

# consumption

*Why Does it Matter in Cultural Research?*

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## — INTRODUCTION

Prompted by the opening of Hong Kong Disneyland, journalists from different countries interviewed Hong Kong scholars about the project. Talking to reporters from quality newspapers and tabloids alike, I felt a sense of complete failure to communicate. I do not know whether I injected our conversations with the jargon often said to be typical of cultural studies scholars; however, I can still feel my discomfort when the first question all the journalists asked was: What is the cultural impact of Disneyland on Hong Kong?

One point should be clear from the outset: I do not conduct globalization studies from a top-down perspective. I believe that the local–global relation should be viewed as dialectical, and I do not use the terms ‘Disneyization’ or ‘Disneyfication’ to describe Disney’s effects on the Hong Kong landscape. Because of my commitment to a new ethnography emphasising the concrete daily life of local peoples in a larger social context, I could conjure up no satisfactory responses to the journalists’ questions. When I told journalists that my research concerns, on the contrary, how locals use Disney products in their daily lives, the former evidently suspected they were talking to the wrong person; many of these interviews were not published. In contrast, the French daily *Le Monde* did not interview me but it did run the following quote: ‘“La présence de Disney ne va faire qu’accroître notre réputation de grand supermarché de la consommation”, déplore Kimburley Choi, une doctorante à l’université de Lingnan.’<sup>1</sup> I wish I could summarise my thesis in four words, but ‘a supermarket of consumption’ would not be the four I would choose. This very formulation ignores the important role that consumers play in the supermarket.

Without public consultation, the Walt Disney Company and the Hong Kong SAR government signed contracts for the establishment of a Hong Kong Disneyland in November 1999. Despite their reservations over the government's generous subsidies, its secret dealings with Disney, and the ecological damage to be done to Lantau Island, the Hong Kong public (according to various opinion polls) embraced the Disneyland project. Critics have often focused on the economic allure of the project, but in my view the Disneyland project can rather be seen from the 'other' side as a local identity project. The 'world city' or 'cosmopolitan city' image offered by Disneyland promises Hong Kong people a 'dream' of re-enacting our 'Chinese-plus' cultural identity<sup>2</sup>, an identity through which 'Hong Kong people' distinguish ourselves from the Chinese. Meanwhile, for the HKSAR government, Hong Kong Disneyland seems a good substitute for the British legacy; Hong Kong can still be a cosmopolitan, 'East meets West' city without negatively affecting the government's authoritarian re-nationalization project. The hybrid Hong Kong popular culture is affirmed among the people but it is also deployed by the government so that an authoritarian regime might simultaneously reassert its legitimacy. Disney is a household name with which Hong Kong has long been in contact. This article asks how Disney texts connect to Hong Kong families' lived experiences and to their larger social, economic and political environment; in particular, how Hong Kong middle class parents appropriate Disney products for their own uses while simultaneously being subjected to various discourses that shape the parents' lived sense of themselves and their child-rearing practices.

What is the value of such cultural research, especially when it concerns the consumption practices of middle class parents, the privileged of Hong Kong? Scholars easily acquire legitimacy by researching the disenfranchised because we, as mediators, help the disenfranchised 'voice out';<sup>3</sup> some of us help the disenfranchised construct 'enabling' discourses to cope with and prevent illness.<sup>4</sup> This kind of cultural research has direct political effects on both the researched and the society at large. Yet, living as we have with the shift of power from Britain to China, riding the property-price wave from crest to trough, facing the Asian financial crisis, and coping with—among other things—Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), economic restructuring, and a shrinking employment market, the middle class members of Hong Kong society, including me, consider ourselves the 'crippled' privileged, reflecting our own 'lack' instead of making 'gains' in the global economy. Research on Hong Kong middle class Disney consumption may not have direct political effects on the researched, but it sheds light on middle class struggles and on the micropolitics that the middle class exercises to maintain its privileged position. Certainly, scholars differ about the role played by the middle class in political transformation.<sup>5</sup> In the context of this paper's concerns, I discuss how parents' consumption behaviour in general, and Disney merchandise in particular, materialises the middle class 'self-help' culture and local family power dynamics within

the existing global order. I also ask how this consumption behaviour fits the authoritarian, administration-led management practices of the SAR government.

In 2002 I began conducting an ethnographic study of five middle class families with the aim of studying parents' approaches to the process of parenting, particularly in relation to family consumption of Disney products (including movies, merchandise and theme parks). In new ethnography, researchers should do justice to the researched, including their perspectives and their lived experiences. As the writing subject, however, I could not possibly escape my own constraints and political agenda to interpret their doings; therefore, I have employed dialogic and self-reflexive modes of writing to escape from ventriloquism.<sup>6</sup> Believing that the parent is always aware, to different degrees, of the discourses in which he or she is embedded, I interviewed parents in order to render explicit their ideas and practices of parenting, and their views on children and child education. I then tracked the interviewees by conducting follow-up interviews and fieldwork taking the form of casual encounters (such as babysitting and casual talks through phone calls, e-mails and home visits). I have tried not to interpret parents' thoughts without their knowledge; instead, I discuss my interpretations with them. Shared interpretations turn into dialogues, during which I acknowledge people's concrete concerns and experiences and during which I also uncover my own political agenda. Therefore, the people being studied, as well as the readers, gain access to my motivations and concerns.

#### — HONG KONG: CITY OF DISNEY CONSUMPTION<sup>7</sup>

Hong Kong is famous as a big shopping mall; the *International Herald Tribune* calls the Central District the 'Fifth Avenue of the Far East.'<sup>8</sup> Unlike other governments in Asia the Hong Kong government does not restrain citizens' extravagant spending. 'In revitalizing Hong Kong's economy and strengthening community cohesiveness following the SARS outbreak' in 2003, the government launched a three-month 'community self-help' campaign, 'We Love HK,' to 'call upon the Hong Kong public to "go out and spend" and help the ailing economy.'<sup>9</sup> In contrast to many Koreans, for example, Hong Kong people do not feel guilt over their consumption of American or Japanese imports.<sup>10</sup> Living in a big mall landscape, Hong Kong people's shopping culture is incorporated into their daily spatial practices.

Whether Hong Kong residents live in public housing or on a private estate, there are malls nearby that the residents can walk past, peer into and buy from. In 2005, over one third of the housing estates managed by the Hong Kong Housing Authority had shopping malls.<sup>11</sup> A ride to any district centre will reveal another mega-mall. The most successful district mall is the New Town Plaza in Shatin (one of Hong Kong's 18 districts).<sup>12</sup> With 200 000 square meters comprising three internal mega-malls, New Town Plaza is one of the largest shopping centres in Hong Kong.<sup>13</sup>

Since November 1999, when the official announcement was made to initiate Hong Kong Disneyland, Disney has undertaken a 'synergy'-based<sup>14</sup> marketing strategy to boost its local and civic image in Hong Kong. This strategy has included extensive promotion of Disney movies, the refurbishment of Disney Stores in 2001, frequent public-library retellings of Disney stories, and regular Disney-related activities held for children and high school students. Disney's largest marketing functions took place during the 2001 and 2002 Christmas season.

The 2001 Disney Christmas function 'Snow White's Magical Christmas' was held at the centre of New Town Plaza on 24 November 2001 and 1 January 2002. The site was decorated as a mini-Disney park, at the centre of which stood a castle. Inside this medieval edifice, visitors walked through a corridor featuring a Walt Disney biography and a production history of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937); played with an interactive magic mirror; visited the Seven Dwarfs' house; watched a *Snow White* promo; and bought Disney merchandise. The site emphasised meanings, images and sensations: the beginning of the trip through the corridor emphasised reading, and after this 'rite of passage' more physical entertainment and consumption became the core activities.

'Disney's Magical Moments' in 2002 was co-produced by the Walt Disney Company (Asia Pacific) Limited and the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HKHA). Running from 21 December 2002, to 5 January 2003, this event remains the largest function ever held by the HKHA. Networking 131 of the HKHA's shopping centres, it issued souvenirs to customers who purchased over HK \$200 (\$35 AUD) of Disney products. Four shopping malls—Stanley Plaza, Tsz Wan Shan Shopping Centre, Lok Fu Shopping Centre and Lei Yue Mun Plaza—were lavishly decorated with gigantic sets and models that served as stages for Cinderella, Belle, Snow White and the Little Mermaid. Disney merchandise occupied every corner of these malls and their department stores. In 'Disney's Magical Moments,' Disney did not ask visitors to familiarise themselves with Walt's biography or with Disney movies' production histories, but rather to memorise the huge, exotic Disney caricatures by taking a snapshot of their happy Disney moment. The image itself provides the ultimate meaning by stating the omnipresence of Disney, and the particular types of pleasant experiences that stem from a visit to the Disney landscape. Not long after this grandiose event, Disney icons appeared in all major local festival celebrations: the Mickey Mouse Garden featured in the 2003 Hong Kong Flower Show, the big lantern of Sleeping Beauty Castle took part in the 2003 mid-Autumn festival in Victoria Park, and since 2001 the Hong Kong Disneyland float has graced the Chinese New Year parade.

The opening of Hong Kong Disneyland gave rise to a Mickey Mouse craze, elevating the cartoon rodent from modest to high fashion, emblazoning the icon on everything from T-shirts to jewellery, and generating a market even for counterfeit Mickey Mouse-themed goods; indeed, *International Herald Tribune* describes the abundant appearance of the Mickey

icon as 'a Disney mania.'<sup>15</sup> Disney merchandising also includes character-themed candies and grooming products in pharmacies and beauty chains such as Mannings and in local supermarkets like Park N' Shop; Disney-related toys, computer games, and books in Toys 'R' Us; similar household products, soft toys, and gifts in thirteen Trendyland chain stores;<sup>16</sup> inexpensive youth fashion in 'It's Mickey' chain stores; uptown high fashion in Moisselle chain stores; jewellery in forty five Chow Sang Sang shops; and Disney merchandise in over two hundred McDonald's restaurants in Hong Kong. Other merchandise featuring Disney characters that Hong Kong has imported from Japan can also be found in trendy youth shops inside MTR stations, Japanese department stores and small shopping malls in every corner of the metropolis. Counterfeit Disney merchandise can be found in small stationery stores in every public housing estate, in the famous Ladies Market in Mong Kok, and in markets in Causeway Bay, Wan Chai, North Point, Sham Shui Po, and so on.

Disney's commercial success is largely due to its synergy approach, whereby the company first produces movies treated as merchandise advertisements; then it makes TV series, comics, soundtracks and musicals and sells a range of movie character merchandise in Disney Stores, theme parks and local stores. Throughout the process, it operates an extensive and penetrating series of marketing and promotional activities. As the biggest licensor in the world, Disney exercises control over a host of instantly recognisable characters, each of which corresponds to hundreds of kinds of products; thus, it is no surprise that cross-media marketing helps Disney turn great profits. Mickey Mouse's face sells US \$4.5 billion worth of merchandise every year;<sup>17</sup> the production cost of *Toy Story* (1995) was about US \$75–100 million,<sup>18</sup> and the film grossed US \$356.8 million at the worldwide box office,<sup>19</sup> subsequently grossing over US \$3 billion<sup>20</sup> during ten years of further profits, including ancillary earnings.

It is evident that Disney—because of its differentiated merchandise, its shifting aesthetic sense, and its adaptive application of contradictory popular discourses to local needs and desires—has managed to insert itself into different Hong Kong families' lives successfully. On the one hand, the American-based firm links up the brand 'Disney' with Hong Kong's local festivals and family rituals and, on the other hand, it advertises its characters by presenting them in various promotional activities, movie screenings, and product sales in every corner of Hong Kong. The commercial operation is massive. However, if the core aim of Disneyization<sup>21</sup> is to sell successfully and to ask consumers to consume happily and thoughtlessly, then a Disneyized culture is hardly found; instead, Disney merchandise becomes a vehicle by which parents can mould their children into a certain type of cultural being. Moreover, parents' uses of Disney products not only reinforce the existing power order, including local class differences and the pax Americana,<sup>22</sup> but also an emerging China-based world order.

Hong Kong people regard family as the most important component of human life; in particular, having children and child-centeredness in a family setting are norms in Hong Kong culture.<sup>23</sup> Children's status in Hong Kong society, as Chun Hung Ng argues, has changed over time, 'from a beginning of neglect, then to alarm and protection, and, since the 1970s to a view of children as the pillar of the future society and hence an asset to be invested in'.<sup>24</sup> Such shifts as the one from child-neglect to child-centeredness have become possible both under the changing state policies<sup>25</sup> and amidst the proliferation of TV programs, games and toys, clothing and other products treating children as consumers who have their own tastes and wants.

Living inside this 'Shopping Paradise,' Hong Kong parents on the one hand refrain from shopping for themselves so that they can save for their children's future.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, they disagree with and reject the consumerist attitude promoted by children's TV programs and the mega mall landscape of Hong Kong, although they allow their children to have their own tastes to different degrees; as I will show later, they do encourage their children to consume particular edutainment products and even provide an 'environment' for them to do so. Thinking of children as passive, vulnerable and dependent, parents frequently state the importance of 'environment' in children's development. In discussing their child rearing methods, parents believe that they should provide their children with an environment conducive to a 'healthy' childhood and should protect their children against environments that affect the innocence of children 'negatively'. Listed among these environments are Hong Kong shopping malls and especially Disney's consumerist landscape, containing mainly 'low cultural capital' commodities.

Catherine and Kat are two mothers who consciously act against malling behaviour, consisting of parent-child visits and wanderings through shops inside malls, visits which could last for hours and result in a bevy of purchases. Because of the economic doldrums that seized Hong Kong after the handover, Catherine consciously changed her consumption practices into a pragmatist approach.<sup>27</sup> As full-time working mothers, both Catherine and Kat expressed concern over their lack of child-centred time. To develop parent-child intimacy, both mothers planned activities such as outings and storybook readings, as well as casual activities such as sandwich making, and both considered these activities to be more valuable than malling:

Catherine: I'm not in the habit of taking him shopping because he can't quite control himself ... It's a waste of time, since we don't have much time to be together ... I have to go to work on alternate Saturdays. On Sunday, we wake up at about 10 and 11. After lunch, he has to study, since we just do it once a week. After studying, it's about three. What can we

do? At most, we go to the park, or to the public library. After a while, it's time to have dinner. It is a waste of time if we also go shopping at the mall and play stupid things in Jum Pin Gym ... Now I know some of his classmates' parents, and we go to the park together. Those parents also think like me. Going out to the park is better than spending time in the mall.

Seeing children as innocents who need to be constrained with discipline, parents discipline their own lifestyle. Fighting against ideas of consumerism and materialism, Kat and her husband Alex seldom go to a mega-mall. When they do go shopping, they try their best to go alone, that is, to avoid bringing their daughters along; this strategy reflects the parents' effort to prevent their children from developing the desire to shop. Since their first daughter, Dondon, was born, the family eats dinner at home except during festivals. As does Catherine, Kat refuses to treat shopping in malls on weekends as a family ritual.

Consequently, Dondon and Stephanie, the two daughters of Kat and Alex, seldom go to a mall, even though their residence in Shatin is less than a ten-minute drive from New Town Plaza. Dondon is a bit different from other children, as she recognises Disney characters but has no special preference for any particular character. She exhibits no strong desire to own a product with a character image. There are Winnie the Pooh plastic plates in Kat's home, but these are gifts from friends.<sup>28</sup>

Teresa and Henry, another couple, enjoy dining out with their son, Linus, but they hate Disney's promotion of child-centred consumerist behaviour. Characterising Disney as an institution that is 'dredging money from children by tantalising them,' they practice the 'no buy' policy:

Teresa: ... After seeing the movie, he wanted to have a toy, such as Buzz Lightyear ... Every time he goes there [Disney Store], he touches them. We keep on saying, 'We won't buy it because it is expensive and we don't need it. You can come but only to look at them.'

Linus accepts his parents' teachings and puts them into practice. After watching *Lilo and Stitch* (2002), Linus and I visited a Disney Store. His fondness for Stitch instilled in him a powerful desire to own a Stitch plush doll, but he decided not to buy it because 'mother likes it least'. He displayed the 'look but don't buy' behaviour again when we stepped outside the Disney Store and back into the mall, where a temporary counter was selling Bossini casual wear featuring images of Stitch and Lilo. Linus asked me to accompany him to the counter to have a look. When we arrived, he said, 'Actually, I don't really like short-sleeved shirts. I have a lot at home. I don't need to have more.' His desire to own the T-shirt was suppressed by his rational evaluation of needs.

Becky is less ambivalent and more positive than other mothers toward Disney offerings; she is also the only parent who does not insist on training Harold, her son, to be less consumerist. When I first visited Becky and Harold, I was stunned by the huge number of Disney videos in their home. Becky explained that Harold liked watching the same movies repeatedly and that the cost of going to the movie theatre was more than the cost of buying a DVD; deciding to forego the movie-theatre experience, she instead opted to wait for the release of a film on DVD. As an English teacher in a well-known girls' school, Becky is lenient toward Harold's Disney-watching practices because she finds that Harold improves his English by imitating simple dialogue in the movies. I will discuss the function of Disney products as useful edutainment in later sections.

— HARD-WORKING WORKSHOP: STICKER COLLECTION

Though attractive, Disney's countless pieces of merchandise are not parents' objects of desire; on the contrary, parents try their best to guard their children against the desire to shop and to own these vast arrays of goods. Although it may not be easy, children can still get what they want by requesting a particular product as their birthday gift or by behaving well in return for a reward. To instil in children the understanding that 'there is no free lunch,' mothers Amy and Catherine present their children with an alternative way to get rewards: sticker collecting. If their children collect a certain number of stickers, they get a reward.

As a full-time wife, Amy is concerned with Angel's academic standing. She spends most of her time in line with Angel's tight cram-school schedule and she has bought books and educational kits for Angel. Amy notes that Angel receives HK \$10 (\$1.5 AUD) of pocket money each week and that Angel could spend her money according to her wants. If she does not want to use her own money, Angel can behave well to get star stickers. After collecting a certain number of star stickers, Angel earns a gift such as stationery. If her conduct falls below expectations, stars will be deducted and she will have to behave better to earn the stickers back.

Amy uses sticker collecting to encourage Angel to be docile and to do well in school, whereas Catherine sees it as a practice-based reflection of the 'winner-take-all' world in which we live.

Cat: Alex has to collect 100 stickers for a Digimon game.<sup>29</sup> He tries his best to be the best. He has to be the best in school. And if he doesn't behave well that day, he will ask, 'How many stickers can I get today?' He is aggressive in this aspect. He has to win. If he loses, he will cry. But it's OK, since everybody experiences failure while growing up.

Kim: You want to train Alex to be aggressive?

Cat: I want him to know that there is no free lunch in the world, that you have to work hard for your dreams.

In the consumerist world, children are seen as full-fledged consumers who have their own tastes and who deserve some freedom of choice. The Hong Kong parents who were interviewed for this study strive to protect their children from such a consumerist attitude by limiting their exposure to shopping mall environments and, therefore, to the ubiquitous Disney products. Although nine Disney Stores were located in major Hong Kong shopping malls by 2004, these parents seldom shopped there, as they found that Disney merchandise did not live up to its billing. According to the sum of their views, children who desire something need to act well, a dictum that runs parallel to the 'work hard, play hard, spend hard' mentality of Hong Kong.

— NO KILLINGS, NO DISOBEDIENCE, NO LAZINESS: FAILED DISNEY MOVIES AND STORIES

Shopping and watching TV are two interrelated daily behaviours—the more exposure children have to TV, the more consumer power children will demand.<sup>30</sup> Parents try their best not only to obstruct children's introduction to the consumerist world but to keep them away from the television set as well. Many Hong Kong parents consider television viewing as a negative influence on children's development: it takes away from children's homework time, promotes consumption and broadcasts explicit depictions of sex and violence. Over half of the respondents in a local survey agreed that the government should exercise tighter control over the content of television.<sup>31</sup>

In the family, it is the mother who acts as cultural gatekeeper and who thus rules over children's media use. Choi and Lee argue that women—both at-home workers and marketplace workers—are more responsible than men in Hong Kong for childrearing and for domestic work.<sup>32</sup> In one of my own studies,<sup>33</sup> I further argue that mothers control what children can and cannot watch; mothers talk to the children about what they should or should not learn from television and movie characters; and mothers even change their own watching habits to cater to their children's development.<sup>34</sup> The increase of families' VCR ownership,<sup>35</sup> the rise of home rental markets for videos in the 1980s, and the subsequent rise of VCD and DVD markets have greatly helped parents select particular programs for children to watch. As the world's largest provider of child-oriented content, Disney releases movies that, most recently in the VCD and the DVD media, have impressed both parents and children in Hong Kong, especially when these parents consider local movies and TV soaps to be mind-numbingly pointless but consider Disney movies, presenting little sex or horror, to be safer for children.<sup>36</sup> It should be noted, however, that while establishing a family-entertainment market in which the whole family can enjoy a movie together, Disney movies fail to deal with local family agendas in detail; the Hong Kong parents in this study express concern that Disney's

feature-length animated cartoons are too long for children's health and that the movies' romance and revenge themes and some of the characterizations work against Hong Kong parents' idea of children's entertainment.

In order to protect their children from the potential harm that might arise from their exposure to fear, confusion, anger and disgust, these parents have established household rules about screen-media use. Although Kat enjoys songs from *The Lion King* (1994) and although her daughters like the film, Kat has reservations about this big Disney hit. She declares that it contains 'too many killings':

Kat: ... in *The Lion King*, the two brothers kill each other. I watch the film with the children and I have to explain why this or that happens; but I can't explain why the two brothers need to kill each other ...

These families carry with them a sense of Chinese traditionalism.<sup>37</sup> To them, parents are superior to children and should teach their children the difference between right and wrong; children are innocent and should receive an education and an upbringing based on talks, controls, rewards and (physical) punishment. Because of this traditionalism, children's entertainment in parents' eyes should teach children to be polite, docile, honest, gentle, cultivated and hardworking, instead of naughty, wild, deceitful, violent, uncouth and lazy. Some Disney characters such as Tinker Bell are famous and popular for their mischief, and Hong Kong parents do not view such characters as positively as do parents in a Western context emphasising relatively liberal child-rearing practices. Catherine, the administrator of a local movie company and a fan of *Snow White*, dislikes *Pinocchio* (1940) because 'Pinocchio is not a good kid and I don't like a bad kid,' and she hates *Lilo and Stitch* for Stitch's disruptive behaviour:

Catherine: I really don't like the film. It's unacceptable. The first whole hour is about how that thing [Stitch] destroys things. Children should not watch the film. This cartoon animation is made for children. However, he [Stitch] is so naughty. Is it that you [Disney] want the children to be as naughty as Stitch? I really want to leave the theatre. I will be picky in choosing Disney movies in the future.

Afraid that her child will imitate inappropriate behaviour, Catherine argues that Disney has failed in recent years to produce 'good-children' movies and that she has become suspicious of Disney productions altogether.<sup>38</sup> Other parents such as Teresa and Becky raise similar concerns about Stitch's naughtiness, but they do not prohibit their boys, Linus and Harold, from watching the movie; instead, these mothers talk to the children and direct them to interpret the movie. As I mention above, Linus follows Teresa and Henry's 'no buy' policy because he knows that his mother does not like Stitch. In fact, *Lilo and Stitch* was not well received

at the Hong Kong box office. Despite prevalent promotion activities and the golden movie-release time of the summer holidays, *Lilo and Stitch* reached a disappointing twenty-ninth place at the local box office in 2002, grossing a mere HK \$8.64 million (\$1.52 million AUD). That same year, the second highest grossing film was *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (HK \$38.26 million, \$6.73 million AUD), and rounding out the top five highest grossing films was *Monsters Inc.* (HK \$25.77 million, \$4.53 million AUD).

As a working mother who believes in hard work and meritocracy, Kat does not like Disney's princess stories because, she argues, they teach girls to think only about romantic affairs and marriage. Kat argues that girls who daydream of romance and marriage are naughty and lazy:

Kim: What do you like or dislike about Disney stories?

Kat: Too many love stories and too many killings. For example, in *The Lion King*, the two brothers kill each other ... You asked me if Disney is American. Well, these nonsense love stories are very American. And this thick book on Disney classics—the stories just ask girls to get married. What is the point of these stories? Is it sick to ask small girls to daydream about getting married as soon as possible? I don't know how to tell them the stories when I find that I can't educate them through these stories. Therefore, I don't use them anymore ... We try to find stories that are more educational, and we are afraid of popularising certain ideas, you know, materialism and violence ... That's why I stopped telling them these stories.

Disney's princess stories run counter to Kat's 'work hard' mentality and the ideal that she projects onto her two daughters—an ideal that substitutes a professional career woman for a married wife without a marketable profession. As a result, traditionalism (which emphasises hierarchical parent-child relationships based on children's obedience) and a middle class mentality (which emphasizes self-made success based on hard work) encourage parents to restrict their children's exposure to some Disney movies because these movies purportedly have 'negative' effects (disobedience, laziness) on children.

Parents are aware of and feel uneasy with some Disney values and consumerist discourse in general. Surrounded by this threat, the parents resist it by negotiating with it: the families watch and buy some—but not any—Disney movies and products. Underlying this strategy is not only an actively local negotiation with global discourses but also a global contestation of local cultural formations—in this case, parental authority in Hong Kong's 'traditional' family practices relative to child-centeredness and harmonious family relationships based on the 'modern' domestic ideal; or, frugality and hard work as family virtues relative to market-based consumption as a child's right. In the next section, I will demonstrate that parents' active consumption shapes their own middle class ideas on parenting and,<sup>39</sup> at the same time, reproduces the privileged status of those ideas by instituting a 'good environment' (in Bourdieu's terms, a *habitus*) for their children.

It is quite common for affluent families to have Disney movies at home. It is also a widespread practice for parents in Western countries such as Australia to set rules limiting children's media use.<sup>40</sup> However, what distinguishes Disney merchandising in Asia is the greater market presence (relative to English-speaking countries) of Disney educational products. This presence earns Disney a privileged status for many Hong Kong families.<sup>41</sup>

Coming from the intermediate and the lower classes, most present-day Hong Kong parents have attained an education, worked hard and climbed the social ladder. It is these parents who dominate the first generation of Hong Kong's current middle class: administrators, managers and other related professions. Without inherited economic capital, these parents are deeply concerned over their children's social identity and make a concerted effort to maintain their children's middle class status by acquiring capital of both the economic and the cultural kind: the core of their sense of attainment centres on children's language skills, and an important supplement to this concerns the nurturing of children's competence in high culture.

Parents attach great importance to their children's adeptness in oral and written English because it signifies that these children can enter a better school and, later in life, find a better job. Furthermore, since the Handover in 1997 many Hong Kong parents see Mandarin as increasingly important, particularly given the emergence of China as a power to reckon with in the global economy. Not far behind language on the importance scale is 'cultivation' in high culture, which children are expected to possess if they are to gain entrance to prestigious schools. As a result, four out of the five families that I have worked with pay for private English lessons and piano lessons for their children, and three of the five enrolled their children in Mandarin lessons at the age of five. The extreme case is Angel, Amy's daughter. When she was in Primary one, Angel not only spent a full day at school but also managed to take nine additional classes every week: piano on Monday, English on Tuesday and Wednesday, ballet on Thursday, mathematics and English on Friday, and Mandarin, English pronunciation and ballet on Saturday. Of the nine private lessons, four involved English, and one was in Mandarin.

Since these parents are pragmatic consumers, they consume products that can heighten their children's learning initiative and abilities. Hong Kong parents will not use a Disney movie as a babysitter, but they do treat Disney *educational kits* as babysitters. All the families in my study have Disney educational products: Teresa bought Linus *Winnie the Pooh 123s* and *Winnie the Pooh ABCs* so that her son could learn counting and letter recognition when he was three years old; Catherine bought bilingual Disney storybooks and Disney's *Read Along* CD-and-storybook series to help Alex learn both English and written Chinese; and Amy bought Disney's *Sing Along Songs* and several of Disney's English-language storybooks

so that Angel could learn English.<sup>42</sup> Parents bought Disney edutainment kits because, even before the purchase, both they and their children were familiar with the characters. People's 'familiarity' with Disney characters, caused by the omni-presence of the Disney image as discussed in a previous section, encourages parents to purchase the Disney brand instead of other edutainment products:

Becky: It [Disney] belongs to my generation ... These characters are attractive to us. We watched Disney when we grew up. The BBC also has a set of teaching-English materials. Its main character is an owl and it's cheaper, I should say a lot cheaper. But as a mother, I think what attracts me can attract my son. Perhaps this is the wrong idea. Perhaps the owl also attracts him. But who buys the set? The mother, not the son. They [Disney characters] are attractive to me, and therefore I bought this set.

*Disney's World of English* is my focus here because the first set is for children aged three to six and recommends daily use over the course of three years. Consisting of twelve English learning books and many vocabulary cards, the set costs HK \$14 000 (\$2 444 AUD), which is slightly below Hong Kong's average household monthly income of HK \$15 500 (\$2 706 AUD),<sup>43</sup> and about ten times the cost of another brand's English learning VCD set. Among the five families I have studied, Kat and Becky use the first set and Becky paid the full price for it.

However, *Disney's World of English* is not developed by the Walt Disney Company itself but by a licensee, World Family Ltd. The English kit emphasises children's ability to learn American English as their mother tongue through 'listening, absorbing and copying'. The kit asserts that its approach to learning is not complex; the claim is that children aged three to six who play it everyday for three years can learn to speak English as their mother tongue and can do so easily because the kit successfully creates an English learning environment. It was first introduced in 1980 in Japan and has served over 100 000 families across Japan and Taiwan.<sup>44</sup> Introduced to Hong Kong in the late 1990s, it soon became popular with middle class families.

Attracted to the concept of an English learning environment, Becky and Kat bought *Disney's World of English*. Both women have Filipino maids who take care of their children and communicate with them in English, but as Becky and Kat are unsure of their maids' English-language teaching skills, they have asked them to use the Disney set they have bought and to play the disc and sing the songs with the children in the morning. At night, the mothers read to the children from the same books.

The parents are suspicious of the content of Disney movies but they are not suspicious of the content of the Disney English learning kit. Mickey, Minnie, Donald, Goofy and Pluto

become an important entry point through which two-year-old and three-year-old children begin their English-language learning. The parents allow their children to watch the same disc, day after day and week after week, until the children can memorise all the linguistic details of each speaker. Kat tried out Book 8 in front of me. The following dialogue was in English (unless indicated):

Kat: I am a ...

Stephanie lowers her voice: ... a strong man.

Kat: I can lift ...

Don and Stephanie: ... a hundred pounds.

[Then Dondon and Stephanie speak themselves.]

Don: Can you lift two hundred pounds?

Stephanie lowers her voice: Of course I can. I am a strong man.

Don: Can you lift three hundred pounds?

Stephanie lowers her voice: Of course I can. I am a strong man.

Don: Can you lift four hundred pounds?

Stephanie lowers her voice: Of course I can. I am a strong man.

Kat to Kim [in Cantonese]: Every night is like that. I want to finish it as soon as possible and then I can go to sleep.

Kat: five hundred, six hundred ...

Don [in Cantonese]: No, only the last three are like that, not now!

[Kat then follows the book and talks.]

Don [in Cantonese]: No, it's not like that. You should ask a question, not just talk to yourself.

Stephanie sings an English song after a while.

Kat [in Cantonese]: She is singing a song from another book.

Don [in Cantonese]: It's in book six.

Kat [in Cantonese]: And she learns the word *hippopotamus*.

From Kat's perspective, the 'pure entertainment' of Disney movies contains gender stereotypes that would encourage her daughters to think only of marriage; the Disney English-language kits, in contrast, are educational and the cultural concerns are of secondary importance.

Kim: When I played back the Disney kit's tape that you tried in front of me, I was a bit scared because the children learn not only the pronunciation but also what it means to be a man—you know, 'I am a strong man.' Have you thought about it?

Kat: You mean gender stereotypes? No, I have not thought about this before.

Kim: Have you ever worried about this?

Kat: For pronunciation, they also watch other English learning programs and I hope that they won't just believe in one system of phonetics. About stereotypes, I always tell them about alternative ways of thinking. For example, regarding men, I told them that they just need to find a good man to marry and that daddy is a good man. Being a good man means so many things: a rich man, a handsome man, or a strong man does not necessarily make a good man.

Language acquisition is more important here than cultural issues. While cultural critics criticise the post-handover use of Mandarin as the medium of instruction in Hong Kong schools and attribute this use to the Mainland's cultural imperialism, Kat accepts such changes because she considers them pragmatic: 'What's the problem? They speak Cantonese at home. Their English and Mandarin must be better than ours so that they can earn a living'. We should note here that Kat's actions are not the direct result of unconscious acts, and she is not thoughtlessly adopting other parents' behaviors. Rather, she understands clearly the 'lack that characterises her and her husband; because of their lack of 'world exposure', and their sub-standard English (the two are closely related in her eyes), the career choices available to Kat and her husband are not as broad as those choices available to 'better' counterparts in society.

Kat: The most ideal case for me is that ... they can get a scholarship to study overseas. In the globalised world, they should have world exposure. Their parents do not have it, and we feel bad about this.

...

Kim: How about Mandarin?

Kat: She has not started learning Mandarin but we found one school for her ... We accept the idea that Mandarin is the medium of instruction in school. What's the problem? They speak Cantonese at home. Their English and Mandarin must be better than ours so that they can earn a living.

Kim: Do you think that you can't earn a living?

Kat: Of course I don't.

Kim [expressing astonishment at the answer]: What do you mean by having the ability to earn a living then? And you should know that speaking good English and Mandarin can't guarantee you a good job.

Kat: I don't know. Let's say, if my oral Mandarin is as good as a native speaker's, then I can work for Phoenix TV,<sup>45</sup> and I won't need to work for TVB Jade, ATV or Cable. I get more chances. If my English is very good, I get more opportunities ... You know, HK's media. Of eleven Chinese newspapers and two English newspapers, only one English newspaper is OK, but how come I can't be one of those top reporters? English is the barrier. I am in

grade C but they are in grade A. I mean, only grade A people can work at Reuters: I can't ... Actually, if I tell you I am not a pushy parent, it is a lie. I would very much like them to do something I can't do.

Kim: Such as acquiring better English than you and I have?

Kat: Yes, because *we* know so clearly the *limitations* of people living in Hong Kong. You must have professional skills to survive in this globalised world ... For me, children need to leave Hong Kong because, you know, [the job market of] Hong Kong will get saturated after twenty years. If they don't have the ability to go outside Hong Kong, their development will be more limited than ours.

Kim: But where does one go?

Kat: At least the condition of leaving Hong Kong is language, right? Other skills should also be acquired, but the most important thing should be language.

The parents in my study attribute their successful ascent of the social ladder to academic achievement, but they qualify this success as 'partial' and are conscious of their 'lack', which hinders their further success in, for example, the job market. In our conversations, Kat lamented several times her 'sub-standard' English. Kat had graduated from her university thirteen years earlier and has never stopped studying since. After doing her Bachelor's degree in history, she completed a law degree and a Master's degree in journalism. The former degree reflects Kat's interest in the field, whereas the latter degree reflects her pragmatic efforts to tune up her English. In the past, Kat worked as a reporter for two local English newspapers, *The Standard* and *The South China Morning Post*. After several years, she changed to her present job when opportunities for promotion at the newspapers grew rare. Kat's workplace experiences have become a significant part of the cultural schemata from which she frames her sense of the global and the local and from which, therefore, she selects her 'strategies of action'<sup>46</sup> toward her two little daughters. Kat's comments on her lack shed light on her intention to build a material and social environment that will shape her children's habits and (language) skills in a way that successfully prepares them for careers in the increasingly competitive labor markets of the transnational economy.

From Kat's perspective, being local is an impediment. For instance, a Hong Kong person whose native dialect is Cantonese and who refuses to master English or Mandarin will lack the cultural capital necessary for economic viability.<sup>47</sup> Bombarded by the sense of a dominant global arena and struggling local arenas, Kat makes every effort to shape her two little children into global citizens who can go to and stay in the English-speaking world or the Mandarin-speaking world, rather than remaining in the 'saturated' local space of Hong Kong. If being local cannot strengthen one's career options, then such cultural identity loses its importance. Convinced that local pop culture is mind-numbing and that Cantonese has

no economic value, parents rid their domestic spheres of local pop culture and urge children to learn foreign languages (English and Mandarin) diligently.

#### — CONCLUSION

According to Baudrillard, consumption is based on lack. This may be questionable as a general model, and theories of desire as a positive force have much to offer. However, living in a small city, facing an ailing economy, and acknowledging the growth in regional and international competition, the parents in my study do feel an enormous sense of 'lack' that induces Hong Kong's high consumption of economically valuable cultural goods, including language kits like Disney's. The consumption patterns of middle class families indicate that consumption is not just about leisure and lifestyle in symbolic and material terms but also about fulfilling the changing and adaptive *local* cultural imaginary, which accords preference to the cosmopolitan figure who uses global cultural capital to navigate the world.

It is evident that these parents do not accept Disney values as a total cultural package and that they are partially successful in negotiating and resisting certain cultural meanings offered by Disney. In the 'cultural supermarket',<sup>48</sup> it seems that parents can select their favourite cultural products for their child-rearing practices. However, consumer power is not absolute. Because a few transnational conglomerates dominate the media market and parents cannot access with equal ease the offerings of all cultures, parents will find it much easier to 'choose' which particular Disney merchandise to consume than not to consume any Disney products at all; because our consumption of a particular culture is largely determined by its market value, parents have greater agency to decide to use or not to use Disney learning kits than they do to choose not to teach children English and Mandarin. Consumer agency, in this sense, is constrained by both the cultural domination of Disney and the global order. At the same time, parents' consumption behaviour reinforces cultural hegemony in a specific way. As the economic viability of local identity (being 'Hongkongese') decreases, Hong Kong's middle class parents actively and reflexively purchase those glocalised products which address our 'cosmopolitan' desires, amplify our economic and social needs and forge meaningful and distinguishable social identities and relations. As a way for these parents to maintain their privileged but insecure local class positioning, such local actions not only maintain local class disparity but reinforce the unbalanced Hong Kong–Mainland power relation, the *pax Americana*, and the emerging *China-based* world order.

In this sense, the relations between the local and the global are more dynamic and complicated than we might expect. In order to understand these parents' consumption practices in terms of cultural globalisation, we need to consider them from four perspectives. First, there is always the consumerist, fun-seeking element in Disney—no cultural imperialism writ large, but part of a range of such diversionary practices churned out by global culture

today. The parents in my study purchase occasional, expensive, globally-sourced diversions and in this their behaviour is not resistant. Second, Disneyfied consumerist landscapes such as shopping malls, merchandising and Disney animations are seen as a contested site for a more mundane moral project of passing on moral guidelines and teaching and learning how to be a human being. Here, parents' resistance to Disney's promotion of consumerist behaviour and their locally inspired family standards regarding screen violence, mischief, and morals can be seen as a resistance to globalised consumption and a reassertion of local mundane morality. Third, the parents in my study use cultural goods self-consciously to achieve class distinction; their aspiration of becoming 'modern' and 'cosmopolitan' is, like the process itself, laden with the *local* class context and their lived sense of their experiences of upward mobility. Parents' use of Disney (and other) products is an uptake specifically to solidify their distinctive position in a newly proclaimed global order. Uptake is not equal to resistance.<sup>49</sup> When a local university graduate cannot get a job in a prestigious local hotel because of his or her lack of non-local experiences and non-local ideas, then the local culture and identity must—in order to be successful—undergo a transformation along lines prescribed by the global culture—which is to say, the dominant culture. At this point, local action constitutes the dominant global order inasmuch as the local community actively and consciously acquires globalising cultural capital (such as proficiency in certain languages). Fourth, this cultural consumption is also a local identity project involving two facets; the government's re-deployment of cultural symbols and ordinary people's own local use of these. The parents in my study fit the SAR government's imagineering project in that they try their best to become the modern, competitive, cosmopolitan beings promoted by the government after the handover.

Parents are turning their children into cosmopolitans who can 'earn a living' in the world's near-future workforce. In this sense, the conscious acquisition of 'foreign' languages through consuming Disney and other education kits reconstitutes the deterritorialised hybridity of local Hong Kong culture and heightens Hong Kong's 'cosmopolitan' ways of life. Unfortunately, such ways of life are not the ways of life that many scholars attribute to cosmopolitanism, if by this we mean that people consider themselves world citizens, concern themselves with all humanity and respect cultural pluralism based on democracy.<sup>50</sup> Parents who ask their children to excel in English do not want their children to excel in individualism and democracy; instead, these parents' child-rearing method emphasises hierarchical parent-child relations in which the child embodies obedience. What so many parents hope to mould their children into is the type of consumerist cosmopolitan who has little contact with local popular culture (the relatively low-cultural-capital world of cheap commodities targeted at child consumers) but who can access the relatively high-cultural-capital world of expensive commodities (piano lessons, English and Mandarin fluency), that all but

determine where one lives, what one eats, what one listens to, and so on. This consumerist cosmopolitanism has little to do with belonging, commitment, or the rights and the obligations of citizenship.

The hierarchical parenting method works in tandem with the government's authoritarian regime, and parents' currency-based evaluation of local culture also coincides with the government's city planning of Hong Kong, whereby Hong Kong should develop as a world city based on consumption instead of civil citizenship. As Ku argues, the postcolonial HKSAR government reinterprets Hong Kong history as an economic success story.<sup>51</sup> To maintain this economic miracle, the SAR government strives to develop Hong Kong into a world-class city comparable to London and New York, and such a city must provide 'soft and hard infrastructure' and an improved business environment<sup>52</sup> for 'multinational companies and Mainland enterprises'.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the task at hand for Hong Kong is to establish rule of law, efficient administration, political stability and language proficiency in English and Mandarin. The interests of transnational corporations are protected by low tax rates, minimal government control, minimal disclosure requirements on businesses and discouragement of union membership. Hong Kong will be an optimal space in which transnational corporations can do business. Nothing serious is said, however, about the desirability of a local community whose values stray outside the laws of supply and demand.

Hong Kong Disneyland was built under such circumstances. Putting the deal together in secrecy, the government, without public consultation, withdrew HK \$22.95 billion from the public coffers to sign the deal with the Walt Disney Company, financing ten per cent in return for a forty seven per cent stake. After the Asian financial crisis, the SAR government admitted that Hong Kong's 'bubble' economy had burst. Trying to recoup from the downturn, the government promised to restructure Hong Kong's economy on the basis of consumerism, from a reliance on the property market to tourism development, and to commodify the city into a dreamscape for 'touristic voyeurism'.<sup>54</sup> Through the Disneyland project, the government successfully but temporarily builds its own legitimacy and redefines Hong Kong's distinction from China in terms based not on political aspirations but on cultural, cosmopolitan and consumption-based ways of life.

When a community believes in authoritarian parenting and has relatively little agency to protest against corporatism, 'expert system'<sup>55</sup> solutions and dictatorial planning for tourism development,<sup>56</sup> it is hard to imagine how parents' ambivalent attitudes and consumption practices toward Disney products (sometimes acceptance, sometimes resistance and sometimes appropriation) might target the corporate transformation of the community into a dreamscape. With even stronger phantasmagoric force<sup>57</sup> beneath that landscape's surface, we have less control over our work, our daily lives and our environment. We have the right to choose neither which companies and which experts plan our city, nor which type of

government and which representatives decide our community's present and future. Our right to choose is limited to consumer products. In democracy's cities, citizens may fall into thinking that consumers should make choices on the basis of professional advice, rather than be active producers of knowledge.<sup>58</sup> In Hong Kong, the public does not have the right to choose between political parties and no cultural supermarket can provide products that compensate for a 'lack' of formal democratic citizenship rights.

Agency in regulating our own cultural consumption does not equate to democracy; self-assertion in commodity culture is not the same as human rights. Consumption of certain Disney products in a certain way is an acceptance, a resistance or an uptake, depending on which perspective we emphasise, but it cannot be equated to political resistance. The concept of agency has often been deployed in reception and consumption studies, but as I have tried to suggest it is not a useful term when it predicates a continuum with no sense of *gradations* and *conditions* built in. This paper hopes to complicate our understanding of consumption behaviour by arguing that we must consider these behaviours in various perspectives under different conditions, instead of reading our own theoretical or political agenda into (in this case) parents' behaviours.<sup>59</sup>

Cultural meanings and politics are concretised in goods. The consumption of Disney goods like any other can be a site of both liberation and domination, depending on what aspects of power the researcher addresses. Hong Kong families' consumption of Disney goods does not necessarily reflect a love for Disney's conception of family, child development and morality; but Hong Kong parents' consumption of certain Disney products does forge a link to their aspiration to realise a particular type of 'good life' and its political effects. If cultural research in cultural studies is not about the study of culture but about the politics of cultures, then consumption studies should not be overlooked as just a study of the symbolic realm; rather, these studies situate concrete concerns in the materiality of peoples' lives, limitations, and aspirations, as they respond to economic arrangements, emotional structures, and cultural discourses<sup>60</sup> within the broad, complex webs of power relations forming the domestic, national and international spheres.

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1. The English translation is ‘‘The presence of Disney can only increase our reputation as a large supermarket of consumption’’, deplored Kimburley Choi, a doctoral student at the University of Lingnan.’ Bruno Philip, ‘Les Hongkongais ne veulent pas  tre pris pour des Mickeys,’ (‘Hong Kongers don’t want to be taken for Mickey’s’) 14 September 2005, <<http://www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0,1-0@2-3234,36-688459,0.html>>.
2. Gordon Mathews, *Global Culture / Individual Identity: Searching for Home in the Cultural Supermarket*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000.
3. For example, in the first book devoted solely to women’s views on and experiences of HIV and AIDS, the researched women urged Lather and Smithies to publish *Troubling the Angels* as soon as possible because the women did not have time to wait. Patti Lather and Chris Smithies, *Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colo., 1997.
4. Pertti Alasuutari, *Desire and Craving: A Cultural Theory of Alcoholism*, University of New York Press, Albany, 1992.
5. Richard Robison and David S.G. Goodman argue that the Asian middle class plays a decisive role in political transformation. See ‘The New Rich in Asia: Economic Development, Social Status and Political Consciousness’, in Richard Robison and David S. G. Goodman (eds), *The New Rich in Asia: Mobile Phones, McDonald’s and Middle-Class Revolution*, Routledge, London, New York, 1996, pp. 1–18. Local scholars have different views on the role that middle class members play in political transformation. Tai Lok Lui and Chun Hung Ng argue that Hong Kong’s democratic movement is doomed to failure if it relies on middle class populations for their unique interests, whether conservative or otherwise; whereas Anthony Cheung views the reliance as a positive strategy. He established SynergyNet and argues for ‘better governance reforms.’ See 吕大乐, 王志辉, 香港中产阶級處境觀察, 三聯書店(香港)有限公司, 香港, 2003; 陳昭偉 et al, 七一的中產論述, 七一的中產論述, 香港, 2003; Synergy Net website <[http://www.synergynet.org.hk/en\\_main.htm](http://www.synergynet.org.hk/en_main.htm)>.
6. According to Morris, previous studies by Fiske, Willis and Radway operated under the assumption that scholars know the ‘true’ better than the researched people and that respondents became ventriloquists for scholars’ political agendas. See Meaghan Morris, ‘Banality in Cultural Studies’, in Patricia Mellencamp (ed), *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, London, 1990, pp. 14–43.
7. The Trade Development Council, starting from 2003, aimed to build up Hong Kong as the ‘Consumption City of China.’ Here I appropriate the term while adding ‘Disney,’ <<http://www.tdctrade.com/econforum/bea/bea031001.htm>>.
8. ‘HK a Magnet for Luxury Retailers’, 1 December 2004, <<http://news.gov.hk/en/category/ontherecord/041201/html/041201en11001.htm>>.
9. ‘‘We Love HK’’ Campaign Ends with a Great Success’, 2003, <<http://www.welovehongkong.com/success.asp?lang=EN>>; ‘We Love HK’, 6 May 2003, <<http://www.bar.org.hk/news.htm>>.
10. Sangmee Bak, ‘McDonald’s in Seoul: Food Choices, Identity, and Nationalism’, in James L. Watson (ed), *Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1997; Beng-Huat Chua, ‘Consuming Asians: Ideas and Issues’, in Beng-Huat Chua (ed), *Consumption in Asia: Lifestyles and Identities*, Routledge, London, New York, 2000, pp. 136–60.
11. In 2005, there were 133 shopping malls managed by the Hong Kong Housing Authority among 177 public housing estates and 192 subsidised housing estates. Hong Kong Housing Department, ‘Residential Properties’, <<http://www.housingauthority.gov.hk/en/residential>>.
12. Shatin’s population increased from 30 000 residents in the 1970s to about 640 000 according to the 2001 census.
13. New Town Plaza contains 60 restaurants, 124 fashion stores, 44 beauty parlours and pharmacy stores, 26 gift shops and bookshops, 4 department stores, 15 electrical appliance stores, 31 jewellery shops, 29 home furnishings, 13 travel agencies, and 23 banks and mobile service shops. Because of its sheer size, the mall always holds exhibitions, performances, and even car shows.
14. Synergy can be understood as a combined action among individual units. It is the key strategy used by Disney. The brand of Disney derives from Disney’s movies and merchandise. The setup of Disneyland in 1955 used Disney’s own created characters and brands as the basis for the park’s attractions. The introduction of Disneyland on ABC further promoted the Disney brand.
15. Alexandra A. Seno, ‘A Craze for Disney Chic Sweeps Hong Kong’, *International Herald Tribune*, 15 September 2005, <[http://www.iht.com/bin/print\\_ipub.php?file=/articles/2005/09/14/opinion/rdisney.php](http://www.iht.com/bin/print_ipub.php?file=/articles/2005/09/14/opinion/rdisney.php)>.
16. <[http://www.ipd.gov.hk/eng/promotion\\_edu/no\\_fakes/nfretailer/Toys&Gifts.pdf](http://www.ipd.gov.hk/eng/promotion_edu/no_fakes/nfretailer/Toys&Gifts.pdf)>
17. Mike Schneider, ‘Disney Icon Mickey Mouse Turns 75’, *AP Entertainment*, 18 November 2003, <<http://www.newsday.com/entertainment/news/wi>

- re/sns-ap-mickey-at-75,0,116499.story?coll=sns-ap-entertainment-headlines>.
18. Steve Jobs, the Chairman and the CEO of Pixar Animation Studios, claimed that Pixar's computer-animated techniques reduced the movie's production costs greatly. With traditional techniques, the film would have cost between US \$100 million and US \$125 million, but with Pixar techniques, the cost was between US \$75 million and US \$100 million. From 'With Digital Technology, There is Room for Small Players Too', *Economist.com*, 19 November 1998, <[http://www.economist.com/surveys/displayStory.cfm?Story\\_id=176659](http://www.economist.com/surveys/displayStory.cfm?Story_id=176659)>.
  19. *Toy Story* is the 65th highest-grossing movie in history, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toy\\_Story](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toy_Story)>.
  20. C. W. Nevius, 'Pixar Tells Story Behind *Toy Story*', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 August 2005, <<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/08/23/BAGDKBPA1.DTL>>.
  21. Alan Bryman identified four trends reinforced by the Disneyland park: theming, hybrid consumption, merchandise and emotional labour, and Disneyization. These four trends enhance consumers' propensity to spend money on both goods and services across the globe.
  22. I borrow the term from Sum. See Ngai-ling Sum, 'Paradox of a Tourist Centre: Hong Kong as a Site of Play and a Place of Fear', paper read at 5th Annual Meeting of the Hong Kong Sociological Association, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, 2003.
  23. Ming Kwan Lee found that although fewer Hong Kong people feel the need and the obligation to have children than in the past, and that although people widely shared doubts about having children and sacrificing for them, most still endorse the belief that 'marriage without children is not fully complete.' Ming Kwan Lee, 'The Family Way', in Siu Kai Lau, Ming Kwan Lee, Po San Wan, Sui Lun Wong (eds), *Indicators of Social Development: Hong Kong 1993*, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, 1995, p. 4.
  24. Chun Hung Ng, 'New Directions in Cultural Studies', in Elizabeth Sinn (ed) *Culture and Society in Hong Kong*, Centre of Asian Studies, Hong Kong, 1995.
  25. State policies reflect an increasing concern for the shielding of children from abuse in the workplace and at home: for instance, the instigation of nine-year compulsory education and the establishment of the Youth Charter. See Chun Hung Ng, 'Popular Culture and Domestic Ideals', in M.H. Sze and Chun Hung Ng (eds), *Studies in Hong Kong Popular Culture*, Joint Publishing, Hong Kong, 1993, pp. 123–7.
  26. Ng found that regardless of class differences, 77.6 percent of respondents agreed with the idea that 'parents should plan for children's futures and should be frugal in their own entertainment and consumption.' See Ng, 'New Directions', p. 349.
  27. The term *pragmatist* refers to people who hold a more practical attitude toward consumption. It is borrowed from Annie Hau Nung Chan, 'Middle-Class Formation and Consumption in Hong Kong', in Beng-Huat Chua (ed), *Consumption in Asia: Lifestyles and Identities*, Routledge, London, New York, 2000, pp. 98–134.
  28. Hong Kong people practice a gift-giving custom, and gift giving in Hong Kong typically involves parents and adults who give gifts not to each other but to children (Joy 2001). It is common that if my friend or relative has a child, I would buy gifts for the child instead of for the adult, because children do not have money to spend on their favourite products. Annamma Joy, 'Gift Giving in Hong Kong and the Continuum of Social Ties', *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 239–56; Joseph Bosco, 'The McDonald's Snoopy Craze in Hong Kong', in Gordon Mathews and Tai Lok Lui (eds), *Consuming Hong Kong*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, 2001, pp. 263–86.
  29. *Digimon* is a Japanese TV animated cartoon series. Alex likes *Digimon*, whereas Catherine disapproves when Alex watches it because of its Japanese militarist mentality. There are four TV series of *Digimon 01*, namely *Digimon* (2001), *Digimon Zero Two* (2002), *Digimon Tamers* (2003), and *Digimon Frontier* (2004).
  30. Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys, TV, and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing*, Verso, London, 1993.
  31. Joseph Man Chan and Paul S.N. Lee, 'Mass Communication: Consumption and Evaluation', in Siu Kai Lau, Ming Kwan Lee, Po San Wan, Sui Lun Wong (eds), *Indicators of Social Development: Hong Kong 1990*, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, 1992, pp. 91–2.
  32. Po King Choi and Ching Kwan Lee, 'The Hidden Abode of Domestic Labour: The Case of Hong Kong', in Fanny M. Cheung (ed), *Engendering Hong Kong Society: A Gender Perspective of Women's Status*, Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, 1997.
  33. Wing Yee Kimburley Choi, 'To Watch or Not to Watch: Why Didn't Mother Watch Horror Movies with Me Again?' in Kam Wah Chan, Kit Mui Day Wong, Lai Ching Leung, Wai Yee Jo Lee, Chi Kwan Ho (eds), *Difference and Equality: New Challenges for the Women's Movement in Hong Kong*, Association for the Advancement of Feminism,

- Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, 2001.
34. Gan and Xing found that women respondents always suppress their individual preference to their mothering roles. When they were asked what they thought about the media's portrayal of women, they immediately declared that some images are obscene and have a bad influence on children. Even though they found some advertisements attractive, they would worry about the susceptibility of their children's subconscious to negative influences therein. As a result, the women acted as gatekeepers and suppressed their own sexual desires. Cui Ping Gan and Xing Ling Feng, 'TV Commercials: Conflicts Between Mothers' Roles and Women's Liberation', in Kam Wah Chan, Kit Mui Day Wong, Lai Ching Leung, Wai Yee Jo Lee, Chi Kwan Ho (eds), *Difference and Equality: New Challenges for the Women's Movement in Hong Kong*, p. 206.
  35. Chan and Lee found that over 70 percent of Hong Kong households possessed a VCR in the eighties. Joseph Man Chan and Paul S.N. Lee, p. 96.
  36. There are exceptions: *The Lion King* (1994) and *The Little Mermaid* (1989) were accused of presenting gratuitously sexual images.
  37. I borrow the term 'Chinese traditionalism' from Hoiman Chan and Rance P.L. Lee. They argue that although Confucianism can no longer be abided by, its ethical tenets have become part of the social norms in everyday life in Hong Kong society. See Hoiman Chan and Rance P.L. Lee, 'Hong Kong Families: At the Crossroads of Modernism and Traditionalism', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 1, vol. 26, no. 1, 1995, p. 83.
  38. Box office information came from the Motion Picture Industry Association, <<http://www.mpia.org.hk/mpia/indexc.htm>>.
  39. Thomas W.P. Wong and Chun Hung Ng, 'Education Ethos and Social Change', in Siu Kai Lau, Ming Kwan Lee, Po San Wan, Sui Lun Wong (eds), *Indicators of Social Development: Hong Kong 1995*, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, 1997.
  40. University of Western Sydney and Australian Broadcasting Authority, *Children's Views about Media Harm. Monograph 10*, Australian Broadcasting Authority, New South Wales, 2000.
  41. Chan's qualitative research on the views of leisure among the 25 married individuals across different class and family life-cycle stages found that the families without children would save money for children's living environment and education, and that the low income couples with dependent children were reluctant to spend money on themselves but willing to spend money on unnecessary children's items such as music. Wing-sang Oliver Chan, *Intra-Familial Resources Allocation and Leisure Pursuits among Married Couples in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, 1999.
  42. Amy chose to use not *Disney's World of English* but Longman's English learning kit because Disney's set is far more expensive than Longman's: the former costs around HK \$40 000 whereas the latter less than HK \$2 000. Because Angel likes reading, her room is full of books, in both English and Chinese, and from different publishers including Disney.
  43. In 2003, the median monthly household income in Hong Kong is HK \$15 500. Census and Statistics Department, *Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2004*, Government Printer, Hong Kong, 2004, p. 40.
  44. World Family Shopping, <<http://shopping.worldfamily.com.tw/wfshop/about.asp>>.
  45. In Hong Kong, there are four free TV channels: TVB Jade (in Cantonese), ATV (in Cantonese), TVB Pearl (in English), and ATV World (in English). Starting in the nineties, different pay-TV channels became available, such as Star TV and Phoenix TV: the former is an English channel whereas the latter, a Mandarin channel.
  46. I borrow the term 'strategies of action' from Ann Swidler. The meaning of 'strategies of action' concerns the patterns of behaviour that emerge when 'actors routinely go about attaining their goals.' Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*, University of Chicago, Chicago, London, 2001, p. 82.
  47. The Cantonese language has been marginalised as a 'local' dialect, and Cantonese culture is often seen as low-brow popular culture. Hong Kong has always been described as a 'cultural desert,' although its popular culture proliferates.
  48. The term 'cultural supermarket' is from Gordon Mathews, 'Cultural Identity and Consumption in Post-Colonial Hong Kong', in Gordon Mathews and Tai Lok Lui (eds), *Consuming Hong Kong*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, 2001, pp. 287–318.
  49. See Anne Freadman, 'Anyone for Tennis?' in *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, Taylor & Francis, London, 1994; 'Uptake' in *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre: Strategies for Stability and Change*, Hampton Press, Cresskill, N.J., 2002, pp. 39–56.
  50. On whether cosmopolitanism can help develop democracy and 'moral economy' if cosmopolitanism means a lack of social solidarity, commitment, and belonging, see Craig Calhoun, 'Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism', in Umüt

- Özkirimli (ed), *Nationalism and Its Future*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003.
51. Agnes Shuk-mei Ku, 'Postcolonial Cultural Trends in Hong Kong: Imagining the Local, the National, and the Global', in Ming K. Chang, Alvin Y. So (eds), *Crisis and Transformation in China's Hong Kong*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, 2002, pp. 343–62.
  52. HKSAR government, *Policy Address 2001*, phrase 31, <<http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/pa01/e29.htm>>.
  53. HKSAR government, *Policy Address 2001*, phrase 82, <<http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/pa01/e82.htm>>.
  54. Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1991, p. 51.
  55. Giddens argues that money and the expert system are two disembedding mechanisms in the development of modern social institutions and that these two mechanisms depend on 'trust' in 'abstract capacities.' Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity, Cambridge, 1990.
  56. Colin Michael Hall, *Tourism and Politics: Policy, Power, and Place*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, New York, 1994.
  57. On this use of 'phantasmagoric' to describe forces of modernity that lessen our control over social realities see Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 1990.
  58. Engin F. Isin, 'Global City-Regions and Citizenship', in R. Keil, G. R. Wekerle, David V J. Bell (eds), *Local Places in the Age of the Global City*, Black Rose Books, Montreal, New York, 1996, pp. 21–36.
  59. My thinking on this is greatly influenced by Paula Saukko. See *Doing Research in Cultural Studies: An Introduction to Classical and New Methodological Approaches*, Sage, London, Thousand Oaks, 2003, chapter 2.
  60. Paula Saukko, p. 51.