

**THE (GEO)POLITICS OF BEAUTY: RACE, TRANSNATIONALISM,
AND NEOLIBERALISM IN SOUTH KOREAN BEAUTY CULTURE**

by

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To Oma and Ahpa who prayed every night.
To Dean who worked by my side each of those nights.
And to Banyan who kept me company all day long.

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ABSTRACT

THE (GEO)POLITICS OF BEAUTY: RACE, TRANSNATIONALISM, AND NEOLIBERALISM IN SOUTH KOREAN BEAUTY CULTURE

by

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Chairs: Nadine C. Naber and Maria S. See

Departing from the current literature on cosmetic surgery, which largely asks *why* Korean women undergo procedures at the highest rates per capita globally and pathologizes them for doing so, *The (Geo)Politics of Beauty: Race, Transnationalism and Neoliberalism in South Korean Beauty Culture* maps the discursive formation of plastic surgery by asking *how* it has become normalized as economically necessary. This dissertation articulates plastic surgery as a form of “body work” shaped by consumer and popular culture, on the one hand, and neoliberal policies and rationalities, on the other. Situated in the epistemological gap between Korean studies and Asian American studies, *The (Geo)Politics of Beauty* places these literatures in dialectical tension while locating the Korean beauty aesthetics within a genealogy of imperial racial formation. Through an examination of the politics of the everyday that make

cosmetic surgery a viable form of self-management along with the concomitant industries productive of, and profiting from, these beauty practices, *The (Geo)Politics of Beauty* theorizes the concealed relations between seemingly unrelated spheres—popular and consumer culture, medicine, tourism, the military and other governmental institutions.

The (Geo)Politics of Beauty juxtaposes close reads of popular cultural forms with lived experiences in the form of consumer practices as well as feminist resistance campaigns against heteropatriarchal beauty standards in general and cosmetic surgery and dieting in particular. Accordingly, this dissertation analyzes a variety of popular cultural forms including Korean serial dramas and films, independent documentaries, on-line video clips and advertisements and mainstream television shows related to plastic surgery. In addition, *The (Geo)Politics of Beauty* utilizes a wide range of discursive materials such as public advertisements, newspaper and magazine articles and brochures as well as archival materials and in-depth interviews. This range of texts and interdisciplinary methodologies—archival research, discursive analysis and ethnographic interviews—form an interdisciplinary project that offers a transnational feminist perspective on Asian/American and more specifically, Korean/American women’s identities and experiences of embodiment.

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the South Korean film *200 Pounds Beauty* (미녀는 괴로워 2006) garnered over 6.23 million admissions, making it a sleeper hit and South Korea's most successful comedy to date.¹ Criticized in some circles, on the one hand, as pro-plastic surgery and hailed by others as a satirical indictment of South Korea's "booming surgery culture," *200 Pounds Beauty* chronicles Hanna's journey from obese back-up singer to sleek and sexy headliner.² Saving up money from gigs as South Korea's most famous pop star's "ghost singer" and as a sex hotline operator, Hanna undergoes major surgery and reemerges with an ideal face and body according to dominant 21st Century South Korean beauty standards. As a result, her outward appearance is finally considered as beautiful as her voice. Her popularity eventually surpasses even the woman whose voice she had secretly supplied, yet the attempt to keep her former identity (and looks) a secret proves too much a burden for the pure hearted Hanna who eventually confesses her secret at a major concert to tens of thousands of fans. Albeit shocked at first, masses of fans accept Hanna for

¹ Nigel D'Sa, "200 Pounds Beauty Weighs in at Box Office," *HanCinema: The Korean Movie and Drama Database*, February 2, 2007, accessed December 1, 2010, <http://www.hancinema.net/200-pounds-beauty-weighs-in-at-the-box-office-8630.html>.

² Kim Yong-hwa, No Hye-yeong and Suzuki Yumiko. *200 Pounds Beauty*, *미녀는 괴로워*. DVD (Kim Yong-hwa, 2006: 120 min).

her honesty, thus catapulting her even further into stardom and providing a tidy ending to the film.³

While *200 Pounds Beauty* fits neatly into the romantic comedy genre replete with a heroine who must overcome obstacles in order to find not only herself but true love, it is also exemplary of the myriad popular cultural productions that both speak to the pervasiveness and normalization of cosmetic surgery in contemporary South Korean society.⁴ These narratives, while not uniform, render visible the neoliberal logics driving cosmetic surgery consumption as well as mounting social anxieties about its unprecedented and unregulated consumption. For example, although Hanna is far more talented and hardworking than the pop star for whom she sings, she is unable to fully realize her potential until she has undergone her physical transformation to meet heterosexual gendered norms. After investing in her self vis-à-vis surgery, however, her previous industriousness and dedication coupled with her new appearance allow her to finally be recognized for the gifts she possessed all along. Yet, *200 Pounds Beauty* also teaches us a moral lesson about cosmetic surgery consumption. That is, it is not until Hanna is honest with her fans (and

³ All Korean words and names have been romanized throughout this dissertation using the McCune-Reischauer system with the exception of words directly quoted from previously published texts or widely known proper names. I also retain the spelling of Korean names as they appear in English language publications. I follow the Korean naming practice of surname then given name when the person referenced is Korean and the Western convention of given name followed by surname when referencing Korean Americans.

⁴ Throughout this dissertation I use the terms “cosmetic surgery” and “plastic surgery” interchangeably. I lean more on the term “cosmetic surgery” when I am discussing the particular context of South Korea (in chapter four for example), because in my estimation, it is a more accurate translation of the Korean terms, *miyong sŏnghyŏng* (미용 성형), which connotes reconstructive surgery for beauty purposes.

friends) about her past that she finds true success and happiness—one’s character and integrity must also match one’s appearance.

Around the same time that cosmetic surgery began to take prominence within South Korean popular culture, attesting to its ubiquity, U.S. media outlets also began reporting on South Korean cosmetic surgery consumption. In November of 1993, for instance, *The Wall Street Journal* ran an article entitled, “Cosmetic Surgery Goes Hand in Glove With the New Korea.”⁵ The subheading read: “What Would Confucius Say About the Westernization of Eye, Nose and Breast?” The article opens in Myŏngdong, one of the Seoul’s bustling shopping and tourism districts, describing it as a hub for finding “Western-style accessories” including Calvin Klein clothing, Gucci and Chanel handbags *and* Western-styled “eyes, noses and breasts.” With the same fervor with which they seek out the aforementioned fashion accessories, the article asserts, “Korea’s young and affluent women (and some men)” seek “to ‘go Anglo’ with Caucasoid features.” The article’s shocking revelation presumes that South Korean affluence through a so-called “New Korea” is signaled by a bizarre South Korean consumption of all things “west” to such an extent that not only is Korean culture replaceable via Western-styled fashion, but Korean phenotypes are also necessarily replaced through a new kind of commodity that marks Korea’s entry into modernity.

⁵ Steve Glain, “Cosmetic Surgery Goes Hand in Glove With the New Korea,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 23, 1993.

In the 1990s to the 2000s, U.S. media coverage regarding South Korean plastic surgery consumption such as the above *The Wall Street Journal* article was innumerable. From *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (the subject of chapter one) to MTV, a particular discursive formation concerned themselves with South Korean women's desire to "go Anglo" through plastic surgery and attain "Caucasoid features." While *The Wall Street Journal* article is unique in its blatant use of outdated ethnological terminology, most of these representations presuppose a biologically essentialized appearance for both Koreans and whites and assert that Koreans are trying to achieve, through cosmetic surgery, white "looks." Moreover, as the article above illustrates by likening cosmetic surgery procedures to the purchase of handbags or brand name clothing, these discourses typically point to South Korean women's cosmetic surgery consumption as an example of their excessive, if not bizarre, consumer practices. And, just as the article harkens to Confucius, asking "What Would Confucius Say About the Westernization of Eye, Nose and Breast?," these essentialized notions posit a traditional Korea that is at odds with the trends, practices and spending habits of "New Korea." U.S. obsessions with Korean cosmetic surgery, as the only avenue through which to contend with South Korea's newfound affluence (and influence), comes at a time when U.S. economic global dominance appears most threatened, which perhaps says more about an anxious western gaze that desires to see itself in places where its hegemony is on the wane.

The seeds of this dissertation were planted by, what has been to my Korean American sensibilities, a glaring contradiction. As a transnational Korean American

growing up in Southern California near Los Angeles, home to the largest population of Koreans outside of Seoul, cosmetic surgery was not only normalized but also unproblematic for both first and second generation Koreans within my Korean American community and my extended family in South Korea. Often a marker of high school or college graduation and usually in preparation for *sahoe saenghwal* (사회생활) or professional life, including finding suitable marriage prospects, cosmetic surgery and the “double eyelid” surgery (as it is colloquially referred) in particular, often signified the beginning of a woman’s life outside the familial home. Like Hanna whose singing career depends on her outer appearance, friends and family around me would justify such bodily alterations as necessary for their professional success if not personal happiness. The discourse of race, so prevalent in U.S. depictions of South Korean women’s choices, was altogether absent in the personal narratives I was privy to in these contexts.

Departing from the current literature on cosmetic surgery, which largely asks *why* Korean women undergo procedures at the highest rates per capita globally and pathologizes them for doing so, my dissertation *The (Geo)Politics of Beauty: Race, Transnationalism and Neoliberalism in South Korean Beauty Culture*, maps the discursive formation of plastic surgery by asking *how* it has become normalized as economically necessary. In other words, I examine the competing discourses that shape a regime of truth that posits cosmetic surgery as a viable mode of economic investment. South Korean women largely explain their cosmetic surgery consumption in economic and aspirational terms, just as Hanna does throughout *200 Pounds Beauty*.

As such, I articulate plastic surgery as a form of “body work” shaped by consumer and popular culture, on the one hand, and neoliberal policies and rationalities, on the other. Through an examination of the politics of the everyday that make cosmetic surgery a viable form of self-management along with the concomitant industries productive of, and profiting from, these beauty practices, I theorize the concealed relations between seemingly unrelated and often uninterrogated spheres—popular and consumer culture, medicine, tourism, the military and other governmental institutions. While dominant U.S. discourses focus on the racialization of the individual, my dissertation asserts that the desire to undergo plastic surgery can be located at the intersection of these global industries and state institutions.

In so doing, I argue that ideas about beauty, and women’s subsequent choices in regards to it, are inherently geopolitical. I understand geopolitics as, per transnational feminist cultural studies scholar Inderpal Grewal’s summation, not only “a matter of state politics and claims of territories but also as a mode of regulation in which discourses of territoriality, space, and nationalism produce forms of subjectivity.”⁶ That is to say, more than mere consumption, everyday practices of beauty are embedded within deep histories of (neo)colonialism and produced by transnational and local trajectories of global capital and competing discourses therein. I argue that mapping U.S. notions of race onto the South Korean context elides the geopolitical specificities that shape women’s quotidian and corporeal choices by centering the U.S. nation state and further reinforcing the First World/Third World

⁶ Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 17.

hierarchies that inform U.S. empire. As such, my work contributes to a larger political and intellectual feminist project that seeks to build transnational alliances that do not privilege U.S. feminisms or posit a “global feminism” but rather, excavate linkages between women in various locations by paying careful attention to local differences structured in complex unity with transnational capital.

Accordingly, chapter one examines global media vis-à-vis *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and parses out how Oprah’s geopolitical positioning as a U.S. woman of color necessarily affects her interpretation of Korean women’s choices—as evidenced by the labored criticism this show received from South Korean viewers, presumably leading her to cut the segment from subsequent airings of the episode. This chapter illuminates the ways in which such popular culture representations enact discursive violence through a centering of U.S. (white) women that constructs them as rational agents in opposition to irrational South Korean women. By juxtaposing my analysis of her global media empire, and this segment in particular, with independent documentary filmmaker Elizabeth Lee’s *good for her*, this chapter offers not only a sense of how these differing media forms operate but argues that ultimately, they collude with the aims of neoliberal feminism, which shares the same neoliberal ethics that undergird the cosmetic surgery industry.

While Asian American studies scholarship on plastic surgery focuses on the salience of race in the self-identity fashioning of South Korean women, South Korean scholarship sees cosmetic surgery as a symbol of the excesses of late capitalism. Because scholars are often limited to their national language, the

intersections of these interventions are never fully interrogated. Situated in the epistemological gap between Korean studies and Asian American studies, my second chapter triangulates these fields with Korean beauty aesthetics while locating them within a genealogy of imperial racial formation.⁷ Indeed, plastic surgery in Korea can be traced to the 1920s during the Japanese colonial period when Eugenics and Ethnology informed elite Japanese and Korean choices to mimic white or more specifically, Euro-American features.⁸ Cosmetic surgery was available to the masses after the Korean War, when American doctors alleviated Koreans of the “sleepy look” of the “Oriental eye” as a Cold War humanitarian effort. Koreans’ negotiations with colonialism and occupation by both Japan and the United States has influenced Korean people’s conceptions of beauty exemplifying what Nadia Kim calls “imperial racial formation” or “the link between the state and dominant representations” that “has forged the superiority and normativity of White America and, in relation the inferiority and Otherness of Korea and its people.”⁹ Using imperial racial formation as a theoretical framework, then, chapter two complicates the ideology of imperialism in the contemporary Korean aesthetic without reducing South Korean cosmetic surgery consumption to an analysis of race devoid of U.S. and Japanese (neo)colonial practices. Using Kim Ki-duk’s films *Address Unknown* and *Time* as well as Bong Man-

⁷ The “triangulation” of Korean studies, Asian American studies and cultural studies is informed by the spatial and conceptual framework theorized by Native Pacific cultural studies scholars that maintains that these points are always moving and in flux.

Vicente M. Diaz and J. Kehaulani Kauanui, “Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 315 – 341.

⁸ Lee, Young-ah, *한국 근대초기 미용성형수술의 풍경*, (paper presented at Seoul National University’s Women’s Studies Institute, Seoul, South Korea, Spring 2010).

⁹ Nadia Kim, *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008), 56.

dae's *Cinderella*, this chapter argues that processes of (neo)colonialism have constructed for South Koreans an “American Dream”—aspirational desires for the life promised by American neocolonialism and capitalism. As such, under the auspices of militarized capitalism, both cosmetic surgery and sex work have emerged as methods of “body work” through which Korean women attempt to secure these aspirations.

Since its (neo)colonial origins, however, cosmetic surgery in South Korea has taken on new meanings that while possessing its refractory imprint, has grown distinct from its (neo)colonial origins. South Korea's neoliberal era has ushered in new standards for feminine self-empowerment that are measured on a scale of competitiveness on the labor and marriage market, displacing traditional emphases on motherhood as the definitive marker of femininity. Since South Korea's 1997 IMF Crisis, rates of cosmetic surgery have risen to the highest per capita globally with recipients citing fierce competition for jobs as their major reason for undergoing procedures.

At the same time, also owing the economic downturn caused by the 1997 Crisis, the South Korean government has turned to its popular culture and more recently, medical tourism industries for export growth. *Hallyu* or the “Korean Wave” (as South Korean popular culture is known) grossed \$71.4 million in 2005, illustrating its global popularity while South Korea expects 100,000 medical tourists in 2012.¹⁰

¹⁰ Doobo Shim, “Waxing the Korean Wave,” ARI Working Paper, No. 158, June 2011, www.nus.ari.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm, 27.

Such developments have solidified the transnational connectivities through which South Korean ideas about beauty and self-management circulate abroad and most prevalently, to other parts of Asia. Chapter three illustrates the mutually constitutive nature of *Hallyu* and the medical tourism industry, arguing that *Hallyu* and Korean dramas more specifically, not only regulate social anxieties about plastic surgery but also act as “technologies of subjectivity” that proliferate neoliberal mandates that champion the consumer market and cosmetic surgery in particular. I contend that these cultural productions construct a fantasy space for viewers that, depending on their position and location within geopolitical formations, enacts either nostalgic or aspirational “Korean Dreams.” The medical tourism industry plays on such dreams posing cosmetic surgery, and traveling to South Korea to undergo it, as a rational economic investment in part because of how it is affectively tied to *Hallyu*’s narrative and representational strategies. By showing how both *Hallyu* and South Korean medical tourism are formidable players within transnational economies, this project shifts debates about U.S. economic and cultural hegemony. Although global beauty standards and consumption practices are largely thought to be at the mercy of U.S. global hegemony, my project mines the ways in which cultural and economic flows indeed move multidirectionally.

While this dissertation begins with *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in order to understand how Korean women’s choices are framed internationally through a U.S.

Bae Ji-sook, “[KoreaToday] Cosmetic Surgery Emerges as Export Product,” *The Korea Times* (Korea Today, January 27, 2010), http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/01/117_59782.html.

lens, it is bookended by an examination of a localized South Korean context. As discussed above, U.S. discourses such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *The Wall Street Journal* not only overdetermine race but subsequently present a myopic picture of cosmetic surgery that often pathologizes the patient for their choices. Chapter four examines a South Korean feminist non-profit organization's, *Yŏsŏng Minuboe* (also known as Korean Womenlink), "Love Your Body" campaign as an example of "counter-conduct" that attempts to disrupt the normalizing force of cosmetic surgery consumption in South Korea.¹¹ By focusing their campaign on the perhaps particularly South Korean concern of "lookism," Womenlink centers the specific geopolitical concerns of contemporary South Korean women. In particular, I argue that their interrogation of the cosmetic surgery industry's predatory marketing strategies and legal action against them (in addition to health-oriented educational outreach, public forums, and rallies), refocuses debates on cosmetic surgery by shifting the gaze from individual women to the entities that enact and profit from such predatory strategies. In showing how various groups of women are constituted differently by geopolitically situated sets of discourses, my project illuminates how geopolitics operates in women's everyday lives. As such, this chapter examines feminist organizing in South Korea, highlighting their privileging of the everyday as a viable site for feminist practices.

Taken together, these four chapters seek to understand how beauty is mediated through variously structured fields of power specific to the geopolitical

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population (Lectures at the College de France)*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 333-362.

context. Because culture is both engendered by and engenders the economic and political, this dissertation makes the larger argument that culture—in the forms of cultural production as well as cultural practices—is a critical site for the study of the body and consumption. Consumption itself can be understood as a cultural practice, and accordingly, this dissertation locates the ways in which neoliberal governmentalities operate through and are performed within culture itself.

In the following pages, I first provide an explication of my project's theorization of transnational Asian/American studies. Next, I review the existing literature and theoretical frameworks on the body and neoliberalism, consumption and modernity while locating my work's contributions to these fields. I then provide a description of my methodological approaches and finally, I end with a detailed outline of each chapter.

TOWARDS A TRANSNATIONAL ASIAN/AMERICAN STUDIES PROJECT

Between 2008 and 2009, I conducted several interviews with second generation Korean American women in their 20s and 30s in the Los Angeles area. These women had undergone some form of cosmetic surgery and most typically the double eyelid procedure. If U.S. discourses assert that Korean/American women want to “go Anglo” and I hypothesized that this assumption was incorrect or at the very least inadequate, my fieldwork sought to locate more nuanced reasons for Korean American cosmetic surgery consumption. More specifically, my questions attempted to parse how Korean American women understand (if at all) the

relationship between cosmetic surgery, culture, nationalism and transnationalism. My interviewees' responses varied. Some women felt pressured by older women in their families such as their mothers or aunts while others simply wanted to enhance their ability to wear eye make-up. Still others asserted that it was normal for Koreans in Korea and hence, also normal for Korean Americans gesturing towards surgery as a form of diasporic performance.

Because my project is conceived transnationally as a two-sited project (Los Angeles and Seoul), I spent the following year doing fieldwork in Seoul, South Korea as a Fulbright-Hays and Korea Foundation fellow. In Seoul, I set out to understand the networks through which ideas and practices of beauty travel to the Korean American context and shape the lives of the Korean American women I had interviewed. While there, my theorization of transnationalism and consequently, my project changed. Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa, for instance, argue for modes of inquiry that do not merely recognize “the multiple meanings of Asianness in Asian and Asian American studies and the historical conditions that give rise to them.”¹² Instead, they call for a newly emergent field of inquiry “situated *around* and *between* those disciplinary formations, that takes as its focus precisely the differences among those meanings as a way of exposing the ideologies that affiliate particular kinds of value (political, institutional, cultural, historical) to epistemological objects

¹² Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa, “Introduction: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora,” in *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora*, ed. Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 5.

and practices.”¹³ Once in Seoul, Chuh and Shimakawa’s formulation resonated with my findings. Since the U.S. military’s popularization and proliferation of racialized cosmetic surgery in Korea after the Korean War, the cosmetic surgery industry (and its procedures) has taken on not only new meanings but also new and lucrative connections to other industries, creating connectivities to other populations in addition to Korean Americans.

Accordingly, my dissertation attempts to provide an examination of the Korean context “situated *around* and *between*” Asian and Asian American studies. Rather than viewing South Korea simply as a point of context for Korean American experiences, my project focuses on South Korea as a salient nexus of global capital and transnational culture that has been shaped by U.S. imperialism but is not determined by it. Whereas my original project sought to uncover the similarities and networks connecting Korean and Korean American women, my dissertation instead illuminates the ways in which gender, capital and culture operate in and through South Korean discourses, global industries, and feminist practices. In so doing, I see my dissertation as a mode of Asian American studies inquiry that is not intellectually and geographically bound to the U.S. but asks instead how Asian American studies itself might be transformed or informed by engaging with Korean feminist scholarship and its attendant concerns. Through a transnational framework, then, my project makes the larger argument that Korea is a crucial intellectual and political node for Asian American studies given that it is a site of U.S. imperialism and

¹³ Ibid.

Japanese colonialism as well as a formidable player within contemporary formations of global capital and politics.

As such, *The (Geo)Politics of Beauty* provides an invaluable foundation for my book manuscript, which will return to the Asian American context in order to develop a theorization of Korean diasporic beauty culture in conjunction with the specificities of South Korea laid out here. As Chuh and Shimakawa explain, “transnationalism exposes the apparatuses through which [postcolonial] ideologies continue to be deployed and reveals how these contemporary deployments are shaped by available technologies.”¹⁴ To be sure, my dissertation is a critical first step in theorizing the transnational apparatuses and technologies that deploy and disseminate the ideological realities, to which my original interviews alluded, shaping Asian/American women’s everyday lives.

In addition to the interviews I collected in 2008 and 2009, my book manuscript will delve deeper into Transnational and Diasporic studies by analyzing further interviews with Asian American cosmetic surgery recipients, providing close readings of cultural texts, and through an analysis of the trajectories of capital linking South Korea and the U.S. vis-à-vis beauty industries. According to Cold War scholar Jodi Kim, Asian American cultural productions can be understood as “Cold War compositions” that “trace, uncover, and interrogate U.S. Cold War imperialism.”¹⁵ In recent years, Asian/American plastic surgery consumption has been the subject of

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 12.

multiple Asian American documentaries, performance art pieces/shows, magazines, and blogs. My book project will examine these Cold War compositions in order to excavate not only the ways in which Korean beauty culture travels to and through the Korean diaspora but how it is understood by Asian Americans within the imperial legacy of Japan and the United States. By coupling my existing research on the Korean context with more in-depth theorization of the Asian American one, my book will provide a comparative and relational analysis of the lived and imagined experiences of Asian/American embodiment in different diasporic registers.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Drawing from the fields of Transnational Feminist cultural studies, Korean studies, Economic Globalization and the Body, and Asian American cultural studies, my theoretical framework brings together feminist critiques of modernity, approaches to neoliberalism and the body and research on beauty and consumption to formulate a transnational feminist practice. In the following section, I map the theoretical concepts underlying my argument as well as the literatures I draw upon.

Geopolitical Biopower

Because male subjectivity has taken on a particular representational salience within South Korean histories, feminist scholars have sought to counter this by showing the specifically gendered effects of modernity on female subjectivity. These scholars emphasize modernity as a lived experience and seek to show how South

Korean women have navigated it as such. While these scholars' own understandings of modernity are differently inflected, each of these scholars show that modernity cannot be understood as monolithic but rather as a local and gendered phenomenon. For instance, Cho Haejoang argues that South Korea's "aborted and colonial modernity" created two major shifts in Korean womanhood through which Korean women went from identifying themselves primarily as mothers to identifying themselves primarily as wives and now in the current era of consumer culture, sexy individuals (Cho 2002). On the other hand, Seungsook Moon's concept of "militarized modernity" shows how these shifts were, in fact, impelled and facilitated by state discipline, which encouraged the "housewifization" of Korean women (Moon 2005). Lastly, Nancy Abelman has shown that the melodrama of South Korean women's personal narratives—the "melodrama of mobility"—both reflect and constitute South Korea's "compressed modernity" or rapid modernization (Abelman 2003).

Transnational feminist scholars have also made significant contributions to critiques of modernity by questioning teleological assumptions that modernity is necessarily progressive or emancipatory (Abu-Lughod 1998, Deeb 2006). These scholars build upon the insights of Foucault whose work illuminates how the modern state, its institutions and the family normalize and discipline through the production of discourses about the self and sexuality. These scholars not only illuminate the productive nature of modernity but also complicate binaristic understandings that posit modernity against tradition and East against West, instead highlighting the

fluidity of national boundaries especially in the colonial context. Rather than being separate, Eastern and Western cultures have been constituted by each other such that one would not exist without the other. As such, purely Eastern cultural practices, for example, cannot be said to exist since cultural practices have developed in the context of the other. By examining these processes of entanglement, we can examine how seemingly static cultures are actually entwined through processes of hybridization.

Building upon the literatures above, I understand the entangled concept of modernity through the notion of “geopolitical biopower.” According to Michel Foucault, biopower is essential to the ways in which modern governments govern their populations (Foucault 1990). In this formulation, power is organized around two poles, which constitute the regulatory controls or biopolitics of the population: control of the body and control of the population. In this view, the state is concerned with the daily lives of individuals because their lives are politically useful and thus, biopower is essential to the maintenance of capitalism, not only as a form of control but also as a means of optimizing life. Biopower thus justifies arrangements of power and hierarchies, making natural uneven distributions of power and resources.

I pair the concept of “biopower” with geopolitics in order to yield a location-specific understanding of power and how the local interacts seamlessly with the global. As transnational feminist scholars have stressed, geopolitics are not simply international conflicts between nation-states but rather, are technologies of power that both produce and manage territorial space, as well as subjects of those territories.

According to Inderpal Grewal, geopolitical biopower has specific relationships to neoliberalism because of neoliberalism's global reach in the last 30 – 40 years (Grewal 2005). Accordingly, neoliberalism's emphasis on market logics has engendered location specific concerns for variously gendered and racialized populations. Indeed, the body is a crucial site for understanding geopolitical biopower in contemporary South Korean society since as feminist scholar Kim Eun Shil relates, "Along with the end of the Cold War regime and the active integration of the Korean society into the global neoliberal order, bodies of consumer subjects that embodied the individuation created by the market began to be constructed by demonstrating the value of differences and diversity."¹⁶ In the context of neoliberalism, then, South Korean consumer culture has taken up the body as a new site for commodification using the rhetorics of self-empowerment and personal style. I thus understand beauty culture as a form of geopolitical biopower that engenders its own gendered codes of conduct that are at once particular to the local context even while they travel through transnational connectivities.

Consumption and the Body

Korean studies scholars have addressed consumption not only as a consequence of capitalist modernity but also as a cultural and nationalistic practice. Laurel Kendall, for instance, illuminates how South Korea's modern history is reflected in the changes to the wedding ritual over the past one hundred years and

¹⁶ Kim Eun Shil, "The Politics of the Body in Contemporary Korea," *Korea Journal* 49, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 9.

how specifically, consumption has come to play a significant role within wedding rites with the emergence of South Korea's consumer culture (Kendall 2002). As Laura Nelson shows, cultural rituals and consumption practices are linked to the state since "consumer nationalism," or nationalism based on bettering the collective economy, describes the link between South Korea's economy and national ethos (Nelson 2000). South Korean nationalism is based on ideas of the future given Korea's tumultuous past and as such, South Korean women have been pushed to either be frugal or to spend (depending on the economy) on behalf of their country. Significantly, this framework fits nicely with the scholarship on modernity since pushing housewives to be consuming subjects was part and parcel to the ways in which the Korean state has disciplined housewives as "modern" wives and mothers.

Still other scholars have intervened to expose the ways in which these efforts to constitute Korean women as consuming subjects have had significant effects on Korean women's bodies. According to So-Hee Lee, Korean housewives were swept into consumerist postmodernity by the "Missy" phenomenon, which emerged as an advertising ploy of a major Korean department store (Lee 2002). The "Missy" embodies the image of a married woman who looks like a young, single woman, usually works and engages in sexual encounters freely. Young-ja Lee stresses that this image is in part accomplished through "body making" or the conflation of self-identity through gender identity vis-à-vis body management i.e. consumer fashion, dieting and plastic surgery (Lee 2000). As Taeyon Kim shows, however, although South Korean women's "body making" may seem like a new phenomenon, South

Korean women's manipulation of their bodies can be seen as new forms of Neo-Confucian "body techniques" finding expression in the context of global consumerism (Kim 2003).

Although this scholarship addresses modernity and consumption, research that places these concepts within a transnational context and interrogates how practices such as "body making" extend beyond national borders is virtually non-existent. My work examines how two of South Korea's global industries—*Hallyu* and medical tourism—shape (as well as problematize) consumer practices and ideas about modernity for both Koreans domestically as well as Asians residing outside of South Korea. Moreover, although this scholarship theorizes cosmetic surgery as a technology of the self and contextualizes it within social structures like Neo-Confucianism, my work parses out the ways in which these practices have been shaped by South Korea's (neo)colonial encounters with the U.S. and Japan.

While Korean studies scholars address consumption as a consequence of capitalist modernity within the South Korean context, Asian American cultural studies scholars such as Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu are increasingly understanding consumption practices as "technologies of the self" or a "set of dynamic practices through which subject positions are inhabited by individuals within fields of power and knowledge production."¹⁷ Finding synergy with this understanding of consumption, scholars such as Jigna Desai and Nhi T. Lieu have

¹⁷ Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu, "Introduction," in *Asian American Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 25.

shown how diasporic acts of consumption in the South Asian and Vietnamese communities respectively, constitute diasporic subjectivities (Desai 2005, Lieu 2007).

While scholars such as Desai and Lieu illuminate how consumption constitutes diasporic identities through the transnational circulation of homeland popular culture, other scholars have focused on consumption as a means of constituting American identities. Lisa Park, for example, contends that second generation Asian Americans use consumption as a ritualized and performative means of proving their Americanness (Park 2005). Similarly, Shirley Lim shows how Asian American women have historically engaged with various cultural forms including beauty culture through ethnic beauty pageants, fashion and women's magazines to cultivate a sense of cultural citizenship or belonging both amongst themselves and within American culture (Lim 2006).

When it comes to plastic surgery consumption and that of cosmetic eyelid surgery in particular, however, Asian American scholars (in the humanities and cultural studies, more specifically) have been less concerned with consumption in processes of identity formation and more concerned with whether or not such acts of consumption are agentive or oppressive. In scholarship that disavows Asian American women who elect cosmetic surgery, race is assumed to correlate with physicality and both are assumed to relate to ethnicity. In other words, women who elect such procedures are assumed to "want to look white" and as such, assumed to disavow their Asianness (Palumbo-Liu 1999, Kaw 1991). While these scholars overlook individual agency, they pay close attention to the Cold War origins of

racialized plastic surgery in Asian American communities. On the other hand, other scholars argue that such critiques do not acknowledge the discursively constructed nature of racialized traits and instead, assume them as natural thus reinscribing them (Yamamoto 1999, Zane 1998). In this view, plastic surgery consumption can be seen as one way of negotiating the material effects of such discourses on Asian American bodies and although these works acknowledge individual agency, they also tend to decontextualize the double eyelid surgery from its Cold War history.

To date, Taeyon Kim has provided the most three-dimensional treatment of Korean cosmetic eyelid surgery that takes the discussion out of structure/agency debates. In her dissertation, Kim historicizes cosmetic eyelid surgery and shows how seemingly race-neutral medical discourses are implicated in the normalization of racialized plastic surgery (Kim 2005). She also includes a short chapter on Korean American consumption and argues that Korean American women elect the procedure in order to enhance or solidify their diasporic Korean identities.

Although Asian American studies scholarship has examined consumption practices and beauty culture as processes of identity formation, this scholarship rarely links the two. When they have, as in the case of Kim, this scholarship continues to focus on a singular racialized procedure rather than the cosmetic surgery industry as a whole and neglects to interrogate the transnational industries and neoliberal imperatives undergirding women's choices. In other words, Asian American scholarship has not, as of yet, taken seriously beauty culture as a site of consumer culture through which Asian American identities are shaped vis-à-vis transnational

networks in complex relation to U.S. nationalism. Furthermore, while Asian American studies scholarship has tackled the issue of racialized beauty standards, it has mostly done so within structure/agency debates that limit conversations to an either/or framework. While this dissertation does not address Asian American cosmetic surgery consumption as its primary source material, it brings Asian American studies literature and insights to bear on the Korean context in order to yield a transnationally informed and diasporically wrought analyses.

In order to do so, I draw upon sociologist Nadia Kim's concept of "imperial racial formation." Kim describes "imperial racial formation" as a process of racialization that occurs "across borders and through multiple and related lines of inequality."¹⁸ Kim uses the term to describe the process through which South Koreans have been inculcated into American racial ideologies vis-à-vis military occupation, mass media, and complementary ideas in South Korea and channeled through Japan. Kim's formulation highlights the fact that U.S. imperialism in Asia since World War II has been a key source for racializing Asians and interpellating them into American ideologies. While my own use of "imperial racial formation" finds synergy with Kim's, I modify it to address consumptive practices in order to complicate understandings of race as they pertain to beauty ideals. In other words, while U.S. discourses on cosmetic surgery have focused on race, I reframe the issue through the lens of U.S. imperialism in South Korea, which allows me to more

¹⁸ Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, 3.

broadly understand how gendered consumptive practices in South Korea continue to be constituted by the legacy of U.S. imperialism.

As stated in the section above, neoliberal markets in South Korea have brought new forms of bodily enhancements, permanent or otherwise, as means of self-care and management. Thus, I see consumption practices as a primary vehicle through which neoliberal ethics play out. I agree with Nguyen and Tu's formulation of consumption practices as technologies of the self. Building on Foucault, they understand consumption as a set of practices through which individuals inhabit different subject positions "within fields of power and knowledge production." Thus, consumption is more than the accumulation of stuff but the practices through which identities and in this case, appearances, are transformed. I argue that such consumptive practices are a form of "body work." According to sociologist Debra Gimlin, "body work" is "work on the self. By engaging in body work, women are able to negotiate normative identities by diminishing their personal responsibility for a body that fails to meet cultural mandates."¹⁹ Gimlin's "body work" is a method for reconciling the separation between "the body" and "the self" and takes place in aerobics classes, weight control organizations, and beauty salons in addition to plastic surgery clinics. While my use of the term "body work" builds on Gimlin's, I significantly depart from her definition because I use the term to suggest both the work that women do *to* their bodies as well as the labor performed *by* their bodies. Thus, the concept of "body work" aptly illustrates the different but gendered ways in

¹⁹ Debra Gimlin, *Body Work: Beauty and Self-Image in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 6.

which imperial racial formation, in the development of capitalized and militarized modernity, has mobilized South Korean women's bodies in multiple ways depending on their social and class locations.

Neoliberalism and the Body

Whereas Korean studies scholars see questions of beauty and consumption as consequences of South Korea's rapid modernization and Asian American studies scholars frame Asian American beauty consumption within the politics of race, scholars of *Economic Globalization and The Body* frame these issues within debates about economic rational actors and embodiment. These scholars are concerned with whether or not people can make rational choices about their bodies, for instance, and how to take people's experiences with embodiment seriously. Perhaps most compelling is that these debates nod to the ways in which people are increasingly considering their bodies as domains of self-entrepreneurship, management and care. As such, these scholars have asked whether these engagements can be considered ethical, especially given the politics of neoliberalism on a global scale.

According to Nancy Scheper-Hughes, while commodification of the body is not specifically a result of globalization, new technologies have generated new markets for bodies and body parts (Scheper-Hughes 2003). In other words, although transactions concerning the body have existed for centuries, late capitalism has opened up the range of transactions possible through a litany of new technologies, thus creating a world of haves and have-nots in which the body itself has become a

prized commodity. Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas offer perhaps the most optimistic view of the relationship between biology, technology and citizenship (Rose and Novas 2004). They argue that in the West, biological citizenship is catalyzing a specifically active form of citizenship wherein practices of biological choice are taking place within a “regime of the self” through which people are increasingly seeing themselves as enterprising individuals, actively shaping their lives through acts of choice.

Significantly, these aspects of “biological citizenship” echo the imperatives of neoliberal governmentality that proffer individuals as responsible for their own self-cultivation and management. As David Harvey, Elizabeth Martinez and Arnoldo Garcia note, as economic policy, neoliberalism promotes the freedom of the market through deregulation and privatization at the expense of collective good by cutting public expenditure of social services (Harvey 2005, Martinez and Garcia 2007). Yet, as many scholars assert, neoliberalism does not simply shift state functions to the private sector but also functions as a mode of governmentality that shifts strategies of government to private individuals (Brown 2003). The model neoliberal citizen, then, calculates her choices within multiple spheres—economic, political, social—rather than attempting to alter these spheres.

Neoliberalism has not only had profound effects on individual bodies, however, but on populations of laboring bodies as well. Third World women have been disproportionately and intentionally affected by neoliberal economic policy since the First World orchestrates—indeed, engineers—the poverty-stricken

conditions of their home countries in order to create a pool of laborers that will do the jobs that no one else will do (Chang 2000, Parrenas 2001, Louie 2001). Nowhere is the debate on the bodily effects of economic globalization more heated, however, than in the realm of sex work. Many Western feminist scholars vie for an understanding of sex work as another form of labor and for sex workers to be recognized as agentive laborers who deserve safe and fair working conditions (Chapkis 2003, Doezma 2001, Kempadoo 1998). On the other hand, many Third World feminists disagree, pointing to the global and geopolitical structures that unevenly shape women's choices (Aguilar 2004, Lacsamana 2004, Moon 1997).

As with Asian American studies scholarship, scholarship that addresses plastic surgery consumption in this field also focuses on agency/structure debates. Kathy Davis shows that plastic surgery consumers, like others engaged in selling their bodies, body parts or manipulating their bodies for medical rather than cosmetic reasons, are motivated by a sense of ownership over their bodies and the desire to look "normal" (Davis 1995). In her following book, however, Davis notes a cultural shift in discourses on the body and plastic surgery more specifically such that discourses of "normal" or "abnormal" have shifted to discourses of difference and individuality. Discourse matters: whereas discourses of ab/normality framed plastic surgery as a solution for extraordinary circumstances, discourses of equality frame it as a neutral technology that can apply to everyone since we are all "equally" different (Davis 2003).

While scholarship on Economic Globalization and The Body has begun to address the effects of neoliberalism, both as economic policy and governmentality, on the body, much of this scholarship continues to focus on the either/or framework concerning agency and structure and whether or not people can be rational economic actors when it comes to their bodies. My project focuses instead on the industries, institutions and histories that shape women's beauty and body choices. Rather than understanding cosmetic surgery as either inherently empowering or oppressive, my project maps the competing discourses and counter-discourses with which women have to contend. That is to say, I situate Korean women's agency within the discursive formations that shape their terms for agentive action. In so doing, I do not discount the possibilities for agency but attempt to account for the larger historical, economic, and political forces that set the stage for women's everyday choices.

Moreover, debates in the field are uneven in the sense that these rational economic actors are often assumed as Western and white, thus making much of this scholarship questionable in non-Western contexts. And, while many scholars of color have shown the disproportionate effects of neoliberalism on Third World women laborers, this scholarship has not yet adequately addressed the effects of neoliberalism on middle-class consumption practices in non-Western contexts. My work thus makes a particular contribution by placing the middle-class cosmetic surgery consumer in conversation with the presumed lower-class militarized sex

worker as a means of understanding how militarized and capitalist modernity has placed distinct but related demands on women's laboring bodies.

To these ends, I understand neoliberalism as not only a set of economic policies but also as a mode of governmentality that shifts strategies of government to private individuals. Scholars such as Wendy Brown have illuminated that neoliberalism works on an ideological level so that neoliberal subjects are interpellated as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life and are thus "controlled *through* their freedom."²⁰ Moral autonomy is measured by a capacity for self-care and the ability to make choices that will benefit the citizen no matter how constrained those choices are. And since everything is measured as a calculation or purchase, neoliberal governmentality affects everything from our evaluations of "right and wrong" to life choices, like college education or the decision to undergo plastic surgery.

Such a proliferation of neoliberal governmentality as common sense requires ideological and cultural work with social and cultural institutions constituting neoliberalism as social ethos. I view beauty and culture industries, feminist discourses and state agencies as a few amongst these sites. In particular, I identify several cultural forms that work as "technologies of subjectivity" including *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Hallyu*, and more specifically, Korean television serials. Anthropologist Ahiwa Ong suggests that "technologies of subjectivity rely on an array of knowledge and expert systems to induce self-animation and self-government so that citizens can

²⁰ Wendy Brown, "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," *Theory & Event* 7, no. 1 (2003), 7.

optimize choices, efficiency, and competitiveness in turbulent market conditions.”²¹ Indeed, through their affective narrative strategies, these cultural productions codify neoliberal mandates governing women’s bodies impelling them toward “self-improvement” vis-à-vis the consumer market. These gendered cultural productions are powerful precisely because they travel globally, further solidifying the transnational connectivities that link women where global capital and cultural representation meet.

(Trans)nationalism

While Postcolonial theory has laid out complicated understandings of colonial relationships, feminist scholars have intervened to show that gender and sexuality permeate colonialism (albeit contradictorily in different contexts) in ways that often play out on female bodies. In particular, these scholars have shown the link between colonialism, capitalism and the exploitation of women’s bodies through state and cultural violences (Davis 2003, Smith 2005, Trask 1999). More recent transnational feminist scholarship has begun asking how we can understand these varied bodily experiences in relation to one another. For instance, Ella Shohat’s *Talking Visions* pays close attention to the particularities of the gendered and sexed body such that *Talking Visions* puts female genital surgery, rape and cosmetic surgery in conversation with one another without claiming equivalence (Shohat 1994). Furthermore, in

²¹ Aihwa Ong, *neoliberalism as exception: mutations in citizenship and sovereignty*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 6.

reclaiming the gendered and sexed body, *Talking Visions* seeks to avoid converse pathologies that moralize and essentialize Asianness, Africanness, Nativeness, etc.

Transnational feminist scholars have also shown that gender permeates both nation and nationalism and is critical to the construction of the boundaries and parameters of both. According to these scholars, women are symbolized within nationalisms that have very real consequences for whether or not they emerge as enfranchised citizens or as wards of their communities (Williams 1996, Kandiyoti 1994). More often than not, because nationalisms are predicated on masculinities, women's issues and concerns are relegated to the background. Norma Alarcon, Caren Kaplan and Mino Moallem offer instead, the space between woman and nation as "the space or zone where we can deconstruct these monoliths and render them more historically nuanced and accountable to politics."²² The investigation between woman and nation is not a domestically demarcated project, however, but actually allows us a way of destabilizing the nation such that transnational inquiries and investigations are made possible. In addition, such a deconstruction of the nation-state opens the door toward refusing "global feminism" that assumes an essential "woman," and makes possible instead a transnational feminism. According to Inderpal Grewal such affinities can be traced through "transnational

²² Norma Alarcon, Caren Kaplan, and Mino Moallem, "Introduction" in *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalism, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, eds. Norma Alarcon, Caren Kaplan, and Mino Moallem, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) 12.

connectivities” or the “transnational connections [that] produce groups, identities, nationalisms.”²³

While transnational feminist scholars have emphasized transnational methodologies, which illuminate how certain ideas, goods and bodies travel across national borders, little scholarship exists on how ideas of beauty and neoliberal mandates for self-management travel across national borders. Furthermore, although many scholars have shown the effects of American consumer culture outside of the U.S., few studies have shown how non-American industries affect non-Western communities. My dissertation fills this lacuna within existing literature by interrogating how South Korean popular cultural forms globally disseminate a specifically South Korean capitalist modernity through representational strategies that find synergy with its medical tourism industry. At the same time, my dissertation also pays careful attention to the specificities of a local context and examines how feminist practices contend with these global and transnational industries. In so doing, I join the ranks of transnational scholars such as Nadine Naber who examines how women negotiate transnationally mediated discourses of femininity (Naber 2009).

My own usage of the term “transnational” is informed by Ahiwa Ong’s theorized articulation of globalization with transnationality. Ong defines globalization as “new corporate strategies” and in contrast, defines transnationality as “the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space—which has

²³ Grewal, *Transnational America*, 23.

been intensified under late capitalism.”²⁴ Moreover, she defines transnationalism as “the cultural specificities of global processes, tracing the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of ‘culture.’”²⁵ Her formulation emphasizes how transnationalism is facilitated by global capital and interests, which finds salience to my project’s examination of the industries and institutions productive of consumer practices and the transnational proliferation of ideas and governmentalities. By examining processes of imperial racial formation and the circulation of cultural productions, I argue that South Korean beauty culture is constituted by and constitutive of transnational flows of peoples, discourses and goods. In turn, these movements create networks, interconnectedness and indeed, cultures of interconnectedness—“transnational connectivities.”

METHODOLOGY

My dissertation employs a Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies (TFCS) methodology. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan propose Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies as an alternative to liberal versions of feminism that celebrate multiculturalism as a management of diversity as well as masculinist interpretations of Marx that erase gender. Instead, Kaplan and Grewal argue for a practice that incorporates economic, cultural and political concerns through a marrying of poststructuralism, Marxism, postmodernism, postcolonial theory and transnational

²⁴ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999),

4.

²⁵ Ibid.

feminism. Central to these theories is a transnational frame that centralizes gender as an analytic category. Whereas cultural studies and postcolonial studies inquiries have been nation-specific, TFCS opens the space of inquiry to the global economy in order to “acknowledge transnational patriarchal links of culture and capital as important reactionary interests.”²⁶ To this end, Grewal and Kaplan propose “transnational feminist practices” or “an attention to the linkages and travels of forms of representation as they intersect with movements of labor and capital in a multinational world.”²⁷ Their conception of TFCS focuses on drawing linkages, rather than similarities, universalisms, or essentialisms, “among diverse, unequal, and uneven relations of historically constituted subjects. [...] Linkages suggest networks of economic and social relations that occur within postmodernity vis-à-vis global capital and its effects.”²⁸ Such linkages are not purely for academic sake, however, since theorizing linkages (rather than similarities) allows for practicing solidarity and coalitional work.²⁹

²⁶ Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, “Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies: Beyond the Marxism/Poststructuralism/Feminism Divide,” in *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalism, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) 361.

²⁷ Kaplan and Grewal, “Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies,” 357.

²⁸ Kaplan and Grewal, “Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies,” 359.

²⁹ While they do not call it TFCS, Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd find synergy with Grewal and Kaplan in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*. Like Grewal and Kaplan, Lowe and Lloyd argue for a study of culture that does not see it as separate from the spheres of economy or politics: “We suggest that ‘culture’ obtains a ‘political’ force when a cultural formation comes into contradiction with economic or political logics that try to refunction it for exploitation or domination. Rather than adopting the understanding of culture as one sphere in a set of differentiated spheres and practices, we discuss ‘culture’ as a terrain in which politics, culture, and the economic form an inseparable dynamic” (1). As such, Lowe and Lloyd argue for the study of cultural productions as alternative forms that provide a window into people’s analyses of economics, politics and social relations. In particular, Lowe and Lloyd seek to show critical resistances to neocolonial capitalism and modernity, not as “postmodern” instances of resistance or contradiction as in the sense of after or even as returns to premodern tradition but rather, as concurrent contradictions to manifestations of modernity in the postcolonial period. Like Grewal and Kaplan, Lowe and Lloyd are also invested in drawing linkages or what they call “lateral connections.” They argue for the importance of “exchanges and collaborations across sites

In this vein, my methodology privileges culture as a crucial site for understanding gendered economic and ideological processes. As such, my project examines cultural productions in order to take stock of the various ways in which South Koreans articulate, resist, critique and are interpellated by neoliberal mandates that champion cosmetic surgery as a viable form of self-management. This motley cluster of cultural productions include Korean films (Kim Ki-duk's *Address Unknown* and *Time* and Bong Man-dae's *Cinderella*), Korean television serials (*Before and After Plastic Surgery Clinic*, *My Lovely Samsun* and *Boys Over Flowers*) and Korean Womenlink's independently produced satirical educational video, *Knifestyle*. I do not assert that these cultural productions represent the totality of the field but rather, that they exemplify how neoliberal mandates are proliferated and/or resisted in conjunction with global capitalist industries. Thus, I identify these as part and parcel to the structure of knowledge and power governing South Korean, Asian, and Asian American women's bodies today. The specific method of discourse analysis allows me to expose these structures through close readings that locate these discourses within a larger web of social, historical and political relations of power.

Yet, my primary source material is not limited exclusively to South Korean cultural production. I put these in conversation with other cultural productions such as a U.S. mainstream and internationally broadcast television show (*The Oprah Winfrey Show*) and an independent Korean American documentary film (*good for her*). By

connecting subjugated practices that cut across the orthodox categories that have organized historical understanding: the people, the nation, the epoch, the state" (5). David Lloyd and Lisa Lowe, "Introduction," in *Politics in the Shadow of Capital* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 1 – 32.

placing these discourses in relation to U.S. discourses regarding South Korean women and cosmetic surgery, I reveal the linkages between South Korean and Asian American women. To be sure, such linkages do not equate one with the other but instead, illuminates both the intimate ties created by global capital and shared histories as well as the geopolitical differences shaping location specific discourses and thus, women's daily lives. As outlined above, TFCS has particular political and feminist valences. Rather than privileging a unitary subject of "revolution," TFCS scholars call for an attention to the multiple resistances that speak to the "scattered hegemonies" of the postmodern era.³⁰ Centering gender and transnationalism with an attention to geopolitical differences allows for transnational alliance building through "linkages" that enable alliances that are keenly aware of transnational structures of power. In this sense, my project seeks to allow for solidarities that are more relevant to the realities of different women's lives, across national borders.³¹

In order to fully grapple with the intersections between cultural production and practices and "movements of labor and capital in a multinational world," my project also deploys interdisciplinary strategies. That is to say, I use archival research and in-depth interviews to reveal how these cultural productions travel in conjunction with or go against the grain of global capital in the forms of *Hallyu* and medical

³⁰ Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

³¹ Such critical inquiries go beyond "global feminism" that assumes an essential "woman," and makes possible "'imagined communities of women' with divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systemic." Alarcon, Kaplan and Moallem, "Introduction," 13.

tourism in addition to beauty industries. In so doing, this dissertation engages with the formations of capital that undergird women's beauty choices rather than presenting a myopic view that pathologizes individual women for their beauty and consumption choices.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

CHAPTER ONE. Lessons from "Around the World with Oprah:" Neoliberalism, Race and the Geopolitics of Beauty

In 2004, on an internationally televised episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Oprah likened South Korean women's plastic surgery consumption to "me [Oprah] having surgery to not look black." Her take on the topic was clear when she explained, "I don't get it." In recent years, South Korean and Korean American women appear frequently in the U.S. media for their plastic surgery consumption. These discourses—concerned with whether or not South Korean and Korean American women want, in Oprah's words, "not to look Asian"—are limited to examinations of individual women's choices from an American perspective that engenders either/or analyses: women's beauty choices are either empowering *or* oppressive. This chapter begins with a discussion of the abovementioned Oprah moment and suggests that Oprah's framing of plastic surgery in the South Korean context is contingent on Oprah's production of neoliberal feminism based on liberal notions of choice. Moreover, given her global reach these neoliberal feminist subjects are not produced equally but are discursively constructed along a First

World/Third World divide wherein First World women are praised for their abilities to make rational choices while Third World women are not.

On the other hand, independent documentary film, *good for her*, takes to the streets of Seoul in order to understand how South Korean women assert their agency through cosmetic surgery in order to access social power. By juxtaposing these two very different media representations, this chapter argues that, despite their differing depictions of Korean women's plastic surgery consumption, both representations' continued focus on the individual fails to interrogate the neoliberal rationalities propelling the plastic surgery industry on a global scale. In so doing, I argue, these representations uphold neoliberal feminist ethics, which serve to undergird the cosmetic surgery industry.

CHAPTER TWO. Consuming Commodities: Body Work, Gender, and Modernity in South Korean Film

Starting with Korean comfort women and extending to U.S. military camptown prostitutes and military brides, the figure of the *yangkongju* has simultaneously been both the catalyst for demands for justice as well as the allegorical figure of the nation's shame and domination. In marked contrast, another signifier has also emerged in recent popular depictions of Korean women—the specter of the Korean plastic surgery consumer, which has come to signify South Korean modernization and (excessive) consumption. This chapter places these two figures within the same analytical frame in order to theorize their shared affinities. That is to say, while much intellectual work has pointed out the discursive function(s) of the *yanggonju* and the ways in which she allegorizes the Korean nation, this chapter considers *both* figures of Korean women as distinct iterations of gendered corporealities or embodiments of Korean history. As discursive conjurings and as lived experiences, these archetypes illuminate how South Korea's modern history—under the auspices of modernization and militarization—have demanded different types of “body work” from gendered bodies depending on their social and class locations. This chapter uses controversial Korean director Kim Ki-duk's films, *Address Unknown* and *Time*, and Bong Man-dae's horror film, *Cinderella*, as entry points into thinking about these two types of “body work” as mutually imbricated in processes of imperial racial formation. This chapter articulates these two previously unjuxtaposed figures as instantiations of how capitalism, (neo)colonialism, and

neoliberalism mobilize gendered bodies towards different ends. Said differently, this chapter argues that these types of body work have emerged within Korea's modern history as two distinct interventions in identity.

CHAPTER THREE. Entertaining Beauty: Hallyu, Cosmetic Surgery and South Korea's Burgeoning Medical Tourism Industry

In the last five years the South Korean government has sought to turn its booming domestic plastic surgery industry into an international one and since 2007, the number of medical tourists has quintupled from 20,000 to 100,000. Indeed, in my recent interview with a representative from Seoul Tourism Organization's Marketing Division, she conceded that despite this growth, their organization has focused little on advertising for its cosmetic surgery market. She observed that *Hallyu* (the Korean Wave) is their advertising given its worldwide popularity. Referring to South Korean popular culture forms from music to film to television serials, the representative underscored *Hallyu* actors, storylines and aesthetics' effectiveness in bringing in overseas patients.

By focusing on popular television serials (*Before and After Plastic Surgery Clinic*, *My Lovely Samsoon*, and *Boys Over Flowers*), this chapter asserts that South Korean dramas utilize neoliberal representational strategies that find synergy with medical tourism's marketing strategies. In illuminating the mutually constitutive nature of *Hallyu* and South Korea's medical tourism industry, this chapter argues that *Hallyu* and Korean dramas more specifically, not only regulate social anxieties about plastic surgery but also act as transnational "technologies of subjectivity" that proliferate neoliberal mandates championing the consumer market and cosmetic surgery in particular. I contend that these cultural productions construct a fantasy space for viewers that, depending on their geopolitical location, enacts either nostalgic or

aspirational “Korean Dreams.” The medical tourism industry plays on such dreams posing cosmetic surgery, and traveling to South Korea to undergo it, as a rational economic investment in part because of how it is affectively tied to *Hallyu*’s narrative and representational strategies.

CHAPTER FOUR. “Love Your Body:” Lookism, Feminist Organizing, and Dangerous Corporations

South Korea’s neoliberal era has ushered in new standards for feminine self-empowerment that are measured on a scale of competitiveness on the labor and marriage market, displacing traditional emphases on motherhood as the definitive marker of femininity. Since South Korea’s 1997 IMF Crisis, rates of cosmetic surgery have risen to the highest per capita globally with recipients citing fierce competition for jobs as their major reason for undergoing procedures. As a result, South Korean feminists of the non-profit organization *Yŏsŏng Minuhoe*, known in English as Korean Womenlink, have taken to the streets holding signs emblazoned with the words, “Love your body the way it is.” Their “Love Your Body” campaign sought to strike at the heart of a salient feminist issue in contemporary South Korean society: “lookism” or the economic and social devaluation of women whose features do not conform to a modern beauty aesthetic that is productively shaped by Korean media, medical industries and histories of imperial racial formation.

This chapter provides a close examination of Womenlink’s “Love Your Body” campaign, through close reads of their satirical educational video, *Knifestyle*, archival documents, newspaper articles and interviews. While Asian American feminists, scholars and mainstream outlets focus on the salience of race in Asian/American cosmetic surgery consumption and other U.S. feminists largely focus on patriarchy, Womenlink’s campaign exemplifies how feminist organizing can, and should, address the intersections of these organizing logics with capitalism as a driving and many

times, predatory force. By focusing their campaign on the perhaps particularly South Korea concern of lookism, Womenlink centers the specific geopolitical concerns of contemporary South Korean women. In so doing, the “Love Your Body” campaign ceases to focus on the individual and her capacity to make rational or moderate choices and instead interrogates the predatory practices of the beauty industry itself.

CHAPTER ONE

LESSONS FROM “AROUND THE WORLD WITH OPRAH”: NEOLIBERALISM, RACE, AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF BEAUTY

On October 6, 2004, viewers went “Around the World with Oprah” and received a rare glimpse inside the lives of thirty year-old women from seventeen different countries.¹ Audiences learned that “21 percent of French women are overweight compared to a whopping 62 percent of Americans.”² Kuwaiti women were touted as having “extravagant lifestyles, complete with mansions and servants.”³ Oprah revealed that, on average, Cuban women have three husbands by the age of thirty. While these little-known “facts” may be interesting, the show highlighted them as unique and exotic precisely because of their marked difference from the perceived lifestyles and attitudes of 30 year-old American women. When Oprah turned her gaze (and that of middle-class American housewives) eastward, she highlighted Korean women’s penchant for plastic surgery as their defining exotic characteristic.⁴

¹ “The Oprah Winfrey Show,” *Around the World with Oprah* (Syndicated, October 6, 2004).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Oprah’s magazine readers may shed light on her television demographic, which seem to be largely female and middle class. According to <www.Oprah.com>, 13,265,000 people read *O*, the Oprah magazine. Of these, ninety percent are women with the median age of 43.1 years and a median household income of \$66,422. The website does not provide demographics according to race or region.

<www.Oprah.com> (accessed 15 April 2005).

The show's South Korea correspondent, and host of *National Geographic Ultimate Explorer*, Lisa Ling announced, "30 year-old South Korean women are going under the knife in droves, shedding traditional Korean looks for more Western features. [...] In Asian cultures, it's always been considered more beautiful if you have rounder eyes and more Western features."⁵ Obviously dismayed, Oprah tried to draw a parallel that her viewers might more readily relate to: "So is the idea not to look Asian? [...] I'm looking at those women. They still look Korean. That would be like me having surgery to not look black [...] I don't get it."⁶ Ling attempted to insert Korean women's self-image and subjectivity into the dialogue by underscoring their assertions that motherhood, not beauty, defines Korean femininity. The focus of the segment, however, remained not only on how much and what kinds of plastic surgery Korean women undergo, but also their motivations for doing so. These motivations were painted as the products of internalized racism and described as decidedly self-loathing.⁷

Oprah's "trip" to South Korea, as mediated by Ling, is emblematic of U.S. discourse surrounding South Korean women's plastic surgery consumption, most of

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ To be sure, plastic surgery has reached unparalleled heights in South Korea since the 1980s (when its economy peaked before the Economic Crisis of 1997), surpassing American consumption. While reports vary, a Korean weekly magazine reported in 1989 that somewhere between 20 to 30 percent of all unmarried Korean women in their early twenties have cosmetic surgery performed on their eyes, noses, mouths, or breasts. A more general statistic notes that in 2000, thirteen percent of Koreans engaged in some form of cosmetic surgery compared to three percent in the US. And, as stated previously, amongst the various procedures available to patients—everything from the standard breast enlargement to calf reductions—the double eyelid surgery or *ssangkeŏp'ul* procedure, is the most popular bodily alteration.

Dennis Michael Hart, *From Tradition to Consumption: The Rise of Materialist Culture in South Korea*, (Seoul: Jimoodang Publishers, 1991) 256.

Elizabeth Pyon, "Plastic Surgery Boom Changing Faces of Korea," *Korea Herald*, 4 February 2000, 1.

which—from *Oprah* to the *Wall Street Journal*—focuses on the double eyelid surgery or *ssangkekŏp’ul* procedure as it is called in Korea.⁸ Because of the racialized connotations of this particular procedure and the fact that it is by far the most popular amongst Korean and Korean American women, debates surrounding the *ssangkekŏp’ul* procedure revolve around questions of agency and choice. Most typically, these discourses reduce Korean women’s plastic surgery consumption to a desire to “not look Asian,” a “false consciousness” explanation exemplified by Oprah’s and Ling’s discursive treatment of South Korean women. Much as the veil has come to symbolize Middle Eastern women’s oppression in both popular and academic discourses, the *ssangkekŏp’ul* procedure has come to signify South Korean (and in many instances, Korean American) women’s acquiescence to not only patriarchal oppression but racial oppression as well.⁹ In both cases, U.S. discourses obfuscate Middle Eastern and South Korean women’s volition while essentializing and normalizing Euro-American women as liberated feminist subjects.¹⁰

⁸ In 1993, the *Asian Wall Street Journal* (this same article appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* the same month) featured an article entitled, “Urge to ‘Go Anglo’ Sends Koreans Scrambling to the Cosmetic Surgeon.” The article notes that the doctor’s patients include “Korea’s young and affluent women (and some men) who want to ‘go Anglo’ with Caucasoid features.”

Steve Glain, “Urge to ‘Go Anglo’ Sends Koreans Scrambling to the Cosmetic Surgeon,” *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 24 November 1993, 1.

The *ssangkekŏp’ul* procedure is the Romanization of the Korean: “쌍꺼풀 수술.”

⁹ For a brief discussion and overview of the veil in academic writing, see Sondra Hale’s “The West and Veiling,” <<http://www.international.ucla.edu/cnes/home/article.asp?parentid=14575>> (accessed 09 December 2007).

¹⁰ Scholars of gender and Middle Eastern studies have written against teleological narratives regarding modernity and women’s emancipation. In *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, Afsaneh Najmabadi contests understandings of modernity as necessarily liberatory using Iranian women’s unveiling as a case in point. Najmabadi asserts that Iranian women’s bodies were disciplined in new ways once they unveiled. Because the veil no longer contained the sexual energies thought to be inherent in women, it was replaced by an “invisible veil” or veil of chastity, which “was to be acquired through modern education, as an internal quality of the

This chapter seeks to go beyond the psychologization of these debates and of South Korean women in particular, in order to ask what such psychological musings—and their attendant discourses on “natural” and “normal” bodies—might instead obscure about the very political nature of beauty itself. As Victoria Pitts-Taylor writes, “the intensity of our focus on the subject” or patient “decenters other actors: the surgeons, the psychiatrists, the technologies, the media, the ideologies, the structure of medicine.”¹¹ Using “Around the World with Oprah” as a starting point, then, this chapter examines beauty at the intersection of race, technology, and (geo)politics in order to show that in an era of neoliberalism, plastic surgery itself is a neoliberal rationality that Oprah herself normalizes as such. Like other forms of self-management, self-care, and self-improvement, topics that lie at the core of Oprah’s shows, plastic surgery as well as racially marked forms of plastic surgery, is often rationalized as an investment in the self towards a more normal, if not better, future.¹² As this chapter will show, such a framing of plastic surgery is contingent on Oprah’s production of neoliberal feminist subjects vis-à-vis her espousal of a neoliberal feminism based on liberal notions of choice. Given her global reach, these

self. The body of modern woman was to contain its own unruly sexuality and shy away from its own public presence” (152). As such, women’s behaviors—embodied and discursive—changed significantly as a result of their newfound “freedom.”

Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Women’s Veil and Unveil” in *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 2005.

¹¹ Victoria Pitts-Taylor, *Surgery Junkies: Wellness and Pathology in Cosmetic Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007) 184.

¹² Throughout the dissertation I choose to use the term “racially marked plastic surgery” rather than “racialized plastic surgery” since all forms of plastic surgery forms, even those undertaken by white consumers, are racialized. The term “racially marked” instead nods to the ways in which nonwhite subjects and their acts are always already marked.

neoliberal feminist subjects are not produced equally, however, but are discursively constructed along a First World/Third World divide.

NEOLIBERALISM AND THE RISE OF OPRAH

The Oprah Winfrey Show is not the only global phenomenon to have come out of Chicago. Neoliberal economic theory was popularized in the United States by Milton Friedman of the University of Chicago School of neoliberalism, who won the Nobel Prize in economics in 1976.¹³ According to David Harvey, Chile was the first country to undertake the neoliberal experiment. The United States supported a successful coup d'état against Socialist president Salvador Allende in 1973, allowing Augusto Pinochet to bring in “the Chicago boys,” a group of Chilean economists who were trained at the University of Chicago School of neoliberalism (and were funded by the United States to do so), to restructure the Chile’s socialist economy in favor of the business elite.¹⁴ Keeping a watchful eye on the Chilean context, both the United States and Britain also turned to neoliberal policies in the early 1980s under the leadership of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher respectively.¹⁵ Globally, neoliberal policies have spread over the last 30 years under U.S. leadership of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, albeit unevenly.

¹³ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 22.

¹⁴ Harvey, *A Brief History*, 7 – 9.

¹⁵ About using Chile as a test case for neoliberal policy Harvey writes, “Not for the first time, a brutal experiment carried out in the periphery became a model for the formulation of policies in the centre (much as experimentation with the flat tax in Iraq has been proposed under Bremer’s decrees)” (Harvey, *A Brief History*, 9).

As economic policy, neoliberalism promotes the freedom of the market through deregulation and privatization at the expense of collective good by cutting public expenditure of social services.¹⁶ Domestically, such policies had dramatic effects during the Reagan administration and thereafter. New markets opened due to the deregulation of everything from telecommunications to airlines. Deindustrialization and capital flight abroad became more and more common while labor unions were increasingly under attack. Meanwhile, corporate and top personal tax rates were cut, opening doors for monopoly consolidation.¹⁷ Yet, as many scholars assert, neoliberalism does not simply shift state functions to the private sector but also functions as a mode of governmentality that shifts strategies of government to private individuals. Thus, as Wendy Brown contends, the effects of neoliberal governmentality are far-reaching from the “soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire.”¹⁸ Neoliberalism works on an ideological level so that neoliberal subjects are interpellated as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life and are thus “controlled *through* their freedom.”¹⁹ Moral autonomy is measured by a capacity for self-care and the ability to make choices that will benefit

¹⁶ Elizabeth Martinez and Arnoldo Garcia outline five main points of neoliberalism in “Neo-liberalism Defined”: 1) Total freedom of movement for capital, goods and services 2) Cutting public expenditure of social services 3) Deregulation 4) Privatization and 5) Eliminating the concept of “The Public Good” for “Individual Responsibility.” These scholar activists assert that neoliberalism has amounted to nothing short of neocolonialism abroad. “Neo-liberalism Defined,” <<http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/econ101/neoliberalDefined.html>> (accessed 27 June 2007).

¹⁷ Harvey takes issue with assumptions that neoliberalism is a set of economic policies that have inadvertently classed effects. Harvey asserts that from their onset in the United States and abroad, the neoliberal turn has served to reconsolidate class power.

¹⁸ Wendy Brown, “Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” *Theory & Event* 7, no. 1 (2003), 3.

¹⁹ Brown, “Neo-liberalism,” 7.

the citizen no matter how constrained those choices are. The model neoliberal citizen, then, calculates her choices within multiple spheres—economic, political, social—rather than attempting to alter these spheres. And since everything is measured as a calculation or purchase, neoliberal governmentality affects everything from our evaluations of “right and wrong” to life choices, like college education or the decision to undergo plastic surgery.

Such a proliferation of neoliberal governmentality as common sense has required ideological and cultural work, however.²⁰ In seeking to understand how consent for neoliberalism as a hegemonic discourse was constructed in the 1970s, Harvey asserts that “we must look [...] to the qualities of everyday experience.”²¹ In this vein, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* provides a window into examining how neoliberal rationalities are proliferated within contemporary U.S. cultural landscape precisely because of her focus on the everyday. Significantly, Oprah departed from the modern day talk show format established by Phil Donahue in favor of one that tells real people’s stories. Instead of tackling politics, scandals, and world news—at least not exclusively—the Oprah show examines “the trivial,” or the “microscopic texture of everyday life.”²² Oprah does not just document everyday life, however, but

²⁰ In “A Short History of Neoliberalism,” Susan George reminds us that neoliberalism is a constructed set of ideas with which a small group of elites has struggled to capture hegemony. George contends that once we realize that it is a constructed set of ideas, we can realize that another set of ideas can someday replace it.
<<http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/econ101/neoliberalism.html>> (accessed 27 June 2007).

²¹ Harvey, *A Brief History*, 40 – 1.

²² Eva Illouz, *Oprah Winfrey and the Glamour of Misery: An Essay on Popular Culture*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 51.

significantly influences it through her everyday reach into the lives of her viewers vis-à-vis her daily television show and the rest of her multimedia global empire. In other words, Oprah's show is part and parcel of the ways in which civil society also engenders neoliberalism, which, as Michel Foucault describes, extends "the rationality of the market, the schemes of analysis it proposes, and the decision making criteria it suggests to areas that are not exclusively or primarily economic."²³

As Ronald Reagan's neoliberal policies took center stage in the United States, so too did Oprah as what cultural studies scholar Eva Illouz calls "a biographical icon."²⁴ Unlike other celebrity success that hinges on beauty and youth, Oprah's notoriety has been built on her "therapeutic biography."²⁵ Since her show went national in 1986, Americans have been privy, not only to her humble beginnings as a Mississippi schoolgirl but also to her personal revelations about child abuse, poor self-esteem, and drug use. In sharing these stories, however, Oprah does not focus on the hardship itself so much as her ability to overcome the psychological obstacles these hardships posed. Time and again, Oprah has presented herself as "a female response to Horatio Alger, offering a feminine parody of the masculine myth of self-help."²⁶

My use of Oprah's first name throughout this chapter (Oprah as opposed to Winfrey) is intentional. Because she demands to be known globally, not as "Ms. Winfrey" but merely as "Oprah," I use her first name to highlight the unforeseen effects of the familiarity she herself cultivates.

²³ Michel Foucault, "The Birth of Biopolitics," in *Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 1, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1994) 73 – 80.

²⁴ Illouz, *Oprah Winfrey*, 30.

²⁵ Illouz, *Oprah Winfrey*, 34.

²⁶ Illouz, *Oprah Winfrey*, 33.

Perhaps more importantly, however, her “therapeutic biography” is ultimately put in the service of her viewers. Oprah uses herself as an example of women’s potentiality to achieve and self-manage despite gender, race, class or psychological adversity. In so doing, Oprah positions herself as “every woman” although she is one of the most influential and wealthiest people, not only in the United States but also in the world. Oprah consistently brings her own personal advisors and trainers on her show, making their knowledge and thus help available for mass consumption usually through their mass marketed self-help books or programs. As such, Oprah fuses self-care with the consumer market by drawing

...on the basic therapeutic creed that we are perfectible and that identity can and perhaps ought to be shaped by willful self-management and introspection. This creed is congruent with a structural feature of the consumer market: both therapeutic and consumer activities are set into motion by a state of perpetual dissatisfaction and a Sisyphean desire to fashion and improve one’s own self. *The Oprah Winfrey Show* solicits the viewer-consumer within this fine and dual dynamic of dissatisfaction and self-improvement.²⁷

By sharing her story, Oprah impels her guests and her viewers to share their own therapeutic narrative and begin their own self-made journey to self-improvement, which often begins in the consumer market.

These therapeutic imperatives find synergy with the political and economic ones at the crux of neoliberalism. In particular, we find such rhetoric undergirding Republican Party values, which privilege discourses of individual solutions to social problems. In this capacity, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* can be seen as a “technology of subjectivity.” Anthropologist Ahiwa Ong suggests that “technologies of subjectivity

²⁷ Illouz, *Oprah Winfrey*, 164.

rely on an array of knowledge and expert systems to induce self-animation and self-government so that citizens can optimize choices, efficiency, and competitiveness in turbulent market conditions.”²⁸ Indeed, by marrying the therapeutic world with the consumer market and by employing multifarious self-help experts in multiple arenas, Oprah Winfrey offers her viewers multiple modes of “self-animation and self-government.” Through confession and therapeutic advice from Oprah herself as well as professionals, through community building amongst audience members and other guests as well as countless others on her website, the Oprah show simply put, helps people deal with their lives. In many ways, however, this “help” puts forth a logic that is in tune with the neoliberal rationalities that have become so commonplace in every sphere of life since the Reagan administration. Thus, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* is a powerful global media form that buttresses neoliberalism as social ethos.

Given Oprah’s positionality as an African American woman and that her audience is largely female, her espousal of neoliberal rationalities is in many instances specifically gendered. Oprah, the richest woman in entertainment and the only black female billionaire, is perceived as a beacon of both feminine and African American success.²⁹ Moreover, Oprah has made it clear that a priority of the show is “to empower women,” to be what narrative studies scholar Corinne Squire calls

²⁸ Aihwa Ong, *neoliberalism as exception: mutations in citizenship and sovereignty*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 6.

²⁹ “In Pictures: The Richest 20 Women in Entertainment,”
<http://www.forbes.com/2007/01/17/richest-women-entertainment-tech-media-cz_lg_richwomen07_0118womenstars_slide_2.html> (accessed 09 December 2007).

“televisual feminism.”³⁰ I argue that Oprah’s televisual feminism is a brand of neoliberal feminism that equates female empowerment with (consumer) choice.

According to transnational feminist cultural studies scholar Inderpal Grewal, this kind of consumerization of feminism has become widespread:

Empowerment, self-esteem, and self-help through spiritual and new age movements, exercise and health club attendance, and talk shows and books on the topic, along with new manifestations of cosmopolitanisms, became key to dominant feminist practices [by the end of twentieth century].³¹

Just as Oprah’s show marries therapeutic discourses with consumer culture through the privileging of self-fashioning, so too does Oprah’s show like western feminism more generally, yoke feminism to consumer culture through a privileging of choice. As Grewal outlines, in activist circles internationally against domestic violence or in favor of reproductive rights, feminists have largely posed “having choices” as the opposite of “being oppressed.” This centering of choice as a representation of feminist agency has created a situation in which “feminism was engaged in a struggle with neoliberalism but also dependent on it for its existence,” since “the concept of choice is essential to participation in democracy as well as to consumer culture.”³²

As we shall see in the following section, neoliberal feminism, and Oprah’s espousal of it, is not neutral but rather, serves to discursively construct South Korean women only in relation to American women, erecting a First World/Third World

³⁰ Corinne Squire, “Empowering Women? The Oprah Winfrey Show” in *media studies: A Reader Second Edition*, eds. Paul Marris and Sue Thornham (New York: New York University Press, 2000) 354 – 355.

³¹ Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 16.

³² Grewal, *Transnational America*, 28.

divide. Moreover, by psychologizing South Korean women, “Around the World with Oprah” elides the ways in which neoliberal rationalities govern the bodies of both Western and non-Western women.

NEOLIBERAL FEMINISM AND “AROUND THE WORLD WITH OPRAH”

Nowhere is the link between consumer culture, feminism and neoliberalism more evident in “Around the World with Oprah” than in her treatment of American consumers of plastic surgery. In the following segment, we see the logic of the market informing Oprah’s interpretation of Americans electing plastic surgery procedures in Brazil:

WINFREY: Thank you. I hear Brazil is known as the mecca of plastic surgery. It is, right?

Ms. LING: Huge numbers of operations happen and, in fact, a lot...

WINFREY: That a lot of American women...

Ms. LING: A lot of Americans, because it’s significantly less expensive. I’ve traveled throughout South America—Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil—and I’m always shocked by how many American women I encounter there because it’s less expensive and you can vacation in Rio while you’re—while you’re recovering.

WINFREY: Get a bikini wax, wear a thong, and go home.

Ms. LING: Yeah.³³

Without a trace of irony, Oprah and Ling, on the heels of the South Korean segment on plastic surgery, deem Brazil the “mecca of plastic surgery” and note that “Huge

³³ *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, October 6, 2004.

numbers of operations happen.” In marked contrast to the South Korean segment, American (ostensibly white) women are lauded for their economic investment as Oprah and Ling make note of American women’s cost-effective choice to undergo cosmetic surgery and vacation at the same time. As such, Oprah and Ling highlight American women’s abilities to “optimize choices, efficiency, and competitiveness in turbulent market conditions.”

Not only does this failure highlight American women’s capacity for neoliberal rationality but it also animates liberal assumptions that Euro-American (read: white) subjects, guided by their individuality, are able to make choices in ways that non-American subjects cannot. In other words, Americans electing plastic surgery in Brazil are not only choosing to do so for somehow “better” reasons than their Korean counterparts, but smart enough to do it for cheap, and in a tropical location at that. Thus, we see what Chandra Mohanty, in her now seminal “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” characterizes as a First World/Third World divide.³⁴ And the demarcation is clear: Euro-American women are characterized as “educated, as modern, as having control over their bodies and

³⁴ In her newer “Under Western Eyes Revisited,” Mohanty admits that she now prefers the “One-Third/Two-Thirds Worlds” demarcation rather to the more outdated “Western/Third World.” While the former is a non-essentialist categorization, she asserts that it “misses the history of colonization that the terms Western/Third World draw attention to” (227). In order to highlight the U.S. continued neocolonial relationship to Korea, I have chosen to use these terms throughout this chapter. American media forms and media empires like Oprah’s especially, continue to have discursively colonial relationships with non-Western nations even if they are, like Korea, Second World economically. Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes Revisited,” in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) 227.

sexualities, and [exercising] the freedom to make their own decisions.”³⁵ The “average third world woman” is a necessary part of such discursive self-representations of Euro-American women, thus seemingly stabilizing Western feminism even as it continues to be a contested site at home. In marked contrast, the “average third world woman” “leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized etc.).”³⁶

In this case, however, South Korea’s status as an “industrial tiger” complicates the construction of South Korean women as “average third world women.”³⁷ After its political independence from Japan in 1945 and the subsequent Korean War, South Korea rapidly industrialized in the 1960s and 1970s under the dictatorial regime of Park Chung-hee. By the 1980s, the fruits of such industrialization were realized by a burgeoning middle class with money to spend and a flourishing consumer culture

³⁵ Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) 56.

³⁶ Ibid.

Leti Volpp makes an almost identical argument, in “Feminism versus Multiculturalism,” contending that in contrast to third world women Western women are portrayed as “liberated, and in total control of their lives. But the assumption that Western women enjoy complete liberation is a product of discursive self-representation, which contrasts Western women’s enlightenment with the suffering of the “Third World woman.”

Leti Volpp, “Feminism versus Multiculturalism,” *Columbia Law Review* 101, no. 5 (2001), 1198 -99.

³⁷ In his chapter, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory,’” Aijaz Ahmad contends that the First World/Third World binary falls apart when one considers that “countries of the Pacific rim, from South Korea to Singapore, constitute the fastest growing region within global capitalism. The list could be much longer, but the point is that the binary opposition which Jameson constructs between a capitalist First World and a presumable pre- or non-capitalist Third World is empirically ungrounded in any facts.”

Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, (London: Verso, 1992) 101.

within which to spend it. Thus, South Korea's rapid modernization created multiple spaces in which tradition and modernity collide. As a result, South Korea, like Japan, is often depicted as a place run amuck with technology, which often gets recoded as perverted excess. In other words, South Korea's technological advancement as well as Korean middle-class participation in bourgeoisie lifestyles, aptly symbolized by cosmetic surgery consumption, aggravates American anxieties much in the same way Japan's status as an economic threat to the U.S.—vis-à-vis their dominance of the automobile industry—did in the 1980s.³⁸ Rather than the “poor, uneducated, tradition-bound” Third World woman, then, South Korean women in this instance are constructed as an “other” defined by the excesses of modern consumption. Moreover, this discursive representation exists alongside that of Euro-American women whose consumption is implicitly represented as rationally self-controlled.

We see this dynamic in motion in “Around the World with Oprah.” Although “Around the World with Oprah” departs from the standard format of the Oprah show, which typically exports American suffering abroad, offering instead a postmodern pastiche of international women's experiences for American consumption, we see the therapeutic narrative at play in Oprah's treatment of Korean women.³⁹ Part and parcel of the therapeutic narrative is the identification of a psychological problem or maladjustment. Clearly here, since the Korean plastic

³⁸ Perhaps the most well-known consequence of American anxieties, animosities and fears towards Japan's success within the automobile industry is the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin who was killed in Detroit, Michigan during an altercation with two ex-employees of Ford who thought he was Japanese.

³⁹ Illouz, *Oprah Winfrey*, 167.

surgery craze is described as the outcome of Korean women's desire to look "more Western," Oprah (with the help of Ling) identifies Korean women's malady as internalized racism:

Ms. LING: I think there's a desire—in Asian cultures, it's always been considered more beautiful if you have rounder eyes and more Western features. I mean, if you notice on my eye—I'm Chinese—I have this sort of flap of skin over my eyes. What's happening in Asia is they're lifting this skin and making it more deep-set, and it's happening so frequently in Korea that a lot of women do it before they even get married. They destroy all the pictures.

WINFREY: So is the idea not to look Asian? Because you—I'm looking at those women. They still look Korean.

Ms. LING: They still look Asian.

WINFREY: That would be like me having surgery to not look black.

Ms. LING: Not look black. Right.

WINFREY: You still look black to me, you know.

Ms. LING: I know.

WINFREY: I don't get it. Yeah.⁴⁰

In her efforts to put Korean women's experiences within the US context, Oprah translates Korean women's experiences as equivalent to that of Oprah "having surgery to not look black," something that, in the American context, signals pathology of the worst kind. Significantly, the issue at hand is not cosmetic surgery itself but the implicit idea that Korean women's choices are constrained by internalized racism, making some choices better than others. Thus, (unfettered)

⁴⁰ *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, October 6, 2004.

choice becomes a measuring stick for feminist liberation and Korean women fall short.

Oprah is able to draw this parallel precisely because she is not white and as such, her blackness gives her the currency with which to name South Korean women's actions and desires as they relate to whiteness. This statement assumes that biological essentialisms correlate to race and that South Korean women and black women have a shared relationship to whiteness as *women of color*. Critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw writes that in the same way that "women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color," women of color experience "sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women."⁴¹ Crenshaw thus critiques the idea of "woman" as a unitary, universal subject. Similarly, I argue here that there is no unitary, universal subject called "woman of color." While South Korean women and black women are engaged in overlapping struggles as members of a globalized world, structured and dominated by institutionalized white supremacy, translating South Korean women's experiences solely through the lens of African American women's experiences effaces the specific historical contingencies and cultural meanings that create South Korean women's contemporary situation. As such, Oprah's statement effectively centers American women and represents South Korean women only in relation to that universal subject.

⁴¹ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color" in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberle Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gay Teller, and Kendall Thomas (New York: New Press, 1995) 360.

Accordingly, Oprah's show, like other debates on plastic surgery, creates a distinction between non-racialized and racialized plastic surgery forms based on assumptions about "natural" and "normal" body types. In the following segment on 30-year old Brazilian women, this logic regarding racially marked plastic surgery forms takes a different turn:

WINFREY: This is so cool, seeing how 30-year-olds live around the world. Our next stop, Brazil. Now if you're a 30-year-old woman in Brazil, you're spending quite a bit of time in a thong at the beach, so having a beautiful bum is a must. Listen to this: They do more bottom implants there than anywhere else in the world. Can you imagine?

Ms. LING: They gotta shake it.

WINFREY: They gotta shake it. Here we go. OK. Take a look.⁴²

Rather than the bewilderment and judgment resounding through Oprah's reactions to the Korean segment, the assertion that Brazilian women get "bottom implants" garners a more neutral, if not playful reaction. In fact, Oprah does not uphold trenchant feminist views that categorize all forms of plastic surgery as gendered bodily mutilations but instead seems to find Brazilian women's engagements with "bottom implants," an ostensibly racially marked plastic surgery form, normal since "They gotta shake it." Unlike Korean women, who Oprah perceives as electing racially marked plastic surgery "not to look Asian," the assumption undergirding this

⁴² *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, October 6, 2004.

segment is that Brazilian women, known for their curvaceous backsides, want to look like themselves.⁴³

According to gender and cultural studies scholar Kathleen Zane, such assumptions about the way people do and should look actually reify socially constructed hierarchical notions of racialized traits. Speaking specifically to assumptions about the “Asian eye,” Zane contends that “Like the ‘Oriental’-ized script used for representing Asianness in titles or signs [...] the Asian eye (a slashed icon) is a racialized inscription identifying the Asian as Other.”⁴⁴ That is to say, racialized physical traits from the “Asian eye” to the Brazilian backside, are parts of a Western representational system that enacts power and domination through representation and thus, posits the white body as “normal.” These assumptions obscure the fact that all forms of plastic surgery are both gendered and racialized, even those procedures performed on white women (and men). As Kathy Davis explains: “White women, with their ostensibly ‘unmarked’ identities, participate in the privilege and oppressive mentality of Northern European ideals of feminine beauty

⁴³ Technically, Korean women are attempting to look like other Korean women. Somewhere between 25 and 50 percent of Koreans are born with the epicanthic fold. Moreover, significant circulation of Korean dramas and pop music around the world has made Korean beauty hegemonic within Asia and Asian American communities, the subject of chapter three. In many cases, Korean and Asian American women strive not to emulate whiteness so much as to emulate the looks of Korean actresses and pop stars.

Sandy Kobrin, “Asian-Americans See Negative Side to Eyelid Surgery,” *Chicago Tribune*, 25 August 2004, sec. Women’s eNews, 1.

⁴⁴ Kathleen Zane, “Reflections on a Yellow Eye: Asian I(\Eye/)Cons and Cosmetic Surgery” in *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*, ed. Ellen Shohat (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 167.

when they have cosmetic surgery, making it a specifically ethnicized and racialized practice.”⁴⁵

The type of intense scrutiny of cosmetic surgery patients of color exemplified by Oprah and Ling is particular to the United States as a reflection of its racial anxieties and has given way to “ethnic appropriate” forms of plastic surgery in the United States. In her book, *Surgery Junkies: Wellness and Pathology in Cosmetic Culture*, Pitts-Taylor reads an episode of *Extreme Makeover*, the first in a string of plastic surgery reality shows, featuring a Filipina woman. The show’s producers and doctors take great pains to present her makeover and “ethnic cosmetic surgery” in general as “more multicultural, less whitening, and thus more acceptable for people of color.”⁴⁶ These sentiments seem to match up with Oprah’s lines in the proverbial sand: less whitening, more acceptable for people of color.

It would make sense, then, that Asian Americans electing the *ssangkkŏp’ul* procedure would also receive the kind of discursive treatment exemplified by Oprah’s South Korea segment. Interestingly enough, however, some media reports treat Asian Americans differently than their diasporic counterparts. *The Los Angeles Sentinel* reported in 2002 that Asian American cosmetic surgery consumption had increased by 300 percent while Latinos experienced a 200 percent increase compared to a 34 percent increase in white patients between 1999 and 2001. The article cites three main reasons, taken from the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive

⁴⁵ Kathy Davis, *Dubious Equalities and Embodied Differences: Cultural Studies on Cosmetic Surgery* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003) 99.

⁴⁶ Pitts-Taylor, *Surgery Junkies*, 49.

Surgery, for this jump in numbers—a growing middle-class with expendable income, medical advances that reduce scarring for darker-skinned patients and finally, that “the American media has helped awareness that a single standard of beauty no longer exists in multi-ethnic America.”⁴⁷ Despite the fact that the article goes on to affirm that the *ssangkekŏp’ul* procedure is the most popular (presumably amongst the Asian American patients), it asserts that minority patients “seek to enhance rather than shed their ethnicity.”⁴⁸

This juxtaposition between Oprah’s treatment of South Korean women and *The Los Angeles Sentinel’s* treatment of Asian Americans illustrates what Elizabeth Haiken calls “The Michael Jackson Factor.” Haiken writes that “Jackson’s haunting face signals not only that all is not well in never-never land; it suggests that something larger has gone awry in twentieth-century North America.”⁴⁹ Racially marked plastic surgeries invoke not only uneasy feelings about the patient’s well being but about the well being of the nation as a whole. In other words, “the fact that the image of America [Michael Jackson’s] face reflects is so unflattering accounts for much of our discomfort.”⁵⁰ The urge to avoid this “image of America,” helps explain why the Asian American case is characterized so differently from the South Korean one.

Clearly, then, racially marked plastic surgery conjures up racial anxieties in the U.S. context and in “Around the World with Oprah,” Oprah maps both U.S. notions

⁴⁷ “Rise in Minority Patients, Other Trends in Facial Plastic Surgery,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 16 May 2002, A13.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Haiken, *Venus Envy: A History of Cosmetic Surgery* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) 177.

⁵⁰ Haiken, *Venus Envy*, 182.

of race as well as their attendant racial anxieties onto South Korean women. In so doing, Oprah obscures geopolitical and historical specificities of the Korean context despite South Korean women's attempts to insert their own subjectivities into the narrative. Returning then, to Oprah's South Korean segment, we see this silencing in effect when Ling states that "everyone I spoke with agrees the thing that most defines a South Korean woman is her role as a mother."⁵¹ Following this statement, Ling's interviewee states that taking "care of my children is—I think is the very happiest thing in my life." Another woman declares that, "Korean women are very strong moms."⁵² Oprah, visible with disdain, says, "I don't get it [...] But the women are really still concerned about their families..." to which Ling replies, "Absolutely."⁵³ Implicit in Oprah's statement is that these two issues, South Korean women engaging in plastic surgery and their self-conception as good mothers, cannot exist simultaneously. In other words, "excessive" modern consumption does not a traditional mother make! Thus, not only are South Korean women silenced—and Oprah and Ling's commentary about them given more authority—but Korean women's reverence for the traditional role of motherhood is painted as irreconcilable with South Korea's (post)modernity. As such, Oprah's segment not only fails to address the historical and social forces shaping South Korean women's subjectivities but also *produces* Korean women outside of their own self-conceptions.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, October 6, 2004.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ According to feminist scholar Cho Haejoang, compulsory motherhood remains consistent with current demands on South Korean women to be at once maternal, youthful and sexy as well as

The colonizing effect of these discourses are powerful precisely because their effects are not isolated but rather, inform relations between First World and Third World women as well as relations between various types of women within the landscape of the United States. Oprah's assertions that South Korean women want to "not look Asian" as well as her non-verbal reactions reproduce American audiences' opinions not only about South Korean women but also about Korean American women and perhaps Asian American women as well since Asian ethnic groups have historically been lumped together within US racial paradigms. Women of color within American national borders are often framed in similar ways as their international counterparts.⁵⁵ Asian Americans, particularly marked by dominant American culture as "perpetual foreigners," are especially susceptible to the interchangeability between Asians abroad with Asians at home.⁵⁶

As such, ideas about Asian American women's foreignness and difference are fueled by representations like those in Oprah's South Korea segment. Orientalist claims about South Korea are ever more complicated, however, by Lisa Ling's

career-oriented just as Ling's respondent suggests when she says "Korean women are very strong moms" despite their cosmetic surgery consumption.

Cho Haejoang, "Living with Conflicting Subjectivities: Mother, Motherly Wife, and Sexy Woman in the Transition from Colonial-Modern to Postmodern Korea" in *Under Construction: The Gendering of Modernity, Class, and Consumption in the Republic of Korea*, ed. Laura Kendall (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002) 165 – 196.

⁵⁵ In her book, *Compositional Subjects: Asian/American Women*, Laura Kang shows how representations of Asian and Asian American women are necessarily related. By focusing on four popularized figures of Asian/American women—writing self, desiring body, national citizen, and transnational worker—Kang shows how Asian/American women have been figured through mutually imbricated modes of identity formation.

Laura Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Asian/American Women* (Durham: Duke University Press) 2002.

⁵⁶ Perhaps the most well-known consequence of American anxieties, animosities and fears towards Japan's success within the automobile industry is the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin who was killed in Detroit, Michigan during an altercation with two ex-employees of Ford who thought he was Japanese.

positionality as an Asian American woman. Although Ling is not specifically Korean American, given that the racial schema of the U.S. conflates all Asian ethnic and even Pacific Islander groups into one category, Ling's status as an Asian American serves these purposes adequately. Much like the other experts Oprah employs on her shows—life strategists, psychologists, home decorators—Ling, as a person of Asian descent, stands in as an “expert” on Asia, thus being authorized to make historical and even psychological claims.

Accordingly, Ling's assertion that, “In Asian cultures, it's always been considered more beautiful if you have rounder eyes and more Western features,” is particularly discursively violent to Korean women given her “authority.” Ling's use of the word “always” stabilizes and fixes Western facial features as the normative beauty ideal in Asia while also erasing historical contingencies that have made these ideals hegemonic or more specifically, the historically uneven colonial and neo-colonial relationships through which the U.S. has engaged Asia. Thus, just as Oprah's blackness allows her to speak about women of color's relationships to whiteness, Ling's Asianness gives her license to speak for all Asians. The fact that Ling's (as well as Oprah's) race is put into service within this segment is clear when one imagines the discomfort that might result from a white correspondent making similar claims. Thus, the show's application of an a priori homogenous notion of women (of color) to women in Korea, not only robs them of their own historical and political agency and subjectivity, once again centering American women as the

ultimate referent to others' experiences, but also serves to homogenize Asian women and women of color's experiences more generally on the domestic front.

Ironically, Oprah and Ling liken South Korean women to U.S. women of color in ways that flatten their crucial differences but fail to connect South Korean and American women vis-à-vis their neoliberal justifications for engaging in plastic surgery. In Oprah's South Korean segment, Ling notes that "Korean women say looking more Western means you have better chance of getting a good job and finding a husband."⁵⁷ That is to say, Korean women do not describe their motivations for electing plastic surgery as a desire to "not look Asian" but rather as acts of self-entrepreneurship and management, the very neoliberal rationalities espoused by Oprah herself. Although both Ling and Oprah gloss over these explanations in favor of racialized ones, Elizabeth Lee's documentary film, *good for her*, offers a counterpoint to Oprah's Orientalist depictions of Korean women.

Written, directed and produced by Korean American filmmaker Elizabeth Lee, *good for her* is a Fulbright Foundation funded documentary film that hit the Asian American film festival circuit in 2004, the same year that "Around the World with

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas assert that people are not only more active in their choices regarding health, recovery and self-care but are increasingly holding themselves responsible for the aspects of their health and body that are under their control. Significantly, they point out how medical technologies are particularly salient ways through which modern citizen subjects remake themselves, echoing the imperatives of neoliberal governmentality that proffer individuals as responsible for their own self-cultivation and management.

Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas, "Biological Citizenship" in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, eds. Aihwa Ong and Steven J. Collier (Boston: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) 439 – 463.

Oprah” aired.⁵⁸ In *good for her* Lee attempts to tell a multilayered story about the multiple subjectivities of Korean women and begins this process with her own self-reflexive insights. She asks, what if cosmetic surgery in South Korea might be “a means by which to access power in Korean society.”⁵⁹ In order to find out, Lee explains, “I needed to take the conversations outside the confines of my Western head and bring it into classrooms, homes and coffee shops in Seoul and seek my answers that way.”⁶⁰ Notably, this self-reflexive and self-conscious process composes the first five minutes of Lee’s film, signaling her attention to the possible and probable elisions her documentary, as an act of translation, might entail.

Through multiple sections titled, “power in being like others,” “power external,” “understanding her power,” and “power internal,” Lee offers a picture of Korean women that highlights their engagement with cosmetic surgery as agentive. The women in Lee’s film reveal the multiple ways in which Korean women utilize or conceive of plastic surgery as a means of navigating the terrain of Korean womanhood in an unduly competitive society. For example, 24 year old Jieun Oh, a student at Ewha University likens the *ssangkekkŏp’ul* procedure to making an investment: “I think changing yourself by means of plastic surgery is like making an investment on yourself and caring for yourself.”⁶¹ Such an investment has very real practical impetuses as well as implications. As another interviewee states, “the economic situation has gotten even worse (since the Economic Crisis of 1997). There

⁵⁸ *good for her*, dir. by Elizabeth Lee (2004; Fulbright Foundation, video).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

are so many people that need employment but only a handful get jobs. So naturally, the competition has become fierce. People try to have better English abilities than others. For women, a better face and height, which is also important.”⁶²

Lee’s interviewee alludes to the Economic Crisis of 1997 also known as the Asian Debt Crisis and in South Korea, the IMF Crisis, which began on November 21, 1997 when South Korea became the subject of IMF bailout because it lacked the American dollars necessary to pay back loans from foreign financial institutions. Under the neoliberal regime of Kim Dae Jung, South Korea’s first civilian president who took office but a month after the crisis began, South Korea’s unemployment rates soared and workfare policies were implemented.⁶³ According to Jesook Song, neoliberalism in South Korea has become a “social ethos of moral-economic value that gains its explanatory power through a wide variety of social agents.”⁶⁴ As Song suggests, neoliberal governmentality, as evidenced by Lee’s subjects, is as much a concern in South Korea as it is in the United States.⁶⁵ Although Lee’s depiction of South Korean women is markedly different from Oprah’s given her attention to their agency, Lee—like Oprah—fails to look beyond cosmetic surgery consumption as an

⁶² Ibid.

Interestingly, male plastic surgery patients usually cite employment as their main motivation although as we see here, it is also a popular motivation for women. While plastic surgery rates for Korean men, as for American men, have increased in recent years, women still dominate the market. American men also cite competition in the job market as their number one reason for electing plastic surgery.

⁶³ Jesook Song, “Family Breakdown and Invisible Homeless Women: Neoliberal Governance during the Asian Debt Crisis in South Korea, 1997 – 2001” *positions* 14, no. 1 (2006), 40 – 42.

⁶⁴ Song, “Family Breakdown,” 55.

⁶⁵ Neoliberal governmentality is perhaps even more of a concern for South Korean people than for Americans or at least manifests in more obvious ways within South Korea’s structure of labor. For example, photos are required along with resumes making appearance an immediately crucial factor on the job market.

individual choice in order to question neoliberalism as a “social ethos of moral-economic value.”

In “Under Western Eyes Revisited,” Mohanty reflects on her seminal essay some ten years after the fact. Mohanty illuminates that in writing about the difference between First and Third World women she had hoped to illuminate how “difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully.”⁶⁶ Similarly, in underscoring the limitations of translating South Korean women’s experiences through the lens of U.S. women of color, we also see that neoliberalism as both economic policy and governmentality and its attendant neoliberal feminism, are universal concerns affecting both American and Korean women (amongst others). While Oprah focuses on the racialized connotations of Korean women’s plastic surgery consumption, Lee focuses on their ability to access power and negotiate Korean femininity through that consumption. Neither, however, problematizes their subjects’ neoliberal rationalities nor the free market ideology governing their bodies. Moreover, neither connects booming rates of cosmetic surgery consumption in both the United States and South Korea. That is to say, by focusing on the individual, both Lee and Oprah neglect to ask what global conditions might allow for this kind of mass consumption of cosmetic surgery on the part of women all around the world. It is precisely such questions that the psychologization of South Korean women and an overdetermined focus on rational choice obscures.

⁶⁶ Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes Revisited,” 226.

CONCLUSION

The South Korean segment was cut out of subsequent airings of the show, narrowing Oprah's trip around the world to a mere sixteen, rather than seventeen countries. Presumably, outcries from South Korean and Korean American fans, as documented on Oprah.com's message boards, as well as organized demands for a public apology prompted Oprah to leave the segment on the cutting room floor. Although this deletion perhaps signals the sensitivity of the Oprah genre to viewer commentary, no official statement or public apology was ever released. While *The Oprah Winfrey Show* has undoubtedly brought much needed attention to global and domestic issues of other sorts, raising awareness and resources for causes such as AIDS relief in Africa, to dismiss the lessons from *Around the World with Oprah* because of Oprah's philanthropic work elsewhere, misses the other types of cultural insight the Oprah show provides. Oprah Winfrey's continued attention to the everyday makes her show, and "Around the World with Oprah" in particular, an ideal site through which to expose the (geo)politics of beauty and beauty practices at the intersection of race, technology and neoliberalism.

The Oprah Winfrey Show purports to empower women as a feminist outlet for "women's political, economic and educational advancement."⁶⁷ As we have seen, however, "women" is a category that rests upon the universalization of "American women." And while "Around the World with Oprah" certainly tackles issues relevant to many women—beauty, dissatisfaction, body image and bodily

⁶⁷ Squire, "Empowering Women?," 357.

transformations—it also illuminates how neoliberal feminism, as espoused by Oprah, manages and constructs women’s relationships to one another domestically and across national borders through the televisual medium. While Oprah is largely thought to cater to a white, middle-class demographic in the US, the show is exported to 120 countries around the world and presumably, many of the women of these countries are Oprah’s mainstay viewers as well.⁶⁸ Thus, “Around the World with Oprah” provides many lessons with respect to transnational feminisms by exemplifying how the mapping of US racial logics onto other geopolitical contexts serves to discursively colonize. As such, the Oprah segment flattens the historical specificities that shape South Korean women’s lives and instead constructs them only in relation to American women. Such representations are powerful precisely in their ability to perpetuate US cultural hegemony while obscuring the political and economic structures that uphold US hegemony in general.

⁶⁸ Sheryl Wilson, *Oprah, Celebrity and Formations of Self*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003) 3.

CHAPTER TWO

CONSUMING COMMODITIES: BODY WORK, GENDER, AND MODERNITY IN SOUTH KOREAN FILM

MY BODY LIES
OVER THE OCEAN
MY BODY LIES OVER THE SEA
MY BODY LIES OVER THE DMZ
OH BRING BACK MY BODY TO ME
BRING BACK, BRING BACK, OH BRING BACK MY BODY
TO ME.¹

- Yong Soon Min, *Kindred Distance*

In 2006, the South Korean film *200 Pounds Beauty* (미녀는 괴로워 2006) garnered over 6.23 million admissions, making it a sleeper hit and South Korea's most successful comedy to date.² Surpassing even *Shiri*'s (쉬리 1999) 6.21 million box office admissions, *200 Pounds Beauty* is the eighth biggest box office draw in South Korean cinematic history.³ Criticized in some circles, on the one hand, as pro-plastic surgery and hailed by others, on the other hand, as a satirical indictment of

¹ Yong Soon Min, "Kindred Distance," in *Vestiges of War: The Philippine American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899 – 1999*, ed. Angel Shaw et al. (New York: NYU Press, 2002), 300.

² Nigel D'Sa, "200 Pounds Beauty Weighs in at Box Office," *HanCinema: The Korean Movie and Drama Database*, February 2, 2007, accessed December 1, 2010, <http://www.hancinema.net/200-pounds-beauty-weighs-in-at-the-box-office-8630.html>.

³ Ibid.

Released in 1999, *Shiri* (Kang Je-kyu), action movie starring *Los'*s Eunjin Kim, combined Hollywood style with Korean content and style. The film outdid James Cameron's *Titanic* and was the biggest box-office hit in Korean history at the time.

South Korea's "booming surgery culture," *200 Pounds Beauty* chronicles Hanna's journey from obese back-up singer to sleek and sexy headliner.⁴ Saving up money from gigs as Korea's most famous pop star's "ghost singer" and as a sex hotline operator, Hanna undergoes major surgery and reemerges with an ideal face and body according to dominant 21st Century South Korean beauty standards. As a result, her outward appearance is finally considered as beautiful as her voice. Her popularity eventually surpasses even the woman whose voice she had secretly supplied, yet the attempt to keep her former identity (and looks) a secret proves too much a burden for the pure hearted Hanna who eventually confesses her secret at a major concert to tens of thousands of fans. Albeit shocked at first, masses of fans accept Hanna for her honesty, thus catapulting her even further into stardom and providing a tidy ending to the film.

The same year *200 Pounds Beauty* took the box office, controversial director Kim Ki-duk and lesser-known director Bong Man-dae also released films about Korean plastic surgery consumption.⁵ In stark contrast to *200 Pounds Beauty's* innocuous and seemingly empowering mainstream and normalizing portrayal of plastic surgery, Kim's art house film *Time* (시간 2006) and Bong's horror flick *Cinderella* (신데렐라 2006) use the generic conventions of psychological thriller and horror to problematize plastic surgery consumption in multiple ways. The emergence

Frances Gateward, "Introduction" in *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema*, ed. Frances Gateward, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007) 6.

⁴ Kim Yong-hwa, No Hye-yeong and Suzuki Yumiko. *200 Pounds Beauty*, *미녀는 괴로워*. DVD (Kim Yong-hwa, 2006: 120 min)

⁵ Joo Jung-wan, "On Celluoid Plastic is Murder," August 29, 2006, accessed on December 1 2010, <http://www.hancinema.net/on-celluoid-plastic-is-murder-7017.html>.

of these three films in the same year signals not only that plastic surgery is a social issue being explored in South Korean film but also a new intersection in the marketplace—that of the ascendancy of the consumption of plastic surgery procedures for aesthetic purposes with the more established visual consumption of film. Given the plastic surgery patient’s recent representational ubiquity within Korean film (and television serials), this figure can be seen as a new female archetype that has risen to prominence alongside her real life counterpart—the throngs of South Korean women undergoing the knife at the highest rates per capita globally.⁶

Although the plastic surgery consumer is a relatively new archetype, the well-known and well-established figure of the Korean woman who has had sexual encounters with Japanese and especially American servicemen has figured prominently within Korean film since its early inception until today. Starting with the Korean comfort women and extending to U.S. military camp town prostitutes and military brides, this figure has simultaneously been both the catalyst for demands for justice within Korea as well as the representational figure for the diaspora’s disgrace and historical domination. Not only do we see the *yangkongju* on the news but also in documentaries such as Byeon Yeong-ju's *The Murmuring* (낮은 목소리 1 1995),

Habitual Sadness (낮은 목소리 2 1996) and *My Own Breathing* (낮은 목소리 3 2000)

⁶ A more general statistic notes that in 2000, thirteen percent of Koreans engaged in some form of cosmetic surgery compared to three percent in the US and more recently, the *Chosun Ilbo* reported through informal research that nearly one in every two women have had some kind of plastic surgery.

Jyeon Hyeonsuk, “One Out of Every Two People Have Had Facial Plastic Surgery (특별취재팀, “두명중 한명, 얼굴 고쳤다,”)” *Chosun Ilbo*, October 26, 2009.

“It’s official: South Korea has the world’s highest rates of plastic surgery but...” *Asian Plastic Surgery Now*, accessed October 1, 2011.

and in fictional accounts such as Ahn Junghyo's novel *Silver Stallion* (은마는 오지 않는다) as well as the 1991 movie remake by Chang Kil-su, just to name a few.⁷

Yangkongju, literally “Western princess,” is a pejorative term for U.S. military prostitutes. According to sociologist and performance artist Grace Cho, the *yangkongju* “is at once a hypervisible object of loathing and desire for Koreans on the peninsula and a shadowy figure hidden in the collective psyche of the Korean diaspora.”⁸ Allegorizing the Korean nation, then, the colonized female bodies of the comfort woman and the *yangkongju* represent Korea's subjugated status and (neo)colonial relationships with Japan and the U.S. at the same time signifying Korean men's emasculation. The figure of the *yangkongju* has thus come to signify Korea's turbulent modern history even as, or perhaps especially because, she is shrouded in shame.

⁷ Released in 1995, *The Murmuring* documents the lives and testimonies of former Korean comfort women living at the House of Sharing as they seek justice for the crimes committed against them. *Habitual Sadness* and *My Own Breathing*, sequels to *The Murmuring*, were released in 1996 and 2000 respectively.

The Murmuring, Najeun Moksori 1. VHS. (Byeon, Yeongju, 1995: 98 min)

Habitual Sadness, Najeun Moksori 2. VHS. (Byeon, Yeongju, 1996: 98 min)

My Own Breathing, Najeun Moksori 3. VHS. (Byeon, Yeongju, 2000: 98 min)

Ahn Junghyo's *Silver Stallion* is a fictional tale of a Korean village destroyed by the Korean War. The story is told through the perspective of Mansik, a village boy, whose mother is raped by American soldiers and subsequently becomes a prostitute.

Ahn, Junghyo. *Silver Stallion: A Novel of Korea*. New York: Soho Press, 2003.

Korean American writer Nora Okja Keller's fictional work, *Comfort Woman*, brings the comfort woman issue into a diasporic and transgenerational frame as Beccah, a biracial second generation Korean American, is forced to care for her mother, Akiko, a former comfort woman.

Keller followed *Comfort Woman* with *Foxgirl*, a novel about Hyun Jin, a girl whose only family becomes her best friend, Sookie, a teenage prostitute kept by an American soldier.

Keller, Nora Okja. *Comfort Woman*. New York: Viking, 1997.

Keller, Nora Okja. *Foxgirl*. New York: Viking, 2002.

⁸ Grace Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy and the Forgotten War*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3.

Accordingly, Asian Americanist scholarship on the *yangkongju* also abounds. Korean American women scholars, artists and writers have especially focused on these tropes, such work constituting a genre unto itself. In her essay “Teumsae e-kki-in yosong: Korean American Women Between Feminism and Nationalism,” Asian American studies scholar Elaine Kim attempts to critically engage with these works by asking about “Korean American women’s fascination with this topic?” in order to scrutinize the use of Korean women’s bodies as a visual trope.⁹ Kim posits several possible reasons for the affinity between Korean and Korean American women, such as a desire on the part of Korean American women to challenge sexual moralism by identifying with the *yangkongju* instead of with the Korean nation-state itself. Ultimately, Kim posits a romantic affinity between Korean and Korean American women:

Korean American women may be interested in comfort women and sex workers because as Asian women living in the U.S., they too are marginalized and suspected as possible traitors to the Korean nation, and because they too feel subject to the processes of racialization and sexual objectification... Perhaps it is their interstitial location between two powerful patriarchal nationalist discourses that allows these Korean American women writers and artists to recognize themselves in those sisters across the waves.¹⁰

Kim uses a language of ethnic and feminist sisterhood that locates Korean American scholars’ investment in the *yangkongju* within a seemingly natural transnational affinity that binds Korean and Korean American women. In so doing, she contends that

⁹ Elaine Kim, “Teumsae e-kki-in yosong: Korean American Women Between Feminism and Nationalism,” in *Violence and the Body: Race, Gender, and the State*, ed. Arturo J. Aldama (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002), 36.

¹⁰ Kim, “Teumsae e-kki-in yosong,” 39.

Korean American work on Korean sex workers “does not push the reluctant Korean female body onto a stage lit up for pornography and commodification.” Instead, she asserts, Korean American scholars are reaching for “the mutual lines of affinity” that link Korean and Korean American women “in a mutual struggle to understand and struggle against our respective experiences of colonization, racialization, and gender oppression.”¹¹ Indeed, because such notions depend on ethnic affiliations, Kim falls into the trap of essentializing such affiliations as natural forms of sisterhood.

Literary critic Laura Hyun Yi Kang, on the other hand, writes against such romantic visions of Asian American scholarly work. Kang contends that, despite Asian American scholars’ good intentions and perceived affinities, such projects produce—rather than simply depict—certain kinds of subjects. These representations have overtly political effects. That is to say, such scholarship does, if unintentionally, “push the reluctant Korean female body onto a stage lit up for pornography and commodification.” Marking a distinct turn in Asian American studies away from scholarship that “gives voice” to a previously unheard or unseen subject, recent scholars like Kang have interrogated how figures of Asian and Asian Americans themselves come to be constructed by scholarly, activist and artistic productions. Moreover, because these constructs are never neutral, it remains critical to interrogate the producers’ investment in these circulating representations. Specifically, Kang examines Asian women as sites/sights of transnational labor. Kang’s juxtaposition of the homophones “sites” and “sights” reveals Asian women as

¹¹ Kim, “Teumsae e-kki-in yosong,” 42.

both laboring bodies as well as visual constructs that perform labor themselves. By “placing the labor conditions of Asian women workers in export-oriented manufacturing alongside those in international sex tourism,” Kang seeks to “interrogate the mechanical and the eroticized constructions of the Asian female body, as well as any assumed separation of these two stereotypes.”¹² Such inquiries require us to ask, “How and why have these presumably contradictory properties of business and pleasure become attached to this particular racialized and gendered body?”¹³ Building on Kang’s query, this chapter pairs two distinct contemporary representations of Korean women—the surgery consumer and the *yangkongju*—in order to stitch together their “assumed separation.” Accordingly, this chapter unveils the specific geopolitical circumstances that have constructed these two stereotypes in an attempt to understand the meanings they produce for Korean women in Korea and abroad.

Unlike the image of the usually disenfranchised and lower class *yangkongju*, the specter of the Korean plastic surgery consumer has emerged as a marker of South Korean modernization. In the U.S., as I have outlined in the previous chapter by using the example of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, discourses on Korean women’s cosmetic surgery consumption usually focus on the *ssangkekŏp’ul* procedure (or double eyelid surgery as it is commonly referred) and so this image of the Korean woman signifies self-internalized racial oppression. As a result, Korean women emerge in

¹² Laura Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Asian/American Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 427.

¹³ *Ibid.*

academic scholarship and media portrayals as cultural dupes, victims of a sort of “false consciousness” that explains their plastic surgery consumption. On the other hand, such discursive framings in South Korea, both popular and academic, focus more centrally on South Korea’s rapid modernization, flourishing consumer culture and rampant postmodernity. In other words, while U.S. discourses on the topic (and Asian American studies itself) are overly concerned with the salience of race in the self-identity fashioning of South Korean women, South Korean discourses (as well as Korean/Asian studies) are more troubled by the excesses of late capitalism.

This chapter places the *yangkongju* and the plastic surgery consumer—figures that have heretofore not been juxtaposed—in the same analytical frame in order to theorize their shared affinities. That is to say, while scholars such as Grace Cho, Kandice Chuh, Laura Hyun Yi Kang, and Lisa Yoneyama have pointed out the discursive function(s) of the *yangkongju* and the ways in which she allegorizes the Korean nation, *both* figures of Korean women are distinct iterations of gendered corporealities or embodiments of Korean history. As discursive conjurings and as lived experiences, these archetypes illuminate how South Korea’s modern history, under the auspices of modernization and militarization, has demanded different types of body work from gendered bodies depending on their social and class locations—just as Hanna is at once a plastic surgery consumer *and* a sex-line operator and embodies each of these as distinct ways of negotiating her circumstances.

According to sociologist Debra Gimlin, “body work” is “work on the self. By engaging in body work, women are able to negotiate normative identities by

diminishing their personal responsibility for a body that fails to meet cultural mandates.”¹⁴ Gimlin’s “body work” is a method for reconciling the separation between “the body” and “the self” and takes place in aerobics classes, weight control organizations, and beauty salons in addition to plastic surgery clinics. While my use of the term “body work” builds on Gimlin’s, I significantly depart from her definition because I use the term to suggest both the work that women do *to* their bodies as well as the labor performed *by* their bodies. I do not equate the two but rather, ask what we can learn by reading in tandem representations of the *yangkeongju* and plastic surgery consumer. Just as the films *200 Pounds Beauty*, *Time* and *Cinderella*’s release in the same temporal frame provided viewers with multiple meanings about and critiques of plastic surgery, this chapter fleshes out the multiple vantage points that arise when these two figures are positioned relationally and theorized together. Given South Korea’s Cold War context, I argue that both positionalities emerge as distinct instantiations of how capitalism, (neo)colonialism, and modernity have mobilized gendered bodies towards different ends. In other words, these seemingly disparate forms of “body work” provide insights into the affective and material ways in which women’s bodies are utilized and transformed in the service of capitalist modernity.

As transnational feminist cultural studies scholars have shown, many “modern” ways of being—such as the professionalization of housewifery, the organization into nuclear families or even women’s entrance into educational

¹⁴ Debra Gimlin, *Body Work: Beauty and Self-Image in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 6.

institutions—were new coercive norms that subjected women to new forms of control and disciplines even as they perhaps subverted other forms of patriarchy. Although modernization in non-Western countries has come to signify Westernization and more insidiously, liberation and progress, as Lila Abu-Lughod argues, modernity is a messy and complicated process that “ushered in new forms of gendered subjection (in the double sense of subject-positions for women and forms of domination) as well as new experiences and possibilities.”¹⁵ As such, I suggest that the two related but distinct forms of body work discussed above should not be taken for granted as inevitable outcomes of South Korean modernization. I argue instead that both types of body work are imbricated within the same “processes of entanglement,” to borrow Abu-Lughod’s phrase, originating from the (neo)colonial encounter.¹⁶ The disentanglement of these processes illuminates how gender operates through militarization and modernization such that female bodies are not only the object of power struggles but also the sites upon which notions of tradition and modernity are enacted, performed and constructed.

Using controversial director, Kim Ki-duk’s films, *Address Unknown* (수취인 불명 2001) and *Time*, and Bong Man-dae’s horror film, *Cinderella*, as entry points into thinking about the discursive relationship between the *yangkongju* and the plastic surgery consumer as well as the plastic surgery consumer’s distinct significations, this chapter examines how these two types of body work are undergirded by processes of

¹⁵ Lila Abu-Lughod, “Introduction” in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 13.

¹⁶ Abu-Lughod, “Introduction,” 16.

imperial racial formation. Said differently, this chapter mines the ways in which U.S. imperial practices have distinctly shaped and normalized the necessity for these forms of body work. By bridging the analytical and geopolitical insights of Asian American studies and Korean studies, this chapter provides a transnational framework from which to argue that within the context of South Korea's capitalist modernity, both sex work and plastic surgery emerge as interventions in identity. As a result, the body becomes a means for new, albeit differently classed, subjectivities. Ultimately, this chapter seeks a richer understanding of the various ways in which Korea's modern history has been both written and enacted upon Korean women's bodies.

Finally, this chapter shows that these films offer a complex and critical analysis of Korea's modern consumption of plastic surgery by putting the phenomenon into the larger context of colonialism, militarization and modernization. Specifically, Korean film provides an apt medium for thinking about the shifting representations of Korean women through the process of Korea's rapid industrialization. While the *yangkongju* emerges as a symbol of the (neo)colonial past, despite the fact that militarized sex work continues to abound, the plastic surgery consumer signifies not only the present moment but a prosperous future. According to anthropologist Nancy Abelmann, "In a patriarchal society such as South Korea with its history of national loss and displacement, it is easy for male subjectivity to take on particular representational salience."¹⁷ This chapter attempts, instead, to foreground female subjectivity by examining the effects of gendered modernities on Korean women vis-

¹⁷ Nancy Ablemann, *The Melodrama of Mobility: Women, Talk, and Class in Contemporary South Korea*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003) 188.

à-vis body work. Although Kim, and to a lesser extent Bong, has been panned by feminists, this chapter shows that these films are productive of a feminist postcolonial critique of South Korea's capitalist modernity and neocolonial ties to the U.S.

HALLYU AND THE RISE OF KOREAN FILM

Although South Korean cinema, like plastic surgery, has become one of the country's internationally known and thriving industries, its history is wrought with political censorship and struggles for cultural hegemony that have shaped the now booming industry. The development of the medium was stifled during the colonial period through World War II and until the end of the Korean War. Beginning in the mid-1950s, however, South Korea experienced what is known as its Golden Age of film, characterized by a neorealist mode of art cinema that explored Korean values and national struggles.¹⁸ Films of the era such as *Aimless Bullet* (오발탄 1961), whose main character maintains Confucian values in an impoverished post-War Korea (while his sister becomes a *yangkongju*), illustrate how film became a medium through which Korean society struggled with economic devastation, national division and changing values. As such, South Korean cinema produced over a hundred films a year during this period with that figure doubling by the 1960s.¹⁹

¹⁸ Aaron Han Joohn Magnan-Park, "Hallyu: The Koreanization of world culture" in *Korean Wave*, ed. The Korean Herald, (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2008) 236.

¹⁹ Gateward, "Introduction," 4.

The rise of the military dictator Park Chung-hee and militarized democracy, however, saw the end of the Golden Age and ushered in the dark age of Korean cinema—two decades of censorship and regulation that lasted through the Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo administrations.²⁰ The national agenda’s dual imperatives of anti-communism and rapid industrialization demanded an inflexible ideology that hampered directors’ creative freedom. At the same time, the emergence of Hollywood blockbusters and their global marketing threatened South Korean cinema from without until the production/distribution of Korean feature films reached a low of seventy-three films in 1982 with most people assuming South Korean cinema was near extinction.²¹ Reacting against Americanization, the Screen Quota Civil Society was established in 1985 and the government increased the mandated number of screening days of Korean films from 121 to 146.²² Directors also responded and soon, what is now known as the New Wave of Korean cinema was born with the emergence of directors such as Park Kwang-su and Jang Sun-woo who not only reinvigorated the national film industry but defied the traditional apprenticeship system for directors by branching out on their own.²³

In addition to these milestones, the loosening of censorship, changes in trade laws and the 1980’s democratic movements renewed South Korean cinema in the 1990s. As Hollywood films began to dominate the South Korean market, South

²⁰ Magnan-Park, “Hallyu,” 237.

²¹ Gateward, “Introduction,” 5.

²² Lee Hyang-jin, “Identity politics of contemporary Korean cinema,” in Korean Wave, ed. The Korean Herald, (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2008) 225.

²³ Ibid.

Korean cinema flourished as a form of cultural resistance to Western cultural imperialism and hegemony.²⁴ In order to compete with Hollywood, Korean directors developed a hybrid style that combined commercialism and artistic experimentalism in a way that, as art historian Young Min Moon contends, embraces “the narrative structures and technical elements of Hollywood cinema while unraveling the psychological ‘knot’ in Korean history.”²⁵ As such, Korean cinema’s renaissance began in the early 1990s with a plethora of “sex-war” comedies that reinvigorated Hollywood’s romantic comedy formula.²⁶ After the success of these comedies such as Kim Ui-Seok’s *Marriage Story* (결혼 이야기 1992), Korea’s major business conglomerates took notice and corporations (known as *chaebol* in Korean parlance) such as Samsung began funding Korean films, allowing Korean cinema to create big-budget blockbusters rivaling Hollywood and Hong Kong in technical polish and depth. By 1997, when espionage thriller *Shiri* broke the box office record in Korea held by James Cameron’s *Titanic*, thus besting Hollywood in the minds of many Koreans, South Korean cinema had officially reemerged as a commercial and artistic force. In 2001, local cinema accounted for 45 to 50 percent of the overall ticket sales,

²⁴ Cultural sociologist Lee Hyang-jin argues, “The sense of crisis surrounding the loss of cultural identity resulted in the revival of the film industry. Accordingly, the thriving film culture in contemporary Korea is the result of cultural resistance to the power of Western-led globalization.” Ibid.

²⁵ Young Min Moon, “Violence and modernity: The Re-inscription of Memory,” personal correspondence December 30, 2010, 6.

²⁶ Tom Vick, *Asian Cinema: A Field Guide*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008) 158.

making South Korea's one of the largest commercial film industries after the U.S. and India.²⁷

With such domestic success, Korean producers began pursuing overseas distribution, thus initiating what is currently a global love affair with Korean cinema, along with other Korean popular cultural forms. In fact, Korean pop culture is often referred to as *Hallyu* or “the Korean wave.”²⁸ First coined by Chinese journalists to describe the influx of South Korean popular music, television serials and films and their vast popularity with youth, *Hallyu* has achieved cultural hegemony in much of Asia for the last decade. In fact, many cultural critics and academics posit *Hallyu*'s popularity, along with Bollywood, as a signal that global culture is no longer dominated by Western e.g. American cultural forms.²⁹

While other foreign film markets have reached success through a particular genre such as Hong Kong action movies or through just a few particular auteurs as is the case of the Taiwanese market, South Korean films have reached international

²⁷ Darcy Paquet, “The Korean Film Industry: 1992 to the Present,” in *New Korean Cinema*, ed. Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer, (New York: NYU Press, 2005) 33. And, despite the fact that the U.S. forced South Korea to lower its quota to 72 days per year in 2006, Korean cinema continues to do well—a testament to the quality and diversity of the films produced there.

²⁸ Jeeyoung Shin, “Globalisation and New Korean Cinema,” in *New Korean Cinema*, ed. Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer, (New York: NYU Press, 2005) 58.

²⁹ Nadia Kim notes that *Hallyu* has “taken much of Asia by storm (e.g., Japan, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia) and garnered the attention of some Western audiences” and “along with other examples (Bollywood), begun to change the tide of global culture.”

Nadia Kim, *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to L.A.*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008) 40.

Outside of Korean ethnic enclaves such as Los Angeles' Koreatown, *hallyu* is most noticeable in the U.S. in Hawai'i where Korean serials are available at mainstream drugstores such as Long's Drugs. In fact, Korean dramas are so popular in Hawai'i that Brent Anbe wrote and directed a film about Korean dramas and the local women who love them. *Ajumma, are you Krazy? Hawai'i's First Kimchee Comedy* chronicles the zany adventures of three local women's attempt to meet their favorite Korean actor when he comes to Hawai'i. *Ajumma, are you Krazy?* toured the film festival circuit in 2009.

acclaim on a variety of levels, through a variety of genres and directors.³⁰ Moreover, Korean films address myriad social and cultural concerns—tensions between North and South Korea, South Korea’s rapid industrialization, changing relationships between the genders as a result of modernization, class struggles—through a diverse array of film genres. From touching family flicks such as Lee Jeong-hyang’s *The Way Home* (집으로 2002) to science fiction films such as Lee Si-myung’s *2009: Lost Memories* (로스트메모리즈 2002) to horror films like Kim Ji-Woon’s *A Tale of Two Sisters* (장화, 홍련 2003), the Korean film renaissance has spurred the production of films of every genre that have gained international popularity. In fact, Korean films have thrived at international film festivals ever since Im Kwon-taek’s *Chunhyang* (춘향뎐 2000) was nominated for an award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2002. Since then, in addition to Im, directors such as Lee Chang-dong, Kim Ki-duk (who we will examine further in the following section) and Park Chan-wook have brought home awards from Cannes, the Venice International Film Festival and the Berlin International Film Festival.³¹

The South Korean government laid the foundation for such international success and notoriety when in 1994 President Kim Young-sam announced his

³⁰ Vick, *Asian Cinema*, 160.

³¹ Lee, “Identity politics of contemporary Korean cinema,” 229.

South Korean cinema experienced its first downturn in exports in five years in 2007. Markets varied, however. Exports to Asia, a market that favors commercial films, decreased while exports to Europe, a market favoring arthouse films, remained constant. Films to Hungary, Poland and South America where commercial films are more popular, actually increased.

Lee, “Identity politics of contemporary Korean cinema,” 230.

segyebwa or globalization policy.³² The policy took a two-pronged approach to globalization—one that was committed to national advancement on the international stage in all regards, economic, political, cultural, and another that focused on the domestic success of the Korean economy. Accordingly, the government recognized “culture as an industry that can produce a huge profit” and sought an even higher level of domestic success by Korean films, as I note above in my discussion of Hollywood’s encroachment on the South Korean film industry.³³ Since the late 1990s, however, “the promotional endeavour has increasingly aimed at the elevation of Korean cinema’s international profile and the growth of international sales.”³⁴ Notably, the South Korean government’s emphasis on culture as an export has also served to bolster its burgeoning medical tourism industry. According to Samuel Koo, president and CEO of Korea’s Tourism Board, South Korea had 7.8 million tourists in 2009, 60,000 of whom were medical tourists seeking mostly cosmetic and dental procedures.³⁵ In 2009, the South Korean government’s Ministry of Tourism and Culture began promoting medical tourism as a viable international industry and significant efforts are being made to market medical tourism abroad.³⁶ In many cases, *Hallyu*’s multiple forms—film, television serials, and music—serve not only as cultural products in their own right but also as international advertisements for South Korea’s plastic surgery clinics (the subject of chapter three).

³² Shin, “Globalisation and New Korean Cinema,” 53.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Shin, “Globalisation and New Korean Cinema,” 55.

³⁵ Samuel Koo, “Korea in the Global Village and the Effort to Strengthen its Brand Power,” (lecture presented at Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea, May 20 2010).

³⁶ “South Korean Hospitals to Attract Foreign Patients from May,” Asia Pulse News, 28 April 2009.

South Korean cinema has developed as a cultural and industrial medium through which the “psychological ‘knot’ in Korean history” has been (re)enacted, revisited and explored. As the following sections on Kim Ki-duk’s and Bong Man-dae’s films will show, Korean women’s bodies have also been primary sites on which and through which these histories and conflicts have played out. As two parallel sites of capitalist modernity, Korean cinema provides a rich entry point for the theorization of how the gendered violence of militarization and modernization—as forms of body work—intersect.

UNRAVELING HAN IN KIM KI-DUK’S *ADDRESS UNKNOWN* AND *TIME*

Kim Ki-duk is an unusual South Korean director in that, while he is infamous in his native country, he enjoys more critical success internationally. Kim has garnered “Best Director” accolades at the Berlin and Venice International Film Festivals for his films *Samaritan Girl* (사마리아 2004) and *3-Iron* (빈 집 2004). In addition, ten of his fifteen feature-length motion pictures are available in the U.S. home video market—an unprecedented number for any Korean director.³⁷ His perhaps greatest international recognition, however, was when New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) held a then-complete retrospective of his work in 2008.³⁸

Unlike other directors, particularly art cinema ones, Kim Ki-duk is from a working class background and spent much of his youth working in factories before

³⁷ Hye-Seung Chung, “Beyond ‘Extreme’: Rereading Kim Ki-duk’s Cinema of *Ressentiment*,” *Journal of Film and Video*, 62(2010): 97.

³⁸ New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), accessed on April 1, 2009, <http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/films/597>.

serving mandatory military conscription in the Marines, the most physically and mentally harrowing branch of the Korean military.³⁹ Upon finishing, Kim traveled to Paris to learn cinematography and made his debut on the Korean cinema scene in 1996 with his film *Crocodiles* (악오 1996). Known for his violent and unapologetic portrayals of his cynical view of humanity, his films reflect his own disenfranchised and working class past. His films typically tell the story of marginalized men, many of whom are either taciturn by choice or literally mute but physically strong. Prostitution also figures prominently in his films and, for this, Kim has been widely criticized in feminist circles. Kim's films tend to incite "love it or hate it" receptions that characterize his films as either gratuitous or, as film programmer Tom Vick notes, "honest expressions of Kim's worldview [...] made with great skill."⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the controversies and debates surrounding Kim's works converge upon one thing: the extremity of his films. Because Kim does not shy away from graphically portraying violence in his films from rape, dog beating, self-mutilation to murder, his work is typically described simply as "extreme." In fact, in Korea Kim remains generically elusive as his films are simply known for their "brutal *yopgi* (translated as bizarre, grotesque, or horrific) aesthetics."⁴¹ Building on Nietzsche's theorization of *ressentiment*, however, Hye Seung Chung asserts that Kim's

³⁹ "The Kim Ki Duk Page," accessed on April 1, 2009, <http://koreanfilm.org/kimkiduk.html>.

⁴⁰ Vick, *Asian Cinema*, 166.

⁴¹ Chung, "Beyond 'Extreme,'" 102.

films are a means through which he “avenges the cruelty of a classist, conformist society.”⁴² Attempting to recuperate his work’s value, Chung argues the following:

Kim’s visceral cinema can be read as an example of the ‘body genre’ theorized by Linda Williams. According to Williams, there are three major body genres: (1) Pornography, characterized by gratuitous sex and nudity; (2) horror films, characterized by gratuitous violence and terror; and (3) melodramas, characterized by gratuitous emotion and affect.⁴³

These genres intersect in their ability to compel viewers to mimic the bodily sensations experienced by the characters on screen. Thus, in an attempt to illustrate that Kim’s films are not simply gratuitous, Chung contends that “[t]he extremity of Kim’s cinema should not—indeed, cannot—be divorced from its historical and social context.”⁴⁴

The very historical specificity of Kim’s extremity suggests, however, that *han* rather than *ressentiment* undergirds Kim’s films.⁴⁵ While perhaps only shades apart in meaning since *han*, too, can be roughly translated into resentment, *han* departs significantly from *ressentiment* in that it is uniquely Korean. *Han* is best described as an inventory of historical memory that deals with Korean people’s collective trauma and

⁴² Chung, “Beyond ‘Extreme,” 101.

⁴³ Chung, “Beyond ‘Extreme,” 104.

⁴⁴ Chung, “Beyond ‘Extreme,” 105.

⁴⁵ Arguing against critics who assert that *ressentiment* is a passive reaction through which Natives are constituted by their own wounds, Glen Coulthard asserts that *ressentiment* is a cathartic event that reminds Natives that the colonial situation is not of their own doing. Moreover, *ressentiment* as righteous anger is ultimately productive when it topples the structures that lead to *ressentiment* in the first place.

Glen Coulthard, Settler Colonialism and White Supremacy Plenary Session #2, (paper presented at the national Critical Ethnic Studies and the Futures of Genocide Conference, Riverside, California, March 11 2011).

suffering.⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, Kim's invocation and (re)enactment of such historical memory has not fared well with Korean audiences.⁴⁷ Despite his success abroad, domestically Kim has had to repeatedly defend his films. As a result, Kim withdrew from the Korean media for two years, reemerging in 2006 to hold a press conference for *Time*. Critiquing the big studios' domination of the Korean film industry and underscoring the fact that his films are received better in North America and Europe than in South Korea, Kim suggested that he would "stop 'exporting' his films to South Korea should *Time* sink at the box office."⁴⁸ In the face of criticism from fans and critics alike afterwards, Kim was forced to offer a public apology for his statements.

I argue that Kim owes his failures at the Korean box office to the fact that his body of work is not only a cinema of *ressentiment* but of *han*. As Koreanist James Freda has cogently outlined, discourses on *han* are critical antidotes to the historical amnesia characterizing modernity's promises of linear progress and happiness vis-à-vis consumption. As such, discourse on *han* "seeks to retrieve the cultural forms through which the experiences of suffering can be recognized and dealt with."⁴⁹ Yet, Kim's films are never simple depictions of the past but are almost satirical in their juxtaposition of the mundane with the extraordinarily inhumane. Writing about

⁴⁶ Koreanist James Freda has argued that *han* "acts as historical memory treating the legacy of suffering incurred in Korea."

James K. Freda, "Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea: Absent Suffering and Industrialist Dreams," accessed on March 1, 2011, <http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v3i12/freda.htm>, page 4.

⁴⁷ Ironically, the South Korean government posits *han* as one of the emotional attributes responsible for K-dramas' unprecedented popularity amongst Asian fans (see chapter three).

⁴⁸ Chung, "Beyond 'Extreme,'" 106.

⁴⁹ Freda, "Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea," 15.

Filipino American artists, Asian American cultural studies scholar Sarita See cogently argues that:

While the artistic and cultural practices serve as complex and powerful recording devices—acts of memory that index and counter the power dynamics of imperialism—the emergence of a Filipino American cultural moment cannot be described simply as an essentialist project of recovery. The subjectivities produced by these texts are marked by playfulness and slipperiness: a relentless, ingrained kind of punning.⁵⁰

In a similar vein, Kim's films engender an unsettling complexity that neither offer tidy resolutions nor simply bolster Korean nationalism but instead, force audiences to confront their historical and collective suffering. Although many films such as *Tae Guk Gi: The Brotherhood of War* (태극기 휘날리며 2004) have dealt with historical topics such as the Korean War, they provide narrative solutions to national trauma through filmic conventions and appeals to emotion.⁵¹ Contrarily, Kim unsettles audiences by connecting the present to the past. The use of *han* put forth by his films illuminate robust critiques of capitalist modernity and South Korean entanglements with the U.S. That is to say, despite characterizations of Kim as “extreme” or gratuitous for gratuity's sake, Kim's films not only force a general Korean audience to historicize the present within a genealogy of imperial violence but also filmicly depict *han* as a contemporarily lived experience.

Telling the story of three teenage outcasts who live in a camp town near the outskirts of a U.S. military base, Kim's fourth film *Address Unknown* (2001)

⁵⁰ Sarita Echavez See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) xviii.

⁵¹ Released in 2004 and directed by Je-gyu Kang, director of *Shiri*, *Tae Guk Gi: The Brotherhood of War* is often described as the Korean version of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* and was the most successful Korean movie up to that time.

exemplifies how Kim makes use of the body genre as a form of *han*.⁵² Set in the 1970s, the film addresses the painful legacy of the Korean War, namely, the continued presence of the U.S. military in South Korea. As such, the three main characters, while friends, each experience the military differently. Chang-gook is the abandoned teenage son of an African American serviceman who lives with his mother on the outskirts of the camp town in an immobilized bus. She is clearly marginalized from their small town for having had a relationship with an African American soldier and continues to hold onto the belief that she and Chang-gook will someday be reunited with his father. To this end, she writes and sends Chang-gook's father letters, which are constantly returned, hence the title of the film, *Address Unknown*. While Chang-gook is strong and physically intimidating, his friend, Ji-hum, is a slender, artist type (said to be based on Kim Ki-duk himself) who is constantly harassed by neighborhood bullies. Chang-gook more than once comes to his rescue and although both of them are seen as outsiders, Chang-gook, through his physical strength, is able to, at least momentarily, defeat the neighborhood bullies for the both of them. Eun-ok, the only girl in this motley crew, is an outcast because of her physical appearance. Having been shot in the eye with a sling shot by her own brother as a young girl, Eun-ok is blind in one eye, which she keeps covered with her hair. The neighborhood kids frequently torment her by making fun of her physical disability. According to Kim, all three of these characters are scarred and serve to

⁵² In her article, Chung also provides a read of *Address Unknown*. My read departs from hers, however, in that it focuses specifically on how *Address Unknown* address the bodily affects South Korea's social and historical contexts have had on Korean women.

illustrate different sides of military culture and war.⁵³ Eun-ok's storyline is of particular interest, however, as it marries several of the issues raised here: bodily alteration, sex, race, gender and imperial racial formation.

Although Eun-ok begins the film as a regular, though physically different, schoolgirl, circumstances soon find her making the critical decision to become a *yangkongju*. Raped by the same neighborhood bullies who harass Ji-hum, she has an abortion and is kicked out of school. At the same time, her family finds out that rather than dying in the Korean War as a hero, her father was a deserter to the North Korean army, rendering his government pension null and void. Now a complete outcast and in need of money, Eun-ok begins to consider James, the U.S. serviceman who propositions her, a viable option. Eventually, through promises of eye surgery that would restore her eye/sight and make her look normal, Eun-ok becomes James's girlfriend and exchanges her affection, both emotional and physical, for the surgery and material security.

While the eye surgery in this movie is not the *ssangkekŏp'ul* procedure and reconstructive surgery rather than cosmetic, it serves as an entry point to thinking about cosmetic surgery as a modern and imperial technology for several reasons.

First, in the film, Eun-ok elects the surgery in order to look "normal." Although she

⁵³ *Address Unknown* International Release DVD, Bonus Features: Interview with the Director. Although Kim held trenchant views against U.S. neocolonialism, he has said that his views towards individual soldiers changed when he was scouting for shooting locations and witnessed firsthand the dilapidated conditions of the camp town: "...the deapseated military culture and the imperialist sentiments...cannot be a matter of one or two U.S. soldiers." As quoted from his own website in Myung Ja Kim, "Race, Gender, and Postcolonial Identity in Kim Ki-duk's *Address Unknown*" in *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema*, ed. Frances Gatewood (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 251.

is blind in one eye, this disability does not affect her day-to-day ability to do things or get around. It is her desire to no longer be marginalized that motivates her decision. When Ji-hum tries to talk her out of the surgery, she replies, “Do you want me to live marginalized forever?”⁵⁴ An intervention in identity rather than appearance, the desire to look “just like everyone else,” or at least how society discursively constructs how everyone should look, is a powerful motivator to elect bodily alteration.⁵⁵ Thus, Eun-ok’s surgery as well can be viewed as a move to alter her identity and status vis-à-vis her appearance.

Second, as many Asian American scholars, including David Palumbo-Liu, Eugenia Kaw and Nadia Kim, have pointed out, the *ssangkekŏp’ul* procedure was popularized in Korea through the U.S. military in order to build public relations between Americans and Koreans after the Korean War:⁵⁶

The U.S. military indeed doled out not just food but ‘stuff.’ The stuff included a public relations program wherein the military offered free reconstructive surgery to Korean war victims as well as plastic surgery, namely the double eyelid procedure in which a fold is cut into the eyelid.⁵⁷

We see these historical facts play out in the film when James cuts out a picture of an eye, tapes it over Eun-ok’s blind one and says, “You’d be a shoe in for Miss America.

⁵⁴ Kim, *Address Unknown*, 2001.

⁵⁵ Feminist scholar Kathy Davis has shown that recipients of plastic surgery often use the discourse of normalcy to justify their choices. In other words, rather than vanity, plastic surgery recipients often choose to undergo surgery in order to fix the flaw that categorizes them as abnormal. Kathy Davis, *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery*, (London, England: Routledge, 1994), 5.

⁵⁶ Palumbo-Liu, David. “Written on the Face: Race, Nation, Migrancy, and Sex,” in *Asian/America: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 81 – 115. Kaw, Eugenia. “Medicalization of Racial Features: Asian American Women and Cosmetic Surgery.” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 7(1):82.

⁵⁷ Nadia Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, 53.

Do you want eye surgery? Good ole U.S. hospital...”⁵⁸ Cultural critic Lisa Lowe points out that medical services as humanitarian efforts, did not only build public relations but did the work of empire building through a regime of morality that cemented the liberated/liberator, colonized/colonizer relationship.⁵⁹ James and Eun-ok’s exchange indicates that the military hospital is the only place where such technology is available and for Eun-ok, an already marginalized camptown girl and as such, a U.S. serviceman is her only avenue to accessing that technology. Thus, Eun-ok performs labor *with* her body in order to receive labor *for* her body. Her body (and her affections, physical and emotional) becomes, in essence, the only capital she has and she invests that capital accordingly.

The cut-out eye James places on Eun-ok’s is clearly that of a white woman’s, however, and according to African American Studies scholar Myung Ja Kim, “represents the fantasy of Western beauty and the implied American dream for her. James represents the typical colonizer, a benefactor with political and economic power who can provide an eye operation.”⁶⁰ As Kim illuminates, race in this instance is about more than just an individual’s looks or looking like “Miss America.” White beauty instantiates modernity, the cut-out eye a glossy symbol of not only feminine beauty but of a life inside the margins. In other words, rather than signifying Eun-ok’s fantasies of attaining beauty, the cut-out blue eye symbolizes her desires for

⁵⁸ Kim, *Address Unknown*, 2001.

⁵⁹ Lisa Lowe, Critical Ethnic Studies and the Future of Genocide Closing Plenary Presentation, (paper presented at the national Critical Ethnic Studies and the Futures of Genocide Conference, Riverside, California, March 12 2011).

⁶⁰ Kim “Race, Gender, and Postcolonial Identity,” 256

bodily wholeness and the better life whiteness and subsequently, the United States represents. Thus, even though Eun-ok wants nothing more than to be “normal,” normalcy here is represented through not only a white aesthetic but also a white benefactor, exemplifying what Nadia Kim calls “imperial racial formation” or “the link between the state and dominant representations” that “has forged the superiority and normativity of White America and, in relation the inferiority and Otherness of Korea and its people.”⁶¹ As *Address Unknown* illustrates, this “inferiority and Otherness” is about more than just racial aesthetics, however, and is intimately tied to empire, militarization, technology and capital. As such, “imperial racial formation” as a concept and its emphasis on American imperialism, aptly describes racialized plastic surgery procedures in South Korea.

Asian American scholars often overdetermine the salience of race in such procedures while Korean scholars focus their critiques on South Korea’s materialist and consumer culture. The concept of imperial racial formation, however, illustrates how understandings of racial superiority and inferiority are linked to formations of empire with very real material outcomes (i.e. wanting a better future vis-à-vis looking “normal”) that extend beyond simply the desire to look white, which is how these procedures are often oversimplified within Western discourses. In other words, Kim’s film problematizes the issue of plastic surgery, illuminating how, like sex work, it is embedded within structures of colonial dominance. In fact, Korean historian Lee Young-ah has recently shown that Koreans’ engagement with plastic surgery as a

⁶¹ Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, 56.

colonial technology dates back even further to the Japanese colonial period.⁶² Although Korea's first plastic surgery clinic opened in 1961 at Yonsei Severance Hospital, newspaper articles can be found discussing the merits of plastic surgery as early as the 1920s. Lee argues that Japan's obsession with eugenics and ethnology as well as their own relationship to whiteness as the "superior race" led to their embrace of plastic surgery as a means of remedying perceived physical inferiority. The desire to erase or transform physical inferiority was not simply an aesthetic endeavor, however, but imperative to the continuance and survival of racial and national groups. Following this logic, many upper class and educated Koreans also began to ponder the merits of plastic surgery given Korea's tenuous global position as a colony of Japan subject to the superiority of the Japanese and the West. According to Korean historian Henry Em, post-colonial studies poses new questions for the study of Korean history in regards to knowledge production during the Japanese colonial period.⁶³ Such inquiries problematize Euro-centric notions that privilege the West as well as Japan, rather than relying on and thus reproducing their imperial terms. This fruitful marrying of post-colonial studies with Korean studies exposes the various technologies of colonial control and domination that subjectified Korean society during the Japanese colonial period. In this vein, Lee illuminates how quotidian and feminized notions such as beauty, in addition to state concepts such as sovereignty, were constructed vis-à-vis processes of colonial knowledge production, illustrating

⁶² Lee, Young-ah, *한국 근대초기 미용성형수술의 풍경*, (paper presented at Seoul National University's Women's Studies Institute, Seoul, South Korea, Spring 2010).

⁶³ Henry Em, "Introduction," ed. Henry Em, *Asea Yon'gu* 51, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 1 – 6.

that from its very introduction, plastic surgery in Korea has always been imbricated in processes of imperial racial formation.

Although Eun-ok has the surgery and emerges whole and indeed beautiful, her bliss over her new appearance and boyfriend is short-lived and ironically, the normalization of her appearance only further marginalizes her since she is now a *yangkongju*. In an interview included in the International release of *Address Unknown*, Kim notes that he wishes to expose Americans not only to the U.S.'s prolonged military presence in Korea but to the hardships faced by American soldiers abroad as well. Accordingly, James does drugs to escape the difficulties of military life and becomes increasingly violent, eventually going AWOL. Plotting his escape, James asks Eun-ok if she will remember him if he leaves and sends for her later. Then, as was customary practice of U.S. soldiers, he takes out a knife to tattoo her breast with his name (we see this kind of tattoo on Chang-gook's mother's breast) in an effort to literally inscribe himself upon her body, violently marking Eun-ok as his sexualized commodity. Shocked and horrified, Eun-ok fights for her life and finally succeeds in getting the knife away from him. She points it at him, to which he responds, "Go ahead, stab me" with a smirk, knowing full well that her strength could never match his.⁶⁴ It is at this moment that Eun-ok turns the knife to herself and after a split second pause, gouges out her newly restored eye, effectively reclaiming her body from her American military boyfriend and benefactor.

⁶⁴ Kim, *Address Unknown*, 2001.

The scene described above can be considered the pinnacle scene of the film and perhaps where “body genre” most aptly describes *Address Unknown*’s generic trappings. As viewers, we, too, viscerally experience Eun-ok’s eye gouging, made all the more real by the sound of flesh—her eye—being torn, cut and mutilated by the knife. Because the viewing conjures a kind of liberation via horror, disgust and fear, Kim’s scene graphically exposes how Korea’s continued neocolonial relationship with the U.S. is punctuated by military violence, sexual abuse and geopolitical power that permeates personal lives, relationships and real life bodies. While Kim supplies the narrative with another *yangkongju*, Chang-gook’s mother, and her story is ultimately tragic, as is Chang-gook’s, here through Eun-ok, Kim reclaims and redeems the Korean nation from its indebtedness to the U.S. Like Eun-ok, who could not access the technology she needed to restore her to normalcy yet frees herself from James, Kim seeks to do the same for a nation that rebuilt and recovered from the Korean War through American aid. By reclaiming her eye and thus her body through self-mutilation, Eun-ok liberates herself not only from James but also from the “American Dream.”

Playing on Myung Ja Kim’s use of the phrase, here (and throughout the rest of the chapter) I offer the “American Dream” as a theoretical means of bridging the insights of Asian American Studies scholars with those of Korean Studies scholars. “American Dream” in this context provides a frame for putting assimilation to hierarchized racial difference (privileging of whiteness and Euro-American features) together with the formidable power of consumer culture. While the phrase and idea

of the “American Dream” usually refers to the aspirations of immigrants within U.S. national borders, I am instead referring to the work that empire does in establishing aspirational desire within those outside of the physical borders of the U.S. but inside the reach of U.S. empire. What critical ethnic studies scholar Dylan Rodriguez has called the “ascendancy of white life,” the American Dream in this context refers to the ways in which U.S. empire sets up the parameters for not only beauty but for humanity.⁶⁵ Surgery, then, as an intervention in identity rather than appearance, becomes a means through which a better life is secured, one that is symbolized by whiteness itself. While Asian American Studies scholars often lament the privileging of whiteness as an aesthetic because it signals internalized racism and self-loathing, Korean Studies scholars have instead focused on the devastating effects of materialism and consumer culture in Korean society. By framing women’s actions within the notion of the “American Dream,” however, we are able to understand that within the frame of neoliberalism, bodily alterations and excessive participation in the marketplace are inroads through which Korean women aspire to secure the fantastic lives that American neocolonialism and capitalism have promised. South Korean women’s bodies intersect with imperial and corporate affective pedagogy vis-à-vis processes of imperial racial formation that are underpinned by neoliberal mandates for “body work.” In other words, whiteness in this case, is not so much about looks but rather, about first world living. Since U.S. empire has come to them, Koreans

⁶⁵ Dylan Rodriguez, (paper presented at the national Critical Ethnic Studies panel at the American Studies Association national convention, San Antonio, Texas, November 19, 2010).

need not immigrate to the U.S. but merely migrate to the marketplace to consume the American Dream.

In today's modernized South Korea, the context within which many Korean women and some men are electing to undergo plastic surgery is certainly distinct from that of Eun-ok. As Myung Ja Kim points out, however, "in *Address Unknown*, Kim is sending a clear message that history is not the past but the present; and, without a real confrontation with history, especially the dark and shameful past, we will just repeat it in the future."⁶⁶ Kim plays out this repetitive cycle in his thirteenth film, *Time*, which was released in 2006.⁶⁷ In it, Kim extends his comments on the limitations of plastic surgery as a means of identity formation and transformation and perhaps more importantly, critiques linear notions of progress signified by such gendered technologies. When read in tandem, Kim's films asks us to us to interrogate what, if any, kinds of progress Korean society has made between the two contexts depicted. In so doing, Kim puts forth a type of recuperative praxis, which according to Freda, "neither flees into the future not (sic) the past but confronts the present in a lived awareness of alienation."⁶⁸

A psychological thriller, *Time* tells the story of a couple who has been together for two years. Insecure that her boyfriend, Ji-woo, is growing tired of her, Seh-hee (세희) disappears and decides to undergo a full makeover in the hopes of renewing

⁶⁶ Kim "Race, Gender, and Postcolonial Identity," 260.

⁶⁷ In further evidence of Kim's international popularity, *Time* was financed by a Japanese company, Happinet Pictures.

Chung, "Beyond 'Extreme,'" 101.

⁶⁸ Freda, "Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea," 14.

their love through her new found looks. Distraught over her disappearance, Ji-woo grows increasingly agitated until he meets Sae-hee (새희).⁶⁹ The two begin dating until she reveals her true identity. Unable to cope with Sae-hee's revelation that she is indeed, his original girlfriend, Ji-woo decides that he too, must undergo a complete makeover so that the two can start anew. Tables turned, Sae-hee begins to experience Ji-woo's madness. Ultimately, Ji-woo dies in a car crash and a devastated and incoherent Sae-hee finds herself again in the plastic surgeon's office where he offers, as a solution, to make her "unrecognizable."⁷⁰

Most notably, Kim links the two films through a scene in which Seh-hee, preparing for her first makeover, cuts out various facial parts from a magazine. She chooses each part separately—one blue eye, a green eye, a white woman's nose and lips. Reminiscent of the scene in *Address Unknown* when James calls Eun-ok a "shoe-in" for Miss America, here too, we see that Seh-hee's body work also entails "the fantasy of Western beauty." Although "the implied American dream for her" may be more subtle in this film, the juxtaposition of the two women's lives and social contexts—Seh-hee has what Eun Ok could only dream of and yet she is perhaps just as, if not more, discontent and alienated—illuminates Kim's desire to portray the emptiness of the American dream as modernity and its implied progress and consumer fulfillment.

⁶⁹ The difference in her names before and after surgery in English is perhaps best explained as the difference between Sara and Sarah.

⁷⁰ Kim, *Time*, 2006.

To be sure, Kim portrays Seh-hee in an almost cartoonish fashion. Obsessed with her boyfriend's growing disinterest and insecure about her looks enough to undergo massive surgery, it becomes difficult at times to extract Seh-hee's humanity or agency from this film. His purported portrayal of the hysterical woman, usually a sex worker and something of a hallmark in Kim's films, has generated most of the feminist critiques leveled against him. Myung Ja Kim, however, offers an alternative reading of these figures:

Through the representation of these characters, Kim seems to deconstruct the dichotomies of moral/immoral, good/evil, chaste/promiscuous, college girl/prostitute. Exerting the twisted and displaced power of madness and grotesqueness, they desperately attempt to turn themselves into self-determined individuals of their own autonomous subjectivity and sexuality. In this sense, Kim's films can be interpreted as antiheroic farces, criticizing the dehumanizing cultural assumptions against marginalized women.⁷¹

When read together, the female characters in *Address Unknown* and *Time* gesture towards the shared affinities linking the sex worker (commodity) and plastic surgery patient (consumer). While the sex worker is often portrayed as destitute and working against constrained choices, the plastic surgery consumer is characterized by the excesses of consumer culture. The hysteria that Kim depicts is not class specific, however, which can perhaps be read as Kim's critique that hetero-patriarchy itself maddens women. Although these representations may not be empowering per se, Kim's female protagonists reveal the varying demands placed on female bodies and the distinct ways in which patriarchy shapes and limits women's choices. They push back, however, within those limitations through "their own autonomous subjectivity

⁷¹ Kim, "Race, Gender, and Postcolonial Identity," 254.

and sexuality.” Moreover, Kim is just as graphic in depicting the violence of plastic surgery as he is depicting sexual violence. Unlike mainstream portrayals such as *200 Pounds Beauty* that gloss over the actual procedures thus positing plastic surgery instead as some sort of magical, painless and instantaneous transformation, *Time* opens with a surgery sequence not for the faint. Replete with sutured and slashed body parts, Kim’s use of body genre here illuminates yet another mode of physical violence and pain experienced by the female body, distinct from yet related to that of Eun-ok’s. Since the film opens with these scenes, before the viewer has been acquainted with the main character, these scenes not only indicate the corporeal violence experienced by Seh-hee herself but the violence experienced by the thousands of Korean women daily frequenting plastic surgery clinics in South Korea. That is, Kim’s film opens with an indictment of plastic surgery as gendered violence.

In addition to the contemporary reality of the physical violence of plastic surgery, Kim shows us that “history is not the past but the present” on a national level vis-à-vis Sae-hee’s double existence. Much like Korea’s national division, which has engendered not only a physical border—the DMZ—but an historical one that recounts history as either before or after the Korean War, Sae-hee’s existence, too, becomes ever after about the demarcation between her pre and post-surgery self. As the last third of the film finds her seeking a return to her and Jiwoo’s purer love, their state-of-affairs before her surgery, the viewer comes to feel that such a return is futile.

Aptly titled then, time figures prominently in the film with the characters constantly lamenting the passage of time and/or their inability to go back in time.

Ultimately, however, the viewer witnesses as their actions take them back where they started as Kim ends the movie with one of the opening frames of Seh-Hee bumping into a woman who has just exited a plastic surgery clinic. Their collision causes the woman to drop the photo she is carrying and Seh-hee offers to have it fixed. Only this time, the viewer realizes that the woman Seh-hee bumps into is a newly transformed and “unrecognizable” Sae-hee and that the photo is of Sae-hee, disheveled and hysterical, just before she undergoes surgery yet again after Ji-woo’s death. Rather than following Seh-hee as she goes to have the frame fixed as the film does originally, our gaze fixes on Sae-hee as she escapes into a huge crowd, becoming just one in many, many similar faces. By ending his film as such, Kim denaturalizes linear notions of progress, especially as they pertain to technologies such as plastic surgery. The film ends where it begins indicating the absence of a teleological end point of progress symbolized by technologies such as plastic surgery.

And ironically, although U.S. discourses critique Korean women for emerging post-surgery looking more Euro-American and thus different from their assigned racialized traits, Kim ends his film highlighting the uniformity and conformity of Korean looks as a product of the plastic surgery craze. His ending is all the more poignant given that, in an era of neoliberalism, plastic surgery is often proffered as a viable solution to individual problems. As a method of self-management and care, plastic surgery has become normalized as a means of remedying an undisciplined body. As Sae-hee blends in with the rest of the crowd, the camera zooms farther and farther out, enlargening the sea of people into which she disappears. Sae-hee is no

longer an individual but has effectively rejoined the collective consciousness. This final scene ties Sae-hee's individual predicament to the collective suffering signified by *han*. Just as Kim begins the movie with a generalized scene optimizing the physical pain of plastic surgery, he also ends with a scene of the masses that says just as much about Korean women and the nation as a whole as it does about one filmic character. As such, Kim's film brings together the past and present as well as the individual and the collective in order to show plastic surgery as a form of gendered violence—of *han*—that continues to permeate and unsettle the lives of Koreans today.

Not only does Kim bring these insights to bear on plastic surgery as a technology, however, but to the film industry as well. Much in the same way that doctors slice, suture and stitch bodies, so do directors splice, edit and cut film in order to tell easily packaged and palatable stories. As outlined in the previous section, Korean film has been a medium through which filmmakers have both propagandized and critiqued South Korea's national narratives. Sae-hee's holding of the frame and Seh-hee's breaking of it can be read as Kim's critique of the medium and industry of film as a type of cosmetic surgery for the nation. Kim asserts that like plastic surgery, film cannot be considered a teleological technology but rather, one with politically laden historical origins that gets mediated within specific contexts towards different political ends. Significantly, the South Korean government is zealously marketing both cosmetic surgery and Korean film as international industries. As stories of multifarious genres enter the international market, South Korean corporations sell, in

addition to movie tickets and dvds, South Korean “looks.” Meticulously surgoned actors represent the hope of obtaining such beauty vis-à-vis South Korea’s medical tourism market. In many parts of Asia, such “looks” have come to signify, not the American Dream, but the “South Korean Dream” of capitalist modernity.

THE HORRIFIED BODY (GENRE) IN BONG MAN-DAE’S *CINDERELLA*

As of yet unwritten about in academic texts on Korean cinema, Bong Man-dae is a much lesser known director than his notorious counterpart, Kim Ki-duk. An actor, director and screenwriter, Bong directed fifteen straight-to-video films as well as a television series in 2004 and is perhaps best known as a soft core porn director.⁷² Bong’s star is on the rise, however, as he recently participated in the iPhone 4 Film Festival, which featured a dozen short films made by well-known Korean directors exclusively on their iPhones.⁷³

If, as Chung asserts, Kim’s corporeal effects can be read as an example of Williams’ “body genre,” then Bong Man-dae’s 2006 horror film, *Cinderella*, offers an example of how horror and melodrama operate together within this genre. The film begins with Hyunsu’s mother carrying a birthday cake down a dark set of stairs and finding a young girl who has hanged herself. After this suicide flashback, the movie proceeds in chronological time and revolves around Hyunsu, a high school student,

⁷² “Bong Man-dae Biography” accessed on December 1, 2010, http://www.hancinema.net/korean_Bong_Man-dae.php.

⁷³ Lee Hyo Won, “Lights! iPhone! Action!” accessed on December 1, 2010, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/art/2010/09/141_73647.html.

Directors’ shorts were available for viewing on the iPhone 4 Film Festival’s website from October 6 through the 31 and also screened at theaters in Seoul.

whose mother is a plastic surgeon and whose friends, one-by-one, elect surgery at her hands. Strangely enough, after each friend goes under the knife, the friend is haunted, feeling as if something is grossly wrong with her face until she is compelled to mutilate it. Amidst this gruesome plot, the viewer, along with Hyunsu herself, begins to understand that Hyunsu's own story is key to what is happening to her friends. Burned beyond recognition as a toddler when her mother leaves her in the car (while she argues with Hyunsu's father) and it explodes, Hyunsu nearly loses her life. Unable to accept either her near death or her disfigurement, her mother serendipitously meets an orphaned girl who asks her to take her home. She does and in what she perceives as an act of motherly love, Hyunsu's mother removes the face of the orphaned girl and puts it on Hyunsu, allowing her to live a normal life with a beautiful face. Unable to kill the orphan child afterwards, Hyunsu's mother locks the girl in her basement, raising her there secretly and promising her, "I'll make you a new face; I will make you pretty."⁷⁴ Ultimately the viewer discovers that it is the orphan girl who has hung herself—driven mad by her jealousy and resentment towards an unknowing Hyunsu—and it is the orphan's ghost who now haunts Hyunsu and her friends from beyond, seeking revenge for her stolen face and life.

As outlined in the previous section, Williams' "body genre" includes pornography, horror and melodrama. She groups these three types of film under one rubric because all three elicit physical responses from the viewer that mimic what is happening to the characters' bodies on screen. Furthermore, as Williams writes,

⁷⁴ Bong, *Cinderella*, 2006.

although the violence, gore and sentimentality of these genres have often been characterized as gratuitous, they serve the function of problem-solving:

The deployment of sex, violence, and emotion would thus seem to have very precise functions in these body genres. Like all popular genres, they address persistent problems in our culture, in our sexualities, in our very identities. The deployment of sex, violence, and emotion is thus in no way gratuitous and in no way strictly limited to each of these genres; it is instead a cultural form of problem solving.⁷⁵

While Williams attempts to think comparatively about these types of film, Bong's *Cinderella* is unique in that it combines the horror genre with what Williams calls "weepies," commonly known as "chick flicks" such as *Steel Magnolias* and *Terms of Endearment*. In so doing, *Cinderella* can be read as an indictment of both plastic surgery and motherhood within modern Korean society.

On the one hand, *Cinderella* is a story of maternal pathos. Like Debra Winger in *Terms of Endearment* or Bette Midler in *Stella*, two films Williams uses to exemplify "weepies," *Cinderella* also features a longsuffering mother who harbors a dark secret in the service of bettering her daughter's life. As Williams points out, "In these fantasies the quest for connection is always tinged with the melancholy of loss. Origins are already lost, the encounters always take place too late, on death beds or over coffins."⁷⁶ Indeed, Hyunsu's mother is overcome by loss on multiple fronts—not only does she nearly lose Hyunsu as a child but then again as a teenager once Hyunsu begins to unravel the truth about her past in order to recover her own lost origins. To make matters worse, Hyunsu's mother is guilt-ridden over the loss of the

⁷⁵ Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess," in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham, (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 276.

⁷⁶ Williams, "Film Bodies," 279.

orphan girl. Directed by this guilt and at the orphan ghost's bidding, the film ends with Hyunsu's mother about to operate on Hyunsu only this time to remove her face in order to put it on the orphan's corpse, back to its rightful owner. Unable, however, to cut into Hyunsu's face, her mother falls to the ground weeping. Enraged, the orphan girl's ghost descends on Hyunsu and attempts to do what her mother could not. In just the knick of time, Hyunsu's mother saves her by assuaging the angry ghost, telling her "I'm your mother, baby. And you are the pretty one."⁷⁷ Leading the ghost away from the table to save Hyunsu, her mother loses her daughter again—this time in order to save her. As such, even as the film's final scene is one of the most horrific, replete with the final scare notorious to horror films that makes audiences jump out of their seats, it ends with the ultimate sense of loss and unfulfilled connection between Hyunsu and her mother.

While this story is indeed fantastical, Korea's modern history—from a woman's perspective—is a tale of changing notions of femininity yet unwavering motherly sacrifice.⁷⁸ As feminist scholar Cho Haejoang points out, Korean femininity has undergone three major shifts in the 20th Century. The shift from traditional patriarchy to modern patriarchy or from mother-centered to a wife-centered patriarchy, marks Korean women's first major transition in the 20th century. During Japanese colonial rule, although the patrilineal principle that privileged fathers

⁷⁷ Bong, *Cinderella*, 2006.

⁷⁸ At the time of writing this chapter, American doctors performed the first full face transplant in the U.S., making the Cinderella's storyline perhaps a bit less fantastical. Katie Moisse, "Complete Face Transplant Gives Texas Man New Lease on Life," *ABC News*, accessed on March 21, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/Wellness/full-face-transplant-dallas-wiens-texas-construction-worker/story?id=13184195>.

remained culturally salient, mothers were placed at the center of the household since many men either emigrated to find work or joined independence movements.

Accordingly, this first generation of women was expected to be hardworking, wise and self-sacrificing. Not only did they take care of their immediate families but they also orchestrated the well being of their extended families. As Cho notes, however, their self-sacrificing was recognized and appreciated since most Koreans lived in such destitution that deferred gratification was the order of the day. Beginning in the 1960s and extending through to the 1980s, however, the second generation of Korean women experienced the nuclearization of the family and their own “housewifization” and as such, their main objectives were to make their families modern and middle-class.⁷⁹ Since many of these women grew up in poverty but could raise their children in relative affluence, a new generation of middle-class mothers put an emphasis on middle-class values: a better apartment, their children’s education, and advantageous marriages for their children.⁸⁰

The third transition, ushered in with consumer culture, occurred between the 1980s and 90s affecting the third generation of Korean women who came of age in the 1980s and grew up during the democratic student movements and the women’s liberation movement in Korea. While the women’s movement was isolated to elite

⁷⁹ As transnational feminist scholars point out, such modern ways of being were themselves disciplinary in the Foucauldian sense.

⁸⁰ Cho credits these women as the backbone of change in Korea: “I regard women of this generation as the main source of the Korean economic transformation’s vitality. With such a strong yearning for modernity, refusing to live like their own mothers who struggled for mere survival, disregarding their incompetent fathers and husbands, they have transformed their society as well as themselves” Cho Haejoang, “Living with Conflicting Subjectivities: Mother, Motherly Wife and Sexy Woman in the Transition from Colonial Modern to Postmodern Korea,” (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002) 176.

circles, rhetoric of “self-realization,” urging women to define themselves as individuals rather than through family relations, circulated widely. As radical movements of the 1980s died down, however, and consumer culture escalated, ideals privileging individuality transformed into narcissistic individuality. According to Cho:

In the name of individuality and self-expression, the image of the feminine as embodied in a lovely and sexy woman was being constructed. Women bought the image, partly out of a desperate striving to escape their mothers’ hold, to fashion themselves in their own style as promised by the new opportunities for consumption. Ironically, these newly feminine daughters were manufactured by the ambitious women of the previous generation, who encouraged them to undergo cosmetic surgery on their eyes and noses, believing that an improved appearance would change their daughters’ life chances in marriage and employment.⁸¹

As Cho cogently states, motherhood has become implicated in neoliberal forms of self-management as mothers (and women more generally) attempt to advance their children’s lives vis-à-vis consumer culture. In a highly competitive society, especially in the aftermath of the 1997 Economic Crisis, mothers have become critical to the maintenance of the plastic surgery industry. Hyunsu’s mother, both a sacrificial mother *and* a plastic surgeon, is perhaps the most telling representation of this phenomenon. While Kim’s *Time* offers a critique of Korean postmodernity and the excesses of capitalism, Bong’s film takes this critique a step further by showing how neoliberalism and consumer culture has come to define even the most intimate of relationships—that between mother and daughter.

Accordingly, Hyunsu and her mother’s relationship is defined by body work on multiple levels. As a plastic surgeon, Hyunsu’s mother works on bodies as a

⁸¹ Cho, “Living with Conflicting Subjectivities,” 182.

profession and as a mad science. Given the film's Frankensteinian undertones, Hyunsu's mother literally illustrates how Korean mothers, in the desire to secure their children's futures, *make* their children into their own creations. Echoing Kim's critiques not only of cosmetic surgery but of the film industry, Bong points out that mothers also edit and splice their children, literally and figuratively in order to achieve society's ideals. For example, *If You Were Me 1* (여섯개의 시선 2003), an omnibus film comprised of six shorts commissioned by the South Korean Human Rights Commission, documents how some Korean children undergo lingual frenectomy or tongue cutting surgery because their parents believe the procedure will improve their English pronunciation.⁸² While the documentary wrought much controversy upon its debut, catalyzing debates similar to those around the *ssangkekŏp'ul* procedure, the example offers a more utilitarian example of such neoliberal impulses. That is to say, while discourses around cosmetic surgery procedures often center beauty even when its recipients cite practical reasons for undergoing them, frenectomies illustrate a case in which physical selves are altered for purely practical and functional reasons. Little evidence exists, however, to suggest that these procedures actually work especially given the hundreds of thousands of Korean Americans who speak perfect English without ever having undergone them.⁸³ Korean academies or *hagwŏns*, which Korean children notoriously attend after school to improve their skills in English, Math and Science, also offer another example of how Korea's highly competitive society

⁸² *If You Were Me 1*, 여섯개의 시 1. DVD. (Park, Gwang Su and Park, Jin Pyo, 2003: 110 min)

⁸³ Demick, Barbara. "A snip of the tongue and English is yours!" *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 2002. http://web.archive.org/web/20061210222056/http://www2.gol.com/users/coynerhm/a_snip_of_the_tongue_and_english.htm

engenders conformity to trends and neoliberal solutions in order to secure advancement. *The Washington Post* reports that Korean parents spent 15.6 billion dollars in 2006 on English language tutors alone and at least 24,000 children in the first to twelve grades left the country to study English abroad.⁸⁴ As these examples show, pressures abound in South Korea for mothers to mold their children in the hopes of bettering their future.

Yet, Hyunsu and her mother work on their bodies in less permanent and mundane ways as well. In multiple scenes Hyunsu is bathed by her mother and receives facials and facial masks from her mother—everyday occurrences for many Korean mothers and daughters who often bond by sharing beauty secrets and practices.⁸⁵ When the viewer realizes, however, that Hyunsu’s mother puts hardening masks on Hyunsu’s face not only to give her better skin but also because she gives the orphan girl the hardened masks to wear, the film puts the mundane together with the horrific. In doing so, Bong denormalizes commonplace beauty practices. For Hyunsu, this economy of beauty is deadly, cultivating between her and her mother a closeness that kills. While such mundane forms of body work do not usually end in death for real life practitioners, one questions what other forms of being become foreclosed by these practices and standardized notions of beauty.

⁸⁴ Cho, Johee, “English is the Golden Tongue for S. Koreans,” July 2, 2007.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/01/AR2007070101259.html>

⁸⁵ This is certainly true in my own family. My own relationship with my mother is characterized by visits to the spa and sharing of beauty products and techniques. My cousin recently took what she learned from her mother to the bank when she launched her own skincare line based on her mother’s beauty practices and secrets. Another cousin recently opened an elite health spa that features traditional Korean skincare and healing methods.

Despite the fact that *Cinderella* tells a tale of maternal pathos, it is also a horror story. As Williams outlines, American horror stories often contend with issues of sexual difference:

Some of the most violent and terrifying moments of the horror film genre occur in moments when the female victim meets the psycho-killer-monster unexpectedly, before she is ready [...] This surprise encounter, too early, often takes place at a moment of sexual anticipation when the female victim thinks she is about to meet her boyfriend or lover. The monster's violent attack on the female victims vividly enacts a symbolic castration which often functions as a kind of punishment for an ill-timed exhibition of sexual desire.⁸⁶

While the “problem-solving” enacted in American horror films has to do with sexual difference, disciplining young girls’ sexual identities and desires at the same time teaching the young adolescent male spectators often drawn to this genre, *Cinderella* does not involve sexual relationships at all. In fact, save Hyunsu’s father’s character, there are no males in the storyline. Neither Hyunsu nor her friends have boyfriends or love interests. For these girls, terrifying moments occur once they go under the knife, receiving the new face the orphan girl herself has been promised but never received. Rather than the “ill-timed exhibitions of sexual desire” that do American victims in, Hyunsu’s friends are victimized for exhibitions of vanity and the easy fix plastic surgery as modern science presents.

Accordingly, Bong’s film is rife with tension between the traditional and the modern and perhaps more profoundly between North Korea and South as represented by Hyunsu and the orphan girl’s dichotomous existence. Here, Bong’s film finds synergy with Kim’s in that he, too, illustrates the salience of history to the

⁸⁶ Williams, “Film Bodies,” 279.

contemporary situation of Korea: “history is not the past but the present.” Hyunsu, like discursive depictions of South Korea, epitomizes the excesses of capitalist modernity with her privileged lifestyle, Western style home and her mother’s profession and status as a divorcee. The orphan girl on the other hand, isolated and literally stuck in time as a child despite her maturing body, is anachronistic, much as popular discourses paint North Korea. This binary is fortified by the orphan girl’s grandmother’s attempts to locate her. In an early scene, Hyunsu waits for the bus with her friends before her birthday party. At the bus stop a grandmother, hunched over and wearing working class clothing, hands out leaflets of a missing child. Hyunsu receives one of the leaflets, which later becomes a clue to her origin story as the child looks like her. She first thinks that she is the orphan girl in the leaflet only to discover that it is her face that she has taken. In stark opposition to the glossy materialism and wealth characterizing Hyunsu’s modern home, the grandmother represents traditional Korea, the loss of which produces anxieties in South Korea’s postmodern capitalist society, while the orphan girl—North Korea—is literally sequestered from the world. In this vein, the orphan girl seeks her lost face, haunting Hyunsu, her mother and her friends with her demands to “give me back my face.” Hyunsu’s friends, however, describe the orphan girl’s grip on them as an inability to “stop wanting to mess up my face” because of the feeling that “this isn’t my face.” Their cries are always for a return to realness, much like Seh-hee’s desire to return to her pre-surgery life and love with Jiwoo. In marked contrast, Hyunsu’s mother continually tells the orphan girl, “I’ll make you a new face.” Read together, these

constant iterations throughout the film create a back and forth between the traditional and the modern, a desire to “go back” versus a desire for something new, between North Korea and South.

This tug of war is also subtly alluded to by the characters’ use of language. The word “mine” (*naŭi*) is rarely used in the Korean language in regards to familial relationships. Instead, “our” (*uri*) is often used to indicate a possessive relationship between family members and romantic partners. For example, even though a husband is married only to his wife, a wife will commonly refer to her husband as *uri namp’yŏn* or “our husband” despite the fact that the possessive relationship is in relation to her and her alone. In a scene where Hyunsu is receiving a facial from her mother, she describes her mother as “my mother” to which her mother asks, “My mother? Not our mother?” and Hyunsu replies, “No, you are *my* mother.”⁸⁷ Similarly, when Hyunsu’s mother confronts her ex-husband about his relationship with Hyunsu, she tells him that she is “my daughter.” When he interjects that she is also his, she says, “No, she’s mine, not ours.”⁸⁸ Most noticeably, in all of Hyunsu’s mother’s flashbacks of the orphan girl as a small, happy child (before she loses her face), she laughs, throws her arms around Hyunsu’s mother and calls her “our mother.”⁸⁹ While these linguistic differences may seem minute, Bong’s differentiation between possessive terms can be read as an indictment of eroding Korean values. That is to say, *uri* indicates a different understanding of “I” that does

⁸⁷ Bong, *Cinderella*, 2006.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

not see itself as an individual but rather, as part of a collective. Thus, “my mother” is not mine alone but a collective being with relationships that extend beyond the mother/child connection. As such, Hyunsu and her mother’s departure in terms of claiming one another indicates a vast departure from traditional understandings of familial ties, values and language. In comparison, the orphan girl and her grandmother represent a purity of the past and a lost innocence. Bong juxtaposes the two pairs—Hyunsu and her mother; the orphan girl and her grandmother—in order to highlight the loss accompanying modern, meaning Western, practices and ways of living. In other words, while modern discourses often emphasize what is to be gained when non-Western countries adopt Western ways, Bong illustrates the irreversible cultural as well as material consequences.

Like Kim, however, Bong’s storytelling falls into sexist pitfalls. His symbolic dichotomy—traditional/modern; North/South Korea—is highly gendered and as mentioned above, there are no males in the storyline except for Hyunsu’s father. Although her father is a conductor of a symphony and listed as “Vivaldi” in her phone, alluding to the fact that his lifestyle is perhaps more Western as well, he plays no significant part in her life nor the decisions made by her mother. Furthermore, when not at Hyunsu’s home, Hyunsu and her friends are largely depicted in art class where they sculpt one another from large clay blobs. It is here in these gendered spaces, where only the girls reside attempting a European art form, that many of the gruesome scenes occur. For instance, two of Hyunsu’s friends, possessed by the orphan girl after both having surgery, turn from their clay to one another and cut into

each others' faces with their sculpting knives. They are found drenched in blood, admiring their work. Thus, *Cinderella* is a gendered indictment of consumerism and capitalist modernity as is often the case in nationalist narratives. As Laura Nelson points out:

The imagined inability of women, as a class, to restrain their desires is seen as leading to the social disharmonies of conspicuous consumption, the financial ruin of spending beyond one's means, and the corrupting adoption of foreign ways and things. [...] This sense that the nation is made vulnerable through its women-as-consumers seems almost sexual, metaphorically related to the idea that the nation's women need to be protected from the predations, or temptations, of foreign men.⁹⁰

Here, Nelson points out that consumption and sex—body work—allegorize struggles over national boundaries. In other words, the gendered female body provides a vehicle through which contestations over tradition and modernity are enacted and performed.

CONCLUSION

In Korean and Korean American studies as well as popular depictions about Korean women, the *yangkongju* has emerged as a particularly fetishized object of study that symbolizes feminist calls for justice. The plastic surgery consumer, on the other hand, has emerged as a representation of South Korean women's excessive consumption and internalized racial oppression. By reading these figures together through the films of Kim Ki-duk and Bong Man-dae, I have attempted to show that,

⁹⁰ Laura Nelson, *Measured Excess: Status, Gender and Consumer Nationalism in South Korea*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 144.

like the *yangkongju*, the plastic surgery consumer is also embedded within a history of colonial domination, militarized capitalism and imperial racial formation. Indeed, these films demand that the viewer contend with Korea's modern history and the ways in which Korea's entanglements with U.S. empire have made specific demands on gendered bodies. In theorizing intersections between sexual labor and bodily manipulations, both distinct types of body work, we can begin to have larger conversations that do not fetishize the female laboring body or castigate female consumers but rather, put the two into conversation in order to understand how capitalism and (neo)colonialism mobilize gendered bodies towards different ends. Rather than conceiving of plastic surgery consumers as cultural dupes who have given into the false consciousnesses created by structures of racism, sexism and/or consumer culture, connecting women's everyday beauty choices to their larger historical contexts provides new strategies for understanding these issues. Far more than just frivolous concerns, beauty choices—women's body work—are the everyday manifestations of gendered historical legacies that emerge as interventions in identity that women often see as inroads to the procurement of the "American Dream." These legacies resonate throughout the diaspora and by opening our frame of reference to the myriad ways in which women's bodies are subjected we can perhaps conceive of new methods of thinking about and organizing around these issues on a transnational scale.

CHAPTER THREE

ENTERTAINING BEAUTY: *HALLYU*, COSMETIC SURGERY, AND SOUTH KOREA'S BURGEONING MEDICAL TOURISM INDUSTRY

“...we must consider the cosmetic surgery patient as a cultural production, one that is created in the process of becoming a patient.”

--Victoria Pitts-Taylor¹

“The Koreans have just begun to realize that culture can be as profitable as semiconductors or cars.”

--Doobo Shim²

In 2005, half of all South Korean households tuned in to watch the finale of what was, to date, the most popular South Korean television serial in its genre, *My Lovely Samsong* (내 이름은 김삼순 2005). Dubbed Korea's *Bridget Jones' Diary*, the drama or K-drama (as Korean television serials are commonly called) chronicles the exploits of an overweight, single, and almost thirty year old pastry chef embarking on her career while losing, then finding, love along the way. The lead character, Samsong, played by Kim Sun-ah, is a heroine (much like Bridget Jones) with whom average women can relate.³ Considered overweight and perhaps worse yet, brazen

¹ Victoria Pitts-Taylor, *Surgery Junkies: Wellness and Pathology in Cosmetic Culture*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007) 181.

² Doobo Shim, “Waxing the Korean Wave,” ARI Working Paper, No. 158, June 2011, www.nus.ari.edu.sg/pub/wps.html, 7.

³ In this chapter I use the widely accepted (on fan sites, webpages, etc.) romanized spellings of K-drama actors' and characters' names rather than their McCune-Reischauer transliterations.

and outspoken by South Korean standards, Samssoon offers a departure from the svelte heroines typical of most dramas, thus inviting her female viewers to connect with her struggles with constraining notions of femininity and beauty.⁴

The first episode finds Samssoon going to a matchmaking company for a consultation after she catches her boyfriend of three years cheating on her on Christmas Eve. After the manager asks her a series of questions about her family, their wealth (or lack thereof), and her position within the family (she is the youngest of three daughters), he asks if she has had any work done on her face. When she replies that she is 100 percent natural, he responds by saying: “What were you thinking? How could you not get plastic surgery in today’s world with that face? Just look at yourself!”⁵ He then advises her that “It’s easier to get hit by an atomic bomb than for a woman over thirty to find a boyfriend.”⁶ Aghast, Samssoon retaliates with the sharp wit that is a hallmark of her character traits. The viewer soon realizes, however, that Samssoon is dreaming having dozed off in the waiting area of the matchmaking company. When she does meet with the manager after awaking, he asks the same series of questions but rather than asking about or suggesting plastic surgery, this time he suggests their unlimited dating, special membership for the exorbitant price of 9,990,000 W—nearly \$6,600 U.S. dollars.

⁴ Just as Renee Zellweger did for *Bridget Jones Diary*, Kim Sun-ah also received much media attention for gaining weight specifically for the role. As in Zellweger’s case, people debated whether Lee’s final weight of 52 kilograms (she gained 7 kilograms) really put her in the category of “overweight.”

⁵ My Lovely Samssoon (내 이름은 김삼순), “Episode 1,” My Lovely Samssoon instant stream, 57:43, http://www.dramafever.com/drama/8/1/My_Lovely_Sam_Soon/

⁶ Ibid.

As the above scene reveals, plastic surgery is considered a rational tool of self-enhancement in South Korea. Women are increasingly going under the knife (and paying for dating services) to increase their chances on the marriage and labor markets.⁷ In fact, women like Samssoon who do not engage in such practices are often seen as unfulfilling their potential while women who do are deemed protean go-getters. That the above sequence is but a dream is all the more telling since these admonishments are coming from our heroine's subconscious rather than an external source, symbolizing the ways in which neoliberal mandates for self-management are not only received by women but internalized modes of self-discipline as well. What's more, that the rest of the series does not focus on cosmetic surgery illustrates how such issues of body image and modification are quotidian experiences for women such as Samssoon.

In my interview with a representative from Seoul Tourism Organization's Tourism Marketing Division, she conceded that while medical tourism is a growing industry for South Korea, their organization focuses little on advertising for its plastic surgery market. She observed that *Hallyu* is their advertising given its worldwide popularity.⁸ Dubbed *Hallyu* or "Korean Wave" by Chinese reporters in the late 1990s for its rippling popularity amongst Chinese teens, *Hallyu* has culturally dominated Asia for more than a decade. As such, popular dramas (or K-dramas as they are

⁷ According to feminist scholar Park Hye Gyong, "Increased economic instability wrought by neoliberalism bolsters market-oriented social value. After the 1990s and especially after South Korea's Economic Crisis in 1997, commercial websites and matchmaking services began to emerge, creating a situation where individuals' choices for partners for either marriage or dating have become mediated by markets."

Park Hye Gyong, Personal Communication, 9 February 2012.

⁸ Eun Mi Kim, personal interview, March 10, 2010.

popularly referred) like *My Lovely Samsoon* not only reflect the normalized practices and ideas of South Korean society but also circulate them to an international audience. As noted above, more than half of all Korean households tuned into the series and according to the Korean Culture and Information Service and Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, it is considered one of the top ten Korean dramas that has been “particularly beloved by foreign fans.”⁹ In fact, during the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism’s 4-day annual international content market event in 2005, *My Lovely Samsoon* pulled in US \$9 million in sales to overseas networks.¹⁰ *Hallyu* seemingly conquered the European market last June when French fan frenzy made international headlines during the “SM Town Live in Paris” concerts.¹¹ More recently, *Hallyu* casted an even wider net with K-pop sensation Girls’ Generation making their U.S. late night debut on *The David Letterman Show* and morning show debuts on *Live with Kelly* and *Good Morning America* with their English single, *The Boys*.

The marketing representative’s recognition of *Hallyu*’s popularity is perhaps unsurprising given its global reach. What is notable, however, is the acknowledgement of the symbiotic relationship between *Hallyu* and medical tourism—two booming South Korean industries. This chapter takes seriously the

⁹ Wi Tack-Whan and Chung Ah-young, *K-Drama: A New TV Genre with Global Appeal* (Seoul: Korean Culture and Information Service, 2011) 76.

The other top ten: *Jewel in the Palace* (2003 – 2004), *Winter Sonata* (2002), *Autumn in My Heart* (2000), *Sarangbi: Winter Sonata*, *Jumong* (2006 – 2007), *Coffee Prince* (2007), *Full House* (2004), *Boys Over Flowers* (2009), *Iris* (2009), *Secret Garden* (2010 – 2011) pages 77 – 87.

¹⁰ Doobo Shim, “The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries and the Korean Wave” in *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave* ed. Chua Beng Huat et al. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008) 28.

¹¹ “K-Pop Invades Europe,” June 13, 2011, accessed July 1, 2011, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/06/13/2011061300450.html.

epigraph at its beginning: "...we must consider the cosmetic surgery patient as a cultural production, one that is created in the process of becoming a patient."¹² As such, this chapter locates popular culture and K-dramas in particular, as an epicenter of the "process of becoming a patient" and attempts to understand how popular culture representations intersect with consumer practices. I argue that K-dramas act as "technologies of subjectivity" that proliferate neoliberal governmentalities that champion cosmetic surgery (among other things) as viable avenues for self-management and investment. If *The Oprah Winfrey Show* is exemplary of the ways in which neoliberalism operates through the televisual realm in the U.S., as chapter one asserts, then *Hallyu* or K-dramas more specifically, operate similarly in the South Korean context. In other words, K-dramas are cultural mechanisms that reify neoliberalism as social ethos. This is powerful not only in the South Korean context but precisely because, like *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Hallyu* travels transnational trajectories because of its global popularity.

South Korea expects to welcome 100,000 medical tourists in 2012, most of who will be cosmetic surgery patients—South Korea's medical tourism industry's most popular and lucrative field.¹³ These rising numbers of medical tourists point to a significant trend in the healthcare industry today: medical care has increasingly become a consumer good that is bought and sold through transnational circuits and just as manufacturers take their businesses abroad for cost effectiveness, medical

¹² Pitts-Taylor, *Surgery Junkies*, 181.

¹³ Bae Ji-sook, "[KoreaToday] Cosmetic Surgery Emerges as Export Product," *The Korea Times* (Korea Today, January 27, 2010), http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/01/117_59782.html.

consumers are now expected to do so as well. According to medical anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes, while commodification of the body is not specifically a result of globalization, new technologies have generated new markets for bodies and body parts.¹⁴ As such, this chapter illustrates the mutually constitutive nature of *Hallyu* and South Korea's medical tourism industry. Through its representations of South Korean capitalist modernity, *Hallyu* does the affective work necessary to interpellate Asian women as consumers of medical procedures. As sociologist Charis Thompson articulates, "It has often been argued that markets need affect; medical migrations bring this point home for markets that are increasingly capitalized and that take as their raw material life itself."¹⁵ In other words, cosmetic surgery, and traveling to South Korea to undergo it, becomes a rational economic investment in part because of how it is affectively tied to *Hallyu's* popular culture representations. *Hallyu's* effects are not uniform, however, but constitute different meanings depending on the transnational connectivities it travels and the contexts within which it is received. Thus, I argue that *Hallyu* constructs a fantasy space for its viewers that either resurrects nostalgic dreams of the past or erects aspirational dreams—a "Korean Dream." In both cases, emulating South Korean beauty, because of *Hallyu's* enmeshed nature with South Korea's cosmetic surgery (and other beauty) industries, is coded as one avenue of embodying such dreams.

¹⁴ Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "Bodies for Sale – Whole or in Parts," in *Commodifying Bodies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), 1 – 8.

¹⁵ Charis Thompson, "Medical Migrations Afterword: Science as Vacation?," *Body & Society* 17, no. 2 & 3 (2011): 210 - 211.

First, this chapter offers a brief history of South Korean television and the global rise of *Hallyu* and K-dramas in particular. Second, this chapter closely reads popular K-dramas *My Lovely Samsoon*, *Boys Over Flowers* (꽃보다 남자 2009), and *Before and After Plastic Surgery Clinic* (비포&애프터 서형외과 2008), heretofore referred to as *B & A*, in order to examine the methods and narrative logics employed by South Korean dramas to subjectify viewers and normalize cosmetic surgery. Next, this chapter provides an historical overview of South Korea's medical tourism industry, its current outlook and marketing strategies. This chapter culminates with a discussion of how the medical tourism industry intersects with *Hallyu*, arguing that *Hallyu* engenders both nostalgic and aspirational dreams amongst its fans that ultimately render the consumer market a viable space for enacting (at least in part) those dreams.

THE RISE OF THE KOREAN DRAMA

Like Korean cinema, the history of the Korean drama has also been affected by the country's political trajectory. Korea's first broadcasting company, Kyungseung Broadcasting Company, was established during Japanese occupation by the Resident-General, the Japanese governing body of colonial Korea.¹⁶ Although its radio programming was mainly propagandist in nature, designed to deliver messages to the Korean people from the Japanese government, it was the foundation for the Korean

¹⁶ Do Kyun Kim and Se-Jin Kim, "Hallyu from Its Origin to Present: A Historical Overview," in *Hallyu: Influence of Korean Popular Culture in Asia and Beyond*, ed. Do Kyun Kim and Min-Sun Kim (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2011), 21.

broadcasting industry and eventually became the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS), which is currently the largest broadcasting company in South Korea. Korea's short-lived first television network, HLKZ-TV, launched in May of 1956.¹⁷ Five years later, the aforementioned KBS, Tong Yang Television Company (TBC) and Munhwa Broadcasting Company (MBC) were established and until 1991, Korean television stations were primarily supported and controlled by the South Korean government.¹⁸ The establishment of these television networks brought with them the first era of Korean dramas. Because little has been written on South Korean dramas before *Hallyu*, perhaps owing the government's central involvement, the following section outlining the early history of K-dramas relies heavily on a governmental publication, *K-dramas: A New TV Genre with Global Appeal*, published by the Korean Culture and Information Service and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

Unlike the dramas of today, dramas of the mid-1960s offered little by way of entertainment and were used instead as education and propaganda tools of the authoritarian government. The very first drama, *Backstreet of Seoul* (KBS 1962), resembled more of a lecture series on the problems of urban life while children's drama, *Yeong-i's Diary* (KBS 1970), served as a platform for public campaign announcements. *Real Theater* (KBS 1964 – 1985) was a major vehicle through which

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

The Korean Culture and Information Service's publication, *K-Drama, A New TV Genre with Global Appeal*, does not mention government involvement with television networks and instead describe KBS as the South Korea's first public broadcaster and TBC and MBC as the first commercial broadcasters.

Wi and Young, *K-Drama*, 59.

the government drove their anti-communist message home to citizens for two decades.¹⁹

In 1969, the government lifted its ban on commercial advertising and networks began to compete with one another for commercial advertisers and more importantly, viewers. The fierce competition initiated an early “heyday” during which fifteen dramas aired a day between the three networks.²⁰ The heyday ended, however, when the government imposed content regulations as well as requirements for educational and news programming. When more households began acquiring television sets throughout the 1970s, not only did network television’s influence on everyday life increase but dramas also began to reflect everyday life. For example, *Assi* (KBS 1972) and *Yeoro* (KBS 1972) portrayed the difficulties of the tail end of Japanese colonial rule in Korea as well as the Korean War while *Reed* (TBC 1972) revolved around characters enduring extreme poverty.²¹ Towards the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, however, drama storylines reflected new social concerns for Koreans, moving away from poverty to urban issues involving violent crime.

Color television brought another milestone to Korean drama production, which utilized the technology to evoke new types of emotions from viewers. Rather than merely depicting social problems, dramas of the 1980s offered nostalgic looks back to simpler times by depicting pastoral life and landscapes that contrasted with South Korea’s urban development. Historical dramas also emerged at this time with

¹⁹ Wi and Young, *K-Drama*, 63.

²⁰ Wi and Young, *K-Drama*, 60.

²¹ Wi and Young, *K-Drama*, 64.

Founding the Country (KBS 1980) and *500 Years of Joseon Kingdom* (KBS 1980) liberally interpreting historical facts for the sake of educational entertainment.²²

If the 1980s was the decade of color television, then the 1990s was the decade of cable television, which created intense competition between the networks. With new developments in satellite technology and interactive cable systems, Korean citizens had better and more access to television at the same time that they began to have more disposable income to pay for it. SBS, a new terrestrial broadcaster and the first commercial television station, also emerged at this time and initiated a “television drama offensive” that diversified the storylines, locations and content of dramas while increasing their numbers.²³ Engaged in a “drama war,” all the networks subsequently began to invest more money in production quality, resulting in unprecedented spending on dramas.²⁴ For instance, historical drama *Eyes of Dawn* (1991 – 1992) depicted Korean history from the Japanese colonial period to the Korean War and costed some \$200 million W (US \$132,000) each episode.²⁵

At the same time, the government also relaxed its regulations and censorship, which contributed to a diversity of new programming. First, dramas began to be geared toward younger audiences vis-à-vis “the trendy drama.” Inspired by Japanese television programming of the era, Korean trendy dramas, like their Japanese

²² Wi and Young, *K-Drama*, 65.

²³ The Chun Doo-whan administrations forcibly collapsed 29 broadcasters into 2 in 1980—KBS and MBC.

Shim, “The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries,” 23.

²⁴ Shim, “The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries,” 24.

²⁵ Wi and Young, *K-Drama*, 66.

counterparts, were “visual metaphor[s] for capitalist-consumerist modernity.”²⁶ That is, vis-à-vis the stylish lives and love relationships of young people, trendy dramas put forth an image of South Korean lifestyles wherein consumer goods (and the wealth to buy them) were equated with the seemingly modern. This, coupled with exorbitant production spending, initiated a second heyday for K-Dramas.²⁷ Young people tuned into dramas such as *Jealousy* (MBC 1994) for their hit soundtracks, fashion forward clothes, and good-looking stars. Second, relaxed surveillance of television content also led to more political dramas such as *Sandglass* (1995), which some argue singlehandedly rewrote Korean history. Still one of the highest rated dramas in Korean history with a 64.3 percent share for the series finale, *Sandglass* was the first popular culture production to depict the 1980 Gwangju Uprising in which hundreds of peacefully protesting civilians were killed by paramilitary troopers.²⁸

GLOBALIZING THE K-DRAMA

Until the late 1990s, Japanese television programming had a monopoly on the exportation of television serials to other Asian regions. Conversely, not a single non-Japanese program had ever been imported to Japan until 2004 when NHK broadcasted *Winter Sonata*.²⁹ Several factors led to this turn of events that has irreversibly changed the popular cultural landscape of Asia. First, the 1997 Asian

²⁶ Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi, “Introduction” in *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, ed. Chua Beng Huat et al. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008) 2.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Jennifer Flinn, “History Cast Ashore,” Archive Site, *Asia Pacific Arts, UCLA Asia Institute*, October 28, 2006, <http://www.asiaarts.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=56467>.

²⁹ Huat and Iwabuchi, “Introduction,” 4.

Financial Crisis had a twofold effect. The hard hit South Korean economy had the government looking for new export industries and its culture industry was identified as a potentially major profit-generator. Former President Kim Dae-jung who was inaugurated in 1998 and formally called himself the “President of Culture,” established the Basic Law for the Cultural Industry Promotion in 1999, which allocated \$148.5 million to the project of exporting South Korean cultural products abroad.³⁰ Indeed, the government’s promotional policy has been the major factor in *Hallyu*’s rapid growth. At the same time, other Asian countries that were also recovering from the 1997 crisis were experiencing media liberalization and looking for programming cheaper than the relatively expensive Japanese dramas that were also waning in popularity. In fact, K-dramas were a quarter of the price of Japanese dramas and a tenth of the price of Hong Kong television dramas.³¹ K-dramas, in vast supply given their government backing, swooped in to fill this demand.

Although MBC sold *Eyes of Dawn* to Turkey’s national broadcaster (making it the first drama to be exported to Europe) and *What is Love All About* to a Hong Kong network in 1992, *Hallyu* really first took hold in China.³² As noted in the introduction, Korean popular culture was first coined *Hallyu* by Chinese journalists in 1999. Two years earlier, China Central Television Station (CCTV) aired its first K-Drama, *What is Love All About*, which was such a success that they re-aired it the following year in a prime-time slot. This time, *What is Love All About* garnered the second highest ratings

³⁰ Sung, Sang-yeon, “Introduction: Why are Asians attracted to Korean pop culture?” in *Korean Wave*, *The Korean Herald*, ed., *Insight into Korea Series Vol. 5*, (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2008) 16 – 17.

³¹ Shim, “Waxing the Korean Wave,” 5.

³² Shim, “The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries,” 25.

ever in the history of Chinese television.³³ In 1999, *Stars in My Heart* became a hit not only in China but in Taiwan as well and from there, K-dramas began to take up airwaves in Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia.

Given South Korea's status as a former colony of Japan, *Hallyu's* cultural hold there has particular significance. In fact, the South Korean government issued a ban on Japanese cultural forms in 1945 that was not lifted until 1998 with the signing of the New 21st Century Korea-Japan Partnership allowing media products to flow freely between the two nations.³⁴ Although Korean music and movies had already gained quite a following in Japan by the late 1990s, *Winter Sonata's* 2003 debut on NHK marked the first time a K-drama had been aired for Japanese audiences and it was an instant national sensation—so much so, in fact, that although the term *Hallyu* had already been coined, it came into common parlance that year with Japanese fanfare. *Winter Sonata's* audience shares peaked at 22.2 percent—the highest share achieved by any drama aired on Japanese television at the time.³⁵ In fact, *Winter Sonata's* male lead, Bae Yong-Joon (known affectionately by his Japanese fans as Yonsama or “Prince Yong”) was so beloved, that upon visiting Tokyo in 2004,

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ As other scholars have noted, the ban did not prevent Japanese cultural products from influencing South Korean popular culture since even KBS was guilty of illegally importing Japanese pop culture. According to Kim Hyun-mee, “Japanese [pop] culture in Korea had already set its roots deep into the emotional structure of Koreans (as cited by Huat and Iwabuchi).” Huat and Iwabuchi, “Introduction,” 4.

³⁵ Sun Jung, “Bae Yong-Joon, Soft Masculinity, and Japanese Fans: Our Past Is in Your Present Body,” in *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption*, TransAsia: Screen Cultures (Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 36.

According to the Korean Culture and Information Service, nearly 70 percent of Japanese viewers had watched at least one episode by the end of 2004.

Wi and Young, *K-Drama*, 17.

approximately 3,500 Japanese women swarmed the airport to catch a glimpse of him causing 350 riot police to come on the scene. Such enthusiastic greetings from fans and political officials had until that point, been reserved only for Hollywood celebrities.³⁶

Hallyu's growth and popularity in Asia has been so intense that in 2004, the Korean television programming export figure was \$71.4 million from \$5.5 million in 1995.³⁷ These figures and *Hallyu's* undeniable fandom across Asia has caused many scholars to conjecture, research and debate just *why* it is so popular amongst fans. Although factors such as the government backing and media liberalization provide structural explanations for how *Hallyu* caught on, they do little to explain why individual fans love K-dramas to such an extent. The Korean Culture and Information Service and the Ministry of Tourism and Culture cite three main reasons in their government issued book, *K-Drama: A New TV Genre with Global Appeal*. First, K-dramas espouse family-based Confucian values, such as respect for elders, with which many Asian viewers can relate. More specifically, because K-dramas deal with everyday life, they “appeal to global audiences because *jeong*—a Korean term for human affection—is usually a central theme.”³⁸ Second, K-dramas tend to be less sexually and/or violently provocative than Hollywood productions. Using less sexualized images, romantic dramas in particular leave audiences feeling “warm and

³⁶ Do Kyun Kim and Min-Sun Kim, “Preface,” in *Hallyu: Influence of Korean Popular Culture in Asia and Beyond* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2011), 10.

³⁷ Shim, “The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries,” 27.

³⁸ Wi and Young, *K-Drama*, 42.

happy.”³⁹ Lastly, K-dramas offer simple stories that are emotionally and dramatically charged. Because dramas do not follow a “season” format but often run anywhere from 16 to 24 episodes, storylines are action-packed, melodramatic and focused on a central theme.⁴⁰ While many scholars have noted that K-dramas’ Confucian sensibilities appeal to Asian viewers’ sense of shared values, the government publication makes a point to highlight distinctly Korean emotional concepts such as *jeong* or *han*—the Korean term for historical and collective suffering and resentment—as focal points of their appeal.⁴¹ Such characterizations exemplify the ways in which K-dramas have been used to construct a sense of cultural nationalism that posits that K-dramas’ global popularity is directly tied to distinct (and perhaps superior) attributes of Korean culture.

While *Hallyu* fans’ appreciation for K-dramas’ shared values and emotional storylines is well-documented, scholars have added to these. Communications scholar Doobo Shim explains that cultural consumption is a process of negotiation in which consumers “invest their time, money, energy and emotional allowances in cultural commodities in order to acquire pleasure and make meaning.”⁴² For viewers in developing nations such as China and Taiwan, Shim asserts, Korean dramas have offered “better terms for negotiation” by providing high-quality entertainment coupled with Asian values and stories that balance traditional sentiments with

³⁹ Wi and Young, *K-Drama*, 44.

⁴⁰ Wi and Young, *K-Drama*, 45.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Shim, “The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries,” 26.

modern cityscapes and lifestyles.⁴³ Cultural studies scholar Sung Sang-yeon's respondents, Asians living in Vienna who enjoy K-dramas, put it a bit differently by describing it as the "self-confidence and nationalism Koreans show through their popular culture."⁴⁴ In other words, "Korean pop culture has borrowed the best of Western popular culture and recreated it according to Korean tastes. That is why Korean popular culture differs from others—it expresses inner passion and powerful energy."⁴⁵ That Sung's respondents would identify these positive attributes as "self-confidence" and "nationalism" indicate that dramas help fans to negotiate the development of their own sense of values by serving as a model for such negotiations amidst economic development. Often, however, this modeling takes place on the consumer market as will be further discussed in the last section.

In 2006 the export growth rate of K-dramas waned for the first time and many predicted the end of *Hallyu's* reign. Scholars and cultural critics cited *Hallyu's* inability to release fresh products, saying that *Hallyu* fans would not continue to come back for the same stories again and again. In order to address these issues, the Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange conducted a survey called "The Comprehensive Study for Sustainable Growth of the Korea Wave" from October of 2007 to April of 2008.⁴⁶ The survey was conducted in China, Japan, Taiwan and Vietnam and concluded that while television programs are still the driving force behind *Hallyu* consumption (compared to film and music) production companies

⁴³ Shim, "The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries," 27.

⁴⁴ Sung, "Introduction," 20 - 21.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Yang Sung-jin, "The Korean Wave needs new strategies to solidify position in Asia" in *Korean Wave, The Korean Herald*, ed., *Insight into Korea Series Vol. 5*, (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2008) 245.

should concentrate on producing high-quality content and strengthen overseas distribution networks to continue *Hallyu's* success.⁴⁷ Since there were no regulations to ensure such high quality, many critics predicted *Hallyu's* downward spiral.

Hallyu's recent resurgence, however, has proved critics wrong. *Boys Over Flowers*, the Korean version of Taiwanese *Meteor Garden* and Japanese *Hana Yori Dango*, became a sensation in Asia in 2009. According to Shim, this was a “turning point for the Korean Wave” because “it marked a new generation of Korean television stars” since the drama about high school students featured fresh faced and young actors and actresses.⁴⁸ Moreover, pop singing sensation, Wonder Girls, also hit a milestone when they made it into the Bill Board Hot 100 that very same year with their hit, *Nobody*. Not only have many K-pop (as Korean popular music is called) stars crossed over into acting in dramas to increase their visibility and breathe new life to K-dramas, they have also taken to YouTube to grow their success overseas. As mentioned in the introduction, K-pop stars recently met with pandemonium during their concerts in Paris, France and pop group, Girls' Generation, is currently sweeping the U.S., making appearances on national television shows. Most significantly, this new phase of *Hallyu* popularity is distinct from *Hallyu's* early success:

In the early 2000s, [*Hallyu*] was characterized by scenes of middle-aged housewives in East Asian countries chasing after Korean actors whom they were enamored of from watching television and VCDs (video cassette disks). Now, Korean pop music, or K-pop, has become the centerpiece of the Korean Wave, and it is largely enjoyed by teenagers around the world—not just in Asia. As noted, this change is an outcome of the Internet, which brings

⁴⁷ Yang, “The Korean Wave,” 247.

⁴⁸ Shim, “Waxing the Korean Wave,” 15.

us to pay further attention to material aspects and new sensibility of media practices.⁴⁹

As Shim notes, *Hallyu* is reaching a new generation of popularity through new mediums such as the internet that have increased the popularity of not only K-pop but of K-dramas as well. What's more, *Hallyu*'s popularity has extended beyond Asia to the Middle East, Africa, Europe, Latin America and North America.⁵⁰

With *Hallyu*'s unprecedented success in the late 1990s, the South Korean government deemed its cultural products—dramas, film, pop music, computer games, animation, etc.—“cultural technology.”⁵¹ Like IT or Bio-Technology, cultural products were proclaimed one of six technologies that would drive the South Korean economy into the 21st century. To this end, the government established the Korea Culture and Content Agency in 2001 whose sole responsibility and initial budget of \$90 million was dedicated to the financial investment and administrative support of domestic cultural industries.⁵² In many ways, “cultural technology” is apt terminology to describe how *Hallyu*'s trajectory has been intertwined with many modes of technology and is a story of technological adaptation. From the mere emergence of the television set to expansion into color, then cable television, the early days of dramas found writers and producers adapting narratives to these new advances. With the widespread use of the internet and now smartphones, dramas are riding the wave of technology even further and traveling with viewers from their

⁴⁹ Shim, “Waxing the Korean Wave,” 16.

⁵⁰ Do Kyun Kim and Se-Jin Kim, “Hallyu from Its Origin to Present: A Historical Overview,” 22.

⁵¹ Shim, “The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries,” 28.

⁵² *Ibid.*

homes throughout their day-to-day lives while reaching even more viewers still.⁵³ At the same time, *Hallyu* also intersects with other technologies altogether. Popular culture's intersection with the plastic surgery industry is the topic of the following sections.

K-DRAMAS AS TECHNOLOGIES OF SUBJECTIVITY

As we have seen in chapter one, neoliberal governmentality shapes South Korean women's lives and informs their personal decisions. The interviewees in Lee's documentary film, *good for her*, cite economic rationales for wanting to undergo cosmetic surgery procedures. According to cultural anthropologist Jesook Song, neoliberalism in South Korea has become a "social ethos of moral-economic value that gains its explanatory power through a wide variety of social agents."⁵⁴ If *The Oprah Winfrey Show* is exemplary of the ways in which neoliberalism operates through the televisual realm in the U.S.—as chapter one asserts—then *Hallyu* or K-dramas more specifically, operate similarly in the South Korean context. In other words, K-dramas are cultural mechanisms that act as "social agents" in providing the "explanatory power" behind neoliberalism as social ethos. This is powerful not only in the South Korean context but precisely because, like *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Hallyu* is a "technology of subjectivity" that travels transnational trajectories as outlined in the previous section. By closely reading scenes from three major K-dramas, *My*

⁵³ Significantly, Seoul is known as the "bandwith capital" of the world. Information technologies have grown side-by-side, then, with "cultural technologies." I plan to further explore the relationship between the two as well as the plastic surgery industry and patients' use of the internet as a medium in the next phase of manuscript writing and researching.

⁵⁴ Song, "Family Breakdown," 55.

Lovely Samssoon, *Boys Over Flowers*, and *Be&A*, this section examines some of the narrative strategies K-dramas employ to proliferate neoliberal rationalities that govern the body.

This chapter begins with Kim Samssoon, the heroine of internationally popular K-drama *My Lovely Samssoon*, being berated by the manager of a matchmaking company for not undergoing plastic surgery to improve her chances on the dating market. As noted in the introduction, women like Samssoon who do not engage in such practices are often seen as unfulfilling their potential while women who do are deemed protean go-getters. Interestingly, however, the sequence outlined in the introduction is a dream, attesting to the ways in which neoliberal governmentality is a mode of self-discipline through which women, having internalized such rationalities, rehearse the stakes of such bodily measures.

The scene continues, however, and after she has her second interaction with the manager, she awakes a second time on the bus and realizes that the entire sequence was a dream—she had had a dream within a dream. She sees the ad on the backseat of the chair ahead of her for the matchmaking company complete with a picture of the manager with whom she had had the two conversations. Presumably, the ad had triggered the dream within a dream in the first place. After staring intently at it, she says, “What? They want me to invest nearly \$10 million Won (US \$6,600) in a species that is hopelessly immature? Yeah right, in your dreams.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *My Lovely Samssoon* (내 이름은 김삼순), “Episode 1,” *My Lovely Samssoon* instant stream, 57:43, http://www.dramafever.com/drama/8/1/My_Lovely_Sam_Soon/

This dream within a dream sequence opens itself up to be read in two divergent ways. First, because Samssoon is considered overweight by contemporary South Korean standards coupled with the fact that she is outspoken, women viewers lauded her for being a female lead that is somewhat oppositional to standard portrayals of demure and svelte heroines. As one blogger puts it: “Unlike a lot of female protagonists in Korean dramas, she’s [Samssoon] very direct about what bothers her and why. You won’t see her suffering in silence [...] Her actions are realistically flawed, but not to the point of disliking her.”⁵⁶ The blogger’s description exemplifies how women audiences see Samssoon as an alternative to the traditional Korean female protagonist.

Such characterizations stem from the multiple ways in which Samssoon seems to diverge from traditional expectations of South Korean femininity throughout the drama. In this scene in particular, Samssoon not only scoffs at the idea of investing in “a species that is hopelessly immature” but by doing so, she also rejects the idea of either cosmetic surgery or matchmaking services as viable options for her self-empowerment. Moreover, and just as importantly, she is on the bus going to a job interview. In many ways, Samssoon embodies a strong and independent heroine in this scene, attempting to secure her own economic advancement. Such actions, coupled with the fact that she flatly rejects cosmetic surgery and embraces her “looks,” opens up a space for women viewers to construct their own narratives of resistance to today’s standardized notions of femininity.

⁵⁶ Beth, “My Lovely Sam Soon - K-drama Review,” Personal Blog, *Alohamora!*, March 31, 2012, bethanish.wordpress.com.

I argue, however, that such portrayals of female characters and *My Lovely Samssoon* taken as a whole, actually serve to reify the neoliberal governmentalities that regulate women's bodies. K-dramas that feature such heroines have become commonplace since *My Lovely Samssoon's* unparalleled popularity. More recent hits like *Boys Over Flowers*, *The First Shop of the Coffee Prince* (2007), and *Secret Garden* (2011) also revolve around female leads who are brazenly honest and unafraid to break gender norms either through their occupation or through their actions. *Boys Over Flowers*, for example, begins with the female lead bravely saving the life of a high school boy who attempts suicide by jumping from a building. *Coffee Prince's* heroine lives a double life as a young man in order to secure a job at a coffee shop to support her mother and sister while *Secret Garden* features a female protagonist who is a stuntwoman for action films. K-dramas with a strong female lead have become a genre unto themselves. I argue that such narratives do not eliminate their opposition but rather, work through them by representing the counter-narrative in such a way that works on behalf of hegemonic norms. In the end, in all three of the abovementioned K-dramas, the atypical heroine ultimately capitulates to the very typically heterosexually masculine male lead.

Moreover, the real life actress who plays Samssoon, Kim Sun-ah, (as well as the female actresses in *Boys Over Flowers*, *Coffee Prince*, and *Secret Garden*) is reknown in South Korean popular culture for her beauty. While she indeed gained fifteen pounds to shoot the drama, she quickly lost the weight and has appeared in several dramas and films looking quite the opposite of her frame in *My Lovely Samssoon*. In her

book, *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption*, communications scholar Sun Jung shows how Japanese fans of Bae Yong-Joon use multiple definitions of masculinity to construct a hybrid masculine identity for his character in *Winter Sonata*.⁵⁷ Her interviews with fans illuminate, however, that these character traits are also imposed onto Bae Yong-Joon, the actor. The fans appreciate, for instance, Bae's character's politeness throughout the drama. When asked what they like about Bae, Jung finds that fans tend to collapse the two and characterize Bae in similar ways, greying the lines between his actions in the drama and his actions in real life. Similarly, while female protagonists may reject conventional ideals about beauty and femininity on camera, their off-screen personas serve to erect such beauty standards as attested to by Kim's multiple cosmetic and fashion advertisements in South Korea. This conflation of actor with character actually serves to shrink the spaces of resistance opened up by such representations, if not undo them altogether, since celebrity, consumer and beauty culture are so intimately tied. Thus, cultural productions such as *My Lovely Samsong* contain a refractory counter claim that speaks to the anxieties and problems of South Korea's capitalist modernity and ultimately serves to reaffirm, rather than dissolve, neoliberal mandates that champion the consumer market.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Jung, "Bae Yong-Joon," 51.

⁵⁸ Jung points out that Bae Yong-Joon's good looks have also been the subject of scrutiny by cosmetic surgeons: "Many South Korean plastic surgeons suggest that BYJ [Bae Yong-Joon] is able to project a tender and mellow image because of his slim feminine face and small nose. These plastic surgeons also suggest that his face shows the perfect mixture of both feminine and masculine side, which is commonly detected in Japanese pretty boy stars." Jung, "Bae Yong-Joon," 57.

We see this same type of normalization through opposition at play in *Boys Over Flowers*. As mentioned previously, *Boys Over Flowers* was a worldwide *Hallyu* hit in 2009 and helped revive *Hallyu*'s waning popularity. Originally a Japanese manga called *Hana Yori Dango*, the Korean version was the third drama adaptation after the Taiwanese and Japanese versions. The drama tells the story of a working class girl, Geum Jan-di, who after saving the life of a student at Sinhwa Academy, is allowed admission to the elite high school. There, she encounters F4, a popular band of wealthy boys whose leader, Gu Jun-pyo, falls in love with her. As the drama progresses, viewers witness as the two overcome their class differences as well as other obstacles to true love.

In Episode 5, one such obstacle is none other than Jan-di's best friend at Shinhwa, Oh Min-ji, a beautiful and down-to-earth girl who is the only student to befriend Jan-di. When Min-ji discovers their courtship, however, she attempts to sully Jan-di's reputation. Once her plot is discovered, Min-ji reveals that Jun-pyo had traumatized her when the two of them were children by rejecting her friendship and calling her "an ugly pumpkin."⁵⁹ Devastated, Min-ji moves to Germany and undergoes plastic surgery once every two years. And although, as she recounts it, it was very painful, it was not nearly as painful as what she experienced at the sting of Jun-pyo's words and the animosity in his eyes. Eventually the entire school comes to learn of her surgeries and a particularly mean group of girls tell her: "Is that the face

⁵⁹ *Boys Over Flowers* (꽃보다 남자), "Episode 5," *Boys Over Flowers* instant stream, http://www.dramafever.com/drama/26/5/Boys_Over_Flowers/?ap=1

of a human? If I looked like that, I would've already committed suicide.”⁶⁰ Jan-di, like Samsun, is outspokenly righteous and although she is still angry with Min-ji, she comes to her defense saying:

“Your eyes. Your nose. Your cheekbones. You paid money for all of that, didn't you? If there's something you want, you pay money and buy it. Can't the same be done with beauty? Hey, haven't you all had plastic surgery? Then why are you picking on Min Ji? If it's ok for people who are already beautiful to become more beautiful, why isn't it ok for ugly people to want the same thing? She didn't do it without reason. She paid a tremendously painful price. So what about it? So what? Can anybody say that it's not Min Ji's? If so, step forward. Step forward and let me see!”⁶¹

Jan-di's monologue to her wealthy classmates brings to light several aspects of plastic surgery consumption. First, as was the case with Samsun, this scene points out the ubiquitous nature of plastic surgery as a neoliberal tool for self-management—a solution to social exclusion that can be bought with money. If, as Jan-di contends, “the beautiful” and wealthy can engage in such practices “to become more beautiful,” then democratically speaking, according to her logic, so can “the ugly.”

Next, Jan-di asserts that Min-ji's new looks are not merely paid for with money but also with her pain and suffering through which she has earned the rights to her body. In addition to having paid for it with money, Jan-di points out that Min-ji “paid a tremendously painful price” by enduring the physical agony of not one but several operations. That Jan-di couples money with physical pain is significant in that it points out the commodified nature of that pain. I suggest that Jan-di's assertion highlights a capitalist read of a traditionally Korean concept: the commodification of

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

han. As discussed in chapter two, *han* is best described as an inventory of historical memory that deals with Korean people's collective trauma and suffering. *Han* encompasses the legacy of suffering endured by Korean people as a whole and, at the same time, is also present within individuals, marking individual suffering as part of a larger historical and collective suffering. Jan-di's contentions, then, to her fellow students about Min-ji's transformation justify her friend's acts because of suffering she has purchased and endured alone, which give her rightful claim to her newfound looks. Such justifications attempt to elide consumer transactions by positing this kind of bodily suffering as noble—a commodified form of *han*. After Jan-di delivers her speech, however, we see that she does not forgive Min-ji, which constitutes the biggest lesson of them all: While plastic surgery may be a commonplace tool, newfound looks are meaningless without matching character and integrity. Thus, at the same time that it normalizes plastic surgery, this scene and storyline from *Boys Over Flowers* also regulates it, instructing viewers on “proper” modes of consumption.

As the previous two scenes exemplify, plastic surgery emerges in many, if not most, K-dramas as the subject of side jokes, marginal storylines or major plots that offer pedagogical lessons about plastic surgery and set its moral limits.⁶² *Before & After Plastic Surgery Clinic* (*B&A*) is unique, however, in that the entire plot revolves around plastic surgeons and staff such that every storyline engages the social anxieties engendered by South Korea's heightened levels of plastic surgery consumption and

⁶² In 2009, *The Chosun Ilbo* reported through informal research that nearly one in every two women have had some kind of plastic surgery. Jyeon Hyeonsuk, “One Out of Every Two People Have Had Facial Plastic Surgery (특별취재팀, “두명중 한명, 얼굴 고쳤다,”)” *Chosun Ilbo*, October 26, 2009.

bodily transformation. While this chapter has so far offered examples of pedagogical moments concerning cosmetic surgery within two of the most domestically and internationally popular dramas of the last decade (*My Lovely Samsoon* and *Boys Over Flowers*), this chapter now turns to the only K-drama to deal exclusively with the issue of plastic surgery. If dramas are one epicenter where the cultural production of the cosmetic surgery patient begins, then *B&A*'s exclusivity in dealing with the topic informs us as to what K-dramas teach and sell as well as how they shape potential plastic surgery consumers.

Indeed, the main storylines and character tensions seem designed to work out some of plastic surgery's central contradictions. Dr. Han Geon-su begins the series as a stylish playboy who is bequeathed the Before and After Clinic and its debts upon his father's passing.⁶³ With this turn of events, he bares the burden of keeping the clinic successful while paying off his father's loan shark. Because Dr. Han has not picked up a scalpel since scarring the face of his first surgery patient, Dr. Choi Young-woo, a reconstructive surgeon who we later learn was born disfigured and operated on by Dr. Han's father at *B & A*, joins the staff. As a patient at *B & A*, Dr. Choi learns from Dr. Han's father and develops a passion for helping others like himself through reconstructive surgery. The anesthesiologist who drinks too much, an office manager who herself is a plastic surgery beauty, and a slapstick nurse are supporting cast to the doctors whose character development takes center stage in addition to that of Nurse Hong Gi-nam with whom the two doctors fall in love.

⁶³ *Before and After Plastic Surgery Clinic* (비포&애프터 서형외과), MBC, Sundays 23:40 (11:40 Korean time), 2008-Jan-06 to 2008-March-30.

While much (perhaps too much) happens in the 12 episode arc including a kidnapping, an attempted suicide, a hostage situation and an array of plastic surgery procedures, *B & A*'s central tension revolves around Dr. Han and Dr. Choi who represent two seemingly incommensurate poles in debates surrounding plastic surgery and its ethics. It is through this tension, I argue, that *B & A* both regulates anxieties about the moral limits of plastic surgery while illuminating surgery's endless possibilities for transformation and success vis-à-vis the rhetoric of "the makeover." As mentioned above, Dr. Han and Dr. Choi are presented as opposites. Dr. Han understands the clinic as a business and needs to do so considering he has signed his organs away as collateral on his (father's) debts.⁶⁴ With a keen eye for aesthetics, an understanding of popular trends and a deep need for money, Dr. Han represents plastic surgery as an industry that is subject to the ups and downs of trends and plays on the insecurities of women and men. Dr. Choi, on the other hand, represents it as a medical field that is bound by a set of ethics and guided by service rather than profit. As such, he questions and even berates many of the patients who enter the clinic for cosmetic reasons. Technically skilled, Dr. Choi sees surgery as a means for correcting deformities, not for changing bodies that do not meet societal beauty standards. By the end of the series, however, both doctors meet in the middle the spectrum. Dr. Han becomes more giving and ethical, performing surgeries for the

⁶⁴ Because Dr. Han has signed his organs away as collateral for the clinic, organ trafficking emerges in this drama as a major undercurrent. According to Thompson, "Medical tourism and medical trafficking tend to be treated differently, masking connections that largely remain to be made between the two, of which the vacation destination is just one link." Using *B & A* as a starting point, future iterations of this work will examine these connections. Charis Thompson, "Medical Migrations Afterword: Science as Vacation?," *Body & Society* 17, no. 2 & 3 (2011): 209.

needy and even dissuading some patients against “unnecessary” procedures while Dr. Choi comes to see that socially constructed abnormalities can be just as psychologically debilitating as those caused by physical illness or deformity. In so doing, *B & A* attempts to negotiate these two sides of the plastic surgery coin while setting the limits for “good” and “bad” surgeries in addition to “good” and “bad” reasons to elect them. According to Pitts-Taylor, shows such as *B & A* are “processes by which we are deciding what kinds of surgeries, and which kinds of patients, we will socially accept and promote” during a historical moment when such practices are experiencing unprecedented expansion.⁶⁵

In the U.S. and worldwide, Michael Jackson is perhaps the best-known cautionary tale of crossing the moral boundaries of plastic surgery consumption. Most people can easily identify not only his “before” appearance but also the point at which they feel he “should have” stopped as well as when he “went too far.” Much like the discourse surrounding an alcoholic that has too many drinks, plastic surgery, too, is regulated by a discourse of addiction and moderation. Unsurprisingly, then, Michael Jackson is mentioned throughout the series at least three times to three different patients as an example of why the doctors will not perform the surgery they want.⁶⁶ As feminist scholar Jun Bo Gyung writes, such debates began in the Korean public media in 2004 with singer Ok Joo-hyun representing the “good” plastic surgery consumer who chooses plastic surgery to improve and better manage her life

⁶⁵ Pitts-Taylor, *Surgery Junkies*, 5.

⁶⁶ The episode that deals specifically with cosmetic surgery addiction, *Chart 8: Plastic Surgery and the Addict* (성형과 중독), actually criminalizes it. The addict is a con artist who deceives men out of their money and undergoes surgery to both escape and lure the next victim. To make matters worse, she has also left a young daughter behind to pursue this lifestyle.

and Han Hye-gyung, known as the “Fan Lady” (*sŏnp’ungi ajumma*), representing the “bad” consumer or the plastic surgery addict.⁶⁷ Ok Joo-hyun is a pop singer and musical theater star who was in girl group Fin.K.L. until their break-up in 2002 when she went solo. In addition to three solo albums, she has also starred in musicals such as *Aida* and *Chicago*. Ok’s transformation through plastic surgery is common knowledge and is largely hailed a success with multiple websites posting her “before” photos as an awkward schoolgirl and her “after” photos as a pop star. Han, on the other hand, emerged in multiple news broadcasts and newspaper articles as an example, not of how cosmetic surgery can positively transform but how excess can disfigure. A once famous and beautiful opera singer, Han earned the public moniker “Fan Lady” because of her big and round fan-shaped face, which came as a result of having self-administered too many silicon injections. Amidst a growing industry with little formal regulation that is constantly pushing the boundaries of morality and ethics, these figures represent the two ends of social acceptability. Ultimately, *B & A* teaches us that while surgery for vanity’s sake—and too much of it at that—is wrong, surgery is a viable way of bettering oneself socially and economically by conforming to society’s gendered norms as Ok exemplifies.⁶⁸

Rather than critiquing these gendered norms, the series illustrates surgery’s positive possibilities through the logic of “the makeover.” In twelve episodes, Dr.

⁶⁷ Jun Bo Gyung (전보경), “A Genealogical Study on the Discourse of Cosmetic Surgery as Technologies of the Body-Self in Korean Society (몸-자아 테크놀로지로서의 미용 성형에 대한 계보학적 담론 연구),” (Masters Thesis, Ewha Women’s University Graduate School, 2009).

⁶⁸ *B & A* does feature one storyline that perhaps eschews normative gender when Drs. Han and Choi perform a sex change operation. The patient, however, is already an old man and receives the surgery as his dying wish.

Han and Dr. Choi successfully operate on nearly twenty-four patients, helping each to achieve not only the “look” they originally aspired to but to become better versions of themselves inside and out and ultimately, better people. In so doing, *B & A* features makeovers in every single episode not just once but multiple times given the various subplots of each episode. According to gender studies scholar Brenda Weber:

Makeovers teach a way of being, a care of the self (as manifested through the body [...]) that can be visually discerned and popularly celebrated. The transformation, in turn, unblocks barriers that have led to dejection, sadness, and self-ridicule, instead allowing for the ‘free’ expression of happiness, self-esteem, confidence, and optimism.⁶⁹

Here Weber refers to the makeover reality television craze that has overtaken American television for some time now.⁷⁰ The quote aptly describes *B & A*’s portrayal of plastic surgery patients’ transformations, however, given the globality not only of plastic surgery (as referenced in chapter one) but also of the neoliberal ethics governing the logics of “the makeover.” Like Oprah’s particular brand of self-help, which marries the therapeutic world to the consumer market in order to sell life-improvement products and services, “the makeover” also puts forth a pedagogical lesson in favor of bodily self-management as a necessary (if not only) avenue towards self-esteem, humanity, and happiness. This lesson is directed not only at the makeover subject but viewers who literally see her transform before their very eyes. Vis-à-vis the logic of the makeover, then, K-dramas sell a neoliberal mandate for self-

⁶⁹ Brenda Weber, *Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship, and Celebrity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 29.

⁷⁰ Reality television is also prevalent in South Korea including weight loss and plastic surgery shows.

care that ultimately services the market. While not all television serials are perhaps as obvious as *B & A* in their portrayals of “the makeover,” given the preponderance of plastic surgery amongst *Hallyu* stars and their more recent penchant for openly admitting to such procedures, *Hallyu* actors and actresses themselves embody “the makeover” attesting to the social and cultural capital plastic surgery offers as a neoliberal rationality.

Having described both the larger narrative plot of *B & A* as well as a general character analysis, this chapter now turns to a specific episode of *B & A* as an example of how the series proffers the logic of “the makeover.” Each episode’s title provides a societal diagnosis in regards to plastic surgery consumption, one that the episode will attempt to remedy. Episode two, for example, entitled *Chart 2: The Society that Encourages Plastic Surgery* (*sŏngbyŏng kwŏnhamŭn saboe*), deals with a young student who cannot get a job despite her outstanding marks at a vocational school. A job interview scene in which the employer states, “I’d rather hire someone street smart and pretty,” makes it clear that her looks coupled with her lack of confidence make it difficult for her to pass the interview stage.⁷¹ Both doctors consult her when she comes in and Dr. Han immediately recommends the double eyelid or *ssangkekŏp’ul* procedure to alleviate the “depressed look” of her “downward slanted eyes.”⁷² He further tries to sell her the procedure by saying that in addition to technical skills,

⁷¹ “Chart 2: The Society that Encourages Plastic Surgery (성형 권하는 사회),” *Before and After Plastic Surgery Clinic* (비포&애프터 서형외과), MBC, Sundays 23:40 (11:40 Korean time), 2008-Jan-06 to 2008-March-30.

⁷² *Ibid.*

“outer appearance is also a skill.”⁷³ Dr. Choi, on the other hand, refuses to do the surgery saying that there is nothing physically wrong with the student. Dejected and in need of money, the student turns to prostitution when Dr. Choi happens to run into her on the street about to go into a bar with her first customer. He saves her and sees, through her act of desperation, just how much she “needs” the procedure. The episode ends with a montage featuring the student receiving compliments on her new look from her friends and later receiving a job offer after her new found confidence leads her to help an old man on the street after he has fallen.⁷⁴

According to Weber, “the makeover” as a narrative form involves three crucial components. First, the narrative employs the architecture of renovation and rejuvenation.⁷⁵ The student is not only “renovated” vis-à-vis cosmetic surgery but rejuvenated and made more confident as attested to by the penultimate scene of the episode which shows her not only smiling and laughing with friends but gluing a new (and improved) photograph of herself to her resume. Second, upon realizing their deficiencies, makeover subjects not only celebrate their new state of being but also espouse the values of those that made them over.⁷⁶ *B & A*’s final episode shows the student sending a message to Dr. Han, asking him to reopen his clinic so he can help more people as he did her. And lastly, makeovers require a “big reveal”—the moment in which the makeover subject’s new appearance is revealed to his/her loved

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ This storyline puts forth a clear moral message, however: Good looks alone are not enough to bring opportunities. One must also be kind and respectful as evidenced by the student’s helpful nature post-surgery.

⁷⁵ Weber, 29.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

ones.⁷⁷ The student is never more triumphant than when she is sitting in a fast food restaurant with her friends who tell her how pretty she has become while admiring her new resume photos.

Ultimately, cultural forms such as *B e A* (in addition to others such as *My Lovely Samssoon* and *Boys Over Flowers*) serve to normalize plastic surgery, justifying profit-driven medical practices in addition to advertising the logics of “the makeover” that sell neoliberal mandates for self-management and care. At the end of episode 2, Nurse Hong narrates the rift between Dr. Han and Dr. Choi saying, “There are two kinds of doctors—doctors with a sense of responsibility and doctors with ulterior motives [...] But now I know that those two doctors probably started out with the same heart, the heart that wants to help others.”⁷⁸ Said differently, medical services for profit are justified so long as market rhetoric puts forth an ethic of medical service and care. The following sections examine not only how these ethics operate within South Korea’s medical tourism industry but also the ways in which *Hallyu* itself propels South Korea’s burgeoning medical tourism industry.

MEDICAL TOURISM IN SOUTH KOREA

Hallyu’s popularity has spurred new markets in addition to cultural products such as dramas, music and movies. In fact, K-dramas are so popular that they have spawned a love of all things Korean in many countries where *Hallyu* fans reside. For

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ “Chart 2: The Society that Encourages Plastic Surgery (성형 권하는 사회),” *Before and After Plastic Surgery Clinic* (비포&애프터 서형외과), MBC, Sundays 23:40 (11:40 Korean time), 2008-Jan-06 to 2008-March-30.

example, Korean language schools have emerged in the Philippines, Indonesia and Egypt. Most notably, however, *Hallyu* has spawned greater movement of people in addition to goods vis-à-vis a growing tourism industry centered around K-drama locations including Nami Island, the setting for *Winter Sonata*, Ch'unch'ŏn, where Bae Yong-Joon's character's home is located and Cheju Island.⁷⁹ According to sociologist Yukie Hirata, for example, the number of Japanese tourists to South Korea increased 35.5 percent in 2004 compared to the previous year.⁸⁰ Before then, Korea was considered a "male space" wherein Japanese male tourists viewed Korea through an imperial gaze with the first tour package to Korea taking place in 1906.⁸¹ The purpose of such tourism was to evidence Japan's superiority and for an othering look at the Korea as a colonial space that was part of the Japanese empire. After Korea's independence from Japan in 1945, Japanese men's gendered and imperial gaze of Korea continued in the form of sex tourism since *kisaeng* (female entertainers akin to Japanese *geisha*) tours were very popular amongst Japanese male tourists in the 1970s and 1980s.⁸²

The gendered nature of tourism to Korea from Japan began to change in the late 1980s when the South Korean government made efforts to change its

⁷⁹ Sun Jung, "Bae Yong-Joon, Soft Masculinity, and Japanese Fans: Our Past Is in Your Present Body" 38.

K-dramas also increased tourism from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. In fact, the number of Taiwanese who visited Korea in 2003 totaled 180,000, marking a 50 percent increase from the previous year.

Shim, "Waxing the Korean Wave," 6 – 7.

⁸⁰ Yukie Hirata, "Touring 'Dramatic Korea': Japanese Women as Viewers of *Hanryu* Dramas and Tourists on *Hanryu* Tours" in *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, ed. Chua Beng Huat et al. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008) 143.

⁸¹ Hirata, "Touring 'Dramatic Korea,'" 145.

⁸² *Ibid.*

international perception. Since then, *Hallyu* tours have played a major role in the feminization of tourism in South Korea. In fact, The Official Site for Korean Tourism includes a list of over sixty K-dramas. When visitors of the site click on a desired drama, they find not only a synopsis of the drama, character bios and photos but also filming locations. For instance, a search for *My Lovely Samsoun* reveals twenty locations including coffee shops, restaurants, and landmarks as well as maps, hours, and photos of scenes in which the locations were featured in the drama.⁸³ Quick links on the site allow site visitors to easily access brochures, E-books, interactive maps as well as conveniently make flight, hotel and tour reservations.

Significantly, these changes in tourism interpellate Asian women tourists as consumers. Women tourists are engaged largely through their ability to consume cultural and beauty products and services. In addition to *Hallyu* tours, this is also the case with beauty tours. According to anthropologist Laura Miller, estute or beauty tours to Korea are especially popular amongst Japanese women and travel packages include air travel, hotel rooms, salon treatments usually at the hotels, meals and special cosmetics infused with what Japanese tourists believe to be especially Korean ingredients and/or medicinal herbs such as ginseng.⁸⁴ Packages such as the “Become a Beauty in Seoul” tour are attractive to young Japanese women because “Korea and Korean things are on the list of what is ‘cool’ and exotic, and it is less expensive than

⁸³ “My Lovely Samsoun: The Official Site For Korean Tourism”, n.d., http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/CU/CU_EN_8_5_1_10.jsp.

⁸⁴ According to Miller, the concept of “estute” in Japan is derived from the French “esthetique” meaning aesthetics and was borrowed in the 1980s to catapult the four-hundred-trillion-yen beauty industry there simply known as estute.

Laura Miller, *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) 14.

Japan. For older Japanese women, a desire for the Korean experience may perhaps hint at nostalgia for more traditional Asian lifestyle or values.”⁸⁵ Interestingly, while *Hallyu* fans in more developing countries such as China or the Philippines see South Korea as the embodiment of modernity infused with tradition, Japanese women understand Korea as a signification of a return to the past. Such nostalgia also stems from Japan’s colonial relationship to Korea wherein Korea is always seen as anachronistic in comparison to the progressive metropole. Thus, despite the gendered differences between colonial and *kisaeng* tours of the past, Japan’s colonial relationship to Korea continues to inform feminized tourism and the ways in which Japanese tourists understand and experience Korea.

With *Hallyu* and estute tourism to South Korea already in full force, the South Korean government launched efforts to grow their medical tourism industry. According to an economic report by Yoon Young Ho commissioned by the Seoul Development Research Institute in order to assess the current state and future directions of medical tourism in 2008, the South Korean government first identified medical tourism as a feasible industry in 2006.⁸⁶ At the time, standard definitions of “medical tourism” were rapidly changing. Until as recently as the 1990s, definitions of medical tourism emphasized leisure and tourism in conjunction with medical care, health maintenance or improvement—medical tourism was largely thought of as a leisurely activity undertaken by wealthy individuals. By the 2000s, however, such

⁸⁵ Miller, *Beauty Up*, 198.

⁸⁶ Yoon Hyung Ho (윤형호), *서울시 의료관광 현황과 방*, 서울시정개발연구원, (Seoul: Seoul Development Research Institute, 2010) 24.

definitions began to subtly change to highlight medical tourism as inexpensive medical service and professional treatments in combination with tourism.⁸⁷ In other words, medical tourism experts began to highlight medical tourism as an inexpensive way for patients to purchase medical procedures such as heart surgery or orthopedic treatment rather than, or more primarily than, to vacation or leisure. According to medical anthropologists Elizabeth F.S. Roberts and Nancy Scheper-Hughes, such commodification of medical services is the hallmark of contemporary medical migrations:

Medical tourism is based on a neoliberal paradigm of commercialized medicine and individual choice that implies the ability of those who can do so to travel, often great distances, to purchase elsewhere what they cannot buy or otherwise procure at home. Thus medical tourism and medical commerce go hand in hand. ⁸⁸

As Roberts and Scheper-Hughes cogently point out, medical tourism finds as its basis the positioning of the ailing body, not as a patient in need of medical care but rather, as a savvy consumer willing to travel for the sake of efficiency and economy.

Yoon's report echoes such sentiments by identifying three major areas where South Korean medical tourism would appeal to international consumers.⁸⁹ First, South Korean medical care is far less expensive than in other countries, especially the U.S. where 45 – 60 million people do not have health insurance. Second, medical care for tourists is immediate unlike places like England or Canada where socialized medical systems force patients to wait up to six months for specific surgeries or non-

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth F.S. Roberts and Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "Introduction: Medical Migrations" *Body & Society* 17:1(2011) 19.

⁸⁹ Yoon, *서울시 의료관광 현황과 방*, 24.

emergency treatments. Lastly, and more poignantly for the purposes of this chapter, since cosmetic procedures such as plastic surgery, dental care or dermatology are not covered by insurance, South Korea can offer competitive pricing in addition to new technologies. Accordingly, “medical tourism for plastic surgery” in addition to “reproductive technologies, experimental medical procedures, gender assignment, liposuction, etc. [...] is commercialized and commodified health care.”⁹⁰ According to Yoon, while such procedures used to be the domain of the wealthy, growing expendable incomes coupled with “desires to become more beautiful” make middle income groups the main target demographic for South Korea’s medical tourism industry because “they are showing interest in that area.”⁹¹

Against this backdrop, the Bureau of Korean Tourism established medical tourism as one of its main areas for growth and as a strategic product for South Korea in 2007.⁹² South Korea’s medical tourism industry took as its models the already existing industries in Singapore, Thailand, and India.⁹³ Yoon’s report, for instance, includes statistics for Bumrungrad Hospital in Bangkok, which served 434,071 foreign patients out of its total 1,056,566 patients in 2006, earning more than half of its revenue from the foreign market. Parkway Healthcare Group in Singapore, one of the ten largest hospitals in the world, admitted 154,000 foreign patients that same year with 40 percent of its revenue owing to medical tourism. In comparison to these already established medical industries, Yoon suggests, South Korean hospitals

⁹⁰ Elizabeth F.S. Roberts and Nancy Scheper-Hughes, “Introduction: Medical Migrations,” 19.

⁹¹ Yoon, *서울시 의료관광 현황과 방*, 24.

⁹² Yoon, *서울시 의료관광 현황과 방*, 25.

⁹³ Yoon, *서울시 의료관광 현황과 방*, 38.

were well poised to enter the international market because of their higher levels of medical techniques and technology, higher capacities for accommodating more patients and greater number of specialty treatment centers. Moreover, Seoul's higher number of large hospitals and closer proximity to medical tourism markets in Russia, Mongolia and Northeast China would give them a competitive advantage with such consumers over Southeast Asian cities such as Singapore and Bangkok. Indeed, Yoon's report illustrates the type of international competition amongst healthcare providers outlined by Roberts and Scheper-Hughes wherein "hospitals and health care corporations [...] establish themselves as international medical institutions and centers of excellence, [...] all based on the [consumer's] ability to pay."⁹⁴

In this international landscape, South Korean medical institutions began to campaign their services to foreign patients in June 2008. The following year, the Korean Medical Act was amended so that hospitals could more aggressively (and legally) promote themselves internationally as well as build hotels adjacent to hospitals.⁹⁵ The Korean Health Industry Development Institute (KHIDI) was also created to oversee operations and receive applications from local hospitals in the hopes that "lifting restrictions that barred direct advertisement or receiving patients through dedicated referral services [would] open new horizons for the medical service industry as a whole" according to the Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family

⁹⁴ Roberts and Scheper-Hughes, "Introduction: Medical Migrations," 19.

⁹⁵ "South Korean Hospitals to Attract Foreign Patients from May," AsiaPulse News, April 28, 2009 accessed July 11, 2009, General OneFile, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Affairs.⁹⁶ The KHIDI projected at least 80,000 foreign patients a year that would significantly reduce the \$48.1 million (65 billion W) deficit South Korea posts each year in the medical field. 500 clinics and 40 – 50 general hospitals were expected to apply to attract foreign patients. These medical institutions are not only located in Seoul but also in the outerlying regions of Pusan, Taegu and Cheju as local governments also took part in the growing industry by marketing to foreigners according to their strengths and medical specialties.⁹⁷ In addition, the South Korean government also established a medical tourism visa for foreigners seeking treatment.⁹⁸ According to Yoon, in 2008 the average foreign patient at Samsung Seoul Hospital spent 8 million W (US \$5,280) in medical bills over five days and since most were accompanied by family members, the revenue was substantially more.

The Korea Tourism Bureau and the KHIDI in conjunction with the International Medical Service Association, which was also established by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs, began an international media campaign to put South Korea on the medical tourism map.⁹⁹ First, these organizations held a medical tourism seminar in Los Angeles with twenty-seven representatives from participating medical institutions, Korean travel agents, and government representatives in 2007. Then foreign specialists were invited to Seoul for the Korea Medical Tourism Tour and Seminar later that same year. Twenty medical agents, insurance company representatives, travel agents and reporters for beauty and health magazines from the

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Yoon, *서울시 의료관광 현황과 방*, 24.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Yoon, *서울시 의료관광 현황과 방*, 24.

U.S. Canada, Singapore, Vladivostok and Japan participated in touring twenty-nine facilities during a 2 night/3 day “medical experience.” In November of 2008, the Korean Tourism Bureau had its third International Medical Travel Conference in Seoul with about thirty participating countries. With the amendment to the Korean Medical Act, however, the KHIDI began aggressively marketing abroad by hosting the first Global Healthcare and Medical Tourism Conference in Seoul in 2010 with the Medical Tourism Association, an international organization.¹⁰⁰ The conference attracted 800 people from various segments of the healthcare industry from over twenty-five countries. Due to its overwhelming success and that of Korea’s medical tourism industry in its first few years of existence, the second annual conference took place in April of 2011.

Notably, the KHIDI characterizes 2010 as the “year when Korean medical tourism got its jumpstart with the U.S. market” because of the success of its Global Healthcare Conference.¹⁰¹ Accordingly, on October 7, 2010 Fox New Los Angeles aired a two-part segment called “Medical Tourism: Pros and Cons” explaining how some U.S. corporations are now providing employees with the option to receive medical care in South Korea and paying them cash incentives to do so.¹⁰² Christine Devine, anchorwoman, begins the news story with two provocative questions: “Need an operation but can’t afford co-pays and deductibles? How about getting paid

¹⁰⁰ Patricia K. Kummer, “KHIDI USA :: MEDIA - PRESS RELEASE - Korean Medical Tourism: Spotlight on Seoul,” *Korea Health Industry Development Institute*, March 7, 2011, http://www.khidiusa.org/?mid=media_press&document_srl=1496.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Tony Spearman, “Medical Tourism: Pros And Cons | FOX 11 News,” *Fox News Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: KTTV, October 7, 2010), <http://www.myfoxla.com/dpp/health/medical-tourism-20101007>.

\$5,000 in cash to have surgery in South Korea?” The segment goes on to show a tourism commercial advertisement for South Korea that features Korean b-boys (breakdancers), traditional drumming and beautiful landscapes while Devine narrates that one can “see the sights and get medical care.” As the footage plays, a caption runs along the bottom of the screen: “Courtesy of KIHDI.” Randy Trollop, who is lobbying U.S. insurance companies to provide overseas medical coverage then states, “Bottom line is savings on your expenses.”¹⁰³ The segment then jumps to b-roll of a medical tourism meeting sponsored by the Korean government where Fox News interviews James Bae, representative of the Korean Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs who explains that “Korea’s healthcare prices are about 20 percent of the cost in the United States” and that although Korean Americans are being targeted first, the South Korean government plans to expand to the “entire U.S. people.”¹⁰⁴

The news segment emphasizes that medical tourism to South Korea can be lucrative not only for corporations but for individuals who would not only receive better treatment but a vacation and a cash bonus. In fact, James Carter who is described in the segment as working for the Korean government to “entice Americans to go there for care,” characterizes the price differential in capitalist terms: “It’s labor costs. It’s the same reason why outsourcing works in manufacturing and it works in high tech.”¹⁰⁵ Significantly, Carter applies the same “bottom line” rhetoric used by Trollop, illustrating how neoliberal logics and capitalist calculations justify

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

transnational healthcare markets and transactions. Such justifications evidence the ways in which “medical tourism does not conceive of health care as a *right or entitlement of citizens* [...] but rather as a thing, a commodity, that can be bought and sold through global medical markets (emphasis in original).”¹⁰⁶

The second part of Fox News’ coverage features two doctors who go on to debate the Pros and Cons of medical tourism.¹⁰⁷ Dr. Brian Johnston, Medical Director of White Memorial Medical Center represents a less enthusiastic view of medical tourism while Dr. Mark Berman, President of the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery is far more optimistic about the positive possibilities of transnational medical care. Dr. Johnston begins his position by stating his practical concerns about a patient’s ability to travel long distances after undergoing major procedures such as heart surgery. Moreover, Dr. Johnston argues, a patient might have complications when she is home and would then have to receive medical aftercare from a physician who was not physically present during the her operation. The segment ends with Dr. Johnston critiquing the \$5,000 incentive system as a coercive measure that limits patients’ options for fear of termination. Rather than being enticed or intimidated by their employers, Dr. Johnston believes that “People should go where they want to go because they think they’ll get better care or they think they can get the same care at a better price.”¹⁰⁸ Despite his critique of employer incentives, Dr. Johnston still applies market logics to his reasoning since people

¹⁰⁶ Roberts and Schepher-Hughes, “Introduction: Medical Migrations,” 19.

¹⁰⁷ Tony Spearman, “Medical Tourism: Pros And Cons | FOX 11 News.”

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

should, in his estimation, be able to make clear consumer calculations as to whether or not they will get “better care” or “the same care at a better price.” That is to say, healthcare should still be considered a product that consumers consider based on price and quality control. As such, his critique falls short of laying out the problematics of treating healthcare as a global industry and once again emphasizes “individual choice” as Roberts and Scheper-Hughes describe.

Dr. Berman, on the other hand, begins the discussion by responding to a question about safety stating, “I was just in Korea a couple of weeks ago and they have tremendous facilities. I think it is safe for most *elective* procedures (emphasis added).”¹⁰⁹ While Dr. Johnston speaks only of non-elective procedures such as heart or orthopedic surgeries, Dr. Berman emphasizes that South Korea is a good place for elective procedures, which the viewer assumes to be cosmetic in nature given his expertise. Indeed, that Dr. Berman is himself a plastic surgeon adds credibility to his ability to speak to South Korea’s level of care and technology in the field of plastic surgery, thus indirectly promoting this area of the market.

After South Korea recovered from its 1997 IMF Crisis, plastic surgery as an industry experienced a boom since improved looks were seen as providing an advantage in South Korea’s highly competitive society. In 2009, however, patient visits went down as much as 40 percent with a number of clinics closing their doors.¹¹⁰ In addition, South Korea’s currency depreciated enough such that

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Martin Fackler, “Economy Blunts South Korea’s Appetite for Plastic Surgery,” *New York Times*, January 1, 2009, accessed October 1, 2010,

procedures were cheaper than in other currencies. At the same time, as outlined above, medical tourism was identified as one way to bring demand to South Korea's oversupply of clinics.¹¹¹ According to Samuel Koo, president and CEO of Korea's Tourism Board, 7.8 million tourists visited South Korea in 2009, 60,000 of who were medical tourists seeking mostly cosmetic and dental procedures.¹¹² This is a staggering increase from the less than 20,000 foreign patients South Korea saw in 2007.¹¹³ What's more, estimates suggest that the number will rise to 100,000 patients by 2012.¹¹⁴ In 2009, admitted foreign patients' average medical expenses were 656 million W (\$582,723 US) and of those, the main symptoms for people who paid 10 million W (\$8,883 US) or more were congenitive heart conditions, heart attacks, and plastic surgery.¹¹⁵ Moreover, of the specialty clinics enrolled in the medical tourism program in 2009, one-fourth were plastic surgery clinics and another fourth specialized in dermatology.¹¹⁶ Indeed, medical tourism is proving not only to bring

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/02/business/worldbusiness/02plastic.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all.

¹¹¹ Medical tourism's lucrative nature is also portrayed in episode 4 of *B & A, Chart 4: Butterfly* (나비). Late on his payment to the loan shark, Dr. Han disappears and *B & A* is about to be handed over as collateral for the loan. *B & A*'s office manager, who more than once saves the clinic throughout the series, comes up with a plan to bring in Chinese medical tourists. When Dr. Han returns to the clinic sure that he has lost it for good, he finds his waiting room filled with Chinese women wearing facemasks, eagerly awaiting consultation.

“Chart 4: Butterfly (나비),” *Before and After Plastic Surgery Clinic* (비포&애프터 서형외과), MBC, Sundays 23:40 (11:40 Korean time), 2008-Jan-06 to 2008-March-30.

¹¹² Samuel Koo, “Korea in the Global Village and the Effort to Strengthen its Brand Power,” (lecture presented at Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea, May 20 2010).

¹¹³ Yoon, *서울시 의료관광 현황과 방*, 25.

¹¹⁴ Yoon, *서울시 의료관광 현황과 방*, 30.

¹¹⁵ Geum Reun Park, *Medical Korea, 60,000 Foreign Patients Treated in '09* (Seoul: Ministry of Health, Family and Welfare, April 27, 2010).

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

demand to the oversupply of plastic surgery clinics in South Korea but to be lucrative as well.

The thrust to bring consumers to South Korea's plastic surgery market has led to the promotion of beauty in conjunction with health and medical services or what I refer to here as the "medicalization of beauty." As mentioned earlier, estute tours have been popular amongst Japanese women tourists since the 1990s. According to Eun Mi Kim, a representative of the Seoul Tourism Organization's Planning and Marketing Division, however, new efforts have been made by the Korean Tourism Board to revamp such tours to include medical services in addition to standard beauty treatments such as facials or spa experiences. In 2010, during the time of my interview, Kim asserted that "Medical Estute" was becoming a popular tour amongst Japanese women whose tour packages included skin assessments, cosmetic surgery procedures, "well-being" food or meals consisting of organic health foods and shopping.¹¹⁷ Such packages were arranged in conjunction with a travel agency and had so far attracted 800 tourists since their inception the year before.

According to a *Donga Ilbo* article entitled "100,000 International Patients will bring 900 billion W (US \$594,019,000) to Korean Economy," the Blue House (South Korea's equivalent of the White House) approved medical estute tours in 2009. Written by Doctor Sang H. Kim, the article explains that private hospitals are teaming up with the Korean Tourism Bureau to offer medical tour packages to attract Japanese women tourists who will undergo plastic surgery procedures and

¹¹⁷ Eun Mi Kim, personal interview, March 10, 2010.

dermatological treatments. According to the article, South Koreans' penchant for plastic surgery as well as their high levels of technical skill have been widely known in Asia since the 1990s and are being used as marketing strategies to attract Asian women medical tourists in particular. Such sentiments were echoed by Eun Mi Kim who also stated that because Koreans use heavy metal chopsticks, Korean plastic surgeons have more technical skill and dexterity in their hands compared to doctors of other nationalities. That Korean doctors are more dexterous than non-Korean doctors is widely believed in Korea and often cited as an example of why Korea's cosmetic surgery industry is thriving. When asked why foreigners are choosing to have procedures done in Korea, Kim Byung-gun, director of BK Dongyang Clinic (the largest plastic surgery clinic in Seoul) told the Korea Times that "Koreans are quite good at handling small and delicate operations."¹¹⁸

In addition to medical estute tours, KHIDI's "Body and Seoul Sweepstakes" also illustrates how the medicalization of beauty is being used as a promotional tactic for South Korea's medical tourism industry. Initially 2,500 entrants from throughout the United States entered the internet sweepstakes and in October 2010, Katherine DePasquale, a senior writer with The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board in Manhattan and her guest, Rodolfo Chaparro, a biochemist, spent six nights and seven days touring Seoul and its medical facilities.¹¹⁹ In addition to round-trip business-class tickets on Korean Air, six nights at the JW Marriott Seoul, traditional Korean

¹¹⁸ Bae Ji-sook, 2010 January 27, "[KoreaToday] Cosmetic Surgery Emerges as Export Product."

¹¹⁹ Patricia K. Kummer, "KHIDI USA:: MEDIA - PRESS RELEASE - Body and Seoul Sweepstakes: And the Winner Is ...," *Korea Health Industry Development Institute*, February 15, 2011, http://www.khidiusa.org/?mid=media_press&document_srl=1417.

meals and sightseeing to cultural and historical sites, the package included a day at Konjiam Resort's Spa, a VIP health check-up at Seoul St. Mary's Hospital, a dental exam and teeth whitening at Seoul National University Dental Hospital, traditional Oriental medical treatments at East-West Neo Medical Center and skincare treatments at Arumdaun Nara Beauty Clinic.¹²⁰

The Official South Korea Medical YouTube channel features a seven minute promotional video that captures DePasquale's trip from start to finish including the couple receiving medical treatments including an EKG, pulmonary tests, dental bleaching, facial treatments, pulse analysis, music, and color and light therapy amongst others.¹²¹ Given that YouTube is a visual medium, the video features very little talking and instead offers a video montage of each day of the trip set to lighthearted music that highlights each facility's state-of-the-art equipment such as DePasquale and Chaparro's RFID wristbands, which served as electronic keys that got them from one exam to the next, and their electronic medical records, which were totally paperless. Understandably, since most people are not used to having their medical tests and procedures videotaped, DePasquale and Chaparro seem slightly uncomfortable in many of the shots but ultimately act as good sports with

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ The couple's full VIP check-up included: height and weight measurement, an EKG, urine test, blood tests for tumor markers, arthritis, cholesterol levels, and liver function, eye examination, hearing test, pulmonary function test, echocardiogram, abdominal ultrasound, a UBT *Helicobacter* test, a body mass index test, a breast ultrasound, a mammogram, a bone-density scan, a thoracolumbar spine X-ray, a brain MRI, ultrasounds of carotid artery and thyroid, and a coronary artery CT. Other treatments consisted of a two-hour dental exam and teeth whitening, a laser procedure to brighten and even out facial skin tone, a Vitamin C facial treatment, music therapy, analysis of pulse and blood flows, voice analysis, yoga, color and light therapy, and crystal bowl therapy.
Ibid.

DePasquale even showing her newly bleached pearly whites off to the camera. The visual medium also provides a clear juxtaposition of medical technology with the more traditional and spiritual methods used in the “Oriental Medicine” portion of the couple’s trip. While the pair are attached to machines and blowing into gadgets during the early portion of the video, the later portion finds them beating on traditional Korean drums and then meditating to the sounds of a therapist “playing” a crystal bowl. Such fusion of techniques typically categorized separately as “Eastern” and “Western” medicines is purposeful. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs announced plans in Winter of 2011 to globalize its ancient and oriental medicines industry by expanding the Korean market to ten trillion Won (US \$8.9 billion) by 2015.¹²² The government will not only track ingredients from production to distribution in order to prevent unacceptable levels of toxins and insecticides but also intends to ease regulations on other possibly toxic ingredients such as heavy metals. The video, as the sweepstakes itself, thus illustrates how several industries are enmeshed within efforts to promote the medical tourism industry.

The video ends with the couple’s thoughts about their experiences. Both of them emphasize how impressed they were with the medical technology, especially in conjunction with more traditional forms of medicine. DePasquale states that, “We don’t usually see that level of technology so that was quite impressive.”¹²³ Chaparro acknowledges that although a language barrier existed, he felt as though people were

¹²² “Korean Oriental Medicine as Big Business”, Winter 2011, http://www.asianplasticsurgeryguide.com/koreatrends/1105_korean-oriental-medicine.html.

¹²³ *Medicalkorea’s Channel - YouTube*, n.d., http://www.youtube.com/user/medicalkorea#p/c/1/zgt5KtDdl_I.

trying to communicate to make them feel comfortable. The video's visual more than aural nature perhaps emphasizes this point and ironically, there are several grammatical errors not only in the English subtitles that accompany their soundbites but also in their editing.

In comparison to the video, KHIDI's press release covering the sweepstakes trip offers a much more detailed version of the DePasquale and Chaparro's experience. In addition to providing an endless list of all of the medical tests the two underwent, it also provides an exhaustive summary of the cultural and historical sights they visited as well as every single Korean meal. Most notably, when the pair go to have their dermatological beauty treatments at Arumdaun Nara, a dermatology and plastic surgery clinic, their treatments—a laser procedure and a Vitamin C facial—are characterized as “health and medical treatments.” That is to say, rather than relegated to the realm of beauty, the treatments are described as both necessarily related to good health and medical, not aesthetic, in nature. Furthermore, as the press release reveals, the clinic bestows upon them a goodie bag as a parting gift filled with the clinic's own brand of facial products and DePasquale's assessments after using them are included in the release. As the “Body and Seoul Sweepstakes” medical tour shows, the medicalization of beauty asserts that beauty, like healthcare in the form of surgeries and lifesaving treatments, can be bought and sold on the global healthcare market through treatments, procedures, surgeries and products. Moreover, by placing medical procedures in relation with holistic and beauty treatments, beauty itself is medicalized and deemed a necessary part of health and bodily management.

Furthermore, by experiencing traditional healing techniques with cutting edge technology, South Korea is constructed as a space wherein both the modern and the traditional coexist. Such portrayals of South Korea—where tradition and modernity meet—and how they operate within *Hallyu*'s economies of desire and desperation, are the topic of the following section.

HALLYU AND THE (NOSTALGIC) KOREAN DREAM

Having provided a sense of both *Hallyu* and South Korea's medical tourism industry, I now return to how these strategic industries intersect, not only for the South Korean government but also within the everyday lives of Asian women. I argue that *Hallyu*, first through its K-dramas and to a lesser extent films and more recently K-pop, performs affective labor for the medical tourism industry. Because *Hallyu* functions as a "technology of subjectivity" with transnational trajectories, *Hallyu* actors and actresses, storylines, fashion and scenery animate *Hallyu* fans' desires in opportune ways for the medical tourism industry. Aihwa Ong suggests that "technologies of subjectivity rely on an array of knowledge and expert systems to induce self-animation and self-government so that citizens can optimize choices, efficiency, and competitiveness in turbulent market conditions."¹²⁴ Accordingly, K-dramas normalize ethics of self-management including cosmetic surgery in addition to ironing out the cosmetic surgery's moral tensions as we have seen in *Be&A*. *Hallyu*'s narrative strategies "induce self-animation" by creating what sociologist

¹²⁴ Aihwa Ong, *neoliberalism as exception: mutations in citizenship and sovereignty*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 6.

Charis Thompson calls a “fungibility between the affective and the economic.”¹²⁵ She explains that “often otherwise non-fungible economic activity is rendered fungible only because of the affective economies in question.”¹²⁶ In other words, cosmetic surgery, and traveling to South Korea to undergo it, becomes a rational economic investment in part because of how it is affectively tied to *Hallyu*’s popular culture representations. *Hallyu*’s effects are not uniform, however, but constitute different meanings depending on the transnational connectivities it travels and the contexts within which it is received. Thus, I argue that *Hallyu* constructs a fantasy space for its viewers that either resurrects nostalgic dreams of the past or erects aspirational dreams—a “Korean Dream.” In both cases, emulating South Korean beauty, because of *Hallyu*’s enmeshed nature with South Korea’s cosmetic surgery (and other beauty) industries, is coded as one avenue of embodying such dreams.

Indeed, South Korea’s growing numbers of medical tourists suggest a synergistic coupling between the two industries. According to the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery’s (ISAPS) Biennial Global Survey conducted in 2009, South Korea ranked seventh amongst the top ten nations that performed the most plastic surgery procedures (the United States was first).¹²⁷ Given its population size, however, South Korea boasts the highest rates of plastic surgery per capita. Significantly, Chinese cosmetic surgery patients compose 30 percent of *all* cosmetic patients. Of medical tourists, Japanese patients are the second largest group with

¹²⁵ Thompson, “Medical Migrations: Afterword,” 210.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ “Worldwide Plastic Surgery Statistics Available for the First Time -- NEW YORK, Aug. 9 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ --”, n.d., <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/worldwide-plastic-surgery-statistics-available-for-the-first-time-100248404.html>.

Singaporean and Indonesian numbers not far behind.¹²⁸ Eun Mi Kim stated that the Russian population is also quickly growing and being targeted by the Korean Tourism Board.¹²⁹ Moreover, according to Kim, it is difficult to get a true sense of just how many American medical tourists come to Korea each year since many are Korean Americans who already have a grasp of the language and stay with family rather than booking packages tours.¹³⁰

The number of Chinese patients is growing so rapidly, in fact, that the Foreign Ministry of China issued a warning in 2010 against going abroad, and more specifically, to South Korea for cosmetic surgery procedures.¹³¹ The Chinese Foreign Ministry stated that many patients have returned from their surgeries not having received sufficient information about their procedures and/or disliking the outcome because they were not able to fully communicate with the surgeons. Although many Chinese women are heading to Korea, China's cosmetic surgery industry is also growing and the Ministry's warnings may also be in an effort to grow their industry domestically. Despite their admonitions, however, Chinese patients continue to travel to South Korea for surgery. A *New York Times* article interviews a 23-year-old bank employee who underwent a US \$15,000 cheekbones and jaw reshaping surgery.

¹²⁸ Bae Ji-sook, 2010 January 27, "[KoreaToday] Cosmetic Surgery Emerges as Export Product."

¹²⁹ Eun Mi Kim, personal interview, March 10, 2010.

¹³⁰ Thompson characterizes the medical migrant as "often utilizing kin and diasporic networks, travel and treatment may well be financed with borrowed money, and made possible by public and private prior connections." My book manuscript will further explore how diasporic circuits intersect with *Hallyu* and the medical tourism industry.

Thompson, "Medical Migrations: Afterword," 207.

¹³¹ "Chinese Government Warns Of Plastic Surgery Overseas", 2010 March 23, http://www.ukmedix.com/surgery/eyelid-surgery/chinese_government_warns_of_plastic_surgery_overseas5333.cfm.

She deliberated between the procedures and opening a Starbucks with her savings and ultimately chose the former because she “was curious to see what [she] would look like.”¹³² The interviewee’s choices—between opening a Starbucks and undergoing surgery—illustrate how cosmetic surgery is often understood as an investment in one’s future, one in line with a lucrative business venture such as opening a Starbucks.

While there are multiple reasons for medical tourists’ visits to Korea including less reputable and regulated care in their home countries (as is the case with China) or lower costs, *Hallyu*’s influence on Asian consumers in particular, is also a prominent factor. According to the *International Medical Travel Journal*:

Cosmetic surgery among Asians reflects the “Korean Wave.” Cost is not an issue, as they are willing to pay up to three times more for surgery in Korea. Asian women from China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Singapore and Hong Kong are flocking to Korea for facial bone contouring and cosmetic surgery on their eyes and noses. Asians from other territories want to look more like popular Korean actors and musicians. And they are willing to travel and pay up to three times more than they would in China.¹³³

Such reasoning is verified in the sentiments of Wen Lin Lin, a 26-year-old Chinese woman who underwent rhinoplasty (nose job) in Korea in 2010. Lin Lin admits that “Song Hye-gyo is my favorite actress. When I decided to alter my face to look like her, there was no other choice than to visit Korean doctors.”¹³⁴ Statements such as

¹³² Sharon LaFraniere, “Chinese Turn to Plastic Surgery in Growing Numbers - NYTimes.com” (Asia Pacific, April 23, 2011),

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/24/world/asia/24beijing.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹³³ “Seoul to Dominate South Korean Medical Tourism Industry”, 2010 January 20,

http://www.asianplasticsurgeryguide.com/news10/012010_seoul-korean-plastic-surgery.html.

¹³⁴ Sharon LaFraniere, “Chinese Turn to Plastic Surgery in Growing Numbers - NYTimes.com.”

Lin Lin's distinctly reveal the connection between *Hallyu's* affective power and the medical tourism industry's neoliberal pull.

Hallyu's influence on fans and potential consumers is not limited to cosmetic surgery consumption, however. According to Shim, *Hallyu* consumption has spawned new consumer lifestyles for Asian fans abroad that have had "a big impact" on consumer culture "including food, fashion, make-up trends, and even plastic surgery" such that Asian youth are adorned in *Hallyu* fan gear and "in the streets of Hanoi and Beijing, it is common to find young members of the 'Korea Tribe', or Koreanophiles, sporting multiple earrings, baggy hip hop pants, and the square-toed shoes of Seoul fashion."¹³⁵ South Korean companies, capitalizing on *Hallyu's* success, have targeted consumer markets abroad. Corporations such as Samsung and LG have cashed in by featuring *Hallyu* stars in local commercials in various parts of Asia and even paying for K-dramas to air on local television networks.¹³⁶ For many *Hallyu* fans, K-dramas and the lifestyles they portray symbolize Asian capitalist modernity. As such, the right computer or gadget accessorizes a modern life while neoliberal rationales codify the body as a site for commodification as well.

Notably, the affective power of *Hallyu* is not uniform but rather, travels through historical and geopolitical circuits that largely affect how *Hallyu* consumers interact with it. According to Korean popular culture specialist Mark Russell,

In Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Bangkok, Seoul seemed modern and hip, and the protagonists of the shows had lives that young audiences could aspire to. But Japan is much richer than Korea, its technology generally more advanced.

¹³⁵ Shim, "Waxing the Wave," 7.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Korean television in Japan did not take off because it represented the future; it represented the past.¹³⁷

Accordingly, Japanese *Halhyu* fans have generally been older than those in other Asian countries. These middle-aged women, like the women embarking on Korean estute tours because they evoke “nostalgia for more traditional Asian lifestyle or values,” interact with Korean cultural products through their own repositories of personal and national memories. Importantly, these national memories are colored by Japan’s colonial and postcolonial relationship with South Korea and as Jung asserts, “the desires of Japanese fans for South Korean popular culture must be distinguished from the desires of other Asian consumers.”¹³⁸

We see this evocation of the past at play in Jung’s analysis of Japanese fans of Bae Yong-Joon. Jung contends that:

...the difference in the progression of the phases of modernization in South Korea and Japan created a significant temporal lag. The two countries occupy a ‘different *now* and *then*.’ This asynchronous temporal experience is the main reason for the counter-coeval gaze of Japanese fans at BYJ’s soft masculinity. [...] Japanese audiences find their lost virtues from BYJ’s soft masculine body. [...] In the case of BYJ’s polite image, Japanese fans find their ‘past’ and ‘memory’ in BYJ’s ‘present’ body. BYJ’s polite body exemplifies the nostalgia of the fans where counter-coevality is evident.¹³⁹

As Jung explains, Bae Yong-Joon fans’ counter-coeval gaze is made apparent, for example, in how they understand his body. While fans appreciate his *momjjang*

¹³⁷ Mark Russell, *Pop Goes Korea: Behind the Revolution in Movies, Music, and Internet Culture* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2008) 120.

¹³⁸ Jung, “Bae Yong-Joon, Soft Masculinity,” 41.

¹³⁹ Jung, “Bae Yong-Joon, Soft Masculinity,” 64.

(perfectly toned) body, a postmodern ideal, they articulate such appreciation by filtering it through the traditional ideal of *wen* (controlled, sensitive and noble) masculinity, something they lament has been lost in contemporary Japanese men and society at large.¹⁴⁰ In other words, Japanese fandom is necessarily mediated through Japan's postcolonial relationship to South Korea so that fans see their past in South Korea's present, thus resurrecting nostalgic dreams.

The medical tourism industry's marketing strategies play on these nostalgic dreams in their construction of South Korea as both a modern and traditional space. As outlined in the previous section, the medical tourism industry has made significant efforts to combine medical services with their estute tours since they are already popular amongst Japanese women. Estute tours emphasize traditional Korean beauty treatments, foods and medicines and medical estute tours fold skin assessments, cosmetic surgery procedures, "well-being" foods and shopping into this pre-existing (and successful) marketing strategy. Similarly, marketing ploys like the Body and Seoul Sweepstakes YouTube video take careful pains to emphasize oriental healing techniques and medicines, such as Korean drumming and crystal light therapy, as effective healing tools alongside South Korea's technologically advanced medical facilities. Thus, *Hallyu* activates nostalgic dreams on the part of Japanese fans and the medical tourism industry asserts itself a way of experiencing that nostalgia while receiving technologically advanced, modern procedures.

¹⁴⁰ Jung, "Bae Yong-Joon, Soft Masculinity," 70.

In China and Southeast Asian countries, however, Korea evokes “the future” and *Hallyu* fans tend to be much younger than those in Japan. While Russell’s use of the linear temporal terms “future” and “past” evokes a false teleology, he does capture the differing ways in which fans in these regions might relate to South Korea given their distinct historical and economic relationships. As we have discussed, for viewers in developing nations such as China and Taiwan, Shim asserts, Korean dramas have offered “better terms for negotiation” by providing high-quality entertainment coupled with Asian values and stories that balance traditional sentiments with modern cityscapes and lifestyles. This is perhaps best captured in an article written by deputy editor of Asia News Network, Yasmin Lee G. Arpon, about Philippine fandom of “Koreanovelas,” as K-dramas are known in the Philippines. Chronicling the experiences of Paola, a journalism student who studied industrial management in South Korea simply to have a chance to go there, Arpon describes Paola’s meeting her favorite *Hallyu* stars as “the perfect way to cap her *Korean dream* (emphasis added).”¹⁴¹

In chapter two, I use the concept of the “American Dream” to refer to the work that empire does in establishing aspirational desire within those outside of the physical borders of the U.S. but inside the reach of U.S. empire. Surgery, in this frame, operates as an intervention in identity rather than appearance, and becomes a means through which a better life is secured, one that is symbolized by whiteness itself. Similarly, I argue that *Hallyu* activates a “Korean Dream” for Paola and other

¹⁴¹ Yasmin Lee G. Arpon, “‘Koreanovelas’ Fever Is Sweeping the Philippines;” in *Korean Wave*, ed. The Korea Herald, vol. 5, Insight into Korea Series (Seoul: Jimoodang Publishers, 2008), 32.

Southeast Asian and Chinese fans. In the same vein, bodily alterations and excessive participation in the marketplace are inroads through which these women aspire to secure the fantastic South Korean lifestyles that are mediated through *Hallyu's* cultural productions. In this case, cosmetic surgery is not about whiteness so much as it is about South Korean looks and Asian capitalist modernity.

There is no end in sight in the near future for *Hallyu* or for medical tourism. To be sure, critics of Korea's medical tourism industry have come forth now that the burgeoning industry is in its fifth year. These critics contend that South Korea cannot afford to use its doctors for foreigner care given its rapidly aging population.¹⁴² Others echo the Chinese government's warnings regarding language and the inability to properly communicate with healthcare providers. Still others, like Fox News Los Angeles' Doctor Johnston, are concerned with patient aftercare. In spite of these critiques, medical tourism's profit—US \$60 million per year—continues to grow as do the numbers of medical tourists who are expected to reach 140,000 by 2015.¹⁴³ What's more, plans for expansion continue and a cosmetic surgery/casino is under construction during the writing of this chapter.¹⁴⁴ As *Hallyu's* reach in Asia continues to expand, so too does South Korea's medical tourism industry.

¹⁴² Robert J. Fouser, "Rethinking Medical Tourism," 2011 April 25, The Korea Times.

¹⁴³ "Seoul to Dominate South Korean Medical Tourism Industry."

¹⁴⁴ Lee Hyo-sik, "Seven Luck to Boost Ties with Clinics," *The Korea Times*, October 7, 2010, sec. National, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/10/117_74181.html.

CONCLUSION

This chapter is about dreams. As is the case for our heroine, Samsun, corporeal issues and the neoliberal rationales that govern them, are a part of Asian women's quotidian lives and can operate in and through the ephemeral, aspirational and very personal space of dreams. For Japanese *Hallyu* fans, such dreams take on a nostalgic resonance given Japan's postcolonial relationship with South Korea. Chinese and Southeast Asian fans, however, construct "Korean Dreams" that intersect with aspirations to Asian capitalist modernity and economic development. Both types of dreams are mediated through *Hallyu's* fantastical representations of South Korean capitalist modernity and for many Asian women, South Korea's medical tourism industry is one way of achieving such dreams. As feminist scholars have shown, geopolitical disparities affect women's bodies in multiple ways.¹⁴⁵ For example, the 2009 film *Google Baby* profoundly "explores the business of outsourcing babies," by following the lives of surrogates in India along with the Western couples who contract them. The documentary aptly illuminates the demarcation between who contracts such labor and who performs it.¹⁴⁶ Plastic surgery consumption and medical tourism pose a similar but unique dilemma particularly for Asian feminism: On the one hand, Asian women have differing access to technologies of the self such as plastic surgery. On the other, women globally are subject to transnational market flows and ideologies that posit neoliberal forms of self-management as critical to

¹⁴⁵ The 12th International Women's Film Festival in Seoul Conference in 2010, for example, covered the topic "The Political Economy of Maternity in the Glocal Era" (지구지역시대 모성의 정치경제학).

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/google-baby/index.html>, accessed July 1 2011.

success and constitute them as liberal subjects. *Hallyu's* cultural hegemony throughout Asia poses new formations of power that disrupt the binary of “the West and the rest.” Such developments necessitate a new language amongst Asian feminists that goes beyond the critique of the individual patient and her psyche and interrogates instead the structures of economy, cultural forms and ideologies that push Asian women into the consumer market. Accordingly, an examination of *Yŏsŏng Minuhoe*, a feminist non-profit organization based in Seoul, South Korea, and their “Love Your Body” campaign is the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

“LOVE YOUR BODY”: LOOKISM, FEMINIST ORGANIZING, AND DANGEROUS CORPORATIONS

We can no longer simply blame these problems on each individual woman’s awareness. We have to establish a solution to minimize the influence of capital investment and commercial public culture on women’s bodies, which has become a new market.¹

-- Kim Sang-hŭi, Executive Director of Korean Womenlink

During an interview with So Sŭng-jin, a thirty-five year old who works long hours at an overseas investment firm and an English student of mine, Sŭng-jin described a massage shop she frequents called *Yakson Myŏngga* in Kwanghwamun, a bustling professional district in Seoul.² Sŭng-jin frequents the shop to receive massages to relieve the asymmetry of her face. She told me that because of the location, most of the customers are like her, early to mid-30s working single women with disposable income. Believing that one side of her face protrudes farther out than the other and that in general her face is too wide, Sŭng-jin purchased the deluxe facial package for facial symmetry, which provides the customer with eight massages. Unsure of whether the treatments would yield results, she opted out of the most expensive package of sixteen massages for the equivalent of \$2000 US.

¹ Kim Sang-hŭi, “Society Incites Cosmetic Surgery,” *Joong Ang Ilbo* (Seoul, South Korea, n.d.), sec. Minority Voices.

² So Sŭng-jin, “Interview with Sŭng-jin Soh,” In Person, March 16, 2010.
All interviewees’ names have been changed except those in official public positions.

When she took me to the shop to receive a free consultation for my research, Sŭng-jin was also going to have her second to last massage. She told me that she thought she could see results but that she could not be sure if they could be attributed to the massages or the fact that she had been making a conscientious effort to chew with only one side of her mouth.³ I asked Sŭng-jin whether she had ever gone to a doctor and while she had not, her friend had. The doctor suggested, she told me, a cosmetic surgery procedure that would cost \$6,000 US. Sŭng-jin reasoned that the eight massages were a much better deal. The masseurs, on the other hand, had told her that the problem was a result of chewing her food on only one side and uneven hip alignment. In order to correct this, the whole body had to be massaged for two and a half hours at a time. When I suggested that I experience one, Sŭng-jin said it would be too painful (she repeated this several times underscoring just how painful the massages are), not to mention expensive.

Once in the shop, I perused the services menu. While Sŭng-jin had mentioned that the massages also had therapeutic effects such as relieving shoulder and back pain, I noticed no mention of these benefits and that all the services were grouped by body regions: “Face Management” (*ŏlgul kwalli*) and “Body Management (*mom kwalli*).” During my consultation, the consultant asked me what I was interested in. When I asked about the weight loss and face shrinking massages, she qualified

³ In a subsequent meeting, Sŭng-jin told me that the massages had worked. The shop had taken a mold of her face on her first visit and her last. When she compared the two molds, she could see a visible difference in the shape of her face. She had signed the original molding so she knew it was the same one they had made the first day. The difference between the two molds was, she reasoned, indisputable evidence of the efficacy of the eight painful massages she had invested in.

their efficacy by saying that they would not be as effective for someone who has always had weight problems compared to someone who has recently gained weight. She also commented that there was not enough definition between my chin and jaw and that I'd be prettier if there were. When I told her I was from the U.S. and that I'd never seen anything like this before, she mentioned that the shop was looking to expand to the U.S. in either Los Angeles or New York and that they had recently opened shops in the Philippines and Japan. I thanked her for her time, said I would think about it and left the shop in a hurry before the consultant could sense my anxiety. Sŭng-jin was absolutely right, I could not afford even the most inexpensive massage on my researcher's budget. What's more, her assessment of my looks left me questioning the contours of my face and the shape of my body.

I had been living in Seoul nearly a year by then and during that time was subject to the same kinds of scrutiny, advertisements and media images that inform South Korean women's everyday lives. Waiting for the subway, I would daily see commercials playing on flat screen televisions at the platform advertising *soju* (Korea's national liquor, akin to Japanese sake) or the like that featured scantily clad and slim actresses dancing around, shot glass in hand. Once on the subway train, I was bombarded with ads for cosmetic surgery clinics featuring "before and after" photos of "successfully" transformed women. At family gatherings, my cousins and aunts either reprimanded me for gaining weight or lauded me for losing some. Indeed, what I had felt that day in the massage shop was not new but rather, a reminder of

the daily anxieties that had been mounting even as I tried to observe such things from a researcher's distance.

Sŭng-jin's experiences—and my own—underscore the myriad body management techniques and services, media images and advertisements through which South Korean women must navigate. These various types of “body work” are a result of new identifications with the body. As feminist scholar Cho Joo-hyun cogently argues, “the source of self-empowerment is no longer based on the womanly virtues of traditional ethics, but on measurable and quantifiable factors such as height, weight, and BMI index.”⁴ In order to achieve this self-empowerment, then, South Korean women are thus increasingly seeking self-improvement through various forms of body work that include cosmetic surgery, dieting, skin and body care as well as innovative—and expensive—new treatments, like Sŭng-jin's, to secure and signify their identities where smarter clothes or a more original hairstyle would have sufficed in the past.

It is precisely such multifarious forms of body work that South Korean feminist non-profit organization, *Yŏsŏng Minuboe* (한국여성만우회), known in English as Korean Womenlink (heretofore Womenlink), sought to address in their 2003 “Love Your Body” campaign.⁵ Officially called “Women's bodies are beautiful

⁴ Cho Joo-Hyun, “Neoliberal Governmentality at Work: Post-IMF Korean Society and the Construction of Neoliberal Women,” *Korea Journal* 49, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 15 – 43.

⁵ The campaign had several names/slogans during its months-long run depending on the context. It was also called the “No Diet, No Cosmetic Surgery” campaign, the “Revitalize Your Body” campaign, and the “I am the Owner of My Body” campaign.

Korean Womenlink, “여성의 몸 있는 그대로가 아름답다 외모지상주의 인식개선산업”, 2003, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

as they are: The Lookism Perception Reform Project,” the campaign lasted from April through the end of the year and sought to not only educate women about the health of their bodies but to strike at the heart of “lookism,” which is largely defined as “prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of appearance.”⁶ Womenlink identifies lookism as a major social concern for women that has material consequences vis-à-vis the job and marriage markets. Through a multi-pronged approach, the organization outreached to women and girls, held rallies, filed legal complaints against cosmetic surgery clinics and diet food companies, conducted surveys, monitored media programming and even produced a half hour mockumentary. In these ways, Womenlink’s campaign embodied one of the organization’s major tenets—that the personal is political.

This chapter argues that the “Love Your Body” campaign offers a critical counterpoint to Western discourses on South Korean cosmetic surgery consumption that overdetermine the salience of race. As we have seen in chapter one, Western discourses map U.S. notions of race onto the South Korean context in ways that obscure the geopolitical realities shaping the South Korean context. Given South Korea’s homogeneous demographic population, however, race is less salient (although not absent) in discourses and critiques concerning cosmetic surgery.⁷

⁶ As quoted from John Ayto’s *20th Century Words* in William Safire, “The Way We Live Now: 8-27-00: On Language; Lookism - New York Times,” *The New York Times*, August 27, 2000, sec. Magazine, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/27/magazine/the-way-we-live-now-8-27-00-on-language-lookism.html>.

⁷ South Korea’s demographics are, however, rapidly changing. A 2007 report prepared by the Committee of Policy on Foreigners predicts that the number of migrants living in Korea will rise to 4 million, roughly 10% of the total population, by 2020. Accordingly, efforts have been and are being made by state and non-state actors to see Korea as a multiracial and multicultural society in the

Accordingly, Womenlink's campaign constructs women's excessive consumption of cosmetic surgery as a multi-dimensional problem that not only affects women's health but is the result of a social problem with material consequences: lookism. This chapter argues that, by organizing around the politics of the everyday, Womenlink levels a powerful and provocative critique against the cosmetic surgery industry by indicting its predatory marketing practices and locating the construction and perpetuation of lookism where the interests of the media and cosmetic surgery clinics converge. In so doing, I contend, Womenlink exemplifies geopolitically situated feminist organizing around issues of the body that cease to focus on the individual (and whether or not her choices are rational) and instead, interrogates the predatory capitalist practices of the industries productive of those choices.

Accordingly, this chapter first offers a brief genealogy of South Korean feminism and of Womenlink itself. Then, this chapter uses Womenlink's educational and satirical video, *Knifestyle*, as a prism through which to examine the "Love Your Body" campaign in order to interrogate its distinct organizing logics. I argue that, when it comes to issues of embodiment, Womenlink's campaign offers critical lessons in feminist organizing that move beyond race and patriarchy and instead, demands justice for the ways in which women's bodies are increasingly interpellated as sites of capitalist consumption.

making. For an ethnographic study on how NGOs are translating the discourse of migrants' rights to difference into practices and new ethics of normativity and tolerance, see: EuyRyung Jun, "Virtuous Citizens and Sentimental Society: Ethics and Politics in Neoliberal South Korea," (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011).

Womenlink's broader goals translate into feminist practices that seek to transform the fabric of women's everyday lives. Indeed, Womenlink takes quite seriously the adage that "The Personal is Political" and seeks, through their movements "to change personal matters into political issues."⁸ According to Kim Kyŏng-hŭi, this slogan not only directly connects politics and daily life but also expands the agenda of the women's movement by creating a link between women's personal desires and social change.⁹ In so doing, Womenlink breaks through ideological barriers between public and private affairs that understand everyday choices as removed from the realm of politics. As we shall see in the brief genealogy of South Korean feminism, it is this very commitment—to enacting change both institutionally as well as in the realm of the everyday—that sets Womenlink apart from other South Korean feminist organizations.

South Korean feminism, like the rest of the country's historical, political and economic trajectories, has been unduly affected by the nation's triangulated colonial relationships to Japan and the U.S. The first women's movement formed during

⁸ Kim Kyŏng-hŭi, "개인적인 것이 정치적인 것이다" in *한국여성민우회 20년 운동사: 여성운동 새로 쓰기*, (Seoul, South Korea: Korean Womenlink, 2008) 41 – 190.

⁹ Ibid.

The feminist mantra "The personal is political" originates out of the U.S. Women's Liberation Movement and more specifically a paper entitled, *The Personal is Political* written by Carol Hanisch in 1970, the slogan (in its original sense) meant to impart that women's concerns regarding sex, appearance, abortion and division of labor (to name a few) were not "personal" as they had been deemed by larger radical movements but were in and of themselves political. In other words, while women shared concerns with the men they organized with, they also had issues that were not only particular to them, often having to do with their bodies, but from which their male compatriots actually benefitted.

Carol Hanisch, "The Personal Is Political: The Original Feminist Theory Paper at the Author's Web Site", n.d., <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>.

Japanese protectorship (1905 – 1910) and its primary goal was to raise funds to pay the debt owed Japan by Korea in the hopes of ending protectorship status.¹⁰

Feminism was enmeshed with nationalism and Korean women were at the forefront of the March First, 1919 demonstrations for independence from Japan.

In the years immediately following the March First demonstrations, the short lived New Women's Movement emphasized the exploration of women's sexuality and liberation from patriarchal households and mandates.¹¹ An outcome of educated and upper-class women who had traveled to and had been educated in Japan and thus exposed to European liberalism, the New Women's Movement unsurprisingly met with hostility from the national liberation movement and was soon replaced by the Christian church-based nationalist women's movement and the socialist women's movement.¹² The socialist women's movement and the women's labor movement in particular, reached its peak in the late 1920s and 1930s continuing into the Korean War. By the early 1950s, however, national partition and Cold War ideology justified the violent suppression of socialism and the Left, leaving a feminist vacuum in South Korea until the 1970s.

Military dictator, Park Chung-hee, drove economic growth through industrialization throughout the 1970s and brought in foreign capital investment through cheap, female labor. As a result, an inordinate number of underage girls were exploited as factory workers and subjected to extremely harsh working

¹⁰ Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi, "Introduction," 2.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

conditions for very little wages. Under these conditions, the Women Factory Workers Movement began to take shape and focused on improving their working conditions by emphasizing human rights to life. This movement joined with the more middle-class college-educated women's movement, which opposed Park Chung-hee's authoritarian rule and became the foundation for the progressive women's movement.¹³

In the 1980s, Korean women started forming new progressive organizations including the Female Christian Scholars Association (*Yŏsinhakcha Hyobuihoe* 1980), the Korean Women's Equal Friends (*Yŏsŏng P'yŏnubhoe*), Women's Hotline (*Yŏsŏngwi Chŏnhwa* 1983), Another culture (*Tto Hanaŭi Munhwa* 1984) and Christian Women's Friends (*Kidok Yŏminubhoe* 1986).¹⁴ These organizations were formed mostly by well-educated women and focused mainly on what they saw as women's rights in the forms of domestic violence and labor issues such as companies' unwritten policies to retire women workers by the age of twenty-five. Other organizations, however, sought to focus on national politics in addition to, or with more urgency, than women's rights.

In order to rectify this political divide, the Korea United Women's Organization (*Han'guk Yŏsŏng Tanch'eyŏnhap* /KUWO), an umbrella organization that houses twenty-one other feminist groups, was established in 1987 by three key

¹³ Kim Ki Sŏnmi, "제 4 장 '진보적 여성운동'의 전망" in *한국현대여성사*. The Current History of Korean Women 4, (Seoul, South Korea: Hanul Books, 2004), 346 - 370.

¹⁴ Yi Migyŏng, "여성 운동과 민주화운동--여연 10 년사" in *열린희망: 한국여성단체연합 10 년사*, (Seoul, South Korea: Dongduk Women's University Women's Research Center, 1998) 15 - 46.

groups: the Women Factory Workers' Movement, who organized labor efforts for better working conditions, the well-educated women's movement composed of women who had participated in the democratic movements during their college years, and the Christian Women's Group whose goals centered on sex workers' and prisoners' human rights.¹⁵ These three movements coalesced around the same objective to democratize Korean society through the goal of women's liberation, which, they theorized, would serve the democratization of society as a whole. Yi Chŏng-u, the first chairwoman of KUWO, articulated KUWO's mission in the first issue of *Democratic Women* in July of 1987 as such: "The goal of the women's movement [...] should seek to change the infrastructure of society in order to reduce discrimination and suppression. To make this change, we should fight for democracy and equal rights along with human rights to be free from political suppression and foreign influence."¹⁶ In this way, Womenlink's contemporaries, while organizing around gender inequality, largely focused on structural and institutional change.

Womenlink was established the same year as KUWO on September 12, largely by women who were student movement activists in the 1970s and 1980s and office workers who were members of the Women's Labor Center.¹⁷ Two years later, in 1989, they established their Life Cooperative, which takes as its mission the protection of human life and the environment and continues to be actively engaged in environmental issues and consumer campaigns. Between 1992 and 2001,

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Park Hye Gyong, Personal Communication, March 30, 2012.

Womenlink opened eleven branches in various parts of South Korea including Koyang, Chinju, Kwangju and Inch'ŏn.¹⁸ During that time, the organization also opened its Media Movement Headquarters, Equal Employment Headquarters and established their Family and Sexuality Counseling Center, which allowed them to grow their influence by offering their services regarding family and sexual violence issues in addition to labor issues.¹⁹

Today, Womenlink is the largest, most active and visible feminist organization in South Korea. In fact, according to feminist scholar Park Hye Gyong, former members have gone on to positions within the Ministry of Gender Equality and to become congress members, thus lending their support to Womenlink's campaigns. As a result, Womenlink is able to garner a wide-range of media coverage for their campaigns and events.²⁰ With a membership of 9,000, Womenlink employs twenty-three full-time staff to execute, research and fundraise for their incredibly wide array of campaigns and projects.²¹ According to staff members Jŏng Eŭnji and Ju Gai, their membership reflect a diversity of women in their twenties to their fifties from multiple regions and many of their staff are graduates of Ewha Women's University's Woman's Studies Masters Program.²² Indeed, Womenlink is deeply connected to the University and their Women's studies program, which is known to be radically

¹⁸ Korean Womenlink, "단체소개서-한국여성민우회", 2003, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Korean Womenlink, "단체소개서-한국여성민우회", 2003, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

²² Jŏng Eŭnji and Ju Gai, "Interview with Jŏng Eŭnji and Ju Gai," In person, April 5, 2010. Park Hye Gyong, Personal Communication, March 30, 2012.

feminist, since many of the organization's critical members are graduates including Han Myōngsuk, head of the current largest oppositional party in South Korea.²³

Since its inception, Womenlink has casted a wide net and has initiated activities towards the broad aims of building an independent, democratic society; founding a national, independent economy; equal rights and opportunities for women; securing just labor rights for women; lobbying for women's participation in all social arenas; and eliminating domestic violence and sexual discrimination.²⁴ According to an application they submitted to the Ministry of Gender Equality for funds for their "Love Your Body" Campaign, the organization's current mission is "to abolish gender discrimination and make sure that society guarantees women's rights. Furthermore, our mission is to organize towards a society in which nature and humans are in harmony."²⁵

Womenlink's understands the everyday realm as part and parcel to nurturing such "harmony." According to their website, their "Movement starts from daily life. We strive to eliminate alienation and discrimination against women in the workplace, the home and local communities."²⁶ As such, their commitment to "daily life" and "home" is evident in several of their campaigns apart from the "Love Your Body" campaign. The year before the "Love Your Body" campaign took place, they launched the "Smile, Holiday" campaign, which sought to "raise awareness and start

²³ Park Hye Gyong, Personal Communication, March 30, 2012.

²⁴ "한국여성민우회," in *열린희망: 한국여성단체연합 10년사* (Seoul, South Korea: Dongduk Women's University Women's Research Center, 1998), 342 – 344.

²⁵ Korean Womenlink, "단체소개서-한국여성민우회", 2003, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

²⁶ "Korean Womenlink -- About Us", n.d., womenlink.or.kr.

discussions about sex discrimination in regards to labor on holidays” especially those pertaining to memorial customs.²⁷ On major holidays, according to prescribed gender roles within Korean society, it is commonplace to find women preparing and serving elaborate meals for their in-laws while men relax with one another, usually enjoying drinks and playing games. Preparing meals for family members to eat as well as to offer those that have passed during memorial services is also the sole responsibility of women. As such, women typically dread major holidays as a time of increased labor within the house rather than a time of rest or relaxation.

Womenlink’s “Smile, Holiday” Campaign sought to reform such gendered practices and they organized a street campaign, published a brochure on the topic, established an Equal Holiday Practices Declaration Movement as well as an on-line campaign.²⁸ The “Smile, Holiday” Campaign speaks to how Womenlink seeks to transform the everyday lives of women inside their very homes and during even the most intimate of occasions by working towards the goal of women smiling (rather than dreading and thus, frowning) on holidays.

Womenlink’s focus on the everyday does not, however, preclude them from enacting campaigns to reform political institutions. In 2003, the organization ran eighteen campaigns in addition to “Love Your Body” and “Smile, Holiday.”²⁹

²⁷ Korean Womenlink, “한국여성민우회 2003 년 여성부 고동협력사업 신청서”, 2003 February 21, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ These campaigns included: “Making Schools Violence Free,” fact finding on women laborers, securing mothers’ rights and reviewing legal effectiveness of home and work dual support, analyzing local governments’ women policies and budgets, enforcing women’s green co-op movement, sanitary napkin project, reducing caesarean section campaign, responding to life engineering (in vitro fertility practices), improving school cafeteria food, sexual violence prevention, responding to sexual

Another core project of the year was to “make schools violence free” by fact finding and initiating school reform to end sexual violence in high schools. Their other major projects sought to link women’s low birthrates to their working environments by reviewing women’s labor laws in order to determine problems with execution and misinterpretations. On a local level, the organization also set out to review local government’s policies on women and their budgets for this arena. Such reviews would allow Womenlink to enforce gender related policies.

By utilizing an organizing approach that addresses both the everyday realm as well as structural violence and neglect, Womenlink is able to affect change on multiple fronts. For their “Love Your Body” campaign, this approach allows Womenlink to disrupt cosmetic surgery and dieting practices on the level of technologies of the self that operate through the neoliberal rationalities that inform women’s daily lives. Through their diverse set of activities, events and programs included in the “Love Your Body” campaign, Womenlink hoped to reach the following goals:

- 1) Increase social attention and discussion about women’s health
- 2) Emphasize the “life cycle” health model for women through educational programs
- 3) Help women to have independence in regards to their health and appearance management so that they can create positive self-images and through this, recover their health by themselves
- 4) Establish social common ground about the standards and shapes of various beauty ideals

harassment at work, developing a program for sexual perpetrators, single parent support networks, gender equal media programming campaign, quality improvement of television program, campaign to establish children’s TV law, and various education programs including domestic violence counselor training, sex education lecturer training, women’s environment education, media education, folk music education, donation culture raising workshop and organic food cultivation.

- 5) Educate society about the problem of lookism as proliferated by the media and
- 6) Utilize media to educate society about various ways of being beautiful and healthy.³⁰

To these ends, Womenlink sponsored health-oriented outreach programs, launched a monitoring campaign of television shows, women's magazines and daily newspapers for which they received national press coverage, issued legal complaints against cosmetic surgery clinics and diet food companies and produced a satiric, mockumentary style educational video called *Knifestyle*, which encapsulates the central organizing themes of the "Love Your Body" campaign.³¹ The following sections closely read the educational video as a framework through which to interrogate Womenlink's organizing methods and the logics driving the campaign.

"KNIFESTYLE, NOT LIFESTYLE."

Of the myriad forms of body work bombarding South Korean women today, Womenlink's half hour mockumentary film, *Knifestyle*, takes cosmetic surgery as its focal point. Produced in conjunction with WOMB, a women's film foundation, *Knifestyle* is a farcical account of a representative of the fictional Paradise Advertising Agency coaching cosmetic surgeons on marketing strategies to maximize patients and thus, profit. In so doing, *Knifestyle* uses the mockumentary and infotainment genres to extract the codes and conventions of both news programs and marketing seminars

³⁰ Korean Womenlink, "여성건강[여성의 몸, 그대로가 아름답다(가칭)회의]", 2003 March 4, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

³¹ Korean Womenlink, "2003 년도 공동협력사업 추진실적 보고서", 2003 December 31, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

in order to tap into the viewers' privileging of such programs' authoritative voice.

Queer theorist Judith Butler writes about the protagonists of documentary film, *Paris is Burning*, whose drag performances similarly attempt to subvert hegemonically gendered norms:

This is not an appropriation of dominant culture in order to remain subordinated by its terms, but an appropriation that seeks to make over the terms of domination, a making over which is itself a kind of agency, a power in and as discourse, in and as performance, which repeats in order to remake—and sometimes succeeds.³²

In a similar vein, *Knifestyle* appropriates the news media form of official knowledge and its repertoire of strategies to offer a counter narrative that calls into question not only the very medium itself but how its interests converge with those of the cosmetic surgery industry. *Knifestyle's* satirical mimicking provides the viewer with a direct gaze into the cosmetic surgery industry and its marketing strategies with much more efficacy than a documentary that exacts the same content. In the young women and adult education classes where the video was screened, women were often confused about whether it was an actual marketing video or a satire. Indeed, it is in that space of confusion—between reality and satire—where *Knifestyle* is most effective. This efficacy was brought to a much wider audience when it aired on KBS on September 11, 2003.³³

³² Judith Butler, "Gender Is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion," in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 348.

³³ Korean Womenlink, "2003 년도 공동협력사업 추진실적 보고서", 2003 December 31, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

Knifestyle begins with the advertising representative dressed in a dark suit and burgundy tie sitting in an all black studio. The bespectacled representative, and announcer for the program, appears to be in his 30s, decent looking but not extremely handsome. There is a small table next to him with a Barbie doll perched on it. The same Barbie is featured on a flat screen television on the other side of the table. The Barbie is dressed in a pink and silver sparkly gown and wears a tiara—she resembles a beauty contestant. In place of a scepter, however, she holds a scalpel and the words “Marketing Strategies for Cosmetic Surgery” run on the top right of the screen while the words “Knife Style” are captioned at the bottom.³⁴

The announcer, speaking in a news anchor cadence throughout, begins the video by welcoming the hypothetical audience of cosmetic surgeons and introducing himself as part of Paradise Advertising Agency who specializes in cosmetic surgery clinics’ advertising market. The camera zooms in for a medium close up as he asks, “Ladies and gentlemen, have you ever heard of modern life’s neologism, ‘knifestyle?’”³⁵ Simultaneously, as he speaks the word “knifestyle,” the word also appears on the screen beneath him. He goes on to clarify, “Not lifestyle,” at which point the word “knifestyle” is replaced with “lifestyle” only to be crossed out by big, red X’s as a buzzing sound, the kind heard on game shows when contestants make a misstep, indicates its incorrect usage. “Many of you are probably hearing this for the first time,” he says and then holds up a scalpel.³⁶ “Knife, makes you think of a

³⁴ Korean Womenlink and WOMB, *Knifestyle*, Video (Seoul, South Korea, 2003).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

scalpel, doesn't it? Knifestyle comes from the scalpel's symbolism that, if you want, we can make you beautiful."³⁷ As he speaks, he waves the scalpel around beating it to the rhythm of his words and thus emphasizing the fact that it is indeed the scalpel that makes one beautiful. Through such details of acting and a mix of audio and visual effects, *Knifestyle* humorously engages violent content in a satirical tone that pokes fun at the industry it seeks to portray and thus, subvert.

Significantly, Womenlink describes Knifestyle as a “satire of lookism” that sheds light on the realities of cosmetic surgery including the ways in which the industry itself has a vested interest in perpetuating lookism.³⁸ I argue that the concept of lookism allows Womenlink to organize a geopolitically situated feminist campaign that not only addresses the material consequences of women's everyday concerns but also centralizes capitalist marketing practices (and the profits they engender) as a point of their critique. Thus, I offer here a brief synopsis of the origins of and debates surrounding the concept.³⁹ Although *Womenlink* attributes the term lookism to *The New York Times Magazine* columnist William Safire and his August 27, 2000 column “On Language; Lookism,” he actually traces the word to a *The Washington Post Magazine* article in 1978 when it was used by the Fat Acceptance Movement to describe both what their members experience and what they oppose.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Korean Womenlink, “2003 년도 공동협력사업 추진실적 보고서”, 2003 December 31, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Korean Womenlink, “여성건강[여성의 몸, 그대로가 아름답다(가칭)회의]”, 2003 March 11, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

William Safire, “The Way We Live Now: 8-27-00: On Language; Lookism - New York Times.”

Today, in the U.S., lookism is associated with Nancy Etcoff, a psychologist at Massachusetts General Hospital and faculty member at Harvard Medical School whose book *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty* argues that human propensity to favor beauty is biological and a product of human evolution.⁴¹ Her book brings together numerous scientific studies including one she conducted in conjunction with other Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers that used magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technology to analyze men's brain activity as they viewed photos of beautiful women.⁴² The researchers found that the images triggered the same parts of the brain that alcohol triggers for alcoholics, food triggers for hungry people and that money triggers for gamblers. In other words, beauty elicits the same chemical reactions in the brain as addiction. Because humans are hardwired towards beauty, Etcoff reasons, insistence that beauty is socially constructed is counterproductive and actually serves to further entrench the beauty hierarchy. Many critics understand her

That William Safire coined lookism seems to be a widely held belief in South Korea, appearing on multiple blogs and internet videos on the topic. Whether this can be attributed to Womenlink's educational campaigns cannot be ascertained although they seem to have solely raised awareness around the idea. Safire's weekly column, "On Language," where "On Language; Lookism" appeared, focused on linguistics and grammar in playful and insightful ways. Thus, his column on lookism actually traces the origins of the word and its usage while satirizing the concept by likening it to other "politically correct" terminology. Womenlink's citation of Safire's article may very well point to the politics of (mis)translation and their need to ground their concept in a Western "-ism" akin to racism and sexism. Another possibility, however, is that Womenlink aligns themselves to Safire precisely because of his satiric use of the term. As discussed in the last section of this chapter, Womenlink produced a mockumentary called *Knifestyle*, through which they satirically critique the cosmetic surgery industry.

⁴¹ Nancy Etcoff, *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000).

⁴² John Stossel, "The Ugly Truth About Beauty - ABC News," *ABC News*, <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=123853&page=1#.T17lhxixVc>.

book as a direct response to feminists such as Naomi Wolf who argue that beauty is not only socially constructed but also premised on misogyny.⁴³

While lookism in and of itself is not a major concern for feminists in the U.S., it was a topic of concern within the mainstream media around the time that Etcoff published her book and Safire published his column. *ABC News*, for example, conducted experiments for which they hired actors, “some great looking, some not,” and compared them in various situations such as applying for jobs, soliciting for charitable donations and asking for help alongside the road.⁴⁴ In all of these situations, the better looking actors were treated more favorably compared to their average looking counterparts—they got the job, made more in donations and got more help. The report ends with the suggestion that “We should add the bias of ‘lookism’ to sexism and racism. It’s just as bad but we don’t need a federal program.”⁴⁵

While there is no mention of cosmetic surgery in relation to lookism in the *ABC News* feature, a *Hartford Courant* article entitled, “Our ‘Lookist’ Society,” makes the connection between the two revealing that more and more baby boomers are looking towards cosmetic surgery as a means of competing with younger people on

⁴³ Karen Lehrman, “The Beautiful People,” *The New York Times*, March 21, 1999, sec. Books, http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/03/21/reviews/990321.21lehrmat.html?_r=2. Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (London: Vintage Press, 1991).

⁴⁴ John Stossel, “The Ugly Truth About Beauty - ABC News.”

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

the job market.⁴⁶ The article notes that there had been a 153 percent increase in cosmetic procedures between 1992 and 2000 when the article was published. It goes on to say that cosmetic surgery is no longer for the vain or the rich evidenced by the fact that 65 percent of those who had an aesthetic procedure in 1994 had family incomes of \$50,000 US or less. Thus, the article drives home the point that an increasing number of baby boomers are seeking more youthful appearances because it is “economically sound,” as one interviewee stated.

Womenlink’s use of the concept “lookism” derives from the U.S. context but also significantly departs from it. As mentioned above, the organization attributes the concept to William Safire, *The New York Times Magazine* columnist, and identifies it as “one of the causes of unequal relations in human history along with race, religion, sex and ideology.”⁴⁷ While Etcoff would certainly agree with this definition, Womenlink’s similarities with Etcoff in their use of the term end there. While none of their materials indicate whether or not Womenlink members believe the propensity towards beauty is biologically driven, this seems to fall outside their major concern. Similarly, while Womenlink’s understanding of lookism might fall closer to the Wolf camp wherein beauty is socially constructed, the sole indictment of patriarchy as an oppressive force is not their major concern either. Rather, in addition to a patriarchal

⁴⁶ Diane Weaver Dunne, “Our ‘Lookist’ Society - Hartford Courant,” *Hartford Courant*, April 4, 2000, sec. Youth Culture, http://articles.courant.com/2000-04-04/features/0004041634_1_cosmetic-procedures-youth-culture-nancy-etcoff.

⁴⁷ Korean Womenlink, “여성건강[여성의 몸, 그대로가 아름답다(가칭)회의]”, 2003 March 11, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

Although Womenlink uses the Korean term for lookism, *oemochisangjuŭi* (외모지상주의), interchangeably with the English word, in most of their campaign materials, they use the term “lookism.”

analysis, Womenlink understands beauty through a capitalist framework that gets to the heart of not only the material consequences of lookism but who benefits from it as well. In other words, Womenlink brings a more complex analysis to the feminist milieu in the U.S. by asserting that South Korean women are increasingly seeking body work because lookism affects their job and marriage prospects and that the beauty industry sustains these social circumstances to its benefit.

This indictment of the beauty industry and the cosmetic industry in particular is made evident in the following scene from *Knifestyle*. The announcer begins the information session by showing his audience why advertisements are so crucial to the cosmetic surgery industry. He points out that cosmetic surgery is but one part of the beauty industry that is comprised of “cosmetics, which are essential to women, diet foods that everyone has tried at least once, and health clubs that are very popular in the summer time,” all of which comprise a 7 trillion W (over \$6 billion US) a year industry.⁴⁸ “Isn’t that alluring?” he asks, referring to the amount of money the beauty industry generates.⁴⁹ As he asks this rhetorical question, the shot transitions into crowds of people that fill the screen indicating the endless possibilities for profitability. Although cosmetic surgery is a latecomer compared to the other mainstays of beauty, he shares, the industry is booming simply because it makes money. “Because of the specifics of cosmetic surgery, medical insurance doesn’t cover it. So all the expenses for surgery, which cost millions of won, will become

⁴⁸ Korean Womenlink and WOMB, *Knifestyle*.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

your net income.”⁵⁰ As the announcer speaks these words, b-roll of Korean won fanned out and being counted fills the screen. Because of this fact, however, the cosmetic surgery industry is already oversupplied. “Since there are more clinics that you need to compete with, you need strategies to bring customers in and an advertising war is essential for you to win those patients.”⁵¹ Indeed, the number of cosmetic surgery clinics increased from twenty-two in 1975 to 164 in 1985 to 567 in 1995 and then 926 in 2000.⁵² What’s more, 48.7 percent of South Korea’s cosmetic surgery clinics are located in Seoul and 64 percent of those are located in the Kangnam area, making competition amongst these surgeons fiercer.⁵³

Despite the oversaturated market and fierce competition, the cosmetic surgery industry in South Korea thrives and *Knifestyle* points out that the industry flourishes because it is specifically gendered taking as its potential customers, “half of the world’s population.”⁵⁴ The announcer’s statement is strengthened by his news reporter cadence and tone, which has come to signify the objective and sagacious voice of journalistic ethics. As he speaks, the crowds of people, busily walking through a plaza or shopping area, appear once again in aerial view and the camera

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Korean Womenlink, “여성건강[여성의 몸, 그대로가 아름답다(가칭)회의”, 2003 March 11, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Korean Womenlink and WOMB, *Knifestyle*.

Womenlink notes that in 2000, 143,676 cosmetic procedures were performed in the U.S., which accounts for 37.72 percent of the world’s total that year.

Korean Womenlink, “여성건강[여성의 몸, 그대로가 아름답다(가칭)회의”, 2003 March 11, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

scans the crowd going over multiple faces until it focuses in on a woman who is standing near a table or booth. While people pass her on both sides, the camera steadily zooms in until it holds still to reveal a pretty, young woman dressed in a red tank top and sunglasses unknowing that she is being watched. The camera is wobbly, evidencing the fact that it is handheld and all the more underscoring the fact that someone is targeting, if not stalking the woman. In belying the anonymity of camerawork through the slight wobble of the held shot, the scene alludes to culpability and accountability. Rather than an invisible force, there are responsible parties outside of the individual herself that interpellate her as a consumer in her everyday life, as she walks through a crowd or stands near an outdoor booth. Through similar shots and sequences, *Knifestyle* deems South Korea's beauty industry's marketing tactics as predatory. The following section examines how neoliberal imperatives for "self-investment" are part and parcel to such tactics.

"TODAY, YOUR LOOKS ARE YOUR RESUME."

In documentary and news report fashion, *Knifestyle* takes to the streets and interviews several vocational school students who are about to enter the job market. These high school seniors are dressed in school uniforms, no make-up on their faces with straight, shoulder-length hair. The camera lights are unforgiving and several of their faces are riddled with pimples, a testament to their youth. Each of the girls confess to wanting to undergo several cosmetic procedures with one of them having plans to actually do so over the coming vacation. They all contextualize their desires

as necessary for their job security. As Yu Hŭi puts it, “When we are applying for jobs, they see men’s ability but for women, they see appearance first.”⁵⁵ Such statements are echoed by a college student who says “I heard that some companies have a checklist for appearances—best, average, poor. Even though they say that your ability is the priority, blah, blah, blah, I still believe that this society privileges appearance more than ability.”⁵⁶ The announcer chimes back in summing up the students’ thoughts by saying, “Today, your appearance is your resume.”⁵⁷ This scene illustrates the ways in which young women increasingly internalize neoliberal mandates for self-management as imperative to their economic success. The following section outlines how Womenlink contextualizes and organizes their campaign around these mandates. Although they do not specifically call it as such, I argue that rather than focusing on race, Womenlink organizes around what bolsters lookism—neoliberal governmentalities.

As discussed in chapter 1, neoliberal governmentality operates in such a way that individuals are controlled through their freedom and the myriad choices they make towards their personal success, which are coded as the results of their self-entrepreneurship. This manifests, for example, in parents spending limitless amounts of money so their children can amass skills and experiences to give them an advantageous edge over their peers—private tutors to excel in college entrance exams, trips abroad to study English, and even cosmetic surgery to enhance their

⁵⁵ Korean Womenlink and WOMB, *Knifestyle*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

appearances (as briefly discussed in chapter two). In South Korea's neoliberal regime, "the most successful self-entrepreneurs [...] will be those who faithfully internalize the neoliberal logic, subjugating themselves to the techniques of biopower with no intention of activating their own critiques or initiating their own forms of subjection."⁵⁸ Thus, "body work," and the success it represents, displaces motherhood as a priority for women and the "naïve neoliberal logic requiring competitiveness, self-responsibility, and rationality [...] necessarily exclude[s] the power of motherhood that is based on caring and communal interests."⁵⁹

Such changes are the consequences of new gender norms and shifting social realities in post-IMF, neoliberal South Korean society. While marriage has been considered most important to women's success, in the last decade job security has begun to displace marriage in its salience with marriage becoming optional. At the same time, divorce rates have increased and on average, women stay unmarried for far longer than women in the past. Moreover, rapidly decreasing birthrates have caused a crisis of the middle class, leading the South Korean government to enact numerous policies such as improving maternity leave, as incentives for childbearing. These social changes signal significant ruptures in a culture where motherhood has traditionally been the ideal role of women; while neoliberal imperatives push women

⁵⁸ Cho, "Neoliberal Governmentality at Work," 37.

⁵⁹ Cho, "Neoliberal Governmentality at Work," 39.

Cho takes this critique further and argues that the displacement of motherhood in South Korea weakens family system, which will eventually threaten the sustainability of biopower operations and neoliberal systems.

towards methods of self-care, these rationalities are at odds with traditional notions of motherhood.

Significantly, Womenlink puts neoliberal imperatives for self-management at the forefront of their campaign by contextualizing it within the shifting social realities that have transformed identifications with the body. Their campaign proposal describes the current situation as such:

As women's participation in society has increased, women's bodies have increasingly been seen as objects. In the past, women's bodies were focused on a mother's role of having, then raising children. Now, however, the body is a site for raising one's self-value and is a symbol of one's position or lifestyle. As such, a well-maintained appearance is not only a marker of her self-satisfaction but is an avenue to attaining social status. Thus, many women are aggressively managing their bodies.⁶⁰

While identification with motherhood has waned, the body has become a site for “raising one's self-value and has become a symbol of one's position or lifestyle.” As a result, the neoliberal rationale of investing in one's own body becomes all the more imperative since one's body is an “avenue to attaining social success.” That is to say, because of the body's increasing social importance and visibility, women's choices to manage their bodies are all the more constrained even as they are narrated as liberatory. In this way, Womenlink sees neoliberal governmentalities as part and parcel to gender oppression in contemporary South Korean society.

Womenlink's reference to the ways in which Korean women identified with their bodies, as mothers, does not celebrate or romanticize the past but rather, points

⁶⁰ Korean Womenlink, “여성건강[여성의 몸, 그대로가 아름답다(가칭)회의]”, 2003 March 4, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

out that new gendered mechanisms for control are in place. According to Kim Sang-hŭi, Executive Director of Womenlink, in a self-written editorial for *Joongang Ilbo*, “In traditional society, a woman’s body was completely controlled by male-centered society, especially because of the ideology of staying a virgin, which was a strict controlling tool of women’s bodies. But now, lookism has replaced that ideology.”⁶¹ Here, Kim points out that lookism is a mechanism of control that, like chaste ideologies in centuries prior, discipline women’s behaviors and relationships to their own bodies. Moreover, lookism is powerful precisely because there are negative consequences for *not* participating in addition to perceived benefits for doing so: “In a lookist society, it is not just about self-maintenance, it’s that unbeautiful women are seen as lazy and as incapable. Lookism discrimination is pervasive in job hunting and marriage and such discrimination based on ‘looks’ is deemed ok by this society.”⁶² Like the main character of *My Lovely Samsoon* discussed in chapter three who was berated by the dating service’s manager for not having had cosmetic surgery, women who choose not to invest in themselves are seen as unfulfilling their potential. As such, beauty ads for cosmetic surgery, dieting, skin and body care (like the menu at *Yakson Myŏngga*), use the terms “self-management” and “self-development” to describe their products, goods and services.

In this context, buttressed by gendered neoliberal imperatives that demand self-management from women of all ages, the beauty industry in South Korea grossed 7 trillion W (over \$6 billion U.S.) in 2002. Given this, Kim asserts that such issues

⁶¹ Kim Sang-hŭi, “Society Incites Cosmetic Surgery.”

⁶² Ibid.

cannot be merely addressed on an individual level: “So, we can no longer simply blame these problems on each individual woman’s awareness. We have to establish a solution to minimize the influence of capital investment and commercial public culture on women’s bodies, which has become a new market.”⁶³ Here, Kim makes clear Womenlink’s intent to disrupt corporate interests and the neoliberal rationalities upon which they rely. It is precisely this focus on industries rather than the individual, I argue, that makes Womenlink’s campaign such a significant departure from discourses and campaigns surrounding issues of beauty and body in the U.S.

Knifestyle exposes corporate interests by exposing the predatory marketing practices of cosmetic surgery clinics to the viewer. The first marketing strategy the announcer presents is to “Spread appearance complex.”⁶⁴ These words are in text on the screen, juxtaposed against a surgical light. This scene then transitions into a black and white aerial view of another crowd of people. This time, a target, the kind one looks through when shooting a gun, overlays the people, searching their backs until it zooms in on one woman, and then a pair of women, and then another pair and so on. Each time the target pauses, a gun shot rings out—the women have been tagged as in need of surgery. This likening of a marketing strategy with the violent nature of stalking, taking aim and then shooting at individual and pairs of women animates the predatory nature of capitalist advertising as enacted by the cosmetic surgery industry. While neoliberal mandates promote self-management and investment as liberatory

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Korean Womenlink and WOMB, *Knifestyle*.

acts of choice, *Knifestyle* posits that such actions are already constrained since they have been engineered to target women all along.

Accordingly, *Knifestyle* illustrates how in women's daily life, these predatory violences take the shape of advertisements that stalk women through their ubiquity while targeting them through their illegal advertising strategies. The following section of the video shows a specific beauty "problem" and its corresponding "solution." "Small, sleepy eyes" transform into "vivid and fresh eyes." A "strong and impressive hook nose" turns into a "natural-looking nose." A "square, masculine jaw and big face" magically changes into a "slender face." A still shot of a forlorn or serious looking woman that highlights these features accompany the text and when the "solution" appears on the screen, the photo shows the same woman smiling and satisfied. The announcer notes, "Actually, since cosmetic surgery is a medical activity, before and after photos are illegal. But it doesn't matter. Everyone is openly doing it anyway but I just wanted you to know, for your reference."⁶⁵ *Knifestyle's* sleight of hand is critical here and reveals the mockumentary format's ability to bring the cosmetic surgery industry's contradictions to the fore. While the announcer is supposedly educating imaginary cosmetic surgeons, in reality he educates the many women who are privy to this video. In this way, Womenlink outreaches to women that such advertisements are not only illegal but also dangerous.

As discussed in the section above, Womenlink enacts feminist organizing that seeks institutional change as well as the betterment of women's everyday lives. Thus,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

in addition to exposing such illegalities through educational outreach, Womenlink also took legal action against such predatory practices. From July to August, Womenlink monitored women's magazines and daily newspapers and found that of 109 diet food advertisements, fifty-six violated either Food Safety Law or Fair Labeling and Advertisement Law or a combination of both.⁶⁶ These laws prohibit labeling that conflates food with medicine or exaggerates or minimizes its effects. Womenlink found that a significant portion of diet food labeling asserted claims for which there was little or no evidence or made exaggerated claims.

In the case of cosmetic surgery, Womenlink's ad monitoring showed that of 143 ads from forty-one clinics, 138 ads from thirty-seven clinics broke some form of medical law.⁶⁷ Article 46 and 47 of Medical Law prohibit clinics or medical doctors from advertising their treatment methods, their resume, experience or effectiveness.⁶⁸ Moreover, advertisements are not allowed to use before and after photos or sketches to illustrate treatment effectiveness or customer satisfaction. On the other hand, Article 33 of Medical Law permits medical advertisements to include the following only: name, gender and license of medical professional; specialty; contact information of clinic including name, address, and telephone number; business days and hours; appointment information; night and holiday availability and parking.⁶⁹ Womenlink

⁶⁶ Korean Womenlink, "다이어트 제품 및 서형수술 광고의 문제점과 피해사례", 2003 March, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

As noted in chapter 3, the Medical Law was amended to suit the burgeoning medical tourism industry's need to advertise its facilities. Whether these changes impacted how medical professionals advertise domestically is not clear to the researcher.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

found that myriad clinics show before and after photos, provide intricate details of their procedures and list their resume while claiming effectiveness.

Because consumer complaints to the Consumer Protection Agency have seen an annual 30 percent increase with patients receiving little or no compensation for botched surgeries for which they were misinformed through advertising, Womenlink filed thirty complaints with Seoul's District Attorney and then fourteen more.⁷⁰ Not only are liability complaints on the rise, but accurate information about surgeries' side effects is unavailable with positive claims exaggerated in advertising instead. As a result of their legal actions, the Kangnam Police Department began an investigation and according to their final campaign report, the number of illegal advertisements decreased dramatically thereafter.⁷¹ To be sure, Womenlink's legal actions were not an effort to merely expose minor details either overlooked or purposely added by individual clinics. Their actions illuminate how these clinics' illegal actions are part and parcel to the ways in which, as legal scholar Angela P. Harris describes it, "corporate capital [...] sell(s) us the dream that we can individually transcend oppressive systems."⁷² Although Harris writes specifically about the oppressive system of racism, her quote aptly describes the ways in which the cosmetic surgery market is tethered to and reliant upon the oppressive system of lookism.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Korean Womenlink, "2003 년도 공동협력사업 추진실적 보고서", 2003 December 31, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

⁷² Angela P. Harris, "Introduction: Economies of Color," in *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters*, ed. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2.

Womenlink paired their legal action with a “No Diet, No Cosmetic Surgery” rally to raise public awareness. The rally took place on July 2 in Myŏngdong, one of Seoul’s main shopping and tourism districts, and was the follow up to the very first rally on May 6 to commemorate International No Diet Day (INDD).⁷³ INDD was created by Mary Evans Young, the director of the British group, “Diet Breakers,” in 1992 and has spread worldwide with INDDs taking place in the U.S., Germany, Russia and Norway.⁷⁴ Young personally suffered from anorexia and instituted the day as a means of promoting self-acceptance. Womenlink’s INDD was the first to be held in Asia and received much press coverage as such. Through INDD, Womenlink hoped to help women “positively evaluate our bodies and build self-respect” as well as educate women about the dangers of excessive diets and cosmetic surgery. The INDD rally featured a performance by the performance group Sun about a woman dying from complications from cosmetic surgery. They also introduced ten pledges, which they encouraged women passersby to commit to including: Accept and love your body as is; Diet and cosmetic surgery cannot change your life; and Appearance is not ability, it’s only difference.

While INDD focused on self-acceptance, the “No Diet, No Cosmetic Surgery” rally sought to educate women about illegal advertising practices by passing

⁷³ Korean Womenlink, “2003 년도 공동협력사업 추진실적 보고서”, 2003 December 31, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

⁷⁴ Korean Womenlink, “여성건강[여성의 몸, 그대로가 아름답다(가칭)회의”, 2003 March 11, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

out informational materials and talking with passersby.⁷⁵ The rally also featured a mask performance about a woman victimized by cosmetic surgery and dieting and Womenlink members collected complaints from passersby about illegal cosmetic surgery ads. The last “No Diet, No Cosmetic Surgery” rally targeted youth and took place in Ilsan, just north of Seoul.⁷⁶ This rally featured a folk music performance by the Koyang Womenlink branch, a youth bicycle publicity campaign, an exhibition of the dangers of dieting and cosmetic surgery and gave youth the opportunity to write letters to their bodies as well as other positive expressions about their bodies. In addition to these three main rallies, Womenlink branches in other parts of South Korea also held concurrent rallies in Taegu, Inch’ŏn and Ch’uch’ŏn.⁷⁷

“JUST A LITTLE MORE, A LITTLE BIT MORE.”

Knifestyle’s second marketing strategy is to “Present the perfect beauty.”⁷⁸ The camera once again provides a wide shot of the studio with the announcer in his seat and the Barbie on the flat screen to his right. Rather than perched on the table, however, the announcer is holding the actual Barbie doll, looking at it as he speaks: “It is a great pleasure to see a beautiful woman’s body. In ancient times, a perfect woman’s body was a symbol of beauty and in modern times, it is the crystallized form of sexiness.”⁷⁹ As he finishes these words, he raises the Barbie and looks into the

⁷⁵ Korean Womenlink, “2003 년도 공동협력사업 추진실적 보고서”, 2003 December 31, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Korean Womenlink and WOMB, *Knifestyle*.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

camera and says, “Just like this Barbie doll.”⁸⁰ That the announcer holds a Barbie Doll clearly alludes to the idea that in South Korea, as in the U.S., white women are considered an ideal standard. Although this is the only time in the video he refers to the Barbie Doll in an overt manner, his words and actions indicate that Barbie—and thus white women—represents that “crystallized form of sexiness.” Moreover, the juxtaposition between “ancient times” and “modern times” alludes to a shift in ways of thinking about women’s bodies. Although women’s bodies have always signified beauty, the announcer suggests that sexiness is a modern construct in Korea that coincides with Euro-American beauty standards. As discussed in chapter one, U.S. discourses on South Korean women and cosmetic surgery largely attribute their consumption to the desire to “not want to look Asian,” as Oprah described. This section parses out Womenlink’s critique of Western hegemonic beauty ideals arguing that while their critique acknowledges the imperial origins of Western standards they contextualize such standards within the consumer market, making their critique more relevant to South Korean women.

The planning meeting notes for the “Love Your Body” campaign state that “There is a problem with Westernized, or more specifically, Caucasian lookism.”⁸¹ The notes go on to explain that the average face length of a traditional Korean woman is 182 to 186 mm while the width is 129 to 136 mm yielding a ratio between 1.3 and 1.4 cm. Current beauty standards, however, extol slim and narrow faces with

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “서구적, 더 구체적으로는 백인적 외모지상주의라는 문제가 있음.”

Korean Womenlink, “여성건강[여성의 몸, 그대로가 아름답다(가칭)회의”, 2003 March 11, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

a ratio closer to 1 cm. This measurement, the document clarifies, is more akin to those of Western faces. While the description essentializes Korean women's physiology and makes a sweeping generalization about Western women's anatomy as well, it illuminates the fact that Womenlink organizers, like U.S. critics of cosmetic surgery, identify Western hegemony as having shaped South Korean beauty standards.

Contextualizing Western hegemonic beauty ideals within South Korean history brings to light, however, the power dynamics that have informed this beauty ideal. As discussed in chapter two, racialized cosmetic surgery in the form of the *ssangkekŏp'ul* procedure is widely understood to have been popularized in South Korea by the U.S. military who during U.S. occupation of South Korea performed reconstructive surgery on war victims in addition to handing out chocolate, clothes and other necessities and niceties. According to cultural anthropologist Eugenia Kaw, Dr. Willard first performed the *ssangkekŏp'ul* procedure there to remedy the "sleepy" look of the "Oriental eye."⁸² Although more cosmetic than reconstructive in nature, doctors like Willard imagined themselves as heroes performing a great service for Koreans by alleviating them of facial features that by Western standards made them seem not only less attractive but less trustworthy. East Asian studies scholar Chungmoo Choi argues that such gifts constituted a "gift economy" that symbolically structured the U.S.'s (neo)colonial relationship with South Korea and interpellated Koreans as (neo)colonial subjects whereby "the investment or display of

⁸² Eugenia Kaw, "Medicalization of Racial Features: Asian American Women and Cosmetic Surgery," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (March 1993): 74 – 89.

material power anticipates obligatory reciprocation from the recipients, which often allows the gift-giver's political and economic domination."⁸³ In other words, these "gifts," whether chocolate or surgery, brought (neo)colonial realities to the everyday realm and structured power relationships between individuals as well as within the South Korean imaginary. Choi emphasizes that the gift economy carries into the sexual economy, creating a gendered and sexualized relationship between the colonizer and colonized not only metaphorically but corporeally as exemplified in the relationship between Eun Ok and her U.S. military boyfriend, James. I suggest that Barbie symbolizes this gift economy and *Womenlink* thus implicitly nods to the history outlined above. Like Dr. Willard and by extension, the U.S. military as a whole, who popularized racially marked procedures in South Korea, or James who was able to secure reconstructive surgery for Eun Ok, Barbie in the context of *Knifestyle* presents the scalpel that "can make you beautiful." Pairing Barbie and the scalpel this way reveals a more complicated analysis that makes whiteness and perhaps implicitly the U.S. the central focus of analysis rather than the pathologized South Korean consumer.

Importantly, *Womenlink* contextualizes their critique within the changing trends of South Korean society today, thus linking Western hegemonic ideals back to corporate practices. Unlike the myriad critiques of Western beauty standards that have to do with the racialized "Asian eye," *Womenlink*'s critique focuses instead on face shape. The *ssangkekŏp'ul* procedure has become so normalized in Korea that it is

⁸³ Chungmoo Choi, "Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea," in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Chungmoo Choi and Elaine H. Kim (New York: Routledge, 1998), 12.

often described as *kibonjŏk* (기본적), a given, a standard. In fact, most people no longer consider the procedure surgery at all but akin to an advanced beauty treatment.⁸⁴ What's more, Womenlink's focus on face shape points to South Korea's quickly changing beauty trends.⁸⁵ The ideal of a slim face, referred to popularly as "V-line," is ubiquitous in Korean popular culture, television ads and on the streets of Seoul. As one walks along, a person sees a plethora of beauty shops selling various facials and products to help achieve the "V-line" look wherein a woman's face is so slender it resembles a "V" with the chin at the bottom point. Accordingly, facial contouring surgery, which shaves a person's jaw and removes fat from the cheeks, is in high demand. Indeed, these trends are driven by corporate interests that benefit from the never-ending succession of beauty treatments and traits that women must secure.

In my interview with Ju and Jŏng regarding the "Love Your Body" campaign, neither mentioned westernized beauty standards until I asked about it first. In response, they conceded that Asian women have suffered from "American influence" in regards to standards of beauty. What's more, they did not know of the history cited above and neither was it of central importance. They instead focused on the goals of their campaign, which they articulated as helping women to "build self-confidence in other ways" besides dieting and cosmetic surgery. Similarly, although

⁸⁴ A *Women's News* article entitled, "Filing a Complaint Against the Fantasy of Cosmetic Surgery," laments that "These days, celebrity cosmetic surgery is a given and *ssangkekŏp'ul* isn't even considered surgery."

⁸⁵ In addition to the "V-line," other popular trends include "S-line" "Innocent Glamor," "Flower Man," "Honey Thighs" and "Babyface."

Womenlink identifies “Caucasian lookism” as “a problem,” Euro-American beauty standards are not mentioned again in the notes or in any other archival documents thereafter. That is, “Caucasian lookism” is not a point around which Womenlink overtly organizes or educates. Instead, Womenlink’s planning meeting notes ask: “What bolsters lookism? Mass media such as TV and movies boost the idea that a small and pretty face is a virtue in addition to beauty contests and clinics that are seeking profits.”⁸⁶ In other words, while they acknowledge U.S. hegemony has historically shaped contemporary beauty standards, this acknowledgement is but a means to the end of identifying and holding accountable the institutions that perpetuate lookism’s “unequal relations” today.⁸⁷ Significantly, they identify these institutions as the media and the clinics themselves in their collusion to seek profits.

According to *Knifestyle*, one way that cosmetic surgery clinics bolster their profits is not only to standardize beauty but to proliferate a standard of beauty for each part of the body. Breaking the body up into discreet parts allows surgeons to develop myriad new procedures to continue to increase demand, like new products.

Womenlink’s planning meeting notes lists the variety of procedures available to

⁸⁶ Korean Womenlink, “여성 건강[여성의 몸, 그대로가 아름답다(가칭)회의”, 2003 February 14, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

⁸⁷ South Korean feminists have protested the Miss Korea pageant since 1999, calling it the Anti-Miss Korea Festival. The movement, called IF (If you want to become a real Feminist), successfully got the pageant off of television broadcasts in 2002 and has addressed multiple women’s concerns including adultery laws and workplace discrimination. The festival also has a lighthearted side and celebrates women through performances such as the group of 50-something women who performed a dance there to Abba’s *Waterloo* in 2009.

“South Korean Activists to Stage Anti-Miss Korea Festival | News.com.au,” News.com.au, April 24, 2009, sec. News, <http://www.news.com.au/miss-korea-killjoys-to-stage-own-pageant/story-0-1225703165921>.

“Anti-Miss Korea Festival Celebrates Women’s Lives @ HanCinema :: The Korean Movie and Drama Database, Discover the South Korean Cinema and Drama Diversity,” *Han Cinema Daily*, April 22, 2009, <http://www.hancinema.net/anti-miss-korea-festival-celebrates-women-s-lives-19063.html>.

Korean women: *ssangkeŏp'ul* (1.2 – 2 million ₩); rhinoplasty (1.5 – 2 million ₩); arm, thigh, or stomach liposuction (2 – 5 million ₩); Botox; skin thinning; breast augmentation (5 - 7 million ₩) face contouring (5 – 6 million ₩); lip enlargement (2 million ₩); dimple construction; and belly button reshaping.⁸⁸ As this incomplete list illustrates, new procedures are constantly being developed as new technologies emerge. At the same time, cosmetic surgery clinics' aggressive marketing techniques have also increased. From 1980 – 1989, there were 0.5 cosmetic surgery advertisements in women's magazines per issue per month. That number increased to 1.7 between 1990 and 1994, to 7 in 1997 and then jumped to 26.5 in 2000.⁸⁹ As these figures indicate, there has been a dramatic increase in marketing in the cosmetic surgery since 1995 when the GNP per person exceeded 10,000.

Knifestyle reminds its audience of cosmetic surgeons that “since the whole body is operable, emphasize that they [potential patients] can come close to being the perfect beauty through surgery. That will bring even already beautiful women to the clinic.”⁹⁰ As he speaks the camera returns to a wide shot with the announcer standing. The Barbie is visible, laying on the table next to him and again, the Barbie on the flat screen is in full view. This time, however, the flat screen and thus, Barbie, takes up more of the shot than the announcer who stands off to the side. Moreover, since he is wearing a dark suit that blends into the black background and the Barbie is in pink and sparkles, she remains foregrounded in the shot. Then, the camera zooms

⁸⁸ Korean Womenlink, “여성건강[여성의 몸, 그대로가 아름답다(가칭)회의”, 2003 March 11, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Korean Womenlink and WOMB, *Knifestyle*.

back to him in a medium close-up as he says, referring to women’s desire to be the perfect beauty, “Just a little more, a little bit more” and holds up his fingers to make the corresponding gesture.⁹¹ Barbie’s centrality to this shot coupled with the announcer’s words—“Just a little more, a little bit more”—and hand gestures, illuminate how Euro-American standards of beauty work in conjunction with the proliferation of such standards to segment the body into discreet areas that require an endless array of body work. Hence, the desire to be the perfect beauty can never be fully fulfilled. The following section addresses how this proliferation is enacted through the media to the benefit of cosmetic surgery clinics while highlighting Womenlink’s organizing strategies against capital interest.

“LIKE AN INTIMATE FRIEND, WHISPERING IN THEIR EAR...”

In order to build the desire for “the perfect beauty,” *Knifestyle* suggests using the media to “build trust to eliminate fear or hesitation” since cosmetic surgery is “still surgery.”⁹² The announcer explains to surgeons that if you “approach a reporter with a topic that piques their interest, the broadcast will welcome you. Since they heard it on TV, and on the news at that, the average citizen will give you 100 percent of their trust.”⁹³ This statement is followed with five clips of real news anchors reporting on the popularity of and/or new types of cosmetic surgery procedures—“Operating without a scalpel is now possible,” one of the reporters say and “People

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

are increasingly open about their cosmetic surgery procedures.” What’s even better, the announcer adds, is to appear on a news show directly since “the media needs professionals’ opinions and doctors need to advertise their clinics,” which amounts to a “win-win situation.”⁹⁴ Accordingly, *Knifestyle* weaves together multiple clips of medical doctors in white coats giving their professional advice on news broadcasts. For maximum effect, he continues, either include the clip on your homepage or link your site to a television network’s. He explains that some networks perform such services and shows photos of doctors holding plaques engraved with the Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS) insignia. These efforts are effective precisely because the media is “Like an intimate friend, whispering in their [potential patient’s] ear.”⁹⁵ Here, *Knifestyle* not only renders visible the collusion between the media and cosmetic surgery industries but also calls attention to the ways in which cosmetic surgery is normalized through news reports and network endorsements. Such media representations (akin to mainstream films like *200 Pounds Beauty*) do the work of eliding the surgical and therefore dangerous aspects of cosmetic surgery. Because media representations inform women’s lives on the level of the everyday—through television and other forms of print and digital media—Womenlink enacted several outreach programs to counteract the media’s normalizing messages. While these were localized actions compared to the scale of mass media, I highlight the fact that these forms of counter-conduct privilege local women’s knowledges and their abilities to inform one another in public, group and one-on-one settings.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Through educational programs, outreach, flyering and open forums, the “Love Your Body” campaign sought to counteract media representations by providing the lesser-known facts about cosmetic surgery and lookism. For example, the entire campaign began on April 30, 2003 with a discussion and open forum on women’s health called “Demanding Choice, Problems and Answers to ‘Lookism’” at the Democratic Movement Commemoration Hall in T’aep’yŏngno in Seoul. This open forum featured women scholars, medical professionals, advertising specialists, fashion consultants and media representatives and was designed to “seek the right way to keep women healthy throughout their lives under these circumstances [of lookism].”⁹⁶ The event opened with Executive Director Kim Sang-hŭi outlining the evening’s goals: “Challenging lookism is like hitting a stone with an egg but we must start now and hopefully, we can find new solutions for lookism through this discussion.”⁹⁷ Accordingly, the featured speakers not only discussed lookism but offered solutions as well.

The first speaker in the panel of discussants was Kim Kyŏng-ae, a women’s studies professor at Dongduk Women’s University.⁹⁸ According to Kim, women discipline and manage their bodies because they are immersed in capitalist ways of thinking. Many of Kim’s suggestions mirrored what Womenlink’s campaign would do in the coming months: surveill media and re-educate people not to judge people based on “looks.” In everyday life, she suggested people avoid mentioning

⁹⁶ Korean Womenlink, “한국여성민우회 2003년 여성부 고동협력사업 신청서”, 2003 February 21, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

⁹⁷ “I Am the Owner of My Body, No Diet, No Cosmetic Surgery,” *Minjushinmun*, May 11, 2003.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

appearances. The second panel speaker, Myōng Jin-suk, general manager of Womenlink's Women's Environment Center, presented a survey about women, dieting and cosmetic surgery.⁹⁹ Womenlink had conducted the survey the month prior with 566 high school girls and 467 college students as respondents and found that 80 percent were not satisfied with their own body weight and 83.5 percent were not satisfied even though their body weight was normal. She suggested that women be educated about healthy lifestyles as well as effective punishment for entities engaging in or perpetuating excessive dieting or cosmetic surgery. The third speaker, Im Ok-hŭi, editor of a feminist theory magazine (*Yōsōng Iron*), asserted that the real danger of lookism is its standardization of beauty into specific measurements, adding that Korean society is becoming more Americanized.¹⁰⁰

The last speaker, Kim Hye-sŏn, Director of Women's Policy in the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs, illustrates the extent to which lookism is perceived as a national concern.¹⁰¹ She spoke about a survey that the Ministry conducted regarding appearance perception of youth just the month prior. Their survey found that 38.7 percent of underweight girls see themselves as normal or overweight and 43.6 percent of normal weight girls see themselves as overweight. Because society upholds slim body types as an ideal, she concluded, young people's perceptions are distorted. She then went on to say that the Ministry plans to promote more campaigns like "Love Your Body," support educational programs that teach

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

children about gender equality both in the home and within society and use mass communications to educate people about the dangers of excessive dieting. Kim's presentation illuminates that the government sanctions lookism's negative effects on women's bodies as a national problem. Indeed, Womenlink received nearly three-fourths of its budget for the campaign from the Ministry itself.¹⁰²

While the open forum sought to encourage debate and dialogue amongst a large group of women, Womenlink's "Mimimi" overnight camp allowed mothers and daughters to learn about these issues in an intimate, one-on-one setting. The camp took place on August 1 for one night and two days and every aspect of the camp, including the name, was carefully crafted to cultivate inner-beauty and physical acceptance. "Mimimi" refers to three homonyms that mean "me," "beautiful," and "taste." Once at the camp, the mother and daughter pairs participated in various activities and lectures including writing stories about their bodies, making dolls without prejudice, running in the moonlight to encourage joyful playing and walking meditation. A *Korean NGO* article describes the camp as an opportunity for mothers and daughters to have their "feminine bodies as their common denominator" and "experiment and practice new ways to be truly beautiful, fun and tasteful."¹⁰³

The educational health component of the campaign also featured health programs by age group (from teens to 50s) in which groups of women held discussions, learned about health issues and watched educational videos including

¹⁰² Korean Womenlink, "국비 보조금 교부신청서", 2003 February 11, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

¹⁰³ Ryu Kyŏng-mi, "Womenlink Opens Me, Beauty, Taste (Mimimi) Camp," *Korean NGO* (South Korea, July 21, 2003).

Knifestyle.¹⁰⁴ Womenlink also sponsored an “I love my body” poster contest for women in their teens to their 30s to promote positive images of women’s bodies. In order to provide a safe space and utilize the internet, Womenlink created an “I love my body” homepage where women could share their stories, post positive comments about their bodies, and share healthy body management tips with one another.¹⁰⁵ In these ways, the “Love Your Body” campaign counteracted the media’s normalizing messages and promoted health and self-acceptance as alternatives to commodified forms of body work. More importantly, their efforts posed other women as viable sources of knowledge, information, self-esteem, and validation. The following section outlines Womenlink’s actions against gender-biased media programming itself.

“IN MODERN SOCIETY, KNIFESTYLE IS LIFESTYLE.”

Finally, *Knifestyle* offers one last strategy to ensure an onslaught of clientele: “Instill in them that investing time and money to achieve the perfect appearance, as opposed to living the way they are, is the best choice for confident women in the 21st century.”¹⁰⁶ As the viewer hears the announcer’s authoritative delivery, visually one has the perspective from the driver’s seat of a car that is traveling down a long, dark tunnel. The viewer speeds down the tunnel as surgical images, a knife cutting into a

¹⁰⁴ Korean Womenlink, “2003 년도 공동협력사업 추진실적 보고서”, 2003 December 31, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Korean Womenlink and WOMB, *Knifestyle*.

nose and then cutting into eyes, overlay the still visible tunnel signifying that such investments are not only long but painful journeys. Soon, however, the proverbial “light at the end of the tunnel” appears and once the car and the viewer inside reaches it, it is overlaid once again but this time with the image of two smiling women. When the tunnel then fades to white, the shot returns to a close-up of Barbie’s torso, the end of the scalpel highly visible in her hand. We hear the announcer’s voice as the shot centers on his close-up: “In modern society, knifestyle *is* lifestyle.”¹⁰⁷ Simultaneously, the words “Knife Style” appear at the bottom of the screen in red and next to it, “is Life Style” in white. Through the intricacies of this sequence, *Knifestyle* animates the metaphorically long and literally painful roads women must travel in order to chase the perfect beauty standard represented by an almost sinister looking Barbie holding her scalpel.

As we have seen in chapter three, however, women are encouraged down these roads of investment and management through the media and more specifically, through celebrities whose own lifestyles are dependent on the knife. As increasingly open consumers of cosmetic surgery, celebrities are not only endorsing individual clinics but are walking advertisements for cosmetic surgery and the standardized beauties it generates, creating a climate in which “the average woman feels that it is absolutely necessary for her self-management and investment, too.”¹⁰⁸ As the announcer speaks these words, *Knifestyle* cuts to video clips of real celebrities congratulating or thanking surgeons. In one clip, an actress says, “Since you’ve

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

opened your clinic, please make many more beautiful and healthy people!”¹⁰⁹ *Hallyu* can be understood as a “technology of subjectivity” that proliferates neoliberal mandates for self-management through its affective narrative strategies (as we have seen in the previous chapter). In this section, I argue that Womenlink attempts to disrupt these travels of form through its media monitoring campaign, which publicly exposed the media’s gendered dynamics by demanding gender reform.

Notions of self-entrepreneurship that emphasize the words “investment” and “self-management” have coalesced with neoliberal feminist ideals regarding work, family, sexuality and individuality. Under the auspices of neoliberalism, liberation or freedom is often equated with choices, even when those choices are limited to the consumer market. Womenlink challenges this notion, however, by asserting that such choices are engineered by profit-driven industries:

Media is largely responsible for this [women’s aggressive body management]. TV and magazines show underweight, young women who are in their teens and twenty so people think that they represent success and beauty. [...] Under these circumstances, Korea’s beauty and cosmetic surgery market size is exceeding 7 trillion W. [...] Lookism is used as a societal method so bad diet methods and cosmetic surgery continually comes up. Thus, women’s desires to have slim bodies are threatening women’s health through cosmetic surgery addiction and diet fever.¹¹⁰

Rather than understanding neoliberal governmentality as an amorphous or intangible force, then, Womenlink views these governmentalities as operating through two identifiable industries: mass media and the beauty industry. Womenlink contends

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Korean Womenlink, “여성건강[여성의 몸, 그대로가 아름답다(가칭)회의]”, 2003 February 14, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

that trends along with unattainable beauty standards are proliferated through television, music and film and then maximized for profit by clinics and diet companies. In other words, Womenlink sees lookism as critical to the tethered interests of mass media and the cosmetic surgery industry. Because of media's far-reaching tentacles, lookism is an issue for women of all ages. Unlike the *Hartford Courant* article, which focuses on how lookism is driving older people to undergo cosmetic surgery procedures to compete with younger people on the job market, Womenlink emphasizes that lookism creates physical, psychological and emotional problems for women of all ages from their teens onward as evidenced by their multi-age education programs.¹¹¹

In order to track just how detrimental the media is to women's self-image, Womenlink monitored gender representation on television programming and released a report on June 24.¹¹² Their monitoring project reviewed eighty-two different programs during 240 hours of broadcasting from May 12 to 25 during prime time (weekdays 7 – 11pm/weekends from 6 – 11pm) on three major networks. They counted 7,427 actors accounting for 69.6 percent of television representation and 2,262 actresses accounting for 30.2 percent for a gender ratio of 7 to 3. Of women, 42.3 percent were below the average body mass index (BMI), 49.2 percent were average BMI. For men, 73.1 percent were average compared to 14.8 percent who were below average. Men with above average BMI accounted for 12 percent whereas

¹¹¹ Significantly, however, the article features a quote from an interviewee who describes her choices to manage her body through cosmetic surgery as "economically sound." Such wording alludes to the fact that neoliberal imperatives also govern bodies in the U.S. as citizens are pushed further and further into the consumer market to find solutions to social and economic problems.

¹¹² Hong Jesŏng, "TV Programs Are Boosting 'Lookism'," *Seoul Yeon Hap News* (South Korea, n.d.).

women were only 8 percent. What's more, the report finds that the standard amongst leading women or anchors include small faces, big eyes with *ssangkekŏp'ul*, and large, red lips.¹¹³

In addition to gender balance and body type, the report breaks down its findings by genre and reports that dramas feature beautiful women almost exclusively. The more capable the character these beautiful women portrayed, the more impressive and expensive clothing they wore. News programs or shows with political content fared even worse. According to the report, female anchors or emcees on news and political shows are younger, prettier and skinnier than their male counterparts, a fact represented through our *Knifestyle* announcer and marketing representative whose specialty is beauty marketing despite his own average looks. Womenlink points out that many of these broadcasts criticize excessive cosmetic surgery "fever" and dieting amongst Korean women but are perpetuating and even bolstering lookism themselves through the appearances of their female journalists. The report shows that the same holds true for documentaries and reality-based shows.

Based on their findings, Womenlink concluded that not only are men represented more than women but that female talents, unlike men, are selected based on appearance, body shape and age. This is especially pernicious in news and informational programming because as Yi Chin-yŏng, a representative of Womenlink's Media Movement Headquarters puts it, "The trend is that age is getting

¹¹³ Kathy Cho, "TV Likes Pretty Women, Even in News," *Donga Ilbo* (South Korea, June 26, 2003).

younger for both genders. The results clearly show, however, that women's appearances are a decisive factor in the kinds of roles they get as opposed to men. Therefore, audiences are subconsciously affected by these representations of gender and beauty as they see it on TV."¹¹⁴ Media's lookist bias cultivates society's propensity to judge people based on their looks or clothes rather than their abilities. In light of these findings, Womenlink offered myriad suggestions to media broadcasters including: diversifying the look and body shape of their talents in order to undermine the societal effects and perpetuation of lookism and balancing out the gender imbalance of men to women on prime time television. While it is unclear what kind of impact their suggestions had on the major networks, Womenlink's media monitoring efforts received national press coverage from a multitude of periodicals. In so doing, Womenlink was able to educate the public about television's lookist biases and their effects whether or not primetime television itself was changed. In this public way, Womenlink rendered visible the mutually constitutive relationship between the media and its specificities—celebrity, news, dramas—and the cosmetic surgery industry.

In the final scene of *Knifestyle*, the announcer closes the marketing session with reassuring words: "Let go of your preconceived notions and open up your mind to new horizons. Customers are always nearby."¹¹⁵ He looks to the flat screen as the camera follows his gaze, zooming in on Barbie once more. She fades out, transitioning to a wide shot of five young children, about four years of age, playing in

¹¹⁴ Yi Sŏn-min, "TV's Boosting Up 'Lookism'," *Media Today* (South Korea, n.d.).

¹¹⁵ Korean Womenlink and WOMB, *Knifestyle*.

the sand and laughing with their arms around each other. The shot then cuts to a close up of little girl in pigtails making something in the sand, then a boy giving the peace sign, then another girl doing the same. Finally, the shot cuts left and transitions to a group shot of the children waving and excitedly saying good-bye as the credits roll on the right side of the screen.

As this chapter has shown, *Knifestyle's* camera work and visual effects intimate the predatory nature of cosmetic surgery markets and that these tactics are not only intentional but immediately beneficial to the surgeons, clinics, hospitals—the industry—that wield them. By ending the film in the series of shots described above, *Knifestyle* not only reiterates this critique but reveals that it is not only women who are the targets of such tactics given media and advertising's pervasive nature. While the rest of the video largely focuses on women, the closing sequence shows that predatory marketing tactics are designed to instill the neoliberal ethics of the industry—self-management, investment and development—through the codes of insecurity, complexes and unreachable standards of beauty, early in the development of young children in order to make them potential customers in the future. In other words, because no one is safe from the predatory marketing strategies of the beauty industry, lifestyles in South Korea are unduly yoked to the knife.

CONCLUSION

According to Asian American studies scholar Elaine Kim and East Asian studies scholar Chungmoo Choi, because nationalism tends to construct women as

desexualized, chaste objects who represent the nation, women who fall outside of this category, sex workers or feminist activists for example, “are at once endangered by and dangerous to the integrity of the masculinist discourse of nationalism.”¹¹⁶ In a similar vein, anthropologist Laura Nelson shows how domestic and international discourses in the 1990s constructed South Korean women consumers as “endangering the nation” through their excessive spending habits.¹¹⁷ Such discourses pinpoint women’s consumptive practices as potentially contributing to the nation’s economic vulnerability while simultaneously obscuring men’s consumption, the culpability of large corporations (*chaebol*), and corrupt government practices. By pointing out the ways in which the cosmetic surgery industry creates new markets for the body, however, Womenlink reveals that it is neither excessive consumers, sex workers or feminists that are dangerous to the well-being of the nation but the capitalist industries underpinning “lookism” and thus, cosmetic surgery consumption.

One of Womenlink’s central goals in the “Love Your Body” campaign was to use the media to educate about lookism even as they critiqued and monitored mass media as well. Owing *Knifestyle*’s high production value in addition to its satirical content, Womenlink was able to subvert mass media and the cosmetic surgery industry through their very own mediums enacting “a making over which is itself a kind of agency, a power in and as discourse, in and as performance.” As this chapter has addressed, Womenlink’s campaign is critical to feminist organizing around issues

¹¹⁶ Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi, “Introduction.”

¹¹⁷ Laura C. Nelson, *Measured Excess: Status, Gender, and Consumer Nationalism in South Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 139 - 70.

of the body as they pertain to the politics of the everyday. While Asian American feminists, scholars and mainstream outlets focus on the salience of race in Asian/American cosmetic surgery consumption and other U.S. feminists largely focus on patriarchy, Womenlink's campaign exemplifies how feminist organizing can, and should, address the intersections of these organizing logics with capitalism as a driving and many times, predatory force. By focusing their campaign on the perhaps particularly South Korea concern of lookism, Womenlink centers the specific geopolitical concerns of contemporary South Korean women. In so doing, the "Love Your Body" campaign ceases to focus on the individual and her capacity to make rational or moderate choices and instead interrogates the predatory practices of the beauty industry itself.

EPILOGUE

When asked about the effectiveness of the “Love Your Body” campaign, Womenlink representative, Pak Chǒng-suk, demarcated potential success into two spheres.¹ Success on a policy level is difficult to assess, she said, since Womenlink’s ability to enact gender policy transformation is largely dependent on the political leanings of the governmental administration in office, leading to an ebb and flow of political gains. On the other hand, although there is no concrete way of measuring effectiveness in the realm of women’s everyday lives, she felt the campaign had been successful since the slogan and its many iterations—“No Diet, No Cosmetic Surgery” and “I am the Owner of my Body”—have come into common parlance since 2003 through Womenlink’s sustained efforts. Indeed, the “Love Your Body” campaign did not end in 2003 but was re-launched in 2006. The project, officially called “Seeing Lookism Through the Eyes of Teens,” sought to empower teenage girls by giving them the opportunity to use media on their own terms.² The result was a DVD featuring four short films that interrogate the issue of lookism from the girls’ perspectives. Having already produced *Knifestyle* and screened it in women’s education health classes throughout South Korea as well as on the national television network KBS, Womenlink took a different approach to media organizing that

¹ Pak Chǒng-suk, “Womenlink’s Effectiveness”, April 2, 2012.

² Korean Womenlink, “10 대들의 눈으로 보는 외모지상주의 영상제작”, 2006, Korean Womenlink, Seoul, South Korea.

continued to prioritize women's everyday lives but this time from the perspective of the consumers most targeted for self-management through the economic necessity of plastic surgery.

Pak added that, while she cannot be sure of statistics, dieting and cosmetic surgery consumption has probably increased and that Womenlink's efforts to control the media have been difficult since the media's influence is so far-reaching. To be sure, Pak's comments suggest the difficulty of organizing around the politics of the everyday. Womenlink's multipronged war of position approach in the "Love Your Body" 2003 campaign sought to educate women to create concrete change on a daily level while also attempting to enact institutional reform through their media monitoring and legal actions. Both, as Pak outlines, present distinct challenges that elude straightforward measures of success. Moreover, her conjecture, that dieting and cosmetic surgery is on the rise rather than having waned, attests to the continued proliferation and influence of neoliberal governmentalities that push South Korean women (and other consumers outside of South Korea) into the consumer market.

This dissertation has argued that these governmentalities are powerful precisely because they operate through and within culture, an ideological dialectic between "health" and commercial enterprises. Circulated and set to public memory as entertainment narratives, these cultural advertisements operate while hidden in plain sight, underpinned by a logic of neoliberalism that is tied to medical, tourism and concomitant industries that desire to be publicly imagined as not one in the same. By examining several cultural productions from a variety of genres and vantage

points, I have asserted that beauty is mediated through variously structured fields of power specific to the geopolitical context. As such, women's everyday practices of beauty are embedded within deep histories of (neo)colonialism and produced by transnational and local trajectories of global capital and competing discourses therein. In the South Korean context, as I have attempted to show, consumptive practices are informed by a genealogy of imperial racial formation that continues to constitute the Korean beauty aesthetic and South Korean women's consumptive practices in the form of "body work." Since its (neo)colonial origins, however, cosmetic surgery in South Korea has taken on new meanings that while possessing its refractory aesthetic, has grown distinct from its (neo)colonial origins. South Korea's neoliberal era has ushered in mandates for self-empowerment through bodily self-management and these neoliberal ethics travel transnationally vis-à-vis *Hallyu's* unsurpassed popularity and the transnational connectivities it engenders. In this way, *Hallyu* has a mutually beneficial relationship with South Korea's medical tourism industry thus opening up new international and transnational markets. Accordingly, U.S. discourses that map U.S. notions of race onto the South Korean context elides the very geopolitical specificities that shape women's quotidian and corporeal choices. By mapping out the organizing logics of Womenlink's "Love Your Body" campaign, I have attempted to show instead how feminists are addressing such location specific concerns. Ultimately, I hope this dissertation has illuminated the various linkages that connect South Korean, Asian and Asian American women while situating these linkages within the distinct discursive formations that shape their everyday lives.

In future iterations, this project will contribute to the burgeoning field of New Digital Media studies by examining the ways in which beauty culture intersects with information technology. In addition to being the plastic surgery “mecca” of Asia, Seoul is also known as the “bandwidth capital of the world.” With the highest number of DSL connections per head worldwide, patients not only rate physicians on-line but post “before and after” as well as post-operative photos, creating communities of shared experiences in what South Koreans call cyber “cafés.” Just as *Hallyu* fandom has created shared (and imagined) communities between Asian women, cyber space also enacts similar affective bonds—both facilitated by the internet. Yet, cyber space is also a potent medium for advertising as attested to by South Korea’s medical tourism YouTube channel. In the book manuscript, I will theorize how these technologies—cosmetic surgery and digital media—have developed alongside one another as a result of Korea’s rapid industrialization and more importantly, their mutual impact on consumer culture and identity-making.

Secondly, my manuscript will delve deeper into Transnational and Diasporic studies. According to Cold War scholar Jodi Kim, Asian American cultural productions can be understood as “Cold War compositions” that “trace, uncover, and interrogate U.S. Cold War imperialism.”³ In recent years, Asian/American plastic surgery consumption has been the subject of multiple Asian American documentaries, performance art pieces/shows, magazines and blogs. My book project will examine these Cold War compositions in order to excavate not only the

³ Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 12.

ways in which Korean beauty culture travels to and through the Korean diaspora but how it is understood by Asian Americans within the context of the U.S.'s imperial legacy. By coupling my existing research on the Korean context with more in-depth theorization of the Asian American one, my book will provide a critical space for the lived and imagined experiences of Korean/American embodiment in different diasporic registers.

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