

Refereed article

How Much Is My Face Worth? Neoliberal Subjectification, the Beauty Economy, and the Internet Celebrity Culture in China

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Summary

Since 2015 a new category of media star has come to public awareness and sparked controversial discussion in China: internet celebrity (*Wanghong*). *Wanghongs* build their fame and fandom mostly on their eye-catching and hyperfeminine appearance, which they present extensively on social media platforms to gain public attention and to acquire followers and fans. The stereotypical so-called internet celebrity face (*Wanghong lian*) became the most discussed buzzword of the year 2016, and led to a society-wide discussion about new beauty ideals and the growing popularity of cosmetic surgery, the objectification and commercialization of the body, as well as the increasing importance of presenting an appropriate appearance for the individual's social and economic success since the turn of the millennium. To address these key emerging issues, the article analyzes the development and characteristics of this new group of celebrities and locates them within the booming "beauty economy." By literally selling their beautiful face, *Wanghongs* convert symbolic capital through e-commerce and online advertising into real economic advantage. The utilization of "body capital" has stoked the public discourse about *yanzhi* (value of a pretty face) in China's status-conscious society. With an analysis of the internet celebrity phenomenon, this paper looks behind the sparkling social media façade and reveals the social and economic conditions that have led to this new ideology of "beauty as capital" in China.

Keywords: *Wanghong*, internet celebrity, social media, internet celebrity face, beauty economy, body capital, cosmetic surgery, beauty ideals

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