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Contributions to *East Asian History*

Division of Pacific and Asian History, Research School of Pacific Studies
Australian National University, GPO Box 4, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia
Phone 06 249 3140  Fax 06 249 1839

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Cover illustration  “Seeing the apparel, but not the person.”
Cartoon by Liu Bai 劉白, *Pan-chiao man-hua*
[Five-cents comics], vol.6, no.1 (1932), p.5
1. How ‘Anti-Foreign’ was Anti-Foreignism?

Anti-foreignism is sometimes over-simply defined as a kind of collective, spontaneous, and belligerent mass sentiment against foreign countries among a people.\(^1\) The terms ‘anti-imperialism’ and ‘anti-foreignism’, despite their obvious theoretical disparity, tend to be casually and indiscriminately used by provocative rhetoricians as much as by some Sinologists. Foreigners, however, were not always regarded as ‘imperialists’; nor was everything foreign automatically stigmatized as imperialistic, and hence rejected. In the cultural context, anti-foreignism in Canton in this period was not yet a well-defined ideology, nor a unified movement. With their focus locked on the bellicose side of the history of Sino-foreign relations, and on the officially manipulated political campaigns against imperialist Powers, some scholars have tended to foster a false impression that the Chinese attitude towards foreigners was always hostile and negative.\(^2\)

On the failure of an identity crisis to emerge in China after her encounter with the West, Rhoads Murphey writes:

The Western challenge merely reinforced existing Sinocentric pride.... All foreigners could with some reason be dismissed as barbarians.... The strong sense of cultural continuity and identity prevented any surrender.... And the confrontation with the West heightened the Chinese sense of identity rather than destroying it, in part because the treaty ports had so little cultural impact.... To China, foreign had come to mean inferior.... China was in danger, but not Chineseness.

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As a result, foreigners were believed to have aroused resentment rather than admiration among the Chinese.³

Although Canton was the first Chinese city to taste the bitterness of military defeat by the Westerners, and its subsequent ecoconomic-political encounter with them was not always happy, it would be a mistake to conclude that the Cantonese attitude towards the West must have been holistically negative and uncompromisingly hostile. The San Yuan Li anti-British Resistance Movement (1840), and the Hong Kong-Canton Strike and Boycott Movement (1925-26), may at different times have exerted some impact on the general feeling towards the West. But it is questionable whether these events 'radicalized' the people’s minds or ‘converted’ them to an anti-foreign creed.

The popular Cantonese attitude towards the West was in fact more complicated and ambiguous. Different sorts of attitudes, contradictory or complementary to each other, could exist in the same geographical domain at the same time within the same community of people. Cantonese in this period were pragmatic enough to differentiate ‘foreign’ from ‘imperialist’—practical borrowing from rhetorical denunciation.⁴ Foreign imperialism never ceased to be seen as a threat to China’s security and economic interests. However, to many Cantonese, foreign material progress, life-styles, and cultural achievements were something to be admired and, if possible, emulated. ‘Foreign’ had come to mean ‘superior’, instead of ‘inferior’ as Murphey suggests.

2. Shameen: an Alternative Symbol

The burning down of the Canton Factories during the Second Opium War in 1856, and the indemnity subsequently paid by the Ch’ing court to the British authorities for the cost of building afresh on a new site for the same purpose, made possible the creation of Shameen from a strip of sandbar into a modern and Europeanized “fine place.”⁵ Although Shameen was not a fenced-off foreign concession, the foreign residents there consciously turned the island into an ‘autonomous’ area set apart from the rest of Canton. It was only connected to the Chinese city of Canton by two guarded stone bridges. Shameen Municipal Council, with members elected from amongst the Land Renters, had been running the island since the early 1870s.⁶ Public amenities were built for the exclusive use of its residents.⁷ It was a semi-exclusive place to the Chinese, since they were required to produce a permit issued by the Shameen Municipal Council to gain entry to the island, and they were forbidden to travel on certain parts of Shameen. Chinese were said to be consistently prohibited from renting any premises or dwelling there;⁸ and the gates to the island were ‘normally’ kept open to Chinese until midnight only.⁹
This over-cautious policy as put into effect against the native population provided a convenient target for accusations by fanatics against the foreign Shameenese. During the turbulent mid-1920s, especially after the outbreak of the Shaking Incident in June 1925, Shameen was increasingly stigmatized as a symbol of foreign imperialism in southern China by the jingoists. The Canton authorities also helped internalize the stigma of Shameen by renaming the Shaking Road, where the shooting incident on 23 June 1925 took place, 'June 23rd Road' and erecting a monument there. This tainted image of Shameen often appeared in the work of the 'patriotic writers'.

Visiting Shameen during an anti-Japanese boycott, one such writer was perplexed by the fact that a number of Cantonese peddlers were smuggling Japanese goods out of the settlement for sale in local markets. This activity reminded him of the limited receptivity of the ideology of national revolution by the multitudes. His deep hatred of Shameen and its symbolic meaning was clear:

Whenever one sets foot on this island branded with a shameful mark, who, except those Chinese collaborators, would not be inflamed in his heart with anger and hatred? Who would not spell out a curse on the force which occupies this piece of sand-bar?

The popular attitude towards Shameen, however, was far from being only hostile. To the rich, Shameen stood for security and stability. Falling within the 'military umbrella' of the Powers, Shameen became a refuge for the rich in times of political turmoil. In June 1925, for instance, a large number of wealthy families flocked to the settlement where they spent several nights in the open air while awaiting a berth on the next steamship to Hong Kong. During the Central Bank crises in August 1927 and mid-1928, many Cantonese merchants, bankers, and businessmen hurriedly took their money with them to Shameen in order to escape the extortionate measure of 'compulsory lending', a racketeering expedient often used by the KMT in tiding over financial crises. Contemporary Cantonese novels also relate that most of the wealthy Cantonese deposited their money in the foreign banks in Shameen.

To some, Shameen was simply a source of livelihood. As we shall see later in this article, local peddlers and boat-people were anxious to trade with the foreign community in Shameen, at great risk to their own lives, even at the peak of the anti-British boycott in 1925–26, as well as during the anti-Japanese boycott in 1935.

The physical beauty and orderliness of Shameen, due mainly to the extensive planting of trees, the keeping of lawns, and the proliferation of European architecture, all won admiration from the general public in Canton. The 'Europeanized' ambience was so tranquil and peaceful that all contemporary guide books on Canton, both in English and Chinese, strongly recommended to their readers a walk on the island in order to appreciate in

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10 In Ou-yang Shan's "Chieh Lao-shu" [Old Uncle Chieh], for example, the assault on the protagonist by the Englishmen takes place in a residence in Shameen. This short story is included in Ou-yang Shan's Ob-i-mien-chi [The seventh anniversary commemorating death] (Shanghai: Sheng-huo Shu-tien, 1935).
11 Chin Wei, "Sha-mien-pieh" [A glimpse of Shameen], in Chung-kuo ti i-jib [One day in China], ed. Mao Tun et al. (Shanghai: Sheng-huo Shu-tien, 1936), pp.4-5, 13.
13 For more detail on how the KMT employed similar tactics to deal with financial crises in Shanghai, see P.M. Coble, Jr., The Shanghai capitalists and the Nationalist government (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), esp. chap.2; Marie-Claire Bergère, The golden age of Chinese bourgeoisie, 1911–1937 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.272–92. For more detail on how the Cantonese merchant community reacted to this extortionate policy of the government during the autumn of 1928, see NYSP, 14 February 1928, p.11; 16 March 1928, p.4.
14 Waln, House, p.186.
full the beauty of the city of Canton. This ‘advice’ was apparently also eagerly taken by local Cantonese. A travelogue records that thousands of other Celestials find some excuse to enter Shameen, some merely to report the wonders of the foreigners’ ways of living to their open-mouthed villagers.

Even a professedly patriotic militarist, who labelled Shameen one of “China’s [monuments of] national humiliation,” effusively praised its “tidy planning and cleanliness, [and its] tranquil scenery [which] does not differ much from the fairy-land of P’eng Hu.”

Nora Wain recalled a casual conversation in early 1925 with her four sedan-chair carriers, who praised Shameen as an artifact of Western creativity and transforming power:

“When the island was woven,” Number Two continued, “the Westeners brought all sorts of materials. With these they built offices and homes of such pattern as had not been seen in China before. They planted flowering shrubs. Seeded green lawns. And used some magic force by which they make unboiled water safe to drink and freeze ice here in tropic Canton even on the hottest days. … It was not intended that the Westeners should be comfortable or above water here. But they insolently made this tiny sand-bar nicer than any park in the proud ancient city of Canton. My mother-in-law has a pleasure-boat … The trip around Shameen is the trip most often ordered by her customers…”

It would take more courage than the Chinese soldiers possess to charge into this island, protected as it is by Western battleships. The Westeners are doing no harm living here. All this wasted grumbling energy ought to be used to make another place as good as this. There are plenty of better sites.”

Shameen was seen as a place not that inspired hatred, but rather public envy and appreciation.

Although Shameen was closed to Chinese for permanent dwelling, an alternative site providing its Chinese residents with a similar socially symbolic function was readily available in the eastern suburb of the city called Tung Shan 東山. In the hypercritical eyes of some Communist historians, Tung Shan was unmistakably an enclave of “foreign imperialists and their warlord collaborators.” The “religious wing of foreign imperialism” had allegedly taken the initiative in developing Tung Shan into a “base of cultural encroachment.” Hence, a number of missionary enterprises such as schools, orphanages, churches, homes for the elderly, and a hospital were built there. Substantial investment in real estate by overseas Chinese contributed to the mushrooming of modern residential buildings and Western-style villas in Tung Shan from the late 1910s. It soon became an exclusive residential area for wealthy Cantonese, because of its reasonable distance from the hubbub of Canton proper, and, more especially, because of the concentration of foreign residents there. These latter indeed imparted the blessing of protection by the Powers. Hence, Tung Shan was never overrun during the various military confrontations throughout the course of Republican history. By the mid-1930s, it was proudly presented in an official guide to
Canton as a “popular residential section among officials of Modern Canton” because its Western-style residences were "more comfortable and contain more conveniences than the old-style houses" in the old section of the city. The marked presence of Westerners and their culture in that district was seen more as an attraction, an advantage and even a blessing, than as engendering humiliation or disgust.

Thus, the highly appreciative public perception and the fine image of Shameen and Tung Shan casts serious doubts on the sincerity and unfaltering commitment of at least a considerable number of Cantonese to the rhetorical cause of anti-foreignism in Canton in this period.

3. Aspects of Pro-Foreignism in Canton: a Cultural Perspective

The urban culture of Canton, indeed, showed a strong Western influence. The process of acculturation from which this resulted is well illustrated by the changing concept of beauty at that time.

According to Wolfram Eberhard, the criteria for ‘being beautiful’ postulated by two Chinese writers, one in the seventeenth century and the other in the 1930s, share sufficient similarities for a continuity to be discerned. Most significant in this is the fact that the erogenous zones of the body receive no mention at all—a taboo which was not completely broken, he suggests, until as late as the 1960s.

Eberhard, however, is wrong as far as the timing is concerned. By the 1920s, the inclusion of the erogenous zones in the concept of beauty was already widely upheld in Canton. In an article “On Woman’s Beauty and Ugliness” published in a vernacular magazine, the author teaches his readers how to appreciate a beauty. The long list of the ‘basic’ parts of the female body to be appreciated includes the breasts, buttocks, thighs, and shins. The spiritual quality of charm, which used to be cherished as an essential hallmark, has almost completely given way to sheer physical attraction. The new concept of beauty has taken a more sensual and erotic orientation, which is almost certainly a cultural expression of the influence of the West on Cantonese values.

The growing awareness of the breasts as an element of feminine beauty was indicative not only of the changing attitude toward sex, but also of the acceptance of Western standards of beauty; traditionally, breasts were considered unimportant in the overall attractiveness of a woman, and thus could with justification be bound flat by a band. But from the 1920s onwards, natural ‘big breasts’ became the latest symbol of sensual attraction and feminine health.

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20 Lee, Canton, pp.29–30.
and buxom courtesans became popular, almost to the extent of being “worshipped” by brothel-goers. In one official publication, the “natural and big breasts of those blue-eyed blonde-haired Western women” were not only openly praised, but made out, by implication, to be the ideal towards which all Chinese women should strive. Physically, ‘natural breasts’ symbolized better hygiene and health. Culturally, they became a symbol of women’s liberation from ‘feudalistic’ bondage. Politically, they were seen as an efficacious ‘Western means’ of creating the kind of strong and healthy Chinese race urgently needed to strengthen the nation. A candid cartoon with the caption “Ideal Women of Today” simply shows a sculpture of a woman with permed blonde hair and exaggeratedly big breasts and hips.

In some advertisement illustrations and magazine pin-ups, there was a clear aesthetic tendency to Westernize or ‘idealize’ the facial features of Chinese women. The components of ‘beauty’ in these drawings were usually permed hair, or fashionable short hair (the most popular hair-style for young women after 1926), big, deep-set eyes, and high-bridged noses. Some of the pin-up drawings in a series of Cantonese comic books render the ideal type of Chinese beauty with unmistakably Caucasian facial features. In those pin-ups featuring naked ‘beauties’, breasts and buttocks are always exaggeratedly drawn. In a drawing entitled “The Annoyance of Youth,” a depressed young man is depicted day-dreaming about attractive, unclothed young girls in various seductive poses. Interestingly, all these ‘dream girls’ have short permed hair, are naked, and look more like Western girls than Chinese ladies. The popular obsession with the ‘curves of beauty’ (ch'u-bsien-mei), which was a Western ‘import’, was believed to have contributed to the popularity of the latest tight-fitting fashion in Western dress, which, in contrast to its Chinese counterpart, was so designed that the breasts and hips of the female body were invitingly outlined.

It is worth mentioning in passing that similar popular accolades given to, and an obsession with, Western feminine physical appearance would seem to be re-emerging in present-day China. A journalist recently reported from Shanghai that “after developing a taste for Coca-Cola, rock music, blue jeans, break dancing, and eyebrow liner,” some Chinese have gone one step further and had themselves Westernized by undergoing surgery to achieve rounder eyes and bigger noses, and some women bigger breasts. It is claimed that in Shanghai alone, as many as one hundred women each day undergo...
surgery to enlarge their eyes. Even forty years of ferociously authoritarian and xenophobic Communist rule have therefore failed to root out this kind of extrovert, pro-Western mentality from among its relatively well indoctrinated subjects.

The once-appreciated older standards of inner beauty such as physical fragility, emotional delicacy, and melancholic sensitivity, were criticized as being socially regressive. In an article on the social position of Chinese women, the failure of the women's liberation movement was attributed to the widespread acceptance of these traditional 'destructive' standards of beauty by both men and women. Implicitly, the persevering, outgoing, and uncomplacent character of Western women was believed to be one of the main reasons for the rise in their social position in Western society. Chinese women were urged to take up sports and such cultural hobbies as horticulture, painting, walking, and so on, as the means to build up their bodies. Physical fitness, a cultivated character, and education became the official standards of beauty. The substance of feminine charm had thus taken on an alien touch.

The male body also seems to have undergone a similar process of idealization along Western lines, though one that was less visible and less written about. Once again, illustrations in contemporary advertisements are revealing. In an advertisement for a tailoring company, a Chinese man is depicted in a well-tailored Western-style suit, with neck-tie, leather shoes, and well-combed western-style short hair, adopting a rather foreign posture with one of his hands half inside a jacket pocket, and his legs slightly crossed. But more symbolic is his round, robust and tall body, fitting uncomfortably with the orthodox Chinese tradition of the ideal gentlemen [Figure 5]. In a number of advertisements for a Cantonese herbal tonic, half-naked men with a strong physique are featured. They are muscular, with broad shoulders, wide chests, and muscly necks and arms, and have fashionable, well combed, short hair. One of these ideal men is drawn in a posture resembling that of a classical Greek discus-thrower. All these tend to suggest the desirability of a visibly robust male body, perhaps a new, alien, yet 'modern' and ideal symbol for the urban male.

32 Pan-chiao man-hua, vol.6, no.2, pp.3-4; no.11, p.5. This is perhaps analogous to the wide popularity of the classic 'Rambo' posters in Canton in the last few years. This kind of Hollywood-style hero, the embodiment of idealized masculine symbols openly envied by thousands of local male youngsters, appears to have replaced the self-sacrificing, CCP-made Lei Feng in the minds of some Cantonese.
Even the concept of the ideal boyfriend or husband dreamed of by modern city-girls in Canton was coloured with Western elements. In their view, the ideal husband should be a university graduate, fashionable, and above all possess a Westernized outlook. In a compilation of students' essays about their school-lives, the editor has inserted a few 'satirical' (or realistic?) drawings by different cartoonists of the typical perception of contemporary male high-school and university students. They are invariably wearing foreign suits, with Western-style leather shoes and hats, neckties, walking sticks, and sometimes a cigarette in hand (Figure 6). Like these pin-ups in the comics, the popular image of young gentlemen, the pillars of 'New China', reveals a strong Western savour. The psychic propensity to worship Western feminine beauty was getting close to the advocacy by Chang Ching-shen 張競生 (alias Dr Sex), whose pro-Western cultural values are self-evident, of the total westernization of the Chinese body.

The idea of freedom in love (lit. tzu-yu 愛自由), a symbol of Western individualism, was widely accepted by the young. Criticisms of the inhumanity of 'blind' marriage had intensified in Canton since the early 1920s, a legacy of the nationwide post-May-Fourth feminist movement. In a feminist magazine published in 1922, a female contributor strongly criticized traditional arranged marriage as "a system of looting and barter" which had "raped" the freedom of Chinese women for centuries. Instead, Western-style courtship resting on long acquaintance, and 'modem' marriage based on love and affection, were advocated.

Western-style entertainment, too, rose in popularity. To some, a feast of Western cuisine at a Western-style restaurant was regarded as an enviable experience. The food itself was not especially important; indeed, some Cantonese found it not particularly appealing. 'Chib bsi-ts'ai 吃西菜' [dining on Western cuisine], however, became an increasingly accepted symbol of social status and consumption capacity. Consuming imported wines and Western cuisine at Western-style restaurants became so popular as ostentatious social events amongst the militarists, politicians, and the rich, that a contemporary author labelled it a new social custom in Canton. In the words of an alarmed traditionalist, the young had become so obsessed with 'chib bsi-ts'ai' that they "wasted" most of their pocket-money on it. It is difficult to substantiate such an accusation. An official report tells us that the main attractions of Western-style restaurants and cafes in Canton were that they were "fashionable" and "economical" in cost compared with Chinese restaurants, and were hence doing very good business, even during the depression of the early 1930s.
A Cantonese novel reveals that to invite someone to dinner at a Western-style restaurant was regarded as something special, fashionable, and sometimes romantic. In Chang Tzu-p'ing's "Ch'ang-tu" ['The Long Journey'], when the female protagonist Pi Yun has just arrived in Canton, she is invited by Hsiao Szü, a native she has met en route to Canton, to a Western-style cafe on the top floor of a hotel. Pi Yun realizes that it is a popular place for dating. Western-style music and movies are played and shown there, and most of the customers are fabulously and lavishly dressed. This is their first date.42 A similar romantic value seems never to have been attached to the traditional Cantonese tea-house.

Western-style sports were imported into Canton alongside Western education, and were encouraged in schools by the education authorities, though limited budgets prevented all that encouragement from being put into action. Sports of this type were believed to be essential for building up physical vitality, nurturing and cultivating spiritual character, and fostering obedience and self-discipline amongst the young. In an education conference held in 1930, a panel proposed, on the issue of improving physical education in Kwangtung, that there should be at least one exercise ground, one volleyball court, one basketball court, one tennis court and one football pitch in every middle school. Western gymnastic equipment should also be installed if the financial situation allowed.43 Not one single form of Chinese traditional exercise was recommended.

The sensual pleasure of bodily touch seems to have contributed to the popularity of Western-style dancing in Canton.44 We learn from a serialized short story that the dance-party had apparently become an integral part of "modern marriage" celebration "programmes."45 According to Nora Waln, even those professed patriots who often criticized the evil of Western imperialism were amongst the most enthusiastic dance-hall-goers in Canton during the 1920s.46 A Cantonese film director reminisced that he was approached by such senior officials as Sun K'o 孫科, Wu Chiao-shu 伍朝樞, and Wu Tieh-ch'eng 吳鐵城 to recommend a dancing teacher, since a dance-party was sometimes held to greet visiting foreign officials.47 One of the main events for the 1926 official Double-Tenth celebration was a large-scale ballroom dance held in a Western-style hotel in Canton. The event was organized by the China Music Association, which was said to have contributed substantially to the promotion of Western dancing by running dancing courses in Canton. Senior government officials and a number of foreigners took part in the event.48 One month later, another dance-party was

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41 Kuang-chou nien-chien [1935], chap.10, p.110.
42 "Ch'ang-tu" ['The long journey'], in Tzu-p'ing hsiao-shoo hsuan Selected novels of Chang Tzu-p'ing], 3 vols (Shanghai: Hsien-tai Shu-chu, 1928 [vol.1], 1930 [vols 2 & 3]), 2: 294-5.
44 Contemporary essays and cartoons about dancing support this notion, see ibid. For examples of cartoons see Pan-chiao man-hua.
45 Hsi Hua, "Ai yuyuan" [Love and grievance], in Kuang-chou hsin jih-pao [Canton New Daily], 16 February 1933, p.7.
46 Waln, House, pp.196-7.
48 Kuang-chou min-kuo jih-pao [Canton Republican Daily; hereafter KCMKP], 8 October 1926, p.10.
organized by the same body to commemorate the birthday of Sun Yat-sen. More than two hundred guests took part, all dressed up in lavish and seductively colourful clothes.\textsuperscript{49} Local politics thus found their expression in an explicitly Western cultural idiom.

Movies served as an important medium for the dissemination of Western cultural values and taste. They became one of the most popular pastimes in modern Canton. A student complained that his contemporaries were obsessed with the “3 M-isms: money-ism, mistress-ism, movie-going-ism.”\textsuperscript{50} Another student wryly observed that, judging by the constantly large number of spectators flooding the cinema “like a run on the Central Bank,” China was not likely to run out of cash for military defense.\textsuperscript{51} Provincial Governor Ch’en Chi-tang 陈濟棠 denounced ‘cb \textit{tsi-\textsc{t}ai}’ and movie-going as the two prime examples of the spiritual pollution of the younger generation by materialistic and hedonistic Western culture.\textsuperscript{52}

The popularity of cinema-going and the domination by Western movies of Canton’s film market was indicative of Cantonese receptivity to Western culture.\textsuperscript{53} Apparently, Cantonese audiences preferred Hollywood movies to Chinese feature-films. The absence of Chinese subtitles in both silent and talking movies did not deter people from watching Western movies; nor did the quality of the screenplay appear to matter. Even a bad Western movie, despite its inferior acting and ordinary theme, could become a blockbuster in Canton.\textsuperscript{54} In the opinion of some Cantonese, Chinese film companies rarely produced ‘good movies’ for four major reasons. First, producers were too parsimonious to invest in making good films; hence most Chinese films were so badly produced that their images were blurred, and their subtitles full of incorrectly written Chinese characters.\textsuperscript{55} Secondly, directors were inexperienced, and hence talented actors tended to be overlooked. Thirdly, the wages of actors were too low to attract or keep promising actors.\textsuperscript{56} Fourthly, the poor performance of most Chinese actors could not compare with the ability even of an ordinary supporting actor in the West.\textsuperscript{57} As far as talking movies was concerned, it was even ‘officially’ admitted that Western productions were far superior to the Chinese, both technically and artistically. As a result, it was not surprising to see that most Cantonese cinemas preferred to show Western talkies, although three out of twenty screened Chinese productions exclusively.\textsuperscript{58} But to the discomfort of the authorities, the film market in Canton was dominated by Western ‘products’. In the two years 1934-35, a total of 352 foreign-produced movies was shown in Canton’s various cinemas. By great contrast, only 120 Chinese-made movies were shown.\textsuperscript{59} Aggravated by the unsettled political situation, the film industry in 1920s Canton was stagnant, with merely four short-lived film companies which produced less than ten films in total between 1923 and 1928.\textsuperscript{60} In the first issue of \textit{Hsi-ch"u} [The Theatre], the mouth-piece of the short-lived Research Institute of Performing Arts of Kwangtung (Kuang-tung hsi-ch"u yen-chiu-so 廣東戲劇研究所), the editor poignantly criticized traditional
Chinese theatre as 'backward' due to its pemiciously unaesthetic nature, and as impractical because of its "inability to speak for the masses." 61 Ou-yang Yu-chien, the Director of the Institute, argued that traditionally, Chinese despised the theatre and looked down on actors as "mean people." Hence, traditional theatre was injudiciously evaluated as leaving few socially constructive and artistically refining legacies to Chinese society. In his view, since traditional Chinese theatre was devoid of a healthy tradition in the Western sense, the most effective antidote with which to "progressivize" it was to borrow extensively from the Western theatrical tradition. To support his view, he quoted freely from Western theories of theatre, especially on its utilitarian and social functions in modern society. 62 Thus, it is not surprising to find that almost one-third of the 350-page first issue of the Institute's journal was devoted to translations of Western works on the history, philosophy, theory, and scripts of the modern Western theatre.

In another article, the scripts of contemporary Cantonese opera were denounced in the most defamatory terms as being flooded with obscenity and violence, and having supernatural and over-commercialized, stereotyped plots, operas themselves being irresponsibly performed by uneducated actors at the expense of the good of the public. In the view of its author, since the arts of a nation reflected the national character of its people, their refined and sophisticated theatrical tradition contributed to the refined quality of European 'kuo-min'国 民 [citizens], providing a model that Cantonese would do well to emulate. 63

In the area of music, Western (especially classical) music was believed to possess transcendental and social functions that Chinese music lacked. An article published in an official daily in 1926 expounded the view that Chinese music had long lost its "power to touch" (kan-tung-li 感動力), while Western music alone still possessed the capacity "to transform [a country's] customs, to purify the world, to nourish character, and regulate emotion." The rhythm and harmony of Western music generated symphonic vibrations that stimulated the listeners' emotions and psyche. And classical music, with its element of "beauty," was the best "tool" for unleashing this transcendental power. 64

The obsession with the utilitarian value of Western music was probably attributable to the fact that most of the recommended texts and references for middle-school music teachers and students were non-Chinese publications. 65 An educationalist criticized the inadequacy of the teaching hours (three hours per week) spent on music education in Canton's primary schools, since the subject was believed to be very "useful" for the spiritual nourishment and intellectual development of children. He argued that if music education in the Western sense continued to be ignored as such, it was likely that before that most of the recommended texts and references for middle-school music teachers and students were non-Chinese publications. 66

For instance, in the song-book category, only three out of the thirteen were compilations of Chinese songs while the rest were either in English, Japanese, or translations into Chinese from Western languages. As far as reference texts were concerned, all dealt directly with Western rather than Chinese music; Kai-chin chu-pan-sheng chung-teng bseub-hsiao chiao-yü jang-an [Proposals for the reform of middle-school education in Kwangtung] (Canton: Kuang-tung-shengchiao-yu-ting, 1930), pp.27-8, 53-4, 79-82.

64 "Yin-yueh kan-tung-li chih fen-hsi" [An analysis of music's power to touch], KCMKP, 4 November 1926, Supplement, p.2. Similar pragmatic views on the 'usefulness' of Western music were also shared by some of the first-generation Chinese music-reformers. For instance, Hsiao Yu-mei argued that since Chinese music had been stagnant for nearly one thousand years, European music should be introduced for the "correction and transformation of Chinese music and musical instrument 3." Liu Tien-hua also produced a similar argument. Alexander Therepou, a Russian pianist who had performed in North China during the mid-1930s, was worried by the trend towards the "blind imitation" of European music by Chinese musicians even when playing Chinese music. See Liu Ching-chih, ed., Chung-kuo hsiao-yueh shih lun-tsi [On the history of modern Chinese music] (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, 1988), pp.27-8, 53-4, 79-82.

65 For instance, in the song-book category, only three out of the thirteen were compilations of Chinese songs while the rest were either in English, Japanese, or translations into Chinese from Western languages. As far as reference texts were concerned, all dealt directly with Western rather than Chinese music; Kai-chin chu-pan-sheng chung-teng bseub-hsiao chiao-yü jang-an [Proposals for the reform of middle-school education in Kwangtung] (Canton: Kuang-tung-shengchiao-yu-ting, 1930), pp.27-8, 53-4, 79-82.


For example, the highly respectable brothers Kao Chien-fu and Kao Chi-feng were both successful businessmen. Both of them had travelled widely abroad and had received part of their art education in Japan. Kao Chien-fu had also learnt the technique of Western charcoal-drawing from a French artist. See Li Chien-erh, ed., Kuang-chou hsin-tai hua-jen chuan [Biographies of modern Cantonese painters] (Canton, 1941), pp.8–13. For a comprehensive analysis of

Figure 7

since the subject was believed to be very “useful” for the spiritual nourishment and intellectual development of children. He argued that if music education in the Western sense continued to be ignored as such, it was likely that before.67 Perhaps influenced by such views, the Municipal Radio of Canton spent on average twenty percent of its broadcasting time playing Western music.68

Even in the field of Chinese painting, the urge to syncretize Japanese and Western technique approximated to a fashion among the younger generation of Cantonese painters. The biographies of some of the more outstanding of these from the late nineteenth century to 1940 reveal that the ideal image of a successful Chinese painter had gradually been modified to include as essential the possession of a relatively cosmopolitan outlook and taste.69 P'an Chih-chung 潘至中, a well-regarded Cantonese painter of the 1930s, grumbled about his student painters being so obsessed with Western painting technique that the traditional Chinese skills and approach to the art
were very much despised.\textsuperscript{70} Contemporary pictorial magazines were fond of publishing Western-style oil and water-colour paintings by both Cantonese and Western artists, their motive being reflected perhaps, in a slogan published in one pictorial amidst reproductions of Western-style paintings, which reads: “Friends! Let’s strive for the breakdown of boredom in the art circles of South China!” \textsuperscript{71} By implication, Cantonese Chinese painting was believed to be dull.\textsuperscript{71}

Further physical evidence of a Western-oriented life-style and consciousness was provided by the proliferation of Western-style buildings across Canton’s cityscape. Most of the key government buildings, such as the headquarters of the Canton Branch of the KMT, the head office of the Bank of Kwangtung, the Provincial Finance Department, the Provincial Assembly building, and so on, were Western neo-classical-style structures\textsuperscript{[8, a–d]. Interestingly, nobody tried to interpret, as some nationalistic Indians had, the symbolism of these Western-style buildings as “colonial architecture visibly representing] the European sense of mastery.”\textsuperscript{72} On the contrary, the authorities were proud to show off their Western outlook by including in the 1934 official guide book to Canton photographs of most of these modern government edifices. Unlike the government offices of the Imperial era, which were usually hidden from the eyes of the public by walls and trees,\textsuperscript{73} these modern yamen were intended to command respect from the public by their huge size and overt presence. Western architecture was judiciously used for creating a new and ‘modern’ image of the Cantonese government.

A landmark in Canton in this period was the line of skyscrapers along the Pearl River water-front. These high-rise commercial buildings were not a colonial legacy. It was the Cantonese who had planned and financed this modern skyline for their own city. The eight-storey-high New Asia Hotel, the

\textsuperscript{70} Li, Hua-jen, pp.25–6.
\textsuperscript{72} Thomas R. Metcalf, An imperial vision: Indian architecture and Britain’s Raj (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp.8–9, 250.
\textsuperscript{75} Lin Chin-chih and Ts’ang Wei-chi, eds, Chin-tai hua-chiao t’ou-tzu kuo-nei chieh-yeh shih tzu-tao hsuan-chi: Kuang-tung chuan [Selection of historical sources on Overseas Chinese investment in China in modern times; section on Canton] (Fuchou: Fu-chien Jen-min Ch’u-pan-she, 1989), pp.688–708. In 1934, when a humour-columnist tried to record what had been increasing most obviously in Canton in recent years, ‘modern’ buildings were listed among those things that could hardly escape observation. “I-chien jih-to” [Things that daily became common], Kuang-chou li-pat-liu [Canton Saturday], vol.12 (1934), p.55.
\textsuperscript{76} Chieh-hun-yuan shih cheng-hunjen [The bridegroom is the witness of the marriage] (Canton: Yueh-chu yen-chiu-she, c. 1930).
\textsuperscript{77} Chang Ch’ing-chuan et al., ed., Hsiang-hua hua-pao 3, (Canton, 1929), p.25.
\textsuperscript{78} Hsu, Hsi-lu-chi, p.33.
\textsuperscript{79} This was true at least for the first batch of senior municipal officials. See Huang Yenpei, ed., I-ts’ii chih Kuang-chou-shih [The first anniversary of the Canton municipal government] (Shanghai: Shang-wu Yin-shu-kuan, 1922), Preface, p.2.
twelve-storey Sun Company Building (Figure 9), and the fifteen-storey Ai-Ch'un Building, the tallest in South China in the 1930s, were all built with overseas Cantonese capital. Most of the high-ranking officials of the Canton Government attended the inauguration ceremony of the Ai Ch'un Building, giving official recognition to its symbolic meaning, and from the time it opened for business, Ai-Ch'un became a popular place of rendezvous in the high-society life of the city. 74

Due to the heavy investment by returned overseas Cantonese in the real estate market, a substantial number of new Western-style multi-storey residences had been built since the early 1920s, and this trend reached its peak in the decade after 1927. 75 Western architecture was apparently chosen by the nouveaux riches as an ostentatious means to express their wealth and newly acquired social prestige. Photographs in Kuo Wen-fan's pictorial album on Canton show that the most common Western features on the façades of these new multi-storey residential buildings were the curved and sometimes ornate lintels, the wooden shutters, the vase-shaped concrete parapets, and the triangular or round concrete plaques announcing the year the building was opened. Many social notables resided in the two-storey Western-style villas in the exclusive residential area of Tung Shan. Some of these villas are now, symbolically, still being used as residences for high-ranking Party cadres. 76

Western-style furniture was preferred for decorating these 'modern homes', as may be seen from contemporary commercial advertisements and comics. Most contemporary pin-up girls were photographed against the setting of a room furnished in 'modern' Western style (Figure 10). On the cover of a Cantonese Opera 'romantic comedy' script, a newly-wed couple, dressed in quasi-Western-style wedding suits, are depicted in the bedroom of their new flat, which is decorated and furnished in a Western manner (Figure 11). The happy ending of this opera, with the marriage of the protagonists, parallels the subject-matter of the drawing. It seems to suggest that a happy modern marriage will include a home furnished in modern style. 77 In an advertisement for a record company (Figure 12), a 'modern' family of five are shown enjoying music in front of an imported gramophone, with the parents comfortably seated on Western-style brocade sofas. 78 All these drawings seem to idealize the essential symbolic function of Western-style interior decoration in a 'modern' and happy urban family. In the words of a satirical writer:

Nowadays, all Chinese furniture shops are making Western-style furniture, [as if] preparing for those Westernized men and women living in this Westernized society to get married [and] form their small, Westernized families. 79

In terms of municipal development, the Canton authorities consciously looked to Japan and the West for models. The Municipal Government, staffed mainly by returned students from the West and Japan, 80 tried to transplant a number of Western metropolitan symbols in the hope thereby of enhancing
the reputation and image of Canton, and making it equal in status to its Western counterparts. The city wall, which had been “one of the most imposing walls in China,” one that “any city of pride” should have kept, was torn down and its old symbolism thus destroyed. Between 1922 and 1934, more than ten public parks were built to provide visitors with “varieties of Western-style amusements,” believed to be essential for the nourishment of physical and mental health. Miles of wide carriageways were opened, though some of those were too wide for the as yet not ‘motorized’ city. A symbolic city-flower was chosen, and a museum and two public libraries established. Even a race-course was built, supported by the official rationale that this was something most of the big European and North American cities had.

At a time when the traditional gown and the Chinese-style “jacket and trousers” (shan-ku) and “Sun Yat-sen suit” (Chung-shan-chuang 中山装) were still fashionable, an individual’s preference for Western fashion might be more a symbolic expression of personal attitude and values than just a desire for a change in apparel. It could be interpreted as the physical expression of a person’s preferences and propensity to imitate the mind-set of the Westerner. To those who could afford to choose, clothes were a mirror of character and value-orientation. If we assume that men usually dressed in a way they felt appropriately represented their outlook, then the increasing popularity of Western-style costume in Canton may serve as visual evidence of the cultural acceptance of the West by a substantial portion of its inhabitants. By the mid-1930s, Western apparel in Canton had become identified with social status, cultural level, and above all, modernity.

Formal photographic portraits of both officials and citizens in government and unofficial publications tend to vindicate the proposition that contemporary Cantonese preferred to present themselves in Western clothing at formal and socially ‘important’ occasions. Government publications commemorating special official occasions always included group or individual photographs of senior officials dressed in full Western suits.
By 1934, however, the number of automobiles in Canton had increased to nearly 2,000, and wide roads had become more justifiable. Lee, *Canton*, Appendix 8.

For instance, in the report on a government education conference, both the group and the individual photographs of the senior officials and organizers show that nearly all 273 participants wore Western suits. See *Kai­chun chuan-sheng chung-teng hsueh-hsiao chiao-yu-fang-an* (1934) [see n.65 above]. In the official book commemorating the inauguration of the new Municipal Offices building in 1934, a group photograph of the departmental staff shows all in Chung-shan-chuang, probably in response to the official policy of austerity for civil servants. However, the Mayor and the Governor in their portraits are dressed in Western suits. This seems to suggest that only the 'elite' were permitted to express themselves in Western outfits, symbolizing their official power and social status. *HCLCCN*, photograph section.

**Figure 13**

Chu Hui-jih 朱晦日, the newly-appointed Commissioner of the Public Safety Department, wore a Western suit instead of police or army uniform, even though he was a senior military officer, for the official inauguration ceremony in October 1927. Similarly, when Chi'en Ming-shu 陳銘楨 was sworn in as the Chairman of the Kwangtung Provincial Government in 1928, he wore a Western full-dress suit with a topper. At the official welcoming party for the triumphant return of Huang Hsiao-hsiung 黃紹雄 and Chi'en Chi-tang 陳濟棠 from their military campaigns in eastern Kwangtung, the eighty-seven senior officials and social notables who attended were mostly dressed in formal Western suits, and the banquet, which served foreign cuisine, was held at New Asia Hotel, then probably one of Canton's most exclusive dining places.

This fashion was by no means confined to official circles, however. Respectable citizens did the same. In a magazine published by the alumni association of a prestigious high school, photographs taken during various social functions organized for its members show that all the participants, both men and women, wore formal Western suits or dresses. A photograph of a student group from Lingnan University shows that all fifty members wore Western suits, with neck- or bow-ties and Western-style hats as accessories.

Advertisements for tailoring and drapery companies providing Western clothing predictably show the same trend. One of them reads:

> How can one be good-looking? How can one adapt to the [changing] needs of society? Love fashion! Western clothing!

The intrinsic value of Western fashion was given a 'Darwinist appraisal', so to speak, as being 'progressive'. Another advertisement reads:

> Beautiful people mainly wear beautiful Western suits. This is because Western suits have the advantage of being light and convenient.

In a satirical cartoon entitled "Respect the clothes, not their owner" [Figure 13], two attractive young ladies are holding the sleeves of a Western suit, matched with Western trousers, hat, and neck-tie, worn by a limbless and headless wooden dummy. The embracing of Western fashion with its symbolic meaning and status would thus appear to have reached an 'alarming' stage.

Medicine advertisements unveil the cultural meaning of the Western outlook from another perspective. In a newspaper advertisement for a drug company promoting a brand of tonic pills for women [Figure 14], a listless and sad-looking Chinese lady, clad in ordinary 'trousers and jacket', sits motionless on a sofa—representing one who has not tried these pills and thus remains unattractive with a pale complexion and a 'weak spirit' (shen shu 神衰). By way of contrast, after taking the pills, the lady is shown with fashionable Western clothes and accessories, standing upright and smiling cheerfully. A substantial number of advertisements for Cantonese tonic pills, aphrodisiacs, and medicinal oils use drawings of young ladies made up and dressed in the Western mode as their subjects. Beneath the obvious
visual appeal of these beautiful, and sometimes explicitly scantily clothed and alluring, girls, lies the implication that the ‘power’ of these drugs can bring health and charm to their users, or, in the case of aphrodisiacs, can lead to a successful encounter with a beautiful partner. To be healthy, charming, and sexually attractive, a Western outlook is thus posited as essential. Even children do not escape. In two advertisements for children’s medicine [Figure 15], the use of beautiful little blonde girls as a motif reinforces the cultural symbolism of the Western body representing the ideal of physical and spiritual health and loveliness. It seems to convey the message that by feeding Chinese children the advertised medicines, they can be made to grow as lovely and healthy as their ‘ideal’ western counterparts. Such advertisements tend to identify Western fashion and appearance with health, beauty, vitality and all manner of other good points that the younger generation should aspire to possess.

In real life, the obsession with Western fashion was widespread. One student complained that his contemporaries rejected Chinese clothing as backward and embraced Western garb as a symbol of modernity. Such a social phenomenon was seen in some quarters as an omen of the nation’s collapse. Students were alleged to be so addicted to Western fashion that some Cantonese schools even proposed to the education authority that they should have their heads shaved. Upper-class prostitutes began “titillating with modernity” by wearing daring Western fashions, hair-styles and make-up, and consuming imported liquor and cigarettes, in order to suit the taste of their more Westernized customers. A manual for brothel-goers recommended that its readers dress in Western suits to attract the attention of “high-brow” courtesans.

It has been suggested that the extent of use of a foreign language in any given country may possibly provide an inverse index of its attitude towards that foreign country. From the time of the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, for example, the German language lost its attraction to the

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**Figure 14**

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**Figure 15**

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86 *HTP*, 3 October 1927, p.2, col.2.
88 *MSP*, 13 March 1928, p.11.
89 *Nan-tien shui-yueh*, illustration.
91 Kuang-chou Ssu-li Ling-nan Ta-hsueh Chung-shu, ed., *Chung-shu* [The Centre Club], vol.1 (June 1930).
94 *Pan-chiao man-hua*, vol.6, no.1, p.5.
95 *HTP*, 17 August 1927, p.4, col. 4.
96 Medicine advertisements with drawings of attractive or inviting girls with a Westernized outlook are plentiful in every issue of *Pan-chiao man-hua*. Those relating to children are in ibid., vol. 6, no.1, pp.4, 6; no.2, p.4.
Czechs, creating a void which was filled by Russian. But with the end of the War, interest in the Russian language declined as Soviet influence in the country increased.\footnote{101} In contrast, educated Cantonese seem to have had a different kind of sensitivity to foreign languages. Apparently unmoved by the incessant official rhetoric against ‘foreign imperialism’, educated youngsters in Canton enjoyed interlarding their speech with foreign words, phrases and terms, which were usually unnecessary in that they could have easily been expressed in their native language. High-school students were bold enough to utter a few phrases of incorrect English in their conversations in public to show off their superior social status.\footnote{102} Young Cantonese regarded it as modern to address men as ‘Mister’ (mi-ssu-t’) lady as ‘Miss’ (mi-ssu 慕絲), and married women as ‘Mrs’ (mi-ssu-shih 木絲仕).\footnote{103} This habit of introducing foreign words into speech was a means of showing off knowledge of a foreign language, which was (and indeed still is) popularly perceived as a yardstick of educational level, social status, and intellectual capacity. It is a consciously explicit pro-Western cultural gesture, resembling the penchant for English among the Bengali intelligentsia in the colonial era.\footnote{104} English was said to be “recklessly used” (lan-yung 輕用) by some of the government departments as the “fashionable” medium for official correspondence. It had apparently reached such an “alarming stage” that one of these departments felt obliged to issue an “order” exhorting its colleagues to give up the “inveterate habit.”\footnote{105}

Even the after-life was not spared the adoration of the West. A contemporary traveller was amazed to find a life-size paper automobile with a paper Italian flag flying from the bonnet among items being burned at a funeral in Canton. A foreign flag was apparently considered useful in the next world, perhaps “to combat property-confiscating generals and Tuchuns [in that afterworld].”\footnote{106}

Nobody in Republican Canton was as openly explicit and enthusiastic in advocating and publicizing their faith and confidence in the validity of Western culture to China’s struggle for modernity as a group of lecturers from Lingnan University. In the opinion of Ch’en Hsü-ching, the ring-leader, so to speak, of this group of advocates, Western culture far outstripped its Chinese counterpart in the areas of art, science, politics, education, philosophy, literature, religion, clothing, food, and so on. All the good points in Chinese culture, he believed, could also be found in Western culture, but not vice versa.\footnote{107}

All in all, in the cultural context of Republican Canton, popular attitudes towards the West were not necessarily always one-sided and belligerent. Different and conflicting views on the issue could co-exist at the same time, in the same place, and even in the same person, though modern Cantonese culture showed on balance a strong leaning towards the West in this period.