Intellectual histories of modernization theory have also tended to have a laser-like focus on the struggle between the superpowers. But the idea of modernity is bigger than both the United States and the USSR. Public-health and population-control projects offer exciting new areas for exploration. These were indeed modernization projects. But unlike most other kinds of modernization, the process of turning peasants into wage-earning workers and consumers became quasi-biological in nature. In this way, it revealed one of the more important tensions in the very idea of modernity. If it means anything, modernization means taming nature and harnessing it to a social agenda—which is one reason why hydroelectric dams, despite all their problems, became such potent symbols. Controlling peoples’ bodies and harnessing their sexual energy for social purposes is an even more awesome display of power. We will be living with the consequences for decades to come.

Perhaps the most important thing that has happened in the past hundred years, even the past thousand years, is that people have learned that we might remake ourselves as a species, controlling not only our numbers, but also our very nature. But making that happen has usually required the cooperation of governments, which have their own agendas. Whether such efforts succeed or fail, they demonstrate why it is becoming ever more difficult, even misleading, to separate the history of events from the history of “structures,” or the international history of states from the global history of peoples. The challenge for historians, and everyone else, is to explain how over the longue durée these different fields, too long treated in isolation, are becoming one and the same.

EMILY S. ROSENBERG

During the chaotic days of the Cold War’s end in East Germany and throughout Eastern Europe, capitalist-made consumer goods often seemed both the symbols and the substance of freedom. Throngs of East Germans helped hack down the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and made their way into West Berlin to enter the hallowed halls of the Kaufhaus des Westens. Media images of thousands of new shoppers, carrying coveted consumer products back to East Berlin, seemed to mark both the disintegration of Cold War barriers and the victory of capitalist mass consumerism.

Over the following months, image after image linked the rapid implosion of Soviet power to the triumph of consumerism. Pepsi rushed out a television advertisement that positioned its product amidst pictures of the crumbling Berlin Wall and strains of the “Hallelujah Chorus.” McDonald’s cranked out press releases boasting how East Europeans were developing a taste for American cuisine, and American exporters struggled to meet the demand for Western brassieres, nylon hosiery, lipsticks, and other symbols of what the Kremlin had once derided as consumerist decadence. Prague sprouted new signs reading “I am a billboard. I sell your products,” and Barbie became the prestige commodity for young girls. In a full-page advertisement in the New York Times of December 15, 1989, Playboy proclaimed itself to be “Exporting the American Dream” by becoming “the first American consumer magazine published in Hungarian.”

Scholars have often anchored Cold War histories in geopolitical rivalries, contests waged within high politics and played out on the terrain of the nation-state. This chapter, proposing an alternative, more global, framework for the end of the Cold War, emphasizes the transnational spread of ideas associated

with mass consumerism. Contrary to the pervasive media images, however, it argues that mass consumption contributed to the Cold War’s end less because it was closely identified with the United States than because it was no longer primarily associated with it.

Three emerging literatures help provide a context for this chapter. First, a growing body of scholarship has urged historians to go beyond the “container” of the nation-state to adopt more transnational or global canvasses. (Completely writing out the powerful influences of nation-states and policymakers, of course, would be misguided.) Second, recent scholarly conversations across several disciplines have been critically reexamining discourses of “Americanization,” globalization, and modernity. Third, a rich historiography on consumerism has developed in the context of varied national and global histories.

This chapter deals with mass consumerism, by which I signify a mass-production and mass-marketing system that imagines a widespread abundance of goods within a culture that emphasizes purchasing, desire, glamour, and flexible, consumption-driven identities. It argues that in the first half of the twentieth century the idea of “America,” for many people in the world, came to be identified with the social imaginary of a mass consumer society. Discourses of Americanism and consumerism (and anti-Americanism and anti-consumerism) blended together. Building on this identification, US government and corporate elites after World War II often claimed a consumerist system as their own and invoked it in Cold War battles as almost synonymous with both America and “freedom.”

Gradually, however, mass consumerism became an ever more transnational phenomenon. Throughout the world, as had happened in the United States itself, entrepreneurs and groups drew on diverse impulses to shape variants of mass consumer cultures. By the 1980s, many variants of consumerist imaginaries circled the globe. This globalizing, yet at the same time differentiating, process (which some scholars have called “multilocality”) helped drive the end of the nation-state rivalry known as the Cold War.

Within this broad argument, several recurring themes should be highlighted. First, the late twentieth century’s communications revolution was critical in spreading the imaginary of glamour and desire that surrounded consumer products. Second, discourses of gender and of generational aspiration intertwined with consumerism in complex ways. Third, the “soft power” represented in the spread of communications technologies and their consumerist messages played out differently in different circumstances. In areas with close proximity to the West’s rising standards of living (especially East Germany and Eastern Europe), consumerism helped inspire popular revolutions from below. In the Soviet Union, consumer abundance played a different role. There, dissidents remained under tight control, but some well-traveled elites came to embrace the idea that national progress would require borrowing from models, especially in Western Europe, that mixed consumer abundance, greater intellectual inquiry, and social democratic practices. In China, where influences from the vibrancy in Hong Kong and Taiwan seeped into cities, governing leaders accepted consumerism as part of a pragmatic strategy to promote national growth and maintain their legitimacy. Almost everywhere, especially in the Third World, the perceived popular legitimacy of governments (and therefore a variety of nationalist agendas) rested on the promise of consumer goods. Gary Cross has perceptively suggested that consumerism was the “ism” that “won” the ideological battles of the twentieth century. But it did so in no uniform or simplistic manner.

Before the Cold War

In the closing years of the nineteenth century, many people in the world came to associate mass-produced consumer goods with the United States. Inexpensive and practical American products—Gillette safety razors, Quaker Oatmeal, Singer Sewing Machines, Wrigley’s chewing gum—found success worldwide. Their popular, rather than elite, appeal marked them as quintessentially American.

After World War I, American exporters shipped off an even more impressive, or threatening, array of consumer items. US manufacturers specialized in electrical goods, radios, and refrigerators. American automotive, oil, and

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2 For example, Thomas Bender (ed.), Rethinking American History in a Global Age (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).
6 See David Reynolds’s chapter in this volume for elaboration.
rubber industries promoted internationally the car culture that was converting the United States into a “nation on wheels” and generating both admiration and fear of assembly-line manufacturing techniques. American retailers — Woolworth’s, Montgomery Ward, A & P — merged principles of mass production with techniques of mass retailing and opened branches abroad. A 1929 book called Selling Mrs. Consumer proclaimed, “Consumptionism is... the greatest idea that America has to give to the world: ... Pay them more, sell them more, prosper more is the equation.”

Advertising powerhouse, Walter Thompson and other agencies employed new psychological techniques of persuasion to assist this amazing export wave. The international advertisements for American-made marvels identified the United States with affluence for the masses, a new culture of leisure, a “modern” future, and “modern” women. Women in these global ad campaigns (as at home) were generally portrayed as athletic, unsupervised, and interested in shopping, self-presentation, and fashion. The enormous appeal of Hollywood movies, which dominated screens globally during the 1920s, also spread such images. To many people in the world, “America” lost geographical specificity and became almost a synonym — both embraced and decried — for broad-based affluence, consumer choice, and independent women.

As the Bolsheviks consolidated power within the new Soviet Union after 1917 and introduced a command economy with a controlled informational system, Russians developed a mixed picture of American capitalism. Soviet leaders embraced the idea that machinery, technology, and mass communications would promise greater prosperity. In 1926, when film idols Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford visited Moscow, they were greeted by adoring throngs, but a reporter claimed that, had Henry Ford been the visitor, his presence would have been so great that “they would have to mobilize the entire Red army to keep the crowds in order.” Many Russians, then, admired and adapted the techniques of mass production and image-making identified with the United States. At the same time, of course, Soviet officials also elaborated the critique that American-style private, rather than state, ownership would promote monopoly and worker exploitation. This interwar ambivalence toward American mass consumer society would persist into the Cold War.

Before World War II, political and cultural conservatives probably constituted the most prominent critics of American consumerism. The critique from the Right warned that mass consumption brought crass materialism, soulless individualism, rampant licentiousness, a dangerous feminization of society, and shallow intellectual achievement. The Great Depression provided fertile soil for such discourses that blurred anti-Americanism and anticommunism.

The various themes of pro- and anti-Americanism that flourished internationally in the first half of the twentieth century (like their counterparts in the Cold War era), however, need to be treated cautiously. The supposed meanings of American consumerism were generated out of local cultural and political debates. Proponents of a system of consumerism might seek to identify their domestic programs with the United States as a symbol of the future. But opponents of consumerism, by establishing the United States as its geographic home, could invoke a rhetoric of nationalism on behalf of their own agendas. An array of groups, especially intellectual elites, cultural conservatives, antimodernists, socialists, and Communists, could seek — each in their own countries and even if they had little else in common — to solidify their nationalist credentials by casting the United States as a dangerous Other and then associating consumerist styles, and especially New Women, with national subversion. Long before the Cold War, then, debates over mass consumerism already raged as debates over “Americanization.”

The early Cold War

World War II lifted the United States out of the Great Depression and restored the basis for a flourishing consumerism at home and abroad. During the war,
GIs spread fashions such as blue jeans and tastes for products such as chewing gum and American cigarettes. Armed Forces Radio popularized American music. Coca-Cola bottling plants advanced with the front lines of US troops, cultivating new markets for the postwar era.¹² As the Cold War became a central concern of postwar politics, new informational bureaucracies in the Department of State and in the postwar governments of occupation vigorously deployed radio, movies, and promises of consumer goods to sway hearts and minds.¹³

The US occupation of postwar Japan, for example, introduced visions of American consumerism. In the popular comic strip Blondie, the Bumstead family’s appliances, large house, and huge sandwiches advertised what seemed the almost unbelievable material wealth in the United States. And, perhaps more by inadvertence than design, US officials also assisted small and medium-sized businesses in Japan to reorient production away from war materiel toward consumer products such as tea containers, cameras, and motor bicycles. The materialism that so many Japanese intellectuals of the interwar period had abhorred seemed actually to become a focus for national regeneration, although Japanese citizens remained ambivalent consumers, and debates over “Americanization” soon resumed.¹⁴

During the late 1940s and 1950s, as part of the Cold War policy of containment, US leaders created a governmental infrastructure to promote what Charles Maier has called the “politics of productivity.” They sought to build opportunities for US investment and to identify American economic models with job growth, rising prosperity, and freedom. As Victoria de Grazia has shown, American experts of the postwar era popularized the so-called Standard of Living, a new measure by which continual economic improvements in the lives of ordinary people could presumably be compared. Meanwhile, the flood of Hollywood movies – encouraged by the US government’s pressure on other countries to repeal nationalistic restrictions or quotas – continued to act as dazzling advertisements for what a high standard of living might look like. In challenging Communist parties over which economic model would boost living standards, Americans and their ideological allies around the world knew their policies had to produce tangible gains, not just promises.¹⁵

Efforts to combat Communism through the politics of productivity in Europe centered on the Marshall Plan, which helped arrange hundreds of missions to the United States, studying everything from agriculture to marketing to industrial relations. The Marshall Plan’s counterpart funds financed traveling exhibits that showed the United States as a country of high productivity and good wages, of full shelves and bulging shops. “Freedom Trains,” mobile exhibits that circulated from town to town, carried the slogan “prosperity makes you free.” As Marshall Plan money became a major source of advertising revenue for some European media, it nudged Europe toward acceptance of commercial radio advertising, a trend that, in turn, opened more spaces for the selling of both foreign and domestic products.¹⁶

Occupation policies and the Marshall Plan, however, by no means ushered in an era of US-cloned practices. Both Japanese and European citizens remained ambivalent about mass marketing and US-style consumerism. Moreover, as David Ellwood elaborates, each country had its own traditions on which to build local adaptations of American, consumer-oriented capitalism. Various filtering mechanisms both borrowed from and rejected parts of the American model.¹⁷

Building on postwar informational and cultural initiatives, President Dwight D. Eisenhower established the United States Information Agency (USIA) in 1953. A general who had been well acquainted with the benefits of psychological operations, Eisenhower aggressively expanded programs designed to counter the appeal of Communism by stressing benefits of life in the West. One emphasis, begun in 1956, included “people’s capitalism.”

¹³ See, for example, Reinhold Wagnleimcr, Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).
This campaign emerged from a Yale University–Advertising Council roundtable that sought “a moralistic idea with the power to stir men’s imagination” and tried to coopt the language that Communists used to promise a better life for ordinary people.  

Cold War cultural exchanges during the 1950s reflected the effort to enlist consumer culture in the fight against Communism. At the 1958 Brussels Universal and International Exhibition, the Soviets featured heavy machinery, Sputnik, and the Bolshoi Ballet. The American pavilion, by contrast, displayed affordable washing machines, dishwashers, a Sears & Roebuck catalog, frozen-food packages, television and recording studios, and a pink built-in oven. Katherine Howard, a prominent Republican activist who served as deputy commissioner of the exhibition, contended that modern kitchens provided one of the most valuable weapons in the psychological battle for freedom.

Howard shaped the pavilion as a display designed to appeal especially to women, showcasing household appliances and practical clothing styles. She extolled American kitchens for freeing women from drudgery. Vogue Magazine, a frequent partner in the USIA’s campaigns, staged a daily fashion show at the center of the circular building. Its “Young America look,” appealing to a broad audience, featured jeans and plaid shirts, tennis outfits, evening gowns, and inexpensive sack dresses. American women, the show implied, had abundant leisure time and could slip easily among a variety of social roles simply by changing clothes. Gendered imagery pervaded Cold War contests, as new scholarship related to the linkage between gender and international relations has shown.

The American National Exhibition in Sokolniki Park in Moscow in 1959 took “people’s capitalism” directly to the heart of the beast. The six-room ranch house, the most popular exhibit, set the tone. Ordinary factory workers in the United States, skeptical Russian audiences were told, could afford such a house. Fashion shows again displayed stylish, mass-marketed attire. Helena Rubinstein offered free beauty-shop demonstrations to Soviet women until the authorities banned the practice. Coty cosmetics company tried to give away free samples of makeup but, again, authorities intervened. Three model kitchens boasted appliances, convenience foods, and gadgets of all sorts.

The famous “kitchen debate” between Vice President Richard M. Nixon and Premier Nikita Khrushchev occurred against this backdrop of consumerism. To Nixon, a system that liberated women from wage labor advanced modern, civilized values and thus fulfilled what he regarded as the proper male role of protecting women. Khrushchev denounced the “gadgets” of the capitalist home – but he also became increasingly determined to prove that socialism could produce comparable consumer satisfaction.

In the Soviet Union and throughout the Soviet bloc, governments had begun to acknowledge that rising levels of consumption were needed to enhance their legitimacy. In the immediate postwar period, perhaps, people drew measures of wellbeing from comparisons with the low living standards that prevailed during the war. By the mid-1950s, however, a new generation increasingly looked toward international comparisons. Confident of socialism’s ability to redefine consumerism in a way that would make it possible ultimately to outpace capitalist models, Khrushchev launched plans to enhance housing to accommodate greater personal privacy and to divert resources toward socialist versions of consumer goods. Similarly, East Germany’s leaders, under pressure from rising living standards in West Germany and confronted with a crescendo of refugees fleeing to the West, expanded consumer-credit mechanisms, introduced mail-order catalogs, and planned new self-service retail stores. In 1956, Khrushchev promised to help the German Democratic Republic become a “showcase” of the Cold War, and, in 1958, the East German Communist Party pledged to surpass West Germany in productivity and individual consumption by 1962. The building of the Berlin Wall to staunch the migration to the West rather quickly underscored the failure of this goal and of Khrushchev’s broader vision to reorient socialist planning toward personal consumption. But, by then, on both sides of the Cold War divide, consumer abundance had become widely accepted as an
The typical American woman, featured in USIA publications, lived modestly. She washed, ironed, and mended clothes, cared for the children, and worked in her flower garden. Problems such as racial segregation and economic disparities appeared within a narrative of progress and of “overcoming,” such lapses. The USIA maintained an Office of Religious Information that emphasized the spiritual roots of such positive American values. This office proposed that Eisenhower initiate days of prayer and often mention prayer in public remarks as a way of emphasizing that the Cold War constituted a spiritual, not just a material, struggle. In these presentations, consumer abundance confirmed, rather than threatened, Americans’ piety and providential mission in the world.

US business elites of the 1950s also established campaigns to fight Communism and what many regarded as the New Deal’s legacy of “creeping socialism.” The American Advertising Council funded domestic propaganda to build support for an activist foreign policy and a rollback of New Deal social policies. At the same time, many businesses developed programs showing that capitalism could accommodate a wide range of workers’ needs (an approach sometimes called “welfare capitalism”). To counter political pressure on government to institute a European-style welfare state, large American employers and insurance companies developed health care, recreational programs, and pension plans for workers. Celebrants of consumerism used this model, mixing private and public safety-net provisions, to counter claims that capitalism simply exploited workers or provided wages but no long-term security.

Given the strong censorship imposed in Communist states and the sharply different worlds created within capitalist and Communist Cold War discourse, it is difficult to determine the impact in the Communist bloc of Cold War programs featuring consumer products. Walter Hixson’s Parting the Curtain, however, argues that US cultural policies provided people in the Soviet bloc with glimpses that challenged the claims of their governments. When citizens of Communist states encountered displays of consumer capitalism, the cornucopia of goods they saw simply did not jibe with their picture of “wage slavery” under capitalism. Women who were struggling to juggle full-time factory work with full-time home-making duties had trouble seeing how...

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fashion, makeup, leisure time, and labor-saving appliances provided confirmation of a system designed to oppress.28

American presentations of “people’s capitalism,” however, were hardly needed to stir up discontent within the Soviet bloc. Stalin’s postwar looting of Eastern Europe, the Czech coup in 1948, the East European purge trials, the crushing of the Hungarian revolt and numerous rebellions in the Soviet Union itself, the gulags, the spreading surveillance, and the persistent poverty provided fertile grounds for opposition.29 In many respects, the United States’ best ally in building its power in Europe was always the brutal, inefficient Soviet system itself, and consumer products may have provided a symbol that then also became the substance of resistance.

Assessing the impact of the American “politics of productivity” outside the Soviet bloc is equally difficult. In the 1950s in Western Europe and Japan, and elsewhere, people debated their responses to American models of mass production, advertising, and mass culture. As in the interwar era, critics from both Left and Right frequently identified consumer capitalism with the United States as a tactic in their domestic political struggles; their critiques of mass production/consumption continued to involve warnings that American-style products would render society materialistic, conformist, feminized, immature, and governed through spectatorship rather than democratic processes. Yet left-leaning students throughout the world often protested US power during the 1960s and 1970s in large demonstrations characterized by an abundance of blue jeans and American rock music. Consumerism managed to encompass the forms of resistance—sometimes in messy combinations.30

The rivalry between East and West Germany encapsulated the complicated relationship between consumerism and Cold War rivalries. After 1949, both West and East German leaders framed their contest for legitimacy around which system could provide a better life for ordinary people.

West Germany shaped its identity around the broad availability of consumer goods, and the “economic miracle” permeated public culture during the 1950s. Even the phenomenal popularity of the “refreshment” Coca-Cola, in the view of one scholar, represented “a West German quest for new spiritual values, for a new flavor of German identity.” Coca-Cola wisely melded its advertising slogans into the widespread desire to “refresh” German culture, creating a hybridized image consistent with a new definition of nationalism. Rather than simply imitating American-style capitalism, West Germans were prompted to embrace free choice in a free market, not to imitate US capitalism but to break from their own past and to focus on a new national pride.31

East German leaders tried to create a socialist consumerism that could rival, but be different from, the capitalist model. They sought to develop inexpensive and practical household goods that would reach the masses yet avoid the ostentation, waste, and frivolity of the West’s consumer products. The Purimix, a stainless steel cross-blade appliance, for example, avoided wasteful duplication: “it vacuums dust, it waxes, and with the same motor, but naturally with another attachment, it stirs, beats, mixes, pulverizes, chops, purees, and grinds,” reported one women’s magazine. East German fashion shows featured sensible “socialist fashions” that ostensibly satisfied both a yearning for beauty and a need for workplace practicality. A wide array of plastic products developed in the East during the 1950s also symbolized how socialist chemistry might upgrade living standards. East Germans always had access to images of West Germany’s increasingly abundant consumer society, however, and the West became an important standard by which they judged their own wellbeing. The consumption gap took on ever greater political implications.32

During the late 1940s and 1950s, US-style capitalism and Soviet-style socialism—each allied with rival political groups in most countries of the world—both presented themselves as models not merely of national but of global

28 Hiscox, Parting the Curtain.
30 Kuisel, Seducing the French; Roger, The American Enemy; Garen and Maciel (eds.), The Ambivalent Consumer.
orders. But both sides framed the Cold War as a long-term contest over which system would outproduce and lift living standards more effectively and humanely than the other.

The late Cold War

Robust consumer revolutions, inspired by the American model, transformed most countries of Western Europe and Japan from the mid-1950s on. The growing scholarship on postwar consumerism, however, increasingly complicates any claim that consumer revolutions simply converged toward "Americanization." First, countries generated adaptations drawing from their own traditions. People were both attracted and repelled by mass production and consumerism, a historical ambivalence that reflected both a yearning for affluence and individualism yet also a respect for frugality and community. Shaped in different ways by historical circumstance and by this ambivalence, consumerism increasingly had a French, or German, or Japanese face.

Moreover, as Richard Pells has written, aspects of American culture "never felt all that foreign" to many people because American mass commercial culture drew from a "transnational America" -- a nation of immigrants whose consumer goods and leisure-time innovations often emerged from elsewhere, then adapted to appeal to the broad diversity of American life, and then reemerged in export to world markets. The world, in short, had been transforming the United States, even as American culture also influenced desires across the globe.

Consumerism, of course, is based upon establishing an accelerating cycle of desire and its always elusive fulfillment. In stimulating and then promising to satisfy material and emotional needs, marketers created a repertoire of images of beauty, style, and sex appeal, often linked to "stars" and celebrities. They advanced rather flexible norms related to gender roles, race, and class. Many of consumerism's image-codes became broadly recognizable in the non-Communist and, increasingly, in the Communist world. But variants and localized adaptations of the social imaginaries based on consumerism emerged in each country. Stephen Grundle argues that in postwar Italy, for example, "the transformation of the Italian imagination can be explained by the concept of glamour," which was both an integral part of an American model, but was also readapted by Italian capitalism and then "gave rise to forms of enchantment of its own" -- as in the films of Federico Fellini. (Even the word "glamour" was not easily translatable and therefore became modified through language.)

The growing importance of advertising constituted a major component of localized consumer revolutions. Advertising flourished wherever trade barriers and media regulations fell. In Western Europe, for example, economic integration within the European Community, together with the deregulation of media environments, expanded market size. US television producers accelerated programming: MTV expanded into Europe in 1987, and, during the 1990s, the Disney Channel, the Cartoon Network, and Nickelodeon competed to introduce (and adapt to local customs) their children's programming. Privately run media, however, also expanded European experimentation, entrepreneurship, advertising, and markets. Consumerism thus found expression in differentiated, localized ways (multilocality). If visions of material abundance and cultural choice could stir fears of change, they could also promote pride in national -- and personal -- progress.

In this rapidly globalizing (but not necessarily homogenizing) consumer-driven world, China and the Soviet bloc seemed increasingly isolated, and leaders recognized the need to change if their nations were to maintain a claim to power and legitimacy. America as a nation threatened less than the mass consumer imaginaries that had now gone global and, by the day, seemed less and less associated with -- and thus perhaps less threatening to -- any particular national identification. Mass consumerism was no longer a single rival system that had developed most robustly in the United States. It now adopted various guises, and its seductions were enveloping Western Europe, Japan, and other parts of the world. Indeed, many countries incorporated consumerism into ideologies of national advancement, and those on the Left and Right who still

34 Garon and MacLachlan (eds.), The Ambivalent Consumer; de Grazia, Irresistible Empire.
37 Pells, Not Like Us, 299-302.
tried to identify mass consumption solely with “Americanization” found themselves increasingly irrelevant. Ruling elites in both China and the Soviet bloc appear to have recognized that decline would be inevitable if their countries tried to remain behind economic, cultural, and intellectual barricades.

In China, the last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a slow softening in the harsh controls of the Mao Zedong era and broadening connections with the West. Unlike the dramatic events of 1989 and 1990 in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, no single marker signaled the end of the Cold War with China. The decline in the conventions of Cold War exclusions and hostilities, however, closely correlated with the arrival of attributes of consumer capitalism.

At the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Central Committee in December 1978, Mao’s successor, Deng Xiaoping, called for “modernization.” He then instituted a new open-door policy toward the West that provided a tunnel through which the goods and ideas of consumer capitalism began to flow. By the mid-1980s, the Chinese government began a program to attract tourist money by building golf courses and resorts, such as the luxurious Zhongshan Hot Springs Golf Club in Guangdong province. This emerging tourism sector helped spread new concepts of consumption, leisure, individualism, and fashion, especially to the young. Deng’s reforms also slowly opened the country to advertising, first in newspapers and then on Beijing Radio and Central Chinese Television (CCTV). In 1982, China granted CBS Productions the right to market commercial airtime on China’s only nationwide television network in return for a package of American programming. By 1987, many US entertainment companies had inked similar proposals. In November 1986, the United States Copyright Office granted Michael Jackson airtime on China’s only national radio network to promote his album Bad. The new idea that economic production needed to be connected to the apparatus of mass communication techniques and of goods. Commercial styles that were flourishing in Taiwan and Hong Kong easily slid into Communist China as well. Moreover, many American companies began to speak out publicly against Chinese import restrictions.

A great fascination with the things and the glamour of capitalism – cars, food, cosmetics, fashions, films, music – swept parts of urban China in the late 1980s. In urban areas, per capita income doubled between 1978 and 1990, and household savings rose in the same period from $1.85 billion to $62.9 billion. Consumer durables became commonplace, as did dance halls, new modes of communications, new food and housing options, and new leisure activities. Geremie R. Barme notes that “one of the central features of consumer culture is that through it shoppers are differentiated and treated as individuals via a so-called commodity self; identities and consumer profiles are melded and desires simulated and directed by the guiding hand of advertisers.” Critics of consumerism view such a process as manipulative, but in China the feeling of being “targeted” by advertisers was a new experience that could feel like individual empowerment, promising choice, abundance, and self-realization. As in other Communist states, top party members themselves became eager consumers.

During the 1980s, official Chinese ideology began to embrace privatization and a “socialist market economy” that included the goal of “life satisfaction.” The new idea that economic production needed to please people sparked private entrepreneurship and dramatically changed the structures of state-owned enterprises. Advertising and its associated revolution in consumer tastes even became linked to the official nationalistic goal of stimulating China’s economic development. By the 1990s, the merger of state propaganda and commercial advertising had developed its own conventions, with new consumer signs often both undermining and reinforcing the party’s control over the image landscape.

Simultaneously, the shortcomings of the economic openings that Deng had nurtured brought waves of students into the streets, demanding lower inflation, less corruption, more political freedom, and higher living

40 Ibid., passim.
Confrontations took a brutal turn with the government's massacre of student protesters in many major cities and, most famously, in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Both those who governed and those who protested, however, understood the imperative for change. After Deng's dramatic, reform-driven tour of southern China in 1992, American exporters introduced more and more products, and privatized sectors grew even faster. The largest McDonald's in the world opened in Shanghai in April 1992, serving more than 40,000 customers during its opening day; Mastercard began advertising heavily; Starbucks entered the Forbidden City.

Greater consumer choice and enlarged space for sociability challenged the social, cultural, and political monopolies of the state. Western chains, such as fast-food restaurants, movies, shopping malls, and coffee shops, formed places outside the control of family or state and enhanced the ability to act upon individual desire. Western-style dance clubs and other imports promoted a "marketized" cultural form based upon display and the cultivation of desire. Chinese customers, however, also reshaped these institutions to fit Chinese cultural traditions, developing a consumerism that—like consumerism elsewhere in the world—played off, but could not simply be labeled as, "Americanization."

Unease over economic and cultural isolation and pressure for consumerism affected Communist Party leaders elsewhere as well. Official Communist discourse, of course, had presented capitalist America's films, music, and consumerism as attributes of decadence. At the same time, Communist Parties had promised that austerity and collective sacrifices would, in time, produce even greater abundance and productivity than under capitalism. Both claims came under growing challenge.

Official bans against Western products, particularly films and records, worked to heighten their status as objects of desire and associated them with a culture of resistance to the Kremlin's heavy hand. Half-hidden youth clubs and shadowy entrepreneurs devoted to rock music spread a taste for greater access to Western lifestyles. Although the rock scene varied substantially from country to country and area to area in the Communist

44 Schell, Discos, 337–45.
45 Yunxiang Yan, "Of Hamburgers and Social Space: Consuming McDonald's in Beijing," in Davis (ed.), Consumer Revolution, 201–25; and James Farrer, "Dancing through the Market Transition: Disco and Dance Hall Sociability in Shanghai," ibid., 226–49. See also the essays in Kevin Latham, Stuart Thompson, and Jakob Klein (eds.), Consuming China: Approaches to Cultural Change in Contemporary China (New York: Routledge, 2006).

35. Urban China became enthralled with mass consumerism during the final decades of the twentieth century: desire for glamour and consumption helped end the Cold War.

36. East German shoppers flocked to West Berlin after the fall of the Wall. An Yves Saint Laurent shopping bag sits in the rear window of an East German car, 1989.
bloc, some commonalities seem clear: rock artists often chose to make their political statements through music; music accentuated a generation gap and provided the anthems for dissent and alternative visions of the future. The 1980s became the golden age of rock in the Soviet bloc. Some scholars have even argued that the roots of the revolutions of 1989 resonated primarily through the rock scene.46

Meanwhile, Communist promises of future consumer abundance seemed increasingly hollow. West European and Japanese citizens embraced consumerist lifestyles beyond the dreams of those in Communist systems, and by the 1980s the great structural weaknesses of Communism proved impossible to hide.47 East Germany and then others in the Soviet bloc used foreign loans to cover subsidies for consumer products in attempts to head off rising discontent. Trying to bolster the crackdown against the opposition movement Solidarity, Poland especially began a program of significant borrowing from the West in order to import consumer goods. As strategies of borrowing tried to satisfy citizens’ demands, dependence on Western, especially American, capital grew.48

Governments in Eastern Europe struggled against a tide of popular discontent fed by the proximity of West European prosperity and openness. In 1989, this tide suddenly swept away the Berlin Wall and then less visible barriers as well. Crowds in country after country deposed their Communist governments and, in effect, ended the Cold War. Popular revolution in Eastern Europe occurred relatively easily and peacefully because, by then, Soviet reformers led by Mikhail Gorbachev had repudiated military interventionism.49

The change away from Cold War repression comprised part of Gorbachev’s attempt to transform the Soviet Union from above. Throughout the 1980s, urban elites in the Soviet Union chafed under the rigidities and scarcities of Soviet socialism. Academics, government officials, and anyone else who could do so traveled to the West and returned with video recorders, the latest fashions, and other consumer goods. By the 1980s, over 90 percent of Soviet households had a television and received programming from the West. Use of video recorders soared, as did the circulation of movies from Hollywood and other cultural offerings from the West. Soviet leaders could have continued to manage popular discontent in the Soviet Union, as the apparatus of repression of dissent still worked and the Western temptations were more remote than in Eastern Europe. But the revolution in communications and travel, which fueled a desire for more goods, broader choice, and greater intellectual openness, helped shape an agenda of “new thinking” at the top. Gorbachev, himself, increasingly looked to the pattern of West European social democracy, which combined governmental welfare functions with more open markets and greater consumer choice.50 Boris Yeltsin recalled his trip to a supermarket in Houston, with “shelves crammed with hundreds, thousands of cans, cartons, and goods of every possible sort.” He wrote that he felt “sick with despair for the Soviet people.”51

As the Communist giants, China and the Soviet Union, struggled with how to adapt to the rapidly globalizing consumerist mentalities, the race for influence in the Third World also turned in favor of Western models. During the late 1970s, Soviets leaders had claimed a series of victories by building new alliances with states in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. While East Asian governments, which had turned toward a free-market model, were experiencing a remarkable upsurge in economic growth and consumer wellbeing, however, Soviet-influenced experiments in command and collectivized economies lost ground. By the mid-1980s, the Soviet strategy to expand influence in the Third World lay largely in ruins, and the invasion of Afghanistan further sapped Soviet military and economic strength.52 Despite widespread criticism in the Third World of interventionist US policies during the 1970s and 1980s, much of the world apparently wanted

47 Angus Maddison’s historical statistics on gross domestic product and per capita GDP suggest the growing disparities in per capita income between capitalist and Communist worlds; statistical tables may be found at www.ggdc.net/maddison/.
49 For the end of the Cold War in Eastern Europe and Germany, see Jacques Lévesque’s and Helga Haftendorn’s chapters in this volume.
50 For an analysis of Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms, see Archie Brown’s chapter in this volume.
access to products such as music, films, television, casual clothes, fast food, and soft drinks, and hoped to incorporate forms of consumerism into their own nations. Economic migrants and university students from the Third World generally sought to work or study in the United States, not the Soviet Union. The accelerating communications revolution continued to push images of mass consumption toward anyone with access to radio, television, or the Internet.

Although governments in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and South and Southeast Asia espoused a diversity of hopes and plans during the final phase of the Cold War, nationalist goals almost always promised higher living standards and the consumer products associated with modernity and progress. In the oil-rich countries of the Middle East, for example, elites used oil revenues to entrench their power and embraced consumerist lifestyles. Consumerism also had new critics: Islamic fundamentalists denounced Western consumerism for its decadence; movements of the poor experienced growing marginalization in a world of goods that seemed beyond their grasp. Debates over consumerism and its cultural impact produced diverse political effects in the Third World but, by the early 1990s, elites — particularly those with access to education and travel — generally sought consumerist satisfactions for themselves and promised rising prosperity under their leadership. Most nationalist programs seemed firmly wedded to some adaptation of consumer dreams.

Although the fate of consumerism after the end of the Cold War is beyond the scope of this chapter, it might nonetheless be relevant to note that mass consumer imaginaries may have helped end the Cold War, but the Cold War’s end hardly marked any consensus over the national or international impact of consumerism. The spread of neoliberal policies and the rapid globalization of markets after the end of the Cold War brought disillusionment as well as hope, sharply mounting economic inequality as well as rising aggregate wealth. Discourses of pro- and anti-consumerism, which had so often intertwined with pro- and anti-Americanism and enjoyed strong historical roots in most countries, reemerged in many new guises. Cultural, literary, and political debates over the effects of mass production and mass culture on national and personal values grew more insistent, even as changing economic and international structures reshaped such debates.

Ironically, post-Cold War nostalgia in the old Soviet bloc began to center on the disappearing products of socialist-style consumerism. These once-disdained commodities became markers of lost youth, less harried times, simpler desires, and greater community. Consumption, of course, is all about dream worlds and, just as commodities can be totems of a desired future, they may also evoke filtered remembrance of things past. The popularity that socialist consumerism could not gain in life, it began to win in nostalgic memory.

### Consumerism and the Cold War

During the twentieth century, images of mass consumerism comprised a major component in the growth of US global power. People throughout the world, who often associated mass consumption with the United States, emphasized various positives and negatives. Celebrants generally stressed ways in which mass production and consumption, fueled by advertising, promised higher living standards, social mobility, and new kinds of personal freedoms for ordinary people. Critics, on the other hand, lamented standardized products, repetitive labor routines, advertiser-shaped identities, and the idea that personal values might come to revolve around commercial transactions.

The identification between mass consumerism and the United States, however, seemed less and less close with the passage of time. By the 1980s, consumerism had become so globalized and diversified that it no longer automatically stirred visions of “Americanization.” In many localities, the idea of consumer-led growth became incorporated into nationalist programs, and material abundance seemed a test of national success and pride. “Multilocal” consumer revolutions, powered by diverse forms of consumer nationalism, seemed consistent not only with US-style capitalism, but also with systems emphasizing varying models of social democracy and even with China’s “market socialism.”

Consumer goods themselves did not end the Cold War. People did not overthrow governments because they wanted American washing machines and Playboy magazines, as the American press often implied. Rather, consumer products by the 1980s had become symbols of diverse and adaptable processes that came, almost everywhere, to represent progress and glamour. As the communications revolution created ever more permeable borders, the Imaginary of a beneficent and efficient global Communist system lost its attractions. Many leaders in the Soviet bloc and in China faced the prospects of declining legitimacy and of growing isolation in a world marketplace that

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they, as much as anyone, now wanted to join. Mass consumerism, by the closing decades of the twentieth century, had both adapted to and transcended national differentiations. Its iconography mixed both rebellion (often cultural and/or generational) and cooption; it was both radical and conservative. For better or for worse (especially in ecological impact), people throughout the world had come to embrace mass consumption as the look of the future, even as locally specific debates about the impact of consumerism and of "Americanization" continued.

How might the proposition that consumerism, rather than the US nation-state, "won" the Cold War affect the way that historians discuss the late twentieth century? Certainly, frameworks bounded by elite policymaking and by nation-state actors would appear increasingly inadequate. Instead, research agendas would broaden out globally (as is already occurring), to include diverse cultures of consumption, the economics of class and globalization, and the complexities of individual and national aspirations in an age of mass selling.

24

An 'incredibly swift transition': reflections on the end of the Cold War

ADAM ROBERTS

The end was dramatic, decisive, and remarkably peaceful: a rapid succession of extraordinary events, symbolised above all by the opening of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the end of the USSR in December 1991. It provokes the question: what factors caused this conclusion of the long-drawn-out and fateful rivalry of the Cold War; and how did interpretations of these events impinge on international relations in the post-Cold War era?

Since these events, some beguilingly simple answers have been offered, always linked with simple policy prescriptions. This tendency, while by no means unique to the United States, has been particularly prevalent there. Some have seen the wave of democratisation around the world, of which the end of the Soviet empire was an important part, as leading towards a secure future thanks to the beneficent workings of the democratic peace. Some have seen the end of the Cold War as a triumph of American values and might, leading to the conclusion that US power could be freely used as an instrument for world-historical change. Some, having previously seen the Cold War as the problem of international relations, believed that its ending must mean that the future of world order would be completely different from its past. Such views exerted a pull on policy-makers after the end of the Cold War and shaped their actions.

This exploration is in four parts. First, it summarises certain characteristics of the Cold War that help to explain its ending. Secondly, it provides examples of how fundamental change in the Soviet sphere was foreseen by many acute observers. Thirdly, it explores six possible explanations for the end of the Cold War. Fourthly, it suggests that all six explanations are convincing, and that the manner of the Cold War's end influenced what came after, but did not mean the end of history.

What was the Cold War?

The Cold War had two unique characteristics. The first was the extraordinary fact that in the entire period 1945-91 there were just two major powers, each of

More recently, historians have undertaken archive-based accounts of international public-health campaigns, which delve more deeply into ideologi­cal and technological origins pre­dating the Cold War. See, for instance, the fascinating study by Edmund Russian, War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and Sunil Amrith, Decolonizing International Health: India and Southeast Asia, 1900–1965 (London: Palgrave, 2006). India's current project on smallpox eradication and Robert Brigham's research on malaria will doubtless prove important additions to this growing corpus. The history of colonial medicine as an auxiliary in power projection will continue to provide essential context; see, especially Philip D. Curtin, Disease and Empire: The Health of European Troops in the Conquest of Africa (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).


Bibliographical essay


 24. An ‘incredibly swift transition’: reflections on the end of the Cold War


 Soviet commitments near and far, including in war-prone postcolonial states, formed one basis for historians of imperial overstretch to envisage trouble. The distinguished French historian, J.-B. Durosselle, in Tout empire perd: une vision théorique des relations internationales (Paris: Sorbonne, 1981), forecasted the eventual collapse of the Soviet empire, but then backtracked, saying that totalitarian systems could resist change (347–49). Seven years later,