

## **MEDIA PORTRYAL OF WOMEN AND SOCIAL CHANGE: A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN OF CHINA**

In exploring the relationship between media and society, pertinent questions include whether media are molders or reflectors of social structures, and whether media are agents of social change or reinforcers of the status quo (Rosengren, 1981; Glasser, 1997).

The mirror approach employs the metaphor of the mirror to describe the role of media in society (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott, 1982). It assumes that the media provide a truthful and objective portrait of social reality. The null effects approach also suggests that media content reflects reality with little or no distortion, but sees this reality as the result of compromises between those who sell information to the media and those who buy it (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991).

Studies show that the “pictures” we get from the media differ from the world outside (e.g., Giltlin, 1980; Lang & Lang, 1971). Media content does not simply reflect the world, but represents it by highlighting certain elements over others (Devereaux, 2003). Traditional Marxists believe that the images and definitions provided by the media are “distorted or ‘false’ accounts of an objective reality” which are molded by the ruling political and economic groups (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott, 1982, p. 22).

Many feminist studies on media and society focus on the relationship between media portrayals of women and social reality. Much attention has been given to the gender-role messages in television programs (e.g., Ferri & Keller, 1986; Matelski, 1985), newspaper and magazine content (e.g., List, 1986; Silver, 1986), and advertising (e.g., Lysonski, 1985; Whipple & Courtney, 1980). These studies found

that women are often underrepresented or stereotypically portrayed as playing passive, submissive and dependent roles. The media are hypothesized to fulfill the structural needs of a patriarchal and capitalist society by reinforcing gender differences and inequalities (Van Zoonen, 1996).

The female images constructed by the media are not fixed entities and have changed over time in response to both the feminist movement and the broader socioeconomic changes (Rhode, 1995). One obvious improvement might be the shift from firmly locating women in the domestic sphere to one that emphasizes an independent career in the world of paid employment, but the gulf between the media representations and reality still exists (Devereaux, 2003).

Cross-cultural studies show that media portrayals of women are influenced by socio-cultural factors. For instance, Sengupta (1995) found that women in U.S. advertisements are more likely to appear in working roles as high-level business executives and be shown relaxing at home, while women in Japanese advertisements are more likely to be portrayed as entertainers and be shown cooking, cleaning and doing other household chores. Gallagher (1981) suggests that in countries such as China and the socialist states of Eastern Europe, the government-controlled media with a strong commitment to the emancipation of women seem to “offer exceptionally positive images of women and lay stress on women’s contribution to economic and social development” (Gallagher, 1981, pp. 70-71).

In general, past studies show that the media portrayal of women is related to the broad socio-economic, political and cultural context of a society. Images of women in the media are more likely to be the results of a social-construction of reality than the products of media reflection or distortion (Glasser, 1997). Any meaningful examination of media portrayals of women has to be based on specific social,

economic, political and cultural conditions of a given country within a particular period of time (Ceulemans & Fauconnier, 1979).

This study investigates the relationship between the media and society by examining the media portrayal of Chinese women from a historical perspective. The People's Republic of China established in 1949 provided an environment of heightened political consciousness and socialist revolutions (Croll, 1978). The end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 saw the country undergoing a major shift from class struggle to economic development (Lee, 1990; Glasser, 1997) and transforming its planned economy into a market economy (Zhao, 1998). Such changing tableaux make China an ideal case to study the relationship between the media content and social changes.

Tightly controlled by the communist party and state, the Chinese media are used as instruments to propagate the party line and state policies (Pan, 2000). The official press sees itself as the Party's "mouthpiece" and supports this "commandist system" (Lee, 1990; Pan, 2000). How would such a party-controlled press deal with the issue of women, who are considered "half of the sky" in China? Would the press's coverage of women reflect the social changes in China despite the persistent Party control? This study attempts to answer such questions through a content analysis of the covers of *Women of China*, China's official publication on women for foreign readers.

This study is unique in the sense that unlike in a capitalist society, media representations of women in China are taking place within the general framework of "commandist system" (Lee, 1990; Pan, 2000). Nevertheless, women's images in the media could serve as indicators of the social progress and offer clues to the complex relation between politics, market and culture in China (Johansson, 2001).

## **WOMEN'S ROLE AND STATUS IN CHINA**

The Chinese women had a long history of prolonged oppression, degradation and abasement in feudalist China. Discrimination against women was institutionalized within all the structures of society: family, economy, education, culture and the political system (Pearson, 1995).

A traditional Chinese woman was shackled with feudal ethics known as “the three obediences and the four virtues”. The “three obediences” refer to obedience to her father and brother before marriage, to her husband after marriage, and to her sons if she was windowed. The “four virtues” are fidelity, physical charm, good manners and efficiency in needle work (Su, 2003). Therefore, to be a filial woman, a dutiful wife and a good mother became a woman’s highest life value and standard of moral excellence (Lin, 2000). In a rigidly hierarchical family system, women had no right to determine their marriage, which was arranged by parents and matchmakers mostly on a monetary basis. The young wife was valued principally for her potential to reproduce male descendants for her husband’s agnatic line (Su, 1996).

It was not until the founding of the People’s Republic of China by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949 that thousands of years of feudal oppression and enslavement of women finally ended. Based on the Marxist maxim that the liberation of women follows as a natural consequence of the liberation of all classes, the new government policy on gender relations was egalitarianism (Edwards, 2002). Women were hailed as “half the sky” (Glasser, 1997) and gender equality was provided in the constitution promulgated in 1950. In the same year, the government implemented the Marriage Law, which was praised as “the first indispensable step toward dismantling the system of oppressive patriarchal authority” (Evans, 1995, p. 361).

The land reform in 1950 gave women equal shares of land, thus improving women’s economic position. The electoral Law of 1953 stipulated that women enjoy

the same electoral rights as men. All these policies encouraged women to participate in the economic and social reconstructions of China. The number of women employed in 1958 soared to seven million, a ten-fold increase over 1949 (Tsai, 1960). Women were encouraged to perform traditionally male-dominated occupations and were paid as equals to men. The Cultural Revolution further advanced women's social status as more and more female party officials and exemplary laborers were promoted as role models.

Since China embarked on its road of economic reforms in the late 1970s, the corresponding changes in the ideological, political and social structures of the society have exerted great influence on the lives of Chinese women. With the abolishment of the government-arranged employment system, women began to have more freedom to pursue their career. The share of Chinese women's earnings in total family income rose from 20% in the 1950s to 40% in the mid-1990s (Information Office, 1994). Women's financial independence assured them of a greater say in the family.

Another obvious improvement is women's education. The illiteracy rate of Chinese women dropped from 90% in 1949 to 32% in the early 1990s, with attendance rate for girls in elementary schools rose from 20% to 96.2% during the same period (Information Office, 1994).

However, the state's retreat from its paternalistic role as the liberator and protector of women and the growth of market forces have also put women at a relatively disadvantaged position in the reform era (Edwards, 2002). Without the socialist job-protection, women, who were particularly vulnerable to sackings, accounted for 70 per cent of the urban jobless (Keith, 1997). One proposal to solve China's growing unemployment problem involved women's returning home to become housewives (Edwards, 2002). In addition, the reform has strengthened and

reconstructed the sexual division of labor, keeping women concentrating on the labor intensive and low-paid work (Honig & Hershatter, 1988). A 1999 study showed that Chinese women earned 50% of the male wages in 1991, and 42% in 1994 (Maurer-Fazio, Rawski & Zhang, 1999, P. 67).

The reform has also considerably reduced the number and proportion of women serving in senior positions of political leadership. In 1973, 10.3% of the members in the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party were women; it dropped to 5.2% in 1982; and in 1992 it had risen slightly to 6.4% (Rosen, 1995, pp. 318-319).

Women still have to face the task of balancing the demands of work and family. They carry the double burden undertaking between 2 and 3 hours more housework each day than men (ACWF, 1991). China's one-child family policy has reduced the annual birth rate and improved maternity and childcare services, but also led to female infanticide and abortion of female fetuses as a result of the persistence of feudal ideas (Richard, 1996). Meanwhile, domestic violence against women remains a problem (Su, 2003).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Media are considered social systems within a specific system -- the set of social and cultural conditions that make up the society (Defleur, 1970). As such, the content of the media has to be understood within the framework of the overall social, political, economic and cultural conditions that are prevailing in a society (Hao & Chen, 1998).

The political economy approach based on the traditional Marxism focuses more on economic structure than on ideological content of the media. According to the Marxist base/superstructure metaphor, ideology is regarded as part of the superstructure, determined by the economic base (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). As a

result, the role of media is to disseminate and legitimate ruling ideology through the production of false consciousness, in the interest of the class which owns and controls the media (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott, 1982, p. 62).

The media have long been blamed by feminists as main instruments transmitting stereotypical, patriarchal and hegemonic values about women. Van Zoonen (1994) summarizes this “transmission model” as follows: “media reflect society’s dominant social values and symbolically denigrate women, either by not showing them at all, or by depicting them in stereotypical roles” (p. 17). Sexist images reproduced by the media make hierarchical and distorted sex-role stereotypes appear “non-ideological”, “natural” and “normal” (Carter & Steiner, 2003).

Studies on gender and media content can be traced back to the early 1960s (Carter & Steiner, 2003). Betty Friedan (1963), the first feminist who examined the content of popular women's magazines, argued that the articles, fiction and advertising in the women’s magazines created an image of women fulfilled and happy in their roles as housewives and mothers.

Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) examined female stereotyping in U.S. magazine advertisements and found that women were portrayed as sex objects, only having a place in their homes, incapable of making important decisions, and fully dependent on men. Dominick and Rauch (1972) contrasted men’s and women’s portrayal in U.S. prime-time television commercials and concluded that 56% of women were represented in domestic roles as housewife/mother and only 14 per cent of men were portrayed as husband/father. Women had fewer occupations than men and rarely held high-status jobs.

Franzwa (1974) studied fictions in U.S. women magazines and found that women were generally portrayed as singles looking for a husband, housewife-mother, spinster,

and widowed or divorced. Few married women were presented as working outside the home, and 51 percent of those who worked had low-status.

Ferrante, Haynes and Kingsley (1988) replicated Dominick and Rauch's (1972) classical study and found that women were shown in a wider range of occupations and appeared more frequently in settings outside home than in 1972. They concluded that the advertisers had come to realize the altered roles of women and take this into account in fashioning their commercials to appeal to ever changing audiences.

Low and Sherrad (1999) examined the photographs of women in U.S. college textbooks and found that in the 1970s, photographs were devoted primarily to traditional images of women. Influenced by the wave of feminism, the 1990s saw a higher percentage of photographs with feminist message. However, photographs with traditional gender role messages still dominated. In a study of the advertisements in *Ms.* Magazine over a period of 15 years, Ferguson, Kreshel and Tinkham (1990) found that the portrayal of women as subordinate to men or merely decorative objects had decreased over time, but their portrayal as alluring sex objects had increased.

Sex-role stereotyping has been observed in other countries as well. Iysoniki (1985) examined 5000 British magazine advertisements for the 1974-1975 and 1979-1980 periods and found that the dependency and neutral portrayals declined but women were seldom depicted as career-oriented and in non-traditional activities. In a follow-up study, Michell and Taylor (1989) used the same British magazines and found that there appeared to be two polarizing trends: one towards a more traditional, home-related, dependent images; the other towards a non-traditional, career-oriented, female authority portrayal.

In Asia, Hamdan (1987) conducted a content analysis of advertisements in four



Malaysia magazines and found that women were frequently portrayed in traditional roles and often exploited for “sex appeal”.

Although the stereotyped portrayal of women in mass media has become a global phenomenon, a few comparative studies show that there are some differences in media portrayals of women due to social-cultural influences. Gilly (1988) examined the gender role portrayals in television commercials from Australia, Mexico and the United State, and found that women were more likely to be portrayed in a home setting or outdoors and men were more likely to be shown in occupational settings in commercials from the United States. Australian commercials exhibited the least difference between men and women of the three countries. Commercials from Mexico presented less sex role stereotyping than the United States. Wiles and Tjernlund (1991) compared Swedish and US magazine advertisements and found that men were more often portrayed in working roles than women in U.S. advertisements, while both men and women were depicted more often in professional roles in Swedish advertisements.

Sengupta (1992) compared advertisements from *Newsweek* and *Asiaweek* and concluded that the majority of women were shown in nonworking roles in both Asia and U.S. advertisements. However, Asia advertisements were more likely to portray women in middle and low-income jobs and in decorative roles in idle situations. In a later study, Sengupta (1995) examined role portrayals of women in U.S. and Japanese advertising and found that in television commercials of both countries, men were more likely to appear in working roles as high-level business executives and as blue-collar workers; while in non-working roles, more women than men were shown in decorative roles.

As a result of China’s drastic social changes, the hegemonic definition of Chinese women in the media has continuously been “renewed, recreated, defended and

modified” (William, 1977, pp. 112-113). McDougall (1984) noted that workers, peasants, soldiers, and forceful female characters played a central and heroic position in the new literature and art that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. Eber (1976) found that the women of New China were portrayed as assured and outspoken, strong and independent to compete with men after the land reform and the promulgation of the Marriage Law in 1950. Glasser’s (1997) study of magazine fictions showed that during the 1961-1966 period, a majority of lead female characters were shown in the workplace, representing an extraordinary selfless commitment to the collective or the public. With the economic reforms started in the late 1970s, the characters’ background gradually shifted from the rural to urban area, representing the trend of urbanization and modernization.

Liu (1993) found that the works of female writers in the second half of the 1980s challenged the suppression of gender difference in state and party discourse, focusing on the conflict between family and self-fulfillment, and between love and independence, which represented a form of engagement for the women critics to contest the claims of the state.

The decline of state control and the growth of consumerism have contributed to the recreation and commercialization of “femininity” (Hooper, 1998). Since the early 1980s, female models have been widely used as magazine cover girls. A 1982 survey showed that over 25 per cent of popular magazines had ‘pin-up girls’ on their covers (Summary of World Broadcast, 1982). The most blatant and visible use of women as sex objects has been for the lucrative annual calendar market (Hooper, 1998).

Johansson (2001) noted that images used for covers changed from the revolutionary representations of the Mao era to enticing and beautiful young women. Many of the cover girls were portrayed in new desirable careers such as Air China

stewardesses and office secretaries, or shown in settings of leisure and entertainment. He argued that the changing images of women underwrite that the revolutionary discourse is being challenged by a capitalist commercial culture. In a comparative study of Chinese and U.S. television commercials, Cheng (1997) found significant differences in the images of female models. Women in Chinese commercials were found to wear “demure” dress and stay in groups more often than their counterparts in U.S. commercials.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To understand the impact of social changes on the Chinese media’s presentation of women, this study chose to examine *Women of China*, a magazine published by the All-China Women Federation (ACWF). Being the only women magazine published in English, *Women of China* serves as China’s official tool to publicize the achievements of Chinese women and promote the gender ideology of the Communist Party to the world. Its mission is to “share with the world the ‘realities’ of Chinese women’s lives” and “serve as a bridge between Chinese women and the world” (Women of China, 2004).

*Women of China* began its trial run in 1954 and was officially launched as a quarterly two years later. It was suspended during the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution and became a monthly after its resumption in March 1979. It is now distributed in more than 130 countries and regions with a circulation of 150,000 copies per month (Yun, personal communication, 2004).

We chose to analyze the front cover of the magazine because the front cover of a magazine is “the first thing readers see, and the place where the editors declare their intentions” (McDonnell, 2003). According to former editor-in-chief Liu Zhonglu

(personal communication, 2004), the cover pictures of *Women of China* are consistent with the style and content of the magazine and represent “the ‘typical’ Chinese women in different periods”.

The overall time span of the selected magazine runs from 1956 to 2003, except for the 1967-1978 period when the magazine was suspended. Data are compared over three time periods: 1956-1966, 1979-1992, and 1993-2003. The first period marks the initial years of the magazine until the start of the Cultural Revolution. The second period marks China’s initial efforts to turn its state planned economy into a market economy. The third period marks the stage when China has embraced the market economy and integrated itself into the global economy and culture. In total, the covers of 352 issues were examined in this study, 54 issues for the 1956-1966 period, 166 for the 1979-1992 period and 132 for the 1993-2003 period.

The unit of analysis was the cover picture of each issue. Since this study focuses on the presentation of women, a few pictures featuring male characters and children were excluded from the final analysis. In addition to variables measuring the technical aspects of the pictures, we measured the characters’ nationality and ethnicity, age category, occupation, appearance, make-up and dress. We also coded where the picture was taken and how the characters looked at the camera. More subjective measurements include the themes of the cover stories and cultural values reflected by the covers. The coders used captions and inside stories about the covers to help determine the categories.

The intercoder reliability test using Krippendorff’s alpha yielded acceptable results. The alpha scores range from low 0.80s for the more subjective variables to mid to high 0.90s for the more technical ones, well above the minimum intercoder reliability of 0.75 suggested by Wimmer and Dominick (2003).

In addition to the content analysis, the first author also spent a week in the editorial office of *Women of China* in Beijing, observing their working process and interviewing their former and current editors, photographers and writers.

## FINDINGS

The 1955-1966 period may be called an era of revolution, during which the dominant images of Chinese women shown by the cover of *Women of China* were plain-looking, casually-dressed working class heroines engaged in agricultural and industrial production (20% and 16.7% respectively). Women were portrayed as equals to men by participating in labor, reflecting the government effort to promote an awareness of the potential economic and social contributions of women (Croll, 1978). The figures below are typical pictures appearing on the covers of *Women of China* at the time.



Figure 1: Cover of Apr-May 1960 Issue



Figure 2: Cover of May 1975 Issue

In this period, more than half of the characters (59.1%) were shown in a rural setting. Many cover pictures showed female farmers working in the people's communes, reflecting the government's emphasis on the importance of a strong agricultural base in China's socialist construction.

Apart from being an important force in national economic construction, women

were also portrayed to play a particularly significant role in building socialist spiritual civilization. A large number of artists were shown in the covers, accounting for 27.8% of the total. Some were traditional opera singers and folk dancers; and others were heroines in films depicting the heroic deeds of the Chinese Communist Party, echoing the importance of art as an ideological tool during the Mao era (Glasser, 1997).

In this period, women were also highly visible as administrators/leaders, who appeared 11.1% of the covers. Their participation in politics was promoted as a great improvement of women's social and political status in China. On the other hand, women were seldom portrayed as housewives, who were called upon by the Communist Party to work outside their home.

On the whole, the covers appearing in this period demonstrated that the Chinese women were liberated from the feudal oppression and enslavement to become masters of the new society. Women were largely portrayed as builders in the social and economic reconstructions of the Chinese society.

In the 1979-1992 period, more than half of the characters (59.6%) were shown in an urban setting. The most important theme in the messages conveyed by the covers was also the career development of women. The images of blue-collar workers, farmers, artists and political figures decreased rapidly. Instead, a large number of women were shown as professionals, who increased from 5.6% to 25.7%. More doctors, writers, architectures, sculptresses and designers were featured. For example, Figure 3 shows a fashion designer, looking directly into the camera with much confidence. Women were also shown as better educated and more knowledgeable. Figure 4 featured girl students who entered the university by doing well in the nationwide college entrance examination.



Figure 3: Cover of the Feb 1990 Issue



Figure 4: Cover of July 1980 Issue

Compared with the previous emphasis on women's participation in the workforce, covers featuring women's family life increased from 1.9% in the first period to 11.1% in this period. More Images of married women enjoying family life (see Figure 5 for example) appeared to reflect women's emotional gratification in familial relationships.



This represented a contrast to the Cultural Revolution period, in which the Chinese people, especially women, were called on to sacrifice their home and family for the interests of the collective and state.

In the 1993-2003 period, more than 80 percent of the characters were shown in urban settings, reflecting the urban domination in the market economy. Despite the fact that farmers still constitute the bulk of the Chinese female population, images of farmers almost disappeared entirely from the covers after 1992. The proportion of blue-collar workers also decreased from 7.3% to 1.0%. In the mean time, women began to be shown as business persons, who had never appeared in the first period. For example, the cover of the January 1998 issue (Figure 6) depicted a female border trader and her Russian partner.



Figure 6: Cover of Jan 1998 Issue

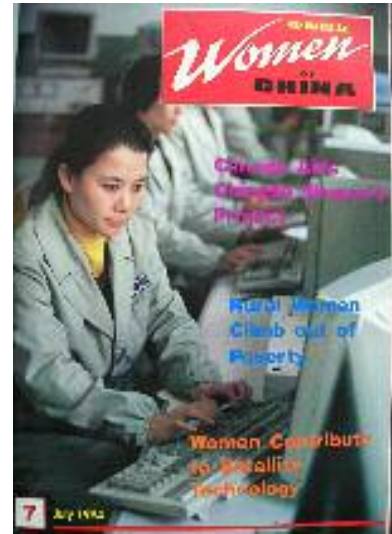


Figure 7: Cover of July 1994 Issue

In this period, women were most often featured as professionals (See figure 7 for example). The second largest group of people featured by the covers was artists, whose portrayals increased from 10.1% to 21.2%. The images of socialist art workers in the first period gave way to popular film stars, singers and dancers in the third period, who are highly visible not only because of their professional success, but also because of their youth and beauty. In addition, the representations of women administrators and leaders increased rapidly from 6.4% to 13.5%, even though the reform has considerably reduced the number and proportion of women serving in senior positions of political leadership (Goodman, 2002).

Comparison of the three periods yielded some significant differences. First, differences were found in terms of the cover category. There was not much difference between the first two periods in terms of whether the cover featured individual persons or a topic. In the third period, however, covers featuring individual persons increased dramatically, accounting for about four fifths of the covers.

In terms of the appearance of the characters that appeared on the covers, the last decade saw more good looking women being featured. More of them also wore make-up and looked at the camera rather than away from the camera.



While most of the cover pictures showed rural background in the first period, urban settings dominate the background of cover pictures of the second and third periods. Pictures featuring rural areas dropped from 59 percent in the first period to 40 percent in the second period and then to 18 percent in the third period. In the mean time, pictures with urban background jumped from 41 percent in the first period to 60 and 82 percent in the second and third periods. Such changes certainly do not reflect China's reality as the rural population still account for two thirds of China's total population despite the speedy process of urbanization. Please see Table 1 for details.

Table 1 about here.

Changes in the rural-urban representation correspond to changes in the occupation of the characters. Farmers, who made up 20 percent of the cover characters in the 1956-1966 period, dropped to 14 percent in the second period and 1 percent in the third period. Their counterparts in the cities, the blue-collar workers, shared similar fate, dropping from 17 percent in the first period to 7 and then 1 percent in the second and third periods. In the mean time, as more Chinese women had received higher education since 1949, more and more women were featured as professionals in the second and third periods. In addition, more women have been featured as managers and business owners. While the profiling of women as professionals, managers and business owners more or less reflects the real occupational changes, the decreases in featuring women as blue-collar workers and farmers are more likely to reflect a drop in their social status and the importance the public and the editorial staff of *Women of China* attach to them. Table 2 presents the details.

Table 2 about here.

Significant changes were found in how the women characters dress themselves as the covers of *Women of China* seem to have "brightened up". Fashion clothes worn

by the characters increased from zero to 5.2%; the light/bright dresses rose from 55.8% to 73.9%; and dresses with multiple colors also increased from 11.6% to 21.3%. With the relaxation of state controls, descriptions of fashions and advices on beatification could also be found in *Women of China*. Please see Table 3 for details.

Table 3 about here.

Overall, the most important theme shown by the cover pictures is women's career development, which accounted for half the pictures. The second most popular theme is about Chinese traditions and culture. The two themes remained the dominant themes during the three periods, reflecting some consistency in the magazine's editorial policy. Self-development as well as fashion and beauty, which were not covered at all during the first period, got into the cover pictures since the start of China's reforms. In the mean time, the coverage of children and youth as a theme steadily dropped over the years. Please see Table 4 for details.

Table 4 about here.

As for various values reflected by the cover pictures, there have been fewer pictures emphasizing collectivism, an important value upheld by the Communist Party. In the mean time, there has been a sharp increase in cover pictures that emphasize knowledge, social status, gender equality and women's success in the second and/or third period. Please see Table 5 for details.

Table 5 about here.

No significant differences were found among the three different periods in terms of the activity area of the main characters, who were seldom shown in a home setting, which accounted for only 8.0% of the covers. Most of the pictures were taken in a public place or workplace, which accounted for 54.0% and 38.0% of the covers respectively. The proportion of workplace gradually increased from the initial 28.6% to

39.6% and then to 40.9% during the three periods.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the image of Chinese women presented by the covers of *Women of China* has not remained the same despite the persistent controls exercised by the Chinese Communist Party over the country's media. The cover pictures have clearly been influenced by and reflected general social changes in China during the past few decades.

Several trends could be identified. First, there was a shift from the rural to urban location of the characters, as the cities began to play a more important role in China's economic and political life. Secondly, there was a move from the collective to the individual level of presentation of the characters as the market economy became less dependent on collective efforts and the state relaxed its controls over the Chinese people's everyday life. And thirdly, there was shift from de-feminization to re-feminization as China progressed from its revolution era to the market economy era.

It has been argued that the Chinese Communist Party's fundamental concept of political communication and the propagandist role of media have remained the same despite some changes in media performance and production during the economic reforms (Zhao, 1998). *Women of China*, as a state-controlled publication for foreign publicity, can be no exception. This is clearly understood by the editorial staff of the magazine, who told us about this during our interviews.

As an official magazine for foreign publicity, *Women of China* is responsible for promoting the gender ideology of egalitarianism and publicizing the achievements of Chinese women to legitimize the communist system. In general, *Women of China* presents "sanitized" images of Chinese women to promote the Communist Party's

gender policies and its hegemonic definitions of women in different periods of the country's political and economic development. Given the Party's continuing commitment to gender equality and its argument that the basic road to equality is through participation in the workforce (Hooper, 1998, p.183), the covers of *Women of China* have always emphasized the working image of Chinese women. The values of "status", "equality", and "success" have been continuously emphasized to demonstrate the superiority of the socialist system.

However, the Party ideology alone does not determine the content of *Women of China*, which is also conditioned by changes in the political, economic and social structures of the Chinese society. A magazine published in China, even a magazine meant for foreign publicity, needs to reflect social reality in its content. As long as the society keeps changing itself, the content of a publication also metamorphoses. In this aspect, the Party-controlled *Women of China* is no different from women magazines in a libertarian society. The party ideology is no doubt followed in the editorial decisions of *Women of China*, but the party ideology is expected to be carried out through the creative presentation of the reality about Chinese women, thus leaving much room for the editorial staff to construct the modern image of Chinese women.

It should be also noted that the reflection of social reality does not mean an exact copy of reality. The news media constantly construct and reconstruct social reality (Tuchman, 1978) to suit their editorial positions or the taste of their readers. As a result, the image of Chinese women shown by the covers of *Women of China* is by no means an exact copy of Chinese women in real life. The photographers and editors choose to highlight and overlook certain sectors and certain aspects of the Chinese women from time to time in order to present what the Party and/or the editorial staff of the magazine see as reality about Chinese women or what the editorial staff believe

their foreign readers want to see in Chinese women.

In sum, the image of Chinese women presented by the covers of *Women of China* was to a large extent influenced by the socio-economic and political-ideological changes in China. Rather than a literal portrayal of the “reality”, it is a symbolic representation of Chinese women created through the interaction of party ideology, editorial policy and readers’ taste with the changing reality of women’s life and work in China. The interlocking of party control and societal influences determines the image of Chinese women shown by *Women of China*.

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Table 1. Significant Differences among Three Periods

<b>Cover Category</b>	1956-1966	1979-1992	1993-2003	Total
Personal cover	29 (53.7%)	70 (42.2%)	105 (79.5%)	204 (58.0%)
Topical cover	25 (46.3%)	96 (57.8%)	27 (20.5%)	148 (42.0%)
Total	54 (100%)	166 (100%)	132 (100%)	352 (100%)
$\chi^2=42.629$ , df=2, p=.000				
<b>Appearance</b>	1956-1966	1979-1992	1993-2003	Total
Plain-looking	36 (81.8%)	120 (87.0%)	85 (69.7%)	241 (79.3%)
Good-looking	8 (18.2%)	18 (13.0%)	37 (30.3%)	63 (20.7%)
Total	44 (100%)	138 (100%)	122 (100%)	304(100%)
$\chi^2=11.977$ , df=2, p=.003				
<b>Make-Up</b>	1956-1966	1979-1992	1993-2003	Total
Not at all	24 (60.0%)	114 (83.8%)	51 (41.5%)	189 (63.2%)
Some	7 (17.5%)	9 (6.6%)	63 (51.2%)	79 (26.4%)
Much	9 (22.5%)	13 (9.6%)	9 (7.3%)	31 (10.4%)
Total	40 (100%)	136 (100%)	123 (100%)	299 (100%)
$\chi^2=75.298$ , df=4, p=.000				
<b>Gaze</b>	1956-1966	1979-1992	1993-2003	Total
Looking at the camera	7 (16.7%)	24 (17.1%)	51 (40.8%)	82 (26.7%)
Looking away	35 (83.3%)	116 (82.9%)	74 (59.2%)	225 (73.3%)
Total	42 (100%)	140 (100%)	125 (100%)	307 (100%)
$\chi^2=21.387$ , df=2, p=.000				
<b>Location</b>	1956-1966	1979-1992	1993-2003	Total
Rural area	13 (59.1%)	38(40.4%)	11 (17.7%)	62 (34.8%)
Urban area	9 (40.9%)	56 (59.6%)	51 (82.3%)	116 (65.2%)
Total	22 (100%)	94 (100%)	62 (100%)	178 (100%)
$\chi^2=14.977$ , df=2, p=.001				

Table 2. Major Occupation Changes

	1956-1966	1979-1992	1993-2003	Total
<i>Manager</i>	0 (.0%)	2 (1.8%)	4 (3.8%)	6 (2.4%)
<i>Business Person</i>	0 (.0%)	1 (.9%)	10 (9.6%)	11 (4.4%)
<i>Professional</i>	2 (5.6%)	28 (25.7%)	28 (26.9%)	58 (23.3%)
<i>Blue-collar worker</i>	6 (16.7%)	8 (7.3%)	1 (1.0%)	15 (6.0%)
<i>Farmer</i>	7 (19.4%)	15 (13.8%)	1 (1.0%)	23 (9.2%)

Table 3. Changes in Dresses

<b>Type of Dresses</b>	1956-1966	1979-1992	1993-2003	Total
Traditional dress	8 (18.6%)	36 (26.7%)	22 (18.2%)	66 (22.1%)
Casual dress	19 (44.2%)	44 (32.6%)	30 (24.8%)	93 (31.1%)
Fashion clothes	0(.0%)	7 (5.2%)	34 (28.1%)	41 (13.7%)
Suit	2(4.7%)	10 (7.4%)	14 (11.6%)	26 (8.7%)
Sports wear	3 (7.0%)	12 (8.9%)	9 (7.4%)	24 (8.0%)
Stage wear	6 (14.0%)	8 (5.9%)	3 (2.5%)	17 (5.7%)
Uniform	5(11.6%)	18 (13.3%)	9 (7.4%)	32 (10.7%)
Total	43 (100%)	135 (100%)	121 (100%)	299 (100%)
$\chi^2=49.622$ , df=12, p=.000				
<b>Dress Color</b>	1956-1966	1979-1992	1993-2003	Total
Dark	19 (44.2%)	36 (26.1%)	31 (25.2%)	86 (28.3%)
Light\bright	24 (55.8%)	102 (73.9%)	92 (74.8%)	218 (71.7%)
Total	43 (100%)	138 (100%)	123 (100%)	304 (100%)
$\chi^2=6.264$ , df=2, p=.044				
<b>Color Type</b>	1956-1966	1979-1992	1993-2003	Total
Single	23 (53.5%)	81 (59.6%)	64 (52.0%)	168 (55.6%)
Double	15 (34.9%)	26 (19.1%)	20 (16.3%)	61 (20.2%)
Multiple	5 (11.6%)	29 (21.3%)	39 (31.7%)	73 (24.2%)
Total	43 (100%)	136 (100%)	123 (100%)	302 (100%)
$\chi^2=12.458$ , df=4, p=.014				

**Table 4 Themes Covered over Three Periods**

	1956-1966	1979-1992	1993-2003	Total
<i>International/national events</i>	2 (3.8%)	7 (4.5%)	10 (7.6%)	19 (5.6%)
<i>Tradition and culture</i>	9 (17.0%)	30 (19.4%)	15 (11.4%)	54 (15.9%)
<i>Career development</i>	22 (41.5%)	60 (38.7%)	79 (59.8%)	161 (47.4%)
<i>Self-development</i>	0 (.0%)	11 (7.1%)	10 (7.6%)	21 (6.2%)
<i>Fashion and beauty</i>	0 (.0%)	3 (1.9%)	5 (3.8%)	8 (2.4%)
<i>Family life</i>	1(1.9%)	17 (11.0%)	4 (3.0%)	22 (6.5%)
<i>Children and youth</i>	10 (18.9%)	11 (7.1%)	3 (2.3%)	24 (7.1%)
<i>Women's problem</i>	0(.0%)	0(.0%)	2(1.5%)	2(.6%)
<i>Other</i>	9(17.0%)	16(10.3%)	4(3.0%)	29(8.5%)
<i>Total</i>	53 (100%)	155 (100%)	132 (100%)	340 (100%)

**Table 5 Cultural Values Manifested**

	1956-1966 (n=54) (%)	1979-1992 (n=166) (%)	1993-2003 (n=132) (%)	X <sup>2</sup> values (df=2)
<i>Collectivism</i>	9.3	2.4	1.5	8.12 <sup>*</sup>
<i>Patriotism</i>	5.6	1.8	2.3	2.36
<i>Peace</i>	1.9	0.6	0.8	0.78
<i>Tradition</i>	22.2	26.5	17.4	3.49
<i>Knowledge</i>	5.6	24.1	25.8	10.06 <sup>**</sup>
<i>Status</i>	25.9	21.1	49.2	27.84 <sup>***</sup>
<i>Equality</i>	24.1	37.3	56.8	20.36 <sup>***</sup>
<i>Success</i>	27.8	25.9	51.5	22.77 <sup>***</sup>
<i>Family</i>	1.9	13.9	3.0	15.01 <sup>***</sup>
<i>Beauty</i>	0.0	1.8	2.3	1.201
<i>Youth</i>	22.2	15.1	4.5	13.54 <sup>***</sup>
<i>Respect for the elder</i>	0.0	1.2	0.8	0.72

Note: <sup>\*</sup> p<0.05, <sup>\*\*</sup> p<0.01, <sup>\*\*\*</sup> p<0.001