

CHAPTER I

Fashion, Beauty, and Nation

1.0 Introduction

Séagh Kehoe

2020 was the year of ‘China Chic’ (*guochao* 国潮). Coined by social media users, ‘China chic’ literally translates as ‘national tide’ and refers to the rise of domestic fashion and cosmetic brands that incorporate ‘traditional Chinese elements’ into their designs. The term, which for a while even appeared in lists as the 2020’s ‘word of the year’, originally referred to homegrown streetwear brands but has since been applied to fashion products more broadly. It reflects, as Chinese state media frequently mention, a growing enthusiasm for ‘national culture’ and, in direct reference to Xi Jinping’s exhortations, ‘a stronger cultural confidence’ (Chen 2021).

As part of the shift from ‘Made in China’ to ‘Designed in China’, ‘China Chic’ follows a series of similar trends in recent years across the PRC. In 2018, for instance, models for sportswear brand Li-Ning paraded down the catwalk at the New York Fashion Week in the colours of the PRC’s national flag with ‘China Li-Ning’ (*Zhongguo Lining* 中国李宁) emblazoned across their tracksuits (Hales 2018). In November 2019, hundreds queued for hours in Guangzhou to purchase a pair of Air Force 1 ‘Black Silk’ sneakers by Hong Kong-based fashion brand CLOT. The sneakers, produced in collaboration with Nike and Fragment Design, featured ‘traditional Chinese-style patterns’ and followed a similar style from the year before in a Terracotta Warriors design (Xinhua

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2019). Meanwhile, the *Hanfu* 汉服 movement, which started in 2003 as an online craze with the aim of revitalizing the wearing of Han Chinese ethnic clothing, continues to boom (Dzidzovic, Zhou, and Leung 2019).

The emergence of such trends draws our attention to the various ways in which fashion, beauty, and nation intersect. Whether in the case of clothes, hairstyles, or make-up, sartorial and cosmetic practices have played an important role in the production, maintenance, and projection of ‘normal’, idealised and/or improved national subjects, often in deeply gendered, classed, and ethnicised ways. In Chinese Studies, this has been richly explored in several recent studies across a range of contexts, including the beauty economy (Yang 2011), Mao-era clothing (Chen 2001), fashion-making in the diaspora (Ling and Segre-Reinach (Eds.) 2018), and online fashion cultures (Liao 2019). Work of this kind offers an opportunity to consider how, as Maxwell (2019) explains, individuals may be forbidden, permitted, or even obliged to wear particular forms of clothing or cosmetics, and can reveal much about how the ‘Chinese nation’ is imagined. However, fashion and beauty practices can be more than simply top-down directives, and can work to negotiate, resist, and remake national norms and ideals.

The articles in this section explore these issues in the case of the PRC. Across a wide range of contexts, they examine the everyday practices of wearing, discarding, producing, consuming, and designing fashion and beauty, with particular attention to how these issues variously construct, contest, and negotiate a national Chinese identity.

In 2020, nowhere was the intersection between fashion and nation more acutely illuminated than in the case of Xinjiang. In July 2020, human rights campaigners issued a statement criticising many of the world’s biggest fashion brands for purchasing cotton from the region, which the coalition argued made them complicit in the forced labour of and human rights violations against the Uyghur people (Kelly 2019). This was strenuously denied by the Chinese state and dismissed across state media as an attack by ‘anti-China forces’ (Liu and Zhang 2020). These claims resurfaced in April 2021 and resulted in an enormous outpouring of support for Xinjiang-produced cotton across social media in the PRC, calls for a boycott of western apparel brands, and a number of PRC fashion brands and designers proudly confirming the use of Xinjiang cotton in their products (Friedman and Paton 2021).

Consumer nationalism is one way in which the intersection between fashion and nation in the case of Xinjiang manifests, but there are many others. As Leibold and Grose (2016) have argued, the Islamic veil has been at the heart of many of the Chinese state’s campaigns to control and standardise Uyghur dress and has also become an important symbol of ethnonational resistance, religious faith, and global Islamic haute culture. As explored by Tim Grose’s article in this section, the state’s attempts to use fashion and beauty norms as a way to discipline and transform the appearance of Uyghur women through legislation, campaigns, staged public fashion shows, and even a ‘Beauty Parlour

and Hair Salon' initiative to promote particular ideas about modernity while also identifying pious and Turkic standards of beauty as deviant.

Across the PRC, the regulation of bodies through fashion and beauty ideals upholds and promotes the state's political and economic objectives in many ways. While in Mao's era, beauty and fashion were frowned upon as frivolous and decadent, in contrast, today they are key sites in the development of consumer capitalism. As Yang (2011, 335–6) argues, this is particularly true for female bodies, youth, beauty, fitness, and slimness, all of which have become important 'tokens of class and status distinctions' in post-Mao China. All of this is evident in Zheng's article in this section, which examines sartorial practices among rural migrant karaoke bar hostesses in the PRC. She shows how migrant karaoke bar hostesses, often derided for their rural origin and assumed unstylish, rustic aesthetic, perform fashion in such a way as to imagine a sense of global belonging and citizenship, staking a political claim to the cosmopolitan through their foreign 'ultra-fashion'.

Zheng's article draws our attention to another recent fashion trend in the PRC: 'Too Cool' (*tuku* 土酷). *Tu*, which is literally translated as soil, usually denotes rural, outdated, or tasteless. However, Too Cool, in contrast, celebrates rural aesthetics as a disruption to the top-down authority of fashion and manifesting instead through a tongue-in-cheek style and pride in grassroots culture. While similar in some ways to the emphasis on pride and confidence described above in the case of 'China Chic', Too Cool styles itself as a subcultural challenge to mainstream aesthetics (Jiang 2020). In her article in this section, Jian Xiao examines similar dynamics in the case of the punk movement in the PRC, describing the various symbols and processes of constructing the 'punk look' as a visual defiance to the aesthetics of mainstream lifestyles.

Discussions of fashion and beauty often focus on the regulation and manipulation of female bodies in the pursuit of national goals, but since the 1980s, masculinity has also become a topic of considerable attention in the PRC. This 'masculinity crisis', as Geng (2010, 406) explains, goes hand in hand with the replacing of Confucian and Maoist-based models of manhood with 'productivist and consumerist values'. These fears are perhaps best captured in the official hand wringing over the rise of *xiaoxianrou* 小鲜肉, literally 'little fresh meat', which refers to handsome male stars who do not conform to traditional gendered style guidelines and are characterised in Chinese state media as emblematic of a broader 'feminisation of Chinese boys' and as 'a threat to the development and survival of our nation' (Du and Chen 2021). These developments are examined by Wen Hua in her article in this section, where she describes why cosmetic surgery and beauty practices have become increasingly popular among Chinese men in recent years and how this presents an alternative masculinity that defies the gendered ideals that otherwise informed 'the national character'.

These articles illuminate the myriad ways in which fashion, beauty, and nation converge in the PRC today. They also interrogate, in implicit and explicit

terms, how national trends are entangled within, informed by, and respond to issues that extend far beyond the national borders of the PRC. Indeed, at various points, whether in the case of Turkic beauty norms in contemporary Xinjiang, the consumption of Korean and Japanese fashion trends, punk aesthetics or masculinity ideals, the boundaries of 'Chinese fashion' and 'China' often blur. Notions of any single or compartmentalised 'Chinese fashion' is further complicated by articulations of 'Chineseness' from outside the PRC. Transnational beauty pageants organised for the Chinese diaspora, such as Miss China Europe, are a notable example of this. Here, as Chow (2011) describes, various forms of 'Chinese selves' are performed, all of which negotiate complex expectations and ideals of a 'Chineseness' rooted in ancestral connection and linguistic ability. Then, there are designers from Taiwan, Hong Kong and the diaspora who eschew the title of 'Chinese' designer and use of 'Chinese' aesthetics in their work (Ling 2018). What does it mean in the case of Cultural China, then, to speak of 'Chinese' fashion and beauty, and who does it refer to? Even within the PRC, as we see in this section, the answers to these questions are far from straightforward.

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1.1 Beautifying Uyghur Bodies: Fashion, 'Modernity', and State Power in the Tarim Basin

Timothy Grose

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) routinely stages public fashion shows in Uyghur communities of the Tarim Basin (present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region). In Yopurgha County (Yuepuhu 岳普湖), Kashgar

Prefecture, young girls, teenagers, and middle-aged women sit patiently as Uyghur beauticians dab face whitening cream, draw perfectly symmetrical eyebrows, and paint lush red lips on their faces. Meanwhile, groups of Uyghur women, organized by age and dressed in either blue jeans, mini-skirts, or pencil skirt-business coat ensembles, are paraded on stage to display age-appropriate attire. *Usma*, *henna*, braided hair and other (secular) grooming habits typical to Turkic Muslims of the Tarim Basin and Fergana Valley (Nalivkin and Nalivkina 2016, 89–102) are notably absent from the stages.

These events represent the CCP's recent efforts to transform the appearance of Uyghur women; yet, the party began disciplining the Uyghur feminine body in earnest nearly a decade ago. In 2011, officials unrolled Project Beauty (Grose and Leibold 2015), a five-year, US\$8 million dollar multi-media initiative that encouraged piously-dressed Uyghur women to 'look towards modern culture by removing face veils and *jilbāb*' (*Tianshan Net* 2012). Throughout southern Xinjiang's rural villages, officials organized fashion shows, beauty pageants, longest-hair contests as well as lectures on ethnic policy, ethnic attire, and social etiquette to persuade Uyghur women to 'let their hair down and show-off their pretty faces.' By 2015, lawmakers in Ürümqi introduced legislation that outlawed *hijab*, *lichāk*, *chumbāl*, and *jilbāb* as well as 'abnormally long' beards and clothing featuring star and moon insignia in any public area (*ChinaFile* 2014). These measures effectively discouraged Uyghur women from donning many veiling styles. During my visit to Ürümqi and Turpan, June–July 2017, two years after the veiling ban, I did not observe any women covering their faces with veils or hair in *hijab*. Some, mostly older, women continued to don a scarf or *yaghliq*, which they either knotted behind their heads or tied loosely under their chins.

In 2017, the CCP rolled out the 'Three News' campaign (*Haiwai Net* 2017). This package of study sessions, cultural programs, and workshops organized by local-level governments aims to 'advocate a new lifestyle, establish a new atmosphere, and construct a new order' (*changdao xin fengshang, shuli xin qixiang, jianli xin zhixu* 倡导新风尚, 树立新气象, 建立新秩序). Buried beneath the campaign's jargon is the 'prohibition against wearing strange clothing' (*chuandai qiguai* 穿戴奇怪). Although the language is ambiguous, it signals the CCP's recommitment to standardizing and Sinicising sartorial practices among Uyghurs, especially women.

Officials are carrying out this campaign by farding the complexion of Uyghur feminized beauty with ostentatious glamour. Representatives of the All-China Women's Federation (*funü lianhehui* 妇女联合会) have organized step-by-step makeover tutorials in several southern counties. During one such event in Qaraqash County (Moyu 墨玉), Khotan, a Uyghur beautician taught her peers how to style hair and apply cosmetics (Qaraqash County Government 2018). A May 2018 cosmetology training course in Atush called 'Let your beautiful long hair down and show your pretty faces,' which 'drew on the influence of "Project



Fig 1.1.a: Photo taken by author in Ürümchi, June 2015; captions by Darren Byler.

Beauty” provided instruction on fashion and cosmetics to over two hundred women. A report on the event featured dramatic before-and-after photographs of women who underwent makeovers. After her beauty treatment, a woman named Amangül Alim celebrated her new look: ‘I’ve never been as beautiful or confident as I am today. We used to have to go to the city for these services, which was a long way from here and expensive. So, we hesitated to go. Now we’ve learned to apply cosmetics and style our hair ourselves. We don’t have to spend money, yet we look great!’ (*Fanghuiju zhi sheng* 2018).

To provide rural Uyghur women with access to these new fashion trends, county-level governments launched the ‘Beauty Parlor and Hair Salon’ (*liang-fawu* 靓发屋) initiative. This campaign has funded the construction of salons across rural Uyghur villages. In 2018 alone, the government boasted 2889 new beauty parlours (each equipped with facial steamers, shampoo chairs, styling chairs, and disinfectants (People’s Daily 2018) and 7954 newly certified Uyghur beauticians in Xinjiang’s southern four districts—i.e., Kashgar, Khotan, Aqsu, and Qizilsu (CRI Online 2018). To put these numbers into perspective, government officials built a new beauty parlor for approximately every 3,600 people or one facility per 1800 women in these districts. Residents of Qaraqash County alone can visit 252 newly built salons; every village operates at least one business (Sina 2018).

Uyghur women are often coerced into cosmetology careers. For instance, over one hundred women from Ulughchat County (Wuqia 乌恰) in Qizilsu Prefecture completed a twenty-day ‘closed-door’ (*fengbi shi* 封闭式) course, which required them to live and study, ‘without charge,’ in a vocational facility. In addition to learning the ropes of cosmetology, these women also studied *Putonghua* and Chinese law (CRI Online 2018). Therefore, their curriculum resembles that of women ‘studying’ cosmetology and hairdressing in the region’s concentration re-education centres (The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China).

The Three News campaign provides an illuminating example of what Michel Foucault called ‘biopower.’ Foucault observed that the state saw human bodies through a crude coloniser or colonised binary. He introduced this concept to describe the subtleties of power and its ‘calculated management of life’ (Pylypa 1998, 24). Foucault argued that political order cannot simply be imposed on a population; it has to be taught, replicated, and self-inflected to effectively regulate human behavior. Power, therefore, functions to control life—not end it—through ‘continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms’ (Foucault 1978, 144). In other words, biopolitics need to work in tandem with discipline, which Foucault conceptualises as a type of physical and mental subjugation imposed to increase human efficiency.

To be sure, Foucault introduces ‘biopower’ to describe the types of power that permeate neoliberal societies; however, his theory may have utility in understanding how CCP power targeting Turkic Muslims operates outside the concentration re-education centers. In the case of setting new standards of beauty, the impulse to look a certain way is not forced upon an individual through threats of violence; rather, power ‘constructs normality and deviance’ and creates the *desire* to conform (Pylypa 1998, 22). A young Uyghur woman from Qaraqash remarked, ‘Since our village opened a salon, I’m able to maintain a beautiful hairstyle, attend to my skin, and apply make-up. I feel as pretty as a city girl’ (Qaraqash County Government 2018). Her statement exposes the CCP’s biopolitical intentions. The Party is inscribing ‘modernity’ and urban beauty on cosmetics, permed hair, and casual dress, thus normalising these practices, while it is identifying pious and Turkic standards of beauty as deviant.

Officials confidently predict that this campaign will transform Uyghur women into docile Chinese subjects. A representative from the XUAR’s Women’s Federation explained that ‘the Beauty Parlor and Hair Salon initiative will bring forth three transformations in the lives of women. First, women will transform their body image. Then, they will transform their way of life. Finally, they will transform their way of thinking’ (Sohu 2019). Certainly, the beauty parlors introduce new beauty standards. Dozens of photographs depict newly trained beauticians dying hair, styling it in curlers, applying face whitening cream, and putting thick layers of cosmetics on their clients. However, according to Foucault’s theory, the practices required to maintain this manicured

countenance at home—i.e., mimicking a stylist's techniques and repeating this process daily—inscribe the body with state-produced knowledge and sustain their own subjugation (Pylypa 1998, 24). A work team member in Yopurgha County, Kashgar Prefecture claims to have noticed a significant change among women: 'Now, women in the village have changed from shy and old-fashioned to cheerful, lively, and generous' (China Women's Paper 2018).

To be sure, this tactic to impose new beauty standards and, more importantly, teach them to ethnic and racial minorities is reminiscent of colonial methods to control indigenous bodies. Federal boarding schools for Native Americans provide instructive examples. Students at Haskell boarding school were forced to adopt 'white' appearances: boys were forced to cut their hair and keep it trimmed while women were required to wear blouses and dresses (Child 2000, 30–31). Strict dress and appearance codes at Chilocco were part of the federal government's efforts to train domesticated and subservient women (Lomawaima 1993). Six hundred miles north, the Native boarding school children in Flandreau, South Dakota trained as beauticians and barbers and learned how to wash, style, and cut hair in the Euro-American fashion (Child 2000, 81).

The US example not only provides us with a lens to understand the 'Three News' campaign, it also portends its potential failure. Indeed, the US government could not completely uproot Native Americans from the land and disassociate them from their cultures. This history provides a gleam of optimism for Uyghurs: as long as they remain committed internally to their cultural, linguistic, and spatial roots—both individually and collectively (Lomawaima 1993)—they will insulate a space wherein Uyghurness can blossom and flourish, on their own terms, again.

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1.2 Karaoke Bar Hostesses and Japan-Korea Wave in Postsocialist China: The Politics of Fashion, Class Hierarchy, and Transgression

Tiantian Zheng

Fashion has always been the key for me in noticing a rural migrant karaoke bar hostess during my research with them in Dalian, China (Zheng 2009). On the street, it is hard not to spot a hostess wearing exotic fashion and with a distinct appearance. Indeed, they are fashion trendsetters and bright components of the human landscape in Dalian. Their fashion ensembles challenge traditional Chinese sartorial practices in a myriad of ways, including exposing large portions of the body, combining ostentatious and outlandish colours, and featuring irregular styles and unfamiliar cuts. Their attire is derived from foreign or foreign-inspired fashion products.

From head to toe, rural migrant karaoke bar hostesses are covered in Korean and Japanese fashion. These fashion products include, but are not limited to, plastic hair trinkets, scarlet hair dye, fake second eyelids, fake eyelashes, fake tattoos, cosmetics such as whitening cream and black lipstick, bracelets, clothes, and pointed-toe shoes. Almost all hostesses' feet are sheathed in pointed-toe, high-heeled shoes which were first introduced from Korea and later produced and manufactured in China. Their black or other dark-shaded lipsticks are also produced and manufactured in Korea, inspired by Korean movie and music celebrities. Their cell phones are adorned with Japanese Hello-Kitty-emblazoned transparent plastic baubles that flash blinking lights upon every incoming call.

Rural migrant karaoke bar hostesses' fashion practices embody the Japan—Korea Wave in the context of global cultural flows (Zheng 2011). The Japan—Korea Wave first rippled into China in the early 1990s, with a deluge of Japanese and Korean commodities and a rising popularity of Japanese and Korean popular culture across the country. Just one decade after China opened its door to the outside world and began to play an increasingly significant role in the global market, this Wave grew into a full-fledged tidal wave, enveloping Chinese youth in the conspicuous consumption of Japanese and Korean products.

The Japan—Korea Wave can be seen in the popularity of Japanese and Korean products either directly imported from Japan and Korea or copied and manufactured in China. These products include, but are not limited to, comic books, DVDs of film, TV series, and singing idols. Many Chinese youth adore and follow the Japanese popular looks of bleached white or blond hair streaks, white eye make-up, tubular-front elevated shoes, or Hello-Kitty embellishments. However, this pursuit of Japanese popular culture was stymied by the nation-wide anti-Japanese boycott movements in the 2000s (Gerth 2003).

In contrast, the popularity of Korean cultural products in China continued without animosity, mainly because both China and Korea were victims of Japan during World War II and an affinity between the two countries was felt by many. Korean popular movies, TV dramas, and singing idols flooded the Chinese consumer market and were consistently the highest rated nation-wide for many years. Under the Korean influence, many Chinese youth copied the Korean style and started Chinese Hip-Hop and R&B bands. Young people also pursued Korean-style plastic surgery and Korean-style scarlet red long hair, fake stick-on tattoos, drawn-on thin eyebrows, fake double-eyelids, black or dark shades of lipstick, pointed-toe high-heeled shoes, and other lace embellishments. A fervour developed toward Korean fashion that eschews simple colours in favour of juxtaposed, outlandish colours and features a tight, transparent, and skimpy style that exposes skin, irregular skirt opening, vests or bellybands exposing the whole or half of the back, and single-shouldered style.

Chinese popular media compared the Korean Wave to rural migrant karaoke bar hostesses. For example, as one piece published by *Shenzhen Weekly* (*Shenzhen Zhoukan* 深圳周刊) noted, 'Korea almost seems like a young country girl who suddenly arrives in the city. She sees all kinds of strange and novel things and doesn't wait a second to try them out on herself. The result is an odd-looking mess of colours. It seems to be ultra-extravagant (*chaoxuan* 超炫) and ultra-modern (*chaoxiandai* 超现代), but in fact it cannot cover up her country air (*tuqi* 土气). Country air goes hand in hand with Korea's astonishing rise to wealth (*baofu* 暴富). We can see the same sort of cultural mentality reflected in those Chinese youth who hold the Korean Wave in highest esteem' (Wang 2002, 41).

Anthropologists Sandra Niessen and Ajun Appadurai have pointed to attire as a class-signifier (Appadurai 1996; Niessen 2003; Wilson 1992). In China, the anti-peasant derogatory term ‘*tuqi*’ applies the concept of *qi* 气 an essence or energy, to all peasants, to reify them as country bumpkins whose bodies are seen as radiating a rustic and unstylish essence. Indeed, many urbanites claim that, even though rural migrants in the city shed their countryside clothing and refashion themselves in new clothes, the *tuqi* essence of their rural origin can never be concealed by this disguise, instead seeping through their dark skin and ‘ultra-flashy’ and ‘ultra-modern’ fashion to give away their rural origin. In other words, their rural origin impedes them from being perceived as capable of fully grasping the ‘true’ aesthetic sensibility of modern fashion, a foil against which urban women’s mastery over fashion is staged. Since fashion is perceived as an embodiment of urban women’s membership in a global, modern community (Johansson 1998; Schein 1999), the alleged fashion ineptitude of peasants denies them this membership.

The opposite term of *tuqi* is *yangqi* 洋气- sea, ocean essence. *Yang* signifies a foreign world outside China, and *yangqi* represents a foreign, stylish essence, associated with urban women. Rural migrant hostesses employ an ‘ultra-fashion’ strategy to perform fashion by avoiding *tuqi* 土气 and striving for *yangqi*, thus resisting the ‘rural *tuqi* - urban *yangqi*’ hierarchy and imagining a sense of global belonging and citizenship. They appropriate the Japan–Korean fashion as the most visible hallmark of social status to claim their legitimate membership in the global community and destabilise, subvert, and transgress the rural–urban class hierarchy. They deride urban women’s conservative, parochial fashion sense and stake a political claim to the cosmopolitan, global community with their foreign, ‘ultra-fashion’ that heralds them trendsetters at the forefront of China’s fashion landscape (Zheng 2011).

Note

This article is adapted from Zheng, Tiantian. 2011. Karaoke Bar Hostesses and the Japan–Korean Wave in China: Fashion, Cosmopolitanism, and Globalization. *City and Society*, 23 (1), 42–65.

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1.3 Punk Culture and Its Fashion in China

Jian Xiao

Possibly the first punk musician in China, He Yong, arrived on the scene in 1994 in Beijing, and the first two punk bands, Underbaby and Catcher in the Rye, emerged at the same time. Only a few years later, 1998 witnessed the explosive growth of punk bands in China. At that time, there were several influential bands, such as 69, Brain Failure, and Anarchy Boys, which inspired the younger generation to sport mohawks and leather jackets. Another landmark event occurred that year: a punk club called the Scream (*haojiao jùlebu* 嚎叫俱乐部) opened in Beijing, which would soon become a significant cultural space for the punk musicians of the day, such as Wuliao Contingent (*wuliao jundui* 无聊军队). One important performance took place on April 8th, 1998, when more than 200 people came to this club, which was only supposed to house a maximum of 100. The founder, Mr. Liao, commented later: ‘Just as Tang Dynasty [*Tang Chao* 唐朝, a Chinese band] showed us what a heavy metal scene could be like, people began to understand what hardcore, ska, or Oi! punk were [...]. I can still remember the intense punk atmosphere – it was strong, simple, straightforward, and powerful, while also full of happiness and exciting anger.’ Further to this, Yang (2012) has used the term ‘youth restlessness’ to describe this atmosphere, especially in the case of Underbaby performances.

Adopting a similar style to punks in the West, Chinese punk musicians can be recognised as skinhead punks by their bald heads, Doc Martens boots and belt trousers, or as street/metal punks by their Mohawk and studded leather jackets. Following the unprecedented economic growth and new cultural spaces that emerged after the Reform and Opening-Up, being a punk became



Fig 1.3.a: Punk show. Photo by the author.

a way to speak and act against commercialisation. Moreover, because of commercialisation, Chinese punks have had greater access to resources. This differs from the punk scene in Portugal, for example, where, as Guerra and Xiao (2018, 178) describe, ‘the present context of economic crisis and social precariousness has accentuated a recourse to punk (and its DIY ethos) both as a word and as praxis pertinent to everyday concerns such as housing, work, and urban sociability and conviviality’. Comparatively speaking, the Chinese punk musicians have not been driven by necessity to apply a DIY attitude to fashion—it has been entirely possible to purchase the punk-type clothing items they desire, such as black leather jackets or Doc Martens boots, in China.

The DIY ethos is still important to Chinese punks, particularly for overcoming challenges relating to actualising other aspects of punk activity—for example, music performances or punk media (music videos, publications such as zines, etc.). For punks to ‘dress like punks’, they needed to resort to various expedients for dressing in accordance with their stylistic code; for example, whenever they needed a belt, they had to customise it with spikes purchased from hardware stores as there were not yet any shops selling punk belts. The musicians would also make their own labels and craft their own hairstyles. Those creative, enjoyable and entertaining moments have also become culturally significant, allowing the musicians to integrate into the punk community in a global sense.

The meaning of punk fashion is often associated with resistance. Researchers at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which was established at the University of Birmingham in 1964 and examined various aspects of youth, subculture, and resistance, assigned great relevance to style. Cohen (1972) described style in terms of four central characteristics: clothing, music, rituals, and language. However, he also noted that style is not a quality inherent to subcultures but something that is constructed over a long period of time. Hence, what creates a style is the stylisation—the active organisation of objects alongside different activities and perspectives, which, in turn, produces an

organised group with a coherent identity and distinctive ‘being-in-the world’ (Guerra 2010, 416).

In the Chinese social context, subcultural resistance in individual practice occurs in a more intimate environment and on a smaller scale. It manifests in various forms, such as insisting on dressing in a distinctly punk fashion, living a lifestyle of attempting to resist the mainstream, joining and staying in punk groups to resist peer pressure and parental expectations, and seeking alternative forms of employment and income to maintain a state of expressing one’s true self and opinions, and of resisting what is interpreted as a phenomenon of widespread ‘blindly following’ in mainstream society. In fact, the conflict between punk musicians and the mainstream can evolve from being just an alternative visual style at variance with ‘normal’ fashion into an alternative lifestyle against that of the mainstream.

The behaviour of dressing as a punk in a group can appear especially offensive and threatening to the public since their visual look can be associated with gangs. For instance, one punk musician’s decision to adopt a skinhead Oi! punk visual style in public was criticised by teachers, neighbours, and peers early in his life. As a consequence, he developed a form of visual resistance—insisting on his particular punk visual style specifically as defiance to the mainstream visual style—despite constant pressure from the surrounding mainstream. At this stage, the mainstream response to his visual resistance played a role in his construction of his punk identity, but did not immediately influence his life in other significant ways. It was at a later stage that this musician’s visual resistance caused problems at work, prompting him to leave his job.

Generally speaking, the state responds to the Chinese punk scene in a negative way. Punk events can often be stopped by the government for reasons of political sensitivity relating to some of the messages contained in the lyrics. For those events that are not shut down, the state intervenes through strict surveillance to prevent punk musicians from expressing alternative political opinions. This intervention, which is usually led by government officials, can sometimes turn into a violent one.

While variations are hardly noticeable in terms of punk style across different Chinese regions, internal differences within punk groups still exist and are related to concerns about punk authenticity. Punk musicians in Wuhan, for instance, believe that the Beijing punk circle is full of small subgroups and issues of hierarchy, possibly due to the difference between punk musicians born and raised in central Beijing, and those who grew up in the suburbs. Thus, they create their own intimate groups based on ideas of equality and existing without a hierarchical approach, such as supporting newcomers. By doing so, Wuhan punks regard themselves as being more authentic. In this sense, being a punk is never just about dressing like a punk.

Ultimately, fashion is a means of expression, and the choice of style is a process of identity-building. One Chinese punk musician once commented: ‘We

started to learn about skinhead culture, then the clothes. We like boots, braces, Levi's trousers, and a simple working-class style. It suits us.' In this sense, dressing in a particular style is not only symbolic of cultural and musical resistance to a troubling status quo, but also a concrete expression of an urban movement focused on music, fashion, and a particular lifestyle, sometimes bohemian, sometimes working-class, and in this case, punk.

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1.4 Cosmetic Surgery, Flower Boys, and Soft Masculinity in China

Wen Hua

SoYoung, one of the biggest Chinese cosmetic surgery mobile apps, released a report in 2017 stating that the Chinese cosmetic surgery market was developing at six times faster than the global average in terms of the number of people undergoing non-surgical and surgical procedures. It also noted that Chinese consumers accounted for around 41% of the global total cosmetic surgeries, among which about 10 percent of consumers were men (SoYoung 2017).

Compared with their female counterparts, beautification practices for men constitute new territory. To participate in the improvement of one's appearance through daily grooming, let alone through surgery, men need to overcome their entrenched perception of beautification practice as women's domain. Who are these men and what procedures do they opt for? What does the new trend of male beauty in China look like, and how do beautification practices affect constructions of masculinity?

It has been widely reported (Wang and Cai 2016) that entertainers, young white-collar workers, successful career men in their 40 and 50s, and college

students are the main customers of male cosmetic surgery in China. Male entertainers such as models, actors and TV hosts are generally more concerned about appearance, in all its aspects, because appearance is particularly important for their career development. Although male and female public figures seldom admit they have undergone cosmetic surgeries, Hu Ge, one of most influential Chinese male celebrities appearing on the covers of most fashion magazines, admitted that he underwent a number of procedures to restore his looks after he had a serious car accident in 2006.

Young white-collar workers normally opt for small operations rather than going under ‘the big knife’; typical procedures include nose jobs (rhinoplasty), jawline recontouring, and ‘double-eyelid surgery’. For successful middle-aged men, they are more concerned with aging, the signs of which they combat by having eye bags reduced, sagging cheeks, jowls, and necks restored, hair implanted, and excess fat removed by liposuction. Less invasive procedures such as injections of Botox or hyaluronic acid, which reduce wrinkles and help the skin look younger, are also popular. Young students who ask their parents to pay for their surgery sometimes go to cosmetic surgery clinics and hospitals armed with pictures of movie stars and pop stars. Genmei (2016), another influential cosmetic surgery app, reported that the most desirable facial features of China’s male cosmetic surgery trend were the eyes of Huo Jianhua, nose of Hu Ge, face of Yang Yang, and mouth of Lu Han. Popular procedures for this group included ‘double eyelid surgery’ (to make their eyes appear larger), together with operations to sculpt their noses or shave their jawbones to produce a softer face.

The increasing popularity of male cosmetic surgery shows the rise of aesthetically conscious men in China. In the past decades, the media, soap operas, and lifestyle magazines have been saturated with messages about men discovering their ‘feminine’ sense of beauty. A new type of male beauty idol, ‘flower boys’, or in a new catchword, *xiaoxianrou* 小鲜肉—literally, ‘little fresh meat’—has become extremely popular as a label of a new type of Chinese male icon, who are known for their flawless, boyish appearance, exemplified by the cute-faced TF Boys, one of China’s most popular teenage boy bands. Although there are different ranking charts for the most popular *xiaoxianrou*, celebrities such as TF Boys, Lu Han, Wu Yifan, and Yang Yang appear in most charts. These male idols are shaping new images of male beauty, which is in contrast to the macho stereotype tough guy image which dominated the Mao era. The rise of ‘flower boys’ and *xiaoxianrou* is not limited to China. Something very similar has also taken place in other Asian countries, especially Japan and South Korea (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012; Jung 2011; Miller 2003). The rise of ‘flower boys’ and men’s growing interest in their appearance challenges conventional macho masculinity and presents an alternative soft masculinity, or ‘metrosexual’ in Simpson’s term (1994).

The term ‘masculinity’ in Chinese today, *yanggang zhi qi* 阳刚之气, implies ‘macho’. However, scholars (Louie 2002; Song 2004) have argued that the

configurations of Western hegemonic macho masculinity are not applicable to *wu* 武 masculinity in China. In Chinese history, sometimes soft *wen* 文 masculinity was superior to macho *wu* masculinity because it was the literary skills and cultural attainments conceptualised as *wen* masculinity that was more closely associated with social status than *wu* macho masculinity. Of course, there is never just one kind of masculinity and masculinities change over time. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 836) argue, masculinities are ‘configurations of practices that are accomplished in social interaction and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting’.

Under the revolutionary ideology of the Maoist China from the 1950s to the later 1970s, the traditional predominance of *wen* masculinity over *wu* masculinity was overturned when intellectuals were labelled as ‘bourgeois rightists’ and workers, peasants, and soldiers (*gong* 工, *nong* 农, *bing* 兵) as the proletariat central to the power of the state. The hegemonic macho masculinity was exemplified by strong and muscular ‘iron girls’ (*tie guniang* 铁姑娘) who were supposed to look and act like men.

Wen masculinity made a comeback following China’s reform and opening-up in the 1980s. With consumerism becoming increasingly important during this time, *wen* masculinity came to embody not only scholarly attainment, but also an ability to consume. It also became associated with metrosexual traits, as vividly exemplified by the rise of aesthetically conscious ‘flower boys’ or ‘little fresh meat’ and beauty products advertised by those influential androgynous male idols. As part of this consumer culture, an attractive and groomed male body has come to represent a new form of sophisticated identity and consumerist masculinity.

The rise and popularity of ‘little fresh meat’ challenges representations of masculinity in contemporary China and has received a strong pushback from powerful state media. The state news agency Xinhua published an editorial denouncing ‘sissy pants’ (*niangpao* 娘炮) or those who are ‘slender and weak’, warning of the adverse impact of this ‘sick’ culture on teenagers (Xing 2018). The editorial stressed that ‘what a society’s pop culture should embrace, reject and spread is really critical to the future of the country’. While some fear the popularity of effeminate male idols may threaten the country’s future (see Teixeira 2018), others believe in an open and diverse society. Aesthetics can be varied and there is plenty of room for diversity.

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