

Rights of the vagabond: a study of consumer society and urban consumerism

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Abstract

This is the journal of a wandering vagabond. He puts his thoughts to paper while his chaotic life lurches from one problem to another. He also relates how the book came about.

1. Food for thought

The advent of globalization and the consumer society as a part of every day life in China has had a surreptitious influence on popular culture, characterized by the market and its concepts. The globalized market and popular culture tend towards consumerism, while at the same time reshaping daily life, and has also greatly changed the relationship between intellectuals and ordinary people. So the question of how to establish an effective system to comment on Chinese daily life and popular culture to help better understand it in an increasingly globalised world, has become a contentious issue that intellectuals in China will have to face.

2. Wanderings in Shanghai

The urban scene in Shanghai is changing fast. That doesn't just mean housing and daily life, it also means changes in lifestyle and the disappearance of life as we knew it. A classic example is the gradual disappearance of old Shanghai, as well as the old fashioned way of life in those quarters.

3. The power of literature and cinema

Literature and the cinema reflect real life in the cities. It is possible to climb to the top of the highest skyscraper and look down on the entire city, just as it is possible to wind your way through the streets at the foot of the same buildings. There lies the difference between the observer and the vagabond. In the eyes of the omnipotent observer, that space is simply an-easily understood modern script that allows him to navigate through a new environment in full control. It is in fact a theoretical simulation of reality and the vagabond is at the core of it. For him roaming is at the essence of this new world of senses and meaning. His body rests or moves according to how his own script of this reality is compiled.

4. Technology

Technical progress has provided man numerous new opportunities to make the most of life. However, because of a bureaucratic system, this progress is often at the expense of individual innovation and initiative. The experience of aesthetics in contemporary society reveals another fundamental reality that is all too often ignored: the fact that we will probably never be able to reflect on current major issues in an objective, timely and thoughtful manner.

5. Alcohol and the world of bars

Bar culture in shanghai is not part of traditional local culture. The consumer group targeted by bars is not of local extraction. It is the consequence of the sudden arrival of a foreign culture. When they first appeared they were careful to keep a safe distance from local life. They have always been places for distinguishing social status and taste rather than places where social barriers fall. They

have been, and remain, venues for consumers building an appearance. In less than ten years, bars in Shanghai have won a loyal customer base, which reflects both their success and ability to adapt to the local environment. It also marks one of the shining triumphs of the globalization process in Shanghai. The new climate, consumerism, globalization and local culture intertwine in the bars of Shanghai to form a complex, hazy fabric.

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