

## *Conferences, Workshops, and Seminars*

Workshop on “Lifestyling in Southeast Asia”, 12–13 May 1997,  
Sociology of Development Research Centre (SDRC),  
University of Bielefeld

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

The 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 she applied it to her studies on the new Indonesian middle class. Globalization and mass consumption make available a large range of expensive, but mass-produced consumer items. Stressing the symbolic value of commodities, Gerke argues that the new bureaucratic middle class in Indonesia is involved in symbolic consumption as a way of life. The lower middle classes without the economic means of leading a middle-class life engage in what she calls virtual consumption and lifestyling. Virtual middle 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 was drawing 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 on 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 Southeast Asia. Second, consumerism makes apparent the emergence of new class divisions in Southeast Asia. Third, consumerism is seen as Westernization by the older generation. 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 deconstructs the ethnographic approach as a practice. The practitioners see the other people as governable, salvable, translatable, transformable, manageable, and saleable. Hobart describes field-work as a confrontation of anthropologists versus the people. He refers to a large stock of text about the Western body in the tropics. Field-work becomes a matter of survival, voyeurism, dislocation. In short, Hobart sees a growth of ignorance of academics, consultants, and developers towards 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 the people talk about themselves.

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 aims for an original contribution to the literature on globalization 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 mobilize 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 bureaucratization and globalization, Horstmann attempts to show the way lifestyling shall empower respective strategic groups in the social struggles carried out in southern Thailand.

Dr Mark Hobart presented a second exciting paper, titled “Consuming Passions. Overinterpreting Television-Viewing in Bali”, which con-

stituted an attractive start for an additional meeting on media and consumption, 13 May 1997. Focusing on the notions of agency and practice, Hobart stimulated a lively debate on media and cultural studies. He argues 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 currently is interested in the practices of television viewing in Bali.

In summary, all participants found the workshop enjoyable and plan to meet again at a later stage.<sup>2</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Editor's introduction for Chua Beng-Huat, ed., *Consuming Asians: Material Life of Asia's New Rich* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).
2. The papers are available on request at the Sociology of Development Research Centre (SDRC), University of Bielefeld, D-33501 Bielefeld.

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