This volume edited by Tak Wing Chan reflects an ambitious effort to put some flesh on theories of cultural consumption in a truly comparative context. Its geographical scope is as impressive as its innovative and meticulous treatment of empirical data. The book presents an important step towards a much-needed synthesis in understanding the intricate relationship between lifestyles, cultural tastes, and social inequality.

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How does cultural hierarchy relate to social hierarchy? Do the more advantaged consume ‘high’ culture, while the less advantaged consume popular culture? Or has cultural consumption in contemporary societies become individualised to such a degree that there is no longer an social basis for cultural consumption? Leading scholars from the UK, the USA, Chile, France, Hungary and the Netherlands systematically examine the social stratification of arts and culture. They evaluate the ‘class–culture homology argument’ of Pierre Bourdieu and Herbert Gans; the ‘individualisation arguments’ of Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and Zygmunt Bauman; and the ‘omnivore–univore argument’ of Richard Peterson. They also demonstrate that, consistent with Max Weber’s class–status distinction, cultural consumption, as a key element of lifestyle, is stratified primarily on the basis of social status rather than social class.

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