Re-visiting Hong Kong Paradise
A Study of Japanese Net Surfers

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Introduction

Nowadays, what can be conveyed as borderless lifestyles in East Asia might be seen as a result of transnational and global types of consumerism including tourism, food, use of language, popular culture and respective cultural experiences, such as college education and language training in different countries. In order to achieve a better understanding of all these changes and enhance our knowledge of the cultural dynamics in these countries, we realize that a new approach to cross-cultural understanding is necessary. In this paper, we will start by looking at the change in and the development of a computer-mediated discussion group focused on Hong Kong society; the purpose will be to investigate how foreign culture is internalized in Japanese net surfers' everyday social life. Furthermore, we will explore how the Japanese post-war generation practises similar kinds of borderless lifestyles and will consider the embedded meanings of their social tastes from a socio-cultural perspective.

Here and There

As we have seen from recent ethnographic writings, the approach that members of a host society take to the study of a "foreign" culture is simply the reflection of a cultural identity that has been constructed by a great variety of lifeways, foreign as well as local. Here, we investigate one particular instance of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in order to show how cultural

identity needs to be re-defined in a transnational context and to consider the adjustment that the role of anthropologists must undergo in studying the borderless communities created by CMC.

Before looking at the details of the case itself, we would like to address the problems of methodology and anthropological viewpoint which a study of CMC, such as this case, suggests. How do the traditional anthropological definitions remain useful when networks based on CMC reduce the separation between people that geography imposes? Geertz (1988) defines "there" as a postcard experience, while "here" is the place where anthropologists re-construct data in proper order. According to Geertz, early anthropologists were simply those who went there but wrote here; but the whole issue has gotten complicated as: "The entrance of once colonialized or castaway peoples onto the stage of global economy, international high politics, and world culture has made the claim of the anthropologist to be a tribune for the unheard, a representer of the unseen, a kenner of the misconstrued, increasingly difficult to sustain" (1988:133). In particular, Geertz concludes that, now, "much less insulate, much less well-defined, much less spectacularly contrastive" characteristics of "here" and "there" have emerged both in "the field" and in "the academy" (1988:148).

These trends which are observable in society as well as in anthropology have drawn our attention to the contemporary borderless lifestyles to which CMC has contributed. Again, the two distinctive physical locations, "here" and "there," used to differentiate the ethnographic presence of anthropologists and the place that was talked about; but, now they have become problematic, as anthropologists try to understand the meaning of CMC and the corresponding socio-cultural context in which CMC occurs. We seek to elaborate on these notions, making use of the "field" research on the virtual community formed by Japanese net surfers, especially on the meaning of "Hong Kong Culture" to the group that had special interest in Hong Kong society.

In particular, "there" used to be the site of the anthropologist's data collection, but now the idea of "there" is used to indicate the virtual space in which communication between a group of people takes place, although there is no physically existent space involved. People now can communicate with each other through the Bulletin Board Service, World Wide Web, e-mail and mailing lists on specific topics. With the emphasis on how the Internet is used in various ways for communication, most scholars focus on issues which arise through different modes of CMC, such as censorship, imagination and human relations (Argyle 1996; Argyle and Shields 1996; Shade 1996). In the case which follows, the "there" we are looking at is the virtual space through which individuals are brought closer to each other.

Another crucial concept that we would refer to is the "here" level, which is conventionally the place where academic books and articles are written and presented. In the Internet, however, "here" is no longer just somewhere far from the field-site — the only physical location — but rather a complicated site which can be both virtual and real. This site overlaps with "there" because the researcher can observe, ask, analyze and present at the same place, in some situations, computer users physically meet and talk with each other instead of doing these through CMC. In order to deal with this, we have used the methodology of participant observation in order to get insight into this virtual and borderless community form, "here." Practically speaking, participant observation within computer user groups' CMC is different from working in any community that exists physically because there is no substantial participation in the community's activities but only observation of their words.

Even after taking into consideration changed conventions for the meanings of "here" and "there" in this case being investigated, the issues of "here" and "there" are more complicated by the coincidence in the same location of the anthropologist's working place and the geographical areas on which discussion is focused (Hong Kong). This complication is highlighted by the fact that my informants know much more about Hong Kong than we do in certain respects, including resort areas, food and cuisine, pop music, fashion, transportation and activities among foreigners

living in Hong Kong. Thus, the meanings of "here" has to be reconsidered because it is different from how anthropologists talk about the existence of being away from the field and back to their home countries; but "here" is also the place which informants (the user group) used for the construction of their (cultural) identity.

HonPara and HonPara Subscribers

The emergence of CMC helps people to gain a wider access to information from the outside world, for which we used to rely only on other media, while at the same time, it allows us to form new human networks in spite of geographical separation (Lozada 1998). More importantly, CMC is different from other types of media in that opinions and ideas are expressed and commented on by individuals rather than the authority of the media. Taking the assumption that subjects choose to join the communication of their own will, we realize that the significance of studying the virtual community would be a theoretical challenge to conventional anthropological field research in which scholars physically participate and observe from the site (Cheung 1998b).

Cross-boundary and transnational characteristics of global culture were once intensively discussed by some scholars (Appadurai 1991; Featherstone 1990; Hannerz 1992); however, there is still a lack of substantive and long-term studies on how social life is affected. In order to know more about people's motivation beyond the CMC, we will make use of a computer-mediated discussion group as a case study to investigate the social implications of CMC, the development of interest group networks and the way information is shared among "globally" connected individuals. Nonetheless, we find Japan a good example for investigating all these changes as well as the impact brought about by CMC. In particular, the interest shift among scholars in Japanese studies from social structure, cooperate culture, family and ancestor worship (Nakane 1970; Smith 1974; Vogel 1971) to popular culture,

consumption and re-invented traditions (Ivy 1995; Martinez 1998; Skov and Moeran 1995) in the last decade proves this point too.

Hong Kong Paradise (HonPara, the short form in Japanese) can be understood as a "virtual community" in which a group of young Japanese who have a common interest in different aspects of Hong Kong share their ideas with each other. HonPara is the twelfth of twenty conference rooms in one bulletin board system (BBS) operating channel called China Forum (the description can be found in the China Forum web-site: http://cf.net) that was founded in November 1994. Any person who pays to join the NIFTY-Serve BBS entitled China Forum, can become user, potential writer and reader of all the conference rooms under China Forum. According to the introduction on the web-page of China Forum, there were over 6,600 subscribers (in 1997) who had joined China Forum, mainly from China and Japan, and who may participate in the daily exchange of opinions about the Sino-Japanese culture, economy and other subjects in the twenty conferences. Despite the large number of registered users, however, one frequent writer told me that there had been only approximately 1,000 people who had been actively writing in the China Forum (BBS) by late 1997.

Technically speaking, HonPara is a "conference room" in a private channel supported by a commercial bulletin board service called NIFTY-Serve (its description can be found in http://www. nifty.com[1] — in which subscribers can talk about anything and everything related to Hong Kong. HonPara is part of the China Forum, which can be reached in two ways. Relations between NIFTY-Serve, China Forum and HonPara should be understood as follows:

> 1. NIFTY-Serve (WWW) China Forum Web — Conference Room No.12: HonPara http://cf.net/japan/mes/mes12.html (file collected until early 1997; now, this information is kept in a file called Travelog (discussions up to March 1997) http://www.nifty.com/forum/fchina/japan/j3main.html.

2. NIFTY-Serve (BBS) China Forum — Conference Room No.12: *HonPara* (access through Telnet and only for subscribers to the Nifty). In the beginning, topics posted in *HonPara* were limited to Hong Kong; now, topics can be about Shenzhen and Macau[2] http://www.nifty.com/forum/fchina/japan/mes/12main.html.

Regarding the cultural backgrounds of most subscribers, *HonPara* subscribers wrote in the Japanese language, but they also kept some vocabulary in the original Chinese (or Cantonese), such as the names of food, places, people and movies. Their topics showed a great variety, including movies, Cantonese popular music, entertainment news about singers and movie stars, Cantonese language, food and cuisine, hotels, travel, political issues and even personal feelings about Hong Kong. *HonPara* subscribers observed some common etiquette in talking and responding to questions and comments. For example, within their conversations, they only addressed each other by pseudonyms; some of them used the same nicknames in their social life; they also used some particular expressions, codes and marks made by symbols to show their personal characteristics; these were not common expressions in daily life.

Regarding their similar characteristics and conventions of behaviour, *HonPara* subscribers liked to search for unusual and specific things in Hong Kong by themselves rather than relying on information offered in television programmes, magazines and guidebooks. Once they had discovered an interesting topic, they would post it in *HonPara* and share it with other subscribers. Looking at their "choices and tastes," it seems to us that they were particularly interested in local and minor aspects that packaged tours would never include in any tour-visiting schedule. Nevertheless, we did realize that they expected more than a packaged tour could provide.

To our knowledge, most early subscribers had visited Hong Kong more than once, and some of them had even temporarily been working in Hong Kong. For example, our informants had visited Hong Kong three to four times (starting from 1994 to March 1997) over a few years, and, at each visit, they had made an effort to confirm and update their information about Hong Kong. Data were carefully compiled and then posted on the *HonPara* BBS for further extensive discussions. Their discussions ranged from social issues to personal interests, such as foodways, movies and pop culture.

Also, as is the characteristic of the unbounded territory in CMC, *HonPara* included active participants as well as writers who were in Hong Kong or frequent visitors to Hong Kong. By our own informal counting of the names appearing on the web-site and BBS, it is clear that there had been fewer than 100 persons who were actively posting materials by 1997. We could see that about 18,000 messages had been posted between March 1996 to 1997 (less than two years), on topics including travel diaries, festivals in Hong Kong, Lantau Island, mountain and sea trips, delicacies in the New Territories, food and cuisine, Chinese tea, hotels, etc. *HonPara* was one of the most popular conference rooms in China Forum in those days.

As we can observe in *HonPara*, culture and personal relationships can be summarized as two different kinds of identities constructed at two levels. One level is considered inclusive: the shared Japanese identity in terms of common language (in this case, Japanese), common opinions — referring to the consistency shown throughout different people's use of expressions — and the common interest in foreign lifeways that emerged from the Japanese social and economic change that had begun in the early 1980s. The other level is considered exclusive because it emphasizes personal and distinctive standards as well as "tastes," experience, interests and insights regarding the choices. The participants distinguish themselves from other Japanese by the choices they make regarding Hong Kong. For example, from among the different kinds of lifeways in Hong Kong, they like to choose things considered local, popular, off-the-beaten tourist track. They self-consciously try to distinguish their own choices from those written in any guidebook about Hong Kong. Therefore, the subscribers' unified "standards" and "tastes" indicate

how they construct the cultural identity of and for their own group through CMC in *HonPara*. Such cultural identity will be elaborated on later.

Moreover, all the text appearing as ideas and comments are useful for understanding not only Hong Kong but also Japanese society. In other words, the whole *HonPara* is a text that needs to be socially contextualized in order to shed light on contemporary Japanese values, taste, individual choice and formation of cultural identity. Thus, we seek to learn about the social backgrounds of the group subscribers, not only about their activities and interests.

However, as the two years passed, we observe that there are some changes in the virtual community of *HonPara*. There is a shift from virtual to real — the real one being less a community than a voluntary association. The observed change is the emergence of real groups (in the case of my key informants, the Chinese Tea Association in Japan). People who have been in the *HonPara* for a while would gather to explore their interests together and to create their own networking.[3] In particular, the Chinese Tea Association in Japan is a good example of the more local, authentic and specific interests that would be expected of a less distinctive pool of knowledge. Finally, this association could be one of the various re-created "real" communities in social life since some people are closer to one another and willing to have their own gathering about specific interests concerned.

Changes in the Paradise: From 1997 to 1999

Today, *HonPara* is still one of the most popular BBS among Japanese who are interested in Hong Kong, but, compared to a few years ago, we observe some changes among the participants of *HonPara*, especially the emergence of real and formal groups rather than only the CMC based ones as before.[4] The change started when some Japanese net surfers who were active in the *HonPara* would gather to explore certain interests specific to them. In the following, one volunteer association, called the Chinese Tea

Association in Japan (*Nihon chugoku cha kyokai*), will be explored for a better understanding of the meanings of social tastes among young Japanese net surfer in contemporary Japanese society.

First of all, let us talk about changes in *HonPara* after 1997. H, our key informant who wrote often in *HonPara* after joining, mentioned that the most significant change was that the contents of the posted messages became dull and the number of new subscribers decreased after Hong Kong's handover in 1997. For example, the number of messages decreased from its peak of eighty to less than ten messages in one day (also see Appendix I for the breakdown of different months during the past few years). Regarding the decrease in the number of messages in *HonPara*, H also pointed out several reasons based on his observation as an insider during the past few years. Firstly, it was the unprecedented "Hong Kong boom" evoked by the mass media in Japan that had passed quickly after the handover in July 1997, which had resulted in Japanese people becoming less interested in Hong Kong society. Secondly, the increase of free Internet information available about Hong Kong lured users away from BBS; especially people did not want to pay extra money just for some handy information about travelling.

Thirdly, the economic depression in Japan, which had begun in the early 1990s, had become serious in the last two years because of the overall Asian economic crisis. Therefore, overseas tourism in Japan was directly affected, and the number of Japanese travellers to Hong Kong markedly decreased; moreover, some subscribers who had lived and worked in Hong Kong were sent back to Japan by their companies. Although *HonPara* was a transnational communication network which should not have been affected by the subscribers' geographical base, information and data in *HonPara* became less fresh as well as less spontaneous, and exclusive insider conversation did not attract new subscribers.

Lastly, the inter-relationship between *HonPara*'s subscribers and the board-operator (*kaigishitsu-gakari*), one of the forum staff members, worsened because the board-operator's announcement

that *HonPara*'s subscribers had to refrain from their exclusive insider conversation had been so bureaucratic as to hurt some subscribers' feelings. But, it was also because subscribers, most of whom were totally new at CMC, had not expected originally that they could be directed in such a top-down way. As a result, it did not favour either old or new subscribers.

When *HonPara* became less active, the Chinese Tea Association in Japan was founded mainly by some *HonPara* subscribers who were trying to activate suitably interesting topics based on the current network. According to H, a system-operator (*shisu-ope* of China Forum) made an appeal to all subscribers about establishing a commercial enterprise named China Forum Limited which could take the advantage of the current networks among subscribers from different areas. H told us that he had had similar ideas and had actually posted several messages in *HonPara* suggesting how a mail-order Chinese tea business would be possible and interesting. H obtained some subscribers' responses and finally compiled a mailing list; however, H and other friends soon felt that it would be difficult to run a new mail-order business in their spare time, and some of them left. The deterioration did not bring their idea to an end because of the existence of a similar Chinese tea company, *You-Cha*, which provided a balance for the discrepancy germinated among members in the Chinese Tea Association in Japan.

By making use of the two groups with different interests, the Chinese Tea Association in Japan (http://www.chinatea.org) and *You-Cha* (http://www.youcha.com) became more important to each other. H mentioned that those who had interest in profit-making activities could choose to participate in *You-Cha*, and those who just wanted to enjoy Chinese tea drinking as a hobby could join the Chinese Tea Association in Japan. Some of them joined both, as did H. On top of that, H was the vice president (*fuku-daihyou*) of the tea association and also gave advice to *You-Cha*'s administration and management from an honorary position.

As we can see, relations between the Chinese Tea Association in Japan and *You-Cha* are sometimes unclear, especially when there is overlapping affiliation among members; however, both of them could be considered "real" groups developed from the *Hon-Para*. The tea association was established with an aim to contribute to the further advancement of the Chinese tea industry and culture through different types of intercultural exchange (the association's statements can be found in its web-site). Now, the tea association's current president (*daihyou*) is a young Chinese (W) living in Japan; W's father is the vice president of the Chinese Tea Society (*Zhongguo chaye xuehui*) and is very influential in the world of Chinese tea.[5] The Chinese Tea Association in Japan became an officially affiliated member of the Chinese Tea Society and other authoritative organizations concerned with Chinese tea in mainland China.

On the other hand, *You-Cha* is a small commercial enterprise financially supported by a small Hong Kong investment company. It is mainly managed by two persons: M who is Japanese in her early forties and Y who is a Chinese in his early forties. Both of them are subscribers to *HonPara* and directors of the Chinese Tea Association in Japan. M previously worked as a Japanese language instructor in Beijing and Hong Kong and is now working full-time for *You-Cha* as one of the two presidents. Y was born in Hong Kong and is now the vice president of the above Hong Kong investment company run by his father and serves concurrently as a managing director (*torishimari-yaku*) of *You-cha*. Basically, all decisions are made between the two of them, though Y usually takes more initiative in *You-cha*'s management. According to H, Y has certain beliefs that the Chinese tea business would expand in Japan, as well as in Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China, in the near future and that is the reason for their enthusiasm.

You-Cha not only sells Chinese tea and tea sets through mail-order, but also organizes tea parties, lectures and activities, including Chinese tea fairs in different department stores. In 1998, their first tea house opened in *Omote-sando*, which is considered the most fashionable street in Tokyo, and several part-time salespersons were hired by the store. Regarding the administrative structure, the president (W) of the association does not for-

mally participate in *You-Cha*'s management but serves as the tea consultant, namely *cha-hakase*,[6] providing different kinds of knowledge about Chinese tea. At the same time, he is involved in building up their business network through making contact with influential people in mainland China. We do not know whether they will be successful in the end or not, yet it would be interesting for us to think about their motivations in relation to their personal backgrounds. For example, how their ambitions might be related to the fact that they are both very "international" people and have plenty of knowledge of and experience in trading between Japan, Hong Kong and mainland China.

H mentioned that his trips to Hong Kong as well as his involvement in *HonPara*, as with other subscribers, declined after 1997. Though he visited Hong Kong several times a year before the handover, he visited just three times after the handover basically because his job had become more demanding. Even so, he emphasized that he loved Hong Kong as much as ever and joked: "Figuratively speaking, it is like a situation where a man who spoke so amorously of his new wife just after marriage stops doing so after the honeymoon." Though the number of trips and the involvement in *HonPara* declined, he emphasized that there was no "trade-off" between his interest in Hong Kong culture and that in Chinese tea. For him, *HonPara* was like a favourite *izakaya* (Japanese style of bar-restaurant), where he frequently came and poked in his head to listen to the regulars. He said such stance toward *HonPara* would hardly change in future. He added that the Chinese Tea Association in Japan had never been more than a site for leisure activity for him and he would have been seriously, if enjoyably, doing production or promotion related works. As for future prospects, he hoped the association would not only contribute to the popularization of Chinese tea in Japan but to the advancement of technology and living standards in areas producing tea.

Maina shikou and Social Tastes among Young Japanese Middle-class

Are Japanese crazy about the United States (US)? Do Japanese think that the US is the best country in the world? These are always difficult questions for us to answer. It is quite true that there is much influence from the US in Japan and Japanese are used to the American material culture in particular. But, are they crazy about all those? On the other hand, Hong Kong people also realize that Japanese tourists are considered adventurous and are famous for exploring every corner of Hong Kong. These contradictions might be clarified by looking carefully at social change and development in the post-war Japanese society.

Speaking about the past, Japan's defeat in World War II brought dramatic changes to Japanese society, both in political and cultural ways. Apart from the military restrictions and security force maintained by the US government, American popular culture, commercialization and urbanization invaded post-war Japanese society and challenged the so-called Japanese tradition. Several factors brought about a subtle change to Japanese social values and initiated a quest for identity, especially during the post-war era of development into an economic power. As a matter of fact, those interested in the US are considered the mainstream in Japanese society, and those who are interested in China and Hong Kong might be understood as a "minority" group. However, the "minority" might not be necessarily weak or powerless as it can challenge the dominant values.

Let us take a look at the meaning of Chinese culture in Japan during the last two decades. Until the mid-1970s, mainland China was ideologically different from Japan as well as from all capitalist countries. However, after the Open Door policy of 1978, the relations between China and Japan changed greatly. First of all, we should mention a pair of pandas that were sent from China to Japan as symbols of the re-establishment of foreign relations. The two pandas were kept in Ueno Zoo and attracted much attention

from the Japanese mass. Moreover, the panda's popularity did not only bring benefit to the zoo, but also contributed to constructing a positive image of China among the Japanese public. The next thing, we speculate, was to be the re-discovery of Chinese civilization, initiated by the documentary "Silk Road" and the puppet drama "Sangoku-shi" (Story of Three Kingdoms) shown on NHK (Japanese national television channel) during the early 1980s. Furthermore, the Chinese impact was not limited to television programmes, it also made Chinatowns in Yokohama and Kobe popular tourist destinations among Japanese. Those were only parts of the "China boom" in Japan during the 1980s.

Considering the "Hong Kong boom," it branched out from the "China boom" but became much influential among the postwar generation who kept looking for something for their identity construction. Historically speaking, the first "Hong Kong boom" in Japan had been brought about by a world-famous movie star, Bruce Lee, who had drawn to Chinese kung-fu (marital art) movies an international attention in the mid 1970s. Following him, Jackie Chan who with his "comical kung-fu" became popular in Hong Kong in the late 1970s attracted attention in Japan as well. Further, Hong Kong's comedy director/actor, Michael Hui, successfully explored a new style through his comical but critical insights while depicting Hong Kong as a modern capitalistic city. Hui's funny as well as "black" humour attracted the attention of the Japanese masses, especially of the young generation who was tired of the mainstream popular culture of those days.[7]

With the success of Hong Kong's film industry, there were more Japanese young visitors coming to Hong Kong searching for their own favourite movie stars. Among those who brought people's attention to Hong Kong as a "minor" taste within the general interest in Chinese culture, it would be necessary to mention some key culture brokers who became as well the founders of the so-called Honkongaku (Hongkongology). They were essay writers, such as Yamaguchi Fuminori, Shimao Shinzo, Hani Mio, etc., who wrote in detail about Hong Kong people's everyday life and picked up many small but interesting phenomena of the

hybrid society made of Chinese and British cultures in the 1980s. Moreover, a non-fiction novelist, Sawaki Kotaro, who wrote a bestseller novel Shinya tokkyuu (Midnight Express), gave an exotic image of Hong Kong and Macau to the Japanese public. The writers all intended to talk about their discovery of "minor" aspects of Hong Kong society, which were something that popular guidebooks did not mention. They had sufficient storytelling ability to lead their readers to recognize such "minor" (exotic but easily accessible) phenomena as attractive enough and to wish to actually go and see them.

As we have observed, both the style and variety of Hong Kong films available in Japan were increasing in those days. New heroes and heroines, such as Chow Yun Fat, Andy Lau, Leslie Cheung, Maggie Cheung and Joy Wong, won popularity in Japan too, though their popularity, in contrast to Bruce Lee's and Jackie Chan's, was confined to a small portion of the Japanese people: those in their twenties and thirties who had a special interest in Hong Kong. The meaning of "major and mainstream" and "minor" has varied at different time of the past few decades, according to our observations. In particular, those who were considered "minor" became popular in the mainstream. Compared to Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan who were close to the mainstream,[8] Chow Yun Fat and Andy Lau were popular among a smaller number of Japanese; however, nowadays, both Chow and Lau have become part of the mainstream as regards Hong Kong movie stars in Japan. In the same line, motion pictures by Wong Kar Wai, especially "Chung King Express," were "minor" in 1995; but, they have already become "major" among people who are interested in Hong Kong, while still remaining "minor" to the rest of Japan. So, it is sometimes difficult to claim whether Wong Kar Wai is "major" in Japan today or not.

Anyway, such inflow of Hong Kong films or pop-music in Japan led to a further increase of cultural intermediaries specific to those "minor" trends in Japan, who also contributed to the pushing force. Hong Kong "culture" was considered minor in contrast to American pop-culture and mainstream Chinese culture; so,

most importantly, we would like to understand the demand for such "minor"-ness as well as the ideas of being someone with *maina-shikou* (intend to be minor)[9] in contemporary Japanese society, starting from the late 1980s.

Regarding this tendency to choose one's tastes, we did ask H for his comments and explanations. H explained to us: "I recognize I am more *maina-shikou* than ordinary Japanese, and it is an option which the middle class can choose to manage its own lives without feeling inferior. I know many Japanese people who have tried to fit themselves well into the 'major' and live peacefully without any doubt. However, such attitude is mainly taken by the upper class in which one will not doubt one's parents or their social position or the lower class people who cannot do it. We want to carry convictions for ourselves, and those can only be gained through our 'exploration' of and 'participation' in something meaningful. I think that will explain the desire underlying my own *maina-shikou*."

Regarding the meaning of hobbies as social expression, we would like to know how one is chosen and, in this particular case, why knowledge about Hong Kong "culture" and society is related to individual taste. For example, when people are just visiting Hong Kong a few times in one year and, at the same time, they can still keep a job in Japan where their expertise can be applied, they can probably enjoy the most personal selection by themselves through an absolute distinction. This distinction might not be as solid as the class related social identity about which Bourdieu (1984) has spoken, but an imaginary individualism out of the ordinary social life experience. The whole idea is used to create distinguished social tastes in which potential symbolic/cultural capital can be fully developed and re-invested, motivated by the capitalistic ideology which tells us that only those that can "grow and increase" are valuable. Here, we found that H and his friends began by having intensive communication in *HonPara* during the first two to three years until some of them became quasi-experts from the hobby at "discovering Hong Kong." However, at a certain point, they began searching for something more "real," and

their choices were well reflected in the establishment of the Chinese Tea Association in Japan and *You-Cha* in which they were able to "invest" their knowledge of Hong Kong society into a specific and new area. The shift from *HonPara* to tea associations did not only show the change from virtual to real, but also created room for their production of Chinese tea culture in Japan. At that stage, it was more than a hobby and involved some business-related strategy considerations. Their active involvement might be considered similar to those previous culture brokers and Hongkongologists. Moreover, their identities of being both the consumers of Hong Kong culture and producers or promoters of authentic Chinese tea culture became mutually effective in the current process.

Then, we will ask whether these are Japanese values. If not, we might have to consider the background of that particular generation in this context. In order to understand the motivations behind all those social tastes, we would like to bring in some background to Japan's socio-cultural development. Moreover, Japan's concern with internationalization should not be overlooked; the search for familiar, but exotic, feelings within one's own society may be epitomized by the rediscovery of Chinatowns (in Yokohama and Kobe) as local, yet ethnically, different spots for Japanese consumers (Cheung 1998a). The awareness of internationalization in Japanese society was aroused not as an isolated social phenomenon but occurred at various levels, such as choosing one's lifestyle, learning languages, tasting foreign foodways and travelling abroad. This will not only be considered as an expression of individualism with the emphasis upon one's character in making various choices (Moeran 1983), but also be recognized as the maintenance of specific social relations through some personal hobbies (Turner 1974).

Therefore, the meaning of Hong Kong metropolitan culture among Japanese would be a suitable aspect for the further investigation of the motivations led by *maina-shikou*. By considering the search for Hong Kong culture, we seek to discuss the socio-cultural meanings behind the changing tastes and choices among

Japanese young middle class through the concept of *maina-shikou*, which is a very common expressions in Japan. Our informant H did admit that it reflected the concerns of one's values. There are various similar terms, such as *otaku*, fan, maniac, etc., which are considered in the same story line because the motivations to being "minor" was commonly seen among the post-war generation who had a hard time negotiating between Japanese traditional culture and American-oriented modern culture.[10] Regarding the emergence of the so-called *shinjinrui* (new humans), Ivy (1995:55) points out how it was considered new:

> [T]he third postwar generation — what the Japanese press has lately come to call *shinjinrui* (new humans) or *shin Nihonjin* (new Japanese) — has grown up in an Americanized, affluent state in which certain things Japanese appear more exotic than products of western civilization. Unlike the 1960s' generation, which initiated a double reappraisal of Japanese "tradition" — the high and the low of elite fine arts and artless folk crafts — the *shinjinrui* are inspired by what might be called mass culture, particularly the popular products of the Taisho (1912-1926) through early Showa (1926-1989) periods.

By studying the adaptation of baseball with the emphasis on *faito* (fighting spirit) in Japan, Moeran (1984) suggests that *seishin* (spirit) can be achieved from consumerism but needs to be "internalized" as one's belongings. The intention of being minor that we are talking about is not simply some strange and unusual habit among Japanese; but, it means how distinctive social tastes can be internalized as one's own cultural identity or capital that can be invested and re-invested. In other words, the significance of Hong Kong culture among some Japanese would probably be some sort of material culture reflecting specific social values with the emphasis upon spiritual satisfaction.

The case study of *HonPara* and its subscribers is suggested in order to understand the changing social tastes, the mechanism of distinction in terms of "cultures" and young middle class, as well as the following generation of *shinjinrui* and their negotiation

between individualism and groupism, regarding social networks and transnational cultural understandings. We might be able to consider them as the same generation that manipulated foreign culture for its own identity construction after putting itself on a voyage of discovery in Japan. Most importantly, the study has significance for the understanding of the changing Japanese society, especially its re-defined ideas of foreign culture in relation to the ideology of internationalization, or how "Hong Kong culture" is selected, manipulated and contextually restructured. The construction of cultural identity through CMC sheds light on the exchange of cultures in complex societies.

On the one hand, we have shown how Japanese ideas of individuality can be investigated through the language of overseas travel brochures; state ideology can be seen through the localization of foreign food and domestication of foreign lifeways. On the other hand, by showing our informants' experience in the past few years of participating in different groups, from virtual to actual gatherings, we are able to trace the change in social tastes among some young Japanese middle-class people and in their ideas of culture as the means to respond to as well as link oneself up with the ideal aiming to reach the internationalization initiated by the central government.

Discussion:
Internationalization and Internalization

From an anthropological perspective, it is important for us to know why groups with similar backgrounds are doing something together and, also, why they choose Hong Kong as a subject. Considering the changing cultural-political situation in Japan since the early 1980s, the notions of internationalization and being international have spread out in all directions, ranging from government policy to individuals' everyday-life practices. The demand to "upgrade" oneself into an international being could be reflected in the internalization of foreign "cultures" through

various ways. Furthermore, with the *HonPara* as a case study for investigation, we are able to bring out some other thoughts related to the understanding of the Japanese concept of *maina-shikou* among Japanese post-war generations that might be applied to other Asian societies with the following characteristics:

- Rapid economic growth as compared to some East Asian countries, especially the four "small dragons" (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore);
- new generation which is negotiating between traditionalism and modernism as well as traditional culture and Western culture (even though we have probably heard about these negotiations during the last few decades, what is new here would be the use of other foreign cultures for one's own negotiation); and
- the emergence of a large number of young middle-class in-dividuals who have stable, as well as professional, jobs and enough income for a good living but lack cultural capital for further investment. In other words, they are looking for cer-tain kinds of symbolic capital for the construction of a self-identity.

Notes

1. It was in http://www.nifty.ne.jp before.
2. There were 675 messages related to Macau and 444 messages related to Shenzhen out of 27,454.
3. Those meetings were called *ofu* (from the English "off-line") in Japanese.
4. Regarding the female/male ratio among *HonPara* subscribers, it was difficult to tell the exact proportion, but in the associa-tions we realized that it was basically male dominant.
5. Interestingly, when H and others were preparing to found a tea association in Japan, one of them met by chance W in a conference on Japanese tea held in *Shizuoka* and then they

tried to persuade him to take a post as a president of the coming association. W originally had come to Japan for his postgraduate studies and had never been a subscriber to China Forum so far. H joked: "Founding a Chinese tea related association by looking upon W as a president is like founding a computer-related association by looking upon the son of Bill Gates as a president." Furthermore, H added that W's per-sonal contacts in maintaining the business network of Chinese tea were expected for bring the association some kind of international attention.

6. The Japanese word *hakase* can be used to signify someone who owns a doctorate degree or people who know a lot about some specific field; here, we take the latter one.
7. Beginning in the 1970s, the Hong Kong film industry success-fully explored the international market, including Japan. At the same time, Hong Kong (usually in a Hong Kong and Macau package) also became one of the most popular tourist destinations for Japanese charter tours, second only to Hawaii.
8. Actually, Bruce Lee was introduced to Japan after becoming famous in the US, but Jackie Chan somehow became famous in both US and Japan at the same time.
9. The word *maina* (in English, minor) has meanings that con-trast to major; however, it does not mean weak as against strong; subordinate as against dominant; or powerless as against powerful. The question might fall within the realm of the ideology of *tatemae* (principle) and *honne* (one's true inten-tion) suggested by scholars who are interested in *Nihon bunkaron* (discussion of Japanese uniqueness).
10. Those who can read Japanese and are interested in knowing the background of different related concepts, such as *otaku*, fan and maniac, can search a website called *Otaku kenkyu sho* at http://www.netcity.or.jp/OTAKU/ for further informa-tion.

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Appendix 1

The total number of messages posted in *HonPara* from 21 March 1996 until 3 November 1999 is 27,454.

	1996	1997	1998	1999
January	—	1,483	107	1,726
February	—	1,121	141	324
March	10*	1,122	124	280
April	913	795	50	407
May	1,511	636	468	1,155
June	1,257	231	303	986
July	959	222	211	570
August	1,368	331	284	232
September	1,037	567	211	214
October	1,107	85	160	251
November	1,138	80	516	11[†]
December	1,465	107	1,178	—

Notes: * 21-31 March only.
        † 1-3 November only.

Re-visiting Hong Kong Paradise
A Study of Japanese Net Surfers

Abstract

For a better understanding of changing lifestyles in contemporary Japanese society, we would like to investigate some changes occurring among Japanese net surfers who are interested in Hong Kong society. In this paper, we find the significance of studying a computer-mediated virtual community located in the net would be, on the one hand, a theoretical challenge to understanding the meanings of culture from distant tribes to transnational settings; on the other hand, a means for understanding social relations among middle-class young in some Asian countries that experience borderless lifestyles brought about by globalization. As for the case study, we examine a bulletin board called *HonPara* that was first welcomed by many Japanese. However, as time passed, after Cheung's study in 1997, there were obvious changes among Japanese subscribers; and, one of them was the establishment of formal associations rather than the maintaining of the virtual community of the net as before. Those who had been active participants in the *HonPara* gathered for a more specific kind of interest; their networking in a Chinese Tea Association reflected some "minor" interest they used to distinguish themselves from others and shed light on constructing an identity through internalizing a foreign culture.

重訪香港天地
一個日本網站的研究

張展鴻
河口充勇

（中文摘要）

為了進一步了解現代日本社會，我們嘗試從一個以香港社會文化為主題的日本網站，來探討一群日本人對外地文化的接受過程及其在日本的發展意義。本文不單提出了一個研究跨文化、跨地域的方案，更重要的是以實際的個案來徹底了解文化全球化所造成的無邊界生活經驗。最後，我們希望能透過分析電腦網站這模擬社區的人際關係所引發的其他組織結構的發展過程，拓展理解新一代日本中產階級的研究方向。