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Selling beauty in digital China: gender, platform, and economy

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Propositions

1. This dissertation focuses on the expanding reach of beauty blogs from the 2000s to the 2010s in China. It investigates how this process has been shaped and accelerated by gender discourses, platform labor, and the beauty industry, each of which is rooted in the broader context of China's social transformation.
2. Beauty is an outcome of certain cultural customs and practices, which always bind us to the social order, a social order that is marked by the enormous inequalities of wealth, status, and power.
3. It is problematic to equal Chinese beauty bloggers with a general concept of beauty influencers, for Chinese beauty bloggers grow in a specific cultural, technological, and economic environment.
4. The seemingly rich variety of beauty templates on offer conceals the notably restrained imaginary of beauty on social media. Moreover, the sense of empowerment conjured by makeover tutorials is extremely vulnerable and cannot substantively empower women.
5. Beauty blogs may seem superficial or trivial to those who are not engaged with them. This impression may stem from the fact that aesthetic labor seems to operate at an individual level and does not directly present a general picture of societal change in China. However, when we stop seeing these little things as individual in character and connect them to Chinese history, it becomes clear that together these little things have shifted the pervasive understanding of how Chinese women should look.
6. Through professionalization, verticalization, and institutionalization, Weibo has turned beauty amateurs into regular content providers and connected them with a broad range of audiences. While promoting beauty bloggers, Weibo actively maximizes the profits that it makes from them, whether through user

engagement, targeted advertising, and algorithmic preferences. For Weibo, the process of making beauty bloggers or wanghongs is also a process of making platform labor.

7. Beauty products, which lie at the heart of beauty blogs, are non-digital, non-virtual, and non-abstract. Accordingly, the development of Chinese beauty bloggers cannot be solely explained as a result of immaterial labor involving communication, services, and the production of meaning.
8. Posting personal consumption experiences online is not profitable in itself. Beauty blogging becomes lucrative only when it boosts the beauty industry's capacity to realize value. This explains how and why the beauty industry has taken pains to further the proliferation of beauty bloggers.
9. Constantly rising marketing budgets in the global beauty industry provide worldwide beauty bloggers with a significant flow of finance, inciting more and more people to join the beauty influencer business.
10. Rather than being an outgrowth of an essential Chinese culture, the wanghong economy is driven by the widespread use of social media, enormously popular influencers, growing consumer markets, and sufficient suppliers. The wanghong economy has developed successfully in China because all of these factors have been present there in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.
11. The state has played a hidden but significant role in stimulating connections among the players involved in the Chinese beauty blogging business and paved the way for the rise of beauty blogging and the wanghong economy.
12. The rise of beauty blogging in China is an embodiment of global capitalism, which has strong ties with the beauty industry's pre-digital system of mass production.