a rich 'pouching' ground for foreign universities that were strapped for funds to set up distance learning programmes, in various modes of collaboration with local professional and educational agencies. Courses offered tended to be in established fields, like law, business studies, communications, computer studies, accountancy and information technology—programmes that were in tune with the then rapid rate of regional economic development.

The expansion of tertiary education opportunities through such colleges had benefited the non-Bumiputra, particularly the Chinese, in two ways. First, it enabled them to escape the ethnic quota system imposed on entrance to national institutes of higher education which discriminated against them. Second, as the language of instruction in such colleges tend to be in English, enrolment in them facilitated entrance to universities in Britain. The consequence being that the Chinese educated in such tertiary colleges and other distance-learning programmes are better-qualified for well-paid employment in the multinational sector of the economy, relative to their Malay counterparts in the public sector. In the long term, this could clearly lead to greater inequality in their respective incomes and wealth, thus potentially subverting the aims of the NEP.

Credit as instrument of conspicuous consumption

Underlying the highly visible, identity-giving items and practices of consumption discussed above is the proliferation and penetration of credit facilities, especially the credit card, into individual and domestic economies. In Malaysia, as the middle class remained a rather thin strata, the use of credit cards has become a minor symbol of status and prestige.[12] Nevertheless, over the decades, with the penetration of market economy, the values, attitudes and practices of Malaysians towards credit have undoubtedly changed. The credit facilities and the changed attitudes are, of course, inextricably tied to consumption expansion. The following discussion on the use of credit is based on an exploratory cross-cultural study of consumer credit among the three major ethnic groups, the Malays, Chinese and Indians, in Malaysia. The three variables tested in the study were ethnicity, urban/rural location, and class, a variable which was confined to urban middle-and lower-class Malays and Chinese because of difficulties in locating middle-class Indians in the sample areas.[13] The results reveal some very interesting features of credit use.

Credit use and ethnicity

Credit use is not just an economic behaviour in its own right but one which is embedded in the different cultures of household resource management among the three respective ethnic groups. The general picture from the survey was that Malays and Indians were more prone to using credit than the Chinese, especially for non-productive goods. The difference was very obvious for such items as household furniture and electrical goods. Table 2.5 shows the relative propensity to use credit for the three groups. On furniture and electrical appliances Malays scored 41.7 per cent and 73.4 per cent respectively, Indians at 59.4 per cent and 71.7 per cent, while the Chinese score was only 1.33 per cent and 7.93 per cent. For jewellery, the Chinese appeared not to purchase on credit while Indians had the highest propensity of 51.1 per cent and Malays 10.2 per cent. Similarly, on renovation of houses and feasting, Malays and Indians were more inclined to use credit than the Chinese.

In-depth interviews among Indians reveal that jewellery has always been very important culturally. Even the agricultural estate dwellers, who as plantation workers, were on the bottom economic rung, would use credit to buy the jewellery that would form part of their daughters' dowries. An Indian girl showed me her parent's gift for her wedding, a

Table 2.5 Credit practices and ethnicity: means of purchase by ethnic group, Malaysia

Item	*Cash/ credit*	*Malay*	*(%)*	*Chinese*	*(%)*	*Indian*	*(%)*
Food	cash	331.0		337.0		1010	
	credit	51.0	(13.40)	41.0	(10.80)	116.0	(53.40)
Clothes	cash	376.9		363.8		188.0	
	credit	4.0	(1.05)	10.0	(2.68)	1.0	(0.53)
Health	cash	142.0		62.0		23.0	
	credit	172.0	(54.80)	228.0	(78.70)	101.0	(81.40)
Housing	cash	42.0		128.0		12.0	
	credit	301.0	(87.8)	207.0	(61.80)	117.0	(90.70)
Furniture	cash	223.0		370.0		86.0	
	credit	159.0	(41.70)	5.0	(1.33)	126.0	(59.4)
Electrical appliances	cash	102.0		348.0		59.0	
	credit	282.0	(73.40)	30.0	(7.93)	149.0	(71.70)
Festivals/ ceremonies	cash	301.0		338.0		153.0	
	credit	11.0	(3.52)	37.0	(9.87)	24.0	(13.50)
Holidays	cash	315.0		308.0		131.0	
	credit	38.0	(10.80)	56.0	(15.40)	9.0	(6.42)
Land	cash	111.0		53.0		5.0	
	credit	59.0	(34.70)	39.0	(42.30)	25.0	(83.30)
Renovations	cash	221.0		316.0		86.0	
	credit	33.0	(12.90)	18.0	(5.39)	25.0	(22.5)
Jewellery	cash	342.0		376.0		104.0	
	credit	39.0	(10.20)	0.0	(0.00)	109.0	(51.10)
Emergency	cash	130.0		367.0		39.0	
	credit	150.0	(53.60)	10.0	(2.60)	163.0	(80.60)

Note: Figures shown are in Malaysian dollars

set of jewellery valued at RM5,000. Yet her family could hardly be considered well-off. She said that it is important for her to wear that jewellery whenever she visits her in-laws. Such social demands for women to wear jewellery are not uncommon among Malays; for example, one Malay academic told of how her mother-in-law was horrified when she turned up at a wedding without any jewellery and the mother-in-law scolded her son for not buying her any.

However, with the exception of women in certain states, like Kelantan and Penang, in general, Malays have not been too concerned about jewellery historically. Those who are familiar with Kelantanese women would have noticed that the women market traders are usually laden with 24-carat gold, which is normally paid for on a daily basis, usually RM5–10 per day for periods of up to six months. This relative indifference to jewellery changed with the rise of self-employed professional women and wives of new rich men in urban areas. A direct-selling jewellery trader who operated alone disclosed in an interview that she enjoyed business worth RM50,000 a month dealing among about 80 regular clients, mostly the wives of corporate men, politicians and academics around Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya. Being a Kampuchea Malay, her clients were almost exclusively Malays. Some of women academics complained that her prices were a bit high compared to regular Chinese jewellery shops in town but they were attracted to the fact that the dealer offered credit with monthly payments for up to a year.

The obvious question is: Why were more Malays and Indians willing to take non-productive credit compared to Chinese? Since income and class variables are controlled in the survey, the answer was to be found in the values, attitudes and practices of the different ethnic groups. When respondents were asked why they do or do not use credit, the standard replies were as follows. Generally the Chinese would say, 'No money, no buy', 'Buying on credit is expensive' and 'I'll save and buy'. The other two groups would say, 'If I don't take credit, I can't have the goods', 'Everybody takes credit, even the government' and 'It is easy payment, why worry?' The study showed that self-employed Chinese in the lower-income group were most prudent regarding consumer credit. Whether rural or urban, this group was wary of credit because of its high cost and a sense of financial insecurity, of 'having to save for the rainy day'. This group actually practised what they said: 'No money no buy'.

On the matter of credit, the NEP might have had negative impact on the Malay community because, as Bumiputra, they had greater access to various forms of productive credits, subsidies and other financial help, such as the various state-financed assistance schemes for higher education. This might have given them the (mistaken) impression that they would be bailed out by the government whenever they were in financial difficulties, thus giving them a false sense of economic security. The so-called 'subsidy mentality' has unwittingly become ingrained over the years among the Malays: if one of the major financial commitments, education for children, were taken care of somewhat by the state, it would be reasonable to assume that one had greater discretionary spending power. This effect of the NEP combined with the relatively new wealth had enabled the Malay middle class radically to increase their consumption.

Small-scale studies by students in the Sociology Department at University of Malaya showed similar patterns. First, a study among the settlers in one of the state-sponsored agricultural (FELDA)[14] schemes showed that the settlers used credit for almost everything, from a table fan, cheap carpets, linoleum flooring to *batik sarung* (sarong cloth). In an interview, a FELDA manager said, ‘It is easy enough to chart the economic standing of the settlers, just watch the lorries ferrying the electrical goods, coming or going’. Another study comparing consumption habits of Chinese of different socio-economic classes, with one group staying in low-cost flats and the other in middle-class residential areas nearby, elicited a different pattern of credit use. The lower-income Chinese used credit less than their middle-class counterparts. They would save by joining rotating-credit associations with family members and friends to raise the necessary amount before purchasing something like a refrigerator or a TV (see, Kimmy Khoo 1985/86 and Leong Yoke Kian 1985/86).[15] Their general response was that no consumer item was so urgent that they could not wait for it.

Returning to the issue of ethnic differences in attitude to credit, the suggestion that Malays are more prone to using consumer credit was further reinforced by the findings of the above-mentioned national survey on the use of credit cards. From a total respondents of 982, 145 have credit cards, of these 51.03 per cent are Chinese, 39.31 per cent Malays and 9.66 per cent Indians. The findings showed Malays to have a very strong urge to own credit cards, compared to the Chinese. Findings also showed that more Malays would like to have credit cards but were not eligible, whereas the Chinese were not keen to apply for credit cards, although more of them were eligible (see Table 2.6). Further questions on the use of credit cards showed that more Malays than Chinese claimed that they ‘very often’ use their credit cards, and the cards also served their need for cash. The Chinese not only used the cards less often but also seldom used them to obtain cash, indicating that the credit cards were more a matter of convenience rather than credit (see Tables 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8).

Successful rapid expansion of consumption and consumerism within a culture requires as part of its economic infrastructure the expansion and wide distribution of credit facilities. However, the willingness to take up these facilities, i.e., to go into debt for consumption purposes is clearly unevenly distributed within different cultural and ethnic groups in Malaysia. Across every economic strata, Malays and Indians appear to be more inclined than the Chinese to use credit

Table 2.6 Reasons for not having credit cards, by ethnic group, Malaysia

Reason	*Malay (%)*	*Chinese (%)*	*Indian (%)*	*Total*
Not eligible	260 (53.94)	128 (26.56)	94 (19.50)	482
Not interested	37 (12.94)	165 (57.69)	84 (29.37)	286
Don't know how to apply	— —	2 (12.50)	1 (33.33)	3
Not ready for it	11 (68.75)	— —	3 (18.75)	16
Not applicable	20	9	21	145
Missing cases				0
Total respondents				982

Table 2.7 Reasons for using credit cards, by ethnic group, Malaysia

Reason	*Malay (%)*	*Chinese (%)*	*Indian (%)*	*Total*
Convenience	46 (37.10)	67 (54.03)	11 (8.87)	124
Easy credit facility	11 (91.67)	1 (8.33)	— —	12
Security	— —	3 (75.00)	1 (25.00)	4
Not applicable				837
Missing cases		3	2	5
Total respondents				982

Table 2.8 Frequency of use of credit cards, by ethnic group, Malaysia

Frequency	*Malay (%)*	*Chinese (%)*	*Indian (%)*	*Total*
Very often	20 (35.10)	8 (26.67)	2 (6.67)	30
Often	23 (40.30)	20 (41.67)	5 (10.42)	48
Sometimes	13 (23.64)	50 (67.27)	5 (9.09)	55
Seldom	1 (1.80)	9 (12.20)	1 (9.09)	11
Not applicable				837
Missing cases			1	1
Total respondents				982

facilities for discretionary goods and services. The Secretary of the Direct Selling Association of Malaysia observed that Malays are the best customers and seem to prefer decorative items while the Chinese prefer health items' (Talib 1995:228). The relative willingness to use credit was perhaps partly a consequence of the prevailing political condition in Malaysia during the 1970s and 1980s, when government redistributive policies had disadvantaged other ethnic groups *vis-à-vis* the Malays, thus imposing on the former, such as the Chinese, greater financial discipline in individual and familial consumption (see Rokiah Talib 1995).

Conclusion

What I have tried to sketch out above is a general sense of how consumption and consumerism had expanded in, particularly urban, Malaysia during two decades of economic growth. This expansion could be best observed through the consumption of 'positional' or 'status' goods, such as houses and other real estate properties, vehicles and, in the Asian context, education expenditure among the new middle class. This expansion might also be particularly apparent among the Malay middle class because of their newly acquired wealth compared to the Chinese Malaysians, who have traditionally held a disproportionate share of the domestic economy. It could be said that the Malays were just making up for lost time in availing themselves of consumer goods and services. While it is possible to justify the consumption of such goods and services on functional grounds, such justification is but an alibi because the goods and services are consumed largely for their symbolic use in constructing and communicating to others an image of personal success. The trajectory of expansion, however, has been radically disrupted and even rolled back as a result of the currency depreciation which started in mid-1997. The Malaysian currency stabilised at the beginning of 1999, in part due to the introduction of control of the flow of capital in and out of the country. However, the economic downturn will continue into the year 2000 and possibly beyond.

Meanwhile, many Malay entrepreneurs and Malay-owned companies, who had become substantial market players under the NEP, have been labouring under financial difficulties. Unemployment has increased substantially and will continue to do so, leading the Malaysia government actively to repatriate illegal migrants from Indonesia, who were tolerated during the growth years as a source of inexpensive labour. The slump in the real estate sector will likely continue as the take-up rate of already completed or on-stream properties slows to a trickle because of the credit squeeze and negative consumer confidence. Similarly, the retail sector has been affected by consumers' concern about economic uncertainties in the immediate future.

However, it should be noted that the wealth accumulated by individuals and families during the growth years, has not been entirely wiped out by the crisis. This is reflected in the fact that the private savings rate in the country stood at 40 per cent at the beginning of 1999. Ironically, in spite of the downturn, excessive prudence among consumers is itself detrimental to the domestic economy. Consequently, the government of Malaysia have been calling on the citizens 'to show more confidence in the government's economic recovery effort' (Special Function Minister, Tun Diam Zainuddin, *Straits Times,* 18 December, 1998) and spend money. It has also introduced several policies to stimulate domestic consumption, which included the reduction of in the minimum for credit card payment from 15 to 5 per cent, and giving civil servants one Saturday off per month, so that they have additional time for leisure and consumption. That the government has to stimulate consumption is, of course, not surprising, as it is but following the logic of capitalism. Whether it is successful in its efforts is secondary to the fact that the economic crisis is an opportunity for those with cash to accumulate the status goods at affordable prices. So, while the total volume of consumption at individual, household and national levels has declined and probably continue to do so, selective picking of status goods for their symbolic values will continue among those who are cash-rich; the new condominium will still find a buyer if the price is right.

Notes

1 The term 'Bumiputra' means 'natives of the soil' and refers to the natives of Sabah, Sarawak and Peninsular Malaysia, such as Dayaks, Kadasan, Malays and minorities like Semais and Temiars, respectively.

2 See Second Malaysia Plan, 1971–1975 for details.

3 A case in point is the eldest son of Prime Minister Mahathir. Before the Asian economic crisis, Mirzan Mahathir was one of the top businessmen in Malaysia. In 1992 he bought a small trucking company and soon ended up controlling nearly half the Malaysian market in trucking transportation. In 1994 and 1996, he bought two shipping lines for US $80 million and US $230 million respectively. After the devaluation of the Malaysian currency he ran into difficulties repaying loans and relief came when one arm of the cash-rich national petrol company, Petronas, bought his shipping line for US $200 million. The Prime Minister said that he was not involved in the sale and purchase (*The New Paper,* Singapore, 4 January, 1999).

4 There is an ongoing research project being conducted by several lecturers at the Universiti Kebangsaan (National University). At the time of writing however, no results have been published.

5 See, ‘Art auction born as S. E. Asia grows richer’, *Star* (12 November, 1996). The article named Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia as the golden triangle for auction business.

Original or reproduction antiques pieces are ‘must-buys’ for wealthy Singaporeans, as such items are seen as reflecting great aesthetic taste. In Bourdieu’s terms, elevated to the abstract status of high art, such objects have been stripped of ‘any kind of affective or ethical interest in the object of representation’ (Bourdieu 1984:44–6).

6 The project is by the company Damansara Impian Sdn. Bhd.

7 The RTD would not disclose the names of the owners of these superbikes, consequently, the data were collected mainly through personal communications.

8 The wife of the PRO was seen wearing a special watch with the word ‘Jugra’ written on it. When I commented on the unique watch and its brand, she said, ‘Oh! this was given to me by RM’.

9 According to the public relations officers of the two Hiltons in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, Malays are generally not superstitious about finding suitable dates for weddings and are happy to hold them on weekdays, if that is when the venue is available. On the other hand, Chinese continue to select ‘auspicious’ dates according to the Chinese lunar and astrological calendars.

10 By tradition, guests would bring gifts. There remains a preference among Malays for decorative items—glassware and Queen Anne-style silverware are favourites. However, electrical goods also appear to be favoured, as reflected in the disparaging remark of the wife of a top civil servant who married off her daughter: ‘I could be a rice cooker distributor for the next year’, commenting on how many rice cookers she received.

11 The data for 1996/97 intake is not available because of the new system which allows students to enter the university either at the beginning of the first or second semester.

12 In Singapore, the credit card is included in the ‘5Cs’ that symbolise the middle class, namely, cars, condominiums, country club memberships, credit cards and cash.

13 For details of the research methodology see, Talib (1995).

14 FELDA is the acronym for Federal Land Development Authority. The agency relocate villagers into new areas of agricultural land schemes, mainly for Bumiputra.

15 On rotating credit associations among Chinese in Southeast Asia see Chua (1981)

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3 Changing Lifestyles and Consumption Patterns of the South Korean Middle Class and New Generations

Seung-Kuk Kim

Introduction

The study of consumerism as a culture or as an ideology has long been an orthodox sociological interest (Veblen 1934; Baudrillard 1970; Warde 1992; Featherstone 1991). However, in South Korea, it was not until the early 1990s that social scientific (Kim 1987a, 1987b; Paik 1994, 1996) and lay public awareness and discussion of social 'issues' shifted from the subject of inequalities of income distribution, popular in the 1980s, to that of consumption patterns of various social groups and consumerism as a culture, an ideology or a lifestyle.[1] By then, it had become obvious that consumerism, in all its diverse forms, has become part of South Korean's daily reality. Indeed, before the Asian currency crisis and subsequent deep economic downturn which began in July 1997 and which severely affected South Korea, the refrain of South Korean media was, 'The level of consumption is rapidly rising. Consumption expenditures in skiing, golf, and dining out are sharply increasing. The tendency to buy bigger size refrigerators or cars is growing explosively. Imported goods are dangerously penetrating into domestic markets'. The media warned against soaring levels of consumption and the environmental costs, as the huge amount of energy consumption and garbage disposal in South Korea were undeniable indications of a nationwide expansion of consumption (Jeong 1994; Paik 1994).

A central feature of contemporary consumerism is, of course, the expansion of leisure activities. Many leisure activities have become inseparably integrated with such consumption behaviours as shopping, eating out, tourism and sports. Conceptually and substantively, the so-called 'leisure society', where the processes of production and consumption are intertwined, but under the domination of the leisure industry, is one in which the previously exclusive membership of the leisure class has been opened up to consumers at large. In such a society, leisure is no less important than work, home, family or friends. Its planning, preparation and implementation require careful attention and no small amount of money and information. Leisure has become not only a serious business, but also people's preoccupation, especially the young and the middle class.

South Korea, as a consequence of more than three decades of economic growth until the 1997 economic crisis, was increasingly becoming just such a society. According to a 1996 national survey (Jeil Kihoek 1996), the number of people who viewed the quest for leisure as being more important than the quest for accumulating money steadily increased from 48 per cent in 1933 to 50 per cent in 1996. South Koreans who accepted 'consumerist' values also increased from 38 per cent to 44 per cent. Many pursuits that were once the exclusive province of the upper class, since only they had the time, money and thus skill, have been taken over by a much broader social strata, if not quite the masses, as even members of the lower economic groups had increased leisure time. For example, with a general rise of social interest in fashion, men were using more perfumes and accessories (from 12 per cent to 20 per cent), were caring more about their weight and body type (from 20 per cent to 28 per cent), and skiing, golfing and travelling constituted part of the list of the 10 most desired leisure activities nationwide.

As elsewhere, in South Korea as similarities in consumption of goods and services developed, the differences between white- and blue-collar workers were also blurred, but never obliterated.[2] In this sense, consumption/leisure practices appear, in general, to be able to pave the way for personal discovery and fulfilment. However, it is not quite so simple in real life. On the one hand, expansion of consumption may provide the possibility to set for oneself freely chosen goals and purposes in which one can express oneself in ways that productive work never permitted. On the other, leisure as an always extending commoditising and commercialising of experience is in contradiction to these presumed emancipatory possibilities. Leisure/consumption accelerates spending. A succession of marketed interests, fads, whims and distractions follow each other, each being driven away by more urgent and recent ones, making constant demands for money that can bring about a unique stress.[3] Leisure may become finally 'a restless search for entertainment and escape; a full-time occupation which in many ways suggests a perpetuation of the never-completed task of work in mine, mill, or factory' (Seabrook 1988:4–5). At a deeper level, the liberating possibilities of consumerism and leisure society belong securely within the growth and expansion dynamic of capitalism, thus giving us ample grounds for scepticism regarding its promises.

Also, the liberation potential of leisure is unavoidably structurally limited. First, and most simply, leisure requires both money and time, which are not equally distributed in a capitalist society such as South Korea. Consumers are thus divided and differentiated by income, culture, aspirations and dreams. This fragmentation and diversification of consumer experiences is itself a distinctive feature of contemporary society. And the Baudrillardian (1981) conceptualisation of 'the sign value of consumption' may be read either as self-deception or as cultural mystification of the simple expression of human desires. It may be yet another mechanism by which capitalist economic processes, which are increasingly disarticulated from human needs, may survive.

Consumption is thus a multi-dimensional concept and touches on areas of main sociological importance—stratification and inequality, the nature of work, social motivations, the organisation of political action, social movements and contemporary cultural forms. However, in this essay only a specific dimension of consumption will be examined. Using various secondary data from recent national surveys and statistical yearbooks, the major objective is to ascertain empirically the extent to which a culture of consumerism was in the process of being formed among South Korea's middle classes and younger generations, up to the economic crisis of 1997.

The organisation of this chapter is as follows. First, I will examine, historically, the growth and expansion of consumerism in South Korea and provide some empirical data on the levels and patterns of consumption. I then discuss some characteristics of contemporary consumption patterns, in particular the 'excessive consumption' of the middle class and the younger generations.[4] Three identifiable patterns of lifestyle will be discussed, namely, that of the progressively fashionable new generations, the 'rational' middle class, and the traditional conservatism of a 'general' public, as reflected in public opinions. Finally, I will address some social implications of the rise of consumerism in South Korea. A cultural politics of consumerism had been in the making among Korean middle class and new generations, integrating identity formation, status symbols and depoliticisation, all of which may be said to be major functions of the capitalist consumption. Consumption inequality due to capitalist consumerism has not significantly dissolved, even in the era of globalising consumption. In order to achieve an egalitarian consumer society or 'democratic consumerism', the issue of the power/authority of the consumer must and will be raised.

Historical formation of consumerism in Korea

The rise of consumerism

The cultural foundation of expanding consumerism may be rooted in the political and economic transformation of South Korea from a poor and repressed society to an affluent democratic one. Rapid economic growth and political democratisation from an authoritarian regime through the 1980s had brought about a blossoming of civil society. This political pluralisation, with its liberalising and deregulating effects on people's social and economic life, had certainly contributed to the rise of consumerism. To these factors must be added the demographic explosion of the numbers of college/university students in the last two decades. In addition to having relatively affluent parents who could provide for most of their needs, many of these students earned substantial earnings from providing personalised, outside school, tutoring to younger students, thus greatly increasing their own purchasing power.

The demographic factor accounted for the controversy, among South Korean sociologists (Joo 1994; Park 1996; Jeong 1996; Kim 1996), which linked the social characteristics of the so-called 'new generations' to consumerism as a culture/ideology. The proportion of the younger generations in the population[5] is substantial: those who are 15–39 years of age constituted 46.7 per cent in 1995. Not surprisingly, in the area of electoral propaganda and commercial advertising, the political and economic roles of this demographic segment had been greatly appreciated. Ideologically, the ensuing constructed differences between the old (more than 35) and the young (less than 35) embodied not only the political differences of being conservative versus progressive but also the cultural differences of the old's predominantly productionist orientation versus the apparently consumerist orientation of the young. In spite of these constructed differences, it may be argued that there was a historically constituted, strong cultural or psychological tendency among South Koreans toward excessive and impulsive consumption.

It has been frequently pointed out that most South Koreans, particularly those more than 50 years old, are emotionally or psychologically full of tears and regrets, unsatisfied desires and discontents, and grudges and enmities. In Korean, this aggregate sentiment is called *Han*. For Koreans as a nationality had to endure the tragic hardships of modern history: suffering tremendously under imperialist struggles and domination, from such bloody events as civil wars, Japanese colonial rule and the Korean War. Many economists have tried to explain the rapid economic growth of South Korea in terms of this psychological/cultural trait which supposedly played a significant role in the strong achievement orientation necessary for the mobilisation of human resources in national development. Unlike Western capitalism, with its close religious connection with ascetic Protestant ethics, South Korean capitalism had been socio-psychologically constructed on the basis of hungry spirits of Korean people full of *Han*.

A corollary of this is that Koreans may be said to have been waiting for a long time to overcome their repressed psychological feelings and unhappy memories. In fact, one of the most popular national slogans for economic development in the early years of South Korean industrialisation was 'Let's live a rich life in our lifetime'. This slogan made poor South Koreans believe that they could emerge out of poverty and enjoy a better life in the future, if they worked very hard and obeyed their government and company. Thus, the very same psychological characteristic of South Koreans might be encouraging, even driving, people to compensate materially for their perception of deprivation or emptiness. The rapid expansion of consumption in South Korea is certainly promoted by this psychological and cultural desire to catch up, to put behind them the deprivations of the past. This kind of 'thirsty' consumption behaviour seems to be caused by the desire for retrospective compensation for a lost self-identity rather than being a quest for the constructive demonstration of a newly creative self-identity. As a consequence, many Koreans are extremely hungry for higher education, particularly for their children, and for a lot of food, big houses and cars, expensive clothing, new leisure opportunities and frequent tours—so much so that the deprived parents may feel greatly relieved by the affluence enjoyed by the children for whom they spend willingly.

The level and pattern of Korean consumption

The absolute level of consumption among South Koreans had been increasing steadily and the pattern greatly diversified, until the currency and economic crisis that began in 1997; although, as in all capitalist societies, this expansion had been unequally distributed, ranging from extravagance of the 'overnight' millionaires who made their money from real estate speculation to others who continue to struggle just to stay alive. However, the hype of Korean newspapers that the level of excessive consumption was nationwide and had reached a dangerous point was undoubtedly grossly exaggerated and may be readily disputed.

Table 3.1 Yearly increase rate of real consumption expenditure and national savings, South Korea, 1976–97

Year	*Consumption expenditure per capita (current prices, 1000 won)*	*Rate of increase of consumption expenditures (%)*	*National savings as % of GNP*
1976	257	0.0	24.2
1977	309	20.4	27.5
1978	400	29.4	29.9
1979	516	29.0	28.5
1980	645	25.0	32.2
1981	791	22.6	22.9
1982	881	11.4	24.4
1983	974	10.6	27.6
1984	1,075	10.4	29.9
1985	1,177	9.5	29.8
1986	1,282	8.9	33.7
1987	1,418	10.6	37.3
1988	1,617	14.0	39.3
1989	1,871	15.7	36.2
1990	2,248	13.6	36.9
1991	2,659	18.3	36.1
1992	2,971	11.7	34.9
1993	3,264	9.7	35.2
1994	2,696	13.2	35.2
1995	4,134	12.3	36.2
1996	4,607	11.4	34.8
1997	4,909	6.6	34.6

Source: National Statistical Office (1998).

The growth of consumption

Surprisingly, Table 3.1 shows that both the increased rate of consumption expenditure and the ratio of consumption expenditure to GNP have been lowered during the last 20 years, although the absolute quantum of money spent per capita has increased enormously.

Two plausible explanations for these unexpected findings may be offered. First, the size of South Korean GNP from 1976 to 1994 had expanded greatly while consumption expenditure was reduced sharply from 1981 and thereafter stabilised, except in 1991. The rate of increase in consumer prices was very high from 1976 to 1981, from 10.2 per cent to 28.8 per cent. After 1981, however, it was sharply reduced to below 10 per cent. Speculatively, this decline might have been due to the fact that once most household durable goods were already purchased during

Table 3.2 Comparison of consumption increase rate to income increase rate, South Korea, 1991–7 (%)

Year	*Increase rate*		
	Consumption		*Income*
1991	19.9	<	22.8
1992	15.8	<	17.0
1993	9.3	>	9.0
1994	12.9	<	15.1
1995	12.6	>	12.3
1996	11.4	>	9.6
1997	6.6	=	6.6

Source: National Statistical Office (1998).

the earlier consumption booms, subsequent consumption was largely additional or replacement consumption, thus leading to a reducing rate of consumption expenditure to GNP. Second, rather than being spendthrift, as the newspaper hype would imply, the national savings rate had increased rapidly during the same period

The increased rate of consumption and income

Table 3.2 shows that the rate of increase of consumption was not as fast as that of income. Since South Koreans were spending money within expendable incomes there was no strong reason to worry about a tendency towards excessive consumption. Indeed, the government had strongly emphasised the virtues of thrift and savings as an indispensable component of national economic development and hence tried to keep interest rates relatively high while discouraging or condemning the rising tendency for consumption. Consequently, South Koreans were used to high savings.

Both the consumption expansion and the tendency for high savings were to play contradictory roles in the early days of the 1997 currency crisis. Then, the government immediately put out a call for Koreans to trade in their private holdings of gold jewellery for government bonds. This netted enough gold for the government to exchange for more than two billion US dollars. At the same time, similar to the Malaysian case discussed elsewhere in this volume, the government had to encourage the population to go out and spend money and not to save excessively, in order to keep the domestic economy afloat.

Table 3.3 Percentage of households possessing durable goods, South Korea 1970–90

	TV	*Fridge*	*Phone*	*Piano*	*w.machine*	*Air con.*	*Car*	*VCR*
1970	6.6	5.0	2.2	1.0	—	—	—	—
1975	30.6	9.7	6.6	1.6	1.0	—	—	—
1980	86.6	24.0	37.8	3.7	10.4	1.1	—	—
1985	97.2	48.7	71.0	6.0	25.9	1.9	4.0	4.1
1990	99.0	84.7	93.1	—	64.3	3.2	13.5	27.8
Total increase	97.7	106.1	55.4	—	193.6	100.5	296.9	701.3

Source: Paik (1994).

Durable goods

As in other Asian economies, part of the rapid expansion of consumption had been, and will continue to be for sometime yet, the acquisition of household durables which the developed economies of the West already take for granted as 'necessities' (Table 3.3). For example, in the 1990s demand for cars and air-conditioners had been increasing dramatically. Parenthetically, as a result of spending primarily on expensive durable items, the average expenses of one person, either bride or bridegroom, for a wedding had reached almost US $40,000. It is uncertain when the expansion of consuming durable goods will finally reach its 'upper' limit, if indeed there is such a limit. As in the Malaysian situation, South Koreans were acquiring cars and apartments at very high prices, especially those which required expensive redecoration and renovation.

Leisure

Table 3.4 indicates that the percentage of leisure expenditure[6] to total consumption of both urban and farm households increased sharply between 1970 and 1990. However, as would be expected, there was significant urban-rural inequality in consumption. Urban households spent six times more money than farm households and the proportion of total consumption spent on leisure is about 5.5 times greater on average. One item of leisure activity deserving particular mention is golf. The explosive quest for golf among the urban middle class during the Roh Tae-woo era was reflected in South Korea being labelled 'the golf republic'. By September 1991, there were 60 golf courses already in operation, with a further 118 under construction (Cotton and Kim

Table 3.4 Percentage of leisure expenditure to total consumption expenditure, South Korea, 1970–97

Year	*Urban household*		*Farm household*	
	Amount (won)	*Percentage*	*Amount (won)*	*Percentage*
1970	9,156	2.1	1,246	0.6
1975	20,196	1.9	7,170	1.2
1980	55,880	1.8	35,755	1.7
1985	126,468	3.3	41,222	0.9
1990	364,572	4.4	54,515	0.7
1991	466,800	4.8	62,182	0.7
1992	528,324	4.7	70,165	0.7
1993	587,868	4.8	106,222	0.9
1994	664,644	4.9	116,282	0.9
1995	802,176	5.3	126,689	0.9
1996	908,952	5.3	130,517	0.8
1997	924,684	5.2	130,947	0.8

Source: National Statistical Office (1998).

Table 3.5 Percentage rates of overseas travel, South Korea, 1990–6

Year	*1990 (A)*	*1993 (B)*	*1996 (C)*	*(B)/(A)*	*(C)/(B)*
Whole country	3.3	6.1	12.8	1.85	2.10
15–19 years	0.4	1.1	2.75	2.75	2.45
20–9 years	1.8	4.4	2.44	2.44	2.68
30–9 years	4.0	7.7	1.93	1.93	1.96
40–9 years	5.4	8.0	1.48	1.48	1.88
50–9 years	4.4	7.5	1.70	1.70	2.08
60+ years	4.0	7.2	1.80	1.80	1.88

Source: National Statistical Office (1998).

1996:199). Other leisure facilities such as pleasure resorts and health clubs also proliferated in the period.

Tourism

Table 3.5 shows that the rate of increase of overseas travel among younger generations had been growing faster than that of the older generations. For the young, going abroad during vacations or undertaking foreign language training in foreign countries had become almost a ‘must-do’ activity, especially among university students in South Korea, with funds obtained, as mentioned earlier, either from affluent parents or savings from providing private tutorship.

Table 3.6 International comparison of changing consumption expenditure, South Korea, Japan, West Germany and USA

(a) By major economic indicators, 1990

Indicator	*S. Korea*	*Japan*	*W. Germany*	*USA*
GNP/capita ($)	5,659	23,993	23,801	21,739
Population (10,000)	4,231	12,354	6,323	24,997
Rate of economic growth (%)	8.4	5.6	3.2	1.0
Rate of domestic savings (%)	36.1	33.8	22.2	12.5

(b) By changes in consumption expenditure (in each country's national currency, %)

Country	*1984 (A)*	*1990 (B)*	*(B)/(A)*
S. Korea	288,397	601,100	2.08
Japan	282,716	331,595	1.17
W. Germany	2,445	2,934	1.20
USA	1,638	2,364	1.44

(c) By nominal and real increases in rate of consumption expenditure, 1984–90 (%)

Country	*Nominal increase*	*Real increase*
S. Korea	108	75
Japan	17	8
W. Germany	20	14
USA	44	18

Source: Korea Chamber of Commerce (1993).

International comparison

A 1990 international comparison[7] of the consumption levels among four countries, namely, South Korea, Japan, West Germany and the USA, indicated that South Korea had a higher rate of increase of consumption expenditure (Table 3.6). This might be due to the sustained high economic growth during the period from 1984 to 1990, a period in which South Koreans had just begun voraciously to enjoy the fruits of an affluent society. Furthermore, the lower rates of increase in the other three nations might be because, as advanced capitalist countries, the USA, West Germany, and Japan had already passed the stage of mass consumption and are heading towards the stage of mature consumption, where post-materialist cultures in conjunction with environmentalist values play an anti-consumerist role. However, this suggestion is placed in doubt if we examine a different set of data provided by the United Nations (UN National Account Statistics 1993): the ratio of consumption expenditure to GNP of South Korea (average 53.5 per cent during 1984–1990) was much lower than those of Japan (average 57.0 per cent) or the USA (average 66.1 per cent), reflecting the much higher savings rate in Korea than both Japan and the USA which suggests anything but a decline of consumption in the latter two countries.

Public perception of excessive consumption

As elsewhere in Asia where consumption expansion was a recent phenomenon, a common public discourse in Korea was a critique of consumerism as a culture of 'excessive' and 'blind' materialism. Furthermore, there was the fear that the ostentatious consumption of the relatively wealthy might provoke the anger and frustration among the poor, thus reawakening class divisions and social conflicts. For these reasons, moral criticism of excessive consumption was constantly being produced by governments and mass media, creating a kind of 'moral panic' or ideological battle. As highlighted in the introductory chapter in this volume, such government and mass media criticism were inevitably caught in a contradictory bind, because both were financially dependent on incessant and 'excessive' consumption, the latter directly through advertising revenues and the former indirectly through the economic growth which results from consumption. Nevertheless, their moral crusades against consumerism did lead many South Koreans to conclude that excessive consumption was pervasive in the nation. However, an analysis of the issue, based on the data provided by a 1993 national survey (Kukeun Institute of Economy 1993), shows that such moral criticisms were based more on perceptions than actual consumer behaviour.

(1) Is excessive consumption a serious social problem in Korea?

Yes (37.2%)	More or less (55.8%)	No (6.6%)

(2) Are you an excessive consumer?

Yes (4%)	More or less (16.6%)	No (82.9%)

In response to the question, 'Is excessive consumption a serious social problem in Korea?' 93 per cent of South Koreans responded positively. However, when answering the question 'Are you an excessive consumer?'

at best only 17 per cent answered 'yes', while 82.9 per cent said 'no'. Indeed, many Koreans continued to shop for their clothes at discount stores (40 per cent) and during sales (57 per cent), although the number of the latter has dropped from 61 per cent in 1993 to 57 per cent in 1996, while the number of impulsive purchasers has increased from 7 per cent to 19 per cent in the same period (Jeil Kihoek 1996).

Given the very high positive response to question (1) and the very high negative response to question (2) among the same respondents, who are the excessive consumers? Was the so-called excessive consumption a fictitious perception or actual behaviour? If indeed only one of six South Koreans had more or less of a tendency to consume excessively, it might be argued that this was too small a proportion to worry about.

As to the question of perception, excessive consumption is always unavoidably a matter of relative degree and hence depends upon one's viewpoint. If the rich consumed a great deal it would not be considered excessive. If the poor were to consume more than their disposable income it would be considered excessive. Perhaps it is indicative of the ideological success of the media and the government that South Koreans who had been urged either to morally criticise excessive consumption and/or to abstain from 'wasteful' consumption for the purpose of savings were likely to blame innocent others for committing the sin of excessive consumption.

However, assuming there was 'excessive' consumption, where would the money be spent? In the realm of everyday life, the sites of 'excessive' spending were thought to be as follows:

(3) Where do you spend excessively in everyday lives?

Children's education and fees for out-of-school teaching	(23.5%)
Entertainment, leisure and travel	(19.8%)
Expenses for congratulations and condolences	(17.7%)
Clothes	(13.0%)
Food and eating out	(8.9%)
Buying durables	(8.7%)
Nowhere	(4.3%)

Much like the previous case of Malaysia, and indeed elsewhere in Asia, South Koreans carried a heavy burden of expenses for children's education, particularly in high tutoring fees for private lessons. Conventionally, approximately 90 per cent of high school students in urban areas who were preparing for university entrance examinations would take one or more forms of private lessons outside school.

Furthermore, regrettably, a bribery culture in which envelopes of money are customarily requested from students' parents by some teachers, continues to exist in South Korea. Expenses for congratulations and condolences are also an unavoidable item due to Koreans cultural practices.

As to the reasons for 'excessive' spending, apparently, Veblen's classical theory of conspicuous consumption, what might be called the 'demonstrative' effect of consumption, remained a strong motivation for excessive consumption. This 'demonstration' effect is, of course, tied to the process of identity formation through consumption, commonly assumed and explored in postmodernist literature. On the other hand, impulsive buying is likely to be more than just the induced effect of contemporary marketing strategy; it can also be a release of the repressed self, a thesis worthy of further exploration.

(4) Why do you spend excessively?

Demonstration	(44.1%)
Impulsive purchase	(25.1%)
To reduce stress	(15.5%)
Having an unearned income	(9.3%)
Don't know and no response	(6.0%)

Consumerism of the young

As suggested earlier, a major constitutive element of generational distinctions for the 1990s' youth in South Korea had been the differentiated consumption patterns between them and the relatively older generations. In the 1970s, younger generations achieved their identity through youth culture as a variant of counter-culture. In the 1980s they developed an anti-capitalist or socialist political identity through participation in radical or revolutionary student movements; popular culture was one of the major symbols of 1980s' South Korean democratic movements. According to the following data, however, the 1990s generation is clearly consumerist (Jeong 1996; Joo 1994; Kim 1996; Park 1996; Paik 1996).

(1) Attitude to work and leisure by generation

	Work-orientated (%)	Leisure-orientated (%)	DK (%)
21–40 years old	29.8	65.3	4.8
more than 40 years old	61.7	35.6	2.7

Source: Korean Sociological Association (1990)

Clearly, the younger Koreans were more leisure-orientated while the older were more work-orientated. The generational distinction between old and young coincides with the cultural-ideological distinction between productionism and consumerism.

(2) Attitude to the idea of buying a car before having one's own house, by generation

	Very good (%)	Not bad (%)	Wrong (%)	DK (%)
21–40 years old	1.6	36.0	53.3	9.0
more than 40 years old	1.4	16.3	77.5	4.8

Source: Korean Sociological Association (1990)

Significantly, reflecting the sustained effect of financial conservatism, a larger proportion of the younger generation still thought that owning a car before a house was wrong. However, according to a 1996 national survey report (Jeil Kihoek 1996), those whose priority was to buy the car first had increased from 30 per cent in 1993 to 43 per cent in 1996. Since house prices are very high in South Korea, young people would have to endure an austere life for a lengthy period of time if they wished to buy their own houses. Furthermore, for the younger ones in the age group, the need to own a house and the burden of carrying a mortgage might not yet figure in their life since they were still far away from marrying and setting up families. These two factors might have contributed to the number of younger Koreans who would give priority to car ownership.[8]

In spite of the apparent financial conservatism with reference to cars and houses, the younger generations appeared to agree with the general perception that they were more consumption-orientated than their elders.

(3) Are the young people consumption-orientated and spendthrift?

	yes (%)	no (%)	DK (%)
21–40 years old	77.6	13.9	8.4
more than 40 years old	82.2	10.5	7.3

(4) Are the old people frugal and thrifty?

	yes (%)	no (%)	DK (%)
21–40 years old	63.8	25.0	11.2
more than 40 years old	84.2	10.5	5.3

Source: Korean Sociological Association (1990)

Yet, even this agreement might be more apparent than actual, because the respondents might have confused behaviour with attitude. Undoubtedly, the older generations had been more thrifty in terms of behaviour. This might, however, be largely a result of economic underdevelopment and not necessarily a consequence of their attitude. If they could have lived in an affluent society, they would likely have been as consumerist as the younger generations of today. One cannot therefore conclude readily that the survey results 'proved' that the young were fundamentally more consumption-orientated and spendthrift than their elders. Nevertheless, it was indisputable that there were significant behavioural differences in consumption.

A 1993 survey by the Korean Chamber of Commerce provided the following characteristics of consumption and leisure patterns of the new generations:

- Food: Western-style and fast foods
- Dining out: more interested in mood rather than expense
- Frequent use of credit card
- High levels of impulse buying among women in their twenties
- Priority of design over function in purchasing products
- Very sensitive to fashion and interested in fashion information
- Marked preference for casual clothes
- Relatively higher expenditure on buying clothes
- Higher preference for apartment and bed [over house and futon]
- Strong orientation to recreation and entertainment
- Enjoyment of various types of hobby and leisure activity
- Pursuit of individualised leisure

Finally, although the surveys quoted had used the term 'younger generations' without differentiation, it seemed necessary to make greater distinctions between teenagers and '20-somethings'. For example, in the matter of fashion, the two groups showed very different preferences and interests. According to a report by Jeil Kihoek (1996), teens (36 per cent) were much more eager to buy brand-named items than those in their twenties (17 per cent), and the latter (65 per cent) more than the former (45 per cent) favoured simple designs. Indeed, teens of the 1990s, in contrast to other generations, were very aware of imported fashion (58 per cent), very quick to accept new fashion (31 per cent) and willing to purchase such fashion (29 per cent). Furthermore, they (75 per cent) are more likely to go shopping with friends than the '20-somethings' (58 per cent) and those in their thirties (48 per cent). The teens were also more prone to eat American-style fast food as their lunch, with 29 per cent of the teen population, compared to 1.5 per cent of those of 50 years and above, preferring Western foods to Korean foods. The teens were thus the most receptive to the trendy markets of the 'perpetually' new. Beyond this group, it seems to me that it is still premature, despite its rapid expansion, to argue that South Korean consumers in general have been taking an active role in creating their self-identity through consumption, as much of the expansion remained at the level of accumulating household and other durables.

Social implications of Korean consumerism

With an open-door policy of expanding the importation of foreign goods, there are now many global consumer products available in South Korea, from French mineral water to American prefabricated houses. The flood of notionally 'Western' goods (a convenient but incorrect label because so many of them come from Japan and China, or even Korea itself) is noticeable countrywide. The trade deficit for 1996 reached nearly 150 billion US dollars, the highest ever, just before the 1997 currency and economic crisis. Until that point, the South Korean government, with its desire to join the OECD, which it did in 1994, could not but take an open-door stance to foreign imports, although its position remained ambivalent. Nationalist movements with such slogans as 'Buy Korean goods', 'Less consumption, more savings' or 'Anti-Westernisation' were frequently organised by pro-government consumer groups, without much success. However, until the current crisis, South Korean authorities might have felt that the cultural 'risks' of exposing people directly to products symbolising a Western lifestyle were more than offset by the potential political and economic dividends on offer to the existing regimes.

This tolerance of imported goods and their presumed attendant cultural practices by the government was echoed at grassroots level. Jeil Kihoek (1996) reported that South Koreans' acceptance of the 'Westernisation' of their life increased from 40 per cent in 1993 to 44 per cent in 1996.

During the same period, those who preferred bed to *ondol* (a Korean way of sleeping) had increased from 37 per cent to 40 per cent; those who were critical of the use of foreign models and foreign images in advertisements had decreased from 32 per cent to 26 per cent and 70 per cent to 64 per cent, respectively. Although, some conservative religious moralists had been eager to declare spiritual war against 'demoralised' and 'demoralising' Western cultures, for example, to prohibit Michael Jackson from performing, the 'anti-Westernism' ideology in public discourse on consumption often found in other developing countries of Asia had been rather weak in South Korea. In general, the cultural, moral and sometimes economic criticisms that the young generations were imitating Western street culture and wasting money on foreign goods had been losing ground among South Koreans. Instead, a cultural consensus that the young people too have an inviolate right to enjoy in their own ways has become more widely accepted, particularly by the new middle classes. Correspondingly, the young generations may discover the 'self-liberating' potential of consumerism, despite authoritarian attempts by some old and conservative individuals to prevent them from consuming new cultural items and practices.

The desire for freedom and liberation inherent in the consumption culture of youth may be expressed in terms of a counter-culture against the authoritarian political culture which remains pervasive in South Korea. South Korea has been known certainly for its student political movements. This political role of students as a democratic force in state politics has been diminishing since their critical intervention in the establishment of elected civil government in 1993. Many students have been distancing themselves from the political activities of the state, preferring instead either a cultural politics of consumption[9] or new social movements;[10] already, some top politicians have tried, as a political gesture, to be friendly with and tolerant of youth cultures. Politically, the new cultural politics of consumerism may yet emerge in South Korea as a 'counter-cultural' force, as in the case of Taiwan discussed in a later chapter in this volume.

Finally, I would like to stress the importance of a weak but very significant line of consumer movement in South Korea. From the mid-1980s, various types of consumer co-operatives, such as the Hansalim Gongdongche, Saenghyup Undong and Urimilsaligi movements have emerged in a quest to build a 'prosumer' (producer + consumer) community. This communitarian approach to organising consumer movements could, if successful, exercise a great deal of influence in correcting the inherent materialist and unequitable tendencies of capitalist consumerism.[11] The democratic form of consumerism may be best represented by the emergence of consumer groups, whose members are concerned with participating directly in consumption policy making (Abercrombie 1994). Without understating the unevenness of consumption practices across class lines, and without underestimating the absence of self-reflexivity in most of today's consumers, it is, nevertheless, possible for South Korean consumers to organise themselves against powerful capitalist producers and distributors.[12] The 1997 economic crisis might provide a window of opportunity, before consumerism becomes a mere cultural fetish, for consumers to organise as a social force in order to pursue common interests and call for a more community-based approach to consumption (Gabriel and Lang 1995:185–90).

Notes

1 The idea of consumerism has experienced an interesting and ideologically significant inversion in recent times (Featherstone 1991). The term is now used in two opposing senses; first, to denote an uncritical attitude towards consumption and second, a self-reflexive attitude to consumption. As Gabriel and Lang (1995:2) point out, the consumer as the mature and sovereign individual, on the one hand, seeks to enjoy life by making free choices, but consumerism, on the other hand, is the final stage of capitalist commodification where all social relations are finally reduced to usage and exploitation and consumers as duped victims are manipulated by producers, advertisers and image-makers.

2 This is not to say that class divisions in consumption have been totally erased. Of course, some leisure activities (e.g. collection of rare antiques or yachting) are still restricted to the upper class by virtue of the specialised knowledge or money required.

3 Rojek (1995) argues that leisure is not in any meaningful sense free time and free space; he presents a radical critique of the traditional 'centering' of the concept of leisure on 'escape', 'freedom', and 'choice'.

4 Conventionally, it is asserted that differences in consumption patterns and consumption inequality are very closely related to income inequality, i.e., class differences. However, there are variations in the quantitative levels and qualitative features of consumption that are relatively independent of income inequality. Instead they are related to other social locations, such as the generations to which one belongs. Also, in consumer society, class differences are likely to be manifested in the quality of goods purchased rather than in their quantity.

5 The composition of population by age group in 1995 is as follows: below 15 is 23.2 per cent; 15 to 19 is 8.8 per cent; 20 to 24 is 9.9 per cent; 25 to 29 is 9.5 per cent; 30 to 34 is 9.5 per cent; from 35 to 39 is 9.0 per cent (15 to 39 is 46.7 per cent) and, those above 40 occupies 30.1 per cent.

6 Leisure expenditure consists of the costs of buying books, newspapers, entertainment 'furniture' (such as TV, camera, piano, toys, sporting goods, leisure goods, fees for lessons and for buying tickets for travels concerts, etc). There are, however, some differences between urban and farm households in the composition of leisure expenditure.

7 It should be noted that international comparisons of this time tend to be unreliable because of each country's internal diversity and the problems of standardisation.

8 Editor's note: In Singapore, where both apartments and cars are priced out of the reach of the new entrants into the work-force, young workers tend to concentrate their consumption on the body as a site, i.e., by buging fashion, food and accessories.

9 For example, such famous vocal groups as Su Tae Ji or Pipi Band used to put very anti-authoritarian and rebellious lyrics in their songs, thus arousing a keen social controversy and greatly appealing to their teenage fans.

10 New social movements, for example, the women's movement, the ecology movement, anti-racist groups, welfare rights collectives and the like, have emerged in reaction to the established political, military and economic framework of Western capitalism. While these groups differ in their political objectives, they share a general dissatisfaction with the bourgeois lifestyle with its emphasis on materialism, conspicuous consumption and privatisation. The new social movements are ideologically 'left-libertarian' (Kriesi *et al*. 1995:xx).

11 Inequalities among South Korean consumers may be growing, with the poor already reduced only to 'window-shopping'. According to data provided by Jeil Kihoek (1996), many South Koreans are still complaining about shortage of leisure time (51 per cent in 1993 but 55 per cent in 1996) and simply cannot afford, financially, to enjoy leisure (53 per cent in 1996). These social limits to access to leisure chances are, of course, differentially stratified along income, job and education lines.

12 One small bright spark of news for such a prospect is that the strong influence of commercial advertisements on Korean consumers is slowly but steadily decreasing. For example, according to a national survey (Jeil Kihoek 1996), the number of people who believe in the usefulness of advertisements in choosing products has decreased from 64 per cent in 1993 to 60 per cent in 1996, while those who turn off TV advertisements has increased from 17 per cent to 23 per cent. The number who trust the quality of much-advertised products has decreased from 32 per cent to 29 per cent.

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4 Economic Development and the Changing Patterns of Consumption in Urban China[1]

Chengze Simon Fan

Introduction

For two decades following 1978, China witnessed rapid economic growth. It has also performed well in the face of the current Asian economic crisis which threatens to end the so-called East Asian economic 'miracle', as Japan continues to be stuck in prolonged economic recession and the South Korean economy drags itself back slowly from the brink of the currency crisis that began in mid-1997. Although China's growth in the second half of 1998 slowed down as a result of unprecedented flooding which devastated vast areas of southern and northeastern China, the Chinese economy does not appear to have suffered from a loss of investors' confidence and the ensuing capital flight, as experienced in the rest of East and Southeast Asia. Thus, it is reasonable to predict that economic growth will continue in the near future, perhaps at lower annual rates. As was often emphasised by the late Deng Xiaoping, who liberalised the economy, the ultimate purpose of economic development is to improve the social and individual welfare of the population, a commitment that has been maintained by his successors. The obvious and significant question, therefore, is: Exactly how much improvements have been generated in the living standard of the population as a result of the rapid economic growth in China?

One indicator that measures people's standard of living is, of course, a country's per capita gross domestic product (GDP). During the period from 1978 to 1997, China's real per capita GDP grew more than threefold.[2] However, it has long been recognised that indicators of people's welfare are not confined to the nominal average income of an economy. In the case of China, the per capita GDP calculated by the exchange rate between the Chinese yuan and the US dollar is a particularly inaccurate, even misleading, measure of Chinese people's consumption and living standards. For example, in 1976, the World Bank reported that China's per capita GDP was US $410, which was more than twice as high as India, and higher than Thailand's. Over the next 13 years, China's growth rate continued to be higher than Thailand's and about twice as high as India's. However, in 1990, the World Bank reported that China's per capita GDP was US $370, which was about the same as India's (US $350) and about one-third of Thailand's (US $1420).[3] This puzzle can be partly explained by the sizeable depreciation of the Chinese currency relative to US dollars. But it illustrates clearly that the economic achievement in China and the improvement of the Chinese people's living standard cannot be fully reflected by the change in China's per capita GDP. So, alternative ways have to be sought to generate a more accurate measurement of individual and social welfare in China.

Due to changes of relative prices over time, improvements in living standards are more accurately reflected by the changing patterns of consumption on different commodities than simply the increase of aggregate consumption expenditure. This chapter, therefore, attempts to analyse the actual improvements in the standard of living of the Chinese, after China's economic reform, by examining the changing patterns of consumption in urban China. It will also examine briefly the pattern of income distribution in China during the post-reform period because this affects the expansion and spread of material consumption among the population. I will first provide a general description and an analysis of the changing consumption patterns and income distribution issues in urban China after the economic reform. This will be followed by an examination of consumption patterns and changing lifestyles in Guangzhou and Shanghai, two major cities in China, based on a recent detailed survey.

The 'consumption-ladder' of urban China

As a starting point, we first have a look at the quantitative aspects of consumption and living standard in terms of per capita income. Table 4.1 presents the indices of per capita income in urban China for the selected years between 1978 and 1997.

Table 4.1 shows that the average urban resident's real income increased rapidly after 1978, indicating that the population has benefited greatly from the economic growth generated by the economic reform in China. However, as mentioned earlier, per capita income or per capita consumption expenditure is inadequate as a means of revealing

Table 4.1 Index of per capita income in urban China, 1978–97

Year	*Index of per capita annual income*
1978	100.0
1980	127.0
1985	160.4
1986	182.5
1987	186.9
1988	182.5
1989	182.8
1990	198.1
1991	212.4
1992	232.9
1993	255.1
1994	276.8
1995	290.3
1996	301.6
1997	311.9

Source: China Statistical Yearbook (1998).

the exact extent of improvements in living standards for the population. It is, therefore, necessary to study consumption patterns in order to gain a better understanding of how the increase in income improves people's welfare.

Table 4.2 illustrates the changing patterns of food consumption in urban China. It shows that as people's incomes increase with the economic development, so the pattern of their consumption of food also changes. In particular, it seems that Chinese urban residents pay increasing attention to the consumption of different varieties of food. For example, they consume less of the 'traditional' diet, such as grain and vegetables, which are relatively cheap in China and simultaneously consume an increasing amount of relatively 'luxurious' foods such as sea food, fresh eggs and poultry, which are relatively expensive. This can be readily understood as people generally prefer to eat a variety of food. However, when the population is poor, it is often subject to 'subsistence constraint', i.e., constrained by the needs of subsistence as a survival imperative, arising from the basic nutritional requirements for health and life.[4] Poverty thus explains why Chinese people's 'traditional' diet is rice and other cheap vegetables. However, when their financial condition improves, they can spend more on expensive food and still consume a large enough quantity of food to satisfy the subsistence constraint. Economically speaking, such behaviour appears to follow the law of diminishing marginal utility of

Table 4.2 Annual per capita consumption of food in urban households, China, 1982–97 (kg)

Year	*Grains*	*Fresh vegetables*	*Vegetable oil*	*Pork*	*Beef and mutton*	*Poultry*	*Fresh eggs*	*Fish and seafood*	*Liquor*
1982	144.56	159.08	5.78	16.85	1.82	2.56	5.88	7.67	4.48
1985	134.76	144.36	5.76	16.68	2.04	3.24	6.84	7.08	7.80
1990	130.72	138.70	6.40	18.46	3.28	3.42	7.25	7.69	9.25
1995	97.00	116.47	7.11	17.24	2.44	3.97	9.74	9.20	9.93
1997	88.59	113.34	7.20	15.34	3.70	4.94	11.13	9.30	9.55

Source: China Statistical Yearbook (1983, 1998).

consuming any single individual commodity which implies that people have a preference for consuming different varieties of goods.[5] So, they tend to spread their consumption expenditures evenly on a wide variety of goods.[6]

In addition, this pattern appears to be in accord with an important empirical law of consumption in economics, called Engels' law, which states that the income elasticity of demand for food is relatively low.[7] This implies that the proportion of the income of a nation (or family) that is spent on food is a good index of its welfare, with better-off nations (or families) spending a smaller proportion on food than poorer ones. Following this argument, as China develops, its people not only have more money to spend on different varieties of food but also on durable goods, entertainment, and leisure. This has indeed been the case.

Prior to economic reform, when most of the income of a Chinese family was spent on necessities such as food and basic clothing, the most popular household goods, often referred to as the 'four big items', were sewing machines, watches, bicycles and radios. With economic reform and continual improvement in living standards, in the 1980s, the old 'four big items' were replaced by a new 'six big items', which were colour TV sets, refrigerators, cameras, electric fans, washing machines and tape recorders. With increasingly larger incomes in the early 1990s, people have come to focus their attention on such luxury items as video recorders, hi-fi systems, air-condition machines and computers. Demands has also been increasing for private apartments and cars.

Table 4.3 documents some of the changes in patterns of consumption in urban China, showing that living standards have improved significantly, as measured by the population's consumption of a variety of durable goods.

Interestingly, the Chinese people's consumption patterns of durable goods can be conceptualised in terms of a 'consumption ladder'; that is, people's consumption, particularly of durable goods, often experiences discrete jumps because of the indivisibility of the consumption of durable goods themselves. For example, because a colour TV set has a minimum price regardless of its quality, one can afford to buy a colour TV set only when one's income reaches a certain level; similarly, for other durable goods such as refrigerators, motor-cycles and cars. Since the cost of a durable good may be a relatively small proportion of a individual's annual wage in a rich country, whereas purchasing the same durable good often requires several years' income in a poor country, the phenomenon of a 'consumption ladder' is relevant

Table 4.3 Urban household year-end ownership of major durable goods (per 100 households), China

Item	*1982*	*1985*	*1990*	*1992*	*1995*	*1997*
Woollen coat	—	116.20	169.98	194.22	204.15	186.85
Composite furniture	—	4.29	19.29	30.92	46.23	53.38
Sofa bed	—	5.53	16.45	24.62	36.46	41.62
Bicycle	146.65	152.27	188.59	190.48	194.26	179.10
Sewing machine	73.60	70.82	70.14	65.92	63.67	57.48
Electric fan	53.17	73.91	135.50	146.03	167.35	165.74
Washing machine	—	48.29	78.41	83.41	88.97	89.12
Refrigerator	—	6.58	42.33	52.60	66.22	72.98
Colour TV	—	17.21	59.04	74.89	89.79	100.48
Stereo recorder	—	18.88	35.51	33.90	27.52	—
Ordinary recorder	17.99	22.28	34.24	39.69	45.31	—
Camera	—	8.52	19.22	24.32	30.56	33.64

Source: China Statistical Yearbook (1983, 1996, 1998).

only in developing countries as a measure of the level of improvement in living standards. For the Chinese, as already mentioned, the first step of the 'consumption ladder' seemed to be the old 'four big items', and the second step the new 'six big items'. More recently, many have been climbing on to the third step, the constitutive components of which are still unclear, but there are some indicators. For example, some Chinese economists predict that demand for privately owned low-cost apartments will become the new 'focal point' of consumption in the near future. In response, the government has adopted preferential policies to encourage property developers to build more low-cost housing. Significantly, the state is also partly motivated by the desire, indeed the necessity, to reduce public subsidy on state housing provision. As in all socialist economies, the artificially low rent collected from state housing had rendered the recovery of capital cost of each cycle of housing construction impossible and had, therefore, become a constant drain on the national economy. Thus the citizens' desire for home-ownership is matched by that of the state's promotion of home-ownership.[8] However, not surprisingly, artificially low rents have kept the desire for home-ownership in check for obvious reasons.

In the telecommunications sector, telephones have become increasingly common in urban households. In Beijing, for example, 16 per cent of the households have home telephones in 1995, and 68.8 per cent of them pay their own bills.[9] Demand for computers has been rising also. Some high-income families already own personal computers. Finally, perhaps a more convincing piece of evidence that material life has turned for the better, is the emerging flower market. Prior to economic reform, indoor decorations were mainly window paper-cuts and silk flowers. In recent years, many flower shops have appeared in urban China. It is common now for people to buy flowers when they go to a gathering, visit a sick friend or attend a wedding or birthday party. Fresh flowers are also indispensable for other ceremonial occasions, particularly New Year's Day and Valentine's Day.

Income distribution in urban China

As with all market-driven expansion, opportunities to step up the consumption ladder had been largely concentrated in urban areas and were very unevenly and narrowly distributed. The inequality had been compounded by uneven regional development (Hsueh 1996). Consequently, uneven income distribution, which had not been a public issue in the pre-reform period, has emerged as a serious social and economic problem in contemporary China, attracting widespread public complaints and serious state attention. Table 4.4 reveals the worsening income distribution in urban China.

Table 4.4 is a summary of the changing pattern of urban income distribution since 1984 when urban economic reform was initiated. The entries in the table represent the average percentage shares in income of the different percentile groups ranked by income levels. In the period 1985–1997 the relative income distribution between the lowest quintile

Table 4.4 Income distribution in urban China: percentage income share by income group, 1985–97

Year	*Low income (1st quintile)*	*Medium-low income (2nd quintile)*	*Medium income (3rd quintile)*	*Medium-high income (4th quintile)*	*High income (5th quintile)*	*Total*
1985	12.84	16.41	19.11	22.20	29.45	100
1986	12.37	16.09	20.83	21.78	28.92	100
1987	12.76	16.37	19.05	22.17	29.64	100
1988	12.44	16.11	18.95	22.33	30.16	100
1989	12.29	15.99	18.87	22.25	30.59	100
1990	12.33	16.13	18.96	22.36	30.22	100
1991	12.76	16.34	18.98	22.16	29.76	100
1992	12.13	15.93	18.91	22.29	30.75	100
1993	11.58	15.37	18.47	22.47	32.11	100
1994	11.03	15.28	18.51	22.53	32.41	100
1995	11.26	15.28	18.51	22.53	32.41	100
1996	11.30	15.24	18.47	22.58	32.42	100
1997	10.67	14.92	18.41	22.72	33.28	100

Source: calculated by the author from various issues of *China Statistical Yearbook*.

and the highest quintile income groups worsened, particularly between 1991 and 1994. The changes were largely due to the shift from the old 'socialist' egalitarian income distribution system to an incentive-driven wage system. From a technical economic viewpoint, the changes may be considered rather minor, they have nevertheless led to public concerns about increasing economic inequalities for at least two reasons.

First, the actual inequality might have been greater than that reflected by official statistics, as many people's reported incomes were likely to deviate significantly from their true incomes or salaries. For example, many 'corrupt' government officials often received large amount of bribes which were, of course, never documented in official statistics. Second, in the pre-reform period, the ideology of socialism was egalitarianism in income distribution. This legacy of socialism makes Chinese people much more sensitive to even slight changes in income differences, driving those whose income conditions have not changed for the better to register their complains.

However, in spite of the increase in income inequality, it should be noted that economic reform has actually raised the overall income condition nationally; for example, the proportion of the population living in poverty was halved between 1978 and 1986, when it stood at 250 million, and further reduced to 80 million by 1994.[10] On the other hand, in the words of the late Deng Xiaoping, the economic reform has indeed 'made a proportion of the people get rich first'. Most of these 'new rich' live in a few relatively well-developed cities such as Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen, and enjoy a much higher standard of living than their fellow citizens living in other areas. They are already on the higher rungs of the 'consumption ladder' and their consumption patterns may be said to represent the trend of the future. As the introductory chapter points out, the most visible part of this expansion of consumption among the urban newly rich is to be found among the relatively younger population; we will examine further the consumption pattern of this particular group, specifically those of Shanghai and Guangzhou, in greater detail below.

The lifestyle of the 'new rich' in China: a case study of youth in Guangzhou and Shanghai

This analysis of the youth in Guangzhou and Shanghai is based on a 1994 survey carried out by the South China Market Research Corporation Ltd.[11] In the survey, two groups each of 240 youths aged between 18 and 28 were interviewed, one each in Guangzhou and

Shanghai. Youths were chosen as the subject of study because they are the wealthiest consumers in China, for at least two reasons. First, as discussed in the chapters on Malaysia and Korea in this volume, in China, economic status is a very important factor in the marriage markets. Consequently, parents or grandparents often encourage the younger generations to consume more as a demonstration of their economic status to potential marital partners. Consequently, the young are often the recipients of a significant amount of intergenerational wealth transfer to facilitate consumption. Second, youths are at the top of income distribution in China as a result of the economic reform. For example, in 1994, the average monthly income of those who had stable jobs and were between 18 and 28 was 1085 yuan in Shanghai, and 1215 yuan in Guangzhou, while the average monthly income of the entire work-force, aged between 18 and 59, was only 789 yuan and 940 yuan, respectively.[12]

This age-income profile is distinctively different from those in developed Western countries. For example, Willis (1986) reports that in the United States, the wage rate of a typical white, non-farming, man rises rapidly after he joins the work-force; reaching its peak when he is about 45 and starting to decline only after he becomes about 60. The rapid increase of income in the first half of an American's working life can be explained in terms of increased productivity with experience of working. However, economic reform has radically changed the economic 'institutions' in China. It rendered, on the one hand, an older worker's education and extensive experience in the old planned economic system 'useless' to his productivity in the new economic system; on the other hand, the human capital acquired in schools by the young people is more useful in commerce and industry in contemporary China. Thus, a typical young worker would tend to earn more than an old or even a middle-aged worker in China today, which explains partly why they are also the wealthiest consumers. The following discussion will focus first on young people's expenditure, then on their participation in leisure activities, and finally, their satisfaction with the material life they have.

Table 4.5 presents the summary of the answers to the question: 'Which of the following items makes up the largest part of your total expenditure?'

From Table 4.5 we can see that a significant proportion (33 per cent in Shanghai and 31 per cent in Guangzhou) of youth, arguably the 'wealthiest' consumers in China, still rates expenditure on food and beverages as taking up the largest portion of their total consumption expenditure. Applying the earlier mentioned Engels' Law, this implies

Table 4.5 Major expenditure item, by city (%), China

Item	*Shanghai*	*Guangzhou*
Food and beverages	33	31
Clothing and footwear	25	20
Education	11	10
Miscellaneous	12	17
Entertainment	8	8

that the living standard in China is still low relative to that in most developed countries, where people's expenditure on food and beverages is only a small proportion of their total consumption expenditure. 25 per cent of respondents in Shanghai and 20 per cent in Guangzhou rated clothes and footwear second to food. The significant expenditure on clothes not only reflects the attention given to fashion and appearance but also signals a person's economic status to a potential marital partner. Educational expenditure appears also to be important to urban young people; 11 per cent in Shanghai and 10 per cent in Guangzhou report that education as their top expenditure. With economic development education has become increasingly important in determining an individual's earnings. Hence, there are strong incentives among the young to invest in their education. Finally, Table 4.5 shows that a small percentage of the respondents, 8 per cent in both Shanghai and Guangzhou, rated their expenditure on entertainment as the top of their total consumption expenditure, indicating that some Chinese people were already leading a relatively wealthy life. In local parlance, these people had already reach the 'Xiao Kang' level, roughly defined as 'moderately comfortable' or 'having a little more than enough', a humble way of describing the middle class position in China. Quantitatively, the late Deng suggested that the living standard of 'Xiao Kang' level is when one's real annual income reaches US $1000. The general picture of the consumption level of the young is thus: about one-third still have a relatively low standard of living, while the top 8 per cent are already beyond merely consuming necessities and are becoming more entrenched in urban consumerism as culture of everyday life.

We next turn to the actual durable goods that were owned by the young in Shanghai and Guangzhou.

Table 4.6 shows that the living standard of some of the youth in Shanghai and Guangzhou is fairly high in terms of their consumption of durable goods relative to the rest of the country. Many young

Table 4.6 Ownership of durable goods, by city (%), China

Item	*Shanghai*	*Guangzhou*
Cassette recorder	55	43
Sports bicycle	11	44
Motorcycle	1	10
Pager	17	34
Pure gold jewellery	35	43
Luxury watch	21	23
Camera	30	41
Credit card	13	23

people, particularly in Guangzhou, seem to have already put a foot on the next rung of the consumption ladder beyond the 'six big items', mentioned earlier. For example, owning a motor-cycle, a sports bicycle, or pure gold jewellery was no longer uncommon among the youth in Guangzhou. In recent years, credit cards have become increasingly popular and, as elsewhere in Asia where such cards are newly introduced or conditions for eligibility rather restricted, they are seen as a sign of economic and social status.

As China develops and people's material consumption increases, leisure activities become increasingly important to their welfare. Table 4.7 presents a picture of the current patterns of young people's leisure activities in Shanghai and Guangzhou.

Prior to economic reform, very few Chinese households owned TV sets. At that time, leisure activities consisted largely of listening to the radio and chatting with friends. An indication that living standards have improved dramatically over the past two decades is that, today, almost every household in urban China owns at least one TV set and almost everyone watches TV in their free time (Table 4.7). Indeed, some people have stopped listening to the radio altogether. Beyond this, with the continuing economic development some expensive leisure and entertainment activities, such as travel and karaoke, are becoming more popular among the urban young. They work hard to set aside both the money and the time for such activities. For example, many people visit the 'paradise on earth' of Hanzhou in the southeast China in the summer, and go to Harbin for 'ice festival' in winter. More recently, many have travelled to foreign countries such as Russia, North Korea, and Vietnam. Expenses for tourism and amusements have increasingly become an intrinsic part of the family budgets in urban China.

Living standards have undoubtedly improved but what about the level of satisfaction of the young regarding their current living standard?

Table 4.7 Participation rate of leisure activities, by city (%), China

Leisure activity	*Shanghai*	*Guangzhou*
Watching TV	100	100
Listening to the radio	98	92
Chatting with friends	96	99
Shopping or window shopping	99	98
Going to cinema	93	74
Karaoke	85	82
Travel	77	75

Table 4.8 Average level of satisfaction with consumer goods and services, by city, China

Item	*Shanghai*	*Guangzhou*
Food and beverages	4.4	4.5
Clothing	4.4	4.5
Furniture and electric appliances	4.3	4.4
Education	3.9	4.0
Entertainment and sports activities	3.8	3.8
Telecommunication facilities	3.7	4.1
Living environment	3.3	3.7
Transportation system	2.7	3.0

Key: 6 = very satisfactory, 5 = satisfactory, 4 = basically satisfactory, 3 = barely satisfactory, 2 = unsatisfactory, 1 = very unsatisfactory.

A South China Market Research Corporation survey revealed the results in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 shows that young people in Shanghai and Guangzhou generally feel satisfied with their current level of 'private' material consumption which is within their control. They are less satisfied with the less tangible parts of consumption such as education, entertainment and telecommunications which escape their control and in many instances are subject to state intervention, i.e., censorship. They showed greatest dissatisfaction with the consumption of public goods which are entirely controlled and provided by the state, such as the living environment and the transportation system of the cities, particularly in Shanghai, where traffic and environment pollution are major inconveniences. Indeed, in the pursuit of economic growth, the entire nation has long neglected the need for environmental protection; a problem which intensified after economic reform. The municipal governments of the two cities have begun to take tentative steps to curb pollution

Table 4.9 Respondents answering 'yes' to money-related questions, by city (%), China

Question	*Shanghai*	*Guangzhou*
Is becoming a millionaire a goal of your life?	41	46
Is the amount of money one makes the main criterion to judge a person's success?	25	23

and traffic problems. As yet, the results are still far from satisfactory, as reflected in the survey findings.

The most powerful reminder of the cost of environmental neglect, or its nemesis, must be the disastrous flooding in southern and north-eastern China in 1998 that left millions homeless and economically ruined. Evidence suggests that the intensity of the flooding was in significant part a result of official neglect or worse, official policies. For example, the excessive logging activities in the upper catchments of the Yangtze River resulted in severe deforestation which had led to rapid runoff of rain waters and increased the silting of river and lake beds; some estimates suggest that the storage capacity of freshwater lakes in the Yangtze River basin has been reduced by up to 50 per cent due to deforestation and soil erosion. The government has accepted that its land-use practices were to blame for the flooding and has introduced sweeping changes (*New York Times,* 26 August, 1998).

To return to the issues of the consuming young in Shanghai and Guangzhou, Table 4.9 provides a glimpse into their aspirations for future material consumption.

The table shows that just less than half of the young people aspire to be rich, while about a quarter consider wealth to the measure of success. Both figures imply the desire to expand radically their current material consumption levels. In sum, the surveys of the young in the two major cities of Shanghai and Guangzhou show that consumption has clearly expanded rapidly after economic liberalisation in 1984. However, the full development of consumerism as the culture of everyday life for the people of China remains a distant possibility, especially in view of the economic slowdown which it has experienced since 1998, and will continue to for some time yet, as a result of the economic crisis in the rest of East and Southeast Asia.

Conclusion

The Chinese economy has experienced spectacular growth for the past two decades as a result of China's economic reform and 'open door' policies initiated in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The national economic growth has obviously translated into improved material life for the people, particularly those in urban areas, which have benefited most from both domestic and foreign direct investments. In an attempt to examine the concrete material benefits derived from this economic growth, this chapter has explored, in a preliminary manner, first, the consumption patterns of the population as a whole and subsequently, the consumption patterns of the urban population, particularly the youth segment of two of the major cities which have so benefited, namely, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

At the national level, the pattern of consumption expansion evinced a very significant 'social' dimension. There appear to be informal 'baselines' which govern the distribution of goods across society at different stages of economic growth, such that the entire population moves forward and crosses each base-line at roughly the same time. Thus, prior to the economic reform, when most of a family's income was spent on basic necessities such as food and cheap clothing, the most popular household goods were sewing machines, watches, bicycles and radios. These were often referred to as the 'four big items'. Economic reform has since continuously improved the population's standard of living. In the 1980s, the old 'four big items' had been replaced by a new 'six big items' of colour TVs, refrigerators, cameras, electric fans, washing machines and tape recorders. By the 1990s, consumer attention has become focused on such luxury items as video recorders, hi-fi systems, and air-conditioners. The pattern of consumption of durable goods may be conceptualised in terms of a 'consumption ladder', where individuals or households will only attempt to climb the next rung after all the durables in a specific rung have been obtained. As development continues, the Chinese will likely reach a higher rung in their 'consumption ladder', an aspiration which is already apparent among the urban young population.

The presence of such a 'ladder' is partly a reflection of the low level of overall consumption in a developing economy, where the distribution of consumer durables is still very tractable. Indeed, the concept of 'consumption ladder' is be particularly useful for economies at the lower end of development. Under such conditions, acquisition of household durables dominates consumption where functionality and utility rule, while personalised items remain either out of reach or of secondary concern. Obviously, such economies have yet to reach the development level where full-blown consumerism is the quotidian culture for all. Once this level of consumerism is reached, where consumer choices become the concern for an ever-expanding range of items of consumption, including the household durables themselves, then, the ability to itemise the goods and services into discrete rungs on a ladder becomes difficult, if not impossible. Thus, the utility of the concept of 'consumption ladder' is likely to be limited for developed economies that are fully integrated into global capitalism, where consumerism is already a way of life for almost everyone.

Notes

1 I am grateful to Chua Beng-Huat and Annie Chan for helpful comments.
2 See *China Statistical Yearbook* (1980, 1998).
3 This puzzle seemed to be first recognised by Garnaut and Ma (1993).
4 For a rigorous analysis on how the 'subsistence constraint' affects people's consumption behaviour see Davies (1994).
5 The Law of diminishing marginal utility is a fundamental axiom in economic theory. It states that the more of any one good consumed in a given period, the less satisfaction (utility) generated by consuming each additional (marginal) unit of the same good. For a detailed discussion, see Case and Fair (1992).
6 For a rigorous analysis on why people generally have a 'preference for variety,' see Avinash Dixit and Joseph E.Stiglitz (1977).
7 For a detailed discussion on the Engels' law, see Edwin Mansfield (1994).
8 For details on comparative housing policies between socialist and non-socialist economies see Chua (1977).
9 See *Beijing Review,* 2–8 January, 1995, p. 30.
10 See *Beijing Review,* 24–30 March, 1997, pp. 16–18.
11 See 'A survey on the lifestyle of the youth in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Fuzhou', the South China Market Research Corporation Ltd, 1995. Some of the results are also reported in a recent paper by Zhongcheng Zheng and Wenshuang Zhang, 'A primary study of the youth's lifestyle in Guangzhou and Shanghai,' memo, Zhong Shang University, China.
12 See *Guangzhou Statistical Yearbook* (1995) and *Shanghai Statistical Yearbook* (1995).

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5 Middle-class Formation and Consumption in Hong Kong

Annie Hau-nung Chan

Introduction

This chapter attempts to chart some fundamental issues concerning the consumption patterns of a sub-section of Hong Kong's new rich.[1] Risking charges of over-generalisation, the 'new' in the term 'new rich' generally refers to those relatively new wealthy social groups which have emerged during post-war economic development. Being a relational concept, it follows that attempts to define the 'new rich' in a particular society on the basis of predetermined criteria—e.g. ethnicity, absolute wealth, socio-political orientation, occupation or mobility—would be meaningless.[2] In the case of Hong Kong, the 'new rich' in the 1990s can be seen as consisting of entrepreneurs and businessmen, as well as professionals, administrators and managers, and these categories can be further sub-divided by age.[3]

The focus of this chapter is on a particular sub-section of Hong Kong's new rich which has attracted the most attention in recent literature—i.e., the middle class.[4] In what follows, I start by laying out issues which pertain to the formation of the middle class in Hong Kong, before turning to examine the specific role of consumption in this process. Survey findings will be used to shed some light on the relationship between consumption and class in Hong Kong, before moving on to examine the likelihood of a new middle class[5] whose subjective identity is constructed upon distinctive consumption patterns and accompanying values. This is achieved by examining findings from an exploratory study which analyses respondents' outlooks, practices and patterns of consumption, as well as their conceptions of taste and social distinction. Here, findings will be assessed against Bourdieu's theory of taste as a form of cultural capital and social distinction, its employment by 'new cultural intermediaries' (or new middle class).[6]

'Class' in Hong Kong

Class analysis was described as 'conspicuously absent' in Hong Kong studies before the mid-1980s (Leung 1994). It was probably a much-quoted remark—'to describe a society like [Hong Kong] as a class society, is not very appropriate' (Lee 1982:69) —that has sparked off a series of attempts to rebut the application of liberal theories of industrialism,[7] and to reinstate the centrality of class. Lee, for example, has argued that class is no longer a meaningful concept in Hong Kong because social classes here are internally fragmented, and that members of the same class no longer share the same interests and outlooks (Lee 1982). He claims that the emergence of new social cleavages along the lines of consumer groups, professional affiliations and so on has further denied class as the basis of interest identification and collective action.[8] The increasing affluence of society as a whole, the growing importance of formal qualifications, technology and professional skills, together with the dominance of market mechanisms, have rendered ascribed status and social origin less important in accounting for individual achievement (ibid. i. 56, also see Lau and Kuan 1988:64–7). The argument is a well-rehearsed one—that Hong Kong is, objectively speaking, an open society where individual merit is the main criteria for achievement. This structural feature reinforces subjective perception of equality of opportunities and social openness, which renders the influence of class insignificant.[9]

Recent literature, on the other hand, paints a radically different picture. Historical and sociological studies have identified the formation of a number of classes throughout the history of Hong Kong as a British colony.[10] In other words, while people might think that society is open and meritocratic, the reality is not what it seems. The distribution of power and material resources has never been in any way egalitarian, and economic development has continued to widen rather than narrow the gap between the rich and the poor in Hong Kong. As is the case with most neighbouring Asian societies, it is the middle classes who have benefited the most from rapid and compressed economic development, and to whom our attention will now turn.

Middle-class formation in Hong Kong[11]

There are two major factors which contribute to the growth of Hong Kong's middle class. First, economic restructuring and increasing links with the international economy have led to increasing demand for professional and managerial personnel, particularly in the sectors of

Table 5.1 Hong Kong's working population by industry, 1976–96 (%)

Industry	*1976*	*1981*	*1986*	*1991*	*1996*
Manufacturing	44.6	41.3	38.5	28.2	18.9
Construction	5.8	7.7	6.2	6.9	8.1
Wholesale, retail and import/export trades, restaurants and hotels	19.3	19.2	22.3	22.5	24.9
Transport, storage and communication	7.4	7.5	8.0	9.8	10.9
Financing, insurance, real estate and business services	3.3	4.8	6.4	10.6	13.4
Community, social and personal services	15.2	15.6	18.4	19.9	22.3
Other	4.4	3.9	2.9	2.1	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number in thousands	1,915	2,404	2,643	2,715	3,043

Source: Census and Statistics Department (1986, 1991, 1996).

Table 5.2 Percentage distribution of population aged 15 and over by educational attainment, Hong Kong, 1981–96

Educational attainment	*1981*	*1986*	*1991*	*1996*
No schooling/kindergarten only	16.1	14.1	12.8	9.5
Primary	34.2	29.2	25.2	22.6
Secondary	39.3	43.0	45.8	46.6
Sixth form	3.6	4.7	4.9	6.1
Tertiary:				
Non-degree courses	3.3	4.7	5.4	4.8
Degree courses	3.4	4.3	5.9	10.4
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Census and Statistics Department (1991, 1996).

commercial and financial services. Rapid and continuous expansion of education, notably on the tertiary level, has raised the overall level of educational attainment within the population. In terms of occupational and educational attainment, there is little doubt that Hong Kong's middle class is in formation (at least socio-demographically).

It has been observed that the members of Hong Kong's 'new middle class' are mostly second-generation, locally born, upwardly mobile, have attained relatively high levels of education, are concerned about the future (since they have little direct inheritance), and are also seen as crucial to Hong Kong's economic as well as political development (Cheung *et al.* 1988). However, socio-demographic characteristics were often casually extended by observers to speculate on the cultural

Table 5.3 Occupations of the working population in Hong Kong, 1991 and 1996 (%)

Occupation	*1991*	*1996*
Managers and administrators	9.2	12.1
Professionals	7.1	5.0
Associate professionals	10.3	12.1
Clerks	15.9	16.8
Service and shop sales workers	13.2	13.8
Craft and related workers	14.7	12.3
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	13.5	8.5
Elementary occupations	18.5	18.6
Skilled agricultural and fishery workers; armed forces and occupations not classifiable	1.0	0.8
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Census and Statistics Department (1991, 1996).

constitution of the new middle class. Such speculations include their intellectual and moral influences and constitution, their subjective attitudes to communist China, their values and behaviour with regard to planning for the future, their role in Hong Kong's political development and, in particular, their centrality in the process of democratisation.[12] Others, however, have reservations about the likelihood of the new middle class becoming major political actors, given the heterogeneity of their mobility routes and educational backgrounds (Lui 1988; Wong and Lui 1992).[13] Nevertheless, despite internal divergence within the middle class, some writers remain optimistic that middle-class formation and middle-class action is still possible in the near future for both structural and contingent reasons (i.e., their common material interests and political future).[14]

The overall impression is that for most writers, issues of democratisation and political participation are of greater centrality than cultural aspects of middle-class formation. Collectively, these writers have come to see the distinction between the three levels of class analysis (i.e., class structure, class formation and class action) as important, and some information has been brought to bear on structure and political action. However, a serious gap remains on second level of sociocultural class formation—i.e., on how a set of potential interests as defined by structural positions actually gets translated into concrete identities.

A number of recent empirical studies have tackled the theme of middle-class formation from a structural point of view, through the study of patterns of social mobility (Wong and Lui 1992; Tsang 1992, 1993, 1994a, 1994b; Chan 1994; Chan *et al*. 1995). These studies found that the service class of Hong Kong is better educated, has lived in Hong Kong longer; mostly lives in self-contained private housing, commands a higher income and have one or more investments.[15] Of perhaps greater relevance here is the finding that the service class tends to be intergenerationally stable.[16] These studies found that while absolute mobility has increased, relative mobility rates have not.[17] In addition, the effects of social origin and sex on socio-economic status attainment remain significant.[18] In other words, Hong Kong society is not nearly as open as it seems.

Studies on Hong Kong's middle class have thus taken two general directions. On the one hand, some writers are interested in the political organisation and participation of the middle class. On the other hand, interest on the middle class lies within broader issues of Hong Kong's class structure and openness. In both cases, however, relatively little information has been gathered concerning the culture of the middle class. Now we turn to look at one such cultural aspect which is of relevance to middle-class formation in Hong Kong—consumption.

Consumption, cultural capital and middle-class culture

Sociological interest in consumption and stratification takes on two general directions. First, to what extent is society stratified along lines of consumption? Here, focus is on the differential distribution of resources as a basis of social division, which is directly reflected in modes of consumption of goods and services (i.e., consumption in the public vs. private sectors).[19] Second, to what extent is consumption the basis of subjective identification and group formation? Here the emphasis is on social distinction through the display and practice of 'lifestyles' which do not operate blatantly according to the principles of economics,[20] as well as the use of consumption as a form of cultural capital.[21]

On the first question, it is not surprising that sharp consumption-sector cleavages can be found in Hong Kong, particularly in housing, health care and educational provision.[22] In the leisure sector, some information has been brought to bear that consumption patterns and lifestyles vary amongst different sectors within the population in Hong Kong. Laurent (1987) identified eight broad types of consumers in Hong Kong, each with a distinctive combination of consumption and leisure patterns and corresponding socio-demographic characteristics. In general, those with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to have been to a Western restaurant, read a book, listened to classical music, and have been to a shopping mall; whereas those with a lower level of education and engaged in routine manual work are

Table 5.4 Consumption pattern by social class, Hong Kong (%)

Consumption indicator	*No employment*	*Service*	*Intermediate*	*Manual*
*Knowledge about Far Eastern Economic Review**				
No	77.1	30.8	61.5	67.3
Yes	22.9	69.2	38.5	32.7
(N)	(96)	(52)	(91)	(55)
*Possession of CD player**				
No	66.7	30.8	51.6	67.3
Yes	33.3	69.2	48.4	32.7
(N)	(96)	(52)	(91)	(55)
Travelled in Europe last year†				
No	99.0	86.5	96.7	100.0
Yes	1.0	13.5	3.3	0.0
(N)	(96)	(52)	(91)	(55)
*The Biggest expenditure item for family in the average month**				
Accommodation	34.1	67.3	32.9	38.8
Food	55.7	18.4	35.4	40.8
Entertainment	3.4	6.1	9.8	0.0
Children's education	5.7	6.1	13.4	20.4
Transport	0.0	2.0	4.9	0.0
Clothing	1.1	0.0	3.7	0.0
(N)	(88)	(49)	(82)	(49)

Notes:
* Chi-square test is significant at 0.0000 level.
† Chi-square test is significant at 0.0004 level.
(N) Number of people surveyed
Source: Ng (1995:342).

more likely to watch football at home, bet on horse races, watch TV and engage in minimal physical activities (Laurent 1987:360–89). In terms of cultural activities, those with higher levels of education have the highest rate of attendance at 'high' cultural performances.[23] Findings from recent surveys also indicate that consumption knowledge and practices vary along the lines of class, age, income and education (Ng 1995). Tables 5.4 to 5.6 show some selected findings.

From Table 5.4, we can see that consumption knowledge and practices differ clearly along class lines. Those who score high predominantly come from younger age cohorts, have achieved post-secondary education, and are employed in service-class occupations. Table 5.5 shows a clear association between social class and consumption scores, which indicate overall consumption knowledge and practices. While the extent to which consumption is an increasingly important line of

Table 5.5 Overall practice of consumption by social class, Hong Kong (%)

	Consumption score[1]			
Social class	*Low*	*Medium*	*High*	*(N)*
No employment	55.2	26.0	18.8	(96)
Service	5.9	39.2	54.9	(51)
Intermediate	22.2	46.7	31.1	(90)
Manual	61.8	21.8	16.4	(55)

Note:
1 In this study, respondents were each given a consumption score based on their knowledge and practices of a list of twenty-nine items of consumption (see Ng 1995: 338–43 for a complete list of consumption items)

Source: Ng (1995:345).

Table 5.6 Perceived most important thing for Hong Kong, by consumption group (%)

Consumption group	*Improve Sino-Hong Kong relations*	*Develop democracy*	*Develop welfare*	*Maintain economic prosperity*	*Don't know*	*(N)*
Low	18.5	6.5	13.0	44.6	17.4	(92)
Medium	30.5	5.1	6.8	56.8	0.8	(118)
High	36.0	10.5	3.5	50.0	0.0	(86)

Source: Ng (1995:359).

social cleavage in Hong Kong remains unclear, there is evidence that different consumption groups have different concerns. Consumption knowledge and practices were found to correlate significantly with respondents' economic and political priorities. In Table 5.6, we can see that while economic prosperity is generally desired by all three consumption groups, welfare is seen by the low consumption group as particularly important. The development of democracy is seen as most important by the high consumption group, while the low consumption group seems to care less than the other two groups about the state of Sino-Hong Kong relations.[24]

The systematic association between consumption practice and knowledge, occupational class and various socio-political attitudes serve to illustrate Bourdieu's insight on the interrelationship between people's position within the social structure and their consumption patterns and knowledge as manifestation of the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu also asserted that cultural and symbolic capital can be actively deployed to enhance social advancement through mechanisms of social distinction —i.e., the drawing of symbolic boundaries based on taste. There are few studies on Hong Kong which directly address this latter aspect of Bourdieu's thesis—i.e., the relative autonomy of consumption as a basis of social division and the significance of consumption as a form of capital for cultural and social reproduction. In what follows, I present findings from an exploratory study which addresses some of these issues.

Young professionals, managers and administrators in Hong Kong

This study examines the significance of consumption for a sub-section of Hong Kong's middle class,[25] who, according to Bourdieu, are most likely to employ consumption taste as a form of social distinction and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984).[26] Respondents in the study fit the following descriptions, and can be regarded as typical of Hong Kong's 'new middle class':

- single,
- age 25–35,
- employed in non-manual, professional, managerial or administrative occupation,[27]
- financially independent,
- attained post-secondary education,
- command above average monthly income,
- locally born.

In all, 29 in-depth semi-structured interviews were successfully conducted with respondents sampled through the snow-balling method.[28] In this section, I summarise findings on respondents' leisure and consumption patterns, their views on the meaning of taste and on taste as a form of cultural capital and social distinction. I will argue that systematic patterns of consumption practice and orientations can be found along lines of respondents' social origins and occupational sector, and that these differences are to be understood within the context of a society which has undergone, and still is undergoing, rapid socioeconomic and socio-political change.

A Leisure activities

The most commonly reported leisure activities practised by respondents are cinema-going, eating out and shopping. Television viewing, on the other hand, ranks low on respondents' agenda. This stands in contrast to the general Hong Kong population, where TV viewing is the most popular form of entertainment, followed by cinema-going and shopping (Chan and Lee 1992:81–91). Long working hours and the lack of home space might be one reason for respondents viewing the home as a place for relaxation and rest rather than for entertainment. Because of this, common leisure activities are usually bought and consumed in the market. Almost all respondents named eating out as a major leisure activity. While some respondents regarded eating out as an end in itself, i.e., for the food, drinks or atmosphere, others saw it as the means for social gathering and for killing time. Most respondents are highly selective as to what films they see, and, like eating out, movie-going is often used as a means of socialising. Literary and artistic activities were rare amongst these respondents. Only a handful of them mentioned reading at all, and those who have had formal training in the high arts (e.g. piano, violin, ballet and painting) admitted that they rarely practice due to the lack of leisure time. However, respondents engaged in the public relations, fashion and design sectors (what I shall call the 'marginal' occupations[29]) reported that they were able to mix work with pleasure,[30] while those in 'mainstream' occupations such as those traditionally recognised professions (e.g. bankers, architects, lawyers, managers and administrators in industry) rarely do so.

B Outlooks on consumption

While general leisure activities do not vary greatly amongst respondents, this does not imply that they are more or less homogenous as consumers. A closer look reveals that respondents differ in terms of their outlooks on consumption. Two major types of outlook could be identified amongst the respondents—those who adopt a consumerist attitude, projecting their identities in terms of individuality and style in consumption; and those who adopt a more practical attitude to consumption; whereby they may be constantly aware of alternative lifestyles yet do not find them attractive. I shall label these two types of respondents as 'consumerist' and 'pragmatist'. The consumerist view of consumption can be illustrated by the following excerpts:

> My motto in life is 'work hard, consume hard'. Most of my friends would agree with me.
>
> (Art director and entrepreneur, social origin class V[31])

> There are so many beautiful things in life, and if money can buy them and make you happy, there's nothing wrong with consumerism. It's important to have savings too, but I won't starve myself in order to save.
>
> (Editor and publisher, social origin class I)

> I like shopping very much…I am a very vain person, both materially and spiritually…I like to possess things, it makes me feel secure and happy…and beautiful things make the world a nicer place too…I don't save at all; or rather, I can't.
>
> (Editor, social origin class I)

> I have my dreams, and it is important to save money if I were to realise them. But I'm not the type of person who saves from buying less or eating less…I think that's absurd. I won't change my consumption habits, I'll just work harder to make more so I could save more.
>
> (General manager of jewellery shop and workshop, social origin class I)

Notions evoked above included 'dreams', 'beauty', and 'happiness', as well as the insistence that consumption take higher priority than saving for the future. These respondents expressed an attitude which resembles what some have described as characteristic of consumerists of the 'postmodern' variety—i.e., indulging in pleasures, fantasies and dreams through acts of consumption.[32] Consumerists within the sample, however, are not impulsive buyers. While consumption is seen as desirable, they do not spend recklessly.

> When I was younger I was quite a big spender. Like, when I was only an artist in an advertising agency and making only $2,500 a month,[33] I could spend $1,500 on one pair of trousers, with no regrets too. That was quite silly, when I look back on it now. Now that I'm older, I'm much more rational, even though I still buy expensive things that many people would find silly, like $30,000 for a bed…but it's because I know what I buy is not just something to sleep on, it's a work of art too.
>
> (Art director and entrepreneur, social origin class II)

> When I got my first credit card I spent much more than I should. I was easily tempted by 'special offers' on expensive skincare

> products which I don't need…I try to control myself now. I now stop and think and ask myself, do I really need this?
>
> (Solicitor, social origin class I)

> I'm willing to spend lots of money on just one item, but it also depends…like for instance this coat I really liked at MaxMara, it's $8,000. If it's $6,000, I probably would have bought it without thinking. But now I'm waiting for the big sale at the end of the season…$8,000 is too much. Not that I can't afford it, but I'll feel better if I'd bought it on a sale.
>
> (Retail manager, social origin class I)

> I buy expensive things sometimes, and definitely with no regrets if it's worth it. If I spend $2,000 on a shirt, I want to make sure it's not made in Hong Kong or something, make sure it's of high-quality craftsmanship. Some people think that expensive is always good, but it's not really.
>
> (Photographer, social origin class III)

Even though these consumerists remarked on how they do not spend money just for the sake of it, and in some cases how they have changed their ways from 'buying without thinking' —i.e., from being 'silly' and 'impulsive' —the prices they mentioned (somewhat casually) for a piece of furniture, a pair of trousers and pots of face cream still seem extravagant by most standards. Pragmatists, on the other hand, rarely spend large sums of money on one item, and articulated the 'need' to consume differently compared to consumerists. For them, consumption is based on 'need', rather than based on a way of life or the pursuit of 'pleasure'.

> I buy something only when I have a need. Like, if my old suit is looking too scruffy, or if my socks have holes all over them. Then, I'll go and buy some new ones…I've never had a walkman all my life, everyone else seems to have one, but I didn't need one until recently, because I have some language tapes I want to listen to, so, I bought one. Like, there's this camera I really like and it's quite cheap too, but I don't really need it, so I don't buy it. Simple as that.
>
> (Marketing manager, social origin class VII)

> Even though I'm much more well-off now than when I was young, I still don't spend much on unnecessary things. My biggest expense

now is my mortgage, which just started not long ago. If I go shopping I only buy things for my flat. Like mirrors, rugs, frames for posters and so on…things I need for my flat.

(Associate in public relations consultancy, social origin class VI)

When I go shopping, which is not very often, it's usually for choosing presents for family or friends. I don't buy many things for myself—maybe a few CDs every now and then…there aren't many things I need that I don't have already.

(Public relations executive, social origin class I)

There are only four respondents within the sample who expressed a 'pragmatist' outlook towards consumption, where three are from working-class backgrounds (Class VI and VII), and one from the service class (class I). All consumerist respondents are either from service-class backgrounds or engaged in marginal occupations (see Table 5.7 below).

C Specific patterns of consumption

Apart from differences in consumption outlooks, respondents also differ in the wheres and whys of their consumption activities. While cinema-going, eating out and shopping are the main leisure activities, respondents do not go to the same cinemas, restaurants or shops.

Table 5.7 Consumption outlooks and specific consumption patterns, Hong Kong, by profession

Occupation	*Social origin*	*Outlook*†	*Films*‡	*Eating out*§	*Shopping*§§	*Score*
Solicitor	I	1	1/2**	1/2	2	6
PR manager	I	1	1	1	2	5
Editor/publisher*	I	1	1/2	1	1	4.5
PR manager	I	3	2	3	3	11
Bank manager	I	1	1	1	1	4
Retail manager	I	1	1/2	1	1	4.5
Editor*	I	1	1	1	1	4
Marketing manager	I	1	1	1	1	4
General manager	I	1	1	1	1	4
Sales manager	II	2	3	2	2	9
School teacher	II	1	1	1	2	5

Table 5.7 (cont'd)

Occupation	*Social origin*	*Outlook*†	*Films*‡	*Eating out*§	*Shopping*§§	*Score*
University administrator	II	2	1	2	2	7
Creative director*	II	1	1	1	1	4
Art director*	II	1	1	1	1	4
Commercial photographer*	III	1	1/2	2	2	5.5
PR manager	IV	2	3	2	2	9
Architect	IV	2	1/2	2	2	7.5
Art director*	IV	1	1	1	1	4
Sales supervisor	IV	1	2/3	3	2	8.5
Account director*	IV	1	2/3	1	1	5.5
Project director	IV	1	2/3	2	2	6.5
Sales executive	V	2	2/3	2	3	8.5
Art director*	V	1	1/2	1	1	4.5
Commercial photographer*	V		2/3	1	1/2	6
PR manager	VI	2	1	2	2	7
Art director*	VI	1	2	1/2	2	6.5
PR associate	VI	3	2	3	3	11
Sales manager	VII	3	3	3	3	12
Marketing manager	VII	3	2/3	3	3	11.5

Notes:

* denotes respondents in aesthetics, art and related occupations

** scoring is based on the overall interview with each respondent, and the classifications are not always clear-cut. For example, this solicitor is mainly interested in arty films, but sometimes do not mind. A high total score (as indicated in the far right hand column) indicates an overall pragmatist attitude towards consumption, whereas a low score indicates a generally consumerist attitude.

† 1 = consumerist outlook
2 = agrees with 1 but not always do so in practice
3 = pragmatist outlook

‡ 1 = into arty films
2 = don't mind much
3 = into mainstream blockbusters, resist arty films

§ 1 = exquisite, expensive restaurants
2 = occasionally eat at 1, mostly 3
3 = average priced restaurants, fast food

§§ 1 = exquisite, designer labels
2 = department stores and foreign chain stores, occasionally shop at 1
3 = local chain stores, local small shops

1 Cinema-going

Two broad categories of cinema-goers can be identified within the sample. First, the pragmatists are those who are interested only in 'big production' or highly entertaining blockbusters. They do not express a particularly high interest in films in general, mainly because they think that cinema-going is too time-consuming. Therefore, they only go and see films which are 'guaranteed' to be 'good'. This might be one reason why they also resist 'arty' films or mainstream 'rubbish' local productions—both considered to be a complete waste of time.

> I don't read film reviews. I only see movies that are entertaining or have won or been nominated for Oscars. I once went to the Arts Centre with some friends to see a Russian film, and it was a total waste of time…didn't know what it was all about.
>
> (Public relations officer, social origin class V)

> It's quite difficult to find time to see a film these days. I could never make the 7:30 shows, and sometimes not even the 9:30…If I do see a film I'll only see the really good ones, not any of the rubbish local films.
>
> (Hotel sales manager, social origin class VII)

Unlike the pragmatists, who adopt a middle-of-the road/mainstream taste in films, a second group of cinema goers does not resist mainstream films, but tends to favour 'arty' films if they have to make a choice. Whilst agreeing with pragmatist movie-goers that popular local films are often quite 'rubbish', they nevertheless do not mind seeing these films, since watching the film itself is not necessarily the reason behind a trip to the cinema.

> …if I'm going [to the cinema] with a bunch of friends, then it doesn't matter what I see. Usually they are the late-night shows of local films…just for a laugh. Mainstream films are too commercial, and they use very basic techniques only…you can't learn much from them. If I see a more serious film I usually go by myself. They make you think about things, and you can always learn something from them.
>
> (Commercial photographer, social origin class III)

> I am not very picky about films, but I'm quite interested in more serious ones. I find them more interesting because they make you

> think about things. If my friends ask me to, I'll go. I'm not saying that films like *Thelma and Louise* are crap. It is a very entertaining film, and some of the Chow Sing Chi films are my favourites. But, if I have to choose, I'd prefer going to the International Film Festival.
> (School teacher, social origin class II)

> I usually go to the Palace, Columbia Classics or Cine-Art…but now I don't have so much time anymore. I still try to go to the International Film Festival every year, but work is always busy so I don't get to see much of these good films anymore.
> (Art director, social origin class IV)

> For the rubbish films, I watch them when I'm really bored, so I usually get the video out. But if a bunch of friends ask me then I don't mind going along. They are good for killing time. So, if I go to the cinema, it's usually to see more serious or interesting films in film festivals, and I'll make sure I won't miss any good ones…even if it means taking time off work.
> (Marketing manager, social origin class I)

However, respondents quoted above—i.e., those who do not resist going to see a 'rubbish' film—are not indiscriminate cinema-goers. They seem to be fully aware of the difference between films for 'killing time', 'getting together with friends' or 'for a laugh' and those which are more 'serious' or 'interesting'. Film festivals were regularly mentioned and seem to represent the place where 'quality films' are shown.

Those who like blockbusters and/or resist 'arty' films are mostly from class IV or below. In only one case is the respondent from a service-class background, and only two were engaged in marginal occupations. On the other hand, all those who are into 'arty' films but do not explicitly express resistance to 'rubbish' films are either from service-class social origins or engage in marginal occupations.

2 Eating out

Respondents eat out both out of necessity and for leisure. There are those who eat in modest establishments (e.g. fast-food and average-priced restaurants and dai pai dongs) when eating on their own or with friends, and seldom initiate dining in expensive restaurants. Three of these respondents are from working-class backgrounds (class VI and VII), while one is from petty bourgeois background (class IV).

> I spend an average of about $100 to $120 on food everyday [for all three meals]…from lunch boxes to restaurants…I can't relate myself to spending thousands of dollars on one meal.
>
> (Marketing manager, social origin class VII)

> I get very 'yuk chek'[34] if I have to spend hundreds of dollars on one meal. I wasn't brought up that way. But sometimes I have no choice if I go out with a group of people. It's okay if it's for work and I could get my company to pay. But still, it seems such a waste of money.
>
> (Hotel sales manager, social origin class VII)

> If I eat with my family we go to Chinese restaurants near home, because my parents don't like Western food and they don't like to go to new places. If I eat with close friends we usually go to ordinary restaurants…like the Boston, Big Shanghai, Pizza Hut, places like that. On special occasions we might go to hotels and more expensive places, about three or four times a year. But I sure don't mind going more often if I don't have to pay.
>
> (Hotel sales executive, social origin class V)

For these respondents, eating out at one's own expenses is infrequent, and when it does happen it is the norm to visit an average-priced restaurant. Spending large sums of money on eating out is seen as 'wasteful' and undesirable. On the other hand, there are six respondents who regularly eat at modest establishments but feel quite comfortable splashing out once in a while—as a little treat.

> I spend quite a lot of money eating out. I'm crazy about Japanese food, so even though I don't have sashimi three times a day, when I go I spend thousands of dollars on one meal. I like trying out new places too. But for an average meal, I think I spend about a hundred dollars or so.
>
> (Project director, social origin class IV)

> There isn't a lot of choice around here [where I work]. I usually bring my own lunchbox. I think it's more healthy this way. But I like going to nice coffee shops and try new, interesting restaurants. True, they are a bit pricey but well, it's the atmosphere that counts. And it's not like I spend hundreds of dollars on every meal! I don't go very often, but yes, I'm quite adventurous and I like to try new things.
>
> (University administrator, social origin class II)

On average there are more respondents who are consumerists rather than pragmatists when it comes to eating out—nearly half of all respondents claim to enjoy frequent visits to upmarket restaurants. They tend to take eating out seriously, and were often able to readily name their favourite restaurants. This group of consumerist diners are all from either service-class backgrounds or engage in marginal occupations.

> I like to try new restaurants, new places and new things in general. I like this place very much [American Pie in Lan Kwai Fong], and I like the Asahi Super Dry, and Grissini at the Grand Hyatt… [named some more places]. That's why I spend all my money on eating.
>
> (PR manager, social origin class I)

> Unluckily I have this group of friends who, like me, love eating. Most of my friends like Western food but I prefer Chinese food, and that could get pretty expensive if you are serious about it. I also like Japanese food, and that could get out of hand if you are not careful as well. [How much would an average meal cost you?] It's very hard to say. It could range from a few hundred dollars to thousands. But again it's very hard to estimate, because me and my friends like drinking as well, and you know how expensive alcohol can get in these places.
>
> (Commercial photographer, social origin class V)

> I spend a lot of my money on eating. I love food, even though I don't eat a lot. My parents like the Amigo (French restaurant) and they used to take me there when I was younger. I think that place is a bit too 'old' for my taste now. Gaddi's [French restaurant in the Peninsular Hotel] is one of my favourites. The food is really good and the service is excellent. And you know all those restaurants along Lan Kwai Fong, there is one especially nice little place call Cafe de Paris, I still go there quite regularly. [Do you ever go to dai pai dongs or fast food restaurants?] Oh, it's been a long while since my last visit to McDonald's. It's junk food, it's not good for you. Dai pai dongs are no-go areas for me. I hope you don't get the wrong idea that I'm a snob, but since I can afford to eat better, I'd rather do so.
>
> (Bank manager, social origin class I)

> I like eating in nice places. It's more for the atmosphere than for the food, even though that is important too. I like this place [Post

> 97 in Lan Kwai Fong], and I like M at the Fringe. It's very European, makes me feel like I'm in Europe…and there are a lot of beautiful people here too [in Lan Kwai Fong].
>
> (Creative director, social origin class II)

The above respondents are familiar with the most trendy and exquisite eateries. They stressed the aesthetics, atmosphere and quality of service of eating-out experiences, rather than the price or convenience —as is the case with pragmatist diners. Respondents' eating-out practices and preferences, as with cinema-going, show clear differences along lines of social origin and occupational sector. I now turn to the last category of consumption-related leisure activities examined in the study, and arguably Hong Kong people's favourite sport (next to horse racing?) —shopping.

3 Shopping

Three categories of shoppers can be identified within the sample. First there are the pragmatists, who do not mind much where they shop. They might buy their work clothes from local chain stores (e.g. G 2000, Giordano, Theme) or sometimes from small shops in major shopping arcades, and cannot always name the shops they frequent. Only five respondents fall into this category and all but one are from class V or below. A second group of shoppers do their shopping mostly in Japanese department stores (e.g. UNY, Isetan, Sogo and Yaohan), and sometimes at more expensive outlets or foreign chain stores (Lane Crawford was often mentioned, and some included Stefanel, Esprit, Benetton and Pop 84). A third group of shoppers regularly do their shopping at exquisite outlets and designer labels (e.g. Seibu, the Landmark, Joyce, le Cadre, etc.), and claimed that they almost never buy anything from chain stores. Unlike the pragmatic shoppers, this group of shoppers can readily name their favourite designers or labels, and the names they gave are surprisingly similar—designers such as Romeo Gigli, Yohji Yamamoto, Dolce and Gabanna and Byblos were mentioned by most respondents in this category of 'big' spenders. They are all from either service-class backgrounds or are engaged in art- and aesthetics-related occupations.

More interesting, however, is the disgust some respondents expressed towards local chain stores. These are the first signs of consumption used as social distinction by respondents, since a moral evaluation was made on the desirability of certain labels.

> I really hate Giordano.
>
> (PR manager, social origin class VI)

> …you can't expect me to wear Giordano or Sparkle, can you?
>
> (Art director, social origin class IV)

This expression of distaste and contempt for mass-produced clothing is at the same time a statement of their subjective identity (i.e., they are the kind of people who only wear certain kinds of clothes). Those from a higher social origin, however, tend to be more sympathetic and expressed little distaste towards mass outlets. The following respondent is one of the most expensive shoppers in the sample, yet seems to hold no prejudices against mass outlets.

> Giordano is a famous label in Taiwan! Not many people know that…I don't need to wear Giordano, but I have nothing against it…at least its styles are clean and basic, and quality is reasonable.
>
> (Art director, social origin class II)

It appears that those from an intermediate social origin tend to show more contempt for mass tastes. They also seem to be quite knowledgeable about designer labels, expensive shops and high-quality goods, even though they seldom buy them. This is quite similar to patterns of cinema-going, where those from an intermediate origin rather than those from the highest social origin reject mass tastes most strenuously —which may be interpreted as an urge to distinguish themselves from other social groups. Unlike those who have just reached the service class, intergenerationally stable respondents already 'have it all' and can relax about their social identity. This might be one reason why outbursts of contempt for mass outlets did not come from respondents with a service-class background.

Respondents' practices and orientations to eating out, cinema-going and shopping can be seen as fitting within broader patterns of association between occupational class and consumption knowledge and practice, as shown in survey findings we saw earlier in the chapter. One difference, however, is that the cleavages here are along lines of social origin and occupational sectors *within* one distinct socio-occupational grouping, rather than *between* occupational classes as such. This suggests that present occupational class alone does not determine consumption practices and orientations. In other words, having a middle-class job and higher levels of educational attainment do not necessarily mean that one will attach a higher significance to taste and consumption as part of one's subjective identity and as part of everyday life. How the meanings of consumption are articulated also depends on personal history and mobility experience. That is to say, we need to locate consumption culture within the context of individuals' experience and history in a changing society, rather than explaining consumption practices in terms of some unproblematic and direct association with corresponding socio-economic status.

D Taste, cultural capital and distinction

Studies in the West have increasingly pointed to the significance of cultural capital in social reproduction and social advancement, and consumption taste could act in favour of social advancement and social reproduction in several ways. First, possession of certain consumption tastes enables entry into occupational fields where taste is recognised as a form of cultural capital and is utilised for work-life mobility. Second, taste can be used as a criteria against which entry into high-status social groups is evaluated. And third, by investing in the cultivation of taste in one's offspring, cultural capital can be instilled and incorporated into the habitus. How taste is understood and what it means to different people also reflects whether or not, and if so how, it could contribute to the construction of symbolic boundaries.

In this section, I focus on respondents' views on the conception of 'taste, as well as the extent to which taste is rewarded in their occupational fields, and used as a means of social distinction. Table 5.8 summarises respondents' views on taste.

Table 5.8 shows that all but five respondents subscribe to the view that there *are* objective standards of taste. It is not unreasonable to suspect that those who hold this view are more likely to use taste as a legitimate classifier than those who believe taste to be entirely arbitrary or subjective. When asked to explain what taste actually is, most respondents interpret good taste in terms of objects relating to one's appearance, clothes in particular. Cultural activities were also mentioned but to a much lesser extent. It appears that the basic requirement of good taste in dress is cleanliness and tidiness. Some respondents said that it is important to 'know yourself' before good taste could be achieved. That is, by knowing what kind of a person one is, and then expressing one's personality and character through choosing the right commodities to match accordingly. Those who have bad taste are people who do not really know who they are, are easily influenced by the mass media and advertising, and buy to achieve good taste by purchasing

Table 5.8 Conceptions of taste, Hong Kong, by profession

Occupation	*Social origin*	*Are there objective standards of taste?*	*Is taste related to money?*	*Can taste be acquired?*
Solicitor	I	+	sometimes	+ $
PR manager	I	+	sometimes	+ limit
Editor/publisher*	I	+	+	+ $
PR manager	I	+	+	+ $
Bank manager	I	+	sometimes	+ limit
Retail manager	I	+	sometimes	+ limit
Editor*	I	+	–	+ limit
Marketing manager	I	+	sometimes	–
General manager	I	+	sometimes	–
Sales manager	II	+	+	+ $
School teacher	II	–	+	+ $
University administrator	II	+	–	+ limit
Creative director*	II	+	–	+ limit
Art director*	II	+	–	–
Commercial photographer*	III	+	–	–
PR manager	IV	+	–	+ limit
Architect	IV	+	+	+ $
Art director*	IV	–	–	+
Sales supervisor	IV	+	sometimes	+ limit
Account director*	IV	–	+	+ $
Project director	IV	+	sometimes	+ limit
Sales executive	V	+	sometimes	+ limit
Art director*	V	+	–	–
Commercial photographer*	V	+	sometimes	+ limit
PR manager	VI	+	–	–
Art director*	VI	+	+	+ $
PR associate	VI	–	+	+ $
Sales manager	VII	+	+	+ limit
Marketing manager	VII	–	–	–

Notes:

*	denotes respondents in aesthetics, art and related occupations
+	= yes
-	= no
+ $	= can be acquired with money
+ limit	= can be acquired but there's a limit as to how far you can go

ready-made images and styles on the market. The following excerpts illustrates these notions.

> Leslie Cheung [pop star and actor] is beautiful, and no one will object to that. But is Chow Wuan [ex-Miss Asia contestant turned

> actress, Playboy centrefold] beautiful? Some may think yes and some might think no. So, there are certain things that are absolute.
>
> (Creative director, social origin class II)

> Like this typeface here [picks up menu on the table] is typically Hong Kong taste. It's too big, too loud and doesn't really go with the rest of the design. Ask anyone with the slightest 'art sense', and they will tell you the same.
>
> (Art director, social origin class I)

For the above respondents, what is good or bad taste is obvious to their eyes and certain standards of taste are seen as 'absolute'. Table 5.8 shows that all respondents who engage in art- and aesthetics-related occupations subscribe to the view that taste is an objective matter. This may be interpreted as a sort of justification for the professionalism of their own occupations, which after all, are primarily about matters of taste. On the other hand, those who expressed a more relativistic judgement towards taste are mostly from lower social origins or are engaged in mainstream occupations. For them, there is no such thing as 'objective good taste'. They believe that there are only different kinds of taste, rather than 'good and bad' tastes as such. To illustrate, the following excerpts show how respondents were careful not to be judgemental on the 'goods' and 'bads' of other people's tastes, and the notion of lifestyle is preferred over the more normative implications of the notion of taste.

> …I won't say that people like Danny Chan [pop star] or Maggie Cheung [ex-Miss Hong Kong turned actress] have 'good' taste as such…it is more of a different kind of lifestyle that they have …like Cheng ManYa [ex-Miss Hong Kong turned photographer and actress], she makes pottery and takes photos in Africa; or people who collect antiques…some people say that is good taste. But I think it is just a kind of description of their kinds of lifestyles, not necessarily good taste.
>
> (Architecture, social origin class IV)

> Maybe some rich people would think that if you know nothing about antiques, then you have no taste…poor people would never have a chance to know about these things, but you can't say they have bad taste…rich people don't know about the good taste of going to dai pai dongs…different people have different tastes and you can't really say which is better than which.
>
> (Art director, social origin class IV)

According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is at its most powerful when it is least directly interchangeable with economic capital (Bourdieu 1984). We now turn to see whether or not respondents think that taste can be bought with money. Seven respondents think that taste is objective because taste is associated with money. For these respondents, taste can be purchased by those who can afford the price. One implication is that these respondents are less likely to see taste as either a high status symbol or as a form of cultural capital. They are sceptical about the real meaning and importance of taste, since only those who can afford it can play the game of taste. In other words, for these respondents, the autonomy of taste as a form of valued cultural capital is relatively low.

> If you have money then you can pretend you have good taste. It's all a matter of money really. I think you can judge a person more from his or her income and education rather than from taste… which would be anything you say it is.
>
> (Hotel sales executive, social origin class V)

> It's really pretentious to talk about taste…if you are loaded then of course you can have taste, have designer labels printed all over you. If you have no money, how can you even afford to talk about taste when there are better things to worry about, like food and shelter!
>
> (Insurance sales supervisor, social origin class IV)

Ten respondents subscribe to a middle-of-the-road view and believed that taste is sometimes though not always related to money. As for those who claim that taste is not related to money whatsoever, their social backgrounds and occupational fields vary greatly, and the small sample size makes it difficult to delineate systematic patterns of association here. In addition, the degree of conceptual abstraction of the question makes it hard to interpret these views meaningfully. Nevertheless, the fact that over one-third of all respondents think that taste is *not* always related to money implies that the interchangeability of these two forms of capital (i.e., cultural and economic) is not seen by all respondents as a matter of course. The issue of the autonomy of cultural capital within a population has important implications on processes of social reproduction and social mobility, and directly assaults claims of meritocracy.[35] Regretfully, the sample here is unable to address this question in relation to taste and consumption with any justice.[36]

For the 21 respondents who agreed that good taste could be acquired, channels for its acquisition mentioned include 'go to nice places', 'read more fashion magazines', 'go window shopping more often', but more importantly, 'be observant', 'be sensible and sensitive', and 'try to develop a critical eye'. Still, there are 11 respondents who pointed out that for some people, no matter how hard they try, there is an 'upper limit' as to how good their taste can become. In short, not everyone has an equal 'talent' in this game of taste.

> I grew up with these cousins of mine, and their family is a lot richer than us…they buy all their clothes from the Swank Shop and places like that, but they still look awful on them. It still is a bit of a mystery to me. It's not as if they can't afford it or they don't take their clothes seriously. They just can't have good taste no matter what they wear.
>
> (Retail manager, social origin class I)

> Even though most movie stars shop at Joyce and wear Gigli or Armani, some look good and some don't. It could even be the very same outfit and still they would look different. It has to do with the 'substance' of the person, not just the clothes or the money. Some people just buy whatever the salesgirls said they look good in, and believe me it really happens because I've seen it so many times, they simply have no dress sense.
>
> (Jewellery shop and workshop general manager, social origin class I)

Respondents who believed that not everyone can achieve good taste because there is an 'upper limit' as to how 'high' some could go also suggested that it is more important to have good taste 'as a person'. This is particularly important for those in fashion- and aesthetics-related occupations, but also holds for those in service-orientated jobs, such as public relations and sales. The reason is that first impressions are important when meeting clients, thereby suggesting that one's performance and abilities at work are, to a certain extent, sometimes judged from one's taste.

> Of course it is important to dress decently for my job, because what I sell are my ideas, my brains…It is not the same as selling a fax machine or a microwave oven, where the consumer can check out the product and hold it in his hands and look at it before deciding to buy it. For advertising, if you cannot show the client that you

> have good taste, how can they trust you enough to put their products into your hands?
>
> (Creative director, social origin class II)

While it is hardly surprising that taste qualifies as a form of cultural capital in certain occupational fields, the more important question remains: How salient is taste as a form of social distinction? This is obviously a difficult question to answer, and the following discussion could not claim to be anything more than preliminary observations.[37] When asked to give a general comment, most respondents agreed that it is difficult to judge another person solely on the basis of appearance. However, a closer look at some of the respondents' casual comments revealed that in real-life practices and experiences, consumption taste is regularly used as a criterion of interpersonal evaluation and social distinction. Below are some examples.

> I'm not like my friends at all. They are very fashion-conscious, and follow designer labels and stuff. They spend all their money on clothes, eating out and clubs. What do I think of them? I think they are really naff […]. I look at [young people] with those silly clothes on (the so-called 'rave' look) and I have nothing to say but sigh. I thought to myself, I surely never was like that when I were their age!
>
> (PR manager, social origin class I)

Through evaluating the lifestyles and consumption patterns of other people, the above respondent is also at the same time drawing a symbolic boundary between herself and her 'fashion-conscious' friends, distinguishing herself from teenagers who blindly follow fashion trends. Similarly, another respondent commented on a girl she used to teach at a tutorial school. This ex-student went on to secretarial school and is now working as a secretary in an architect's office. The following is this respondent's account:

> I bumped into her in Landmark one afternoon, and I could hardly recognise her! She used to be this little girl next door, really down-to-earth…nice one-length hair and so on. But now, her hair is dead short and all gelled up, and she was looking rather 'trendy'. We met for coffee and she told me that she was going to a ball and how she wanted to look 'cool' and to stand out. She is not pretty and that's why she wanted to look 'cool'. She is only a secretary and that's why she wanted to look 'cool, so that other

> people would think that she is a designer or an architect or whatever. She's only a joke in other people's eyes! And that, she would never know.
>
> (PR manager, social origin class VI)

Both respondents quoted above seem to imply that they 'know better' than 'others', and their evaluation of 'others' is not merely a matter of *differentiation,* but that of *distinction*. However, once the issue of social distinction and interpersonal evaluation is touched upon during interviews, it quickly emerged that apart from taste, there are many different criteria by which respondents evaluate the 'worthiness' of others. For example, what is considered 'superficial' or 'typical', and what kinds of action and outlooks are deemed 'worthy' and 'unworthy' are no longer reflected from taste alone:

> [My colleagues] are very different from me. Taste is one thing, of course…I don't think they like shopping at Seibu. They would think it's a waste of time and money. There are other things as well. Their vision is very narrow. They are the sorts who, after spending a fourteen day holiday in Europe on a deluxe tour, come back with forty rolls of film, and talk about it as if they have seen it all…so typical…
>
> (University administrator, social origin class II)

> [My colleagues], they are those people who would rush to Joseph Ho [local fashion designer] when it is on sale. It's not only the kind of clothes people wear or the kind of films they see…what I really dislike are people who are insincere, not just in the sense of lying or pretending, but that they don't take things seriously. They don't take their lives seriously and sincerely…I don't know how else to put it, but that's how I feel.
>
> (School teacher, social origin class II)

> [My colleagues] are all so typically 'see-lai'![38] Always making a big deal out of everything. Like, if you do something that they don't do themselves, they will pass a judgement immediately, like, 'Oh, you go to Lan Kwai Fong don't you? It's full of Gweilos I've heard. Aren't you scared?', or some stupid comment like that. They're so intolerant. That's typically Hong Kong don't you think?
>
> (Bank manager, social origin class I)

> I don't like the people I came across in university. All the boys were into chasing girls, skipping classes, getting more part-time

> jobs, copying assignments…all the girls had their hair permed into the shape of instant noodles, and their sole purpose in university was to look for a husband! And the one thing which I couldn't stand the most about them was that their English was so bad. I hate people whose English is bad!
>
> (Magazine editor, social origin class I)

From the selection of quotes above we can already see that while taste is found to be used by some respondents as a criterion of social distinction, other criteria such as 'inner substance', cultivated manners, intellect and open-mindedness were more commonly evoked by respondents from service-class backgrounds. They do not place a high value on material success, and even actively dissociate themselves from the worldly and the material.[39]

On the other hand, comments made by respondents from modest social backgrounds also suggest the existence of cultural boundaries between sub-groups within the sample as a whole. For instance, when asked about the beginning of his career in the world of advertising, this successful art director remembered how he had felt then, and notions of inferiority and superiority are evoked:

> I felt that there were 'grades'. I remember thinking, I'm now in grade D. When will I be in grade A? It was definitely a negative feeling. I felt that people were graded in terms of the way they dress, the people they know, the things they talk about…of course I've achieved grade A now, but I still remember that feeling very clearly…it was almost a motivation for me to be determined to success so I could be like them one day.
>
> (Art director, social origin class IV)

The above respondent was making great strides in his career at the time, and his talents had been acknowledged by his employer through rapid promotion. However, career success did not come hand in hand with social recognition in his case. In the following cases, respondents expressed similar feelings of social exclusion.

> Some people could be very mean if they think they know something you don't. Like some lawyers or doctors, they deliberately ask you to translate in detail the entire insurance policy, which I'm pretty sure they could understand well. They were sort of hoping I couldn't do it, because they probably think I couldn't speak English

> as well as they could. I'm very familiar with 'insurance English' now. I want to make sure they can't pull my legs anymore.
>
> (Sales supervisor, social origin class IV)

> I once went to this party, and the host was my boss. I know quite a lot of the people there so I wasn't feeling strange before I went. Upon arrival, I noticed that everyone else went in their Mercedes or Porsches, and I took a taxi! I felt a bit strange then, I must admit. But then I thought, if I'm really good at my job, then there is no reason to feel inferior. But still, I try to avoid parties like that from now on.
>
> (Marketing manager, social origin class VII)

Material (expensive cars) and cultural (proficiency in English) resources were yardsticks whereby the above respondents evaluated their social distance from others. Such distinctions are either self-imposed or seen as being used by others to maintain their respective social distances. These responses can be compared to quotes from respondents from service-class backgrounds, who resist using socio-economic status as a criteria of interpersonal evaluation even though admitting that feelings of inferiority are inevitable. In short, socio-economic status is seen subjectively as a criterion of social differentiation rather than social distinction.

> I guess [feeling inferior] is unavoidable. So many people are richer than you, and so many are more popular than you, and know more than you do…I think it's more a matter of how to overcome it. I think it happens to everyone who has rich friends. People should try to overcome their inferiority rather than moan about it.
>
> (Art director, social origin class II)

> I don't really resist my very rich friends. If I do, then I'm feeling inferior [to them]! I'll consciously try to be very natural. I like to feel equal with my friends. I don't want to discriminate against anyone or myself because of money.
>
> (School teacher, social origin class II)

These nuances regarding feelings of social inferiority and superiority found amongst respondents from different social origins suggest that perhaps intergenerationally stable respondents feel more confident and at ease in their service-class habitus than those who had just arrived at this class.

In this section we have seen that while taste is used by some respondents in interpersonal evaluations, more frequently evoked are criteria of career and material success, moral integrity, cultural sophistication and various other aspects of personal constitution. Taste, together with other cultural and moral criteria of evaluation, stands in contrast to the measurement of one's worth in terms of crude monetary success. However, as seen earlier, over half of all respondents consider taste as sometimes if not always purchasable with money. Hence, the relative autonomy of taste as a criterion of social distinction is not equally shared amongst our respondents.

Conclusion

Although recent research on middle-class formation and class analysis in general have suggested that class is a significant analytic and substantive social category in the Hong Kong context, there remains a dearth of studies on the socio-cultural formation of the middle class. In this latter context, studies which found that consumption knowledge and practices differ along class lines suggest that lifestyle and consumption is one important dimension in which the middle class is likely to display a distinctive identity. This chapter examines a constitutive element of lifestyle and consumption, the significance of taste, as a means of social distinction and a form of cultural capital for a group of young middle-class people in Hong Kong.

The 29 young middle-class respondents interviewed differ in terms of their outlooks as well as specific consumption practices, mainly along lines of social background and occupational sector. It was found that, despite overall similarities in life cycle, levels of income, occupational class and educational attainment, two broad categories of consumers can still be identified within the sample. Pragmatists, who are mostly from working-class backgrounds or engaged in mainstream occupations, stand in contrast to consumerists, who are mostly from service-class backgrounds or engaged in marginal occupations, in terms of general outlook on consumption as well as specific patterns of consumption.

In terms of social distinction, a large majority of respondents believe that there are objective standards of good taste; this includes all those in marginal occupations, several of whom were able to enter the service class by virtue of their 'taste' and in spite of their less-privileged backgrounds. However, some respondents associated taste with abstract notions of 'beauty', while another group associated taste with money. Differences in conceptions of taste reflect the relative importance of material versus non-material forms of capital. In many cases, taste was readily used as a criteria for interpersonal evaluation. Respondents from lower social origins expressed how they felt excluded from high-status social groups, suggesting that non-material boundaries can both be self-imposed or imposed by others. Nevertheless, there are a few signs within the sample that taste is seen as equally important by respondents; that is, there is little evidence that consumption taste is widely shared as a high status symbol, in spite of its use in interpersonal evaluation to a certain extent.[40] The extent to which 'taste' has actual effects in processes of social exclusion thus requires further examination. Overall, the meanings, practices and outlooks of consumption and taste clearly diverge along lines of occupational sector, class and social origin, suggesting that the level of socio-cultural formation of the middle class as a whole is likely to be much more complex than some have suggested.[41]

The above interviews were conducted before the onset of the Asia economic crisis that has greatly affected the Hong Kong economy since mid-1997, shortly after Hong Kong's reunification with the PRC, and for which signs of recovery are yet to be found by early 1999. Depite the government's repeated insistence that Hong Kong's economy is in a much better position to recover than those of its neighbours, official statistics continue to paint a gloomy picture. Since July 1997, GDP has continued to fall while the unemployment rate has continued to rise, retail sales have continued to decline, with the sharpest declines in department store sales. Restaurant receipts have likewise suffered; the sharpest decrease has been in Chinese restaurants while fast-food restaurants registered a slight increase intake in the first quarter of 1998. The broad picture suggests that overall domestic spending has slackened. Obviously, in times of economic recession people are likely to be prudent with their money, more deliberation is likely to precede each act of consumption, especially when it comes to items and services that do not satisfy immediate needs.

The question germane to this chapter is: What are the implications for consumption taste as a form of subjective identity and social distinction in Hong Kong? Given that the impact of the current economic downturn on young managers, administrators and professionals is likely to be much less significant than it is for those in intermediate and working-class occupations, the curent recession may, ironically, be an opportunity for 'taste' as a form of cultural capital to figure more prominently amongst the new middle class as a means of social distinction and for carving out their subjectivity. When the economy is doing well and relatively large numbers of people are getting rich quickly, this newfound wealth is easily manifested in the possession of expensive goods, masked as 'good taste'. For cultural capital to gain its own legitimate currency, its distance from economic capital needs to be maintained. As we have seen, although there are some signs that particular sections of Hong Kong's young middle class are insistent about the difference between *taste* and *having money,* it is more common that most respondents assume some kind of taken-for-granted association between the two. A short- to medium-term economic recession may well serve the purpose of dissociating taste from money, hence allowing more room for the former to develop into a distinctive type of cultural capital that separates various groups within the middle class.

Notes

1 Readers should note that the term 'new rich' is not unproblematic, and is perhaps more suited to the purposes of journalism and the mass media. Academics who are interested in the issue of Asia's 'new rich' have also acknowledged that the new rich in Asia are 'far from homogeneous in any respect' (Robison and Goodman 1996:3–7).

2 The 'new rich' is a particularly tricky concept when applied to a whole geographical region such as Asia, given its uneven levels and conditions of socio-economic and political development. A more straightforward approach would be to define the 'new rich' against the 'old rich', where a temporal dimension can be specified for comparison. In the case of Hong Kong, rapid economic development during the post-war years (largely fuelled by the political and economic situation in the PRC) has produced a generation of 'self-made men' who built their fortunes on industry, trade and commerce. In this sense they can also be seen as the 'new rich' when compared to British and other European traders who established their wealth and influence during the first hundred years of Hong Kong's colonial history. Economic restructuring since the late 1980s has led to the rise of another group of 'new rich' which consists largely of professionals, managers and administrators. As such, this generation of 'self-made men' may in turn come to be regarded as the (relatively) 'old rich'.

3 Apart from being in different occupational groups and having differing employment status, fractions within the broad category of 'new rich' in Hong Kong are also seen as having different political and economic orientations (see Lo 1996:165).

4 See e.g. Cheung *et al*. (1988), So and Kwitko (1990), Chung (1994), Wong and Lui (1992) and Chan (1993) for recent discussions and studies of Hong Kong's middle class. See note 11 for clarification on the use of the term 'middle class' in this essay.

5 The 'new' middle class refers to a younger generation of professionals, managers and administrators who have higher levels of education, in contrast

to 'old' middle class who achieved their service-class positions primarily through internal promotion, on-the-job training or starting their own business.

6 Bourdieu (1984).

7 Here I refer to theories which claim that industrial development leads to increasing equality and the disappearance of traditional lines of social divergence, as a result of the dominance of meritocratic ideologies and principles of economic organisation in developed industrial societies (Kerr *et al*. 1973; see also Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992).

8 The argument that consumption encourages 'depoliticisation' in capitalist societies, however, is said to be relevant to Korean society. See Kim (Chapter 3) in this volume.

9 See e.g. Lau and Kuan (1988:64), Lui and Wong (1994), Wong (1991) and Wong and Lui (1992).

10 See e.g. Chan (1991), Leung (1990, 1994).

11 The concept 'middle class' is probably one of the most contentious concepts used in the social sciences. To minimise confusion, in this essay I use 'middle class' interchangeably with the concept of 'service class', as defined in John Goldthorpe's class scheme (Goldthorpe 1987). This particular definition of the service class, and Goldthorpe's work in general, although by no means unproblematic (for criticisms see e.g. Pahl 1989; Crompton 1993), does however enable us to avoid the problems of defining class positions in terms of relations to property and capital alone (for a cogent summary of these debates see Crompton 1993). In the present context the 'service class' is defined in terms of their superior work and market situations as compared to the intermediate class (routine non-manual and service workers) and the working class (i.e., semi-skilled and unskilled workers). In Goldthorpe's own words, service-class positions 'afford their incumbents incomes which are high, generally secure, and likely to rise steadily over their life-times; and that they are positions which typically involve the exercise of authority and/or expertise within a range of discretion, and thus offer considerable autonomy and freedom from control by others' (Goldthorpe 1987:41). Refer to note 31 for a full description of the sevenfold class scheme used in this paper.

12 See e.g. Cheung *et al*. (1988), Scott (1989:267), Chung (1994), So and Kwitko (1990).

13 Subsequent studies have refuted Lui's claim that formal qualifications play a limited role in determining career advancement (Tsang 1993; Chan 1994).

14 Ironically, perhaps one of the clearest signs of middle-class formation on the level of group action is that of emigration rather than political participation (see Salaff and Wong 1994; Skeldon 1990).

15 Investments in foreign exchange, stocks and other financial products, for example.

16 Upward mobility rate for a trichotomous class structure is 31.5 per cent, and downward mobility is 23.8 per cent, which is close to the UK Oxford Mobility Study data for 1972 (Wong and Lui 1992). Similarly, using census

data, Tsang argued that Hong Kong's class structure has undergone a 'process of structuration', whereby 'definite social closures of mobility opportunities have emerged and consolidated within the occupational hierarchy in Hong Kong' (Tsang 1994b:74).

17 Absolute gross mobility rates do not take into account overall increases in 'room at the top' due to structural changes. Relative mobility, on the other hand, discounts structural effects.

18 Also see Pong and Post (1991) for effects of gender and class on educational attainment. This finding is echoed by findings from comparative mobility studies, which found that Hong Kong is not any more or less open than other industrial societies (Chan *et al.* 1995).

19 See e.g. Saunders (1987), Dunleavy (1980).

20 See chapters on Malaysia, South Korea and Singapore in this volume, which also discuss the use of consumption as lifestyle and the basis of subjective identity.

21 See e.g. Bourdieu (1984, 1986), DiMaggio (1992), DiMaggio and Mohr (1985), Lamont and Lareau (1988).

22 Inequalities in consumption in these areas are largely due to the lack of comprehensive state provisions, which are somewhat ameliorated by family and social networks which continue to play a key role in the providing of assistance and mutual help. See e.g. Lee (1981a, 1981b).

23 Census and Statistics Department (1985).

24 Although this stands in contrast to the theory that consumption encourages 'depoliticisation' in capitalist societies (see for example Chapter 3 on South Korea), this does not mean that consumption plays no role in contributing to the overall apathetic and indifferent attitude towards politics in Hong Kong's general population. What is at issue here is that consumption is possibly one of the many manifestations of much more fundamental cognitive schemata (much like what Bourdieu coins the 'habitus'), which regulates and shapes people's preferences, actions and practices. The correlation between consumption 'scores' and attitudes towards politics are more appropriately seen as stemming from agents' habitus, rather than as links of direct causality

25 Data was collected between November 1991 and February 1992 (Chan 1993).

26 The study also examines respondents' conceptions of success, social advancement and their familial experiences, which are not included in the present chapter.

27 These occupations form the bulk of the service class (Goldthorpe 1987). See also note 29.

28 Several points of entry to the target population were used so as to avoid bias in sampling. Interviews were recorded on tape and their lengths ranged from an hour and a half to three hours.

29 The term 'marginal occupations' is used as a shorthand for service-class occupations which are related to aesthetics, arts, media and public relations. They are 'marginal' in two senses—first, these are relatively new occupational

fields which have only taken off in later periods of industrialisation. Second, these are also occupational fields which are least likely to operate according to the straightforward economic logic. Hence, they are 'marginal' compared to older and more established professions, and 'marginal' to the principles of economic rationality.

30 By, e.g. attending openings of shops, restaurants, hotels and cinemas, private viewing of films and exhibitions, and other cultural activities.

31 The classification of occupational classes used here and in the rest of this chapter is as follows:

- I upper service class: higher-grade professionals, administrators and officials, managers in large establishments, larger proprietors;
- II lower service class: lower-grade professionals, administrators, higher-grade technicians, managers in small business and industrial establishments, supervisors of non-manual employees;
- III routine non-manual employees in commerce and administration, personal sevice workers and shop sales personnel;
- IV petty bourgeoisie: small proprietors, artisans, contractors, with or without employees;
- V lower-grade technicians, supervisors of manual workers;
- VI skilled manual workers;
- VII semi-skilled and unskilled workers, agricultural workers.

32 See e.g. Featherstone (1991).

33 All amounts are in Hong Kong dollars. Current exchange rates stand at approximately US $1 to HK $7.8 or £1 to HK $12.5.

34 'Yuk chek' in Cantonese means feeling pain physically.

35 See Lamont and Lareau (1988), Lamont (1992).

36 The question of meritocracy (i.e., the extent to which social selection is based on achieved rather than ascribed status) is about the general distribution of 'origins and destinations' of individuals in society, which requires representative sample and a large data set in order for analyses to be meaningful. Alternatively, ethnographic data would be necessary to assess processural mechanisms on this issues.

37 The ethnographic method would be most appropriate for such purpose.

38 'See-lai' is Cantonese for married women usually with petty attitudes.

39 This is illustrated by our magazine editor (social origin class I, who commented that *Next Magazine* is 'to be held responsible for glamorising the world of business and celebrating these so-called "entrepreneurs", who know nothing apart from their business. Money, money, and more money.'

40 One possible explanation is that the use of consumption goods as a means of social distinction is ineffective when information regarding consumption goods is quickly and effectively disseminated through society by the mass media, as is the case in Hong Kong.

41 See e.g. Lui (1988).

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6 Global Lifestyles under Local Conditions: the New Indonesian Middle Class

Solvay Gerke

Introduction

The economic take-off of Asian countries has given rise to new wealth and the emergence of new middle classes whose formation process differs distinctly not only from that of their European counterparts. (Evers and Gerke 1994:5; Lev 1990:25; Robison 1996:8) but also from nation to nation within Asia; as Crouch (1984:116) suggests, the Indonesian class structure is quite different from that of Thailand and Malaysia. Although the new rich and the newly established middle classes have been collapsed often into one category, as the bearers of 'modernity', their socio-economic backgrounds differ, making it difficult clearly to identify who has joined the middle class and who is still excluded. The terms 'new rich' or 'new middle class', therefore, describe, in broad terms, the new wealthy social groups that have emerged from industrial changes in Asia, with their social power based either on capital and expertise or rent and/or position in the extensive state apparatus.

With specific reference to Indonesia, until the beginning of economic and political crisis in mid-1997, observers generally agree that a middle class was growing but that it was still small in number relative to other Southeast Asian countries. The social and economic base of this emergent middle class was largely anchored in the extensive state apparatus. As a result of rapid expansion of both the bureaucracy (Evers 1987) and the education system, civil servants constituted the largest and distinct group inside the emerging middle class. The still small but growing group of businessmen and professionals were also dependent on the state for contracts and monopolies. Overall the state was 'the fountain of social and economic power and success depends upon gaining access to the flow' (Robison 1996:97). Given this dependency on the state, the new middle class had not developed into an autonomous social force. Its role in Indonesian society must, therefore, be understood in the context of the role of the state and its representatives in society.

In the early 1990s, Chalmers (1993:54) estimated that families who were able to enjoy a middle-class lifestyle constituted between 7 to 10 per cent of the population, living predominantly in urban areas. According to Juwono Sudarsono, Minister of Education and Culture in the post-Soeharto Habibie government, the GDP per capita in Indonesia fell from US $1,300 in July 1997 to about US $400 in mid-1999 and the size of the middle class was reduced to about 5 million in a population of about 230 million (*Straits Times,* 19 May, 1999).

However, the economic crisis has also brought about the much-desired yet also much-feared removal of Soeharto from the presidency. It was much desired because corruption was rampant under the authoritarian regime, causing greater and greater social and economic inequalities in the midst of rapid economic expansion. It was concurrently much feared because of the power vacuum that would be left behind by his removal from office, potentially causing social and political chaos in an archipelagic nation that spans 17,000 islands, large and small. Nevertheless, Soeharto's removal came to pass. Amongst other consequences, this has provided opportunities for the democratisation of the polity. For the first time in more than three decades, Indonesians went to the polls in a relatively free election in June 1999. This was only the first step on the long road to democratisation, and Indonesian politics is thus still vulnerable to great uncertainty and instability for the foreseeable future.

Before the crisis, the emerging middle class was striving for a consumption-oriented lifestyle, with new models of leisure that included shopping, sports, travel and watching Western movies. Consumption of mass-produced goods and the promotion of lifestyles of leisure have become their defining characteristics in Indonesia. However, the effects of this development are beyond the middle class itself. Consumerism as cultural practice affected the life of all people, enticing them to surround themselves with all kinds of 'discretionary' consumption goods that symbolise 'modernity' and urban lifestyles. Thus, with the emergence of the new middle class, rules of social integration changed in Indonesia. Consumption practices as constituting a 'lifestyle' were gaining greater significance as marks of social rank, in contrast to socio-economic criteria of classification.[1]

The development of a culture of consumption in Indonesia reflected and yet differed from observable global tendencies. Globally, lifestyle is increasingly becoming 'valid' as a form of social identification.

It signifies an independent standard of reference for social integration; one that is not reducible to other factors of social status because lifestyle can be used not only for the construction of self-identity and to communicate this identity to others but is also well suited for establishing and maintaining membership in collective identities. Thus, lifestyles are blueprints for the organisation of everyday life. Bourdieu (1979), Featherstone (1991) and others have widely documented such developments in Western societies and placed the phenomena in theoretical perspectives. However, consumerism as a lifestyle under conditions of economic underdevelopment, as in Indonesia, took a different course than consumerism in developed economies.

By the standards of developed nations, the ability of the Indonesian middle class to consume was very weak, even before the 1997 crisis. Nevertheless, this did not prevent individuals from judging others by 'lifestyle'; indeed, to a large extent questions of style structure social contacts. Consequently, those who were not able to pursue a middle-class lifestyle felt the social pressure to give their life a middle-class 'touch'. One way of managing this dilemma is what I call 'lifestyling'. Lifestyling refers to the symbolic dimension of consumption and can be defined as the display of a standard of living that one is in fact unable to afford. 'Virtual' consumption instead of real consumption, the demonstration of the symbols of a modern lifestyle instead of buying lifestyle goods—behaviours that rely on the demonstration of a certain lifestyle without the economic basis for real consumption—these are what I call 'lifestyling'. In this essay, special emphasis will be placed on lifestyling strategies of the 'much neglected and under researched populist lower middle class' (Robison 1996:88).

Amidst the ongoing economic restructuring aimed at refloating the devastated economy and the political restructuring in hope of greater democratisation, the life of all Indonesians, not the least the middle class, will be undergoing significant and rapid changes for at least the next decade. The lifestyles of the middle class have been reduced by the crisis, with scant chance of recovery in the near term. The following analysis of the consumption patterns and collective lifestyling patterns and strategies of the Indonesian middle class, undertaken before the onset of the 1997 crisis, must be read in a historical perspective. As such, apart from the substantive analytic values, its heuristic value lies in the future, when there is an opportunity for comparison with yet another new middle class that will undoubtedly emerge when the economic and political dust settles.

The emergence of the Indonesian middle class under Dutch rule

The analysis will begin with an overview of the emergence of the Indonesian middle class, with necessarily emphasis on the emergence of government bureaucrats because they constituted the largest component group. Until the end of the nineteenth century, traditional rulers as well as the colonial government never displayed much concern for formal education for local Indonesians. Access to Western education was confined to the sons of the traditional aristocracy, thus perpetuating the gap between the traditional aristocratic elite and the people. It was not until the end (in the period 1901 to 1942)[2] of more than 300 years of colonial rule that the Dutch began to allow children of well-to-do Indonesian parents to have access to Dutch secondary and tertiary education in such fields as medicine, law and engineering. This was the beginning of the creation of a modern Indonesian middle class. The Dutch's aim was to produce a small Western-educated elite who could fill administrative positions in the growing civil service. However, contact with Western liberal values during their education in the Netherlands made these privileged Indonesians more aware of the character of colonial rule, of the differences between Dutch rule in the Netherlands and that in the East Indies. The fact that they had only limited career prospects reminded them of their second-class status in their own country.[3]

Independence marked a radical shift in Indonesian development. The non-aristocratic, Western-educated middle class replaced not only the Dutch colonial regime but also the traditional aristocratic leaders as holders of political and moral power. The new government of independent Indonesia, formed by a small group of Dutch-educated intellectuals, was republican and democratic in political orientation. Furthermore, the leaders were attracted to Marxism and were strongly anti-capitalist, favouring socialism instead of liberalism in the economic sphere. Castles nicely describes the circumstances:

> As the commanding heights of the Nederlands Indies economy were already occupied by European capital, nationalist sentiment coincided with socialist in demanding their nationalization…As employees of the state, the elite had every reason to favour the maximization of its economic role.
>
> (Castles 1967:74)

Under Sukarno's presidency (1948–1965) parliamentary democracy was subsequently abandoned in favour of 'Guided Democracy' and 'Guided

Economy', which was said to be 'Socialism *à la* Indonesia'. The essence of Sukarno's ideology was that the elite, the peasants and the workers form a single united class, with the state's concern for justice and economic equality expressed in the Panca Sila (five principles)[4] written into the Constitution. Unfortunately, the socialist spirit did not raise the level of welfare of the people through effective measures to achieve greater equality in the distribution of basic commodities. In theory the masses should have benefited also from the nationalisation of foreign enterprises; in practice, however, rapid bureaucratisation was initiated and, because of widespread corruption, distribution was implemented only for civil servants.[5] Nevertheless, public sector goods and services were heavily subsidised. The impact of the subsidies on the budget was so great that attempts to reconcile state ownership with popular welfare were economically disastrous, leading to hyper-inflation. 'Anyone with liquid capital and political connections was well placed to make large profits through concessions and speculations' (Dick 1985:87). The society was thus characterised by worsening inequality with a small group of newly rich families and individuals on one side and people at different levels of poverty on the other.

The rise of the educated middle class in independent Indonesia

In his book on *Social Changes in Yogyakarta,* Selosoemardjan (1962) provides a vivid picture of social changes that occurred in Yogyakarta during the late 1950s. He describes the many features of the Javanese principality that had survived the turbulent years of the Japanese occupation, the short period during which the city was the capital of the Republic of Indonesia, and its final integration into the administrative structure of the new republic under President Sukarno's leadership.

Two basic processes were central to the social changes in Yogyakarta. First, traditionally Javanese society was divided into three classes, the nobility, the bureaucracy *(priyayi)* and commoners (*wong cilik* or 'little people'). As the nobility lost its function as intermediary between the Sultan and his bureaucracy and between the Sultan and the people, its prestige declined, 'particularly in the city, where the intelligentsia and the new group of *pegawai negri* [government officers] were moving upward in the social hierarchy' (Selosoemardjan 1962:121). After the revolution, the allowances of the nobility were not raised and were quickly eroded by rising rates of inflation, leading to their further decline in status and political importance. Selosomardjan analyses the rather complicated process through which the declining traditional courtiers were replaced by or transformed into civil servants employed by the provincial or the central government. Indeed, this process has captured the imagination of several scholars since Selosoemardjan's account (see Sutherland 1979; Benda 1965; Evers 1987). The basic question commonly asked is: Was the old *priyayi* elite replaced by modern civil servants of Weberian persuasion or did the civil servants permute into *'neo-priyayi'* by taking over the cultural values and behavioural patterns of their predecessors? Most authors favour the latter position by pointing to the centralised structure of the Indonesian administration, the culture of *bapakism* (father knows best), the top-down approach of the bureaucracy, the prevalence of Javanese in top positions and the typically Javanese way in which the administration was run generally.

Second, after independence, the new government increased the number of civil servants. 'This policy was in line with the high social value of government jobs, that was carried over from the Dutch colonial period' (Selosoemardjan 1962:106). The formation of a new middle class was intimately connected with this growth of the civil service.

> The new middle class which grew up under Dutch aegis occupied a place parallel to that of the priyayi class. The members were Indonesians, for the greater part Javanese, who worked as officials in the Dutch administration in Jogjakarta and were thus the colleagues of the priyayis. Most members of this new class had either primary or high school education.
>
> (Selosoemardjan 1962:37)

In Java the 'intelligentsia' usually emerged from *priyayi* circles (Sutherland 1979:56), but had divorced itself from its cultural heritage and the feudal civil service (Pangreh Praja).

According to Selosoemardjan, this 'educated class' replaced the nobility, and took over leadership of new political and social institutions.

> The rise of the intelligentsia to the upper class was recognised by other classes, which tried to acquire the external symbols of this new class by wearing Western-style dress and walking around with a dispatch case in one hand and a fountain pen showing in the upper pocket of the jacket. But by far the most distinguishing symbol of the new upper class was the use of foreign languages, namely Dutch or English.
>
> (Selosoemardjan 1962:129)

Upward social mobility of the middle class thus meant downward mobility of the aristocracy. The new intelligentsia, as the new middle class, adopted a Western lifestyle and engaged in politics, whereas the new bureaucrats patterned their behaviour on that of the traditional *priyayi* court officials. It was thus apparent that the upward movement of young people into new social positions took two very different cultural turns.[6]

The political and economic situation changed dramatically when the 'New Order Regime' came into power by a military coup in 1965. The winners of this coup were obviously the Armed Forces. Subsequent institutionalisation of the dual-function *(dwi funksi)*[7] of the military further emphasised its non-military societal responsibility, strengthening its influence in society. Along with the military, an emerging middle class of bureaucrats was among the winners of the coup. Dick notes,

> It is no paradox that the students, who in 1966 spearheaded the movement which forced Sukarno to abdicate were absorbed so easily into the New Order. In 1966 they were not only the conscience of the emerging middle class but also had a strong vested interest in a system of privilege for those with education.
>
> (Dick 1985:88)

These individuals filled the expansion of the bureaucracy under the New Order (Evers 1987).

Although the bureaucracy grew in size under Guided Democracy, the majority of its members suffered a remarkable decline in living standards and privileges because of hyper-inflation, which stood at about 600 per cent in 1965–6. After the coup, with the help of international development aid, the inflation rate was reduced to 10 per cent in 1969. Between 1970 and 1980, the economy maintained a remarkable annual growth rate of about 8 per cent in real terms, mainly due to the booming oil sector, which accounted for the major proportion of the value of exports and of central government revenues. The benefits of this impressive rise in real income per capita have flowed disproportionately to the relative small urban middle class, which included the increased number of the civil servants.

To its credit, the New Order government further vigorously and successfully promoted education expansion during the three decades that it was in power. Universal education had always been a demand of nationalists in the pre-independence period because they themselves owed their political influence and personal advancement to the fact

Table 6.1 Government employees, Indonesia, 1920–90

Year	*Government employees (1000s)*	*Government employees (per 1000 population)*
1920	81.5	1.6
1930	111.0	1.8
1940	82.0	1.1
1950	303.5	3.7
1960	393.0	4.1
1970	515.0	4.4
1980	2047.0	13.9
1990	3771.2	21.0

Source: Evers (1987), updated by using census and other official data.

that they were educated. The ideology that education, personal engagement and responsibility for one's own future are the keys to economic success led to very high levels of school attendance beyond primary education (cf. Gerke 1992:72–6). Improvements to the education system raised hopes and expectations among the population for upward social mobility, which was associated with fixed incomes, expansion of consumption, particularly of imported goods, and a lifestyle which included leisure activities. The material aspirations and the level of consumption of the middle strata expanded dramatically under the Soeharto regime. Any cursory observation would have confirmed this: the number of private cars rose significantly, the number of motorcycles increased dramatically and the growing number of urban modern housing complexes marked the growing number of well-to-do middle-class households.

Having established that there was a rising, albeit still small, middle class, we are now in a better position to delineate the class structure of contemporary Indonesia.

Defining the new middle class

The most common stratification model for contemporary Indonesian society has been, and continues to be, the differentiation between those who can 'barely make it', those who 'have enough' *(cukupan)* and those who are 'rich people' *(orang kaya),* which included high office holders. This threefold division has been used throughout Indonesia in both urban and rural areas and can, therefore, be called a 'folk model' of Indonesian social stratification (Evers und Gerke 1994). A more academic approach recognises a 'poverty line', for which a variety of

Table 6.2 Organisation of Indonesian society: poverty line approach

Orang kaya (elite) *Cukupan* (enough)	Upper-lower status	poverty line
Absolute poor	Lower-lower status	

Table 6.3 Organisation of Indonesian society: consumption line approach

Consumption levels	*Social strata*	
Orang kaya (elite)		
Real consumption **Symbolic consumption**	Upper middle stratum **Lower and middle-middle stratum**	consumption line
Cukupan (enough)	Lower stratum	poverty line
Absolute poor	Lower-lower stratum	

measures have been used.[8] Collapsing these two models into one, we arrive at a stratification model in which the poverty line separates the lower stratum of Indonesian society into a 'lower-lower stratum' of the absolute poor members of the society and an 'upper-lower stratum' of those, who have enough (Table 6.2).

This folk model has been redefined by delineating a 'new middle class' (see Tanter and Young 1990) or a middle stratum whose members earn enough to participate in a modern consumer culture (Table 6.3). This stratum consists of those who have been able to secure higher education and are able to afford at least the symbolic items of middle-class consumption; thus, defining themselves as the 'new middle class' *(golongan menengah)* (Gerke 1995). The *'cukupan'* level is now clearly situated in the lower stratum, separating the very poor from the not-so-poor.

Admist the debate regarding who belongs to this rising new middle class in Indonesia, our survey in 1994 gave some indications on the features of this new group in two typical Indonesian cities, Yogyakarta and Padang (Evers and Gerke 1994).

In the survey, we first looked at the middle-income group in Indonesian society. As stated earlier, the ideology that education, personal engagement and responsibility for one's own future are the keys to economic success lead to rapid expansion of secondary education since the late 1970s (Gerke 1992:72–6). This has in turn contributed

Table 6.4 Distribution of middle-class* occupations, by city (%), Indonesia

Occupation	*Yogyakarta*	*Padang*
Labourer	12.3	17.1
Employee	29.2	21.5
Government officials	58.4	61.3
% Middle-class in pop.	38.5	47.6

Notes: n = 455 (Yogya, 169, Padang 226), wage earners only.
Members of the 'middle class' earn between Rp5,000 and Rp200,000 per day *and* have completed high school (Gerke 1994).

significantly to the growth of a middle class and the spread of middle-class values. Accordingly, and following their self-definition, we have counted only those with high educational attainment (high school or university graduates) as members of the middle class. The Yogyakarta data show a distinct group of people with an average per capita daily wage of between Rp5,000 and Rp20,000. Another useful measure of the middle strata, in consumption terms, was provided by data on the expenditure for food as percentage of total monthly household expenditure (Engel's curve). In Yogyakarta, we could clearly separate two groups, namely those with more than 50 per cent food expenditure (lower strata) and those with 30 per cent to 50 per cent food expenditure (middle strata).[9]

Rapid expansion of the bureaucracy and the education system had spawned the civil servants as the largest group inside the Indonesian middle class. Of the government employees in our sample 85.3 per cent fell into the middle strata of society. Alternatively, looking at the situation from the other side, 62.8 per cent of the middle class, across all age groups, were civil servants.[10] They constituted a state-caste with a high degree of occupational inheritance and exhibited a strong aspiration to secure their position (Evers and Gerke 1994:9). As loyal government employees, they fully supported the New Order government. Furthermore, in contrast to the professionals, businessmen and military personnel interviewed, they shared a decidedly non-critical political outlook, in the sense that they are not interested, nor sufficiently informed, to recognise all the facets of political life in the country. The state supported them and they supported whatever the state did in a true *bapak-anak* (father-son) relationship. Indeed, there was no shortage of social issues in Indonesia during the time of research; among other events, were the murder of a woman labour activist, Marsinah; reported political unrest in East Timor; and worker strikes in Medan. However, for these civil servants to be 'knowledgeable' about these political happenings would have meant becoming intellectually and psychologically involved as critical citizens.

There is no doubt that a middle strata emerged in Indonesia during the 1980s and 1990s, sandwiched between the poor and the very rich members of the society. The socio-economic backgrounds of its members differed dramatically. A clear-cut differentiation of who was already in and who was still out of the middle class was hard to draw with parameters used for developed economies (Evers and Gerke 1994).[11] For example, the classical variables of research on the American and European middle class (SES = occupation, income, education) did not apply here. Nevertheless, in spite of economic underdevelopment, the term 'middle class'[12] was a frequently-used emic category that had, above all, a social function in Indonesia. Members of Indonesian society who characterised themselves as 'modern' and who wished to demonstrate this through what was, in their eyes, a specifically 'modern' lifestyle routinely described themselves as 'middle class'. 'Membership' was thus not necessarily dependent on income but was defined through social behaviour and lifestyle. Consumption thus became a symbolic act signalling 'modernity' and membership in the ascriptive category 'middle class'. The frequently observed conspicuous consumption of Western consumer goods very often did not reflect the economic capabilities of the consumers nor their production class situations.

The culture of the 'new middle class'

Typical in its formation, the culture of the 'new middle class' is one marked by an ongoing attempt to demarcate itself against the lower strata of the society. Its formation is thus bounded in a complex process of distancing itself from the poor 'Other'. In Indonesia, the 'new middle class' was in the strategic social position to construct hierarchies via the creation and promotion of a 'modern' lifestyle through consumption. Although consumer and leisure industries remained underdeveloped during the Soeharto regime, the emerging middle class was already promoting consumption and leisure as its ultimate values, through both the control over the production, and subsequent appropriation, of lifestyle images in TV, radio and the press.

As elsewhere in the contemporary world, lifestyle identifications were engendered by the media industry that continued to boom from the end of the 1980's. (Ironically, during the economic and political crisis, print media continued to expand as a result of the lifting of licensing controls and rapid expansion of press freedom.) During the Soeharto years, representatives and employees of this industry were commonly identified as members of the 'new middle class' and placed themselves as the arbiters, hawkers and interpreters of lifestyles. Interviews with journalists of the magazines *Femina* and *Tiara* confirmed that they, indeed, regarded themselves as stylists and missionaries of 'modernity' as well as trend-setters of a new way of life. They were the providers of symbolic goods of 'modernity'. The cultural appropriation of the images they produced and the reality-simulation effects of these images altered peoples' perceptions and their sense of the real, the possible and the fictional. Thus, lifestyle became an increasingly important new mode of social integration in Indonesia, as it could be used not only to signal self-identities but also for establishing and maintaining membership of collective identities. As suggested earlier, it signified a distinct and independent standard of reference of social integration, not reducible to other elements of social status.

Symbolic consumption and lifestyling

The role of cultural differentiation in the delineation of social positions is, following Bourdieu (1979:191), a process by which a particular class-determined habitus distinguishes itself in the cultural marketplace by identifying with a clearly defined set of products and activities —a lifestyle. In Indonesia, it seemed, nearly everyone wanted to take part in 'modern' life. The socially palpable pressure to re-establish, constantly, middle-class membership led inevitably to demonstrative consumption. As Mulder puts it: 'One way or another, consumerism affects the life of all, enticing people to surround themselves with all kinds of goods that become indispensable as markers of urban ways' (1994:112).[13] Through such consumption, Indonesians manifested a 'class consciousness' that was determined not by interest in political action but one of identification with a class or group of people pursuing a particular lifestyle.

However, even before the 1997 crisis, only a small portion of the Indonesian new middle class was able to afford a Western or urbanised lifestyle. The overwhelming majority was unable to consume the items defined as appropriate for members of the middle class. They might be educated and employed in jobs that provided social prestige, but they could not afford a lifestyle that would be regarded as suitable for their status. Thus, they engaged in substitutional activities to give their lives a middle-class 'touch'. As their consumption possibilities were limited, consumption assumed a mere symbolic dimension. For example, one could readily see young people and families spending hours sitting in strategic places, where they could be seen by all and sundry, at McDonald's or Pizza Hut drinking Coke or milk-shakes with a burger. They would take the empty hamburger bags with them, as they left the fast-food restaurant, so that everybody in the street could see where they had lunch or dinner. Students would share one Benetton sweater with two or three others, wear second- or third-hand Hammer T-shirts and borrow jewellery from roommates to go shopping or hang around shopping centres.

Such acts gave new meanings to the idea of 'symbolic' consumption. I call these behaviours *lifestyling,* to signify a superficial activity with no real consumption deriving from economic well-being. Lifestyling has symbolic features to manifest a standard of living that is absent in fact. In this sense we have to see demonstrative consumption and the whole set of lifestyling practices as aspects of a more general strategy for the establishment and/or maintenance of self-identity. Through active lifestyling people constantly demonstrate group membership and very often ignore their social and economic reality.

Lifestyle-shopping

The Indonesian youth population might be said to be especially susceptible to media-produced dreams and have invented their own mechanisms of 'lifestyling', in order to participate in the 'modern' life. Fashion is their *metier*. They invested energy and money in their outfits and the wearing of 'brand names'. It had to be Levis (and not 'no name') jeans and no ordinary T-shirt but only a Hammer (a popular local brand) or Benetton would do. If one were unable to afford the desired lifestyle articles to signal one's identity and belonging to the modern way of life, one could take advantage of the second-hand market for brand name articles. The second-hand market—with the goods sorted according to their degree of wear—offered everything from Benetton to Boss and Aigner.

A highly popular means to get access to lifestyle articles was 'resource pooling'. In Indonesia, it had been a common practice for several families to contribute to a common fund to obtain festive costumes, so that their daughters could dance proudly as the main attraction at village events. Traditional credit associations *(arisan)* also give members of village society the opportunity to pool small individual contributions into larger collective funds, to uplift their subsistence production by, for instance, raising chickens. Such financial arrangements were used by students who lived together in hostels, by teenagers from the same neighbourhood or by groups of friends to pool their limited resources in order to accumulate a shared collection of brand name articles of clothing, so that they could trip down to McDonald's for a Coke, togged in a Hammer t-shirt. Even the act of making a purchase became part of the group experience of lifestyle-shopping (Shields 1992). Generically, the places where the objects of consumption appear are social spaces where people meet, display themselves, communicate and interact. It is therefore highly appropriate that Indonesian town planners represent shopping centres on city maps by symbol usually reserved for amusement or recreation areas.

Education and lifestyling

Education was another element of lifestyling. This is perhaps ironic but not surprising, as the first step of being defined as 'modern' is to possess the symbols of 'modernity', of which 'education' is an important icon. Thus, in pre-crisis Indonesia, symbols of education defined middle-class membership and the collection of these symbols reflected aspects of consumption (Gerke 1992:134; Mulder 1983:50). The main concern of the education system was neither quality nor knowledge transfer. Knowledge was not adapted to local conditions but adopted from outside with English or 'Indonenglish' terminology used throughout. The great majority of members of the academic community have, however, little or no command of English. Thus, very often 'forms' were transmitted but not content. What indigenous knowledge production or home-grown scientific discourses there were, existed in some isolated enclaves staffed with foreign or 'globally' trained scholars. School certificates, university titles, diplomas and degrees were not indicative of reliable qualifications. Although those who possessed them were assumed to be 'knowledgeable' in the same way that those who owned the symbols of modernity were modern. The value of the degree as a symbol created a certain state of general acceptance of its 'reality'; thus, it was not important that the education system did not generate knowledge but only holders of titles and diplomas. Consequently, looking at the boom in the education industry, from mid-1970s till mid-1990s, one could only conclude that this expansion had only 'symbolic' value, expressed quantitatively in the number of schools and universities and the number of 'graduates'.

Housing consumption

The one area in which there was substance in the consumption of the Indonesian new middle class was in housing, where privatisation ran

Table 6.5 Moving pattern of individuals living in housing estates *(perumahan)* using data from three housing estates in Padang, West Sumatra

	Village	*Inner-city* kampung	*Other housing estates*
Place of birth	789 (78.6%)	215 (21.4%)	—
Last place of residence	403 (42.8%)	494 (49.2%)	80 (8.0%)

Notes: n = 1004 (male = 502; female = 502)
Source: own data (1994).

contrary to conventional practices of the past. To a certain extent, conventionally, consumption assets such as bicycles, TV sets and radios were, and continue to be, shared or borrowed goods. Refusal to lend something, as well as not allowing neighbours to share the privately owned TV, is regarded as anti-social behaviour. The social pressure to share has resulted in certain middle-class families moving out of inner-city *kampungs* into housing estates *(perumahan)* that are now spreading in every Indonesian city. Even village middle-class families who worked in urban or semi-urban environments would leave their home villages and move into housing estates at the urban fringe (see Table 6.5). These housing estates accommodated people with the same living standard who enjoyed their privacy and avoided too much contact with their neighbours. Here, women played an important role in defining class boundaries because they did not allow their offspring to play with children from the lower strata of the society.

Collective lifestyle strategies

As part of the class formation process, the production of lifestyle is not just a personal matter, it is also directed towards the establishment of social boundaries and structures of exclusion, in order to establish a 'collective' identity.[14] The specific structuring of Indonesian society into social groups with strategic interests has already been theorised by Evers and Schiel (1988). According to the strategic group theory, power structures in Southeast Asian societies emerged partly as a result of planned, long-term action of groups, like the military and the bureaucracy, who tried to shape society in such a way as to enlarge their own chances of appropriating economic goods in the first instance but increasingly cultural and symbolic goods as well. These goods can be seen as strategic resources that are necessary to produce and reproduce a social order which is in the interest of the dominating strategic groups. The basic focus of Evers (1973) and Evers and Schiel (1988)

Table 6.6 Organisation of Indonesian society: strategic group approach

Real consumption	High-ranking military	Big business	High bureaucrats	High-income professionals	Elite	
Real consumption	Upper military	Big business	Upper bureaucrats	High-income professionals	Upper-middle class	
Symbolic consumption	Middle-ranking military	Middle business	Middle bureaucrats	Middle-income professionals	Middle-middle class Lower-middle class	**consumption line**
Subsistence level	Low-ranking military	Small business	Lower bureaucrats	Low-income professionals	Lower class	**poverty line**
Absolute poor						

has been the transformation of 'quasi groups' with unrecognised common interests and goals of appropriation into 'self-conscious' strategic groups. After the transformation, group solidarity and social integration emerge on the basis of increasing self-recruitment and a common lifestyle. The relevance of these latter aspects to strategic group theory is very underdeveloped and undertheorised.

In Indonesia, politically active strategic groups like the military and the bureaucracy, who were successful in developing strategies to regulate social distribution of economic resources, were also in the position to control access to symbolic goods. Along with the business community, the bureaucracy and the military represented strategic groups that were extending their privileged positions into the cultural sphere, in the struggle for prestige and distinction. Part of this attempt was through the production of collective identities through lifestyles. Membership in these groups were expressed through the presentation of specific lifestyles. 'Lifestylisation' was a means to culturalise social distinctions, to cultivate perceptions of difference in relation to other strategic groups and, at the same time, to strengthen group identity and group spirit. Lifestyle was thereby a visible form of a socially approved collective *Lebenspraxis,* which is draped in the trappings of cultural symbols, representing an increasingly important mode of social integration (see Table 6.6).

For example, lower-ranked bureaucrats with a monthly income similar to that of the lower class (about Rp150,000 at the time of field work) would not identify with those of similar class positions, such as small-scale businessmen, lower-ranked members of the military and other wage workers. Instead, they would identify with higher-ranked members of the bureaucracy and attempt to imitate whenever possible the latter's lifestyle. Thus, occupational group consciousness was highly developed while class consciousness was not. The bureaucracy and the military supported such group consciousness and group identification of their members through all kinds of sport and leisure activities, during which participants wore the same T-shirts, carried the same handbags, without apparent regard for the differing social status which is intrinsic in such organisational hierarchies.

This apparent 'equality' among group members hid the fact that sports played were obviously distinction markers with these organisations: lower-ranked bureaucrats played table tennis and football; middle-ranked bureaucrats played volleyball, some in the upper-middle strata played tennis, and high-ranked bureaucrats played tennis and golf. Recreational activities were prime examples of strategic management of the resources available to members of the group. The types of recreational activities, the matching outfits that ranged from T-shirts to bicycles to the brand of golf clubs, were all items of public display. All these items varied according to occupational groups and status distinctions within these groups and all had a socially integrative function. Social distinction and high status were achieved not just through wealth or by the fact of being a government official or a military officer. The political and ideological demand to generate symbolic equality among group members dictated crucially how one converted his or her position into one of prestige in the cultural arena.

Thus, a large proportion of the Indonesians who were commonly considered as belonging to the middle class were faced with a dilemma. As members of specific occupational groups they were under acute social pressure to demonstrate their standing by means of a certain group lifestyle that varied according to social positions within the group. For example, an official of the mid-level of civil service (*golongan* IIIa) had to adopt a certain house-type that was identified in brochures as III-house or RS house (RS means *rumah sederharna,* simple house).[15] If he were promoted, he would have to build an addition to the house, enlarging it to meet the standards of the house type reflecting the higher position. The improvements would have to include a parabolic antenna, a symbol that would make his status even more visible. Since only in a minority of cases did official position actually correlate with income, a financial dilemma would arise. This dilemma would be solved either through additional income (corruption) whenever possible or through symbolic consumption, i.e., 'lifestyling'.

The majority of people, who, in terms of education and occupation were counted as middle class, nevertheless belonged economically to lower-income groups. They were, therefore, not in a position to own or consume the goods that were attributed to their positions, status and strategic groups. They therefore felt coerced into giving their lives a middle-class 'touch'. Since they were financially limited, symbols took the place of real consumption. Establishment of symbolic spaces (or virtual realities) became the survival strategy for maintaining middle-class status. For example, living rooms would be decorated to 'demonstrate' travel and recreation. If individuals could not afford a trip to Singapore or Germany, they acquire a Merlion sculpture, the trademark of Singapore, or a cuckoo clock in Jakarta or Medan. Placed at a prominent and quite visible place in the living room, these objects created a symbolic environment that enhanced feelings of belonging to the middle class, as the items demonstrate leisure, the ability to travel, to be international—values strongly associated with middle-class activities.

All the above strategies of lifestyling were desperate attempts to maintain 'membership' of the middle class. In Indonesia, where the tradition of negative sanctioning of individuality still holds, 'personal' styles had always been simultaneously distinctive characteristics of membership of a social group. Tendencies towards individualisation could readily be and were indeed integrated into new forms of association, into the lifestyles that expressed collective identities. Lifestylisation was the concrete and visible mode of a *Lebensführung* that was collectively approved. Accordingly, before the economic crisis that disrupted the political hierarchy and thus the position of civil servants and military officials in society, cultivated sensitivity to those signifiers that had social recognition value not only enabled clear social distinctions to be made but also promised a person gains in prestige.

Conclusion

In Indonesia, the above forms of symbolic demonstration of class and group membership were made necessary because of the demonopolisation of symbolic hierarchies and patterns of interpretation of status and prestige which were defined and dominated by Javanese court culture, and by neo-*priyayi* government officials before the New Order regime. With rapid capitalist economic development, prestige and status became negotiable values, depending mainly on a person's lifestyle and consumption patterns, and no longer based on traditional established values and hierarchies. In this process, local cultural elements lost much of their status-enhancing function, displaced and often replaced to a large extent by globalised modern/Western symbols. In general, this displacement has, at least, two possible effects. First the relative standardisation of culture of consumption of globally marketed goods enables people, including Indonesians, to be identified as members of the middle class on a national, even international, scale. Second, it may lead to a new generation of strollers through the 'no place' postmodern urban spaces (Calefato 1988) for whom TV is the world.

In Indonesia, as we have shown above, a certain mode of symbolic consumption defined membership in the new middle class, not income and actual consumption. This was because Indonesia was a poor country, made poorer by the 1997 crisis. The small Indonesian middle class primarily identified themselves as members of strategic groups and expressed their identifications and memberships through the imitation of lifestyles of the upper ranks in their respective groups. If contemporary lifestyles associates with the middle class were conventionally based on actual education, occupation and income, then what had emerged in Indonesia might be said to be the development of a 'virtual' middle class, before the economic basis for middle-class formation is established. One of the consequences of this process of appropriation of middle-class symbols without actual consumption capacity is the reduction of social conflict without political democratisation.

As mentioned in the introduction, Indonesia has been one of the worst-affected nations of the economic crisis that has swept through East and Southeast Asia since mid-1997. The financial crisis radically devalued the Indonesian currency to a mere fraction of its pre-crisis worth within a few months. It further precipitated the much-desired but also much-feared removal of President Soeharto, who had been at the centre of an authoritarian regime for more than three decades. The political crisis that ensued also reduced radically the prestige and status of individuals who were part of the military and/or government bureaucracy. High-profile individuals within these ranks were attacked publicly for their part in the maintenance of a thoroughly corrupt regime. To the extent that the majority of the pre-crisis middle class were functionaries of the state, in military and civil bureaucracies, one of the questions for future research has to be: What happens to the 'virtual middle class' and its lifestyling during and after the current financial and political crisis.

Obviously, given the tenuousness of the middle class in a poor country such as Indonesia, any financial instability would quickly reveal the vulnerability of the class itself. As mentioned earlier, an immediate effect of the crisis has been the reduction of the middle-class ranks, within two years, to a paltry 0.2 per cent of the total population. Accordingly, one would expect the great majority of the above-described members of the lower-middle strata, who were manipulating lifestyling strategies to demonstrate their 'middle classness', to have fallen back into poverty, which by early 1999 has expanded to include, supposedly, more than 50 per cent of the total Indonesian population. The broad group of lower- and medium-ranking civil servants who relied primarily on government salaries to meet routine expenses would be expected especially to face mounting difficulties in maintaining their pre-crisis standard of living. From the information provided by residents of Padang in 1999, civil servants with additional income from other sources, such as informal business and subsistence production, appeared to be fairing better, although they too had to struggle to meet such financial obligations as paying back credit and loans. On the whole, with the exception of the clearly upper-middle class, every social strata below that level in the pre-crisis class structure has experienced downward mobility, sinking to at least the class below, if not further.

However, in spite of the overall decline of income and expenditure across the middle class, the need to maintain ‘symbolic’ consumption has not necessarily disappeared among those who are still able to do so. Indeed, the situation calls for ‘new’ strategies to demonstrate one’s middle-class status. Thus, one saw TV and movie entertainers opening, and serving at, their own sidewalk cafes and restaurants. Their status as ‘entertainers’ acted as promotional advertisements for the humble but relatively successful establishments. The once young and upwardly mobile urban middle-class individuals still have to make their rounds in the local scenes, such as bars and discos, albeit consuming a lot less food and liquor, in order to impress upon others that they are not affected by the crisis. Indeed, it would appear that such acts of symbolic consumption have become even more necessary in the struggle to avoid further slides down the class structure and into the economic abyss. The economic crisis receded somewhat by mid-1999, and conditions have begun to stabilise. The ‘prestige’ of the armed forces as a whole and that of the subservient politicians and bureaucrats has also been symbolically dismantled. As Indonesians look to a more democratic government and a more transparent and accountable civil service, with a new president in 1999, the shape of the middle class that will undoubted emerge subsequently will likely adhere more closely to the class-formation process found elsewhere in the capitalist world and the consumption pattern will, hopefully, be more substantively real than imaginary and hollow.

Notes

1 This paper reflects first results of a field study on middle-class lifestyles which I carried out in Indonesia in 1993 and 1994 under the auspices of the Sociology of Development Research Center at the University of Bielefeld. Fieldwork was supported by the Faculty of Social Sciences at Andalas University in Padang and the Population Studies Center at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta.

2 Much has been written on the Ethical Policy as, for example, Furnivall (1939).

3 Indonesians did not get the same remuneration as Europeans in services such as education or credit where they worked side by side (see Van Niel 1960:180–1).

4 The ‘five principles’ (Panca Sila): belief in God, the sovereignty of the people, national unity, social justice and humanity

5 See Tan, 1967, 29ff. See also Evers 1987

6 It should be noted that this type of analysis differs somewhat from Geertz's well known description of the partition of Javanese society into three *'aliran'* (vertical socio-cultural groups) of Priyayi, Santri and Abangan. The Westernised intelligentsia has no place in Geertz's scheme.
7 The 'dual function' claimed by the Indonesian Armed Forces, i.e., a role in society as well as the defence of the nation.
8 For a discussion of the 'poverty line approach' see Evers 1995.
9 Twelve calculations based on unpublished SUSENAS data 1992 for Yogyakarta city.
10 On the Indonesian state and its middle-class bureaucrats see Robison 1996: 82ff.
11 The majority of our respondents in Java as well as Sumatra put the line that separates the lower from the middle stratum of the society at a daily regular income of more than Rp5,000 per person (US $2.30) (more than Rp20,000 for a couple) and an education beyond secondary school level (SNM). This corresponds with data reported in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (20 July, 1995) which cites the well-established Brokerage Smith New Court which counts those as middle class in Indonesia who earn at least $1,630 annually.
12 Indonesians use the term *kias menengah* or *golongan menengah* to classify themselves or others as members of the broad middle stratum of the society.
13 See also Kessler (1991) who provocatively states that Asia's new middle classes are interested solely in consumption.
14 For a discussion about inclusion, exclusion and boundary maintenance see Schlee 1992.
15 The RS house is 36 m^2 and cost about Rp6.9 Million in 1994.

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7 The Formation and Consumption of KTV in Taiwan[1]

Kuan-Hsing Chen

Introduction

In the introductory chapter of *The New Rich in Asia,* Richard Robison and David Goodman seem to have captured a material basis for the emerging new imagination of contemporary 'Asia':

> It is as consumers that the new rich of Asia have attracted an interest of almost cargo-cult proportions in the West. They constitute the new markets for Western products: processed foods, computer software, educational services and films and television soaps. They are the new tourists, bringing foreign exchange in hard times. What has helped such an enthusiastic embrace of the Asian new rich is that they are emerging at a time when prolonged recession and low growth rates have depressed home markets in the West.
>
> (Robison and Goodman 1996:1)

The 'Western' view of 'Asia' as a space for global consumption is undoubtedly rooted in a desire for capital. However, for cultural analysts living in the region the critical task, obviously, is not to naively celebrate the triumph of consumerism as a means of boosting the global capitalist economy.

Until recently, critical studies of cultural consumption have been either too abstractly theorized or too empirical and lacking critical awareness. Both trends share a similar problem of being ahistorical in their analyses of the content and forms of objects consumed. This ahistoricity is further reinforced by the epistemological separation of production, distribution and consumption as distinct spheres of analysis. Indeed, very few critical analyses try to account for the, historically, recent formation of consumer societies in countries like South Korea, Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Some questions that need to be raised include: When and how has this consumer society come into being? What is its connection to local cultural history? How was local history articulated to the structure of 'global' capitalism, or more specifically the 'globalization' of cultural production and consumption?

From 1990s onward, globalization has become a central term in current debates in the public sphere. Much like the earlier obsession with the postmodern, attempts have been made to pinpoint the structural trends and defining characteristics of the globalization process. The neo-liberal view, basically following the track of a revival of McLuhan's theory of the global village, takes a technological determinist stance, as if suddenly over a long night, different parts of the world became interdependent, interconnected, networked, through satellite and information superhighways; in short, the technological revolution that began in the 1970s has transformed the entire globe. Furthermore, as none of its effects appears to have an intentional political project, it is argued by neo-liberals that globalization is beneficial for all, that the entire world has gone beyond the era of imperialism and more specifically cultural imperialism.[2] The left, on the other hand, would subsume technological revolution under the term 'global economic formation', and stress the uneven processes and contradictions this entails; that is, not every society, and, not every individual, especially those in less privileged class subject-positions, is equally involved in the global network in terms of power relations.[3] The central questions here are: What are the consequences of globalization for local cultural identities? What local strategies are there to confront it?

Both the liberals and the left seem to postulate a radical historical break, which we can see in terms of familiar signposts: from the modern to the postmodern, colonial to the postcolonial, imperialism to post-imperialism, fordism to postfordism, world economy to global economic formation. It is not my intention here to argue instead for radical continuities; nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the structural elements of the past are still crucially defining the shape of the present. What Stuart Hall says in the context of negotiating the 'postcolonial' conditions is also relevant to the question of globalization:

> What, in their different ways these theoretical descriptions are attempting to construct, is a notion of a shift or a transition conceptualized as the reconfiguration of a field, rather than as a movement of linear transcendence between two mutually exclusive states. Since transformations are not only not completed but they may not be best captured within a paradigm which assumes that

> all major historical shifts are driven by a necessitarian logic towards a teleological end.
>
> (Hall 1996:254)

While it is necessary to avoid the totalizing and universalizing tendency of the discourse on globalization, it is increasingly apparent that local cultural production and consumption cannot adequately be analyzed without linking them to global geo-political structures. The complex and delicate mediations in the articulation of the global and the local, therefore, have to be addressed in concrete, specific ways. The global is always locally specific, just as the local is globally specific. Unless specificities can be maintained, it is neither meaningful nor useful to address the globalization question or global-local dialectic. A tentative theoretical proposition is thus put forward here: If globalization is posited as a process of structural formation, then it has been prepared for and is being shaped by the long histories of imperialism and colonialism.

In response to the demands for historicity, i.e., to take history seriously, in the general field of consumption studies[4] and theorization of globalization, this chapter, then, aims to demonstrate the long-term trajectories of global dynamics from the point of view of a local geographical site. KTV is chosen as a strategic site for mediation,[5] so as to understand the cultural history of consumption in post Second World War Taiwan. The discussion is conducted through three sets of materials:

- a semi-structural analysis which attempts to paint a picture of the formation of a consumer society;
- a historical tracing of the emergence of the cultural form of KTV within the conditions of possibility of such a consumer society; and
- field work observations to further understand the different modes of consuming KTV.

KTV: an introduction

KTV is a complex phenomenon to research, not only because this requires distanciation from the phenomenon which betrays its call for emotional involvement at the personal level, but also because KTV crystallizes various historical landscapes of contemporary social life in Taiwan. It involves institutional infrastructure, its connection to popular music industry, food supplies, advertising agencies, and new technologies; not to mention the unrepresentable flow of dispersed energies and desires. It is in the spaces of KTV where cultural lives are lived out, where trajectories of histories (or more precisely colonial and neocolonial histories) reinscribe themselves. To limit the scope of analysis, the essay focuses on the historical and structural aspects, and only touches on activities of consuming subjects.

As one of the most popular forms of consumption in Taiwan, KTV is a cultural creation which flowed from the local and is now consumed globally. My own research finds that KTV has been flowing around in LA, San Francisco, Chicago, New York, Manila, Seoul, Sydney, Melbourne, Singapore, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and London.[6] Reports also indicate that the KTV-related machinery, karaoke, is operating in small villages of Indonesia and west Africa. In Taiwan itself, the proliferation of KTV and MTV, which is connected to but not the same as Music TV in the US (this will become clear later), marks a decisive moment in the history of Taiwan's social formation: at the conjuncture or coincidence of the lifting of martial law in politics and the formation of a consumer society, which as one of its consequences, the consolidation of local pop culture industry, particularly the pop music industry. Unlike the local film industry, including the so-called Taiwan New Cinema, which has been and still is under the control of the KMT state, the KTV moment has gone beyond such control.

Indeed, the Taiwanese state may be said to be losing control over cultural consumption as a whole. It is no longer capable of direct intervention. The cultural consumption boom, through critical elements in underground theater, pop music, alternative video, pirate radio stations, the informal information-spreading network of taxi drivers, cable and satellite TV and cultural-political magazines, has created a situation in which the authoritarian state machinary no longer has the capacity to manage and control adequately. Censorship departments, for instance, are no longer equipped with sufficient technology and labour to go through all the materials flying around the island. State control most certainly could not cover all the activities going on in thousands of KTV spots everywhere. Thus, it is perhaps not an exaggeration to maintain that the dissolution of the authoritarian regime had to do with the rise of a consumer society, and behind it the rise of a middle-class population that has been mobilized by opposition forces. And that the lifting of martial law, in 1987, had less to do with political conscience of the party-state and more to do with the explosion of long-suppressed social forces. This is, however, not to suggest that the KTV moment is by its structural location subversive against the state and capital. It does, nevertheless, designate the opening up, for the first time of a space of relative autonomy.

Accordingly, Taiwan's local history seems to challenge the argument that political legitimacy of the governments of some nations in Asia lies in the state's ability to improve the material life of the governed— the improvements constituting a dominant part of the visual evidence of the successes of the respective governments—and, because of that, the new middle class may be inclined to be supportive of existing regime rather than of change. The argument is only partly true. It may explain conditions in Singapore and Malaysia, and perhaps Indonesia, but not the emergence of opposition politics in Korea and Taiwan and, to a certain extent, Hong Kong, from the mid- and late 1980s onward. The basis of the opposition support has come precisely from the middle-class-based civil society sector of which KTV as a component of popular culture is a part.

The formation of a consumer society

For an outline of Taiwan's middle-class consumer society, which developed after the Second World War, a survey of the statistics on household expenditure is necessary.[7] From Table 7.1, it can be seen that the overall GNP had grown from US $145 to US $8,111 during the period 1951 to 1990. If GNP growth connotes capacity for consumption, then it seems clear that significant expansion of consumption capacity did not take place until mid-1970s, and accelerated in early 1980s. Several aspects of household expenditure could further indicate the growth of lifestyle consumption. The proportion of the total household expenditure for 'necessities', such as food, drink and tobacco has declined gradually from 61.81 per cent in 1951 to 29.66 per cent in

Table 7.1 GNP and consumption expenditure, Taiwan, 1961–90

	1961	*1966*	*1971*	*1976*	*1981*	*1986*	*1990*
GNP (US $)	142	221	410	1,041	2,443	3,646	7,285
Necessary household expenditure*	58.8	—	49.9	—	40.7	—	30.3
Education and leisure expenditure*	5.5	6.3	8.1	8.8	12.8	14.3	16.3
Transportation and communication expenditure*	1.7	—	3.5	4.8	7.6	10.6	13.4

Note: *Percentage of total household expenditure of the population

Table 7.2 Ownership of consumer durables, Taiwan, 1960–90

Item	*1960*	*1965*	*1970*	*1975*	*1980*	*1986*	*1990*
Motorcycle	24,468	68,198	701,421	1.7 million	3.9 million	6.6 million	9.2 million
Car	6,395	8,943	28,849	105,885	358,277	830,315	2.6 million
Colour TV*	—	—	—	1.5%	6.4%	15.8%	33.7%
(year)				(1976)	(1981)	(1987)	(1991)

1990. On the other hand, and crucially, the proportion spent on education and leisure consumption has increased steadily from 5.45 per cent in 1961 to 16.26 per cent in 1991; with the biggest jump of 4 per cent between 1976 and 1981. By 1990, educational and leisure consumption took up one-sixth of household expenditure.

Similarly, from Table 7.2, expenditure on transportation and communication (telephone) has increased steadily, from 1.72 per cent in 1951 to 13.16 per cent in 1991, with a consistently higher rate of increase after 1976 than the previous decades. This might have to do with the rise of motorcycle and car cultures. The number of motorcycles increased exponentially from 1,248 in 1950 to 1,705,263 in 1975. Between 1976 and 1991 more than two million motorcycles were added to the roads every five years. Non-business car ownership increased slowly from 2,713 in 1950 to 8,943 in 1965 and dramatically from then on, going from 28,849 in 1970 to 830,315 in 1985 to 2.5 million in 1991. The proportion of households in the population that own cars increased a meagre 1.54 per cent in 1976 to 15.54 per cent in 1987 to 33.67 per cent in 1991. Increases in expenditure on other 'modern facilities' are also suggestive. Ownership of color TV sets increased from 23.48 per cent in 1976 to 99.16 per cent in 1991. Travel to foreign lands is yet another indicator of the expansion of consumerism as a lifestyle. This increased from 217,971 (time/person) in 1980 to 317,772 in 1985, to 2,874.231 in 1991; in one year, 1989 to 1990, the number increased by over a million (860,207 to 1,971,212), followed in 1991 by another million increase (to 2,874,231). These sudden increases had to do with the state policy of allowing travel to mainland China. From these figures, it might be reasonable to suggest that a proto-consumer society was taking shape around the mid-1970s to 1980 and consolidated in the second half of the 1980s. Other indicators, such as changes in media structure, the culture industry, and advertising all point to the same trend. What follows is a tentative interpretation of the process of formation of this consumer society, subject to further research.

Immediately after the Second World War, the economic structure of Taiwan island was on the verge of collapse with lack of resources at every level, low productivity, high unemployment and high inflation. According to Duan's (1992) political economic analysis, between 1946 and 1949, during the high-inflation period, cash was released 100 times by the state, while productivity was minimal. This combination led to hyper-inflation of prices, which went up 1,056 times, while productivity almost stopped.[8] From 1950 to 1965, an annual US $100 million of military and economic foreign aid helped to arrest inflation, and prices for goods started to decline (Liu 1992:350–76). Meanwhile, US aid in both the industrial and agricultural sectors supplied materials and machines which enabled the recovery of productivity. Land reform also led to a steady increase in agricultural production. Consequently, from 1952 agricultural production increased by 5 per cent every year for the next 10 years. This not only led to self-sufficiency in food but also enabled large volumes of exports to make up for shortages in industrial production (Duan 1992:120–9). Concurrently, state policy of importing materials for local production aimed at enabling local textile industry to meet the basic need for clothing. In sum, the 1950s set the agenda to stabilize and prepare the economy for future development.

Beginning in the late 1960s, the economy was subject to another critical readjustment; it switched from import substitution to an export-oriented policy, which fundamentally transformed the structure of production. Employment opportunities in the then new labor-intensive industries pulled rural labor out of the agricultural sector to urban centers, particularly Taipei and Kau-hsiung. Between 1963 and 1973 annual industrial growth averaged 20 per cent, which constituted an average of 11 per cent of overall national economic growth. Rapid accumulation of local capital provided the funds and impetus for further infrastructure development. The construction of the North-South freeway running the length of the island was an example of the Ten Big Construction Plan, to speed up movement of commercial goods. With the steady expansion of the industrial sector and the corresponding decline of the agricultural sector, income improved and consumption power increased gradually, reflected in the consumption pattern as seen in the above tables. The 1973 global oil crisis led to a depression of export trade. This forced local capital to 'discover', and invest in, the domestic market, which was by then characterized by significant increase of consumption power and with the necessary infrastructure gradually in place.

The formation of a consumer society in the late 1970s expressed itself in different fields: in 1977, media advertising reached beyond NT $5,000 million, and in 1980, NT $10,000 million; in 1978, the North-South freeway opened; in the same year, Tung-i, 24-hour convenience chain-stores were established, which have since gradually changed the pattern of everyday consumption in urban centers, displacing 'traditional' neighborhood grocery stores (Ho 1994); in 1979, the Chiang Kai-shek international airport began its service, and the Sungsan airport was turned into a domestic airport; in 1980, the train system for the northern part of the island was completed; from 1976 to 1981, household expenditure on food dropped by 10 per cent, and leisure expenditure increased by 4 per cent. These were all signals of the coming of a consumer society.

In 1986, for the first time, employment in services exceeded that of the industrial sector, indicating sustained expansion of the local consumer market. Apparently, the turn to domestic market had made it possible to sustain overall economic growth.

From 1986 onward, taxes on imported cars, books and cosmetics were reduced, and consumption of these previously more expensive objects increased sharply. In 1987, the state lifted martial law, which meant an end to the official curfew and effected a longer time span for spending in the evenings thereby.[9] It also suspended control over foreign exchanges and travel to Hong Kong and Macau. This period also saw a trend in the rise of chain stores; besides the convenience stores which were saturating the island, book stores such as Ching-Shih Tang began to expand and the expensively decorated Eslite Books which, in 1994, had six stores in various parts of Taipei, began to expand to other cities. In sum, changes in government policies stimulated a qualitative shift towards more expensive consumption, including cars and travel.

Retrospectively, it is obvious that the formation of a consumer society in Taiwan has been deeply tied to the political-economic structure. Without rapid economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s which increased consumption power in the population, the rapid formation of a local consumer market would have been impossible. The political/policy interventions in the content and forms of consumption have had critical impact in this formation: in contrast to the omnipresent power of the state from 1950s to 1970s, the expansion of space and time for consumption has gone beyond the management capacity of the state. Theoretically, the 'Taiwan experience' seems to fit into Baudrillard's (1988) structural argument: consumer society is the extension and expansion of industrial production, which organizes and incorporates consumption power. In 50 years, Taiwan had been transformed from an agrarian to an industrial society, linking it to the international system of production. One of the consequences of this is the expansion of consumption at all levels of daily life. This trajectory seems to be the history of capitalism, miniaturized and compressed into 50 years.

With this semi-structural analysis, it is time to focus on the formation and consumption of KTV.

The KTV phenomenon

The KTV institutions emerged in the late 1980s. Unlike other quick set-ups, such as a brief fashioning of a 'beer house' or 'tea house', which is intended for short-term seasonal consumption and then torn down for other purposes, investments in KTV cost far more and were for the longer term. The first KTV form appeared in June, 1987, when a restaurant in Han-Ko Street, a relatively less-developed part of Taipei city, cut up its space into small rooms and, in each placed a karaoke machine to attract business (Chang 1993:17). This arrangement took off like a bullet. From the second half of 1987 onward, it quickly became the most popular type of leisure consumption in Taiwan. This was reflected in the rapid growth of the 'industry', which was 300 per cent from 1988 to 1989. During this period, investment in KTV establishments could be recovered within five months. For example, one of the popular spots, 'Cash-box' on Tung-hua South Road, recovered its NT $20-million investment within six months (Chang 1993:20). In 1990, Taipei city had 130 stores; 12 million people went to these places in the same year. By 1992, the city had 770 KTV centers. Throughout the island, a conservative estimate is that there are about 2,000 KTV stores and over 30 million people have visited these establishments, (the total Taiwan population is 21 million). Few of the establishments, if any, were legally registered. Many were fire-traps; some 70 people died from accidental fires in such establishments in the city of Taichung in 1995.

By the end of 1988, KTV neon bill-boards dominated the evening cityscape. According to Hsia (1992), with the emergence of KTV, singing culture became almost a popular social movement, cutting across racial, ethnic, gender and class boundaries. Related industries developed, there were *bu-si-ban* (learning schools) which taught one how to be a better singer; the laser disk machine was invented to generate better sound quality and sold well for personal practices and family entertainment; recording studios also emerged to produce personal records, even CDs. KTV was everywhere: private companies, schools and public institutions, including military camps. By early 1990, other forms of what can be called 'X'-TV phenomenon also appeared: HTV referred to KTV merging with hotel business; R(estaurant)TV; D(isco-dancing)TV; CTV, with CD Laser equipment; *guei*TV, cargo containers *(guei)* transformed into entertainment sites; T(ea house)KTV; B(eer house)D(isco)KTV; BTV, for love hotels; and finally, cable TV offered services for home viewers to order particular songs to sing to. Taipei, at that time, could be said to be a KTV city.

In Taiwan, the term KTV stands for a physical and social space of leisure consumption, generally but not exclusively in an urban setting. The basic elements involve a TV set, microphones connected to a stereo system, karaoke machine which works with specially designed tape to eliminate the vocal track, song folder-books which contain songs in different languages—Mandarin, *Min-nan* (also the language of Fujian Province in the PRC), English, Japanese, Cantonese and, when in their territory, Hakka—and a system by which consumers can order particular songs, which ranges from using paperclips, to computerized key-in and sound reflection. 'High-Tech' is one of KTV's selling points. Consequently, for certain more expensive KTV venues, staff members wear headphones for communication, from the front desk to the service areas in each floor. Food and drinks are always served in KTV establishments (in certain KTV locations, in the bathroom there are designated containers for the drunk to vomit).

There are usually two kinds of physical space, often coexisting in the same establishment:

- a small room, with size ranges to fit in four to 20 people, designed like a living room in regular family setting, where TV set is always placed at the center, surrounded by sofa sets and tables to place drinks and food; one goes to these with friends and family; and
- an open space where one can go alone or as a group to meet others, as in most gay and lesbian bars.

These two types of spaces can be set in almost any building, occupying either only one floor or the entire building. The number of rooms in an establishment ranges from two or three to some 120. For those which occupy entire buildings, the number of employees can range from 170 to 800; one establishment, the 'A-la-K' had over 30 staff working in the song control room alone (Chang 1993:17).

With reference to the clientele, according to a 1990 report, there was no clear gender difference; age-wise, over 70 per cent of the consumers were 20 to 35 and 16 per cent, 31–35. In terms of income 12 per cent had monthly income of between NT $30,000 and NT $40,000, 38 per cent earned between NT $20,000 (roughly US $800) and NT $30,000 and 25 per cent below NT $20,000 (Hsia 1993:154–5; Chang 1993: 26–9). These three groups, constituting 75 per cent of the consumers, reflected incomes which are below upper middle class. When asked about the purposes of going to KTV, 64 per cent answered for leisure gathering with friends and relatives, 33 per cent for interpersonal contacts for business, 30 per cent for releasing pressure, 18 per cent for curiosity, 12 per cent for satisfying the desire of performing, 12 per cent for practicing, 3 per cent just for fun, 1 per cent for company gathering (Chang 1993:28).

Class differences are very clearly marked by different KTV sites. The equipment, facilities, physical spaces, design, and quality of food have everything to do with class differences. Around the University campus area, for instance, one could spend NT $200 hundred (US $7) for the whole night, and the stores provide free water. At the other end, businessmen can spend over NT $25,000 (US $800) to NT $80,000 (over US $2,500) or more per night, accompanied by women singing, with further charges for sex. The middle range expense is around NT $400 to NT $700 for a three-hour night.

A short history of the KTV form

With its undeniable popularity, there are an infinite number of dimensions, stories or questions that could be posed regarding KTV. Probably, the most obvious question is: What were the historical-cultural elements which came together at a particular conjuncture to constitute its present form? Or, to put it differently, what had been the historical processes preparing for its emergence, if a new cultural form had to build on preexisting resources? It is therefore necessary to trace historically the complex articulation of different cultural elements that constitute KTV. The argument proposed here is that KTV is historically overdetermined. It picks up and absorbs cultural elements from a local history articulated to various colonial and neocolonial moments, and is further linked to the political economy of a geographical space typical to the 'third world'. This section will focus on how cultural elements from the past shape KTV's present form, and the next section will offer a political-economic explanation of its conditions of possibility.

The longest singing and music tradition on the island comes from the culture of the aboriginal people, who now constitute around 1.5 per cent of the population. Without a written form of history, songs have been one of the sites for transmission of traditions from generation to generation. Aboriginal activists claim that they had already a five-thousand-year history prior to the beginning of Han Chinese settlement in the twelth century and later, the Portuguese 'discovery' in the late sixteenth century (Yichiang and Lawagau 1992). Of course, this version of their history contests the one held by the Han Chinese, which claims Taiwanese history to be approximately four hundred years old, with everything prior to that regarded as 'prehistory'. The diversity of aboriginal musical cultures might be connected to their interactions with other forces, first with Han and then with the Dutch.[10] The Dutch landed in the south of Formosa in 1622, establishing a trading post for the then Dutch East India Company, and subsequently the Spanish occupied the North in 1626 (Tsau 1979). In 1642, partly with the support of the aboriginals, the Dutch defeated the Spanish and conquered the entire island. Dutch colonialism left little cultural residue on the island except in the form of missionary work to Christianize the aborigines.[11] By 1650, it was reported, there were 5,900 converts. Till today Christian churches are very much in evidence; where there is an aboriginal tribe, there is a church. This was perhaps one of the moments in which aboriginal music tradition absorbed outside elements. A representative figure of aboriginal musicians is Hu Der-fu, who had released the song 'Capitalism sucks'. Hu plays a great variety of music, improvisational or otherwise, without knowing how to read musical notes, and claims this capacity comes from his own cultural tradition.

Another singing tradition was the Hakka cultural form of *hsiong bao,* antiphonal interaction, in which participants sing back and forth to express emotional relations. Today, efforts at cultural revival also use singing contests to bring back the 'essence' of Hakka-ness and Hakka identity. In contrast, singing in front of the group or in public was not a tradition of the dominant Han culture. In the early days of the KTV moment, the well known Hakka politician, Wu Bor-hsiung, then Minister of Interior, now general secretary of the Nationalist Party, was invited to sing at a fundraising event. He was subsequently reported to the Prime Minister for *'bu-cheng ti-tung'* (conduct unbecoming). However, over the years of KTV boom, government officials have started to learn how to sing in public in attempts to win popular support. Apparently, the seriousness of traditional Han *li-chiao* (ritualism) has been transformed; KTV has become the ritual medium through which a populist political culture is now formed.

A crucial moment which is linked to KTV formation was the period of Japanese occupation, from 1895 to 1945. In 50 years, Japanese colonialism fundamentally reconfigured the local culture at all levels; for example, in language, religion, education and initiating industrialization. Indeed, in spite of KMT's efforts, since 1945, to root out all Japanese elements, Japanese colonial culture still operates visibly today. For instance, for individuals 60 years or older, Japanese is still often the common language of communication. Also, although Japanese movies were banned in 1950s and then tightly controlled until 1986, the eve of lifting the martial law (Lo 1996), Japanese TV programmes are the most popular foreign import today (Lii 1996).

A cultural form which can arguably be treated as the originating element of the KTV was the Japanese *'nakasi'* culture. Japanese men would drink together over dinner and a small band with basic musical instruments would be brought in, along with local women, to entertain them. A highly gendered practice, these men would order familiar songs to sing. This form continues in places like Bei-tou (a popular spot with Japanese tourists), and other traces of the practice also can still be found. Like the KTV, *nakasi* expanded into different social classes, and is found even in remote rural working-class areas. For example, in *A Borrowed Life,* the film about the life of copper miners directed by Wu Nien-chen, *released in* (1995), the *nakasi* scene played a central role for social gathering. One could argue that the later development of the karaoke machine was but a technological modulation of *nakasi*.

Today, in business circles, the masculine spaces of *jeo-jia* (drinking parlor), pubs or clubs have been displaced by class-defined, particularistic KTVs. Business contracts are still mediated through women as entertainers or sex workers. Huang Tsuen-ming's famous 'homeland' novel, *Sayonara, Goodbye* documents this particular moment of history. This is the archetype of business culture, pervasively practiced. For a regular evening, it can cost a party of four about NT $40,000– 80,000 (US $2–3,000).[12] On the tatami floor of local restaurants, the same old scene is being enacted; women serving the men by singing to them or with them. Undoubtedly, the male-dominant form of entertainment lingers, however, the gendered monopoly is over. Women's groups often make use of KTV spaces. Lesbian circles have created their own 'national anthem',[13] by changing the lyrics of songs to suit what they want; alternatively, heterosexual love song can always be 'queered' without having to change the lyrics.

KMT's occupation of Taiwan in 1945 both ended Japanese colonialism and constituted itself as a Han-centric Chinese colonization. The KMT not only brought with it diverse Han Chinese cultures from different provinces, but also carried the crucial impact of American forces, particularly immediately after the 1950s' Korean War. The geopolitics of Taiwan's location was then repositioned yet again. It was reconstituted as the strategic point of the great divide between communism and the 'free world' throughout the Cold War, indeed, even the 'post'-cold war era. This was the crucial moment in which Taiwan was inserted into a neo-colonial structure under the hegemony of the American 'empire'. The entire infrastructure of the island, including electrical grids and transportation highways, was built and rebuilt according to American standardization. Culturally speaking, 'America' has since been the meta-referent point against which things Taiwanese are placed, measured, legitimated, or contested. This cultural imaginary continues to operate profoundly, as a routinized unconscious, in the daily life of the people in Taiwan.

During the 1960s, Taiwan was to serve as a leisure site for members of the American air-force on holiday and a tourist site for Japanese; a typical development in the dependent-development process within the international division of labor (Hsia 1993). The Chung-san North Road district was the most marked leisure space for the US military forces; ‘Western’-type bars and pubs can still be found there today. American culture began to pour into Taiwan partially through such mechanisms as the American air-force radio station (AFNT), airing American pop music. Such music became one of the major forms of cultural consumption for college students in the early days, when leisure consumption was terribly lacking. For the more educated who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, imaginary knowledges of the outside world was partly mediated through the American pop music scene, the American anti-war movement, the hippies and drugs. Indeed, to know American pop music then counted as one’s cultural capital.[14] Through the 1960s and 1970s, one of the means by which the local record industry guaranteed profit was to produce pirated anthologies of the Top 40 hit songs.[15] However, the local music industry consolidated in the 1980s, building on the expansion of leisure and cultural consumption that came with economic growth of the past decades. A wave of urban music production was to emerge (e.g. Lo Da-you), addressing local issues and experiences. A ‘star’ system, fashion design, fan—clubs which were developed by both the industry as well as self-generated by the fans—followed. This was the point at which local pop music might be said to have displaced the dominance of imported Top 40. However, the American Top 40 continues until today to be the key market player in competition with local pop music productions, such that if there were no competitive new local releases, sales of Top 40 tunes would go up.

In early 1980s, the karaoke machine, invented in Japan, was introduced to Taiwan. Karaoke had its moment, but was not as popular as the later development of KTV. That the majority of the ‘singing’ population would rather be out of the house than be subjected to ‘surveillance’ by other family members, partly explained why a karaoke culture, marketed as family-based home entertainment, did not take off. Nevertheless, public gathering places which made use of karaoke, juxtaposed with food and drink, began to emerge; for example, a karaoka space was often set aside in restaurants. Another new site for social interaction through singing was thus constructed.

To have the courage to sing in public is very different from singing in private contexts. Passing the microphone through different tables, people began to communicate through songs. The practicing consensus was supposedly to support each other; indeed, the audience in the crowd would applaud loudly in appreciation of the 'amateur' singers. Underneath that, however, a sense of 'distinction' was gradually operating. Some of the frequent 'practitioners' suddenly discovered that they had talent and, among friends, some came to be known as a 'king or queen of singing'. This led inevitably to competition, turning the karaoke-restaurants into sites of contests and conflicts, including physical fights which progressively gave karaoke places a 'bad' reputation. However, what was culturally significant was that, through singing, people began to train and express themselves and such practices began to extend beyond karaoke restaurants. For example, at the peak of the social and political movements during late 1980s, karaoke machines were always brought to the site of political activities for temporary release of anxiety.

Also in the early 1980s, Music TV emerged in the US and landed in Taipei around mid-decade. Due to the close contacts between the two countries, especially through linkages with the US West Coast Chinese communities, pirated copies of Music TV produced in the US were shipped over to Taiwan and quickly established their public presence in coffee houses. One of the first showing spots was called 'Wu-Ya Der Wuo' (Crow's Nest); the literal rendering is actually 'we're the world' —a signal for the appropriated inscription of American culture. Patrons drank their coffee and watched rock videos; music videos came to serve a promotional purpose for the cafes. Then, to accommodate different preferences of the patrons, a new form was created: a cafe would be divided into different sections, patrons in each section could then pick what they liked and watched together. Eventually, this form evolved into separate rooms, each with holding capacity ranging from two to 20 people. Ironically, as more capital was invested Music TV was eliminated; such venues were turned into places for watching movies on video. From mid-1980s on, the so-called MTV-centers, i.e., movie-tv centres, became the most popular form of entertainment. They almost displaced movie theaters, forcing many to close.[16] The rapid development of the MTV-centers was made possible by the infrastructure provided by Taiwan's informal economy: pirated copies of anything a consumer requested could be quickly made available as the centers could reproduce the copies themselves. Up to 1991, this was still a common practice. However, with the subsequent imposition of legislation to protect intellectual property, the MTV moment was over.

In relation to movie theaters, MTV-centers provided not only more variety but also a sense of privacy. It is the latter which made MTV-centers so popular, especially for teenagers who were dating. For the same amount of money as going to the movies, one could see a movie, get a free drink and obtain desired privacy; once the door was locked, anything could happen. Significantly, the MTV-centers also 'renovated' the traditional sex industry which picked up this form so that soon consumers could go and watch porn videos with sex workers. MTV-centers thus became a problem for the parents and certain state authorities. For example, in 1990, the then Prime Minister, Hau Bo-tsun, openly stated 'good people will not go to MTV or KTV' (*China Times,* 26 August, 1990). The state intervened by imposing a surveillance device: on each door a window was filted, so that the occupants could be watched from the outside. However, the moral 'concern' intensified. The result was a new government policy which required these places to be closed by 3 a.m. This was the compromised result of several rounds of negotiations between the business sector and the state, which initially proposed a 1 a.m. closing time.[17]

With American MTV, local music industry also began to make music videos as advertising promotions for newly released pop songs. Not only was advertising style thus transformed, the growing popularity of video clips with images and songs paved the way for the KTV. The M(ovie)TV forms of entertainment space with karaoke and TV screen with moving images were all the elements necessary for business people to put together to create KTV. The initial 'trial' of simply taking over MTV spaces and putting in singing equipment proved to be a great success and grew immediately. One small technical difference between KTV and karaoke should be noted because it partly explains the instant popularity. With karaoke, performers have to know the songs well enough to sing along at the right pace; whereas with KTV, singers are prompted by the screen on when to sing and what to sing; the subtitles are gradually colored in, thus cueing singers as to when to sing the right lyrics. This makes a very significant difference: one does not have to know the song well to sing it. Hence more people can be incorporated into KTV's cultural space.

Given the different strands of singing practices in Taiwan elucidated earlier, it could be argued that as a cultural practice singing in general, and KTV in particular, is crucially about social memories. Singing particular songs brings people back to different moments in their life. The different song-preferences of the different generations reflect the historical moments that have been incorporated into the KTV culture. Picking a particular song to sing is indicative of one's generational belonging. Thus, when the more mature generations go to KTV, Japanese songs dominate their choices; that Japanese songs constitute an independent category is, of course, historically not accidental. On the other hand, Top 40 titles from the 1960s and 1970s are demanded by its own respective generations, for whom American pop is very much part of the local culture. For the younger still, neither Japanese nor English songs are chosen, instead local pop songs in Mandarin Chinese and Min-nan are the most heavily consumed in KTVs.[18]

It is clear that various moments and elements of the colonial and neo-colonial histories of Taiwan get crystallized in the KTV phenomenon. Here, the materiality of history literally presents itself beyond the simple articulation of these formal elements. One can see those historical moments get squeezed in one single space and time, sometimes in completely schizophrenic ways. In a family gathering, 1920s' Japanese song, 1940s' Shanghai folk song, 1960s' Beatles, 1980s' Taiwanese rap, and 1990s' Hong Kong-influenced teenage pop could all be there. Members of different generations of a family might not even know what the other is singing about. Seemingly trivial phenomenon like this is, of course, actually not accidental at all. The specificities of the coming together of different languages, of the pace of the different music, from extremely 'boringly' slow to 'noise', of different memories of moments of life are structurally, historically, geographically overdetermined. Or should one say, Taiwan's colonial history has prepared for the specificities of the local KTV culture.

State and capital

Of course, the cultural formation of KTV is deeply grounded in the political economy of the state and capital, and to a certain extent the nature of labor, characteristic to Taiwan. I would argue that the intensity with which KTV has been embraced and its speed of proliferation could not have happened in any of the advanced capitalist societies. From the 1950s and 1960s onward, the Taiwanese state's major mission was economic development. To radically mobilize social forces (capital and labor) to participate in the national growth project, the state had to relax various controls in the zoning and usage of space, both private and public. Thus, while zoning bylaws and guidelines were in place legally, they were never observed by users nor policed by relevant authorities.

Economically, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the dominant image was 'living room as a small factory'; indeed, even today, the so-called residential areas are full of restaurants, groceries and other stores. Informal economy was and remains the dominant form of the flow and accumulation of capital. The so-called Taiwan 'miracle' of the 1970s was built on two features:

- low-pay, labor-intensive production which stressed speed and efficiency, and
- highly mobile small- and medium-size capital looking for quick return instead of long-term investment.

These were the features the KTV industry inherited: labor-intensive work, such as quickly picking up the songs a consumer orders and just as quickly switching to another, and 'hit-and-run' capital engaging in 'fashionable' business for quick returns.

In terms of public spaces, having not provided enough space for collective consumption, such as public parks, museums or sports-ground (Hsia 1992; Chang 1993), the state has to be completely *'laissez-faire'* on leisure spaces, to meet the increasing demand generated by urbanization and improved wealth of the households, as long as ideological and moral taboos were not involved. Prior to the waves of M(ovie)TV and KTV, the city of Taipei saw beer houses, tea houses, cafes, 'wild chicken' cities, sauna and massage parlors, roasted food or deep-fried food stalls and other street vendors, not to mention the long tradition of night markets in cities throughout the island. Physical spaces were readily available for all these forms of leisure businesses because of the high rate of empty apartments which, under conditions of non-enforcement of zoning and land use codes, could be quickly turned into commercial uses. In 1993 a conservative estimate of empty apartments or houses throughout the island was 600,000 units. In 1996, it stood at 800,000 units. The glut of apartments was itself the result of the economic growth in the 1960s through the 1970s which encouraged local corporate groups *(tsai-tuan)* to 'heat up' the real estate market. This, coupled with the state's disinclination to provide public housing, such as that offered in Singapore or Hong Kong, has made Taipei, and now all the urban centers in Taiwan, notorious for high-cost but low-quality living. Indeed, the poorly planned urban conditions may be said to be the result of an 'alliance' of state, capital and landowners.

One mechanism which the KMT uses to maintain its political power is through its co-optation of local factions *(di-fan pai-si)* who control economic resources, including land, transportation, and capital. These individuals and their representatives are chosen as electoral candidates and eventually elected to various levels of councils and parliament. The elected city council members, legislators *(di-fan ming-yi dai-biau)* across all ranks, sometimes even the mayor himself, perform one essential 'democratic' function: to represent the 'interests' of their respective constituencies. They would go to local authorities to 'solve' land use problems, get construction licenses and/or generally 'help' their supporters to get around bylaws when the latter chose to use office units or entire buildings for KTV or restaurants. As mentioned earlier, by 1992, according to Taipei city government record, there were some 700 illegal KTV places in various forms—businesses falsely registered, business activities that did not abide by zoning code, and businesses where the spaces used extended into public spaces and/or where premises did not meet minimum safety standards. In fact, KTV was only one of many businesses that violated all regulations. Indeed, Taipei's municipal authorities claimed that the problem with KTV was less serious than with the eighteen other types of businesses listed. Hence, KTV was not on their priority list to be investigated.

Corruption of government officials, policemen, legislators and the strong presence of local mafia and gangsters to manage the entertainment industry only indicate that legality, the ethos for regulating capitalist system, has yet to be properly established in Taiwan. This lack of cultural 'respect' for the law is a result of past developmentalist economy orchestrated by an authoritarian state. Only a historical understanding is able to uncover the complex political-economic interests which were at work to produce the conditions that allowed for the emergence of KTV and related leisure industries. In short, in the post-war era, the 'developmentalist' economic policy of the Taiwanese state, which underprovides public spaces for collective consumption, coupled with an incapacity to control the use of social space, had preconditioned the sudden boom of such leisure spaces as KTV.

Conclusion

The formation and consumption of KTV is about history. To return to the globalization question, the global-local dialectic in the sphere of consumption is mediated through Taiwan's colonial history. In the opening of the concluding chapter, entitled 'Freedom from Domination in the Future', in Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism,* he writes, 'Imperialism did not end, did not suddenly become "Past", once decolonization had set in motion the dismantling of the classical empires. A legacy of connection still binds countries like Algeria and India to France and Britain respectively' (Said 1993:282). Indeed, the colonial legacy binds them together structurally and institutionally, not only in terms of international politics and international division of labor in the global economy. The bondage is also kept alive at the level of deepseated psychic structure and the processes of cultural formation, which in turn intersect with subsequent movements of neo-imperialist and neo-colonial forces. An example is the assumption of control of Taiwan by KMT colonialism and US imperialism from the hands of Japanese imperialism. In retracing the short history of KTV in Taiwan, it has become clear that critical analysis should be reminded not to 'forget' or rupture with the past, which has become a fashionable enterprise of the 'post' in its embracing of an ideology of the new. Instead, it should try to discover how the seemingly dead ghosts still condition the present, and even the future.

The instance of the KTV in Taiwan teaches us that, for different locales, globalization has specific historical trajectories. For a consuming subject living one's daily life within the structures of the national space of Taiwan, the cultural forces penetrating from the outside, within the process of globalization, are predominantly 'Chinese', 'Japanese', and 'American'. It is not accidental that Min-nan, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese and American songs are made available to the KTV consumers, but not French or Korean ones. And the 'cut and mix' creation of the KTV form was an articulation of Han Chinese musical traditions with an appropriation of Japanese *nakasi*/karaoke and American MTV. If Taiwan's colonial history were erased in the name of the homogenizing forces of globalization, then the specificities of KTV cultural practices could not be explained. The suspicion against a faceless globalization should not by any means be read as nostalgia for colonial legacies. If 'decolonization' means something beyond the nationalist independence movement and the installation of a new nation-state, then it must surely also means a recognition of the historical forces of colonialism, in order to transcend the colonial structure of identification.

Finally, this chapter has also demonstrated that the emergence of KTV as a form of cultural production and consumption was tied to the history of Taiwan's local political economy. Its emergence must be positioned as an integral part of the wider formation of a Taiwan consumer society which resulted from the successful export-oriented economic strategies of the Taiwanese developmentalist state. Such a developmentalist state is the nodal point which articulates the local political economy to the structure of global capitalism in a new international division of labor central, if not typical, to the historical experiences of the Asian newly industralizing countries (NICs). However, the sudden proliferation of KTV locally had to be 'supported' by the long-term alliance of the state and capital, which also explains why such an intensive rate of expansion is not likely to happen in more regulated capitalist societies.

Notes

1 I must acknowledge the National Science Council for funding my two-year research project on 'Postmodern Cultural Politics: Media, the Masses and Consumer Society' (1991–1993; NSC81-0301-H007-513E), from which the materials on consumer society are drawn. I thank Chang Shu-mei for generously sharing information collected and analyzed in her 1993 MA thesis work on KTV, in the Graduate Institute of Building and Planning, National Taiwan University. I thank Jing Wang and Leo Ching (Duke University) for their conversations in the earlier stages of this project. I thank Chua Beng-Huat's editorial suggestions and support.

2 The representative position can be found in Tomlinson (1991), especially the last chapter.

3 See, for instance, King (1991).

4 For a review of the problems and complexities involved in consumption studies, see Chua Beng-Huat's 'Consumption Patterns of Asia's New Rich,' the introductory chapter to this book.

5 The theoretical reworking of historical materialism into a 'geo-colonial historical materialism' is presented elsewhere (Chen 1996).

6 For relevant studies, see Wong (1994). I thank Stuart Cunningham for pointing out this study to me.

7 All data presented here come from a compilation of government statistics; for details, see Chen (1993).

8 The February 28, 1947 (228) massacre of local Taiwanese radically destroyed social energies; political power, backed up by military forces, which took its authoritarian form since then, lapsed into long-term tight political control.

9 It is often recognized that the 'life' in Taipei is literally 24 hours. Evening life does not finish until 5 a.m. and many restaurants are famous for their business after midnight.

10 There are ten tribes and more than ten languages still to be found in Taiwan today.

11 The Dutch brought in Christianity to Taiwan and, in contrast, the Spanish took Catholicism to the Philippines during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This might explain the different influences on contemporary religious presence in both places.

12 When multinational corporate people had just arrived in the 1970s, it was a shock to them; the headquarters at home did not understand how such huge amounts of money could be used for 'public relations'. They soon learnt, however, that no food, no drinking and no women meant no business.

13 'Ku-hai nu-sen-lung' (the Troubled Life of a Woman Worrier), a classic Mi-nan folk song, has been reclaimed by the lesbian circle, although there was nationalist argument suggesting that the song was 'originally' about the hard life of the Taiwanese people, not just about women, and definitely not lesbians.

14 Edward Yang's *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991), which documents the 'mainlander' youth culture of the 1960s, was shot through with identification with the American pop music.
15 The anthology of the pirated music was named 'Songs of the Students' and was made available on the market every month.
16 Of course, not only did MTV centers emerge, but also video movie rental stores began to sweep the island before copyright restrictions were imposed.
17 For detailed documentation and analysis, see Chang (1993:38–46).
18 My own observation in different KTV contexts suggests that the younger generation (15 to 22) no longer favors imported songs, except the recent wave of Hong Kong pop from early 1990s on.

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8 Singaporeans Ingesting McDonald's

Chua Beng-Huat

Globalisation of capitalism elicits two contradictory responses from managers of the nation-state, especially those in the so-called periphery and semi-periphery. To prosper, indeed simply to survive, a nation must be able to insert itself as a node in the global network of capital flow. To this end, the arrival of capital is to be enthusiastically embraced. However, its effects on the culture of everyday life that attend the arrival of capital invariably gives rise to a 'dis-ease' —a lingering cultural reservation and conservatism—which reduces enthusiasm and renders the embrace of capital less than complete.

A most apparent and immediate cultural effect of successful capitalisation of the local economy is the expansion of material consumption. Global marketing of mass-produced objects, broadcast through advertisements and other popular culture media, like TV and movies, provides the images to be emulated by consumers worldwide. Consumption expansion thus tends to lead to some level of global homogenisation of culture among consumers; an effect that gives rise to negative responses to globalisation.

As consumer goods are always also cultural goods, expansion of consumption of imported products and services often gives rise to an exaggerated sense of 'panic', of cultural 'invasion' which, supposedly, if left unchecked will result in the demise of the local culture. Critics, including the state, thus inveigh against specific 'foreign' targets, such as 'Americanisation' or 'Japanisation', and take upon themselves to promote 'local' culture as ballast against the 'foreign' cultural invasions. The desire of the state to involve itself in such ideological critique is obvious. Homogenisation of culture globally is antithetical to the idea of the 'uniqueness' of nationalist sentiments and, therefore, is potentially threatening to the hold of the nation-state on its citizens. Emphasising the 'national' as 'local' differences is in the interests of the nation-state as an act of self-preservation. Hence, existing alongside embracing the arrival of capital is a cultural/moral critique of both the commodification of social life and the 'cultural imperialism' of the countries from which the goods originate.

The conjoined material and cultural responses, always in tension, constitute a disjuncture at most, if not all, sites which respond positively to the penetration of globalised capital. This chapters examines one instance of how the disjuncture works itself out in a location which is highly successful in inserting itself into global capitalism—Singapore—a success which in turn transforms it into a modern consumer society.[1]

Singapore's economic success is overwhelmingly the result of doing everything that is necessary to achieve capitalist growth. The logic of capital operates unfettered, enshrined ideologically in a local version of pragmatism, to be discussed later. On the other hand, a critique of the culture of consumption is framed by a larger public discourse of contestation between so-called Eastern (Asian) and Western (European, Australian and American) values in the cultural spheres (Ho 1989). The local 'Asian culture' is discursively constituted by the state as a distilled composite of the three major cultures of Asia, namely, the Chinese, Malay, (Islamic) and Indian, the traditional cultures of the three ethnic groups that constitute the national population (Mahbubani 1994; Koh 1993). It is this 'Asian-ness' that is supposedly under siege, via consumption, by 'Westernisation/Americanisation'.[2] This deculturalisation/Westernisation is supposedly most inscribed on the youth, the most avid consumers of all things 'foreign', in a city of relative affluence and where the body has become the locus of consumption for all. The fear of this process greets the arrival of almost all new consumer goods.

Empirically, it is impossible to document, without extreme simplification, the whole array of phenomena which, in their totality, constitute the overall transformation of Singapore from a city of material privation to one of, as many would say, excessive consumption. This documentation can be done only in fragments, including the present chapter. The fragment analysed here is the reception and consumption of McDonald's hamburgers. McDonald's came to Singapore in the beginning of the 1980s. It had, by 1995, 65 outlets and Singaporeans are among the largest consumers of its burgers per capita in the world.[3] There is a McDonald's everywhere, sometimes two in larger public housing estates. This extensive reach of McDonald's is obviously indicative of its popularity with the population.

There are two reasons for the analytic interest in McDonald's. 'McDonaldisation' has come to represent two separate processes in the discourse on late capitalism. First, from a production point of view, it stands for the continuing rationalisation, beginning with Taylorism, of the process of mass production. This involves progressive deskilling of workers through increasing simplification, standardisation and routinisation of job tasks (Ritzer 1993; Leidner 1993). Second, to cultural critics in both the US and locations invaded by McDonald's, the latter often stands as a US 'imperialist export' (Leidner 1993:47); reflecting the commonly held thesis that 'homogenisation' of cultures, which results from the globalisation of capitalism, is synonymous with 'Americanisation'. With this double representation, McDonald's as a consumption phenomenon contains within itself the analytic resource for the examination of issues at hand.

McDonaldisation as rationalisation

In *The McDonaldization of Society* (1993), Ritzer suggests that the extreme automation of production, serving and consumption of hamburgers at McDonald's stands as the exemplar, and discursively 'McDonaldisation' stands as the 'trope', for the inevitable outcome of the internal logic of the rationalisation of social life, which began in the nineteenth century in the West. This trajectory of rationalisation has two loci; one in the bureaucratic management of society and the other in the breaking down of work into standardised routines in the mass production of industrial goods. The two processes have the same motivation and result: the increasing efficient control of both people and production through standardisation and resulting predictability. Arguably, in broad outline, all contemporary capitalist nation-states must abide by the logic of these two subprocesses of rationalisation. Singapore is thus no exception.

From the very outset the single-party dominant government, which had governed the island for all of its slightly more than 30 years history of independence, decided that the only road to survival as an island-nation, without any natural resources except a good harbour and a growing population in need of immediate employment, was to embrace global capitalism through export-oriented industrialisation fuelled by transnational companies and state-owned corporations. The economic is thus privileged, indeed hegemonic, over all other aspects of social life. The single-minded pursuit of continuous economic growth became the sole criterion for initiating and assessing all public policies. This instrumental rationality is ideologically crystallised into a local version of 'pragmatism': that which aids economic development is deemed practical, all other arguments and criteria for or against any policy are not to be entertained. For example, 'in principle' arguments are often trivialised as mere form or useless academicism.

To make the nation attractive to global capital, not only must the necessary financial and physical infrastructure be developed, but social conditions must be disciplined. The once-militant labour movement was brought into the fold of government-sponsored National Trades Union Congress; the population is continuously developed by means of education into a valuable human resource; meritocracy is the basis of allocation of social and material rewards, merit itself being measured by standardised performance criteria. In principle no sector of social life, no matter how private, is exempt from state intervention to harness it for economic growth. All these translate into a generalised regime of social discipline under a highly centralised rational public administration under the political leadership of a single political party that possesses a high degree of continuity of both ideology and personnel.[4]

After more than 30 years of continuous economic expansion, the small labour force, women included, is fully employed. The economy suffers from chronic shortage of labour. To save labour, social organisation and everyday life need to be further rationalised. In business, the Economic Development Board has become a one-stop facility to co-ordinate all relevant government agencies responsible for attracting foreign investments. In public administration, an ambitious information technology plan which will wire up the entire island is being implemented with the aim of enabling all transactions with government agencies to be conducted via computers (Kuo 1988). In production, computerisation, automation and robotisation are promoted with very substantial grants-in-aid from the government (cf. Hing and Wong 1995). Finally, in the consumption sphere, not only is self-service implemented whenever possible, a 'cashless' society is being promoted, in which it is envisaged that all daily retail transactions will be conducted through 'smart' cards.

All the above processes fit, substantively and discursively, into the trajectory of the idea of the McDonaldisation of everyday life. Their institutionalisation in Singapore has transformed the island-nation into something of a model for many Third World nations. This is especially so for the Asian 'socialist' nations, such as China and Vietnam, in which their respective Communist Parties hope to achieve high levels of capitalist growth without having to share power with any other political rivals. The result is that Singapore, an insignificant geographical space, has commanded a disproportionate space in international discourse, not only on economic development but also on social and political development, in which it champions so-called Asian values and a version of 'Asian' democracy. It is at this level of values that the negative cultural response to global capitalism, also going under the trope of 'McDonaldisation', raises its head.

The level of material consumption has expanded greatly across all class divisions. With the expansion of wealth, the island-nation became increasingly inundated by American-produced mass cultural products and services, along with those from other parts of the world, notably Japan. Ideologically, the arrival and rapid spread of McDonald's may be thus read as an instance of the increasing 'Americanisation' of Singaporeans and their ethnic-based cultures. McDonald's stand as a sign(ifier) of a concept of 'American-ness' (Barthes 1972), and Singapore instance stands as an example of the 'ineffable McDonaldisation of the world' (Appadurai 1990). The consumption of McDonald's burgers is not, therefore, solely a nutritional concern, nor an economic one, for with current Singaporean wages it is an inexpensive food. However, it may be of 'cultural' concern, seen contextually as part of the invasion and consumption of all 'icons' of America, such as blue jeans, sports shoes and other items of 'streetwear'. It is this cultural penetration of American-ness into the supposedly 'Asian' values of Singaporeans that is being thematised in a cultural/moral/political discourse of contestation between Asian and Western values; a discourse that is promoted by the Singaporean state itself. This Americanisation thesis will be examined, first, in terms of the 'meanings' of McDonald's, both its food and its spaces, to the most avid consumers, the Singaporean teenagers and, second, the way McDonald's advertises itself on local TV, the premier medium of popular culture and cultural penetration.

Familiarising McDonald's

As elsewhere in the contemporary world, there are no self-respecting Singapore teenagers who have not spent time in a McDonald's. A recent minimal survey of 200 youths aged between 12 and 24 who regularly hang out in groups of various sizes at two McDonald's in Singapore—one in the prime shopping area and one in the town centre of a public housing new town—found:

- the majority meet at McDonald's, because of the convenient locations, before going out or going home;
- the mean length of time spent is about 24 minutes for all male groups, 27 minutes for all girl groups and 33 minutes for mixed groups (the larger groups tend to spend longer time); and

- about 70 per cent reported that they did not actually like the food (Ang, Low and Koo 1995).

It should be noted that the 'American-ness' of McDonald's, which makes it a place of 'cultural consumption', did not figure at all in the answers given for using the places, nor was it deemed significant for the teenage-researchers to pursue.[5] This is, perhaps, in contrast to the high level of awareness accorded to McDonald's 'American-ness' in other places outside the US.

To better document the reception and consumption of McDonald's in Singapore, it is instructive to examine ethnographic interpretations of how 'American/cultural' inscription of McDonald's is experienced in France and the Netherlands. On the opening day of a new McDonald's in a smaller city in France, it was observed that:

> queuing behaviour differed substantially from the way the fast food ritual is practised in the United States. Customers would tend to gather all along the counter, with little respect for the integrity of the cash registers as line markers.... Consequently, the workers at the counter, for whom it was presumably their first active day on the job, spent a good deal of effort trying to herd customers over to their particular cash register 'station'.
>
> (Fantasia 1995:222)

During the busier periods,

> an assistant manager placed herself about four or five yards in front of the counter to serve as a 'guide', answering occasional questions and directing traffic to available places at the counter. The fact that someone was assigned this task suggests that the company anticipated some initial difficulties for those unfamiliar with the ritual process, and indeed there were occasional moments of chaos on the first day of business.
>
> (Fantasia 1995:222)

The same 'pandemonium' at the serving counter has been noted in the Netherlands. Anthropologist Peter Stephenson recounts the experience of his search for a cup of hot coffee, on a cold Sunday morning, in Leiden, where nothing was open, except for the church and McDonald's:

> Approaching the 'service area' I notice that there is a considerable melee in front of the bank of cash registers where a swarm of

> children and a few lumbering adults are all trying to gain the recognition of a small group of green uniformed and harried looking adolescent McDonald's employees.
>
> [a] voice lifts me out of my brief surreal reverie with, 'Excuse me, but is this a queue?' directed at Ms Junior Management Trainee …[whose] robotic smile fades a bit and a giggle escapes with the answer…'Actually, I have never observed the Dutch to queue'. Several people in front of me begin to wave their order forms aloft, and when the 'service person' asks, 'Who is next?' they simultaneously yell, 'me!', 'me!'
>
> (Stephenson 1989:231, 232)

From this ethnographic account, Stephensen suggests that, 'there is a kind of instant emigration that occurs the moment one walks through the doors, where Dutch rules rather obviously don't apply and where there are few adults around to enforce any that might' (1989:237).

For Stephenson, the most unnerving behavioural demand that McDonald's imposes on the Dutch is queuing. It is a cultural practice that is in contrast to the type of loose ordering of Dutch customers awaiting service which is usually practised, in which one is responsible for noting one's position in the crowd and claiming the proper turn when it arrives. This difference in turn-taking 'marks' McDonald's as an 'American' space into which Dutch customers are transported and where an 'American form of presentation of self' is required. This reading was to be affirmed, for ethnographer Stephenson (1989:237), by the mid-Western American couple complaining about the 'rudeness' of the Dutch at the same restaurant. Similarly, 'difficulties' of getting the French customers into queues behind the cash registers is used by Fantasia to mark one feature of the American-ness of McDonald's.

Parenthetically, given that queuing is not a particular difficult exercise, one wonders whether the refusal of the Dutch to abide by McDonald's rules is not a form of cultural resistance in itself. As Leidner points out, in spite of McDonald's explicit scripting of the routines of interactions between staff and customers, it has 'to face some service-recipients who seemed intent on thwarting the routines or on interfering with the workers' preferences about how to proceed' (1993:7).

However, the use of 'queuing' as a representation of American-ness is intelligible only contextually. Its indexical significance as the 'Americanisation' of the French and the Dutch is only remarkable with reference to the behaviours of the latter two. Its representational or symbolic efficacy for marking American-ness fades, if not disappearing completely, in situations where queuing is already the norm even before the arrival of McDonald's, as is the case in Singapore.

Queuing was a non-issue in Singapore by the time McDonald's arrived in this island-nation. Driven single-mindedly by the desire for economic success, every aspect of life is rationalised to increase orderliness; orderliness is a 'totalising' strategy of government. Queuing 'naturally' falls into this strategy; the unruly crowds at bus stations, ticketing outlets, department stores and supermarkets have all been disciplined into queues, defined by the space within guard-rails if necessary. That queuing has become a norm of everyday life is signalled by, first, the appreciation of its efficiency; second, the psychological relief of not having to pay attention to who was before or after you nor of having to fight for your turn; third, the avoidance of others' anger when one inadvertently jumped the queue; and finally the tinge of guilt one experienced in doing so purposely. Consequently, instead of being disoriented by or resisting the practice, Singaporean youth are undaunted by queues at McDonald's; thereby eliminating the indexical efficacy of queuing to signify 'American-ness'.

On the other hand, Singaporean youth appears to be appropriating its spaces for themselves.[6] The functional use of McDonald's as a 'meeting' place, mentioned above, may be explained contextually, in terms of the characteristics of the friendship pattern of the youth themselves and the planning and allocation of public spaces in Singapore.

In Singapore's education system, schools are assigned to secondary students not by place of residence, as in community schools. Rather, assignment is according to the students' respective academic achievements in national examinations. They are thus placed into a hierarchy of schools of descending 'quality', spread across the island. Consequently, school-based friendship networks are correspondingly drawn from the entire island. These school-based networks are of greater significance to the youth because residential neighbourhoods have lost much of their function in generating contacts among residents.

During pre-industrial days, the 'urban village' environment was a prime site for simple, inexpensive, even free, recreational activities, which often amounted to little more than idling together in open spaces and local coffee shops. Friendships were prevalent among those who idled together and often cut across age groups (Chua 1989). However, the complete transformation of the island's residential landscape from urban villages to high-rise, high-density public housing estates, has radically changed youth friendship patterns in Singapore. Living in relative isolation in the air and surrounded by too many strangers at ground level, a high-rise, high-density living environment is a rather inhospitable site for establishing acquaintances. Furthermore, very significant improvement of comfort at home encourages individuals to stay at home rather than hang out in public spaces. These residential conditions combined with the increased affluence which enables them to purchase commercialised entertainment, and their desire to escape routine familial restraints and disciplines, drive youth away from the residential compound to seek entertainment in downtown areas; to stay out as long as permissible, once they are out of the house.

Given the various distances which students must traverse to and from homes and schools, a location which is convenient for everyone in a network must be found. McDonald's restaurants meet this need nicely. The business demand to capture the largest possible market slice dictates the spatial distribution of McDonald's outlets throughout the island: they are found in every public housing estate, where approximately 85 per cent of Singaporeans reside. This ubiquity among the people 'normalises' and reduces McDonald's presence to the quotidian. It is an important step towards the reduction of any sense of 'exclusivity' which may in turn impart to McDonald's a sense of the 'exotic', the 'foreign'/'American'. The same ubiquity also lends to McDonald's outlets convenience as meeting places: they are open for long hours, near mass rapid transit stations and in busy thorough-fares, which provide visual pleasures while waiting for each other.

McDonald's in Singapore is also particularly hospitable to upper-level secondary school students. At the outlets that are not within the central business district, local management tend to allow students to do their school-assignments on the premises during the non-peak business hours; in consideration of the fact that many of the students do not have the luxury of either study spaces and/or relative silence in the public house flats that are their homes. This is in sharp contrast with the policy, in the US itself, of minimising the chances of its outlets from becoming 'teenage hangouts' (Leidner 1993:50). This generosity of McDonald's is especially appreciated during the annual national examination periods. Psychologically and symbolically, this particular use of McDonald's as a study space 'familiarises' it, in both senses of being familiar and familial. Such familiarisation displaces the sense of the space as 'exotic', a feature that is a necessary ingredient for a reading of McDonald's as an 'American' space in Singapore.[7] However, this displacement does not erase the symbolic potential of representing McDonald's as an 'American' place, a point which I shall return to in the concluding section of this chapter.

Accommodating McDonald's

As an externally introduced food, McDonald's is unavoidably inserted into local gastronomic practices of every location in which it sets up business. Marketing and consumption of McDonald's must, therefore, work within existing terrain in order to achieve desired results. Here again, its reception in France is instructive to understanding its reception in Singapore.

Tobin, quoting various French writers, points out that cuisine is an arena of French cultural imperialism:

> Phileas Gilbert, writing in 1884, envisioned a French school of professional cookery…'The products of our French restaurants and foodshops, which are exported all over Europe, would be represented on a vast scale, and the alimentary riches of the entire world would flood into the school, just as they once did into Rome. Our national culinary experts would, in their turn, imprint the seal of their genius upon these products, as they do with everything that passes through their hands, and redistribute them to the greater happiness of our modern gastronome'.
>
> (Tobin 1992:162)

Against this totalising French culinary claim and ambition, American food has but a place in the extreme periphery. The insertion of McDonald's into France was, not surprisingly, met with cultural hostility. French sociologist, Michel Crozier asserted, 'for many French people there is an association that good food is French and fast food is American and foreign and bad' (quoted in Fantasia 1995:202). However, such scepticism did not prevent the subsequent penetration of McDonald's to become the largest fast food chain in France. Indeed, Fantasia suggests that the popularity of McDonald's and other American fast-foods was one cause of the formation, in 1989, of the 'National Council of Culinary Art', by the French Ministry of Culture, charged with the duty of 'protecting the culinary patrimony'. For according to the then Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, 'France has developed the art of living which we all need to discover and safeguard' (quoted in Fantasia 1995:203).

It is against this proud French heritage that McDonald's defines itself. French cuisine requires for itself a certain decorum about how it is to be consumed; one has to have time for long meals with proper tableware and appropriate, if not exacting, manners. These cultural entailments have apparently driven a segment of the French urban population to fast foods. One example is the new breed of managers who are in a hurry and only stop long enough for 'disconcertingly simple lunches, consisting of a sandwich or an airline-style meal on a tray' (Fantasia 1995:214).

'Old bourgeois' manners with their formal demands also turn away, and turn off, youth. It is here that the consumption of McDonald's as consuming 'American-ness' is most clearly expressed as a form of 'resistance by ritual'. Self-served fast food is preferred by the young: 'you can choose your own place to sit'; 'each person orders direct from the cook'; 'you simply pay individually, so you don't have to bother dividing up the check among everyone'; 'the tables are not set, they are clear'; 'there are no utensils and you can eat by hand'; 'you can choose to eat one thing, one doesn't have to order several courses'. In sum, 'there are no rules'.

The informality of McDonald's gets culturally 'essentialised' as essentially American: 'You really feel the American atmosphere—the noise, the bright colours, the dress of the staff'. This informality, 'loud' and 'gaudy' and 'disorderly', is marked as the difference against the 'sedate', 'subtle' and 'sophisticated' practices of the French. Hence, the French adolescents' distinction between a 'cafe' and a fast food outlet: 'you just wouldn't linger for a long time in a fast food restaurant like you would a cafe' and, 'No—its different, the cafe is more human—you can feel the presence of people; there's a warmer atmosphere there, people are not in a hurry'. Significantly and ironically, the consumed 'American' Other is not a valorised but a degenerate Other with reference to the French cultural self.[8]

The antipathy between French culinary establishments and practices and McDonald's, which is use as the basis of the 'hyper-real' representation of McDonald's as 'America(n)', is in turn appropriated by the latter in positioning itself in French society through advertisements:

> For example, an ad running in 1994 consisted of a child's voice reciting proper table manners ('Don't put your elbows on the table'; 'Don't play with your food'; 'Don't eat with your fingers'; 'Don't act like a clown'; 'Don't make noise at the table'; etc.), with different images of people eating at a McDonald's corresponding to each edict (i.e., people eating with their elbows on the table; playing with their french fries; with their hands; joking around; etc.) The child's voice concludes the ad by announcing 'that's how it goes at McDonald's'.
>
> (Fantasia 1995:224)

This intentional marking of differences between French gastronomic practices and those of McDonald's serves to intensify the symbolic representation of McDonald's as 'American' and the behaviours contained within as 'American' culture.

The insertion of McDonald's as fast food into the gastronomic terrain of Singapore is much less dramatic. 'Fast food' is a common phenomenon in Singapore, *avant the lettre*. Until the recently acquired wealth, with extremely few exceptions, all food consumed outside the Singaporean home was 'hawker' food, purchased in a number of locations and modes: from itinerant hawkers, from stationary hawkers in markets in the morning or all day in local coffee-shops; from hawkers who gathered at open-air parking lots in downtown locations in the evening, when the cars of office workers had cleared. These varied locations and modes were 'rationalised' by the government in its drive for orderliness and efficiency. Hawkers were herded, by the mid-1970s, into purpose-built, 'hawker centres', which are little more than wide-open shelters without walls.

In such centres, food is ordered individually and directly from the stalls. Consumers sit wherever there is a free table and the tables are numbered for ease of identification by hawker-assistants when they are delivering the food ordered. When hawkers are particularly busy, customers often serve themselves. These practices are hardly any different from those of McDonald's. Furthermore, McDonald's familiarity has been enhanced recently by the employment of middle-aged or older Singaporean workers, including as frontline service staff, because of labour shortage and the reluctance of Singaporean youth to work during the school term. This removes the 'smiling' youthful service that is trade-mark of McDonald's in America.

Even the once significant exception of McDonald's being an air-conditioned, hence a more comfortable space is of decreasing relevance with the emergence of 'food courts', which are air-conditioned hawker centres in large commercial buildings. In sum, the practices which can be indexically identified as McDonald's essential 'American-ness' within and against French practices are, again, unremarkable in Singapore. They are devoid of the possibility of cultural thematisation and valorisation, and cannot, correspondingly be marketed as the Other to Singaporeans.

It should be noted, however, that hawker food in Singapore reflect the ethnic composition of the population, and are ethnically marked. One can get Chinese, Malay or Muslim and Indian food in every hawker centre; the same type of noodle may be cooked differently by different ethnic hawkers. While the hamburger has always been known to the English-educated Singaporeans, McDonald's contribution is to make it an 'everyday food', just another possible item of hawker food, available to everyone. Like all the other hawker foods, the hamburger is ethnically marked, in this case as 'Western' food, along with pork-chops, 'chicken-chops', hot-dogs and fish-and-chips, which together constitute the offerings of local hawkers who sell 'Western' food. However, it bears no additional cultural significance to the rest of the equally ethnically marked food; the consumption of the Western food materially is not tantamount to consuming the West culturally, it is merely a change of taste.[9]

Significantly, McDonald's further inserts itself into the local palate with deeper indigenisation of its offerings. Chicken McNuggets are served with curry or sweet-and-sour sauce. Chili sauce, an essential ingredient for all hawker food in Singapore, is served with burgers along with ketchup. Finally, at the level of cultural signification, it introduces local emotive signs in the naming of some of its food items. For example, a chicken burger was marketed as *'kampong'* burger; *kampong* refers to the villages in which most Singaporeans lived prior to being resettled into high-rise public housing estates, a time which is remembered nostalgically as the 'good old days' when life was much more relaxed and community more organic than today's high-stress living in a globalised economy (Chua 1995b). This level of use of local cultural signs is carried further into McDonald's advertising campaigns.

Inserting McDonald's into Singaporean-ness

In the absence of possibilities of marking behavioural differences, the selling of McDonald's in Singapore takes a completely opposite track from that which it takes in France. Instead of marketing itself against local culture, McDonald's seeks to insert itself into the latter. Furthermore, given the relatively short history of Singapore as a nation, and the fact that its national 'identity' and 'culture' remain a matter of active state promotion, McDonald's advertisements seek actively to partake in this constitution of a national identity and culture.

One of the repeatedly used TV advertisements, especially during the run-up to national day (August 9), begins with a morning assembly of primary school boys in a flag-raising ceremony with the boys choir singing, 'when the sun shines over our land'; this is followed by a frame of two eggs frying and piping hot coffee, suggesting that it is breakfast time; it then cuts to a Chinese old lady in a shophouse, symbol of old Singapore architecture, opening a window to let the sunshine in; it next moves into a primary school classroom, with children sitting on the floor learning the alphabet, 'b for boy', 'g for girl' and 'm for McDonald's'; the scene switches to a group of clean and fresh boys in a McDonald's, one of them was attracted to a girl who flashes him a smile, and he says 'I will have whatever it is that she is having'; he is followed by a frame of pouring of freshly cooked french fries onto a metal tray and a fishburger oozing with white creamy sauce; the next frame is of a young man driving a red convertible sports car— a very coveted possession in a land where cars can costs as much as public housing flats—singing to himself the McDonald's song in Mandarin, driving by to pick up his hamburger; he is awakened from his self-contentedness, blushing slightly, by the applause and laughter of two McDonald's waitresses; the scene then cuts to the clock tower at the Victoria Memorial Hall, a monument to Singapore's colonial past, the time is 7 o'clock in the evening; the final shot is of an old Chinese gentleman in traditional clothes, no longer in use by anyone, sitting stiffly in a rose-wood chair, in a very traditionally appointed sitting room, playing the McDonald's refrain, 'at McDonald's', on a Chinese string musical instrument, the 'erhu'.

That this ad aims to insert McDonald's into the daily life of Singaporeans, rather than taking them out of it and into an 'American' space, is obvious; it takes us through a twelve hour day of Singaporeans of all ages in less than a minute. In addition, any Singaporean will readily recognise that the ad touches on the various values and their attendant activities that are actively promoted by the government, as constitutive elements of a 'national' culture. Among these thematised values are: first, the restoration of the historic landscape of Chinatown and national monuments, such as the Victoria Memorial Hall. Restoration began in earnest around mid-1980s, when there was a serious decline of tourist arrivals because Singapore was becoming too much like any other big city and losing its 'exotic' Asian elements. Now, four historic districts, namely, the civic district of colonial administrative buildings, Chinatown, Little India and the historical Muslim area of Kampong Glam (Kong and Yeoh 1994), and individual buildings of significant architectural heritage, are being conserved.

Second, as mentioned earlier, the emphasis on education as human capital investment for individual social and economic mobility and national economic growth. This emphasis is also being ideologically transformed from its instrumental function into an 'Asian' essentialism. It is being promoted as part of the 'traditional' commitment of all three Asian ethnic groups that constitute the population to education, as signified by high level of private financial investment on children's education and by the keen competition among students for scarce spaces in the universities. With reference to the US, the high achievement of Asian students in American academia is used as evidence of the 'Asian commitment', relative to the others in multiracial America.

Another 'Asian' value that is being promoted is the veneration of the aged as part of the idea of 'family as the basic unit of society', which is legislatively enshrined as part of the national ideological system, known as the 'Shared Values' (Lee 1989). This veneration of the aged has also led to the promotion of three-generation families through public housing policies. Such families are entitled to greater concessions in cash grants, reduction of waiting time and preferential locations for a flat. Pro-family advertisements which encourage marriage, childbirth and living in extended family are constantly broadcasts by different ministries that are responsible for different aspects of the overall pro-family policy. In public discourse, the preservation of the 'Asian' family is ideologically contrasted with high divorce rates and ubiquitous 'senior citizen' homes in the United States and elsewhere in the developed West.

Finally, the promotion of Mandarin as the language of all Chinese through an annual, month-long 'Speak Mandarin' campaign has been ongoing for more than a decade. This was initiated by the then prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, as a means to bridge the communication gaps within the Chinese population itself, which was divided by often mutually incomprehensible 'dialects'. Since then, all Chinese students must obtain at least passing grades in Mandarin, in order to secure a place in local universities; all dialect programmes on TV were abolished, and imported Cantonese or Hokkien programmes from Hong Kong and Taiwan, respectively, are dubbed into Mandarin. The result is that Mandarin has become the common language among Chinese, at the cost to cross-generational communication, especially between grandparents and grandchildren. However, the emotional appeal of dialects remains high among older and less-educated individuals (up to 50 per cent of the Singapore work-force has less than primary education). This has resurfaced politically. For example, in the 1991 General Election, an opposition party member who won the parliamentary seat, made his mass rally speeches in the predominant dialect of that particular constituency. Furthermore, with the recent economic opening up of the southern coastal areas of China, from whence most Singaporean Chinese came, dialects are being rehabilitated in a limited manner and use of dialects is less frowned upon.

The above set of values, actively sponsored by the state, are recurring themes of annual national campaigns and of the speeches of politicians and cabinet ministers, widely covered by the national newspapers. They constitute the ideological diet of Singaporeans. They are promoted as 'cultural ballast' against the excessive individualism of America/West. Against this ideological background, any heavy selling of McDonald's as a sign(ifier) of 'American-ism' would be counter-hegemonic, selling it as 'resistance culture' as in the case of France but on a more political plane. What would be the government's response to a counter-hegemonic marketing of McDonald's will never be known. However, it would not be wrong to say that the response would undoubtedly be negative from a government which polices and censors images, including advertisements, that enter the national ideological space.

Conclusion

The motivation behind this analysis of McDonald's in Singapore is to argue against any simplistic equation of product consumption with imaginary consumption of a culturally desired Other. Whereas all imported products may be potentially imprinted with the cultures of their respective origins, the consumption of the products is not automatically tantamount to the consumption of the cultures of the origins themselves. Specific to the marketing and consumption of McDonald's in Singapore, it is apparent that the level of cultural consumption of a desired Other, of 'American-ness', in fantasy is very low, if not completely absent.

The issue is not whether the potential of such imaginary or fantasy consumption of foreign products exists, indeed it does; rather, the realisation of this potential is not a simple process. Thus, in spite of the relative ease with which McDonald's can be inserted materially into the Singaporean hawker food milieu, its potential for selling 'American-ness' is not absent. However, its realisation is dependent on the cultural terrain in which the consumer item is inserted and against which it must act.

Within the political/ideological space of Singapore, arguably the space for the consumption of 'American-ness' is already provided by the state itself as it is precisely against a concept of 'Americanisation' that the current 'Asianisation' and 'communitarianisation' of Singaporeans is being undertaken by the state. Against a reductionist version of 'individualism' as a proxy of liberal democracy in America is juxtaposed the reinvented 'communitarianism' of 'Asian' traditions, to be inscribed on the Singaporean social and politic body (Chua 1995a). Thus, any version of 'American-ness' would constitute automatically in itself a powerful counter-discourse within contemporary ideological space in Singapore (cf. Lee Kuan Yew 1995). It would be attractive to those who are critical of the constraints placed on the political, cultural and social spaces by the communitarian ideology, with its emphasis on the 'collective' over the individual. For them, 'America' symbolises the space where individual rights and differences are valorised. For them, the consumption of any representation of 'America', through whatever medium—TV, movies, music and fashion—would constitute the imaginary inhabiting of that desired Other space.

That the possibility of inserting McDonald's as a sign(ifier) of Americanness is not taken by the enterprise must be attributed to profit motivation which seeks not to contest the ideological sphere lest it incurs the wrath of the managers of the state and be constrained in the market. Therefore, in the selling of McDonald's, as in any imported goods, economic interest is strategic while its cultural representation to achieve this interest is always simply tactical.

Notes

1 The economic success of Singapore in the new international division of labour and global capitalism is by now well documented (cf. Drysdale 1984; Rodan 1989), and there is little need to recite its litany.

2 As Appadurai suggests, the relative 'homogenisation' of culture as a result of the global reach of capitalist production and consumption 'often subspeciates into either an argument about Americanisation, or an argument about commoditisation, and very often the two arguments are closely linked' (1990:5). Significantly, there are more consumer goods from Japan than from the US in Singapore. However, in contrast to Taiwan (cf. Ching 1994), there is no concern with the possible 'Japanisation' of Singaporean culture in Singapore. This is largely because Japan is read positively as a model of an 'Asian' nation that is able to successfully preserve its culture while modernising its economy (Wee 1995).

3 McDonald's in Singapore apparently also serves as a regional supply centre to outlets in neighbouring countries. Its bakery reportedly supplied 32 million buns to McDonald's Singapore, in 1994 (*Straits Times* 10 October, 1995).

4 Detailed discussion on pragmatism as national ideology in Singapore can be found in Chua (1995a:57–78). For a discussion of the very intrusive reach of the 'survival' ideology see Devan and Heng (1992).

5 The researchers for this project were three secondary school students in the gifted education programme under the mentorship of a lecturer at the National University of Singapore.

6 Given the generalised 'rationalisation' of social life in Singapore, both the idea that McDonaldisation stands as a trope for the 'rationalisation' — namely, efficiency, calculability, predictability and control—of society (Ritzer 1993) and that fast-food production and service stand as exemplar for the standardisation of service work in late capitalist societies (Leidner

1993) would readily apply to this very successful bastion of multinational capitalism. It should be noted, however, that these processes of production rationalisation are the consequences of the logic of capital, which in being globalised has its own homogenising effects on cultures of different locations. This homogenisation of cultures should not be read simplistically as 'Americanisation'; indeed, Ritzer could be said to implicitly disavow such a culturalist reading of the process.

7 Secondary school students are particularly inventive in their search for places to study, and everything else besides, in groups. One of the favourite sites is the Changi International Airport, especially Terminal II which is yet to be fully utilised. It has large, secluded but well-lit spaces which are available to all 24 hours a day.

8 All quotations from French youth are to be found in Fantasia (1995:222–5).

9 In his analysis of the penetration of Japanese mass consumer goods in Taiwan, an ex-Japanese colony, Leo Ching (1994) has raised similar reservations regarding any simple attempt to equate popular material consumption, even technological consumption, with simultaneous consumption of culture of the Other.

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9 Consuming ‘America’: from Symbol to System

Shunya Yoshimi

Tokyo Disneyland (TDL) opened in a Tokyo suburb in 1983, stimulating a number of debates, and it continues to draw about 15 million people every year. TDL has come to symbolize the Japanese cities that formed during the ‘bubble economy’ of the 1980s. This means that TDL has become an extremely well designed example of the highly organized consumerism of Japan today. At the same time, this theme park has been spoken of as ‘“America” in Japan’. Its origins and successes are seen as the culmination of postwar Japanese ‘Americanization’. Yet, what kind of meaning does that ‘America’ hold? As we will see later, cultural Americanization started in the late 1920s and the images of Disney films and comics permeated Japan after the 1950s. But the phenomenal success of TDL in the 1980s seems to show that something different from the mere extension of this Americanization process has emerged. Here, I will focus on the cultural politics of TDL and reconsider the process of Americanization in contemporary Japan. I will also try to clarify the structural change of ‘America’ in Japan that took place from the 1970s. Moreover, I want to locate the process of developing and consuming ‘America’ in Japan within the contemporary global topography of identity.

‘America’ in Japan before WWII

Cultural Americanization did not begin in Japan under American military and economic pressure following World War II. Rather, it started long before in the late 1920s. Hollywood films, consumer goods, and the American lifestyle began to captivate the middle-class inhabitants of large urban environments, such as Tokyo and Osaka. This is the reason why Takanobu Murobuse wrote in 1929, in his book entitled ‘America’, ‘Where could you find Japan not Americanized? How could Japan exist without America? And where could we escape from Americanization?

I dare to even declare that America has become the world, Japan is nothing but America today' (Murobose 1929:4). He continued that America exported its civilization not only to Latin America, Japan, China, and India, but also to England, Germany, France, even communist Russia, and the eternal city, Rome, so that the world was entering into the age of America, when America would dominate not only the dollar (economy) but also the world civilization based on the dollar (Murobuse 1929). Looking at it now, Murobuse's argument is a very crude statement of cultural imperialism, and we can find many illogical jumps and exaggerations. In particular, I could never agree with the idea that Americanization meant worldwide exportation of American civilization. Yet it is important to note that such arguments on Americanization were already being discussed extensively in the 1920s.

From the end of the 1920s to the 1930s, Japanese monthly magazines often contained featureds on 'America', and writers were keen to cover the subjects. For example, Itaru Nii wrote in 1929 that the world was coming to the age in which colors, smells, and sounds of nations were rapidly melting together, and that Americanism poured over this world in what he referred to as 'cocktail age'. According to his observation, the young were intent on jazz and willingly imitated the hairstyles, makeup, and dress of the Hollywood movies which began to flow into Japan in large quantities. Working in an American-style building, watching a baseball game or driving on Sunday afternoon, and dancing or going to cinema at night, all of these became fashionable in the urban lifestyle of the day. Nii noted the correspondence between the vogue for Americanism in lifestyle and the vogue for Russianism in social thought. In Japan, 'a man who adheres to Russian ideology often prefers American tastes, and a "modern boy" who keeps the American way of life also knows well about socialism'. In Japan, these two tendencies were not contradictory, but concurrent (Nii 1929).

Sōichi Ōya seized on another aspect of the Americanism that had spread around large cities like Osaka as 'modern life', saying, 'Osaka is Japanese America'. Japanese modernization from the late nineteenth century had been led by the governmental elites in Tokyo, and it had persistently followed the model of European nations: England, France, and Germany. As a result, Tokyo became an urban center full of Western imitations. During this period, 'America was seen as a colony of Anglo-Saxon origin, and Russia as a developing country stretched out over Asia'. But these cultural geopolitics drastically changed after World War I. Out of this upheaval, two types of twentieth-century culture come to the fore: Russia and America. Especially, 'America, with its enormous capital and propaganda ability of Hollywood films and others, is sweeping over Europe, its cultural motherland which was exhausted during the war, and also over Asian countries, even over the whole world'. Then Ōya compared this cultural condition of Europe with that of Tokyo after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. Ōya argued that, as the culture of Tokyo had been able to develop through imitating European countries, this copy would likely fall into decay when the original lost the force of previous days. Instead of Tokyo, according to Ōya, it was Osaka that came to sweep over Tokyo, and it was popular American culture that became prosperous in Osaka (Ōya 1981:152).

It is certain that Americanism spread widely in Osaka in the late 1920s, and people began to be familiar with American-type consumer culture. Recently, Jeffry Hanes has traced this Americanization in inter-war Osaka. Osaka, he says, was 'wheeling and dealing in modern life' in the late 1920s. For example, its marketing men introduced 'tease' advertising, enticing consumers with product images rather than product qualities; its department stores ran bargain days, put on fashion shows with manekin garu [girls]', opened restaurants, dressed up window displays, and set up mail order departments; the Shinsaibashi arcade attracted 'kankouba' (small-scale department stores) and specialty boutiques; national chains like Morinaga put in 'belt-line' stores to purvey their confections; mom-and-pop their storefronts with brand-name advertisements; the mass media published nine newspapers and a wide range of mass magazines; NHK went out over the air waves with programs produced and broadcast from its Osaka affiliate; and the 'culture industry' opened cafes, dance halls, movie theaters, vaudeville halls, amusement parks, 'Taishu Shokudo', and beer halls, among others (Hanes 1996).

Of course, Osaka's preeminence in modern life was short lived. After the 1930s, Ginza in Tokyo became the center where Americanism would flourish to the full in prewar and postwar Japan. During the Meiji period, Ginza, which was designed by the Meiji government as a model for Westernization, was a clear imitation of the Western-style main street in Victorian London, and was similar to streets in the British colonies (Fujimori 1982). Soon after, the French style was in vogue with elites and bourgeois who gathered in Ginza, and there emerged some French-style cafes. Shiseido, Japan's largest cosmetics company, which started in Ginza, propelled French taste to the forefront. But after the 1930s, both of these British and French styles were suddenly overwhelmed by American consumer culture. Kōsei Andō, in his 1931 book *Ginza Saiken* (Detail Watch on Ginza), wrote,

> It is Americanism that dominates Ginza today. If you look at pedestrians on the sidewalks, you find at once that their style and behavior is completely imitated from American movies…The majority of restaurants in Ginza do not serve French dinner with wine, but American lunch with beer. You can hear American jazz in every cafe…Instead of French taste, Ginza is filled with the Americanism of large capital, speed, and the movies. Today, most Japanese want to understand the world only through America.
> (Andō 1977:29–30)

It is this Ginza of Americanism, not the Ginza of Westernization in the Meiji period, that became the prominent center of Japanese consumer culture from the 1930s to the 1960s. By the 1960s, more than 500 shopping streets all around Japan were named after 'Ginza' to emphasize their 'modern' image (Hattori 1976).

It is important to note that the flourishing Americanism in large Japanese cities after the late 1920s was not merely importing American culture but remaking it in Japan. Although 'America' was often said to have swept over Japanese popular culture, the latter was not reduced to dependency on American mass cultural products, but strove instead to naturalize and reinvent them. So, already in 1943, in the midst of the war against America, Ikutaro Shimizu pointed out that the prevailing Americanism in contemporary Japan was not the same thing as the original Americanism in the USA. According to his sociological viewpoint, when some fragments of American culture were imported to Japan, it was impossible for them to retain their original functions, because the functions of culture are always dependent on context. In particular, he stressed, elements of leisure and consumption disproportionately proliferated in Japan, while Americanism originally meant the basic philosophy which threaded through all aspects of American life and culture. In Japan, every kind of modern leisure and consumption pattern after the late Taisho era tended to be called 'Americanism'. Another difference is that, in Japan, Americanism was strongly related to private, domestic life, while the original was a expression of American public consciousness (Shimizu 1943).

In a sense, this private character of the Japanese 'Americanism' was derived from the structural change in Americanism itself in the 1920s in the United States. As many sociological studies, including Robert and Helen Lynd's *Middletown* (1929) and Frederic Allen's *Only Yesterday* (1931), describe, mass consumption had swept over American life in the 1920s. Through this process, 'Americanism' in the US came to be more and more related to the private life of mass consumption. The advertising industry expanded and such commodities as the automobile, radio and household electronic appliances became the symbolic elements of Americanism. The relationship between American consumer life and Japanese 'Americanism' after the 1920s can be exemplified by the movement of *'seikatsu kaizen'* (Life Improvement). The chief advocate of this movement, Kōkichi Morimoto, had studied consumer economics at Johns Hopkins University. His concept of 'cultural life' was strongly influenced by what he thought of as the private life of the American middle class. He established the Association for the Cultural Way of Life in Tokyo to proliferate the rational knowledge of life among housewives, using as its model the correspondence education that was popular in the US at that time. Although Morimoto's movement did not succeed then, similar ideas of 'cultural life' prevailed and continue to have influences on the popular image of 'modern life'.

Between 'pro-America' and 'anti-America'

From the late 1940s on, the process of widespread, overwhelming Americanization began. However, we can see this process as one whereby the 'America' that began to infiltrate the everyday consciousness of Japanese urban dwellers before World War II expanded to all of Japan. For instance, the small Japanese-English pocket guide, *Nichibei Eikaiwa Techo* was published just a month after the end of the war and it sold 3 million within two months. When the NHK radio program *America Tayori* (News from America) through which listeners heard some of the latest information from Washington, began in 1948 it soon became extremely popular (Ishikawa 1981). Also in 1950, the *Asahi shinbun* newspaper held an 'America Exposition' in Nishinomiya, an Osaka suburb, which succeeded in winning a great many visitors. Nishinomiya was the place where some expositions of propaganda rallies, which were in favour of Japanese military aggression, had taken place during wartime, sponsored by the same *Asahi shinbun*. But here, in the America Exposition in 1950, many American symbols such as 'the White House', 'Lincoln', 'the Statue of Liberty', 'the New York Skyscraper', 'Niagara Falls', 'the Western Frontier', and 'TV' were displayed in the exposition site (Fig. 1 in Yoshimi 1992). All of these instances demonstrate a kind of popular desire for 'America' very soon after the end of war. The military and economic might of the American Occupation Force was not the only, or even the main reason for such a desire. Rather, there was a continuity of Americanism in Japan from the prewar to the postwar period.

Based on this continuity, the Japanese public had already began to associate images of Disney's film and land with 'America' as the symbol of 'richness' and 'newness'. In 1958, Nippon TV started broadcasting a bi-weekly TV program called *Disneyland*. Originally produced by Disney for ABC Network in the US, it had a considerable impact on Japanese viewers, strengthening their image of America. At the beginning of this program, Walt Disney himself would appear and address the audience. The rest of the program consisted of Disney's animation and documentary films, edited for TV. Masako Notoji says,

> when children saw this program on a black-and-white television in a tiny Japanese living room, it was bright, sparkling, and wonderful. Interestingly enough, this program was coupled with live broadcast of professional wrestling. One week it was the dazzling world of Disney and overwhelmingly rich America, and the following week, at the same time on the same channel, the kids watched Rikidozan (a very popular Japanese wrestler at the time) beating monstrous American wrestlers. For these Japanese children, it was inferiority and superiority alternating each week.
>
> (Notoji 1990:3–4)

The fact that the postwar imperial family crafted its self-image based on the model of the American lifestyle helped the process whereby nationalism and Americanism were conflated and spread throughout Japan. This conflation, effectively promoted through the marriage of the Prince with Michiko Shoda in 1959, operated through images of the Princess's family on Japanese TV and in magazines. In fact, the coverage of the Crown Princess's marriage was framed according to two symbols: *heimin* (commoner) and *ren'ai* (love). Despite the fact that the Shoda family came from a long line of Japanese capitalists, the *heimin* quality of the Princess was repeatedly emphasized as the symbol of postwar democracy. Also, despite the fact that the marriage was masterminded by the imperial household, the image of free *ren'ai* through playing tennis and telephone calls was stressed. These images of *heimin* and *ren'ai* were strongly influenced by the image of 'American Way of Life' of the day. So, the collapse of the hierarchies in the prewar emperor system revealed a new centripetal system of value projection wherein people envied the imperial household as a ideal 'home' of 'American' richness (Matsushita 1959).

There are photographs which show these American elements in the image of the Princess's family. In one photograph, mannequins of tennis players modeled after the Crown Prince and Princess were located to the side of a department store escalator, and shoppers riding the escalator could look down on them. Here, the symbol of the Imperial Marriage is ideally positioned as a model of mass consumption. Hiroshi Kashiwagi has made an interesting note on photographs of the Prince's family, taken 11 years after the marriage. One of the photographs shows the Princess with her daughter at a table in a garden. What is noteworthy is that the garden table is Early American style, and a Snoopy doll is sitting on the chair. This mother-daughter photograph depicts the 'family image of practicing the American way of life in the post-war period'. Kashiwagi points out that the emergence of photographs showing the Prince's family as a model of an American family corresponded with the transition from formal portrait photographs to snapshots. In the case of portrait photography, the camera and the subject face each other. It is not simply that the subject is made into an object for the camera. The gaze of the subject in the photograph faces the camera, and, through that, possibly faces the people who will look at the portrait. In the past, photographic portraits of the emperor gazed out at the people who lined up before him. However, the case is completely different with snapshots: even if the subject is the Emperor's family, they are only looked at. They became a kind of consumable product (Kashiwagi 1990:51–2).

Besides the image of American 'richness' and 'newness', 'America' in postwar Japan was also a symbol of 'emancipation' and 'resistance' for the urban young. In particular, the youth subculture of jazz, rock-'n'-roll, and comics soon spread from American military facilities to urban entertainment districts. This is similar to Dick Hebdige's discussion of Americanism in postwar England (Hebdige 1988). The postwar music culture for the young, from jazz in the late 1940s to the rock-a-billy boom in the late 1950s, was overwhelmingly influenced by such American radio programs as, for example, the 'American Top 40'. In the middle of the 1950s, the 'Sun generation' emerged. They were strongly influenced by Shintaro Ishihara's best selling novel, 'The Season of the Sun', and were drawn to Ginza, because Ginza at the time was the first place where postwar Americanism was on the rise (Mabuchi 1989). From the end of the 1950s to the early 1960s, the emerging 'Roppongi generation' and the 'Harajuku generation' loitered about Roppongi and Harajuku, where, near the American military facilities, the cultural influences of the American army remained. (Roppongi and Harajuku are still very fashionable shopping areas for Japanese young people, even today.) The foundation of these districts' images was the interaction between the American army culture and Japanese younger people in the 1950s.

This youth culture has formed a layered structure of oppositional values within ‘America’ as a symbol.

On the one hand, the Japanese yearned for ‘America’ as a symbol of ‘richness’ and ‘newness’, and they integrated it into their everyday lives. But on the other hand, the Japanese youth accepted American popular culture as a symbol of ‘emancipation’ and ‘resistance’. In any case, the ‘America’ of that period was ‘America’ as a symbol. Of course, these ‘Americas’ were accompanied by an ‘anti-America’ as well. It is important to note that, although the ‘anti-Americanism’ of the prewar and war period was usually supported by the right wing, who criticized America for depriving Japan of its ‘national purity,’ the ‘anti-Americanism’ of the postwar period was advocated mainly by the left wing. Shunsuke Tsurimi once pointed out that a latent inferiority complex lay behind the fanatic Japanese ‘anti-Americanism’ during the war. The Japanese tried to reverse this complex and construct a false consciousness of superiority in Asia. According to Tsurumi, the trick of that reversal from the inferior self to the superior self was repeated by left-wing intellectuals of the postwar period. It is well known that the widespread popular movement against American military power was led by the left wing in the late 1950s. Yet, under the surface, those leftist leaders who advocated the creation of ‘National Science’, ‘National Literature’, and ‘National Culture’, had a kind of ethnocentric inferiority complex similar to the ultra-nationalistic ‘anti-Americanism’ of the war years (Tsurumi 1956).

Perspective integrated into the screen

From the 1920s, while Japanese society was increasingly integrated into an expansive world economic system, people’s sentiments swung like a pendulum between the yearning for ‘America’ as a symbol and an ‘anti-America’ consciousness. In contrast, from the 1970s, ‘America’ in Japan went through a certain structural transformation. In short, this transformation was one from ‘America’ as a symbol to ‘America’ as a system. As the advance of McDonald’s in Japan and the birth of Tokyo Disneyland demonstrate, cultural Americanization continued to move forward from the 1970s. Yet, despite that development, the discursive, oppositional structure of ‘America’ versus ‘anti-America’, and of a mainstream ‘America’ versus a subcultural ‘America’ disappeared in short order. During the 1970s, ‘America’ stopped being a symbol of ‘richness’ and ‘newness’, of ‘emancipation’ and ‘resistance’, and of ‘depravity’ and ‘imperialism’. In those years, ‘America’ in Japan was diluted of its symbolic character and came to operate at a deep level of everyday life.

One of the fundamental reasons for this change is, of course, Japan's rapid economic growth from 1955 to 1973. During this period, Japanese people eagerly collected many kinds of electric goods and other commodities in their homes, and began to enjoy their own economic affluence. So, by the middle of the 1970s, the Japanese had come to feel that they were no longer poorer than their American counterparts. The once-strong sentiments of envy which had dominated the Japanese everyday consciousness gradually decreased. One should note here that in the middle of the 1970s the new generation, which had been born during the postwar period of rapid economic growth, was reaching adolescence. As the consciousness and behavior of this generation were very different from the previous generation, they were often called as *shin jinrui* (New Humankind) by the mass media. This new generation began to enjoy consuming many types of styles and cultures as completely commodified artifacts. 'America' had by then become not so much a symbol by which people were fascinated but an artifact which people would repeatedly consume (Katō 1985).

The success of Tokyo Disneyland in the 1980s was not simply an extension of 'America' as a symbol in postwar Japan. Rather, it shows clearly the structural transformation from the 1970s mentioned above. The fact that TDL can draw such large numbers of people is largely based on the power of a system which offers up for consumption various self-images within a commercial landscape, not on simply-making direct references to 'America'. In other words, if it can be said that TDL is a kind of 'America' in Japan, this 'America' is the system of consumption which constructs the Japanese self-identity as consumable, or as something to be colonized. I will develop this argument from three points of view. First, I analyze the spatial structure of TDL, second, I analyze the discursive structure, and third, I will try to place this spatial-discursive structure of TDL in the wider context of the social transformation in contemporary Japan. The last point is strongly related to the identity consumption so highly developed in Japan today.

Let's begin with the first point: It is easy to notice upon entering Tokyo Disneyland that one is contained in a place of self-sufficiency. The place is designed to block views, and one can hardly see the outside world from inside the park. In TDL, there is nothing that reminds visitors of Urayasu where it is located, nor even of suburban Tokyo. The 'reality' produced in the park maintains its consistency since contradictory elements from outside are almost completely shut out (Myerhoff 1983). This approach is tactical and employs other methods as well. For instance, L.Marin points out that the parking space and the ticket counter function as filters to 'neutralize cars and money, and transform them into "utopian" something else' (Marin 1973). Visitors not only part from their vehicles and money by the entrance, but are not allowed to bring food and alcohol into the park. This, and the constant cleaning-up, keep Disneyland in a sterilized state. Furthermore, one should also realize that one's view is blocked not only from what's outside the park, but also from what's outside the particular 'land' one is in. World Bazaar, Fantasyland, Adventureland, Westernland, and Tomorrowland, all the sights of these areas exist independently from one another, without any ambiguous bordering areas. The same could be said of attractions and rides that offer serial sequences instead of amorphous chaos or panoramic views.

When put in a historical context, this absolutely closed structure indicates a change in the nature of amusement parks. The first modern amusement parks were created in the nineteenth century under the strong influence of fairs and expositions. Towers, panorama, hot balloons, Ferris wheels, and aquariums were the popular attractions during this period, which shows that offering an overview was a central element for early parks. They offered a feeling to ordinary people that they were in the center, the privileged position for overlooking and controlling the whole world. So here the desire to incorporate the entire world within a single view was actualized. This was the world of Jules Verne rather than Walt Disney, a world miniaturized through this overview, accompanied by dazzling fantasies (Takayama 1985). But in Disneyland, there is no desire for an overview of the world. The park responds to the desire to act out different parts in discrete settings instead of taking in the world in a single view from the center. As Shunji Ito points out, 'the still "regard of the panoramic House in the nineteenth century, that overlooked the whole world from afar", has changed to the "patchwork of countless glances, as in a simulation from late-twentieth-century SFX movies"' (Itō 1986). These experiences may be enclosed in a serial sequence of different cut-off scenes. And this is what Disneyland suggests, where floating glances are captured in a world without an exit, without the holders being aware of it.

In order to elucidate this well-designed strategy of Disneyland, it is important to understand that Disneyland is not a variation of amusement parks from the nineteenth century. It is based on a completely different idea, the imagination of Walt Disney, who never stopped cultivating different media to express his world. From comic books to animation films, short black and white silent movies to longer talkies with color, from two-dimensional movies to three-dimensional Disneyland—these changes were all a necessary continuation in Disney's imagination (Thomas 1983). As a result, the essence of Disneyland is much closer to movies than to other amusement parks.

It is easy to find common elements between Disneyland and Disney films in all parts of the park. For example, it is well known that Disney made only one gate to Disneyland, against advice from amusement park experts. To Disney, the entrance gate and the beginning part of a movie are the same. From the gate, visitors head toward the shopping mall, where each store is a three-story house with a facade, similar to those of a small American city in the late nineteenth century. These facades reduced in various degrees, detach visitors from outside reality and bring them into the world of nostalgia. As a similar scenography is also used on streets that stretch from the entrance to the central plaza, the scene inside the park is put in a frame, and the street is long enough for visitors to transform themselves into inhabitants of Disney's world.

At the end of the street, visitors also find the world of Disney films in three dimensions. The art directors who designed the scenery were chosen from the movie industry. Visitors enjoy attractions in the same manner as they enjoy Disney movies; one moves from attraction to attraction as if switching a TV channel, or watching films one after another. 'Audioanimatronics' of Disneyland are computerized automatons that obscure the distinction between reality and fiction, just as SFX technology does. By moving about the preset stages freely, among automatons that talk to you, visitors become absorbed into the huge screen that is Disneyland.

When examining the loss of overview in Disneyland, it is important to take into account that Disneyland was fundamentally based on the movie-making concept. The place does not offer an overview, because it is designed on a completely different dimension; i.e., visitors become two-dimensional movie characters as they go through different tricks in the park, and this transformation is a premise if they are to enjoy the place. A female college student says, 'I've been to TDL four times, but always with different friends or relatives, because there must be only fresh surprises on each visit. You cannot say "Oh, I know this trick" even if you have experienced it. You must say "Gee!" or "Oh, that's so cute!" and pretend that it's your first time.' And when one becomes a movie character on the Disney screen it is difficult to step outside from the depthless space of different 'first time' images.

Colonizing 'frontier' time and being

TDL has five separate self-sufficient parts. By the entrance gate is World Bazaar, a recreation site showing the good ol'America, with cinemas, jewelers, clock shops, tailors, restaurants, etc., just like in a Hollywood set. At the end of the mall lies a central plaza, encircled by Adventureland, Westernland, Tomorrowland, and Fantasyland. Among these, the first three have the same semantic structure. In Westernland, where the steam boat Mark Twain sails around the island of Tom Sawyer and the mining train runs through a rising Big Thunder Mountain, one sees the frontier of the American West. And if this Westernland is the domestic frontier, Adventureland, a tropical jungle with Caribbean pirates and jungle cruise, is the global frontier, while Tomorrowland, with Space Mountain and Star Tours, is clearly the space frontier. To Americans, these three 'land's are simulations of the 'unexplored, uncultivated, and unrealized' frontiers on the domestic, global, and spatial levels, respectively (Marin 1973).

How do visitors meet 'the Other' in these frontiers? We could approach this matter by focusing on Fantasyland, which is semantically at the heart of Disneyland, and which is where the Disney fantasy that spreads so widely through movies, TV, picture books, comics comes together and captures the imagination at the physical level. But what is more, Fantasyland is yet another 'frontier', i.e., the frontier of fantasy and fairytales. 'The Others' in this frontier are fairies, dwarfs, small animals in the woods, insects, and other imaginary creatures, as well as witches, pirates, and scary creatures at the bottom of the sea. Encounters with these 'Others' is the main attraction in this 'frontier'. But how does this meeting take place?

It is often pointed out that fantasy is the very foundation of Disney's imagination, and that his commercial success owes much to folk tales. This, however, is not blind adaptation by any means. Disney did considerable work on the stories before taking them into his own world of imagination, and this structural change is what we must focus on. Various analysts have commented on this point; how ideologies were cunningly worked in under innocent masks. For example, E.C.Sayers criticized the fact that in Disney's fantasy, the folk tradition is vulgarly used and the creative minds of artists are rudely altered. By making folk tales sweet stories and their characters adorable, the original structures and symbolism are destroyed (Sayers 1965). R.Schickel also followed Disney's alteration process closely, and called the end results 'Disney's version' (Schickel 1985). B.Myerhoff says that Disney's stories attract people too much, capture them too much, so that it is almost impossible to recall the original (Myerhoff 1983).

I also maintain that the encounters with 'the Other' in Disney's fantasy are structurally different from the original folk tales. The best example would be Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* of 1937, the first full-length animation film, which received an Oscar. The original story collected by the Grimm Brothers is one of death and rebirth, a very common theme in folk tales. The princess is exiled by her stepmother to the woods, where dwarves save her from death. In one version the princess is taken to the home of cannibal dwarves, which shows that these dwarves are aliens of a strange world, and the princess is in what Victor Turner (1969) called a 'liminal' situation. Upon learning that the princess is alive, the stepmother tries to kill her with different tricks. In each attempt the princess dies, but is always brought back to life by the dwarves. Death and rebirth in a liminal situation is the basic pattern when stories are based on a rite of passage. In the end, the princess escapes death by the poisoned apple and returns to the kingdom.

The original story ends quite dramatically. The stepmother is tormented to death, dancing in the red hot iron shoes she is made to wear. The original opposition in the story; i.e., the opposition between the kingdom and the woods, and between the queen and the dwarves, are completely destroyed in Disney's version. There is no hint of violence in his fantasy. Disney cut out the part where the queen dances herself to death in the iron shoes. Her tricks are also cut down from three to one. And a more important point is that the strange dwarves of the woods become adorable characters. When they are given names like 'real people' there is no hint of strangeness in these creatures any more. When Disney was working on this film, he was concerned with these 'aliens' more than anything else. He wanted to turn them into lovable characters. In the end he not only succeeded in eradicating the oppositional structure but also in reducing the contrast between the kingdom and the woods to mere background, and changing the focus to the princess, friendly dwarves, cute little creatures of the woods, and the prince who saved Snow White. Disney's *Snow White* is not at all a folkloric tale of death and rebirth, but a fantasy of a young girl dreaming of her prince, surrounded by cute, adorable pets. The princess in Disney's fantasy is never thrown out of the 'kingdom', nor does she encounter death.

Similar transformations take place in other Disney versions. Here, instead of opposing the external and the internal, unknown nature is colonized as part of the familiar kingdom. The performers of this 'external' world are adorable, tamed little creatures. Through this process Disney killed the sense of time that generates folk tales. In Disney's fantasy world, the 'external' is already a part of the internalized world, where everybody is tamed into a cute being. And this same structure functions in other lands as well. The strange 'external' that was colonized in Fantasyland is the 'wild West' of Westernland, the 'tropics' of Adventureland, and the 'strange planet' of Tomorrowland. Thus every 'Other' in this 'kingdom of dream and magic' is tamed, and there is no room for an 'external' world to exist. In Disneyland we can only experience the continuous reproduction of the 'happy present'. Visitors tour around different sets, but never through different experiences, because what seems varied on the surface is structurally the same.

'Disnification' of contemporary Japanese society

I have so far discussed the structure of Disneyland on the spatial and discursive levels. On the one hand, my main argument is that Disneyland is not another variation of an amusement park, but rather functions as a three-dimensional version of Disney films. As a result, scenes within the park are essentially all movie-like, with no depth nor width, and by walking through the carefully planned introductory portion of the park, visitors become part of the huge screen called 'Disneyland'. Naturally there is no overview perspective in this closed world, and the smaller 'lands' within Disneyland are also self-contained. On the other hand, Disneyland offers different types of colonized 'external' worlds, i.e., the frontiers of the 'unexplored', 'uncivilized', 'future', and 'fantasy'. Visitors encounter 'the Others' of the wild West, the tropics, strange planets, or strange woods. However, these encounters do not have internal/external opposition, because they are mere simulations in a 'kingdom' without boundaries. How, then, does this structure of TDL relate to the wider context of contemporary Japanese society?

Based on previous arguments, we can see the resemblance of contemporary Japanese society to Disneyland in two ways. First, everyday reality in Japan after the 1970s has become an extension of the 'screen' created by the media in the same way that Disneyland is a three-dimensional Disney film. Actually, downtown areas, shopping centers, tourist sites, and even living quarters are indeed losing their depth and width, resembling more and more the flat TV screen. One example of this spatial change is Seibu Group's space planning around Shibuya, Tokyo. After the late 1970s, the Shibuya area became one of the most fashionable gathering places in Tokyo, and the younger people preferred to loiter there more than in the Shinjuku area, where the radical cultural movements had once taken place in the 1960s. This change was initiated by the redevelopment of the Koen Dori (Park Street) district in Shibuya, managed by Seibu Group, one of the largest retail companies in Japan. In 1973, Seibu built a new commercial building called ‘Parco’ at the middle of the Kōen Dōri, on the way from Shibuya to Harajuku, another famous fashionable gathering place for the young after the 1970s. After that, Seibu created a new image of Shibuya around ‘Kōen Dōri’ and presented this area as the open ‘theater’ of cultural consumption where every consumer can take a role of their consumable self images.

Like Disneyland, Seibu’s space planning packaged an area into a closed space. Their three main strategies were: first, to give exotic names to locations in order to set them up as ‘stages’. Accordingly, the scenery became exotic and ever-changing, as if someone had cut out photographs of foreign cities and pasted them on. Also, the new exotic names helped to cut off outside areas, and transform the streets into a space with its own reality. Second, the area was made into a sequence of separate individual spaces, whereas a traditional department store would have an overview. Each boxed space has its own particular genre, connected by intricate maze-like paths. Third, this new commercial space produced a ‘segmented sensation’, because unlike the older downtown that contained a variety of different elements, each of these spaces was constructed according to its ‘theme’ and ‘taste’ (Yoshimi 1987).

What the Seibu Group did in Shibuya was to take a designated area out of the surrounding region, and to transform it into a theater, through the accumulation of sequences. This space planning was an obvious sign of new space production, which Disneyland carried out in a more structured way. The transformation of the downtown into a shopping mall in the 1970s was, in a way, analogous to the shift from amusement parks to Disneyland in the 1980s. So a writer wrote in 1983,

> Disneyland begins with Main Street, buildings that take after the belle époque period of the early twentieth century. Somehow it is all familiar…and a moment later I realize that the place is just like Spanish Street in Shibuya or Pension Street in Kiyosato, that have Swiss, German, Spanish, everything but Japanese settings. Partially and on a smaller scale, Disneyland’s structure had already existed from the 1970s in Japan.
>
> (Sansujin 1983:330)

The transformation of space planning paralleled the transformation of the discursive structure. I would now like to move onto my second point, and maintain that the discursive system of Disneyland in the 1980s had precedents in the previous decade. As Disneyland tamed strangers from the 'external' and made them into adorable creatures, contemporary Japanese society also had a discourse to colonize strangers. For example, Kazuma Yamane pointed out that the comic-like, round handwriting of teenage girls, what he calls *hentai shojo moji* was born around 1974, and spread widely from around 1978. According to Yamane, one cause of this phenomenon was the discursive system of *kawaii*. This word *kawaii,* originally used to express affectionate feelings towards small animals and children that are too weak to support themselves, started to control young people in the middle of the 1970s (Yamane 1986). Young girls would employ *kawaii* handwriting, collecting *kawaii* goods, making friends with *kawaii* characters in a *kawaii* room, thus becoming *kawaii* girls themselves in a world of fantasy. In other words, *kawaii* is a credential for inclusion in this imagined community of fantasy. All that is *kawaii* is taken in, and all that is not *kawaii* is denied entrance. By looking at the world through this *kawaii* discourse, it is possible to shut out problematic reality from one's perception. The system of *kawaii,* that started to influence young people in the 1970s, seems quite innocent on surface, but it is in fact surprisingly cruel.

The spread of this *kawaii* system is conformed by numerous phenomena. For example, Eishi Ōtsuka focused on the young girl's comic called 'Ribon', which carried various *kawaii* goods such as *omake* trinkets that came with the comic book, and discussed how these *kawaii* goods circulated widely in fashion, room decoration, and urban scenes in the 1980s. According to Otsuka, the *omake* of the girl's comic changed considerably in 1974, from movie star's still pictures to 'fancy goods' illustrated by the young comic artists. It is important to note here that the new *omake* system was both part of the fictional comic world and 'practical' goods that could be used everyday. When the *omake* of the comic featured the faces of pop stars, who usually were variations of American-type movie stars, these faces were basically special symbols of the glamorous world of cinema and TV. However, when they started to construct a self-referential *kawaii* world and penetrate into everyday life, they became more than paper trinkets, as they now became interchangeable with usable goods were thus made a part of school and home life (Ōtsuka 1991).

Today, these objects of *kawaii* culture also exist as various room decorations in children's playrooms, gift shops on the streets of Shibuya and Harajuku, and building facades in suburban shopping malls. The developments of Sanrio after the 1970s is a typical example of the popularity of this culture. Once a small trading company of miscellaneous goods called ‘Yamanashi Silk Center’, Sanrio created a huge and lucrative so-called ‘fancy goods’ market, and has become its leading player. In 1969 the company made business arrangements with Hallmark Corporation, the largest greeting card company in the US and in 1973 it absorbed its card department and renamed itself ‘Sanrio’. Mickey Mouse and Snoopy had already decorated their goods in 1970, and they soon introduced ‘Hello Kitty’ and ‘Patty and Jimmy’. From movie production to their own theme park, Sanrio Puro Land, which was opened in 1991, Sanrio’s business developments followed that of Disney quite closely.

If, in my analysis of Snow White, the colonization of the external world could be called ‘Disnification’, there is a system of broad colonization in contemporary Japan that could be called ‘Cutification’. Ken Ōhira, a psychiatrist, gives a wide range of examples to show that there is a tendency in contemporary Japanese to avoid confrontation by recognizing both themselves and others as a set of goods. People now turn both themselves and others into goods, or pets, ‘sterilizing the uncertain and the dark sides’ from their everyday consciousness. Needless to say, this was the same system used in Disneyland to tame strangers from the ‘external’ and change them into *kawaii* beings. Contemporary Japanese young people ‘sterilize’ the external within themselves and take on the roles of *kawaii* kids in Never-neverland in the same manner as strange dwarves in medieval woods became transformed into cute lovable characters (Ōhira 1990).

Transformation of ‘America’ after the 1970s

So far, I have discussed the spatial-discursive structure of TDL and its correspondence with the transformation of the Japanese cultural landscape after the 1970s. What can we conclude from these discussions as to the structural change of ‘America’ in contemporary Japan? As I noted in my opening sentences, TDL has usually been spoken of as ‘“the America” in Japan’. Its origins and successes are seen as the culmination of postwar Americanization. Even a criticism of TDL, that, in trying to sell ‘American’ images the park would become too ‘American’ to be smoothly managed by the Japanese, seems to accept as self-evident that TDL is an imported artifact from the US. According to this view, the cultural meanings of TDL were to be endorsed by the meanings of the original Disneyland in Anaheim, and TDL might be seen as the new symbol of ‘America’ which had represented ‘richness’ and ‘newness’ in Japan from the 1920s.

Mary Yoko Brannen has made an effective critique of this idea. Instead of regarding TDL as a derivative of American civilization, a mere copy of the original Disneyland in Anaheim, she emphasizes the process of recontextualization of Disneyland in the Japanese cultural context. She maintained that this recontextualization of Disneyland was a specifically Japanese construction of cultural consumption. For example, 'Main Street U.S.A.' in Anaheim has become 'World Bazaar' in Tokyo. She said that in Tokyo's World Bazaar, 'the storefronts are full-size, as opposed to the three-quarter scale of the original ones, and the facades face Main Street directly, rather than being set at an angle, resulting in a less intimate welcome…plus the covered walkways and glass roof over the entire World Bazaar give Tokyo's Main Street the feel of a large suburban shopping mall' (Brannen 1992:222). Brannen insists that this commercial character of TDL can be explained by the Japanese gift-giving custom. According to her idea, one can buy many kinds of mementos at World Bazaar, and this function of TDL is based on the strong cultural needs of Japanese visitors.

If this recontextualization can be called the strategy of 'making the exotic familiar', there is another kind of recontextualization which can be called 'making the exotic exotic'. Against the Western idea of cultural imperialism which operates in one way, Brannen emphasized that a different type of cultural imperialism was at play in TDL. 'This Japanese form of cultural imperialism operates by continually reinforcing the distinction between Japan and the Other, by keeping the exotic exotic' (Brannen 1992:230). For example, the treatment of *gaijin* (foreigners, usually Western and white) employees in TDL is complex. There are two categories of *gaijin* employees in TDL: cast members who dress up as Peter Pan, Snow White, Cinderella etc., and authentic craftspersons such as Swiss clock-makers, glassblowers, and silversmiths.

> These *gaijin* employees function as 'authentic artifacts' with whom the Japanese guests can have their pictures taken to legitimate the experience of foreign vacation. To maintain their distinction as exotic, *gaijin* employees are asked to speak only in English and not to wear name tags, presumably so that guests do not relate to them as individuals. Rather than function as facilitators of the Disneyland experience, *gaijin* employees are put on display.
>
> (Brannen 1992)

Although Brannen's analysis of TDL as an artifact recontextualized in Japanese culture is much better than the cultural imperialists' view in which TDL is a symbol of American cultural dominance all around the global village, I must take issue with her view of the Japanese cultural context itself. In her analysis, it seems that there is a kind of stable continuity in Japanese culture and identity. She explains away the commercial character of the World Bazaar with the gift-giving needs of the Japanese, and she keeps the space of 'exotic' only for foreign people. In this process of recontextualization, Japanese culture, 'the context', seems to have remained the same as it has always been. But I have argued that the very 'context' in which Japanese society recontextualized American artifacts changed structurally in the 1970s. The Japanese younger generation born after the 1960s, who constitute the main part of TDL visitors, no longer have the same background and identity as the preceding generation. So, if the similarity between TDL and the shopping mall can be explained by the gift-giving needs of the Japanese, this 'gift-giving' might be very different from the traditional one.

Regarding this contextual change, Marilyn Ivy's analysis of the advertising campaign of 'Exotic Japan' produced by Japan National Railway from 1984 is very persuasive. Ivy compared this 'Exotic Japan' campaign with the preceding 1970's campaign of 'Discover Japan'. She concluded that the Japanese have clearly exoticized themselves. According to Ivy, the important point is that 'Exotic Japan' was written in *katakana,* the Japanese script used to transcribe foreign languages, as if 'Japan' itself had been introjected as the foreign, as something that entered from the outside. As foreign people usually are not expected to read *katakana,* this 'Japan' is foreign for the Japanese, because, on the level of script, 'Exotic Japan' established Japan as elsewhere, as 'Other'. Yet the message of this advertising was 'an almost comically stereotypical description of Japan as seen by Westerners'. Then, although the basic structure of the exoticism, the structure of Orientalism in a broader sense, not only remains but also penetrates throughout the society, the Japanese stands on both sides of 'the Westerner' and 'the Other'. In other words, all of Japan becomes exoticized for the Japanese themselves: here the native itself becomes the foreign (Ivy 1995).

In order to locate this 'reversed' situation historically, Munesuke Mita's argument about the transformation of the meaning of 'reality' in postwar Japan is useful. He divides postwar Japanese history into three periods in terms of the antonyms of 'reality'. The first period was from 1945 to about 1960, in which the word 'ideal' *(risō)* was opposed to 'reality' *(genjitsu)*. The 'American Democracy' and the 'Soviet Communism' were two powerful ideals which dominated postwar Japanese consciousness, and the supporters of these ideals were opposed to the 'realists' who supported the conservative power structure. During this period, the ideal was thought to be realizable. In other words, the ideal was the reality of the future. So ordinary people eagerly pursued the 'ideal family life', the 'ideal occupation', the 'ideal house', and the 'ideal electric rice-cooker', all of which referred to the material abundance of 'America' mentioned before. The postwar Japanese worked hard in order to realize this ideal. The second period was from about 1960 to the early 1970s, during which the word 'dream' *(yume)* was opposed to 'reality'. Young radicals in the late 1960s did not pursue the ideal of American democracy nor the ideal of Soviet communism, but emancipation from all these established ideals. But in the third period, which began from the late 1970s, the word 'fiction' (kyokō) became the antonym of 'reality'. Mita emphasizes that the sense of this 'fictionality' is that it has already lost the intention of realization. In other words, reality has already been 'fictionalized' in the sensibility of this period. He gives many examples of this 'fictionalization' in the 1970s including my own analysis of TDL (Mita 1996).

Mita's argument points out the structural change in 'reality' in the 1970s, and is helpful to understand the meaning of the process in which 'America' has lost its preceding symbolic image. Until the 1960s, the Japanese could place the ideal abroad, and they intended to realize it in the context of modern Japan. People could believe in the ideal which had not been internalized into their domestic reality. The 'America' which the Japanese desired as well as criticized, was the most popular ideal of this period, and it was placed in the 'external' side. But after the late 1970s, this 'America' has been internalized so far as the Japanese would feel familiar with the 'American' culture much more than with Japanese traditional culture. The point is that this process was not the 'colonization' of Japan by American cultural imperialism, nor the mere 'domestication' of America into the Japanese context. Throughout the process, Japan has been externalized to the same extent as America has been internalized. So the very structure of opposition between 'Japan' and 'America'; the 'internal' and the 'external' was no longer able to function from the 1980s. Although it is possible to identify the strategy of exoticization as the common denominator of the commercial phenomena from Disneyland in Tokyo to the 'Exotic Japan' campaign, this strategy functions on a reality that has been totally fictionalized. Instead of mere 'colonization' and 'domestication', it would be better to use the word 'hyper-realization' (Baudrillard's term) for this process. As I have discussed, TDL organizes this strategic process of 'fictionalization' very cleverly.

Now, we must consider the increase of TDL's visitors from Asian countries and the diffusion of the cultural artifacts re-made in Japan after the late 1980s. In the late 1980s, TDL saw a considerable increase in visitors from other Asian countries. According to the Oriental Land Corporation, foreign visitors amounted to 6 per cent of all visitors, almost all from East and Southeast Asia. From this phenomenon arises a serious question: Is this Disneyland experience, the same as the experience of American Disneyland for Japanese in the 1960s? Is the postwar relationship between 'Japan' and 'America' being reproduced in a different phase? For example, Shinobu Yoshioka gives an interesting description of how 'Japan' functions as a symbol of 'richness' and 'newness' in today's Thailand. Japanese pop stars frequently appear in Thai magazines for the young, and famous Japanese brands are copied by Thai fashion industry. At the same time, a Thai magazine editor says, 'You know how they say *"kakkoii"* (stylish) and *"kawaii"* in Japan? We have come to use the same expressions here in Thai' (Yoshioka 1989:238–9). It seems that a kind of fictionalization or self-exoticization process has also already begun in Thailand. In this process of self-exoticization, both 'America' and 'Japan' have come to be detached from existing nations; they become the focusing/vanishing point of 'perspectives' in the world reconstructed on a hyper-real level as a universe of commercial goods. Unlike the colonization forced by 'cultural imperialism', the hyper-realization of the 'external/internal' relationship which Disneyland so cleverly actualized is embedded in commercial artifacts, spaces, and performative relationships, and spreads in Japan as well as to other Asian countries. There is a possibility that a 'Disneyfying' ('cutifying' also) society might eventually transcend national boundaries. We must follow these transformations from various aspects, with a reminder that these changes constitute the spatial-discursive system of contemporary global capitalism.

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10 The Anomic World of the High Consumer: Fashion and Cultural Formation

Joanne Finkelstein

The new consumer societies of the twentieth century, such as the postcolonial societies of the Indian subcontinent, parts of Asia and Eastern Europe, are being shaped by many of the same influences that defined the West's consumer patterns in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The material and ideational dominance of fashion as a consumer force is important because it promulgates more than a propensity to consume and be receptive to marketing campaigns for new products. It is obvious that fashion is more than an economic activity which brings higher standards of living and new trends in consumption. The pursuit of the fashionable entails much more than the simple acquisition of goods. I argue in this chapter that the expansion of a consumer ethic instantiates identifiable patterns of sociality and public conduct irrespective of location in either the West or Asia. This appears to contrast with Robison and Goodman (1996:3–4), in the first volume of this series on Asia's new rich, who emphasize the specific historical circumstances that characterize each developing capitalist society.

These differing views, however, are reconcilable over the long durée. In this volume and elsewhere, Chua (1992) gives the vivid example of how Singaporeans impoverish themselves in cash terms in order to own the positional goods which ostentatiously demonstrate the importance of consumption in their daily lives. In a similar vein, Chan, Chapter 5 in this volume, identifies a related pattern in Hong Kong, demonstrating how well integrated subjective identification and group formation is with patterns of consumption. Taking an overview across the century, these late-twentieth-century formations echo the nineteenth-century patterns of conspicuous consumption followed by the new Parisian middle classes as represented in Emile Zola's (1957) novelistic account of the department store. At this level of analysis the specificities of late-twentieth-century Singapore and Hong Kong and late-nineteenth-century Paris illuminate a closely related phenomenon.

Identifying these transcultural and transhistorical patterns in the practices surrounding shopping and conspicuous consumption illustrates how the relationship between individuals and the world of material objects suggests a universality of how mass produced goods encode and commodify cultural life, and how the realm of material objects can come to stand as a mediative bridge between individuals. While certain practices around consumption are tied to specific histories of a society's industrialization and productivity, as Robison and Goodman (1996) point out in the first volume of the 'New Rich in Asia' series, there are other social significations around consumption which indicate a similarity in experiences for the fashion habitué in both the West and Asia. It is the argument of this chapter that those inclusive experiences produce an anomic world for the high consumer, that is, a social universe destabilized by the cyclical time frames invented by fashion seasons, the transcultural circulation of goods, images and ideas, and the simulated relations framed and mediated through the interests of consumer capitalism.

The culture of fashion

Fashion has been seen as a Western phenomenon, located in its earliest instances in the court societies of established feudal regimes, and more latterly in the embryonic capitalism of Europe. Since industrialism, fashion has been linked with the middle classes, who redefined Western cultures in the modern era and reconstituted the social world through a calculating, consumer perspective. The middle classes imbued the experience of modernity with the values of capitalism; thus, shopping became a way of life, solutions to problems could be thought of as purchasable, the art of living was equivalent to knowing where and what to consume. Accordingly, fashion as an aspect of modern consumerism is not limited to the economic sphere but can be seen to impinge upon the development of cultural practices and everyday habits.

For the first time in history, we have a choice about what and how much we consume, and how we do it. This requires an examination of the function of desire and how it cultivates a fascination with material possessions. Consumption elicits various emotions such as envy, greed, anxiety, guilt; it stimulates craving and longing. Such responses are generally acknowledged as less than noble. Rosalind Williams (1982:3) declares that 'we who have tasted the fruits of the consumer revolution have lost our innocence'. Her point is that consumption must be recognized as an ethical activity. The naturalized status of shopping has made plenitude seem normative, and this legitimation of possessive desire has displaced other more remote concerns which appear in the history and politics of the mass turnover of goods, namely, a salient concern with resource consumption, environmental degradation, chronic inflation, differential standards of living, economic inequalities and poverty. The emotional currency circulating around shopping, fashionability and consumption installs in these cultural practices an ethics of desire which appears to promote the view that living well is a virtue. And this sensibility persists even when larger-scale economic circumstances move through the boom-and-bust cycle endemic to late capitalism.

A world in which the proliferation of products seems unlikely to abate requires such a justification. The logic behind conspicuous consumption privileges the enjoyment of luxury as rousing us from complacency, from the inertia and disengagement which supposedly threaten to let society lapse into barbarism. Enjoying the luxuries and superfluities made available by our own effort and ingeniousness is a sign of civilization (Williams 1982:41; Elias 1978). The existence of luxuries provokes those desires which inflame envy, vanity, ambition and pride. These in turn are domesticated by their translation into the public benefits of increased trade and economic development. Such was the view of Voltaire in the eighteenth century, who saw consumption as a revolutionary force and the new social actor, the enlightened consumer, as the epitome of civilization.

The other side of the argument, offered by Rousseau, favoured austerity on the basis that an over-concern with materialism produced spiritual pettiness, a characteristic of a slave mentality. Rousseau's characterization of conspicuous consumption as a form of enslavement has resonance across the centuries. The modern fashion slave, for example, is a figure of fun because s/he is depicted as enslaved to the good opinion of others, too easily swayed by impressions and incapable of judging the value of objects—as Oscar Wilde has Henry Wotton say of this new bourgeois figure, 'nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing'.

Williams (1982:92) succinctly abbreviates the polarities of these eighteenth-century positions by arguing that industrialization transformed the world into a *vast* and *centreless* universe where the abundance of material goods has made the illusions and dreams of wealth into irresistible propelling social forces (Williams 1982:57). It is not a matter of being civilized or living virtuously that is the issue. Now the economic stability of society requires high levels of consumption, and it is here, in the practices surrounding shopping, that the tensions between the individual's agency and the ideological imperatives to consume and follow fashion are played out.

The cultural practices around consumption cannot be divested of their ethical features as materialism supplies a system of discourse, and shopping produces its own justification. As Bourdieu (1984) and Chan in this volume well demonstrate, taste in material goods and cultural practices is a form of self-expression. When we pursue needs which we ourselves have created then their claims seem all the stronger. Yet, ironically, this is a position overlaid with contradictions, as Williams suggests, we 'resent our own tendency to judge ourselves and others according to trivial differences in consumption habits' (1982:4). None the less, the saliency of the fashionable signifier is so apparent it seems impossible to resist. Williams (1982:145) describes our fascination with artifice, with the accumulation of material luxuries, as a form of self-deception. This dynamic at the heart of conspicuous consumption is well illustrated by modern advertising and the mimetic relationship which is cultivated between advertisements and styles of sociality (see, for example, Mort 1996 on the production of masculinity, and Clark 1987 on femininity).

In the recent reimagination of the geopolitical landscape through the emergence of new economic regions, societies that were once separated by national, religious, economic and other differences (those in Asia and the West, say,) are now depicted as being dominated by the market metaphor. This appears to draw cultures together, blending their populations into the common category of *consumer*. Coca-Cola, Pepsi, McDonald's, Benetton, Nike, Sony and others transcend local designations by creating transnational marketplaces. McDonald's expresses this sentiment in its advertising slogan: *'It's what everyone around the world keeps saying—"It's MacTime"'*. The Benetton label promises to make the consumer a member of a global 'tribe'. When consumerism is depicted as an homogenizing and inclusive market strategy, then capitalism is being troped as an invitation to join a world community.

Fashion influences the formation of culture and the habits that come to characterize the everyday. With the advent of the shopping mall, the two million Australians who reportedly go there every day have been inducted into new ways of consuming, many of which are in contrast to previous shopping practices (Reekie 1993). Dressing up to go to town in the conservative 1950s has been replaced by exuberant mall-jamming in the 1990s. The white-gloved, well-groomed women who went shopping in the highly regulated public domain of the Anglophile Menzies' era have now been replaced by a more casually dressed and habituated shopper who uses the mall as a home away from home, a place to congregate, meet with friends, take in a movie, visit the doctor and dentist. The cultural practices associated with shopping have altered the character of this aspect of the public domain (Morris 1988).

The influential nature of shopping has been evident since the mid-nineteenth century with the emergence of the arcades and department stores in Paris and then London, and it is still evident, in the late twentieth century, as the mall, home-shopping, and the Internet, evolve into new sites of consumption. Yet throughout these changes, the economic impulse to consume continues to function in concert with other desires which can be seen to destabilize the consumer by generating anomie. Fashion functions in this way irrespective of its locale, be it in the West or in parts of Asia. This chapter describes how fashion functions to detach the consumer from local identifications and induce a sense of anomie which further enhances the attraction of conspicuous consumption.

The anomic world of the high consumer

Emile Durkheim, the Western world's first professional sociologist, observed that a society in the grip of rampant consumerism produced a pathogenic, anomic environment. Paris, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the birthplace of the modern department store, was such a society. The global markets of the new rich in Hong Kong, Singapore, Taipei, Sydney or on the Internet are others. Anomie measures social dysfunction (Durkheim, 1952). It occurs when individuals are too free to remake themselves, when they are deregulated from society through a weakening of their ties to social groups. It signifies an indefinable discord, an absence of a sense of proportion, as when the ethical dimensions of social life are mystified. Anomie, like charivari, signals a world out of joint, a misalignment which is subsequently naturalized and then passes unnoticed.

The growth of consumerism cultivates new desires, needs and practices; it also reconfigures the ethics and constituents of subjectivity while keeping a positive emphasis on the economic. The ethical, non-economic and unintended by-products of modern consumerism have most recently been articulated by such theorists as Haug (1986 [1971]), Langman (1992:42–82) and Bowlby (1985:18–34; 1993:94–119), who observe the darker side of the consumer revolution in their respective descriptions of the social practices and new manners of the marketplace which include exhibitionism, spectatorship, greed, desire and obsession.

Dick Hebdige also draws attention to the problematics of consumption in his description of the ideal consumer as conceived by the moguls of the advertising and marketing worlds. According to these captains of capitalism, the consumers' propensity to pursue fashions, to overlay styles and tastes in an incoherent way, is psychologically unhinging. The authority invested in fashion, the receptiveness with which marketing campaigns are met, the desire to satisfy whims with consumer items, makes the ideal consumer into a modern schizophrenic (Hebdige 1993:82–3).

> The ideal consumer as deduced from contemporary advertisements is not a 'he' or a 'she' but an 'it'…It is a young but powerful (i.e., solvent) Porsche-owning gender bender who wears Katherine Hamnet skirts and Gucci loafers, watches Dallas on air and Eastenders on video, drinks lager, white wine or Grolsch and Cointreau, uses tampons, smokes St Bruno pipe tobacco, uses Glintz hair colour, cooks nouvelle and eats out at McDonald's, is an international jetsetter who holidays in the Caribbean and lives in a mock-Georgian mansion…
>
> The ideal consumer is not the ideal productive worker of an earlier epoch—a sexually repressed nobody, alienated from sensual pleasure, subjected to the turgid, life-denying disciplines of the working week and the nuclear family. Instead, the ideal consumer…is a complete social and psychological mess. The ideal consumer as extrapolated from the barrage of contradictory interpellations from advertising billboards to magazine spreads to TV commercials is a bundle of conflicting drives, desires, fantasies, appetites…The subject of advertising is not the rational sovereign subject of Descartes…it is Deleuze and Guattari's 'body without organs' —the absolute decentred subject, the irresponsible, unanchored subject: the psychotic consumer, the schizophrenic consumer.

Shopping may seem unproblematic, providing as it does a sense of order and power over the material cornucopia of the everyday world. Yet Dick Hebdige's description points out how the endless search for the latest fashion object challenges the deep-seated cultural value we attach to the rational, autonomous individual. When Hebdige reports that 'the ideal consumer…is a complete social and psychological mess, a bundle of conflicting drives, desires, fantasies, appetites…who is not the rational sovereign subject of Descartes but is the absolute decentred subject, the irresponsible, unanchored subject: the psychotic consumer, the schizophrenic consumer' (1993:82–3), then, like Fredric Jameson (1983) before him, he is problematizing the easy naturalization of social pathologies. Both are signalling that the psychotic shopper is not to be regarded as an isolated case but is representative of a category phenomenon. The disturbances in identity alluded to by Hebdige and Jameson resonate with Durkheimian anomie. Unanchored subjectivity, the permeability of identity, precisely imitate Durkheim's view that anomie is not a psychological or private condition, but is a demonstration of the saliency of the structural over the individual. Although the desires which propel us to shop may appear psychological or atomistic in their expression, they are simultaneously properties of a specific moral order which has elevated the material over the abstract, the systemic over the subjective. Anomie is the result; it is a by-product of a particular moral order.

It is relevant that Hebdige's modern consumer and Durkheim's anomic individual share a similar social world—one of material abundance. Paris, in the second half of the nineteenth century, was the capital of the new department store. This was a period of intense consumer activity when the emergent bourgeoisie was fast learning the pleasures and practices of shopping for novelties and luxuries (Miller 1981). The second half of the twentieth century has also seen the emergence of another form of marketplace which includes the architectural innovation of the interiorized shopping mall, the media spectacle of *haute couture,* the globalization of designer commodities and the revolution of marketing practices through democratized credit systems, telemarketing and home purchasing.

This level of anomie is naturalized in the consumer imaginary. It is even parodically encapsulated in Barbara Kruger's photographic aphorism *I shop therefore I am*. Kruger's image has gained a longlasting, international currency as the icon of retail therapy. It has been reproduced, devoid of its original irony, on oversized calico shopping bags which are touted around the shopping malls as misconceived emblems of shopper pride. The popularity of Kruger's image supports the position that shopping for desires is unproblematically natural, as if the key to happiness was simply knowing where to shop. The spontaneity of desires makes them seem authentic and ordinary, as if the affinity between personal pleasure and shopping were a natural formation. Kruger recognizes this propensity in the acceptance of the belief that we are what we buy; such a viewpoint seems benign because we see shopping itself as deeply appealing; after all, it is an activity over which we still seem to exert control (Kruger 1994:62). None the less, consuming is a social and historical event with implications beyond the personal—hence, Kruger's effective satirizing of it using the red, black and white colours of this century's authoritarianism.

Across the century, the pathological tendencies of the modern consumer echo those of the nineteenth-century anomic individual. The consumer ethic has recast the world into a marketplace. The consumer ethic orients desire towards material solutions, giving the sense that control and autonomy become realizable through the act of purchase. This in turn supports a privatization of life in preference to a communal-based, public and politicized social life. Interest in category rights associated with ethnicity, gender and class are diminished as the consumer attitude individuates the person, making it seem as if products and practices can be sufficiently emblematic of identity. Each product comes with a tag, an address, a lifestyle. The act of purchase locates the individual within a *tribe,* and in this way, fashion functions to regulate lifestyles and produce the belief that every consumer choice is a free choice, a way in which individuals invent themselves. Such practices can co-opt self-identifying groups into the consumer cycle, even those who may be politically and ethically opposed to it—for example, those targeted by the new niche markets in anti-fashions, eco-sensitive clothing, and products from recycled materials.

As the fashion industries segment the marketplace and localize certain social groups by their tastes and desires, it is simultaneously advertising identity as a commodity. This interplay of consumer tastes and identity was first noted by Thorstein Veblen (1899) in his nineteenth-century analysis of the new American bourgeoisie. Veblen observed that the upper classes invented fashion to distinguish themselves from those below. When the styles and practices of the upper classes were imitated, when their fashions 'trickled down' to their social inferiors, the upper classes were impelled to reconstitute themselves (Veblen 1899; McKendrick *et al.* 1982). The trickle-down theory of fashion has been slightly rewritten by twentieth-century street and diffusion fashions, which do not follow the rules of gravity but which still function in the same way to designate the identify of the wearers.

The invention of the fashion label or brand name has further enhanced this by giving the consumer a sense of social location which promises to neutralize the oceanic disorientation of a limitless horizon of commodities. This sense of location is made to seem part of the allure of fashionability and part of the promised yet unexplicated stabilizing of identity which accompanies signature goods—Marlboro, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, BMW, Sony, DKNY. These goods interpellate us, addressing the notional Marlboro Man, the loyal Coke drinker, the Stussy devotee, the dedicated Donna Karan fan. Without the fashion label or brand product, there are few pathways through the crowded field of commodities, but with the label, fashion functions as a how-to guide to a rich, material life. The brand invests the everyday practices of the contemporary consumer with the specificities of taste, social location and subjectivity. Fashion, in this way, appears to resolve the performative problem of living among strangers by providing the precise gestures, roles and scripts which Erving Goffman (1959) argued we needed in order to go on, to live each day.

Fashion and history

In practice, as part of our everyday repertoire, we readily map identity onto appearance in a promiscuous fashion, giving a high premium to exteriority, the body surface and *the look*. The dominant assumption is that dress is *thick* with anthropologically significant meanings. To choose a particular garment, hairstyle or make-up is simultaneously to express a cultural viewpoint. It is as if clothes represent complex ideas; as if there were discernible connections between the visibility of one's appearance and the invisibility of one's political and social values (Polhemus 1994:15). Indeed, dress can appear to signify any position on the political spectrum. In his analysis of the invention of tradition, Eric Hobsbawm describes how the cloth cap became iconographic evidence of the wearer's class position: '[It] clearly became characteristic of the working class, not only because members of other classes, or those who aspired to such status, would be reluctant to be confused with proletarians, but also because manual workers did not care to choose (except no doubt for occasions of great formality) to cover their heads in any of the numerous other available fashions' (1983: 287).

The evidencing of identity and social position through physical appearance is a widespread assumption reasserted in a variety of popular forms. The novelist Alison Lurie, who wrote the popular non-fiction *The Language of Clothes,* has few doubts that we all employ telltale details in our dress to allude to other interior qualities. She writes, 'the woman in the sensible grey wool suit and the frilly pink blouse is a serious, hard-working mouse with a frivolous and feminine soul' (1992: 245). Lurie has no trouble with the idea that when we encounter one another, and especially so in the anonymous sphere of the public domain, that our clothes are garrulous and disclose our desires, beliefs, even secrets. Although Lurie's viewpoint seems highly speculative, the popular currency of these ideas cannot be dismissed. John Molloy's instruction manuals on dressing for success (Molloy 1975; 1977) have sold millions of copies. The popularity of women's magazines and the mainstream cinema which contain prescriptive images of feminine and masculine ideals (Coward 1984; Brookes 1992; Gaines 1990) all contribute to the ideological belief that images and appearances can be both revealing and accurate. As Lord Chesterfield, in the eighteenth century instructed his son to understand—while stylish dress may seem foolish and an expensive vanity, it is more foolish to dress unfashionably because in one's adherence to the proper codes of appearance, more important declarations of social acceptability are being conveyed (quoted in Bell 1976:18).

The capacity of fashion to appear always relevant to its social context sustains the assumption that fashion is a measure of the times: the fashionable individual then always seems to be well located, at the cutting edge. Yet this easy historicizing of fashion makes it difficult to see what fashion actually reveals about time and place. This is the complaint which fuelled the response of the international press when the Paris fashion house, Comme des Garçons, launched a menswear collection using death-camp imagery, on 27 January 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The Reuters news service, the *Independent* newspaper and the *International Herald Tribune* each reported the fashion show as an embarrassing event, worthy of widespread moral indignation. The same fashion house had launched a post-Hiroshima fashion show a few seasons earlier at which the catwalk models were cosmetically made-up to look nuclear-wasted, that is, inhumanly coloured in purple and white. There are other incidents, such as the fiasco created by Chanel's Karl Lagerfeld, when his tight, low-cut dress bodices, which featured Koranic verses embroidered in grey pearls, offended many in the Muslim community.

When fashion is transposed into an emblem of history, the assumption is being made that fashions literalize their contexts; thus, leather garments are signs of Nazification and neo-militarization, and the striped pyjamas from Commes des Garçons designer Rei Kawakubo echo the concentration camps of World War II. Even though it may be the case that certain images do have connections with historical events, these images are now so intricately mixed with other representations, such as the various cinematic treatments of the Holocaust by Hollywood, that they cannot be read as literalizations of history but are rather reproductions of other representations; they are simulations.

Importing Western fashions into foreign contexts provokes some of the same problems. Roland Barthes unintentionally addresses this effect of fashion when he analyses the propensity to interpret appearances as emblematic of the times. With fashion, he states, there are two separable but related measures of time being employed: one records a conventional notion of time as evolving, periodic and epochal, and the other uses time as experience, a sense of lived time. He describes these as 'one strictly historical, the other what could be called memorable' (Barthes 1985:295). In the context of fashion, the first category refers to how styles in appearance evolve over a long period of time but are not necessarily attached to any particular historical moment. He illustrates this category by drawing on the anthropological work of A.L.Kroeber who recorded the shifting arrangements of specific sartorial features. Such changes moved in relation to one another, for example, the depth of the neckline with the height of the hemline, the position of the waist with the width of the skirt. But these changes do not extend beyond the fashion system; they are driven only by the internal dynamic of fashion itself. They demonstrate its cyclical nature, but little more. As Barthes states: 'there is no analogical relation between the Napoleonic period and high waistlines' (1985:295).

Barthes opposes the position that assumes an easy reciprocity between fashion and its historical and cultural context. He understands that '…paradoxically, Fashion can know only a very long history or no history at all' (1985:296), by which he means that fashion changes very little in its structure (trousers for men, skirts for women) thereby making its history immensely long and hardly discernible, but at the same time, fashion is always changing—as with new season styles— giving a sense of it being impermanent even anarchic and always totally new, having 'no history at all'. Barthes draws the important conclusion from these annual and seasonal displays of constant change that 'the Fashion system far exceeds human memory' (1985:298). No one can keep account of these rapid fluctuations and assert authoritatively which styles, colours and shapes preceded or followed the other, and even if a detailed record of these minutiae were assembled, it is hard to know what significance could be drawn from them.

In the everyday world, Barthes argues, fashion produces a tumult of confusing simultaneities which indicate a negative measure, what he refers to as the limits of memory (1985:299). Barthes describes fashion as 'an order made into a disorder' (1985:300), one of its functions is 'to blur the memory of past Fashions, so as to censure the number and the return of forms' (1985:300). In short, fashions are made to seem discontinuous so that they always look new. Even a fashion like retro, which claims to quote from and reclaim the past, is really just another assembled style. Thus, Barthes states, 'the Fashion consumer is plunged into a disorder which is soon an oblivion, since it causes the present to be perceived in the form of a new absolute' (1985:300).

Barthes associates fashion with the privileging of the new, *neomania,* which he links to the rise of capitalism. Barthes's location of fashion within modern capitalism and the era of the simulacrum supports his interpretation of it as both a source of mental incoherency and an unreliable historical marker. It cannot, by its very nature, do the work that is commonly associated with it, namely, contributing to the formation of subjectivity, and reflecting historical events through particular styles in appearance. Fashion works because its historicity is concealed by other qualities such as the pleasure of its immediate erotic charge. Fashion works because it stops any interrogation of appearances in preference to the imitation of them. Fashion provides the pleasure of satisfying desires which have only been created in order to be satisfied by fashion. Fashionability has become a personal goal, and the purchase of endlessly produced fashionable items is encouraged as a kind of personal achievement. Barthes understands fashion to be paradoxical; it is ambiguous, 'simultaneously unpredictable and systematic, regular and unknown, aleatory and structured, it fantastically conjoins the intelligible without which men could not live and the unpredictability attached to the myth of life' (1985:300).

In many of these assertions Barthes can be seen to be saying much the same as Hebdige, that the modern consumer can make intelligible that which really does not make sense. That is, we learn to calculate the price of satisfaction, to meet desires with the easy purchase of goods, and to accept the importance of *a look* as guaranteed by a brand or fashion label. Barthes summarizes his theory of fashion by stating that the consumer must think irrationally and overlook the utility of the fashionable object in order to value its social and cultural properties. As he describes (1985:xi–xii):

> Calculating, industrial society is obliged to form consumers who don't calculate; if clothing's producers and consumers had the same consciousness, clothing would be bought (and produced) only at the very slow rate of its dilapidation; Fashion, like all fashions, depends on a disparity of two consciousnesses, each foreign to the other. In order to blunt the buyer's calculating consciousness, a veil must be drawn around the object—a veil of images, of reasons, of meanings; a mediate substance of an aperitive order must be elaborated; in short, a simulacrum of the real object must be created, substituting for the slow time

> of wear a sovereign time free to destroy itself by an act of annual potlatch…what is remarkable about this image-system constituted with desire as its goal is that its substance is essentially *intelligible:* it is not the object but the name that creates desire; it is not the dream but the meaning that sells.

Barthes highlights the problematic functions of fashion by arguing that the simple correspondences between social rank and vestimentary appearances, which worked in a pre-industrial era, no longer work in a contemporary context. Paradoxically, reliance on appearances and fashion increases as a social practice wherever social mobility and class categories are in flux. Economic historians have maintained that once manufactured and imported goods become abundant (see McKendrick *et al.* 1982; Braudel 1981), which is the case for the newly industrialized societies throughout Asia, any direct correspondence between social identity and appearance becomes increasingly weaker. Higher levels of trade enrich the social field making it more difficult to discern which differences in visible insignia have greatest significance. Emulating the appearances of those higher on the social hierarchy produces category confusions which in turn can advantage those lower on the scale. By imitating behaviours and manners in dress and by manufacturing fake insignia, individuals can appear to invent themselves and not only become objects of their own desire but sources of confusion to others.

At such times, new codes of conduct develop around dissemblance. Individuals make greater use of goods because of their availability. However, as the social meanings of these goods are always in flux, the effect of their employment is increasingly ambiguous. While it seems commonsensical to speak of modern fashions as a communicative system through which claims are made for social status and personal identity, and through which displays of rivalry, competition and conflict may also be expressed (Lurie 1992; Polhemus 1994), what else is being communicated remains uncertain. Fashionable appearances enable individuals to differentiate themselves, as if the way they looked made visible their self-consciousness, their sense of who they were, to all those others they imagine are scrutinizing them. Fashion is imagined as being capable of both revealing and concealing the psychological dimension thought to have developed in tandem with the demands of a social life passed largely among strangers (Elias 1978; Goffman 1959; Sennett 1976). It is precisely this conflation of materialism with abstract states of mind which makes fashion seem capable of successfully functioning as both a private pleasure and a social barometer reflective of its historical context. Yet, it is a view of fashion which has been disputed here.

Conclusion

Material wealth encourages an awareness of the opportunities for self-invention and social mobility. Roaslind Williams (1982:34) acerbically notes that consuming is about aspiring to be something other than what we are. It enflames desires; it transgresses boundaries. Over the past century of industrialization and mass production, there has been a new emphasis given to the subjective and the playful desire to re-invent oneself. Advertising for mass consumption amplifies these desires and attempts to generate widespread dissatisfaction. Durkheim (1897) noted the same phenomenon when describing how modern life encouraged the appetites. The logic behind this manner of thinking propels us toward the loss of traditions, the commodification of all social values and experiences, and a predisposition towards anomie.

Fashion is a mode of social exchange, and like many other social discourses, its function is ultimately to maintain cultural continuity. This may seem a contradiction at those recent sites of fashionability where the new rich of Asia are ostensibly consuming foreign commodities from the West which do not appear to carry much cultural continuity. Yet the dynamic of fashion itself is self-maintenance. The continuity it is supporting is its own. And the ease with which material goods are accumulated encodes the ready promise that desires can be gratified with each discerning purchase. By being fashionable, by supporting the fashion system, we are also meeting our own needs. Such beguiling offers renew, and also pathologize, the hope that all pleasures can be made part of the capitalist imperative to consume. Commodities are fetishized, invested with abstract desires and tastes, thus making the act of shopping an exercise in self-gratification. At least this is the culture of consumption promulgated by the marketing moguls who regard the consumer as the unhinged subject. It is a position we appear to endorse in the appropriation of Barbara Kruger's parodic image that we shop to exercise our will, not demonstrate our lack of such. Yet our effervescent interest in consumption can also resolve the anguish of not really knowing what we want, nor how best to extract from our pleasures whatever we need to sustain ourselves. Poggioli (1968:79) has argued that fashion is about ensuring the incessant circulation of the same. It is a self-enclosed system, or as Barthes suggests, a simulation or hyperreality distanced from the everyday, yet part of it. These paradoxes of fashion make it capable of sustaining cultural continuity irrespective of its locale, in Asia or the West, at the same time that its anomic charge makes it resistant to the specificities of time and place.

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Index