

The Predicament of the Newly Rich

By Sam Vaknin, Ph.D.

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They are the object of thinly disguised envy. They are the raw materials of vulgar jokes and the targets of popular aggression. They are the Newly Rich. Perhaps they should be dealt with more appropriately within the academic discipline of psychology, but then economics in a branch of psychology. To many, they represent a psychopathology or a sociopathology.

The Newly Rich are not a new phenomenon. Every generation has them. They are the upstarts, those who seek to undermine the existing elite, to replace it and, ultimately to join it. Indeed, the Newly Rich can be classified in accordance with their relations with the well-entrenched Old Rich. Every society has its veteran, venerable and aristocratic social classes. In most cases, there was a strong correlation between wealth and social standing. Until the beginning of this century, only property owners could vote and thus participate in the political process. The land gentry secured military and political positions for its off spring, no matter how ill equipped they were to deal with the responsibilities thrust upon them. The privileged access and the insiders mentality ("old boys network" to use a famous British expression) made sure that economic benefits were not spread evenly. This skewed distribution, in turn, served to perpetuate the advantages of the ruling classes.

Only when wealth was detached from the land, was this solidarity broken. Land – being a scarce, non-reproducible resource – fostered a scarce, non-reproducible social elite. Money, on the other hand, could be multiplied, replicated, redistributed, reshuffled, made and lost. It was democratic in the truest sense of a word, otherwise worn thin. With meritocracy in the ascendance, aristocracy was in descent. People made money because they were clever, daring, fortunate, visionary – but not because they were born to the right family or married into one. Money, the greatest of social equalizers, wedded the old elite. Blood mixed and social classes were thus blurred. The aristocracy of capital (and, later, of entrepreneurship) – to which anyone with the right qualifications could belong – trounced the aristocracy of blood and heritage. For some, this was a sad moment. For others, a triumphant one.

The New Rich chose one of three paths: subversion, revolution and emulation. All three modes of reaction were the results of envy, a sense of inferiority and rage at being discriminated against and humiliated.

Some New Rich chose to undermine the existing order. This was perceived by them to

be an inevitable, gradual, slow and "historically sanctioned" process. The transfer of wealth (and the power associated with it) from one elite to another constituted the subversive element. The ideological shift (to meritocracy and democracy or to mass-democracy as y Gasset would have put it) served to justify the historical process and put it in context. The successes of the new elite, as a class, and of its members, individually, served to prove the "justice" behind the tectonic shift. Social institutions and mores were adapted to reflect the preferences, inclinations, values, goals and worldview of the new elite. This approach – infinitesimal, graduated, cautious, all accommodating but also inexorable and all pervasive – characterizes Capitalism. The Capitalist Religion, with its temples (shopping malls and banks), clergy (bankers, financiers, bureaucrats) and rituals – was created by the New Rich. It had multiple aims: to bestow some divine or historic importance and meaning upon processes which might have otherwise been perceived as chaotic or threatening. To serve as an ideology in the Althusserian sense (hiding the discordant, the disagreeable and the ugly while accentuating the concordant, conformist and appealing). To provide a historical process framework, to prevent feelings of aimlessness and vacuity, to motivate its adherents and to perpetuate itself and so on.

The second type of New Rich (also known as "Nomenclature" in certain regions of the world) chose to violently and irreversibly uproot and then eradicate the old elite. This was usually done by use of brute force coated with a thin layer of incongruent ideology. The aim was to immediately inherit the wealth and power accumulated by generations of elitist rule. There was a declared intention of an egalitarian redistribution of wealth and assets. But reality was different: a small group – the new elite – scooped up most of the spoils. It amounted to a surgical replacement of one hermetic elite by another. Nothing changed, just the personal identities. A curious dichotomy has formed between the part of the ideology, which dealt with the historical process – and the other part, which elucidated the methods to be employed to facilitate the transfer of wealth and its redistribution. While the first was deterministic, long-term and irreversible (and, therefore, not very pragmatic) – the second was an almost undisguised recipe for pillage and looting of other people' property. Communism and the Eastern European (and, to a lesser extent, the Central European) versions of Socialism suffered from this inherent poisonous seed of deceit. So did Fascism. It is no wonder that these two sister ideologies fought it out in the first half of the twentieth century. Both prescribed the unabashed, unmitigated, unrestrained, forced transfer of wealth from one elite to another. The proletariat enjoyed almost none of the loot.

The third way was that of emulation. The Newly Rich, who chose to adopt it, tried to assimilate the worldview, the values and the behaviour patterns of their predecessors. They walked the same, talked the same, clad themselves in the same fashion, bought the same status symbols, ate the same food. In general, they looked as pale imitations of the real thing. In the process, they became more catholic than the Pope, more Old Rich than the Old Rich. They exaggerated gestures and mannerisms, they transformed refined and delicate art to kitsch, their speech became hyperbole, their social associations dictated by ridiculously rigid codes of propriety and conduct. As in similar psychological situations, patricide and matricide followed. The Newly Rich rebelled against what they perceived to be the tyranny of a dying class. They butchered their objects of emulation – sometimes, physically. Realizing their inability to be what they always aspired to be, the Newly Rich switched from frustration and permanent

humiliation to aggression, violence and abuse. These new converts turned against the founders of their newly found religion with the rage and conviction reserved to true but disappointed believers.

Regardless of the method of inheritance adopted by the New Rich, all of them share some common characteristics. Psychologists know that money is a love substitute. People accumulate it as a way to compensate themselves for past hurts and deficiencies. They attach great emotional significance to the amount and availability of their money. They regress: they play with toys (fancy cars, watches, laptops). They fight over property, territory and privileges in a Jungian archetypal manner. Perhaps this is the most important lesson of all: the New Rich are children, aspiring to become adults. Having been deprived of love and possessions in their childhood – they turn to money and to what it can buy as a (albeit poor because never fulfilling) substitute. And as children are – they can be cruel, insensitive, unable to delay the satisfaction of their urges and desires. In many countries (the emerging markets) they are the only capitalists to be found. There, they spun off a malignant, pathological, form of crony capitalism. As time passes, these immature New Rich will become tomorrow's Old Rich and a new class will emerge, the New Rich of the future. This is the only hope – however inadequate and meagre – that developing countries have.

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Chinese Marriage

By Wong Yee Lee

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In ancient China, a man could have as many concubines as possible after the first wife. It was possible that the youngest concubine would be a teenager while the husband could be an ancient old man. Poor families sold their young daughters to rich families just because they could get some money from the rich family and also get rid of a useless female in the family.

Since 1950, the Chinese government has promulgated a law which stated that one man can only get married with one woman. It offends the law for anyone who has more than one wife.

In the past, parents arranged marriages were very common. Usually young people would have their spouse decided by their parents. Sometimes young people could only have the first look of their spouse at their wedding. It was also common that sometimes an arranged marriage could be organized even before the child was born as long as parents from both families agreed.

In modern days, things have changed quite a lot. Free love prevails and lovers can choose to get married with whoever they love. Of course, in order to show their respect to their parents, formal agreement has still to be obtained prior to any proper marriage procedure.

Even more modern, matchmakers businesses are all thriving just because sometimes people find it a bit hard to find their true love.

Before getting married

Before getting married, young people have to pay a formal visit to each other's parents. When visiting the girl's parents, the boy has to bring with him the betrothal gifts in order to show sincerity. When the gifts are received, then both the boy and the girl are engaged. When the girl visits the boy's parents, the parents have to prepare a formal gift for the future daughter-in-law.

In China, usually the newly wedded couple will move to live with the boy's family. Sometimes it is not surprising to see that they will live with the girl's family. However, in these modern days, young couples would prefer to live alone without the parents if they can afford to pay for a new flat or house.

One of the wedding procedure is that the bride has to prepare a dowry to be brought to the bridegroom's family on the wedding day. A dowry is things bought by the bride's family, which includes blackest, clothes, accessories, daily necessities and etc.

What comes next is to choose a good day to hold the wedding. It is very important in the Chinese culture. A wedding, being such an important day in a person's life, has to be held on a day which symbolizes goodness. People will choose the best day based on the Chinese Lunar calendar, or on any festival days.

The wedding ceremony

A formal Chinese wedding requires the bridegroom to pick up the bride at the bride's home after respectfully greeted the parents-in-law to be. The couple-to-be will then go to the bridegroom's home, where the bride will greet her parents-in-law to be, or to the banquet location. If they choose to go to the bridegroom's home, the young couple will have to greet the parents-in-law to be with a cup of tea each and the parents will return the daughter-in-law to be with a red packet of money inside. Similar to the western culture, the bride and bridegroom will be accompanied by bridesmaids and best men and they are usually still non-married.

One very important procedure is the banquet. All relatives and friends will be invited and they will wish the new couple with all the best. At the banquet, the newly wed has to drink half glass of wine for a pair of glasses linked by a ribbon. After that the newly wed has to cross-hand and drink the other half of the wine. It is believed that after this ceremony the newly wed will love each other more dearly.

In some parts of China, the fish served in the banquet should not be eaten totally. The head, tail and the whole skeleton of the fish should be left untouched so as to symbolize a good start and end of a marriage.

After the banquet, friends of the new couple will usually continue the night by deliberately disturbing the new couple with a few games. Games will include different quests for some difficult performances or questions. Unfortunately to the newly wed that these games usually last till very late in the night!

However in the modern days, many young people try to skip most of these rituals or ceremonies. They do that either because they think that new generations should not be confined by these old traditions, or some do so just because of economical reasons of trying not to spend as much money as possible.

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