

## Lecture 7

This week the focus was on mainstream markets, and particularly the issues that arise with mainstream markets and the ways that people are addressing these issues to take back the market. We chiefly did this by working on a series of exercises. (But first I gave the students some feedback on their first reflective journal exercise, including showing them some extracts from the journal that received the highest marks, [Slides 2 to 7](#)).

1. We started with a [Where From? Inventory](#), based on the one in TBTE (page 90) and the Chapter 4 Tool (Slide 10). However, I modified the inventory in two ways: first, including mainland China as its own category (given how many products come from mainland China); and second, simply having a blank column for the items. Students worked in pairs and did an inventory of the following:
  - What we are wearing (e.g. jacket, hoodie, watches, shoes, glasses, backpack)
  - What's in a pencil case (e.g. pens, pencils, rulers, erasers, correction pen)
  - What's in a backpack (e.g. distilled water, TBTE book! (extra points for that); I-Phone; earphones, portable battery);
  - Our favourite fruits (e.g. mango, strawberry, blueberry, dragon fruit, lychee, banana).

Helen (our wonderful tutor) and I did an inventory over morning tea, as Helen had a cup of ginger tea and I had my usual, a delicious Hong Kong milk tea (hot) (if you want to know more about Hong Kong milk or stocking tea, see <http://www.ibiblio.org/chineseculture/contents/food/p-food-c03s04.html>). We could not find out much about what went into my milk tea (for some makers, it's a commercial secret). But we found out marginally more about Helen's ginger tea from the wrapper, and we used this example in the class to discuss one of the issues with mainstream markets (see below).

2. Student briefly presented what they had been able to find out about their items. Unsurprisingly, most had come from mainland China. I had planned to then do the Distance Others Dandelion ([Slides 12 to 13](#)) but we ran out of time so got straight onto discussing the concerns ([Slides 14 to 18](#)). As mentioned above, Helen's ginger tea was a great example of the third point—how hard it can be to find information about the product we purchase. In the case of the ginger tea, it was a Dilmah tea, but the packaging only said it contained tea, ginger and honey and that it was *packed* in Sri Lanka. This raised more questions than it answered! And it led to a great discussion of product labelling in Hong Kong and how there are different rules in different countries. We also discussed the case of conflict minerals from TBTE ([Slides 17 and 18](#)).
3. We then looked at what is being done to try to address the concerns and issues with mainstream markets, starting with the production of ethical shopping guides ([Slides 19 and 20](#)). Students went back to their inventories and had to use one of the readily available ethical shopping guides to research some of their items in more detail. The students chiefly used the Ethical Consumer guide from the UK, see <http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/>. Though I showed them an Australian site as a comparison, see <http://www.ethical.org.au/>. The students had a lot of fun poking around these sites and looking at how different products and companies rates. Overall, their conclusion was that the more well-known a brand, the more poorly it scored (and therefore the less ethical it was). For example in the cola category, Coca Cola and Pepsi scored the lowest, while two unknown brands, Gusto Organic Sparking Kola and Ubuntu Cola, scored the highest, see <http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/buyersguides/drink/cola.aspx>.

This exercises demonstrated the first collective action to take back the market—track where products come from and use an Ethical Shoppers' Checklist ([Slides 21 and 22](#)). We then looked at three other collective actions:

- legislating against unethical practices (discussed via the examples of the ban on battery cages for egg-laying hens in Europe, page 99 in TBTE; and the US's suspension of the Generalized System of Preferences for Bangladesh, because of concerns about the Bangladeshi government's slow response on workers' rights, following the Rana Plaza building collapse in 2013) ([Slides 22 to 28](#))
- voluntary agreements, such as those run by the Fair Labor Association, which was actually initiated through student action in the US ([Slides 29 to 42](#))
- developing different sorts of markets, such as Fair Trade (and here we looked at page 102 in TBTE on fair trade) and CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) (which we didn't discuss in any detail as one of the students is doing her case study on a rice CSA in Hong Kong, and will present this in-class) ([Slide 43](#)).