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Mexican Women and Modernity- the India Bonita Contest in 1921

This paper seeks to analyze the contradictory nature of the creation of modernity in Mexico by focusing on the 'India Bonita' contest, the first Mexican beauty contest held specifically for indigenous women in 1921.

During the 1920s, after the conclusion of the Mexican Revolution, Mexico experienced a period of national soul-seeking, and attempted to create a new Mexican national identity, or 'Mexicanidad', which united the multiethnic, multicultural Mexican society inspired by the traditional native culture based on its pre-hispanic architecture, folk arts and crafts. Although the India Bonita contest seemed at the time to be a reaction against the rapid modernization that occurred during the prior regime, the French-oriented Porfiriato, it also exhibits elements constituting important characteristics of "Mexican modernity", such as commercialization, international influence, and the willingness to change the status quo.

This paper shows how organizers of the India Bonita contest, who were cosmopolitan intellectuals, attempted to replace the Porfiriato's Eurocentric aesthetic of beauty with a new modern concept, one based on notions of "Mexican traditional beauty". Moreover, they then sought to internationalize this image by projecting it onto the international stage as the true universal representation of the Mexican woman.