The Connection Between Chinese Feminism and Western Society

——View from Posters in 1920s

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The feminism of Western society has perceptibly influenced modern Chinese culture nowadays. Sometimes, the position of Western society has been exaggerated by the Chinese. We could easily find a lot of comments on the Chinese social media about how correct Western society's conceptions are, especially with regards to feminism, and sexual liberation. In fact, in the thousand years of Chinese history, the position of the female has been truly lower than the male. Things began to change after the establishment of the Chinese Republic. World War One and industrialization made China reopen itself to the world and be influenced by Western society. The idea of Western society began to be accepted by China. For example, the conception of womenhood began to be highly praised in China. The appearances of the female image in Chinese, newspapers, ads and movies are real evidence of how idea of womenhood changed. Since the images always tell more truth than words that can be edit by many people with different attitudes, analyzing posters is a good way for us to understand this history of women in 1920. We could find many clues from the posters at that period, like how women clothes and posture changed. Origins of this social revolution should also be considered. This requires us to go back to the history of Western Europe and America. The connection between Western society and China in the 1920s had a deep influence on modern people in China, especially show on the idea of women. The poster can be an interesting and useful point of penetration to know the history of this connection in 1920. According to this paper, the history of feminism in Western society and China will firstly be mentioned. Secondly is how this history reflected on posters in 1920s.

In the 20th century, the feminine consciousness in Western and the development of the feminist movement not only had a far-reaching impact on Western world but also on non-Western countries. This constituted a remarkable phenomenon of modern and contemporary

culture. The role of women in this time was not only to be housewives but also women in many different jobs, from dancing girls to writers and nurses. The recognition of women's position and role changed for various reasons. The main reason is conscription. Conscription for World War One led to the lack of male laborers in the market. Women began to have chances to work in the factory, management department, and even the military. The position of women thus began to change. For earning and being treated equally when women were working, the feminism movement grew. In the middle of 20 century, the women's movement began to move from Europe to the United States. Later, the feminist wave swept across all of Western society. The influence of the feminism showed in people's outfits, jobs, and degrees of literary. Leila Ahmed mentioned that change occurred rapidly in the first years of the twenties century. The change was readily apparent to the eye: women's and men's apparel changed, and women were more to be commonly seen on the street.[1]

While this movement was become widespread in Western society, the economic exchange between China and Western society also occurred. Cigarettes, silk stockings, and soap, all other kinds of products were shipped to China and a big market was created there. Because of the popularity of those products around women, the thought of feminism was carried by those products, shipped across the ocean, spread in China.

Feminism in China started in the 20th century with the Chinese Revolution in 1911. In China, feminism has a strong association with socialism and class issues.2 Shanghai, as the

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[1] Leila Ahmed, Women and gender in Islam historical roots of a modern debate (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Pr., 2011).

[2] 1952-, Lin, Chun, (2006-01-01). The transformation of Chinese socialism. Duke University Press.

biggest city that opened to the world at 1920s, is the foothold of all new thoughts, especially the idea of feminism. With the influence from Western economy, Shanghai grew into a modern metropolis which had a rapidly increasing population and an expanding economy. The store in the International Settlements sold Western infrastructure and amenities, which lead a new fashion in Shanghai. The growth of modern Shanghai shook traditional Confucian ethics and values and changed the "traditional culture." The view that "girls from good families should stay at home and should not venture out into the public place" was also challenged. This gave women chances coming out in public. According to the social situation, women in the China Republic could be separate in two groups, New Women, and Modern Women. The difference is that New Women shows the hope of reviving China when Modern Women more focuses on the appearance, which was directly influenced by Wester society in a visual way. The Modern Women is what always show in movies, magazines, and posters. This discrepancy was not only between women but also is the reflection of the society in 1920s. The Community Party of China had passed the Women's movement Resolution on July 1922. This resolution decreed that people should break up all feudal ethics. In 1926, they passed another resolution that focuses on the women's self-liberation. 3

The Community of China publicized the new position of women, and the changing of conceptions about women was also spread far and wide among the people. In the field of art, the ability to express the female consciousness and voice became an indispensable part of this period of artistic creation.4 We could see this change directly from posters and advertisement in that

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[3] My translation. 石川禎浩. "1920 年代中国女性剪发——舆论、时尚、革命." *中国社会主義文化の研究*, May 2010, 27-60. doi:C913.68; K26.

[4] My translation. 璜生 王, " 自我画像：女性艺术在中国（1920-2010）专题展序言二," 东方视觉, , accessed June 26, 2017, http://www.ionly.com.cn/nbo/zhanlan/showAtt_3030.html.

period. The cover of famous magazines, like *Linglong* and the *Republic of China* (figure 1)5, features photos or paintings of such attractive "modern women" such as famous actresses, social butterflies, ladylike female students and the daughters of distinguished families. They were the motifs of the calendar posters in the 1920s and 1930s.6 Different from Western society's modern style, Art Deco, Chinese posters were in style called Yue Feng Pai. Yue Fen Pai is a form of advertising art that helped create a sense of "modernity" in consumer culture in Modern China. During the 1920s and 1930s, Yue Feng Pai was immensely popular. The similarity between Yue Fen Pai and Art Deco is that these two styles both focused on the figure and liked to use lines and strong colors to show the beauty of objects .

Figure 1

[5] A women's weekly magazine (founded March 18, 1931) and a pictorial gravure magazine (founded March 18, 1931)

[6] Ochiai Emiko, "Introduction: Intimate Work and the Construction of Asian Women," *Asian Women and Intimate Work*, 2014, doi:10.1163/9789004258082_002.

The Art Deco is a style of visual arts. This style of architecture first appeared in France just before World War One. Art Deco shows the beauty of lines which generate geometric figures in bright and exaggerated color. One feature of this is style is the image of Modern women. If we compare the image of female in posters before 19th century with those posters after the World War One, we could easily find that women in the posters are both show as naked. The assistance in the Philip Williams Posters pointed out that the similarity of posters before and after the 1920s. However, the big difference was hidden, which was the temperament of them. Women in image before 1920s were weaker. Those ladies come from the upper social class, relying on the family and spending most of their time on enjoyment (figure 1)7. On the other hand, the women's image in 1920s changed a lot. Since the World War One gave women a great chance to find their value in the society, such as workers and nurses, they became more independent and confident. Poster, as a reflection of the social revolution, records all those changings with times feature. Posters at that period show those capable women '

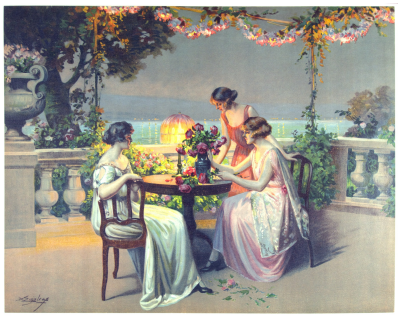

Figure 2

Figure 2

were wearing clothes that more functional. One feature of these women was their hair style—— they all cut and permed their hair (figure 2).8

One interesting thing is that we could also find this feature — short and permed hair — in Chinese posters. Posters at that period embody the high praise of Western culture, from hair style to conceptions. By learning from Western society, Chinese women made a lot of changes like giving women chance to join factory and revolutions. Cutting hair is one of the expressions of their determination. Posters, as the visual recorder, record this behavior as the fashion in that period. Also, in the old time, Chinese women were advocated to stay in the home and avoid coming out in public, the open showing of image of women on posters is a symbol of feminism's effect.

The conception of feminism was spread to China by not only economic current, but also the military incursion. The military incursion, especially the Siege of the International Legations, made China completely became a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Chinese people in that period were enforced to accept Western thoughts. On the other hand, some people saw the advantage of Western thoughts and began to worship them. However, since people always could not see the complement of new things, especially the disadvantage and the context that those conceptions grew up in, many problems appeared. The receiver of new thoughts normally are people who have the higher education than others in the same period. The educational background made them able to accept those new thoughts from Western society. Some followers of new thoughts subjectively criticized people holds the old thoughts, without thinking the context that those "backward elements" grow up on. Undoubtable, the background of feminist in China and Western society was different. Women call for equality in Western society because of

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[7] Ladies of Leisure, French. Collections of the Poster Museum.

[8] "Gee!! I Wish I Were A Man" Navy recruiting poster issued in 1917. Collections of the Library of Congress: U.S. Naval Historical Center Photograph: Photo #NH 63193-A-KN (Color) http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppmsca.40824/

they truly need it—they were facing the unequal treatment in their working places. However, Chinese women at that period did not have needs for earn and treat equally since they did not work for factories and governments. They accept feminism just because they think it was right. This made people who publicized feminism need to stress the advantage of feminism. Through the process of publicizing, some misunderstanding may exist, since the Chinese women might not fell as strong desire as that pioneers of feminism had. This kind of misinterpretations of Western thoughts continuous in modern China. The idea of feminism sometimes is exaggerated nowadays. When you go to the Chinese social medium and search Zhinanai, you could find a lot of statements about how men should treat women. Except for the equal rights in career, education and socially active, some Chinese "feminist" use feminism as the protective cover for their greed. This is what called Pseudo-Feminist. They think that male should always spending more money and energy in a relationship. They set some rules for men to delimit whether they respect feminism or not. For example, they think that if men do not pay meal for the women, it will be rude and anti-feminist. Also, the pre-marital property is another severely afflicted area of the Pseudo-Feminism. By passing the struggle period of women in the production work and jumping into the period of seeking benefit and equality for women, some misinterpretations were made by the Pseudo-Feminist. They more focusing on the result of getting more benefits for themselves, but forget the primary goal is gender equality.

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This is an introduction of the exhibition, 自我画像：女性艺术在中国. The exhibition shows the self-portrait of Chinese woman from 1920 to 2010. The introduction shows the meaning of this exhibition and how it reflects to the history.

Emiko, Ochiai. "Introduction: Intimate Work and the Construction of Asian Women." *Asian Women and Intimate Work*, 2014, 107-39. doi:10.1163/9789004258082_002

This article shows how Chinese magazines at 1920s shows the changing of woman. The process of how women change their appearance is the main topic that this

石川禎浩. "1920 年代中国女性剪发——舆论、时尚、革命." *中国社会主義文化の研究*, May 2010, 27-60. doi:C913.68; K26.

This is an article of what made Chinese woman begin to cut their hair. The connection between Chinese and Western society is the main research direction in this article. Also, the behavior of cutting hair is the symbol of feminism in author's view.

Gilmartin, Christina Kelley. *Engendering the Chinese revolution: radical women, communist politics, and mass movements in the 1920s.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.

This book talking about the revolution that happened in China around 1920s. It focuses on the woman at that time period, especially how they were influenced by revolutions.

James, Pearl. *Picture this: World War I posters and visual culture.* Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

This book talks about the history of World War One. It uses posters as the carrier to indirectly show the facts and influences of the World War One.

Primary Source Portfolio Outline

Pictures

Pictures took in the poster museum:

UNE LAMPE PHILIPS c'est plus sûr ...et pas plus cher!
GRANDIN
PHILIPS
"Griffon"
Peugeot
toujours vaillant après 50.000 km !
Chocolat Carpentier
Saxoléine
PÉTROLE DE SÛRETÉ
en Bidons plombés de 5 litres
ET BEAUTÉ DES CH
XOUR
SPÉCIALISTE DES SOINS DU CHEVEU

SWITZERLAND
TWA
XX
ARNHEM
ISRAEL
FOIRE DE MILAN
SCHWEIZ
PORTUGAL
Espagne
MEXICO
BULGARIEN
THE DALES
ITALIE
Haïti
joie de vivre en
MIDDELKERKE
Fête des Vignerons
VEVEY
NICE
ESPAÑA
XVI FERIA
ZARAGOZA
CHEMINS DE FER ALGÉRIENS DE L'ÉTAT
Visitez POLOGNE
LOYALTY!

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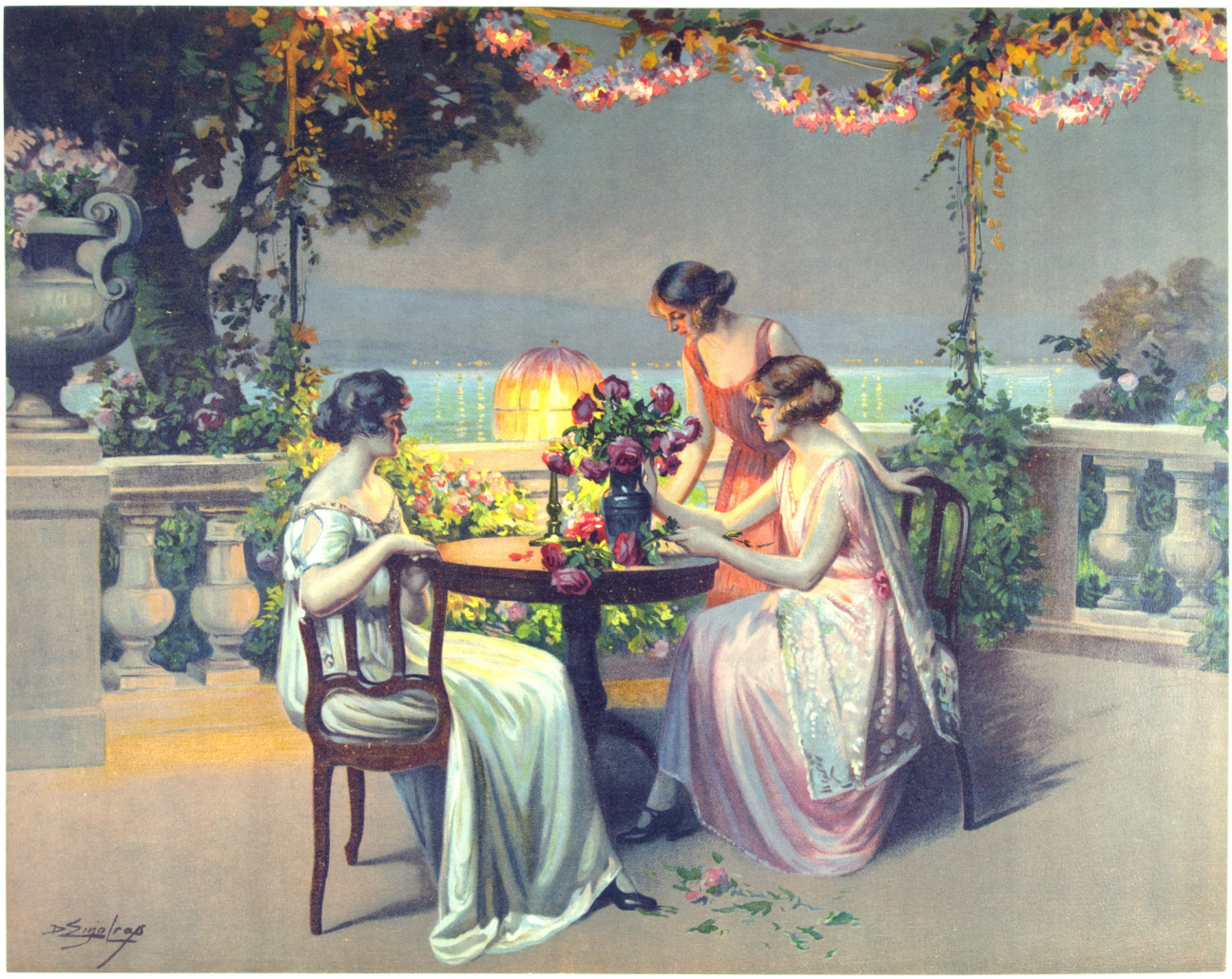
Pictures that I found in the https://postermuseum.com



Pictures that I found in the http://retrographik.com/category/vintage-posters/oriental-posters/

Pictures that I found in the https://postermuseum.com

Y.M.C.A.
ONE OF THE THOUSAND Y.M.C.A. GIRLS IN FRANCE
United War Work Campaign
Nov. 11th to 18th

EMPRUNT NATIONAL 1920
Prêtez à la France pour qu'elle grandisse dans le rayonnement de la Paix !
AU COMPTOIR NATIONAL D'ESCOMPTE DE PARIS ET DANS TOUTES SES AGENCES

Interview

1.
I went to the poster museum and asked few questions to the assistance there.

Do you think the women's feature in the posters 1920 changed?

Yeah it is true. The main difference is on the art style.

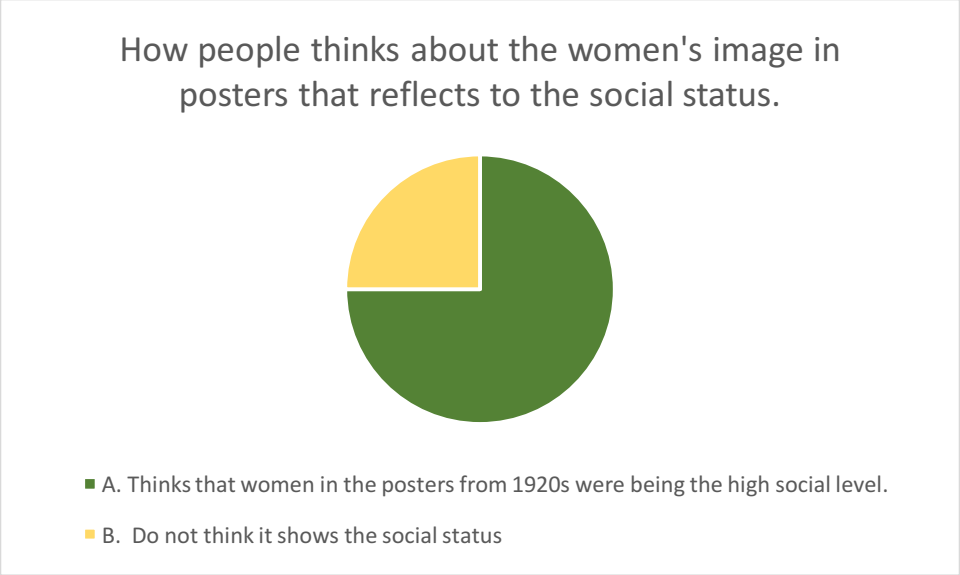
Do you think that women's outfits changed that shown on the posters?

Maybe…? It's not about the appearance, I think. They could be scantily clad. Since you know, those posters were more looking for attract men's attention. But the temperament and identity of those ladies were different.

Do you think there was connection between the posters in China and Western Society?

Yeah, they were almost on the same style.

2.
After went to the poster museum, I asked few questions to pedestrians, and get the date that I show in the chart below.



And all people I interviewed thinks that women had higher status after 1920s.