

Impact of Beauty Fashion on Contemporary Chinese Youth

LI Changsong^{[a],*}

^[a]Lecturer, School of Politics and Public Management, Southwest University, China.

Research Field: Youth education theory and practice.

*Corresponding author.

Supported by the Western Project of National Found of Social Science—Research on basic experience of Chinese Communist Party in terms of the diversified social thoughts since the reform and opening up (No. 12XKS034).

Received 5 July 2013; accepted 21 October 2013

Abstract

Beauty Fashion is the product as well as the reflection of the new age. Its emergence and prosperity, on the one hand, cater to the contemporary Chinese Youth's psychological seeking for beauty characterized by seeking for novelty, change and fashion; on the other hand, they have exerted immense impact on the young's value orientation, aesthetic sentiment, consumer attitude, character and lifestyle due to their own limitations and their incomplete understanding of beauty and fashion.

Key words: Beauty fashion; Youth; Impact

LI Changsong (2013). Impact of Beauty Fashion on Contemporary Chinese Youth. *Canadian Social Science*, 9(6), 15-20. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/j.css.1923669720130906.2988>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.css.1923669720130906.2988>.

INTRODUCTION

Beauty Fashion is a kind of group preference and trend revealed in the process in which people are seeking for beauty under the contemporary conditions with a similar social psychology and in a similar behavioral way. It is the product and reflection of contemporary socio-political, economic and cultural development, and also enjoys such features as novelty, diversity and time variability.

Youth, as a special group, has a lot of say in beauty seeking. The vast majority of them are passionate about innovative ideas and changes so that what is popular today may turn out to be obsolete next day. Flourishing under the contemporary conditions, Beauty Fashion not only caters to Chinese youth's unique psychology for beauty and helps them realize the beauty-seeking dreams, but also exerts inconsiderable impact on them in terms of ideological and conceptual change and the transformation of way of life. To a large degree, they are the largest group affected by Fashion Beauty.

1. IMPACT OF FASHION BEAUTY ON CONTEMPORARY YOUTH VALUE ORIENTATION

Youth value orientation refers to their tendentious attitudes towards choices and pursuits. As a product of the current era of social development, Beauty Fashion has broadened the spiritual horizons of contemporary youth, enriched their spiritual life, and played a positive role in cultivating their ideas and concepts, which thus has made inconsiderable influence on their life value orientation.

1.1 Enhancing the Individuality of Value Pursuit

The emergence of Beauty Fashion has impressed upon contemporary Chinese youth's pursuit of value, so that the values of contemporary Chinese youth are gradually shifted to what are admired in the new era. The youth's concerns about entertainment are highly concentrated on "serving their own interests". The individualized values of advocating freedom, pursuing self-development, developing individuality, and creating new things gradually take root in the minds of contemporary Chinese youth. In contrast, it appears that traditional values are fading away. The values held by contemporary youth are different from those of the previous generation

and are rarely affected by the traditional factors. In this sense, the young people have their own beauty preferences, aesthetic sentiment and consumer attitude. Besides, they have their personality traits and lifestyles. Individual freedom and self-development have become their life-pursuing goals. Meanwhile, Beauty Fashion has created favorable conditions for youth's development of personality in its unique way, which facilitates the production of individualized values such as desire for freedom, self-expression, and unwillingness to be restricted. Under the influence of Beauty Fashion, contemporary Chinese youth's passion and pursuit of cosmetology way and cosmetic products which are revealing, pioneering, and sensational have given full expression of their individualized value pursuit.

1.2 Vulgarize the Values of Some Young People

Youth is a special life stage in which people chase popularity and fashion, care about their appearance, have a strong curiosity, and are keen to track and capture the subtle changes in the forefront of beauty. Moreover, they are passionate in exchanging information of various beauty products and information on beauty. They often linger in diversified beauty places and institutions, and tend to take an initiative boldly. All these characteristics mentioned above are in line with the special development stage of life. However, some people are too indulged in it, pursuing individuality and gaudy and paying attention to dress-up, which in the long run too would have negative impact on choosing their mainstream life values, resulting in fading political ideals and weakening civic awareness. What is more, their Lei Feng spirit and patriotism would be given little attention so that the lofty ideals to serve the motherland would almost go bankrupt. In addition, the young are deficient in rational judgment in front of showy and fickle Beauty Fashion phenomena so that they are more likely to make value judgments based on some specific phenomena, which makes the mediocre things admired as trendy whereas profound and noble things considered outdated.

Beauty Fashion, to some degree, gives rise to the phenomenon of vulgarization. And the youth's irrational pursuit of weirdness and exaggeration breeds their spiritual needs for superficial and vulgar things. All these have hindered the improvement of values, making the values of some young people show the characteristics of vulgarization.

2. IMPACT OF BEAUTY FASHION ON CONTEMPORARY YOUTH AESTHETIC SENTIMENT

The popularity of contemporary Beauty Fashion has had a profound impact on the aesthetic sentiment of contemporary Chinese youth. They are no longer proud

of mimicking the mainstream, and regard it as the overwhelming beauty; instead, they are willing to go along with it, seek novelty, difference, and exoticness to satisfy their own desires for beauty, and establish and express themselves through the pursuit and display of "personal charm" and "unique beauty".

2.1 Seeking Novelty

Contemporary youth's pursuit of novelty in aesthetic sentiment is essentially an indirect expression of their expectations for self-independence and desires for self-identity. Contemporary youth always want to get rid of the old way of life, and create a new lifestyle. They are chasing fashion in order to keep up the pace without falling behind. So it often goes that before mastering a new thing, they would learn another brand-new one so as to meet their desires for novelty by constantly changing. The kind of desires for novelty has made their own beauty and dress-up also show novel characteristics. The advent of new beauty products and technologies will soon be the concern of young people, and the more novel beauty products are, the more likely they are to be chased by young people and thus become their "new favorites".

2.2 Valuing Timeliness

Time variability is an important feature of Beauty Fashion, under the impact of which the aesthetic sentiment of contemporary Chinese youth appears the characteristic of timeliness. We can find its expression in their pursuit of products and way of Beauty Fashion: the products and way of Beauty Fashion are produced and expanded all of a sudden but will soon fade away within a very limited time, or another new product and way of Beauty Fashion comes afore so that they turn their attention to the new one again. At present, no matter what kind of the popular beauty fashion is, it will cause the attention of young people. As far as the hairdressing is concerned, in the previous period the young people were chasing after dying hair. Hence in a very short time, heads with hairs full-dyeing, half-dyeing, and highlighting are ubiquitous. The variety of colors on the heads could even overshadow the colors of the sky rainbow. With the passage of time, the attention of the young turned to straight hair. The falling and dynamic straight hair suddenly became the best choice for young people, and straight hair then was changed to a wide range of curly hair. Coming all of a sudden and going out of blue is the most distinctive feature of timeliness of youth's aesthetic sentiment.

2.3 Mistakes in Aesthetic Ideas of Some Young People

Since the understanding of popular items for Beauty Fashion on the part of young people is limited, some of them may make mistakes in cultivating their aesthetic concept by blindly pursuing formatted beauty. Therefore, "beauty" in the aesthetic ideas of these young people has been distorted and alienated, which could be

represented by the following points: First, there are wrong interpretations of “beauty of individuality”. In fact, for the contemporary young “Koreaphile” and “Japanification”, the aim of what their beauty-pursuing is not for the benefit of the beauty itself, but to draw more attention when they are walking on the streets. What’s worse, they do not have a clear idea of whether their own image is beautiful or not. Second, there is an excessive pursuit of “perfectness”. Its aesthetic characteristics are demanding “exacting beauty”. For instance, if the joint of one finger is bit thick, then it is demanded to make it thinner; and if the foot bone is slightly bigger, then it is demanded to do an operation, so that the bone will be cut to be lanky. Third, “weirdness” and “coolness” are worshipped as beautiful. The aesthetic standards held by these young people do not set the natural beauty high, but according to the standards, one with a piercing tongue, sharpened ears, elongated chin, navel plastic surgery and other quirky beauty is full of beauty. Fourth, physical beauty is the only beauty. Under the influence of the Beauty Fashion information such as “ideal body”, “perfect image”, and “one hundred perfect”, some young people one-sidedly focusing on mending and beautifying the physical beauty while ignoring the cultivation of the inner beauty of the soul. Therefore, some erroneous aesthetic values are developed such as “physical beauty is more important than inner beauty” and “physical beauty is the key while inner beauty does not matter” and so on.

3. IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY YOUTH’S CONSUMER ATTITUDE

The young people are not only the main consumers of Beauty Fashion, but also the loyal consumers of various brands. The young and Beauty Fashion interact with each other. The contemporary youth, on the one hand, stimulate the development of Beauty Fashion; on the other hand, they are fully influenced by the consumer attitudes in the field of beauty. The main reflections are:

3.1 Prominently Valuing Brand and High Quality

Under the influence of Beauty Fashion, the contemporary Chinese youth have showed largely high consumer desires for brands and high-quality products. They pay more attention to the reflection of identity and seeking high taste when turning to brands. When it comes to the brand awareness of such well-known brands as Maybelline, Avon, Shiseido, Yves Saint Laurent, Clinique, Elizabeth Arden, etc., the contemporary youth population has arrived at about 80%. Those overwhelming advertisements of modern Beauty Fashion and consumer demonstration of some celebrity model have constantly inculcated young people with some symbolic meaning of a product, a way of consumption as well as of a consumer attitude, thus continuously building

symbol systems in the youth, so that young people could successfully register in the social community by gaining self and social recognition in the process of consumption. All these could reinforce the brand consumer awareness and high-quality consumer attitude in an intangible way. It’s easy to see them in a variety of beauty consumer sites. Besides, they have enough knowledge about the beauty and continue to think about their money spending. They will spend money in consuming the Beauty Fashion products that they themselves believe are the most tasteful and with the best quality. Of course, the upscale consumption on Beauty is not what most young people could achieve, for the “brand consumption” is not only a matter of consumer attitudes, but also a matter of economic strength.

3.2 Youth Beauty Consumerism Making First Appearance

Everything has a dual nature, and the beauty consumption on the part of the young people is not an exception. Youth, as a special group, has created a special cultural environment. Beauty Fashion and its derivative beauty products, on the one hand, have catered to the needs of young consumers; on the other hand, due to the profitable commercial purposes, they have introduced an ideology of consumerism during the course of their popularity and spreading. Youth beauty consumerism refers to the consumer attitudes and consumption pattern in the field of beauty under the influence of Beauty Fashion. It has lighted the passion of the young for beauty pursuit and has stimulated their desire to buy beauty products. Today, there are a great number of young people who have such consumer attitudes as “following the fashion by consuming”, “one-step consumption”, and “excessive consumption”, and “being superior in consumption”. Furthermore, today’s businessmen launched a variety of beauty products which are not placed in the counter in separation, but rather in the form of full set to publicize the products with all efforts. In this way, the consumption impulse of the young people is stimulated so that the logic of buying a beauty product is diverted to buy another beauty product, which inevitably develops a fixed consumption pattern aimed at young consumers. Contemporary youth, due to the restriction of its own life experience and other deficiencies, lacks the ability to distinguish right and wrong. They make judgments and select beauty products merely out of personal preferences and impulse, which results in irrational consumption behaviors on the part of young people while they are passionately pursuing beauty products and cosmetology way. All these have made the youth’s beauty consumption concepts filled with a lot of blindness and in an unorganized nature, showing a consumerism tendency of “well-off morbidity” and “irrational consumption”.

4. IMPACT OF BEAUTY FASHION ON CONTEMPORARY YOUTH'S CHARACTER

The nature of the times is in line with the character of young people, and the character of young people reflects the trend of the times. The traits of youth's character will surely be influenced and constrained by the society and cultural context in which they live. As a popular phenomenon in contemporary society, Beauty Fashion has made a vast majority of young people willing to express themselves and achieve their dreams, and in the process of pursuing Beauty Fashion, they have formed, changed and developed their own characters.

4.1. Expanding Space for Youth's Independent Personality

The intention of the youth for following fashion is to highlight the self, get admiration from the peers and envy from the opposite sex. Since the young people have such psychology as independent curiosity, trying to be preeminent, and seeking success, they are finding independent freedom of personality that fits them in a constantly changing fashion and developing charisma in line with their own circumstances. In addition, they are trying to influence and impress others with such kind of independent freedom of personality and charisma so as to get recognition from others and the society.

The independence of youth's personality is contradictory to the social influence. To put it more specific, the young not only could not make compromise to the social influence, and also have to maintain their personality and ensures that they do not swim with the times. Social Beauty Fashion is in a constant change and development. In our modern society, Beauty Fashion could be seen everywhere and at any moment, under the impact of which the cognitive regulation, volitional efforts, emotional control, and self-reinforcement and other psychological conflicts have become very prominent. Faced with the arrival of every Beauty Fashion, the young are inclined to chase, mimic, get obsessed in and unable to extricate themselves from it, which have caused blindness and uncertainty in youth character development and made the development course in a variable and repeated feature. However, we should also see that the arrival of Beauty Fashion has also created a new space for the formation and development of youth's independent personality. On the one hand, the young people's participation of Beauty Fashion has accelerated puberty socialization process, broken with their personality patterns in childhood, and accelerated the transition to adult character pattern; on the other hand, young people has given vent to their emotions in the pursuit of Beauty Fashion, enabling their personality recognized, meeting their "disparate demands", and relatively completing the character pattern transformation. Therefore, young

people's character formation and development has gradually "taken shape" in a series of unstable and constantly repeated process (Zhang, 2002, p.336).

4.2 Opening up New Field for Youth's Self-Confidence

Aristotle once said, "Beauty is a more powerful recommendation than any letter of reference." What kind of method can make you become self-confident? Scientific studies show that the most simple and effective method is to make you become more beautiful. According to an authoritative survey, "61% of people think that dyeing hair can enhance self-confidence", and "90 % of women think that plump breasts could bring self-confidence to them"; what is more, some scholars also point out in their research, "Keep one's hairs clean is not only related to personal hygiene, but it directly affects people's psychological characteristics including self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and so forth (Yang, 2004)."

Such slogans as "Beauty can enhance self-confidence" and "where there is beauty, there is self-confidence" have become remarkable and popular among the contemporary young people. In our modern society where emphases are put on visual effects here and there, external beauty, on the one hand, has given enjoyment to people's eyes; on the other hand, it continues to affect people's judgment. If one's external beauty is poor, the first impression given by him or her to others will be largely discounted. Today, some companies are willing to pay big bucks, inviting beautiful women and handsome men in order to enhance the company's overall image. Besides, young men and women are increasingly focusing on each other's appearance and temperament when choosing their soul mate. After all, natural beauty and not needing make-up belong only to a few people. The cheering thing is that the rise of Beauty Fashion is in a good position to provide homely young people with services such as "Beauty Mending". Hence, in order to enhance self-confidence and achieve success in job market and mate selection, a great number of young people are turning to cosmetic surgery. Especially in today's society where the "artificial beauty" gains momentum, the number is remarkably going up. The young are spending most of their income in in the packaging of their appearance and dressing up.

5. IMPACT OF BEAUTY FASHION ON CONTEMPORARY YOUTH'S LIFESTYLE

There are a variety of forms of Beauty Fashion whose scale is expanding and contents become increasingly pervasive. All these have largely transformed young people's ordinary way of life. Greatly affected by the full impact of Beauty Fashion, the contemporary young people have a tireless desire and pursuit of a brand-new life. With more leisure time, they have updated the contents

of life, increased the levels of their pursuits, and created numerous “excitements” one after another in life while seeking beauty, knowledge, and pleasure.

5.1 Health is Beauty

With the advent of Beauty Fashion, young people have showed more concern about their health than ever before, and they are firmly convinced that there is no beauty without health. From the daily diet, outdoor sports, body-building to tobacco and alcohol quitting as well as overeating prohibitions, the contemporary youth is struggling to create a healthy environment for themselves, looking for a way of beauty that is fit to themselves. In the diet, they are paying more attention to “nutrition beauty”. Proceeding from such aims as beautifying skin, hairdressing, slimming, losing weight, and improving eyesight which are conducive to their health and beauty, the young have formulated scientific “beauty nutrition menus” and set “health and beauty diet plan” tailored to themselves, treating their beauty with a healthy and nutritious diet. Considering the importance of a regular healthy lifestyle, most young people have put an end to tobacco and alcohol abuse to protect their own health. At the meantime, such slogans as “life is movement”, “women will fall behind the times without exercises and “it is better to ask people to sweat than eat” have become the advertisements for present Beauty Fashion. A colourful series of sports like yoga, “Parapara dance”, aerobics, equipment sports, and travel are becoming fashionable ways of exercises among the young people. All the things have revealed that the contemporary youth has realized doing a right amount of light sports could help speed up the body’s metabolism and cell replacement to beautify skin and lose weight; furthermore, it could reduce stress, relax themselves and enable them to maintain a best body condition, making health and beauty coexistent.

5.2 “Slimming” Exercises are Popular

The contemporary youth is quite concerned about the figure, for in our society filled with intense competition more and more young people are aware of the importance of good figure and temperament, which could leave a good impression on others, thus gaining more opportunities. Therefore, as one of the most accepted item of Beauty Fashion among the young, “Slimming” exercises have gained momentum. It advocates regarding “fatness” as the enemy and “slimness” as a friend, which meets the desires and needs of young people, thus becoming a hot pursuit of contemporary youth. “Losing weight” popular in the past decades is obsolete, while “slimming” is penetrating into people’s minds. Slimming methods such as beauty and slimming, slimming diet, slimming exercises, slimming methods and slimming thorough surgery are spreading among the young. According to a survey published by the globally leading market research firm, AC Nielsen, “nearly 66% of Chinese young people have joined the army of slimming”. “Slimming” campaign has enabled young

people to have vision, hope, relaxation and happiness. Hence the young people who advocate “slimming” are faithful followers of Beauty Fashion.

5.3 Plastic and Cosmetic Surgery is Hot

The passion for beauty is human being’s nature. Whoever you are and whatever you look like, you are born to love beauty, and there is no exception. With the improvement of people’s living standards and the upgrading of people’s psychological needs, loving and seeking beauty have become a crucial part of people’s daily life. Under the circumstances of Beauty Fashion, the contemporary youth even considers beauty as an asset. They all are dreaming to look like a celebrity, in particular, some young women are even eager to have a Zhou Xun’s chin, Zhao Wei’s eyes, and Zhang Ziyi’s face. Therefore, the plastic and cosmetic surgery industry has become a beauty workshop where the young people are enabled to be a beauty, which makes the dream of “thousands of people have a same look” become a reality. The contemporary youth called the past year—2003 as an “artificial beauty” year. The confidence on the part of the young in plastic and cosmetic surgery has been enhanced with the emergence of “artificial beauty”. They believe that beauty is created, and through plastic surgery, they themselves will look younger and more beautiful. In this sense, many cosmetic plastic surgeries such as cosmetic tattoos on eyebrow, eye liner, and lips, lash lengthening, polymer synthesis double-fold eyelid, pouch removing without scars, painless wrinkles lifting, laser spot removal, e-whitening, artificial dimples, breast implant through soft tissue injection, and ultrasound emulsified liposuction have attracted a number of young people to have a try. This leads to a fact that the contemporary youth population has gradually formed the biggest army of cosmetic plastic surgery. However, since young men and women often do not have a right and profound understanding of their physical condition before cosmetic plastic surgery and also the expected effect thereafter, it is highly common to see some physical as well as mental traumas caused by blind cosmetic plastic surgery and surgery at a lower age.

CONCLUSION

As one scholar goes, “social fashion is playing a remarkable role in changing mainstream ideology and upgrading values (Deng & Ren, 2007).” “It is easy for the young to show their contradictory side in the process of growing up: the collision of passion and reason, assertive personality, confused but optimistic views of life and values (Deng & Ren, 2001).” Therefore, we should not ignore the negative impact of Beauty Fashion and the cognitive biases caused by it while appreciating and enjoying Beauty Fashion’s leading young people’s pursuit of beauty and giving young people passion for life. We should guide the youth to have a positive, good, and sound attitude

towards Beauty Fashion, so that they could grow up healthily and happily under the influence of Beauty Fashion.

REFERENCES

Deng, Z. M., & Ren, Y. M. (2001). *I choose and I like—Contemporary social fashion and college students*. Beijing: China Youth Publishing House.

Deng, Z. M., & Ren, Y. M. (2007). *Social fashion and contemporary youth*. Chongqing: Southwest China Normal University Press.

Yang, W. (2004). *This way of beatification can stimulate self-confidence*. China Beauty Fashion.

Zhang, J. F. (2002). *Modern youth psychology*. Chongqing: Chongqing Press.