

## ETHNIC IDENTITY AND CONSUMPTION OF POPULAR CULTURE AMONG YOUNG NAGA PEOPLE, INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The rapid economic growth of India has been internationally well recognised for the past decade. Following the economic growth, its media products are also beginning to be recognised. Hindi media products are most pervasively spread in the country. This research is to investigate how the ethnic minority group of the Nagas from the Northeast India is reacting when they are exposed to Hindi mass culture. By looking at the young Naga people's consumption pattern of media products, the reflection of political status of the Naga in India as well as their identity vis-à-vis India becomes visible. The article argues that Naga people's separate identity from India is reflected in their consumption pattern of media products, which prefer to consume Western media products instead of Hindi mass culture.*

**Keywords:** Naga, ethnic identity, consumption, popular culture, India

### INTRODUCTION

Recent rapid economic growth of India has been internationally well recognised for the past decade. A new middle class is emerging, which is becoming the main player of consumer society in India. In 1991, India liberated its economic policy and opened its market for international trade and investment, boosting economic growth. Earlier, India had been practicing socialist economic policies since gaining independence from

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Britain, which included protectionism, business regulations, central planning and so on. The media and entertainment industries have also been growing along with the economy.

According to Munshi (2008), television is the fastest growing medium of entertainment in India. Over 85 percent of the urban populace and 45 percent of the rural inhabitants own a television set. The subscription to cable television is quite popular now and there are nearly 100 channels on the cable network. Moreover, India is well-known for its film industry. Many of these films are created in the city of Mumbai, formerly Bombay, and they are popularly known as Bollywood films. The language used in these films is mainly Hindi. In Delhi, where I conducted my fieldwork, Bollywood films are the main genre of shows in the cinema halls and there are many film channels on television showing Hindi films round the clock. Bollywood films are also available in the form of pirated DVDs, which are widely sold all over the country.

However, as Raghavendra (2009) mentions, the fact is that only about one-third of the films made in India is in Hindi. In Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and in many other places of India, movies are being made in their own languages. The constellation of mass cultures in India is quite complicated, but as Raghavendra (2009) also points out, since Bollywood has its audiences dispersed across the Indian subcontinent, it can be said that Hindi cinema is pan-Indian, articulating "national" concerns and addressing the "Indian" identity. Therefore, the spread of Hindi mass culture to non-Hindi speaking areas will expectedly make a certain impact on the cultures in the regions. This research will investigate how the ethnic minority group, the Naga from Northeast India is reacting when they are exposed to Hindi mass culture. By looking at the young Naga people's consumption pattern of media products, the reflection of political status of the Naga in India as well as their identity *vis-à-vis* India becomes visible.

This research paper mainly looks at young Naga people living in Delhi, many of whom move to the big city for study or work, partly with the help of the Government of India's Reservation Policy, an affirmative action to recruit more ethnic minorities in higher education and public service. It is hardly uncommon for a Naga youth to experience for the first time a completely different environment from his or her home located in Northeast India. The majority of people in this area is ethnically close to the people of

the Indo-china peninsula, who become more distinct when they move to other parts of India. The minority stigma can be felt more strongly when they come into a place like Delhi. Therefore, I have found it worthwhile to conduct research on the Naga people in Delhi in order to understand their identity struggle.

The research was conducted through anthropological methods by collecting qualitative data. I stayed in Delhi from August 2007 to March 2011 with a few months break during the period. I met the first Naga person in a student hostel of Delhi University and then expanded the contact through networking. Others made my acquaintance at the department where I was affiliated as a post-doctoral fellow. A few have become very good friends of mine and they have taken me to places where many Naga people gather, such as the church, fresher parties, seminars and so on, which has offered me opportunities to meet many Naga people to interview. The data was collected through participant observation, casual conversations and unstructured/semi-structured interviews by spending time with them as much as possible. I visited their homes for dinner or drink occasionally and was invited to house parties. The university campus was also a good place to meet and chat with them.

During my fieldwork, I collected data on the behaviour of media consumption with the purpose to examine its relationship with ethnic identity. This is because what people say does not always match what they actually think and their comments may change depending on the circumstances. It is the task of the researcher to interpret the context as well as to consider the cultural background (cf. Geertz 1973). Collecting in-depth data and analysing these enables a better understanding of Naga people's perception of their ethnic identity.

The following sections of this article will use an ethnography excerpt that depicts a party setting among young Naga people to show how they live in a big city like Delhi. Central to the discussion is an analysis of their language and behaviour in terms of consumer identity. In order to contextualise and provide a general understanding of young Naga culture in an urbanised environment, I will briefly explore Naga society and history. The Naga possess a distinctive ethnic identity, which has become a cause of their political struggle. Hence, understanding their identity question caused

by their historical experience will help the reader interpret the ethnography better.

## **YOUNG NAGA PEOPLE IN DELHI**

"I have to make a move soon," Vikali hung up her call and stashed her sleek Nokia phone into her fancy hand bag.<sup>1</sup>

"Oh, you are leaving?" someone said to her.

She dressed neatly and put on her lipstick. About ten minutes later, her phone rang again and she talked briefly in her clumsy Hindi into the receiver.

"The cab has come, I have to go," Vikali said.

She wore a pair of nice little shoes and left for work. It was nine o'clock at night.

I was invited to a house party by a friend of Vikali and mine, named Ayang, on Friday night. There were about 10 to 15 people at the party, playing American music from a laptop and drinking much beer. Personally, I cannot drink much alcohol, so I was drinking Coke after a couple of glasses of beer. The host of the party prepared pork dishes and we finally started eating. The party went on till late at night. Some were playing cards, some were drinking hard liquor and some were just chatting. One girl was talking about her boyfriend, telling us that she doubted that he had an affair with a friend of hers. Another girl at the party was either talking on her mobile or sending text messages to someone. These young partygoers were wearing casual clothes, although some of them were wearing foreign namebrands. A shirt costs about USD20, which is quite an amount for average Indian people. Many of them were young professionals, such as doctors or other white collar workers, but some were students.

Vikali is also a young professional, working in the corporate sector. She had to leave for work because it was Friday night, which was her office hours. She works for a call centre, as do some other people at the party. Most of these call centres operate for American or British companies that have outsourced telephone operating jobs to India. India is a good place for them to invest because it has a large English speaking workforce and

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<sup>1</sup> I use pseudo names in this article to protect their privacy.

moreover, the labour cost is relatively low. Because of the time differences between India and the U.S., call centres operate during the night. The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) companies provide cars with drivers to pick up the employees, which often allow them to avoid the rush hour commute. Even if the BPO companies subsidise their travelling costs, companies in the U.S. and U.K. can still reap bigger profits. There are many young university graduates working in the BPO sector, making on average a salary of INR20,000 to INR25,000 per month (approximately USD450 to USD560 as per June 2011 rate).<sup>2</sup> In Delhi, the average salary of a chauffeur is about INR4,000 per month, and salaries for office workers in small Indian companies can range between INR6,000–8,000. Those working in the BPO sector generally earn more.

In the big Indian cities, there are many BPO companies and IT related companies, which often employ young university graduates; some companies also hire undergraduates, provided that they are enrolled for a distance learning degree course with a university. These young professionals now constitute the new middle class in India. The young people at the party were also among these new middle class people. They have a new style of living, which is immersed in a consumer society. Having received their education in English, they speak the language fluently. In India, education in English is quite common, but in North India, especially in government schools, Hindi is the lingua franca. In many cases, those who have grown up with an English education tend to come from the upper castes and pursue higher education, which leads to taking higher paid jobs.

Vikali is from Nagaland and has also received an English education. Unlike North India, Nagaland education is generally conducted in English instead of Hindi. The partygoers were mostly Naga people, speaking their local languages when conversing with others from the same tribe, but using English when speaking to other Naga people.<sup>3</sup> Because of their fluency of English, many young Nagas work in BPOs.

Here, I would like to point out that the music they were playing at the party was American rock music and sometimes they were dancing to the

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<sup>2</sup> USD1 converts approximately INR45 in June 2011.

<sup>3</sup> The Naga consist of scores of sub-tribes. Each tribe has its own language and some tribes have local village dialects. Tribal identity is an important factor when discussing Naga's political struggle; however, since this article is to investigate how the political relationship between the mainstream Indians and Naga people is affecting their media consumption, it will not get too much into the internal struggle of the Naga community.

music. One young man brought a guitar and played an English song. I had other opportunities to visit houses of North Indians in Delhi and observed that they love to watch Hindi television programmes and listen to Hindi music. But as to the Naga people's gatherings, I observed that they were listening to American music and watching Hollywood movies.

In the following section, I will examine why young Naga people do not consume Hindi media products. However, in order to contextualise the current political relationship between the Naga and the Government of India, I will start by providing basic information of the Naga people, their society and their brief history. Because English language materials on the Naga are scarce, my discussion mainly draws from R. Vashum's book *Nagas' Right to Self-Determination*.

## **A BRIEF INTRODUCTION: THE NAGA**

The Naga are located in Northeast India. In present-day India, the Northeast commonly refers to seven states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, though recently Sikkim has also been added to the list. The area borders Burma to the east, Bangladesh to the south, Nepal to the west and Bhutan and China to the north. The Northeast is a hilly area and has heavy rainfall. The people in the Northeast are of mixed ethnicity, but in the eastern areas the people resemble more like those from East Asia, Burma or Thailand.

Naga people mainly reside in Nagaland, but some of the "sub-tribes" live in neighbouring states such as Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, while some live in Burma as well. The total population of the Naga is estimated to be about 4 million (Vashum 2005). In the state of Nagaland, as the name suggests, the Nagas are the main ethnic group, which includes tribes like the Ao, Angami, Sema, Konyak, Lotha, Chakhesang, Rengma and others. There are also non-Naga tribes such as the Kuki and Kachari. Apart from the Naga people mentioned above, the Tangkhul and Mao are the largest Naga groups living outside Nagaland. In some of the districts in Manipur, the Nagas predominantly make up the population; for example, the Thangkhuls live in the Ukhrul district, and the Zeliangrongs and Kharams are the major ethnic groups in the Tamenglong district (Vashum 2005).

The languages of the Nagas are very diverse. Nagamese, which is a mixture of Assamese and Bengali, is commonly spoken in Nagaland, but this language is not derived from the vernacular of the Nagas. Each sub-tribe has its own language, and as mentioned above, people speak their own dialect when they converse among themselves. Some tribes, such as the Tangkhul, have their tribal language, but they also have their own village languages. People from the same village speak their village language among themselves, but when people from different villages gather, they use Tangkhul for communication. Apart from their own dialects, English is widely used. Schooling is conducted in English, so people who have received formal education have a good command over this language; such works to their advantage when they proceed to higher education. I have had many good opportunities to attend Naga gatherings where the young people from different tribes were speaking in English to converse with each other.

As for religion, the Nagas predominantly practise Christianity. In a 2001 census, 98.5 percent of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) population in Nagaland was Christian.<sup>4</sup> Before the introduction to Christianity, the Nagas were practising their traditional religion. Christianity was introduced to the Naga people in the 19th century. Most Naga Christians are of the Baptist denomination (Vashum 2005). Christianity has also contributed to the spread of the English language.

Vashum (2005) argues that the societies of the Naga are basically egalitarian in structure, being classless and casteless. Traditional laws used to rule the code of conduct for the Naga. Nowadays, civic law governs Naga societies, although traditional customary laws are still influential for everyday practices.

### **A Brief History of the Naga: Formation of Identity**

Though it is believed that the Nagas migrated from outer regions, there is no solid theory supporting this. Vashum (2005) states that the Nagas migrated from present-day Yunnan province of China during prehistoric times. Popular belief also holds that they came from the Southeast Islands and moved up Northwest to arrive at the Naga Hills. In identity theory, as Hall

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<sup>4</sup> The data was extracted from: [http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables\\_Published/SCST/dh\\_st\\_nagaland.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_st_nagaland.pdf), accessed on June 2011. According to this census, in Nagaland, 89.1 percent of the total population is Scheduled Tribes. In Nagaland, the Nagas consist 98.2 percent of Scheduled Tribes.

(1996) argues, identities are constructed through the encounter of "Others." In what follows, I will show how the British were the "Others" for the Nagas and which helped shape their national identity.

The Nagas had contacted other neighbouring tribes, of course, but it was the British who initiated major contact with the Nagas, the first tribe being the Angamis. The British went into the Naga Hills in the early 1830s because they wanted to open the way through Manipur and Assam. Initially, they did not intend to occupy the Naga Hills; however, occasional raids by the Naga led them to conquer the area. In 1866, the British established the Naga Hills District and then implemented the Inner Line Regulation in 1873. This line, as Vashum (2005) insists, did not in any way decide the sovereignty of the territory beyond. The plantation owners were not allowed to acquire the land beyond the line.

The British government recruited about 2,000 Nagas during the First World War, and sent them to France as Labour Corps. As Yonuo argues:

"The journey across seas and countries awoke the spunk of the Naga nationalism, like it had in other parts of India, and they began to develop the concept of a Naga nation, which had not been dreamt of before" (Yonuo 1984 cited in Vashum 2005: 65).

In 1918, an association called the Naga Club was formed with the joint efforts of government officials, village headsmen and Nagas who had returned from France. In 1929, the Naga Club submitted a historical Memorandum to the Simon Commission in Kohima; they demanded to be released from the proposed Reformed Scheme of India (Vashum 2005). In 1941, the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills and Governor of Assam at the time suggested a scheme to carve out a trust territory called Crown Colony, which included the Naga Hills, the Northeast Frontier areas in upper Assam and the hill areas in upper Burma.

During the Second World War, the Naga Hills became a fierce battle zone between the British and the Japanese. The Japanese army proceeded from Burma in an attempt to occupy Imphal, which was the main supply base of the Allies to China. The Japanese lost the battle against the British

and retreated from the Naga Hills. The Imphal mission was very badly organised and many Japanese soldiers died of malnutrition and tropical diseases.

After the Second World War in February 1946, in order to unite the Nagas and recover from the damages of the war, the Naga National Council (NNC) was formed. Initially, the NNC did not speak about separation from British India, but later on it demanded autonomy of the Naga Hills under Assam, which was to be separated from Bengal (Vashum 2005). In 1947, the NNC sent a Memorandum to the Viceroy of India to set up an Interim Government for the Nagas over a period of ten years, at the end of which the Naga people will be left to choose any form of government they wished. The NNC declared Naga National Independence on 14 August 1947, one day before the independence of India. British India did not recognise the declaration at all of the Naga National Independence.

In December 1949, A. Z. Phizo, the leader who started to shape the Naga nation, advocated the establishment of a sovereign Naga State outside the Indian Union, complete with a separate flag, currency and so on, but the Government of India did not agree to the terms. The NNC decided to establish a separate sovereign state of Nagaland in April 1950 regardless, and Phizo was elected as the president of the NNC in December 1950. The Naga independence movement blossomed, but in 1955 the Government of India decided to instil martial law in Assam. The military forces went on razing to the ground almost all the villages in the Naga Hills; many Naga people were killed (Vashum 2005). Phizo managed to escape and arrived in London to lobby for the cause of Naga independence. At present, there are many Nagas working toward independence, though the Government of India is not ready to listen to their plea. Negotiations are ongoing.



Figure 1: Young Naga people wearing traditional clothing, from the Poumai community (Photo taken in Delhi by author).

## **THE NAGA YOUTH IN DELHI: DISTINCT ETHNICITY**

This section focuses on how Naga articulate their political situation (cf. Hall 1996). I will look at their consumption of media products and analyse comments on their experiences in Delhi as well as their styles of consumption.

When analysing comments, one should be careful in assuming that the comments represent the voice of young Naga people, because each individual has his or her own experiences. It is the task of the researcher to find some commonalities among the informants' comments. One of the commonalities I have found among the young Naga people I met in Delhi is that most of their hometowns are located in the Naga Hills. They were born in villages in Naga inhabited areas and received education in the vicinity. Some people went to nearby boarding schools. They came to Delhi to pursue their undergraduate degrees. For the young people who had grown up in a small town or city, a mega city like Delhi can prove stimulating and exciting. One girl told me:

"I like going back home for holidays, but when I stay there long, I begin to get bored. Delhi is noisy and dirty, but it is more exciting. There are many shops in Delhi from where I can buy nice, trendy clothes, and many good restaurants where I can try out various cuisines."

For young people, Delhi is a fun city where many things happen. Their parents and grandparents are in their hometowns. They miss their hometowns when they are in Delhi, but they know that the excitement they get in Delhi is lacking in their hometowns.<sup>5</sup>

Income is important in a consumer economy. Upadhaya (2008), who has conducted research on young people working in the information technology (IT) industry, points out that software engineers and other IT professionals receive relatively high incomes and therefore can indulge in high levels of consumption. The income difference between these young people and their parents, most of whom belong to old middle class is noticeable (*ibid.*). One of Upadhaya's (2008) informants tells that he can just go and buy a couch while his parents had to plan for four years, and that he can buy a fridge immediately, but his parents had to plan for two years to buy one and kept the same one for 25 years. According to Jaffrelot and Van der Veer (2008), the old middle class was created by British rule in order to persuade the intelligentsia to work for its administrative staff; in many cases, the "new middle class" are descendants of the "old middle class."

In the case of the Naga, where British rule remained quite weak, as Vashum (2005) mentions, class division did not occur. It was after the independence of India that local people start working as salaried workers in government related jobs. The young Nagas I met in Delhi are children of these people, or children of farmers. For most Naga people, the lifestyle of receiving a regular paid salary is relatively new. These young urban professionals earn more money than their parents, are the new generation receiving regular incomes from the private sector.

Vikali, as mentioned above, earns USD450 per month, which is not as much as these IT employees make, but certainly much more than that of her

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, I also met quite a few young Naga people who are thinking about going back home after they earn enough money to settle down.

parents. She shares her house with two other girls. They have basic electronic appliances, such as a fridge and a TV, and she has a laptop which costs about USD650. Mobile phones are widely purchased. The prices are USD25 for the very basic ones and USD500 for the latest smart phones, but quite a few young people I met have mobile phones which cost around USD200 or above.

Students consume more frugally than young professionals. It is not common for students to take a part-time job in India. Students who come from low-income families and have good academic records are entitled for scholarships from the Government of India and can be prioritised to stay in university hostels. They can also receive monthly allowances of about USD15, which is little money, but since they stay in the hostel and meals are provided, 15 dollars can help them out with small everyday expenses. Since Naga students are categorised under the ST status, they have a better chance to receive scholarships. Apart from that, many of them receive allowances from their parents or siblings. The Naga students I am in touch with do not have fancy smart phones, but they have mid-range mobile phones with cameras and music functions. Some of them have laptops.

For Hindu Indians, caste is an important factor for their identities; however, for the Naga, since most of them are Christians, caste does not come into their identity issues. Instead, they carry a strong ethnic identity. As Hall (1996) argues, identity is constructed through the advent of the "Other;" when an Indian person goes abroad, to a place like the U.K., he or she become a minority and struggle for his or her ethnic identity. "Asians" living in the U.K. are homogeneously perceived in general. People with Pakistani origins and Indian origins are occasionally mixed up by non-South Asian British people. Similarly, the Nagas are a minority group in India. When they come to Delhi, many of them experience being stared at by other Indians. One of my friends Amy remarked:

"Those Indians are very loud and rude. They stare at me with dirty eyes. They call us Chinky, or istake us as Manipuris or Nepalese. I am sick of it."

In Amy's comment, there is the term "Chinky," which refers to people from the Northeast. The etymology of the term is not clear, but I assume that the

term is derived from Chinese. Because Northeastern people do not look like mainstream Indians, but look more like Chinese, the term is used to refer Northeastern people. Chinky is a derogatory term and is used with some insult. Because their appearance is different from "typical" Indians, North-Easterners are looked on as "different," and not socially included in the group of "us." Some look down on Northeastern people by calling them Chinky. This ethnic difference is the main reason why Amy used the word "Indians" to refer to the people from other parts of India. Technically, Amy is also an Indian; however she distinguishes herself from Indians. Not only Naga people, but people from other parts of the Northeast used the term "Indian" in the same way. I have some friends from Tamil Nadu, a state in South India. Some of them are not always happy about Delhi-centred politics, which is represented by North Indians in many ways. However, I have never heard them using terms like "those Indians" when referring to North Indians. This means that they are identifying themselves as Indians. On the contrary, it can be said that Northeastern people separate themselves from Indians, judging from their use of the term "Indians" when they refer to the people from other parts of India.<sup>6</sup> I talked to many Naga people during my stay in India, and they told me that they had a strong Naga identity. In the case of Naga people, their mentioning of the term "Indians" when they refer to people from other parts of India can be interpreted as separating themselves from India, and also it is possible to argue that they are ethnically separating themselves from other parts of India. For the Naga, "Indians" are people from non-Northeastern part of India, who also compose of the people of India; "India" is the country where "Indian" people live. For the Naga, they are not ethnically "Indians" and they are not "Indian" either, although they are technically Indian nationals.

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<sup>6</sup> The strength of Indian identity varies depending on the regions in the Northeast. Due to historical reasons mentioned above, Naga people's "Indian" identity is quite weak in general.

## **MEDIA AND POP CULTURE OF THE NAGA**

As I have mentioned previously, Naga people have different consumption behaviours of media products compared to the Hindi speaking North Indian people. They have a tendency not to consume Hindi media products. This section will discuss how their political struggle, including their consciousness of ethnic identity, is reflected in their media practice.

For North Indians, the pattern of consumption behaviour on the media products is related to their education and income. Hindi movies and music are widely consumed by young people in Delhi. However, people whose main language is Hindi are more devoted to Hindi media products than English speaking people. The young North Indians whose first language is English follow the hit Hindi movies and music, but they also watch Hollywood movies and listen to English songs. Many young English speaking North Indian people I met appreciate Western media products more than Hindi products. At home, they watch English programs, news, talk shows, movies, documentaries, history programs and so on.

On the emergence of Hindi youth culture, I would argue, it has just begun. Here, I would like to briefly introduce the development of youth culture in Japan, where the author comes from, to give the readers some idea about how the youth culture had developed in other parts of Asia.

In Japan's case, as Miyadai et al. (1993) argue, youth culture emerged in the mid 1950s. Before that, there was no clear distinction between the younger generation and the older generation in terms of their media consumption. People, regardless of their ages, watched the same movies and listened to the same music. But since the mid 1950s, the category of the "youth" has become more overt, and the entertainment industry has started providing icons for young people. For the older generation, the music which young people were listening to became too noisy. After the 1970s, according to Miyadai et al. (1993), the separation became more complicated, and the differences of young people in terms of media consumption emerged. The difference became much clearer in the early 1990s, and the fragmentation of sub-cultural practice has become quite evident since then.

In the case of India, as Jaffrelot and van der Veer (2008) point out, the liberalisation of the economy in the early 1990s affected the pattern of consumption. Before liberalisation, since the market was closed, foreign

products were not so much available for Indian consumers. However, after the opening of the market, Western products have flooded into India, and people's tastes have begun to be affected by the West. Contrary to the idea of Gandhism and subsequent Nehru's socialism that value frugality, the new middle class people tend to value materialistic wealth, although there is a criticism against the pursuit of narrow self-interest.

During my stay in Delhi starting in 2007, I have observed that Hindi movies and music cross generation and gender. In this respect, youth culture has not emerged yet. However, this does not mean that youth culture has never existed in India. It has always existed among English speaking crowds. They have been listening to English pop-rock music, which the older generation does not listen to. But for Hindi speaking people, media products have been shared by many groups of people. Hindi media targeted primarily at young audiences has only recently emerged. MTV India is showing reality shows where young Indians participate and Hindi rock music is gaining popularity. These media products are not consumed by the older generation.

In the case of Naga people, Hindi media products are rarely consumed. Young people watch Hollywood movies and listen to American music, so youth culture is filled with Americanisation. Playing guitar is quite popular among young boys, namely the music of American rock bands. They also like heavy metal a good deal. Tom, a young Naga boy in his early 20s, told me:

"I don't like Hindi music. It's just boring. The melodies are the same, and the girls sing in a high-pitched voice. I don't watch Hindi movies, either. They just sing and dance. Not interesting at all. I don't understand their language, either. I like rock music. I also play guitar. Indian people don't listen to rock. You know, when American rock stars come to hold concerts in India, they come to Shillong, not Mumbai and not Delhi. They know that we Northerners are listening to their music."

I had an opportunity to visit Tom's house. He shares a flat with his relatives. The owner of the flat is the parent of one of the residents. There was a television set in the living room connected to satellite television. They were watching English programmes and they told me that they did not watch Hindi programmes. They are in India and have Indian nationality, but they are hardly attached to Indian media products, except news, which is domestic news broadcast in English.

Naga people are not only consuming foreign media products but are also producing their own media products. They make films and music. The productions are done in their hometowns, and there are local rock and pop bands creating albums. Some of my Naga friends in Delhi have these music clips and put them into their mobile phones. Because the number of listeners and viewers is small, these media producers do not have targeted ages, although young people are more inclined to view/listen to them. One of the traits of local media production among Naga people is that they are made in their local dialects. The friends I mentioned who have their local pop music are from the Tangkhul community. Their songs are sung in the Tangkhul language and their movies are also made in Tangkhul. Other Naga tribes are also making their own media products. These activities are helping them to evoke local identities.



Figure 2: Students playing music at a "freshers' event" (Photo taken in Delhi by author).

Another characteristic of Naga people's media consumption is that Korean media products are very popular among young people. This is an interesting phenomenon. Korean, as well as other East Asian films, television dramas and music are hardly consumed in other parts of India. Japanese animations are beginning to be broadcast on television, but East Asian television stars are scarcely known by the mainstream Indians. Probably Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee are the only stars widely known in India. However in Northeastern India, Korean movie stars and singers are recognised by many young people. They watch Korean dramas on DVDs smuggled through Burma or downloaded from the Internet. A few of my Naga friends mentioned that some people in their hometown subscribe to the Arirang Channel through satellite television. The Arirang Channel is a Korean television station. Vikali, the Naga girl mentioned in the ethnography section, said:

"I like Korean dramas because they look like us. We are Asian, right? And you know, the Korean language is popular among young people in my hometown now because of Korean drama. They pick up some Korean words and mix them with English when they send SMSs. This is good because parents don't understand Korean, so boys and girls can send secret SMSes to each other."

Vikali's comment is interesting suggesting that Asian is quite an elusive entity. For the British, the word refers to South Asia, but in the United States, people imagine East Asian when they hear the word. For Vikali, Asia refers to the area where people of similar appearance like her live. From her word use, it is possible to read that she is identifying herself more strongly to "Asia" rather than "India." Vikali is not the only one person who has made such comments. Quite a few young Nagas I met mentioned the popularity of Korean media products among them, and they discuss their fondness of Korean stars. They told me that being similar looking is a key factor to identifying themselves with the actors and they also feel that Korean dramas are more real compared to Bollywood films.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has explored the characteristics of young Naga people's consumption practices. Young Naga people come to Delhi for study and stay there for work. These young people can earn much more than their parents. This cluster of people is considered to be the new middle class. As Fernandes (2007) argues, class is a space for interaction between structure and middle class identity. I also observed these interactions by looking at Hindu young people during my field research in India. Young people who are from non-high castes and take a job in a big city to earn a substantial amount of money are finding their space within this structured society. In the case of the Naga people, caste structure is non-existent. Instead, ethnicity is a very important factor for identity struggles. Among the Hindus, the state boundary is clearly defined. Even if the people are from different caste status, they are in the same large framework, being India. Therefore, although they are in different castes they are still "us" in this big framework. This framework can be applied to religion too. In India, many religions are practised. Apart from Hindus, there is a large Muslim population. There are also Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and so on. There are large numbers of Muslim people in Delhi, but as far as my fieldwork experience goes I can say that the Muslim people I met consider themselves as Indians and Hindu people also see them as Indians, although bloodshed and clashes occasionally break out between them. The same exists between Sikhs and Hindus. There is a substantial number of Christians in Kerala, a state in South India. I imagine that the majority of them relate their identity as Indians.

However, when it comes to ethnic issues, things are a little more complicated. North India and South India are ethnically divided; they also belong to different language families. However, the South Indians I met have Indian identity, and North Indians also consider them as Indians. Punjabis are regarded as North Indians but sub-ethnically, they distinguish themselves from the people in Uttar Pradesh or Haryana. Many Punjabis practise the Sikh religion, and men in certain sects wear turbans. In India, "Punjabis" are stigmatised with a stereotypical image. In this sense, they stand out from other ethnic groups; however, they are still "us" to both Punjabis and other Indians. The interesting case is Bengal. The state is

divided into two: West Bengal and Bangladesh (formerly East Bengal). I have met scores of Bengalis in Delhi. From their conversations, I would argue that they have Bengali identity, but they also have strong Indian identity. However, my Bengali contacts were only in Delhi; some were born in Delhi, and some moved from West Bengal to study or work. But as far as the Bengali people I met in Delhi are concerned, it seems that they feel closer to the people from other parts of India than to the people from Bangladesh, except for those who moved from Bangladesh during the Partition. For many West Bengal people, Indian identity overshadows Bengali identity. This can also be applied to the Punjabi people who reside where the land is divided between India and Pakistan. As I have not been to Kolkata, I cannot tell whether people in Kolkata are more attached to the Bangladeshis than to non-Bengali Indians, but the important thing is, they have a strong Indian identity. And other Indians naturally consider Bengalis as Indians.

In this respect, it can be said that "unity in diversity" has been realised. Unity in diversity is the national motto of India. When I ask Indian kids and young people about the traits of India, they answer with the phrase, "unity in diversity." However, in the case of the Nagas, things are not the same. Ethnic identity is quite a big issue for them. Back to the topic of middle class identity, in case of caste issues, it can be discussed within the framework of India, although for the Naga people, this framework itself is questionable. They have slipped out of the net bound by the slogan "unity in diversity," despite the fact that the Government of India is trying to incorporate Northeastern people into "India."

The question of the framework is reflected in their media consumption. Because of their English language ability, it is natural for them to appreciate Hollywood films and American music, but their consumption of American media products articulates their taste of consumption. In this case, the Naga young people attribute their fondness of American media products to good taste. If we expand Bourdieu's (1984) argument of taste to global popular culture, American popular culture is considered to be at the highest rank among many young people in Asia. In India's case, those young people who are accessing American popular culture are considered to be cooler than those who are into Hindi music, so they consider themselves to have better taste in terms of appreciating

popular culture. They think they have more "subcultural capital" (cf. Thornton 1995). The young Naga people think that they know more about American popular culture than local Hindi speaking boys do. They consider themselves to be in the superior position in the world of youth popular culture, despite their difficult position as an ethnic minority group in everyday life.

Their position as an ethnic minority also affects their disposition of appreciating Korean media products. Bollywood is a mega dynamo for the production of popular culture. However, Northeastern people are hardly represented in the Indian entertainment industry. A Naga girl told me that she cannot identify herself in Bollywood films because they look completely different from her. Instead, she can identify herself in Korean stars as a member of an "Asian." Her Asian identity is stronger than her Indian identity, if it indeed exists. For her, Asia is roughly East and Southeast Asia.<sup>7</sup> Here, we can observe that their political situation is articulated in their pattern of media consumption. In the case of the Naga, analysing young people's fondness of consuming American and Korean media products and their rejection of Hindi films and music makes it feasible to argue that ethnicity, language and politics became important factors in selecting media products to consume.

As mentioned above, Naga identity emerged during British rule and the Nagas attempted to establish a nation-state right after the Second World War. The movement still continues, but it is a very difficult goal to achieve. The Northeast is geopolitically an important area because it serves as a buffer zone to China. Naturally, the Government of India does not want to release the area. Moreover, it is difficult from an economic point of view. There is no strong industry in Naga areas. Agriculture is their main industry, but produce is mainly consumed within the area. Most of the salaried jobs are government related jobs. The economy is totally dependent on the Government of India. Because jobs are very limited back home, young people go out to the big cities like Delhi. As the above-mentioned Naga girl

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<sup>7</sup> The connection between one's appearance and the disposition of his/her media consumption can be affected by various factors. For example, Hindi media products are widely appreciated by people in Arunachal Pradesh. The area borders China, and the people look like East Asians. However, they possess Indian identity and enjoy watching Bollywood films. Because of the lack of space, this paper focuses on the Naga people, but it is worth researching Arunachal's case. In the case of the Naga people, I placed their explanation of their detachment to Bollywood popular culture. The difference between Arunachal and the Nagas regarding their preference of Hindi media products comes largely from their historical process of becoming a part of India. Hindi language is also commonly spoken in Arunachal.

argued, life in the big city is appealing to young people. In order to maintain the middle-class lifestyle, it is more beneficial to remain as part of the Indian nation; however, if they pursue this direction, their ethnic identity will weaken. This will make it more and more difficult to realise their hope for independence. For the Nagas, pursuing a middle class life contains an ambivalent element.

Right now, most of the Naga in Delhi have their hometowns and come to Delhi at the start of college. After graduation, they stay in Delhi and start working. Then they will find partners and have children. These Delhi-born children are growing up now. Because they were born in Delhi, their attachment to the Naga villages is weakening. They can also speak Hindi. I can imagine that their identities and values will change from the ones which their parents hold. From this perspective, the Naga relationship between ethnicity, language, politics and media consumption will not remain the same.

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