

Flipping through a magazine: The consumed and consuming 'woman' in contemporary Chinese art

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Abstract

The turn of the millennium marked China's full engagement with globalized capitalism, the fulfilment of the contemporary turn in Chinese art and an increase in representations of women and female bodies in contemporary Chinese art. The 'consumed and consuming' body had arrived in China via, amongst other means, glossy fashion and lifestyle magazines. This article produces a comparative textual analysis of two artworks, the single-channel video installation *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002 by Chen Lingyang and the photographic installation *Summer*, 2009 by Yang Zhenzhong. Both artworks feature glossy women's magazines. The two works will be compared in how they represent 'women', and the question asked, what do the differences in the artists' treatment of the female body and glossy magazines suggest about gendered subjectivity?

Keywords

Glossy magazines

contemporary Chinese art

women

body

globalization

consumption

The all-encompassing gaze of power emanates from the bathroom scale, the mirror, the television, magazines; power is found at gym class, the clothing store, the dinner table, the office; it is reflected in the compliment 'You've lost weight', and 'the designs of products from Coke bottles to cars [...] (Pylypa 1998: 27)

We the audience are invited to look at four bodies. Their feet are visible, but no faces. One person at a time can walk up two steps and look at them through a viewing hole. The wall conceals us from their view, even if they had eyes to return our gaze. As we look from this position, fragments suspended from the ceiling and supported from the ground align to reveal the complete image. Four people are sat in a café drinking coffee or milkshakes, all wearing fashionable strappy shoes and short skirts. They are refreshing themselves, perhaps before or after a day spent shopping on Nanjing Road, a major shopping destination in Shanghai, PRC. Our view is mostly under the table, between their legs, and up short denim skirts. One flips casually through a glossy magazine.

Above is a description of the photographic installation *Summer*, 2009 (Figures 1 and 2) by male-identifying contemporary artist Yang Zhenzhong (born 1968 Hangzhou) who is based in Shanghai, PRC. It was produced eight years after female-identifying contemporary artist Chen Lingyang (born 1975 Zhejiang) produced the single-channel video installation *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002 (Figures 3–6). At the time of producing *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002 Chen Lingyang was based in Beijing. Both artworks feature women's glossy magazines. In this article the two works will be compared in how they represent 'women', and the question asked is: what do the differences in the

artists' treatment of the female body and glossy magazines suggest about gendered subjectivity?

As this article aims to produce a departure from existing interpretations of artworks by contemporary Chinese artists whose work engages with the female body and representations of womanhood, works were selected by artists already well known

Figure 1: Yang Zhenzhong (1968 Hangzhou) *Summer*, 2009 site-specific installation. Courtesy of the artist and ShanghART Gallery, Shanghai.

Figure 2: Yang Zhenzhong (1968 Hangzhou) *Summer*, 2009 site-specific installation. Courtesy of the artist and ShanghART Gallery, Shanghai.

and written about in scholarship and the art press. To find 'canonical' contemporary Chinese artists I cross-referenced a number of sources. The sources included Thomas Berghuis' book *Performance Art in China* (Berghuis, 2006), Wu Hung's *Contemporary Chinese Art* (Wu, 2014), the Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong and the collections of White Rabbit, Sydney and M+ Sigg, Hong Kong. The collections have online databases, rigorous and transparent collecting policies and research strategies, and an international reputation. The specific pieces *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002 by Chen Lingyang and *Summer*, 2009 by Yang Zhenzhong are, however, not represented in these collections and less has been written about them in anglophone and Chinese scholarship and art press than the artists' other works. I spoke to both artists about the works, Yang Zhenzhong in 2016 at his studio in Shanghai with the

assistance of translators, and Chen Lingyang in 2017 by e-mail correspondence.

The holdings of Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong were used to triangulate my findings.

Yue Jing Jing, 2002 and *Summer*, 2009 are compared here through a framework of biopower and *nannü*. The concept of biopower was developed by Michel Foucault and elaborated by Giorgio Agamben. Here, rather than a focus on Agamben's 'bare life' or Foucault's interest in governmentality, there is a discussion of how biopower can be adapted to give feminist attention to these texts. This article specifically focusses on one pole of Foucauldian biopower: the discipline and optimization of bodies. Jan Pylypa includes magazines in her discussion of Foucault and an anthropology of the body, proposing that they are one means by which society achieves the bodies it requires (1998: 22). The theory of optimized bodies will be augmented with Anarchist feminist He-Yin Zhen (c.1884–c.1920)'s category of *Nannü* (man/woman, male/female). He-Yin did not invent the word, but she repurposed it at the turn of the twentieth century to describe the power of the ongoing production and re-production of the binary genders. Foucault did not develop the capacity of his theories to discuss gender, beyond a brief suggestion in his book *The History of Sexuality* that sex could be a regulatory construct (1998: 55). *Nannü* is used here in combination with biopower, because He-Yin explicitly proposed 80 years earlier

Figure 3: Chen Lingyang (1975 Zhejiang) *Yue Jing Jing* (2002). Installation shot Guangzhou Triennial 2002. Image courtesy of the artist. (Note the entrance to the screening room top left).

Figure 4: Chen Lingyang (1975 Zhejiang) *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002. Installation shot Guangzhou Triennial 2002. Image courtesy of the artist.

Figure 5: Chen Lingyang (1975 Zhejiang) *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002. Installation shot Guangzhou Triennial 2002. Image courtesy of the artist.

Figure 6: Chen Lingyang (1975 Zhejiang) *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002. Installation shot Guangzhou Triennial 2002. Image courtesy of the artist.

that the same discursive and non-discursive forces Foucault discusses could be used to produce gender(s) and to subjugate and disadvantage women and girls (Liu, Karl and Ko, 2013).

Nannü as a category to analyse contemporary Chinese art has been used by Sasha Welland. In Welland's *Experimental Beijing*, *nannü* is applied to the political and cultural economy of the Beijing art world to argue that gender is enmeshed in the rise of contemporary art in China, but often neglected in commentary and analysis (2018). Other important scholarly works at the intersection of gender and contemporary Chinese art tend to focus on the artistic production of female-identifying artists, producing necessary departures from the dominant narratives of contemporary Chinese art that privilege male artists (Tao Yongbai and Ling Shi 1995; Liao Wen 1999; Tong Yujie 2011; Cui 2015; Teo 2015; Guest 2016; Merlin 2018).¹ This article takes a different approach, giving equal attention to the work of a female and a male artist, in order to ask how 'women' are represented through a comparative textual analysis. Yet it contributes to the urgent question that these scholars have asked, of whether gendered subjectivity is an important consideration in this discourse.

Glossy and globalized magazines aimed at the male and female markets in China have been extensively researched (Karan and Feng 2009; Frith and Yang 2009; Song and Lee 2012; Chen 2016). Glossy lifestyle and fashion magazines provide blueprints for how to live and understand the self in specific cultural and temporal contexts. They can therefore be understood as a site of Foucauldian discipline as they demonstrate the requisite: 'training and standardization [...producing] subjects by categorizing and naming them in a hierarchical order [...] through a rationality of efficiency, productivity and "normalisation"' (Barker 2000: 226). The intersection of gender in this disciplinary regime will be discussed further on in this article. Western

Figure 7: Cover of *Elle China*, 1998. Image courtesy of <http://coversarchive.wixsite.com/gallery/elle-china>.

Figure 8: Cover of the January 2018 edition of the English language magazine *Women of China*. Image courtesy of www.womenofchina.cn

glossy magazines titles had started to arrive in the Chinese market in the 1980s and 90s. There was a boom in the market after the millennium. The bodies that came to discipline Chinese women through these media, initially, were white. *Elle China* in 1988 was the first magazine to launch a version in China (Chen 2016). The model used on the first cover of *Elle China* was white (Figure 7). For Louisa Schein, the importation of white female bodies into China by means of images of women in bikinis and lingerie did not necessarily map onto the heterosexual gaze or ideas about beauty in the Chinese context, but rather it signalled the desire to be globalized subjects (1994: 142). The magazines, marketed to women in China's expanding urban environments cost several times the price of local print titles. They prescribed that women present themselves according to the new globalized beauty paradigm, and regulate themselves as desiring subjects and objects of desire (Rofel 2007). For Eva Chen, the glossy magazines emerging in the Chinese market at the turn of the twenty-first century represented 'power femininity' (2016) and an assertion of the new femininity of the reform era, which was both biologically essential and a social-cultural construction that could be cultivated, against the backdrop of the market-led economy. It is also worth noting the shifting visual discourse of class in representations of female bodies and the state-sanctioned media. Wang Zheng noted in a presentation in 2016 that *Women of China* magazine, a publication supported by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), had not one peasant or lower class worker on its cover after 1998 (Liu 2016). The January 2018 English language edition of *Women of China* magazine had the cover line 'Shaking off Poverty' (Figure 8). This is evidence that by the turn of the millennium the official visual rhetoric of the female body in the PRC had shifted to a middle and upper class globalized aspiration. This aspiration was to be consuming and consumed.

Chen Lingyang was working as a contemporary artist in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Chen was a graduate of Central Academy of Fine Art, Beijing (CAFA) and part of the 'contemporary turn' in Chinese art of the 1990s (Wu Hung 2009: 290–308). The 1990s were a period of shifting discourses of feminism and gender (Min 2017). In the early 1980s Professor Li Xiaojiang had established the first women's studies department at a Chinese university and began to reflect on the impact of Communism on China's women. In the 1990s, China both felt it was ahead of the global picture in woman's rights, and was re-establishing its place in the global conversation about feminism, gender and rights. This was epitomized by the conversations at *The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace*, convened by the UN and held in Beijing in 1995. For Chen, the connection with international feminist discourses came after her breakthrough work *Twelve Flower Months*, 1999–2000, produced the year after she graduated. That piece comprised a series of twelve photographs of her menstruating body, mapping time over the course of one year. Each image contained a flower, starting with narcissus (Figure 9). Rather than glossy magazines, that series referred to the discourse of *yuefenpai*, beautiful women calendars (Figure 10). *Yuefenpai* were vehicles for advertising, they emerged with the advent of mass printing in the late Qing and early Republican 'colonial modernism' (Barlow 2013). They connected consumables to images of beautiful, healthy, modern women (Zhao and Belk 2008); establishing a discourse of 'women' that consumed and were consumed. The calendars often included images of flowers or references to Chinese gardens. The parameter shape of each of Chen Lingyang's *Twelve Flower Months*, 1999–2000 images is a reference to windows and gates in a Chinese garden. Projects

examining the contemporary legacy and traces of historical visual discourses of women have been undertaken by other female contemporary artists. Ma Qiusha (born 1982 Beijing) also produced a series of works on paper investigating *yuefenpai* imagery, and artist Ye Funa (born Kunming 1986) in 2012 produced videos and still photographs inserting herself into family photographs and images from pictorials. However, in the next work that Chen Lingyang produced developing the theme of menstrual blood, the artist investigated a much more contemporary visual discourse of 'women'.

In December 2002, Chen Lingyang exhibited her installation *Yue Jing Jing, 2002* at The First Guangzhou Triennial Guangdong Museum of Art 'Experimentation Continues', in Guangzhou, PRC.² The installation comprised of a single-channel.

Figure 9: Chen Lingyang, *Twelve Flower Months* – month one narcissus, 1999–2000. Photograph. Image courtesy of the artist.

video in a darkened room (the artist refers to this screening-space as the 'garden shed', perhaps a linking thread back to the gates and windows of the Chinese garden). Various objects and materials led towards the entrance to the screening area. Make-up, magazines, laundry drying on the line, furniture and a toilet, all featured atop a dazzling red carpet. Furniture, lamps and mirrors were all fixed at precarious angles. The effect was a dramatic and chaotic rendering of a young woman's bathroom-bedroom space where she might internalize the contents of

Figure 10: Calendar
Poster; 月份牌;
Yuefenpai. Collection of
the British Museum.
1993,0813,0.1

magazines and prepare herself in their image. The title pinyin is a pun, the characters sound like a girl's name, but also translate as something like 'Menstruation Fairy' (Chen, 2017).³ The artist refers to the protagonist of the film in English as 'Fairy'. The narrative of the single-channel video tells the story Fairy, wearing a skirt-suit, working in an office within Beijing's transforming urban cityscape, inflicting menstruation onto her colleagues both male and female. Chen writes:

A girl works, a smile on her face. Suddenly she is transformed into a martial arts fighter, her sword made of cotton and tissue, she thrashes around. After a while, as if at the end of a day at work, she walks home. Blood suddenly appears to be flowing down her leg to which she is oblivious. (Chen in Wu 2002: 454)

It could be a dream that Fairy has, it could be reality within the universe of the film. The magazines that Chen Lingyang collected to use in the installation were women's glossy fashion and lifestyle titles. Onto the images of models advertising international brands such as Helmet Lang, and Hong Kong retail outlet 'Saint Jack', the artist had crudely drawn a thick line of menstrual blood running down their clothes in red marker pen.

Chen Lingyang revealed in our interview that *Twelve Flower Months*, 1999–2000 had been conceived to connect with Daoist discourses of nature and harmony (Chen 2017). As well as being a departure from the earlier work in tone, scale and media, *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002 lets go entirely of this need for harmony. Fairy can be

understood as inscribed with the attributes of 'humour', 'anger' and 'madness', rather than the normative attributes of 'feminine', 'beautiful' and 'natural'. In the earlier work normative attributes exist in harmonious balance with the 'powerful and polluting' (Chu 1980; Song 2012; Remoiville 2017) qualities of menstrual blood. Fairy, in *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002, is not afraid of transgressing normal boundaries of behaviour and menstruation management. One target of her anger is the female representations in glossy magazines. They are consumed, consuming, but not breathing or bleeding. She corrects their consumed and consuming superficially with a flow of powerful and polluting red blood. Chen explained in our interview the shift between the two works:

After I created *Twelve Flower Months*, 1999–2000, I begun to learn about feminism [*nüxing zhuyi*], because other people interpreted the work as feminist. After that, I conceived and created *Yue Jing Jing*, 2001, which by contrast is from a woman's [*nüxing*] perspective, although it continues the menstrual theme. (Chen Lingyang, 2017)

This shift in perspective and connection with international feminist discourse opens up the possibility of different interpretative frameworks for Chen's later, and less discussed piece, *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002. Mediation between international and localized discourses is a requisite for contemporaneity in Wu Hung's definition (2009: 290–308). In *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002 Chen Lingyang is explicitly reacting to the imposition of disciplining globalized bodies arriving in the spatially-bounded Chinese context. In our dialogue, Chen described *Yue Jing Jing*, 2001 as (it could be) 'a moment of madness for any woman around us' (Chen 2017). This suggests that Chen wanted Fairy to feel like an everywoman, and, or, that any woman could suddenly be

overcome by 'madness' or anger and suddenly lash out.⁴ It therefore connects to a problematic trope of female hysteria; but most importantly the 'woman' inscribed onto the body of Fairy is reacting to the boundaries and restrictions placed upon her.

Chris Berry describes in Asian women's film a phenomenon when: 'the dream of modernity was unattainable but there was also no possibility of return to any benign tradition', Berry conceptualizes this as a 'blockage' (2013: 18). Berry could be using 'blockage' in a similar way to how this article uses 'boundary'. The protagonist in *Yue Jing Jing*, 2001, is presented against a backdrop of urban Beijing and globalized life, overtly absent are the references to Chinese visual traditions of *Twelve Flower Months*, 1999–2000. Following Berry, the tangible frustration and anger Fairy exudes could be a response to this 'blockage'; trapped between tradition and the future. The leaking of blood could be a breaking through of immobility.

Yang Zhenzhong graduated from the Zhejiang Institute of Silk Textile, Hangzhou, Fashion Design Department in 1990. His shift to producing contemporary art and establishing a career as an artist in Shanghai coincided with globalization and the contemporary turn in Chinese art of the 1990s (Wu Hung 2009: 290–308). In 1992, Yang exhibited in The First Guangzhou Triennial Guangdong Museum of Art 'Experimentation Continues', in Guangzhou, PRC, as did Chen Lingyang. Twenty five years on, Yang has been exhibited and collected internationally. Yang's photography and video work broadly focuses on abstracting aspects of everyday life to explore the human condition. The themes of claustrophobia, communication and the absurd run throughout his body of work.

Yang Zhenzhong's *Summer, 2009*, is an illusion which relies on the participation of the audience, to move and stand in a particular place. Yang compels the audience to be physically complicit in the work, he foregrounds the audience's act of seeing. But more than this, perhaps he could be understood as inscribing the bodies of the audience members as predatory, libidinous, heterosexual males. The gazers, 'men', are not entirely omitted from the artist's critique, as the view they are compelled to take below the table, up skirts, communicates a certain seediness. Nevertheless, they hold the power. The 'women' are inscribed as the 'gazed upon', 'lesser than', 'flippant', 'idle', and 'sexualized'. But also, importantly, these attributes are communicated by and intermixed with their consumption of glossy magazines, coffee and high street fashion. Yang Zhenzhong agreed with my suggestion that the women in *Summer, 2009* had been chosen because they were beautiful and enticed the viewer to engage with the work (Yang Zhenzhong 2016). *Summer, 2009* is not the only work by Yang Zhenzhong in which he presents young women as being inextricable from the capitalist economy in the PRC, the two synonymous with each other. I interviewed Yang Zhenzhong at his large, bright, white, studio in 2016. Whilst he poured the tea we talked at length about the role of the female bodies and womanhood in his output and his perception of young women in real life. He described the women he had featured in the video installation *Let's Puff, 2002* and single channel video installation *Exam, 2012* as well as the women in *Summer, 2009* as having been chosen because they represented 'Nanjing Road [...] the commercial world, trade, and shopping' (Yang Zhenzhong 2016). His ambivalence towards capitalism and consumerism, based on this conversation, seemed to be the driver for producing these works, which relied on his inscribing the female body as representing these phenomenon.

Yang's ambivalence towards capitalism belies the fact that he has been successful in the industry of contemporary art in the PRC, which relies on commercial sponsorship and private money. An anecdote Yang Zhenzhong gave to Biljana Ciric as part of the research process for the exhibition *History in the Making: Shanghai 1979 till 2009*, highlights his awareness, ambivalence, critique and even disdain towards capitalism and the role he sees female people taking within it. In this quotation Yang Zhenzhong is referring to the exhibition *Art for Sale*, 1999, which was based on the concept of the supermarket:

We did a lot of things to raise money for this exhibition [...We were eventually sponsored by multinational water brand] Evian and Deutsche Bank. Evian was interested because the exhibition was presented on Huaihai Road.⁵ That was where their target consumer group, trendy young ladies, loved to hang out most. They saw this as a chance for brand promotion. As for the bank, its director said [he would support the exhibition]: 'Because my girlfriend loves your art'. (Yang Zhenzhong in Ciric 2014: 374)

Of course it is entirely permissible for artists to reflect on the political economies of art and its production. But for Yang Zhenzhong to explore the complex intertwined economies of money, geography, culture and consumption, he inscribes the female body with certain attributes and critiques. His audience must be able to understand the inscriptions that he writes on the body, recognizing their globalized, consuming bodies. Although the object of his critical lens may be capitalism within communist governance, the female body becomes both canvas and node within his artistic

inquiry. What is at stake is a reproduction of stereotypes of women as vacuous and unthinking consumers, when in reality it is often female-identifying people who have little control over finances in the PRC; they are excluded from accumulation of real estate wealth (Hong Fincher 2014) and market research has found they do not spend as much on consumables and leisure services as their male counterparts (Ren 2016).

The 'women' in selected examples of Yang Zhenzhong's output, and particularly in *Summer, 2009*, are body-objects, inscribed as desirable, desiring, modern, urban, consumed and consuming. Consuming coffees, consuming magazines and leisure time, consuming a globalized lifestyle. They are the kind of represented bodies that discipline bodies in real life to be thin, beautiful and buy things, the women in the magazines themselves. They also correspond to the neologism *baifumei* (white, rich, beautiful) a term that refers to the preference for lighter skin, high status, wealth and beauty in female marital partners in twenty-first century urban China. There is a definite connection between *Summer, 2009* and advertising imagery. The women fall within category of the 'urban sophisticate', identified by Hung and Li in a quantitative analysis of tropes of women represented in glossy magazines (Hung and Li 2006: 8–9). The scale, tone, lighting and high resolution of his photography is reminiscent of commercial imagery, although Yang Zhenzhong disrupts this by fragmenting the images and by the 'up skirt' camera angle. In *Summer, 2009* it is important that the women have been photographed as if in a public place because Yang Zhenzhong is trying to capture a sense of confidence and freedom, the artist opined: 'compare women and men at the same age, the girls have more freedom, they are more free than the men [...] In Shanghai. [...] They go to public places, they are beautiful and

wear sexy clothes' (Yang Zhenzhong 2016). This could be seen as positive and post-feminist, or even an example of Li Xiaojiang's 'market feminism'. Li's theory has so been called as she argued that the market would enable women to construct their own feminine identity, rejecting the masculinization of the Communist era (Li in Barlow 2013). However, in *Summer, 2009* the young women are critiqued for engaging in a lifestyle of consumption and desire. They are disciplined and regulated, even attacked, by the gaze. A critique of capitalism is being played out in conflicting inscriptions on the four female bodies.

In what ways are the artists treating the glossy magazines differently or similarly? Moreover, what does it mean that one artist is female and the other male, and what might their different treatment of the topic of glossy magazines suggest about gendered subjectivity? *Summer, 2009* makes a poignant comparison with Chen Lingyang's video installation *Yue Jing Jing, 2002*. Both appear to be at ambivalent, critical or even angry towards the arrival of the disciplining, consumed and consuming (often white) body that arrived in China in the pages of glossy magazines. Both artworks question the 'reality' that the magazines portray in their advertising, editorial approach and features. Chen Lingyang does this by attacking the images of fashion models, or correcting them, with 'powerful and polluting' menstrual blood. Yang Zhenzhong does this by disciplining the 'women' who consume the magazines and regulate themselves accordingly, using a libidinous and critical gaze. However, in so doing, Yang also critiques heterosexual males who consume the globalized female body, making them out to be seedy and lustful. *Summer, 2009*, brings a male gaze and a male perspective to the scene, irrespective of whether the artist is male-identifying or not (although any audience very likely will

know he is male). In Yang Zhenzhong's *Summer*, 2009, there is a separation of female and male, woman and man. The female is fragmented, gazed upon, sexualized. The male is a real audience member, gazer, libidinous. The magazines are positioned within the sphere of the female, within the images themselves. Chen Lingyang, in contrast, maintains a female perspective. The magazines are attacked with menstrual blood by 'Fairy' who we know to be female. Chen Lingyang does not use her own body in the piece, nor does she discuss her identity in relation to the piece. However, the overt female perspective suggests that the piece contains something of Chen's own experience or her own feelings towards glossy magazines. Chen has said she used an actor in order to represent what could happen to any woman (2017), in this case specifically, madness and anger directed towards models in magazines. Yet what she does is remind the audience of the lack of attention to corporeality in the representations of women in the magazines. Chen anoints the bodies with a flow of blood, 'the stigmata of past experience' (Foucault [1971] in Rabinow 1984: 83), her own corporeal experience inscribed onto the otherwise bloodless and breathless represented bodies.

I will briefly revisit why Chen Lingyang might be ambivalent, even resentful or angry towards the magazines before returning to the question of gendered subjectivity. Laikwan Pang suggests that 'individuals' social experiences in any given society are often incredibly homogenized, and such coherency is often achieved through a shared body of texts' (Pang 2007: 209–10). Glossy magazines could be seen as one of these shared texts. As the PRC shifted to a capitalist economy it needed manufacturing bodies and middle class consuming bodies, but not, or so it thought, a lot of new babies (Xu and Pak 2015; Zeng and Hesketh 2016). The magazines

present a literal hybrid of international titles, local brands and state-owned media (Frith and Yang 2009). They are also a hybrid of transnational companies' commercial interests in selling consumables to consumers, and disciplinary representations of the new consuming body that the CCP required for its new role within globalized capitalism. As Frith and Yang write, the CCP appear to have 'less strict control' of women's magazines but at the same time they 'contain consumer ideology that fits comfortably into the current government economic plan' (2009). The limitation of Frith and Yang's article is that their evidence supports the production of a consuming individual, but insufficiently demonstrates how the magazines are part of the ongoing production of binary genders (*nannü*).

This article earlier proposed that magazines could be understood as a site of Foucauldian discipline (Pylypa 1998: 27). However, one feminist critique of Foucault is that his sites of discipline are usually 'housed' within structures: schools, hospitals, prisons. Sandra Bartky, proposes expanding Foucault's concept of discipline to include consideration of a 'disciplinary regime of femininity' (1988). However Lois McNay finds Bartky's proposal to be too weighted towards a separate history of discipline of 'women' that ignores how men and women are caught up within changes occurring in society (1991: 133). This is where He-Yin Zhen's category of *nannü* could be helpful. For He-Yin Zhen, circulating powers continuously remake the binary genders as part consolidating control. It was the production of genders that concerned He-Yin, rather than a disciplinary regime that affected 'women' more so, even if the outcome of the production of (uneven) genders was the subjugation of women. The magazines could; therefore, be understood as a site of the disciplinary regime of *nannü*. They are overtly marketed towards the binary genders, with

particular paradigms of beauty and aspirations for life targeted towards either women or men. Yang Zhenzhong uses glossy magazines and female bodies as signifiers for capitalism, about which he is ambivalent. However, for Chen Lingyang the target of her anger – the magazines – is a disciplinary regime that seeks to (re)produce binary genders and regulate her own body along the lines of a globalized beauty paradigm in the interests of CCP-led economic growth.

The role of the gaze is a key point of difference in how Chen Lingyang and Yang Zhenzhong approach the subject of the female body, and therefore their representation of 'women'. The male gaze concept came from western feminist film studies, first introduced by Laura Mulvey. For Mulvey, cinema was reproduced to support the patriarchal world that engendered it. Therefore, woven into the discourse of the film industry was the structure of: 'women [...] as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectators within the auditorium' (Mulvey [1989] 2009: 838) and 'women as image [...] and [...] men as bearer of the look' (Mulvey [1989] 2009: 837). We can see this relationship of (female) object and (male) look reproduced in Yang Zhenzhong's work. Yang Zhenzhong, moreover, uses the gaze as a method of separation. The hole for the audience (men) to gaze through is a physical barrier emphasizing separation. There is also another gaze at play in *Summer*, 2009. The women in the fragmentary images – with faces unseen – gaze down at the magazines. Therefore, we can understand the controlling element of the gaze to be fluid: sometimes the gazer is the controlling power, other times the gaze can be drawn towards disciplinary regimes that control us. In *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002 the audience, those that come across Chen Lingyang's defaced glossy magazines, is not so gendered as in *Summer*,

2009. However, the audience does intrude into 'Fairy's' intimate space, and therefore potentially their intrusion is undesirable, intrusive. The audience that gaze upon Fairy in the video do not encounter a sexualized female body, erotically designed to correspond to the dominant discourse of compulsory heterosexuality. In exchange for their intrusion, they gaze upon powerful and polluting menstrual blood, and bodies that have been rendered corporeal, bloody, angry, mad. The resistance to regulatory discourses acting on the female body is affected through bodies that are gazed upon. As Foucault writes 'there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised' (Foucault in Gordon 1980: 142).

Foucault provides another category, which was underused by him in relation to gender(s) but which could help to conceptualize the importance of gendered subjectivity in these two works. Foucault talks about practices of speaking truth using the term *parrhesia* ([1983] 1999) which he borrows from Ancient Greece. It is not that Foucault is concerned with what the truth is, but that the speaker is communicating what they believe to be the truth, and speaks it publicly. It is a practice of speaking the truth, rather than the role of the interpreter to establish the truth, that is of interest. The criteria of *parrhesia* that Foucault sets down are that, 'the speaker makes it manifestly clear and obvious that what he says is his own opinion', says what they know to be the truth and 'that a speaker says something dangerous – different from what the majority believes' (Foucault [1983] 1999).

Chen Lingyang's video installation *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002 as well as the photographic series and artists' book *Twelve Flower Months*, 1999–2000 both focus on

representations of menstruating bodies. *Yue Jing Jing, 2002*, develops the theme of *Twelve Flower Months, 1999–2000*, a piece that the artist made explicitly clear was autobiographical. Chen Lingyang made it known that *Twelve Flower Months, 1999–2000* was about her own body, her own menstrual cycle. Moreover, using the paratexts in the artists' book, Chen Lingyang made it clear to the audience that the *Twelve Flower Months, 1999–2000* photographs were related to the topic of the fragmentation of female identity. It is the view of this article that *Yue Jing Jing, 2002* as a related piece is a further expression of Chen Lingyang's opinion, identity and experiences. As an artwork with a female perspective, the piece can only be understood as 'truth speak' when it is understood as being produced by a female artist. This is evidence for the importance of gendered subjectivity in the interpretation of the work. *Yue Jing Jing, 2002* furthermore fits in the category of *parrhesia* 'practices of speaking the truth', because it is speaking a different truth to the dominant discourse. Fairy's normative skirt-suit and the backdrop of urban Beijing in *Yue Jing Jing, 2002*, as well as mainstream glossy women's magazines, could be understood as representing the dominant discourse. The representation of menstruating female bodies is a departure from the dominant discourse (both art discourses and mainstream visual culture, such as the magazines) which would normally exclude menstruation from representation of bodies. It is highly unusual to represent menstruating bodies in mainstream visual culture, either in China or beyond. There was a period in western contemporary art where female artists such as Carolee Schneemann used their own bodies and menstruation as a departure from the male-dominated art discourse. But specifically the concern here is that *Yue Jing Jing, 2002* departs from the conventions of the localized discourse. The piece was 'dangerous' enough in China that it has not received much critical attention.

Yang Zhenzhong's representations of the consumed and consuming female body in *Summer, 2009* also correspond to the artist's point of view. In our interview he opined that young women are confident, fashionable consumers in real life (Yang Zhenzhong 2016) and this is what he represents in his artworks. However, his representations of the female body are not based on his experience, he represents a (male) imagination of the body and of 'women'. Yang Zhenzhong is not speaking the truth of his own corporeal experience, except the truth of his experience of gazing at female bodies, the truth of feeling critical towards those that gaze on bodies. The audience are aware that he is a male-identifying artist and from Shanghai. His truth is an idea of 'women' that he divines from being a male in that context. Moreover, perhaps his work does not fulfil the criteria of *parrhesia* because he reproduces a dominant discourse of the female consumer. *Parrhesia* can be a useful way of making a differentiation in how the work can be interpreted, based on what we are able to know of the artists' experiences. *Parrhesia* encourages attention towards the artists' practice as an act of truth speak, and attention towards how the point of view in the work corresponds to what we know of the artists' biography. Furthermore, it encourages attention towards whether the artist was brave in relating a point of view that departed from the dominant discourse, or in fact corresponds to it, potentially reproducing inaccurate stereotypes.

Yang Zhenzhong's representation of 'women' corresponds to the dominant misapprehension that (young) women are the principle consumers in globalized capitalism and China's urban centres. His representation of women in the piece *Summer, 2009*, takes advantage of this dominant discourse in order to relate his

mixed feelings towards capitalism in the PRC. The glossy magazines are used to portray consumed and consuming women. They are consuming ideas from the magazines that regulate their bodies and encourage them to be thin, fashionable, to spend money, to engage in shopping, buy short skirts, be hyper visual, gazed-upon, anonymous, voiceless bodies. Chen Lingyang is also critical of glossy magazines. The magazines epitomize the disciplinary controls that inscribe 'women' with particular attributes in urban twenty-first century China. They are, specifically, a disciplinary regime that seeks to produce genders and regulate Chen's own body. Chen identifies within this discipline the same attributes that Yang Zhenzhong observes, encouraging women to be thin, fashionable, beautiful, consumers. Yet Chen Lingyang critiques the representations in the magazines directly. Therefore the 'woman' protagonist in *Yue Jing Jing* 2002 is represented not as yielding to – or produced by – the disciplinary forces, but as resisting them. Fairy attacks the magazines with 'powerful and polluting menstrual blood', Chen inscribes them with the truth of her own corporeal experience.

Foucault and He-Yin have offered a framework in which to discuss the differences between these two works and to argue the importance of considering the gender identity and gendered subjectivity of the artists. This article argues that consideration of the artists' gender identities allows for new interpretations of art that take into account the different ways that discourses of 'women' regulate bodies. Therefore these interpretations take into account how the artists may be using artistic practice to respond to disciplinary discourses of gender, or, in fact reproducing them. This research depended on finding artworks that have been canonized, in this case specifically collected in high profile collections with rigorous collecting policies and

research strategies. What could not be found within the collection databases at this time were more complex gendered narratives relating the artists' own truth, such as by non-binary artists. These artworks may be found in spaces where artists self-publish, such as online spaces, or they may be being produced by artists of the Chinese diaspora. However, there was not scope in this article to find or discuss such pieces. This article contends that examples of contemporary Chinese art suggest 'women' in twenty-first century China live in negotiation with disciplinary regimes of globalized beauty and the consumed and consuming 'woman'. Moreover it argues that contemporary Chinese art can be considered a practice of speaking the truth of gendered corporeal and experiences, and the experience of negotiating with other visual discourses. Finally, it argues that the artists' response to the disciplinary regime of globalized beauty alters according to gendered subjectivity. Attention to the artists' gender identity and their practices of speaking their truth can offer different understandings of the artists' outputs and their representations of 'women'.

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Notes

¹ There are scholarly works investigating masculinity in contemporary Chinese art, but they are less common. Katie Hill discusses representations of masculinity in her book chapter 'Why the manic grin? Hysterical bodies: Contemporary art as (male) trauma in post-cultural revolution China' (2007).

² The *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002 installation was re-made at Taiking Space, Beijing, PRC and in the exhibition Difference: 貳 + ZWEI in 2003.

³ The title of *Yue Jing Jing*, 2002 in Chinese characters is 越晶晶.

⁴ Lovene identified a recurrent theme in Chinese cinema of the 'mad', troubled, female artist (2014).

⁵ This street is another major shopping destination in Shanghai, considered to be more upmarket and less aimed at tourists than Nanjing Road.