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MASTER'S THESIS

**MARKETING BEAUTY: ANALYSIS OF COSMETIC SURGERY  
MARKET IN CHINA**

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## AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

Beauty is a product of culture, history, and time as desire for it is in human nature (Sun, 2014, p. 81). Beauty has become a part of economic activity with people seeking social identification and differentiation through consumption of beauty, inducing the emergence of global beauty industry as one of the most important global industries. Globalization in the beauty industry is a phenomenon propelled by young people, mostly women, eager for belonging and originality, using every mechanism at their disposal to look good. The beauty industry comprises of sales of cosmetics, perfume and skin as well as hair products, while spas and beauty salons are considered the service sector of the beauty industry (McCracken, 2014).

With cosmetic surgery becoming more accessible to a broader segment of the population with less invasive techniques offering less expensive alternatives, more and more women avail themselves of cosmetic procedures in order to look more beautiful. When researching Chinese cosmetic surgery market, it is important to point out that the statistics on cosmetic surgery are relatively new and tend to be misleading and sometimes inaccurate. It has to be taken into consideration that plastic surgery tourism as well as cosmetic surgery black market are booming at the same time and are usually not covered in the analytics. However, most research show Asian countries are expected to be the fastest growing cosmetic surgery markets in the world regardless of the fact that cosmetic surgery tourism and black market are not included in the statistics (Kim, 2012). In fact, China has become the industry's third-largest market in the world, after the United States (hereinafter: the U.S.) and Brazil, according to China's Association of Plastics and Aesthetics (Burkitt, 2016).

China represents the second largest consumer market globally, where consumer demand has been shifting significantly for the past three decades (Council on Chinese Consumer Demand Shifts, 2015). Discretionary income in the last decade was spent mostly on houses, cars and travel, whereas cosmetic and plastic surgery have become the fourth most popular way to spend income (LaFraniere, 2011). In 2014 around, 7 million Chinese decided to enhance their appearance by resorting to cosmetic surgery, generating sales of some EUR 48,84 billion in 2014 (Burkitt, 2016). The most common procedures Chinese women resort to are the blepharoplasty (double eyelid surgery), rhinoplasty (nose surgery), mentoplasty (chin surgery) and mammoplasty (breast augmentation) (Hua, 2013, pp. 30-31).

An ongoing debate on the phenomenon of artificialization of appearance has risen among researchers in different fields studying the reasons behind the growing numbers of cosmetic surgery among the Chinese women. One of the most commonly and yet mistakenly addressed reasons is the strive of the Chinese women to look more western (Lah, 2011). Economic, cultural

and political changes in China have produced immense anxiety among women, making them believe that beauty is capital (Hua, 2013, p. 7). Reasons behind the decision to undergo surgery are thus usually far more profound. The following will be addressed in the thesis: governmental pressures, gender discrimination, social media, parental interference and self-empowerment.

The purpose of this thesis is to theoretically and empirically examine possible reasons behind the increasing demand for cosmetic surgery among Chinese women and to look into advertising and marketing strategies of such services. The objective of this study is to examine the five postulated reasons and their importance for the Chinese women when making the decision to get a cosmetic surgery. Being a relatively unexplored topic as a whole, since experts from different fields only provided the literature with their points of view, the findings of my research could benefit the companies which are already present, as well as those entering the cosmetic surgery market in China. The study can help them reshape their approach to customers and rearrange marketing campaigns. Since the number of cosmetic surgeries in China is expected to increase in the future, the question that arises is who will take advantage of the rising market successfully.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I will discuss cosmetic surgery in general. I will describe the global evolution and the evolution of cosmetic surgery in China and try to place cosmetic surgery in the Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. I will then present the marketing mix of cosmetic surgery and in the last part describe the future development of cosmetic surgery market. In the second chapter, cultural background and marketing of cosmetic surgery will be researched. This section is mostly focused on the marketing view of cosmetic surgery, discussing the wheel of consumer analysis and marketing strategies present in the Chinese market. In the next chapter, I will discuss in detail, the reasons behind the decision of Chinese women to undergo cosmetic surgery. In the fourth chapter, the methodology I will use for the qualitative part of my research is described and the results and findings of the research are presented. Finally, in the fifth chapter, I will discuss the results of the research, its limitations and implications.

# 1 THE EVOLUTION OF COSMETIC SURGERY

The term plastic surgery is derived from the Greek term »plastikos«, meaning »to mold«. It has two branches: cosmetic and reconstructive surgery. The principle of the cosmetic surgery, unlike the reconstructive surgery, is solely focused on enhancing appearance, symmetry and proportion. It treats areas which function properly and is therefore elective. Reconstructive surgery, on the other hand, is intended to correct dysfunctional areas and repair defects to reconstruct a normal function and appearance (Morrison, 2008, pp. 1570-1578). However, the term plastic surgery is often used when describing cosmetic surgery.

The very beginnings of cosmetic surgery date back to the Ancient Egypt. Egyptians back then believed that the features of the deceased must remain recognizable after death, wrapping mummies in bandages, and inserting seeds and even bones into parts of their bodies (DiBacco, 1994, p. 99). While the Egyptians performed cosmetic surgery on the deceased, Ancient Indians were the first in the recorded history to perform surgery on the living. Ancient Indian Sanskrits describe procedures on body parts, mostly noses and ears, which were lost in battle or as a punishment for crimes (Gilman, 1999, pp. 6-16). Cosmetic surgery next boomed in the Ancient Rome. The Romans performed more complicated and advanced procedures such as circumcision removal, breast augmentation and scar removal. With the fall of Rome, cosmetic surgery declined as well, only to re-enter the Western culture during the late middle ages, the Renaissance. That era commemorates the birth of Italian Gasparo Tagliacozzi, whom most cosmetic surgeons today recognize as the father of the modern plastic surgery. His work mostly evolved around nose procedures of syphilitic patients (Gilman, 1999, pp. 49-60).

It was not until the beginning of 18th century that Karl Ferdinand Graefe first attempted to portray to the public that losing a nose is not a morally branded sin, but rather a medical condition. His efforts were not in vain until later on in the 19th century when noses became inextricably associated with race, the belief that is still entrenched in our culture today known as the ethnic rhinoplasty or the “Michael Jackson Factor” (Gilman, 1999, pp. 85-88). With the World Wars came innovations in cosmetic surgery, mostly due to war injuries and it was then that the surgeons that served in the World War I established the American Association of Plastic Surgeons. After the war which generated most patients, the business was slowing down for plastic surgeons, who had to start marketing their services in order to create the need for plastic surgery that might not otherwise exist (Gilman, 1999, pp. 157-177). The latter has led to the evolution of cosmetic surgeries we know today, such as breast augmentation, liposuction, laser treatments and many more.

## 1.1 Cultural history of cosmetic surgery

Throughout the history, cosmetic surgery was shaped by cultural priorities. Ancient Egyptian civilization shaped cosmetic surgery based on their religion and the belief in life after death. Death was merely a step in the process of rebirth into an eternal life and preservation of the physical form through mummification was just one of the means of ensuring eternal life. The belief that one's features must remain the same in the afterlife is probably the reason why Egyptians were reluctant to perform surgery on the living but rather on the deceased, in order to keep their features recognizable (Taylor, 2001, pp. 46-92).

In the Ancient Indian culture, faces or in particular noses, played an important role. Nose was an organ of pride and respect for many men, and thus a frequent target in battle, in punishment or revenge for misdeeds such as adultery. Nose was also frequently associated with fertility and good fortune. Reconstructive surgery was thus in high demand in order for people who have experienced physical trauma to regain the public's respect (Braswell, 2014).

Cosmetic surgery started gaining in importance in Ancient Rome. While reconstructive surgery was mostly performed on wounded soldiers and gladiators, cosmetic surgery was reserved for freed slaves and rich upper classmen. Romans were the first to use plastic surgery to improve self-image. In Ancient Rome, beauty of the naked body was a part of culture and body image was of most importance especially to those who availed themselves of public Roman baths. Larger breasts on an obese man or disproportional genitalia were a subject of man's cosmetic surgery (Gilman, 1999, pp. 49-60). Women mostly underwent procedures on their ears, which had become stretched under the weight of earrings (Spiegel, 2012).

After the Roman era, as mentioned, plastic surgery briefly disappeared only to reappear in the Renaissance. People then believed that damaged or unattractive faces reflected an equally disfigured inner self. Surgeries however were risky and painful and often led to infections or even death of the patient, and were hence scarce. It was not until 1880s when cosmetic surgery became relatively safe and it became possible for wealthy people who felt unattractive to change their appearance. Since then, western societies were becoming more comfortable with cosmetic surgery. It has become a method of self-improvement and self-fulfillment for white people. Until the 20th century, science was only concerned with the white race and classified features that were not »typically white« as unattractive (Smith, 2016).

Cosmetic surgery trends throughout history were closely linked to the qualities people value as a culture. They were also related to shifting ideas about race, health, femininity and ageing. Cosmetic surgery in modern age still follows trends and adapts accordingly (Smith, 2016).

## **1.2 Cultural history of cosmetic surgery in China**

Similarly to mummies discovered in Egypt, preserved corpses packed with medicinal herbs have been recovered from submerged cypress coffins in China (Wade, 2010). The Chinese as the Egyptians believed that the body should remain intact, discouraging any kind of alterations to the appearance of the living. After passing away, however, the deceased needed to remain recognizable. As in Ancient Egypt, primitive techniques of surgery were used in order to preserve the body of the deceased (Hua, 2013, p. 25). It was not until the beginning of twentieth century that plastic surgery was first introduced to China. An American surgeon dr. Jerome P. Webster who taught general surgery at the Peking Union Medical College from 1921 to 1926 was the first to carry out facial plastic surgeries in China. Some of the first Chinese surgeons that obtained their medical degrees overseas studied plastic surgery under the tutelage of dr. Webster. In 1926, the first department of plastic surgery in China at St. Luke's Hospital and Margaret Williamson Hospital in Shanghai was established by dr. Ni Baochun who studied at Johns Hopkins University under dr. John Staige Davis (Hua, 2013, pp. 27-29).

Back then, small breasts and almond shaped eyes with single-fold eyelids, typically portrayed in Chinese literature and art, were some of the most desired feminine features. Before the Westernization in the twentieth century, traditional feudal idea was that men are superior to women, hence women needed to accommodate to the male perception of beauty. For example, foot binding, i.e., lotus feet, was considered a symbol of high status, since women from wealthy families that did not have to work, could afford having their feet bound. Features such as small feet, small breasts and thin eyes would constitute an advantage in finding a spouse as well. This trend lasted until the Xinhai Revolution in 1911 which overthrew the empire of the Qing dynasty and brought equality between men and women. With the change in perception and ideas of female beauty and the spread of Western medical techniques, in 1930's the demand for cosmetic surgery started to rise (Hua, 2013, pp. 29-32).

Increasing contact with the West shifted China's consumer culture, especially in Shanghai which, under the influence of Western commodities, became the largest commercial city in Asia. Only a few Chinese magnates could afford to participate in the new consumer culture and most of them were at least to some extent influenced by the newly introduced Western culture. The latter was reflected in advertising which portrayed images of Chinese women with western features such as large eyes with double eyelids, curvy bodies and sexual appeal. As the general perception of ideal beauty became ubiquitously influenced by the Western notion, women began craving modern beauty features (Hua, 2013, pp. 30-37).

The demand for cosmetic surgery started rising, only to be halted by the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war. However, as in Ancient Rome, the war in China claimed numerous casualties, once again reviving plastic surgery to serve the needs of wounded soldiers. Until 1970's cosmetic surgery was thus controlled and restricted only to a select number of people, while others who wanted cosmetic surgery needed an official permission from the Party Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Cosmetics and fashion back then were considered a bourgeois luxury. It took some bold young women who began altering their look with the help of surgery, for the consumer market to grasp the commercial possibilities of cosmetic surgery (Hua, 2013, pp. 38-46).

With the rise in demand for cosmetic surgery, the market soon became oversaturated with beauty salons and clinics. People started confusing everyday beauty services with medical aesthetic services and eventually came to believe, that there is no difference between the two. A research conducted by the health care department of Beijing Municipal Health Bureau showed that by the early 2000s over 70 % of everyday beauty businesses were providing medical aesthetic services. Almost 20 % of them even provided breast augmentation and liposuction surgeries. It was becoming impossible for the government to regulate the industry (Hua, 2013, pp. 46-48). On 1 May 2002 Regulations on Services in Medical Cosmetology promulgated by the Chinese Ministry of Health came into effect. Only qualified doctors registered with professional institutions with at least six years of relevant clinical experience, under the supervision of a qualified doctor in charge of the cosmetic medical practice, can from now on carry out cosmetic surgeries. Regardless to the changes in the regulation, demand for cosmetic surgery continues to rise both in the black as well as the regulated market (Hua, 2013, pp. 49-50).

### **1.3 The evolution of Chinese beauty ideology**

In the era from 7th to early 10th century, during the Tang dynasty, Chinese women had to be robust and resistant in order to be considered beautiful. Wide hips and curvaceous figure were a matter of pride. It was in the Song dynasty in the late 10th century, that the beauty ideals started shifting. Beauty became androgynous, a mixture of masculine and feminine characteristics. Feminine features became obsolete with hips and breasts becoming frail and unassuming and the clothes becoming increasingly modest. This trend lasted all through the Ming dynasty from 14th to the 17th century. In the 17th century, Qing dynasty took power and the androgynous look was radicalized (The Changing Definitions of Beauty in China, 2017).

Beauty begun getting a deeper meaning and was not considered just a matter of outer appearance any more. In order for women to be considered beautiful, certain personal traits were required as well. A woman had to be obedient, shy and quiet. However, at the same time women's bodies

were becoming more and more fragile and delicate and their skin extremely pale. In the early 19th century, while still possessing personal traits valued in the 17th century, outer appearance requested women to look like men in order to be considered beautiful. Thick eyebrows and short hair were most admired while make-up was forbidden by the Communist Party. This trend did not last long, since by the end of 19th century women once again started resorting to a more feminine look and mastered the art of make-up, once the Party abandoned the ban on beauty products (The Changing Definitions of Beauty in China, 2017).

Modern beauty ideal combines historic trends with contemporary beauty images and makes them a coherent whole. Historic trends that are still present until today are slender body, dark hair, pale skin and personal traits, whereas modern idea of beauty extols the large eyes, sharp jaw lines and a narrower nose (Kane, 2016).

#### **1.4 Placement of cosmetic surgery in the Maslow's Hierarchy of needs**

Understanding motivational factors in people's decision process is the key when trying to explain what motivates people to fulfill their needs. Maslow explained it through a five-stage model (later on an eight-stage model) which can roughly be divided into basic and growth needs, growth needs being further divided into psychological and self-fulfillment needs. Basic physiological and safety needs must be satisfied in order to progress on to meet higher level needs, which are belongingness, love and esteem needs. In order to achieve self-actualization, which is the highest level of the hierarchy, one needs to satisfy all the lower level needs first. Maslow additionally noted that only one in a hundred people can achieve full self-actualization because our society rewards motivation primarily based on esteem, love and other social needs (McLeod, 2014).

As mentioned above, Maslow later on expanded his five stage into an eight-stage model, adding cognitive, aesthetic and transcendence needs to his pyramid of needs, placing appreciation and search for beauty and balance in the 6th highest level of the pyramid. A graphic presentation of the eight stages of the Maslow's hierarchy of needs model is in Appendix A. Before introducing the beauty and balance level of the pyramid, the need to artificially alter appearance could be placed in the third or fourth level of the five level pyramid. The 3rd level of the pyramid representing the need to feel loved and the need to belong could include the need to look and feel beautiful. It is not seldom that people believe they cannot establish relationships because of their looks. They need to feel beautiful first, in order to fulfill the need to be loved and to belong. That need to feel beautiful can also be placed in the 4th level of the pyramid, which is the level of esteem needs. In order to feel confident, it is often important to feel beautiful as well. Some needs take precedence over others, meaning that only when one need is fulfilled, a person seeks

to fulfill the next. In order to achieve self-actualization and reach full potential, a person needs to fulfill the need to feel beautiful as well (McLeod, 2014).

## **1.5 Cosmetic surgery as a part of the marketing mix**

There are three types of companies – the ones that sell and market products, the ones that sell services and the ones that sell both. Services have five characteristics that distinguishes them from products: lack of ownership, intangibility, inseparability, perishability and heterogeneity. A service cannot be owned, and stored like a product, cannot be touched or held, cannot be separated from the service provider, one can never be identical to another and they last for a specific period of time (Bhasin, 2016). In order to establish a successful business, it is crucial to know your target market. A marketing expert E. J. McCarthy developed a model that would help marketers in preparing their business plans. He called it the 4P model, 4Ps standing for product, place, price and promotion. The 4P model is the foundation of the idea of the product marketing mix. Since services have different characteristics than products, in order to achieve the optimum service delivery, the model needed to be adjusted. Three additional Ps were added to the model, those being people, process and physical evidence (Bhasin, 2016).

- **Product**

Service can be described as the sum of a product and process. A product is something that is produced to satisfy the needs of a certain group of people. In case of cosmetic surgeries, the group of people who constitute the target market are the people that feel the need to alter their look in order to feel good about themselves and to eventually achieve self-actualization. The product that they are looking for is a new body feature, and they must go through a certain process to obtain it. Most people who decide to undergo cosmetic surgery are aware of the fact that the process itself is not going to be pleasant, so many cosmetic surgery providers decide to emphasize the painlessness of the procedures, progressive techniques and short convalescence in their marketing campaigns (Bhasin, 2016).

- **Place**

Placing and distribution channels are a very important part of the marketing mix. The service needs to be accessible to potential buyers in order for them to make use of it. Generally, it is best to locate business where it is most convenient to potential clients. In China, cosmetic surgery facilities can be found both in urban as well as rural areas. Placement of the service in China is often associated with quality and price. Hospitals in major cities are known to provide a good service for a higher price, while beauty parlors and smaller clinics in rural China, even

though more accessible as far as pricing goes, the quality associated with these places is poor. Understanding customers' needs helps deciding on a place to start business, once the target market is determined (The Chartered Institute of Marketing, 2009, p. 6).

- **Price**

A price is a cost consumers have to pay in order to purchase a good. Generally, the height of the price is associated with expected quality, meaning the higher the price the higher the expectation of quality. Ultimately, a service is worth what people are willing to pay for it. Since price is the only element of the marketing mix that generates revenue, it is key to set a price that will be competitive as well as provide profit (The Chartered Institute of Marketing, 2009, pp. 4-5). The price is often a problem for potential customers in China. The average yearly wage has been gradually increasing in China and has reached an average wage of some EUR 8,500 in 2015 (China Average Yearly Wages, 2016). The latter is an improvement from 2006, when the average wage was only some EUR 3,500, but with the rise in domestic income, the prices of goods and services have risen as well. Average prices of cosmetic procedures carried out in modern, well equipped and licensed facilities vary from EUR 1,350 to 2,700 for one of the most common procedures – rhinoplasty and up to EUR 13,500 for facial bone reshaping procedures. The only place a customer can receive a EUR 160 double eyelid surgery is at one of the China's illegal underground beauty parlors. Regional prices around the country vary in relation to local income, while at the same time the quality of service in rural area is distinctively lower than in the cities (Meronk, 2016).

- **Promotion**

Promotion is comprised of several elements, such as branding, public relations, advertising, sales promotion and corporate identity. The main objective of promotion is to portray a consistent message to potential customers and give them a reason to choose your service over that of the competitors'. The message should not only include the features of the service, but the benefits one can obtain from choosing that exact service. There are different channels of communication, such as radio, television, the internet, mouth-to-mouth referral, organizing seminars, handing out flyers and many more. With China's social media booming, the internet is the most popular way to promote services today. Although China does not strictly prohibit advertising of cosmetic surgery, there is not a lot of aggressive advertising of such services (Boseley, 2012). Boseley explains that successful clinics for example endorse a celebrity to promote their services, post banners on social media, promote their services in apps, enabling users to see what they would look like if they had cosmetic surgery and use other similar internet

advertisements. Advertising and marketing of cosmetic surgery will be studied further in chapter 2.4.

- **People**

People define the service. Companies are reliant on the people who run them to deliver the service effectively. Especially in a business such as cosmetic surgeries, where the result of the service is permanent, it is important that people carrying out the procedures are properly trained, have a license and a substantial amount of experience. In a rapidly developing industry it is also important to educate surgeons on new techniques, materials and instruments (Tracy, 2004). The reputation of the surgeons is very important in such a saturated market as China. In fact, the Chinese have developed websites where anonymous users can assign stars to doctors who carried out their surgeries, giving a positive or a negative reference to the surgeon. Hence, the best way to gain positive reputation is to produce consistently superior results and give people a reason to promote services themselves, based on their satisfaction (Meronk, 2016).

- **Process**

The methods of delivering a service are crucial to customer satisfaction. Waiting times, information about the service and adjustments of the process according to individual's needs are key when the desired result is for the customer to leave content with the received service. In the industry of cosmetic surgery, a well-run process can be the greatest competitive advantage. The customer is not only paying for the surgery itself, but for the whole service. An integrated service is key, from the initial scheduling of the consultation session, to the post-operation service and checkups. Often businesses forget about this part of the marketing mix and with services that need subsequent attention and assistance, the process of delivering is often neglected (The Chartered Institute of Marketing, 2009, p. 8).

- **Physical evidence**

When buying something intangible, there is always some uncertainty. The best way to at least partially eliminate the perceived risk of something not going according to expectations, is to enable customers to see what they are buying. With cosmetic surgery, one way is to display results of previous successful operations in form of pictures and videos or even engage patients who have already received surgery to show and share results with potential clients. Not only do potential customers need to see the result of the service, environment in which the service is provided is oftentimes equally important. Clean, up-to-date equipped, sterile operating rooms and rehabilitation premises are key (The Chartered Institute of Marketing, 2009, p. 9).

## **1.6 Future development of Chinese cosmetic surgery market**

Despite quality control and safety issues still posing a great problem in the industry, Chinese cosmetic surgery market is expected to bloom. Education options in China are evolving, interest in obtaining a proper medical education amongst young Asian people is rising and so are the options to train abroad and to take part in international seminars and other forms of education. The most worrying obstacle today is that even if surgeons are well trained and educated, they hardly speak a word of English. Foreign cosmetic surgery tourism in China is thus not expected to grow significantly. On the other hand, domestic market is developing. Cosmetic surgery has become the fourth most popular way to spend discretionary income. In busiest public hospitals in China, surgeons are performing 50 operations per day. One of the reasons the industry has come this far are the looser regulations on the internet policies and advertising. Newspaper, magazines, shopping malls, and city billboards have all been flooded with advertisement, resulting in higher demand for the service. The trend is still showing that most operations are and are going to be done to modify normal ethnic features rather than reverse changes from aging, which are more common in the Western world (Meronk, 2016).

In the past decade, cosmetic surgery in China increased by 30 % per year, on average. In 2015, there were over 10,000 registered plastic surgery clinics in China and a few ten thousand unregistered salons. Most popular procedures carried out were the double eyelid surgery, nose surgery and liposuction. This trend is expected to continue in the future. The industry is expected to be worth over EUR 100 billion by 2019 (Xin, 2015).

## **2 CULTURAL BACKGROUND AND MARKETING OF COSMETIC SURGERY IN CHINA**

### **2.1 Chinese socio-economic environment and shifting values**

Following the U.S., China is the world's leading economy. After opening to the outside world by 2005, China became the second largest economy worldwide measured by gross domestic product (hereinafter: GDP) based on purchasing power parity (hereinafter: PPP), following the US (Fogel, 2010, p. 12). By 2015 China outpaced the US and is now the world's leading economy measured by GDP based on PPP (The World Bank, 2016). Household consumption was at 38.7 % of GDP in 2016, while the services industry took up 50.7 % of China's GDP.

China was fifth on the list of countries by the level of accumulated foreign direct investments (hereinafter: FDI) with over EUR 1.5 trillion accumulated in 2016. An increase by 8.3 % compared to 2015 made FDI in services a 70.3 % of total FDI (Central Intelligence Agency,

2017). The rate of inflation often refers to the rate of inflation based on the consumer price index (hereinafter: CPI). CPI shows the change in prices of a standard package of goods and services which households purchase for consumption. Inflation was relatively low and stable in China for the last two decades and was only 2.3 % in 2016, a slight increase from 1.5 % in 2015.

Unlike stable inflation rate, Chinese currency renminbi (hereinafter: RMB) has fluctuated since 2005 when China officially de-pegged RMB from the US dollar. China wants a strong currency in order to prevent capital outflows and at the same time help exporters make their goods cheaper on the world market (Cendrowski, 2015). China as one of the biggest and strongest economies in the world causes serious repercussions around the world by changing its politics or devaluating its currency. By lowering the prices of Chinese goods, China became the world's largest exporter, reducing trade revenues for many export-driven economies around the world. In short, every move China makes has a profound influence on the world economy (Shobhit, 2016).

China is the most populated country in the world with over 1.3 billion people, which is roughly 20 % of the world's population. Total yearly population growth rate was at 0.43 % in 2016. In 2015 a total of 56 % of the Chinese population lived in the urban areas, which is an increase of over 30 % since 1980 (The World Bank, 2016). Urbanization is an important part of China's structural reform program as the nation transitions to a more service-based economy. The objective of China's State Council is for 60 % of population to be living in cities by 2020 (Hsu, 2016). Unemployment rate in 2016 was at 4.2 % while the minimum monthly wage was at EUR 298. Consumer spending has increased significantly through the last decade in China with the shift from products to services and from mass to premium segments.

In relation to the ongoing trend of pursuing social status and wealth, a 2016 survey by McKinsey & Company shows that consumers are allocating more of their income to lifestyle services, family and experience (Zipser, 2016). Chinese women, for example, spend double the amount on cosmetic surgery each month compared to other women around the world, based on a survey by Insight Engineers, a market research consultancy in the United Kingdom. Monthly beauty expenditure of Chinese women amounts to about EUR 80, on average. In 2015, the aesthetic medicine market generated over EUR 50 billion. The number is expected to increase by 20 % each year according to The Chinese Association of Plastics and Aesthetics (Allergan, 2016).

## **2.2 Conceptual equivalence of cosmetic surgery in China**

In order to discuss the concept of cosmetic surgery, the meaning of beauty needs to be considered first. Beauty is an important part of every culture, especially in China where it is

considered a reflection of health. Beauty in ancient China was not only based on looks, women were also tested on their intellect, and purity of the soul was also important (Jhin, 2011, p. 29).

China's cultural history is intertwined with beauty influenced customs and rituals. Many of the latter are closely linked to traditional Chinese medicine, mainly in the form of acupuncture and herbal usage. The Chinese believe beauty literally comes from within – »qi« or internal energy controls how one looks. Balanced »qi« equals external beauty (Connor, 2012). For example, certain locations of facial channels correspond to internal organs – redness of the nose indicates extra heat in the lung, stomach and large intestine area, while dark circles around the eyes indicate kidney weakness. The mentioned symptoms can be treated with acupuncture in order to heal the body, improve appearance and balance the »qi«. Many modern beauty rituals Chinese women make use of today originate from ancient China. For example, Chinese women start their day with rice water which is used for toning the skin, oyster shell powder and pearl powder which are used to rejuvenate the skin and green tea which is used to lose weight and slow down the process of aging. Especially herbs are very important for Chinese women, since they can be used both directly on the skin and hair, and consumed for health at the same time (Ping Ming Health, 2013).

Girls in China usually start using beauty products in their teens. Not only beauty products, China's cosmetic surgery patients are younger than anywhere else in the world. Beauty is such an important part of the Chinese culture, women have begun resorting to cosmetic surgery if all other beauty tips and remedies failed to bring the desired result (Ping Ming Health, 2013).

What certain cultures value when it comes to plastic surgery depends on ethnic standards and social norms. Cosmetic surgery in Iran, for example, is a sign of prestige and class and the result of influence of the Western culture. Iranian women being covered with *hajib* when in public can only exhibit their facial beauty. Rhinoplasty thus became the most popular procedure amongst Iranian women who openly wear their post operation »bandages of honor«. In Brazil, where there is a strong beach culture and summer lasts the whole year, women also feel a strong need to conform to the society's perceptions of beauty. Most common procedures among the Brazilian women are buttock augmentation and liposuction. Much like in Iran, cosmetic surgery is a status symbol and an attempt at self-improvement in Brazil. Brazilians even developed a tradition of retail financing in installments in order to make cosmetic procedures available to the middle class citizens. Dr. Ivo Pitanguy, a Brazilian surgeon, in addition opened a charity cosmetic surgery clinic that offers operations such as breast augmentation and rhinoplasty to the underfunded (Lenahan, 2011, pp. 47-62).

On the other hand, the culture and the level of openness surrounding plastic surgery in the US is still shrouded in stigma and taboo (Kennedy, 2015). Both hidden and very public condescension towards patients of cosmetic procedures is present in the American culture. Public figures are often frowned upon when even the smallest of suspicions arise that they have altered their appearance with the help of cosmetic surgery. Not only are they harassed on social media, mass media talks and writes about the »shameful« procedures they have had done (Motakef et al., 2014). A decade ago, attitude towards cosmetic surgery in China was similar to that in the US. Patients would disguise themselves and stay at home for several weeks after having procedures done.

Today however, especially due to the fact that celebrities are publicly admitting to resorting to cosmetic surgery and posting the process on social media, cosmetic surgery is becoming less of a taboo. People are beginning to perceive cosmetic surgery as a more advanced form of makeup, a high-end consumption that helps them improve their look. With economic development and increasingly open society cosmetic surgery will become more accepted and with that more common as well (Xinyuan, 2016). Chinese may not be as open about surgical enhancement of appearance as Iraqi or Brazilians, but given that China has the highest share of internet users in the world (approx. 22 %), admitting to having procedures done online is almost equivalent to showing off post operational bandages (Stevens, 2016).

Perception of beauty differs around the world. Every culture has developed a certain standard of beauty to which its members aspire. In Thailand, for example, the Kayan tribe measures beauty by the length of woman's neck. Putting brass rings around the neck of a girl at four years of age in order to make their neck appear longer when they grow up is an ancient practice still present today. In Ethiopia, the Mursi women are extending their lips with lip plates as an expression of female maturity and beauty (James, n.d.). Beauty standards in other cultures tend to be less extreme, but they do differ and women around the world resort to different procedures in order to achieve what is considered beautiful by their culture. Beauty standards such as neck rings, lip plates and double eyelids can be considered a **cultural specificity**, while resorting to cosmetic surgery in order to achieve what is considered beautiful can be assigned to **cultural universality**.

The objective of cosmetic procedures is to ultimately look and feel more beautiful which brings certain benefits. Functional and experience or enjoyment benefits go hand in hand when it comes to cosmetic surgery and conforming to a certain standard of beauty. The most important facial feature the Chinese believe must be present in order for someone to be considered beautiful are the double eyelids. Only half of Chinese population are born with double eyelids (Chow, 2014). This standard of beauty is so deeply rooted in the Chinese culture it is almost necessary for those

who were not born with it, to surgically create the double eyelids in order to feel beautiful and confident. Not only will surgery help their confidence, Chinese also generally believe that looking a certain way will help them obtain a job, find a spouse and will ultimately benefit their social life. If the objective of surgically altering appearance is to achieve such goals, **utilitarian value** can be attributed to cosmetic surgery. When the main objective is to feel beautiful, cosmetic surgery is assigned **hedonic values**. Chinese thus attribute both utilitarian and hedonic value to cosmetic surgery (Pao, 2010).

### **2.3 Marketing and Advertising cosmetic surgery**

Although they both contribute to the same objective, marketing and advertising each have their own processes. Marketing deals with identifying and meeting human and social needs while advertising includes any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an individual sponsor (Kotler & Armstrong, 2015, str. 369). Companies can communicate the existence of their products or services through various media – television, print, radio or the internet. The most popular way of advertising lately is through social media due to the low cost and the wide range of users (Ganguly, 2015).

Since the purpose of advertising is to persuade people to purchase a product or a service, the most effective ads need to appeal to emotions, especially desire. That way consumers can associate the subject of the advertisement with highly valued qualities. In today's culture where attractive appearance brings the real economic and social rewards to those who possess this trait, it is not that difficult to persuade someone to purchase services such as cosmetic surgery. The promise of beauty that cosmetic surgery offers often leads consumers to make impulsive decisions, which is not a good idea especially in the time of personal crisis (Sullivan, 2010, pp. 407-411). Psychologist Joyce Nash researched the motives behind the decision to undergo a cosmetic procedure. What she learned was that the only appropriate candidates for such procedures are those who take cosmetic surgery seriously, who consider their options carefully and are generally happy and pleased with themselves (Pitts-Taylor, 2007, p. 30).

While inherently cosmetic surgery is not unethical, emotional advertising of such services can be. Emotions are automated actions, in fact »motivation« and »emotion« share the same Latin root »*movere*«, which means to move. Appealing to emotion through advertisement can hence lead to impulsive actions (Van Praet, 2012). There is a specificity with advertising cosmetic surgery that marketers sometimes fail to take into consideration. Most ads for cosmetic surgery promise favorable results, but often fail to mention the risks that come with the procedures, which can provide a basis for a lawsuit. With misleading advertising, a breach for warranty arises. While malpractice usually takes place in the operating room, lawsuits regarding

misleading advertisements are filed where the advertisement was received (Aicher, 1998, pp. 229-232). Aicher further explains that in order to avoid such situations it is best to make no promises in the advertisement in the first place or to at least include a disclaimer excluding warranties. In addition, prior to the procedure, patients should always sign an agreement with which they confirm they are aware of the risks and possible negative outcomes.

There have already been calls for the regulation of irresponsible advertising and promotion of aesthetic procedures to protect the interest of consumers. In South Korea, for example, regulations restricting aesthetic related advertisements on public transportation and in areas close to schools have been introduced a few years ago. Singapore on the other hand issued the Singapore Code of Advertising Practice, which restricts unacceptable claims on beauty advertisements, for example, ads are not allowed to contain any claim to provide rejuvenation, implying psychological change associated with increasing age (Legislative Council, 2014, p. 48).

In 2012, a group of surgeons from the British Association of Aesthetic and Plastic Surgeons introduced a six-point plan proposing tighter regulation in the cosmetic surgery industry worldwide. The group argues that cosmetic procedures are ultimately medical procedures and advertisement for it should be banned as it is for prescription medicines. The proposal was the result of concern about the standards of private cosmetic clinics and the lack of training and qualifications of surgeons working in the private sector. Private cosmetic clinics allocate a great portion of their resources towards advertising which often trivializes surgery and endangers the patient. Traditional sales accelerators such as coupons, 2 for 1 sales and buy now get a discount, are becoming popular in the private cosmetic surgery sector and the most extreme form of advertising private clinics services are reality makeover shows (Boseley, 2012).

### **2.3.1 Makeover shows and beauty pageants**

Private corporations are treating cosmetic surgery as a commercial product and market it as such. Although aesthetic procedures have always been a popular topic in talk shows, as mentioned above, in the last two decades makeover shows have become one of the most extreme ways of advertising cosmetic surgery. Some of the shows are focused on the patients, some on the physicians, but almost all focus on the extremes of aesthetic medicine. Despite the fact that such shows encourage unrealistic expectations, some plastic surgeons agree that there are potential benefits of programs that expose the public to the positive impacts of cosmetic surgery on ordinary people's lives (Klatsky, 2004, pp. 244-245). Unarguably, makeover reality shows at least to some extent normalized the field of cosmetic surgery (Lazar & Deneuve, 2013, pp. 878-885).

Patients are responding to the hype of makeover shows. A study by Dr. John Persing and his team at Yale University School of Medicine revealed that TV shows focused on plastic surgery can boost viewers own interest in cosmetic procedures. Those who decided to undergo the desired procedure say they were strongly influenced by the media to seek out plastic surgery. They also feel more knowledgeable about the procedures and tend to have more unrealistic expectations about the outcome of the procedure. Although the sample of this study was too small to generalize the results to a broader population, the findings support the idea of cosmetic surgery reality makeover shows influencing both the expectations and choices of potential cosmetic surgery patients (Crockett, Pruzinsky, & Persing, 2007, pp. 316-324).

What makeover shows usually fail to portray are the possible risks and complications of the surgeries. Due to the exaggerated positive outcomes of the procedures and falsely portrayed rapid results, the audience is misled to believe that all procedures come with the same level of safety and ease. Examples of makeover shows are »*Prête à Tout Pour Plaire*« in Belgium, »*Make Me Perfect*« in the United Kingdom, and »*The Swan*«, »*I Want a Famous Face*« and »*Extreme Makeover*« in the US. Some of these shows depict head to toe multiple procedure makeovers, while others show patients wanting one procedure and being later on persuaded to undergo a number of additional procedures (Lazar & Deneuve, 2013, pp. 878-885).

In China one of the first such shows was the »*Beauty DreamWorks Project*«, featuring China's first artificial beauty Hao Lulu. The show was sponsored by a privately owned EverCare Cosmetic Surgery Hospital in Beijing, that due to SARS epidemic in China suffered a significant decline in revenues. In order to promote business, the company's marketing director Bao Huai came up with the idea of filming the transformation of an average-looking woman into a striking beauty. In the pursuit of beauty, Hao Lulu thus underwent a six months and over EUR 50,000 worth of cosmetic procedures on her entire body. Hao Lulu's before and after surgeries picture can be seen in Appendix B. The Beauty DreamWorks Project was featured on CNN and some other international TV channels, which brought great success to both EverCare and Hao Lulu. Hao Lulu got the title of the first artificial beauty of China, which brought her fame and fortune, EverCare hospital on the other hand attracted new customers and considerably increased revenues. Since its establishment in 1997, EverCare was only able to generate smaller revenue. By May of 2003, monthly turnover of the hospital was at EUR 10,500. In December, after the success of Bao Huai's marketing project, however, daily turnover reached the level of May's monthly turnover. Monthly turnover was then at EUR 200,000-300,000. EverCare began opening branches in other Chinese cities and became one of the most famous privately owned medical aesthetic hospitals in China. Today, there are 17 EverCare operating hospitals in China (Hua, 2013, pp. 3-4).

After the major success of Hao Lulu's transformation show, China held a first ever artificial beauty pageant in December 2004. The pageant was actually the result of an unsuccessful lawsuit due to emotional damages, which was filed by the 18-year-old Yang Yuan who was disqualified from the Miss International beauty pageant because she had cosmetic surgery. Even though Yang did not win the case, the whole process was extensively reported by the Chinese media, which brought her fame. She later on wrote a book and became the ambassador for the clinic where she received her surgeries. Yang's before and after surgery photos can be seen in Appendix C. What is more surprising is that the same organizers Yang sued for disqualifying her from the Miss International Beauty Pageant, were the ones who decided to organize the Miss Artificial Beauty. This pageant was created exclusively for women who have already undergone cosmetic surgery. The pageant was also a unique opportunity for Chinese cosmetic surgery clinics and manufacturers of cosmetic surgery products to advertise their services and products (Hua, 2013, pp. 3-4).

In 2005 China produced its first cosmetic surgery reality TV show, »Angels Love Beauty« (cn. *Tianshi ai meili*). After the success of the show, China started producing numerous cosmetic surgery reality TV shows. Most viewed were the »See My 72 Changes« (cn. *Kan wo 72 bian*) and »Cinderella and the Swan« (cn. *Huiguniang yu tian'e*). The latter was sponsored by the SK Aikang Hospital, which is a Sino-Korean joint venture premium hospital in Beijing, targeting wealthy Chinese people. While procedures in most Chinese hospitals that are performed by Chinese surgeons, cost about EUR 250 per each surgical procedure, in SK Aikang Hospital where most surgeons are Korean, a single procedure costs over EUR 2,000. The hospital first opened its door as an answer to the Korean Wave (cn. *Han liu*), which is a term used to describe the popularity of Korean pop culture around the world. In addition to taking advantage of the Korean Wave, the widely televised cosmetic surgery reality show was just another marketing opportunity for the hospital (Hua, 2013, pp. 177-184).

Reality TV shows triggered the widespread pursuit for beauty and a cosmetic surgery craze. This presented an opportunity for medical organizations to launch marketing campaigns which tended to exaggerate the results of procedures. As a result, China imposed a ban on television and radio advertising for products that promised breast enhancement, weight loss or increased height in July 2006 (Hays, 2015).

### **2.3.2 Online, print and other advertising**

With the increasing number of medical cosmetic providers, the market has become consumer oriented and is relying on advertising for survival. There are four major media that reach most consumers on a daily basis. These are digital, television, radio and print. Chinese like digital

media the most, while print and radio are becoming obsolete. In 2012 Chinese spent an average of 2.1 hours per day on digital media, 2.7 hours watching television and only 0.2 listening to the radio and reading print media. As can be observed in Appendix D, print and radio still got the same attention in 2016 and television got 2.6 hours per day, while average time spent on digital media rose to over 3 hours per day. The fact is most Chinese spend majority of their time online where they also get most of their information (Incitez China, 2016).

There are numerous ways of advertising online. Cosmetic surgery providers can establish their own websites, they can advertise on forums or blogs, in the form of banners in phone apps, on social media such as Weibo and Tweeter or even on TaoBao or Tmall, Chinese versions of Ebay. Privately owned cosmetic surgery hospitals are not only advertising their services on websites such as TaoBao, they are selling them as well. An example of a clinic, selling its services on TaoBao can be found in Appendix E. What is worse is that besides the discounts and similar sales promotions, some of these clinics offer to come to the customer to carry out the procedure. The practice is to gather multiple patients, accommodate them in a rented hotel room, where the procedures which were previously purchased online are then carried out, usually by unqualified personnel. Naturally, post operation care is not provided (Zheng, 2015).

The bottom line is that internet provides clinics with the capability of reaching potential patients more effectively than through traditional print advertising. Company websites have almost become a necessity when doing business nowadays. Not only are they easily maintained and can be quickly updated, they cost less than print ads and can offer far more information (Wong et al., 2010). However, the passive presentation of information and the static nature of standard websites are increasingly out-of-date. Consumers today demand a higher degree of interactivity which is made possible on forums, blogs and social media. Social media has facilitated open communication, inviting both surgeons as well as patients who have already undergone cosmetic surgery to share their experience and knowledge (Wheeler et al., 2011, pp. 435-411).

Some of the most popular social media in China are Weibo, QQ and WeChat. Most of them offer an option to »tag« a person or a page, which makes searching for specific surgeons, treatments or hospitals easier for other users. The positive effect of »tagging« is definitely promotion as long as the feedback is positive, whereas negative criticism can bring irreparable harm to a cosmetic surgery practice, especially since not all apps allow surgeons to reply to the criticism (Camp & Mills, 2012, pp. 349-351).

Since the cosmetic surgery market is so oversaturated, providers of such services find it necessary to advertise wherever possible to attract customers. Advertisement for cosmetic procedures can thus still be found in magazines, on billboards, bus benches, in public transport and in brochures that are being handed out on the street and are pointing out the way to the

nearest cosmetic surgery hospital. A few examples of such advertisement can be seen in Appendix F.

### **3 FACTORS AFFECTING DECISIONS TO UNDERGO COSMETIC SURGERY**

An ongoing debate on the phenomenon of artificialization of appearance has risen among researchers of different fields studying the reasons behind the growing numbers of cosmetic surgery among the Chinese women. One of the most commonly and yet mistakenly addressed reasons is the strive of the Chinese women to look more Western (Lah, 2011). Economic, cultural and political changes in China have produced immense anxiety among women, making them believe that beauty is the capital (Hua, 2013, p. 75). Reasons behind the decision to undergo cosmetic surgery are thus usually far more profound.

#### **3.1 Westernization of Chinese beauty ideology**

In the 1980s Globalization wave hit China. Western consumer ideologies were then first introduced to the Chinese people through goods, films, television programs and beauty products flooding the markets. It was the global capitalist market that brought the fantasy of Western female beauty to China. Even today Caucasian women are featured in advertisements, in magazines and on television. One of the most influential Western beauty icons which is still present today was introduced to the Chinese market in 2000s. It was Barbie, the perfect figure, long legged, blond haired, big blue eyed doll, manufactured by Mattel, world's leading toy manufacturer (Hua, 2013, pp. 172-184).

In 2008, when financial crisis hit global markets, Barbie's global sales fell 21 %, while in China the sales have been continuously rising since the introduction to the market. By 2008, Barbie was sold in over 200 Chinese cities. Shanghai was selected as a test run market for the first ever Barbie flagship store, a store that offers beauty as a whole. There was a beauty salon, clothes and jewelry store, candies, books and much more. Due to poor adjustment to the Chinese market preferences, the store was only opened for two years (Hua, 2013, pp. 175-176). Mattel was not an isolated case. Disneyland, for example, also suffered the same reaction in Hong Kong, due to a poor analysis of the market's preferences (Grover, 2011).

The influence of dolls, such as Barbie, on beauty ideals around the world has been studied in the past. One of the most troubling results show that if Barbie was an actual person she would not only have almost inhumanly proportions, she would lack the body fat required to menstruate (Winterman, 2009). However, Barbie still remains an ideal for many girls, teenagers and adult

women. Susan Bordo, an expert in the field of anorexia studies, explains that body management and the idea that one can choose the body they want is a feature of consumer culture and commodity excess. The ideal of beauty Barbie stands for is obtainable through Barbie look-alike clothes, Barbie look-alike contests, and now thanks to medical development, lateralization of becoming Barbie has become possible through cosmetic surgery (Urla & Swedlund, 1995, pp. 227-313).

In 1990s, another wave hit China, only this time it was the Korean Wave, K-Pop in short. Just like Western images, Korean images were brought to China. One show in particular, »The Jewel in the Palace«, triggered the Chinese women's pursuit for Korean beauty ideal. Not only did women start seeking out the help of cosmetic surgeons to fulfill their dreams of looking like Korean celebrities, they started massively traveling to Korea in order to receive cosmetic surgery from Korean doctors (Hua, 2013, pp. 182-184).

Most Chinese tourist that come to Korea to get surgery are inspiring to look like K-Pop celebrities. Korean ethnic features have thus become a standard of beauty in China, which some experts see as a rebellion against Western Caucasian looks that dominate the vast majority of the international media. Some, on the other hand, view the popularity of Korean pop culture as a submission to the Western beauty imperialism. What differentiates the Chinese from the Korean facial features are exactly those features that make Koreans look more Western – large eyes with double eyelids, high bridged noses and a small oval face. It is thus difficult to conclude whether Chinese are looking for Western or Korean features (Fairclough, 2005). However, Yoon Ho-jin, a director at Korea Creative Contents Agency, hypothesizes that South Korea, being heavily influenced by the Western culture, combined the perfect amount of Hollywood with Asian taste and sense (Jung-a, 2016).

Once the Koreans realized the impact of their entertainment industry on China and became aware of the wave it has created, they started investing in the entertainment industry. Numerous movies, soap operas and games attracted millions of people to visit Korea. It was around that time that medical tourism started taking shape as well. Travel agencies started organizing trips including seeing K-Pop stars perform, visiting movie filming locations and workshops, where doctors offer advice to perspective clients. Millions of people started flocking to South Korea to go shopping, visit most attractive K-Pop sites and most importantly to get cosmetic surgery. Even the Korean government saw an opportunity in actively promoting a »Korean medical Wave«, setting aside up to 4 million EUR to help promote medical tourism. As a result, Chinese tourists today represent the largest segment in South Korea's medical and K-Pop tourism (Stevenson, 2014).

### 3.2 Governmental pressures

»Beauty is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics« (Wolf, 2002, p. 12). In 2007 the Ministry of Education added a new term to China's national lexicon - »剩女 (*shèngnǚ*)«. *Shengnu* or a leftover woman is a derogatory term pertaining to women in China who are over the age of 27 and unmarried (Hua, 2015). Women that are seeking education, economic freedom and who wish a more unconventional life path for themselves, in comparison to the Chinese cultural norms, are considered to be doing something wrong. Government agencies, academics and even some businesses are treating *shengnu* as the source of potentially serious social problems. The government is worried that if the number of such women continues to grow, they could exacerbate population imbalances, lure married men into affairs and drive down real estate sales. The government has thus stigmatized *shengnu* with an aggressive propaganda campaign, causing a great number of women to internalize this ideology. The purpose of the propaganda campaign is to ensure long-term social and economic stability (Pip, 2016).

With social stability in mind, Chinese government started actively promoting marriage through education, media campaigns and government-sponsored matchmaking. One of the more extreme examples of the government's marriage promotion, population planning and the desire for demographic balance happened in 2008 when Sichuan was devastated by an earthquake, which resulted in 87,000 dead. Widows and widowers were urged by the Communist Party officials to marry each other and create instant families in order to ensure social and economic stability. Nowadays the government rather makes use of digital and print media, in order to reach as much population as possible, issuing out reports accompanied by cartoons or staged photographs urging leftover women to get married. An example of such propaganda can be seen in Appendix G.

The cartoon in Appendix G portrays a woman in her graduation gown shivering with her diploma in her hands on a top of a tower. The caption on the tower reads »Urban Leftover Woman Seeks Marriage Partner«. Beneath the tower, where there is no storm, are two men commenting »She is too highly educated« and »She is too successful«. Another example of leftover women propaganda is in Appendix H. In this cartoon a woman with her baggage: high education, high salary, and good looks on one side of the scale is exclaiming »it is not fair« trying to reach love on the other side of the scale. Almost all media portrayals of leftover women present them as highly educated and independent, which, according to the Chinese government, is not a desirable trait to possess. The media even managed to turn accomplishments of urban Chinese women into objects of mockery (Fincher, 2014, pp. 22-25). Television series comedy,

which in principal revolve around a leftover woman and her family, devastated by the fact, that she is still not married, bring the subject of leftover women into public the most (Feng, 2012).

However, the main reason behind China's threatened social balance is the country's sex ratio imbalance, which already created a demographic crisis of millions of men who will be unable to find a wife. A traditional preference for boys rooted deep in Chinese culture, which in combination with the access to modern technology enabling sex-selective abortions, has resulted in sex ratio of approximately 118 boys to 100 girls in 2012. Since women are the ones giving birth, their deficit will lead to a decline in birth rate, which will reduce the working age population and speed up the aging of the population. The fact is that the adverse demographic trend afflicting China's social security system and the rapidly declining ratio of active to retired workers has the government concerned with creating a high quality workforce. In order to create a workforce that can not only compete on global markets but also provide pensions for the aging population, the government finds it essential to marry off urban, highly educated women. In addition, the government has evoked the one-child policy in October 2015, coming into effect in January 2016, allowing married couples to have two children. The goal is to coerce educated urban women out of the workforce and into matrimony and family care. The campaign is especially effective considering the rigid role of family within the Chinese culture. Chinese women are expected to keep the older generation satisfied, while men are expected to provide financial stability (Fincher, 2014, pp. 20-22).

It looks like the campaign was successful, since over 90 % of Chinese women marry before the age of 30. Average age for a woman to be married in China in 2015 was 27 (Hua, 2015). The total number of registered marriages has been decreasing through the past few years, while registered divorces, on the other hand, have been rising. In 2015, there were 210 million registered first marriages in comparison to 2012 when there were 236 million first marriages (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2015). Despite the decline in marriages, birth rate following the end of one-child policy has increased by 7.9 % in 2016 from 1,31 million newborns in 2015. 45 % of babies were born to families which already had one child (Haas, 2017). The National Health and Family Planning Commission sees the two-child policy as the solution to the recent ballooning of elderly population. If the sex ratio trend continues, as many as 1/5 of today's baby boys will be unable to find a bride once they reach marrying age (Nardelli & Swann, 2015).

The Cabinet of China's State Council explains the problem of the leftover women as follows: »There is an opinion that A-quality guys will find B-quality women, B-quality guys will find C-quality women, and C-quality men will find D-quality women. The people left are A-quality women and D-quality men« (Magistad, 2013). Consequently, the leftover women's high

standards are preventing them from settling for men who are in the prime marrying age population, but in most cases uneducated, poor and rural. What is worse, the leftover women are being held responsible for the older unmarried man taking part in activities destroying social order (gambling, rioting, stealing and gang fighting) and their inability of finding a spouse and having a child (Fincher, 2014, p. 21).

Furthermore, Osburg John (2013, p. 33) explains that it is common for Chinese businessman to take on a mistress which is the ultimate status symbol reflecting on his wealth, reputation, masculinity and sophistication. Usually the mistress chosen to provide for the man's needs was poor and uneducated, so that she would be more dependent and reliant on the man. Recently, however, the government has expressed concern that leftover women, educated and well situated, are taking over the places of mistresses. The latter goes hand in hand with the fact that the leftover women are looking for men who are equivalent to them instead of older, poorer unmarried men, which according to the government they should be marrying. Since the majority of successful man are already married to younger, more dependent women, leftover women have been taking the places of their mistresses instead (Beech, 2015).

The government is pointing a finger at the leftover women, not only blaming them for the sex ratio imbalance and potential social catastrophe, but for the global economy developments as well. Wei and Zhang (2011, pp. 511-564) discuss the gender imbalance in relation to higher households' savings rates. In highly distorted sex ratio regions, women or rather their parents have started to ensure financial stability for themselves, rising the savings rate, which has had a huge impact on the global economy.

High savings rates are presumably a major contributor to the housing price bubbles. By depressing global long-term interest rates, the latter resulted in the global financial crisis (Greenspan, 2009). A research by Wei and Zhang (2011, pp. 511-564) shows that housing sizes and prices tend to be higher in regions with a higher sex ratio. The latter is due to the higher savings rate by parents of sons in the rural areas and parents of girls in the urban areas. The reason why parents are saving more money is mainly due to the fierce competition in the marriage market. In order to compete in the marriage market, real estate ownership is key. That is why real estate ownership rate in urban areas was at 85 % in 2013, and most homes were owned by men. 80 % of these homes were purchased in marriage and the property deed was registered to the husband (Fincher, 2014, pp. 38-39).

In order to encourage people to marry and bear children immediately after marriage, the government implemented the »extra seven-day honeymoon leave« that was granted to couples who married late. Officially, marrying late in China means marrying at 25 years for man and 23

for women. This statute that supported the amended Family Planning Law was canceled in 2016 due to the fact that late marriages were becoming too common. Indeed, the late marriage leave did motivate people to get married since on the last day of 2015, right before the cancellation, 300 instead of the average 70 couples registered their union in Beijing. The same happened in other larger cities in China, like Shanghai and Guangzhou. Legislators are taking into consideration the importance of bearing the first child as soon as possible in order to have enough time to have another child, now that the two children policy was implemented. Women have thus been given another 30 days maternity leave, in addition to the 98 they had before the new law was imposed. Men, on the other hand, get 5 additional days of parental leave to the 10 they had before (Xinhua, 2016).

Women that have internalized the leftover stigma due to constant pressure from the government, feel that they need to maintain their looks in order to increase the possibility of finding a spouse once they reach their thirties. They are thus prone to undergo cosmetic surgery, which they believe will improve all aspects of their lives, the possibility of finding a husband being one of them.

### **3.3 Gender discrimination**

The phenomenon of the leftover women is the modern age resurgence of gender inequality in China. Not only is it hard to find a suitable husband for a leftover woman, all Chinese women find it difficult to obtain a job as well. With gender discrimination still being present in the workplace, Chinese women of all socioeconomic classes invest in surgery in order to improve their career options as well as their social lives. Employers are often paying attention to physical attributes in the process of employee selection, continuing the discrimination against women in the workplace (Floracruz, 2013).

In 2003, a review of job advertisements found that almost 90 % of vacancies open to women listed an age limit of 30. In ads for secretaries, for example, not only acceptable age is specified, but body measurements as well (Beech, 2015). Minimum height requirements are typical for government jobs. In order for a woman to work for the government, she needs to be at least 1.58m high. Especially the latter is encouraging women to undergo leg-lengthening procedures which have been banned by China's Ministry of Health because of possible complications that have left many Chinese women permanently disfigured (Floracruz, 2013). Another example of a very specific job requirement was one of a modeling agency searching for women to work as flight attendants. Candidates had to be a specific height, have no scars in visible places, and even had to pose in swimwear for their interviews (Sanghani, 2015). In China 76 % of women aspire to top jobs, which makes them turn to cosmetic surgery in order to meet the job

requirements. Appearance has become just as important as education, hence maintaining appearance once the job is obtained is of crucial importance (Chow, 2011). Competition for jobs has become a beauty campaign. In order for women to survive in a male dominant society, they cannot only count on their education and experiences, they need to utilize their appearance as a source of competitive advantage.

Women in China however, usually first face gender discrimination once they enter the education system. Despite the fact that Chinese Education Law forbids discrimination on several grounds, including gender, the practice of gender-based quotas and enrolment policies in higher education is widespread. It often results in women having to score much higher than men in entrance examinations for certain majors, especially at institutions concerned with police or military training. Not to be mistaken, even female pioneers are being objectified, as state media only focuses on their looks instead of competence (Branigan, 2014). When asked, China's Education Ministry defended their view on the practice of educational institutions on the basis of »national interests« despite the fact that the practice often extends to majors with little relation to gender, such as languages and sciences. Educational institutions on the other hand often offer explanations, that are nothing more than paternalistic judgments about the roles women are best suited to (China Labour Bulletin, n.d.).

While the law is clear on gender equality, it fails to detail repercussions for those discriminating against women. As far as consequences go, there are none when it comes to women enforcing their rights. In 2013, a woman filed a lawsuit against a private tutoring firm that refused to hire her because she was a woman. This is believed to be the first gender discrimination lawsuit in China. She applied for a job that specifically specified in their ad that a man is required since the tutoring job will also include some physical tasks, such as changing a bottle on a water dispenser. Nonetheless, despite meeting all the job's requirements, she was turned down as was her lawsuit which ended in a settlement, due to the fact that there was no discrimination case as the academy changed the recruitment notice after her complaint (Branigan, 2014).

Instead of determining the consequences of unfair treatment, the Labor Law rather focuses on the regulations for female workers. Chapter VII of the Chinese Labor law is dedicated to Special protection for female staff and workers and juvenile workers. For a statute that generally lacks specificity, there are four very specific articles in the Chapter VII of Labor law stipulated by the Chinese government that prohibit women from working in certain industries. Article 59 prohibits female workers from working in physically demanding jobs such as mining or logging. Article 60 prohibits women in their menstruation period from working in elevation, low temperature or in cold waters. Article 61 prohibits pregnant women from working in physically demanding jobs, while women that have been pregnant for seven months cannot work extended

working hours or night shifts. Article 63 further states that breast feeding women whose child is under one year of age, cannot work in physically demanding jobs or extended working hours and night shifts (National People's Congress Standing Committee, 1994).

Employers still ask these prospective female workers about their family plans, out of concern that female workers will leave their jobs for maternity leave. Employers even require women to take pregnancy tests in the process of selection of candidates for the job. Employers are searching for ways of coercing pregnant workers into resigning in order to save on temporary replacements or benefits costs. Pregnant workers are asked to work unreasonable hours or are given intense workloads, and their applications for maternity leave are often turned down (China Labour Bulletin, n.d.). State news agency Xinhua has expressed concern that a relaxation of the country's strict family planning laws could even exacerbate discrimination, making employers more reluctant to hire women who could take maternity leave more than once (Branigan, 2014).

In addition to women being discriminated against because of their physical strength and the ability to carry a child, sexual harassment is a pressing problem in the workplace as well. According to a report from the City University in Hong Kong, 80 % of working Chinese women report experiencing sexual harassment at some point in their working lives. Despite the Law of People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women that was passed in 2015, sexual harassment in the workplace, especially in low-wage or poorly regulated industries such as retail and domestic work, continues to go by underreported and unprosecuted. The Law on the Protection of Women promises explicit protections for women from sexual violence, but the hard truth is that courtrooms usually fall short of delivering justice (China Labour Bulletin, 2017).

The plastic surgery phenomenon has only re-exposed the glaring issue of gender inequality in China (Grace, 2015). With women being aware of the discrimination that awaits them, while at the same time still wishing to work and provide for themselves, they go to extreme lengths to get a chance to succeed in the business world. Women of all economic classes invest in cosmetic surgery in hopes of improving their options of building a career for themselves.

### **3.4 Social media**

One of the defining phenomena of the present times is the worldwide accessibility of the internet and social media. Social media plays a big role in our lives and in how we interact with others. It all started with one word – *selfie*. Selfie was announced by the Oxford Dictionaries as the international word of the year in 2013 and is by definition a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically taken with a smart phone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website

(Selfie, n.d.). Social media has thus begun bringing to light the self-perceived need for cosmetic surgery. Every selfie taken and posted is a reminder of how you look and that you are getting older. Surveys have shown that many people deciding on how to medically alter their look, base their decision on pictures posted on social media (Reiman, 2015). Furthermore, modern technology even offers apps such as »Plastic surgery Simulator Lite: how would you look with a reshaped nose?« and »Photo plastic – Virtual Surgery Simulator, Pic Surgeon Editor« enabling one to experiment while promoting getting real cosmetic surgery (Smith, 2013). Since many people are posting the processed photos online, peer pressure to alter appearance has increased on social media (He, 2016).

In 1990s, the online use of the pound sign, today referred to as hashtag (#), began on Internet Relay Chat, i.e. IRC. It was used to categorize items into groups. In 2007, designer Chris Messina asked his followers on Tweeter how they felt about using the pound sign to group conversations on the micro-blogging platform, and thus became the first person to use the hashtag in modern social media. People responded and by 2009 hashtag was formally adopted by Tweeter and later on by other social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Today hashtags have become an important part of every marketing strategy. They can provide insights on what target customers are interested in, what they are thinking about and they can increase brand loyalty (Bennett, 2014). Helping marketers is not the only role hashtags have undertaken. In the last few years, the so called hashtag challenges have emerged on social media, some for charity, some for fun and some for the annihilation of body image.

Challenges affecting body image have emerged all over the world. In the U.S. there was the »Kylie Jenner lip challenge« where girls would suck on a glass in order to make their lips appear fuller, thinking they will achieve the same effect Kylie Jenner, American reality TV personality, achieved with the help of cosmetic surgery. Some of the participants in the challenge ended up in the hospital with tears and lacerations that left them with permanent damage. Another challenge that was supposed to send the message that one should not judge a book by its cover was the »don't judge challenge«. How it works is people would go out of their way to look as unattractive as possible with the help of makeup, drawing acne on their faces and strong eyebrows, followed by the covering of the camera lens with their hand only to unveil their beautiful faces. The problem with this challenge was, it only emphasized that beauty in fact is all that matters. People participating in this challenge did not realize that the message they were sending was if a book is judged by its cover, the cover can be changed, while the content remains the same (Park, 2017).

China, on the other hand, only strives to one beauty ideal – skinniness. A study on overweight perception among Chinese female college students showed that while only about 17 % of female

college students in China believed they were obese in 2016, 50 % believed they were too heavy while 20 % resorted to diet pills, fasting, vomiting or smoking in order to reach their goal weight (Tanenbaum et al., 2016, pp. 458-466). Social media challenges have adapted to the Chinese ultimate beauty ideal as well. One of the most notable was the »#A4 challenge« where women would use an A4 sheet of paper to demonstrate their waist is thinner than the width of the paper, which is 21 centimeters. The »iPhone6challenge«, where women would place their iPhone 6 on their knees to show how skinny their legs are, was only passed if the knees are only as wide as the phone. To prove how skinny women's arms are, they would wrap a bank note around their wrists for the »banknote challenge«. With the »bellybutton challenge« women would reach their arm around their back to reach the belly button from the other side, similarly with the »lipstick challenge« women would reach their arm behind their head to apply lipstick from the other side to prove how small their face is. The »coins challenge« has women stacking as many coins as possible on their collarbones – the more upright the coins stand, the skinnier the woman is. The only challenge that is not related to skinniness is the »under boob pen challenge« where women would prove they could grip a pen solely using the underside of their breasts (Yeh, 2016). For an image of listed challenges, refer to Appendix I.

The challenges social media has created show the tragic state of body image among young women who appear desperate to surmount them. Not only do these tests put intense pressure on women, they are potentially inspiring women to develop destructive eating and exercising habits (Kane, 2016). Research has shown that media plays a significant role in transmitting thinness norms. The latter is linked to increased body image dissatisfaction, eating disorders and lowered self-esteem among women. Cosmetic surgery clinics have jumped at the opportunity to advertise their services on social media claiming they can help women conquer these challenges. In addition, as established, hashtags can help raise brand awareness and increase sales if used properly – the cosmetic surgery industry is taking advantage of that as well (Westcott & Ge, 2016).

Another of the latest trends fueled by social media in China is the alleged Chinese women's craze to look like Ivanka Trump. Ever since Donald Trump's election and later on inauguration, Chinese have started obsessing over the first daughter of the new American president. Businesses with Ivanka's name, wishing to cash in on her popularity, have started emerging. In the time between the US elections on 10 of November 2016 and the end of the same year, 258 Ivanka-inspired trademark applications were lodged in China. Allegedly, one of them is Foshan Yiwanka Medical Management. It is a cosmetic surgery clinic that is successfully making use of Chinese women's desire to look like Ivanka. Women have supposedly been flocking to the hospital with pictures of Ivanka wanting to have her nose, eyes, lips and figure (Smith, 2017). Ivanka is believed to have facial features, disposition and appearance that are perfect no matter

whether they are judged by the beauty standards of East or West. Chinese women admire Ivanka's look and aspire to create the same balance of entrepreneurship and family life that she has. Social media definitely had a huge impact on the popularity of Ivanka in China since she posted a video of her five year old daughter singing a new year song in Mandarin on Tweeter in February 2017, generating over 9 million views in just a few days (Denyer, 2017). Whether women are really striving to look like Ivanka, or just admire her ability to balance business and family life, if it were not for social media, this speculation would not even arise.

The trend of social media fueling cosmetic surgery market in China reflects through the average age of Chinese women seeking cosmetic surgery. The population of plastic surgery patients in China is much younger than anywhere else in the world (Junqian, 2016). The latter may be the reason why 47 % of patients who got cosmetic surgery in 2011 consulted Facebook and Tweeter before going under the knife, rather than consulting a surgeon in person. Most common practice is tracking down plastic surgeons online and reading the information they have made available, asking for feedback from friends and networking with people that have undergone surgery and viewing photos of people with a look similar to what they are looking for (Amorasak, n.d.).

Cosmetic surgery today can be considered as a sort of physical Photoshop. In contrast to apps enabling one to filter and alter appearance for that one photography, cosmetic surgery can fix imperfections permanently, making every photo and video beautiful. With blogging, vlogging, live streaming and other forms of engaging on social media via videos, it is becoming increasingly important for people to always look good. Apps that can alter appearance have become obsolete. Plastic surgeons have responded to this craze by providing online consultations to their patients and by offering specialized procedures to correct imperfections that in some cases people did not even know they had, including hand makeovers, the injection of fillers into feet to make them easier to squeeze into heels and surgery to trim stout ankles (Mintz, 2014).

To sum up, the beauty industry pushes the idea that there is no such thing as an unattractive woman, there are just lazy women who do not make the surgical changes necessary to conform. Those who are conforming to the almost unbelievable and unhealthy norms are taking extreme measures to reach the goal of being Barbie thin, large breasted and overall almost surrealistically beautiful. Since exercise and dieting cannot always bring desired results and it usually takes too long, it is easier and faster to reach the perfect beauty with the help of severe surgical procedures. In accordance with the rising number of cosmetic surgery procedures in China, women have apparently been doing exactly that.

### 3.5 Parental interference

In 1980s, an official program called the one-child policy was initiated by the central government of China in order to limit a family unit to one child each and to slow down the growth of an already enormous population (Pletcher, 2015). Most children born in that era are now at the right marriageable age and those who have not yet found a suitable spouse by themselves are facing intense pressure from their parents to get married and start a family. The pressure is on, especially now that the government terminated the one-child policy and adopted a new two-child policy that only applies to married couples (Ren, 2016). This has prompted the evolution of so called marriage markets. Even though the origins date back to 2004 to Shanghai, marriage markets began booming throughout the country just a few years ago. Parents were becoming increasingly worried and since parental interference in marriage matters is an integral part of Chinese culture, it only seemed suitable to start posting resumes of their children onto boards and umbrellas in the middle of parks. The resumes usually include age, height, weight, zodiac, occupation, accomplishments, home town and only rarely a photo or personality traits (Wei, 2016). Talking to some of the parents at the Renmin Gongyuan People's Park in the Center of Shanghai, one of the largest marriage markets in China, where there is even a corner for parents looking for a foreign partner for their children, it seems that physical appearance is becoming more important in spouse selection, due to the intense competition on the singles market. Some parents even confessed to saving up money to provide their children with cosmetic surgery in order to improve their chances of getting married as soon as possible.

There are three significant milestones in life originating from ancient China – success in the imperial examination, marriage and the birth of a son. While imperial examination which is a civil service examination system to select candidates for the state bureaucracy was abolished in 1905 (Jiao, 2013), traditional marriage and the importance of birthing a son are still deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Traditionally, love had nothing to do with marriage. It was a business transaction between two families that settled on terms and conditions before the future spouses were even introduced. The fate of children was thus determined at an early age. Conditions taken into consideration usually included wealth and social status (Ancient Chinese Marriage Custom, 2017). With the Marriage law passed in 1980, the practice was outlawed. The decision whether and who to marry is to be made by an individual, not their family (Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, 2001).

Freedom to choose a partner in modern China is today generally accepted, but the pressure of parents and society still exists. Mainly women are encouraged to marry socially and economically advantageous partners, due to the poor retirement system which obligates children to take care of their parents in their old age. Since women are usually not able to provide for the

whole family, they are pressured to marry a man that will take care of both their own and the wife's family (David & Friedman, 2014, p. 119). This is called *hypergamy* which is informally often referred to as »marrying up«. The term is used in social science for the practice of marrying a person of the same or higher caste or social status (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2017). The latter is especially important in the contemporary China, since it is not unusual for several generations of the family to share a home where children along with their spouse are usually responsible for providing financial stability.

A research by the Population Studies Center of University of Michigan carried out in 2014 showed that co residence of parents and adult children is not only influenced by parent's needs but also by children's values and expressed filial piety, socioeconomic resources and past receipt of parental help. It is stipulated in the China's constitution that family members have the primary responsibility to take care of their elderly parents, including arranging for suitable housing. Despite rapid economic development, research have shown in the period between 1990 and 2000, 60 % of elderly men and 69 % of elderly women were cohabitating with their adult children. The situation has not changed since in 2009 the majority of elderly people still lived with their children. An 80 year old person will spend two thirds of their lifespan in co-residence with adult children and their kids (Zhang, Gu, & Luo, 2014).

Respecting parents is one of the most important qualities in Chinese culture. Not getting married is the sign of ultimate disrespect. Even personal happiness is irrelevant when it comes to fulfilling parents' expectations. According to the World Bank's research, parental matchmaking is robustly correlated with lower marital harmony. The research found the reason for unhappy, often arranged, marriages is the parents' inability to take their children's feelings into consideration. Parents are actually putting their needs for elderly care ahead of their child's happiness. The perfect match for their child is one who will not only provide financial security, but also be submissive enough to tend to chores and boost household productivity (Huang, Jin, & Xu, 2015).

In order to find their children a partner that meets all requirements mentioned above, parents avail themselves of various methods of matchmaking. Mentioned above were the marriage markets, of which success rate is actually very low, despite thousands of parents' regular daily participation. Parents usually attend these markets in cooperation with professional matchmakers. One would expect most of the parents attending such an event would be those searching for a wife for their son. As a matter of fact, about 80 % of all singles advertised at the marriage market are women. The latter is presumably the result of leftover women propaganda. Parents of women in their twenties, who have not yet found a spouse, are in a hurry to match their daughters with suitable men. Preferably one who already owns his own real estate, drives

his own car and is a compatible sign of the Chinese zodiac (Tacon, 2013). Over 90 % of women marry before the age of 30, while men are not in such a hurry to get married. In 2013 the average age for a man to get married was 35 (The China Post, 2013).

Finding a spouse for women is hence more difficult. They are expected to marry at an earlier age to a wealthy and well situated man. In order to marry the best man possible, a woman must be intelligent, elegant, and above all, beautiful. Young women as well as their parents are aware of the latter, which is reflected in the growing share of parent financed cosmetic surgery procedures among underage girls. In 2010 15 % of cosmetic surgeries carried out in China were undergone by women under 18 years of age. Some research find that if teens did not need parental consent or parents' funds to get procedures done, the number would be even higher. However, today it is not unusual for parents to encourage children to change their appearance. Buying cosmetic surgery as a graduation gift is a common practice in China. Parents believe their children, if they looked their best, would have the competitive advantage needed to get the best grades, find the best jobs and last but not least, find the best spouse (Diller, 2011).

### **3.6 Self-empowerment**

An old Chinese proverb »the ugly wife is a treasure at home« is believed to still be deeply entrenched in the mindsets of many Chinese men. The message of this proverb is that women that are not as naturally beautiful are the best spouses to create a family with, so that they can stay at home and take care of children and eventually their spouse's parents (Schneider, 2014, pp. 1-18). This may be true in rural China, where women are less likely to achieve any kind of professional success and their primary goal is to get married, start and take care of family. In urban areas, the situation is somewhat different (Avella & Kakoyiannis, 2015). On the one hand women are submitting to male-dominated ideals of beauty and are becoming passive victims of the »beauty myth«, while at the same time are becoming empowered by educating themselves and becoming financially independent, being able to take control over the distribution of their own income. The question remains whether women are really becoming more empowered or is the allocation of their income somehow guided by the male idea of the perfect woman (Hua, 2013, pp. 6-7).

The beauty myth, as explained by Wolf (2002, pp. 11-12), is a conspiracy of the patriarchy and capitalism. As women release themselves from the feminine mystique of domesticity, the beauty myth socially controls their empowerment. Beauty is thus the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact. The pursuit of beauty through cosmetic surgery is hence seen as submission to a superficial priority placed on appearance moderated by men. Men produce the notion of beauty and women unknowingly conform to it.

Women have been criticized for having overly high expectations for their marriage partners in the past. Management level women, although there are few, were and still are discriminated against in the marriage market, since most Chinese men believe a woman should only take care of the household and the children. Women would often conform by working less business hours and doing more housework in order to try to maintain their marital life a success. Highly educated women are being passed over for less educated, less career oriented women, who are easier to control. While one would think being successful would bring competitive advantage to women in the marriage market, it is actually an obstacle for women trying to meet an accomplished man. The men that are rejecting successful women are usually successful themselves, but are apprehensive when it comes to having a partner who is or has the option to become more socially and financially successful (Simpson & De Lacey, 2013). The phenomenon of A-quality women having trouble finding A-quality man was explained in the 3.2 chapter on governmental pressures.

As explained, it goes both ways. Especially women that have the option and ability to become successful are saying no to men who cannot afford a luxurious life. These men are usually from the poorer villages of China, where the gender imbalance is even more evident and where dowries are still a part of almost every marriage (Huang E., 2017). These men, who fail to add fruit to their family tree, are referred to as bare branches (cn. *光棍*- *guānggùn*). Men on the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder are having a hard time attracting a bride since women are now allowed and even encouraged to marry men with sufficient resources to provide a life of comfort (Li, 2017).

As already mentioned, economically disadvantaged single man who are sexually frustrated might eventually vent their anger through violence against others. Chinese government fears these men are a public security and social stability threat. Social scientists agree with the government's assumption and argue that long-term bachelorhood not only compromises men's well-being, but also puts underprivileged men at risk of gravitating towards aggression. Such behavior has been observed both in China as well as India. Especially violence against women has become a serious problem in countries with the highest gender imbalances. In India for example, reported rape cases have grown nearly 700 % since 1970 (Chowdhury, 2013).

In traditional China, the proverb stating that an ugly wife is a treasure at home, was expressed through polygamy and concubinage. Until 1950, it was legal to keep several wives or concubines, it was even considered a luxury for aristocratic families. Once polygamy was outlawed, women gained the right to divorce for the first time. In order to get a divorce in the 1950s, the couple had to obtain a permission of the state, which was rarely granted, while in the 1980s a permission from the employer of both parties had to be obtained. Divorce then was

frowned upon, and divorced women were labeled as »worn shoes« (cn. 破鞋 - *pòxié*). In modern China, however, the stigma of divorce has decreased exponentially. The problem that remains is that the male dominated courts favor men who usually get full custody of the children and keep most assets obtained in marriage (Xiao, 2011, pp. 607-627).

To sum up, in order for women to compete in the labor market, marriage market and in society in general, a nice personality is not enough. Women are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that obtaining a good job and finding a decent man who is not already married, requires more than just a nice personality. By educating themselves and finding work, women become financially independent, which enables them to change their appearance as well. The look most Chinese women strive for is the result of the social perception of beauty. Since men represent a greater share of China's population, it could be assumed that the ideal feminine beauty is mostly influenced by men. Discrepancies between the discourse of liberation and subjugation have been studied in the past. What was found is that the desire to alter appearance surgically is the product of both transnational and national forces. Chinese women's desire for beauty must be seen and understood as both empowerment and an ongoing subjugation to men, markets and the state (Hua, 2013, p. 213).

## **4 EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF CHINESE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR**

In this section of the thesis I will discuss the empirical research I conducted based on my theoretical findings. The research is based on three in-depth interviews and a survey.

### **4.1 Purpose and objective of the research**

China as one of the leading world economies is rapidly developing in all areas. In the last decade, beauty and appearance have gotten a lot of attention, and opportunities to develop new profitable businesses arose. Since beauty is such a specific subject, and the preference for it a personal matter, it is crucial for businesses that want to seize the opportunity of the new trend of cosmetic surgeries, to understand the reasons behind the consumers' decision to alter their appearance with the help of surgical procedures. There are as many reasons as there are consumers.

The purpose of this analysis is to empirically examine possible reasons behind the increasing demand for cosmetic surgery among Chinese women. Being a relatively unexplored topic as a whole, the findings of my research could benefit companies which are already present, as well as those entering the cosmetic surgery market in China. The study can help them reshape their approach to customers and rearrange marketing campaigns. Since the number of cosmetic

surgeries in China is expected to increase in the future, the question is who will take advantage of the rising market successfully.

The objective of this analysis is to determine which of the five postulated reasons is the most important to Chinese women when making the decision to get cosmetic surgery. With the help of in-depth interviews and a survey, I will be able to establish the most common reason and determine what kind of marketing approach is most suitable for that group of customers.

## **4.2 Methodology**

As a basis for my thesis, secondary data in the form of academic articles, case studies and other sources on the subject were examined. The literature I drew from is accessible in libraries and online data bases mostly in English and Chinese language. I got most of the research starting points from books from various fields, mainly psychology and sociology and scientific articles from databases such as Ebsco and Proquest. Qualitative research and the theoretical review of the literature provided me with a basis for further qualitative research in the form of an interview and quantitative research in a form of a short survey.

To get a deeper insight into the mindset of Chinese women, I conducted three in-depth interviews with women aged 21 and 27, and a man aged 30. I asked open-ended questions in a form of a semi-structured interview with questions prepared in advance. The interviews were flexible and continuous, additional questions were posed when appropriate. This was the most effective way of getting information on such a specific and personal subject, on the mindset and perception of the respondents.

In the next step, I carried out a survey among Chinese students at Shanghai university of International Business and Economics, aged between 20 and 25 years. The questionnaire was distributed physically during class. The purpose of the survey was to establish whether the findings of the interviews apply to a larger research sample and to better understand what influences the purchasing decisions of women, how is appearance artificialization expected by the society and what leads women to make the decision to enhance their beauty using invasive cosmetic procedures.

### **4.2.1 In-depth interviews**

In-depth interview is a qualitative tool usually used when the population or the nature of the researched subject are very specific. They capture descriptive data about people's behaviors, attitudes and perceptions. When conducting an in-depth interview, it is important to pose

questions in such manner that the interviewer motivates the interviewee to answer questions sincerely. In perfect conditions, the interview should take place in the native language of the interviewee (Berg, 2001, pp. 76-77). However, the majority of my interviews was conducted in English. We had an English-Chinese dictionary available at all times to exclude any misunderstandings. With in-person interviews, body language is as important as the conversation itself. It is thus important for the interviewer to listen and interpret both verbal and nonverbal communication. The latter is particularly important in subjects that are not pleasant for the interviewee to talk about, such as personal matters (Berg, 2001, pp. 76-77).

Cosmetic surgery can be considered a very personal subject, especially for people who are not open to talk about personal matters. That is why it is crucial to establish a trusting relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The best way to create a trusting environment is to chat about subjects that are not related to the interview, before and during the interview. Small talk is also useful when the interviewee is answering in short and non-substantial sentences. In order to create a relaxed environment, it is also important to carry out the interview in an environment pleasant to the interviewee. Preferably, the location is to be chosen by the interviewee (Berg, 2001, p. 99).

Marketing researchers usually make use of two basic instruments when conducting an interview, a questionnaire and a recording device (Kotler, 2004, p. 136). When conducting my in-depth interviews, I used a questionnaire and a tablet to take notes as all of my interviewees requested not to record the conversation. I designed the questionnaire based on the postulated reasons behind the decision to undergo cosmetic surgery, which served as a research starting point. The reasons were postulated based on the literature I reviewed beforehand.

#### 4.2.1.1 Execution of in-depth interviews

In order to obtain valid data, it is important to conduct interviews properly. It is essential to take enough time to make sure the interviewee is relaxed enough to answer questions truthfully. With the conduction of in-depth interviews, I relied on the following principles:

1. I carried out three interviews in various locations in Shanghai and Beijing, China. All interviews took place in a relaxed environment.
2. Based on the preference of the interviewees I met each at their suggested location. I conducted the first interview at a tea house in the center of Shanghai, the second one at a restaurant in the business district of Shanghai, while the last interview was carried out in one of the many gardens of Beijing.

3. I opened the conversations with small talk in order to get to know the interviewee and to gain their trust. I only started posing questions I prepared in relation to cosmetic surgery, once I felt the atmosphere was relaxed enough. Additional questions were posed in accordance with the course of the conversation.
4. The interviews with female interviewees lasted approximately three hours each, while the conversation with the male interviewee lasted for two hours.
5. I took notes of the interviews on my tablet. All interviewees requested not to make a recording of the conversation, yet they offered to stay in touch in case I needed additional information.
6. The basis for the analysis of primary data were the questionnaire I prepared in advance, the notes I took during the interviews and my follow-up conversations with the interviewees once I returned home.

#### 4.2.1.2 Research sample

I interviewed three people. The first interview with a female correspondent aged 21 was carried out in Shanghai on the 16th November 2015 at 15.00. The second interview with a female correspondent was carried out in Shanghai on the 18th November 2015 at 18.00 and the last interview with a male correspondent was carried out in Beijing, China on 24th November 2015 at 11.00.

Table 1. Information about the participants in the in-depth interviews

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Consumer of cosmetic surgeries</b>	<b>Considering cosmetic surgery</b>
Dayeni Wang	F	21	Student	In a relationship	No	Yes
Jing Zheng	F	27	Working in finance (LLC)	Single	No	No
Chen Hailiang	M	30	Working in sales (LLC)	Engaged	No	No

#### 4.2.1.3 Interview questionnaire design

For the in-depth interviews I prepared questions in advance and posted additional questions when appropriate. I prepared 21 questions. Questions 1-4 are basic questions to introduce the subject to the interviewees. The fourth question is intended to see if the interviewees find other reasons to undergo cosmetic surgery from the top of their heads, before I introduce the reasons I postulated for my thesis. Questions 5-22 are detailed questions related to the five reasons

behind the decision to undergo cosmetic surgery postulated in the thesis. Below is the detailed reminder for the interviews:

1. How do you define beauty?
2. Cosmetic surgery is gaining popularity in China. Why so you think that is?
3. Do you think surgical alteration of appearance is becoming more accepted by the society?
4. Have you undergone cosmetic surgery? If you were thinking about it, what would be the reason?
5. Some say beauty is a currency system, and is determined by politics in China. Have you ever felt that the government is pressuring women to conform to the standards of beauty dictated by society?
6. Have you heard of the term *shengnu* – the leftover woman? What do you think about the government's implications that unmarried women over 27 are becoming a social problem in China?
7. Do you feel pressured into marrying early in order to meet the expectations of the government?
8. Would you consider undergoing surgical procedures in order to improve your chances of meeting a well situated man?
9. Gender discrimination is still present in China, especially in the educational system and the workplace. Are women having a hard time getting into schools and finding a job?
10. Do you think it is easier to achieve success if you are considered beautiful?
11. Would you be willing to undergo surgery to improve your chances of getting a job?
12. Do you believe a woman that is considered unattractive should not work, stay at home and take care of children and elderly parents?
13. How much time do you spend on the internet? How much of it is on social media? Do you post your pictures on social media?
14. How do you feel if the picture you have posted does not get the reaction you were hoping for? Do you feel bad about yourself if you do not get enough likes?
15. Have you ever used an app to change your appearance before you posted your picture?
16. Have you ever felt pressured to consider cosmetic surgery because of social media?
17. Women are also being pressured into marriage by their parents. Have you ever felt the pressure from your parents to get married?
18. Do your parents believe looks are important when it comes to entering the marriage market? Would your parents ever pressure you to change your appearance in order to improve your chances of meeting a better partner?
19. Have you ever been to a marriage market? Have you or your parents ever posted your resume in one of these markets?

20. Would you say women's financial independency is one of the reasons women get cosmetic surgery? Is it to feel empowered, or are they conforming to the male ideal of beauty?
21. Would you consider undergoing cosmetic surgery if you were financially independent and wanted to boost your self-confidence?

## 4.2.2 Survey

A survey is a tool where a collection of questions are asked repetitively to a sample from a population to mathematically derive characteristics of the total population (McKee, 2016). The smaller the sample, less representative it is of the population. I conducted the survey on a small sample. The purpose was to determine whether to refute or confirm what I have learned in the interviews and to help me design a marketing strategy for companies offering cosmetic surgery services. I designed the questionnaire based on the postulated reasons behind the decision to undergo cosmetic surgery. As mentioned above, the reasons were postulated based on the literature I reviewed beforehand.

### 4.2.2.1 Conduction of the survey

The survey was conducted during class among Chinese students of Shanghai university of International Business and Economics, aged between 20 and 25 years. The questionnaire focused on female participants. Surveying women correspondents is more reasonable since women are the major consumers of cosmetic surgeries in China. Knowing what women of the age group that is most prone to undergoing cosmetic surgery are thinking, is key for determining the marketing approach that would address the target audience most efficiently. As the survey was handed out physically to class participants, all respondents that were included in the analysis represented relevant units. The research sample consisted of 53 units.

### 4.2.2.2 Research sample

As already mentioned, the analysis includes 53 female respondents aged 20 to 25 years, with the average age of 22.6. Over 52 % of respondents only focuses on studying and does not work, while almost 34 % perform student work, 11 % of respondents are part-time employees and 1 respondent is a full-time employee. The latter is also married, while others are either single (70 %) or in a relationship (28 %). Average net monthly income of the respondents ranges from RMB 2001 to RMB 3000, which is approximately EUR 275 to EUR 410<sup>1</sup>. Two out of 53 respondents already underwent cosmetic surgery, 39 respondents are considering it and 12

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<sup>1</sup> 20 respondents did not wish to answer.

would never consider undergoing cosmetic surgery. A more detailed description of the research sample can be found in Appendix J.

#### 4.2.2.3 Survey questionnaire design

The questionnaire that was handed out to respondents consisted of 16 questions. Most of the questions were multiple choice, three were Likert type scale questions and one was a question requiring ranking values from least to most important. The questions were divided into four logical sections. Survey questionnaire design is presented in Appendix K.

The objective of the first set of questions was to get an insight into perception and appreciation of beauty, complacency and the level of self-esteem of the respondents. In this section, respondents had to answer questions on how they define beauty (question 1), how they feel about their appearance and what would be the potential result of being better looking (question 2), how they rank a proposed set of values (question 3) and what factors can negatively influence their self-confidence (question 4). The key questions of this section were the second and the third question. In the second question, respondents had to state the level of their agreement with 7 statements. Each of the statements indirectly relates to one of the five reasons for cosmetic surgery postulated in the thesis. The third question helped me establish which values are the most and which the least important to the respondents.

In the second section of the questionnaire, respondents were required to answer a question on how much they know about cosmetic surgery in general and where they get their information (question 5 and 6). Question 7 asked respondents if they felt cosmetic surgery is accepted by the society, whether they think cosmetic surgery is an acceptable way to reshape the human body and whether they agree cosmetic surgery can increase self-esteem and bring about more opportunities. The respondents then had to answer whether they had undergone cosmetic surgery themselves and which was the procedure they underwent or would like to undergo if they ever decided to get cosmetic surgery (question 8 and 9). The final question of the second section asked respondents whether they would or did keep their surgery a secret (question 10).

The third section only consists of one question. With the help of Likert scale I asked respondents to state the level of their agreement with statements directly related to the reasons I postulated in my thesis as the most probable when deciding to undergo cosmetic surgery. Question 11 thus consists of 7 statements asking directly what would be the reason to undergo cosmetic surgery if the respondents were to consider it.

The final section of the questionnaire covers socio-demographic questions about the respondents. Respondents had to answer questions 12 to 16, where they stated their gender, age, employment status, marital status and their net monthly income. I found asking respondents about their place of residence irrelevant, since the students that were included in the analysis were all based in Shanghai.

### 4.3 Data analysis

I analyzed the data I generated from the in-depth interviews with the help of notes I took during the conduction of the interviews. In the process of my analysis I realized some of the answers needed further explanation, which I gained by subsequently contacting the interviewees. Reports on the in-depth interviews can be found in Appendix L. Next, I analyzed the survey results with the help of Excel and SPSS. The findings will be presented in the chapter 4.3.2.

#### 4.3.1 Analysis of the interviews

The objective of my research was to understand why consumers decide to undergo cosmetic surgery in China. I wanted to see which of the five reasons, if any, assumed in my thesis, is the most probable when deciding to undergo cosmetic surgery. I found that three of the reasons stand out the most, since they are somewhat related to each other – the government, gender discrimination and self-empowerment. Based on my findings I designed a survey which would either confirm or refute the findings of the interviews and which would help me determine if one of the three reasons found most probable in the in-depth interviews stands out with a larger research sample. For an easier review I divided the interview questionnaire into six sections.

The first section consisted of four questions which asked correspondents **general questions about beauty and cosmetic surgery**. When asked to define beauty, both female participants pointed out that personality defines beauty, while the male participant stressed outer appearance such as pale skin and bright eyes are the features a woman must possess in order to be considered beautiful. I then asked the interviewees why they thought cosmetic surgery is gaining popularity in China. Dayeni and Chen both believe it is due to the newly gained purchasing power of women, while Jing thinks it is the imposition of celebrities' images. I sensed that her answer may relate to the purchasing power as well, so I asked her if women had been undergoing cosmetic surgery before the market was flooded with images of beautiful women. She confirmed my assumption and told me women were only able to opt for such expensive services due to the rise in their incomes which coincides with the increasingly prevalent celebrities' images in the market.

We further on discussed whether cosmetic surgery is more accepted by the society today as it was years ago. All three interviewees agreed that the society is very acceptant, it is even encouraging women to undergo cosmetic surgery. It was again pointed out that endorsing celebrities for cosmetic surgery advertisement pushes women to search for ways to look like these images. I was told, celebrities openly talk about procedures they have had done insinuating they are famous and powerful because of their looks. The last question in this section asked the interviewees whether they have undergone a procedure and what was their reason. My female correspondents have not had cosmetic surgery, while the male correspondent had otoplasty – his ears pinned back when he was 6 years old. When asking participants what would be the reason if they were ever to decide to undergo a procedure, both Dayeni and Jing said that they would feel more beautiful, and better about themselves. Chen, on the other hand, puts a lot of emphasis on other people's opinion and says the only reason he would consider cosmetic surgery is for people to take him more seriously and respect him. His comment related to the operation he had as a child. Bullying can often be the reason why people feel the need to change their features.

The findings of the first section imply beauty is a complex concept which cannot be unambiguously explained. In order for someone to be considered beautiful **outer appearance is important**. I also found that **cosmetic surgery is widely accepted by the society**, that mainly women opt for artificial alteration of appearance and that the latter is due to the grater purchasing power of women. As far as reasons go, the interviewees were not too eloquent in the first section, so I rather focused on the next five sections. In the next sections I encouraged the interviewees to consider reasons for undergoing cosmetic surgery I postulated in the thesis, more profoundly.

The next set of four questions focused on **governmental pressures** as one of the possible reasons why women opt for cosmetic surgery in China. Asking female interviewees whether they feel the pressure from the government or society to conform to their perception of beauty, both responded very emotionally. Dayeni immediately mentioned challenges women face in the labor market with certain expectation a woman must meet especially if she wants to work in the public eye. Chen also pointed out the labor market challenges women face. Jing, on the other hand, pointed out the monetary aspect of the government pressures. She said beauty is profitable business that fills the government's treasury. All three correspondents felt strongly about the idea of women being expected to look a certain way in order to get ahead.

The 6th question focused on the leftover women. All correspondents knew the term well, and again reacted very emotionally. All three interviewees felt strongly that the government is putting unnecessary pressure on women, who are not to be blamed for the mistakes the government made. All correspondents mentioned the poor pension system and the lack of

finance for elderly people. They explained women are being pressured into marriage with the intention of giving birth to children as soon as possible. I was told that women who are becoming independent and self-sufficient are feeling less affiliated to the country, so the purpose of the government's campaign is to make women feel bad about their achievements, and guilty for not being loyal to the government. Women are thus being guiled into marrying for the sake of having children and restoring stability in the economy. Since she is 27 and single, Jing felt the strongest about this subject. Surprisingly, Chen, the only male correspondent also felt strongly about the impropriety of the government's intentions. He also mentioned the bare branches and how these men feel no pressure in comparison to the leftover women while stating: »They are the real social problem, not women.« I asked the female interviewees if they are feeling the pressure to marry early which they both confirmed. As the subject was too unpleasant for my correspondents, we did not discuss it further.

With the last question of the second section I asked the female interviewees whether they would be willing to undergo cosmetic surgery in order to improve their chances of meeting a well situated man and the male correspondent whether he thinks a lot of women undergo surgery for that reason. While both female interviewees said they would never change their appearance for anyone else but themselves, Chen said there are women whose sole intention is to marry rich and are willing to go to extremes in order to do so, but it is not the norm. He thinks if women: »...have the money to pay for their surgeries themselves, they are independent enough not to need a wealthy man.«

The result of the second section is clear, especially due to the emotional reactions of the interviewees to some of the questions. **The society and the government have a great impact on the self-esteem of women.** The government focuses on the monetary aspect of beauty. Not only is the government filling their treasury with the profits of the lucrative beauty business, but is also pressuring women into marriage and early motherhood in order to reestablish economic balance in the country. However, when asked if women are willing to change their appearance in order to conform to the government's expectation and marry young, the answer was a resounding no.

The third section was dedicated to revealing whether **gender discrimination** is an important determinant in deciding to undergo a surgery. The interviewees were asked to answer four questions, the first revolving around gender discrimination in the workplace. The answer that was most surprising to me was that girls needed higher grades and numerous achievements in order to compete for the same schools as boys with lower grades and less achievements. When it comes to the labor market, all correspondents said it is harder to find a job for a woman than

a man. Jing stressed that highly educated women get lower paid positions, while achieving career success is near to impossible.

When asked whether beautiful women have it easier, again all correspondents affirmed. Jing said: »There is so much competition in the Chinese labor market, it is hard to stand out«, while Chen pointed out that: »it is easier to compete in the market if you are not only smart, educated and accomplished.« Dayeni explained her point of view in a hypothetical situation, where an employer interviewing two equally competent women out of which one was significantly more beautiful, they would offer the job to the prettier one.

After establishing my correspondents all believe women have it harder in the labor market, I asked them whether they would consider cosmetic surgery in order to get a (better) job. The answers were surprising. Dayeni said the reason she is in fact considering cosmetic surgery is to feel better about herself and to boost her self-confidence before she has to enter the labor market. She knows her education, intelligence and achievements will not be enough for her to get a job where she can build herself a successful career. Even though she is otherwise against it, Jing said she would only consider cosmetic surgery in order to obtain a job, because she is aware that her looks are not competitive enough in the labor market. Since she already works, she would only consider changing her appearance if she was to search for a new job. Chen again stressed a woman needs to be beautiful in order to work in the public eye and if her beauty does not come naturally, cosmetic surgery is the only option.

Lastly, I asked my informants if they agree with the proverb »the ugly wife is a treasure at home.« Jing finds that no one should even be entitled to decide who is beautiful and who is not. However, all interviewees again said all women should work. Women who are at home taking care of the husband, their offspring and parents, are dependent on their husbands and are not allowed to live their life to the fullest.

By the end of the third section, it is safe to conclude **gender discrimination still remains a problem in China**. Women are prone to undergoing cosmetic surgery in order to improve their chances of finding a well-paid, high position job. Not only are they competing with men, they are competing with each other. All of the interviewees agree intelligence, education and accomplishments are not enough to build yourself a career if you are a woman in the Chinese labor market. Both female correspondents would consider undergoing cosmetic surgery if it would bring them the much needed competitive advantage in the labor market.

In the next section, I asked four questions about **social media**. The first question was a general question on the time spent on the internet and social media. Chinese are known to spend a great

portion of their free time on the internet. They have numerous platforms, where they can chat, post pictures and videos, microblog and more. In average, Dayeni, Jing and Chen spend up to 3 hours a day on the internet, at least half of it on social media. They all like posting their pictures and they all post at least one photo of themselves a day.

Since all informants like posting their photos, I asked them about how they feel when their photo does not get the reaction they were hoping for and whether that influences their self-esteem. Except Dayeni, who is bothered by the opinion of others and often deletes photos that did not get enough feedback, the other two interviewees say they post photos for themselves and are not bothered by opinions of others. I then asked if they liked using apps that change your appearance as if you had cosmetic surgery. They all confirmed and said that these apps were fun to use and to make them look good. However, implying that these apps could be the reason for them to start thinking about undergoing cosmetic procedures in order to look like the processed photos, they all refuted the idea. They all like to look good in their pictures but Chen, for example, put it as follows: »As far as looking good on social media goes, I can always use apps, rather than scalpels and injections.«

The conclusion of the fourth section is that **social media does influence self-esteem and promotes cosmetic surgery**. None of the interviewees feel they would be willing to undergo cosmetic surgery in order to look good in their pictures without any app processing. However, Dayeni said she did try out apps that show you how you would look if you were to get cosmetic surgery. I told her I read, women often come to consultations with their surgeons with pictures they processed with these apps and say they want to look like the picture. She then told me she knows, the result can never be the same as in the pictures, but it is easier that way for the surgeon to know what you are going for. When she goes to her first consultations, she will also bring along the pictures she took in order to explain to the surgeon how exactly she wants her cosmetic surgery to turn out.

The fifth section of the interviews focused on the **parental interference**. In this section I asked the interviewees to answer three questions related to arranged marriages and their parent's perception of importance of physical appearance in marriage. I started this section off with the question if the informants ever feel pressured by their parents to get married. Jing's reaction was again very emotional since she is at the age of 27 considered a leftover woman. She says the label she has been given is not helping her meet anyone and is only stressing out her parents. They have begun actively searching for someone to marry her daughter. Out of respect for them, she is willing to meet the men her mother finds for her, but is not ready to settle down if she does not feel a connection. Chen said parents are concerned for their own well-being, since it is expected from the children to take care of their parents. He also pointed out that in contrary to

today's youth, parents feel a strong ligament with the government and »...don't want their daughter to be a burden to the society.« Dayeni had similar thoughts as Chen saying: »Less wealthy parents are more inclined to pressure their daughters to marry early and to find a rich husband«.

When asked if their parents believe looks are important when it comes to entering the marriage market, the interviewees all affirmed. However, no one has ever felt the pressure to change anything about themselves by their parents, even though Dayeni and Jing are both single. Jing's father did suggest she should have her nose and chin operated, but he never pressured her to do anything she did not want to do herself. Dayeni said her happiness comes first to her parents. They would never pressure her to hurry into something she is not ready for, but were also very supportive when she told them she will be getting the double eyelid surgery. Chen pointed out some parents are willing to pay for their daughter's surgeries if it would bring a wealthy man into the family, so they would be taken care of as well.

Next I wanted to know what my informants thought about the marriage markets. They have all been to the marriage market, but have never posted their resume. I was told that the success of such matchmaking is really low, and that most of the resumes posted are of women. Chen pointed out that usually women are not the one posting their resumes, it is their parents.

The fifth section taught me that **parents influence the self-esteem of their children only to some extent**. However, my interviewees told me their parents would not want them to undergo any kind of procedure they would not want to undergo themselves. Parents do worry about their own futures, since they are aware of the fact that they will have a financial problem once they retire, but their children mean too much to them to try to force them into marriage just so they will be able to take care of them in their old age. Children thus do **not feel pressured into changing their appearance** for the sake of their parents.

The last section of questions was dedicated to the last proposed reason, **women's self-empowerment**. I only posed two questions in this section. With the first question I wanted to see how my interviewees felt about financial independency of women and the male ideal of beauty. Dayeni explained women who make their own money like to show off their success by purchasing luxurious items and services, cosmetic surgery being one of them. These women are usually proud of their artificial features, since they are an indicator of their success. Chen thought the same. However, when asked if the surgeries women get are just an indirect way of conforming to the male ideal of beauty, they had to reconsider. Chen and Jing both said that the procedures women get are usually the ones men would like as well. It is possible that the male and female ideals are so similar it is hard to determine whether procedures women undergo can

be considered conforming or self-empowerment. Dayeni summed up her thoughts with: »Women just want to feel better about themselves and choose procedures that will make them feel more beautiful« not thinking about what men would want them to look like.

Asked whether they would be willing to consider cosmetic surgery if they were financially independent and wanted to boost their self-confidence, Dayeni answered that she never thought about it that way and realized that she will actually be stating her independence with her surgery. Jing has never considered cosmetic surgery but explains that: »Women just want to do something for themselves« and that beautiful women are more confident and feel more sure of themselves. She says sometimes a minor procedure is all a woman needs to feel empowered and confident enough to reach her full potential.

In the last section I found that opinions on whether women are actually opting for cosmetic surgery in order to feel empowered, or are they conforming to the male ideal of beauty, are divided. This is a broad subject that would need further investigation. As mentioned previously, Wen Hua (2013) also found in her research that Chinese **women's longing for beauty must be seen both as their need to empower themselves as well as their subjugation to men, markets and the state.**

#### **4.3.2 Analysis of the survey**

I found in the analysis of the in-depth interviews that three out of five reasons I proposed, stand out the most. Influencing women's decision to undergo cosmetic surgery the most are the government, gender discrimination and the need to feel empowered and independent. These reasons are highly intertwined since the government is the one that allows gender discrimination in the education system and the workplace, which is why women need to empower themselves in order to succeed and thrive in such environment. The objective of the second part of my research is to confirm or discard this theory. Findings of my survey are presented below.

The first question asked how respondents define beauty. Out of 53 respondents 13 % believe beauty is defined by external appearance, 32 % describe beauty as something that comes from within and 55 % think it is the combination of both.

The second question was designed in the form of a Likert scale, where respondents had to answer whether they strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree or strongly disagree with presented statements. Only one of the respondents that defined beauty as external appearance is satisfied with the way she looks. Otherwise only 9 % of respondents strongly agreed with the statement »I appreciate my appearance«, 25% agreed, 30 % were neutral, 28 % disagreed and 8 % strongly disagreed. At the same time 32 % of respondents strongly agree and 32 % agree with

the statement »Physical appearance is important in today's society« while only 9 % disagree and 2 % strongly disagree. 37 % of women agreeing that appearance is important also feel pressured to meet the ideal beauty standard. Almost 82 % respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement »Better appearance would boost my self-confidence«, 6 % disagreed and 13 % were neutral (average answer was 4.2 and standard deviation 0.87). Similarly, 58 % respondents strongly agreed and 28 % agreed with the statement »Better appearance would increase my professional opportunities«, while only 1 person disagreed and 6 were neutral (average was 4.4 and standard deviation 0.77). When asked how strongly they agree with the statements »Better appearance would make me more friends« and »Better appearance would improve my chances of attracting a potential partner« respondents answers were quite opposite. In both cases there were many neutral answers, while 18 women disagreed that better appearance would make them more friends and 10 disagreed that better appearance would help them attract a man. The results of question 2 are presented in detail in Table 2.

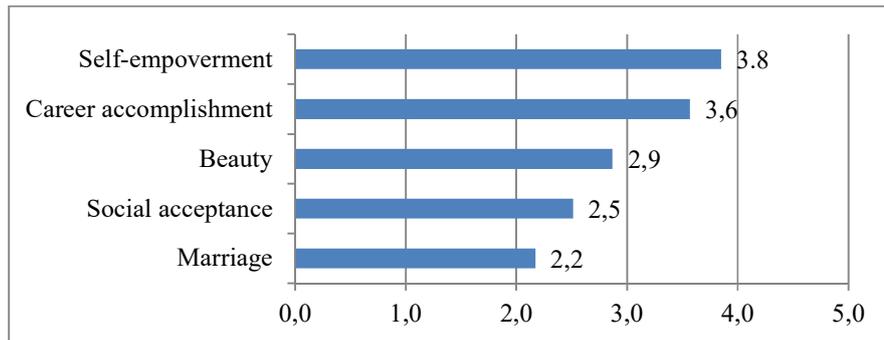
Table 2. The level of agreement with statements relating to the five postulated reasons for undergoing cosmetic surgery

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
I appreciate my appearance	5	13	16	15	4	3,0	1,1
Physical appearance is important in today's society	17	17	13	5	1	3,8	1,1
I feel pressured to meet the ideal beauty standard	5	21	15	11	1	3,3	1,0
Better appearance would make me more friends	3	9	23	18	0	2,9	0,9
Better appearance would boost my self-confidence	22	21	7	3	0	4,2	0,9
Better appearance would improve my chances of attracting a potential partner	5	23	15	9	1	3,4	0,9
Better appearance would increase my professional opportunities	31	15	6	1	0	4,4	0,8
5 point scale: 5 = Strongly agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2= Disagree, 1 = Strongly disagree							

Question 3 asked respondents to rank five values in order of preference, 1 presenting the least important and 5 the most important value. Ranking values by importance, 18 women ranked self-empowerment as the most important value, 6 ranked social acceptance the highest, 3 ranked marriage the highest, 17 ranked career accomplishment highest and 3 ranked beauty the highest. Beauty was ranked lowest by 9 respondents, career accomplishment by 5 respondents, marriage by 20 respondents, social acceptance by 16 respondents and self-empowerment by only 2 respondents. The respondents that ranked self-empowerment the lowest, ranked beauty and social acceptance the highest. Respondents who ranked marriage the highest, ranked beauty and

social acceptance the lowest. The results of question 3 indicate similarity with the findings of the interviews, since most respondents find self-empowerment and career success the most important values. Detailed results of the question are presented in Appendix M. Presented in Figure 1 are the average ranks each value was attributed to.

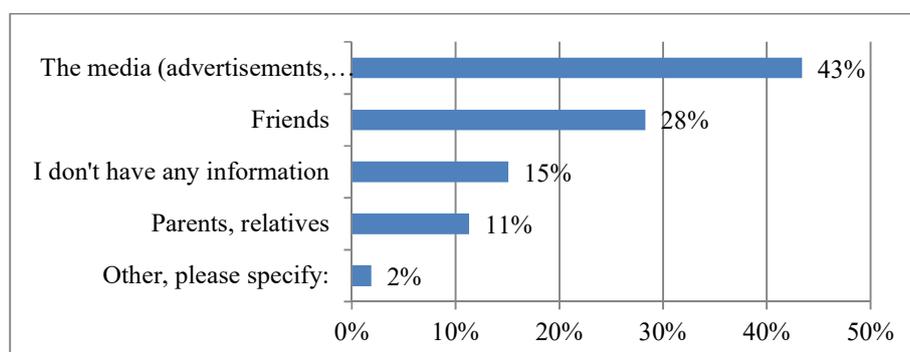
*Figure 1. Values in order of preference (N=53)*



Question 4 asked respondents what were the factors that influenced their confidence in a negative way. 13 women answered pressure from the society influences their confidence the most, while comments from parents and relatives only influence the confidence of 5 women. Results of the fourth question are visually presented in Appendix N. Question 5 was related to the respondent's knowledge about cosmetic surgery. 47 % of women are familiar with the details of cosmetic surgeries, 40 % know the basics, while 13 % are not familiar with the types of procedures and their risks.

Question 6 then asked where do respondents that are familiar with at least the basics of cosmetic surgeries get their information. Most women get their information from the media (43 %), others get information from friends (28 %), parents (11 %), 15 % do not have any information and one respondent said she gets her information from her boyfriend. Results are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Sources of information about cosmetic surgeries (N=53)



Note: \*under other, respondent stated "I get my information from my boyfriend"

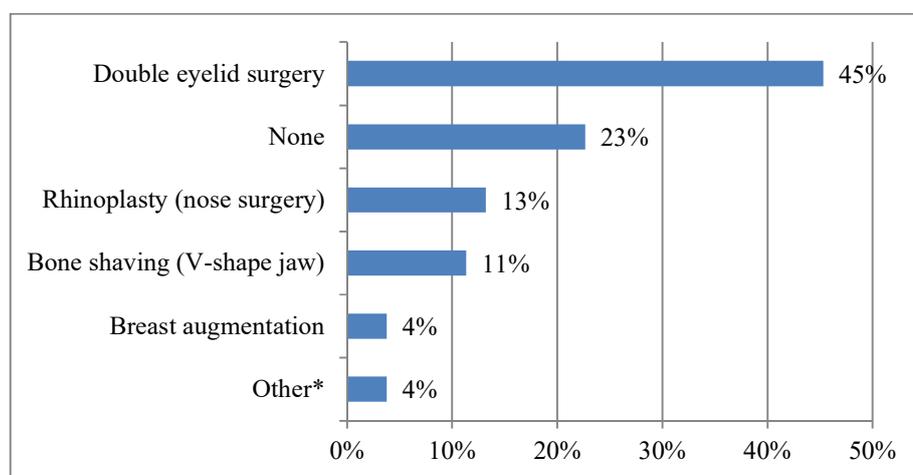
Question 7 was again a Likert type scale where respondents had to state the level of their agreement with four statements. The first statement was »Cosmetic surgery is the most effective way to re-shape the human body.« 56 % of women either strongly agreed or agreed, whereas only 13 % disagreed and 30 % were neutral. 59 % of women either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement »Society feels cosmetic surgery is an acceptable way of changing appearance«, while 11 % disagreed and again 30 % were neutral. 75 % of women agreed and strongly agreed with the statement »Undergoing cosmetic surgery increases self-esteem«, 6 % disagreed and 19 % were neutral. Finally, 66 % of women agreed with the statement »People who have undergone cosmetic surgery get more opportunities«, 17 % disagreed and 17 % were neutral. Detailed results of question 7 are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The level of agreement with statements relating to the respondents perception of cosmetic surgery

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD
Cosmetic surgery is the most effective way to re-shape the human body	15	15	16	7	0	3,7	1,0
Society feels cosmetic surgery is an acceptable way of changing appearance	13	18	16	6	0	3,7	1,0
Undergoing cosmetic surgery increases self-esteem	23	17	10	3	0	4,1	0,9
People who have undergone cosmetic surgery get more opportunities	16	19	9	9	0	3,8	1,1
5 point scale: 5 = Strongly agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2= Disagree, 1 = Strongly disagree							

The results of question 8 showed that only 2 respondents have already undergone cosmetic surgery (both double eyelid surgery), while other 51 have not. 12 also never intend to while 39 would like to undergo cosmetic surgery in the future. When asked which procedure they would like to undergo, 24 women responded double eyelid surgery, 12 would not get cosmetic surgery, 7 would get rhinoplasty, 6 would have their bones shaved into a V shaped face, 2 would get breast augmentation and two stated under other that they would like to get liposuction and otoplasty - ear surgery. Results are graphically presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Procedures respondents would like to undergo (N=53)



Note: \*under other, respondents stated »liposuction« and »ears pinned back«

Question 10 asked participants whether they would keep their cosmetic surgery a secret and 59 % answered no, whereas 41 % said they would keep their surgery a secret. 12 women did not answer question 10. The latter were also the women who answered the eight question negatively, because they never intend to undergo cosmetic surgery.

Question 11 was a Likert type scale as well. Likert scale is the most useful when the objective is to measure characteristics such as attitudes, feelings and opinions. I thus used Likert type scale in three of the questions. This question summed up the research with straight forward statements »I would/did consider cosmetic surgery: because I want to look more western«, »if I was over 27 and unmarried«, »to improve my career opportunities«, »in order to look better on social media«, »to please my parents«, »to have a better chance of finding a partner« and »to boost my self-confidence and feel empowered«. The statements most women agreed with were »if I was over 27 and unmarried« (22 strongly agreed, 13 agreed), »to improve my career opportunities« (23 strongly agreed, 16 agreed) and »to boost my self-confidence and feel

empowered« (25 strongly agreed, 12 agreed) which supports the results of the interviews. Detailed results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The level of agreement with statements on why the respondents would decide to undergo cosmetic surgery

<b>I would/did consider cosmetic surgery:</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
because I want to look more western	0	0	6	24	23	1,7	0,7
if I was over 27 and unmarried	22	13	7	8	3	3,8	1,3
to improve my career opportunities	23	16	5	5	4	3,9	1,3
in order to look better on social media	0	4	15	19	15	2,2	0,9
to please my parents	4	10	19	18	2	2,9	1,0
to have a better chance of finding a partner	0	8	14	21	10	2,4	1,0
to boost my self-confidence and feel empowered	25	12	10	3	3	4,0	1,2
5 point scale: 5 = Strongly agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2= Disagree, 1 = Strongly disagree							

In the analysis of my interviews, I found that the government, gender discrimination and the need to feel empowered are the reasons why Chinese women decide to undergo cosmetic surgery. Analysis of the survey confirmed a larger sample also finds these three reasons to stand out among the postulated five. I tested the latter by asking the respondents to state the level of agreement with statements corresponding to each postulated reason. The statements with which most correspondents agreed were the statement »if I was over 27 and unmarried« which corresponds to the government, statement »to improve my career opportunities« which corresponds to gender discrimination and finally statement »to boost my self-confidence and feel empowered« which corresponds to self-empowerment. However, when testing whether the respondents find these three reasons equally important when deciding to undergo cosmetic surgery, I found the respondents ranked the three reasons differently and are thus not equally important.

In order to determine whether the findings from the survey can affirm the findings from the in-depth interviews, I ran a paired sample t-test assuming the means of two dependent samples are equal. I ran the test for each of the possible combinations between the three variables representing each of the reasons. Another assumption I made after the analysis of the interviews was that there is a correlation between the three reasons, which would mean that women who would decide to undergo cosmetic surgery if they were over 27 (variable 1) would likely

consider cosmetic surgery to improve their career opportunities (variable 2) and to feel empowered (variable 3).

Comparing survey answers on variable 1 and variable 2 and examining descriptive statistics, it is obvious that the two variables do not differentiate a lot, since the mean of variable 1 is 3.8 and the mean of variable 2 is 3.9. To provide a formal test for equality of means for variable 1 and variable 2, I ran a paired sample t-test which resulted in a t-test statistic of -0.724 and exact level of significance, i.e. p-value, of 0.472. I am unable to reject that women who would decide to undergo cosmetic surgery if they were over 27, would find undergoing cosmetic surgery in order to increase career opportunities equally important. The results of paired sample statistics and test for variable 1 and 2 can be seen in Appendix O. Moving on to the second pair and comparing answers on variable 1 and variable 3, I again found the average answers to be similar (mean of variable 1 is 3.8 and mean of variable 3 is 4.0). I run the same t-test as for variable 1 and 2 to find whether importance assigned to being over 27 and unmarried, and to self-empowerment are equally important. The results show, respondents find these two reasons equally important. The results can be seen in Appendix P.

The last pair I compared were variables 2 and 3. Descriptive statistics showed the mean of the variable 2 is 3.9 and the mean of variable 3 is 4.0. Running the t-test for the last pair of variables, I am unable to reject that women deciding to undergo cosmetic surgery find the reason to improve career opportunities equally important to undergoing cosmetic surgery to feel empowered. The results can be seen in Appendix R.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Results interpretation and key findings**

My qualitative research included three in-depth interviews and a survey with the goal to get a better understanding of Chinese women view on cosmetic surgery and to determine what the reasons behind their decision to undergo cosmetic surgery are. My secondary data review showed that there are five reasons most frequently mentioned in the literature. I focused my qualitative research on these reasons. Based on the results I obtained through all of the research methods, I can conclude, that three reasons stand out the most. The survey also showed they are equally important.

As mentioned above, I divided the interviews into six sections, first one discussing cosmetic surgery in general, while the other five focused on the reasons assumed in the thesis. In the first section, I found that cosmetic surgery is considered a luxury service, becoming accessible to a

wider population due to the rise in the purchasing power. At the same time, cosmetic surgery is becoming widely accepted by the society. Respondents, however, usually do not contemplate possible personal reasons behind the decisions of others to undergo cosmetic surgery.

Posing specific questions related to each of the reasons, some of them induced strong emotional reactions. I found respondents felt strongly about the government's pressure on women. Not only in the workplace, women are feeling the pressure in their personal life as well. Gender discrimination is still quite present throughout women's life in China even in the era when gender selective abortions are not as widely present anymore and the one-child policy is refuted. Women are expected to achieve more, while actually being prevented to get ahead due to the government's needs to utilize them as means of regulation of the economy.

In order to overcome the pressures they are faced with their whole life, women feel the need to empower themselves by becoming financially and emotionally independent. Whereas purchasing luxury items can bring temporary surfactant satisfaction, purchasing cosmetic surgery can bring the sense of fulfillment and inner contentment. Contrary to the literature, I found that social media is not that important in women's decision to undergo cosmetic surgery. However, apps used to beautify a picture before posting it online can be of help to show the desired after look to the surgeon. As far as pressure from parents goes, I found that direct pressure to alter appearance in order to either find a partner who will take care of parents, or to obtain a job with which the whole family could benefit from, is not common.

Drawing from the findings of the interviews, I conducted a survey. The objective was to determine whether these findings can be applied to a larger sample. Just like the interview, I divided the survey into sections, one relating to general information about beauty and cosmetic surgery, while the others focused on the reasons assumed in the thesis. I found in the survey as well as in the interviews that beauty and physical appearance is important in today's society, whereas respondents do not feel pressured to conform to the beauty standards dictated by the society. The most interesting finding is that when ranking a set of values, respondents in average ranked beauty as the least important value in their lives, while self-empowerment was in average ranked as the most important value. Women who ranked self-empowerment as the most important value also think physical appearance is important in today's society and believe that society considers cosmetic surgery an acceptable way of changing appearance. 83 % of these women are considering undergoing cosmetic surgery in the future.

While not knowing a lot about cosmetic surgery, especially the risks, since most information the respondents have come from the media, the vast majority of respondents still want to undergo cosmetic surgery in the future. The research also found double eyelid surgery to be the

most popular procedure and that over half of the respondents would feel comfortable undergoing cosmetic surgery and would not try to keep it a secret.

The most important finding of my research is that women believe appearance is important in today's society and that being better looking can boost one's confidence and increase professional opportunities. These women also believe cosmetic surgery is accepted by the society and that people who undergo cosmetic surgery have higher self-esteem and get better opportunities in life. Those are also two main reasons why these women would consider undergoing cosmetic surgery. The reason that stands out the most, which women find important as well, is that they would be willing to undergo cosmetic surgery if they were over 27 years old and still unmarried. The connection between the three reasons that stand out the most are the society and the government. Since the objective of my thesis is to determine which of the reasons identified with the help of literature is the most probable so that I will be able to find an appropriate marketing approach for that group of customers, I can conclude, that the government and the society are the reasons women feel the need to conform to what is considered the beauty ideal.

## **5.2 Limitations**

The empirical research has certain limitations which have to be taken into account when analyzing results. Since my research was conducted in a foreign culture I will divide the limitations into two categories, one discussing the fact that international research inherently have unique specificities, while the second category will discuss general limitations of the research.

### **5.2.1 Specific limitations related to foreign culture research**

International marketing research is more complex than domestic research due to the following factors which affect the conceptual, methodological and organizational starting points of international marketing research (Hrastelj & Makovec Brenčič, 2006, p. 52):

- differences between markets (linguistic, cultural, etc.): It is especially important from the linguistic point of view that the questions a researcher poses have the same or at least comparable meaning in all languages, since certain cultural characteristics do not even have a conceptual equivalent in another language (Mooij, 2011, p. 34),
- lack of secondary data for numerous foreign markets and countries,
- higher cost of obtaining primary data, especially in less developed countries,
- problems associated with coordination and data collection in different environments.

### **5.2.2 General research limitations**

Although in-depth interviews provide much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods, they have certain limitations. Because in-depth interviews are time consuming and my time in China was limited, I only got to carry out three interviews. I also had a hard time finding informants who would be willing to speak about procedures they have already undergone. My interviewees were thus people I met through mutual friends, who were prepared to take a few hours of their time to discuss cosmetic surgery with me. One of the interviewees was male, which meant I had to adapt some of the questions. I was then limited to only taking notes since all of the three interviewees asked me not to record the interviews. I had to take detailed notes while still holding up the conversation. Since I was not able to take as detailed notes as I would like to, I kept in touch with the interviewees to question them additionally if any answers needed further explanation. Most important limitation of my analysis, however, was that the results are not generalizable and it is even hard to compare candidates since the objective of my research was to get a deeper insight into thinking patterns and personal beliefs of the interviewees.

Just like interviews, surveys have their limitations as well. The most important limitation in my research was the sample size. I included all class participants willing to take 10 to 15 minutes of their time after class to answer my questionnaire, thus creating a purposive sample including only women aged between 20 and 25. The sample is therefore not representative, which means that the results of the survey cannot be generalized to the entire population. In my research I found that the Chinese do not pay enough attention to marketing research before deciding on a marketing strategy for their product or service. In order to attract customers and increase sales, it would be recommendable to conduct a similar research in the future, but rather on a larger, representative sample.

### **5.3 Implications**

Determining the most probable reason why women in China decide to surgically alter their appearance are the society and the government, I am able to propose the most effective message a marketing strategy reaching the target group of consumers should portray. Firstly, it is necessary to emphasize, that the research sample on which I conducted my research was too small for me to be able to generalize my findings to the population. In order to determine whether my findings apply to the population, further research needs to be carried out.

During my travel in China I saw numerous cosmetic surgery advertisements, almost none of them with content. Posters, billboards and internet ads mostly present only the services a clinic

provides or before and after pictures of patients who have presumably undergone cosmetic surgery at their clinic. In order to portray the benefits of undergoing cosmetic surgery it is important to understand the decision-making process on why people would even be willing to consider cosmetic surgery and what they wish would be the outcome. My research found, women want to belong and feel included in the society, they want to be equivalent to men and receive the same opportunities. They want society to accept and encourage them to strive for independence and success. Right now, the role of women in China is still not clear. The government expects women to marry and birth the next generations that will solve problems China will be facing soon. The government does, however, have an interest in the development of cosmetic surgery market, due to the fact that it is a lucrative business. Advertisement does not have many regulations in contrary to many other Western countries in the world that ban cosmetic surgery advertising. The only regulation China imposed is a ban on television and radio advertising of products that promised breast enhancement, weight loss or increased height (Hays, 2015). Thus, underground parlors, for example, mostly advertise on social media, shopping platforms and similar internet websites. Certified clinics, on the other hand, are not putting that much effort into advertising.

Drawing from my research, I am able to highlight what needs to be taken into consideration when creating a marketing strategy for a cosmetic surgery provider. First and most important is the understanding of the decision-making process which makes it easier to make advertising campaigns personal. My research found, women are not always comfortable with openly discussing cosmetic surgery and admitting to having undergone certain procedures. Body image being a sensitive subject, it is important to take into account that many women are not comfortable with anyone knowing they underwent cosmetic surgery. It is thus important to reassure patients that their procedures are highly classified. My research also showed not a lot of women are clear on consequences cosmetic surgery can bring. Women mostly get their information from the media, but the information they get is too scarce. It is thus important to educate women on the types of procedures, methods used, possible adverse effects and the realistic possibilities of achieving the desired results.

Last but not least I found the most common reason women decide to undergo cosmetic surgery is because of the pressure they feel from the society and the government. I found the ultimate goal of women is to empower themselves in order to become equivalent to men and to change the perception about their role in society. Cosmetic surgery is just a means that can help women feel better about themselves and consequently increase their self-esteem. It is the confidence they will gain that will help them overcome the prejudices that are so deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Emphasizing the latter could just be the one factor that is needed for a successful marketing campaign.

To create a marketing strategy with a content that would effectively address the target audience of women who decide to undergo cosmetic surgery to empower themselves, achieve career success and last but not least defeat the stigma that haunts leftover women, certain guidelines have to be considered. The Chinese spend a significant amount of time online and using social media. A marketing campaign must thus focus all efforts on making the internet campaign as effective as possible. Creating company's own website, where surgeons would be able to discuss questions directly with the patients is of most importance. Since the qualifications of surgeons are what most cosmetic surgery patients want to see before deciding on a surgeon, the history of education including certificates on qualifications should be available for patients to see on the company's website. Advertising services on forums and blogs discussing cosmetic surgery and other beauty forums is also vital. Surgeons could take part in the forums as well. Developing its own app or a game, promoting its services, could benefit company's sales as well. In addition to internet advertising, I would recommend companies to post their advertisements on billboards of business districts and busy streets. Past experience have also shown celebrities endorsing a company have a great impact on women, making them think if they were to undergo cosmetic surgery themselves, they would have the option to become rich and famous. Endorsing a celebrity can thus present an effective method of marketing.

However, all advertising would be in vain if it would not appeal to the target segment of customers. In order to achieve desired results all advertisement, according to the findings of my research, must include some key points. Since people are not educated enough about the risks of surgeries, those must be somehow presented in the advertisement. The latter would also exclude any possibility of legal persecution due to misleading advertisement. Positive effects of looking beautiful must be presented as well. If women were to see how beauty can benefit their lives, help them get ahead in the business world and find an A-quality husband, they would rather consider altering their appearance in order to achieve what women in the advertisement achieved with the help of cosmetic surgery.

In China however, with women being used to pressure and usually subdue to it, the opposite approach can be used. Advertisement could portray negative effects affecting the women not conforming to what is expected of them and what could be the possible consequences of not undergoing surgery in order to look like the rest of society. This idea was already tested in Korea, with a South Korean director Doyeon Noh creating a short horror film which portrays a young girl living in a world of people who have all undergone extreme cosmetic surgery and all look the same, only she has jet to conform. Everyone, including her parents are rejecting her until she finds an underground cosmetic surgery parlor, where she receives her transformation for free. The film highlights the issues of Korea's obsession over plastic surgery and points out how people are expected to conform to the society's perception of beauty. This method is risky

and ethically controversial, but there is a strong possibility of success of such advertisement in the Chinese market, since women have already internalized the leftover women propaganda and the normality of gender discrimination.

## CONCLUSION

In my master's thesis, I have extensively analyzed the Chinese cosmetic surgery market. In accordance with the objectives set in the thesis, I carried out a quantitative research by examining literature and analyzing various aspects of the cosmetic surgery market. With the help of literature, I examined the history of beauty ideals and cosmetic surgery, and marketing aspects of the cosmetic surgery market. Looking into reasons why Chinese women decide to undergo cosmetic surgery, I found there are five that stand out the most: governmental pressures, gender discrimination, social media, parental interference and self-empowerment. Once I examined each reason, I carried out additional research in a form of in-depth interviews and a short survey.

Reviewing the literature, I found beauty ideals have been changing throughout history and so have the trends in cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery in ancient China was used solely to preserve the deceased's appearance after their death. Later on, in the time of World War I and II, cosmetic surgery was used to help the victims who were injured in the war. Modern cosmetic surgery only began taking shape with the westernization of the markets. Since then, the most popular procedure remains the double eyelid procedure that gives Chinese women an additional fold in the eyelid in order for their eyes to appear larger. Large eyes are the ultimate beauty ideal in China, but since only half of Chinese population is born with the double eyelid, in order to achieve the desired feature, Chinese women decide to undergo cosmetic surgery (Chow K., 2014).

When examining the marketing aspects of the cosmetic surgery market in China, I found that most advertisement lacks in content and does not focus on a particular segment. In addition, advertisement exaggerates the results achieved and lacks in information on surgeons' qualifications as well as information on possible undesirable results. The only regulation China imposes is a ban on television and radio advertising of products that promise breast enhancement, weight loss or increased height (Hays, 2015). Due to the lack of regulation in the market, underground parlors advertise their services mostly on social media, which is the least regulated marketing channel that gets the highest volume of customers. The latter are usually not aware of the consequences they could face if one of the underqualified surgeons performing the surgery fails to deliver the service properly. Proper advertisement of qualified suppliers is

thus crucial in order to deter consumers from resorting to underqualified surgeons, just because their service is cheaper.

Looking further into the reasons behind the decision to undergo cosmetic surgery I found some interesting facts about the Chinese market and culture. The first reason I examined was the governmental pressure women are faced with in China. Conducting research for my thesis introduced me to the term *shengnu*. What I found was that women over 27 years of age are being stigmatized as a social problem, because they have not yet gotten married and given birth. Why reproduction is so important is that the Chinese population is aging, while the workforce is becoming scarce. Instead of turning to themselves, the government rather blames women for the situation that is actually a result of government's family planning regulations. The second reason I researched was gender discrimination. The latter is namely present in the work place, where women are prevented from advancing, if they are even able to obtain a job. The third reason was social media. I found women are feeling pressured into conforming to the beauty standards the society finds ideal in order to be competitive on social media. The ideal I found most troubling is the extreme thinness, which is often taken to extremes and can result in diseases such as anorexia and bulimia. The fourth reason was parental interference. Parents still play a major part in children's love lives. Being at risk, that their pensions will not be high enough to live comfortably in their old age, they wish for their daughters to marry rich, so the husband could take care of the whole family financially. The other reason parents want their daughters to get married is because of their affiliation to the government. They do not wish for their daughters to be stigmatized and feel the need to oblige to the government's requirements. The last reason I examined was self-empowerment. I found women are internalizing the government's pressure and the pressure from their parents as well as the social media. In order to resist this pressure, women feel the need to succeed on their own more than ever. They wish to be financially and emotionally independent.

Drawing from the conclusions of my literature review, I conducted three in-depth interviews and a survey. In the interviews, I found that although women are being pressured from many directions, they are most influenced by the government, which still makes use of gender discrimination despite the strong promotion of gender equality in the last few decades. Chinese women are mostly exposed to discrimination in the workplace. The government wishes for the women's place in the society to remain in the role of family and children caretakers, rather than successful career women. That is why there is almost no regulation on discrimination of women in the workplace. Parents and the social media, however, are usually not the reason why women in China feel the need to conform to the society's ideals. In my interviews, I found the reason why women are deciding to undergo cosmetic surgery is usually to state independence, feel empowered and to gain respect and equal opportunities than man.

Finding that women feel so strongly about their role in society, I wanted to examine if the three reasons that stood out the most in the interviews are also the ones that survey respondents find important. Further, I wanted to see if these reasons are connected or do women rank them in importance and in this case, which is the most important. I indeed found governmental pressures, gender discrimination and self-empowerment are the reasons women in many cases decide to undergo cosmetic surgery. My analysis shows that the reasons are equally important. However, due to the small research sample I am not able to generalize these findings to a broader population.

Lastly, I applied the findings of my research to highlight what lacks in the marketing of cosmetic surgery businesses and to suggest how to make advertisement more efficient. One of the most important findings was that underground illegal parlors advertise their services on the social media, since the latter are the least regulated. Promoting low prices and special discounts, they lure customers into purchasing their services, without disclosing the possible risks and educational background and qualifications of the person who will be performing the surgery. The advertisement of qualified clinics must thus primarily be educational and explanatory. Since the Chinese spend so much of their time online, I believe it is important to make social media, blogs and forums the key promotional channels. Finally, since current promotion usually lacks the content, I also suggested making it more efficient by being interactive and insinuating.

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## **APPENDIXES**



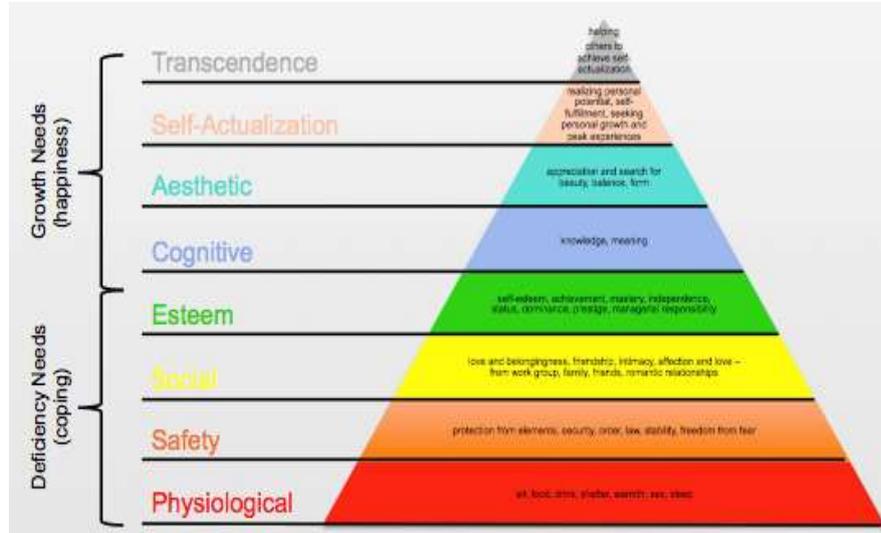
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## APPENDIX A: Graphic presentation of Maslow's eight-stage Hierarchy of needs model

Figure 1. Graphic presentation of Maslow's eight-stage Hierarchy of needs model



Source: D. Fossas, The Purpose Economy, Part 2: Foundational Human Behavior, 2015.

## APPENDIX B: Before and after photo of Hao Lulu

Figure 2. Before and after photo of Hao Lulu



Source: E. Shan, Hyped beauty takes girls under knife, 2004.

## APPENDIX C: Before and after photo of Yang Yuan

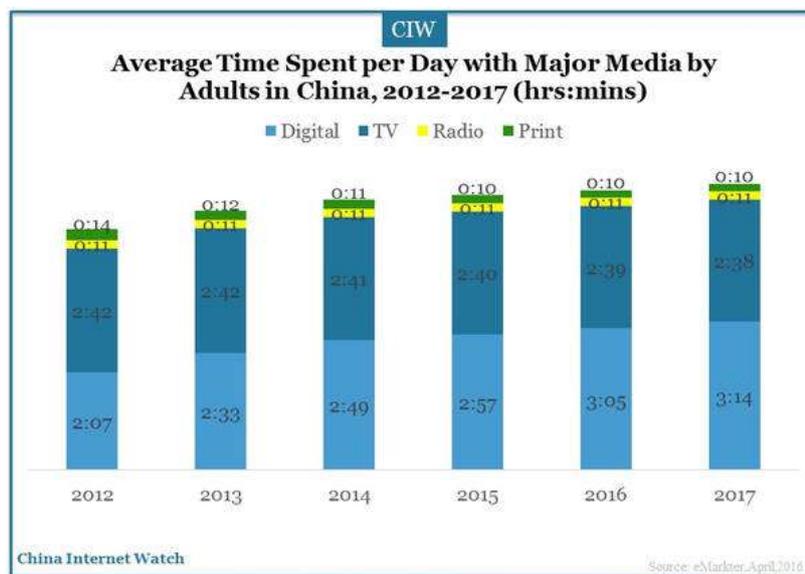
Figure 3. Before and after photo of Yang Yuan



Source: China Daily, New wealth buys a fresh face in modern China, 2017.

## APPENDIX D: Average time spent per day with major media by adults in China, 2012-2017

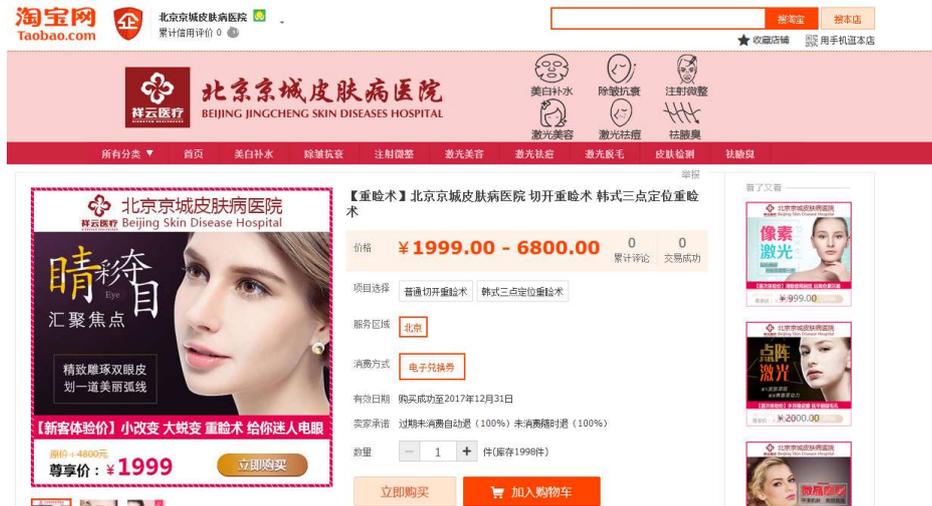
Figure 4. Average time spent per day with major media by adults in China, 2012-2017



Source: Incitez China, China adults spend more time in digital media in 2016, 2017.

## APPENDIX E: An example of cosmetic surgery advertising (online shop)

Figure 5. An example of cosmetic surgery advertising (online shop)



Source: TaoBao.com, 2017.

## APPENDIX F: Examples of cosmetic surgery advertisements

Figure 6. An example of cosmetic surgery advertisement (billboard)



Source: O. Lam, How Social Media Fuels China's Growing Love of Cosmetic Surgery, 2017.

Figure 7. Various brochures distributed by cosmetic surgery clinics and hospitals



Source: W. Hua, *Buying Beauty: Cosmetic Surgery in China*, 2017.

Figure 8. Locations of cosmetic surgery clinics in Beijing



Source: 精品購物指南 (Fine Goods Shopping Guide) 芭比的金融危機 (The Crisis of Barbie), 2017.

Figure 9. An advertisement for breast augmentation in a taxi



Source: W. Hua, *Buying Beauty: Cosmetic Surgery in China*, 2017.

## APPENDIX G: Leftover women propaganda 1

Figure 10. Leftover women propaganda 1



Source: M. E. Cunningham, *Leftover Women: In Pictures*, 2017.

## APPENDIX H: Leftover women propaganda campaign 2

Figure 41. Leftover women propaganda campaign 2



Source: M. E. Cunningham, *Leftover Women: In Pictures*, 2017.

## APPENDIX I: Social media beauty challenges

Figure 12. Social media beauty challenges



Source: S. Yeh, 6 ridiculous 'beauty challenges' on Chinese social media, 2017.

## APPENDIX J: Descriptive statistics

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	Age	Employment status	Marital status	Monthly net income
Mean	22.57	2.74	1.32	4.49
Standard Error	0.20	0.19	0.07	0.31
Median	23	4	1	4
Mode	23	4	1	7
Standard Deviation	1.42	1.40	0.51	2.25
Sample Variance	2.02	1.97	0.26	5.06
Range	5	3	2	6
Minimum	20	1	1	1
Maximum	25	4	3	7
Sum	1196	145	70	238
Count	53	53	53	53

## APPENDIX K: Survey questionnaire design

Hello,

My name is Alja Sosič (alja.sosic@gmail.com), I am a student of International Business at the Faculty of Economic in Ljubljana, Slovenia. I am conducting a research for my master's thesis titled: " Marketing Beauty: Analysis of Cosmetic Surgery Market in China" under the mentorship of Vida Irena PhD. In order to better understand the view on cosmetic surgery in China, I designed the survey below. The survey is taken anonymously and the results are confidential. There are XX questions that should take you about 10 minutes to answer. Please answer the questions truthfully.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

-----

1. How do you define "beauty"?

- a) external appearance
- b) inner beauty
- c) both

2. On the scale from 1 to 5 (1 being Strongly disagree, 5 being Strongly agree) mark how strongly you agree with the next statements:

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
I appreciate my appearance	1	2	3	4	5
Physical appearance is important in today's society	1	2	3	4	5
I feel pressured to meet the ideal beauty standard	1	2	3	4	5
Better appearance would make my life better and happier	1	2	3	4	5
Better appearance would boost my self-confidence	1	2	3	4	5
Better appearance would improve my chances of attracting a potential partner	1	2	3	4	5
Better appearance would increase my professional opportunities	1	2	3	4	5

3. Rank the following values in order of preference, 1 being your most important and 5 the least important value.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Beauty
- \_\_\_\_\_ Career accomplishment
- \_\_\_\_\_ Marriage
- \_\_\_\_\_ Social acceptance
- \_\_\_\_\_ Self-empowerment

4. What are the factors that can make you lose your self-confidence?

- a) Pressure from opposite sex
- b) Comments from peers
- c) Comments from my partner
- d) Comments from my parents or relatives
- e) Pressure from the society
- f) Social media
- g) Other, please specify:

5. How much do you know about cosmetic surgery?

- a) Familiar
- b) Not familiar
- c) To some extent

6. Where does the majority of your information about cosmetic surgery come from?

- a) The media (advertisements, internet, celebrities)
- b) Friends
- c) Relatives, parents

- d) I don't have any information
- e) Other, please specify:

On the scale from 1 to 5 (1 being Strongly disagree, 5 being Strongly agree) rank how strongly do you agree with the next statements:

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
Cosmetic surgery is the most effective way to re-shape the human body	1	2	3	4	5
Society feels cosmetic surgery is an acceptable way of changing appearance	1	2	3	4	5
Undergoing cosmetic surgery increases self-esteem	1	2	3	4	5
People who have undergone cosmetic surgery get more opportunities	1	2	3	4	5

8. Have you undergone cosmetic surgery yourself?

- a) Yes
- b) No and I do not intend to
- c) No, but I would like to
- d) I do not wish to answer

9. Which procedure would you like to/did you undergo?

- a) rhinoplasty (nose surgery)
- b) breast augmentation
- c) double eyelid surgery
- d) bone shaving (V-Shape jaw)
- e) none
- f) other, please specify:

10. Would/did you keep your cosmetic surgery a secret?

- a) Yes
- b) No

11. On the scale from 1 to 5 (1 being Strongly disagree, 5 being Strongly agree) rank how strongly do you agree with the next statements:

<b>I would/did consider cosmetic surgery:</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
because I want to look more western	1	2	3	4	5
if I was over 27 and unmarried	1	2	3	4	5

to improve my career opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
in order to look better on social media	1	2	3	4	5
to please my parents	1	2	3	4	5
to have a better chance of finding a partner	1	2	3	4	5
to boost my self-confidence and feel empowered	1	2	3	4	5

12. Gender:

- a) female
- b) male

13. Age:

- a) 20
- b) 21
- c) 22
- d) 23
- e) 24
- f) 25

14. Employment status

- a) student work
- b) part-time employment
- c) full time employment
- d) I do not work
- e) I do not wish to answer

15. Marital status

- a) single
- b) in a relationship
- c) married
- d) I do not wish to answer

16. What is your average net monthly income?

- a) less than 100 RMB
- b) from 101 RMB to 200 RMB
- c) from 201 RMB to 300 RMB
- d) from 301 RMB to 400 RMB
- e) from 401 RMB to 500 RMB
- f) more than 501 RMB
- g) I do not wish to answer

## **APPENDIX L: In-depth interviews reports**

### **DAYENI WANG – 21**

#### **1. How do you define beauty?**

I think both inner and outer beauty are important. People who are beautiful are those who have a great personality, which makes them beautiful on the outside as well.

#### **2. Cosmetic surgery is gaining popularity in China. Why so you think that is?**

China has been evolving in the past few decades. Minimum and average wage have both risen. I would say people have more money to spend and are spending it on luxury.

#### **3. Do you think surgical alteration of appearance is becoming more accepted by the society?**

Yes. With so many people undergoing cosmetic surgery, it has become common. It's not such a big deal as it once was. Don't get me wrong, people are still not walking around with bandages, but at least they admit to having something done.

#### **4. Have you undergone cosmetic surgery? If you were thinking about it, what would be the reason?**

No yet, but I am thinking about it once I save up enough money. I know it's mainstream but I would like the double eyelid surgery. I think it would open up my face, since my eyes are now really narrow. Well the reason I guess is I would feel prettier. I just want to be the best version of myself.

#### **5. Some say beauty is a currency system, and is determined by politics in China. Have you ever felt that the government's pressure was the reason you felt the need to conform to the standards of beauty dictated by society?**

I have. You wouldn't believe how many job positions specify appearance requirements. I really wanted to work at the theatre in Shanghai, but I was turned away because of my appearance. They did not specify what exactly was wrong with me, they just said I would not fit in with the other employees. I know other women have experienced similar situations as well and it does make you think if you will ever be able to obtain a job if you don't conform to these expectations. At least private firms are not that strict.

#### **6. Have you heard of the term 'shengnü' - leftover women? What do you think about the government's implications that unmarried women over 27 are becoming a social problem in China?**

I know the term. I don't think women are to be blamed for the problems China is facing. China has a problem with aging population. The government is pressuring young women to birth children as soon as possible to mitigate the consequences of the aging population and the poor pension system. Women are being pressured as if they were responsible for the present situation. The government forgets that women are the one who can have their pick in men. Men are abundant in China, which means women can be more picky with their partners and that takes time. We can't be expected to marry the first men we meet and birth children right away, but that's what the government wants.

**7. Do you feel pressured into marrying early in order to meet the expectations of the government?**

I feel the pressure, since I am constantly being forced the idea. Even the one child policy is supposed to be abolished next year. If that isn't pressure I don't know what is, but I am not going to marry just for the sake of it. I will marry when I find someone worthy, if I'm 30 by then, so be it.

**8. Would you consider undergoing surgical procedures in order to improve your chances of meeting a well situated man?**

There is an abundance of men in China but few are marriage material. The best men usually want a young and a very beautiful woman, but if a man doesn't like me for who I am, I wouldn't be willing to change for him.

**9. Gender discrimination is still present in China, especially in the educational system and the workplace. Are women having a hard time getting into schools and finding a job?**

Girls still have to have better grades than boys to get to ivy league schools, even though education is the same for both genders. It's hard for me to say how hard it is for women to find a job, since I have only worked as a student. We've already talked about my first labor market experience, but I really hope the situation will change once I start looking for a full time employment.

**10. Do you think it is easier to achieve success if you are considered beautiful?**

If an employer had to choose between two equally competent women and one was significantly more beautiful than the other, he would probably choose the beautiful one. It is easier to advance if you are beautiful, yes.

**11. Would you be willing to undergo surgery to improve your chances of getting a job?**

Unfortunately we all know, society is not going to change anytime soon and if I want to get a good job, it would be easier for me to adapt a few of my features, so I would have the competitive advantage because of my looks, since my education will probably not be enough.

**12. Do you believe a woman that is considered unattractive should not work, stay at home and take care of children and elderly parents?**

Of course not. All women deserve a chance to partake in education, establish a career and become independent. Women who marry just to stay at home and take care of the family in my opinion can't be fully happy. They will never be independent, travel and live life to the fullest. They are both financially and emotionally dependent on their husbands.

**13. How much time do you spend on the internet? How much of it is on social media? Do you post your pictures on social media?**

At least 3 to 4 hours a day and the vast majority of it on social media. I like posting my pictures, especially when I travel or attend an event. I don't always post selfies, but a lot of pictures either include me or my friends.

**14. How do you feel if the picture you have posted doesn't get the reaction you were hoping for? Do you feel bad about yourself if you don't get enough likes?**

Honestly, I always like it when people comment and like my photos. Who doesn't feel good about themselves when they get compliments? I have deleted pictures in the past if it didn't get enough likes. I never thought about it too much, but wouldn't have deleted the pictures people didn't like if I didn't care about their opinion.

**15. Have you ever used an app to change your appearance before you posted your picture?**

Most apps have the option to apply filters while taking your picture. I make use of these apps regularly. I did download an app that changes your face the way you want and then tells you which procedure you would have to get to achieve this look

**16. Have you ever felt pressured to consider cosmetic surgery because of social media?**

Not particularly. Social media can motivate you to think about it, but ultimately,

**17. Women are also being pressured into marriage by their parents. Have you ever felt the pressure from your parents to get married?**

They did express their concern, because I am currently single, but I still have time. Maybe they will start pressuring me if I don't find a boyfriend for another few years. I think less wealthy parents are more inclined to pressure their daughters to marry early and to find a rich husband.

**18. Do your parents believe looks are important when it comes to entering the marriage market? Would your parents ever pressure you to change your appearance in order to improve your chances of meeting a better partner?**

My mom did tell me I will be able to find a better man, because I am good looking. I don't think she would pressure me to change myself if I weren't beautiful. I've got schoolmates whose parents paid for their cosmetic surgery, but they wanted to get the surgeries themselves.

**19. Have you ever been to a marriage market? Have you or your parents ever posted your resume in one of these markets?**

I have been to the Shanghai marriage market, but I have never posted my resume and neither have my parents. I find it interesting how most of the resumes are of girls. There are so much more single man than women, but women are the one looking actively for a partner. I guess it is because women are in a hurry to find someone or want to find a good man, whereas successful men have no trouble finding a partner, and those less successful wait until a women is desperate enough to lower her standards.

**20. Would you say women's financial independency is one of the reasons women get cosmetic surgery? Is it to feel empowered, or are they conforming to the male ideal of beauty?**

Women who make their own money are usually very proud of their accomplishments. Some show it by purchasing luxury items such as a really expensive pair of shoes, a bag or even an expensive car, others like to show their success with a new pair of eyelids. I don't think it is the male ideal of beauty, I think women just want to feel better about themselves and choose procedures that will make them feel more beautiful.

**21. Would you consider undergoing cosmetic surgery if you were financially independent and wanted to boost your self-confidence?**

My friends and parents know I intend to get the double eyelid surgery once I save up my own money, if that means I'm getting the surgery to show them I can do whatever I want with my money, than yes, I would consider cosmetic surgery because of my financial independency. I guess I am stating my independence with this surgery.

**JING ZHENG – 27**

**1. How do you define beauty?**

Beauty comes from within. For me, someone is beautiful if they are kind and warm.

**2. Cosmetic surgery is gaining popularity in China. Why so you think that is?**

It's like Hollywood in the US. People want to look like all the fake celebrities. It's the same in China. Once Fan BingBing, she is a really famous actress here in China, spoke openly about having cosmetic surgery done to reshape her face, it's just become the new trend. Girls and women have been going under the knife to achieve the same look ever since.

**3. Do you think surgical alteration of appearance is becoming more accepted by the society?**

Certainly, the society is the one pushing people to change themselves. Pictures of celebrities and before/after pictures are everywhere. Celebrities are even endorsing campaigns for cosmetic surgery clinics. So it's not only that the society is more acceptant, it is encouraging people to use cosmetics and undergo cosmetic procedures.

**4. Have you undergone cosmetic surgery? If you were thinking about it, what would be the reason?**

No. I have never even thought about changing something about myself. I was however suggested to start with hyaluronic acid injections from my friends, since it is supposed to postpone the aging process of the skin. I am 27 and I am going to have wrinkles sooner or later. If I was to consider this minor cosmetic procedure, it would be to stop the postpone the aging process and to look young for as long as possible.

**5. Some say beauty is a currency system, and is determined by politics in China. Have you ever felt that the government is pressuring women to conform to the standards of beauty dictated by society?**

Cosmetics business has become a very profitable business here in China, it's in the interest of the government to keep the cash flow going. It is thus also in the interest of the government to encourage women to spend money to become beautiful either by purchasing cosmetic products or undergoing various procedures.

**6. Have you heard of the term 'shengnü' - leftover women? What do you think about the government's implications that unmarried women over 27 are becoming a social problem in China?**

Absolutely, I am considered a shengnu. It is ridiculous. By 27 I got my masters in finance, I am working for an international company, making my own money, I am paying taxes, I have even bought my own apartment. My parents did help, but I am paying them back. I really don't see how independent women, who are just not ready to settle down and have children are to blame for being a social problem. It shouldn't be my problem, that the government can't provide sufficient finance to elderly people. They can levy more tax from rich people and leave women alone.

**7. Do you feel pressured into marrying early in order to meet the expectations of the government?**

I feel the pressure from every direction. My friends are all married and my parents are worried I will never find a husband, at least I am lucky enough to be working in an international team, so my coworkers find it normal I'm single and 27. I don't even want to talk about the government, making use of every possible campaign to force women to get married and have kids.

**8. Would you consider undergoing surgical procedures in order to improve your chances of meeting a well situated man?**

No way. I can take care of myself. I don't need a well situated man, I need a man who will love me for me and won't cheat. Cheating is considered normal in China by the way.

**9. Gender discrimination is still present in China, especially in the educational system and the workplace. Are women having a hard time getting into schools and finding a job?**

I was pretty lucky. I had really good grades in school and was able to enroll into a good school. Not all girls are that lucky, since schools would rather enroll men, even if their grades and achievements are lesser than that of girls'. However, I studied in the international department with foreign students, where I met some influential people. I now work for one of them. I believe if I hadn't had the connections, I wouldn't have gotten such a great job. For my friends it was not that easy. I only have one female friend in an important position in a firm. All my other friends are either stay-at-home moms or wives, while others work in low paid positions. I have to add, all of these women are highly educated.

**10. Do you think it is easier to achieve success if you are considered beautiful?**

Women are being discriminated against as it is, but yes, when applying for a job, beauty is of great importance. Even though qualifications for the position do matter, it is outer appearance that will get you the job. There is so much competition in the Chinese labor market, it is hard to stand out. Since most job adds require a photo, first impression is made when the employer receives your resume. If your picture is not nice, you won't even get the job interview.

**11. Would you be willing to undergo surgery to improve your chances of getting a job?**

My mom always told me that natural beauty is the most precious gift you can ever be given. I live by that motto and I never even considered changing anything about myself. Besides I am lucky enough to have already found a job I love. If I were ever to consider cosmetic surgery it would probably be because of a job, because my looks are not competitive enough and I am aware of that.

**12. Do you believe a woman that is considered unattractive should not work, stay at home and take care of children and elderly parents?**

Firstly, I don't even understand who gets to say whether one is ugly or beautiful. All women are beautiful in their own way and should not be discriminated against because they are not considered conventionally beautiful. So no, women have a right to work and their main role shouldn't be to stay at home and please everyone else.

**13. How much time do you spend on the internet? How much of it is on social media? Do you post your pictures on social media?**

A lot, probably about at least 10 hours a day. But my job involves working on the internet, so in my free time, I don't like to waste my time surfing the web. I try to not spend more than two or three hours on the internet in my spare time. But it's mostly social media in my free time. I love posting pictures on my profiles. I usually only post group photos of me and my friends.

**14. How do you feel if the picture you have posted doesn't get the reaction you were hoping for? Do you feel bad about yourself if you don't get enough likes?**

I don't mind. I mainly post pictures for my friends to see, since they are on them. If they don't like the photos it's most likely because they don't like themselves in the photo. I don't feel bad, but I don't mind the likes, it's nice to know people like what you post.

**15. Have you ever used an app to change your appearance before you posted your picture?**

Me and my friends use it for fun. I never thought about it too much, but I guess we just want to look good in the pictures. And most of these apps promote at least some kind of cosmetics, if it isn't surgery, it's a whitening cream, slimming substances or any other cosmetic products.

**16. Have you ever felt pressured to consider cosmetic surgery because of social media?**

I did get really positive comments on some of the pictures I posted that were processed with different apps, and people told me I would look really good if my eyes for example were really that big. Even if I agreed, I would never consider cosmetic surgery just so I could post my pictures without processing them with apps beforehand.

**17. Women are also being pressured into marriage by their parents. Have you ever felt the pressure from your parents to get married?**

Ever since I turned 27 it has been worse. When I was 25 they were worried, but now that I'm 27, they have lost all hope. I don't like to admit it, but my mom has been actively searching for a husband for me and has been trying to set me up several times. I usually don't like who she picks, but I am open to meeting someone if she finds someone we both like.

**18. Do your parents believe looks are important when it comes to entering the marriage market? Would your parents ever pressure you to change your appearance in order to improve your chances of meeting a better partner?**

My dad thinks I am single because I am not as beautiful as my friends who are already married. My mom would never suggest to change anything about myself, whereas my dad suggested I should at least get a chin implant and a nose job. Supposedly that would help me find someone.

**19. Have you ever been to a marriage market? Have you or your parents ever posted your resume in one of these markets?**

I have been to a few matchmaking events, non successful evidently, and just walked through a marriage market. Honestly, I don't even want to know if my resume has ever been hung in these markets. I would like to think my parents are not that desperate, but I have no idea if they felt the need to post my resume.

**20. Would you say women's financial independency is one of the reasons women get cosmetic surgery? Is it to feel empowered, or are they conforming to the male ideal of beauty?**

It's hard to say. My friend just had a bunch of work done on her face - eyelids, nose and chin. She works and makes her own money. She would probably not be able to pay for all the procedures at once by herself, but she could get them all over time. But since her husband thought she is not as pretty as she could be with the help of a surgeon, so he not only paid for the procedures, but chose how he wanted for the surgeries to turn out. My friend is excited and says she did it for herself so she will feel more attractive, but in reality it was all her husband's idea. He went out of his way to convince her it was all her and that she wanted it herself. He even said she can pay him back in monthly installments, so she would really believe it was all her idea. Well, she does feel empowered and independent, but in reality it was all her husband's idea and she now looks exactly how he imagined.

**21. Would you consider undergoing cosmetic surgery if you were financially independent and wanted to boost your self-confidence?**

I wouldn't, but I see why other women would. With so much discrimination and pressure from everywhere, women just want to do something for themselves. Besides, beautiful women are more likely to achieve success, at least from my experience. It's not just their appearance, they are more confident and sure of themselves. If there was a reason good enough for me to at least get the hyaluronic acid injections I told you about, it would be to feel good about myself.

## CHEN HAILIANG – 30

### **1. How do you define beauty?**

I associate beauty with beautiful dark hair, white pale skin, bright eyes and a small figure. A woman with all of these features who is also smart and loving can be considered perfect.

### **2. Cosmetic surgery is gaining popularity in China. Why so you think that is?**

It is, but especially among women. Some are not born that beautiful and can now pay to achieve the look they otherwise never could. It's even better, that cosmetic surgery in China is accessible to everyone, it's not as expensive as in Japan or Korea, so even women who don't make that much money, or their family hasn't got plenty money, can afford to get some procedures done.

### **3. Do you think surgical alteration of appearance is becoming more accepted by the society?**

Definitely. A few years ago, people would hide and lie about their procedures, whereas today while men would still hide it, women are proud of their artificial features. I see women posting pictures and videos of their procedures, recommending surgeons to their friends. There are so many groups on Weibo where women talk about their experience going through the procedures and recovery. Surgeries have become so common, that people even get minor procedures during their work break and are back in the office in half an hour wearing a bandage.

### **4. Have you undergone cosmetic surgery? If you were thinking about it, what would be the reason?**

When I was little my parents had my ears pinned back. But I was six then and I am still grateful to my parents to have made the decision, since I was teased because of my ears a lot as a kid. That was the only feature that would bother me, and if it wouldn't be taken care of back then, I would have my ears operated on now. It would be because I'd look funny and no one could take me seriously if my ears were sticking out like that.

### **5. Some say beauty is a currency system, and is determined by politics in China. Have you ever felt that the government is pressuring women to conform to the standards of beauty dictated by society?**

I wouldn't say pressuring, but women are expected to look a certain way in order to either work in positions where a job requires dealing with customers or especially if there is a television job, a woman is supposed to perform. If a woman wants a job that requires a particular look, she simply has to invest more in her appearance. But the government is not pressuring women to apply for these positions, it's their own choice.

**6. Have you heard of the term 'shengnü' - leftover women? What do you think about the government's implications that unmarried women over 27 are becoming a social problem in China?**

Yes, I have also heard of bare branches, but they just don't get as much media attention. Maybe it's because these are mostly men from rural areas and no one pays too much attention to them. I don't know why women are considered a social problem if they haven't married by their 27th birthday. Women are going to marry when they feel like it, whereas single men who probably won't ever find a wife are not considered a social problem. They are the real social problem, not women who are just going to have a baby later in life. I guess the logic behind it is to put pressure on women, since men are not able to birth, so it doesn't make sense to demean them. They have it hard enough and it is not their fault there are not enough women for them to marry one and make a baby. It's not fair and I really don't appreciate the campaigns forcing women to settle down before they are ready. And let me tell you, women are giving in because of the pressure and are really unhappy in their marriages in which they were practically forced.

**7. Do you think a lot of women consider undergoing surgical procedures in order to improve their chances of meeting a well situated man?**

I think so, but the women whose sole intention is to catch a wealthy guy are usually not the ones who get to marry him, they only get to be their mistresses. For vain women this is usually enough to go through the pain of cosmetic surgery. Wealthy men often buy these women their own apartments, so that every time they feel like spending time with their mistresses, she is available to them. Often the man would even pay for additional surgeries, if he wants to change something about his mistress. However, mistresses are only interesting while they are young. So a woman that is dependent on such men will eventually end up alone. Otherwise I think there are not a lot of women who would get surgery just to find a rich man. If they have the money to pay for their surgeries themselves, they are independent enough not to need a wealthy man.

**8. Gender discrimination is still present in China, especially in the educational system and the workplace. Are women having a hard time getting into schools and finding a job?**

Probably. I never had many female coworkers and I know it's hard for women to obtain a job, let alone a well paid job. I think it's still the mentality that women are intended to give birth, cook and clean and nothing more, while at the same time, people still think women are not as intelligent as men. I think women don't have that much trouble obtaining a less paid job, whereas a good job, suitable to their education is hard to get.

**9. Do you think it is easier to achieve success if a woman is considered beautiful?**

Sure. And it's not just women, even men that are handsome find work easier. Let me paraphrase, it is easier to compete in the market if you are not only smart, educated and accomplished. In

China almost everyone is highly educated. Experiences for example count, but being the whole package will get you further.

**10. Would you be willing to undergo surgery to improve your chances of getting a job? Are women prone to undergoing surgery in order to obtain a job?**

I wouldn't, but I'm a man and the competition is not as fierce for me. Women on the other hand, as I have told you, if they want to work in the public eye, need to look beautiful. Those who wish to work in that environment and are not naturally stunning, have no other choice but to seek out a surgeons help.

**11. Do you believe a woman that is considered unattractive should not work, stay at home and take care of children and elderly parents?**

No, women need to work too. If she really hasn't got any luck finding a job, than she can stay at home, but if it was my woman I would want her not to give up and search for a job until she finds it.

**12. How much time do you spend on the internet? How much of it is on social media? Do you post your pictures on social media?**

About 3 hours per day, half of it on social media. I do, I post a lot of selfies from everywhere I go.

**13. How do you feel if the picture you have posted doesn't get the reaction you were hoping for? Do you feel bad about yourself if you don't get enough likes? Do you think women are more likely to feel bad in that case?**

If I'd care what people think about my photos I would be depressed all the time. I post so many photos, that I don't even expect people to look at all of them. I see on social media how women are posting provocative photos and if they don't get comments and likes, they would delete the photo immediately. Women are now posting photos doing various challenges such as placing as many coins as possible on their collarbones. The more coins they can balance the skinnier they are. Women partaking in these challenges are crying for attention. They are depressed if they can't complete the challenge and would put all their efforts to lose weight in order to complete the challenge and let the world know with a photographed evidence.

**14. Have you ever used an app to change your appearance before you posted your picture?**

I have. With the help of these apps you can see how you would look if for example you had larger eyes, skinnier face, smaller nose and so on. It's a good marketing concept for cosmetic surgery places - with the help of our surgeons you could look like this in real life.

**15. Have you ever felt pressured to consider cosmetic surgery because of social media?**

No. I use social media to keep in touch with people I know and like, my friends. If they ever implied I needed to change something about myself, they wouldn't really be my friends. As far as looking good on social media goes, I can always use apps, rather than scalpels and injections.

**16. Women are also being pressured into marriage by their parents. Do you feel women are indeed pressured by their parents to get married?**

My wife for example told me her parents did indeed insinuate she is old enough to get married and that they want a grandchild. However, I think most Chinese parents want their daughter to marry as soon as possible since she and her husband will in most cases have to take care of both the wife's and the husband's parents once they retire. Another possible reason I see is that older people feel a strong commitment to the country and the government and are thus easily influenced by the leftover women and men pressures. They just don't want their daughter to be a burden to the society.

**17. Do your parents believe looks are important when it comes to entering the marriage market? Would your parents ever pressure you to change your appearance in order to improve your chances of meeting a better partner? Would a woman's parents put more pressure on her?**

For a strange reason it is easier to find a wife than a husband. I say that because there are so many men in China and not enough women, but still, finding a beautiful wife was easy for me. Probably because I have my own apartment and make a lot of money, but still. My parents do find looks are important in a person, probably that's why they had my ears operated, but when it comes to marriage, they were never worried I wouldn't find someone. For women it's different, especially when the woman doesn't work and is looking for a husband that will take care of the finances. Parents who know their daughter needs such a man will be even willing to invest in her looks. I know women whose parents paid for their surgery so that they would have a better chance of finding a well-situated man. Their investment would thus be returned.

**18. Have you ever been to a marriage market? Have you or your parents ever posted your resume in one of these markets?**

I've been to the market, it's fun looking at all the resumes. I haven't had my resume posted, I got married quite early for a man. Anyhow, some of the women's resumes are really too good to be hanging in such places, but usually it's the parents that don't even tell their daughters they are actively searching for a man for them in the marriage markets.

**19. Would you say women's financial independency is one of the reasons women get cosmetic surgery? Is it to feel empowered, or are they conforming to the male ideal of beauty?**

Maybe. Most women I know who have undergone cosmetic surgery paid for it themselves and are really proud of their new features. They all had common procedures such as the eyelid procedure or nose jobs and some had their breasts augmented. But these are all the features men like in women. We like large eyes and small breasts. It is hard to say if they are conforming to our ideal of beauty, since we like the same things. They are doing it for themselves, so it's more that they want to feel that they achieved something and can show it by spending it on cosmetic surgery.

**APPENDIX M: Values ranked by preference**

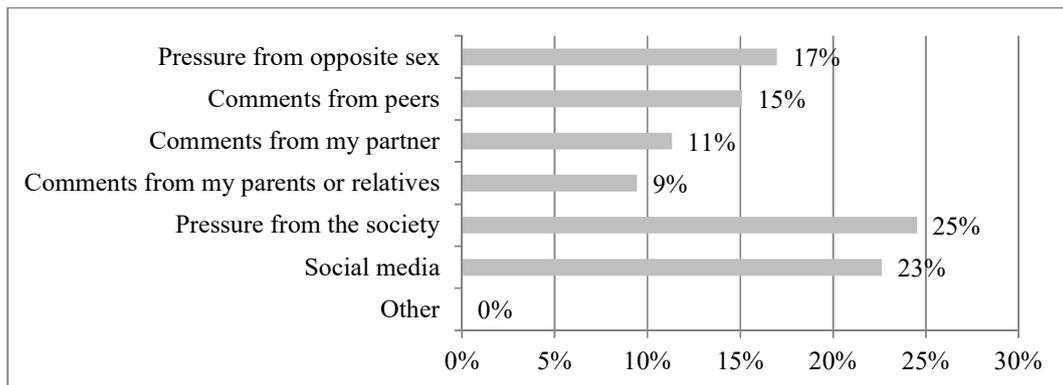
Table 2. Values ranked by preference

Value\Rank	5	4	3	2	1	Total	Average
Beauty	9	8	13	13	10	53	2,2
Career accomplishment	17	15	7	9	5	53	2,5
Marriage	3	6	8	16	20	53	2,9
Social acceptance	6	5	15	11	16	53	3,6
Self-empowerment	18	18	10	5	2	53	3,8

Note: 5 – most important, 1 – least important

**APPENDIX N: Factors that make respondents lose their self-confidence**

Figure 13. Factors that make respondents lose their self-confidence



**APPENDIX O: Paired samples statistics and test for variable 1 and 2**

Table 3. Paired samples statistics for variable 1 and 2

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	leftover	3.8113	53	1.28687	0.17676
	career	3.9245	53		0.17427

Table 4. Paired samples test for variable 1 and 2

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	leftover - career	-0.11321	113.782	0.15629	-0.42683	0.20041	-0.724	52	0.472

**APPENDIX P: Paired samples statistics and test for variable 1 and 3**

Table 5. Paired samples statistics for variable 1 and 3

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	leftover	3.8113	53	1.28687	0.17676
	empowerment	4	53	1.19293	0.16386

Table 6. Paired samples test for variable 1 and 3

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	leftover - empowerment	-0.18868	1.27183	0.1747	-0.53924	0.16188	-1.08	52	0.285

**APPENDIX R: Paired samples statistics and test for variable 2 and 3**

Table 75. Paired samples statistics for variable 2 and 3

**Paired Samples Statistics**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	career	3.9245	53	1.26869	0.17427
	empowerment	4	53	1.19293	0.16386

Table 8. Paired samples test for variable 2 and 3

**Paired Samples Test**

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	career - empowerment	-0.07547	1.08927	0.14962	-0.37571	0.22477	-0.504	52	0.616