



PolyU Design

PhD

THESIS SERIES

LEUNG YUET MEI SHARON

The Image of Beauty - Representations of Female Beauty:
With Reference to Contemporary Women's Magazines in
Hong Kong

2000

PhD

1999–2020 THESIS SHOWCASE

This research provides a critique of female beauty images as portrayed in contemporary women's magazines in Hong Kong. The research identifies the characteristics of female beauty as represented in women's magazines in Hong Kong. It investigates factors affecting them by testing the applicability of Western cultural theories whilst establishing a theoretical framework pertinent to the cultural context of Hong Kong. The research explores the interaction between images of beauty and the actual situation of Hong Kong women. A comparative approach is adopted for integrating different theories and concepts, within which 'images of female beauty' are treated as the problem, women's magazines, the case, and the paradigm of 'beauty', the central topic of study. The study results construct a theoretical framework relevant to Hong Kong, which establishes systematic theories on traditional Chinese female beauty. The thesis also makes observations on the new eclectic images of female beauty emerging in Hong Kong, which reflect the unique cultural representations as well as the new attributes embodied in the looks of everyday women.

Copyright ©

School of Design,
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
PhD 2020.

Original copy: https://julac.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=HKPU_I251204585310003411&vid=HKPU&search_scope=All&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US&context=L

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]

THE IMAGE OF BEAUTY
Representations of Female Beauty: with reference to contemporary
women's magazines in Hong Kong

submitted by

Leung Yuet Mei, Sharon

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in October 2000

UMI Number: 3023384

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3023384

Copyright 2001 by Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company.
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Abstract

This research provides a critique of images of female beauty as portrayed in contemporary women's magazines in Hong Kong. The research *identifies* the characteristics of female beauty as represented in women's magazines in Hong Kong and investigates factors affecting them by *testing* the applicability of Western cultural theories, whilst *establishing* a theoretical framework significant to the cultural context of Hong Kong. At a deeper level, the research explores the interaction between images of beauty and the actual situation of Hong Kong women.

The research is based primarily on theory. Empirical information from interviews, quantitative data, and theories from literature are analysed qualitatively. The analysis is conducted using a reflective approach. Various methods including those that are empirical, historical, semiological, theoretical are used, as well as case studies. The research also refers to inter-disciplinary theories of sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, aesthetics and gender studies on the images of female beauty in Hong Kong. A comparative approach is adopted for integrating different theories and concepts. In this research, 'images of female beauty' are treated as the problem, women's magazines, the case, and the paradigm of 'beauty', the central topic of study. There are two main subjects of analysis: 1) the images themselves; 2) theoretical literature relating to

the images including the literature on: a) traditional female beauty and aesthetics (both Western and Chinese); b) representations of women in media; c) female appearance and identity; d) female beauty and femininity; e) female images and power; f) theories of postcolonialism, post-feminism, postmodernism, and Hong Kong cultural studies.

The literature reviewed fall into three main categories:

- 1) **traditional Western theories on women or beauty:** e.g. theories of Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Kant, Burke, Sartre, Karl and Marx;
- 2) **traditional Chinese theories on women or beauty:** e.g. *A.* philosophies of Yin Yang, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism; *B.* images relating to female charm, beauty and sex in classical Chinese literature and arts;
- 3) **More recent theories on women or beauty:** *A.* Women and beauty: e.g. Efrat Tseelon, Susan Brownmiller, Nany Whittier, Elizabeth Grosz, Francette Pacteau, Wendy Chapkis, Naomi Wolf, Myra Macdonald and Tania Modleski; *B.* Female beauty in cultural studies: e.g. John Berger, Judith Williamson, Ellen McCracken, Janice Winship, Daniel Miller, Pasi Falk, John Fiske, Mike Featherstone, Jean Baudrillard, John Mackenzie, and Bryan Turner; *C.* Critiques on women and beauty in the context of Hong Kong and China: e.g. of Roland Barthes, Lin Yutang, Dorothy Ko, Veronica Pearson, Rose Wu, Choi Po Kam, and P K Leung.

'Images of female beauty in Hong Kong' is not a topic which has yet been subject to thorough academic investigation. The scarcity of relevant theory within the local context necessitates an initial focus on Western theories of beauty. The thesis analyzes and challenges this material by locating it in the Hong Kong context. In doing so it positions the argument within the context of cultural studies, particularly the work on aesthetics, post-colonialism and post-modernity, gender studies, cultural representation and identity. **The main result is the construction of a new theoretical framework that is relevant to Hong Kong, besides establishing systematic theories on traditional Chinese female beauty.** The thesis also makes observations on the new eclectic images of female beauty emerging in Hong Kong, which reflect the new cultural representations as well as the new attributes embodied in the looks of everyday women.

Acknowledgements

I would like to seize this chance to thank my supervisor, Dr Hazel Clark, for her perseverance and continuous support throughout the period of my PhD study. I am also grateful to Professor John Minford for his valuable advice on my English writing and Romanization, and Clive Dilnot for his helpful comments on my proposal. Of course, this thesis would not have been possible without my being awarded the studentship by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, which pampered me with a decent studying period of books and academic trips.

Above all, I would like to thank my family wholeheartedly, without whom my thesis could not have been realized – my parents, for their endless patience; my husband Eric, for his indispensable emotional support; and Nicholas, my son, for his accompany and cheers which helped me to pull through all the researcher's blues.

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1 - 44
CHAPTER ONE	
THE <i>IDEALS</i> OF BEAUTY.....	45 - 75
CHAPTER TWO	
THE <i>NATURE</i> OF BEAUTY.....	76 - 118
CHAPTER THREE	
THE <i>CULTURE</i> OF BEAUTY.....	119 - 167
CHAPTER FOUR	
THE <i>TYPES</i> OF BEAUTY.....	168- 199
CHAPTER FIVE	
THE <i>PRESENTATION</i> OF BEAUTY.....	200 - 228
CHAPTER SIX	
THE <i>POWER</i> OF BEAUTY.....	229 - 257
CHAPTER SEVEN	
THE <i>MANAGEMENT</i> OF BEAUTY.....	258 - 318
CONCLUSION.....	319 - 332
BIBLIOGRAPHY	
APPENDICES	
FIGURES	

INTRODUCTION

This thesis provides a critique on images of female beauty with particular reference to their portrayal in contemporary women's magazines in Hong Kong. The configuration of the discourse entails investigation into three main areas within the context of contemporary Hong Kong: women, beauty, and images. 'Beauty' is the central topic of study, and women's magazines are treated as the vehicle of the research. The primary concern is the notion of beauty as aesthetics (philosophical issue), and how it refers to women (gender issue) and its representations (cultural issue). By exploring the images of female beauty as deployed in women's magazines and their pertinent contexts, the research aims at testing the validity of Western theories of beauty, while establishing a theoretical framework relevant to Hong Kong.

Problems - Motives of Research

The motives of this research are generated by a series of questions pertinent to the images of female beauty in Hong Kong. They are:

1. Female beauty and images: what are the meaning, characteristics and function of 'images' of female beauty in contemporary society?

2. Female beauty and identity: are human relationships appearance-based? Does appearance contribute to female identity and value?
3. Female beauty and culture: can female beauty be construed as cultural signs? Is it contextual, power related, and free-floating?
4. Female beauty and nature: is female beauty inborn? Is female beauty stigmatized, self-refining, and self-completing?
5. Female beauty and gender: is perception of female beauty influenced by gender distinctions? What is the relationship between images of female beauty and femininity? Is femininity constructed?
6. Female beauty in Hong Kong: what are the images of female beauty within the context of Hong Kong, as illustrated in contemporary local women's magazines, and how are they constructed?

These questions reach areas beyond the images of female beauty themselves. They raise related issues of female identity, gender politics, aesthetics of female appearance and so forth. Moreover, these questions concern not only images of female beauty in general but in Hong Kong in particular. These issues, however, are all subsumed under the paradigm of aesthetics which is the major concern of the research.

Objectives

The aims of the research are to investigate what sort of female beauty is articulated in women's magazines in Hong Kong through the deployment of visual images, and to examine how the images of beauty can be correlated to the particular culture of beauty in Hong Kong. The objectives of the research are fivefold:

1. Decode the images of female beauty presented in women's magazines and identify their characteristics, then investigate and compare the factors affecting and giving rise to these characteristics.
2. Echo the above findings by exploring the nature and culture of female beauty as seen in the everyday life of contemporary Hong Kong.
3. Trace the change of taste and ideology of female beauty from a historical perspective, with reference to Chinese tradition and to influences from other cultures, for deeper and broader contextual insight.
4. Test the applicability of Western theories in construing the images of female beauty in the local context.
5. Ultimately seek to establish a new theoretical framework relevant to Hong Kong and hypothesize about future trends of female beauty and their representations in Hong Kong.

There are two main subjects of analysis: 1) the images themselves, 2) theoretical literature related to the images, including literature on: a) traditional female beauty

and aesthetics (both Western and Chinese), b) representations of women in media, c) female appearance and identity, d) female beauty and femininity, e) female images and power, f) theories of postcolonialism, post-feminism, postmodernism and Hong Kong culture.

Methodology

The most fundamental and initial step for the research is a reconsideration of existing methodologies in the study of images of female beauty. Representations of female beauty, a topic naturally posited within the scope of cultural studies, can be studied with one of three main approaches, according to their adoption in the Hong Kong academic field in the recent past. These approaches, according to Ng Chun Hung, are divergent, spanning the disciplines of anthropology and other social science disciplines, and conducting focused case studies especially of popular culture'. The investigation of female beauty can lead to a historical study of Hong Kong beauty culture associated with Chinese kinship, traditions, and Western influence; or a quantitative and empirical study of images of women and beauty using questionnaires and interviews; or case studies of specific cultural representations of female beauty in contemporary Hong Kong. These approaches can make certain contributions from different perspectives, but nevertheless remain flimsy and marginal due to their disparate nature. In view of this, Ng called for a unified

¹ Ng Chun Hung, 'New Directions in Cultural Studies', in *Cultural and Society in Hong Kong*.

research agenda for cultural studies, that is, an establishment of a range of research strategies combining methods of various disciplines, besides the setting up of a common subject of study.

What Ng proposed, in my opinion, is in fact a problem-based study method, stressing the essential problem that, in his words, is 'Hong Kong's development experience'². His emphasis on the re-examination of Hong Kong people's experience, especially popular culture in the contemporary context, is indeed well grounded. Cultural criticism in Hong Kong reveals a tendency to react against anything old, in terms of theories and methodologies. It is not because striving for originality is a natural renewal process of academic research in general, but because we have been following the changing pattern of research and theoretical concepts in the West in recent decades. The emphasis of social science on the transition of Hong Kong society during the era of industrialization and modernization in the seventies, was a reaction against the anthropological approach of analysis particularly of the postwar history of Hong Kong. Similarly, the shift in interest to the study of mass culture in cultural studies in the 1980s reflected Hong Kong's emergence as one of the most interesting examples of consumer society to Western academic study. The truth is that local academic research, cultural studies in particular, was relatively under-developed two decades ago. That was the time most cultural research adopted the free and convenient Western approaches imported by scholars and intellectuals who had studied overseas. In the local context, these approaches represented radical

Elizabeth Sinn (ed.), *The University of Hong Kong*, 1995, p. 1-22.

directions - the meaning of newness stems less from a realization of the change of local experience than from a proposition of revolutionary methods and theory with relation to those already existing in Hong Kong. Hence the whole point is to try to reassert the certain 'isms' of certain schools, aiming to apply rather than test the applicability of the foreign theories. The research on local women's magazines by Stephen Sze done in 1991 can be seen as a work of this kind. Focusing on female consumption, the research almost completely borrowed the methodologies and theories of Ellen McCracken's *Decoding Women's Magazine*. This trend of study is anything but constructive, not merely because it gives rise to incorrect and misleading interpretations, but, more importantly, because it reduces research space, thus suffocating local researchers in pursuit of original and relevant theories and methods.

The concepts and structure of the methodology of this research are grounded in the above consideration. In addition, it serves as an impetus for my choosing 'female beauty' as a topic of cultural research. Adopting an inter-disciplinary approach comprising theories of philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology, linguistics and gender studies, I see 'images of female beauty' as a problem and 'representations of women in women's magazines' as a case. The intent, however, is not necessarily for a unified agenda but a more reflective, contextual method of research starting from a phenomenon instead of an idea. The result is not a linear but a spiral discussion as well as argument with the integration and juxtapositions of

² Ibid., p.18.

theories from diversified sources. In analyzing the image of Oriental female beauty in the chapter 'The Types of Beauty', for instance, I deliberately bring forward and compare theories of different areas, including the aesthetic theories of John Berger, the semiotic theories of Roland Barthes, the gender theories of Judith Williamson, and the political and economical theories of Marx. In many other circumstances, I contrast Chinese theories with those of the West, like the parallel discussion of traditional Chinese philosophy with pre-modern Western philosophy in 'The Culture of Beauty'. All these seek to provide a more comprehensive, all-round picture of the issue, and open it up to broader rather than preconceived dialogues.

In spite of this, I believe, a certain degree of control should be exercised in order to achieve a more programmed, and a less perplexing methodology. The articulation of concepts is attained by strategies of juxtaposing oppositional objects and theories, making comparisons and contrasts, and synthesizing. Dichotomy is established as a means but not the aim and end product of study. Here I find a resonant opinion in Leung Ping Kwan:

To recognize cultural identity of Hong Kong art, we cannot ignore the meanings of concepts of dichotomies, such as tradition and modern, East and West, local and expatriate, high art and low art, in the real situation of Hong Kong. Nonetheless, we also need to see their complexity and changes by transgressing beyond the simplified system of dichotomy.³

³ Leung Ping Kwan, 'Considering Hong Kong Cultural Identity in between High and Low Art' (in Chinese), in *Culture and Society in Hong Kong*, p.117.

To adopt a system of dichotomy, one also has to be conscious of its variations, diversification and multiplicity. In other words, the complexity of the real situation should not be viewed through a simplified, singular system of dichotomy. The structure of my methodology is both inductive and deductive – inductive in a sense that all standpoints and persuasions could be subsumed under the dual system of contradictions or conglomerations, and deductive by means of translating and explaining particular facts with general laws. This structure can enforce a controlled environment for the reflective approach, which would otherwise be lacking focus and direction. This can be a way of actualizing the unification of the agenda in the research of female beauty.

In respect of the data put in this comparative system, I make frequent correspondence between traditional Chinese values and the contemporary ideologies of Hong Kong. This thesis is formulated on the presupposition that there are inseparable connections between the traditional and the contemporary. From this aspect I am dubious of Ng's suggestion that the re-examination of Hong Kong's development experience alone brings about a reflective and open-minded methodology. Ng's attack of the prevalent approaches, especially that of anthropology relating Chinese tradition to modern Hong Kong society, can be seen as another example of reaction towards the old approaches. Not only is Ng's latest agenda derived from the new attitude of sociological research in the West, but he also falls in the same trap of neglecting the particularities of the local condition for the sake of originality. Discourse on the 'experience of Hong Kong development'

should include the association with traditional Chinese influence, alongside the ideas of modernization, Westernization and globalization, since they together render the culture in Hong Kong unique. Man Kit Wah has commented on the relationship between traditions and the modern:

Nobody can leave aside his/her past and construct his/her present and future. All the time we look back on or re-estimate the past, so as to speculate upon our future. History is a continuum from tradition to modern, no matter how different the ways of the past, the present and the future⁴ may be.

The point is Chinese traditions (and Western traditions) are treated as background rather than factors giving rise to the Hong Kong situation. No subject or issue exists in a temporal vacuum without historical contexts. Even though Hong Kong has evolved into something totally differently from old Chinese society, the subtle affiliation between the two cultures is worth studying. It should not be mistaken that Hong Kong is regarded as a relic of tradition or colonialism in a superficial sense. Rather, the method indicates my recognition of the fact that new theories as well as problems are always constructed on the old. My reference to traditional thoughts only demonstrates my overriding concern with how things change instead of what things are – for a better comprehension of their complexity – although obviously it is more of a comparative than a historical approach.

⁴Man Kit Wah, *Jutao Chuan tung yu tan tai Chung-kuo Ma-ko-siu mei hsueh*

For comparison purposes, I frequently adopt the terms 'Western' and 'Chinese' in this thesis. I feel it is necessary to clarify them here. Certainly 'the West' in its broadest sense covers a range of countries with diverse cultures. However, in this thesis, for most of the time at least, 'Western' refers to 'the European and the American' – the white communities which have made the most impact on Hong Kong culture among all 'Western countries'. On the other hand, the meaning of term 'Chinese' is more obvious. Chinese generally means Chinese people or culture in mainland China, Taiwan or Hong Kong. In certain areas I use the 'East/West' division to replace the 'Chinese/Occidental' dichotomy, just for the sake of ease of understanding. As 'East/West' has been a comprehensive term in academic thinking, this generalization, I believe, can help articulate the relevant ideas by highlighting the main point of cultural discrepancy.

Reconsidering the prevalent methodologies leads to my rethinking of the current theories in cultural studies of Hong Kong. Among these are theories of semiotics which have been dominant in the analysis of cultural images in Hong Kong since the eighties. As semiotics is a branch of knowledge originating from linguistics, it poses a basic problem to the understanding of images of female beauty, especially of female beauty in the Chinese tradition. Semiotics relies on the system of signification, analogous to the formulation of languages, which is ineffective, in my point of view, for estimating the non-linguistic, experiential images of traditional Chinese beauty. Since I observe that there are certain linkages between beauty

(Traditional Confucianism and 'Naturalism and Humanism' of Marxist Aesthetics in

representations in Hong Kong and the experiential tradition of Chinese aesthetics, the validity of semiological interpretation must be subjected to questions.

This, nonetheless, does not imply that the adoption of semiotics is an absolute fallacy in the local context. Since the ideals and tastes of female beauty are immensely affected by the West, notably by the Occidental in contemporary Hong Kong, it seems reasonable to tackle it with Western theories. This is especially true given the contemporary stress on the 'cultural images' of female beauty, which fosters the development of the 'beauty of signs' stressing coding and communication in visual and external female beauty. The standards of female beauty, like fitness and whiteness, function as preset group of signs whose values and meanings are freely determined by the paramount ideologies. A semiological approach can make sense of the analysis of the images of Hong Kong women whose standards of beauty are typically influenced by the West, both in a narrow sense of beauty ideals and in a broader sense of evidential, sign-related beauty. These Western standards used to be the mainstream. It was only recently that alternative female images started to gain popularity. For the study of everyday Hong Kong women whose beauty, I will argue, is even more allied to the experiential aesthetic taste of Chinese tradition, the method of identification of evidence so essential to semiotics is further doomed to be unsuccessful.

Closely associated with methodologies and theories are the old conceptions

Contemporary China). Doctoral thesis in Chinese, 1990, p.436. The quotation is translated by me.

which I will attempt to challenge. The most prominent one is the belief that Occidental beauty is a dominant trend in Hong Kong, both in women's magazines and everyday life. Western theories of female beauty focus on the globalization of images and tend to speculate on the impact of the West on the East, rather than vice versa. The work of Janice Winship which attacks the globalization of white beauty in women's magazines, and Judith Williamson which exposes the Occidental ideology of 'otherness' through decoding advertisements, are two cases in point. They presume Westernization is a general trend of female beauty in contemporary Hong Kong both in terms of taste and of phenomenon. This is quite different from the truth. The research provides evidence that the factors giving rise to these images are not one-sided. There is also substantial interchange of cultural elements within the Asian countries, such as the influence of Japanese beauty, in addition to the intimate connection with mainland Chinese culture. On top of that, there is a gradual trend to localize Western standards of beauty, as exemplified by the increased representations of local beauty in foreign-origin women's magazines. The problem at stake is that the old concepts hypothesize women's images on the basis of influences, and do not regard 'Hong Kong female beauty' as a particular topic of study, so that many detailed and subsidiary issues have been overlooked. This thesis argues against this preconception by scrutinizing the changing pattern of female beauty within contemporary Hong Kong, while, at the same time, giving due respect to its interrelation with various shaping forces.

The centrifugal study of contexts is balanced by the centripetal examination

of cases. Women's magazines are selected as a case for studying the culture of contemporary female beauty representations. W. Eberhard, a Western scholar who contributed to the study of Chinese female beauty, has commented on the cogency of book illustrations in the manifestation of female beauty.

One way to studying the present-day popular attitude towards beauty is to study book illustrations rather than movies or modern theater plays. ...Book illustrations seem to be a more realistic reflection of popular ideals, especially the illustrations which cannot be regarded as artistic.¹

My choice of women's magazines as vehicle of study is based on three reasons. Firstly, as noted by Eberhard, contemporary women's magazines are composed largely of illustrations, nowadays chiefly photographs, which can effectively and realistically reflect and influence the prevalent taste of beauty. Secondly, women's magazines play an increasingly dominant role in cultural representations of female beauty, as evidenced by the boom of the industry in contemporary Hong Kong. Thirdly, women's magazines provide accessible, solid material for textual analysis and are also useful for the analysis of 'female images' which is essential for the research.

However, the methodology of this research has been slightly altered by

¹ Eberhard, W., 'What is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman?', in *Moral and Social Values of the Chinese: Collected Essays*, Taipei: Chengwan, 1971, p.295-296.

shifting the focus from 'femaleness' suggested in my initial thesis proposal, to the paradigm of 'beauty'. As a result, aesthetic theories and cultural studies of images are extremely significant points of reference in my thesis. They are also important for balancing out other theories on beauty. This refocus of my research is a result of the desire to conduct a more focussed, in-depth and thorough study of 'Hong Kong female beauty', after having realized that related theories are deficient in the local academic field. I also want to take this chance to respond to the increasing emphasis on visual female beauty, seen both in the female images in the media and the actual appearance of women. Hence this thesis combines the critique of the visual and the textual from a cultural rather than a political point of view.

Nevertheless, I do not dismiss some of the important contemporary feminist theories. It is unrealistic to think about female beauty without considering women's issues. Hence certain influential feminist theories are used, in particular to help analyse certain texts and images. These include Ellen McCracken's theories of 'distorting and misleading title (p.93) and 'stereotypes'; Judith Williamson's 'self and otherness' (p.102); Efron Tseelon's 'Madonna and Whore' (p.104) and 'fashion and femininity'(p.112); Myra Macdonald's 'voyeurism' (p.133). These theories are applied critically rather than unquestioningly in the Hong Kong context, and some of them are found to be invalid. For instance, Wolf and MaCracken treat contemporary women's magazines as a conspiracy, because of their exploitation of the 'lingua franca' situation. I refute this by demonstrating that in Hong Kong, women's magazines are produced by small editorial teams whose understanding and

interest in politics are rather limited. Therefore I conclude that this kind of 'all-pleasing policy', if it happens in women's magazines in Hong Kong, is a result of contingency rather than conspiracy.

Current, especially feminist, criticism and research tend to attribute the prominence of female beauty in the definition of femininity to certain ideologies and powers, while ignoring the investigation of the subject itself. However these ideologies should be observed from the position of cultural phenomena and not the other way round. Furthermore, I believe that the shaping of cultural representations should not be taken as the result of a single unchanged ideology but should involve more complicated interaction and modification among different forces. On the other hand, the subject matter, images of female beauty, should not be taken purely as 'vessels' or consequences of ideologies. In the contemporary context, images of beauty create ideologies as the images themselves were created. However the two situations are not necessarily analogous to each other. I refer to the particular Chinese concept of 'nature' and show how it evolves and is transformed under the various influences of realistic pursuance. This, and other sections in the thesis on female power, focus on power in relation to female representation. In principle, to undertake research into femaleness would entail consideration of broader issues of women's or feminist studies, which would deviate from the specific objectives of this research.

Literature Review

The literature review provides insight both on images of female beauty and on pertinent theories. This comes from books, periodicals, journals, newspapers, previous research projects, and from reader survey reports on women's magazines. The literature comprises sources from the East and the West, from the traditional and the contemporary.

The first group of literature comprises **traditional Chinese theories on women or beauty**. The most typical are **Confucian theories** which make frequent statements on traditional concepts of women and their role in Chinese society. The work of Mencius is also remarkable in this aspect. Another important theoretical school is **Taoism**, which has contributed much to the ideas of female beauty, femininity, and sexology. The most significant reading material of female beauty and sexology from the perspective of Tao is *Su Nu Jing* 素女經 (*The Book of the Plain Girl*). Taoism, together with the philosophy of 'I' (changes), are treated as the primary sources on traditional Chinese aesthetics, whose tastes and characteristics are based on the concept of changes. Yin-yang, a pertinent school of theories of Taoism, supplies information on the ancient Chinese concepts of femininity and femaleness. Other theories come from classical Chinese writings on female beauty, the most useful of which is *Xiangyan Congshu* 香艷叢書 (*A Collection of Chinese Eroticism*) of Qing dynasty, which document in detail the traditional ideals of female beauty.

Apart from mentioning typical figures from classical literature including novels and poems, I also refer directly to traditional criticisms of Chinese female beauty. The work of Li Yu provides one of my most important texts for study, besides *Su Nu* and *Xiangyan*. Li Yu 李漁 was a famous playwright for Chinese opera in the seventeenth century. In addition to drama, he also wrote many novels and essays. His work, *Xianqing Ou Ji* 閑情偶寄, are a collection of essays on his attitude and philosophy towards life and the arts. One of the sections, 'On Voice and Appearance', is a valuable source on the traditional Chinese concepts of female beauty. This is largely because traditional texts specifically on female beauty are limited. What makes Li's work outstanding, however, is that the discussion is made from the perspective of beauty, rather than from erotic customs as is usually the case with other sources on female beauty. This essay should be seen as a philosophical discourse on aesthetics as well as an account of female beauty. It is certainly an exception text on the topic of female beauty. The dialectical articulation of this essay provides good material for comparison with Western aesthetic theories. Moreover, according to Wang Qiang's 王強 research *Li Yu Yan Jiu* 李漁研究, underlying Li's work are a thousand years of Confucian tradition and citizen ideology which emerged towards the end of the Ming dynasty. He was described as a prestigious figure of Chinese popular culture, whose work reveals certain traces of modern concepts⁶. The selected text is, therefore, very meaningful to this research which primarily concerns female beauty in popular culture.

⁶ Wang Qiang, *Li Yu Yan Jiu*, Jier Jiang Classical Literature Publication, 1995, p.1.

In analyzing Li's theories, however, I did not refer directly to Xianqing but Wolfram Eberhard's article 'What Is Beautiful about a Chinese Woman?' I believe that this secondary source would be more helpful than the original for a number of reasons. First, Li's theories in Eberhard's work take the form of quotations, with only a few sequences reorganized. Since these quotations predominate, Eberhard's work is almost an English version of *Xianqing*, preserving effectively the concepts of the Chinese text. Having already studied the original text, I feel the accurate and clarified translations of 'What Is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman' more useful and convenient for my research. Second, studies on Li Yu are more important and prominent overseas than in China. The first *Collected Works of Li Yu* was edited by a German scholar⁷. The concrete experiences of Western researchers would bring additional insight into Li's concepts. It is also worthwhile to see how Westerners interpret Chinese theories on female beauty, and how the questions and frustrations that arise illuminate various cultural discrepancies. This East-West perspective underpins the third reason for using the reference. Eberhard is a German anthropologist who spent over fifty years studying Chinese language and culture. Hence, his knowledge of the 'Western versus Chinese' situation is substantial. His special devotion to the study of Chinese fairy tales, folk tales, festivals, motion pictures, symbols and Cantonese ballads, provide precious information on Chinese popular cultures of both the pre-modern and modern period. Eberhard is also one of a few Western scholars who understands the Chinese in such depth that he is able to examine how they think. In his criticism of Chinese portraits in 'What Is Beautiful in

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.2.

a Chinese Woman?³, for instance, he highlights the humanist thinking (clear division between arts and reality) and disinterest of physical appearance of the Chinese. These two points serve as the foundation on which some of the basic concepts of this thesis are built.

The second group of traditional theories are **Western theories on women or beauty**. This group dates back to theories of **Plato**, who started the tradition of idealism in Western aesthetics. His theories, especially of the 'three levels of beauty', can be regarded as the first influential theories on the idea of 'images'. The humanist **Aristotle**, on the other hand, was the founder of the artistic theory of naturalism in the West, and set the trend of visualization in Western aesthetic tradition. Other theories used include **Jean-Paul Sartre's** theory on the realization of images and aesthetic feeling, and **Marx** on socialist aesthetics, commodification of images and political economy.

Another main reference from Western aesthetics comes from **Immanuel Kant**, in his *The Critique of Judgment*. The most representative of his concept of beauty comes from his theories of taste, the beautiful and the sublime. Although he is not specifically interested in female beauty, his theories serve as useful tools for comparison with Chinese theories of beauty. In chapter two of this thesis, I make a great deal of reference to *Judgment*, comparing the theories to those of *Xianqing Ou Ji*. This comparison is based on my discovery of a subtle linkage between Li's and

³ A similar discussion also takes place in another of his works, *Life and Thought of Ordinary*

Kant's aesthetics, by virtue of their relation to Neo-Confucianism. The development of Neo-Confucianism in the Ming and Qing Dynasties were divided into two stages, 'li xue' 理學 (philosophy of the principle) and 'xin xue' 心學 (philosophy of the mind), respectively. Chinese historian Luo Xianglin 羅香林 in *Zhongguo Minzu Shi* (*The History of Chinese Ethnology*) mentioned that the influence of Neo-Confucianism was so strong in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that Western philosophers like Kant were inspired by it. Kant was mainly influenced by the 'rationalism' of the philosophy⁹. Li Yu, on the other hand, was obviously connected with the stream of 'xin xue' of Neo-Confucianism.¹⁰ Both supported the theories of idealism. Nevertheless, their philosophies represent interesting synthesis and variations between philosophies of the Chinese and the West. I also found that Kant's theories of beauty, especially of the sublime, bear distinctive analogies to the Chinese 'mei' 媚 (charm) addressed by Li. Although 'mei' is particularly female in the Chinese context, it shares certain common characteristics with 'the sublime'. This leads to the development of new theories in this thesis.

Recent theories on women or beauty belong to the third group of literature. This is the largest group and is divided into three categories. The first category concerns 'women and beauty', and consists of some of the most prevalent feminist critiques in the West. These include discourse on female beauty with relation to femininity by Efrat Tseelon and Susan Brownmiller. These can be

Chinese, Berkeley: University of California, 1982, p.161.

⁹ Luo Xianglin, *Zhongguo Minzu Shi* 中國民族史 (The History of Chinese Ethnology), p.68. .

¹⁰ Wang Qiang, for example, stated that Li straightly inherited the 'xin xue' of Wang Yang Ming

grouped together with the renowned criticism on contemporary images of female beauty by Naomi Wolf and Wendy Chapkis, Myra Macdonald and Tania Modleski adopt more moderate views on representations of women and the media. In respect of female appearance, Kathy Peiss concentrates on connecting cosmetics to women's identity whereas Celia Lury aims to examine the process of production and consumption of female beauty. Francette Pacteau, however, is more interested in the investigation of the staging of aesthetic emotion from psychoanalytic study, and Arthur Marwick, in the discussion of Western beauty from a historical perspective. Adopting a political point of view, Elizabeth Grosz challenges the male-based theory of the body and mind by probing the corporality of the female body, and Lee Wright adopts a post-feminist position in her interpretation of the symbol of female beauty and sexuality—the stiletto heel.

The second category of recent theory concerns female beauty pertaining to cultural studies. This includes the previous critiques of women's magazines. Among them, the most well-known are works by Ellen McCracken and Janice Winship, who both adopting a negative view towards contemporary Western women's magazines. Leslie W. Rabine, on the other hand, throws doubt on this opinion by articulating the double meaning of female bodies in fashion magazines. Other studies on female beauty, femininity and fashion consist of theories posed by Jennifer Craik and Elizabeth Wilson, with the latter taking a radical yet positive view on female fashion. In discussing images of female beauty, it is inevitable to

三陽明 (A great master of Neo-Confucianism), in *Li Yu Yan Yin*, p.6 .

mention **John Berger** and his theory of the 'male gaze'. His work, *Ways of Seeing*, which studies the portrayal of women throughout Western art history, has become a classic of this position. Following the concept of seeing, **Lynda Nead** explores the female nude in terms of aesthetics and sexuality. **Judith Williamson** is another notable researcher contributing to the theories of femininity and colonization. **John Mackenzie** has written extensively on Orientalism, and **Bryan Turner**, on Globalism. Theories on consumption, popular culture and postmodernism relating to female beauty are developed by **Daniel Miller**, **Pasi Falk**, **Mike Featherstone** and **John Fiske**.

The third and last category of recent theory comes from critiques on women and beauty in the context of Hong Kong and China. In this category, I examine firstly contemporary theories on Chinese female beauty, including the **Dorothy Ko's** aesthetic conception of foot-binding, **Elisabeth Croll's** changing identities of Chinese women, and feminist thought in ancient China by **Liu Yutang 林語堂**. The theories of Neo-Confucianism are crucial in the philosophical analysis of Chinese thinking. I rely tremendously on them to trace the tradition and development of Chinese values. Here I adopt theories of different scholars, among whom the most significant is **Chan Wing Tsit**. Chan is a renowned and experienced scholar both in Hong Kong and overseas, whose research has provided considerable insight into the tradition of Chinese philosophy. As a member of the board of editor of *Philosophy East and West*, one of Chan's areas of expertise is East-West philosophies, which makes his viewpoints exceptionally important to this thesis.

Another contemporary Western scholar who has written on Chinese culture is Roland Barthes, noted for his idea of the maternity of Chinese women and culture, in *Alors La Chine?*. I was also impressed by his analysis of female beauty using semiology, which forms a basis for some of my arguments on East/West aesthetics. No doubt the study of theories within the Hong Kong context is vital to the research. In this area I refer to the following theories: gender inequality in Hong Kong by Veronica Pearson; Hong Kong feminist movement by Rose Wu, Choi Po Kam and the Association for the Advancement of Feminism; influence of industrialization on local women and aesthetics of contemporary Hong Kong culture by Leung Ping Kwan; and consumption and women's magazines by Stephen Sze.

'Cultural studies' is a relatively new academic area in Hong Kong. Cultural studies of female beauty in contemporary Hong Kong from the perspective of aesthetics barely exist. To date, most of the local research on female images have been text-based. For critiques of the visual, I had to refer to many 'non-Hong Kong' theories on women and beauty, mostly from the West. For 'women' and 'beauty', however, I studied the works of both Western and traditional Chinese scholars. In comparison there is a lack of contemporary material from mainland China and Taiwan.

Procedure of Image Research

1. Scope

a. Cultural representation - women's magazines: three titles were chosen out of roughly 20 titles of women's magazines in Hong Kong due to the following particular aspects of their images. They are:

- 1) *Sisters' Pictorial* - the oldest women's magazine originating in Hong Kong, and a leader in advertisement revenue for women's magazines. It is representative of the older generation of women's magazines in Hong Kong.
- 2) *Elle* - a women's magazine owned by the subsidiary of a foreign company which was the best seller of glossy women's magazines in Hong Kong in 1995 and 1996. It is representative of foreign-origin women's magazines.
- 3) *Orient Beauty* - a local women's magazine supported partially by foreign investment. its aim is to appeal especially to Asian women. It is representative of the new generation of women's magazines.

All issues (roughly 80) of these magazines published in 1995 were examined intensively. The background and history of each individual magazine was also studied.

b. Human relationships associated with the image of beauty in:

- 1) cultural representation - publishers, editors, image-creating teams, movie stars and models.
- 2) the 'real' situation - people working in beauty entertainment and services.

2. Methods

A. *Interviews*

In-depth interviews were carried out to gather primary information from people involved in:

- a. the production of women's magazines - publishers, editors, make-up artists, stylists, photographers, graphic designers, models, movies stars and celebrities appearing in women's magazines;
- b. beauty entertainment and services - producers of beauty pageants, sales of cosmetic company, owners of beauty and fitness centres, and cosmetic surgeons.

Interviews were open-ended with only the theme decided on beforehand so that the respondents could freely express their experiences or raise important issues related to the research. For interviewees from similar fields (e.g. editors of the three magazines studied), semi-structured interviews with preset questions were adopted to gain standardized information. These planned interviews, however, were conducted with flexibility. Care was taken to maintain a balance between 'floating prompts' and 'planned prompts'. All the editors of women's magazines were asked

the same set of questions and the information obtained was clarified in form of a table (see Appendix 1)

B. *Analysis of the Texts*

- a. **Quantitative analysis** - this provides **hard data** and formulates a **structure** for the qualitative analysis. This includes sampling of women's magazines of the same period, counting the number of pages and percentage of beauty and fashion pages in each title (see Appendix 6a & 6b), and dividing the content of beauty and fashion pages into categories according to the formats used.

- b. **Qualitative analysis** - this is the major part of the analysis and contributes to the key concepts and theoretical knowledge of the research. It comes after the quantitative analysis.

Formats Used for the Beauty and Fashion Sections in Women's Magazines in Hong Kong

1. *Articles*

a. *Interviews* – stars

.. celebrities

.. designers / stylists

b. *In-depth writing on beauty / fashion* – experts' advice

– research / discovery

– history / philosophy

c. *Guidelines to beauty / fashion* – step-by-step guide to dressing up/

skin care/ make-up/ hair styling /

keeping fit.

2. *Photos*

a. *fashion stories*

b. *carwalk photos*

c. *features on beauty / fashion* – promoting nature/not promoting nature

3. *Promotion*

a. *advertorial (a combination of editorial and advertisement)* e.g., editor's recommendations.

b. *fashion and beauty products (mainly in photos)* e.g. B&F news/ notes/ ideas/

best

buys/ styles/ trends/ views/ editor's choices, etc..

c. *club news*

The qualitative analysis proceeds in **two directions**:

- a) **horizontal analysis** - to compare the same category among three women's magazines published in the same year
- b) **vertical analysis** - to compare different categories within one magazine
 - to compare the same category in one title published at different times.

The qualitative analysis makes use of empirical data from the interviews, the quantitative analysis, and theories. It focuses on two aspects: 1) images of female beauty (what are they/how they change), 2) theories of images of female beauty (post-colonialism/feminism/post-modernism theories for the cultural context of Hong Kong). The analysis will be framed within theories of diversified disciplines including aesthetics, semiotics, art history, and psychoanalysis. Only photographic texts are analysed. However, linguistic texts with vivid imagery of female beauty are also considered as supporting material.

Hypotheses

The images of beauty found in women's magazines of the 1990s illustrate a new order of aesthetic value in Hong Kong that is taking shape as the city approaches the end of the century. This is observed in the varied depiction of females in female

images. Parallel to the speedy tempo of post-modern living is the ever changing ideals of aesthetic perfection. Out of the profusion and proliferation of female images comes the fragmentation of the stabilized, the consistent, and foundational bits and pieces of which float freely, constantly entangling with and disentangling from each other. This process takes place 'when a stable order of matter enters a period of disintegration, towards total chaos, it reaches the limit of its own development, at the same time, numerous and more varied new orders arise from this chaos'¹¹. I hypothesize that women's magazines portray eclectic images of female beauty, which is reflective of a particular aesthetic eclecticism in contemporary Hong Kong. This is the 'kernel' hypothesis of the research, which contains the following three dimensions:

1. *Internationalized* Female Beauty (as opposed to *Orientalized* and *Occidentalized* female beauty)

The rising influence of foreign women's magazines on the market gives rise to the belief the female images portrayed should illustrate a Westernized concept of beauty. On the other hand, there was a craze in the 90s for the typical Chinese face¹², which was indicated by the recurring appearance of the 'Chinese idols' on the cover page of women's magazines and the launch of the magazine *Orient Beauty*. In both cases,

¹¹ Hou Hanru, 'Entropy: Chinese Artists, Western Art Institutions', in *Global Vision Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, 1994, p.79. Hou Hanru, Chinese writer, critic and curator based in Paris.

¹² A typical Chinese face is a face of the northern Chinese, who is believed a pure heir of Han. Good examples of this are faces of the pop singer Sandy Lam, movie stars Ng Seen Lin and Gong

one is lured into following a structuralist binary system, a concept of either-or, encouraged by the common notion of the cross-cultural phenomenon, 'East meets West'. This is an over-simplistic way of dealing with this specific cultural entity. A statement by Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen that 'Today there is no fashion: there are only fashions, no rules, only choices'¹³ would be more symptomatic of the anti-conformist and anti-normative culture of Hong Kong in the nineties.

The internationalization of the female image can be taken in both the collective and individual sense. Collectively it refers to the juxtaposition of various images of beauty among magazines of different origins and styles; individually it concerns the hybridization of the various images within a single issue per se. Some female images are 'internationalized', and hence, are a common feature of the images in women's magazines. One example of this is the 'white skin' phenomenon (See Chapter 4).

2. *Aestheticization of the everyday looks and everyday life (as opposed to the dream world or the reality) of women*

Women's magazines in Hong Kong 'present a master narrative about the world, an ostensibly women-centered account of reality that links the utopian to the everyday'¹⁴ The eternally enchanting images presented by women's magazines

Li.

¹³ Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen. *Channels of Desire*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1982, p.249.

¹⁴ Ellen McCracken. *Decoding Women's Magazines*, summary on cover flap.

subversively enter women's daily life in the form of simulation, described by Baudrillard as the 'aesthetic hallucination of reality'.¹⁵ By means of imitation and enhancement, the female image and its projected environment become 'aestheticized' versions of the real situation of women. This is a process of the realization of the artistic. In actuality, most women in Hong Kong step into their 'aesthetic reality' through consumption. Beauty becomes a kind of added value connected with 'a certain style of make-up' or 'a certain way of dressing' imposed on the 'real' face and body. The real situation becomes hyperreal, for the artistic becomes the real. Everyday women live their life as art, a lifestyle prevalent in the contemporary society of Hong Kong. The concept of 'nature' in traditional Chinese beauty is greatly eclipsed by the growing impact of 'cultural images' in recent decades. Female images in women's magazines reveal the process of merging and separation between the ideal and the realistic, and disclose their subtle relation with Chinese and Western cultures.

3. An ambivalent gender-related concept of beauty (as opposed to *the feminist /the chauvinist position*)

The Chinese use 'se' 色 to describe the appearance of women, which involves both the woman's looks and her sex appeal, and therefore bears a strong association with the patriarchal system. Women's magazines in Hong Kong claim that the female images they portray, however, are of new and independent women. There was even

¹⁵ Baudrillard, J. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e), p148.

an article warning about women's obsession with dieting which had led to an increasing incidence of eating disorders in Hong Kong ('Food for Fraught', *Orient Beauty*, 1994 winter, p. 24). Nevertheless, beauty pages, fashion features, and the tremendous amounts of advertisements for beauty products still affirm the significance of body management—that it is important *to be* beautiful. On the other hand, the portrayal of women by women's magazines as sociable and career-orientated persons seems to blur the line of distinction between the working sector and the domestic sector which conventionally locates women in a position of 'simply preparing and supplying drink and food'¹⁶. This ambivalent attitude maintains that a woman should be a good housewife, and have lots of sex appeal, while simultaneously pursuing her career.

In addition to the hypothesis that women's magazines in Hong Kong portray eclectic images of female beauty, this paper makes other hypotheses relating to the following distinctive images of female beauty:

1. The postmodern images - eclectic images of female beauty are particular to Hong Kong culture

The image of beauty represented by women's magazines in Hong Kong in the 1990s is characterized by their proliferation both in numbers and in composition and by the juxtaposition of these images. Besides the locally originated women's magazines

¹⁶ Mencius, *Regulating the Family*, Book III.

such as *Sisters* and *Orient Beauty*, there were *Beauty* from Taiwan and the Japanese title *Non-no*, and of course the Chinese version of Western magazines like *Elle*, *Marie Claire* and *Cosmopolitan* which occupy a significant share of the market. This hybridized and multiple images of female beauty are mainly a consequence of the cultural heterogeneity of Hong Kong, rather than simply a result of globalization. It reflects the high degree of versatility and absorbency of the cultural space of Hong Kong, which has a tendency to neither digest nor be influenced by exotic culture unreservedly, but to mold foreign culture to suit its own use. This throws light on the utilitarian side of Hong Kong culture.

2. The eclectic images of beauty will persist in the near future.

It is still uncertain whether the cultural situation of Hong Kong has and will change drastically due to the return of its sovereignty to China. I propose that new cultural representations, as evidenced by the new image(s) of female beauty, are already emerging in Hong Kong, and that these will continue to flourish in the near future. The post-1997 period is marked by further development along the lines of the mid-90s, rather than a reversion to the pre-colonial situation. This is partially asserted by the fact that the publication business in Hong Kong has, for some years, been influencing rather than being influenced by China. The editors of the women's magazines I interviewed all came to the same conclusion that 1997 would not be an influential factor on the orientation of the magazines, and things seem to be proving them right. Even if more Chinese models are employed, stylistically, the images are

still typical only of Hong Kong.

3. **The post-feminist images** - the eclectic images of female beauty are evidence of **a diversification of opinion on the beauty of Hong Kong women.**

Opinion on the beauty of Hong Kong women can be seen from two aspects: social and private. The social aspect is understood as how women's beauty is valued by society while the private aspect is how women see their own beauty. Compared to the situation of one or two decades ago, women's magazines now adopt a more diverse position of presenting women from various social classes, backgrounds and outlook. They also insist on providing women with more choices instead of limitations on femininity. Women in the reality of the 90s, consider their beauty more natural and less stereotyped than their sisters' or mothers', and even think positively of the instrumental side of being feminine and beautiful. Both these aspects are contained in the concept that feminism is not necessarily antagonistic to femininity, for it 'seems' that women have already been able to determine their images. *Nonetheless*, contemporary culture still obliges Hong Kong women to look intensively after their appearance, which, after all, favours beauty rather than ugliness.

4. **The postcolonial images** - the eclectic images of female beauty are evidence of **new cultural representations in Hong Kong**

The cultural atmosphere in Hong Kong approaching 1997 was permeated by a strong sense of home and a kind of patriotism towards the place where we live. Ample examples can be found in the media, especially in advertisements such as for *KMB* and *Hong Kong Bank*. For women's magazines, this aspect is seen through the launch of *Orient Beauty* in winter 1994. The changing image of *Orient Beauty* is an epitome of how Hong Kong, where colonization ended, was trying to establish an image of identity for its culture. Although a great variety of images of beauty appear in the women's magazine market simultaneously, these images are all characterized by *localization*. A local production, *Orient Beauty* is armed with the catchword 'magazine for Hong Kong women' and seeks to construct new images of Hong Kong beauty which are eclectic rather than strictly Chinese or Western. Other magazines like *Sisters* and *Elle*, are also *restarting* their identity as 'local' women's magazines by either substituting more Chinese models for western ones (as *Elle*), or utilizing more up-to-date international information on beauty and fashion (as *Sisters*). All these illustrate the emergence of the new images of beauty as contributors to the development of new cultural representations in the postcolonial context of Hong Kong.

The eclectic images of female beauty are formulated by ideologies and powers particular to Hong Kong. In addition to the primary hypothesis of 'images of beauty', there are two hypotheses concerning the generating forces of these images. They consider the notion of femaleness in relation to images of beauty, and, therefore, are treated as auxiliary hypotheses. One of them, to do with the

ideologies of female beauty, stresses the concept of femininity and comprises the following aspects:

1. Femininity and Image of Female Beauty

Being female and being feminine are two different things. Whereas the former refers to a biological classification, the latter is a socially and culturally acquired attribute. 'Techniques of being female include practices associated with fertility, nurturing and caring, they also include techniques associated with domesticity and management of everyday life. Techniques of femininity are related to these but are characterized by techniques of display and projection of the female body.'¹⁷ On the whole, offering advice on femininity and providing entertainment for women constitute the major contents of most women's magazines (C.White 1970, p.276). This is the case for women's magazines in Hong Kong which stresses beauty and fashion, and appearance management. The look, the image of female beauty, becomes crucial elements of feminization, from which not only the appearance but the gender of a woman is defined.

2. Femininity as Ideology in Society

Women's growing interest in beauty and fashion in women's magazines is closely related to the attitude towards female looks in society. Beauty, whether it is an

¹⁷ Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion*, p.44.

innate or an acquired attribute, is certainly indispensable to one's social existence. The ideology of making judgment on inner beauty by through the perception of outer beauty is deep-seated in our society, as appearance is a cultural sign. Research at The Chinese University of Hong Kong has supported the belief that 'what is perceived as physically beautiful is (mostly) good and hence beautiful people are likely to be chosen for a job, as a spouse, or for praise from a teacher in Hong Kong'¹⁴. Our yearning for physical attractiveness is proven by the fact that women spend millions of dollars on cosmetics and fashion each year. This is illustrated by the contemporary flourishing of the beauty business, including hair salons, beauty parlours, fitness centres, cosmetics retailers, and, of course, women's magazines.

3. Femininity and Gender

Not only is the body image of a woman very much related to 'femininity' as it is experienced and perceived by others, but appearance is also emphasized and valued more highly in females than in males (Tseeton, 1995)¹⁴. The meaning of and the attitude towards physical beauty are related to gender. For men, physical attractiveness is the toning up of the 'self', trying to keep and improve his looks. For women, it means a metamorphosis of the self. What is termed 'female beauty' is bound up with the ideology of 'femininity', a universal measurement of physical attractiveness for women, for which criteria are delimited and formalized as fragmented and objectified images. This ideology is basically the result of influence

¹⁴ Source from *Beyond the Chinese Face*, Michael Harris Bond, p.44.

of Western visual culture. Traditionally visual perception is regarded a masculine sense, whereas the contemporary interest in corporeal and evidential beauty in Hong Kong is exclusively 'for' women.

4. Definition of Femininity

The definition of femininity changes along with the changing life experiences of women. In China, the ladies of the nineteenth century, for example, were very different from the female factory workers under the Communist government in the middle of this century. The constitution of femininity changes according to the changing economic, political or cultural situation of a society. Its definition, however, is still preconditioned by stereotyping. In Hong Kong, in the late 20th century, women's lives are becoming increasingly complex and multi-orientated, yet their images are still servile to the doctrines of femininity. This phase of femininity existing today is not only typified by stereotypical female images, as it used to, but more specifically, its associated delimitation of the meaning of female within the area of appearance (physical beauty).

The other auxiliary hypothesis is grounded on femininity under patriarchal power. Western patriarchy provides an explanation for the construction of gender (femininity) in the cultural, political, economic, and colonial contexts. In this light, female images are basically divided into three main streams. The first one

¹⁹ *The Masque of Femininity*. Efraim Tseelon, p.79.

is the introduction of the male's gaze as gender-coded in psychoanalytic discourse (e.g. Mulvey, 1975)²⁰ and art history (Berger, 1972)²¹. The second comes from theories of Marxist political economy that equate men with production and women with consumption and cheap labour in capitalist society (e.g. Veblen, 1970)²². Finally, the colonialist position intensifies the male isolation and suppression of women whose existence is shaped into an 'otherness' (e.g. Judith Williamson, 1986)²³.

Any one of these streams of theory can be applied to Hong Kong, a former British colony, a capitalist society, and a place where traditional Chinese values are retained. Yet, alone, none can explain a culturally hybrid place like Hong Kong where the cultural, political and economic situations are the synthesis of the three approaches. Hong Kong in the 1990s has proved to be a unique example of how culture, politics and economy from different times and spaces intersect, integrate, and take on new meanings. Hong Kong has preserved many traditional Chinese customs and values although it also underwent 150 years of British rule. The primary interest of the British government in Hong Kong was economic (entrepot economy) so that 'the main political strategies have been the co-option of the Chinese elite into the government administrative structure (King, 1981), coupled with the government's calculated non-interference in the way of life of the Chinese

²⁰ 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Mulvey, L. *Screen*, 16.

²¹ *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger.

²² *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen, T.

²³ 'Women Is an Island: Femininity and Colonisation', Judith Williamson, in *Turning it On*.

community (Lui, 1982)²⁴. After the 1950s, Hong Kong emerged as an industrialized city and capitalism imported Occidental influence which has since then remained significant in the cultural context of the colony. In the mid-90s, with concerns over the return of sovereignty from the British to the Chinese, and the transition in the orientation of Hong Kong's economy from production to service, Hong Kong reached a critical historical threshold, one from which a new political, economic and cultural situation was going to emerge.

How are all these accounts relevant to the notion of patriarchy? Like the political and economic context, the cultural context in Hong Kong is unique. I use the term 'Hong Kong patriarchy' to differentiate it from Western and traditional Chinese patriarchy. 'Hong Kong patriarchy', a modification of Chinese patriarchy, adheres to a Confucian tradition, and is influenced by patriarchal concepts from the West, notably capitalism, colonialism and Christianity. In a century of colonial rule and of fast development in the economic sector, Hong Kong has adopted a local patriarchal system where meaning is anything but fixed, simple and single. Decolonisation in the political sense does not necessarily mean a cultural return to its motherland, for 'the Hong Kong person is now a bird of a different feather, a kind of Maltese Falcon'²⁵. If Chinese patriarchal values persist in the 'colony' because 'patriarchal attitudes were something that the two groups (British and Chinese males) had in common'²⁶, then, these values have mutated, especially around the

²⁴ Source from *Women in Hong Kong*, Veronica Pearson and P.K. Leung, p. 6.

²⁵ Akbar Abbas, *City at the End of Time*, p.6.

²⁶ *Women in Hong Kong*, p.6.

period of handover, because Hong Kong has released itself from the influence of the colonizing country without being absorbed by a much more powerful and older 'mother' culture. It is because Hong Kong is embryonically developing a culture of its own, which bears affinity to the parallel development of a local government (a government ruled by the people of Hong Kong).

In summary, the hypotheses on beauty images, ideologies and powers are closely related to each other, although they have different levels of significance in this thesis. I want to restate, however, that I deprecate the adoption of single perspective and theory for my research. Therefore, when I associate the notion of ideologies and powers with the 'eclectic' images, it does not mean that the images are necessarily formulated and shaped by one ideology/power alone. Even though I regard that femininity and patriarchy are still 'dominant' forces in the construction of female images in Hong Kong society, they interact and are counter-balanced by other forces. These forces are mainly to the new and more positive perspectives towards female beauty and its images. Experimental female images have been created and traditional codes of femininity have been subverted. The contents of femininity and patriarchy have been changing and their meanings redefined. This is a post-modern, post-feminist and post-colonial aspect of female beauty particular to Hong Kong.

Structure of the Thesis

To address the hypotheses, this thesis is composed of seven chapters, all following a logical sequence. In Chapter One, 'The Ideals of Beauty', I introduce the thesis by accounting for the 'facts' of beauty culture in contemporary Hong Kong. This consists of three aspects: everyday beauty culture (cultural images and reality), women's magazines (cultural representations), and modeling (women and beauty). The chapter provokes on the ideals and standards of female beauty portrayed in women's magazines and reflected in society. Besides raising the main problems that will be tackled by the subsequent chapters, this chapter seeks to investigate the values of mainstream standards of female beauty and the factors causing them.

The second and the third chapters, 'The Nature of Beauty' and 'The Culture of Beauty', provide historical contexts and background of female beauty in Hong Kong within the paradigms of nature and culture. In *Nature*, the meaning of female beauty and femininity, and whether women's beauty is innate or constructed is explored, with regards to the traditional Chinese context and contemporary Hong Kong. The third chapter, on the other hand, traces the traditions of beauty culture of the Chinese and the West by means of philosophical analysis of distinctive thoughts, which are then applied to the area of female beauty and to the context of Hong Kong.

Chapter Four, 'The Types of Beauty' and Chapter Five, 'The Presentation of

Beauty', concentrate on the case studies of beauty images. These are **intensive analyses of images of female beauty deployed in contemporary Hong Kong women's magazines**, with the former chapter concerning the **contexts** and the latter, the **styles**. Chapter Four focuses on the **theoretical analysis of female images portrayed on the covers of the women's magazines**. This serves to identify various characteristics of these images and to **engender relevant issues of interest**. The **stylistic presentations of female images, including different techniques and positions employed, and the configuration of the magazines, are discussed in Chapter Five**. The chapter focuses on **examining visual presentation, mainly photographic s of female beauty, and paves the way to my exploration the gender issue**. In Chapter Six, 'The Power of Beauty', the **dialectic aims at reconsidering and redefining the meaning of naturalism and realism in female beauty representation in women's magazines, inquiring into images of female beauty from the aspect of 'female power'**.

From representations to reality, and from the particular back to the general, the last chapter, 'The Management of Beauty', serves to conclude the thesis by putting forward a new theoretical framework on images of female beauty. Echoing the first chapter, it is a critique of everyday female beauty culture in contemporary Hong Kong society. This chapter is divided into two main sections – the sense of sight, and the other senses. Each kind of beauty practice, such as cosmetics and skin care, falls into the theoretical framework of visual perception and other perceptions accordingly. This framework of the 'five senses' can test and investigate the logic of

this culture, and help to **conclude the exploration of images of female beauty, as representations as well as reality.**

THE IDEALS OF BEAUTY

In this introductory chapter I shall discuss the major standards of female beauty seen in contemporary culture in Hong Kong. I shall begin with a brief account of the contemporary culture of female beauty in Hong Kong, then go on to examine the concepts of 'beauty and fashion' put forward by women's magazines, and echo them with the typical ideals of female beauty in the society. Framed around the two poles of 'the represented' and 'the real', this chapter is not only intended to identify these standards, but also to investigate factors leading to them as well as to open up questions on their ideological values. It pinpoints the key problems and issues of the thesis which will be investigated in the chapters that follow.

Beauty Culture of Women in Contemporary Hong Kong

The culture of female beauty in Hong Kong subsumes the paradigms of everyday beauty management of women, cultural representations of female beauty, and other beauty practices such as the modeling business, beauty promotions and beauty pageants. The female beauty culture in contemporary Hong Kong, when seen from a historical point of view, is a consequence of colonization, modernization, Westernization and globalization, due to the particular spatial-temporal situation of the local context. Since the standard of female beauty has been changing in Hong

Kong, as elsewhere, to relate it to contemporary society it is necessary to recount its background with relevance to the cultural phenomena of today, rather than simply tracing the 'tradition' of female beauty culture in Hong Kong (which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3).

This paper examines female beauty in Hong Kong by tracing its history from three aspects - beauty as everyday culture, representations in women's magazines, and the modeling business. The first concerns contemporary beauty culture in Hong Kong in a general sense, whereas the last two deal with specific cases of female beauty as images and as images of women.

Beauty as Popular Culture of Women –the Management of Beauty in Hong King in the 90s

The management of appearance, or attending to what is called 'somaesthetics'²⁷ in cultural terminology, has been a popular interest that has been widely adopted by the contemporary community. Female Beauty management comprises the disciplines of female behaviour, and the practices of maintenance as well as adornment of appearance. Contemporary beauty management in Hong Kong is characterized by an increasing emphasis on the physical beauty of women, which is reflected by the booming beauty maintenance and adornment business. This includes cosmetic

companies, beauty and hair salons, fitness centres, and department stores and boutiques selling fashion and accessories. It is also indicated by the increased exposure of cosmetic surgery through the media²⁸ in the 90s.

The value of net imports of cosmetic products to Hong Kong was estimated to be around HK\$2.9 billion in 1996, according to Hong Kong Government statistics. An independent British market-research firm, Euromonitor, estimated that Asian women spent approximately HK\$247 billion on cosmetic products in 1996. In Hong Kong, from 1992 to 1996, the cosmetic market grew by nearly 84%. Spending on cosmetic products has increased from HK\$756 per capita in 1992 to HK\$1,223 in 1996, exceeding even that of the United States. The Hong Kong cosmetic market²⁹ is estimated to increase by approximately 24% from 1997 to 2000.

In terms of cosmetic retailing, although the Hong Kong market is more mature than those of South East Asia and the People's Republic of China, it is far from saturated. Sa Sa, the largest cosmetic retailing company in Hong Kong, recorded an increase in turnover of 52% and 34% in 1996 and 1997 respectively.³⁰ And stepping into 1998, its business was not much affected by the economic crisis

²⁷ The first scholar to use the term 'somaesthetics' appears to be Richard Shusterman, in his article entitled "Somaesthetics and the Body/Media Issue" in *Body and Society*, Vol. 3, No.3, 97.

²⁸ I take cosmetic surgery as evidence of the craze for body management on the basis that this social taboo is becoming more comprehensive as it is brought into the limelight by the media. However, it does not follow that cosmetic surgery is gaining popularity as an ideology or a social practice.

²⁹ Figures from the prospectus of *Placing and New Issue of Shares of Sa Sa International Holdings Limited*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.51.

striking Hong Kong and other Asian countries²¹. On the contrary, the company succeeded in accruing considerable capital through share offers in July 1997, and is expanding its retail network in both Hong Kong and beyond to Japan and other East Asian countries. It now has 20 outlets and a share of over 30% of the cosmetic market in Hong Kong. Sa Sa's enormous success turns it into a model of survival to its competitors, including cosmetic counters in department stores and small-scale independent perfumeries. They adopt its strategies of either price-cutting or providing products of a variety of brands and origins. Other forms of cosmetic retailing emerge such as the sale of specialized products, e.g. Japanese fancy cosmetics and health and natural beauty products. Promoting cosmetic products alongside their fashion counterparts is also an increasingly common tactic adopted by well-known brands.

Beauty services contribute to a major part of the beauty industry in Hong Kong. Their prosperity is indicated by increasing number of chain outlets for large beauty centres, and by the growth of small beauty salons in terms of their numbers and centrifugal distribution from prime shopping areas, which illustrates the tremendous and region-wide demand for such services. Fitness centres are a typical example of beauty services which have been thriving since the mid-90s. From two to three leading companies 10 years ago to double digit numbers nowadays, these companies have been tapping the huge potential of the market. In the past few years they have started to compete with each other by offering different packages of

²¹ *Economic Daily*, 23 July, 1998.

fitness services at ever lower prices, rendering gym-going an unprecedentedly popular activity for all social classes.

Alternative beauty regimes, such as cosmetic surgery, are regarded as body alteration within the area of beauty management. As a practice it is still not as readily accepted by the Hong Kong community as by Japan, the U.S., and even the P.R.C. Nevertheless, with the help of the media, people in Hong Kong have begun to know and understand more about the facts of cosmetic surgery, as well as topics such as gay and lesbian culture, AIDS, and other taboos in this society. The increasing popularity of women's beauty pageants within the past 30 years also reflects the fact that beauty promotions are popular entertainment in contemporary society. And of course, women's magazines have played an important role in the promotion of female beauty images.

Images of Beauty - Women's magazines in Hong Kong

Women's magazines, the first of which to appear in the American publishing industry being *Godey's Lady's book*, dated as far back as the eighteenth century and deal with women's fashion and domestic matters. In Hong Kong, the market for women's magazines was not opened until the middle of this century. Hong Kong's magazine industry has a rather short history of approximately a hundred years, of which the first half was marked by stagnant development due to the war and economic

depression. After the second world war, Hong Kong's economy started to take off and so did the publishing industry. By the sixties, magazine titles numbered under a hundred. Magazines like *Women and Home* and *Home Life*, which were available in the market then, can be regarded as the forerunners of women's magazines, despite the fact that they offered practical knowledge and business up-dates and were like compilations of women's column in newspapers. Relatively speaking, graphical and photographic texts were much less significant than written texts.

By the end of the sixties, women's magazines had attained a more sophisticated look, indicated by the launch of *Style* and *Sisters' Pictorial*. *Style*, the first bilingual women's magazine in the local market, will celebrate its thirtieth anniversary at the end of this century. *Sisters'*, launched in 1970 and very popular at the lower end of the market, had been grossing the highest advertising revenue among women's magazines all the way into the 90s²². The eighties onwards saw the golden period of the publishing industry. From 1985 to 1990, the paper product printing and publishing industry in Hong Kong soared by 16.2%, which defeated all other industry groups²³. Towards the mid-90s, there were 619 magazines being published and roughly 4,800 printing factories in operation²⁴.

The business of women's magazines in Hong Kong is still flourishing. Today there are over 20 titles in the market, compared to only a handful just two decades

²² Source from *Hong Kong Adex Revenue in Magazines 1994*.

²³ Figures from *Hong Kong Social and Economic Trends, 1980-1990*.

²⁴ Figures from *Hong Kong 1994*.

ago. In 1991, these 20 titles accounted for over 20 per cent of all advertising expenditure in magazines in Hong Kong, and totaled some HK\$576 million³⁵. In addition to locally originated women's magazines, there are quite a number of Chinese-edition foreign magazines. In the 90s, the development of women's magazines was marked not only by an increase in the number of titles, but also by more diversified orientations. On the one hand, there are fashion-oriented women's magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar*, their slightly younger counterparts such as *Elle* and *Eve*, and *Cosmopolitan* and *Marie Claire* which claim to be lifestyle rather than women's magazines. On the other hand, locally originated *Sisters' Pictorial*, still adhering to her traditional 'pocket book' style, has been highly successful as a low-market entertaining women's magazine. The fact is, according to *Hong Kong Adex Revenue in Magazines 1991*, *Sisters'* reaped the highest advertising revenue of almost four times the best performer in the Western-originated women's magazines category, *Cosmopolitan*.

From the mid-90s onwards, more new titles emerged and competed for the advertising pie. This new generation of women's magazines is characterized by local origin, glossiness, and a **focus on female beauty**. *Orient Beauty*, launched jointly in winter 1994 by Hachette Magazine House Ltd. and Le Salon Orient, was the first women's magazine to specialize in local female beauty. More recent titles like *Beauty and Beauty and Fashion*, oriented towards beauty in particular with relation to consumption and beauty practices, resemble seasonal beauty handbooks rather

³⁵ Figures from *Asian Media and Marketing Weekly*, 1991.

than theme magazines. I predict that the future of women's magazines will follow the trend of mass entertaining magazines, with an overriding emphasis on female beauty and fashion. The trend also points to a younger look for women's magazines, concentrating on creating a sense of playfulness, both in the layout of the photographic texts and the ideas in the linguistic texts. Written texts will further shrink to become headlines, and may sometimes only serve as part of the graphic layout.

Women of Beauty – the Modeling Profession in Hong Kong from a Historical Perspective

Modeling in Hong Kong developed into a profession in the last 30 years. The 1960s was the golden age of the textile industry and most of the products were made for export. At the time a Singaporean-born Chinese, Mei Ling Chan came to Hong Kong and started training models for catwalk modeling. The models were in high demand for export garment shows, which always took place inside production houses. The profession was enlivened by the fashion shows, held each season, of the four large department stores in Hong Kong at the time: Lane Crawford, Sincere, Wing On, and Whiteaway. Fashion in that decade meant making one's clothes by oneself or having them made by tailors. To buy ready-to-wear, one had nowhere else to go but these few department stores and Chinese department stores, since there was at least another decade before boutiques and chain stores entered the fashion

retailing industry. The seasonal fashion shows staged by these renowned department stores became spectacles of consumption, attracting crowds to them to see the latest fashion as well as the models. It was not long before the Trade Development Council began to recruit fashion models for regular exhibitions and fashion shows promoting Hong Kong fashion.

By the 70s, larger scale modeling schools emerged including Elite and Richard de Silva, both of which carried their fame way into the 90s. Together with Catwalk Production and Mega, they are now the major modeling agencies connected with the Trade Development Council that supply models for its fashion shows. Despite their common will to provide 'good services', these four modeling agencies have different backgrounds. Richard de Silva was established by a Portuguese dancer 20 years ago; Elite is a French company based in Hong Kong; Catwalk and Mega are locally owned companies with the latter especially interested in employing models from the P.R.C. The current chair of the Hong Kong Design and Fashion Association, Judy Man, began her career as a model three decades ago. Trained in Elite, she opened a modeling agency of her own before finally moving to the garment manufacturing industry. Models trained in Judy's school such as Carrie Wong, have already started their own modeling agencies. The existence of the modeling profession in Hong Kong was triggered by the garment industry. It will still play an important role in the industry in the future, as at present, as the marketing and promotion of the garment industry will remain in Hong Kong despite the relocation of its manufacturing sector up north.

In the past, modeling was seen as no different from show business and therefore was rejected by the older generation on moral grounds. Now more and more young women in Hong Kong are interested in the profession, partly because it has become more socially acceptable, but more importantly because it is seen as a shortcut to wealth and glamour. The number of modeling schools is also on the rise. Some of these are run illegally or are downright swindles. While fantasies surrounding the profession approach boiling point, the models have never had to be more pragmatic. Many, especially the inexperienced ones, must learn to plan well financially in order to survive the jobless seasons. Besides their looks, both natural and made-up, has become closer to that of everyday Hong Kong women. Compared to models two or three decades ago, models today have less of that 'star-like' quality and are more down-to-earth, as Judy Man commented. As the business of beauty imaging and beauty representation is steadily developing, the demand for models, especially Chinese looking models, is greatly heightened. Even foreign-origin magazine, such as *Elle*, began to opt for indigenous local faces as a new marketing strategy in the 90s. This signals not only a new trend of images of female beauty, but also a transition of the modeling profession from a highly individualistic skill to mass production. Female models in contemporary Hong Kong, particularly those casting for women's magazines, serve as mediators between women's dream and reality. They are simultaneously 'mannequins' of up-to-date female beauty and bearers of certain ideals and attributes that resonate the beauty of everyday women.

Beauty and Fashion Pages in Contemporary Women's Magazines – Gauge of Everyday Beauty Culture

Beauty and fashion are always a 'spectacle' in women's magazines, regardless of orientation and target readers. A 1995 readership survey of *Sisters*⁷ tells us that the readers' favourite topic is beauty and fashion (see Appendix 2). Other women's magazines, like *Elegance*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Marte Claire*, which do not see themselves as strictly beauty and fashion magazines, also had a similar finding.³⁶ The fact that the advertisement revenue of local women's magazines depends highly on fashion and beauty products further reflects the general taste of the market. The question that remains is why beauty and fashion play such a dominant role in locally published women's magazines. If women's magazines are about women, does it follow that fashion and beauty are the most important, if not the only thing women are about?

Women's apparent obsession with beauty and fashion (let's not consider for the time being the controversial question of whether the media is responsible for inducing or reflecting such obsession) is closely related to the role occupied by a woman's *looks* in society. Appearance, so innate and natural, is at the same time fundamental to one's social existence. Our description of our impression of a person is often predicated on his/her looks or appearance. Hence, our opinion of an individual's looks (expressed with words like 'looks', 'appears to be')—that of a

heterosexism that 'affects every aspect of our lives, from employment to politics to the courts, with handsome men and pretty women getting more jobs, earning more money, even getting easier ride in court.'³⁷ In America, a survey conducted by Synder et al. (1977) documents an unusual but interesting phenomenon that males tend to believe females with friendly, likeable voices on the phone are physically beautiful.³⁸ In Hong Kong, our pursuit of physical attractiveness is no less serious due to lookism. I have already discussed the 'hectic' beauty culture in the previous section.

Strangely enough, physical (un)attractiveness, which should be equally shared among males and females as a natural phenomenon, is particularly outstanding in the dictionary of women. Even if the term exists in the dictionary of men, it refers to a collective sense of well-being, healthiness, youthfulness or strength, or the lack or, rather than to objectified individual body parts (full lips, big eyes, hourglass figure, etc.) as it is when employed in the judgment of women. In light of this, the *meaning of* and the *attitude* towards physical beauty is gender-related. For men, physical attractiveness is the toning up of the 'self', trying to improve looks without losing them. In the case of women, however, it typically involves a process of changing oneself to another (from A to B, rather than from A to a better A as in the case of men). When a woman wears make-up or undergoes cosmetic surgery, she is in fact trying to replace her own identity by altering it. A

Editor of *Elegance* and *Mame Claire*.

³⁷ Quotation from the article 'Looks Don't Matter, Says "Ugly" American', in *South China Morning Post*, 14th June, 1996.

new face represents not only a more beautiful, attractive face, but a new identity, a new self. Therefore, adornment for men is like shaving a beard or changing clothes, whereas for women, the changing of a physical self also means a different spiritual self—a rebirth.

With regards to the issue of gender difference, there are two points I would like to raise. First of all, 'female beauty', to Hong Kong people, is basically a series of stereotypes *fixed* on a formal level so that the answer to the question 'Is this woman beautiful?' is absolute, and can only take the form of 'yes' or 'no'—as clear-cut as the result of a mathematics calculation. The 'perfect' female body is a 'mannequin' to be universally desired and a yardstick for measuring femininity. This approach to beauty results in the observation that 'the only physical beauty is created by plastic surgery'³⁹. Second, the quality of female beauty in Hong Kong is not only fixed and fragmented; it is also *objectified*. Here the word objectification stresses the *action* of objectifying rather than the *noun*, the object. The opposition of object versus subject is vital in defining female beauty since women are constantly situated in the position of an object, and their feelings about themselves are always bound up with the impression they give to the subject. Even when a woman looks at her own reflection in a mirror, she objectifies herself by watching herself in the gaze of another. The strict distinction between subjecthood and objecthood collapses because 'this is no simple self-aggrandizement, but rather the intuition that a sense of beauty in oneself can only ever be alien to oneself, can only be in an image: a

³⁹ Source from Efrat Tseelon, *The Masque of Femininity*, p.79.

"beautiful work" formed in the gaze of another, and in the guise of another."⁴⁹

'Beauty' is realized by the way the subject treats his/her physical self as object.

Ideals of Female Beauty

All those practices of beauty management and new orientations and strategies of women's magazines reveal a general characteristic of beauty culture in contemporary Hong Kong favouring **young, female, popular, trendy and physical** beauty. Kathy Pesis in her article 'Making Up, Making Over' noted that using cosmetics was a class-related phenomenon in Western society in the eighteenth century, a trend which underwent a change from in the nineteenth century when it became more a matter of gender than of class. Although the notion that cosmetics use is related to class has its roots in Western cosmetic history, it is also applicable generally to beauty management in Hong Kong today, as its popularity rises in direct proportion to the living standard. Cosmetics, ideologically considered a luxury like cigarettes and wine, are duty-free in Hong Kong, unlike in most other countries. This enables them to gradually transform into a daily necessity.

Visiting fitness centres, an upper-class activity of well-to-do housewives or a 'quirk' of a minority of men a few years ago, is now indulged in by all classes, especially white collar office workers. There is clearly a gender difference here with

⁴⁹ Baudrillard, *America*. 1986/1989, p.32.

women being the major, if not the only practitioners of beauty management. This is demonstrated even more effectively by the recent interest among women in working out at the gym. This raises the issue of androgyny in cultural practice—that modern beauty management in Hong Kong tends to transcend differences between the genders. However this concept is subject to question on the grounds that ‘androgyny’ is not received the same way when practised by different genders—the masculinization of women is a lot more readily accepted than the feminization of men, at least on the level of appearance. Nonetheless, all classes and genders involved in beauty management are uniform under the youth category. The unifying power of youth is an amusing phenomenon in the conception of human beauty and is reinforced by the power of trends which are so commanding in this society. Youth (age), femaleness (sex), popularity (class), and keeping with the trends (taste) are by no means autonomous of each other; rather, they are interlocked as a result of the prerequisites of physical beauty. But before I continue with this point, I shall first focus on the interrelationships of age, sex and taste.

Age and Sex in Beauty Management

The pursuit of a youthful appearance within the paradigm of somaesthetics in contemporary Hong Kong society is a topic especially worthy of study. This is because the meaning of ‘youth’ today varies from that of yesterday due to different

⁴⁰ Francette Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty*. Harvard University Press: 1994, p. 187.

historical contexts. Youth was traditionally regarded by the Chinese as one of the most important treasures of somaesthetics. There are abundant stories on men being 'fengliu' 風流 (both romantically and sexually) in classical Chinese literature, in which the women desired are always in puberty. The Chinese classics on love and sexology, *Xianyan Congshu* 香艷叢書, actually set an age limit for female beauty:

The most beautiful time of a woman is the ten years from the age of thirteen or fourteen, to twenty-three. It is the time when a woman starts to bloom like a flower, beautifully, fragrantly, charmingly and coquettishly. Beyond this age is the full bloom of flowers, and the beauty of which will be soon followed by perdition.⁴¹

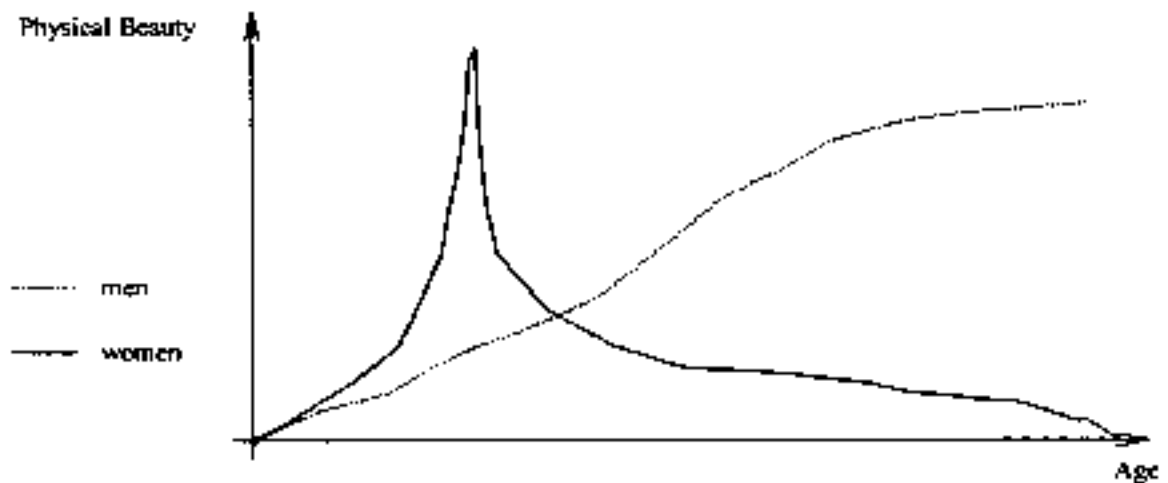
In biological classification, the period covers a woman's teens to early adulthood. Hence it makes sense that the author likened it to the period preceding the full bloom of flowers. In the classification of social age, however, ancient Chinese women or even those of a few generations earlier matured much more quickly than women today, due mainly to early marriage. Concern about the youth of a woman is closely related to her fertility. Another Chinese classics on sexology, *Su Nu Jing*, also mentions that 'the most good-looking women' should be unmarried (a virgin in the traditional sense), but slightly older, from the age of twenty-five to thirty.⁴² The book's favouring of more mature women is not the result of 'diversified' taste, I believe, but its orientation towards eroticism rather than romance, for there is

⁴¹ Translated by me from *Xianyan Congshu*, Beijing: People's Literature Publication, Vol. 1, p.4.

subsequently a description on how well these young women perform in bed (being not too young to know how to gratify men, or too old to stale them). From this perspective, traditional Chinese values regarded youth as a dominating constituent of female beauty because it fulfils women's social function of pleasing men. A beautiful woman was chosen for her ability to produce offspring and have sex, so even though not all young women were raving beauties, a truly beautiful woman could not be past her youth.

Another issue arising from this is the meaning of youth. This period in the biological classification of a human being's life is in fact engendered in traditional Chinese culture. A woman's youth terminated on the night of her marriage. On the following day, she wore different hairstyle and clothing to indicate her maturity. Men, on the other hand, grew old without this type of apparel signification, and enjoyed a much longer and more permissive 'youth'. The following is my graphical summary of the traditional Chinese conception of the comparative relationship of physical attractiveness to age for women and men:

⁴¹ *Zhongguo Zhu Nu Jing*. 中國古代服飾總史 Jiang Nan Publication, P.248.



Not only is the delineation of youth more clearly defined for women than for men, it is also more compact. Compared to male youth which involves a long process of mutation and multiplication, female youth is fixed and instantaneous, happening as if within the blink of an eye. Metaphorically speaking, the articulation of youth for men is a drama, and for women, just a pretty picture; or syntactically, for men, a thesis, and for women just a headline.

The engendering of youth is even more apparent in the positive light in which old age in men is seen. Aging for men implies wisdom and sophistication, a great contrast to the case of women whose oldness witnesses the 'pathetic ending'⁴³ of women's lives. The inner beauty of men is also reflected at a physical level whereby the attractiveness and strength of the mature male body is venerated, likened to a 'tall tree in the wind' and 'muscle of tigers and bears'. (The physical attractiveness

of young men, however, is always characterized by feminization. The best example of this is Jia Bao Yu 賈寶玉 in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. Even Pan An 潘安, who is idolized by the classical Chinese legends as 'the first handsome man in Chinese history', is feminine in the vein of being 'pretty'. I believe this celebration of male youth similar to the compliments for the female, that is, beautiful young men are judged by the same standards as beautiful young women, hence they must have certain feminine attributes. Following the same principle, in classical Chinese literature, youthfulness is rarely seen as a compliment for men. On the contrary, its demerits such as imprudence and naivete, are always articulated. There is also an occasional tongue-in-cheek compliment on the 'early success' of youngsters, implying that usually a man would not have any real achievement till he is old. This idea reveals a double standard in the judgment of youth—the affirmation of youth in male beauty by its distinctiveness and the negation of that in female beauty by its universality. In other words, youth in females is essential but, in males, superfluous.

If femaleness is a characteristic of youth, and the female's social function is the reason for the celebration of youth in traditional China. In modern Hong Kong, femaleness is less of a characteristic of youth, and the notion of youth takes less from its social function. In a conventional sense, youth means health, fertility, ability to work (especially manual work), and good looks. The modern version seems to neglect the first three aspects while highlighting good looks and another element, liveliness, as exceptional to youth. The youthful aspiration to make a personal

⁴³ 'Pathetic looking' is the actual wording (in Chinese) used to describe women already past their

contribution to society is replaced by the eagerness for self-improvement. Two features can be observed in the meaning of youth today. The first is that it is not a 'utilitarian' youth, that is, its meaning is not drawn from the actual performance of a person in a community (family, working area, sexual relationship, etc.), but it is a 'visual youth', one which stresses one's appearance to others in interpersonal relationships. Therefore the value of youth lies in its attractiveness or beauty rather than pragmatic considerations such as its ability to survive. The second feature is that the concept of youth in the modern era is not based on relativity, which emphasizes a periodical role of youth in the great wheel of time. Instead, it perceives youth as a fixture and a totality of time. Tradition treasures youth due to its shortness whereas the modernity sets great store by it due to the wish to prolong this shortness. Modernity values less the transience of youth, regarded so much by our predecessors as the very essence and beauty of it, than what is bestowed by that essence. The following is a simple but comprehensive explanation of the idea:

Modern conception of youth



Traditional conception of youth



youth, in the chapter 'Album of Beautiful Women' in *Xiangyan Congshu*

The linear, stagnant predicament of the modern conception of youth distinguishes itself from the circular flow of youth in Chinese tradition. The circularity infers a situation of evolution and vicissitude in respect of youth in a person's life span, synonymous with the natural development or metabolism of biological human growth. However, it must be noted that this synonymity is founded on the basis of general tendencies instead of the classification framework which gives rise to youth as an age group. The traditional conception was not necessarily based on biological development, but rather, on a 'chronological' development of life as determined by the standards of society. As these standards fluctuate with changing cultural contexts among which the life duty requirements of different age groups vary, the framework of chronological growth does not remain unchanged in history. This happens in terms of time in Chinese society, such as the age for adulthood of women was younger in pre-modern society than in the present day, and of space, with the more primitive races in the world demanding an earlier adulthood. The fact is that different societies need different physical, emotional and cognitive development so that their respective members can adapt to their social systems. For instance, the lengthening and popularization of education in Hong Kong, which coincided with technological and civil improvements, postponed chronological maturity. On the other hand, early sexual experience among the young, sometimes as early as age 11, leads to earlier biological maturity.

Nevertheless, at a theoretical level, the traditional Chinese view of a circular chronological development bears reference to the 'life cycle' of biological

development. It is a view that respects the living process which comprises growing, ageing and dying. This is also reflected in the generational transition of responsibility with adults supporting their offsprings until they are old enough to support by them in their old age. This view is associated in particular with the emphasis on family kinship as a reason for having more children to retain the family name. In present-day Hong Kong, a considerable number of people still uphold the traditional concept of bearing children to make their life fulfilled, like their counterparts on the mainland. Though childless coupling is a common phenomenon in other developed countries of the world, here it is only a new 'lifestyle' practised by the younger generation and subject to moralist criticism. (It seems the Family Planning Association in Hong Kong understand very well these 'Chinese values' because its promotion of 'one family two children' instead of 'no children' 30 years ago has been successful to this day.)

However, it seems that gradually more couples are preferring a childless lifestyle. This would result in a flattening of the life cycle into a straight line pointing to a single direction. In replace of the proliferation of life generation by generation, people today focus on the prolonging of a single life, through the effacement of chronological stages and lengthening of the period of youth. In doing so, the biological meaning of youth becomes less important than the 'visual' meaning of youthfulness. Contemporary criticism has argued that the practice of dieting, eating health foods and other body maintenance rituals aim virtually at impeding the

recognition of traditional chronological age by restating the significance of biological age:

Chronological age continues to be discredited as an indicator of inevitable age norms and lifestyles and new breed of body maintenance experts optimistically prescribe health foods, vitamins, dieting, fitness techniques and other regimens to control biological age, which, it is argued, is the true index of how a person should feel.⁴¹

One crucial point I need to add is that biological age is substantially constructed on appearance. Hence, if our age depends on how we feel, then how we feel relies very much on how we appear. The contemporary culture of Hong Kong society has already set norms and stereotypes for youthful appearance. These standards of corporeal beauty are more tangible and easily attainable than manipulation of the biological clock, something still far from materialization. Hence, all forms of body maintenance (it has a narrower meaning than body management which includes changing, creating, besides fixing) intending to extend biological youth are primarily focused on reinforcing 'outer' youth, in which 'inner' youth is embodied. This particular interest in physical beauty is fundamentally not a traditional Chinese phenomenon, but a concept associated specifically with the Western way of 'seeing' which has had a great impact on the modern culture of Hong Kong. (This point will be explored further in the next two chapters).

The flat and linear conformation of the modern conception of youth and age resembles the condition of 'inertia' as understood in the area of physics. It bespeaks the movement of an object with the same speed to the same direction continuously without ending. The characteristic of this conformation, when applied to the living process of human beings, suggests not only a sluggish, changeless process without signs of growing, but also a living process with no indication of dying. This implies a connection of the modern conception of youth to the idea of longevity, but probably more to the longing for the preservation of youthful appearance to a very old age. Longevity is taken as a perpetuation of existing 'living' rather than as a matter of survival, and hence it is reasonable that youth is the most likely age to be perpetuated. The desire for longevity, however, is not a modern phenomenon in Chinese culture. Besides the daily consumption of herbs, highly popular today as traditionally, history has it that the first emperor of Qin sent thousands of virgin boys and girls to Japan to find him the 'undead medicine'. It is just that in contemporary culture, this motive for biological longevity has been transformed into physical immortality. The delay of death is substituted by the denial of looking old. Eventually, it is no longer a question of how long a person lives, but how a person lives in most of his/her life.

The neurosis towards death of modern people is associated with the reluctance to disappear, probably more in a cultural than in a biological sense. Technological advancement especially after the industrial revolution has altered the

⁴⁴ Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth. *The Mask of Aging and the Postmodern Life Course*.

'look' of our environment immensely. This has been happening especially in Hong Kong where a small place with a huge population makes a high demand on the reconstruction of the natural environment and of traditional life forms. Village houses have been replaced by multi-storey buildings which were later torn down to build skyscrapers. In this way, Hong Kong has metamorphosed from a small fishing village to an international city. It is a city of changing "faces" – while people in other cities are engrossed in preserving their historical architecture, Hong Kong is proud of its amazing speed of constructing new building complexes. Hong Kong is a young city, lively and energetic, with no glorious past but an optimistic future:

In contrast to other colonial cities Hong Kong has no precolonial past to speak of. It is true that in a sense Hong Kong did have a history before 1841, when it was ceded to the British, there are records of human settlement on the island going back at least to the Sung dynasty, but the history of Hong Kong, in terms that are relevant to what it has become today, has effectively been a history of colonialism.⁴⁵

Due to its particular historical background, Hong Kong is still on its path to maturation, economically, politically and culturally. The emptiness of the precolonial cultural space of Hong Kong renders it a distinctive mission of Hong Kong people to invent rather than look back, to prospect rather than retrospect. The indulgence in youthfulness symbolizes a seizure and perpetuation of the very present existence.

Quoted from the authors' mention of Walmsley's and Margolis's opinion.

This consequently leads to an ideology which relates oldness to traditions, and anything traditional is connected to the negative concept of retrogression. Since retrogression in Hong Kong's historical context means returning to the poor old days of nothingness and particularly to mainland China which is miscomprehended and mistrusted to a certain extent. Therefore it is soundly rejected.

The yearning for newness and the fear of lagging behind is in turn embodied in the exceptional interest in trends, 'Trends' become the orientation of women's magazines, as indicated by the editor of *Sisters' Pictorial*⁴⁵, and can be regarded as responsible for the direction of every aspect of cultural activity in Hong Kong. The law of trends is marked by a rapid turnover of commodities in a commercial sphere, akin to a short life span in a biological sense. The fact is that objects in the environment change so quickly that they die before they get old. Ackbar Abbas relates this changing 'appearance' in Hong Kong to 'disappearance', putting this as 'deja disparu' which is the characteristic of Hong Kong culture. I think the perspective should not be from a single aspect of 'deja disparu' or 'deja vu', but from a whole picture of how things emerge and vanish in this self-exploratory process of Hong Kong people. Disappearance is a consequence rather than a cause of this process, and appearance does not always recur as 'deja vu' in this culture. My concern is more on the continuity of objects' transient life cycle and the actual

⁴⁵ Ackbar Abbas. *Hong Kong - Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. Hong Kong University Press. 1997, p.2.

⁴⁶ Evelyn Chan, the editor of *Sisters' Pictorial*, mentioned in the interview that 'trends' are the most important thing to people in Hong Kong and hence are what Hong Kong's entertainment magazines are based upon.

happenings, between the moment of appearance and of disappearance. This is the time when an object is in its most fresh and vibrant form, similar to the goodness of youth in the human life cycle. The problem is that the human biological cycle is not analogous to that of their environment: man tends to live longer due to scientific advancement and objects tend to live shorter owing to constant inventions. The result is that while objects live their whole life in glamour, the subject (man's physical body) has to undergo an indispensable process of physical transformation, from growing to dying, from bloom to deterioration. The urge for youthfulness is a reaction to this incompatibility, calling for synchronicity between man and the environment at a surface level. Visual harmony is very important in postmodern societies, and also it seems, in Hong Kong society, which has been under the influence of Western culture. It is because appearance functions as a sign for the inner self, and therefore looking old does not only mean visually not being in tune with society, but is linked profoundly to the powerlessness of keeping up with the pace of modernization, in terms of cognitive and physical abilities.

A distinguishing characteristic of the meaning of youth in the context of modern Hong Kong is liberation from the traditional delineation of genders, specifically observed in beauty management. Men today not only assume a less conservative attitude towards appearance management, they actually invest more money in it. In the West, the emphasis on youth is the primary reason for men to undergo plastic surgery, according to a spokesman for the American Academy of

Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.⁴⁷ Although plastic surgery in Hong Kong is still less popular than in America and some other countries, the prevalence of advertisements for plastic surgery in popular magazines (and women's magazines) and in public areas prove that facelifts, removal of under-eye bags, and other types of youth improvement are men's favourite cosmetic surgery. Other kinds of appearance management for men such as hair dyeing, hair weaving and treatments for baldness all indicate their desire to look young. Now men and women share the same anxiety of getting old, perhaps less over how old they actually are (in the biological and mental senses) than how they look. Modern fashion plays with this notion of beauty, as seen specifically in its promotion of juvenility. Roland Barthes has expressed the following opinion on the boyish look in fashion:

The boyish look itself has more a temporal than a sexual value: it is the complementary sign of an ideal age, which assumes increasing importance in Fashion literature: the junior, structurally, the junior is presented as the complex degree of the feminine/masculine: it tends toward androgyny; but what is more remarkable in this new term is that it effaces sex to the advantage of age: this is, it seems, a profound process of fashion.⁴⁸

The intriguing point of boyish fashion is not the ambivalence of gender coding but its interest in advertising youth. It is not the androgynous but the young image which is consumed with the product. This young image captures and recreates the sexual

⁴⁷ From *The Times*, Style and Travel, 26 June 1994.

⁴⁸ Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, P.258.

ambiguity of juvenility, of which bewilderment is its fun, and youth is what it celebrates. It is at this particular age that girls feel uncomfortable dressing like grown women (that is why it is not a 'manly' look), therefore, a boyish look has to be distinguished from an androgynous look which does not indicate age. Another point which can verify this is the term 'boyish' (not 'girlish') which points to the fact that it is an image for the female instead of for the male. Androgyny only makes sense in its attribution to the proclamation of age, not to the gender itself.

The shifting of focus from sex to age is an important change in the vicissitude of fashion, as well as in other forms of bodily adornment and management. Another example of this is the prevalence of body fitness already mentioned - the sole reason for working out, having a sauna or buying expensive fitness equipment is to have a better looking body, and the primary element of a better looking body is a young looking body. As youth possesses a quality of universality, that both men and women *do* enjoy youthfulness at a certain time in their lives, it is differentiated from beauty which is more specific. A clarification needs to be made in that, firstly, beauty and youth are basically two different entities as far as we are concerned here. Typologically, beauty is polymorphous, composed of various elements of which youth is one. Secondly, the traditional Chinese beauty of soma was almost entirely defined by that of bodies of femininity (including feminine male bodies). As the significance of youth in beauty judgment begins to be emphasized in modern culture, it infringes upon the traditional delineation of genders by linking the beauty of women to men on the basis of its non-sexuality. However, although youth is a

determining factor in the judgment of beauty for both genders. it is not the only factor for women as it is for men. If we consider beauty of soma in general (not particular to women's or men's), youth is only one of the components when a beautiful body is considered. so that the anti-gender quality of youth is not necessarily inferred in the quality of beauty. Youth transgresses sex in defining beauty, but it is not indispensable to the meaning of beauty. In fact, unless we have sufficient evidence to prove that the beauty of soma is unrelated to sex (or simply related to men), it is now still an exemplary women's issue, as I have noted before.

THE NATURE OF BEAUTY

This chapter, 'The Nature of Beauty', and the next chapter, 'The Culture of Beauty', together provide philosophical and historical contexts for the images of female beauty. Here the dichotomy between nature and culture is taken at the structural level—for it provides a clarified and well-adopted configuration for analysis—rather than the ideological level. Hence the term 'nature' in association with beauty is understood from two aspects. The first one pertains to the linguistic interpretation of the word 'nature' that connotatively refers to the meaning of beauty. The second is related to the denotation of the word 'nature' itself and its relation to female beauty. The second aspect therefore aims at articulating within the paradigm of 'nature' as objects of reality whereas the first aspect tends more towards the definition 'beauty'. Despite of this structural schism, the polemic will be tightly bound up by the following three orientations of female beauty going through the whole chapter: definition, context and theoretical construct. Comparison will also be made from spatial and temporal perspectives, in which contemporary female beauty is set in contrast to the traditional, and the Occidental to the Chinese.

The Meaning of Female Beauty

The inquiry into the 'nature' of beauty would be readily connected with the question

'What is beauty about?' In the realm of female beauty the inquisition becomes 'What are beauty and women about?' The long anthropological history bears witness to the fact that women have consistently been linked to the notion of beauty, although what female beauty is still remains a topic of academic research. My objective is not to put forward a universal definition for female beauty, which, in any case, I would by no means succeed in doing, due to the fluidity and abstractness in terms of time and space of the idea of female beauty. On the other hand, I disagree with those contemporary critics⁴⁹ who propound the doctrine of 'multiple meanings' of female beauty at the expense of clear definition, which ends up turning female beauty into a puzzling and problematic issue. Leaving the question open, I will tackle this 'ambiguous' topic by demarcating it within the temporal-spatial context of present-day Hong Kong, and collate it with the traditional Chinese version, which can reasonably be regarded as the forerunner of local culture.

In considering the meaning of female beauty in Chinese tradition, it is better to make references to Chinese literature and criticism on this area, which is more straightforward and convenient than relying on examples of female beauty. There are copious terms in Chinese language for describing female beauty, some of which, especially in modern Chinese, are derived directly from the West. To define Chinese female beauty through decoding Chinese language, two criteria have to be adopted in choosing the terms. First, they have to be widely used and have a long history in the Chinese language. Second, they have to be general descriptions of female beauty

⁴⁹ These include Efraim Tzeelon, Naomi Wolf and T.E. Perkins.

rather than specific tropes on female attraction. The following is a table of these beauty terms and their closest translations in English:

<u>Chinese Terms for Female Beauty</u>	<u>English Translations</u>
美	Beauty
靚	Glamour
艷	Flamboyance
妖	Ability to Enchant
秀	Elegance
嫵媚	Attraction
嬌	Exquisiteness
俏	Prettiness

Now, a completely accurate translation of these Chinese words into English is infeasible, even with the help of a reliable Chinese-English dictionary³⁰. The reason for this is not that there is a paucity of English terminology in the area of female beauty, nor that there is an over-abundance of beauty terms in Chinese. While all these beauty terms are created according to their types, the division between the Chinese terms is less obvious because of the self-contained quality of their meanings. Chinese terminology in the aspect of beauty is less defining and signifying

³⁰ *Far East Chinese English Dictionary* is taken as sidelined reference for the translation.

(which interestingly clicks to the area of semiotics, also from languages) than the Western, due to the fact that these two languages are constructed on different perceptions of female beauty. I will explore this in depth in next chapter, 'The Culture of Beauty'. Meanwhile I will briefly introduce this idea below.

The perception of female beauty, as believed in other kinds of aesthetic perception in the Chinese tradition, is grounded in experience. This experience, by meaning, is not necessarily bound up with Western empiricism and the theory of memory. This is the experience of the present, and not the collective, accumulated existence of the past. The 'experience' inferred is the strict opposite of 'evidence'. A similar Western approach of subjective/objective dualism is discarded in this analysis of Chinese female beauty, since it is inadequate to ally it with the important mechanism in the process of Chinese aesthetic appreciation: sensing. Apart from the fact that experience is subject-related, it is initiated by random perception via five senses, rather than by predetermined observation through the eyes. The perception of beauty through a coordinate position of the five senses without hierarchy is a spontaneous experience, which abstains from the hegemony of the sense of sight which tends to frame objects and embark on a purposeful search for the 'traces' of beauty. The traditional Chinese texts on female beauty even documented the mistrust of visual perception, precluding the somaesthetic judgment of female beauty on the basis of physical appearance. *Xiangyan Congshu* 香艳丛书 (*A Collection of Chinese Eroticism*), one of the most representative works of Chinese literature on female beauty, has the following narration in *Yue Rong Pian* 悦容篇 (Chapter of Attractive

Face):

There is no standard face for beautiful or ugly women. The beauty of women is to please. A woman is beautiful if someone is pleased and attracted by her.⁵¹

Beauty of Formlessness

What I suggest concerning the Chinese conception of the meaning of female beauty, however, should be differentiated from that of 'inner beauty' customarily used in popular culture and that by current scholars such as M. Featherstone and J. Craik. The meaning is constituted less by the style, manners, personality, temperament, and wisdom of a woman, frequently regarded as 'inner beauty', than by what is commonly taken as 'outer beauty'. Chinese female beauty is concerned with women's physical appearance, only that the appearance is composed of no form. Formlessness is one of the major characteristics of Chinese female beauty, with physical make-up often escaping scrutiny. The Chinese do not seek the physical evidence of beauty; rather, they reckon it to a pure attraction. This attraction can only be sensed but not put into words. Even to Li Yu, the prestigious aesthete of seventeenth century China, the extreme form of female beauty is the most profound metaphysical topic, judged better by the experience of beholders than by verbal

⁵¹ Xiangyan Congshu 香艳丛书 (*A Collection of Chinese Eroticism*), Beijing: People Literature

articulation²². This point of view strikes a contrast with the language-based culture of the contemporary world, which lays particular stress on the configuration of conceptions, including beauty. I will turn to this point later.

What then is this female attraction? In Chinese vocabulary, probably the best and the most classical term for female attraction is 'mei' 媚. Eberhard, in her essay *What is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman*, translated this idea of Li Yu as 'charm'. It seems that charm is the most appropriate English term for 'mei', in terms of inferring this particular form of aesthetic attraction²³, although 'mei' is more gender-bound. Despite the inadequacy of the translation, the word 'charm' does clearly distinguish itself from 'beauty', which is one of the main concerns in Li's discussion. Charm is the most important quality of a beautiful woman, according to Li Yu:

What, then, is perfection in a woman? It is her charm. ... Charm not only makes a beautiful woman more beautiful, a fascinating woman more bewitching, it also makes an old woman young and an ugly one beautiful. A girl with charm and with only little beauty can outshine a (charmless) beauty.²⁴

Charm is the most perfect and ideal form of female beauty in Chinese aesthetics. It is

Publisher, 1992, p.67.

²² Eberhard, Wolfram, 'What is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman?', in *Moral and Social Values of the Chinese: Collected Essays*, Taipei:Chengwan, p. 278.

²³ I would say 'charm' comes closer to the Chinese term 'yunwei' 韻味. Both refer to a more general context of aesthetic attraction. For 'mei', it might be better to describe it specifically as 'female charm'.

positioned on the uppermost rank above beauty, elegance, glamour and other qualities I cited. This specific mode of female beauty, with its very nature, role and logic of operation in aesthetic appreciation, is reminiscent of the aesthetic theory of the sublime held by Kant (whereas by Burke the theory overridingly frames on the idea of 'terror' in aesthetic perception of the sublime, which is barely referential to the Chinese concept).

One of the typical analogies between the traditional Chinese conception and Kantian theory is the material form of female beauty, both of which accentuate formlessness. Li Yu says:

If I were the Creator, I would have no difficulty assigning a bodily form to man and giving him reason, except this little thing which is not a thing, this something without shape which acts as if it had shape, in other words – charm.⁵⁴

In Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, he also relates the idea of the sublime to the object of no form, which is, in his word, an 'absolute greatness':

The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.274-275.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.274.

by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness, yet with
a super-added thought of its totality.²⁶

Li's view concords with Kant's in the sense that they both see 'objective form' as a significant point of bifurcation between beauty and charm/sublimity. Nevertheless, while formlessness to Li is understood as impreciseness, it is to Kant 'infinity' (non comparative magnum), a greatness in comparison with which everything else is small, that is, beyond the limitation of form. From this aspect, Kant regards formlessness in terms of quantity – objects composed of infinite units to be measured and apprehended by perception. As each unit is also uncountable the greatness of that form is absolute. The feeling of charm in relation to material form, in Li's account, is associated more with quality than quantity. The object does not represent itself as overwhelming greatness but as variation. An example of this theoretical collision can be illustrated by the difference between an unsolvable question and an incomprehensible question. The sublime deals with the questioning of a difficult object which is unanswerable by common sense (cognition), and even by imagination (which is valid in the judgment of the beautiful). This difficulty is caused either by its boundlessness in space (e.g. close-up of huge mountain, vast ocean), or by its abstractness, unimaginable in terms of form (e.g. situations leading to the feeling of negative pleasure). The charming object is not denied its phenomenal existence; it is just that its physical form is too illusionary to be comprehended the same way as 'beauty' (which relies on 'eternal form'). Hence in the case of charm, the question is

²⁶ Kant, I, *The Critique of Judgment*, James Creed Meredith (trans.), Oxford, 1991, Book II, p.90.

there, but a solution is unattainable since it is not certain what is being asked. Clearly different from the idea of 'non-shape shape' of Chinese charm, the Kantian concept seems to be less interested in the being/nothingness of the material form than in how the form gives rise to the feeling of the sublime. Therefore, the judgment of the sublime, or at least in the psychological operation of it, is synonymous with the solving of an impossible question, rather than finding out what the question is about, as in the case of charm.

Beauty of Sense

The crucial factor that brings about this theoretical discord on the form of beauty is closely related to the faculty of the senses. To the Chinese, to distinguish female charm from beauty is to merit the spiritual at the expense of the material, to negate the visibility of female beauty. In other words, the Chinese throw little doubt on the validity of the sense of touch, smell, taste and hearing in comparison with sight. Li, in fact, is convinced that charm is a 'thing', an actual form which however cannot be perceived through the visual sense:

It (charm) is something spiritual, not material. It is perfection only because it appears to be material without being material, or to have form without having it.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Eberhard, W, 'What is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman?', p.274.

Despite the nullity of sight in the perception of charm, Li reiterates that it is something experienced, recounting two occasions on which experienced female charm as instances, and then purposely leaving the conclusion open to the judgment of the individual. Experience in the Chinese context, as I have mentioned, is closely pertinent to the senses, as it refers to the 'action' rather than the 'event' of a momentary presence involved. The connection of this action to sense is testified by the Chinese term of 'experience' ('ti hui' 體會), which is 'action/body' and 'understanding' if translated verbally. It means that one has to take action in order to understand, and this behaviour is one that cannot be separated from one's senses of the body. Since what is meant by senses in Chinese verges more on mentality rather than on corporeality, unlike in the West (this will be elaborated upon in Chapter Three, 'The Culture of Beauty'), it forms a substratum for the experience of charm in the appreciation of female beauty.

In Kant's *Judgment*, on the other hand, there is an overt disavowal of the cogency of all senses. By degrading the position of sensibility, aesthetic feeling is reckoned as a result of reason, notably reflected in the experience of the sublime. Hence the aesthetic experience concerned is an evidence of one's 'supersensible' existence, whose faculty of reason is able to grasp the immeasurable and the chaotic which nonetheless can not be fathomed by corporeal senses:

...the inner perception of the inadequacy of every standard of sense
to serve or the rational estimation of magnitude is a coming into

accord with reason's laws, and a displeasure that makes us alive to the feeling of the supersensible side of our being, according to which it is final, and consequently a pleasure, to find every standard of sensibility falling short of the ideas of reason.³⁸

To distinguish man from other worldly beings, Kant reaffirms the might of human soul in the name of reason. Even in aesthetic experience, in which imagination plays a main role, reason is able to supersede senses by linking up to reason's highest end, morality. But what are senses, and how are they related to the faculty of imagination? It seems that senses are a cause for imagination and also cognition, since Kant only concentrates on articulating how imagination and cognition are deemed void in comprehending the sublime object, while restating the fallibility of sensibility. If the feeling of the sublime is caused by harmony between imagination and reason, as put forward by Kant, then, the faculty of senses is disclaimed simply because it acts as a mere channel for higher faculties of thinking. Senses are only mechanisms for thinking, for, by themselves, they cannot generate ideas. They are inferior not just to reason, but also to imagination. The hierarchy within the theoretical structure of Kantian sublime is clearly defined.

While conceding that the delight springing from sublimity is emotion-based, Kant stresses that this stir of emotion is instructed by rationality, his rationale involving the triumph of rationality of the supersensible over the common senses of

³⁸ Kant, I, *Judgment*, p.106.

cognition and imagination. In such a way Kant distinguishes between rational reason and irrational senses, and between imperative reason and non-imperative senses in the judgment of the sublime. For one thing, while Kant presupposes the limitation of imagination in digesting the sublime object, he does not provide sufficient explanation on how the notion of limitation is aligned to that of irrationality and indetermination, or why the unlimited is associated with rationality. Another thing is that he leaves the question on the relationship between imagination and sensibility unanswered. It seems that Kant bestows contradictory qualities to the senses—wild, irrational and vulgar (corporal) on the one hand, and controlled and tame under the superiority of reason on the other. In praising the mightiness of rationality in terms of the quality of power, which synthesizes sublimity in intuition, he confutes the quantities of power exercised by irrationality pertaining to sensibility.

The idea above pinpoints the link of the Chinese concept of charm with the Kantian sublime with new light. Given the theoretical discrepancy regarding the senses, the aesthetic processes of charm and sublimity are different. If the sublime indicates that imagination is harmonious with reason, then, charm discloses a cooperative relationship between the senses and imagination. For charm, the faculty of imagination is located in a mediated position, as in the case of the sublime, however it is supervised by the faculty of senses instead of by reason. Contrary to the Kantian theory condemning the senses as something not only external but violating reason, they are venerated precisely because of their irrationality according to the traditional Chinese concept of charm. The aesthetic activities relating to charm

in the Chinese context are not judged morally, contrary to the case of sublimity which posits morality as the prime consideration in aesthetic judgment. Rather, the Chinese pay more attention to the everyday experience of beauty/charm than to the reasoning of that experience. In the premise of this, the Chinese particularly treasure the senses which bring the audience close to the feeling of charm, so close that it is conceived only by the individual.

The Chinese concept of charm reveals the logic that imagination and sensibility are complementary to each other, rather than confronting entities as suggested by Kant in his analysis of the relationship between imagination and reason in sublimity:

For just as in the estimate of the beautiful imagination and understanding by their concert generate subjective finality of the mental faculties, so imagination and reason do so here by their conflict – that is to say they induce a feeling of our possessing a pure and self-sufficient reason, or a faculty for the estimation of magnitude, whose pre-eminence can only be made intuitively evident by the inadequacy of that faculty which in the presentation of magnitudes (of objects of sense) is itself unbounded.⁵⁹

Despite the statement that 'imagination is harmonious with reason in the judgment of the sublime', the engagement of these two faculties is based on their discord, or

strictly speaking, on the defeat of imagination. Kant suggests that imagination is confined by sensibility, and the confrontation between imagination and reason is, in fact, one between sensibility and reason. Hence Kant presupposes the close affiliation of the faculty of imagination with the senses, by virtue of their agreement. This condition is analogous to the Chinese conception of charm, wherein the harmony between sensibility and imagination is attained on a smooth and integral basis. The so-called 'harmonization' of imagination with reason in Kantian theory, therefore, is virtually a conquering of sensibility through the redemption of the imagination by the puissance of reason. Here Kant not only makes the essential faculty of imagination passive but also inferior, to either understanding (pertaining to the faculty of cognition in the perception of beauty), or to reason (pertaining to the faculty of morality in the perception of the sublime).

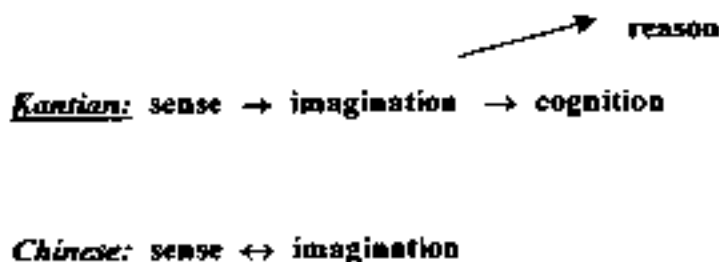
Conversely, imagination is glorified in Chinese aesthetics. In respect of female beauty, one of the most recent and well-known criticism is by Dorothy Ko, on the aesthetics of footbinding in ancient China. In her essay 'Bondage in Time', she comments on the Western misunderstanding concerning the Chinese obsession with bound-feet:

Its [bound-foot's] enchantment lies in concealment and its beauty realized only by the imagination that the literary figurative requires. In first refusing to be seen and then, when seen, refusing to

²⁹ Ibid., Book II, p.107.

be taken as is, the bound foot mocks the empirical realism of the foreign spectator, represented by the I-saw-it-with-my-eyes narrative strategy of the travelers from the earlier centuries and the photographic lens of the moderns.⁶⁰

After attributing the beauty of bound-feet to the imagination of the spectator, the author, unfortunately, did not go on investigating that 'particular mode of imagination in the Chinese context'. It seems that that imagination can only be interpreted through the literary figurative, and this figurative can only be found in the Chinese context, which is, in fact, implausible. What is required is another form of deduction followed by the deduced imagination, otherwise the argument would be two-dimensional, if not general. Ko's meaning of the 'literary figurative', I believe, epitomizes Chinese romanticism, a paradigm not confined to literature of course. What distinguishes Chinese romanticism from others is not the integration of imagination alone, but the intimate correlation between imagination and sense. The following diagram is a 'summary' of the key faculties involved in the process of Chinese aesthetic judgment, in comparison to its Western counterparts as represented by Kant:



⁶⁰ Ko, Dorothy, 'Bondage in Time: Footbinding and Fashion Theory', in *Fashion Theory*, Vol. 1.

In judging an object of beauty, Kant presumes that the motive is to understand, with a definite 'concept' in mind, and the imagination is one pertaining to common sense ('as a matter of course'). It is only in the feeling of the sublime that imagination is not rooted in 'concepts' but 'ideas', which is a 'subjective presupposition' we are bound to make¹¹ Regarding the absence of concepts in aesthetic appreciation, Kant's theory of sublimity can again be compared with the Chinese conception of charm. Hardly related to understanding as a motivation, Chinese charm is realized in the process of **exploration**, without any preconception of the object under scrutiny. However, this preclusion of concepts is not due to formal boundlessness of the object, as in the sublime – for obviously the woman 'can be' seen – but due to an **intentional avoidance of concepts** (understanding), and an indulgence in the bewilderment provoked by imagination. Seen in this light, imagination in Chinese aesthetics is an **active rather than passive agent**.

Imagination in the Chinese context acquires its character through its relation with sense. Imagination acts as mediator for aesthetic ideas, which is simultaneously triggered by and affects the faculty of sense. Imagination is behaviour whereas the senses are motivation as well as outcome of the appreciation of charm. The process of aesthetic appreciation is self-sufficient within the faculties of imagination and sense, operating as a two-way system of which finality is found in the faculty of sense itself (instead of being directed to 'higher faculties'). The prime factor leading to this disparity in theoretical structures between Chinese and Western

issue 1, March, 1997, p.21.

contexts is a discrepancy in motivation and, therefore, in the logic of beauty appreciation. In Kant's judgment of beauty, imagination is considered a means for cognition, though it is closely connected with the senses. In the theory of the sublime, cognition is subordinate to reason because of the incompetence of imagination. It is obvious that the motivation for aesthetic appreciation is to apprehend and comprehend⁶², rather than to feel, in a process involving a great deal of the work of imagination. It seems that Kant deliberately retains the notion of imagination which is essential to the analysis of the process of aesthetic judgment, while relating it to the concept of understanding and reason (even morality) which is his ultimate purpose. In short, Kant's theory presumes an aesthetic experience that primarily focuses on discovering what the aesthetic object is rather than how it is in relation to the spectator. Dealing with the same subject on quite an antithetical way, judgment of beauty/charm in the Chinese context manifests itself in the **how** instead of **what**. It holds that aesthetic experience is a result of **aesthetic feeling**, and imagination is more pertinent to the desire to enjoy the experience than to its understanding. This explains why Li would rather recall his personal experiences than make statements articulating female beauty. Charm is an experience beyond words. Li resorts to citing the following two examples

I was once in Wei-Yang where I was to select a concubine for a distinguished gentleman. . . there was one who did not immediately respond but, with some encouragement, she lifted her head, glanced

⁶² *Judgments*, Book II, p 116.

at me briefly but without really meeting my eye, and quickly she detached her eyes from mine again. Only then did she lift her head fully. After everyone had looked at her, she glanced at me once more and then again lowered her head. This was charm⁵².

It is one of the two events; the other one is even more complicated:

I was once caught by a rainstorm and found shelter in a pavilion which was sought out for shelter also by a number of girls. ... All the girls gathered up their dresses so they would not get wet, but she (among them a poor woman) left her dress alone. When the rain stopped, all the other girls left, but she lingered a while and left a bit later. After she had walked a few steps, it started raining again and this time she was the first to return to the pavilion. As the poor woman had now smoothed her dress, she stood out a hundred times above the others because of her charm.⁶¹

These two instances reveal the fact that Chinese aesthetics of female beauty requires a high degree of mutual communication between the beholder and the beheld. The experience of charm brings the viewer and the woman together in a single instance, despite the physical distance separating them. The most explicit remark is found in the first example, in which the girl responds to the spectator also

⁵² Ibid., p. 99

⁶¹ 'What is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman', p. 276

⁶² Ibid., p. 277

by looking at them. In the second incident, the author is convinced that the woman is conscious of being looked, although the charm she shows is something unconscious. Not only the man is attracted to the beautiful woman, the woman is also impressed by the spectator's eyes. Hence the experience calls for an interaction of two people in the moment of charm, involving a mutual play of emotion which is irrational rather than rational. The aesthetic appreciation in this case is final to the faculty of sense, which is to conceive as well as to judge (compared to Kant's theory that it is final to the faculty of understanding/reason). Despite this, both Kant and Li highly value the significance of sight. Yet while Western theory assumes that eyes are used instinctively to grasp (the **subject matter** of beauty), the Chinese stress eye contact between two people as a means to feel (the **event** of beauty).

Apart from the bifurcation between Kant and Li in their views on the motivation and logic of aesthetic judgment, the modes of pleasure arising from the processes are also different. According to Kant, the feeling of the sublime is a pleasure that,

arises indirectly, being brought about by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful.⁶¹

Not only is the pleasure indirect, it is also double-tiered, since 'the mind is not

⁶¹ *Judgments*, p.91

simply attracted by the object, but is also alternately repelled”⁴⁴. The delight coming from the sublime is violent in nature, the dynamics of which, I think, resemble the theory of action and reflection in physics – the force of repulsion is proportional to that of attraction. As the emotion is formulated upon this conflict, the pleasure attained is a negative rather than a positive one. The feeling resulting from the experience of the beautiful, by contrast, is a positive one that is directly related to ‘the furtherance of life’ and the dynamics involved is analogous to the ‘playfulness of imagination”⁴⁵.

Hence the ‘charm’ of Chinese female beauty seems to be more akin to Kant’s theory of beauty than sublimity, with regards to aesthetic pleasure. In *Judgment*, Kant attaches the feeling of the beautiful to that of charm in terms of their modes of pleasure⁴⁶. Nonetheless, Kant does not put much stress on the idea of charm, nor identify its role in relation to beauty. The compatibility of beauty and charm are constructed on the premise that both ground their pleasure in restful contemplation, and are distinguished from sublimity by the strong mental forces associated with the latter. The charm of female beauty in the traditional Chinese context also postulates this kind of contemplation, the feeling of which is more subdued and peaceful than that obtained from the sublime. However, Chinese charm is discordant with the theory of beauty in the energy they produce during aesthetic experience, with the former being much more strenuous than the latter. The

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

dynamics of pleasure of the beautiful pertains to 'playfulness' and 'restfulness', according to Kant. Consequently the energy fed into and generated from the object of beauty is in moderate amount. Contemplation of a woman's charm is, however, as shown by Li, characterized by its restlessness. Irrationally prescribed by the faculty of imagination, the power of charm is embodied in the way that,

Girls, regardless of their beauty, can cause a man to think constantly of them or to sacrifice their lives in the attempt to get them.⁶⁹

And Li emphasizes that all this is the result of one thing, charm. Hence the aesthetics of female charm tends to engender copious energy which takes a form corresponding to that of beauty. This means that female charm is close to the sublime in terms of the quantity of the energy, while verging on the beautiful in terms of the quality of the energy.

Strictly speaking, however, the dynamics of charm is not as simple as this. Other than the approximate level of vehement attraction (quantity) involved in both charm and sublimity, the form of attraction (quality) between them is also analogous to a certain extent. Most apparently is the simultaneous use of the concept of 'intuition' to interpret aesthetic feeling. For Kant, the formlessness of sublimity necessitates intuition to grasp it as a totality; for Li, the charm of women is

⁶⁹ 'What is Beautiful of a Chinese Woman', p.275.

something which.

magically creates sentiments in us when there were none before, and without being aware of it one is captured.⁷⁰

Li's description is similar to Kant's in terms of the action (and not reaction) of the dynamics of aesthetic pleasure. In both cases the incoming force is so powerful and sudden that the reins of presentation within the faculty of imagination are challenged. In the case of sublimity, it leads to a situation in which the mind transgresses beyond representation to the faculty of reason, which reacts quickly to the strong attraction with an even more powerful energy. In the case of female charm, the chaos of imagination caused by the tremendous attraction takes refuge in none other than the imagination itself, and a sense of pleasure is brought about by this very chaos and uncertainty

The dynamics of reaction in the feeling of charm and sublimity, however, are different. The sensation of female charm inclines to be emotional as it is tied to the faculty of sense instead of reason. Besides the dynamics of sublimity is manifest in the conflict between the faculties, from which pleasure is attained by the victory of reason over sensibility. Female charm, on the other hand, operates by virtue of consistency, not contradiction, by concession, not aggression. This consequently brings variation into the form of reaction, though the quantity of reactive energy is

⁷⁰ Ibid., p 274-275.

the same. The aggressiveness of sublimity provokes a concentrated and instantaneous reaction which attempts to suppress the incoming action, whereas the concessive experience of charm is reflected in a multiple, diverse and lingering sentiment. Thus, structurally, the form of reaction in charm is a flattening of that in sublimity—the concentration of energy is leveled out along with time. The idea is analogous to the popular description of charm in Chinese society, which stresses depth and length (深 长 'shenchang'), not greatness. Hence, teleologically, the aesthetic pleasure of beauty/sublimity testifies to the Western discomfort with (visual) uncertainty, which, in the Chinese conception of charm, is a source of pleasure. This dialectic is another topic for investigation in the following section.

The Nature of Female Beauty

In this section I shall focus my discussion of traditional Chinese female beauty on the aspect of nature. Let me begin by referring back to the Li Yu's stories of female charm. These two examples illustrate the Chinese concept of female beauty from several perspectives. First, female charm is not tied to physical beauty. It transcends the demarcation of form, as shown by Li's description of the woman taking shelter from rain, 'she is not a beautiful woman'.¹¹ Second, communication between the onlooker and the woman is essential. This communication is related more to the senses (irrational) than to reason (rational). Third, female charm takes place by

¹¹ *Ibid.*

chance in daily life. It just happens, in a certain situation at a certain moment

The first perspective pertains to the **subject matter**, the second to the **experience**, and the last to the **context** of female beauty. I have discussed the subject matter and experience of female beauty in the last two sections. I shall now concentrate on the context, which is helpful in giving a bird's eye view of the traditional Chinese concept of female beauty

Beauty of Changes

The beauty of Chinese women, as mentioned before, is not constituted by forms. It is, in Li's terms, 'a shape without shape', and its beauty is embodied in this ambiguity in subject form. As Chinese beauty cannot be gauged effectively by the visual sense, attempts to explain it could easily slip into **mysticism**. This is probably why Chinese women are always seen as mysterious and enigmatic in the eyes of foreigners, whose perception of beauty is founded on their system of visualization. The experience of female charm also remains a mystery, if not a myth, as exemplified by Li's irrational response to female seduction:

There is a girl whom one has seen only once and cannot forget. One sacrifices everything to be able to live with her, this is the **mystery**, the **marvel**⁷.

⁷ Ibid., p.274

Perhaps the most 'mystic' aspect of Chinese female beauty is 'charm', but female charm implausibly belongs uniquely to the Chinese aesthetics. Moreover, the Chinese are not the only ones who find charming women mystical. In English-speaking societies and many other societies with different linguistic systems, charm is usually meant as a compliment for attractive men or women in social contexts. It is usually used in differentiation from beauty, rather than to extol beauty. And since the experience of charm has no universal consensus, unlike beauty, it becomes a commonplace compliment. And charm, a topic of much academic investigation, is considered by the Chinese to be the most mysterious concept of female attraction. Roland Barthes is one of the scholars who wrote much on female charm.

In *Mythologies*, Barthes gives an analysis of the beauty of Garbo. In asserting Garbo as a stereotype of female charm, he puts forward a system of this particular attribute which is very different from Li Yu's. The most obvious difference is his entire focus on Garbo's face, where he said her attraction lies. This reveals the Western (especially modern Western) taste for morphological structure, and more importantly, their desperation for clarification, as reflected in their preference for close-ups. Besides, despite the mystical quality of Garbo's charm, she is still admired as a 'face-object', whose nebulosity is rendered by distance:

The make-up (of Garbo) has the snowy thickness of a mask, it is not a painted face, but one set in plaster, protected by the surface of

the colour, not by its lineaments”⁷³

However unclear, the face remains a solid object, a mass without defined lines of boundary, reminiscent of images of impressionist paintings. While Barthes devoted a whole paragraph to describe the ‘impression’ made by Garbo’s face, Li, in an anonymous way, tries hard using words to explain the inarticulateness of female charm, naturally without touching on the exact locus of face. The comparison goes to show that while Barthes is interested in finding out the **what** of female charm, particularly when he likens it to the ‘absolute mask’, Li collates female charm to fire, candle and jewels, emphasizing on **how** it enraptures:

Charm is for the human being what burning is for the fire, gleaming for the candle, glistening for jewels, gold, and silver. It is something spiritual, not material.⁷⁴

The obscurity of Chinese female charm, according to Li, is a consequence of **movement** – the behaviour rather than the look of a woman. Therefore, Li’s laborious narration of the two instances of charm does make sense. The very nature of charm necessitates recounting in detail, not Li’s inability to translate female charm. This is seen in his step-by-step description of how the woman in the rain stays, leaves and returns to the pavilion, and how the courtesan moves her eyes and head among other contestants. Eberhard, the author of ‘What Is Beautiful In a

⁷³ Barthes, Roland, ‘The Face of Garbo’, in *Mythologies*, Vintage, 1993, p. 56

Chinese Woman'. relates Li's abundance of details on movement to his interest in the theatre and stage production⁷⁴. Without making any further references to material on traditional Chinese female beauty, Eberhard's view is surely a misunderstanding. He fails to realize that change, manifest in the movement of female bodies, is one of the most fundamental concepts of traditional Chinese aesthetics. A contextual study of Chinese aesthetics, including that of Chinese female figure drawing and calligraphy, one would be amazed to find how immensely the Chinese conception of beauty has been influenced by the idea of change.

Change is the pivotal thought of one of the most ancient Chinese philosophies, *yin yang*, and the central concept of Taoism. According to Richard Wilhelm, a translator of *I Ching (The Book of Changes)*, 'Tao' 道 is 'something that sets in motion and maintains the interplay of these forces', and since it means a 'way' or 'course' rather than a material, it is nothing in itself yet serves to 'regulate all movements'⁷⁵. It is clear that Tao is the principle, the changes the orientation, and the movement the behaviour. In the original source of *I Ching*, there is also detailed explication of the concept of change:

Movement and rest have their definite laws; according to these, firm and yielding lines (of the oracles) are differentiated . . . Events follow definite trends, each according to its nature. . . . In the heavens

⁷⁴ 'What Is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman', p.274.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.289.

⁷⁶ *I Ching*, Richard Wilhelm (trans.), Penguin, 1989, p.297. 'The Great Treatise' Chapter V.

phenomena take form: on the earth shapes take form. In this way
change and transformation become manifest.

From the movement of worldly materials, one realizes the universe is oriented towards constant change. Implicit in the meaning of change is not only the idea of variation, but more importantly, transformation through which all beings are subject to incessant renewal and evolution. It is in this way the principle (Tao) of the universe is fathomed. In the paradigm of aesthetics, the emphasis on movement with the distinctive deployment of flowing lines and curves as seen in Chinese calligraphy and figure drawings, indeed matches the organic changes of nature. In fact, people from other cultures have had difficulty understanding the remarkable position occupied by calligraphy in Chinese art, primarily because they do not fully comprehend the significance of the 'lines'. The lines of calligraphy or drawing, which stress the ideas of continuity, action and direction, are manifestations of the logic of change, which the Chinese call 'qi shi'氣 勢 (the spirit with relation the flows of lines). In the aesthetics of female beauty, the law of Tao reveals itself in the manners and behaviours of living women, whose beauty synthesizes into the fluid changes of bodily movements and of scenes of their life.

Beauty of Life

Footnote 1.

Closely linked with the concept of change is the concept of life in the aesthetics of traditional female beauty. There is a great emphasis on daily events in Chinese philosophy (which will be elaborated in 'The Culture of Beauty') which is deeply imbedded in the traditional idea of female beauty. In his essay, Eberhard quotes Li's praise for living women:

To those who claim that beauty alone is perfection, able to enrapture man, I say: Why is it that the beauties on silk, the bewitching women in the modern paintings, whose beauty is ten times more perfect than that of living women, do not enrapture anyone and cause no one to fall ill with desire? You see, the charm is indispensable.⁷⁹

He then compares charming women to the burning fire and candle, both lively and warm with life. To Li, a lifeless woman, like those in paintings, can be called beautiful but never charming, and therefore her beauty is not perfect. He claims that perfection can only be achieved when beauty is complemented by charm, implying that the difference between beauty and charm is one between physical appearance and spiritual embodiment. The spiritual embodiment is represented by the life of the women, how they eat, sleep, smile or cry, in short, the bits and pieces of daily life. Having lotus feet has been a crucial beauty trait for Chinese women until the turn of this century. Their seduction lies, Li suggests, more on the gait of these women than

⁷⁸ Ford, p.289, Chapter I.

⁷⁹ Eberhard, p.274.

on the smallness of their feet:

Man was created with feet so he could walk ... In fact, her feet were admired and highly esteemed precisely because her gait was beautiful. But if a woman's feet are so small that she cannot walk, it is as if her legs had been chopped off.⁷⁹

Li did not mention the fact that the women could not walk often not because they were born with small feet but because their feet were bound. Nonetheless, 'steps' is considered by Li a dominating factor contributing to female charm, which coincided with traditional Chinese sayings about beautiful girls: 'Lotus blossoms spring from her every step' or 'Each of her steps is like jade'. The idea also makes interesting correspondence to Li's basis for aesthetic judgment which focuses on standards for choosing wives or concubines, rather than not pure anatomical beauty which Li describes as reminiscent of 'clay figurines'.

I have mentioned the idea of 'distance' in Barthes' interpretation of female charm. Another point reaffirming this proposition is that he locates female charm in the realm of idealism, contrary to the Chinese emphasis on reality.

Garbo still partakes of the same rule of Courty Love, where flesh gives rise to mystical feelings of perdition. ... this face, not drawn but sculpted in something smooth and friable, that is, at once

perfect and ephemeral . her face was not to have any reality
except that of its perfection.”¹⁹

In highlighting the connotation of ‘death’ in Garbo’s charm, Barthes locates it in a parallel position to Rudolph Valentino’s, which actually caused his fans to commit suicide until only a few years earlier. Barthes’ notions of perdition, suicide, and the ephemeral, I believe, are similar to Ackbar Abbas’ concept of ‘disparan’²⁰, referring to images which are short-lived and disappearing rather than dead, lifeless countenances. For though her face is compared to a ‘totem-like’ mask, the author believes that her charm lies in her being a fleshy, corporeal being. How can this be justified? Unlike the absolute mask that implies the presence of a hidden secret, Garbo’s face reveals the essence of a human face—in Barthes’ term, it is an ‘archetype’²¹. Since this human essence is found only in one’s mind—‘intellectual even more than formal’²²—the existence of Garbo’s face seems to be instantaneous, about to vanish any minute. Yet her charm is not any lesser or more dubious. It just never deteriorates because of its temporary revelation.

Now we have a theoretical dichotomy related to female beauty, brought forward by Li and Barthes. Li separates charm from beauty on the division between the spiritual and the material; for Barthes, it is the dualism between the essential and

¹⁹ Ibid., p.287

²⁰ *Mythologies*, p.56-57.

²¹ In Ackbar Abbas’ *Hong Kong- Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, p 2

²² Ibid., p.56

²³ Ibid., p.57

the existential, although the differentiation is only implicit. An analysis of these four categories of the dichotomy: the material, the spiritual, the essential and the existential, could provide a better insight into the issue.

<u>How</u>		<u>What</u>
Material	→	Substance
Existential	→	Event
Spiritual	→	Dynamics
Essential	→	Concept/ Idea

In the paradigm of female beauty, the material means the physical form of women, and the existential refers to the way of life of women. The spiritual is the dynamics of women (bodies), and their life, and the essential is the concept encompassing all those categories, including the looks of a woman, her life and how she lives. If the charm of Garbo, in comparison to that of Audrey Hepburn, is analogous to the 'difference' between ideas and events, concepts and substances, as Barthes stated, then the mysticism of traditional Chinese women is a result of 'variations' within these events and substances. These variations or changes are caused by the dynamics of Chinese women's life. Hence from them is observed another dichotomy between the corporeal and the mental, with substance, event and dynamics belonging to the former and concept pertaining to the latter. More precisely, it is a schism between nature and the human mind, a classical object/ subject division.

Spirit, a fundamental element in Chinese aesthetics including that of female beauty and of artifacts, **belongs to the material world** in Chinese thinking. In connection with female beauty, spirit becomes the 'charm' of women, opposite to physical beauty in terms of concrete forms (female faces, figures etc.). The charm of women cannot be perceived except from their daily life, which is full of mundane events. Traditional Chinese thinking posits the spiritual, the material, and the existential of female beauty all as part of nature, although Li relates female charm to a power more superior than man:

It is the Charm which lets us recognize how Heaven and Earth were artists in the creation of mankind and how skilful the deities were when they gave form to their creatures.⁸⁴

In *Mythologies*, Barthes expresses a similar view over Garbo's charm:

The name given to her, the 'Divine', probably aimed to convey less a superlative state of beauty than the essence of her corporeal person, descended from a heaven where all things are formed and perfected in the clearest light.⁸⁵

In their praise of female charm, both Li and Barthes associate this specific attribute with 'heaven'. It is noteworthy that the term 'heaven' has discrepant connotations

⁸⁴ 'What Is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman', p.274.

⁸⁵ *Mythologies*, p.56.

and should be interpreted cautiously. Li's heaven is set in the context of earthliness, which imposes a meaning of spirituality and the unworldly. Barthes' heaven, on the other hand, implies a beauty that exists within the human world, but is found only in the human mind.

Here we see interesting theoretical constructs on the relationship between human and nature with regards to female beauty. When Li asserted female beauty as God's creation, he found that its value and attractiveness in fact lie in its worldliness. Female beauty is part of nature, and subsists within women themselves. Garbo's beauty, on the other hand, dwells in human beings as it is generated in the mind, although it resembles the 'platonian idea of human creature descending from heaven'. The relationship between the object (women, nature) and the subject (beholder, human), is explicitly conveyed. Celebrating the victory of human mentality over nature, Garbo's charm is evident of Kant's aesthetic theory of the sublime in this particular aspect. Kant notes,

Sublimity does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind, in so far as we may become conscious of our superiority over nature within, and thus also over nature without us (as exerting influence upon us) ³⁶

The feeling of sublimity is not caused by a deep respect for beauty displayed in

³⁶ *Judgment*, Book II, p.114

nature, but the realization that there is a faculty within human beings that is inspired by and greater than nature. Undeniably, this Western concept is a stark antonym to the Chinese, as illustrated by Li, which bespeaks a disinterest in the unearthly, and veneration for nature itself. The Chinese also emphasize the mind's **communication** and **integration** with nature, instead of its contest with nature as viewed from the West. Accordingly, although charm (spiritual) is explicitly taken as superior to beauty (physical), the relationship between the two is complementary, one which strives for perfect female beauty. By contrast, although Kant does not postulate a direct connection between beauty and the sublime, he obviously privileges sublimity over beauty owing to the former's relation with superior reason.

What is meant by the 'reality' of a woman is the amalgamation of her spiritual, material and existential selves. What is meant by the 'life' of a woman, however, is the combination only of her spirit and existence, like that believed by the ancient Chinese. If the face of Audrey Hepburn, according to Barthes, represents an existential beauty, composed of substance and event in terms of language, then traditional Chinese women should be recognized as mortal beauties consisting only of events and the dynamics of events, in other words, **phenomenon**. Traditional Chinese beauty is phenomenal, which is not only dissimilar to the essentialism of Garbo, but is also distinguished from the existentialism of Audrey Hepburn. The earliest text to remark on the disparity between essence and phenomenon (changes in life), *I Ching*, reads,

As continuer, it is good. As completer, it is the essence⁸⁷

The 'essence' in this ancient Chinese text implies the origin of things and bears great affinity with Barthes's essence in relation to the archetype. All in all, Chinese female beauty stresses both the process (continuer, of change) and its power (completer, of Tao). In addition, the focus on women's existence is less connected with physical make-up (substance), as in the case of Hepburn, than with actions in relation with their physicality (events). Chinese beauty, as a phenomenon formulated by the events of everyday life, is planted in nature (women) and its manifestation is spontaneous. Its appreciation calls for sensing, experiencing, and fathoming, rather than judging, evaluating, and recreating. It is the reason Li is particularly interested in the 'restrained beauty' and shyness of women, which suggests an ontological beauty within women yet to be discovered.

Both substances and events pertaining to female beauty, nevertheless, are constitutive instead of independent, giving rise to a structure whose configuration is still an unraveled mystery. This system consists of all the indispensable components in the make-up of a beautiful woman. 'Meiren Pu' 美人譜 (Manual of the Beautiful Women), a main chapter of the Chinese classic *Yangyan Congshu Shu*, offers us the best example of the system of female beauty. All the matters and events associated with beautiful women are split into ten categories in this book.

⁸⁷ *1 Ching*, p.298

- 1 physical appearance
- 2 charm
3. skills
4. events
- 5 residences
- 6 time
- 7 clothing & accessories
- 8 complementary substances
- 9 gourmet
- 10 amusement”

These components are ‘about’ beautiful women rather than ‘of’ the women themselves. In short, they are concerned with how a beautiful woman lives. Here female beauty is linked with, or even substituted by female characteristics and behaviours, and hence comes close to the ideology of femininity. Seen in this light, the Chinese consider female beauty in terms of femininity. In traditional Chinese thinking, female beauty is not valid without the guise of femininity. Unlike Garbo’s charm which seems bisexual to Barthes, this beauty has absolute sexual orientation. It can be said that the Chinese systems of female beauty, such as those erected by Li and Mei, stem from the traditional Chinese system of genders besides aesthetic theories. They act as references to the intellectuality of aesthetic taste to men and as prescribers of appropriate conduct and behaviour to women

**Nanyan Ciyangshu*. Beijing: People Literature Publication, 1994. p 11-13.

The traditional Chinese beauty system is nature-based, that is, female beauty is taken as **endowment** but not adornment. Li said,

Charm comes from heaven, it cannot be put on artificially. Put-on charm not only fails to increase beauty, it rather emphasizes ugliness.¹⁹

The charm of a woman seems to be a matter of fate, something inborn. But then the author goes on to argue that although charm cannot be taught, it can be learned” (an interesting mirror to Kant’s theory proposing the acquisition of aesthetic taste). Li’s polemic on female charm reveals a **nullity of nature/culture division** in traditional Chinese aesthetics. Similarly, there is **no essence/existence dichotomy** of beauty, as seen from the **philosophy of changes**. Femininity is a hot topic in the nature versus culture dispute in the West. Li would say that femininity has its base in nature yet it can be cultivated. How is this opinion justified? It is easily justified when one realizes that what the ancient Chinese were trying to do was to erase rather than construct contradictions. Li’s idea illustrates the Chinese ‘Doctrines of the Mean’, the strive for synthesis, not oppositions. When female charm is regarded as an inborn asset, it is actually assimilated to Tao, the essence of all lives. Like Tao, gifted charm only indicates a potential for female beauty, at the earliest stage of a woman’s life when her attraction is still subject to change. On the other hand, women who lack this kind

¹⁹ ‘What is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman’, p.275.

of potential can acquire it, perhaps through living with someone who possesses it. From this we see emphasis on both innate trait (essence) and subtle change in life (existence). It is not due to a depolarization of standpoints - for obviously there is no pole to be obliterated - but a synthesis of concepts through which the isolated become parts of the whole.

Conclusion - Nature of Female Beauty in Contemporary Hong Kong

I conclude this chapter by turning our focus back to the examination of the nature of female beauty in the contemporary local context. The aim is to highlight the various accords and discords with the traditional context in this specific aspect of female beauty by considering them as a whole, rather than as individual points of study. From the traditional to the contemporary, the transition of female beauty is epitomized in the fact that the pre-modern 'Meiren Pu' was transformed into modern women's magazines. Women's magazines are basically formulated with a structure similar to that of 'Meiren', if structure is defined in terms of its contents. The contents of both are unanimously about beautiful women, including their appearance, lifestyles, and manners, although the size of each category varies greatly. Despite the dramatic expansion of the fashion and beauty section especially in the new generation of women's magazines, the cognate structure of contents indicates a **cohesive ideology of femininity**. Women's magazines in Hong Kong have inherited

* Ibid., p.278.

the Chinese traditional ideology of femininity in the articulation of female beauty. What gives rise to the transmutation from the old to the new is the **subject** rather than the ideology of female beauty, that is, the shift from the articulation of real women to the **images** of women.

The accentuation of female images in women's magazines marks an important turning point in the conception of the nature of female beauty. This is rendered more by the changes in the **aesthetic taste concerning female beauty** than by ideology related to femininity. This transition provokes debates not only on whether images of women in women's magazines are **natural or cultural**, but also on the definition of 'images'. To gain a better insight into the first issue of nature/culture, I shall begin by trying to translate the meaning of images. Images are figurative conceptions of something, which are, however, not necessarily inspired by figures. Images have two distinctive characteristics, firstly, they are **representations** of something else; secondly, they are **visualization** of a concept or an object, in reality or in the mind. This definition precludes female beauty accounted in 'Meiren' as images, primarily because it is less a visualization of a concept than a concept of beauty itself. In 'Yue Rong Pain' (Chapter of Attractive Faces), another chapter of *Xiangyan Congshu*, there is a sentence on female beauty which sums up the concept illustrated in 'Meiren':

Beautiful women have style, spirit, amusement, love and heart.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *Xiangyan*, p.71

Resources on traditional Chinese female beauty indicate a persistent avoidance of articulation through visualization of beauty. Even in the visual arts, the overall homogeneity of the subjects' physical make-up indicates an orientation towards style instead of form. Very often, the explication of female beauty is assisted by the use of similes to other objects or events, in order to encourage the comprehension of beauty through imagination in the process of experience. This method is more about setting examples and making associations than reifying the concept by means of graphics.

The deployment of female beauty in women's magazines, on the other hand, relies highly on images, that is, it is represented as well as visualized. It is largely a consequence of the shift in aesthetic modes, from the literal to the graphic. The invention and popularity of photography and motion pictures in the modern era is certainly responsible for this shift:

The 'great beauties' of the era of mass reproduction have in common, along with their acclaimed flawless skins, 'classic' noses, large and well-modeled eyes, photogenic bone structure and pleasing proportions, some quality of individuality, uniqueness, irregularity, something that makes each particular face memorable.

..The impact of the media on our imaginations is undeniably enormous. We are accustomed to seeing still, posed faces, even in

the movies.⁵²

The variation of aesthetic mode in this age of globalization has significantly shaped aesthetic taste in female beauty in contemporary Hong Kong. The traditional Chinese 'content over form'⁵³ has been reversed, as exhibited by the visualization of female beauty, the construction of its images as a morphological complex. The embodiment of female beauty as images has mutated from the conceptual to the formal, and from the experiential to the visual. Images of female beauty, in women's magazines as in other media, have become objects of consumption and of scrutiny. This is clearly demonstrated by the gradual interest in dramatic close-ups and snapshots. Close-ups stand for a shortening of distance in terms of space; snapshots bespeak a bringing of time and hence movements to a standstill or even perpetuation. Through them, the traditional notion of female beauty as nature is tempered with – the images detach the spectator from nature while simultaneously bringing them closer to nature (in terms of space and time). The coherent existential beauty of women is cut up into incoherent units of essence, and is retailed into a hyper-natural image.

Accordingly the question about whether the images of female beauty in women's magazines are cultural or natural is resolved. They are definitely a construct of modern culture. These images seem dissatisfied at simply playing a

⁵² Halprin, Sarah, *Look at My Ugly Face*, Penguin, 1995, p.256-257.

⁵³ In *I Ching*, there is a hexagram 'Pi' which means beauty. Wilhelm interpreted this particular beauty in the Chinese context of changes as one to 'counteract over-emphasis of form by means of

representative role. Instead of identifying themselves with women in real-life situations, they attempt frequently to transgress and take over nature. This tendency is prevalent in Hong Kong today where the influence of global culture is accelerated by the rapid flow of information due to technological advances. Computer-aided photography and virtual tele-images, which I believe will be the images of local women's magazines in the future, further bind the notion of culture and nature together just as they are splitting them apart. The reversed relationship between art and nature portrayed in women's magazines now is already foreshadowing this interlocking yet contradictory tendency. Images of beauty are not only repetitive in quantity but also functional in quality, building up a system of functions based on the look, as opposed to the old content-grounded structure of female beauty. Traditional femininity is therefore challenged at the level of women's appearance, rather than of ideology. There is also a re-emphasis of sense in the experience of female beauty in this era of images, albeit as a cause and not an outcome of aesthetic appreciation. The glorification of images at the expense of the real in this context, signals a redefinition of nature rather than its disavowal. Contrary to the denouncement of nature/culture dualism of traditional Chinese, the boom of female images in contemporary women's magazines reclaims this dichotomy which has become a system of aesthetics as well as one of political play and inquiry.

contin'. See p.499.

THE CULTURE OF BEAUTY

Conducting a study on female beauty in Hong Kong, one encounters problems on the methodology. One of these problems is caused by the uncertainty over what theoretical framework is appropriate for the particular cultural context of Hong Kong, where the pertinent historical context is also a specific rather than a general one. The other problem has to do with whether it is necessary to draw up a new analytical framework and, if so, how. All these questions arise out of the observation that neither traditional Chinese nor Western theories can effectively help explore the aesthetics of female beauty in Hong Kong.

I have pointed out in Chapter Two that the traditional Chinese aesthetics of female beauty is closely allied to the traditional concept of femininity, which is topologically segregated into inner and outer beauty. Outer beauty (physical appearance) was less prominent than inner beauty (personality, manners, taste, skill, morals, etc.) in determining a 'good-looking woman', as qualities associated with inner beauty such as virtue, good social class, and perspicacity were highly valued. This traditional aesthetic value has been considerably reversed in modern times as a result of an intensified focus on outer beauty. This transposition of inner and outer beauty in the judgment of female beauty is definitely connected with Western influence. Eberhard made a similar conclusion in his historical research on the aesthetics of Chinese female beauty. He remarked that 'the Chinese women and

presumably also the men are developing a new ideal of female beauty which is strongly influenced by Western customs"¹⁴. However he did not further investigate the nature of this connection and how it is related to the social and cultural context as a whole. On the other hand, we should not stop at Western influence in our investigation of such changing values because the contemporary culture of Hong Kong is not shaped by Western influence alone, and Western aesthetic values are also changing. Seen in this light, changing values are not simply a question of Westernization but a more complex one of modernization and globalization. But before possible answers could be obtained for these questions, I shall now concentrate on examining the nature of Western aesthetic value in relation to female beauty and how it is positioned in a Chinese society such as Hong Kong.

Aesthetics of the Female Body and 'Visual' Culture

The obsession with physical appearance in the area of female beauty is closely tied to Western 'visual culture'. Visual culture is a culture typified by being activated from the perspective of the optical. The Western proverb 'Seeing is believing' indicates a sincere trust in the ocular sense on which the cognition of an individual of the outside world is founded. Visuality plays a dominant role in modern Western culture which nevertheless has its basis in pre-modern Western traditions, as evident in theories of philosophy, aesthetics, feminism, and even medicine. Richard

¹⁴ W. Eberhard, "What is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman?" 1971. In *Moral and Social Values of the*

Shusterman, a contemporary philosopher, has made a critique on the methods of somatic improvement and identified problems arising from the predominance of representational beauty over experiential beauty in the concept of somaesthetics. He advocates the practice of experiential somaesthetics, which echoes the Chinese emphasis on inner beauty, and attacks the 'oppressive norms of external body' which create a 'tedious homogeneity of standardized looks'⁹⁴. What he pointed out as representational somatics, both as body and as image of the body, is characterized by a formalization and materialization of the abstract idea of beauty within the frame of corporeality.

The emphasis on 'form' in aesthetic judgment is of course not a recent phenomenon in Western philosophy. In his discussion of classical beauty, Aristotle laid stress on the unity and clarity of an object's form, because 'the chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness'⁹⁵. Subtly pertinent to his concept of aesthetic harmony, Aristotle's focus of the aesthetic being is its structural solidity and substantiality, which can be calculated and defined in terms of space. The idea of form and material boundary initiated by Aristotle not only set criteria for artistic tradition but also brought about art criticism on the 'body form' undertaken by critics like Kenneth Clark and Lynda Nead, as well as by feminist critics on its relation to the visual perception of the other. Western psychoanalysis, represented by

Chinese Collected Essays Taipei, Chengwan, p.299

⁹⁴ Richard Shusterman, "Somaesthetics and the Body/Media Issue" in *Body and Society*, Vol.3, No.3, p.45-46.

⁹⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book XIII. In Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns, eds., *Philosophy of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*, New York:1964, p.96

Freud has proposed an alliance between the perception of subjectivity with the lines of demarcation and the construction of the self. This theory is to a certain extent mapped on the connection between 'visuality' and masculinity, first put forward by John Berger in a study of female images in paintings, and later taken up by Laura Mulvey in a criticism of films. In fact the feminist theory of the male gaze is taken from sources as early as Aristotle, who wrote that 'of all the regions in the head the eyes are the most seminal'⁴⁹. It is not the intention of this section to trace patriarchal power in Western cultural history, but I will draw up adequate evidence to testify to the overwhelmingly dominant role that visuality occupies in Western culture. It is the culture which gives rise not only to the character of this visuality but to its whole tradition. (By Western culture I refer to that which has its roots in Greek civilization and not simply that which is geographically located in the West. See also *Introduction* for definition of the West.)

No doubt it is just a brief account rather than a complete documentary of the role of visuality in Western culture. Nonetheless, it covers several important aspects of the culture which are noteworthy. The first of these has to do with the object 'seen' and is linked directly to the notion of visuality. This is connected with the formal culture in which the individual's cognition of the world is based on what he actually sees rather than experiences. The second aspect concerns the relationship between the individual who sees and the one seen, and it is constructed on power. These two aspects have been briefly mentioned in the above paragraph. The third

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, A.L. Peck, (trans.), MA: Harvard University Press, 1965.

aspect is focused on the perspective of the seer and is more subtly related to the notion of seeing. The seer's overwhelming interest in seeing a substantial form of the object can be construed as a particular emphasis on evidence.

Of the three aspects, the last one is the most complicated and hence needs to be further articulated. Evidence does not necessarily stand for visual substance – sound, taste, smell, touch can also be evidence – although evidence captured by the eyes is always believed to be the most reliable. The connection between evidence and visibility from this aspect is not founded on the superficial meaning of the optical but on broader associations of the word 'vision'. In English vocabulary the most closely related word to 'vision' is 'seeing' which carries the senses of 'understanding' and 'exploring' in addition to its apparent meaning of 'looking'. Underlying this enthusiasm for seeing is the spirit of Western culture to search for the truth, always by looking for evidence by dissecting the subject of study for detailed scrutiny. This type of deductive, systematic method of exploration provides a constructive solution to finding evidence. It is a crucial component of Western scientific research of which Western medical practice is a case in point.

In Western medicine, the human body is divided into different parts and each is treated on its own, often by specialists in the respective areas. If a patient visits a Western doctor for skin disease, for instance, the doctor will most probably begin by treating his skin alone, if not the affected area of the skin. In Western medicine, investigation always starts from symptoms. A Chinese doctor, on the other hand,

would consider problems with internal organs especially the digestive system – which is believed to be connected to the condition of skin and the mouth – before examining the symptoms, if he does. Sometimes Chinese doctors, especially the experienced ones, prescribe treatment right after taking the patient's pulse, without asking questions about the symptoms. In the eyes of the West, Chinese medicine is anything but scientific, in the sense that the very logic of it could not be proven by evidences. Even ways of medical treatment like acupuncture and 'qigong' (气功) which are beginning to attract attention worldwide as alternative medicine, will remain as 'myths' unless underpinned by scientific evidence. The interesting point is that although the Chinese do not actually 'see' the 'qi' (the energy within the body) or 'jing luo' (the route through which the energy flows – providing necessary map for acupuncture), they have been using acupuncture and qigong with enormous trust in their efficacy for thousands of years.

The discrepancy between the Western idea of medicine and the Chinese is a reflection of the different logic underlying the two cultures: the Western use of fragmentation and the Chinese use of unification in the process of finding the truth. The ultimate reason for this conceptual division is that 'evidence' plays a more important role in Western than in Chinese thinking. The meaning of 'truth' is also different for the two cultures. The Western believes in a universal, single truth, which can be proven by evidence. The old Western saying that 'Truth, Beauty and Kindness are forever' (note that beauty is put alongside truth and hence is also universal) clearly imparts this point of view. This conception about universal truth is

persistent in Western philosophy except, perhaps, in the age of existentialism when philosophers like Kierkegaard and Sartre put forward the idea that truth is created by personal existence – truth only makes sense in individual act and choice in every moment of existence. Truth to the Chinese, on the other hand, is less fixed and more contextual. To draw an example again from medicine: two persons may suffer from the same kind of cough but the underlying disease and the treatment needed could be different (hot cough and cold cough), depending on their health conditions – whether they have ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ bodies in the classification of Chinese medicine. The ‘truth’ as regarded by Zen can be used to explain this aspect of Chinese thinking: truth is a mirror in one’s mind but it is formless so no one knows what it is. The only way to understand it is to act and live with it. Since everyone’s life is unique, the meaning of truth is changes in relation to individual experience.

Experiential Aesthetics: the Chinese Concept of Female Beauty

We do not know whether Buddhism influenced Chinese indigenous thinking or vice versa, and it is not a topic to be further explored here. However it is known for certain that when Buddhism first stepped on the land of China a thousand years ago, it began a clever process of localization by absorbing Chinese values, especially Taoism, in order to thrive. Zen, as the most dominant stream of Buddhism in the twentieth century, in fact originated from Southern China and was advocated by Chinese monk Hui Yuan as early as the Jin 晉 dynasty. Therefore, long before it was

prevalent in the Tang dynasty. Zen had already been born with Chinese characteristics. From the Sung to the Ming and Qing dynasties, Buddhism together with Taoism and Confucianism became the three major contributing thoughts to Neo-Confucianism. In the 800 years from then to now, Neo-Confucianism has become a dominant philosophical system in China. But during the same period, Taoism and Buddhism witnessed no significant individual development as schools of thought or institutions.

In order to understand more about the Chinese concept of female beauty, one has to refer to Chinese theories on aesthetics. And to trace Chinese aesthetics, one has to examine Chinese philosophy from a historical perspective. The best way to do so is to focus on Neo-Confucian theories. Neo-Confucianism occupies an important position in the history of Chinese philosophy not simply because it is the most recent and influential system, and is most indicative of China's present and future philosophical trends of China, but because it has inherited and assimilated concepts from ancient and medieval Confucianism. More importantly, it manifests a subtle integration and reconciliation of concepts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, each of which has played a prominent role in Chinese philosophy. Owing to this unprecedented philosophical synthesis, Confucianism, as the leading school, deviated for the first time from its essential humanism and pragmatism, and gradually oriented towards the investigation of metaphysics and contemplation of the mind. Neo-Confucian scholars during the period were all steeped in Buddhist and Taoist theories, and the concepts of spiritualism, so representative of these two schools of

thought, were prevalent. This trend persisted for most of the Ming and Qing dynasties, until a philosophical reaction against straight metaphysics in favour of a return to empirical Confucianism took place in the last three hundred years. This was the time when China was desperate for political and economic reform and traditional theories were thrown into question by the new philosophical trends from the West. The contents of traditional Chinese philosophy in this era contained, to some extent, Western influences. Therefore they should not be treated as part of traditional Chinese sources when doing comparisons of traditional Western and Chinese aesthetic values.

How is the Chinese concept of female beauty connected with that of Neo-Confucianism? I shall begin by concentrating on general theories of aesthetics in relation to Neo-Confucianism. Like ancient and medieval Confucianism, primary texts on aesthetics found in written sources on Neo-Confucianism are extremely rare, due largely to the fact that Confucius cared more about human relationships than human enjoyment in life. Fortunately, the abundant artifacts produced within this period provide valuable secondary texts testifying to the prevalent ideology. Calligraphy and landscape paintings are two important kinds of artistic representations that bear witness to Neo-Confucian aesthetics. Calligraphy in the Ming and Qing dynasties was basically a development from the genre in Tang and Song, but with intensified emphasis on 'qi' 氣 (spirit), 'yun' 韻 (rhythm), 'sheng' 生 (life) and 'dong' 動 (movement). 'Qiyunshengdong' was designated by Xie Ke 謝赫 around 100 B. C. to be the primary requirement among the 'liu fa' 六法 (six

principles) of paintings. It has remained an authoritative criteria for classical criticism of Chinese paintings since then. Calling for the depiction of objects with emphasis on content over form, this idea has shaped and set the direction of artistic movements of later centuries.

In calligraphy the influence was seen in the enormous popularity of the 'Caoshu' 草书 style (scribble, figure 1) in the Ming and Qing dynasties, which is characterized by a transgression of formal limitations by the practice of expressive lines, namely, 'xieyi' 写意 (writing of sensation). The idea of 'Qiyunshengdong' 气韵生动 also permeated through landscape paintings during the same period, inspired obviously by Neo-Confucian values—celebration of the life of a recluse as well as a contemplative mind. The elevated position of calligraphy in Chinese art history may be a novelty to Western eyes, the reversed positions of calligraphy and painting further distinguish Chinese art history from the Western. Following the rules of 'chi', the flowing lines of Chinese calligraphy have a similar composition to the structure of graphical art; whereas the pictures of landscape paintings are virtually constructed by these lines of feeling. These reflect the obsession of the prevalent philosophy with individual feeling and experience regarding the objects portrayed and its criticism of figural norms and doctrines.

Certainly the status of 'xin' 心 (mind) reached its pinnacle in the era of Neo-Confucianism. The elevated role of the mind had already been revealed through the ideas of early Neo-Confucians when their central interest was still on 'li' 理

(principle) rather than 'xin'. They believed that 'taiji' 太極 (the Great Ultimate) was the principle through which material force is generated, and which contributes to the evolutionary, harmonious and well-coordinated system of reality. This reality is one of change, one in which mystery lies at the very moment when the foregoing past ushers in the forthcoming presence. The concept of change was undoubtedly inherited from the Confucian classic *The Book of Change (I Ching)*, but it was also associated with the Taoist understanding of change in nature. Not only material beings are ever changing due to the progressive force of 'yin-yang', the underlying principle itself is also formless. This is due to the belief that 'principle is above form'. To understand it, one cannot simply look at material appearance but has to investigate the deeper levels of material operation. One has to concentrate on objective phenomena, observing them with one's mind instead of eyes, while obeying the severe discipline of 'cheng' 誠 (sincerity) and 'ken' 懇 (seriousness). In light of this, the Neo-Confucian view of knowledge acquisition began to correspond to that of Buddhism, in terms of the practice of meditation and the inward exploration of the human mind.

This mind-centred philosophy was further fueled by Lu Xiang Shan, who said 'the universe is my mind, and my mind is the universe'. The wave climaxed when Wang Yang Ming, who denied the existence of anything beyond the mind, claimed 'separated from my clear intelligence, there will be no Heaven, Earth, spiritual

* Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhu Xi Lei Ji* 朱熹集 . (A Collection of Conversations of Early Chinese Philosophers), Book I. Zhu Xi was a leading scholar of early Neo-Confucianism.

** From *Lu Xiangshan Quanyi* 陸象山全集 (Complete Works of Lu Xiang Shan), Book XXI.

beings, or myriad things, and, separated from these, there will not be my clear intelligence."¹⁰⁰ Wang affirmed the absolute position of the mind and the nullity of matters through our appreciation of flowers:

Before you look at these flowers, they and your mind are in the state of silent vacancy. As you come to look at them, their colors at once show up clearly. From this you can know that these flowers are not external to your mind.¹⁰¹

Wang narrowed down the external world to mind – being is nothing unless we think about it. This is reminiscent of Descartes' 'thinking human being' but whereas Descartes' rationalism is underpinned by reason, Wang's is by experience. The beauty of flowers in bloom only makes sense in our mind's judgment ('xin'), a judgment that is pertinent to behaviour ('xing' 行). This is because our cognition of the material world is tied up with our response towards it:

Seeing beautiful colours appertains to knowledge, while loving beautiful colours appertains to action. However, as soon as one sees that beautiful colour, he has already loved it.¹⁰²

Translation by Chan Wing-Tsit in *Source Book*, p.579.

¹⁰⁰ From *Wang Yangming Quanshu* 王陽明全集 (Complete Works of Wang Yang Ming), Book III

Translation by Chan Wing-Tsit in her *Instructions for Practical Living*, p.257

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, Chan, trans., *Instructions*, p.222

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, Book I, Chan, trans., *Instructions*, p.10.

Here Wang commented right on the central point of my discussion, aesthetic appreciation. Unlike the moralists' view that reason precedes action, or the romanticists' belief that rational judgment occupies a lower status than emotional reaction in aesthetic appreciation, Wang considers **aesthetic judgment** and **aesthetic feeling** two phases of the same thing. The colours are thought to be beautiful not because of the particular attributes of these colours but because viewers are born with the ability to judge what is beautiful, just as they are born to judge what is good. Their ability to judge beauty varies directly in proportion to their ability to feel beauty. This is the simple but complete process of aesthetic appreciation: objective beauty stems from the mind and the comprehension and feeling of beauty is respectively inspired and initiated by the object. Beauty is not sheer 'reason', either in the objective self or in mind, but involves an interactive experience between the subject and object by a mutual interplay of feelings.

How is knowledge of the world gained? The general answer to this question is by 'referring to the facts of the world'. This view would most possibly be refuted by the Neo-Confucians who believed that the mind comprised all knowledge, from the trifles of human life to the large issues of the universe. Since the mind is the epitome of all principles and knowledge, there is no point in acquiring them in the external world. Rather, it is necessary for us to clear up the obstructions and disturbances in our mind so as to expose it in its original purity and perfection. This can only be achieved when the mind is left in a state of absolute tranquility. In practice, 'tranquil repose' is recommended by the Neo-Confucians, which clearly

shows an affiliation with Zen meditation. Tranquil repose may be the best way to know what beauty is, since the Neo-Confucian emphasis on expanding one's knowledge means both cognition as well as ethical and aesthetic judgment. The practice of tranquil repose for the sake of contemplation demands a mental state of extreme calmness, with the help of a silent environment and stillness of posture. In Chinese philosophy, the meaning of contemplation is distinguished from looking or even observing, as its meaning is closer to thinking and searching. The most substantial proof of this is from the classic of Chinese philosophy, *I Ching*, in which 'contemplation' is one of the sixty-four hexagrams. The miscellaneous notes on the sequence read

The hexagram has a double meaning: it 'partly gives', i.e., provides a sublime view, and 'partly takes', i.e., contemplates, seeks to attain something by contemplation.¹⁰³

Contemplation is a self-completed way of gaining knowledge: it is communication without the subject and object of communication. In this sense the communication is not dependent on language, or any means of communication – it is a sheer self-realization. Tranquil repose is a practice of inward examination of the mind, predicated on the assumption that the mind alone is bestowed with all the principles and knowledge of human life. The mind is like a mirror reflecting reality, so that to have a clear mind, one has to remove all its impurities and stigmas as if polishing the

¹⁰³ *I Ching*, Richard Wilhelm, trans., p.486.

mirror. Yet the impurities and stigmas are, ironically, bits and pieces of reality itself. Here we can see exchanged positions of the subject and the object: reality is not reality but its reflection! This view enhances the significance of the mind while at the same time degrading the value of material bodies. It is not difficult to understand why Neo-Confucian thinkers were suspicious of material existence. They were working under the preconception that material beings are void; even if they do 'appear' to be there, they are unreal. (An interesting side issue worth mentioning is that in the Chinese language, the pronunciation of 'things' is the same as 'nothingness', both as 'wu'). Knowledge, in the age of Neo-Confucianism, becomes a kind of self-emerging substance pertaining to the ontology of the mind. There is no media for communication: as a matter of fact, one does not need one. This degradation of material beings could have set the point of divergence of Chinese from Western culture which values material 'evidence'.

Let me now summarize the main issues discussed above. Although I have highlighted some antitheses between the Western and Chinese culture, I am not trying to construct my theory on the rigid structure of dichotomy. The fact is, despite the discrepancies, they are, in most cases at least, not direct opposites of each other. In the dialectic of the culture of beauty, the central point of my argument is aesthetic appreciation, which I discussed by raising some aspects of bifurcation between the Chinese and Western ways of thinking. Chinese thinking can be summarized from two main aspects. The first is the 'process' of aesthetic appreciation, which is based on the beholder's personal experience of the object of

beauty. Implicit in this experience are both thinking and feeling. The second aspect is the 'method' of aesthetic appreciation, which is **contemplation**.

The practice of contemplation, which, it is believed, leads to enlightenment, seems to be contradictory to the emphasis on the actual experience of objective beauty. However, closer investigation reveals ambiguity in the relationship between experience and contemplation. Experience is constructed from two factors, namely, the experience of contemplation and the experience of the material world that initiated the contemplation. The meaning of experience is slightly different between these two factors since the latter comes closer to what is understood as 'empiricism'. It is also the cause of the ambiguity. To clarify this point Wang's example of filial piety comes in helpful: we do not have to learn and acquire filial piety because this virtue is inborn – we feel and act with filial piety in everyday life although we have never been asked to do so. **Despite the claim that we should learn from our mind, human life and activities are the 'contents' of our contemplation.** Our experiences in life provide us with material for our mind's workings. However, such reality derived from experience are not 'evidence', for experience pertains to the universal and the principal, while evidence pertains to the particular and the factual. The obligation to experience as a characteristic of Chinese thinking is well demonstrated by the legend of Sheng Long 神農 (the god of medicine), the originator of Chinese medicine:

He(Cheng Long) collected all kinds of plants. He put them one by one in his

mouth, chewing and swallowing them, so as to recognize their natures and functions. . . Sometimes he would be poisoned over seventy times in a day,

at last he could tell what is edible and what is inedible, and what could be taken as medicines. He recorded all the functions and natures of various plants in detail, which became a book, entitled *Ban Cao* 本草 (*The Book of Herbs*). This book has been a reference till the twentieth century, which is the most venerated and authoritative classic in Chinese medicine.¹¹⁴

We are impressed by Cheng Long's bravery in trying to experience the unknown and equally surprised by his ignorance of the scientific investigation of the unknown. He made his judgment on experience without bothering to 'prove' it. Another metaphorical rendition of this concept is the different ways of solving a murder mystery: speculating on the basis of similar cases in the past (done by the police) or on evidence obtained from autopsy (conducted by pathologists). This dispute between these methods reflects the incongruity between the Western and Chinese philosophical traditions—the former's belief in evidence and the latter's faith in experience. Therefore it can be seen that the major difference between them is not predicated on the subject/object of thinking, evidence and experience both being empirical in a sense, but on the ways of thinking. Experience is always associated with speculative conclusions, while evidence usually leads to scientific

¹¹⁴ Bai Yang 白揚, *Zhongguoren Shi Gang* 中國人史綱 (History of the Chinese). Translation by me. P.61

verification. This in turn explains why I am focusing, at least at this stage, on the **process** of aesthetic appreciation and judgment rather than what beauty is.

Before discussing the topic any further, I need to clarify two points. First, my analysis of aesthetic culture in Western and Chinese society is done from the perspective of aesthetic appreciation. As I have mentioned, the 'process' of aesthetic appreciation can effectively reveal the bifurcation in ways of thinking between the two cultures. Besides this specific aspect of aesthetics is deliberately interrogated because it corresponds closely to the 'culture' of beauty which is a central point of this chapter. Since 'cultural studies' is regarded academically as 'studies of human activity' in a broad sense, the focus of my study should fall on that aspect of beauty which is oriented towards human activity. Beauty, in a cultural context, necessarily provokes questions on aesthetic appreciation, aesthetic judgment, and aesthetic feeling, all of which are ultimately associated with the question of taste.

This topic, however, is less concerned with the current debate on what gives rise to taste (e.g. whether it is inborn or culturally constructed) than the relationship between taste and the logic of human thinking. Diversification in tastes is taken as a manifestation of different ways of thinking. Tastes emerge through different forms of human cognition in relation to the material world, and one of these is aesthetic experience.

This brings us to the second point of clarification, that is, my positioning of aesthetic appreciation and philosophical cognition as parallels. One would argue against this on grounds that the engagement of feeling and sensual interaction found particularly in aesthetic experience is absent in the acquisition of common knowledge. But as I have emphasized, a characteristic of Chinese philosophy is that judgment and feeling occupy equal positions with no hierarchical differences, working simultaneously and harmoniously with each other. Hence, feeling is involved in the acquisition of common knowledge as in aesthetic appreciation, because feeling is interpreted as not only a sensory process but a mental process in tune with judgment. This ushers in another topic about beauty and senses that I will discuss in the following.

Body and Mind

One of the most consistent topics in philosophy is the battle between the mind and the body. The paradox between the body and the mind basically set out the two poles of philosophical traditions, the pros and cons of which have helped to weave the history of philosophy. In spite of the vast variations in ethnology and geography, one would be amused to find that scholars of philosophy in Western and Chinese societies shared the same profound interest in the study of the mind and the body, an interest which imbued their writings. In both cultures, philosophical thinking was polarized and dichotomized into the mind and the body from its origin, but the

developments of philosophical concepts followed separate routes and gradually became estranged from each other

Generally speaking, the tradition of Western philosophy moved from an emphasis on the mind to one on the body, from the idealism of Plato to the rationalism of Descartes, and then to the empiricism of Berkeley, Locke and Hume, and the materialism of Nietzsche and Marx. This is a trend topologically running from the ancient 'organs without a body' to the postmodern 'body without organs'¹⁴. The concept of the body has, in fact, been provoking widespread interest and criticism in contemporary academia, and has assumed unprecedented importance in the history of philosophy in Western society. Shusterman makes the following point:

While Plato could dismiss the body as too ephemeral to be real and valuable, today the body seems more stable, durable and real than the rest of the world we experience. ... The body thus emerges as what we most deeply and immediately are; its foundational, privileged status forms part of the implicit common sense of today's secular society, which spends fortunes on the soma's care and adornment. ¹⁵

¹⁴ Harvie Ferguson, 'Me and My Shadows: On the Accumulation of Body-Images in Western Society. Part Two – The Corporal Forms of Modernity', in *Body and Society*, vol. 3, no. 4

¹⁵ Richard Shusterman, 'Somacsthetics and the Body/Media Issue', in *Body and Society*, vol. 3, no. 3.

The history of Chinese philosophy, however, has been developing in a almost opposite direction from its Western counterpart. The primordial form of Confucianism is generated from the ontology of the body, with its primary concern on humanism, from pragmatic, ethical and empirical points of view. Even Taoism, considered commonly a unique Chinese philosophy with its naturalistic conceptual foundation, came close to the Confucian idea of material existence in its early form. Lao Zi 老 子, the precursor of Taoism, did not dismiss the body as a non-living being despite his repeated avowal of the life of Tao. Isomeric to the Confucian doctrine of central harmony ('zhongyong' 中庸), the aim of Lao Zi was not to substitute being by nothingness in respect of the body; rather, he tended to affirm both since there is no difference between being and nothingness. He proclaimed the simplicity and spontaneity of the body rather than denied it.

The affirmation of the body in Chinese philosophy was later counter-balanced by that of the mind, as a result of the influence of Buddhist metaphysics, the re-interpretation by yin-yang cosmology, and the introduction of Zhuangzi's 庄 子 mysticism and fatalism in the middle ages. This was basically a period when the philosophy of the mind gradually enriched itself conceptually in the various schools. It enjoyed a prosperity parallel to that of the philosophy of the body until it underwent a dramatic boom in the age of Neo-Confucianism. The wave of Neo-Confucianism was so strong that the position of the body remained suppressed until a wave of reaction against the more 'extremist' thinking coming from within the system of Neo-Confucianism took place beginning in the Qing dynasty. The history

of Chinese philosophy did not end there of course. But as I intend to discuss its influence on Hong Kong culture, I think I had better stop here and turn to the West, whose philosophical impact is not only seen in Hong Kong but also in Mainland China.

The analysis of the historical shift in power between the mind and the body in philosophy throws light on the general differences and similarities between the Western and Chinese ways of thinking. Let me digress a little by stating that the methodology used for the analysis of the histories is qualitative, that is, I do not treat the philosophies in strict terms. Instead, I conducted a qualitative categorization of various systems of philosophies, based on the typicality of their doctrines and concepts. In the process, I found that the dichotomy in the Chinese philosophy systems, 'wei xin' 唯心 (advocacy of the mind) and 'wei wu' 唯物 (advocacy of the thing) bears affinity to the dualism of the Western systems, 'rationalism' and 'empiricism'. This analysis also provides a general rather than a detailed picture of the philosophical trends in relation to broad areas of the mind and the body. Specific systems requiring contextual examination do not comply with the aims of the analysis. Seen below is a simplified diagram of the historical dichotomy between the mind and the body which embodies the differences and similarities of philosophical thinking between two cultures:

Western Thinking
M B



Chinese Thinking
M B



Chronological order
↓

M = mind

B = body

As mentioned previously, the significance of the mind and the body was reversed in antithetical directions between the two cultures, starting with the Western mind and the Chinese body. An interesting observation is while the philosophical conceptions of the two cultures started off being largely contradictory—Plato who was highly respectful towards God would not have hesitated to call Confucius a blasphemer if he heard the latter's comment 'If you cannot serve man, how can you know to serve spirits?'¹¹⁷ at the end of these philosophical trends, both systems regard the mind and the body highly and as equals. The modern period is marked by this similar valuation of the two poles of philosophy, on the one hand, and, on the other, a variation in the relative configuration of the mind and the body. The Chinese system sees a synthesis of the mind and the body, whereas in the Western system, they move further apart and are strengthened as separate entities. In China this move possibly

¹¹⁷ Confucius, *Analects (The Analects of Confucius)*, XI, p 11

started by the end of the nineteenth century when Shien Wun introduced 'an equal emphasis on ethical and on materialistic advancement'. Historians like Luo Xianglin proclaimed the characteristic of the culture of this period as 'an syncretism of humanist theories and material science' and 'a synchronism of knowledge and practice'¹⁰⁶.

Shien's attitude towards the material world was, to a certain extent, influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution, which threw new light on the body's theory and fascinated many in the West in the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, while the body movement in the West was developing at a greater speed than ever before, there was also a strong undercurrent of the mind travelling at the same speed to a different direction. This new current of the mind was no longer identified by its classical metaphysical form, but manifested itself in a more 'physical' form, that is, as **the image and representation of the body**. Here the mind and the body are engaged in a paradoxical situation, in which they develop and flourish infinitely within their own contexts.

As telecommunications render bodily presence unnecessary, while new technologies of mediatic body construction and plastic cyborg-surgery challenge the very presence of a real body, our culture seems increasingly fixated on the soma, serving it with the adoring devotion.

¹⁰⁶ LuoXianglin, *Zhongguo Wenshi Shi (The History of Chinese Ethnology)*, Taiwan: Chinese Culture, 1953, p.74.

once bestowed on other worshipped mysteries”¹⁰⁰

From the reverse angle, the vis-à-vis situation of the body and the mind is summed up in the single name of ‘the image of the body’:

The modern body-image is organized, indeed, around a distinction between object and subject. As object the body image is part of the world of formally identical objects interacting in the infinity of space and time; but as subject the same body-image is immeasurably enriched with the inner content of lived experience. ... As the plane of separation between object and subject the modern body-image is a boundary which both contains an infinity, and moves through infinity.¹⁰¹

A third dimension is added to the primordial two-dimensional philosophy of the West composed of the body and the mind—the representation of the body, which gives depth to contemporary Western culture.

The representation of the body, its very presence, is ambivalent with relation to the mind and the body – it tends to blend them in as well as split them up. The body-image itself is no doubt a combination of the body (the shape and form of the living body) and the mind (imagination and creation). However, it also sets a clear

¹⁰⁰ Richard Shusterman, ‘Somaesthetics and the Body(Moda)’, in *Body and Society*, vol 3, no 3, p. 33.

¹⁰¹ Harvie Ferguson, ‘Body-Images in Western Society Part Two –The Corporeal Forms of Modernity’, in *Body and Society*, vol 3, no.4, p.6.

breach between them, by celebrating the bodily form through advertisements, films, the Internet, and all forms of representation in the media—denouncing its corporeality while appealing to the flexibility and creativity of the superior mind. Cultural critics are becoming aware of an alarming tendency of Western culture to progressively relegate the living body to a subsidiary position to the body-image and the mind. Of the three, only two alone could serve as the structural basis of human cognition. There is a danger that Western epistemology is becoming image-bound, that the traditional body/mind relation is replaced by the mind/body-image relation. A distinguishing characteristic of this mind/body-image relationship is that knowledge comes right from the image to the mind through perception instead of bodily experience, and this perception is not sensory nor mental, but signal. It is because messages from images are planned, calculated codes which need to be decoded rather than comprehended. In such a way images alone can constitute the basis of cognition, without relying on even the mind, since the activity of the mind is predetermined by the system of signs. Images become absolute. This is an abrupt turn of Western culture, which marks the point of deviation from Chinese culture. Looking at Western culture historically, however, a common thread can still be seen despite this considerable change. It is, as I have brought up, the issue of visuality which is the motivation and orientation of Western thinking.

Sense

The mind and the body have been a central point of philosophical discussion. However, thorough investigation into the area of sense has been hard to come by. This may be due to the idea that sense had never been considered a 'substance', only a mediator between the body and the mind. If we regard the body and the mind as opposite entities, then, in English language the meaning of the word 'sense' is ambivalent, that is, it pertains both to the mind and to the body. Biologically, sense refers to the special powers of the body by which things are perceived—the five senses. Sense is also used to describe the state of mind, including that of understanding, judgment, consciousness, and appreciation. In philosophical thinking, the interpretation of sense is also different between Western and Chinese. **This conceptual difference has, most importantly, led to a divergence between the two cultures in the field of aesthetics.** Western philosophers who talked about sense came mainly from the empirical school, and their opinion on sense was essentially taken from 'sensory perception'. Even Kant, who contributed greatly to the critique of aesthetic judgment, tended to construct his theories on the dichotomy between reason and perception, and pondered consistently over the two extremes of 'the starry heavens above' and 'the moral law within'¹¹. The association of sense with the body (both human body and material world) and of reason with the mind is apparent. It does not mean that Western perception is isolated from the understanding and judgment of the mind (the other meaning of sense). The point is

¹¹ This comes from the most quoted saying of Kant, "the starry heavens above me and the moral

that perception is generated from the corporeal rather than the mind. This concept is allied to the dominance of visuality in Western culture wherein cognition is founded on evidence.

The Chinese understanding of sense, on the other hand, comes nearer to the faculty of the mind. In the Chinese language, the word 'xin'(mind) consists of two meanings, namely, 'mind' (akin to Western interpretation) and 'heart'. Therefore, when the Chinese formulated a philosophy on 'xin'(mind) and 'wu' (things), they were in fact formulating a trune system comprising the mind, the heart, and the body, with the heart tending to serve the mind more than the body. The role of the heart coincides with that of sense in the West, with both being mediators between the mind and the body. Nevertheless, the West and the Chinese give 'sense' slightly different definitions, with the former verging on the sensory and the latter on the sensuous. To the Chinese, sense is something to do with the heart, hence sensuous things are those which pertain to our sensation, or arouse our feeling. Unlike in Western thinking, perception in Chinese thinking tends to stem from the mind and not the body. This observation can be proven by the concurrence and synchronism of judgment and feeling in the process of aesthetic appreciation, which I discussed earlier in relation to Neo-Confucian theories on cognition. Consequently, the ideal perceptual mind unfolds to the world the nature of an individual's cognition, and this process is based on experience or feeling.

law within me' which was carved on his gravestone

The bifurcation of the Western and Chinese conceptions of sense is tied up with the inconsonance of their cognitive processes and the final judgment (which is the cause or the effect is not important). This bifurcation, if studied carefully, is two-fold, one being the different **attributes** of sense between the two cultures that I have discussed above, and the second being the different **attitudes** towards sense shown by people of the two cultures. In the West, not only is sense considered the sensory, but the five senses are also graded in a system of hierarchy. Echoing my view about the visuality of Western culture, sight occupies the highest rank above hearing, smell, taste and touch, as mediators for cognition:

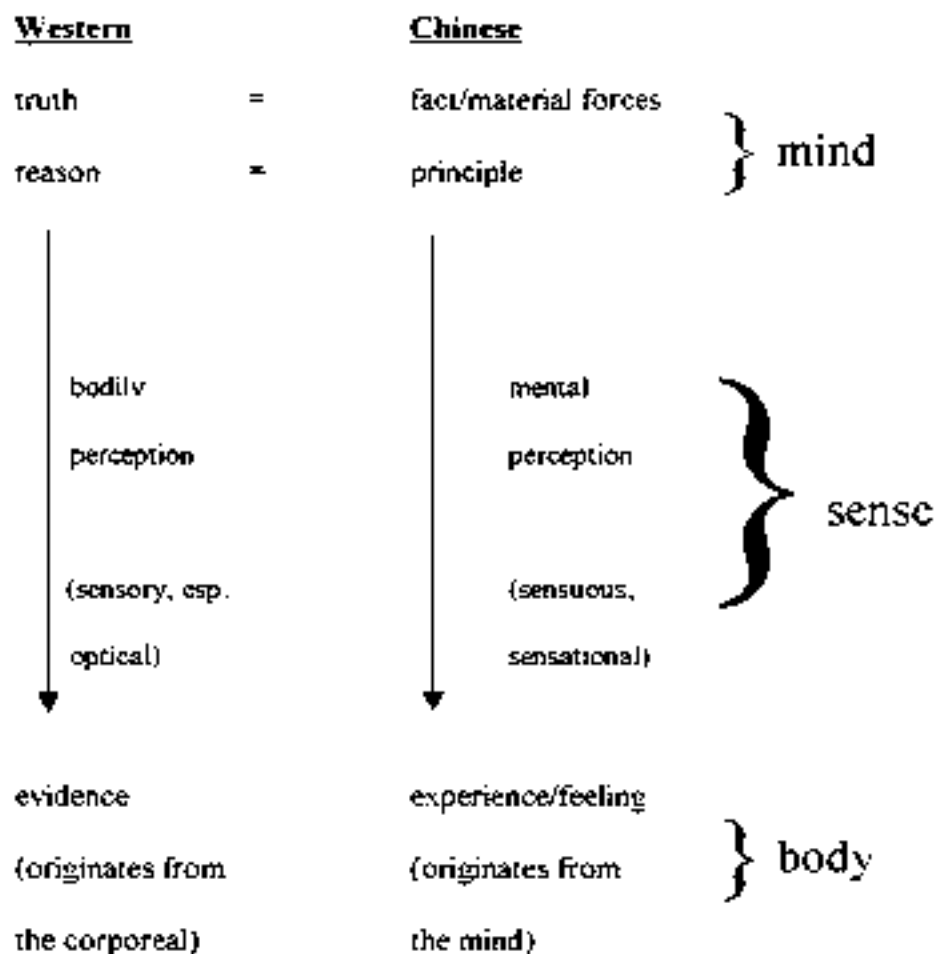
While each sense was considered to have superior and inferior uses, the senses of sight and hearing were held to be more closely associated with the 'higher' functions of the mind, and the other sense with the 'lower' functions of the body.¹¹²

The sensory hierarchy in Western history, inseparable from its gender hierarchy, classify sight (and probably hearing) as 'distanced', 'intellectual' sense(s) belonging to the domain of men, and smell, touch, and taste as 'immediate', 'corporeal' senses belonging to women. This ideology is in turn pertinent to the classical association of men with mind and women with body. However, since gender is not the primary issue here, and it is not my aim to look for reasons, I will relate the sense of sight to evidence in a phenomenal sense. The Chinese sense, on the other hand, does not fall into this system of division and hierarchy. Even if there was division, all five senses

¹¹² Constance Classen, 'Engendering Perception: Gender Ideologies and Sensory Hierarchies in

seem to coexist on an equal footing, compatibly assuming the duty of 'experience' together with the mind.

The following diagram shows the relationships and attributes of the three faculties: the mind, the body and sense, which set the process of cognition in motion, in Western and in Chinese thinking



Western History', in *Body and Society*, vol 3, no.2.

While evidence plays a prominent role in the Western conception of cognition, it is a progressive rather than a static situation. The industrial revolution and modern technological developments in the West, which have entailed a reverence for science and the scientific, have been largely responsible for this evidence-based philosophy. I believe this cultural trend is the result of an intensifying effect rather than an abrupt turn in the basic concept, as the consciousness of evidence is deeply rooted in Western thinking. On the contrary, I can see that the focus on the realm of the body in modern Chinese philosophy represents a turning point, one inspired by the West. It is not an essential concept of Chinese philosophy. It was due to the political weakness considered to be the consequence of the Chinese philosophy of the mind that the Western approach was resorted to. In practice, however, Chinese thinking still followed, to some extent, its primordial experience-based tendencies.

As mentioned earlier, there is a trend in both modern Chinese philosophy and its Western counterpart to equalize the mind and the body on an elevated level. Yet despite this synonymy, they show antonymous patterns of development: the synthesis of the mind and the body in the Chinese and their antithesis in the Western. This variation of philosophical developments, in my opinion, is also caused by the different definitions of sense, which is the major factor contributing to the fundamental difference in the conception of cognition (or aesthetic thinking) between the two cultures.

But how are my observations of Chinese/Western ways of cognition connected with the historical trends of philosophy? As shown in the diagram above, Chinese philosophy was open to the relevant ideas from the West because both are empirical in the sense that evidence and experience alike belong to the faculty of the body. History shows that both cultures were characterized by the opening up of the mind to the body (the material world) in the modern period. Nonetheless, they diverged at the point where the West held trust in factual, corporeal evidence, whereas the Chinese promoted the body by a return to the empiricism of early Confucianism. Thus although the Chinese took their idea from the West, they adapted it and framed it within their concept of experience. Note that experience in Chinese philosophy is not "intuition", as held by Western scholars¹¹, but it is human history or events (so my conclusion is Chinese philosophy is not purely metaphysical or empirical, but experiential). It is under these circumstances that Western culture continues its ongoing process of enriching the scientific, evidential body, which, ironically, develops into a counter-stream of the mind, e.g. tele-images, whereas the experiential body in Chinese culture is reunited with the mind, in a circular path.

Beauty Culture in Hong Kong – a Syncretism of Chinese and Western Thinking

Finally, the limelight is back to spot at the centre of this topic: the culture of beauty

¹¹ One of these critics is Fulmer S.C. Northrop, in his essay 'The Complementary Emphases of Eastern Intuitive and Western Scientific Philosophy', in *Philosophy – East and West*, Charles A. Moore, ed., Princeton University Press, 1944, p.212.

in Hong Kong. I have spent quite some time discussing Chinese and Western cultures, tracing their philosophical histories, identifying their conceptual differences and similarities, as I am sure that, in order to form a substantial theoretical and contextual basis for my assumption, such in-depth analysis is a must. Eventually, with aims in mind and with clues on hand, it is time to answer the following crucial questions, which I have already raised in the opening of this chapter.

- 1) What elements in Western and Chinese culture are related to Hong Kong culture and how?
- 2) What How has What is this relation mentioned in question 1) to do with beauty culture in Hong Kong?

The platitudinous nature of the first question might lead to superficial answers. It is more than obvious that Hong Kong has had influence from both Chinese and Western culture due to its colonial background. But we should think of its colonial background in a particular rather than a general sense. I agree with Abbas' view that colonialism in the context of Hong Kong is particular in the sense that it has no pre-colonial history—what we count as culture here is that which has a close affiliation with today's Hong Kong. What makes it even more particular is that while it has no pre-colonial history, it has pre-colonial culture. By pre-colonial culture, I do not mean the culture of the fishing village that is often believed to be the predecessor of Hong Kong the international city, but that of China as a whole. Ninety-eight percent of Hong Kong's inhabitants are Chinese, and more importantly, most of them are the

descendants of immigrants from the mainland. These immigrants, predominantly merchants and farmers, brought with them the traditional values of China, besides their intelligence, money and working forces. Yet owing to their particular social status and the circumstances under which they came to Hong Kong, these people did not bring with them many traditional artifacts from the mainland. All they brought was their deeply rooted Chinese thinking.

This kind of migration should be distinguished from cross-country migration—Chinese knocking on the door of a different culture—such as the large-scale migration of Chinese to Southeast Asian countries during the last few centuries and to the West today. Migration within mainland China has also been a common occurrence throughout Chinese history. What makes the Hong Kong case distinctive is that the immigrants did not have substantial cultural identification with Hong Kong (as in the case of cultural movement from North to South during the war in the pre-modern period) nor was there a pre-existing group of politicians and intellectuals (as in the case of centrifugal migration from the continent to coastal cities). Hong Kong was seen as a place to make money rather than to stay for good. This view matched wonderfully the British intention to treat Hong Kong as nothing more than an entrepot.

On the surface, Hong Kong seemed to be a total 'vacuum' before being ceded to the British in the nineteenth century, but in fact a subtle Chinese cultural environment was already there before that. There was already human activity, albeit

little and primitive, before the colonial age. Its cultural affinity with the mainland was also affirmed by their geographical proximity to the mainland, a factor which, I believe, consequently led to the 'Southern culture' in Hong Kong as it is geographically more accessible from the South-east provinces. Besides Hong Kong was historically closely involved with Guangzhou and other parts of China. This clear kinship between pre-colonial Hong Kong and mainland China paved the way for the future arrival of more mainland culture. The influx of immigrants from the mainland especially at a later stage of the territory's development further intensified its (Chinese) cultural orientation. To perceive pre-colonial Hong Kong as a vacuum devoid of time and space is to describe an impossible situation, as if to articulate a theoretical paradigm without contextual and presumably historical insight.

It is against the background outlined above that the westernization of Hong Kong culture takes its meaning (otherwise the meaning of this westernization can be interchangeable with 'general cultural impact from the other'). Apart from this, one should bear in mind that westernization is not unique to Hong Kong; mainland China too underwent westernization, probably even earlier than Hong Kong, in the Qing dynasty. Nonetheless, the culture of Hong Kong has never reacted¹²⁴ to Western culture as violently as did mainland China. This should not be misread as an indication that Western culture has made a smaller impact on Hong Kong than on China. Rather, it points to a more flexible and complex cultural space in Hong Kong that tends to absorb and synthesize. It is true that the territory's colonial context

¹²⁴ The reaction implies both antagonism towards and imitation of Western culture, the most

made Western influence authoritative and even aggressive, in both quantitative and qualitative terms. But in reality these influences were felt more keenly in the political and social than the cultural spheres. Traditional Chinese culture, originating largely in the mainland, survived amidst the wave of Westernization and strove to develop by synthesizing with Western culture.

What Wing-Tsit Chan meant by the ‘tendency in philosophy to synthesize’¹¹ may be close to a Chinese philosophy that is deeply embedded in the minds of that population of seven million people. The part and parcel of the link between Chinese and Hong Kong culture lies not in cultural representations such as art, literature, and language, nor cultural practices such as rituals, customs, and ways of living, but in the ways of thinking, traditional values and concept. The inclination to synthesize, deeply ingrained in the minds of the Hong Kong Chinese, rendered them compliant to the colonial system while retaining their traditional attitude. As time went by, this cultural synthesis was no longer confined to the dualism of East meets West but was based on a more complex unification of diversity and plurality (for example, the Japanese cultural invasion of the eighties). As international exchange of information and culture became prevalent, westernization as a cultural movement mutated into globalization, and the pace of modernization accelerated simultaneously in the West and in Hong Kong. The culture of Hong Kong itself was changing, not necessarily as a result of Western influence or the eclipse of Chinese culture. Hong Kong was

typical example of which is the social reform ‘wei zheng’ 維新 in Qing dynasty.

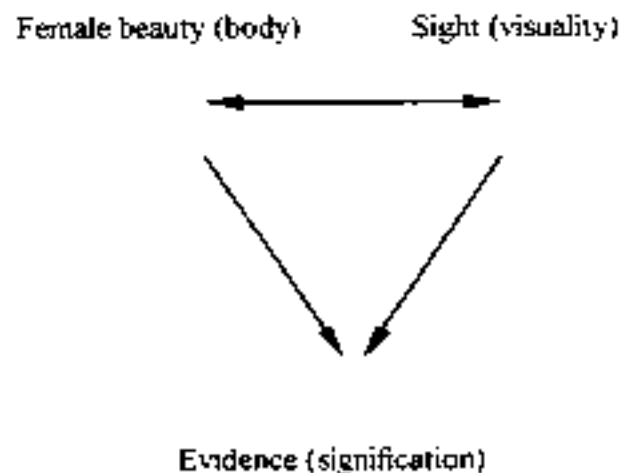
¹¹ Wing-Tsit Chan, ‘Synthesis in Chinese Metaphysics’, in *The Chinese Mind*, Charles A. Moore ed., p 145

developing its own culture, consciously and unconsciously, that was still in an embryonic stage. As generations came and went, the ways of thinking of the oldest immigrants was eroded by changing values and lifestyles. This stream of Chinese thinking, however, has synthesized with Western cultural influences, and from this synthesis has emerged a new form of culture that belongs to contemporary Hong Kong. For the time being, the process of cultural synthesis has transformed into cultural syncretism. And it is not just a syncretism but an invention. It is in this self-evolving process that Hong Kong culture was born, little by little, leaving colonial culture behind as just another page in its history.

I am, therefore, critical of the claim that Chinese cultural influence was impeded from the beginning of colonialism, and only revived in its wake. On the contrary, I believe from observation that traditional Chinese thinking has never been obliterated, it has only metamorphosed in the course of time. Moreover, this metamorphosis will remain an ongoing process if the people of Hong Kong remain their own masters, politically and culturally.

That is the general cultural configuration of contemporary Hong Kong. The issue now is how it is related to the culture of beauty, specifically female beauty. Before tackling this topic, I believe it appropriate to investigate and identify the characteristics of Western and Chinese concepts of female beauty, since these two influences have contributed the most in molding the ideology of Hong Kong. The impact of the Western standards of female beauty corresponds directly to visual

somaesthetics, which is tied up with the enhancement of role of 'the body' in the Western cultural paradigm. The consequence of this 'body culture' can be observed from three perspectives. The first is the pertinence of the **body** to the affirmation of **material existence**, so that the certainty of the **body** means a certainty of its boundary in space, namely, size, shape or form. The concepts of size and form, together with that of colour, are then related to the **visuality** of somaesthetics which predicates female beauty on the sense of sight. This perspective, related to the notion of the 'gaze', splits somaesthetic appreciation into the dichotomous categories of subject/object, superior/inferior, active/passive. The third perspective is connected with the effect of objectification and fragmentation rendered by the visual sense, and pertains to the notion of evidence. The prevailing culture of signs is profoundly an embodiment of 'the search for evidence' defined by a preset, rational, calculated system of **signification**. The interrelationships of these three perspectives are as follows



Visual culture can be regarded as responsible for the fragmentation and objectification of the female body, and the emphasis on its shape, size and colour. On the other hand, the general predication of female beauty as corporeal existence can result in an emphasis on sight. Another aspect of this relation is either the cultural movement of visuality or that of the body (or probably both) is (are) the cause of the culture of signification in contemporary Western societies, and not vice versa. Hence we can see that the system of signification, developed from body and visual culture, is located at a deeper cultural level. All in all, these three perspectives have led to the Western standards of female beauty which stress first, on the outer, corporeal beauty of women's body; second, on the particular locus, form and colour of women's physical appearance, induced by the onlooker's gaze; and third, on the value-added, convertible, and the coding/decoding system of signification from which the meaning of female beauty is defined.

In the context of Hong Kong, these Western standards of female beauty are juxtaposed with the traditional Chinese ideals of female beauty. The Chinese ideals, as I have analyzed, have to do with the concept of **experiential somaesthetics** which has its roots in thinking inherited from the previous generations. Experiential somaesthetics can be explained from two aspects. First, it is a quality of beauty that can only be attained through experience, not examination. Therefore, it has less to do with the form of physical beauty than the sensation arising from it. The most typical example is the Chinese obsession with women's 'charm' (discussed in detail in Chapter Two 'The Nature of Beauty'). Description and articulation of female

beauty in terms of physical form is, strictly speaking, uncommon in Chinese traditions. Even though there are classical references to certain features of beautiful Chinese women such as 'almond eyes and 'cherry mouth', they were used purposely to provoke romantic feeling rather than to record the features of the subjects. In his research on Chinese female beauty, Eberhard also touched on this point:

When a woman is said to have eyebrows like distant mountains, or like the crescent of the moon, this refers always to exclusively to the beauty of the curve. Of course, the curve of the eyebrows should not be a crudely naturalistic image of distant mountains or of the crescent of the moon, but it should merely remind one of the moon or cause one to think of the mountains.¹¹⁶

Western scholars, like Eberhard, were surprised by 'the apparent lack of interest on the part of the artist in the face, breast, waist, shoulders, neck, and other parts of the body' in Chinese paintings, as well as in literature and in aesthetic theories of female beauty in various textual forms¹¹⁷. Though Eberhard's account of Chinese female beauty needs more theoretical sustenance, he did present some important literary documents which exemplify the concept of experiential somaesthetics. One of these is Li Yu's praise of 'lotus feet':

¹¹⁶ Eberhard, W., 'What Is Beautiful in a Chinese Women', in *Moral and Social Values of the Chinese: Selected Essays*, Taipei: Chengwan, 1971, p.284.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.272.

As one sits with them (courtesans) on the bed and touches their gold-lotus, one longs to hold them forever and knows that this pleasure cannot be surpassed . . . One night at dinner I was entertained by two girls, one from the province of Shan-si, the other one from Ho-pei. None of them was a great beauty but both had very small feet. Now I asked those who had disbelieved me to test what I had said, and it turned out that indeed the Shan-si girl had much more beautiful feet than the Ho-pei girl. There was a big difference in the softness of the skin.¹⁷⁶

There are two significant points in Li Yu's narrative. The first is that the narrator values individual experience ('test') of female beauty, which is personal and reliable. The second is the suggestion that somaesthetics of the female has less to do with features of the face ('the great beauty'), nor size ('very small feet'), than the condition ('softness') of the skin. This is in line with my second point on the experiential somaesthetics of Chinese female beauty, which is, **the effacement of the hierarchy among the five senses**. Servants to experience, the five senses function with analogous purpose and importance in the process of somaesthetic appreciation. The Western mode reveals a different process in which the aesthetic feeling comes after the senses (primarily visual sense), that is, experience is an outcome rather than a means for aesthetic appreciation.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 287-288

Chinese people seem less interested in portrayals of female beauty derived from sight, than from hearing, touch, smell, and taste. The voice is one of the most decisive factors in judging female beauty in *Su Nu Jing*. A beautiful woman should have a voice that is not coarse and dry (“ru xing” 柔行)¹¹⁹. Voice (“sheng” 聲) was as crucial as appearance (“se” 色) to courtesans as well as female entertainers (“youling” 優伶) of pre-modern China. There is a normative compliment on the beauty of these women: ‘voice is as excellent as look’¹²⁰ (of course, implicit in the quality of their ‘voice’ is their singing). Classical Chinese literature throw light on this vocal somaesthetics by frequent depictions of women’s voice, such as ‘giggles’ or ‘gurgles’, besides their adoption of the aural (voice) prior to the visual (faces)¹²¹ in the judgment of female beauty. The sense of smell, like that of hearing, appeared frequently in Chinese literature. The smell of women, often likened to the scent of flowers, refers to their natural odour rather than artificial fragrance. A typical praise for the smell of women is ‘fragrant sweat’. Unlike the focus on the size and shape of women’s breasts in the West, the Chinese commonly describe beautiful breasts as ‘sao’ 嫵, a metaphor referring both to the softness and the feminine smell of the skin of that part of the body. Undisputedly, the tactile sense is the most significant and consistent in the somaesthetics of women for the Chinese. Abundant illustrations can be found in serious, popular, and erotic art and literature on the Chinese fastidious requirements on the softness, smoothness, and refinement of women’s skin. The

¹¹⁹ *Chinese Su Nu Jing*, publisher: Jiang Nan, p.248. The meaning of ‘ru xing’ is ‘slow flowing of river’, if translated verbatim. I interpreted it as ‘not coarse and dry.’

¹²⁰ Tan Fan, *Youling Shi (The History of Female Entertainer)*, publisher: Shanghai Arts and Literature, 1993, p.161.

¹²¹ One example comes from the last novel of Jin Yong 金庸, *Ju Ding Ji* 鹿鼎記, in which the man

sense of taste in relation to female beauty is more ambiguous. Its role in female somaesthetic judgment is probably analogous to that of taste in Chinese food culture. Mencius' famous saying that 'the love for female beauty and food are both natural human instincts'¹² can perhaps throw light on the parallel functions of taste in the judgment of female beauty and of food. Basically, taste is an abstraction in the somaesthetic experience, which, like smell and touch, may be related to sex.

How are these Western and traditional Chinese concepts of female beauty positioned in the contemporary cultural context of Hong Kong? I have pointed out that the culture of Hong Kong is a syncretism of Chinese and Western cultures, associated with the process of the evolution of local culture. Since the cultural spirit is not just to receive but also to renovate, it has been the aim of Hong Kong people to search for as well as establish their identity from the different and diverse cultural influences under which they have been living. In short, this is a process of internationalization, a consequence of the triple forces of modernization, Westernization, and globalization. Though Hong Kong is frequently labeled as an 'international city', I do not think the term 'international culture' can suitably and accurately describe its specific cultural configuration, nor the term 'international beauty' in explaining female beauty in Hong Kong. Internationalism is surely a characteristic of Hong Kong culture, but Hong Kong culture cannot be articulated by its being internationalized alone. This is because 'internationalism' is about space, and hence, it is inefficient in describing the very element that makes Hong Kong

Duan Yue is convinced by the beautiful voice of Wang Yuyan that she is a great beauty.

culture so exceptional in time. Many places in the world are undergoing the same phase of internationalization, but definitely only Hong Kong has been through **that very history** of complexity, vibrance, and chaos. People in Hong Kong are used to surviving in this complicated and chaotic cultural sphere, and their primary task is try to make sense out of it using a three-tiered method, which I call the ‘3Cs’—coordination, conglomeration, and construction.

What is meant by coordination in the culture of female beauty in contemporary Hong Kong? The common belief that the Western ideal of female beauty is predominant over other standards of beauty in Hong Kong is, to me, spurious. Rather, I would say that standards of beauty from various cultures are located on **coordinate positions**. The fact is while Hong Kong people admire the Western standard of beauty, they reject it simultaneously, as if they are at once defending and rejecting the traditional Chinese standard of female beauty. The motivation for rejection is proportional to that for defence. The reason for this attitude is not that Hong Kong people are lukewarm to incoming cultural influences. On the contrary, they open their door to the world’s cultures, just as they operate a ‘free market’ economy. However, this does not necessarily mean that they are ‘eager to learn’. It is simply that being a group that has no sense of belonging politically and culturally, nor identification with a strong indigenous culture, they can find no reason or ability to keep cultural influences at bay. In another words, they do it because they feel it is the natural thing to do. This very attitude of ‘aimlessness’,

¹²² Mencius 孟 子, ‘Gaozi Shang’ 告 子上, *Mencius*, Book VI

virtually the praxis of 'wu wei' in Taoist philosophy, entails simultaneously 'open-mindedness' and 'superficiality'.

They accept the influence of Western culture readily but only superficially. They keep it at a distance, coordinating its position with that of Chinese culture, and hold their own views about both. This phase was especially evident in the culture of Hong Kong in the fifties and sixties, when Western female beauty was considered the ideal. Hong Kong people emulated whatever the Western beauty trends offered: the dramatic make-up, the space and optical fashion, the relaxed postures and manners, besides orientating Western facial features and figures as the ideals of female beauty in Hong Kong. This explains why Eurasian actresses and singers were particularly popular in that period.

This method of coordination includes compromises. The wholeness of female beauty culture is split up into different attributes. Hong Kong people can identify the attribute and associate each with their life. They distinguish between the concepts and practices of Western bodily grooming from those of traditional bodily maintenance of China, for example, and try to come to a compromise between the two. In doing so they find that the Western style of physical bodily management can be combined with the Chinese concept of 'inner' beauty maintenance. The combining of these concepts gives rise to the **conglomeration** phase. This synthesis of beauty cultures leads to the formation of eclectic female beauty, beauty that is all summed up in a single ideal woman. In practice, women would go to fitness centres, apply make-up and adorn themselves according to Western trends, yet at the same time,

taking Chinese herbs, bird's nest, and other foods that are supposed to contribute to one's beauty. Regarding beauty standards, women would, for instance, prefer Occidental facial features combined with black Chinese eyes and dark hair. This is the female beauty culture of contemporary Hong Kong, indicative of brave attempts to pick and choose, mix and match standards of female beauty from various sources

It is the adventures of conglomeration that brings the culture of female beauty in Hong Kong to the phase of construction. Now the direction is to create rather than learn, to invent rather than imitate, although these efforts are still based on existing standards. A step forward from the phase of conglomeration which is dictated by the need to compromise, to strike a balance between the different standards, construction is predicated on the harmonization of conflicts without blunting the intensity of the various standards. This beauty is constructed fundamentally on contradictions. However, in terms of cultural movement, it is a syncretism rather than a schism of the cultures of female beauty. Its most distinctive aspect is the blending of Western visual somaesthetics with Chinese experiential somaesthetics. The Western focus on the physical form of beauty is essentially contradictory to the relative lack of concern about it in the Chinese tradition. The syncretism of these two poles can only be possible on a conceptual instead of substantial level. Therefore, the idea is not a 'matter' of putting the Western ideals of 'long' legs, 'big' eyes and 'fair' skin together with the 'formless' smell, touch and voice of the Chinese beauty, but a **conceptual merging of the five senses of female somaesthetics**. The beauty constructed appeals to sight as effectively as to the other

senses. In other words, the visual sense is not particularly interested in the Western standards of legs or eyes, just as the senses of smell, touch and hearing are not particularly fond of the Chinese ideals of skin texture, odour and voice. A contemporary Hong Kong woman with rough skin and a raspy voice may be regarded, especially by the younger generation of Hong Kong people, as charming, similarly a woman with traditional/non-Western physical make-up could be considered as an extremely modern, international beauty. The integration of the functions of the five senses in the process of somaesthetic appreciation creates more room for the shifting and proliferation of judgment. While the West tends to standardize female beauty by sight, Hong Kong tries to personalize it by experiencing it with other senses. Hence the result is not a question of whether local people conform to Western or Chinese or any standard of female beauty, but whether they adopt a one-sided or multiple views towards female beauty. It is from this juxtaposition and this omniscient horizon that new forms of female beauty are constructed.

The increasing emergence of non-normative and non-Western female beauty in show business the last ten years, such as female singer Sandy Lam, actresses Maggie Cheung (Fig. 2), and Ng Sin Lin (Fig. 3), proves my point. Although this phenomenon is most obvious in the media – new forms of beauty which are essentially beauty representations or images – their relation to female beauty in reality is not to be neglected. In contemporary local women's magazines, actresses and female models carry the double status of a star and a person. It is because,

unlike paintings and other artistic forms, the mass media, presumably women's magazines composed mainly of 'photos', can certainly give us a more relevant and reliable picture of reality. More importantly, local women's magazines are using more Hong Kong Chinese models in the 90s and this trend is likely to persist. In addition, the representation of 'essential' beauty in the magazines of the previous generations is gradually replaced by portrayals of 'existential' female beauty (see my analysis of *Oriental Beauty* in Chapter 4). This indicates the magazines' effort to identify themselves as 'local women's magazine' by reflecting specifically the beauty of everyday Hong Kong women.

Of course the notion of female beauty may be more complex in reality. The 3Cs may work in a vertical progress of time, as well as in a lateral progress of individual adoption (that is, not all the contemporary Hong Kong people are in the phase of constructing female beauty, but, most possibly, they coordinate and conglomerate). Nevertheless, the celebration of free construction of female beauty by the media would definitely have effects on everyday women, who rely so much on the 'beauty information' it provides. Everyday women consume the beauty images as well as the beauty products, which is attested by the fact that the rising popularity and growing numbers of beauty-orientated women's magazines in contemporary Hong Kong is parallel to the increasing consumption of beauty products (see Chapter 1 for an overview of Hong Kong beauty culture and women's magazines). All in all, the contemporary stress on 'qi ze' 氣質 (female attraction)¹²¹ in the Hong

¹²¹ 'Qi ze' is similar to 'charm' and 'mei'. However, it is more neutral in terms of gender, and its

Hong Kong media discloses a revival of experiential beauty and an acceptance of more diversified female beauty images. This trend, I believe, reflects a shift of values rather than a creation of values by the media, for the beauty of 'real Hong Kong women' is multifarious and should not be articulated through a few representations (visualized forms) of female beauty. The representation of female beauty in women's magazines, however, is a question to be dealt with in the following three chapters, 'The Type of Beauty', 'The presentation of Beauty', and 'The Power of Beauty'

implication of experiential beauty bears exact opposition to physical beauty.

THE TYPES OF BEAUTY

After exploring the contexts of 'nature' and 'culture' of female beauty in contemporary Hong Kong, I will turn to the investigation of **female beauty representations**. This and the subsequent two chapters together formulate the case studies of women's magazines of this thesis. This chapter will focus on the 'styles' of female beauty representations whereas Chapters 5 and 6 will deal respectively with technique and ideology. In this chapter I will attempt to examine different images of female beauty by analyzing the covers of women's magazines. Three contemporary titles were selected for analysis. They are *Elle* (foreign-origin women's magazine), *Sisters' Pictorial* (old-generation women's magazine), and *Orient Beauty* (new-generation women's magazines). (Please refer the methodology section in the Introduction for the choice of magazines).

The Cover

The cover is a concentrated version of a magazine. It tells you what it *is* and what it *has* inside. On the first level, the synoptic nature of the cover offers us a concrete form of hundreds of pages of visual as well as verbal texts of the magazine. It refers to the material form consumed. The second level is associated with the fact that these visual and verbal texts connect necessarily with consuming desire that in return brings in the spiritual attainment (beauty/wealth, etc.) resulting from consumption.

Hence the cover of a magazine not only summarizes but also describes, it not only displays but advertises, both for itself and for the products in the content pages. The cover acts as a promising gate through which the readers can achieve whatever is listed.

The cover tells us what it is because it projects its style, orientation and target readers through the choice and depiction of pictorial and linguistic messages. In the case of women's magazines, female models are almost a must for covers, as Evelyn Chan (editor-in-chief of *Sisters' Pictorial*) said, 'It is why they're seen as women's magazines.'¹²¹ Apart from gender, age group and readers categorized by income/class/mode of fashion/lifestyle etc. are also important concerns for gaining access to target readers. The cover also serves to differentiate itself from the other women's magazines by staging a certain image. In Hong Kong, establishing a unique image is especially important in the ever increasing diversity in market sectors in postmodern society, as pointed out by Stuart and Elizabeth's quip that 'Today there is no fashion, there are only fashions'¹²² Individualistic images of women's magazines also indicate a collapse of homogeneity and uniformity in consuming choice, which strengthens the capitalistic idea of 'self' and 'otherness'. Setting up a system of differences for competition and exploitation is the essence of capitalism, as 'capitalism feeds on different value systems and takes control of them, while nourishing their symbolic differences from itself'¹²⁶

¹²¹ Source from interview with Evelyn Chan held on 27th January, 1996

¹²² Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire* 1982: 249

¹²⁶ Judith Williamson, *Woman is an Island*, in Modleski's *Studies in Entertainment*, 1986: 92.

The interaction and interplay between the photographic and verbal texts on the cover not only positions one's idea on the magazine, but also initiates ideas (tells you what it has). These are, according to Barthes, two functions of linguistic text in photographic text: *anchorage* and *relay*.¹²⁷ The title and headlines of the magazines anchor the meaning of the photo which might be otherwise polysemous. In a complementary way, the photo enriches the message carried by the title and headlines by providing a vivid picture. On the other hand, the photographic and linguistic texts assist each other in transmitting the contents of the magazine, through a preset system of connotation, a discourse which stimulates yet delimits one's understanding of the message (this point will be further elaborated below)

Elle

Elle, despite its foreign origin, is the best-selling women's magazines in Hong Kong. I will assume that its well-structured cover plays a main role in contributing to its success. Single-copy sales are dominant in the magazine industry in Hong Kong as subscription of magazines, as is the case in the West, is not common. It is not likely that people here stick to a certain title (it would happen for a few 'readable' special-interest magazines, but not in the case of entertaining magazines). This is due to the fact that reading magazines is a form of leisure activity but not a routine activity. In the West, time for work and leisure is more clearly defined, so that there are 'five-

¹²⁷ Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', in *Image-Music-Text*, 1964, 32-33.

day weeks', 'Friday night fever', 'Sunday church visit', and so forth. In Hong Kong, however, leisure for many people is something 'occasional', for 'working extra hour for extra money' is regarded as the most positive way to live. No wonder that Ruth du Cann, the Beauty and Fashion editor of *Elle* who was originally from England, exclaimed that 'more time to relax and enjoy life is the thing women in Hong Kong most need'¹²⁸. Another reason for the significance of single-issue sales is the high density of news agents owing to the dense population in Hong Kong. Although bookshops are not outstanding in the colony, with regards to both their quality and quantity, news stands can be found everywhere. The easy access to magazines and the freedom single-issue buying offers make readers reluctant to pay for a subscription in advance.

As most magazine readers in Hong Kong are active buyers (rather than passive recipients of subscribed issues), having an attractive cover becomes a crucial factor for good circulation. The covers of *Elle* are, at least at an initial glance, very effective in attracting sales. First, its size is a key factor in catching the eye. Besides its typical close-up of the cover models and the large bold characters used for the headlines, its usual 'props' for its covers, contribute to its attraction. Second, the significant number of headlines take up considerable space on the cover. Sometimes, these huge headlines are less conforming and are deliberately spread over the cover, as seen on that of the December 1995 issue (Fig. 4). It creates an effect of richness and diversity on the cover. The last but not the least important factor for attraction is

¹²⁸ Ruth du Cann, a quotation from an interview that took place on 7th December, 1995. (Also see

the **conciseness** of all the elements presented on the cover. Headlines are short, direct, and plentiful, which interact with the stunt close-up that is also simple, straightforward but powerful. Semiotically, they work with the physical **thickness** (*Life* is the thickest women's magazines in Hong Kong) of the magazine as signs signifying the contents which are concise, abundant and extraordinarily high in quality:

		<i>signifier</i>		<i>signified</i>
	<u>headlines</u>	<u>photo</u>	<u>weight of the mag.</u>	<u>contents</u>
	short	simple		concise
	direct	straight- forward		clear
	plentiful	large	heavy	abundant/ great in variety
	efficient	powerful		high in quality

Despite its claim that Asian models would be given priority when choosing models, the company sets great store by Western supermodels, especially for the covers, for 'they are famous and captivating'¹²⁹. It renders a major difference from the other three women's magazines concerned whose covers portray almost only female movie stars. There could be two reasons for this choice. The first is that using

Appendix 1).

models instead of movie stars can better focus the readers' view on beauty and fashion which is the orientation of the magazine (as in the case of *Bazaar*). The second reason is the idea that attraction is more important than beauty with regards to covers of women's magazines. Flora Cheong-leen, a celebrity, a model and a successful woman in the fashion business both in Hong Kong and mainland China, pointed out that "at least 30% of the quality of a good model contributes to her attraction and style, while the tallness and slimness of her figure, or the beauty of her face come second"¹²⁹.

In choosing Western supermodels instead of local ones for covers, the magazine enjoys the double edge of their attraction and their popularity (the main reason for choosing local movie stars), besides the international touch they bring along. As these models are already well-known the world over, they are considered idols in the mind of local female readers. Moreover, Western models with prominent facial features tend to stand out among their Asian counterparts, rendering them the perfect choice for magazine covers. The common features of models in the West are large deep-set eyes, straight nose, full lips, and prominent cheekbones. If the messages carried by these features are encoded, they can be decoded in a relatively short time. The more prominent the features are, the shorter the time needed to send out the most messages to readers. Consequently, less time is needed to grasp the attention of passers-by. The theory is similar to that of the relationship between the

¹²⁹ Ruth du Cann, *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Flora Cheong-leen, a quotation from a short interview after the *Hong Kong Supermodel Contest '96*, held on 26th May, 1996.

speed of the shutter and the size of the aperture of a camera, wherein a larger amount of light flow means shorter shutter speed. One could compare the cover of any issue of *Elle* to that of the winter issue of *Orient Beauty* (Fig. 5), featuring Hong Kong female singer Sandy Lam. Both close-ups, the dramatic, eye-catching features of *Elle*'s model, however, are more effective than the typical Chinese ones in capturing visual attention

Now let's *read* the images. The eyes and lips have been dominant features for female beauty. These are emphasized through make-up and giant close-ups of the cover models. The eyes are large and expressive (they 'speak'). They also seem to look *right* at the readers, producing a direct, close and almost tactile effect. The facial expression, on the contrary, is relatively calm and although the eyes are looking at their beholders, they seem to be undergoing a 'psychological withdrawal from the situation'¹³¹ or immersed in a kind of self-contemplation (compared to the pleasing pose of Elizabeth Lee Mei Fung on issue No.537 of *Sisters' Pictorial*, which indicates a pre-occupation of attention by a second party (see Fig. 6 and Fig. 7). This interchanging balance of the sense of involvement and detachment is a typical artistic play of the postmodern aesthetics, termed by Featherstone as 'a controlled de-control of the emotions'¹³². The positions of involvement and voyeuristic emotions is sometimes reversed. The January issue of *Elle* '95 portrays a model with a warm and friendly smile, and to balance out, an upper-body shot instead of a close-up is used, suggesting a certain degree of distance (Fig. 8)

¹³¹ Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisement* 1976

The power of lips should not be neglected. Topologically speaking, lips are doors to the mouth, openings of the body linking the corporeal self with cultural society. Pasi Falk has contextualized this important sensory part of the body to consuming culture and stressed its significance through the introduction of the three metaphors - eating, reading, and speaking as functions of the mouth.¹²² From the aesthetic point of view, lush lips rank highest for covers of women's magazines (they are also a typical feature of Western models). They suggest puberty and youth, and are symbolically associated with sex. Like eyes, lips possess mighty powers of seduction through the process of exchanging values of signs. As in the political economy, the made-up mouth is fetishized, revealed in not for itself but its exchange value. As all sorts of perversion need effects or highlights, a mouth that is painted is objectified, 'like an artificial sign, like cultural labour'¹²³, metamorphosed into a phallic mannequin from which our fantasy and erotic pleasure is derived. It explains why the close-up, full and made-up lips of a woman are preeminently appealing on a cover - they are not lips to speak and to eat, but to be fantasized and venerated.

In all its aspects, the cover of *Elle* is emblematic of postmodern aesthetics, which is figural and sensational. The photographic image, with its face occupying at least half of the cover, crudely put on a white background (a classical format of the magazine), seems to compete for space with the linguistic texts which themselves act as 'images' crawling lavishly on the cover for attention. There is no rigid rule applied

¹²² Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* 1994: 78.

¹²³ Pasi Falk, *The Consuming Body*: 1994: 10-10.

¹²⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* 1993: 103.

on the colour as well as the font of the linguistic texts (except the font of the title that acts as logo), since they are played to enhance the chromatic visual effect. 'Meaning' is not vital for the headlines, for they are no longer words but images of which messages are not only beautified but also generalized. For example, the June '95 issue uses four bold Chinese characters to summarize the theme of the issue, translated as 'carefree summer'. The readers are not given actual information but a general idea of what is inside the magazine. It is also common that 'the need for compression and the desire to attract readers result in distorting or misleading phrases'¹³⁵ All these point to the fact that the cover of *Elle* presents to us a list of 'uncontrolled' elements and hence provides a temporary outlet for our emotions from our controlled surroundings resulting from the process of civilization. The cover appeals to the primary process (sensual, immediate) of aesthetic appreciation, succeeding in whetting desire and stimulation as do fun fairs or theme parks, and continually adding colours to the cultural scene of Hong Kong in this postmodern age.

Sisters' Pictorial

From the most successful foreign-originated women's magazines to the most successful local-originated women's magazine in Hong Kong, *Elle* and *Sisters' Pictorial* form two extremes in terms of style in the market. If the cover of *Elle*

¹³⁵ Ellen McCracken, *Decoding women's Magazines*, 1995, p.34.

represents the most 'postmodern' example in portraying female beauty in Hong Kong, that of *Sisters' Pictorial* should be the most traditional in doing the same thing.

The copy size of *Sisters' Pictorial* is only 13x19cm, a small cover size about one-third of that of *Elegance* (23x30cm). The magazine has not changed the size of its copy since it was first published which, however, is not a 'classical' size for entertaining magazines at the time it was born. During the sixties, there were several entertaining magazines (strictly speaking, there was no women's magazine at that time, therefore it is quite natural to compare *Sisters'* to those magazines with similar content and style of covers) which were quite popular in Hong Kong such as *Hong Kong Movies' Pictorial* 香港影畫, *Nan Guo Pictorial* 南國影畫, *Guo Je Pictorial* 國界影畫 and *Yu Le Pictorial* 娛樂影畫 and their copy size is more or less the same as the women's magazines in the nineties. It is believed that the idea of the magazine's small size is original, and then it became classical when a number of gossip magazines like *Zi Cai* 姿采 and *Young Ladies* 少女 started to take on its format. Apart from the economic considerations of a bi-weekly magazine, the inspiration for the copy size might have been the comics of the time. From a contextual point of view, however, its linkage with romantic novels in the sixties and the seventies should be a more reliable affinity. Romantic novels, notably those by Taiwanese writer Qiong Yao 瓊瑤 and Hong Kong writer Cen Kai Lun 岑凱倫, were the craze, besides rock'n roll and fashion, in Hong Kong's cultural scene of that era. Since the magazine's target readers belonged to the age group that also tended to be

obsessed with the novels, it was probably that the company wanted to publish a book-like magazine, a form of handbook which contained information that would kindle a young woman's interest.

Given this relation to romantic novels, it is not difficult to trace a major characteristic in the style of *Sisters*: that is, the secondary position of photographic texts to linguistic texts (however, the quality of its writing was not the best among the magazines). Although there had been a rise in the quantity as well as the quality of photographic texts (more and more colour pages using high-quality paper - thanks to the improvement of printing technology) from the 60s to the 90s, their significance had not increased accordingly. This is simply because the magazine did not treat photographic images as a spectacle, as did many other women's magazines. Rather, they were seen as a necessity for an entertaining magazine. On the other hand, the magazine lay great emphasis on the 'Fiction and Novel' section. The payment for writings of this section was larger than the sum of all freelance writings of the magazine.¹²⁶

According to the 'Performance Ratings on Various Aspects' of the Readership Survey Report '95, 'Editorial Content' got the highest percentage of the 'quite good' category (68%), while 'Printing Quality' got the highest percentage of the 'very good' (37%), whereas 'Graphic Design' got the lowest percentage when the ratings of these two categories were added up (74%, compared to 87% of

'Printing Quality') (Please refer to Appendix 3). Apparently, the readers of *Sisters'* were less concerned with the quality of the pictures and articles than the editorial content (*what* and *how many* rather than *how* the editorial contents were presented), or perhaps they thought that paying HK\$12 (the retailing price) for a magazine of over 90% good colour pages was a bargain.

Hence the statement that 'an attractive cover is crucial to the success of a women's magazine' which is true of *Elle* does not apply to not the case of *Sisters'*. 'We win readers by good contents' was Evelyn Chan's observation¹³⁷, which was substantiated by the results of the survey showing that 69% of the readers had been reading the magazines for three years or more and that most of them bought it for its contents or out of habit (see Appendix 4). Single-issue sales is not important. The Readership Survey Report '95 also tells us that only 15% of the readers believe that an 'Attractive Cover' (gaining the second lowest ranking next to 'Others') is their reason for reading (see Appendix 5). The magazine's performance ratings indicate that readers are quite satisfied with the cover design, receiving 32% of the 'Very Good' rating and 50% of 'Quite Good' (altogether 82%)¹³⁸. Thus, it can be concluded that readers of *Sisters'* do not pay much attention to the cover. If that is really the case, my supposition that *Sisters'* is a novel-like publication whose value lies in its contents and not its cover is further affirmed. Moreover, it explains why the basic style of presentation of the cover has not been altered for 28 years - if it

¹³⁶ Source from the interview with Evelyn Chan, editor-in-chief of *Sisters' Pictorial*, taking place on 27th January, 1996.

¹³⁷ Evelyn Chan, *ibid*.

suits the taste of the readers and it does not affect circulation much, why bother to change it?

'Classic' appropriately describes the style of *Sisters' Pictorial* (an interesting contrast to what I called the *postmodernism* of *Elle*) which can be easily detected from its cover. 'Classic' here carries two senses. First, the style of its cover has not changed much in the **chronological** sense, so that some of the design formulas used are well recognized and have become 'golden rules'. The second is an **aesthetic** sense. The style of the magazine is closely tied to the cultural context of Hong Kong and follow traditional presentations of female beauty. I am not suggesting that this aesthetic style is a peculiarly Hong Kong/Asian one—'classic' also carries the underlying meaning of 'universality'. The point is that this is a style that still works in the ever-changing mass media in Hong Kong. All in all, the general implication of 'classic' is something 'fixed', 'ordered', and 'well-balanced'.

Concerning the chronological sense, *Sisters'* has been very consistent in the graphic presentation of both its photographic and linguistic texts over the years. A typical example is the title of the magazine. Most women's magazines, and other magazines as well, use a standard font for the title, but *Sisters'* further standardizes the colour of the title. This consistent use of golden lettering is, according to the editor, a 'quirk' of the boss¹³⁹. Frequent pleas of the editor and graphic designers have led to the adoption of a second standard colour, metallic red. It is worth noting

¹³⁹ Source from Appendix 3.

that despite the compromise, the company insists on using metallic colours to maintain the effect of what the Chinese term 'golden brand'. It insists on clinging to the traditional taste for 'gaudy' glamour. The photographic images also retain their old style of one-quarter-body shots that are partly the result of the limited size of the cover. The format of the covering portrait remains unchanged and only young and popular local female movie stars are used. Headlines and subtexts are placed neatly on the lower half of the cover and the top right corner. The price, issue number, and a short description of the magazine reading 'a variety bi-weekly magazine containing fashion, beauty, lifestyle, entertainment, music and fiction' are printed, as they were before.

'Beautiful' might be a superficial remark for a good cover of a women's magazine, but it was the only comment on *Sisters*' by its editor. Beauty here, specifically speaking, refers to 'classical beauty'. During the Renaissance, beauty belonged to art, which embodied harmony, balance and coherence. After four centuries, the West still believe that the key to physical beauty is symmetry¹⁴⁰. For three decades, the covers of *Sisters*' have been abiding by this rule without fail and it never seems to go out of fashion¹⁴¹. No one, male or female, would be repulsed by a picture which pleases the eyes! The cover model is styled to attain a harmonious rather than captivating effect: make-up is not overdone, a tame and 'proper' hairdo, and absolutely no flamboyant clothes. The aim is to enhance the model's natural beauty while refraining from any kind of novelty including anything 'trendy'. The

¹⁴⁰ Evelyn Chan, *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ From Geoffrey Cowley, *The Biology of Beauty*, in *Newsweek*, June 5, 1996.

¹⁴² Fashion refers to "popularity" here.

model always tilts her head slightly, with an unthreatening soft smile on her lips, controlled facial expression, and striking a carefully calculated pose. Sometimes, the model is set against a 'real' background in the studio. It is an image of a 'portrait', a sort of effect you get when having your picture taken in a photographic studio. Every new consumer is portrayed in the same old situation (same sets, same pose, same angle of shooting, same lighting effect, and so on) for what matters is not the shooting style, but you (the famous movie stars in the case of *Sisters*). The cover effectively mirrors the concept underlying all the sections in the magazine: up-to-date contents in classical format.

From a semiotic point of view, the classical presentation of female beauty relays to viewers to the traditional form of femininity.

<i>Signet</i>	<i>Signifier</i>
white, unblemished face	youth, chastity
soft smile	controlled, satisfaction
unthreatening gaze	tameness, faith
properly set hair	prudence, discretion

Even when the model is portrayed in a partially naked state (Fig. 9), she exudes an wholesomeness and freshness rather than sensuousness. This kind of friendly but not sensational sex appeal, put forward by John Clammer as 'responsive sexuality', is a characteristic of an image 'of a highly sexualized female whose sexuality is still one

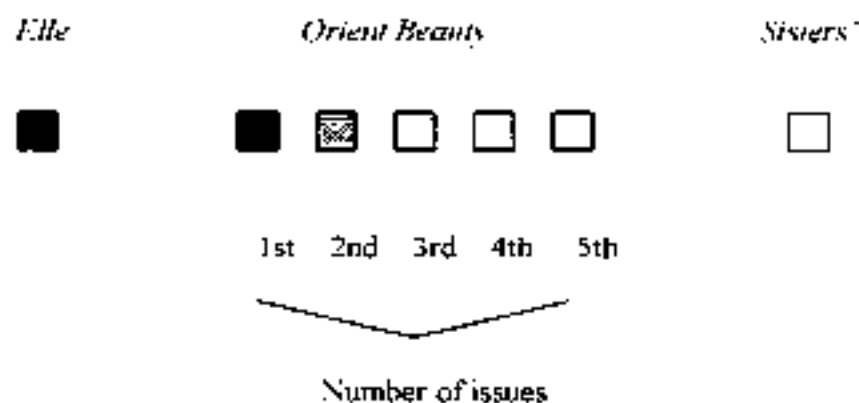
of the responses to the active sexuality of a man¹⁴². It reclines to the traditional stereotype of femininity –the dependent sexuality of Madonna’s type of housewife, a projection of men’s own fantasy and imagination, which is a contrast to an independent and sexually active woman. The cover of *Sisters*’ offers us a good example of ‘beauty in the eye of the beholder’¹⁴³. The model in a classical pose in front of the camera is conscious of the presence of onlookers. Her gaze stares right at the inferior readers, as if to say, ‘I’m more beautiful than you, aren’t I?’

Orient Beauty

If *Elle* covers illustrate postmodern female beauty and those of *Sisters*’ show classical female beauty, the covers of *Orient Beauty*’ should be regarded as a mediator between these two extremes. Their mediating position can be studied from two perspectives: the first one relating to the combination of different formats of presentation derived from the two extremes, and the second, the transformation of the presentation format of female beauty from one extreme to another in respect of time, which gives rise to an unstable, gradually changing, and ‘greyish’ third entity which is characteristic of *Orient* covers. The situation is illustrated by the following diagram:

¹⁴² John Clammer, *Consuming Bodies in Women. Media and Consumption in Japan* by Brian Moran, 1995, p.212.

¹⁴³ Here ‘beholder’ does not refer exclusively to men, but to any second party consuming the



The origin of *Orient Beauty* throws light on the mixed character of the magazine. *Orient Beauty* is the latest local-origin women's magazine in Hong Kong. However, it is not owned by a local publishing house but by a partnership between Le Salon Orient System Inc., and Hachette Magazine House Ltd., both foreign companies. Hence from the beginning the magazine carried Occidental ideas of Chineseness. In other words, indigenous subject matter is articulated in a foreign way. It is like a Chinese restaurant run by a Westerner where the cooking, presentation of the dishes, and the eating experience are not authentic despite the fact that indigenous ingredients or even chopsticks are used.

Referring back to the diagram, assuming the *Elle* cover exemplifies what is Western and postmodern (indicated by black), and that of *Sisters'* exemplifies what is Chinese and traditional (indicated by white), then the style of the cover of *Orient Beauty* can be interpreted as Chinese postmodern or Western traditional (indicated by grey, a mixture of the two). Nevertheless, what I propose here is not a rigid

images.

binary system or a deductive resolution, but rather, some possible outcomes resulting from the combination of the two styles.

The grey is not a fixed grey. Its tone has been changing since the magazine's first issue, roughly speaking, from darker to lighter (assuming that 'black' represents 'otherness' and 'white', 'self'). The first issue of *Orient Beauty* was launched in Winter 1994, and the prologue by the editor-in-chief, Catherine Gaynor, reads, 'At Orient Beauty we want to re-dress the balance, and give Asia's women the beauty news that they want. ...Won't it be lovely to know how those looks seen on the catwalks translate to *our* skin tones, to *our* hair colour?' It is a kind of irony that such intimacy as implied by the use of 'our' is used to address the Asian readers by this blue-eyed blonde, one among other the many Westerners who constitute over 90% of the working members in the 'prestigious team of writers, editors, designers, stylists, photographers, and make-up artists'¹⁴². After three issues, the companies felt a need to further localize the magazine by reorganizing the working team to give it a more local base. Yvonne Wong was appointed as the editor-in-chief from the autumn '95 issue and her aim is to orient the magazine more towards local culture, which the owners believed would better suit the taste of the local market. Consequently, from autumn '95 to winter issue, there was a dramatic change in style, notably seen in the covers. There was an abrupt shift of the way of portraying female beauty in Hong Kong from a foreign point of view to a local, or to put it in linguistic terms, from reported to direct speech.

¹⁴² Introduction of the 'Contributing Editors' on page 1 in the winter issue of *Orient Beauty*, 1994.

What is Chinese beauty in the eyes of the West? A foreigner would order sweet and sour pork and 'chop shui' in a Chinese restaurant, or buy qi-paos and china in Tsim Sha Tsui for their 'Chineseness', as a Chinese would associate jeans and hamburgers with 'Americanness', and geisha and sushi with 'Japaneseness'. It is only too easy for one to found one's judgment of another culture on a few stereotypes. Stereotypes are 'ready-made packages of beliefs'¹⁴⁵ which structure and shape our ideas to the social world and are especially important in guiding us in making judgment or taking cognizance of something we are unfamiliar with. There are two kinds of stereotypes: one based on its peculiarity and the other on its popularity. For instance, Madonna the singer is an American sex symbol and this stereotype is a result of her peculiarity. She is unique, even shocking, in her appearance and behaviour, e.g. dancing sensually wearing inverted metallic cones for brassiere while singing 'Anti-Christ'. On the other hand, the stereotyped features of English beauty are blue eyes and blond hair. Due to the prevalence and popularity of these features, we automatically attribute them to English people. And the image formed becomes a sort of stereotype.

The adoption of stereotyping as a way of articulating female beauty in Hong Kong by *Orient Beauty* can be clearly observed in its first and second issues. According to Yvonne Wong, the first issue of *Orient Beauty* was very successful which, I believe, was precisely the result of this stereotyping. Practically speaking,

¹⁴⁵ From Michael Harris Bond, *Beyond the Chinese Face*, p. 42.

stereotyping is a usual tactic for covers of women's magazines. Ellen McCracken pointed out that a smart-looking woman in an executive suit sitting in an office environment can be a stereotype of *working women*, or a blissfully smiling woman with a neat hairdo and wearing a feminine outfit can be a stereotype of *housewives*. For *Orient Beauty* the stereotype evolves from its title, which is, a female image allied strongly to the postcolonial concept of *Orientalism*. Orientalism, an idea which emerged from the West, is the representation of the Oriental by the Occidental according to the latter's interpretation of the former, which is not an accurate reflection of reality. Owing to the lack of familiarity with the East, 'the task of Orientalism was to reduce the bewildering complexity of oriental societies and oriental culture to some manageable, comprehensible level'¹⁴⁶ As a result, Oriental men are projected not only as a group of otherness who have all the characteristics that Occidental men do not in a constructed topology, but also as a homogeneous crowd whose hierarchy and diversity was leveled out. Hence to consider Orient beauty is, in this case, to consider the collective beauty of Chinese women using the mentality of the West. It is clear that the magazine's choice of Sandy Lam as the cover model for its critical launch issue is an official decision in this direction (Fig. 5). Sandy Lam is a good embodiment of what a Chinese woman *should* look like: smoothly curved eye-brows, eyes with single upper lids, sleek hair, very pale fine skin, small stature, shy and subtle. Her looks fit right into the stereotyping framework of Chinese women. These looks are also very popular among the local

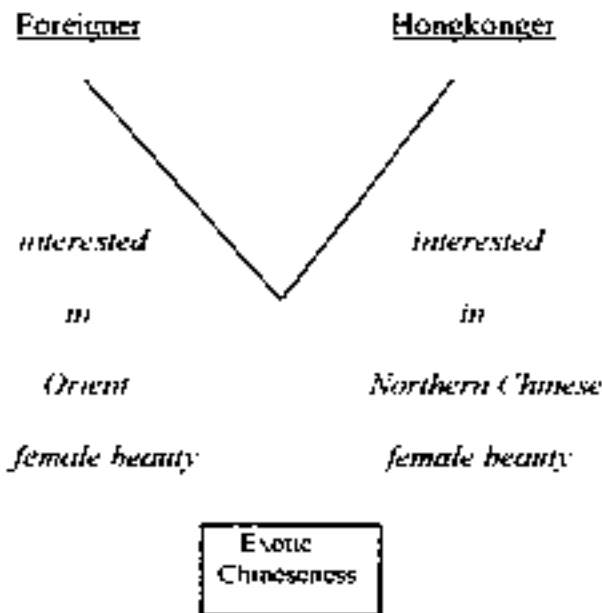
¹⁴⁶ Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*, Routledge: 94, p. 42

Chinese women, not surprisingly, as many Chinese believe that Northerners are more refined looking, and hence, more attractive than Southerners.

Nonetheless, the cover only portrays an imaginary Chinese woman. As in the case of any kind of stereotype, to contrive a mono-appearance for a population of plurality, complexity and changeableness is by nature illogical, for it can never truthfully and accurately reflect reality. The point here, however, is whether the 'real look and situation of women' is necessary for the cover of a women's magazine. I believe that Marx's theory on the political economy of consumption - a balanced engagement in and detachment from the commodities - can be justly applied to aesthetic appreciation in the process of consumption. The editorial team selected Sandy for the launch issue because of her indigenous looks and local (although, as mentioned above, 'this indigenoussness remains trapped within the notion of Western culture as racially homogeneous'¹⁴⁷), and simultaneously for her exotic appeal to themselves. At the production level, the whole idea of image creation is constructed on a system of differences: at the consumption level, readership is based on a system of distance. Not only is the imaginary figure 'unreal' to 'real' women, as a necessary condition of stereotyping, but Sandy has typically northern Chinese looks that are not common in Hong Kong's largely southern population. Her delicate facial features are commonly believed by the Chinese to be typical features of 'Han'.¹⁴⁸ The beauty has been celebrated by countless depictions in the hands of classical Chinese poets, novelists, artists, wall-painters etc. Yet it is 'alien' to Hong Kong Chinese

¹⁴⁷ Jean Fisher, *Global Icons*, Kala Press: 1994, p.6

who have rounder eyes and coarser and darker skin. Hence, the cover's success lies in its 'exotic' appeal. A Hong Kong Chinese woman consumes an exotic image of the North for its 'Chineseness' just as a foreign woman consumes an exotic image of the Orient for its 'Chineseness'.



Although a foreigner and a local will look at the image from separate points of views, they will come to the same conclusion that it represents exotic Chineseness. Compare this cover to that of spring '95 (second issue) which gives a completely different effect (Fig. 10). Still using the concept of stereotype, the image of Anita Lee, however, represents a 'peculiar' type of Orient beauty. Her flamboyant outfit, long brownish curls, ruby-coloured lips, and, in particular, the blue contact-lenses, remind one of 'Susie Wong' or the 'show girls' of Hong Kong's club scene of a few decades back. The editorial team intended to portray a kind of Oriental female

attraction that is mystical and exotic. But such portrayal does not provoke the same response among the local readers. Hong Kong people simply did not recognize the image as an 'befitting stereotype' of Oriental beauty, and that has led to the failure of the cover.¹⁴⁸

Anita Lee's threatening eyes, half-opened mouth and wriggly hair portrays an image of a sexually independent women, a prostitute. It is an image of Medusa. It is a look with a story, a fantasy whose structure is embedded in imperialist ideology. The local readers may resist being identified with a whore or show girl. They may also see the image as too detached from real life, presenting the beauty of the Pocahontas which exists only in the dream world. Anita Lee is carefully made up and styled for a show - she is an actress in action, she is no longer her own person. Ironically speaking, she is an image of a Chinese beauty pretending to be a 'Chinese beauty', like a girl wearing her hair long in order to be a girl. This identity is formulated according to the ideology of the dominant power in society, not the law of fundamentalism. The identity of the 'Chinese female beauty' is constructed by two suppressive powers which have given rise to the prevalent ideology in society.

¹⁴⁸ According to Yvonne Wong, the cover of Anita Lee is the least favourite cover for the readers as

<u>suppressive power</u>	<u>ideology:</u>	<u>signs</u>	<u>identity</u>
patriarchal	feminine	long hair/ curved figure /soft skin etc	women
imperialist	exotic/ repressed/ mystical/ changeless	bewitching eyes /fancy wear/ made-up face, etc	Chinese

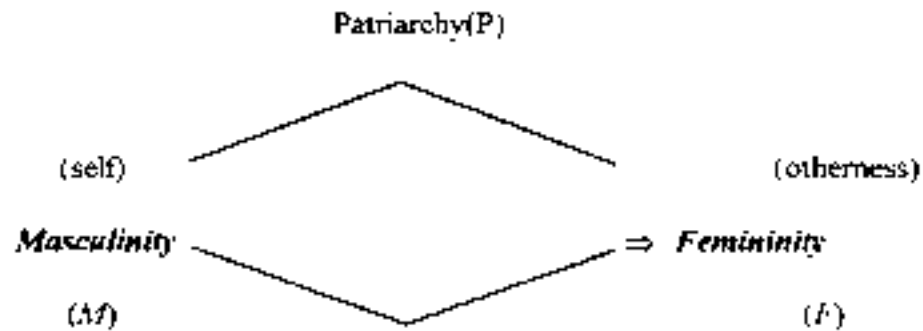
The image of Anita Lee reveals a dual problem, one which is common in the interpretation of women in a colonial culture: gender and race, as pointed out by Pratibha Parmar: 'the common-sense ideas about Asian female sexuality and femininity are based within, and determined by, a racist patriarchal ideology'¹⁴⁹. Under this lop-sided cultural atmosphere, 'women' are defined by men and Oriental women, by Occidental men.

Both patriarchy and imperialism have their roots in the aggressive nature of masculinity and both point to the same goal of conquering otherness (see diagram below). The meaning of otherness, whether it be gender- or race-related, is determined by what 'object' they are attacking. But the aim is always to efface

well as for herself. Please see Appendix 1.

¹⁴⁹ Pratibha Parmar, 'Hateful Contraries: Media Images of Asian Women', in *Looking On by* Rosemary Battersby (eds.), 1984, p.98.

'otherness' by putting women/other races into inflexible stereotypes, erasing their multiple natures with a single name of femininity so as to glorify masculinity.



Imperialism(I)

$$M + P = F$$

$$M \cdot I = F$$

$$M \cdot P = M \cdot I$$

$$P = I$$

The diagram above shows how capitalist society is based on the antagonistic power relations (masculinity/femininity, self/otherness) and, at the same time, the doing away of differences, rather than on an equal distribution of power and a genuine respect for differences. Judith Williamson pointed out that capitalism cannot 'function alone in equilibrium' and it is not 'internally sufficient', because 'our culture (Occidental culture, in her sense), deeply rooted in imperialism, needs to destroy genuine difference, to capture what is beyond its reach; at the same time, it

needs constructs of difference in order to signify itself at all.¹⁵⁰ If 'masculinity' is the driving force, then 'patriarchy' and 'imperialism' are the forces bearing the characteristics of offensiveness and progressiveness, while 'femininity' is the necessary answer to the joined forces of this warring team of capitalism. The aim of creating 'the other' is to fortify the position of the 'self'. While affirming femininity, masculinity is reassured in the same way a winner needs a loser to be a winner. Note that women have no participation, though they occupy a position in the whole game, surviving only under the beautiful name of 'femininity' designated to them by the stronger sex. Cultural space (and political space as well, perhaps) is clearly defined, the male/ imperial belonging to the active, dynamic, oppressive side while the female/ colonized is destined to be its passive, static, and submissive counterpart.

In Chinese philosophy, harmony is achieved by a binary logic of 'yin-yang', articulated in *I Ching* as 'Qian Kun' 乾 坤, meaning Heaven and the Earth in the beginning of the world. Heaven sows and gives, Earth conceives and takes. Confucians believed that Heaven and Earth have their separate functions, akin to the separate responsibilities taken up by men and women. 'Man is the representative of Heaven, and is supreme over all things. Woman yields obedience to the instructions of man, and helps to carry out his principles.'¹⁵¹ The rigid understanding of the living space of men and women as centrifugal and centripetal is a structural and ideological issue in gender, which can also be applied to the broader cultural sphere. Masculinity

¹⁵⁰ Judith Williamson, 'Women is an Island - Femininity and Colonization', in Helen Bachr & Ann Gray (ed.), *Turning It On*, Arnold: 1996, p.24.

¹⁵¹ Confucius, *Narratives of the School*, book 3.

and femininity are not only symptoms of the two sexes but of the political theories of the Occident and the Orient. Using the familiar binarism of psychoanalytic terms, Barthes has made the following description of the China and the West:

China occupies a maternal, imaginary, unarratized space antithetical to the sociosymbolic paternal order exemplified by the West.¹⁵²

Kristeva also likens the matriarchal authority of pre-Confucian China to the pre-oedipal state before the intervention and suppression of the father. Interestingly, both Barthes and Kristeva see China as a feminine, preverbal, eccentric and imaginary space, an 'other' space estranged from the tyranny and overdetermination of Western signification. Hence China is turned into a fetish. Chinese women are also fetishized as if they are commodities in the political economy. Images of Chinese women reveal a romantic courtship of 'the Orient' and 'women' (both constructed as feminine and exotic) of the West, manifesting in the dream-image of otherness. These kinds of dream-images, such as the dancing hostess image of Anita Lee, are similar to commodities in the process of used for their exchange value—deprived of their original identity and meaning and reduced to a fetish. Therefore, although the image is a Chinese woman, it is not a Chinese woman, only a reflection of Occidental values pointing to the nostalgia of imperialism. 'Europeans are visually

¹⁵² Barthes, *Alors Le Chine?*, translated by Lisa Lowe in 'The Desires of Postcolonial Orientalism: Chinese Utopias of Kristeva, Barthes, and *Tel Quel*'. Source from *Critical Terrain*, Cornell University Press, 1991, p.172

absent but psychologically present because they constitute the all-seeing, all-powerful gaze¹³³. When the Occident defines the identity of the Orient, he is in fact trying to explore and assure his own identity.

It is why the image of Anita Lee is robbed of its fresh and up-dated quality, replaced by an 'old-fashioned' beauty permeated with the bitter-sweetness of the fading glory of the old days. It is not a live figure, only a sign, and its closure is what it signifies. Since it only exists in one's imagination, it is fixed and timeless. Mackenzie's description of the 'timelessness' of the Oriental images, which implies 'the absence of the historical dynamic of progress that represents Western superiority'¹³⁴, echoes the 'homogeneity' of the cultural space of China suggested by Barthes. Their views upon the flatness and the lack of colours and dimension of the Chinese cultural space, is the result of a romanticization and mystification of the Other, a turning of the object of fear to that of desire.

We can still find traces of 'the presence of the absent gaze' and the element of 'timelessness' on the cover of the autumn issue of *Oriem Beauty* (Fig. 11). This issue, although published under a Chinese editor, adheres stylistically and ideologically to the previous issues with regards to its cover. This was due mainly to the fact, that, to use Yvonne's words 'I could do little about it, my foreign colleagues chose the picture *just because they liked it*' (the autumn issue represents

¹³³ John M. Mackenzie, *Orientalism: History, theory and the Arts*, Manchester University Press 1995, p.46.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

a transitional copy of the magazine, and also of the transition from the old to the new editor) The cover featured Rosamund Kwan, a very feminine figure in the eyes of Hong Kong people. She is in a black low-cut evening gown, wearing an elegant hairdo, 'classical' feminine make-up (white skin, dark curved eyebrows, curly eyelashes, rouged cheeks, and ruby-coloured lips) and a calm, soft expression. The whole appearance is one of the glamorous and elevated, reminiscent of the film stars depicted on Hong Kong's movie magazines in the fifties and the sixties

Nonetheless, like that of Anita Lee, the image of Rosamund Kwan is a drama. She is a movie star masked behind a veil, forever enchanting but inaccessible. She is performing on the screen, taking the role of a certain stereotype of women to quench the desire of the Occident/men. As I have located men and the Occident on the same level, as the antagonists of Orient/women (see diagram below), it is worthwhile to regard the careful construction of the femininity of Rosamund Kwan not only as a typical image of Oriental beauty but of female beauty in general.

<u>feminine</u>	<u>masculine</u>
<i>women</i>	<i>men</i>
<i>the Orient</i>	<i>the Occident</i>

What sort of female beauty does Rosamund Kwan project? If the image of Anita Lee is that of a prostitute, the image of Rosamund Kwan should be that of a good wife. It is not simply because Rosamund Kwan is well-known for her 'goodness' both in

temperament and background in show business. She also fits very much into the image of women Orient Beauty wants to project in that issue—that of a chaste, faithful, obedient and feminine Chinese woman. There are great contrasts between the two images.

Anna Lee

half-opened mouth

aggressive gaze

curly long hair

see-through garments

hot tone

wild

bad

Rosamund Kwan

closed smiling mouth

unthreatening gaze

tidy done up hair

black evening gown

cool tone

tame

good

I agree with Efran Tseelon's remark that 'Both the Victorian Madonna and the Victorian whore were projections of man's own phantasy'¹¹³. Men has incorporated their sexual desire into the interpretation of women, both good or bad, as seen by the attractive images of women who are ever ready to please men. Whereas sensually they may desire the prostitute, they also afraid of this type, so they construe an opposite type to counter this fear—the good wife. This formula is applicable to the Asian-woman image of the prostitute as well as the air hostess. Ideologically, the

¹¹³ Efran Tseelon. *The Masque of Femininity*. Sage. 1995. p.99.

alluring air hostess, though disciplined and neatly dressed, is a prostitute as her job is to satisfy men's needs.

These are two kinds of portrayal of women that are antonymous to each other: that of a good wife who, at least as far as her appearance goes, shows no sign of sexual desire, and that of a prostitute who should have every hint of coquetry in her looks. An ambivalent figure is exemplified by the angle-devil female image often depicted in Japanese pornography—she is a fresh school-girl or a faithful housewife who is lustrous and yearning for heterosexual sex. In all these cases the women seem to be helpless, victimized by the fact that the surging sexual desire so described as innate in women is repressed by the morals of society. And then men are the heroes who come to save the women from their peril by having sex with them, covering up the conspiracy that what is understood as 'morality' is also the men's creation. Meanwhile I would like to extend Efrat's idea by pointing out that men are afraid of sexually independent women because they find masculinity in their activeness, assertiveness, and progressiveness. As women are regarded in patriarchal society as the Other, which calls for domination, they should have the corresponding looks and behaviour, i.e., looks and behaviour which spell 'femininity'. The ultimate aim of their femininity is to protect men from their own femininity, if fear and cowardice be feminine traits.

The cover of the winter issue of *Orient Beauty*, with Michele Reis as model, represents a turning point in the stylistic change of the magazine I observed earlier:

the move from the black (postmodern) to the white (classical), from the foreign to the local (see Fig. 12). Now a beautiful Chinese girl is speaking for her own beauty. Talking about her requirements for creating an image for the cover, Yvonne Wong said all that was needed was to show the model's natural beauty by highlighting her most beautiful parts.¹⁵⁰ Visually the cover with Michele Reis accomplishes exactly that. Her beige-toned make-up, simple hair style, unisex clothes, and ordinary pose suggest the image is anything but dramatic, echoing the headlines of the feature interview of that issue 'The Natural Touch' (Fig. 10). The image gives one the impression that it was not shot in a studio, but in an everyday environment by a home camera. It is reminiscent of the images found in family photo albums. If we think that the images of Anita Lee and Rosamund Kwan are real Chinese women pretending to be typical (Oriental) Chinese women, the image of Michele Reis is a special (movie star) Chinese woman pretending to be an everyday Chinese woman. Another interesting antithesis observed here is that there is a strong foreign flavour in the images of the 'typical' Chinese women (the 'Chineseness' of Sandy Lam, the 'exoticism' of Anita Lee and the 'femininity' of Rosamund Kwan) but a local quality in the image of the winter issue despite the fact that Michele has foreign blood.

¹⁵⁰ From an interview with Yvonne Wong held in December 1995.

THE PRESENTATION OF BEAUTY

In this chapter I will continue to examine representations of female beauty in contemporary women's magazines with specific regards to the **techniques and methods** employed. I will turn to the contents of the magazines (as opposed to their covers which I discussed in the previous chapter), focussing on the linguistic texts and photos from the perspective of **aesthetics** rather than semiotics. In the second half of the chapter I will discuss the most distinctive and common method/way of deploying female beauty in contemporary women's magazines in Hong Kong, that is, **naturalism**, and explore how it is related to the notions of the 'nature' and 'images' of women.

Female Fashion and Beauty – Essence of the Contents of Women's Magazines

The contents of a magazine are *elaborations and disclosures* of what is summed up on the cover. The cover is a synopsis or an abridgment of the contents, it gives one only a general idea of the full version. It also acts as an advertisement both of its title and its contents, and of the relevant commercial product if the cover is sold to a certain brand. Therefore, the primary requirement for attractiveness and effective use of space is testified to structurally by the lustrous colours and eye-catching designs of the linguistic and pictorial texts, and, ideologically, by unconventional and

provocative images, such as, a female model striking a masculine pose. Seen in this light, headlines and images may be misleading. They may not be absolutely truthful reflections of the contents. Certain topics may be given disproportionate emphasis. The contents, however, are where the truth, the real face of the magazine, lies.

Reading the contents of a magazine simply because it has an alluring cover is similar to watching a movie because of its commercials or posters. One point worth exploring is the interrelationship between the cover and the content. On the other hand, the 'content' of the content, that is, the subject matter, the orientation, the style, and the format used are also important points for investigation.

At the linguistic level, a women's magazine is a magazine that is concerned with women, or a magazine about being women. This applies to what we understand as the two general categories of female readings, women's readings and feminist readings. The crucial point whether the contents are concerned with women or concerned with being women. Now almost all women's magazines published in Hong Kong fall into the former category—their contents may fall mainly around women (or what are generally taken as 'women's topics' and 'women's lifestyle, such as fashion and beauty, cookery, home furnishing), or for women (such as news on films, psychology games, information of entertainment, and beauty and shopping guides), or by women (female editorial team as well as female writers for individual articles or fictions). The latter category, specified by its affiliation with some basic

ideas of feminism, is absent from the market except the very short-lived women's magazine, *In*, which was published in the early nineties¹⁷.

In was an ambitious project that struggled to carve a niche in the market full of soft-core women's magazines published purely for entertainment and leisure. The editorial of the launch issue, entitled 'What is a Women's Magazine?', tried to restate its aim and position by explaining the company's slogan: 'The magazine for women by women'. The editor wrote, 'We endeavour, among the many of glossy local women's magazines, which do not try at all to encourage women in Hong Kong to change some of distorted relationships and unfair realities in society, to bring about an alternative experience or raise questions about some of the rules and traditions we are used to following'¹⁸. She even quoted the words of Simone de Beauvoir to reaffirm the importance of moral, social and cultural besides economic factors in the 'evolution' of women. Undoubtedly, the magazine has taken on the serious mission of looking into 'women's problems' in society from a feminist point of view, although it claims that feminism is only adopted as a position and is not something it worships. Having too many contents that are considered politically 'hard-core' or 'leftist' could endanger the magazine. This was what the editor tried to avoid. Ironically, the woman who wrote that essay is none other than Evelyn Chan, the editor of *Sisters' Pictorial* today, whose morale seems to have been

¹⁷ *In* was a glossy women's magazine published in the early 1990s, by Yongder Hall Group Hong Kong, which also publishes *Marie Claire* (Chinese edition) and *Elegance* (has been out). *In* is distinguished from the other magazines by its feminist orientation and its target readership of educated women.

dampened by the *In*'s failure in terms of sales. Resorting to fatalism, she said with sarcasm and some pride leftover from her previous project, 'People in Hong Kong simply like reading this kind (pointed to *Sisters*) of magazines - it is what reality is about'¹⁵⁹

The three women's magazines examined (*Elle*, *Sisters' Pictorial* and *Oriental Beauty*) belong, without exception, to the first category of magazines I mentioned. These women's magazines are not only characterized by their soft-core style, but also by the overwhelming predominance in quantity and orientation of fashion and beauty content. *Elle* is the best-selling women's beauty and fashion magazine in Hong Kong and *Oriental Beauty* is introduced as a 'Beauty Bible' for Asian women. Although *Sisters'* has multiple orientations, its fashion and beauty pages exceed a third of the total number of pages (see Appendix 6a & 6b).

In addition to the number of pages, there is a 'disproportionate emphasis' on fashion and beauty headlines on covers, which was also mentioned by Ellen McCracken in her analysis of American women's magazines. Not only the beauty topics are deliberately selected for the covers, they tend to be in most eye-catching fonts and occupy most of the space. On a linguistic level, these 'beautiful topics' are always 'beautified' through their wording, which interacts with the photographic images to produce an even stronger effect.

¹⁵⁹ Here is my translation of an extract by Evelyn Chan, in the article 'What is Women's Magazines?' in the column 'Experience into Words', published in the first issue of *In*.

A common tactic in use is the lavish spread of **poetic beauty headlines**, which creates a blank space in the imagination to be filled in by the background photo. It is reminiscent of traditional Chinese paintings (ink-wash paintings of landscapes, flowers and birds, and of human figures) that are often accompanied by a poem. The poem may act as a linguistic narration of the picture, or as a conclusion or lesson drawn from the photo. The linkage between the photographic and linguistic texts is interestingly developed. At times, even, there is no sign of relationship between the two at all, exemplifying the Kantian idea of free play of imagination over understanding in aesthetic perception, where 'understanding is at the service of the imagination'¹⁴⁰. At other times, meaning is self-evident and grounded in a factual photo. One thing worth mentioning is the unique structure of Chinese poetry. Apart from rhyming which is a common feature of the poetry of many different languages, great flexibility in the arrangement of subjects and verbs is crucial in creating poetic effect.

¹⁴⁰ From an in-depth interview with *Sisters'* editor, Evelyn Chan, which took place in January 1996.

Structure

- omission of subjects and verbs
- free arrangement of subjects and verbs
- rhyming

Effect

- creates a blank space for the imagination
- effacement of the rigid structural rules which hinder free flow of imagination
- creating music which enhances feeling and imagination

Among the three aspects, the omission and the free play of certain parts of speech in Chinese poetry are especially significant in bringing out a set of disparate elements which provides space for the soaring of the imagination (structurally the omission of certain parts of speech in a sentence is analogous to the interplay of concealment and exposure in creating an evocative/erotic effect). As our comprehension of the poem cannot be facilitated by an empirical concept, we invent a concept to fill in the gap between imagination and understanding. Since we judge it as a presence rather than an instance, we concentrate on the picture it conjures up and we think not by association but by a regulating process of chaotic forms. In the case of the covers of women's magazines, however, the play of the imagination on the poetic headlines is conditioned by the photographic image, so that the sensation resulting from our imagination has actually been calculated and prearranged. Hence the pleasure arising from reading the beautiful covers of women's magazines. I

¹⁰⁰ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, translated by James Creed Meredith, Oxford, 1991.

would suggest, is a typical example of a 'controlled de-control of the emotions'¹⁶¹ of postmodern culture, wherein the process of perception is similar to that of aesthetic appreciation of the fine arts (harmony between imagination and understanding under the authority of reason), except that in postmodern aesthetics our emotion is pre-calculated and exploited, and not self-determined as in the latter case.

In the light of the above, the beauty and fashion headlines become very helpful when complemented by a 'beautified' picture to construct a complete beauty package. The headlines in bold of the 'Fragrance Special' of *Elle* reads 'Subtle Fragrance Floods the Summer' (May 1995, *Elle*, see Fig. 13) is foregrounded against a photo of Claudia Schiffer with light make-up, wearing a plain dress and a casual smile. Despite its seemingly unrelated context, the image seems to go well with the linguistic text to emphasize the youthful, fresh and spontaneous quality of summer. Issue no.538 of *Sisters* deploys the poetic headline 'A Pretty Woman as Soft as Water'¹⁶²(see Fig. 9). The word 'water' reminds one of the softness and purity of beautiful women, characteristics shared by the visual portrayal of summer in the picture: blue water, wet hair, pinkish flowers on head. The result is that both women and summer are made feminine for they unanimously carry the quality of soft water. The cover is made beautiful by the construction of a feminine environment, so that beauty is equated with femininity.

p.241.

¹⁶¹Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* Sage, 1994, p.78

Poetic headlines are a distinctive characteristic of local women's magazines, and a trace of **traditional Chinese aesthetics**. They work by creating a kind of ambiguity through the flexible and imprecise meanings of the wording – which is analogous to the changeable and romantic female beauty in the traditional Chinese context (please refer to Chapter 1 for traditional female beauty). In *ELLE*, all the headlines appear as rhymed lines in the content pages. This type of couplets, which we call 'dayoushi' 打油诗 (informal poetry), is commonly found in the content pages of classical Chinese fiction and in prologues read out by a clown in Chinese dramas as a synopsis of the story (see Appendix 7). These headlines are marked by very similar structure and an equal number of words. At the structural level, these lines in the content pages form a system, a 'beautiful form' in addition to their 'beautiful meaning'. Like the cover, they direct the attention of the readers to the section of beauty and fashion by creating a beautiful (feminine/ poetic) environment, without really talking about beauty and fashion.

The Visual the Crucial - a Close Study of Photographic Texts

Following the table of contents, we come to the body of the magazine, consisting of articles, essays, features, and advertisements which have already appeared in highly synoptic form in the headlines and sub-headlines on the cover and the table of contents. Presenting a women's magazine from the cover to the contents is

¹⁶² My translation of the Chinese headline. The original Chinese headline has two nouns located

analogous to describing a woman from a distance to close-up, from generalities to specifics, and from impressions to actuality. The content is the food referred to in the menu, the commodity inside the wrappings. It is the substance to be consumed, but it is not the whole. The contents of a women's magazine provide consumable information, images and lifestyles, and so does the cover. The cover is a separate part of the whole and is at the same time complementary to the main body. Information is presented from different angles and in different forms by the cover as well as the contents, which are bound tightly together in a single, whole unit. Contemporary women's magazines manifest the postmodern logic of playing with the image of a commodity, so that the material self is crumbled up on a pseudo-realistic level and then rearranged as an ambivalent unity.

The contents are made up of two components: photographic and literary texts. I refrain from adopting the usual differentiation of image and language on the basis that the meanings of these two terms can overlap. Image can be a form of language while language can be read as image. On the other hand, the aim of this differentiation is not to reductively categorize the rich variety and complexity of the contents, nor to suggest that photographic texts and literary texts carry on autonomous existences. My main concern is to clarify the focus of study rather than make distinctions.

Photographic texts contribute to the main part of the contents of women's magazines, in respect to both their coverage and significance. Undeniably, women's magazines are not alone in demonstrating the predominance of visual images in contemporary cultural representations in Hong Kong. A research conducted by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in 1994 provides evidence for this claim. The researcher examined the graphic design of a teen's magazine *Breakthrough* published over the last ten years, and discovered that the most prominent change is the increasing proportion of photographic images versus literary texts.¹⁶¹ If this is a trend in a soft-core educational magazine like *Breakthrough*, one could surmise that it would be more strongly the case in entertaining magazines. In fact, the number of entertaining magazines in the market has been increasing, including gossip magazines, comics, special interest magazines and of course women's and men's magazines. Their proliferation both in the number of titles and copies reflects the general taste of the public in favour of reading for leisure and entertainment. This boom in image-oriented reading material such as comics (of sex, violence and horror) and gossip weeklies points to a cultural emphasis on spectacle. For other entertaining magazines, this trend entails an enlargement of photographic texts at the expense of literary texts.

The stress on figure rather than discourse is widely accepted as one of the typical features of postmodern culture and is exemplified by those contemporary glossy women's magazines in Hong Kong. These magazines have the common trait

¹⁶¹ The research was conducted by Ester Chan, HKPU, on *Breakthrough* magazine in 1994-95.

of comprising a great quantity of colourful pictures, in high quality prints and paper. It can be found in the two magazines studied, *Elle* and *Orient Beauty*, but *Sisters'*, which claims to be 'glossy' but not a women's magazine, contains no trace of it. It does not mean that *Sisters'* has comparatively fewer glossy pictures than other women's magazines, for there is no formal research on the quantity of photographic texts in these magazines, nor is there any practical necessity for it. I have observed that, as far as photographic texts go, *Sisters'* seems to be exception to the rule. Since its inception, it has never relied on photographic texts as an ingredient for success. The relative proportion of photographic and literary texts in a single copy today is very similar to that 20 years ago, while other magazines like *Elegance* and *TB* have adopted new formats several times for the sake of enhancing visual attractiveness. Moreover, the magazine gives particular attention to its literary section 'Fiction and Novel', a phenomenon which is almost absent among other women's magazines.

Before embarking on a detailed analysis of photographic texts, I would like to point out several general characteristics. Besides their large numbers and visual attractiveness, these pictures are displayed in certain styles that are determined either by tradition or the orientation of the magazine. These styles are usually adhered to for a long period of time. More importantly, the visual display and arrangement of the pictures always go with the presentation of the image of beauty. Small-scale pictures (e.g. illustrations) are arranged harmoniously with large-scale pictures (e.g., fashion stores). On one hand, and interact with the image on the cover on the other

In most cases, there is communication between photos and words. Even if there is no apparent interaction, there is still a preexistent pattern of combining photographic with literary texts. In this sense the depiction of images of beauty depends a lot on the formulation of a system. In the words of the insiders, it is style, which essentially means the particular orientation of a magazine. This refutes the argument that the composition and presentation of texts in women's magazines in Hong Kong is pure improvisation. I believe there is a coherent system in the portrayal of female beauty in each magazine, as evidenced, at least, by the surviving titles in the market (an incoherent system, I would say, is typified by *Elegance* which has dropped out of market), even if the system is not consciously designed.

Photographic texts in women's magazines appear in various forms and serve various functions, both within a single copy and among different magazines. As beauty and fashion pages serve as the main paradigm here for the study of the image of female beauty in women's magazines, I shall concentrate on photos of this area, which can be classified into four categories: fashion stories, catwalk photos, photos for features, and illustrations.

Fashion Photos

Perhaps the most impressive and distinctive component of contemporary women's magazines in Hong Kong are fashion photos. Fashion photos are a series of

photographic presentations of fashion, worn by models and set against various backgrounds. They usually make up the majority of the photographic texts in beauty and fashion pages, and in women's magazines as a whole. Fashion photos are also one of the oldest formats used by women's magazines for showing fashion, emerging as far back as the first issue of women's magazine. Their venerable position in women's magazines is probably a reflection of their popularity among the readers, but they are definitely an indication that fashion has an overriding significance for femininity, a widely accepted criteria for female beauty.

The relationship between fashion and femininity is not a new topic in cultural studies. An empirical research carried out by Efrat Tseelon found that people derive self-confidence from clothes.¹⁶³ The issue has more to do with social and cultural factors than anthropology, specifically the need to cover up and keep warm. Since the meaning of clothes (or fashion) is not the same for men and women, the researcher attributed the self-refining role of clothes to the basic gender problem. Women's reliance on beautiful clothes reveals the fragility of the female self—they look good in order to establish a sense of self-worth, as they are constantly a spectacle of the stronger sex. An unclothed body is an incomplete and stigmatized body. This ideology has a true follower (unfortunately) in historian Theodore Zeldin, who stated covertly that the role of fashion is to conceal because most women are ugly.

¹⁶³ Source from 'The Gender of the Spectacle', in *The Masque of Femininity*, p. 59-64

The great attraction of fashion was that it diverted attention from the *insoluble problems of beauty* and provided an easy way—which money could buy—of at any rate approximating outwardly to a simply stated, easily reproduced ideal of beauty.¹⁶⁵

I will discuss the primary concerns of fashion and its relation to power in the last chapter. Meantime, I shall discuss the different formats adopted by the fashion stories found in the three cases, *Elle*, *Sisters* and *Oriem Beauty*, focusing on how fashion refers to the notion of female beauty rather than to itself

Fashion Images

In the semantic division by Roland Barthes, fashion photos of women's magazines belong to the second level of the fashion system: photographed clothes.¹⁶⁶ In Barthes' words, the 'fashion photograph is a semi-formalized state of the garment system': it is neither abstract like written fashion nor formalized like garments. Although I do not intend to adopt the semiological approach of reading fashion (since disputes on interpretation of signs are common), I think it might be worthwhile to borrow its clear classification system to help define the subject of study. What is regarded by Barthes as photographed fashion, I prefer to call 'fashion-image'—image to be consumed rather than material to be worn. The level

¹⁶⁵ Theodore Zeldin, *France*, vol.2, p.44

of materialism is reduced to the extent that it still manifests itself as a picture (or 'symbol' in semiological terms). The message it sends is conditioned by certain stereotypes or canons, for example, prevalent shooting styles, poses, and body shapes

A **fashion-image** is not simply clothes photographed and presented as two-dimensional graphical language, it is the whole idea of the 'fashionable look', specifically found in a few postmodern examples of women's magazines, of which *Elle* is one. Fashion-image originates from clothes, and its meaning is centrifugal, as shown in the following diagram

Clothes Which Are Photographed or Fashion-Image

clothes → clothes in fashion (or fashion) → look of clothes in

fashion → fashionable look of clothes in fashion ⇒ the look

Postmodern technique positions clothes as the subject matter, the look as the ultimate goal. As clothes metamorphose through photography, the look gradually takes over their domain before finally engulfing the clothes. In the end, there is nothing left but the look, a pure image of fashion. Whereas fashionable clothes can make an important contribution to a fashionable look, a fashionable look can do

¹⁶⁰ Roland Barthes, *Element of Semiology*, p 26.

without fashionable clothes. The shifting positions of subject and object, its very logic, is a major attribute of *Elle* fashion stories.

Elle designs fashion-images to give different 'effects'. The first and perhaps the most obvious one is the **powerful image** which is conceived on both a physical and graphical level. In my study of the fashion stories in *Elle* in 1995, I found that the number of stories for each monthly issue is nine or 10, much higher than *Sisters'* and *Oriental Beauty*, which are five and two respectively. With one story spanning approximately six pages, the total number of pages of fashion stories come to about 60, half the total number of beauty and fashion pages, which is around 120. (I came to the conclusion that fashion stories must be the most sales-boosting component of photographic texts in *Elle*). Their sheer coverage is amazing. Besides all 60 pages of fashion photos are strategically presented as one while lot, with smaller clusters of fashion stories combining into series of larger fashion stories. This structure comprising the uniting of tiny unrelated parts into a whole is postmodern (Note: it is not a reconstruction since there is no deconstruction of the original form). This continuum, this unexpected, this plenum, results in a captivating and stunning bazaar. Here is an intentional intertwining of elements of time and space, that is, the speediness embodied in the rapid flipping of magazine is woven into the enormous amount of ever-changing surprises provided by the colourful pictures. It mirrors a parallel situation in reality—the rapid lifestyle of women in postmodern Hong Kong is juxtaposed with the amount of new information bombarding their consciousness each moment of the day. Reading these fashion stories is similar to touring Europe.

on a five-day package tour. It is an exciting and stimulating experience that make you stop for your breath. The effect comes from the way time and space are squeezed into a compact form.

On the physical level, the abundance of unrelated materials to be read is contradicted by the requirement to read speedily or to flip (I draw from Meeling Leung, the ex-fashion and beauty editor of *Elegance*, who remarked that readers of women's magazines tend to flip rather than read). On the graphical level, another ambivalence is created through the play of contradictions. Relaxing, fluid images are counterbalanced by jumpy, striking images—the cool and serene is contrasted with the hot and bouncing. There are images of impressionism (Fig. 14), romanticism (Fig. 15), and sudden captures of uncontrolled emotion (Fig. 16). These I put into the 'fashion photos in action' category. Others belong to the group of still but powerful fashion photos, characterized either by big close-ups (Fig. 17), extravagant poses, or styling (Fig. 18), or by realistic portrayals of detail. This dichotomy forms the basic matrix of fashion photos in *Elle*. The two poles either interact with each other or create an effect separately.

The impressionist filmic image¹⁶⁷ a significant style of contemporary fashion photos. However, it is by no means a style experimented in this decade. In the West, the image of fashion models in action appeared as early as the 1920s.

¹⁶⁷ The term 'filmic' is drawn from Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion*, p. 118.

Static poses largely disappeared, replaced by moments of a narrative, fleeting impressions, and blurred actions. The trend was reinforced by the popularity of casual and informal clothing styles.¹⁴²

Two points can be made from the above quote from Craik. The first is that these photos have an impressionist quality, and the second, probably more important, is that these images reflect a special kind of femininity which is in tone with the prevalent fashion style. Whereas impressionism is still a technique for shooting fashion photos in the 90s, the code of femininity it projects is very different. Fig. 14 shows two faces of a woman in motion. She is wearing dramatic make-up and hairstyle, and devoid of any facial expression. The redness of the plant in the foreground contrasts with the black background while echoing her flaming hair. The clothes are completely concealed in the dark, leaving the two heads floating in the air. It is a fashion photo without clothes, even without the body of the woman. Female figure is dethroned by the desire for pure aesthetics. Fashion photos in *Elle* give us more than a few examples of form superseding content, of the fixed doctrines of femininity melting into a pure art form.

The filmic images also illustrate sudden capture of body movement and facial expression: the effect created is akin to 'the controlled de-control of emotions'

¹⁴² Jennifer Craik, *The Face of fashion*, p.99.

regarded by Mike Featherstone as one of the cultural regimes of postmodernity.¹⁶⁷ Instead of posing for a shot, the model, as she moves, is captured in a series of shots, sometimes with the technique of snapshots. Each shot represents a moment in a series of related movements. The editor and photographer will then select one from the series of shots. The shot chosen is supposed to have seized the best moment of a movement. There is also a tendency in postmodern fashion photos to shoot the subject in a relaxed, less contrived setting. Natural landscape is highly preferred, so shooting often takes place outdoors. The model is engaged in a moment of action: dancing, running, walking or playing, with an expression of either self-contemplation or disinterest, a fad of modern aesthetics termed as 'coolness', or of rapture, described by the catchword of women's magazines, 'carefree'-ness. In both cases, the model is self-engrossed, her eyes without a focal point and her smile not intending to please. This is a trend for photographing fashion and fashion models highly advocated by women's magazines in Hong Kong in the 90s, namely **naturalism or realism**.

Naturalism in Female Beauty Representation

The idea of naturalism as a style of representation of female beauty has emerged side by side the women's movement in Hong Kong in the 80s. The portrayal of female

¹⁶⁷ Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, p.78. Featherstone argues that although the "controlled de-control of emotions" is a common regime of postmodern cultural representations, it has its basis in modernity.

images by the media was intensively scrutinized, and women's magazines became their first target. Stereotyping of female beauty by women's magazines is deemed by many previous researchers as instance of sexual discrimination against women. On the grounds that the delimitation of human appearance within certain ready-made images, exceptionally common in the case of the depiction of women, neglects any complexity and plurality of female beauty bestowed by nature. The promotion of naturalism was closely connected with the rise of feminism. As a result, this naturalism could easily be taken as an advocate of feminism, which could very well be part of the truth. From my point of view, however, new aesthetic concerns are a more decisive factor for this changing mode of representation of female images. Women's Liberation is related, in certain ways, to this new aesthetics, but it is not necessarily the cause for its coming into being.

I have already given examples of the constructions of female images in *Elle*. Let me restate here that the concern for visual aesthetics precedes any other factor in contributing to the popularity of naturalist fashion photos in Hong Kong's women's magazines of the 90s. This phenomenon does not mark an attempt to abolish the authoritative sign system, but the implementation of a code of signs which serve more to provoke than to articulate. The new direction is emotion rather than information. The relation between signifier and signified is less rigid and more open to possibilities. It is, therefore, also less comprehensible, akin to the condition of appreciation of art. (There will be more discussions on realism in the following). On the surface, it is difficult to judge whether the images are controlled by ideology or

by pure aesthetic impulse, or whether the two interact in the same project to achieve different ends. At a deeper level, however, it can be observed that the introduction of naturalism represents a deliberate breakthrough of the coding system, in a manner similar to breakthroughs in the visual arts, rather than a shift in the old system of signification. This breakthrough relies on the execution of the old and development of the new codes, instead of the destruction and reconstruction of meanings the codes carry. It is not wrong of course to interpret these codes from sociological and political points of view, such as to link the images to feminism. However it would be less fruitful than reading them from the perspective of art which, after all, is the ultimate creation of the images.

It might be interesting to see how naturalism the image-setters—the editors in the case of women's magazines—look at naturalism, before we assert readily that fashion photos of women's magazines are pieces of art. Editors like Yvonne Chan and Meeling Leung are of the view that naturalism was the most appropriate style for portraying women in fashion magazines in Hong Kong in the 90s. Meeling believes that naturalism of the 90s, focusing on reflecting a woman's personality, has replaced the artificial looks of the 70s¹⁷⁰. It is the chosen style of *Elegance* and is the so-claimed 'Marie Claire's touch'. Yvonne believes that 'showing one's natural beauty by highlighting one's most beautiful part of the body'¹⁷¹ to be the most basic requirement in creating an image.

¹⁷⁰ Source from interview with Meeling Leung on 11th January, 1996.

Two issues can be observed here. First, one editor proceeds from photography and the other, from a woman. Second, they hold different viewpoints. Meeling's comment connotes a strong feminist ideology in its interpretation of the natural beauty of women. This essentialist approach to understanding what is female goes against the current conception that female beauty is decided by physical make-up. Instead, it is her psychological make-up, her 'personality' which counts. Compared to Yvonne's idea which affirms physical make-up as an attribute of female beauty, Meeling's comment casts doubts on the overriding importance of having a beautiful appearance, or of visualizations of beautiful appearances, assuming such a thing as a 'beautiful appearance' exists at all. From a feminist perspective, this shares similarities with the opinion of Lynn Romer, a pioneer for the rights of the 'appearance-impaired' in America, who attacks the weight physical attractiveness is given. She says in justification of her stand

I do not care if it is nature - genetic impulses telling us to shun the ugly - or nurture (Hollywood and the glamour magazines) that is to blame. If it is inbuilt we should overcome it, just as we try to curb the urge for violence and other Darwinian leftovers. If it is learned behaviour, we should unlearn it.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Quoted from interview with Yvonne Chan on 6th February, 1996.

¹⁷² From 'Looks Don't Matter, Says "Ugly" American', in *South China Morning Post, Preview*, 14 June, 1996.

The fact is, unlike Romer, who sends angry letters to women's magazines, Meeling is still editing and promoting women's magazines containing plentiful pictures of good-looking women. Since women's magazines are a visualized source of entertainment, female beauty, however abstract it is, should be presented visually, or should be, in a way, seen. It is quite obvious that Meeling would contradict herself if she tried to make any political statement through the created images. It is not that an editor should not have any political position; it is just that her position may not necessarily be that of the magazine. The best conclusion to her concept of naturalism is that she made use of certain feminist discourse to explain a new style of photography. After all it is always wiser to make a friend than an enemy.

This new style of photography consists of diversified streams. Naturalism is one of them, characterized by the freedom of thought and behaviour from conventions so distinctive in postmodern culture, which is also exemplified by post-feminist discourse. This goes to show that naturalism is not an unique style for shooting women's photos, or, for that matter, men's in men's magazines and fashion magazines. And as I have mentioned, its forerunner appeared way before feminist thought was crystallized and evolved as a cultural as well as political movement. An example of this are the photos in action of the 50s. Although these are foreign examples, they still make sense in explaining the situation in Hong Kong because, until now, most of the fashion photos found in local foreign-originated women's magazines are bought from their mother companies.

Assuming that the naturalism Meefing referred to is a stylistic evolution in photography rather than a political or social phenomenon, the issue that needs to be examined now is how both editors consider this new style from an aesthetic point of view. Meefing's belief that personality play a more important role in determining female beauty than looks represents a flattening of the hierarchy of female physical appearance, and a doing away with the idea of beauty as a natural endowment. Beauty here is what is natural. If anything natural is beautiful there would not be any 'born beauty' as there is no 'born ugliness'. Here beauty is applied to the whole female race. A woman should be beautiful with her natural complexion and body, no matter how big her eyes are or what colour her skin is. In other words, small eyes can be as beautiful as big eyes, just as dark skin can be as beautiful as fair skin. Female beauty is marked by multiplicity rather than simplicity. By contrast, stereotyping in the form of simplification and generalization of female beauty can be detected in Yvonne's comment that highlighting a woman's most beautiful part is the best way to show female beauty. In saying this she has classified female physical being into that of beauty and that of plainness and ugliness. Even if a woman looks plain, some parts of her face or body should be more beautiful than others. It is beauty in relativity, similar to the 'relative universal' of beauty introduced by Arthur Marwick, the author of *Beauty in History*:

I mean beauty of face and of form, or 'figure' as we usually say in English... In any age there are conventions and prejudices which will affect perceptions of beauty; compared, however, with the central

physical or biological fact of beauty, these are minor. Thus, in jargon, beauty is a universal, or, more precisely, to take account of the minor social influences, a 'relative universal'. ..but, this is absolutely crucial, in many types¹⁷³

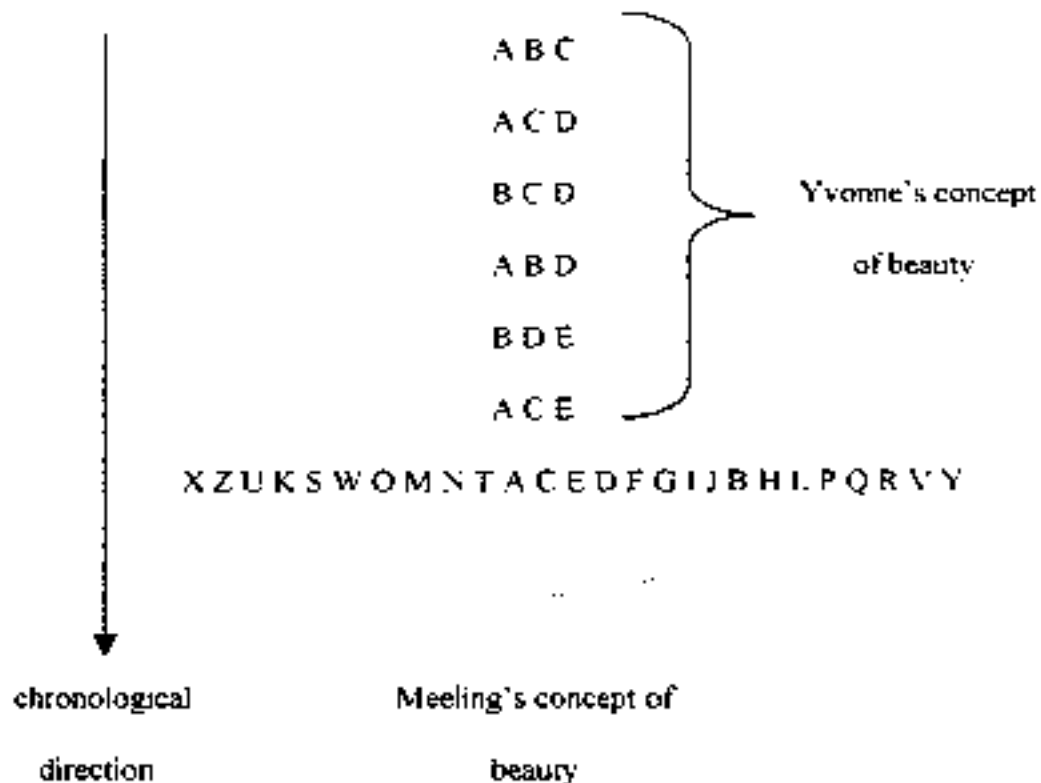
Beauty is understood by the author to be inborn, it is a quality determined by our genes rather than by society. It is universal, recognized by the majority of people regardless of race and age. It is a perception of aesthetic instincts which are deeply rooted and are shared by all human beings. Beauty is also a series of stereotypes. And beauty is nothing but the physical features of human beings. These all seem to coincide with what Yvonne regards as the 'natural beauty' of women

From a structural point of view, the ideas raised by Meeling and Yvonne about female natural beauty form two main streams in aesthetic discourse. Yvonne's is closer to classicism and idealism, which believe that beauty is measured by generally accepted standards, or formulas for 'distinguishing' beauty, with minor changes allowed due to social influence. Implicit in this idea is that beauty can be classified and generalized, since the belief in the validity of 'across-the board' standards for measuring beauty leaves no room for ambivalence and diversity. This vertical construction of conceptual development runs opposite to the horizontal system of Meeling's idea, which emphasizes individuality, fluidity, and flatness in the

¹⁷³ Arthur Marwick, *Beauty in History*, P.31.

meaning of beauty, and which corresponds to the characteristics of postmodern aesthetics.

Two Systems of Naturalism in Beauty



Despite their immense differences, both these ideas share the Platonic translation of naturalism in female beauty as 'inherent' beauty, distinguished from beauty resulting from representation or grooming. Both editors agree that female beauty, whether it be tangible or intangible, exists on its own, which echoes Plato's view that true beauty is natural, not created. This opinion is ironic in that the female images in women's magazines are all representations and, hence, not inherent

Interestingly, while they assert that female is inherent, they do not deny the role of cultural representation in enhancing beauty—the beautiful features have to be highlighted or 'depicted in a less artificial way'. If representing female beauty in a natural way is deemed important, then naturally endowed beauty is also reaffirmed. This attitude, however, is not equivalent to the 'lingua franca' situation described by some critics of women's magazines^{17a}. 'Lingua franca', a term originally referring to a language adopted for local communication over an area in which several languages are spoken, implies the presence of a multiplicity of thoughts that may even be contradictory. In this case, the two concepts complement rather than contradict each other. The representation of female beauty is a reflection and not merely an imitation of true beauty as regarded by Plato. The two editors, as representatives of contemporary image creators, do not deem beauty representations to be of lesser value as Plato did. Their ideas echo those held by idealist and realist artists. However, there is a problem. Nature, whether whole (realists) or selected (idealists), is not necessarily connected with artistic representations. In works of art, an ugly face can look beautiful, as if a pretty woman can be portrayed terribly. Zhu Guangqian, a renowned art critic of contemporary China, says this succinctly in two sentences.

1. The beauty and ugliness of art and that of nature are two different things

^{17a} One of these critics is Jennifer Craik in her discussion on the techniques of femininity and women's magazines. Other critics use terms like 'multi-languages' or 'playing with contradictions' with similar meaning.

- 2 The beauty of art does not come from imitation of the beauty of nature.¹⁷³

Now we come back to the meaning of naturalism in female beauty. I would like to stress that it is not my interest here to advocate 'constructed beauty' or to reject 'endowed beauty' or vice versa. What I intend to bring forward is that the remarks of Meeling's and Yvonne's about naturalism in female beauty reveal a special cultural phenomenon in contemporary Hong Kong, that is, **the artistic images of a woman and her actual looks no longer follow the model of a subject-object relation**. Female beauty subsumes the meaning of both the substance and its reflection, in the way that reality is already confused with the parody of it. Obliterated are the delineation between drama and real life, the images of women in women's magazines and the actuality of women, at least on a conceptual level. On such grounds, I have reservations about accusations directed at the 'lingua franca' situation or multiple orientations of women's magazines. The current criticism, directed notably at the concept of female beauty, is based on a supposition of institutional conspiracy, which, I think, is refutable. A central issue of that argument is the ambivalent position taken up by the magazines when they promote natural female beauty and beauty adornment all in the same breath. This has been seen as an opportunist policy aimed at please both readers and publishers by appealing to both feminism and of consumption. This argument, constructed on conspiracy theory, sees an ulterior motive in the display of contradictory elements. However, I doubt

¹⁷³ Zhu Guangqian 朱光潜, *Tan Mei Shi X* (On Beauty), p. 36. Extract is translated from Chinese.

the validity of this theory as the editors that I interviewed did not emphasize or exploit the differences and contradictions in orientation. Rather, they showed a tendency to eliminate them, albeit not deliberately. The fact is these editors did not see a clear distinction between real life and drama: a make-up face can reflect a women's natural beauty, just like her natural beauty is alterable with make-up. To suggest that the contradictory ideologies underlying women's magazines (in Hong Kong and abroad, excluding those that are politically oriented) are deliberate, and form part of a 'conspiracy', is unrealistic, especially given working teams composed of only two to three editors in Hong Kong. It is also dangerous to judge on the basis of such presumption, without examining carefully the actual situation. Previous theories of academic cultural criticism can be very misleading, when they are too abstract and hence detached from reality. Therefore, theories must be applicable in practice, and this is what I am doing by analyzing 'real' women's magazines, investigating the methods, techniques, and motives of production besides the images themselves

THE POWER OF BEAUTY

After examining the visual images and various practices employed by women's magazines in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, I shall now try to relate the specific practices of 'naturalism' to **gender issues**. In the following, I shall explore the two schools of aesthetic thought frequently employed in contemporary women's magazines - naturalism and realism - and see how they end up as 'voyeurism', from conceptual and historical perspectives. Voyeurism, an academic term originating in psychology, will be carefully studied and bestowed new meaning through relocation in the field of aesthetics. The central interest of this study is to investigate **the logic of connections and changes** within these academic ideas, in order to explain why there are certain **stylistic variations of female images** represented in women's magazines in this particular moment in Hong Kong. Western aesthetic history will be utilized as a vehicle of discussion, on the premise that naturalism, realism and voyeurism are themselves Western academic theories. In bringing the dialogue closer to the local context, I shall also adopt the basic conceptual categories of Chinese aesthetics, 'spirit' (same as 'essence' as used by me) and 'form', for explanatory and comparative purposes.

Naturalism – Presentation of How Women Ought To Be

Naturalism and realism as aesthetic conventions in photography are very similar in theory but their implementation can be very different. Stylistically, both naturalism and realism, originating from the words **nature** and **real** respectively, seek to represent the 'truth'. Apart from their **faithfulness** to the 'truth', naturalism and realism are hardly interchangeable. Naturalism, as a photographic technique, aims at capturing the **essence** of the object, says, the **nakedness** of a nude, the **liveliness** of a live scene, the **femininity** of a female. Naturalism emphasizes the primary, basic quality, devoid of any kind of human moderation and addition. This essence exists before civilization, and does not contain implications of **progress**. For instance, as nakedness is the essence of a nude, naturalism is attained through the effective representation of this 'natural' quality. Therefore, a nude with a dress on is unnatural, because something secondary has been added to the primary, which jeopardizes what is understood as the essence of a nude (an undressed human figure), and refer to a progressive situation, that is, culture. Hence nature here is understood as the opposite of culture, with the former emphasizing the constant and the essential, and the latter, the fickle and the additional.

This constance and essentiality, or what I call the 'essence', or in classical terms, the 'truth' of nature, is not the same as the 'truth' of reality, since what is natural is not necessarily real, and what is real is not necessarily natural. Naturalism, in Western artistic tradition, stresses the significance of *inventio* (invention), and

the capturing of the 'truth' of nature by the minds of artists through the creation of an analogue to nature. Raphael of Urbino, a fifteenth century Italian artist, wrote in his letter to Castiglione that

In order to paint a beautiful woman I should have to see many beautiful women.
. . . but since there are so few beautiful women and so few sound judges, I make use of a certain idea that comes into my head.¹⁷⁶

Although Raphael's letter made an appeal more to neo-Platonic idealism than to naturalism, this letter written, 500 years ago, is still valid for explaining what is 'naturalness' in classical artistic representation, that is, art and nature means art for nature. Perhaps the humanist Aristotle rejected the hierarchy implicit in the idea of selecting the best from nature (he proposed *natura naturata*, art analogous to nature, and believed in the beauty of nature in which he was a part), perhaps the anti-classical trend in the seventeenth century,¹⁷⁷ and even modern artists have their own interpretations of naturalism.¹⁷⁸ But the relationship of art and nature remains closely tied up in naturalism, in which nature is the aim and art is the means. Naturalism is not a technique for austere copying of nature, but a recreation of nature that involves much artistic imagination and invention. However, this relationship has been mutating rather than static. It has moved towards two extremes

¹⁷⁶ Panofsky, Erwin. *Idea*. New York, 1968, p. 59-60

¹⁷⁷ One of the artists of anti-classicism in Western art history is Italian artist Caravaggio. He tampered with Platonic and Aristotle's classicism by using the method of 'alla prima' and copying from still life in his depictions of religious subjects. One of his most radical paintings is *Madonna di Loreto* in which a prostitute was used as the model for the Madonna.

from classical idealism: the artistic and the realistic streams. Eventually, art for nature is split into art for art's sake¹⁷⁶ and nature for art

Despite the fact that 'naturalism' is a common term within the field of aesthetics, it has not been formally adopted in artistic criticism until the twentieth century. In the *Story of Art*, a well-known introduction to art criticism by E. H. Gombrich, 'naturalism', as an artistic trend, has not been assigned to any period in Western art history. The author believed that what he called 'the conquest of reality' in the early fifteenth century and 'the mirroring of nature' in Holland in the seventeenth century, came nearest to the concept of naturalism. However, the relating of naturalism to these periods is questionable because the stylistic characteristics typifying these two periods were not only inconsistent but also contrasting. The anti-classical stream of the seventeenth century is basically the antithesis of classicism, which emphasizes pictorial balance and harmony. Anti-classicism 'valued truth and sincerity above harmony and beauty'¹⁷⁷, and is, in principle, similar to what we understand as realism. If a strict definition of naturalism is requested in terms of a certain artistic trend, it would be classicism of the fifth century, which, however, is different from what is known in modern times as naturalism. To refrain from giving an ambivalent yet simplistic conclusion that the definition of naturalism cannot be pinned down because it has been changing in

¹⁷⁶ An example are the expressionists who claimed to get close to 'inner truth of things' through feeling and imagination instead of observation of reality.

¹⁷⁷ Ample examples of artistic stream in modern Western art history can be found in the works of pop art and of surrealism.

¹⁷⁸ E. H. Gombrich *The Story of Art*, 1989, p. 335.

different contexts. I suggest taking naturalism as a general technical term that explains the relationship between nature and art as nature preceding art

Consequently, the long history of classical and pre-modern art can be reinterpreted in this light. Not only does it help explain the rare appearance of naturalism in the terminology of pre-modern art history, but it also leads to another interesting but more substantial idea. The term naturalism appears frequently in modern criticism, especially in the area of contemporary cultural representations. By dividing art history into pre-modern, modern, and post-modern eras, a new dimension is added to the modern understanding of naturalism. Unlike its classical counterpart, naturalism in the modern and post-modern periods carries connotations of revolt against the old. The classical concept of 'art for nature' is challenged and overthrown, and replaced by 'nature for art', the rendition of nature in its details for the sake of art. Naturalism has re-emerged in the modern era to highlight and challenge the 'unnaturalness' of the past. From this point of view, there are still no grounds for saying that the term naturalism is in fact an invention of modern aesthetic history, but without this particular period, the very concept of naturalism would have never existed at all.

I shall conclude that the theory of naturalism in art is about the relationship between art and nature (with 'nature' referring to what is natural or naturalness, instead of 'Nature' as always used in art criticism). Pre-modern artists saw art as means and nature as purpose, whereas, in the hands of the modern and post-modern

artists, nature is a tool that is used to speak for art. Although naturalism arguably applies to both these situations. I tend to support the pre-modern interpretation for two reasons. First, in defining a theoretical term, it is the ultimate aim rather than the means which should be given more weight. Second, as I have stated, nature is given a functional role in the modern period to counteract the conventional art-nature relationship which posited nature as the aim. This approach is similar to realism, which concentrates on the laborious and precise copying of details. The following diagram is a summary of this chronological division in terms of the meaning and position of 'nature'

Meaning and Position of Nature Pre- and Post- the Modern Era

Pre-modern Era

the aim

complimented

intangible

abstract

ideological

the essence

recreated by art

Modern and Post-modern Eras

the means

functional

material

formal

visible

the whole

painstakingly imitated for art

Naturalism as a trend in contemporary cultural representation is largely associated with the revival of the concept of nature, which showed its onset in the aftermath of the industrial revolution and became invincible from the second half of the twentieth

century. This revival came about with the green movement in the late 60s, following a decade of renovation both in the scientific and cultural spheres. During the 60s, Hong Kong, too, was influenced by this new thinking, imported together with Western pop music, optical art and avant-garde fashion, and reinforced by political instability at the end of the decade.¹⁰¹ During the 70s and the early 80s, people began to tire of wars, the hippies and psychedelic obsession. In the cultural scene, a fresh vein of thinking began to take shape, which calls for a return to nature. In Hong Kong, the seventies witnessed a general desire for political stability and better lifestyle through economic development. The Western mode of naturalism, underlain by the universal yearning for peace and self-improvement, clicked well with the mentality of Hong Kong people at the time. The Western origin of this mode of naturalism can be testified by the fact that it is theoretically different from the traditional Chinese concept of naturalism, and also from the pre-modern mode of naturalism in the West discussed above.

Regarding naturalism in the Chinese context, it would be better to examine the meaning of 'Nature' in traditional Chinese philosophy and literature, for 'naturalism' as a term has never existed in Chinese vocabulary. Nature, or the world or the universe in philosophical discourse, and its relation to human beings is strongly emphasized in classical Chinese philosophy. Zhuangzi, the great Taoist master after Laozi, who believed in the infinite Tao as the ultimate force of creation and evolution, said, 'The universe and I sustain a relation of co-existence. I and all

¹⁰¹ From 1967 to 1968, there was anti-government riot all over the territory.

beings have the same entry into the One'¹⁶², laying stress on the individual's harmony and coordination with all other parts of the world. Though a disciple of Confucius, Zhuangzi was influenced by Mencius as far as his view of man and nature goes. In the *Book of Mencius*, theses such as 'The universe is my mind, and my mind is the universe'¹⁶³, and 'the universe (ten thousand things) is perfectible in myself'¹⁶⁴ can be found which contain the synthesis of man and nature in a dichotomy of subjectivity and objectivity, human consciousness, and the material world. Although the ethical idealism and high motivatedness of Mencius' thought strikes a stark contrast from the fatalism of Zhuangzi, their ideas intersect at the point where human living is translated as individual experience which exists in harmony and coordination with the rest of the universe. Thome H. Fang said,

As to the nature and status of man, the Chinese, either as a unique person or as a social being, takes no pride in being a type of individual in estrangement from the world he lives in or from the other fellows he associates with. He is intent on embracing within the full range of his vital experience all aspects of plenitude in the nature of the whole cosmos and all aspects of richness in the worth of noble humanity.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² *The Works of Zhuangzi*, Chekiang: Chekiang Book Co. 1875, Vol. I, Chapter 2, p.25

¹⁶³ *Mencius*, VIIA, 4.

¹⁶⁴ *The Complete Works of Lu Xiangshan*, Shanghai: Chung Hua Co. 1935, Vol. 36, p.37

¹⁶⁵ Thome H. Fang, 'The World and the Individual in Chinese Metaphysics', In *The Chinese Mind - Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture*, Charles A. Moore (ed.), Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968, p.260.

Man and nature are an inseparable whole. Oriented towards either the affirmation of the mind or to the affirmation of the object, humanist thinking has been a major constituent of Chinese philosophy. It is apparently due to the fact Confucianism, the leading and most authoritative stream in the Chinese philosophical tradition, believes that the subtle interrelationship between individual and the world is not just one of reception and actualization, but involves a whole process of realization, enlightenment and creation in respect of man. This does not mean that belief in the independent existence of objects, such as that put forward by Mozi (墨子) and the Yin-Yang school, is a quirk in the Chinese philosophical tradition. It is just that it could not survive long before torn down by the great waves of Confucianism.

Understanding nature in Chinese thinking is important for find evidence for the existence of 'naturalism' in Chinese aesthetics, if it has existed at all. Chinese ink wash landscape paintings, representative of all art forms in depicting man's situation in the midst of nature, has been greatly influenced by Confucian, Taoism, and Buddhism. These paintings competently demonstrate the Chinese version of 'naturalism', characterized by three aspects. First, nature is perceived from the eyes of man. The smallness, scarcity, and sometimes absence of human portrayal in landscape paintings aims not at eliminating the position of man, but rather, at drawing attention to it, through emphasis of its significance or helplessness. Sometimes the position of man is emphasized by being put into question. Second, nature is depicted as magnificent and beautiful scenery, perceived by man in awe and respect. Chinese landscape paintings are celebrations of the power of nature, whose

amazing beauty is close to Kant's sublime. Nature is not to be reasoned, but to be enjoyed and glorified. A vein of mystery and legend permeates through mountains, rocks, trees or lakes, rendering an extraordinary sensation of uplift or of calmness. It is because Chinese landscape painters focus more on depictions of 'qi' (spirit) than realistic portrayals of nature. As 'qi' is the sensuous reflection by man of nature, it echoes the first characteristic that nature is perceived from the eyes of man, and leads consequently to the third characteristic, that nature, in the Chinese context, is spiritual rather than formal. Chinese landscape paintings overwhelmingly emphasize the use of lines, which is to be trained strictly in the studio prior to the observation of nature. More importantly, these are expressive lines bestowed with life, and the natural scenery they compose is, hence, embodiment of human attributes: high and continuous mountains become loftiness and heroism of man; clearness of the lake is the virtue of 'qunzi' 君子 (superior men).

These humanist, metaphysical, and mystical characteristics of nature found in Chinese landscape paintings explain what is naturalism in Chinese aesthetics in a direct and comprehensive way. It is due to the fact that the subjects of nature (natural scenery) coincide with those of other representational arts, such as birds, trees, flowers, and human figures including, certainly, women.

These characteristics are no doubt different from the new mode of naturalism brought about by popular culture in contemporary Hong Kong, which, as I have stated, is very much influenced by the new wave of thinking in the West. This

naturalism is translated not only as a new way of representing nature in arts, but also as a new way of living. This is the behavioral aspect of naturalism. This concept of naturalism results in a tangible, objective perception of nature that is aesthetically very close to realism. Therefore, it can be deduced that naturalism emerged first as a new ideology of living. Given its anti-civilization stance, it attacks other ideologies which are distanced from 'real living', like the aestheticization of everyday life (in Featherstone's words) and hyperreality of everyday culture (Baudieu's theory). Only through the combination of the technique and concept of realism that the idea was gradually extended to the area of cultural representation, including the portrayal of female beauty.

Since 'naturalism' in contemporary Hong Kong culture has been so readily accepted although its background is little known, I feel the need to examine it more closely. In the field of women's magazines, naturalism has been a catchword for the representation of female beauty since the 80s. This trend of portraying women and its relation to Western influence is very obvious. The 80s were the time Western women's magazines made their debut in the territory through franchise. In the early 90s, women's magazines became a hot topic of cultural criticism in the West, and naturalism served as a tailor-made cultural theory for decoding the presentations of women and fashion, as evidenced by Jennifer Craik's discussion of the techniques of fashion photography in women's magazines. In Hong Kong, editors of women's magazines like Meeling Leung and Yvonne Wong jumped on the bandwagon.

claiming naturalism as their style of portraying women¹¹⁶. However, the connection between naturalism and the portrayal of female beauty in women's magazines has not been studied systematically by academic researchers, probably because female beauty seems too 'frivolous' for academic study. This absence of careful study leads inevitably to inaccurate, if not wrong, judgment of cultural phenomena in this respect. In the case of fashion photography, for instance, Jennifer Craik comments on the use of naturalism for projecting images of femininity:

The representation of clothing produces a contemporary image of 'what looks natural'. ... Fashion photography introduced new codes of 'naturalism' and new ways of thinking about fashion. ... The photographic technique was welcomed because of its 'realism', though, in practice, it constructed other forms of representation that prompted new ways of seeing.¹¹⁷

It is a pity that Craik observed the 'new codes' of naturalism and 'new ways of thinking' about fashion without comparing them to the 'old codes' and 'old ways of thinking'. Moreover, naturalism was conflated with realism, as is the case in many other cultural discourses on the same topic, without any attempts at analyzing the similarities, differences and backgrounds of these theories. Hence the reckless application of naturalism by the media can be easily imagined.

¹¹⁶ Recorded from the interviews with Meeling Leung and Yvonne Wong, which took place on 11th January 1996 and 6th February 1996 respectively.

This new mode of 'naturalism' that is commonly recognized in the culture of contemporary Hong Kong, is indeed realism, at least on an aesthetic level. As realism is not the subject I am concerned about at this stage, I shall concentrate on exploring what naturalism is in female beauty representation. Not to be conflated with realism, naturalism evolving in contemporary Hong Kong should be understood as a theory of syncretism between conventional aesthetics of the East and those of West. Despite the different interpretations of naturalism given by the Chinese and the West, I notice striking similarities in their ideas. These include ideas regarding what is nature and how it is represented in art. In both traditions, the concept of nature, 'truth' in the West and 'shengqi' 聖氣 in Chinese, is intangible, and the work of artists is to capture this truth and recreate it. Therefore, works of art are products of man's interpretation of nature rather than nature itself. Similarly, the cognition of mankind is the cognition of men, whereas the objectification of nature is analogous to the objectification of women. In women's magazines, this interpretation is linked to the patriarchal portrayal of women, the use of certain stereotyped characteristics in female images. Beyond this basic classification, the images are various, depending on what the prevalent ideologies of society regard as naturalness in women.

This style can be illustrated by female images drawn from fashion photos of women's magazines in Hong Kong. Among all the titles, *Sisters' Pictorial* is the one that most favours the naturalistic style of female beauty portrayal. Very often, the magazine employs traditional signs of femininity through which the naturalness of

¹⁶ Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion* (Routledge, 1994), p.93.

the female is manifested. The feminine images found on covers of almost every issue are the most typical (see Fig. 19). These pictures use flowers to enhance of the beauty of the women, either on the models' heads or purely as decoration in the foreground or background. Flowers have been a conventional metaphor for beautiful women in Chinese (and Western) culture. In fact it is commonplace for the 'ladies' to pose next to flowers even in casual snapshots. The flowers most often used are 'fúrong' 芙蓉, 'lihua' 梨花, and 'haitang' 海棠, and examples abound in Chinese literature and the popular media. They appear often in Chinese names for women, and in fact, have become clichés. Besides flowers, other signs of femininity include pink/red lips, very fair skin, clear well-defined eyes, and neat hairstyle. This style of presentation constitutes the majority of the female images in *Sisters*, one of the best example of which is probably the wedding picture featuring Liz Kwong (see figure 20). Apart from the flower decoration on hair, the round eyes, the oval shape of the face and the light skin tone is reminiscent of the 'indisputably beautiful women' put forward by Arthur Marwick (figure 25):

Paintings of no great artistic merit can contain indisputably beautiful women: the paintings of Greuze provide important support for my contention that a woman desired for her beauty in the late eighteenth century would be so desired today - *The Broken Jug* is no masterpiece, but what a lovely young woman it portrays.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Arthur Marwick, *Beauty in History*, Thames and Hudson, p. 53

Liz resembles the portrait of *The Broken Jug* with her slightly Occidental facial features, in addition to her youthful freshness. While Occidental looks are a favourite in Hong Kong, youth is a universal criteria for beauty. And this criteria is one that pertains to 'natural' beauty, so that it is also eternal, contrary to fashion. A beautiful woman should also be 'desired' and 'lovely' - the subtle connection with patriarchy is eminent within the whole concept of naturalness of femininity. However let me add that a naturalist portrayal female beauty is not necessarily an 'honest' portrayal. Rather, it is affected by the mainstream ideologies of society, through which certain modes of naturalness are constructed. In contemporary Hong Kong, the mainstream has been challenged by new ideas and values, demonstrated by the diverse forms of depicting female images in women's magazines that also claim to be naturalist.

From Naturalism to Realism - the Presentation of Women in Reality

I intend to trace naturalism in Western art history as it would provide a more complete picture than Chinese art history due to the fact the modern era is one that has been greatly influenced by the West. The classical period also nurtured naturalism, although a different style of it. It is necessary to define 'naturalism' as a term in aesthetics, although it is not the major intention of this chapter to do so. What I will try to show is not simply the similarities and differences between naturalism and realism, but also their particular relation to each other. Chinese aesthetician Zhu Quanguan, talking about realism in his article *'Draw a Melon,*

Copy a Melon’, said, ‘realism is an offspring of naturalism’.¹⁶⁹ According to Zhu, naturalism in art originated from French artist Rosso, who believed that nature which is created by God’s hands is the most perfect, and hence, is unbeatable by any artificial manipulation, however skillful. The cleverest way of creating art is imitating nature, since nature itself comprises beauty and goodness. Ruskin, an English art critic in the nineteenth century, pointed out that imitating nature is the most possible origin of art. This idea, according to Zhu, was gradually taken up by the realists as the theoretical skeleton of their cultural representations, and eventually flourished as realism, which was exceptionally popular in France by the second half of the nineteenth century. Realism requires cultural representations to be seen real, the realer the better. Since looking real is a must, detailed depiction becomes necessary. The novelists of the nineteenth century, for example, had a habit of collecting evidences by taking lengthy notes of the actual scenes, and compiled their work simply by arrangement of these actual objects and happenings. Zhu said sarcastically that ‘They insisted on capturing very detail, until they had spent at least several pages on describing a house.’¹⁷⁰

The connection between naturalism and realism put forward by Zhu seems to make sense, although I am skeptical about the point that naturalism in art originated from Rosso. The relation between the two ‘isms’ is highlighted by the point that, in the hands of the realists, nature is studied intensively and articulated in stringent

¹⁶⁹ Chu Quan Zhen, *Tan Mei*, Taipei, 1993, p.82. Quotation and the article’s title are translated from Chinese texts.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

detail, honestly and unselectively. In other words, it is the process through which naturalism metamorphoses into realism. Realism discards the 'spirit' (the essence of nature) while retaining the 'form' of nature, and the concept materializes through formal copying. Ernst Fischer's criticism on the realistic novelists in the capitalist world accurately describes this style of representation:

They insist on seeing things 'as they are'. They are determined to speak only of what they can see, hear, touch, or directly perceive. They cling to the smallest detail, the visible, audible, unchallengeably 'real' detail. Anything that goes beyond such details is suspect to them.¹⁹¹

Although this was written almost half a century ago, it clearly shows the artists' fear of losing touch with reality and how they tried to regain it. It also shows how realism, although in a fledgling form, was already well-formulated in terms of its concept and direction, which have remained basically unchanged to this day except that the techniques now used tend to be more playful. Here reality is used as the subject of presentation, instead of its ultimate end. In reaction against the capitalist world, in which what is known as reality is weighed down by the overload and proliferation of images and clichés, the artists aim at rediscovering reality in its pure form, by reconstructing it. In the area of female beauty portrayal, the aim of the realists is to unfold the real look and real situation of women, either through scrutiny or reconstruction of women's reality. It is what some contemporary women's

¹⁹¹ Ernst Fischer, *The Necessary of Art*, Penguin, 1959, p.198.

magazines have been doing. *Elle* is one of them. As a magazine of Western origin, these images of realism seek to bring in alternative female identities that break away from the existing stereotypes of Hong Kong women. Through this process, an 'inner' and 'realer' woman is supposedly projected.

Realistic presentation of female images calls for an intensive and close study of a woman's looks, which in photography, is translated into close-ups of women's faces. Figure 17 shows a blond in a very close close-up. Close-ups of the model's face are a reasonable style for make-up pages, however, make-up is less noticeable than facial expression in this case. It seems that the photographer deliberately uses lighting to smooth out the contour and texture of the face, letting the eyes stand out, in melancholy. She seems to be posing right in front of a spotlight - because the light is too glaring and the distance is too short - her face is slightly distorted and the whole impression of the image is shocking rather than realistic. A sense of uneasiness arises from the mixture of the contradictory elements, that is, the distanced woman in reality is brought to a nose-to-nose encounter with the beholder. While the other facial features are out of focus because of the great close-up, the image is reduced to the expression of the eyes, through which the real, inner self of the woman is released through communicating with the beholder. Compared to Fig. 17, the image portrayed by *Orient Beauty* (see Fig. 22) also reveals the shocking side of reality. However, it achieves the effect not through the play of visual distance but that of the conventional codes of femininity. Unlike the unpretentious, faded facial expression of the blond, this dramatic facial expression is the focus of the

image. It is only through this facial expression that the image of beauty takes on meaning, as restated by the Chinese caption: 'The elegance and glamour of this winter mean you can shamelessly express the 'real face' of your femininity'

Reality can be reconstructed, besides being scrutinized. The whole idea of realism is embodied in a game of cut and paste, that snaps of the reality are collected and rearranged. Owing to the reliance on sensory impressions and the process of reconstruction, the resulting images are disconnected, lost in time and space. They are strange and unrealistic images. In portraying female images, women's magazines experiment with the mode of realism by trying to reconcile various subjects of reality to form a single image. It would, for example, depict a girl (the woman: feminine/modern/beautiful) in leather jacket (the fashion: masculine/chic/modern) walking on a smoky street lined with old industrial buildings (the background: old/masculine/shabby), like in Fig. 23. This image I conjured up is reminiscent of a similar picture as described by Fischer:

All that is concrete dissolves: figures grope in a chaotic primeval fog, and there is for them no forwards nor backwards but only a timeless, directionless 'existence'. The official world has been replaced by a private yet no less ghostly one. The intention is to represent uncomprehended being, the 'timeless' being of man in a timeless darkness.¹⁹²

¹⁹² Ernst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art*, p.200-201.

The 'ghostly' image put by Fischer resonates the 'grotesque' body described by Featherstone of modern aesthetics, reminding one also of the novels of Franz Kafka. All in all, representations of reality (everyday women and scenes) are not based on a belief in emulation, but in the rediscovery of existing reality which has been imbued with illusion.

On the other hand, realism can also be understood as the aim in the presentation of female beauty—so that the woman portrayed looks a live, everyday woman. By observing the details from reality, the artists try to resemble reality by constructing it (rather than reconstructing it as in the above case) as faithfully as possible. In women's magazines, the resemblance of reality results in the appearance of **fashion stories**¹⁹³. As the filmic images of fashion photos, the emergence of fashion stories is closely related to the boom of the motion picture industry in the second half of the twentieth century. Contrary to the anti-novel qualities of stunning images, fashion stories depict the 'stories' of clothes, that is, how clothes are worn in an everyday environment, rather than simply the clothes themselves. The focus is on the portrayal of 'real women' in 'real fashion'. In practice, the model is styled in an ordinary everyday look and acts out her 'story' in an everyday scene, pretending to be a woman from 'reality' (see Fig. 24). With the same casual wear, make-up and everyday scene, the fashion stories depicted by *Sisters*¹⁹⁴ give us a totally different sense of reality (see Fig. 25). The facial expressions and focus of the model's eyes reveal high self-consciousness of her own presence, in contrast to the woman's self-

¹⁹³ Fashion stories are a series of fashion photos compiled in women's magazines, with definite

indulgence in daily activities portrayed by *Elle*. Other than the realistic subject and situation, the images are portrayed in a series, giving rise to the impression of a fleeting reality. Each image alone becomes a glimpse of the reality continuum. This indicates an interest in disclosing the hidden sides of reality.

From Realism to Voyeurism - the Presentation of Women Behind the Light

An extreme form of realism in female beauty representation can become voyeurism. The term voyeurism here refers to the style itself. I define voyeurism as a style of representation **only** of women, which is distinguished from the desire to 'peep' which is applicable to the portrayal of any object. Nevertheless, the peeping element revealed by these representations has a tendency to transform the style from realism to voyeurism. I have mentioned that realism in image presentation, in its starkest form, results in either an intensive inspection of a single detail or a promiscuous narration of frivolous details. The images of the reality produced become those of **giant close-ups** or of **meaningless reconstruction of inconsistent, yet factual trifles**. In a behavioural sense, this obsession with dissecting reality is already evidence of an inclination to **discover or disclose the unseen sides of reality**. The transition of a realistic to a peeping style of representation is akin to the transformation of the style of documentary to reportage, and to soft-core gossip news like *20/20* and *Watch Hong Kong More Closely*. Like gossipy reporting, though in a less inquisitive

topics and story lines.

manner, the peeping style is distinct from the realistic in its particular enthusiasm in reporting the 'undiscovered' reality, which is either too private or too trivial. When the subject matter of representation is a woman, the 'peeping Tom' style would then potentially transform to voyeurism, due to the presence of the element of sex.

Remember that the motivation for peeping is not necessarily related to sex. A peeping person could be a person who is interested in prying, perhaps out of curiosity. If a person loves peeping on women, however, his motivation is very possibly sex-related. Figure 26 is an image of a girl adjusting her leather boots on a street, accompanied by the Chinese caption 'striding around freely is what modern women are fond of'. The aim of this photo is apparently to create an image of a 'realistic modern woman'. By portraying the woman in an unconventional posture, the image seeks to play with the traditional ideology of femininity, which believes that a woman should behave like a lady, especially in public. The origin of this social taboo (adjusting one's garments in public) lies in the belief that dressing up, like making up, is an activity that should be done in privacy. The intention to present women as subjects of their own identity by redefining the meaning of femininity, is nonetheless impeded by a pervasive sense of voyeurism in this image. As the image gives the impression of a glimpse, and because it is acted out by a beautiful, well-dressed woman, the image of 'a woman walking bravely and freely on the street' becomes that of 'a woman carelessly exposing her privacy in public'. The exposure of her privacy is double coded, by her dressing up in public area and also by her accidentally exposing her private parts (signified by raising her leg under a mini

skirt). This way, the woman presented as subject ends up as object, bringing us back, through voyeurism, to the ideology of femininity which defines women as sexual beings

Another example of the voyeuristic presentation of women is found in Figure 27. More subtly portrayed, the image strikes a balance between the exhibitionism and voyeurism of female sexuality. The revealing skirt of the woman is counter-balanced by the spontaneous exposure of female sexuality, which is indicated by the gesture of her hand touching her underwear. Overtly, the bra-top, mini skirt, and romantic background, which associates her femininity with sexuality, invites the male gaze. Yet this exhibitionist desire is overtly denied by the model's look of self-containment, the absence of any sign of engagement between the model and the reader, and a pose too 'realistic' to be in front of a camera. Nonetheless, the image elicits the desire to peep. Yet conceptually inconsistent or even oppositional representations of an image would sometimes result in a consistent way of perception, as Griselda Pollock said

The appropriation of woman as body in all forms of representation has spawned within the women's movement a consistent attempt to decolonise the female body, a tendency which walks a tightrope between subversion and reappropriation, and often serves rather to consolidate the potency of the signification rather than actually to rupture it.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Griselda Pollock, 'What's Wrong with Images of Women', in *Looking On*, p.45

The treatment of this image seems to revolt against traditional femininity in that the connection between female sexuality and male domination seems to be questioned. Although women may look sexy or may be sexy in 'nature' or 'reality', they are not trying to titillate. Using realism as a guise, the image strives to differentiate itself from responsive female sexiness found in soft-porn and sometimes even women's magazines. Unfortunately, it falls short of its aims and becomes a victim of voyeurism, which is the other extreme of the patriarchal hierarchy dictated by the male's gaze.

Undeniably, the exhibitionist urge is accompanied by the desire to attract the male gaze. To presume a person is flaunting her/his body purely for self-gratification is similar to thinking of sex without thinking of gender. In voyeurism, on the other hand, the person carrying out the sexual or sexy deed is totally unaware of the participation of the voyeur, so that for her/him, the sexual deed is a self-closure. It is not carried out in order to entertain. In psychoanalysis, voyeurism is explained as a perverted result of a transformation of an active exhibitionist urge into passive looking (peeping). This explanation helps bring the power relations of exhibitionism and voyeurism to light. In exhibitionism, the exhibitionist, the person engaged in the sexual or sexy deed, plays an active role—that of a seducer of his/her passive spectators. In voyeurism, the voyeur occupies an active position and the person engaged in the sexual or sexy deed, i.e., the one being peeped at, plays a passive role. An important issue arising from these situations is that although both voyeuristic and exhibitionist images involve connection between the active and

passive parties, there is no communication between the object and the spectator in the voyeuristic image. It is because a voyeur's possession of the object through the gaze is without permission, whereas a spectator can choose to resist the seduction of the exhibitionist

It is clear that women's magazines have become battle-fields for the scramble for power between images and readers, women and men, through representing women either as objects of seduction or of submission. Defining voyeurism, Myra Macdonald makes the following point:

Sex as performance, as 'taking' or 'being taken' maintains sexuality within a predominantly masculine paradigm, whatever the gender of the performer¹⁹¹

Although I disagree with the use of 'performance' to describe voyeuristic sex (which contains exhibitionist implications), I have no doubt, however, that the relation between audience and image in voyeurism is an unequal one, with audience being in a superior position. In the exhibitionist style of presenting female sexuality, it is the sexy woman who is superior and the spectator is put into a situation that is, to some extent, beyond his control (However, it does not necessarily follow that exhibiting one's body means having power.) However, the helpless woman is in the eyes of the voyeur a source of titillation, and a 'stolen' source at that. Here comes an enigma, despite Macdonald's mention of the 'unfixed gender of the performer', this

performer is almost always a woman. Foucault says the following regarding the passivity of women.

As for the woman's passivity, it did denote an inferiority of nature and condition, but there was no reason to criticize it as a behavior, precisely because it was in conformity with what nature intended and with what the law prescribed.¹²⁶

Foucault attributes the passivity of women to her 'nature'. This is a 'nature' that is mediated by the prevailing ideological values of society and not one that is intrinsic to being female. The author's aim in the extract is, in fact, is to compare the passivity of women to that of men. The passivity of women in gender relations is visually exemplified by Fig. 28. Voyeurism is very explicit here, with male eyes peeping at the woman's lingerie behind the magazine. Male power is exerted through intrusion into female privacy. Yet the woman is blamed for her 'inferior nature', her asking for attention, as indicated by her exhibitionist tendency to flaunt her lingerie and don extravagant wear while doing laundry.

The other female image that can demonstrate the portrayal of women's passivity is found in the same series of photos as Fig. 28 (see Fig. 29). Instead of having the model pose properly in front of the camera, the decently dressed model is captured falling drunk on a busy street. The beauty and sexuality of this woman

¹²⁶ Myra Macdonald, *Representing Women - Myth of Femininity in the Popular Media*, Edward

stems from her debasement rather than her decency. The voyeurism in the picture comes through in the 'fascinating' helplessness of the woman and her apparent obliviousness to her spectators. She is reduced to a source of pleasure for the men, on the first level, and for the readers, on the second. By putting the woman in the midst by a group of masculine men in uniform, vulnerability as the nature of women is stressed. This strengthens the strong/weak dichotomy in the model of man/woman relations. This nature of the relation is seen as being determined by the nature of women—they have such beautiful alluring bodies, yet they are so fragile. Their femininity is associated implicitly with the inferiority of women in sexual relationships. Hence one can fairly say that the female image of this fashion photo in a women's magazine and those in photos of sadomasochism found in pornographic magazines originate from the same ideology. Ironically, although both types of pictures present women as a victimized, passive gender, the images of sadomasochism are directed at men, while this one is supposedly directed at the 'new women' of contemporary Hong Kong.

Conclusion

Naturalism, realism and voyeurism in the presentation of images of female beauty provide evidence of the constant effort of women's magazines in Hong Kong to search for the identities of women in contemporary society, by endeavouring to

Arnold, 1995, p. 182.

represent women 'as they really are'. The question is what is the 'realness' of women in Hong Kong and how can it be represented? According to naturalism, the 'realness' of women is a set of stereotypes of femininity which are believed to be part of the nature of women. As society is familiar with these values, they are accepted as though they were true. Realism, by contrast, tries to portray women as they appear in reality, which does away with the naturalist stereotypes of female beauty of naturalism and focuses on the women as living human beings. Realism, which contains a sense of 'discovery' can transform into voyeurism when the aim of presentation is limited to the exposure of the privacy of women.

From naturalism to realism and then to voyeurism in female beauty representations, we see the changing images in terms of time and space. Images of naturalism belong to the conventional while realism and voyeurism belong to the modern. Besides images of realism and voyeurism are always found in photographs produced in the West, while local images usually cling to the naturalistic style. On the other hand, this trend of changing styles also illustrates conceptual changes from affirmation to skepticism of conventional femininity, from naturalism to realism, and finally voyeurism. However, whether this trend is on the right track to achieving 'genuine' images of female beauty is subject to question. In trying to release female images from the restrictions of stereotypes, the images can go astray, defeating the very purpose they set out to achieve. In its attempt to refrain from creating 'unnatural' images like naturalism, realism may result in unreal, incomprehensible

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, 'The Object of Desire', in *The Use of Pleasure*, Vintage, p 216

images. An extreme manifestation of this phenomenon is voyeurism, in which a woman's femininity is defined through being rendered a sex object for men. A vicious cycle is set in motion by molding women into another stereotype, that is, images of sexuality, and since sex is a social taboo (more so in Chinese society), its discovery and exposure becomes an adventure for men. The problem is that the gaze of patriarchy is so dominating (the male gaze 'keeps an eye' on the images sometimes even through female eyes) that these permissive images of female beauty can be easily objectified and exploited. In competing for power in gender relations, women may finally imprison themselves in the same house of inferiority by their every effort to escape from it.

THE MANAGEMENT OF BEAUTY

Resonant with the first chapter, *The Ideals of Beauty*, this chapter will shift the focus back to the 'real world', by examining the contemporary culture of beauty management in Hong Kong. Besides clarifying the meaning of the term 'beauty management', I shall explore it as a cultural phenomenon and issues pertaining to it, by building a new theoretical framework which has its basis in the concept of the 'five senses'. I will also make references to the traditional Chinese definition of femininity. My objective is to avoid the Western framework for beauty management which I consider inadequate and inappropriate in explaining the issue of beauty in the context of Hong Kong.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In Section I, the discussion centres on visualization in beauty management, and in Section II, the focus will be shifted to forms of beauty management that pertain to the sense of hearing, smell, taste, and touch.

Beauty Management in Contemporary Women's Magazines in Hong Kong

Beauty management, by my definition, covers the skills and techniques of maintenance, enhancement, and concealment that pertain to the achievement of

physical beauty. Contemporary Western theories, like those by Turner (1982), Featherstone (1982), and Baudrillard (1970), all tend to focus on analysis of the 'maintenance' of bodily beauty, given the craze for fitness training and dieting in contemporary Western societies. This emphasis is no doubt related to the increasing attention on the human 'body' as a site of criticism in academia, due to the body's predicament in the West. The body is recognized as an object to be consumed and disciplined, leading to an 'irrepressible, irrational self-destructive frenzy'¹⁵ which has become a potential social problem in Western societies. These studies throw light on the profound belief in the West that beauty endowment and beauty adornment are clearly separate categories. Body maintenance falls within the paradigm of natural beauty (for example, dieting, exercise, consuming health foods) whereas enhancement and concealment, within that of cultural beauty (for example, cosmetics, fashion).

Reviewing the cultural discourses West reveal that beauty adornment has never been condemned as vehemently as beauty maintenance as an violation to the human body (the most typical should be the use of brassieres, corsets and high-heels in fashion in the West), despite the fact that the body (particularly that of female) is constantly under physical restriction by beauty adornment. The locus of controversy, therefore, lies on the anxiety over the diminishing of the boundary between beauty endowment and adornment of contemporary beauty management, rather than on the

¹⁵ Baudrillard, J. *The Consumer Society*. Baudrillard pointed out that one-third of the adult population of over-developed countries are currently engaged in the practice of dieting. Sage, 1998, p 142.

obsession with physical appearance alone. Featherstone himself pointed out that the emergence of the 'grotesque body' and the 'performing self' are not unique postmodern experiences but can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century¹⁹⁷. He also pointed out the concatenation of beauty maintenance and adornment in modern consumer culture.

Within consumer culture, the inner and the outer body become conjoined: the prime purpose of the maintenance of the inner body becomes the enhancement of the appearance of the outer body.¹⁹⁸

Beauty maintenance touches the sensitive rubric of Western culture where the ontology of the natural body is infringed upon. This very issue induces a radical turn in the morphological history of the West. Looking east to Chinese history, the traditional modes of bodily maintenance, such as physical exercise and consuming herbs, have been means for enhancing outer beauty for thousands of years, and are still widely practiced in Hong Kong and other Chinese societies today without raising many questions. This is because the Chinese value system lays relatively little stress on the morphology of the body, so that bodily maintenance verges on the maintenance of the sense of well being, the experience and perception of beauty of the self. This sense of beauty is attained by a self-completing system of experience. Unlike the Chinese, the strict subject/object delineation of the West produces a paradoxical situation in which attention paid to the inner beauty (that is, the

¹⁹⁷ Featherstone, M., *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, Sage, 1991, p.82.

functioning, living body) becomes a means for achieving certain standards by the outer body. The implementation of the 'bizarre' objective standards of the outer body, which are arguably set by the infinite (media) representations of the body, on the finite inner body results in a distorted, unbalanced cultural practice of beauty maintenance. Beauty maintenance has been a topic of great concern in Western societies, caused primarily by its infraction of the conventions of adornment of physical appearance. This infraction also bestows new meaning on the morphological beauty of the human body.

Women's magazines act as channels for formalizing female beauty through the presentation of various forms of beauty management. In Hong Kong, contemporary glossy women's magazines, like their Western counterparts, provide beauty information and advice. The structure of the presentation is, to a great extent, founded on the fragmentation and objectification of the visual image of the female body. Ironically, this echoes Yvonne Wong's remark that the aim of *Orient Beauty* is to 'look after each part of female body from head to toe'¹⁹. This sort of two-dimensional, visual fragmentation of beauty is inevitably subject to frequent criticism, particularly by feminists. The contemporary rise in awareness of health and ageing seems to add a third dimension, a 'depth' as it were, to the meaning of female beauty, which is again framed in the fragmentation between the 'inner' and the 'outer'. One can observe that the system of fragmentation operates not only in defining female beauty but also in the management and academic study of it, which

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 'The body in Consumer Culture' in *The Body*, Sage, 1996, p.171

ultimately falls back on the conception of the visual (the perspectives of length, width and height). In my analysis of beauty management in women's magazines in Hong Kong, I will refrain from following this structure of fragmentation – a horizontal analysis of different parts of female outer beauty or a vertical analysis of inner and outer beauty. Instead, I will adopt a framework that is formulated on the 'five senses'. The 'senses' play a prominent role in traditional Chinese aesthetics which has contributed significantly to aesthetics in Hong Kong (refer to Chapter 3 for the discussion on this issue). I believe it can give a new and more encompassing and effective perspective than the model of physical fragmentation for examining female beauty management and beauty itself.

Section I

Sight

Sight refers to the category of beauty management that appeals specifically to the optical sense, in other words, that which pertains to **colour and form (shape)**. The major form of beauty management for the enhancement of the colour aspect of women's appearance is cosmetics. For the beauty of female form, it ranges from the practice of dieting and fitness regimes, to the skills of dressing, cosmetic surgery, and prevention of the skin from sagging. It should be noted that beauty management

²² From interview with Yvonne Wong on 6 February 1996

for the sight includes almost all kinds of beauty strategies commonly practised by contemporary women. Gratification for the eyes appears to be the primary reason for beauty management by women. Another point is that colour and form are not rigidly exclusive aims in beauty management for the sight. Most often, they play complementary roles, assisting and fulfilling each other. For example, the colours of cosmetics can alter the shape of the face and fashion can enhance the beauty of a female body in terms of both form and colour. In any case, I will concentrate on the analysis of visual beauty management by discussing the concept and practice of making-up and toning up, which bear enormous significance in the contemporary beauty culture of Hong Kong.

Making up – the Constructed Face

One of the most conventional ways of female beauty management is the use of cosmetics. In Hong Kong's women's magazines, information about cosmetics appears mostly in the format of guidelines, experts' advice, and illustrations of made-up models, and advertisement for cosmetics. According to my study, cosmetics account for the largest proportion of beauty pages in women's magazines in Hong Kong. The reason for this is not hard to understand, since, to quote Kathy Peiss, 'the face, of all parts of the human body, has been marked as particularly meaningful, a unique site of expression, beauty and character' especially in Western culture. Peiss also believes that 'beauty originated less in visual sensation and formal aesthetics

than in internal character'²¹ Peiss' remark somehow reminds one of traditional Chinese 'face reading', which sees physiognomy as a window opening to the world of the internal spirit, personality, past experience, and even fortune. The 'look' of a person is construed as meaningful, the beauty of one's face is taken as a sign of goodness. Of course I am not trying to relate Peiss's comment to practise face reading, yet their conceptions of physiognomy do show certain commonalities. In both cases, facial appearance is treated as a means rather than an end in itself. Beauty of the face is an instrument, a mediator between the true self and the community in social relationship. This was a phenomenon which originated in pre-modern society, when class and social status superseded physical appearance in the identification of an individual. It was then that the bourgeoisie and the upper class sought to distinguish themselves through appearance management, one of which was the application of cosmetics.

In pre-modern China, cosmetics were most commonly used by two very different types of women: ladies of the court and those from affluent families, and prostitutes. While in the case of prostitutes, make-up was a necessary professional 'tool', women of the upper class wore make-up to signify the class of leisure and superb taste they belonged to. One of the best examples of this was the application of 'ehuang' 敷黃 (yellow powder) by Mongolian women in the Yuan 元 dynasty. The use of yellow powder as cosmetics for women's forehead originated in Tang, and had its inspiration in the statue of the golden Buddha that was found in temples all

²¹ Kathy Peiss, 'Making Up, Making Over' in *The Sex of Things*, Victoria de Grazia, Ellen

over the country. It was in the Yuan dynasty that Mongolian women physically assumed the implied qualities of nobleness and royalty of the colour gold, rendering yellow powder (as a substitution for gold) an indispensable make-up of the upper class²². Another example, probably widely known, is the Chinese obsession with white skin. Surely favouring white skin is not unique to the Chinese. Among the European and other races in pre-modern history, white skin was a symbol of good breeding. Lightening the face with 'rice powder' and later 'lead powder' is a traditional and most essential step of make-up for Chinese women. Although turning the complexion completely white without applying any blusher was extremely rare in the history of Chinese make-up, which in fact happened only as short-lived fads, the general touch of whiteness confers a look readily associated with an in-dwelling and wealthy life with little exposure to the sun and hard work. The same principle can be applied on the beauty ideals of long fingernails (of both men and women), bound feet and extravagant hairstyle in China till the turn of twentieth century.

Another phenomenon in make-up in pre-modern China was the use of 'facial decorations'. I call them 'decorations', because when applied to the face, they look like 'forms' with precise lines of boundary rather than masses of 'colours'. These do not include fake moles ('zhuangye' 妝靨), floral tapes ('huatian' 花貼), and 'red scars' ('xichong' 斜紅). Fake moles and floral tapes are ready-made patterns of decoration for sticking onto the face. Red scars are red-coloured

Furlough (eds.)

²² Source of 'yellow powder' is from Dai Zheng 戴正, in *Zhongguo Gudai Furu Huan Shu* 中國古代服飾史 (A Concise History of Chinese Pre-modern Clothing), Taipei, p.185

decorations in slightly curved or crescent shapes painted onto the skin near the temples. There are many stories about the origin of these make-up accessories. One legend to do with red scars is about the Emperor Cao pi 曹操 and his beloved court lady Xue Ye Lai 薛夜来 in the period of the Three Kingdoms. One day the emperor was reading under a lamp. As Xue was trying to go up to him, she accidentally banged her head into a crystal frame which left two scars on her face. The emperor only loved her more after that. The look became a craze in the palace and it was gradually emulated by the women of the upper class²⁴. The anecdote about floral tapes is probably more romantic. It was a day in July when the princess of the Nan 南 dynasty was sleeping under a plum tree. A soft breeze blew a plum flower onto the princess' forehead, staining her skin with a beautiful floral pattern which could not be washed off. It became a fashionable look of the time²⁵.

The stories above impart two major aspects of Chinese cosmetics: they all originated in the court, and, their prevalence depended on the process of identification. These kinds of cosmetics are characterized by the putting of definite coloured shapes on definite locations on the face. They added symbols or signs to the face rather than accentuate parts of it. The function of these decorations, fake moles and floral tapes in particular, resembles that of tattoos which produces spiritual meaning through the visual form. Nevertheless, once these signs gain popularity, they lose their original attached meaning and are reduced to a pure sign

²⁴ Source from Zhou Xun 周迅, *Zhongguo Lida Funu Zhuangshi 中国历代妇女妆饰史/The History of Chinese Female Adornment*, Shanghai, p.133

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.132

of beauty. In the Tang dynasty, due to the prosperity and the general freedom of thought, these kinds of 'facial décor' were exceptionally popular, so much so that some women wore them all over their face. In contemporary eyes, this made-up style may be dismissed as the 'artificial' and 'bizarre' taste of pre-modernity. However what is not realized is that it runs parallel to the logic of **identification** which also determines taste and lifestyle in the modern period. Ironically, the made-up Tang woman is reminiscent of certain female celebrities and ladies of leisure in contemporary Hong Kong, whose look is marked by an overload of designer brands. High fashion garments and accessories are juxtaposed with the latest make-up and hairstyle. Such kinds of adornment like this, as were the make-up of Tang women, draw attention to the meaning or beauty of particular sites (e.g. part of the make-up, a certain accessory) rather than produce visual unity and harmony. Beauty is an object, carrying with it a preset value to be identified. However, what we observe about female beauty of the Tang Dynasty follows a matrix of objectification, rather than of commodification as in the case of modern beauty. Its operation depends less on the 'conspiracy' of the political economy than on mere contingency.

What I am arguing here is that cosmetics are not uniquely a fashion of modern times, and even less a fashion of the modern Western world. Women of pre-modern China treated cosmetics as tools to identify not only their social status, family background, but also their distinguished taste and lifestyle. Contrary to the belief that Chinese make-up, like clothing, remain unchanged over time, there were, in fact, more fads in cosmetics than other forms of beauty management for women in

ancient China. Cosmetics were not imbued with fixed meaning like rituals and customs; if there was any meaning, it was only fashion. That was why, as far as beauty went, scars were held in the same regard as plum flowers, and also moles which in fact were regarded as a stigma in traditional Chinese face reading.

Perhaps the greatest manifestation of this fashionable spirit was the Chinese extraordinary fondness for eyebrow retouching. In the Tang Dynasty, Emperor Xuan Zong 玄宗 commissioned the court artists to draw 'Shi Mei Tu' 十眉圖 (*Ten Styles of Eyebrows Retouching*), though there were actually far more than 10 styles. Apart from the most common shapes of the crescent, the willow, and the distant mountain, there were shapes like the Chinese character for 'one' (a straight horizontal line), that for 'eight' (two slanting lines pointing away from each other), and the reverse of the previous style. The thickness and length of eyebrows also varied enormously, from the thick and short 'cinnamon leaf' of late Tang to the long, curved, and slender style of Qing. The eyebrows were retouched to make them either pointed or feather-like, at one or both ends. Basically, eyebrow retouching was the most important part of make-up for pre-modern Chinese women, so much so that they would retouch their eyebrows even when they were not wearing other make-up. *Sui Yi Lu* 隋遺錄 (*A Relic Record of Sui Dynasty*) recorded the craze of eyebrows retouching in Sui. The court ladies found the daily supply of fifty packets of 'dai' 黛 (mineral used for blackening eyebrows) not enough for the purpose¹⁰. In Tang, a girl as young as eight would retouch their eyebrows surreptitiously, as ridiculed by a

poem by Li Shangyin 李商隐²⁴. Make-up fads came and went, analogous to the fickleness fashions of the modern era.

Of course the most widely known anecdote is about Zhang Chang 张敞 retouching his wife's eyebrows some 2,000 years ago. The point worth noting in this story is that Zhang found eyebrow retouching an 'enjoyable mission', and even an essential bond of their marriage. A drastic change from the present concept that make-up is a private deed involving a sense of secrecy, presumably particularly of women, it was a shared interest between the two sexes in pre-modernity. Chinese literatures contain an abundance of narratives on emperors and noblemen encouraging women, both financially and spiritually, to use make-up. While the association of these facts to patriarchal ideology is obvious, their taste in female beauty seems to hail less from power politics than from a mutual congeniality between men and women. It is largely because the spread of cosmetics in ancient Chinese society was based on standardization, although the styles kept changing over time, dictated by the laws of fashion. The definite 'form' and 'colour' of Tang make-up indicate the objectification of female beauty and the possibility of exchange of female beauty codes. Therefore the principle of identification by women simply spells conformity to those beauty standards.

The second aspect arising from Zhang's anecdote is that cosmetics to

²⁴ Ibid., p.125.

²⁵ The poem is *Hu Zi 胡笳 (Cuddled)*, and the relevant lines are 'surreptitiously, eight-year-old girls look at mirrors, retouching their eyebrows by extending them'. Translated by me.

ancient women were less of a tactic of visual deception to men. The whole story of Zhang focuses not on the beauty of his wife but on the act of retouching by a man for the woman he loves as one of joy and endearment inside the boudoir. Beauty lay not in the made-up (and deceptive) female face, rather, beauty lay in art of change. In other words, the very process itself is romanticized. I have mentioned in Chapter 2 that the 'beauty of change' is a basic idea in Chinese aesthetics, and here we see that it is also evident in the management of beauty. Chinese opera, in which making up is a prominent part of the art, is a good reification of the idea of the beauty of change. The actors set great store by the process of putting on and removing make-up. It is done so carefully that each step induces a new source of inspiration and relish. This contrasts with the Western conception which sees make-up as a finished product to be paraded on stage rather than a process. In fact engaging in the latter in public is a taboo. Make-up in Chinese opera is an art form rather than everyday adornment, but the very spirit it embodies is in fact a mere intensification of Zhang's story. Seen in this light, making up, in pre-modern China, was beauty management with a strong artistic bent. Make-up was not deemed artificial, because the unmade-up face was not deemed natural. Note of course that the framing of the body into a strict dichotomy of natural/cultural is a modern, and notably Western concept. From a contemporary perspective, pre-modern Chinese make-up served to served to create an affect closer to the beauty of art than to enhance the natural beauty of women. The interest fell centrally on the make-up itself, and not the face.

Making up as a strategy of beauty management in contemporary Hong

Kong, amply and effectively seen in the profusion of women's magazines, gives us another picture of the culture of cosmetics. One of the obvious characteristics of modern cosmetic use is the elimination of class distinction. Using cosmetics is no longer a luxury of the upper classes but a lifestyle of the masses, thanks in part to the increasing publicity given it by the media. However, this ideological collapse of the class structure has led to some other modifications on the concept of identification. Women in the olden days identified themselves with various standards of beauty that were associated with different styles and were reflected by different make-up trends. Do women of today do the same? Undeniably, the association of the use of cosmetics with wealth and taste ended with the popularization of cosmetics. If being identified with wealth and a certain social class was the primary motivation for and consequence of make-up, what do contemporary women want to be identified with through the use of cosmetics? Another ingredient of contemporary culture or simply nature itself?

In women's magazines in Hong Kong, cosmetics proliferate both in terms of their product variety and the 'looks' they create. These all bespeak the ideology that making up is a technique that needs to be acquired, and, most important of all, a technique that changes according to trends. There is a sense of fickleness, superficiality, and of artificiality about the culture of cosmetics. On the other hand, cosmetics in contemporary societies are so popular that they have become something as 'essential' as our **natural** skin (notice how today make-up is promoted as 'second skin'). The ambivalence of cosmetics in female beauty management inevitably leads

to a question of female identity, that is, whether the identity of women is distorted or revealed by using make-up. To answer this we should go back to the core question of whether there is a pre-existing identity of women to be revealed. The contemporary cosmetics industry exploits the essence of ambiguity in female identity as a selling point by attaching make-up to the notion of naturalness. In this way make-up is said to help reveal rather than distort the true female self. Peiss pointed out that the role modern make-up plays in the idea of self-realization:

Beauty culturists and cosmetics manufacturers evolved a language of metamorphosis for their services and products that spoke directly to the troubled relationship between appearance and identity. Before-and-after advertisements, instructions for make-up applications, and cosmerology manuals spoke of transformation, what women's magazines today call the makeover. Cosmetics not only remade external appearance, they became a crucial aspect of self-realization.²⁷

The realization of the self relies on the self-revealing make-up, the understudy of nature. Referring back to my theory of the beauty of sight, modern make-up seems to be less constructed on a fixed set of forms and colours than its pre-modern predecessor. There is a general tendency of modern make-up to blend in the form and colour of the unmade-up face. If ancient Chinese cosmetics are considered alien to the body, the contemporary make-up of Hong Kong effaces this

subject/object division by merging the appearances of the made-up and the unmade-up face. Its most salient function is the alteration of facial contours using make-up that is close to the natural tone of the face. This is almost absent in traditional Chinese make-up. This method of make-up is popular in Hong Kong, as Chinese women tend to have flatter faces than Westerners, and especially given the current trend emphasizing facial form:

I want to create a very natural look, so that I am obviously made-up but not with colours everywhere. It's kind of contradictory because you have to put on so much make-up to make it look natural. This is where the technique lies. When we go on TV, the contouring is particularly important. The features of Chinese people are very different from the Westerners. They are flatter so we need to enhance them.²⁰⁷

This extract from an interview with Sandy Lam unfolds four major paradigms that the trend of contemporary Hong Kong make-up stresses: naturalism, formalism, representation, and, summing them all up, Westernization, as the West is also undergoing these influences. The concern with facial contour is undoubtedly related to the visual orientation of contemporary culture, and more importantly, to the visual form of the natural body. When make-up negates the original face by imposing on it a new look, it is at the same time reaffirming its authenticity.

²⁰⁷ Kathy Peiss, *Making Up, Making Over*, p. 523.

²⁰⁸ 'Q & A: Sandy Lam', in *Oriental Beauty*, Winter 94, p. 55.

Revealed here is an accentuation of the natural body which has emerged in reaction to the previous artificiality of contemporary culture. The promotion of cosmetics, therefore, relies on the assertion instead of the denial of nature. The association of visibility with naturalness creates a new relationship between cosmetics and the female body. Cosmetics are no longer a subordinate to but a decisive agent of female beauty. Make-up is stepping out from its role of mediator of beauty to become the **subject** of beauty by exploiting 'natural beauty', the definition of which is still unknown and controversial.

The emphasis of natural beauty appears to be contradictory to the ever-increasing colours and styles of make-up. Women's magazines provide abundant tips and guidelines on how to wear make-up according to seasons and occasions, and how to change a woman's look several times a day. The proliferation of make-up in the market is justified by the claim that they are simply catering to the needs of ordinary women whose identities, roles, and experiences are also constantly changing in contemporary society. Women's magazines tend to call such trends 'choices' instead of 'standards':

FACING - These days, even make-up houses move at breakneck speed. Whether it is to complement fashion trends or to enhance a certain look, there are plenty of make-up choices for women to pick from.²⁴

²⁴ "Facing", in "Beauty Essentials", *South China Morning Post*, 30 March 1997.

The double standards women's magazines adopt, the way they live off the contradictions and compromises between nature and culture, has been constantly condemned by current criticism. This position, described as the 'lingua franca' situation by Jennifer Craik, 'mixed messages' by Ellen McCracken, and as 'women's two bodies' by Leslie W. Rabine, tends to be shown in a negative light. It is understandable, in the sense that their argument is largely built on the presumption that there is an ontological body prior to the body that appears in culture. Not only did this body exist previously, it is unique, fixed, and perpetual. These are characteristics of the 'naturalness' of the female body glorified, since the expression of the self is recognized as the prime function of the body appearance in contemporary culture. Hence the affirmation of the natural body attests to the existence of a true self or identity, which contemporary people (particularly women) strive to attain.

Critics²¹¹ attack the advocacy of naturalism in women's magazines, labeling it as a 'hypocritical' and 'all-pleasing' strategy. However their reasoning, in my opinion, should be accepted with precaution, because closer examination reveals it to be lop-sided and self-fulfilling. Their complaint on the promotion of make-up in women's magazines is only a reflection of their ultimate negation of the consumption culture of capitalism, so that any kind of representation connected with it is assumed to be premeditated. The logic of their theories, built upon the linkage among natural body, identity and beauty, is somewhat inadequate. It explains that natural

²¹¹ One of these is Ellen McCracken, in *Decoding Women's Magazines*.

appearance is an emblem of the real self, yet it does not mention whether it has anything to do with beauty. Similarly, their belief in the pre-existing self does not mean there is necessarily pre-existing beauty. If women's magazines are criticized for exploiting the notion of naturalism for better revenue, these theories are themselves staggered by the fact that they challenge the prevailing representations also by making use of the concept of naturalism. The only difference, quite contrary to their aim, might be that these theories do not elevate the position of the body but confine it into an imaginary, pre-discursive entity whose only function is to 'mirror' the self.

By contrast, women's magazines have a more positive tone towards make-up. In line with the favouritism for 'the natural body' in the expanding industry and the cosmetics market, women's magazines also promote make-up as mean of self-expression and performance. Now the central concept of the cosmetics history of pre-modern China, art, has been revived in contemporary Hong Kong where the heat of naturalism is at its boiling point. Here comes a trend full of extremes, contradictions, perplexity and chaos, distressing every mind that yearns for organized and standardized beauty. Pages on 'invisible make-up', juxtaposed with advice on using 'experimental shades' (*Orient Beauty*, Winter 95), are common in women's magazines. The colours themselves, the composition of cosmetics, manifest a spirit of revolution in the aesthetics of female beauty. The versatility of beige-colour make-up, which acts not only to improve skin tone and colour (foundation), to conceal (concealment stick), but also to adorn (lipstick, for

example), illustrate the fact that contemporary cosmetics tamper with traditional norms by visually breaching the fixed boundary surrounding the form of make-up. Colours are no longer used primary to create pre-determined forms or shapes, as seen in the cases of eyebrow retouching and other facial decoration of pre-modern China, but individualized effects on the face. In other words, they are used to create shades rather than shapes, and mixing colours to create various visual effects becomes fun.

Vary the tone of red to make sure it complements your natural skin tone. Combine red and pink to soften or red and gold to glow.²¹

In light of this, the use of make-up for naturalness and for performance are not necessarily mutually exclusive opposites. With the increasingly diverse array of cosmetic colours and methods of application, contemporary make-up is able to create any effect, whether natural or dramatic, with little difficulty. If facial appearance is a revelation of one's identity, then contemporary make-up has rendered the face a site of illusion and deception. This new relationship between make-up and identity brings advantages rather than disadvantages to women, for they are now freer to express themselves by changing their looks. The key is to objectify instead of being objectified by cosmetics. Today Hong Kong women do not put on make-up in order to conform to certain identities, as their ancestors did, but to construct and invent their own identity. The truism is, identification implies a

²¹ Headline of page on lipsticks, *Orient Beauty*, winter 94, p. 74.

process of self-exploration rather than of self-realization, and this gradually evolves into a common theme of contemporary Hong Kong women's magazines. Nonetheless, the claims of these magazines should be constantly gauged against their practices to ensure that their discourse really do provide 'choices' instead of imposing dogmatic 'standards'.

Toning Up – the Rebellious Body

Another type of beauty management that appeals to sight is concerned purely with the **form** of the body—it is the contemporary indulgence in 'keeping fit'. I use the term 'toning up' to imply a preclusion of both the alleviation of bodily functions. After all, the aim is to 'keep' and to 'fit' the female body into prescribed spatial boundaries morphologically, as distinguished from making up which involves a sense of construction and transformation. Hence making up, and also dressing up, suggests beauty management that takes a centrifugal course from the limited to the unlimited, while toning up takes an opposite, centripetal course that goes from the indefinite to the definite. The main strategy of making up is to explore and to construct, whereas the primary approach of toning up is to revolt and to destroy. Despite the ideological discrepancy between the two ways of beauty management, both seem to protest against paragons of female beauty of contemporary culture, seeking a possible way to voice the female identity which is progressively reclaimed to be the women's own.

The contemporary culture of keeping fit in Hong Kong is a direct result of Western influence, although toning up is not a prevalent phenomenon in Chinese culture. The regime of keeping fit takes two main directions: exercising and dieting. In women's magazines, the idea of fitness is generally represented by guidelines on workouts in the gym, recommendations on consuming health foods, low-calorie recipes, and the introduction of fat-reducing skin care products. Other regimes, such as slimming drugs or plastic surgery, are seldom mentioned in local women's magazines. These magazines want to maintain a wholesome image and one of the ways to do so is to denounce slimming drugs and surgery which are considered 'unnatural' and 'unhealthy'. On the other hand, dieting and exercise are considered natural and healthy ways of keep fit because they emphasize self-discipline, and this discipline, in my opinion, is embodied more in a sense of **self-maintenance** rather than self-denial of the body. Many scholars hold different views, however, including Baudrillard who regarded the interest in bodily fitness in contemporary society as a 'repressive solicitude'.

Now that solicitude, like everything which has to do with the body and the relation to the body, is ambivalent. It is never solely positive and overall, indeed, it is negative. The body is always 'liberated' as simultaneous object of this dual solicitude. As a consequence, the immense process of solicitude of the 'gratifying' kind, a process we have described as the instituting of the body in its modern form, is accompanied by an equal and equally substantial investment of

repressive solicitude ²¹²

But even Baudrillard calls the interest in bodily fitness not a 'denial' but an 'investment' ²¹³ of the body, since **the body is too important**. The body is important, according to Baudrillard, because it functions as sign, and the representations of the body are ones of fetish, and of capital because its value can be measured by money. The latter is what Baudrillard calls 'investment' of the body as significant exchange material—the conversion of the body through the practices of beauty regimes into certain signs. In short, the body only takes on meaning when transformed into signs. I would like to add that more importantly, **these signs are designed and manipulated by the faculty of sight**.

I have stated in the above that the regimes for bodily fitness suggested by women's magazines hail fundamentally from the concern for self-maintenance. Its attainment varies very much in accordance with the functions of the individual body. There is no optimum condition in terms of bodily functions. Even if there is, it is not measurable. Therefore the practices of fitness regimes themselves are simply a concept, a positive attitude towards one own body and way of life of which the best needs to be preserved. Just think of the traditional Chinese exercises for fitness, commonly known as 'Yongchun' 永春, 'Taiji' 太極 and various forms of 'wushu' 武術 (martial arts). They have been practised for thousands of years without causing adverse effects on women's bodies. Dieting, fasting, consuming health foods like tea

²¹² Baudrillard, J. *The Consumer Society*. Sage, 1998. p.141.

and herbs for the attainment of bodily fitness are not rare in Chinese tradition. What I am arguing here is not that the traditional Chinese management of fitness is concerned only with health and not beauty, as in fact it concerns both, but that it bears a different concept of beauty from the modern strategy. Another case in point is slimming of the female body. Traditional Chinese refer to it as 'xing shen', 形, meaning literally, reducing weight, whereas the modern emphasis is on reducing size. The toning of the bodily form, or transforming the body fat into muscles through gymnastic exercise, for example, results in a smaller, more compact body but not necessarily a lighter body, as muscles weigh more than fat. To be fair, therefore, the beauty strategies for fitness, which are currently severely accused of having negative effects on women's physical and psychology well-being, are not problematic as far as their aim goes. It is only the images they project that are problematic. Our generation is so obsessed with the images that visual representations of the female body are given top priority in women's magazines. The skinny images are there, silent, staring at the audiences, but in fact they speak more than all the narratives on fitness regimes. The images render these narratives into a set of rigid 'standards', so that this fitness information is received merely on a visual/emotional level rather than a contemplative level.

One only needs a glimpse into local women's magazines to notice the great contrast between the images of make-up and of fitness. A considerable departure from the celebration of diversification of make-ups trends, women's magazines tend

²¹ *Ibid.* p.129.

to promote the homogenization of female figures. Even in magazines like *Orient Beauty*, which tends to show a variety of models of different nationalities, the figures of the models seem to be shaped by the same mold. It indispensably triggers questions on the matrix of this consumer culture, in which women's magazines are important activators: if consumer culture encourages, and in fact exploits, the proliferation of facial appearance, why does it standardize the female body to such an extent that it seems to be hurting the economy which, it would seem, would certainly benefit from greater diversification? Moreover, there is also a question on the actual paragon of the body, why it has to be the slim but not the chubby figure to be venerated, when the profit obtained from the beauty products of reducing weight and of gaining weight should be the same? Hence, if the craze for fitness is seen as one of the themes in consumer culture, then, it is a particular rather than a general one, for the concept of fixation it advocates demonstrate a reverse philosophy to that of the fickleness of fashion. It illuminates the fact that the culture of fitness is more than a fad, not only because it has been a persistent trend over the past thirty years, but also because it requires a substantial ideology to sustain its uniqueness. This ideology is that of the women's movement.

...thinness was just the latest construction. ...It just happened to coincide with that moment in history when women were beginning to demand that they take up more not less space in the world, when women attempted to be seen as more than (sexual) objects.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ "The thinness of the models is not new or dramatic, but its effect is shocking all the same".

The seed of feminist idea has found its growing ground in the domain of the media, through turning the female body into banners of protest against the traditional stereotypes of female images. These images of slim beauty are the consequence of a general social movement, accelerated rather than constructed by consumer culture. Capitalism has brought about two political mainstreams in society, feminism and consumer economy. Both glorify the achievement of the individual, which becomes the ideological common ground both streams thrive on. Baudrillard criticized the 'violence' of the fitness culture which is so severe that the body is 'sacrificed'¹⁶, to highlight the vicious side of capitalist society. The truth (however cruel) is consumer economy is never (and should not be) interested in the 'shaping effect' of the everyday female body - it is only interested in the profit derived from it. Similarly, feminism is not concerned with the notion of symmetry, health and naturalness in female beauty, simply because these are all the traditional cultural codes of beauty they want to abolish. The female body is probably sacrificed both in the war of gender and of money. However, readers of the magazines should never be taken as sheer puppets or mechanical receptors of the new concepts 'created' by the media. Even in the name of fashion, the commercial world has to capture the ideology echoing the deep-seated desire of women in reality, who have exercised their right and choice when selecting the magazines. Again, it is the images to be blamed. It is the images of female body shown on giant, glossy illustrations and photographs which reify the concept of fitness into an actual measurement in the eyes. It is the images which convert a cause of liberation into an enslavement of salvation, through

¹⁶ Guardian, 31 May 1996.

the mimetic process of consumption.

Now let us take a close look at the 'fashionable' female image. The female body of thinness is not just thin, it is a 'morphologically deformed' figure, and strictly, a **contraption**. The size of the body trunk is minimized, the breasts are flattened, the length of the limbs and of neck are extended; the size of the head is reduced but the eyes are enlarged. Still, it is an image of a human being, but a human being of a rare kind, for there are only eight in three billion women in the world who possess this type of figure, according to statistics²¹⁴. It is the image of a 'new human being' endorsed by women's magazines, and just because this being is consistently female, it is a great shock for the eyes. The traditional signs of femininity are deliberately subdued: there are no more protruding breasts and gigantic bottoms, what is impressive are the slender limbs supporting the weightless body in a relaxed way. While the signs of gender are obliterated, signs of modernity are accentuated by the long limbs which relate the figure to the concept of mobility, dexterity and independence. Basically, there is a general shrinking of the flesh (fat), which is associated with the concept of voluptuousness and libido embodied in the traditional definition of femininity. This is, however, not an image of androgyny, or of masculinization of the female. Despite the sexual ambivalence indicated by these bodily signs, the notion of femaleness is certain, sometimes by other feminine signs of long eyelashes and full lips and usually by clothing specifically for exposing the

²¹⁴ Baudrillard, J., *The Consumer Society*, p. 143

²¹⁵ From *Full Voice*, published by The Body Shop, 1998, which claims that the statistics come from US and UK.

'sexy female body' The image violates the traditional codes of femininity by substituting them with other codes. Plumpness and voluptuousness, for example, are replaced by tallness and slimness. Unfortunately, even though the image seems to challenge the current structure of signification, it is in fact covertly reaffirming this very structure, by turning the body of women into another 'visage' of signs.

The taste for slim female beauty in contemporary society is in fact not an unprecedented phenomenon in Chinese history, although it seems to be a distinctive and extreme case in the Western history of female beauty. The most typical figures of slim beauty in Chinese history are the concubine of the Emperor Han Wu 汉武帝, Zhao Fei Yan 赵飞燕, and the image of Lin Dai Yu 林黛玉 in the Qing novel, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (see Fig. 30). Both are famous for the lightness of their bodies. Their beauty, however, cannot be accurately described as 'thinness'. Zhao's beauty is summarized in the anecdote of her dancing on the emperor's hands, implying the ancient taste for delicacy, subtlety, and agility rather than smallness and thinness of the female body. In a like manner Lin's beauty manifests itself in her fragility and vulnerability, her life struggle with ill health. The beauty of Zhao and Lin are not embodied in their slim 'figure', but in their exquisite but vulnerable 'charm' which invites love and sympathy. This is ideologically and morphologically different from the slim female beauty of contemporary tastes. Yet, in spite of its basic thinness, the modern female body tends to be sturdy and tall, with broad shoulders and large feet. The overall image is one of solidity rather than of ethereality as characterized by the pre-modern images. The broad shoulders are

especially symbolizing

Hanging shoulders in men symbolize a weak, hen-pecked man. Correspondingly, women should have hanging shoulders. A cape often emphasized the falling shoulders. Today, he says, girls with broad shoulders are appreciated. Following his argumentation, we could then say that broad shoulders symbolize strength and independence in women.²¹

The stability and weight of the body is an affirmation of the existence of the body. Echoing my refutation of the linkage between slimming and self-negation of the body on the previous page, I restate that this female body is substantial simply because it is a signal. **The configuration of signification survives on the stability of the object (sign).** Since the signification of female body nowadays operates predominantly on the visual level, the figure has to 'appear' to be firm and solid, despite its apparent shrink in size. It is why I term the body a 'contraption', even though, morphologically, it is antithetical to thin bodies, which tend to look weightless, ill, and under-nourished. Here I find more supporting evidence in the notion of health accompanying the idea of thinness. Women's magazines often emphasize that the thin images they depict have only to do with healthiness. There is no reason why they do not. I would say, since healthiness is merely one of the fragments constituting to the **instrumental composition** of the body. The idea of

²¹ Eberhard, W. "What Is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman", in *Moral and Social Values of the Chinese: Selected Essays*, Taipei: Chengwan, 1971, p.293

healthiness is, hence, made visual, through the blushed face, flawless skin, sleek hair, and reddish lips, apart from the sturdy body I mentioned above.

From this, one can see that the magazines are trying to instill in their readers a positive view towards these new images of beauty, which are permeated with the tone of hedonism and optimism. Unlike the old tactics based on the stigmatization of real bodies adopted by magazines of previous eras, the new generation of women's magazines in Hong Kong have adopted an advisory, informative²¹ rather than an intimidating, instructive position in relation to the readers. Unfortunately, the language of positivity and certainty regarding the female body ends up, in most cases, as doctrines of ordeals for women who deny their body and starve themselves in order to look like the models portrayed. Is it not a curious thing that the hedonic persuasion of the magazines would turn out to be ascetic 'torture' of the female body? Chris Shilling said of this 'discipline' of the female body in female beauty management.

Whereas the body used to be given meaning by national governments, there has in recent years been an increased concern on the part of women to 'reclaim' their bodies, and from people in general to define their bodies as individual possessions which are

²¹ 'Providing information is the aim of *Elle* (Hong Kong edition)', said Ruth du Cann, fashion and beauty editor of *Elle*. Yvonne Wong also addressed to the informative nature of *Orient Beauty*, by seeing it as a 'beauty handbook'. From interviews held on 7 December 1995 and on 6 February 1996 respectively.

integrally related to their self-identities.²¹⁴

The image of the slim body is influential because it redefines the norms (outward form) of female beauty while, at the same time, renaming their identities. The very essence of dieting, starving and any form of deconstructing of the present body is imbedded in the process of discipline. Unlike the beauty of facial features which could only be imitated by make-up (besides taking the shortcut of plastic surgery), in the beauty paradigm of thinness, the best way of parody is discipline, for **the body can actually be thin!** Thus, the beauty of facial image and of bodily image can create quite different effects, simply out of the fact that the form of the body can be changed more easily than that of the face. The fluctuation of the bodily form triggering uncertainty, and, hence, anxiety about a woman's self, can be only resolved by controlling it through discipline. It also explains why the female beauty of thinness is exceptionally exposed to accusation by society: the serious health problems it brings to women, was probably not something the media originally expected.

Undeniably anorexia nervosa is increasingly a health threat to the young women of Hong Kong. Dr Sing Lee of the Prince of Wales Hospital said:

The problem of an increase in body weight is one that many Hong Kong Chinese women can relate to. Since the emergence of fatty

²¹⁴ Chris Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory*, Sage, 1993, p. 30.

Western food, the traditional image of a slender, slim-hipped Oriental is no longer the norm. Local girls whose own mothers weigh less are starting to over-compensate by dieting.²²

Despite this, the eating disorder is not as common here as in the West. Dr Lee believes. Generally speaking, Chinese women have slimmer figures than Caucasian and Black women, and extreme obesity is relatively uncommon. Throughout Chinese history, tastes regarding the female body have varied tremendously, from the plump Buddha-like figure of Tang to the gaunt sick beauty of Qing. Nonetheless, there has been a propensity for **small-framed female figures**. The characteristic of a small-framed figure is that, no matter whether it is fat or thin, it would not result in a bony look or a large and heavy look. It would retain the female body 'curves' which were essential in the traditional Chinese ideals of female beauty. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, the traditional taste for "flowing beauty" in China emphasized less on the actual size and form than the **kind** of beauty, the body curves, the fluidity and softness of this strain of femininity. As women tend to have rounder body than men because of a **higher fat content**, the penchant for body curves seems to be more closely related to the natural rather than cultural female body. Portraits of traditional figures of Chinese ladies²³ also reveal that slimness has been an ideal of female beauty since the late Ming dynasty.

The Chinese taste for slimness has been transformed into a predilection for a

²² 'Food for Fraught', *Orient Beauty*, winter 94, p 26

tougher, more angular, and taller thinness in contemporary Hong Kong, due to the influence of the Occidental taste in white female beauty. Ironically, while increasing numbers of Hong Kong women complain about their weight, even greater numbers probably feel dissatisfied with their height²²¹, except that, in the latter case, they also feel comparatively more helpless. Besides a stronger disposition, modern female beauty in Hong Kong is also marked by a **preciseness, specificity and fragmentation** of the female body. It is not a general thinness like the ancient figures, but a thinness of specific parts of the body, remarkably of the waist and legs, while not withholding a generous roundness from the breasts and buttocks. This gives rise to the absurd phenomenon of local women working hard at reducing fat in certain areas of their bodies, while simultaneously trying equally hard to 'plump' up certain loci of their bodies (usually by push-up bras rather than by surgery or any means involving actual physical transformation). This is all due to the carefully calculated and fragmented body of female beauty, which has captivated the female mass through **actualization**. The tension becomes intensified since Chinese/Asian women used to have smaller breasts, and there is a tendency of refocusing the zone of female beauty on the breasts since a few years ago. This reversion of femininity back to traditional sexuality, however, is primarily promoted by the mass media such as local TV, films and gossip magazines. Women's magazines, in this aspect, pose as a counter current to this trend rather than its proponent.

²²¹ Liu Huihuang, (ed.), *Traditional Figures of Chinese Ladies*, Hong Kong: Wan Li, 1990.

²²² A survey carried out by Eberhard on the physical traits usually complained about by Chinese women in Taipei in the 60s, shows that 'overweight' and 'shortness' are two major 'defects' most commonly named by Chinese women. Following my point in the thesis, I believe the data can serve as an indicator of Hong Kong women to a great extent, although the route of Westernization taken

Section II

Hearing, Smell, Touch and Taste

Hearing

Compared to the faculty of sight, the senses of hearing, smell, touch and taste play relatively trivial roles in our aesthetic appreciation of female beauty in contemporary Hong Kong. Female beauty management is therefore focused on the improvement of form and colour which appeal primarily to the optical sense. Contemporary beauty regimes have almost totally neglected the sense of hearing, although traditionally female voice contributes to a great part of femininity (I have cited examples earlier from *The Power of Beauty*). Traditional Chinese medicines and health food are seriously concerned with enhancement of voice as a significant step of achieving beauty. One example of this can be found in the book of dietotherapy written by Chinese doctor Guan Zhiyi 關之義²², who classified dietetic foods into four major groups, each appealing to the different aspects of female beauty – the face, the body, the smell and the voice. Nevertheless, female voice is virtually never mentioned in local women's magazines, whether from the perspective of strengthening and protection of the vocal organs, or from the perspective of speech or conversation manners. Hearing, unlike seeing and thinking which also used to be engendered as perception within the masculine domain, is particularly left out in the modern culture

by the Taiwanese should not be exactly the same as Hong Kong.

of female beauty. If female beauty is a responsive attribute to male perception, then there must be a gradual annulment of the sense of hearing, not because men are becoming dumb, but because they are more interested in looking. To put it briefly, people, whether men or women, have nullified the sense of hearing as a faculty of perception, for the simple reason that they do not speak.

Smell

Smell, taste and touch, on the other hand, were customarily categorized as female senses according to traditional Western values, founded on the prejudice that women belonged to the instant, sensual, corporeal and thus low rank of perception.²²¹ Not only were women's perception believed to rely on the olfactory sense, but as they did not see and think as men did, it was believed, they were said to produce odour. The view coincides with the conventional Chinese view relating femininity to women's body smells. However, the scent springing from a female body, in the Chinese context, has usually been a subject of compliment, contrary to the 'malodour' produced by men. It might be due to the fact that as early as the Qin 秦 Dynasty (two centuries b.c.), Chinese women were already in the habit of using perfume. They were 'xiangnang' 香囊 (scented bags) or 'xiangqiu' 香球 (scented balls) and contained dry flowers and herbs. Xiangqiu was especially cleverly designed

²²¹ Guan Zhiyi, *Dietotherapy for Beauty* (in Chinese), 1989.

²²² See Constance Classen's *Engendering Perception: Gender Ideologies and Sensory Hierarchies in Western History*, *Body & Society*, Vol 3, No 2, June 1997.

so that the dry flowers can be burned inside the ball made of silver, while it was suspended next to the body. These scented devices were either hung on the canopy above women's beds or over the waist of women as decoration. Hence there was a common association of fragrance with the body and bed of women in classical Chinese texts. In fact 'flowers' was the most prevalent simile of women in Chinese literature, which applauds the female face as well as female scent. Usually, when women were praised as being 'fragrant', the reference made was the natural odour of women's bodies rather than perfume. The classical erotic texts of China always associate this fragrance to women, especially young women, in the form of descriptions such as 'scented skin' or 'real scent of the body' (as opposed to artificial scent)²²⁴. While we are not sure whether women of different ages produce different odours, these metaphors seem to create a sense of imaginary rather than realistic female beauty. It is a **romanticization** rather than a realization of female beauty in pre-modern Chinese culture. It is this romantic element which transforms the odour of female bound-feet into the enchanting fragrance of lotus.

In contemporary women's magazines, beauty management for the sense of smell is represented by the use of **perfume**. Although perfume has persisted as a significant topic in women's magazines, in actual fact, it accounts for only one fifth of the total sales of all cosmetic products in Hong Kong²²⁵. This is because the promotion of perfume products in women's magazines is done largely for

²²⁴ Yue Rong Pian '(Chapter of Attractive Faces), *Nanyan Cong Shu (A collection of Chinese Eroticism)*, Book I, Scroll 2, p. 73.

²²⁵ Figure from the 'Product Analysis' as of 31 March 1997, the *Investor Presentation* of Sa Sa.

commercial purposes, it is a means of 'flattering' the perfume advertisers so as to attract more orders. Apart from the advertisement of new perfume products in every issue, the magazines also publish *fragrance specials*, which are either separate or enclosed, to highlight the products on a regular basis. In reality, perfume is not as essential as skin care or even make-up for Hong Kong women in everyday beauty management. Dissimilar to make-up and skin care, the sales of perfume depends in a great part on its being purchased as gifts. This shows that it occupies a relatively insignificant role in the management of female beauty in Hong Kong. The apparent gap between the promotion of women's magazines and the 'wearing' of perfume in reality implies a certain incompatibility between the two over the concept of smell in female beauty management. It might be true that the Chinese have much less body odour than the other races²⁷, so that local Chinese women would not treat fragrance as an fundamental 'remedy' for their beauty. The primary cause for the gap, I observe, is that the use of perfume, its very practice, is a particular cultural phenomenon of modernity. It is not simply because perfume is a modern, Western invention, but because it has metamorphosed itself into a sign of femininity.

With the term 'sign', I refer to perfume as something which bears meanings, commodified and consumable. The perfume is **really there**, like an object, although it cannot be seen. The contemporary (or what is termed as postmodern) perfume, although claiming to enhance feminine mystique (reminiscent of scented female beauty in traditional Chinese culture), is virtually constructed on an anti-mystical

International Holdings Limited, the largest cosmetics retailing company in Hong Kong

structure, for all signs work on an open, pre-agreed system. The expansion of this sign system of fragrance can be clearly seen in recent years, demonstrated by an increasing variety of 'smells' together with their 'meanings' of female beauty – cute, sophisticated, passionate, seductive, amorous, carefree, etc. On the surface, it seeks to enlarge the vocabulary of female beauty by endorsing a wider range of female identities, just as fashion and make-up do. Unfortunately it ends up delimiting female identities into a collection of stereotypes, as the system is so self-completing that it barely leaves space for individual invention (we seldom mix and match fragrances as we do fashion and make-up). Fortunately, however, fragrance is less emphasized as an ingredient of female beauty by the representation of female image in women's magazines, simply because smell cannot be transmitted visually (although it can be visualized through the presentation of the various designs of fragrance containers). This in turn illustrates another reason why local Chinese women are less influenced by perfume promotions than promotions of fashion, for instance, in the magazines, although they obviously find the colours and forms of the images very persuasive and alluring.

Aromatherapy is a regime that has been added to the management of female beauty only about a decade ago. In Hong Kong, although it has been a beauty trend for only a few years' time, it has become one of the hottest topics in women's magazines. Like perfumes, the range of aromas are categorized and coded, albeit not according to their meanings but to their functions. Easing, clearing, balancing,

²⁷ Eberhard, *What Is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman?* p. 298

relaxing, energizing and calming are some of the most common functions of aromatherapeutic products, and this classification is signal rather than functional. A notable aspect of aromatherapy is that it echoes the green movement by locating female beauty in the realm of nature. The promotional leaflet of aromatherapy of The Body Shop shows several naked, dark-skinned women in poses of rapture or enjoyment (see Fig 31). These figures are embedded with not only the notion of naturalism but also a sort of primitivism and sensuality that webs femininity to the traditional Western division of women as nature/men as culture. By adopting the prevalent definition of women as 'nature', the tactic nevertheless aims to demolish the contemporary 'culture' of female beauty which stresses exclusively on women's physical beauty. The leaflet reads the 'what' of the therapy

Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils to enhance harmony and wellbeing of body, mind and spirit. ...As they work on the outer you, they can also influence the inner you. ...Our Aromatherapy range adds a new dimension to skin care and mood enhancement. . . we hope to heighten the pleasure and meaning involved in the daily rituals of touch, smell and communication ²²⁹

And an article entitled 'Scents and Sensibilities' in *Orient Beauty* reads:

Essential oils – safe, simple, natural products – work as the only therapy to effect our physical, emotional and psychological

states²²⁹

Named as a kind of 'therapy', the whole idea of the beauty regime is based on the idea of the malfunction of the body. In this sense, it is synonymous to the medical treatment of diseases. Traditional Chinese medication believes sickness hails from the imbalance of bodily functions, and incense burning has long been a way of heightening the olfactory enjoyment and of strengthening bodily functions in pre-modern China. The modern accentuation on bodily functions, which comprises physical as well as psychological dimensions, is a deepening of the outer female beauty into the inner, experiential states. With a similar association to the notion of 'health', however, fitness fashion exploits the healthy body for the implementation of the 'look' of outer beauty, whereas aromatherapy emphasizes the experience itself. This **experiential revival**, originating in the ancient worlds of Egypt, Rome, Greece and Persia²³⁰, also recalls the 'feminine matter' of incense burning which was taken as overwhelmingly important as an indicator of female beauty in ancient Chinese society²³¹. The association of female beauty with the olfactory sense has mystical connotations, indicating a **internalization** rather than **externalization** of beauty. Nonetheless, the modern version attaches a hint of **self-consciousness** to the idea by interpreting the experience as one of 'communication'.

²²⁹ 'Aromatherapy - the Essential Experience', published by The Body Shop, 1998.

²³⁰ *Orient Beauty*, Winter 95, p.38.

²³¹ 'Aromatherapy', Icaffe, published by The Body Shop, p.1

Taste

In *Xianyan Congshu*, there is a column entitled 'Cuisine of Beautiful Women', which is composed of all kinds of fresh fruit, fish, tea, precious dry food, wine and famous recipes²¹. It is an interesting analogue to contemporary Hong Kong women's magazines where food and drinks are given significant coverage (whereas it is less common in men's magazines). However, the gourmet pages of modern glossy women's magazines are related more to lifestyle (how to enjoy eating rather than how to cook) than the domestic roles of traditional femininity (housewives). Yet, having said that, contemporary women's magazines seem to reassert the conventional association of female beauty with the sense of taste, while at the same time encouraging indulgence in physical beauty for sight. It is from the transition of the format of 'cookery' in the magazines of the last generation to that of 'cuisine' and 'gourmet' of this generation that the female beauty of taste has progressively changed from a private to a social sensation. Like fragrances, it acts as an insignificant counter-balance to the perception of visual beauty, purely because the individual experience of taste is opened up onto an evidential, comprehensible level of presentation of dishes. The traditional articulation of hot, cold, sweet, fresh, or piquant beauty of women has become the celebration of colourful pictures of international gourmet food.

²¹ 'Meiren Pu' (The List of Beautiful Women), in *Xianyan Congshu*, book 1, scroll 1, p.12.

Touch

In contemporary women's magazines, smell and taste can be visualized, but how about the sense of touch? Female beauty appealing to the sense of touch is reflected on the smoothness, fineness, softness of women's skin as well as body contour, and on the sleekness and glossiness of hair. Touch pertains not only to the texture but also the temperature of the female body, with the standards for the latter being more ambiguous. The tactile quality of beauty in local women's magazines can be observed in the smooth, flawless make-up on the face and the body of individual images. Of course, clever photographic techniques and good quality printing also contribute to their effectiveness. Compared to the beauty of sight which is based largely on the form and colour of the images, tactile beauty has to be transmitted in a more indirect way, like that of smell and taste, through the perception of visual, distant images in women's magazines. It might be inferred that the practical impact of the sense of smell, taste and touch in beauty management would be fairly similar, much less than that for the sense of sight. The fact is, however, quite the contrary. The sense of touch is the greatest concern of everyday women in Hong Kong, as far as beauty management goes. Hence one of the marketing strategies most commonly used for selling cosmetics is a focus on skin care. According to the statistics of Sa Sa Cosmetics Company, skincare products accounted for the largest percentage of total turnover (44%) and also of gross profit (53%) of all cosmetic products sold by

²² Ibid., p.17.

the company in 1997²¹¹. The nearest figures came from make-up which accounted for 31% and 26% respectively, taking up roughly one-fourth of the market share (compared to about half of the market share taken up by skincare products). The company also mentioned that the other two Asian countries that value skincare products highly are Taiwan and Japan, where the market shares occupied by the products were 65% and 33.1% respectively, while in Singapore it was only 32% for skin care and make-up together, and even less in non-Asian countries²¹².

The figures above open up a series of questions, about the relations among aesthetic tastes and culture, economy, ethnology, and even climate. One thing is certain, that is, the tactile aspect of female beauty is given more weight in Asian than in Western countries. Among Asian countries, the situation also varies. Although also composed largely of ethnic Chinese, the aesthetic taste of Singapore is apparently very different from that of Taiwan and Hong Kong, from the perspective of female beauty management. In Singapore, fragrance is the favourite beauty product²¹³. This can be explained by the warmer climate of the country which necessitates the need for fragrance. The real issue of aesthetic taste, however, can be much more complicated than this. Taiwan has a huge market for designer brands originating in the West. It is also the most significant place for the preservation of traditional Chinese culture outside mainland China:

²¹¹ 'Product Analysis' as of March 31, 1997, *Investor Presentation*, published by Sa Sa Cosmetics.

²¹² Figures as of 1994, from 'Industry Overview', in book of *Placing and New Issue*, Sa Sa Cosmetics, p.33-34.

Just because the Taiwanese enjoy certain aspects of Western culture such as Prada handbags, Gucci shoes and *Vogue* magazines doesn't mean they want our (Western) culture as a whole. They don't. They have their own. ... At the magazine's (*Vogue*) launch party, splendidly bedecked by Gordon in the bright citrus colours of the fashion season. The two cultures are more thrown together than blended.²⁷⁴

The official voice of Singapore, on the other hand, identifies their culture as Singaporean rather than Chinese. The remarkable market share of skin care products in Japanese beauty management, however, is accompanied by a considerable consumption of make-up cosmetics. Skin care seems not to be a 'typical' area of beauty management in Japanese culture.

Definitely, exploring the representation of Chineseness requires a much more carefully thought out methodology, but the subtle relation of Chinese culture to the contemporary management of female beauty can be discussed here. Skin care is not only a highlight of the beauty routine of women in Hong Kong, it has distinctive affiliations with the aesthetics of female skin of traditional Chinese culture. In general, modern skin care focuses on three main aspects of women's skin, which are whiteness (colour), firmness (form) and smoothness (texture). There are many examples of praise for fine, beautiful, white female skin in Chinese classics, some of

²⁷⁴ Ibid. fragrances and toiletries accounted for almost 50% of the market share in Singapore.

²⁷⁵ 'Asia in Vogue – Why We Are Selling Glamour to Our Near Neighbours', in *The Sunday*

which I have cited before, but compliments on the firmness of skin are uncommon. In the seventeenth century, Chinese aesthete, Li Yu, made a detailed discussion of women's skin. Surprisingly for a work of traditional aesthetic criticism, his approach was analytical rather than intuitive.²²⁷ In respect of whiteness, he believed that it was the 'basic colour' of women's skin. A really white complexion was rare, however, because:

What is the material origin of the human being²²⁸ – semen and blood. The semen is whitish, and the blood is red verging on purple. If a pregnancy is caused by a great amount of semen, the child will always have white skin. If the paternal semen and the maternal blood are mixed equally, or if there was a lot of blood and little semen in the mixture, the child thus begotten will have a skin colour between dark and light.²²⁹

Li Yu's statements are by no means grounded on scientific investigation. One would even say that his concept was based on superstition. What is important about Li's view is that the colour of women's skin is regarded as inborn, so that there is a surreptitious conviction that women's skin colours are naturally various. Therefore, 'if the natural element in a girl is dark without a light component, she cannot hope to become lighter'.²³⁰ This idea goes against the creeds of skin care of contemporary

Morning Herald, Saturday, January 4, 1997.

²²⁷ Eberhard, W. 'What is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman', pp.278-281.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.279.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

societies, which claims technologically advanced beauty products can help women to 'regain' the born colour of their skin, which is fundamentally white. Women are told that they have darker complexions due simply to the harmful rays of the sun, drugs, pollution, and most likely, aging. The secret of the success of modern skin care promotion is its constant denial of the diversity of women's skin tones, and its persistent claim on revealing instead of concealing female natural beauty, as cosmetics do. Exfoliating cream, masks and fruit acid are typical whitening skin care products which all carry the idea of eliminating blemishes so as to unfold one's pure complexion. Even women with the darkest skins are made to believe that beauty treatment can 'reverse' their skin to its 'original state', however slowly. But obviously there is no evidence it really can. The beauty myth of modern skin care is no less sacred than Li's dogma.

But then it does not mean Li underestimated the power of beauty management of female skin. He reiterated that the colours of women's skin could become lighter during the course of their life, if their body were less exposed to the sun and wind and they took special Chinese medicines²¹. Nevertheless, these kinds of skin management could not essentially rectify the natural colours of the skin, as the dye of a black cloth could not easily be removed and turned white. Hence Li concluded, 'Man may be a genius as to his skills, but he cannot win against Heaven.

²¹ *Ibid.* Cloud-mother and ground rock-crystal were two examples of Chinese medicines given by Li. These were also prescribed to the European women before 1920s, according to the endnotes of the article.

he cannot undo what was previously created' ²²¹ The beauty philosophy of contemporary culture, on the contrary, perpetually stresses individual achievement, in whitening the complexion just as in keeping the body fit:

Skin that is as smooth as porcelain. A complexion that glows with the luster of alabaster. A face that radiates flawless beauty, milky-white purity and eternal allure. . . This is the skin that every woman wishes for, and thanks to Lancôme, this is no longer an unattainable dream. ²²²

Women of all races, ages and physical appearances can attain this beauty of whiteness. 'Whiteness' is projected as a target, a goal to strive for, like the 'thinness' of the figure. The conception of whiteness is fetishized and venerated, and its appeal lies in its 'allure' and 'purity'. When it is claimed that the most possible factor sullyng the skin is civilization (pollution, harmful sun rays, unbalanced diet due to a stressful lifestyle, etc.), modern industry has invented beauty products as remedies for the skin, also from civilization. Vastly different from the hedonic tone of beauty regime promotions, the essence of those routines and austere methods of beauty practice are embodied in females labouring for themselves, under the prevalent ideology of self-improvement and personal fulfilment. The vicious cycle is effectively entrenched by the idea of white beauty that is commodified into names of 'crystal' and 'snowy' lines, and further visualized as 'creamy' and 'milky' lotions. With only

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p.280.

²²² 'White Magic', in *SCMP*, 30 March 1997.

money and a little effort ('a few applications'). women of contemporary society are swindled into believing that they can simply take the beauty of Snow White home, without realizing that they still need to work in order to consume

Clearly white is colour of the contemporary standard of female beauty. It is a cultural white. Like the craze for tanned/bronze skin some twenty years ago, the power of white is not manifest in its colour, but in the sacred messages it carries. There is a parity between white and tan/bronze, and all colours, for no sooner when the images of vanity and of awe have been construed than the colour extinguishes itself. Colours are only chess pieces in this cultural game, which is extremely important yet means nothing. The colour of white profoundly influences us nowadays because it has become an international skin colour, an emblem of new, perfect female beauty. This is no longer the natural white mentioned by Li, nor the fair skin colour pursued by the Occidentals themselves, but a holy, mythical white, pertinent to images instead of live human bodies. Baudrillard's discussion of the 'resacralization' of the body—that the secular body today has taken over from the soul as salvational scheme²⁴—makes sense in this context. But what I would like to add to this particular point is that the body is a religious imperative in contemporary culture, fully embodied in the obsession it arouses. It is an obsession of an object of whiteness in this case, for no reason, hence, it is irrational. The only motive sustaining this irrational preoccupation is faith, because only faith can find its standpoint in pursuance of the unknown. Signs signify nothing in this case.

²⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, p. 176

Whiteness is a sign of absolute sense, with no association with the signified, thriving on the intriguing mythology and rapture so called hedonism.

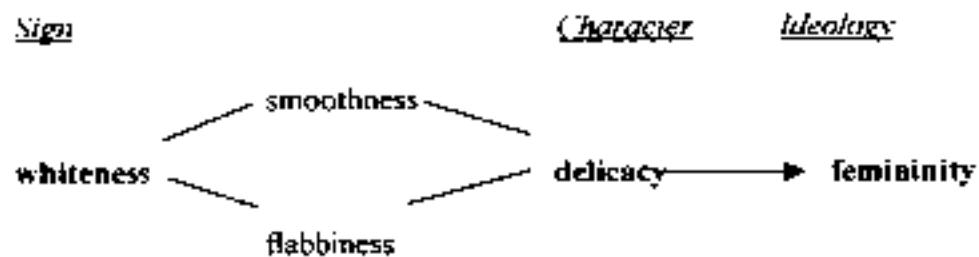
From this perspective, the globalization of white female images as ideal physical beauty should be taken as a cultural rather than a purely political (racial) issue that has been one of the most influential persuasion in academic field until most recently²²⁴. One possible reason for this point may be found by examining how white skin is related to the sense of touch. An essential quality of beautiful skin is smoothness, a gratification for the sense of touch. Smoothness is almost always praised in the same breath as whiteness of skin. Although apparently smooth skin is not necessarily white, there is a general impression that smoothness is proportionate to whiteness, due largely to contemporary skin care promotion campaigns that stresses the synchronization of both qualities. Consumer culture endorses cleanness, purity and flawlessness, the essential ingredients of smooth skin, as complements to white skin. The interrelationship between the sense of sight and of touch in modern standards of female beauty can be detected here. This, nevertheless, is not a unique phenomenon of today's culture. In Chinese cultural tradition, smoothness of female skin is portrayed as an inseparable attribute of white skin, since it was believed that delicate skin can become lighter more easily than coarse skin. Li likened fine-textured skin to silk that absorbs and loses colours much more quickly than cotton cloth (coarse skin).²²⁵ The idea is in concordance with the fact that fair skin tends to

²²⁴ For example, Anoop Nayak's essay 'Frozen Bodies: Disclosing Whiteness in Haagen-Dazs Advertising', in *Body & Society*, Vol. 3, No. 5, September, 1997, pp. 51-69

²²⁵ Eberhard, W. 'What Is Beautiful in a Chinese Woman?', pp. 280-281

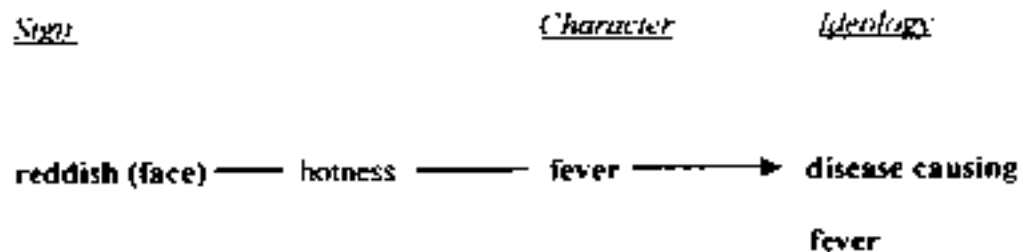
tan and fade more easily. What should be noted here is the association of the concept of smoothness with delicacy. As delicacy is what is valued highly, the way silk is ranked above all other fabrics, smooth skin is thus an object of desire for the distinctive daintiness it represents.

The ultimate quality of beauty that can be inferred from the close alignment between whiteness and smoothness in the traditional point of view is delicacy. The skin is glorified not simply because it is white, but also because white skin is indispensably regarded as smooth skin. By the sense of touch, smooth skin means delicate skin, and delicate skin is a typical embodiment of femininity.



Instead of a signifier/signified binary system, here we have a trio configuration, composed of signs, character, and ideology. Delicacy, like fragility, sentimentality or weakness, is a 'character' of femininity, and has to be explained and reified by whiteness (sign). Whiteness as visual sign is less directly associated with delicacy than with smoothness, which appeals to the sense of touch. Why is white, rather than black or yellow, seen as delicate? On the other hand, delicacy as a character is the result of provisional analysis, and is crucial for the interpretation of the sign. A

possible simile to the role of character in the configuration is 'symptom' in medical practice. Symptoms do not come about by themselves but are caused by illness or disease. Symptoms, such as fever and headache, are almost always detected through feelings rather than sight. Using disease as a trope, the following is another trio configuration:



Although a fever can be detected both by taking body temperature (touch) and observing certain outward signs (sight), the former is more reliable. Without heat, the colour red is unrelated to fever. Similarly, delicacy does not necessarily refer to whiteness without the 'touch' of smoothness. Therefore, traditionally, the Chinese concept of female beauty is not constructed on absoluteness (signification), but on a deep-seated ideology of femininity which is linked principally to the concept of delicacy.

Eberhard tried to explain the Chinese obsession with white skin by referring to social class²⁴. This paradigm is well established in the West for the analysis of pre-modern Western societies from a sociological perspective. There seems to be no

²⁴ Ibid. p.291

reason why it cannot be used in the context of traditional China. The only argument is that the influence of the aesthetic taste under probe on Chinese women should also be seriously taken into account. Certainly the fondness for delicacy is not unique to the Chinese, but only the Chinese have ever treasured it so greatly and steadfastly. Probably Li's discussion of the flabbiness of female skin can help elaborate this point:

Flabby and dark skin is like unironed silk cloth or like shoes left without stretchers . . . it is flabby only because there is not sufficient flesh and blood. It must be fed, and the effect is like ironing silk cloth or stretching shoes. As soon as there is enough flesh and blood, the skin looks different. Therefore I say that flabby skin can be made light more easily than firm skin.²⁴⁷

In addition to smoothness, Li attaches the notion of flabbiness to that of whiteness, which points to an ingrained interest in the tactile. Flabby skin is favoured not only because it is intimately linked with white skin, as Li suggests, but also because it is soft to the touch, which again connotes delicacy. Despite the fact that he obviously prefers flabby skin because of its potential for whiteness, he coverly declares his fondness for flabby skin, as one of the three elements for beautiful female skin. 'Should all men fight for the women with light, smooth and flabby skin, while those with darker, rougher, and firmer skin are condemned?'²⁴⁸, he notes. Flabbiness is an independent quality of beauty, according to the Chinese concept of Yin. The

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p.281

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

character for 'flabbiness' is 'rou' 柔 (softness), as opposed to the firmness/toughness of Yang. The softness of Yin represents an essential element of Chinese femininity, one which is reflected in the physical, psychological or behavioral composition of a woman. Hence flabbiness and smoothness should not be taken as secondary to whiteness, but rather, as preconditions for whiteness. It explains why flabby skin is loved. Even though Li puts flabbiness side by side dark skin, it does not seem to devalue flabbiness as it is later likened to unironed 'silk cloth'.

Based on the observation above, it can be concluded that the alliance of the notion of whiteness with smoothness and flabbiness in the traditional Chinese concept of female skin beauty is subsumed under an overriding concern for **naturalness**. The association with the traditional ideology of femininity which stresses the instinct-based femaleness frames the aesthetic taste regarding women within personal experience (feeling), which is efficiently conveyed through the sense of touch. White skin in the domain of nature appeals to the touch rather than to the eyes. The colour of white makes no sense visually except when paired up with the beauty of smoothness and flabbiness, which are its necessary catalysts of meaning. This marks a huge disparity from the modern standard of female skin beauty, notably in their attitudes towards the elasticity of the skin. Today flabby skin is far from being considered seductive. If anything, it has become something of a stigma. The modern preference for firm skin (of both sexes) is another symptom of the focus of human thinking on the visual sense. Human bodies are rendered into stable, well-defined forms.

A plump figure can still be concealed under the thick cover of winter clothes, but during the summer, exposing our bodies is inevitable, whether at beaches, swimming pools, in the gym, or even in the changing rooms of department stores.²²⁹

With the arrival of spring, it's time to start peeling off the layers. It's out with the sweaters – which hide a multitude of sins – and in with the sheer, the chic, and those body-clinging chiffon that leave so little to the imagination.²³⁰

The object of desire has to be clearly seen, and its form remains unchanged – a perpetual object, resembling the images of the media. Cosmetic manufacturers have invented products that can tone up the face as well as the figure, emphasizing on attaining a better 'silhouette' and 'shape'²³¹ of the human body. Even the perception of smoothness is visualized, usually accompanied by the 'lustre', the 'glow' of unwrinkled skin. The abstractions of beauty are not only reified by the framing effect of visualization, but also defined by visual associations, as fully illustrated by the modern approaches to female skin appreciation.

What is female beauty with regards to female skin, and how is it located in

²²⁹ From the article 'Tight & Toned', in *Elle*, July 1997, p.252, translated from the Chinese by me.

²³⁰ 'Shaping and Contouring Made Easier', in *SCMP*, March 30 1997.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, the selling points of the advertisement of Clarins' body care products are 'made-to-measure', 'firmer silhouette' and 'the shape of things to come' which is its catchword.

the context of Hong Kong? I have compared various properties of ideal female skin from the perspective of traditional Chinese aesthetics with modern trends. The focus is now shifted to the local context. In the first place, it is true that skin predominates in the judgment of female beauty as a whole, as reflected by the astronomical revenue obtained from the sales of skin care products among all mainstream beauty products in Hong Kong. There are reasons to believe that the situation in Hong Kong is similar to those of other countries—a typical result of the globalization of images of female beauty. While the controversies surrounding gender, race, and power politics are frequent, it would not be constructive to try to find a universal explanation, assuming it can be found, without thoroughly understanding individual contexts. The beauty culture in Hong Kong comes under the influence of global trends of course, but it also has a subtle and important affinity with Chinese culture. The local aesthetic taste with regards to female skin provides supporting evidence for treating the Hong Kong case as a unique one rather than another example of globalized aesthetics.

The element of central concern in female skin beauty in Hong Kong is colour. Information gathered from ancient Chinese literature on female beauty to the latest trends in Hong Kong shows that whiteness has consistently been considered beautiful with regards to female skin. Apart from colour, however, most other beauty attributes related to female skin have undergone marked transformations through the centuries. Most typical is the drastic change in attitude towards the elasticity of female skin I have just mentioned. Skin texture also underwent a change

from being a tactile quality to a visual quality. Beautiful female skin in the eyes of contemporary Hong Kong is judged according to three main criterias, colour (white), form (firm and toned) and light (smooth and lustrous). The modern ideals appeal to the sense of sight, compared with the traditional ideals of smoothness, flabbiness and whiteness which provide tactile gratification. Certainly the beautiful white skin women strive for nowadays is also not the same as that before. The colour of white is exceptionally provoking and complex in this very age when both natural and cultural elements integrate. I have collected and categorized the most important considerations of female white beauty from contemporary and the traditional perspectives in the following²³²

Traditional Chinese

White Beauty

1. Instinct-based beauty,
health and youth
2. *Social class*

Contemporary Hong Kong

White Beauty

1. *Sign of beauty - fashion*
2. *Means of self-improvement*
3. Health consciousness
4. *Social class*
5. *Race*

(Note: Factors are arranged according to their level of significance, with the first being the highest. 'Natural factors' appear in plain font while 'cultural factors' appear in *italics*.)

²³² Data is summarized from interviews with women's magazine editors and the personnel of Hong Kong cosmetic and skin care business, as well as past research on female fashion in Hong Kong in the sixties. HKPU.

Contemporary taste in white skin is determined overwhelmingly by cultural factors. In traditional aesthetics, cultural and natural factors seem equally important, but I believe that the latter had a greater influence than social class is more specific to its era in the traditional Chinese context, as I have discussed.

In the previous pages I made a general comparison between traditional and contemporary white beauty, which is theoretically constructed on the senses of beauty. Here I shall further elaborate on some of those ideas with respect to the context of Hong Kong. The diagram shows that the most influential factors in both cases are beauty-related. Disparity is noted in the natural/cultural dichotomy, with the traditional stressing human instinct and the contemporary clinging more to the trends of beauty. In line with the concept of innate beauty, appreciation of beauty is traditionally considered an instinct, and instincts are inborn. Except for criteria based on the 'need to reproduce' which were used to gauge female beauty (that has been confirmed also by recent anthropological research in the West), this 'instinct' is often treated in formal writings and literature as an enigma. Since female beauty is difficult to capture and control, being embodied distinctively in the feeling of 'charm', white is a seductive besides a reflective colour of fertility. Therefore, there is a schism between the understanding of instinct for beauty in the traditional sense and the concept of reproduction still being used in contemporary society of Hong Kong. The metaphysical perspective of beauty instinct, on the other hand, melted into a cultural urge—the love of white female skin is reconstructed by the media as a new human instinct, founded on a similar logic of mythology. From the natural to

the cultural instinct for white beauty there is a dramatic and interesting mutation, exhibiting how Chinese tradition is retained while assimilated by and synthesized with Western culture in contemporary Hong Kong society. Hence the meaning of beauty instinct is two-tiered – the cultural, absolute white skin boosted by skin care and cosmetic companies, and the natural white skin with a rosy transparency which is especially popular among older women.

There is another interesting issue in Hong Kong beauty culture of the nineties: the idea of healthy white skin. Cosmetic manufacturers have produced a wide range of skin whitening products, targeting at eliminating the harmful effects of the sun on skin. The threat of skin cancer and dehydration is infused into the paranoia of pigmented, dull, chapped, and wrinkled skin. The marriage of the concepts of beauty and health in white skin, like the craze for fitness, represents a new conjunction between culture and nature in this particular era in Hong Kong. Based on the same presumption that white skin is a mirror for good health and youth, the contemporary white, however, is distinguished from the traditional in its positing skin as an active rather than passive agent of beauty, in its notion that health is alterable and no longer determines the colour of the skin. Women whiten their skin to make it look healthy and compatible with their good health condition. Clearly there is an underlining of the human will in today's concept. Women apply special skin care products and paint their skin to be healthy. The power of signification in relation to the sense of sight is evident. This message of health conveyed through the visual white, and modified perhaps by modern cosmetics,

escapes the scrutiny of 'touch'

Another issue related closely to health consciousness is the association of skin beauty maintenance with self-improvement. Women's magazines play an especially crucial role in this respect, delivering or defying the trend. With regards to white skin, Hong Kong's women's magazines have a double standard – promoting white skin by numerous advertisements of cosmetics and skin care products while showing an abundance of beauty photos of women of different colours. This is particularly the case in the new generation of women's magazines, such as *Orient Beauty*. Besides the linguistic texts of these magazines seldom teach women how to 'work hard' at achieving whiteness, unlike in some traditional Chinese beauty manuals. It may be due to the fact that, unlike dieting and exercise for body fitness, natural ways of lightening skin colours are limited. The most one can do is to prevent it from darkening by staying out of the sun. A more plausible reason is the magazines' purposeful adoption of the traditional ideal of female skin colour. This is why the position of women's magazines is often perceived to be ambiguous, if not conventional. This double standard should be differentiated from the current one related to female stereotypes, though both make ambivalent statements on female beauty. Contemporary critics including Ellen McCracken and Janice Winship accuse women's magazines of advocating women's right while stereotyping them by imposing standards for female beauty. On the contrary, tackling the issue of white beauty, the new generation of women's magazines in Hong Kong releases women from stereotypes by questioning prevailing trends of skin colour while promoting

commercial products for achieving the very skin colour they advocate. The white culture in female beauty has added a new dimension to the ideological configuration of women's magazines. The controversy is not just whether new modes of female beauty can empower women through self-improvement, but also whether traditional aesthetic standards would imprison women in their old roles, even though they may be repackaged as the ideal of white skin.

All in all, the beauty culture of white skin in contemporary Hong Kong is a result of diverse cultural factors. Global culture, Chinese traditions inherited and recreated, in some cases, local inventions combine into the complex and multiple layers of Hong Kong beauty culture. By comparison, social and racial factors are less significant in setting this trend. Class struggle used to be a vital factor affecting people's taste in skin colour in old societies of China and was still influential in Hong Kong until the sixties. The role of race in white skin culture is relatively unimportant in Hong Kong compared to mixed societies. Nevertheless, it was one of the contributing factors from its days of colonization to perhaps 10 years before the handover of its sovereignty to China. Today beliefs associating white skin with class and racial superiority are preserved chiefly in Hong Kong women above 35 years of age²⁷. To the younger generations, there has been, in fact, a counter force as witnessed by contemporary beauty promotions and beauty representations. There have been attempts at selling 'international beauty' through the promotion of female models and movie stars of alternative colours, and introducing new aesthetic

²⁷ Source from 'The Influence of Female Movie Stars on the Fashion in Hong Kong in the Sixties'

standards on skin colour through beauty articles and contests²⁴

The revival of white skin in female beauty culture in Hong Kong in the nineties is a complex phenomenon deserving close scrutiny. Today, voices are not raised aggressively and directly against the revival of the tradition, as they did the craze for tanned skin. Rather they are transformed into subtly subversive narratives and actions that challenge old standards. This is how the contemporary culture of white skin in Hong Kong strives: on ambivalence—resisting yet conforming to tradition. In the process, **whiteness is given new meaning**. Women flaunt their white skin not because it signifies good breeding and a life of leisure, but because it is the latest fashion and the fruits of long and hard labour.

research project, HKPU, 1994-95.

²⁴ There was an award for 'Lady with the Most Beautiful Skin' in Hong Kong Asian Beauty Pageant, 1998, the criteria of which were firmness, smoothness and lustre, and surprisingly excluded whiteness.

CONCLUSION

This thesis attempted to challenge the validity and applicability of existing theories, largely from the West, in the interpretation of female beauty in the contemporary context of Hong Kong. It was undertaken by rethinking and re-estimating the cultural representations of female beauty and by regarding them as new and distinctive beauty images of Hong Kong. Problematizing the old, I also constructed new theoretical frameworks that are relevant to the particular contemporary context of beauty images in Hong Kong.

Challenging Old Approaches and Theories

In this research I treated 'images of female beauty' as a problem, 'representations in women's magazines' as a case, and 'contemporary Hong Kong' as a context. The methodology of research is, therefore, reflective and contextual, phenomenon-rather than theory-oriented. This can prevent misinterpretations and even distorted facts resulting from having the singular aim of justifying certain theories, which is, in fact, common in contemporary research on similar themes which lay overwhelming stress on ideology. I adopted a multi-perspective and cross-fertilizing approach that integrates different methodologies, including the empirical, theoretical, historical, and semiological, as well as case studies of images of female beauty. **The**

theories used come from multiple disciplines, such as aesthetics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, anthropology, history, and gender studies

This research explored the images of female beauty **with special respect to their spatial and temporal context** of contemporary Hong Kong. This is not only because relevant theories within the context of Hong Kong are rare, but also due to my belief that female beauty is something changing rather than static in time and space. I am particularly attentive to the association of contemporary Hong Kong concepts of beauty with traditional Chinese and Western values, on the premise that it is a crucial factor contributing to the uniqueness of Hong Kong beauty culture. Besides the 'beauty of Chinese women' had not been a subject of systematic investigation in Hong Kong, nor had the applicability of Western theories and concepts been tested. Within this particular context of Hong Kong are the uniqueness of her history, the rapid transformation of her contemporary culture and the specific embodiment of female beauty of a population that is ethnically predominantly Chinese. This condition assures the expediency of a contextual study of Hong Kong cultural history.

A **comparative approach** was adopted, besides the reflective method. This approach was predicated on my viewpoint that cultural factors should be relational and interactive, rather than isolated and self-explanatory. The approach can also exercise certain control over the theoretical overload and chaos that may result from the reflective method. In practice, I achieved this by juxtaposing different theories

and phenomena, setting oppositions, comparing and contrasting, and synthesizing variations. I was particularly interested in establishing systems of dichotomy, within which the diversified material could be systematically scrutinized. This method was inductive and deductive, and not just reflective. The ultimate aim is to better structure and focus the research, and avoid the rigid categorization of different concepts using binary systems. In this way, the changeability and complexity of the real situation can be more easily and clearly comprehended.

Construction of New Theories

Before exploring the characteristics of images of female beauty in Hong Kong, I examined the uniqueness of traditional Chinese conceptions of female beauty. As traditional Chinese female beauty had not often been subject to systematic investigation, an exploration of the issue helped pave the way to an understanding of the Hong Kong context. It was especially crucial since I discovered a certain affiliation between the two cultural systems on concepts of beauty founded on experience. This specific mode of beauty, which I termed 'experiential beauty', is a manifestation of traditional Chinese aesthetics, and it is often found in classical representations of Chinese women. I distinguished experiential beauty from evidential beauty, stressing **aesthetic feeling** which results from the process of aesthetic appreciation rather than trying to pinpoint what the object of beauty is. This aesthetic feeling is initiated by a close and specific correlation between the

faculty of the senses and of imagination, the operation of which is self-sufficient and not dependent on the mediation of rational thinking. In short, the experience glorifies aesthetic imagination by extolling the uncertainty and mysticism of female beauty.

Apart from imagination, I treated senses as the central idea of the Chinese concept of female beauty, as it is the means through which the beholder is brought close to the everyday experience of women that the Chinese especially treasure. The senses refers to the 'five senses' – sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Each contributes equally to the aesthetic pleasure of female beauty. Hence, judgment is not confined to the domain of sight. As traditional Chinese are more skeptical of visual perception than of the other senses, somaesthetic judgment of female beauty is not made based on the physical make-up of a woman. This concept is revealed in the Chinese taste for **formless female beauty**, whose attributes cannot be calculated and identified by the sense of sight. This formless beauty is connected subtly with the idea of **change**, embodied in the body's movement, and various actions and scenes in the daily life of a woman. Nonetheless, the formlessness and mysticism do not give rise to an idealistic or essential beauty. Traditional Chinese emphasize human reality, hence, only the beauty of earthiness of **living women** is celebrated. Female beauty, notably charm, is an abstract quality **inexplicable by language**, although it can be 'learned' from charming women through the very experience of 'living' itself. Female beauty is, therefore, simultaneously a born and cultivated trait of women, due to the fact that there is an **absence of a nature/culture division** in traditional Chinese concepts of female beauty.

Inspired by the idea of the five senses in Chinese beauty, I drew up a **theoretical framework based on the 'five senses'** to test and verify some of my findings. This gives this thesis its specific structure—the first few and the closing chapters are closely interrelated. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 compared between Western and Chinese concepts of beauty by tracing both cultures from historical and philosophical perspectives. From this I **established the theory of Western evidence/Chinese experience**, and I concluded that neither Western nor Chinese concepts alone can explain Hong Kong's case. This view is tested and proved by the framework of the 'five senses' in Chapter 7 by applying the theory to the actual situation of Hong Kong. Hence Chapter 7 is virtually a **reification of 'concepts'** discussed throughout Chapters 1-3. This is less an attempt to account for the essential difference between Western and Chinese cultures, than to differentiate between some of their basic concepts that are closely related to the present phenomenon of Hong Kong. The substantiation of theories (Chapters 1-3) by facts (Chapter 7, which also echoes chapter 1) is briefly summarized as follows:

Western evidence

- affirmation of material body
- interested in physical appearance of female body
- dominance of gaze
- fragmentation & objectification
- stress particular locus and form (fashion and fitness) and colour (cosmetics) of body
- significance of evidence
- beauty as 'signs' in system of signification (e.g. white skin, red lips)

Chinese experience

- disinterest in female physical form
- skepticism to sense of sight (e.g. skin care)
- emphasis on sensation arising from aesthetic experience (e.g. charm)

The primary concern and, hence, the most important outcome of this thesis is the **construction of a theoretical framework of female beauty relevant to the contemporary context of Hong Kong**. I accomplish it by contextual studies not only of Chinese culture, but also of Western culture in general, for together they form the two main backgrounds of Hong Kong beauty culture. From this I found that beauty culture in Hong Kong is a **syncretism of both Western and Chinese culture**, covertly uncovered in the representations of female beauty in media such as women's magazines. This syncretism is actually an integration of fundamental concepts, between the visual beauty of the West and the experiential beauty of the

Chinese, through the process of **coordination, conglomeration and construction**. From my theoretical framework predicated on the concept of senses, I deduced senses as the pivotal factor in the discrepancy between Chinese/West thinking. The West sees **visuality** as the paramount perception, for they associate the senses with the **faculty of cognition/reason**. The Chinese, on the other hand, associate the senses more with the **faculty of imagination** so that the hierarchy among the five senses is **wiped out in the face of spontaneous experience**. This framework of the 'five senses' serves to explore and testify the synthetic culture of beauty in Hong Kong. While the contemporary taste of female beauty is enormously bound up with the Western somaesthetics of **visuality**, the traditional mode of Chinese aesthetics remains important in molding images of beautiful women in contemporary Hong Kong. It means that the hegemony of the sense of sight, consequently caused by **objectification, fragmentation and concentration on the colour, size and shape** of female physical beauty, is balanced out by the great significance of perception of other senses, which is remarkably seen, for example, in the obsession with **fine, smooth and firm skin** today. This progressive interaction and merging of different concepts contribute to new directions of Hong Kong female beauty, the configurations of which are characterized by **constant changes and variations**. Seen from this aspect, the female beauty culture of contemporary Hong Kong is not merely a product of encounter between Chinese and the West, but more of a consequence of a **self-evolving process** in a complex, multi-orientated cultural situation.

Emblematic of this syncretism is the **emergence of a new female beauty**, exhibited in the new representations of women in contemporary women's magazines in Hong Kong. This new kind of female beauty is **neither Oriental nor Occidental**, neither idealistic nor realistic, and neither feminist nor chauvinist. It is, rather, a **destruction and reconstruction of all these positions**. It is an **eclectic and postmodern beauty**. Kim Robinson has highlighted the eclectic as a new orientation of Hong Kong female beauty:

Hong Kong is no longer blindly following the latest trends, the girls on the street have a new confidence that reflects the international scene and are wearing the latest styles their ways.²²⁶

These new images are basically imbued with the following characteristics, which verify the hypotheses I posed in the 'introduction'.

1. These images are **eclectic**, showing ambivalence in terms of nationality, gender positions and attributes (real/representations).
2. These images reveal the prevalent **ideologies of femininity** that more and more emphasizes the **physical appearance** of women, which is a result of increased influence by Western visual aesthetics.

²²⁶ *Orient Beauty*, Summer 95, p.38.

3. These images witness the magazines' effort to appeal to and react against current powers in the society, one of which is patriarchy
4. These images echo the contemporary trends of beauty management in Hong Kong and, hence, to a great extent, reflect the look of everyday women as they reflect the beauty culture.

But even if I call it postmodern female beauty, it should be differentiated from the beauty of post-modernity seen elsewhere, since it evolves from a contextual stratum particular to Hong Kong. This is a beauty that is connected with traditional Chinese and Western cultures as mentioned above. On the surface, the beauty illuminates elements of internationalism, ambivalence in gender positions and the aestheticization of everyday life. On a deeper level, these eclectic qualities are underpinned by a conceptual synthesis of experiential and evidential female beauty. Female images in women's magazines, therefore, not only represent stereotypes, as commonly considered, but more complex types of female beauty that result from a changing structure on a conceptual rather than formal level. There, for example, we see female beauty representations as a mixture of standardized physical forms and of flowing sensation, or as combination of Chinese corporeality with Western behaviour and lifestyles. Hence the meaning of postmodern Hong Kong female beauty goes far beyond the neutralization of various extremes by a combination of polarized 'forms' of beauty. Rather, it is a throwing together and reinvention of

diversified components of beauty in respect of the mutable relationship between experiential and evidential beauty.

I predict that not only will this new image of beauty persist and **proliferate** in the near future, but that it is also evidence of an accelerated importance of the role of **images** in the contemporary society of Hong Kong. The increased significance of female beauty as representations in the media has affirmed this direction. This point has also been proven by the fact that more rather than fewer women's magazines have been launched after 1997, though the media had predicted a saturated market for the period. These images play with the natural and cultural codes of female beauty, and seek to overstep their representative roles. This trend is foreshadowed by the popularity of **photography** and reasserted by the introduction of digital photos and virtual tele-images. A picture of female beauty, such as that found in women's magazines, bespeaks a 'reality' of a beautiful woman that could be formulated on culture. It, nonetheless, does not signify an effacement of delineation between culture and nature. Instead, there is a **restatement of this division by reclaiming their variances**. While the beauty images try to make use of elements of nature, the meaning of nature itself is also **redefined**. It is from this process that not only is the culture of female beauty not stagnant, but what is meant by natural female beauty also undergoes change. In these representations we come across situations in which cloned and repetitive images of female beauty are juxtaposed with individual images of beauty, and functional, signal beauty, with instinctive beauty. With the intervention of the experiential beauty of the Chinese, the dimension of these images

is not limited at the level of 'hyperreality' caused by a simulation of reality, for reality or nature itself can not be measured by the evidence serving for simulation. In the everyday situation, real women in turn consume, emulate and respond to these images of female beauty portrayed in the media according to individual contexts. The reciprocal positions and circular movement reinforced by the representations and the real would consequently lead to a renewal and enlargement, rather than limitation of female appearance and identities of contemporary Hong Kong women.

Significance

'Images of female beauty in Hong Kong' is a topic which had not yet been subject to thorough academic investigation. This was due mainly to the prejudice against using female beauty as a topic for intellectual enquiry. This concept neglects the prominent role played by female beauty in popular culture which, in turn, is a dominant shaping force in the contemporary culture of Hong Kong. In tampering with this preconception, the research positions the argument of female beauty within the area of cultural studies, particularly the work on post-colonialism and post-modernity, gender studies, aesthetics, cultural representation and identity. This helps to draw attention to the topic and place female beauty and its representations as a core rather than a subsidiary and subordinate issue for contemporary culture.

To date, research projects on Hong Kong female beauty are exiguous. In addition to the common prejudice, it is rendered by a deficiency of relevant theories, especially those from a Chinese context. Theories on traditional Chinese female beauty, like those expounded by Dorothy Ko and Eberhard Wolfram, basically lack insight and structure, and tend to be intuitive in many cases. Along with the assertion of the affiliation of the beauty images of Chinese women between the traditional and the Hong Kong, the logic of Chinese aesthetics, chiefly that of female beauty, are also brought forward for systematic investigation. From this I drew up **the theory of 'experientialism' of Chinese female beauty**, which can supplement the lack of Chinese theories, besides bridging the theoretical gaps in the historical context. This is necessary for an exploration of Hong Kong beauty.

The primary significance of this thesis is undoubtedly **the construction of theories of images of female beauty pertaining to contemporary Hong Kong**. The scarcity of relevant theories on the specific topic necessitated an initial focus on Western theories of female beauty. However, the thesis attempted to analyse and challenge this material and this establishes a theoretical framework with reference to the Hong Kong context. I formulated the framework of the 'five sense' for examining and testing the validity of Western theories in the local context. I also put forward the theories of emergence of a new female beauty, one which reflects the new cultural representations as well as the new attributes of beauty embodied in everyday women's looks in Hong Kong. In providing alternative study to mainstream researches of female images focusing on consumption and feminist

studies, this thesis can **broaden the scope of cultural research on female beauty and go beyond the narrow interpretations resulting from the use of existing theories.** Finally, I supplied information and forecasted the trend of female beauty, which can be valuable for **the improvement and revolution of the beauty business and of beauty representations in Hong Kong's media.**

Further Studies

This research concentrated on exploring female beauty with relation to its representations in women's magazines in Hong Kong. I have pointed out the three components of the structure of this thesis, which are 'femaleness', 'beauty' and 'images', with the topic of 'beauty' being most predominant. For 'images', there is still space for further investigation, such as of the images of women in association with the everyday life of real women in Hong Kong, although this was quite beyond the scope of this research. The study of beauty representations can also mean a focused media study, looking into, for example, the process of image creation and pleasure arising from the consumption of these images of beauty. For the area of 'women', I examined the relation of images of female beauty with the notion of power, in the chapter 'The Power of Beauty', with regards to beauty representations in women's magazines. This chapter opened up some important issues relating specifically to gender issues and their connection with contemporary female beauty. Questions of women's roles and positions in respect of female beauty culture in

Hong Kong are still to be unraveled, and can be one of most worthwhile topics for further research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aaron, D. *About Face: Towards a Positive Image of Women in Advertising*. Toronto: Ontario Status of Women Council, 1976.

'Ad Revenue Helps Identify the Successful Titles in Hong Kong Market'. *Media*. Hong Kong, 25 Oct 1991.

Allen, R. *Reading Women Writing*. Prepared for the Course Team by Richard Allen.
Femininity and Women's Magazines: A Case Study of Woman's Own - 'First in Britain for Women'. Prepared for the Course Team by Janice Winship. Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1983.

Association for the Advancement of Feminism. *Women and Media*. Hong Kong: AAF, 1987.

Baehr H. & Gray, A. *Turning it On*. Arnold, 1996.

Baudrillard, J. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981.

Baudrillard, J. *Selected Writings*. Edited by Mark Poster. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988.

Baudrillard, J. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. London: Sage, 1993.

Beard, M. R. *On Understanding Women*. New York: Longmans Green, 1931.

Bebel, A. *Woman in the Past, Present and Future*. London: Modern Press, 1885.

- Benstock, S. *On Fashion*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994.
- Berger J. *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin, 1972.
- Featherstone, M. & Turner, B. (eds.). *Body and Society*. Sage, periodical.
- Bond M. H. *Beyond the Chinese Face*. Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Bonner, F. *Imaging Women: Cultural Representations and Gender*. Polity Press in association with the Open University, 1992.
- Bordo, S. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Bronfen, E. *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.
- Brownmiller, S. *Femininity*. Glasgow: Paladin, 1986.
- Butler, M. and Paisley, W. *Women in Contemporary Society*. London: Macmillan, 1988.
- Cantor, M. 'Popular Culture and the Portrayal of Women: Content and Control' in *Analyzing Gender*. California: Sage, 1987.
- Ceulemans, M. *Mass Media: the Image, Role, and Social Conditions of Women: Collection and Analysis of Research Materials*. Unesco: distributed by Unipub, 1979.
- Chapkis, W. *Beauty Secrets*. London: The Women's Press, 1988.

- Chen, P. A. *A Study on the Localization of International Women's Magazines and Readers' Attitudes Towards the Trend*. Hong Kong: Department of Business Studies, The Hong Kong Polytechnic, 1993.
- 'Chinese Glossies to Create New Market', *Media and Marketing*, Hong Kong, May 27 1986.
- Chung, L. 'Degrading' Ad a Female Idea, Agency Says'. *Women's News Digest*, Hong Kong: 1991.
- Craig J. *The Face of Fashion*. Routledge, 1994.
- Croll, E. *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*. Hong Kong University Press, 1995.
- Davis, F. *Fashion. Culture and Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Duby, G. *Power and Beauty: Images of Women in Art*. London: Tauris Parke Books, 1992.
- Ewen, S. *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*. New York: Basic Books, 1988.
- Ewen, S. *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982.
- Farley, J. 'Women's Magazines and the Equal Rights Amendment: Friend or Foe?' in *Journal of Communication*. Vol.28, 1978.
- Faulder, C. *Is This Your Life? Images of Women in the Media*. London: Virago, 1977.

- Featherstone, M. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Sage, 1991.
- Ferguson, M. *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity*. London: Heinemann, 1983.
- Finkelstein, J. *The Fashioned Self*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1991.
- Fisher, J. *Global Visions*. London: Kala Press, 1994.
- Flugel, J. C. *The Psychology of Clothes*. London: Hogarth Press, 1930.
- Foucault, M. *The Use of Pleasure*. Vintage, 1990.
- Freud, S. 'The Psychology of Women'. *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. London: Hogarth Press, 1933.
- Freud, S. *The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman*. Coll. Papers, 1920.
- Gaines, J. and Herzog, C., eds. *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Gallagher, M. *Unequal Opportunities: the Case of Women and the Media*. Unesco Press, 1981.
- George, W. L. *The Story of Women*. New York: Chapman & Hall, 1925.
- Germaine G. *The Female Eunuch*. London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1971.
- Grosz E. *Volatile Bodies*. Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Gulk, R. H. van. *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period*. 1992.

- Gulk, R. H. van. *Sexual Life in Ancient China*. Leiden E. J. Brill. 1974.
- Halprin, S. *Look at My Ugly Face*. Penguin, 1995.
- Harrison, M. *Beauty Photography in Vogue*. Octopus Books, 1987.
- Hebdige, D. *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*. New York: Routledge. 1988.
- Hebdige, D. *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen. 1979.
- Ho, S.C. 'Sex Role Portrayals in Print Advertisements: the Case of Hong Kong'. *Equal Opportunities International*. No.4, Vol. 2, 1983.
- Hollander, A. *Seeing Through Clothes*. New York: Viking, 1975. Hong Kong 1994.
- Kalish, D. 'Creative Concepts: Who's That Girl?' *Marketing & Media Decisions*. Oct 1987.
- Klein, V. *Feminine Character: History of an Ideology*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Ko, D. *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*. Stanford University Press. 1994.
- Kuhn, A. *The Power of the Image: Essays in Representation and Sexuality*. London: Routledge & Degan Paul. 1985.
- Kulkarni, V.G. *Asian Social Consciousness of Women's Roles in Mass Media*. Centre for Communication Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1976.
- Legge, J., trans. *Confucius*. New York: Dover, 1971.

- Leung, P. K. *City at the End of Time*. Introduced by Abbas A. and translated by Osing G. T. Hong Kong University Cultural Studies Series No. 3. 1992.
- Li Yu. *Xianqing Ou Ji* 閒情偶寄, 上海國學研究社, 1936.
- Lin Yutang. *The Importance of Living*. William Heinemann Ltd. London: 1938.
- Lin Yutang. *Confucius Saw Nany and Essays about Nothing*. The Commercial Press Ltd., Shanghai: 1936.
- Luo. Xianqin. *Zhongguo Minzu Shi* 中國民族史, Chinese Culture Publication. 1953.
- Lury. C. 'Making Up and Making Do'. *Consumer Culture*.
- MacCannell. D. & MacCannell, J. F. 'The Beauty System'. *The Ideology of Conduct*. London: Methuen, 1988.
- Macdonald, M. *Representing Women*. Edward Arnold. 1995.
- Mackenzie. J. M., *Orientalism - History. Theory and the Arts*. Manchester University Press, 1995.
- Man, K. W. 傳統傳統與當代中國馬克思美學中的〈自然人化〉題 *Jufao Chuan tung yu tang tai Chung-kuo Ma-ko-ssu mei hsueh*, doctoral thesis, 1990.
- Marwick, A. *Beauty in History*. Thames & Hudson, 1988.
- Mattelart, M. *Women. Media. and Crisis: Femininity and Disorder*. Comedia Pub. Group. 1986.

- McCracken, E. *Decoding Women's Magazines from Mademoiselle to Ms. Basingstoke*. Hampshire: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's 1993.
- Mencius, *Regulating the Family*. Book III.
- Miller, C. *Words and Women. New Language and New Times*. New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1976.
- Millum, T. *Images of Woman. Advertising in Women's Magazines*. London: Charto and Windus, 1975.
- Motte, C., ed. *The Chinese Mind – Essentials of Chinese Philosophy & Culture*. University of Hawaii Press, 1968.
- Nead, L. *Female Nude- Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*. Routledge, 1992.
- Not Following the Rules But Still Playing the Game*. Hong Kong: Media, 1990.
- Partridge, M. 'Packaging the Public Women: the Role of the Media in Hong Kong' presented at *Women of Hong Kong: From Domestic into Public World?*, workshop held by the Center for Asian Studies, The University of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong Council of Women, 1989.
- Pearson, V. & Leung, P. K. *Women in Hong Kong*. Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Peter, S. 'Fashion Colonialism: French Export 'Marie Claire' Makes In - reads'. *Advertising Age*, vol. 60, 1989.
- Plato. *Symposium*

- Rabine, L. 'Women's Two Bodies: Fashion Magazines, Consumerism, and Feminism'. *On Fashion*. Benstock, S. & Ferriss, S. (eds).
- Reilly, P. "'Vogue' Readies an Invigorated Assault on 'Elle'". *Advertising Age*. July 17, 1989.
- Rewick, F. *Nobel Body Image: a Socio-Psychological Theory: Hierarchy and Model Applied to Consumer Behavior and the Marketing of Female Self-Esteem*. Document Supply Centre. British Library, 1986.
- Rose, J. *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*. New York: Verso, 1986.
- Schoorbus, P. 'Personal Appeal'. *Marketing & Media Decisions*, Oct 1987.
- Scott, R. *The Female Consumer*. London: Associated Business Programs, 1976.
- Seid. *Never Too Thin*.
- Shevelov, K. *Women and Print Culture*. Routledge, 1989.
- Sinn, E. (ed), *Culture and Society in Hong Kong*. Centre for Asian Studies, The Hong Kong University, 1995.
- Skov, L. & and Moeran B. *Women Media and Consumption in Japan*. Curzon Press, 1995.
- So, S. 'Gender Stereotyping in Hong Kong: A Content Analysis of Print Advertising' in *Proceedings of the Academy of International Business Southeast Asia Regional Conference, Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, June, 1990.

Sonenklar, C. 'Women and Their Magazines'. *American Demographics*, June 1986.

Sze, S. (大眾化的婦女雜誌與其區異形態), 收在 *媒介與文化 - 香港研究*, 1989.

Sze, S. *香港高級女性雜誌的圖像文化及意識形態*, 香港中文大學新聞及傳播與社會發展研究會論文, 1991.

Taniguchi, E. *Aphrodite for the 1990's*. Shogakukan, 1985.

Ted, P. *Body Styles*. Lennard Publishing, 1988.

Terawanji, S. *Access to Education and Employment in Mass Media in Hong Kong*. Centre for Communication Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1976.

Featherstone, M. & Turner, B. (eds.), *Theory, Culture and Society*. Sage.

Thompson, C. *The Role of Women in this Culture in Psychiatry*, vol. 4, 1941.

Tseclon, E. *The Masque of Femininity*. Sage, 1995.

Turner B. S. *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*. Routledge, 1994.

Veloo, B. M. *Clark Kents Giving Way to Lois Lanes: Fourth Estate No Longer a Mostly Male Domain*. Hong Kong: Window, 1993.

Wang, Q. *Li Yu Yan Jiu 天涯研究*. Jijiang Classics Publication, 1996.

- Weibel, K. *Mirror, Mirror. Images of Women Reflected in Popular Culture*. New York Anchor Books, 1977
- Wilson, E. *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*. London. Virago, 1985
- Wilson, E. & Taylor, L. *Through the Looking Glass: A History of Dress from 1860 to the Present Day*. London: BBC Books, 1989.
- Winship, J. *Inside Women's Magazines*. London: Pandora, 1987
- Wolf, N. *The Beauty Myth*. Toronto, Ont Random House, 1990
- Wolfram, E. 'What Is Beautiful About a Chinese Woman?' *Moral and Social Values of the Chinese: Collected Essays*. Taipei: Chengwan, 1971.
- Wolfram, E. *Life and Thought of Ordinary Chinese Collected Essays*, Taipei Republic of China, 1982.
- Women's Magazines: Enough Is Enough*. Hong Kong. Media and Marketing, 1987
- Xiangyan Congshu 香艳丛书 A*. Beijing: People Literature Publication, 1992.
- Lee Xiao-hong L. *The Virtue of Yin - Studies on Chinese Women*. Wild Peony Pty Ltd. 1994.
- Yu, T & Chu, L L. *Women and Media in Asia*. Center for Communication Studies. The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1976.
- Zhu, Guangqian. *Tan Mei 姵美*. Taipei: New Cultural Business Company Ltd., 1993
- Zoonen, L. van. *Feminist Media Studies*. Sage, 1994.

Zuckerman, L. 'Who's Running the Newsroom?' *Time Magazine*, 28 November, 1988.

Appendix I Interviews with editors of women's magazines in Hong Kong

Topics / Title of WM	Elle	Orient Beauty	Sisters' Pictorial	Elegance	Marie Claire	Cosmo-politan
Date of interview	7/12/1995	6/2/1996	27/1/1996	11/1/1996	11/1/1996	5/2/1995
Editor's name	Elizabeth Chan (fashion & beauty editor)	Yukenne Wong (editor in chief)	Evelyn Chan (editor in chief)	Meeling Louie (fashion & beauty editor)	Meeling Louie (fashion & beauty editor)	Josephine Chan (editorial director)
Time working for the M	3 years	12 year	More than one year	Less than 5 years	5 years	No information
Job's nature	involved practically with every aspect of the M - seeing and visiting in Europe, organizing ideas for each month, localizing foreign brand, writing editorial articles - doing the copy & making sure layout is correct	make plan for the M from the cover to the content, participating in interviews and photo shooting consultation, coordinating with stylists, photographers, celebrities or writers, proof reading and writing	The position is like a "great QJ" who checks and makes sure every editorial and production work is OK before the M is compiled. She also has to deal with some day to day administrative and managing work.	Similar to Marie Claire	Apart from doing the basic editorial work, she has to conduct the annual plan for the direction of the M. She has also to deal with advertisers for more sale's revenue e.g. recently design a book (attached to the M) for promoting a French perfume.	Supervise the work and direction of the M
Language of the M	Chinese	Bilingual (Chin & Eng)	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese
Areas of circulation	Hong Kong, China	Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Southern China (Shenzhen)	Hong Kong editor for HK and major cities all over the world (New York, London, Paris, etc.) and Singapore & Malaysia edition and Taiwan edition	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Hong Kong
Readers' favourite pages/ Why	Fashion & Beauty section acts as a F&B directory, within this the Top Ten Items which shows local products readers can buy is the most favourite. It's because the busy people in HK need something practical.	It's a M special for Beauty. It is chosen because women in HK concern very much with their look resulting from the fact that: 1) they look better than their older generation, 2) they become financial independence, 3) they take refuge in companionship as they lack sense of security due to 1997.	Beauty and Health section. The second favourite is local fashion. It is simply that advertisement is a universal interest of women. Beautiful outlook is the prior importance (rather than personality or ability) in evaluating women in HK. It becomes a trend that even one who doesn't care about beauty would need copies of magazines to be	Fashion & Beauty section. It is believed that the visual-based F&B section excels other sections by providing leisure reading and are more attractive to HK readers whose lifestyle are rich and have on reading habit.	Those who read the M would find almost every section interesting (no particularly F&B). The M caters for a group of women who wants to know more than just beauty and fashion. She believes that this segment is expanding while our society is upgrading.	Beauty and Health. It is simply that the love of adornment is a nature of women, even looking at beautiful things is a source of pleasure.

			shared with peers			
Orientation of the WM	Fashion & Beauty	Beauty facts as a beauty guide of beauty, health, especially threat beauty which is also the title of the M due to the Partnership between Hachette Magazine (House Ltd. and Le Salon System Inc.	A bi-weekly entertaining M for women. Its broad contents include local and foreign fashion, lifestyle, home furnishing, cuisine, travelling, psychological tests, features on stars, news on books and cultural activities, fiction, besides beauty and health	It contains many topics (e.g. models) besides fashion and beauty. Though its local origin is a focus of promotion, international touch is also found in the M	A WM with dynamic content. Besides fashion and beauty, it concerns topics as far as races or women's issues all over the world, as close as people, human relation and society around HK women	A lifestyle WM. Its content includes many aspects - aspect concerns how a woman looks (e.g. trend of B&F) and aspect concerns how she thinks (human psychology and human relationship). Beauty and fashion only takes up 10-15% of the content of the M
Criteria of creating an image	most important is to make sure people see what you present, i.e. to show what trends are rather than just take beautiful pictures as Elle is a informative, useful WM	No strict formula or criteria could be applied in creating image. To show one's natural beauty by highlighting one's most beautiful parts is important. Trend and disposition of models are also factors of concern. The editorial team and stylists concerned more of the technique and mood of a picture than the beauty of the model itself (perhaps because they are foreigners). Y's define replacing this by more natural, everyday rather than glamorous look of models.	Mainly follow the tradition of the M - to create beautiful and approachable female image. The styling and fashioning of models is influenced by the latest trend to the extent that it is well accepted by the mass. The traditional layout of using numerous small illustrations are gradually replaced by full-page photos. Playing around spacing and characters also contribute to a certain divergence from the tradition	For creating a fashion story for fashion page, they have to decide the theme for the story first, and then go for a model who is suitable for the image to be created, e.g., whiter, fresher face for Spring. For covers, the character, background and age of models rather than trends are criteria of creating images. Naturalism in the 90s focused on reflecting a model's personality has replaced artificial looks in covers in the 70s	What more important than trends is the Marie Claire's touch, that is, how to send out trendy message with one's own personality, so that one can always master over trends and maintain her style. An editor's taste is influential for the M. Fortunately, Marie Claire style just wins Mcleung's taste	Trends/trends of the world) dominant the images of the M. Among various trends, the editor would select particular trends which suit the personal taste of the editor. There is an art director for creating the images for the covers. He tried create new looks for the movie stars according to trends and seasons. 11 or 2 out of 12 issues would have sexy cover images.
People determining the creation	Major creation is from the designers. The editor mixes the original designers' ideas with her own taste and style of the M. She also interpret it into a everyday lifestyle, e.g. wear a jacket or sweater over a see-through clothes.	The Partnership was initiated by Le Salon (Hua and HTH both foreign companies). They felt a need to further localize the M by reconstructing the working team which are now local based, to capture more effectively the spirit of culture of HK and to suit the taste of HK readers.	Creation of images in the M is a result of team contribution - there are meetings on how to package the star for the cover or to style models for fashion pages. Before each shooting, the editor will then play an important role to determine which photo is best for	The editorial and production work are instructed by the boss (Zee-sung) regularly as he set great store by the M (it's his 1st M)	Following Marie Claire style is the most important. Creation is by the editor and the stylists. The boss of the company does not care much about the content, but he would criticize and make certain alteration (unpleasantly) on covers, occasionally e.g. replacing	The editorial director gives guidance to the chief editor who actually work and create an concrete image for the M. The company normally follows the style of USA edition which would be fluctuated a bit every now and then recalled from different concepts of the editorial director.

			the M		plain colours by eye-catching colours.	
Preference in choosing pictures/ Why	Do more local shooting than any other MM in HK as realizing readers are getting fed up with international pictures	Local source predominates over the Western source (about 20%). Local shooting is preferred especially for the opening of an article. Western photos would be used to a limited extent to enhance the touch of 'internationalism' because 1) HK is a place of East meets West, 2) undeniably culture in HK is influenced by the West, e.g. fashion design & make-up.	pictures of Asian faces (e.g. Japanese in majority), besides those from local shooting are used. Japanese images for a typical local M because 1) Japanese culture is prevailing (e.g. comics, Japanese tech magazine such as Yon-mei); 2) readers identify themselves more with Asian than with Western faces; 3) buying pictures render a lower production cost than shooting.	Prefer using pictures from local shooting or those photos Asian models.	No special preference.	Pictures of foreign source would be used purely for illustration in a limited quantity. Local shooting is predominant.
Preference in choosing models/ Why	Chinese (at least Asian) being the first priority because it doesn't seem Chinese would identify themselves with 'blond hair', but sometimes shifting to Western supermodels for their are gorgeous and captivating.	Continue using local models (Chinese being the predominance). For covers, local models stars as models are still a strong attraction to local readers and hence are preferred. Generally speaking, celebrity (as label observation) is more of a concern than nationality of models.	Only local (Chinese) models will be used for the cover, only the hot and young female movie stars in HK are eligible (no models or celebrities, e.g. 1) as the company believes in the attraction of local movie stars.	Almost 100% are local models. Even when using foreign models for special features, those with black hair are preferred. It is because the M has been naming its prestige by its indigenous origin.	Local models (mainly Chinese) are used in local shooting. Covers are brought from original French copy because: 1) original covers can preserve a French touch; 2) using original cover is not a road block; preference of the mother company; 3) foreign cover models are quite accepted by HK women; 4) quality of the covers are guaranteed.	Both local and foreign models are accepted by HK readers. However, the company prefers using local models to differentiate the style of the M from that of <i>Elle</i> . No foreign model on covers now and almost all of them are local female movie stars.
Source of local models	Used to be quite limited since HK is a small place, but this situation has been changing with the expansion of the local model agencies and the profession became more socially accepted.	Local models include those from Singapore, Malaysia, Philippine and Mainland China (e.g. Gho Jun). Young girls on the street would also be modeled and packaged to give newer and fresher look to the M.	Models are from model agencies in HK which provide profiles of each model for reference. Generally speaking, they ask for reasonable pay and their quality is quite high.	Source for cover models is limited and booking of them tend to be extremely difficult, as the M only look for those movie stars or celebrities who are on the super level and glamorous enough for the M.	The majority is from model agencies, while suitable persons from personal connection are also considered.	No information.
Obligation with mother company	HEP owns the M, it's not a joint venture cooperation, thus is free to use any kind	Local origin.	Local origin.	Local origin.	Around 40% of the materials should come from the mother edition. Each	No obligation basically but the company has to let the mother company have

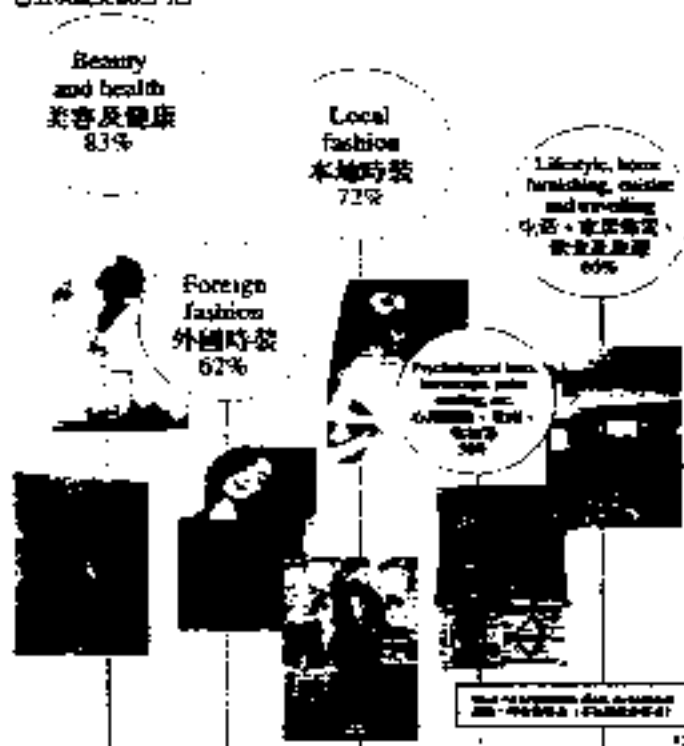
	of materials for the M				HK edition is sent to the mother company on regular basis for 'inspection'	each HK edition as well as know what is going on about the M
No. of advertisement	70-750	around 30	around 100	No information.	No information	around 90
View towards advertorial pages	work with advertisers as a kind of joint arrangement like <i>Elle Promotion</i> also need new information from them in writing about	No information	Advertorial page is rare in the M. The editor is careful in selecting the right kind of product which is high-quality and worth to promote.	As Marie Claire	The editor has to meet and talk to the advertiser so as to know very well the product. Hence the recommendation is in-depth to-the-point and practical.	No information
Quality of advertisement	advised to be looked in down-market WM are accepted now since the products are upgrading themselves and affording to pay for the ads.	No information	Quality of the advertisements is not a great concern of the company. They accept any kind of ads except those outbreak the reputation of the company, e.g. indecent pictures.	The M takes more ads for local brand than Marie Claire. In the market, unfortunately, the introduction of a new brand is much quicker than the improvement of the quality of the ad for it.	It is true that ad for down-market product is increasing as competition among advertisers and also that among WM is getting greater and greater.	No information
Favourite kind of ads for advertisers/readers	Fashion and Beauty products	Almost all advertisements are of beauty products	Beauty products	Fashion and beauty products	Fashion and beauty products	Beauty products
Source of advertisements	No information.	over 90% of the advertisements are supplied by the advertisers.	Two sources: 1) clients through advertising agencies whose artwork has been done, 2) direct clients whose artwork is to be done by the company. These two sources make a half-half share.	There is about half of the ads with artwork, while the other half without artwork ready for publication. For the latter, the M company has to produce the artwork according to ideas of the advertisers.	In-house production is less of a source than that supplied by the advertisers.	No information
Unique style/identity of the WM	style of <i>Elle</i> , which is for the urban modern working girl who is individual and knows what she wants except she needs help to find it. The M do not dictate but presents information to give her choices.	A M for women in HK, especially women who are active, lively, confident, in fond of new things, and know as well as appreciate her own individual beauty.	Very local and approachable. It follows the trend but refrains from novelty. Its broad and comprehensive content is like a department store or a variety show in which performances are by/for women from their 20s to mid-thirties.	The M identifies itself as 'the most glamorous magazine for contemporary women in Hong Kong'.	The M appeals to the HK women who are stylish and independent, and are enthusiastic to know what is happening not just about beauty and fashion, but also about different issues around the world.	It is a self-improvement/ lifestyle M for the young HK girls who have just worked for a few years and find there are lots more to know and learn.
Female image/beauty portrayed in the M	The M tries to make people look better themselves rather than create a stereotype of beauty, because each country has	Female images of HK girls, which are in fact quite varied - say, there are three types of Chinese: 1) those were	No typical image is portrayed in the M, if one, this would be an image of a beautiful, approachable and	The image is modern, beautiful, upper-class, and most important of all, glamorous.	The M aims at creating an image of a beautiful woman who is also independent, down-to-earth	It portrays an image of a 'big sister' (HK Cosmo girl) who is beautiful, helpful, clever and her wide range of

	their own beauty. On the other hand, beauty doesn't have to be labeled as "international" as obviously people used to move around the world frequently today.	them and have been living in HK. 2) those who had emigrated and came back to HK. 3) those from Mainland China.	in everyday HK women (as if the look of the covers)		and sensible	Knowledge are bible of survival for the young working girls.
Target age of the M	24-25	20-24	84% aged between 15-34, with 25-29(29%) being the largest group (95 survey)	Target age had been fluctuated over the 18 years	20-34	18-30
Position of the M in relation to gender	A fashion but not a political M. Although most of the readers are women, the no. of male readers is increasing especially in China (e.g. manufacturing buyers).	No particular position in relation to gender. It's simply orientated from an view of modern women, who concern a lot of their appearance and know how to bring out their beauty with the help of cosmetics and clothes.	Gender is not a concern of the M because SP is a pure entertaining M.	The M concerns more about consumption than gender.	There is no strict position of the M though articles on feminism appear occasionally. The message sent is simple that modern women is an individual self.	The M refrains from having a strict position in relation to gender as the M tend to be still male.
Image of women in M v.s. real situation of women	Life is a M that gives readers practical information rather than a dream. Images in the M are feasible and able to be used, despite the fact that they are all beautiful (has to be beautiful to attract readers).	The M is very localized, catering for affluent women in the society who are willing to spend a certain amount of time and money in looking after their appearance. This is also the female image portrayed in the M.	The M portrays images of middle-class women whose fear and need mirrors the real situation of ordinary women.	A dream world is presented by the M which can only find reflection in the most upper-class section in reality.	The M portrays a sophisticated female image who cares lots of other things besides consumption, which is fact, different from the status in reality. The M had tried to please the readers by adding some more down-to-earth sections such as confession, argument and so on.	The beautiful environment presented in the M is not a reflection of reality, but a dream which acts as encouragement for readers to upgrade their life. To fill the gap between the dream and reality, the M also portrays a local female image with lots of local information and ideas.
Things W M could serve for contemporary HK women	1) To make women more aware of the rest of the world especially Asia (e.g. women's problems around the world). 2) To encourage women look at more avenues or to give them a cross-section of facts, especially people in HK seldom read.	The 90s is a time HK women care and afford to care about their appearance (just for the gratification of themselves). W/M serve as a kind of informative, practical beauty handbook for them.	1) To provide practical and useful information for busy women in HK. 2) To provide leisure reading.	As Marie Claire	1) To provide information for consumption and for improving oneself. 2) To beautify one's life.	1) To provide information. 2) To provide leisure reading.
The M's capability in doing the above	No, because Elle is a fashion magazine and dealing only with fashion and beauty.	Absolutely	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Things today	They have to give	Sense of security	Fashion (in	As Marie Claire	1) they want to	They want to be

HK women really need	themselves more time to relax and enjoy life. HK women don't have to be so paranoid about their appearance since they have already looked after themselves extremely well. They also spend too much time in pursuing fitness and diets.	(especially security from men) is what they need. It is caused by serious social problems such as late marriage, mistress in China and homosexuality. Women turn to consumption for material satisfaction.	beauty (sex). HK women always find comfort in getting away to the latest trend (the main stream) for fear of lagging behind.		catch up the trend and improve themselves by up-to-date information. 2) they need entertainment.	more beautiful and presentable because: 1) HK women joined the workforce much earlier than other Asian countries and they are more financial independent and afford to care about lifestyle. 2) Our society values good-looking persons higher than plain-looking ones.
New plan for F&B pages	Depending what have been being done. The basic goal is to bring in the most up-to-date information, whether of fashion, beauty and of anything else from other parts of the world, as creativity is not the strength of HK people and local products are not in favour.	The considered expansion would be a further enrichment of the existing sections. These would include sections of hair, make-up, skin care and <i>off</i> <i>top</i> <i>th</i> . Probably in the future there are articles about female beauty from different Asian countries.	No concrete new plan for F & B pages at this moment.	Not applicable.	Beauty is a practical information in the form of tips or short articles to suit the taste of HK people will be included. Fashion expanding the <i>101</i> <i>ideas</i> and add sections called <i>surprise</i> and <i>fashion</i> <i>news</i> , and will publish a booklet <i>Make</i> <i>Clair</i> <i>for</i> .	No new plan at the moment.
Influence of 1997	Would continue the trend of using Oriental faces as many as possible.	No drastic change except to cater for the large China market. Hopefully, there would be a special version for China in or after 1997.	No drastic influence expected in 1997 is foreseen now, especially publication business in China has been being influenced by HK.	Not applicable.	1997 would not be an influential factor on the stage of the M.	Chinese models have been more important due to the development of the profession of the profession in Mainland China and Taiwan, not due to the approaching of 1997.
Topics would be added	Try to add more local pages as the demand is there.	Only topics concerned with beauty would be added.	Will stick to the existing topics.	Not applicable.	development other than beauty and fashion would be of second priority.	Satisfied with the topics that exist.

The Top Five Most Favourite Editorial Contents

首五項最受歡迎內容



Appendix 2

Performance Ratings on Various Aspects

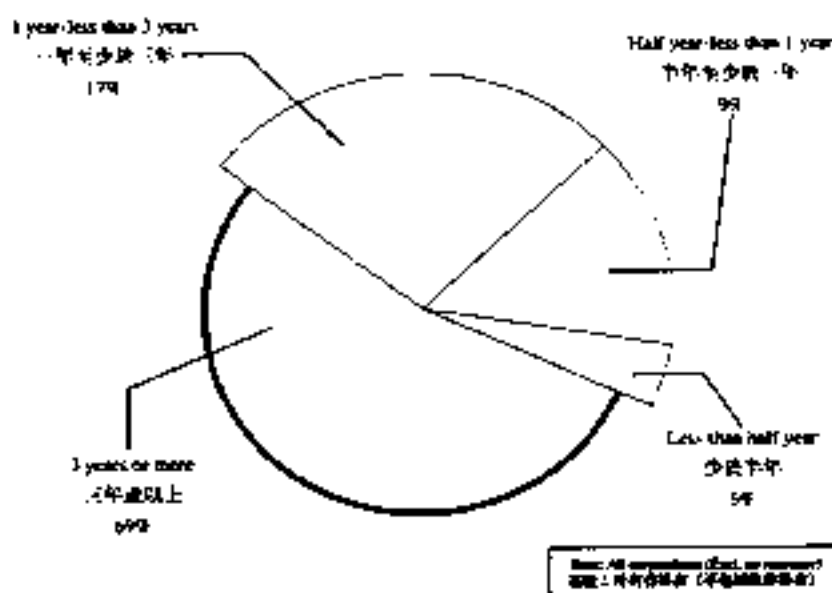
(姊妹) 各方面表現

	Very good 非常好	Quite good 良好	Average 普通	No good enough 不太好
Printing quality 印刷質素	37%	50%	12%	1%
Cover design 封面設計	32%	50%	16%	2%
Photo/Picture 攝影/圖片	31%	47%	20%	2%
Graphic design 美術設計	19%	55%	23%	3%
Editorial contents 內容	17%	68%	14%	NI
Wording quality 文字質素	13%	63%	23%	1%

Appendix 3

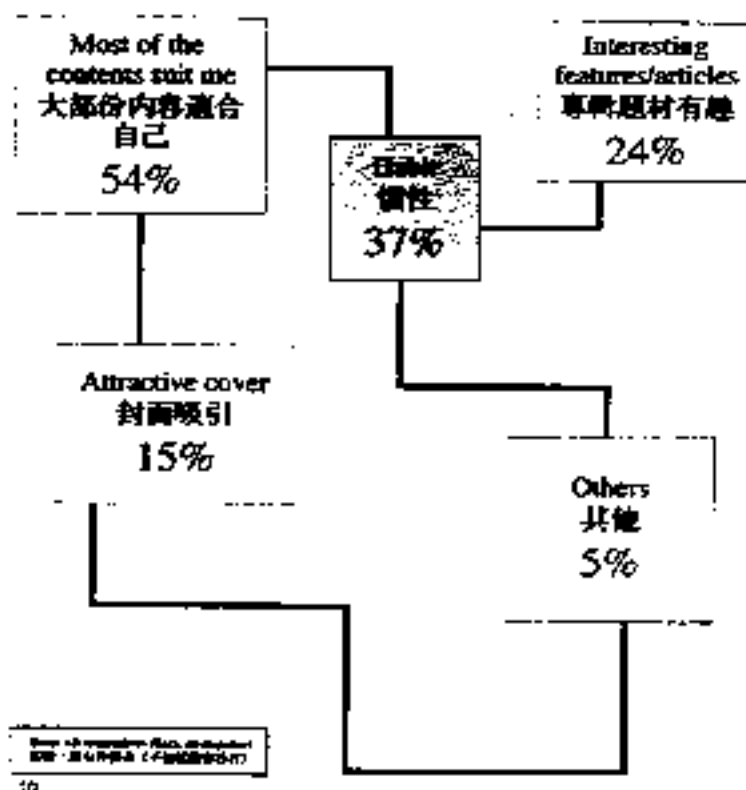
Length of Time Being a Reader

閱讀《新妹》年數



Appendix 4

Reasons of Reading 閱讀《新妹》原因



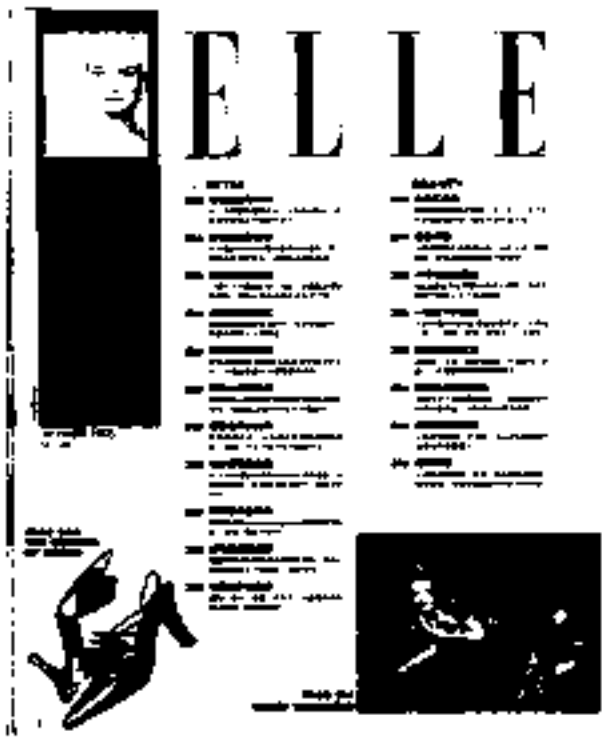
Appendix 5

Appendix 6a Formats utilized by women's magazines in Hong Kong (summer issues, 1995)

Format	Elle	Sisters' Pictorial	Orient Beauty
articles-interviews-stars	1	1	2
- celebrities	1	1	1
-designers/ stylists	5	1	1 (promoting)
-writings-experts'	1	1	1
advice			
-research/ discover	1	2	2
-history/ philosophy	1	1	2
-guidelines-dressing up	1	1	1
-make-up	1	1	3
-skin care	1	1	1
-hair styling	1	1	1
-keeping fit	1	1	2
photos-fashion stories	11	5	4
-carwalk photos	1	1	1
-features-promoting nature	5	1	1
-non-promoting nature	1	1	1
promotion-advertorial	1	1	1
-B&F products	8	3	5
-club news	1	1	1
Total topics of B&F	32	20	25
Total pages of B&F	108	101	122
Total pages of the M	(222-67=155)	(393-136=257)	(165-32=133)
Total % of B&F	69.7	39.3	95.1

Appendix 6b. Formats utilized, from 95' winter issues of *Elle*, *Sisters' Pictorial* and *Oriental Beauty*.

Formats	No. of topics	M	Elle	Sisters' Pictorial	Oriental Beauty
articles-interviews-stars			/	/	1
- celebrities			/	/	/
-designers/ stylists			2	/	/
-writings-experts'			1	1	/
advice					
-research/ discovery			/	/	4 (non-promoting: 2)
-history/ philosophy			/	2 (promoting: 1)	1 (promoting)
-guidelines-dressing up			1	/	2
-make-up			2	2	2
-skin care			/	1	1
photos-fashion stories			9	5	2
-catwalk photos			3	1	1
-features-promoting nature			2	/	2
-non-promoting nature			2	/	/
promotion-advertorial			2	/	1
-B&F products			9	1	4
Total topics of B&F			33	13	21
Total pages of B&F			(B:40+ P:79)119	(B:18+P:48)66	97
Total pages of the M			(334-141)193	(260-130)130	(130-30)100
Total % of B&F			61.7	50.8	97



Appendix 7a Contents of *Elle* (December 95')

一	四	一	一
二	五	二	二
三	六	三	三
四	七	四	四
五	八	五	五
六	九	六	六
七	十	七	七
八	十一	八	八
九	十二	九	九
十	十三	十	十
十一	十四	十一	十一
十二	十五	十二	十二
十三	十六	十三	十三
十四	十七	十四	十四
十五	十八	十五	十五
十六	十九	十六	十六
十七	二十	十七	十七
十八	二十一	十八	十八
十九	二十二	十九	十九
二十	二十三	二十	二十
二十一	二十四	二十一	二十一
二十二	二十五	二十二	二十二
二十三	二十六	二十三	二十三
二十四	二十七	二十四	二十四
二十五	二十八	二十五	二十五
二十六	二十九	二十六	二十六
二十七	三十	二十七	二十七
二十八	三十一	二十八	二十八
二十九	三十二	二十九	二十九
三十	三十三	三十	三十
三十一	三十四	三十一	三十一
三十二	三十五	三十二	三十二
三十三	三十六	三十三	三十三
三十四	三十七	三十四	三十四
三十五	三十八	三十五	三十五
三十六	三十九	三十六	三十六
三十七	四十	三十七	三十七
三十八	四十一	三十八	三十八
三十九	四十二	三十九	三十九
四十	四十三	四十	四十
四十一	四十四	四十一	四十一
四十二	四十五	四十二	四十二
四十三	四十六	四十三	四十三
四十四	四十七	四十四	四十四
四十五	四十八	四十五	四十五
四十六	四十九	四十六	四十六
四十七	五十	四十七	四十七
四十八	五十一	四十八	四十八
四十九	五十二	四十九	四十九
五十	五十三	五十	五十

Appendix 7b Contents page of Qing's novel, *Sui Tang Yan Yi* 隋唐演義



四·四五 董其昌草书《白居易绝句行》

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



HONG KONG

電影時裝
百年回顧

Teri Hobbins
脫胎換骨新形象

杜可風

紅粉

200週年

Christmas
Special

DECEMBER 1995
第25卷第12期



Figure 4

ORIENT

林憶蓮

秀髮變圖 短的誘惑 悠然神采

專賣西藥 四十種變色

青春美膚 駐顏果酸

hair

Short Cuts
Simple and Soft

lip service

The New Colours

facesaver

The Antiaging Acid Test

**Sandy
Lam**
New Look
New Attitude

WINTER 1994
HK\$28



9 771023 759682

Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

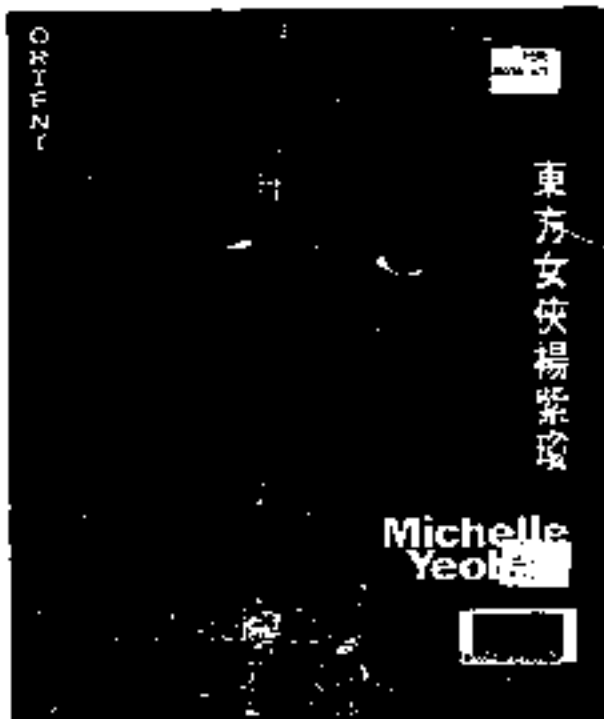


Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 5



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 18



Figure 17



Figure 22



Figure 17



Figure 22

名人專訪

Jodie
Foster

Thierry Mugler
Todd Oldham

精采紛呈：

Isabella Rossellini

香氛專輯

母親節獻禮



P 771013 134403

1005 HK330
3304969E

Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25



UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY
This document is classified UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY
UNLESS INDICATED OTHERWISE BY A CONTROLLING AUTHORITY

Figure 26



Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30



Figure 31