

Introducing Anthropology of Consumption

Understanding daily life in China



Dominique Desjeux, anthropologist
Professor at the Sorbonne (University of Paris-Descartes)
Visiting professor at the University of Foreign Languages,
Guangzhou (China) and USF (Tampa, FL, USA)

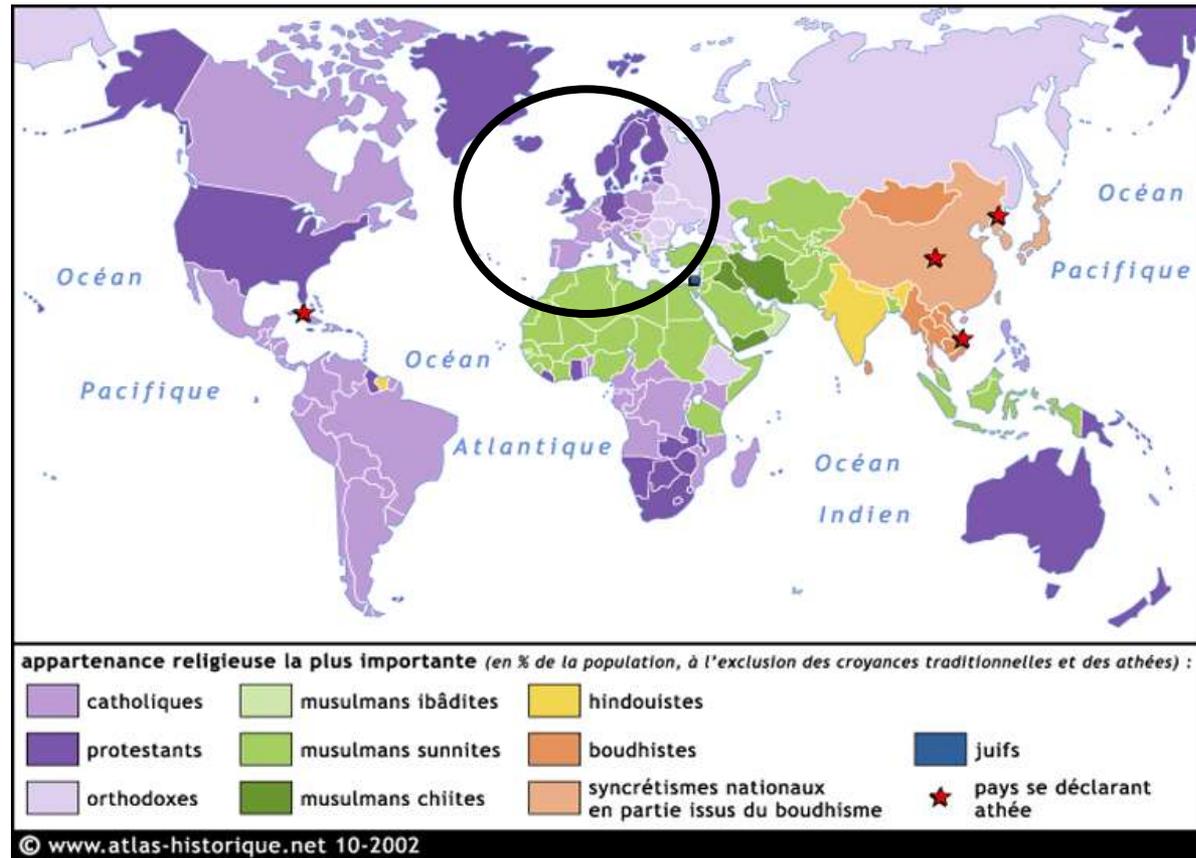
www.argonautes.fr

D. Desjeux, 2006, *La consommation*, PUF, Ques sais-je?

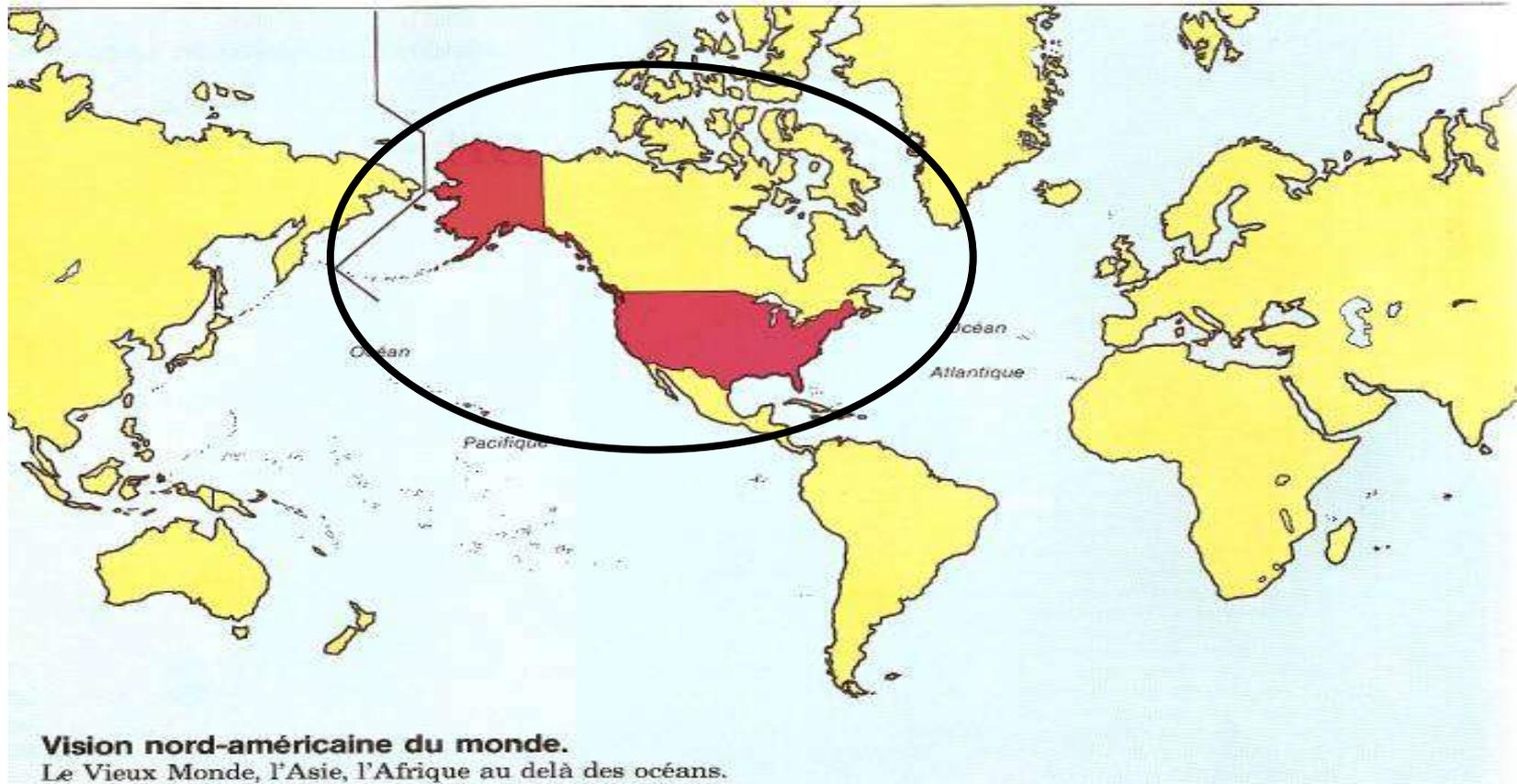
D. Desjeux, 2044, *Le sciences sociales*, PUF, Ques sais-je?

2007 11 8-9, Beijing, China

A traditional European point of view: Europe seen as the middle of the world Asia as far East

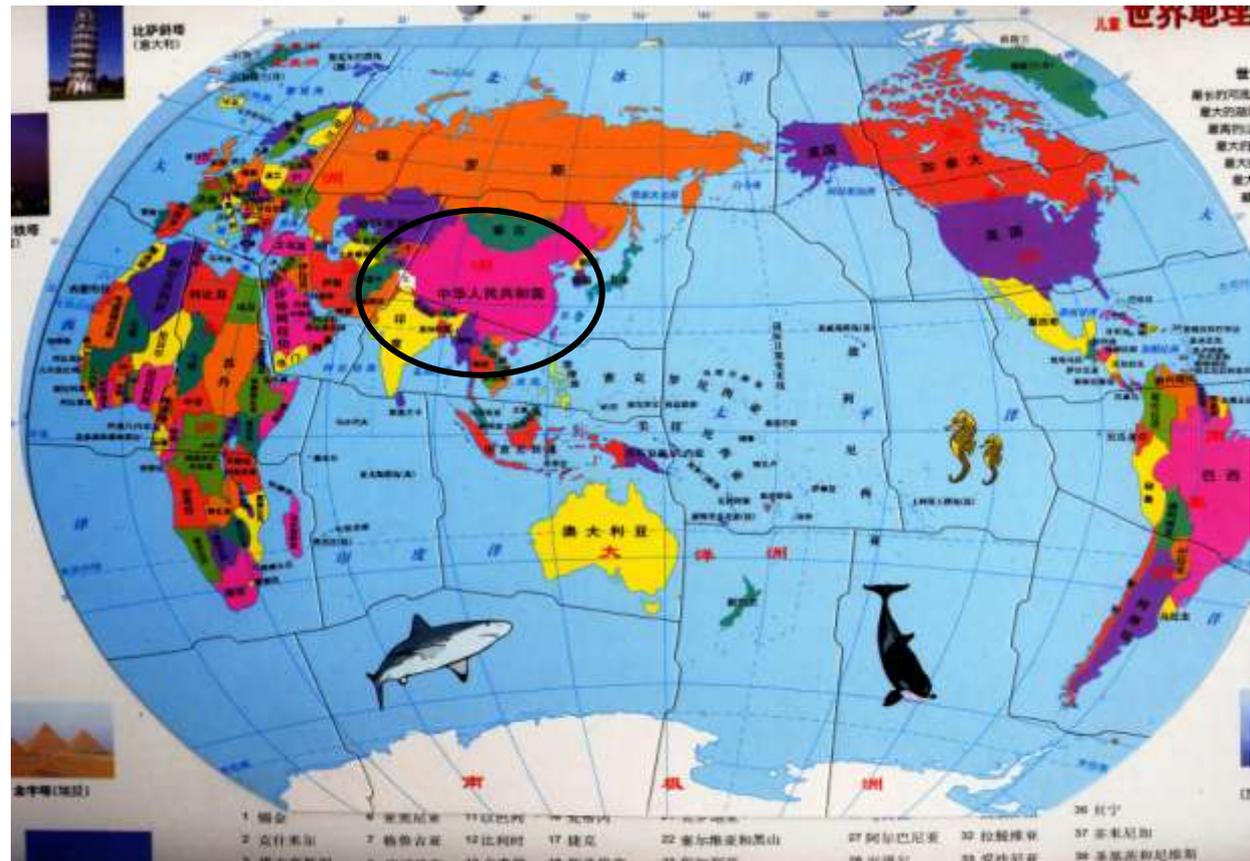


An American point of view: Asia is very closed



(by Gérard Chaliand and Jean Pierre Rageau, *Atlas Stratégique*, Fayard, 1983)

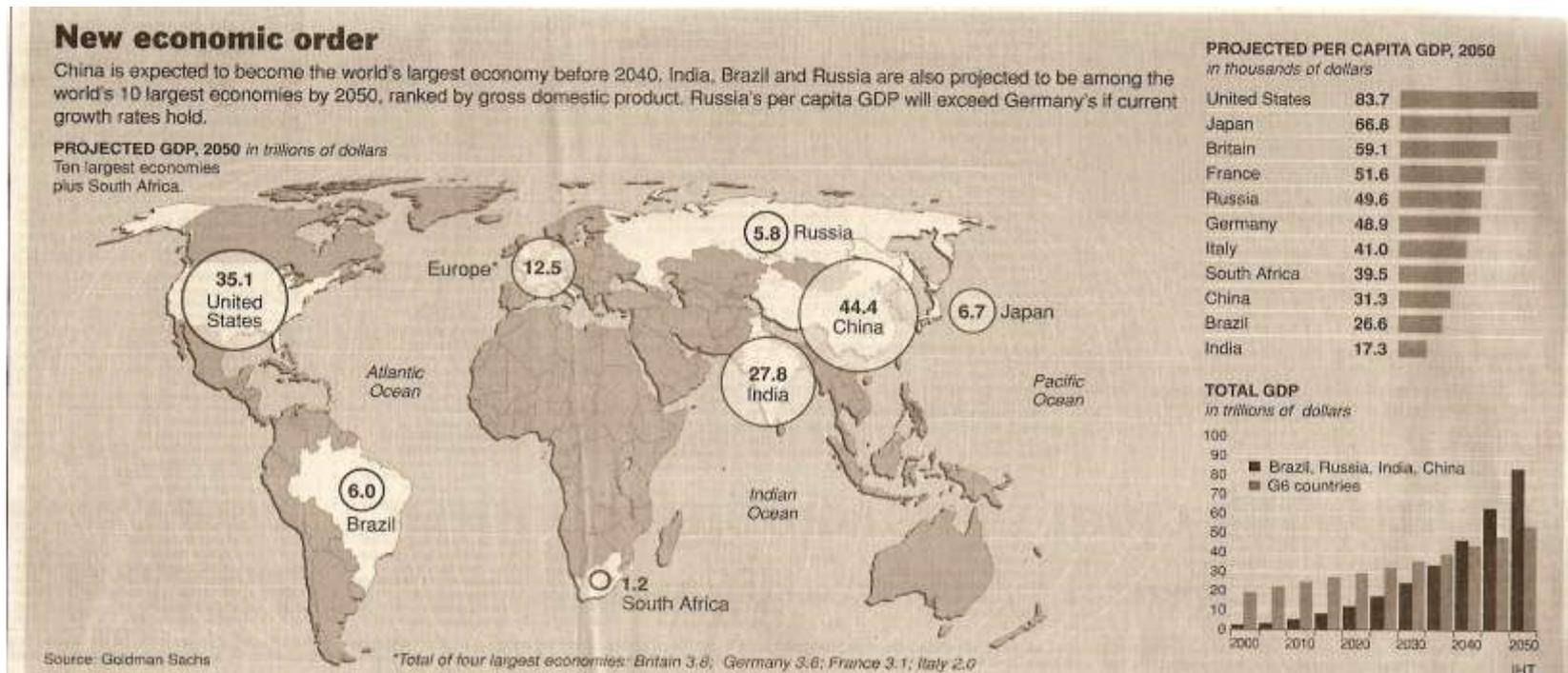
A chinese point of view: China as *zhong guo*



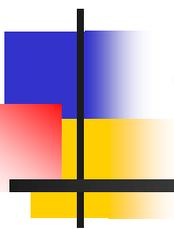
A Chinese puzzle for children

Nowadays there are several « middles of the world »

Les PIB en Trillions de \$ 2050

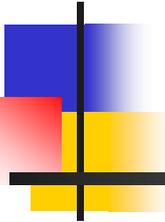


(IHT, JULY 10, 2004)

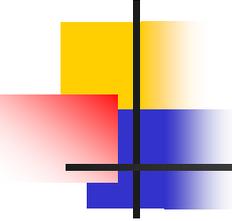


Carrying out intercultural field
study means to move off center

There is no culture in the center
of the world

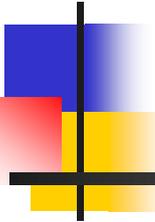


I - The basic principles



Three main methodological principles to carry out a qualitative field study on consumer behavior

- Discovering the relevant scale of observation
- Following an itinerary of decision making process in the home space
- Distinguishing practices from representations



II - The scales of observation

Five main scales of Observation

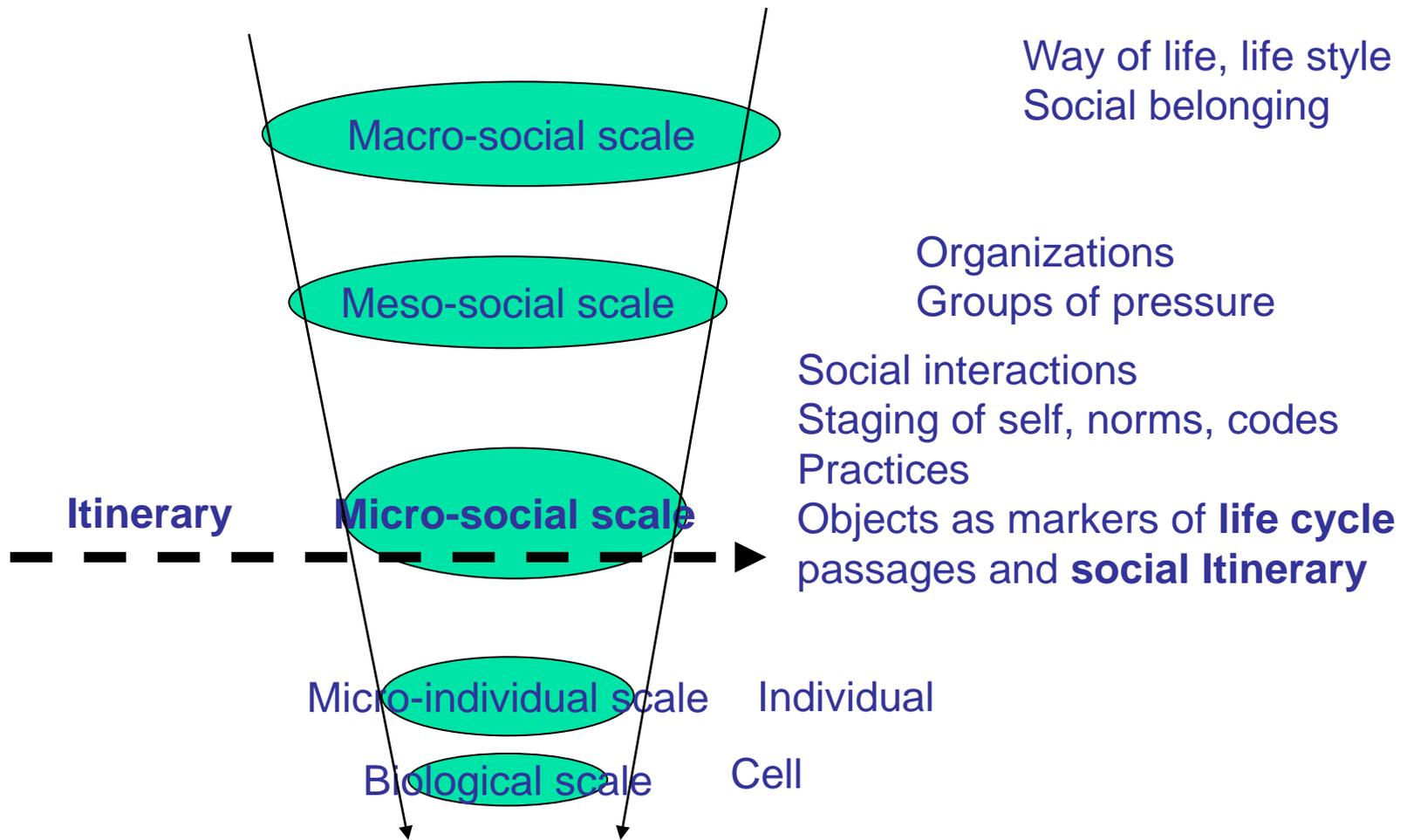
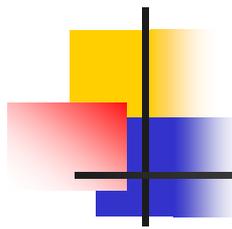


Illustration of scales of observation in regard to consumption



1997, Photos by D. Desjeux

Macro-social scale



Meso-social scale

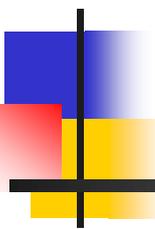


Micro-social scale



Micro-individual scale

Depending on the scale, one phenomenon which could be visible at one scale becomes invisible to another scale of observation



Chinese Life style at a macro-social scale of observation

Based on a work done by Laurence Varga
Free lance anthropologist
MA at the Sorbonne (University of Paris-
Descartes)
Pragmaty, Paris, 2004

Attitude across age groups



The children of the Liberation (above 50 y.o.)



The children of the cultural revolution (between 35-50 y.o.)



The children of the economic growth (below 35 y.o.)

(2002, Photos by Laurence Varga)

Children of the liberation - Life style

Worked all life in state company

Low income

Traditional activities and leisure (mahjong)

Often financially dependant on children



One model : the state

Conservative values

Observe the changes, but don't feel part of it

Survival economy

Not reactive to advertising

Children of the cultural revolution – Life style

Double income :
sometimes state
and private

Saving for buying
an apartment or at least
moving

Big purchasers of
household appliances,
motivation to have equipped

Less interested in
'leisure' consumption

Do not see much
difference
between brands and ads



In between 2 system
of values

Focused on family
and child

In process of
Adapting to the market,
led by their child

Willing to try new products
but not daring

Children of the economic growth – Life style

High salary

Dynamic

Live with parents /
buy an apartment

Longest exposure
to marketing

Self gratifying
purchase

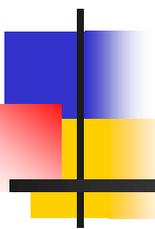
Sensitive to
advertising

Seeking education
opportunities

Have faith in
their future

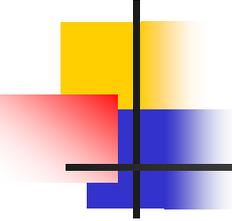
Leisure consumers





III - The micro-social scale of observation

Material, social and cultural constraints



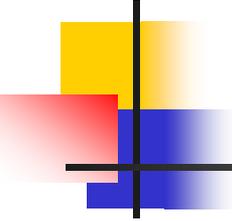
Understanding the three levels of constraints which weights on goods shopping and uses

- **Material:** size of the household space, income of the family, system of material objects
- **Social:** conflicts, cooperation and social transactions, strategies and social norms
- **Culture:** Imaginary, religion, values, social status, meaning of objects

1 – Material constraints: little space for storage

- A student bedroom in 1997 at Guangzhou University:
- How to cope with limited space for seven students
- There is no room for more goods





2 – Social constraints: Entering a structured household space

- Goods become integrated into 3 domestic spaces:
 - public
 - private
 - intimate
- Uses and the ways of storing goods within these 3 spaces depends on three social norms.
- what is:
 - Prescribed
 - Permitted
 - Forbidden
- Goods are organized depending on 3 ways
 - Displayed
 - left visible
 - hidden

An example of what is allowed to be displayed, left visible or hidden depending on the culture

In public

- displayed



2000, USA, displaying the American flag

- left visible

2004, Israel, weapons visible when shopping



- hidden



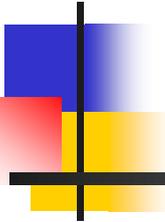
2003, Algeria, hiding hair

3 - But cultural norms could be reinterpreted from its first cultural use when going into another culture because its meaning is changing



American and French bathrooms:
toilet paper stored in an intimate space

China storing of sanitary paper
in the living room, a public space



IV - The itinerary method

Some examples of historical changes in consumption behaviors from 1997 to 2007 in Guangzhou, China

The itinerary method

The boom of consumption in Guangzhou : between 1997 and 2006



Friendship department store,
a former public state store
in 1997 in Guangzhou



A new mall in Guangzhou
in 2006

The signs of the middle class rising income in China



A modern middle class flat in 1997



the same middle class
in a new flat in 2006

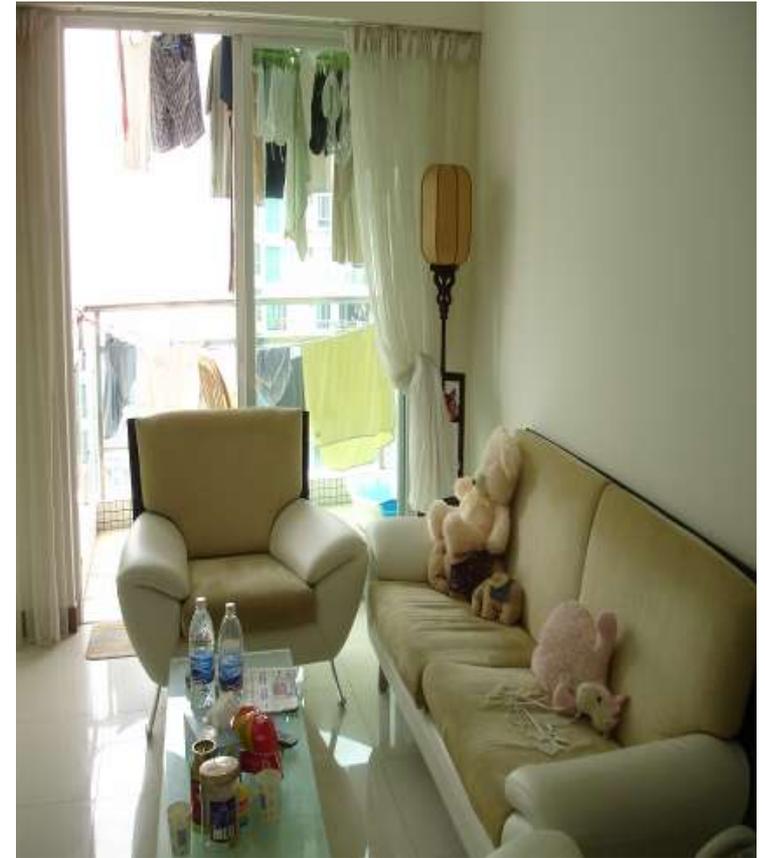
Flat entrance in 1997: wires are visible, 2006 material are more expensive, wires are invisible. The signs of modernity

2005

1997



1997, Living with neon, 2006, without neon and new material (wood vs. cloth)



The dining area: from wood to plastic

1997



2006



1997, the kitchen: no fridge, no oven



saucepan



Vegetable colander



wok



Knives
Pair of scissors

Cooking block

2005, oven, fridge and cooking hood entering the kitchen



Bathroom 1997-2005

1997



2005



Nowadays western toilettes are could be seen as signs of social distinction

1997 the bathroom



Minimum equipment



Only a few products

2006: well equipped



But tradition is still there: lift
without 4, 14, 24 (3A, 13A, 23A)

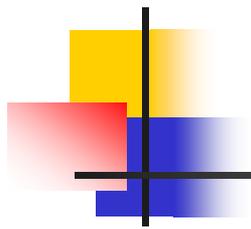


Chinese calendar



Meet friends
Dig earth
Build the roof

Don't get married
Don't go to the
hair dresser



19

1428 شوق SYAWAL 28
 甲辰歲九月運程1964年生人，百尺幹頭，更進一步。
 甲子鼠九月運程1984年生人，龍蛇帶水，後已誤人。

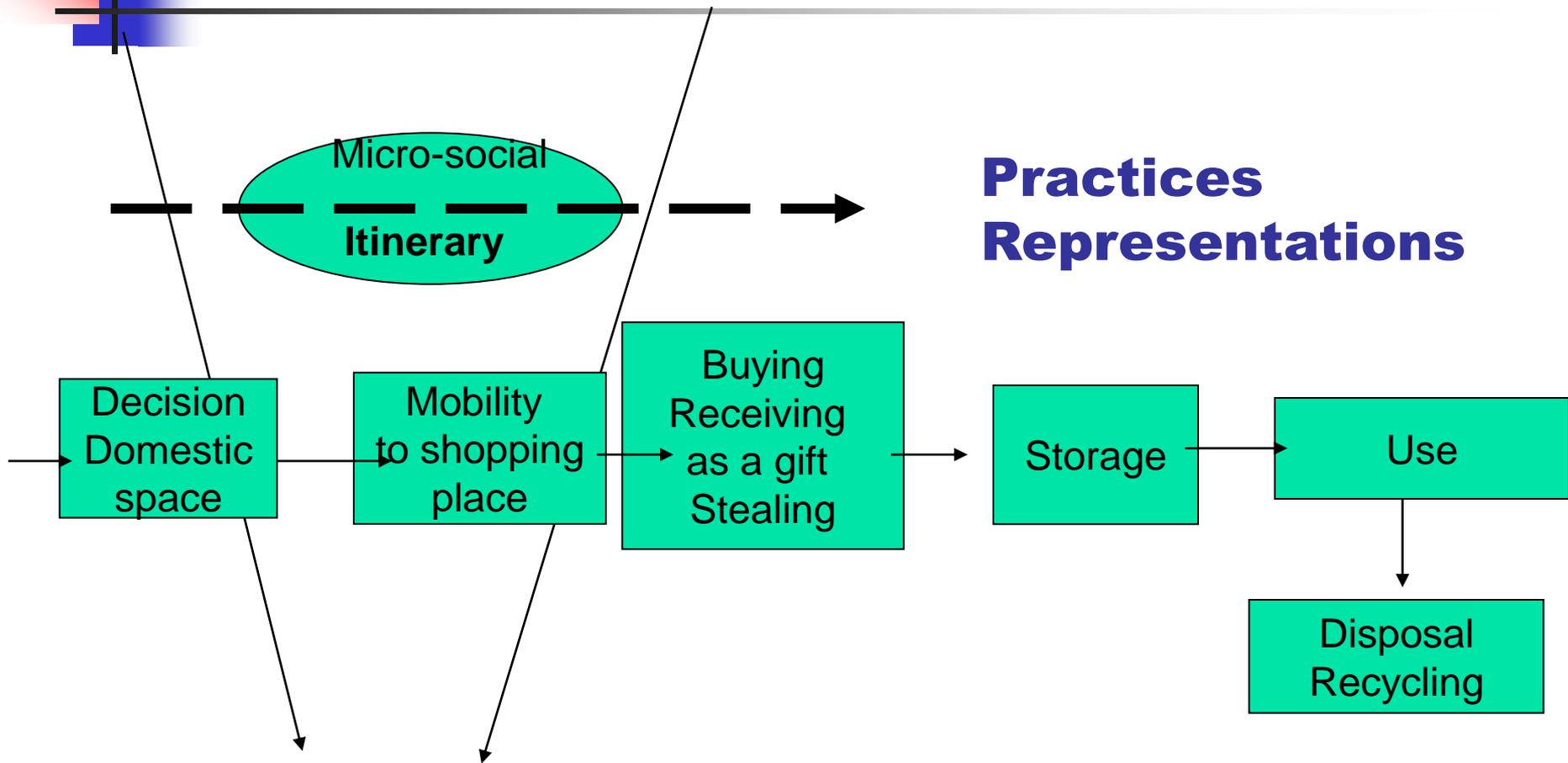
 勸士納壽交郵 勸婦納采裁衣 勸總入學會友 勸生車器用 丁丑己丑	 每日相落 歲煞西 47 本月費人時 辛亥	FRIDAY 星期五 三十日	丁未水戌成日十四小堂 九月大	吉神方位 貴神西北 吉門東北 每日胎神 意房內東 倉庫廁	 理髮 整甲 星日命擇 牛節互緣
		丁未年 子日亥時 午日辰時 卯日巳時 辰日午時 巳日未時 午日申時 未日酉時 申日戌時 酉日亥時 戌日子時 亥日丑時	年 月 日 時 亥 未 辛 酉	本 日 一 生 相 辛 丁 己 年 冲 丑 丑 丑	

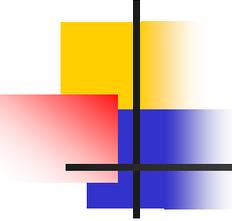
香港正版通勝日曆

Buddhist practices in Guangzhou



The itinerary method applied to Guangzhou





Method

- Photography and on-site interviews
 - Photos of the neighborhood context
 - Photos of building entrance, stairway, doorway, electric wires, objects
 - Photos of all the rooms
- In depth interviews
- Observation
- Focus groups

Shopping and eating Itinerary: starting shopping



Bringing a limited amount of money



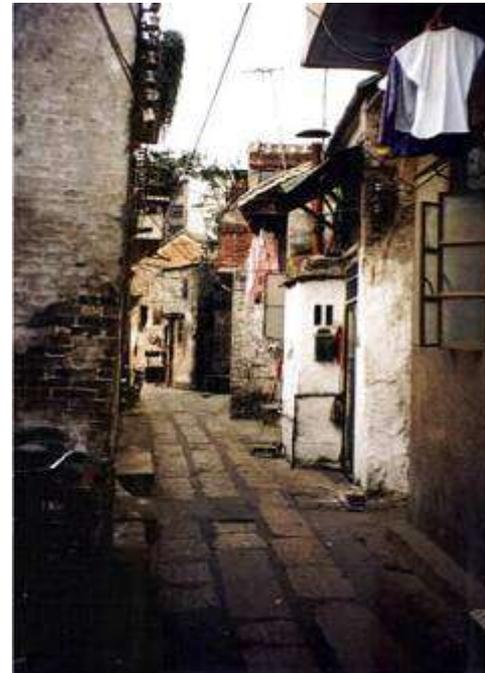
A shopping bag

It is an every day shopping process based on limited means in 1997

Mobility



Shopping by foot



The old Guangzhou

Shopping



Unwrapped meat



Choosing living shrimps



Protecting her money
In the pocket

Living animals as sign of quality



Choosing living chicken



Ready to be eaten

Going back home



Cooking as a long process in a small space

Frying



No oven

It is a good example of the importance of looking at uses from a western point of view

An optimized use of space

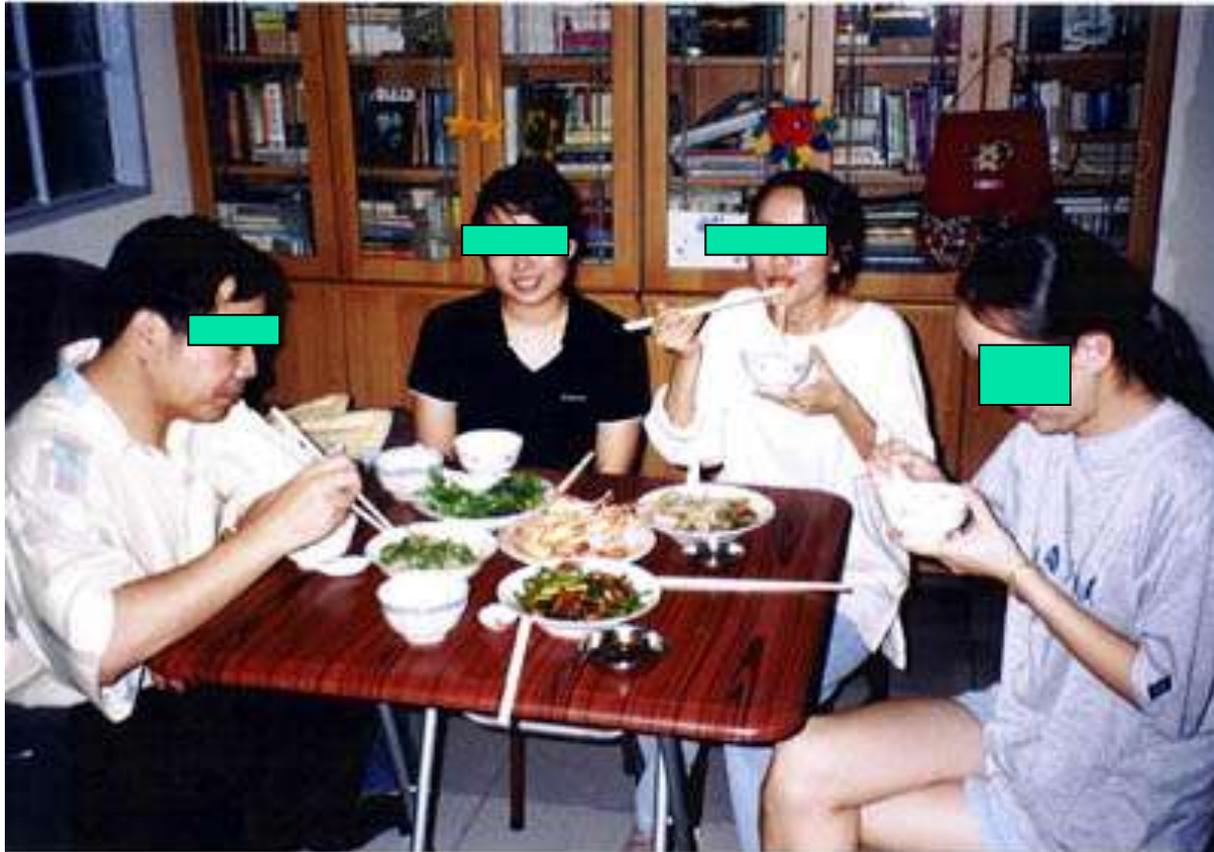


A collective meal



Chopstick tips
are displayed
outside the
table as
hygienic
practice

Picking in the same bowl



Eating



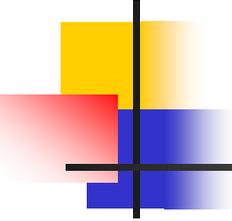
Having more rice



**No napkin
Left over
on the table**

Washing up





Conclusion: Shopping as the result of a domestic use

- Instead of focusing on motivation, pleasure and individual what is a relevant angle of observation
- Anthropology focuses on what organized the behavior of consumers beyond the intention of individuals
- Conformity (and transgression) of social norms are observed
- Buying an object is conditioned by use in the home which is conditioned by social norms.
 - Thank you for your attention