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Consuming the other: the fetish of the western woman in Chinese advertising and popular culture

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Introduction

In a recent interview the Chinese female author Anchee Min told the blonde, blue-eyed, female reporter that if she had met someone with her features during the Cultural Revolution she would probably have killed her. This shocking statement is symptomatic of Chinese relations to the West throughout the twentieth century. Seen as enemies of the Chinese nation and its people, Westerners have, from the Boxer revolution to the Cultural Revolution, been portrayed as child-snatchers, counter-revolutionaries and spies. With the economic reforms and the opening of China to the outside world of the last couple of decades, representations and fantasies of the Westerners changed dramatically, revealing a parallel history where anything Western is adored and coveted. Chinese popular culture is now saturated with imported American television shows and films delivering pictures of a rich and beautiful West. The most prevalent Western image is the blond, blue-eyed woman that Anchee Min thought she would have killed had she met her some decades earlier. This Caucasian female now fills Chinese-produced television soaps such as 'Russian babes in Harbin', lends her traits to the Chinese dressmaker dummies, and decorates the covers of magazines, posters, calendars, and advertisements. The image of the blonde, blue-eyed Western woman no longer triggers a reaction to kill. The xenophobia has instead turned into what Slavoj Zizek sees as the other side of the phobic object, namely the fetish.[1] The White female has thus become the prime fetish in a new Chinese symbolic universe, governed not by class struggle and resistance to imperialism but by the symbolic exchange of a globalised commodity culture.

Advertising not only sells goods but also identity. Ads present visions of individual identity as well as a sense of belonging to certain groups, cultures, and lifestyles. However, since the construction of the Self is closely bound to the construction of the Other, advertising also creates and sells difference and otherness. This is something that takes on extra importance in the context of global marketing and advertising. Here marketing professionals often reduce the choice of models of different racial and ethnic features to a question of either showing local models so (local) people can identify with them, or using

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foreigners to give a sense of prestige and quality to a product. Caucasian models are used to represent the 'West'. If Caucasian women in ads represent the West, the interesting question is not only what kind of 'West' they represent, but how they represent the West. Although the image of the White woman is always locally resignified, it also always carries connotations of power and pleasure. The purpose of this article is to discuss the Chinese meanings of the Western woman by examining Chinese print advertising from the 1990s against fantasies of cross-racial sex in Chinese popular culture. The article shows that Chinese representations of White women not only conflate xenophobia with commodity fetishism but also transgress the usual grid of heterosexual logic ruling most gender representations. Following Horni Bhabha's ideas on race, power, and desire in colonial discourse this article suggests an interpretation of Chinese representations of Western women as a form of racial fetishism.

Chinese advertising in women's magazines

The following examination of Chinese ads featuring Caucasian-looking women is limited to ads that are produced solely for use in China. Ads originally created for another national, regional or global audience are excluded. The selection consist of all ads that appeared between 1990 to 1995 in *Zhiyin, Hunyin yu jiating, Shaonü, Zhongguo funü, Fenyou, Shaonü and Nüyou*. These magazines are all published and edited by the women's federation, but range from serious magazines directed towards women in their middle ages to popular products read by young women and teenage girls. News-stands in Chinese cities hold large numbers of titles geared towards female readers, but these magazines are almost all published by the All China Women's Federation or its provincial and municipal branches. They are therefore under the control of the Chinese Communist Party. As the ruling party's grip on media is still very strong it was still in the mid-1990s extremely difficult for a foreign magazine to publish in China. During the Cultural Revolution advertising was made a symbol of the 'decadence and waste of capitalism' and was brought to a definite halt. It reappeared with the reforms of 1979 and has since then become important for the Chinese printed media, especially so since 1992 when the government announced that all newspapers and magazines would have to rely on the market or go broke. In the mid-1980s Chinese women's magazines started carrying ads and since then the number of ads in these magazines increased from an occasional back page ad and a few mail order ads to anything between just a few pages to a quarter of the content. Most of the ads are for Chinese products. The study is also based on fieldwork in Beijing, Shanghai and Canton when during three months in 1995 and 1996 a limited number of interviews were carried out with Advertising Agencies, women's magazine editors and young female readers.

Masculinisation of the White woman

There has been widespread concern in the West that advertising portrays women as submissive objects. In this gender construction, men are represented as active

doers while women are passive and done to. As John Berger writes in *Ways of Seeing*, 'Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at'. The concept of 'fetishism' has been used extensively to describe the role of women in Western visual culture, as in representations of body parts such as lips, legs or feet. Female representation in Western visual culture has further been described as a 'spectacle' constructed around a 'male gaze'. In a now famous article by Laura Mulvey this idea is taken further by using Freud's term of 'scopophilia' to describe how gendered representations in film are structured by male fantasies and fears of castration.[2] The regime of gender representations these theories elaborate upon has changed but as tools for examining how Chinese women are represented in contemporary Chinese commercial visual culture they are still helpful. In contemporary Chinese advertising, representations of women are often constructed around a male gaze.[3] Scholars like Beverley Hooper have argued that Chinese women have been drawn into the logic of global consumer culture and been made into objects for consumption just like women in the West.[4] The body language of Chinese models in ads expresses shyness and subordination with canting of heads and bodies, lying down and covering of faces. Chinese models are often portrayed in a childish way and made to act like little girls. The image of the Chinese woman thus conveys most of the 'feminine' characteristics and the domination of a 'male gaze' once said to have ruled Western visual culture.

This re-feminisation of women after Mao appears against the masculinisation of the Western woman. The sociologist Erving Goffman makes a list of gendered body postures he found in Western advertising that represent women as subordinate, fragile, and childish.[5] In Chinese advertising Western women are represented in a totally opposite manner. Rather than bending their knees, for example, women are seen standing stable on the ground with their legs straight and wide apart. Instead of inclining their head shyly forwards or to the side, they hold their heads high. Gazes are not turned away, instead Western women look straight into the cameras, boldly meeting the eyes of the beholder. These women do not cover their mouths when laughing. If anything is characteristic of Chinese representation of Western women it is their conspicuous laughter, as they are frequently shown with wide-open smiles, showing off rows of white teeth. This strikes one as extraordinarily uninhibited where in China for a woman not to cover her mouth while laughing would be a *faux pas* in most social contexts. Bodies and heads of Caucasian models are not lowered, neither are women lying down in these pictures. In short, Western women are not portrayed as subordinate. On the contrary, they display the same bodily postures usually reserved for men, postures that Erving Goffman translates as unashamedness, superiority and disdain.[6] The Caucasian models in these ads hold their bodies erect and their heads high. They look powerful, self-confident, and satisfied with themselves.

To sum up, ads with Western and Asian women respectively present two contradictory set of female images: the Asian women are made subordinate and childish and the Western women take on certain 'masculine' qualities. In these ads the notion of 'Men act and women appear. Men look at women', is turned on its head. Here women are doing things with men. Portraying women together with men is rare in ads with Asian models but more common in ads with

Western women, and these portrayals are furthermore diametrically opposed to common perceptions about the asymmetrical nature of gender relations. In one ad a man with his shirt sleeves rolled up stands attentively behind a 'power dressed' Caucasian woman who is sitting behind a desk with her feet on the table.[7] It would appear that the woman, with a remote control in her hand, is scrutinising a business presentation made by the man. In that way the image reverts conventional notions of the male gaze. A similar interpretation can be made of a medical ad, also portraying a man and a woman. A smiling girl in a bathing suit and hat leans over a man lying down on a landing.[8] If the former example portrayed gender reversal in the workplace, this one is about sexual initiative. It illustrates the typical beach-flirt, but it is the woman picking up the man lying down and not the other way round, and lying down is of course a conventionalised expression of sexual availability.

Not only is the Western woman portrayed as active, powerful and sure of herself, she is also pictured as having a strong physique, of being fertile, passionate, and sexy. Caucasian women are, for example, shown as engaged in various sports and outdoor activities far more often than their Chinese counterparts. We see them in swimming clothes on the beach, wind surfing, or with tennis rackets in their hands. This portrayal of Western women as athletic tallies well with an earlier-held Chinese idea that the 'Eastern' woman is not so strong as the 'Western' woman, and that therefore some sports do not suit Chinese women.[9] Another sign of the strong and healthy white body is the use of Caucasian models to market clinics or different medicines that claim to cure infertility. One ad for a Qingdao clinic tells the reader that the famous director has been given the nickname 'the child-bringing goddess' (*songzide guanyin*). The ad features a Caucasian mother sitting beside a bathtub with no less than five healthy-looking children.[10] The children, four boys and one girl, are laughingly playing around in the water. These representations show Western women as active, productive and strong.

When it comes to these representations of Western women the Chinese imagination is definitely not ruled by a male gaze set in motion by male traumas caused by fantasies of female demasculinisation. These women, paradoxically, occupy the symbolic position of phallus. To explain this female position of both pleasure and power we have to transcend heterosexual interpretations of the fetish and the pleasure of watching. While earlier theories more or less denied the possibility of a female fetishism and a female gaze, much literature now challenges these assumptions. Anne McClintock, for example, deconstructs the Freudian Oedipus myth, showing that fetishism has to do not only with traumas surrounding gender and genital categories but with a crisis in other categories such as race, power and work.[11] To fully understand the image of the Western woman we have to examine racial and cultural stereotypes and see how they are employed in a Chinese politics of desire.

Occidentalism, sexuality and the other

The Chinese advertising law prohibits nakedness below shoulder-height or 10 cm above the knees. This law against nudity in ads is only strictly followed

when it comes to commercials on television. Ads in magazines are full of scantily dressed women. The most revealing ones often features Caucasian models. Not only are Caucasian models more revealing than Chinese models in ads, but representations of Western women are more overtly eroticised. Some of these ads go quite far in their sexual explicitness. One ad for a water heater, for example, shows a woman wearing only a short, translucent top, apparently ripped to pieces.[12] Taken from the back in semi-profile, the picture leaves her naked buttocks almost fully revealed. Just in front of her, a strong jet of water comes flushing up from the ground. The woman's head hangs back as if in great passion, while her eyes are closed and her mouth wide open. The caption printed above the woman reads 'With Qianfeng ("vanguard" [the brand name]) in the house there is happiness' (*jia you qianfeng le zai qizhong*). Another striking example comes in an ad on the back page of *Shaonü* (*Teenage girl*), an inexpensive magazine for girls in their early teens. In this otherwise careful and prudish teenage magazine is a picture of a young blonde woman that displays her two large, naked breasts in a see-through net top. She strikes a pose that one would expect of a model in *Playboy*.[13] In line with this eroticisation of Western women, semi-nude Caucasian models are also frequently used on packages and ads for various Chinese medicines and potions that claim to cure impotence.

In discussing ads with young women in Beijing and Guangzhou they sporadically referred to the Western models in the ads as '*hao piaoliang*' (real pretty) or '*zhen meilide*' (so beautiful), and explained that the large number of Caucasian models as a simple matter of them being beautiful. The explanation for the prevalence of Western women in ads would be that Westerners are considered a standard of beauty. Producers of images like these, advertising personnel and magazine editors, also talked about the beauty of Western women, often by creating a dichotomy between China and the West. A middle-aged director at the Chinese advertising agency White Horse Advertising Limited (Baima Guanggao Youxian Gongsi) in Guangzhou explained the frequent occurrence of Western women in ads by saying that: 'Really! In the Chinese mind we think that white women are more sexy than Chinese women. And that is maybe the explanation ... In our minds we always think that in bygone times Chinese women really had a beauty, an inner beauty, as women. But in modern society white women have all the charms of sex and love.'[14]

In explaining things in this way, she could mean a number of things. She could mean that in modern society 'White women' lead lives where they can enjoy the pleasures of sex and love. She could also mean that a certain beauty ideal, a certain femininity, in the globalised context of consumer culture, has become a sign for sex and love, and that Western women have come to symbolically embody these characteristics. An alternative or complementary interpretation would be that Chinese women are moral while Western women are debauched. A middle-aged editor at an official women's magazine in Beijing thought that Western women had sexy and beautiful bodies whereas Chinese women possessed an inner beauty manifested primarily by their 'politeness' (*limao*).[15] This 'inner' beauty, she said, found expression in how Chinese women cared about their homes, husbands, children, and parents. She obviously regarded Western women as not living up to this Chinese ideal. Chinese women

were also 'reserved' (*hanxu*), which Western women were not, and Chinese women, she added, strongly disapproved of how 'outgoing' Western women were.

That the meanings of the White woman in China, rest on negative stereotypes of the West also comes through in the various receptions invoked by the ads discussed above. The ad for the water heater was commented on as being '*tai baolu*' (too revealing) or '*tai guofende*' (going too far) in discussions with women in Beijing and Guangzhou. However, other nude or eroticised illustrations of Western women raised no objections. Explicitly erotic or pornographic ads like the ones above, do not appear with Chinese models since, as a young Chinese woman explained, 'ads with seminude Western women are perfectly acceptable, whereas similar portryals with Chinese women are unacceptable'.[16]

Can we read the consumerist representations of Western women as examples of a Chinese Occidentalism? In one sense, Yes! The Western female body is made into a stereotype of strength, sexuality, and promiscuity that can be consumed and cannibalised without any fear of losing belief in the traditional virtues of Chinese women. The White female is constructed as the Occident other in a clean-cut dichotomy of West and East. Ads and interviews portray the White female woman as sexy, passionate and licentious, in sharp contrast to the 'inner beauty' of Chinese women. This construction mirrors that of a Western Orientalism where Women from the Near East were represented in art and literature as degenerate bearers of primitive passions and sexually available to White male desire.[17] However, this comparison is complicated by the fact that the asymmetric power relations between China and the 'West' has been in favour of the latter, which disturbs any simple reading of Chinese representations of Western women as just the inversion of Western Orientalism. The Chinese stereotypes of the West are not part of a Chinese colonial discourse.

The Other of Chinese colonial discourse exists, instead, in stereotypes of dark-skinned people from Africa and south-east Asia and 'minority people'. 'Minority people' (*shaoshu minzu*) is a label given by the Chinese State, to various people of non-Han-origin, that in the process of Chinese inner colonialism have been driven to barren, mountainous and peripherical parts of the Chinese empire. In cultural representations a distinction between Chinese modernity and the 'backwardness' of 'primitive' minority groups is regularly made.[18] In Chinese literary and artistic imagination minority women are endowed with a free and uninhibited sexuality. The anthropologist Louisa Schein has described this Chinese discourse on minority people as an 'internal orientalism'.[19] Just like with minority women, Black women are often represented as primitive and nude. Popular and official press both relish in images of bare-breasted women from Africa. Despite this, Black models are as rare in ads as minority women. When I asked my Chinese informants in Canton why there were so many Caucasian yet no Black models in Chinese ads they told me that Black people are not beautiful. Although this was a question that clearly embarrassed them some said frankly that Black people are 'ugly' (*chou*) and 'dirty looking' (*zang*), revealing the underlying racialised notions of beauty. Although, these people are made objects of desire in popular

consciousness, minority women seldom appear in Chinese advertising. In spite of the eroticisation of coloured people and of minorities, Westerners are almost without exception the only discernible 'non-Chinese' found in Chinese advertising.

In Western colonial discourse the mission of the European explorers was to *penetrate virgin* land and to *unveil* its secrets.[20] In the colonial imagination, still undiscovered land was regarded as feminine. In this feminisation of the non-Western world, the people inhabiting Asia and Africa were constructed as passive and seductive, while the Western imperial powers imagined themselves as active father-figures. In the Chinese ads discussed above, Western women were represented both as strong and sexually active, while Asian models were portrayed in subordinate poses. This would indicate a reversal of not only the conventional roles of gender, but also of the position of the Other in colonial discourse. The symbolic position of women in Chinese advertising reveals a Chinese masculinisation of the Western female Other. This suggests that the eroticised representations of Western women is not limited to a heterosexual desire but points to a libidinal economy of race and power. The subjugated minorities are subjected to sexual fantasies, but that is it. The image of the White woman involves something more. As she represents power and wealth, the White woman becomes a fetish structuring identity and difference as well as desire and fear.

Racial fetishism

In an interesting article on Orientalism and colonial discourse the literary critic Homi Bhabha manages to get past moralistically defining representations and stereotypes as simply good or bad. He proposes an alternative interpretation of the racial stereotype which fits very well into the Chinese context. Referring to what he labels the 'Freudian fable of fetishism', he unpacks the contradictions embedded in Western colonial discourse. By replacing the possession and lack of a penis in gender relations with possession and lack of same skin colour in racial relations Homi Bhabha reads the racial stereotype as a fetish: 'For fetishism is always a "play" or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity—in Freud's terms: "All men have penises"; in ours: "All men have the same skin/race/culture"—and the anxiety associated with lack and difference—again, for Freud, "Some do not have penises"; for us, "Some do not have the same skin/race/culture" '.[21]

The fetish in Freud's theory was 'a substitute for the woman's phallus which the little boy once believed in and ... does not wish to forgo'.[22] Its function is as a denial of reality, a triumph over, and a safeguard against, the threat of castration. According to Bhabha, the construction of, and the obsession with, the Other, ultimately springs from primal conceptions of identity and difference. The stereotype then, just as the fetish, is nurtured through a complex web of desire, identity and lack, and, just as the fetish, gives access to an identity built on mastery and pleasure, while simultaneously feeding on anxiety and defence. This resonates well with the contradictory set of Chinese images of the West. The

Western female is perceived as beautiful but the West is still regarded as a moral threat.

The White other is of an entity substantially different from the Chinese themselves, and in some instances made into an image where fear and desire is replaced by mastery and degradation. In the 1930s, the popular author Lin Yutang could write that Westerners facial and body-hair was a proof of civilisational backwardness *vis-à-vis* the Chinese, who had led civilized indoor lives much longer than the Westerners and therefore lacked such hair.[23] As the historian Frank Dikötter explains, in Chinese racial discourse hairiness was used to construct 'bestiality'.[24] During the occupation the Japanese enemy was depicted in propaganda as extremely hairy. Advertising is careful not to use negative images, but in two Chinese ads from 1995 we can find images of the West that caters to simian constructions of the Westerners. The first ad shows a blonde woman standing laughingly besides a washing machine.[25] The washing machine has the word 'Revolution' written over it in bold letters, clearly a reference to the communist revolution of China. A couple of months later a similar ad for the same company, Wuxi Little Swan, showed up in the same magazine.[26] The Caucasian woman is here replaced by a chimpanzee. The animal is made to look human by wearing glasses, bow tie, a white shirt and trousers. The (human) monkey is standing beside the same washing machine with the same word 'Revolution' written over it. In addition a logo beside the monkey spells out in childish handwriting: '*Wo ye hui yong xiao tiane*' (I can also handle Little Swan). The blonde woman in the first ad is replaced by a monkey in the second, but otherwise the settings are the same. The monkey cannot only handle the washing machine, he can also write Chinese characters, albeit in the clumsy handwriting that characterise children's and foreigner's attempts to come to grips with the Chinese written language. With a camera hanging from his neck the dressed monkey looks like a tourist. The boundary effect created by dressing up a monkey is reinforced, and just like the monkey is only almost human he is with the tourist connotations of the camera, and the poor handwriting, only almost Chinese. The image of the not-quite-human Westerner turns up also in a scene in a recent Chinese soap-opera. As the protagonist in the television serial *A Beijing Man in New York* (*Beijingren zai Niuyue*) cries out about the Americans to a Chinese friend: 'Fuck them! They were still monkeys up in the trees while we were already human beings. Look at how hairy they are, they're not as evolved as we are. Just 'cause they have a bit of money!.'[27] The scene captures the contradiction of the West as simultaneously subordinate and powerful in the Chinese imagination, while it also reveals a will of power over the Other.

In the images above we have a representation of the West as the pure bodily Other. These representations of the West partake in a Chinese dichotomy of mind and body where images of White women in the Chinese ads reflect the racialised/culturalised idea of sexuality and morality according to which Western women embody an animalistic sexuality—ruled by their passions and desires—whereas Chinese women embody the cultivated virtues of civilization. These two ads read together, repeat the notion of Westerners as uncivilized, and illustrates the double bind of racial fetishism described by Bhabha.

Consuming the Other

The cultural critic Rey Chow argues that the White woman is made the symbol of what China is not or does not have.[28] In Chow's view the White woman becomes a fetish that has nothing to do with sex.[29] Rey Chow is probably both right and wrong. She is right in pointing out that the White woman is imagined as something more and different than just the heterosexual opposite to man, but wrong in saying that the image of the White woman is not about sex. The gender categories and sexual fantasies make up the core logic of the fetish. After all, it is the White *woman* that is fetishised. But this does not automatically entail that the fetish of the White woman is a heterosexual construction to relieve a certain male anxiety. On the contrary, turning to representations involving Chinese men and Western women we see that the White woman becomes not only an object for male sexual desire but also a source of fear eventually leading to abjection. The racial fetish thus comes to transgress the inherent structure of male/female power relations, proving that the White fetish is heavily invested both in an economy of desire and an economy of power.

The widely discussed Chinese television series *A Beijing Man in New York* describes the hardships of a Chinese couple that has decided to emigrate from Beijing to the Western metropolis of New York. The male Chinese protagonist has to give up his career as a musician and take work in a Chinese restaurant washing dishes. He has not only lost his former profession but also his social position and is degraded to suffer humiliation at the bottom of American society. He eventually manages to work himself up from poverty and, at that stage he picks up a White, blonde and buxom prostitute to vent his pent-up frustrations on. While screwing the White woman he showers her with dollar bills, demanding her to cry out repeatedly 'I love you'[30] In an article Geremie Barmé uses this scene to open up a discussion of resurgent nationalism among Chinese intellectuals in the 1990s. According to Barmé this scene was extremely popular with the Chinese audience in mainland China. He refers to how an émigré Chinese had told the writer Sang Ye that 'to screw foreign cunt is a kind of patriotism' (*cai waiguo bi ye suan aiguo ma*).[31] To buy, and therefore to consume, a White, blonde and blue-eyed American becomes a metaphor for Chinese revenge for over a century of Western imperialism, and a sign for China's new economic power in the world.[32]

The scene from *A Beijing Man in New York* has an early parallel with the famous novel *Hong meigui yu bai meigui* (the white rose and the red), by female writer Eileen Changs where a similar amorous affair is played out by a Chinese student stationed in Europe.[33] In the opening of the Eileen Chang novel the male Chinese protagonist looses his virginity to a blonde, blue-eyed prostitute in Paris. After returning from his studies abroad he brags about this episode to his friends saying that: 'Before I got to Paris I was only a boy'. The memory of the incident, however, resists his conscious effort to transform it into a romantic and engendering affair. Instead it leaves him disgusted. That warm summers eve he had been out for a stroll. He suddenly encountered a prostitute in a place where he did not expect to meet one. She seduces him, and takes him to a nearby hostel.[34] Convinced that all 'foreigners' smell worse than his compatriots do, the

Chinese protagonist remembers watching secretly how the woman anxiously raises her arm and smells at her armpit. What turned him off was not so much her body odour as her insecurity, he recalls. Considering the situation, he a virgin and she a prostitute, this episode reads like a projection of the student's own anxieties. In fact, he laments that he could not even be in control of a woman like her. 'He spent money on her body but still couldn't become her master' (*ta zai ta shenshang huale qian, ye hai zuobuliao tade zhuren*). After coitus her appearance suddenly takes on masculine traits: 'It was the gloomy, cold face of a man, the face of an ancient warrior'.[35] The scene he wants to recollect as the obtainment of his manhood becomes a terrifying experience where the racial fetish turns back at him with full power. Instead of he himself, becoming a man, the White woman turns into a potent male warrior.

Barmé reads the story about the Chinese émigré and the American prostitute in New York as representing 'the coming of age of Chinese narcissism', as bespeaking 'a desire for revenge for all the real and perceived slights of the past century'.[36] The Chinese émigré's wish for the prostitute to cry out 'I love you' besides being a perfect mis-en-scene of the Lacanian impossibility of fulfilling desire, also captures the trope of the fetish. He cannot get from her what she does not have. He is not content to fuck the White prostitute but wants to have something which he knows she is not selling. In the book on which the screenplay is based this scene is set a little differently. The frustration of the man is here replaced by impotence and his command of the woman is replaced by his own subjugation. In this original version, the Beijing man in New York has by chance ventured into a porno movie-theatre.[37] He is approached by a prostitute who entices him into a secluded booth. She makes him sit down and begins to give him a blow job. Apparently he cannot make it, whereupon the prostitute asks him if he is 'chicken', slaps his butt and asks him to pay. He stumbles out of his impotence and, the book continues, 'after that he never dared to roam astray again'. In Eileen Chang's story the man wants to possess and control the White prostitute. 'He spent money on her body', that is on sex, but what he really coveted was control and power. After failing he decides to create a 'right' (*dui*) world for himself, and in 'this miniature world he would always be the definite master'. Just like the Beijing man his fear of impotence leads to abjection. The reactions of the two men when they get too close to their desired objects resembles what Slavoj Zizek writes on the gaze: '… the fetish object *par excellence* (nothing fascinates me more than the Other's gaze, which is fascinated in sofar as it perceives that which is "in me more than myself", the secret treasure at the kernel of my being), but it can also shift into the harbinger of the horror of castration (the gaze of Medusa's head)'.[38] Both of the men are seduced by the fetishised White woman. But she actively takes control of the situation and at the moment of fulfillment of their racialised sexual fantasies the men are struck by the 'Medusa's gaze' and flees their imminent castration.

Free, licentious sex is invested into the image of Western women, articulating disturbingly well the fetishist mode of the stereotype: the desire for, and the wish for power and domination over the Other, which ultimately grows out of fear. Read together, these three scenes express an almost identical psychological investment in the trope of the White woman. Besides describing the psychology

of race, sex and power on a personal level these scenes could also be read as a postcolonial allegory on having what the West has, which the White women fetishistically signifies. They describe the attempt of cultural consummation by the consumption of the Western Other.

Conclusion

There is obviously more to the representations of Western women in Chinese advertising than a simple reference to the West. The representations of Western women as powerful and attractive suggest that Chinese women in the specific gender politics of the 1990s perceive themselves as still precluded from an imagined femininity that entails both power and pleasure. Female pleasure and power is instead projected upon Western women, who are presented as having what they themselves lack. While Western women are portrayed as powerful, self-content, sexually attractive and on equal terms with men, Asian women are portrayed in childish terms. This contrast in representation between Western and Asian women resembles constructions of gender relations in Western ads, but with the important difference that in the Chinese ads the White woman take the symbolic position men have in Western ads. It is as if these women symbolically possess what Freud claimed women could not possess and the symbolical space of the West is thus masculinised.

In the logic of the fetish the promise of pleasure co-exists with a wish for power. The White female body is inscribed in a larger geopolitical and historical context of Chinese–Western relations. She appears not only in a Chinese economy of pleasure, but also in an economy of discourse, domination and power. These images represent a threat, not only to Chinese Self-identity, but also to Chinese aspirations of becoming a modern, strong rich and potent nation. This fact read together with the substitution of gender with race, makes the White woman in Chinese advertising and popular culture come to resemble the racial fetishism Homi Bhabha describes. In the global flows of culture, desirable images of the West disturb assumptions of a shared Chinese cultural identity. The image of the Western Other therefore, not only represents a promise, but also poses a threat, a threat to the idea of full identity. Bhabha, following Lacan, describes the fullness of the stereotype—its image as its identity—as always being threatened by incompleteness. This is what is expressed in the Chinese fetishised stereotype of the West: a desire to have what the Other has, and an aggressive reaction to the fear of Western containment, which reads like the fear of castration.

Notes

[1] Slavoj Zizek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, London, Verso, 1997, p 104.
[2] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasures and narrative cinema', *Screen*, 16(3), 1975, pp 6–18.
[3] See Perry Johansson, 'White skin, large breasts: Chinese beauty product advertising as cultural discourse', *China Information*, XII(2/3), Autumn/Winter 1998, pp 59–84.
[4] Beverley Hooper, 'Women, consumerism and the State in post Mao China', *Asian Studies Review*, 17(3), 1994.

[5] Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, New York, Harper and Row, 1987, p 24.
[6] Ibid, p 40.
[7] *Zhiyin* (Bosom friend), 121, January 1995, p 65.
[8] *Hunyin yu jiaring* (Marriage and family), June 1990.
[9] Susan Brownell, 'Representing gender in the Chinese nation: Chinese sportswomen and Beijing's bid for the 2000 Olympics', *Identities*, 1996, p 237.
[10] *Hunyin yu jiating* (Marriage and family), July 1995.
[11] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, New York, Routledge, 1995, pp. 181–203.
[12] *Fenyou* (Share the burden), September 1994. A similar ad had appeared a couple of months before. That one was of a blonde woman in a damp top letting water stream down from a shower onto her breasts.
[13] The ad was for a body lengthening device!
[14] Interview Canton April 1996.
[15] Interview Beijing April 1996.
[16] Millie Creighton follows a similar line of argument discussing Japanese ads. According to Creighton nude or semi-nude representations of Western women are quite common while showing Japanese models like that is only possible in pornography. Creighton argues that Western culture is seen as being built upon egoism and individualism imagined as the opposite of true Japanese values and that the creation of *gaijin* (a Caucasian foreigner) as a social construction of Japanese Occidentalism fulfilled a need to assert control over the moral threat of an intruding outside world. The conclusion Creighton reaches regarding Western women in Japanese ads are that their nudity is not so obscene and morally disturbing for a Japanese observer as an Asian nude would be. Western women, the 'attractive alien beings', are already part of a sinful West. Portraying Japanese women semi-nude in ads for consumer products would be improper. By using Caucasians it is possible to portray what is morally threatening in Japanese culture, such as egoism, individualism and sexuality. She argues that this 'imagined' White Other is created so that the Japanese can be able to cope with problems they themselves confront in the clash between traditional values and modernity and that the ultimate effect of this is a reinforcement of Japanese notion of self-identity. See Millie Creighton, 'Imagining the Other in Japanese advertising campaigns', in *Occidentalism: Images of the West* James G Carrier (ed.), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995.
[17] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London, Penguin Books, 1985, p. 190.
[18] Dru Gladney, 'Representing nationality in China: refiguring majority/minority identities', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 53, February 1994, pp 99–103.
[19] Louisa Schein, 'Gender and internal orientalism in China', *Modern China*, 23(1), January 1997, pp 69–98.
[20] See McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, pp 24–25.
[21] Homi Bhabha, *Locations of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994, p 74.
[22] Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism', Standard edition of the *Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, J. Strachey (ed), London, Hogarth Press, 1953, Vol. 21, p. 152.
[23] Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People*, New York, John Ray, 1935, p 27.
[24] Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 1992, p 141.
[25] *Zhongguo funü* (Chinese women), March 1995.
[26] *Zhongguo funü* (Chinese women), October 1995.
[27] Geremie Barmé, 'To screw foreigners is patriotic: China's avant-garde nationalists', *The China Journal*, 34(2), July 1995, p 210.
[28] Rey Chow, 'Violence in the Other country: China as crisis, spectacle, and woman', in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty *et al* (ed.), Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991, p 86.
[29] Ibid, p 86.
[30] Barmé, 'To screw foreigners is patriotic', p 209.
[31] Ibid, p 209.
[32] Ibid, p 210.
[33] Zhang Ailing, *Hong meigui yu bai meigui* (*The White Rose and the Red*), Guangzhou, Huacheng chubanshe, 1996.
[34] Ibid, p 25.
[35] Ibid, p 26.
[36] Barmé, 'To screw foreigners is patriotic', p 210.
[37] Cao Guilin, *Beijingren Zai Niuyue* [A Beijing Man in New York], Beijing, Zhongguo wenhua chubanshe, 1991, p 77.
[38] Zizek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, p 104.