

see the world through different eyes

by Andreas Stuhlmann



At the mention of plastic surgery, most people think of Michael Jackson noses and Pamela Andersen breasts. What drives people to interfere with nature's design and get rid of their unique features, all in the name of looking different? To find out more about plastic surgery, TJ went to the Tokyo Skin Clinic in Roppongi and talked to the director, Dr. Yuri Okabe, and Dr. René du Cloo.

"Sure, we have many patients from modeling and other high-profile professions that require perfect skin and a perfect body, but the trend is more towards stressing individual points rather than just having the body altered to conform to 'ideal' standards," says Okabe.

The scale of operations for nothing but aesthetic enhancement is as wide as the range of personal tastes and psychological problems that lead to the patient's dissatisfaction with their self-image. For each operation, "it is necessary to consider the social and psychological consequences for the patient to determine whether and how they should be treated," says the Tokyo Skin Clinic's brochure. "Of course it sometimes happens that we advise a patient not to have an operation, especially when he/she comes for the seventh or eighth time. Such people are so-called "operation addicts."

Plastic surgery patients seek not only to augment their individuality. The operations function on a more subtle level. People want their friends to notice that they look different and more beautiful, but the reason for the change should not be so obvious or even visible. Although eye operations are still one of the top earners for the clinic, nowadays people come for only minimal changes like accentuating the existing eyelid crease.

Talking about cosmetic surgery necessitates talking about female patients, but the proportion of male patients has increased to over 30% at the Tokyo Skin Clinic. "Japanese men are becoming more and more female recently. They shave their chest, care a lot about hair and facial conditions and even have cosmetic operations." The most common problems of Japanese males are those related to hair, such as hair loss, thinning hair or excessive body

hair. In addition, eye operations are not uncommon.

Generally speaking, the main aim of male as well as female patients is the magical formula of "rejuvenation," which seeks to suppress the aging of the body in the vain quest for eternal youth. Therefore it is necessary to repeat operations, since no part of the body stays the same shape forever, even if it's operated and lifted. Herein lies a danger not only of a psychological but also a medical nature. A medical procedure that destroys your natural balance of preventive powers is one factor that is often not adequately considered when it comes to the consequences of an operation.

This leads into the second chapter, the medical side to plastic surgery. As for the Tokyo

Skin Clinic, where most of the patients are foreigners, more than all the face-lifting and hip-shaping, the main business is dealing with medical problems such as acne, moles, warts, age spots and other tumors and scars. Some of them are caused by psychological reasons such as stressful situations or even a change of place, with many patients being new arrivals who have problems with their new surroundings. Other conditions are caused by congenital, degenerative or infectious diseases that require medical care. Still others are traces of previous medical interventions, such as poorly-healed wounds that

leave ugly scars. The techniques used here differentiate plastic surgery from general surgery, and need to be explained in a bit more detail.

When a hospital surgeon treats a wound, time constraints mean that little consideration can be given as to how well it will heal. This job is left to the plastic surgeon, who takes charge of removing the scar. "When a non-plastic surgeon sews up a wound, for instance, he does it with bigger needles and makes 5 or 6 wide stitches. This leaves traces in the form of stitch marks and/or wide scars. In plastic surgery, we sew wounds up in several layers, using much finer instruments, and for a wound of the same size we would do 20 very small stitches that will hardly leave trace."

Scars you are already carrying around can be cut out and sewed up again in this refined way. Scars, moles, warts or acne scars can also be removed or smoothed out with a carbon dioxide laser, which evaporates the unwanted blemish rather than burn it. This is a fast and bloodless procedure.

Other common operations include different kinds of injections and trans- and implants, mainly of collagen and fat. The controversial silicone is not recommended. For any of these implants it must be considered how the body will deal with the 'intruder' element after the operation. Collagen implants are either prepared from cow skin (bovine collagen) or cultured from the patient's own fat (autologous collagen). Scientists are currently working on a way to produce human collagen more effectively, since many patients are allergic to bovine collagen.

Finally, foreign Tokyo residents should be aware that the extremely humid air in summer can cause fungal infections, while the dry air in winter makes the skin rough, cracked and sometimes itchy. A fungal infection can recur easily and prevention is difficult. In winter, proper skin care will improve dry skin. You can use moisturizers after washing, as they contain water-binding substances and grease which will increase the water content of the skin. Another problem that often occurs in a Japanese house or apartment is when you put a carpet on a tatami. This causes an increase of mites, which can trigger a housedust allergy.

Besides medical and surgical treatment of skin diseases, the Tokyo Skin Clinic offers various laser treatments, glycolic acid peel, various injections and implants, liposuction (removal of fat), eyelid surgery and others. Prices range from ¥7,000 for consultation to ¥60,000 for a collagen injection and ¥150,000 for eyelid rejuvenation. All prices are minimum prices and subject to change.

Tokyo Skin Clinic (3585-0272)

3F Shinjokai Bldg, 3-1-24 Roppongi, Minato-ku

Opening hours :

Tue, Thu & Sat: 9am-4:30pm Wed & Fri: 1pm-7:30pm

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