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How Much Is My Face Worth? Neoliberal Subjectification, the Beauty Economy, and the Internet Celebrity Culture in China

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Summary
Since 2015 a new category of media star has come to public awareness and sparked controversial discussion in China: internet celebrity (*Wanghong*). *Wanghongs* build their fame and fandom mostly on their eye-catching and hyperfeminine appearance, which they present extensively on social media platforms to gain public attention and to acquire followers and fans. The stereotypical so-called internet celebrity face (*Wanghong lian*) became the most discussed buzzword of the year 2016, and led to a society-wide discussion about new beauty ideals and the growing popularity of cosmetic surgery, the objectification and commercialization of the body, as well as the increasing importance of presenting an appropriate appearance for the individual's social and economic success since the turn of the millennium. To address these key emerging issues, the article analyzes the development and characteristics of this new group of celebrities and locates them within the booming "beauty economy." By literally selling their beautiful face, *Wanghongs* convert symbolic capital through ecommerce and online advertising into real economic advantage. The utilization of "body capital" has stoked the public discourse about *yanzhi* (value of a pretty face) in China's status-conscious society. With an analysis of the internet celebrity phenomenon, this paper looks behind the sparkling social media façade and reveals the social and economic conditions that have led to this new ideology of "beauty as capital" in China.

Keywords: *Wanghong*, internet celebrity, social media, internet celebrity face, beauty economy, body capital, cosmetic surgery, beauty ideals

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Introduction

This article starts with the observation of an intensification of feminine beauty norms and the commodified proliferation of beauty technologies in China over the course of the last decade. This development reached a tangible peak with the growing popularity of so-called internet celebrities from 2015 onward. In their striving for the perfect social media performance, internet celebrities rely mostly on their good looks and therefore subject themselves to a mixture of, on the one side, empowering and beneficial and, on the other, also gender and age discriminating and disciplining techniques of the self. Their carefully crafted and optimized appearance on social media forms the "projection surface" for a society-wide discussion about new motivations and mechanisms of beauty practices and ideals, ones that have seemingly now positioned themselves at the heart of society and hence progressively become part of mainstream Chinese culture. Thus internet celebrities have become the prominent symbols of a fierce discussion about new beauty ideals and the growing popularity of cosmetic surgery, the objectification and commercialization of the body, as well as the increasing importance of sporting an appropriate appearance for the individual's social and economic success since the start of the new century.

This article sees itself as an explorative study, and an initial attempt to address this new phenomenon. As my research on this topic is still in its nascent stages, the findings of this article are based on preliminary qualitative research. This includes a content analysis of images (see, among others, Bell 2011) posted on select Chinese internet celebrity profiles (mainly on Weibo) alongside a methodological mixture of visual semiotics (to identify symbols and their relationship to broader systems of meaning in society) and discourse analysis (to focus on sites of images in relation to their broader discursive framing).[1] This research also involves an analysis of the general discourse about the *Wanghong* phenomenon in Chinese media (mainly focusing on, but not limited to, online media) as well as semistructured interviews personally conducted with five internet celebrities (each of whose social-networking site, SNS, profile I have analyzed, among others) in China to consider the site of production and the conditions shaping it.

My goal is to understand how a new awareness for "aesthetic vigilance" is constructed through the self-presentation of young women within this recently established internet celebrity culture, to borrow the concept of Simidele Dosekun (2017) — who originally applied it to hyperfeminine self-constructions of women in Nigeria. Aesthetic vigilance can be understood as a calculative and self-governmental labor of risk-managing one's attachments to beauty and its

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1 As a good example of the methodological mixture of visual semiotics and discourse analysis, I orient myself toward Amy Shield Dobson's (2015) analysis of postfeminist feminine gender performativity on Myspace profiles.

technologies, against the backdrop of neoliberal discourses of self-optimization and capacity-building. As a new form of social knowledge, aesthetic vigilance is a postfeminist and neoliberal rationality of power, in that it makes the women's subjection to these forms of power seem reasonable and manageable (Davies et al. 2002; Bordo 1993; McRobbie 2015). Social media pulls together themes of beauty, authenticity, labor, and entrepreneurial endeavor, and can therefore be seen as an intersection between postfeminism, neoliberalism, and subjectivity. My approach is driven by the aspiration to understand the specific ways in which social media representations simultaneously utilize and complicate the construction of a "postfeminist" neoliberal femininity. Thereby I follow the argumentation of critical postfeminist scholars like Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, who write extensively about "aesthetic entrepreneurship" (Gill 2007; Gill and Scharff 2011, 2017; Scharff 2015). This paper will thus contribute to further answering the question of how the forces of neoliberalism are shaping experiences and practices related to beauty.

The construction of neoliberal body politics and aesthetic vigilance in social media communication manifest in various discreet ways, for example recommendations for care and beauty treatments, makeup or hairstyle tutorials, workout tutorials, and so-called fitspo pictures which show perfectly modeled athletic bodies. Especially pertinent in the Chinese case, meanwhile, are so-called cosmetic surgery diaries (*zhengrong riji*), but also the public discourse on the overwhelming economic success of attractive young women as *Wanghongs*. My approach here is to trace these entangled processes — to discover how normative gendered body and beauty ideals are interwoven with narratives of success and with which rhetorics and images of aesthetic vigilance and labor they are institutionalized. This is done in order to explore how the internet celebrity culture shapes the sense of subjectivity of young Chinese women and more broadly fosters the imposition of new disciplinary practices on the body in enduring ways.

China's *Wanghong* culture

In 2016 Chinese media giant Sina Weibo hosted the "Superstars on Weibo" award (*Chaoji hongren jie*) for the first time, raising public awareness for a new category of media star and sparking a very controversial, society-wide discussion about these internet celebrities (*Wanghongs*). The term *Wanghong*, short for *Wangluo hongren*, mostly refers to a private person whose profile on social media platforms arouses such great public interest that his or her pictures or videos are virally circulated and shared by tens of thousands, up to millions, of fans and followers who subscribe to his or her profile page or visit it regularly, but without any personal contact between the profile owner and the fan or follower. In this sense, *Wanghongs* can be seen as the Chinese counterpart to the new professional group of "Instagram influencers" that has emerged in the Euro-American regions. Unlike

bloggers, whose reputations are based on their often polarizing statements on politically and socially relevant issues, *Wanghongs* are decidedly apolitical and devote themselves almost exclusively to the areas of fashion and cosmetics, lifestyle, gaming, comics, and entertainment. With the aforementioned public tribute to the most successful internet celebrities of the year, it became clear that this new group of personas is increasingly becoming more important than "classic" movie and media stars, not only in terms of income and advertising range but also of social influence and of acting as role models. It is estimated that around one million *Wanghongs* are currently active on Chinese social media (Shen 2016), and the number of them with more than 10,000 followers increased by 57 percent between 2016 and 2017. At the same time, the fan base grew rapidly from 100 million people in 2014 to a total of 470 million in 2017 (iResearch 2017).[2] Especially among the younger generation and digital natives, the importance and influence of these new stars is growing: making up 56 percent of *Wanghong* fans, the main target group is 20- to 30-year-olds while as many as 89 percent of 15- to 19-year-olds are already familiar with these internet celebrities (Xie 2017).

Most of these individuals have one thing in common: exceptionally good looks. In particular, female internet celebrities — and 90 percent of the winners of the "Superstars on Weibo" award were female — have gained much of their fame primarily through an above-average physical appearance and thus belong to the category of so-called "beauties" (*meinü*).[3] Although there are also some men active in this category, ones who rigorously adhere to the same beauty standards and who have gained fame as "flower boys" (*huanan*), I will focus in this article only on female staging strategies as women are without doubt quantitatively the main representatives of the *meinü* genre. Their physical perfection has provoked criticism and ridicule among many commentators on the aforementioned award ceremony. In some media reports, these laureates were referred to as "goddesses with noses that stick up in the sky [meaning surgically modeled and raised], and a face full of hyaluronic acid all designed from one cast, looking like Barbie dolls

2 Most surveys in this sector are not conducted by academics, but by private economic institutes or ecommerce consulting agencies — so the parameters of their findings and statistics are not fully traceable. I nevertheless use these numbers here just to demonstrate the overall trend and scope of this new phenomenon.

3 According to a list of the 100 most influential and successful *Wanghongs* in 2016, compiled by the Chinese search engine Souhu, most internet celebrities (36 percent) belong to the category of *meinü* and specialize mainly in beauty and fashion. The category "manga and comics" follows with a clear margin of 21 percent, and then the one of "comedy and entertainment" with 17 percent (Shen et al. 2016). These genres all follow different rules, and demand different requirements of the actors operating within them. Good looks are especially required in the category of beauties, but less important in ones like comics or comedy. This means that not all internet celebrities have gained fame only because of an extraordinarily attractive appearance; however the representatives of the genre of beauties have garnered most public attention, and thus shaped the popular image of internet celebrities as beautiful and attractive. In what follows, I speak only about the representatives of the *meinü* genre then.

produced on the assembly line" (Yu 2016: 44). Subsequently, the stereotypical so-called internet celebrity face (*Wanghong lian*) became the most discussed buzzword of the year 2016.[4]

Bringing together social media research and the new beauty boom

Apart from the many headlines in global media, actual academic analysis of this new beauty boom in China is still missing. Especially in the case of internet celebrities, whose emergence and growing publicity can be seen as symptomatic of the beauty boom, research in China hitherto has mostly been concerned with collecting mere statistics rather than with discussing the social implications and causes of this emerging phenomenon. In Western research literature, internet communication in China and especially social media platforms like Weibo have been studied mostly only under the presumption of exploring new channels for political opinion formation, democratization, and sociopolitical protests among a critical online public (e.g. Chen and Reese 2015; DeLisle et al. 2016; Le Han 2016; Marold and Herold 2016; Negro 2017; Shan and Yang 2017). But the fact that most Chinese people are more concerned with entertainment, gossip, and superficial topics in their digital life has been disappointing for those with high hopes for new digital ways of political reform and disenchanting for other observers interested in sophisticated internet communication analysis.

Only recently have some more comprehensive studies, with greater social focus on the Chinese Web 2.0 landscape, been attempted (Chen and Ip 2018; Gong and Yang 2017; Kent et al. 2017; Zhang 2016). But a detailed discussion of the internet celebrity phenomenon or the mechanisms and effects of bodily representations via social media is still lacking. As the rising popularity of social media stars and influencers is, of course, not a culture-specific phenomenon limited only to the Chinese region, with similar trends currently being observed worldwide, there has grown a body of Western research in the fields of Media and Communication Studies and also Sociology. Herein we can find a wide range of examples of how to discuss different aspects of social media — from content creation, to the role of technological framing, to reception research, to ways of integrating new technologies into daily life. Yet, even here a special focus on bodily representations is still marginal relative to the overall publication volume on the topic of social media (e.g. Albury 2015; Cover 2016; Dobson 2015; Lister 2013; Marwick 2015; Rettberg 2014; Whitefield-Madrano 2016).

4 The question "Is the internet celebrity face pretty or ugly?" provoked an unusually high number of responses (2,590) on the popular Chinese community platform Zhihu, most of which tended to be more negative ones. The question "If no-one likes the internet celebrity face, why are more and more women getting one by surgery and becoming successful?" even received 3,337 responses meanwhile (Yang 2017: 71).

To bridge this research gap, I will also include more comprehensive discourses on (neoliberal) constructions of the body in China in my considerations. Here we can find a broad array of literature, ranging from studies about the role of the female body as object of consumer culture (Hopkins 2007; McWilliams 2013; Munshi 2001; Otis 2016) to discussions on gendered bodies and gender relations (Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002; Hooper 2015). Within the framework of sociological studies in sexuality, the gendered body is discussed in its function as role model for incorporated heteronormativities (Fahquar 2002; Farrer 2002). In the course of criticism of public and political preoccupations with the sexual body, specific reference is made to beauty practices and their role in discourses of power (Brownell 2005; McMillan 2006). In the last few years there has been a gradual increase and diversification in social analysis about various current body and beauty trends via the prism of neoliberal politics (Luo 2012; Lee 2012; Rofel 2007; Sun 2014; Wen 2013; Yang 2011). Most of these studies refer primarily to three factors to explain the increasing intensity of beauty practices: China's global market opening and the diffusion of global body and beauty ideals as well as gender role models via mass media; the establishment of an enormously influential and rapidly growing consumer culture targeting the country's new middle class; and, last but not least, the increasing commodification of all areas of life due to neoliberal economic and political agendas (Kipnis 2007; Luo 2008; McWilliams 2013; Meng 2012; Otis 2011; Rofel 1999; Yan and Bissell 2014; Xu and Feiner 2007).

I will also take studies on South Korea into account here, as I consider the findings on that country's neoliberal approach vis-à-vis the intrusion of capitalist market logic into the private sphere and the subsequent colonization of the body very convincing and applicable to the Chinese situation too (Cho 2009; Elfving-Hwang 2013; Lee 2012; Park 2007). I would like to bring together these different strands as well as combine theoretical considerations from Communication Studies on the working principles and effects of social media regarding discourses of the body in the intersection of Gender and Area Studies and the neoliberal narrative. This will enable us to more fully grasp the internet celebrity phenomenon on Chinese social media platforms, as well as its implications for narratives of vigilant body practices — as both a new feminine competence and as a site of feminine subjectivity and empowerment.

If we understand social media as the mediatization of general, social communication processes, then far-reaching social implications can be traced back to the *meinü* representations on Weibo, Weixin, and the like[5] — ones that also

5 At the end of 2016, the number of internet users totaled 770 million. The number of mobile devices was even higher — 1.3 billion — with 50 percent of them being equipped with mobile internet capability. Ninety-one percent of Chinese internet users are active on SNS, and spend an average of 46 minutes per day on them — as compared to 67 percent of American social media users.

have visible offline effects on negotiations within the processes of subject formation and the contestation of social norms. In online communication on SNS, images have gained a particularly dominant role: photos, above all the omnipresent "selfie," serve a social communicative use and consumption practice among peers and like-minded people, but they also increasingly create a parallel reality by collecting and displaying more and more images of specific representations and stagings dogmatically (Astmeier et al. 2011; Autenrieth 2011). In this type of communication, images take on the function of a substitute for the body and thus also for the ego: they demonstrate a kind of "identity performance" (Boyd and Ellison 2007) that can be interpreted as processes of identity construction in terms of Goffman's (1959) "performance of the self in everyday life" — but with no clear difference between front- and backstage, both falling together in the supposedly "authentic" representation of the self in the selfie. To see each other, to show others how you want to be seen, and to see how others see you — acceptingly or critically — the social use of images links together presenters and recipients in a glocal peer-review system that increasingly takes over the performative function of a social normalization process through either "likes" or "shitstorms." In an age of deep mediatization, the self is increasingly constructed through new, highly mediated figurations of different but interrelated meaningful actors. Thus, media-based narratives act in the mode of epistemological techniques of knowledge production, and thus intimately shape our sense of everyday reality (Reichert 2008).

If considered under an action-theoretical approach inspired by Krotz (2007), the symbolism of the communicative handling — meaning images on social media — gains meaning only through an interactive communication process. By acting in relation to others symbolically, the individual actor constitutes his or her world and their truth. In this process, images serve as communicants — with the help of which a mediated construction of social reality can be understood. Thus social media is not reflective of a preexisting reality but rather produces and constitutes

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Probably the most famous SNS platform is Weibo, founded by Sina.com in 2009, which is often compared to Twitter as a kind of microblogging platform. In addition to its microblogging service, private and commercial profile pages for self-representation in the manner of Instagram have gradually become increasingly popular on Weibo. According to its own data, 400 million active users were registered on Sina Weibo as of November 2015 with most of them owning a personal profile page. The app WeChat (Chinese: Weixin), originally conceived as a messenger service from Tencent, had 963 million users in mid-2017. More than two-thirds of users — born mainly between the 1980s and the beginning of the new century — log in daily, and spend an average of 90 minutes on the app. Some 61.4 percent of users access the WeChat Moments feature, which allows you to create and view personal profile pages, to check your friends' latest updates, or to post something yourself. Only 1.3 percent of WeChat users never use this channel for potential viral self-representation.

the sense of the real through repeated discourses and representations of material resources, objects, and bodies (Couldry 2012).

> It is not just that media extend direct experience via a gradual process towards more indirect experiences: from the outset our social world is suffused with technological media of communication, and the "directness" and "mediatedness" of experience are inextricably interwoven with each other. In this respect, media are changing not only our *Mitwelt*, but more basically, our *Umwelt*: our directly experienced social reality […]. (Couldry and Hepp 2017: 29)

Thus image-based communication on social media can be seen as the means of visualizing culture and social life, and also as sites for new visual practices derived from the changes occurring in society (Hand 2017: 217). But to understand the increasing importance of physical attractiveness and highly artificial and aestheticized body representations in all of their social dimensions, we have to step back from pure media research in favor of a more "non-media-centric approach" (Couldry 2012, Horst and Pink 2015). To fathom how digital media contributes to the construction of people's everyday worlds, we also need to understand all other social, economic, and political aspects of their milieus and lives. We thus need to look beyond the digital before we can grasp how it plays out in this specific environment. As such, besides the implications of digital media for body ideals, bodily practices, and individual subjectification processes, we also have to consider the entanglements of body and beauty norms with the sociopolitical agendas and socioeconomic changes emerging in China during the last decade. When we acknowledge these developments as inseparable from the occurrence of current phenomena like the *Wanghong* culture, this offers us a new means to understand the complex intertwining between a changing social reality, digital responses to it, and the accompanying unheralded offline implications.

Wanghong culture (*wanghong wenhua*) is considered a new digital phenomenon, even though it actually has its roots in the emergence of early forms of networked virtual communication since the turn of the millennium. First broad public attention was given to bloggers in online forums who published controversial, eye-catching online texts, such as Annie Baby and Mu Zimei — with their raunchy descriptions of their love lives (Farrer 2007). Over time, the importance of images and photos in communication increased. "Sister Lotus" (Furong jiejie) can be seen as a pioneer in image-based, online fame-building, as she came to nationwide prominence in 2004 with the internet publication of quite bizarre photos of herself scantily clad across various university community platforms. She was followed by numerous other "brothers and sisters" whose short-term "internet careers" were fueled primarily by sensationalism and ridicule. With the maturation of mainly image-based communication and social-networking services, an increasing number of people received widespread positive both online and offline public attention

through the viral distribution of their photos and/or videos.[6] Therefore, Chinese communication researchers consider the year 2016 as the breakthrough one for the *Wanghong* phenomenon that has now arrived at the center of society and which is progressively shaping mainstream culture (Shen et al 2016, Sun 2017, Yang 2017). With their expertise as fashion and beauty trendsetters, *Wanghongs* create a highly person-centered fan cult that revolves around their self-presentation in the photos and (livestreaming) videos that they post on their profiles.

Much of the success of the internet celebrity phenomenon has been based on the development of the technical prerequisites, like smartphones as well as the widespread dissemination of mobile internet access in most parts of China. Furthermore, the core mechanisms behind the mediatization of social relationships inherent in communication on SNS have helped enhance the immense popularity of internet celebrities. The premise of authentic authorship and the public display of one's personality in all its facets — at least as it purports to be — promote a feeling of social connectedness and facilitate the development of virtual, parasocial relationships (Giles 2010; Chung and Cho 2017). It is precisely the supposed approachability and authenticity of these SNS representations that creates a new kind of "digital equality" fandom. Owners of SNS profiles are in principle on the same social level, and are thus "approachable" through the transformation of SNS into a mediated dimension. Or, to put it bluntly: internet celebrities are like you and I, just a little bit prettier, richer, and more perfect.

The "internet celebrity face": Aesthetic labor and the temptations and pressure of the beauty economy

It is the representation of a seemingly perfect life and perfect looks that generates broad public attention and lots of fans, ones who are all too eager to learn how to become so flawless themselves. A striking physical appearance that corresponds to the mainstream beauty ideal as closely as possible is one of the most central features hereof — and, as an eye-catcher in the world of images, is hence a prerequisite for social media success. Internet celebrities are regarded as beauty ideals who have become flesh, and the so-called internet celebrity face (*Wanghong lian*) has been firmly established vis-à-vis the description of certain physiognomic characteristics. In public discourse the term *Wanghong lian* carries, at least in most

6 Examples are the cases of "Sister Milktea" (Naicha meimei), Zhang Zetian, and the *Wanghong* star Zhang Xinyuan. The former gained virtually overnight national fame as the embodiment of the ideal Chinese woman after a photo of her with a mug of milk tea circulated online in 2009. She used her publicity wisely, and recently became China's youngest billionaire at the age of 24. The latter, meanwhile, advanced in a career as a popular fashion and beauty model and internet star after the circulation of her private vacation photos from the Maldives in 2008. She is seen as one of the first-generation internet celebrities, meaning those who became famous by circulating so called "beauty shots" of themselves on SNS.

cases, a mocking undertone, because it is seen as a derogatory generalization of a specific appearance among young women who all look the same — namely an oval, "pickaxe-shaped" face (*zhuizi lian*) with oversized eyes, as well as a pointed chin and a clear nose relief. This ideal of beauty has been so perfected by numerous *Wanghongs* through cosmetic surgery that the term internet celebrity face is now often used in everyday speech as a synonym for a very artificial, de-individualized appearance like the one often seen after such surgical alteration. But even if the internet celebrity face has seemingly been discredited, the fascination with it still continues: among the 100 most viewed streams created by women on the popular livestreaming platforms Douyu, Yangke, and YY, 96 percent of the hosts have such a visage. Among the ten top-selling stores on Chinese Ebay counterpart Taobao, meanwhile, six of them are managed by typical *Wanghong* beauties and they moreover generate a turnover of some RMB 1 billion per year (Yang 2017).

The combination of an attractive appearance and economic gain is clearly emphasized in the Chinese public discourse, and kicks back against the mockery of the all-too-uniform face. *Wanghongs* are considered the personification of the equation "beautiful = successful." On social media, beauty — in the truest sense of the word — has become a business: the beauty economy (*meinü jingji*, alternatively *yanzhi jingji*) (Xu and Feiner 2007). The "*Wanghong* economy" (*Wanghong jingji*), a part of the beauty economy, has grown into a billion-dollar business as one of the main branches of social commerce — and it is considered to be the fastest-expanding and growing future market in ecommerce. In the beauty economy, attractiveness is regarded as the core commodity and incentive that garners attention — and thus generates sales. The beautiful body is, accordingly, degraded to but a means of marketing and consumption. Social commerce, in which internet celebrities use their public prominence to aggressively promote products and even distribute them in linked partner online shops, has become an important source of income in China's booming ecommerce sector in recent years.

The existence of internet celebrities is intrinsically linked to more or less obvious social commerce activities. Many *Wanghongs* either started their careers as Taobao models and expanded their online shops successively on social media platforms by advertising their products as their own tested best-choice ones (and thus blurred the line between authentic self-representation and commercial gain) or they acquired repute among fans with beauty-product recommendations and styling tutorials over the years.[7] This makes the *Wanghong* the perfect advertising medium for the

7 With the spread of ecommerce, this new professional group of so-called Taobao models (*taobao mote* or *taobao nülang*) emerged: amateur models presenting clothing, jewelry, and accessories on the order pages of online shops. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, this was still regarded as a quite popular job for young women who wanted to enter the beauty economy but did not meet the aesthetic standards of professional international modeling agencies. Many Taobao models made

fashion and cosmetics industries: According to intrasectoral surveys, *Wanghong* business generated sales of around RMB 520 million in 2016, with forecasts for 2018 predicting approximately RMB 1 billion meanwhile. In the second quarter of 2017, with 18 million products sold via social commerce as advertised by internet celebrities, a monthly trading volume of RMB 54 million was generated — a 106 percent increase on the previous year (iResearch 2017). As media giant Sina.com was involved in these statistics, the numbers may be a little overestimated; the overall trend of rapid growth in this sector has nonetheless been validated by different sources however.

Internet celebrities embody the new Chinese dream of self-made millionaires, and their careers fuel the fairytale of the girl who has nothing to offer but her body but who with the clever marketing of it becomes a millionaire. Such an individual is Zhang Dayi, who presented new products in her Taobao shop in a livestreaming video on her Weibo profile in 2016 for Chinese Singles' Day. The video was viewed 410,000 times within two hours, and received over a million likes — turning public attention into real cash: the sales of these products generated a turnover of RMB 20 million (Tian 2017: 43). Another *Wanghong* shooting star, Papi Jiang, is said to have sold the first commercial advert on her website for RMB 22 million in 2016, due to the enormous marketing value of her 20 million fans (*Epoch Times* 2016). According to estimates around 30 percent of all internet celebrities earn more than RMB 300,000 per month, while particularly successful ones can make several million via advertisements or sales deals. Even "average" part-time *Wanghongs* earn a few thousand renminbi per month.

This supposedly simple equation of attractive mainstream appearance and commercial and economic success enhances the appeal and fascination for the mostly female fans. The myth of becoming famous with a photo almost overnight, and earning a higher income than ever possible in a normal job by representing yourself on social media in a certain way, sounds tempting. That is why, despite the mockery of their uniform appearance, *Wanghongs* are obviously acting as role models for many young fans in the same way that classic celebrities do. By staging themselves as the digital "girl next door," they paradoxically embody a "feasible" beauty ideal — one that is supposed to be attainable for every woman with a bit of discipline, continuous care rituals, and elaborate makeup artistry. She has to but regularly follow online recommended makeup practices, cosmetic tips, and styling suggestions. However this establishes a dangerous ideal of beauty and the desirable body image, laments the Chinese feminist activist collaboration "Women

use of their experiences and opened their own online shops, where they could present their products themselves. Of course these former models, as well as the new generation of internet celebrities, like to share their product-advertising photos from their shops also on their SNS profiles too.

Awakening Network," as the appearance of internet stars is usually anything but natural and just the result of skillful styling (Tsoi 2016).

Officially, only about 10 percent of internet celebrities have admitted to having cosmetic surgery — but the real number is likely to be much higher. Talking to insider Yan Jiaqi, a Beijing-based internet celebrity with 1.4 million followers, as one representative of this new group of women confirms the high percentage of artificial beauties within the *Wanghong* business.[8] According to Yan, cosmetic surgery and regular minimally invasive corrections are the "standard job requirements" of this profession. According to her own experience, there is virtually no woman in the business who has not undergone multiple corrections and she calls it outright the prerequisite for success alongside continuous work on perfecting and maintaining beauty — meaning daily beauty routines, sport, and dieting, as well as regular minimal corrections with Botox and Hyaluronic fillers. She herself is also openly committed to various cosmetic operations, such as the creation of a double eyelid, eye enlargement, nose correction, and the grinding of the jawbone, as well as various Botox and Hyaluronic injections. In addition she abides by a rigid diet, frequently works out to keep her body in shape, and uses extensive skincare rituals. In so doing she describes herself as relatively "unpretentious" and simple when it comes to all that beautification work that can potentially be done to the body, compared to her colleagues.

She judges her experience with surgeries as a "necessary measure for the work," and sees them as completely pragmatic; if something on her face does not correspond to the general mainstream ideal of beauty, then a little nip and tuck are necessary. She sees it as a kind of positive enrichment: "If it [cosmetic surgery] makes you happy and benefits your work, then it is a good thing and should be done, of course." If there were no professional necessity, she might have considered minor corrections, too, but she would not have done them so purposefully. However, the growing competitive pressure requires a steady keeping pace with the latest visual requirements — even if Yan, who worked as a model before she started her social media career, considers the current beauty ideal in China to be superficial, undifferentiated, and de-individualized. But if the fans want to see an internet celebrity face, then let us have an internet celebrity face. She says: "My greatest fear is that when people see me, they think I cannot achieve anything and would only be pretty. Or not even pretty."

The intensive work on the body remains hidden in the published photos on SNS; only the perfected results are visible. At the same time, however, according to the rules of the genre of SNS, these photographs also raise claims to reality and authenticity, even if the recipients might suspect a certain amount of manipulation

8 Personal interview with Yan Jiaqi, conducted in September 2017 in Beijing. Yan's Weibo profile is available online at: https://www.weibo.com/yanyanmystic?is_hot=1.

of the visible through image-editing programs. Nevertheless, according to Roland Barthes (1989), images generate a moment of emotionality at the very instance of viewing and capture the viewer's gaze in an immediate way. Thus, carefully staged and edited pictures can also unfold their seductive appeal to work done on the self. Because the digital girl next door, in her virtual staging of the perfect body/makeup/life/etc., embodies both the imperative and the promise that even for a normal woman an optimized body/a more attractive appearance/a more successful life is within reach with a little effort.

The increasing number of viral success stories on private SNS profiles show that more and more actors in the arena of glocal attentiveness strive for acceptance, and therefore deliberately subject themselves to market-compliant standards of beauty and stereotypically gendered staging strategies. Subsequently, a gradual normalization of the behavior takes place — with tendencies toward making accompanying actions and representations more and more flexible. And, above all, perpetual self-objectification is normalized: women only perceive themselves through the eyes of others, and thus forever discover deficits that need to be worked on. This effect is also confirmed by studies on the influence of social media participation on the self-image of female users: after comparing themselves with photos on SNS, the test subjects felt the worst emotionally, had the most negative self-image, but the highest degree of motivation to work on their bodies (e.g. via diet and sport) (Fardouly et al. 2017; Yan and Bissell 2014). The *Wanghong* economy makes use of this effect by suggestively promoting a deficient self-image vis-à-vis the user's body: under slogans such as "Let's all become beautiful together" (*dajia yiqi mei*), which can be often read on Wanghong profile pages, the body is proclaimed to be obviously inadequate in its current state and the constant work on it declared a "common task." Internet celebrities (and the beauty and fashion industries that they represent) will, of course, be happy to help with advice, tutorials, recommendations, and exemplary representations in the pursuit of self-optimization. Social media profiles serve thus as a comparison portal, where not only highly artificial pictures of their owners serve as an incentive for body manipulation but where also users are encouraged to upload their own photos of progress and to evaluate and encourage each other.[9]

The profound psychological, emotional, and practical effects of the omnipresent representation of a highly artificial body image, as practiced in *Wanghong* culture, on the self-image and self-perception of Chinese users can only be observed to a certain extent at present and needs more detailed research done on it. Only recently have Chinese studies appeared discussing the influence of social media on modes

9 An example is the earlier mentioned SNS genre of cosmetic surgery diaries, where patients who have gone under the knife document their recovery, compare their "progress" with other patients, and give advice on how to choose the right procedure and clinic to their readers.

of socialization and the subjectification of adolescents, as their main user group. Also emerging is research on a fear of the normalization of a radicalized and highly objective body and gender image (e.g. Sun 2017).

Studies on the motives for cosmetic surgery also indicate that SNS-based role models are leveraging an increasingly important influence over the decision to have it, and are significantly lowering the inhibition threshold. For example, around 70 percent of female cosmetic surgery patients strive for the controversial ideal of the internet celebrity face (Zhang 2012). For this reason, some clinics even offer a so-called *Wanghong* package to their clients: double eyelid surgery, eye enlargement, and rhinoplasty all in one operation (Yang 2017: 71). The internet celebrity face has become a kind of standard treatment in beauty clinics where surgeries are mostly practiced according to seemingly objective universal aesthetics standards, and not according to the individual facial and bodily features of the client. This standard is mainly based on the golden ratio, and consists of the so-called 3 parts to 5-eye cut and the 4 heights and 3 depths.[10] This means, beauty is measured and standardized into "objective" numbers and is no longer in the eye of the beholder — because "numbers do not lie" (Whitefield-Madrano 2016: 13).

The reduction of beauty to a set of narrow numbers gives way to a more technical and instrumental understanding of beauty and the body. A golden ratio body or face is seldom bestowed by nature, and mostly achieved only with artificial help. The Chinese saying of beauty being only 30 percent naturally inherited and 70 percent manmade coincides with this understanding of a deficient body, which thus has to be artificially enhanced as the only logical consequence. And by the way, this fixation on numbers as new observable "facts of science" may explain why so-called body challenges on social media — based on the measurement of body parts via the iPhone-knee-challenge or the A4-waist-challenge — are so extremely popular in East Asia. The biological basis of beauty has seemingly become fact, and shifted surrounding knowledge and self-perceptions.

But the simple causal equation of online idols and real-life imitation would be too short of thinking. It must be borne in mind that online beauty ideals, as embodied by internet celebrities, do not exist in a social and cultural vacuum but are indeed connected to broader social trends. We can observe a general intensification of feminine beauty norms and the commodified proliferation of beauty technologies in China in the last decade. The acceptance of cosmetic surgery and artificial looks, as personified in *Wanghong* culture, is closely related to an overall new "beauty boom" or "beauty craze" in both China itself and East Asia at large. Since 2001

10 The 3 parts to 5-eye cut means that the face, from the hairline to the chin, can be divided into three identical parts and the distance between the ears can be hypothetically filled with five eyes. The 4 heights point to the higher parts of the face: forehead, nose, chin, and cupids bow and the 3 depths of course to the less convex parts like the nasal root between the eyes, the philtrum, and the upper part of the chin.

China has witnessed an explosive wave of beauty clinics mushrooming up: the demand for plastic surgery in major cities has risen to around 7.4 million operations per year (Shang 2015), with annual growth rates of 200 percent in the last few years. Today, 12 percent of all cosmetic surgeries worldwide are practiced in China and, joint with South Korea, it ranks third globally among the countries with the most such surgeries. The Chinese beauty industry experienced a huge boom between 2010 and 2015: cosmetic surgery and noninvasive services made an annual turnover of RMB 150 billion in 2014, while the Chinese Plastic Surgeons Association forecasts revenue of RMB 800 billion for 2019. Beauty has become big business in recent years — and internet celebrities are, literally, only the most visible tip of the iceberg. They function, so to say, as the avant-garde in a new general zeitgeist of aesthetic labor and self-optimization.

The result of this is, as we see in the case of the internet celebrity face, a devaluation of individual features in favor of a quite uniform look — although one that is paradoxically clearly disparaged in the public discourse. This seeming paradox might be explainable by neoliberal adaption processes: the fear of falling by the wayside of social norms produces intense pressure to meet the narrowly defined canon of requirements. Or, as Sabine Maasen (2008) puts it in line with Foucault: in the logic of bioaesthetic governmentality, the fateful body turns into the body of options and thus is the starting point for neoliberal strategies of enhancement and empowerment in the form of capacity-building and adaptation. This I explore in the next section.

Seizing every chance: Aesthetic vigilance, the autotelic self, and growing social inequality

Social institutions and the promises of first modernity — like the nuclear family, meritocracy, social inclusion, and the equal allocation of resources — have become increasingly brittle and dysfunctional for women after the global victory of neoliberal economic reforms as the side effects of capitalist modernization. With the collapse of these institutions, life chances are increasingly perceived as uncertain and insecure. The most important lesson learned from the last three decades is that one has to adapt to the presenting conditions in order to make the best of the situation at hand. This is the entry point for a new neoliberal discourse preaching that everyone has to accept that it is not possible to resist or secure himself or herself from all kinds of difficulty encountered both individually and collectively, but instead has to learn how to adapt to their enabling conditions via the embracing of insecurity (Chandler and Reid 2016).

The neoliberal subject is an autotelic self, in the sense of Anthony Giddens (1991): the autotelic self embraces risk as an active challenge and turns insecurity into self-actualization, which means personal growth by developing resilience and adapting

to change. All kinds of problem faced in life are reassessed and understood differently as "positive challenges," ones that must be actively addressed. However it does not matter whether these challenges and problems lie within the individual's sphere of influence or whether they are caused by systemic failures of the state and of society — such as the toleration and even encouragement of highly gender-discriminatory social and economic structures, for example, as we will see below. Threats are no longer externally produced, but lie exclusively in the capability or not of the individual to take responsibility for his or her own security. So it is the resilient subject who has been taught, and who has furthermore accepted, lessons concerning the need to capacity-build in order to make the right choices in the development of sustainable responses to the threats posed by the dangers in their environment. This contains a new neoliberal promise that gradually replaces the old one of modernization (social equality, inclusion, and upward mobility). Instead of hoping for a meritocratic societal structure with institutions that secure social justice, the new mantra of individual agency is that if you just work hard enough on yourself, and if you also continuously improve yourself and adapt to all social requirements, then you will be relatively safe in a world where nothing is secure anymore. The pressure for aesthetic self-regulation can also be seen in this context. The improved, perfected body becomes the bulwark against social insecurity, the visible sign of the awareness of capacity-building's necessity and the acceptance of the inherent requirements of neoliberal socioeconomic structures. Investing in "body capital" is, then, the lesson learned from the disappointment of the failed promises of social modernization increasingly evident since the 1980s.

The resilient subject is one that has accepted the necessity of adaption to the "realities" of an endemic condition of insecurity, and therefore also the need to capacity-build in order to make the "right choices" vis-à-vis avoiding the threats and dangers posed by their environment. Making the right choice qualifies him or her as a modern, self-responsible, and successful individual. And if you choose what is "scientifically" proven to be good — like the golden ratio — it simply cannot be the wrong pick. So to float along with the current trends of "modern" lifestyle choices, like the internet celebrity face, against a tide of critical and disparaging voices is the consistent implementation of this core neoliberal logic: "If I want to become more popular, my face has to be smaller and smaller, and the eyes bigger and bigger […] they even sacrifice health and the normal functions of their body just to match the aesthetic ideal of the perfect internet celebrity face" (Yang 2017: 72). This statement clearly reflects an awareness of aesthetic vigilance that is constructed through the process of neoliberal subjectification in the discourses of resilience and capacity-building: the autotelic self has a highly vigilant and critical gaze on his/her body, as an important resource in the better distribution of life chances.

The new profession of internet celebrity serves as a typical example of the construction of aesthetic vigilance. It suggests a tendency toward identity demarcation; the actor incorporates neoliberal identity technologies, in the process learning how — through the calculative and self-governmental labor of risk-managing one's attachments to beauty and its technologies — he or she can succeed in standing out from the great monotony of the many. The social media actor is literally the entrepreneur of his or her own opportunities, by successfully positioning and marketing themself in the global market of attention-harvesting. And his/her SNS profile is the visible "wall of fame" of their success: the carefully staged and automatically digitally modified selfies on Chinese social media sites are witnesses to the continuous vigilant self-narration, self-representation, and efforts of self-maintenance of the profile owners, as autotelic selves (on the exact functions of the selfie, see Kwon and Kwon 2015).

The fact that the outer appearance and body have been colonized, utilized, and thus exposed to neoliberal optimization rationalities by the economic system is also shown by the very popular terms of *yan zhi* and *lian zhi* (value of a face, facial capital) circulating in the public discourse, according to which the outer appearance — in particular of the face, but also of the entire body — is equated with other capital values. This in the sense of Catherine Hakim's (2010) understanding of the erotic, or in this case body capital. Although Hakim's theses are representative of the Euro-American zone, they also describe quite precisely the contemporary East Asia logic: attractive wins and ugly loses in today's rat race. Hakim seems to express exactly what many young Chinese women are currently feeling when she says: "Today, the financial returns of attractiveness equal the returns of qualifications. Many young women now think beauty is just as important as education" (2011).

A similar ideological turnaround can be observed in China: until the beginning of the new century, education was not only regarded as a traditional virtue but also always contained the promise of social advancement. This promise has become fragile with capitalist economic and neoliberal social reforms however, while the privatization and economization of the higher education system have produced masses of unemployed university graduates who see themselves as having been cheated of their chance in life. Career starters not only have to study at a high-ranked university, achieve an excellent degree, and score high on the English test (the so-called three pack), but also need a lot of additional "competitive advantages" to even successfully enter the job market in what is lamented as the "historically most difficult time" for entrants. These additional "soft skills" include a professional and attractive appearance, and this may be the reason why it is high school graduates and university students with an average age of around 20 years old who account for the largest percentage of customers of beauty clinics in East Asia (Wen 2013:75ff.) — in contrast, for example, to the United States or

Germany, where the average age of patients is between 40 and 50 years old (ASPS 2016).

On the one side, appearance offers very practical value in the increasingly fierce competition of the job market. Since education reform has devalued "hard" qualifications like university degrees, "soft" ones like attractiveness and social skills have risen in importance. Or, like one interviewed girl put it: "You have to be discovered among 500 applicants before you can show off your skills. A pretty face is your entrance ticket."[11] Zheng Tiantian (2009) found in her own analysis that a large number of female college graduates attached their half-naked, colorful portraits to their resumes and emphasized that they could sing and dance and that they were beautiful, decorous, gentle, and good at socializing as well as drinking alcohol. An attractive appearance is seen as the best opportunity to get out of the status of the "new poors," and to overcome the frustration of social immobility (Du 2016).

A second cause for the popularity of the body capital ideal can be found when taking a closer look at the social status of women in Chinese society — or what Leta Hong Fincher calls in the subtitle of her book "the resurgence of gender inequality" (2014). From a distance gender equality might seem quite well developed under the surveillance of the Chinese state's feminist agency, but a closer look actually reveals a lot of setbacks in the development of an equal society. Various economic and political developments in recent decades have contributed to the problematizing and vulnerability of the life chances of women. With the end of the socialist era and the latest neoliberal economic reforms of the 1990s, women were and have continued to be stigmatized as socially endangered subjects in public discourses such as journals and women's advisory books in China (but also in other East Asian countries too) (Dippner 2016; Hooper 2015).

The female journey through life seems to be problematic in all stations. It starts with unequal education chances when girls seek higher education. Then, they experience a much rougher entrance into the job market. And, finally, discrimination and faster unemployment ensue when women are forced to handle the burden of family care and job requirements. These facts are played down as an individual problem of women, like a column from March 2011 that ran just after the International Women's Day shows. It said: "Pretty girls do not need a lot of education to marry into a rich and powerful family, but girls with an average or ugly appearance will find it difficult" (Fincher 2012). Even Chinese feminist scholars like Huang Lin (2012) recognize the vulnerable position of women, and thus recommend the so-called marriage economy (*hunyin jingji*) — that means to commit to a stable marriage with a capable husband as the main breadwinner as the most secure "investment" for women nowadays. Set against the awareness of fewer

[11] Interview with the author in Beijing, September 2017.

educational and employment opportunities and the new stress on women's domestic role, physical self-enhancement became an omnipresent mantra in a "society that only looks at the face" (*kanlian de shehui*).

These side effects of China's reform and economic growth have enlarged inequality patterns, instead of making the "Chinese Dream" of shared wealth come true. After a bitter awakening to the reality of this dream, many people from the middle stratum of society were forced to realize that contemporary stratification features a reemerging class hierarchy in which interest groups are in control of the unbalanced allocation of resources. Or, like Du Caixia puts it: "No matter how hard they try, they find there is always a glass ceiling in their way, which only provides an illusion of the future at a distance but would never let them get through" (2016: 36). This perceived (gendered) inequality and stagnation may be the trigger for why many young people — and especially women — from second- and third-tier cities with a medium-level educational background and few other resources for social advancement besides are placing their hopes in the "body politics" of the beauty economy as the new "holy grail" for generating income and upward social mobility. With the educational system gradually losing the ability to facilitate interclass flows, many young people are now looking for alternative life paths. According to a nationwide survey heavily debated in the media, 48 percent of university graduates of the post-1995 generation do not want to enter normal working life after graduation due to a lack of opportunities and the intense competitiveness of the market.

Half of them would rather seek their fortunes in the beauty economy as "little fresh meat" (*xiao xianrou*) (the Chinese internet slang term for a willing, young, handsome person) so as to make "easy money" with good looks alone (Xinhuanet 2016). As more and more willing novices enter this burgeoning market, a follow-up economy of its own has even established itself. Companies such as TopHot and Ruhnn call themselves "hotbeds" that make future internet stars fit for fame, but they also hire established top talent and assume responsibility for content creation, marketing, and all kind of commercial aspects such as market development, negotiations with business partners and business management, and the development of multiple channel networks (MCNs). An advertising slogan by the agency Ruhnn makes the role of appearance in the process of commercialization clear: "Your task is to be beautiful like a flower, we take care of making money" (Yu 2016: 61).

If the alleged equation "beautiful = successful" is elevated to a social normalization dogma, then this will have serious consequences for understandings of the body and of self-image for women. In contrast to Bourdieu (1987), body practices in East Asia do not represent social status but are currently a means to an end in themselves and aim to help achieve such status. This means of upward mobility, initialized by the utilization of the body, is becoming increasingly important the

more that class affiliation is consolidated. While in the 1980s, with the inception of the capitalist market economy in China, social mobility was easily realized — even with low individual capital due to the occupation of new economic niches — social class membership has contrariwise been stabilizing over the past few years, as economic growth has leveled off and social advancement is becoming increasingly difficult — especially for those with only limited resources. Prospects are low, social mobility rare, and the possibility of an improved and secure material living standard seemingly remote. Therefore the "potential for opportunities" (*jihui chengben*) must be maximized, so as to grab every chance you might happen to come by. Someone might check your SNS profile, and if they like your photos then you could become a nationwide sensation the next day — you just have to be ready.

Beauty becomes the aspiration of a generation of frustrated and stagnated social climbers, because it inherits the promise of neoliberal self-governance: beauty is not seen as a rare gift from nature for a few lucky but is understood rather as an egalitarian concept of meritocracy. Or, like the Chinese female self-help literature puts it in a nutshell: "There are no ugly women, only lazy ones" (Dippner 2016: 101). If you have the discipline and the necessary skills, then anyone can be beautiful and successful. In its physical limitations, the body appears to be an ideal access point for optimization measures, which are easier and faster to implement than other forms of capacity-building. Thanks to the promises of modern consumer-oriented medicine, physical optimization seems to be as simple and rewarding as never before — and guarantees results without any great effort. So, on the one hand, we have clearly the empowerment of the individual to actively change and improve their own image and thus social position through rational investments in their appearance. On the other, there is also a growing imperative for the application of beautification practices. If good looks are no longer merely a gift from nature, they become instead the embodiment of the entrepreneurial individual in a neoliberal society — and thus ultimately a symbol of status. In a culture of "embodied classes" as visible signs of new social hierarchies, beauty becomes the synonym for success. The more significant the external appearance is for the affiliation of the social position and social identity, the more the eye is fixed on externally noticeable and measurable assets.

Especially the lower and middle classes, those who are defined as the new Chinese precariat (Du 2016), occupy a very unstable social position and are highly sensitive to economic and social change. They make greater efforts and take bigger risks to accumulate capital and secure their privileged status. Or, like Ren Hai puts it: "The regularization of the do-it-yourself way of living in everyday life makes individuals vulnerable in their life-building process. They live in the border zone between rich and poor, between haves and have-nots, between employed and unemployed, and between winners and losers" (Ren 2013: 125). It is this social

group that is mostly dedicated to the neoliberal rhetoric of self-optimization and self-improvement, as strategies to counter risk and insecurity. Therefore beauty is used as a placeholder, a substitute, and sometimes even as a replacement for other relevant capitals in the construction of social position. The former editor-in-chief of *Harper's Bazaar China*, Yu Xiaoge, humorously summarizes the mentality of this group so: "I cannot wait, I am so busy, I am feeling anxious, I must become beautiful, I must become slim, I want it right now. Everything must be now, now, now."[12] This explains the rise of explicitly niche cosmetic products and the popularity of surgery as the easiest and most promising ways to achieve your body goals within the shortest possible time.[13]

Conclusion

In the controversial reactions to and public discussions about the supposedly stereotypical appearance of internet celebrities in the aftermath of Sina's "Superstars on Weibo" award, the ambivalences of neoliberal strategies are particularly clearly reflected. On the one hand they appear as techniques of empowerment that can bring wealth and fortune, on the other as subtle techniques of social normalization with more and more constraining effects. In this dilemmatic intermediate realm of simultaneous opportunity and coercion, bioaesthetically aware subjects have to choose how to position themselves. As such social media representations concomitantly both utilize and complicate the discourse of a postfeminist neoliberal femininity. The analysis of self-representations of Chinese internet celebrities also reveals the social construction processes of the aesthetic vigilant subject: they embody every stage of neoliberal self-enhancement, from digital self-surveillance to self-consciousness up to self-fashioning (both of images and in reality). Work on the body is seen only as one of many necessary measures to optimize opportunities and build capacities against systemic challenges such as gender discrimination in the job market and unstable family relationships.

Work on the body and self symbolizes not only the process-like nature of such labor but can also be seen as a substitute for the multitude of optimization imperatives applied to the individual in Chinese society today. But it is the body, as Baudrillard (1985) has already pointed out, that remains most succinct and ultimately the object on which it is most worth concentrating in the multi-option society of modernity. In its physical limitations, the body appears to be an ideal access point for optimization measures — which are easier and faster to implement here than other forms of capacity-building are. Physical adaptation and

12 Personal interview with Yu Xiaoge, conducted in September 2017 in her office in Beijing.

13 An example is the app iSNOB, on which "international top-notch experts" rank top-ten lists of cosmetic, fashion, and lifestyle products. The paid-for app describes itself as the "Michelin Guide of China's fashion and lifestyle for elite consumers," and hit number one in the iTunes download charts for 43 consecutive days after its initial launch.

optimization to certain standards, such as the internet celebrity face, are positively connoted in the discourse of postfeminist neoliberal self-enhancement and seen as sensible capacity-building of the individual as a vulnerable subject, who must arm themself against incalculable challenges in China's modernized society. Under this assumption, a vigilant gaze on the body and aesthetic labor are clearly emphasized — indeed glorified. Fans admire their new social media idols for their courage and discipline in constantly controlling and monitoring their bodies, and "making something out of themselves" by exploiting all of their available opportunities. Even if one possesses nothing but the naked body, economic and social success can still be achieved by constant aesthetic vigilance and calculative, self-governmental cosmetic labor. Or, as an article on a Chinese fashion website puts it: "If your wallet and your heart are strong enough, then you are only 15 hyaluronic shots away from an internet celebrity face" (Fashion.qq 2015).

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