Since English writer Oscar Wilde’s work was translated into Chinese in 1915, the trend of aestheticism had become more and more influential in China. Most of the works of the main writers and artists of aestheticism, such as Théophile Gautier, Junichiro Tanizaki, Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, were introduced to China. Many Chinese artists and intellectuals imitated their aesthetic style. In the 1920s and 1930s, plenty of aesthetic images appeared in various media: books, magazines, pictorials, posters, among others.

Comparing Chinese with the European and Japanese texts, I will investigate the visual and written forms that the trend of aesthetics took, investigating key figures such as Salomé and Dorian Gray. I will attempt to answer the following questions: How did the Chinese writers and artists interpret or represent the aesthetic images in the texts? Why did these foreign images travel across cultures and become trendy even though they went against Chinese conventions greatly? In the context of deepening national crisis and thriving left-wing activities, why was there still a trend of representing aesthetic images in China, even though it is a common view that aesthetic images are only "art for art's sake" and should thus be condemned? How does a subcultural trend negotiate and interlink with the mainstream trend? What were the purposes of the artists with different ideologies when creating such aesthetic images? What do the aesthetic images convey? What is the relationship between these images and Chinese modern urban culture, or culture of consumption?