

# Technological-progress and accident-drive: the presentation of the topic of "medical beauty" in the domestic media—the media reports of "People's Daily", "Southern Metropolis Daily" and "China Women's Daily" as examples(2000-2022)

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**Abstract:** Based on the framework theory, this study takes "People's Daily", "Southern Metropolis Daily" and "China Women's Daily" three traditional media with different positioning as examples, to have a glimpse of their media discourse presentation and practice of "medical beauty". Through content analysis, it is found that the media presentation of medical and aesthetic topics is mainly driven by events, and its positive aspects are not only reflected in the possibility of providing people with the chance to change their lives and destiny, but also tied to the discourse of technological nationalism. There are significant differences in the framework and topic focus of different media. People's Daily pays more attention to constructive perspectives such as industrial economic framework and governance, while media such as Southern Metropolis Daily lays more emphasis on accidental issues that can draw the attention of the audience.

## 1. Introduction

As of 2020, the cosmetic surgery market in China reached 256 billion yuan (\$36.71 billion), and it is estimated the Chinese cosmetic surgery market will hit 1 trillion yuan in 2025.<sup>[1]</sup> It can be seen that "medical beauty" has combined with modern social discourse practice, functioning as a window of the public aesthetics and technological evolution

## 2. Literature review

In today's society, plastic and cosmetic surgery has gain more popularity. However, there are few academic achievements directly related to it in the domestic social science field. Academia place their product "artificial beauties" or the actual "female body" performed by surgery into the research category of consumerism and feminism, and criticize women's options of cosmetic surgery, makeup and other body reconstruction behaviors, which means the subordination to patriarchal culture and capital market consumerism (Jiang Xiuhua (2003)<sup>[2]</sup>, Xu Min and Qian Xiaofeng(2002)<sup>[3]</sup>, Long Hongxiang and Liu Jia(2006)<sup>[4]</sup>). The existing results are mainly published after 2003. Because at the end of 2003, Hao Lulu's "Freshly Released", "China's No.1 Artificial Beauty", set off a wave of cosmetic surgery among women. Domestic and foreign media are scrambling to report on plastic surgery cases, beauty pageants and other hotevents. As a result, scholars in the fields of journalism

and communication are also discussing. Dong Tiance (2004)<sup>[5]</sup> and Jin Xia(2004)<sup>[6]</sup> defines it as a typical case of commercial hype.

What role does mass media play in presenting women's bodies and thus shaping women's aesthetic culture? Views are mainly divided into two categories. On the one hand, some scholars argue that "advertising" plays a pivotal role in consolidating patriarchal culture and manipulating women's bodies (Jiang Xiuhua, 2003<sup>[2]</sup>; Xu Min and Qian Xiaofeng, 2002<sup>[3]</sup>). Similarly, Tongxin (2014)<sup>[7]</sup> commented on posts that clamored for attention to the "body", "They constantly reinforces women's body anxiety". So does the social media, "Viewing images of females who have undergone cosmetic enhancements affected young women's desire for cosmetic surgery." (Walker, Krumhuber, Dayan, & Furnham, 2021<sup>[8]</sup>)

However, there are also studies that challenge this view, arguing that the media has become a tool to liberate women's rights by empowering them. For example, Yang Xianshun and Pan Yingyao (2012)<sup>[9]</sup> found that feminist advertising can "subvert the patriarchal tradition" to some extent. Findings in fashion magazines echo this sentiment. Tracing back the important historical stages in the development history of Chinese fashion magazines, Zhao Yunze and Gan Guangqian (2008)<sup>[10]</sup> asserted that the medium was "a powerful tool for the liberation of women's bodies and minds, and even the designer and communicator of women's political discourse". It can be seen that the academia generally believes that women's bodies and appearances are "shaped", which has some connection

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with the mass media. Ke Qianting (2015)<sup>[11]</sup> found that "plastic advertisements use information such as aesthetic principles, technological myths, and doctors' authority to establish a new discourse on beauty: beauty does not have to be innate, but can be obtained through consumption and medical care intervention". "The prevalent and positive media representation of cosmetic surgery may induce a desire to directly model this behaviour" (Slevec & Tiggemann, 2018)<sup>[12]</sup>, and "those who consumed more media believed that cosmetic surgery brought more benefits." (Furnham & Levitas, 2012)<sup>[13]</sup>. All-aboved shows that we can comprehend the factors and changes that shape women's body and aesthetics in contemporary China by analyzing media discourse, with "cosmetic and medical plastic surgery" providing a good case.

Wenhua (2010)<sup>[14]</sup> classifies the perspectives of the mass media on cosmetic surgery into three types: one is approval, regarding it as women's "right" and "liberation"; the second is criticism that cosmetic surgery is just a means for the colonization of women's bodies (Morgan, 1991)<sup>[15]</sup> and a conspiracy of the patriarchy and capitalism as the "beauty myth" (Wolf, 1991)<sup>[16]</sup>; the last voice comes from the state-owned Chinese media, reckoning the pursuit of body beauty as an result of economic development. For a long time, the body has been the core concern of gender studies. Women's struggle for further liberation in modern society is bound to be accompanied by a new understanding of their own bodies. Therefore, plastic surgery, as an important means of transforming the female body, inevitably contains multiple connotations.

To sum up, first of all, scholars have thought the guiding effect of mass media on aesthetic culture to varying degrees, but combined with the basic blank of the traditional media form of "newspaper" and the content presentation method of "news report". Second, the mainstream studies stress the feminist framework, selecting "the female body" or "the presentation of the female body in the media" as the research object, while temporarily neglect the significant body modification technology of "medical aesthetics and plastic surgery". Furthermore, the above results have a certain time distance from the present. Taken all-above mentioned in to account, in the modern society where appearance and body anxiety are increasingly rampant, this paper intends to use the content analysis method, to make up for the existing gaps by analyzing the presentation methods of "medical aesthetics and plastic surgery" in the traditional mainstream media in China. Specifically, the research questions of this paper are mainly:

- (1) What are the characteristics of the quantity and trend of mass media reports on medical aesthetics?
- (2) Are there differences in the coverage of medical aesthetics by different media, and what are they?
- (3) What aspects do different media focus on in medical aesthetics?

### 3. Research methods

This paper selects three traditional paper media,

"People's Daily", "China Women's Daily" and "Southern Metropolis Daily" as the research objects for their reports on medical aesthetics and plastic surgery. There are two factors. First, traditional media reports are a stable carrier of social attitudes and changes. Compared with Internet texts, they can form a more stable frame of samples. Second, the market positioning of media determine media reports to a certain extent. Therefore, this paper selects the types of central official media, industry newspapers and market-oriented urban newspapers, in an attempt to more comprehensively understand the attitudes and reports of different types of media on the phenomenon of medical beauty. I conducted a search in the period from January 1, 2000 to April 21, 2022 with the keywords of "medical beauty" and "plastic surgery" through the WiseSearch Database, and obtained 89 articles in People's Daily and "Plastic Surgery" 304 articles in China Women's Daily and 812 articles in Southern Metropolis Daily respectively. After manual review, repeated and less relevant reports were eliminated, and a total of 713 valid samples were finally determined.

According to the hypothesis, we set the dominant frame and topic type as the research dimension and coding category. The coding work was done by two coders together, and the final coders reliability kappa was 0.741.

**Dominant Frames:** According to discourse tendencies, reports are divided into progressive frames, risk frames and others.

**Types of topics:** All reports are classified into five categories: Rampant medical beauty disorder, adjustment and governance of the medical beauty industry, emerging cosmetic surgery trends, emerging cosmetic surgery technologies, and others. Among them, the category of "emerging plastic surgery trends" includes not only new changes aimed at plastic surgery recipients, such as students' plastic surgery fever, job seekers' plastic surgery fever, and the increase in the number of male beauty seekers, but also summer plastic surgery fever, going to Korea for plastic surgery, and plastic surgery at a younger age. change, appearance anxiety, etc

## 4. Research findings

### 4.1 Number of reports: Market media mainly focus, event-driven reports

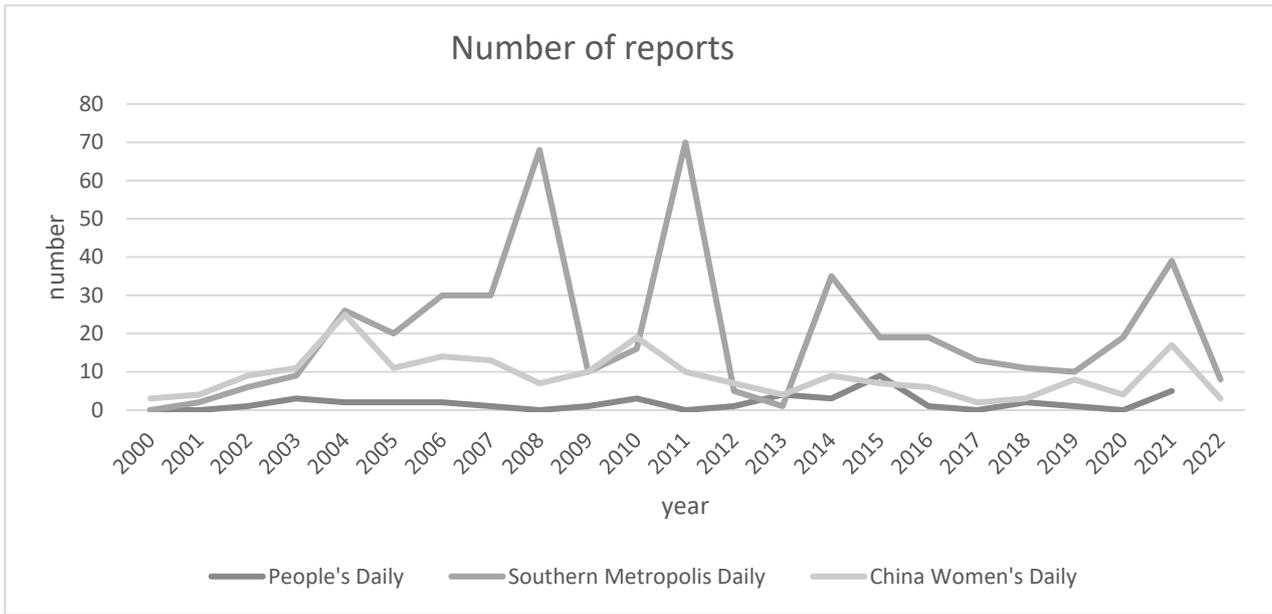


Fig. 1. Number of reports

After sample cleaning and statistics, from January 1, 2000 to April 21, 2022, there were 41 reports on medical beauty and plastic surgery in People's Daily, 206 in China Women's Daily, and Southern Metropolis Daily up to 466 articles. The Southern Metropolis Daily paid the highest attention to the topic of medical beauty, peaking in 2008 and 2011. Southern Metropolis Daily, as a market-oriented media, mainly focuses on the supply and demand side of emerging markets for medical and aesthetic issues, and has a strong timeliness. For example, also in 2011, during the Spring Festival, it was reported, "Give me the whole' lucky nose'" (2011.02.14); on Women's Day, "the whole' prosperous nose' for a good marriage" (2011.03.07); During the National Day, it became "Lucky Micro-Shaping is very popular nowadays" (2011.09.30). It can be described as "advance with the times".

As can be seen from broken line chart 1, the issue of medical aesthetics has not received sustained attention in the media discourse sphere, so the number of reports fluctuated dramatically and was driven by important events. This finding also echoes the presentation of media reports on other issues, and media discourse is often influenced by issues such as

policies, disasters, and emergencies. The media presentation of medical beauty topics is mainly influenced by the beauty pageant schedule. For example, the number of relevant reports in China Women's Daily peaked at 25 in 2004. Among them, the number of keyword reports containing "artificial beauty" is 14, because it is at the stage of "China's first artificial beauty" Hao Lulu undergoing plastic surgery. At this time, medical aesthetics reports mainly focus on the impact of medical aesthetics on an individual's life path. A few reports claim its positive side, claiming that it can "make the career path more confident and add value to professional quality" (2004.06.18); but most of them adhere to the angle of criticism and reflection, such as "make beautiful women or make selling points?" (2004.01.10); "Is Free'Renovation'a Gospel or Another Trap?" (2004.06.08). In order to increase the credibility and influence of the views, many reports quoted authoritative sources. Zhou Xiaozheng, a sociology professor at Renmin University, believed that "'artificial beauties' are modern feet" (2004.01.14)

### 4.2 Reporting framework: There are differences in the reporting framework among the media, and the risk framework dominates

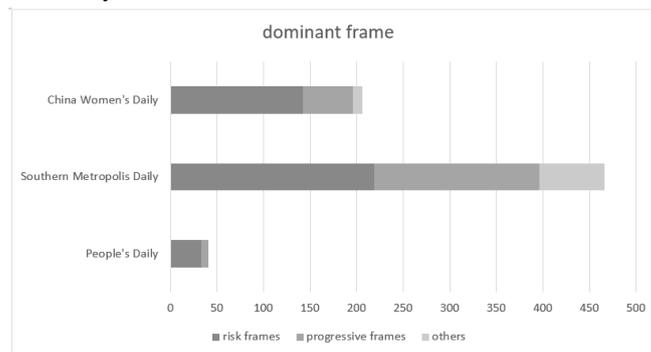


Fig. 2. dominant frame

In media reporting, framing is a process of re-"selecting" and "emphasizing", making an aspect of intended emphasis more prominent in the text(Pan&Kosicki,1993)<sup>[17]</sup>.In response to the second research question, this paper found that the three media selected the risk framework as the dominant framework when reporting medical and aesthetic-related issues, as shown in Figure 2,accounting for 47%,68.9%and 80.5%,respectively.Relatively speaking, however, Southern Metropolis Daily's use of the progressive framework is much higher than that of the other two newspapers, accounting for 38%,much higher than the others.

The risk here mainly emphasizes not the risk of medical beauty technology itself, but the abuse of medical beauty technology by unqualified subjects. In other words, even in the risk framework, medical beauty technology is not completely denied, but focuses on the issue of safety qualifications. The headlines of "People's Daily" often use rhetorical techniques such as rhetorical questions, contrasts or metaphors to strengthen the tone, thereby deepening the reader's impression and reminding the reader to reflect. For example, "Destroy 200,000 Faces in 10 Years, Beauty or Disfigurement?" (2003.11.21)," "Face Project" Can't Buy" Job Tickets"" (2005.08.03).

What is worth highlighting is that the risk of medical aesthetics is mainly demonstrated in the use of medical aesthetics technology as the icing on the cake in the event of "excessive" pursuit of beauty, rather than as a medical means in the restoration of patients in disasters such as burns. For example, "People's Daily" once reported the political news that "courageous actions lead to damage to the appearance, Shanghai citizens can get free plastic surgery"(2007.01.15); "China Women's Daily" also reported the case of children injured in the Wenchuan earthquake who regained their beauty due to medical beauty surgery(2008.07.15).Such concept may also be related to traditional Chinese concepts such as "parents who receive body and skin", explaining why the media has a negative attitude towards "plastic surgery" as a whole.

When reporting on positive events such as "the use of medical aesthetic plastic technology to repair congenital or acquired facial defects that hinder the normal life of patients", the three newspapers all chose the progressive framework and showed a relatively positive reporting attitude. This also reflects the progressive discourse of medical aesthetics as a "technology", echoing Wenhua's (2010) statement that medical aesthetics technology is bound up with the discourse of national progress to reflect China's desire to be accepted by the international community. For example, the words of "China Women's Daily" linking Chinese medical beauty technology with the world, "Injection beauty technology has attracted much attention from the medical beauty industry at home and abroad,which is called the future development direction of medical beauty(2007.05.22)."Previous studies on technological discourse in China's cyberspace have also found that technology is often tied to the country's political and economic goals(Wang Qin&Ouyang Guohua,2020)<sup>[18]</sup>. For example, the media

discourse on artificial intelligence is highly related to China's manufacturing and technological dreams(Zeng et al.,2020)<sup>[19]</sup>.The research on medical aesthetics in this paper also confirms this view.

In addition to the technical level, the progressive framework of medical aesthetics is also reflected in taking it as an "opportunity" to change the fate. On Women's Day, a report in Southern Metropolis Daily (2011.03.08) said: "Beauty is the passport of mankind, and beauty is also the goal that all women pursue. Every woman who knows how to pamper herself will never give up any opportunity to be more beautiful.". It can be said that the "opportunity discourse" is intended to encourage readers to increase their advantages in seeking employment, finding a partner, etc. through medical cosmetic surgery, so as to realize the "transformation" and "renew" of destiny.

In this paper, the chi-square test confirms that the frame difference between different media types is significant( $p < 0.00***$ ), and the choice of frame for different media does show differences. This finding is still consistent with the "marketization of urban newspapers and the trend toward entertainment"(Su Linsen,2013)<sup>[20]</sup>,and also reflects the choice of different media to appeal to the state's position and the public's position (Zeng Fanxu et al.,2013)<sup>[21]</sup>.In the special medical field of medical aesthetics and plastic surgery, which is far more profitable than public welfare, private plastic surgery institutions bring more benefits from advertising; Words and pictures such as "beauty" and "model" are also more suitable for the tastes of most readers.

#### **4.3 Types of issues: lack of industry governance issues, and chaos attracts more attention**

Through statistical analysis of the types of topics, this paper finds that the medical beauty industry has the lowest proportion of governance and adjustment (9.39%), and the issue that the media attaches most importance to is the rampant chaos in medical beauty (30.7%).It can be seen that the media's attention to constructive reports is slightly less, while accident reports are more able to enter the media's field of vision. This also shows that the media discourse lacks constructive reports

on the medical and aesthetic industry, and the audience is exposed to more news that is a catastrophic frame. From the perspective of emotional and behavioral impact, this may lead to an increase in people's negative emotions and a decrease in motivation to take positive behaviors (Xu Jinghong et al.,2019)<sup>[22]</sup>.

This paper also found a significant difference in the association between media type and issue type through the chi-square test( $p < 0.00***$ ), which indicates that different media have significantly different selected issues. Among them, "Southern Metropolis Daily" is more inclined to the topics of "emerging cosmetic surgery trend" and "rampant medical beauty disorder", accounting for 29.4%and 28.5%respectively; "China Women's Daily" is similar to the former. Correspondingly, although People's Daily does not pay

much attention to the topic of medical beauty, it pays more attention to the perspective of industry governance. In recent years, the huge economic volume of the medical beauty industry has made it impossible to be ignored by the mainstream media. And just as People's Daily reported on video games, "In the report of the 'industrial economy' framework, they (here refers to individuals such as medical aesthetic practitioners and plastic surgery recipients) are no longer required to be present as objects. Correspondingly The protagonists in the report are the country, the government, enterprises, capital and entrepreneurs (He Wei&Cao Shule,2018)<sup>[23]</sup>.

## 5.Conclusion

This article attempts to analyze the media's shaping and presentation of medical and cosmetic discourse by analyzing the content of medical aesthetics and cosmetic surgery technologies in three media: People's Daily, China Women's Daily, and Southern Metropolis Daily from 2000 to 2022. Specifically, it is found that the topic of medical aesthetics carries the progressive side of technological nationalism, and can also be used as an "opportunity" to bring people the possibility of changing their lives and destiny. But on the other hand, the media has not formed continuous attention to the topic of medical beauty, and mainly pays attention to the chaos and qualifications of the medical beauty industry. In terms of presentation methods, there are obvious differences in the presentation frameworks and topics chosen by different media. "People's Daily" focuses more on constructive perspectives such as industrial economic framework and governance, while "Southern Metropolis Daily" and other media pay more attention to accidental issues that can attract the attention of the audience.

This article contributes to the presentation and sorting out of different types of domestic media on medical and aesthetic issues. However, future research can also focus on more diverse aspects, such as actors in reports, the relationship between media presentation and time, etc. These topics are also worth digging into

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