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**CONSUMPTION IN TAIWAN AND
THE QUADRILITERAL RELATIONSHIPS
WITH THREE SUPERPOWERS**

Sumei Wang

Lancaster University, UK

Email: s.wang[at]lancs.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper investigates how the consumption of coffee, Japanese food, electronics and made-in-China products relates to the quadrilateral relationship between Taiwan, China, Japan and America. Each case has a main theme to discuss: the first looks at how coffee represents American culture; the second investigates the controversial image of Japan in Taiwan; the third explores Taiwanese consumers' collective refusal of products made-in-China. I argue in the paper that accepting foreign influxes can enrich local culture and identities.

Introduction

Taiwan has experienced a dramatic transformation in the past two decades. Prior to 1987, Taiwan had been under martial law for four decades. Not only was the freedom to travel and information limited, but daily consumption was also supervised under the war-time doctrines. After the lifting of martial law, Taiwan has had significant changes, including political attitudes, lifestyles and the ways people identify themselves. As restrictions have been gradually loosened up, Taiwanese people keenly embraced all kinds of novelty and exoticness. This phenomenon has prompted many debates about whether Taiwan has its own culture, or is just a cultural colony of foreign empires, mainly the US, Japan and China.

In the following, I will explore this change by looking into what people do in their

everyday lives. The ways that people in Taiwan consume coffee, Japanese electronics and Chinese made products have much to do with the actors' backgrounds. I shall investigate how 'Others' play a crucial role in forming the identities of 'Us'. People continually evaluate different cultures, making comparisons between 'us' and 'them', and appropriating and adapting new ideas foreign practices and goods. Being associated with foreign culture does not necessarily mean forgetting one's roots or being culturally invaded. In fact, no culture develops from isolation. Many traditions are results of cultural exchanges. Reading Taiwan as a victim of cultural imperialism is another myth of seeing the past as purify and stability confronting external threats. As Taiwan opens up to the world and absorbs diverse foreign cultures, the island also greatly strengthens its indigenous culture and local identity.

Practices, Consumption and Identities

Taiwan's history has been interwoven with that of China, Japan and the US. Taiwan was ceded to Japan by the Qing Empire after the 1895 Sino-Japan War and became a Japanese colony for fifty years until the Chinese Nationalist Party (also known as the KMT) led Republic of China (ROC) took over the island after World World Two. The KMT regime retreated to Taiwan and claimed its legitimacy of representing One China in international communities with the support of the US. After the ROC was expelled from the United Nations in 1971, the pressure from people eventually contributed to the lifting of martial law in 1987. Since then, Taiwan has experienced a dramatic change: moving from a closed society to an open world.

The KMT government announced 'Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of Communist Rebellion' in 1948, which was not abolished until 1991. The Temporary Provisions superseded the Constitution and deprived of many basic rights of the people. Back then, travelling abroad for tourism was not allowed; information on the media was controlled by the government; daily consumption was supervised under the doctrines announced by the authority in order to ensure a 'proper' lifestyle during the war-time. For example, the United Daily News put an announcement made by the KMT's central committee on its front page on the 26th of November 1971, saying that: 'people should be aware that this is a key moment deciding whether our nation will live or die, hence we should build a war-time life model—urge frugality, refuse extravagance'.

The end of martial law freed people from their cages and changed many things. Polls

conducted by different organisations show a common trend: people in Taiwan now mostly consider themselves to be 'Taiwanese', whereas the answer was 'Chinese' twenty years ago. Regimes shifted a few years after the end of martial law and the change has not been limited to politics. In the past, the US and Japan were the only 'Others' that people in Taiwan ever encountered. Now that travelling has become the most popular leisure activity, and with a vibrant media environment, the Taiwanese widely accept foreign influences. Cheng's (2004) offers an explanation for this phenomenon: '... Taiwan's isolation in international political community made Taipei citizens curious and eager to absorb international information; ... By consuming foreign imports, Taipei residents can get in touch with the global.'

My approach to investigating the transformation of Taiwanese society is through analyses of actors' everyday practices. Situated in the tradition of practice theorists, including Pierre Bourdieu(1977, 1984), Anthony Giddens (1984), and Schatzki(2002), I recognise the importance of daily practices, which although often unnoticed, are embedded within the social order. Rather than looking into official, and deliberate exhibitions of national identity, my focus is on the subtle and unstated expressions of identities in everyday life. My investigation of 'Taiwanese-ness' is intended to find out how the Taiwanese live their lives and how they are situated in the world of globalisation. Among all sorts of practices in daily lives, in this paper I shall focus on consumption. Early discussion of consumption was based on a tradition inherited from Marx, in which consumer culture was identified with 'an exploitative, alienating, modern, capitalist culture, and regarded as embodying selfish, dehumanizing and materialist values (Campbell, 1995: 98). However, as consumption-based middle-class cultures took hold, interest in consumption has grown rapidly and research has made fruitful progress. Miller's (1998) empirical work in Trinidad offers the argument that consumers are not as vulnerable as some theorists thought them to be. In Trinidad, Coca-cola is a 'black' drink referring to the 'black' people—the Black African Trinidadians--in contrast with the traditional 'red' drink and the red people—the East Indian immigrants. The reading of Coca-cola as an ethnic symbol is not given by global business but created within the local culture. Foreign company executive's attempts to reduce the sugar content only made their products less popular. The way Trinidadians enjoy gossip, fashion and relationships in the American soap opera *Dallas* actually objectifies a central element in their own culture called 'bacchanal' (Miller 1992). The contradiction between the soap and the values and traditions of Trinidadians can, in a way, sharpen their awareness of being Trinidadians.

The Trinidadians did not deliberately have drinks, develop their tastes, and watch American soap operas to demonstrate their collectivities. However, consumption activities such as those investigated by Miller often are embedded with social cultures. Morley (2004) makes more of this line of argument in that he states the point explicitly: national culture should be understood to be both firmly rooted in what appears trivial and continually reproduced through the cultural practice of everyday life. At the level of emotional effect, the sense of national belonging is often inscribed in the taken-for-granted practices of everyday life: for example, the way stamps are bought in France as opposed to in Poland; the way a burger can be ordered in Amsterdam as opposed to in New York; or the many tiny details which make a Swedish supermarket or post office different from a Norwegian one. In other words, everyday practices in the same nation always have led to some collective experiences on which a collective awareness is founded.

Building on these ideas, I will discuss how the practices of consumption reveal the Taiwanese identity, in particular when shopping for electronics and foodstuffs. I attempt to find some answers to the following questions: What is it to have foreign imported services and goods? What do these foreign imports enable people to do? How are novel imports domesticated and appropriated by the locals? How are the interpretations and evaluations of these goods related to the historical context and the consumers' personal backgrounds? How is the fantasy/othering of goods connected to the image of the US, Japan and China and to the political history of relations between these countries and Taiwan?

Research Methods

Although the KMT stepped down in 2000, influences from its long-time rule still linger. A significant one is the ethnic conflicts between the *benshengren* and the *waishengren*. The KMT regime's registry system classified the natives as the '*benshengren*' (originating from Taiwan province), while the Chinese mainlanders who followed the KMT to Taiwan were the '*waishengren*' (originating from other provinces). The *waishengren* who composed one tenth of the population became the ruling class and represented the high culture, while the *benshengren*, as the ruled class, were often associated with vulgarity and local. In the post-martial law Taiwan, while the *benshengren* have gradually gained their political influence and economic affluence, the distinctions between the two have become less clear. There is a common discourse in Taiwan that the *benshengren* and the *waishengren* only differ in their political stances. In this research, I suppose that, given the historical

context, many differences between the two are actually hidden in their daily practices.

To learn more about how the ethnic differences may appear in daily practices, I arranged six focus group discussions. The focus groups were divided by age and ethnicity—the *benshengren* and the *waishengren*, and held in Taipei in 2006. Two focus groups involving youngsters aged between 19-21 took place on-campus in the National Taiwan University; and four focus groups involving middle-aged (40-50) respondents were held at coffee shops, where most people in cities meet up with their friends. I invited everyone to talk about coffee, dining out, and shopping for electronics, foodstuffs in general. I also did some interviews with Taiwanese students in England and business people who often visit China. My purpose is to investigate the ‘Taiwanessness’ hidden in those seemingly ordinary practices and how consumers’ preferences may differ according to their personal backgrounds.

Here I have chosen American coffee, Japanese electronics, popular music and products’ country-of-origin, especially commodities that are made in China, as my main focus of discussions. These subjects are selected because, firstly, they directly relate to quadrilateral relations between Taiwan and the three superpowers: the US, Japan and China, and, secondly, many of them came out spontaneously from conversations in focus groups—a feature that indicates that political and economic interactions among Taiwan and these other three countries do have direct influence on people’s lives and experiences. In the following three sections, I will discuss coffee and the American dream, the controversial image of Japan, and the country-of-origin effect in Taiwan. In each section, the political and economic contexts will be firstly reviewed. I then will use my empirical data to elaborate on how people in Taiwan actually do and the meanings embedded in those practices.

Coffee and the American Dream

How is coffee, as a foreign cultural import, imagined, appreciated and localised in Taiwan? By elaborating on my empirical data, I will show that the consumption of coffee in Taiwan is connected with the fantasies of the West, and especially of American culture. When it comes to ethnic differences, the US is a neutral third party. Both the *benshengren* and the *waishengren* have positive interpretations of American culture, something that could be related to the post-war relationship between Taiwan and the US.

●Coffee in Taiwan

Coffee was introduced to Taiwan in the 1930s, when Taiwan was under Japanese colonial rule. The Japanese regarded coffee as a symbol of modern society and encouraged its officials to drink it. After the KMT came to Taiwan, drinking coffee was associated with luxury lifestyles and hence discouraged by the authority. A very high tariff was imposed on imported coffee beans which made coffee extremely expensive. In 1991, McDonaldized coffee chain stores from Japan began to sell coffee at NT\$35 per cup and made coffee shops popular meeting places for ordinary people. Starbucks came to Taiwan in 1997; thereafter many chain coffee houses run by native businesses followed a semi-Starbucks style—turning coffee shops into lounges, with sofas, music, and paintings on the walls. Soon after Starbucks became really popular, take-away coffee stalls emerged on busy streets. Now coffee shops at different levels, and for different purposes are available everywhere in Taiwan. People rarely notice that coffee shops once had a bad reputation; rather, coffee represents modern urban culture.

●What is it to drink coffee?

Tea and coffee are two common soft drinks in many places. Tea is deeply rooted in Taiwan and often figures as a valuable gift. As my informant Chang (44, male, *benshengren*) said: 'When people give me tea as gifts, I usually know where it is from, Nan-tou or Jia-yi'. When stepping into a *benshengren's* house, a tea set is usually situated in the living room. The host will treat the guests to the best tea from private collection and invite everyone to share tea, some snacks and chat. The process of making a pot of Formosa Oolong tea is complicated and regarded as an art performance. The *waishengren* drink tea in a much simpler style--putting leaf tea in a glass of hot water. The two groups drink different kinds of tea and in their own ways. Tea is usually drunk in family or with families. Tea is local grown and bounded with families and traditions in Taiwan.

In contrast to tea, coffee came to Taiwan as an absolute novelty unfettered by tradition. None of my informants, even the youngsters, came from families that see coffee as a daily necessity as the westerners do. Many middle-aged informants' first experience of drinking coffee was in western-styled restaurants.

My first experience of coffee? That might be when I was in high school. Sometimes my parents took us kids to western restaurants. My mother and sister they loved the after-meal coffee and began to buy instant coffee. We didn't dine out very often so that was kind of rewards if we kids

did well at school. I did not like steaks really, but I was extremely excited when thinking that we were going to have a western meal. (Ching, 45, female, *waishengren*)

While tea has been one ethnic distinction in Taiwan, coffee, being new and neutral, signifies social status in another sense. Two decades ago, when Taiwanese society was opening up and experiencing dramatic changes in the 1980s, coffee was novel and its drinkers were considered to be members of a stylish group who had better taste. My informant Guan (46, male, *waishengren*), a middle-aged colonel, treated visitors to coffee, rather than tea, when he worked on a naval vessel in the 1980s, because 'it showed that you really valued the guests, while tea was something you drink by yourself'. Wei (43, female, *waishengren*) remembered that, 25 years ago, she earned NT\$ 24 per hour as a part-time waitress in a coffee shop while the cheapest coffee in store was NT\$ 60 per cup. The wage was bad but being a waitress in a coffee shop was very cool. As she recalled:

Coffee houses were not popular back then--unlike now, everyone can go to coffee shops, even children, everyone, and there are many different kinds of coffee. When I was young, coffee was a pronoun for "advance". Ordinary people wouldn't go to coffee shops but we did, because we were very fashionable. I think coffee represents foreign culture, especially the American culture. (Wei, 43, female, *waishengren*)

●Fantasy, Informality and Classiness

This image of coffee is probably influenced by Taiwanese impressions of the West, and especially of America. The KMT retained its alliance with the US after WWII and Taiwan became politically, economically and militarily dependent on the US. Taiwan received \$1.4 billion US Aid during 1951-1965 (Academia Historica) and in turn had been taken as a base of the American force in the Korean War and the Vietnam War. America was described by the KMT as Taiwan's strongest supporter, an ally in defence and a friendly country that provided economic aid. Even today, although there is no diplomatic tie between the US and Taiwan, the Americans play a key role in cross-strait balance: the US agrees to defend Taiwan if China starts a war, while Taiwan has to purchase a massive amount of weapons from the US. In Taiwan, English has been called the 'American language' and '*wai-quo-ren* (foreigners)' was usually referred to the Americans.

Two of my informants were servicemen. Their conversations revealed that Taiwan's defence sector has always had a close relationship with the US, especially the navy which of-

ten ran training sessions on US warships. My informant Chao said:.

The navy is more international than the army. They are more westernised. That's why people say the navy looks more handsome, while the army is a bit stiff. Once I got the chance to attend a meeting with the navy. Meetings used to be very serious in the army. Everyone had to sit tight. I was impressed when the chair ordered coffee for everyone at present. We had coffee during the meeting and leaned back on our chairs. The feeling was very special. [Q: Which kind of coffee was that?] Instant coffee, maybe, I didn't know. It was not coffee itself, but the feeling that was important. With coffee you could feel more relaxed. We were more willing to talk that day. In the army, it seemed that you might get into trouble easily if saying something wrong. (Chao, 45, retired serviceman, *waishengren*)

Coffee here is equated with American culture. It was not the taste of coffee but the 'feeling' that mattered. American is modern, relaxed, and more 'handsome'. The impression is not limited to the military sector. In Taiwan in the 50s speech was severely controlled. Even popular culture had to be related to 'anti-communism'. Wang (2004) studied the 'World Today', a magazine in Chinese sponsored by the US, that intrigued the Taiwanese with its representation of Western cultural and sexual imagination and gave the youngsters a temporary escape from the Chinese orthodoxy constructed by the KMT regime. In the same way, American rock and roll appealed to many Taiwanese in the 60s. The Taiwanese always envied the Americans who appeared to have time and money to enjoy their lives. This is why 'American time' means 'plenty of leisure time' in Taiwan. As Taiwan constantly lives under the threat of war, many people have emigrated to the US. Since the early 1950s, the US has been the country to which most Taiwanese youth went for postgraduate education and a good percentage of them stayed there. When I conducted my interviews, many informants had worked in the US, studied in the US, and, especially the *waishengren*, have relatives living in the US. Many Taiwanese have an American dream.

●Domesticating Coffee

Nowadays coffee shops have become common meeting places. They are usually situated in urban areas so that busy office workers can get a quick drink and leave. For the Taiwanese who are used to live in crowded communities, coffee shops are an extension of their living rooms. Several of my informants are insurance salespersons who often meet clients scattered in different parts of the city at chain coffee shops. For them the popularity

of coffee shops is not for the drink but for the convenience: 'There were no places for tea like coffee shops before. This style of shops was introduced from the West. This is very convenient for friends to chat or for us to talk with clients. I think this is why coffee gets popular' (Bee, 45, *benshengren*, sales woman).

Indeed, for many Taiwanese who go to coffee houses, it is the space that matters. For Guan, coffee shops are good places where he and his wife can take a break from the family. 'My wife and I sometimes go to coffee shops. Because when we stay in Taipei, we live at my parents' house. My wife thinks that we need more space of our own. So we go to coffee shops, have some desserts, quite nice'. Coffee houses provide private spaces and enable couples who live with extended families to have more quality time together. Many informants said they don't really like drinking coffee, but they do love the space, the convenience, the atmosphere and individuality that coffee shops have brought them.

In a combination of comfortable space and a simplified style of drinking tea, chain tea shops have recently emerged in urban areas, such as 'Cha for Tea'. My experience of holding interviews in different types of coffee shops also showed that local businesses actively adopted the western service while providing traditional food. For example, the one I went to with two middle-aged *waisheng* men was picked by accident. We thought it was a coffee shop from the outside — they had small tables and booths, but actually it provided Taiwanese stir-fry dishes with after meal coffee and tea. Another one, where I went with a group of female insurance saleswomen, was a composite shop that supplied coffee, tea, juice, set meals and buffet. This shop located near a metro station and was crowded by office workers during the lunch time. Set meals were traditional food served in a western style — a small portion of every dish arranged in a plate, rather than many dishes on a big round table. The buffet included fresh salads, breads, corn soups, and stir-fry vegetables, etc. The combinations of coffee and traditional food reveal that coffee is localizing, or, in other words, the Taiwanese is domesticating coffee.

Japan: controversial colonialist?

Unlike the US, which enjoys a generally positive image in Taiwan, Japan's image in Taiwan has been controversial. In this section, I will firstly review the disparate memories of the two groups, and then investigate whether the views of Japan have changed across generations. I will look into how the structure of political economy affects people's shopping preferences and how they make and reveal their identities in the practices of consumption.

●Disparate Memories

When Taiwan was under the Japanese colonial rule, Mainland China experienced a series of wars with Japan. This disparate experience resulted in disparate memories and thus attitudes towards Japan between the *benshengren* and the *waishengren*. As soon as the KMT took over Taiwan, the authority determined to 'reinforce the sense of [Chinese] nationalism, eliminate the enslaved thinking [left by the Japanese]' (*the Outlines of the Plan for the Takeover of Taiwan*, cited in Huang, 1996). Ironically, in its attempt to eliminate Japanese influences, the KMT reproduced the class structure in colonial Taiwan by replacing the Japanese coloniser with the Chinese Mainlanders (Gates, 1981). Many Taiwanese intellectuals grew up under the Japanese colonisation associated themselves with the Japanese in order to dissociate from the Chinese (Peng, 1972). As Chen (2002) writes, 'the divided attitudes towards Japan--the modern advanced Japan vs. the evil invader Japan--were the source of contention between Taiwan's *benshengren* and *waishengren*'.

In its project of re-Sinicise Taiwan, the KMT government halted imports of Japanese films and encouraged boycotting Japanese products from 1945 to the 1960s (Lee 2005: 64-65). Japanese video and audio imports were restricted until 1993. Under martial law, history books never mentioned how people lived under the Japanese colonial rule¹. However, the post-war international relationship did not allow the KMT to succeed an overwhelming de-japanisation. After the War, Japan formed a security alliance with the US. Both the US and Japan ranked among Taiwan's top trading partners until being surpassed by China recently. Japan continually shifted its manufacturing production to Taiwan. The KMT attempted to block Japanese culture but could not resist its investment. The boycotting of Japanese culture was not successful either. After the restrictions on Japan's cultural imports were softened, Japanese music, fashion, and dramas soon became very popular among the youngsters.

●Japanophobia or Japanophilia?

Since the deregulation of media industries in 1993, all restrictions on Japanese cultural imports were released. Being attracted by Japanese popular culture, including

¹ Tsai (2000: 1) wrote in the preface of her master dissertation on Taiwan's educational system under the Japanese colonial rule: History schoolbooks said very little about Taiwan under the Japanese rule. They said that the Japanese colonial government was very cruel and violent to the Taiwanese. ... Once I had a chance to join my grandparent's gathering. I heard them talking in Japanese, singing Japanese songs, recalling memories under the Japanese rule. I got a very different impression of Japan from the textbooks. This intrigued my curiosity about the life under the Japanese rule.

comics, animations, music, films, dramas and fashion, many youngsters worshipped Japan and formed a distinctive subculture: 'they learn and dreamed of becoming Japanese through everyday practices' (Lee 2004). These young Japanese fans were labelled as the '*Harizu* (Japanophile)' (Lee 2005: 5). This subculture attracted criticism from 'the adults'--saying that the *Harizu* were irrational and losing their own cultural identity. It seems to me that there is a Japanophobia behind all this name-calling and labelling. Data from my fieldwork show that orientations towards Japan still figure as a form of ethnic distinction within Taiwan.

The contrasting stance toward Japan is revealed in many family practices. For example, My informant Ching, who is a middle-aged *waishengren*, recalled how she was surprised when visiting her college mate's family in southern Taiwan: 'My friend's parents, they watched Japan's NHK, listened to Japanese music, and ate Japanese food everyday. I thought their brains were damaged. Didn't the history books tell us that the Japanese were all brutal colonisers?' Questions about families dining out also reveal ethnic differences. Zon (19, female, *benshengren*) said 'whenever my family eat out, we go to Japanese restaurants', while Jia (19, male, *waishengren*) said 'my family ... we rarely go to Japanese restaurants'. During the discussion, Jia described the Japanese as '*xio tou rui mian*'--meaning that the Japanese look as crafty as mice and did not want to be associated with the Japanese.

The *waishengren* may inherit certain impressions of the Japanese from elderly members of their families but perceptions can change. The *waishengren* who attempted to boycott Japanese products often found themselves in contradictory positions: they couldn't get away from the influence of nationalism but had to admit that many Japanese products were popular and of good quality. My informant Huei (44, female, *waishengren*), in the discussion on countries of origin, firstly said that 'I bought an Olympus digital camera in Japan a year ago. I only want "made in Japan"'. Later in the conversation she claimed that she never bought any Japanese products 'because of nationalism, because of Nan-Jing Massacre'. Her words actually were inconsistent with what she said earlier. Despite their family backgrounds, many of my *waishengren* informants acknowledge that Japanese products, especially electronics, are trustworthy and therefore count as first choice.

●Re-Made in Taiwan

Apart from Japanophilia and Japanophobia, Japanese culture has been internalised, localised and re-invented in Taiwanese society. Cheng (2004) discusses the concept of

'menu localization' by investigating ethnic restaurants in Taipei city. He argues that Japanese restaurants actually provided 'Taiwanised Japanese cuisine'. During the 50-year colonial period, Japanese culture had been 'indigenized' into the local. Many words in Taiwanese come from Japanese and so do many terms for food, such as 'Tehbura', 'miso', 'wasabi' and 'susi'. When Taiwanese customers ordered these dishes, they did not think of them as exotic; rather, they had been modified and adopted into local tastes.

In discussions, members regarded 'made-in-Taiwan' products as 'good quality'. For example, my informant Jasmine(25, *benshengren*) said: 'Taiwan's brands, such as Acer, have been my best choice when buying a laptop. I wouldn't think of any others'. I can see that the *waishengren* also felt proud of Taiwan's progress from their conversations. They called themselves 'the Taiwanese'--a name their parents would only use to refer to the *benshengren*. The fading sense of 'Japanophobia' revealed a signal of indigenisation: they moved on and began to identify themselves with the natives. In a focus group with three middle-aged *waisheng* mothers, they recalled how they loved American music, such as Andy Williams and the Bee Gees, in the 1970s, and couldn't understand why their children like Jay Chou, a Taiwanese pop idol, so much.

C: My son has an iPod and listens to Jay Chou's songs everyday.

Y: Ha! So is mine.

C: I told him that was decadent music. ...

W: My daughter admires Jay's creativity.

Y: Yes. He is creative.

C: I though our level was higher than them back then. I told my son: Mum wouldn't listen to this kind of decadent music when I was at your age.

Q: What did you listen to?

C: Andy Williams.

W: I began to listen Western music since secondary school. I liked the Bee Gees.

These middle-aged mothers valued American songs much better than Taiwanese pop music. However, teenagers think their local idols creative, cool and familiar to them. Jay Chou's personal profile said that he was born in Taipei in 1979, high school graduated, and the only child of a single-mother. Since 2000, he has become a superstar who attracts thousands and millions of fans across Asia (Chan 2006). Chen (2004) commented on Jay Chou's music videos: '...Jay Chou catches the ingredients of both the Eastern and Western culture. You can't tell whether his style is Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese or American—

perhaps everything a little bit. All the cultural elements are hybrid and mingled.'

It occurred to me that the '*Harizu*' had no longer been a concern lately since the most popular stars were all native born singers. The phenomena of Japanophobia and Japanophilia have both faded. Taiwan has now become a leader of the Mandarin popular music. Artists must publish their work in Taiwan to become famous in world-wide Mandarin-speaking communities. The interactions between the global and the local are dynamic. Having absorbed the influence of Chinese, American and Japanese culture, Taiwan mixes, reinvents, and then re-exports them to the world.

Not Made in China

This section is about the 'country-of-origin' effect in Taiwan. I will show how consumers in Taiwan actively avoid Chinese products when shopping. I will argue that this boycotting can be seen as resistance to China, which is entangled with long-time hostility and reveals Taiwan's anxiety and insecurity.

●The 'country of origin' effect

The 'country-of-origin' effect is a popular topic in marketing research. It means that consumers' impression of products is based on country stereotypes and experience of products from that country. Bruning (1996) says that country of origin effects have been observed to operate in several ways. First, consumers simply use the country-of-origin label as an additional variable to inform product evaluations. Alternatively, the country label may be viewed as a form of halo effect which impacts on consumers' attention and evaluation of other product attributes. Finally, the country-of-origin cue may be conceptualized as a form of country stereotyping which consumers use when other product-specific information is not easily available.

The Taiwanese care very much about products' country of origin. This is probably because Taiwan developed its economy as a manufacturing based structure. The government imposed a high tariff on imports to protect domestic industries until the late 1980s and made imports too expensive to be affordable for most people. Prior to the 1980s 'made-in-Taiwan' was regarded as 'poor quality', while imported commodities signified luxurious, expensive, and fine goods from the advanced world. As Taiwan has become a newly industrialized country, many of its businesses have gradually built their reputations. Added to this, the global division of labour has brought the manufacturing

sector to China, India and other south-eastern countries. Foreign imports are no longer unaffordable luxury goods from 'advanced countries'. Consumers now have more confidence in Taiwan's own products. On many occasions shoppers can see 'Made in Taiwan' boldly marked on packaging to attract customers.

In focus group discussions, when I asked whether the members would check a product's country of origin when going shopping, Ching said: '[I] will and must [check the origins]. Not only us, [the adults], even the kids will check. They won't buy any made-in-China products.' Wei in the same group insisted on her criterion for shopping as 'not made in China': 'Many products are made in China by contract manufacturers but their prices remain the same [as they were]. I do not want to spend so much money on a product made in that place.' Both Ching and Wei are *waishengren* and they believe that made-in-China products are not worth their price. Although the *waishengren* tend to identify more with China, they stand on the same side with their *benshengren* counterparts when it comes to choosing by country of origin.

●Global brands, different origins

My informants Julia and Chris both work in computer businesses. As account managers they travel to China and the US regularly in order to bridge the communication gap between their clients and factories. They acknowledge that the shift of operations to China is a necessary move for globalization of their business, but as consumers they are still averse to China-made products. Julia said: 'When shopping in the US or Hong Kong I sometimes bought things mindlessly and then realised that they were made in China. At that moment I felt the quality reduced to half.'

According to Julia and Chris, some of their clients demand that 10%-20% of the whole procedure should be done in Taiwan, Mexico, Japan or the US so that their products would not be labelled 'made-in-China'. 'My company makes laptops for a Japanese company. They would never allow us to finish the whole machine. They ask us to send the bases to Japan and put on LCD monitors there. So the products would become "made in Japan". The value will be totally different' (Julia). Consumers in Taiwan well understood the global brands' strategy in outsourcing their manufacturing to China. With products sold under the same brand names they look into the countries of origin. Chao, a retired serviceman, described how he selected a Nokia mobile phone:

Nokia is a good brand. ... But now everyone knows: you have to remove the battery to see its

country of origin label. Nokia is a Finnish company. You are lucky if it's made in Finland. ... Many have complained about those 'made in China' mobile phones, including the shells, the IC chips, getting out-of-order and crashed easily. Now the ill fame has been spread far and wide. If you happen to buy something made-in-China, you must demand a guarantee that you can swap it with a brand new one within 7 days. That was how I bought my mobile. ... And within these 7 days, you should keep trying every single function out, so that you can be sure the phone's good. (Chao, 44, *waishengren*)

Many consumers do what Chao does all the time. The same also applies to PC components. It is common for computer users to assemble their own PCs in Taiwan. In my research, several students talked about how they prefer products of Malaysian or Indonesian to Chinese origins if made-in-Taiwan ones were not available. Pu, 20, who grew up in a *waishengren* family once sold his used hard drive and CD-rom on Yahoo! Actions. Nobody was interested in his items until he indicated that they were made-in-Japan. At last he was amazed with the premiums that bidders were willing to pay.

●'Evil-hearted' foodstuffs

The suspicion of Chinese products is not limited to electronics or computer components, but also clothes, food, and literally everything. Since Taiwan accelerated economic interaction with China in the 1990s, many Chinese food imports have been circulating in Taiwan. When the lunar new year is coming, news media teach the audience how to avoid Chinese foodstuffs and warn that many of them might pose a health threat due to the excessive amount of chemical and preservative residuals. These kinds of products are condemned as 'evil-hearted' or tainted. All packaged food in Taiwan must identify the country of origin but it is difficult to tell if bulk goods in wholesale or traditional markets are truly from local farms. Dried mushroom is an important ingredient in daily cooking and given as a gift when visiting friends. Many of my informants said they always bought mushrooms from reliable merchants. Here is an example:

We are surrounded by Chinese products, and very cheap. ... I think their quality isn't as good as Taiwan's. [There are] too many 'evil-hearted' things. So when I shop, I will check the country of origin and think twice before I buy it. ... I always buy mushrooms from my friend, whose father cultivates mushrooms in Tai-Chung's mountain area. So I am 100% sure that the mushrooms are grown in Taiwan. ... Maybe it only matters psychologically. Everyone has some queer insistence. (Liao, female, *benshengren*)

Many Taiwanese express similar concerns to those of Liao. Given that China has become the manufacturing centre for global businesses, sometimes there is no alternative other than 'made-in-China'. The informants said they had to compromise with 'reality' otherwise they could not buy anything. When it comes to daily commodities, such as clothes and low-priced electronics, the consumers care less about their origin. But when it comes to expensive items, especially products related to human health, they follow the criterion strictly. Informant Bee admitted that sometimes she would buy made-in-China goods, but 'If we were talking about medicine, I can't accept those from China. That is something you eat and probably damages your health immediately'.

●Why boycott China?

The boycotting of Chinese products was not initiated by any particular organisation but had become a very significant phenomenon. The boycotting was never simply about quality alone. A few informants told me: 'I won't deny that I don't like them [China].' I asked the informants whether they felt the same toward Vietnam- or Thailand- made products. Chris said: 'At least the Vietnamese wouldn't be so "evil-hearted". And Julia added: 'It could be Sri Lanka, Malaysia, or Hong Kong, anywhere. But as long as I know it is made in China, I feel the quality is worse [than others].' The boycotting was not simply directed toward lower income countries; it was specifically aimed at China, with which Taiwan has the most complex relationship.

Since the Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan, he and his KMT had depicted the Chinese Communist Party as 'the diabolic communist devil' who 'stole our lost land'. Communications between the two sides were disrupted until the 1980s. After its status in the UN was replaced by the PRC, Taiwan's 'economic miracle' was the only thing that the KMT could use to justify its autocratic rule. When the *waishengren* re-visited their homeland after the lifting of martial law in 1987, Taiwan's wealth, in contrast with China's poverty, gave these KMT loyalists great comfort. Nonetheless, as China emerged as one of the economic superpowers and the KMT lost office in Taiwan, the *waishengren's* feelings became more complicated. Among my interviewees only two, who were both *waishengren*, defended made-in-China products. They confronted the others by saying: 'The world is a global village now.' They justified their claims, not by emotional appeals, but by describing globalization as an unavoidable trend. The informants who spoke out for China represented the long-time wish of some *waishengren*--a rich and mighty motherland. However, in most cases, the *waishengren's* attitude toward China was similar

to the *benshengren*'s. The *waishengren* felt and behaved in a way that was close to the *benshengren*, while China and the Chinese were outsiders to them.

The reason that Taiwanese manufacturers move to China has been purely economic. As Julia said: 'Why move to China? Because it is big, it is cheap, and it is close to Taiwan.' Business owners, mostly *benshengren*², say they have been pushed by globalization and urge the government to loosen all restrictions on investing in China. However, as employers shift their operations to China where they can always hire someone at much a cheaper cost, native workers have lost jobs and their salaries have been slashed. On closer inspection, Taiwanese consumers are often boycotting products made by Taiwanese businesses in China. This boycott is about quality, about the long-time rivalry, and also an expression of their insecurity caused by unemployment and the economic competition with China.

Conclusion: Globalisation and Local identity

By choosing practices of consumption as my entry point, I have reviewed how foreign imports are perceived, adapted, and domesticated in Taiwan. On the one hand, personal preferences are affected by one's backgrounds, such as class and ethnicity; on the other hand, common values are shared nationally. Examples discussed in this paper relate to Taiwan's connections with three powers: the US, Japan and China. Coffee, being associated with American culture, is regarded as a positive and neutral other by Taiwan's two major ethnic groups. The image of Japanese products, including cuisine, fashion and electronics, etc., is controversial due to the sensitivity of Sino-Japan relations. As for products made-in-China, most of my informants, both the *waishengren* and the *benshengren*, clearly expressed their dislike.

These cases reveal the complexity of the quadrilateral relationship between the US, Japan, China and Taiwan. The KMT considered America as its biggest ally in the continuing war against Communist China. After it came into office in Taiwan, the KMT wanted to eliminate all influence left by the Japanese and re-Sinicise the local people. However, as the Chinese mainlanders replaced the Japanese as the island's new ruler, the class structure in colonial Taiwan was reproduced. The KMT's discriminatory policies and repression pushed the natives closer to the Japanese. After the pro-independence DPP

2 This is due to the ethnic division of labour since the KMT came to power in Taiwan. Because the public sector had been dominated by the *waishengren*, the *benshengren* needed to manage independently. Many of them founded family businesses by as making buttons, shoes, umbrellas, and bicycles, etc. and then further expanded their scales. Therefore, most enterprise owners are *benshengren* in their ethnic origin.

came to power, the pro-unification KMT leant toward China. As cross-strait economic interactions become more frequent than ever and businesses urge the government to lift all restrictions on investing in China, Taiwan's consumers do their best to boycott all kinds of made-in-China products.

Although most residents in Taiwan are Chinese descendants, the contemporary Taiwanese culture is a cosmopolitan one. After long periods of colonisation and interaction, Japanese culture has become a part of Taiwan. American culture also has a significant influence on the island. When Taiwan was under martial law, American culture helped the youngsters get away from orthodox Chinese culture as promoted by the state. The blending of the west and the past has evolved into a new cultural hybrid. This multi-lingual nature indicates Taiwan's multi-cultural context. Taiwanese people are generally open and eager to accept new objects of consumption, which can be seen as a reaction to the KMT's long-term oppression. Foreign cultures provide a space in which to escape from the orthodox Chinese culture. By identifying with the foreign, the Taiwanese make themselves distinctive from the Chinese.

Being associated with foreign culture does not mean being invaded culturally. Among my informants, the middle-aged mothers have listened to Andy Williams and the Bee Gees since they were teenagers. Now their children have got their native pop idols. However, without the influence of American music in the 80s and Japanese pop culture in the 90s, Jay Chou could not have created his style of mix and Taiwan could have never become the leader of Chinese music industry. Development in globalisation often stimulates self-awareness and the demand for locality. As societies persistently exchange with each other, a lot of the 'foreign' has been localized through the process of appropriation and adaption. As Miller (1992) writes about Trinidad:

'the fact that Carnival is derived from French colonial culture, Anansi stories from Africa, Divali from India, Sesame Street from the United States, Rasta from Jamaica does not dictate the process of local consumption with its considerable transformative properties. The mistake is to assume this means the end of specificity for Trinidadian culture.'

The same applies to Taiwan. Coffee was introduced to Taiwan by the Japanese but became a symbol of the American dream; both Chinese and Japanese customs are practiced in everyday life; audiences welcome dramas from Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong and Hollywood, and the PRC-made commodities are deliberately avoided despite global

enterprises persuade their customers to trust the brands. All these features are shared by people in Taiwan. People do not just take what is given to them by the state or corporates-- they make and remake their own culture continually. People in Taiwan have been confused about what they should call themselves: some say 'Chinese' while the others insist on being 'Taiwanese'. Nevertheless, through these and other practices, they have constituted their own distinctive Taiwanese culture.

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