

# Politicizing Consumer Culture: Advertising's Appropriation of Political Ideology in China's Social Transition

XIN ZHAO  
RUSSELL W. BELK\*

China's ideological transition from a communist country toward a consumer society provides an unprecedented context in which to explore the rise of consumerism in a contemporary society. We examine how advertising appropriates a dominant anticonsumerist political ideology to promote consumption within China's social and political transition. We show how advertising reconfigures both key political symbolism and communist propaganda strategies through a semiotic analysis of advertisements in the *People's Daily*. Our structural framework of ideological transition extends Barthes's myth model and examines ideological transition in advertising from the macroperspective of political ideology. This framework goes beyond the transfer of cultural meanings and can help to explain ideological shifts in other societies.

Consumerism is a belief and value system in which consumption and acquisition rituals (e.g., shopping) are naturalized as sources of self-identity and meaning in life, goods are avidly desired for nonutilitarian reasons such as envy provocation and status seeking, and consuming replaces producing as a key determinant of social relations (Belk 1988; Slater 1997; Stearns 2001). How consumerism has become prevalent throughout the world has attracted multidisciplinary interest (Brewer and Porter 1993; Campbell 1987; Grazia 2005). The call to investigate such important macrolevel issues has been voiced for decades (Belk 1987; Hunt 1983; Olson 1982) but is still unanswered (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Belk 2002; Cohen 2004). Related microissues of how established ideologies shape consumption practices and consumers' identity construction

have received more attention (Gramsci 1971; Holt 2002; Thompson and Tambyah 1999). Sustained effort has been made to explore how marketplace ideologies constrain consumer creativity (Firat and Venkatesh 1995) and emancipation (Murray and Ozanne 1991), structure consumers' identity projects (Belk 1988; Kozinets 2002), and shape and constitute consumer desires (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003). Although it has been acknowledged that macrocultural ideologies provide superordinate legitimizing and moralizing consumption meanings (Kozinets and Handelman 2004), the process of consumerism rising to dominance in contemporary societies such as China still remains largely unexamined (Schor and Holt 2000).

In just 2 decades, China has changed from a communist country toward a consumer society in which communism is considered by many to have become more rhetorical (Baum 1994; Ci 1994; Davis 2000; Gamble 2003; Wasserstrom 2007). Never in the course of human history have a larger number of people gained more wealth in such a short time. China thus provides an unprecedented opportunity to examine the rise of consumerism in the contemporary world. As an embodiment of and the major propaganda vehicle for consumerism (or what Schudson [1984] called capitalist realism), advertising is an ideal arena in which to explore such macroissues (Belk and Pollay 1985; Tse, Belk, and Zhou 1989) and has been a frequent focus for studies of sociological and cultural changes (Goldman and Papson 1996; Lears 1994; Twitchell 1996). In this study, we take a semiotic approach and examine three issues: (1) how advertising has appropriated a dominant anticonsumerist ideology to justify its pro-

---

\*Xin Zhao is assistant professor of marketing at the Shidler College of Business, University of Hawaii at Manoa, C502c, 2404 Maile Way, Honolulu, HI 96822 (e-mail: xinzhao@hawaii.edu). Russell W. Belk is Kraft Foods Canada Chair in Marketing, Schulich School of Business, York University, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3, Canada (e-mail: rbelk@schulich.yorku.ca). The authors would like to specially thank Gary J. Bamossy and Janeen A. Costa for their comments, suggestions, and continuous encouragement in all stages of this project. The authors thank the editor, associate editor, and reviewers for their constructive comments. This article is based on the first author's dissertation. The authors gratefully acknowledge the Sheth Foundation, which generously funded the data collection through the ACR-Sheth Dissertation grant in 2003.

*John Deighton served as editor and David Glen Mick served as associate editor for this article.*

*Electronically published June 3, 2008*

motion of consumption, (2) how advertising has adapted to help bridge the apparent ideological tensions between communism and consumerism, and (3) what structural patterns of representation have facilitated this ideological transition in advertising. We examine how key symbolism (widespread signs that embody a depth of significance and are capable of evoking strong positive and negative responses; see Geertz 1983; Lane 1981; and Ortner 1973) has shifted with the sociocultural and ideological transition in China over the past 25 years. Such macroinvestigation of how advertising appropriates sociopolitical changes and ideological conflicts during the emerging stage of consumerist ideology is conspicuously rare in consumer research in spite of its importance (Belk 2002). Consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005) can be greatly enriched by historical investigation of how advertising has facilitated the rise of the world's most populace consumer society. Thus, we seek to contribute to consumer research on both substantive and theoretical fronts.

### ADVERTISING AND MYTH IN SOCIETY

Consumerism has been celebrated by some for its potential stimulation of cultural rebellion and social democracy, for its role in constructing meaningful life experiences, and for being conducive to social well-being (de Certeau 1984; Douglas and Isherwood 1996; Miller 1997). More often, consumerism is subject to criticism and held responsible for establishing and reproducing social stratification through consumption, precipitating epidemics of anomie and depression, and leading to commodity fetishism and the commercialization of culture (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944; Bourdieu 1984; Veblen 1925). Although these debates around consumerism will likely never be fully resolved, our close examination of the role of advertising in China's dramatic ideological transition from communism toward consumerism is intended to inform such theoretical discussions of the sociocultural consequences of global consumerism. Historically, advertising has played a crucial role in cultivating and facilitating the spread of consumerist values such as hedonism throughout the world (Stearns 2001). It functions at an aggregate level as a project of social education with the effect of naturalizing individual brand-related desires and homogenizing them with social aspirations (Baudrillard 1981; Williams 1980). It works by reconfiguring cultural symbols and cultural myths for the purpose of selling consumer goods (Lears 1983; Marchand 1985). Despite the recognition that advertising frequently echoes political ideology (Cohen 2004; McGovern 2006), the political aspects of advertising and consumer culture have not been fully explored (Daunton and Hilton 2001; Strasser, McGovern, and Judt 1998). We address this gap by drawing upon theories of Barthes (1972, 1977) in order to highlight an alternative path to consumerism other than the previously examined appropriation of religious symbolism in the rise of the consumer culture in the West (Lears 1983).

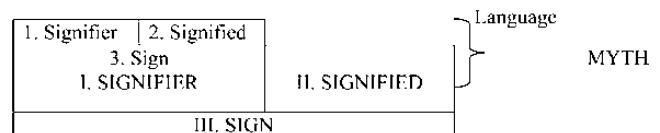
In *Mythologies*, Barthes (1972) attempts to sketch the structure of the reproduction of the bourgeois ideology in

social life through the study of myth. His focus is on ideas in form. Myth is a mode of signification in which a completed sign, with historically embedded meanings in an original sign system, is transformed into a signifier in order to promote another, new, signified. This process of decontextualization and reconfiguration can be illustrated by figure 1.

In this model, the preexisting semiological system (language) is recontextualized in myth and transformed into a signifier (SIGNIFIER I) to connote a mythical meaning (SIGNIFIED II); the two together are then reconfigured into a myth sign (SIGN III) to propagate and naturalize ideological messages. This process can be understood by considering how the image of workers is mythified in communist China. The denotative meaning of the right-hand illustration in figure 3 is that "two younger workers are busily engaged on an assembly line." Such workers are often celebrated in communist myths. When similar images are reproduced in party propaganda, the signification of socialist realism (Schudson 1984) suggests a new connotative reading: "everyone in communist China works relentlessly and happily toward the realization of communism under the leadership of the party." This unspoken myth naturalizes a politicized social reality and reproduces an established ideology, which is constantly replicated through different signifiers. A similar mythification can be seen to underlie much contemporary advertising. While the denotative text of the ad encompasses its literal claims, the more fundamental connotative text (you will be beautiful, successful, and happy with the help of the advertised goods) is an unchallenged insinuation that works at a deeper level to reproduce the ideology of consumerism. Although Barthes's myth model is illuminating for understanding how communism and consumerism are each reproduced and naturalized in Chinese society, it is less useful for understanding historical changes in these ideologies. Nor are the semiotic tensions and competition involving the two ideologies in China's social transition from communism toward consumerism explained by Barthes's myth model. Chinese advertising provides an ideal space in which to examine these important theoretical questions left by Barthes. This study will extend the myth model to examine the structural pattern of advertising during China's sociopolitical changes. Before we proceed to a close look at Chinese advertisements, a brief contextualization of China's ideological transition is necessary.

FIGURE 1

BARTHES MODEL OF MYTH (BARTHES 1977)



## CHINA'S ECONOMIC REFORMATION: 1979–2003

Facing a shattering economy and deteriorating social problems in the post-Mao era, China shifted its priority from class struggle to economic development in January 1979. The market was given a larger role, and the planned economy was gradually replaced by a combined economy of central planning and market mechanisms (Riskin 1987). The Four Cardinal Principles (to uphold socialism, the people's democratic dictatorship, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party [CCP], and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought) were still firmly embraced. But the Maoist approach that emphasized ideological hegemony as the primary path to communism was replaced by a more pragmatic approach of realizing socialism through economic growth (Liu 2004). To further ensure the socialist nature of China's economic reforms, in 1982 the construction of a Socialist Spiritual Civilization was set as a key goal of the reformation (Baum 1994). It emphasized the importance of simple and frugal living and rejected worshipping material possessions and the idea that consumption can bring happiness. This two-civilizations construction (economic and socialist) has dominated China's ideological campaign ever since. Despite such ideological campaigns, the political impact of the reformation was evident (see Schell 1984, 1988). Although from 1984 to 1988 Chinese consumers began to enjoy a wide variety of affordable consumer goods, attitudes toward consumption had been conspicuously ambivalent throughout the 1980s (Barme 1999). The dramatic changes were a shock to many and caused widespread public confusion about the apparent inconsistency between a communist legacy emphasizing austerity and equalitarianism and an emerging consumerist ethos celebrating individual hedonism and distinction seeking through consumption.

Accumulated social and economic problems erupted in the spring of 1989. Various social groups took to the street to protest the rapidly increasing cost of living, debilitating corruption, and open violations of the law by party cadres. The mass demonstration in Beijing gradually turned into a political turmoil that was ended by a military crackdown in early June 1989. To some extent, the turmoil was a public confrontation between fading communism and rising consumerism. The consumerist lifestyle desired by the Chinese people was quickly accused of undermining the official ideology of socialism. A new wave of ideological campaigns was launched to advocate socialist ideals, such as sacrifice, altruism, simple living, and trust in the party's leadership (Baum 1994). The event marked the return of tighter ideological control that favored traditional Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy for the next few years (Barme 1999, 99). Sensing the slow progress of the reformation, in the spring of 1992 Deng Xiaoping traveled to southern China, where his speeches initiated more dramatic changes. Soon after, the party began to actively encourage hedonism in order to transform people's political zeal into sensational passions to be fulfilled through consumption (Ci 1994). In response

to the rapidly fading ideology of socialism since the 1990s, the party has emphasized nationalism (Gries 2004). Although there have been continuous adjustments of policies in recent years in order to co-opt the changes in society (e.g., President Jiang Zemin's advocating incorporating capitalists into the party), ideological reversals toward a rising consumer culture, like those of the 1980s (see Schell 1988), have disappeared. This article considers how advertising has responded and contributed to the transformation from production-oriented communism toward a consumption-oriented society through examining the reconfiguration of key political symbolism and propaganda strategies.

## METHODOLOGY

The context in which Chinese advertising was conditioned and the manner in which its practices appropriated apparent ideological inconsistencies over the past 25 years can be best informed by interpretive approaches. A semiotic analysis of advertisements in the *People's Daily* was conducted to investigate the ideological transition from communism toward consumerism as represented in advertising. This was supplemented by reading official government statements regarding advertising and related articles in the Chinese advertising trade press. Our focus is on the ideological aspect of advertising, in order to understand how the ideology of consumerism is represented and valorized in advertising. Semiotics, the science of signs growing from the works of Saussure (1916/1983) and Peirce (1931–58), provides powerful techniques and rich theories for exploring consumption and marketing communications (Mick 1986; Mick and Oswald 2006; Miller 1997). Although various extensions of Peircean semiotics and Saussurean semiology have been adopted to address marketing communications at the micro-level (McQuarrie and Mick 1999), Barthes's myth model is more appropriate for macroanalysis of social and ideological aspects of advertising (Arnold, Kozinets, and Handelman 2001; Williamson 1978) and was thus adopted in our study.

Our purpose is to understand China's social transition from a communist country toward a consumer society through the lens of advertising. The choice of the *People's Daily* was based on several considerations. In the early days of China's economic reformation, both television commercials and billboard ads were rare and were seldom preserved. Newspapers have been a consistent and influential advertising medium in the period from 1979 to 2003 that we are interested in. The *People's Daily* is the oldest and has remained the largest national newspaper since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC). It has been the primary choice in previous longitudinal research on Chinese advertising (Tse et al. 1989). The *People's Daily* is usually subscribed to by Chinese organizations and passed among many employees (Xu 1990). It is also displayed in public newspaper kiosks on the streets and reaches people from all walks of life. The *People's Daily* has also been the official newspaper of the Chinese government since 1949. Therefore it is more conservative and sensitive to ideological changes than any other commercial publication. A three-stage pro-

cedure was adopted to select the advertisements and other information for the current study. First, advertisements in the *People's Daily* from January 1, 1979, to June 31, 2003, were examined by the first author. Second, a pool of 38 advertisements for the current semiotic analysis was selected based on how conceptually interesting and rich each ad was (Leeuwen 2001; Mick 1986; Mick and Oswald 2006; Rose 2007) in revealing the ideological transition from communism toward consumerism in China. Our selection is not meant to be representative of all Chinese advertising of the time but rather to exemplify ideological transition in the symbolic space of advertising. We recognize the limitations inherent in generalizing from such a purposive sample and stress the discovery-oriented nature of our inquiry (Wells 1993). Nevertheless, such selection of limited advertisements in order to exemplify theoretical points is not unusual in previous research (Mick et al. 2004; Sherry and Camargo 1987; Thompson 2004; Williamson 1978). Third, other supplementary information was then collected to enrich the analysis. Such data consisted of relevant *People's Daily* editorials, articles from trade magazines such as *China Advertising* and *Modern Advertising* that are representative of the dominant discourses in the Chinese advertising industry, and varied online resources. These data were all in Chinese and published in China in the same 25-year period when the ads in our analysis were placed. We also referred to secondary data from political, sociological, anthropological, and humanistic literatures in both Chinese and English to contextualize our analysis.

The interpretation of advertisements draws on Barthes's (1972) semiological theory of myth. The authors immersed themselves in the vast literature on China's ideological milieu during the period when the ads were run in order to develop a holistic understanding of the dominant ideology and the dominant sign system of the time. The discourses around Chinese advertising were examined and analyzed based on these understandings of the dominant ideology in each specific period. Particular attention was paid to how socialism was invoked in advertising discourses that guided advertising production in China. Such assessment and integration of diverse information in order to understand and explain sociocultural changes are characteristic of historical methods (Smith and Lux 1993). The advertisements were then closely read in relation to the dominant ideology when they were placed. The signs under both communism and consumerism were identified and traced to the ideological sources of their original political significance. The uses of the signs were in turn analyzed based on the myth model of Barthes (1972) that we later extended here. Such semiological analysis (see also Leeuwen 2001; Rose 2007; Williamson 1978) attends to the sociocultural construction of signs and exemplifies the political nature of what seems natural or self-evident through examining the historical origins of the taken-for-granted signs and existing significations (Barthes 1972). The analysis proceeded systematically through an iterative process, and it examined the structural transition and transformation of political ideology in ad-

vertising. The focus was on the reconfiguration of key political signs in commercial advertising, rather than merely the meanings transferred to material goods (McCracken 1986). The analysis was not restricted to the verbal and visual content of the ad but also extended to the spatial composition, the manner in which certain objects were represented, and the discursive styles that were enmeshed with political significance. Such analysis is grounded upon prior semiological studies of both advertising (Goldman and Pappson 1996; Williamson 1978) and other cultural materials (Bonnell 1997; Fisk 1989; Hodge and Kress 1988). In our analysis, individual advertisements are taken as particularistic expressions of the broader and changing social and ideological world (Thompson 2004), in ways similar to prior historical research that examines sociocultural changes through the lens of advertising (Lears 1994; Marchand 1985).

In focusing on structural characteristics and being constrained by the historical nature of this study, we do not offer an account of consumers' actualized meanings for the ads discussed. However, we do not assume that consumers see these advertisements in the same way as we do. Like a poem, advertising provides an expression to which varied meanings can be attributed, and semiological inquiry concerns only potential meanings of advertising renderings (Mick 1986, 1997; Mick and Oswald 2006). Such analysis is hermeneutic in nature (Arnold and Fisher 1994) and can never be exhaustive of all consumer-actualized meanings (McQuarrie 1989; Rose 2007). Data from consumers are considered unnecessary to such semiological explication of possible meanings of advertisements (Leeuwen 2001; McQuarrie 1989; Mick et al. 2004). Our perspective concerns the structure of the semiotic process of ideological transition in advertising, rather than the pragmatics of this semiosis actualized by its audience. Neither do advertisers expect consumers to perceive the structure of a complex semiotic process. Our interpretations are based on semiotic theory and seek to offer a systematic analysis of the structural richness of the ads. Our approach is a conceptual examination of how advertising reveals social transition from a semiotic perspective. It goes beyond the conception of advertising as a distorted mirror (Pollay 1986) to examine the dynamics of ideological transition within individual ads.

## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

We now examine how key communist symbolism is appropriated to interpret consumerist values in Chinese ads. Whereas Barthes focused on the reproduction of established ideology and attended to signs, we will illustrate ideological transition in advertising and how ideological strategies through which communism was propagated are transformed to justify consumerism in advertising. Based on Barthes's myth model, an extended framework of ideological transition in advertising emerged from our analysis. It is presented first to guide the following discussions of how advertising has represented consumerism's rise toward domination in China. Barthes's concept of myth is synchronic and emphasizes myth today (Lavers 1982). However, myth is a

message sent in a certain code, and the code may change (Hall 1980, 1997). It is constantly being reconstituted during times of social transition, as seen in contemporary China. Our extension helps to better understand the transformation of the dominant ideology within advertising and reveals the semiotic mechanisms through which advertising facilitates the reconfiguration and subversion of the previously dominant anticonsumerist ideology.

The structure of the extended Barthes model is illustrated in figure 2. Sign I is a political sign of socialism in its original settings (e.g., ideological terms in a *People's Daily* editorial), which is constituted by socialist discourses and imagery (Signifier I) and their original ideological significances (Signified I). When used in advertising, the historically constructed socialist Sign I is decontextualized from its original settings, distanced from its ideological significances, and transformed into a signifier (SIGNIFIER II) to be reconfigured. Sign 1 is a consumerist sign constituted by Signifier 1 (consumerist discourses and imagery under consumerism) and Signified 1 (e.g., social status symbolized by the possession of luxury goods). Before entering the symbolic space of advertising, Sign 1 is contextualized within and interpreted through the previously dominant ideology. In China's case, consumerist signs are interpreted through socialist ideology and stigmatized as an emblem of evil capitalism and bourgeois lifestyles. When presented with other socialist signs in advertising, however, the consumerist sign has been detached from the ideological stigmata and distanced from its ideologically problematic significance, and it becomes an impoverished form (SIGNIFIER 2) to be rationalized and valorized.

The juxtaposition and recontextualization of the displaced socialist Sign I (the complete sign under socialism but turned into signifiers by advertising) and the to-be-valorized consumerist Sign 1 (the complete sign under consumerism that functions to naturalize consumerist values but is stigmatized under socialism) in advertising creates an ambiguity around the SIGNIFIEDS of both SIGNIFIER II and SIGNIFIER 2. This ambiguity imposes a transient code that breaches the dominant ideological code and opens up the possibility for consumerism's ideological transgression from the politically problematic to the politically desirable. Consumption is here associated with socialist discourses and imagery and becomes ideologically desirable. Socialist construction is connected with consumerist signs and thereby made profane (e.g., consumer goods as a symbol of socialist modernity). The consumerist Sign 1 (SIGNIFIER 2) is naturalized by the appearance of the displaced communist Sign I (SIGNIFIER II). The EMERGENT SIGN 3 is constructed by combining the consumerist Sign 1 and the ambiguous socialist SIGNIFIEDS (i.e., consumption as a means of building socialism now represented as politically desirable). However, the emptied socialist Sign I (SIGNIFIER II) is joined by the concept of consumption to complete a RECONFIGURED SIGN III, which functions to naturalize consumerism with the appearance of socialism. The cumulative effect of advertising over the 25-year span natu-

**FIGURE 2**  
EXTENDED BARTHES MODEL

Signifier I	Signified I		Signified I	Signifier I
Sign I SIGNIFIER II		Ambiguous SIGNIFIEDS	Sign I SIGNIFIER 2	
RECONFIGURED SIGN III			EMERGENT SIGN 3	

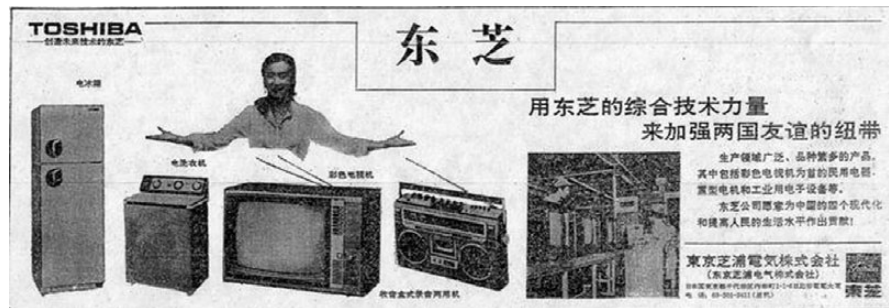
ralizes the EMERGENT SIGN 3 and redefines socialism through the RECONFIGURED SIGN III. This process can also be better understood through the examples in the following section.

We now analyze in detail some of many instances of advertising's reproduction of communism in the promulgation of consumerism, by focusing on both ideological strategies (Eagleton 1991) and key political symbolism. Advertising shares a persuasive proclivity with socialist realism (an art form that combines social reality and fictional portrayals in order to suggest a life as it ought to be and to motivate the masses—Schudson 1984). A prominent function of socialist realism is to create socialist heroes (Lane 1981). Heroes express fundamental themes and values of society (Warner 1965), and they are called upon to offer a role model for emulation, especially during rapid social changes, in order to ease the reorientation. Socialist heroes are political symbols and the concrete embodiment of selective ideological norms (e.g., altruism) that are fundamental to the political system (Lane 1981). We attend to various key symbols of socialism and propaganda schemas in the construction of socialist heroes (e.g., mounting public support, celebrating socialist achievements, and materializing the glory of socialism in architecture). Based on the above discussion of the extended Barthes model, we illustrate how these ideological strategies have been appropriated in advertising to herald the coming of a consumer society and how socialist heroes have been transformed into consumerist idols in advertising through the manipulation of key political symbolism (Lane 1981).

### The Appropriation of Public Support

Figure 3 is an ad for Toshiba from the *People's Daily* on November 6, 1979. On the upper left is Toshiba's brand logo in English, under which the Chinese slogan reads: "Toshiba, Creator of Future Technology." On the left are Toshiba products, all of which were consumer luxuries in 1979 China. Beside the products is a picture of factory workers assembling televisions on a production line. On the right, the ad slogan reads: "Use the Comprehensive Technology from Toshiba to Strengthen the Friendship Tie between the Two Countries." The ad copy below reads: "Producing a large selection of products needed in various fields, including heavy-duty electromotor and electrical equipment for industrial use and electronics for the home as represented primarily by our color televisions. Toshiba aspires to con-

FIGURE 3

TOSHIBA AD IN THE *PEOPLE'S DAILY*, NOVEMBER 6, 1979

tribute to China's Four Modernizations and to improving the People's living standards."

This ad is steeped in political significance. The Four Modernizations were initiated to transform China into a modern, powerful, socialist country and to bring the ideal of communism into reality through accelerating development in the fields of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology (Baum 1994). None of the modernizations were intended to stimulate consumption but instead advocated enhancing infrastructure and increasing productivity. Likewise, the policy of developing friendships with other countries (Liu 2004) emphasized production and ideology and was by no means to encourage the pursuit of consumerist values. The new policy also called for using Western science and technology to accelerate the realization of communism. In the ad, the young Japanese woman is dressed in a thin stylish shirt, while the only fashion in 1979 China was the plain-colored military Sun Yat-sen (Mao) suit. Her look is feminine with a contemporary trendy hairstyle and earrings, which were both dramatically different from the nongendered look of most Chinese women at the time. Had advertising even been allowed, the image would have been subject to severe ideological condemnation only a few years earlier. Maoist socialism advocated abnegation, sacrifice, and egalitarianism and rejected hedonistic enjoyment through the pursuit of material possessions. Fashion and jewelry were among the bourgeois lifestyle elements to be eliminated through ideological campaigns, especially during the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). The appearance of such images in the official party organization made them all the more shocking. However, the apparent conflicts between the two rival ideologies of communism and consumerism were bridged through the reinterpretation of socialist symbolism (Lane 1981).

The original connotations of the Four Modernizations, adopting Western technology, and developing friendships postulate specific knowledge about communism and embody a whole history of ideological struggle about different paths to communism. When used in this advertisement, they have been removed from their political context, distanced from their original ideological significance, and transformed into signifiers to endorse consumption and strip it of its

former stigmatization under communism. The original meanings are subverted in order to promote Toshiba products. The emphasis on production essential to the realization of the Four Modernizations is shifted to consumption. Adopting advanced technology to improve industrial productivity as advocated by the official ideology is recontextualized as adopting the latest consumer goods. Although the image (a consumerist sign) of luxury goods and a fashionable woman would earlier have been subject to severe ideological condemnation, when used in this ad with decontextualized socialist signs (e.g., the discourses of the Four Modernizations), the problematic consumerist sign has been distanced from being stigmatized (i.e., turned into the SIGNIFIER 2 in fig. 2) and reinterpreted through the displaced socialist discourses and imagery (i.e., EMERGENT SIGN 3 is constructed). The possession of Toshiba consumer luxuries is justified through the modernization project, and consumption is represented as a means of participating in socialist construction. However, socialism, represented through the ideological discourses and imagery, has been stripped of its original political significance in the ad and turned into the RECONFIGURED SIGN III that interprets modernization and realizing socialism through consumption and the pursuit of individual hedonism. As seen here, there is a simultaneous presence of two rival ideologies of socialism and consumerism, both at work in competition for signification rather than the reproduction of a single dominant ideology as demonstrated by Barthes (1972).

The connotations of being consumers are also elevated and transformed by the connection with the ideological significance of socialist workers here (Lane 1981). Those few who could afford to consume are equated with the ideologically gloried socialist workers and presented as new role models in the era of economic reformation. Social status is no longer represented as determined solely by one's political stand and ability to produce but instead through the stratified ability to consume. Development in the past 25 years seems to have fulfilled the promise in this Toshiba ad in 1979. The use of socialist symbolism (Lane 1981) may be simply to enhance brand image and sell products. By incorporating socialist signs, advertisers may also pretend to have an-

swered the party's call for producing advertising that could simultaneously promote socialism and spread economic information (Ding 1985). Although the dominant ideology firmly opposed "corrosion by decadent ideas from abroad" and Deng Xiaoping vowed not to allow "the bourgeois way of life to spread in our country" (Deng 1982, 158), consumerism is nevertheless excused in the guise of building socialism in advertising. The focus on economic development has forced the party to compete with advertisers at the level of signifiers, while maintaining consumption as the primary incentive for economic growth.

### The Appropriation of Anticonsumerist Campaigns

Advertising in 1980s China was vulnerable to political fluctuations and was often the target of ideological criticism. To justify itself, advertising continuously adapted to the latest Chinese communist ideological campaigns, even those condemning advertising. It closely resonated with party politics and shifted with policy changes. In late 1982, the party launched the previously mentioned Constructing Two Civilizations campaign to ensure the socialist nature of the economic reformation and to combat ideological influences of consumerism. The endeavor was quickly appropriated in advertising. On January 2, 1983, an ad for Shanghai Broadcasting and Television Industrial Company (SBT) from the *People's Daily* made an explicit reference to this campaign. The headline prominently claims: "To Provide Quality Broadcasting and Television Products for the Construction of the Two Civilizations."

Similar to the Toshiba ad, this SBT advertisement is framed as voicing support for party policy. People are expected to publicly express their determination to build socialism and to accomplish the sacred mission given by the party. Promoting such determination is a ritualistic daily routine in state propaganda in order to cultivate public support for the party. This has provided an inexhaustible reservoir for the ideological manipulation of consumerism in advertising. Within original socialist discourses, the two civilizations involve a large set of dogmas and accompanying codes of behavior. When used in advertising, however, the two-civilizations theme is decontextualized from its political space, deprived of its rich ideological significance, and used to endorse the consumption of products ranging from consumer electronics to broadcasting equipment. It has ceased to function as an ideological thrust to contest the corruption of consumerist values such as hedonism and individualism. The choice of the right product is instead constructed as an important part of the two civilizations. SBT is represented as an active participant in the two-civilizations construction by offering various products for its customers. Advertising constitutes a signification (i.e., emergent sign) that valorizes consumption as an updated way of constructing socialism. This opposed rather than endorsed the official ideology of the time. The regression of the two civilizations from socialist practice to an impoverished phrase is compensated by the act of consumption (i.e., reconfigured sign). Consumption is presented as an alternative to other ideological

activities, such as political study, as an emergent practice of the reinterpreted socialism. Advertising thus not only suppresses the meanings and history of the decontextualized sign as described by Barthes (1972); it also suppresses the attention to the social practice embedded in the sign and refills it with new practices required by the rising ideology. The reconfiguration of socialism in advertising is thus multidimensional. Whereas party conservatives and liberals competed to control China's reformation, advertising co-opted discourses of both sides to reinforce consumerist reorientation of socialist ideology. The new signification also alters the power relationship under orthodox socialism. Those who behave according to the codes of behavior advocated by the original two-civilizations discourse used to be the privileged in socialist China. However, this social order is symbolically inverted by advertising. Those who can afford to consume are represented as ideologically superior and more active participants in the socialist construction. The newly constructed social structure and power relationship are made to appear natural by the reconfigured socialist discourse involving the two-civilizations construction.

### The Appropriation of Socialist Landmarks

In this ad (see fig. 4), Citizen Watch is promoted in a night scene of Tiananmen Square (Gate of Heavenly Peace),

FIGURE 4

CITIZEN AD, DECEMBER 16, 1983

西铁城自1979年10月始已先后在上海、苏州、福州及广州设立了最完善的维修服务处。为了进一步推广服务网络，最近更在北京增设一家维修站。务使从南至北的中国顾客均能得到相同的周到服务。西铁城在中国所设立的庞大服务网，不独可为中国人民提供优质的维修服务，同时也创造了训练专业人才的机会。更可引进西铁城先进科技、最新的设计理念及现代化的管理方法，务求精益求精。

西铁城及设计时请留意一拥有27种型号的表款，而部分更附有防水功能及防震功能。

男表 30-3081-50

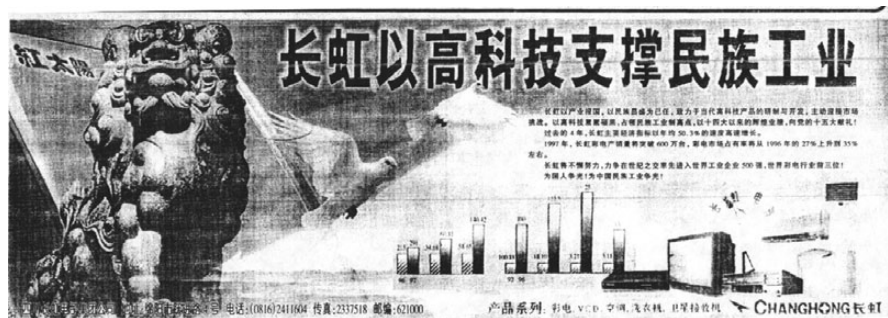
女表 30-1019-20

西铁城 (国外译名夏民果)  
科技冠全球 服务遍中国

国内维修站：北京：前门大街19号 福州：八一七北路121号  
上海：南京路262号 泉州：中山南路370号 广州：中山五路85至87号

FIGURE 5

CHANGHONG TV AD, FEBRUARY 5, 1997



the sacred birthplace of the socialist nation. On the left is the Memorial Hall of Chairman Mao. In the center is the Monument to the Heroes of the People, the tribute to those who sacrificed their lives in the founding of the PRC. On the right stands the Great Hall of the People, the place where the National People's Assembly convenes. The logo of Citizen is placed prominently above the square replacing the red star that symbolizes the CCP and that usually occupies this position in propaganda posters. The copy announces Citizen's expansion of its service networks in China and claims its aspiration to contribute to China's modernization by providing the latest technology. The Chinese translation of the brand Citizen based on pronunciation literally means "west iron city." It conveys a sense of being masculine and modern, rather than a watch for the ordinary people as implied by its English brand name.

The architectural icons shown here are all sacred symbols of socialist China and the hallmark of the country's progress in socialist construction (see Baum 1994; Schell 1988). They are closely connected with the political power of the party and are impregnated with the official ideology of communism. They signify the rupture with a humiliating past and the reconnection with a promising communist future. Their images are intended to be read with awe and are expected to evoke experiences of the greatness of the party and the pride of participating in socialist construction. However, all this is distorted in their reproduction in this advertisement. The sacred is made profane by their commercialization. The party's intent to materialize and immortalize the glory of communism in marble and stone is reconfigured to promote Citizen watches, a symbol of the decadent consumerist lifestyle constantly stigmatized by the official ideology in the previous era. Advertising creates an ambiguity in which the images alternate between an impoverished advertising signifier to justify consumption and a complete sign with rich historically conditioned ideological meanings that demand particular honorific awe-inspiring readings. The signified of the ad, valorized by the decontextualized images of socialist space, is consumption. It has also been associated with other sanctioned socialist practices as seen in other ads discussed here. Ambiguity is constructed around the meaning of con-

sumption, which used to be rendered invisible in the public arena except for its condemnation but is now associated with the glory of communism. The semiotic conflicts (Volosinov 1973) between communism and consumerism are bridged by this "ambiguitization" of the meaning of consumption and consolidated through the signification of advertising. Consumption of the status-evoking Citizen watch is justified as part of the modernization project. Codes provide the rules that generate signs (Eco 1976). Here the socialist code that renders consumerist signs as decadent is breached, and a consumerist code that renders the Citizen watch as desirable is established. A sign system of consumerism emerges from and is valorized by the existing sign system of socialism.

### The Appropriation of Socialist Heroes and Icons

Figure 5 is an ad for Changhong TV from February 5, 1997. The Chinese on the flag is Changhong's TV brand Red Sun, beside which is a grandiose stone lion with doves flying around it. The slogan "Changhong Supports National Industry through Its High-Tech [Product]" is coupled with the company's heroic determination to "Win Honor for Chinese People! Win Glory for National Industry!" This ad was placed at a time when dominant ideological campaigns called for the country to unite around the party center to develop a strong national industry in the face of the increasing impact of global companies in the Chinese market. As socialist ideals lost their salience (Liu 2004), China's leadership increasingly used nationalism to build loyalty (Gries 2004). This ad extols the company's success in the past 4 years and attributes it to the party's leadership. Its achievements are presented as an impressive contribution to the party's fifteenth convention and as a showcase of progress. China is presented as struggling to face challenges from global companies, whereas Changhong is constructed as a heroic company that can champion national industry, save face for China, and help China achieve prosperity. Becoming a Fortune 500 company and the world's top color TV manufacturer is heralded as a source of glory and pride for Chinese industry and Chinese people.



The ad is marked by political symbolism. The slogan uses an imposing font usually seen in official announcements from the party. The copy is written in a grand discursive style typical of party organization editorials, as if it was provided by the party to endorse the company as a new role model for emulation. The militant wording signifies the company's determination to lead the nation's industry and thereby to make an impressive offering to the party. The red flag is a sacred icon of communism. Here Changhong's TV brand Red Sun is written on the flag in traditional Chinese, even though simplified Chinese was adopted more than 3 decades earlier by the PRC. Such a rendering signifies a connection with the party's heroic revolutionary era. A red sun is also steeped in political significance in Chinese propaganda. Mao and his works were touted as the red sun of China that had saved the country from its humiliating past. The brand Red Sun thus indicates that the company can lead the country toward a bright (consumerist) future. The grandiose presentation of the stone lion is part of the propagandist efforts during the period that used traditional symbolism to empower and signify the party. White doves are also frequently used to associate the party with world peace. The growth chart and product display are characteristic of China's socialist past and highly symbolic representations of heroic achievements of socialist construction. All the symbolism unmistakably refers to the passing socialist ideology that privileges industrial production over consumption. However, their reconfigured presence in advertising celebrates consumption and exemplifies the spread of consumerism under the influences of market socialism. The purchase of Changhong products is reinterpreted as glorifying and supporting the party and the nation. Although the ideological environment in late 1990s China differs significantly from the 1980s and early 1990s, when consumerism still faced strong opposition by communism, the structure of ideological transition in advertising still echoes that of the 1979 Toshiba ad in figure 3. Again we can see that Barthes's myths model privileges the reproduction of dominant ideological values while our more extended framework addresses the complex interaction of ideologies in transition.

### **POLITICAL MYTH IN ADVERTISING: CHINA AND BEYOND**

Although our focus is on Chinese advertising, similar patterns likely exist in other societies. During India's transition from national protectionism to a globally oriented economy, many key symbols of Gandhi's nationalistic Swadeshi ideology were reinterpreted in advertising to promote consumption (Mazzarella 2003). Advertisers competed to establish their own credentials for patriotism. Nehru's famous words about "freedom at midnight" were frequently appropriated to promote consumer products ranging from mosquito coils promising freedom from bugs to air-conditioning offering freedom from heat. During this transition, Indian advertising was also the focus through which cultural and ideological tensions were reinterpreted and co-opted,

similar to what we have observed in Chinese advertising. In Saudi Arabia, where advertisers face conflicting values of Shi'i, Zaidi, and Sunni minorities and global consumerism, multiple semiotic tensions are exploited in advertising to promote consumption, especially during Ramadan (Zirinski 2005). Our extended framework may help to understand how the appropriation of key Islamic symbolism facilitates changes in Arabian society and its systems of representation. For instance, consumption is celebrated in advertising in the same way as the *mada'ih* poems used to praise illustrious rulers in Arabic history. This is similar to how the socialist propaganda strategies discussed above are appropriated to promote consumerism in Chinese society.

Marketers do not always seek to collaborate with the state or to reconcile conflicting values with the official establishment of dominant meanings. They also propose alternatives for social reconstruction that sometimes counter the state's expectations but seldom contradict economic interests of global corporations. When existing ideology acts against marketer interests, it is more likely that the signifieds of key symbolism are reinterpreted while the signifiers are retained. When existing ideology supports marketer interests but is challenged by alternative ideologies, it is more likely that its signifieds are reaffirmed while its signifiers are replaced by symbols of alternative ideologies. After 9/11, FCUK, Next, and even Hyundai all took advantage of rising patriotism in the United States and adopted images of the American flag, the Statue of Liberty, and the founding fathers to reframe patriotism as spending and to shift the reflection on foreign policies from collective government action toward personal consumption. Although colonialism has diminished and previous colonialist representation of Africa has been replaced by imagery that claims to celebrate cultural diversity, racism continues to be exploited in the guise of multiculturalism in advertising to reinforce the cultural differences that affirm inequities between developed and underdeveloped countries (Ramamurthy 2003). In many Benetton ads, whites are still represented as givers and blacks as receivers. "Her first perfume by Benetton" resonates with colonialist advertisements depicting black's "first shoes" or "first smile." Unlike Chinese advertising, which retains dominant socialist signifiers and replaces socialist signifieds with consumption meanings, such advertising retains racist values and replaces colonialist signifiers with multicultural symbols. Although the transition from colonialism to post-colonialism differs from the shift from communism to consumerism, the structural patterns in advertising are similar.

### **DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Through the lens of advertising, we sought to examine consumerism's expansion within Chinese society and contribute to the macrodimension of consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Belk 2002; Cohen 2004). In these examples from our full analysis, we have illustrated through the extended Barthes model how this ideological

transition from communism toward consumerism is explicated in advertising within an officially hostile ideological environment and how the semiotic tensions among rival ideologies within the space of a single advertisement are bridged by the decontextualization and reconfiguration of political symbols. In Chinese advertising, consumerist values have been subtly celebrated in the guise of promoting socialist construction, and the once dominant ideology opposing consumerist values is reconfigured to reinforce and naturalize China's social conformation to global consumerism. Advertising transforms both the form (ideological schemas) and the content (key political symbolism) through which previously dominant ideology is promulgated. It potentially facilitates the discursive exchange between socialism and consumerism and functions to economically transcend (Stallybrass and White 1986) the political and ideological constraints of socialism in China. It seems to offer a public discourse and transformative logic that resonate with social changes and can be potentially adopted by other social groups promoting radical changes in a society. It does this in a way that was probably beyond the volition of advertising practitioners. As consumer goods flourish, consumerist beliefs and values shake the socialist consciousness and challenge the old socialist ideological system. However, advertising should never be taken as an isolated institution, and it alone did not trigger the ideological shift in China. Rather, it resonates with other domains of social transformation that continue to replace China's communist past with a consumerist future (Barme 1999; Baum 1994; Davis 2000). The present focus on the transformation of socialism to valorizing consumerism and the structural patterns of advertising that facilitate the reconfigurations of key symbolism during this period of rapid social transition should extend our understandings of dynamic consumption in several important ways to which we now turn.

### The Extended Barthes Model and Advertising in Social Transition

The ideological transition represented in Chinese advertising provides a context in which to reconsider Barthes's myth model. Societal myth is evasive and functions to naturalize history and to depoliticize and reproduce an ideology that has passed its revolutionary stage (Barthes 1972). Although Barthes recognizes the dynamic nature of sign, he dismisses the possibility of ideological transition, especially in French society in which all that is not bourgeois is transformed to reproduce this dominant ideology. Barthes's myth model examines the structure of an established system of representation and reveals the political nature of everyday reality in French society. But the rapid ideological transition in contemporary China is unlike the process foreseen by Barthes. He does not examine how a dominant mode of representation is subverted by change. Barthes's myth model is focused on how socially accepted signs are used to present and naturalize dominant ideological messages, but it does not explore how socially stigmatized signs become desira-

ble. Prior to their mythification, Barthes's examples of wrestling, French wine, and Citroën were all part of daily French life (Lavers 1982). Similarly, the tricolored hues (yellow, green, and red) had to be understood as Italian before they could convey "Italianness" in an ad for tomato sauce analyzed by Barthes (1977). However, in early 1980s China, images of luxury goods and happy consumers were propagated signs of decadent capitalism and were far from being desirable. How such consumerist signs become valorized and how advertising helps to invert and transform these signs requires an extension of Barthes's model. By examining two rival ideologies competing for signification of key symbolism within advertising, our extension of Barthes illustrates the myth in transition. It reveals a microstructure of advertising during social transition that potentially facilitates the valorization of an emerging ideology on its way to becoming dominant, if not hegemonic (Gramsci 1971). The syncretism of signs from conflicting systems of representation resonates with social transitions. Social change at the symbolic level is to a large extent the construction and reconstruction of signifiers and signifieds. The new signifieds (e.g., the pursuit of consumer goods) are elevated through the displaced old signifiers (e.g., the communist icons used to justify the consumption of a Citizen watch). The old signifieds are interpreted through new signifiers (e.g., modernization is built through the consumption of the latest consumer goods).

Prior research infers sociocultural changes by comparing advertisements from different periods (Lears 1983, 1994; Leiss, Kline, and Jhally 1990). It takes a synchronic approach to examine how meanings are constructed through signs and rhetoric in advertising (Scott 1994). The competition among rival ideologies within the space of a single advertisement has rarely received attention. In the Chinese case, realizing modernizations through production suggests a dominant socialist ideology, whereas pursuing modernity through consumption indicates the rise of consumerism. Elements of both of these ideologies are present in the semantic space of single advertisements. Our extension bridges two rival representational systems (Hall 1997), each of which has its own ideological agenda and reproduces values serving conflicting interests. Transitional advertising, such as that in the social transition discussed here, imposes a transient code (Eco 1976) that reconfigures existing sign production and bridges semiotic conflicts (Volosinov 1973) among rival ideologies. This complex reconstruction of signs in transitional advertising is more than the reproduction of established values (McCracken 1986). The theoretical logic of advertising as a cultural system (Sherry 1987) leads to the conclusion that advertising in different phases of social development is participating in cultural evolution. Advertising builds into its compelling interpretation of the ideal of this moment the necessity for a different reconfiguration in the next moment, as with fashion design (Hollander 1993). The shift of sociocultural environments imposes a particular structure to the interpretation of symbolism, and symbolic forms must be studied in relation to changing historical contexts (Geertz 1972). The concept of trans-

formational advertising (Deighton 1985) also emphasizes the particularity of advertising structure in achieving specific effects. But Deighton's construct focuses on microlevel consumption experience rather than how advertising works in social transformation. Our framework extends this discussion from the microlevel of how arguments are constructed in advertising to the macroperspective of ideology and social transition.

### Advertising and Political Ideology

The marketplace is not only alive with cultural mythologies but saturated with political ideologies (Cohen 2004). Throughout history, consumption has seldom existed outside politics, which sometimes exerts its influences by means of sumptuary laws (Brewer and Porter 1993). Consumers often politicize consumption, and the state has been actively involved in the definition and representation of consumers (Cohen 2004; Strasser et al. 1998). At the same time, consumer abundance has been wielded as an ideological weapon against communism both in the United States and in Europe (Grazia 2005; McGovern 2006). Cold war ideology prominently contrasted the consumer regime of capitalism and the production-oriented communist economy. In advertising, the persistent use of political language, images, and concepts has equated spending with voting and markets with communities (McGovern 2006). Although Crocket and Wallendorf (2004) argue that political ideology should be at the heart of consumer research, how dominant political ideologies, especially anticonsumerist ideologies, are co-opted in advertising has received relatively little attention. Even less is said about how advertising contributes to the subversion of the political ideology it draws upon to politicize consumption meanings during social transitions. This gap in consumer research is more conspicuous, given that consumption is often promoted in the grander discourses of citizenship and civic duty (Cohen 2004; McGovern 2006).

In examining how advertising appropriates the key political symbolism of the anticonsumerist communist ideology to justify consumption, we detected a blurred boundary between politics and the marketplace. This liminal space captures political nuances not articulated by previous conceptions of myth (Stern 1995) and marketplace mythology (Thompson 2004). Whereas, in Western societies, mythical archetypes are often evoked to promote consumption, Chinese consumer culture in its early development is unmistakably shaped by political ideology. The commercialization of religion (Lears 1994; Miller 2004) that is considered so crucial in the transformation of Western society into a consumer culture is simply missing from the Chinese context. Communism itself had already displaced religion as the dominant belief system in China and underwent significant transformation since the late 1970s (Baum 1994). The mythology of a consumer society, as articulated through socialist advertising, fashions consumerism in terms of the previously dominant ideology of communism. In this socialist country that enthusiastically promoted the superiority of an advertising-free economy throughout its prereforma-

tion era, advertising was reinstated as an extension of the party propaganda initially subject to the supervision of the State Department of Propaganda. This was intended to integrate advertising with existing representation systems constituted by slogans, posters, and other party propaganda as a means of advocating socialism and disseminating economic information (Ding 1985). The political posters that increasingly dominate China's public space envision an idealized and prosperous future, seek to persuade people that the present and the represented future are indistinguishable, and provide a model for the masses to strive for (Bonnell 1997). Advertising draws upon this rich tradition of political propaganda to build imagery of China as a consumer society. Consumerist values are entwined with communist visuals and rhetoric accumulated over past decades. Even ideological campaigns against consumerism (e.g., the Constructing Spiritual Civilization campaign) are transformed into advertising celebrating consumption. Such co-optation of dominant official ideological establishment differs from advertising's appropriation of its critical discourses and counterculture in Western societies, where dominant ideologies rarely challenge consumption or herald a society based on a production ethos (Frank 1997). In this process, the secularization of once-sacred communism opens the country to a search for an alternative sacred metanarrative (Dai 2002) and leads to a culture of quest comparable to that of popular spirituality among baby boomers in the United States (Roof 1999). Consumption is represented and naturalized in advertising as an answer to this search for the sacred and the yearning for a deep spiritual destiny.

Advertising reinterprets consumption as an important element of Chinese modernity and recasts China's modernization project as an end reachable only through consumption. For Weber (1907/1998), the change from pursuing the ultimate values of substantive rationality to the more immediate and individual values of instrumental rationality paved the way for many developments in the rise of production capitalism. A century later Barber (2007) argues that both types of rationality are overcome by play, emotion, and pleasure in the rise of consumer capitalism. However, China's transition to a consumer society has not yet gone this far. Rather, its representations of modernization have changed from substantive to instrumental rationality. The Four Modernizations initiated as a means to achieve communism originally shared its substantive objective (i.e., realizing communism). In advertising, modernization is represented as a goal in itself and is redefined as the consumption of the latest consumer goods, rather than as production and contribution to the good society. The triumphant longing to become a modernized socialist country has been critical in China. But it has changed into an escalating consumption competition that can mark the individual as being modern (Davis 2000). Over time, the political construction of consumption meanings in advertising has evolved into a consumer culture fused with political ideology, which coexists with marketized socialism (Barme 1999). Pride in China is now pride in Chinese consumer lifestyles and the

hope for Chinese brands to become global leaders. This politicized consumer culture is also evoked by the party to legitimize its control in the new millennium, as seen in the promotion of a holiday-stoked economy and touristic consumption as social advances under the party's leadership. All these changes seem to resonate in the appeals of advertisements over the 25 years studied. It remains to be seen whether the democracy and freedom demanded by many Chinese will similarly be channeled to the marketplace.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

We sought to exemplify the expansion of consumerism as represented in advertising. It should be noted that we focus only on ads in the official newspaper of the CCP. Similar patterns may also exist in other forms of advertising. For instance, a Chinese television commercial for a vacuum cleaner claims, "Dust won't disappear of its own accord" (Barne 1999). This is a famous phrase taken out of Mao's works that declares that reactionaries would have to be swept away because they would not disappear automatically. Furthermore, advertising is only one among many institutions contributing to the transformation of communism in China. Many avant-garde artists also help to crumble the edifice and ridicule the corpse of communism in the marketplace (Barne 1999). In pop culture, the tunes of the party's revolutionary songs are turned into rock-and-roll songs to express dissatisfaction with society. Pictures of Mao are given as free gifts for purchases of consumer products. In other countries such as Cuba, the government seeks to incorporate and co-opt counterhegemonic art forms such as rap music to strengthen its power and promote its propaganda message (Fernandes 2006). Although its implications remain to be seen, many rappers express radically different political ideals in performances claiming to celebrate socialism. The effort to reconcile critical expressions with dominant values inevitably generates conflicting discourses in public space, which can potentially subvert the hegemonic ideological values. Such processes seem similar to those we have examined through the prism of Chinese advertising. Future research may take a more holistic view of the multiple institutional forces that transform a society (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Cohen 2004). It should be fruitful to examine advertising in other historical contexts and times using the present approach. For instance, the reverse ideological transition from consumerism to communism in the early years of the PRC can be analyzed through the extended Barthes framework. Before the PRC, Shanghai in the 1930s was the fifth biggest city in the world, with a prominent, although still not pervasive, consumer culture (Crow 1937/2003; Lee 1999). In the early 1950s, before the propaganda images of degendered communist depictions of women workers became dominant, the rural was idealized through images of fashionable women happily working in an agricultural field. In this case, the pleasures of consumption were linked to labor and production. Such reconfiguration of signifieds and signifiers allowed the new communist ideals to

be understood as desirable and likely facilitated the social conformation to communism.

## REFERENCES

- Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer (1944), "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. and trans. John Cumming, London: Verso, 121–47.
- Arnold, Stephen J. and Eileen Fischer (1994), "Hermeneutics and Consumer Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21 (June), 55–70.
- Arnold, Stephen J., Robert V. Kozinets, and Jay M. Handelman (2001), "Hometown Ideology and Retailer Legitimation: The Institutional Semiotics of Wal-Mart Flyers," *Journal of Retailing*, 77 (2), 243–71.
- Arnould, Eric J. and Craig J. Thompson (2005), "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (4), 868–82.
- Barber, Benjamin R. (2007), *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole*, New York: Norton.
- Barne, Geremie R. (1999), *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Barthes, Roland (1972), *Mythologies*, New York: Hill & Wang.
- (1977), "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image-Music-Text*, New York: Hill & Wang, 33–51.
- Baudrillard, Jean (1981), *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin, New York: Telos.
- Baum, Richard (1994), *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Belk, Russell W. (1987), "Presidential Address: Happy Thought," in *Advances in Consumer Research*, ed. Melanie Wallendorf and Paul Anderson, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.
- (1988), "Third World Consumer Culture," in *Marketing and Development: Toward Broader Dimension*, ed. Erdogan Kumcu and A. Fuat Firat, Greenwich, CT: JAI, 103–27.
- (2002), "Changing Consumer, Changing Discipline," in *The Changing Consumer: Markets and Meanings*, ed. Steven Miles, Alison Anderson, and Kevin Meethan, London: Routledge, 144–61.
- Belk, Russell W., Güliz Ger, and Søren Askegaard (2003), "The Fire of Desire: A Multisited Inquiry into Consumer Passion," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30 (September), 326–51.
- Belk, Russell W. and Richard W. Pollay (1985), "Images of Ourselves: The Good Life in Twentieth-Century Advertising," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 11 (4), 887–97.
- Bonnell, Victoria E. (1997), *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984), "Introduction," in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, ed. Richard Nice, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1–8.
- Brewer, John and Roy Porter (1993), *Consumption and the World of Goods*, New York: Routledge.
- Campbell, Colin (1987), *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Certeau, Michel de (1984), *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ci, Jiwei (1994), *Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution: From Utopianism to Hedonism*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

- Cohen, Lizabeth (2004), "A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (December), 236–39.
- Crockett, David and Melanie Wallendorf (2004), "The Role of Normative Political Ideology in Consumer Behavior," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (December), 511–28.
- Crow, Carl (1937/2003), *400 Million Customers: The Experiences, Some Happy, Some Sad, of an American in China, and What They Taught Him*, Norwalk: Eastbridge.
- Dai, Jinhua (2002), "Redemption and Consumption: Depicting Culture in the 1990s," in *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, ed. Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow, London: Verso, 172–88.
- Daunton, Martin and Matthew Hilton (2001), *The Politics of Consumption*, Oxford: Berg.
- Davis, Deborah S. (2000), "Introduction: A Revolution in Consumption," in *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*, ed. Deborah S. Davis, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1–22.
- Deighton, John (1985), "Rhetorical Strategies in Advertising," *Advances in Consumer Research*, 2, 432–36.
- Deng, Xiaoping (1982), "Emancipate the Mind, Seek Truth from Facts, and Unite as One in Looking to the Future (December 13, 1978)," in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, 1975–1982*, Beijing: Foreign Language, 151–64.
- Ding, Yupeng (1985), "On the Socialist Advertising in China" [in Chinese], *China Advertising*, 15 (1), 4–5.
- Douglas, Mary and Baron Isherwood (1996), *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*, New York: Basic.
- Eagleton, Terry (1991), *Ideology: An Introduction*, London: Verso.
- Eco, Umberto (1976), *A Theory of Semiotics*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Fernandes, Sujatha (2006), *Cuba Represent! Cuban Arts, State Power, and the Making of New Revolutionary Cultures*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Firat, A. Fuat and Alladi Venkatesh (1995), "Liberatory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (September), 239–67.
- Fiske, John (1989), *Introduction to Communication Studies*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge.
- Frank, Thomas (1997), *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gamble, Jos (2003), *Shanghai in Transition: Changing Perspectives and Social Controls of a Chinese Metropolis*, London: Routledge Curzon.
- Geertz, Clifford (1972), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic.
- (1983), *Local Knowledge*, New York: Basic.
- Goldman, Robert and Stephen Papson (1996), *Sign Wars: The Cluttered Landscape of Advertising*, New York: Guilford.
- Gramsci, Antonio (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Grazia, Victoria de (2005), *Irresistible Empire*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gries, Peter Hays (2004), *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hall, Stuart (1980), "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–1979*, ed. Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, London: Hutchinson, 128–38.
- , ed. (1997), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Sage.
- Hodge, Robert and Gunther Kress (1988), *Social Semiotics*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Hollander, Anne (1993), *Seeing through Clothes*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Holt, Douglas B. (2002), "Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29 (June), 70–90.
- Hunt, Shelby (1983), "General Theories and the Fundamental Explananda of Marketing," *Journal of Marketing*, 47 (Fall), 9–17.
- Kozinets, Robert V. (2002), "Can Consumers Escape the Market? Emancipatory Illuminations from Burning Man," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29 (June), 20–38.
- Kozinets, Robert V. and Jay M. Handelman (2004), "Adversaries of Consumption: Consumer Movements, Activism, and Ideology," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (December), 691–704.
- Lane, Christel (1981), *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society, the Soviet Case*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lavers, Annette (1982), *Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lears, T. J. Jackson (1983), "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880–1930," in *Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880–1980*, ed. Richard W. Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, New York: Pantheon.
- (1994), *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*, New York: Basic.
- Lee, Leo Ou-Fan (1999), *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Leeuwen, Theo van (2001), "Semiotics and Iconography," in *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, ed. Theo van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt, London: Sage, 92–118.
- Leiss, William, Stephen Kline, and Sut Jhally (1990), *Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products, and Images of Well-Being*, Toronto: Nelson Canada.
- Liu, Kang (2004), *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Marchand, Roland (1985), *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mazzarella, William (2003), *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- McCracken, Grant (1986), "Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13 (June), 71–84.
- McGovern, Charles F. (2006), *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890–1945*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- McQuarrie, Edward F. (1989), "Advertising Resonance: A Semiological Perspective," in *Interpretive Consumer Research*, ed. Elizabeth C. Hirschman, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, 97–114.
- McQuarrie, Edward F. and David Glen Mick (1999), "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising: Text-Interpretive, Experimental, and Reader-Response Analyses," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13 (March), 196–213.
- Mick, David Glen (1986), "Consumer Research and Semiotics: Exploring the Morphology of Signs, Symbols, and Significance," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13 (September), 196–213.
- (1997), "Semiotics in Marketing and Consumer Research:

- Balderdash, Verity, Pleas," in *Consumer Research: Postcards from the Edge*, ed. Stephen Brown and Darach Turley, London: Routledge, 249–62.
- Mick, David Glen, James E. Burroughs, Patrick Hetzel, and Mary Yoko Brannen (2004), "Pursuing the Meaning of Meaning in the Commercial World: An International Review of Marketing and Consumer Research Founded on Semiotics," *Semiotica*, 152 (1–4), 1–74.
- Mick, David Glen and Laura R. Oswald (2006), "The Semiotic Paradigm on Meaning in the Marketplace," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*, ed. Russell W. Belk, Cheltenham: Elgar, 31–45.
- Miller, Daniel (1997), *A Theory of Shopping*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Miller, Vincent J. (2004), *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture*, New York: Continuum.
- Murray, Jeff B. and Julie L. Ozanne (1991), "The Critical Imagination: Emancipatory Interests in Consumer Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 18 (September), 129–44.
- Olson, Jerry (1982), "Presidential Address 1981: Toward a Science of Consumer Behavior," *Advances of Consumer Research*, 9, v–x.
- Ortner, S. B. (1973), "On Key Symbols," *American Anthropologist*, 75 (5), 1338–46.
- Peirce, Charles Sanders (1931–58), *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Vols. 1–6, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, and Vols. 7–8, ed. Arthur Burks, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Pollay, Richard W. (1986), "The Distorted Mirror: Reflections on the Unintended Consequences of Advertising," *Journal of Marketing*, 50 (April), 18–36.
- Ramamurthy, Anandi (2003), *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Riskin, Carl (1987), *China's Political Economy: The Quest for Development since 1949*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Roof, Wade Clark (1999), *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rose, Gillian (2007), *Visual Methodologies*, 2nd ed., London: Sage.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de (1916/1983), *Course in General Linguistics*, London: Duckworth.
- Schell, Orville (1984), *To Get Rich Is Glorious: China in the '80s*, New York: Pantheon.
- (1988), *Discos and Democracy: China in the Throes of Reform*, New York: Pantheon.
- Schor, Juliet B. and Douglas B. Holt (2000), *The Consumer Society Reader*, New York: New Press.
- Schudson, Michael (1984), *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*, New York: Basic.
- Scott, Linda M. (1994), "Images in Advertising: The Need for a Theory of Visual Rhetoric," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21 (September), 252–73.
- Sherry, John F., Jr. (1987), "Advertising as a Cultural System," in *Marketing and Semiotics: New Directions in the Study of Signs for Sale*, ed. Jean Umiker-Sebeok, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 441–62.
- Sherry, John F., Jr., and Eduardo Camargo (1987), "'May Your Life Be Marvelous': English Language Labelling and the Semiotics of Japanese Promotion," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14 (September), 174–88.
- Slater, Don (1997), *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Smith, Ruth A. and David S. Lux (1993), "Historical Method in Consumer Research: Developing Causal Explanations of Change," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19 (March), 595–610.
- Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White (1986), *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Stearns, Peter (2001), *Consumerism in World History: The Global Transformation of Desire*, London: Routledge.
- Stern, Barbara B. (1995), "Consumer Myths: Frye's Taxonomy and the Structural Analysis of Consumption Text," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (September), 165–85.
- Strasser, Susan, Charles McGovern, and Matthias Judt (1998), *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, Craig J. (2004), "Marketplace Mythology and Discourses of Power," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (June), 162–80.
- Thompson, Craig J. and Siok Kuan Tambyah (1999), "Trying to Be Cosmopolitan," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 26 (December), 214–41.
- Tse, David K., Russell W. Belk, and Nan Zhou (1989), "Becoming a Consumer Society: A Longitudinal and Cross-Cultural Content Analysis of Print Ads from Hong Kong, the People's Republic of China, and Taiwan," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15 (4), 457–72.
- Twitchell, James (1996), *Adult USA: The Triumph of Advertising in American Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Veblen, Thorstein (1925), *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, London: Allen & Unwin.
- Volosinov, V. N. (1973), *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, New York: Seminar.
- Warner, L. (1965), *The Living and the Dead*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Wasserstrom, Jeffrey (2007), *China's Brave New World*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Wells, William (1993), "Discovery-Oriented Consumer Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19 (March), 489–504.
- Weber, Max (1907/1978), *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Williams, Raymond (1980), "Advertising: The Magic System," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, London: Verso, 170–95.
- Williamson, Judith (1978), *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*, London: Boyars.
- Xu, Bai Yi (1990), *Marketing to China: One Billion New Customers*, Lincolnwood, IL: NTC.
- Zirinski, Roni (2005), *Ad Hoc Arabism: Advertising, Culture, and Technology in Saudi Arabia*, New York: Lang.