Representations of "female Asian look" in Advertising – Young Chinese Women's Responses to Fashion and Beauty Advertisements Targeting Chinese Market

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Abstract

This study was inspired by two advertisement series targeting the Chinese market, Dolce&Gabbana's "Eating with chopsticks" campaign videos, and Zara's makeup posters of a new released lipstick series. Having these two advertisements as cases, this study used focus group interview to collect data of young Chinese women responding to these advertisements and used Critical Discursive Psychology (CDP) to analyze the interview data.

This study draws on the three main concepts of CDP: interpretive repertoire, ideological dilemma, and subject position, to find out what kind of repertoires surrounding the "female Asian look" in both advertisements are possible to emerge, and how are the opinions and repertoires socially constructed. Findings of this study suggest that young Chinese women's responses to "female Asian look" in both cases were mainly constructed in reading through social media comments, interacting with others, and other social and cultural norms such as Chinese beauty standards and their general impression of western brands. Visible dilemmas, contradictory repertoires and different subject positions were observed and discussed in the responses. Findings of this study could also be helpful for future companies wishing to enter the Chinese market.

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Additional information None

FIGURES

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the development of the global market, many international brands who wish to increase their market influence and exposure are also changing their marketing and advertising strategies according to different targeting markets. We can see that most large international organizations are willing to put some effort into localizing their marketing plans and advertisements to attract foreign customers (Jones, 2011). Chinese market has been continuously growing since the reform period and China's joining the WTO (Zhang, 2012). In the past few years, the beauty and fashion industry has been booming in China due to consumers' rising income levels and the trend of consumerism being advertised especially on social media platforms (Johansson, 1998). China has become one of the largest markets of cosmetics products, with most of the targeting consumers being young Chinese women. When most of the beauty and fashion brands are targeting these consumers with good consumption capacity but numerous amounts of choices in the market, the consumers' preference and consumption behavior are believed to have the power of guiding and influencing the ways of marketing and advertising of brands.

My thesis topic was inspired by a series of international brands' advertisements targeting Chinese market from the year 2018-2019. The advertisement series chosen as case study in my thesis are commercial videos from Dolce&Gabbana's "Eating with chopsticks" campaign, and makeup posters of a new-released lipstick series from Zara. Both advertisements series were mainly targeting the Chinese market, and both had a female model as the leading role of their advertisements. The layout of the advertisements, especially the female model's image has caused strong reactions within the Chinese market and awakened wide discussion surrounding how stereotypes, representation, gender, and

beauty were presented in these advertisements. One of the most frequently mentioned focus points is that the brands tried to build up a "representation" of female Asian in the advertisements that "could not properly represent Chinese people or convey Chinese cultural elements". Although there has already been plenty of comments towards these advertisements on social media platforms such as Sina Weibo and WeChat, social media comments still have some limitations. For instance, the comments normally consist of individuals' responses towards certain topics, but seldom includes any real interaction and discussion between the audience. Also, not all people would want, dare or bother to express their true feelings on social media. I am specifically interested in how people would discuss with each other about these topics - how female Chinese audiences relate and react to the female Asian look in these advertisements, how are the opinions and statements constructed in interaction, what kind of confusions and dilemmas might appear while responding to these advertisements, even, how do they think of the dominating discourse on social media – those things that I might not discover from only looking into social media comments. People's responses towards a certain topic could be socially constructed by lots of influential factors, such as social and cultural norms in different societies, mainstream voices on media, and other people's opinions. I believe knowing the feedback of target consumers, as well as examining how these opinions emerged through different kinds of interactions, plays an important part in producing advertisements with equality and respect. That is the reason why I chose focus group interview as my research method and used critical discursive psychology to analyze my interview data.

In the following chapters, I would present in detail the theoretical framework, methodology, findings and discussions of my study. I hope this study could provide some insights in understanding the sense-making repertoires that potential young Chinese

women might bring up when taking their stance towards "Western" brands, as well as present some suggestions for foreign brands in planning advertisements towards the Chinese market. Such insights could be useful for brands wishing to enter the Chinese market to have some pre-knowledge of the cultural norms in the Chinese beauty market, which kind of narrative might cause controversy, and ways to better combine brand values with localizing needs.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In my research, the main focus will be to analyze young Chinese women' response towards the representation of female Asian images in both fashion and beauty advertisement series – How do they relate to the female Asian image in these advertisements? What kind of patterns and repertoires they would use to express their opinions and feelings, and how are these repertoires constructed? How do they position themselves while responding to the advertisements?

In order to answer these questions, I need to get an overview of the two main themes that forms the theoretical framework of this research – representation and advertising. Theoretical review of representation part includes the concept of representation in general, visual representation and image, previous insights and overview about frequently discussed topics in similar cases such as Orientalism, othering, and stereotyping. For the advertising part, I need to analyze how international brands choose to localize and design their advertisements for the continuously growing Chinese market. Narrowing down to the specific case in my research, the cultural elements, ethnicity, and gender in advertising industry, especially in fashion and beauty advertising would also be discussed. Moreover, social media's role and influence in the current advertising industry is also an important aspect of the advertising cases I chose and in my research focus.

2.1 Representation

When the discussion of both advertisements started to emerge on the social media platform Sina Weibo, it could be seen under relevant hashtags such as #boycottdolce#, and comment sections of some hot posts, that quite a lot people posting and commenting were not satisfied of how "Chineseness" is presented in both advertisements. Some influencers were not fond of the female model's image in both advertisements either, stating that how the producers have badly designed the advertisements represented the way they actually see China and Chinese women (Xu, 2018). The concept of representation was frequently brought up in relevant discussions of these advertisements, and has led to more detailed aspects concerning visual representation, beauty standards, orientalism, etc.

2.1.1   Representation, visual representation and image

As Stuart Hall (1997, p.15) explained, representation is a way to connect meaning and language to culture, using either spoken, written or visual languages to meaningfully represent the world to other people. It is a process when meanings emerge in our minds through seeing different forms of language, be it literal, audio, or visual language. During this process of seeing things and producing meanings, we refer those created concepts and meanings to "either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or the imaginary world of fictional objects, people or events" (Hall 1997, p.17) . Based on this explanation, it can be seen that there are two systems, or two stages of representation. The first stage is about how we relate the objective world to the concepts or mental representations that we already know as common sense (Hall 1997, p.17), for example, how the word "chair" is related to the material object. The second stage is about how we frame abstract meanings based on the knowledge of the first stage, which may not have the one and only correct answer. For

example, every person may have a different definition of love; Or like in this specific topic I want to discuss, the term "Asian" can also convey different meanings based on nationality, ethnicity, cultural identification or cultural elements. One can be related to "Asian" if he or she holds a nationality from the geographical East-Asian countries. One can be identified as an Asian if he or she has an Asian ethnic looking face, even if the person is not born and grown in Asia. One can also identify him or herself as "spiritual-Asian" if the person approves Asian culture or habits, for example, if people love Asian food, they could say that they have a "Asian stomach".

There are three main approaches to explain how representation of meaning through language works. They are known as the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist or constructivist approaches (Hall 1997, p.24). The reflective approach sees the world in a completely objective perspective, and language is seen as a mirror to reflect the already existing true meanings in the world. The intentional approach stands in the opposite side – it claims that language only means what the author or speaker intends it should mean, that is, in a subjective, idealistic perspective. The constructionist approach denies neither the existence of material world nor the symbolic practices and process of operating meanings. However, it acknowledges that it is the "language system" we are using to present our concepts instead of the material world that actually conveys meanings (Hall 1997, p.25). In this approach, representation is seen as an abstract practice which uses material objects and effects; and meaning depends on the symbolic function but not only the material quality of objects (Hall 1997, p.26). For example, the "Asian image" to be mentioned later in the article contains the meaning of both the objective Asian ethnicity, and the conceptual, representative Asian systems in general. My research will be conducted based on the ideas

of constructionist approach, which means that the focus of "female Asian look" is more on how the understanding and impression of Asian image is socially constructed in different forms of interaction.

The concept of visual representation has frequently been discussed in studies focusing on photography (Hall, 1997), international and cross-cultural advertising (Fowler & Carlson, 2015) and beauty industry (Jha, 2015). It is a concept that cannot be separated from the social, cultural and historical factors that lies behind manmade visual images. Hall (1997, p.76) introduced the term "dominant representational paradigm" while exploring how "Frenchness" is represented through the visual elements within images depicting France and French society around 1950s. The concept of dominant representational paradigm indicates that the way photographers and video producers choose to present their works offers a certain vision of the objects and people they want to document. How objectives are presented in visual works rests on how photographers or producers would want them to be presented, and which aspects need to be shown. The visual works and visual representation of certain objects cannot be separated from the values and ethics of those who worked with it – the visual works are naturally born with and constructed by these values (Hall, 1997, p.76).

In my research, by talking about the visual representation and producers, I am primarily concerned with the advertisement videos and pictures that documents the information and values the brands want to convey to its consumers. It is a global consensus that what a brand presents in its advertisements could represent their perspectives and the brand story they want to tell. In many cases of unsuccessful advertising, that is also the main reason of consumers boycotting brands if their advertisements include false or

offensive representation of certain social groups. As Fowler and Carlson (2015) indicates in their study about visual representation of beauty in transnational advertisements, they argue that beauty ideals and ethnicity are portrayed and conveyed through the created visual images. These portrayals, then, reflect the social norms and cultural values of given groups (Fowler&Carlson, 2015).

This could partly explain the negative comments on Chinese social media indicating that the female Asian models represented in D&G and Zara advertisements was unpleasant and inaccurate (Xu, 2018). The perspectives shown in these two advertisements clearly have offended some of its audience, and the cultural elements documented in the advertisements did not match with its target consumers' cultural identity. Cultural identity is depicted as sense of belonging to particular groups based on various cultural categories, including nationality, ethnicity, gender, or certain values (Chen, 2014). It is an important part in self-identification, and acts like a connection between ethnic groups and their members' feelings about the representation others have created for them. My research focuses on young Chinese women' response towards the female Asian look presented in advertisements. The general tendency of discussion on Chinese social media platform Sina Weibo, as well as the news reports about these topics (Holland & Wang, 2018), show that there appear to be clear differences in how the brands have constructed the female Asian look in their advertisements, and how target audience would want it to be constructed. This, then, can lead to the following topics – Asian women as a social group, and how the representation of this social group has been related to stereotypes, othering and Orientalism in advertising.

2.1.2   Stereotyping, othering and Orientalism

Stereotyping and Othering

In several forms of visual representations, stereotypes and Othering are two concepts that are more relevant to the field of intercultural communication (Dervin 2012). To briefly explain the concept of stereotypes, it is defined as "a set of beliefs about the characteristics of a social category of people"(Dervin 2012, p.186). Although stereotypes are often believed to have negative connotations, they can help to show the superiority to one's group, to differentiate, or to "locate" one's place in certain cultural groups (Dervin 2012).

Othering is another form of representation which relates closely to stereotypes (Dervin 2012). Othering, or "creating the other", usually means the objectification of another person or group, which puts aside the complexity and subjectivity of the individual (Dervin 2012, p.187). Just like stereotyping, othering allows one group to "deliberately pick" the things that they think could represent another group, and to construct sameness or difference to affirm their own identity. It is often seen to be used with critical meanings when one cultural group is trying to depict another cultural group but expresses a visible image of their own values and imagination, usually in an ignorant way. Othering is also an important part in the concept of Orientalism, which will be discussed later.

According to Dervin (2015), Othering is not a one way, but mutual process. Reverse othering, or reverse orientalism, has been identified in how people from eastern countries use orientalist expectations to other themselves (Dervin & Gao, 2012). In Mao's (2009) study, she discussed a set of housing advertisements in China which used names of well-known western cities and even European architecture to attract buyers. Western names of community and European style architecture are seen to have constructed an elegant,

magnificent vibe, and created an imitated, imaginary "nobility life" for the rich Chinese landlords. In Johansson's (1999) study of western women in Chinese advertising and popular culture, he analyzed seven magazines in China from year 1990-1995. Johansson (1999) found out that the representation of western white women implied a cross-racial fantasy in Chinese popular culture, and combined commodity fetishism with a hatred of foreigners. Another example in today's context is that lots of Asian teenagers also start to mimic western beauty standards. Under the hashtag "European makeup" in Chinese social media Sina Weibo, it is easy to find tons of pictures with young girls looking alike to the beauty standards popular in Instagram, represented by the Kardashian style thick lips and relatively heavier makeup compared to Asian types. When these beauty standards start to trend on social media, it would form a general impression or image that could be used to depict or represent certain groups.

Orientalism

Since I will focus specifically on international brands' advertisements targeting Chinese market and how they constructed representation of Chinese consumers in their advertisements, the concept of Orientalism (Said, 1978) is also worth paying attention to. Throughout history, Orientalism is known as the depiction of Eastern world by the West, usually with a negative, colonial perspective. In Edward Said's influential critic work *Orientalism* published in 1978, he has explained Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'" (Said, 1978, p.2). Said (1978) also stated that "Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient" (Said, 1978, p.3). It is a kind of "patronizing representation", which is often seen today as how the West

describes, teaches, making statements about and authorizing views of the Orient. In this perspective, West is seen as the "Self" and East as the cultural "Other". Othering reduced to cultural inferiority the people, places, and things of the Eastern world, which then justified colonialism by establishing the West as the superior standard of culture (Said, 1978). Although the concept of Orientalism as well as Said's book has already had a long history, Orientalism is still alive and can be seen widely in today's new forms of communication and discourse, such as advertisements, films, mass media and political discourses. For example, there has been a long existing criticism in China towards the preference of Asian facial appearance in western film-television industry represented by Hollywood, saying that they would prefer Asian actors and actresses that have more ethnic looks. In other words, those who look more "Asian" – of course according to their understanding. The typical stereotypes of Asian immigrants can also be seen in some films and TV series, the most common ones being either "the Asian cliché nerd who is good at math" or a pretty doll that mostly plays the role of eye candy.

The later appeared term "New Orientalism" is also mentioned and defined in some studies (Dai, 2014; Fitzpatrick, 2009; Mao, 2009), although there are not many thorough explanations about this term yet. The majority of these studies explain New Orientalism as representing a meaning of when people of Asian descent are given space but still marginalized (Dai, 2014, p.10). Under today's globalization discourse, the represented social groups of the orient, such as Asians and Muslims, are believed to have been relatively less negatively constructed as in Said's time. However, today's criticism surrounding the new forms of orientalism are more focused on contexts that rely on native or semi-native testimony, but still promote inaccurate or problematic assumptions towards eastern social groups (Fitzpatrick, 2009).

2.2Advertising

2.2.1   Global Advertising and Localizing

The influence of China's reform and opening up policy towards Chinese market's economy has been discussed a lot in studies about global advertising and the boom of beauty consumption in China(Johansson, 1998; Zhang, 2012; Hopkins, 2007). The growth of the world beauty market was closely related to the waves of globalization began since the nineteenth century (Jones, 2011). The growth of market needs also spawned large export businesses and fast development in global advertising and localizing.

Before the most internationally active western firms started to export to foreign markets, beauty was more often seen as a craft that lies in its local products and traditions. The idea of beauty was more general and universal, and global standard of what it meant to be beautiful had not been born (Jones, 2011). Yet, the western firms carried with them strong assumptions of the markets and societies they were exporting to, and spread the beauty ideals prevalent in the West with fast paces to worldwide. They as well soon learned that their targeting markets differed in tastes and preferences while expanding internationally (Jones, 2011). It has later become a consensus in the industry, that firms need to adjust their products to local consumers.

According to Jones(2011), although the localization strategy is complex and different for every case, high-end and luxury brands normally sought to minimize local adaptation. Since most of these brands represent global aspirations and superior lifestyle, any adaptation needed to avoid conveying false information to consumers. If a luxury brand's

localization goes too far, it is also more possible to harm the original brand image. However, a search for local relevance in foreign markets has also been a popular choice for western brands. Apparently, a lot of western brands have taken such strategies to endorse local celebrities as brand ambassadors, use local social media influencers to advertise new products, and tailor localized advertisements for targeting markets alongside with their global advertisements. These strategies, indeed, have created a closer connection and mental attachments between brands and consumers.

2.2.2 Ethnicity in Advertising

In my research, the understanding of the term "ethnicity" is not only about anthropological, sociological and social geographical aspects of groups that share the same language, culture, race etc. (Banks & Banks, 1996). In the case of D&G and Zara advertisements, the discussion of ethnicity is more focused on the strong emotional appeal and politically mobilizing potential that connects more to individual identity (Eriksen, 1992).

Studies regarding ethnicity in beauty and fashion advertising have been discussing a lot about how models' ethnicity plays a crucial role in the fashion display (Fowler & Carlson, 2015), and how Caucasian facial appearance like wide eyes and high nose has been spread to a worldwide beauty preference (Jones, 2011; Johansson, 1998; Jha, 2015). The portrayal of ethnic models in advertisements is seen to reflect the social norms and cultural values of given societies, which cannot be discussed separately without concerning cultural and historical factors.

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Ethnicity can also be seen in researches about the representation of Asians in global advertising. With the continuous growing of Asian markets, Asian elements are even more frequently seen in advertisements targeting Asian and global market. Using Asian models in advertising or adding some symbolic Asian cultural elements in advertising is seen as a common way of localization and adjusting to the targeting market. The most obvious features of ethnicity are normally distinctive hair color, skin tones, or recognizable facial appearance.

Findings in relevant researches suggest that celebrities/models with Chinese ethnicity appear to be more attractive to consumers who identify themselves with these ethnic groups (Erba, Zhang & Liu, 2019). However, such attractiveness and attachment does not always lead to positive results. In any case if target consumers are not pleased with the model's appearance, or if the brands mistakenly interpret ethnic features, brands might have to face the risk of provoking consumers and causing a PR crisis. Concerning my research topic, representation of ethnic Chinese models is discussed in the context of "ethnic look as a tool of power". The ethnic facial features of models are seen not only as physical appearance, but more as a tool of power that connects to cultural contexts and reflects the preference or intention of the brands. According to Jones (2011), beauty companies are to be seen as interpreters of the ethnic and cultural assumptions in certain societies. This could also be seen from consumers' response towards some localized advertisements as a common understanding.

2.2.3 Gender and female image in advertising

With the increasing consumption of beauty and fashion products in China and worldwide, the female image constructed in beauty and fashion advertisements is seen to have complex influence towards consumers' ideal beauty pursuit and beauty assets (Johansson, 1998; Zhang, 2012). Findings of Zhang's (2012) study of Chinese beauty discourses suggest that young female consumers in China describe the ideal beautiful female look as "have a tall and thin body, big eyes, well-shaped face, fair skin, and charisma", which, according to them, is also connected to the extreme beauty standards advocated in media. Since beauty and fashion advertisements still use more female models and depict mostly the female image, female consumers are believed to respond more actively to these advertisements. They would normally feel more related to these advertisements – if the ads advocate an ideal female image, female consumers are more likely to feel the societal, cultural and peer pressure of pursuing beauty (Zhang, 2012).

Some studies also point out that the female image constructed in today's beauty and fashion advertisements is based on established social and gender roles, and therefore might reinforce the existing gender, social or cultural stereotypes (Hopkins, 2007). We cannot talk separately about female image without referring to the cultural and social repertoires that naturally remind people when showing this image in advertisements. In my research, the female Asian look is seen as representing a combination of ethnicity and gender. These concepts relate closely to each other and frequently appear together in studies concerning beauty industry and representation in international advertising (Jones, 2011; Kim & Chung, 2005). In Kim and Chung's (2005) study of images of Asian/American women in advertising, they analyzed three advertising campaigns of cigarette, cognac and photography service. By analyzing in detail how Asian women are visually presented in

the advertisements compared to western models, they found that the U.S. society used racialized and gendered representation of Asian American women to construct them as the objectified, culturally misrepresented and visually consumed "Other" (Kim & Chung, 2005, p.67).

The conclusion of Kim and Chung's (2005) study can well represent the current situation of gender roles and female image in international advertising – while western beauty and fashion brands open its doors to the new Asian consumers, they do so by representing them still within traditional White patriarchal perspective. In my study, I look into how young Chinese women respond to the female image in advertisements, also whether they will mention these kinds of common repertoires.

2.2.4 The role of social media in advertising

Nowadays we can hardly find a fashion or beauty brand who still does not have its own official account in popular social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. For China it is the same on the two biggest platforms, Sina Weibo and WeChat. More and more brands choose to launch their advertisement videos or pictures simultaneously on their social media accounts and in their stores. The effective marketing communications brought by social media has led to power shifting from advertising departments towards the discussion and opinions of audience (Stokinger & Ozuem 2018). The many-to-many online communication style on social media has enabled customer-brand conversation to become much easier, and much faster for brands to know about real-time market response.

However, together with all this effectiveness in communication and promotion, social media might also bring unexpected crises to brands (Chan, Skoumpopoulou & Yu, 2018). Once a PR crisis happens on social media, it would not be easy to handle because customers' responses towards the incident is influenced by both the original content, and others' responses and comments towards the incident (Chan, Skoumpopoulou & Yu, 2018). As Wekwerth (2019) summarized in his study of online firestorms, negative information attracts more attention, is more influential, and last longer than positive information. If an influencer with large number of followers stands out to comment on such incident, his/her followers, or more precise, fans – have higher chances to follow the influencer's opinions.

Although Dolce&Gabbana and Zara advertisements have awakened quite similar discussions on Chinese social media regarding representation of Asians and beauty image, there has been a difference in negative responses and aggressive comments these two advertisements have received. The D&G advertisements apparently attracted more attention on social media with longer-lasting hashtags, more engagement of KOLs, and more discussion coming from other social media users.

In my research, I also try to see how the outcry on social media have influenced young Chinese women's response towards female Asian look.

3. METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, this study was inspired by the promotional video series of Dolce&Gabbana's advertisements and campaign pictures of Zara's lipstick collection, as well as the discussion these advertisement series awakened in social media regarding ethnic stereotypes and beauty standards. In this study, I am specifically interested in how the female Chinese audiences, as the group represented in the advertisements, would respond to the female model image presented in these advertisements. Hence, the methodology I choose to use is based on three parts: case study of the two advertisements series that received wide discussion; focus group interview methods for interviewing the audience and recording social talk; and critical discursive psychology method for analyzing the interviews' data.

3.1 The Case – Dolce Gabbana and Zara advertisements

Dolce&Gabbana is an Italian high-end luxury fashion house founded in 1985 by two Italian designers, Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana. With an Italian origin, the brand designs, produces and distributes high-end clothing and accessories that infuses southern Italian culture and a Mediterranean aesthetic (Blendis & Deputato, 2010). In November 2018, Dolce&Gabbana was planning to have their fashion show in Shanghai, for which they released an online video campaign consisting of three video clips on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and the mainstream Chinese social media platform Weibo (Chung & Holland, 2018). The video series are named "Eating with chopsticks". In the videos, a young female Chinese model tries to eat unusually big portions of Italian dishes like Pizza

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Margherita, spaghetti and cannoli with chopsticks. The model wearing Dolce&Gabbana dress and accessories performs with exaggerating facial expressions and body movements, for example, she uses chopsticks in a wrong way (see Figure 1) and giggles a lot while eating (see Figure 2 & 4) . The videos' setup looks like an old Chinese restaurant, with traditional Chinese music playing in the background, and an exotic-sounding male voice as narrator. Soon after publishing the video series, it has triggered a big PR crisis on social media. Many Chinese audiences expressed their opinions on Chinese social media platform Sina Weibo, and the hashtag #BoycottDolce began to circulate (Ferrier, 2018). When reading through the discussion, the general opinions seemed to be that the criticism was not only around the whole construction of the videos, but also the ethnic look and obsequious expressions of the model. In a Weibo post that received over two thousand reposts, Xu (2018), DPhil Candidate in Politics at the University of Oxford, commented the videos as "a combination of racism and sexism" and "stereotypical, obsequious Asian women in western eyes", which many Weibo users also agreed in the comment section.

The pictures shown below(Figure 1-4) are screen shots from a version of the original videos with English subtitles uploaded by Li (2018) to YouTube, since the original videos published by Dolce&Gabbana are almost all taken down on the internet.

Figure 1(left). The model cuts a huge pizza with chopsticks (Dolce&Gabbana, 2018)

Figure 2(right). The model giggling, and a big portion of spaghetti (Dolce&Gabbana, 2018)
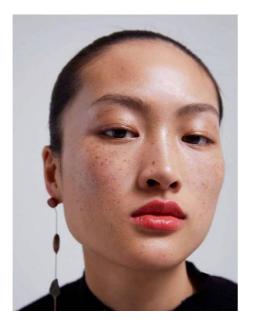

Figure 3(left). Cannoli (Dolce&Gabbana, 2018)

Figure 4(right). The model's facial expression (Dolce&Gabbana, 2018)

The campaign pictures of Zara's new lipstick collection were released in February 2019, several months after the Dolce&Gabbana PR crisis, when the public was still quite sensitive about the so-called "stereotypical look" that international brands constructed for their Asian models . The discussion surrounding Zara's case was closely related to Dolce&Gabbana's example – whether the model's pale skin, freckles and not-so-chic hairstyle is "insulting Chinese" (Fu, 2019). However, different from the one-sided criticism in Dolce&Gabbana's case, this time people started to discuss whether it is the brand who

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was deliberately defacing the model, or it is just different beauty standards between different cultural backgrounds regarding, for example, freckles (Fu, 2019).

Figure 5&6. Zara's lipstick campaign pictures by Jing Wen, one of the top models from China (Zara, 2019)

These two cases were chosen because "ethnic look", here referring to physical appearance relating to Chinese women, was brought up in both advertisements. They both caused wide, representative discussions about ethnicity, beauty standards and representation; yet the discussions led to quite different directions, which also attracted me to do further research on it.

3.2 Focus Group Interviews

3.2.1   Background

Focus groups is a particular type of group interview where the researcher recruits a small group of people and encourages an informal group discussion focusing around a specific topic (Wilkinson, 2011). Although the interviews are normally guided by a set of questions, the aim is to lead the discussion and actively encourage interviewees to interact with each other, instead of getting detailed answers from everyone. Originated in the 1940s, focus groups was first used to conduct commercial market research on audience responses to soap operas, and has been a key tool in this research area since then (Silverman, 2014, p.207). Hence, I have chosen focus groups interviews as the research method for my topic regarding Chinese female customers' response towards advertisements.

The intention of focus group interviews is to record the semi-guided, but naturally emerged social talk focusing around a specific topic happening in a group (Ryan et al., 2013). It has some similarities with how people discuss about certain topics under a social media post, but according to the socially-oriented point of view, the interaction between group members and how their opinions might be influenced by group dynamics could be more visible in focus groups (Belzille & Öberg, 2012). That is also the reason why I chose focus groups instead of just looking at social media comments – the social media discussions usually take place between anonymous people and is lack of reacting to each other. Also, interviewees might feel safer and encouraged to speak up what they may not dare to comment publicly on a relatively sensitive topic. The data of this research comes from two focus groups interviews with participants responding the two advertisements mentioned before. By asking participants to discuss the controversial images in a focus

group discussion, the moderator can also learn whether explanations related to the earlier social media scandal actually become visible or not.

3.2.2   Interview Participants

The participants of this focus groups research consist of two groups of highly educated Chinese young women. The participants were recruited through "snowballing". As the moderator, I used my own network as well as my friends' network to recruit participants. The first group is done in July 2019 and consisted of five female university students who were in their bachelor's and master's studies, aging 19 - 23. All of them were living in China when they participated the interview, but they all have had experience in either living abroad or being in an international, multilingual environment. The second group is done in February 2020, consisted of four young women aged 24-30, who are currently working in Finland. They were all living in Finland when the interview happened. All of them have lived in Finland for two to four years. They are all highly educated and doing knowledge intensive work.

As the moderator of the two focus groups interviews, I introduced to each participant about my study before inviting them to participate in the interviews. Every participant was given a consent form and allowed time to consider whether they wanted to participate or not. Then those who were willing to take part in signed the consent form before the interviews to ensure that their personal information is hidden in the research. By signing the consent form, they were aware that some of the interview data would be recorded, transcribed, translated and become visible in my master's study. They also gave permission for transferring the data to Finland.

With all the group members having had international experience in different levels, their chances to have experienced stereotypes or racism are considered relatively higher. Therefore, they might feel more related about the constructed female image in advertising and would provide more comments also regarding their personal experience. All of them being middle class Chinese women, they are also part of the main target audience of luxury brands, also the implied audience of the advertisements in question (Depino, 2019). They are financially capable to buy the products, as well as respond to the brands' marketing strategies with their consumption choices. Also, they all have access to social media, and some of them might already have seen the original post of advertisements and the discussion followed in social media context.

By gathering two groups of highly educated young female Chinese audiences, the purpose of this focus group is to gather information about what would the group members notice in the advertisements, what kind of discussion and opinions are possible to be constructed, and how group members frame meanings through interactions.

3.2.3   Procedure

The first focus group interview was held in a group work room of one Chinese university. The second interview was held in a common meeting room in Finland. Both interviews were held by me in Mandarin Chinese, each lasted about one hour. I have had connections with all the participants and have met most of them before. In each group, some participants knew each other, but not everyone was familiar with every participant. Interviews' process was video and audio recorded. Obvious reactions and representative

comments of the interviews were marked down by the me, transcribed and translated into English, and become visible in the research.

The process of the interviews started with showing the participants the three advertisement clips from Dolce&Gabbana, then a set of cosmetics campaign pictures from Zara. After showing the visual materials, the discussion was guided by a set of questions provided by the moderator. I always started with the same first question, and the other questions were brought up naturally during the group discussion based on how the conversation went, sometimes not in a fixed order. The aim of the questions was not to get detailed answers from each individual, but to act as a direction of the interview process and inspire the participants to discuss and interact more with each other. As the moderator, I tried not to interrupt the participants' discussion or show any personal tendencies, instead stood back from the discussion so that group dynamics could emerge (Noak & Wincup, 2004).

The questions mentioned in the group discussions include:

1. Please briefly tell about what you have seen from these ads.

2. What's your strongest impression of these advertisements?

3. How do you feel when you see these pictures / videos?

4. Can you try to assume what the producers wanted to express when they created these ads?

5. How do you think of the female model's image created in both ads?

6. How would these ads influence your purchasing behaviour or your general impression about these brands?

7. If you were the producer, how would you design these two ads?

8. Can you compare these two ads? Describe the similarities and differences.

9. Based on today's discussion, do you have any suggestions to other brands that are trying to enter Chinese market?

The design of these interview questions also reflects my research questions for this study. How do female Chinese Audiences respond to the female Asian look presented in these advertisements? How do they make sense of, define or support their responses? Where do they see themselves in responding to these advertisements?

3.3 Analytic Concepts and Procedures

I worked with a corpus of interview transcripts derived from all the material produced in response to the questions above. Based on the previous observation of social media discussion about this topic, the focus group method, and the intention to analyze social talk and interaction in focus group discussions, I chose critical discursive psychology (CDP) as the method that fitted best to analyze my data.

CDP is one of the main forms of the broader approach, discourse analysis (DA), that is widely used in social science research (Wiggins, 2017). According to Wiggins (2017), discourse analysis seeks to understand the role of discourse in the construction of our social world. Compared to other forms of DA, CDP aims to identify the repertoires that shape the understanding displayed in people's talk of a particular topic under certain cultural and social contexts; as well as define the subject positions shown within that topic (Wiggins, 2017). As Wiggins (2017) cited from Whetherell (1998), it focuses more on "what is actually said" than the details and sequential aspects of talk. CDP understands discourse, interaction and language as culturally situated, and is more concerned with the broader

patterns of talk across a particular data set (Wiggins, 2017). It is commonly used as a methodology in interviews, focus groups and news media texts. Classic studies applying this method have mostly been discussing conceptual issues in a cultural context, like singleness (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003), masculinity (Edley, 2001), gender, or parenting (Locke & Yarwood, 2017).

A CDP analysis would begin by searching through the data corpus for ways of talking about a particular issue (Wiggins, 2017). In my research, I drew on two focus groups to operate the discussion and create opportunities to access the repertoires participants use to comment on the " female Asian look" constructed in advertisements. The search for patterns was guided by three main concepts of CDP, "interpretative repertoire" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1988), "ideological dilemma" (Billig et al., 1988) and "subject position" (Davies & Harré, 1990; Hollway, 1984). Interpretive repertoires consist of recognizable routines of discourse that people use to argue for or against a particular issue (Wiggins, 2017). It is like "what everyone knows" about a topic, be it familiar clichés, social norms, or common understanding within a cultural context (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003), while some most dominant repertoires can become so naturalized that they are understood as common sense of "fact" (Wiggins, 2017). For example, you can draw on a feminist repertoire to justify that singleness is a form of self-development and achievement, or you can draw on a traditional repertoire to justify that singleness is seen as social exclusion (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). Ideological dilemma is a situation of contradiction people find themselves in when they draw on two or more contradictory repertoires to address an issue. For example, being overweight can be discussed as putting oneself at health risk but also as a sign of a healthy body image or resisting the norm of

being slim, depending on different beauty standards and situations. Subject position refers to in what kind of position or identity people position themselves while trying to make the most sense of their discourse. For instance, if a single woman draws on the repertoire of singleness as a self-development and achievement, her subject position could be that of strong, feminist and independent. However, this position is not compatible with talk about singleness as personal deficit (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003) . Each concept effects and relies on the others, making a link between broader social or cultural concepts and situated discourses (Wiggins, 2017).

I looked first for regularities and patterns in group participants' talk about the female Asian look presented in both advertisements in general to identify if there were any obvious repertoires, then at whether opposing repertoires were drawn for the same issue. In other words, what has been constructed by the participants and what it told us about wider societal ideologies (Locke & Yarwood, 2017), say, were those common repertoires acknowledged by people who share the same social background as my participants, and what it could tell about the societal ideologies that lie behind. After that I analyzed the identity management relating to these repertoires, that is, how the participants position themselves while discussing different topics under this context .

During the process of interviewing and discussing, some patterns have been recognized as most frequently appeared and commonly acknowledged patterns while responding to the advertisements, such as the mainstream voice in social media, the long-existing "China and West" narrative, cultural stereotypes, and different beauty standards. These extracts were later sorted out and combined into three interpretive repertoires: response towards female Asian look as influenced by social media; response towards female Asian look as constructed by social narratives; and response towards female Asian

look regarding different beauty standards. Based on these patterns and repertoires, contradictory repertoires such as different opinions regarding the intention of advertisements' designers, and ambiguity in defining beauty standards are identified as ideological dilemmas. While drawing on and making sense of the repertoires, how the participants position themselves differently in their response could also be seen, for example as female Chinese nationals, as targeting group for the advertisements, or as several subject positions combined.

Combining the main research questions of this study, and the focus of CDP, the aim is to examine the interpretive repertoires, dilemmas and subject positions that emerge in focus group discussions about female Asian look, as well as discuss how these discourses is constructed and its potential influence.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Participants' response towards female Asian look

"I might already be influenced"

The interviews always started with me showing the participants the three campaign videos of D&G and the campaign pictures of Zara, then asking them to briefly tell about what they have seen from the two advertisements series I showed them. Despite the fact that these two advertisements have been hot topics in social media, it is still rather surprising to see that at the very beginning of discussing these advertisements, the repertoire of "people's response could have been strongly related to and affected by the leading voice on social media" has already emerged. This repertoire typically emerged when participants tried to find a "kick-off point" to start with the topic, and when they draw on the leading opinion to either make sense of their own responses, or to argue against the mainstream voice.

Extract 1 From question "Please briefly tell about what you have seen from these ads"

Yvonne: These advertisements are quite popular in China nowadays, especially the D&G one was trending in Weibo for days…

Yvonne: For the D&G advertisements I actually can't see what they are advertising…Zara's one I can see that it's a lipstick campaign. Maybe because I've seen it before I was already <u>influenced,</u> like there are freckles on the model's face or something… but I think it's understandable, at least the <u>focus</u> was on lipstick. How do you feel?

Xenia: The first advertisement, if I haven't seen the comments on Weibo and haven't been

influenced (by it), I would think it's quite nicely done, the set-up is pretty. The color,

the make-up, the clothes and accessories of the model is delicate and beautiful. The

layout is center-focused, and the color looks good…I won't feel it's insulting China

or something. I won't think like that.

Maria: I also feel like that, although I'm more or less also influenced by Weibo comments.

(…) But I'm confused, like are these videos targeting Chinese or foreign audiences?

For these two advertisements, if they are targeting Chinese audiences, people really

won't know what they are talking about, and would feel it's not the China we know.

From Extract 1 we can see that the first two participants who started the discussion

both started with talking about the advertisements' social media presence, then they

naturally continued with adding their own thoughts regarding this topic. As the moderator

myself, I felt that this way to start the discussion has created a reasonable atmosphere for

discussing these advertisements and expressing their own opinions. It is clearly seen that

the participants share a common understanding that people's opinions would have been

influenced by the discussion they have seen on social media. Already at the very beginning

of our group discussion, they started to mention the most commonly seen statement about

these two advertisements, such as "insulting China". They themselves are aware of the

possible influence and would even point this out before they go into further discussions.

They would also draw on the most frequently appeared patterns on social media regarding

this topic, like "insulting China" or "freckles on model's face", but as can be seen in the

interviews, participants do not always agree with the social media keen opinion leaders.

Having been exposed more or less to those leading discourse, they would more likely still

keep their own opinions towards this topic, although they might not say it out load publicly or argue with people in the comment section of Weibo posts online.

In this repertoire, social media is constructed as a tool of power that provides a safe way, or a "common rule" of responding to a topic – it would less likely go wrong if you hold the same opinion as the majority of audience, or if you start to talk about the most popular story about one topic. People's response towards the female Asian look in these advertisements is seen as strongly related to their first impression of what they have read or seen on social media, and the most frequently mentioned patterns on social media are normally the first things people would search for when they actually look into these advertisements. However, it is also to be expected that individuals would still keep their own opinions, although more or less exposed to the mainstream discourse. People would even draw on those statements to criticize them and make sense of their own opinions, which would be discussed later.

"Ours" and "Theirs"

After interview participants have briefly presented their first impression of the advertisements and gradually opened up for more complex, detailed focus points, it can be seen that the participants started to mention the positioning of Chinese audiences and the brands; as well as the different perception of female Chinese image from the brands and from Chinese themselves. In this stage, their response towards female Asian look also presented more personal feelings and emotion. This repertoire involved an obvious construction of "us" and "them" while responding to the female Asian image in advertisements produced by western brands – which in this research refer to European brands Dolce&Gabbana and Zara. The repertoire of "us" and "them" typically emerged in

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discussions about the Chinese social norms, common stories and narratives about western

stereotypes towards China, and in imagining the views of others.

Extract 2 From question "Please briefly tell about what you have seen from these ads"

Xenia: …The D&G campaign was topping the "hot search words" column <u>continuously</u>

<u>for one week</u>!

Hana: I think especially for the first D&G one, since I personally would pay attention to

these intercultural elements, so my first thought was it (the advertisement) is definitely

not made by Chinese. And, the whole advertisement shows a lot of stereotypes of

female Chinese image from the west…

Extract 3 From question "What's your impression towards the videos?"

Xenia: It said, "try this and that", feels like she knows nothing and (people) would have to

teach her how to do things.

Rita: Feels like as if we Chinese are NOT familiar with their food, and they have to say it's

good just try it. Feels like they also have a misunderstanding of how we understand

their culture. Very big misunderstanding.

Hana: I would think that they know absolutely nothing about us. Also, they know nothing

about the whole market and Chinese audience. Their ignorance also shows in that

they obviously didn't do market research, or they didn't even want to do the market

research. Whether in social media or in other official platforms, China as a very big

economic entity, if we try to advertise our beauty standards or like our food culture,

at least we are not voiceless. If you want to get to know China, you would definitely

find how. Like what we like and what we want. But they didn't, they still construct

things based on their stereotypes.

Extract 4 From question "What's your impression towards the videos?"

Sally: It fits more of the stereotypes western people have towards Chinese.

Lisa: It's like they try to combine their brand's image and the Chinese elements they

understand, but in an uncomfortable way. It's the China in their eyes, but actually we

are not like that. So, I think if they want to show Chinese audience the advertisement

that is targeting Chinese market, they should think in Chinese audiences' shoes.

Tina: The model's face expression is quite obsequious, as if the Italian things represent a

sense of superiority. I even thought it was an advertisement for restaurant the first

time I saw it.

From extract 2 to extract 4 we can see that when the discussion started to go deeper, the participants came up with more detailed and emotional responses towards the advertisements. They started to talk about what kind of personal feelings the advertisements have awakened in them, refer to the frequently discussed stereotypes towards Asians, common experiences of being mistreated as a minority group, also their opinions towards the more reasonable ways to produce the advertisements. Here their response towards female Asian look in advertisements was closely related to the most common social narratives, in other words the well-worn stories of a specific cultural context. The participants were rehearsing some of the most familiar discourse of China and the West as opposites, such as stereotypes towards Chinese, arrogance and ignorance of western brands, Asian inferiority and western superiority. In this aspect the focus was on

participants' assumption of the brands' intention to create such images in these advertisements. The female Asian look constructed here is seen as a obsequious, unpleasant, a combination of western stereotypes and the western superiority value, and an example of unsuccessful advertising.

During this part of discussion, it seems to be an obvious fact that participants' response towards female Asian look echoes with the social narratives under Chinese cultural context and familiar stories about similar topics. Such kind of repertoire may have spread to people from political discourse, social media and other forms of communication channels, but in this specific case is also believed to have cultural and historical influencing factors. For example, China's old history of being partly colonized by western countries and now being the second largest economic entity in the world would possibly arise more sensitivity in responding to the Chinese image created by western brand, just as one participant said: "we are not like that anymore". Audience would pay more attention on how the brands present Chinese culture, and whether the advertisement shows respect and equality.

Participants also mentioned that it could be seen from the advertisements that the brands did not do enough market research. If the Chinese audience would feel that some brands were just trying to make money of the Chinese market without showing their preparation and respect, they would less likely to receive positive market response. Such specific cultural and historical genre and the social narratives it brought about is seen to have powerfully shaped my participants' response towards the female Asian look in the advertisements. As mentioned in the theory chapter, the portrayal of female image in advertisements often reflect how ad producers see the social and cultural values of a given

society (Fowler & Carlson, 2015). And apparently, today's female consumers could be quite sensitive to the cultural preference shown in the advertisements.

Beauty standards

Besides the leading discourse on social media and the social narratives in Chinese cultural context, beauty preference and beauty standards are also frequently appeared topics in the interview discussion. In the discussion about beauty standards, opinions and repertoires of the previous two parts came together with this part and are combined here. Interview participants apparently have connected the female Asian look in both advertisements to the producers' intention. They have also discussed their feelings about how the female Asian look has influenced the whole layout of the advertisements, and how the leading discourses in public discussion of both advertisements reflect the social standards of beauty. It can be seen that two kinds of repertoires about beauty are constructed here – the ideal beauty image in western perspective, and the ideal beauty image in Chinese perspective. These two sets of beauty standards are seen as very different, and sometimes incompatible.

Extract 5 From question "Please briefly tell about what you have seen from these ads"

Hana: ...about choosing the model, whether it's a so-called "super-model" face or not, it's definitely not what we Chinese traditionally think, <u>we</u> think is pretty. Like, if we think a girl is pretty, maybe she fits more into the model industry. For Chinese audience, whether male or female, it would be difficult to say that these two models are very pretty. They are not like those faces that we normally think(is pretty), like Fan Bingbing...

Extract 6 From question "How do you think of the female model image created in both ads? "

Rita: I think it didn't show any positivity or negativity if not talking about the model's movements. It's like we would normally think Europeans has big eyes and straight strong nose, they would also think we look like this (the female Asian look in the advertisements), I don't think it's insulting China.

Xenia: If only talking about the look of these models, I think Chinese audience were over-reacting. Feels like they are not confident about how they really look like. It's impossible that everyone would look like Fan Bingbing, that's only a very small amount of people. Most Chinese people do have relatively flat face and "slanted" (almond-shaped) eyes. We could do nothing about it, and it's not bad. I feel like Chinese people are pursuing too much the delicate and perfect look, thus are a bit lack of confidence in how we really look like.

Interview participants have mentioned words that are specifically used in Chinese context to depict those facial features that look more western and fit more into western beauty standards, such as "super model face". In Chinese context, this term is often used to describe pronounced facial features, like high cheekbones. However, not everyone mentioned this term with positive attitude. Some participants doubt whether the producers themselves really think this kind of look is attractive, which will be discussed in detail later.

Although interview participants did not describe in detail what Chinese consumers think is beautiful, it is clearly a "familiar story of culture" (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003) that needs no specific explanation. In extract 5, one participant mentioned Chinese female

actress Fan Bingbing as "the face we normally think is pretty". She did not need to explain more about what Fan Bingbing looks like or how pretty she is, because Fan Bingbing's image is already commonly admitted as a consensus of beautiful face within Chinese cultural context. However, some participants also held the opinion that pursuing the delicate, flawless kind of beauty is a symbol of not accepting the true self. This kind of criticism is also seen in current hot trends of social media and filtering apps. After all, it is not realistic for everyone to keep up with the beauty level of female actresses.

4.2 Visible dilemmas in participants' response

At some points, I could see that interview participants drew on the same repertoires to support opposite opinions. The two most controversial topics and visible dilemmas are the intention of both advertisements, and the advertised beauty image in these visual materials.

The intention of advertisements' producers

Extract 7 From question "What do you think the producers were thinking then?"

Rita: I think I've seen somewhere on the internet that they want to combine eastern and western culture. But from their perspective, I mean maybe they didn't mean to show an "overlook" towards our culture, but it's natural, it's in their bones. They just think it should be like this.

Hana: Yes, I also think they didn't do it on purpose for attracting attention. How to say, this whole thing had a negative effect. I just don't get the point. They make the model digging food with chopsticks at most time of the video, and just the last sentence she

said : look at my pretty bracelet. I was thinking, if you don't mention it, I wouldn't

even recognize this thing! I think this combination and also the beauty standards

shown in this advertisement is a failure. It didn't well explain what they want to

express.

Extract 8 From question "Do you have any suggestions to other brands that are trying

to enter Chinese market?"

Tina: They don't need to please or look down upon us, just being respectful would be fine.

Sally: Do more market research and hire some Chinese people if possible.

Zoe: Their local advertisements look pretty ok, just keep that level.

Sally: I feel that they <u>really</u> want to integrate to the Chinese market, they were so eager

that they ended up messing up. Their impression towards us still seems to stay in the

ancient times.

This part of discussion is closely related to the repertoire of "us" and "them" and

beauty standards that were explained in previous chapters. From extract 7 and 8, we can

see that interview participants used these repertoires to support their opposite assumptions

towards the advertisement producers' intention. Some use these to suggest that the western

producers naturally have discrimination against us, "even if they didn't mean to, it's in

their bones". This repertoire is also used in extracts that stated the producers were so

arrogant that they did not even do enough market research before planning such

advertisements. At the same time, other participants also brought about that these

advertisements producers did not aim to publish a controversial advertisement and seek for

attention. They count it more to only the planning of the advertisements, such as the

storyline, layout and narratives of the advertisements. It was more explained to pure ignorance instead of deliberate discrimination. Some thought that their original purpose was not bad, but maybe they were too eager that they messed up.

The way of presenting beauty

Extract 9 From question "What's your impression towards the videos?"

Yvonne: I feel like <u>those artists</u>, their beauty standards are not like what we normally could understand.

Hana: There's a difference. Maybe it's based on the European beauty standard that I'm how I am and won't hide the freckles. But for us, maybe we would pursue the more delicate or perfect-looking kind of beauty. We would think we want to hide our imperfections… For example, the model's face looks flat(in this picture). If I do my make-up, I would want to make my facial features look more pronounced, but the construction of this picture makes her face look even more flat. Maybe foreigners don't care about it, but we would choose a better angle or a better makeup.

Extract 10 From question "How do you think of the female model image created in both ads? "

Me: How about the Zara case?

Group: Zara's case is ok.

Rita: I haven't seen Zara's case from the internet before. I didn't feel it's offensive, I think it's just ok.

Yvonne: They said that the freckles are uglifying the model…

Rita: Oh, I don't think freckles are bad...

Xenia: Freckles are just freckles.

Looking into interview participants' discussion about beauty standards, we can see that there is still vagueness in deciding which ethnic looks are offensive and which are not. Similar discussions and repertoires emerged while discussing the advertisement cases, but apparently the negative comments both cases have received is not in the same level. Although most of the participants respond that the model in Dolce&Gabbana's advertisements represent more of the "insulting China" image than the model in Zara's pictures, they did not explain, or separate which facial features made them think so. With both advertisements raising up the discussion of offensive representation of female Asians, Dolce&Gabbana's model was more related to the "western imagination of obsequious Chinese". Zara's model faced much milder voices, with most of the comments being like "freckles are just freckles".

4.3 Subject positions of female Chinese audiences

From the responses of young Chinese women, we can see that the way they respond to the female Asian look presented in the advertisements places them in specific subject positions. The most frequently observed ones being Chinese national, Chinese female consumer, and the combination of both positions.

Extract 11 From question "How do you think of the "female model" image created in both ads?"

Rita: ...I was thinking, if these advertisements appeared tens of years before, when China

was actually learning from the western countries, would we still react like this to it?

It's because we have changed, and we are not like the old country anymore, but they

still present us like the we were in the past. We are not like that anymore. We are not

so awkward and ignorant anymore.

Here, Rita was referring to China's old history of learning from western countries, and how the situation is very different nowadays. It could be seen in this extract, that the way Rita responded to the advertisements placed her in the position of a Chinese young women who wants the western countries to let go of their old stereotypes and see China's change.

Extract 12 From question "How do you think of the "female model" image created in both ads? "

Sally: Maybe would be better if the D&G advertisements used a male model. Women are

normally seen as the less powerful group, so the advertisements looked like wanting

to show the obsequious feeling of women. Probably they won't even construct a male

model like that.

Tina: If I would not like to be represented by the model, it's not because of her look, but

more because of the uncomfortable feeling she expressed.

In this extract, Tina expressed the unwillingness to be represented by a female model who shows obsequence in western advertisements. Such response places her in the position

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of a female Chinese national, who does not want to be "Othered" in the western advertisements.

Extract 13 From question "How do you feel when you see these pictures / videos?"

Xenia: As a consumer I would think Zara's advertisements are quite successful. Zara used to be known as a clothes brand, but now everybody knows that they are starting to do makeups…

Xenia's response to Zara's advertisements places her in the position of a consumer who did not think too much about the meanings lied behind the advertisements, but only thought the result was good.

Extract 14 From question "How do you think of the "female model" image created in both ads? "

Maria: As the represented group, I would feel you have misunderstandings, I mean negative misunderstandings about me. As the audience of the advertisements I would feel you are not really advertising your products to me. You don't even care if I would buy your products, you just make this advertisement to fool me around…

Extract 15 From question "How would these ads influence your purchasing behavior / your general impression about these brands?"

Yvonne: Even if I don't have any strong feelings towards these ads, the ongoing trend of "if you still buy it you don't love our country" would keep me away from buying.

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Xenia: If the advertisements itself makes me feel uncomfortable, I would not buy it no

matter how good the products are or how big the discount is. A lot of people still care

about the brand story. The brand tells more than what you think. As for myself, would

not buy it again. You would probably be looked down upon (by others) if you still buy

anything from them, even you don't have that intention. Better not get yourself into

trouble.

The participants' response in Extract 14 and 15 places them in the combined positions of Chinese nationals and female Chinese consumers. They talked about how they felt confused about the advertisements itself, as well as how they felt uncomfortable and misunderstood while relating themselves to the female Asian models.

From the extracts we can see that these young Chinese females are more than just consumers and targeting audience of these fashion and beauty brands. They have the knowledge and alertness of how these advertisements reflect historical and cultural meanings in country level. They identify themselves with the ethnic Chinese groups and are willing to protect the representative image of these groups. They are not consumers that would take anything that the brands give. Instead, they choose from the best brand stories and values. Compared to the facial features of the model, they are more concerned about whether the model showed obsequious feelings. This also means that instead of how to be represented physically, they care more about whether the female Asian look in these advertisements is accurately presented, and whether it showed equality and respect.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

In general, young Chinese women's responses towards "female Asian look" in both cases were constructed in reading through social media comments, interacting with others, and other social and cultural norms such as Chinese beauty standards and the general impression of western brands. While some previous studies (Wekwerth, 2019; Chan, Skoumpopoulou, & Yu, 2018) indicate that social media comments mainly have negative impacts on people's opinions about such PR crisis cases, findings of this study suggest that people might draw on contrary repertoires, other than those popular ones on social media, to construct their opinions. Although the impact of social media is clearly visible, and participants in this study tend to use the leading discourse as a reference, but they still construct their repertoires more based on their own thoughts. Compared to the findings in Zhang's (2012) study that beautiful Chinese woman should fit into the traditional beauty standard of big eyes and fair skin, findings of this study also show that participants agree with this to be the beauty norms in China. In addition to the Caucasian facial features that has been the mainstream popularity in fashion and beauty industry (Jha, 2015; Johansson, 1998) , young Chinese women in this study believe that even the "ethnic Chinese look" has also the possibility to be beautifully presented in advertisements. The negative comments in participants' responses are more about the obsequious way the female model is represented. Participants are relatively more tolerant to the physical facial features of the model.

The findings of this study could also provide some insights for companies wishing to enter the Chinese market in the near future. From the consumers' point of view, it would be risky to construct an image in visual campaigns that would make consumers feel negatively related. In today's competitive international market, the need for doing localization for foreign markets and learning about the local preference has become more important. Good localizing strategies might also help the brand to create a better first impression among local consumers. According to the findings of this study, western fashion and beauty brands could, for example, do some adaptation to Chinese beauty preferences. Doing thorough market research and intercultural check could also be very useful to avoid miscommunication and PR crisis. The findings suggest, that most interview participants agree that Chinese consumers appreciate those brands who show respect to the Chinese market and culture. If a PR crisis does happen, a genuine attitude is believed could work better than an ignorant, superior attitude.

5.2 Conclusions

These interpretative repertoires reflect the prevalent patterns of in relation to my interview questions about how young Chinese women respond to the female Asian look in fashion and beauty advertisements. Most young female participants drew on all the mentioned repertoires, some drew only on a few. These repertoires, along with the ideological dilemmas and subject positions shown through discussion, construct the kinds of conversations, dialogues and arguments that are possible for the representation of female Asian look in advertising.

The participants drew on repertoires surrounding social media discussions, "Us and Them" counterpoint within eastern and western social narratives, and different beauty standards to create a discursive package. The second and third aspect of repertoires also included ideological dilemmas that the participants themselves felt vague about. The most representative subject positions offered to these female participants were Chinese nationals and female consumers of these fashion and beauty brands. Sometimes the two positions were discussed separately, but most of the time they appear and are discussed at the same time.

In general, young Chinese women held the opinion that their response towards female Asian look in both cases were more or less influenced by the leading discourses on social media. They see the representation of Chinese females in the advertisements as imagination of the "Other" created by producers, which reflected these brands' old-fashioned stereotypes of today's Chinese consumers and their lack of market research. While responding to these advertisements in the position of young female Chinese consumers, they were still not certain about the producers' intention of creating these "racist" advertisements, and the beauty standards advertised.

5.3 Possible Limitations of Data Collection

One visible fact and limitation of focus group as a research method is that focus group discussions are still very much researcher provoked and informed by how the moderator framed the situation (Belzille & Öberg, 2012). The moderator's limitations could also reflect on the constructed context and when analysing the results. Although the moderator

should be extra careful about the power balance in group, as Belzille and Öberg (2012) mentioned, it is still a structure encounter in which "everyone is aware of who's driving" . Also, the group dynamics can provoke rich discussion surrounding a specific topic but could also silence particular viewpoints (Belzille & Öberg, 2012).

Another limitation is that two groups might not well represent all the aspects of Chinese female audiences' response towards the advertisements, and since the whole topic covers several broad aspects, the discussion that focus groups have provoked might still be lack of details. However, some repetitiveness has already occurred within these two focus group discussions, so the data should be able to reflect some common viewpoints regarding this topic.

5.4 Future research prospects

This study about representation of female Asian look in fashion and beauty advertisements aims to provide an overview of female consumers' psychology using cultural perspective. By using focus group interview and discursive psychology methods, I discovered the most frequent repertoires, dilemmas and subject positions in discussions towards this topic.

Most of the studies in this field focused either on how female image and beauty standards are constructed in international advertising, or how female consumers respond to the beauty standards constructed in advertising. Inspired by the two advertisements that provoked phenomenal discussions of cultural difference, stereotypes, representation of female Asian, and beauty standards, I wish this study could provide some insights of

combining these elements while studying today's international advertising industry. As the globalization process is still continuing, and the world is facing unpredictable changes, the situation of such cases might still become more controversial and complex. Although my study has limitations, the findings might provide some useful insights and representative results for researchers or students that are interested in this field.

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APPENDIX

Interview extracts in original language (Chinese and some English terms used by participants)

Extract 1

Yvonne: 这两个广告在国内还挺火的，尤其 D&G 那个微博热搜上了好几天了

Yvonne: 第一个光看广告的话我看不出来他们想要宣传什么，第二个的话能看出来是口红嘛。因为我已经之前看过，所以我会受到一些影响……比如之前大家关注的点都是女模特的雀斑……但我觉得可以理解吧，毕竟它重点放在口红上了。你们觉得呢？

Xenia: 其实我觉得第一个视频，如果我没有看微博然后没有收到那些评论的影响的话，我会感觉它做的还挺精美，挺漂亮的。整个色调啊，包括模特的衣服，妆容，首饰，就很精致很漂亮。包括整个画面的布局，比较集中，然后颜色很饱满，单看的话我不会太感觉它有辱华的倾向。

Maria: 我也有这种感觉，虽然多少也会受到之前微博上的影响，但是不明白这个视频到底是要给外国人看还是给中国人看的。如果给中国人看，谷歌真的会不知道你在说什么，也会觉得这跟我们认知中的中国不太一样。

Extract 2

Xenia: 杜嘉班纳那个广告，一个星期连着上热搜啊。

Hana: 尤其第一个杜嘉班纳的广告，因为我自己会比较注意这些跨文化的元素在里面，所以我当时我第一反应就是这绝对不是中国人做的东西。而且整个广告夹杂着很多西方对于中国女性形象的刻板印象。

Extract 3

Xenia: 那个旁白说"你试一下什么什么"，就感觉她什么都不会然后他在教她

Rita: 就感觉我们中国人对他们西方食物好像不是很了解，他一定要说"这个很好，你试一下"，感觉他对我们对他们的认识也是有偏差的，有很大的偏差。

Hana: 我觉得他们对我们其实一无所知，对于中国市场和广告的受众也一无所知。他们可能压根就没有想做市场调研。作为年轻人我觉得不管是社交媒体上还是其他的官方宣传，我觉得中国作为很大的体量，他去宣传他的审美也好，饮食文化也好，我们起码不是 voiceless。如果你想来了解我们，你肯定是会知道我们现在想的是什么，我们的偏好是什么。但是他们没有，他们还是用他们很陈旧的观念来塑造一些东西。

Extract 4

Sally: 比较符合西方人对中国人的刻板印象

Lisa: 把他们品牌的元素和他们理解的中国元素强行嫁接在一起，就不太舒服。就是他们眼中的中国，其实咱们根本不是那样的。所以我觉得他们要是想给中国人看中国人能接受的广告，他们就应该站在中国人的角度去拍。

Tina: 这个模特表情特别谄媚，有一点觉得意大利的东西有优越感。第一遍看我以为是餐厅广告

Extract 5

Hana: 在模特的选择上，不管这是不是所谓的"超模脸"，这也不是我们传统意义上会觉得好看的那种。如果我们说一个女孩漂亮，那她可能更适合模特行业，但是对中国消费者来说，不管男性还是女性，可能都很难说这两个模特非常的漂亮，她们不是我们一般会觉得漂亮的那种脸，像范冰冰……

Extract 6

Rita: 我觉得没什么褒贬的色彩，抛开动作什么的，就像我们觉得欧洲人就是大眼睛高鼻梁，那他们觉得我们就是这样的，我不觉得是一种（辱华）

Xenia：单论这些模特的长相而言，我觉得中国消费者反应有点过激了。感觉有点对自己真实的长相不自信。不可能每个人都长成范冰冰，那是极少数的，大多数中国人脸就是平啊，眼睛就是有点吊啊，那没办法，又不是不好。我觉得大家有点过度追求精美，然后对自己本来的样子有点不自信。

Extract 7

Rita: 我觉得他们想要把中西方文化融合一下，但他们融合的时候，他们可能也没有故意想要表现一种高姿态，但他们自然而然的觉得就应该是这样。

Hana: 他们不会故意想要引来很多注意或者是非。但说实话我觉得这个室友跑偏。你看她半天都在用筷子倒那个东西，然后最后才说一句"你看我的手链很好看"，我就在想，你要不说我都注意不到这个！我觉得各方面的融合和审美都是失败，没有很好的把想表达的表达出来。

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Extract 8

Tina: 没有必要故意讨好也没有必要故意贬损，建立在尊重的基础上就行了

Sally: 多做点市场调查吧，多雇点中国人.

Zoe: 在本地做到广告都挺正常的，就保持原来的水平就行了

Sally: 我觉得他们太想融入了，有点弄巧成拙的感觉，他们的印象好像就停留在古代……

Extract 9

Yvonne: 我觉得那些艺术家，他们的审美是平常大众所无法理解的……

Hana: 我觉得有个差异。他可能是以欧洲那种，我很自然，就算有雀斑也不会加以掩饰。但我们可能还是追求那种更加精致，希望把自己完美的一面展现给其他人。比如她这里面的脸很平。如果我化妆的话，我可能会希望把自己的脸化的更立体一点。但她这里给化的就是平上加平。外国人可能会觉得管他什么角度，但我们可能就会选择更好的角度或者更精致的妆容。

Extract 10

Me: 那 Zara 呢？

Group: Zara 那个还挺好的

Rita: 那个我之前也没在网上看过。看的时候没感觉有什么

Yvonne: 网上有说他们故意丑化这个模特

Rita: 那我不觉得雀斑一定是丑化

Xenia: 雀斑就是雀斑嘛.

Extract 11

Rita: 我就在想，如果这个广告放在几十年前，就是中国还在向西方学习的阶段，我们还会这个反应吗？是因为我们现在变了，但他们做的展现还是我们原来的样子。但我们现在不是那样了。不是那么手足无措，什么都不了解的样子。

Extract 12

Sally: 第一个的话换成男的会好一点，因为女性本来有点弱势群体，有点对女性的不尊重，多少有一点刻意表现女性谄媚的感觉。男性可能本身也不会这么塑造的。Tina: 如果不想被模特代表的话，应该不会是因为她的外貌，而是这种谄媚的感觉。

Extract 13

Xenia: 作为消费者我觉得 Zara 的广告挺成功的。Zara 本来不是服装品牌吗，现在大家都知道他们开始卖口红了……

Extract 14

Maria: 作为被展示的群体我会觉得你对我有误解，而且还是不好的误解，作为看这个广告的消费者我会觉得你根本就不是诚心来给我卖东西，你根本就不 care 我要不要买你家东西，你就做这么个广告来糊弄我……

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Extract 15

Yvonne：哪怕我自己对广告没什么特别深刻感觉，现在形成的这种买了不爱国的趋势也会让我望而却步的。

Xenia：如果广告本身让我感觉不舒服我就不会买了，不管再怎么降价再怎么好看我也不买了。本身也会有很大一部分人在乎 brand story。The brand tells more than what you think。我自己是不会买了，我身边要是有人买可能也会遭到鄙视。就算你没有那个 intention，可能也会遭到鄙视吧，尽量不要给自己惹麻烦。