CONSUMPTION AND MATERIAL CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

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and John Clammer

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Sabine Frühstück

Introduction

In a Sumo wrestler's drill hall in Japan the term 'transformation of the body' (*jintai kaizô*) is omnipresent and explicit. 'I want to build a body that looks just like the body of a foreigner,' says one young Sumo wrestler (Moriguchi, 1992) while the case of another sixteen-year-old would-be Sumo wrestler received a lot of press coverage around the world when, desperate to join the Japan Sumo Association as an apprentice wrestler, he had a massive 15 centimetre piece of silicon implanted in his scalp and passed the physical examination that required a minimum height of 173 centimetres (*Time International*, 1994: 8).

There are different ways to analyse and interpret the meaning and function of the human body in modern societies (see Frank, 1991, Turner, 1991, Shilling, 1993, Featherstone and Turner, 1995) but one of the more prominent ones is the analysis of the human body as part of consumer cultures (Falk, 1994). Rather than analysing the human body as a cause or source of consumption as is common, I intend to look at those practices which regard the body itself as a commodity. In this paper I

introduce various ways of treating the body as a commodity, drawing on material from Japanese magazines for teenagers and people in their twenties, namely *An An*, *Josei Jishin*, *Crea* and *Oggi* which are mainly read by females and *Hot Dog*, *Popeye* and *Tarzan* which are mainly read by males, which I gathered during a two-year stay in Japan from 1992 to 1994 and a two-week stay in April 1995. Two arguments are pursued; first, I will assert that, besides professional sportsmen such as the Sumo wrestlers in the examples above, a growing number of Japanese people consciously or unconsciously accept that their body's size, shape and even its contents are potentially open to remodelling in line with the intentions of its owner. Second, I will argue that in the notion 'ideal body images' features considered 'Western' play a prominent role, while keeping in mind two major reservations: as the body is an object of cultural perception, it must be understood as the semiotic construct of a particular culture at a given point in time, i.e. as much as the 'Western image' of the 'ideal body' is constantly changing along with other aspects of Western culture, so too the Japanese image of the perfect body is in a constant state of change, and furthermore these changes are neither necessarily in line with Western trends nor uniform in all Japanese social groups. Not only the general idea of physical beauty in Japanese culture, but also the hierarchy of priorities established regarding body parts is significantly influenced by Western perceptions of what is ideal and what is less important; a Sumo wrestler's 'Western ideal' is radically different from that of a Japanese woman who wants to have her bust enlarged or her legs straightened. Diet, exercise and, in the most radical cases, plastic surgery are all methods of body transformation which are well integrated into the economy and require substantial financial commitment. Borrowing a term from Featherstone (1991) I will refer to these practices advertised and promoted in Japanese magazines as 'body projects'.1

The idea of reshaping Japanese bodies according to Western models is not a new one. However, means and models have

changed considerably. While in the sixteenth century Western foreigners were still perceived as ugly and thus referred to as 'red–nosed whities,' Japanese intellectuals seriously discussed mass weddings of Occidentals with Japanese to improve Japanese bodies and consequently the Japanese race as part of the body politic during the second decade of the Meiji period. Originally suggested by Takahashi Yoshio in his *Theories on the Improvement of the Japanese Race* ('Nihon jinshu kairyôron') in 1884, other leading intellectuals, such as Fukuzawa Yukichi, explicitly approved and supported the idea (Fukuzawa, 1885). During the late nineteenth century, physical differences between the 'Japanese race' and 'other races' were proclaimed and suggestions made as for how to improve the bodies and souls of the Japanese. Indeed, the reform of the 'Japanese body and soul' became one of the explicit aims of modernisation and civilisation as attempted by the Japanese bureaucracy. Fukuzawa Yukichi, Takahashi Yoshio and other prominent intellectuals developed their theories concerning the 'improvement of the race' and the 'improvement of society' drawing ideas from Galton's eugenic concept, Malthus' concept of population control and a variety of interpretations of Darwinian theories. At the beginning of the twentieth century European and American anthropologists and medical men 'discovered' Japan. In the words of a professor of anthropology,

> The Japanese are one of the newest 'races' in the world, and their recent entrance into the ranks of the great powers [marked by Japan's victory over China in the war of 1894-5 and over Russia in the war of 1904-5; my comment] makes it difficult to judge them accurately and assign to each of the factors responsible for their existence its proper and definite weight.
>
> Chamberlain, 1912:176

Their physical condition was commonly described in derogatory terms or ridiculed by both Western as well as

Eastern, that is to say Chinese, contemporaries. Throughout the nineteenth century, Western authors who were concerned about the development of the races had discussed the nature and significance of the intellectual and emotive characteristics of the Japanese. Their small stature, for the most part, and a certain frailty inferred therefrom, led members of the 'white race' to discount their prospects as, in all probability, of little or no consequence in the future achievements of mankind. In 1839, in a text on external influences on the character of a people, the author finds some of the peculiarities 'caused by the lack of vigour of the muscular and alimentary systems' (quoted in Chamberlain, 1912:176), which, in their turn, are held to be due to improper nutrition, while he recognised as hereditary other 'physical traits which influence the mind' (quoted in Chamberlain, 1912:176). And in 1896, an English anthropologist printed the following curious statement concerning the Japanese, whose intellectual powers he considered to be equal to those of the more advanced European nations:

> Compared with the average Chinese, and especially with the Manchus and Koreans, they are but a feeble folk, no doubt possessing considerable staying power, but physically weak, with slight muscular development, contracted chests and a marked tendency to anaemia, which however, may be largely due to the non-nutritious national diet of rice, fish and vegetables.
>
> Quoted in Chamberlain, 1912: 176-177

Similar notions were common in China where 'ethnocentric aesthetic criteria were projected upon outsiders such as the Japanese' (Dikötter, 1992: 48) and where Japan was contemptuously designated as a country of 'dwarf slaves' (Dikötter, 1992: 62). When the Japanese were not referred to as 'dwarf slaves,' their size was ridiculed: Chinese popular studies on human races of the early twentieth century called them e.g. a 'race of tiny men' (*airenzhong*), and anthropologists described

them as characterised by 'fat bodies, large and square heads, protruding cheeks, slanted eyes, flat noses and big mouths' (Dikötter, 1992:149).

At the end of the Meiji period and the beginning of the Taishô era, notions of the beautiful body (*utsukushî karada*) were increasingly linked to civilisation and progress. When eugenic theories gained ground during the second and third decades of the twentieth century, the beautiful body was equated with the 'body that is good for society,' an idea that was extensively introduced by Nagai Sen, a prominent and powerful biologist, in 1915 (Saitô, 1993:133). Ironically, at about the same time European doctors and anthropologists discovered the exotic beauty of Japanese (female) bodies, extensively praising their 'refined slim appearance and soft transparent complexion' (Stratz, 1904:36). In 1969, Ichirô Kawasaki, a Japanese diplomat, published his unfavourable views which would cost him his job:

> Of all the races in the world, the Japanese are perhaps physically the least attractive, with the exception of Pygmies and Hottentots. Members of the so-called Mongolian race to which Japanese belong, have flat expressionless faces, high cheek bones, and oblique eyes. Their figure is also far from being shapely with a disproportionately large head, an elongated trunk, and short, often bowed legs.
>
> Kawasaki, 1969: 26

While the discourse on the body that was established around the turn of the century was based on the idea of a physical entity of the Japanese nation, the body perceptions that underlie contemporary 'body projects' involve clearly different ideas of the body and the self as situated in society. Furthermore, different meanings and functions are ascribed to it. Rather than the improvement of the body as part of the 'national body' that was of explicit interest during the first half of the twentieth century, body projects in contemporary Japanese society are

based on a body perception that directly latches the body onto the economic process and promotes the treatment of the body as commodity.

Bodies in Consumer Culture

It was Marcel Mauss who first pointed out that the body is the first object human beings work on when transforming nature to culture. The human body is never found in its natural state, except perhaps for a short period after birth (Mauss, 1935). Recognising that the body has become a project for many modern Japanese people entails accepting that its appearance, size, shape and even its contents, are potentially open to reconstruction. Recent publications have claimed that the project of the self in modern society is the project of the body (Shilling, 1993). It is the reflexive self (Giddens, 1991) that is associated with the idea that the body in modern society can be fashioned to express the self through cosmetic surgery, body transplants and implants as well as through diet, keep-fit regimens and so forth. It has been pointed out that consumer culture combines the traditional self-preservation concept with the notion that the body is a vehicle of pleasure and self-expression.

A survey (*Shî dî ai*, 1986) conducted among Japanese people of all ages for an underwear company revealed that about half of those questioned felt some sort of complex concerning their face and/or body. According to the survey, while skin complexion, teeth and noses are common sources of dissatisfaction, weight, stomach, waist and hips are the parts that are most dissatisfying for 65 per cent of females and 47 per cent of males. However, for 28 per cent of women and 18 per cent of men, the whole body is a cause for dissatisfaction. The most popular way to reshape one's body, and one of ever

growing popularity, is diet. A survey about diet experience of female middle school students at a college in the Shimane prefecture, reveals that the age when girls first diet has gone down over the years. In 1992, 42 per cent of those who were categorised as of 'normal weight' and 18 per cent of those who were categorised as 'under weight' were either on a diet or had had diet experience. One-third of 918 girls had tried at least one diet and of this third, 54 per cent claimed to have been successful. They either chose to skip breakfast (8 per cent) or lunch (61 per cent), engage in sports (53 per cent) or minimise the amount of food in general (28 per cent) (*Asahi Shinbun*, 1993b:14). Other surveys drew similar results, and one undertaken in Nagoya also came to the conclusion that in general girls want to lose weight while boys want to gain weight in order to become stronger (Morikawa, 1992).

If diet fails or if it only works for the upper part of the body, if 'push-up' bras and pants bring no satisfaction and various methods of straightening legs or lengthening the whole body (*Asahi Shinbun*, 1993a, *An An*, 1995a: 168–9, 1995b: 196, 1995c: 217 and 1995e: 223) by various treatments as advertised in newspapers and magazines prove to be ineffective, there are other ways to get rid of complexes concerning face or body on offer. Cosmetic surgery clinics provide almost every reconstruction service except for sex reversal.2

Treating the body as a project does not necessarily entail a full-time preoccupation with its wholesale transformation, although it has the potential to do so. The spectrum of possible contexts and consequences of the engagement in a 'body project' ranges from being just one way of relaxation after work or indulgence 'in a sense of superiority' provided by the sophisticated surroundings of an aesthetic salon (Tanaka, 1991:14), to full-scale involvement. This full-scale involvement may extend to a point close to a life based on a closure of the self that almost borders 'social death,' a process that has not only been described by body-builders in relation to their activities in body-building studios (Wacquant, 1995a: 71) or by

professional sportsmen such as boxers (Wacquant, 1995b), but also by a Japanese female university drop-out drifting in and out of various beauty parlours gradually devoting herself to her 'body project'.

> All of my friends worked for design companies or the like and were too busy, when I suddenly realised that the only company I had for lunch were the aestheticians (*esutê no nêsan*) from the aesthetic salons. When I first went to the Proportion Academy in my second year at university I thought of it more as a joke, but now the aestheticians of the aesthetic salons are important friends of mine. Then later, going to the Jet Slim Gohanda Clinic three times a week where the aestheticians were nice and pretty became my whole life. When I even freed myself from the burden of being a student, there was no justification for existence left but the aim to become perfectly beautiful.
>
> Yokomori, 1992: 58

Clients as well as critics claim that undergoing plastic surgery leads to the ultimate transformation of the self, and whether this is true or simply the pure fantasy of clients and aestheticians, it is clear that 'body projects' do involve individuals being conscious of and actively concerned about the management, maintenance and appearance of their bodies. This involves a practical recognition of the significance of bodies both as personal resources and as social symbols which transmit messages about a person's self-identity. In this context, bodies become malleable entities which can be shaped and honed by the vigilance and hard work of their owners as the advertisement text for a book on 'super beauty techniques' suggests: 'You don't know your real self yet'.

Working as a recycling process, fat from hips, stomach and buttocks is reinjected into breasts at the cost of about three million yen as clients seek to create a beautiful body, thus making themselves more attractive and creating a radical change in their lives. Motivations for undergoing cosmetic surgery vary but all of them follow similar lines. Asked why

she so desperately wanted larger breasts, a twenty-three-year-old woman answered: 'Because it is nicer for a women to have bigger breasts, isn't it'3 while others justify their first visits in aesthetic salons and cosmetic surgery clinics with 'curiosity'. Such cases are however rare. Aestheticians and surgeons rather have the impression that a large number of their younger clients are introverts and seem to suffer from long-held complexes (Yamazaki, 1992:121). While for many clients services offered in beauty salons and surgery clinics are simply ways to rid oneself of complexes assembled during childhood and puberty (Yokomori, 1992:48–63) and to be made more attractive, others have more radical ideas about what to find there; 'I wanted to change my whole life' (Sasakura, 1992), says a newly divorced twenty-three-year-old female, while a newly employed twenty-seven-year-old professional man who, 'wanted to like [himself]' says, 'I wanted to express 100 per cent of myself' (Yamazaki, 1992).

Images of the attractive body, openly sexual and associated with hedonism, leisure and presentation emphasise the importance of appearance and 'the look' (Featherstone, 1991). Within consumer culture, advertisements, the popular press, television and cinema, provide a proliferation of stylised images of the body and in addition, the popular media constantly emphasise the cosmetic benefits of body maintenance. The reward for ascetic body work ceases to be spiritual salvation or even improved health, but becomes enhanced appearance and a more marketable self.

The emphasis upon body maintenance and appearance within consumer culture suggests the existence of two basic categories: the inner and the outer body. The study of the outer body ranges from demographic and human ecological aspects, down to face-to-face interactions in which appearance, preservation of self and management of presentation (Goffman, 1971) become the focus of attention. It can also encompass the organisation and control of disciplined bodies in social space (Foucault, 1975; Giddens, 1981) as well as the aesthetic

dimensions of the body.

The Body as Commodity: Appearance and Exchange Value

For our purposes, it is the appearance and management of impressions of external body images that are of particular interest. Within consumer culture, the inner and the outer body become linked: the prime purpose of the maintenance of the inner body becomes the enhanced appearance of the external body. On the one hand, body maintenance provides an expanding market for the sale of products and services as we shall see below, while on the other hand it encourages a body perception of being open to immediate treatment of the body as a commodity itself; a commodity open to reconstruction through diet, exercise, various forms of treatment in aesthetic salons and cosmetic surgery clinics. The individual is increasingly on display as s/he moves through the field of products and services on offer. An effect of the progressive expansion of the market is to discredit traditional norms and unhinge long-held morals which were firmly grounded in social relationships and cultural traditions. Advertising plays a crucial role in this process and has become one of the central purveyors of the new consumer culture values.

Almost two-thirds of the advertising models in the Japanese popular media are Western women and men and hence the rhetoric of the advertisements suggests that current body ideals in Japan come close to those of the West.[4] Advertisements for fashion often present Western women as the mature, elegant type, leaving the cute, girlish counterpart to Japanese models,[5] while advertisements for cosmetic treatments tend to feature more Japanese models, reflecting the perception that this area is a weakness of the Japanese body. Advertising helps to create a

world in which individuals are made to become emotionally vulnerable, constantly monitoring themselves for bodily imperfections which could no longer be regarded as natural. Within consumer culture the body is proclaimed as a vehicle of pleasure: it is desirable and desiring and the closer the actual body approximates the idealised images of youth, health, fitness and beauty, the higher its market value. Perhaps the most common example of the body as a project can be found in the unprecedented amount of attention given to the personal reconstruction of healthy bodies. Indeed, in Japan as well as in other industrialised countries this concern has been facilitated by the production of what appears to be an almost limitless number of self-help books (*An An,* 1995f: 225), make-up guidelines, dietary supplements and exercise plans. Consumer goods battle with each other in an attempt to make people's bodies look and feel sensuous and provide programmes for people to achieve a skin quality and muscle tone which communicate images of health through a healthy and youthful appearance. Exercise is by current standards a rather conventional method. However, the example I have chosen from one of the most popular men's magazines, *Popeye*, does not promise fitness, health or good physical shape in general but a 'hip-up strategy for three months,' claiming that it is a man's buttocks that women look at first (*Popeye,* 1992b: 18–33, 50–3, 81–100). The cover page features a photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe as an example of the ideal African–American buttocks.

However, the pervasive influence of the new health consciousness is not the only way in which the body has become a project to be moulded in line with people's self-identities. More than 50 per cent of the typical Japanese woman's magazine for fashion, diet and cosmetics consists of advertisements; advertisements for make-up, beauty, food, diet, cosmetic surgery and similar treatments.6 Here one also finds advertisements for aesthetic salons and beauty clinics, some of which appear in the same layout as magazine articles, giving

advice about what one should know concerning liposuction, face-lifts, tummy tucks, nose, chin and eye remodelling in question and answer style. Individuals are persuaded that they can achieve a certain desired appearance while advertising, feature articles and advice columns in magazines and newspapers ask individuals to assume responsibility for their appearance. This becomes important not just in the first flush of adolescence and early adulthood. Similarly, notions of 'natural' bodily deterioration and the bodily betrayal that accompany ageing become interpreted as signs of moral laxity (Hepworth and Featherstone, 1982).

Hence it should be clear that most of the strategies to sell the 'beautiful body' or parts of it, five of which I will now present, are 'pull strategies' rather than 'push strategies' as is also the case for so-called 'embarrassing products' such as hair-pieces or pregnancy tests. The most important strategy is aggressive advertising in magazines, featuring everything from tailor-made underwear that pushes up specific body parts to cosmetic surgery, maintains the pervasive notion that bodies or parts of bodies can be bought or transformed just like any other commodity in consumer culture. Secondly, toll-free telephone services and free counselling 24 hours a day is offered to encourage people to make initial contact with companies offering body improvement products and services. Photographs of true cases are another means to grasp attention. Particular advertisements for beauty salons (*esutê saron*) and cosmetic surgery clinics (*biyô gaika or keisei gaika*) in popular Japanese magazines feature 'before' and 'after' photographs showing the results of successful treatment. The 'after' photographs usually show a smiling client not only made more attractive but also with a healthier skin complexion, prettier hairstyle, fashionable clothes and, in case of the female client, in high heels, hopefully convincing even the most sceptical reader that ordinary looking people like themselves can make something of their bodies too. Exact statistics regarding kilograms both lost with the help of diets or massage and gained through

various treatments which enlarge breasts or penises round off the success story portrayed in such advertising. Pseudo-scientific explanations of a variety of body reconstruction methods are another prominent feature of Japanese magazine advertising. 'Hip-up gymnastics' for men are advertised with simple drawings and captions of buttock forms explaining that the Japanese buttock forms a triangle while the Occidental buttock forms a reversed triangle. According to the explanation, the development of the buttock form of the Occidental peoples can be traced back to the Stone Age when they were forced to run a lot as they hunted in the woods in which they lived. 'Age-old Chinese methods,' or 'the latest American methods' are other variants of pseudo-scientific explanations. Furthermore, a prominent role is played by the surgeon in the case of advertisements for cosmetic surgery clinics or beauty salons, usually referred to as 'doctor so-and-so,' a middle-aged man in the classic white coat who promises the 'clearance of complexes' or *biyô ni kan suru nayami, konpurekkusu gimon o kuriâ ni suru* and offers services resulting in slim waists and legs or *kubireta uesuto, hosoi ashi*, a super model's bust or *sûpâ moderu no yô na basuto* as well as 'straight legs' suggesting a 'leg revolution' and the 'revolution of fat legs' or *ashifutori kakumei*. The texts of advertisements for cosmetic surgery usually promise 'safe, scientific methods' and prices are only given in relative terms such as 'for a third of the money other salons charge'; which in one case is still 180,000 yen for permanent forearm depilation and 280,000 yen for permanent arm pit depilation (*An An*, 1995d: 202). These five major strategies together, aggressive advertising, free counselling, photographs of successful treatments, pseudo-scientific methods and the authority of experts, are thrown into the balance to legitimise the 'body project' business thereby drawing clients and glamorising places with names of a pseudo-scientific touch like Research Institute for Beautiful Legs (*Biashi Kenkyûsho*), Beautiful Face Clinic (*Bigan Kurinikku*) or Jet Slim Clinic (*Jetto Surimu*

Kurinikku).

While cosmetic surgery clinics mainly offer medical treatments, aesthetic salons still lack a clear-cut definition of their role and in fact the job of an aesthetician covers various fields, including weight control, hair removal and skin massage.7 Electrolysis – the removal of unwanted hair by destroying the roots with a needle-shaped electrode – has proven the most popular form of hair-removal treatment, especially among young women. However, the Health and Welfare Ministry has since 1984 warned aesthetic salons against using this technique, saying that electrolysis performed by non-medically qualified persons violates Article 17 of the Medical Practitioners Law. The law bans unlicensed individuals from engaging in medical treatment and related services, and according to doctors electrolysis is such a treatment (Tanaka, 1991: 14). Cosmetic surgery and other beauty services offered in aesthetic salons and surgery clinics take place despite the amount of money required and in spite of the pain which may result during the weeks after. In the 1970s, aesthetic salons – offering women's skin care, hair removal and weight loss regimens – were expensive and exclusive, while today they are still expensive, but they are no longer exclusive. 'Whenever I go to an aesthetic salon, I feel like I'm rich, because, you know, the place is fancifully beautiful and gorgeous,' says a regular student client of an aesthetic salon (Tanaka, 1991: 14). Twenty years ago, the regular customers of such establishments were almost all wealthy women or professional singers, actresses or dancers, a veteran specialist recalls. Today, however, an increasing number of working women in their twenties and college students make frequent visits to the costly salons. Spending 500,000 yen for permanent removal of underarm hair during a few sessions seems 'reasonable' if one can appear more attractive as a result. A September 1990 survey by Dentsu Inc. showed that 39 per cent of women in their twenties and thirties living in the metropolitan area did not mind spending a considerable amount

of money on cosmetics. And 23 per cent of the respondents replied that they are willing to make use of the salons. Suzuki Yoshihisa, one of the researchers at Dentsu, is convinced that today 'most young women spend more money along this line than on dresses.' (Tanaka, 1991:14.)

In recent years the salons have mushroomed throughout the country and according to a report compiled by the Osaka-based Yano Research Institute Inc., they constitute a 231.2 billion yen industry. Ten years ago net sales amounted to a mere 1.59 billion yen and in 1990 there were a total of 16,300 salons. Hayakawa Tsutomu, a staff researcher at the Yano Research Institute, speculates that two key elements – aggressive advertising and the recent widespread use of credit cards – have contributed greatly to the industry's expansion and predicts that total sales would more than double to 500 billion yen by 1995. While some people seem disinterested in possible negative effects, others are aware of potential risks, both financial and health related, knowing that the booming industry is not without its problems. The Japan Consumer Protection Center received 4,020 complaints about the salons between 1st January and 20th June in 1991, while in comparison the total number of complaints the centre received regarding the industry three years prior was only 2,180, most of which were related to the terms of contracts, and in many cases the customer simply wished to cancel the contract. Katô Etsuko, a staff member of the Japan Consumer Protection Center described contracts as complicated and fraudulent perhaps because it has been only nine years since the Labour Ministry officially recognised 'aesthetic salons' as legitimate commercial enterprises separate from hairdressing shops and barbers, and guidelines regulating the aesthetic salon industry are yet to be introduced. Ishikawa Sugo, chairman of the All Nippon Aesthetic Association, explains that there are numerous aesthetic salons which could cease to exist one way or another at any moment.

> Technically, anyone can open an aesthetic salon. It is thus next

> to impossible to determine the exact number of salons and to investigate their management methods in the absence of governmental regulations.
>
> Tanaka, 1991:14

Plastic surgery provides a small, but fast-growing number of individuals with the opportunity for a radical and direct way of reconstructing their bodies in line with particular notions of youthfulness, femininity and masculinity. Face-lifts, liposuction, tummy tucks, nose, chin, and in the case of Japan especially eyelid remodelling, are just a small selection of operations and procedures open to Japanese people with enough money who want to reconstruct their bodies. Cosmetic surgery, however, is a particularly radical form that enables people to add to or subtract from the fat, flesh and bones in their body. The majority of cosmetic surgery clients seek facial treatment (Yamazaki, 1992:114). Speaking from his experience, a cosmetic surgeon says that while until recently 'correcting errors' and eye remodelling (*hitoe futae*) were the most common facial operations, nose, chin and cheek restyling are gradually becoming more popular (Ishitobi, 1995:30-1). It has been suggested by some physicians that the Mongolian eyelid (*môkohida*) affects sight, but as it is not medically proven, the operation is not covered by health insurance. An eye and nose operation together cost around half a million yen and while an eyelid operation cannot be reversed, a silicon implant in the nose can be removed whenever desired. According to patients, however, the operations are very painful (Yamazaki, 1992).

While the eyelid operation is a concession to Western images of beauty, problems which in the West are considered 'aesthetic errors' such as crossed teeth are more or less tolerated in Japan. Although oral hygiene attitudes in Japan are gradually shifting, dental braces are still unpopular. While sixty per cent of US children start orthodontic treatment in their early teenage years, less than ten per cent of Japanese children do so.

Many factors have led to this slow acceptance of orthodontic treatment, however. Sharp increases in disposable income coupled with a reduction in family size means that today funds are increasingly available for orthodontic treatment if parents desire it. However, probably the main reason braces are not more popular in Japan is that orthodontic costs are still not covered by insurance. Furthermore, crossed teeth – particularly the occlusion by the canine teeth of others to the side or front of the mouth – were considered highly attractive historically and are still thought to be appealing.[8] Hence, although a slight attitude shift in Japan is due largely to the acceptance of Western notions of oral beauty, Japan's dental aesthetic beliefs still place much less emphasis on uniform rows of teeth as a sign of attractiveness than is the case in Western cultures (Campbell, 1989:11).

Just as the advertisements suggest, the vast majority of the clients of cosmetic surgery clinics and aesthetic salons are women. However, it is not only the financially secure middle-aged woman fighting against wrinkles and sagging flesh who dominate the market. Liposuction and breast enlargement is popular among a small number of Japanese women in their twenties and thirties, many of whom save money for the operation over years (Sasakura, 1992). Although women seem more likely to undergo cosmetic surgery or similar treatments, there also exists an increasing market for the reconstruction of male bodies. Generally speaking, products and services for the remodelling of male bodies are less visible in magazines in form of advertisements or feature articles than those for female bodies.

At least ten to twenty per cent of the clientele in cosmetic surgery clinics and aesthetic salons are men. Most of them decide to get their nose or eyes remodelled when they start their professional career. The enlargement of the mouth and the removal of facial muscle tissue to achieve a slimmer look are another two common options for facial surgery, even though the price is about one million yen (Yamazaki, 1992). Looking

at magazines mainly read by men, the penis is presented as another problematic body part men might wish to have enlarged using special techniques, as plastic surgery is not always successful. The magazine *Hot Dog* claims to have made a survey of 100 high school students about size, shape and colour of their penis referred to as *ochinchin, musuko* and *mochimono*. For those unfortunates whose penis was not longer than 14 centimetres when erect (the average size was 14.1 centimetres), a number of methods for lengthening or straightening the penis in order 'to optimize [its] functioning' are advertised: 'Lengthen your penis with the pump for healthy lengthening (*kenkô zôdai ponpu*). If you do it every day ...; 7,500 yen'. 'Optimize the functioning [of your penis] with the power of a two-hundred-million-year-old stone in your t-back pants, 15,800 yen'. 'Goodbye to your phimosis with the correction ring, 5,000 yen' (*Hot Dog,* 1992a: 39). The relatively low prices suggest that the effect of these treatments is rather unclear.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have suggested that the meanings and functions of the human body embedded in the material culture of contemporary Japan can be fruitfully studied by focusing on the analysis of 'body projects' as those practices that directly latch the individual body to the economic process and thus use and treat it as a commodity. I have discussed the advertisement strategies for aesthetic services and products, the clientele and their justification for making use of these services and products as well as the role of the 'Western ideal' in regard to body reconstruction in Japan.

Historically, the shift from the improvement of the national

body toward the improvement of the individual body seems to be at least threefold. First, discourses on the body and public health up to the Second World War were grounded in a body politic that put clear emphasis on the body of the nation or the 'race' as opposed to the individual's body. All those practices and regulations that were considered to be useful for the improvement of the Japanese body clearly referred to the welfare of the nation. Second, while this older concept was defined, controlled and promoted mostly by political leaders, the post-war 'body project' is far more influenced and led by economic agents and capitalist market mechanisms. Closely intertwined with this change is a third development. While physical strength and thus national power was the aim of former attempts to improve the Japanese body, the primary purpose of contemporary Japanese 'body projects' is the achievement of better looks, as both personal well-being as well as market value – be it on the job or in the marriage market – seem to be greatly dependent on what is perceived as a beautiful body.

Notes

1 For a somewhat different interpretation of the term see Ben-Ari (1997).

2 The Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology said last year that a sex change operation should be permitted on certain conditions, including that a patient undergo psychoanalysis and hormone therapy following the procedure. On 12 May 1998 the ethics committee of the Saitama Medical School approved a multistage sex change for a 30-year-old woman said to be mentally a man, paving the way for Japan's first legally approved sex change operation (*Japan Times*, 1998, May 18-24: .4).

3 Laura Miller has shown that '[w]hile the quest for a bigger bust in the US has continued from an earlier era into the 1990s, it is just now manifesting itself in Japan.' (Miller, in press).

4 On advertising in Japan see Skov and Moeran, 1995, Moeran, 1996. On advertising language see Tanaka, 1994.

5 This division has been described by John Clammer (1995). For the representation of female bodies in Japan see Sharon Kinsella (1995).

6 Lise Skov and Brian Moeran found considerable differences concerning the share of advertisements in women's magazines: In 1986, *An An* contained more than 85 per cent adverts and editorial tie-ins; *Non-no* had 45 per cent straight advertising with fewer editorial tie-ins (Skov and Moeran, 1995: 60).

7 Kawazoe Hiroko has discussed the ongoing negotiations in regard to the overlapping areas of aesthetic and medical treatment in her thesis on *Gendai ni okeru shintai henkô no bunka jinruigaku kenkyû. Nihon ni okeru biyô gaika no jirei kara* (unpublished thesis).

8 On the transformation of the beauty ideal in Japan see Inoue, 1991.