Buying Beauty

Cosmetic Surgery in China

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God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another . . .
—Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene I, 141–42

Prologue

During a casual conversation in December 2004, a German friend of mine asked me: "Did you see the BBC news reporting on China's Miss Artificial Beauty 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 was speechless at his question. People outside China can hardly figure out how an ideologically "socialist" country could host such a beauty pageant. What struck me was not just the news itself but my friend's shocked reaction to it: China, a "socialist" country which used to regard the quest for beauty as decadent bourgeois culture now offers the Miss Artificial Beauty Pageant—the first beauty pageant in the world exclusively for women who have undergone cosmetic surgery. My friend's shock projects the disjuncture between China today, as a place where people freely pursue beauty by any and 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 aroused my curiosity about the Miss Artificial Beauty Pageant and the unprecedented boom of the cosmetic surgery industry in China, and inspired me to begin the research that led to this book.

The "Miss Artificial Beauty Pageant" (*Renzao meinü xuanmei dasai*) was held in Beijing in December 2004.[1] Reportedly the idea of this pageant

1. Chinese words in this book are romanized in italics without tone markers, according to the standard pinyin system.

was born after an 18-year-old girl, Yang Yuan, was disqualified from the Miss International Beauty Pageant earlier in 2004 because the organizers discovered that Yang had undergone cosmetic surgery. In February 2004, Yang spent 110,000 yuan at a cosmetic surgery clinic in Beijing to undergo eleven cosmetic surgery procedures,[2] including rhinoplasty [a "nose job"] (*long bi shoushu*), "augmentation of the temple" (*long nie shu*),[3] "chin augmentation" (*long xia ke*),[4] "mandibular angle reduction" (*xiahejiao quchu shu*),[5] double eyelid blepharoplasty or double-eyelid surgery (*shuangyanpi shoushu*),[6] reconstruction of upper and lower lips, orthodontics and so on. Yang also made the decision to take part in the competition for the Miss International Beauty Pageant in 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. Yang passed the first and second rounds of the Miss International Beauty Pageant and became one of the thirty finalists. However, while she was preparing for the final round, she received a notice from the organizers saying that her candidacy was revoked because she was an "artificial beauty" (*renzao meinü*). Since the cosmetic surgery clinic at which she had received her procedures used her before-and-after photos in advertisements and she had made no attempt to conceal this, the organizers of the beauty contest learnt of this fact. Out of anger and disappointment, Yang decided to defend her right to be in the competition which had no regulation against cosmetic operations. On June 1, 2004, Yang filed a lawsuit demanding a formal public apology from the organizing committee on the grounds that the committee had infringed her legal rights by disqualifying her and using the biased term "artificial beauty." In addition, Yang argued that the organizers made no mention of any prohibition against cosmetic

2. Between August 2006 and July 2007, US$1 was roughly equivalent to 7.6 Chinese yuan.

3. Augmentation of the temple is often used to soften the harsh appearance of a sunken temple and oversized cheek bones.

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

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

6. Double eyelid blepharoplasty, more commonly known as "double-eyelid surgery," is a surgery to create a superior palpebral fold. After a crease is formed on the upper eyelids, the eyes appear rounder and larger.

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 organizers, for infringements upon her rights and dignity.

Although Yang lost the case, the event was extensively reported by the Chinese media and 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*, and became an "image ambassador" for the cosmetic surgery clinic where she received operations. Beyond this, and more surprisingly, the organizers of the Miss International Beauty Pageant which disqualified Yang Yuan from the contest soon announced that they would launch a new beauty pageant exclusively for women who had undergone cosmetic surgery. As a result, the Miss Artificial Beauty Pageant was held in Beijing in December 2004, with nineteen contestants aged from 17 to 62 years old, all with doctor's certifications that they had undergone cosmetic surgery. Not surprisingly, the sponsors of this beauty pageant included Chinese cosmetic surgery clinics and manufacturers of cosmetic surgery products. Triumphing over eighteen other contestants, Feng Qian, a 22-year-old student, was crowned China's first Miss Artificial Beauty in Beijing on December 18, 2004. The two high-profile participants—the oldest contestant, 62-year-old Liu Yulan, and transsexual Liu Xiaojing—shared a prize for Best Media Image.

When I first heard about Yang Yuan and the Miss Artificial Beauty Pageant from my German friend, I was both fascinated and confused. I had seldom heard much about cosmetic surgery before, but since 2003, reports on 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 known in the Chinese and international media as 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 beauties." On the one hand, there are stories describing women who have undergone cosmetic surgery as being finally bold enough to take control of their bodies in the quest for beauty—an act which they could not imagine during the Maoist era. On the other hand, there are stories about the huge number of women who had been disfigured, and some even killed, by cosmetic surgery. It has been extensively reported that at least 200,000 people in China have been disfigured by cosmetic surgery

in the last decade (Weaver 2003). The most prominent case reported was on women who suffered from infection and disfigurement after receiving breast augmentation through the injection of a chemical called hydrophilic polyacrylamide gel.

Reading these stories about Chinese "artificial beauties," I wondered why more and more Chinese women are willing to undergo cosmetic surgeries despite a plethora of reports on their possible side effects and hazards. Who are these women? Why are they apparently so obsessed with their physical appearance that they would be willing to undergo surgery? What kinds of operations do they seek? How, if at all, does cosmetic surgery change their lives? More broadly, I have been curious to know why cosmetic surgery has suddenly gained popularity 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 a glamorous appearance through cosmetic surgery over just a few decades? To put it simply, as my German friend asked me, "What's going on in China?" In this book, I will try to answer this question.

Cosmetic Surgery as the Focus of the Research

To begin with, let me explain two key words—"cosmetic surgery" and "artificial beauty." People sometimes use the words plastic surgery and cosmetic surgery interchangeably, but there is an important difference between the two. Generally speaking, plastic surgery covers both functional reconstructive operations and cosmetic enhancements, but it is more often used to refer to the former. 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 that restricts itself to the enhancement of appearance by surgical and medical means.[7] While plastic surgery (reconstructive surgery) is medically indicated, 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*

7. The definition is an extract from the AACS website's "Frequently asked questions" page. More information can be found at www.cosmeticsurgery.org.

shoushu) and "cosmetic surgery" (*zhengxing meirong shoushu*). In this book I will use the term plastic surgery in a general way which covers both fields of surgical practice. The terms reconstructive surgery and cosmetic surgery refer, respectively, to these two fields; the focus of this book is on cosmetic surgery.

Another important term to address is "artificial beauty" (*renzao meinü*), which refers to a woman who has enhanced her appearance through cosmetic surgery. As a newly coined term, "artificial beauty" has gained currency since 2003. The popularity of this term in the Chinese media in recent years reflects an unprecedented boom in the cosmetic surgery industry in China. "Artificial beauties," women who opt for cosmetic surgery to enhance their appearance, are a focus of this book. While the subjects in this study are Chinese women, it does not mean that men do not undergo cosmetic surgery. Actually, cosmetic surgery is no longer a female preserve, and Chinese men have been invading this territory in recent years. However, women are still in the great majority of those undertaking cosmetic procedures. Due to the constraints of my fieldwork, this book will only discuss Chinese "artificial beauties" and leave Chinese men's surgical body alterations and the comparative studies of gender involvement in cosmetic surgery for the future.

Let me go back to Yang Yuan's story and the Miss Artificial Beauty Pageant. I have used this beauty pageant as the starting point for my discussion because several interesting arguments have been raised from the reports on the event. Beauty pageants and cosmetic surgery in China have been looked at favorably by the mass media in recent years. When these two things come bundled together, it is not surprising that the story attracted intensive media coverage and worldwide curiosity. Three different perspectives emerged from the reports. One was offered by women who viewed receiving cosmetic surgeries as a matter of their "rights" and "liberation." For example, when asked why she filed a lawsuit demanding a formal public apology from the organizers of the beauty pageant, Yang Yuan said, "I just want to get back my rights . . . I hope that in the future there will be a niche in society for [people like] me" (Yardley 2004). A similar account can also be found from the two Miss Artificial Beauty Pageant contestants highlighted in the media (Ang 2004; BBC 2004). One of them was Liu Yulan, the oldest contestant, who looked "at least a decade younger than her 62 years" (Ang 2004). Liu Yulan attributed

her youthful look to a facelift and blepharoplasty. She told the 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). She said that she was not participating for the sake of a prize. Instead, she wanted to show off her new-found confidence to herself as well 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 featured in the media was Liu Xiaojing, twenty-one years old, who had work done on her eyebrows, nose, chin and facial contour. It was revealed that Liu Xiaojing was a man until three years ago. She said that she did not tell organizers that she was a transsexual because no one asked. Yet if the organizers were to disqualify her, 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 . . . This is a turning point in my life" (Ang 2004).

It is obvious that Yang Yuan, Liu Yulan and Liu Xiaojing all felt strongly that it is their rights to pursue beauty, youth and femininity, and to express their sense of self by purchasing beauty and youth through cosmetic surgery. When they fulfilled their dreams through cosmetic surgery, they seemed to have transcended the boundaries of age, sex, and appearance, their bodies becoming flexible assets rather than given and unalterable fates. They seemed to regard their bodies as a collection of raw materials through which one can construct one's own true self. Such a view legitimizes body alteration as a source of autonomy and self-determination and explains the desire of some women for body alteration as a desire for liberation, perhaps in part from the "older" generation in the Maoist era in which individuals sacrificed their bodies and beauty for the sake of the state. However, we also see that the hospital where Yang Yuan received surgery and the organizers of the beauty pageant all gained publicity from the highly publicized lawsuit. Just a few months later, the same organizers held a beauty pageant for "artificial beauties." In this sense, the personal freedom and subjectivity expressed by Yang Yuan through her cosmetic surgery and the lawsuit in effect served as a marketing strategy for the cosmetic surgery clinic and the organizers of the beauty pageant.

Not surprisingly, some Chinese scholars criticized women's choice of cosmetic surgery as a submission to the male gaze (*China Daily* 2004b). This sort of criticism was in line with some feminists arguments. Many

feminists 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 the patriarchy and capitalism as the "beauty myth" (Wolf 1991). Therefore, the first question I will focus on in this book is: To what extent are the women who have cosmetic surgery passive victims of the "beauty myth" constructed by patriarchy and capitalism, and to what extent are they transforming themselves as powerful actors by taking control over their own bodies to achieve their sense 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 cosmetic surgery comes from the state-owned Chinese media, which characterize the phenomenon with 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 standards, Chinese women pay increasing attention to their 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), and "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 a product of their economic condition.

When a beautiful face and youthful figure can be easily purchased, there is no doubt that a "consumer revolution," as it is widely acknowledged (Davis 2000), has been taking place over the past few decades in the world's most populous country. However, is the pursuit of beauty merely a sign of economic prosperity? When women shop for cosmetic surgery, beyond beautiful faces and youthful bodies, they also pursue the symbolic meanings embodied in beautiful appearance and personal bodily practice. The pursuit of beauty cannot be interpreted only as a consequence of economic prosperity. Cosmetic surgery is a matter of consumer choice, but it 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 still

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. The Chinese capitalist market has had an extraordinary effect in shaping people's views about beauty and the body. However, the market alone is not enough to account for people's beliefs about what is beautiful, and what is not. The market, despite being a source of consumer choice, cannot completely be detached from the power of the state in controlling an individual's body management and representations. This leads us to examine the role of the Chinese state in guiding or controlling China's "beauty economy." Thus the second question I will discuss is: 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 an individual's life with commercial alterations to the body, and 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 book 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 to this event.[8] Western correspondents like to emphasize the contestants' obsession with adding a palpebral fold to the upper eyelid and changing other features in order to approximate a "Caucasian" appearance. Indeed, the double-eyelid surgery has become one of the most requested cosmetic operations in Asia including China. Western media 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).

While some typically Caucasian features are desirable among Chinese women, a more culturally specific standard of beauty seems to be 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" (*shuang yanpi*), "big eyes" (*da*

8. For the purposes of this book, Western refers to Anglo-American and the West refers to West European and North American countries.

yanjing), "a high-bridged nose" (*gao biliang*), "big breasts" (*fengman de xiong*), and "fair skin" (*bai pifu*) may not be fully compatible with Western ideals of a beautiful woman. The emerging Chinese ideal of beauty may not be simply imitating the "global standard of white beauty" (Kawazoe 2004; see also Miller 2006). Thus, the third question I will discuss is: 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 within China's historical and sociocultural contexts? Simply put, this book examines the tension between homogenization and heterogenization in terms of ideals of beauty and practices in the pursuit of beauty in an era of globalization.

In brief, the question this book aims to answer is: 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 book will mainly explore the role of the capitalist market, the state, and globalization in shaping Chinese women's views about what constitutes a beautiful appearance and women's body alteration practices in pursuit of a beauty. Using women's body alteration by cosmetic surgery in contemporary China as a lens, this book aims 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 book 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."

I hope that this discussion can contribute to a fuller understanding of the dilemma between agency and structure, the intersection between state power and market discourse, and the interplay between individual and globalization in terms of body regimes. From the analysis of Chinese women's involvement in cosmetic surgery, I hope to arrive at insights into the tripolar relationship between the state, the market and women of China.

Beauty and Women's Body Images in China

Cosmetic surgery is of course not practiced exclusively by Chinese women, but with the transition of China from a Maoist regime to a post-Mao consumer society within a few decades, the meanings and implications of cosmetic surgery in China are particularly interesting. With this in mind, let me discuss some of the earlier studies on beauty and women's body images 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 analyses are primarily framed in mainstream feminism. Chinese scholars mostly view women who undergo cosmetic surgery as victims of the patriarchy and consumerism (Ding 2006; Jiang 2004; Long and Liu 2006; Tang 2005; Wang Y. M. 2005; Zhang M. 2004). A similar view is found in studies of beauty pageants, the beauty industry, and slimming culture and 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).

Unlike the perspective held by these Chinese scholars, Susan Brownell (2005) examines China's cosmetic surgery in relation to both Western influences and Chinese nationalism, discussing how the development of transnational cosmetic surgery has interacted with Chinese nationalism. Tracing the trajectory of cosmetic surgery from the West to China, from being an unwelcome bourgeois practice in the Maoist era to a source of national pride in the reform age, Brownell elaborates how cultural and political meanings are grafted on to the practice of cosmetic surgery. More specifically, focusing on the case of double-eyelid surgery, Brownell discusses how Chinese cosmetic surgeons claim technical superiority to their Western counterparts and how the Chinese claim double eyelids as an essential feature of the Chinese ideas of beauty rather than an imitation of the West. In so doing, Brownell 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 reveals that the notion of female beauty in Chinese culture came from both Taoist and Confucian traditions. Through an examination of classical Taoist and Confucian texts, Man points out that while women's physical beauty and sexual attractiveness were emphasized in Taoist teachings, their moral virtue was stressed in Confucian beliefs. Man argues that despite this seeming contradiction, both the external sexual and inner moral dimensions contributed to the notions of feminine beauty in Chinese traditions. 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. This situation changed only after China opened its doors in the late 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 that the consumption of fashion and beauty products became a way to change personal identity. Man concludes 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 into 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 for demonstrating how a certain beauty ideal comes out of a particular historical and social context. Gao focuses on the emergence of an aesthetic concept of "robust beauty" during China's "national crisis" in the 1930s. According to Gao, under the atmosphere of foreign menace and national crisis in the 1930s, to strengthen the physical body became a part of the nation-building project in China. Therefore, the nationalist government implemented legal and administrative measures to enforce the development of "sports; physical education; physical culture" (*tiyu*) and encouraged women to participate in this to become physically strong. Thus, driven by *tiyu*, the Western

representations of "health" and "beauty" were translated into the Chinese local discourses as "robust beauty." Through a study of *Linglong* [玲瓏], 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 demonstrates that to bolster the threatened nation into a strong nation, the female body, in terms of fitness and physical appearance, was reshaped, and the content of femininity was also redefined.

Taking into account 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, 1998–99; Li S. Q. 2006; Morris 2000). Brownell (1995) notes that during the encounter with the West in the nineteenth century and under the influence of social Darwinism, the meanings of physical activities changed from being ways of cultivating moral characters to ways of gauging the health and strength of the nation. The body, especially the female body, has been a useful site for understanding the modernization of China. As Hershatter writes, "in twentieth-century China, women were the site at which national modernity was imagined, often through a language of crisis" (2004: 1028).

Brownell (1998–99) observes the importance of the female body, in both sportswomen and 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,[9] "a shift that can approximately be labeled as one from Communist nationalism to consumerist nationalism" (1998–99: 37). When sportswomen, especially the heroines of the Chinese women's volleyball team, represented the nation in the 1980s, their obedience, their capability to "eat bitterness and endure hard labor" (*chi ku nai lao*), and their physical suffering and pain were much emphasized in the official press. Brownell argues that

9. 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 displayed, and the lifestyle that is expressed in that display" (1998–99: 37).

the images of sportswomen resonated with the century-long nationalist images of obedient female suffering and male importance. 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, with a discussion of 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 Maoist 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 a new femininity, offering new role models for Chinese women. Therefore, representing the ultimate archetype of beauty, fashion models spawned a beauty industry which includes the cosmetic industry, beauty salons and the 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 is also concerned with the interplay of Western/global and Chinese/local forces manifested in the changes of fashion and aesthetic values. She concludes that the

transformation in fashion and the re-fashioned "modern woman" reveal 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 redefinition of femininity and a reconstruction of the "modern Chinese women" in post-Mao China. One useful entry point of understanding the modernization in China is through an analysis of 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 their identity in terms of work performance and portrayed themselves as having been liberated by the revolution, which enabled them to work. Inscribed with a Cultural Revolution discourse which completely destroyed gender differentiation, the second generation, the Cultural Revolution cohort, learned the politics of authority and performed their identity through challenging the power of cadres 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 the re-establishment of the traditional gender roles by monitoring women's sexual activity through birth control. Market forces also influence the young generation of women in their renewed interest in body images, sexuality and femininity. As shown 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 for the local imagination and representation of national modernity.

To understand women's involvement in cosmetic surgery, marriage is an important dimension. 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). With the end of Maoist asceticism in the late 1970s, the everyday life of Chinese women has changed dramatically, and social norms and attitudes toward sexual life, love and marriage have been evolving 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 the relatively new forms of self-indulgent bodily pleasures involving food and sex in post-socialist China are a result of emancipating "natural" desires 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. The 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 argues, she might be overestimating the role of 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, Evans (1997) shows that sexuality in Maoist and post-Mao China has 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 the 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 the mass media and the increasing concern about physical appearance and sexual

appeal among Chinese women (Evans 1997). Moreover, decades after the abolishment of concubinage in the Mao period, an undercurrent of "sexual liberation" has emerged, resulting in an increase in extramarital sexual relations and the return of concubines. In recent years, the keeping of mistresses and "second wife" (*er nai*) 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; Zheng 2004).[10] With extramarital sex becoming 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 show how the images of women and of sexuality have been radically altered with the emergence of a new ethos of sexuality and a new behavioral model.

The above review shows that scholars have conducted fascinating studies of female body images and the gendered body in Chinese cultural and political context. Although the entry points vary, scholars have noted that beautiful and enticing young women have been used to portray China's national modernity (Brownell 1998–99, 2001; Farhuhar 2002; Li 1998; Schein 1994; 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. As Gao argues, "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).

Methodology and Fieldwork

The fieldwork on which this book is based was carried out from August 2006 to July 2007 in Beijing, China. Before that, I also conducted a month of preliminary research in Beijing from July to August 2005. I chose Beijing as my field site because it is a political, cultural, educational, and medical center of China. In 2003 and 2004, several influential events, such as the emergence of China's first "artificial beauty" and the first beauty

10. 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.

pageant exclusively for women who had undergone cosmetic surgery, happened in Beijing. These events exemplified the significance of Beijing in China's cosmetic surgery industry. During my fieldwork, I conducted participant observation, in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, and text analysis.[11]

To conduct fieldwork in a big city like Beijing was quite a challenge, especially when the topic is sensitive and concerned with business secrecy and personal privacy. It was hard to get the access to carry out my fieldwork in 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 owners or surgeons of privately-owned cosmetic surgery clinics when I tried to discuss sensitive issues with them. Under such circumstances, my social network in Beijing was valuable in helping me find sites to investigate cosmetic surgery. By 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 had greatly helped me access cosmetic surgery clinics/hospitals as well as women who underwent cosmetic surgery. Using snowball sampling, I tried to contact as many informants as possible and identified several key informants.

Hao Lulu, China's first "artificial beauty," who has been in the spotlight of the Chinese and international media since 2003, was one of the most important gatekeepers. In my preliminary study in July 2005, I came to know Hao Lulu through a friend. I spent a lot of time with her and was able to have a deep look into her life. Sometimes, I assisted Hao in doing newspaper interviews and talk shows on TV, 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 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

11. All names of interviewees except one are pseudonyms for the sake of protecting privacy. The name of a key informant, Hao Lulu, is real because she is a public figure and her story has been widely circulated. She has allowed me to use her real name. All the interviews were conducted in Chinese, and the excerpts cited in this book were translated from Chinese.

TV show called *Cinderella and the Swan* in 2006 and 2007, I was able to observe much of 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 program coordinator and plastic surgeons, and observed one of the operations and the making of some of the episodes.

Through Hao's introduction, in December 2006, I came to know Ms. Li, a famous consultant and manager in the cosmetic surgery business circle in Beijing. When Ms. Li was invited by a privately-owned cosmetic surgery clinic to give training courses to its staff on cosmetic surgery consultation, I temporarily worked as her assistant in January 2007. During that time, I chatted with the boss of the clinic, nurses, clients and surgeons. This experience offered me a good chance to get a closer look at the cosmetic surgery business.

In the summer of 2005, I came to know Ms. Shi, who had a wide network in the cosmetic surgery business in Beijing. Ms. Shi has undergone various kinds of cosmetic surgeries since the 1980s. At the time when I conducted my fieldwork, she owned a cosmetic surgery hospital in Beijing where I constantly visited to observe changes in the business. Ms. Shi was helpful in providing me with valuable information, allowing me to observe the consultation process of cosmetic surgery in her hospital, and introducing informants to me.

In order to better observe the business of cosmetic surgery, I also visited some plastic surgery clinics/hospitals and beauty salons during my fieldwork. There were some three hundred plastic surgery clinics/hospitals in Beijing between 2006 and 2007, which can be generally divided into three types: military, public and privately-owned. I visited forty-two of them, comprising three military hospitals, six public hospitals/clinics, thirty-two private hospitals/clinics and one joint-venture hospital. During my visit to these hospitals/clinics, I sometimes pretended to be a client to discover the strategies hospitals/clinics used to persuade people to undergo cosmetic surgery, to check the prices of various cosmetic surgeries among different hospitals/clinics, and to determine the major differences among these public/private hospitals/clinics. In the waiting rooms or wards of hospitals/clinics, I observed and chatted with clients, and listened to their experiences, grievances, and opinions on surgeries they wanted to undergo or had undergone. I carried out further interviews with some of these

women.[12] I also visited twelve beauty parlors to observe how they were illegally involved in cosmetic surgery operations. Moreover, in order to get a closer look at some of these beauty parlors, I joined some facial programs and a weight loss program. 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 methods mentioned above, I interviewed fifty-eight of these women. I identified several of them as key informants, and constantly chatted with them in person, via phone calls or online messaging. Two thirds of the interviewees were from Beijing and the others came from other cities and provinces such as Shanghai, Chongqing, Sichuan, Yunnan, Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Shandong, Guizhou, Hubei, Henan, and Guangdong. The social profiles of the women I interviewed were diverse. They included high school students, college students, waitresses, freelance writers, manicurists, staff members of cosmetic surgery clinics and beauty salons, bar singers, models, businesswomen, office ladies, managers, sales representatives, market directors, journalists, and housewives. 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 the interviewees was sixteen to fifty-five 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 discomfort among interviewees, in some cases, I could not find out the individual's exact age and income. However, I still tried to get an estimate of their age and income through observation as well as their indirect answers to some of my questions.

In order to obtain the 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 Surgeons 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

12. All the interviews conducted in hospitals and elsewhere were based on informed choice. I explained to my interviewees that I was doing research on cosmetic surgery for my Ph.D. and also assured them that all interviews would be disguised with pseudonyms in writing to protect their privacy.

not available. I cross-checked many sources and confirmed that there were indeed no precise official statistics available concerning issues such as the number of cosmetic surgery procedures taken place every year and the demographic features of cosmetic surgery in China.

Due to the lack of government statistics, in order to obtain a broader picture of Chinese women's involvement in cosmetic surgery, I tried to extend my vision by consulting many written sources including newspapers, magazines, biographies, and advertisements. As cosmetic surgery has been a hot topic in China in recent years, there is much to be found in the Chinese media. In addition to reading extensively 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 with key words such as "cosmetic surgery," "artificial beauty," "Hao Lulu," and "Miss Artificial Beauty Pageant" in different databases to locate reports about cosmetic surgery in Chinese newspapers and magazines dated from 1998 to 2007.[13] For example, when I performed a key word search with the Chinese term "cosmetic surgery" (*zhengxing meirong shoushu*) in the database, WiseSearch, it became apparent that the Chinese media coverage of cosmetic surgery increased dramatically and continuously from 1998 to 2007 (see Figure 1).[14] This rising media attention reflects the growing popularity of cosmetic surgery in China.

To observe how information and tips about beauty and cosmetic surgery were presented in women's magazines, I have read the Chinese editions of 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 have watched around 50 Chinese TV programs concerning cosmetic surgery, including talk shows, news reports, and documentaries on China Central Television (CCTV) such as *Topics in Focus*, *Weekly Quality Report*, *News in 30 Minutes*, and *News Probe*, as well as reality shows dealing with cosmetic surgery such as *Cinderella and the Swan*, *Angels Love Beauty* and *See My 72 Changes* produced by local

13. The two databases I primarily used are China Journal Net (CJN) and WiseSearch.
14. 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). WiseSearch claims to be one of the largest Chinese databases of published information from Greater China.

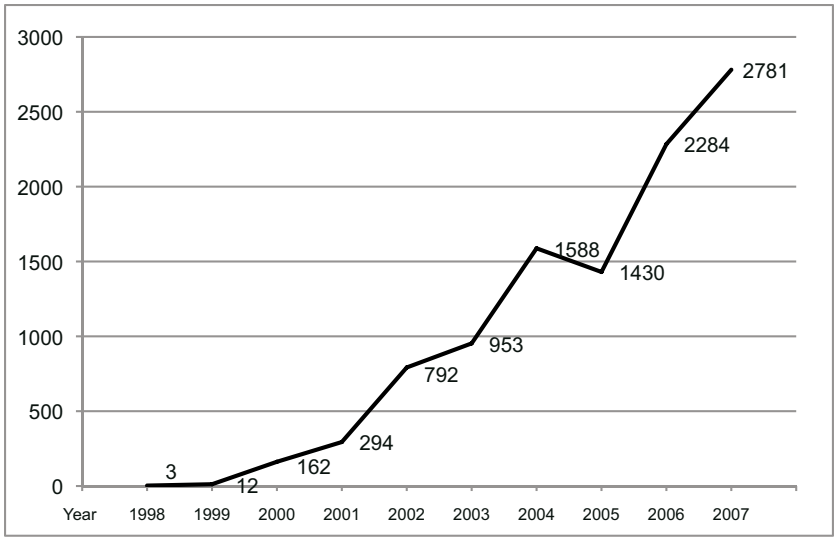

Figure 1

The number of hits for the key word "cosmetic surgery" in WiseSearch (1998–2007)

TV Stations. Information gathered from these sources appears at points throughout this book.

Organization of the Book

The chapters that follow are divided into different thematic sections. Each section consists of two chapters. The first section outlines the historical and cultural background of cosmetic surgery in China. I first review how plastic surgery, a Western medical specialty, was transmitted from the West to China and adopted into China's social and political settings from the early twentieth century to Republican China, Maoist China and then to contemporary China. Moreover, by detailing the story of Hao Lulu, China's first "artificial beauty," and the controversial debates concerning her surgery, I seek to offer a quick yet telling glimpse into the burgeoning cosmetic surgery industry in China and women's involvement in it.

In section II, I 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, as reflected in the

women I interviewed. I discuss the phenomenon that Chinese high school and college students, girls especially, have rushed to cosmetic surgery clinics and hospitals over summer and winter holidays to improve their looks in order to get an edge in a tough job market. I also discuss how the obsession with the female beauty in workplaces and in the marriage market is rooted in traditional Chinese gender norms. Using ethnographic cases of a laid-off woman, an upper-middle-class woman, and a rural-to-urban migrant woman, I highlight the diverse motivations for undergoing cosmetic surgery of women positioned differently in the power-laden social hierarchy.

The focus of section III is the commodification of female appearance in China's flourishing beauty industry and its profound socio-cultural and political implications. I explore how the media plays a pivotal role in creating the desire to buy an "ideal beauty" through cosmetic surgery, and how the consumption of beauty has become a way of life for some Chinese women. Furthermore, I discuss how the female body image and bodily alteration practices have become not only a reflection of personal identity, but also a site of ideological contestation, where state power and market forces reconfigure their power structures to form a new body regime.

In section IV, I explore beauty ideals and cosmetic surgery in China from the perspective of globalization. Taking the expansion of Barbie sales 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 under the influence of the omnipresent Western beauty ideals and consumer culture. Moreover, I study 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. Through a discussion of 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 relation to the globalization of the standards of beauty and women's pursuit of these standards through cosmetic surgery.

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

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