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The Body in Packaging Culture: Researching Cosmetic Surgery within Korea's Neo-Confucian Culture

By Eunji Choi

**Submitted to Utrecht University
Graduate Gender Studies Program**

Main Supervisor: Prof. dr. Anne-Marie Korte

Support Supervisor: Dr. Mark Johnson

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Abstract

Contemporary developments within the current global self-care regime have increased the potential of many individuals to control their own bodies, and to have their bodies surveilled by others (Shilling, 2003). The body is understood as a project that needs to be “worked at and accomplished as part of an individual’s self-identity” (Shilling, 2003:4) in this time of ‘high modernity’ (Giddens, 1991). The project of cosmetic surgery is one example of how modern individuals attribute significance both to their bodies and the way their bodies look. In a South Korean context, the cosmetic surgery scene is especially interesting to examine in the light of the uniquely Korean practice of giving cosmetic surgery as a gift, especially to daughters. Ironically, the body has to remain unaltered from how it has been received at birth according to the Neo-Confucian tradition, which continues to form the ideological base of contemporary Korean society. Moreover, this tradition teaches that inward goodness does not depend upon one’s outer appearance, something that is quite opposite to “popular physiognomic assumptions that the body, especially the face, is a reflection of the self” (Featherstone, 2010:195). This thesis specifically attempts to understand the practice of cosmetic surgery within Korean society, arguing that this practice is ironically supported by Korea’s remaining Neo-Confucian traditions as well as by contemporary global body-care regimes, which somehow interlock with Neo-Confucian ideas concerning body management.

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1. Introduction

In South Korea, the beauty capital of East Asia, one's appearance is likely to differ from that received at birth. The International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (ISAPS) reported that one out of every five South Korean women receives cosmetic surgery (Cho, 2013)¹. Contemporary developments within self-care regimes have increased many individuals' ability to control their own bodies, as well as to have their bodies surveilled by others and to constantly be 'on display' to others (Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 2003). As a result of developments as diverse as plastic surgery, biological reproduction, and genetic engineering, the body is "becoming increasingly a phenomenon of options and choices", and is "potentially no longer subject to the constraints and limitations that once characterized its existence" (Shilling, 1993:3). Resultantly, questions of how we should control our bodies and to what extent medical discourse should be allowed to reconstruct the body become more urgent (Shilling, 1993). There exists a tendency to view the body as an entity that is in the process of becoming, "a *project* which should be worked at and accomplished as part of an *individual's* self-identity" (Shilling, 1993:5). An individual who does not follow contemporary body-care trends such as dieting and anti-aging might be considered slothful or even suspected of having a flawed self (Featherstone, 2010). On the contrary, people with an improved appearance are considered to exhibit bodies and faces that are more consistent with their 'true' selves (Featherstone, 2010).

Advertisements for plastic surgery clinics can be found all over the subway stations, buses and electric bulletin boards of Gangnam, the Southern part of Seoul, where the majority of plastic surgery clinics are located². The descriptions on those advertisements usually stress the 'naturalness' and 'balance' of the new looks they may provide to their recipients. In addition, they emphasize the idea that individuals who are in control of their bodies are truly 'modern' and may achieve their goals and desires through their 'enhanced' bodies. Modernity, amongst its many effects, has urged individuals to relate themselves critically to their bodies, tightening the relationship between the body and self-identity (Shilling, 2003). Investing in the body provides individuals with "a means of self-expression and a way of potentially feeling good and increasing the control they have over their bodies" (Shilling, 2003:7). The project of cosmetic surgery is one example of how modern individuals give significance to their bodies and the way their bodies look. The South Korean cosmetic surgery scene is especially interesting to

¹ According to the data collected by ISAPS and UN in 2011, 13.5 persons out of 1,000 have plastic surgery in South Korea, including both invasive and non-invasive treatments (The Economist, 2013). South Korea ranked first among all other countries in the plastic surgery rate and constituted a quarter of the global plastic surgery market in 2011 (ISAPS, 2011, quoted in Cho, 2013, para.3).

² Gangnam is an affluent district in Seoul where leading South Korean beauty and fashion trends burgeon.

examine in the light of the uniquely Korean practice of giving cosmetic surgery as a gift³. Many Korean parents give their daughters double eyelid surgery as a present when they enter university, often following a girls' own wishes and sometimes on the recommendation of the parents, usually the mother⁴. Some of those young women initially refusing to have surgery end up taking it before graduating from university, or at different times in their lives. Further to this, men increasingly participate in the practice of cosmetic surgery as well.

My research project specifically aims to understand the practice of cosmetic surgery within Korean society in order to argue that this practice is ironically supported by Korea's Neo-Confucian traditions. Taking cosmetic surgery as the subject of my research poses an awkward dilemma for myself as a woman as well as it forms the base for this research project. As a feminist, I am inclined to be more critical towards cosmetic surgery as it can be an oppressive practice, especially for women. At the same time, I believe that we should be able to do what we want with our bodies, assuming that those activities do not harm others. This split within my approach to cosmetic surgery concurs with many other researchers' thoughts on cosmetic surgery, including advocates of feminism. Let us suppose I have a desire to become more beautiful via cosmetic surgery. Even if I did, I would be discouraged by prevailing assumptions that surround cosmetic surgery participants. Besides, accepting cosmetic surgery might be considered not to be feminist enough in the first place, as the feminist sociologist Kathy Davis also mentions while addressing her uneasiness with cosmetic surgery in her book *Reshaping the female body: the dilemma of cosmetic surgery* (1995). The recipients of cosmetic surgery, and women in particular, have long been treated and viewed as either "cultural dopes" who are "deluded by the false promises of the feminine beauty system" (Davis, 2003:13), or as actors with agency that take their lives into their own hands (Bordo, 1997). My understanding of this dilemma is that neither explanation is thoroughly sufficient. Moreover, it seems unreasonable to comprehend the practice without concerning the existing gendered social order and "the complexity and ambivalence" of women's involvement in beauty practices (Davis, 2003:9). As my data will demonstrate in Chapter four, the choices that South Korean women make predominantly emerge from conventional conceptions of what is considered socially acceptable and desirable. Regardless of the particular choices the women participating in my research made, all were conceptualized and interpreted within such conventional notions. Resultantly, such notions both shape and are shaped by these women's personal negotiations of selfhood. My aim in this research is thus to

³ In this thesis, plastic surgery or cosmetic surgery designates surgery that is done for aesthetic reasons which excludes reconstructive surgery. 'Korea' designates the period either before Korea was divided into two states or South Korea unless it is elaborated as two Koreas or North Korea.

⁴ Plastic surgery clinics cutting down the prices of surgeries only for examinees of university entrance examination became a huge trend (Shin, 2014). Expectedly, Korean mothers are more interested in surgery than the potential recipients (Shin, 2014). This nationwide university entrance examination takes place once every year in the beginning of December. The majority of examinees are 17 to 18 year-old students in upper secondary school.

shed light on how structures and choices shape one another, rather than falling into the trap of polarizing the issue by following either of the explanations cited above.

It gets even more complicated when my culturally Korean self comes in. I grew up mainly within a Korean cultural setting, which means that Confucian moral values are an integral part of my upbringing. Although Confucianism no longer works as a prescriptive orthodoxy within political and social realms, it has “gone underground and continues to covertly shape behavior and social organization in Korea” (Robinson, 1991:204). Cosmetic surgery as well as other beauty related procedures tend to remind me of vanity. Nonetheless, as Taeyon Kim (2003:107) argues in her article ‘Neo-Confucian Body Techniques: Women’s Bodies in Korea’s Consumer Society’, beauty has become “a requirement of decorum for women” in Korea. Absurdly, I am absolutely convinced of her argument while my Neo-Confucian self clearly instructs me to see beauty related procedures, especially cosmetic surgery, as forms of vanity.

Confucianism, which remains the ideological basis of contemporary Korean society, teaches that one’s true nature should not be judged by outward appearance. In other words, inward goodness is said not to depend upon one’s appearance, something that is quite opposite to “popular physiognomic assumptions that the body, especially the face, is a reflection of the self” (Featherstone, 2010:195). In *The Book of Filial Piety* written by Zeng Zi, Confucius says: “The body, hair and skin, all have been received from the parents, and so one doesn’t dare damage them—that is the beginning of *xiao* (filial piety)” (Feng Xin-ming, 2008). Filial piety is considered as “one of the founding pillars of Confucianism” (Qin, 2013:139). Owing to the influence of Confucian teachings, the body traditionally had to remain unaltered. Accordingly, Korean people did not cut their hair until the ordinance prohibiting topknots was promulgated to control and destroy national traditions and sentiments during Japanese rule at the end of the 19th century (Lim and Chun, 2012). Then, how must we understand the fact that the body that was once preserved for the sake of filial piety is now encouraged towards modification by the parents themselves? From this perspective, the burgeoning practice of cosmetic surgery seems highly controversial to me. In addition, some parents will receive cosmetic surgery as a gift from their grown-up children. In contrast with the industry’s conspicuousness, such patients often try to hide whether they had cosmetic surgery or not. What does this phenomenon mean?

Indeed, in the present climate of rapid globalization Korean women are increasingly influenced by feminine beauty ideals and practices coming from the outside world. Yet the Neo-Confucian way of thinking continues to shape the minds and behavior of Korean people, seemingly without causing much of the tension that one might expect to be stirred by what some consider to be mutilating beauty practices. How can we make sense of the proliferating practice of cosmetic surgery that coincides with Neo-Confucian body-management? How is it possible for individuals to recommend such a practice without breaching dominant cultural norms? My hypothesis is that the Neo-Confucian way of thinking about the

female body allows Korean women to actively participate in the practice of cosmetic surgery. In other words, the Neo-Confucian perception of the female body actually functions as a justification or grounds for participating within the cosmetic surgery scene.

This project aims to (1) map the development of Neo-Confucianism within South Korea in order to understand how South Korean women presently perceive and manage their bodies under the Neo-Confucian body-regime, and to (2) examine narratives of cosmetic surgery circulating within popular culture, media and an online forum Sungyesa in order to provide an empirical documentation of a Neo-Confucian perspective upon cosmetic surgery and contemporary body-management within a South Korean context.

2. Researching Cosmetic Surgery

Along with an enormous upsurge of academic interest in the subject of the body within the social sciences, cultural studies and the humanities, the body of academic literature concerning cosmetic surgery has been constantly expanding during the past decades. In addition, feminist scholars have long been contemplating and writing about cosmetic surgery. The topic of cosmetic surgery in relation to studies of the body in particular touches upon issues concerning identity and embodiment, as well as providing “a perfect illustration of the obsession in Western late modern cultures with the makeability of the body” (Davis, 2003:2). Since the early feminist literature on cosmetic surgery is dispersed amongst various journals and books that address a variety of related topics, feminists have been relatively disengaged from each other in their on-going debates concerning cosmetic surgery. Only recently have attempts been made to collectively articulate issues around cosmetic surgery within feminist scholarship (for example see *Cosmetic Surgery: A Feminist Primer*, edited by Heyes and Jones in 2009).

The key question for feminist intellectuals is understanding and explaining why so many individuals, mostly women, are drawn into cosmetic surgery in order to alter their natural or ‘normal’ appearances. Interpreting women who receive cosmetic surgery as “either vain social strivers, or as victims of a patriarchal beauty system” is a prevailing dominant tendency that one can easily find in popular representations of cosmetic surgery, including within some feminists literature (Heyes and Jones, 2009:6). Feminist literature has particularly highlighted “what cosmetic surgery might mean to individuals”, and “how that meaning might be understood as informing and being informed by a larger social context” (Heyes and Jones, 2009:7). Although different feminist approaches place different epistemic emphasis on women’s stories and narratives, feminist scholarship is marked by a continued preoccupation with the question of what kind of explanations cosmetic surgery recipients provide for their surgeries. I briefly summarize the debate within existing feminist scholarship on the issue of beauty practice including cosmetic surgery in order to position myself within the field and explicate my potential contribution to this debate.

In many cases feminist scholarship has claimed that women’s beauty practices are supported by patriarchal social orders that view women as, and reduce them to, merely bodies. Among different causes identified, ‘capitalist consumer culture’ and a (coercive) ‘beauty industry’ have been pointed out as the primary causes for the rise of such practices. Feminist literature has criticized the beauty trend within consumer society as a mechanism that controls women’s mentality by constantly reinforcing the potential imperfections of women’s bodies (Lee Young-ja, 1997, 2000, quoted in Lim, 2004:98). In addition, the beauty industry is blamed for being an oppressive system due to its tendency to consider women’s bodies as fragmentary parts, with flaws that need to be corrected (Bordo, 2003; Woo Kyung-ja, 2002; Balsamo,

1996, quoted in Lim, 2004:98). Although it is believed that the desire to pursue beauty is in the nature of the human being, women in particular are expected to fulfil such a desire within the patriarchal social order. In this respect, women that make an effort to become more beautiful are not fulfilling a natural instinct, but rather perform a social 'duty' (Barthel, 1988; Freedman, 1985, quoted in Lim, 2004:98). Moreover, the patriarchal social order provides women who actively play this role with an opportunity to capitalize on their bodies as a reward (Lim, 2004:99). As Bourdieu (1995, quoted in Lim, 2004:99) argued, a woman's body that materializes the concept of "femininity" as it is determined by the society at issue can become a resource that is convertible into an economic or a social capital. Accordingly, a good-looking woman enjoys popularity among friends and co-workers; has higher chances of marrying up; possibly receives less severe punishment at court; and will generally find more people willing to give her a hand (Synnott, 1990, quoted in Lim, 2004:99).

Consequently, women's beauty practices, including cosmetic surgery, have been discussed as oppressive practices for women. Today's idealized standard of beauty is extremely narrow and intolerant so that it is almost impossible for anyone to live up to it. In the present situation, women are prone to become obsessed with how their bodies look and are appreciated by others. Such an obsession may sometimes manifest itself into disorders such as anorexia, or an addiction to cosmetic surgery that may enable one to more closely conform to the current standard of beauty. In addition, women's investments of money, time and energy into this competitive society supports and reproduces the idea that women are inferior to men (Wolf, 1991, quoted in Lim, 2004:101). Lastly, beauty practices that pursue an ideal of unified femininity result in the homogenization of women's appearances as well as their lives: women are classified as normal or not according to whether they conform to the idealized body or not (Bordo, 2003; Morgan, 1998, quoted in Lim, 2004:101).

In this context, it is hard for women not to follow and actively participate within the beauty trend. Moreover, women's embellishing body practices are often equated with their choices to improve their moral values. In effect, "free space" where individuals enjoy "choice" in any unconditioned sense of the word does not exist (Davis, 2009:39). By underlining this point, my aim is not to fit women's personal narratives into the question of "whether women can be said to choose cosmetic surgery, or whether that "choice" is overdetermined by a larger patriarchal structure that makes cosmetic surgery seem like the only option for psychological survival in a world hostile to women's bodies" (Heyes and Jones, 2009:7). As Giddens (1976, quoted in Davis, 2009:40) has claimed, "every competent actor has a wide-ranging, but intimate and subtle, knowledge of the society of which he or she is a member". This means that social action cannot be explained as merely individuals doing their own thing, or as individuals deluded by false promises or compelled by social forces. Social actions need to be understood by examining how

individuals bring their knowledge of themselves and their situations into play as they negotiate their daily lives (Davis, 2003, 2009).

As much feminist literature on the subject tries to unravel, my interest in cosmetic surgery also lies within the question of what is the meaning of cosmetic surgery or what it means to alter the body in contemporary cultural life particularly within South Korean context. My research attempts to work through where local context joins the emerging and rapidly transforming global picture. With the expansion of cosmetic surgery industry in South Korea, Korean feminist scholars have written literature on issues of cosmetic surgery as well. However, none of these literature actually mentions how Korean bodies were perceived and treated by uniquely developed Korean cultural norms assuming that Korea has already shifted away from those traditions. My aim is to bridge the traditional Korean body that had been dominated by the Neo-Confucian body regime with the current techniques of body in contemporary capitalist consumer society. This research will shed light on what it means to cultivate one's beauty as a woman but also what it means or what is expected to be as a woman in South Korea, and how these issues relate to long-established Neo-Confucian body-management. Moreover, my observations offer a deeper understanding of Korean society in general, which I define as a society in which Packaging Culture is rampant.

2.1 Research Questions

I find the topic of cosmetic surgery within a South Korean context most intriguing because all the questions presented in this thesis are derived from my own experiences and curiosity as a Korean woman. On the one hand it is difficult to understand how the proliferating practice of cosmetic surgery has been able to become as prevalent as it is today as a full member of Korean society, yet it is surprisingly natural for me to accept and to even be tempted into practicing cosmetic surgery on the other.

When I first started this research, I posed the following question: "How do different social actors conceptualize beauty—actualized by cosmetic surgery—and what do such conceptualizations mean within a South Korea context?" However, this question proved somewhat broad and ambiguous with regard to what I would like to observe. Indeed, this question requires an understanding of how different social actors make sense of altering bodies within a space where such alterations should be considered inappropriate in the light of existing Neo-Confucian norms which continue to inform a certain mode of thinking and behaving. In addition, by examining existing literature on cosmetic surgery, and considering various arguments and issues concerning cosmetic surgery in a South Korean context, 'beauty' appeared to be an inappropriate term to use, especially when the recipients of cosmetic surgery are concerned. My understanding is that the convergent goal of recipients of cosmetic surgery is more to accomplish 'a new-

self', rather than accomplishing 'beauty', whereas the ambition of plastic surgeons probably is indeed to materialize prevailing beauty ideals. Then, I encountered Taeyon Kim's article 'Neo-Confucian Body Techniques: Women's Bodies in Korea's Consumer Society'. This article helped me to re-articulate and sharpen my questions by linking the body in contemporary modern society to Neo-Confucian body-management, rather than merely looking into the legacy of Neo-Confucianism within Korean society. In order to understand how Korean female bodies are still influenced by the Neo-Confucian body-regime, I found that it was necessary to review my ideas about how Korean Neo-Confucianism developed in its own unique way, and how its specific developments continue to shape the behavior and mentality of Korean people. Hence, the central question that guides this research is:

How do Korean women practice cosmetic surgery within the Neo-Confucian body-regime while at the same time negotiating a certain conception of the body prevailing within Korea's consumer society that does not seem to coincide with the former, more traditional model?

Questions that follow from this question include: How do they reconcile the discomfort (if there is any) between the intentions or implications of long-established Neo-Confucian cultural values on the one hand, and the modern beauty practice of cosmetic surgery on the other? What urges them to participate within the practice of cosmetic surgery? Why does the President having cosmetic surgery appear to be more problematic than Korean civilians participating within the same practice? (This question will be elaborated in Chapter four.) And how does this issue relate to the prevailing Neo-Confucian legacy?

My thesis is an extension of Taeyon Kim's analysis of Korean women's bodies within Korea's consumer society, specifically looking into narratives of practices of cosmetic surgery. Furthermore, I intend to stretch this thesis towards providing a description of the remaining legacy of the Korean Neo-Confucian way of thought and conduct. I observe that we as Koreans have not abandoned Neo-Confucian methods of body discipline, but rather intertwine such methods with the body-regime perpetuated within Korea's contemporary consumer society, thereby facilitating the practice of cosmetic surgery. This process is possible within Packaging Culture, a term I have coined in order to demonstrate remaining Neo-Confucian customs. Packaging Culture refers to a way of life that I have observed within a South Korean context in which seemingly vain or earthly practices such as cosmetic surgery are beautifully wrapped up within traditional discourse, simultaneously seeking to confine individual motives to dominant norms and explanations.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

In order to approach my topic and my research questions, I have tried to build my analyses upon a sociological framework of understanding the body that addresses the particular issues of the body within contemporary society. I take these issues to be: images of the body; body maintenance; and the body as the bearer of individual identity in relation to notions of consumer culture.

Today's interest in the body is ever more prevalent. While a more traditional interest in the body primarily focused upon its physical health and fitness, today's interests have shifted towards a concern with the body as a means to realize individual identity (Shilling, 1993). A constant interest in the body is abundantly observed within the popular media such as television, magazines and newspapers, informing individuals to keep their body look young, sexy and beautiful. According to Shilling (1993:1), the position of the body within contemporary popular culture exhibits "an unprecedented *individualization* of the body" as well as it urges people to view "the health, shape and appearance of their own bodies as expressions of individual identity". In order to understand this trend, it is necessary to make sense of the conditions that have assembled the context for this tendency. In this respect, the emergence of a new type of social system that Giddens calls 'late' or 'high' modernity, as a preceding state of consumer society is relevant to understand.

'Modernity' has been generally indicated as the "modes of social life and organization which emerged in post-feudal Europe, but which have in the 20th century become increasingly global in their impact" (Shilling, 1993:2). 'Modernity' can be understood practically as 'the industrialized world' where "social relations implied in the widespread use of material power and machinery in production processes" (Giddens, 1991:15). In addition, it also includes some aspects of capitalism, where this term signifies "a system of commodity production involving both competitive product markets and the commodification of labour power" (Giddens, 1991:15). These features of modernity can be recognized from the institutions of surveillance, which derived from the increase of organizational power in relation to the rise of modern social life (Giddens, 1991). Among its several ramifications, modernity has encouraged an expansion in the degree of control bodies are subjected to by nation-states as well as by the medical sector in particular (Shilling, 1993). It has also led to "a reduction in the power of religious authorities to define and regulate bodies" (Turner, 1982, quoted in Shilling, 1993:2).

Anthony Giddens used the term 'high modernity' to describe the radicalization of the modern trends in the late 20th century. In contrast to some theories of post-modernism and post-modernity, Giddens suggests that we should look at the nature and consequences of modernity rather than inventing a term such as post-modernity that revels in linguistic complexity and producing discourse that characterized by assumptions rather than arguments (Giddens, 1990; Mellor, 1993). Giddens notes that the post-modernist view of 'a plurality of heterogeneous claims to knowledge' is reflective of persisting significance of *modernity* (Mellor, 1993). In other words, it is a natural tendency of modernity to produce

not only encompassing stories, but also to engender scepticism around those statements. Giddens further argues that modernity is marked by certain “discontinuities”, and what is compelling about “contemporary modernity is that this discontinuist character has now come to dominate the other tendency, resulting in a scepticism directed towards the master narratives of modernity” (Mellor, 1993:113). Therefore, he suggests that “rather entering a period of post-modernity, we are moving into one in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalized and universalized than before” (Giddens, 1990:3).

Giddens notes three main elements of the dynamic qualities of modern social life. First, he argues that we have entered into an era that relates social activities without necessary reference to the particularities of place in the world that applies a globally standardized time (separation of time and space). The process of separating time and space is central for the second element which Giddens calls ‘disembedding mechanisms’. Disembedding mechanisms can be explained as the ‘lifting out’ or ‘disembedding’ of social relations from the particularities of locales and “their rearticulation across indefinite tracts of time–space” (Giddens, 1991:18). The emptying of time and space, conjoined with the disembedding mechanisms, enabled our social life to move away from the dominance of traditional precepts and practices. Giddens nominates this phenomenon as the context of the third element that he calls ‘institutional reflexivity’. Modernity’s reflexivity pertains to “the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge” (Giddens, 1991:20). Consequently, knowledge is not cumulative nor incidental to modern institutions but situated under doubt. The reflexivity of modernity extends to the self and, finally, the body.

The self is conceived as a reflexive project in late modernity which means that we are “what we make of ourselves.” Therefore, the underlying aim of self-understanding goes beyond merely getting to know oneself better, instead building or rebuilding “a coherent and rewarding sense of identity” (Giddens, 1991:75). According to Giddens (1991:56), the self is embodied in the body. As a result, the body is not simply an ‘entity’ or a ‘being’, but is “experienced as a practical mode of coping with external situations and events”. In other words, the body is “part of an action system rather than merely a passive object” (Giddens, 1991:77). As the body is the basic medium with which to exist and understand the world, awareness of the body not only includes the monitoring of sensory input and bodily dispositions, but also entails recognition of requirements of exercise and diet. Indeed, the increasingly reflexive forms in which individuals relating to their bodies can be defined as one of the exemplifying features of late modernity. The narcissistic cultivation of outer body is actually “an expression of a concern lying much deeper actively to ‘construct’ and control the body” (Giddens, 1991:7). A tendency for people to put significance

and emphasis on the body as constitutive of the self that has observed and participated in high modernity, demonstrates an integral connection with the massive rise of the body in consumer culture.

In this vein, body care activities within the context of a consumer culture already have pre-defined meaning. Images of beauty and youth become entangled with aspirations for the mass consumption of goods (Featherstone, 1982, quoted in Yang, 2011:336). The wide range of cosmetic and bodily preservation products that are marketed and sold imply the importance of appearance and body maintenance within late capitalist society (Featherstone, 1982). A myriad of stylized images of the body are distributed by television, films and advertisements, and the media constantly highlights the significance of bodily appearance. The reward for an ascetic body no longer stays at “spiritual salvation” or “improved health”, but shifts to “an enhanced appearance and more marketable self” (Featherstone, 1982:170-171). Discipline of the body and hedonism therefore cease to be incompatible. According to Featherstone (1982:172), “the subjugation of the body through body maintenance routines is presented within consumer culture as a precondition for the achievement of an acceptable appearance and the release of the body’s expressive capacity”. Within consumer capitalist society, bodily qualities such as slimness, fitness, beauty and youth have gained new significance as marks of class and status distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984, quoted in Yang, 2011:336).

The importance of appearance and body maintenance within consumer culture ultimately suggests two different categories of body: the inner and the outer body. The inner body represents issues of the health, which requires maintenance and restoring in the face of disease and deterioration of the body (Featherstone, 1982). The outer body involves “appearance as well as the movement and control of the body within social space” (Featherstone, 1982:171). Interestingly, the inner and the outer body become combined because “the prime purpose of the maintenance of the inner body becomes the enhancement of the appearance of the outer body” (Featherstone, 1982:171). Within consumer culture, the good-looking youthful body is conceived as healthy and it even indicates one’s morality. In other words, physical attractiveness becomes associated not only with vitality and energy but also achieving social acceptability and worthiness as a person. Similarly, “the body beautiful comes to be taken as a sign of prudence and prescience in health matters” (Featherstone, 1982:183). The belief within consumer culture that appearance and bodily presentation express the self develops a new relationship between the body and self.

As Featherstone (1982) notes, women in particular are trapped in this beauty myth, a myth reinforced by images of the body represented by the cosmetic, fashion and advertising industries within consumer society. With the rampant development of consumerism, women are no longer objects fulfilling purely productive and reproductive imperative, rather, women’s bodies are now celebrated for their erotic-aesthetic functions to promote consumption (Yang, 2011). Bodily activities are reduced to simply

erotic-aesthetic functions, and this consequently restrains “the collective, plural, and social aspects of embodiment in favor of its private, individualistic features” (Turner, 1994, quoted in Yang, 2011:336).

Although women across the globe now share a desire to alter their bodies, the features they want to change differ. Kaw (1993:75) notes that “while the features that white women primarily seek to alter through cosmetic surgery (i.e., the breasts, fatty areas of the body, and facial wrinkles) do not correspond to conventional markers of racial identity, those features that Asian American women primarily seek to alter (i.e., “small, narrow” eyes and a “flat” nose) do correspond to such markers”. What most Korean women wish to alter coincides with the wishes of Asian American women together with women in East-Asian countries like China and Japan. She further illustrates that Asian American women’s decision to have cosmetic surgery is “an attempt to escape persisting racial prejudice that correlates their stereotyped genetic physical features (“small, slanty” eyes and a “flat” nose) with negative behavioral characteristics, such as passivity, dullness, and a lack of sociability” (Kaw, 1993:75). These characteristics are not always valid in a South Korean context, however, characteristic Western beauty is considered optimal, therefore, desirable. Within prevailing consumer society, medical technology stands as an authoritative producer of norms, one that strengthens “the idea that beauty should be every woman’s goal” as well as beauty standards that tend to idealize the Western look through “the subtle and often unconscious manipulation of racial and gender ideologies” (Kaw, 1993:75). As a result, Asian women within a localized consumer culture internalize a body image created by the dominant global culture’s racial ideology and decide to have cosmetic surgery to conform to an ethnocentric norm.

2.3 Methodology and Structure

In the first half of the thesis (Chapter three), I delineate the history of Korean Neo-Confucianism to argue that how Korean Neo-Confucianism has evolved into its very unique form and still pervades all aspects of Korean life today. This aspect is crucial to examine because the introduction and expansion of Neo-Confucianism in Korea had a significant influence on the position of women in society. Indeed these changes determined the management of female bodies significantly, and this trend has covertly continued until today. In order to focus my discussion, some definitions are necessary. I explain what Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism mean and provide a brief history of both Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. Moreover, I explain how Neo-Confucians envisioned and treated the body according to the scheme of Neo-Confucianism.

In the second half of the thesis (Chapter four), I examine how Korean women manage their bodies according to the Neo-Confucian body concept and how it actually fits into notions of contemporary body management within Korea’s consumer culture in this time of high modernity. I also

make clear how people reconcile the latent tensions that emerge from incompatibilities between traditional cultural norms and the desire to become more beautiful or to achieve an upgraded body. I draw upon a vast range of cultural manifestations that are exemplary of today's preoccupation with cosmetic surgery, analyzing narratives on an online forum, public debates presented in the media including popular culture, and surgical stories of patients or potential patients from scholarly literature on cosmetic surgery⁵.

An important decision was the choice of an exemplary website. The reason I chose the website, *Sungyesa*, is because this website is the only non-profit online platform for participants of cosmetic surgery managed by an individual⁶. Within the website, I chose to examine the forum '*What if I get it done?*'. Unlike the other forums⁷, most entries are written by newcomers to cosmetic surgery who might share why they want to have cosmetic surgery. There are 4,605 postings, posted anonymously on this forum, between December 23rd 2004 and May 29th 2015. I only went through the postings from January 2nd 2011 to May 29th 2015 that consisted of 830 postings posted by (potential) recipients of cosmetic surgery.

To give a better insight into how this practice does not accord with Korean cultural norms, I illustrate the cosmetic surgery of the late President of South Korea Roh Moo-hyun that took place during his presidency. Finally, I interpret how Korean society and individuals comply with the promises and agreements in cosmetic surgery within the context of South Korea.

⁵ I observed an online community of cosmetic surgery participants, *Sungyesa* to comprehend how the participants of cosmetic surgery make sense of accomplishing "a new-self" via cosmetic surgery and to understand what leads them to consider having cosmetic surgery. The use of the Internet as "a form of unobtrusive method" (Lee, 2000, quoted in Hine, 2015:157) provides us with research possibilities on visible aspects of everyday life. As a covert observer and a participant of this online community, I plan to participate in debates and give comments on postings if necessary. However, examining online a community of cosmetic surgery has a limitation. The practice of cosmetic surgery has become increasingly accepted within Korean society so many of the users of online communities do not explain why they ended up being there, having or considering cosmetic surgery. Therefore, I additionally make use of narratives in public debates and popular culture to extend the applicable data.

⁶ Most online communities for cosmetic surgery are opened and run by plastic surgery clinics or at least have some relations with clinics.

⁷ Other forums are mostly for the experienced members to share the processes and outcomes of their cosmetic surgery experiences.

3. Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism in Korean Context

Confucianism has permeated neighboring countries of mainland China such as Korea and Japan as those civilizations have developed, a process taking thousands of years (Chang, 1997, quoted in Zhang et al., 2005). The principles of Confucianism are spread throughout institutions like schools and public services as well as media. Some of these traditional values are challenged by “increasing competition from alternative sets of values (e.g., pleasure, individual achievement) in an age of globalization” (Zhang and Harwood, 2004, quoted in Zhang et al., 2005). Nonetheless, Confucianism still markedly represents what it means to be East Asian in general. Hence, Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism should be elaborated in order to understand the mentality of Korean people. For my purposes of this research, I use the term ‘Confucianism’ as an origin of this philosophy and ‘Neo-Confucianism’ as the entire Confucian tradition that has remained as a way of life as well as philosophy.

3.1 Confucianism

Confucianism refers to the ethical teachings of Confucius, teachings that were passed on to later ages up to and including the present day. This also includes the entire expansion of the purported Confucian tradition, throughout the centuries (Ching, 1977). Some might ask whether Confucianism is a religion or a philosophy. Confucianism, like other religions, involves a public cult: “sacrificial cult of veneration for Heaven and for ancestors, and it allowed for sacrifices of incense and foods even to “semi-deified” historical personages, including Confucius himself” (Ching, 1977:9). However, it lacks a monastic order as well as an organized priesthood outside of the identification of the emperor as a priest (Ching, 1977)⁸. In effect, the question whether Confucianism is a religion never arose until China encountered the West (Chang, 1958). This is because Confucius did not have a position that is nearly as “decisive as that claimed by Jesus Christ for his own mission and teachings” (Ching, 1977:7). The Chinese people have usually favored the school or teachings of scholars (儒家 Ju-jia or 儒教 Ju-jiao) than “Confucianism” or Kong-jiao (孔教)(Ching, 1977:7). In this regard, Confucianism is rather a misnomer designated by Western allies.

Confucius was looked upon as a teacher, a sage, and an example of personal cultivation (Chang, 1958). Confucius himself did not recognize himself as an innovator of the teachings but rather a cultural

⁸ The emperor is the only person who is qualified to sacrifice to Heaven along with the heads of families (predominantly male) as mediators between the living and the ancestral spirits (Ching, 1977:9).

transmitter who has inherited the philosophy of ancient sages (Roger, 2010; Ching, 1977; Tu, 2000). According to Ching (1977), philosophical elaboration of Confucianism came later by engaging the original teachings to a defined theoretical order by Neo-Confucianists. This is probably because a Confucian ideal of the political being uniquely represents “scholar-official” (Kim Sungmoon, 2009). In Confucian society, two ideals—to be morally perfect (self-cultivation) and to dedicate to statecraft of the common good (governing others)—were ironically incorporated (Kang, 2006). The underlying rationale was that “bureaucrats well versed in Confucian classics and thereby morally cultivated would make the state a semblance of a moral school by domesticating human desires and eradicating violence, that is, by moralizing politics” (Kim Sungmoon, 2009:30). In this respect, Confucianism can be considered a teaching that has religious, political and philosophical aspects that underwent several changes in the course of history.

3.2 Neo-Confucianism

Confucianism is a knotty subject since it has developed in many different ways within several regions in East Asia. The origins of correlative thinking dates back to Shang dynasty of China (c. 1600 – c. 1046 B.C.), but it traveled across centuries to our present day (Ames, 2010). In a contemporary context, it often uncritically refers to the 20th century Confucian traces such as “the ethical teachings concerning political loyalty, filial piety, female chastity, and justice or righteousness” as well as “the Confucian social structure, in which these teachings had become imbedded” (Ching, 1977:8). If “Confucianism” remains inconclusive, then “Neo-Confucianism” is even more so.

The term ‘Neo-Confucianism’ is used in order to distinguish it from ‘Classical Confucianism’ which began with Confucius (511 - 472 B.C.), subsequently declining with the fragmentation of the Han dynasty (206 B.C. - A.D. 220) (Tu, 2000). Neo-Confucianism refers to the Confucianism that flourished after the Tang dynasty (618 - 907) (Ching, 1977; Berthrong, 2010). The canonization of the Confucian Classics by the Han dynasty Confucians partly enabled the process of cultural unification, and this resulted in political unity of the empire during the Han dynasty (Berthrong, 2010; Chang, 1958). However, the philosophy of Confucianism gradually became more scholarly and lost vitality (Chang, 1958), and many Confucians were affronted by the “the inevitable misuse of Confucian symbols by state authority” (Berthrong, 2010:11). It was then that Daoism (Taoism) and Buddhism began to permeate down to the popular mind and all levels of society (Chang, 1958). The renewal of Daoism as a religion and the arrival of Buddhism are both presumed to have occurred from the Wei-Qin period to the end of the Tang dynasty (from about A.D 220 to 907) (Berthrong, 2010). Although Confucianism never lost its prominent position in the Chinese state and family, the Chinese academic world experienced a major

transformation after its encounter with Buddhist principles. Metaphysical interests within Daoist and Buddhist philosophies opened up a new age of Confucian thought (Ching, 1977).

Neo-Confucianism of the Northern and Southern Song (Sung) (A.D. 960 - 1279) known as The Renaissance of Confucianism was followed by “the awakening of the Chinese to their own cultural tradition” as well as “the struggle against Buddhism” (Chang, 1958:28), this lasted until Yuan and Ming dynasties (1279 - 1644) spreading Neo-Confucianism into Korea and Japan (Berthrong, 2010). Although the appreciation of Buddhism was widespread and far-reaching, a number of controversies arose between the devotees of Buddhism and the advocates of Confucianism (Berthrong, 2010; Chang, 1958). Many Confucian scholars saw “the abandonment of family life by monks, freedom from taxation and military service for monks, and the theoretical emptiness of the Buddhist dogma, which was in opposition to the Confucian affirmation of living” as the challenge of Buddhism (Chang, 1958:28). For Confucians, Buddhist monasticism was seen as “a negation of human values” and “a manifestation of selfishness” (Ching, 1977:87-88). Nevertheless, the rebirth of Confucianism as opposed to the success of Buddhism took place by following the way of Buddhism. This incorporation was necessary in order to resist ‘the law of impermanence’ and ‘the theory of emptiness’: Confucian scholars had to establish a new philosophy founded on the concepts and terms of Confucianism (Chang, 1958). This new Confucian philosophy contained both a conclusive ethic as well as epistemology which affirms the will to order things, the value of human effort, the belief in man’s creative position in his own redemption, and determining “the basis of knowledge of what *is* and what *ought* to be” (Chang, 1958:28). It did so in order to be able to give a satisfactory counter-argument against Buddhism (De Bary, 1975).

However, this Neo-Confucian trend was challenged in the Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911) by the School of Evidential Learning, or School of Han Learning (hanxue 漢學). The followers of the School of Evidential Learning believed that Confucianism must provide, or be of, some practical use for the people. They argued that the approaches of the Song and Ming period were infected with corrupting Buddhist and Daoist ways of thinking which lacked “the practice of service to self and others in practical ways”. Hence, this School often emphasized empirical and historical research (Berthrong, 2010:13). This view was prevalent until the opening of China to the West, even though Neo-Confucianism, alongside Korean and Japanese ways of thought, was still considered to be the most dominant factor within Chinese thinking during the last thousand years.

Under the influence of extensive and intrusive Western powers, the Confucian tradition was disrupted not only in China but also in Korea. The upheaval in East Asian Confucian societies continues even today alongside the modern debate of globalization (Berthrong, 2010). In order to respond to such a challenge from the West, East Asian Confucian scholars have been in search for a modern identity that is

more consistent with the Confucian way of thinking. This movement is called “New Confucianism”, and is often referred to as the third wave of the Confucian tradition (Tu, 2000; Berthrong, 2010).

Although many academics have argued that Confucianism presently no longer functions as a social and political norm or a prescriptive tradition within East Asian societies, it still continues to covertly shape behavior and social organizations, and remains in the minds of East Asian people (Choi, 2010; Robinson, 1991; Tu, 2000). Korea especially is known to preserve the Confucian traditions even more so than the neighboring East Asian countries of China and Japan: Confucianism continues to serve as a cultural, social and political principle that determines the customs and consciousness of Korean people (Choi, 2010). Koreans accommodated Confucianism standards to their own indigenous patterns, leading to the establishment of significantly different practices (Robinson, 1991; Haboush, 1991). Thus, it is necessary to understand the specific, unique developments of Korean Neo-Confucianism and the particular ways in which it has been lived throughout Korean history.

3.3 Korean Neo-Confucianism

A number of historians speculate that Confucianism was first imported to the Korean peninsula long before the Chosŏn (Joseon) or Yi dynasty (1392 - 1910) and assimilated into the native Korean culture over a period of a thousand years⁹. When Neo-Confucianism reached the peninsula, Chosŏn willingly transformed itself into a Confucian society because of its long-standing investment in Confucian norms and morals. I shall divide the history of Korean Confucianism into three periods:

1. The introduction of Neo-Confucianism in the early Chosŏn period (14th to 16th centuries);
2. The development of Neo-Confucianism in the late Chosŏn period (17th to 19th centuries);
3. The evolution of Neo-Confucianism from the modern period of the Korean Empire until contemporary Korean society (20th century to the present).

The Introduction of Neo-Confucianism in early Chosŏn period

Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and indigenous religions co-existed prior to the Chosŏn period as an important part of people’s daily lives. Confucianism served as “a governing method, and a political ideology, and an academic subject” (Choi, 2010:36), whereas Buddhism provided “a philosophical foundations of society” (Duncan, 1994:79). Confucianism played a crucial role as an impetus for social reform during the transitional period from the late Koryŏ (Goryeo) to the early Chosŏn period (Choi,

⁹ Haboush (1991) further explicates that Korea’s first exposure to Confucianism took place in the second century B.C., when Han China built the four commanderies on the Korean peninsula.

2010; Kang, 2006). In the early Chosŏn period, Confucian intellectuals pursued a modern Confucian society by introducing China's advanced philosophy of Neo-Confucianism, deploying Neo-Confucianism as a political and ideological instrument to resolve pending problems of military rule during the rule of the Koryŏ dynasty (Choi, 2010).

Neo-Confucianism in early Chosŏn, like the Neo-Confucian drive in Song dynasty of China, also started as a critique of Daoism and Buddhism (Choi, 2010; Kang, 2006). Neo-Confucian thinkers in the early Chosŏn period regarded both philosophies as neither productive nor practical, even though different factions of Neo-Confucianist thinking interpreted them in their own particular ways. In the end, Neo-Confucians blamed the illness of society on "the decadence and corruption of Buddhism" (Duncan, 1994:77) and ultimately tried to root Confucianism within practical learning as well as practice, as opposed to the supposedly unproductive philosophies of Buddhism or Daoism (Choi, 2010).

In the very beginning of the Chosŏn dynasty, the Korean attitude toward contemporary China's Ming society was rather ambivalent. The early Chosŏn Koreans tried to invent their own ideal version of Confucian society modeled after the classical period of China. Both Korean and Chinese Confucians regarded Confucianism as a "universal truth applicable to all civilized societies" (Haboush, 1991:91). Thus, the quality of Korean Confucian advancement would not be considered inferior to the Chinese one. Nonetheless, early Chosŏn Confucians adopted some of aspects of Chinese Neo-Confucian institutions for direction and guidance by examining the practices of Chinese dynasties, primarily those of the Song court (Haboush, 1991).

Within the framework of Neo-Confucian philosophy, the ruling elite of early Chosŏn almost entirely restructured the arrangement of society, from education and bureaucracy to the organization of the family (Haboush, 1991). The Neo-Confucians of the early Chosŏn organized a nationwide state-run school system because they were convinced that a moral education based on Confucian teachings would transform society. By deploying such a strategy, the time of absorbing entrenched knowledge was over some time in the beginning of the 16th century (Haboush, 1991). Although China as a country had been far more influential and dominant, Korean Neo-Confucian scholars contributed not only to the development of Chosŏn Neo-Confucianism but also to Neo-Confucian philosophy in general (Choi, 2010). By this time, the government encouraged the private academies that functioned as centers for students preparing for the civil service examination as well as research hubs for private academics (Haboush, 1991). As a consequence, both private and state schools became "an important transmitter of Confucian values in society" and the civil service examination became "a prime avenue of social mobility" (Robinson 1991:205). However, this examination system instead created many layers of

yangban, the upwardly mobile newcomers forming the lower layers¹⁰ (Haboush, 1991). According to Haboush (1991), the nationwide public school scheme and the examinations were invented to construct a “meritocratic hierarchy”. In the case of China, the examinations functioned to distribute privilege and power whereas the examinations left little space for the minor lineages in Korea (Haboush, 1991; Cumings, 1997). Indeed it was still difficult for the majority of peasant families to spare a son to study for the exams in both cases (Cumings, 1997). In the case of Korea, twenty-one of the dominant clans produced 40 percent of *munkwa* degree holders, and 53 percent were produced among thirty-six clans¹¹ (Wagner, 1973, quoted in Cumings, 1997:53). This proves that aristocratic power was concentrated and preserved within a small elite circle (Haboush, 1991; Cumings, 1997).

The political ethos of the mid-16th century Chosŏn court was essentially Confucian. Haboush (1988, quoted in Haboush, 1991:95) claims that the long established clash between the throne and bureaucracy manifested as “a competition over who better understood and achieved Confucian virtue”. The unique role of Censorate, charged with “monitoring the behavior of the monarch and bureaucrats” (Robinson, 1991:205), represents the intensity of the Confucian ethos within political customs. The Censorate appeared as “a full-fledged member along with the executive branch and the throne in a tripartite power structure” unlike in China: the censorial voice was regarded as “the conscience of the nation” and the censors were made up of a group of the brightest young bureaucrats (Haboush, 1991)¹². The political traditions of Chosŏn such as the recruitment of officials via the civil service examination, the Confucian curriculum in educational establishments, bureaucratic outspokenness of the censors and the power groupings of ruling elites are clear manifestations of Confucian political concepts¹³.

The organization of the family was most notably affected by the process of Confucianization. In order to claim that Chosŏn is favorably Confucianized, the family had to be reorganized to fulfill “the requirements of patrilineality and patriarchy” as it was written in both the classical and the Song ritual texts, along with Ming law (Haboush, 1991:99). In effect, pre-Chosŏn Koreans had never practiced such an order. According to Ebrey (1991), Koreans practiced only one patrilineal and patriarchal practice in the pre-Chosŏn period—namely, aristocratic families and many common people had patrilineal family

¹⁰ The definition of the *yangban* is still debatable, but it apparently was an elite different from that in China or Japan, and this elite status was hereditary, unlike that in China. The criteria required to be recognized as the *yangban* was that one had to “demonstrate that at least one ancestor in the previous four generations had been a *yangban*” (Cumings, 1997:51).

¹¹ *Munkwa* means liberal arts, and to have such a degree means to pass the civil service examination.

¹² Haboush (1991) noted that the function of the Censorate in China was decreased to inspection of bureaucrats because of the rise of imperial power.

¹³ “The rule of virtuous men” and “the importance of selecting officials on the basis of merit” were stressed within Neo-Confucian political system, at least in theory: this is because a harmonious state, which Confucianists view as an ideal state, was believed to be realized through civil bureaucrats governing society (Robinson, 1991:205). The power groupings, also known as faction politics, was more predominant in the late Chosŏn period.

names. Most of the native customs from the Koryŏ period lasted in the early Chosŏn period, that includes matrilocal marriage, an equal quota of the inheritance for all children including daughters, flexibility in forming and dissolving of marriage alliances, participation in family affairs of daughters or son-in-laws as fully as sons and many more (Haboush, 1991). The patriarchal and patrilineal emphasis in the Confucian regime clashed with deeply ingrained and fundamentally native ideas of women at the bottom of society. The state endeavored to prevent the remarriage of women for the sake of chastity of widows, and even implemented a legal sanction to discriminate against the sons and grandsons of remarried women when attempting to serve the bureaucracy or attending examinations (Haboush, 1991). The reasoning behind this practice was that marriage was not about “love between man and wife, but a bond of love between two surnames” as written in *Li Chi* (禮記), or the Book of Rites, and the widow’s fidelity to the adopted family was “a form of property” (Cumings, 1997:63-64). Moreover, the state made a considerable effort to encourage women to adopt Neo-Confucian norms and place them in the domestic sphere. The state proclaimed several injunctions. The fundamental purpose of the state was to place women in the domestic sphere. In 1392 Yangban women were prohibited from associating with or talking to men beyond a certain closeness of kinship. In 1412 if women were to leave the house, their bodies should be completely wrapped and faces should not be displayed. In 1462, the state outlawed equestrian practices for women that had been common during Koryŏ period. Following the development of Korean written characters in the mid-15th century, the state began publishing morality books to promote Confucian morals and customs, and those books for women in the late 15th century emphasized “wifely submission, devotion to parents-in-law, frugality, and diligence” (Haboush, 1991:106). According to Cumings (1997:62), by the 16th century “a yangban woman had to be married for years before daring to move in the outer world of society, and then only in a cocoon of clothing inside a cloistered sedan chair, carried by her slaves”.

The final areas to undergo a significant transformation in the early Chosŏn period were funeral and mourning rites as well as ancestor worship. These customs contained the most patrilineal and patriarchal features of Confucianism. In early Chosŏn, the state used both moral suasion and the legal means to promote those practices: however, legal recourse was considered objectionable because of Confucian bias against such a procedure: the state rather preferred to repeatedly exhort the yangban to become a model for the masses: In 1401 Confucian funeral and mourning rites and ancestor worship were included in the first of a series of codified laws (Haboush, 1991). The ritual practice promulgated from the ruling elite to the yangban class and down common people. Haboush (1991) notes that when ancestor worship became a dominant practice, Koreans did more than the law prescribed.

The development of Neo-Confucianism in late Chosŏn period

The geopolitics of East Asia went through great changes during the 16th century. The Ming dynasty (1368 - 1644) of China was replaced by the Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911), and the Edo period (1600 - 1827) of Japan began. Chosŏn also went through a significant transition.

Choi (2010) notes that there were indications of conversion from an agricultural society to a commercial and industrial one in the late 18th century, and this probably explain the development of the Pragmatic School in the late Chosŏn. Neo-Confucian philosophers made academic progress on the philosophical issues of the time as they also made “political claims on the reform of land and social class” based on the philosophy of the great progenitor of Neo-Confucianism from Song dynasty Zhu Xi (朱熹, also written as Chu Hsi) (Choi, 2010:47). Moreover, Western sciences and catholic theology were imported via China and they “provided new paradigms different from the then-current cosmology and worldview” (Choi, 2010:45). Confucian ethics and morals penetrated into all levels from the high to lower strata in the late Chosŏn period. The Korean alphabet, which was devised in the mid-15th century, was utilized to educate commoners in Confucian morals: the commoners increasingly had more chances to learn Confucian texts because of the growth in the number of private academies and primary schools (Haboush, 1991).

Neo-Confucianism includes within its tenet “contradictory impulses that support centralization of political power around a merit-based bureaucracy while also affirming ascriptive class distinctions in society” (Robinson, 1991:206). The practice of recruiting officials on the basis of merit encouraged the populace to participate in the civil service examination and this produced many layers of yangban in the first half of Chosŏn period by allowing commoners to shift to a higher class. This trend continued in the late Chosŏn period, and induced a problematic distribution of social class. In the late 17th century, a total of somewhere between nine and 16 percent of population considered themselves as yangban according to a few collections of household registers: the category of yangban had been weakened by the 19th century, and more people claimed this exclusive status (Cumings, 1991). According to the data from Kyŏngsang (Kyungsang) Province, more than half of the total population were made up of yangban in several districts (Haboush, 1991). A strange mixture of “a strong class-consciousness” and “the Confucian meritocratic ideal” made it possible to challenge the long-established notion and organization of class even though the expansion of “an aristocratic/bureaucratic hybrid system” preserved certain ascriptive privileges for the ruling elite (Robinson, 1991:206). The growth in access to education meant that more well educated people were produced yet a greater proportion of them did not wish to attain a government post (Haboush, 1991). Accordingly, patrilineage became considerably more important as “a means of maintaining a claim to social status” for yangban descendants who ardently recorded genealogy and practiced ancestral rites (Haboush, 1991:109). Moreover, the enhancement of their local leadership

encouraged the spread of Confucian morals and this made all residents of villages more attuned to the elements of Confucian behavior (Haboush, 1991).

By the mid-18th century, patriarchy and patrilineality were fully established. For example, most genealogies documented sons first and then daughters after the mid-18th century, and daughters' descendants were completely excluded by the 19th century (Haboush, 1991). The daughter did not deserve a name before she was engaged yet, daughters had a significant role in solidifying family alliances: if a married woman gives a birth to a son, she achieved her designated status in the new family as well as an honored name (Cumings, 1997). The native Korean perception of woman practically reversed during the Chosŏn period as the new family law became more entrenched. However, a woman's status continued to control that of her descendants: for instance, children by concubines were excluded from their familial rights as well as in public careers and status (Haboush, 1991). Haboush (1991:108) notes that "a woman was an agent, as much as her husband was, through which her children inherited status, but she lost all claims of inheritance to her natal line". In this regard, a woman's body was "occupied with maintaining and reproducing the family body through corporeal bodies of the family" (Taeyon Kim, 2003:100). In summary, the position of women weakened while patriarchal authority in family and aristocratic privilege in government strengthened in late Chosŏn period (Robinson, 1991; Cumings, 1997). This trend eventually begins to decline although a close look at the tendency reveals that it still persists to the present today.

The evolution of Neo-Confucianism from the modern period of Korean Empire until contemporary Korean society

The political system of Chosŏn survived until the late 19th century because of "Korea's relative isolation, the long period of peace and concomitant atrophy of its military institutions, and the absence of a strong commercial class" (Robinson, 1991:206). Not only Korea but also East Asia as a whole was forcefully opened up by Western imperialism in the mid-19th century starting from China and, later, Japan. The traditionalist intellectual response to this crisis was to protect orthodox Neo-Confucianism and reject heterodox foreign values (Robinson, 1991; Choi, 2010). With the intrusion of Western commercial and military power in the late 19th century, Korea was forced to enter into the global capitalist economy even though it signed its first international treaty (the Kanghwa treaty) in 1876 with Japan, instead of a Western power. Japan enforced "a Western style unequal treaty, giving its nationals extraterritorial legal rights and opening several Korean ports to international commerce" (Cumings, 1997:86). After signing the Kanghwa treaty, it became increasingly difficult to maintain the state orthodoxy and isolate Korea from Western values. Accordingly, progressives began to discuss the complete reorganization of political

institutions and social practices. Moreover, the propriety of Confucian ideology in the modern world was disputed for the first time (Deuchler, 1997, quoted in Robinson, 1991:207).

During the Chosŏn period, Korean hierarchy was so successfully established that it also informed a foreign policy known as *sadae* (serving the great), this can be used a mechanism with which to explain centuries of Korea's relationship with China¹⁴ (Cumings, 1997). The innate political values within the Confucian tradition became the target of criticism with the rise of nationalism after 1900. This Korean nationalism in particular problematized the external Chinese origin of Confucianism, and the view of Confucianism as an alien tradition gained significance and influence amongst nationalist modernizers (Chandra, 1988, quoted in Robinson, 1991:207). Nationalists denounced the predicament of the declining political system of Chosŏn for its "excessive veneration of a foreign cultural system" (Sin, 1981, quoted in Robinson, 1991:207). The concept of *sadae* was closely related to political and social dimensions of Confucianism within this debate. Nationalists tried to separate their outlook of a modern and autonomous Korea from the Chosŏn period's "cultural and political dependence/subservience to an outmoded and decadent universal order centered in China" (Robinson, 1991:208). For example, an influential intellectual, Sin Ch'ae-ho argued that "the nation could survive only if its people were reconnected with its national history and culture, both obscured by 500 years of excessive veneration of the alien Confucian tradition" (Robinson, 1991:208). Although the reaction of nationalists exaggerated the causal role of Confucianism, it enabled them to link the failing of the late 19th-century crisis with the traditional Korean political system. The general critique of *sadae* was that this "mentality weakened the legitimacy of the Korean monarch, thereby circumscribing his authority" (Robinson, 1991:209). In the beginning of 20th century, nationalists retained Confucianism as "a barrier to modernization": they believed that the only way to be modernized was to reject Confucianism (Yi, 1922, quoted in Robinson, 1991:209). Hence, the state examination was abolished in 1895, and "New learning" such as Western languages, science, philosophy, and mathematics eventually became the core of the curriculum. Consequently, the elements that defined the cultivated man changed. For instance, if classical Chinese used to be a requirement to prove one's cultivated-ness, this was replaced by knowledge of Japanese or Western language (Robinson, 1991). Additionally women's position in society shifted slightly in this time. Christianity was spread with the influx of foreign missionaries, and they founded schools for girls: women became free to participate in activities outside the home however, there was objection from men who support orthodox Confucian attitude toward women's increasing autonomy (Nadeau and Sangita, 2013).

Nationalist intellectuals of the early 20th-century also critiqued the Neo-Confucian social system, namely Neo-Confucian human relations and ritual observances that sustained Neo-Confucian values: they

¹⁴ "The great" implied China, especially China of the Ming.

were convinced that individual freedom was a substantial ingredient of Western identity (Robinson, 1991). What they believed was that “Confucianism, with its reliance on hierarchical and male-dominated relationships, imprisoned individual will and stifled creativity” (Robinson, 1991:210). As I delineated in the previous sections, the position of women in Korean society degenerated after the adoption of Neo-Confucianism in the beginning of the Chosŏn dynasty. Critics pointed that the sexual inequalities such as “the subordination of wives to husbands, daughters to all men in the family, the loss of inheritance rights, inequitable marriage laws, and unequal treatment in genealogical records (*chokbo*)” was re-enforced by the Neo-Confucian tradition (Deuchler, 1977, quoted in Robinson, 1991:211). Ancestor worship and its rituals also came under attack by progressives: they believed that these practices promoted the hierarchy of age and the legitimate roles for the sexes through the exclusion of women and patriarchal authority (Janelli and Janelli, 1983, quoted in Robinson, 1991:211). Therefore, modernizers considered those values as “wasteful, backward-looking, authoritarian, and superstitious” (Ch’oe, 1962, quoted in Robinson, 1991:211).

The critique of Neo-Confucianism was broadened during Japanese colonial rule from 1910 to 1945. Because Korea had fallen under Japanese rule, the Neo-Confucian tradition was blamed as the political malaise that had dragged Korea down. Koreans had ethnic and linguistic harmony as well as long-identified national boundaries well before Europeans reached them. Moreover, “by virtue of their relative proximity to China, Koreans had always felt superior to Japan at best, or equal at worst” (Cumings, 1997:141). To understand the general critique of Neo-Confucianism, it is meaningful to look into Hyŏn Sang-yun’s book *History of Korean Confucianism* (Chosŏn yuhaksa), published in 1949. Hyŏn, a nationalist politician and influential educator, compiled the general critique of Neo-Confucianism from the late 19th century until the Japanese occupation in order to evaluate both the good and pernicious aspects of Neo-Confucianism “with a mind to preserving the good and expunging the bad” (Robinson, 1991:212). “Industry of men of virtue, high regard for virtue and humaneness, and respect for law” were listed as the valuable elements of the Neo-Confucian tradition whilst: “envy (veneration of China), factionalism, clanism, class conflict, literary effeminacy, disparagement of commerce, reverence for titles, and reverence for the past” were classified as the destructive influences from the Neo-Confucian tradition (Robinson, 1991:212). Although Hyŏn’s argument is misguided in several areas, his ideas reflected not only the general consensus of Korean people at the end of the colonial period but also had a great influence on Korean intellectuals of the time. No matter how important his work might be, it explicates how Korean people acknowledged the Neo-Confucian traditions and already treated them according to such a categorization.

However, the Japanese state strategically manipulated the cultural sensibilities of Koreans to promote their policies. This strategy made it easier for Japanese authority to claim the legitimacy of the state and require loyalty from the people. Moreover, the Japanese state became official patrons of Neo-Confucianism by developing the curriculum that stresses “values of loyalty and submissiveness to the state” as well as filial piety¹⁵ and also attempting to “preserve useful aspects of the traditional Korean class system” (Robinson, 1991:215). For example, the Japanese state financially supported organizations dedicated to the preservation of Neo-Confucian values and patronized individual Neo-Confucian scholars. This policy resulted in a reinforcement of the public educational principle of loyalty to the state as well as strengthening conservative and upper class elements of Korean society (Robinson, 1991:215).

Although some Neo-Confucian traditions were eliminated during Japanese colonial rule, Neo-Confucian interpersonal values quietly continued to influence the private lives of Koreans. South Korea remained an agrarian nation until the 1950s even after limited industrialization during the 1930s and 1940s. Between 1948 and 1950, rural society of Korea was significantly reshaped by land reforms. The Korean War, and the subsequent economic growth after the war, quickened a massive shift of population from farm to factory, village to city. In this way, the traditional value system became hard to preserve with the change in the way Koreans lived and worked. Yet, the modern South Korean governments rather indirect use of Confucian values of loyalty and service, and its attitude toward the Neo-Confucian tradition was rather ambivalent. This is because there was “a tremendous antipathy to the Confucian tradition, which is seen as an obstacle to economic development” (Robinson, 1991:218-219). While Confucianism and its influence were still criticised as “a barrier to the creation of a modern society and economic system, post-liberation leaders continue to use the language of Confucian loyalty to bolster the identification with the state”: state authorities have been willing to take advantage of “the value of loyalty, now in the guise of modern patriotism” (Robinson, 1991:217-218). At the same time, the Confucian traditions functioned efficiently to promote “public interest” and “discipline”. When South Korea achieved some level of economic development, Chun Doo Hwan, a former president of South Korea (in office from the 1st of September 1980 - 25th of February 1988), claimed that “the Confucian spirit was the basis of Korean culture; therefore, to not maintain discipline in the name of economic development and national security was a breach of traditional values”. Moreover, he adopted “a Confucian reformist attitude in admonishing citizens to rectify moral values as a precursor to behavioral change” (Robinson, 1991:219).

¹⁵ The Japanese state expected that reverence for one’s parents and elderly family members would permeate through the loyalty to the state.

It is stated that Neo-Confucianism no longer exists as the basis of the society from 1910 with the fall of Chosŏn dynasty according to an official handbook published in 1990s by the Korean state. However, the same source affirmed that it does continue to shape the habits, customs, and thoughts of the people (Robinson, 1991). Those elements are believed to exist as “reverence for age, social stability, and respect for learning and culture”. In contrast, “idolization of the past, social rigidity, and abstract unworldliness” were regarded as the elements that needs to be eradicated (Robinson, 1991:220). Whether these are true categories of Confucianism or not, the point is that they have been marked as such.

There has been a significant transformation in the family structure and roles in the family with the rapid economic development. The strong Neo-Confucian traditions on woman such as the virtue of woman, namely obedience “to the father, the husband and the son” are indeed fading, as a result of industrialization and women’s increasing participation in the labor market and development of gender equality policies (Sung, 2014). Nonetheless, the dominance of Neo-Confucian family values remained strong. Lee (2005, quoted in Sung, 2014:6) argued that “the Korean family resembles the nuclear family in structure, in terms of the actual activities undertaken within it, the principles of the stem family and the extensive influence of the traditional conceptualization of the family have not diminished”. The Neo-Confucian traditional views of women’s subordination to their husbands and parents-in-law still exist. For example, married women often give priority to their husbands’ families over their own, while men do not feel the same way about their wives’ families (Sung, 2014). Moreover, statistics show that over eighty-five per cent of women in paid employment revealed that the “housework was done either only or mostly by the wife, while only ten point one per cent said that it is fairly shared between the husband and wife” (Statistical Yearbook on Women 2004, quoted in Sung, 2014:31). This indicates that the Neo-Confucian tradition maintains a strong effect on women’s role and position in the family and society. Sung (2014:31) asserts that “women’s involvement in paid work reflects societal change, while their roles as primary carers and domestic workers in the family are in line with traditional ideas”.

The economic success of South Korea has been attributed to “the high level of education and trainability of Korea’s workforce” (Robinson, 1991:222). This is often explained by a logical outgrowth of the Neo-Confucian tradition that education is the principal avenue to social mobility. Some assert that Neo-Confucian traditions, such as “diligence and hard work, a great emphasis on education, and dutifulness”, helped South Korea to achieve rapid economic growth (Sung, 2014:5). However, “others downplay economic growth in favour of the disadvantages imposed, particularly in relation to gender: ‘in traditional Confucian societies women were in a disadvantaged position’” (Palley and Gelb, 1992, quoted in Sung, 2014:5). Koreans spend a large portion of their savings to educate their children, even though there has almost always been an oversupply of liberal-arts-trained college graduates. This implies that the

disparaging attitude toward manual work and technical positions during the Chosŏn period remained (Robinson, 1991:223). The idea of filial piety has been converted into “a concept of intergenerational compromise”: privilege and authority of the elder generation became less unconditional, but is still offered to parents as “a reward for providing” (Robinson, 1991:222).

In summary, Confucian values persist, but in altered form in the contemporary South Korea. Appreciation for education as well as individual cultivation lingers on in the contemporary Korean “drive for advanced degrees and the phenomenal expansion of higher education”: “interpersonal relations remain guided by a strong sense of reciprocity; intergenerational authority and respect, although weakened, remain important values in Korean life” (Robinson, 1991:225).

Korea has undergone a rapid transformation in its identity and culture during the last two centuries. Nonetheless, remnants of the Neo-Confucian traditions are still prevalent in Korean society. The most significant element of the Neo-Confucian traditions is probably serving one’s parents reverently and obediently. In the book *Classic of Filial Piety* (孝經, also written as Hsiao ching), purportedly written by a disciple of Confucius Tseng Tzu, it is explicated that Confucius stressed filial piety as “the basis of virtue and the source of all instruction” and consequently it became “the cornerstone of all morality” (De Bary, 1960:169). Indeed, Korean Neo-Confucianists hold the same idea that the body goes beyond physical matter. Yulgok, a prominent Neo-Confucian scholar of Korea’s Chosŏn period noted that one must preserve and treat one’s body reverently because one’s body is owned by the parents (Kang, 2006). The body, in this context, designates a vessel that contains one’s nature and providence inherited from the parents. Thus, Neo-Confucians treat the body as sacred. The fundamental way to treat one’s parents with filial piety is to remain bodily unaltered. Since the body is handed down from one’s parents, in accordance with filial duty, the body needs to be preserved as it naturally is within the Neo-Confucian culture. With this point in mind how can we understand proliferating practices of cosmetic surgery in South Korea?

In this Chapter, I explore how people of South Korea sanction the practice of cosmetic surgery that mutilates and reconstructs bodies, and what makes South Korean women more vulnerable to this practice within Korea’s consumer culture. Moreover, I attempt to explicate whether the practice of cosmetic surgery breaches Korea’s Neo-Confucian body regime or not. In order to fully comprehend this phenomenon, Neo-Confucian views on self and body will be the site of primary consideration.

3.4 The Neo-Confucian Body

To understand the Neo-Confucian body, it is important to recognize how Western philosophy and Confucianism are fundamentally different in approaching self and humanity. According to Western traditions, the substance of the self has been envisioned as rationality by Greek philosophers, as the Cartesian *res cogitans*, and as Kantian transcendental pure reason: in spite of the differences within them, these ideas share “the assumption that there is something called human nature, something that constitutes the universality of humanity” (Wonsuk Chang, 2010:87). On the contrary, the Confucian classics do not define the general qualities of being human: rather, it concentrates upon “different varieties of people and how they are interrelated with and distinguished from each other at their peculiar levels of self-cultivation in the concrete situations, roles, and relationships that constitute them” (Wonsuk Chang, 2010:88). The big question of humanity in Confucianism is not “what is essence of the humanity” but rather “how does a person achieve meaning in a given situation” (Wonsuk Chang, 2010:88). One of the most distinctive aspects of the Confucian view on humans is “a lack of interest in the universality of human nature”. With this point in view humans are not explainable by some single given pattern but rather individuals participating in particular situations: humans re-create themselves by developing and maximizing their own potentials and capabilities in response to changing environments (Wonsuk Chang, 2010:88). In Neo-Confucian thought, man is malleable and consequently one is able to achieve perfection through self-effort. This perfectibility of man through self-effort becomes a distinguishing feature of Confucian humanism, and “the real strength of the Neo-Confucian development of the Confucian concept of man” (Tu, 1971:79). In contrast with the Judeo-Christian tradition, humans do not play a weak and inferior role but rather humans have “the capacity to create meaning in collaboration with their fellow humans and environmental forces” (Wonsuk Chang, 2010:99).

The point of departure in Confucianism is “self-cultivation”. Confucian traditions hold the idea that “man’s given conditions in the secular world, such as his instinctual demands, his socio political situation, and his natural environment, are all legitimate constituents of this so-called design of man” (Tu, 1971:79). In other words, Neo-Confucianism embraces the secular desire of humans and yet it stresses the moral essence of man that a cultivated person can embody. Thus, the great challenge for man becomes transferring “the message that the ultimate meaning of life is in the ordinary existence of man” rather than going beyond human capability (Tu, 1971:80).

Mencius, the most famous Confucian after Confucius, recognized that one’s body and mind are essentially the same phenomenon. The concept of *ki* is crucial to understand the Neo-Confucian unification of body and mind. *Ki* is “a material force which links the body and mind into one system”. It “flows through all things, giving them form and vitality” (Taeyon Kim, 2003:99). Within the Neo-Confucian tradition, the body is not only physical matter but it is considered as the very place where human virtue manifests: one’s body is a microcosm and a natural object like animals and plants as well as

an object that represents reason of all things most properly (Lee Young-Chan, 2007:141). The idea of self is diffused throughout the Confucian view on the body because the Neo-Confucian self is produced from the body. The body that includes one's mind thus becomes the self (Lee Young-Chan, 2007:143). Mencius explained that the self can be divided into two different selves: *Self* which functions to control one's mind and pursues *Ren* (仁: goodness) and *Yi* (義: righteousness) and *self* that works as sensors of the body and seeks external objects and sensory desires: Mencius expounded that when the *Self* controls the *self* exquisitely, one becomes a cultivated self (Lee Young-Chan, 2007; Park Yeoun-Gyu, 2011).

Since *ki* is in everything, Confucius developed the idea that “the Many are ultimately One” and “the One is differentiated into the Many” (De Bary, 1960:457). Thus, there is “no distinction between the self and the universe” (Taeyon Kim, 2003:99). This harmony with the universe can be considered as the ultimate goal of a Neo-Confucian sage¹⁶. Accordingly, “how to achieve the most productive harmony between heaven and humans” or “the continuity of heaven and humans” is the question that the Confucian tradition answers (Wonsuk Chang, 2010:98). Achieving “the continuity of heaven and humans” became possible when one let go of oneself and become selfless. A Neo-Confucianist Shao Yung (1011-1077), inspired by the Confucian classic *the Book of Changes* (易經, also written as Yijing or I Ching), noted in his book *Selections from the Supreme Principles Governing the World* (also written as Huang-chi Ching-shi shu) as follows;

We can understand things as they are if we do not impose our ego on them. The sage gives things every benefit and forgets his own ego (quoted in De Bary, 1960:465).

The sage can be made through forgetting his own self and becoming selfless, or erasing boundaries between self and others. According to Taeyon Kim (2003:99), “the ideal of *selfless* subjectivity was nurtured through rigid Neo-Confucian techniques of self-cultivation, which involved study of the Confucian classics, adherence to strict codes of proper conduct and interpersonal relations, and observance of ancestor worship rituals, all of which reinforced a sense of self whose substance was a *ki* which was concretely joined with others”. *Ki* functioned as a material link between ancestors and descendants transferred from parent to child throughout the generations (Lee, 1993, quoted in Taeyon Kim, 2003:99).

¹⁶ ‘Heaven’ indicated by Wonsuk Chang is equivalent to Taeyon Kim’s universe. Heaven, originally Tian (天), is a term that is conventionally rendered: in the Confucian classics, clear-cut definitions of the terms like heaven or self are not given: this is because Confucius employs these concepts from specific contexts: the Confucian tradition often frames “questions about the self in the light of the relationship between heaven and benevolence, rather than giving clear, separate definitions of the two concepts” (Wonsuk Chang, 2010:89).

As a result, a Confucian man is an ultimate social being, and the Neo-Confucian body is the body that functions in between the self and others (Park Yeoun-gyu, 2011; Lee Young-Chan, 2007). The primary aspect of human social being is the family (Berthrong, 2010). Consequently, this aspect of Neo-Confucian man makes the confines of the body vague. Filial piety is the most notable concept that represents this notion of the Neo-Confucian body. Remaining one's body unaltered for the sake of filial piety implies that the body is not clearly one's own but rather shared with one's parents, by extension, with one's family members. The family formed "a unified body through ki, and the identity of self and family was continuous and undifferentiated" (Taeyon Kim, 2003:99). In other words, the Neo-Confucian self was defined through ki and family body. Neo-Confucian texts emphasize to "lose consciousness of the self and to enter a state of selflessness where the self becomes subsumed into the family, the community and, finally, the universe, thereby achieving the ultimate goal of sagehood" (De Bary et al., 1960:465, 469, 497-8; Chan, 1967:124-125; De Bary and Haboush, 1985:21, quoted in Taeyon Kim, 2003:99). The Neo-Confucian self-cultivation finally leads to social responsibility.

3.5 The Neo-Confucian Female Body

As I have discussed in the previous section, the body includes one's personality and nature that are bequeathed by parents within the Neo-Confucian custom. If so, shouldn't the body of a woman be treated as equally as that of a man?

A Confucian reference to a woman's body made by Ban Gu from the Han Dynasty noted that a body of the wife is equal to that of the husband regardless of their class and positions (Kang, 2004)¹⁷. Within the framework of Neo-Confucianism, an equal appreciation of both male and female bodies becomes possible mainly because of filial duty: the female body was regarded as the equal bearer of those features inherited from parents. Ironically, the unreasonable Confucian reference toward the woman's role was also developed in Han Dynasty. Ban Zhao¹⁸, a famous female historian, in her book *Lessons for Women* (女誡), insisted that the woman does not need to be excellent in work or other skills: spinning as well as serving guests with good food and alcohol are the tasks that she has to put the most effort in, and this makes a virtue of her position as a wife (Kang, 2006). Ban Zhao, a highly educated and academically achieved woman, was also deeply connected with the Neo-Confucian male and female roles. This does not necessarily mean that a woman's body was unappreciated but rather that a woman's body was treated and managed differently as a result of these roles. Since Confucian terms and concepts are defined in

¹⁷ Ban Gu is the official-scholar as well as well-known historian of Chinese Han Dynasty.

¹⁸ Ban Zhao completed her brother's work on the history of the Western Han, the *Book of Han* (漢書), and became the most famous Chinese female scholar of the time.

relation to each other, it is useful to examine the social relations that were stressed within the Neo-Confucian traditions and thus probe how woman's body was characterized.

Confucius expounded his views on the four principal relations such as ruler–subject, father–son, elder brother–younger brother and friend–friend. It seems that Confucius left women out of his worldview. It is uncertain whether Confucius thought little of women or not, but certainly his interests were less involved with women. The relation between husband and wife was included later by Mencius. The relation of husband–wife, together with the four relations stressed by Confucius, constitute the five primary social relations called *wulun*¹⁹ (Kang, 2004). According to *Book of Rites* (禮記), the husband and wife should be distinctive mainly in two ways: first, the wife stays in the main room of the house, and the husband lives in the detached area of the house: second, the wife does the work within the house, and the husband does the work outside of the house: accordingly, the wife and the husband should not interfere in each other's activities (Kang, 2006). This signifies that the roles and space of woman and man are essentially distinctive, therefore, cannot be collaborated. Neo-Confucianists understood that the Neo-Confucian relations between 'husband and wife' and 'man and woman' are not a discrimination but distinction because they believed this distinction is based on ethics of equality (Keum, 2000, quoted in Kang, 2006:8).

A prominent Confucianist, Xunzi²⁰ demonstrated that the competence to make "distinctions between man and woman based on reciprocal social roles and obligations is indexical of humanity" (Rosenlee, 2006:46). Rosenlee (2006:46) finds two notable implications from this Neo-Confucian notion of humanity: first, the distinction between man and woman fundamentally differs from the distinction between male and female for animals because the former is "a self-conscious distinction between social roles and obligations" whereas the latter is "an instinctual distinction between the inborn reproductive bodies"; second, that the reproductive bodies themselves are not considered as the premise for the distinction between man and woman indicates that "a discrete conceptual separation between the concepts of "sex" and "gender" was absent". My understanding is that humanity cannot be accomplished without distinction claimed by both Classical Confucians and Neo-Confucians does not necessarily attempt to debase women's body or position but it does certainly produce an unequal relation between roles and status of man and woman as a result. Moreover, asserting that this tradition is founded on an ethic of equality is a way to justify such traditions within Neo-Confucian culture without a proper reason. This Neo-Confucian style of equality is based on the assumption that women are incapable of doing what men

¹⁹ A woman in traditional Confucian society belongs to two different categories: (1) "unmarried girls or daughters/maids"; (2) "married women and wives/mothers" (Rosenlee, 2006:46).

²⁰ Xunzi was active in the same period with Mencius. Xunzi believed man's nature is centered on self-interest and greed, counter to Mencius's view that man is innately. He believed that ethical norms had been invented to rectify mankind.

can do, and it is also suggested in the *Book of Rites* (禮記) that women cannot become an independent human being throughout her lifetime (Kang, 2006). This implies that women in the Neo-Confucian view were “incapable of achieving sage-hood and therefore had neither the need nor the ability to strive for transcendence of the self and body” (Taeyon Kim, 2003:100). Consequently, selflessness of Neo-Confucian body only applies to men.

Korean women were deeply invested in the body as “the family body (through their reproductive role in continuing it), the individual bodies within the family (by clothing, feeding, curing and cleansing them), and their own bodies (as the main object of value)” (Taeyon Kim, 2003:101). Women were engaged in reproducing and supporting the family body by maintaining physical bodies of the family while men developed their selves through the mind and body which involved studying the Confucian classics and observing ancestor worship: the corporeal body was emphasized for women whereas such an aspect was for men to transcend (Taeyon Kim, 2003:100). While Neo-Confucian men needed to transcend their bodies, women’s bodies were to be protected and concealed as a result of the appreciation of their ability to deliver children and labour within a Neo-Confucian system that considered women’s bodies as “subjectless bodies” (Taeyon Kim, 2003: 101). As I have outlined in the third section of Chapter three, Neo-Confucian officials made a rigorous effort to keep women inside and out of sight as much as possible in the beginning of the Chosŏn period (Deuchler, 1992, quoted in Taeyon Kim, 2003:101). Women were mainly corporeal bodies, and these bodies were predominantly invisible.

4. The Body in Packaging Culture: Understanding Cosmetic Surgery Participants

4.1 The Korean Neo-Confucian Female Body in Consumer Culture

The dominance of Neo-Confucian control of the female body seems to come to an end concurrent with the rapid changes Korea went through during the 20th century. During thirty-five years of Japanese colonial rule in the beginning of the 20th century, the Korean body was ‘colonized’ as well as ‘modernized’: examples of this are the systematic prohibiting of men’s topknots and the recruitment of men, women and children for labour in factories and mines (Taeyon Kim, 2003). The ordinance cropping topknots provoked riots and protests throughout the country as it was implemented to destroy the national tradition and sentiment of Korea. In the case of women, thousands of them were forcefully mobilized for sexual slavery during the Second World War. As Taeyon Kim (2003) noted, it was this period that women’s bodies acquired an institutional role outside the domestic sphere, and they became visible in schools, factories and churches. After Japanese colonial rule, Korea encountered a series of complex and problematic changes: The earlier unified Korea finally split into two discreet Koreas as a result of the Korean civil war and, South Korea experienced a sequence of dictatorship, rapid industrialization, and finally, the settlement of a liberal democracy. Modernizing processes, which had already begun under Japanese colonial rule, were completed by the reshaping of a traditional agrarian kingdom into an industrialized and modern nation. This resulted in a significant shift in women’s role and position. Women began to participate as crucial and integral members of the now-burgeoning work force. They were no longer kept inside of their homes, but brought out to schools and factories during this time. This trend was promoted by the policies of the military dictator Park Chunghee during his presidency in the 1960s and 1970s. Women’s bodies were for the first time recognized as an important source of labor in order to achieve rapid modernization and industrialization: their bodies were “pulled out of the domestic sphere and into the public sphere, and the labour produced by their bodies was important now for nation building, both as workers in the factory and as mothers in the home” (Taeyon Kim, 2003:102). Finally, with the arrival of a post-industrial, consumer capitalist society in the 1980s, Korea experienced a fundamental reordering of its political, social and cultural system (Robinson, 1991). Consequently, women became “more important as consumers than as factory workers, shifting the utility of their bodies from national labour production to national consumption” (Taeyon Kim, 2003:102).

Both an expansion and recovery of Neo-Confucianism in the process of modernization was realized: this was crucial for the national reconstruction project after a series of disastrous experiences

such as colonial rule and the civil war (Taeyon Kim, 2003; Robinson, 1991). Moon (1998, quoted in Taeyon Kim, 2003:102) argues that “Neo-Confucianism came to stand for an essential ‘Korean-ness’ and was quickly embraced as the authentic culture of Korea—so much so that challenges to Neo-Confucian principles were branded as threats to national integrity”. Robinson (1991:204) also notes that Korean stance on “political and social authority, interpersonal relations, social mobility, and education all remained informed by Confucian values” although whilst differing in intensity. Especially, Neo-Confucianism as an elite culture was maintained and diffused throughout Korean society. As Koreans were increasingly becoming upwardly movable, many sought to “identify themselves with the former *yangban*, making what was originally an ideology and culture of the elite minority into a culture of all Koreans” (Taeyon Kim, 2003:102-103). Appreciation for education is probably one of the most prevalent examples of Neo-Confucian Korean-ness, together with a virtuous culture of respect for parents and ancestors. Meritocratic hierarchy as in the Chosŏn period remained but in a different form²¹.

Nevertheless, Neo-Confucianism as a definitive Korean-ness was being replaced with capitalism and democracy as the dominant state ideology at the same time (Taeyon Kim, 2003). As Taeyon Kim (2003:103) claims, Neo-Confucianism was gaining importance as “Korea’s cultural and national identity but losing ground as Korea’s dominant ideology” with “control of women’s bodies moved from Neo-Confucian state edicts to capitalist consumer models, but the understanding of the body remained Neo-Confucian”. These phenomena: that the governance of female bodies adopted a capitalist consumer pattern, whilst simultaneously, the Neo-Confucian perception of the body persisted, stand very much in congruence with my observations of many different realms in Korean society. Korean women’s bodies became objects for display as opposed to the previous strict governance of the Neo-Confucian female body, but there is something profoundly uncomfortable about today’s celebration of women’s bodies. However, the subjectlessness of the Neo-Confucian female body remains as they are constantly displayed, observed and controlled by the male gaze.

Taeyon Kim (2003:103) further argues that women do not follow “the Neo-Confucian command to be invisible and protect their bodies from both sight and touch” anymore, but rather women have become remarkably visible, and “free to be observed and appreciated in any public space”. A striking example of this is an immoderate celebration of women’s physical features. In 2009, a Korean female singer UEE in a girl group ‘After School’ was publicly praised for her healthy-looking thighs and she became popular owing to her thighs. It is uncertain who coined this term ‘Honey thighs’ but she was

²¹ Evidence of this trend is easily observed with the high rate in attending college. Korea’s college entrance rate in 2010 was 79 percent, and Korea ranked fourth among OECD countries in 2010 for this (OECD, 2010, quoted in Choi, Hwang and Kim, 2011) even though there are not enough jobs for the college graduates. Suitable employment opportunities cannot keep pace with the supply of job-seekers with degrees. In 2011, 40 percent of college graduates were unemployed (Nam, 2011, quoted in Choi, Hwang and Kim, 2011).

called by this nickname. ‘Honey thighs’ refers to thighs that look aesthetically desirable so that one wants to constantly stare at. An online media AllKpop (2009), which covers Korean entertainment news described Honey thighs as “a common phrase used among the netizens and also the hormonal males of all ages, to describe a girl/woman with immaculate thighs”²². UEE supported the term, saying that “the phrase honey thighs made me and defines who I am. Thank you. I don’t feel offended at all” (AllKpop, 2009). I was startled by her response because this to me was a sexual harassment and a reduction of a person into her thighs disguised as a ‘compliment’. Apparently, this has offended some people in South Korea. However, the number is quite small as ‘Honey thighs’ still refers to UEE or other female celebrities who possess similar features in 2015.

As Taeyon Kim (2003:103) notes “beauty has become the new standard of a woman’s value”, and in order to become beautiful, reconstructing their physical bodies to enhance or to create this ‘beauty’ became normal. Taeyon Kim (2003) finally asks what does this mean in relation to the Neo-Confucian body, and if this implies an erasure of the Neo-Confucian female body. The big question of this thesis mostly goes along the same line with questions and arguments Taeyon Kim raised and articulated but particularly by analyzing contemporary narratives of cosmetic surgery. Moreover, I would like to relate and extend this research on today’s Neo-Confucian female body to define the remaining legacy of Korean Neo-Confucian thinking and conduct. My understanding is that the burgeoning practice of cosmetic surgery does not mean that Neo-Confucian body management is abandoned, but rather the Neo-Confucian body regime somehow interlocks with the body management in Korea’s contemporary culture, one which seems predominantly a culture of consumerism and capitalism. Ironically, the proliferating practice of cosmetic surgery perfectly fits into notions of Neo-Confucian body management. The culture of packaging, which I demonstrate in this Chapter together with the governmentality of Neo-Confucian female body I suggest, ultimately supports the practice of cosmetic surgery. In order to understand this phenomena, I draw on a wide range of cultural manifestations of today’s preoccupation with cosmetic surgery, including narratives drawn from an online forum *Sungyesa*, public debates presented in the popular media, and surgical stories of recipients or potential patients from scholarly literature on cosmetic surgery. This will provide an empirical analysis of contemporary Korean society in relation to the deeply ingrained Neo-Confucian female body regime that has been supported through consumption of beauty works. Finally, I observe the cosmetic surgery of a late president of South Korea Roh Moo-hyun to prescribe the predominant tradition of Korea’s Neo-Confucianism that has remained until today in a move which I call Packing Culture.

²² As AllKpop also noted ‘Honey thighs’ is a short way of saying “sweet-as-honey thighs” or “charming as-if they-were-coated-with-honey thighs”.

Sungyesa is a non-profit online cosmetic surgery community managed by an individual²³. This community initially started as an Internet cafe²⁴ on a popular portal website Daum in 2003 (17th September). Due to its tremendous popularity and rapidly growing member numbers the café creator opened an independent website in 2004 (November). Anyone can become a member and contribute to this community. The website displays one small banner advertisement for a plastic surgery clinic on the right side of the website. If you click the link, it opens a forum where you can directly get advice from the director of this particular clinic. Besides this, mentioning specific clinics is strictly prohibited. Owing to the larger number of female members, there is a separate forum for men only.

I found a forum named *What if I get it done?* the most intriguing to examine. Most entries are posted by newcomers to cosmetic surgery and this was significant as I believed they might share *why* they want to have cosmetic surgery. Members can freely upload their photos on this forum to get advices from other experienced members.

However, despite my expectations, I noticed from the titles of entries that many posters actually do not seem to know what or where they wish to reshape. These are some of the titles of those entries: “Where do you think is a problem (in my face)?”, “Where (in my face) would it be effective to correct?”, “Do you think I can become pretty?”, “Where do you think is the first that needs to be corrected?”, “Where and how should I reform it?”, “Don’t you think I need a rhinoplasty?”, “I want to look more feminine”, “I want to become handsome”. I clicked them to see whether they have any idea or plan about what and how to modify their faces or bodies. Some of them had clear ideas of where to alter and some did not. For example, Songain, who wanted to look more feminine, initially wanted to receive bimaxillary surgery, which is known to be extremely painful and even dangerous. She later commented that she decided not to have bimaxillary surgery after getting advice from the members of Sungyesa but still decided to receive chin correction and rhinoplasty for the second time. Another member Gwangejeondori, who wanted to become handsome, did not seem to have any fixed idea about how to proceed. He had four comments that he is already good-looking. One member commented that he needed to correct his mind rather than his looks. In this regard, Sungyesa is not only a space where people share information and thoughts on cosmetic surgery but also where people approve of, and support each other in terms of their appearance.

²³ Sungyesa is an abbreviation for ‘people who became beautiful after having plastic surgery’ in Korean language.

²⁴ “Internet cafe” is a typical Korean term for an online platform for all kinds of activities from selling second-hand stuff to getting to know and doing activities, for example, with other bikers. You can only create these cafes through online portal websites like Daum or Naver, and this makes the cafes rather closed communities. This is because you need to first log on to the portal website and meet the requirements to become a member. If you meet the requirements, the creator or the operator will allow you to become a member. However, to become a full member, you often need to meet more advanced requirements.

Although members are composed of people interested in having cosmetic surgery, this does not make them all pro-cosmetic surgery. Depending on one's experience with certain surgery or combination of surgery, I observed that attitudes shift and switch from one side to another, for and against surgery. Members who comment on other members' entries openly talk about their experiences in order to encourage or discourage surgery. As I looked deeper into the community, I realized that cosmetic surgery for members of Sungyesa resembles a product one consumes, a beauty item one can easily install or uninstall if one does not like it anymore by following the trend in the market. In effect it has become a product people review, share experience of and thus recommend or disapprove of.

The striking thing about the titles and contents of the entries cited above is the fact that many do not recognize a specific *problem* in their faces or bodies but merely wish to become *beautiful/feminine/pretty/good-looking* and this signifies an absence of critical thoughts on what actually is *beautiful/feminine/pretty/good-looking*. This I suggest is closely related to a "lack of subject-hood" of Neo-Confucian female bodies. Korean women constantly pay attention to how other people evaluate their appearance rather than what they think of themselves, and if others would approve of their looks. That is why Korean women desire to become *beautiful* by pursuing the standard of other people.

The Korean female body has been affirmed as an object for display within Korea's consumer culture and their bodies no longer ruled by Neo-Confucian control of female body. Within consumer culture, which is driven by an individuals' desire, advertisements, the popular media, television and movies provide a proliferation of stylized images of the body (Featherstone, 1982). Moreover, the media constantly accentuates the cosmetic advantages of body maintenance: the compensation for ascetic body-work is no longer understood as "spiritual salvation or even improved health, but become an enhanced appearance and more marketable self" (Featherstone, 1982:170-171). Indeed, the desire to become beautiful has been always there. Only what and who is 'beautiful', and how to achieve it have been changed over time²⁵. The standardized beauty ideal, propagated by the radicalization of modern trends and globalization, spread within society, constantly pushes one to desire a certain type of beauty, one that has now become to a significant degree a universal concept²⁶.

Haiken (1997:176) illustrates that race- and ethnic-based plastic surgery in the United States has "focused on the most identifiable, and most caricatured, features: Jews, noses; Asians, eyes; for African Americans, noses and lips". Practically all efforts made through cosmetic surgery are in order to achieve a more Caucasian look. However, this not only applies in a Western context. Although attractiveness is inflected and diversified according to local contexts (Jones, 2008), the ideal beauty features of a

²⁵ In Neo-Confucian texts, it has been stressed that one should not choose a wife by the appearance but by the virtuous mind/benevolence (Kang, 2004).

²⁶ Meredith Jones, in her book *Skintight* (2008) argues that undergoing cosmetic surgery is acting globally, and suggested 'beauty' as a master-term like democracy which has a universal meaning that is somewhat homogeneous.

globalized North is accepted as a universal beauty model in South Korea as the frequency of double eyelid surgery and rhinoplasty attests. Many of the models on Korean television and advertisements are Euro-American and Eurasian or at least have that appearance, and this trend has become ever more pervasive. This tendency started in 1994, when certain changes in the law allowed the use of foreign models in the advertising industry (Byun, 1997, quoted in Taeyon Kim, 2003:103). In the 1990s, Cindy Crawford, Meg Ryan and Claudia Schiffer appeared on Korean national TV marketing products for the domestic market. In the 2000s foreign celebrities in TV commercials became much less common but still many models are white Euro-American or have similar features. Notably, fair skin, double eyelids and large eyes are the most noticeable and popular features of beauty in South Korea. This disparity implies that Korean female body has been identified as an object that needs to be reconstructed, therefore must be disordered and inherently flawed. The proliferation of the cosmetic surgery industry, coupled with an acceptance of such practices mean that the 'disordered' Korean female body can be reconstructed through a process of consumer-consumption as part of a wider fashion led motive.

Davis (1993, quoted in Taeyon Kim, 2003:105) notes that "many women in America have justified their choice to have cosmetic surgery in terms of individual empowerment, justice, entitlement, ownership of one's body and personal assertion of one's individual choice". On the contrary, Korean women choose to have cosmetic surgery to conform to beauty ideals, which have been defined and given by others. In other words, their choices can be attributed largely to conformity rather than individuality. The constant input of global beauty ideals together with Korea's culture of conformity enables Korean women to follow the same beauty trend. Within Korea's culture of conformity, Korean women's constant concern regarding how other people assess their appearance result in a conformity in both fashion and body management trends. For example, an Yves Saint Laurent lipstick which was known to be used by the leading actress Gianna Jun (Jeon Ji-hyun) on the Korean TV series *My Love from the Star* in 2014 was completely sold-out in the domestic market, including duty-free shops, together with the bag and the coat she wore in the series. The following illustration called Gangnam Miindo (literally, an illustration of a Gangnam beauty) mocks this culture of conformity within cosmetic surgery practice.



Gangnam Miindo (Source: Google image)

Man-made Korean beauties frequently observed in the Gangnam district of Seoul have astonishingly similar features such as big eyes with double eyelids, a pointy nose, a sharp chin, a rounded forehead, full lips and chubby cheeks giving them a youthful appearance. As with the above illustration, the only elements to show any dissimilarity are make-up and hair-style however, it would not be surprising even if they had the same kind of hair, make-up and clothing as well. Amongst Korean women, items that are more sold and popular are predominantly believed to be the better products regardless of the differences between individuals²⁷. This implies that what *other* people conceive as beautiful is what is conceived as legitimately beautiful for Korean women. This again is related to the subjectlessness of the Neo-Confucian female body, and Korean women's obsession with being approved of by others as a result of it. As Neo-Confucian female bodies were valued by the functions of their corporeal bodies, so today's Korean female bodies still continue to gain recognition through their physicality, especially with regard to their outward appearance. Taeyon Kim (2003) critically commented on a Korean female columnist who wrote about Korean women's bodies suggesting that Korean women lack subject-hood, and certain body features of Korean women - short legs, big face, yellow skin - are flawed and therefore, contributed to the treatment of the body as an object for modification. Taeyon Kim (2003:104) demonstrates that her analysis on Korean women explicitly shows "a legacy of the subjectlessness of the Korean woman" because she makes "a blurry distinction between herself and other" by suggesting what is best or right for

²⁷ Often a salesperson in Korea will recommend items that sell more, telling or tempting customers to purchase by saying that they sell better and are more popular.

her must also be fitting for everyone else. This is because Korean women enjoy “fashion as a representation of the multitude rather than the self”. Since the subjectlessness of female body remains, the notion of self as an individual whose physical boundaries are characterized by the corporeal body was an unfamiliar concept (Taeyon Kim, 2003). This subjectlessness survives here in the pattern of “contemporary Korean women’s familiarity with the popular Western notion of fashion as an expression of an individual self” (Kang, 1995, quoted in Taeyon Kim, 2003:106). The following interview of a Korean actress also illustrates why many Korean women choose to undergo cosmetic surgery, enacting a homogenized and stylized beauty pattern.

A famous Korean actress Hyunhee Roh, who suffered disgrace for having excessive cosmetic surgery and also side effects caused by that surgery, revealed in an interview with a woman’s magazine that she was “locked in how other people grade her (by her appearance including other superficial qualifications)” (Woman Sense, 2013). She also confided that she had gone far with cosmetic surgery as a compensation for her failure in marriage thinking that it would make her more beautiful, and consequently it would get back at her former husband. This not only confirms conformity that Korean women pursue, but also validates an ongoing absence of subject-hood. The beauty she wanted to achieve was for the sake of her self-confidence, which she can only gain by others’ appreciation of her and her beauty. Further, this is a clear manifestation of Korean women’s painful need to be more desirable to others, especially by male counterparts. The way most Korean men look at women’s bodies, and the way the popular media presents them, has a great influence on the way Korean women view themselves. The male notion of beauty often used in Korean TV commercials and advertisements of female products such as clothing and cosmetics emphasizes that women who use those items will get more love from boyfriend or husband.

The story of Hyunhee Roh is by no means unique, as she remarks in the interview, many women she has mentored indulge themselves with cosmetic surgery because of perceived failures in love and/or relationships²⁸. In this case, cosmetic surgery is conceived as some kind of a key to a happier love life, therefore a happier life generally, for some women. In addition, Hyunhee Roh suggests that if plastic surgery clinics treat these women (who had problems in love relationships) motivated by earnings rather than the needs of the patient, then the patient will most likely fail to achieve a satisfactory outcome because of her weak state in mind and body as well as possibly excessive combinations of surgery that the clinic might recommend to her.

²⁸ Hyunhee Roh founded the Internet cafe ‘Healing Life Campaign’ to cure people who suffer from failures of cosmetic surgery in 2013, and offered herself as a mentor for them. This cafe is still actively run by Roh herself, amongst other administrators.

As I have mentioned previously, the favored physiognomic assumption that outer body is a reflection of the inner-self goes against the teachings of Neo-Confucianism²⁹. Nonetheless, it is observed that participants of cosmetic surgery presume transformative techniques, namely cosmetic surgery, will bring “a renewed body and self, better able to move through interpersonal spaces and more able to enjoy the full range of lifestyle opportunities and pleasures on offer” (Featherstone, 2010:196). The following passage written by one of the members of Sungyesa illuminates the assumptions that enhanced appearance will lead her to a successful social and work life as well as raise her self-esteem:

[...] I have been failing to lose weight for the last 10 years. I have gained a complex about my appearance ever since. I have suffered from anorexia and bulimia. I don't have a normal social life either. After secondary school, I almost only communicate with my family [...] I honestly think that I would've not thought about getting cosmetic surgery if I hadn't failed in losing weight. I always thought that I should never ever have cosmetic surgery. But I constantly failed in things. Now I think it is better for me to overcome my complex about my look first. I feel so ugly whenever I look at myself in the mirror. I am always hiding in my room but I want to finish this secluded life. I feel like I will look pretty if I have my eyes done even though I am overweight and have bad skin. I have this dramatic idea that my social life will get better once I gain confidence in my look. But then, I really liked my eyes before I gained weight. Probably I only need to lose weight, so I am very worried at the same time that I might regret.... This morning my elder sister asked me why I don't get a double eyelid surgery. She said my appearance will improve. Now I am really tempted to have it done.... I am waiting for your advices (Amunyangnyang, 2014).

Amunyangnyang's story highlights many different levels of decision-making and pressures that lead her to her current position. Her failure to acquire an (her) ideal body image contributed towards her considering cosmetic surgery. She is hopeful that she will have a brand new life if her face gets renewed. Cosmetic surgery, in this sense, is understood as a tool or a medium that shapes and enables one's self-confidence. Although Amunyangnyang does not entirely believe that cosmetic surgery is an ultimate solution, her sister compels her to believe that it can be at least a 'quick fix'. The fact that individuals regard the practice of cosmetic surgery as an easy, probably the easiest, solution piqued my curiosity.

²⁹ Ironically, the belief that one's inner self will be uplifted by enhanced external features is the complete opposite of the Neo-Confucian way of cultivating oneself. Although the body is an important matter as the Neo-Confucians did not adopt mind-body dualism, the Neo-Confucian self can only be elevated by self-effort, and the harmony between heaven and humans. And these can be achieved only by learning the Neo-Confucian texts and internalizing key ethics of Neo-Confucianism.

Why do individuals feel comfortable about having cosmetic surgery without making an effort to preserve bodies so as to fulfill filial piety? Moreover, how can we as Koreans freely recommend each other, especially among family members, to have cosmetic surgery?

Although Neo-Confucianism no longer functions as Korea's dominant ideology, it still occupies the mind of the Korean people and shapes our way of conduct. I am questioning: how can Korean people breach cultural norms whilst also being fully convinced that having cosmetic surgery is necessary? What does this imply and where does this necessity originate? And finally, what can we deduce from this phenomenon?

Technological developments in body maintenance practices such as dieting, cosmetic surgery and tanning together with today's popular media invites individuals to perceive the body as an object constantly in the process of becoming. The major reason for individuals to strive for such activities is because "‘looking good’ not only becomes necessary to achieve social acceptability but can become the key to a more exciting lifestyle" (Featherstone, 1982:185). This trend reinforces more of an ideal standard about how a body should be and look like. Social and cultural norms that are more discriminative towards a woman's appearance than a man's as well as the expansion of material support, particularly the plastic surgery industry, has led individuals to perceive appearance as an object which needs to be acquired by an individual's effort and choices. In this vein, the capitalist consumer culture supported by the beauty industry has led to an appearance-oriented society that discourages the un-pretty, and forces individuals to participate in this trend. Moreover, required female body management such as dieting and cosmetic surgery is also an outcome of the patriarchal ideology that defines women's femininity with their appearance combined with the body management in capitalist consumer culture (Bartky, 1982, quoted in Nah et al., 2009:75).

Women are clearly more trapped than men in the narcissistic, self-surveillance world of images (Featherstone, 1982), and this surely explains why the practice of cosmetic surgery is more exercised by women. Korean women are not exceptional as they realize the importance of 'looking good' at a young age. According to research by Lim Kyunghee (2005, quoted in Nah et al., 2009:78), only 13.7% of female teenage respondents were satisfied with their appearance, and 67.8% of them wished to have cosmetic surgery. A significant number of them chose 'a woman should be pretty' and 'one's appearance is important for getting a job and participating in social activities' from the list of the things they think about appearance which shows that these girls already internalize the benefits of 'looking good' as well as the ideas of how a woman should look in order to be able to enjoy a *better* life. Moreover, 40.4% of the respondents picked 'you are pretty' as the compliment that they want to hear the most. The following passage is from an interview with a high school girl who shockingly expresses how appearance is important in everyday life for girls of her age:

[...] the student who is pretty and has a good grade had a better rapport with teachers. Sometimes, a teacher designates the pretty student as the president of the class. Those students (whom are pretty) easily get good grades in art, music and physical education. A student who is pretty will likely be forgiven easily even if she often makes troubles (Kim Kyung-ae, 2002, quoted in Nah et al., 2009:80).

In this regard, cultivating one's beauty becomes a requirement rather than a choice even for teenage girls. The following passage is from an interview of a teenage girl who dropped out of school:

Some teachers say "you're pretty but why aren't you good at studying?" or "why are you not pretty?" to students. Sometimes, they don't even remember the names of the students whom are not pretty even though they sit at the front row. But they remember the names of the pretty student sitting at the very back, and be friendly to them. Teachers discriminate in favor of good-looking students (Nah et al., 2009:91).

The teenage girls who experienced discrimination both directly and indirectly in daily life criticize their own appearances that do not meet the beauty standard rather than the society that produces such a perception or the attitude of teachers. According to the survey of Korean Womenlink (2007; Nah et al., 2009:78), a significant number of teenage girls recognize the discrimination and disadvantage women can experience because of appearance. Teenage girls responded that the following moments caused them to regard appearance as both influential and imperative: when seeing one getting an advantage or a disadvantage because of one's appearance (40.4%), when seeing celebrities who became popular essentially because of their looks (23.7%), when seeing friends that are popular in school because of their appearance (16.6%). 11% of them selected 'the potential disadvantage when getting a job etc.' as the reason why they wish to have cosmetic surgery. Alteration of the body through cosmetic surgery has become much more feasible and normal in Korean society as is corroborated by the following passage from an interview of a girl of fourteen who decided to have a surgery:

I didn't fall asleep during the class but my teacher asked me if I had fallen asleep. My eyes are small so everybody in the class burst into laughter. That is why I decided to have double eyelids surgery (Nah et al., 2009:90).

What surprised me most in the preceding short passage is that she claims and justifies her reason for having surgery as being for the sake of others and to be approved of by others and that she feels very comfortable with this reasoning. I suggest that this ultimately implies that a desirable appearance becomes a resource, one that enhances one's personality (Kim Kyung-ae, 2002, quoted in Nah et al., 2009:80). When appearance dominates as a cultural and social resource, parents as well as teachers cannot be free from this belief, and it directly influences how teenage girls understand appearance. A girl of eighteen notes how her life has changed after getting double eyelids surgery:

It is very important to be good-looking. I think everything gets easier if you are pretty. You know, you look nice whatever you wear (if you're pretty). It seems that I've got more choices now, and confidence, confidence. The film '200 Pounds Beauty (2006)³⁰' became popular also because of that... I am like that in school. I go around in school a lot, and be confident (Tae Hee-won, 2012:178).

This shows that alteration of the outer body changed the form of her life, and this further empowered her. This phenomenon can be explained by the position of the body in consumer culture, one that understands the body as a vehicle of pleasure and self-expression, a good-looking body and face are believed to reap further lifestyle rewards (Featherstone, 1982). Improving one's outward appearance thus equates to improving oneself and a means to overcome one's anxiety. The following passage demonstrates how cosmetic surgery functioned as a mechanism with which to control and plan one's life as well as seizing an opportunity:

My sister met her husband after she had cosmetic surgery. You know, men regard women's appearance highly. I believe that she tried to improve her qualities. And expand the range of her choices. Probably, (she was) thinking that she'll meet a guy with a higher salary than her.... Then she can choose (because she's good-looking). You know men also weigh (such qualities of women). I know that men also ask a woman's income and they decide to date her or not (Tae Hee-won, 2012:178).

³⁰ This is a South Korean romantic comedy movie based on a Japanese manga 'Kanna's Big Success!'. The following is the plot of the film: Hanna is an overweight phone sex operator and a ghost singer for a popular female singer Ammy who cannot sing well. She fell in love with the producer of Ammy, Sang-jun. However, she is invisible for him as a woman. She gets head-to-toe cosmetic surgery, and appears to Sang-jun. Indeed she is a good singer and no one recognized Hanna, she could debut as a singer Jenny, and Sang-jun also starts to like her. When people noticed that she was *fake*, she made a moving speech about herself at her first concert and this touched everyone. She finally lives her life as Hanna, a famous pop singer. According to the director of the film Kim Yong-hwa, the lesson of this movie is that true beauty is always on the inside. We should not overlook that she could go so far so that other people listen to her because she had a complete makeover. This film accurately depicts the cosmetic surgery scene in South Korea, and the narratives around it.

This passage is from an interview with a woman of thirty-three, a full-time housewife, talking about her sister who had cosmetic surgery. She notes that her sister, working in a specialized field, was not much interested in improving her appearance during her days in university and also her first few years in her current job. In 2009, her sister had cosmetic surgery a couple of times, and then entered into the marriage market. This case confirms that ‘a feminine body’ can be recognized as a resource that opens up possibilities in the market-oriented capitalist consumer society framing a relationship involved in love and marriage as an object of rational calculation and dealings (CHO, 2009, quoted in Tae Hee-won, 2012:178). The Korean plastic surgery industry employed the term ‘noble surgery’ as a strategy indicating that cosmetic surgery could be one way to re-define one’s class and status, and the popular media rather indiscreetly generates this belief through the makeover through cosmetic surgery (Nah et al., 2009:85). The case of the interviewee’s sister also attests to her intention to climb up the social ladder by enhancing her body. This can be further related to Korean women’s subjectlessness and persisting patriarchal Neo-Confucian relations between men and women.

According to Taeyon Kim (2003:107), the Neo-Confucian emphasis on propriety and harmony with others along with self-cultivation oblige women to be particularly attentive to “the propriety of their bodies”. The rules of propriety regarding the body convert into a stringent insistence to abide by the rules of fashion in Korea’s consumer society (Taeyon Kim, 2003). In support of this discriminative custom, Korean people often shamelessly say (for example), that it is improper for women over twenty-five years of age not to wear make-up when they go out. In this respect, beauty in Korea has become “a *requirement* of decorum for women rather than a vanity” (Taeyon Kim, 2003:107), and Korean women are well informed about the propriety of their bodies.

4.2 Defining Packaging Culture

Women are clearly heavily influenced by the widely held belief of Koreans that physical beauty is a competitive and compelling power in modern life. However, the belief that one’s body is a manifestation of one’s inner self and identity as well as the promise of a good-looking body do not only apply to women. In this appearance-oriented society, women and men are both affected by the pressure of ideal beauty standards and drawn to the technology they can employ to alter their bodies. The most noticeable examples are observed in *Spec* and matchmaking services.

“*Spec* (스펙)” as in abbreviated form of “specifications” is a word meaning the crucial elements taken into consideration when being hired for Korean people, for example, a person’s perfunctory

qualifications such as occupation, work experience and the level of education one received in a broad sense. The global economic downturn has presented today's Korean youth, as with young people all over the world, with many difficulties finding a job. The young generation of South Korea is obsessed with improving their *specs* as a consequence of the fierce competition, and this appears to be the only thing they can do in order to succeed in the struggle. The Youth Commission directly responsible to the President includes a team named '2030 Policy Participation Researching Spec Team' which is in charge of examining the realities of overheated competition for advancing one's specs and suggesting a more advisable employment policy. The Team pointed out that two more elements are added to the existing "assorted spec set" on the 18th of December 2014, namely getting 'cosmetic surgery' and volunteering 'social service' (Asia Economy, 2014) which means that these two practices became common activities to enhance one's spec.

It might sound absurd and even funny to foreigners, but this clearly is a serious matter for Korean people. In South Korea, every single job application requires an attached photograph of the applicant³¹. In one survey, eight out of ten human resources managers responded that the appearance of a job applicant is reflected in the result (Kim and Park, 2013). This means that if two applicants have equivalent qualifications, the better-looking person will be most often hired. Furthermore, a job applicant needs to fill out the names, ages, occupations, positions (at work) of parents and siblings, and sometimes even academic achievement of the family members.

The mechanism of matchmaking services, which became popular starting from the early 2000s in South Korea can be understood along similar lines with the implications of *Spec*. These agencies have multiplied significantly since the early 2000s not least by propagating the idea that they contribute to solving the problems of the low birth rate as well as an aging population. Matchmaking agencies rate members with personal statistics such as age, height, appearance, academic achievement, occupation, family background, property and so on. With these two examples I have briefly attempted to show that rating people with such personal qualities has become commonplace and cultivating one's appearance through cosmetic surgery becomes merely another way of improving one's competitive power in contemporary society. What I would like to glean from the foregoing is that they exhibit contradicting aspects of Korean Neo-Confucian tradition, additionally demonstrating how this tradition interlocks with the promises and beliefs of the body 'looking-good' in consumer society finally supporting the practice of cosmetic surgery.

As explained in Chapter three, the body bequeathed by parents had to remain unaltered within the Neo-Confucian traditions. Moreover, it is believed that one's inward goodness cannot be judged by one's appearance. In this respect, grading people with their perfunctory qualities as well as practicing cosmetic

³¹ An applicant also needs to state if they are disabled or not.

surgery in order to become highly graded seem to glaringly clash with the Neo-Confucian approach. I therefore ask, is the practice of rating people with those superficial features mainly as a result of Korea's radical and rapid advancement in capitalism and consumerism?

My understanding is that these activities accurately demonstrate the continuation of Neo-Confucian tradition, namely a strong class-consciousness and meritocratic hierarchy. As I have already examined in Chapter three, the appreciation of intelligence and education is derived from a unique development of Korean Neo-Confucian tradition. This awareness of the importance of class and meritocracy in today's Korean society has expanded as an appreciation of external features of a person such as appearance, occupation and academic achievement. Moreover, the practice of evaluating a job applicant or any individual with family background also pertains to blurry distinctions of the Neo-Confucian self and family³². Interestingly, the way Neo-Confucianists view the body and the notion of body within consumer culture ironically coincide with one another.

Neo-Confucianists understand that body and mind are fundamentally the same phenomenon because the body is not merely physical matter but regarded as the very place where humanity manifests (Lee Young-Chan, 2007:141). Similarly, the inner and the outer body within consumer culture become conjoined because the primary reason for maintaining one's body becomes the improvement of the presentation of the outer body (Featherstone, 1982:171). Whilst the Neo-Confucian inner self, which can be translated into the mind, is placed in the body, an individual in consumer culture tries to elevate one's inner self by enhancing the outer body. The purposes of these two body concepts are fundamentally different but ultimately result in the same thing. Especially, with the continuation and advancement of meritocratic hierarchy, today Korean people enhance their outer body for exactly the same reason as in consumer culture: the belief that "appearance and bodily presentation express the self" and that this will lead one to a successful life (Featherstone, 1982:189). With outward presentation being taken as a reflection of the self "the penalties of bodily neglect are a lowering of one's acceptability as a person, as well as an indication of laziness, low self-esteem and even moral failure" (Featherstone, 1982:186). Therefore, *normalizing* one's body through cosmetic surgery can be justified as investing in oneself or improving the inner body in order not to fall into those improper categories.

In acknowledgment of the foregoing, it is appropriate and poignant to mention of the late leader of South Korea Roh Moo-hyun's double eyelid surgery during his presidency. South Korea attracted a huge amount of global media attention because of this personal event, and through this became a

³² Neo-Confucianists pursued to "lose consciousness of the self and to enter a state of *selflessness* where the self becomes subsumed into the family, the community and, finally, the universe, thereby achieving the ultimate goal of sagehood" (DeBary et al., 1960; Chan, 1967; DeBary and Haboush, 1985, quoted in Taeyon Kim, 2003:99).

laughingstock for the whole world³³. Each source illustrated different reasons why he had the surgery: “inconvenience caused by saggy eyelids” (Woo, 2012); complaint that “his eyelashes were poking his eyeballs” (The Economist, 2009). However, Koreans suspected that he merely wanted to cultivate his appearance. Perhaps the explanation for his surgery was not so simple and the possible reasons can obviously be multiple.

This affair is ironically comical and embarrassing for Koreans because the President of Korea is expected to be the person *least* likely to undergo such a practice. Roh’s double eyelid surgery made Koreans feel both confused and shamed in a way because it not only strayed from his existing characteristics, namely ‘simple’ and ‘modest’ but also departed from the image of a proper national leader. However here I would like to ask: Why is the President achieving his beauty goal more problematic than ourselves doing the same?

One of the key ethics of Neo-Confucianism *Li*(禮), often translated as ritual, proper conduct, or propriety, embraces “all rites, custom, manners, conventions, from the sacrifices to ancestors down to the detail of social etiquette” (Graham, 1989:11) as well as providing each member with “a defined place and status within the family, community, and polity” (Ames and Rosemont, Jr., 1998:51)³⁴. As Ames and Rosemont, Jr., (1998:51) explain, *Li* is deeply ingrained in Korean society, also works as “life forms transmitted from generation to generation as repositories of meaning, enabling the youth to appropriate persisting values and to make them appropriate to their own situations”. However, pursuing or accomplishing *Li* has manifested again in its unique way in Korea. In order to understand what exactly exercising *Li* is for Korean people, it is useful to examine *Li yangban* emphasized by looking into literature on yangban.

*Yangbanjeon*³⁵ is a satirical novel that accuses yangban of incompetency by only attaching importance to forms such as class, rank, erudition and being categorized as yangban without having satisfying qualities. In the book, it says that “yangban must not hold money as well as not know how much rice costs” (Park, n.d., quoted in Kang, 2004:19). This implies that money and rice are material things, and therefore debase a decent person like *yangban* who should therefore not have them in mind. This does not actually mean that yangban continue with their cultivation in the Neo-Confucian texts even if one has no money to buy rice or resource to harvest rice, but it shows how the culture of yangban give importance to the formality of what yangban ought to do and ought to be. Since money and food are basic

³³ Roh Moo-Hyun is the 9th President of the Republic of Korea (2003 - 2008). Roh had his double eyelid surgery in 2005. Roh committed suicide on 23 of May 2009, embroiled in a broadening corruption scandal, by jumping from a mountain cliff behind his southern rural home (Kim Sungmoon, 2009).

³⁴ According to Graham’s (1989:11) interpretation, *Li* in social intercourse “corresponds to a considerable extent with Western conceptions of good manners”.

³⁵ *Yangbanjeon* was written by a prominent Neo-Confucian scholar Park Ji-won in the 18th century, late Chosŏn period.

things needed to make a living, Li yangban is, in a contemporary context, rather hypocritical and unpractical. My understanding is that the intention to attain Li at all times is unfortunately realized as a culture and a practice of 'face-saving' such as 'declining a few times before accepting an offer'³⁶. The transformed or even distorted custom to exercise Li supports the reasoning behind having and presenting cosmetic surgery as a gift. Moreover, it explains why the President Roh's plastic surgery is more problematic than that of others in the wider population.

In this highly courteous society, the desire to become beautiful by mutilating one's face and body had to be somehow justified with appropriate logic and proper reasons to eliminate the stigma of immorality, narcissism and 'being fake'³⁷. The fierce competition within consumer culture allowed one to easily come up with a reason or an excuse for enhancing the body and face because the body is not merely understood as self-identity but also as a capital which demands an investment (Bourdieu, 1995, quoted in Lim, 2004:99). One's desire coincides with the social pressure related to economic, cultural and social opportunities that encourage them to reshape their face and body. In other words, social expectations perfectly fit into one's desire to become beautiful (for whatever the reason is). Getting a job, for instance, is a matter of life and death in the long-term. In this regard, having cosmetic surgery is neither a shameful nor a vain activity. One becomes beautiful and obtains a job as a consequence. Plastic surgeons make profits therefore, everyone involved wins from this practice. I would like to term this systematic order a *Packaging Culture*. Within packaging culture, both the patients' intentions for having cosmetic surgery are pleasantly packaged, as are the plastic surgeon's aims and motivations. I argue that the culture of packaging, which is prevalent in Korean society, supports and promotes the practice and make cosmetic surgery accessible for recipients.

Roh's surgery was controversial because he was the face of South Korea, whose motives were neither acceptable nor visible to Koreans. The President as another human being was reduced to a successful figure who represented Korea, and a cosmetic desire of such a character was ignored. Perhaps it was too painful for the majority of Koreans to identify Roh as the representative of Republic of Korea, in its role as the capital of cosmetic surgery. Moreover, it again shows the blurry distinction between self and others, or self and family members in Neo-Confucianism: assuming the President as a head of family, and the people as family members, this can be a shameful even for the people of South Korea. Roh's surgery failed to be packaged because his position did not meet the accepted criteria for having cosmetic

³⁶ 'Offer' in the text means things such as food and gifts or money. It is inappropriate to accept an offer before the other party insists one to accept the offer two to three times because it is regarded as equivalent to showing one's desire to take the offer.

³⁷ Plastic surgery used to be considered as an immoral activity as if it is plagiarizing before the 1990s. A women's magazine *Yeosung Chongang* published an article titled 'Why one covets another's face?' in July 1970, and described plastic surgery as 'vain', 'not one's own' and 'fake' in March 1985 (Lim, 2002:194). In the United States, cosmetic surgery conducted on a healthy body was thought to be unethical; until the beginning of the 20th century, plastic surgery was only practiced to reconstruct the congenitally deformed or the badly wounded in war (Haiken, 1997).

surgery. In this sense, the culture of packaging not only functions to beautifully wrap the inconvenient, messy affairs of having cosmetic surgery but also works to box people neatly into the existing narratives, closely related to the culture of conformity. I prescribe Packaging Culture as the legacy of uniquely Korean Neo-Confucianism, one that is observed in every level of the contemporary lives of Koreans.

5. Conclusion

After having offered my analyses of the proliferating practice of cosmetic surgery within South Korea in relation to Korea's Neo-Confucian legacy, I would like to return to my research questions in order to sum up and conclude how I believe these analyses provide answers as well as further considerations. In order for my conclusion to be as concise as possible, I go through the research questions I have posed in Chapter two methodically one by one.

This thesis has attempted to explicate how Korean women practice cosmetic surgery within coexisting Neo-Confucian body regimes and the body in Korea's consumer society that are seemingly ambivalent as well as to expound the reasons why Korean women decide to participate in the practice of cosmetic surgery. On the most obvious level, the practice of cosmetic surgery and Neo-Confucian female body management seem to go against one another since cosmetic surgery is a practice that mutilates one's body whereas the Neo-Confucian body is considered sacred, therefore, has to be remained unaltered. On closer inspection, however, the lack of subject-hood of Neo-Confucian female body continues until today, and informs Korean women to conform to the universalized beauty ideals that are mainly Western as well as male notions of beauty within Korea's consumer society. As Korea entered into a modern capitalist consumer state, the body has become a project that needs to be worked at as significant part of an individual's self-identity. Thus, bodily qualities such as beauty and youth have become marks of class and status as well as being indicative of a cultivated self. Women are clearly more influenced by these beliefs as I have argued previously, and Korean women are still very much governed by the male gaze. The idea that "the more beautiful a woman is, the more her value increases in both the marriage and employment market" (Taeyon Kim, 2003:108) is predominant so that enhancing one's appearance via cosmetic surgery is expected to promise one's expansion of cultural, social and economic opportunities. Therefore, having cosmetic surgery can be condoned, and it can be even given as a gift from parents without thinking that this activity breaches Korea's traditional cultural norms.

In addition, I have attempted to pinpoint in what way the Neo-Confucian traditions have survived until today shaping our minds and behaviors to ultimately argue that the remaining Neo-Confucian legacy upholds the practice of cosmetic surgery to a certain extent. In Korea's late modern capitalist society, rating people with perfunctory qualities such as appearance, family background and academic achievement became so natural that cultivating one's appearance through cosmetic surgery became simply enhancing one's competitive power. Seemingly, it demonstrates a complete abandonment of Neo-Confucian tradition since it is taught that one's real nature should not be judged by external features in Neo-Confucianism. However, this exactly presents the way Korea's Neo-Confucian tradition has remained: a strong class consciousness and meritocratic hierarchy developed in the late Chosŏn period

has extended to an appreciation of external features such as appearance and occupation; and the practice of evaluating an individual in relation to their family background also pertains to blurry distinction of the Neo-Confucian self and family. Furthermore, the Neo-Confucian body and the body within consumer culture converge in identical ways of managing a body because both adhere to the idea that the outer body and the inner body represent each other. Therefore, improving one's outer body via cosmetic surgery becomes cultivating one's inner self.

Lastly, I have attempted to identify the reason why the President of South Korea achieving his beauty goal via cosmetic surgery was more problematic than the general populace doing the same. This again shows in what manner Korea's Neo-Confucian legacy has manifested itself within Korean society. In Korea, it is considered indecent and vulgar to talk about earthly matter explicitly so that one must have a proper reason to do so if necessary. Such a practice has derived from one of the key ethics of Neo-Confucianism, *Li* (禮), which is translated as proper conduct, or propriety in English, but often manifested as 'face-saving'. Within this culture of *Li*, mutilating one's face or body had to be justified with a proper reason to remove the stigma of being vain and fake. The fierce competition within consumer culture enabled one to justify enhancing the face or body via cosmetic surgery because the body became a capital item, one that demands an investment. Improving one's appearance became a way to gain chances of getting a better job and marrying a person with more desirable qualities. In the society where people are rated by appearance, getting cosmetic surgery is not a disreputable activity, but rather a modern survival strategy. Moreover, the recipients as well as plastic surgeons win from the practice of cosmetic surgery by doing their best in their positions. I term this way of life a *Packaging Culture*. Within packaging culture, the purposes of everyone involved are attractively packaged so that no one needs to blush with embarrassment or feel uncomfortable. In contrast, the surgery of the late President Roh, who once was a representative of South Korea as well as a successful figure, was unacceptable because his reasons for having surgery was not recognized as necessary, therefore, could not be packaged.

This study has offered a different perspective on the relationship between the female body in Korea's consumer society and Korea's Neo-Confucian tradition, a tradition that has a great influence on the way of life for Korean people. The findings reflect how female cosmetic surgery recipients make sense of participating in such a practice on a global scale, but more particularly on the local context. Moreover, this study by extension clarifies the issues of the remaining legacy of Korea's Neo-Confucianism by looking into narratives that surround the subject of cosmetic surgery. Finally, Korean men now increasingly participate in the practice of cosmetic surgery. I believe that this thesis has opened up a new direction in studies of Korean male body and their masculinity by linking it with the Neo-Confucian male body.

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