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Title	Sino Centre: shopping mall as a cultural space
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City University of Hong Kong
Department of Chinese and History
BA(Hons) in Culture and Heritage Management

CAH4514 Project

SINO CENTRE: SHOPPING CENTER AS A CULTURAL SPACE

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MAY 2016

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Sino Centre: Shopping Center as a Cultural Space

Abstract

The research explores an organically formed cultural space, a shopping center at the heart of Hong Kong's busiest commercial district that has developed into an alternative model of popular cultural consumption under a disappearing ownership model - fragmented ownership. Within the context of the current land development policy in Hong Kong, this ownership model creates a shelter for the small scale, non-chain shops to survive under the tense competition with the international chained brands and still be able to operate in the shopping malls. Using Sino Centre as a case study, it represents a shopping mall under fragmented ownership and, at the same time, act as a cultural space that caters to diversified tastes of consumers. Besides the ownership model, the research will further look into the ecology within Sino Centre as a cultural space and the consumption patterns of the popular cultural products offered in Sino Centre while comparing with the highly standardized corporate own shopping mall in the same geographical location, the Langham Place in Mong Kok district.

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Table of Content

Abstract 1

Acknowledgement 2

Table of Content 3

Chapter 1 - Introduction 5

Objectives of Study 5

Research Questions 7

Chapter 2 - Conceptual Framework and Methodology 8

Conceptual Framework 8

Methodology 16

Chapter 3 - Sino Centre: What makes Sino Centre Different? 18

Development of Sino Centre 19

Location 21

Urban Planning and Ownership Model 23

People's Impression towards Sino Centre 28

Summary 30

Chapter 4 - Ecology of Sino Centre 31

CDs and Idols Goods 31

Vinyl Records and Second Hand CDs 34

Comics, Games and Figures 37

Observation 39

Chapter 5 - Comparison between 2 Ownership Model 43

Product Range 43

Customized Service 44

Consumption Pattern 45

Summary 46

Chapter 6 - Conclusion 47

Bibliography 49

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong

Appendix 54

Appendix 1: Questionnaire Sample 54

Appendix 2: Statistics from Questionnaires 57

Appendix 3: Interview Summary and Transcripts 62

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Modern urbanites shop every day, ranging from daily necessities to luxury products. Shopping centers are found everywhere in Hong Kong, from community mall to large-scale shopping centers. Shopping is no longer an activity to meet physical needs, but also for pleasure and gratification.

Recently, some small-scale shopping centers were closed down, while some were redeveloped by the major land developers. They were either replaced by a brand new shopping center or rented to large scale chain stores. Either way the diverse outlooks of small shopping centers are fast giving way to more or less identical, if not homogenous, chain store operations. More Hongkongers begin to be aware of the issue. With the increasing expectations from the customers and in this highly competitive environment, how could one shopping center withstand the inevitable wave of redevelopment and remain successful in the market?

Cultural products are often found in shopping centers. Customers can obtain gratifications and form a community through purchasing their desired cultural products. They see the shopping center as a platform for cultural consumption. In most cases, we associate shopping centers as commercial space for retailing. But is it possible to analysis a shopping center as a cultural space?

Objectives of the study

This study will provide an insight into the cultural space operating under the fragmented ownership model in Hong Kong by using Sino Centre as case study. We define Sino Centre

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as not just a shopping center, but also a cultural space.[1] Sino Centre is an example of fragmented ownership that was once a common property ownership model in Hong Kong before the 80s. However, now it is seen a fading model in Hong Kong, in contrast to the sole ownership model encouraged by the current urban planning policy[2] in Hong Kong. Most of the shopping malls nowadays are owned by major properties developers such as Sun Hung Kai Properties or MTR Corporate Limited. The stores inside these malls are highly standardized and mostly rented by chained international brands.

Sino Centre is an exceptional case of shopping malls under the current situation - it is one of the few malls in Hong Kong which is still under fragmented ownership, other examples would be Kwai Chung Shopping Mall and Sincere Podium (also known as Sin Tat Plaza). Kwai Cung Shopping Mall mainly offers trendy fashion items while mobile phones and accessories can be found in the Sincere Podium. Both malls offer space for the small scale, non-chain shops to do businesses. These malls have different specializations, like clothes and electronic gadgets. This study focuses on Sino Centre, which located in prime location and has a longest history of fragmented ownership. It has witnessed years of changes in Mong Kok and still remain popular.

Sino Centre also offers a favourable environment for the consumption of popular cultural products. It is able to provide all the conditions vital to the survival of the small, independent and non-chain stores which sell popular cultural products so it is worth to be studied. Three main types of popular cultural products can be found in Sino Centre, namely

[1] The concept of cultural space will be discussed in chapter 2.
[2] Urban planning policy refers to the implementation of Comprehensive Development Area in the late 1970s, will further explain in Chapter 3.

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popular music CDs and idol goods, second hand CDs, and figures, comics and games (FCG), will be discussed.

Sino Centre demonstrates an alternative mode of cultural consumption. It is an organically formed cultural space that facilitates diversified consumption patterns of popular cultures. The shops in Sino Centre offer a wide range of choices of the aforementioned cultural products that cater to the specific needs of consumers and thereby develop and sustain the taste community. Moreover, the intimate connections between suppliers and customers in Sino Centre seldom exist in large-scale, homogenized shopping malls in Hong Kong.

Research Questions

1. Why is Sino Centre a cultural space?
2. Why is Sino Centre a favourable environment for cultural consumption?
3. What is the consumption pattern(s) of popular cultures in Sino Centre?
4. How does Sino Centre facilitate regional popular cultural flows?
5. Can Sino Centre be an index of popular trends and fashion in Hong Kong?

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Chapter 2 - Conceptual framework and Methodology

Conceptual Framework

This part explains key concepts and the analytical framework adopted in the study. First we will introduce the fragmented ownership of Sino Centre as a fading model of shopping mall in nowadays Hong Kong. Shopping center theories will be introduced to analyze the set of geographical, operational and social conditions that make Sino Centre an unique shopping center in Hong Kong.

We see Sino Centre as not only a shopping center, but also a cultural space. We will identify the three main types of cultural products offered in Sino Centre and then look into the cultural consumption patterns of the visitors in Sino Centre. We would like to further establish the significance of Sino Centre as a unique shopping mall that offers a favourable environment for non-chain shops offering popular cultural products.

Shopping center theories provide a general framework to analyze the spatial characteristics of Sino Center. Incorporating cultural studies concepts and theories, it provides a concrete framework for analyzing data collected from qualitative and quantitative research. The method adopted will be further explained in the next chapter.

A) Shopping center theories

Shopping centers are described "as planned retail developments comprising various retail outlets which are under one freehold ownership and managed and marketed as unit." [3]

[3] Warnaby, G., Bennison, D., & Davies, B. (2005). Marketing communications in planned shopping centres: evidence from the UK. *International Journal Of Retail & Distribution Management*, *33*(12), 893-904.

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Three major components can be extracted from current scholarship: Location, customer mix and tenants allocation. It helps to analysis the successfulness of shopping center by understanding the tenants profile and how they utilize the physical characteristics of the shopping center, and how external environment influences the customer constitution.

Location

Location is the first important component of a shopping mall. It explains how external environment and physical characteristics affect the development of the shopping center. For this purpose, site analyses are conducted to study the geographical, historical and infrastructural context of the specific shopping center.[4]

Customer mix

Customer is the second component in studying shopping centers. The role of the customer is not only to purchase or visit the shopping center, but play an active role in the value creation process of the shopping center[5], which also influence the development of the shopping center indirectly.

Customers' shopping values can be used to explain the behaviors of irrational shopping by understanding the entertainment related to the "shopping experience".[6] Four major shopping types, namely convenience shopping, comparison shopping, specialized shopping and impulse shopping, can help to categorize the consumption behaviors of the customers through their shopping habits.[7] By understanding

[4] Meyer, T. (1988). Site Selection vs. Site Evaluation: Techniques for Locating. *Real Estate Issues*, *13*(1), 25-28.
[5] Hakansson, H. & Snehota, I. (1995). *Developing relationships in business networks* (pp. 1-330). London: Routledge.
[6] Holbrook, M. & Hirschman, E. (1982). The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings, and Fun. *Journal Of Customer Research*, *9*(2), 132-140.
[7] Levy, M. & Weitz, B. (2008). *Retailing management* (7th ed., pp. 192-245). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

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customer's shopping type, it helps to allocate the tenants in suitable location in order to utilize the space.

Tenant allocation

Tenant allocation is the last composing element of shopping centers. It connects closely with the previous elements, as it has an important role in facilitating customer traffic within the shopping center. Allocating the tenants in appropriate location will help to optimize the physical space of the shopping center.

In previous research, it finds that only 11% of customers will walk through the whole shopping center,[8] and impulse shopping tends to occur on the lower levels of the shopping center.[9]

B) Cultural space

Cultural space does not have a general definition as it is subject to many factors and subjective elements. However, the concept of social space as elaborated by Henri Lefebvre can help illuminate the meaning and nature of cultural space. According to Lefebvre, "space" is produced no matter how it is produced and what kind of society it is in. To him, a social space "contains and assigns appropriate places to social relations of reproduction and relations of production"[10]. Social space contains many social relations because it produces social relations and is reproduced by social relations. Besides, it is supported by social relations. The function of a social space depends on the "spatial practice"[11], which

[8] Brown, S. (1992). Tenant Mix, Tenant Placement and Shopper Behavior in a Planned Shopping Centre. *The Service Industries Journal*, *12*(3), 384-403.
[9] Yiu, CY., Xu, S., & Ng, HC. (2008). Space allocation and tenant placement at high-rise shopping malls. *Journal Of Retail And Leisure Property*, *7*(4), 315-324.
[10] Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space* (pp.32-33). Oxford, OX, UK: Blackwell.
[11] Lefebvre (1991). *The production of space*

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"embrace production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation."[12] It "ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion."[13]

The notion of social space by Henri Lefebvre enables us to see that the formation of cultural space is similar to the production of social space. In fact, cultural space is a further development of social space. Foucault's idea of space gives us insight on what makes a cultural space. According to Foucault, space is "a social constructed with the social itself being spatially organized."[14] It is noted that human activity should be included in space as "human interaction is situated in particular spaces that have a variety of social meanings."[15] Moreover, spaces are "emotionally charged places"[16] as people have a wide variety of activities with different cultural meanings in them.

C) Cultural consumption

Cultural Consumption is a 'ritual activity in which people consume to communicate with other consumers, and shifting accumulations of these acts cultural consumption constitute the making of culture.[17] According to Pierre Bourdieu, the patterns of cultural consumption are used for the purposes of marking and maintaining social distinction. Collecting is one of the manifestations that demonstrate the dynamic of cultural consumption.

[12] Lefebvre (1991). *The production of space*
[13] Lefebvre (1991). *The production of space*
[14] Barker, C. (2004). *The Sage dictionary of cultural studies* (pp. 209-210). London: Sage Publications.
[15] Baker (2004). *The Sage dictionary of cultural studies*
[16] Baker (2004). *The Sage dictionary of cultural studies*
[17] Douglas, M. & Isherwood, B. (1996). *The world of goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. London: Routledge.

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Culture of collecting - Why people collect?

People collect out of passion. According to Jean Baudrillard, collecting itself is a regressive behavior, which means that people see collecting as a way to escape from reality since collecting objects enables them to develop their autonomy. People indulge in collecting because this practice "does not seek to still a desire, yet it can bring about a reactive satisfaction that is every bit as intense."[18] The satisfaction is returned by the behavior that generates internal passion, which "lends this regressive behavior its sublimity"[19].

Psychologically, people feel pleasant in the activity of collecting as this activity "balances two stimulus found in any pleasurable activity"[20]. These stimulus are supplied by collectors when they discover that the size of their collections could be expanded continually and their collections are recognizable[21].

"Passion, focus and commitment"[22] are the features that differentiate collecting from normal consumer behaviors. According to Russell W. Belk, majority of collectors have passionate emotion, which is a main characteristic that distinguishes collecting from other examples of consumption. Besides, collecting is a 'rule-governed game"[23]. Collectors "gain a sense of mastery and competence"[24] if they can make a good collection by learning the rules. Individually, expanding the

[18] Jean Baudrillard.(1968). The System of Collecting. In Elsner, J., & Cardinal, R. (1994), *The Cultures of Collecting* (pp.7-24). London, UK: Reaktion Books Ltd. (Translated by Roger Cardinal)
[19] Jean Baudrillard.(1968). The System of Collecting
[20] Berlyne, D. & Madsen, K. (1973). *Pleasure, reward, preference: their nature, determinants, and role in behavior*. New York: Academic Press.
[21] Berlyne & Madsen (1973). *Pleasure, reward, preference: their nature, determinants, and role in behavior*
[22] Belk, R. (1995). *Collecting in a consumer society* (pp. 147-158). London: Routledge.
[23] Belk (1995). *Collecting in a consumer society*
[24] Belk (1995). *Collecting in a consumer society*

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collection means expanding the "sense of self" [25] to the collector. Moreover, collecting boosts the self-esteem[26] of the collectors if they "success in competition with other collectors." [27] Furthermore, "a sense of fellowship with fellow collectors"[2829] is developed among the collectors through "actual interaction or tacit sense of community." [30] According to Pierre Bourdieu, "taste is what brings together things and people that go together."[31] Collectors who have similar interests form a taste community as they share certain cultural capital. This community is semi-open which means that people could be part of the community as long as they acquire knowledge.

Fan culture

Fans, are conceived as the passive and pathological victims of the manipulations of the culture industries[32]. According to Joli Jenson, fan is assigned to specific cultural consumption activities that is not just established by the object of consumption but also in how the object is said to be consumed[33]. Fan culture is about the public display and circulation of meaning production and reading practices. They make meanings and committee with other fans through mass media and develop a 'poaching' to an art form. [34]

[25] Belk, R. (1988). Possessions and the Extended Self. *Journal Of Consumer Research*, *15*(2), 139-168.
[26] Storr, A. (1983). The Psychology of Collecting. *Connoisseur*, 213 (6), 35 - 38.
[27] Belk (1995). *Collecting in a consumer society*
[28] DiMaggio, P. (1987). Classification in Art. *American Sociological Review*, *52*(4), 440.
[29] Friedman, M., Vanden Abeele, P., & De Vos, K. (1993). Boorstin's consumption community concept: A tale of two countries. *Journal of Consumer Policy*, *16*(1), 35-60.
[30] DiMaggio (1987) *Classification in Art* ; Friedman, Vanden Abeele., & De Vos (1993). *Boorstin's consumption community concept: A tale of two countries.*
[31] Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste* (pp.241); translated by Richard Nice London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
[32] Fishke, J. (1992). The Cultural Economy of Fandom: the fan is an excessive consumer of popular culture. In L. Lewis, *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (pp. 46). London: Routledge.
[33] Jenson, J. (1992). The Adoring Audience. In L. Lewis, *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (pp.9). London: Routledge.
[34] Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual poachers*. New York: Routledge.

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Popular culture

Popular culture, also regarded as pop culture, is generally recognized as the vernacular or the mass culture at the point in time.[35] It is produced by industrial techniques of mass production and marketed for profit to a mass public of consumers.[36] According to Brummett, popular culture involves the aspect of social life of the mass and is determined by the interactions between people in the everyday society. [37] Identities and communal bonding are forged through consuming similar popular culture items.[38] In the nowadays, popular culture is mostly informed by the media. Examples of popular culture are popular music, daily fashion, entertainment, television, etc.

D) Shopping center as a cultural space

Sino Centre is not only a shopping mall but also a cultural space. The "spatial practice"[39] in Sino Centre decides that it is a collecting point of popular cultural products plus collectibles. Geographically, it can be easily accessed. Historically, fragmented ownership enables many independent shops to survive in Sino Centre. These shops mainly supplies pop-cultural products. Some provides collectibles like second hand CDs. These characteristics produce many relations between shop owners and customers who favor in these products. In other words, Sino Centre becomes a place where these commercial activities take place and where these people gather. Yet, this shopping mall has an

[35] Delaney, T. (2007). Pop Culture: An Overview. *Philosophy Now*. Retrieved from https://philosophynow.org/issues/64/Pop_Culture_An_Overview
[36] Strinati, D. (2016). Mass Culture and Popular Culture. In *An introduction to theories of popular culture*. London: Routledge.
[37] Brummett, B. (1991). *Rhetorical dimensions of popular culture*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
[38] Delaney (2007). *Pop Culture: An Overview*
[39] Lefebvre (1991). *The production of space*

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emotional dimension - Sino Centre is also an "emotionally charged place"[40]. This is embodied in the close connections between customers, shop owners and staff. In short, because of the "spatial practice" in Sino Centre, emotional element is found in this shopping center.

On the other hand, the visitors of Sino Centre are usually collectors who have accumulated certain cultural capital through the consumption of specific kinds of products. Moreover, meaning is constructed through these human consumptions. People have developed an impression that when they want to find something rare or interesting, Sino Centre is the place they should visit. Regarding to this impression, taste communities are formed and found in Sino Centre. Individuals in the community develop a "sense of fellowship through collectibles"[41]. This community is a semi-open community that requires certain cultural capital, which is the knowledge of the cultural products they consumed.

To summarize, Sino Centre is not simply a shopping mall but a cultural space as the "spatial practice" outlined above enables the production of the close connections between the customers and shop owners and staff. Visitors with similar tastes unwittingly form a taste community in Sino Centre. On the surface, the customers and shop owners are performing commercial transactions. In fact, they are undergoing an exchange of their cultural capital at the same time. Therefore, a cultural space is formed through "spatial practice".

[40] Baker (2004). *The Sage dictionary of cultural studies*
[41] DiMaggio (1987). *Classification in Art*; Friedman, Vanden Abeele., & De Vos (1993). *Boorstin's consumption community concept: A tale of two countries.*

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Methodology

This part presents the research methods used to address the research questions of the study. A mixed method research is adopted to help understand the demographics, people's consumption pattern and perception towards Sino Centre.

A) Quantitative questionnaires

Quantitative questionnaires are useful to gather a larger number of responses and quantifiable data in objective manner. The questionnaires were distributed nearby Sino Centre and through online platform. The targets were mainly visitors of Sino Centre.

Total of 154 valid questionnaires were collected. The questionnaire consists of 13 questions. It was mainly designed with multiple response questions, where respondents were asked to state their preferences for each question. Nominal data was also collected in order to understand the respondents' statuses and analysis their consumption activities. The sample and result of questionnaires are included in the appendix.

B) Qualitative semi-structured interviews

In semi-structured interviews, questions and instructions can be prepared ahead and conducted by several interviewers in the field. Interviewers are able to ask follow-up questions, while the respondents can express their answers freely in their own terms. So, it provides reliable and comparable qualitative data.

The targets of semi-structured interviews were the owners or staff of the shop inside Sino Centre. During February to April 2016, 8 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Prior to the interview, each respondent was asked for their consent to interview. All responses

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were either recorded in tape or written notes. The interview questions, respondent details and their response summary are included in the appendix.

C) Qualitative observation

To understand the demographics, trends and consumer behaviors in Sino Centre, qualitative observations were conducted during February to April 2016. Observation were made and recorded immediately for further analysis. 4 main aspects were observed during each field trip, i.e. age of visitors, time spent in single shop, specialization of goods, relationship between staff/owner and customers, and changes of display and adverts inside Sino Centre.

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Chapter 3 - Sino Centre: What makes Sino Centre Different?

This chapter will first examine the background and historical development of Sino Centre. Then it will discuss what makes Sino Centre different from other shopping centers and become a favourable environment for the consumption of popular cultural products. Our analysis consists of three parts: locational factor, urban planning and ownership model, and people's impression towards Sino Centre.

Sino Centre was built in 1979 by Sino Group.[42] It is a 23-storey commercial building located at 582-592 Nathan Road. B-2/F[43] are currently used as shopping mall, where most stores located. The size of each floor is around 4800 square ft. and is divided into around 40 individual small stores.[44] Visitors can access these floor freely by escalators. Higher level, i.e. 3-21/F, are used for office units, while some changed into upper-floor shops nowadays. These floor can only be reached by elevators on the ground floor. Visitors need to check their desired shop beforehand or the shopping guide next to the elevators.

Shops in Sino Centre offer diversified products for different visitors. Watches, CDs (both first hand and second hand), games, figures are products that agglomerate and commonly known for selling in Sino Centre. But there are also small amount of miscellaneous companies like travel agency, music school, domestic helpers agency opened up in Sino Centre.

[42] Rating and Valuation Department. (2015). *Names of Buildings*. Rating and Valuation Department. Retrieved 28 April 2016, from http://www.rvd.gov.hk/doc/tc/urban_201504.pdf
[43] Basement, ground, mezzanine, 1st and 2nd Floor
[44] 知日部屋. (2006). *信和中心：日本潮流商品超市 vs 盗版天堂*. Retrieved 28 April 2016, from http://www.cuhkacs.org/~benng/Bo-Blog/read.php?211

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Despite that Sino Centre has already been established for 37 years, the property transactions in Sino Centre remain active in recent years.[45] The rent per square ft. ranges from HKD 30 at higher levels to HKD 37 at lower levels. The selling price for each shop units in past 6 months is around 11,000 to 13,000 per square ft. for both upper and lower level units.[46]

Development of Sino Centre

Before the construction of Sino Centre in 1979, the site had been used for entertainment and retail purposes, i.e. the *Ming Yuen Amusement Park (明園遊樂場)* in 1950s, *Lung Wah Restaurant (龍華茶樓)* and *Chung Kiu Chinese Products Emporium (中僑國貨公司)* in 1960s. [47]

In 1979, the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) started service. Mong Kok was one of stations in the initial proposal submitted to the Legislative Council in 1968. Along with the rapid development of the Nathan Road, Sino Group saw the potential of the site and developed the land as a new shopping center.

In the 1980s, shops inside Sino Centre can be classified into 4 main types: CD stores, philatelic Shop, needlework, real estate and travel agency[48]. At that time, Sino Centre was one of the main exchange platform for stamps collectors.[49] Philatelic shops were opened

[45] In Hong Kong, buildings aged 30 or above are required to participate in the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme to inspect the building conditions and make necessary repairment, which reduce the investor incentive to purchase.
[46] Midland IC&I Limited. (2016). *Latest Transactions*. Retrieved 8 May 2016, from http://www.midlandici.com.hk/
[47] Cheng, PH. (2014). *默默向上游 - 香港五十年代社會影像* (p. 104). Hong Kong: The Commercial Press.
[48] Travel agency in Sino Centre usually only offers service for booking ship tickets, yacht or villa.
[49] Metro Post. (2009, August 14). Focus 《家家有寶》系列之放貨與格價(上). Retrieved from http://www.metrohk.com.hk/?cmd=detail&id=114366

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up on mainly 1-2/F of Sino Centre. In early 1990s, most of them were closed or moved to Ho Mong Kok Shopping Centre because of the change of ecology in Sino Centre. The shop owners prefer to agglomerate with shops selling similar products, i.e. old coins, vintage toys, in other shopping center specialized in vintage goods.

According to Mr. Choi, the owner of Sky Music who has been visiting and working in Sino Centre frequently since late 80s, he mentioned there were lots of needlework shops in Sino Centre. The shop owners did not only sell tools and materials there, they also ran needlework classes inside their shops.[50] Since the early stage, Sino Centre has become a platform for the lovers of different culture to communicate and exchange specific types of cultural products.

In the 1990s, more stores selling popular cultural products moved in, including popular music CD, Japanese fashion, comic, gaming, and figures. CD stores started to open up in Sino Centre, e.g. Sky Music started in 1990. 1990s is the golden period of Cantopop, Sino Centre became the center for selling Pop music CDs and Idol goods. The term "Sino Index" were introduced and used as an index of popularity of Hong Kong stars.

On the other hand, illegal activities started to occur in Sino Centre, like porn selling and pirate issues. Sino Centre, along with *SimCity (星際城市)*、*Sin Tat Plaza (先達廣場)*、*Ho King Commercial Building (好景商業中心)*, were the 4 major porn selling sites in Mong Kok.[51] In 2000s, there were more than 30 stores selling porn VCDs/DVDs in these

[50] Choi. (2016, February 29). Interview with Mr. Choi from Sky Music [Personal interview].
[51] Apple Daily. (2004, April 25). 搗四大商場「四仔」舖. Retrieved from http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/news/art/20040425/4004485

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shopping centers.[52] Most of the stores are located at 2/F of Sino Centre. With the frequent clearance by the Hong Kong Custom and their cooperation with Sino Group, most porn-selling stores in Sino Centre were forced to close down in 2004.[53] Similar to porn-selling, piracy became serious in mid 90s, and affected the profit and operation of CD store selling real copy.[54] Along with the porn-selling stores, pirate CD/VCD stores were also cleared by the custom in their operations during 2000s.

Today, Sino Centre is known as a 'trendy space', a retail center for a retail center for popular products like pop and second hand CDs/DVDs, figures, comics and games, and miscellaneous items like phone accessories, travel agencies. The ecology of Sino Centre will be further explained in the next chapter.

Location

Sino Centre is sited in Nathan Road, Mong Kok and enjoys geographical advantages and convenient traffic. Mong Kok is one of the most congested and prime shopping and residential district in Hong Kong. Its development can be traced from the colonial period.

In 1860, the Convention of Peking was signed. The British Colonial Government gained control of the Kowloon Peninsula. They carried out reclamation project in order to build road connecting Tsim Sha Tsui to Boundary Street, Kowloon Peninsula started to urbanize. So, the old Mong Kok Village (芒角村) was demolished and replaced by factories, roads

[52] Sing Tao Daily. (2000, March 14). 警撬門搜店破鹹碟鐵竇. Retrieved from http://std.stheadline.com/archive/fullstory.asp?andor=or&year1=2000&month1=3&day1=14&year2=2000&month2=3&day2=14&category=all&id=20000314a07&keyword1=&keyword2=

[53] Apple Daily. (2014, March 30).「香港秋葉原」曾淪四仔天堂. Retrieved from http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/news/art/20140330/18673460

[54] Choi (2016, February 29). Interview with Mr. Choi from Sky Music

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and residential buildings.[55] In 1904, Sir Matthew Nathan, the then Governor of Hong Kong, put strong emphasis on the development of Kowloon Peninsula. Under his governorship, the Kowloon-Canton railway was constructed and Nathan Road was widened. It brought in more residents, population flow, and provided a ground for the rapid development of Mong Kok.

Nowadays, shops in Mong Kok mainly cater to the consumption needs of the lower and middle-class. As there are many places for entertainment and trendy shopping malls concentrated in Mong Kok, it becomes a favorite destination of teenagers during their spare time. Hence, the term "MK-style (MK is the short form of Mong kok) emerges to describe the way how people dress, style their hair, move and speak. This style usually suggests a strong passion for foreign culture, e.g. Japan. [56]

Because of the external environment, Sino Centre gathers diversified popular cultural products which are usually consumed by teenagers. And it soon becomes the concentration spot of Japanese popular cultural products and trendy goods, earning it the reputation of being the "Akihabara[57] of Hong Kong" or "Miniature Harajuku[58] in Hong Kong".[59]

Nathan road is the main thoroughfare of Kowloon. It lines up different tourist attractions and shopping malls from Tsim Sha Tsui to Sham Shui Po. As a major road in Hong Kong,

[55] Chan, CT. (2013). *地文誌：追憶香港地方與文學* (pp. 83-100). Hong Kong: 聯經出版公司.
[56] China Daily. (2013, August 31). MK style and rise of 'shamate'. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hkedition/2013-08/31/content_16933957.htm
[57] Akihabara is located in Tokyo, Japan. This area is famous for its deep influence by the *otaku* culture. The streets are covered with anime, manga images and advertisement, and cosplayers handing out leaflets on streets. And maid cafés can also be found in that area.
[58] Harajuku is also located in Tokyo, Japan. Similar to Akihabara, this area is internationally famous as a center of Japanese youth culture and fashion, for example Lolita and Aristocrat style.
[59] Apple Daily. (2014, March 29).【執剩兩間】信和一度淪為四仔天堂. Retrieved 25 April 2016, from http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/realtime/breaking/20140329/52335030

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it offers a wide range of transportation options for visitors. Both tourists and local visitors from different districts can travel easily to Sino Centre. With the lower time cost and shorter travelling distance, it attracts visitors with different background and habits into Sino Centre to look for their desired products.

Urban planning and ownership model

In the 1970s, Hong Kong entered a new phase in urban planning and development. Comprehensive Development Area (CDA), a new urban development control tool, was imposed. CDA means comprehensive development of the whole land zone. Fragmented ownership is no longer a preferred model of ownership. So, Sino Centre becomes one of the few shopping centers still adopting the fading model of fragmented ownership.

In the case of Sino Centre, the Kowloon Development Company Limited purchased more than 50 stores' ownership from Sino Group with 145.6 million Hong Kong Dollars in early 00s.[60] In last few years, Kowloon Development Company Limited began to sell some of their shops' ownership to other parties, like Shall Take Limited.[61]

Currently, the largest proportion of Sino Centre's ownership belongs to Kowloon Development Company Limited. The company holds a total of 51 shop units[62] from basement floor to 1st floor, which occupies 965/3935 shares (24%) of and in Kowloon Inland Lot 7051, 7052, 7053, 7054, 7055, 7056 under government lease.[63]

[60] AM730. (2010, November 3). 九建 1.18 億沽信和中心地舖. Retrieved from http://www.am730.com.hk/article-30178
[61] Sing Tao Daily. (2010, November 3). 旺角美觀大廈 1.73 億將易手. Retrieved from http://www.weshare.hk/GAProperty/articles/721493
[62] The 51 shop units owned by Kowloon Development Company Limited comprises with: 29 shop units on the basement, 17 shop units on the ground floor, 2 shop units on the mezzanine floor and 3 shop units on the 1st floor of Sino Centre.
[63] Kowloon Development Company Limited. (2005). *Circular of Very Substantial Acquisition* (pp. 134). Hong Kong. Retrieved from http://www.kdc.com.hk/upload/file/E20050630a.pdf

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A) Comprehensive development area

The new urban planning model "Comprehensive Development Area" (CDA) is a form of development control tool similar to other land use zonings on the Outline Zoning Plans (OZPs).

The CDA was first introduced into the OZPs in 1976 as 'Other Use (Comprehensive Redevelopment Area)'. The main purpose is to facilitate comprehensive development design and avoid haphazard piecemeal redevelopment, by requiring a sole development agency to submit a master layout plan of the entire zone.[64]

The master layout plan needs to include a full set of information and is submitted for the approval by the Town Planning Board (TPB) established under the Town Planning Ordinance. For example, information about[65]:

(1) The nature, position, dimensions, and heights of all buildings to be erected in the area

(2) The proposed total site area and total number of flats and flat size.

(3) The details and extent of Government, community, public and recreation facilities, like parking facilities and open space

(4) Report on environmental, traffic, and Drainage and sewerage impacts

[64] Town Planning Board. (2016). *Town Planning Board Guidelines for Designation of "Comprehensive Development Area ("CDA")" Zones and Monitoring the Progress of "CDA" Development*. Retrieved April 10, 2016, http://www.info.gov.hk/tpb/en/forms/Guidelines/pg17a_e.pdf

[65] Hong Kong Legislative Council. (2001). *"Comprehensive Development Area" ("CDA") Zoning on Statutory Plans*. Retrieved April 10, 2016, from http://www.info.gov.hk/tpb/en/forms/Schedule_Notes/msn_cda_e.pdf

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Impact of CDA

Under the principle of comprehensive development, the land area for each land sale increases. When land area increases, the investment cost increases and no longer to be afforded by small scale developers. With the financial strength of larger scale developers, they are able to integrate more projects and resources in developing the site, thus form a megastructures. Megastructures refers to constructed modular units that are capable of great or even 'unlimited' extension.[66] As the land becomes privately owned, the developer commercializes the space, while the community says to the space reduces.

In the shopping mall constructed under the CDA, in order to secure profit and ensure population flow, developers tend to allocate lots of anchor stores in these malls. Anchor stores usually refer to store with reputation, chained shops or department stores. [67] So, these shopping malls become homogenized by corporatized management and increasing standardization of product categories and service, which limits consumer choices.

For instance, Union Square[68] is a commercial and residential real estate project on West Kowloon reclamation area, one of the largest scale comprehensive development project in Hong Kong, occupying 13.54 hectares. The plan integrated seven commercial and residential projects[69], one of them is to construct a large scale

[66] Wilcoxon, R. (1968). *Council of planning librarians exchange bibliography*. Monticello 66: 2
[67] Brueckner, J. (1993). Inter-store externalities and space allocation in shopping centers. *The Journal Of Real Estate Finance And Economics*, *7*(1), 5-16.
[68] The project is contracted to four main developers, Hang Lung Group, Sun Hung Kai Properties, Wharf Holdings and Wing Tai Asia, all organized by the Hong Kong SAR government through the coordination of the MTR Company.
[69] The 7 projects are The Waterfront, Sorrento, The Harbourside, The Arch, Elements, The Cullinan, and International Commerce Centre.

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shopping mall - the Elements, opened in 2007 with a total retail area of 1,000,000 square feet. The tenants can be classified into 3 main categories: fashion, dining and entertainment (cinema and ice rink), most of them are high-end products and chained stores, which detected from the daily need of the community. The shopping centers are flooded with chain stores and lack of distinguishing features, except they are large and new.

The CDA expends the uniqueness from the shopping malls, as they are flooded with anchor stores. Under this development model, there are no longer "community malls", which cater the needs or offer choice to community, but replace by large scale malls.

B) Fragmented ownership

A fragmented ownership structure implies that the property is owned by two or more owners. According to CAP 545 Land (Compulsory Sale for Redevelopment) Ordinance Section 3, the person has to own no less than 90% of undivided shares in a lot to be eligible to make an application for redevelopment.[70]

Fragmented ownership may impose difficulties in the execution of renovation and reorganization projects, mainly caused by the unwillingness of some property owners to engage in discussions. In the case of most shopping malls, the retail sale and lifespan of the malls will decline due to the lack of new excitement and new environment. [71] However,

[70] CAP 545 Land (Compulsory Sale for Redevelopment) Ordinance, § 3 (2002).
Original sentence: "the person or persons who owns or own, otherwise than as a mortgagee, not less than 90% of the undivided shares in a lot may make an application."
[71] Khoshbakht, B. (2015). *Fragmented Ownership in Shopping Centres - The influence of fragmented ownership on the value of retail units*. Netherlands: Eindhoven University of Technology.

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Sino Centre demonstrates the advantages of fragmented ownership in terms of providing a favourable environment for the consumption of popular cultural products and facilitating a diversified consumption patterns of popular culture.

Advantage of fragmented ownership

Under this early model, the building was owned by more than one party, which made redevelopment difficult. Although it seems a disadvantage, however in Hong Kong context, once it is redeveloped, there is high possibility that it will become another large scale shopping mall dominated by chain stores. The fragmented ownership acts as a shield to protect small-scale and local community shopping malls from being redeveloped so the small tenants can continue to run their businesses there. This is especially important to Sino Centre. Sino Centre, as the concentration spot of popular culture, it closely follows the cycle of rise and fall of different popular cultures. Most of the stores there are neither chain stores nor anchor shops.

The fragmented ownership also maintains the heterogeneity of Sino Centre, as it provides a less controlled environment for cultural consumption. Tenants are able to move in or move out quickly through different property agencies. So, tenants are able to agglomerate organically and attract target customers. According to the principle of minimum differentiation, by agglomerating, retailers compete on many non-price factors and these non-price factors prevent a lower price competitor from becoming a monopolist. It helps to maintain the business equilibrium within the shopping mall. [72]

[72] Hotelling, H. (1929). Stability in Competition. *The Economic Journal*, *39*(153), 41-57.

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Agglomeration provides a favourable environment for small scale store to promote themselves. When large number of tenants selling similar product within Sino Centre, it construct the image and people's perception towards the shopping mall. They believe they can find their desired product there, as shop selling similar products are agglomerated there.

People's impression towards Sino Centre

After 37 years of establishment and the agglomeration of tenants, people have a strong impressions towards Sino Centre, no matter whether they have been to there or not. From our questionnaires, 38% of respondents describe Sino Centre as a landmark. There are 2 main reasons:

First, 31% of respondents think that Sino Centre is well-known by most Hong Kongers. It is a landmark of Mong Kok and Nathan Road. In the questionnaires, few of the respondents indicate that they will use Sino Centre to indicate their location to others as they think Sino Centre is well-known among Hong Kongers, even some of them have never been to Sino Centre in recent years. There are a few Cantopop songs include Sino Centre in their lyrics, for instance *Nathan Road (彌敦道)* sung by Ken Hung[73], *New Town (新地市)* sung by goldEN[74]. It is a popular song broadcasted through TV and radio programme. It further promotes Sino Centre to people who never been to there.

[73] Lyrics: "一經信和暴雨瀉 沿著長龍又不想 貼近些....."
[74] Lyrics: "如可不一樣 信和的黑膠音色更響....."

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Second, Sino Centre gathers trendy and diversified goods which are usually consumed by teenagers. It is the only place where they can find those cultural products. This impression especially attracts customers to do comparison shopping at Sino Centre.[75] This type of customers have a targeted product in mind, but do not have full knowledge about its brand. Even it requires extra efforts (time cost/travel cost), they tend to choose Sino Centre which accommodates more retailers selling their desired type of products, as it would reduce the risk of not able to find their targets.

From the questionnaires, 40% of respondents think that Sino Centre is a concentration spot of popular culture and/or non-mainstream cultural products. When typing *Sino(信和)* in Google search engine, a few suggestions are provided (Figure 1). Most of them are related to the choices of cultural products offered inside Sino Centre, like CD, figures, PS4 (games). Moreover, when newspapers report Sino Centre, most of them introduce Sino Centre as "Japanese culture center" or "center of popular cultures", it further solidifies people's' impression towards Sino Centre.[76]



[75] Levy & Weitz (2008). *Retailing management*
[76] Hong Kong U Lifestyle. *信和中心. HK 港生活*. Retrieved 6 May 2016, from http://hk.ulifestyle.com.hk/spot/detail.html?id=ABdGDVowBwhZFwNr

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Figure 1: Search suggestions provided by Google when keyword Sino (信和) was inputted.

Summary

The above analysis explains why Sino Centre has been able to maintain its uniqueness and remain successful in the market over the last three decades.

From the locational aspect, Sino Centre enjoys the geographical advantages for situating in Nathan Road, Mong Kok, which increases the accessibility of Sino Centre and able to attract potential customers more easily.

From the aspect of urban planning and ownership model, fragmented ownership acts as a shield to protect the heterogeneity of the shopping center by providing a less controlled environment for the consumption of popular cultural products.

All these favourable factor shape people's impressions towards Sino Centre, which further suggest the uniqueness of Sino Centre and attract new customers to the shopping center. So, Sino Centre demonstrates a favourable environment which facilitates the diversified consumption patterns of popular cultural products

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Chapter 4 - Ecology of Sino Centre

Sino Centre is comprised of CD stores, comic, game and figure store, consignment stores, electronic accessories stores and other non-chain stores selling tawdry items. According to our questionnaires, 25% visitors of Sino Centre often look for CDs and idol goods, 21% for figures, 20% for games, 15% for comics and 5% for second hand CDs. Therefore, we would like to focus on these three types of popular cultural products, i.e. CDs & Idol goods, second hand CDs and comics, games and figures (CGF), in order to investigate the ecology of Sino Centre.

CDs & idol goods

The first impression of Sino Centre for most of the Hongkongers should be the CD stores. They have been involved in Sino Centre since the 80s. Either go up or down the escalators at the entrance of Sino Centre, the first shop appears to the visitors would be Sky Music on 1/F or Echo CD Centre on B/F, the 2 "giants" among other CD shops in Sino Centre, both located at the prime locations. Most of the CD shops locate at the B/F and 1/F of the mall.

A) Location

Since the 80s, LP, cassette and CD stores began to start their businesses in Sino Centre. Internet is not yet popularized back to the time, music lovers had to go to Sino Centre to buy LPs or cassettes of their favorite singers or musicians. CD stores gradually moved into Sino Centre since the 90s. From local hits to underground music, Sino Centre offered broad and diversified choices and became a major gathering point for music lovers and CD "hunters".

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Since the rise of Cantopop in the 90s, Sino Centre became the center for selling Pop music CDs and Idol goods. Acknowledging the significant position of the Sino Centre, the term "Sino Index" was introduced in the 90s ranking the best sellers of idol goods in Sino Centre. The index indicated the popularity of Hong Kong pop artists.

However, piracy became more critical in 90s which seriously affected the ecology of CD stores in Sino Centre. Along with the decline of Cantopop, "the sales volume dropped seriously in 1997."

Moving towards the 00s, due to the frequent clearance by the custom and the rise of illegal download in internet, most of the pirate CD stores were closed or moved out. Only the CD stores which sold legal copies and have rooted in Sino Centre survived.

Nowadays, Sino Centre is still the most well-known place for purchasing CDs in Hong Kong. Comparing to the 1990s, the demand of CD/DVD has dropped significantly. Because of the historical position of Sino Centre, people, whether locals and tourists, will thought of Mong Kok immediately when they want to purchase CDs. Sino Centre is seen as the only place where these small scale/independent? CD shops can survive and operate even under a high rent pressure and declining market. However, they cannot survive in other districts in Hong Kong due to the low familiarity and population flow.

B) People

Customers

As a place offering highly specialized goods, the majority of customers are regular customers. According to Mr. Choi, the owner of Sky Music, 40% of the customers

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are frequent customers. One of the significant sources of customer is high school students. They usually come to search for specific targets, such as goods of specific singer, genre or country. The rest of the 60% are one time and walk-in clients. The proportion between regular and new customers depends on whether the occasion of CD release.

Some die-hard fans will collect every CD of their favorite singers, even if they are no longer famous, in order to show their continued support. They define themselves as 'fans' and usually look for Southeast-Asian, Japanese, Malaysian and Cantonese singers. If these singers hold concerts in Hong Kong, they will drop by Sino Centre and buy CDs during their trip.

Connections

Sky music has broad connections to both local and Asian musical industries such as the main CD distributors and record label companies. Sky Music can directly contact them to look for specific CDs or goods.

Sky Music has staff scattered in several East Asian countries including Taiwan, Korea and Japan. These staff are responsible for purchasing for customer's' individual order. They will purchasing specific goods for Sky Music's customers such as concert tickets, joining fan clubs to purchase fan-club produced goods. Occasionally, they will help search for products that cannot be obtained through distributors or retailers.

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Vinyl records & second hand CDs

The technology of CD was risen in around 1980s and spread to Hong Kong in 1990s. Before that, Vinyl record was the major way to circulate pop songs. At the beginning, people had to bring the master tape to Japan and West Germany for CD production. The outputs were little and every CD and vinyl records were precious and limited. Meanwhile, Hong Kong pop music boomed since 1960s to 1990s. Buying CD and Vinyl records were very common for fans to support their beloved artists.

Although most of the people use phone and Mp3 to listen music, all the CDs produced in the 1980s are still valuable in the second hand market. Secondhand CD, it is a byproduct of the music industry[77]. Some die-hard fans of Cantopop still collect Vinyl records and CDs of pop stars in the old time.

A) Location

While Hong Kong's popular music industry is suffering from the piracy issues like free download online, second hand CD and Vinyl Record remains its popularity. Sino Centre is one of the famous places for reselling and purchasing Vinyl records and second hand CD. As described by Mrs. Cheng, an old staff of *Classical Music Gallery (古典發燒廊)*, Sino Centre is the 'mainstream' of selling second hand CDs.

In late 90s, internet was popularized in Hong Kong. Piracy issue and porn stores were everywhere in the Sino Centre. In 2004, all these kinds of stores were swept and second

[77] AM730. (2014, March 4). 物以罕為貴 港初版 CD 炒價近萬元.. Retrieved April 23, 2016, from http://www.am730.com.hk/article-198237

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hand CDs stores merged into Sino Centre.[78] On the first few floors of Sino Centre, there are 8 stores selling second hand CDs and Vinyl records while more stores are located on the upper floors. The stores on the lower floors mostly function as collecting CD while the upper floor ones are for reselling. People usually walk floor by floor and look for the second hand CDs. As for Vinyl records, they are mostly sold inside the upper floors. Some Vinyl records are sold together with the second hand CDs such as *Classical Music Gallery (古典發燒廊)*. Different stores in Sino Centre provide different types of music. For example, *Classical Music Gallery* (*古典發燒廊)* sells classical music, *Music Life* sells mainly Jazz and foreign second hand CDs and *Music Castle (音樂堡壘) sells both classical and C*antopop secondhand CDs. Most of the Vinyl Records are purchased from Japan and Britain. The range of music genres diverse from classical musical to popular songs of 1990s.

'The sales of Vinyl record per day is unpredictable because a single Vinyl Record could be very expensive', mentioned by Ms Cheng. It costs from several hundreds to over ten thousands. The older the Vinyl record is, the more expensive it is sold. Some people would purchase glass Vinyl records purely for collection. In the recent 5 years, more people are interested in Vinyl records as more industries produce Vinyl records players. As for second hand CDs, the most high-valued second hand CDs are the albums of Alan Tam, Teresa Tang, Danny Chan, etc. Most of them are 80s pop stars. Some special edition albums cost for several thousands.

B) People

<u>Customers</u>

[78] Apple Daily (2014, March 29) .【執剩兩間】信和一度淪為四仔天堂

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There are many new visitors as Sino Centre attracts different kinds of customers. [79]However, most of the customers who purchase a Vinyl record or second hand CD are regular customers. They usually visit the stores with targeted singers or albums and are familiarized with where the products are placed in the store. Since the Individual Visit Scheme in 2003, many mainlanders come to Sino Centre to look for CDs released in the 80s.[80] 'They were not capable to buy it in the 80s so now they come to Hong Kong for the second hand one.' said by Mr Chung, owner of a second hand CD store.[81] Among the 'frequent customers' of Vinyl record, they are mostly middle-aged people and students studying in Music-related subjects. They are music lovers and know how to appreciate Vinyl records. Meanwhile, the owners of these kind of stores are usually lovers of CDs too. Friendship is developed between store owners and customers based on the shared interest.[82] Sometimes, customers would 'Whatsapp' the owners for searching uncommon/ limited editions of secondhand CDs.

Connections

Vinyl record stores source goods from factories and their customers while second hand CD stores source goods mainly from their clients. People bring their CDs/Vinyl records to the owner. The owner will then check and decide whether they accept the second hand CDs by considering the year of release and the featured

[79] Cheng. (2016, February 29). Interview with Ms Cheng from Classical Music Gallery *古典發燒廊* [Personal interview].
[80] People.cn. (2014, March 14). 香港上世紀 80 年代原版 CD 炒至近萬港元. Retrieved 25 April 2016, from http://hm.people.com.cn/n/2014/0314/c42272-24640559.html
[81] AM730. (2014, March 4). 物以罕為貴 港初版 CD 炒價近萬元
[82] Oriental Daily. (2014, August 6). 我恒我訴:二手 CD 店. Retrieved April 23, 2016, from http://orientaldaily.on.cc/cnt/lifestyle/20140605/00329_001.html

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singers. Therefore, the customer of Vinyl record/CD can also be the supplier. The goods are recycled until they are collected by their devotees.

Comics, games and figures

Sino Centre is known as the gathering point of comics, games and figures (CGF) shops in Mong Kok. They are usually very specialized in terms of the type of product they sell - the comic stores will seldom sell (or only sell a few) figures or games. The same situation can also be applied to the shops specialized in selling figures or games. The comics, games and figures are usually spinoffs from the Japanese and American manga and animations. The shops in Sino Centre provide great variety of these cultural products imported from the manufacturers. As the staff of Novelty Outlet (*精品* Outlet) , Mr Fung, mentioned, the comics, games or figures lovers will immediately think of Sino Centre if they have to look for targeted products.

A) Location

The comics, games and figures stores have been doing their businesses in Sino Centre since the 80s[83]. Some of them even have branches within Sino Centre. The shops, especially for those selling figures and games, do not just located at the shopping mall on B to 2nd floors of Sino Centre, many of them have branches on the upper-floor commercial units. They are separated at two levels to differentiate customers and products to be sold.

The products sold in the shops at the shopping mall are usually most up-to-dated and latest models. They are strategically placed there in order to attract first time customers and walk-in clients. They tend to stay for short time in the stores so their first impressions of the

[83] Apple Daily (2014, April 6), 【玩物達人】信和老字號宇宙船執笠 動漫迷：難覓日本精品, http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/realtime/supplement/20160406/54951350

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shops are important. These shops are usually smaller in size comparing to the shops on the upper floor. Greater variety of choices are provided on the upper-floor shops and therefore require larger space. These shops mainly serve their frequent and loyal clients who have already known the shops and have been purchasing comics, games or figures from them for years. As pointed out by the staff of the CGF shops, up to 50% of the customers of their shops are frequent customers and they will prefer to spend longer time at the shops to look for their targets and chat with the staff or shop owners.

B) People

Customers

According to the interviews with the staff of the CGF shops, there is a wide combination of backgrounds of their clients, from students to businessmen, amateur collectors to professional collectors. Most of the customers have specific targets to look for when they visit the CGF shops in Sino Centre. They are usually fans of a certain series of cartoon or animations and are collectors of the related figures, comics or games.

The age range of their customers is mainly between 20 to 50 year old. The senior customers usually have greater consuming power comparing to the younger customers. Besides looking for the newly launched game or the latest volume of comics or figures, the senior customers would also look for products related to the cartoon and animations which they have watched in their childhood. If they cannot find the products in the store, they will place orders to the shops to look for the products for them. The shops will then send order to the manufacturers or even look for the requested products in the overseas markets.

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The customers will compare between shops for not just the price of products, but also the variety of choices of products, the efficiency of the shop to gain most up-to-dated products, the "completeness" of collections of the customers' target and the knowledge of the shop owners and staff.

Connections

The CGF shops have great network with the overseas manufacturers (e.g. Bandai, Marvels or Nintendo), publishers, suppliers and distributors of the cultural products. They act as the retailers of the products. Some larger scale CGF shops will even have office and staff in Japan or Northern America to assure that they can get the latest products in time as well as look for specific products for the customers in the overseas.

Observations

According to the concept of 'human ecology'[84], a space could be analyzed through the spatial and temporal interrelationships between human and their economic, social and political organizations[85]. Sino Centre is formed by non-chain retail stores which offer different kinds of cultural products e.g. idol goods, CDs, games, etc. By identifying the players, networking and human activities such as cultural consumption patterns, we could understand the ecology of Sino Centre and its spatial relationship with the people.

[84] Human ecology is a branch of sociology dealing with the relationships between people and their environment. It focuses on the interaction between the human social system and the rest of the ecosystem. The social system is everything about people, their population and the psychology and social organization that shape their behaviors. The social system is a central concept in human ecology because human activities that impact on ecosystems are strongly influenced by the society in which people live. Values and knowledge form our worldview as individuals and as a society. Social organization, and the social institutions that specify socially acceptable behavior, shape the possibilities into what we actually do. Like ecosystems, social systems can be on any scale - from a family to the entire human population of the planet.
From Marten, G.G. (2001). *Human ecology: Basic concepts for sustainable development* (pp.1-2). London: Earthscan Publications.

[85] Merriam-webster. (n.d.). *Human Ecology*. Retrieved May 12, 2016, from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/human ecology

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A) People

Customers and retailers are two major players in Sino Centre. There are three kinds of customers: regular customers, walk-in clients and mainland visitors. More than 50% of the customers for second hand CDs and Vinyl records are regular customers and mostly middle-aged people; around 50% customers of comics, games and figures are frequent customers. In the case of CDs and idol goods shops, 60% of their customers are walk-in clients.[86] As Sino Centre is famous for its concentration of pop-cultural products, it attracts many new clients to walk floor by floor.[87] Meanwhile, the third type of customers is the mainland visitors under the Individual Visit Scheme since 2003. They usually look for Cantopop CDs in the 80s. As for retailers, they usually rent a shop or upper-floor office unit in Sino Centre as non-chain shops.

B) Networking

The interrelationship between customers and retailers has fostered a close community. Friendship is developed based on mutual interests. The customers can also be sources of supplies the pop-cultural products, e.g. second hand CDs. Shops in Sino Centre offer customized service for the customers. If customers cannot find their targeted goods in the store, they can place customized orders. This makes people confident that they will get what they want in the Sino Centre.

In order to handle customized orders, shops in Sino Centre have broad overseas networks with the manufacturers, publishers, suppliers and distributors of cultural products. For

[86] Choi (2016, February 29) . *Interview with Mr. Choi from Sky Music*
[87] Cheng (2016, February 29). *Interview with Ms Cheng from Classical Music Gallery*

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instance, CD stores in Sino Centre have connections with both local and Asian CD distributors and record label companies. Some shops also have staff located in different countries. For example, some larger scale shops recruit staff in Japan and North America, where the companies like Nintendo and Bandai Namco Entertainment situated. Industry networks and connections of the shops have secured the flow of popular cultural products closely corresponding to popular trends. Shop owners will go on online forums to carry out market research and predict the popular trends before stocking the pop-cultural products. While they are making the cultural products accessible in Hong Kong, they are creating a desire to collect.

C) Human activities - cultural consumption patterns

When looking into the human activities in Sino Centre, there are mainly two types of cultural consumption patterns. The major cultural consumption pattern in Sino Centre is comparison shopping.[88] This type of customers have a general concept of products they desired but do not have full knowledge about the brands. They tend to choose shopping center that accommodates more retailers. According to the questionnaires, 120 out of 154 interviewees visit Sino Centre randomly without a specific targeted cultural good. Sino Centre offers board choices for different kinds of cultural products and meets the needs of this kind of customers. For example, there are more than 15 stores for both CDs and Vinyl records lovers while there are around 25 stores that sell comic, games and figures. The heterogeneity of Sino Centre makes itself popular for comparison shopping and people can search for trendy pop-cultural products in this paradise of popular cultures.

[88] Levy & Weitz (2008). *Retailing management*

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The second type of consumption pattern identified in Sino Centre is specialized shopping.[89] This type of customers aim at specific products and do not accept replacement. Nearly 23% of interviewees visit Sino Centre for specific cultural products such as magazines, figures and CDs. 45% of them regard Sino Centre as their first choice for purchasing these products. Loyalty is developed towards the brands and the retailers. Taking Cantopop fans as an example, they state themselves as *Die-hard Fans (樂迷)*. They collect every CD of their favorite singers, no matter they are still famous or not. At the same time, they are also die-hard customers of the retailers in Sino Centre that offers their targeted products e.g. *Sky Music*.

D) Summary

Sino Centre is a space for consuming pop-cultural products. It allows different cultural consumption patterns, such as comparison shopping and specialized shopping, to take place, an important social function the "paradigm shopping malls" cannot fulfill. Together with the shops' broad connections with overseas cultural industries, especially those in the East Asian region, it is highly responsive to global popular cultural trends It offers broad choices that meet specific needs together with customized services. A close community is organically formed between customers and retailers. Friendships and loyalty are developed and formed the taste community.[90] Sino Centre is a favorable environment for alternative cultural consumption of pop-cultural products.

[89] Levy & Weitz (2008). *Retailing management*

[90] Jean Baudrillard.(1968). The System of Collecting. In Elsner, J., & Cardinal, R. (1994), *The Cultures of Collecting* (pp.7-24). London, UK: Reaktion Books Ltd. (Translated by Roger Cardinal)

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Chapter 5 - Comparison between two ownership models

This chapter will compare shopping centers under two different ownership models, fragmented ownership and concentrated ownership, in terms of product range, customized services, and consumption pattern. It aims to emphasize the fragmented ownership model of Sino Centre and distinctive characteristics. A large-scale shopping center in the same district, the Langham Place, is chosen for comparison.

Langham Place is located in the very heart of Mong Kok. People could easily access this shopping mall through the exit C at Mong Kok MTR station. It was built in 2004 and opened in 2005. Champion REIT owns the 13 stories shopping mall. Customers control and tenant allocation are implemented in Langham Place.

Product range

A wide variety of products can be found in Langham Place. According to Langham Place official website, it provides "a myriad of international and local fashion brands, exclusive food and beverage outlets and a cinema."[91] In contrary to Langham Place, the products found in Sino Centre ranged from popular cultural goods like games, figures, comics, CDs to second hand CDs. The shops in Sino Centre tend to focus on one particular type of pop-cultural products yet offer broad choices for the customers. They do not just offer latest released products but also overseas special editions, novelties and second hand products. In short, the product range of these two shopping mall is different. Both of them target on the mainstream market as they both provide latest popular products. Yet, Sino Centre

[91] Langham Place. (2016). *About Langham Place*. [online] Available at: http://www.langhamplace.com.hk/en/#/about_lp/mall [Accessed 11 May 2016].

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considers demands of the niche like second hand CD markets. Therefore, its product range is an advantage to its competitive edge.

Customized services

For Sino Centre, it provides personalized services, which especially suit the needs of collectors who want rare products. When the customers place orders for specified goods, the shop owners search the goods along the supply chains outside Hong Kong. On the other hand, with their regional connections, they are able to get latest products earlier than chained shops in large-scale shopping mall. For example, Sky Music, a popular music shop on the M/F of Sino Centre, sold the album of Korean girl group TWICE on the same day that the album is officially released in Korea. (Figure 2) The shop owner conducts market analysis mainly based on the forums and people responses in order to predict the trend and decide what products they should order next time. For Langham Place, the retailers import popular cultural products from the suppliers directly. They are not ready to sell the products until the logistic procedures are finished. In short, the arrival of stocks in Sino Centre is much earlier than that in Langham Place and therefore the collectors are able to look for tailor-made service in the Sino Centre.

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Figure 2: Sky Music sold the album of Korean girl group TWICE on the same day that the album is officially released in Korea.

Consumption pattern

Sino Centre has wide product range, especially for the second hand CDs, which cannot be found in Langham Place where most of the shops are international brands to satisfy the mainstream market. The chain stores in Langham Place would not sell second hand products as the market is relatively small and the sales is unpredictable for profit making. Therefore, the needs of the consumers for second hand CDs cannot be satisfied by this kind of shopping mall. The shops in Sino Centre are able to meet their taste by offering great variety of choices for the second hand CDs, ranging from albums of local popular singers in the 80s to classical music albums or vinyl records imported from Japan or Europe. In

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addition, the shops offer customized service to search for specific products on behalf of the customers. The shops' broad networking makes their customers trust that they can find products that are rare and difficult to get hold of. In return, customers will develop loyalty to the shops and even build connections with the shop owners in Sino Centre.

Moreover, the fragmented ownership of Sino Centre enables many non-chain shops to survive. It follows that the shops owners who run the same businesses would gather unwittingly. There is no tenant allocation in Sino Centre so their shops scatter on different zones of the shopping center. The customers tend to perform specialized shopping in Sino Centre. Compared to Sino Centre, Langham Place has the Leasing Department[92] as a gatekeeper to filter the shops which are not potential lessee. Besides, it implements tenant allocation and customer traffic control. Therefore, the distribution of shops are under control. As a result, the customers are more likely to perform impulsive consumption in Langham Place. In short, the consumption pattern in Sino Centre is different from that in Langham place because of its product range and customized service.

Summary

Sino Centre is different from the large scale shopping mall like Langham Place because of fragmented ownership, which enables many independent shops to survive. It indirectly differentiates its product range from Langham Place. On the other hand, the shops in Sino Centre are able to make full use of their own advantages like regional connections so they can offer customized services for their customers. Without Leasing Department like Langham Place, Sino Centre is without tenant allocation and customer traffic control. Thus, the consumption pattern in Sino Centre is different from that in Langham Place.

[92] Langham Place. (2016). *Contact Us*. [online] Available at: http://www.langhamplace.com.hk/en/#/contact_us [Accessed 11 May 2016].

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Chapter 6 - Conclusion

Sino Centre, as a shopping mall, offers a favourable environment for consuming popular cultural products with a set of conditions fulfilled. Geographically, it is located in Mong Kok which is a densely populated and prime shopping district in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, Sino Centre has a strong social connection. An intimate relationship between retailers and customers is created and friendship is developed in the process of human interactions. The fragmented ownership structure of Sino Centre favours the survival of non-chain stores and sole proprietorship. They have more flexibility to offer diverse cultural products that cater to a specific taste community. The customized services and regional connections with East Asian cultural industries developed by small shop owners create a reputation that people would get what they want in Sino Centre. Unlike paradigm shopping malls with concentrated ownership structure such as Langham Place and Elements, Sino Centre stands out as a vibrant yet overlooked shopping center that has preserved uniquely "human" qualities that are increasingly marginalized in Hong Kong's shopping culture.

'Place influences both production and reception, and consumption influences place'.[93] The significance of Sino Centre is not only to provide alternative choices for the consumption of popular cultural products, but is also a disappearing example of shopping mall under fragmented ownership, which was once a common model in Hong Kong before 1970s. Contrary to nowadays comprehensive development area which is flooded with anchor chain stores, Sino Centre inherits an old model of shopping mall which nowadays gives shelter to small-scale stores and allows people to get closer with one another. It is a cultural space where people develop their social and cultural networks and form taste community

[93] Jubas, K., Taber, N., & Brown, T. (2015). *Popular culture as pedagogy: Research in the Field of Adult Education*. Boston: Sense Publishers.

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through cultural consumption. It is a complement of paradigm of shopping malls and offers living spaces for heterogeneous cultural practices. Under the inexorable urban renewal, this study recognizes the value of Sino Centre as both shopping mall and cultural space. Further research on land use and its influence to the ecology of a cultural space is needed to study the cultural landscape of Hong Kong and the factors that shape the cultural preferences of Hongkongers.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire sample

你好！我們是城大文化及文化產業管理系的四年級生，現正為畢業論文進行有關信和中心的資料搜集。如果你曾到訪過信和中心，希望你可以花一點完成問卷。問卷不會擔誤你太多時間，大約只需 3 分鐘。謝謝你! 所有資料只用作學術用途。

We are a group of final year students of Culture and Heritage Management at the City University of Hong Kong. We are now conducting research for our Final Year Project. If you have been to Sino Centre before, please kindly help us to fill in this questionnaire. The survey will only takes around 3 minutes. Thank you so much for your time! For academic purpose only.

第一部分 Section 1

1) 請問最近 1 年你有沒有到訪過信和中心?
In previous year, have you ever been to Sino Centre?
   a. 有 Yes
   b. 沒有 No (請到第五部分 to section 5)

第二部分 Section 2

2) 平均每月到訪信和中心多少次?
How often do you visit Sino Centre in a monthly average?
   a. 2 次或以下 Less than two times
   b. 3 - 5 次 times
   c. 6 - 10 次 times
   d. 10 次以上 10 times or above

3) 為什麼到訪信和中心?
Why do you visit Sino Centre?
   a. 採購特定的商品 Looking for specific products
   b. 純粹行逛 No specific target, simply shopping (請到第四部分 to section 4)
   c. 取貨 Collect delivery (請到第四部分 to section 4)

第三部分 Section 3

4) 你採購的特定商品是什麼?
What are the specific products that you are looking for at the Sino Centre?
_____

5) 信和中心是你的首選採購地點嗎?
Is Sino Centre your first choice for purchasing these products?
   a. 是 Yes
   b. 不是 No, 請列明 Please Indicate: _____

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第四部分 Section 4

6) 你最常到信和的哪些店鋪？
What kind(s) of shop at the Sino Centre do you visit most often? (可複選 Multiple selections accepted)

a. 唱片鋪 CD/DVD
b. 二手唱片 Second-hand CD
c. 明星週邊商品 Idols related goods
d. 模型 Figures
e. 電子遊戲 Games
f. 漫畫 Comics
g. 其他 Others

7) 最主要採購來自哪裡的商品／流行文化？
Where do the cultural products that you mostly consume at the Sino Centre come from? (可複選 Multiple selections accepted)

a. 香港 Hong Kong
b. 台灣 Taiwan
c. 日本 Japan
d. 韓國 Korean
e. 歐美 Europe/America
f. 中國大陸 Mainland China
g. 其他 Others

第五部分 Section 5

8) 你會怎麼形容信和？ (最多選擇兩個)
How would you describe the Sino Centre? (Please select 2 choices at most.)

a. 創新 Creative
b. 獨特 Unique
c. 潮流指標 Trend Marking
d. 地標 Landmark

9) 為甚麼會選擇這個（這些）形容詞？
Why will you describe Sino Centre with the above word(s)?

_____

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個人資料 Personal Particulars

10) 年齡 Age
   a. 10 - 19
   b. 20 - 29
   c. 30 - 39
   d. 40 - 49
   e. 50 - 59
   f. 60 +

11) 性別 Gender
   a. 男 Male
   b. 女 Female

12) 教育程度 Education Level
   a. 小學 Primary education
   b. 中學 Secondary education
   c. 大專 Tertiary education
   d. 碩士或以上 Master degree or above

14) 收入狀況 Income status
   (如果你是全日制學生，而有兼職工作，請選擇「兼職人士」。If you are a full time student working part-time/freelance job, please select "Part-time worker".)
   a. 零收入人士 No income
   b. 全職人士 Full-time worker
   c. 兼職人士 Part-time worker

-完 END-

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Appendix 2: Statistics from questionnaires

Total: 150 collected, 154 valid
Consist of 3 compulsory questions, 6 follow-up questions, 4 questions for personal particulars

Section 1

In previous year, have you ever been to Sino Centre?	
Yes	60% (92)
No (Jump to Section 5)	40% (62)

Section 2

How often do you visit Sino Centre in a monthly average?	
Less than two times	88% (81)
3 - 5 times	10% (9)
6 - 10 times	2% (2)

Why do you visit Sino Centre?	
No specific target, simply shopping (Jump to Section 4)	61% (56)
Looking for specific products	38% (35)
Others	1% (1)
Collect delivery	0% (0)

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Section 3

What are the specific products that you are looking for at the Sino Centre?	
CD	18% (8)
Figures/Models	18% (8)
Instant-film	9% (4)
Electronic gadgets and accessories	9% (4)
Games	9% (4)
Idols good	6% (3)
Board games	6% (3)
Depends	6% (3)
Comics	4% (2)
Accessories (e.g. Earrings)	4% (2)
Daily goods	2% (1)
Japanese Magazine	2% (1)

Is Sino Centre your first choice for purchasing these products?	
Yes	45% (16)
Depends on situation	20% (7)
Langham Place	8% (3)
Online store	5% (2)
Ho King Commercial Building (好景商業中心)	5% (2)
Dragon Centre (西九龍中心)	2% (1)
Trendy Zone (潮流特區)	2% (1)
Argyle Centre (旺角中心)	2% (1)
Hysan Place (希慎廣場)	2% (1)
HMV	2% (1)

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Section 4

What kind(s) of shop at the Sino Centre do you visit most often?	
Figures	21% (36)
Games	20% (34)
CD/DVD	17% (29)
Comics	15% (27)
Idol goods	8% (14)
Second hand CD	5% (10)
Boutiques	3% (6)
Board games	1% (3)
Electronic gadgets and accessories	1% (2)
Consignment store (格仔舖)	1% (2)
Cameras	1% (2)
Porn and adult toy	1% (2)
Watches	0.5% (1)
No specific	0.5% (1)

Where do the cultural products that you mostly consume at the Sino Centre come from?	
Japan	42% (64)
Hong Kong	16% (24)
Korean	14% (22)
Taiwan	11% (17)
Europe/America	8% (13)
Mainland China	3% (5)
No specific	3% (5)

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Section 5

How will you describe Sino Centre?	
Landmark	38% (73)
Unique	31% (59)
Trend marking	17% (33)
Creative	9% (18)
Others	5% (10)

Why will you describe Sino Centre with the above word(s)?	
Concentration spot of popular cultural product	40% (63)
Well-known by Hongkongers	31% (48)
Long History	7% (12)
Diversified	7% (12)
I don’t know	6% (10)
Not much similar type of shopping center in Hong Kong	3% (6)
Observation	1% (2)
Nothing special	0.6% (1)

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Personal Particulars

Age	
10-19	42% (64)
21-29	42% (65)
30-39	11% (17)
40-49	2% (3)
50-59	2% (3)
60 or above	1% (2)

Gender	
Female	51% (78)
Male	49% (76)

Education Level	
Tertiary education	55% (85)
Secondary education	36% (56)
Master degree or above	8% (12)
Primary education	1% (1)

Income status	
No income	44% (68)
Full-time worker	31% (47)
Part-time worker	25% (39)

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Appendix 3: Interview Summary and Transcript

	Date	Interviewee	Role	Category	Recording
1	19 Feb 2016	/	Staff	Idol goods	N
2	29 Feb 2016	Mr. F	Staff	Figures	Y
3	29 Feb 2016	Ms. C	Staff	2nd Hand CD/LP	Y
4	29 Feb 2016	Mr. C	Owner	CD / DVD	Y
5	14 Mar 2016	/	Staff	Comics	N
6	14 Mar 2016	Ms. L	Staff	Comics	N
7	14 Mar 2016	Mr. L	Staff	Games	N
8	14 Mar 2016	Ms. C	Staff	Games	N

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