ABSTRACT

THESIS: As The World Grows Increasingly Cosmopolitan: A Comparative And Transnational Analysis Of Gender And Modernity In East Asia And North America During The Jazz Age.

STUDENT: Jason U. Rose

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Around the turn of the twentieth century, women from all corners of the globe began their fight for equality. Commonly referred to as the New Woman, these women burst onto the world scene at a time of great political turmoil and were quickly followed by the “frivolous” Modern Girl. This thesis demonstrates that the Modern Girl aesthetic contained a political element that was expressed through their consumption, style, and behavior. In other words, the flapper style was itself political in the sense that the accompanying brand of consumption had, at its core, implications which called into question the connection between power and gender. Another, often overlooked, aspect of the politics advanced by the Modern Girl was a kind of cosmopolitan identity that challenged the ethnocentrism that intensified in the U.S. during the 1920s. In fact, the transnational component of the flapper has been largely overlooked in older scholarship on the flapper in the United States as most American interpretations emphasize its frivolity and miss it as a highly contentious aspect of modernity. Throughout much of the world, the Modern Girl style had political implications that extended across national boundaries as it was often depicted as an imperialistic adoption of Western styles. This research joins more recent scholarship that situates agency within consumption and sees Modern Girls engaging in internal debates about gender and power throughout East Asia and the world. Essentially,
the Modern Girl was a transnational phenomenon which saw influence flow from west to east and vice versa. Consequently, a strong continuity in thought and beliefs between the Modern Girl and her New Woman predecessor was also demonstrated. Primary evidence comes from underused fashion magazines, *The Flapper* (U.S.), *Ling Long* (China), and *Seitō* (Japan), coupled with works by flapper writers, which give voice to the political and cultural dialogue of the Jazz Age. The combination of literature, both academic and popular, allows this thesis to weave these important stories into the larger historical tapestry of the period. It also helps distinguish this project from other works that investigate the Modern Girl, while still allowing the work fit to within the existing literature that examines the Jazz Age, *fin de siècle* women, urbanization, consumption, and modernity.