When the Gendered Millennial Goes Global: A Cross-National Reading of the 'New Woman' in British and Chinese Television Ads

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Abstract

This paper compares the similarities and differences between Chinese and British advertising representations of the new woman. The comparison is both transnational and historical. This paper analyses the characteristics of new women to observe the construction process of modern gender discourses in the Western and Eastern contexts in the contemporary globalized world. Second, it explores how feminism (as a globalized idea) affects the way of shaping the new female characters, which is to examine the influence of modern feminism on the construction of new women's gender identities in the British and Chinese society. This research regards feminism as a cultural object modified in cross-cultural communication; therefore, this paper also analyses the complex relationship among globalization, cultural integration, feminism, social development, and gender from the perspective of the construction of new woman's identities.

Contributor Note

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Citation

Advertising the 'New Woman'

The idea of the 'new woman' was first proposed as a political manifesto of Western feminist movements in the 19th century (Lavender, 2014; Zhang, 2019), and is changing with historical and cultural contexts. Although deviations might exist in the perceptions of the new woman in different regions, globalization has gradually compressed the earth into a plane showing an inevitable trend toward homogeneity. Today, the new woman is generally considered to refer to a growing number of well-educated and feminist women, most of whom work in the public sphere and are financially self-sufficient (Stevens, 2008; Chen, 2014; Zhang, 2019). With the rise of woman's power around the world, the new woman as a gendered identity embedded in a globalized context has become one of the critical forces to construct gender representations in the contemporary era.

The 'new woman' has been indissolubly bonded with the mass media since the very beginning. As research has pointed out, the media representation of the new woman to some extent reflects a resistance to the traditional distribution of power relations and the appeal to the new discursive practices of gender in a specific context (Genz, 2010; Khondker, 2011; Munshi, 2013; Patterson, 2008; Rowbotham, 1997). In this sense, this research takes the interpretation of the new woman as a cultural and political project which aims to help us pry into the practical process of gender politics and predict the prospects of social changes.

Nowadays, the recreational ways of the emerging middle-class women and the re-positioning of gender identity brought about by the rise of these new women groups have attracted the attention of advertisers around the world (Zhou, 2015), which invisibly affects the image of women in advertising campaigns.

Based on these premises, this paper chooses two Mercedes-Benz adverts, produced in different countries but released in the same year. It observes the representations of young female groups in the 'Chinese' and 'British' texts. The paper focuses on the similarities and differences of the represented gender identity of the new woman in British and Chinese advert copy. It examines the constructions of new female identities in different contexts. The examination of the similarities and differences in the representation of the new female group in advertisements, on the one hand, helps us to read the relationship between young women's perception of gender identity and the process of globalization and, on the other hand, helps us understand the developments of feminist projects in Western and Eastern contexts.

Also, in ways we have not yet fully discussed, the new female group has helped shape our consumer culture (Russell, 2007) and modern gender discourse. It means that we shall no longer simply compare the portrayal of new women in British and Chinese advert cases: we need to expand our interrogation and argument – not only to verify the existence of new women in advertisements but also to verify their roles in shaping local culture and the changing gender discourse. In summary, the discussion and comparison of the two advert cases aim to help us to further understand the relation and interaction among gender, identity, and globalization.

The comparative demonstration of the new woman's images in British and Chinese commercials can be understood as a part of a series of cultural projects involving tradition and modernity, the East and the West, localization/globalization, homogenization and heterogenization, feminism and social changes. Exploring the differences and similarities of advertising representations of the new female groups also provides an approach to read the understanding, interpretation, and adjustment of feminism and modernity in non-Western societies.

New Generation and the Production of New Gender Identities

Using female images for commercial purposes is not a new trick for advertisers. Spence (2005) argues that women's advertising images are largely impacted by the popularly accepted opinions of gender roles and the connotation of femininity. Krijnen and Bauwel (2015: 70) also point out that the construction process of female images is based on our common understanding of women and the dominant gender discourse. As the discursive construction of femininity in a specific context, women's representation shows us the essential elements of being a woman through the depiction of femininity, the designed gender display, and the set of gender display (Spence, 2005).

According to Jhally (2011), advertisers often use the most widely accepted sexual symbols of femininity and masculinity to shape advertising characters; there is little room for variation unless the purpose of the ad is to attract attention by using a 'funny' and 'abnormal' reversal of gender roles. In other words, the female and male advertising characters usually represent an idealized femininity and masculinity; in this way, the advertising could accomplish the purpose of obtaining the recognition of the broadest range of audiences within a particular social dimension. By representing images of idealized women and men, advertising copy reflects the mainstream gender concepts in a society. Furthermore, some researchers indicate that the representation of gender could shape the discourse of gender and affect audiences' views of gender roles and recognition of gender identity (e.g., Geis, Brown, Jennings, Walstedt, and Porter, 1984; MacKay and Covell, 1997; Tincknell, 2005; Wood, 2012).

Advertising campaigns have close relations with gender. Still, it is worth noting that previous studies have revealed the fact that advertisers often use misrepresentations to objectify women and reinforce sex differences/stereotypes in order to stimulate consumption (Irigaray, 1985, 2012; Goffman 1979; Cortese 1999; Williamson 1978, 1986; Kim and Chung, 2005), because advertisers need to grab audiences' attention and convey specific messages in a concise amount of time (Krijnen and Bauwel, 2015). Advertising was argued to have distorted the imagery of female bodies to meet the pleasure of the male gaze, condoned or encouraged violence and stereotypes against women, and belittled the feminist movement (Mulvey, 1975; Sheehan, 2013). Under the logic of the male-dominated power system, women are often linked to the 'domestic situation' as mothers and wives, or as sex objects to titillate and entertain male audiences; female characters usually are young, slim, emotional, have perfect body parts which conform the image of 'ideal' beauty and traditional femininity (Butler and Paisley, 1980; Gill, 2003; Gallagher, 1981, 1992; Mager and Helgeson, 2011; Collins, 2011; Frith and Mueller, 2010).

Although many studies have proven that stereotypical representations of gender are still easy to find in contemporary media, some researchers show contradictory results (Krijnen and Bauwel, 2015; Mcrobbie, 2004, 2008). Some studies reveal that fewer stereotypical representations of women appear in advertising, and women are being represented in a broader scope of powerful and professional roles as a global phenomenon (MacDonald, 1995; Wollin, 2003; Bruce, 2016). Another evidence is the increasing number of images of 'superwoman' in mass media, which is usually simultaneously portrayed as a good friend, lover, mother, wife, boss or employee, and have 'self-assured sexual being' (Gill, 2003, 2007; Krijnen and Bauwel, 2015).

Another new phenomenon in women's advertising representation, which has been increasingly noticed, is the representation of female masculinity (e.g., Cooper, 2002; Fink, 2015; Bruce, 2016). Part of the reasons lies with the global spread of feminist thoughts and the rise of the third wave of feminism (Bruce, 2016). Feminism has long emphasized

women's empowerment. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between female masculinity and the new form of modern femininity (Gillis et al., 2004). Beasley concluded that masculinity is an identification. It is not tied to a sexed body and escapes the biological. It also appears to escape the social, since it is no longer conceived in historical terms and aspects of masculinity's social production, as a positionality whose definition rests upon the subordinated status of women, seem to disappear' (2005: 233). Markula (2009), drawing on Derrida, discusses 'what it might mean to think "outside" of a category of feminine/masculine' and 'reach beyond the hierarchical binary structure', and concludes that 'this remains a very difficult task' (Markual, 2009: 103-104).

The key factors that dramatically changed the advertising representation of women in recent decades could be considered to be the rise and development of feminism (Nicholson, 2013) and the increasing power of women brought by the enormous influence of women's purchasing power nowadays. Since the second wave of feminism swept the Western world in the 1960s and 1970s, feminists have been questioning the 'political correctness' of the depiction of women and the female body in media (e.g., Waters et al., 2007; Cortese, 2016; Mendes and Carter, 2008). The central idea of feminist media critiques is that 'hierarchical gender relations (re)produce social inequalities across time and cultures, thereby making it difficult for men and women to be equal partners in democratic society' (Mendes and Carter, 2008) and the primary goal is to 'fill in the gaps' in knowledge about gender-setting-gaps made by the prior male bias (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2016: xiii).

Some studies suggest that feminism has become a tool of modern marketing (e.g., McQuail, 2010; Lotz, 2006; Goldman, Heath, and Smith, 1999; McRobbie, 2008). Reker (2016) argues that the post-Fordist society has reshaped the logic of consumption; new branding strategies encourage consumers to make purchases based on the idea that the brand supports rather than on the product itself. The trend of focusing on modern women for advertisers will become increasingly popular due to the significant influence of women's purchasing ability and women's increasing power in the coming years. With the global awareness of feminist ideas and women's power, feminist messages are used as a means of sales promotion (Goldman, Heath and Smith, 1999; Reker, 2016). To use feminist beliefs for commercial purposes is not a new thing, which could harken back to the 1920s with Edward Bernays' campaign encouraging female consumers to break gender limitations of smoking (Goldman, Heath and Smith, 1999). With the increasing popularity of 'femvertising' nowadays (Bahadur, 2014; Reker, 2016), it is not difficult to find that the emerging new female group has become one of the most popular symbols that modern advertisers tend to use to express their feminist attitudes.

The usage of feminist ideas by advertising is hardly surprising, given the benefit-chasing characteristic of advertising. By representing feminist beliefs and the empowerment of women through the new image of women, advertisers are able to target the modern female market effectively. Goldman, Heath, and Smith (1999) state that common strategies used by advertisers include a 'subtle reframing of the male gaze shifting the power as such a relationship from the surveyor to the surveyed' and 'validating an image of the new woman defined as independent and equal to men'. Stampler (2014) indicates the statistical success of the appropriation of feminism for commercial purposes, which is defined as 'commodity feminism' by Goldman, Heath, and Smith (1991) and Goldman (2005). Duffy (2010) and Reker (2016) find that many current adverts encourage the self-empowerment of women and express the ideas that women's bodies should be treated as 'a site for women's pleasure' and 'a resource for her power in a broader marketplace of desire'.

However, McRobbie (2008) suggests that feminism is now 'celebrated in such a way as to suggest that the politics of feminist struggles are no longer needed' because advertising creates images of women who have already won the freedom but in fact, these representations often simply act as 'a therapeutic mechanism for women to feel empowered through their capitalist values' (Reker, 2016). Therefore, Lotz (2006) reminds us that advertising is a tool of capitalism, and the initial purpose of feminist advertising is to earn business benefits rather than breaking gender stereotypes. Reker (2016) points out that advertising is fundamentally incompatible with the goals of radical feminism as it is not an agency through which the previous power structure could be changed. But these advertisements offer up a post-feminist viewpoint, in which the empowerment of women is enacted through their ability to choose what they want to be like or what products they would like to buy; and the tension between feminism and post-feminism about the emancipation and identity of the 'female' group offers a representational space for advertisers (Lazer, 2006).

At the same time, globalization remains a critical reference point in understanding the discursive construction of new women's advertising representations. The significant effects of globalization today are shown as the increasing cross-regional economic inter-connections; the speedup of information dissemination; the erosion of old hierarchies; the possibility of forming new identities; social and cultural changes (Li, 2016; Held and McGrew, 2000). The globalization process, on the one hand, encompasses optimistic cross-cultural understandings, but on the other hand, brings international conflicts and upheaval (Valentine, 2015).

One central debate about today's globalization process is the tension between homogenization and heterogenization (Li, 2016). Most often, homogenization is argued to be reflected as Westernization or cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1996; Li, 2016).

However, as Giddens (1999) argues, 'globalization today is only partly Westernisation [and] is becoming increasingly decentred'. Appadurai (1996: 35) also states, 'the global relationship […] is deeply disjunctive and profoundly unpredictable', which involves five 'scapes': ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes.

On the other hand, arguments around heterogenization focus on the diversity and hybridity in the globalization. Some research, such as Kroon and Swanenberg (2018: 1), believes that the ongoing globalization processes are 'turning the world into a far more diverse place' and creating an environments 'in which new discursive genres and patterns are emerging, along with new linguistic and cultural practices and identities'. Heterogenization, however, has also been criticized for denying and glossing over racism (Ang, 2001), neutralizing power relations and hiding unequal power relations (Dirlik, 1994), and endorsing multiculturalism co-opted by global powers (Li, 2016). Kraidy (2002), therefore, stresses that there are mechanisms of cultural production at work in these processes of globalization that construct different hybridities, and in which hegemonic power structure plays an important role.

Due to the rapid globalization of media and popular culture, representations need to be examined in a transnational view as the current media texts are produced in a globalized context. However, global audiences can easily access information and media texts from different countries at any time (Waisbord and Morris, 2001; Crane, Kawashima, and Kawasaki, 2016).

With the abundance of Western media and cultural values being transmitted across the world, Western media texts and ideas have been consumed by audiences in various geographical regions. Taking the influence of Western representations of women as the example, on the one hand, the global spread of Western media representation of women is

creating a more liberated female culture in Asia (Kim, 2010), on the other hand, it has generated a complex condition for understanding the construction processes of femininity, gender relations, and the reflexivity[1] of gender discourse. Some research implies that the global spread of Western media products have largely shaped Chinese contemporary women's media representations and affected the understanding of femininity among young Chinese generations:

Madanat et al. (2011: 102) find that 'Western media, fashion, and advertising promote thinness as the most desirable appearance, which leads to the pursuit of slimness'. Some Chinese scholars came to similar conclusions. Luo et al. (2005) note that China's import of Western media products has resulted in the diffused sexual attractiveness in Chinese commercials and increasing body dissatisfaction levels among Chinese young women. Although some researchers held that the critical elements of the Chinese ideal female body, such as thinness and whiteness, are rooted in some historical periods of China (Leung, Lam, and Sze, 2001), but some researchers observed that representations of beauty in East Asia had experienced a series of changes in recent decades under the influence of Western norms about femininity and beauty. One example is the popularity of Caucasian appearance such as deep sculptured faces and double eyelid in modern East Asian society, which has led to the popularization of plastic surgery in the East Asian market to a certain extent (Kyo and Selden, 2012; Li and Ma, 2008). Studies on changes of mainstream femininity in China illustrate that Chinese modern femininity to some extent could be regarded as a negotiation of Chinese traditions, hegemonic culture, politics, and globalization. The impact of Western hegemonic femininity on representations of new women and femininity in the Third World

is evident and profound. However, the symbols of Western femininity, as Hemondhalgh (2008: 219) states, 'will be often reinterpreted and adapted by symbol creators in other contexts'.

New Women in British and Chinese Mercedes Commercials

This paper selects British and Chinese Mercedes commercials (2017) as case studies to compare images of the new woman. Today, many advertisers have realized the strategic availability of focusing on specific client groups who are more likely to be attracted by their products and services (Armstrong and Kotler, 2007: 181). According to Mercedes-Benz official website (2018), it is a luxury vehicle brand designed for quality modern life. The new female group is highly coincident with the target consumer groups of Mercedes-Benz, given their income, lifestyle, and purchasing ability. In China, young female consumers are labelled as 'steady income', 'strong consumption desire', and 'main consumer groups of luxury brands' (Zhou, 2015). They have become the 'opinion leaders' in the Chinese market, as they can directly change many brands' marketing strategies (Lin, 2010). Female groups' consumption-ability also cannot be ignored in Britain society, and it has made significant impacts on the advertising industry (Greer, 2007).

Regarding the commercial purpose, the representations of the new woman in the chosen cases work as an effective marketing method to attract potential consumers. But from cultural and social perspectives, the examination of advertising representations of the new woman in British and Chinese advert cases could help us read the characteristics and identity of the current new woman as advertising is an effective cultural indicator to examine the relationship between the society

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[1] Reflexivity refers to 'the relationship one may have when consuming and comparing mass

media with what they are experiencing in their own lives' (Goodall, 2012).

and its social members; it will also help us explore to what extent similarities and differences are being produced in the representations of the new woman between Britain and China and to further explore why.

Case Study 1: Women in Chinese Mercedes Commercial

The Chinese Mercedes commercial (2017) shows us the changing processes of six different female characters. Female character 1 changed from waiting for her partner for dinner to preparing a sumptuous meal at home – with the background monologue 'you are waiting for a meal, a meal is waiting for you' (see figures 1 and 2). Female character 2 changed from waiting for her date in the theatre to starting to act on the stage and pushing away a male character during the performance – 'you are waiting for a good show, and a good show is waiting for you'. Female character 3 meticulously checked the makeup before the interview, but the male interviewee ignored her and left in a hurry – 'you are waiting for an opportunity, the opportunity probably will not wait for you'. Female character 4 changed from holding a man's hand when climbing up the mountain, to driving the car by herself and looking at herself in the mirror – 'listen to him and naturally have direction. Regardless of him, the direction will naturally come'. Female character 5 changed from a model photographed by a male photographer to a fashion designer – 'the world wants to define your beauty, but you define the beauty'. Female character 6 came to the fencing hall which is exclusively occupied by men, and defeats her male opponent – 'people look at you with different sights, you use the extraordinary ability to fight back'.

Figure 1: 'You are waiting for a meal'

Figure 2: 'A meal is waiting for you'

In the end, coinciding with the background voice 'the more you go forward, the harder it will be; the harder it is, and the more you will go forward' (Figure 3), the advert shows close-ups of women's footsteps wearing from high heels to sneakers. In the last scene, the female characters gather together and toast to celebrate – 'they thought you were lonely, but you are not alone. The one who understands you is waiting for you here. To meet your confidence, and see yourselves' (Figure 4). These changing processes of these six female characters shown in the advert are also the transformation of their self-recognition, connoting the split of the connections with the previous male-dominated discourse and the start point of these women's new identities.

Figure 3 'The more you go forward and the harder it will be'

Figure 4: 'To meet your confidence and see yourselves'

Figure 3: 'Mind your manners'

Figure 4: 'Go to bed early'

Case Study 2: Women in British Mercedes Commercials

The second advert case – the British Mercedes Benz commercial (2017) – shows audiences some common rules of being a young woman: 'when you start to be responsible, there are several rules you should follow'. These include 'work hard'; 'mind your manners'; 'go to bed early'; and 'grow up'.

This advert consists of four separate scenes: two young women drive to the beach (Figure 5); one of the female characters pours a glass of water on a man's face in public (Figure 6), corresponding to the advert words 'mind your manners'; the female characters dance and appear drunk at a club (Figure 7), accompanied by the narrative voice saying 'go to bed early'. Two female characters make up and watch the sunset together after an argument (Figure 8), implying it is now the time to 'grow up'.

Figure 5: Driving to the beach

Figure 5: 'Grow up'

New Women – New Identities

Advertising agencies often use the same 'briefs' from their clients, but execute them differently according to cultural contexts. The selection of ads makes for a cross cultural comparison. The British ad was made by a European agency and is for a pan European audience. In this case, the Chinese ad involved the same agency.

In many Western countries including Britain, popular feminism is declaring women's equal opportunities and free choices through the mass media almost every day: feminist projects such as 'Pink March' and 'Girl Power'

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have taken a significant part of popular culture, which seems have gradually banished the issues of `gender troubles' into a distant and dark past (Munford and Waters, 2014). In China, modern young people's interpretations of gender are a complex agglomeration of ideas freely drawn from feminism, modernity, liberalism, socialism, nationalism, cultural revivalism, and so on. The generation of Chinese who grew up after China's reform and opening-up were generally the only child in families, in line with government policy. Due to the development and changes of the times and politics, it is easy to find that a huge gap exists between the young people and the older generation concerning opinions on many social concepts including gender roles and identities. In the process of globalization, with the help of mass media, Western ideologies and theories spread rapidly among young people in China (Wu, 2016; HY Digital Marketing Research, 2014), which have had a tremendous impact on young Chinese's perception of gender identity and gender roles; meanwhile, the influence of traditional ideas of gender and gender roles seems to be gradually weakening.

By comparing the representational approaches of the female characters in the British and Chinese Mercedes commercials, we can see that the similarities of the new women in the two cases are more significant than the differences. The similarities of the representations of the new women (or in other words, the general characteristics of the new female groups in different countries) and the differences could be understood from the following aspects.

New Definitions of the Subject

The designs of the female characters are varied in the two Mercedes advertisement cases: we see five middle-class women living without male company, and two young women learning to 'grow up' after quarrels and hangovers. The attention to self-identities and the diversity of the subjectivity of the

advertising characters to some extent has reflected the emphasis on the individual and personal values, showing a significant trend of cultural convergence between the Chinese and British societies.

As Young (2010) states, the 'individual' is a significant base of modern Western civilisation, as the freedom of both political democracy and the capitalist market economy relies heavily on the existence of individual liberty and civil rights. Although patriarchal discourse systems have long attempted to classify women as one gender category for discipline and management purposes, the tradition of valuing individual experience has benefited British women's liberation movements to a certain extent, thus making the mass audience more focused on the diversity of genders and identities. Therefore, the detailed description of the characteristics of various characters in Mercedes adverts have a profound social, cultural, and historical background in British society.

Grouping people into specific social groups and weakening the presence of the individual under collectivist value has a long national tradition in China, formed during the development of Chinese nationalism (Lin, 2013). The word 'individual' generally has a derogatory sense when it comes down to the interests of the group, the nation and the masses in Chinese traditional values (Hsu, 1981; Zhang, et al. 1996; Lin, 2013) – although cultures are showing a trend of homogeneity under the unavoidable influence of the global system of often orientalist post-colonial discourses. Hegemonic cultural ideas and values have been disseminated to the world through mass communication tools and techniques. Modern Western concepts have gradually been accepted by more Chinese in the process of learning the Western economic and social systems. However, as Lin (2013) observes, the unique and ingrained cultural traditions in China still play a significant role in manipulating mainstream social values in many perspectives, resulting in conflicts and contradictions existing in the Chinese

national identity, showing as two distinct different but often blended attitudes – learning from and resisting the West.

One of the conflicts shows as the underlying understanding of 'people' in modern Chinese contexts. Traditional Confucianism emphases the value of collectives and groups which determines that Chinese behaviour patterns tend to be socially and collectively orientated (Michailova & Hutchings, 2006). On this basis, the concept of 'people' in Chinese culture has been constructed on an ideological level of emphasising 'integrity, goodness, and beauty' ('真善美') rather than the individualised 'her' or 'him' (Tang, 2012). Under the guidance of Chinese collective cultural tradition, gender is constructed as a series of political symbols, and the existence of the individual could be weakened within the collective gendered symbol system, which to some extent could hinder the development of post-feminist ideas such as the advocacy of diverse subjectivities and gender identities in China.

In contrast, Steele & Lynch (2012) find that the ideas which emphasise the importance of individual value, the pursuit of the personal rights, and individual independence have been widely accepted by the Chinese today. Along with other political factors, such as the one-child policy and booming development of market economy (Hofstede, 1980), the self-consciousness of the new generation in China has developed to an unprecedented state (Wang, 2007), and individualism may replace collectivism as the new mainstream value orientation in China (Steele & Lynch, 2012), which also has impacted the representation of gendered groups in the case study adverts.

New Forms of Female Bonding

But the women in the Chinese and British advert cases do not show significant essential distinctions. On the contrary, these female characters are quite similar in terms of their lifestyles, entertainment tastes, and personal values.

First, we can find that the new women in both the British and Chinese cases are groups of young women, each having independent personalities and economic abilities. They are more eager to seek the realization of self-values, free, and independent social lives rather than pursuing marriage and family life or showing other characteristics commonly seen in the traditional female images.

The case study commercials convey the idea of woman's independence by representing the female characters' resistance to the dualistic male-female gender setting, the possibility of freely choosing women's lifestyles, and women's enjoyment of being themselves without being impacted by the absence of the male characters. The new women portrayed in the case study adverts, to some extent, represent the ideas of women's power and liberation which are widely accepted in both the British and Chinese societies today. As Goldman (1992) argues, women' liberation is reflected in the aspects such as leisure and lifestyle, discretionary income, and professional and personal characters. The female characters in the adverting cases belong to the group of women with a keen consciousness of independence and empowerment, which are closely relevant to women's emerging power behind the representations. The ideas of women's independence and empowerment can be perceived by a series of symbols that appeared in the advert copy, including the close-up features of various women's shoes, the six times' use of 'you', and the breakup with the male characters.

The British and the Chinese advert cases, on the one hand, advocate individual independence; on the other hand, both reflect a seemly contradictory popular social proposition of the necessity and reliability of building up a same-sexual bonding among women. These two cases both end with the reunion of the female characters and the encouragement and company of other female members from the female same-sexual group. No matter whether in advert copy or our daily life, the same-sex union

seem has become a powerful political tool for the woman to express their resistance to patriarchal gender settings and show the rising power of female groups.

To be more specific, the new same-sex group of women is conflicted with the traditional male-female family structure as the core idea of this female union is the empowerment and independence of women. The strong bonding among the new female group members is significantly different from the traditional female gathering, which aims to facilitate information exchange around family and maternity. It is also different from the conflict-ridden same-sexual social group based on the heterosexual-oriented homosociality in traditional industrial society. Its essence lies in avoiding the threat of the traditional power structure to women and deconstructing the stereotyped understanding of a woman's role, thus providing a political backup for the establishment of new female identities.

Global Femininity and Anti-Stereotyped Femininity

The second similarity between the British and Chinese case study commercials is that both adverts construct femininity as a fundamental characteristic of the new female characters. Although each culture has a set of general concepts about the constitution of femininity and beauty (Frith et al., 2009), we cannot find a noticeable difference in the constructed femininity in the chosen two commercials: the female characters in the British and Chinese advert cases are attractive and feminine. With a closer look, we can see that these two advert cases did not avoid representing the femininity of the female characters even when advocating the independence and empowerment of women.

Tencent News (2017) examines prevailing new female images in the global film market. It finds that the construction of new female images shows two contrary trends in recent years: on the one hand, the image of sexy new woman frequently appears in visual texts; on the other hand, some of the new women have been shaped as masculine characters such as the image of tomboy. As Tencent News (2017) points out, both of these commonly constructed approaches of the new women are problematic.

By shaping the new woman as a sexy character, she could easily become a materialized symbol in the consumer society. On the other hand, deliberately negating the femininity of the new woman, first, is tantamount to denying the diversity of women's identities, and the complexity of gender, second, has belittled the values of femininity. In fact, this kind of new woman's image has again fallen into the essentialist traps by using the performativity of gender differences to shape the 'new' identity of the new woman but lacking the awareness of the complexity and fluidity of gender and identity. Therefore, intrinsically speaking, the masculinization of the female image is just a reconfirmation of the so-called 'natural' structure of heterosexual gender roles.

For comparison, the new woman's images in both of the British and Chinese adverts neither gives up on displaying femininity nor deliberately uses the sexualization of women to meet the male gaze. The case study adverts make a new definition of femininity by representing the coexisting of feminine appearance and independence. From a practical view, this new definition of femininity, on the one hand, subverts the outdated statement which alleges woman's power and independence as abnormal; and on the other hand, it changes the stereotypical artificial portrayal of the woman in advertising. In this way, the previous binary understanding in which masculinity is regarded as 'strong' and femininity as 'weak' has been dramatically diminished.

The 'New' Woman?

As discussed above, the new women in British and Chinese adverts have more common characteristics than differences; but still,

differences do exist. As we can see, there is no leading male character in the Chinese advert, but the male character is closely associated with 'a dinner', 'a good show', 'an opportunity', 'direction', 'world', 'people' and 'they'. In the life of the female characters, there is always an invisible male character hiding in the shadows, such as the absent partners at the dinner and the show, the departing interviewee, the male partner during climbing, the photographer, the opponent in fencing, and so on.

In the study case, the first choice designed for the female character is to have dinner with the male companion, while making herself a dinner works as a substitute. It suggests that a heterosexual relationship is still the primary reasonable and acceptable source of Chinese new women's social life. The appearance of the women's gathering at the end of the advert hints that being single is an adverse situation for these new women, as (although the fact is 'you are not alone') in the eyes of the general public 'you are lonely', and only through those who understand them and are waiting for them, can the new women 'meet their confidence' and find their identities. It implies that the establishment of a woman's new identities should be based on the deconstruction of male-dominated gender relations, and the identification and self-recognition of the new woman are still affected by the logic of male-dominated gender relations in Chinese society.

New Women's Representations: Convergence in the Globalized Context and Traces of the Old Days

Some might argue that the advertising representation of the new woman is still an artificial product rather than a real insight of the complexity of the new woman's life due to the commercialized nature of the advertising campaign, but as previously mentioned, advertising roles are usually made based on the mainstream values in a society in order to gain the recognition of as many consumers as possible. Today, women's advertising

images have become more diversified and sometimes contradictory. The design of the female advertising characters needs to cater to the targeted audiences' views on the woman while the public's identifications of women's roles and identities are showing trends of personalization and diversification in the postmodern consumer society. In this sense, the design of advertising female characters must seek balance in different social, cultural, and political factors. By examining and comparing the detailed descriptions of the new woman in Britain and China, this study finds the representations of the new woman (like many other cultural objects which have experienced a series of negotiation, assimilation, resistance, and compromise in the process of globalization) show apparent similarities and less obvious differences. The reasons could be discussed from the following perspectives.

The Increasing Similarities of Young Women's Lives

With the increase in interdependence and interaction between countries and cultures, millennials show amazing consistency in many ways including the recognition of gender roles and identities. Over the past decades, views on what it means to be a woman have undergone revolutionary changes. The study cases show us a series of similarities between British and Chinese women, from their lifestyles and entertainments to their values and pursuits. These similarities redefine the cultural identity of the new female groups in a globalized context, behind which is the increasing convergence of young women's lives in Britain and China driven by the cross-national interactions and specific social factors.

According to Zuo and Wen (2016), different generations, social classes, occupations, and regions have different impacts on the construction of identity, which means that the new female group cannot represent every other social member. However, the study

cases, to some extent, could confirm that globalization has played a specific role in building today's new women's identity and changing women's lifestyles, especially for Chinese new women.

First, globalization works as a primary driving force to construct similar lifestyles and values of these new women in Britain and China. Since China reopened its doors to the world in the 1980s, society and people's lives have undergone dramatic changes. One significant change is that Chinese young people's lifestyles are approaching those of Western countries represented by the United Kingdom and the United States. The increasing pressure in Chinese society, the one-child policy released in 1978, and improvement of the household economy led to a significant increase in concerns and material inputs of Chinese parents to their child/children, which have made more parents send their child/children to study in Western countries. The sharp transition of Chinese society and family that has happened within recent decades has led to significant changes in young people's lives, which unexpectedly has added fuel to the westernization of the new generation in China. At the same time, changes of communication methods brought about by the globalization of technology and economy in the past decade provide technical and financial possibilities for the convergence of people's (especially the young people's) lives and entertainment styles, which further brings about changes of ideology and identity.
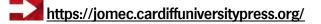
Second, globalization has undoubtedly played an important role in forming young people's identities in both Britain and China. With the modernization of politics and cultures, the boundaries between the West and the East tend to be blurred. The openness of the society enables the British and Chinese youth cultures to constantly integrate and communicate with other cultures, and then form an ever-changing culture presenting characteristics of diversification and hybridity, but as previously discussed, the hegemonic power structure plays a non-negligible role in global cross-cultural interactions. It is in no doubt that modern Chinese society has been hugely shaped by the global and its relationship with the West (including Britain) in all perspectives, as to become modern is a 'grand narrative' (Lyotard, 1984) for China in the last two centuries while modernity is considered as highly equal to the Western model of social-cultural, political and economic structures (Chow, 1991, 1993; Chen, 2002; Li, 2016).

However, the social transformations and cultural changes in China are not simple replications of the West but are modifications situated in specific local/global cultural and social contexts (Chen, 2002). The peculiarity of Chinese modernity lies in its constant struggle between emulating Western modernity and creating an alternative mode of development (Walker, 1999; Lu, 2007; Klein, 2014; Li, 2016). In the field of gender discourse, admittedly, the current common understandings of gender and gender roles in China have been largely affected by Western concepts and feminist ideas. In this sense, the identity and self-esteem of modern Chinese women could be seen as a negotiation space of multiple factors, including traditions, globalization, feminism, cultural resistance, and politics and regulations.

Similarly, the interpretation of the British new women's representations should not be limited within the British context. Many shreds of the complicated social phenomenon have shown that the current world is an interactive system which is strikingly new and continuously updated (Li, 2016), and the cross-cultural communication is always a two-way flow.

The emerging cultural phenomena are the international environment for the new women's advertising representations of British advertisements, and also provide the theoretical background for understanding the similarities of the representations of British and Chinese new women.

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The Growing Power of Feminism

As previously discussed, both the British and Chinese case study adverts use similar commercialized ideas benefited from the global feminist projects into the descriptions of the new female character's leisure time and daily life. In fact, it is not the first time the feminist new woman's image used in advertising.

In reviewing the history of women-advertising relations, the images of new female characters are now gradually getting rid of the traditional functions such as acting as a stereotypical good wife and mother or a decorative object. The new images of feminist women are used by more advertisers in both Britain and China to cater to modern young generations who grow up in a constantly globalized context.

Moreover, by comparing the female alliances in the advert cases, we can see that globalization plays a similar function in at least constructing the lifestyles and values of young women in both Britain and China. Similar female alliances are not established in the traditional binary woman-family structure but are a social way which juxtaposes with the independent gendered subject.

Behind these representations is the recognition of feminist beliefs in the contexts of Britain and China. Today, as Maclaran (2017) states, the feminist word has finally made a comeback in Western countries. In the West, high-profile women such as Beyoncé, Miley Cyrus, and Emma Watson are popularizing feminism for a new generation (Maclaran, 2017). Consequently, feminism has become a buzzword in British advertising marketing, resulting in the emergence and rapid development of commodity feminism.

Compared with Britain, the public's consciousness of women's empowerment in China starts relatively late and has encountered a setback at the end of the last century caused by the frustration of feminism after the Reform and Opening-up in the 1980s. However, looking from the current cases, the advertising representation of the identity and role of the new female group in China has not been significantly different from that of the British women, which can be seen as a staged strategic victory of feminism in Chinese society in recent years. In China, although we have to admit that women's social status is still complicated and needs further improvement, the younger generations have been seeking new ways to discuss issues of gender and face the changing gender relations and roles in the contemporary era, and Chinese citizens are relatively optimistic about the government's commitment to promoting gender equality (Wesoky, 2013). The emergence of global feminist discourse and women's growing power bring changes in the public's awareness of femininity and gender roles, and also result in the similar advertising image of women in both Britain and China, reflecting the wide acceptance of feminist ideas among female consumers in these two societies.

Advertising is a mode of business activities. Therefore it must balance the representation with its financial viability. Advertisers investigate the predispositions of their clients when creating a market segment, and then turn fictive communities into communities of consumption (Berger, 2013). Regarding the target consumers in these adverts, we can assume that the Mercedes-Benz product is targeted at the young people of the urban middle class. In these advertisements, we see the representation of the diversity and autonomy of female characters, which implies that the women's rights advocated by feminism are deeply rooted in young urban female professionals and well-educated social classes in both Britain and China.

From the feminist point of view, the emerging middle-class young women represented in the Mercedes adverts have thoroughly implemented and practiced the social consciousness of women's rights and power. The best explanation for this is that the new middle-class female group builds a secure

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emotional connection at the end of the case studies adverts; this homosocial community had previously only been represented by the male union associated with the working and living conditions in the traditional industrial or agricultural societies.

From a cross-cultural perspective, we can see that feminist ideas and Mercedes commercials are also connected through a joint process that turns different areas (Britain and China) into one coding program to seek common interests and voices. In commercials targeting the middle class, the life of each female character is built around engaging in typical middle-class entertainment, such as hiking or fencing in Chinese Mercedes advert and the drinks and beach in the British Mercedes advert. In terms of the representation of women's lifestyles in these adverts, it is not difficult to find that the new middle-class women in both British and Chinese adverts have similar lifestyles.

Therefore, we can state that the impacts of globalization and global feminism on the young new women in both China and Britain are both profound. The lifestyles of these young new women in China and Britain are becoming more similar under the influence of the globalization, which could be seen as a rhetoric of the suffusion of feminist trends in the globe. The Mercedes advertising representations of the woman and female bonding absorb and embody the ideas of feminism and woman's empowerment, once again projecting the commercialized feminist discourse to the audience's understanding of women's roles and identities.

The reaffirmation of the feminine female group follows the de-gendering trend of modern feminism, reflecting the respect for subjective identity rather than dissevering or exacerbating the binary woman-femininity relationship. At the same time, it shows a positive understanding of femininity: femininity is not equal to 'weakness'; femininity does not conflict with women's independence, denoting an attempt of feminism to reshape the previous power

structure of gender discourse by redefining the core ideas of modern femininity.

Feminism, however, is a complex and pluralistic discourse. The commercialization of feminism is sometimes dangerous and disconcerting, as the feminist ideas reflected in advertising representations are overly simplistic and easily manipulated. The images of the new woman in Mercedes advertisements can be seen as a kind of representation of a decentralized and then reorganized gender subject as they are designed to be decoded by audiences along the designed route, which makes it an important tool in reconstructing the identities of the new woman, reinforcing the designed feminist ideas, and reflecting the new relations of feminist discourses between different contexts from a global perspective. Therefore, we can say that the boundaries between advertising and gender myths, representation tools and feminist concepts, historical and social relations systems, and possible identity issues of the new woman can be interlinked. The identity of the new woman, feminism, and advertising copies are mutually constructed.

Traditional Impacts: Issues of the New Woman

The British and Chinese case studies show us two groups of young, beautiful and confident women; however, as we can see, the female characters' dependence on men in the Chinese case study advert is much more evident than in the British case, or in other words, the Chinese advert case, on the one hand, emphasizes the close relationship between the woman and the man, on the other hand, symbolizes the man as a frustration for the new woman, and the independence and self-confidence of the female characters are achieved by dissevering their connections with the old male-dominated power structure, making women's same-sexual union a second choice and a countermeasure facing the absence of the man. Taking a further look, the ambiguous and simplified way of representing the relationship between the new woman and the

man in the Chinese study case is more or less relevant to single discrimination and age discrimination to the woman in Chinese society. The best example of this is the popular expression which labels the single woman over a certain age as the 'older young woman'('大龄女青年') or the 'leftover woman' ('剩女') appeared in the early 21st century.

Since 1949, most Chinese women work in the public sphere; many women's incomes are higher than their husbands (although, on average, women still earn less than men in China) (Ji, 2015); and the proportion of female university students have been approaching half in the 2000s (Li and Kirkup, 2007). Therefore, marriage is no longer the only and necessary way to survive for most women today, but the social disapproval of unmarried women still exists (Li, 2016).

From a historical perspective, the single discrimination and age discrimination to woman are, to a large extent, rooted in the basic principles of being a woman in Confucian culture: 'the unmarried woman follows her father; the married woman follows her husband; when the husband dies, follows her son' ('未嫁从父;出嫁从夫;夫死从子'). In such cultural situations, preparing for marriage, taking care of the family, and doing housework have constituted the entire life of a Chinese woman (Fincher, 2016; Feldshuh, 2018; Shen, 2017).

Goode (1963) predicts that gender roles and family patterns in the non-Western countries will be Westernized with the global spread of industrialization. More than fifty years since Goode predicted a global homogeneity of gender discourses, some researchers suggest that China is still different to the West in many perspectives due to the significant impact of its distinctive and sophisticated national culture (e.g., Lan and Fong, 2015; Yang Hu and Scott, 2016; Li, 1993). Today, more and more Chinese people suggest these discriminating labels of gender, such as the 'leftover' woman, should be abandoned and replaced by the words which show our life chooses and attitudes such as 'being single' (Sohu News, 2017). From the 'leftover' to 'being single', the

change reflects the rise of feminist consciousness in modern Chinese society, but it also shows that the age discrimination and single discrimination towards women still exists, and the gap between the rising economic ability of women and the mainstream understanding of woman's gender roles cannot be ignored.

It is worth noticing that the man is employed as an index to distinguish the boundaries of the new and traditional women's identities. The man, or the man-woman relation, has been constructed as a gendered symbol taking the duty of constantly reminding us of the role of woman in the traditional heterosexual model, reflecting the predicament faced by a new female group in the current social transition period. The predicament faced by the new woman is also the dilemma of the development of Chinese feminism today. In this sense, the process of separating the new woman from the man, on the one hand, shows women's resistance to the previous gender discourse, on the other hand, reflects the issues of the development of Chinese feminism.

From a global perspective, it is undeniable that women are still distinctly 'second-class' citizens in many countries and areas (Johnson, 2009; Li, 1993), which is specifically reflected in the fact that young women are often required to sacrifice their interests and career developments in order to support their families like elder female generations did (Bauer et al., 1992; Schein, 1997; Yeh et al., 2013; Yang and Scott, 2016). Although feminism has become increasingly global and powerful since the last century, it is far from clear whether the traditional concepts of gender roles will be profoundly challenged by globalization, at least to a similar degree as in the economic field (Yang and Scott, 2016). The fact is that traditional marriage values and conjugal relations still seem to inform the notion of 'being a woman' for many women and men today (Lan and Fong, 2015).

Conclusion

By comparing representations of 'new women' in these Chinese and British adverts, we can see these constructed new female characters show little difference between them. In the context of globalization, the convergence of lifestyles of new women in different countries, to some extent, has confirmed the homogenous development trend of globalization as well as the spread and wide acceptance of aspects of feminism in both Western and Eastern cultures. The affirmation of femininity in adverts reflects the modern feminist ideas that femininity and new powerful woman could coexist independently. This, to some extent, has reflected the modern intentions of femininity to reshuffle the previous patriarchal discourse structure which believes femininity sometimes connotes weakness (that existed in both the British and Chinese contexts), and to re-define the definition of femininity in our current societies.

However, we still see evidence of the influence of patriarchal power in constructing the representation of Chinese new women, reflecting the insufficient development of Chinese feminism since it has been introduced by the male group at the beginning of the 1900s. Subjected to the social development status and cultural structure, Chinese feminism has never been born out of the male discourse system. Therefore, the identity of the new female produced in this context shows some differences from the new female group in Britain, resulting in a slightly different understanding of new women's roles. Along with this logic, we can predict that the future development of gender discourse in China and Britain will be both similar and different, which is also an inevitable cultural phenomenon produced by the hybrid and heterogeneous cross-cultural integration in the process of global cultural communication.

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