Embodiment and Subjectivity of an Advertising Post in 1935

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ART 272: Embodiment and Subjectivity in Later Chinese Art

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With dark yellow as the main color frame, two women in qipao are playing golf in an advertising poster for a Shanghai soap company in 1935.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Chinese brand of the soap was “Baiyushuang”, which is the name of a famous opera actress in Shanghai in 1930s. However, the English brand of this soap, “Victoria”, was from Europe, and the manufacture factory was from Japan.[[2]](#footnote-2) This poster perfectly recreates the image of women and unveils the multicultural society in modern Shanghai. Therefore, this paper will discuss these women and their clothes, and indicate how elements in this advertisement embody the identities about women in Shanghai.

This poster was made in the first decade of the Republic of China. After the 1911 Revolution which ended Manchu rule, and influenced by the Western lifestyles and ideas, clothing changed and complicated styles were replaced. With most fashion and global trade taking place in Shang, Shanghai became the place where bred the new development of Chinese dress including qipao. Moreover, Shanghai was experiencing an economic growth at that time. By 1888, the modern industry began to appear in China. Subsequently, Shanghai gradually became the center of industry with its unique industrial advantages and treaty port.[[3]](#footnote-3) During that time under unstable political climate, Shanghai was known as Asia’s preeminent metropolis where East and West culture collided and fused.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Qipao, the iconic garment by which Chinese women are still known throughout the world, is the symbol of the evolution of the modernization in China. Besides, the emergence of qipao was also an evolution of the Chinese fashion and opening up. In 1930s, qipao was considered a daring style, elegantly revealing the shape of a woman’s bewitching figure. The young lady in the right of the post wore red qipao with serried flowers design. As the famous portrayal of fashion in 1930s, this fashion-conscious lady qipao’s hemlines dropped to the ankle, and side slits reached right up to the thigh. These styles depicted a woman slender legs dimly as never before, and accentuated a modern Shanghai woman’s confidence of her beauty and projecting herself. The miss in the right of the post wore a similar slim fitting qipao in pure white with inwrought lace. The white clothes and her clean and tender skin were the best advertisement of the cosmetic soap. Before the era of the Republic of China, the forms of aesthetic expression were veiled. In comparison to the Chinese clothes in the past which were exquisite and dazzling, qipao focused on the conciseness value, which emphasized revealing the elegance of women itself and the freedom of expression.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Successful union of Chinese style and Western tailoring

Aesthetic appreciation

were provocative and accentuated the femininity.

People could clearly see the high-heeled shoes the woman wore, which were totally different from Manchu shoes, highlighting the high and slim shape of figure.

“Women with style copied the permanent wave favored by Shanghai movie stars. ”

“With their glamorous poses, wavy hair, arched eyebrows, and coy looks, their influence was pervasive ” 147

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1. Garrett, Valery. Chinese dress: from the Qing dynasty to the present. (Tuttle Publishing, 2012), 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Victoria Soap is a Swedish family run company that was founded in 1905 in Helsingborg Sweden. <https://www.victoriasoap.se/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Zurndorfer, Harriet T. "Imperialism, globalization, and the soap/suds industry in Republican China (1912-37): the case of Unilever and the Chinese consumer." (2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Minick, Scott, and Ping Jiao. Chinese graphic design in the twentieth century. (Thames and

   Hudson, 2010),s 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Roberts, Claire, ed. Evolution & Revolution: Chinese Dress, 1700s-1990s. (Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, 1997), 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)