

# How Lingerie Brand NEIWAI Connects with Chinese Women

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“I used to hold an umbrella when I went out because I didn’t want to get tanned,” states a tanned Chinese girl nicknamed “Naiping,” sporting an afro. “I was scared of gaining weight, so I quit carbs and put myself on a diet, which made me lose my period for a year.” Naiping is one of six women featured in the Chinese lingerie brand NEIWAI’s social media campaign, including a 14-minute documentary, *No Body is Nobody*, which was released ahead of International Women’s Day on WeChat and Weibo for its Chinese audience.

The campaign’s other women, who were dubbed “Big Boobs with No Brains,” “Mom,” “The Aged,” “Muffin Top,” and “Scars” all represent, like Naiping, familiar negative female stereotypes. As the voice of female empowerment gains momentum, even in the post #metoo era, the fashion industry can no longer see the movement, which encapsulates body diversity and self-expression, simply as a passing trend. Customers’ values have become directly associated with this change, with Victoria Secret’s plummet and buyout as the most recent example.

The modern Chinese woman, whose population has now exceeded 400 million from 16 to 59 years old, have found the need to express their hidden desires and aspirations in diverse ways. Although China has seen some success with beauty brands, female empowerment has rarely been touched by clothing and lingerie brands, which presents an untapped opportunity for the vast China market.

NEIWAI, which means inside and outside in Chinese, is no stranger to female empowerment for its Chinese consumers. Born as an online lingerie brand best known for its wireless bras, it has since morphed into an online and offline retailer, with 73 stores in mainland China after eight short years. From #myinsideandoutside (#我的内外) in 2018, to 2019’s *I am \_\_\_\_\_, I’m also myself* (我是\_\_\_\_\_, 也是我自己) and #fromthecrowd (#在人海里), and now their current *No Body is Nobody*, NEIWAI has been consistent with empowering everyday women. “We hope that these stories from the crowd will give women more strength and courage and see different possibilities of life,” wrote NEIWAI’s marketing team via email.

In the initial launch post of *No Body Is Nobody*, released at the end of February, each of the six featured women were rebranded from social stereotypes. In the post, “Flat boobs” Naiping is sitting on the carpet, telling the readers that “less is more.” Sister Ma, “The Aged,” is in a lime-colored bra, saying that “I’ve loved this body for 58 years and still do.” Then there is Georgina, “Scars,” revealing a long medical scar along her spine, saying that “Scars are life’s burning kisses.”

The campaign, however, is more than a simple tagline to the larger female empowerment movement. It's rooted in the brand's diverse product lines, for both men and women, which includes undergarments and active wear for different body types. "We wanted to emphasize the concept of 'Body Diversity' in our product designs in 2020," the brand said of their women's underwear campaign. "Ideally speaking, whether women have large or small breasts, whether they are slim or plump, regardless of their age groups, we want them to find their underwear at NEIWAI."

In an environment where traditional beauty standards — white, thin and pretty (白瘦美) — are the norm, how does NEIWAI determine which negative social labels to rip off? "We didn't determine these labels from the get-go, they actually surfaced during the recruitment process," NEIWAI said, adding that since the project kicked off last September, their team has filtered over 70 profiles to the public. "A lot of feedback and stories we heard from women were about their body image, and although these six labels cannot cover everyone, we think that they are the most representative."

NEIWAI's representation of diversity is reciprocated by the many long comments underneath their two official WeChat posts, which collectively have garnered almost 100,000 views since the release. "I don't know why I cried," a reader wrote, before she shared her own story of being ashamed of her birthmark on her leg when she was younger. "Only when I confront my own imperfection without hiding, I can then be treated with gentleness by the world."

By shining a spotlight on the consumers themselves, NEIWAI has built strong emotional connections with its target audience, who share the collective struggle of accepting their bodies. In a public virtual space like WeChat, women started openly sharing their own insecurities that parallel the six NEIWAI women, which makes the campaign stretch beyond its commercial meaning.

Another component that added to the resonance of the campaign was working with the photographer Luo Yang, who has been working on her on-going photography project entitled, *Girls*, for 12 years and has exhibited at home and abroad. When asked how other brands should choose which creatives to collaborate with, NEIWAI's marketing team said there has to be an alignment with ethos and experiences. "You have to fully recognize each other's standpoints, in this case, we both wanted to break the social stereotypes of China's beauty standards. Also, it'd be ideal if both of you have experiences in similar projects."

As a globally-minded homegrown brand, NEIWAI is all about moving forward. They're launching a new official website in both Chinese and English at the end of March and opening their first US store in San Francisco this May. Given this, the brand might be hoping that marketing messages like *No Body is Nobody* and women like Naiping will resonate with new consumers in the West, many of whom are already familiar with the diversity conversation and can help translate this Chinese brand's message and product line to a wider world.