

Research Note

The Image of the Beautiful Woman: Beauty Ideals in Modern Urban China

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Summary

Images of the female body are widely employed in advertising, cinema, fashion, and media the world over. In Chinese cities, meanwhile, everywhere we look we can see advertisements for cosmetic treatments that depict desirable bodily representations with the following core characteristics: thin figure, oval face with pointed chin, slim cheeks, high-bridged nose, big eyes, and fair skin. These are the supposed features of the modern beautiful woman, and set the beauty standards that cosmetic treatments aim to reach up to. The beauty standards promoted nowadays are, to a certain extent, the result of globalization and individualization: with the reform era the diffusion of Western (i.e. Euro-American) culture in China had an impact on existent norms of beauty, creating new global and local standards — ones that women choose to pursue as a way to affirm their individual identity. This Research Note focuses on the ideals of beauty that are currently widespread in Chinese society, highlighting specifically the cultural and social influences that have shaped them. Additionally it points out the currently popular cosmetic surgery trends, as they embody perfectly such ideals of beauty — and thus ultimately attempts to show the power of body images in the construction of modern individuals.

Keywords: female beauty, body image, beauty ideals, modern society, individualization, globalization, cosmetic surgery, China

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Introduction

However much the particulars of the beauty package may change from decade to decade [...] the basic principles remain the same. The body beautiful is woman's responsibility and authority. She will be valued and rewarded on the basis of how close she comes to embodying the ideal. (Chapkis 1986; in Balsamo 1996:70)

A certain image of the female body has become increasingly visible in Chinese society. When walking along the street, reading a magazine, or watching television, we are surrounded by pictures of good-looking young women that have a promotional or decorative purpose. It is common knowledge among advertisers that, in order to really convey a message, you need an appealing image. I can only agree. And I would add that most of the time you need a beautiful one too. In China, these images depict female bodily representations with the following characteristics: thin figure, oval face with pointed chin, slim cheeks, high-bridged nose, big eyes, and fair skin. These characteristics have become the measurements of one's ideal appearance, and seem furthermore to be pursued by most women in urban society. They constitute the ideals of beauty that this Research Note deals with; this piece is part of a broader research project, one that is still ongoing at present and therefore has produced only preliminary findings so far.

Here I focus on one specific aspect thereof; that is, the modern ideals of beauty in China. I look at the various cultural and social influences that have shaped them. In addition, I argue that the process of individualization within Chinese society during the reform era¹ has contributed to women being driven to pursue these new ideals of beauty. Besides considering the relevant secondary literature, firsthand data was also gathered in 2017 in the cities of Hangzhou and Shanghai. This was collected mainly through direct observation and via interviews conducted with employees in the beauty and fashion industries, medical doctors, patients of cosmetic clinics, and "regular" women interested in discussing beauty (twenty-three in total) — as well as during short fieldtrips to Seoul and Tokyo too.

The beauty trends underpinning the pursuit of popular such ideals include cosmetic surgery, which has become increasingly widespread and accessible since China's first publicly known artificial beauty, Lulu Hao, initially gained media attention in 2003 (Luo 2012). At the peak of the reform era, cosmetic surgery was even "glorified as a natural expression of human nature, of the personal freedom and individuality that had been suppressed under Mao" (Brownell 2005: 142). Cosmetic surgery in China sees women have their faces surgically modified to meet certain aesthetic

1 The era of the Chinese economic reform, simply called the reform era, is the period that officially started in 1978 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, where China underwent a number of reforms aimed at changing its political, social, and economic system. In essence, the country opened up to foreign trade and moved toward a market economy, starting therewith its incredibly fast development (Minzner 2015; Cao et al. 2010).

requirements; as mentioned earlier, these are an oval face with pointed chin, slim cheeks, a high-bridged nose, and big eyes.

The most performed such procedure is the so-called double eyelid surgery (technical name, blepharoplasty), which consists of creating a second fold in the upper eyelid in order to have wide, open, and deeper eyes, because about half of East Asians lack such an upper eyelid crease (Chen 2006; Li and Ma 2008; Liu et al. 2017). However Chen (2006) reminds us that the other half of the population are, on the contrary, naturally born with it; as such those who seek this surgery usually want to look like their fellow Asians, not like Caucasians. Yet, as Li and Ma (2008) point out, single-eyelid eyes historically characterized a unique beauty in Asians: it is only the intensification of global cultural exchange that has modified their sense of beauty and led them to consider double eyelids more appealing.

It is important to note here that beauty discourses do not regard only women: male beauty and masculinity are objects of discussion too, and my choice of concentrating on female beauty comes only from my own personal interest in studying the position of women in society.

The role of beauty

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” goes the old saying. We can argue that this is because there is no ultimate beauty; it is but a cultural construct that depends on the particular society in which it is articulated. As pointed out by Hesse-Biber et al.: “The female body is a cultural artefact defined and redefined over time in response to broad cultural and historical transformations” (2004: 49). Attractiveness, too, is not a unidimensional construct (Englis et al. 1994). As beauty is culturally constructed, it is indeed an important aspect of society — and I believe that the way that it is represented, promoted, and individualized can help us to better understand a given society and its unique cultural development.

However, even if there is no ultimate beauty, the association of beautiful with good is a notion spread worldwide, including also in China. “Everybody loves beauty,” goes a Chinese idiom (original Mandarin: 爱美之心, 人皆有之 *ai mei zhi xin, ren jie you zhi*). Thinking that what is beautiful is good may have a sound basis: ugliness is often psychologically related to negative qualities and attractiveness to positive ones, as shown by Dion et al. (1972). These scholars demonstrated that attractive people were actually assumed to have more socially desirable personalities, as well as better prospects for living more satisfying lives — including happier marriages and more prestigious occupations. It is no wonder, then, that people deeply long to be beautiful.

According to Englis et al.:

A beauty ideal is an overall “look” incorporating both physical features (e.g. “pouty” lips vs. thin lips, large breasts vs. small), and a variety of products,

services, and activities. These can include clothing, cosmetics, hairstyling, tanning salons, leisure activities (e.g. aerobics, tennis, or weightlifting), and even plastic surgery (e.g. breast or lip implants, or liposuction). Ideals of beauty often are summed up in a sort of cultural shorthand; one may talk about a “vamp,” a “girl-next-door,” or an “ice queen,” or one may refer to specific women who have come to embody an ideal, such as Cher, Marilyn Monroe, or Princess Di. (1994: 50)

In this sense, some famous actresses such as Fan Bingbing and Angelababy can be seen as embodying the beauty ideals of modern women in China. In fact, it emerged from my interviews that young women often take fashion and beauty inspiration from these very actresses, to the point that they want some of their body parts to look like the actresses’ own ones (for instance by asking surgeons to give them Angelababy’s lips or Fan Bingbing’s nose).

In order to better understand beauty in a particular cultural context, it is important to look also at the terms commonly used to refer to it. In Mandarin there is quite a wide variety of adjectives that define female beauty, as discovered during the interviews that I conducted. 好看 (*haokan*), 漂亮 (*piaoliang*), 美丽 (*meili*) — all these terms denote “beautiful,” but carry slight differences of meaning. *Piaoliang* and *haokan* usually refer to outer beauty (“good looking, attractive, pretty”), while *meili* is beautiful in a more comprehensive way, including also inner beauty and good manners. In this sense, 善良 (*shanliang*) is used to describe a woman who is very kindhearted and, because of that, beautiful. It is often translated into English as just “kindhearted,” but in my opinion this single word fails to encompass all its shades of meaning. In addition, 可爱 (*ke'ai*) points out cuteness and tenderness (pretty in the sense of “cute, adorable”) and is generally associated with younger and innocent beauty. This creates a conceptual opposite to *meili*, which evokes a more mature and conscious beauty.

All these adjectives are related to a feminine quality, 女性气质 (*nüxing qizhi*), which we may as well translate as femininity, even though there are several terms for that too — each one highlighting some particular aspect of the feminine. Many of my respondents portrayed the beautiful woman as possessing both outer beauty, 外在美 (*waizaimei*) and inner beauty 内在美 (*neizaimei*), which I see as being the influence of Confucianism; this philosophy promoted an ideal woman as one who was both virtuous and concerned with her appearance (Ip 2003). The inner-outer beauty debate, according to my respondents, can be summarized as follows: refined and good-mannered women possess the inner beauty that makes them truly beautiful, because a pretty face without a kind heart does not qualify as real beauty. It would seem, then, that inner beauty is the more important of the two, because without it one cannot qualify as truly beautiful. However, when looking at how big the beauty industry has become and how deeply women care for their looks, it is hard to believe that inner beauty wins out over external beauty in modern society (Dippner 2016). Also, my interviewees admitted that appearance has become terribly essential in

everyday life, even though sometimes people are reluctant to acknowledge it. Some popular expressions, however, show the situation very clearly: we live in a 外貌协会 (*waimao xiehui*), that is to say a society of appearance, where we are used to choosing people according to their looks (以貌取人 *yi mao qu ren*) and where a pretty face earns you a decent living (靠脸吃饭 *kaolian chifan*). Once again, language is a precious aid to understanding society. Whereas grasping the evolution of language and the gradual changing of the lexicon of beauty would certainly require a separate study, the transformation of beauty ideals is the object of interest here — and can indeed be traced thanks to sufficient studies hereon being currently available.

Change and development in beauty ideals

In China, female beauty has adapted to contrasting ideologies throughout history. First, for centuries, Confucianism promoted the ideal of a demure and delicate-looking woman, one devoted to her household, whose attributes were virtue, words, work, and appearance — bound feet were considered a sign of this aspiration (Ip 2003; Kyo 2012). Then, Maoism enforced the rejection of Confucian frail feminine beauty: “One goal of revolutionary politics, according to the Communists, was women’s liberation from the male-dominated system of private property. Lack of adornment signified their liberation and dignity” (Ip 2003: 334). It also signified their revolutionary attitude, because women who rejected self-beautification were considered more capable of being able to endure poverty and to be working for the revolution (Ip 2003). Therefore, male and female fashion of that time was dominated by shapeless grey and blue outfits (Kunz 1996). After the market economy became the dominant ideology with the end of Maoism, many forms of beautification have arisen and women have been experiencing a sort of re-feminization — as if to celebrate the reacquired freedom to show their femininity and individuality, earlier suppressed in favor of “gender sameness” (Evans 2002; Brownell 2005). Cosmetics, fashion, and aesthetic surgery have flourished rapidly in this zeitgeist, giving birth to what has been called the “beauty economy” (美女经济 *meinü jingji*) — which includes all kinds of commodities and activities related to beautification (Xu and Feiner 2007).

What created the conditions under which women felt entitled to pursue the beauty ideals that they admired? I borrow here the theory of the individualization of Chinese society by Yan Yunxiang (2010), in order to attempt to answer this question. According to Yan, who draws on Beck’s second modernity theory (Beck 1992; Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2002), in the Mao era people had been unrooted from traditional family-centered society and placed into a new socialist one, wherein their role as members of a collective was not very different from their role as members of the family. Herein they had few opportunities to develop their own individuality, as they were mostly defined as part of a group. In the reform era, contrariwise, people

found themselves untangled once again from the collective, now free to choose their lifestyle as individuals. This encouraged them to seek an individual identity, as well as stimulating entrepreneurship and desire.

Now, let us stretch Yan's argument toward the beauty-pursuit perspective: in the Mao era women were disembedded from traditional family-centered society, therefore freed from prevailing notions of beauty. In the reform era, meanwhile, the rise of the individual and the abundance of lifestyle choices available set the conditions for the beauty economy to flourish, through the market's promotion of related ideals. In their search for an individual identity, women felt entitled to commence the pursuit of such ideals according to their own personal desires. We could say, then, that individualism has replaced familism, as it has in Western modern societies too (Ruan et al. 2004).²

Moreover, the market promotion of beauty has given birth to what Brownell (1995, 2001) calls "body culture": it has incited fashion models and athletes to display China's transnational image and culture, contributing to the cementing of set beauty ideals and encouraging people to take care of their looks as a way to make obvious their lifestyle. In a nutshell, we might say: I am my soul as much as I am my body, because I am defined by how I look. In this sense, the whole inner-outer beauty debate loses significance, because stating that what counts is only to be beautiful on the inside sounds rather anachronistic. Appearance matters. This is the very reason why beauty ideals are constructed and then pursued.

Due to cultural and geographical closeness, beauty ideals in China are very similar to those in South Korea and Japan too. In fact, we may simply refer to them as East Asian beauty ideals, as they enjoy mutual influences. However, as emerged in my interviews, Chinese women tend to think that what they take from Korean and Japanese fashion and beauty notions is more than what they bestow to them in return. In fact China looks to its neighbors as sources of inspiration in terms of style, especially South Korea: Korean-style beauty or beautification (韩式美容 *hanshi meirong*) has become highly valued in China in recent years (Davies and Han 2011). South Korea is considered the beauty hub of East Asia, and has constructed a whole economy on that basis — investing considerably in advertising itself as one of the top destinations worldwide for cosmetic tourism (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012). It ranked third globally in 2014 for the total number of cosmetic surgery procedures and specifically for face procedures, and third for overall number of surgical and nonsurgical procedures in 2015 (ISAPS 2014, 2015). Its cosmetic products and fashion brands are successfully exported all over East and Southeast

2 In this text, the term "Western" has the meaning of "Euro-American". Although I am perfectly aware that the West is geographically much broader, I chose to use it this way to reflect its use in Chinese: 西方 (*xifang*), "Western", generally indicates Europe and North America, and this is how my interviewees intended it. Therefore, Western beauty here corresponds to Caucasian beauty.

Asia; its cosmetic surgery clinics attract so many people from abroad that they commonly have teams specialized in dealing with foreign customers – usually an English-speaking and a Chinese-speaking team, as was observed firsthand during my visit to Seoul.

Concerning aesthetic surgery, after several years of great admiration, it emerged from my interviews that Chinese customers are now starting to see Korean surgery results as too artificial. Even though the influence of Korean beauty remains probably the strongest one overall, China is now turning also to Japan for inspiring surgery style. I had the chance to meet a medical doctor in Hangzhou who has opened a company that provides Chinese customers with all the necessary arrangements to go and have surgery in Japan. What they seek is surgery that improves their features, not that changes them completely, because they want to retain their uniqueness. The cosmetic surgery market in Japan has a different style: it is much less flamboyant, but it still exists and indeed flourishes. According to a Chinese woman from Heilongjiang living in Tokyo, beauty care is far more subtle in Japan.

The women who opt for aesthetic surgery come from a range of different social backgrounds, but the majority of them are white-collar women – that is to say those who can economically afford expensive treatments for various personal ends (Zheng 2009). Already these circumstances shows that socioeconomic factors do evidently have a certain influence. Aesthetic surgery is a matter of money, and not everyone can afford to spend it. But, what are the hierarchies when it comes to setting beauty standards?

Beauty, power, and social class

Kyo (2012) affirms that, even in beauty, the most powerful influence the least powerful. Through a thorough analysis of ancient paintings, poetry, and prose, Kyo shows how beauty standards in China and Japan have changed dramatically over the course of history, and how they were usually related to power. For instance the portraits of empresses and princesses would set the fashion and beauty trends of a particular period, because they were in the position to exercise cultural power over other women. In the same way, the beauty-power relation also relates to the influence of Western beauty ideals on East Asian ones too: the economic power that Europe and North America have had in relatively recent history over East Asia made the standards of beauty of the latter reflect their visions of the former. According to Kyo (2012), when the Chinese first saw fair-haired and blue-eyed Europeans they were far from thinking that they were handsome; on the contrary, they thought they must be demons because of such strange looks. But then, as those blue-eyed Europeans were able to impose their economic power over East Asians through colonization, their appearance started to be accepted and eventually even considered beautiful. In the 1920s and 1930s, permed hair, fashionable clothes, high heels, and makeup were

very popular, reflecting a certain degree of admiration of Western beauty practices (Dong 2008). In the reform era, meanwhile, European and North American representations of beauty massively penetrated China via the mediums of cinema, fashion, cosmetics, and advertising, and have endured ever since — leading to the current circumstances.

In addition I think that a similar pattern of power relations is nowadays reproduced with celebrities within China, not only by actresses and singers but also by internet ones (网红 *wanghong*) too. What kind of power do such celebrities exercise exactly? I would argue that they have “social power,” in the sense of power exercised via social media over the internet. We could say that this is a brand new type of power that has only arisen in the digital era, thanks to the massive daily use of social-media networks. Celebrities are more powerful than their captive audience, a consequence of them being famous and extensively followed on social networks; this enables them to influence their public on what concerns beauty trends and practices. However I have not myself conducted in-depth research on this topic, and therefore am not in a position to discuss it further; Anett Dippner instead takes on the mantle in her article appearing in this special issue.

A good example of the connection between beauty standards and social class is skin tone: given the sheer amount of skin whitening creams and skin brightening lotions that can be found on the market in China, it is quite clear that the idealized version is supposed to be pale in color. Just like in Victorian times, in ancient China fair skin was a symbol of nobility, because noblemen and noblewomen did not have to work under the hot sun but could stay in the shade inside their mansions; peasants, instead, had to spend the day working in the fields under the searing sun, and therefore their skin was heavily tanned (Schein 1994; Xie and Zhang 2013). For this reason fairer skin tones were considered more beautiful than darker ones, an ideal that is in vogue again nowadays. Meanwhile in Europe and especially North America this notion faded away, and has even been replaced by the opposite one: since Coco Chanel first made it fashionable in the 1920s, tanned skin has been preferred because of its relation to leisure, health, and luxury (Xie and Zhang 2013).

We observe, then, that a beauty ideal can change according to how societal needs shift. In this regard, Bourdieu (1979) and his description of taste is pertinent: he differentiates between luxury taste (*goûts de luxe*) and necessity taste (*goûts de nécessité*), and argues that the dominant class and the working class are distinguished by the following three consumption structures (*structures de consommation*): food, culture, and expenses for self-presentation and performance (*représentation*). The latter includes also the costs of beauty products and toiletry items. In his study he found that these expenses for performance and self-presentation were quite high for professionals (those holding higher cultural and economic capital, usually professors, managers, etc.) compared to for the working class. Differences are the key: “L’identité sociale se définit et s’affirme dans la différence” (Bourdieu 1979:

191). That is, every condition is defined in relation to other ones in a system of differences — every condition is determined by what distinguishes it from what it is not. Following this logic, women with similar social backgrounds should share analogous beauty tastes, and thus aspire to closely aligned such ideals.

However this “rule” does not seem to apply to the Chinese case, where women appear to share similar beauty ideals regardless of their social class: thin figure, fair skin, oval face with pointed chin, and big eyes are the features of the beautiful woman belonging to any class, it emerged in my research. Nevertheless, given the substantial differences between 1970s French society as studied by Bourdieu and contemporary Chinese society as observed by myself, it is hard — and perhaps risky — to draw parallels. The professionals referred to as constituting the dominant class by Bourdieu could be nowadays translated into the upper middle class. Since China has not followed the same path as Europe vis-à-vis the evolution of such social classes, the very definition of middle class in China is a prickly question — and many scholars avoid the term “class” altogether because of its political connotations, opting instead for more neutral terms such as “stratum” or “social group.” It seems, however, that the following elements characterize the Chinese middle class: relatively high and stable income; professional or managerial occupation; higher education; and, a high standard of living (Li 2010; Alpermann 2011). Considering these characteristics, then, the Chinese middle class today could have certain traits in common with the dominant class in 1970s France. I argue, following the abovementioned example on skin tone, that beauty ideals tend to be conceived according to the features of the wealthy, and therefore women in China aspire to embodying the beauty of the highest echelons of society. In fact this connects to a colloquial term used mostly among youth to describe the ideal woman, 白富美 (*baifumei*), meaning “fair skinned, rich, and beautiful”, that has been viral online since May 2013 (Li et al. 2014).

As middle class is characterized by an affluent lifestyle, beauty ideals reflect this well-earned extravagance. Davies and Han (2011) contest the international media’s interpretations of Korean idealized facial features as attempts at Westernization, for these depictions are excessively reductive. They suggest instead that:

These idealized features are largely effaced of *ethnic and racial* significance because they are advertised as a *consumer* ideal of beauty. This ideal is promoted as a symbol of social success – the beauty that the high-achieving individual “deserves” (because he or she can afford, as it were, to look like a star) (Davies and Han 2011: 149–150, italics in original).

Although I share their opinion on consumer ideals and how reductive it is to call them Westernized, I would argue that ethnic and racial meanings, rather than being effaced, have in fact been combined and blended with each other. These meanings, hence, remain in a way that neither prevails — but all are somewhat visible. As I perceive it beauty cannot be completely detached from ethnic significance, because

it is related to cultural understanding — which is itself related to ethnic background. Moreover, due to nowadays incredibly fast communication over the internet, beauty ideals are even more reciprocally influenced around the world, and absorb more and more ethnic features — thereby converging, and in some cases even overlapping. To give an example, when I interviewed women who had undergone double eyelid surgery they were quite proud of keeping their Chinese-ness in the form of their eyes: sure, they had been enlarged, but without losing their ethnic traits. Therefore, there was no attempt to look Western, and at the same time none to erase the ethnic features of their eyes either.

The role of the internet

The media plays a big role in the promotion of beauty ideals. Advertisements in traditional media (magazines, television, etc.) formats have played an important part in promoting an idealized female body; the emergence and development of the internet, then, have disseminated these notions, and the discussions around them, even further afield via social media. Since Chinese women have become increasingly involved in beautification practices, several trends have developed and attracted attention. Moreover, with the massive use of the internet, these have become more visible and widespread. For instance in March 2016 the so-called “A4 waist challenge” amazed internet users. First reported by China’s *People’s Daily*, the news was then recast on the websites of well-known international newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Telegraph*. The challenge started on Weibo, where young women had been posting pictures of themselves covering vertically their waist with an A4 sheet of paper to show that the width of their waist corresponded to that of the A4 sheet — only 21 centimeters. This proves that thinness is one key aspect of Chinese beauty standards. The *New York Times* online reported:

The tiny waist has a long tradition in China, going back at least to King Ling of Chu, who ruled from 540 to 529 B.C. Many in China know the passage from the Book of Han, the history of the Western Han dynasty: “The King of Chu loved a narrow waist. Many people at court starved to death.” As noted in Mozi, the text compiled by followers of the philosopher Mozi: “So his ministers ate only one meal a day, and only fastened their belts after taking a breath. They were only able to stand up by holding onto a wall.” (Tatlow 2016)

Although thousands of years have passed since the times of Mozi and the King of Chu, this quote serves to reveal that some beauty standards that are popular nowadays have in fact ancient roots in a particular culture — even if they were not continuously in vogue over the centuries. In the last three years, many pictures related to other quite particular beauty challenges have filled Chinese social-media networks: the “belly button challenge,” where girls tried reaching their belly button turning their arm behind their back to show their thin figure; the “iPhone 6 knee

challenge,” where an iPhone 6 was put horizontally on the knees and covered both knees to show, again, that they were thin (Chen 2015; Qin 2016). As expected, these trends also triggered severe criticism on social media, because of their dangerous promotion of unrealistic bodily expectations (Westcott and Ge 2016).

In addition, as mentioned earlier, internet celebrities make significant use of the media to promote beauty treatments and fashion, becoming what is nowadays called “influencers.” According to Freberg et al., social-media influencers “represent a new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media” (2011: 90). In this sense, social media is contributing to the modification and spread of beauty ideals, ones that — given modern high-speed communication technologies — exert and are subject to influence more quickly than ever.

Conclusion

This Research Note has discussed female beauty ideals in China, in order to understand the importance of bodily images in the construction of individuals. There is, of course, much more to explore and worthy of discussion when it comes to the topic of beauty ideals in China, starting from the aspects discussed here: the relationship between social class and given beauty aspirations; the evolution of new such notions since the reform era; and, the role of the media in changing and popularizing beauty trends. Related research stretches from the techniques of aesthetic surgery to gender inequality in the workplace, covering a wide range of topics that moreover involve a number of different disciplines — including Medicine, Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, and Gender, Cultural, as well as Media Studies. Each nuance deserves to be further analyzed, for it may lead to greater comprehension of the development of all aspects of Chinese society. In particular, it would be interesting to see further research on the use and understanding of cosmetic surgery among Chinese women, and in the development of significant trends, specifically in connection to the female role within the family sphere.

Future research should also deal with cosmetic surgery among men, because it is not to be overlooked that they also pursue beauty too — as well as analyze the evolution of the notion of masculinity in contemporary China. Another research path would be to look at the beauty practices and ideals of Chinese ethnic minorities, in comparison to those promoted by the Han majority, in order to explore the diversification of cultural influences among the fifty-six ethnic groups officially recognized by the People’s Republic of China. Last, greater focus on the countryside is needed, since most studies on related topics (including mine) concentrate only on the urban, providing us with results valid only for one part, but not the whole, of Chinese society.

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