

**Angelina Chin**

**"Performing and Policing Femininity: Transformations of Femininity and Fengsu (Social Customs) in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou"**

My paper traces the cultural shaping of desired femininity in South China in the Republican era. I interpret the ways women dressed, acted or performed themselves in public as performance of invented norms of ideal femininity. Such repetition in imitating served to universalize those beliefs and values attached to the ideal, to which many lower class service laborers aspired. Nevertheless, local politicians and revolutionaries also attempted to shape another form of ideal female citizenship through reforms of "social customs". In late 20s and early 30s South China, "social customs" (fengsu) became a popular signifier tied to proper habits and behavior of women. I argue that it was an invented cultural device repeatedly recycled by the government officials in disciplining lower class women. In 1927, the government in Guangzhou set up campaigns against "social customs" (fengsu) such as breast-binding, ear-piercing, long hair. Slowly such emphasis on health, simplicity and naturalness transformed into publicly desired qualities of feminine beauty. However, the rising sexual images of modern women and the excessiveness of sexually explicit materials about women's body parts created a moral dilemma for the governing regime. By the mid-1930s, the government and some middle-class elites started to uphold yet another campaign with a more conservative ethos of chastity to protect "social customs" from deteriorating (fenghua) by banning extravagant clothing and seductive behavior. Through "re-disciplining" the woman's body, the new urban elites attempted to give guidelines to a new social standard of sexuality, gender relations and work, which were indispensable prerequisites for urban female citizenship in Guangzhou.