



General Certificate of Education
Advanced Subsidiary Examination
June 2011

Critical Thinking

CRIT1

Unit 1 Critical Thinking Foundation Unit

Source Material

This source material is to be read in conjunction with the questions in unit CRIT1.

Document A

* The following article was posted on a website which deals primarily with issues to do with global economics.

One shoe fits all!

By Nina Chowdury

When it comes to the market for branded sportswear in China, the likes of Nike and Adidas no longer rule the roost. The Chinese are now manufacturing and consuming their own brands on a scale to rival the big internationals.

Evidence for this can be seen by simply wandering down one of the main streets in Jinjiang, a small city in the southeastern region of Fujian. Along a typical 100 metre stretch, you can count 34 shops all selling different domestic (i.e. Chinese) branded products. Laying down the challenge to Nike and Adidas – each of which is likely to make around \$1bn in sales in China this year – there are Chinese-produced rivals such as K-Bird, Anta, Tebu, 361, Xingquan, Li Ning, Deerway and Xtep.

In value terms, China's sportswear market is destined to grow from an estimated US\$7.2bn in 2009 to around US\$12.4bn in 2012. Such growth will catapult Chinese sportswear brands into powerful – even dominant – positions in the industry worldwide.

And it's not just the sportswear brands – the big-name designer labels have their rivals, too. "It is made mostly of cashmere and just a little wool, exactly like an Armani," said a shop assistant in Lilanz while pointing out a stylishly cut grey coat. "But from the price tag you can see that it costs only a fraction of the price," she added. "And people won't see the label, so it looks like you are wearing Armani." The shop Lilanz is run by China Lilang, a local Jinjiang company.



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Document B

Naz and Kerry are students at a London art college. Their conversation is part of a debate on fashion.

- NAZ What do I have against modern clothing styles? They are killing fashion. There is no individual expression, individual identity. Before long everyone on the planet is going to be wearing the same pair of trainers.
- KERRY What have you got against trainers?
- NAZ It's such a boring look! Trainers and sportswear: fine for the gym, or for middle-aged Americans jogging off their waistlines – but there's nothing creative or expressive about it. How can you express yourself by selecting a pair of trainers from a range made by some big global corporation?
- KERRY What does it matter how big the company is that is making your shoes? You're still choosing someone else's look, unless you make the shoes yourself! And where do you stand on the designer labels, like Armani, Hugo Boss, that kind of thing? Presumably you wouldn't wear that down the gym.
- NAZ As far as I'm concerned, as a so-called fashion statement it's even worse. It's still all about the brand name. It's just a more expensive name. There's no meaning or message: nothing artistic or creative about it. It's all just about telling the world how much money you've got.
- KERRY You can't complain about that. Fashion's always been tied into wealth. Think of all those 18th century ladies and gentlemen showing off their latest garments from India or somewhere exotic; or the Victorian ladies with the enormous dresses made of expensive materials! It was all just a display of wealth.
- NAZ But surely the whole point of youth or street fashion is that it's supposed to be sticking two fingers up to that sort of thing – to the ruling classes and their materialistic displays of wealth! Youth fashion should be about rebellion; it should be stuff older people don't get. You can't be rebellious if you're pouring money into the pockets of Mr Nike.
- KERRY What makes you think fashion is so important anyway? Isn't it all just about looking good, about looking attractive – to the right people, the right crowd? In what sense is that rebellious? In what sense is that artistic or creative? I'd say that's just being vain.
- NAZ I agree that looking good is part of it. Caring about how things look is important, it's what inspires people to make art, after all. But for your appearance to be interesting, I agree that it needs to have some sort of individual twist. Otherwise you're just following the crowd.
- KERRY Isn't that exactly what fashion is?
- NAZ No! Fashion should be about defining yourself against the crowd. Or at least, it should be about saying, I'm part of this small crowd that is different from the rest of you.

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- KERRY It's still about being part of a crowd, though. So it's not a personal, individual expression.
- NAZ What you wear can be a vivid expression of beliefs, of emotions, of individuality. It can be a political gesture. Think of Pete Townshend from The Who and his union jack jacket. He was drawing attention to the dangers of nationalistic pride. Or think of someone like David Bowie, or Boy George, challenging our assumptions about gender and sexuality.
- KERRY But that's not fashion. Those are individuals, making individual political statements. What's fashionable by definition must be what everyone is wearing. And like it or not, everyone is wearing trainers.
- NAZ Which are all made by big companies. And these big companies are simply dictating what people wear. Therefore there is no individual expression.
- KERRY I think you are over-simplifying things.
- NAZ Oh really? So you're telling me that designer labels and big sports brands are not dictating what young people wear? Look at the clothes young people are wearing. And then look at the stuff you see being advertised on the television. The kids just buy into brands that have marketed themselves well to the young. Young people are no longer in control of street fashion; they are slaves to the marketing men.
- KERRY You're assuming that there is no meaning or message to any clothes that any young people wear. Either that's the case, or you just don't like people in trainers!
- NAZ I'm just saying it's unfortunate the way things have turned out. When early hip hop artists started wearing big chunky jewellery, designer labels or sportswear, it may have had a significant meaning or message. The problem is that it's now become a big business, one that is ruled by very powerful companies, with very big marketing and advertising budgets. Consequently it's stopped having any message.
- KERRY It still means something – it's still rebellious. Look at the way media treats the 'hoodie'.
- NAZ But where has all the dynamism gone – all the shock of the new? OK there are variations between types and makes of trainers, but sportswear is basically a uniform now – it's become the default setting for the look of the 'youth' – just in the same way that a suit and tie has become the default setting for the look of 'smart' or professional or grown up. Basically if you were wearing a pair of old skool Adidas trainers and a decent hoodie any time in the last 30 years you would have been accepted on the streets.

Document C

Following the debate in Document B, a student who was present at the debate posted a comment on the college website. Her post reads as follows:

- (1) When it comes to fashion and taste – in anything, not just clothes – people are far too obsessed with the idea of ‘the new’. If something is new, we think it’s got to be good. If something appears old-fashioned or traditional, then forget about it.
- (2) The problem with this is that it means we end up judging things on very shallow terms. If we think something is good because it appears new or original, that prevents us from considering it on other, deeper levels. Like whether or not we find it beautiful, how it makes us feel, what it has to say to us.
- (3) This obsession with ‘the new’ spells creative disaster. Being creative requires a sense of judgement, of taste; you need to know what you are trying to achieve; you need a sense of what looks good. In assuming that what is new must be good, people confuse what looks good with what simply looks new.
- (4) The same is true of any artistic enterprise. Think of architecture. How many buildings are there now that clutter up our environment simply because some architect, in the pursuit of ‘the new’, forgot to consider his or her own sense of judgement, taste or proportion? It’s true that you can’t be especially creative by just copying things that have been done before, and it’s true that you sometimes need to be critical of current ideas in order to discover something better. But people easily go too far. Being critical of the present is one thing; assuming that anything that is new or different must therefore be better is another.
- (5) People lose their sense of taste and judgement in the hunt for the next big thing. As a result they end up looking foolish. But that’s fine. People who are just wearing something because it is new and fashionable without considering how it will be seen in the future deserve to be laughed at. They’re fashion victims. They’re not just making themselves look stupid, either; they’re demeaning creativity. The stuff people like just because it’s new represents the shallowest, most trivial side of fashion, of image; of art in general.
- (6) It’s possible to like something not just because it’s new, but because it’s good. The fact that older styles remain shows that they have some enduring quality. Youth culture is in a better state now because it’s not so driven by fads; people can be truly creative, not led simply by the ‘latest thing’ but by their own individuality.

Posted by: Sylvia, 11.33 pm

Appendix

(i) The Who, 1960s



© Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy

(ii) David Bowie, 1970s



© Trinity Mirror/Mirrorpix/Alamy

(iii) Boy George, 1980s



© Trinity Mirror/Mirrorpix/Alamy

(iv) Teenage gangs 60s and present



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