

It was a journalist, Hans W. Vahlefeld (Hamburg), who gave the concluding presentation and, not surprisingly, he did so with a more pessimistic outlook. Vahlefeld reminded the participants of the relevance of human rights as an issue about which the West should always be concerned, and he regretted that questions of morality are excluded in almost all the economic discourses concerning China. The future of Hong Kong as a democracy may not be too bright, and Vahlefeld concluded by warning: "Perhaps one day the West will be confronted with the accusation that it did nothing for Hong Kong's liberty."

*Martina Zellmer-Bjick*

### **Lifestyling in Southeast Asia**

Workshop at the Sociology of Development Research Centre  
(SDRC), University of Bielefeld, 12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> May, 1997

The workshop was chaired by Prof. Dr. Hans-Dieter Evers, Director of SDRC, and Alexander Horstmann, Research Fellow.

Presentations at the workshop included:

Dr. Solvay Gerke, SDRC (Bielefeld): 'New Approaches to Lifestyling, Consumerism and Social Inequality'; Prof. Chua Beng-Huat, National University of Singapore: 'Consuming Asians: Ideas and Issues', Dr. Mark Hobart, SOAS (London): 'A Very Peculiar Practice, or the Unimportance of Penguins'; Alexander Horstmann, SDRC (Bielefeld): 'Lifestyling as Empowerment: Strategies of Social Actors in Time and Space'; Dr. Mark Hobart, SOAS (London): 'Consuming Passions. Overinterpreting Television-Viewing in Bali'.

Dr. Solvay Gerke highlighted some fundamental aspects of her theory of Lifestyling as applied to her studies on the new Indonesian middle class. Globalisation and mass consumption make available a large range of expensive, but mass produced consumer items. Stressing the symbolic value of commodities, Gerke argued that the new bureaucratic middle class in Indonesia is involved in symbolic consumption as a way of life. Without the economic means of leading a middle class life the lower middle classes engage in what she called virtual consumption and lifestyling. Virtual mid-

dle classes have to buy fakes to display the referential necessary for middle class membership. She further distinguished lifestyle from 'Lifestyling'. Lifestyle allows for social classification. Lifestylization is a process by which the new middle class is differentiating itself from other poorer groups.

Prof. Chua Beng-Huat drew on his book to be published in a series on the new rich in Asia.<sup>1</sup> Chua made a number of crucial clarifications to the concept and moral discourses of consumerism in Asia. First, improved material life increasingly constitutes the performance criterion for political legitimacy of less than democratic governments in SEA. Second, consumerism makes apparent the emergence of new class divisions in SEA. Third, consumerism is seen by the older generation as Westernization. The moral debate is a generational conflict between traditional parents and their 'Westernized' children.

Dr. Mark Hobart gave a most entertaining lecture on the ignorance of anthropologists in the field and a new dimension to research as Lifestyling. Hobart deconstructed the ethnographic approach as a practice. Practitioners see other people as governable, salvable, translatable, transformable, manageable and saleable. Hobart described fieldwork as a confrontation between anthropologists and the people. He referred to a large stock of text about the Western body in the tropics. Fieldwork becomes a matter of survival, voyeurism, dislocation. In short, Hobart sees a growth of ignorance of academics, consultants and developers about the unknown, overinterpreted other. He proposes an alternative ethnography in which the anthropologist learns to listen to the people and be sensitive to the issues they themselves talk about.

Alexander Horstmann introduced his ethnography on the new rich in the deep south of the Thai Kingdom, bordering Malaysia. Horstmann provided an empirical example which illustrated many theoretical concepts raised during this workshop. However, he aimed for an original contribution to the literature on globalisation and lifestyle. The new rich are the lifestyle agents or culture builders who select specific building items from the social fields market and state and mobilise various types of capital in their social and economic behaviour. In southern Thailand, ethnicity is a key strategic resource. Linking lifestyles to larger processes of bureaucratisation and globalisation, Horstmann attempted to show the way lifestyling empowers respective strategic groups in the social struggles taking place in southern Thailand.

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<sup>1</sup> Chua Beng-Huat (ed.): *Consuming Asians: Material Life of Asia's New Rich*. London: Routledge, forthcoming.

Dr. Mark Hobart presented a second exciting paper, entitled 'Consuming Passions. Overinterpreting Television-Viewing in Bali', which constituted an attractive start for an additional meeting on media and consumption on 13<sup>th</sup> May, 1997. Focusing on the notions of agency and practice, Hobart stimulated a lively debate on media and cultural studies. He argued that, while the beauty of the media interpreter is reproduced by media studies and anthropologists risk becoming organic intellectuals for business, audiences are largely unknown. Mark Hobart is currently interested in the practices of television-viewing in Bali.

In sum, all participants found the workshop enjoyable and plan to meet again at a later stage. The papers are available on demand from SDRC (Sociology of Development Research Centre), University of Bielefeld, D-3501 Bielefeld.

*Alexander Horstmann*