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***The Representation of Modern Women in Yuefenpai in
1920s and 1930s Shanghai:***

*A comparison between the calendar posters of Zheng Mantuo and Hang
Zhiying*

A Master's Thesis for the Degree "Master of Arts (Two
Years) in Visual Culture

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ABSTRACT

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Modern women images in Yuefenpai in early twentieth century Shanghai:

A comparison between the works of Zheng Mantuo and Hang Zhiying

by Yiding Zeng

Yuefenpai is a type of calendar poster that was prevalent in Shanghai during the early 20th century and the pre-Communist era. These posters were influenced by Western advertisements and were successful in advertising and giving recognition to the artists. In this study, the origins of *Yuefenpai* are outlined, the changing image of the modern women is described, the reasons for the change are analyzed, and the impact of *Yuefenpai* on the modernization of women is discussed. Through a comparative analysis of the *Yuefenpai* images of two of the most influential artists, it was found that the changing image of the ideal modern woman from androgyny to sexuality and back to traditional women could not be isolated from political motivations and commercial interests. Evidence of these political and commercial actors was found during a study on the androgynous and feminine qualities of the women in the paintings.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Historical Background of Yuefenpai.....	1
1.2 Research Questions.....	3
1.3 Sources and literature.....	4
Yuefenpai pictures: Zheng Mantuo.....	5
2.1 Zheng Mantuo and his works	5
Figure 2.1 Female Students	7
Figure 2.2 Two Girls	8
2.2 Androgyny.....	10
2.2.1 Shorthair.....	10
2.2.2 Qipao: Masculine One Piece Dress.....	14
Chapter 3 Yuefenpai pictures from mid-1930s: Hang Zhiying	19
3.1 An introduction of Zhiying Studio.....	19
3.2 <i>Yuefenpai</i> girls in Hang Zhiying's works.....	20
3.3 Femininity	24
3.4 The role of homemaker	28
Chapter 4: The modern woman in Shanghai context.....	32
4.1 Colonial modernity	32
4.2 A male perspective of seeing.....	36
4.3 Relating the development of modernity to Zheng Mantuo and Hang Zhiying	39
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	44

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Historical Background of Yuefenpai

Yuefenpai, literally means advertisement calendar posters in Chinese, is a particular type of advertising poster in the form of calendars during colonial time in Shanghai. *Yuefenpai* emerged in late nineteenth century and disappeared in 1949, when the Communists took over the city. The popularity of these posters reached its peak at around 1930's. ¹The flourishing period ran from the start of the Republic of China (1911) and till the occupation by Japanese in Shanghai (1937), and this is the specific time period that will be covered in this study.

This time period has a unique historical background and some corresponding historical facts and this will be discussed. After losing the Opium War in 1840, China opened up five coast cities, according to Nanjing Treaty (1842).² Shanghai is one of those cities. A half century later in 1895, China signed Treaty of Shimonoseki, after losing First Sino-Japanese War. Foreign companies were now allowed to open factories in treaty ports.³ Soon afterwards, Shanghai developed tremendously from a fishing village to China's finance, trade and industry center. By 1930 Shanghai had become "a cosmopolitan metropolis, the fifth largest city in the world and China's largest harbor and treaty port,..."⁴ In terms of being a treaty port Shanghai had been divided into many sections, a concession for France, and an international concession which was mostly for Britain and America.

¹ Laing, Ellen Johnston, *Selling Happiness: calendar posters and visual culture in early-twentieth-century Shanghai* University of Hawai'i Press, 2004, pp3-4

² Many publications on the historical studies in Shanghai had discussed about this historic facts happened in China, including: Lee, Leo Ou-fan, *Shanghai Modern: the flowering of a new urban culture in China, 1930-1945*, Harvard University Press, 1999. Shanghai Modern; Marie-Claire Bergère, "'The Other China': Shanghai from 1919 to 1949," Cambridge University Press, 1981. pp.1-34

³ Laing, pp.2

⁴ Lee, Leo Ou-fan, *Shanghai Modern: the flowering of a new urban culture in China, 1930-1945*, Harvard University Press, 1999. Shanghai Modern pp.3

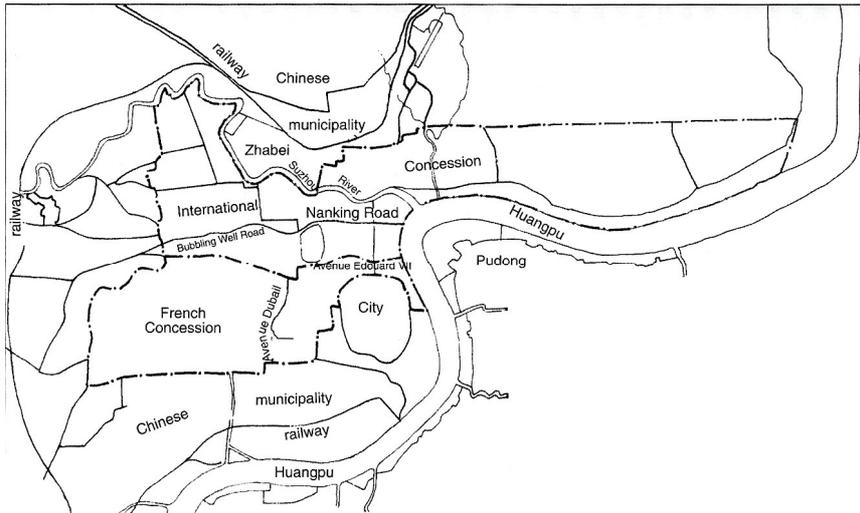


Figure 1. Map of Shanghai in 1920s.⁵

See Figure 1, foreigners also brought their style of architecture, entertainment, and the newest fashion, and of course the idea of modern from their mother countries. A good example of this foreign influence on China can be seen in the emergence of Western style calendar posters.

The origin of type of poster was started by the British American Tobacco Company (BAT) for its promotional campaigns. At the beginning, the same format of the advertising campaigns picture they used in the West was used in China, for instance, “German fairy tales, ..., American landscapes and American heroes like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and even American women,...”⁶ However, the Chinese could not enjoy those images, because they are not related with the beholders real life⁶. As a result, Chinese artists were hired to produce new images that are more attractive to the local people.

The combination of image, commodities and the actual calendar is fascinating. The commercial companies look at it as a means to sell their products, the mass look at it as a decoration with attractive young women in the picture and the real use as a calendar. The most common format of *yuefenpai* is a vertical rectangle in shape and with the largest image in the center, usually a portrait of a woman. And at the bottom is the text, may be the commodity and company information and the calendar. Some

⁵ Source of map: Feetham, Richard, *Report of the Hon. Mr. Justice Feetham, C. M. G., to the Shanghai Municipal Council*, Shanghai, North China Daily News and Herald, 1931, 2 vols. pp. 356

⁶ Laing, Ellen Johnston, *Selling Happiness: calendar posters and visual culture in early-twentieth-century Shanghai* University of Hawai'i Press, 2004. pp.30

of *yuefenpai* leave out the calendar part, especially in the works after late 1930s. It's also common for artists to place the text on the side instead of bottom. Quite often they were framed with floral pattern, which can be seen as the Deco style. These *yuefenpai* are usually sold to customers for very low price or given away as gifts with commodities or a reward to old customers as New Year gift.⁷

1.2 Research Questions

The uniqueness of the *yuefenpai* is rooted in its combination of beautiful female image, advertising commodities and the calendar. It has the traces from ancient Chinese painting of ladies⁸ and the folk art of New Year calendar woodblock prints painting as well as the trait from the commercialized eastern colonial metropolis. Its hybrid character made it popular in a short time after its first appearance, and it's also appealing to me for the rich content for instance, the newest fashionable clothes and accessories for girls, the latest interior decoration, the promoted article, etc. Daily living goods from liquor to textile, cosmetics and pesticides are mostly common in *yuefenpai*, however, the most common article is cigarettes. And despite the large range of the items, 'women were almost the sole subjects of the advertising campaigns...'⁹. Thus, there's a nickname in Chinese for *yuefenpai*, *xiangyanpai*, cigarette poster; and *yuefenpai* girls are called *xiangyanpai nvlang*, that can be translated as cigarette pin-up girls. There's a certain connection between *yuefenpai* girls and pin-up girls in western.

In this thesis, *yuefenpai* girls have been chosen as the study object. The two artists I've chosen are Zheng Mantuo and Hang Zhiying. They were active and important in the specific period studied. Zheng was active from 1914 till late 1920s. Hang Zhiying founded his studio in 1921 and gained his fame around 1930 and produced most of the *yuefenpai* works in 1930s. This paper will look at the changes of the

⁷ Ibid pp.29-39

⁸Painting of Lady is a branch from the Chinese portrait painting. Women usually depicted alone or in groups in their daily life, like outing, playing, even wondering in their boudoirs. Usually the women been portrayed are up class women or well-known female characters in the history and tradition tales. This topic has been neglected in English language researches on Chinese visual culture. Lee, Lily Xiao HongMen, review on *Wang Zijin; 'Zhongguo chuantong yishu: Shiniu tu'*,(Chinese traditional arts: Paintings of lady) Women & Gender in Early & Imperial China; Oct2002, Vol. 4 Issue 2, p238-239

⁹ Mittler, Gendered Advertising in China: What History Do Images Tell?

pictures in these two artists in terms of the fashion and how they presented the *yuefenpai* girls in those posters. What is the difference between the early 1920s *yuefenpai* image and the mid 1930s one? Why has the image of women changed over time? What is the definition of the modern woman? After comparison, it is hypothesized that this changing image of the modern woman is because of the development of modernity in society. In the last chapter, media and other non-*yuefenpai* sources to aid in the analysis of this change.

1.3 Sources and literature

There are a few publications of *yuefenpai* posters, most of these being catalogues. Well-known *yuefenpai* painters and their famous works have also been studied in those publications. Apart from that, some articles on *yuefenpai* research the gender issue, commercialization and advertising issue. There are also many books about the clothes fashion of Republic China and also the feminist movement and Chinese women's status at that time. This thesis will begin with analysing the images, and then extract the features of the female image at that specific time. Then the paper will go further with reading beyond the symbols from the *yuefenpai* picture in these different points in time and try to relate those symbols to the social realities and the mentalities. I will research on the factors of the more revealing and seductive girls in late *yuefenpai* images. And the last question to be answered is whether or not sexual permissiveness is an inherent feature of modernity.

Regarding the date of *yuefenpai* works, most of the pictures cannot be traced to a specific date. Many *yuefenpai* catalogues have conflicted work date, or date unknown. Although some of them have calendars that makes much easier to tell the creation time, but there are also a few *yuefenpai* which do not include calendars, especially after mid 1930s. This creates lots of trouble in studying *yuefenpai*. To avoid this, I chose two artists that are representative of different time periods.

Yuefenpai pictures: Zheng Mantuo

2.1 Zheng Mantuo and his works

Zheng Mantuo (1888-1961) was active as a yuefenpai painter from 1914 to 1930 in Shanghai, and he was the major innovator in *yuefenpai* painting techniques. In his early age, he received both Chinese painting and western watercolor painting training. He opened a portrait studio in Erwoxuan Photography Shop. At his studio, carbon powder was used in the portraits based on photographs (generally larger portraits) and watercolor was used as pigment for old black and white pictures. This is a major innovation of *yuefenpai* painting skill invented by Zheng Mantuo and later it became an important terminology called *rub-and-paint*. Zheng kept this rub-and-paint skill secret so that other painters could not imitate until later Hang Zhiying revealed this technique and popularized it. And in 1914 he posted four of his paintings of women in Zhang Garden and caused a big sensation and all his works were purchased by a wealthy Chinese merchant, Huang Chujiu(1872-1931). At this point local Chinese merchants had also realized the importance of the *yuefenpai* as a tool of promotion for their products, so that they can keep up with foreign companies. As local merchants, they have a more similar taste with their consumers and a greater idea of what will become popular in next season. From this point, Zheng formally started his career as a *yuefenpai* artist in Shanghai.¹⁰ He became the most popular *yuefenpai* painter until Hang Zhiying took over his place in the 1930s.

However, Zheng is more famous for his idea of fashionable new women image. The *yuefenpai* girls before him are mostly from the Chinese ancient tales or famous women in old time. The trace from traditional Chinese painting is dominant, not only in term of the theme but also the technique is similar. And Zheng made a huge change in both the theme and technique. The fresh and up to date female images in Zheng's painting gained him not only commercial success but also a good name in

¹⁰ Biography information about Zheng Mantuo can be found in:
Laing, Ellen Johnston, *Selling Happiness: calendar posters and visual culture in early-twentieth-century Shanghai* University of Hawai'i Press, 2004 pp.115-118
Song, jialin, ed., *Lao yuefenpai*, Shanghai: Shanghai huabao chubenshe, 1997 pp18-19
Bu, Ji, "Jiefangqian de 'yuefenpai' nianhua shiliao," *Meishu yanjiu* 2 (1959) pp.52

keeping up with latest ideology, which is democracy and science advocated by the May Fourth Movement in 1919. This movement took its name from the day 4th of the May massive university student protest against the Treaty of Versailles, in 1919, for transferring Germany's occupied Chinese territorial to Japanese. But May Fourth Movement has more profoundly affected Chinese in other ways, in advocate a new culture from western modern thoughts and emphasizing the importance of democracy and science and abandoning the old Chinese traditions, Confucianism.¹¹ Zheng's series of schoolgirl *yuefenpai* picture gained his fame as an innovative artist.



Figure 2.1. Zheng Mantuo(1888-1961) *Female Student*, advertisement calendar

¹¹ Grieder, Jerome B. *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937*, IUniverse, 1999

poster for Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Co. Ltd. in 1920s.¹²

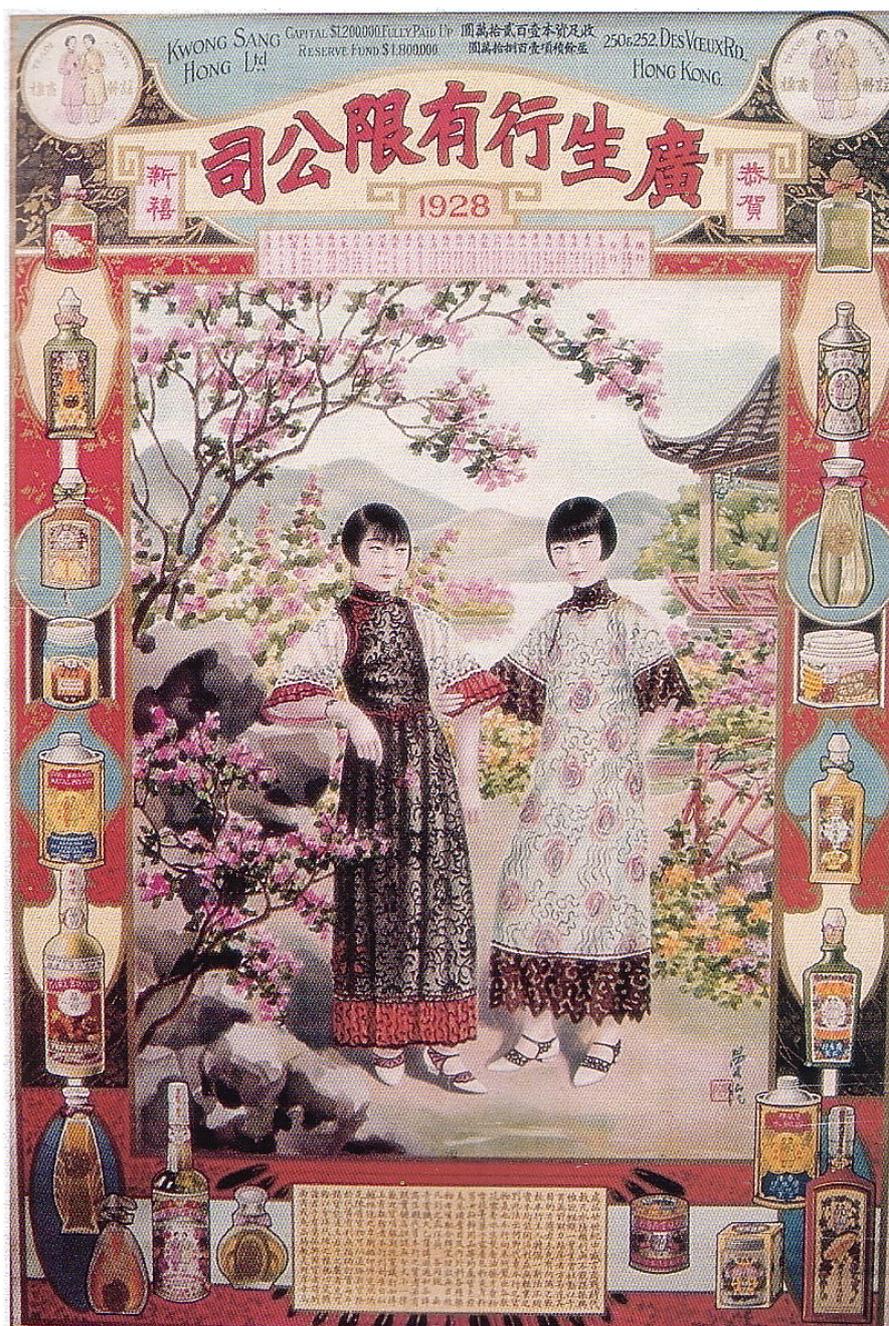
Figure 2.1 Female Students

A schoolgirl is reading a book in this picture. Girls were not supposed to be educated in old Chinese traditions. There is a proverb about the importance to keep females from being educated in old times. “Ignorance is women’s virtue.”¹³ This idea about woman virtue is a part of the Confucian moral principles. This is Zheng’s early work for Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company. The calendar is omitted in this work but the packages of cigarette are still at the top right corner of this poster and the company name is in the upper middle part. A girl is resting next to a stream and flower tree. She is sitting on a rail thinking with a book in her right hand and leaning her left hand on the railing. She is still in old hairstyle, which is long and combed and tucked to back of her head in a bun. She is dressing in the May Fourth style outfit, in which she is wearing a Chinese jacket with wide three-quarter length sleeves and wearing a dark-colored with white grid calf-length skirt. This is the standard dress for young women in their late teens and early twenties around the May Fourth Movement.¹⁴ There is no exact date given for the painting on the book other than it originating from the 1920s, but from this girl’s dressing, I would argue that it is most likely created the early year of this decade. A pair of white heel leather shoes is from outside China. Traditional Chinese women shoes are usually made from cloth for bound feet.

¹² After Deng, Ming; Gao, Yan, *Meinv Yuefenpai*, Shanghai: Shanghai huabao chubanshe, 2003, pp.22

¹³ This proverb origin from Ming Dynasty and used a great deal in different literature sources including the most famous one, *Hong Lou Meng* (the Dream of Red Mansion), The Fourth Chapter.

¹⁴ Finnane, Antonia, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation*, Columbia University Press, 2007. P.139



广生行有限公司广告 郑曼陀 20世纪20年代作

Figure 2.2 Zheng Mantuo(1888-1961), *Two Girls*, advertisement calendar poster for Kwong Sang Hong Ltd. for 1928.¹⁵

Figure 2.2 Two Girls

This is another of Zheng’s work for *yuefenpai* for Guangsheng hang, a Hongkong cosmetics company, for their 1928 advertisements. Thus, this piece is mostly created

¹⁵ After Song Jialin, ed., *Lao Yuefenpai*, Shanghai: shanghai huabao chubanshe, 1997, pp.21

in 1927. Set in a Chinese garden, which has lots of similarities with figure 2.1, with the riverbank and a flower tree next to the girls. Two girls are in the center of the picture, and they are in the latest fashion: the girl on the right is wearing a one piece loose garment paired with mandarin collar. This is the emergence of the *qipao*¹⁶, the significance of which will be explained in more detail later. The girl on the left has a sleeveless jacket dress over her blouse, a bit tight and yet she does not show any female curves. Her dress was called vest with blouse, it was just as popular as *qipao*. Both of their sleeves are three quarter length and they are wearing similar pair of shoes, which are light colored with a lace edge.

Besides the new garments, a striking aspect of the image is the new and fresh short ear-length hairdo. On the right, she had her bang cut horizontally; it is a typical bob hair, which was also popular in Europe at that time. The other girl has short hair at ear-length but with a slightly different bang, which was quite common in early Republic era. This type of bang is called “Star-studded Sky” to describe her short and thin bang falling down from the center of the forehead.¹⁷ Take a close look at the postures. The girls in this picture are stretching more than the girls in earlier poster. Refer back to the girl in figure 2.1. She covered her chest area by the bent elbow and a book in her hand. The girl on the right is less repressed and grasps the other girl’s arm. There is no hiding from the observer, both of her feet are fully shown and not like the girl in first figure who is trying to cover her ankle with her foot.

In addition, the gaze of the girl on the right differs from other *yuefenpai* girl at the 1920s. She is directly gazing at the beholders, while the other girl is looking aside. This direct gaze girl in a *yuefenpai* picture is a rare case in the 1920s. Ellen Laing discussed about the piercing gaze of *yuefenpai* girls when she studied the *yuefenpai* artists from British American Tobacco Company. She elaborated the idea of piercing gaze women from Hu Boyang and Ni gengye’s works in 1930s. She observes those girls as more active and seductive. As they are looking at beholders, there’s no barrier between the beholders and subject, therefore piercing gaze can be seen as a

¹⁶ Qipao is the name originally describing the clothes Manchu women wear in Qing Dynasty. However the reformed style one-piece garment in early 1920s made its name popular. As the picture shows, it is often hanging loose from the neck till hem. A further explanation will be made late in this chapter.

¹⁷ Laing, pp.132

provocative sign and sexual invitation.¹⁸ The girl in Zheng's picture is looking at the viewer but not in a provocative way. Chinese girls in *yuefenpai* do not smile widely or have exaggerated expressions. It's a part of the inherent nature in Chinese philosophy. Emphasize the resonance of the spirit instead of the form, so less attention was paid to a realistic depiction of the body gesture and facial expression. In the portraying of females this law particularly has to be followed, smiling broadly and improper gestures are unacceptable. So what make this girl so interesting? The females have no expression on their face yet they give a hint of the concept of a modern girl, who is bold enough to look at you directly in your eyes and take initiative to hold her companion's arm.

2.2 Androgyny

From the two pictures above, we can see two major changes in hairstyle and women's clothes in Zheng's works in the early and late 1920s. Cutting women's long hair is often read as the first step to the modern woman and getting rid of braids is a sign of removing their feminine quality. This together with the dress change can be seen the androgynous qualities are growing in the new modern women. In this chapter, these traits will be picked up and make a detailed discussion. The major influence for this change is due to the May Fourth Movement, and this has been discussed a great deal in the literature regarding Chinese fashion, women's status, and the political movement at the time.

2.2.1 Shorthair

There was more than one example of schoolgirl images which appeared in *yuefenpai* after the May Fourth Movement. It was Zheng initiated a series of schoolgirl images at early 1920s with long hair but a standard May fourth clothing style¹⁹. Furthermore, this motif had revealed the corresponding idea, which is that the

¹⁸ Laing, pp.182-187

¹⁹ Finnane. "...jacket-blouse with wide sleeves and a mandarin collar paired with gathered skirt." pp.139

modern woman should be educated and independent. However, short hair or bob hair does not appear in this poster. This publicity of cutting long hair short from the May Fourth Movement did not make shorthair really popular in Shanghai soon after. That is why *yuefenpai* girl's hairstyles still remain traditional while adopting the new clothing style. Shanghai fashion was not directly affected by the political movement, which took place over thousand miles away in Beijing. Modern girls in Shanghai have a different environment compared with the girls in Beijing; a capital city which is more political. With no doubt, *yuefenpai* painters caught these differences. So this short bob hairdo did not become the popular fashion until several years afterwards.

The issue of women with short hair is debated worldwide after WWI. Scholars usually perceive this short hair style along with the new fashion as “a sign of ‘the refusal of any constraint,’ the ‘emancipation of women,’ and ‘the affirmation of liberty.’” Furthermore, scholars look at the short hair women as a reflection of the new “freedom of movement brought about by the war”.²⁰

One French hairdresser explained how it related to the war time. “The woman who took an active place in industrial, commercial, artistic, social life during what is called ‘The Great War’ has in part conserved it... Rapidly and not undeservedly, women are winning their right to freedom. And to equality perhaps ... in a bold and impressive jump, this generation is surmounting the high barriers of tradition, prejudice and established morality concerning hair: she is having her hair cut.”²¹

Indeed, short hair is bounded up with the social change of women's status due to war. Since women of all classes need to work the simpler way of hairdo emerges from the times require.

As mentioned above, Shanghai is a colonial city which has tons of western buildings, and factories, and commodities. As Lee Ou-Fan mentioned in his book *Shanghai Modern*, Shanghai is mainly influenced by concessions countries²², especially by the

²⁰ Roberts, Mary Louise, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927*, University of Chicago Press, 1994. pp.81

²¹Roberts, pp. 80

²² Concession is a political agreement granting preferential treatment to foreign countries or nationals. Usually a territory within one country and governs by a foreign country or national. The foreign country who holds sovereignty over it is a concession country. Source from: Encyclopedia of the

French.²³ It is also the fact that France has the exclusive concession area, while Britain and American belong to the international concession. The publications and the movies from outside country have made an important contribution to popularize the exotic culture and life style. In Lee's book, he also remapped urban life in Shanghai: From Café, chocolate shop, to department store public park, from movie theatre and ballroom to race club.²⁴ Lee also mentioned about massive amounts of western publications got into the city. There were in general three ways of getting publications from outside country. First, many book stores in Fuzhou Road, was also known for the culture street where all kind of bookstores located. Two major bookstores Commercial Press and Zhonghua Bookstore had their own library foreign books. There were smaller bookstores around the same area, which specifically deal in the foreign language books, e.g. Kelly & Walsh and Sino-American Bookstores. In addition, many magazines and novels could be found at secondhand bookstores. These books were often from the shipboard reading material from foreign travelers. Apart from these sources, one could always order a foreign book c.o.d.²⁵ At the same time, a large number of foreign publications were translated in Chinese by the new generation of intellectuals, some of them with study experience from Europe. Most of these publications were translated from English and French language.²⁶ Thus, Shanghai is guaranteed to be the up to date fashion with fashion outside of the country.

At the same period, France is going through their fashion revolution as well. Coco Chanel cut her hair at 1916, and she is often regarded as the revolutionary in hair style, together with two hair dressers Antoine Cierplikowski and René Rambaud, who pioneered the bob hair style in professional circles in early 1920s.²⁷ Soon this bob hair fashion became a heated debate in the whole country and this discussion "peaked between 1924 and 1926".²⁸ This new fashion soon spread across Europe

United Nations and International Agreement: A to F by Edmund Jan Osmanczyk, Edited by Anthony Mango. Routledge, 3rd edition (2004), pp 432.

²³ Lee, pp .202 "... the heady foreign atmosphere of the 'western façade' of Shanghai's concessions, especially the French."

²⁴ Lee, pp3-42

²⁵ Lee, pp120-122

²⁶ Lee, pp.144-148

²⁷ Roberts, Mary Louise, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927*, University of Chicago Press, 1994. pp.65

²⁸Ibid. pp.64

and America. Furthermore, the popularity of the bob hairstyle by the French have more or less helped it get more recognition through modern Shanghai girls.

To understand the developments of this time, one needs to think about WWI and the domestic wars by local warlords at that time. As Finnane wrote in *Changing clothes in China* “War, both at home and abroad, determined that national struggle of girls’ hair would finally be about the bob, not the braid.”²⁹ France and China share the same postwar situation and especially Chinese have suffered not only from the lost territorial sovereignty in WWI, but also from the imminent anti-Japanese war, which started from Shanghai in 1937. Global fashion and this domestic situation raise



Figure 2.3 ³⁰

this population. See Figure 2.3. This image depicts a series of short hair style advertised in *Linglong* magazine. It is also true that it requires less time attention for short hair, and simplicity instead of complexity is the major character of the postwar fashion everywhere. Also, the short hair girls are associated with the new modern and independent women both in France³¹ and China. These qualities coincide with the modern woman idea that the May Fourth Movement preaches.

Finally, women also cut their hair short to be more similar to men. So this androgynous feature of new women caused a great stir in the whole society. For conservatives, this shows women giving up their female status and disrespecting their family and the traditions. However, the education system encouraged this new

²⁹ Finnane, Antonia, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation*, Columbia University Press, 2007. Pp.159

³⁰ This picture is one from a series of short hair style demonstrated by a western female in *Linglong* magazine 1,15(1932): 904

³¹ Roberts, “After 1922, the new style (bob hair together with ‘à l’allure garçonnière’) were associated with the young, sex, independent modern woman.” pp65

initiative. Change of vestimentary in Zheng's *yuefenpai* girls is also started in schools. School is a powerful agent for modern Chinese girls, because it is the first public place for young girl to go when they free themselves from their boudoirs. In traditional sense, a well brought up girl should not step outside her family doorsill until she is married. From thereon she ought to stay inside her husband's house taking care of her husband and the children. It is scandalous for women showing themselves in public place, and the whole family is ashamed. School is also an institution which can educate ignorant women (pre-modern) so that they become intelligent, knowledgeable, and most importantly political and patriotic women (modern) for saving their nation from disaster.

2.2.2 Qipao: Masculine One Piece Dress

One piece garment for Chinese women, *Qipao* was first seen in schools and on intellectuals. This kind of garment was continuously in fashion after the May Fourth Style. And it shares the same feature with men's wear, for example the one piece long gown at that time, which is called *Changpao* in Chinese and it means literally long gown. During the 1920s it was a rising fashion and it had some major distinctions between the later time, in which there were no splits on both sides and the gowns were never tightly tailored. The girl (Figure 2.2) on the right is in this kind of A-line loose gown fitted from the shoulders but widening from under shoulders till the hem. As a result, the breasts and the waist part are covered completely. It successfully concealed the curves of female body, and its androgynous features are enhanced with her bob hair.

The girl on the left is dressing in a vest over her dress, but more closely fitted compared to the girl on the right. These two types of dresses coexisted in the twenties, but *qipao* gradually became the dominant fashion until the late twenties.³² A photo took from a 1928 magazine corresponded with Zheng's *yuefenpai*.

³² Finnane, pp.150



Figure 2.4 A family photograph of Commander Yang Hu shot in 1928.³³

See figure 2.4 it's a family picture of Yang Hu (1889-1966), Shanghai Military Commander of this time. His wife is dressing in vest and blouse style and his two daughters are in wide sleeves *qipao* and with short hair, especially the elder daughter with her distinct dress and very short hair almost obscuring her gender.

Another important detail cannot be overlooked is their flat chests. In order to hide the breast profile, women at that time are often breast binding. Thus, even though the girl who has a tight vest on the left in Figure 2.4, her chest is still flat. Likewise, with the girl in the long gown any rise in her chest part cannot be seen. Breast binding concerns the acceptance of western chemise, which make this action possible and also due to the fact of helping women get into their dress was not close tailored. The western chemise are called little vests in China, that is just a simple top with two straps on shoulders, or a strap that is hanging on the neck. Buttons and laces are applied on the top to flatten the breasts. According to Finnane, it appears when jacket- blouse (simply May Fourth Style) began to give way to the *qipao*. "At this stage, darts were not used to tailor the bodice or upper part of *qipao*... The most that could be done by far of further fitting the *qipao* to be bosom was to stretch the

³³ Figure 2.4 From *Guowen huabao* 19 March 1928.

material at the right places through ironing.”³⁴ In this way, little vests became popular and made it easy for tailors making *qipao*.

Moreover, Chinese have never been comfortable to show the explicit female curves from a traditional standpoint. And this tight fit vest of the girl in Zheng’s picture is already a daring revolution of the traditional women’s clothing. As Dyer Ball described, “Fashion decreed that jackets should fit tight, though not yielding to the contours of the figure, except in the slightest degree, as such an exposure of the body would be considered immodest.”³⁵ Thus, those girls in new costume need to restrain their chests to obey the social moral. Besides this, covering up their feminine features accord with their initial idea of being donned in men’s clothes to be more like men.

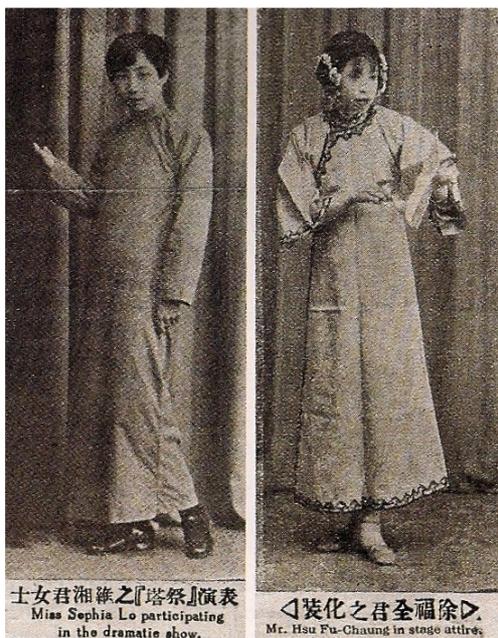


Figure 2.5 Cross-dressed actor and actress in typical clothes. ³⁶

Yet one might wonder why suddenly girls donned themselves in man’s clothes. Figure 2.5 depicts women and men’s dressing style at this time period. Furthermore, it shows how close the men’s wear is to women’s wear. From these pictures, only minor changes had been made from the men’s clothes to the female ones. Female’s dress has trim and men’s gowns are H-line but in female version changed to slightly

³⁴ Finnane pp163

³⁵ Dyer Ball, J., *The Chinese at Home, or The Man of Tong and His Land*, London: The Religious Tract Society, 1911, pp.236

³⁶ from *Beiyang huabao* 10 May 1930.

A-shape. However in daily dress like Figure 2.4 shows, some *qipao* are more sober and plain. As a result, Eileen Chang, a famous female author, comments on this early stage of *qipao*, it is to “discard everything that smacked of femininity, even to the point of rejecting womanhood altogether.”³⁷

From these two major changes above, women are erasing their complicated womanly features, and adopting a simpler and yet more boyish fashion, that reveals the androgynous quality in modern women’s fashion at that decade. Hence, a topic on women disguising themselves as men was discussed a great deal both in China and outside the country. There’s a fifth-century Chinese legend about a disguised woman, Hua Mulan. This story has been dramatically adapted to a Disney film, and the story is, Hua Mulan heard his father sigh while she was spinning. Soon she knew that her father was conscripted to the war and he is too old to fight and yet Mulan doesn’t have an elder brother. So she quitted spinning and dressed in warrior’s clothes and joined the troops under her father’s name. She partook in the battle frontier against invading enemies from Mongolia. She performed outstanding military exploits and was praised by the emperor and gained fame for her family.³⁸ Meanwhile, Mulan is a recurring theme in *yuefenpai* that had been depicted by Zhou Muqiao, Hang Zhiying and other. It is widely believed that Mulan theme recurred at this time is not a single coincidence. This theme is also connected to the impending war between Japan and China. Susan Mann suggested this undying popularity of Mulan is due to it standing for “the new female citizen and a reproach to her contemporary counterparts who have neglected their duty to their country and failed to take advantage of the new opportunities opened to them by their enhanced physical strength”.³⁹

Disguise themselves as men, is a way for women to access convenience and psychological comfort in a male domain. Just like Mulan dressed in a warrior’s uniform and helmet to get onto the battlefield, it is the same with those school girls dress like males to go to the school, which use to be an institution only males could

³⁷ Chang, Eileen “A Chronicle of Changing Clothes,” pp.435.

Finnate, Chapter 7, pp177

³⁸ The story about Hua Mulan is based on a Chinese poem at Nanbei Chao (the Northern and Southern Dynasties)(420-589 A.D.) *Mulan Ci*, Author unknown.

³⁹ Mann, Susan, Myths of Asian Womanhood, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Nov., 2000), pp. 835-862

enter. Furthermore the working office, and many other places which have previously been dominated by males, are also new areas for women nowadays. However, with the help of new costumes they naturally developed a new persona that is not usually been accepted by the current society moral standard. Females developed a stronger personality and ability which was quite opposite to the traditional “fragile beauty”. This new clothing fashion emerged to eliminate the sex segregation. Obviously, this boyish outfit benefits women undertaking men’s role to save this nation or at least receive an education, “which in a context where education was linked intimately to nation self-strengthening.”⁴⁰ From above, we can see the social movement provoke the modern idea like independent and political awareness of new women that reflected in the fashion where we can see from the *yuefenpai* girl in 1920s.

⁴⁰ Finnane, pp.89-91

Chapter 3 Yuefenpai pictures from mid-1930s: Hang Zhiying

3.1 An introduction of Zhiying Studio.

Hang Zhiying(1900-1947) was born in Haining, Zhejiang. His father was one of the founders of the Commercial Press, one of the original press companies and also a bookstore. So naturally, Hang Zhiying attended Commercial Press School for training his painting and design skills after he moved to Shanghai. During his years in Commercial Press School, he acquired Zheng's *yuefenpai* painting skills, rub-and-paint, by examining Zheng's original paintings of calendar posters and imitating his works. Soon he learned Zheng's unique method of painting and popularized this exclusive skill and gained early fame. In the early 1920s⁴¹, Hang Zhiying left Commercial Press School and established his own studio, Zhiying Studio, "specializing in advertisement posters and product design"³⁵. In the early stage, Zhiying's work tended to imitate Zheng's calendar poster style, according to Xiao Chunyuan and Laing. They suggested that Zhiying was still in thrall to Zheng. Laing listed a work dated in mid-1920s and compared carefully with Zheng's work at the same time to prove his observation. It was not until two talented painters, Jin Xuechen and Li Mubai, joined Zhiying's studio and become associates that Zhiying Studio developed the new style *yuefenpai* girls with buxom body and outfit revealing female curves.⁴²

Jin Xuechen(1904-1997) was from Jiading, Jiangsu Province. He is specialized in watercolors Chinese painting and using the spray gun, which he studied from a German specialist. Li Mubai(1913-1991) was from Hang's hometown Haining, Zhejiang Province, and has been his protégé since the age of fifteen. These three artists divided work usually like this: Li Mubai depicts women, Jin Xuechen focuses on landscape and background while Zhiying works on the compositions and corrections.⁴² But all these works made in this studio is under Zhiying's name. This

⁴¹ There are conflicting reports on when Hang Zhiying started his studio, one is 1920, and other source indicates 1922.

⁴² Biography information about Hang Zhiying can be found in: Chen, Chaonan and Feng, Yiyou, *Lao guanggao*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe,1998, pp.36-38; Laing, pp.199-203;Huang, Martha E., *The Spectacle of Representation: Calendar Girls, the Gaze and the Atelier, Transtext(e)s*

is why most of these calendar posters in 1930s were signed under Zhiying's name. It is estimated that there was an annual production of around two hundred advertisement works in Zhiying Studio, and about eighty of these works are calendar posters.⁴³

Hang Zhiying stopped creating *yuefenpai* the year Shanghai was occupied by the Japanese army (1937). According to a TV interview with his son, Hang Mingshi, he recalled the time when Japanese officials asked Hang Zhiying to draw a propaganda poster with a Japanese women in kimono hand in hand with a Chinese woman in *qipao*. But Hang took the excuse that he retired as a poster painter, afterwards his house was watched by Japanese guards, and he did not create any *yuefenpai* or commercial related painting or design. Since Zhiying Studio was located in his mansion, the whole studio ended work during the occupation by the Japanese. Yuefenpai work was continued for two years after the Japanese left under Zhiying's name but not by him specifically.

Out of income and watched by Japanese soldiers, Hang lived a hard life and drew traditional Chinese paintings to ease his heart. In 1945, after Japan surrendered, Zhiying Studio opened again. At this time Hang Zhiying was not in a good health condition and all of the *yuefenpai* posters from then on were made by his associates.⁴⁴ Hang Zhiying passed away in 1947, at the age of 47.

3.2 Yuefenpai girls in Hang Zhiying's works

The main theme of Zhiying's works is attractive modern women. See Figure 3.2 and figure 3.3 for two posters of this style. The first impression of these girls in up to date dress is the absolute feminine attractiveness. The pastel pink color and the white trimmed clothing in Hang Zhiying's posters have its strong sexual appeal, not only because it's close fitting, but the fabric of the clothes on these two *yuefenpai* girls are

Transcultures 2|2007, mis en ligne le 29 October 2009, Consulté le 31 mai 2010.

URL:<http://transtexts.revues.org/index87.html>

⁴³ Buji, pp53

⁴⁴CCTV, 2009 April, From an Interview with Hang Zhiying's son Hang Mingshi.
<http://art.cctv.com/20100421/101817.shtml> (Accessed August 2010)

also sheer. Through the thin and see-through fabric, the buxom female body becomes tangible to beholders.



Figure 3.1 Hang Zhiying(1900-1947) *Girl in Pink* advertisement calendar poster for Monkey Brand mosquito incense in 1930s.⁴⁵



⁴⁵ After Song Jialin, ed., *Lao Yuefenpai*, Shanghai: shanghai huabao chubanshe, 1997, pp48.

Figure 3.2 Hang Zhiying(1900-1947) Advertisement calendar poster for British Trading Company in 1930s. ⁴⁶

Their hairstyle was the typical thirties' style, which is one variation from finger wave hair style, and it was popular hair style in 1930s in the West. They parted their hair from one side. This asymmetric amount of hair in each side of the face makes one look more lively. At the same time the curled hair ends touch her face increased her charms. Besides, its curves can conceal the jaw and helps to get a more ideal facial shape (an oval shape). In general, the Chinese share some of the Mongolians facial features, which consist of a quite flat and square face compared to the West.

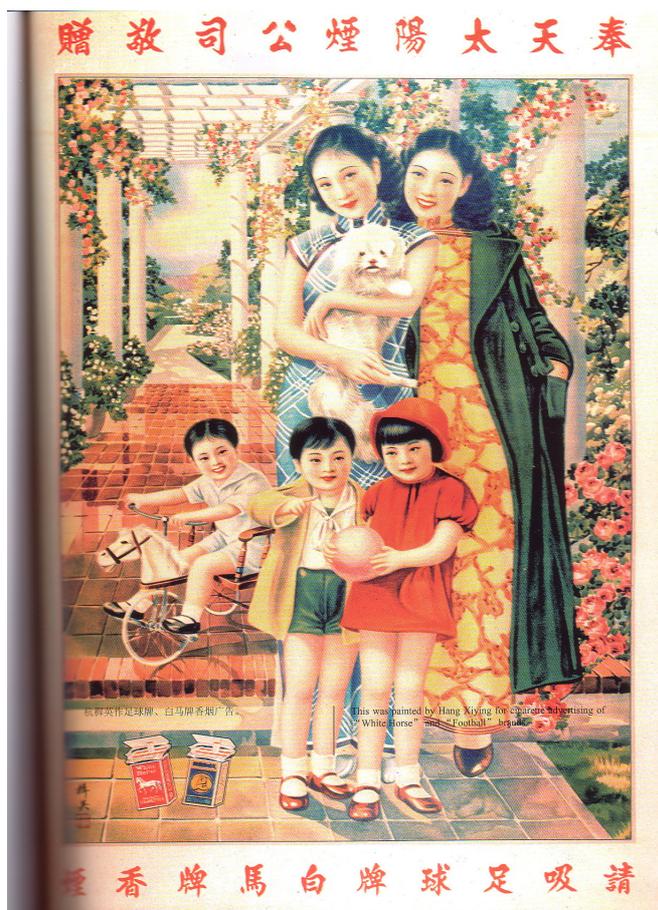
However, the traditional ideal facial shape from the pre-modern time for Chinese women is oval shape. But take a close look at the facial shape in these two girls, the change here is subtle. The popular V oval shape gave way to the rounder heart shape one. In addition to the facial shape, the makeup in this picture sets the *yuefenpai* girl apart from the earlier ones. Especially the girl in figure 3.2, her pencil thin eyebrows are neatly painted and pink eye shadow has been applied on her eyelids to deepen and brighten her eyes, looking closer we can also see the trace of the black eye liner as well. At meantime, this girl has a pair of double-fold eyelids. Giving up the tradition long and narrow eyes with no fold in eyelids to these rounder bigger eyes with double-fold eyelid is an obvious sign of the changing standards of beauty under the influence from the West. The matching color blusher can be found on her cheeks around her cheekbones, this is the most common way to sculpture her face with darker color powder. After all this, we can tell the use of cosmetics is not uncommon among Shanghai girls. Basic skills of how to apply are as well popularized as those cosmetic products. A fairly board smile in figure 3.1 girls' face and even her teeth is shown. This is a strong break from how the traditional female has been portrayed unsmiling and devoid of expression. A bigger rise of the corner of the lips and smiling eyes gives viewer a closer feeling and also a more approachable feeling to the beholder.

Furthermore, the posing changes accordingly, like the Figure 3.1 shows, one is stretching arm showing the armpit and girl in figure 3.2 is lazily sitting and on the table and supporting her body by her both hands. There are more variations of the

⁴⁶ After Chen, Chaonan and Feng, Yiyu, *Lao guanggao*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1998, pp63

body gestures and most of them are lazy cozy in boudoir and gives beholder an intimate feeling. According to Dal Lago in her paper on modern girls in Shanghai 1930s, the pose of showing the armpit together with crossing the legs are invitational body language, which endows these girls with sexually easy-going attitude.⁴⁷ According to Dal Lago, those *yuefenpai* girls intended to be perceived as morally loose girls.

Apart from the outside appearance, one can see even inside of the dress, the underwear of these two models. They are dressing in brassiere that do not flatten the breasts but emphasize the full round shape of the breasts. Look back at Figure 2.1 and 2.2 the difference, in term of the bosom curve, is vast. Compared with Zheng's work, those females hide their curvy female natural body by donning themselves in masculine dresses gave the way to these sexualized girls.



⁴⁷ Dal Lago, Francesca. 2000. "Crossed Legs in 1930s Shanghai: How 'Modern' the Modern Woman." *East Asian History* 19 (June): 103-144

Figure 3.3 Hang Zhiying (1900-1947) Advertisement calendar poster for Fengtian Taiyang Tobacco Company⁴⁸

This is another representative piece from a mother and children series by Zhiying Studio, young mother and children. First class *yuefenpai* artists always have the peculiar abilities to sense the slightest scent of the new trend and make it popular in an acceptable advertisement poster for consumers.

As figure 3.3 shows, in this type of poster, fashion is not the main theme, the emphasis is on the happy young mother and the chubby babies. It is also common to see more than one woman like figure 3.3. Mother usually dresses in proper clothes, regular *qipao* at 1930s, still looking young and quite attractive and children usually look a little bit chubby and play with toys.

In this picture, there are two women standing closely with each other at right side of the picture. They both look like the similar fashion with Zhiying's other *yuefenpai* girls but much less polished traces, curved hair and light make-ups and rounder facial shape as well. However, they are wearing the more conservative *qipao* and while have some fashionable elements up-to-date at the same time, Short sleeves, art-deco pattern, bare arms, regular fit, and trench coat. One of them carries a pet in her arms. Pets were not common in China at that time, even in big cities like Shanghai or Hongkong, but Zhiying borrowed some of the elements from American magazines he subscribed to.⁴⁹

3.3 Femininity

From above, one can easily tell the main characteristic of Hang Zhiying's *yuefenpai* girl and the differences compared with Zheng Mantuo's. It is like everything from Zhiying Studio's *yuefenpai* girl is a reversed version of the girl Zheng had portrayed. It couldn't be more obvious that in Hang Zhiying's *yuefenpai* works are filled with femininity attractions one can possibly imagine, pinkish, see-through, fair skin, plump body and tiny waist. It is definitely an announcement of the unprecedented

⁴⁸ Zhang, Xichang, *Beautiful Girls in Yuefenpai*, Shanghai Jingxiu Wenzhang Chubanshe, 2008, pp 73

⁴⁹ Laing, pp207-214; CCTV, 2009 April, From an Interview with Hang Zhiying's son Hang Mingshi. <http://art.cctv.com/20100421/101817.shtml> (Accessed August 2010)

time in China to adore and worship the feminine beauty. Besides, it is also preaching on the women's virtue, such as a role of gracious house maker or patient baby sitter. The main aspects of femininity attraction are below:

Brassiere

The depicting of brassiere shows the great development in women's underwear at that time in Shanghai. The *Little vest*, as I introduced in the last chapter is designed to flatten female curves by tightening up the laces, and it goes against natural physique. Many health issues were raised by this type of underwear, not only because the breasts are squashed but also the chest part is constrained a great deal. However, the new modern brassiere has two cups and keeps the natural shapes of breasts and supports them at same time.

In fact, the modern brassiere was introduced to Shanghai in the late twenties. Evidence can be found in the magazines at that time.⁵⁰ *Vogue Shanghai* is one of the earliest publications. In 1926, one of the articles advocates that Western style underwear including petticoats, step-ins, chemises, were appropriate underwear. It claims those proper underwear had "the advantage of not binding the breasts", and therefore being "particularly compatible with [the wearer's] health."⁵¹ After this, the call for the public to realize the danger of binding breasts continued and asked for more attention. *Shenghuo*⁵² and other influential publications had successive articles commenting on the liberation of bound breasts, and spreading common medical knowledge regarding breast care at same time. It is not only targeted at female readers but also to male readers, as a role of husband. A couple of years later, some other article pointed out that the binding of breasts could also jeopardize the woman's children, when it came to breastfeeding the newborn babies.⁵³

⁵⁰ *Vogue* 1926: 45 ,

Beiyang hua bao 19 Octobter 1927 has an illustrated article to explain how a modern brassiere works and the detail structure of one brassiere.

⁵¹ *Vogue (shanghai)* 1926:45, finnane, pp165

⁵² shenghuo is the Chinese phonetic form of one of the most popular magazines newspaper in Shanghai, also is known as *Life* in English translation.

⁵³ Yan Fu, "Gansu jiechu xiaomajia!" (Hurry up and end the little vest!), *Nvzi yuekan* (8 March 1933) 36-37

At this stage, the public was already quite aware of the disadvantages of the little vest. Therefore, a new fashion happened with those younger and modern women. They donned themselves in new brassiere with two cups to hide the breasts. At the same time the clothing had changed accordingly. The latest fashion of *qipao* in 1930's was tailored for the protruding part of the breasts.

However, these radical women's fashion changes are based on a social movement, the Natural Breast Movement. The Chinese government advocated to release the bound breast in 1927, as well as the releasing of bounded feet (a few years earlier) as a part of a liberation of women. For the government it was easier to proceed with the release of bound feet, as breasts always have been something sensitive for Chinese women and their family. After this, some radical young women decided to follow this new trend and get rid of the little vest, but the problem is by that time brassiere was not really popular so what most women did was wearing nothing extra for the breasts. Then this could be quite apparent that anyone could see the shape of the breast from the outside clothes.⁵⁴ So this created quite a stir in society, and the majority of women dared not to go out without any extra protection for the breasts. However, it was not until the popularising of the new style brassiere that this movement went further and more women got involved to it.

A new fashion of tailoring *qipao* is taking over the rigid lines in 20s. The change of the dress is almost simultaneous with the innovation of the underwear and the new idea of releasing the breasts. The *qipao* fashion during 30s is close-fitting and showing more skin in essence.

Facial Feature

The face of the *yuefengpai* girl is always the major eye-catching attraction in the whole picture. When we look back at 1920s posters, the viewer does not get any particular impressions from the early *yuefengpai* girls. On the contrary, in 1930s, girls in posters are often described as fashionable, glamorous and desirable. As a beholder, one can both see and feel it. This will be explained from the viewpoint of the beholder. Their well-painted faces are definitely one thing which adds to their

⁵⁴ Huang, Qiang, *Neiyi Sufang Zhizheng*. (An Argument on Binding or Releasing Breasts), March 2009. <http://www.huaxia.com/zhwh/gjzt/2009/03/1340970.html> (Accessed July 2010)

charm, as I gave the details above (see Figure 3.1 top picture). But this beauty of their face is not enough to make them as glamorous and desirable as they are. The smiling eyes and relaxed lips facial expression made their facial expression more lively and vivid, therefore, those girls become tangible to beholders. In this way, beholder can easily sense the desirability and availability of these glamorous yuefenpai ladies. Furthermore, this relaxed facial expression is often read as they are signaling the bedtime is near and they want to relax and rest soon.⁵⁵ If we read together with the body gesture it is not difficult to find it is true. The girl is raising one of her arms and scratching her hair. There is one mosquito incense which has been lit on the table (people at that time usually lit mosquito incense before sleep so they won't be bothered by the insects). The hidden context in this poster is she just lit the mosquito incense, after that she is stretching her body a little bit then going to sleep. Also, Laing's analysis on this same poster is that raising one arm up is a smart way to reinforce the fullness of this woman's bust by pulling the dress more tightly across her chest area.⁵⁶

The suggestive poses along with the background setting and the commodity that this poster is trying to advertise is a medium for exhibiting the subject's female beauty.

Rounder features

Rounder face shapes were seen as more attractive at this time relative to the previously attractive oval-shaped face. It also applies to the body. In 1930s, one of the most distinguishable changes for the *yuefenpai* girl is the thin and skeletal figures become rounder and plump. The rapid change for this is due to the social movement "New Life Movement" launched by the nationalist party, known as Kuomintang(KMT) in 1930s. After the collapse of the cooperation between CCP(Chinese Communist Party) and KMT in 1927, Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the KMT began his Nanking Decade 1927-1937. During Nanking decade, Chiang vigorously promoted the New Life Movement and published *The Outline of New Life Movement* in 1934. The essential idea of the people developing a strong and healthy body is a main issue in this movement. A physically stronger body can help

⁵⁵ Dal Lago

⁵⁶ Laing, pp 217

the nation to withstand the invasion of enemy.⁵⁷ Taller, fuller, and rounder body take the place of the fragile female beauty that is once very popular in the late imperial period (before 1911) and had a great influence during the early Republic era. The thoughts of this movement can be traced back to Yan Fu (1854- 1921), a political reformer, who considered that the physical body of the people directly determines the military power. Therefore, if mothers (women) were strong, their children would also be strong. From this point, we can see the stronger body of the women is the calling from the nation with the hope of stronger military power. Hence, the fragile aesthetic beauty gave way to a more physical and stronger one due to the realistic reasons of the leader of KMT. Those are the fear for the enemy inside the country, the growing power of the CCP, and the invaders from outside the country.

3.4 The role of homemaker

Previously, *yuefenpai* girls are the only subjects in the posters; most of them are of one model in the posters while a few posters have two models. However, Hang Zhiying added a new subject focus to *yuefenpai*, mothers and their children. The hidden reason for this new theme getting popular is also related very much to the New Life Movement.

According to The Outline of The New Life Movement one of the most important ideas is to develop a strong and healthy body. As I mentioned above, there is a direct provenance for the mother children theme and idea for this theme is from Yan Fu. He often proclaimed that healthy mothers give birth to strong babies. He used the Chinese word which literally means fat baby. Fat and chubby equals healthy and strong bodied in oral Chinese. Thus, the people of the nation would become stronger if mothers are in better health and therefore this helps to give more strength to stabilize the nation and save it from invasion by other countries. So this explains those baby fat legs of those children in Figure 3.3.

Another important emphasis from New Life Movement is on the traditional virtues.

⁵⁷ Chiang, Kai-shek, *The outline of the New Life Movement*, 15 May, 1934. website <http://zh.wikisource.org/zh/新生活運動綱要> (Accessed 20 Aug. 2010)

It has a purpose to revive the Confucian tradition that had been abandoned following the May Fourth Movement. Everything goes back to before the fourth of May. Gender roles in the society once again become an important issue and females are not on an equal ground. According to the Confucian tradition, men should take the responsibility of the affairs outside the house, while women should take care of domestic matters. Furthermore, men make the important decisions and women have to follow with their respects. The New Life Movement no doubt brought women back to the old role of homemaker.

Thus, the new theme of mothers and children became popular under the influence of the New Life Movement. The mothers are decently dressed in qipaos, but less fancy and nothing provocative. This is also what Chiang Kai-shek stressed in the New Life Movement: both men and women are required to dress neat and plain.⁵⁸ Less focus on the ornate material pieces on appearance, so one can put all of their heart on the family and domestic issues. Among all these caring mother images, quite a few of the *yuefempai* set its background in women's boudoir.



Figure 3.4 Hang Zhiying (1900-1947)

Advertisement calendar poster for Fengtian Taiyang Tobacco Company⁵⁹

As figure 3. 4 shows boudoir has a strong symbolic meaning for a feminine space. When they are depicting women inside a boudoir, *yuefempai* painters, are suggesting that this is a proper place for women to be. Putting the subject in the boudoir setting is not to reinforce the status of the women which is always belong to the domestic space.

⁵⁸ Chiang, Kai-shek, *The outline of the New Life Movement*, 15 May, 1934. website

<http://zh.wikisource.org/zh/新生活運動綱要> 20 Aug. 2010

⁵⁹After Chen, Chaonan and Feng, Yiyou, *Lao guanggao*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1998, pp15

In general, the favorable or ideal women in the 1930s cannot be unified. On one hand, the suggestively dressed modern women can often be seen in the *yuefenpai* posters and these posters were very popular, on the other hand the decent housewives with children is also the type of the poster people wanted to see.

In the 1930s, Shanghai became more synchronized with the Western world, and this was in terms of materiality and modernity. The glamorously dressed girls holding cigarettes in Hang Zhiying's posters gave the mass public the idea of the modern girl. Despite people behind their backs, modern girls were still daring enough to dress in revealing clothes and smoke in public place just like me. Most importantly, they pushed themselves forward to fight for a job in places filled with men. This branch of women followed the May Fourth spirit and stretched the modernity further in term of the form, such as clothing, make-up, and appearance related. But overall they endeavored for discarding the old image of traditional women and strove for more room outside the home for women.

Hence, when the New Life Movement was carried out, the return to the old traditional role for women caused quite a stir during the 1930s. In an article by Xia Rong, *The Debate on "Women Going Home" and "Good Wife and Good Mother" in the Middle of 1930s*, the author summed up the different voices on this issue from different gender aspects. This debate started from 1933 and ended in 1937. There were three main arguments from the male voice, which include: it is the housework and taking the full care of the children, which is the main duty of every woman. Even the famous intellectual, Lin Yutang, and male writer, Lao She was on this side. Lao She published one article in September 1936, talked about the standard for men to choose a wife; being good at housework is definitely a necessity. The preaches of equality for both genders is good to hear from farther away but when a man had a wife who studied philosophy and talked about equality all the time instead of doing housework or taking care of children then he is really unfortunate.⁶⁰ The second argument is more compromising and given mostly by politicians like the mayor of Shanghai and by other people who were more calm about this topic. Their thought is the nation would only be peaceful if every household is stable. When women work

⁶⁰ Lao, She, *Collected works of Lao She*, the 14th volum, Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe 1989, pp 551

for their families, they are indirectly serving and stabilizing the nation. This is in my opinion only a diplomatic way of persuading modern women to do their old job. The third voice from the male perspective is from those who dislike modern women in big cities. They claim those women live a dissipated life and should learn more about housework. However, in my opinion, these men usually come from big cities and are lower class and trying to vent their feeling of unhappiness about these supposedly self-indulgent modern girls, which is exactly the way *yuefenpai* presented modern women. These men want a return to the old female virtues.

On the contrary, the voices from the female side are much milder. They were clearly opposed to the good wife - good mother view and this is the most audible voice. This stands for that women should take apart in the serving the country as much as males. Especially in the crisis, women should do more than household chores. The other argument from the female perspective is women have the right to decide whatever they want to do. Women should have the full right to make up their mind what to do, stay at home or go outside.⁶¹

Till this point, the situation for women was complicated. But this background information gives the beholder an idea of the root of the extravagant decorated ladies in some *yuefenpai* posters, and the docile housewives image as well. To some extent, Hang Zhiying managed to capture the attentions from both genders.

⁶¹ Xia Rong, *The Debate on "Women Going Home" and "Good Wife and Good Mother" in the Middle of 1930s* Journal of South China Normal University(Social Science Edition) No.6, 2004

Chapter 4: The modern woman in Shanghai context

Before advertisements on print media, such as magazines and newspaper became popular, *yuefenpai* was the main form of advertising. With the development of the new printing techniques brought from the West⁶². Magazine and newspaper advertising began to take the place of some of the functions of *yuefenpai*. Black and white, eye-catching, and simple drawings usually with short texts together with cartoon stripes filled the print media with illustration. At this point the speciality of *yuefenpai* painting as an advertisement is threatened by the new rival, which has more opportunities in exposure to the public. Compared with the new means of the quick ads on newspapers and magazines, *yuefenpai* has a longer life since it has the calendar function at the same time. Thus, it cannot be as explicit as those newspaper ads; it is a more aesthetically focused image with a subtle commercial hint. The longer display time made *yuefenpai* posters still in demand and competitive with the new era of popularity of the print media. In the mean time, this competition pressured *yuefenpai* artists harder to dig out the desirable image that may get popular with the consumers/beholders. So a close attention had to be paid to the interests of the masses in the society and the new themes that most people might love to see for a whole year (the calendar is for 12 months). Since the everlasting theme for *yuefenpai* has always been modern girls, the *yuefenpai* girls have naturally a barometer for the idea of the modern girl in China. In previous chapters, I've already elaborated on the deeper and more basic reasons, while in this last chapter, I will focus on the changes of the modern girl image from *yuefenpai* in 20s and 30s and discuss the how the modern girl definition changed related to the social context, which is a bit complicated at that time within the unique historical background in the early modernization time in China.

4.1 Colonial modernity

The term “modern girl” is a “Japanese-cum-English term embedded in a Chinese text”. It was first used in China in 1927.⁶³ A Chinese modern girl was first described

⁶² Finnane, pp123-136

⁶³ Shih, Shu-mei, *The lure of the modern: writing modernism in semi-colonial China, 1917-1937*, pp92

in the English language press of Shanghai as a bob-haired girl in a short skirt with make-up.⁶⁴ When we look back at these modern girl images during these two decades, from an androgynous image with an emphasis on a modern brain, to later the sexually assertive material girl, and then finally a mother role focused on the domestic role for females. The question is why the definition changed so many times in a short period. Then naturally comes the question of what is the definition of the modern within Chinese context. The definition is from two sides, intellectuals and political activists. However, the counterforce from modern women also had some influence.

However, the concept of modernity here is rooted in a special background in a colonial coastal city in Far East. The similarity of occidental modernity is an important and big part of the sinic modernity. The intricate relationship between the modern and the westernized in China is difficult to distinguish because there is so much Westernization in China's modernization. The idea of westernization is in fact a very important part from the May Fourth Movement and, also at this time, the intellectual leaders of the movement were raising the modernization issue. The call for Saving the Nation is high at the May 4th movement, but how should this be done? In the end, a modern nation must be built. Copying from the West both politically and culturally was the intellectuals dream resolution to save the nation.

Westernization is one of the positive slogans raised by the leader of this movement, Chen Duxiu(1879-1942).⁶⁵ Westernization is an effective weapon against the old Chinese tradition those reformers wanted to get rid of. In addition, the intellectuals advocated for democracy and science in this movement, these all rooted from the western ideology. These intellectuals were dreaming of copying all the political and culture from the more developed West could change their nation to a stronger one. Taking the realities of society at that time into consideration, these two words are bound to be together. A scholar in Peking University Hu Shi⁶⁶(1891-1962) raised two slogans, "wholesale Westernization" and "wholehearted Modernization" as the prospect for Chinese civilization, in his essay written in English for the Yearbook of

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp294-5

⁶⁵ Zhang, Taiyuan.

⁶⁶ He is famous for his advocacy in culture reform New Culture Movement, which happened a bit ahead of is also an essential part of May Fourth Movement.

Christianity in 1929.⁶⁷ These two phrases have in a sense the same meaning, but the latter sounds less strong and radical. Later Hu advocated the latter phrase to make his statement less radical and easily for public to accept. The replacement of westernization with modernization somehow gives the idea of these two words indicating the same process.

From the previous two chapters, we can see the main changes in the *yuefenpai* girls. In the 1920s *yuefenpai* girls are dressed plainer, with an emphasis on the aspiring attitude instead of the material things. This is the beginning of the appearance of modern woman look. They may start to look more western with bobs, however, in *yuefenpai* posters, the way depicted was still rather focused on the spirit as independent, educated, and inspirational female figures.

With the preaching of the occidental value in a colonial city, Shanghai, in a semi-colonial country, modernity deviated from what originally intellectuals had dreamt. The commercial purpose of the modern goods, for instance the fur coat and high heels took over the lead of the debate on modernity. *Yuefenpai* itself is a production from the commercialized world. Emphasis on the practical was often confused with material things. More than a decade after the exciting enlightening culture movement ordinary Shanghai people gradually started to focus on more realistic therefore material things. At same time, the government was controlled strictly by high ranking officials and never easily influenced by ordinary people, not even those reformist intellectuals.⁶⁸ “...the stories that Shanghai residents tell about sexual choices, the role of money, inequality, and leisure-time activities are used to mark moral and social boundaries in a newly forming market society”⁶⁹ For girls, especially, they transferred their focus from politics to material things. Pursuing modernity became the pursuing of material things. So in 1930s, Hang Zhiying placed stress on the portrayal of the details of modernity in term of material things and the idea of the modern women at that time. One critic has noted in an article in 1936 about the modern look for ordinary Shanghai women: “ The majority of China’s fashionable (I do not like to use the term ‘modern’) women desire westernized

⁶⁷ Hu, Shi, “The culture conflicts in China”, in *Yearbook of Christianity, 1929*.

⁶⁸ Edwards, pp118-120.

⁶⁹ Hershatter, Gail, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century*, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Nov., 2004), pp. 991-1065

clothing, high heels and short skirts, imitating Western women in every aspect.”⁷⁰ Every thing they desire costs quite bit of money to buy, but this is due to the power and prominence of commercial interests which drove modernity in 1930s. China never had the tradition of curvaceous sexiness in female fashion. It has a different root for modernization compared to Western (e.g. French) origins, and the modern girl in China has gone through the politically modern (1920s) then quickly to the material commercially material modern (1930s) and a reverse to tradition. This was a deviation from the original May Fourth spirit and a by-product from the westernization.

At this point, the debate on the external modernity and the internal quality of modern brain is important to highlight. Louise Edwards discussed this in her article *Policing the Modern Woman in Republican China*, in which she defined this external modernity and inner quality of modern women in her introduction chapter as “External manifestations of modernity -clothing, hairstyles, and shoe styles-were dismissed as superficial trappings. Truly modern women, it was argued, had inner qualities that concerned on an abiding concern for China's national welfare.”⁷¹ The further discussion about intangible modern qualities (for example, being educated, independent, and socially/politically active) for women flooded every main newspaper and magazines.

These all grew out of the modernity drive which had its roots in the May Fourth movement. The “antinomy inherent”⁷² inside the May Fourth attitude lays in the denial of all the old cultural values and traditions and copies the new one from the West. The new ideology from foreign cultures was imported with the purpose of reviving the nation to protect it from foreign invasion and unwanted influence. In a sense, this definitely deepens the cultural invasion by these countries. According to *The Anatomy of Science and Democracy in Modern China* by Ji Shu-li. a nation denies all merits in itself would never build up a confident and independent nation.

⁷⁰ Hua, Sheng, Comments on the Westernization of fashionable women in China from the perspective of the healthy dress movement in Germany, *Linglong* 221(1936): 167-9.

⁷¹ Edwards, Louise, “Policing the Modern Woman in Republican China,” *Modern China*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Apr., 2000).

⁷² McLean, George; Magliola, Robert and Fox, William, *Democracy: In the Throes of Liberalism and Totalitarianism (Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change. The Anatomy of Science and Democracy in Modern China by Ji Shu-li Series VII, Seminars on Cultures and Values)* Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (November 2003), pp 170,

The intellectuals and reformists had soon changed the definition of the modern woman according to the old traditions again. In this new definition, stress has been put on that women should have a homemaker role. The repeated definition of the good modern women has constantly changed in short time. The external debates on what is an ideal modern woman revealed the “internal anxiety and agony of sino-intelletrals”⁷³. The unstable political environment is far from what the intellectuals and reformists had predicted, and copying from the West did not solve any realistic problems, and they started to realize that they have to pave their own way in China to sort thing out.

4.2 A male perspective of seeing

“Mostly, the beautiful ladies of these posters were fictitious. Painters created poster ladies by combining what they envisioned as outstanding features in women and embodying these parts in a ‘prototype woman’.”

This is from the introduction of Cheuk Pak Tong’s book of calendar poster.⁷⁴ An important aspect to consider about *yuefenpai* posters is that the artists are exclusively male and it presents a male perspective of the modern woman. Hence, I take some example from film and literature in 1930s to provide a bigger picture of modern women depicted by male producers.

“New Woman” in fiction and reality

In *New Woman*, a film made in 1934s Shanghai and directed by Cai Chusheng (a male director), the tragic story of a modern women’ life, is presented which ends with the suicide of the protagonist. The actress, Ruan Lingyu, who played the protagonist, committed the suicide the year after this film, causing deep discussion about the real new women (modern women) in the society during the 1930s.

⁷³ Ibid. pp 182

⁷⁴ CHEUK, PAK TONG, "A history of calendar posters," pp. 10-13 in Ng Chun Bong, Cheuk Pak Tong, Wong Ying, and Yvonne Lo (eds.), *Chinese Woman and Modernity: Calendar Posters of the 1910s-1930s*. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1996

New Woman tells a story about a private high school music teacher, Wei Ming, at an all girls school and she is also a writer trying to publish a novel at the same time. She eloped with her husband for freedom of marriage. After one year of marriage, her husband deserted her and her newborn daughter. Dr. Wang, a school manager who has married to Wei's college classmate Zhang Xiuzhen, is pursuing her with no success. However, he made Wei's life hard just to beat her down. At last Wei committed suicide. Just before this, her friend Li Aiying, a female worker in a publishing house who happened to be a physical and mentally strong woman encouraged Wei to be strong but still she killed herself.

A newspaper review about these main female characters published during the year of release included the following passage,

“Zhang Xiuzhen is a college graduate (undoubtedly the daughter of a capitalist family), but she is willing to be a man's plaything all her life as Mrs. Wang of the comprador class. Li Aiying has her roots in the working class, combating the hostile environment in her struggle. Wei Ming's background seems to be somewhere between the former two women and, because of that, she comes to be incapable of extricating herself from the sad fate of the wavering petit bourgeois.”⁷⁵

This critic tries to fit all of the characters into certain classes and categories, and the mapping is quite accurate. The three main female roles are representative of different social status, capitalism, and working class and bourgeois. It should be noted that most modern women are from the middle class, just as the protagonist. The protagonist, an educated woman, breaks away from the old tradition (arranged marriage) and pursues her true love. Ironically, she was abandoned by her true love. With her education, she is economically independent, but her fate and even her work are still controlled by a masculine power.

Apart from the movie discussed, there are many novels from that time which feature modern women with self-conflicting inner features. Liu Na'ou (1900-1939) is one urban novelist. He is known as the leader of neo-sensational school influenced by

⁷⁵ Ai Hui, “*Xin nuxing*” (“*New Women*”), *Zhonghua ribao* (*Zhonghua Daily*), February 7, 1935. from Hong, Guo-Juin, *Framing Time: New Women and Cinimatic Representation of Colonial Modernity in 1930s Shanghai*, East Asian Cultures Critique, Volume 15, Number 3, Winter 2007, pp553-579

Japanese literature.⁷⁶ Most of his stories are about modern women and set in urban environments (Shanghai). He has portrayed many modern women images, some of them are sportive figure and rational forehead and darker skin, some are with permanent wave and have cigarettes on their hands always and daring to flirt to males.⁷⁷ In his short story *Two Men Imperious to Time*, the very modern style female protagonist plays around with two males. She is interested in one but she daringly seduces the other, in the long pages of lovemaking description, however she is described as a virgin. This caused Lee Oufan's question "how can such a free and unrestrained woman have kept her virginity and then chose to lose it with a man in one night's casual tryst in a hotel room only to leave him to another."⁷⁸

This reminded me about another author at the same time mentioned in the same chapter with Liu Na'ou in Lee's book *Shanghai Modern*, Mu Shiying (1912-1940) who was in the same style as Liu Na'ou and also active in Shanghai. In his story "Wuyue" (The Month of May), he created a half-European half-Asian female character, who is from a decent family with a Western education. But she acts strictly like a traditional maiden with all old virtues and never responds to any guys who flirt with her.⁷⁹

The modern women image in the 1930s from other sources than *yuefenpai* posters can explain the modern woman image in different contexts. They are focused on the external modern look or other superficial acts for instance the drinking and smoking city girls. With the examples listed above, the modern women either are fated with tragedy or appear as a self-conflicting creature. The dominant masculine power has a controlling and prevailing influence over modern women. As Shu-mei Shih noted in Liu Na'ou's works, the male characters in his fiction have "outmoded patriarchal moral sensibilities", while the female characters are generically a "product of modernity".⁸⁰ The invisible consumers for this "product of modernity" are males. If I connect these modern females in a picture it would be like as following: modern woman (appearance modern woman) has to follow the male power in her life. If she obeys tradition rules, she would have a happy life with a nice guy (like the *Wuyue*

⁷⁶ Lee, pp191

⁷⁷ Lee, pp.195

⁷⁸ Lee, pp208

⁷⁹ Lee, pp218

⁸⁰ Lee, pp205

from Mu shiying), or if she is skittish and daring to challenge old traditions⁸¹ she becomes just a puppet of men, and ends up been deserted. The third case is worst, if she is strongly against to the male power and not so strong in mind, like Weiming in the movie, she is fated to die.

Where is the real and positive image of a modern woman in China? When I mention about real modern women it means both external and internal qualities. At the beginning of this chapter, I also discussed about the changing definition of the modern woman in China. Reformists, intellectuals, and their political ambitions many times, defined these changes. But when it comes to the female's self-awareness of and ability to influence the defining of the modern woman, the female movement was often powerless.

As Louise Edwards noted in her article *Policing the Modern Woman in Republican China*, the “new woman was an intellectual class (and, therefore, overwhelmingly male) invention,” and the female movement is as well just a utensil for those intellectual people to express their political ideas. By using the statement of how a modern woman should be or should not be, these intellectuals have subtle influence on the future of China without being too obvious to the current government (KMT) voice. At the mean time, women in China were confused about the rapid changes in definition of modern, and had no time to think it over but hastily adopt one type of modern or another. Many times, women adopted modern fashion outwardly, but in their homes kept traditional values, which they were supposed have moved past according to the definition of the modern woman.⁸² This is the natural result of the modern woman situation in China. Females were not in a position to discuss about how they should be modernized, male power (both political factor traditional patriarchal factor) and commercial factors (*yuefenpai* served for this purpose itself) took the role of rule-maker for modern woman.

4.3 Relating the development of modernity to Zheng Mantuo and Hang Zhiying

Zheng Mantuo at this time had during the 1920s caught the core concept of the

⁸¹ liu Na'ou fiction from Scenes of City “Canliu” (Bereavement) “Fancheng Shi”(Formula)

⁸² Edwards, Louise.

modern idea from the May 4th Movement. He firmly abandoned the old theme of fairy women from traditional legends that originated in pre-modern Chinese history, but opened up a new style of *yuefenpai* women in 1920s after 1919's May Fourth Movement. At this beginning of Westernization, the female movement also boomed. Women started to realize a big change and found that they can be independent from men both economically and mentally. Education was seen to be an important means by which to reach the goal of independence. Zheng caught this important part and essential factor in the modern women at that time. Even though his skill in representing women still have a large influence from his predecessor⁸³. Also the idea of portraying a girl with a book, with the focus on short bob hair and school dress (women had no chance to go to school before), was a distinguishing feature of his *yuefenpai* posters. It also matched with the current society mentality that was focus on the enlightenment of women. At the beginning of the modernization every one was in high spirit and excited to expect the changes after this social movement. The May Fourth Movement focused on a clear break from the previously championed traditional Confucious values and thrilled the women at that time. It is estimated twenty new female magazines and newspapers publications came out right after this Movement.⁸⁴ Women believed, as they took apart in this noble transition, that they would soon be an integral part of the country's future. That is how a stronger and almost masculine spirit is shown in 1920s Zheng's works. It did not come from nowhere but a rather realistic depicting of the women at that time.

As the modernization goes further, Hang Zhiying invented a different image for the modern girl. A sexual attraction has applied to modern women in 1930s and this made his works occupy more than half of the *yuefenpai* market.⁸⁵ On one hand, men like to see modern girls in skimpy dresses no matter how badly they cursed the modern woman's growing independent spirit. This can be easily seen from the works of the male movie producers and writers of the 1930s portraying modern women in fictional stories. Women, on the other hand, have obviously already confused modernity with Western materialization. Furthermore, the female movement had limited power in colonial China. The politically focused enlightenment movement

⁸³Laing, the famous *yuefenpai* artist Zhou Muqiao, pp95-110

⁸⁴Hai, Wen, *Nvxing Qikan Chensilu* (*General information about female magazine*), China Book Review, Volume 3, 1995.

⁸⁵Buji, pp 52-54

did not last long. Once the KMT⁸⁶ (the nationalist party) consolidated its rule, the government soon took action in thought control in intellectual and reformist circles. "At the same time, however, other groups used the external trappings to signify quite different social meanings-commercial rather than political modernity. The reformers lost control of the major signifier of their movement to the commercial sector. Commercial interests marketed the desirability of the modern woman, and in this context modern clothing was an aesthetic statement on commercial power politics."⁸⁷ Modern women soon lost their spiritual source, the intellectuals and reformers, and thus turned to be more material focused. Yuefenpai from Zhiying studio showed a great numbers of works with a detailed depiction of fashionable clothing and fur coat and purse and so on. When this extravagant modern girl reached in its peak, soon KMT carried out new social moral standard to follow. Modern women should be a homemaker and keep their house peaceful. Zhiying again caught this trend.

Overall, the two *yuefenpai* artists presented in this paper, Hang Zhiying and Zheng Mantuo, defined two periods of Chinese modernity with their works. Each of these authors was similar in the sense that they focused on capturing the themes (political or social) which were becoming popular in society. The *yuefenpai* calendar posters were a window for the average person to learn of the trends and styles that were representing or beginning to represent the modern in society. Furthermore, both of these artists are male and would therefore to be expected to represent the male perspective and aid in defining the modern woman. However, these two artists portrayed different periods of the modernity movement and thereby focused on different themes (as was mentioned in this section). In the end, these artists were more similar than different. Their works are defined mostly by themes that are driven by societal and commercial factors, and to a much lesser extent their artistic qualities. In conclusion, these artists were very important in presenting the image of the modern woman and are a good source for studying the modernity movement in China.

⁸⁶ KMT Kuomintang (the Nationalist) was funded in 1919.

⁸⁷ Edwards, pp 120

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The portrayal of women in *yuefenpai* (calendar posters) has seen significant change over the 1920s and 1930s in Shanghai. There have been many political, social, and commercial factors that have contributed to this change. To form a picture of this change, this paper compared the works of two influential *yuefenpai* artists, Zheng Mantuo and Hang Zhiying, representing different time periods. These time periods were characterized by strong influences from the West and a movement towards Western-style modernity.

Comparing the works of the Zheng Mantuo and Hang Zhiying, provides a window into the modernity movement in China. Zheng Mantuo's works contain a theme of androgyny in the depiction of women. Women have boyishly short hair and wear a masculine one-piece garment called *qipao*. Furthermore, the women have expressionless faces, stiff figures, and bound breasts. From mid-1920s, schoolgirl images were becoming common in Mantuo's works, highlighting the new focus of society on women's education. In contrast, Hang Zhiying's works have a theme of femininity and sexuality for the greatest part of his time of influence. The girls in these *yuefenpai* posters have buxom bodies, sheer clothing, and a freedom in their postures. Additionally, Western facial features, such as oval-shaped faces and double-fold eyelids, and clothing (for example the brassiere) were beginning to define a new concept of beauty among Chinese women. Zhiying was quick to add these developments into his work as Shanghai became more synchronized with the Western world. But this drive for the modern woman based on a Western interpretation of beauty did not last long, as social and political repression by the KMT led to replacement of Zhiying's typical sexy women with the image of a decent, virtuous young mother, suggesting that the modern woman should obey old tradition and be a good mother and wife.

Many factors have influenced the image of the modern women over time. The May 4th movement, which occurred in 1919, provided a deeper social context for possibilities for women to don themselves in this new fashion and to finally have a

chance to go to school. This was evident in Zheng Mantuo's depiction of women as being similar to men in that they sense that they are able to work and be educated. Intellectuals, reformists, government officials, and commercial interests (predominantly male actors) had a strong influence in the defining of the modern woman. Hang Zhiying's later works, in steep contrast to his previous works, were heavily influenced by political slogans of the KMT that people had to be strong and healthy and the place for women is in the home and taking care of kids.

Shanghai has been through its modernization at the same time it underwent colonization, and this led the modern Chinese women to being different with modern women from the West. How is the modern woman defined? The definition is uncertain. It changes from time to time. *Yuefenpai* girl images precisely reflected this rapid change from the 1920s to 1930s. However, different groups have defined modern women differently according to their own motivations. The many definitions of modern women show the conflicting interests of different male groups and sometimes their own contradicting thoughts.

Further research should focus on the connections among colonial modernity, the political struggles of the 1920s to the 1930s, and the power of the feminine movement in China. This analysis would provide a more comprehensive view of the changing image of the modern woman during this time period.

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