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31. "In a new form of economic colonialism, multi-nationals are forcing harmful products such as junk food, high tar cigarettes and baby milk onto poor countries."

It's worth noting that predatory NGOs in search of campaigns to secure and boost their funding pick on 'scapegoat' or symbolic targets that are readily identified, and can easily be turned into whipping boys. Urban myths are spread about their alleged behaviour, and boycotts are born.

Yet multi-nationals do not force anyone to buy their products. As wealth increases, people seek for themselves some of the luxuries which rich countries have long enjoyed. It may be unfortunate from a diet point of view that many young Orientals prefer McDonalds' hamburgers to the healthy Chinese cuisine they were used to, but they do. They like it for the same reasons that young people in the West do.

High strength cigarettes have falling sales in advanced countries, but sell in the poorer ones. Again, this is not because their inhabitants are tricked or coerced, but simply because they like them. They might only be able to afford a few cigarettes a day, and prefer to make them count.

While breast milk may be better for the child, helping them with antibodies, mothers in developing countries sometimes appreciate the convenience of packaged milk. The same is true in rich countries. It is up to mothers to decide whether the convenience, and often the necessity, of continuing to work merits the trade-off. It is said that in poor countries powdered milk might be mixed with water which has not been properly boiled to kill diseases. The packaging and advertising both handle this responsibly, stressing the importance of hygiene.

Multinationals are supplying what the market wants. It might be sad for sociologists to see poorer countries trying to emulate our vices, but some products are associated with increasing wealth and the convenience this enables people to afford.

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