

The Image Dissemination of Female Sports Stars in the "Golden Decade"—Take the Reports on Yang Xiuqiong by Shun Pao as an Example

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Abstract: From 1927 to 1937, the Republic of China ushered in the "Golden Decade." During this period, sports have developed, and sports journalism and communication have also ushered in a period of prosperity. In this context, female sports stars such as "Mermaid" Yang Xiuqiong appeared. This paper uses the literature analysis method to analyze the characteristics of Yang Xiuqiong's image in Shun Pao: the athlete who saves the country through sports, the practitioner of women's liberation, and the victim of the old times. At the same time, it can be seen that the oppression she suffered as a woman based on the related reports reflects the objective social reality that hinders the development of sports and sports news dissemination to a certain extent.

Keywords: Golden Decade; The Mermaid; Yang Xiuqiong; Shun Pao; Sports

1. Introduction

During the "Golden Decade," China's various undertakings made some progress due to the relatively stable social environment. Therefore, sports and sports journalism and communication have ushered in a period of prosperity. But objectively speaking, prosperity is extremely limited and unbalanced under the semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. In the era when feudal warlords' struggles had not subsided, Chinese people's consciousness had not yet been liberated, and women's rights were not guaranteed, a famous female sports star, the "Mermaid," Yang Xiuqiong, appeared. This makes people wonder what social conditions made her a household name. What was her image in the eyes of the people at that time?

From "Hong Kong International Open Swimming" on page 19 on July 2, 1933, to "Women's 100m Freestyle Final Red Hat Learns to Swim" on page 5 on May 14, 1948, a total of 789 articles related to Yang Xiuqiong were reported by Shun Pao. Mathematical statistics were carried out on the 789 reports about Yang Xiuqiong in Shun Pao. It is concluded that there are 367 reports on sports events, 304 reports on social activities such as the ribbon-cutting report for the Nanchang Water Games on July 26, 1934, and 118 entertainment gossip such as the 1933 "Boom! Hong Kong mermaid Yang Xiuqiong being a concubine." [1] Among these were 723 reports during the "Golden Decade, accounting for 92%, and 66 reports after that, accounting for 8%. Combined with Yang Xiuqiong's own life, she won the title of "Mermaid" in the National Games in 1933. In the 1936 Berlin Olympics, she failed to enter the finals. After returning home, she chose to retire and gradually kept a low profile. The reports surrounding her are in line with her career cycle. It can be said that all her images are based on her role as a female athlete.

Search on HowNet with "Yang Xiuqiong" as the keyword, with 24 search results. Most of them discuss her life experience and sports achievements, while some articles discuss the characteristics of her media image from a gender perspective. This paper tries to explore the status of Yang Xiuqiong's image communication by analyzing the Shun Pao report's content and reveals the deep-seated reasons that affect this dissemination.

2. The Communication of Yang Xiuqiong's Media Image

2.1. Athlete Who Saves the Country by Sports

Yang Xiuqiong's debut in front of the Chinese people was at the Fifth National Games in 1933. She represented Hong Kong and won four individual championships and one team championship in female

swimming. Her excellent performance in competitions earned her great attention, and the title of "Mermaid" spread like wildfire, and she also became a well-known athlete in China then. The following year, she represented China in Manila, Philippines, to compete in the 10th Far East Games and won the championship again, winning four championships in female swimming. Such a victory has dramatically encouraged the morale of the people of China, and she has become a model for winning glory for the country. The media then commented, "Female swimming, the Chinese mermaid Yang Xiuqiong, is in the limelight in the Philippines this time, taking all the swimming championships." The Chinese national flag was hoisted in the swimming pool, the national anthem was played repeatedly, and the audience applauded endlessly. This is unprecedented for China in the Games, and it is an excellent fight for national dignity. The Filipinos call her "Miss China." [2] In 1935, Yang Xiuqiong continued to participate in the Fifth National Games, winning two championships and breaking the national record. Chinese people have given great expectations of the "Mermaid." Finally, in 1936, she went to Berlin to participate in the Olympic Games with the Chinese delegation. Although she failed to enter the final in the Olympic competition, she broke the national record in the female 100m and 400m freestyle.

Relying on her outstanding performance, especially in the international arena, Yang Xiuqiong practiced saving the country through sports. This concept is reflected in the competitions she participated in and a series of her social activities. In 1934, the Nanjing National Government launched the New Life Movement in Nanchang. Yang Xiuqiong spoke at the New Life Sports Club's water sports opening ceremony: "I am deeply ashamed of this dumb luck. I hope that with the encouragement and supervision of all parties, I will continue to seek benefits from the World Games, show some achievements, and hope to win glory for the country. For this trip to Jiangxi, I don't have any other presents, but hope to save the country through sports and show you the championship to encourage each other." [3] Then she left Nanchang for Nanjing, Shanghai, and other places to participate in swimming performances, advocating the "new" of sports. Yang Xiuqiong's personal practice has also received good responses. Shun Pao published an article, "Promoting Sports Waves under Evil Forces", and said: "In female sports, resistance and difficulties are expected. We advocate that the success and failure of sports depend entirely on whether we can overcome this resistance and difficulty... Ms. Yang Xiuqiong's swimming genius and achievements are unique in China, and she can be proud overseas... If you love Ms. Yang, you should use legitimate methods to reward, encourage, and train her to become a real sports talent in China and the world to win glory for China and play for the world." [4] The article not only promotes the development of female sports but also puts forward its attitude toward cultivating sports talents.

2.2. Practitioner of Women's Liberation

Yang Xiuqiong's outstanding achievements in the National Games and the Far East Games have given her an excellent reputation in the domestic society and gained widespread attention from all walks of life. Chu Minyi, secretary general of the executive council, once drove a carriage for her. Lin Sen, chairman of the Nationalist Government, took a photo with her. The first Lady, Song Meiling, recognized her as her goddaughter and rewarded her with a car. Wang Jingwei, the executive president, personally met and treated her in Nanjing. The courtesy these politicians treated her reflected her high social status at the time and further boosted her popularity. It should be noted that the social status of women in the period of the Republic of China was generally not high, and the few well-known women were primarily dependent on men to become famous. For example, first lady Soong Meiling has a very high social status because of her identity as Mrs. Chiang Kai-shek. The actresses and celebrities represented by Hu Die all rely on women's physical characteristics for men's entertainment. But Yang Xiuqiong is entirely different from them. The fame and respect she possesses are fundamentally earned by her own sports achievements, as a pure female strength, which conveys a signal of gender equality to society and inspires women at the time.

Faced with violating her rights and interests, Yang Xiuqiong also actively used the law to defend her rights. Shun Pao also recorded this rights protection, "The newspaper reported that lawyer Yun Hui declared the right of name on behalf of Ms. Yang Xiuqiong, saying that I studied sports and practiced swimming, which was originally a job for young people, but there were books compiled and printed under my name. Anyone who thinks it is a call is not in compliance with the provisions of Article 19 of the Civil Law on the right to name and so on." [5] Although Yang Xiuqiong's rights protection was out of commercial interests, it set an example of a female character's rights protection. It provided a reference for female compatriots to use the law to defend their rights boldly.

As a lifelong event for men and women, marriage reflects the relationship between the genders. Arranged marriages and political marriages in the feudal era were the persecution of both parties and women were undoubtedly the ones who suffered the most. During the Republic of China period, Chiang

Kai-shek and Soong Meiling were typical political marriages; it is inevitable even for such figures, let alone ordinary women. However, Yang Xiuqiong managed to follow her heart to find love and finally married Tao Boling, the "Northern First Jockey," in 1937. This was a highly anticipated pair at the time, and they were a pair of acclaimed "talented men and beautiful women." The two gave birth to two children after marriage and were initially happy. "But Tao Boling's temper is quite rough. Initially, it was just cursing casually, but as time passed, it gradually became more serious, not only scolding but even beating." Under such circumstances, Yang Xiuqiong, who upholds an independent personality, chooses to separate from Tao Boling. [6] Yang Xiuqiong's character of daring to love and dare to hate made her not choose to endure the pain to maintain her marriage. Her actions demonstrated a strong idea of equal rights between men and women. Women are definitely not accessories of men.

With the rise of the discussion of "Strengthening Nation and Ethnicity" in modern times, male and female beauty standards have also begun to be discussed. Especially after absorbing the modern Western beauty standards for women, the society of the Republic of China began to promote the "healthy beauty" of women, and Yang Xiuqiong was discussed as a representative of "healthy beauty." Shun Pao once wrote in an article "Beauty and Talented Scholars": "And the present beauty must not be a weak person, or be able to recite poems or write, and may be competent and happy. She should go out to activities like men. , among the vast group and the masses, to grab a reputation worthy of praise, such as courtesan, queen, and whatever kind of family... Ms. Yang Xiuqiong, since the National Games, has shown her reputation, and she will win again in Far East Games... Ms. Yang is well-known all over the country, and with great success, of course, she has more than enough to receive the reputation of a beautiful woman, and she should be the best of the beautiful." [7] In addition, Yang Xiuqiong was also used as an example to educate women in the Republic of China. "True bodybuilding women, on the one hand, rely on their natural beauty without makeup; on the other hand, they care about actual physical training and moral cultivation. For example, Ms. Yang Xiuqiong, a mermaid admired by tens of thousands of people recently, does not need skin balm of five to twenty yuan per bottle on her legs and ankles." [8]

2.3. Victim of the Old Times

Although the "Golden Decade" was a period of development in various undertakings in modern China, it was still in a "semi-colonial and semi-feudal" society, and the bad habits and oppression of the old times existed. Yang Xiuqiong, as an excellent female sports star, has also become a victim of the old times.

In the historical trend of image-turning, women's bodies are at the two ends of the balance between decoration and nakedness. When women do their best to produce the beauty of the times with selflessness, they suffer from the suspension of the spiritual core. Female bodies are reduced to a perceptual symbol to be consumed. [9] As a female swimmer with a good figure and appearance, society consumes Yang Xiuqiong's body. There is such a description of the scene when Yang Xiuqiong enters the water: "Whenever Yang Xiuqiong is off the field, the audience shouts and screams, standing up and wanting to kiss her, and the order is chaotic for a while." [10] "Jiangxi people's eyes are unsatisfied, and the Laobiao (a nickname for people in Jiangxi province called by outside people) said, 'It's not worth it.'" [11] Swimming is a sport that can show the athlete's body very well, and the swimsuit can show the body curve and reveal a large piece of skin, which is why men are so crazy about watching Yang Xiuqiong swim in the water. As Mr. Lu Xun said: "When you see short sleeves, you immediately think of white arms and immediately think of being naked." [12] Under the "male gaze," her body becomes an object for men to watch and lust, while the sports she plays become irrelevant.

The oppression from the "male gaze" has further developed into harm to Yang Xiuqiong in public opinion and even in reality. As a hot star, she has constantly been slandered by rumors, and for a woman, rumors are most likely to arise from her private emotional gossip. "Recently, a newspaper in Hong Kong reported a piece of strange news that the classic beauty will marry Chen Xiangyuan, a Hokkien who is over forty years old and often suffers from stomach problems!" "Standard beauty," but being unable to marry a standard husband is an injustice for everyone. Later, after interviewing, I realized that this was unwarranted. " [13] Such rumors emerged endlessly, so much so that Yang Xiuqiong ignored them from the beginning of declaring them. However, the harm she suffered was far more than that. In 1937, at a young age, she was forced to become Fan Shaozeng's 18th concubine, an example of the feudal warlords' harm to women in the Republic of China. After going through vicissitudes, she finally traveled across the ocean to settle in Canada. It is embarrassing that the female sports star who fought for the honor of the motherland finally got such an ending.

3. The Reasons for Yang Xiuqiong's Media Image Communication

3.1. Reasons for the Communication of the Image of "Athletes Who Save the Country through Sports."

Around the Far East Games and Yang Xiuqiong's series of activities, Shun Pao built her into the image of an athlete who saves the country through sports. The reason, directly speaking, is that she has achieved a championship in the international arena, significantly boosted the morale of the people in the country, and became an excellent spokesperson for the New Life Movement to advocate sports.

However, the deeper reason is that the idea of saving the nation through sports was born in the context of modern China's ' semi-colonial and semi-feudal ' society. This social voice formed in modern times, accompanied by various ideas of saving the nation, such as industrial salvation.

At the same time, since the September 18th incident and the Establishment of the Puppet State of Manchukuo, Japan has intensified its aggression against China, which has also deepened the national crisis of the Chinese people. In the face of such a strong national crisis, the people need to find psychological comfort. Yang Xiuqiong's victory in the Far East Games has calmed the uneasiness in the hearts of the Chinese people to a certain extent. [14] Due to the needs of the times and the people, she is naturally regarded as an athlete who saves the country through sports.

3.2. The Reasons for the Communication of the Image of "Practitioners of Women's Liberation."

Whether it is gaining social status through sports achievements to prove gender equality, implementing the idea of gender equality in rights protection and marriage, or as a representative of "healthy beauty" to help female compatriots get rid of feudal aesthetics, Yang Xiuqiong is regarded as a woman practitioner of liberation.

An analysis of the social background at that time shows that the New Life Movement initiated by the Nanjing National Government objectively advocated the liberation of women's consciousness, hoping to inspire women's power to save the country. As a result, Yang Xiuqiong got to walk at the forefront of the women's liberation movement because of her own advantages as a female sports star.

But in a deeper context, this wave of women's liberation is already a historical trend. The key to the survival of modern China lies in awakening national patriotic consciousness and emancipating people's minds. Women are bound to usher in liberation in modern national awakening as half the force. At the same time, China is more aware of the crisis under the threat of Japanese aggression than ever. To resist aggression, we must rely on female power in addition to male power, so the improvement of women's social status and liberation is an inevitable result. Under the patriarchal political structure, even the Nanjing National Government was happy to see and promote Yang Xiuqiong, a representative who promoted women's liberation at this time.

3.3. The Reasons for the Communication of the Image of "Victim of the Old Times."

Yang Xiuqiong's ending is tragic, even though people once supremely loved and respected her. However, she was deeply hurt when she faced the oppression of the old era alone. On the surface, it is because Chiang Kai-shek sacrificed Yang Xiuqiong as a bargaining chip to win over the Sichuan-Chongqing warlord Fan Shaozeng.

But when we turn our perspective to the historical process, we will find that in 1937 Japan launched a full-scale war of aggression against China, and the Chinese nation was at its most difficult time. Sports and sports journalism and communication declined rapidly. As an athlete, Yang Xiuqiong inevitably lost her foundation of establishing fame and becoming famous. However, she did not disappear because of the decline of sports; warlords destroyed her. This is the oppression of the "three big mountains," which has destroyed thousands of men and women like her. In the era of chaos, everyone is not stable as a speck of dust.

4. Conclusion

With her efforts, Yang Xiuqiong grew into an athlete who saved the country through sports and a practitioner of women's liberation and was reported by the media at that time with such an image. It can be said that her achievements are inseparable from the opportunities provided by the "Golden Decade." Since human effort is the decisive factor, she seized such opportunities and added a touch of brilliance

to this period. In the Seventh National Games in 1948, a new mermaid Huang Wanzhen appeared in female swimming. She broke the swimming record held by Yang Xiuqiong for several years in the 100-meter freestyle competition. And Huang Wanzhen seems to have copied Yang Xiuqiong's swimming style: She is also from Hong Kong, has a family atmosphere that loves swimming, and has a pretty face. The only difference is that the New Mermaid was born in the late 1940s when the Kuomintang government was in turmoil. It was difficult for Huang Wanzhen to be portrayed as a mermaid in the patriarchal political field. She again confirmed that the mermaid was just a flash in the pan in that particular period. Her destiny gradually declined under the more significant historical background. She also became a victim of the old times.

Nowadays, sports and sports journalism and communication are no longer in the old times. We need serious thinking and research to grasp development opportunities in the new era and develop our business into a more mature evergreen tree.

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