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# The global and local influences in the portrayal of women's roles: Content analysis of women's magazines in China

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**This paper analyses the impact of the global and local forces in the portrayal of women's roles in women's magazine in China by examining the content of women's magazines. Particular reference is given to the editorial content of both local and international magazines as the process of globalization influences magazines in China, and this influence has been traced in the changing depiction of women's roles in the magazines. Through a quantitative content analysis of women's roles in magazine articles, the interstices of global and local constructions of "woman" were examined. Moreover, the analysis of the magazine content showed that women's magazines in China tend to reinforce traditional sex role stereotypes, and underlined the pervasiveness of consumerism and the commercialization of gender.**

**Key words:** Globalization and magazines, global and local forces, international women's magazines, portrayal of women's roles, content of women's magazines, consumerism.

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, women in China have been influenced by "Confucian" oriental culture, which is authoritative, patriarchal, and family-oriented. According to Confucianism, the traditional soft-spoken and submissive women exemplify ideals of femininity in China (Johansson, 2001). A woman is taught to serve the family, obey her father before marriage, obey her husband after getting married, and obey her son as a widow. Thus, she belongs to the family and should not have any intellectual self-determination.

Women's emancipation in China began in the wake of the Democratic revolution of 1911 and since then their status began to improve (Li, 1988). During the 1930s, the new life movement was initiated, which proposed to rework confucian philosophies to fit the times and included encouraging Westernization as well as maintaining a Chinese essence (Shih, 2001). At the same time, journals, newspapers, and academic institutions emphasized the need to educate people with a new set of

moral values. At the heart of this education was a sense of self-determination and autonomy that encouraged women to enter the public sphere as independent, free-willed, and professional participants (Wang, 1999). Yet, this newly constructed public role depicted women in relation to female spaces of consumption. The new woman emerged in the 1930s as an icon of urban Chinese modernity and symbolized the modern ideal of an emancipated woman, who had a public life, an education, was self-supporting, and surrounded herself with modern (Western) accoutrements such as cosmetics, new technology, and dance halls (Zhang, 1994).

Curtin (1975) pointed out that the decisive and fatal blow to the age-old forces that held Chinese women in subjugation was the communist victory in 1949. During the Mao-era the Chinese government used the slogan that women in China "hold up half the sky" as both an ideological guideline and a showcase for increasing women's social status, cultivating women to pursue equal rights, employment and the opportunity to participate in the political arena (Cheng, 1997). At around the same time, the All-China women's federation was established,

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that published a large number of women's periodicals such as *Women of China* and *Labor and Women* to educate local Chinese women (Li, 1988). Under Chinese communism, women are educated to be independent to contribute their work to the country at the expense of a private life, partake actively in social construction, and devote themselves to the society rather than the family. During this period, Chinese women were portrayed in women's magazines as "iron women", featuring serious-looking working heroines, old party women in blue Mao jackets or young female soldiers in aggressive poses (Johansson, 2001). Although advertising was forbidden during the cultural revolution as it was criticized as the "symbol of capitalism", it reappeared together with the launch of the reform policy in the 1980s, which led to the rise of commercial media (Rice and Lu, 1988). Moreover, China's Open-door policy and high economic growth rates propelled many transnational companies to enter the Chinese market (Borton, 2004). As part of the global media conglomerates that have increased their business in expanding their markets, international women's magazines serve as advertising vehicles for these multinational corporations (Mueller, 2004). These international women's magazines, as well as other local fashion magazines, emphasize the images of women as glamorous, individualistic, and hedonistic. Such images of women seem to reflect a post-Mao re-feminization, which fit well into the ideal of globalization leading to a universal consumer culture (Johansson, 2001; Luo and Hao, 2007). Moreover, Ferry (2003) noted that the media packaging of women within the rubric of consumption in contemporary China, driven by local, national, as well as transnational forces, reflected the surge of nostalgia for the 1930s new woman.

Global flow of mass mediated culture, especially the visual image industries, have been spreading into different areas in the world and cannot be easily controlled. However, the rise of global media cannot be separated from the emergence of transnational corporations. Transnational corporations have been using global media as vehicles for positioning and marketing their products worldwide. China, like other countries in Asia, has been affected by this global consumer culture. Moreover, the Chinese paradox of a communist dictatorship with a fast developing capitalist economy has nourished an interesting discussion on the "Modern Chinese woman" image created by various interrelated elements (Johansson, 2001).

### **The rise of women consumers**

Over the last century, the ancient system of gender roles, under which men were assigned a monopoly of access to money and the public sphere, and women were restricted to the home, has been under severe attack in most developed countries. The social and economic forces,

continuing to reinforce each other, have released women from obligatory domesticity (Myers, 1994). Moreover, progress has been made in the labour market as the gap between the average pay between men and women has narrowed significantly and women's presence in the professional and managerial ranks has increased markedly. As a result, the traditional household decision-making is undergoing significant changes as a larger number of women are joining the work force.

Women tend to have fewer children and need to weigh the trade-off between the value of financial reward of outside work and the value of leisure and housework (Bergmann, 2005; Myers, 1994). As women now have greater purchasing power, marketers need to have a better understanding of women's changing values and roles in modern society (Tai and Tam, 1997).

Women in both developing and developed Asian countries have come to a new ground with the social and economic development (Edwards and Roces, 2000). These women, better educated, are extensively involved in professional, technical and other white-collar work, although only very small numbers are employed at the highest levels of the occupational structure. Asia's media and marketing weekly (1992) reported that in the 1990s, as Asian women increasingly moved out of the home and into the workplace, marketers were aware of the fact that women were exerting a great influence on a variety of consumer decisions that used to lie within the sole domain of men, and therefore, these working women were not to be ignored as potential consumer segments.

Since the 1990s, 82.3% of women in China have taken up jobs and have become economically independent (Huang, 2008). Based on the statistical records, in 2004, the average pay of women was equivalent to 66% of that of men in China (Wang and Shao, 2008) and that rate decreased to 46% in Japan (Zhu, 2005). When asked to choose their desired careers, young women aged between 16 and 19 in China most often chose to be CEOs followed by senior manager, whereas the same group in Japan most frequently singled out housewife followed by stewards (Zhu, 2005).

As indicated by Tai and Tam (1997), there is vast potential for the women consumer market in China. As women become wealthier, more heterogeneous, higher-quality products with novel and diversified designs are required. Young women, especially the 80s generation, are becoming very fashion conscious and indulge in expensive foreign brands (Tai and Tam, 1997). Therefore, the authors concluded that though heavily influenced by traditional values such as Confucianism, women in China are also affected by modern consumer culture. Moreover, the rise of women consumerism in China is attributed to women's improved educational background and their enhanced economic status that they not only take control of how they spend their own money, but also have a great influence over how household income is spent ("Please the lady, sell the

stuff", 2007). As China becomes more integrated into the global economy, Western and Japanese manufacturers are capitalizing the burgeoning female consumer market (Hooper, 1995).

### **The role of women in women's magazines**

Previously, women's magazines were obsessed with the construction of stereotype roles of women, portraying them as living for home, babies, cooking, clothes and sex (Courtney and Whipple, 1974; Culley and Bennett, 1976; Ferguson, Kreshel, and Tinkham, 1990; McArthur and Resko, 1975). To aim at the newly emerged working women, companies are starting to draw up new marketing strategies and change the way women are portrayed, as women begin to view themselves differently (Myers, 1994; Tai and Tam, 1997). Subsequently, new types of women surfaced from the glossy pages of the new women's magazines and these were young, fashionable, and often financially independent women that constituted a valuable market for modern consumer goods (Granatstein and Masterton, 1998; Gough-Yates, 2003; Sylvester, 2007; Narunsky-Laden, 2007). The media portrayals of women tended to show them liberated from their housework and were fashion conscious and the focus of women's magazines shifted to fashion and beauty (Moses, 2007). However, themes such as social issues and career development reflecting the changing lifestyle of women occupied much less space than fashion and beauty content (The pink Ghetto: Why women's magazines get no respect, 2001).

For example, in the mid-1990s Chinese women were portrayed predominantly as wives and mothers, even though more than 80 percent were in the workforce. Women's magazines were creating a culture of domesticity with a focus on cooking, house decor and childcare, as well as on fashion and beauty. Women were being cast in two roles: as the traditional virtuous wife and good mother, or as the modern flower vase, someone fashionable and attractive (Hooper, 1995).

As stated by Gauntlett (2002: 191), women's magazines were criticized as they made women feel bad about themselves by showing them the beauty "ideal" and providing many pages of advice on how readers could improve their looks, sex skills or personalities, which would eat up readers' time and money. Wolf (1991) argued that commercial representations of femininity were responsible for the growth of the perniciously manipulative diet, beauty and plastic surgery industries, and women were represented as objects of consumption (Brook, 2008).

Although some studies noted that women's magazines were adding new elements in their content to mirror women's new role, they still lingered over sex role stereotype. After conducting a content analysis of Taiwanese women's magazines, Shaw (2000) found that

while the established traditional women's magazines in Taiwan continued to provide more traditional messages to readers than nontraditional ones, the middle-class and working-class women's magazines contained some articles suggesting broader social horizons for women (such as the articles about work and political awareness). However, these articles remained less common than those reflecting and reinforcing a traditional sex role stereotype. Through a comparison of the content of Japanese women's magazines in the 1970s with that in the 1980s, Sakamoto (1999) concluded that the women's magazines reflected the changing lifestyle of Japanese women (including more themes such as travel and career) who gained more power and freedom in their domestic roles, attempt to reject the traditional path of life and struggled for new identities such as having jobs and careers equal to those of men. Nevertheless, apart from travel articles, the most popular articles were fashion and interior design.

Other studies (Stewart and Laird, 1994; Greenfield and Reid, 1998) pointed out that these sections in magazines could be sponsored by companies and used for product promotions.

Therefore, in the women's magazines, "women achieved their freedom and economic independence not through feminist action, but through the individual consumption of consumer products" (Gough-Yates, 2003: 34). Although women have a growing access to high-status employment, the social development has not been fully exemplified in mass media (Gough-Yates, 2003). Therefore, the changed role from traditional housewife to modern decorated woman does not remove women out of the "stereotyped" role. When international women's magazines expand across national borders, seeking to create an edifice of fantasy feminism, designed to legitimize the new economic activity, the "stereotyped" image is transferred to the local editions to commercialize the local women through the inclusion of foreign fashion and lifestyle (Driver and Gillespie, 1993; Machin, 2005; Machin and Thornborrow, 2003; Stephenson, 2007). Therefore, this study aims to explore how the global (Western and Asian) and local forces have influenced in the portrayal of roles of women in women's magazines in China.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Content analysis was used to study the portrayal of women in the editorial content from a sample of local and the international magazines and to test the hypotheses. The study adopted content analysis because it allows us to examine the construction of various images of women in women's magazines and to understand the portrayal of commercialized images of women in Asia (Frith and Karan, 2008; Wimmer and Dominick, 2006).

#### **Sample of magazines under study**

To maintain comparability, the top-selling Western-style women's

**Table 1.** Circulation and cover prices for sample magazines.

Magazine	Local/ International	Circulation	Selling price (RMB)
Cosmopolitan China	U.S.	528,000	20
Elle China	France	500,000	20
Rayli (Fashion and Beauty)	Japan	680,000	20
Rayli (Woman Custom)	Japan	600,000	20
Woman Friend(Love)	Local	780,000	6
Woman Friend(Cute)	Local	800,000	6

Data from www.AllChina.cn.

magazines in China (Cosmopolitan China, Elle China), the top selling Japanese-style women's magazines (Rayli fashion and beauty, Rayli woman custom), and the most popular local Chinese women's magazines (Woman Friend (Love) and Women Friend (Cute)) were selected. While most of the international women's magazines published in China are classified as "fashion and beauty" magazines, it is difficult to find perfectly matched local Chinese magazines which comprise purely of fashion and beauty, as local women's magazines cover a broader spectrum of content. In each category the magazines were selected because of their large circulations in China (Wu, 2006). Although a few local fashion and beauty magazines such as: Grace, City Beauty, and Lady were recently introduced, their circulation and advertising revenues are very limited.

The Japanese-style magazines Rayli (fashion and beauty) and Rayli (woman custom) are published under licensing agreement with Japanese women's magazines Ray and ef. They have the largest circulation among all the international women's magazines in China, while ranking third and fifth in terms of ad expenditure, just after Elle China, Cosmopolitan China, and Vogue China (HC Media Research Center, 2006).

The top-selling Western-style women's magazines Cosmopolitan China and Elle China were chosen, for they have the highest circulation and advertising revenue among the entire Western-style women's magazines in China.

For the purpose of the study, four issues of each magazine were chosen through a systematic random sampling technique within the 12-month period from October 2006 to September 2007 (Table 1). The first magazine was November 2006 and every third issue thereafter was selected (Feb 2007, May 2007, and August 2007). As a result, a total of 24 magazines were collected from the above-mentioned six women's magazines published in China.

### Unit of analysis

#### Editorials

For all content other than advertising, a column was recorded and the percentage of pages was calculated. Totally, 1578 units of analysis for content occupying 4985 pages were collected.

#### Content categories

All magazine editorials were coded by category of editorial: They were classified as non-advertorial, advertorial, and theme feature (Van Reijmersdal and De Vos, 2002; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2005). In addition, thirteen subjects appropriated from previous studies (Shaw, 1999; Oh, 2007) were used for the coding, after a pre-test to check the viability of these categories in an Asian context. In order to understand whether the magazines are involved with women's

changing roles, this analysis compared the editorial space (number of pages) given to "traditional themes" with that given to "nontraditional themes". According to the studies done by Shaw (1997) and Sakamoto (1999), traditional themes include four categories: family relations, beauty, fashion, housekeeping and decor. In contrast, the nontraditional themes include four categories: career development, travel and vacation, political and social awareness, and human-interest stories. The source of content (Chang, 2004) was analyzed to examine the influences of global and local forces played out in the magazine content (see Appendix for operational definitions).

#### Inter-coder reliability

The coding was done by two Chinese students of an Asian university and the coding technique used by Bretl and Cantor (1988) was adopted: one coder coded all the samples and another coder coded a sub-sample of the whole content to check the inter-coder reliability. According to the methodological guidelines suggested by Wimmer and Dominick (2006: 167), "the content between 10 and 25% of the sample should be reanalyzed for the intercoder reliability". Two coders coded one issue each of Elle China (2007 May), Rayli (fashion and beauty) (2007 August), and women friend (Love) (2007 May), totally three issues, which included 190 units of editorials.

In this study, a total number of 1578 units of editorials were collected. Therefore, using Cohen's kappa, which is suitable for the categorical variables, used 12 percent of all the units of editorials for the intercoder reliability test. The acceptable level of intercoder reliability usually is 0.75 and above by using kappa (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006: 169).

According to Lombard et al. (2005), reliability levels for each variable should be considered rather than overall reliability, as a standard for evaluating the reliability. Intercoder reliability for each category was tested and the results were: "category of content" (0.889), "subjects" (0.97), and "source of origins" (.834). Thus, all categories used in this study achieved the acceptable level of intercoder reliability.

## RESULTS

### Content categories in women's magazines

As can be seen in Table 2, international women's magazines devoted more space to full-page advertisements and other sections that included advertorials and theme features than local ones. In addition, more percentages of pages in Western-style

**Table 2.** Content categories, by amount of pages.

Content category	Western-style women's magazines	Japanese-style women's magazines	Local women's magazines
Advertisements	33.56% (1067)	29.42% (909)	14.25% (115)
Non-advertorial	49.8% (1538)	52.39% (1619)	74.47% (601)
Advertorial	10.47% (333)	9.9% (306)	4.21% (34)
Theme Feature	6.17% (196)	8.28% (72)	7.08% (57)
Total Pages	100% (3179)	100% (3090)	100% (807)

**Table 3.** Percentages of editorial pages given to various topics in women's magazines.

Topic/Subject	Western-style women's magazines	Japanese-style women's magazines	Local women's magazines
Fashion-clothes, accessories	33%(697)	44.8%(977)	11.85%(82)
Beauty	27.46%(580)	34.43%(751)	11.13%(77)
Entertainment	13.35%(284)	3.62%(79)	8.38%(58)
Relationship	4.26%(90)	2.11%(46)	18.5%(128)
Recurring columns	2.37%(50)	1.28%(28)	2.75%(19)
Family relation	1.7%(36)	0.5%(11)	7.95%(55)
Housekeeping and decor	2.79%(59)	2.89%(63)	10.69%(74)
Human interest stories	1.7%(36)	1.70%(37)	4.91%(34)
Travel and vocation	4.59%(97)	2.89%(63)	4.19%(29)
Career development	1.52%(32)	0.55%(12)	4.48%(31)
Health	1.52%(32)	2.38%(52)	5.78%(40)
Political and social awareness	2.13%(45)	0.55%(1)	3.18%(22)
General information	3.5%(74)	2.8%(61)	6.21%(43)
Total Pages	100%(2112)	100%(2181)	100%(692)

women's magazines were occupied by advertisements (33.56%) in comparison to Japanese-style women's magazines (29.42%) and local magazines (14.25%).

In Japanese-style women's magazines, more percentage of pages included theme features (8.28%) than those in Western-style women's magazines (6.17%). Using T-test, no significant difference was found between Western-style and Japanese-style women's magazines in terms of space devoted to advertorials (10.47% for Western-style women's magazines and 9.9% for Japanese-style women's magazines) ( $t(3984) = 0.946$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). However, local women's magazines devoted much more space to editorials (74.47%) than both Western-style (49.8%) and Japanese-style women's magazines (52.39%).

Hence, the findings show that international women's magazines have more commercial content than local women's magazines. Furthermore, the processes of globalization and advertising penetration have had a large combined effect on local women's magazine industry. The fact that Western-style women's magazines devoted more space to full-page advertisements as compared to Japanese-style and local women's magazines explains why in terms of advertising revenue, Western-style women's magazines have a larger control over advertising revenue through establishing a close

relationship with luxurious brands (Wang, 2006). Nevertheless, Japanese-style women's magazines, especially the Rayli series, seek to establish their own identity among advertisers through the inclusion of theme features regarded as product exhibitions where the up-to-date commodities that are selected by editorial staff are displayed gracefully in front of consumers.

### Topics in women's magazines

Table 3 presents the percentage of editorial space given to thirteen topics in the sample magazines. The subjects are distributed more evenly in local women's magazines than in both international women's magazines. In Western-style and Japanese-style women's magazines, "fashion" and "beauty" categories received the most extensive coverage. "fashion" category made up 33% of editorial pages for Western-style women's magazines, 44.8% for Japanese-style women's magazines, and "beauty" made up 27.46% of editorial pages for Western-style women's magazines, 34.43% for Japanese-style women's magazines. In addition, "entertainment" took up 13.35% of editorial pages for Western-style women's magazines, a significant number that needs to be mentioned.

**Table 4.** Percentage of editorial pages given to traditional and non-traditional themes in women's magazines.

	Western-style women's magazines	Japanese-style women's magazines	Local women's magazines
Traditional themes	64.96%(1372)	82.62%(1802)	41.62%(288)
Non-traditional themes	9.94%(210)	5.18%(113)	16.76%(116)

\*Traditional themes include four categories: fashion, beauty, family relation, and housekeeping and décor. Non-traditional themes include four categories: career development, travel and vacation, political and social awareness, and human-interest stories.

**Table 5.** Source of content, by amount of pages.

Number of Pages	Western-style women's magazines	Japanese-style women's magazines	Local women's magazine
Local	68.37%(1444)	59.97%(1308)	98.27%(680)
Mixed	8.95%(189)	5.73%(125)	1.45%(10)
International /Western	22.68%(479)	2.20%(48)	0.29%(2)
International /Asian	0	32.1%(700)	0
Total pages	100% (2112)	100%(2181)	100% (692)

In contrast, "relationships" was the most commonly represented topic in local women's magazines (18.5%). Besides, local women's magazines emphasized other themes—"fashion" (11.85%), 'beauty' (11.13%), "housekeeping and décor" (10.69%), "entertainment" (8.38%), and "family relation" (7.95%).

In Western-style women's magazines, the least represented categories included "career development" (1.52%), and "health" (1.52%), followed by "family relation" (1.7%) and "human interest stories" (1.7%). In Japanese-style women's magazines, the least represented categories were "family relation" (0.5%), "career development" (0.55%), and "political and social awareness" (0.55%). In local women's magazines, the category least represented in the pages was "recurring columns" (2.75%), followed by "political and social awareness" (3.18%).

### Traditional versus non-traditional themes

Table 4 lists the percentage of editorial pages devoted to traditional and non-traditional themes in women's magazines. Among all the three types of women's magazines, the percentage of editorial pages given to traditional themes was much higher than that given to nontraditional themes. Interestingly, the percentage of editorial pages given to traditional themes was much higher in international women's magazines (Western-style women's magazines: 64.96%, Japanese-style women's magazines: 82.62%) than in local women's magazines (41.62%). In comparison, the percentage of editorial space devoted to nontraditional themes was higher in the local women's magazines (16.76%) than in international women's magazines (Western-style

women's magazines: 9.94%, Japanese-style women's magazines: 5.18%).

### Sources of content in women's magazines

Table 5 lists the percentage of editorial space given to different sources of content in sample magazines. More editorial space was given to locally produced content in local women's magazine ads (98.27%) than Western-style (68.37%) and Japanese-style women's magazines (59.97%). Using T-test, the difference between Western-style and Japanese-style women's magazines in terms of space devoted to locally produced content was statistically significant ( $t(4291) = 5.736, p < .001$ ). The percentage of editorial pages in Western-style women's magazines occupied by Western source of content (22.68%) was higher than the Japanese-style (2.20%) and local women's magazines (0.29%), whereas the percentage of editorial space in Japanese-style women's magazines with Asian source of content (32.1%) was higher than in both Western-style (0.09%) and local women's magazines (0). In addition, Western-style women's magazines devoted more percentage of editorial space to mixed source of content (8.95%) than Japanese-style (5.73%) and local women's magazines (1.45%).

### Topics vs sources of content

To further explore whether the topic varies by source of content, the correlation between the source of content and subjects in terms of distributed percentage of editorial pages was analyzed (Table 6 and Figure 1). It

**Table 6.** Amount of space assigned to subjects, by source of content.

Topics/Subjects	Local	Mixed	International/ Western	International/ Asian
Fashion	24.61%(844)	35.49%(115)	51.61%(273)	74.64%(524)
Beauty	31.96%(1098)	32.1%(104)	14.74%(78)	18.52%(128)
Entertainment	8.19%(281)	8.02%(26)	18.15%(96)	1.57%(11)
Relationship	7.23%(248)	1.23%(4)	0.76%(4)	1.14%(8)
Recurring column	2.36%(81)	3.7%(12)	0.76%(4)	0
Family relation	2.94%(101)	0	0.19%(1)	0
Housekeeping and décor	5.37%(184)	0.62%(2)	0.95%(5)	0.71%(5)
Human interest stories	2.89%(99)	0	1.51%(8)	0.85%(6)
Travel and vacation	4.96%(170)	1.54%(5)	1.51%(8)	2.56%(18)
Career development	2.1%(72)	0	0.57%(3)	0
Health	2.86%(98)	0.31%(1)	2.65%(14)	0
Political and social awareness	1.7%(58)	0	1.89%(10)	0
General information	2.86%(98)	16.98%(55)	4.73%(25)	0
Total pages	100%(3432)	100%(324)	100%(529)	100%(700)

showed that the editorial space given to content of local sources covered a wide range of topics, from beauty and fashion to travel and vacation, covering subjects like beauty (31.96%), fashion (24.61%), entertainment (8.19%), relationship (7.23%), housekeeping and décor (5.37%), and travel and vacation (4.9%). The editorial space distributed among content of mixed sources mainly focused on fashion (35.49%) and beauty (32.1%). Further, subjects such as family relations, human-interest stories, travel and vacations and political and social awareness were not represented in the content of mixed source. The editorial space devoted to content of Western sources converged on subjects like fashion (51.61%), entertainment (18.15%), and beauty (14.74%). And the editorial space distributed to content of Japanese source converged on fashion (74.64%) and beauty (18.51%) topics.

This disproportionate representation of fashion and beauty subjects in content of Japanese source indicated that the imported content primarily used in Japanese-style women's magazines focused on the stereotypical role of women, casting them in the roles of modern and fashion conscious consumers.

## DISCUSSION

Through the content analysis of women's roles portrayed in the sampled women's magazines, it was interesting to find that the media portrayal of women in international women's magazines is more stereotypical than those in local women's magazines. The predominant stereotype in international women's magazines, especially Japanese-style women's magazines, is that women are featured in decorative roles. Fashion and beauty categories comprise the major proportion of editorial content. From the perspective of political economy of communications,

the portrayal of women as a decorative object is one of the most profitable stereotypes for Chinese women's magazines. The newly growing popular fashion and beauty magazines adopt and keep alive these stereotypes, as this portrayal can help advertise sell products to female consumers.

It is not surprising that all three types of women's magazines in China transmit much more traditional messages to readers than nontraditional ones. Both local and international women's magazines function largely to reflect and reinforce traditional sex role stereotypes. While international women's magazines (both Western-style and Japanese-style women's magazines) focused on the role of women as fashionable consumers where youth and good looks are emphasized, local women's magazines emphasized the role of women as both fashionable consumers and traditional virtuous wives/good mothers who are defined by the children and men in their lives. Therefore, the modern woman, portrayed in local women's magazines, not only has physical beauty that makes her more attractive, but also one who possesses a family-centered lifestyle that traditional Confucianism promotes.

Compared with international women's magazines, the local women's magazines devoted more editorial pages to some articles suggesting broader social horizons for women and are encouraging them to seek a meaningful life (with articles about career development, political and social awareness, and human interest stories). These articles are less common than those indicating a more passive or vicarious female role. The local women's magazines appear to walk on a thin line between presenting messages for a liberated woman, and messages for a reader who is still traditional and realizes one's value through the eyes of men. It may indicate that the local magazines are appealing to audiences caught between being traditional, as well as trying to cope with

the modern social norms. Moreover, another assumption can be that the local women's magazines, likely to be projecting as the mouthpiece of Chinese communist party, would prefer women to respond to the government's appeals: to liberate Chinese women from the traditional family system and to promote women's participation in the nation's economic construction, which can be reflected from the publicized slogan "women hold up half the sky" in China (Cheng, 1997).

The fact that a good percentage of editorial pages in Western-style women's magazines comprise of stories from local resources than in Japanese-style women's magazines might suggest that Western-style women's magazines tend to make their editorial content more localized than Japanese-style women's magazines. Although making an effort to localize their content, international women's magazines reflect and transmit the consumer values that serve the interests of global brands. And international sources of content concentrated on topics such as "fashion", "beauty" and "entertainment", putting emphasis on women as consumers. In Western source of content, "fashion" is the largest category and these materials contribute a lot to the promotion of latest trends in Western-style fashions. Entertainment is the second largest category. This category primarily included illustrated interviews or articles about celebrities including female and male movie stars, popular singers, and romantic fiction.

The Western-style women's magazines have the advantage of introducing information about international (mainly Hollywood) celebrities to satisfy local readers' curiosity through the inclusion of content from Western sources. These stories of celebrities (especially international stars from Hollywood) as well as fashion news allow readers to get updated on the Western lifestyles including Western styles of clothes and accessories, make-up, and encourage local women to pursue similar physically beautiful looks as the celebrities and the Western lifestyle. As Herman and McChesney (1999) indicated, "The global media provide the main vehicle for advertising corporate wares for sale, thereby facilitating corporate expansion into new nations, regions, and markets. On the other hand, the global media's news and entertainment provide an informational and ideological environment that helps sustain the political, economic, and moral basis for marketing goods and for having a profit-driven social order" (p. 10).

In addition, Japanese-style women's magazines, filled with Asian/Japanese source of content on the latest styles to be found on the streets of Tokyo and Osaka, can also have impact on local women's aesthetics towards fashion. Through orientalizing their own fashion images and using models from other Asian countries for their fashion stories, Japanese fashion magazines can obviate the differences between Japanese and other Asian people and extend Japan's commodity culture in Asia (Morean, 2004).

Moreover, these Japanese fashion magazines as well as other Japanese cultural products play a mediating role of what has usually been viewed as an East/West binary (Iwabuchi, 2002). Therefore, both Western-style and Japanese-style women's magazines reveal a unique blend of global (Western or Asian) and local influences for two reasons: first, these publishing houses can draw articles from their foreign partners as well as their local associates; second, articles of different sources focus on different subjects; while the articles of local source provide broader social horizons for women to build up a meaningful life, the articles of global source put emphasis on "fashion" and "beauty" to commercialize the local Chinese women.

Generally, the high-definition photographs, stylized models, and picture-led text featured in international women's magazines and newly emerged home-grown fashion magazines, were a new departure for women raised in the politically-imposed revolutionary style, family stories of traditional Chinese women's magazines. These magazines fulfill a different role that constructs the consumer market in which products and services are promoted. The new glossy, colourful covers and picture-led content reflect the society that is transforming swiftly around them, and this changing structure of women's magazine industry can be seen as a snapshot of the tensions in a society going through a period of social and economic transition.

Ferry (2003) proposed that the media packaging of women within the rubric of consumption in contemporary China reflected the surge of nostalgia for the 1930s New woman, an icon of progressive modernity at the time when China was ruled by the nationalist government (Guomindang) from 1928 to 1949, before the Communist victory in 1949. This nostalgia is not dated in historical facts, but reconstructs history by the name of consumerism. Furthermore, consumerism is tolerated, provided it can distract the public's attention from political debates (Liu, 1997, in Ferry, 2003:281). For instance, both international imported and the local fashion magazines avoid making any serious attempt to tackle the social or political issues or upheavals taking place around the country as seen in the content analysis where very little coverage was given to such issues. The general coverage of the soft fashion and beauty content indicates a prerequisite for their successful development in the market.

The existence of these commercial magazines shows that the media portrayal of women is consistent with the government-sanctioned images. In light of China's ever-greater participation in the global economy and the entry of new goods and services, state policies are increasingly addressing the role of consumption, as is evident in the construction of a leisure culture that accumulates both economic and cultural capital (Ferry, 2003). For instance, no longer is the ideal woman the "iron maiden" of the cultural revolution years who was mostly dressed in a



blue Mao jacket without fashion clothes, hairstyle or make-up; the new model is a fashionable and urban woman who strives to "hold up half the sky" (Cheng, 1997), for while, she is endeavouring to possess the accoutrements of a modern consumer society, she is also pursuing her career, and participating in the social life. All these are assumed to be the government-sanctioned images of Chinese women, and therefore, are in accordance with the government gender ideology in China. This can help the market-driven economy that is under the guidance of CCP and it is in line with the fast growing number of middle-class women in China.

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## APPENDIX

### Operational definitions of variables

#### Category of story

Content category	Definition
Editorial	Refer to materials that don't contain any commercial information or do not feature any object or objects (such as products, services, organizations, individuals, ideas, issues. etc).
Advertorial	Advertorials appear editorial at first sight, but incorporate strong advertising characteristics, such as the label "advertisement" or "promotion," the advertiser's logo, a (slightly) different typeface, and a focus on one brand. As with all advertising, advertisers always pay for advertorials.
Theme feature	Theme features are regular columns: they appear in every issue and act as news features, presenting new or interesting products to the reader. A theme feature has a strong editorial format within which thematically related products are described in short texts often accompanied by sales information and pictures of the products. Theme features are generally presented by the editors (sometimes under the heading, "selected by the editors," or "editor signals trends and gives ideas," or just "by name editor"). Advertisers can pay for theme features (with money or free products), or the editorial staff can make a voluntary selection of brands and products they think are interesting.

#### Editorial subjects/ Topics

Editorial categories	Definition
Family relation	Information about marriage, child care, brothers and sisters, and friendship.
Relationship	Sex, relationship with boyfriends or husbands.
Beauty	Cosmetic, spa, hairstyle, diet, personal care, and beauty services.
Fashion	Fashion spread, clothing and accessories.
Career development	Information about job interview techniques, resume writing, management style, etc.
Housekeeping and décor	Informative articles about home decorating, budgeting, do-it-yourself, helpful cleaning hints, cooking and recipes, sewing, etc.
Health	Information about fitness, weight loss, diet, nutrition, medicine, illnesses, etc.
Entertainment	Interviews, personal stories, and gossip about celebrities, movies, books, music, arts.
Travel and vacation	Information about sightseeing at famous places, enjoying events, planning holidays, travel articles, small adventures along the way.
Human interest stories	Success or touching stories of normal people.
Political and social awareness	Information about legislation action, social programs, social issues.
Recurring columns	Letters from readers and editors, contributors to magazines, contents.
General Interest	A category labeled general interest, which included any other content apart from those listed in the categories.

**Source of content**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Local	Locally written articles
Mixed	Articles either translated but combined with local names of people and places or composed locally from a collage of imported content (or imported pictures)
International/Western	Imported translation/ main outline from Western partners
International/Asian	Imported translation/main outline from Asian partners, mainly Japan