

**Cosmetic Surgery in Post-Mao China: State Power, Market
Discourse, and the Remaking of the Body**

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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Cosmetic Surgery in Post-Mao China: State Power, Market Discourse, and the
Remaking of the Body

後毛時代中國的整形美容手術：國家權力、市場話語與身體的重塑

Submitted by WEN Hua (文華)

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Advised by Professor Gordon MATHEWS

In the Maoist era, the quest for beauty was regarded as decadent Western bourgeois culture. However, more and more Chinese women have been shopping for a youthful and beautiful appearance by undergoing cosmetic surgery in recent decades. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Beijing, China, in 2006-2007, this study examines the phenomenon of the rapidly growing popularity of cosmetic surgery among Chinese women and considers the relationships between the remaking of female body image through cosmetic surgery, the reconstruction of self identity, and the reconfiguration of state power and market forces with the expansion of global consumerism in post-Mao China. The thesis suggests that the alteration of female body features through cosmetic surgery reflects in microcosm the transition of China

from a Maoist socialist regime to a post-Maoist consumer society within a few decades, following its own “Chinese characteristics.” Therefore, Chinese women’s involvement in cosmetic surgery must be understood within the broader historical and socio-political context of China, and also must be seen both as the empowerment of Chinese women and also their ongoing subjugation to men, markets, and the state.

在毛時代的中國，共產黨的意識形態使得女性對美的追求被看作是西方資產階級腐朽文化的表現。然而，在後毛時代的中國，越來越多的中國女性通過選擇整形美容手術來“購買”年輕漂亮的外表。根據 2006 到 2007 年筆者在北京的田野調查，本研究考察中國日益流行的整形美容現象並探討中國女性身體形象的手術再造、個人身份認同的重新建構以及全球消費文化衝擊下國家權力與市場話語的重新配置這幾者之間的關係。論文認為女性通過整形美容手術對身體形象的改造這一現象從一個微觀的層面反映了中國社會從毛時代向後毛時代的社會變遷及其所富有的“中國特色”。因此，中國女性的身體整形實踐必須被放置到中國的社會歷史背景以及社會政治脈絡下來理解。同時，整形這一身體實踐行為既是中國女性自我賦權的表現，也折射了女性對男性、市場和國家權力的妥協。

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Abbreviations

AACS	American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery
ASAPS	American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery
BOCOG	Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games
CAMS	Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CPPCC	National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
MOH	Ministry of Health
PLA	Chinese People's Liberation Army
PUMC	Peking Union Medical College
SFDA	State Food and Drug Administration
SOEs	State-owned enterprises

Language, Name and Currency

Language

Chinese words in this thesis are written according to the standard pinyin system of the People's Republic of China. Chinese words are written in italics without tone markers.

Name

In this thesis, China means the People's Republic of China and post-Mao China refers to the People's Republic of China since its opening up in the late 1970s. Most names of interviewees are pseudonyms for the sake of protecting privacy. However, for a key informant, Hao Lulu, because she is a public figure and her story has been widely circulated, her name is real.

Currency

The Chinese currency is RMB (Renminbi) and yuan is used to refer to RMB in this thesis. At the time of fieldwork (August 2006-July 2007), one American dollar was equivalent to approximately 7.5 yuan.

Chapter One: Introduction

“God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another...”

--Shakespeare, Hamlet, Action III, Scene I, 141-142

Prologue

During a casual conversation in December 2004, a German friend of mine asked me:

“Did you see the BBC news reporting on the China’s Miss Cosmetic Surgery

Pageant? It says that a lady over sixty and a transsexual are in the competition. It’s

really unbelievable! What’s going on in China?” I turned speechless because of his

question. People outside China can hardly figure out how an ideologically

“socialist” country could host such a beauty pageant. Therefore, what stung me was

not only the news itself. My friend’s response to the news made me realize that,

from the eyes of a European, in addition to surprising the world by its economic

wonder, China, a “socialist” country which used to regard the quest for beauty as

decadent bourgeois culture, seems now to offer many surprises to the world,

including the Miss Cosmetic Surgery Pageant: the first beauty pageant in the world

exclusively for women who have undergone cosmetic surgery. My friend’s shock

concerning the Miss Cosmetic Surgery Pageant projects the disjuncture between the

image that China presents to the world, as a place where people freely pursue beauty

by all means including cosmetic surgery, and the image that others may hold of

China as a socialist country where the quest for beauty is suppressed. It is this disjuncture that intrigued my curiosity about the event of Miss Cosmetic Surgery and the unprecedented boom of cosmetic surgery industry in China.

“The Miss Cosmetic Surgery Pageant” (*renzao meini xuanmei dasai*) was held in Beijing in December 2004. Reportedly the idea of this pageant was born after an 18-year-old girl, Yang Yuan, was disqualified from the Miss International Beauty Pageant earlier in 2004 because the organizer discovered that she had undergone cosmetic surgery. Yang sued the organizer but lost the case. However, the organizer held a new beauty pageant, the Miss Cosmetic Surgery Pageant, in Beijing, with 19 finalists aged from 18 to 62. After beating other 18 finalists, Feng Qian, a 22-year-old student, was crowned China’s first Miss Artificial Beauty in Beijing (Figure 1).

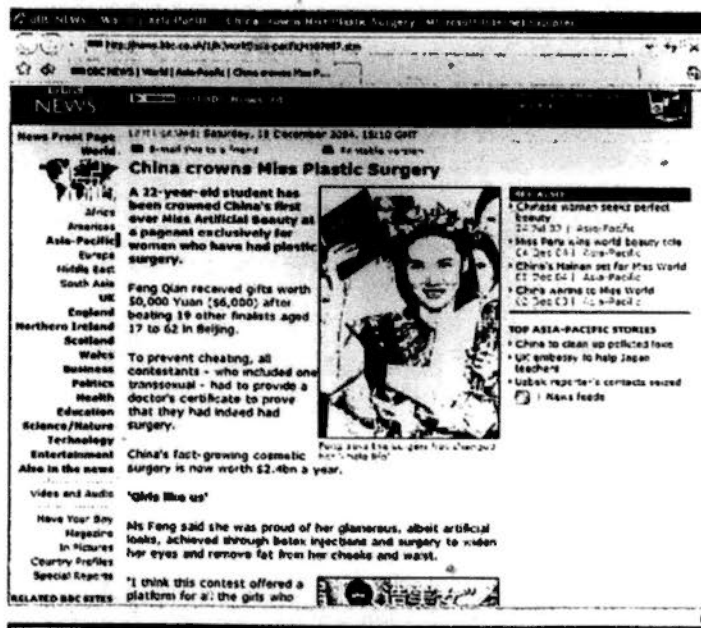


Figure 1. BBC reporting “China crowns Miss Plastic Surgery” on December 18, 2004.

When the news about Miss Cosmetic Surgery came to my attention, I was both fascinated and confused. I seldom heard reports about cosmetic surgery in the last decade, but recently, especially since 2003, reports concerning cosmetic surgery have increased by leaps and bounds. This new practice seems to have been spurred by a young Chinese woman, Hao Lulu, who was targeted by the Chinese and international media as being China's first "artificial beauty." When opening the newspaper, surfing the internet, or turning on the television, I found a surge of reports concerning stories of Chinese "artificial beauty" (*renzao meiniü*). On the one hand, I found cheerful stories describing women who have undergone cosmetic surgery as being finally bold and creative enough to take control of their bodies in the quest to become beautiful—an act which they could not imagine during the Mao era. On the other hand, I found miserable stories reporting that a huge number of women had been disfigured and some even killed from cosmetic surgery. It has been extensively reported that at least 200,000 people have been disfigured from cosmetic surgery in the last decade in China (Weaver 2003). These cases were reportedly prominent in those who suffered from infection and disfigurement after their breasts were enlarged through injections of a chemical called hydrophilic polyacrylamide gel.

Reading these stories about Chinese "artificial beauty," I could not help wondering why more and more Chinese women are willing to undergo cosmetic surgery despite a plethora of reports on the possible side effects and unwanted

consequences of that surgery. Who are these women? Why are they so obsessed with their physical appearances? What kinds of surgeries do they look for? How does cosmetic surgery change their lives? More broadly, I have been curious to know why cosmetic surgery has suddenly emerged in China, a state that used to regard the quest for beauty as depraved until just a few decades ago. How can we explain the transition from wearing unisex gray Mao suits to purchasing glamorous appearance through cosmetic surgery over just a few decades? Simply put, as my friend asked me, “What’s going on in China?”

The Miss Cosmetic Surgery Pageant serves as an introduction to the phenomenon I explore in this research: the rise in practices of body alteration through cosmetic surgery in a rapidly growing beauty industry in contemporary China. The pageant also serves as the starting point for my discussion, since several interesting arguments have been raised from the reports on this event.

Research Questions and Objectives of the Research

Let me first explain two key words—“cosmetic surgery” and “artificial beauty”—to specify the field of my study. People sometimes use the words plastic surgery and cosmetic surgery interchangeably, but there is an important difference between these two terms. Generally speaking, plastic surgery includes both functionally reconstructive operations and cosmetic enhancements. More precisely, plastic surgery refers to reconstructive surgery. As defined by the American Academy of

Cosmetic Surgery (AACS), plastic surgery is a surgical specialty dedicated to the reconstruction of facial and body defects due to birth disorders, trauma, burns, and disease, while cosmetic surgery is a subspecialty of medicine and surgery that uniquely restricts itself to the enhancement of appearance through surgical and medical techniques.¹ While plastic surgery (reconstructive surgery) is medically indicated and reconstructive in nature, cosmetic surgery (aesthetic surgery) is entirely elective and meant to enhance one's appearance. The Chinese translation of "plastic surgery" is *zhengxing*, which also encompasses both "reconstructive surgery" (*zhengfu shoushu*) and "cosmetic surgery" (*zhengxing meirong shoushu*). In this thesis I will use the term plastic surgery in a general way which includes both fields of surgical practice. The terms reconstructive surgery and cosmetic surgery refer, respectively, to these two fields; the focus of this study is cosmetic surgery.

Another important term to address is "artificial beauty" (*renzao meini*), which refers to a woman who has improved her appearance through cosmetic surgery. As a newly coined term, "artificial beauty" has become popular since 2003. The popularity of the phrase "artificial beauty" in the Chinese media in recent years reflects an unprecedented boom in the cosmetic surgery industry in China. Therefore, "artificial beauties," women who opt for cosmetic surgery to improve their appearance, are a focus of this study. Targeting Chinese women as the focus of the study does not mean that men are excluded from body alteration through cosmetic

¹ The definition is an extract from the AACS website "frequently asked questions" page. More information can be found at www.cosmeticsurgery.org.

surgery. Actually, cosmetic surgery is no longer a female preserve, and Chinese men are invading this territory in recent years. However, women are still in the great majority of those having cosmetic procedures. Due to the constraints of my fieldwork, this study will only discuss Chinese women's "artificial beauty" and leave Chinese men's surgically body alterations and comparative studies of different genders' involvement in cosmetic surgery for further studies in the future.

In what follows, using the event of Miss Cosmetic Surgery Pageant as a lens, I discuss the research questions and objectives of the research. When the beauty pageant and cosmetic surgery came together in China, they attracted intensive media coverage and worldwide curiosity. What interested me were the different perspectives which emerged from reports about this pageant. One perspective was offered by women who viewed the cosmetic surgery they received as "liberating." For example, the mass media highlighted two competitors in the pageant (Ang 2004; BBC 2004). One was Liu Yulan, the oldest contestant, who seemed "at least a decade younger than her 62 years," as reported by Audra Ang (2004) of the *Associated Press*. Liu Yulan attributed her youthful looks to a facelift and blepharoplasty. She told media, "Before, I couldn't imagine that it was possible to have places where the old could become young and the ugly could become beautiful" (BBC 2004). In addition, she said that she was not participating for the sake of a prize. Instead, she wanted to show her new-found confidence to herself as much as to those around her. Liu Yulan stated "I wanted to convey a message to

society—that the pursuit of beauty is ageless” (BBC 2004). Another contestant portrayed by media was Liu Xiaojing, 21 years old, who had work done on her eyebrows, nose, chin and facial shape. It was revealed that Liu Xiaojing was a man three years ago. She said that she did not tell organizers that she was a transsexual because no one asked this question. Yet if the organizers were to disqualify her, she said she would use legal means to seek justice. “Becoming beautiful is everyone’s wish...I am now legally a woman, and this contest is my first formal step toward womanhood,” said Liu Xiao Jing, “This is a turning point in my life” (Ang 2004). It is obvious that both Liu Yulan and Liu Xiaojing felt strongly that it is their right to seek beauty, youth and femininity, and to express their sense of self through purchasing beauty and youth through cosmetic surgery.

When 62-year-old Liu Yulan and transsexual Liu Xiaojing fulfilled their dreams of becoming young and beautiful through cosmetic surgery, they transcend the boundaries of age, sex, and appearance and perceived their bodies as flexible assets rather than as given, unalterable fates. They seem to regard their bodies as a collection of raw materials through which one can construct one’s own true self. Such a view legitimizes bodily alteration as a source of autonomy and self-determination and explains the desire of women for body alteration as a desire for liberation, perhaps in part from the “old” generation in the Mao era in which people sacrificed their bodies and beauty for the sake of the state. However, many feminists have taken a different view: they have argued that women who undergo

cosmetic surgery submit to male-dominated ideals of beauty, and cosmetic surgery is just a means for the colonization of women's bodies (Morgan 1991) and a conspiracy of patriarchy and capitalism (Wolf 1991). Therefore, the first question I will be concentrating on in this research is this: To what extent are the women who undergo cosmetic surgery passive victims of the "beauty myth" (Wolf 1991) constructed by patriarchy and capitalism, and to what extent are they transforming themselves as powerful actors by gaining control over their own bodies to achieve their senses of self? This study examines the discrepancies between the discourse of liberation and the discourse of subjugation, both of which are associated with the recent Chinese practice of body alteration through cosmetic surgery.

Another perspective on the issue comes from the state-owned Chinese media which characterizes the phenomenon in terms of a narrative of "evolution" or "marketization." A typical way of reporting on the ongoing popularity of cosmetic surgery is the claim that with the improvement of Chinese people's living standard, Chinese women pay increasing attention to appearance and figure. For example, "Following the rapid development of the social economy, people become much wealthier and have more money to chase after beauty. Thus, this artificial beauty craze is almost inevitable, as is this pageant for this group of women". (*China Daily* 2004c); "Plastic surgery has taken off in China in recent years as people become wealthier and more conscious of their appearance" (*China Daily* 2004b). This narrative claims that the increasing demand for beauty is a result of China's

economic growth. To put it differently, people's appearance and figure are references to and symbolic of their economic condition, this discourse holds.

When a beautiful face and youthful figure can be easily purchased, there is no doubt that a "consumer revolution" (Davis 2000), as it is widely acknowledged, has been taking place over the past few decades in the world's most populous country. However, is the pursuit of beauty only a sign of economic prosperity? When women shop for cosmetic surgery, beyond beautiful faces and youthful bodies, they also pursue symbolic meanings embodied in beautiful appearance and personal bodily practice. Therefore, the pursuit of beauty cannot be interpreted only as a consequence of economic prosperity. Cosmetic surgery is a matter of consumer choice, but also involves the power of the capitalist market in taking control of an individual's life in its most intimate sphere—the body, which was tightly controlled by the state only a few decades ago in China. This leads us to analyze a new form of power of the capitalist market in controlling the female body. This thesis will discuss the functions of the Chinese capitalist market and its impact on people's views about their physical self. The capitalist market can be an important institution for shaping people's views about beauty and the body. However, the market alone cannot serve as a sufficient condition for people's beliefs about what is beautiful, and what is not. The market, despite being a source of consumer choice, cannot completely remove the power of the state in controlling individuals' body management and representation. This leads us to examine the role of the Chinese state in guiding or

controlling China's "beauty economy." Therefore, the second question I will discuss in this thesis is this: When beauty has become a commodity that can be purchased and body alteration has become a matter of consumer choice, to what extent does the capitalist market take control of individuals' lives with commercial alterations to the body? To what extent does the state negotiate and cooperate with the market to play a salient role in disciplining and shaping women's body management? This study thus examines the complex relationship between the remaking of female body image through cosmetic surgery and the reconfiguration of state power and market forces in post-Mao China.

Western media offer yet another perspective concerning this event; Western² correspondents like to emphasize contestants' obsession with adding a palpebral fold to the upper eyelid and changing other features in order to approximate a "Caucasian" appearance.³ They sometimes regard cosmetic surgery as a sign of the "Westernization" of the beauty ideal in China. For example, commenting on Feng Qian, who was crowned China's first Miss Artificial Beauty, a correspondent from *The Times* says, "Her operations gave her Western-style 'double eyelids' and sculpted her face into its heart-shaped form, while liposuction made her thin" (Coonan 2004).

² For purposes of this thesis, Western refers to Anglo-American and West refers to West European and North American countries.

³ The surgical creation of a superior palpebral fold is a type of blepharoplasty. The double eyelid blepharoplasty, colloquially called "double-eyelid surgery," has become one of the most requested cosmetic operations in Asia, including China. After a crease is placed into the eyelid, the eyes appear rounder and larger.

While some typically Caucasian features are desirable among Chinese women, a more culturally particular standard of beauty seems to be gradually emerging in China. It cannot be denied that cosmetic surgery now flourishes in a climate heavily influenced by Western beauty ideals. However, Chinese women's obsession with "double eyelids" (*shuangyanpi*), "big eyes" (*dayanjing*), "a high-bridged nose" (*gaobiliang*), "big breasts" (*fengmande xiong*), and "white skin" (*baipifu*) may not be fully compatible with Western ideals of a beautiful appearance. The emerging Chinese ideal of beauty may not be simply imitating the "global standard of white beauty" (Kawazoe 2004, also see Miller 2006). Therefore, it becomes important to examine comparative perspectives on ideals of Western beauty and the role of the process of globalization in creating such perspectives. Thus, the third question I will discuss is this: In an era of globalization, to what extent have beauty ideals and practices in China been influenced by globalizing forces such as the omnipresent Anglo-American ideals of beauty, and to what extent have Chinese women's perceptions of beauty and their bodily practices taken on particular meanings in China's historical and sociocultural contexts? Simply put, this study examines the tension between homogenization and heterogenization in terms of ideals of beauty and practices of the pursuit of beauty in an era of globalization.

Although there are numerous facets of the increasing popularity of cosmetic surgery among Chinese women, I will mainly concentrate on the above issues in this thesis. In brief, the target question of this research is this: When Chinese women

shop for a youthful, beautiful and sometimes “Caucasian-like” appearance by undergoing cosmetic surgery, to what extent does this bodily practice indicate a triumph of individualism over totalitarianism, the market over the state, and the West over China; and to what extent does it reveal something different from these common assumptions? This study will mainly explore the role of the capitalist market, the state, and globalization in shaping the Chinese women’s views about what constitutes a beautiful appearance and women’s body alteration practices to pursue a beautiful appearance. Rather than making a meta-narrative statement to hail the triumph of individualism, the market and the West concerning Chinese women’s option of cosmetic surgery, I will explore how remaking the female body through cosmetic surgery involves renegotiating and reconfiguring power relations among individuals, the market, the state, and global forces in a rapidly transforming society. Thus, using women’s body alteration through cosmetic surgery in contemporary China as a lens, the objective of this research is to explore the relations among the remaking of female body image, the reconstruction of self identity, and the reconfiguration of state power and market forces with the expansion of global consumerism in post-Mao China. In other words, this thesis explores how the alteration of female physical features through cosmetic surgery reflects in microcosm the transition of China’s social nature from communism to consumerism with its own “Chinese characteristics.”

Although cosmetic surgery is gaining increasing popularity in urban China

today, it has not yet been studied from an anthropological perspective. A close study of the phenomenon will enhance our understanding of women's personal lives in contemporary China, where dramatic and drastic social changes have been taking place in recent decades. Cosmetic surgery is of course not practiced exclusively by Chinese women, but with the transition of China from a Maoist regime to a post-Maoist consumer society within few decades, the meanings and implications of this alteration practice are significant. More theoretically, I hope this thesis can contribute to a fuller understanding of the dilemma between agency and structure, the intersection between state power and market discourse, and the articulation between individual and globalization in terms of bodily regime. From the analysis of Chinese women's involvement in cosmetic surgery, I hope to arrive at insights on the tri-polar relationship between the state, the market and women of China. In what follows, I will review the existing literature on this topic.

Theoretical Approaches and Literature Review

In discussing cosmetic surgery, Brush writes: "If the body is—metaphorically—a site of inscription to various degrees for various theorists, then cosmetic surgery can be seen, at one level, as an example of the literal and explicit enactment of this process of inscription" (1998:24). This thesis uses four primary areas of theory: the anthropological study of the body, feminists' research on cosmetic surgery, theories of consumption, and globalization. Let me present elements of each of these

theoretical areas.

“The Three Bodies”: An Analytic Framework

In the last two decades, there has been much interest in the study of the body in anthropology. Wolputte has argued, “The human body evolved from a rather marginal social fact into a notion of central concern to current social and cultural anthropology” (2004: 251). Here, I will not attempt to provide a summary of the study of the body in the discipline (for thorough bibliographic reviews, see Frank 1991; Lock 1993; Turner 1991). Rather, I will discuss what emerges from the literature as a crucial framework for this thesis.

What is the body? What is its relation to mind, nature, culture, self and society? These seemingly simple questions are actually fairly complicated. How the body is viewed varies across time and space, but the Cartesian mind/body dualism has come to be the foremost conception influencing the understanding of the body in Western intellectual history. The famous Cartesian dictum “I think, therefore I am” privileged the mind in Western thinking for centuries. Therefore, at the core of the investigation of the body in contemporary social theory is the problematization of the Cartesian mind/body dualism. Theorists (Turner 1996; Shilling 2003; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Csordas 1994; Strathern 1999) have tried to escape the mind/body dualism by emphasizing the body as the primary site through which people experience the world. In 1987, two medical anthropologists, Nancy Scheper-Hughes

and Margaret Lock, published a thoughtful essay, *The Mindful Body: An Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology*, to question the arbitrariness of the Cartesian mind/body dualism and to highlight the concept of the body itself. In this article, Scheper-Hughes and Lock outline the “three bodies” as an analytic perspective to understand the body, as I will shortly discuss, and further advocate “the mindful body” as a conceptual approach. Scheper-Hughes and Lock critically examine the Cartesian dualism that separates mind from body, spirit from matter, and real (i.e., visible, palpable) from unreal (1987: 6-7). They argue that this dualism affects both theoretical viewpoints and research paradigms not only in medical anthropology, but in the entire discipline of anthropology. The critical issue raised by Scheper-Hughes and Lock has been discussed by many others subsequently.

The mind/body dualism has also been questioned by scholars in the discipline of sociology (Turner 1996; Shilling 2003). As Turner and Shilling both discuss, although there has long been a great academic interest in the body in sociology, it is only in recent decades that the body has emerged as a distinct area of study. Here too, the negligence of the body in sociology was largely due to the Cartesian mind/body dualism inherited from the Western intellectual tradition, they argue. Having been influenced profoundly by this tradition in many ways, classical sociology focused on the mind as that which defines humans as social beings (Shilling 2003: 8). The acceptance and maintenance of the mind/body dichotomy made classical sociology unable to adequately account for the body in its study. Having said that, however,

rather than being absent from sociology, the body had a “furtive, secret history” (Turner 1996:63) in the discipline, or in Shilling’s oft quoted phrase, the body was an “absent presence” (Shilling 2003: 8) in sociology. One can only detect subtly in classical sociological theory an awareness of the body in the works of Marx, Simmel, Weber, and Durkheim. But contemporary sociologists such as Bourdieu, Goffman (1959) and Foucault (1979) have been influential in placing the body at the centre of their analysis.

Keeping this background as reference, let me now return to Scheper-Hughes and Lock’s work about the body. To break free of the mind/body dualism and bring the interaction between the mind and the body back as a focus for analysis, Scheper-Hughes and Lock began with the assumption of the body as “simultaneously a physical and symbolic artifact, as both naturally and culturally produced, and as securely anchored in a particular historical moment” (1987: 7). With this assumption about the body as a starting point, Scheper-Hughes and Lock distinguish between the “three bodies”: “the individual body” rooted in the phenomenology of the body-self, “the social body” understood in terms of symbolic anthropology and structuralism, and “the body politic” grounded in post-structuralism (1987: 7-8). I draw on the “three bodies” as a conceptual approach to frame my thesis because the “three bodies” stand for “three semantic realms of representation and practice that use the image of the physical body as the locus of reference” (Strathern 1999: 2). In what follows, I discuss how different

theoretical approaches may be assigned to each level of analysis based on the framework of the “three bodies.”

At the first level of analysis is “the individual body,” “the lived experience of the body-self” (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987:6), which is conceptualized in phenomenological theories of the body. The significance of focusing on body experience is to go beyond the traditional emphasis on the dichotomy of mind and body. In discussing what they refer to as “the individual body,” Scheper-Hughes and Lock argue that in the Western intellectual tradition, especially since Descartes, the body has been conceived of as a “natural” organic object separate from the mind. This Cartesian dualism fostered a “mechanistic conception of the body” (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987: 9), where mind and rationality are given a privileged position over the body and emotion. To challenge this tradition, they borrow a theoretical approach from phenomenology, referring to the work of Merleau-Ponty, who promoted a focus on lived experiences as the basis for the body and self. Furthermore, Scheper-Hughes and Lock argue that “the individual body should be seen as the most immediate, proximate terrain where social truths and social contradictions are played out, as well as a locus of personal and social resistance, creativity and struggle” (1987: 31).

At the second level of analysis is “the social body,” “the representational use of the body as a natural symbol with which to think about nature, society, and culture” (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987: 7). The body here is used in the sense established

by Mary Douglas, referring to the use of body imagery as a means of picturing social relations. Drawing on the framework of symbolic and structural anthropology, Scheper-Hughes and Lock regard the social body as both a physical and cultural artifact. As they argue, “Cultural constructions of and about the body are useful in sustaining particular views of society and social relations” (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987: 19). Although Scheper-Hughes and Lock do not specifically discuss the work of Marcel Mauss in terms of the social body, Mauss’s work is relevant to this consideration. In his classic essay, *Techniques of the Body*, Mauss (1979) analyzes the body as the locus of the social. By techniques of the body, Mauss means the way culture expresses itself through particular and highly developed bodily actions: everything from dancing to swimming to sitting to eating and so on. Mauss writes, “The body is man’s first and most natural instrument. Or more accurately, not to speak of instruments, man’s first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means, is his body” (1979:104). Mary Douglas also developed “the idea of the body as a receptor of social meaning and a symbol of society” (Shilling 2003: 64). In *Natural Symbols*, Douglas (1996 [1970]) calls attention to the “two bodies,” referring to the social and physical aspects of the body, and emphasizes that the human body serves as a symbolic template for the social body. As Douglas says, “The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society” (1996[1970]: 69). In this way, Douglas

argues that the human body is the most readily available image of a social system, and suggests that ideas about the human body correspond closely to prevalent ideas about society.

At the third level of Scheper-Hughes and Lock's analysis is "the body politic," referring to "the regulation, surveillance and control of bodies (individual and collective) in reproduction and sexuality, in work and leisure, in sickness and other forms of deviance and human difference" (1987: 7-8). This third analytic perspective is widely known in contemporary post-structuralist theory and formulated through the regulatory practices and controls of power. In this perspective, the body is a site of ideological contestation. Central to the understanding of the body politic are the works of Michel Foucault, Bryan Turner and a number of feminist scholars. Foucault is well known for his concern with the body and power relations. In many ways, Foucault's work is the most radical and influential social constructionist approach, going beyond seeing the body as a receptor of social meanings. For example, he traces (1979) the history of prisons and regimes of bodily discipline. He explores how the body is no longer the target of torture and brutal acts of domination and violence, but instead has become the target of schedules, habit formations, evaluations, and diagnostics; the control of humans has gone from overt to covert techniques. Foucault calls these techniques of control "discipline" which he regards as "an anatomy of power, a technology" (1979: 215), which executes its authority to create the "docile body": a body "that may be

subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (1979:138).

Another important theorist in the consideration of the body politic is Bryan Turner. In many respects, Turner’s works have been heavily influenced by Foucault. From Turner’s point of view, governments do not deal with economic and political issues in the abstract, but with problems of the body which are given by society (Turner 1996, also see Shilling 2003). Foucault’s notions on the body and power have also influence the analysis of body politics in the works of feminists who explore the microphysics of power which operate and/or being operated on female bodies. Exploring women’s obsession with appearance, their struggle to control their bodies, and their pressures to conform to the ideal female figure, while some feminists fight against objectification of the female body, others emphasize a woman’s power over her own body and endorse a range of body modification including cosmetic surgery. I will particularly discuss feminists’ works on cosmetic surgery in next section.

I intend to use “the three bodies” as an analytical framework because they represent three separate yet overlapping units of analysis. Using Chinese women’s involvement in cosmetic surgery as a lens, I will discuss the relationship between body alteration practice and self identity, the symbolic nature of body alteration as a representation of social transition, and control and resistance as embodied in body alteration practice. Moreover, I will not limit the analytic dimensions of the surgically altered body to the “three bodies” in my thesis. As argued by Strathern,

the list of “bodies” can be expanded or compressed in accordance with heuristic needs (1999: 2).⁴ I will expand my discussion to various “bodies” such as the gendered body, the commodified body, the politicized body, and the globalized body in different contexts. Strathern has argued that, “the body is a discrete entity that nevertheless carries separate meanings and aspects. It therefore becomes of interest to know not only what these separate aspects are but also, and perhaps more crucially, how they are related to or influence one another” (1999: 2). Therefore, I will examine the interrelations of these separate yet overlapping multiple bodies. What causes women to undergo cosmetic surgery? How do these women engage their identities through body alteration? How does the altered body represent certain social values? How is body alteration shaped by multiple power structures? How do these multiple powers reconfigure their relations in the image-making process with the expansion of global consumer culture and the globalization of beauty images?

Feminists’ Debates on Cosmetic Surgery

Cosmetic surgery is an area around which there has been a great deal of controversy and debates among feminists. In the pages that follow, let me discuss the works of feminist theorists who have made influential contributions to this area of study.

Naomi Wolf (1991) has put forth her well-know argument that “the beauty myth” is the last but strongest control over women in a patriarchal society. Wolf

⁴ There have been various multiple “bodies” emerging in theories of the body, such as “two bodies” (Douglas 1996 [1970]), and “five bodies” (O’Neill: 1985).

points out that during recent decades, although women have “breached the power structure” by acquiring rights equal to men in areas such as education and professional careers, they continue to be trapped by another form of control: what she calls “the beauty myth.” Wolf believes that patriarchy and capitalism have made an alliance to control women by using images of beauty as a “political weapon.” She regards cosmetic surgery as a patriarchal oppression and women who undergo cosmetic surgery as victims of men’s gaze—men’s concepts of beauty and femininity. In brief, according to Wolf, “the beauty myth” is a conspiracy of patriarchy and capitalism, and cosmetic surgery serves this conspiracy by reproducing and perpetuating this myth.

Eugenia Kaw (1993) also argues that women’s bodies are captured by medical authorities and the consumer-oriented market in the United States. Moreover, she argues that as women and as racial minorities, Asian American women are under heavy pressure to conform to a certain standard of beauty in American society. As women, they are influenced by a gender ideology which states that beauty should be a primary goal for them; as racial minorities, they are made to feel inadequate by the racial ideology of an Anglo American-dominated cultural milieu that infers “passivity, dullness, and a lack of sociability” with “small” eyes and a “flat” nose (1993: 78-80). Kaw argues that with the authority of scientific rationality and technological efficiency, medicine effectively promotes and medicalizes these racial and gender stereotypes, “reinforces and normalizes Asian American women’s

feelings of inadequacy, as well as their decisions to undergo cosmetic surgery, [and] helps to bolster the consumer-oriented society of which medicine is a part and from which it benefits” (1993: 86).

The arguments made by Wolf and Kaw show how women are under great pressure to conform to society’s notion of beauty in a patriarchal consumer society. However, some scholars have argued that it is problematic to treat women undergoing cosmetic surgery as nothing more than misguided or deluded victims. They have argued that cosmetic surgery may enhance women’s self-esteem and confidence, and by so doing, help them to form a new self identity. They regard cosmetic surgery as a form of empowerment rather than oppression (Shilling 2003; Davis 1995, 2003; Gimlin 2004).

Sociologist Chris Shilling points out that although there are some limitations in body projects, by investing in the body as project, such as changing appearance and shape, people are able to express their senses of self, their feeling of goodness, and their control over their bodies in a complex society where people may feel unable to exert influence over their lives (2003: 6-7). Kathy Davis (1995) is uneasy with the traditional assumption that women must be “cultural dopes” for undergoing cosmetic surgery. Davis suggests that to understand women’s own choices in undergoing cosmetic surgery, we need to listen to women’s own voices and look into their own experiences. She argues that women elect to have cosmetic surgery because the operation enables the achievement of an embodied sense of self. She

goes on to suggest that “cosmetic surgery is not about beauty, but about identity” and “in a context of limited possibilities for action, cosmetic surgery can be a way for an individual woman to give shape to her life by reshaping her body” (1995: 163). Davis points out that the concept of agency plays a central role in inquiry into women’s involvement in cosmetic surgery because it help us to understand “how women could view cosmetic surgery—a costly, painful, dangerous, and demeaning practice—as their best and in some cases only—option under the circumstance” (2003: 12).

Similar to Davis, Debra Gimlin (2004) maintains that some feminists overly criticize women who undergo cosmetic surgery, and argues that these criticisms usually ignore important factors: first, “plastic surgery often works” and “frequently achieves the exact goals intended by those who undergo it”; second, criticisms of surgery often overemphasize gender issues and “understate the extent to which this activity involves gender at an intersection with age, race, ethnicity, and even class”; and third, criticisms ignore the fact that women usually reattach their identities to their new appearances (Gimlin 2004: 96-97). Gimlin writes that many women she interviewed claim that their goal for cosmetic surgery is not to be beautiful specifically for husband, boyfriends, or other significant individuals; rather, women “alter their bodies for their own satisfaction, in effect utilizing such appearance to create what they consider a normal appearance, one that reflects a normal self” (Gimlin 2004: 103). Although she implicitly argues that cosmetic surgery is an

empowering life experience for women who choose it, Gimlin also realizes the limitation of this empowerment in that women actually contribute to reproducing the beauty system which constrains them in the long run. Still, she sympathizes rather than condemns women who undergo cosmetic surgery.

In general, both Davis and Gimlin rebut the argument that cosmetic surgery is only a way for men to hold control over women, of the male gaze over female freedom. Rather than emphasizing abstruse theories, they pay more attention to women's own voices to show how women justify undergoing cosmetic surgery, and how women use cosmetic surgery to negotiate the relationship between body images and self-identities. Rather than viewing women who undergo cosmetic surgery as passive victims of an oppressive "beauty myth," they defend those women as positive actors who empower themselves by taking control of their own bodies.

Does cosmetic surgery really offer a woman a new sense of self? Some feminists go beyond the arguments that Davis and Gimlin have made and offer a more radical statement, in which they argue that cosmetic surgery could be used as a way to resist a patriarchal system. Similar to Naomi Wolf, Kathryn Morgan (1991) criticizes the current beauty system and women's commitment to the patriarchal ideal of feminine beauty, and regards cosmetic surgery as a means of colonization of women's bodies. However, Morgan goes further to propose the possibility of subverting this "beauty myth" by using cosmetic surgery to produce what is generally defined as "ugly" as a way to destabilize the notion of beauty. Based on

women's accounts of reasons for their actions for cosmetic surgery, Morgan points out that although it seems that women choose cosmetic surgery to increase their sense of self-esteem, self-creation, self-fulfillment or self-transcendence, they actually have no real choices. Morgan uses what she calls "paradoxes of choice" to demonstrate the contradictions in choice. The first paradox is the choice of conformity. Although cosmetic surgery could be used to create uniqueness or eccentricity, what is being created is "not simply beautiful bodies and faces but white, Western, Anglo-Saxon bodies in a racist, anti-Semitic context" (Morgan 1991: 36). The second paradox is the paradox of colonization. Although it looks as if women are cultivating their own bodies, in fact their bodies are being colonized by the dominant culture, "which is male-supremacist, racist, ageist, heterosexist, anti-Semitic, ableist, and class-biased" (Morgan 1991: 38). The third paradox is the paradox of coerced voluntariness and the technological imperative. Morgan points out that when technological beauty is becoming compulsory, what used to be normal is rapidly becoming deviant, problematic, inadequate and deformed, and those who refuse to submit to cosmetic surgery will become stigmatized.

Morgan offers two different sorts of "politically correct" feminist responses to cosmetic surgery: the response of refusal and the response of appropriation. She argues that although the response of refusal is a right response to recommend to women, it is unlikely to have much impact on current ideology. Therefore, she advocates the response of appropriation as a political weapon to subvert the

dominant patriarchal ideals of feminine beauty through “bleaching one’s hair white and applying wrinkle-inducing ‘wrinkle creams,’ having one’s face and breasts surgically pulled down (rather than lifted), and having wrinkles sewn” (Morgan 1991: 46). Although Morgan has provided a powerful argument by advocating cosmetic surgery as way of resisting patriarchy, her advocacy has not been taken seriously by most women. An exception supporting the performative body argued for by Morgan is the case of French performance artist Orlan. Since 1990, using cosmetic surgery as her medium of choice, Orlan has undergone a series of choreographed “performances” during which her face is surgically morphed. Orlan’s intention is not to become “beautiful” but rather to challenge traditional perceptions of beauty. As Davis comments, Orlan’s project “represents the postmodern celebration of identity as fragmented, multiple, and--above all--fluctuating, and her performances resonate with the radical social constructionism of Butler (1990 and 1993) and her celebration of the transgressive potential of such performativity” (2003: 108).

There is thus a controversial debate over cosmetic surgery among feminist theorists as to whether cosmetic surgery is a form of oppression, a way of empowerment, or a strategy of resistance. In brief, the above discussion shows that cosmetic surgery involves both exploitation and liberation of the body, and both enslavement and empowerment of women. As Davis writes, cosmetic surgery is a complex dilemma: “problem and solution, oppression and liberation, all in one”

(1995: 67). This complex dilemma, in its Chinese context, is what my research analyzes. The arguments cited above have made me realize that in my own research, I need be aware that on the one hand, the body is an object of cultural ideology and social structure, and cannot escape from the shaping of social-cultural constraints, and on the other hand, the body is a subject of individual will, which expresses the individual's own decision and choice. I will explore how these two processes are interlinked in Chinese women's involvement in cosmetic surgery.

Beauty as Commodity

Generally speaking, people who request cosmetic surgery are neither physically sick, nor suffering from a diagnosable disease. Nevertheless, they come to a surgeon with their self-diagnoses: their eyelids need one more crease, their nose needs to be one centimeter higher, or their breasts need to be one cup larger. Unlike an operation to remove a tumor, in most cases, cosmetic surgery is not a "needed" but rather a "wanted" operation, sought for aesthetic reasons. In the sense of purchasing a beautiful body image, undergoing cosmetic surgery is like buying a fashionable skirt or lipstick from the market. We are now living in a world in which consumption rather than production and other activities has become the primary way of living, as American artist Barbara Kruger expressed this in her famous photomontage, "I Shop Therefore I Am." One feature of consumption today is that people consume not only necessities like basic foodstuffs, clothing, and household utensils, but more and

more symbolic presentations involving image, fashion and style. In this sense an “ideal image” is definitely a glamorous commodity. Beauty “becomes something you have to work on by spending a huge amount of money” (*China Daily* 2004c).

The sociological and anthropological approach to consumption is very different from mainstream economic analyses of consumption, which emphasizes the utility of goods, and sees consumption as mainly a matter of rational individuals buying to maximize their satisfaction. Rather than taking consumption as a primarily economic activity, when studying consumption, anthropologists and sociologists have mainly been concerned with social relationships in consumer behavior (Douglas and Isherwood 1996[1979]), the values and meanings of goods (Appadurai 1986), social distinction and class taste in consumption (Veblen 1973[1925]; Bourdieu 1984), the sign value of consumption (Baudrillard 1981), and self-expression and self-enjoyment in consumption (Featherstone 1991a, 1991b). Although these theorists take different approaches to consumption, they all have one thing in common: “consumption...may be seen, as a social and cultural process involving cultural signs and symbols, not simply as an economic, utilitarian process,” as Bocoock says (1993: 3). Let us consider this at more length.

From the perspective of Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, material goods carry cultural and social meanings in daily life (Douglas and Isherwood 1996 [1979]). Douglas and Isherwood argue that ritual gives shape and substance to social relations in a traditional society; consumption can also be regarded as a “ritual

activity” for making and maintaining social relationships in a modern society.

Following this perspective, we can view purchasing a beautiful/youthful image by undergoing cosmetic surgery also as a symbolic activity through which people may generate meaning and maintain social relationships. We may also regard that before surgery and after surgery are two different phases which generate different meanings and express different identities, such as a self identity as a “modern” and “fashionable” Chinese woman for a woman after undergoing the operation.

Another anthropological approach to the study of material culture and consumption is to consider the “social life of things” (Appadurai 1986). Rather than simply claiming that things are social or cultural, Appadurai further argues that things have lives. He identifies two kinds of trajectories of things as “the life history of a particular object” and “the ‘social history’ of a particular kind or class of object.” By looking at goods as “objects in motion,” Appadurai pays attention to the changing ways in which goods create social identity, the different ways in which they act as carriers of interpersonal influence, and the movability or transformability of their meanings (Appadurai 1986; see Lury 1996: 19). As Lury (1996) points out, Appadurai’s approach shows “how the cultural significance of objects is made visible by animating objects, giving them a life and exploring their cultural biography and social history” (26). Concerning the issue of beauty and cosmetic surgery, although beauty and cosmetic surgery are not tangible goods but intangible images and practices, Appadurai’s idea still provides a motivating idea to examine

“the social life” of body images and cosmetic surgery. By drawing on Appadurai’s approach, we may examine the social life of particular body features, such as double eyelids and fair skin; and we may also discover the cultural biography of cosmetic surgery throughout history, for example, the trajectory of cosmetic surgery from the early 20th century to the Mao era, and to Post-Mao China. By looking at the changes over time of cosmetic surgery, we may catch the rich meanings of the change of ideologies and other social aspects which contextually shape the development of cosmetic surgery in China.

The relationship between identity formation and consumption has been an important issue in anthropology and sociology. Veblen was one of the first theorists to explore how commodities can be used to construct relations between consumers. He describes how the “leisure class” bourgeoisie of the late 19th century engaged in “conspicuous consumption” in order to signal their social status (1973[1925]). More recently, Bourdieu’s classic work *Distinction* (1984) demonstrates how particular goods and consumption habits infused with cultural meaning are used by members of a social class to establish their distinctiveness in relation to other social classes in French society. Bourdieu analyzes how members of groups distinguish themselves in relation to how they eat, how they furnish their houses, and what they watch on television. His exploration of the relationship between consumption, class taste, and social stratification has been very influential within social science. Since then, numerous studies of how consumption choices of different groups symbolically

construct social identities and class distinctions have emerged. From this aspect, I will attempt to explore whether purchasing a beautiful appearance is also related to social stratification and how social class as a variable influences the decision-making of cosmetic surgery.

Unlike Bourdieu, who emphasizes consumption as a means of social distinction and stratification in actual social life, Baudrillard (1981) argues that the consumption of goods should be primarily understood in terms of signs. According to Baudrillard, we have moved from a phase in the development of capitalism where the commodity-form was dominant to one where the sign-form prevails.

Consumption, then, must not be understood in relation to use-values, as material utility, but primarily in relation to sign-values, as signification (see Lury 1996: 67-69). As argued by Baudrillard, consumption is “a systematic act of the manipulation of signs,” and “in order to become an object of consumption, the object must become a sign” (Baudrillard in Poster 1988:22). Baudrillard claims that these signs, or symbols, do not express an already pre-existing set of meanings for a person or a group. The meanings are generated within the system of signs/symbols which engages the attention of a consumer. As the symbolic has become primary in modern capitalism, the “image” is more important than the satisfaction of material needs. Therefore, consumption is a total idealist practice in Baudrillard’s conception. This means that it is ideas that are being consumed, not objects. Because it is an idealist practice, there can be no final physical satisfaction: people are fated to

continue to desire consumer goods and consumer experiences. Hence, consumption is founded on a continuous desire for something not there (see Bocoock 1993: 67-69). According to Baudrillard, the consumer is always involved in constructing identity; therefore, we become what we buy. But identities are in a constant state of change and there is no way to fix the social status of groups. Baudrillard's perspective particularly sheds light on thinking about purchasing "ideal beauty" as "sign consumption," which is more about "want" than "need," more about identity construction than buying a thing.

Although also focusing on sign value in consumption, Featherstone places more emphasis on self expression via lifestyle choices in consumer society. He argues that everyday life is undergoing a process of aestheticization, referring to the "the rapid flow of signs and images which saturate the fabric of everyday life in contemporary society" (1991b: 67). Through the process of aestheticization of everyday life, real life has turned into "the art of living," and consumption of goods, images and services has turned into a way to express individual pleasure and identity. Featherstone's perspective offers another way to understand people's motivation to consume luxurious things such as a beautiful face and an ideal body shape. Today, consumption is a means of self-enjoyment and narcissism and the body is a source of pleasure. Featherstone cites Pachter as follow: "Today's popular heroes are no longer the mighty, the builders of empires, the inventors and achievers. Our celebrities are movie stars and singers, 'beautiful' people of leisure who profess a

philosophy of enjoyment rather than discipline and toil” (Featherstone 1991a: 171, citing Pachter 1975: 330). In this sense, what people do is less important than what people look like. Those who “look good and feel good” are more attractive and therefore socially acceptable. While undergoing cosmetic surgery is just a matter of consumer choice, a profound change may happen not only in appearance but also in self-identity: It brings one a sense of freedom and it makes one feel that one is becoming the person one wants to be. In this sense, by undergoing cosmetic surgery, people seek not only beautiful images and potential benefits based on appearance, but also intangible satisfaction, pleasure, self-esteem and a new identity.

Globalization and the Body

Globalization is a process that impacts upon the world we live in and the ways in which we conceptualize ourselves. The concept of globalization has become “a key idea by which we understand the transition of human society into the third millennium” (Waters, 1995: 1). In what follows, I discuss how the theories and studies of globalization contribute to my understanding of the globalization of beauty and bodily alteration practices.

Tomlinson suggests that the phenomenon of globalization can be regarded as an empirical condition of the modern world that he terms “complex connectivity” (Tomlinson 1999: 2). Harvey and Giddens regard globalization as a manifestation of the changing experience of time and space. While Harvey (1989) terms this change

as “time-space compression,”⁵ Giddens (1990) views globalization as an example of “time-space distancing.”⁶ Although Tomlinson, Harvey and Giddens basically discuss globalization theoretically, their interests in the dimension of time and space inspire me to think about the practice of bodily alteration in the dimension of time and space. To some extent, there is also a “time-space compression” concerning body alteration in cosmetic surgery. When an aged woman can possess a glamorous youthful appearance, the color of skin can be radically changed, or the nose can be reshaped, the line between past and present, black and white, or here and there is also transcended. In other words, influenced by the transnational flows of medical technology, beauty ideals and people of different ethnicities, the body also experiences the “compression”/“distancing” of time-space. In a global era, body alteration has radically changed people’s corporeal possession of “young” and “old,” and “West” and “non-West” in the bodily sphere.

Aside from regarding globalization as a process of the fundamental reordering of time and space, theories of globalization of culture have shifted from “cultural imperialism” to a postmodernist global mapping that emphasizes global pluralism, contingent structures and local resurgence (Li 1998 citing Sreberny-Mohammadi

⁵ Time-space compression is a term used to describe processes that seem to accelerate the experience of time and reduce the significance of distance during a given historical moment. Harvey (1989) uses the concept of time-space compression to signal “processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves” (240).

⁶ Time-space distancing is defined by Giddens (1990) as “the conditions under which time and space are organised so as to connect presence and absence.”(14)

1991). Disagreeing that homogenization is a feature of globalization (e.g. Americanization), scholars have argued that the process of globalization results in heterogenization or hybridity, in which global influences become absorbed and adapted in a local setting (Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 2002; Inda and Rosaldo 2002). Appadurai (1996) uses a series of visual metaphors to describe the flows of people (ethnoscapes), media (mediascapes), technology (technoscapes), capital (finanscapes), and ideas (ideoscapes). He argues that different dimensions of “scapes” are not homogeneous, but collide with each other and are transformed locally (1996:32). The description of “scapes” inspires me to think about, on the one hand, how Chinese women’s bodily practices have been shaped by the transnational flows of beauty images, capital, ideology, and medical technology, and on the other hand, how this process has been contextualized with Chinese characteristics. Similar to Appadurai, Hannerz’s (2002) idea of “global ecumene” also rejects global homogenization; it connotes that worldwide cultural flows reach locales very differently and intermingle with local meanings.

Laura Miller’s work on the Japanese beauty industry resonates with above arguments. Through examining changes in beauty and body styles in Japan and suggesting “how they might be symbolic of shifting values and attitudes” (Miller 2006: 20), Miller argues that there is no longer a homogenous beauty ideology existing in contemporary Japan with the circulation of global beauty imaging. She further argues that these hybrid styles of beauty and fashion are not merely an

attempt to mimic EuroAmerican appearance, but also draw inspiration from diverse cultures, ethnic groups, and historical eras. Miller's work has led me to trace the changing beauty ideology in China. Moreover, her work also inspires me to look for multiple directions of globalization in terms of beauty ideals and body alteration practice by examining the influence from non-Western societies, such as the increased popularity of Japanese and Korean pop culture in China.

Some anthropological research on globalization has also shed light on how globalization has had an immense impact not only on manufacturing, sales and economies, but also on conceptualization of body image and gender roles. Freeman (2002) illustrates how capital and labor-intensive industry and service flow around the world, and as a consequence, how "dress" as a manifestation of corporate ideologies about femininity has shaped local female workers' image conceptualization and identity as "professional" workers in Barbados. Freeman raises an interesting question, "whether fashionable dress is a form of female oppression or self-expression and adult play" (Freeman 2002: 92). In China, the process of expansion of global capital has also made massive changes not only on transformation of local economic structures, but also on people's conceptualization of appearance and gender identity. With the impact of globalization, words such as "freedom," "rights," and "equality" have encouraged women to break down gender stereotypes of women as docile objects; nevertheless, the changes in occupational structure, employment stability, job competition, and marital trends reinforce

women's concern over physical appearance. As Freeman argues about the Barbados, "forms of image making are often so subtly bound up in a sort of internationalized mainstream feminine stereotype that it becomes hard to differentiate between corporate discipline...and women's own changing, and perhaps contradictory, subjectivities" (ibid 93). The same dilemma exists in China. On the one hand, women cannot escape from the shaping of an "internationalized feminine stereotype" concerning appearance, and on the other hand, women express their choices and subjectivities by manipulating their body appearance, though generally in accordance with these stereotypes.

Another important work regarding to the body and globalization is Scheper-Hughes's work on human organs. Scheper-Hughes (2002) reports how human organs are commercialized and traded in a global network in which impoverished peoples in developing countries sell their body parts for transplants to rich buyers from wealthy countries. Within the impact of capitalism throughout the world, virtually everything is available as a commodity to be bought or sold. Even body parts are becoming commodified, as Scheper-Hughes reports. This of course applies to the market for cosmetic surgery. Unlike the buying and selling of tangible human organs, what people purchase in cosmetic surgery is an intangible commodity, a beautiful and glamorous physical appearance. Moreover, unlike organs or tissues that are definitely necessary for the desperately ill, a beautiful body image is a luxury. But the prosperity of both the human organs market and the cosmetic surgery

market indicates that with the spread of advanced medical and surgical techniques, human bodies as both tangible material commodities and symbolic representations are inevitably involved with the expansion of global capitalism.

Different from the ways in which Freeman and Scheper-Hughes explore the process of globalization in terms of the flows of capital and commodities in the material market, Gordon Mathews explores another global market—the “global cultural supermarket” (2000: 1), in which people no longer belong to a particular culture, but are free to choose aspects of their lives through shopping, whether food and music or the arts, information, values and beliefs. In this sense, when making the decision to enlarge breasts, heighten the bridge of the nose or lighten the color of their skin, women are also engaging in the purchase of information, values and identities embodied in these body features from a “global cultural supermarket.”

So far, I have reviewed various theoretical approaches which shed light on my inquiry of Chinese women’s involvement in a particular body modification--cosmetic surgery. The female body and its surgically aesthetic alteration is the site of inquiry in this thesis. Nevertheless, the goal of the research is not to theorize the body; rather, it is to capture “a particular historical moment” within which the body, as a physical and symbolic artifact, is “securely anchored” (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987: 7). That is to say, the physical appearance of the body and its bodily practice is a primary site to understand women’s mundane lives and socio-cultural changes in contemporary China.

Beauty and Women's Body Images in China

This section reviews the studies on cosmetic surgery, beauty and the female body in China. Although scholars have done extensive research on the history and culture of cosmetic surgery (Blum 2003; Gilman 1999; Haiken 1997) and women's involvement in cosmetic surgery in Western countries, there are few studies of China's cosmetic surgery. In Chinese academic journals, among the few articles addressing cosmetic surgery, the analytic perspective is primarily rooted in mainstream feminism. Chinese scholars mainly view women who undergo cosmetic surgery as victims of patriarchy and consumerism (Ding 2006; Jiang 2004; Long and Liu 2006; Tang 2005; Wang 2005; Zhang M. 2004). Jiang (2004) notes that, despite numerous reports about accidents caused by cosmetic surgery, Chinese women continue to reshape their bodies through cosmetic surgery. She points out that for Chinese women, a good appearance is no longer a vain demand of their own but a social need, because "being young, pretty, slim and sexy are society's standard for the 'ideal' woman" (Jiang 2004:65). Jiang compares the bodily practice of ancient foot-binding with contemporary cosmetic surgery: "Foot-binding in ancient times and this age's face-lifting and body reshaping, despite being different, are the same in nature. That is that women have to follow the standards and demands of the mainstreaming aesthetic culture and have set themselves against their own bodies" (Jiang 2004:65).

Long and Liu (2006) also argue that the practice of cosmetic surgery reflects

Chinese women's submission to men's authority in a new version. "The phenomenon of artificial beauties is brought about by the social fact of inequality between men and women, which in turn is intensified by this phenomenon" (Long and Liu 2006:102). A similar critical lens is to be found in studies of beauty pageants, the beauty industry, slimming culture and weight-reducing advertising, in which body beautification and adornment are criticized as women's subjugation to a patriarchal beauty system and capitalist consumer culture (see Jiang 2003; Xu and Qian 2002; Xue 2005; Yang X.Y. 2005; Yang S. 2005; Zhang L.M. 2001).

From a different perspective than that held by these Chinese scholars, Brownell (2005) examines China's cosmetic surgery in relation to both Western influences and Chinese nationalism. Brownell discusses how the development of transnational cosmetic surgery has interacted with Chinese nationalism. She applies the notion of "empty form," John MacAloon's study frame for international sports, to biomedicine such as the practice of cosmetic surgery, because both sport and biomedicine "are rigidly defined by the culture of science and yet very open to cultural interpretation of other kinds, particularly in the context of nationalist discourse" (Alter 2005: 12). Through tracing the trajectory of adoption of cosmetic surgery from the West to China, from an unwelcome bourgeois practice in the Mao era to a source of national pride in the reform era, Brownell elaborates how cultural and political meanings are grafted on to the practice of cosmetic surgery. More specifically, using double-eyelid surgery as a template, Brownell discusses how

Chinese cosmetic surgeons claim technical superiority to their Western counterparts and how Chinese claim double eyelids as an essential feature of Chinese ideas of beauty rather than imitating the West. In so doing, she illustrates that cosmetic surgery has been subtly appropriated as a part of the nationalist project in China. Brownell's work on China's cosmetic surgery exemplifies how a transnational practice can be transformed by and imbued with local meanings.

With regard to the topic of cosmetic surgery, it is important to look at the politics of feminine ideals of beauty in China. Man Kit Wah's (2000) historical investigation revealed that the notion of female beauty in Chinese culture came from both Taoist and Confucian traditions. Through examining classical Taoist and Confucian texts, Man states that while a woman's physical beauty and sexual attractiveness was emphasized in Taoist teachings, a woman's moral virtue was stressed in Confucian beliefs. Man argues that despite this seeming contradiction, both the external sexual and inner moral dimensions determined the notions of feminine beauty in Chinese traditions. "The Taoist notion emphasizes natural physicality, while the Confucian beliefs stress behavior control or 'inner beauty'" (Man 2000:176). Moreover, using a case study of the development and construction of feminine ideals of beauty in courtesan culture in later Imperial China, Man illustrates "how the notion of female beauty in China was redefined and represented by male literati under certain political and economic changes" (2000: 169-170). Man also discusses how, in Maoist China, the notion of female beauty became rooted not

in external appearance, but in internal virtues defined by revolutionary and patriotic discourses. As Man writes, “At that time, external beauty was not important; what was important was the inner beauty of women who sacrificed themselves according to Communist ideals for the nation, the people, and the party”(2000:190). This situation changed only after China opened its doors in the later 1970s. With the political and economic changes of China, international fashion trends, and beauty ideals infiltrated Chinese notions of female beauty. Man further argues that “fashion and looks became the necessary symbols of identity and classification” (2000:190) and then the consumption of fashion and beauty products became a way to change personal identity. Man concluded that although Chinese women seem to pursue their desire for a new look freely and confidently, they might be enslaved by the fashion industry, “which merely repeats the bodily constraints of past times in a new form” (Man 2000:194).

If Man’s inquiry of the notion of beauty in Chinese traditions reminds us that feminine ideals of beauty are a particular “cultural, social, and historical construction” (Man 2000: 189), Gao Yunxiang’s study (2006) of “robust beauty” (*jianmei*) in the 1930s is a good example to demonstrate how a certain beauty ideal comes out of a particular historical and social context. Rather than analyzing the notions of female beauty in different historical periods of China as Man did, Gao focuses on the emergence of an aesthetic concept of “robust beauty” (*jianmei*) during China’s “national crisis” (*guonan*) in the 1930s. According to Gao, under the

atmosphere of foreign menace and national crisis in the 1930s, to strengthen the physical body became part of the nation-building project in China. Therefore, the nationalist government implemented legal and administrative procedures to enforce the development of “sports; physical education; physical culture” (*tiyu*) and encouraged women to participate in this to become physically strong. Thus, cultivated by *tiyu*, the cult of Western categories of “health” and “beauty” were translated into Chinese local discourses as “robust beauty” (*jianmei*). Through examining *Linglong*, a Shanghai weekly women’s magazine published from 1931 to 1937, Gao illustrates how media representations displayed strikingly changed ideas of liberated women’s appearance and behavior, and promoted *jianmei*, the robust beauty of a healthy woman, as a new aesthetic fashion among urban Chinese women. Gao’s study of robust beauty in the 1930s demonstrates that to bring the threatened nation to the status of a strong nation, the female body, in its fitness and physical appearance, was reshaped, and the content of femininity was also redefined. “The female body—its meaning and ownership—has long served as a signifier for competing nationalist and feminist discourses on womanhood in modern China” (Gao 2006: 546).

Certainly Gao is not the only scholar to stress the connection between discourses of nationalism and the gendered body in China. In considering that the body and the nation stand for and configure each other, a number of scholars have stressed the association of Chinese nationhood with the physical body (Brownell

1995, 1998-1999; Li S.Q. 2006; Morris 2000). Brownell (1995) notes that during the encounter with the West in the 19th century and under the influence of social Darwinism, the meanings of physical activities changed from being ways to cultivate moral character to being ways to gauge the health and strength of a nation. “Since the devastating encounters with Western powers in the last century, Chinese nationalism has been very closely linked with the body, so that the act of individuals strengthening their bodies was linked to the salvation of the nation” (Brownell 1995: 22). The body, especially the female body, has been a useful site to understand modernization in China. As Hershatter (2004) writes, “in twentieth-century China, women were the site at which national modernity was imagined, often through a language of crisis” (1028).

Brownell (1998-1999) observes the importance of the female body, both those of sportswomen and of fashion models, to Chinese nationalism in post-Mao China. Using sportswomen and fashion models as examples, Brownell analyzes a shift of Chinese body culture from the 1980s to the 1990s,⁷ “a shift that can approximately be labeled as one from Communist nationalism to consumerist nationalism” (1998-1999: 37). When sportswomen, especially the heroines of the Chinese women’s volleyball team, represented the Chinese nation in the 1980s, their

⁷ Brownell defines “body culture” as follows: “Body culture as a broad term includes daily practices of health, hygiene, fitness, beauty, dress, and decoration, as well as gestures, postures, manners, way of speaking and eating, and so on. It also includes the way these practice are trained into the body, the way the body is publicly displays, and the lifestyle that is expressed in that display” (1998-1999: 37). In this thesis, when using the term “body culture,” I refer to Brownell’s definition.

obedience, their capability to “eat bitterness and endure hard labor” (*chi ku nai lao*), and their physical suffering and pain were much emphasized in official press accounts. Brownell argues that the images of sportswomen resonated with century-long nationalist images of obedient female suffering and male importance. The public images of sport heroines were reinforced by nationalist discourses. Brownell further discusses how, like sportswomen, Chinese fashion models in the 1990s were also made to represent official nationalism. But unlike the images of androgynous sportswomen, the sexualized and commodified images of fashion models represent the Chinese project of modernization. Moreover, through discussing the public debate about “what is the essence of being Chinese,” and the semiotic difference between “traditional oriental beauty” (oval face, arched eyebrows, long hair, a melancholic glance, and restrained movements) and a “Western” look (short hair, a direct and assertive glance, and energetic movements) represented by the winners of a Chinese supermodel contest held in Beijing in 1995, Brownell depicts an emerging conflict between a “new nativist-culturalist nationalism” and global capitalism in terms of body culture.

With images of masculinized heroic “comrade sisters” (Evans 1999) of the Mao era replaced by the feminine, physically attractive consumer women (Evans 2000; Hooper 1994, 1998; Li 1998), there has been a clear trend toward the sexualization and commodification of women’s bodies in China in recent years (Brownell 2001; Schein 1994; Yang 1999; Xu and Feiner 2007). Using fashion as a specific site of

investigation, Li Xiaoping (1998) observes the connection between the modernization of Chinese society and the practice of bodily adornment in post-Mao China. She argues that “modernization had reinscribed the Chinese body just as it had changed many women’s lives” (Li 1998: 71). Li states that changing fashion and bodily adornment form new beauty standards and new femininity, offering new role models for Chinese women. As Li says, “the transformation of fashion is accompanied by a shift in the ideology of beauty and the importance of other techniques of femininity” (1998: 79). Therefore, representing the ultimate archetype of beauty, fashion models spawned a beauty industry including cosmetic industry, beauty salons and cosmetic surgery industry (Li 1998: 80). Li also argues that the emergence of fashion-consciousness in post-Mao China reflects important changes in China’s aspirations and a growing sense of connection with the international community. In this narrative, the images of “new” and “modern women” are testimonies of Chinese modernization. As argued by Li, “From the very beginning, modernization in China has involved the construction of the ‘new’ or ‘modern woman’” (Li 1998: 71). Li also is concerned with the interplay of Western/global and Chinese/local forces manifested in changes of fashion and aesthetic values. She concludes that fashion’s transformation and the re-fashioned “modern woman” reveals how global and local forces converge in domains of bodily representation. “It is this mesh that turns the female body into a site on which patriarchy, party politics and consumer capitalism are played out” (Li 1998: 86-87).

As exemplified by Li (1998), the decline of state control and the growth of consumer culture have contributed to a redefining of femininity and a reconstruction of the “modern Chinese women” in post-Mao China. One useful entry point of understanding modernization in China is through examining the female body and women’s mundane lives. Rofel (1999) provides an insightful discussion of the cultural politics of modernity among Chinese women. Based on her observation of women’s lives of three distinct generations in a silk factory in Hangzhou, Rofel suggests that the search for modernity in China cannot merely be seen as the universalizing of Western Enlightenment values. Rather, modernity has been imagined, pursued, and experienced differently by these three cohorts of Chinese women. According to Rofel, the oldest generation of women who entered the factory during the 1950s, constructed identity in terms of their work performance and portrayed themselves as having been liberated by the revolution which enabled them to work. Inscribed with Cultural Revolution discourse which completely destroyed gender differentiation, the second generation, the Cultural Revolution cohort, learned a politics of authority and performed their identity through challenging cadres’ power in the factory. Embodying a contemporary consciousness of seeking naturalized femininity, the youngest cohort--the post-Mao generation of women--defined themselves through their bodies. Rofel notes that in post-Mao China, the state actively participates in reestablishing traditional gender roles of women through the monitoring of women’s sexual activity in terms of birth control.

Market forces also influence the young generation of women's renewed interest in their body images, sexuality and femininity. As exemplified in Rofel's work, the different identities and experiences of these three cohorts of women indicate that the pursuit of Chinese modernity is a fluid, fragmentary, heterogeneous and even contradictory process among women positioned in different life-worlds. Rofel's work sheds light on the ways in which the female body has been a site at which national modernity has been imagined and represented locally.

To understand women's involvement in cosmetic surgery, marriage is an important dimension to be addressed. Scholars have explored marriage in Chinese history as well as the complex interplay between marriage and the social, political, economic, and gender inequalities that have characterized Chinese society (see Watson and Ebrey 1991). In this thesis, I will particularly focus on how women's perceptions of body image have been influenced by everyday life and marriage. With the end of Maoist asceticism in the later 1970s, the everyday life of Chinese women changed dramatically. Scholars have discussed how the social norms and attitudes toward sexual life, love and marriage have been changing rapidly in post-Mao China (Evans 1997; Farquhar 2002; Farrer 2002; Tam 1996; Yan 2003). Farquhar (2002) explores the everyday experiences of "carnal life" in terms of food and sexual life, and the emerging new ideologies of embodied pleasures in post-socialist China. Although people usually suggest that relatively new forms of self-indulgent bodily pleasures involving food and sex in post-socialist China are a

result of emancipating “natural” desire from the shackles of former political repression and Maoist asceticism, Farquhar argues that appetites and anxieties about bodily pleasure in post-socialist China are never completely outside of politics. According to Farquhar, the omnipresent nationalism of the reform period insures that the ideological legacy of Mao inhabits people’s mundane practices and embodied habits in post-Mao China. Farquhar’s study illustrates that economic reforms do not necessarily imply the retreat of the state from everyday life. While we should be aware of the continuing significant role of the state in shaping people’s bodily pleasure as Farquhar discusses, it is important to note that Farquhar might be overestimating the nationalism in the reform period. As commented by Tan (2002: 144), “it is misleading to portray the Chinese in the reform era as generally nationalist, or to constantly look for the ‘national allegory’ in the Chinese embodiment of body linked to food and sex.”

Similar to Farquhar, the work of Evans (1997) shows that sexuality on Maoist and post-Maoist China has always been a special target for state intervention. In her study of gender norms and female sexuality from 1949 to the 1990s, Evans (1997) examines the role of the state in shaping various discourses of female sexuality and argues that women’s sexuality has been consistently seen as a site for the regulation of sexual and social conduct. With the market orientation of social and economic reform since the 1980s, the taboo of sex and the denial of sexuality have been rapidly replaced by an explosion of eroticism and desire for sexual pleasure (Evans

1997; Farquhar 2002). The changes in sex-related issues are evidenced in many ways. One apparent change is the bombardment of erotic female images in mass media and the increasing concern about physical appearance and sexual appeal among Chinese women (Evans 1997). Moreover, after decades of abolishment of concubinage during the Mao period, an undercurrent of “sexual liberation” has emerged, resulting in an increase in extra-marital sexual relations and the return of concubines. In recent years, the keeping of mistresses and “second wives” (*ernai*) has become a rampant and pervasive phenomenon among the rich and the powerful in China (Lang and Smart 2002; Tam 1996). The changing practices of sexuality are also evidenced by the resurgence of prostitution in China since the 1980s (Evans 1997; Jeffreys 2004; Zhang T.T. 2004).⁸ When extramarital sex has become common, a new culture of sexuality has emerged in China, within which attractive and sexualized female images are emphasized and the erotic female body is consumed. These studies on sexuality in China remind us to look at how the images of women and of sexuality have radically altered with the emergence of a new ethos of sexuality and a new behavioural model.

The above review shows that scholars have done fascinating studies of female body images and the gendered body in the Chinese cultural and political context. Although the entry points are different, scholars have noted that beautiful and enticing young women are used to portray China’s national modernity (Brownell

⁸ Shortly after taking power in 1949, the Communist Party of China embarked upon a series of campaigns that purportedly eradicated prostitution from China by the early 1960s.

1998-1999, 2001; Farhuhar 2002; Li 1998; Schein 1994, 1998; Zhang Z.

2001). These studies indicate that discourses of modernity, nationalism and consumerism are important perspectives to examine women's perceptions of beauty and practices of cosmetic surgery in post-Mao China.

Methodology and Fieldwork

The fieldwork for this thesis was carried out from the beginning of August 2006 to the end of July 2007 in Beijing, China. I also conducted one-month preliminary research in Beijing from July to August 2005. I am a Chinese and native speaker of Mandarin, so there is no language barrier to doing fieldwork in China. During the period of fieldwork, I conducted participant observation, in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, and text analysis.

I chose Beijing as my field site because Beijing is a political, cultural, educational, and medical center of China. In 2003-2004, several influential events, such as the emergence of China's first "artificial beauty" and the emergence of the first beauty pageant exclusively for women who have undergone cosmetic surgery, all happened in Beijing. These events partially exemplified the significance of Beijing in China's cosmetic surgery industry. However, to conduct a fieldwork in a big city like Beijing was really a challenge for me, especially when the topic is quite sensitive and concerned with business secrecy and personal privacy. It was hard to get access to conduct my fieldwork at the beginning. I sometimes felt very frustrated

when I was turned away by surgeons and women who underwent surgeries. It was also quite usual that I was treated as a spy by some owners or surgeons of privately-owned cosmetic surgery clinics when I tried to discuss some sensitive issues with them. Under such circumstances, my social network in Beijing was valuable in helping me to access the field site. I contacted all of my friends in Beijing to inform them that I was doing research on the topic of cosmetic surgery, and asked them to introduce women who had undergone cosmetic surgery as well as people who worked in the cosmetic surgery industry, to be my interviewees. Through the women recommended by my friends, I received some other recommendations of interviewees. Using snowball sampling, I tried to contact as many informants as possible and identified several key informants. In this sense, through mobilizing all kinds of social networks, I came to know three “gatekeepers” of the cosmetic surgery industry in Beijing: people with remarkable connections in the cosmetic surgery industry. Building rapport with these gatekeepers greatly helped me to access cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals as well as women who underwent cosmetic surgery.

Hao Lulu, the China’s first “artificial beauty,” who has been a target of Chinese and international mass media since 2003, was one of the most important gatekeepers through whom I could access the field site. In my preliminary study in July 2005, introduced by a friend, I came to know Hao Lulu. One year later, after I arrived in Beijing in August 2006, I quickly got in touch with Hao again. I spent a lot of time

with her and was able to obtain a deep look into her life. Sometimes, I also temporarily worked as an assistant for Hao. I assisted Hao in doing newspaper interviews and talk shows on some TV programs, and also accompanied her to present at some commercial activities. As Hao is a celebrity in China's cosmetic surgery industry, her social network helped me over time to enter into the network of cosmetic surgery business. Introduced by Hao, I interviewed some plastic surgeons and women who underwent cosmetic surgeries. Moreover, as Hao was a hostess of a cosmetic surgery reality TV show called "Cinderella and the Swan" in 2006-2007, I partially observed the production of the reality show made by the Shandong Qilu TV channel. With Hao's help, I visited the cosmetic surgery hospital, interviewed finalists of the TV show, chatted with the programme coordinator and plastic surgeons, and observed one of the operations and some of the episodes.

Through Hao's introduction, I also temporarily worked as an assistant for a cosmetic surgery consultant. In December 2006, I came to know Ms. Li, a famous consultant and manager in the cosmetic surgery business circle in Beijing. As Ms. Li had a wide network in cosmetic surgery business, she also introduced me to several interviewees. Moreover, when Ms. Li was invited by a privately-owned cosmetic surgery clinic to give training courses on cosmetic surgery consulting to its staff, I worked as an assistant for Ms. Li in January 2007. During my stay in the clinic, I chatted with the boss of the clinic, nurses, clients and surgeons. This temporary work experience offered me a good chance to get a closer look at the cosmetic

surgery business.

Introduced by a friend, in the summer of 2005, I came to know Ms. Shi, another gatekeeper of cosmetic surgery business in Beijing. Ms. Shi has undergone various kinds of cosmetic surgery operations since the 1980s. At the time I conducted my fieldwork, she owned a cosmetic surgery hospital in Beijing. During my fieldwork, I continually visited her hospital to observe changes in the business. Ms. Shi was quite helpful in providing me valuable information, allowing me to observe consulting process of cosmetic surgery in her hospital, and introducing informants to me.

In order to better observe business of cosmetic surgery, I also personally visited some plastic surgery clinics/hospitals and beauty salons during the fieldwork. There were some 300 plastic surgery clinics/hospitals in Beijing in 2006-2007, which can be generally divided into three types: military, public and privately-owned hospitals/clinics. I visited 42 of them, including 3 military hospitals/clinics, 6 public hospitals/clinics, 32 private hospitals/clinics and 1 joint-venture hospital. During my visit to these hospitals/clinics, I acted as a client to discover strategies hospitals/clinics use to persuade people to undergo cosmetic surgery, to explore the prices of various cosmetic surgeries among different hospitals/clinics, and to compare major differences among these various public/private hospitals/clinics. In the waiting rooms or wards of hospitals/clinics, I observed and chatted with clients, and listened to their experiences, complaints, and opinions on surgeries they wanted

to undergo or had undergone. I carried out further interviews with some of these women. I also visited 12 beauty parlors to observe how beauty parlors were illegally involved in cosmetic surgery operations. Moreover, in order to get a close look at some of these beauty parlors, I tried some facial treatment programmes and a weight loss programme. In so doing, I chatted with beauty consultants and other clients about various topics related to beauty and the body.

During my fieldwork, I particularly concentrated on “listening to women” (Davis 1995) who had undergone cosmetic surgery. Through the different channels mentioned above, I interviewed 58 women who had undergone cosmetic surgery. I identified five women as key informants, kept in contact with them for almost a year and constantly chatted with them in person, via phone call or online message conversation. For the other 53 women, I interviewed them in interviews ranging in length from 120 to 240 minutes with most interviews lasting about 150 minutes. Interviews were conducted at various venues fitting the convenience of informants, such as wards of cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals, coffee shops, lobbies of plazas, tea houses, restaurants and so on.

Among 58 interviewees, 35 women were from Beijing and others came from other cities and provinces including Shanghai, Chongqing, Sichuan, Yunnan, Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Shandong, Guizhou, Hubei, Henan, and Guangdong. The social profiles of the women I interviewed were diverse. Their careers include high school student, college student, freelance writer, manicurist, staff of cosmetic

surgery clinics and beauty salons, bar singer, model, businesswomen, office lady of a media company, manager of a consultant company, sales representative, manager of a PR company, market director of an advertising company, and journalist. The diversity in careers also determined the different socioeconomic statuses of the informants. While some of them were primarily middle-class and upper-middle-class women who were successful in their careers, others were lower-class women in service sectors who did not hold jobs seen as “respectable.” The age range of those 58 interviewees was 16 to 55 years and their incomes roughly ranged from 800 yuan to 40,000 yuan a month. Actually, as age and income were two sensitive topics which sometimes caused some discomfort among interviewees, in some cases, individuals’ specific age and income were not specifically obtained. However, I still tried to get an estimate of age and income through observation as well as their indirect answers to certain of my questions.

In order to obtain overall statistical and demographic data of recipients of cosmetic surgery in China, I also interviewed an officer from the Chinese Society of Aesthetic and Plastic Doctor and six surgeons from different cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals in Beijing. However, all of them stated that precise statistics about China’s cosmetic surgery market were not available. I double checked many sources and confirmed that there were indeed no precise official statistics available concerning issues such as the number of cosmetic surgery procedures taking place every year in China and demographic features of cosmetic surgery in China.

Due to the limits of random sampling and the lack of government statistics, in order to obtain a broad picture of Chinese women's involvement in cosmetic surgery, I tried to extend my vision by reading documentary written sources including newspapers, magazines, biographies, and advertisements. As cosmetic surgery has been a hot topic in China in recent years, there are tremendous and valuable resources from Chinese mass media. In addition to reading extensive news and reports on the Internet, I visited the National Library of China many times during my fieldwork to search various databases and read piles of newspapers and magazines. I searched key words such as "cosmetic surgery," "artificial beauty," "Hao Lulu," "Miss Cosmetic Surgery Pageant" in different databases⁹ to find out reports regarding cosmetic surgery in Chinese newspapers and magazines dated from 1998 to 2007. For example, through putting the Chinese word "cosmetic surgery" (*zhengxing meirong*) as a key word in the data base, WiseSearch¹⁰, it becomes apparent that Chinese media coverage of cosmetic surgery increased dramatically and continuously from 1998 to 2007 (see Figure 2). This rising media attention reflects to some extent the growing popularity of cosmetic surgery in China.

⁹ Two databases I mainly searched are China Journal Net (CJN) and WiseSearch.

¹⁰ WiseSearch is a Chinese and English database of more than 75 million articles from hundreds of media sources aggregated by Wisers Information Ltd. (Hong Kong). Information is updated daily from more than 1,500 content providers. WiseSearch claims to be one of the largest Chinese databases of published information from Greater China.

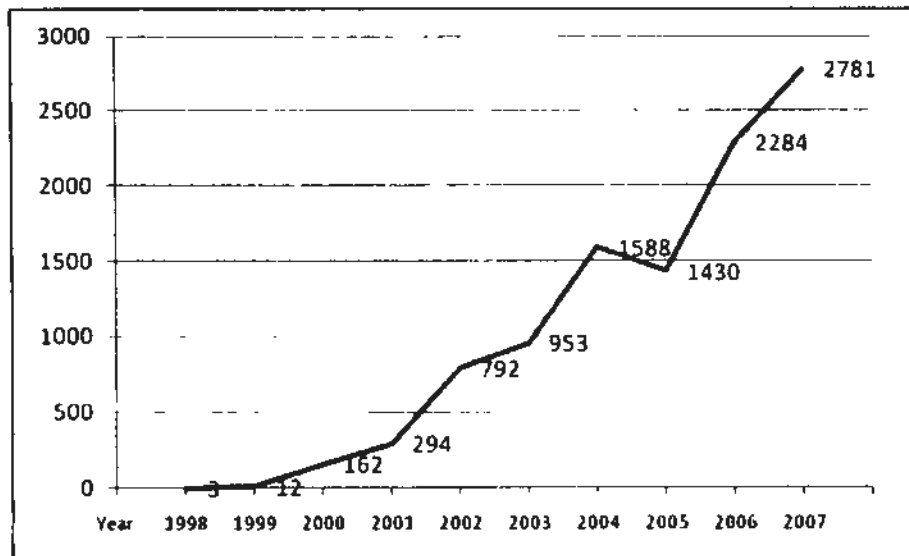


Figure 2. The Number of Hits for the Key Word “Cosmetic Surgery” (zhengxing meirong) in WiseSearch (1998-2007)

Although I did not conduct detailed text analysis, in 2006-2007, I bought many issues of a Beijing-based shopping guide newspaper, *Fine Goods Shopping Guide* (*jingpin guowu zhinan*) to study cosmetic surgery advertisements. In order to observe the stories of Chinese “artificial beauties” that Chinese state news agencies presented to foreign readers, I also paid particular attention to *China Daily*, the largest English newspaper in China, and the English website of *Xinhua News Agency*, a major state news agency.

To observe how information and tips about beauty and cosmetic surgery were presented in women’s magazines, I read various glossy fashion and lifestyle magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Fashion Housekeeper*, *Rayli She Fashion*, *Beauty*, and *Shanghai Style*. In addition, I watched around 50 Chinese TV programs concerning cosmetic surgery, including talk shows, news reports, and documentaries in China Central Television (CCTV)’s programmes such

as “Topics in Focus,” “Weekly Quality Report,” “News in 30 Minutes,” and “News Probe,” as well as reality shows such as “Cinderella and the Swan,” “Angels Love Beauty” and “See my 72 Changes” produced by different local TV Stations.

Information gathered from these sources appears at points throughout my thesis.

Another interesting and important resource for my research has been online discussion forums of Bulletin Board System (BBS) on the Internet. I discovered several online forums in which people who already underwent cosmetic surgery or who are interested in cosmetic surgery usually gather. People discuss every kind of topic related to cosmetic surgery on the online forums. Some of them put their own before-and-after pictures along with diaries on the websites. These people build up a kind of virtual community where they can express their experiences, feelings, satisfaction or disappointment freely. I frequently visited these online forums to record their stories, observe how they share information and experience in virtual communities, and also post want-ads for informants for my research. I also put some interviewee-wanted messages on some websites and sent e-mails and messages to the women who published their stories or diaries of cosmetic surgery on the Internet to ask for interviews. In addition, most cosmetic surgery hospitals/clinics also have their own websites. I visited these websites often to observe what information was published to the public and what activities were used to promote their business.

Chapter Outline

In this chapter, I have addressed some key issues, including the research background, research questions, objectives of the research, theoretical approaches, literature review, and methodology and fieldwork. The chapters that follow, making up the body of the thesis, comprise eight chapters. I basically organize chapters to reflect the research questions I address. While each chapter has its own thematic thread and focus, it connects with all the others in a narrative sequence to produce a whole story.

In chapter 2, “The Cultural History of Plastic Surgery in China,” through reviewing the trajectory of the development of plastic surgery in China from Republican China to Maoist China and then to contemporary China, I discuss how plastic surgery, a Western medical specialty, has been transmitted from the West to China and adopted into China’s social and political settings since the early 20th century. The process of how plastic surgery has been appropriated into China’s social contexts demonstrates that boundaries plastic surgery has crossed over are not only regional, but also national, political and ideological.

My ethnography essentially begins in chapter 3, “China’s First ‘Artificial Beauty’: The Exploited Body or the Empowered Body?” I start my analysis by elaborating the story of Hao Lulu, China’s first “artificial beauty.” By describing her story, I seek to provide a quick yet telling glimpse into the burgeoning cosmetic surgery industry in China and women’s involvement in it. Furthermore, through

discussing controversial debates, I explore a paradox concerning Hao: while her body is much publicized by a private cosmetic surgery hospital to advertise its services in the rapidly growing beauty industry, Hao herself strongly expresses her autonomy via her body alteration as a “new” Chinese woman who fulfills her desire for beauty, happiness and freedom. This inherent discrepancy exemplifies the complexity of women’s surgically bodily alteration under the newly emerging body politics and market discourse of post-Mao China.

In the shift to a market economy following the economic reforms of the late 1970s, China has experienced dramatic social changes associated with rapid economic growth and social restructuring. In chapters 4 and 5, I move to examine the impact of economic and social transformation on women’s bodily practices of cosmetic surgery by delineating changes of women’s lives in employment and marriage. I discuss how the processes of reconstructing economic and social structure of post-Mao China have affected women’s perception of beauty and their choice of undergoing cosmetic surgery. In chapter 4, “‘Being Good-Looking is Capital’: The Gendered Body,” I mainly deal with the phenomenon that Chinese high school and college students, girls especially have rushed to cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals over summer/winter holidays to improve their looks in order to get an edge in a tight job market, where occupational gender segregation and employment discrimination based on gender, appearance, height and age widely exist. Furthermore, I discuss how the obsession with the female beauty in

workplaces and in the marriage market is rooted in traditional Chinese gender norms of women and men, of which women's appearances are more emphasized than their ability and talents.

Chapter 5, "From the 'Iron Rice Bowl' to the 'Youth Rice Bowl': The Anxious Body in Social Transition," departs from a monolithic perspective which assumes that women who undergo cosmetic surgery are a singular group. Using ethnographic cases of a laid-off woman, an upper-middle-class woman, and a rural-to-urban migrant woman, I highlight the diversity of motivations for undergoing cosmetic surgery of women positioned differently in power-laden social hierarchies. I argue that the personal decision to have surgical body alteration is strongly triggered and pushed by the dramatic changes in social, employment and marriage structure in today's China. That is to say, body anxiety is produced by social instability in China undergoing a rapid transition.

In chapter 6, "Make Me the Fairest of Them All: The Commodified Body in China's Booming Beauty Economy," I discuss how women's anxiety about physical appearance is captured by ubiquitous consumer culture and the ever-expanding beauty industry in China. The focus of this chapter is the commodification of female appearance in China's flourishing beauty industry and its profound socio-cultural and political implications. I explore how mass media plays a pivotal role to create the desire to buy an "ideal beauty" through cosmetic surgery, and how consumption of beauty has become a way of living for some Chinese women. Furthermore, I

discuss how female body image and bodily alteration practices have become not only a reflection of personal identity, but also a site of ideological contestation, of which state power and market forces reconfigure their power structure to form a new bodily regime.

Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 explore beauty ideals and cosmetic surgery in China through the perspective of globalization. In Chapter 7, "From Barbie Doll to the Korean Wave: Embodied Globalization," using the rapid expansion of Barbie sale in China's market as an example, I discuss how the process of globalization has integrated China into a global market economically as well as culturally in terms of the influence of omnipresent Western beauty ideals and consumer culture. Moreover, I explore the significant influence of Korean pop culture on Chinese women's perception of beauty and practices of cosmetic surgery to stress the multiple directions of globalization. In Chapter 8, "One Face fits all?: Between the Local and the Global," through discussing Chinese women's preference for double eyelids and fair skin and their bodily practices to pursue these features, I examine the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization in terms of the globalization of standards of beauty and women's pursuit of these standards through cosmetic surgery.

In the final chapter of the dissertation, I conclude that the growing desire for cosmetic surgery in China is a product of a complex combination of forces, at the level of both individual and sociocultural, micro and macro, and national and

transnational forces. The changing image of Chinese women who have undergone cosmetic surgery represents the changing face of a “new” China that has undergone a dramatic and drastic social transition.

Chapter Two

The Cultural History of Plastic Surgery in China

Over a century ago, a German pathologist, Rudolph Virchow (1848), made his famous statement that “Medicine is a social science, and politics nothing but medicine on a grand scale.” Borrowing this line to open this chapter, I intend to use Virchow’s critical perspective to approach the cultural history of a medical specialty, plastic surgery, in the context of China. To review the cultural history of plastic surgery in China is to explore the historical and social conditions with which this Western medical specialty has been adopted in China. Anthropological study is specialized in capturing the meanings of particular phenomena through focusing on what happens now. However, this does not mean that the past is not relevant to or important for current issues in question. Accordingly, although the target of this thesis is the current situation of cosmetic surgery in China, its history is also important to consider. How has plastic surgery been brought in and adapted to China? How has the trajectory of the development of plastic surgery been embedded in China’s social, cultural and political settings? Through tracing its development from Republican China to Maoist China and then to contemporary China, this chapter examines the historical and political conditions imposed upon the development of plastic surgery in China. By reviewing the cultural history of plastic surgery in

China, I show how different political ideologies have shaped the development of plastic surgery in China.

Exploring the “Social Life” of Plastic Surgery

This chapter is largely inspired by two works: Arjun Appadurai’s (1986) cultural analysis of “the social life of things” and Susan Brownell’s (2005) study of “the transnational development of the field of cosmetic surgery” in China. In his influential chapter, Appadurai (1986) proposes that things have “social lives.” He argues that by tracing the biographical trajectory of the life history of one thing, we can understand that how the meanings of the thing in question change within varying contexts. Although plastic surgery is not a thing but a practice, Appadurai’s perspective is inspiring in the sense that it enables us to examine its biographical trajectory. Borrowing Appadurai’s notion, I want to explore the “social life” of plastic surgery in China. Although biomedicine and medical practice are generally regarded as “decontextualized knowledge” (Brownell 2005: 132; also see Hannerz 1990) which has a built-in affinity with transnationalism, by applying John MacAloon’s notion of “empty form” of modern sports to biomedicine, Brownell argues that biomedicine is “rigidly defined by the culture of science and yet very open to cultural interpretation of other kinds, particularly in the context of nationalist discourses” (Alter 2005: 12). From this perspective, through discussing the transnational transplantation of seemingly neutralized cosmetic surgery from the

West to China in different historical periods, Brownell (2005) illustrates how Chinese cosmetic surgery is subtly appropriated to a nationalist discourse. Taking the trajectory of China's adoption of originally Western cosmetic surgery as an example, Brownell demonstrates how cosmetic surgery can be both transnational and national at the same time. Inspired by both Appadurai's notion and Brownell's work, I examine the importance of reviewing the history of Chinese cosmetic surgery from a critical perspective.

As was mentioned in the introduction, while reconstructive surgery is associated with the restoration of health, normalcy and physical function, cosmetic surgery is often entirely elective for aesthetic reasons. Although the target of this thesis is cosmetic surgery, the development of cosmetic surgery has long been intertwined with reconstructive surgery; therefore, I will examine the history of both fields to explore how the meanings assigned to this surgical practice have varied contextually in China.

Medicine as a Cultural Confrontation: the Impact of Western Medicine in China in the Early 20th Century

In many respects, the acceptance of cosmetic surgery among Chinese contains important meanings, because this surgical practice collides with traditional Chinese medical systems and traditional Chinese ideas of the body. Before Western medicine was introduced into China, surgery, as well as the dissection of the body, was

discouraged by Chinese medical and bodily philosophy which stressed the importance of keeping the body intact. Therefore, from refusing even “necessary” flesh incisions to heal the sick body to willingly surrendering the body to “unnecessary” cosmetic surgery to obtain a beautiful appearance, dramatic changes have happened not only within the Chinese medical systems, but also in people’s belief systems about the body. To understand the drastic changes of Chinese people’s conceptualizations of surgical practice and perceptions of the body, we should understand the cultural meanings of Western medicine in China. Hence, before reviewing the history of plastic surgery in China, I will briefly discuss the historical background of the introduction of Western medicine and its underlying cultural and political impact.

The acceptance of Western medicine was turbulent in modern Chinese history, involving various difficult cultural, social and political encounters. Given the insularity of late Qing Dynasty and its protectionism against Western influence, the knowledge of Western medicine and physiology had little impact on the social life of Chinese people before the mid-19th century. The acceptance of Western medicine in China ran in tandem with the crisis of the Manchu empire in facing the superiority of Western technology.¹¹ With the growing awareness of Western science and technology, some Chinese educated elites launched a self-strengthening movement

¹¹ This was first demonstrated by the British through their overwhelming military superiority during the Opium War in 1848.

through appropriating Western technologies.¹² However, this movement mainly focused on manufacturing and military technology, and medicine lagged behind.

The first attempt to introduce Western medicine and anatomy into China was made by Christian missionaries in the early decades of the 19th century. According to Yang Nianqun (2006), Western medicine was widely rejected by Chinese when it was first introduced by Western missionaries in the late Qing Dynasty because Chinese imagined Western anatomical medicine as a kind of sorcery and a dismemberment of live bodies. This imagination was exploited by some local elite groups as a way to keep out foreign missionaries (Yang 2006: 50-52). However, despite this resistance, Western medicine soon swept over Chinese society and threatened the very existence of traditional Chinese medicine. Along with missionary work, Western missionaries set up many clinics, hospitals and Christian medical universities. These early efforts culminated in the founding of the Union Medical College in Peking in 1908 as a joint effort of the British and American missionary societies.¹³ In 1921, the Rockefeller Foundation formally founded the Peking Union Medical College (PUMC), a medical institution based on the principles of Western medicine. The establishment of PUMC was a landmark in the

¹² The self-strengthening movement (1860 –1895) was a period of institutional reforms initiated by influential officials in the late Qing government to strengthen China militarily by establishing arsenals and shipyards with Western machinery. The slogan of the movement was “Chinese learning for the foundation and core, Western learning for practical use” (*zhongxue weiti, xixue wei yong*).

¹³ In 1918, the property of this college was transferred to the China Medical Board of the Rockefeller Foundation. After that, the Foundation started to purchase additional land and erected a series of hospital buildings.

diffusion of Western medical knowledge in China, and gradually became the most prestigious medical school and hospital in China, playing a major role in cultivating Chinese plastic surgeons.

Scholars have argued that through building the PUMC in China, what had been transferred was not only Western medical knowledge, but the social meanings attached to this knowledge as well. As stated by Frank Ninkovich, “The Rockefeller Foundation’s attempt over the course of forty years to channel China’s modernization in a liberal direction epitomizes the marriage of national interest and private policymaking” (1984: 799). Yang Nianqun (2006) argues that a way to study medical imperialism is to examine that how the biomedical model expands to non-medical fields, including spreading the value system of Western culture to non-Western societies. He stresses that a detailed study of the expansion of medical imperialism in modern Chinese medical history is the study of the PUMC (Yang 2006: 4-5; see also Bowers 1972). Along with the spread of Western medical knowledge in China,¹⁴ an increasing concern about science, progress, and democracy has also been cultivated among Chinese elites and intellectuals. To some extent, Western medicine energized the intellectual development of China during this period.

The acceptance of Western medicine and anatomy was intertwined with

¹⁴ Regarding traditional Chinese medicine as an obstacle to the spread of Western scientific medicine, the Beiyang Warlord Government and the Republic Government even proposed to abolish traditional Chinese medicine in 1913 and 1929 (Ou 2005).

different political movements in modern Chinese history, which made the encounter between the Chinese and Western medical system a microcosm for observing the confrontation of ideologies. With regard to surgery, Yang Nianqun (2006) argues that the acceptance of Western surgery and the dissection of the body is a political metaphor in Chinese history. As the sick body is a metaphor of the weak nation,¹⁵ healing the sick body through Western anatomical medicine gradually became a metaphor of building a strong nation in terms of Western science and technology. As Yang writes, “When the first Western scalpel cut a Chinese body, it was an ‘event of modernity’” (2006: 2).

I have briefly discussed the early history of the acceptance of Western medicine and anatomy in China. In what follows, I will bring the emergence and development of reconstructive surgery and aesthetic surgery into my account.

Learning from the West: The Emergence of Plastic Surgery in China

Plastic surgery was transmitted from the West to China at the beginning of the 20th century. Most of the first batch of Chinese plastic surgeons had training in American universities or received training from American surgeons in China before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Hereafter, I briefly introduce some of the most important Western and Chinese surgeons who contributed to the establishment of plastic surgery in China.

¹⁵ The most common expression of this metaphor is “sick man of East Asia” (*dongya bingfu*).

In the early development of plastic surgery in China, Dr. Jerome Webster, an American pioneer in plastic surgery, should be credited.¹⁶ PUMC invited many medical luminaries from the West to teach Western medicine in China after its establishment; he was one of them. With the support of a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation, Dr. Webster accepted an invitation to work at the newly established PUMC in 1921. He was the first resident surgeon and later became an associate professor of surgery at the Hospital of PUMC (Foo 2006). Dr. Webster taught general surgery in PUMC from 1921 to 1926. He and others in PUMC laid the groundwork and foundation of the specialty of surgery in China (Lu 1982: 273). Aside from teaching and performing general surgery, starting from the 1920s Dr. Webster and Chinese surgeons such as Zhang Xianlin,¹⁷ Dong Bingqi (P. G. Tung)¹⁸ in PUMC and Ni Baochun (Nyi Pao-chun) in St. John's University in Shanghai performed some facial plastic surgeries, which marked the earliest stage of the emergence of reconstructive surgery in China (Zhang D.S. 2005: foldout). Because Dr. Webster had a lifelong interest in China, he was invited by Wang Kaixi from

¹⁶ Dr. Jerome P. Webster (1888-1974) was one of the founding fathers of plastic surgery education in the United States. He founded the first division of plastic surgery at the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in 1931. Several pioneer Chinese surgeons, such as Zhang Xianlin and Dong Bingqi, studied general surgery and plastic surgery under his supervision either in PUMC or in the United States.

¹⁷ Zhang Xianlin, obtained his Doctor of Medicine from New York University in 1929. When he was in the United States, Zhang studied plastic surgery under Dr. Webster (Zhang D.S. 2006: 34). However Zhang engaged in general surgery rather than plastic surgery in his career in China.

¹⁸ Dong Bingqi studied plastic surgery at St. Louis under the supervision of Drs. Blair and Brown. After Dong returned to China in 1934, he taught surgery in Shanghai and Chengdu. Dong engaged in some facial surgeries during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). However, Dong was also famous as a general surgeon rather than a plastic surgeon (Lu 1982: 273).

PUMC in 1948 and again came to China, where he gave a short course on reconstructive surgery in Shanghai. Supervised by Dr. Webster, students from different medical schools and provinces studied reconstructive surgery for a month. Although plastic surgery was not well developed at that time, this batch of surgeons including Zhu Hongyin, Wang Liangneng, and Li Wenren continued their research and work on reconstructive surgery in Beijing, Xian and Shanghai, and gradually became famous plastic surgeons in China (Zhang D.S. 2005: foldout).

Another important person who contributed to the early development of plastic surgery in China is Dr. Ni Baochun. Dr. Ni received his Doctor of Medicine from Johns Hopkins University in 1925. In 1926, he studied plastic surgery under Dr. John Staige Davis, a notable American plastic surgeon. Dr. Ni returned to China in 1927 and established the first department of plastic surgery in China at Shanghai St. Luke's and Margaret Willamsen Hospital in 1929. In 1934, Dr. Ni published the first academic article on cleft lip surgery in an English professional medical journal, *the China Medical Journal* (Wang W. 2007:50; Kong 2000:138; see Ni 1934:373).

As two pivotal figures in the development of Chinese plastic surgery, Dr. Song Ruyao and Dr. Zhang Disheng (Ti-sheng Chang) should be emphasized. From the 1920s to the 1940s, the continuous conflicts and wars among Chinese warlords, between the Kuomintang and Communist Party, and between China and Japan stimulated the need for plastic surgery in China. During the Sino-Japanese war, many Chinese soldiers were seriously wounded by modern weapons. While realizing

that even experienced Chinese surgeons were unable to treat those soldiers, the Kuomintang Government sent some Chinese surgeons to the United States to study reconstructive surgery. Funded by the American Bureau for Medical Advancement in China and the Kuomintang government, some Chinese surgeons such as Song Ruyao¹⁹ and Zhang Disheng²⁰ studied plastic surgery under a famous American plastic surgeon, Dr. Robert H. Ivy, at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1940s (Brownell 2005; Wang W. 2003; Zhang D.S. 2006).

The experiences of these Chinese plastic surgeons show that most studied in the United States in the 1920s-1940s. As a matter of fact, “learning from the West” in this field accorded with the modernization discourse emerging in China in the early 20th century, a period during which China was in great chaos. Although there were various voices among Chinese reformists, republicans, revolutionaries and socialists, different political groups shared one belief in common: “the rejuvenation of once-great China” (*zhonghua fuxing*). Influenced by the increasing nationalism and ideas on modernization such as saving the nation by using science and technology learned from the West, many Chinese intellectuals who were trained overseas

¹⁹ Song Ruyao received his medical training at the Medical and Dental Schools of West China University (Huaxi University), where he obtained his Doctor of Dental Surgery in 1939. From 1942 to 1948, Song studied at the Graduate School of Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania under Dr. Ivy. There, Song received his Doctorate of Science degree in plastic surgery. Returning to the West China University in 1948, he went on with his studies and received his Doctor of Medicine Degree in 1951 (Anon. 2003).

²⁰ Zhang Disheng (Ti-sheng Chang) graduated from the medical college of the former Nanjing National Central University in 1941. In 1946, Zhang Disheng went to the University of Pennsylvania as a postgraduate student under Dr. Ivy. When visiting New York, Zhang also studied plastic surgery under Dr. Webster for a short time (Zhang D.S. 2006: 44-45).

returned to China, and later remained in mainland China rather than going to Taiwan.

For example, in his autobiography, Zhang Disheng (2006) recalls that although he had an American girlfriend in the United States at that time, he decided to return to China in 1948. Zhang writes in his autobiography: "I like affluent life in the United States, but I love my country more. I had responsibility for the future of my homeland and I had expectation for the forthcoming new China. I decided to give up the job in the United States and boarded the boat to China" (Zhang D.S. 2006: 53).

Both Song Ruyao and Zhang Disheng returned to China in 1948, when the Kuomintang was defeated by the Communists. Upon their return to China, both Song and Zhang devoted their lives to teaching and developing the specialty of plastic surgery in China and later they both were widely regarded as the founders of plastic surgery in China.

The Female Body and Modernity: the Emergence of Cosmetic Surgery in 1920s-1940s China

According to Wang Wei (2007), a senior plastic surgeon in the Shanghai Ninth People's Hospital, cosmetic surgery emerged in China in the 1930s. In the 1930s-1940s, some plastic surgeons in Shanghai, Beijing, Yangzhou and other big cities already performed surgery such as rhinoplasty, blepharoplasty, skin peeling, cheek dimple creation, and mammoplasty. For example, Shi Guanghai and Yang Shuying opened clinics in Beijing and Shanghai to provide cosmetic surgery. Kong

Fanku, a senior plastic surgeon in the Third Hospital of Beijing Medical College, recalls that when he was in middle school in Beijing in the 1940s, he saw a tablet, "Beauty Clinic of Shi Guanghai," hanging in the Beijing Hotel (Wang W. 2007: 50).

Zhang Disheng also confirmed the emergence of cosmetic surgery in China in the 1930s. As Zhang writes:

At that time (the 1930s), Japan developed cosmetic surgery earlier than other countries. With the invasion of Japan and other imperialist countries, some Japanese surgeons and Chinese surgeons opened businesses in Shanghai and performed cosmetic surgery, such as double-eyelid blepharoplasty, rhinoplasty, cheek dimple creation, and breast augmentation. They gained fame by performing cosmetic surgery on a batch of Chinese actresses. However, many of these surgeries had complications due to the low level of medical techniques and improper operations. These surgeons used paraffin and ivory as the materials for augmentation of breast and nose. One common complication of these surgeries was granuloma caused by the injection of paraffin. I fixed some of these cases in the 1950s. Scientific cosmetic surgery also emerged in China at that time, but developed very slowly. In the 1930s, some overseas-trained general surgeons in Beijing's PUMC and Medical College of Shanghai St. John's University occasionally performed some minor aesthetic surgeries including double-eyelid blepharoplasty, rhinoplasty and repair of cleft lip. (Zhang D.S. 2003: 197)

Although materials used in surgery in the 1930s were definitely different from what is used today, it is interesting that some cosmetic surgery operations such as double-eyelid blepharoplasty, mammoplasty and rhinoplasty, which are popular today, were already requested by some in the 1930s in China. The emergence of these surgeries reflects the changing ideas of female beauty in 1930s China. For example, unlike the view of today, which favors large eyes and double eyelids,

traditional images of female beauty in Chinese literature and paintings always showed long, thin, almond-shaped eyes with single-folded eyelids. With regard to the breast, although the obsession with large breasts is common today, this was not traditionally the case in China; rather, small breasts, as a sign of elegance, modesty and good manners, were highly appreciated in traditional Chinese ideas of female beauty, and traditional Chinese women wrapped their breasts tightly to make them smaller. Even in the late Qing China and the early Republican period, Chinese women struggled over whether they should stop wrapping their breasts tightly (see Wu 2008:73-79).

Why did cosmetic surgery emerge in China in the 1930s? I have discussed the spread of Western medical techniques in China in this period. However, there is no doubt that the impetus of cosmetic surgery is not merely surgical techniques.

Without the desire for big eyes or big breasts, cosmetic surgery such as double-eyelid blepharoplasty and mammoplasty would never have arisen in 1930s China. Aside from surgical techniques, self conceptualization of the body and beauty in a certain social and cultural context played an important role in stimulating the emergence of cosmetic surgery in China. Therefore, the question raised here is this: what was the social impetus which stimulated the emergence of cosmetic surgery in 1930s China? What changes made body features such as double eyelids and big breasts desirable in 1930s China, if not for the masses, then at least for some Chinese women? Zhang Disheng's review sheds light on this subject:

The traditional feudal ideas of “men are superior to women” or “women are inferior to men” prevailed in the presentation of female beauty in the past. For example, in the Qing Dynasty, a girl started binding her feet at a very early age in order to get small feet after she grew up. This created the freak beauty of “lotus-like feet” (*bubu jinlian*).²¹ Under this aesthetic custom, girls with big-feet found it hard to get married. In addition, Chinese women also practiced the custom of wrapping their breasts tightly to make them smaller, which was harmful to the normal development of their breasts. In 1911, Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) led the Xinhai Revolution which eventually overthrew the feudal empire of the Qing Dynasty, and advocated the equality between men and women. Since then, Chinese women have been released from bondage to achieve women’s emancipation. Under this circumstance, in the 1930s, some fine arts schools started to teach students drawing nude women. The way to achieve a beautiful face and body figure through surgery also emerged in the 1930s in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai. Shanghai in particular was the earliest cradle [of cosmetic surgery in China]. (Zhang D.S. 2003: 197)

When talking about the social environment which stimulated the emergence of cosmetic surgery in 1930s China, Zhang Disheng stressed the gender inequality in imperial China and women’s emancipation after the Xinhai Revolution. It is also important to notice that Zhang explicitly linked the practice of footbinding and breast wrapping with the emergence of cosmetic surgery. In this narrative, Chinese women’s emancipation has been represented by their unbound feet and breasts, and by new images of feminine beauty. In other words, women’s bodies became sites of construction for a new modern China. Another point raised by Zhang is that Shanghai was a cradle for the emergence of cosmetic surgery in China. A question raised here is this: why did body features such as double eyelids and large breasts,

²¹ In Chinese, *bu* means step and *jinlian* literally means golden lotus, which is a metaphor for a small foot. Chinese use the phrase “*sancun jinlian*” to refer to a lotus-like foot only 3 inches (10 centimeters) long.

which were not considered beautiful in the past, become desirable in Shanghai in the 1930s?

In the 1920s-1940s, Shanghai, the so-called “Paris of Asia,” became a bustling cosmopolitan metropolis and the biggest commercial city in China. The increasing contact with the West stimulated the development of mass media, the film industry and department stores in Shanghai, in which Western goods, fashions, films, and commodities flooded in as a result. Influenced by the Western ideology of women’s emancipation and modern lifestyle as shown in newspapers, magazines and movies, a new group of women appeared in Shanghai. They gathered in Western-style cinemas, ball rooms and coffee shops, read pictorial magazines, watched Hollywood and Chinese movies, bought Western products, and the latest fashions, and cosmetics from department stores, and wore short hairstyles, high heels, close-cut Qipao, and Western-style bras. This modern lifestyle and beauty culture was reflected in the Shanghai “calendar posters” (*yuefenpai*) of the 1920s-1940s. The calendar poster was a new form of advertising that developed in the early 20th century in Shanghai. Major companies presented calendar posters as gifts to their clients at the beginning of the Chinese New Year. In calendar posters, the central images were usually beautiful women. These beautiful female images were used to sell foreign products mainly cigarettes, Western medicine, and cosmetics (see Figure 3).

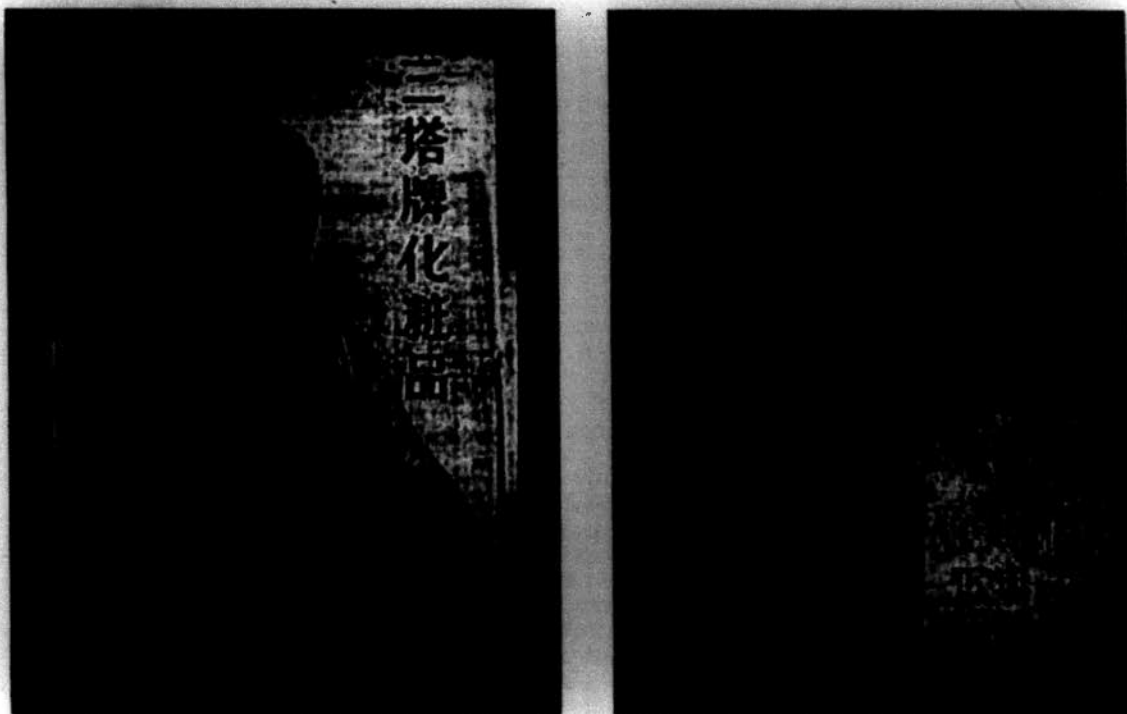


Figure 3. The images of elegant and refined women were used in calendar posters to sell cosmetics and cigarettes.

In addition to their commercial purposes, these posters propagated desired lifestyles and reflected prevailing beauty culture. The calendar posters published in the 1910s-1920s generally depicted women with thin eyebrows and narrow eyes with obvious traces of traditional Chinese aesthetic tastes. However, the 1930s-1940s calendar posters had a flavor of foreign tastes and modern Western style by showing women playing outdoors and depicting overtly sexy women. For example, in some calendar posters, the women did not confine themselves to the home: they played golf and rode bicycles (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. The images of “modern” women playing outdoors in calendar poster.

By depicting the women’s appearance, physical posture, dress and activity, the calendar posters presented a “modern” and “liberated” lifestyle and somewhat Westernized beauty culture. The beautiful female images portrayed in calendar posters became symbols of Shanghai’s modernity (see Ng 1994). While beautiful images were used to advertise commodities and symbolize modernity, beautiful female images became desired commodities as well. Some women accordingly appropriated high-heeled shoes, bobbed hair, and even some Western beauty features. The emergence of cosmetic surgery in China was closely tied to the rise of Western consumer culture and of beauty culture in big cities such as Shanghai. During the 1910s-1940s, along with Western fashion and lifestyle, images of Western women appeared in various Chinese magazines such as *Linglong*, a pictorial Chinese magazine in Shanghai. After Hollywood movies were aired in Shanghai, Hollywood

movie stars' images were no longer strange to Chinese women. Through the years, Chinese magazines showed numerous Hollywood actresses. Images of glamorous Hollywood stars spread Western aesthetics across China.

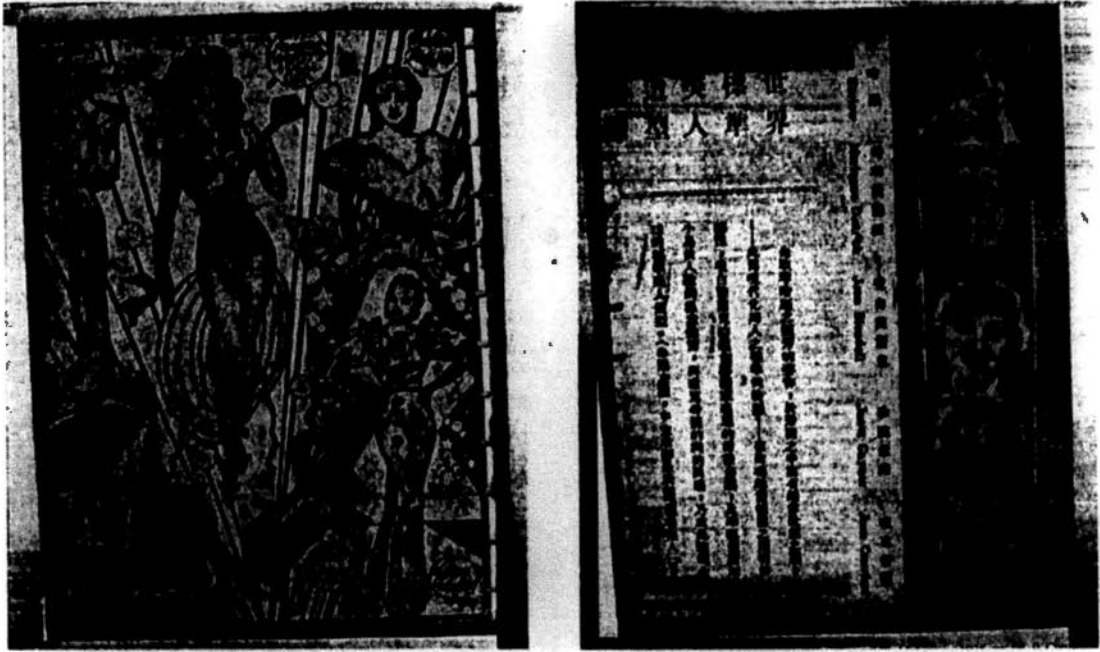


Figure 5. "Poses of international standard beauties" in *Linglong*, vol. 5, no. 2, issue 168, 16 January 1935, pp. 98–99. (see Gao 2005: 555)

In her study of nationalist and feminist discourse on "robust beauty" (*jianmei*) in 1930s China, Gao (2006) analyzes how editors of *Linglong* discussed the "global standard beauty" by drawing on the images of Hollywood stars (see Figure 5). Gao writes as follows:

In one cartoon, *Linglong* showed Jean Harlow, Marlene Dietrich, Joan Blondell, Janet Gaynor and Joan Crawford as representatives of modern feminine beauty. While the editors admired Dietrich for her "lively and mysterious style", Blondell for her "lively gestures to artists' taste", Gaynor for her gentleness and Crawford for her distinctive sensual beauty, they lauded Harlow as "exemplifying *jianmei* [robust beauty] for modern women". The central figure of the cartoon, with wide shoulders and long legs, is Blondell, who was depicted as a "famous artist's ideal girl", but *Linglong* editors interpreted her as the anonymous global "standard beauty" that combined the above assets. (2006: 552)

As the above discussion indicates, Chinese women's perceptions of ideal beauty were increasingly influenced by the pervasive Western beauty culture. This social and cultural background may partially explain the reasons why some occidental features of beauty such as double eyelids and big breasts became desirable among some Shanghai modern women. Under such circumstances, it is understandable why double-eyelid blepharoplasty, mammoplasty and rhinoplasty emerged in 1930s Shanghai. However, the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, the continuous civil war between the Kuomintang and Communists, and especially the governmental transformation in 1949 intruded on the development of cosmetic surgery in China.

The Politicization of Reconstructive Surgery in the Mao Era

After the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established the People's Republic of China in 1949, the development of the field of plastic surgery was soon adopted to the political agenda of serving the needs of the nation and the revolution.

The deformations left by the Chinese civil war on wounded soldiers generated the need for reconstructive surgery. The first department of reparative and reconstructive surgery in the People's Republic of China was founded by Zhu Hongyin in the Peking University Hospital in 1949. The outbreak of the Korean War (1950-1953) stimulated the development of reconstructive surgery in China. Right after the outbreak of the Korean War, Zhang Disheng led a team to set up the first medical center in Changchun to treat deformed soldiers from the war. Supported by

the Health Section of the General Logistics Department of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (CPLA), Zhu Hongyin organized two short-term courses for reconstructive surgery in 1952 and 1953. From 1954 to 1955, supervised by Song Ruyao and Hong Ming, the war-surgery study center in 201 Hospital of the CPLA in Liaoyang also set up an operation team for reconstructive and maxillofacial surgery. These operation teams provided reconstructive surgery to wounded soldiers on a large scale, which made the government realize the necessity of developing reconstructive surgery and training more skillful plastic surgeons.

As a result, following the war, more and more reconstructive surgery departments and hospitals were established. For example, Song Ruyao set up the Division of Plastic Surgery at the PUMC Hospital and remained the chief of the division until 1957. In the same year, Song established the first Chinese plastic surgery specialty hospital in Beijing Dongjiao Minxiang Street—the Plastic Surgery Hospital, Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences (CAMS) & PUMC, where he was the vice director until 1969 (Wang W. 2003; Anon. 2003). As the oldest and biggest plastic surgery hospital in China, this hospital has served as the cradle for Chinese plastic surgery. During the 1950s, other two important reconstructive surgery centers were established in Xi'an and Shanghai: the Department of Burn and Reconstructive Surgery in the Fourth Military Medicine College of People's Liberation Army in Xi'an, which was established by Wang Liangneng in 1954, and the Department of Reconstructive Surgery in Shanghai Second Medical University, which was

established by Zhang Disheng in 1956.

The first stage of the development of China's reconstructive surgery was initiated in the 1950s, but soon ceased due to various political campaigns, including the "Anti-Rightist" (*fanyou*) movement launched in 1957, the "Great Leap Forward" (*dayuejin*) in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, and the "Cultural Revolution" (*wenhua da geming*) (1966-1976). The Anti-Rightist movement was a reaction against the Hundred Flowers Campaign,²² in which intellectuals were encouraged to express criticism of the Chinese Communist Party's rule. When the denunciation and criticism from intellectuals startled the party, it launched the Anti-Rightist campaign in 1957 to strike back at people who spoke out in the previous campaign, labeling them as "bourgeois rightists." Most of the accused in this movement were intellectuals including many doctors and surgeons. In the following years, during the "Great Leap Forward," the campaign went further. The CCP launched a movement called "Pulling up the White Flag and Plugging in the Red Flag" (*ba baiqi, cha hongqi*).²³ According to Brownell, in this movement, the seven most prominent medical doctors in China were attacked as "white flags." Song Ruyao, a founder of the field of Chinese plastic surgery, was one of them (Brownell 2005: 139). Accused as a "white flag," Song became the youngest "reactionary academic authority" (*fandong xueshu quanwei*) in China at that time and was deprived all rights,

²² The classical slogan of the campaign is "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let the hundred schools of thought contend."

²³ "The white flag" (*baiqi*) refers to intellectuals who held bourgeois perspectives and "the red flag" (*hongqi*) refers to those thought to be proletarian.

including teaching and performing surgery, for 20 years until the end of the Cultural Revolution (*News of the Communist Party of China* 2007). Later, especially during the ten-year turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, prominent plastic surgeons including Song Ruyao and Zhang Disheng suffered severe attacks as “reactionary academic authorities” although both Song and Zhang were rewarded for meritorious services by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army in the Korean War. The Plastic Surgery Hospital (CAMS& PUMC) , was closed and moved to Nanchang in Jiangxi Province in 1967. Most doctors were banished to various parts of the country and the hospital building in Beijing was also closed and occupied. During the Cultural Revolution, plastic surgery as a specialty underwent a complete demolition, and only a few reconstructive surgery departments maintained operations for wound treatment and post-accident repair work such as skin grafts after burns. Some centers were abolished and others came to a complete standstill.

Beauty as “Bourgeois Vanity”: Cosmetic Surgery in the Mao Era

After the establishment of the People’s Republic China, cosmetic surgery remained entirely undeveloped in the Mao era due to the restrictions of communist ideology. The CCP promoted a frugal lifestyle, within which simplicity was considered a virtue of the proletariat. Accordingly, the pursuit of feminine beauty was highly criticized as a sign of being bourgeoisie in the Maoist regime. Based on Mao Zedong’s aphorism, “as times have changed, men and women are the same,” the communist

beauty ideology intended to reduce gender difference in the name of equality and sameness. State propaganda promoted a kind of masculinized female image as a model of beauty exemplified by “iron women” (*tie nüren*), the images of strapping women driving tractors and welding (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Images of “iron women” in propaganda posters of the Mao era.

As stated by Chen T. M. (2003), “In Mao’s China, dress and body discourses constituted fundamental components of a political-aesthetic ideal in which proletarian subjectivity became aestheticized.” In this aesthetic ideology, for a member of the proletarian class, no make-up was needed. Because women who looked overly feminine were considered to be pursuing the lifestyle of bourgeoisie, Chinese women wore plain blue dresses, cut their hair short and gave up make-up. When the communist ideology emphasized “iron women” as the model of female beauty, androgynous images and unisex blue trousers and jackets of workers served

as symbols of the proletariat to fight against decadent bourgeois culture in the Mao era. The same beauty ideology was also reflected by the “fashion” of wearing green army uniforms in the Cultural Revolution, popularized by the party leaders and the Red Guards (see Figure 7). Under such circumstances, the pursuit of feminine beauty was heavily denounced, and the practice of cosmetic surgery was forbidden.



Figure 7. Unisex army uniforms during the Cultural Revolution.

Susan Brownell (2005) discusses how cosmetic surgery was labeled as “bourgeois vanity” and engaged with political and class conflicts in the Mao era. She explores how social meanings were attached to reconstructive and cosmetic surgery by discussing the notions of “form” (*xing*) and “function” (*gongneng*). Through analyzing Song Ruyao’s personal experience and Chinese textbooks of plastic surgery, Brownell found that the communist ideology emphasized function over form in surgical practice as a political statement to criticize Western capitalist ideology. As Song Ruyao writes in a letter to Brownell:

During the period of 1950-1953, when I was performing plastic surgery treatments on those wounded in the Korean war, the Chinese government

repeatedly instructed us, “Right now our nation is not yet wealthy; in treating the wounded, emphasize the recovery of function [*gongnengde huifu*], and do not do cosmetic surgery operations.” Later, a few experts applied the concept of class struggle even more, and said, “Emphasizing form is a capitalist style of treatment; a proletarian ought to emphasize the recovery of function.” Thus the phrase “plastic and reconstructive surgery” [*zhengfu waike*] appeared. (Brownell 2005: 138)

As these statements illustrate, in the Mao era, medical questions were deeply mingled with politics. Plastic surgeons were heavily persecuted if they did not claim their political stances properly. In the 1960s, the Plastic Surgery Hospital (CAMS & PUMC) began research on cosmetic surgery; however, as mentioned earlier, after being attacked as a “Beauty Parlor of Bourgeoisie,” the hospital was closed in 1967. Surgery for purely aesthetic reasons was basically prohibited, and was in any case restricted to a very small number of people, mainly actresses.

Zhang Disheng recalls the situation of cosmetic surgery in the 1960s-1970s as follows:

During the 1960s, cosmetic surgery was strictly controlled. Only some special people could receive cosmetic surgery. With permission from the City Culture Bureau, I performed cosmetic surgery such as double-eyelid surgery, surgery to remove bags around the eyes, and face-lifts on some famous actresses and actors to keep them looking young. (Zhang D.S. 2005)

As reported by the *Beijing News* (2004), Kong Fanku, an 80-year-old surgeon, also recalled the situation of double-eyelid surgery in Maoist China at the 55th anniversary of the establishment of the Department of Plastic Surgery of the Third Hospital of Beijing Medical College. According to Kong, from 1963 to 1980, only

“art workers” (*wenyi gongzuo zhe*) such as actresses, could receive double-eyelid surgery. If a common person wanted to undergo cosmetic surgery such as double-eyelid surgery, this person needed to get official permission from the Party Committee of the CCP at her/his work unit. Kong said, “An ordinary woman who wanted to undergo double-eyelid surgery was regarded as holding bourgeois ideology. If a doctor boldly performed cosmetic surgery without the permission of the party committee, he was criticized for ‘helping others to fulfill bourgeois ideology’” (*Beijing News* 2004). Under such circumstances, cosmetic surgery ceased its development in China until the 1980s.

The Renaissance of Plastic Surgery after the Cultural Revolution

The collapse of the “Gang of Four” (*sirenbang*)²⁴ in 1976 marked the end of the Cultural Revolution. Plastic surgery was resuscitated in the 1980s in China. The deficient development of plastic surgery in the Cultural Revolution was revealed through the number of plastic surgeons in this field at that time. Wang Wei, at a meeting for exchanging experiences on the medical use of silica gel in 1976,²⁵ counted the number of participants, both professional and part-time plastic surgeons from the entire country: only 174 surgeons in total. Wang commented, “As a country

²⁴ The Gang of Four (*sirenbang*) was a faction of the Chinese Communist Party playing a dominant political role during the later years of the Cultural Revolution. It included four leading radical figures: Mao Zedong’s wife Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen. Several weeks after Mao’s death in September 1976, they were arrested and blamed for the event of the Cultural Revolution.

²⁵ It was perhaps the first gathering of the specialty of plastic surgery after the Cultural Revolution.

which had more than a billion populations, this was definitely a small group of people” (Wang W. 2002:5).

This situation soon changed in the era of reform and opening-up. A renaissance of plastic surgery swept across the country in the 1980s. Zhang Disheng writes:

Ten years of the “Cultural Revolution” hindered all cultural activities. Plastic surgery as a specialty underwent [a] complete demolition. Some centers were abolished and others came to a complete standstill. Only after the “Gang of Four” was done away with in 1976, did the Spring of Science become a reality and a new era blossom in China. We held the first congress of the Chinese Society of Plastic Surgery in May 1982, and the first issue of our *Journal of Plastic and Burn Surgery* was published in 1985. Another generation of plastic surgeons has been trained to minister to the increasing demands of our rather large population and they have matured to meet those demands. (Zhang D.S. 1985: 276)

The overthrow of the “Gang of Four” represented a political and social upheaval in China. As mentioned by Zhang, the “Spring of Science” (*kexuede chuntian*) brought about the development of plastic surgery after the Cultural Revolution. Coming back to power after the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping embarked on his policy on modernization and economic reform through establishing systems which favored the development of science and technology. Deng delivered a keynote speech at the 4th China National Science Congress in March 1978, calling for the Spring of Science and also for the re-establishment of ideas such as “science and technology is productivity” and “intellectuals are part of the working class.” With the embrace of science, the discipline of plastic surgery began to be revived. From the 1980s, apart from the *Journal of Plastic and Burn Surgery* mentioned by Zhang

Disheng above, several other professional academic journals have been established, such as *The China Aesthetic and Plastic Surgery Journal*, *The Chinese Medical Aesthetics and Cosmetology Journal*, *The Chinese Aesthetic Medical Journal*, and *The Chinese Plastic Surgery Journal*.

Along with the changing discourse on plastic surgery, many plastic surgery institutes was reopened or newly established across the country. In 1979, Song Ruyao and his colleagues re-opened the Plastic Surgery Hospital (CAMS & PUMC), at its present location in Badachu in a suburb of Beijing. Since its re-opening, the hospital has been undergoing a remarkable development. According to the official website of the hospital,²⁶ the hospital covers an area of 100,000 square meters and has a staff of 500 persons, including 41 professors and associate professors and 40 attending doctors. The hospital has 15 divisions and 328 beds for in-patients. Annually, more than 20,000 plastic surgery operations are performed there. As the largest plastic surgery hospital in China, probably in the world as well, the hospital is an important medical center for plastic surgery practice, training, and research in China. In recent years, the hospital has hosted 9 international academic meetings and conferences with more than 5,000 participants. In addition, more than 200 groups and 2,000 foreign plastic and aesthetic surgeons have visited the hospital since its re-opening.

During the first decade or so after the Cultural Revolution, most operations

²⁶ The official website of the hospital is: <http://www.zhengxing.com.cn>.

were bodily repair and wound treatments. However, the demand for purely aesthetic surgery gradually increased. With the rapid development of surgical techniques and the dramatic political and social changes of China, cosmetic surgery was constantly on the rise and eventually broke away from reconstructive surgery in the 1980s. Beijing Huangsi Aesthetic Surgery Hospital was set up in Beijing in April 1986. Since then, more and more aesthetic surgery institutes and hospitals have come into existence. With cosmetic surgery hospitals and clinics have mushroomed in major cities in China, and the number of plastic procedures taking place has increased rapidly over the years. Although nationwide statistics are not available, we can get a glimpse from the case of a Beijing plastic surgery hospital. In his case study on marketing strategies of Beijing Xishan Plastic Hospital,²⁷ Wang L. Z. (2005: 4) gives statistics showing that the number of total plastic surgery operations increased 118% from 1991 to 2004 in this hospital. Interestingly, while the number of reconstructive surgery operations only increased 33.9%, the number of cosmetic surgery operations increased 336% (see Figure 8). The number of people seeking cosmetic surgery has obviously jumped over the past years. As the example clearly indicates, the increasing number of cosmetic surgery operations has been much notable than increases in reconstructive surgery.

²⁷ Xishan is an anonymous name of the hospital, as given by Wang.

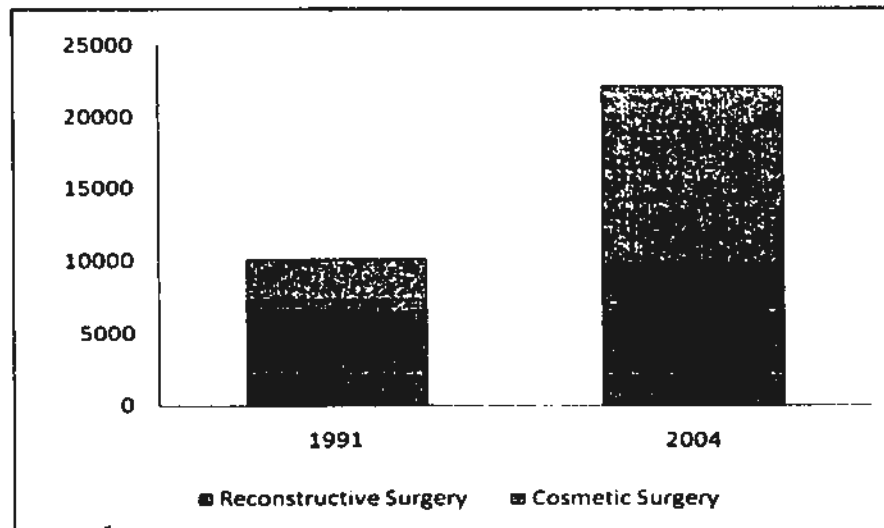


Figure 8. The increase of plastic surgery procedures in a Beijing plastic surgery hospital.

With economic growth and an increasing awareness of beauty trends, Chinese women paid more and more attention to body image, and to fast-changing styles in clothes, haircuts and cosmetics. The rise of consumerism in China brought about the trend of Westernized fashion and beauty culture. The consumer market soon grasped the commercial possibilities of cosmetic surgery. Medical aesthetic enterprises developed very fast, and promoted a booming cosmetic surgery industry nationwide. When details of cosmetic procedures are frequently discussed on talk shows, reality TV programmes and published in magazines, it is not surprising to see a whopping increase of cosmetic surgery in today's China.

The Current Situation of the Cosmetic Surgery Market in China

In November 2006, I interviewed Mr. Song, who worked in the Chinese Society of Aesthetic and Plastic Surgeons.²⁸ As an insider of the Chinese cosmetic surgery

²⁸ Established in 2003, the Chinese Society of Aesthetic and Plastic Surgeons is an organization basically providing services for aesthetic and plastic surgeons. By 2006, the society has 2,000 or

industry, Mr. Song gave an outline of the current situation of cosmetic surgery in China. In what follows, based on my conversation with Mr. Song and other resources, I will briefly introduce the basic structure and current situation of the Chinese cosmetic surgery market.

Cosmetic surgery has been gaining popularity and becoming a big business in China in recent years. When commenting on the rapid development of the Chinese cosmetic surgery market, Mr. Song said:

As a new market, China's cosmetic surgery market is incredibly flourishing yet chaotic.... There is no doubt that the market is booming. But, there are lots of concerns. Especially, many people confuse "daily beauty services" with "medical beauty services." Many people are still unclear that daily beauty service providers are not authorized to carry out medical beauty service. Therefore, many people mistakenly think that accidents caused by illegal daily beauty services are medical accidents.

"Incredibly flourishing yet chaotic" properly captures the current situation of the Chinese cosmetic surgery market. Although precise statistics about China's cosmetic surgery market are difficult to obtain, a report in the *China Daily* (2006) provides a glimpse of the unprecedented boom of the market. It indicates that there are more than one million operations performed every year throughout the country, and cosmetic surgery is a \$2.4 billion yearly industry with a 20 percent growth rate in China. Along with this rapid growth, illegal procedures are rampant in China. According to statistics released by the China National Consumers' Association, during the past decade (1992-2002) there have been over 200,000 lawsuits filed so registered practitioners.

against practitioners by patients because of botched operations (Shao and Daragh 2003). As Mr. Song indicated above, it has become a serious problem that a large number of medical beauty services, including cosmetic procedures, are performed illegally by unlicensed practitioners in beauty salons and parlors.

In order to understand the market of Chinese beauty service, we first should understand the difference between “daily beauty services” (*shenghuo meirong*) and “medical aesthetic services” (*yilao meirong*) in China, as mentioned by Mr. Song. In 2000, the Ministry of Health of China published the *Regulations on Enhancing Administration of Beauty Service*, to classify these two categories of beauty services. While daily beauty services refer to noninvasive beauty services for facial skin care and body sculpting, medical beauty services refer to the use of surgery, medication, medical apparatuses and other traumatic or intrusive medical technologies to repair or reshape a person’s appearance or parts of the body.²⁹ Medical beauty services may provide medical cosmetology, which includes cosmetic surgery, aesthetic dermatology, aesthetic dentistry, aesthetic traditional Chinese medicine and other related subjects. The regulations stipulate that daily beauty services providers, such as beauty salons and beauty parlors, are strictly prohibited from providing any medical beauty service such as cosmetic surgery. However, driven by lucrative profits, many beauty salons and beauty parlors across China provide medical

²⁹ In terms of the classification on an industry administration level, while a daily beauty services provider must acquire a Commercial and Industrial Business License issued by and under the supervision of related commercial and industrial administrative departments, a medical beauty services provider must acquire a License of Medical Institute issued by and under the supervision of health-care departments.

aesthetic services including illegal cosmetic surgery. In 2006, the health care department of Beijing Municipal Health Bureau investigated 66 daily beauty service providers in 9 districts and counties, and found that more than 70 percent of the daily beauty institutes provided medical beauty services; many had even performed cosmetic operations. For example, almost 20 percent of daily beauty institutes provided breast augmentation and liposuction surgeries (Beijing Municipal Health Bureau 2007). The rapid growth of cosmetic surgery clinics and especially illegal practices has outpaced the government's ability to regulate the industry. Accidents and litigation, especially those happening in illegal institutes, are not uncommon in China, as we have seen.

As for cosmetic surgery institutes, there are basically two types: state-owned plastic surgery institutes; and privately-run cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals. Many state-owned general hospitals have established plastic surgery divisions in the past two decades, and the number of public hospitals providing cosmetic surgery services has increased rapidly. Privately-owned cosmetic surgery clinics and hospitals have also mushroomed across China. According to Mr. Song, publicly-owned and privately-owned clinics/hospitals are at a ratio of 4 to 6. While public hospitals engage in both reconstructive surgery and cosmetic surgery, private clinics/hospitals only deal with medical beauty service. In addition to general public hospitals, some military hospitals and military medical colleges also have cosmetic surgery divisions/hospitals. For example, the Beijing Huangsi Aesthetic Surgery Hospital is

under the Fourth Military Medical College of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. Another type of institute which provides cosmetic surgery is joint-venture hospitals, such as the SK Aikang Hospital. As the first Korea-China joint venture hospital, the SK Aikang Hospital Beijing is specialized in medical aesthetic services including cosmetic surgery, skincare, aesthetic dentistry and ophthalmology.

As for the number of institutes and surgeons engaged in the business, Mr. Song said there were no precise official statistics available and he could only estimate according to incomplete statistics. He spoke as follows:

According to our incomplete statistics, the number of professional institutes that engage in this business is about 6,000 or so. The actual number is much higher, but we cannot tell. As for professional practitioners who hold practicing certificates, partial statistics shows that the number could be 20,000 or so. The number of practitioners who are engaging in aesthetic surgery, aesthetic dermatology and aesthetic traditional Chinese medicine and at the same time who register in our association is only 2,000 or so, making only 10 percent of the total. Among these registered practitioners, most of them are surgeons. Some dermatologists also provide medical beauty treatments, but it is hard to get an accurate number. Practitioners who provide illegal medical beauty services, including cosmetic surgery in beauty salons, are numerous. However, it is impossible to get a precise number. We are very concerned about the rapid growth of illegal cosmetic surgery and beauty treatments provided by illegal practitioners.

In order to properly supervise the Chinese cosmetic surgery market, the Chinese Ministry of Health has promulgated regulations concerning the management of cosmetic surgery institutes, *Regulations on Services in Medical Cosmetology*, which came into effect on 1 May 2002. The regulations stipulate that

medical practitioners in charge of cosmetic medical practices must be qualified doctors registered with professional institutes and have relevant clinical experiences. It also stipulates that all cosmetic medical work must be carried out by a doctor-in-charge or under his supervision. Doctors in charge of cosmetic surgery must have at least six years of relevant clinical experiences; doctors in charge of cosmetic dental surgery must have at least five years of relevant clinical experiences, and doctors in charge of Chinese medicine cosmetology or dermatological cosmetology must have at least three years of relevant clinical experience.

As we have seen, cosmetic surgery has become more and more socially acceptable in China, and so the demands for cosmetic surgery have continued to increase in cities and provinces such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chongqing, Sichuan, Liaoning, Jilin, Jiangxi, and Shandong. According to Mr. Song, these places have occupied almost 60 to 70 percent of the cosmetic surgery market. Every year many people come to famous hospitals in Beijing and Shanghai to receive operations. "According to the latest statistics, there are 207 registered plastic surgery institutes in Beijing, which are mainly locate in Chaoyang District and Haidian District," said Mr. Song. Concerning the number of cosmetic surgery taking place every year across the country, Mr. Song said that reliable official statistics were not available for this matter, partly because there were many private and uncertified operators. But still, one certainty was that the demand for cosmetic surgery had increased rapidly. "The Shanghai Ninth People's Hospital alone carried out more

than 90,000 procedures last year,” said Mr. Song. The available statistics show that the cosmetic surgery business has indeed increased dramatically in the two largest plastic surgery institutes in China: The Shanghai Ninth People’s Hospital and Beijing Xishan Plastic Surgery Hospital. According to Wang L.Z. (2005), while for the Shanghai Ninth People’s Hospital, the number of cosmetic surgery increased by 406% from 1991 to 2003, for Xishan Plastic Surgery Hospital, the number of cosmetic surgeries increased by 336% from 1991 to 2004. There is no doubt that a significant demand for cosmetic surgery has taken place over the past decades with accelerating speed in China.

Conclusion

After a brief review of the history of plastic surgery in China in this chapter, I have discussed the trajectory of this surgical practice embedded in the changing politic discourses from the early 20th century to the Mao era and post-Mao China.

The early development of plastic surgery was related to the emerging discourse of modernization in China. At the turn of the 20th century, with increasing contact with the West, ideas of modernization and science became widespread in China. The acceptance of Western medicine including surgery in China was not just a consequence of the conflict and integration of Western medicine and traditional Chinese medicine; it was a part of the process of constructing “modern” China in which Chinese elites and intellectuals willingly accepted Western medicine and

regarded it as a device to strengthen the nation. Moreover, the rising Western consumer culture in China's big cities such as Shanghai contributed to the emergence of cosmetic surgery in China in the 1930s. The acceptance of cosmetic surgery among Chinese signifies a huge change in people's perceptions of the body and beauty influenced by Western ideas. The new form of lifestyle and beauty culture made those women who adopted Western fashion and beauty culture a symbol of modern China.

After the establishment of the People's Republic China, during the Korean War, the practical value of reconstructive surgery was highly appreciated by the communist party state, which enabled the development of reconstructive surgery in China in the 1950s. However, at the same time, plastic surgery became politicized, and reconstructive surgery was basically confined to wound treatments. Moreover, the practice of cosmetic surgery was certainly not welcomed by the Communist Party during the Mao era. As the desire for feminine beauty in the days of Maoist China was regarded as a sign of bourgeois vanity and gravely denounced, cosmetic surgery for purely aesthetic reasons was basically prohibited and restricted only to a very small number of people, mainly actresses. It was not until the end of the 1970s that beauty treatments and cosmetic surgery became an option for Chinese people. Since the 1980s, with the implementation of reform and the opening-up policy, a new discourse on science and technology revived the discipline of plastic surgery; meanwhile, Western consumer culture and beauty culture took root in China. Since

then, the cosmetic surgery industry has developed rapidly and jumped into an ever-expanding beauty industry. The cosmetic surgery industry is experiencing an unprecedented boom in China.

The process of how plastic surgery has been appropriated into China shows that the boundaries which plastic surgery has crossed over are not only regional, but also national, political and ideological. In the following chapters, drawing on the ethnographic data from my fieldwork, I will discuss the dramatic popularity of cosmetic surgery in contemporary China as an illustration and sign of the economic and sociocultural changes of post-Mao China.

Chapter Three

China's First "Artificial Beauty": The Exploited Body or the Empowered Body?

In 2003-2004, a newly coined Chinese term— *renzao meinü* — became popular around the country. The Chinese phrase *renzao meinü* literally means “artificial beauty”: a woman who has improved her appearance through cosmetic surgery. When the Beijing Language and Culture University announced Ten Catchwords in Chinese mainstream newspapers in 2004, “artificial beauty” (*renzao meinü*) was one of them.³⁰ As argued by a scholar, “[a] catchword is not only a lexical phenomenon, but also indicates people’s values from a cultural psychology point of view, as well as reflecting social reality” (Zhang P. 2003). The popularity of the phrase “artificial beauty” in the Chinese media in 2004 reflects an unprecedented boom in cosmetic surgery industry in China. The term “artificial beauty” became popular after a young Chinese woman, Hao Lulu, was dubbed by Chinese and international media as China’s first “artificial beauty” in 2003. Cosmetic surgery has been gaining popularity slowly in China since the 1990s. However, the floodgates swung wide open after Hao ignited the fever of cosmetic surgery in China with her highly-publicized cosmetic surgery procedures in 2003. With Hao’s story spreading all over the country, it provoked significant public controversy concerning cosmetic

³⁰ The selection of Ten Catchwords covered about 500 million characters in 15 newspapers published from January 1 to December 31, 2004.

surgery in China. The extensive debates Hao caused have made her a living billboard for China's cosmetic surgery industry.

In this chapter, I describe Hao's story of being China's first "artificial beauty." By studying her case, I intend to provide a quick yet telling glimpse into the burgeoning cosmetic surgery industry in China and the women involved in it. I will discuss controversial debates concerning Hao in order to explore different attitudes towards cosmetic surgery in the social and cultural context of China. In addition, I will discuss a paradox concerning Hao: while her body is much publicized by a cosmetic surgery hospital to advertise its services in the rapidly growing beauty industry, Hao herself strongly expresses her autonomy via her body alteration as a "modern" Chinese woman who fulfills her desire for beauty, happiness and freedom. In addition to Hao's story, I will briefly describe another famous Chinese "artificial beauty," Yang Yuan, in her fight for the right to participate in a beauty contest as an "artificial beauty." By discussing Yang's case, I hope to further demonstrate the complexity of body politics in the market discourse of post-Mao China.

China's First "Artificial Beauty: Hao Lulu

In July 2005, I was struggling to find some key informants for my research. After having been refused by some women who had undergone cosmetic surgery, I was a little frustrated. Helped by a well-known Chinese anthropologist and his friend, I got the phone number of Hao Lulu, China's first "artificial beauty." At the beginning, I

was worried whether Hao Lulu would agree to meet me, a total stranger. However, after a small chat over the phone, Hao agreed to meet me a few days later. I had a high expectation for this meeting because to some extent, I did not pay much attention to the phenomenon of the increasing popularity of cosmetic surgery in China until Hao came into the limelight in 2003. I had read extensive reports about Hao's story and debates she caused. Therefore, when finally I got a chance to meet Hao face to face, I could not help but wonder what kind of woman Hao might be, what kind of story she might tell, and how cosmetic surgery had changed her life. My first meeting with Hao Lulu was indeed impressive. In fact, what impressed me most was not only her beautiful after-surgery appearance, but her glamorous after-surgery life. Let me describe this meeting.

It was a hot summer afternoon of July 2005. I met Hao Lulu in a luxury hotel, K. Hotel, which is located at the heart of the business district and the diplomatic area in Beijing. As I arrived at the K. Hotel a half hour earlier than the scheduled time, I decided to take a while to look around this five-star hotel. The hotel was connected to the L. Shopping Center, a prime luxury department store full of imported international brands and luxury goods, and surrounded by various fine restaurants which serve Chinese, German, Italian, Japanese, South American, and Korean cuisines. The hotel also featured a stylish lounge bar where I met Hao Lulu. Due to the widespread publicity of Hao's story, Hao's before-and-after photos had been widely circulated in mass media and the internet. Thus, I had no difficulty in

recognizing Hao, who seated on a sofa in the center of the lounge bar. After introducing myself, I got a close look of this famous Chinese “artificial beauty.” Hao was pretty. She did look totally different from her before-surgery photos which I saw on the internet. She had a fair complexion without much additional make-up. She had a high-bridged small nose, a pair of almond-shaped big eyes with double eyelids in an oval face, and long straight shiny black hair. She wore a stylish tight black skirt. I noticed that a pair of Gucci sunglasses next to a water glass was on the table, and a Gucci handbag was lying on the seat beside her. Hao was clearly a charming and fashionable young lady.

I chose not to ask her any sensitive questions about her surgery at our first meeting, and instead chatted with her more about her current life. The conversation went well, and she invited me to have an afternoon tea in a German beer garden in K. Hotel. Sitting outdoors, Hao told me that K. Hotel and especially the beer garden was one of her favorite places to have a drink with her friends because of its cozy atmosphere and convenience of shopping in L. Shopping Center. During our conversation in the garden, Hao met several of her friends there. After exchanging greeting with a middle-aged man and backing to the seat, Hao asked me whether I knew that man. Hearing that I did not know the person, she looked at me and said surprisingly, “How can you not know him? He is the CEO of X Company. His photos appeared in financial magazines.” She added, “People who usually come here are social elites. You see, this is a place where “upper-class” (*shangliu shehui*)

people like to have a drink.” It was that moment that I clearly realized that in our first meeting, what I saw was not only her charming after-surgery appearance, but also her glamorous after-surgery lifestyle. The luxurious hotel, the eye-catching branded handbag and sunglasses, the enjoyable afternoon tea, the cozy beer garden, and the upper-class friends were symbolic reference reflecting the affluent lifestyle Hao holding in her hands as China’s first “artificial beauty.” After three decades of market reforms, there is increasing social class differentiation resulting in the emergence of China’s middle class (*zhongchan jieji*), a social group that has a strong approval of Western commodities, pop culture and lifestyle. Through their consumption choice of brands and lifestyle, they demonstrate their purchasing power, personal taste and social status. The changes that Hao had experienced are not only about the body, but also about the social class.

I explained to Hao what kind of research I was doing and asked whether I could get a closer look of her life. She acceded to my request. “I know there have been many controversial debates about me. I don’t care what other people say about me and how they judge me. But I am glad to be helpful if you really want to understand women like me,” said Hao graciously. As cosmetic surgery is usually considered frivolous, women who undergo it are generally judged as being superficial and selfish. However, this stereotypical image may obstruct our understanding of these women. Hao’s words remind me that rather than judging Hao and those of her ilk who opt for cosmetic surgery, I should listen to them to understand the choices they

made. During my fieldwork, I spent a significant amount of time in hanging out with Hao. I sometimes also accompanied her to TV stations to record talk shows about cosmetic surgery. In 2006-2007, as Hao hosted a cosmetic surgery reality show, I also got the chance to observe her work. Let me now discuss her at more length.

The Making of China's First "Artificial Beauty"

How did Hao Lulu become China's first "artificial beauty"? This can be traced back to her birthday party in 2003. Hao had been a freelance writer with a special interest in fashion. At her 24-year-old birthday party on July 7, 2003, Hao happened to meet Bao Huai, the marketing director of EverCare Cosmetic Surgery Hospital, a privately-owned cosmetic surgery hospital belonging to EverCare Medical Institution. EverCare Medical Institution opened its cosmetic surgery hospital to provide medical aesthetic services in May 2003. However, the business of the hospital had been languishing in the aftermath of the SARS epidemic in China. In order to promote its business, the hospital planned its "Beauty Dreamworks Project" (*meiren zhizao gongcheng*), a plan aimed to transform an average-looking woman into a striking beauty through extensive surgery; Hao later became the star of the project.

During her conversation with Bao Huai in her birthday party, Hao came to know that EverCare was looking for a suitable woman to undergo multiple free cosmetic surgery operations to promote its business. As Hao had already considered

undergoing cosmetic surgery, she told Bao Huai that she was interested in the project. Several days later, Hao went to EverCare to look around the facility and receive psychological and physical examinations. The surgeons and the head of the hospital thought that Hao was an ideal candidate for its project and they made her an offer—multiple free cosmetic operations in return for advertising the hospital. After 20 minutes of consideration, Hao accepted the offer. She announced her plan in a press conference organized by the hospital.

Over six months, beginning July 2003, Hao underwent a series of cosmetic surgeries worth 400,000 yuan. The surgeries comprised of dozens of procedures on her entire body, including the creation of double eyelids, the improving of the shape of the nose, the reshaping of face contour, the removal of eye bags, the lifting up of buttocks, the augmentation of breasts, and the liposuction of abdomen and thighs. At the beginning of Hao's transformation, the Chinese media paid little attention to this "Beauty Dreamworks Project." However, Bao Huai contacted CNN, which showed great interests in Hao's project and became the first international news agency to report on "Beauty Dreamworks Project" and Hao's surgery. CNN documented the entire progress of Hao's cosmetic surgeries. Immediately after her story aired on CNN, a correspondent of BBC called Hao from London and interviewed her. With the effect of CNN's report, Associated Press, Associated Press Television News, Agency France-Press, and other news agencies from other countries subsequently interviewed Hao and reported on her surgery. Since then, many international news

agencies also reproduced Hao's story. The extensive exposure which Hao received from the international news agencies, especially from CNN, ignited the Chinese media frenzy on Hao's operations, and she was soon dubbed China's first "artificial beauty."

Admitting that she had never thought that her surgery could attract so much attention worldwide from major international news agencies, Hao offered her opinion about the great attention her case received in the media:

Lots of my foreign friends told me that my surgery isn't rare in other countries. If this happened in New York, London and Tokyo, it wouldn't be counted as news at all. However, it happened in China. The world is watching China. The international mass media is curious about what's happening in China, especially in Beijing.

In describing the world's curiosity towards China as "the world is watching China," Hao points out why her surgery could attract attention from major international news agencies like CNN and BBC. Since the reforms in the early 1980s, China has been one of the fastest growing economies in the world. There has been a tremendous curiosity around the world about the rapid economic growth and dramatic social changes of China. Furthermore, the reason why there was so much worldwide attention towards Hao's cosmetic surgery is probably due to two contradictory images of China represented in Western media in recent decades. One is the image of a rapidly growing economy and massively changing society. Another image portrayed in Western media is that of Communist China where restrictions

supposedly prevail over freedom of choice. People outside China may have difficulty understanding how these two different images become reconciled in people's everyday life in China. Under such circumstances, a common Chinese woman's bold head-to-toe cosmetic surgery, which was virtually a taboo in the day of Maoist China, gained significant attention from the world as a telling sign of China's booming beauty industry and changing social life.



Figure 9. An online report of “Beauty Dreamworks Project” with Hao Lulu’s before-and-after images.

The “Beauty Dreamworks Project” succeeded and paid off quickly. EverCare hospital gained extensive publicity after Hao became a living advertisement for its services, and Hao’s images appeared in various EverCare’s advertisements (see Figure 10). EverCare started its cosmetic surgery business in May 2003. During the first few months, the monthly turnover of the hospital was only 100,000 yuan. However, after the hospital received exposure from Hao’s project, the monthly turnover dramatically increased to two or three million yuan. In December 2003, the daily business turnover even reached 100,000 yuan (Hao 2004: 109). As Feng Lizhe,

the deputy director of EverCare, said, “about one-fifth of our customers now come because of their admiration for Hao’s new appearance: eyes widened, nose reshaped, breasts enlarged, hips and buttocks augmented and calves slimmed down” (*China Daily* 2004b). EverCare soon opened several branches not only in Beijing, but also in other cities such as Tianjin, Qingdao, Harbin and Jinan. Since then, EverCare has been doing a thriving business in cosmetic surgery and has become one of the most famous cosmetic surgery hospitals in China.



Figure 10. Hao Lulu in EverCare’s advertisement with the captions: “Evercare, making women a beautiful dream coming true” and “let ordinary women become beautiful, and let beautiful women become perfect.”

Despite the upsurge of people’s interest in cosmetic surgery, there are widespread criticisms and debates about cosmetic surgery in Chinese society. This series of criticisms mostly resonates with mainstream feminists’ criticisms, which usually regard cosmetic surgery as a harmful exploitation and manipulation of the

female body. In the following sections, using Hao's surgery as an exemplar, I describe the debates concerning her surgery to explore the discrepancy of different thoughts on cosmetic surgery, "artificial beauty," and their underlying socio-cultural meanings in today's China.

The Publicity Stunt: Women's Bodies as Commodities

As Hao's transformation was quite a fruitful campaign for EverCare Cosmetic Surgery Hospital, the event has been criticized by many people as an irresponsible "publicity stunt" (*chaozuo*). "It's just an attempt at self-promotion by the clinic," said Li Yongjie, the director of the Functional Neurosurgery Department of Beijing Xuanwu Hospital (Sun 2003). A Hong Kong surgeon, Dr. Henry Chan also told

Cosmetic Surgery Times:

In certain parts of China, aggressive marketing by some of the commercial enterprises is not uncommon. This is unfortunate as it is my opinion that medical practice should be of (a) professional nature, not commercial. Because Hong Kong prohibits advertising for cosmetic surgery, doctors are inevitably less aggressive in marketing services such as a complete make-over. (Pietras 2004)

While some doctors criticized Hao's project as a publicity stunt, Bao Huai, the marketing director of EverCare, argued that Hao's event was beyond this. "We are doing this to demonstrate the high standard of cosmetic surgery in China.... There is a very deep misunderstanding as to the level of China's cosmetic surgery and it's time we set the record straight" (Sun 2003). Bao Huai also insisted that the project

helped awaken millions of Chinese women's consciousness of beauty. "Many people have the money now," said Bao Huai, "Why shouldn't they do it?" (Friess 2003). Bao certainly made his ambition clear as a publicist of a cosmetic surgery hospital. Undoubtedly, Hao's publicity stunt underscores the increasing popularity of cosmetic surgery in today's China, where women with more disposable income are becoming more and more concerned with physical appearance.

Hao's surgery soon sparked copycat attempts in many Chinese cities. Inspired by EverCare's success, many cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals across the country have selected women to receive multiple cosmetic surgeries free of charge as hospitals' "image ambassadors" (*xingxiang dashi*) and to promote the business of the clinics. It is not only women that have been targeted by the booming cosmetic surgery industry. In order to attract people's attention to male cosmetic surgery, some cosmetic surgery clinics also promoted the so-called "artificial handsome man" (*renzao meinan*) projects. Although women are still the leading clients of cosmetic surgery in China, male customers have also been targeted by hundreds of aesthetic clinics springing up in big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. There are more beauty products and service for men than ever before in today's China. Male cosmetic surgery has gone from a taboo to just another consumer choice. As reported by *China Daily* (2004a), Shanghai Kinway Plastic & Cosmetic Surgery Center advertised for male candidates to join a competition for the chance to receive 300,000 yuan worth of cosmetic surgery for free, calling for men taller than 1.75

meters between the ages of 18 and 25 and with a college background. Zhang Yinghua was selected from over 30 candidates in the competition called “looking for the city’s first artificial handsome man” held by the clinic. It was said that Zhang would undergo at least seven cosmetic surgery operations to be Shanghai’s first “artificial handsome guy” (Xu 2004).



Figure 11. Hao Lulu attending a commercial event in Guangzhou, 2008.

Let us return to discussion of Hao. The publicity stunt has indeed made Hao famous throughout China.³¹ By December 2003, only six months after her surgeries, there were more than three hundred Chinese media organizations reporting on Hao’s story (Hao 2004:108). Hao also attracted attention from state-run China Central Television (CCTV) — the most authoritative television station in China. Within a short period, Hao was invited to present in several popular CCTV’s talk shows. The

³¹ In searching “Hao Lulu” on Google on 3 November 2008, there are 45,100 results in Chinese and 2630 results in English.

extensive debates and media exposure Hao received made her one of the “People of 2003” selected by *Beijing Weekend*. The media exposure has also landed her two film roles. In 2006 she became the hostess of a cosmetic surgery reality TV programme. Many cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals invited her to attend the commercial events like opening ceremonies.

When talking about the overnight fame she gained, Hao spoke as follows:

Yes, the hospital did use my case to gain publicity, but I’m not a chess piece. I know how to choose the best way for my life. They gain profit and I gain beauty. I didn’t do it for fame or money. I did it to make myself more beautiful. I did it to please myself. I became famous not because I intended to be famous. For me, it’s just a matter of personal choice. It’s people’s curiosity about cosmetic surgery that pushes me in this position.... I didn’t expect to enter into show business. However, when opportunity comes, why should I turn it down? Why not have a try? I want to live life to the fullest.

People’s criticism and Hao’s own defence show that we should not oversimplify cosmetic surgery as an either all-good or all-bad thing. Hao is right to some extent in her view that she is not passively manipulated by commercial interests. She achieved the beautiful appearance she had always dreamed of for free, and also made the headlines around China. On this ground, we should notice that she is not a “cultural dope” without her own will and agency.³² Nevertheless, we cannot deny

³² The term “cultural dopes” is used by Kathy Davis to characterize some feminists’ assumption that “women who choose to have cosmetic surgery do so because they have had the ideological wool pulled over their eyes” (1995: 57)

that her body is objectified and commodified by the market at the same time. Thus, it calls for further discussion on both sides.

Some feminists, such as Morgan (1991), Bordo (1993) and Wolf (1991), argue that women who undergo cosmetic surgery are passive victims because they conform to the norms of feminine beauty and the malicious capitalist market. This view depicts women as passive victims controlled by a conspiracy of patriarchy and capitalism but unaware of the control. This analytic perspective tends to emphasize the coercive aspect of women's involvement in cosmetic surgery. However, Davis is uneasy with the assumption that women who opt for cosmetic surgery must be duped by the beauty industry. She argues that there are three reasons why a "cultural dope" approach obstructs an understanding of women's involvement in cosmetic surgery. First, "it reinforces dualistic conceptions of feminine embodiment" and therefore "women's active and lived relationship to their bodies seems to disappear in feminists' accounts" (Davis 1995: 57). Second, "it rests on a faulty conception of agency" and as a consequence "cosmetic surgery cannot be explored as something which can, at least in part, be actively and knowledgeably chosen" (Davis 1995: 57). Third, it ignores "the moral contradictions in women's justificatory practices" and makes "it difficult to imagine not only what tips the scales in favor of cosmetic surgery, but also what makes the surgery problematic for the recipients themselves" (Davis 1995: 58). Therefore, Davis argues that although mainstream feminists recognize strong cultural pressures and power exerted on

women's bodies, "it has been less successful in finding way to understand women's lived experience with their bodies, how they actually decide to have cosmetic surgery, and how they access their actions after the fact" (1995: 58).

As the above arguments indicate, regarding women's body alteration through cosmetic surgery as either social coercion or individual free choice is overly simplified. Thus, my standpoint in this issue is neither to follow the censoring attitude regarding women who opt for cosmetic surgery as "cultural dopes", nor to regard these women as free agents who take control of their bodies and lives. Instead, while admitting the power structure shaping women's bodies, we must not ignore the agency of its recipients. In this sense, I will not downplay Hao's own statement to explore her lived relationship to her body and will analyze the contradictions in her justification of her decision to have cosmetic surgery.

The Surgery: Beauty Comes at Risk and Pain

Cosmetic surgery has always been a controversial subject around the world. Hao's head-to-toe surgery in China is definitely not an exception, in its evocation of controversy. Hao is certainly not the first Chinese woman who has undergone a series of complicated head-to-toe cosmetic surgeries. However, her surgery fuels the controversy because she is the first Chinese "artificial beauty" who effectively made the process of her cosmetic surgery—which is normally a hidden private matter—open to the public. As Hao said:

Mass media says that I am the first person to eat the crab.³³ Actually, I am quite sure that I am not the first person who has undergone multiple cosmetic surgeries (in China), but the first person who opens the experience of undergoing extensive cosmetic surgery to the public in China. Before I did it, many women who opted for cosmetic surgery just chose to have their bodies done stealthily.... I am a straightforward and simple person. I indeed underwent surgeries. I happily admit it. Why should I hide it?

Since the 1990s, the popularity of cosmetic surgery has been gradually increasing in China. However, although undergoing cosmetic surgery is no longer a taboo in China, most people who undergo it would not admit it. The general attitude towards cosmetic surgery is a sort of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” Therefore, as many women would deny that they have changed their appearance surgically, it is a bit shocking that Hao boldly disclosed her extreme makeover plan. Through media propaganda, Hao became the first Chinese “artificial beauty.” As the first person who frankly and provocatively admitted her cosmetic surgery procedures, Hao received both praise and condemnation from the public.

Some people have applauded Hao. As one man interviewed in mass media said:

I greatly approve of cosmetic surgery. Everyone likes being beautiful and has the right to pursue beauty. People like to see beautiful things every day. Life is short and artificial beauty can make it happier for those who have physical defects. I just hope everyone doesn’t start looking the same. I really admire Hao Lulu for her courage in revealing her experience in cosmetic surgery publicly. I’ve seen her before and after photos, and there is really an obvious contrast. If my girlfriend would like to have such surgery, I would definitely support her. If, after getting married, I found my wife had had cosmetic surgery, I would calmly accept it and

³³ The expression “the first person to eat the crab” is a Chinese idiom which means “the first person with the courage to try something new.”

probably praise the high level of cosmetic surgery craft. (Chen S. 2003)

Although Hao received support from people like Duan, she also received much criticism since she admitted to her surgery. As a surgery which is unnecessary for medical reasons, but carried out to improve appearance with excruciating pain and potential risks such as problems related to anaesthesia, excessive bleeding, infection, scarring, deformation and even death, cosmetic surgery has always been subject to argument. Many people doubt whether it was necessary that Hao, a woman who was not originally unattractive in appearance, underwent extensive and risky operations. As Ms. Ding, a young lady from an IT company I interviewed said:

It's understandable if a woman with obvious flaws wants to have her face or body improved. However, I don't think this is the case for Hao Lulu. From what I saw from her before-surgery photos, come on, she wasn't ugly at all! Is that really necessary for her to take such a risk [to undergo cosmetic surgery]?

What Ms. Ding said relates to the debate between medical necessity and elective enhancement through cosmetic surgery. In different occasions and interviews, Hao expressed that she sought to improve her physical appearance although she did not consider herself unattractive before the surgery. In a talk-show produced by a Beijing TV station, a French guest asked Hao why, if she already considered herself pretty and was confident before the surgery, she would still undergo cosmetic surgery. "Yes, I thought I was pretty. But I wanted to be more beautiful and happy," said Hao. Hao's statement apparently goes against the view

that the demand for cosmetic surgery originates from a sense of having an ugly appearance or a lack of self-confidence. To become a better version of oneself is claimed by Hao, as well as many women I talked.

The operations Hao underwent are truly head-to-toe. As I mentioned earlier, beginning July 21, 2003, Hao received four phases of cosmetic surgery which included a dozen operations such as blepharoplasty, liposuction, mammary augmentation, rhinoplasty, and other procedures to alter her eyelids, lip, nose, cheeks, chin, neck, breasts, upper arms, buttocks, thighs, calves and other parts of her body. In the course of this extreme makeover, her eyelids were doubled to make her eyes appear bigger, her nose was reshaped to be more pointed, her face contour was changed to be thinner, her breasts were enlarged with silicone gel implants, and her buttocks were lifted up and made rounder. In addition, bags were removed from below her eyes, wrinkles were removed from her neck, fat was taken out from her thighs, lower legs, and cheeks, and Botox was applied to her face.

Although cosmetic surgery is more widely available than ever before in China, the dangers involved in Hao's surgery provoked expressions of concern over the safety of cosmetic surgery. Ms. Ma, an interviewee, commented on Hao's surgery as follows:

Cosmetic surgery is so terrifying! Didn't Hao Lulu know how dangerous the surgery might be? Didn't she see the horrible stories of disfiguration in newspapers? I can't understand why she did it. Even if she was lucky enough to survive through risky operations, so what? Some experts have said that her new appearance would only last for between three and five

years. The beautiful face will vanish someday, and wrinkles will come again. Don't be seduced by irresponsible surgeons! Don't be fooled by illusion!

From the point of view of Ms. Ma, Hao is duped to undergo potentially dangerous cosmetic surgery. However, Hao herself said that the procedures were worthwhile despite the potential risks:

Of course I was aware that no operation is a hundred percent safe. Nothing in the world is free. If you want to be more attractive, you should bear the pain and risk of the surgery. If operations fail, if I really turn into an ugly monster, and if things do happen, I have to suffer the consequences for my decision. But I won't regret it! At least I have tried to become more beautiful and I have put an effort into gaining what I want. ... If I said that I never thought about the dangers of the operations, it would not be true. Especially before the surgery, sometimes my thoughts were complicated. I imagined how beautiful I might be after the surgery. And then I suddenly worried about how awful it might be if the surgery failed. Fortunately, I am an optimist. I always think about the positive side rather than the negative side.

From the quotes above, we see that Hao was aware of the potential risks and dangers involved in her cosmetic surgeries. Nevertheless, she insisted on surgeries because she believed that she should try to gain what she really wanted in her life. Hao writes about her concern about the safety of the surgery in her autobiography:

When I made my decision to undergo a head-to-toe transformation surgery, I trusted surgeons who performed operations for me. I did surgery after the press conference. I didn't worry too much. If they even organized a press conference, they surely would take serious responsibility for me. They must perform operations carefully in scientific ways. I had nothing to worry about. Even in the case there might be something wrong in the future such as my nose is broken or something else, I believe that with the development of the technology, there must be some ways to fix it. I was optimistic about this. (Hao

As claimed by Hao, although her decision sounds bold, she did not put her body in risk blindly. Realizing the importance of her surgery to the hospital, the decision she made is grounded upon conscious decision-making and risk estimation. Furthermore, Hao's belief in medical science and modern technology is also worth discussing because it represents a typical attitude towards cosmetic surgery among women who opt for it. Since risk is usually a primary concern with regard to surgery, the rationality of undergoing it has often been questioned. During my fieldwork, I constantly heard women justifying cosmetic surgery as a "scientific" (*kexuede*) method to improve their physical appearance. Cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals also constantly emphasize the "scientific rationality" and "technical efficiency" involved in cosmetic surgery to sell their services. Cosmetic surgery is often portrayed as a sophisticated aesthetic service. The rationality of undergoing it is legitimated by the narrative of science.

EverCare organized a professional team to perform operations on Hao. Zhou Gang, the leader of Hao's surgical team and the honorary president of EverCare emphasized the excellence of the surgeons on his team. He also claimed that Hao's surgery had improved public recognition of the technique of Chinese cosmetic surgeons. "Don't look down on Chinese cosmetic surgeons. They are no less skilled than foreign surgeons," said Zhou (Sun 2003). Chen Huanran, another famous Chinese plastic surgeon, who was not involved in Hao's project, told *Beijing Today*

that Hao's surgery should not only be considered as an elaborate publicity stunt. He said:

We really should endeavor to let people at home and abroad know the true quality of cosmetic surgery performed in China. The skill of our plastic surgeons is equal to those of Hollywood, Japan and South Korea, who are often highly lauded by young and fashionable Chinese. (Sun 2003)

Zhou Gang's and Chen Huanran's statement represent some Chinese surgeons' attitude towards Chinese cosmetic surgeons' techniques. During my fieldwork, I heard that several surgeons praised Chinese surgeons' advanced techniques. A Chinese surgeon I talked with who worked in a privately-owned cosmetic surgery clinic, said:

Though cosmetic surgery originated in the West, I do think that Chinese surgeons' techniques are quite advanced in many aspects compared with that of Western surgeons, as well as Korean surgeons. Just think about how many surgeries we perform each year, especially for double-eyelid surgery and nose job. In this sense, no one can compete with us! After all, "practice makes one perfect" (*shu nen sheng qiao*)!

As discussed last chapter, in her recent study on China's plastic surgery, Brownell (2005) argues that the transnational adaptation of plastic surgery can be distinctly linked to a nationalist discourse in China. The above Chinese surgeons' statements indicate that, with the growth of Chinese economy and the cosmetic surgery industry, Chinese surgeons' claim of technical equality to or superiority over their Western or Asian counterparts to some extent shows their Chinese pride in a

medical practice which is usually assumed to be inferior to the West.

The surgeons who performed Hao's surgery did not disappoint Hao. She underwent dozens of procedures safely. However, not everyone is as lucky as Hao. One afternoon in March 2007, I accompanied Hao to record a talk show programme on a Beijing TV station. In addition to Hao, several guests on the show talked about their experiences of undergoing cosmetic surgery. One of the guests was a female junior college student, Li Fei, who talked about her disfigurement resulting from an illegal surgery. As her eyelids were injured during a double-eyelid operation, she wore sunglasses under the limelight during the talk show. Li Fei said that she never planned to undergo cosmetic surgery as she was more than average-looking originally. However, one day she happened to visit a beauty salon where she was persuaded to undergo cosmetic surgery, and eventually underwent operations which included double-eyelid blepharoplasty, rhinoplasty, and facial injection in that beauty salon. Unfortunately, Li Fei turned out to be allergic to the liquid injected in her face, and her eyes also could not close properly. So, she went to a big hospital where doctors told her that the problem she suffered was eyelid prolapse caused by failed blepharoplasty. Li Fei suspended her study and had to stay at home to seek treatment and recovery. Moreover, because she even did not know what liquid was injected in her face, doctors suggested her to do a whole-body check to see whether internal organs had been injured too, and then to seek new reconstructive surgery for her eyelids. Describing her sad story, Li Fei was crying on the talk show.

Li Fei's experience discloses the messy side of China's cosmetic surgery market. With cosmetic surgery clinics springing up all around the country, there has been a serious issue that a number of clinics do not meet the medical standards for doctor qualifications and equipment. The possibility of huge profits has triggered many unlicensed practitioners offering cosmetic surgery illegally in small beauty salons. A joint inspection performed by the Beijing Municipal Health Bureau, Industry and Commerce Administrations and Beijing Drug Administration found that 70 percent of 66 beauty parlors in Beijing's seven districts performed medical procedures without licenses, and 20 percent of these parlors, which normally provide services such as massages and facials, were also found to be providing cosmetic surgery such as mammoplasty and liposuction illegally (Li Q. 2006). What happened to Li Fei is just one example showing the chaotic aspect of the booming cosmetic surgery market in China.

After the talk show, Hao offered her comment on Li Fei's surgery:

People always say that I am bold to risk my body under the scalpel. Well, you know what? I think many women are more bold than me, just like Li Fei. She really is! How did she dare to undergo surgery just in a beauty salon! How did she dare to let people inject liquid to her face even though she didn't know what the liquid was! It's true that I have undergone many operations, but I never risk my body in that way. I always do research prior to the surgery and make sure that my surgery is performed by qualified and experienced doctors. I do lots of pre-work preparation before I do anything to my body.

Here, in contrast to Li Fei's "bold" decision, Hao justifies her multiple surgeries by

claiming her knowledge about cosmetic surgery and awareness of risk. Hao said that although her surgeries were largely designed by the hospital, she also actively chose the surgeries which she considered fit for her. For example, although it was recommended by the hospital, she rejected an eyelash reconstruction which she thought was not fit for her. In 2007, she published an easy-to-read book entitled *The Making of Beauty*, introducing different kinds of cosmetic surgery and discussing post-surgery care (see Figure.12).



Figure 12. The cover of Hao Lulu's book: *The Making of Beauty*, 2008.

Although most women who opt for cosmetic surgery probably do not have considerable knowledge about cosmetic surgery as Hao does, Hao's argument reminds us of the possibility that through learning and possessing knowledge and information about cosmetic surgery, some women may knowledgeably choose surgeries. Having said that, the extent to which an individual has the ability to

reduce potential risks should not be exaggerated. After all, when it comes to surgery performance and risk control, hegemonic power is held by cosmetic surgeons.

In addition to the risk involved, physical and emotional pain also comes with surgery. One day I watched a video of Hao's surgery. In one of the scenes some journalists take photos of Hao before she enters into the operation room. Suddenly, the scene changes to the operation room, in which Hao screams. The long, loud and piercing scream of Hao made me shudder. This scene reminds me that the pain Hao suffered from her series of surgeries must have been excruciating. Hao said, "I am a sensitive person who is terribly scared of pain. It really hurts, especially during the recovery. I had fleeting thoughts of regret during my painful moments. But now, I have no regrets." Hao also writes about the pain she endured in her autobiography:

Sometimes during or after operations when I felt excruciating pain, I could not help wondering why I would do such thing. I could not help but ask myself: Hao Lulu, after you have gone through these surgeries and have endured such unimaginable pain, if you could choose again, are you still willing to endure such indescribable pain of going under the knife? My answer is -Yes! I would still choose to undergo these surgeries. Some people may ask why. I think that everything comes with a price, so as to be beautiful.... I tend to be a perfectionist. What I want is to achieve perfection from inside to outside. ... Even if I cannot be perfect, I wish I could be more beautiful. (Hao 2004: 46)

Although it was quite painful during the recovery after surgeries, Hao felt very proud of her beautiful body gained from cosmetic surgery. One day when I hung out with Hao and her friend Ms. Cao, Ms. Cao suggested us to buy "magic" underpants called "Hip Training Pants" (*meiti qiaotun ku*). It was said that this underpants can

help women firm their buttocks when they walk. Ms. Cao said that one of her friends had been wearing it consistently and it worked after one month. In an underwear store in a shopping mall, a saleslady showed us this “Hip Training.” It is something like a girdle or knickers, thin and seamless. The saleslady said that the special underpants, which costed 280 Yuan, had waist-shaping, hip-lifting and thighs-toning effect with regular wearing. She also claimed that if anyone wears it at least five days weekly and walk at least 6000 steps daily, one could see results in a month. Whether this special underpants really works out is unknown, but we can definitely sense that how women’s bodies are highly targeted by the immense beauty industry from “magic knives” to “magic underpants.” When the saleslady said that the underpants had a strong function to lift buttocks up, Hao exclaimed loudly, “I don’t need lift my hips up anymore. My hips are up enough!” Then she asked me to touch her buttocks. “Isn’t it very stretchy?” she asked with laughter. I touched her buttocks and also said with laughter, “Wow! It’s very elastic!” Hao then said proudly, “Of course, I had a whole hospital working for me!”

Cosmetic surgery is certainly painful and sometimes dangerous. As we have seen, in spite of the fact that Hao was aware of the potential risks and side effects of surgery, she was very determined and insistent in undergoing cosmetic surgery. She suffered excruciating pain of surgery; yet, she was proud of her after-surgery body. In Hao’s account, her longing for beauty, her fears of potential risks, her suffering of pain, her determination to undergo surgery, and her satisfaction of the result were

mixed together. Many interviewees described their struggle about making decisions to undergo cosmetic surgery, which also often mixed their anxiety about pain, side effects, and especially fear of disfigurement after failed surgery. However, no matter what doubts and hesitations they had originally, once the decision had been made, they were determined to have cosmetic surgery. For them, cosmetic surgery might not be the best choice to solve their personal problems, but from their points of view it is a reasonable choice. The rationality behind this “problematic” action should be discussed in the contexts of both their embodied sense of self and social conditions which trigger these actions.

The Controversy over Beauty: Inner Beauty versus Outer Beauty, and Natural Beauty versus Artificial Beauty

As Man (2000) has argued, in Chinese orthodox ideology—whether Confucianism or Communism—inner virtue and character has the priority over outer appearance. The overemphasis on external beauty was usually regarded as morally or politically incorrect in Maoist China. Although there has been a huge change with regard to conceptualization of beauty, when commenting on Hao’s surgery, many of those who disapprove of her surgery emphasize that appearance is not as important as character. As Li Qingfeng, an expert in cosmetic surgery from the Chinese Medical Association expressed her disagreement about Hao’s project:

Though it is a kind of magic, it only improves a person’s appearance. There is no improvement of their knowledge, ability or disposition at all.

I completely don't understand what they are thinking. Are we producing beauty or producing sorrow? What these women really need is a psychologist, not a plastic surgeon. (Chen S. 2003)

Some people criticize that the emphasis on physical beauty obtained from cosmetic surgery may obscure definitions of beauty and degrade women's position in society. "Feminine beauty takes many forms, such as intellect, benevolence and care... If a woman could understand that beauty consists of many facets, she would not so easily resort to the scalpel," says Liu Bohong, the director of the Women's Research Institute affiliated with the All-China Women's Federation (*China Daily* 2003a).

In addition to stressing inner character rather than outer beauty, some people disapprove of Hao's surgery by emphasizing the superiority of natural beauty—or nature, more exactly, whether beautiful or not. Ms. Zhao, a thirty-something interviewee, said:

Although I'm not satisfied with my look, I don't think I would try what Hao Lulu did. This is what I was born with. I appreciate it because it's given by my parents. As an old saying goes, "our bodies—to every hair and bit of skin—are received from our parents" (*shenti fafu, shouzhi fumu*). No matter how much our society has changed, I think most Chinese people are like me: they still prefer "natural" (*zirande*) over "artificial" (*renzaode*), and "real" (*zhende*) rather than "fake" (*jiade*).

Zhao's statement raises an interesting issue. "Our bodies—to every hair and bit of skin—are received from our parents" is one of the most frequent remarks I heard from people who disagreed with cosmetic surgery. This sentence is a part of a

famous Chinese dictum in “*Classic of Filial Piety*” (*Xiao Jing*).³⁴ Although the saying originally implies that people should prevent their bodies from being “injured or wounded” as the beginning of “filial piety”(xiao), many people use the old saying to refer to preserving the original bodily features as a way of showing respect to parents—or to the natural fact that the body is given. However, what is interesting is that although the dictum is still frequently cited by some people as a reference to criticize cosmetic surgery and to show respect to parents, some Chinese parents support and even encourage their children to get their faces and bodies redone. I will discuss this phenomenon in the next chapter.

For Hao Lulu, the decision to undergo cosmetic surgery has nothing to do with filial piety. She regards it as a private matter which should be made through her own will. Hao said that although she loves her parents very much, she did not consult with them about having these operations before she made her decision. Even when she underwent the first phase of surgery, she told neither her parents nor her boyfriend about her decision. “I didn’t want them to worry too much about me. After all, it’s my own business,” said Hao. She added that being born and growing up in Beijing, as an only child in her family, she lived an independent life. “I grew up in a family which values a democratic atmosphere. My parents have always encouraged me to make decisions myself. I have cultivated my independence for a long while.”

³⁴ “*Classic of Filial Piety*” (*Xiao Jing*) was written in the Warring States period (475BC-221BC) in China. The original Chinese saying is “Our bodies—to every hair and bit of skin—are received from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them. This is the beginning of xiao—filial piety” (*shenti fafu, shouzhi fumu, bugan huishang, xiaozhi shiye*). The version is translated by James Legge (1899:465).

When she told her parents about her surgery after she already had her eyelids and nose done, they were shocked, especially her father. They eventually accepted and supported her decision to change her looks. As we can see, the desire to be independent is evident in Hao's account. This discourse came up repeatedly in Hao's justification for her cosmetic surgeries, which stressed individual bodily autonomy—"it's my body, so I can do whatever I want to do with it." I will discuss this issue in later sections.

As discussed above, there are constant debates over inner character versus outward appearance, and natural beauty versus artificial beauty. Having emphasized that she never considered herself unattractive before the surgery, Hao said,

Everybody wants natural beauty, but no one is perfect. Everyone has flaws. But there is nothing wrong with looking for perfection and satisfaction. I wanted to become more beautiful. I wanted to be better. It might sound like I'm emphasizing "outer beauty" (*waizaimei*) and ignoring "inner beauty" (*neizaimei*). But actually, I am not. Of course the inner beauty is essential. But a beautiful image is a start to shine your inner self.

Complaining that she had been misunderstood as a superficial person who only cares about outward appearance, Hao said that she totally agreed with the idea that a person should possess inner beauty. "As far as I am concerned, the pursuit of outer beauty does not contradict having a good character." Moreover, Hao added:

"Natural beauty" (*ziranmei*) and "artificial beauty" are the same and they should be recognized as such... Whether naturally born or artificial improved, I want to reach a state of harmony... Nowadays it's technically possible for me to become more beautiful. If I can become

beautiful both inside and outside, why not?

In justifying her surgery, Hao employs the notion of harmony, a core value of traditional Chinese philosophy, to balance the dichotomy between inner character and outward appearance, and natural beauty and artificial beauty. Moreover, she argues that cosmetic surgery is motivated by the search for a positive self and a better self. She does not take her body as something natural or given, but rather as something to be reshaped by modern medical technique, which renders the body increasingly “uncertain.” For Hao, cosmetic surgery is a way to upgrade her appearance as well as to be a better self. The fact that Hao attempts to create a sense of a better self through attention to the bodily appearance suggests the important relationship between the body and the self in contemporary society. Shilling (2003) contends that the project of the self in modern society is the project of the body. Influenced by the work of Giddens on modernity and the reflexive self, Shilling emphasizes that “modern individuals’ sense of self-identity” is closely related with their body projects—“their sense of self as reflexively understood in terms of their own embodied biography” (2003:4). Shilling’s argument provides us a perspective to understand the relationship between women’s practices of cosmetic surgery and their perceptions of self.

The Male Gaze: Cosmetic Surgery as Contemporary Footbinding?

In addition to arguments which claim the superiority of medical necessity over

aesthetic improvement, inner character over outer appearance, and natural beauty over artificial beauty, other criticisms of cosmetic surgery—probably the most common—condemn the pursuit of beauty through cosmetic surgery as women’s submission to a superficial priority placed on appearance and women’s submission to the male gaze. Zhou Xiaozheng, a sociologist from Renmin University, denounces the pursuit of beauty through cosmetic surgery as a “frantic pursuit of fantasy fulfillment” which would make society “superficial” (*China Daily* 2004b). Zhou explicitly likens contemporary cosmetic surgery to the ancient Chinese practice of footbinding as a harmful bodily practice which exemplifies women’s submission to the male gaze. “To some extent we are still living in a patriarchal society in which men produce the notion of beauty and women unthinkingly conform to it,” says Zhou (Wang X.N. 2005; for a similar opinion, see Cai 2004). Zhou’s argument represents the mainstream feminist argument, which regards the beauty industry, including the cosmetic surgery industry, as a bastion of patriarchy, mutilating women for the benefit of capitalism. In this narrative, accordingly, by undergoing cosmetic surgery, Hao and her ilk are duped by a male-dominated culture system and beauty industry.

In addition to drawing on a feminist perspective, Zhou criticizes the increasing growth of cosmetic surgery in China in light of communist party ideology:

I think cosmetic surgery is just a form of contemporary footbinding. There is a huge problem in our beauty value system today. Prime Minister Wen Jiabao proposes “two musts”: we must keep the style of “working hard

and living plainly” (*jianku pusu*), and we must keep the style of “humility and circumspection and be free from arrogance and rashness” (*bujiao buzao*). However, the reality is these people don’t work hard or live plainly, and their behavior is neither modest nor moderate. The media today talk endlessly about beauty contests and cosmetic surgery—all of which is invisibly but violently increasing the gap between the rich and the poor, and enlarging social conflicts. (Qi and Chen 2003)

In this view, the making of China’s first “artificial beauty” goes against the communist ideology of asceticism and egalitarian. As I discussed in chapter one, during the Maoist era, when puritan ethics ruled the day, the communist ideology condemned the emphasis on individual beauty as “bourgeois culture.” As noted by Zhou, the reemphasis on a plain and modest lifestyle by the new Chinese leadership reflects the relaxation of Maoist asceticism and the increase of private desire in post-Mao China. As a consequence, the rapid development of the market economy brought the rise of consumerism, which values modernization, individualism, and hedonism, in recent years in China. Some people regard the rising popularity of cosmetic surgery in China as an example of how the once-isolated nation has opened up to the world of fashion and modernity. For example, Lisa Weaver, a CNN resident reporter in Beijing comments that, “Hao’s brave behavior lets more people know about the changes in modern Chinese females. In the past, Chinese girls were always considered conservative, but now they’re seen as more fashionable” (Chen S. 2003).

The above arguments bring up two important issues: how do women who undergo cosmetic surgery account for their positions in the gender power system,

and how do they account for their decision given the changing body discourse in post-Mao China? While cosmetic surgery is criticized by some people as a threatening and harmful practice that degrades women's position vis-a-vis men, Hao insists that her motivation to have such surgery is not about pleasing others, but rather, attempting to satisfy herself. Furthermore, cosmetics surgery is regarded as the pursuit of beauty, happiness, self-improvement and self-fulfillment by Hao and other women who opt for it. I will discuss their opinions in the next section.

Bodily Autonomy: "I Made the Decision for Myself"



Figure 13. The cover of Hao Lulu's autobiography, *I Made the Decision for Myself: Confessions of China's First Artificial Beauty*, 2004.

After undergoing extensive cosmetic surgery procedures, Hao published her autobiography, *I Made the Decision for Myself: Confessions of China's First Artificial Beauty*, in August 2004. As suggested by the title of the book, Hao

strongly defends her surgery through the narrative of personal choice and bodily autonomy. At the start of the book, Hao writes as follows:

Who is Hao Lulu?

qiao duo tian gong:³⁵ artificial beauty excelling nature

I am Hao Lulu.

Someone must say: “Wow! Are you that ‘artificial beauty’?”

Yes, I am. I am that “superficial” woman who loves to be pretty, who goes to extremes to challenge “natural beauty” by using her [altered] body, and who opens her cosmetic surgeries to the public and publicizes cosmetic surgery.

I am a freelance writer. I love freedom. I dream of being beautiful. (Hao 2004:1)

As we can see, Hao in her autobiography proclaims her identity as an “artificial beauty” who challenges “natural beauty,” who admits and thus publicizes cosmetic surgery using her body, and who loves “freedom” and dreams of being beautiful in a country where the pursuit of beauty was not formally supported by the puritanical ethics and legacy of both Confucianism and Communism. After declaring her challenge to natural beauty, Hao writes:

Like many Beijing girls, I am optimistic, open-minded, and humorous. I have lots of friends. I like my friends because we all have the same tastes in fashion and life, and we are never satisfied with just a smattering of zeitgeist and never hold back in going further and deeper. (Hao 2004: 1)

The above statement to some extent shows Hao’s vision of herself as a

³⁵ The Chinese idiom “*qiao duo tian gong*” means wonderful workmanship excelling nature.

fashionable and modern Chinese woman who dares to challenge tradition and try new things. During my fieldwork, I spent lots of time hanging out with Hao to learn her lifestyle. Hao earns a high income through hosting or participating in TV shows, publishing books, and attending commercial events. Her financial independence makes her engage in a kind of “modern” lifestyle defined by the contemporary consumer culture. Hao likes to spend her leisure time in malls, cafes, pubs, and Karaoke bars with friends. She loves gourmet food and afternoon tea, listening to pop music and Western operas, watching movies and modern dramas. As she is a public figure in China’s cosmetic surgery industry, she takes care of her body constantly and attentively by consuming various commodities especially beauty products.

Although there had been many controversial debates about her, Hao said that harsh comments basically came from the public—people she did not know. She added that she did not care about negative criticisms from people who knew nothing about her. “Why should I let their opinions intervene in my life? I cannot control what people think. I just wish they could respect my decision. It’s my body. It’s my choice.” She added that people around her had been supportive and kind to her after she underwent cosmetic surgery operations, although some of them were shocked when they first heard about her project.

Admitting that some women undergo cosmetic surgery in order to find a suitable boyfriend or husband, Hao said that this was not the case for her. “I already

had a boyfriend before the surgery. I didn't do it to find a boyfriend as some media misinterpreted. I did it for myself." Hao insisted that in China, as well as in Western countries, many women took care of their appearance for themselves, not for men or society. It is not surprising that Hao defends her surgery by claiming "I did it for myself." This self-fulfillment narrative is one of the most common justifications I have heard from women who opt for cosmetic surgery. A young office lady, Ms. Wang, who had a rhinoplasty operation to make her nose more pointed and smaller, said:

This is something I did for myself and I'm happy with the results. Life is too short to be unhappy with how we look. I thought it over and then did it. After I did it, some friends asked my opinion about whether they should do it. I always ask them: are you doing it for yourself? If you are doing it for someone else, you are not doing it for the right reason. It should be all about yourself, not your boyfriend, husband or anyone else!

From Hao and Wang's statements, we can see that the choice to have cosmetic surgery is often claimed as a means of self-improvement and a way of self-fulfillment. To some extent, women do freely choose to undergo cosmetic surgery, often in the name of "self-expression" or "being oneself." But the empowerment they might achieve through such action is complicated and sometimes problematic. By claiming "I did it for myself," they seem to achieve control over their bodies and lives through undergoing cosmetic surgery. However, even women who elect cosmetic surgery and who say that they do it for the pleasure of the body-as-self rather than conforming to the male gaze, nonetheless hardly escape

from the constraints of the beauty system and consumer culture. It might be a matter of false consciousness--those women may have accepted male-dominated values as their own self-worth.

In addition to the discourse of “doing it for oneself,” another common narrative expressed by Hao and women of her ilk is “the right of choice” when they justify their decisions to undergo cosmetic surgery. Hao’s emphasis on her bodily autonomy is depicted in her autobiography. As she writes:

In the view of traditional Chinese aesthetic standards, by most accounts, my original looks weren’t bad. People doubt whether it’s necessary for me to undergo a head-to-toe transformation. More than that, they doubt my motivation. Some people shout that I did it just to gain media exposure. They claim it’s just a publicity stunt. Some people even criticize me that I’m irresponsible for myself and society!

Hearing these criticisms, I feel so confused in every possible way.

I can’t understand why people judge me in this way.

I experience the “pain” to chase after beauty. This “pain” is in my body. Other people can’t feel what I experienced. I don’t expect others’ understanding, but why do they slander me in this way?

Did I commit a crime because of the pursuit of beauty? ...

Why can’t I be beautiful? Why can’t I have the right to be beautiful? It’s my body. It’s my freedom to pursue beauty. It’s my right to make changes to my body. Even if you are not willing to appreciate my effort in the pursuit of beauty, please leave me alone! After all, I don’t do anything to hurt others. (Hao 2004: 5-6)

Considering that writing an autobiography is specifically requesting to be noticed, it is doubtful whether Hao really wants to be left alone. Nevertheless, as

noted above, when justifying her decision to undergo cosmetic surgery, Hao strongly defends her individual right of choice and body autonomy in words such as, “It’s my body. It’s my freedom to pursue beauty. It’s my right to make changes to my body.”

The idea that everyone has its own right to chase after beauty is shared by many women I interviewed. Chen Ling, 23, a female college student who had double eyelid surgery and rhinoplasty said:

I did it for myself entirely because I knew it would give me more confidence. After the surgery, not only have the shapes of my nose and eyes been changed, but also my spirit and my energy have been restored. Even if it may not change the way people perceive me, I can feel the changes! What matters is that I can see and feel the changes about myself. I feel like a new person....There is a saying, “loving beauty is human nature” (*aimei shi ren de tianxing*). We’re judged on our appearance all the time. It’s perfectly rational to want to look good. We shouldn’t restrict the freedom of choice. People who are unsatisfied with their appearance have the right to have cosmetic surgery. It’s just a private thing. Others don’t have the right to look down on anyone! It’s my own will and happiness to do so. As the saying goes, “go your own way; let others talk!” (*zou zijide lu, ran bieren qushuo*)

From Chen’s points of view, cosmetic surgery provides satisfactory results in the sense that it improves her self-image and self-confidence. Moreover, the popular saying “go your own way; let others talk” epitomizes some women’s determination to undergo cosmetic surgery as well as their belief in personal choice and freedom in body alteration through cosmetic surgery. The emphasis on the individual’s rights and freedom was the most common argument that women used to justify their determination to alter their appearance surgically. I heard many similar arguments

from my interviewees such as, “I have the right to determine what happen to my body,” and “I think having cosmetic surgery is a matter of individual freedom.”

Cosmetic surgery is also regarded by some women as a way to emancipate the natural human desire for beauty from the shackles of the former political oppression in China. Ms. Wang, a woman who had rhinoplasty, regards undergoing cosmetic surgery as a liberating experience. She spoke as follows:

It was unthinkable to do such a thing in the past. In my mother’s generation, they didn’t dare think about beauty because it was a “capitalist” thing. They sacrificed everything, including their bodies, for the needs of the state. But the pursuit of beauty is human nature. It should never be suppressed. Now things have changed. As individuals, we have the freedom to choose what we want to do with our bodies. It’s a kind of liberating. If it’s affordable and safe, and if it makes people happy, why not accept it? When people feel down, they go shopping and buy something to cheer themselves up. I think cosmetic surgery is the same thing.

Wang compares her generation, which has the freedom to choose what they want to do with their bodies, with the older generation, who “sacrificed everything, including their bodies, for the needs of the state.” This statement illustrates how Chinese women’s perception of freedom in bodily practice should be understood in terms of changing body politics, from the “collective body” in the Mao era to the “individual body” in the post-Mao China. The emphasis on self-choice and self-fulfillment underscore society’s dramatic transformation from the times of Chairman Mao, when the collective was paramount, to the China of today, where the individual is supreme. Furthermore, Wang compares doing cosmetic surgery with

shopping. The loosening social control, along with rising consumer culture, has unleashed pent-up demands of beauty through consuming products, including cosmetic surgery. What Wang said indicates the emergence of new ideologies of the body in post-Mao China, in which individualism and hedonism is highlighted.

So far, I have discussed various aspects of Hao Lulu's transformation. Let me now return to the debate discussed at the beginning of this chapter. By undergoing cosmetic surgery, is Hao exploited by the market or does she empower herself? It is insufficient to simply give a "yes" or "no" answer. I argue that we should examine bodily autonomy and agency on the one hand, and the male gaze, hegemonic cultural ideals, and false consciousness on the other hand. That is to say, we should ask this: in undergoing cosmetic surgery, to what extent is Hao an active agent who controls her own body and life and to what extent is she an oppressed victim of patriarchal and capitalistic market manipulation? Though Hao's cosmetic surgeries and altered body is used by EverCare as an aggressive marketing strategy to sell its service, Hao cannot be considered an unthinking puppet of market tactics. She received a beautiful appearance she had always dreamed of for free, and also gained fame to make a better life. Although she is criticized and sometimes even condemned by the mainstream media, she lives her life on her own way. She knows that cosmetic surgery is not a perfect choice as she is well aware of the enormous price—potential dangers and excruciating pains. However, she knowledgeably made a choice for herself based on a limited range of available options. To some extent,

she expresses her agency and subjectivity through body alteration which was unimaginable in the Maoist era.

As a matter of fact, Hao Lulu might be any person among a genre of new generation of Chinese women, who dare to transgress conventional norms and values, who are the main consuming force of cosmetics, beauty products and services, and who pay more attention to the way of living characterized by consumerism, individualism and hedonism. The emergence of Chinese “artificial beauties” like Hao Lulu underscores a shift of body politics from the revolutionary body in the Mao era to the consumer body in post-Mao China. Nevertheless, this is not to say that this new body politics liberates women in China today. This new body politics also exercises control over women’s bodies through a subtle and delicate means by which women might internalize the male gaze and beauty discourse as their own self-worth. In this sense, the free choice of cosmetic surgery these women insist upon might be a form of false consciousness.

The Story of Yan Yuan: Fight for the Right of Being an “Artificial Beauty”

Hao Lulu is not the only Chinese “artificial beauty” who attracted media attention in recent years in China. A few months after Hao’s event, another “artificial beauty,” Yang Yuan, drew frenzied coverage again. Beauty pageants and cosmetic surgery in China have been favored by mass media in recent years. When these two things come bundled together, it is not surprising that the story is widely publicized. In

May 2004, 18-year-old Yang Yuan captured great attention from the Chinese media after she decided to sue the organizer of a beauty contest in Beijing for disqualifying her from the pageant because of the extensive cosmetic surgeries she had undergone. Hereafter, using material from Yan Yuan's autobiography published in 2004, *I am an "Artificial Beauty"*, and reports from mass media (Yardley 2004; Lin 2004; Xinhua News Agency 2004), I describe Yang Yuan's story of fighting for the right to be recognized as an "artificial beauty" through a lawsuit.

Yang Yuan, from a small county in Henan Province, started a modeling career at the age of 14. After graduating from high school, Yang went to Beijing to pursue her dream in modeling. Although she had received professional training and worked very hard, she did not get much opportunity due to her comparatively plain appearance. Makeup artists had suggested her to undergo cosmetic surgery, but she did not make up her mind until she had suffered rejection many times in her modeling career. With the hope of earning 1,000 yuan so that she could go back home to celebrate the coming Spring Festival with her family, she went to Taiyuan city in Shanxi province to attend a runway show in January 2004. However, on the morning of the show, she received a phone call from the organizer who informed her that her participation in the show was cancelled. She was furious and asked why they invited her to come to Taiyuan but refused to let her appear in the runway show. The organizer said something to the effect that, "It was not your fault to be born ugly, but it is definitely your fault to frighten people in the runway" (Yang 2004: 42-43).

Yang returned to Beijing deeply humiliated, and made up her mind to undergo cosmetic surgery. Yang writes in her autobiography:

I know that inner beauty is important, and I pursue it too. But I feel that a pretty face is important as well. I have entered a handful of modeling contests without success due to my plain looks. I am quite confident that I can achieve good results if I undergo cosmetic surgery. (Yang 2004: 43)

In order to change her plain-looking face, in February 2004, after borrowing some money from her relatives and friends, Yang spent 110,000 yuan in a cosmetic surgery clinic in Beijing to undergo 11 cosmetic surgery procedures including rhinoplasty, “augmentation of the temple” (*long nie shu*),³⁶ “chin augmentation or mentoplasty” (*long xiake*),³⁷ “mandibular angle reduction or reduction angleplasty” (*xiahejiao quchushu*),³⁸ double eyelid blepharoplasty, reconstruction of upper and lower lips, orthodontics and so on. Yang also made her decision that she would attend the competition for the Miss Intercontinental 2004 in Beijing after her operations. She timed the surgeries so that she would be able to recuperate before the opening round of the contest in May 2004. The operations were successful.

³⁶ Augmentation of the temple is often used to soften up the harsh look of a sunken temple and oversized cheek bones.

³⁷ Chin augmentation, or mentoplasty, is a procedure that involves creating a more proportionate face and a stronger chin line with the help of chin implants.

³⁸ Mandibular angle reduction or reduction angleplasty refers to operations to reduce the width of the lower face and change a round or angular face into a more oval-shaped or heart-shaped face.



Figure 14. The before-and-after looks of Yang Yan in her autobiography, 2004.

Yang passed the first and second round of the Miss International and became one of 30 finalists. However, when she was preparing for the final round, she received a notice from the organizers on May 21, saying that her candidacy was revoked because she was an “artificial beauty.” Because the cosmetic surgery clinic she received procedures used her before-and-after photos in advertisements and she had made no attempt to conceal this, the organizers of the beauty contest discovered this fact. “I was speechless and really disappointed,” Yang said. “I did the plastic surgery because of the pageant, and I was disqualified because of it” (Yardley 2004). Out of anger and sadness, Yang decided to fight for her right to be in the competition because there was no regulation in the competition indicating that any girls who had undergone cosmetic operation could not take part. Yang took her case to the mass media and soon a media storm arose, featuring a picture of her tear-streaked face. The organizers denied that they discriminated against Yang, saying it would be

unfair to the other candidates if they allowed an “artificial beauty” to participate in the contest. Under pressure from the media, the organizers ultimately changed their minds and accepted her back into the contest. Surprisingly, Yang tore the notification into pieces in front of journalists and refused to go back to the competition. Yang said that she felt insulted by the wording of “artificial beauty,” which was used by the organizers to bar her from the competition, and she was also angry with the way that the organizers had handled the case. “I just want to get back my rights,” Yang said, “I hope that in the future there will be a niche in society for [people like] me” (Yardley 2004).

On 1 June, 2004, Yang filed a lawsuit to demand a formal public apology from the organizing committee on the grounds that the organizing committee had infringed upon her legal rights by rejecting her and using the biased term, “artificial beauty.” In addition, Yang argued that the organizer made no mention of prohibiting cosmetic surgery in its contest rules. On July 20, 2004, the Beijing Dongcheng District People’s Court ruled that Yang Yuan did not have adequate grounds for suing the beauty pageant organizer, Beijing Tianjiu Weiye Culture and Media Company, for infringing upon her rights and dignity. The court said that whether a person’s rights and dignity have been trampled must be judged according to objective facts and consequences, not the person’s feelings. The court also rejected Yang’s request for a public apology and 50,000 yuan in compensation from the defendant for her emotional damages. The court held that the term “artificial beauty”

was a widely accepted phrase that was frequently used by the Chinese media.

Therefore, the court ruled that by using the term, the organizers did not deprecate Yang Yuan.



Figure 15. The cover of Yang Yuan's autobiography, *I am an Artificial Beauty*, 2004.

Although Yang lost the case, the event was extensively reported by the Chinese mass media, an exposure that made her famous. Her story along with her photos appeared in many newspapers and magazines. A few months later, she published her autobiography, *I am an Artificial Beauty*. In addition, she became an “image ambassador” for the cosmetic surgery clinic where she received operations. Her before-and-after pictures have been widely circulated by the hospital as advertisements for its business promotion. Beyond this, Beijing Tianjiu Weiye Culture and Media Company--the organizer of the beauty pageant who disqualified Yan Yuan's candidacy in the Miss International--soon announced that they would

launch a new beauty pageant exclusively for women who had undergone cosmetic surgery.

As a result, as mentioned earlier, the Miss Artificial Beauty Pageant was held in Beijing in December 2004, with 19 contestants aged from 17 to 62 years old all providing doctor's certificates to prove that they had undergone cosmetic surgery. Not surprisingly, sponsors of this beauty pageant included some Chinese cosmetic surgery clinics and makers of cosmetic surgery products. After beating other 18 contestants, Feng Qian, a 22-year-old student, was crowned China's first Miss Artificial Beauty in Beijing on December 18, 2004. The two most high-profile participants -- the oldest contestant, 62-year-old Liu Yulan and transsexual Liu Xiaojing--shared a prize for Best Media Image.



Figure 16. Feng Qian (C) celebrates after being named China's first Miss Cosmetic Surgery on December 18, 2004 in Beijing, China.



Figure 17. Liu Xiaojing and Liu Yulan shared a prize for Best Media Image in China's Miss Cosmetic Surgery pageant on December 18, 2004 in Beijing, China.

To some extent, Yang Yuan seems to stand out as a new generation of Chinese woman by pursuing her dream to be beautiful through undergoing cosmetic surgery, admitting her cosmetic surgery to the public, and fighting for her right to be an “artificial beauty” in a beauty contest through a lawsuit. On the one hand, we see how Yang empowers herself by gaining a beautiful appearance through cosmetic surgery, mobilizing mass media to get more support from the public, and even using legal weapons to seek equal rights in a beauty pageant. However, on the other hand, we see that during the whole event, the hospital where Yang received surgery and the organizer of the beauty pageant all won publicity from this highly publicized lawsuit. From this case, the personal freedom and subjectivity expressed by Yang Yuan through her cosmetic surgery and the lawsuit in effect served as a strategy of the market promotion for the cosmetic surgery clinic and the organizer of the beauty pageant.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I mainly describe Hao Lulu's case to consider the discrepancies inherent in the attitude towards cosmetic surgery and "artificial beauty" in China. The emergence of China's first "artificial beauty" is an important social event because it has led to an upsurge of interest in cosmetic surgery in China and also triggered a nationwide debate. When Hao Lulu provocatively proclaims her freedom of pursuing beauty through cosmetic surgery—especially when the surgery is a live advertisement for the cosmetic surgery hospital—and Yang Yuan files a lawsuit to fight for her rights as a "artificial beauty," they both make a bold statement in a country which used to denounce the pursuit of physical beauty as a politically incorrect and self-indulgent practice. The booming cosmetic surgery industry, along with aggressive market strategies, has already targeted Chinese women's bodies as its commodity. However, as we have seen from the case of Hao Lulu, women's agency should not be dismissed and neglected in our discussion. By assessing actual options in her life, Hao Lulu makes the most effective use of the options available to her. In fact, nobody likes to risk her/his body by undergoing cosmetic surgery if it is not necessary for one—at least necessary from one's own point-of-view. Therefore, rather than condemning women who opt for cosmetic surgery, it is more important to understand the reasons which push them to undergo cosmetic surgery.

Furthermore, to understand cosmetic surgery's dramatically increasing popularity among Chinese women, we must situate the phenomenon into China's social and

political context.

From the point of view of Hao Lulu and women who have undergone cosmetic surgery, cosmetic surgery is a way of expressing personal freedom that was suppressed under the Mao era. Nonetheless, I would not argue that by undergoing cosmetic surgery, Hao ultimately takes control of her body and life through her own will. We should notice that when Hao and women like her claim that they have rights to choose whatever they want to do to their bodies, the options for them have already been set up. While women use cosmetic surgery to exercise power and control over their bodies and lives, they simultaneously succumb to hegemonic ideals of feminine beauty and omnipresent consumer culture. Therefore, on the one hand, we should explore how women account for their decisions to undergo cosmetic surgery; on the other hand, we should explore how the alteration of women's bodily features is involved in the transition of China's social nature from communist Maoist China to consumerist post-Mao China.

The drastic change in bodily practice and especially the emergence of Chinese "artificial beauties" vividly demonstrates the sharp contrast between the Maoist asceticism and collectivism, and the post-Maoist hedonism and individualism. Therefore, what is the relationship between the individual body, market discourses and state power in post-Mao China? How do market discourses and state power play their roles in reshaping women's body images? The underlying meanings of the increasing popularity of cosmetic surgery in China are complicated due to the

particular historical and ideological context of China. In the following chapters, I will explore how body alteration through cosmetic surgery is shaped by the interactions of multiple power structures to a large degree.

Chapter Four

“Being Good-Looking is Capital”: Cosmetic Surgery and the Gender Body in China

Since the initiation of the policy of reform and opening-up in the late 1970s, China has experienced dramatic social changes associated with rapid economic growth. This chapter examines the impact of economic transition and social transformation on women’s bodily practices of cosmetic surgery by delineating changes of women’s lives in employment and marriage. I first explore the phenomenon that more and more Chinese high school and college students, girls especially, have rushed into cosmetic surgery clinics and hospitals over the summer holidays to improve their looks. In a global sense, cosmetic surgery for adolescents is certainly not a new thing. However, this trend has become particularly strong in China since 1990s. In order to understand this phenomenon, I discuss how the reform of the job allocation system and the expansion of recruitment of college students in higher education have produced high pressure among young people to find a desirable job in a tight job market. I furthermore analyze how cultural and institutional mechanisms, like occupational gender segregation and employment discrimination based on gender, age, physical appearance, and height in the fierce recruitment market, have pushed women to try to measure up by all possible means, including undergoing cosmetic surgery. Finally, I discuss how traditional gender norms, which have highly valued

women's physical beauty, influence the institutionalized obsession with female beauty in the workplace and "the male gaze" towards female beauty in marriage.

A Gift from Parents and Beauty Capital

As I mentioned last chapter, there is a famous saying stated in *Xiao Jing* (Classic of Filial Piety), "Our bodies—to every hair and bit of skin—are received from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them. This is the beginning of *xiao*—filial piety." Traditional Chinese wisdom dictated that a person's body is a gift from the parents and one must treasure this gift in order to be filial. What is happening in China today, however, is a different story. It is not unusual today that cosmetic surgery is a gift from the parents to their children, especially daughters, as a reward or an investment. Let us take a look what I observed in 2006 and 2007.

During this period, I sometimes went to suburban Beijing to visit the Beijing Plastic Surgery Hospital (CAMS & PUMC). I normally stayed in the lounge hall at the second floor of the hospital for observation and sometimes for interviews. Although it is located in the suburbs rather than the city center of Beijing, as the biggest plastic surgery specialist hospital in China (and in the world), the hospital attracts thousands of people from all over China every year. When summer arrives, the number of teenagers and college students coming there to consult or undergo cosmetic surgery rises as high as temperature. In the lounge hall, there were always dozens of young people, mostly girls, waiting for consultation or operation. These

girls were mostly high-school students who had just passed university entrance exams and senior soon-to-graduate university students. While most teenagers were accompanied by their mothers, some college girls came with their close friends, or were alone. Summer vacation, which is supposed to be a period for stressed-out students to relax, has become another stressful time for these young students. Sitting in the lounge, I had many conversations with these young girls, and sometimes with their mothers, about the surgery they anticipated or had already undergone.

In an afternoon in July 2006, when I sat in the lounge, a middle-aged woman who looked a little uneasy sat near me. I moved my seat to her side and started a conversation. I learned that the woman, Ms. Tong, a forty-something mother who was waiting for her daughter who was receiving double-eyelid blepharoplasty in the operation room. Her daughter, Xiao Juan, 18, had just passed the National College Entrance Examination in June with a good score. Xiao Juan probably would go to a famous university in Beijing to major in accounting. As promised by Ms. Tong, the 2,000-yuan double-eyelid surgery was a reward for Xiao Juan's good performance in the examination:

I: Why did you offer cosmetic surgery to your daughter? Did she ask for it by herself or did you propose it?

Ms. Tong: She asked for it. I have been aware that she wasn't satisfied with her looks. She complained that she did not get good genes from me and her father. If it were 20 years ago, in my generation, I would ask my daughter to keep the original appearance she was born with. But society is so competitive. The competition for jobs and every kind of resource is so fierce. She is a smart and adorable girl who studied so hard in the past

few years. If a crease in her eyelid could make her more happy and competitive, why not?

I: Have you thought about the possible risk? Have you ever worried that the result could be out of your expectation?

Ms. Tong: Of course I thought about it. Any operation has potential risk. That's the reason why I chose this hospital rather than others. As a prestigious one, I think it must care more about its reputation. I would never let my daughter go to private clinics. Most surgeons in private clinics are quacks. Besides, I only let my daughter receive an operation for double eyelids. I think the technique for this kind of minor correction is quite advanced. For surgery such as breast augmentation, I would never ever allow my daughter undergo it.

I: Does your husband also support this decision?

Ms. Tong: In the beginning, he was a little hesitant. But he didn't object to it. As long as we chose a prestigious surgeon in a reputable hospital, he was fine with the decision. Compared to a decade ago, today's society has a much more tolerant attitude towards cosmetic surgery.

I: Do you have friends who also support their daughters to have cosmetic surgery?

Ms. Tong: Yes, I have a close friend who supported her daughters' cosmetic operation. Her daughter is a college student who just graduated recently. I heard that she complained a lot about the tough time for her daughter to find a desirable job. It's definitely true. Especially, it's more brutal for girls as they have less opportunity than boys. Although I keep telling my daughter that the most important thing about a person is her good temperament and ability, I know that appearance is absolutely an important element in the keen job market today. If other parents already put investment in their daughter's appearance, I need do something for my daughter as well. You know, as a parent, I need do whatever I can for my daughter's future. A pretty face is a worthwhile long-term investment for my daughter's future!

The expression "a pretty face is a worthwhile long-term investment for my daughter's future" typically reflects some Chinese parents' attitudes towards offering

cosmetic surgery to their children, especially daughters. This conversation is very much like others I have collected in my fieldwork: parents are paying for the surgery of their daughters as a reward for them passing university entrance exams or as an investment for their future career and/or marriage. The phenomenon of adolescents opting for cosmetic surgery is certainly not a new thing in the world as a whole. However, this has become a particular trend in China in recent years. Chinese women who undergo cosmetic surgery are much younger than their counterparts in Western countries. For example, according to the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery:

Approximately 860,000 cosmetic surgery procedures were performed in 2002, mostly on women... and one-third of cosmetic surgery patients are between the ages of 35 and 50; another 22 percent are between the ages of 26 and 34. And 18 percent of people getting cosmetic surgery are under the age of 25. (Rosen 2004: 26)

These numbers clearly indicate that women under age 25 are not the primary target for cosmetic surgery in the United States. However, although there is no official nation-wide statistic available in China, it has been widely reported by the mass media, hospitals and surgeons that high school and college girls are among the most enthusiastic groups seeking cosmetic surgery in China (*Beijing Youth Daily* 2001; Guan 2003; *Harbin Daily* 2002; Jiang 2001; Li and Wang 2002; Liu 2002; *Shanghai Daily* 2005; Ren and Gui 2003; Yang 2002; Yang 2003; You 2001; Wang and Cui 2001; Zhao 2003).

For example, as reported by Zhou and Li (2005), according to a survey undertaken by China Central Television in Beijing, Shanghai and Chongqing, more than 40 per cent of those undergoing cosmetic surgery are college students and 30 per cent are high school students. According to the report, Zhang Wei, a nurse with the Department of Plastic Surgery of Beijing Union Medical College Hospital said, "Every day, we receive about two dozen girl students asking for cosmetic surgery, which accounts for about half of all our patients." Zhou and Li (2005) also reported that, according to a survey conducted in Nanjing, about 85 percent of the girls who underwent cosmetic surgery got their parents' prior approval.

These reports confirm what I observed. During summer and winter vacations, as well as week-long national holidays such as the Labor Day Holiday and the National Day Holiday, when I went to different clinics and hospitals, I always met young students, especially college girls, seeking different kinds of cosmetic surgery. Although for these young students, desirable surgeries ranged from head to toe, they basically looked for modifications in their faces more than their bodies.

Double-eyelid surgery and rhinoplasty [a "nose job"] are two of the most common operations. Cutting one more crease or stitching an extra eyelid to fold double eyelids costs the least among various types of cosmetic surgery. The price can range from 800 to 4,000 yuan depending on where the surgery is done. The price of rhinoplasty ranges from 2,000 to 9,000 yuan depending on what kind of material is

used to fill up the nose bridge and also where the surgery is performed. Aside from cutting one more crease on eyelids and putting extra padding in the nose, some young girls also have their lower jawbone trimmed and their cheekbones flattened. Most of these young interviewees said that their parents supported their decisions as long as the surgery was safe and affordable. Some college girls also saved money from their part-time jobs and daily expense for operations. When I asked these young students their motivation for undergoing cosmetic surgery, the most frequent answer was to better stand out in job competition.

Like many university students in their early twenties, Chen Jing, a 23-year-old student majoring in Economics in the University of International Business and Economics, described resentfully how hard it was to find a job:

To be honest, since last October I have attended almost all of the job fairs I knew about. As long as I hear information about job recruitment fairs, I definitely would go. No matter what kinds of job fairs, there was always a surge of graduates, and no matter what kinds of positions, there was a huge pile of resumes. I was so scared! China lacks everything but people!

After experiencing a difficult time finding a desirable job, Chen Jiang realized that her appearance is as important as what is inside her. As she said:

I was naive to believe that if I study hard, I will get a good job. So when pretty girls in my class were busy hanging out with boys, I stayed in the library to read more. But when we were about to graduate, pretty girls and boys could get employed more easily than me. It's so unfair! I was so frustrated! To get an opportunity to show my ability, I first need a pretty picture in my resume. A college graduation certificate cannot guarantee me a job. I need an edge to stand out!

Determined to find a job in Beijing, Chen Jing spent all of her savings from part-time jobs along with money borrowed from her classmates to undergo double eyelid surgery and rhinoplasty. Wang explained her motivation to undergo cosmetic surgery as follows:

I came from a remote village in Guizhou. I really do not want to go back there to spend the rest of my life. I have a family with no money, and I have no personal network (*guanxi*) in Beijing. I could not count on my parents to help me with my job search. I am willing to pay whatever costs to stay in Beijing. To get an opportunity to show my ability, I first need a pretty picture of myself on my resume. I need an edge to stand out! It is an age of beauty! Being good-looking is capital!

“Being good-looking is capital” epitomizes an ongoing phenomenon among Chinese students, especially girls, who viewed an attractive appearance obtained from cosmetic surgery as a form of capital which can give them an edge in the job market. This phenomenon has been making headlines such as “Students splash cash on looks for jobs” (*Shanghai Daily* 2004), “Students, job-seekers busy with face-lifting in summer” (*Xinhua News Agency* 2005b), and “Facing tough job market, students seek an edge by going under the knife” (*People’s Daily* 2006). In China today, Wang Jing is just one of a growing number of students who use cosmetic surgery to boost their chances of getting good jobs after graduation. Fierce competition among college students for jobs has pushed more and more Chinese students to spend lavish amounts of money on cosmetic surgery to improve their physical appearance and also to improve their chances of getting a job, especially in

big cities like Beijing, where the competition is intensified because of the inflow of young people from all over the country. After hearing students and parents repeating harsh accounts of searching for jobs, I cannot help but wonder why undergoing cosmetic surgery is so relevant to job competition among these young girls. In order to understand Chinese teenagers and college students' motivations for body alteration, we need look at the changes in the job allocation system and also the recent upsurge of university graduate unemployment in China.

The Expansion of University Enrolment and the Tight Job Market

When talking about why it has been more and more difficult for college graduates to find a job, Ms. Tong, the mother who supported her daughter to undergo double-eyelid surgery, made a very simple yet profound comment on the ongoing reform in China's education system:

Back twenty years ago, in my generation, a college degree was a golden ticket to an "iron rice bowl" (*tiefangwang*).³⁹ At that time, within "the state planned job-assignment" (*guojia tongyi fenpei*) system, every college graduate got a government-assigned job in a "work unit" (*danwei*).⁴⁰ However, guaranteed jobs for college graduates are a thing

³⁹ The "Iron rice bowl" (*tie fangwang*) is a Chinese euphemism for government-assigned secure jobs from the late 1950s to the mid-1980s. It refers to a life-long occupation with guaranteed job security, as well as a steady income and benefits prior to China's economic reform. People who were members of the civil service or employees of various state-owned and collective-owned enterprises in urban areas were considered as having "iron rice bowls." Under the "iron rice bowl" (*tie fangwang*) system, although wages were universally low, a job position generally guaranteed daily necessities and welfare benefits, including wages, accommodation, medical care, schooling for children, social and recreational activities, and a pension after retirement.

⁴⁰ "Work unit" (*danwei*) is a term mainly used during the Mao era. Now it usually refers to state-run firms and governmental bureaus. It literally means a place where workers were assigned to their respective work units upon their graduation from school and were expected to stay in their work units for life. The *danweis* were mini-communities that provided comprehensive welfare for

of the past. The once glorified identity of college graduate now means nothing but a job struggle! For the generation of my daughter, after “expansion of university enrolment” (*kuozhao*), everybody has a college degree and they’re all competing for limited jobs.

Ms. Tong’s comments sketch out the transition of the job allocation system and the expansion of college graduates in China in recent decade. Let us first take a brief look of the development of the job allocation system in China. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, in 1951, the Government Administration Council (replaced in 1954 by the State Council) decreed that the state would assign jobs to all university graduates, which was called *goujia tongyi fenpei*. Chinese universities were shut down during the Cultural Revolution; however, after China restored National College Entrance Examination (*gaokao*) in 1977, *goujia tongyi fenpei* were implemented again in higher education sector in the 1980s. Under this job allocation system, the government assigned graduates lifetime jobs in work units. Of course, at that time, graduates did not worry about their jobs and did not really have any career options. However, with China’s economic reform moving to a market orientation, this system was rapidly phased out and replaced by the “bilateral selection or mutual selection” (*shuangxiang xuanze*)⁴¹ in the late 1980s. In the mid-1990s, the government launched further reforms in the higher education sector, including a “personal responsibility for job search” (*zizhu zeye*)

the workers from cradle to grave.

⁴¹ The phrase *shuangxiang xuanze* refers to a job allocation system, which allows students and employers to choose each other.

system. This movement from “state planned job-assignment,” to “bilateral selection,” and to “personal responsibility for job search,” reflects the transition of the planned economy system to the market economy within the educational system. When the Chinese government stopped assigning jobs to college graduates, these fresh graduates had to face their first employment challenges on their own.

Ms. Tong’s comments show us that to understand Chinese college students’ motivations for cosmetic surgery, we have to understand how the policy of *kuozhao*— the accelerating expansion of recruitment in China’s higher education— has created a difficult situation for mass graduates to find jobs. There has been a gradual reform in the higher educational sector from the 1980s to the 1990s. However, the turning point was the year 1999, when the Chinese government decided to accelerate the pace of higher education expansion by implementing the policy of *kuozhao*. There are two features of this policy: commodification and massification of the higher education sector. Although the policy was officially proclaimed as a response to a growing demand for highly qualified manpower, a more immediate motivation for the expansion of higher education was to stimulate the depressed domestic consumption caused by the 1997 Asian economic crisis and to relieve the pressure of increased urban unemployment (Bai 2006; Soo 2008). Chinese economists predicted that in coming years, with the development of the Chinese economy, the employment of university graduates would be easier to deal with than in 1999. With such a background, the Chinese government implemented

the *kuozhao* policy in 1999 to accelerate the expansion of the higher education sector (Bai 2006; Soo 2008).

The graph in Figure 18 shows the basic statistics of the higher education sector in China from the 1990 to 2007. As we can see, the numbers of student enrolment grew slowly in the 1990s. However, the figure of new student enrolment climbed from 1.08 million in 1998 to 1.59 million in 1999, a 47.4 percent increase. Since 1999, subsequent figures of enrolment in higher education institutions increased dramatically and continuously. The figure of enrollment in 2007 was 5.65 million, more than five times as much as in 1998.

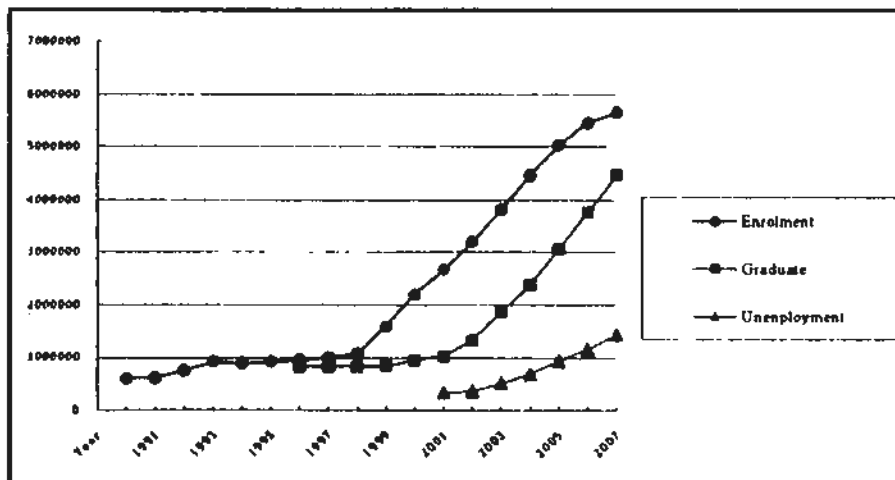


Figure 18. The number of students in regular higher educational sector.

Sources:

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic China. 1990-2007. *Quanguo jiaoyu shiye fazhan tongji gongbao*, 1990-2007 (Statistical Bulletin for National Educational Development, 1990-2007).

The mass recruitment of college students temporarily relieved job market pressure in the late 1990s, but created more pressure in later years. With whole cohorts of new recruits entering the job market, the capacity of the labour market to

accommodate them has been strained. In Figure 17, the graph clearly shows the striking increase of graduates in 2003, four years after the implementation of *kuozhao*. A crucial question is how many of these fresh graduates found jobs.

Unfortunately, unemployment data for fresh graduates are less clear and accurate than data of recruits and graduates in later years. According to data released by the Ministry of Education, the number of university graduate unemployed reached 1.44 million in 2007 from 0.34 million in 2001, indicating that today, some 30 percent of fresh graduates cannot find jobs after their graduation each year. With the rapid transition of the job allocation system and the speedy expansion of the mass recruitment of college students into higher education, limited job vacancies were insufficient to fit the enormous number of new graduates. Thus, it is clear why the difficult time that young graduates have had in finding a job has made headlines over the past few years.

With millions of graduates flooding the job market every year, students try to get an edge in the job market by any means. Various trends have emerged among young students, such as “the craze for graduate study,” “the craze for certificates,” “the craze for going abroad,” as well as “the craze for cosmetic surgery” (*zhengrongre/zhengxingre*). With this background in mind, it is understandable why many Chinese parents seem to be willing to sacrifice a few months’ salary to give their children an edge to compete for lucrative work in the competitive job market. Although the market for cosmetic surgery has gradually expanded since the 1980s, it

did not accelerate into its present form until the first few years of the 2000s, especially 2003 and 2004. Since 2003, after Hao Lulu was proclaimed by Chinese and international mass media as the first China's "artificial beauty," Chinese people have been bombarded by all kinds of stories related to the booming cosmetic surgery industry. During 2003- 2004, there were several important social events related to cosmetic surgery. As I have mentioned in the last chapter, Yan Yuan, a disqualified "artificial beauty," sued the organizer of a beauty pageant in June 2004. The first artificial beauty pageant was held in Beijing in December 2004. The first annual report on China's beauty economy was released in October 2004 and some astonishing figures showed that the beauty industry has become the fifth largest consumer sector in China.

What is most interesting is that, as we saw from Figure 17, there has been a striking increase of college graduates starting from the year 2003, in which the first batch of *kuozhao* students came into the job market. Coincidentally or not, the flourishing of the cosmetic surgery market and the increased flow of graduates into the job market started from the same period. Although the increasing unemployment of university graduates and the increasing popularity of cosmetic surgery among college girls may not have a direct cause-effect relation, there is indeed a linkage between the increasing pressure of graduate unemployment and the increasing attention to personal appearance and cosmetic surgery. The question raised here is this: In what ways does being good-looking bring students advantages in job hunting?

In order to understand how the pressure of finding a desirable job turns into the motivation for cosmetic surgery, we need to further examine the relation between attractive appearance and desirable job vacancies

Occupational Gender Segregation and Employment Discrimination

Although most people I interviewed criticized the valuing of people by their looks rather than by their ability, they all agreed that in China today, physical appearance is often a defining factor of recruitment. In answering my question, “how does beauty matter in job recruitment,” Zhang Lin, a 22-year-old graduating student majoring in mass communication in the Communication University of China, a woman who modified her nose shape and planned to trim her lower jawbone to make her face smaller, spoke as follows:

Yes, we should not judge a person only according to her appearance. But you know, if companies still prefer pretty, tall and thin girls, what can I do? I have to put my “studio portrait shots” (*xiezheng*) on my resume. Sometimes some companies even ask me to write my weight and height in my resume. I don’t think this is right. But this is reality! ... There are some pretty girls in my class and every year they can easily find part-time jobs because of their good appearance. I used to think that I could never be one of them. But last year, when I came back after the summer vacation, I surprisingly found that faces of two of my classmates had changed. Their eyes become bigger, faces become thinner, and noses become smaller and higher. One of them has already signed a preliminary contract with a media company, at which I also got an interview. I didn’t get the job, but she did. I feel that it’s so unfair! My academic record is much better than hers, and I am sure I performed better than her in the interview. It’s just so unfair that they chose her instead of me. The only explanation is that she is taller than me and also prettier than me with the help of the scalpel.... I don’t think that a pretty face is everything. But it definitely brings advantages. It is a key to

opening the door!

Zhang Lin echoes the belief of many students who opt for cosmetic surgery: by undergoing cosmetic surgery, an average-looking girl can become pretty; by holding beauty as capital, she can get more chances for a better future career. In describing her difficulty in finding a desirable job, she said:

I have attended more than 20 job recruitment fairs within the past six months and submitted more than 100 copies of my resume to different companies. But I'm still looking for a job....When coming to job recruitment, boys always get more opportunities than girls; and if you are a girl, you'd better have a pretty face and long legs. Don't you know there is a popular saying? "A pretty face brings fortune" (*piaoliang liandan sheng dami*)!

After complaining about the cruelty of job recruitment, Zhang Lin looked at me and said loudly: "Don't you know how beauty matters in job recruitment? Just go to a job fair and check it out!" Thus, on a cold Saturday in January 2007, I went to a job fair at the China International Exhibition Center in Beijing. I arrived in the exhibition center around ten o'clock. Although I had heard many times that job fairs for graduates could be very crowded, when I found a huge surge of job seekers in the job fair hall, I was shocked. It was extremely crowded and noisy, and people with resumes in their hands were jammed up against each other. I could hardly make a move and instead could only follow the surge. In front of the booths of some banks and IT companies, the lines of those waiting to submit resumes was daunting. Resumes piled up on the desks of the job recruitment booths. Some security guards

shouted loudly to try to keep order. The place seemed like a battlefield, and anxious job seekers seemed to throw themselves into a cutthroat job-hunting war.

I carefully looked through the qualifications and criteria on different recruitment posters, and saw that the segregation between men's and women's jobs was obvious. Many recruitment advertisements publicly specified that they sought applicants "to be male"/"to be female", or "male priority"/"female priority". Some positions like clerk, secretary, public relations, service and sales workers, duty manager, and translator usually required women, and other positions like technician, engineer, and IT service generally required men. Besides educational background and working experience, many advertisements specified gender, age, marriage status, height, and appearance. In some advertisements specifying gender, a woman's appearance and height requirements were stated; they sought applicants who were "above-average looking" (*pinmao duanzhuang*), "good-looking" (*xingxiang hao*), "an elegant manner" (*qizhijia*), and "height over 1.65 meters" (*shengao 1.65 yishang*). With regard to men, want ads seldom specified physical appearance; however, a person's height requirement was quite usual, with normally a minimum height of 1.75 meters. In addition, restrictive age conditions such as "under thirty years old" or "under forty years old" appeared in a large number of recruitment advertisements. The rigorous requirements for appearance, height, gender, and age to some extent revealed why beauty matters in job recruitment in China today.



Figure 19. Job fair at the China International Exhibition Center in Beijing, January 2007. Photo by author.

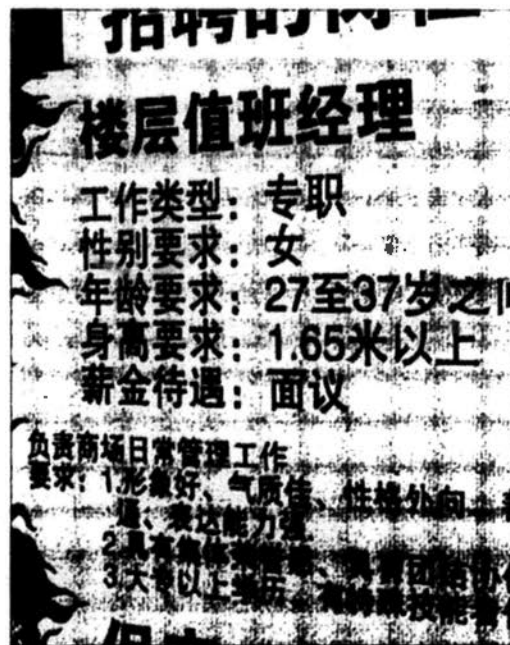


Figure 20. A want ad specifying gender, age, height and appearance of applicants in job fair in Beijing, 2007. Photo by author

Based on what I observed from the job fair, I asked some employers about prejudice against women in the recruitment process. Mr. Liang, who has been an HR manager for three different companies over the past eight years, spoke as follows:

If a man and a woman have similar qualifications, I generally prefer a man. I have no personal prejudices against women. My basic principle is to choose the best for the company. Women cannot travel alone like men. Besides, they will cause a loss to the company when they have babies. But sometimes, for some sorts of jobs such as secretary and public relation, I certainly prefer women.... And if a pretty woman and a normal-looking woman have similar qualifications, of course I choose the pretty one. That's natural! Appearance is not the only criteria. We definitely consider their ability and personality. But since they all have college degrees, why not the pretty one? Since people meet face-to-face during job interviews, of course the first good impression is very important for job interviews. Good-looking jobseekers do get extra credit.

As we can see, in the name of economic efficiency, women are likely to be hired after men (and to be fired before men as I will discuss in the next chapter), and pretty women get more advantages than ordinary-looking women. Ms. Du, another HR manager, also defended screening applicants' looks when recruiting:

We usually have higher standards for women applicants' appearance over men's because women's jobs are generally different from men's jobs. You know, while men usually work with things, women normally work with people and relationships. In many situations, especially in communications with clients, pretty women do get more advantages because of their looks.... Besides, they represent the image of the companies. Whether you admit it or not, we are living in a society in which we "judge others according to their physical appearances" (*yi mao qu ren*).

What I observed in the job fair and what Mr. Wang and Ms. Jiang said indicate two important issues in the job market: occupational gender segregation and employment discrimination based on gender, age, appearance and height. Gender segregation in occupation has been considered a barrier to prevent women from

obtaining access to a broad range of jobs and high status in jobs to the extent that their male counterparts do. With the development of the Chinese economy, while some scholars argue that women now have more options and employment opportunities (Liu 1994), others argue that women more frequently face the risk of unemployment and layoffs than men and occupational segregation by gender is growing worse (Liu 1995; Tan and Bu 1995; also see Cai and Wu 2006). Some studies have showed that despite an increase in the rate of female labor force participation in the past decade, gender segregation and discrimination in occupation has continued to be an important issue encountered by women (Cai and Wu 2006; Lin and Zhao 2000; Liu and Niu 2001; Zhao 2004). For example, based on selected sample data at three time points (1985, 1993, and 2000) from information in 2,373 questionnaires from six cities in three provinces,⁴² Cai and Wu (2006) made a longitudinal comparison of occupational gender segregation and inequality. In the abstract of the article, Cai and Wu (2006) write as follows:

From the initial stage of reform and opening-up to the outside world to the end of the twentieth century, gender differences in China widened and inequality for women worsened. Gender segregation exists in more occupational categories. The number of occupations with segregation against women is far greater than the number of occupations with segregation against men, and the degree of female segregation in white-collar occupations is higher than in blue collar occupations. (Cai and Wu 2006:37)

This argument resonates with an analysis of job advertisements in two major

⁴² These six cities are Guangzhou and Zhongshan in Guangdong province; Zhengzhou and Kaifeng in Henan province; and Jilin and Changchun in Jilin province.

newspapers in Shenzhen, which shows that gender-segregated advertisements state that men are more wanted for technical, managerial and decision making positions, while women, especially pretty young women, are more desired for the service sector. Using recruitment advertisements from the *Shenzhen Special Zone Daily* and the *Shenzhen Economic Daily*, Wang X.H. (2003) analyzed 31,312 want ads in October 1999 and 36,506 want ads in October 2002. The result shows that 41.6 percent of ads in 1999 and 41.9 percent of ads in 2002 specify gender requirement (Wang X.H. 2003: 56). Among 12,877 recruitment ads in 1999 that specify gender requirements, 64.1 percent require men, while 35.6 percent require women. Aside from having less opportunity than men in the quantity of open positions, women also have less opportunity than men in applying for higher positions. Among 63 senior-level positions, 45 vacancies require men, 71.4 percent of the total; among 2,686 middle level positions, 2,378 positions require men, 88.5 percent of the total; and among 10,128 primary level positions, 5,826 vacancies require men, 57.5 percent of the total. Among 523 want ads for the IT sector, 498 ads require men. Similarly, for job positions related to mechanics, electricity, architecture, environment protection, post and communication, irrigation works, and electric power, more than 95 percent of ads specify gender requirement for men. As to the positions like secretary, service personnel, translator, public relation, beautician and hairdresser, more than 80 percent of recruitments require women.

These data clearly shows that the labor market has segmented into men's jobs

and women's jobs. Men are more concentrated in occupations such as technicians and managers. Women are more concentrated in sales, clerical and personal services. Furthermore, Wang points out that for positions available to women, job want ads specify more requirements in age and appearance. Among positions open to women, 88.3 percent have age limitations under 30 years old, while among positions available to men, 44.3 percent require applicants to be younger than 30 years old. Moreover, 102 recruitment ads specify requirements for women based on physical looks, while only 15 want ads demand appearance for men (Wang X.H.2003: 57). Wang's study clearly shows that female job applicants, especially young students, have to face more prejudice and discrimination during their job-hunting processes. Female applicants already have less opportunity than their male counterparts have. Within this lesser opportunity, when height and weight count, and age and appearance matter, it is understandable why more and more Chinese women regard beauty as a capital in the brutal recruitment competition.

Female job applicants are often openly disqualified based on physical characteristics of looks and height. For example, when the government-run Nanchang Institute of Aeronautical Technology recruited flight attendants for the national airlines, applicants were asked to parade on stage in bikinis (Kahn 2004). It is more striking that a vocational school organized more than 30 of its final year students, mostly girls, to consult cosmetic surgeons before they graduated. As reported by He and Liu (2007), Wuhan Changjiang Vocational School in Wuhan,

Hubei Province, organized 30 female students to go to Wuhan Zhonghan Cosmetic Surgery Hospital for consultation of cosmetic surgery in December 2007. These students, described as tall and good looking, were from the same aviation service class in this vocational school. In order to get an edge in the upcoming year's recruitment of cabin attendants in Chinese airlines, 30 female students, 17 to 18 years old, were organized to have consultation about cosmetic surgery. According to Nie Fudong, the assistant president of the school, for students from the aviation service class, cosmetic surgery was a part of the "Body Shaping Plan" which aimed to enhance students' inner manner and outer appearance (He and Liu 2007). Nie said that school had regular body shaping courses for these students, which included at least three hours' physical exercise every day to build and maintain a good body shape. Weight control was also very strict for these students. Students were only allowed to eat an apple for dinner and were required to record their weight every two days. When expressing his opinion about students undergoing cosmetic surgery, Nie said, "Students are eager to be more perfect through (surgically) correcting some minor flaws on the body. I think it is quite normal" (He and Liu 2007). Although it might be a special case, the fact that cosmetic surgery became a "routine" of the "Body Shaping Plan" in Wuhan Changjiang Vocational School to some extent exemplifies that the existing appearance discrimination in job recruitment has been institutionalized.

This gender and appearance discrimination has happened not only in

occupations in which employees “should” have attractive appearances, such as actresses, models, stewardesses and PR personnel, but even in some positions that normally have no relevance to physical appearance, such as civil servants in government institutions. According to a survey conducted by the China University of Political Science and Law in 2007, which covered 3,454 people in 10 cities,⁴³ different kinds of discrimination in employment are widespread in China. As reported by *Xinhua News Agency* (2007):

About 86 percent of the respondents said discrimination exists in the country’s employment market with 51 percent labeling it “serious.”...The survey showed that discrimination is common in government departments, with gender, registered residence origin, height and appearance being the four criteria most frequently cited....“Job discriminations exists not only in companies but also in government departments,” said survey leader Cai Dingjian, a professor from the China University of Political Science and Law.

It has been widely reported that some women were denied government jobs because they did not meet an unwritten code of fitness—height, weight and looks (Wang L. 2007). For example, according to Kahn (2004), Chen Hong Ping, a 35-year-old woman at 1.56 meters, was denied a government job because of the height restriction. According to the report, when the city recruited its legal affairs officials, Chen scored high on the entrance exam, impressed her interviewers and made the short list of 80 finalists which was whittled down from more than 600 applicants. However, after Chen was called in for a second physical checkup, she

⁴³ These ten cities include Beijing, Guangzhou, Nanjing, Wuhan, Shenyang, Xian, Zhengzhou, Yinchuan and Qingdao.

received the news that she could not get the job because she was 2 centimeter shorter than the unpublished restriction of height, that is, 1.58 meters. “They are trying to attract the tallest or the prettiest people, because it makes them (the government departments) look good,” said Chen. “But it is completely random and unfair to everyone else” (Kahn 2004). Chen was certainly not the only one who was denied a government job because of rigorous requirements for height and physique. Later she found that 19 other people, who were also finalists for the job vacancy, were also turned down because of the height restriction. Kahn also reports that when the Hunan government recruited civil servants in 2004, one of the criteria for women was “a pair of symmetrical breasts.” The requirement was dropped only after a public outcry (Kahn 2004). As we can see from these cases, although height and breasts have nothing to do with job seekers’ ability to perform the tasks in question, when height counts and a pair of symmetrical breasts matter in the job recruitment of government servants, the obsession with physical looks has been institutionalized. It was reported that Chen persuaded five other applicants who also encountered height restriction to join her to sue the local government (Kahn 2004). Facing the institutionalized occupational discrimination based on physique, however, some people may turn into cosmetic surgery in order to measure up to written or unwritten requirements of physical appearance, such as Ms. Zhang, who decided to undergo cosmetic surgery as “a lifelong investment” after being turned down from her application of civil servant. As reported by Rong and Wen (2003):

A 22-year-old MBA major in Shanghai, who wants to be identified as just Ms. Zhang, was turned down for a vacancy in the civil service early this year, although she was professionally qualified. "I failed to get the job only because of my looks, or rather my height, to be exact," laments the 158-centimetre tall young woman. That prompted her to take over where nature left off. She will go under the knife, shortly to reshape her body and raise the bridge of her nose. "This is a lifelong investment, which will help me get a better job, and an ideal husband," she says.

Aside from obvious discrimination and prejudice written on the posters, some companies may hide their prejudices in seemingly rational requirements. Hidden prejudice and discrimination in gender, appearance, height and weight against women are harder to avoid. As Yang Chen, a final-year female student at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said:

There are various forms of prejudice. They (companies) do not need to write down their preference on the posters. The job recruitment advertisements do not reflect the truth at all. Under the pressure of public opinion, fewer and fewer companies dare to say that they won't hire girls. But they do it anyway. Of course they would never acknowledge it....At the start, they even put more girls in the first round interview. But in the second round interview, they only pick up boys and a few of the tallest and prettiest girls.

As Yang expressed, even some companies that do not have these strict requirements on their posters, and even if during the interview they seldom openly bring up these concerns, they still practice discrimination and prejudice against women. This hidden prejudice and discrimination is more difficult to deal with. Because there are few relevant laws that ban appearance discrimination, it is very difficult for women who meet appearance prejudice to protect their own rights. As

long as physical appearance is a defining factor in job recruitment, some women would opt for cosmetic surgery to give them an edge in the increasingly brutal job market. This has fuelled a boom of cosmetic surgery in recent years in China.

Gender Expectations, Appearance and Marriage

With the enormous surplus of labor floating in China, there is no doubt that the competition for a desirable job is brutal. However, although both men and women face fierce competition in the job market, women encounter more restrictions and discrimination based on physical appearance than men do. Fundamentally, the obsession with female beauty is rooted in gender roles for women. Traditionally in Chinese culture, men were emphasized in terms of professional achievement outward, while women were encouraged to look inward and emphasized in terms of physical appearance and virtue rather than ability, as in the saying—“a virtuous woman is one without talents” (*nü zi wu cai bian shi de*). Although dramatic changes in gender role have occurred in recent decades in China, some traditional gender norms still remain remarkably stable. For example, a women’s appearance is still more emphasized than her ability or talent; as another famous Chinese saying states, “a talented man matches with a beautiful woman” (*langcai nümao*). The obsession with female beauty exists not only in the workplace but also in marriage.

The popularity of this attitude of “a talented man matches with a beautiful woman” was revealed by an online survey about Chinese women and men’s

attitudes toward gender roles, which was conducted by the Women's Studies Center of Peking University in 2004. Altogether 2,493 participants responded on the internet, resulting in 896 valid returns, among which 71.7 percent were female respondents and 28.3 percent male participants. Almost 75 percent participants acquired college and university education. According to Women's Studies Center of Peking University (2005: 72), the survey showed that with regard to the gender expectations of men, the traditional ideas, such as "men are responsible for works, whereas women are responsible for domestic works" (*nan zhu wai nü zhu nei*), are still powerful. While 63.4 percent of male respondents demanded that they themselves be successful in their careers, less than half (45.8 percent) of females were concerned about professional success (Women's Studies Center of Peking University 2005: 72). This indicates that female respondents feel less social pressure to be successful in careers than men do.

The survey also showed that although 76.2 percent of female respondents are confident about their professional abilities, 40.5 percent still agree with the popular saying, "marrying a prosperous man is more practical than working hard" (*gan de hao buru jia de hao*) (Women's Studies Center of Peking University 2005: 71). The survey also showed that the majority of respondents of both genders (87.8 percent of male respondents and 75 percent of female respondents) consider beauty an advantage for a professional woman (Women's Studies Center of Peking University 2005: 72). Furthermore, the survey showed that, when choosing a marriage partner,

72.4 percent of male respondents prioritize the good-looking appearance of a woman as one of most important standards, while less than half (45.8 percent) of female respondents think appearance is important (Women's Studies Center of Peking University 2005: 72). In general, the survey indicates that, in the eyes of some Chinese people, *lang cai nü mao*— a talented man matches a beautiful woman, is still an influential gender expectations for men and women. Not surprisingly, this gender norm is exemplified in the marriage market in China.

One day my eyes were captured by an anecdotal report: a Chinese millionaire spent 210,000 yuan to publish a full-page advertisement in a Shanghai newspaper to look for a wife. This millionaire also bought 5,000 copies of the newspaper to circulate them in different universities in Shanghai (*Oriental Morning Post* 2005). This full-page advertisement was published on the ninth page of *Xinmin Evening News* on November 22, 2005. Following a romantic poem entitled “Looking for the Ripple of Love,” the advertisement describes a successful businessman from Shenzhen as being 1.77 meters tall, nearly 40 years old, and having an annual income of at least 10 million yuan. According to the advertisement, the millionaire had ended an unsuccessful marriage and lived with his 9-year-old son in Shenzhen. He put forward his requirement of his ideal wife in the advertisement as follows:

If you are a woman aged around 26, as beautiful and pure as a water lily, gentle and virtuous, fair-skinned and slim, above 1.65 meters in height, having received formal college education and intelligent and smart, holding traditional virtues and still a virgin, possessing traditional family values, and willing to stay home after marriage (a teacher or a doctor is

desirable, but university student is also welcome), will you be my soul mate? I look forward to meeting you! (*Xinmin Evening News* 2005)

According to the advertisement, potential candidates were required to send one close-up photo and two full front photos along with their resumes. The millionaire also promised that anyone helping him find his future wife would be rewarded with an overseas trip.

This advertisement is certainly not unique. In the past few years, similar advertisements appeared in various newspapers in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chongqing, Wuhan, Kunming and other big cities in China. Although the male protagonists are different, it is the same story: a wealthy middle-aged businessman (usually divorced) advertises in public for a wife; more precisely, this ideal sweetheart should be young, beautiful, slim, tall, well-educated (although, one presumes, not better educated than the man), and of course, a virgin. As the above advertisement describes, she should be “as beautiful and pure as a water lily.”

Although it is debatable whether these millionaires really expect to find their soul mates in such an amusing way, or simply want to flaunt their fortunes, the fact is that this kind of advertisement always gets hundred and even thousand response from women in a short period, as reported. There are only a few millionaires who can spend millions of yuan to advertise this way for a wife; however, any Chinese newspaper with “marriage seeking” (*zhenghun guanggao*) notices gives the same message: women are judged by their “beauty” (*mei*) and “virtue” (*de*), while men are

judged by their “wealth” (*fu*) and “ability” (*cai*). As has been said, the principle of “a talented man matches a beautiful woman” has never been out of date.

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Figure 21. Marriage-seeking advertisements illustrating that “a talented man matches a beautiful woman.”

It is thus easy to understand that to gain an edge in the job market is not the only reason why some women seek cosmetic surgery. It is done for marriage as well. In 2005, ePanel Marketing Research & Consulting Company, a branch of China Central Television (CCTV), and Sina, one of the most well-known Chinese portal sites, conducted a joint survey on Chinese women’s attitudes towards cosmetic surgery. A total of 5,254 people participated in the survey and the result was released at *Oriental Horizon*, a TV programme of CCTV, on October 20, 2005. Among these participations, when answering the question “without considering economic conditions, would you consider to undergo cosmetic surgery,” 35 percent of respondents said yes. Among participants who said yes, when answering the question “if you consider undergoing cosmetic surgery, what is your main purpose?”

30 percent of people chose “to get compliments from others and make myself happy,” 28 percent of people chose “to make a good marriage,” 22 percent of people chose “to find a good job,” 15 percent people chose “to fix problems of physical appearance,” and 5 percent people chose other reasons (*Oriental Horizon* 2005). Thus almost one third of survey participations would consider cosmetic surgery for marriage purposes.

One of my informants, Gao Lin, is one of these women who opt for cosmetic surgery for marriage reasons. She was an office lady who worked in a big IT company as a manager. She was 33 years old at the time I met her in a yoga course at a fitness center. When Ms. Gao heard that I was doing research on cosmetic surgery, she became excited, and asked me whether I could introduce a good surgeon to her because she was considering undergoing some operations. I was surprised because I did not expect that she would consider undergoing cosmetic surgery. My impression was that although Ms. Gao was not pretty, she seemed very confident as a career woman with a good future. “Yes, I am confident in my work. I may have a good career ahead of me. But so what? Look at me. I am 33 years old and I am still single,” Ms. Gao said. She said that she had fallen in love with two men during the past eight years, but neither of these relationships ended happily. These relationships festered in her mind. She said:

They both got married with the same type of “little woman” (*xiao nüren*), the girls who are “very feminine” (*hennüren*) with a small face, big eyes, white skin, and straight long hair...I am certainly not that type of girly

woman. I am the kind of sporty girl who would rather play basketball than putting on make-up for an hour. My ex-boyfriend always complained that I lacked “femininity” (*nürenwei*) physically and emotionally. It hurts!

Ms. Gao said that when she reached the age of thirty, her parents could not tolerate that she was still single and started to set up “blind dates” (*xiangqin*) for her. At the beginning, she refused because she thought it was very old fashioned. Nonetheless, under the pressure of being over thirty, she agreed to go on blind dates set up by her parents and friends. However, these too did not work out. Being tired of endless blind dates and anxious to find a suitable spouse, Ms. Gao thought that she should make some changes in her life: to undergo an operation to cut off part of her lower jawbone to make her face look smaller and more feminine. She described her decision as follows:

When I was young, it was cool to be labeled as a woman who had “a strong personality” (*gexing*). Now that I am over thirty, if someone says that I have *gexing*, I know it’s just a polite way of saying that I am not pretty...My close friends always say that if I want to have a happy ending for a relationship, I should dress and act in a softer and more feminine way. Probably they are right. Frankly speaking, I don’t even know how to flirt with a man. My personality is too strong, and so is my appearance. My facial contour is too rigid, which makes me less feminine....I can work on my temperament to “be more feminine” (*geng you nürenwei*). But as for my looks, I can do nothing except “undergoing the scalpel” (*dongdaozi*). I know that I should be proud of the way I look, but I just can’t. My face is short and wide, a kind of squarish shape. I have heard that I can get an operation to have a thinner and smoother face....I had believed that a woman’s ability should be more important than her beauty. But maybe it’s time for a change. Anyway, “a woman dolls herself up for the man who loves her” (*nü wei yue ji zhe rong*).

As we can see, even though she is successful in her career, Ms. Gao still cannot escape from the existing gender norms in her desire to be more feminine. Ms. Gao's explanation clearly illustrates how gender expectations of feminine beauty may play a large part in women's perceptions of their body images and their choice to undergo cosmetic surgery. The common saying expressed by Ms. Gao that "a woman dolls herself up for the man who loves her" shows that "the male gaze" towards feminine beauty still remains surprisingly stable in China today, not just in the employment market but especially in the marriage market. Young women cannot escape this, whether they undergo cosmetic surgery or not.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates the impact of economic transition and social transformation on women's bodily practice of cosmetic surgery and the role of women's body images in the embodiment of gender norms, cultural ideology and social inequality. In China today, cosmetic surgery is widely viewed as an investment to gain beauty capital for one's future life in a rapidly changing and fiercely competitive society. To some extent, we should acknowledge women's agency in their body alterations through cosmetic surgery: they themselves are deciding to do this, after all. However, these women's choices to surgically modify their bodies are clearly very much constrained. These women "freely" make decisions under circumstance that they cannot choose, to fit standards they cannot choose. The personal decision to undergo

cosmetic surgery is strongly shaped by the changing economic and social landscape of China today. The reform of the job allocation system and the expansion of recruitment of college students in higher education have produced high pressure among young people, especially women, to find desirable jobs in a tight job market. With an enormous surplus of labor in China, the competition for a desirable job is brutal.

Although both men and women face fierce competition in the job market, women encounter more restrictions and discrimination based on physical appearance than men do. As we have seen, women can hardly escape from the existing traditional gender expectation in which feminine beauty is highly valued in marriage and the workplace. That is to say, the obsession with female beauty in the workplace and marriage is rooted in traditional gender norms which highly value women's beauty rather than their ability. Although there have been rapid changes in gender roles in China, some traditional cultural norms, such as the emphasis on men's professional achievement and women's physical appearance and virtue rather than ability remain surprisingly stable. This gender expectation is exemplified through "the male gaze" towards female beauty and femininity in the workplace and in the marriage market. The existing gender stereotype based on appearance in employment and marriage has pushed more and more women into having cosmetic surgery.

People sometimes assume that cosmetic surgery is a privilege of movie stars,

the elite and the rich. However, as we have seen from this chapter, in today's China, women who opt for cosmetic surgery are mostly young students and office ladies. The dramatic social transitions associated with rapid economic reform have produced immense social uncertainty. This instability, along with the scarcity of resources and insecurity about the future, cause many women to feel particularly anxious about their body images. This body anxiety is produced by social uncertainty in a "transition era." This social instability pushes people to grasp every opportunity, and the idea that good looks hold the key to opportunity stimulates the growth of cosmetic surgery in recent decades in China.

Chapter Five

From the “Iron Rice Bowl” to the “Youth Rice Bowl”: The Anxious Body in Social Transition

Although women in general are primary consumers of beauty though cosmetic surgery, we should never assume that they are a singular group. This chapter highlights the diversity of motivations for undergoing cosmetic surgery of women positioned differently in power-laden social hierarchies. Using the ethnographic cases of a laid-off woman, an upper-middle-class woman, and a rural migrant woman in an urban setting, I examine how the reform of economic and social structures in post-Mao China has affected the body practices of women situated in different social groups. I intend to show that women’s bodies have become intensely contested sites that not only reveal gender assumptions and identities, but also reflect the deployment of social structures with regard to age, class, education, and urban/rural residence. This chapter seeks to depict the socio-cultural changes in contemporary China by examining different types of women who have undergone cosmetic surgery.

From the “Iron Rice Bowl” to the “Youth Rice Bowl”

Since China launched its historic process of economic reform and opening up in the later 1970s, women have become vulnerable to the impact of economic restructuring

on employment. In the preceding chapter, I argued that the fierce competition in the job market is one of the most important reasons for young girls to use cosmetic surgery to improve their appearance in order to get an edge in obtaining employment. Actually, from the middle 1990s, not only have college graduates no longer been guaranteed jobs due to the reform of higher education, but also workers employed in state-owned enterprises have also been faced with layoffs because of the reform of state-owned enterprises. Tens of thousands of middle-aged laid-off workers, especially female workers, have needed to find new jobs. Viewed as more expendable workers, women were more likely to be discharged from state-owned factories. In the past decade, the transition of China's state-owned enterprises has thrown millions of middle-aged women into the highly competitive job market, in which they have been in a disadvantaged position. For some middle-aged women, cosmetic surgery has become a way of keeping their appearance young and thus keeping them competitive in seeking jobs.

One day I asked Ms. Xu, a consultant of a private cosmetic surgery clinic, whether she could introduce me to some of her clients for interviews. She said that it was difficult to arrange for me to meet her clients because they would think that she had invaded their privacy. She said that instead she could introduce me to some employees of the clinic, who had also undergone procedures. I noticed that most nurses and clerks working in that clinic were young and pretty women in their twenties, but there were also a few middle-aged women. As I was curious about how

these middle-aged women could survive in this business, which is mainly concerned about youth and beauty, I asked Ms. Xu whether I could meet any middle-aged woman who had undergone cosmetic surgery. In this way, I met Ms. Zhang, a 47-year-old woman who worked in the clinic as a receptionist and handywoman. Ms. Zhang looked much younger than her actual age. I discovered that she had been a worker in a state-owned factory since 1984. But in early 1999, with the reform of state-owned enterprises, after she had worked there for over 15 year, she was laid off.

As she said:

It was such a blow. I never thought that I could lose my job. How could that happen? I was totally destroyed at that time. Losing a job like that basically means losing everything....I divorced my husband two years before I was laid off. My son was in primary school. I got nothing from the factory. I only received 280 yuan every month in unemployment benefits from the government. In 1984, my first salary was 48 yuan a month, which was a significant income for me. But in 1999, 280 yuan meant nothing. I was under tremendous financial pressure.

To fully explicate what Ms. Zhang is saying, let me discuss the background of the “reform of state-owned enterprise” (*gouyou qiye gaige*) and the policy of “layoffs” (*xiagang*) in China’s economic reform. State-owned enterprises (SOEs), once the backbone of China’s economy, became a drag on China’s financial sources in the 1990s⁴⁴. During the competition with emerging private enterprises, the majority of SOEs lost out because of bad management and outdated technologies. In

⁴⁴ In 1990, 27.6 percent of SOEs were losing money; this figure increased to 41.9 percent in 1999. The average debt-to-asset ratio of these firms was 47.2 percent in 1990, increasing to 68.8 percent in 1998 (Smyth, Zhai and Wang 2001: 42; also see Hu 2000: 644).

order to survive, many SOEs had to cut down their surplus workforce. Although SOE's reform has been an ongoing process since the 1980s, this process entered a new phase in the mid-1990s, when the Chinese government has pursued deeper enterprise reform. Especially since the late 1990s, the restructuring and downsizing of SOEs has resulted in massive layoffs of redundant workers.⁴⁵

Between 1993 and 2001, 43 million urban employees were laid off, affecting roughly a quarter of the urban labor force (Dong 2003). Of the total layoffs, 79 percent were from SOEs and 19 percent from urban collective-owned units.⁴⁶ To alleviate the impact of mass unemployment, the Chinese government adopted a strategy known, as we have discussed, as "layoffs" (*xiagang*). Technically and terminologically, layoffs are different from unemployment, in that those who have been laid off can maintain an employment relationship with their enterprise for two to three years and receive a small living allowance of up to 200-300 yuan per month from Re-employment Service Centers.⁴⁷ Although laid-off workers receive little,

⁴⁵ According to Hung (2003: 205), the number of laid-off workers in China swelled from 5.64 million at the end of 1995 to 9.37 million in late 1999. In 2000, a total of 5.12 million workers were laid off during the year. As some 5.47 million ended their official laid-off status either because they were reemployed or because their layoff period had expired, at year's end, the total number of laid-off workers stood at about 9.11 million (National Bureau of Statistics of China 1996: 409; 2000: 413; 2001: 403).

⁴⁶ Enterprises affiliated with a district government under a municipality or a county are regarded as large urban collective-owned units.

⁴⁷ In June 1998, the National Ministry of Labor required all regions to set up re-employment service centers. The re-employment service centers grant unemployment benefits from the government, and organize job training and launch employment programs for laid-off workers. The service center provides aid for laid-off workers for a maximum of 3 years. In 2003, the five-year-old Beijing re-employment service center ceased operation. All laid-off workers who were not re-employed entered into the free labor force market.

officially they are not considered to be “unemployed” (*shiye*). Therefore, although the Statistical Yearbook of China suggests that in the past a few years, the urban unemployment rate has remained consistently below or around four percent,⁴⁸ other sources suggests that the urban unemployment rate in China is higher. For example, according to the World Bank website, the rate of urban unemployment (registered unemployment and layoffs combined) in China is estimated to be about 8 percent (World Bank 2003).

Knight and Xue (2006) have argued that the China’s official definition of unemployment is too restrictive, and using International Labour Organization definitions results in an estimated urban unemployment rate of 11.5 percent in 2000 (Soo 2008). Some scholars have argued that laid-off workers become “the hidden unemployed” (Hung 2003: 205; Wong and Ngok 1997). Therefore, tens of millions of workers who once could count on lifetime employment in SOEs as an “iron rice bowl” (*tie fanwan*) were released into an uncertain and challenging job market. Under a system in which a wide range of social welfare benefits came with a job, it is understandable why, after being laid off, Ms. Zhang said that “losing a job basically means losing everything.” Generally speaking, most female laid-off workers are middle-aged women who have little education and few marketable skills.

⁴⁸ Officially, China only counts as unemployed those who have registered for unemployment benefits with their local governments in urban areas. According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, China’s official unemployment rate has remained between two to five percent for the last two decades. Even in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the effects of economic reform and SOEs restructuring were at their most intense, the rate barely exceeded four percent.

This also causes female laid-off workers to experience more difficulty re-entering the labor market than male workers.

Ms. Zhang described how difficult it was for her to find a new job as a “laid-off female worker” (*xiagang nügong*):

I was laid off when I was 40 years old. There is no “iron rice bowl” any more. After that, I struggled to find other jobs. It was too hard to find a job for a woman like me. Women are the first ones kicked out and the last ones re-employed. No one wants to hire a divorced middle-aged laid-off female worker. They always hire “youthful pretty faces” (*nianqing piaoliang de liandan*). I have been working in different kinds of jobs since being laid off. I even worked as a garbage cleaner, which I would feel embarrassed about previously. Although the job was dirty and tiring, I had to take it. After all the losses, I needed to grasp every job I could find.

“Women are the first ones kicked out and the last ones re-employed” reveals an important issue: A high proportion of redundant workers laid off from SOEs are female workers, and it is more difficult for laid-off women to find jobs than men. The Chinese Ministry of Labor reported that, in 1997 women accounted for only 39 percent of China’s work force, but nearly 61 percent of its laid-off workers. In addition, as of 1998, compared with fewer than 50 percent of their male counterparts, 75 percent of laid-off women were still unemployed after one year (Rosenthal 1998). Other research on laid-off workers also indicates that laid-off women suffer more difficulty in finding employment opportunities (Appleton, Knight, Song, and Xia: 2001). I discussed last chapter the occupational gender segregation in China’s labor market and the discrimination against women in the job recruitment process based

on gender, appearance and height. This segregation and discrimination also appears when female laid-off workers reenter the job market. Before being laid-off, most of these women were unskilled workers in SOEs. In the re-employment market, with less education and low-level technical skills, most laid-off women enter the service sector to work in housekeeping, cleaning, and caring for the elderly, and some also enter the beauty service industry, including hairdressing and working in beauty salons, fitness centers, cosmetic surgery clinics and hospitals. Moreover, age discrimination has become an increasing problem for both female and male laid-off workers, especially for women, as reported by the *New York Times* in an eye-catching headline: "In China, 35+ Female = Unemployable" (Rosenthal 1998).

I asked Ms. Zhang how she could afford expensive operations if her financial situation was very bad and how she had found a job in this cosmetic surgery clinic. She said that in 2004, after being introduced by one of her relatives, she started to work in this clinic as a part-time cleaner. In the beginning, she never thought that she would undergo any operation. But one day, she heard two nurses talking about how the boss of the clinic would offer free cosmetic surgery to several middle-aged women for business promotion. So she went to see the boss and asked whether she could be one of those women. Ms. Zhang described the conversation as follows:

I was not ugly, but I definitely looked older than my actual age due to the hard work I had been through. I thought that if I could get free operations to make myself younger, I might get more chances to find a better job. I thought it might be impossible for me to receive these operations, but I desperately grasped at the chance. Surprisingly, the boss said that even

though I was not good-looking, I had “proportionate facial features” (*wuguan duanzheng*),⁴⁹ so I had the potential to look much better through some facial operations. Some days later, the boss agreed to offer me free operations, including a face lift, a nose job, eye bag removal, and chin implants. In return, the clinic can freely use all of my before-and-after operation pictures for their business promotion.

As we can see here, the severe financial difficulty after being laid off from the factory and the hope of reentering the job market are the overwhelming factors pushing Ms. Zhang to undergo the free surgery. She described her fear:

Of course I was scared to have surgery. I knew something could go wrong. I even had nightmares about it. But it was the last opportunity I had. The surgery was free! How could I refuse? The competition to find a job is so brutal for a middle-aged woman like me. In order to get a younger look, of course I was willing to take any risk.... In the first week after the operation, my face swelled up like a monster's. I was so terrified! When they finally took off the bandages, I was so relieved.

The painful and terrifying operations eventually brought a reward. After undergoing a series of operations, Ms. Zhang got the opportunity to work in the clinic full time with a stable income of around 800 yuan per month. She added:

Because the effect of my operations was good, the boss decided that I should work in this clinic full time. Aside from doing some cleaning jobs and assistant jobs in reception, sometimes when some clients, especially middle-aged women, hesitate about operations or want to see real people who have undergone surgery, I show up in person to show the effects of operations...Although I am just a bottle washer, I need to put on make-up every day to keep my image looking good.

From the above description, we can see that on the one hand, Ms. Zhang's

⁴⁹ *Wuguan* refers to the five features of the face, including the ears, eyes, eyebrows, nose and mouth. The term *wuguan duanzheng* is used to describe people having proportionate facial features.

aging body is a target of the booming cosmetic surgery market, and on the other hand, by using her body as the object of free surgery, her rejuvenated body comes to serve as a live advertisement for the promotion of the market. In this process, her rejuvenated body is not only feminized and sexualized, but also commodified.

Although her primary motivation was job seeking, as a divorced middle-aged single mother, Ms. Zhang also hoped that a young appearance could give her an opportunity to find a nice husband. She spoke as follows:

My son is in a high school now. If he is going to a college in a few years, how can I afford the expensive tuition fee! It is too scary to think about. Don't you know how hard life is for a middle-aged single mother like me? I really want to have a shoulder to lean on.

I asked her how other people, especially her previous colleagues who were also laid off from the factory, judged her surgery experience, and how she felt about her new body. She described her satisfaction and also other people's approval of her new look and new job. However, she continuously expressed her anxiety of the possibility of losing her job once again:

Everyone said that I looked much younger than I used to. Of course I am happy with it. But what is more important for me is that I could work in the clinic to make a living. It means everything to me! Although the pay isn't much, compared with my previous working sisters who were also laid off from the factory, my situation is not the worst. Some of them are still struggling to find jobs though the chances become less and less. They envy my job and also the younger look I have.... Yes, I have a job now. But just looking at those pretty and youthful girls around me, I am so scared that I may lose my job again. After all, in this business, women are eating "youth rice bowl" (*qingchunfan*).

The expression “in this business, women are eating the “youth rice bowl”” sharply reveals the awkward situation of middle-aged women in the service sector in general and the beauty industry in particular, where the work regime highly values the youth and beauty of female workers. Ms. Zhang is definitely not the only one who was laid off from SOEs and then underwent cosmetic surgery in order to get a share of the “youth rice bowl.” As reported by Ding (2007), Shi Meihong, a 40-year-old divorced woman who had four years of experience as a nude model, also decided to undergo cosmetic surgery when faced with more and more pressure created by younger and prettier nude models around her.

Shi had worked for an extended period as a packaging designer in a factory. After she was laid off from the factory, she struggled to find other jobs. Although she found work in different companies, none of these jobs lasted long. In August 2004, Shi happened to see a poster recruiting nude models in an arts college in Nanjing. According to the requirements, potential candidates for this job should be under 35 years old. Although she was already 36, Shi still went to the interview and got the job. The basic salary of the job was only 450 yuan per month, but she could get 50-55 yuan as allowance for each class. In order to earn more money, Shi tried to find as many classes as possible to model for, and was able to earn 3000 yuan a month. However, although she could feed herself as a nude model, Shi encountered embarrassment and sexual harassment during her work. To avoid discrimination and prejudice, Shi did not tell any of her friends her occupation as a nude model. After

working as a nude model four years, Shi gradually came to feel great stress, especially when facing younger models around her. “I am a 40-year-old woman, I do not have a husband to depend on, and I also do not have any specialty. If I lose this job, how can I survive?” said Shi (Ding 2007). The worry over losing her job and her lack of confidence drove Shi to a cosmetic surgery hospital in Nanjing to seek rhinoplasty and blepharoplasty procedures. Shi told her surgeon, “To be honest, I am too old to be a nude model. I really hope that I will look younger after operations, and then I can work a few years longer.” After she made up her mind, Shi asked for three months leave from the arts college for surgery and recovery. “I hope that after undergoing cosmetic surgery, I could work better,” said Shi (Ding 2007).

From the case of Ms. Zhang and Ms. Shi, we have seen how the shift of work pattern from eating the “iron rice bowl” to the “youth rice bowl” has involved a process which rejuvenizes, feminizes and sexualizes women’s bodies in the workplace. The phenomenon of eating the “youth rice bowl” has been identified as a new trend of gendered employment pattern in China’s new service work regime (Hanser 2005, 2008; Wang Z. 2003; Zhang Z. 2001). As pointed out by Zhang Z. (2001), the “youth rice bowl” refers to a trend in which a range of highly paid new urban positions have opened up almost exclusively for young females, including jobs such as bilingual secretary, public relations girl, and fashion model. Youth and beauty are the foremost, if not the only, prerequisites for obtaining such lucrative positions, where they often serve as advertising fixtures with sexual appeal (Zhang Z.

2001: 132). In her study of changes in Chinese women's employment in the urban setting, Wang Z. (2003) also describes the phenomenon:

Booming service, commercial and entertainment industries post numerous age, gender, and, often, height-specific advertisements seeking women under age 25 and above 165 centimeters in height. Stylish, elegant, or sexy young "Misses" (*xiaojie*) are displayed in remodeled or newly built "modern" hotels, restaurants, department stores, travel service, night clubs, dance halls, and so on. As older state industries lay off women workers over 35, these 'modern' young Misses, many with no particular education or technical skills, are entering the rising industries (mostly in the private sector, some with foreign investment) where their youth and beauty provide a ticket to incomes several times higher than those of their older sisters. (169-170)

The emergence of this new trend of gendered employment has been triggered by the explosive growth of light industry and the service sector in the process of the reconfiguration of China's industry structure. In past two decades, in contrast to the downsizing of the state-owned manufacturing sector, China's service sector and light industry have experienced rapid expansion and created millions of jobs which particularly attract female labor. As workers in the service sector usually have direct contact with customers, the new gendered service work regime places a special emphasis on youth and beauty of workers as a sexual appeal to customers, especially male customers. Therefore, replacing the "iron rice bowl" of declining industry is the "youth rice bowl" in the rising service sector. While young women have been channeled to convert their youth and beauty into potentially lucrative careers to fill their rice bowls, middle-aged women like Zhang and Shi have lost their "iron rice

bowl” and have struggled to eat the “youth rice bowl” through surgically rejuvenating their bodies.

The Rise of China’s Middle Class

Compared with laid-off female workers, another group of middle-aged women, those who are wealthy, is definitely concerned more about body image. With the rise of disposable income and fear of aging, some wealthy middle-aged women are willing to endure expensive procedures to look younger. Ms. Jiang, a woman in her later 40s, represents this type of women. Despite the fact that they both have undergone cosmetic surgery in middle age, Ms. Jiang’s story is totally different from Ms. Zhang’s. Introduced to me by a friend, I met Ms. Jiang in a coffee bar on a Sunday afternoon. At first glance, I got the impression that Ms. Jiang was a charismatic career woman. She wore a stylish embroidered sweater over an ivory-white silk shirt. Her make-up was light and fine. Her well-cut short hair was dark brown, curly and permed. Her membership in the upper-middle class was loudly proclaimed by an eye-catching monogram Louis Vuitton purse she carried and a Cartier watch she wore. While her husband worked with an information technology company as a top manager, Ms. Jiang was a senior market director of an advertising company. Unlike other women, who normally would try to deny that they have undergone cosmetic surgery, Ms. Jiang was open to talking about her surgery as well as her successful career. Ms. Jiang’s story exemplifies the emergence

of the Chinese middle class in the 1990s -2000s, as well as a new cultural identity based on body culture. Her story also shows how changes in marriage and sexual life also influence women's perceptions of body images and practices of cosmetic surgery. Let me describe her story at more length.

Ms. Jiang majored in Chinese literature at Beijing Normal University in the early 1980s. Upon graduation, she became a journalist at an official newspaper office. After spending several years there, she felt bored. The year 1993 was a turning point of her life. Around that time, a surge of civil servants in state organs left their secure work units and "jumped into the sea of commerce" (*xiahai jingshang*).⁵⁰ One day, one of her friends who had set up an advertising company asked her to join his company. Initially Ms. Jiang refused. "Things were in transition at that time, but I wasn't very clear as to what was happening," said Ms. Jiang. However, after three months, she made up her mind to quit her job and join the company. Ms. Jiang said:

When I decided to resign from the newspaper office, I had a big fight with my husband and my parents. At that time, giving up an "iron rice bowl" in a newspaper office and "jumping into the sea of commerce" was really a risk. The job in an official newspaper office was enviable. After I resigned, I lost my pension and everything. I was nervous for a couple months because I was not sure of the future. Fortunately, when I worked in the official newspaper office, I had built up extensive social networks. By using those former networks, I developed several important major clients. Therefore, although the company had a hard time at the beginning, the business was soon on the right track.

⁵⁰ The term *xiahai* refers to giving up a stable profession and jumping on the bandwagon of money makers. *Hai* means sea or ocean which refers to the sea of economic opportunities.

What Ms. Jiang described above indicates an important social transformation in the 1990s; the increased economic liberalization and privatization in China led to a large group of former government officials leaving their stable jobs and going into private business. By using contacts gained through formal official channels in making their business deals, this group of former government officials has gradually become the new business elite and wealthy social class in China. Belonging to this “newly rich class” (*xinfu jieceng*), who can gain and spend fortunes on a staggering scale, Ms. Jiang definitely had more purchasing power to acquire beauty than desperate laid-off women and new graduates. She described her social status as follows:

It's lucky that my husband and I both have high income. China has been changing so fast. We are part of this change. We make it happen and we benefit from it....The economic status of people like me has improved a lot over the last decade....I have everything that a young girl could dream of: designer clothes, fancy purses, memberships in the most exclusive clubs, a big comfortable apartment and a nice car, but I don't have one thing that they have: youth!

In 2005, Ms. Jiang underwent a liposuction procedure which included removing fat deposits from her abdomen and thighs. I asked Ms. Jiang why, as a successful and confident career woman, body image was so important to her. Ms. Jiang laughed and said:

Everyone wants to look good. To be a woman in my position, of course I need to pay much attention to my image. The business of advertising is all about image. My image is the image of the company! A dowdy middle-aged woman is certainly not a proper representation of my social

status. It's OK to be my age, but I need to be gorgeous!

Ms. Jiang said that before she made up her mind to undergo a liposuction operation, she worried a lot about the potential risk of the operation. Actually, before she decided to undergo surgery, she tried all kinds of weight-loss programmes which included physical exercise, diet plans, acupuncture therapy, herb tea of traditional Chinese medicine and so on. However, no matter how hard she worked at it, she just could not get rid of her fat deposits. After witnessing some of her friends successfully trimming excess fat in the abdomen to a flatter abdomen and a more slender and balanced shape through cosmetic surgery, Ms. Jiang gradually changed her mind about cosmetic surgery. "People's attitudes towards cosmetic surgery are more and more open. Just looking around, some of my friends have done procedures to laser away wrinkles, get rid of droopy eyelids, suction out fat, or tighten up their necks," said Ms. Jiang. After consultation, she spent some 45,000 yuan for an advanced ultrasound-assisted liposuction procedure, in which ultrasound breaks down the unwanted fat and semi-liquefies it, making it easier to suck out. The price of 45,000 yuan is higher than the average price of 20,000-25,000 yuan for similar operations. Ms. Jiang explained that the basic price of her surgery was approximately 35,000 yuan. But as different surgeons charged different prices according to their professional levels in that hospital and the surgeon who operated for her was a professor, she paid an extra 9,000 yuan for the operation. As she said:

Yes, it was more expensive. But I didn't care about the price. What I

cared about was the safety and quality of the operation. Believe me, if you want to get a good result from the surgery, you'd better never bargain with your surgeon! Youth and beauty is priceless. That's the reason why I chose a very famous surgeon to operate on me. Do you know surgeon X? He has been the best in this business.... I am happy with the result. I know it's impossible to get back into the shape of my twenties. But at least I should never be a fat woman. I also don't like what the years had done to my face. The deepening wrinkles on my face and forehead made me look older. I wanted these wrinkles erased. If money can buy a young look, why not?

Fueled by rapidly rising income, purchasing power enabling cosmetic surgery among China's affluent and upper-middle-class women has been soaring. For a wealthy woman like Ms. Jiang, this has made it easier than ever before to afford expensive cosmetics as well as surgical operations. In order to keep a young and attractive facial appearance, some of these upper-middle-class women spend extraordinary amounts of money. Ms. Jiang's story reflects an important social phenomenon, that of the rise of China's middle class. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences released a report in 2004 that suggested that China's "middle class" accounted for 19 percent of the country's 1.3 billion population in 2003 (Xin 2004). As China's middle class is getting richer, many are also becoming more concerned with physical appearance. Aside from the proliferation of facial salons, gyms, yoga clubs and fitness centers, the booming cosmetic surgery industry also offers them beautification services ranging from Botox injections to liposuction.

After meeting Ms. Jiang, I invited my friend Ms. Li to dinner to thank her for introducing Ms. Jiang to me for the interview. During the dinner, Ms. Li made me

realize that Ms. Jiang's reasons for undergoing cosmetic surgery were more complicated than what Ms. Jiang had told me:

Do you really believe that she (Ms. Jiang) took such a big risk just because she has money? Don't be so naive! She did it for her marriage! Of course she won't tell you, but we all know that she was willing to take such a risk because she discovered that her husband had been keeping a young girl as "second wife" (*er nai*)⁵¹.

What Ms. Li said points out an open secret in today's China: many men are engaging in "keeping mistress" (*baonai*). Concubinage has a long history in China until the middle of the 20th century. After the CCP came into power in 1949, the practice was abolished as decadent under the rule of Maoist China. However, along with China's economic boom, concubinage has returned in recent years in China. The resurgent trend of keeping mistresses is particularly common among the rich and the powerful. For example, some affluent married Hong Kong men, who cross the border regularly on business, have taken young mainland Chinese women as "second wives" or mistresses in coastal areas of south China (Lang and Smart 2002; Tam 1996). It is not unusual that some powerful government officials have kept mistresses. It has been reported that, according to the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the majority of sixteen top cadres - those holding positions higher than provincial leaders and having been punished for leading decadent lifestyles and corruption since 2002 -- had mistresses (Chen 2009). The phenomenon has become

⁵¹ "Er nai" literally means "second wife," mistress, or concubine, someone that a man decides to take in addition to his wife, while his wife is still around.

so serious that CCP officials have been warned that any party member keeping a mistress would be instantly expelled from the CCP (Chen 2009).

Ms. Li said that Ms. Jiang and her husband have been married for more than twenty years. Once they were regarded as a perfect couple by their friends. However, after becoming more and more successful financially, her husband started having affairs with young women and even keeping a young woman as mistress. He rented an apartment for his mistress, a young woman who previously worked in his company. Ms. Li said angrily:

He and that young girl even attended some friends' dinner parties together with him. He says that she is his "little secretary" or "little honey" (*xiaomi*).⁵² Everyone knows what kind of "little secretary" she is! It's not just gold-diggers and poor girls from rural areas going after married men, but even college graduates and professionals. I have seen many such young women who are willing to "lean on a money-bag" (*bang dakuan*). Several business men I know also have "second wives" (*er nai*) and frequently pick up "misses" (*xiaojie*)⁵³ in nightclubs.

For many Chinese men, and women as well, changing social mores have brought changing ideas of marriage and sex life. Instead of having sex only with one's spouse or having only one spouse for a lifetime, love affairs, cohabitation, concubines, and prostitution are no longer unthinkable in today's China. Especially, as described by Ms. Li, in today's China, "little honeys" or "second wives" are no longer kept hidden away behind closed doors. To some wealthy men, rather than

⁵² The term "little secretary" (*xiaomi*) is a homonym of "little honey" in Chinese.

⁵³ The term "miss" (*xiaojie*) is a euphemistic expression for a prostitute.

embarrassment, having a pretty young girl as one's mistress is a tag of success, symbolizing that they are wealthy enough to afford more than one household.

When I asked what happened to Ms. Jiang's marriage and why her husband kept a mistress. Ms. Li explained:

Why?! Men naturally like young and pretty women. Besides, Jiang is a successful businesswoman. Men don't like "super woman" (*nüqiangren*).⁵⁴ You know, there is an old Chinese saying, "men are responsible for works, whereas women are responsible for domestic works" (*nan zhu wai, nu zhu nei*). Although things have changed a lot, men generally still prefer young and pretty women who have less education background and less successful careers than their own.

Ms. Li said that Ms. Jiang accidentally discovered her husband's secret through some intimate photos on his mobile phone. Although Ms. Jiang was enraged by her husband's affair, she did not intend to get a divorce. As Ms. Li explained:

For a woman almost in her 50s, it is obvious that divorce is not a wise choice...She asked her husband to stop seeing his mistress. In hoping that her husband would come to his senses and come back to her, she took not only laser treatment for facial skin but also liposuction for body shaping. I heard that she is planning to undergo a face lift to get rid of wrinkles for her fiftieth birthday.

Ms. Li's words indicate how the changing patterns of sexual life and marriage has produced anxiety. The cultural obsession with youth and beauty is nothing new, but the pressure to look as if one is in one's twenties for those in their forties or fifties has never been so palpable as now in China. Such pressure and fears plague

⁵⁴ Literally, the popular phrase *nüqiangren* refers to capable women of strong character and with successful careers.

women who are aging. For some middle-aged women, after paying so much, they finally get some economic reward. But they naturally get older, and at the same time they desperately find that they need to compete with women in their twenties for their husband's attention. In response to their husband's affairs with young women or their fears of competing with women in their twenties, some women, especially wealthy middle-class women, have become obsessed with their weight and appearance. The booming beauty industry--including cosmetic surgery, Botox and personal trainers--has offered a way to fill in the fantasy of "timeless" feminine beauty that appears permanently fixed at a young age.

As we have seen in this chapter's two accounts, Ms. Zhang, who was laid off from a state-owned enterprise, and Ms. Jiang, who left the public sector of her own volition, went through two completely different life trajectories. Although they both are middle-aged, different social statuses make their reasons for undergoing surgery different. Without sufficient educational background and skills, Ms. Zhang fell into one of the most disadvantaged groups struggling for the opportunity of re-employment; in contrast, Ms. Jiang is a member of China's newly emerging middle class. However, although they are positioned differently in social hierarchies, they both have remade their bodies to conform to the same dominant body ideal, which perpetuates youth and feminine beauty. While Ms. Zhang regarded cosmetic surgery as the last opportunity for re-employment, Ms. Jiang regarded cosmetic surgery as a privilege of her social status. The process of social stratification has

exacerbated gender disparities in a number of aspects, including bodily practice.

However, one thing in common is that by undergoing cosmetic surgery to gain a younger look, they both seek to win over men: Ms. Zhang seeks a husband, and Ms. Jiang tries to secure her marriage threatened by a pretty young woman.

The Dream of Urban Life

During my stay in Beijing, besides visiting cosmetic surgery hospitals and clinics, sometimes I also visited other kinds of beauty service sectors such as beauty parlors, slimming centers, hair studios, and nail art salons because these places are informal environments in which women are more willing to discuss body beautification topics including cosmetic surgery. In this way, I met Ms. Zhao, a 20-year-old manicurist from Sichuan who has undergone blepharoplasty. Unlike the urban women I have discussed above, Ms. Zhao represents young migrant working women from rural areas (*dagongmei*). Since the reform era, China has experienced a massive movement of population from the agricultural countryside and remote rural areas to the urban areas; this phenomenon is known as the “floating population” (*liudong renkou*). Millions of women have left their villages to work in cities. Social discrimination and the lack of social and cultural capital force the vast majority of these rural-to-urban migrants to the lowest rung of the labor market.

Based on a survey of five cities in China, Wang Z. (2008) argues that there is a serious gender occupational segregation of rural-to-urban migrant workers, in which

female migrant workers mainly enter into service sectors and unskilled occupations as compared to male migrant workers. In addition, according to Wang F. (2000), the percentage of rural-to-urban female migrants working in sales and service sectors is not only higher than that of male migrants, but also much higher than female permanent residents of cities (see also, Yang and Guo 1996). Female migrants commonly work as restaurant waitresses, domestic maids, salespeople, cleaners and bar hostesses. A substantial fraction of female migrants is employed in the booming beauty industry. Although the the life experiences of these rural-to-urban women have drawn increasing attention in academic circles (Gaetano and Jakca 2004; Jakca 2006; Zhang Z.2001; Xu 2000), these rural-to-urban migrant women are normally discussed with regard to topics such as working, life in cities and marriage rather than fashion and beauty, to say nothing of cosmetic surgery. Although the migrant female body is usually represented as the working body rather than the consumer body, some scholars have noticed the relationship between outer body beautification and inner self identity in rural-to-urban women (Zheng 2004; Zhu 2004).

My interest in migrant women's body refashioning and ornamentation has been inspired by Tiantian Zhang's study (2004) of rural migrant women working as bar hostesses in Dalian. In her research, Zheng discusses how these women use various forms of conspicuous consumption including body-altering products and surgical services to try to erase their rural origins. Many female migrant workers I have met, especially those who work in nail salons, beauty centers and hair salons, like Ms.

Zhao, dreamed of being beautiful and engaged in various types of body beautification. Cosmetic surgery has been portrayed in the mass media as a privilege of urban women. Therefore, Ms. Zhao's experience interested me because it revealed a field which has been under-represented: the desire for beauty and body alteration of rural-to-urban migrant women.

When women of various professions and ages view having perfect nails as an important detail of their images, nail care and nail art has become a trend in big cities like Beijing. Tucked into a clothing market on Lady's Street in Beijing, the nail salon where Ms. Zhao worked is similar to many other low-end nail salons. When I visited, the salon was always full, with five to seven young female manicurists busy giving clients manicures or pedicures. The first time I met Ms. Zhao in the nail salon, I found her to be an extremely lively young woman who cares about her appearance and likes dressing up. She had short, curved chestnut colored hair with highlights in champagne color. The thick make-up, stylish camisole, short skirt and high heel shoes which she wore revealed that she tried to be noticed as much as possible. In general, she was an ordinary-looking girl. But I noticed that she had big eyes. When I complimented her that she had beautiful eyes, Ms. Zhao said proudly: "You are not the only one to give compliments about my eyes. Some people have said that my eyes are like Fan Bingbing's eyes."⁵⁵ Don't you think so?" I stared at her eyes and agreed: "Wow, that's right! Your eyes are like Fan

⁵⁵ Fan Bingbing is a popular Chinese actress who is commonly considered to be one of the most beautiful women in China.

Bingbing's almond eyes." Hearing what I said, Ms. Zhao was very pleased. She looked at me with a smile and said: "If you want it, you can have it. You have a pair of big eyes too, but the outer corners of your eyes droop slightly. You can easily fix them by dropping by any cosmetic surgery clinic. You can get them done just like getting your nails polished." I asked her if her own pretty eye shape might have been improved through cosmetic surgery. She did not admit it immediately; but after I went to her nail salon several times and became familiar with her, she admitted that she had undergone double-eyelid blepharoplasty in combination with epicanthoplasty.⁵⁶ After that, every time I went to the nail salon, I chatted with Ms. Zhao about her life, including the reason for her undergoing cosmetic surgery, while she polished my fingernails.

Ms. Zhao started out as a migrant worker when she was fourteen years old. She left her village and came to Wanxian, a county of Sichuan province, in 2001. As a stranger with only primary school education, the only work she could find at the beginning of her migrant life was in a small restaurant as dishwasher and waitress. "It was a harsh, overworked, and badly-paid job," said Ms. Zhao, "I normally got up at five o'clock in the morning and went to bed at twelve midnight and sometime even later." After a year of tolerating scolding from the boss, she left the restaurant and went to Beijing along with her sister, who was four years older than her and had

⁵⁶ A feature of Asian eyelids is the epicanthal fold, the fold over the most central portion of the upper eyelid. Epicanthoplasty is a type of eye surgery to remove the presence of epicanthal folds. By doing so, the overall length of the eye is increased, creating an appearance of a more open eye. An epicanthoplasty is usually performed simultaneously with a double-eyelid blepharoplasty.

more working experiences in cities. She said she left that small county and went to Beijing because she wanted to “see the world and expand my horizons” (*jianjian shimian*). “I was curious about how urban people live in cities,” said Ms. Zhao. Since then, she has worked in various places as a maidservant, waitress and shop assistant. In March 2006, introduced by her friend from her home town, she started worked in this nail salon to provide manicure and pedicure services. Although most jobs Ms. Zhao had had were temporary, low-paid, and little-respected, doing nails, especially toenails, seems even more undignified. But she said that she liked this job because tending toenails and fingernails was the easiest work she had experienced.

When explaining her motivation of undergoing eye-shape surgery, Ms. Zhao initially emphasized that women by nature like to be pretty. However, when our conversations went further, I realized that spending a great amount of money (1600 yuan) to purchase a luxury, an ideal eye shape, contains more cultural meaning than just the pursuit of beauty itself; rather, it involved shedding the stereotypical image of rural women as “country bumpkins” (*tubaozi*) and “cheapskates” (*xiaoqigui*). At first in the nail salon, Ms. Zhao had fewer costumers than other girls. After a few days, her boss talked with her unhappily. Aside from asking her to practice more nail-painting skill and to learn more conversational skills, her boss especially emphasized that her look was too “countrified” (*tuqi*) to attract customers and asked her to get a new hair cut and have her hair dyed. Ms. Zhao recounted how she was scorned as a “country bumpkin” because of her appearance as well as her aesthetic

taste:

Once a thirty-something woman came to the salon. After looking through the catalogue books, she couldn't find a nail pattern she liked. So she asked me to design and paint her nails creatively. I tried some patterns on her nails but she wasn't satisfied with any of them. Eventually she became impatient and complained that my design lacked aesthetic taste. She even rudely changed to another girl to paint nails for her. But what really pissed me off was that she talked loudly with another customer that my nail design was "garish" (*suqi*), as was the way I look. Especially, when I heard her jeer that my eyes were like a panda's eyes because of thick eye shadow, I was so angry.

Ms. Zhao then explained that she used to wear thick eye shadow because she had a pair of small eyes and tried to use eye make-up to make them look big. What Ms. Zhao describes above reveals an important issue. The unprecedented population flowing from rural to urban areas has caused a blurring of the importance of the boundary between the countryside and the city; however, it has not led to the dissolution of the cultural boundary between the peasant and the urbanite in terms of aesthetic taste and body culture. The rural/urban boundary remains important in life style and cultural identity. This rural/urban difference is usually assumed to be represented through body culture. The terms "boorish" (*tuqi*) and "garish" (*suqi*), used by Ms. Zhao's customer to scorn Ms. Zhao's aesthetic taste and body ornamentation are commonly used by city dwellers to describe rural women's lack of fashion and aesthetic taste. In contrast, terms usually used to describe city women's taste in dress and look are "fashionable" (*shiamo*) and "modern" (*xiandai*). Thus, in post-Mao body discourse, body image as well as ornamentation becomes a

diacritical marker distinguishing rural and urban women.

The jeers from urban women definitely shook Ms. Zhao's confidence in her self-image, and matters became worse when taunts even came from fellow migrant workers. She recounted her unexpected meeting with a woman whom she used to work with:

When I worked in a restaurant, there was another girl who also came from my county. We had lost contact for several years. But the world really is small. One day she came here for a manicure and a pedicure. I didn't recognize her at first glance because she had changed so much. She was dressed in a very stylish way. She recognized me first. To be honest, I really didn't want to manicure her nails. But I couldn't refuse at that moment. I was the only available person and my boss was in the shop. So I did her nails. You know, I don't mind washing and painting other girls' fingernails and toenails. But for a girl whom I worked together with in the same restaurant, it was really uncomfortable to service her and even worse to tolerate her showing off. She said that her boyfriend was a Beijing man who run a business in wholesale clothes and accessories. She boasted that she was the "female boss" (*laobanniang*) in his shop. She said that her boyfriend loved her very much and bought lots of cosmetics and clothes for her. I knew she was just showing off. But that was not the worst part. I got so irritated for what she said about me. She said that I still had the "old look" (*laoyangzi*) of several years ago, and the way I dressed was still "countrified" (*tuli tuqi*). She also said that I was still a working girl because I look like a working girl. She even said that I shouldn't be "stingy" (*xiaoqi*) and should spend money to dress myself up like urban girls... What she said really enraged me. We came from the same place and used to work in the same restaurant. How dare she ridicule me and say that I look like a country bumpkin (*tubaozi*)? It's so unfair! We once were the same kind of person. But a few years later, I wash her feet and paint her toenails. How could our fate be so different? ... She did look more fashionable than me. She has always been the kind of girl who cares about her appearance very much. I really hate her. But I could not help but wonder if maybe she was right: instead of saving money, I should invest in my body. If I wanted to change my fate, I should change my look first. To fit into the city, I needed to look like a city girl.

Ms. Zhao said after meeting with her fellow worker, she decided to spend more time and money on dress and make-up. She started to imitate the dressing and make-up of urban girls who came to the nail salon for manicures and pedicures. But no matter how she made up, she was unsatisfied with the shape of her eyes, which seemed too small for her. She dreamed of having a pair of big eyes like movie stars Fan Bingbing and Zhao Wei. In the nail salon, Ms. Zhao had heard customers talking about cosmetic surgery. Gradually, she made up her mind to undergo cosmetic surgery to reshape her eyes. She said that since she had started to work in Beijing, she usually earned 400 to 900 yuan monthly. She normally sent one third to half of the money to her parents, and went back home at the Spring Festival. But at the end of 2005, she did neither of these. Instead, she spent 1,600 yuan for cosmetic surgery on her eyes in a private clinic. Compared with similar surgery in other clinics and hospitals, 1,600 yuan is a low price. But for Ms. Zhao, 1,600 yuan meant almost all of her saving from two years of hard work. Spending 1,600 yuan to purchase an ideal eye shape is absolutely buying a luxury commodity. But what she was buying was more than merely a pretty shape of her eyes. By spending a large amount of money to purchase a beautiful image, Ms. Zhao was trying to shed the stereotype of rural women, as being “boorish,” “garish” and “stingy.” The story of Ms. Zhao is an example of how a rural migrant young girl who lives in a metropolitan city like Beijing tries to negotiate her rural-to-urban identity through bodily practice and fulfill her desire to be modern and her dream to fit into city life

as a pretty and stylish urban girl.

Ms. Zhao also told me a story about Lanlan, a twenty-something woman who has undergone several cosmetic surgery procedures. Coming from a village in Henan province, Lanlan was a “miss,” a sex worker, who worked in a nightclub. She has worked in this business almost four years, but none of her family members knew what she did for a living in Beijing. In order to be more attractive to male customers, Lanlan underwent several procedures, which included double-eyelid blepharoplasty, rhinoplasty, buccal fat pad removal⁵⁷ and breast augmentation. When Lanlan went back to her home village to celebrate the Spring Festival in January 2006, her relatives introduced her to a man who owned a small factory. Lanlan had feelings for that man and wanted to marry him. Of course Lanlan did not tell him that she was a “miss” in a nightclub. She lied that she was in the clothing wholesale business in Beijing. Worrying about her secret, Lanlan decided to have hymen repair surgery in order to disguise her career as a sex worker and appear to be a virgin. Ms. Zhao said that she did not know whether Lanlan finally did this because Lanlan never showed up again in the nail salon. But her disappearance made Ms. Zhao believe that with the help of surgery, Lanlan married and began a fresh start in life.

I asked Ms. Zhao her opinion of women who make their livings with their bodies like Lanlan. She said:

⁵⁷ Buccal fat pad removal is a procedure to create a more defined, angular look to the face. In this procedure, buccal-fat pad is removed through a small incision inside the mouth. It is usually requested by patients with round faces and full cheeks.

Some people may think they are in the bottommost level of society. Actually they are not. At least, they make a great deal of money. As the common saying goes, “people ridicule your poverty, but not your prostitution” (*xiaopin buxiaochang*).

The saying “people ridicule your poverty, but not your prostitution” mirrors a radically changing attitude towards prostitution and the booming commercial sex industry in China today. Shortly after taking power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party embarked upon a series of campaigns to eradicate prostitution. However, since the deepening of economic reform and the loosening of governmental controls over society in the early 1980s, sex workers in China have become more visible in urban areas and the underground sex business has proliferated dramatically over the past three decades. In spite of its illegality, the sex business has now developed into an industry that produces a considerable economic output. In 2004, Chinese Public Security sources estimated that there were four to ten million sex workers in the country (Huang 2004).

A recent study valued China’s underground sex industry at 30 billion yuan (Settle 2004). Thus, as an open secret, it is not hard to encounter China’s thriving sex trade in one of its many guises in hotels, night clubs, karaoke bars, hair salons, and beauty parlors as commercial sex venues. It is a common scene in some small streets that a young “miss” dressed up sexily in a purported “hair salon,” sits seductively, ready to exchange sex for money. It is not surprising that in the business of selling the body for money, sex workers like Lanlan undergo cosmetic surgery to

obtain a more beautiful, youthful, and sexually alluring body to attract more male customers. In her study of bar hostesses in the port city of Dalian, Zheng Tiantian (2004) observed rural migrant women working as bar hostesses, called in Chinese *sanpei xiaojie*,⁵⁸ buy various forms of body-altering products and surgical services for body beautification: “This category includes both permanent alterations (plastic surgery) and non- or semi-permanent bodily modification including skin-whitening creams, fake double eyelids, and permanent waves” (Zheng 2004: 93). Zheng also observed that since male customers prefer hostesses with large breasts, hostesses use various means to increase their breast size. As described by Zheng. “They regularly swap tips on the most effective breast enlargement techniques, including breast-enhancing undergarments, creams, electric devices, herbal pills, and soaps. In addition to using these over-the-counter products, some undergo breast augmentation surgery” (Zheng 2004: 96). Women who work in the sex industry are more likely to be captured by the ever-expanding beauty industry including the cosmetic surgery market; the booming underground sex industry contributes to the flourishing beauty industry.

Conclusion

For many Chinese women, the decision to undergo cosmetic surgery is less about vanity than practicality, rooted in the belief that a more attractive appearance will

⁵⁸ As explained by Zhang (2004), *sanpei xiaojie* means “misses accompanying [men] in three ways, referring to their escorting capabilities of drinking, dancing, and sexual services.

help them to find better jobs or spouses, secure their marriages, solidify their social status, or pass from the rural to the urban. Teenagers and college students pursue cosmetic surgery in order to gain more “beauty capital” for their future careers; laid-off middle-aged women engage in cosmetic surgery to try to gain a chance at re-employment in the rigorous job market after they were laid off in the reform of state-owned enterprises; upper-middle-class middle-aged women invest in their bodies to regain an attractive appearance to secure their marriages when more and more financially successful men keep mistresses; and migrant women from rural areas try to fit into urban life and fulfill their imagination of what is “beautiful” and “modern.” People usually assume that cosmetic surgery is a privilege of the elite and the rich. However, as we have seen from this chapter as well as the preceding chapter, in today’s China, from teenage girls to middle-aged women, from well-educated college girls and office ladies to unskilled laid-off women, from middle-aged lower-class women to upper-middle-class women, from female urban residents who hold respectable jobs to rural migrants who work in the beauty industry and in nightclubs, women who opt for cosmetic surgery come from diverse ages, classes and social groups.

The alteration of the female body in contemporary China is deeply involved in the transition of the job allocation system, the expansion of higher education and the rising unemployment of college students, the increasing gender segregation of female labor in the service industry (especially the beauty sector), institutionalized

occupational discrimination based on gender, age, appearance and height, the continuity of traditional gender norms which continuously prized women's beauty, the stratification between the working-class and the upper-middle class, and the distinction of rural migrant women from urbanites. One particular feature of China over the past three decades is its dramatic and drastic social transition. The dramatic social transitions associated with rapid economic reform have produced immense social uncertainty. This instability, along with the scarcity of resources and insecurity about the future, causes many women to feel anxious about their body images. This body anxiety is produced by social uncertainty in a transition era. When Chinese people have witnessed that within a very short period of time, the poor could become the rich, the rural could become the urban, the traditional could become the modern, and the West could become China, it is not surprising that some people also believe that the Ugly Duckling could become the White Swan with the help of the "magic knife." This social instability pushes people to grasp every opportunity, and the idea that good looks hold the key to opportunity stimulates the growth of cosmetic surgery in recent decades in China.

Chapter Six

“Make Me the Fairest of Them All”: The Commodified Body in China’s Booming Beauty Economy

In the previous chapter I discussed how bodily anxiety is produced by social uncertainty with the dramatic economic and social transition in post-Mao China. This chapter deals with how the anxiety about body image is captured by ubiquitous consumer culture and the ever-expanding beauty market. My focus in this chapter is the commodification of the female appearance in China’s flourishing beauty industry and its profound socio-cultural and political implications. I first discuss the crucial role of commercially motivated mass media in creating an “ideal beauty” and the endless desire to purchase it. I argue that mass media contribute to the commodification of the female body appearance not only by producing the feeling of imperfection, but also by providing various solutions to fix “inadequacy” including normalizing and glorifying cosmetic surgery. Secondly, I explore how women’s bodies have been extensively and deeply targeted by China’s thriving beauty industry or so-called “beauty economy.” Using two different cases, I show the contradiction existing in women’s involvement in cosmetic surgery and other bodily practices in consumer culture. In some situations, women actively construct their senses of self by using their buying power; in other cases, they are passively exploited by the profit-driven market. Thirdly, I discuss the political implication of

China's booming beauty economy. I explore what kind of role the CCP's ideology plays when the body sphere seems to be controlled by the capitalist market. I argue that the pragmatic orientation in CCP's ideology explicitly affects the government's policy of developing the beauty economy and also implicitly influences the individual's decision to undergo cosmetic surgery. In turn, the thriving beauty economy and freedom in consumption strengthen the legitimacy of the party-state in the new era of China.

“Who is the Fairest of Them All”: Ideal Beauty and Mass Media

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?

—*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*

During 2006-2007, I sometimes went to a public plastic surgery hospital in a suburb of Beijing for observation and interviews. In my first visit to the hospital, I was impressed by a dozen big mirrors hanging on the wall at the entrance of the hospital. Although I definitely could find mirrors in any cosmetic surgery clinic/hospital, none of them was like those in this hospital. The whole corridor in the first floor was decorated by big quadrate mirrors one by one. As the corridor was a long way to pass by, I looked into mirrors again and again. It was a strange feeling for me. I certainly look at myself in a mirror every day, but not in dozens of mirrors. Passing by these mirrors and checking myself again and again, I had an uneasy feeling and could not help asking myself: do I look good enough?

During observation at the lounge on the second floor of the hospital, I asked several women's opinions about these mirrors. Ms. Lin, a twenty-something good-looking woman who was waiting for a consultation concerning liposuction, made an interesting comment:

Usually I like staring myself in a mirror. As long as I have time, I always check myself in a mirror. However, sometimes I really hate the mirror. When I look into a mirror, there is always a voice saying, "I am too fat," "I am too short," or "my eyes are too small." ... I have done some operations on my face. My friends said that I am pretty enough. But when I look into a mirror, I still feel that I am far away from the ideal look I imagined in my mind. I am not satisfied with my body shape. I am considering liposuction... My boyfriend said I am addicted to cosmetic surgery. I don't think so. But I am certainly a perfectionist! I want to be as beautiful as women in magazines.

Ms. Lin's statement reminds me of a line: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?" In the fairy tale, the princess's evil stepmother gazes into the mirror and repeatedly asks this question. Here in the real world, a pretty woman gazes into the mirror and repeats the question which has been asked throughout centuries and across continents. Unlike the evil queen, who demands reassurance of her beauty from the mirror when checking and rechecking her body in the mirror, a woman in the real world is preoccupied with an imagined "beauty ideal" infused by ubiquitous mass media. She is thereby convinced that she is not pretty enough and then ask for the "magic knife" to make her the fairest of them all. During my fieldwork, one thing that surprised me is that, contrary to my previous assumption that most women who opt for cosmetic surgery are bad-looking, most of my

interviewees who undergo cosmetic surgery are normal-looking and some are even good-looking, like Ms. Lin. However no matter what motivations draw them to undergo operations; they all are dissatisfied with their body images. I cannot help but wonder why even good-looking women are unhappy with their appearance, who defines the standard of beauty they seek, and how the pursuit of ideal beauty is endlessly produced and reproduced.

What Ms. Lin described of her experience of mirror gazing is an interesting starting point to discuss how a woman knows whether she is beautiful or not. When one looks in a mirror, the mirror reflects one's physical appearance and body shape. But of course one's mental picture also shapes the perception of one's physical body image. For example, anorexic women look into the mirror and see that they are fat, despite the fact that they are emaciated. We actually judge how we look not only through a mirror, but also via the gaze of other people and mass media, and our interactions with others and society. In other words, a mirror is not only a piece of glass, but also an idealized body image produced by media gazing and social interaction.

When Ms. Lin claimed that "I want to be as beautiful as women in magazines," not surprisingly she had a fashion magazine in her hand: *Cosmopolitan* (Chinese version), one of the most widely read fashion magazines in China. I asked Ms. Lin how often she bought this magazine and what other magazines she usually read. "I

have bought almost every issue of this magazine since several years ago," she said. Then she named seven magazines she usually read. I noticed that in addition to a movie magazine and a travel magazine, all the other magazines she mentioned were fashion and life-style magazines. I further asked her what kind of columns in magazines usually drew her attention. She said that she normally enjoyed reading information about trends, tips of how to dress up and use make up, knowledge about yoga and Pilates, and also anecdotes concerning movie stars and celebrities. Then I asked her whether she found information related to cosmetic surgery in these magazines. Here is a translation of part of our conversation:

Ms. Lin: Of course, cosmetic surgery is a hot topic in magazines. There are lots of useful information about high-tech treatments like Botox injection, collagen injection, and other cosmetic treatments. Some articles introduce how to choose an operation properly and safely.

I: Is this kind of information useful to you?

Ms. Lin: Yes, it is. At least I learn the newest trend in beauty treatment. I can also learn how to avoid unnecessary risk.

I: You mentioned that you want to be as beautiful as women in magazines. Do you think they are also really beautiful in daily life even without make-up?

Ms. Lin (laughing): It's hard to say. Actually I think some of them have done something more than make-up, especially some movies stars. Although they always boast they are born in beauty, some of them might be; others definitely have done some touch-up. Did you hear what people say about X (a Chinese female movie star)? Even she denies it. Comparing her pictures which were shot five years ago and which have circulated recently, it's so obvious! ... (Lin stopped talking a second and quickly flipped the magazine in her hand and then pointed out a pretty young girl who poses in the magazine) Look at this girl,

how could a Chinese woman have such big breasts without adding anything to them (laughing).

Ms. Lin is only one example of women whom I have talked with. When sitting on the lounge of various cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals, I always saw women reading glossy magazines to fill up the time of waiting. Sometimes, too, women bring magazines to show surgeons the photos of entertainment celebrities as their desirable looks. Most magazines that these women read are fashion magazines, life style magazines, and cosmetics magazines, including the Chinese version of international fashion magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Marie Claire*, *Fashion Housekeeper*, a series of Japanese-style *Rayli*⁵⁹ magazines such as *Rayli Dress Beauty*, *Rayli She Fashion*, *Rayli Fashion Pioneer*, *Rayli Lovely Pioneer*, and local magazines such as *Beauty*, *Shanghai Style* and so on.

When Ms. Lin expressed that she wanted to be as beautiful as women in the magazines, when she explained how she found information and tips about beauty and cosmetic treatment from magazines, and when she argued that some pinup girls may have undergone cosmetic surgery, it is clear that glossy magazines have operated as a powerful agent in shaping not only her ideas about beauty, but also her bodily practices, including cosmetic surgery. Opening up any glossy fashion magazine, we never fail to find tips on how to look good, and advertisements that promote new products and new technologies promising to hide wrinkles, create

⁵⁹*Rayli* magazines are made up of pictures of Japanese models. Most of the articles are from Japanese fashion magazines, with local advertisement, selling mostly Western and Japanese merchandise.

beauty and stop the aging process. Scholars have argued that there has long been a close relationship between beauty product/treatment and glossy fashion and lifestyle magazines (Wolf 1991; Sullivan 2001). For example, in her study on cosmetic surgery in America, after examining 171 magazine articles about cosmetic surgery from 1985 to 1995 to determine how magazines are involved in the cultural construction of appearance, Sullivan (2001) concludes that women's magazines are one of the most important sources of information about cosmetic surgery. Although Sullivan's study is about America, considering the growing popularity of American-style women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* in China, Sullivan's argument is relevant to China. The glossy magazines have influenced people's perceptions of body images and their bodily alteration practices.

Glossy magazines have long targeted women in matters of beauty, fashion, and lifestyle. China's first recent fashion magazine *Fashion (Shizhuang)* was published in Beijing in 1979. However, more influential fashion and beauty magazines are international copyright cooperation fashion and beauty magazines launched in China since the 1980s. When France's Hachette Filipacchi began publishing a Chinese version of *Elle* magazine in corporation with Shanghai Translation Publishing House in 1988, it marked a growing interest in fashion and beauty across China. Since then, many fashion and beauty magazines have popped up across the country. In 1998 Trend Magazine Group launched the Chinese edition of a famous American women's magazine, *Cosmopolitan*. Begun in 1995 when China Light Industry Press

obtained the copyright for Shufunotomo (Housewives' Friend) of Japan, *Rayli* (*Ruili* in pinyin), another empire of cooperative beauty magazines, was launched in China. In August 2005, working together with China Pictorial Press, *Vogue*, one of the most influential fashion magazines, published *Vogue China*.⁶⁰

These Chinese glossy magazines have been filled with numerous photos of glamorous female body images and reflect as well as create a huge interest in personal appearance, beauty and consumer culture. As fashion and beauty magazines proliferate in China, so too do their ability to produce senses of "ideal beauty," engendering anxiety about body appearance among their readers. The repeated images of youthful, slender and beautiful women represent an "impossible" feminine beauty ideal in various glossy magazines. It is "impossible" because glamorous photos in magazines are almost always altered and manipulated by software programs:

Today, almost every photo on the cover of almost every magazine has been retouched using computer technology. In fact, it could be argued that in a sense our whole society has become a 'cover'. The new magicians of the virtual era multiply the ways to manipulate our perception of reality.... The digital technology is modifying what we see in the media and edited reality is everywhere on billboards, in glossy magazines, tabloid newspapers and advertisements. Life is becoming an impossibly perfect model almost always digitally retouched, smoothed out and airbrushed. (Gavard 1997)

The availability of image manipulation programs allow editors to do amazing things

⁶⁰ For more information about the development of China's fashion magazines, see Zhang W.H. (2006).

with images. In addition to fixing blemishes or small wrinkles, women's legs are stretched, scars are removed, and bodies are slimmed down. The extensive use of image manipulation programs to produce almost perfect images in magazines shows an increasing visual sophistication of the presentation of ideal beauty. With the media constantly providing "ideal beauty," people are consciously or unconsciously seeking the "ideal." As argued by Gavard (1997), "The progress made in the field of computer-manipulated images has created a new world of representation or as Jean Baudrillard would refer to it, a world of simulation." Bombarded with the simulation of unrealistic "ideal beauty," women often compare their bodies to those they see in mass media. Not surprisingly, only a few have the chance of being as slim and pretty as the supermodels featured on covers of fashion magazines. Bombarded with ideal images, women's feelings of imperfection are produced, and pressures to conform to the ideal are enormous. Considering how often we hear women complaining about their appearance, and how even slim girls complain about being fat, we can easily understand how common it is for women to feel pressure to look good. The discourse of ideal beauty represented in various glossy magazines and other media has become a prevalent ideology which constantly produces women's dissatisfaction and anxiety concerning their body images.

In an age in which beauty is promoted through every type of media, whether we open fashion magazines or switch on the TV and watch advertisements, erotic female images and themes like youth, beauty and femininity infinitely recur. We are

born thin or fat, tall or short, light-skinned or dark-skinned, but we are living in a world in which media and ads all promote a similar “ideal beauty” that women everywhere are expected to meet. Newspapers, fashion magazines, TV programs and Hollywood movies produce and promote images of round eyes, narrow chin, slim body figures, big breasts and light skin color as the standard of beauty. With the transnational flow of Hollywood-based beauty images across countries, the globalization of beauty standards has occurred around the world. Nevertheless, I do not suggest that the globalization of standards of beauty means the Westernization of standards of beauty. Although globalizing media spurred the convergence of female beauty standards around the world, the seemingly homogenous standards of beauty are actually perceived contextually in various local settings, as I will discuss in next chapters.

The Normalization of Cosmetic Surgery in Mass Media

Glossy magazines, along with other media, not only perpetuate the idealized standard of beauty that influences women’s perceptions of their body images, but also provide solutions to fix their “inadequacy” and to come closer to that ideal. Articles in women’s magazines discuss the latest skin care products, make-up, exercise routines, beauty treatments, and also cosmetic surgery procedures which can fix any and every beauty problem. In these magazines, international and Chinese movie stars talk about how they maintain appealing appearances through using a

certain brand of beauty products, cultivating a certain life-style, doing physical exercise and yoga, or undergoing cosmetic surgery procedures. Associated with women's beauty, information about beauty treatment and cosmetic surgery has also been conveyed in various magazines over the past decade in China. Cosmetic surgery has been discussed freely in magazines that women are exposed to, no doubt leading many women to think about the use of surgery and whether it is a sensible option for them.

There are various presentations of cosmetic surgery in women's magazines. Pitching the glamorous possibilities of cosmetic surgery is one of them. For example, in *Good Housekeeping* (Chinese version) March issue, 2006, an article entitled "No Cosmetic Surgery, No Glory" (*bu zheng bu guanrong*) describes cosmetic surgery as follows:

If it really can make you look more beautiful and young, if it only needs a few hours, and if it is totally affordable to your credit card...why not undergo it (cosmetic surgery)? This is an unwritten eternal truth: not only men, but everyone loves beautiful women. Even if you have never planned to be the most beautiful woman in the world, you should not keep dwelling on what you are dissatisfied with about your body parts. Dissatisfaction is dissatisfaction! Nobody cares whether your body is a natural one or an altered one....It is about beauty and happiness. It is about the dream in every woman's heart. Who can say we should be moderate to pursue the dream?! So women, please undergo cosmetic surgery. No cosmetic surgery, no glory! (*Good Housekeeping* 2006: 52)

In fashion magazines, cosmetic surgery is usually presented as an option to achieve ideal beauty to their readers. Sometimes, cosmetic surgery is glorified not

only as a means to embrace beauty, but also as a way to achieve happiness. In order to convince people to take one step further by actually going undergoing cosmetic surgery to permanently alter their appearance, articles often tell their readers that if they have had expertly-performed cosmetic surgery, it can work “miracles” on their faces and bodies. The key is to choose a practitioner who is accredited and qualified to perform the procedure, these articles say. In *Harper's Bazaar* (Chinese version) February 2005, an article is entitled “Lunchtime Cosmetic Procedures in an Upper-Class Society” (*shangliu shehui de meirong kuaican*).

A trend of lunchtime cosmetic surgery is approaching us from the American upper-class society, Japan and Korea. The most cutting-edge beautification...has turned from bottles of skin care cream to a pile of white sheets (in clinics), from “doing it yourself” to “having it done by an expert,” from a long-term accumulating effect to an instant effect. In this “fast-food era,” it is no longer an unimaginable dream that we can become pretty within lunchtime. The key is ordering it properly. (Liu 2005)

As we can see here, cosmetic surgery is metaphorically simplified as “fast food” with its quick and efficient effect to fix disliked characteristics over lunchtime. In this narrative, cosmetic surgery is transformed from a risky medical operation to a routine elective commercial service. By discussing “having it done” and “ordering it properly,” the choice of undergoing cosmetic surgery fits into the capitalist logic of using buying-power wisely. Cosmetic surgery, which was earlier viewed as appropriate for therapeutic goals, is now a consumer product. Furthermore, in this article, some less invasive cosmetic procedures such as Botox injections are

introduced as lunchtime cosmetic procedures to those people who are perhaps frightened of actually going under the knife. The article describes how, unlike traditional cosmetic surgery, which requires patients to be hospitalized for weeks to achieve their desired appearance, now many people are turning to less invasive lunchtime cosmetic procedures that are able to give pleasing results with minimal risk (Liu 2005).⁶¹ In the same vein, lunchtime cosmetic procedures are introduced as the latest trend in an article entitled “Lunchtime Cosmetic Surgery” in *Cosmopolitan* (Chinese Version), August 2004. Obsession with female beauty is hardly new; however, the promotion of invasive procedures as fashionable and self-improvement surgery suggests that the pursuit of beauty has taken on unprecedented proportions. Moreover, some articles normalize cosmetic surgery by portraying high technique and “natural-look” results of operations. For example, in *Cosmopolitan* (Chinese version) May 2006, an article entitled “Artificial Beauties, Don’t Let Secrets Get Out” (*renzao meinü xiaoxin xiemi*) in the column “Beauty Solution” states that:

In the shadow of knife and blood, beautiful women are born one by one. Cosmetic surgery helps women to achieve their dreams of being pretty. With the rapid development of advanced techniques of cosmetic surgery, it is not easy to find signs of the scalpel on the faces and bodies of “artificial beauties.” Western surgeons believe one thing: only if the after-surgery body parts look as natural as if one was born this way, has the surgery been successful. The unnatural double eyelids and pointed chin have disappeared. Especially when the augmented breasts look like

⁶¹ Lunchtime cosmetic procedures are typically procedures that do not require major incisions. Services include Botox injection, chemical peels, laser resurfacing facial treatment, and permanent hair reduction and so on.

real ones, some movie stars proclaim loudly that their full breasts were born in nature. Unless you are a surgeon, it is hard to tell whether it is real! (Diandian 2006: 320)

As we can see here, readers are cultivated to embrace the notion of appreciating advanced medical techniques. The article advocates that “artificial beauties” are more beautiful than real ones with their “natural looks.” The distinction between “real” and “artificial” is thus no longer easily discerned, and the boundary between natural beauty and artificial beauty is blurred. As the above articles show, the discourse of the medicalization of women’s body appearance, and the normalization and glamorization of cosmetic surgery in fashion magazines represents cosmetic surgery as a way to achieve an ideal beauty and influences women’s attitudes and activities towards cosmetic surgery.

Along with glossy magazines, over the past few years, more and more media coverage including TV, internet, and newspapers deal with the topic of cosmetic surgery. Representations of cosmetic surgery are becoming more prevalent and topics of cosmetic surgery are openly discussed in all sorts of media. In 2005, “Angels Love Beauty” (*tianshi ai meili*), the first Chinese cosmetic surgery reality television program produced by Hunan Economic TV, participants were rewarded with cosmetic surgery procedures, and the operating room was brought into the audience’s living room. Since then, several Chinese cosmetic surgery reality shows such as “Cinderella and the Swan” (*huiguniang yu tian'e*) and “See My 72 Changes” (*kan wo 72 bian*) have been broadcast in China. Reality programs have

been used as a deliberate strategy to publicize cosmetic procedures and cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals. Although the shows are different, all programs are supported by cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals. By showing the magic power of cosmetic surgery, which can change a person's physical appearance and social life, these TV programs serve as a huge advertisement for the cosmetic surgery industry. From women's magazines to reality television programs, cosmetic surgery is portrayed as an easy and fast way to achieve a beautiful look.



Figure 22. The cover of *Beauty*, November, 2006.

As a multi-million business, commercial advertisements for aesthetic medical treatment including cosmetic surgery are found in various types of advertising carriers including magazines, newspapers, internet, TV, street billboards, restaurants, and even ladies' rooms in shopping malls. Commercial cosmetic surgery advertisements flood pages of some Chinese magazines and newspapers, enticing women who are not satisfied with their looks to get a change overnight. One such

magazine, *Beauty*, which was first issued on August 1, 1992, in Xian, Shanxi province, now serves readers throughout China (see figure 22). The magazine is filled with pages in full color containing various studio-shoot photographs of beautiful women. The main features of the magazine cover general beauty issues, make-up, fashion, style, and cosmetic surgery. As a popular magazine which specializes in medical aesthetic and cosmetology, this magazine provides general knowledge about different cosmetic surgery procedures, introduces the trend of cosmetic surgery technique, and offers advice on choosing cosmetic surgery. The magazine contains various personal stories related to undergoing cosmetic surgery, consumers' testimonies and commercial advertisements.

In addition to advertising in popular magazines such as *Beauty*, which directly aims at the cosmetic surgery market, cosmetic surgery clinics also advertise their services in lifestyle newspapers. Using *Fine Goods Shopping Guide* (*Jingpin guowu zhinan*) as an example, we can quickly see this. *Fine Goods Shopping Guide* is a color newspaper which contains information concerning life style and shopping in Beijing. The newspaper was launched in Beijing in 1993. At the beginning, it was a tabloid with a small circulation. However it grew quickly with the rapid expansion of global consumer culture in China. With an advertising revenue reaching 1.7 billion yuan, by 1998, it was one of China's top ten newspapers. In her study of Chinese tabloids, Zhao Yuezhi (2002) argues that tabloids such as *Fine Goods Shopping Guide* appeal to the urban professional and managerial elite, serving as

“bibles of China’s shopping class,” and inviting members of the affluent urban middle class to indulge themselves in the pleasure of consumption (Zhao 2002:115). In *Fine Goods Shopping Guide*, there are several advertising sections, with one advertising section for beauty service including cosmetic surgery. The advertising for cosmetic surgery clinics is normally put at the beginning and the end pages of advertising sections and has many seductive and beautiful women’s images. At the first page, there is always a “beauty map” in which locations of many beauty centers and cosmetic surgery clinics are detailed in a Beijing city map (Figure 23).

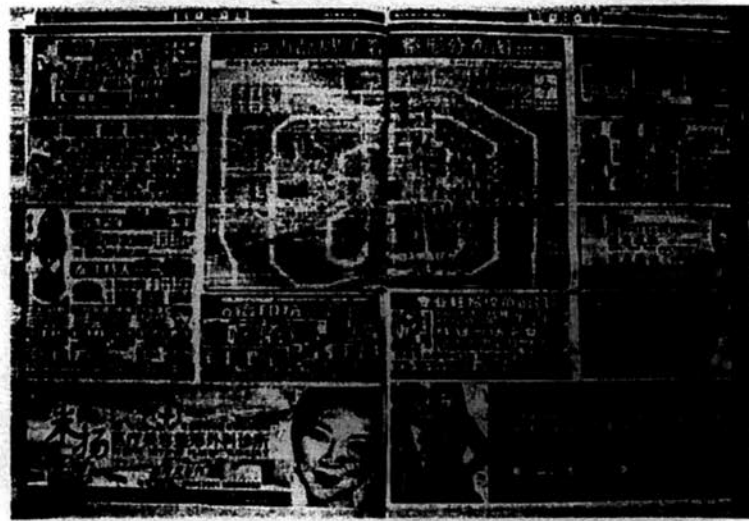


Figure 23. Beauty map of Beijing: locations of cosmetic surgery clinics.



Figure 24. Various brochures distributed by cosmetic surgery clinics and hospitals.

Some cosmetic surgery hospitals and clinics advertise on the internet to recruit candidates for free cosmetic operations as a means to publicize themselves. For example, a famous cosmetic hospital posted a want-ad on the internet which claimed that it would offer all suitable cosmetic operations free of charge to its selected national image ambassadors. The want-ad states:

In this era, who still says that a beauty was born to be beautiful?! Who still believes that beauty is only endowed by nature?! Please join in the recruitment of image ambassadors of “X star”... to find beauty belonging to you, to share the experience of transformation, to enjoy beauty after change. We believe that cosmetic surgery brings you not only a beautiful face, but also a wonderful life.⁶²

Here, the advertisement promises that the change of physical appearance will make a change of life.

Another cosmetic surgery hospital launched a program called “I am a Star” which promised to provide 200,000 yuan worth of cosmetic operations to ten candidates and to help them make an entertainment career. The advertisement of the program writes as follows (see Figure 25):

Have you looked forward to having a similar face (to a movie star)? Have you believed that a similar face would have the same fate? Have you ever believed that grassroots people like you would ignite your passion and release emotion on the stage, and would score a great success in your life? ... Today, you are regarded as equal to a star.⁶³

⁶² The advertisement can be find at: <http://www.163.com>

⁶³ The advertisement is available at: <http://blog.sina.com.cn/lm/zt/2008mystar.html>



Figure 25. The advertising for "I am a Star" on the Internet.

As noted above, this kind of media hype has led people to believe that the cosmetic operations can turn them into anyone they wish to resemble. Cosmetic surgery is portrayed as a pathway to having a look and life just like that of a star.

By a variety of means, various advertisements try to convince people that if they undergo cosmetic surgery, they can not only look better and younger, but also become richer, happier, more successful, and more popular, and have a better life. Public awareness of cosmetic procedures has increased because of the publicity that cosmetic surgery has recently received in all sorts of media. The influence of advertisement on women's perception of their body images and self is incredibly strong. As Featherstone writes, "advertising...helped to create a world in which individuals are made to become emotionally vulnerable, constantly monitoring themselves for bodily imperfections which could no longer be regarded as natural" (Featherstone 1991a:175). Nowadays, everywhere we turn we are bombarded with

images of beautiful young women advertising everything from cosmetics, to underwear, to TV to cars. Under repeated exposure to these images, many women internalize an association between this body ideal and prestige, happiness, love and success. As a result, the appearance of the face and the shape of the body become alienated from their subject and become the object of consumption dominated by the discourse of advertisements and mass media.



Figure 26. An advertisement for reshaping various body parts on a website of a cosmetic surgery clinic. Photo from www.evercare.com

When endless beautiful and youthful images are produced by mass media, and unrealistic images are regarded as ideal beauty, we are living in a world in which media, advertising, television, and motion pictures colonize the real. In Baudrillard's word, we are living in "the age of simulation." According to Baudrillard,

Simulation is the collapse of the real with the imaginary, the true with

the false. Simulation does not provide equivalents for the real, nor does it reproduce it, it reduplicates and generates it. The very definition of the real becomes that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction. The real is not just what can be reproduced, but what is always already reproduced. This is the hyperreal -- the more real than real. (Baudrillard in Horrocks 1996: 109)

Put differently, the hyperreal replaces the real when the real imitates the models of the hyperreal (Baudrillard in George Ritzer 1997: 96). Applying Baudrillard's notion to the "perfect look" discourse in mass media, magazines along with other visual media produce and reproduce "the perfect look" as a form of simulacra which entices people to pursuit an ideal face and body shape. Women, who believe that aspects of their bodies prevent them from conforming to contemporary ideals of beauty, may feel that they need to change their bodies by any means. Especially, within the context of hyperreal ideal beauty and ambitious consumer culture, somatic technology and biomedical science has rendered the body re-shapeable, which increases the acceptance of cosmetic surgery and other associated technological interventions on the body. Cosmetic surgery, promising quick and easy high-tech results, is marketed to women as an accessory to make them more feminine and attractive. Women try to duplicate ideal beauty and imitate models by crafting their bodies through breast augmentation, liposuction, rhinoplasty, rhytidectomy, and blepharoplasty and so on. Today cosmetic surgery has provided a way to simulate ideal beauty, and to transform the real to the hyperreal, that is, to transform a natural woman into an artificial beauty. Hyperreal aesthetics have

rewritten women's bodies into their most excessively idealized forms through cosmetic surgery in urban China today.

In general, within the past decade, the increasing media coverage of cosmetic surgery in China has made cosmetic surgery more acceptable for individuals to use it to improve their appearance. It has constantly produced and reproduced not only ideal beauty images, but also the enormous desire to seek perfection. Undoubtedly, consumer desire produced by mass media is responsible for the soaring popularity of cosmetic surgery in China.

A Finer Consumer Object: The Body

In the consumer package, there is one object finer, more precious and more dazzling than any other—and even more laden with connotations than the automobile... That object is the **body**...its omnipresence ...in advertising, fashion and mass culture; the hygienic, dietetic, therapeutic cult which surrounds it, the obsession with youth, elegance, virility/femininity, treatments and regimes, and the sacrificial practices attaching to it all bear witness to the fact that the body has today become an object of salvation. It has literally taken over that moral and ideological function from the soul. (Baudrillard 1998: 129)

I have discussed how glossy magazines, the advertising industry and cosmetic surgery marketing construct and promote an ideal physical perfection as a desirable commodity to purchase. Beautiful facial features and ideal body shape as commodities are hardly new. However, when this “skin deep” beauty has become an imperative commodity, it suggests that a profound “consumer revolution” has occurred in China. How are women's bodies targeted by China's ever-expanding

consumer culture and beauty industry?

During my fieldwork, I interviewed and chatted with several office ladies who belong to “white collar” professions. Although their personal backgrounds and stories are different, they share some things in common. They tend to be intelligent and knowledgeable; they hold admirable job positions with a high salary; they tend to be fashionable and love to shop; they are generally confident yet at the same time very anxious about their appearance and body demeanor; and they are obsessed with possessing beautiful bodies through consuming various beauty products including high-tech beauty treatments or cosmetic surgeries. In general, they enjoy a kind of lifestyle defined by contemporary consumer culture in which the body has an important role. Wu Mei, a 29-years-old white-collar office lady, is one of these women. On the day I interviewed her, Ms. Wu dressed in a bright blue silk top and gray flared out skirt with her hair tied up in a bun. After graduating from the English department of Beijing International Studies University, she studied in England for her master’s degree in management in 2001. After she came back from England, Ms. Wu worked in different multinational companies. Since 2005 she has been working in a joint venture consultancy corporation as a manager. At the time I met her, she was single. Ms. Wu underwent operations for rhinoplasty and double-eyelid blepharoplasty two years ago and had just had liposuction surgery recently. I asked Ms. Wu why she underwent a liposuction. She said:

I hate excess fat in my body! To be fat is not healthy! And of course,

when you are fat, whatever you wear, it looks sloppy and clumsy! In this society, if you couldn't leave a good impression to others at first glance, you are already at a disadvantage. We are not all born with perfect body shape, but we can work it out with the help of advanced medical technique. Liposuction is a reasonable choice for me.

One feature of consumption today is that people consume not only necessities like basic foodstuffs, clothing, and household utensils, but also more and more symbolic representations like fashion, style and beauty. The creation of desire is a key driver of a consumer society. In order to create desires for consumption, the market must create a sense of dissatisfaction. The fat self-hatred expressed by Ms. Wu shows the link between a "fat" body image and a stigmatized social identity. While being fat is associated with "unhealthy" and negative image of "sloppy and clumsy," being slimness is associated with a healthy body and positive personality.

When I talked with Ms. Wu about her expenses for her surgeries and other beautifications, I realized that cosmetic surgery is just one of her body works. To obtain and maintain a beautiful appearance, she constantly takes care of her body by consuming various commodities and services. Here is our conversation:

I: Could you please tell me how much money you have spent on these surgeries?

Ms. Wu: Sure, let me think...it costs me 3,600 yuan in double-eyelid surgery, 6,200 yuan for nose job, and 15,000 yuan in liposuction for belly and thigh.

I: Wow, it sounds expensive!

Ms. Wu: I think it's Ok. Because I chose imported material for nose job, it is a little expensive. But it is worth it. I trust the quality of imported

goods rather than domestic products.

I: If you don't mind, may I ask how much money you earn every month?

Ms. Wu (laughing): That's my secret! Roughly, it's between 8,000 yuan to 10,000 yuan.

I: In this case, I guess this spending is affordable for you.

Ms. Wu: Cosmetic surgery is a one-time thing. To put something in my body, I definitely choose reputable hospitals, famous doctors and good material. It wasn't cheap. But you know what? To maintain a nice body shape after the surgery, I need to put in more effort. It's a long-term job. Compared with what I spent on other cosmetics and body works, this amount of money was not too expensive.

I: So, what is your other spending?

Ms. Wu: Well, there are too many things. You know just for skincare and cosmetic products, it is really costly. For skin care products, I basically only use international brands like Lancome and Shiseido. However for cosmetics, I buy both imported goods and domestic goods, and both expensive things and cheap things.

I: What beauty products do you usually buy? And how much you spent on these products per month?

Ms. Wu: Wow, it is hard to count. You know sometimes, even a bottle of cream costs more than 500 yuan.... I bought day cream, night cream, moisture cream, anti-wrinkle cream, whitening cream, eye gel, facial scrub, face wash, toning lotion, body lotion, hand cream.... For cosmetics, I have foundation, powder, brow pencil, eye liner, eye shadow, mascara, lip liner, lip gloss, lip stick, blush, and make-up remover and so on. And every sort of cosmetics, I have different colors and brands. How much money? God knows! I guess at least one-third of my salary. Who knows how much money I spend on it?! I just know every month I buy something new. But anyway, money is earned to be spent. As much as I spend, I can earn it back.

I: It is really costly! ... What else? Do you go to beauty salon for skincare?

Ms. Wu: Yes. I go to a beauty center for facial and body care once every two weeks...How much (it is)? Normally, it is 300 yuan for one treatment. However because I am a member of this beauty center, it costs 200 yuan for each time. I prepaid 10,000 yuan for the membership and deposit, and then they deduct the every expense from this 10,000 yuan.

I: It sounds lots of work!

Ms. Wu: To be fabulous means to spend lots of money and time [on the body]. Yoga class, hair style, nail polish ... so many things [I need to do]. As the saying goes, there are no ugly women, only lazy ones. In fact, I don't feel these things are burdens. It has become a part of my life. I like to hang out with my female friends in beauty salons, hair studios and gyms.

I: Why are you so concerned over your body image? Why is it so important for you to spend so much money to be beautiful?

Ms. Wu: Is there any woman who does not want to look beautiful? Come on! Don't be hypocritical! What's wrong with a woman having something done if she wants to look better and feel better about herself?I feel good when I look good. ...Some people like to portray capable and competitive career women as tough "superwomen" (*nüqiangren*) or bad looking "dinosaurs".⁶⁴ It's ridiculous! I know how to make myself beautiful, and my life as well! Modern career women are not only intelligent and independent, but also attractive and charming!

The conversation above reveals the beauty imperative and its moral obligation in consumer culture. Believing that "to be fabulous means to spend lots of money and time" in order to achieve her desirable body image, Ms. Wu works on her body not only through "one-time" cosmetic surgery, but also through "long-term" body maintenance. In this sense, her belief and action demonstrate the logic of consumerism: to get the desired image of beauty and femininity, the body needs to

⁶⁴ The word "dinosaur" is a metaphor of bad looking in Chinese popular saying.

be constantly taken care of through consuming various beauty products and services. In other words, the inner logic of consumer culture is endless desire and constant consumption. This insatiable desire is cultivated by a vast array of visual images in mass media, and also internalized by consumers as “body maintenance” (Featherstone 1991a). As Foucault writes (1977), it is a process of self-regulation, in which the individual regulates his/her body in accordance with socially sanctioned norms of beauty and health. This ongoing regulation of self is imperative even without awareness. In Ms. Wu’s case, when she states that “there are no ugly women, only lazy ones,” this profoundly indicates that a beautiful body is regarded as a reflection of self-control and self-discipline. As noted by Featherstone:

Self-preservation depends upon the preservation of the body within a culture in which the body is the passport to all that is good in life. Health, youth, beauty, sex, fitness are the positive attributes which body care can achieve and preserve. With appearance being taken as a reflex of the self, the penalties of bodily neglect are a lowering of one’s acceptability as a person, as well as an indication of laziness, low self-esteem and even moral failure. (Featherstone 1991a: 186)

Under the beauty imperative in consumer culture, a body image which does not meet the social standards of beauty would suggest that the owner of the body has neglected to take care of her body because of laziness or lack of self-discipline. This brings up the important and intricate relationship between the body and the self.

In many facets of social life, the body is regarded as a representation of the self. Within contemporary social theory, the body has become a “project” that is

worked on and transformed as a central part of self-identity in high/late/post-modernity (Featherstone 1991a; Giddens 1991; Shilling 2003).

Featherstone views the body as a vehicle of self-expression, reinforced by consumerism. He writes, “The body is a vehicle of pleasure and self-expression. Images of the body beautiful, openly sexual and associated with hedonism, leisure and display, emphasizes the importance of appearance and the ‘look’” (Featherstone 1991a: 170). He argues that as part of one’s identity, the self is responsible for “body maintenance” to ensure that the status and particularly appearance of the body achieve the demanding values—health, youth and beauty—demanded by consumer culture. A self that fails in controlling the body’s appearance loses its social acceptability because of its “low self-esteem and even moral failure” (Featherstone 1991a:182-187). Similarly, Chris Shilling (2003) discusses the relationship between the self and the body by identifying the body as “an entity which is in the process of becoming; a project which should be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual’s self-identity” (Shilling 2003: 5).

However, different from Featherstone’s “body maintenance” which emphasizes social regulation of the body, Shilling suggests that by investing in the body as a “project” potentially open to reconstruction in line with the designs of its owner, people are able to increase their control over their bodies, and by so doing, to express their sense of identity. Shilling’s notion of “the body as a project” thus contains more room for agency and for self identity:

Investing in the body provides people with a means of self expression and a way of potentially feeling good and increasing the control they have over their bodies. If one feels unable to exert influence over an increasingly complex society, at least one can have some effect on the size, shape and appearance of one's body. (Shilling 2003: 6)

In Ms. Wu's statement, we also see that she is concerned about how others might perceive her from her appearance. Moreover, to refuse the stereotype of successful career women who lack femininity, Ms. Wu tries to be an "attractive and charming" woman by actively consuming beauty products and services, including cosmetic surgery. Through beautifying her appearance and remaking her body shape, she expresses not only her hedonistic lifestyle defined by consumer culture, but also her sense of self as a "modern" career woman who is financially independent and simultaneously enjoys being beautiful and feminine .

Ms. Wu various body shaping and maintaining works also offer us a quick yet effective glimpse of female bodies' involvement in the thriving beauty industry in China. She is one example of well-paid young urban Chinese women who hold increasing spending power in China today. The fuel behind the spending boom on beauty products and services is the growing number of affluent middle-class professionals created by China's booming economy. Nowadays, with more spending power in hand, more and more career women like Ms. Wu invest not only in education and professional skills, but also in the features of the face and the shape of the body. There has been an emerging trend that women are paying more and more attention to body image, and fast-changing styles in clothes, haircuts, and grooming.

This trend has opened up many business avenues for related services. Adapting to a flourishing open-market economy system, China has developed the world's eighth-largest and Asia's second-biggest cosmetics market. The routine investments of beauty include spending money on skincare products, cosmetics, hair salons, beauty salons, Yoga clubs, and gyms to beautify face, hair, hands, nails and every inch of the body. In addition to these routine beauty works, an extreme make over, cosmetic surgery has also become more and more acceptable and popular. For Ms. Wu, this beauty investment means a roughly one-third of her monthly income. What she may not be aware of is that this amount of her spending has been contributing to the fast development of China's beauty market: a market stuffed with all kinds of beauty products and services.

Although women like Ms. Wu are celebrating their beautiful new bodies gained surgically and their buying power as new Chinese modern women, sometimes cosmetic surgery is not as wonderful as its advertising indicates. The various horrible stories of disfigurement repeatedly reported in Chinese mass media constantly remind us of the dark side of the cosmetic surgery market in China. Let me now discuss one example of this.

Leg Stretching Surgery

Selling beauty has become such a lucrative business that the market is producing many new "products" and "services," including the buying of "height." Using an

extreme example of cosmetic surgery—leg stretching surgery—let me now discuss how cosmetic surgery can sometimes be dangerous and even fatal.

The surgery, which is formally called the Ilizarov procedure, was invented in the 1950s by a Russian doctor, Gavril Ilizarov, who used bicycle spokes to heal fractured bones broken by gunshots. Ilizarov later adapted this technique to lengthen limbs. The surgery is now used all over the world, mainly for therapeutic purposes such as to treat dwarfism and deformed limbs, but it is rarely used for cosmetic reason as it has been used in China in past few years. The popular Chinese name for this leg stretching surgery is “breaking bones and getting taller” (*duangu zenggao*). The surgery does exactly this:

A doctor breaks the patient’s legs and inserts steel pins into the bones just below the knees and above the ankles. The pins are attached to a metal cage. Every day for months, despite excruciating pain, the patient adjusts the knobs a small amount to force the ends of the broken bones to pull away from each other. By constantly forcing the ends of the broken bones apart before they can heal, more new bone comes to fill in the gaps. (Coonan 2006)

In today’s China, in job recruitment, aside from the requirement of attractive appearance, applicants sometimes also encounter restrictions of height. Recruitment ads in newspapers often specify that the criteria for women is height over 1.60 or 1.65 meters, while a minimum height for men is 1.70 meters and sometimes 1.75 meters.⁶⁵ As reported by Ni (2005), in worrying that his 1.62-meter height could

⁶⁵ According to China Population Information Network (China POPIN 2001), the average height of Chinese women is 1.58 meters, and the average height of Chinese men is 1.69 meters.

keep him from a white-collar job, a 22-year-old business major student took a year off from school to undergo leg-stretching surgery. A 20-year-old girl, who was not tall enough to apply to film school because the height restriction for female acting students was accepted by the Beijing Film Academy after adding 7 centimeters to her original 1.55-meter frame through the surgery. However, as a risky surgery, sometimes the surgery fails, and the dream becomes a nightmare. It is indeed risky surgery that may make people taller but could also lead to paralysis.

On April 1, 2007, CCTV documentary program “Weekly Quality Report,” reported the sad story of 25-year-old Xiao Mei, who was crippled in her lower right leg after undergoing leg-stretching surgery at the Guangzhou Far East Cosmetics Hospital. Xiao Mei had been unsatisfied with her height—1.52 meters. Disappointed with various products which promised to increase her height, an advertisement about “breaking bones and getting taller” (*duangu zenggao*) captured her attention. The ads claimed that becoming 10 centimeters taller was no longer a dream by breaking bones to force them to grow. Xiao Mei went to the hospital and met the vice president of the hospital, Wang Kuiran, who told Xiao Mei that this leg-stretching surgery was a simple and effective operation without any risk at all and that Far East had the technique to perform it.

In March 2005, Xiao Mei paid some 45,000 yuan for the leg-stretching surgery in order to have her height increased from 1.52 meters to 1.60 meters. After five months, Xiao Mei’s legs were indeed extended 8 centimeters. However, three

months later, when steel pins were finally removed from her bones and she was supposed to walk normally, Xiao Mei found that she could not walk due to unbearable pain in her right leg. It turned out that the gap in her lower right leg had failed to close. Tortured by excruciating pain and helplessness, Xiao Mei went to Guangdong Provincial People's Hospital and other big hospitals to seek help. Unfortunately, experts told her that she would be crippled for life due to the leg stretching operation she had undergone. "Now I really regret that I was so naive as to believe what the surgeon told me", she said in the TV programme. It turned out that although the hospital had carried out more than 100 such operations since 2004, the procedure in this hospital had never been approved by the health authorities. "Originally, we didn't know that such an operation needed to be approved," said Wang Kuiran, the person who performed the surgery for Xiao Mei. Wang also confessed to the CCTV that his hospital did not have any experience in leg-stretching surgery before they actually performed this operation. When responding to the question "have you ever really mastered this technique," Wang said, "We must have a learning process. This is a process, isn't it?" Guangzhou Far East Beauty Cosmetics Hospital was subsequently closed by Guangzhou Health Bureau.

Of course Guangzhou Far East Beauty Cosmetics Hospital was not the only one providing unauthorized leg stretching surgery in China. In further investigation, CCTV found that over the past two years, similar cases emerged in Beijing, Hebei,

Zhejiang, Guangdong, Liaoning, and Henan. In August 2006, one hospital in Fengtai, Beijing, received 12 patients who had been crippled in leg-stretching surgery. In the past two years, this hospital received and treated more than 60 patients who were injured by leg-stretching surgery. Eventually, on October 10, 2006, China's Ministry of Health banned cosmetic leg-stretching surgery, restricting it to strictly medical grounds and carried out by orthopedic or comprehensive hospitals that conduct at least 400 orthopedic operations a year and offer post-surgery care and rehabilitation. There is no doubt that the recent booming market needs more regulation from the government. However, if workplaces still list specific height requirements, some people probably will still go to extremes to attempt to measure up.

I have presented two cases above: Ms. Wu's cheerful story and Xiao Mei's tragic story. While Ms. Wu celebrates her new body image gained through consuming various beauty products and services including cosmetic surgery, Xiao Mei suffers from permanent lameness caused by leg-stretching surgery. These two types of stories are typically found in mass media, indicating the contradictions existing in women's involvement in cosmetic surgery. In the former case, a woman successfully chooses commodities and services to gain desirable beauty and to construct her sense of self as a "modern" Chinese woman; in the latter, a woman becomes a victim manipulated by a profit-driven cosmetic surgery hospital. Nevertheless, although their experiences are totally different, both cases demonstrate the deep involvement of women's bodies in cosmetic surgery and the beauty

industry, and display how women's bodies have been extensively and deeply targeted by China's thriving "beauty economy."

The Pragmatic Ideology and the Booming Beauty Economy

As discussed in earlier chapters, the pursuit of feminine beauty, not to mention cosmetic surgery, was opposed to the puritanical ethics of communist ideology and was highly condemned in Maoist China. When the quest for beauty and the alteration of the body has become a matter of consumer choice, is the state power of controlling the body superseded by the capitalist market in post-Mao China? Does this phenomenon indicate a triumph of the capitalist market over Chinese communist ideology in controlling individuals' personal lives and bodies? I doubt it. Consumer culture definitely plays a significant role in shaping women's perceptions of and shopping for beauty, and the capitalist market is indeed an important institution to drive the development of China's beauty industry. However, in a country where communist ideology is still immersed into people's daily life, the market cannot function well if it deviates from the inner logic of the dominant ideology. Hence, in what way is the CCP's ideology behind the booming beauty industry and cosmetic surgery market in China?

At first glance, the quest for beauty through cosmetic surgery contrasts a greatly with the CCP's ideology. But closer scrutiny reveals the inner logic of people's choice of cosmetic surgery and of CCP's choice of the capitalist market

economy is similar. As I have argued, a main trait of cosmetic surgery in China is its pragmatism. This pragmatism is not only produced by the instability of the transitional Chinese social structure, but is also channeled by the CCP's changing ideology. During the initial stages of China's opening up after the Cultural Revolution, in setting aside the ideological debate over what is capitalist and what is socialist, Deng Xiaoping put forward his famous "cat theory"—"no matter if it's a white cat or a black cat; as long as it can catch mice, it's a good cat,"⁶⁶ which paved the way for the market oriented reform in China. Deng's "cat theory" exemplified how the CCP's ideology had turned to a pragmatism orientation, which shifted the country away from class struggle and towards economic revival. In Deng's pragmatic approach, it does not matter whether something is capitalist or socialist; what matters is whether it is beneficial to economic development, enhancing the overall national strength, and improving the people's living standards. If something is beneficial in these senses, then it can be appreciated and invoked by socialism. This pragmatic ideology has been justified by the CCP's slogan "building socialism with Chinese characteristics" (*jianshe zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi*). By developing many new terms and concepts of Marxist theory, such as "characteristics theory," to legitimize its new economic system, the CCP maintains that Marxism has not been abandoned ideologically.

⁶⁶ For more detail of Deng's theory, please refer to Deng Xiaoping, Documents Research Division of Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party 1987: 1208, 1106; The details can be also found in Zhao Ouansheng, *Interpreting Chinese Foreign Policy*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.1996.

Latham (2002) has argued that the current situation in China is fundamentally different from that of other post-socialist countries in Eastern Europe due to the rapidly changing nature of Chinese society. The hegemonic legitimacy of the CCP is fundamentally linked to change; the concept of transition in local rhetoric plays an important role in maintaining the party's legitimacy. Latham calls this existing series of ideologies (e.g. building socialism with Chinese characteristics) "rhetoric of transition" (Latham 2002: 231). Although this rhetoric may vary in content, it assumes that the whole country and its population are in transition from their present state to something better in the future. The CCP argues that socialism is not incompatible with these economic policies and argues that China is in the primary stage of socialism. This pragmatic redefinition allows the state to undertake whatever economic policies it desires to develop the market economy. The "cat theory" and "characteristics theory" epitomize the sort of pragmatism and experimentalism that has gripped the CCP in post-Mao China.

With regard to cosmetic surgery, the pragmatic ideology is predominant in both an individual's choice of undergoing cosmetic surgery and the state's policy of developing its beauty industry. As discussed above, for many Chinese women, despite their positions in different social hierarchies, they opt for cosmetic surgery for very practical reasons such as finding a better job or spouse, securing a marriage, solidifying social status, or fitting into urban life. Obviously, the logic of their choices of undergoing cosmetic surgery is in a similar vein to the CCP's pragmatic

ideology: it does not matter whether it is a natural beauty or artificial beauty--as long as it is beneficial to one's life, it is appreciated. From a broad perspective, this pragmatic ideology also works in developing China's beauty industry. Since the reform policy oriented in pragmatism has taken root in China, economic success has gradually led to broadening popular support from the masses, if not for all government policies, certainly for those that have yielded higher standards of living and more opportunities for personal choice. One informant, a 22-year-old female student, spoke as follows:

I don't think anyone cares whether it is socialism or capitalism as long as our living standard is improving. Nowadays, if we have money, we can buy anything we desire. In the case of cosmetic surgery, if we have money, it's just a personal choice. We can even fly to Korea or Hollywood to get our bodies done. What's the difference between socialism and capitalism? Who cares?

The above statement implicitly demonstrates that market reform has strengthened the regime's position, and affluent consumption has provided a new form of legitimacy for the party-state. As Chu states in his review of *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*, "culturally a new identity seems to be emerging, largely across generations, an identity that places material comfort above ideological dedication, and individualism above collectivism" (2001: 1533). A journalist I spoke with about the development of China's cosmetic surgery market and the changing ideology of the CCP, made an interesting comment:

There are lots of problems in our government, such as corruption. But a

great thing our government has done is to develop our economy. Compared with the past, our living standard has indeed significantly improved and we do have more and more freedom to choose whatever we want. The bottom line is that you don't protest in front of *Zhongnanhai*⁶⁷.... Anyway, cosmetic surgery is just skin deep. Why should the government forbid it? Beautiful women and prosperous economy, who does not like it?

From this perspective, the party-state only withdraws from "skin-deep" spheres of personal life which would not threaten its political authority. Or we may argue that the party-state actually forms a new form of surveillance and control of the body through consumption. Having this background in mind, it is not difficult to understand how a once ideologically incorrect practice—the pursuit of "bourgeois" beauty—now has become a thriving beauty industry which underscores the rapid economic growth and the widely spreading consumerism supporting the legitimacy of the CCP's new ideology in reform China.

Along with pragmatism in ideology, the party-state has also used the concept of *xiaokang* (relatively well-off, comparatively comfortable, or comparative prosperity) to form its development strategy and to legitimize its vision for the future of China. The current usage of *xiaokang* invokes earlier Chinese ideas in support of the CCP's Marxism. In ancient Chinese thought, a *xiaokang* society was the predecessor to the *daton* (great unity), a utopian vision of the world in which everyone and everything

⁶⁷ The *Zhongnanhai* is a complex of buildings in Beijing adjacent to the Forbidden City which serves as the central headquarters for the CCP and the Central Government of China. The term *Zhongnanhai* is synonymous with the leadership and government administration of the nation, and is often used as a metonym for the Chinese leadership at large. In addition, the mention of *Zhongnanhai* in the statement implicitly refers to the event happening on April 25, 1999, in which more than 10,000 Falun Gong practitioners gathered outside *Zhongnanhai*.

is at peace.⁶⁸ By invoking *xiaokang*, Chinese leaders intend to legitimate the current inequality associated with the capitalist market.⁶⁹

With this background in mind, let us now examine how the concept of *xiaokang* society has been invoked by Chinese officials and scholars as a reference to speed up China's beauty industry. During the economic forum of the China International Beauty Week held in Beijing in October 2004, Liu Binjie, the Deputy Director of the General Administration of Press and Publication of China, spoke as follows:

100 years ago, *meirong* (activities related to beautification or beauty service) belonged to the upper class. Now it has developed into a huge industrial army. The industry has contributed significantly to our social life and economic development, including bringing beauty to us. I hope that the beauty industry will lead fashion, bring a better life and build a new image of [China's] beauty industry by following the nation's orientation in building a *xiaokang* society and improving people's living standard. (Xu 2007: prologue)

Cheng Xiusheng, Director of Information Center, Development Research

Center of the State Council,⁷⁰ spoke as follows:

⁶⁸ In *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*, Davis (2000:17) writes that according to Hanlong Lu, the popular understanding of *xiaokang* derives from its origins in the Confucian Book of Rites, where the appearance of a *xiaokang* society signaled the demise of a society of equality (*datong*), in which "all under heaven is public" (*tianxia weigong*) and its transformation into a stratified society where "all under heaven belongs to the family" (*tianxia wei jia*).

⁶⁹ In the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China held on November 8, 2002, the report delivered by CCP's former leader Jian Zeming was entitled "Build a Well-off (*xiaokang*) Society in an All-Round Way and Create a New Situation in Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics."

⁷⁰ The Development Research Center of the State Council is a policy research and consulting institution directly under the State Council of the People's Republic of China. Its main function is to undertake research on the overall, comprehensive, strategic and long-term issues related to the national economic and social development and provide policy suggestions and consulting

As an economy, beauty is a mass economy. At the same time, the beauty economy is a *xiaokang* economy. As a consuming need which surpasses the need of basic living consumption and caters to the need for enjoyment, the beauty service industry might speed up in this transforming process (Xu 2007: prologue)

As the above statements indicate, within the new ideology of the party-state, a rich and civilized society pays more attention to beauty, suggesting that a beautiful image is an indicator of a society's development and maturity. The beautiful female body thus turns into a catalyst of the beauty industry and a marker of universal modernity.

The business of beauty has been rising fast in China since the 1990s, but was not widely recognized until the four economists, He Fan, Ba Shusong, Zhong Wei and Zhao Xiao, released the first ever *Annual Report of China's Beauty Economy* during China's International Beauty Week in October 2004. The term "beauty economy" refers to *meirong jingji* or *meinü jingji*.⁷¹ While meanings of *meirong jingji* and *meinü jingji* overlap to some extent, the term *meirong jingji* basically refers to the beauty industry and its consumers, while the term *meinü jingji* refers to activities which use beautiful women as a means to attract attention and promote business. The "beauty economy" used in the annual report refers to *meirong jingji*, the beauty industry. According to this annual report, the sales volume of China's beauty industry from 1982 to 2003 has increased more than 200 times within 20 years. In 1982, the cosmetic sales volume was just 200 million yuan, while in 2003

advice to CPC Central Committee and the State Council.

⁷¹ In Chinese, *meirong* broadly refers to activities, services and products related to making people beautiful, *meinü* means beautiful women, and *jingji* means economy.

the figure reached 52 billion yuan (Donald 2004). The report also claims that the beauty industry ranks as China's fifth-largest consumer sector.

As reported by Chen (2005), Zhang Xiaomei, the editor-in-chief of the report, the present editor of *China Beauty and Fashion Daily*,⁷² and a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), has raised more than 60 proposals at CPPCC, suggesting developing China's beauty industry since 2003. Seven of her ten proposals in 2007 CPPCC are related to the development of China's beauty industry. According to Zhang Xiaomei, beauty service has become an indispensable part of people's daily lives and represents a huge market as a sub-economy: the beauty economy, with an annual turnover of 170 billion yuan and an annual growth rate of 15 percent.

In addition to huge profits, the beauty industry also means considerable job vacancies. Chen (2005) reported that Zhang Xiaomei argued that the beauty industry is highly labor-intensive with one-to-one, and in some cases, several-to-one service. In 2004 China had nearly 1.6 million beauty parlors, employing 9.4 million people. Chen (2005) also reported that according to a survey conducted by the Cosmetology Chamber of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, viewed from a broader perspective, the industry employs more than 16 million. The survey also shows that the average age of workers in this industry is 25.72 years and nearly 80

⁷² *China Beauty and Fashion Daily*, which was launched in 1999, now has become one of the most popular Chinese beauty industry newspapers with a monthly domestic circulation of 200,000.

percent are women, whose average salary stands at 1,050 yuan per month. Having all the above figures in mind, it is understandable why Zhang argues that “China’s booming beauty industry could hatch a considerable number of jobs if developed properly, constituting a potential solution to the country’s unemployment problem” (*Xinhua News Agency* 2005a). Zhang’s opinion was echoed by Chen Yu, the director of the Employment Training Center under the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (Chen 2005).

As an important sector of the beauty industry, the cosmetic surgery market has also developed significantly. According to *China Daily* (2006), “government officials estimate that US\$2.4 billion is spent annually in China on cosmetic surgery procedures. They say about 1 million such operations take place every year.” Therefore, if for an individual, the beauty industry may just stand for satisfying one’s personal needs; for a rapidly developing country like China, it means huge economic profit and a large number of jobs. As the above figures show, the beauty industry has indeed become one of China’s most productive economic sectors.

In the matter of body alteration through cosmetic surgery, the seeming contradiction between free market discourse and coercive state power is actually reconcilable. Latham (2002: 217) regards consumption as a “social palliative” to fill an ideological void left by the demise of Maoism. Latham’s argument sheds light to think about the prosperity of the image-making industry in post-Mao China in the context of legitimacy and changing ideology of the CCP. Through releasing some

social space to people to pursue beauty, the Chinese government has promoted a huge and flourishing market of beauty industry as “social palliative” which provide a finer commodity to people: a glamorous body image. The notion of beauty and freedom of its pursuit are de-politicized from the orthodox communist ideology yet re-politicized in the newly pragmatic communist ideology. In this sense, the female body has been not only targeted by the ever-expanding beauty industry, but also manipulated by the party-state to represent its new image. The flourishing beauty economy serves as propaganda to underline the success of recent liberalizing policies and economic success. The beautiful female image was invoked to represent the cosmopolitan and modern face of post-Mao China, as I will discuss in next section.

“Beauty Diplomacy”: The Miss World Pageant in China

Women are not only consumers of the beauty economy; beautiful women are catalysts of the beauty economy. As mentioned earlier, in addition to the beauty industry (*meirong jingji*), another “beauty economy” is *meinü jingji*, defined by Gary Xu and Susan Feiner as follows:

Broadly defined, *meinü jingji* refers to activities like beauty pageants that are typically commercialized and localized festivities that put beautiful women on parade, as well as the accompanying range of advertisements for TV shows and movies, cosmetics, plastic surgery centers, weight loss products, fitness programs, and the ubiquitous beauty parlors.
(2007:308)

They argue that “one of the unexpected by-products of this new cultural focus on beauty as a significant source of individual economic success is the full bloom of beauty pageants endorsed by the state” (Xu and Feiner 2007: 307). Using beautiful women to sell products, gain publicity, promote companies, and boost the economy is hardly a new tactic around the world. However, considering the ideological context, the Chinese craze in hosting various beauty pageants offers a unique stage to explore not only the flourishing beauty economy but also shifting meanings of the politics of beauty in China, which I will discuss in the this section.

When China announced that the 2003 Miss World contest would be held in China for the first time, the political implication of the lifting of the ban of beauty pageant in China attracted much attention throughout the world. Especially in the background that even in 2002, the Miss China pageant was still an underground competition, raided by Chinese police half-way through for not having the adequate official permit. After more than a half century of denunciations of beauty pageants as a symbol of bourgeois decadence and as demeaning of women, the arrival of the Miss World pageant in China in 2003 made the beauty pageant a stage where the politics of beauty become visible.

Unlike the resistance it received in Nigerian in 2002,⁷³ the Miss World

⁷³ When the 2002 Miss World contest was held in Nigerian, Nigerian Islamic leaders condemned the event, saying that it counters Islamic values by promoting sexual promiscuity. Fighting broke out between Muslims and Christians after a Nigerian newspaper published an article saying the Muslim prophet Mohammed would have probably taken one of the Miss World contestants as his wife. Riots erupted in the northern city of Kaduna, and spread to Abuja, the country’s capital and the intended venue for the contest. The pageant was forced to move to London after more than 220 people were killed in riots between Muslims and Christians.

competition received an extremely warm welcome in China in 2003. The beauty pageant was held in Sanya, a resort town on the southern island of Hainan Province some 2,700 miles southwest of Beijing. The city government of Sanya provided much funding to the organizer of the Miss World organization to secure the privilege to stage the event for the first time. In addition to \$4.8 million “permission fee” and \$31 million sprucing itself up for the pageant, Sanya’s government officials assured the Miss World pageant a setting of peace and stability away from controversies. As noted by Xu and Feiner (2007), “In contrast to the politicization of the contest that occurred in Nigeria, China was committed to showing that political oppression and moral rigidity had been banished from the cultural landscape” (Xu and Feiner 2007: 315). The determination to host the Miss World pageant was enthusiastically expressed by the local government. “It is a milestone in the development of Chinese culture,” said Sanya Mayor Chen Ci at a press conference. “We did spend quite a lot of money, but the consequence will be huge. It will have a positive influence on the city’s future” (*People’s Daily* 2003b).

In December 2003, the first time for China, the 53rd Miss World final was held in Sanya successfully with a worldwide television audience estimated at two billion—easily the best tourist promotion any resort can hope for. “It is a great breakthrough,” said Mini Ai, a reporter from *Shanghai Youth Daily*. “In the past when we were invited to report on the contests for image ambassadors, which were very similar to beauty competitions, the organizers would keep re-emphasizing that

their contest was not a beauty contest” (*People’s Daily* 2003a). While the *People’s Daily*, welcomed the pageant and the “carnival atmosphere and changing social practices” it had brought with it, BBC commented that “as with the Olympics in five years’ time, China hopes to gain not only financial rewards from investment and tourism but also the kind of kudos and camaraderie it craves as an accepted, fully-fledged member of the world community” (Luard 2003).

As predicted and expected by the Sanya government, the publicity gaining from hosting the Miss World event has turned Sanya and Hainan province into a booming tourist destination as the “Hawaii of the Orient.” As reported by *Pakistan Times* (2004), one year after hosting the 53rd Miss World contest, Sanya mayor Chen Ci said in a conference that city’s gross domestic product in 2004 grew 13 percent compared with the year before and property market was booming. “There are many reasons for this improvement but Miss World is one of them,” Chen said. Sanya’s successful hosting of the Miss World pageant signals that beauty pageants have become officially endorsed by Chinese officials. In 2004, China hosted at least six major international beauty competitions, including Miss World, Miss Universe, Miss Asia, Miss Tourism World, Miss Tourism International and Miss Intercontinental. The huge profit has also made Sanya continuously host four rounds of the Miss World pageant in five years from 2003 to 2007. In addition to a series of international beauty pageants, numerous regional and local beauty pageants, modeling contests, image ambassador competitions all take place in China, making

China a land of thousands of beauty contests in recent years. There is no doubt that China's enthusiasm for hosting beauty pageant is fueled by the huge economic profit they bring.

Beauty is about economics, but it is not limited to economics. "Beauty pageants are a stage for politicking should come as a surprise to no one. For Miss World in particular, the idea of exploiting the competition as a conduit for political brinkmanship is all too familiar" (Liang 2007). This statement resonates with Xu and Feiner's argument as follows:

After more than four decades of sexual repression and moral rigidity, beauty pageants could be portrayed by the official state media as symbols of women's liberation and modernization, rather than as the tools of sexual repression and women's oppression, as per the initial views of the Chinese Communist Party. (Xu and Feiner 2007: 314)

From being regarded as a spectacle of bourgeois corrupt culture to being praised as a booster of China's beauty economy, the ubiquitous beauty pageants in China serve as propaganda to underline China's successful economic growth and seemingly liberalizing policies. If the arrival of the 2003 Miss World pageant in China marks a turning point of China's attitude towards beauty contests, the crowning of a 23-year-old Chinese Zhang Zilin as the 2007 Miss World in her homeland might symbolizes the triumphant victory of China's "beauty diplomacy" (Liang 2007) in which the Chinese government uses beauty pageants as a medium to promote China's economic growth and to present a "new" image of China. In answering her

final interview question why she should be selected as the Miss World and what she would do with the title, Zhang Zilin said, “There are 1.3 billion people behind me....If I win I want to become a link between the Olympic Games and the Miss World Organization” (*Women of China* 2007). There is no doubt that Zhang was clever to proclaim 1.3 billion Chinese people as her supporters. After China had hosted four rounds of the Miss World pageant in the past five years, Miss China finally reaped the crown of Miss World when the Olympics was going to be held in Beijing only half a year later.

Conclusion

As I have discussed in this chapter, popular media increase women’s exposure to “ideal beauty,” encouraging them to pursuing beauty including body alteration. At the same time, the huge potential market and its profits have driven various public and private hospitals/clinics to attempt to get their share. When beauty is defined by mass media and the market offer everything including reshaping eyelids, heightening the nose bridge, chiseling the face and lips, removing excess fat, enlarging the breasts and even lengthening the legs, cosmetic surgery has become a matter of consumer choice in contemporary China. Within consumer culture, beauty has become an imperative, of which the desirable body image is promised through the consumption of various beauty products and services, and the neglect of body image is considered a failure in self-discipline. Within consumer culture the body

has become a reflection of a person's identity and a site of ideological contestations. The capitalist market appears to take control of an individual's life in its most intimate sphere, the body, which was tightly controlled by the state only a few decades ago in China. Apparently, the ways in which state power operates in the body sphere have changed; however, this does not necessarily mean the retreat of the state and the triumph of the market. Rather than replace each other, state and market negotiate with each other, and mutually shape each other. The CCP's ideology has taken a pragmatic orientation since the opening up of China. The increasing popularity of cosmetic surgery in contemporary China is not simply a result of media marketing of the ideal beauty. It is a complicated case which relates with the transition from a socialist to a post-socialist regime alongside a change of ideology, in which the beautiful female image partakes in building a new modern face of China.

Chapter Seven

From Barbie Doll to the Korean Wave: Embodied Globalization

In the following two chapters, I explore how beauty ideals and practices in China have been influenced by globalizing forces. Globalization here is understood as “an intensely interconnected world—one where the rapid flows of capital, people, goods, images, and ideologies draw more and more of the globe into webs of interconnection” (Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 4). In this chapter, I first discuss what features are currently considered beautiful in China and which cosmetic surgery operations are most desirable among Chinese women in order to examine Chinese repercussions of Western standards of beauty. Using the rapid expansion of Barbie doll sales in China’s market as an example, I explore how the process of globalization has integrated China into not only a global economic market but also a “global cultural supermarket” (cf. Mathews 2000:4). After discussing the increasing Western influence on China in terms of standards of beauty, I explore how the development of the Chinese cosmetic surgery market has been intertwined with transnational flows of people, media, capital and techniques through the case of a Chinese cosmetic surgery reality programme, “Cinderella and the Swan.” As an American-style cosmetic surgery reality programme sponsored by a Korean joint-venture hospital in Beijing, “Cinderella and the Swan” offers a unique

perspective to explore how, along with American entertainment culture and beauty culture, Korean pop culture, the so-called “Korean Wave,” also has had a significant influence on Chinese women’s perceptions of beauty and practices of cosmetic surgery.

A Glimpse of Changing Ideals of Beauty

During my fieldwork, when I asked women who underwent double-eyelid surgery the reasons why they chose this particular surgery, they generally responded with a typical answer like “double eyelids make my eyes bigger and more beautiful.” When I then asked why big eyes are considered beautiful, some of them stared at me in puzzlement. As one informant said, “It’s universal! Big eyes are always considered beautiful. It is kind of a benchmark of whether a woman is pretty or not. Aren’t big eyes beautiful?”

People generally assume a universal standard of beauty as if it were obviously a fact. However, we really do not have a universal standard of beauty over time and across continents. Preferences for some physical features, such as good health, youth, attributes linked to reproductive ability, balanced features, and symmetry may perhaps be “hard-wired” genetically among people around the world, as argued by Etcoff (2000). However, in terms of detailed standards of beauty, what is considered beautiful in one society may be considered undesirable in other societies, and what is regarded as attractive in one period may also change over time. I will not attempt

to review the history of Chinese standards of beauty here. Rather, by briefly discussing a few paintings and pictures of Chinese beauties in different times, I try to demonstrate that standards of beauty are social and cultural constructions changing contextually and historically. Let us take a quick glimpse of changing ideals of Chinese beauty.

When I read *Chinese Beauty Aesthetics* (Zhang and Liu 2002), I was immediately attracted by some Chinese “paintings of beauties” (*shi nü hua*)⁷⁴. Looking at portraits which capture ideals of Chinese female beauty in different periods, I was struck by how standards of Chinese beauty have shifted. Among various “paintings of beauties,” there are images of Chinese women with a wide variety of physical features from voluptuous female portraits from the Tang Dynasty (618-907), to the graceful portraits of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), and to the effeminate and frail types portrayed in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. The dramatic difference in paintings reveals changing attitudes towards female beauty over time. The shift of ideal Chinese beauty is well exemplified by a famous Chinese idiom: “buxom Huan and slinky Yan” (*huan fei yan shou*).⁷⁵ While Yang Yuhuan (719 - 756) was probably the most famous “plump” beauty in Chinese history, Zhao Feiyan (32 BC-1 BC) was often compared and contrasted with Yang

⁷⁴ “Painting of beauties” (*shi nü hua*) is an important branch of traditional Chinese painting, portraying beautiful women and lives of noble women.

⁷⁵ Huan refers to Yang Yuhuan, a favored concubine of Tang emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Yan refers to Zhao Feiyan, wife of Han emperor Chengdi in the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 8).

with her slender and lithe figure as another ideal of beauty in Chinese history. These two ideals of beauty represent the opposite spectrum in terms of physical attributes, yet both women were considered unparalleled beauties in their time.

People generally assumed that during the centuries in and before the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D.220), slenderness was considered a standard of feminine beauty. However, Chinese standards of beauty changed drastically in the Tang dynasty, when the country was powerful, and people were affluent. It was plump women with wide foreheads and round faces who were deemed most beautiful. For example, in “Court Ladies Adorning their Hair with Flowers” (see Figure 27) painted by Zhou Fang, one of the most influential painters during the Tang Dynasty, a court lady has a round pale face, a flat nose, a tiny mouth, small eyes and fleshy body figure.



Figure 27. Painting by Zhou Fang: “Court Ladies Adorning Their Hair with Flowers” (*Zanhua Shinu Tu*), Tang Dynasty.

What features, then are considered beautiful today? The shift of ideals of

Chinese beauty can be traced not only in ancient paintings, but also in a variety of popular beauty icons in China today. If we look at a photo of Fan Bingbing (Figure 28), who is known as one of the most beautiful actresses in contemporary China, we may be stunned by the contrast between beauty of the Tang dynasty and beauty of today. With her small face, prominent nose, big and expressive eyes and slender body figure, Fan Bingbing represents a beauty ideal in today's China.

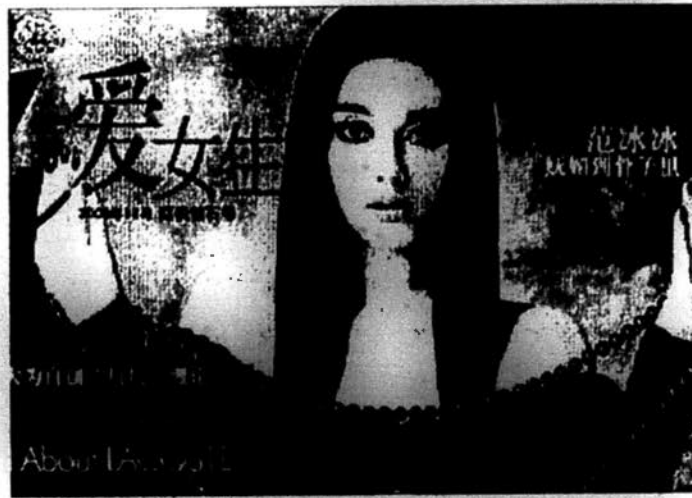


Figure 28. Fan Bingbing on the cover of *Girl (ai nüsheng)* magazine, November, 2005

We even do not need to go as far as ancient imperial China to examine different standards of beauty. If we look at the photo of Hu Die (Figure 29), a beauty icon and the “empress of movies” in 1930s Shanghai, we can easily see the difference. As the two photos indicate, standards of beauty have shifted from flat facial features to angled facial features, from a round face to a slim face, and from small slanted eyes to huge and expressive eyes. Although these pictures only offer a tiny glimpse at the range of different types of Chinese beauties, they make an explicit statement that ideals of Chinese beauty have shifted throughout history. Especially when physical

qualities such as big eyes, prominent nose, small face and angled facial features are considered beautiful, as is the case today, it is not surprising to find that cosmetic operations such as double-eyelid blepharoplasty, rhinoplasty, and facial contour reshaping surgery are popular in China today.



Figure 29. Hu Die on an advertisement for a record by Pathe Shanghai Studio in the 1930s.

Which cosmetic surgery procedures are the most desirable in China? There are no nationwide statistics available on this issue. Nevertheless, we can get an idea of this from some surveys. According to Zhang Xian (2007), the Beijing-based Horizon Research Consultancy Group conducted a multistage random sampling survey and polled 1,553 people aged 18-55 from Shanghai, Tianjin and Shenzhen in January 2007. The result shows that the top five body parts that respondents most sought to improve are eyes (29.8 percent), facial contour (29.3 percent), nose (23.9 percent), waist and abdomen (17.5 percent), and legs (15.3 percent). For women, the survey

finds that 32.8 percent of women want to improve the contours of their faces. Eyelid surgery was the second most desirable operation at 29.1 percent. More specifically, a goose-egg-shaped face and double eyelids were seen as most desirable among women in the survey. Liposuction of the abdomen and waist rank third at 20.1 percent, followed by liposuction of the legs at 19 percent. Rhinoplasty comes last among the top five most sought-after procedures for women, at 18.7 percent.

When it comes to men, the survey shows that 44.8 percent of men want to straighten their noses to give them more masculine looks. Furthermore, 32.7 percent of men would consider double-eyelid surgery, followed by cosmetic improvement of teeth at 20.7 percent and face shaping at 15.6 percent. The survey finds that compared with women, men are less concerned about fat, as only 7.5 percent would consider liposuction of waist and abdomen. In another survey, conducted by a Shanghai-based market-consulting firm in January 2005 (see Searchina 2006), among 4,733 informants, the top five body parts that respondents sought to improve are teeth (23.6 percent), facial contour (18.9 percent), eyes (13.6 percent), body fat (12.4 percent) and nose (11.1 percent). In addition to surveys among people who may or may not undergo procedures, statistics from some cosmetic surgery hospitals also confirm that facial surgeries are indeed popular, especially surgeries such as blepharoplasty and rhinoplasty. According to Chen Huanran, a chief surgeon at the Plastic Surgery Hospital (CAMS & PUMC), the top five popular surgeries are double-eyelid blepharoplasty, rhinoplasty, eye bag removal, blepharoplasty, and

jawline reshaping surgery (Chen 2004: 83).

Although there are no precise statistics available, it is probably fair to argue that facial surgeries in general are more desirable than body surgeries in China. The popularity of facial surgery in China is different from the United States, where a body figure is more emphasized. For example, according to the statistics from American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS 2003), the five most popular surgical cosmetic procedures in America in 2003 were liposuction (384,626), breast augmentation (280,401), eyelid surgery (267,627), rhinoplasty (172,420), and female breast reduction (147,173). For the latest statistics (ASAPS 2009), the top five cosmetic surgery procedures in 2008 were breast augmentation (355,671), liposuction (341,144), eyelid surgery (195,104), rhinoplasty (152,434), and abdominoplasty (147,392). As these statistics indicate, in the United States, the most popular cosmetic procedures target more on body figures rather than facial features.

With the popularity of facial surgeries such as double-eyelid blepharoplasty, rhinoplasty, and jawline-reshaping surgery in China today, a question raised here is this: if flat facial features were considered beautiful in the past, at least in 1930s China, why are Chinese women now obsessed with big eyes, high-bridged noses, and angled facial features? I shall discuss this issue in the following sections.

The Expansion of a Hegemonic Western Beauty Ideal: Barbie as Example

Why have Chinese standards of beauty changed so dramatically over the years? If

China previously set its own standards of beauty, it has been heavily influenced by Western beauty images with the expansion of Western movies, pop culture, the fashion industry, and the beauty industry since China reopened its doors. The prevailing Western beauty images in China can be easily found on films, television programmes, fashion magazines, advertisements, and even dolls. For example, the spread of Western beauty standards around the world can be observed through the global sales of Mattel's Barbie doll, an icon of American fashion and beauty. Let me discuss the expansion of Barbie sales in China at more length.



Figure 30. A pink billboard featuring Barbie image in the Joy City Mall in Beijing, April 1, 2009. Photo by author

On the first day of April 2009, I went shopping with two friends in Xidan,⁷⁶ one of the trendiest areas in Beijing. At the entrance of the Joy City Mall, the newest

⁷⁶ Xidan is one of the major shopping, dining and entertainment areas in Beijing. There were two major stores in this area, the Grand Pacific Mall and Zhongyou Department Store. The opening of the Joy City in 2008 made Xidan more attractive to young people.

and largest shopping mall in Xidan, some huge and colorful billboards immediately captured my attention. On a bright pink billboard (see Figure 30), a slim-waisted, blue-eyed, blond-haired and white skinned cartoon girl smiled at me. On the billboard, there were some lines as follows:

She is your friend in your childhood.
She is a favorite of the fashion industry.
She is a representation of perfect women.
Her legend never fades away.
Happy birthday: she is 50 years old!

Of course this perfect woman is Barbie, the world's most popular doll, launched on March 9, 1959. China has joined the global celebration of the 50th anniversary of Barbie. If considering the fact that this massive new 13-floor mall is equipped with the longest escalator (from 1st floor directly to the 6th floor) in the world, the largest digital cinema in China and the biggest cosmetic shop in Beijing, it is not surprising why Barbie's fiftieth birthday was being celebrated here. Looking at the glamorous images of Barbie, I cannot help thinking about how things have changed so fast in China.

Growing up in the 1970s, when China was still isolated from the West, when I was a little girl, I even did not know what Barbie was. I did have one doll, which was generally called "foreign baby doll" (*yangwawa*).⁷⁷ Actually, it was the only doll I had in my childhood. Living in the 1970s, when many material things were a rarity in China, even this "foreign baby doll" was a rare toy. In fact, there were no

⁷⁷ The term *yangwawa* literally means a doll with Western features.

such dolls being sold in the place where I lived. To receive a precious “foreign baby doll,” bought for me when my mother’s colleague went to Shanghai—the commercial center of China—was extraordinary. Because I owned a “foreign baby doll,” I won popularity among my friends. Almost thirty years later, this is of course no longer the case in China. It is quite common that Chinese girls, especially the generation who grow up in the 2000s, have had several, even a dozen Barbie dolls in their childhood. For example, my five-year-old niece owns thirteen Barbie and Barbie-look-alike dolls to play with. In some ways, Barbie is her best friend. Wherever she goes, she carries her favorite Barbie doll with her. Whenever her parents take her to toy stores, she always grasps a Barbie in her hand along with Barbie-themed skirts, jeans and jewelry for her beloved Barbie dolls. To be sure, unlike my “foreign baby doll” who was a baby girl, my niece’s Barbie dolls are adult-girl-look fashion and beauty icons who hold perfect body features, or more precisely, an impossible body ideal to achieve: a hourglass figure along with a extremely slim waist, long legs and a large bust.

Barbie has been blamed for setting forth an unrealistic portrayal of feminine beauty causing a variety of social ills and especially problems in body dysphoria, self-hatred and eating disorders among young women in American (Urla and Swedlund 1995:298). After applying anthropometry to measure a series of Barbie dolls produced since 1959, Urla and Swedlund argue that Barbie characterizes an extreme ideal of a female figure, “the unobtainable representation of an imaginary

femaleness” (1995: 298). This statement is confirmed by another anthropometric study of Barbie dolls by Norton, Olds, Oliver and Dank (1996), in which they found that the probability of finding a real life-size woman with Barbie’s proportion is less than 1 in 100,000. According to Winterman (2009), researchers at Finland’s University Central Hospital in Helsinki have found that if Barbie were life-size, she would lack the 17 to 22 percent of body fat required for a woman to menstruate. As indicated by the above studies, Barbie’s figure is not only extremely rare, but also certainly unhealthy in the real world. In other words, Barbie’s shape would be unobtainable and unsustainable if scaled to life-size women, as indicated by Winterman (see figure 31).

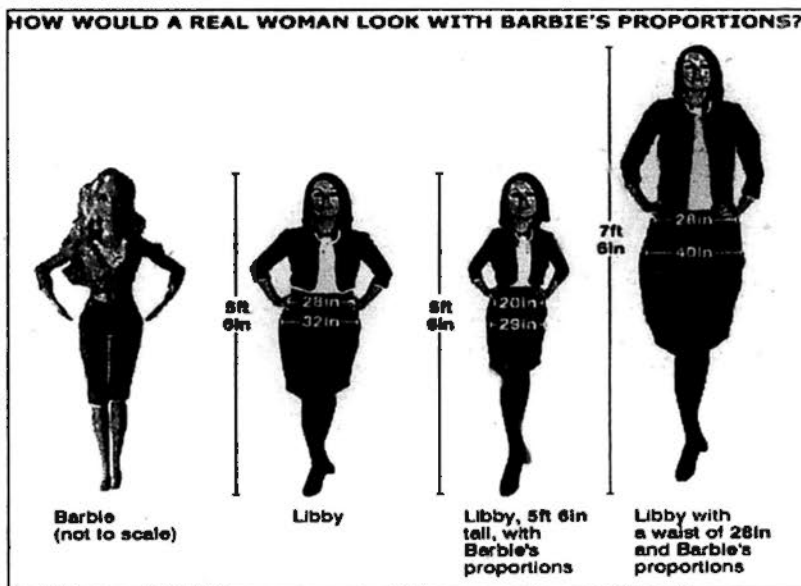


Figure 31: How would a real woman look with Barbie’s proportions? From *BBC News Magazine* (Winterman 2009).

Urla and Swedlund further argue that Barbie’s body type constructs real women’s bodies as deviant, and perpetuates an impossible standard of beauty:

Barbie, as we, and many other critics, have observed, is an impossible ideal, but she is an ideal that has become curiously normalized. In a youth-obsessed society like our own, she is an ideal not just for young women, but for all women who feel that being beautiful means looking like a skinny, buxom, white twenty-year-old. It is this cultural imperative to remain ageless and lean that leads women to have skewed perceptions of their bodies, undergo painful surgeries, and punish themselves with outrageous diets. Barbie, in short, is an ideal that constructs women's bodies as hopelessly imperfect. (1995: 305)

They argue that the experience with Barbie and other popular images of "ideal" beauty leads women to commit to a relentless self-surveillance of the body. With a Barbie-like physique in mind, some women resort to medical and surgical interventions of their bodies to achieve the ideal. In this sense, the body thus has been increasingly viewed as a form of "cultural plastic," as termed by Bordo (1993: 246): malleable, replaceable, and open to reconstruction according to gendered standards of beauty. Urla and Swedlund's research on Barbie dolls offers an interesting perspective to explore the relationship between the successful sales of Barbie dolls and perceptions of beauty and bodily practices of girls and women who have been influenced by Barbie.

If Barbie represents an ultimate American fantasy of unrealistic female beauty, a leggy, blonde-haired, large-breasted and tiny-waisted woman, with the expansion of Barbie's worldwide sales, now this fantasy has traveled throughout the world, and particularly to China. As reported by Zhang Ping (2009), although launched in China only seven years ago, Barbie dolls are now sold in more than 200 cities across the country; more remarkably, while Barbie's global sales value has fallen in 2008, it

has continuously risen in China's market. According to Mattel financial results released on February 2, 2009, the worldwide gross sales for the Barbie brand were down 9 percent in 2008 over the previous year; in the fourth quarter, its global sales fell 21 percent (Mattel 2008). In contrast, the sales volume of Barbie in China's big cities is still rising even after the economic crisis swept the world in 2008 (Zhang 2009). Furthermore, China's market is so lucrative that Mattel, the world's premier toy company and the producer of Barbie, opened the first-ever Barbie worldwide flagship store in Shanghai on March 6, 2009. Richard Dickson, a senior vice president in charge of the Barbie brand, said that China was chosen as the site for its first flagship store because of its large population and vast market potential (Chan 2009). Dickson also said that another attraction was the potential appeal of Barbie in newly affluent urban areas of China. The targeted consumers were not just young girls, but included their mothers as well (Chan 2009). To be sure, the 3,500 square meter, six-floor Shanghai Barbie flagship store offers more than little dolls. Surfing the official website of Shanghai Barbie flagship store, we can see that the store features several areas, including a Barbie theme shopping area, a design studio, a fashion stage and runway, a photography area, a café and a spa and beauty center. More than Barbie dolls, products sold in the store include every Barbie-branded item imaginable, such as clothing, accessories, jewelry, books, candies, and even cosmetics and beauty treatments. A reporter covering the opening of the store commented on its beauty services as follows:

Downstairs, there's a Barbie Spa, which offers women the chance to try "Plastic Smooth" facials (380 yuan, £38) or "Barbie Bust Firming" treatments (also 380 yuan, £38). Instead of trying to look like a plastic-surgery-enhanced celebrity, why not go straight to the source, I suppose. (Moore 2009)

Obviously, what the store offers is "beauty" as a whole; it is not just little girls that Mattel is targeting, but teenagers, young girls in their twenties and even their mothers.

Given my curiosity about this world's most famous fashion and beauty icon and her ongoing popularity in China, when a touring exhibition featuring a treasure collection of Barbie dolls was held in Beijing in May 2009 in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of Barbie, I decided to go and see it. Although it was the last day of the exhibition, there were still lots of visitors: all kinds of people, most of them were young girls along with their mothers and young people in their twenties. In the exhibition hall, some 2,100 items of Barbie dolls from 139 limited collections were displayed.



Figure 32. A young Chinese girl looks at Barbie dolls displayed at a Barbie exhibition in Beijing, May 10, 2009. Photo by author.

When looking around at various Barbie dolls in the first black-and-white swimsuits to the latest fantastic wedding dress designed by the world-renowned designer Vera Wang, I saw that Barbie has indeed grown from a simple doll into an American fashion and beauty icon since she made her debut five decades ago. Furthermore, beyond the blond Barbie that I usually saw, there were many ethnic versions of Barbie dolls, such as African-American, Hispanic and Asian Barbie dolls in the exhibition. Barbie has acquired multiple national guises across the world such as Spanish Barbie, Jamaican Barbie, Malaysian Barbie, Japanese Barbie, Chinese Barbie and so on. However, I simultaneously and surprisingly found that despite having different skin tones and colors, those different ethnic Barbie dolls showed no real ethnic characteristics. For example, the three Chinese Barbie dolls in the exhibition—a Chinese Barbie dressed in a pink chrysanthemum print robe over a skirt, a Chinese Empress Barbie dressed in a Qing dynasty (1616-1911) costume emblazoned with two dragons, and a Chinese Barbie dressed in a Golden Qipao⁷⁸—were still similar in appearance to other Barbie dolls. Despite some subtle changes in skin tone and stereotypically slanted eyes, they seemed identical to other Barbie dolls: the same body size and shape. From what I saw, the differentiation of Barbie dolls relied more on costume than on skin color and other physical features. What I saw in the exhibition fits Urla and Swedlund's (1995) argument: despite the fact that Barbie and her cohort of friends have become increasingly ethnically diversified, the

⁷⁸ Originally, *qipao* was the traditional costume of Manchu women. After the Manchu established and ruled China in the Qing dynasty, the *qipao* became the archetypal dress for Chinese women.

much-publicized “progressive” ethnic differences of Barbie dolls mask sameness.

Urla and Swedlund argue:

This diversification has not spelled an end to reigning Anglo beauty norms and body image. Quite the reverse. When we line the dolls up together, they look virtually identical. Cultural difference is reduced to surface variations in skin tone and costumes that can be exchanged at will. Like the concomitant move toward racially diverse fashion models, “difference” is remarkably made over into sameness, as ethnicity is tamed to conform to a restricted range of feminine beauty. (1995: 284)

As I saw in the exhibition, whether representing “white,” “black” or “yellow,” whether wearing a swimming suit, mini-skirt, tank-top, evening gown, jeans, wedding dress, coat with fur trimming or various ethnic costumes, and whether portrayed as a movie star, a model, a doctor, an astronaut, an entrepreneur, a police officer, an athlete, an army officer or even an ambassador for the United Nations Children’s Fund, Barbie and her friends have something in common: her well-known hourglass-figure with a slim waist, long legs, ample bosom, slender neck and huge eyes.

Barbie is not just a doll. As a fashion icon who has never been out of the trend and a beauty icon who has consistently been fresh, young and feminine with her unattainable hourglass figure, Barbie, the world’s most famous and successful doll, symbolizes a hedonistic consumer culture and an idealized version of Western feminine beauty. Being sold in more than 150 countries at a rate of two dolls every second, Barbie indeed popularizes a hedonistic consumer culture and a hegemonic

Western ideal of beauty around the world. Moreover, although Barbie's multiple ethnicities seem to represent the diversity of culture and beauty, they still end up with sameness rather than diversity. Indeed, in China's market, most Barbie dolls are blond Barbie dolls with huge blue eyes. The aggressive expansion of Barbie sales in China's market is one of the signs indicating that China has been integrated into the global market economically as well as culturally. Commodities always convey cultural values and attitudes. The rapidly growing popularity of Barbie in China shows that Western consumer culture and beauty ideals have taken root in China. I am not arguing that just because a Chinese girl plays with a Barbie doll, she must idolize a Western beauty ideal. However, we cannot deny that, living in a Barbie world which is immersed in a culture that idealizes an unrealistic body shape and occidental features as a standard of beauty, little Chinese girls may internalize some Western features and perhaps desire those features in the future. When more and more Barbie dolls are given to Chinese girls as the icon of ideal beauty, we should not underestimate the power of this little doll. As an icon of ideal Western beauty, the image of Barbie influences the dynamics of perception of ideal beauty in China.

The growing popularity of Barbie in China is certainly not the only example to illustrate how Chinese women's—even little girls'—perceptions of ideal beauty have been involved in the process of globalization. In addition to blond Barbies, beauty pageants, Hollywood movies, glossy magazines, and the fashion and beauty industry also diffuse and perpetuate Western women's images as an ideal of beauty.



Figure 33. A Western woman's image in a cosmetics shop in Beijing. Photo by author.

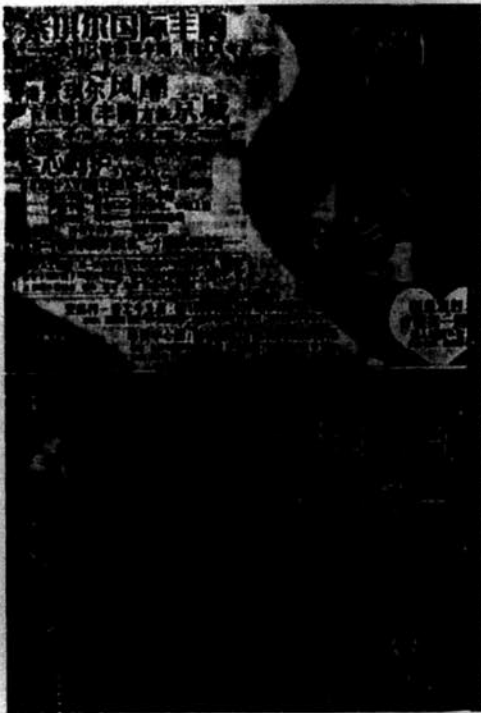


Figure 34. Images of Western women in advertisements for medical cosmetic services.
From Fine Goods Shopping Guide.

With the expansion of an omnipresent global consumer culture, Chinese women's desire for beauty are soon captured by beauty products and medical services that promise to transform their dreams and fantasies, as various advertisements illustrate (see Figure 33 and Figure 34). However, although beauty ideals and practices in China today flourish in a climate intensely influenced by

Western ideals, we should notice influences from non-Western societies as well, as I will discuss in the pages that follow.

The Influence of American Reality Programmes and the Korean Wave:

“Cinderella and the Swan” as an Example

I loved the Brothers Grimm fairy tales in my childhood. One of my favorite stories was Cinderella.⁷⁹ I always remember that in the fairy tale, to try to fit into Cinderella’s petite glass slipper, the wicked step-sisters even chopped off parts of their toes and heels; but only Cinderella could wear that “magic slipper” and become transformed from a kitchen maid into a beautiful girl who finds her Prince Charming and lives happily ever after. If the magic glass slipper only existed in a fairy tale, today we have magic knives in our real lives. Now Cinderella-like stories are no longer just the stuff of fairy tales. Some real-life stories of “ugly duckling to beautiful swan” transformations have been not only brought about through cosmetic surgery, but also broadcast on TV screens. In the United States, ABC’s “Extreme Makeover” initiated a trend in television series featuring cosmetic surgery procedures in 2002. MTV inaugurated “I Want a Famous Face” and Fox aired “The Swan” in 2004. These programs all illustrate how mass media have embraced television programmes featuring teams of doctors and specialists transforming average people through cosmetic surgery procedures and lifestyle changes; all

⁷⁹ Belkin (2009) analyzed how gender was portrayed in 168 Brothers Grimm fairy tales. According to the study, these stories give the message that unattractive people are evil, and women can get by on their beauty.

contribute to the social normalization of cosmetic surgery in the United States.

Moreover, cosmetic surgery reality TV programmes and their influences on the lives of average people are no longer peculiarly an American phenomenon. Influenced by American TV programmes, Chinese viewers have had their own reality programmes that promised to transform not-so-pretty women into beautiful Chinese “Cinderellas.” I never related the fairy tale of Cinderella to cosmetic surgery until 2006, when Hao Lulu told me that she was hosting a TV programme entitled “Cinderella and the Swan” (*huiguniang yü tian’e*), a cosmetic surgery reality programme that exposed the process of some average-looking women’s transformation from “ugly duckling” to “beautiful swan” with the help of extensive cosmetic surgery. To be sure, for a cosmetic surgery reality programme, “Cinderella and the Swan” sounds like a perfect title. What other title could be more representative than “Cinderella” and “Swan”⁸⁰—two classic fairy tales about “magic” transformation?

“Cinderella and the Swan” was mainly produced and broadcast in Shandong Province; however, when eight finalists received operations in Beijing in October 2006, I had the chance to observe some parts of the programme production. With the help of Hao Lulu, I talked with finalists, cosmetic surgeons and members of the crew of the programme. Although there are many interesting aspects with regard to

⁸⁰ “The Ugly Duckling” is a fairy tale written by Danish author Hans Christian Andersen in 1843. The story tells of a homely little bird born in a barnyard who suffers abuse from his neighbors until he matures into a graceful swan, the most beautiful bird of all. The story of the ugly duckling transforming into the beautiful swan is beloved around the world as a tale about personal transformation for the better.

this cosmetic surgery reality programme, in what follows, I primarily discuss the programme from the perspective of globalization. How was the programme influenced by American cosmetic surgery reality programmes and why did a Korean hospital participate in the programme? In a broader sense, how has the development of the Chinese cosmetic surgery market been involved in the global flows of media, capital and technique?

When I first heard about “Cinderella and the Swan,” I realized that the programme was very similar to some American programmes, especially Fox’s “The Swan.” Afterward I asked Ms. Cai, an assistant producer of the programme, whether “Cinderella and the Swan” was influenced by American versions. Ms. Cai said:

We surely did some research by watching American cosmetic surgery reality programmes such as “The swan” and “Extreme Makeover,” but we also made some changes in our version. Actually, in recent years, most popular Chinese reality programmes learned a great deal from American reality programmes. For example, as you know, the most popular Chinese reality programme, “Super Girls Voice” (*chaoji nüsheng*), is just a Chinese version of “American Idol.”

As Ms. Cai pointed out, the American entertainment industry, including TV programmes, has had a significant impact on its Chinese counterpart. It is not difficult to find copies of American reality programmes on Chinese screens in recent years. In addition to “Super Girls Voice” produced by Hunan Satellite TV, we can find other Chinese versions of Fox’s “American Idol” such as “Happy Boys Voice” (*kuaiile nansheng*) produced by Hunan Satellite TV and “My Hero” (*jiayou!*

haonaner) produced by Shanghai Media Group. Other popular American reality programmes also have imitations in China, such as the Chinese version of ABC's "Dancing with the Stars" called "The Dancing War" (*wulin dahui*) produced by Shanghai Eastern Satellite TV, and the Chinese equivalent of NBC's "The Apprentice" entitled "Win in China" (*ying zai zhongguo*) produced by CCTV. When it comes to cosmetic surgery reality programmes, "Cinderella and "The swan" is not the only Chinese cosmetic surgery reality programme. In 2006, the year that "Cinderella and the Swan" was televised, another cosmetic surgery reality programme, entitled "See my 72 Changes" (*kan wo 72 bian*), was broadcast by Hubei TV. A year earlier, in 2005, China's first cosmetic surgery reality programme entitled "Angels Love Beauty" (*tianshi ai meili*) produced by Hunan Economic TV, had already been very widely viewed. Although these programmes were produced by different TV stations, they were similar to Fox's "The Swan" in terms of process and content, in which various women undergo multiple cosmetic operations to compete against each other in a beauty contest in order to be declared "The Swan."

The *American Cosmetic Surgery Times* introduced Fox's "The Swan" as follows:

On the reality TV show, *The Swan*, 16 women are made into "beautiful swans" in three months - with the help of cosmetic surgeons, a cosmetic dentist, a dermatologist, a fitness trainer, a laser eye surgeon, hair and make-up artists, therapists and a life coach. All expenses are paid by the TV show, which is viewed on the Fox network.

On each episode, two female contestants are introduced to viewers through video of surgeries and physical training. The women live in a house with no mirrors, so they cannot see the final results until their look

is unveiled on TV. At the end of each episode, one of the two contestants is selected to compete in a beauty pageant to be crowned the Ultimate Swan. (*Cosmetic Surgery Times* 2004)

“Cinderella and the Swan” was produced by Shandong Qilu TV and co-organized by Sina, a leading Chinese web portal site, and *China Beauty and Fashion News*, a leading Chinese beauty and fashion newspaper. The programme was also sponsored by SK Aikang Hospital, a China-Korea joint-venture hospital in Beijing. In April 2006, the programme initiated auditions in Jinan, Linyi, Qingdao and Beijing. More than 1,000 applicants auditioned to appear on the programme. After an audition lasting four months, 16 women were selected. However, there were only eight women who would receive free cosmetic surgery. To compete for these eight spots, 16 women told their personal stories and dreams on television to win support from the audience. On September 16, 2006, eight winners were selected by the television audience through cell phone message voting. In October, these eight women aged from 19 to 53 went to Beijing and received different cosmetic operations in SK Aikang Hospital. The surgery they underwent was recorded and broadcast on television. After their surgery, these eight women received fitness and yoga training, etiquette and make-up classes, and psychological consultations. On January 26, 2007, six surgically altered finalists competed against one another in a beauty contest for the ultimate prize. Zhu Rongxuan, a 21-year-old model who corrected her “square face” by undergoing bilateral mandibular angle osteotomy and augmented her chin by using bones from mandibular angle osteotomy, was crowned

“The Swan.” (See Figure 35)



Figure 35. The finale of “Cinderella and Swan” on 26 January 2007. Photo from www.Sina.com

“Cinderella and the Swan” and other Chinese cosmetic surgery reality programmes were all sponsored by cosmetic surgery hospitals or clinics that wanted to show the magic power of cosmetic surgery, which could change a woman’s entire life, and of course, to use these TV programmes as a means of advertising.

Interestingly, in the case of “Cinderella and the Swan,” the hospital that advertised in the programme is SK Aikang Hospital, a Korean joint-venture hospital in Beijing. Seeing China’s enormous health market, including the consumption of cosmetic surgery, some large multinational corporations bid to carve out a share of the billion-dollar business. Controlled by the SK Group--the third largest Korean multinational corporation--SK Aikang Hospital was opened in Beijing in March 2004. It is the first joint-venture hospital in China invested in by one of the world’s top 500 companies as listed by Forbes. The SK group invested 29 million yuan (Liu

2004), and holds a 70 percentage stake in the project; the rest is shared between the International Health Exchange and Cooperation Center of China's Ministry of Health and a domestic enterprise based in Fuzhou.⁸¹ Although the hospital also offers ophthalmological treatment and dental treatment, it mainly targets China's huge cosmetic surgery market. Lan Xinzhen (2004) quotes Choi Chanj Ik, the CEO of SK Aikang Hospital Beijing, as saying, "As we are strong in plastic surgery and cosmetology, we will take advantage of this strength by inviting eminent companies and experts from the ROK to the hospital." Lan Xinzhen (2004) also reports that Xie Cheng, CEO of SK China and Board Chairman of SK Aikang Hospital Beijing, told *Beijing Review* that by targeting people with a monthly salary exceeding 20,000 yuan, a relatively high income in China, the hospital expected that cosmetic surgery and related service could become the hospital's biggest selling point. Given such a background, it is understandable why SK Aikang Hospital sponsored the reality programme "Cinderella and the Swan" by offering free cosmetic operations to eight finalists. It is indeed a win-win strategy for the programme and the hospital: while the former uses SK Aikang's reputation to appeal to applicants as well to its audience, the latter obtains enormous publicity.

⁸¹As reported by Lan Xinzhen (2004), although foreign investment was allowed into the medical care market in China as early as 1989, regulations were very strict. According to a document released by the Ministry of Health and the former Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (reorganized as the Ministry of Commerce in 2003) in 1997, it was stipulated that in jointly funded hospitals, foreign capital should not exceed 30 percent of the total investment. However, in 2000, the proportion was reversed. The Chinese government began to heartily welcome foreign funds in the medical market, and stipulated that the total investment in a Chinese-foreign joint-ventured hospital should not be less than RMB20 million, and foreign investment no more than 70 percent.

Located in an upmarket residential area, SK Aikang Hospital is opposite to Chaoyang Gymnasium's east gate in Beijing's Chaoyang district. Despite a drab outward appearance, the inside of the four-floor hospital has an ambiance that is clearly distinguishable from other Chinese public hospitals, which normally feature pungent smells and unpleasant noise. Equipped with cozy lounge halls, soft music, and big TV screens, the clear and relaxing environment makes the hospital seem more akin to a pleasant hotel than a medical facility. For patients who need to stay overnight, the hospital provides suites which are well-equipped with TV sets, closets, sofas, intercoms, independent bathrooms and refrigerators. As a Korean-controlled hospital, there is no doubt that SK Aikang Hospital fully plays to its advantages by employing some Korean beauty specialists and plastic surgeons. And of course, to receive cosmetic operations from Korean surgeons and VIP room services in this pleasant hospital, one needs to pay a considerable price. For example, for liposuction, while most Chinese cosmetic surgery hospitals/clinics in Beijing usually charge 1,500-2,000 yuan for each surgical procedure, this costs 15,000 yuan for each procedure in SK Aikang Hospital. For those Chinese patients who are not concerned about price, the premium paid to Korean surgeons is viewed as a worthwhile investment in their quests to improve on both appearance and personal prospects. Despite the high price, doctors in SK Hospital are may still be surprised by the demand. Kuo (2005) quoted Chung Sung Il, the chief executive of the Beijing-based SK facility, as saying that, "When we decided to build this hospital, we were aware

of the Korean Wave.... But until we actually opened, we had no idea just how big it was.”

In order to understand the booming cosmetic surgery business of SK Aikang Hospital in Beijing, an important term mentioned by Chung Sung Il should be discussed: “Korean Wave” (*han liu*), a term used by Chinese as well as Western media in responding to an upsurge of popularity of Korean pop culture around the world, especially TV dramas, music, movies and fashion in recent decades. When the Korean Wave hit China over the past decade, it brought not only leading Korean stars’ dressing styles, hairstyles, outfits, and make-up styles, but also their appearance. For many Chinese people, Korea is well known as the cosmetic surgery hub of Asia. There have been widely circulated rumors on Chinese websites reporting on some Korean movie and TV stars’ involvement in cosmetic surgery. Korean plastic surgeons are admired by many Chinese familiar with popular Korean pop stars and actors who have publicized their cosmetic transformations. When many Chinese young people are infatuated with Korean pop culture, Korean pop stars, including those who are believed to have had cosmetic surgery performed on their faces, are idols that some Chinese youth may seek to copy. Thus, some Chinese young women have had their eyelids cut and nose sharpened to make them look like their favorite Korean pop stars. For example, it was reported that after “The Jewel of the Palace” (*Da Chang Jin*)⁸² started airing on China’s Hunan TV on September 1,

⁸² “Da Chang Jin” is a Korean TV series about court intrigue during Korea’s Chosun Dynasty. It

2005, some Chinese women began flocking to cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals armed with pictures of Lee Young-ae, the star of the drama, asking doctors to make them look like her (*Chosun Ilbo* 2005a). With the boom of Korean's pop culture, some Chinese women head to SK Aikang Hospital as well as other cosmetic surgery hospitals/clinics in Beijing that employ Korean plastic surgeons for operations. Dr. Huang, a chief plastic surgeon who performed most cosmetic operations to eight finalists of "Cinderella and the Swan" in SK Aikang Hospital, is a famous Korean plastic surgeon in Beijing. During my visit to the hospital, I had the chance to talk with him in English, mixed with Chinese words, about the influence of the Korean Wave on Chinese women's preference for cosmetic surgery. Dr. Huang spoke as follows:

When I was in Korea, I never expected that the Korean Wave would have such an impact on China. After I came to Beijing, I realized that Chinese prefer Korean surgeons for operations. Many women come to the hospital with pictures of Korean stars. They say, "I want my eyes to look like Lee Young-ae," "I want my mouth look like Song Hye-kyo," and "I want my face look like Kim Hee-sum."⁸³

Aside from seeking cosmetic surgery from Korean plastic surgeons in China, some Chinese women make trips directly to Seoul. As reported by the *Chosun Ilbo* (2005b), there has been a trend that more and more Chinese women travel to Korea in specialized tours for cosmetic surgery. *Telegraph* (2009) also reported that a

topped the ratings chart at 14 percent in 31 cities across China as of September 19, 2005.

⁸³ Lee Young-ae, Song Hye-kyo and Kim Hee-sum are Korean pop stars.

group of Chinese women who traveled to Korea for cosmetic surgery baffled immigration officers on their return home when their new looks did not match their passport photos. Actually, as the Korean Wave sweeps not only through China but also other Asian countries, women from the region are flocking to Korea to have their faces remodeled. Commenting on the phenomenon that notions of Korean beauty have been popularized around the region with the Korean Wave, Fairclough (2005) has written:

The popularity of the country's stars is establishing Korean ethnic features as a standard of beauty across the region. Some sociologists see a subtext in the craze: a rebellion by Asian people against the images of Caucasian good looks that dominate much of the international media.

Fairclough brings up an important issue: the cultural interpretation of the globalization of beauty standards in terms of the Korean Wave. However, while some people interpret the popularity of Korean pop culture across Asia as a sign of rebellion against the Western hegemony of beauty standards, others regard it as a demonstration of submission to the Western beauty imperialism. As Fairclough (2005) also writes:

Critics also assert that what appeals to many non-Korean Asians about Korean looks are exactly those features that make them look more Western. Koreans, related to the Mongols who once ruled the Central Asian steppes, tend to have more prominent noses and, often, lighter skin than other Asians. In physical terms, the Korean ideal is a relatively small, oval face with a high-bridged nose and large eyes with Western-style double eyelids. Many Northeast Asians have a single eyelid and pieces of skin known as epicanthic folds that can make their eyes appear smaller.

How can we explain the contradiction between these arguments? Although there is no doubt that the globalization of beauty standards to some extent involves the Westernization of beauty ideals in Asian countries including China and Korea, I believe it is more complicated than being simply an issue of Westernization or homogenization. Therefore, a crucial question is how to explain Chinese women's as well as other Asian women's obsession with big eyes, high-bridged noses and fuller breasts—some seemingly typical Caucasian features. In the next chapter, I will explore Chinese women's preference for double eyelids and light skin and their bodily practices in pursuit of these features in order to explore the above issue.

Conclusion

Since China moved onto the global stage in the 1980s, globalization has brought images of Western women to Chinese women as an ideal of beauty. The worldwide diffusion of Western consumer ideologies and the profound impact of ideal Western beauty can be seen through the case of Barbie. The rapid expansion of Barbie doll sales in China indicates that what the global capitalist market has brought to China is not only a Western commodity, but also an ultimate fantasy of Western female beauty. In looking at Barbie dolls in Chinese girls' hands, we can sense how globalization affects the ideal of beauty among Chinese girls and women. Bombarded by a surge of Western consumer goods, films, TV programmes, and beauty products, there is to some extent a Western "cultural imperialism" in terms of

the globalization of Western beauty culture in China. However, as Inda and Rosaldo have argued, “The global cultural encounter takes place not just between the core and the periphery but also within the non-western world itself” (Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 25). Therefore, it is important to note the influence on Chinese perceptions and practices of beauty from Asian countries such as Korea. In recent years, Korean TV dramas and pop music have become immensely popular in China. The upsurge of the Korean Wave in China shows that the global cultural encounter indeed takes place within the non-Western world. The complexity of globalization is vividly demonstrated when American entertainment TV culture, Korean surgeon’s scalpels, and Chinese women’s bodies converge in a Chinese cosmetic surgery reality TV programme, “Cinderella and the Swan.” This reality programme exemplifies that Chinese women’s surgical body alteration partakes in the process of globalization with the transnational flows of people, capital, images, ideologies, and medical science and technology.

Chapter Eight

Does One Face Fit all?: Between the Local and the Global

When commenting on the phenomenon of the increasing popularity of cosmetic surgery in China, Jesús (2005) writes, “We’ve had the globalisation of manufacture, sales and economies. Now, especially in China, we are about to experience the globalisation of beauty: one face suits all.” There is no doubt that globalization, which integrates the whole world into one big marketplace, has indeed penetrated economic as well as sociocultural boundaries of nation-states. However, even if some “Caucasian features” such as double eyelids, prominent facial profiles and light skin have been pursued by some Chinese women through medical aesthetic treatment and cosmetic surgery, it is simplistic to state that “one face suits all.” In other words, although Chinese women’s preference for these “Caucasian features” are to some extent evidence of their conformity to a Western ideal of beauty, or what Kawazoe (2004) calls the “global standard of white beauty” (as cited in Miller 2006: 116), I suggest that we should further unpack meanings of those “Caucasian features” in local settings to explore the hybrid nature of the perception and practice of beauty in a global era.

In the previous chapter, through examining the impact of Western consumer culture and entertainment culture and the influence of the Korean wave on China, I stressed the multiple directions of globalization in terms of beauty ideals and

practices. In this chapter, focusing on Chinese women's preference for double eyelids and fair skin, I first discuss how these "Caucasian features" take on various meanings in China's historical and social contexts. Furthermore, I argue that the process of globalization has heightened the sense of local culture and increased Chinese people's sentiment towards the oriental aspects of Chinese beauty. At the end of the chapter, using the recruitment and training of ceremony hostesses for Beijing Olympics as an example, I discuss how beautiful female bodies have been appropriated into a nationalist agenda in China.

The Myth of Double-Eyelid Surgery

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, in speaking of shapes of eyelid and eye, single-folded eyelids and small almond-shaped eyes were considered beautiful in ancient China. However, big round eyes with double eyelids have become a benchmark of beauty in China today. In contrast to a "single-folded eyelid" (*danyanpi*), an eyelid without a crease, a "double-folded eyelid" (*shuangyanpi*) refers to a visible fold above the eye opening. While some Chinese women who are born with single-folded eyelids use eyelid glue or eyelid tapes to temporarily create the shape of double eyelids (see Figure 36 and Figure 37), others opt for cosmetic surgery to permanently attain a deep crease in their eyelids.



Figure 36. Japanese eyelid glues and tapes sold in China's market



Figure 37. Using eyelid glue to create a double-folded eyelid.

The double-eyelid blepharoplasty or Asian blepharoplasty, is colloquially called “double-eyelid surgery” (*shuangyanpi shoushu*), which creates a palpebral crease to divide the eyelid into two defined segments (see Figure 38). The double-folded eyelids generally make eyes appear slightly larger and rounder. Among different techniques designed to create a crease in the upper eyelid, the suture technique and the incisional method are two main types. While the suture method binds the dermis and the levator aponeurosis or tarsal plate together by using a suture needle and a

thread to bury the knots of the suture inside the skin of the eyelid, the incisional method removes a portion of the prelevator fat through a small incision (Zhao 2006: 53; Zhou 2004: 75-76).



Figure 38. A before-and-after picture of a double-eyelid surgery.

In fact, double-eyelid surgery has become one of the most popular cosmetic surgeries in China. According to Gilman's research on the cultural history of aesthetic surgery, because about half of Asians are born without a crease in their upper eyelids, double-eyelid surgery is popular among Chinese as well as other Asians including Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Singaporean, and Asian-Americans in the United States (1999: 98-110). Gilman cites Song Ruyao, the former president of the Chinese Plastic Surgery Society, as saying that "altering eyelids is the most popular cosmetic surgery practiced at [my] Institute of Plastic Surgery in Peking" (1999: 106). As one of the most commonly requested cosmetic surgeries among East Asian women, double-eyelid surgery is often seen as a sign of the Westernization of beauty standards in Asian countries (Gilman 1999: 102-109; Kuperberg 2003). Gilman notes that as early as 1896, a non-incision procedure to create double eyelids was introduced by K. Mikamo to Japan, "mimicking... Western eyes" (1999: 100).

He also states that like other groups of Asian immigrants in the United States, Korean-Americans offer eyelid surgery to their teenage children “to make their eyes look ‘more American’” (Gilman 1999: 109).

The narrative of Westernization in terms of Asian women’s involvement in double-eyelid surgery is popular in the Western media. Surfing the Internet, we can easily find that Western correspondents comment that Chinese women as well as other Asian women undergo double-eyelid surgery, rhinoplasty, and breast augmentation in order to look more Western. The popularity of this narrative can be quickly captured by looking at article titles such as “Chinese Women Strive to be Part of Western Culture through Plastic Surgery” (*Associated Content* 2009), “In China, Beauty is a Big Western Nose”(Kristof 1987), and “Eyes Wide Open: Surgery to Westernize the Eyes of an Asian Child” (Ouellette 2009). It is typical to find that Chinese women’s choice of double-eyelid surgery is portrayed as a rejection of Chinese ethnic characteristics and an intention to assimilate to Western body features. Such descriptions are as follows: “Some Chinese women are seeking more Western looks by altering the shape of their eyes and noses” (*BBC* 2003); “Doctors removed the fold in her eyelid to give her a more European look” (Weaver 2003); “She wishes, however, that her eyelids folded like those of Westerners....Looking beautiful is interpreted, very frequently, as looking Western” (Kristof 1987); “Young women in China are seeking to appear Caucasian in the hopes of finding success” (*Associated Content* 2009); “Cosmetic surgery is

becoming increasingly popular as a means of altering the shape of noses and eyes to accord with Western appearances” (West 2003); “Plastic surgery clinics are popping up around the country. Even some of the poorest young women from the countryside are willing to spend months of earnings for a procedure that gives their eyes a more rounded, Western look” (Yardley 2004).

To some extent, the preference for double-eyelids may be related to great exposure to American and European media. There is no doubt that with the huge influx of Western entertainment products such as films, TV series and magazines, together with Western commercial products, the standards of Chinese beauty have been heavily influenced by Western images. However, to regard Chinese women’s practices of double-eyelid surgery as no more than imitation of Western appearances, might be simplistic and problematic, as I will now discuss.

Although the narrative of Westernization concerning double-eyelid surgery is popular in the Western media, it is hardly found in China, where double-eyelid surgery is mainly addressed in the discourse of beauty. The large majority of my interviewees who underwent or intended to undergo double-eyelid surgery denied that they wanted to look like Western women by getting big eyes. Some women said that it was strange or offensive to assume that Chinese wanted to get Western looks by undergoing double-eyelid surgery. Therefore, regarding the issue of cultural implication of double-eyelid surgery, what I saw from the Western media and what I heard from my interviewees form a sharp contradiction. It is understandable that my

interviewees are uncomfortable with the argument that double-eyelid surgery is an attempt to look more Western. After all, no one likes the idea that one attempts to conceal or deny one's own ethnic heritage. In this sense, while some women might have accepted some Caucasian features as standards of beauty, it is also necessary to listen to voices of many women who deny that they seek to look more Western.

Let me start with a woman who to some extent agreed with the idea of Westernization. Ms. Ding, a 23-year-old office lady who planned to undergo a double-eyelid surgery, is an interviewee who said that big eyes could make her more "Western," or more precisely in her word, "*yangqi*" (foreign flavor or cosmopolitan style).⁸⁴ "I think big eyes are really "fashion" (*shimao*). They can make me more *yangqi*," Ms. Ding said. "Speaking of *yangqi*, what do you mean?" I further asked.

She answered:

Well, it's a kind of a Western look. Small eyes with a single fold make people look soft, but big eyes with double eyelids make people look spirited. I definitely like big eyes. Western women always have such big and expressive blue eyes. Their eyes can talk! Just looking at their eyes, you can feel how confident they are! I wish I could have that kind of attitude. Well, I think that is a kind of *yangqi*, a sense of being independent and modern.

Referring to becoming *yangqi* as the reason for undergoing a double-eyelid surgery, Ms. Ding provides an important perspective in exploring cultural meanings attached to Occidental features. Ms. Ding's short yet profound explanation indicates, on the one hand, that she does relate double eyelids and big eyes to Occidental

⁸⁴ The word "*yangqi*" is an antonym of "*tuqi*" which literally refers to rustic.

features; on the other hand, what she really seeks is a symbolic meaning behind double eyelids and big eyes rather than the features themselves: *yangqi*, a sense of being independent and modern. Certainly, *yangqi*, the symbolic meaning attached to Western women's body images, can be decoded from the representation of Western women in Chinese media and advertisements. Scholars have noted that Western women's images have been extensively used in Chinese advertisement to construct an atmosphere of style and modernity to sell products (Johansson 1998a, 1998b; Kraemer 2008). In his study of advertisement from Chinese women's magazines published between 1985 and 1995, Johansson (1998a) observed the distinct differences in the depiction of Chinese and Western women in Chinese advertisements: while Chinese women were most often displayed as shy, gentle, reserved, and submissive, Western women were more often portrayed as free, strong, independent, and eroticized.

Kraemer's study (2008) of outdoor advertisements from 1996 to 1999 in China does not completely conform to the typical depictions Johansson observed. Kraemer states that semiotic meanings of the body images of Chinese women and Western women were increasingly mingled and Chinese women appeared more self-confident in advertising. "However, the general tendency observed by Johansson remained visible also in the outdoor advertisements from the late 1990s" (Kraemer 2008: 143). In such a cultural background, it is understandable why Western women's body features sometimes are a kind of embodiment of modernity

in the eyes of Chinese women. When Ms. Ding claimed that she wanted to be more *yangqi* by undergoing double-eyelid surgery, rather than to look more Western, her real aim may be to obtain cultural citizenship as a “modern” Chinese woman who is independent and self-confident like her Western counterpart.

Unlike Ms. Ding, who directly expressed her desire to look more *yangqi*, most of my interviewees rejected the idea that undergoing double-eyelid surgery meant imitating the West. The majority of them expressed a kind of ambivalence towards the prevalence of Western beauty culture in China. On the one hand, they generally admitted that Western beauty standards had a strong influence on China in recent decades, on the other hand, they insisted that Occidental features were not suitable for Chinese women. In other words, despite openly expressing their admiration for Western women’s body figures and facial features, most women argued that getting big eyes through double-eyelid surgery was more about being attractive, and had nothing to do with being Westernized. These women’s responses call for an elucidation of the complex influence of globalization on Chinese beauty ideology.

Emphasizing double eyelids as a feature of beauty is the most common explanation I heard from my interviewees, including Hao Lulu, the most famous face of the Chinese cosmetic surgery industry. As China’s first “artificial beauty,” Hao Lulu has often been criticized for wanting to look more Western. However, she strongly rejected the idea when talking about her eyelid surgery. “My quest was not to look more Western. It’s all about beauty! I didn’t try to look like someone else,

but to improve myself, of course for a better version,” she said. Aside from being more “beautiful,” as they understood it, there are diverse motivations for my interviewees to undergo double-eyelid surgery, such as getting rid of a sleepy look. As a twenty-something informant said, “The single eyelid makes me look like a dull and passive person. I want to have a sporty look. Large eyes are definitely more expressive.” A similar statement was made by a 23-year-old college student:

I want to undergo double-eyelid surgery because I’m tired of people asking me why I’m always sleepy. After a while, I was convinced I had a tired look! In fact, I’m not sleepy at all when they ask me. It’s just the way I look. I think by opening my eye a little bit more, I can get rid of that tired look. Besides, as the old saying goes, “eyes are the windows to the soul” (*yanjing shi xinling de chuanghu*). Eyes are the first thing that we usually notice when we look at people. Big-eyed girls definitely get more attention.

As we can see, eyes are important because they are regarded as symbols of one’s inner spirit. When droopy eyes are often interpreted as a tired and unhappy expression, it actually affects the way one feels. Thus, reforming the eye’s shape is considered a way to wake up one’s true inner self. The convenience for make up is another reason some women opt for double-eyelid surgery. A 21-year-old bar singer, who underwent double-eyelid surgery, said:

When I had a single eyelid, it was too difficult to make up a “smokey eyes” (*yanxunzhuang*) appearance, which I thought cool.... Now I can wear any kind of stylish makeup as I like.... There are many reasons for women opting for double-eyelid surgery. For me, it’s more about having fun!

Thus, while some women emphasized that they wanted double eyelids to make their eyes less sleepy, others stressed cosmetic reasons. Moreover, the interviewees often said that double eyelids on Chinese and Asians looked different from those on Westerners; therefore, double-eyelid surgery which might make eyes too Western was actually undesirable. As a 25-year-old secretary said:

Double eyelids can make my eyes look bigger....No, no, I don't want to get the cut too wide. If the creases over the eyelids are way too high or too open, they would make my eyes appear too Western, obviously "artificial" (*taijia*) and "unnatural" (*buziran*). I like the proper double eyelids, which are naturally suited for Chinese.

What I discovered in my fieldwork resonates with what Miller (2006) found in her research on Japanese beauty culture. Speaking of double-eyelid surgery in Japan, Miller states, "Indeed, surgery that makes the eyes appear too Western is disliked, since it looks too obviously artificial... Instead, the desire is for an eye shape that looks bigger but is still Japanese" (2006: 120).

So far, I have shown how for different women, the reasons for opting for double-eyelid surgery are always personal and particular. In the pages that follow, I will describe the story of Liu Jia, one of the interviewees who strongly criticized the idea of Westernization when talking about double-eyelid surgery. Different from most women I interviewed, Ms. Liu had lived in the United State for several years. Her life experience makes her talk about double-eyelid surgery in light of cultural confrontation. Let me describe her story at more length.

Ms. Liu was a friend of mine when we both lived in my hometown, Kunming. However, we had not seen each other for years after I left Kunming in 2002 and she went to the United State for study in 2003. When she came back to China to visit her parents in January 2007, I met her in Beijing. At the time we met, I found the changes on her eyelids and had a long conversation with her about the double-eyelid surgery she had undergone. She said that she underwent the surgery, which cost her 1,600 yuan, in a private-owned cosmetic surgery clinic in Kunming in 2003. I asked her why she chose to undergo such surgery before she went to the United States. She said:

I was not satisfied with my eye shape for a long time. But I didn't make up my mind until I got an offer from X University in 2003. I thought if I was going to start my life in a new place, why not to start it with a fresh look?... I heard it was too expensive to afford cosmetic surgery in America. But as you know, cosmetic surgeries were relatively cheap in China. So I thought about it and then asked myself: why not?

Among many reasons which stimulate the demands of double-eyelid surgery in China, an affordable price is one of them. From small beauty salons which perform illegal operations to big hospitals which provide professional medical aesthetic services, the pricing for a double-eyelid surgery ranges from 800 yuan to 7,000 yuan depending on where the surgery is performed. Among various types of cosmetic surgeries, a double-eyelid surgery costs almost the least in China. I asked Ms. Liu why she chose double-eyelid surgery rather than other surgeries. She spoke as follows:

You know there is a famous Chinese saying: “The eyes are the windows to the soul.” My eyes were too small. Even if two millimeters were widened on the eyelids, the eyes would look noticeably bigger. I was not seeking huge eyes, but I wanted them to look a little more open...I didn’t consider any other operation. For me, a little touch-up was fine, but not a big transformation. Most cosmetic surgeries sounded too scary except double-eyelid surgery. After all, it is the most popular surgery in China. The technique to create a crease was mature and safe.

As just mentioned earlier, “the eyes are the windows to the soul” is a popular quote from interviewees. It shows the importance of eyes in Chinese women’s conceptualization of appearance. I further asked Ms. Liu whether there were other reasons pushing her to make a decision before she went to the United States. She said:

I had looked forward to studying in the U.S. for a long time. But when I thought about starting a new life in a strange country, my feeling was a kind of excitement mixed with worry. I guess that I felt a little unsure of my appearance before I went there. As you know, a beautiful look is always a good “passport” for a woman, no matter in the East or the West. Everybody loves beautiful women. I didn’t consider myself unattractive, but I definitely wanted to be more attractive. At that time, to get a pair of big eyes became a way to boost my self-confidence.

It is common that women choose to undergo cosmetic surgery when they move to a new social environment. For example, some high-school girls choose to undergo cosmetic surgery before they go to college, and some college girls opt for operations before they get their first jobs. In Ms. Liu’s case, “to start a new life in a strange country” intensified her insecurity about her body image and double-eyelid surgery was used as a means to improve her self-confidence. For many, cosmetic surgery is a

viable option to solve emotional, mental or social problems. There is a kind of parallel between modern cosmetic surgery and ancient “rites of passage” (Gennep 1960[1909]). Cosmetic surgery sometimes serves as a kind of ritual which marks people stepping from one position in their lives to another. I asked Ms. Liu whether, after she underwent the surgery, she was satisfied with her new look and new life. She said, “Yes. I was satisfied. Though it was only a small change on my face, it boosted my confidence at that time. But do you know what? If I could choose over again, I wouldn’t undergo the same surgery” She continued:

When I underwent double-eyelid surgery in China, I simply wanted to be more beautiful. However, after I came to the U.S., I realized that people equated getting double-eyelid surgery with wanting to look Western. Media usually portray Asian and Asian-American women as requesting double-eyelid surgery to erase their ethnicity. I was angry about this argument. I really don’t think that’s the case. What I experienced was really embarrassing.

Ms. Liu told me that once she had a heated argument with one of her American friends about double-eyelid surgery after her friend discovered her surgery. While her friend insisted that by creating creases on eyelids, Asian women like Ms. Liu seek to Westernize their appearance, Ms. Liu defended her surgery as a matter of beauty. She was offended by her friend’s argument. She said that she did not mind letting others know that she had undergone such a surgery, but she was really unhappy and uncomfortable to be criticized as if she tried to abandon her ethnic characteristics. As she said:

My goal in the surgery was to become more attractive. In China, we consider big eyes beautiful. We never consider that adding a crease in the eyelids means trying to look like a Westerner. I am always proud of being a Chinese. Especially, when I live outside China, I love my country more. When someone came to me with this kind of argument, it's really offensive.

The reason that Ms. Liu strongly defends double-eyelid surgery as a matter of beauty rather than an issue of Westernization might lie in the fact that, living in a Western society, she faced more pressure to hold up her national or ethnic identity as a "Chinese woman." The pervasive narrative of Westernization concerning double-eyelid surgery is rarely found in Chinese mass media, where double eyelid was more portrayed as a feature of beauty rather than a feature of the West in China.

Ms. Liu said:

It is not only "white" people but every race including Asians who have double eyelids. Some Chinese like me don't originally have double eyelids, but others do. Just look at you! You were born with double eyelids. Do you look like a Westerner? Of course not! You are a hundred percent Chinese! You see, it's ridiculous to say that adding a crease in eye folds makes a Chinese less Chinese. So, my goal wasn't to look like a Western beauty, but to look like other Chinese women whom we thought beautiful.

As Ms. Liu points out, some Chinese do not have double eyelids, but others are born with double eyelids. Therefore, simply equating double-eyelid surgery with wanting to look Caucasian is problematic. In fact, those women who undergo surgery generally compare themselves with those Chinese who naturally have double eyelids, rather than with Western women. I further asked her opinion about

why Chinese and Westerners hold different explanations for double-eyelid surgery.

She offered an interesting comparison:

I think that Chinese and Western people have quite different ideals about Chinese beauty. In China, people consider Zhang Ziyi, Zhao Wei and Fang Bingbing as ideals of beauty. But guess what, who is an ideal Oriental beauty in Hollywood? Lucy Liu! Do you know Lucy Liu? ... Yes, she is a Chinese-American actress starring in "Charlie's Angels." Do you think that Chinese would consider her beautiful? Of course not! In the eyes of most Chinese, Lucy Liu is unattractive. However, she is an Oriental beauty in the eyes of Hollywood. Have you ever watched Disney's *Mulan*⁸⁵? Lucy Liu is just a living version of *Mulan*: small-slanted eyes, single-folded eyelids, and high cheekbones.

As argued by Ms. Liu, by Chinese standards, Lucy Liu is not beautiful.

However, "she is an Oriental beauty in the eyes of Hollywood." As the most famous

Chinese-American actress, Lucy Liu indeed made great success in Hollywood.

Certainly, appearance is not the only thing that matters in acting--talent matters as

well. But despite her talent, we should not ignore the fact that Lucy Liu stood out

from the crowd due to her distinct features. It is fair to argue that to some extent

Lucy Liu represents how Asian beauty in general is supposed to look like in the eyes

of Hollywood media. At the same time, as a famous Chinese-American actress,

Lucy Liu's image might also influence audience perceptions of Oriental beauty.

⁸⁵ *Mulan* is an American cartoon film produced by Walt Disney in 1998. The film is based on a Chinese legend Hua Mulan, who is a heroine in a famous Chinese poem, "The Ballad of Mulan."



Figure 39. (Left) Hollywood actresses Lucy Liu; (Right) Chinese supermodel Lü Yan

In fact, if we look at the representations of Oriental beauty in the Western entertainment and modeling industry, we can see that the definitions of Oriental beauty may be quite different from the standards in China. For example, the success story of Lü Yan as European's most sought-after Chinese model has stunned many Chinese in terms of the standards of Chinese beauty. Lü Yan has facial features that would be typically classed as unattractive in China: a big face, small eyes with single-fold eyelids, a flat nose, big thick lips and freckles over her high cheekbones. In fact, what she has are negative attributes according to Chinese standards of beauty. However, she wins fame on the international stage because of her "Oriental look." Certainly, we should notice that models tend to be chosen for their "striking" and "unusual" appearance, not because they are exemplars of beauty—it is a different category. Therefore, Lü Yan is chosen probably more due to her extraordinary facial features rather than her beauty. But still, if we further examine what makes her

unusual in the Western modeling industry, we can find that it is Oriental exoticism.

In the international modeling industry, something bizarre and exotic is often constituent of notions of beauty. As reported by *China Daily* (2003), at the Elite Model Look⁸⁶ contest in 2003 in Singapore, Gerald Marie, the president of Elite Model Management, the world's biggest model agency, said that notions of cultural difference and exoticism are inter-related when referring to beauty. In his words:

We tend to think of beauty as unusual, extraordinary and out of the commonplace....So in our appreciation of the beautiful, there is always room for an element of strangeness, the shock of discovery, or the pleasure of surprise. We may be ready to acknowledge that something strange and exotic is constituent of the very concept of beauty. Asia is emerging, there's always a chance. International modeling agencies can no longer ignore the use of Asian girls. (*China Daily* 2003)

Under such a narrative, it is not surprise that Asian models walk onto the world's catwalks with a splash of exoticism. In fact, whether in the movie industry or the modeling industry, Lü Yan, Lucy Liu and Mulan all share some similar facial features, including small slanted eyes with single-folded eyelids. In what seems like a paradox, in representing "Oriental beauty" on the international stage, both Lü Yan's and Lucy Liu's looks run counter to contemporary Chinese standards of beauty. As the saying goes, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." If beauty is a matter of socio-cultural construction, what are the cultural implications behind this paradox?

⁸⁶ Elite Model Look is a yearly fashion modeling event held by Elite Models Management. It is the premiere and most prestigious contests to discover and launch fashion models in the international fashion marketplace.

In analyzing the Western recognition of Lü Yan as an ideal of Chinese beauty, Xu and Feiner have written:

These are quintessential Oriental faces associated with the “Chinatown hostess” or “Madame Butterfly” stereotype.... Among Chinese intellectuals, the public, or the press we find no trace of debate about or recognition of the Orientalist logic of Lü Yan’s popularity....Lü Yan is a project of the Western male gaze creating an exotic, orientalist vision of Oriental beauty. (2007: 318)

If slanted small eyes and single-folded eyelids are seen as features of “quintessential Oriental faces,” it is understandable why double-eyelid surgery is simply stereotyped and construed as a matter of Westernization. I am not ignorant of the fact that Chinese women do to some extent refashion themselves in accordance with Western features. However, I suggest that we explore Chinese women’s preference for double-eyelid surgery with an alternative perspective that considers the hybrid nature of beauty ideals and bodily practices in different personal, national and international settings. As a woman who grew up in China but lived in the United States, Ms. Liu had an ambivalent attitude towards the double-eyelid surgery she had undergone, mixed with her longing for an ideal of beauty and her resistance to a Western hegemonic discourse of beauty.

In contrast to Ms. Liu’s experience, we may consider an American woman who married a Chinese man and underwent fat reduction surgery in China. One day, when I browsed the English website of the EverCare Institution, the cosmetic surgery institution that made China’s first “artificial beauty” Hao Lulu, I found the

interesting story of Cheryl Baisden Zhao in a column called “American Beauty Project” (Evercare Medical Institution: 2004). The column discussed how the 121-kg Baisden Zhao underwent a series of fat reduction operations to reduce her weight to about 68 kg. The clinic offered 50,000 yuan on the total cost of about 200,000 yuan to help her pay for the operations. In return, Baisden Zhao agreed to promote the clinic whenever she appeared in public. It was said that “Marrying China” might be the name of a book about her life story. According to the column, Baisden Zhao once had an unhappy marriage in Savannah, Georgia, in the United States. She left two children and her divorced husband in Savannah and flew to Beijing in the spring of 2003. Living in Beijing, she placed a marriage-wanted advertisement in a magazine to look for a Chinese husband and eventually found one. However, she soon discovered that her obese body prevented her from fitting into Chinese society, where people even included their height and weight on job applications. Tired of drawing negative and unwanted attention due to her obesity, she embarked on EverCare’s “American Beauty Project” and received fat reduction operations beginning February 29, 2004. Interestingly, according to the website report, she dreamed and imagined being Chinese: “Baisden Zhao claims to have had an infatuation with China since her early childhood years, when she began to have dreams about herself being a little Chinese girl in a previous life, having her feet bound by an old grandmother” (Evercare Medical Institution: 2004). To some extent, Baisden Zhao’s dream of “being a little Chinese girl” and “having her feet bound”

and Ms. Liu's body alteration in her eyelids show a cultural encounter between a Westerner's fantasy of "Chinese beauty" and a Chinese woman's dream of a globalized beauty—or despite her denial, her fantasy of "Western beauty."

In addition to examining double-eyelid surgery in different cultural settings, we also need to decode the cultural meanings of big eyes and double eyelids in China's historical and political settings in the context of gender. Once when I talked about the Chinese preference for double eyelids with Ms. Pan, a college teacher who teaches fine arts, she insisted that big eyes were not necessarily related to Western images. Ms. Pan made her argument as follows:

Surely, nowadays our beauty ideals are influenced by the West. Just taking a glance at advertising billboards in streets and shopping malls, we see Western beauties everywhere. But I don't think that we consider big eyes beautiful only because of the Western influence. If that's the case, how can we explain that big eyes were already considered beautiful before China opened its doors to the West? For example, in the Maoist era, "heavy eyebrows and big eyes" (*nong mei da yan*) was already a standard of beauty. Obviously, China was totally isolated from the West at that time. There was no way that Western beauty standards could influence us. In fact, it is the other way around, if a pair of big eyes were marks of a Western standard of beauty, they would have been denounced by the Communist Party. However, that wasn't the case. How can you explain that?

Ms. Pan's argument leads to alternative explications for big eyes in China's political context. If we look at propaganda posters in the Mao era, we can find that both women and men portrayed on posters were generally featured with "heavy eyebrows and big eyes."



Figure 40. A propaganda poster in Maoist China.

As mentioned earlier, in the Maoist era, with the change of gender norms, communist ideology condemned the emphasis on feminine beauty as bourgeois culture and promoted androgynous women, who were supposed to look and act like men, as an ideal type of beauty. Accordingly, the traditional image of an ideal woman with a slim figure and small eyes on her pale face was replaced by the revolutionary image of a chubby and healthy woman with big round eyes on her tanned face. Moreover, the feature of “heavy eyebrows and big eyes” was not only widely drawn on in propaganda, but also extensively used in Cultural Revolutionary novels to portray heroes and heroines. In his study of fiction during the Cultural Revolutionary, Yang (1998, 2002) argues that Cultural Revolutionary novelists intentionally related the heroes’ outward appearance to their inward characters, in which big eyes were heavily emphasized:

Special emphasis was placed on the eyebrows and eyes, using standard

expressions such as *nong mei da yan* [heavy eyebrows and big eyes] and *minglian de yanjing* [bright eyes]... which intended to convey a symbolic message concerning the heroes' ideological qualities: "big eyes" and "bright eyes" were associated with ideological insight and farsightedness. (Yang 2002: 193)

In propaganda and novels in the Maoist era, big eyes were appreciated, but they took root in different gender and political settings. In the Maoist era, with the shift of gendered body politics from soft feminine women to strong androgynous "iron women," small almond-shaped eyes were replaced by big expressive eyes as politically correct body features. In the post-Mao era, big eyes have been continuously appreciated as a feature of beauty; however, when the "consumer revolution" (Davis 2000) replaced the "political revolution" in China, the cultural meanings of the pursuit of big eyes were recoded in a new political-economic setting. This indicates that a certain beauty standard such as big eyes should be understood in the context of particular ideologies of beauty. Surgical body alteration such as double-eyelid surgery and other aesthetic practices are cultural behaviors which should be interpreted in the settings where they are found. In the pages that follow, I will discuss another preference of Chinese women in terms of body features: light skin.

Fair Skin and the Increasing National Sentiment on Chinese Beauty

Once, I asked a Dutch friend's impression concerning Chinese women's beautification practice which might be different from that of European women's.

Without any hesitation, my friend said what impressed her most was Chinese women's desire for light skin. "When I was in China, I saw many Chinese women putting on long-sleeve shirts, hats, and most of the time using umbrellas in the hot summer to avoid the sun. But we love to have our skin tanned," said my friend.



Figure 41. An advertisement for a whitening lotion in a shopping mall in Beijing.
Photo by author.

It is indeed true that many Chinese as well as other Asian women go to great lengths to avoid the sun and to enhance their complexions with various whitening creams, masks, and professional face scrubs. In fact, Asian women's preference for fair skin has been marketed into a huge industry in Asian countries like China, Korea, Japan and India in recent years, as demonstrated by the huge sales of skin whitening products in these countries. For example, according to Robert McDonald, the chief operating officer of the Procter & Gamble Company (P&G), both in China and Japan, one of P&G's top skin care products is skin whitening products; Olay

skin whitening is a very popular product in China and Japan (*Xinhua News Agency* 2009). Furthermore, with the development of new biotechnology and medical science, the increasingly available yet still expensive medical procedures such as laser whitening treatment and body whitening injections in China's big cities illustrate the length that some Chinese women are willing to go in order to lighten their complexions.

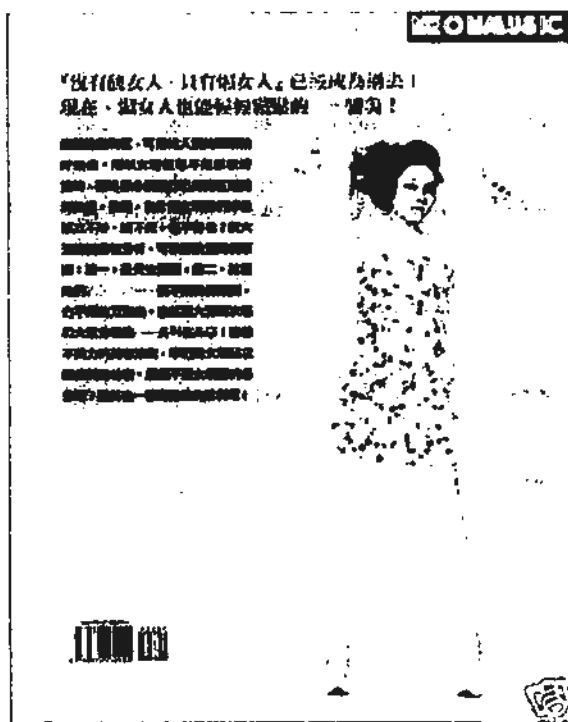


Figure 42. The back cover of Barbie Hsu's book: *Queen of Beauty 2* with the caption: "There are no ugly women, only lazy ones' is a thing of the past. Today, lazy women can easily become beautiful!"

Among various medical treatments which promise to transform dark-complexioned women into white-skinned beauties, body whitening injections have increasingly gained acceptance among some Chinese women in recent years. This trend was pushed by Barbie Hsu His-Yuan (Xu Xiyuan in pinyin; also known

as Da S to fans), a famous Taiwan actress who has been called the “Queen of Beauty.” In her second book on beauty tips entitled *Female Celebrities Exposed: Beauty Queen 2*, Hus revealed a secret: many Taiwan actresses had whitening injections regularly so as to stay fair (Hsu 2007). As one of the best-selling books on beauty tips in China in recent years, Hus’s book has publicized whitening injections as an acceptable means to attain a lighter complexion among Chinese women.

“Whitening injection” (*meibaizhen*) is a generic term to refer to a method of whitening skin through intravenous drip or injections of whitening liquid. Upon the injection into the vein, whitening liquid enters the body through the bloodstream and circulates throughout the body. The compositions of ingredients of whitening liquids, or even the ingredients themselves, vary from brand to brand, and clinic to clinic. Therefore, a prescription that each doctor gives to his/her clients varies according to their needs and conditions. Introduced by Hsu (2007), the basic ingredients of whitening injections are antioxidants including Glutathione, m-Tranexamic Acid and Vitamin C.⁸⁷ While Glutathione promotes oxidation resistance of cells and detoxifies the body to strengthen the immune system, m-Tranexamic Acid inhibits melanin growth and removes existing pigmentation. Normally, it takes 40-60 minutes for one injection.

Despite the fact that whitening injections are already provided by some

⁸⁷ According to a doctor I talked, in addition to Glutathione, m-Tranexamic Acid and Vitamin C, whitening injections also commonly comprise of other ingredients like Vitamin B, Vitamin E, and Ginkgo extracts. The ingredients and the ratio of their compositions are the key to determining the effectiveness of the injections.

aesthetic clinics and beauty salons, the legality of this treatment is problematic in China. As reported by *China Beauty and Fashion News* (2007), some Chinese dermatologists have questioned the effectiveness and side effects of whitening injections in China's market. Moreover, according to Xu and Zhang (2008), although whitening liquids of injections sold in the Chinese market were usually claimed as being imported from other countries, there were no foreign or domestic drug batch numbers for those products. In the official websites of both the State Food and Drug Administration (SFDA) and the Ministry of Health (MOH), there was no registration information for liquids used in whitening injections either as medicine or cosmetics. The SFDA told the *Market News* that whitening liquids had not obtained drug batch numbers from the SFDA in China. At the same time, the MOH also claimed that whitening liquids did not belong to the category of cosmetics, so they could not get batch numbers as cosmetics as well. Thus, the insufficient array of aesthetic treatments had led to the administration of whitening injections in a "vacuum zone" in China (Xu and Zhang 2008:1). Accordingly, despite the fact that whitening injections are widely available in privately-owned medical aesthetic clinics and even beauty salons, they are hardly found in public hospitals.

The chaotic management of whitening injections in China's market has also led to a disparity in pricing. The prices for whitening injections vary sharply from clinic to clinic and material to material, ranging from as low as several hundreds yuan to as

high as several and even tens of thousands of yuan for one injection. Aesthetic clinics and beauty salons usually claim that in order to get a good result, a client needs a full course of treatment including at least 5-10 injections once or twice a week for 1 or 2 months. For example, one full course of treatment of whitening injections in a private-owned medical aesthetic clinic in Beijing costs from 13,000 to 20,000 yuan, including 10 injections.

These whitening injections show the length that some Chinese people are willing to go to pursue fair skin. I am not arguing that whitening injections are widely accepted among Chinese women. Among the women I interviewed, the acceptance of whitening injection is much less than the acceptance of other skin-whitening treatment such as laser whitening programmes. The demand for whitening injections might be limited, but the use of whitening cream and lotion is widely popular among Chinese women. Many women I spoke with said that they had used whitening creams or lotions in their daily beauty practices. Aside from whitening injection, the vast selections of skin-whitening products on shelves of cosmetics stores and supermarkets in China vividly exemplifies the preference for light skin among Chinese women.

Why does skin color matter so much in China? What are the cultural implications of Chinese women's preference for light skin? Similar to big eyes and double eyelids, the preference for light skin has also been a subject of debate. It is important to recognize that although light-skin preference is a sensitive topic which

is generally associated with the issue of race and racism in a Western context, Chinese people seldom relate this preference with race. Instead, the dominant narrative about light-skin preference among Chinese is a matter of social class, as I will shortly discuss. When I brought up the issue of Western influence to women I interviewed, they expressed similar attitudes to those I spoke with concerning double eyelids. While some women attribute the desire for white skin to the globalization of Western media by mentioning the role of media in disseminating the ideal of white skin globally, more women emphasized the long history of Chinese women's preference for light skin. Some women agree that Chinese women are rapidly adopting Western fashion and beauty standards, but disagree with the argument that preference for light skin is a result of imitating Caucasian females.

Thus, even if we might be shocked to see how Chinese women strive to stay out of the sun and strive to be fair, we should be aware that the meanings of "fair skin" in China is not necessarily the same as in the West. As an interviewee said:

Fair skin was already appreciated in ancient China. As a Chinese saying goes: "A fair skin overshadows three ugly qualities" (*yi bai zhe san chou*). For us, fair skin is more about whether you are wealthy enough to avoid outdoor labor. It's just the opposite to Western countries, where people seek to be tanned, and where tanned skin indicates that a person is wealthy enough to enjoy vacations on beaches and resorts. If I say that Europeans get tanned because they want to look like Africans or Asians, many people would consider it ridiculous. Well, is it funny to use this logic to explain Chinese women's preference for fair skin? You see, the function of whitening cream to Chinese is same as the function of tanning lotion to Westerners. While skin color preferences change across cultures, but the preference for wealth remains the same everywhere.

The preference for fair skin has been prevalent in China for centuries. The images of flawless-light-skinned beauty have appeared in numerous classical Chinese poems, works of fictions, and paintings. Scholars have argued that the beauty ideal of unblemished fair skin predates the introduction of Western images of beauty throughout most East Asian countries (Johansson 1998b; Li, Min, Belk, Kimura and Bahl 2008). Traditionally, East Asians held that “fair skin indicated a high social status while dark skin is associated with low social status” (Johansson 1998b: 60). In his study on Chinese beauty product advertising, Johansson (1998b) unpacks the meanings of white skin in China’s changing historical and cultural contexts: fair skin was a symbol of refinement indicating that a person did not belong to the peasant classes who toiled under the sun in ancient China. The value of fair skin was turned upside down in the Mao era, when dark-tanned skin, the symbol of peasants and workers, became the politically correct ideal; however, since the high regard for manual work has again vanished in post-Mao China, the preference for white skin has returned. As Johansson writes, “Fair skin, then, formerly a mark of aristocracy which showed its bearer to be a member of a privileged minority of scholar families, may now have turned into a trait separating ‘middle class’ urbanites from the majority of peasants” (1998b: 61). Moreover, with the flourishing global consumer culture in contemporary China, the meanings of skin color are being recoded. “White skin no longer signifies class and wealth in a domestic context but is now also used to construct identity in a

globalized culture. Instead of signifying identity in relation to an internal other, it now constructs a difference with an external other, namely the West” (Johansson 1998b: 64). Johansson’s analysis demonstrates not only that the fair-skin ideal predates the introduction of contemporary Western-style consumer culture in China, but also that the implications of fair skin vary significantly in China’s social settings. The preference for fair skin combines both the continuity of ancient Chinese beauty ideals and the impact of Western beauty ideology. In other words, the preference for light skin is influenced by both Western mass-mediated ideologies and traditional Asian cultural values. As Li et. al. write, “Western-centrism and cultural hegemony interact with Asian ideologies like Confucianism in strengthening the ideal of whiteness” (2008: 444), in which fair skin is not only about beauty but also refers to the female gender character of soft, pure and tender, and infers a woman’s status and sophistication.

There is no doubt that the cultural hegemony of Western beauty ideals has spread globally with the flow of Western advertising, media and commodities; however, Chinese people’s perceptions of certain beauty standards such as double eyelids, big eyes, fair skin and related beauty practices need not be read as symbols of Westernization. In order to understand Chinese women’s preference for some seemingly Western features, we must examine the historical and local contexts of China. As stressed by Johansson, we should pay more attention to “hybridity, Creolization and local resignification of global beauty ideals” (1998b: 59).

Furthermore, while the process of globalization has indeed brought about a transnational standard of beauty mainly based on Caucasian features around the world, it simultaneously has produced an increasing national sentiment towards “traditional” and “national” characteristics of beauty amongst nations.

With regard to the pursuit of beauty through cosmetic surgery, more and more Chinese people have come to emphasize the importance of appreciating Chinese aesthetic characteristics rather than simply going after a Hollywood standard of beauty. For example, according to Oleson (2007), Zhang Xiaomei,⁸⁸ a key figure of the Chinese beauty industry, has said that cosmetic surgery needs to be customized to fit Chinese faces. Oleson quotes Zhang as follows, “It was popular to do a surgery 10 years ago, a so-called European-style double eyelid that really made eyes sort of pop and appear more Caucasian, but it didn’t look good and Chinese women have learned from that.” Zhang added that high noses and super-plump pouts have also fallen out of favor, giving way to techniques that play up, instead of distort, Asian beauty. In 2005, Zhang published a book entitled *China Beauty: The First Pink Book of Standard Beautiful Women in China*. In the preface of the book, she writes:

The globalization of the economy directly influences the globalization of culture. An open-minded Chinese should hold two aesthetic standards: one comes from our traditional cultural heritage and another from Western standards of beauty. Economic globalization requires us to know ourselves as much as others. (Zhang X.M. 2005: Preface 5)

⁸⁸ As mentioned earlier, as a CPPCC member and the editor-in-chief of *China Beauty and Fashion News*, Zhang Xiaomei is a key figure in the Chinese beauty industry.

Zhang is aware of the huge impact of Western cultural influences on Chinese beauty standards. Moreover, she emphasizes the importance of recognition of Chinese aesthetics in a global era. She writes:

China Beauty believes that globalization is not homogenization. It is a process of learning to respect difference, and a process of different nations learning to be a part of a multiple harmonious world. We believe that the spirit of five thousand years of Chinese culture is all-embracing. It is an ability to be creative, as well as to have a thorough knowledge of both Western and Chinese beauty culture. (Zhang X.M. 2005: Preface 7)

Zhang tells us that the beauty ideals in contemporary China are not simply adaptations from the West. Instead, new, hybridized ideals of Chinese beauty are created, based on the distinct Chinese cultural, social and historical context. *China Beauty* calls for beauty standards featuring Chinese characteristics to resist the hegemony of Western beauty standards. Zhang quotes a famous Chinese saying: "Only what is national can be international (*zhi you minzude, cai shi shijiede*)" (Zhang X.M. 2005: Preface 6).

Despite the prevalence of Western women's images in China, there is thus a new "look Chinese" sentiment emerging--a growing national consciousness to emphasize the features of Chinese beauty. As argued by Zhang, if an ideal of beauty based on Western features was popular in the 1980s and 1990s in China, there has been a desire to return to "Chinese Beauty" in the 2000s. What Zhang has said about the change of beauty culture resonates with what Johansson observed in his study of representations of Chinese and Western women in Chinese advertisements. He

argues (1998a) that Chinese consumer culture has stepped back from a complete acceptance of anything Western in the 1980s to “something like a repatriation of difference in the 1990s, within the discourse of an East Asian or Confucian cultural identity where modern Western values appear to remain only a surface phenomenon” (Johansson 1998 a: 80). A discourse of “Oriental beauty” has been generated in advertising in which beautiful Chinese women are supposed to “be modern, Western, and free, and yet at the same time uphold Chinese values and traditions” (Johansson 1998a: 138).

The Image of Women, the Image of the Nation: Representations of “Oriental Beauty” in the Beijing Olympics

Over the past several chapters, I have discussed why beauty matters for Chinese women and how they pursue it through surgical bodily practices. Does beauty matter to the nation? Certainly it does. The image of women is always closely related to the image of the nation. The image of women comes to constitute a discourse on cultural identity not only for individuals but also for the nation. Just as the pursuit of beauty is never purely an aesthetic issue for individuals, the representation of Chinese beauty on a global stage can be seen as a subtly yet explicitly political statement of the Chinese government. Especially with the rising economic power of China, the intention to increase China’s “soft power”⁸⁹ can be seen through the representation

⁸⁹ The term “soft power” refers to the ability of a nation to exert its influence through non-military means and to attract the attention and cooperation of other nations. The phrase was coined by Joseph Nye of Harvard University in his 1990 book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of*

of beautiful Chinese women in the Beijing Olympics. Using the selection and training of “ceremony hostesses” (*liyi xiaojie*) for the Beijing Olympics as an example, in the pages that follow I discuss the representation of women and their bodies in the national rhetoric of China. Although this discussion does not directly deal with cosmetic surgery, it can lead us to understand the symbolic meanings attached to Chinese women’s bodies in terms of China’s relationship to the West.

On the night of August 24, 2008, standing in front of a window a few miles away from the National Stadium in Beijing, I saw that the sky of Beijing was filled with fireworks. I had just watched the Closing Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics on TV. The show was over; however, I could not help thinking about what I saw in the past 17 days. There is no doubt that the spectacular opening and closing ceremonies and its victory in the medals table had delivered national pride as China expected. Moreover, the images of beautiful ceremony hostesses also became symbols to convince the world that China had arrived on the global stage as a modern and cosmopolitan nation.

In the fall of 2007, the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) started to select hostesses who would assist with ceremonies such as presenting medals and flag-raising. When the BOCOG recruited 40 girls on the campuses of 10 Shanghai universities, the extremely rigorous selection criteria

American Power. He further developed the concept in his 2004 book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. In 2007, Chinese President Hu Jintao stressed the need to enhance Chinese culture as the country’s “soft power” in his keynote speech at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party Congress.

reported by mass media ignited controversy. Guo, Fang, and Cai (2008) outlined in Shanghai's *Xinmin Evening News* the specific criteria for the candidates of hostess, beginning with "eye length (that) is three-tenths of the face." The criteria also stipulated that:

Distance between eyebrows and eyes should be one-tenth of the face.
The width of the nose should be one-tenth of the face width. The width of the mouth should equal the distance between the pupils. The length of the chin should be one-sixth of the face length (Guo et.al. 2008: A02).

Guo et. al. (2008) also reported that according to the selection criteria, the candidates should be 18 to 24 years old, 1.68 to 1.78 meters tall, having a "rosy and shiny" complexion, "elastic skin," "smooth and gently curved legs," and a "plump, but not fat" body. Soon after this report was published, Chinese officials denied that the selection criteria for the ceremony hostesses required strict standards of facial appearance as had been reported; however, it was later proved that this was indeed the case (Guo 2008). Several months later, 337 would-be hostesses for the Olympic victory ceremonies were selected, including 297 young women from thousands of candidates from Beijing and 40 women from more than 1,700 candidates from Shanghai (Ji and Ai 2008). All those women were picked by experts from various professions, including models, body-shaping teachers, journalists, singers, dancers and athletes, based on specific standards of candidates' body shapes and facial features.



Figure 43. Etiquette training of the Olympic hostesses at a vocational school in Beijing, October 25, 2007. Photo from China.org.cn.



Figure 44. The Olympic hostesses practice smiling during training in Qingdao, March 25, 2008. Photo form Xinhua News Agency.

Of course these women also needed other qualities aside from appearance.

Beck (2007) quoted Zhao Dongming, the director of the Cultural Activities Department, BOCOG, as saying, "It is not enough just to have a beautiful appearance. They need to be healthy and they need to have dedicated training."

After being chosen from among thousands of women, 337 would-be hostesses for the Olympic victory ceremonies were sent on a rigorous "beauty boot camp" in a

vocational school in Beijing's northern Changping district. Moreover, 110 women were also selected from 2,000 applicants and trained in Qingdao, in east China's Shandong Province, in order to serve as ushers for the sailing competition at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Ji and Ai (2008) covered how ceremony hostess were drilled with military precision in order to represent Oriental beauty in the Beijing Olympics. Those candidates underwent a strict timetable every day from 6:30 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., and were scheduled to run 1,000 meters every morning and to have classes until the night, including body-shaping exercises, dancing, manners, ceremony processes and basic Olympic knowledge. In order to walk in a graceful way, they were trained to stand in high-heels while balancing a 16-page book on their heads and keeping a sheet of paper between their knees (see Figure 43), for at least an hour at a time. If either object fell or slipped from place, they would have to start the exercise all over again.

Candidates were trained to smile in a perfect way by exposing six to eight teeth. In order to produce this perfect smile, they spent hours in front of a mirror with a chopstick between their teeth (see Figure 44). They were also trained to show courtesy and respect to visitors. There is no doubt that the training was extremely rigorous and harsh. As Ji and Ai (2008) quoted Yang Xu, a 19-year-old candidate, as saying:

It has been a tough job. We are often asked to keep a good-looking posture while wearing [standing gesture on the standardized] 5-centimeter-high heels for more than one hour, so that my T-shirt has

been drenched with sweat even in the air-conditioned room.... Our teacher sometimes was seen taking a pack of broken heels for repair, a measure of our suffering....It is a chance, a god-given chance, to be more accurate, as China has been longing to host the Olympics for 100 years. I simply want to be part of it for the experience and to improve myself.

Although the training was extremely rigorous, the determination of securing their chance to participate in this Chinese historical moment made these women enjoy the “suffering” in the training in order to achieve perfection; Yang Xu, as we saw, expressed her eagerness and pride at representing China at the Olympics. The Chinese authorities also expressed their confidence in representing China’s beautiful face through well-educated and graceful hostesses at the victory ceremony. Wang Ning, the deputy division chief of the Sport Representation and Victory Ceremony Division of the Culture and Ceremonies Department, BOCOG, said, “The young women, with a classical Chinese temperament, would send messages of Chinese implicit beauty in each simple move as taught in the classes” (Ji and Ai 2008). Cai Fuchao, the vice mayor of Beijing, at a start-up ceremony for volunteers, also said, “The victory ceremony will be the faces of China’s Olympics as a necessary part of the Games” (Ji and Ai 2008). The determination of Chinese authorities to ensure the perfection in every detail in the Olympics was clearly displayed. As a great opportunity to represent China in front of a vast global audience, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Game became a grand stage in which beautiful Chinese women’s images were a part of the representation. As expressed by Li Ziyue, a ceremony hostess, “We have worked so much, simply to give for a few minutes a good impression at the

Olympic victory ceremony as we want to show the most beautiful aspect of oriental ladies across the world” (Ji and Ai 2008).

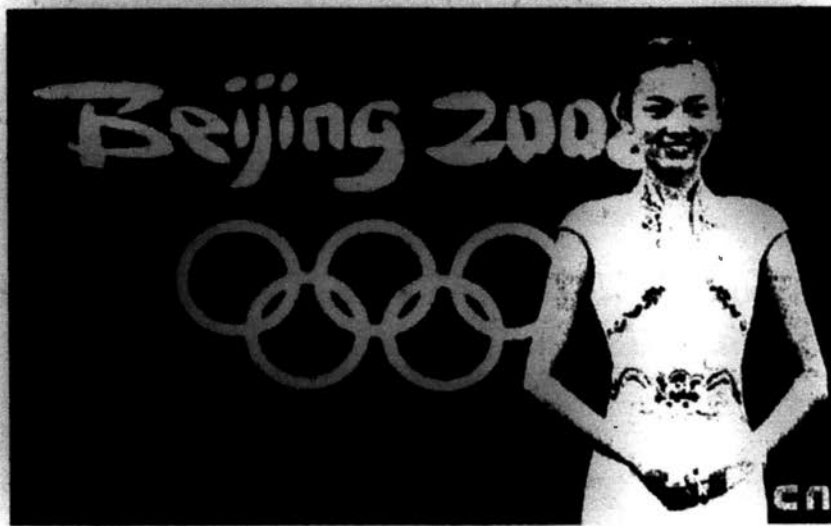


Figure 45. A Ceremony Hostess at the Beijing 2008 Olympics. Photo from news.CCTV.com

The process of selecting and training the victory ceremony hostesses for the Beijing Olympic Game is just one example to demonstrate that how beautiful female images have been used to represent to the world a new face—a beautiful, graceful and cosmopolitan look of China. To some extent, the recruitment and training of ceremony hostesses for the Beijing Olympics is a gendered embodiment of a nationalist expression. The representation of Chinese female beauty on the global stage is an implicit statement that has a great deal to say about structures of power, performances of gender, affirmations of local and global identity, and also configurations of nationalism. It makes a strong statement to the world that an old “backward” China has passed and a new “modern” and “beautiful” China is ready to take its place among the ranks of great nations.

Conclusion

Some scholars have argued that in an era of globalization female beauty is becoming increasingly standardized according to a Western ideal of beauty (Chapkis 1988). However, I suggest that the concept of beauty and the cultural implications of beauty features still vary greatly around the world. In spite of exposure to the “Western” ideals of beauty, people’s perceptions of beauty vary contextually in different local settings. As the discussion of Chinese women’s bodily practices such as double-eyelid surgery and whitening injections indicated, it is simplistic to interpret Chinese women’s beauty practice as a form of imitating a “global standard of white beauty.” Instead, the meanings of bodily practices should be understood in different personal, national and international settings. Moreover, globalization has not only spread Western standards of beauty, but also increased national sentiments concerning beauty standards and practices in China. Chinese women’s conflicting attitudes towards and responses to Western beauty notions and body practices reflect the complexity of their positions in the current beauty regime where globalization, Orientalism and cultural nationalism play out together. The representation of Chinese women’s “Oriental beauty” in the 2008 Olympic Games exemplifies that women’s body images is a symbol of the tension between tradition and modernity, and China and the West. This refashioned “Oriental beauty” shows how local and global dynamics recreate discourses of beauty in which national modernity has been represented.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have theoretically framed my discussion of Chinese women's surgical body alteration in terms of the individual body, the social body, and the body politics. At the same time, I have thematically examined seemingly discrete but actually overlapping "bodies"—the empowered body, the exploited body, the gendered body, the anxious body, the commodified body, and the globalized body—to decipher meanings that are inscribed on the surgically altered female body in China. How often have we heard the saying that "beauty is only skin deep"? Well, maybe it is time to rethink about it. A purpose of this dissertation is to decode meanings embodied in a seemingly "frivolous" and "trivial" beauty practice, cosmetic surgery, in China's social context. As has been discussed over the last seven chapters, beauty and its pursuit through cosmetic surgery are more than skin deep. A closer examination reveals that, as an individual's immediate and intimate possession, bodily appearance is an important terrain where social power is played out. In a "somatic society," a term coined by Bryan Turner, the body has become "the principal field of political and cultural activity" (Shilling 2003: 1 citing Turner 1992: 12). Using surgical body alteration as a lens, I have demonstrated that the body is simultaneously a naturally given and a culturally constructed entity, which symbolizes meanings and values and embodies control and resistance. By discussing

the increasing popularity of cosmetic surgery in China and women's involvement in it, I argue that women's physical appearance and surgical body alteration reflects the reconfiguration of women's mundane lives, their senses of gendered self, and sociocultural and political power over the body in reform China.

In this concluding chapter, I conclude my discussion by further examining the dilemma inescapably involved in cosmetic surgery regarding women's agency and social structure, the symbolic nature of female appearance and surgical alteration as a representation of social control, the reconfiguration between market discourse and state power in terms of body regime, and the articulation between Chinese women's involvement in cosmetic surgery and the global flows of capital, people, commodities, images and ideologies. The surgically altered female body is a locus of a negotiated settlement between the body, and self identity, social control, and globalization.

Women's Agency versus False Consciousness: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery

We need to find ways to explore cosmetic surgery as a complex and dilemmatic situation for women: problem and solution, oppression and liberation, all in one. (Davis 1995: 67)

The relationship between surgical body alteration and individual agency is the first terrain of inquiry concerning Chinese women's involvement in cosmetic surgery.

The issue of agency is intensively debated in feminist discussions of cosmetic

surgery. As has been discussed, while some feminists criticize cosmetic surgery as a means to dupe and to colonize women in a male-dominated beauty system (Wolf 1991; Morgan 1991), others regard it as an individual choice for women to exercise their agency by taking control of their own bodies (Davis 1995, 2003; Gimlin 2004). At the heart of the controversy among feminists, a key issue is cosmetic surgery as women's subjugation to the male gaze versus cosmetic surgery as women's empowerment, women's false consciousness versus women's self choice, and women as victims versus women as agents.

Obviously, any argument suggesting a stark dichotomy between individual choice and social coercion is overly simplistic. Those women who opt for cosmetic surgery may adhere to the male-gazed "beauty myth," and simultaneously exercise their agency by reshaping their bodies. While some feminists' understanding of cosmetic surgery as a repression of women is still highly relevant, we should not ignore the agency embodied in their body alteration, although this may be filled with longing, anxiety and struggle. On the one hand, Chinese women can hardly escape from the existing gender expectation in marriage and workplace, within which feminine beauty is highly valued. For example, as described earlier, in order to find a suitable spouse, a 33-year-old office lady sought to undergo an operation to make her squarish face smaller in order to be more feminine. Similarly, in order to secure her marriage threatened by a pretty young mistress, a middle-aged upper-middle-class woman opted for liposuction and face-lift procedures to

rejuvenate her appearance. In these cases, the purpose of obtaining a beautiful, feminine, or younger appearance by undergoing cosmetic surgery is to win over men in marriage. However, despite some women admitting that they undergo cosmetic surgery because “a woman dolls herself up for a man who loves her,” most women who elect to have cosmetic surgery claim that they undergo cosmetic surgery for themselves rather than for their husbands or others. Moreover, as I have discussed in chapter 4, many women opt for cosmetic surgery for job requirements. “I did it for myself” is one of the most pervasive narratives that cosmetic surgery recipients use to justify their decision-making and actions. Although it may be their “false consciousness” to think that they make decisions for themselves, we cannot deny that some women indeed make changes in their lives through making changes in their appearance by undergoing cosmetic surgery, such as Hao Lulu and Yang Yuan, as well other ordinary women who gain “beauty capital” for their future lives. From these women’s points of view, cosmetic surgery is a practical strategy to exercise control over their lives, although it is a costly, painful, and even dangerous option. However, we must consider that the choice of cosmetic surgery might be a form of pervasive false consciousness that is created and perpetuated by media hype and consumer culture. Although the women who elect to have their bodies surgically altered often insist they know exactly what they are doing, and exercise free choice in controlling their bodies and lives, they might be trapped in false consciousness, in which they have accepted male values and hegemonic discourse of feminine beauty

as their own self-worth. In other words, it looks as if women are controlling their own bodies, whereas in fact their bodies are controlled by a new form of power. Women may think that they make their own choice, whereas in fact they are doing what a beauty system and consumer culture requires them to do. Cosmetic surgery can be empowering at an individual level while at a collective level reinforcing hegemonic forces that oppress women as whole.

The contradiction between these two different perspectives indicates that research on surgical body alteration cannot escape from the fundamental debate about the relationship between agency and structure, "the subject of one of the most long-standing and important debates within social sciences during the past century" (Davis 2003: 12). Can we resolve the contradiction between agency and structure? To be more specific, in cosmetic surgery, can we make sense of women's involvement in cosmetic surgery without denying either the power structure exerted on women or women's own agency? I argue that we can reconcile this apparent contradiction by examining the concept of agency. As defined by Davis, as a sociological concept, agency is "the active participation of individuals in the constitution of social life" (2003: 12). Moreover, there are many different definitions of agency in sociological research on cosmetic surgery. As Eriksen and Goering write:

Despite its conceptual hegemony, there is wide variability in how human agency gets defined in the sociological research on cosmetic surgery, ranging from a 'resource of empowerment' (Davis 1995), an

'effective exercise of power' (Gagne & McGaughey, 2003), a reasoned decision within a framework of choice and pressure (Acheta, 2003), or, by inference, as savvy cultural negotiation in an effort to maximize one's options (Gimlin, 2003[2000]). (Eriksen and Goering 2006: 8)

A closer scrutiny of the definitions of agency in research on cosmetic surgery reveals that despite emphasizing various aspects of agency such as "active participation," "effective exercise of power," "reasoned decision," and "an effort to maximize one's options," as we see above, different scholars do not present the concept of agency as "free choice." In other words, this acknowledgement of women's agency in decision-making on surgical body alteration hardly ignores social conditions which constrain their choices. As stated by Davis, "Individual agency is always situated in relations of power, which provide the conditions of enablement and constraint under which all social actions takes place. There is no 'free choice' where individuals exercise 'choice' in any absolute sense of the word" (2003: 12). Choices are always exercised within a cultural context. In a culture where even slight physical imperfections are seen as barriers to happiness, most women who choose cosmetic surgery certainly do not make free choices.

Thus, the purpose of drawing upon the notion of agency in discussing women's involvement in cosmetic surgery is not to overlook the power structures which exercise control over women's bodies. Instead, the goal is to find ways of criticizing the social conditions which produce the beauty system without simply blaming women as duped victims of ideological manipulation. Although choices are made

under conditions that women cannot choose, there is a niche for these women to exercise control over their lives by using cosmetic surgery as a strategy. As Davis writes:

Cosmetic surgery is not about beauty but about identity. For a woman who feels trapped in a body which does not fit her sense of who she is, cosmetic surgery becomes a way to renegotiate identity through her body. Cosmetic surgery is about women exercising power under conditions which are not of one's own making. In a context of limited possibilities for action, cosmetic surgery can be a way for an individual woman to give shape to her life by reshaping her body. (Davis 1995: 163)

Wijsbek has argued that women's ability to respond adequately to external circumstances is a kind of freedom, "a freedom within the world, not a freedom from it," in Susan Wolf's apt phrase (Wijsbek 2000: 458 citing Wolf 1990: 93). In this sense, I use the notion "agency within" to feature women's ability to act as agents who make actions within specific historical circumstances in terms of surgical body alteration.

How do women negotiate their personal lives under these circumstances by managing their body images? As has been discussed, in contrast to a general assumption that women undergo cosmetic surgery due to vanity, the actual reasons in the context of China are largely rooted in practicality. Among women I interviewed, a common reason for undergoing cosmetic surgery is to gain an edge for their future lives whether in the workplace or the marriage market. In this sense, the body and especially its appearance has become a form of symbolic capital which

can be invested and transformed. Bourdieu (1986) expands on the notion of capital from its economic dimension which emphasizes material exchanges to immaterial and non-economic forms of capital, specifically including symbolic capital and social capital. He argues that different types of capital can be exchanged and converted into other forms. Bourdieu's argument offers us a conceptual tool to explore how a beautiful appearance becomes a form of "physical capital" that can be invested, transformed and exchanged. When applying Bourdieu's notion to analyze physical activity in schools, Richard Light defines "physical capital" as follows:

The term physical capital is used to refer to cultural capital that is embodied through social practice and any form of physical attribute such as athletic skill, beauty, deportment or physical strength which can be converted into other forms of capital. The shape, size, use and adornment of the body carry particular meanings just as ways of walking, sitting, gesturing and taking part in social life are saturated with social and cultural meaning. In particular social settings, these constitute a valuable form of capital that can be converted into more powerful forms such as the economic capital of wages. (Light 2001)

When society increasingly mandates and rewards beauty, a beautiful appearance has become a form of physical capital. Considering attractive body images as capital, some Chinese women use cosmetic surgery as a pragmatic path to obtain desirable jobs or higher earnings, find better spouses or secure marriages, and solidify their social status or cross class distinction between the rural and the urban. For example, the belief that better looks secure better jobs has pushed some Chinese college students to undergo cosmetic surgery. The striking increase of Chinese

teenagers and young people's involvement in cosmetic surgery has become a particular trend in recent years. With the massive expansion of colleges, millions of graduates flood the job market every year. Employment pressure has led to a situation where young students try to get an edge by standing out in the tight job market. Even some parents seem more than willing to sacrifice a large amount of salary to support their daughters' decisions to undergo cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery is thus widely viewed as an investment for the purpose of making more profit in the future.

In a "somatic society," body image governs individuals' life career, marriage, day-to-day interactions and self-confidence. By accumulating physical capital through modifying appearance, a woman may have the ability to alter other areas of her life for her own benefit. The more physical capital a woman can hold, the more ability she may have to reshape the social, cultural and economic fields around her. Therefore, sometimes cosmetic surgery is not only a means to improve one's appearance, but also a strategy to boost one's self-esteem, to obtain a better job and higher earnings, and to signify one's social status. As Shilling argues:

Investing in the body provides people with a means of self expression and a way of potentially feeling good and increasing the control they have over their bodies. If one feels unable to exert influence over an increasingly complex society, at least one can have some effect on the size, shape and appearance of one's body. (2003: 6)

Having said that cosmetic surgery is widely regarded as an investment to gain

beauty/physical capital in one's future life among women who opt for cosmetic surgery, it is important to note that those women's choices of surgical body modifications are not without constraints; rather, they "freely" make decisions under circumstances which they cannot choose. The bodily practice of cosmetic surgery is shaped by the interactions of multiple power structures. As I have argued, in the case of cosmetic surgery, women perform their agency within structure rather than transcending that structure. Chinese women's involvement in cosmetic surgery illustrates the complex relation between gender and inequality in terms of body regime. When discussing gender inequality in Chinese society, scholars have discovered many ironies of the female predicament in China, Watson (1991) has written:

Women may be property holders but have few or no legal rights to property, they may be decision makers without the authority to make decisions, they may have physical mobility but are socially and economically constrained, they may exercise the power of an emperor but have no right to the imperial title. (348)

The similar predicament also exists in women's choice of cosmetic surgery. For those Chinese women who opt for cosmetic surgery, on the one hand they may celebrate their bodily autonomy through body alteration which they could not have imagined a few decades ago; on the other hand, their bodily practices of cosmetic surgery are confined by the changing social structures and ideologies in China. In this sense, as argued by Reischer and Koo, "the body is...a prime site for the

contestation of social and individual power; it is the locus of both oppression and empowerment, simultaneously” (2004: 297).

The Anxious Body: A Telling Sign of China’s Social Transition

In the preceding section, I emphasized the active role of cosmetic surgery in negotiating women’s lives in a complex social world. In this section, I focus on the symbolic nature of surgical body alteration as a representation of social transition in contemporary China. I argue that the unexpected popularity of cosmetic surgery among Chinese women needs to be considered in the context of the transformation of social, economic, and cultural landscapes of post-Mao China.

What is the relationship between the body and society? In her influential book *Natural Symbols*, Mary Douglas (1996[1970]) proposes the notion of “the two bodies” to suggest the physical body as a symbolic metaphor for the social body. As Douglas argues, “there is a strong tendency to replicate the social situation in symbolic form by drawing richly on bodily symbols in every possible dimension” (Preface: vii). That is to say, the body and society embody each other. Douglas argues, “The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society” (1996[1970]:69). In this sense, we can regard the surgically altered female body as a visible site marking China’s dramatic social transformation. To put it in another way, we can capture

changing social lives of women through focusing on their bodily appearance and bodily alteration.

China has experienced dramatic and drastic social transformation over the past three decades. Politically, China has its unique post-Maoist system in which the political centralization of power is still the major feature. Economically, however, rapid marketization, commercialization and globalization have taken place in China. The unusual transformation has granted Chinese cultural characteristics and social structures an utterly new nature which is different from both socialism and capitalism. Given this background, the emergence of Chinese “artificial beauty” and the increasing popularity of cosmetic surgery are inextricably linked to the social transformation and the booming consumer culture in China. To a certain extent, the changing nature of social transition through economic and political reform is allegorically revealed through the changing features of female appearance through cosmetic surgery. The body, especially the surgically altered female body, becomes something reflecting the perplexing and uncertain nature of the society. To put it differently, Chinese women’s anxiety about body images, longings for beautiful appearance and better lives, and decisions to undergo cosmetic surgery, are deeply entangled within China’s larger economic reform and changing social culture.

As I have argued, vanity or narcissism is not the major stimulus to cosmetic surgery; rather, many women undergo cosmetic surgery for practical reasons. These women tend to treat their bodies as projects and self-consciously manage their body

images. Many of them consider cosmetic surgery as a strategy to gain “physical capital” for their personal interests. Although different people have various personal reasons to undergo cosmetic surgery, the triggers that turn dissatisfactions over personal appearance into the act of cosmetic surgery is largely rooted in occupational segregation and discrimination associated with gender and appearance, the distinction between the rural and the urban in terms of body culture, and changing patterns of marriage, romance and sexuality. The practicality of cosmetic surgery is driven by women’s anxiety over their body images and uncertainty over their social lives as produced by rapid socio-economic changes. In particular, when consumer culture and popular culture which extensively address female beauty have become so much a part of everyday life, the desire to become the body beautiful has also been increasing. Facing drastic socio-economic transitions, women are driven to secure or maximize their personal interests by any possible means, including a physically painful and potentially risky strategy—cosmetic surgery.

Furthermore, in contrast to a general assumption that cosmetic surgery is a privilege of the rich in today’s China, women who are involved in cosmetic surgery actually come from diverse ages, classes and social groups. Rather than being the privilege of the rich, cosmetic surgery reaches women positioned in different social hierarchies, from teenage girls to middle-aged women, from middle-aged lower-class women to upper-middle-class women, from well-educated college girls, office ladies and social elites to unskilled laid-off women and migrant women, and

from urban residents who hold respectable jobs to rural-to-urban migrants who work in service sectors such as beauty salons and nightclubs. The wide range of women's involvement in cosmetic surgery reveals the large-scale social changes triggering women's body anxiety and uncertainty over their physical appearance. As has been discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the surgical alteration of the female body in contemporary China is deeply involved in China's social transition. The change of the job allocation system, the expansion of higher education and the rising unemployment of college students, along with the segregation of female labor in the service industry (especially in beauty sectors) and occupational discrimination based on gender, age, appearance and height, produce much pressure on women to get an edge to stand out in the job market by obtaining beauty capital. The continuity of traditional gender norms, which prize women's beauty over ability, leads people to highly value women's physical appearance in the marriage market. Along with the emergence of women with more disposable income and the urbanization process, women's physical appearance becomes an indication of the stratification of upper-middle class as opposed to working class, and of the distinction of rural migrant women and urbanites in terms of body culture. The changing patterns of marriage, romance and sexuality also heavily influence people's perceptions of appearance and their practices of cosmetic surgery.

The body is the locus of social uncertainty, one of the most obvious characteristics of China's ongoing socioeconomic transition. This social uncertainty

becomes bodily anxiety experienced both mentally and corporeally. The uncertain body is a kind of metaphor for the rapid transition of Chinese society in the reform era. To some extent, rather than the pure pursuit of beauty, surgical body alteration indicates a contemporary sense of change, instability and uncertainty that is linked to rapid technological and social changes. Allegorically, the surgically altered female body acts as a symbol for Chinese society's anxiety and uncertainty.

The Rhetoric of Choice: Commodified Freedom and the Politics of the Body in Post-Mao China

The body is not only socio-culturally constructed, but also politically inscribed. As Bordo argues, "Feminism imagined the human body as itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped and marked by histories and practices of containment and control" (Bordo 1999: 251). Embodied control and resistance, the surgically altered female body is a site of ideological contestation. In this sense, the politics of the body, or "the material body as a site of political struggle" in Susan Bordo's words (2003: 16), is another central issue concerning Chinese women's involvement in cosmetic surgery.

As I have earlier discussed, during the Maoist era, when a puritanical ethic and a revolutionary body ideology ruled the day, the communist party condemned emphasis on feminine beauty as bourgeois culture. Accordingly, cosmetic surgery was a taboo in the days of Maoist China. However, the emergence of Chinese

“artificial beauties” like Hao Lulu vividly exemplifies the sharp contrast between Maoist asceticism and post-Maoist consumerism and hedonism in body ideologies. A new cultural identity has emerged among women who opt for cosmetic surgery, especially among the young: an identity that places material affluence above ideological dedication, and individualism above collectivism. The unprecedentedly increasing popularity of cosmetic surgery in recent years in China demonstrates the transition of body politics from the Mao era to the post-Mao era, from the sacrificed body to the narcissistic body, from the collective body to the individual body, and from the revolutionary body to the commodified body. At the heart of this transition, the rhetoric of choice in cosmetic surgery plays a significant role in reconciling the complex relationship between self identity, market discourse and state power.

At the individual level, women who opt for cosmetic surgery largely justify their decisions through the narrative of personal freedom and individual choice. They often defend their decisions in words such as “It’s my body. It’s my choice,” “I make decision for myself,” or “It’s my freedom to choose whatever I want to do with my body.” For this reason, the rhetoric of choice plays a significant role in a life political agenda when it comes to a “problematic” bodily practice such as cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery provides a strategy by bringing the body into line with an existing sense of self. To understand the increasing importance of the body in women’s identity, we must situate it in conditions that have formed the context for this trend--the body and its practice should be understood in relation to

profound epochal shifts. Using Giddens's (1991) work on the reflexive self, Shilling (2003) conceptualizes the body as a "project" that is worked on and transformed as a fundamental part of individuals' self-identity in later/high modernity: an era characterized by a "qualitative advance in technological control and an intensified concern with consumption in which the body becomes a central object of cultivation of its own right"(Shilling 2003: 188), and an era featured by "a decline in those religious, politics and other 'grand narratives' which attributed people's lives with meaning in relation to some transcendent totality such as an afterlife or communism"(ibid). Shilling also argues,

For those who have lost their faith in religious authorities and grand political narratives, and are no longer provided with a clear world view or self-identity by these trans-personal meaning structures, at least the body initially appears to provide a firm foundation on which to reconstruct a reliable sense of self in the modern world. (2003:2)

Although what Giddens and Shilling discuss is the late modern Western world, we can apply this theoretical framework to China. After China implemented its reform and opening-up policy in the late 1970s, a dramatic social transition took place, characterized by a decline of the grand narrative of communist ideology that once formed the moral core and provided meaning for Chinese people's lives. This transition is also characterized by a rise of consumer culture and an unprecedented commodification of the body. Under such a historical and social context, the body has become a primary site of constructing self-identity. With the changing discourse

of bodily practice from the communist collective body in Maoist China to consumerist individual body in post-Mao China, a growing number of Chinese women are concerned about their appearance as an expression of self-identity. More and more Chinese women, and men as well, pay close attention to fast-changing styles in clothes, haircuts, grooming and body appearance. For a woman who wants to make a beautiful body image, along with buying clothes and cosmetics, she has one more choice: cosmetic surgery. By undergoing cosmetic surgery, on the one hand, people seek beautiful body images and economic rewards based on the dominant ideals and beliefs about appearance; on the other hand, they search for intangible psychological, cultural and social rewards, and values, meanings and identities.

To put it differently, when purchasing beautiful images through cosmetic surgery from the market, while some women may regard cosmetic surgery as a practical investment in physical capital, others may pursue not only an image of beauty, but also a sense of fashion and a feeling of freedom. By undergoing cosmetic surgery which was unimaginable in the Mao era, some Chinese women express their self-identity as “modern” Chinese women, who actively fulfill their dreams of beauty and senses of freedom and being modern in the realm of surgical body alteration. Accordingly, “I did it for myself” has become one of the most common arguments expressed by those women who opt for cosmetic surgery. The young Chinese generations born in and after the 1980s who grew up in the reform and

opening-up period place more emphasis on individualism, hedonism and consumerism than elder generations. Some of them seem to view physical appearance as something to be upgraded and purchased.

The rhetoric of choice has become a primary narrative in the market discourse of cosmetic surgery. “The rights to choose” has become a sort of slogan in advertising cosmetic surgery in China today. It is a common strategy to market cosmetic surgery under the guise of “rights” and “choice.” Cosmetic surgery advertisements in magazines and cosmetic surgery reality TV programmes have portrayed the “liberal” aspects of cosmetic surgery. Under the dual slogans of “rights” and “choice,” the market repackages cosmetic surgery as individuals’ self-determination to embrace autonomy over one’s body. The cosmetic surgery industry, which is eager to make a fortune from women’s desire for beauty and fears of aging, uses the language of choice over and over again: “It’s your body, shouldn’t you take control of how it looks?” Cosmetic surgery is portrayed not only as a means to embrace beauty, but also as a pathway to execute a personal right to take control of one’s body and express one’s freedom. Under such a discourse, it is not only beautiful faces and attractive figures but also freedom and liberty that one can purchase from the market. Freedom is commodified by advertising selling beauty products and services. The rhetoric of choice such as “the right to choose,” “women’s independence,” “it’s your right to do what you want to do,” “do it for yourself,” and “care for yourself” is extensively invoked by the market discourse to

sell cosmetic surgery. When “the right to choose” has become a dominant discourse in a consumer society where consumption is not only a matter of needs but of wants, not only of material goods but of symbolic images, consumerism becomes the new “para-belief system” in Zhao Bin’s words (1997: 46), filling the ideological void left by the demise of Maoism. In accordance with the demise of Maoist asceticism, the body beautiful has come into being as another kind of mass-consumption politics.

As Li has written:

The re-fashioned ‘modern woman’ reveals how aesthetic values and body techniques have been reshaped by global consumer capitalism. It also conjures up and adds a new dimension to a historical truth: the female body is now a site on which party politics, consumer capitalism and patriarchy are played out. (1998:71)

With the demise of Maoism and the rise of consumerism, the rhetoric of choice has also served as a “social palliative” to fill an ideological void and to strengthen party-state legitimacy. A first glance, cosmetic surgery is controversial to the orthodox communist ideology, and is not encouraged by the official discourse. However, as a “superficial” bodily practice adorning the surface of individuals, surgical body alteration is legitimated as personal freedom in the post-Maoist body ideology. In a broad sense, the state has withdrawn from the bodily sphere to let the market control individuals’ private life. However, it only withdraws from skin-deep spheres of the body--physical appearance--which do not affect the political authority of the state. Moreover, through releasing some social spaces for women to pursue an

expensive commodity, a glamorous body image, the state has promoted a huge and flourishing beauty industry to boost the government's taxation income and to create more job opportunities.

The Chinese government has worked hard to dispel a once ubiquitous image of China: the unisex Mao suit. The boom of the beauty industry, including the cosmetic surgery industry, has sent a strong message to the world: the old days of the puritanical and rigorous communist Chinese lifestyle are over; China is becoming an affluent and tolerant open society. In this sense, consumption in general and individual freedom in electing to cosmetic surgery in particular, serve the interests of the party-state by strengthening its legitimacy and substantiating its political agenda in women's body appearance. The development of the beauty industry has allowed the communist regime to strengthen its hold and to renew its legitimacy, not on the basis of the old communist rhetoric of egalitarianism, but on the new consumerist rhetoric of prosperity and freedom. In the body politics of contemporary China, the rhetoric of choice reconciles the relationship between the individual, market discourse and state power to reach a complex and subtle accommodation.

Corporal Globalization: The Global Cultural Economy of Remaking Chinese Beauty

The booming cosmetic surgery market in China is not only a result of the transformation of local social, cultural and economic landscapes, but also a result of

the globalization of consumer culture, beauty ideology and medical aesthetic technology. In globalization, as Appadurai states, both cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization are at play and in tension with each other. "The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order" (Appadurai 1996:32). Among various attempts to describe the dynamics of global cultural economy, Appadurai's framework of five dimensions of cultural flow, or what he calls five "scapes" (1996), remains one of the most useful guides for analysis. This five-dimensional model consists of ethnoscaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, mediascaples, and ideoscaples. Appadurai (1996:32) suggests that these five "scapes" work in ways that prevent the construction of a homogenous culture. In this section, using Appadurai's framework of "scapes" as an analytic approach, I discuss the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization of globalization in light of the practice of cosmetic surgery in China.

Let me start with ethnoscaples, "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live" (Appadurai 1996:33). Today, people from different nations and regions move over the world for temporary traveling, business work, study, long-term residence, or cross-national marriage. An effect of this is that not only ethnic boundaries and national boundaries, but also cultural boundaries such as standards of beauty have been breaking down. The new beauty ideal in China today is a transnational standard of beauty which integrates various elements together and transcends the boundaries of ethnicity and nationality, as I will discuss later. This

increasing mobility leads people to receive cosmetic surgery in places around the world--traveling abroad for cosmetic surgery is nothing new in affluent countries. In today's China, rather than restricting their choices to large cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals in big cities in China, some affluent Chinese women also travel to other countries for cosmetic surgery. Because Korean cosmetic surgery services are comparable with services in the United State and Japan but are cheaper than those countries, an increasing number of Chinese women head to Korea for beauty treatments and cosmetic surgery. At the same time, some foreigners also receive cosmetic surgery in China as the quality improves and prices are much cheaper. Moreover, in addition to women who opt for cosmetic surgery, practitioners of cosmetic surgery also move around the world, which brings up "technoscapes" into my account.

By technoscapes, Appadurai refers to the "global configuration" of technology and the way technology has been moving "at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries" (1996:34). As has been discussed, traditionally, Chinese medical systems and bodily philosophy strongly discourage any dissection of the body. The emergence of plastic surgery in China was closely related to the emerging Western discourse of science, modernization, and progress in China in the early 20th century. The acceptance of surgery, especially "unnecessary" cosmetic surgery among Chinese women, reflects the changing cultural meanings of people's conceptualizations of surgical practice and perceptions of the body in contemporary

China. The increasing contacts with the West in the early 20th century made ideas of modernization and science widespread in China, as did the acceptance of Western medical techniques including surgery. As early as the early 20th century, American pioneer plastic surgeons such as Dr. Jerome Webster came to China for teaching; meanwhile, the Chinese founders of the specialty of plastic surgery such as Dr. Ni Baochun, Dr. Song Ruyao and Dr. Zhang Disheng all were trained in the United States. The transnational flow of these surgeons contributes to the establishment of plastic surgery in China at its first stage.

After China reopened its doors in the 1980s, more and more Chinese plastic surgeons have undergone exchange training in other countries; international seminars and trips by foreign visiting expert surgeons are common in China. Foreign experts come not only from America and European countries but also from Asian countries such as Japan and Korea. In fact, in recent years, Korean cosmetic surgeons have been preferred over American and European plastic surgeons by many Chinese. Some Chinese cosmetic surgery clinics also hire Korean surgeons as staff, adorn their advertisements with images of Korean women, and declare that there is no need to fly to Seoul. This trend is exemplified by the establishment the Sino-Korean joint-venture SK hospital in Beijing. With the impact of Korean plastic surgery skills, some Chinese cosmetic surgeons perform operations by using Korean techniques in China. Today, the global flow of techniques of cosmetic surgery is closely tied to the rapid movement of global capital and economic interests of

corporations across national boundaries. This brings “finanscapes” into consideration.

“Finanscapes” refers to the complex landscape of capital transfer on a global level (Appadurai 1996: 34-35). The mushrooming cosmetic surgery market in post-Mao China has been drawn into the logic of global consumer culture and the transnational flow of capital. China’s huge market has been targeted by international corporations. As the opening of Mattel’s first-ever Barbie worldwide flagship store in Shanghai exemplifies the world’s premier toy company’s effort to enter China’s huge toy market, the establishment of SK Aikang Hospital in Beijing demonstrates Korea’s third largest multinational corporation’s determination to grasp the huge potential profit of the Chinese cosmetic surgery market. Facing market saturation at home, a number of Korean cosmetic institutes have begun looking to China as a site for future expansion. Some Korean medical institutes and corporations, who set up cosmetic clinics and even hospitals in China’s big cities, have benefited from China’s massive demand. Chinese women’s desire for beauty and multinational corporations’ desire for huge profit are carved into women’s flesh through cosmetic surgery.

Today, we live in a world connected by technology and media. In other words, we live in a world governed by beautiful images produced by international and local mass media. This brings “mediascapes” into the discussion. “Mediascapes” refer both to the electronic capabilities of producing and spreading narrative information

through mass media and the images created by these media (Appadurai 1996: 35). Mass media, including newspapers, fashion magazines, TV programs and movies, produce and publicize standards of beauty mainly based on Western women's images. Mass media not only produce ideal images which most women admire but stand far away from in their own appearances, but also indicate ways to achieve these ideal images by advertising cosmetic surgery in newspapers and producing various TV programmes about cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery reality TV programmes such as ABC's "Extreme Makeover," MTV's "I Want a Famous Face" and Fox's "The Swan" were popular in the United State. Not to be left behind, Chinese cosmetic surgery reality TV programmes such as "Angels Love Beauty," "See my 72 Changes," and "Cinderella and the Swan" were broadcast on Chinese TV in recent years. In terms of "mediascapes," the significant impact of Asian pop culture should be addressed.

Chinese do not only use the West as a source of cultural consumption. Aside from Hollywood-dominated images, Chinese women consume images from Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, as evidenced by the success of Japanese video games and cartoons, Korean television dramas, and Hong Kong and Taiwanese movies and pop music. The influence of the Korean Wave is particularly strong in the field of cosmetic surgery. The aspiration to resemble Korean actresses such as Lee Young-ae, Song Hae-kyo, Kim Hee-sun and Jeon Ji-hyun makes some Chinese women request the facial features of their Korean idols in pursuing cosmetic surgery.

Mass media also bring images of Eastern beauty to Western audience and valorize the images of Oriental beauty in Western countries. In the global era, the constant appropriation and borrowing of different cultural elements are can be widely seen in pop culture around the world, including definitions of beauty. Therefore, with the globalization of media and the proliferation of the Internet, standards of beauty are transformed into something more multiracial and complex than in the past. In other words, we see an emerging multinational hybrid culture or new cultural pluralism in terms of beauty standards and surgical body practice.

Finally, “Ideoscapes are also concatenations of images, but they are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it” (Appadurai 1996: 36). Surely, images of women and standards of beauty has never been a purely aesthetic issue. As suggested by Appadurai, “ideoscapes are composed of elements of the Enlightenment world-view, which consists of a concatenation of ideas, term and images, including freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation and master term democracy” (1996: 36). In this vein, some keywords of the “Enlightenment world-view” such as science, modernization, freedom, choice, and rights can also be found in Chinese women’s involvement in cosmetic surgery.

From the Republic China, to Maoist China and to post-Mao China, the changing standards of beauty and women’s bodily practices exhibits the changing

tensions between China and the West, and tradition and modernity. In the early 20th, the increasing contacts with the West made images of Western women a symbol of modern. The quest for beauty is thus cultural as well as political. For example, the abolition of female footbinding became an indicator of Chinese national agenda of searching for a modern nationhood. When the female body was closely associated with the rise of consumer culture, cosmetic surgery emerged in big cities in China in the 1930s.

During the Maoist era, however, the ideological and political confrontation between the West and China made a new beauty ideology emerge in China: an ideology which aimed to erase gender difference in the process of eliminating class and socioeconomic differences. Images of androgynous “iron women” were promoted to represent an egalitarian socialist nation. When feminine beauty and the erotic body had no place in the official discourse, the practice of cosmetic surgery was eliminated from women’s lives. Since the early 1980s, however, images of Chinese women have dramatically shifted. There has been an explosion of feminine beauty and erotic images of Chinese women in movies, TV programs, fashion magazines, outdoor billboards and other media outlets, which stresses gender differences and feminized body images. Moreover, in the age of globalization, the globalizing beauty industry and media have spurred the transmission of Western standards of female beauty in China. Standards of beauty have changed significantly in recent decades in China. The popularity of cosmetic surgeries such as breast

enhancement, double eyelid surgery, nasal bridge augmentation indicate the extent to which Western beauty standards have been ingrained into China. The widely circulated Western beauty standards in China are not just representations of images of Western women, they are also iconic representations of the cultural values from which they originate. The process of reshaping the female body is the process of redefining womanhood in China, in which the new body politics highlights Western notions of beauty, freedom, individualism, and sexuality.

However, despite the fact that Western notions of beauty such as big eyes, large breasts and more defined noses have been definitely influenced women's perceptions of beauty in China, there has been a growing national sentiment to emphasize the features of Chinese beauty and a rising nostalgia to recall the traditional values of feminine beauty (see Oleson 2007; Zhang X. 2005). Concerning the case of double-eyelid surgery, the most popular cosmetic surgery in China, desire for a high and wide-open crease in the eyes that is considered Caucasian is no longer in vogue or as popular as it once was. Women want to have a more attractive but still Chinese-appearing eyelid (Oleson 2007). With the rising economic power of China, there has been an emerging backlash, calling for a rediscovery of Oriental beauty and emphasizing the values of Oriental aspects of Chinese beauty, as exemplified by Zhang Xiaomei's book (2005). In recent years a new trend has emerged: a trend emphasizes the combination of Western mass-mediated ideologies and traditional Chinese cultural values. Western cultural hegemony interacts with Chinese

ideologies in strengthening the ideal of feminine beauty. While the features of Western images such as bold assertiveness, feminine youthfulness, and the erotic body becomes a signifier of cosmopolitan modernity, the features of Oriental beauty such as softness and tenderness becomes a marker of traditional Chinese values. The images of beautiful Chinese women become a nationalistic endeavor signifying modernity and the country's presence on the global stage, and yet at the same time upholding traditional Chinese cultural values. At a global level, the changing standards of beauty reflect the changing dynamics of the global political economy.

So far, I have discussed various "scapes" that drive the cosmetic surgery industry in today's China. The core of Appadurai's framework is the "disjunctures" that occur between global cultural economy flows. Chinese women's perceptions of ideal beauty and their pursuit of beauty through cosmetic surgery have been embodied in the process of globalization with the transnational flows of people, medical technology, global capital, media and ideologies. These different dimensions of "scapes" are not homogeneous, but collide with each other and transform locally. With the process of globalization, there is no doubt that influences of Western and other Asian beauty ideals have occurred among Chinese women when they double their eyelids, augment their height and breasts and whiten their skin. However, this is not saying that perceptions of beauty are converging to the "Western" notion. As has been discussed in the preceding chapter, the women I interviewed gave various explanations for their preference for double-folded eyelids

and light skin. Therefore, aesthetic bodily practices need to be considered in the settings where they are found.

Moreover, with the Korean Wave across the region, the Korean influence on the ideals of beauty and the techniques of cosmetic surgery is particularly strong in China of late. This trend shows the transnational flows of plastic surgeons, medical technology, global capital, beauty ideals, and cultural ideology taking place not only between Western and peripheral countries, but also between non-Western countries. The new beauty standards and practices in China are created from local forces, involving aspects of appropriation and reworking. Rather than Westernization or homogenization, the globalization of beauty images is a hybrid process which invokes the local resignification of global beauty ideals. Cultural proximity and cultural nationalism are played out in constructing a new image of womanhood. The perception and practice of beauty have simultaneously become globalized and localized.

In conclusion, the growing desire for a youthful and beautiful appearance in China's cosmetic surgery market is the product of a complex combination of transnational and national forces, including the construction of gender roles, the expansion of global consumer capitalism, the flows of images, ideologies, and medical technology, and the reconfiguration of state power and market forces with the transition of China from a socialist regime to a post-Mao consumer society.

Accordingly, the body politics in China has transformed from the Maoist sacrificed, collective and revolutionary body to the post-Maoist narcissistic, individual and consumer body. In this transformation, the rhetoric of choice plays a significant role in negotiating the complex relationship between the individual's choice of surgical body alteration, and self-identity, market discourse, and state power. China has struggled to reconcile the contradictions and cleavages that are intrinsic to a transitional society. Among many other important forces, state power and market discourse collide, negotiate, compromise, and shape each other in their domination over individuals' lives. In the image-making industry, the post-Maoist state's efforts to create in China a glamorous "modern" look integrates with consumer capitalism's efforts to promote a flourishing beauty economy in which women "freely" undergo cosmetic surgery.

The development of the Chinese beauty industry, including the cosmetic surgery industry, in fact has strengthened the regime's legitimacy rather than weakening it. As China is speeding along in its economic development and competing for a favored place on the global stage, beauty ideologies and bodily politics in China get caught up with issues of consumerism and nationalism. With consumerism becoming a new dominant ideology in today's China, cosmetic surgery offer some Chinese women not only images of beauty, but also senses of fashion and feelings of freedom, which coalesce with a national agenda of boosting China's raging beauty economy, detaching China from the image of a "backward"

country, and giving China a new “modern” and “cosmopolitan” look. That is to say, the image of women has become a representation of the image of the nation. In a nationalist agenda, the glamorous images of Chinese women and the flourishing face of the beauty industry serve as propaganda to symbolize Chinese modernization in which modern Chinese women dress well and look beautiful. In the post-Maoist beauty ideology, a beautiful look is needed in the search for a new womanhood to match the image of the rapidly transforming nation. In sum, the alteration of female body images through cosmetic surgery reflects the dramatic and drastic transition of China from a Maoist socialist regime to a post-Maoist consumer society within a few decades.

Glossary

aimei shi ren de tianxing	愛美是人的天性	loving beauty is human nature
ba baiqi, cha hongqi	拔白旗，插紅旗	Pulling up the White Flag and Plugging in the Red Flag
bai pifu	白皮膚	white skin
bang dakuan	傍大款	lean on a money-bag
bu zheng bu guangrong	不整不光榮	No Cosmetic Surgery, No Glory
buziran	不自然	unnatural
bubu jinlian	步步金蓮	lotus-like feet
bujiao buzao	不驕不躁	humility and circumspection and be free from arrogance and rashness
cai	才	ability
chaoji nüsheng	超級女聲	Super Girls Voice
chaozuo	炒作	publicity stunt
chiku nailao	吃苦耐勞	eat bitterness and endure hard labor
Da Chang Jin	大長今	The Jewel of the Palace
dagongmei	打工妹	young migrant working women from rural areas
datong	大同	greatly unity
da yanjing	大眼睛	big eyes
danyanpi	單眼皮	single-folded eyelid

danwei	單位	work unit
dayuejin	大躍進	the Great Leap Forward
de	德	virtue
dongdaozi	動刀子	undergoing the scalpel
dongya bingfu	東亞病夫	sick man of East Asia
duangu zenggao	斷骨增高	breaking bones and getting taller
ernai	二奶	second wife or mistress
fandong xueshu quanwei	反動學術權威	reactionary academic authority
fanyou	反右	Anti-Rightist
Fengmande xiong	豐滿的胸	big breasts
fu	富	wealth
gan de hao bu ru jia de hao	幹得好不如嫁得好	marrying a prosperous man is more practical than working hard
gao biliang	高鼻梁	a high-bridged nose
gexing	個性	a strong personality
geng you nürenwei	更有女人味	be more feminine
gongneng	功能	function
gongnengde huifu	功能的恢復	the recovery of function
guanxi	關係	personal network
guojia tongyi fenpei	國家統一分配	state planned job-assignment
guoyou qiye gaige	國有企業改革	the reform of state-owned enterprise

hanliu	韓流	Korean Wave
hennüren	很女人	very feminine
huan fei yan shou	環肥燕瘦	buxom Huan and slinky Yan
huiguniang yü tian'e	灰姑娘與天鵝	Cinderella and the Swan
jialde	假的	fake
jianjian shimian	見見世面	see the world and expand my horizons
jianku pusu	艱苦樸素	working hard and living plainly
jianmei	健美	robust beauty
jianshe zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi	建設中國特色的社會主義	building socialism with Chinese Characteristics
jiayou! haonaner	加油！好男兒	My Hero (title of a reality TV show)
jingji	經濟	economy
jingpin gouwu zhinan	精品購物指南	Fine Goods Shopping Guide
kan wo 72 bian	看我 72 變	See my 72 Changes (title of a reality TV show)
kangmei yuanchao zhanzheng	抗美援朝戰爭	the war to resist American aggression and to aid Korea
kexuede	科學的	scientific
kexuede chuntian	科學的春天	Spring of Science
kuaile nansheng	快樂男聲	Happy Boys Voice (title of a reality TV show)
kuozhao	擴招	expansion of university enrolment
lang cai nü mao	郎才女貌	a talented man matches a beautiful

woman

laoyangzi	老樣子	old look
laobanniang	老闆娘	female boss
liudong renkou	流動人口	floating population
liyi xiaojie	禮儀小姐	ceremony hostess
long nie shu	隆顛術	augmentation of the temple
long xiake	隆下頰	chin augmentation
mei	美	beauty
meibaizhen	美白針	whitening injection
meirong	美容	activities related to beautification or beauty service
meinü	美女	beautiful woman
meiren zhizao gongcheng	"美人治造"工程	Beauty Dreamworks Project
meirong jingji/meinü jingji	美容經濟/美女經濟	beauty economy
meiti qiaotun ku	美體翹臀褲	Hip Training Pants or Hip Walker
minglian de yanjing	明亮的眼睛	bright eyes
mishu	秘書	secretary
nan zhu wai nü zhu nei	男主外女主內	men are responsible for works, whereas women are responsible for domestic works
neizaimei	内在美	inner beauty
nianqing piaolian de	年輕漂亮的臉蛋	youthful pretty face

liandan		
nong mei da yan	濃眉大眼	heavy eyebrows and big eyes
nüqiangren	女強人	female strongperson or super woman
nürenwei	女人味	femininity
nü wei yue ji zhe rong	女為悅己者容	a woman dolls herself up for him who loves her
nüzi wucai bian shi de	女子無才便是德	a virtuous woman is one without talents
piaoliang liandan sheng dami	漂亮臉蛋生大米	a pretty face brings rice/fortune
pinmao duanzhuang	品貌端莊	above-average looking
qiaoduo tiangong	巧奪天工	wonderful workmanship excelling nature
qingchunfan	青春飯	youth rice bowl
qizhijia	氣質佳	an elegant manner
renzaode	人造的	artificial
renzao meinü	人造美女	artificial beauty
renzao meinü xuanmei dasai	人造美女選美大賽	Miss Cosmetic Surgery Pageant
sanpei xiaojie	三陪小姐	female escorts
shangliu shehui de meirong kuaican	上流社會的美容快餐	Lunchtime Cosmetic Procedures in an Upper-Class Society
shangliu shehui	上流社會	upper-class
shengao 1.65 yishang	身高 1.65 以上	height over 1.65 meters

shenghuo meirong	生活美容	daily beauty services
shenti fafu shouzhi fumu	身體髮膚 授之父母	our bodies, to every hair and bit of skin, are received from the parents
shimao	時髦	fashion
shinühua	仕女畫	Painting of Beauties
shizhuang	時裝	fashion
shiye	失業	unemployed
shu neng sheng qiao	熟能生巧	practice makes perfect
shuangyanpi	雙眼皮	double-folded eyelid
shuangyanpi shoushu	雙眼皮手術	double-eyelid surgery
shuangxiang xuanze	雙向選擇	bilateral selection or mutual selection
sirenbang	四人幫	Gang of Four
taijia	太假	artificial
tianshi ai meili	天使愛美麗	Angels Love Beauty
tie fanwan	鐵飯碗	iron rice bowl; secure job
tienüren	鐵女人	iron women
tiyu	體育	sports; physical education; physical culture
tubaozi	土包子	country bumpkin
tuli tuqi	土裡土氣	uncouth; countrified
tuqi	土氣	uncouth; countrified
waizaimei	外在美	outer beauty

wenhua da geming	文化大革命	Cultural Revolution
wenyi gongzuozhe	文藝工作者	art workers
wuguan duanzheng	五官端正	proportionate facial features
wuguan	五官	five features of a face
wulin dahui	舞林大會	The Dancing War (title of a reality TV show)
xiagang	下崗	layoff
xiahai jingshang	下海經商	jumped into sea of commerce
xiagang nügong	下崗女工	laid-off female worker
xiahejiao quchushu	下頷角去除術	reduction of the angle of the mandible
xiandai	現代	modern
xiangqin	相親	blind dates
xiao	孝	filial piety
xiaojie	小姐	euphemistic term for a prostitute or female entertainment working girl, literally meaning miss
Xiao Jing	孝經	Classic of Filial Piety
xiaomi	小蜜	little secretary, a homonym of "little honey"
xiaonüren	小女人	Feminine women
xiao pin bu xiao chang	笑貧不笑娼	people ridicule your poverty, but not your prostitution
xiaoqi	小氣	stingy

xiaoqigui	小氣鬼	cheapskate
xiaokang	小康	relatively well-off, comparatively comfortable, or comparatively prosperity
xiezhen	寫真	studio portrait shots
xin fu jieceng	新富階層	newly rich class
xing	形	form
xingxiang dashi	形象大使	image ambassador
xingxianghao	形象好	good-looking
yangwawa	洋娃娃	foreign baby doll
yangqi	洋氣	foreign flavor or cosmopolitan style
yanjing shi xinling de chuanguhu	眼睛是心靈的窗戶	eyes are the windows to the soul
yanxunzhuang	煙熏妝	smokey eyes
yi mao qu ren	以貌取人	judge others according to their physical appearances
yilao meirong	醫療美容	medical aesthetic services
ying	硬	rigid
yixue meixue meirong	醫學美學美容	Medical Aesthetic and Cosmetology
you fengxiade	有風險的	risky
yuefenpai	月份牌	calendar posters
zaijiuye fuwu zhongxin	再就業服務中心	re-employment service center
Zanhua Shinü Tu	簪花仕女圖	Court Ladies Adorning Their Hair with

		Flowers
zhende	真的	real
zhengxing	整形	plastic surgery
zhengfu shoushu	整複手術	reconstructive surgery
zhengfu waike	整複外科	plastic and reconstructive surgery
zhenghun guanggao	徵婚廣告	marriage seeking advertisement
zhengrongre	整容熱	the craze for cosmetic surgery
zhengxing meirong shoushu	整形美容手術	cosmetic surgery
zhengxingre	整形熱	the craze for cosmetic surgery
zhi you minzude, cai shi shijiede	只有民族的, 才是世 界的	only what is national makes it international
zhongxue weiti, xixue wei yong	中學為體, 西學為用	Chinese learning for the foundation and core, Western learning for practical use
zirande	自然的	natural
zizhu zeye	自主擇業	individual responsibility for job search
zou zijide lu, ran bieren qu shuo	走自己的路, 讓別人 去說	go your own way; let others talk

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