

A cut above

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A surgeon draws lines for facial plastic surgery on the face of a male patient at Tianjin 8630 Plastic Surgery Hospital. Photo: Courtesy of Tianjin 8630 Plastic Surgery Hospital

After Gu Yu broke his nose by tripping on a curb when he was 12 years old, he imagined his crooked nose was a focus of discussion for his classmates. Painfully shy and insecure, he stayed at home on weekends and tried to hide his face when talking to others.

"I do not like to communicate with people, which makes me feel uneasy," says Gu. At age 28, he resorted to rhinoplasty to straighten his nose, and recover his self-esteem. The surgery repaired his nose, but not his confidence.

"My original purpose was to fix my crooked nose with nose restoration surgery. But afterward, I still did not feel great about myself, and went in for another procedure and another. I believed that if I could have double eyelids, a narrower chin, a high-bridged nose, I would feel more comfortable, more confident with myself," says Gu.

Hooked on looks

Gu is among an increasing number of Chinese men seduced by the dream of having a handsome face. Over the last five years, there has been a huge boom in men's aesthetic surgery in China. Cosmetic surgery is no longer the exclusive domain of women. Men seeking a better self-image, improved job opportunities and love are increasingly going under the knife. But like many dreams, its fulfillment sometimes just leaves an empty feeling.

Both young men and those in middle age are increasingly turning to plastic surgery. Zhou Maohua, director of orthopedics at Tianjin 8630 Plastic Surgery Hospital, gives what he says is a typical example of a young man coming in for plastic surgery. He describes Zhang, 21, who had a very good academic

record, but was not satisfied with his appearance. Zhang thought being more handsome would improve his prospects of getting a job.

In August 2013, Zhang went to the clinic to get a nose job, liposuction and double-eyelid surgery, at a cost of 50,000 yuan (\$8,000).

"Zhang said that he did so in hopes of getting a job in a multinational company, which places a high importance on the image of its candidates," asserts Zhou. "Job seekers are a great source of patients. They want to enhance their prospects in the work force," explains Zhou.



A surgeon operates on a male patient at Tianjin 8630 Plastic Surgery Hospital. Photo: Courtesy of Tianjin 8630 Plastic Surgery Hospital

Everyone is doing it

He says in the summer vacation of 2013, the hospital performed over 600 cosmetic surgeries for university students, among which 30 percent were male. At the same time, more and more middle-aged men try to look younger with facial rejuvenation, including eye bags removal or wrinkle removal, says Zhou. Many of them are government officials, who hope that a younger appearance will improve their popularity and hide the signs of aging.

According to statistics from the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, in 2011 China ranked third globally in total number of cosmetic procedures performed, with 1.05 million procedures, following Brazil and the United States.

Zhou says that with the growing appeal of entertainment and celebrity culture, the group of people choosing plastic surgery has expanded from the entertainment industry to common people who are under a great pressure to find employment or who feel anxious about aging. Zhou's view is shared by Li Dong, director of the department of plastic surgery at Peking University Third Hospital.

"From 2009 to 2013, the number of men's surgeries in our hospital increased from 504 to 752, an increase of around 50 percent. The first quarter of 2014 alone has seen 201 procedures for men," says Li.

Accepting yourself easier when handsome

Since 2002, Gu has spent hundreds of thousands of yuan on 16 surgeries and micro procedures to achieve a better and younger look. The results have been undeniably effective. He is a handsome man with deep eyes and a high-bridged nose. Although he is 39, he appears to be in his 20s. At the time of the interview, there were two small bruises on his chin, caused by injections he took a week ago to remove wrinkles, and almost no scars on his face.

He plans to continue with surgery as he ages, continuing minor treatments to maintain his youthful appearance. Gu seems to have tapped into the fountain of youth, and found its waters addictive. In fact, many people who begin having surgical procedures cannot stop.

"Many patients having second or even third rounds of procedures tend to have psychological problems. The problem is that they cannot accept themselves," says Chen Yue, a counselor at the Sunshine Psychological Counseling Corporation in Beijing.

A person can enhance his confidence in different ways, including by developing their mind. Chen says plastic surgery is effective when it lets patients accept themselves.

"However, on most occasions, a man's great inner trauma can not be easily stitched together by a procedure on his nose. Once he takes one procedure, it is like cocaine, and he will get addicted," says Chen.



A man takes injections to look younger. Photo: IC

My boyfriend who came from the stars

With the soaring popularity of the South Korean soap opera *You Who Came from the Stars*, some young men want to resemble the white-hot actor Kim Soo-hyun.

Zhou says sometimes young men are pushed into surgery by their girlfriends. He says Zhang Li (pseudonym), a hardcore fan of Kim from Tianjin, insisted in enhancing the looks of her boyfriend so he would resemble Kim, with a beautiful nose and slanted eyes.

Following this request, Zhou made a design for surgery on Zhang Li's boyfriend, including double-eyelid surgery and a nose job. He says he could not fully clone Kim, but could create some similarity in their features.

"The boyfriend, who looked a little bit like a South Korean, had a very good base for surgery, and Zhang was very satisfied with the result in the end," said Zhou.

"This case is not an individual one. Many women take their boyfriends to undergo the procedures. Some men also come by themselves to change their looks according to the image of their favorite stars," says Zhou.

Beauty business

Plastic surgery has become part of Gu's life. He not only regularly undergoes procedures, but runs a consulting business advising others about the procedures.

In South Korea, patients need to go to see a psychologist before undergoing plastic surgery, he says, adding that only after a patient is found not to have psychological problems can they be transferred to a plastic surgeon.

"In China, there are no such arrangements, so many patients are not satisfied with the surgeries," says Gu. At his studio in Haidian district, he can offer counseling for people interested in plastic surgery, or those having trouble recovering from a procedure. "We also help design the ideal face or give advice on what procedures are suitable for patients," explains Gu. "If a patient insists on being made into a star, and this cannot be achieved by surgery, I will advise the patient not to do it."

Selling your mother

Gu says he is not addicted to plastic surgery. He explains he has undergone so many procedures in part because he can get a big discount, and in part because his handsome face is a showcase for how his consulting business can help people.

He noted casually that he had undergone 200 face lift injections during a plastic surgery the week before, which caused the visible bruises on his chin.

"I am a man always pursuing perfection, including in appearance. I want to have a better appearance. I do not think one's outside is more important than one's inside. If one could have a face like a star, but he does not have a very good temperament, it is meaningless," he says.

"Despite the great pain caused by the procedures, I am becoming more and more confident with myself. It is worth it."

Some Chinese people look down on plastic surgery as dishonoring one's parents, who gave you the looks you are altering. This includes Gu's parents, who had always been opposed to plastic surgery.

But Gu says his mother gradually came to accept the idea, and has even had a minor procedure herself.

"She now thinks that plastic surgery is a safe and reliable way to enhance one's looks," he says. "She feels quite different and younger than before, and was very, very happy about it."

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