

***Ambivalent Perceptions of Beauty and Fashion: A Qualitative Study of Chinese Female Students Studying in British Universities***

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**Abstract**

The research explored the experiences of Chinese female students studying in the UK concerning fashion and beauty by investigating the students' definitions of beauty and exploring how social media exposure in different countries and living in a new country affect their perceptions of beauty. This research answered this question through qualitative methods, recruited participants by purposive sampling, collected data through semi-structured interviews, and drawn conclusions by thematic analysis. Chinese female international students' definitions of "beauty" are diverse, and they try to achieve their ideal beauty through fitness and exercise. Chinese social media platforms affect students' beauty perception more than foreign media platforms, and these influences are negative. In addition, conservativeness and close kinship in the Chinese social and cultural background are the factors limiting the perception and expression of "beauty" by Chinese female international students. However, their beauty perception changed when they moved from the Chinese social culture to the UK, so social and cultural backgrounds may influence their beauty perception more than social media in a cross-cultural context. Because the cross-cultural and social media environments are complex and dynamic, the efforts of female international students to find appropriate methods for beauty perception and identity construction in the process of cross-cultural adaptation are far more complicated than we imagine.

Keywords: Cross-Culture, Social-Culture, Female, International Students, Media, Beauty

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# I. Introduction

## 1.1 Justification

In recent years, "white, youthful, and skinny" has been the prevailing aesthetic style in Chinese society. Thin, pale, and youthful women are welcomed, encouraged, and followed on social media platforms and in real life. The concept that "thin is beautiful" continues to rise; many young women try to attain this goal through risky methods such as dieting and the misuse of weight-loss medicines. This unhealthy and even distorted look has garnered controversy and criticism. With Gu Ailing's victory at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, an increasing number of Chinese women noticed her healthy figure and optimistic perspective. In an interview, Gu Ailing also asserted that "white and slim is not beauty; health is beauty", which sparked a lively debate on social media. On Xiaohongshu<sup>1</sup> and other social media platforms, Chinese women have begun to critically analyze the idea of female beauty. For instance, a blogger who explored the new definition of beauty on her site stated that "beauty is a highly subjective adjective that should not have strict criteria".

The series of discussions brought by Gu Ailing have profound cultural connotations. Gu Ailing was born in the United States in September 2003, Chinese-American. In June 2019, she announced through social media that she officially became a Chinese citizen and began to represent China in the World Series. At the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, she won the gold medal at the age of 18, becoming the youngest Olympic champion in freestyle skiing. Gu Ailing's growth was completed in a Western context, which made more people attribute her "differences" to the fact that she was influenced by a different culture from Chinese women: Gu Ailing's advocacy of health aesthetics was influenced by Western culture Influence, and Chinese women's pursuit of "white, youthful, thin" beauty is influenced by the Chinese cultural background.

Social-cultural differences impact how individuals perceive their bodies (Wardle et al., 2006). Similar to Gu Ailing, there is another group of Chinese female university students in the United Kingdom who may similarly be impacted by two distinct social cultures. While studying in the United Kingdom, they may be influenced by the interplay of two distinct cultures, both online and in person, from their home country and the location of study. They may be in the vanguard of cultural fusion, confrontation, and conflict and possess the most intuitive grasp of how this cultural conflict affects them. According to Higher Education Student Statistics UK<sup>2</sup>, 49% of full-time postgraduate students in the UK come from non-EU countries. China sends more students to the United Kingdom than any other nation in the world. In the academic year 2020/21, 32% of non-EU students came from China. In addition, 57% of all college students enrolling in the 2020/21 academic year were female. This group of Chinese female students enrolled in British universities is therefore of tremendous research importance. This study intends to analyze the ambivalent conceptions of beauty and fashion among Chinese female university students in the United Kingdom, and to consider what roles social culture and social media play in their beauty perceptions formation. This article will investigate the following issues: 1) How does this group view "beauty"?; 2) How do social media and cross-cultural environments affect their perceptions of "beauty"?

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<sup>1</sup> The Xiaohongshu is a platform for social media and e-commerce. The Chinese equivalent to Instagram. It has around 300 million registered users and over 85 million monthly active users as of 2019. 70% of its users were born after 1990, and approximately 90% of them are women, according to reports. The app allows users and influencers to post, discover, and share beauty and health-related product reviews.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/higher-education-student-statistics-uk-2020-to-2021>

## **1.2 Beauty Regimes**

### **1.2.1 The Role of Social and Cultural Factors**

People's perception of beauty can be shaped by many factors. Social and cultural influences play the largest effect on body size perception of oneself and others (Furnham & Alibhai, 1983), and different regional cultures may influence people's attitudes regarding body image, weight, and beauty (Kowner, 2002; Wardle et al., 2006; Jung & Lee, 2006). Evidence indicates that this trend is particularly robust in Asia (Madan et al., 2018). Notable among these is a quantitative study of body image and weight control among college students in 22 countries. The results indicated that both male and female college students in Asian nations lost more weight across all weight categories. Perceptions of being overweight and trying to lose weight are strongest in Asian countries, where obesity rates are generally low (Wardle et al., 2006). In addition, it is worth mentioning that in a survey of Chinese and Croatian women's dissatisfaction and perception of female body image, it was found that thin internalisation can predict the dissatisfaction with women's body image in both countries, and Chinese women's dissatisfaction with their body image is scored higher (Stojcic et al., 2020). Compared to Croatian women, Chinese women experience greater pressure from family, friends, and the media to adhere to standard aesthetic norms, and consequently have more negative opinions of their actual body shape (Stojcic et al., 2020).

### **1.2.2 The Role of Social Media Platforms**

Research shows that more time spent on Facebook and/or Myspace are associated with body dissatisfaction, weight loss, internalization of thin ideal, body monitoring, self-objectification and increased dieting level. This result is found among preadolescent girls (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014), female high school students (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012) and female undergraduates (Cohen & Blaszczynski, 2015; Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). Moreover, certain types of activity on social media in particular are likely to make the phenomenon worse (Meier & Gray, 2014). For instance, according to Meier and Gray (2014), higher exposure on Facebook (such as posting, viewing, and commenting on images) is associated with greater dissatisfaction with weight, thin internalization and self-objectification of slim ideals among female high school students; Online social grooming behaviors (e.g., browsing and commenting on peers' Facebook profiles) are significantly associated with female college students' desire for thinness (Kim & Chock, 2015). In addition, the importance of Facebook for one's social life is associated with objectified body consciousness (i.e., appearance self-worth and body surveillance) and body shame among male and female undergraduate students (Manago, 2015).

The large number of photos posted on social media platforms provide users with the opportunity to make regular social comparisons related to their appearance. Research by Myers and Crowther (2009) shows that constantly comparing one's physical appearance to others (especially those who are more attractive than oneself) can lead to negative body image. In addition, studies on female undergraduate students have found that a tendency to compare one's appearance to others (particularly to one's peers) mediated the relationship between Facebook usage and body image concerns (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). Similarly, among female college students, physical appearance tends to mediate between Facebook social grooming behavior and thinness drive (Kim & Chock, 2015). Therefore, appearance comparison plays an important role in the relationship between social media use and body image concern.

### **1.2.3 The Role of Cross-cultural Context**

Cross-cultural adaptation occurs at the stage when all cross-cultural travelers start life in a new country (Kim, 2017). The process of adapting to an unfamiliar culture unfolds through the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic. Over time, through continuous activities of new cultural learning, most people are able to attain increasing levels of functional and psychological efficacy vis-a-vis the host environment (Kim, 2017). Kim thinks that, underpinning the cross-cultural adaptation process are the two interrelated experiences of deculturation of some of the original cultural habits, on the one hand, and acculturation of new ones, on the other. Campbell and Rew (1999) proceeded from an anthropological framework, using the term "identity" to piece together personal desires and experiences, local ways of being, politics and culture, belonging to national "tribes", and global meanings and discourses into one complex structure that constitutes subjectivity. All of these are aspects of "stitching" complex subjectivity that international students have (re)constructed. Some would argue that all cultures are mixed cultures, all subjectivities are mixed, accepting/rejecting the cultural values and influences of various cultural discourses (Koehne, N., 2005). For example, Bhabha (2012) argues that all forms of culture are continuously in a process of mixing...(creating) "third spaces" that allow other locations to emerge. However, when people move into another culture (He, 2002) and speak another language for as long as international students do, the creation of third spaces and the construction of mixed subjectivity tend to materialize. As Hall (2015) himself experienced, when you live in mixed cultures, you "learn to inhabit two identities, speak two cultural languages, and translate and negotiate between them". Constantly going in and out of the way the language and culture exist is something that international students experience and talk about as part of being an international student. In this period, their beauty perceptions may change.

### **1.3 The Present Study (Research Gap)**

Thus, there is indeed literature on the following aspects: Sociocultural factors play a dominant role in the perception of beauty in oneself and others. In addition, people's use of social media also affects their perceptions of beauty and fashion, with social media providing an opportunity to compare physical appearance and, as a mediator, also affect people's perceptions of beauty and fashion. Intercultural adaptation occurs in intercultural travelers, including international students, who are influenced by many sociocultural factors. However, the current research focus of the relevant literature is still on the comparison of groups in different regions and countries, and there is still a research gap in the comparative study of the changes in the identity construction of the same group under different cultural backgrounds. This research aims to explore how exposure from different countries' social media platforms and living in a new country affects the fashion choices and beauty regimes of Chinese female international students, thus contributing to the existing body of knowledge on cross-cultural identity reconstruction.

## **II. Method**

### **2.1 Participants**

The participants are 10 female students from China who are currently studying undergraduate and postgraduate studies at universities in the UK. I made a clear attempt to recruit eligible females of all ages from different social media platforms, including WeChat and Xiaohongshu. I did not match them on other factors. Among them, 1 person is from first-tier

cities, 5 people are from new first-tier cities, 2 people are from second-tier cities, and 1 people is from Taiwan. Table 1 lists other demographic information (Age, Relationship status, Children, Education level, Employment status).

Participant Pseudonyms	Age	Relationship status	Children	Education level	Having work experience	Only Child in family
Rachel	23	In relationship	0	Master's student	No	Yes
Mian	24	Single	0	Master's student	No	Yes
Luo	22	In relationship	0	Master's student	No	Yes
Yi	23	Single	0	Master's student	No	Yes
Ding	34	Married	1	Master's student	Yes	Yes
Xuan	22	Single	0	Undergraduate student	No	Yes
Mao	23	In relationship	0	Master's student	No	Yes
Jenny	23	In relationship	0	Master's student	No	Yes
Yu	24	In relationship	0	Master's student	No	Yes
Zoey	25	In relationship	0	Master's student	No	Yes

Table 1: Demographic information per participant

## 2.2 Procedure

As this study has a fairly clear focus, I chose the form of semi-structured interviewing for data collection. In addition, I chose the form of virtual video interviews. The online interview format has the advantage of greater flexibility, which is expected to allow participants to provide more in-depth answers through longer, uninterrupted interviews to provide richer data. Before data collection began, I first applied for ethical review and received ethical approval from the Glasgow Ethics Committee. I designed an interview schedule with a series of questions (for specific interview questions, please refer to the 6.1 Interview Schedule in the appendix). Before the start of each interview, I sent the participants a Consent Form, a Participant Information Sheet and a Privacy Notice. Interviews only began after I obtained their consent and received the consent forms they signed. Questions in the interview schedule were not asked exactly as listed, but in general, all the questions were asked and a similar wording were used from interviewee to interviewee (Bryman, 2016). Questions were developed based on the literature, but an inductive approach were utilized which allowed for participants' responses to guide discussion, as is recommended in the literature (Wilkinson, 1998).

## 2.3 Data Analysis Method

I established an audit trail, including an ongoing record of all activities, discussions and decisions, to provide logical clues and enable other researchers to judge the credibility of findings and interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The entire interview was recorded and saved. It was transcribed into a written version. Word-order pauses and body movements were also transcribed and annotated, allowing me to examine what participants are saying more thoroughly.

Thematic analysis is used to identify and analyze the data. I used the thematic analysis guide proposed by Braun and Clarke for thematic analysis. This approach is chosen because it is not

bound to a pre-existing theoretical orientation, nor is its goal necessarily to generate new theories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The 'keyness' of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), with an inductive approach (i.e., having data as the ground of analysis), was used to generate themes among women's responses to the interview questions. In the study, I first read the transcripts to familiarize with the data and to write notes concerning interesting features from the data. Next, I re-read the entire dataset multiple times, simultaneously generating initial themes and subthemes through coding. Last, I revised the themes and subthemes, going back to the dataset where necessary.

### **III. Results (Data Analysis)**

In this part, I generated two major themes: 1) participants' perceptions of beauty; 2) factors that affect participants' perceptions of "beauty". In the first part, I mainly explored the participants' definition of "beauty" and their efforts to achieve the ideal "beauty". In the second part, I explored the changes in the process of cross-cultural beauty perception of female international students, as well as the opportunities and challenges they encounter in this period.

#### **3.1 Beauty**

##### **3.1.1 The Definition of Beauty**

In this part, I mainly present what female international students think of "beauty". Besides, I also present the "ideal beauty" they present in social media, and discuss the differences and connections between them. I mainly summarize the "beauty" in their perception by asking: "What do you think is true beauty?", and generalize the aspects that involve the definition of "beauty" beyond this question. In addition, I comprehended their "ideal beauty" on social media platforms by asking them about their social media activities, including photo postings.

When discussing the definition of "beauty", some participants gave specific descriptions, including "slim", "healthy" and "strong". For example, participant Yu identified "slim" as a criteria of beauty. She believes: "If a person is thinner, I think she/he will look better in clothes and look more refined." Mian and other five participants listed "healthy" as one of the definitions of "beauty", and emphasized the importance of "healthy": "I think the pursuit of any kind of beauty must be based on health." Further, another participant Ding, a former professional track and field athlete, took "strong muscles" as her definition of beauty. She mentioned: "I think Miss Bikini<sup>3</sup> is beautiful. It's really difficult for a woman to get a strong muscle, but I've been working hard in that direction. "

However, some participants gave less specific descriptions, such as "confident" and "unique" temperament. Jenny, Zoey, Yi and Mao explicitly use "confident" as one of the definitions of beauty. Jenny and Mao emphasized: "I think self-confidence is a very important thing." "If a woman can show a confident temperament, then I think she is beautiful." Participant Yi described "confident" in a more detailed way: "If I see a person on the street with a raised head, a natural demeanor and good manners, I will be attracted. So I think if you are

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3 The four main divisions in most natural bodybuilding shows right now (2016) are bikini, figure, female physique, and female bodybuilding. In the most basic, a bikini is a sleek, smooth feminine look that most people consider a "fitness model." The word used for bikini athletes is "tight and shapely".

confident, you will have a unique temperament that can attract others." On the other hand, participants Yi and Jenny also raised the importance of "finding a style that suits you". Participant Yi explained: "I don't think people should always copy other peoples' styles because it's very likely that those trends don't suit them at all. I think everyone has their unique style, so people need to find the one that suits them to express their real beauty."

Therefore, I found that these ten female international students have their own considerations for the definition of "beauty" and there are big differences between them. This finding corresponded the notion of "diversity" that the six participants made clear in the conversation. As participants Mian and Rachel reflected: "I think it's okay for everyone to think differently about beauty." "I think my beauty definition for women is very broad, and I can appreciate all kinds of females' beauty." When asked about her opinion on the phrase "white and slim are not beauty, health is beauty", participant Luo also said: "I think what we should really advocate is beauty's diversity. I mean, you have the right to pursue a slim body, and you also have the right to pursue other types of beauty. As long as the process of pursuing beauty is healthy and happy, I think it is enough, and the rest has nothing to do with me." It can be seen that participants pay great attention to the diversity of beauty.

In conclusion, the ten female international students have different definitions of beauty. Notably, this finding runs counter to what I assumed before the study began that more women might use "slim" as a criteria of beauty: only one participant explicitly listed "slim" as one of the criteria, and more women focused on the development of personal health and personal temperament.

### **3.1.2 How to Achieve Their Beauty Goals?**

First of all, in order to achieve the goal of "healthy" beauty, Ding and other four participants chose to exercise in the gym. Ding reflected: "I go to the gym almost three or four times a week, which has become a habit of mine." In addition, participants Rachel and Zoey also have the habit of dancing, and they regularly participate in dance classes in the fitness center. Rachel participates in dance classes twice a week, and Zoey also actively take part in the experience classes offered by the dance studio, including ballet, hip-pop, etc. It can be seen that these women are working hard to achieve their ideal beauty.

### **3.2 Factors That Affect Perception of Beauty**

In this part, I will focus on two factors that affect Chinese female international students' perception of beauty: 1) social media exposure; 2) different social and cultural backgrounds.

### 3.2.1 Social Media Exposure

Participants	Social media platforms used (in descending order of duration)	Posting personal photos on	Total usage time (Hours/ day)
Rachel	Xiaohongshu, Wechat, Douyin, Instagram	Wechat Moment, Xiaohongshu, Instagram	7-8
Mian	Wechat, Douban, Weibo, Instagram	Wechat Moment, Instagram	5-6
Luo	Xiaohongshu, Wechat, Instagram	Wechat Moment, Instagram	4-5
Yi	Wechat, Xiaohongshu, Instagram, Weibo	Wechat Moment	7-8
Ding	Xiaohongshu, Wechat, Facebook, Weibo	Wechat Moment	7-8
Xuan	Wechat, Xiaohongshu, Weibo, Instagram	Wechat Moment, Instagram	6-7
Mao	Wechat, Xiaohongshu, Weibo, Instagram	Wechat Moment	2-3
Jenny	Wechat, Xiaohongshu, Douyin, Instagram, whatsapp, Weibo	Wechat Moment, Instagram	3-4
Yu	Wechat, Xiaohongshu, Weibo, Instagram	Wechat Moment	7-8
Zoey	Wechat, Xiaohongshu, Weibo, Instagram	Wechat Moment	6-7

Table 2: Social media platform usage

As we can see, the use of social media has become an essential part of the life of these female international students - their average daily social media use reaches 5-6 hours. Another thing worth mentioning is that social media platforms they used did not change completely based on the country they live in: even if the country they live in changes from China to the UK, they are still more dependent on Chinese social media platforms. As Yi stated: "Although I followed some fashion bloggers on both Xiaohongshu and Instagram, I still think Xiaohongshu has more influence on what beauty is to me. The first reason is that I use Xiaohongshu more frequently than Instagram. The second reason is that I think I still prefer to read Chinese when I read relative information. Besides, I feel that the content of these Chinese outfit bloggers is more practical for me." Thus, in cross-cultural settings, Chinese social media platforms may still have a mainly impact on their identity construction than Western social media platforms.

Rachel talked about her feelings about using Chinese social media: "I think the fashion and beauty bloggers on Chinese social media platforms are all very white and very thin, making people feel that only thin people look good. Besides, anyone can post comments on social media platforms, whether the comments are good or bad. If there is a fat girl or a girl who is not very good-looking posted some photos, someone will directly say 'you are so fat/ugly' in the comments section below. I think it will deeply hurt the girls who post the photos. It make me feel that girls will be more and more dissatisfied with themselves in this situation." Mao also stated her feeling: "Sometimes when I don't look at the information on social media, I feel that I am in good shape and not too fat, but when I see those pictures that are promoted on social media, I get very anxious and think if I am trying to lose weight. And when I buy clothes on the website, I will see that the models are very thin, making me feel that only thin is beautiful."



### 3.2.2 China's sociocultural context

When discussing how China's sociocultural context affects these participants' perceptions of "beauty", I would like to use the "fashion shame" proposed by participant Mian during the interview to summarize the overall context. The term "fashion shame" means: a feeling of inferiority and shame when wearing "fashionable" clothes in some environments where they think their attire is not appropriate with. Mian, the participant who coined the term, did not define exactly what "fashionable" clothes meant, but described a phenomenon: "When I was young, my parents told me that children should not dress colorfully when they go to school. I think every parent would tell their children like this. It led to a result that even though I have grown up and had my own dressing style, I would feel a sense of shame if I wore some colorful and exaggerated clothes. Besides, I'm afraid people will notice what I'm wearing, and I'm worried they will think what I'm wearing is inappropriate." This long-standing "fashion shame" led them to be afraid of wearing more variety and bolder clothes, because they are afraid that they will appear "strange" in the eyes of others.

I found that the reason for such "fashion shame" mainly comes from two aspects: First, the conservative social environment makes women have greater worries when choosing what to wear. Secondly, the social characteristics of strong social ties in Chinese society also make women have to consider the eyes of others when presenting their own "beauty".

First, participants mentioned the word "conservative" many times in the conversation to describe the social state of China. Mao said: "In the perception of some Chinese parents, wearing bright eyeshadow or bright lipstick is considered a kind of heavy makeup. For these Chinese parents, people who wear heavy makeup are very bad, because they think that only some prostitutes wear heavy makeup. This is one aspect that I think Chinese culture is somewhat conservative." It is not just among the older elders. Rachel mentioned other groups: "Actually, at my bachelor university, there are girls who dress boldly, like some girls would wear tight super mini skirts. But the comments from my peers around me are not friendly, and some of them may say dirty talk to those girls. So sometimes you have to choose more conservative clothes to avoid this situation." Jenny elaborated on the impact that a conservative environment may have on young women: "I feel that it may be because China's parents and elders are more conservative, so they use repressive education methods. So I met a lot of young women who are very good, but at the same time they have low self-esteem and are not confident."

Second, when discussing what influenced their perception and presentation of beauty, participant Mian brought up a phenomenon that "in China, everyone may be more or less connected to each other, so everyone pays more attention to what are the people around them doing". In fact, she explicitly used the term "kinship" to describe Chinese society. Broadly speaking, kinship patterns can be thought of as encompassing people who are connected by ancestry—that is, social relationships in development—and by marriage. In some cultures, kinship may be considered to extend to those with whom an individual has economic or political ties, or other forms of social ties. Mian believes that compared to the UK, China's social network relies more on kinship for expression. This form of expression makes people in society more connected and more concerned about what those around them are doing, as well as being more concerned about what others think. Many participants expressed their discomfort with being overly focused. Mian mentioned: "Because I look white, I received a lot of strange looks from passers-by when I was young. Sometimes I felt like I was being molested by their eyes. I was even called to the office by my teacher when I was in

elementary school. My teacher asked me questions like 'you are too white, do you have any disease?'. I am easily observed and commented on by others because of my appearance, and it make me feel very uncomfortable."

In conclusion, female participants described China's sociocultural background as a more conservative and closely related society, and felt that this social background made them more restricted in expressing their "beauty".

### **3.2.3 British Social and Cultural Context**

When discussing the socio-cultural background of the UK, the characteristics of "inclusiveness" and "diversity" were mentioned by several participants in the conversation. Such features were embodied in the participants' discussions on the theme of "freedom to dress". Furthermore, from their descriptions of the environment of British freedom to dress, I have tried to extract the British society's characteristics of "individualized".

Almost every participant mentioned the idea of "freedom to dress". Participant Mian recounted: "In the UK, no matter how strange clothes you wear, or no matter what your body shape is, you won't get some weird looks." Participant Ding also described: "I think the only standard of British people choosing their clothes is that they think the clothes look good. I feel like In the UK, nobody cares if you're too fat or what, or what clothes you wear. You can wear anything without being judged. In this environment, I gradually don't worry much about some kinds of the clothes will make me looks fat, and I buy clothes that I think is beautiful." Freedom to dress is not only the freedom of men or women to wear their clothes, but also the freedom of men to wear feminine clothes, as well as women's freedom to wear masculine clothes. Today, women wearing masculine clothing is generally accepted or even a trend (women wear overalls, etc.), but the acceptance of men wearing feminine clothing (skirts, crop tops, etc.) still varies from region to region. Rachel used the word "shock" to express her feelings when she first saw a man wearing feminine clothing after coming to the UK: "I remember when I first came to the UK, I saw a man on the bus. He was dressed very feminine, wearing a short top and a short skirt. I was shocked, but I found that people around me didn't care at all, so no one looked at him or judged him." According to this, I summarized the concept of freedom of dress mentioned by the participants, meaning: no matter what kind of body image a person is, tall, short, fat or thin, she/he wears any clothes without being judged by others . In this way, the whole society has reached a consensus that I only care about myself.

This is very different from the social culture in China. As Rachel experienced, the Chinese female student group will inevitably feel some differences in the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Constantly going in and out of the way the language and culture exist is something international students experience and talk about, and part of what they are as an international student. I realized that Chinese female international students are constantly affected by social-cultural context, and cultural context may influence their construction of beauty perception more than social media. As Mao said, "I gradually realized that I shouldn't be blinded by social media feeds. And when I came to the UK and saw so many confident and bold girls, I started to care less about the deformed beauty standards that social media espoused." Rachel also had a similar feeling: "After I live for some time in London, I realize more clearly that when I think about whether I am beautiful today, I don't need to think about what others think of me. I can be just like those British girls on the streets. Even if their figure is not that good, they are very confident and think they are beautiful. Before I came to

the UK, although I always told myself not to care about other people's opinions, I still felt happy or sad when I heard good or bad comments from others. But now I really don't care what other people think. I think I'm beautiful, and I feel like my anxiety is about to go away."

However, are the effects of later cultures on the way beauty perception are (re)constructed permanent?

But, I'm going back to China. I think when I leave the free and open environment of the UK and go back to the environment in China, I may go back to the very uncomfortable state I used to be in. I don't think this change is permanent, it's only temporary.---Mao

Female international students may have realized this change. Cross-cultural and social media environments are complex and dynamic, so the efforts of female international students to find appropriate methods for beauty perception and identity construction in the process of cross-cultural adaptation are far more complicated than we imagine.

#### **IV. Conclusion and Discussion**

Chinese female international students' definitions of "beauty" are diverse, and they try to achieve their ideal beauty through fitness and exercise. Chinese social media platforms affect students' beauty perception more than foreign media platforms, and these influences are negative. In addition, conservativeness and close kinship in the Chinese social and cultural background are the factors limiting the perception and expression of "beauty" by Chinese female international students. However, their beauty perception changed when they moved from the Chinese social culture to the UK, so social and cultural backgrounds may influence their beauty perception more than social media in a cross-cultural context. Because the cross-cultural and social media environments are complex and dynamic, the efforts of female international students to find appropriate methods for beauty perception and identity construction in the process of cross-cultural adaptation are far more complicated than we imagine.

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