

# **The Ideal of Slenderness in Taiwan's Diet Ads From Foucault's Framework of Power/Knowledge**

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### **I. Introduction**

"Be a self-confident woman with her chest stuck out (This refers to her fuller breasts)!" "Be a woman who is not holden by a man's hand." "Trust me you can make it!" These are some of the popular slogans of the 90s diet ads that emphasize the slender curve of the female body achieved by the fantastic services of the beauty institutions. These ads profusely appear in mainstream media and intend to portray the stylized image of the female body and hail women into the specific position of this text; simultaneously, they reflect the ideal embodiment of femininity in Taiwan society.

There are some points of similarity and difference between today's diet ads and those of the past. Following the past strategy of advertising, the 90s diet ads still emphasize "slenderness" as a contemporary ideal of female attractiveness, and formulate the equation of slender = beauty = health.

However, their appeals are different from those of the past. First, the concept of a slender body has shifted from the excess-less body to the fully-developed body. An idealized physical weight is no longer the target of diet ads; rather, a mature and sexually attractive body is underlined. They are characterized by an emphasis on building one's appearance instead of merely losing weight, and redefine the meaning of "fat" so that it is not merely being physical overweight (excess body size), but physical chaos (poor body figure).

Today's diet ads point out that the female's enemy is not just bulges of fat, but also small breasts, soft muscles, flabby buttocks, etc, on the basis of the western standards. Hence, an excess-less body is not good enough if the flesh is flabby or the figure is immature; that is, a woman with an extremely thin body, but without a shapely appearance, is still seen as abnormal. To become a so-called "devilish body" is not just necessary to get rid of those embarrassing bumps but also to reshape her body into the fuller breasts, taut waist, and round hips regarded as the aesthetic standards of the body. Even though a woman has an Asian face in contemporary Taiwan society, she is asked to obtain a western figure. To what degree a Taiwanese woman is eroticized as an exotic-other and colonized-subject is just a simulacrum of the western woman.

Second, regimen and asceticism are no longer the main means of dieting, but leisure and hedonism are stressed. In the past, in order to lose weight women were encouraged to adhere to the instructions of the dietary tables and engage in regular exercise; today's diet ads emphasize achieving a slender body without being hungry, doing exercise or taking drugs. Body maintenance is associated with hedonism and leisure. A woman does not need to try anything about weight loss to keep thinness in certain way by which the modern discipline is etched on her body. Discipline and hedonism are no longer seen as incompatible within Taiwan consumer culture. Through body-maintenance routines, the subjugation of the female body is presented as a precondition for the achievement of an acceptable appearance.

From the above passage, we can find that the slender style of the female body has varied over time in Taiwan society. Whether a "normac" weight or shapely, the female body bears the historial scars of power. Even though I am concerned with technologies of power in the discursive articulations of slenderness which contain and work over female bodies, I must admit that none of the Taiwanese women acted in a way that could be attributed to them having been simply hailed by diet ads. Actually, there are many more oppressive and contradictory discourses and practices at work; slenderness is just an example of being

hailed. Moreover, women are able to develop strategies of resistance to the tyranny of slenderness; for instance, they sometimes protest against the dishonesty of diet ads. Nevertheless, I insist that we shall recognize the immediacy of our involvement in reproduction of the ideal slenderness in which we encounter complex webs of meanings that can influence one's bodily identity, even determine the relationships between men and women, women and other women, and women and themselves in a historical context.

Influenced by the popular trends of post-modernism, feminism, consumerism, etc., the 90s diet ads rearticulate the meaning of "slenderness" and form a new politics of the body. At present, women in Taiwan perceive their body in a new way in which they are allowed to publicly and unashamedly deploy their body in sexual way. This type of thinking could not have happened in the past.

Just like Butler says, the materiality of the body is not given, but is constituted by the historically contingent nexus of power/discourse (Butler, 1993). Hence, slenderness is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized in different ways through time. It is important to understand what the construal of "slenderness" is at a specific conjuncture, because "slenderness" not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it controls.

However, little research about slenderness as a regulatory norm--how deeply it is inscribed on female bodies and how well female bodies serve it--has been conducted in Taiwan; most studies focus on what kind of image of female bodies that ads promote. Such an approach assumes that slenderness is a simple fact or static description of a body, and ignores that slenderness is one of the cultural norms, which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility, demarcates the social zone of abject beings (eg. A fat woman seen as reflecting moral and personal inadequacy, and is treated with humiliation and disrespect (Lyons, 1989; Gortmaker, 1993)), maintains gender relations, and shapes an ideal femininity (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1988; 1987).

Moreover, it's inadequate to interpret the cultural phenomena just based on

the descriptive analysis. For example, the 90s diet-ads adopt a large number of neologisms which are related to feminism, such as "A woman determines her own destiny." "Men follow close behind a woman with her chest stuck out." "A woman can express her individuality"... Ostensibly, these ads promote the self-confident image of women who are less regulated by and even are against traditional authority; however, through closer examination, we will find that such a will (eg. women's sense of independence) that ads depict is based on their appearance. In other words, women are still constructed as desirable and sexual objects, and even as colonized subjects in the line of the gaze. Of course, we cannot deny the fact that women are more independent now than they were in the past. But it does not mean that the apparatuses of power over female bodies are useless; conversely, power has now become anonymous, diffuse, and functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more individualized (Foucault, 1977:193). Even though old forms of domination are eroding, new forms of micropower arise: they rely upon neither violent controls nor public sanctions, but upon the disciplinary techniques through which the docile bodies of women are constituted. These techniques aim at the regulation of the body's size, contours, and the look of each of its visible parts.

This paper will examine the copies and photographs of current diet ads that suggest today's female body ideals in Taiwan. I will explain how the 90s diet ads form the contemporary slenderness ideal through which technologies of power to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration. Then, I will further analyze how the construal of slenderness as a regulatory norm is written and appropriated on female bodies. In order to explore the political investment of the slender body, I make use of Foucault's framework of power/knowledge.

## II. Theoretical questions

Advertising is one of the central purveyors of the new culture values in

Taiwanese society. As the contemporary form of knowledge, advertising offers a way of seeing and speaking to consumers who participate in the consumption of commodities and of symbolic meanings that are attached to products (Williamson, 1978; Jhally, 1987).

Unlike other forms of knowledge, advertising is based on the logic of consumerism, aimed at providing consumers with a philosophy of life in capitalist society (Ewen, 1976). Particularly, diet ads create phantasms on female bodies in ways which women can live eternally a slim and young life by constantly monitoring themselves for bodily imperfections (Featherstone, 1991). Through a circuit of anxiety and desire, diet ads are able to fix and reinforce the specific notion of what is desirable in woman that is involved in the technology of bodies and the formation of subjects. Obviously, advertising creates a new politics of truth that is "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (Foucault, 1980: 133).

However, ad statements do not always have effects of truth forever; they are false at certain moments and in certain areas of knowledge. For example, "A body is made" was hard to imagine before, but it is true now. Hence, if we want to understand what the meanings and functions of ad statements are, we must put them into a specifically historical context, and then probe what governs them, how they are suddenly transformed and how they generate the effects of truth and power.

Foucault points out that power and knowledge operate in a mutually generative manner at a given time. "Power and knowledge directly imply one another; there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations." (Foucault, 1979: 27) But this does not mean that they are identical to each other. Foucault attempts to show the specificity and materiality of their interconnections (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983: 203). Therefore, advertising as a form of knowledge links with power relations that produce and sustain it, and induces the effects of power. In order to explore the ideal of the slender body

that diet ads produce in the contemporary Taiwanese society, I'll put it into the framework of power/ knowledge.

In this paper, to analyze the representations of the 90s diet ads is to comprehend the construal of the slenderness as a corporeal style of the female body in contemporary Taiwanese society. Slenderness is not simply regarded as a uniform signifier, but as a specific power-laden constitution. It is invested with the nexus of power/knowledge so that it has its historical and material meanings. Slenderness whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power. The power carries out two complementary operations: one, intextuation means that an individual body is packed into the cultural codes of slenderness and transformed into the signifier of slenderness; the other, incarnation means that the logos of slenderness becomes the style of the flesh.

Through the normalizing mechanisms of the slenderness ideal, the individual body as the basic unit of a society is able to be effectively materialized--defined, framed, circulated, and differentiated. Slenderness gives the body the status of being applicable and qualified; it strengthens her health and freshness, and promises beauty and youth. Simultaneously, it forecloses or disavows the other corporeal styles--for example, obesity is seen as ugly, clumsy and invisible (Walden, 1985; Lyons, 1989; Wolf, 1991). That is to say, slenderness takes hold of the individual bodies in order to make them become as its text and transform as the social bodies. In this sense, Bordo uses Foucault's conception of "intelligible body" to examine the intextuating effect--how the construal of slenderness is inscribed into the body through which mechanisms of power operate.

**The "intelligible body" includes scientific, philosophic, and aesthetic representations of the body, norms of beauty, models of health, and so forth. These representations, however, may also be seen as legislating a set of practical rules and regulations ... (Bordo, 1987:85)**

As soon as slenderness is applied with and on bodies, "incarnated" in physical

practices, it can accredit itself and make people believe that it speaks in the name of the "real". Slenderness functions as the law of the incarnation upon the female bodies. At this moment, slenderness can bring about the effect of the Panopticon: on the one hand, the visibility of the female body is under a system of centralized observation; on the other hand, a woman exercises this surveillance (an inspecting gaze) over herself. By internalizing, a woman becomes her own overseer. For instance, she begins to measure her weight by the numbers on the scale or to worry about her figure by the sizes of clothes in everyday life.

Obviously, the disciplines impose upon the female bodies through the operation of specific institutions--the beauty industry and that of non-institution--internalization. Often, the absence of formal institutions and authorities invested with the power to carry out institutional directives can elaborate the nature of the disciplinary practices: its anonymity and dispersion, and the effect of those: the docile body of modernity. Women are willing to habituate themselves to self-surveillance and self-improvement, to transform themselves to glorify the flesh of slenderness, and to serve themselves as the norms of slenderness. In other words, the female bodies are less passively grafted with the cultural codes of the slenderness than they are actively embodying and performing the flesh of the slenderness in the mundane manner.

The materiality of slenderness is reiteratively performed by the female body. In this process, the subjectivity--femininity--is constituted. Actually, the disciplinary techniques of slenderness control not just the female bodies but also their minds (Steiner- adair, 1984). They can provide women upon whom they are imposed with a sense of mastery as well as a sense of identity. Hence, slenderness as the ideal body of femininity can make woman's consciousness of herself as a bodily being.

From Foucault's perspective, the construal of slenderness can only take place within and by the operations of power. Therefore, I will locate the representations of the 90s diet ads within the relations of power/knowledge of the contemporary Taiwan society. In this paper, I will explore the questions as

follows:

1. How do the 90s diet ads form the contemporary slenderness ideal through which the mechanisms and techniques of power operate in Taiwan society?

I will focus on what governs the statements of the diet ads and how they generate the effects of truth and power.

2. How does the construal of slenderness become as the instrument and effect of power in Taiwan society?

I am interested in the process of intextuating and incarnating the construal of slenderness upon female bodies; that is to say, how are female bodies effectively materialized through the disciplinary practices of slenderness? How does the materiality of slenderness become the style of the flesh in Taiwanese society? Furthermore, I will reexamine the gender relations of Taiwanese society based on the fact that the slenderness functions as the ideal body of femininity.

### III. Analysis

#### I. A Representational Body of Diet Ads in Taiwan

The 90s diet ads still emphasize "slenderness" as the stylized image of the female body. The concept of slenderness does not just mean a normally-weighted woman, but also a fully-developed woman. We can understand the contemporary ideal of the slender body, through analyzing the photographs and copies of current diet ads. A. The female model of the slender body in diet ads

Photographs provide the visual images of the female bodies that ads shape. As usual, the female models that diet ads use are either actresses or western women, who have shapely figures--tall and fuller breasts, taut waist, and round hips. They conform to the western ideal of physical perfection that means the vital statistics (38', 24', 38'). These models look younger and more attractive: they always wear tacky dresses, and sometimes even are naked; their poses are



seductive and sexy; they seem to enjoy their body maintenance. Diet ads have tried to use the idealized images of the female models to achieve a certain desired appearance that signifies woman as the colonized subject at the same time as she is elevated to the level of exotic.

Actually, the visual images of the female models challenge the traditional values--the Confucian Code of Li (propriety) says, "Look at nothing which is contrary to the propriety." This is the first time that diet ads use large numbers of female models in varying degrees of undress to legitimate the public display of the body's "look". To some degree, the shame in the naked body gradually give way under the persistent critique of commercial interests. The body is no longer proclaimed as a vessel of sin, but a vehicle of pleasure and self-expression. The visual images of the body beautiful and openly sexually legitimate the unashamed display of the female body.

An additional function of the visual images is to make consumers (especially women) conscious of external appearance, bodily presentation, and look. Images can invite comparisons: they are constant reminders of who we are, what we desire and what might become with effort. To some extent, female consumers are willing to believe in the importance of appearance, and further to maintain their body's look in the westernized way.

## **B. The codes of the slender body in diet ads**

What is really the slenderness ideal? The copies of diet ads emphasize to gauge the slender body in a set of the standard measurements. The ad copies offer a scientific method to measure every part of the female body; for example, the standard weight is (height-112) KG; the standard bust is (height x 0.53) CM; the standard curve of the waist is (height x 0.37) CM; the standard curve of hips is (height x 0.542) CM; the standard curve of thigh is (height x 0.26 + 7.8) CM; and the standard curve of ankle is 18- 22 CM, etc. Every woman can calculate and examine every part of her body in terms of these numbers; and she is easy to understand her imperfections and to further remove them.

Obviously, the ad copies intend to point out that the female body is the sum of its parts. The ideal of the slender body is to keep all of its parts perfect, if one of them is defective, it won't be a so-called Slender Body. Of course, in order to achieve this slender style of the flesh, the female body must be corrected, added, repaired and straightened. In this sense, the ad copies imply that the female body, like a machine, can be evaluated in terms of a set of scientific criteria, and requires servicing, regular care and attention to preserve its maximum efficiency.

In fact, the criteria of the slender body that the ad copies produce are not mere statistical numbers, but are the techniques of power that permit the "remarkable parallelism between the desire to measure and the desire to look." (Seltzer, 1992: 100) That is to say, the criteria have the effects of calculation and surveillance; female consumers can "inspect" themselves and transform themselves into the qualified sizes and configurations based on the criteria. The calculable and visible functions of the criteria are to make the female body become the body-machine complex.

## **II. The Construal of Slenderness in Taiwan's Diet Ads**

Not only do the diet ads define the physical contour of the slender body, but they also elaborate the methods of achieving and maintaining the slender body. In this aspect, the diet ads adopt a set of mechanisms to articulate the construal of slenderness besides the machine metaphor for the female body.

### **A. Slenderness And Body Maintenance**

The current diet ads do not simply stress the body excessive, but also focus on the body deficiencies. "What's the problem about your breasts?" "Don't ignore your own body!" "You should save your own body." The diet ads point out that bodily imperfections are not natural but are artificial. They persuade women to

adopt a critical attitude towards their body; that is to say, the diet ads encourage women develop a sense of inadequacy.

One device for sustaining the consciousness of inadequacy is for women to diagnose their own bodies in terms of a set of scientific criteria that ads suggest. The attainment of this acceptable body is extremely difficult for most women, who constantly scrutinize their own body to conform to this ideal. Hence, such a device makes them see bodily deficiencies and engenders them subordinated.

Due to bodily deficiency, the diet ads emphasize the importance of remedy. "Don't pity yourself unless you decide to remain flat-chested." "Age is not a problem for body maintenance." Based on this point, first, they ask female consumers to assume self-responsibility for the way they look. The reason is that the body can be corrected and reshaped to become perfect, if women are willing to do their body work, both on bodily deficiencies (eg. poor development) and "natural" bodily deterioration (eg. aging) can be removed.

Next, body maintenance is underlined. The diet ads suggest the way of slenderness to maintain the body beautiful. This implies that to maintain the body is to look good and to achieve the acceptable body. Its main advantage is not simply to improve physical health, but to improve one's social life. Just like Seltzer mentions, the body is one of physical capitals (Seltzer, 1992), which works out its survival power. If a woman wants to be socially accepted, she has to control her own body in certain way. Apparently, the beautiful body does not merely define the aesthetic dimension of the body, but delimits the body politic.

## **B. Slenderness and the Beautification Technologies**

Body maintenance that the diet ads suggest is based on the late twentieth-century beautification technologies. In this case, we can find that the beauty industry appropriates four functions of high technologies to constitute the myth of slenderness.

First, advanced bio-technologies challenge the traditional belief that the body is born; they claim that the body is made. Through scientific technologies,

the body can be reshaped according to one's wish. A woman has a poor figure: she could ascribe her failure to bad genes in the past; rather, she has no excuse now except that she wants to retain such a figure. In order to persuade female consumers to keep slender, the beauty industry makes use of this fact that bio-medicine's world can change the body. For example, an ad poses, "Trust me, you can make it." On the surface, a woman can be a master to control her own body; this point conforms to feminist's opinions. However, it really means that you must believe in the bio-technologies through which your body can be controlled. Obviously, a change in controlling the female body occurs when the reign of a medical politics begins to replace that of a juridical politics (de Certaeu, 1984: 142). In modern society, the most effective means to control the body is not to torture and confine the body but to fabricate it in the socially acceptable way.

Second, today's bio-medicine shifts into the cybernetic models, which argue that the body, like an object, is a combinative system of elements; if one organ of the body is defective, it can be repaired and substituted (de Certaeu, 1984: 142; Haraway, :208). According to this perspective, the beauty industry decomposes the female body into separate parts: face, bust, arm, waist, hips, thigh, ankle, etc. Every part has its specific remedy for slenderness, such as lifting face, bleaching a whole body, enlarging breasts, defatting arms, bulging hips, etc. This makes female consumers consider nuances of the body rather than a whole body.

Third, another scientific evidence is that bodies have a different kind of specificity and effectivity so that they need a different kind of engagement and intervention. Based on this finding, the beauty industry puts the female bodies into different categories; for example, female obesity is classified into Lythatic Type, Neurotic Type, Mixed Type, Muscular Type, Fat Type, etc. Every type has its specific remedy, including special bio-technologies, medical apparatuses and physical therapy. These specific remedies can change the body and help it look good and keep slender. The diet ads elaborate the law of the classification to show the importance of "individuality"; ostensibly, they underline the differences among individuals, but these effects are fabricated by the disciplin-

ary power. Just like Foucault mentions, the disciplinary power uses the rituals of examination and classification as the means to achieve "the pinning down of each individual in his own particularity (1979: 192)."

Fourth, the convenience of high technologies is stressed. "Within three minutes, your waist shifts from size 28 to size 23!" "Only 30 minutes, you can shape your body in right size." "Do it once, you shall never do it again." Diet ads present themselves via the imagery of instant gratification. A woman just spends a short time to do her body work, and then she will keep slender forever. Quickness, safety and warranty are posed in diet ads, accompanying with the emergence of high technologies.

Through advanced technologies, the female body can be made, decomposed, classified, and preserved. The beauty industry intends to claim the omnipotence of the high technology which seeks to remove something excessive from the body or to add to the body what it lacks. Paradoxically, the high technology can offer the innumerable possibilities of treatment, but in this case, we can find that the advanced technologies retain the functions of marking and shaping female bodies in the name of slenderness. In a word, these technologies make female bodies the inscription and incarnation of slenderness. This reveals that the usage of high technology is not neutral; it keeps female bodies within the limits set by the norms of slenderness; furthermore, it makes them speak out an order.

### **C. Slenderness and Hedonism**

Diet ads suggest an easy way to pursue the aim of slenderness. "Just come here and lie down in a relaxed way, and you can lose weight..." "Lose Weight with ease and do it at a low price..." "Keep slender without performing operations, injecting medicines, doing exercise, being hungry, or taking drugs." A woman just accepts the services of the beauty institution, even though she does nothing about weight loss, she can keep slim. The slender body is no longer associated with asceticism rather than with hedonism.

Diet ads raise three points to link the ideal of slenderness with hedonism:

first, the beauty institution is a recreational site in which it offers a comfortable and pleasurable space for women to relax their body; second, the new therapies that diet ads suggest is a fashionable manner by which the body beautiful can be obtained; third, body maintenance is rearticulated as a "healthy" leisure-time activity which will reap a more exciting lifestyle. The diet ads often take examples to prove this fact that a successful slimmer woman is more confident and gets more admiring glances than when she was overweight. Obviously, diet ads don't assert the body in pain to keep slender, but the body in pleasure to remain an acceptable style of the flesh. The ads make consumers feel a better return on the investment of time and money.

#### **D. Slenderness and Beauty experts / authorities**

An effective means of maintaining the body is that female consumers do their body work under the assistance of the beauty experts. Diet ads repeat that every woman has her own problems and needs; she should not adopt the other's treatment, but ask the experts to solve her questions in terms of medical and dietetic knowledge. As for the responsibility of individuals, they have to confess the truth about themselves to the experts, in order to know themselves and to be known, and further to change themselves. Under this situation, women as consumers are just the products of the complex strategic developments in the field of beauty.

In addition to beauty experts, diet ads always emphasize the image of the beauty authorities. The beauty authorities not only need the experts with their scientific terms and knowledge, but also require a professional license and social reputation as well. Interestingly, their reputations are less based on their quality of services than on their names. Most of the beauty institutions claim themselves well-renowned round the world. They name themselves as international institutions, such as Ma Cherie International Beauty, Golden Global Beauty, Famous International Beauty, etc. Simultaneously, they point out that their chain-companies are spread all over the world, like Germany, France, Japan, etc.

Through the relations with the advanced nations, they think that they can guarantee their quality of services.

### III. Intextuation of slenderness

The ideal of slenderness is invested with power/ knowledge. It has developed a set of discourse on the body politic which exercises the productive effects of power rather than the oppressive ones of power. To what degree diet ads reflect and embody this ideal functions as a text of writing on the (female) body. Actually, the text of the slenderness has four characteristics:

#### 1. Juxtapose to discourse of health

The ideal of the slenderness the diet ads promote is associated with the health education message that being overweight will cause health problems as well as poor physical functions (eg. inertia, dullness, etc.) which have become absorbed into the conventional wisdom (Featherstone, 1991; Wolf, 1991). As a Chinese saying goes, "Obesity is not good fortune." Therefore, the image of slenderness has become an icon of a healthy body in Taiwan society.

Actually, in order to reduce health costs and add to the labor force, state bureaucracies and medical administrations often disseminate knowledge of health which shows the way to longevity and lowered risk of disease. Knowledge of health not only accentuates the importance of self-preservation but also encourages the public to adopt instrumental strategies (eg. dietary care, exercise, regular examination, etc.) to combat deterioration and decay.

To some degree, the diet ads support this thought; they claim that female consumers who conserve their bodies will enjoy greater health and keep younger. On the other hand, diet ads do not just reflect some ideas of health discourse but appropriate them as marketed and sold points whereby diet ads are able to persuade female consumers to buy their services and to accept their disciplinary rules (eg. one has

to self-monitor one's body by the criteria of scientific measurements, or one consumes a new remedy that diet ads suggest). Based on this point, we can see that the ideal of slenderness is the product of complex relations of power (It at least includes state and capitalist power). This ideal as a text of the body is constructed by force relations; then it as an instrument of power writes on the body.

## 2. Function as discourse of morality

Connecting with discourse of health, diet ads claim that slenderness is able to reduce health risks, increase confidence, psychological well-being, and avoid body abuse. Gradually, the ideal of slenderness gets its symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility, and even has its regulatory force to define bodies.

The construal of slenderness is firmly articulated with health, youth, beauty, self-confidence, etc. This reveals that it becomes associated not only with energy, drive and vitality but worthiness as a person. An ad takes an illustration of a successful dieter, who says "I didn't have any friends before, but I make a lot of friends now as I'm thinner than I was." Obviously, the slenderness has been constructed as the truth of the body to define the social zones of viability and abjection. Just like some ads claim, "Fat is the first of all diseases." "Don't abuse your body!" Under the tyranny of slenderness, fatness is foreclosed and demarcated into the domain of abjection. It's impossible that a self-respecting woman is overweight, because fat is the consequence of individual abuse of the body or the mismanagement of sanitation. In a word, fatness is regarded as an indicator of laziness, lack of will power, low self-esteem and even moral failure in addition to as a symptom of physical diseases.

## 3. Techno-biopolitics

To what extent the construal of the slenderness intends to reflect is what the female body politic is. In this case, we can find that female



bodies as objects of knowledge are individualized and objectified. Ostensibly, a woman is proclaimed as an independent subject--an executor of power; for instance, she is able to decide whether she'll buy the service of diet ads or not. However, when she accepts this set of knowledge on slenderness, she has become as the object of power/ knowledge. From a Foucaultian perspective, this process is the objectification of the subject that gives female bodies the status of science (Foucault, 1983: 208; Rabinow, 1984: 8). In the name of science, the female body is carefully supervised by finer and more molecular technologies of bio-power. Just like Foucault mentions, "bio-power brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge/power an agent of transformation of human life" (1990, 143). Various problems of female bodies are identified and annexed as appropriate domains for scientific research and intervention. Apparently, scientific advances do not liberate the female body from external control but intensify the means of social regulation.

Under the extension of systematic knowledge--eugenics, dietetics, orthopaedics, thermodynamics, etc., not only can female bodies be measured with precision and certainty, but they also can be defined and classified into normal/abnormal categories, and then be isolated and corrected. Meanwhile, the "dividing practices" impose upon female bodies that may be either divided inside themselves or divided from others. A woman perceives her individuality by linking her status to the measurements, the gaps, the marks that characterize her and make her a "case".

Through bio-technologies, the female body can be reshaped, like a machine. In reality, the line between the body and the machine is blurred. Famous International Beauty, a beauty institution, claims its special service that it can design for the right size of the body by computer and can carry out this plan of slenderness by beauty

technologies. Its ads always appear an image that a female model leans on a computer whose screen reveals a contrast picture of before-shaping and after-shaping. Its headline is, "We cannot change your past, but we can cross time and space to change your future." This beauty institution offers a way of negotiating the body-machine complex to achieve the ideal of slenderness. Under this situation, it is unclear who makes and who is made in the relation between person and machine (Haraway, 1985: 96). A hybrid of machine and organisms, a condensed image of both imagination and material reality is created, that is to say, a cyborg body that Haraway calls is formed (Haraway, 1990 :191). This cyborg body not only can transgress discursive boundaries and limits, but is materially integrated with technologies. To some extent it is the achievement of "machine-like perfection".

Even though high technology can make a female body perfect, it can do only a copy, a simulacrum in terms of the iconography of standardized sizes --that is, the ideal of slenderness. This clearly explains who controls the interpretation of bodily boundaries. In Taiwan society, the construal of slenderness functions as an active, meaning-generating apparatus of bodily production. It can define, govern and circulate female bodies by cultural media throughout a whole society.

#### 4. Slenderness and Consumption

Through ads, the construal of slenderness becomes as a commodity which is a mixture of the aesthetic, symbolic and commercial. To some degree, it has developed as a fetishized icon of female body relative to the consumerist canons of "good form" and "visible expense" (body maintenance needs to spend money). Such an aestheticization of the female body is emphasized so that a woman is willing to achieve this social acceptability through practices of consumption.

Besides, Taiwan's beauty market creates a perpetual desire for

perfection, for difference and instant satisfaction. The beauty industry claims that a woman is able to express her individuality by high technologies. Ironically, this "difference" is constructed in term of the standardized models that have erased "natural" difference. Obviously, the market culture combines with tech- machine culture to create this fetishized beauty, and then ask women to consume it.

Baudrillard points out that consumption is a collective behaviour, a moral restraint in modern society; as long as the individuals consume products, they assume their social responsibility. Hence, consuming the commodity of the slenderness, a woman gets a marketable self and is accepted. In this regard, a woman's body is etched out not only an economy but also an aesthetic, symbolic and politic that mark and inscribe her look.

According to this part of this analysis, we can find that the construal of slenderness is a complex meaning-producing code, including aesthetic, political, moral, scientific, and commercial dimensions. Through these representations of slenderness, we can understand what the "intelligible (female) body" is and how they legitimatize a set of practical rules and regulations to form a text that writes on female bodies.

#### **IV. Incarnation of slenderness**

The ideal of slenderness has become the dominant standard of the female body in Taiwan. It not only writes on the physical body--the microcosm, but also reproduces the social body--the macrocosm. According to the investigation of the China Times, Taiwan's beauty institution extends its clients from adult females to young girls and aged women, and 80% of its clients participate in dieting courses in order to reshape their figure rather than to lose their weight (1994, June). In this sense, the construal of the contemporary slenderness has developed as the incarnation of an ideal femininity.

In Taiwan, most women have internalized this standard of bodily acceptability and acquired the "self-perception" (China Time, 1994). Foucault thinks that this process is subjectification in which the individual is active to take part in self-formation through a set of disciplines on the individual's own bodies, thoughts, and conducts (Rabinow, 1984: 11). Under the ideal of slenderness women are forbidden to become excessive or deficient; they must make themselves objects and prey for the men. As an ad points out, "Woman! You are a winner...I (It refers to man) cannot resist your attraction." Most women are conscious of a male connoisseur whose eyes are like a tower of the Panopticon; they stand perpetually before his gaze that enforces them to keep prevailing standards of slenderness.

Interestingly, Taiwan males' taste for women follows the western standards --vital statistics--to judge the female body. This taste is justified by diet ads that ask women in Taiwan to assume their responsibility to keep a fine figure, just like western women (It just indicates the "white", but not includes the other races), and to remove the shame of Asian woman's flat-chestedness.

Diet ads adopt a large number of the western female models, medical terms and apparatuses (eg. written in English), and even beauty institutions which also come from the West. This reveals a phenomenon that the western beauty apparatus is globalized through which the representation of the Other is reinforced in diet ads. This beauty apparatus transgresses national, political, social boundaries to produce an image that the White body is superior to the others. Obviously, the ideal of slenderness implies the problematics of the cultural imperialism. For women in Taiwan, it is hard to imagine what is the native standard of the beautiful body, because the "otherization" of the western subject has displaced the Asian subject. Based on this point, women in Taiwan are embedded not only in patriarchal ideologies but also imperialistic views. Their minds have been enslaved and colonized in such a way.

Most women in Taiwan confess that "self" preservation depends upon the body maintenance that ads suggest, because the body is the passport to all that

is good in life, such as health, beauty, confidence, fitness, etc (China Times, 1994: Oct; Dec). They make an effort to possess such a body that is essential to their sense of themselves as a sexually desiring and desirable subject. Obviously, bodies become physical capitals; women appropriate such a body to gain more power over others (women or men), even though they themselves are objects of the disciplinary power that inscribes femininity into female bodies. The materiality of slenderness is reiteratively performed by women who reinforce femininity as this style of the flesh. Here, we can see how the anonymity of disciplinary power and its wide dispersion are crucial to the subordination of women.

#### IV. Conclusion

According to the above analysis, we find that the slender body is not given, but is constructed as the materiality of the body in order to materialize the appearance--the body shape, size and style--and to further consolidate the patriarchal order and the phallic economy of desire. This materiality is invested with power relations, with the competing discourses which have tried to position the female body, affect it, and even name it Woman as both subject and object of knowledge. On the one hand, the materiality of slenderness is established to the extent that it is a vector and instrument of power. Slenderness becomes a cultural norm whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place through a set of disciplinary techniques. Gradually, it can function as a text of writing on female bodies.

On the other hand, this materiality is regarded as the productive effect of power. The construal of slenderness is not only imprinted on the surface of matter--the physical body, but also imposed on the depth of matter--the mind, that is, the subject is formed through its normative power. A female body becomes a site in which materiality and femininity appear to merge to form a slender style of the flesh.

Therefore, the construal of slenderness cannot be seen as a static concept, but as an investiture of power/knowledge. We must deconstruct this construal, then we can understand how female bodies are politicized in patriarchal capitalism and how the power-bearing definitions and disciplines of slenderness are embodied on female bodies so that we can develop alternative knowledge of the female body.

In this paper, I just try to examine how the ideal of the contemporary slenderness as the apparatus of power hail women to the everyday, but do not explore how the female body as a local site resists against the techniques of domination. Foucault points out that power and resistance need each other.

**Power relationships ... depend on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support or handle in power relations. The points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. (Foucault, 1980: 95)**

The techniques of power can never be entirely successful in achieving them. Hence, female bodies never quite comply with the norm of slenderness by which its materialization is impelled. In reality, this is the process of instability that allows the possibilities for rematerialization. But this problematic needs to be further explored by how women in Taiwan "read" the diet ads, how they are conscious of slenderness, and even how the technologies of the self are exercised in mundane practices.

From Foucaultian sense, no one can escape the nexus of power relations, even though it is not necessary to always remain in a position to support power. Therefore, as we deal with the body politic, perhaps we need to consider how to remain conscious of reading the technologies of domination upon our bodies rather than how to control and find one's "real" or "natural" body.

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# 從傅柯的權力／知識架構來看 台灣「美體塑身」廣告

林宇玲\*

(中文摘要)

這篇文章旨在利用論述分析檢驗九十年代的減肥廣告，如何透過一套權力機制型塑當代台灣的瘦身形象。依據傅柯的權力／知識架構，九十年代的減肥廣告被放置在台灣勢力競逐脈絡之下檢視，以便瞭解“瘦身”概念如何成爲一個具有管理性的規範，且被書寫及應用在女性的身上。四個結果被發現：1.瘦身概念的形成端視特定歷史下的權力／知識網絡而定；2.瘦身被建構爲一棟身體的「物質形態」—包括身體的曲線、大小、式樣，主要是透過一套訓練的機制；3.瘦身概念已經發展出一套身體政治的相關論述，包括：身體美學、醫藥、道德、科技和商業等面向，這些論述已發揮權力及生產效果更甚於壓抑效果；4.女體不只是被動地引進瘦身概念之內，而且女體也在日常生活中主動地展現“瘦身”的物質形態。

關鍵字：瘦身、物質形態、文本化、典型化、主體化的過程

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# The Ideal of Slenderness in Taiwan's Diet Ads From Foucault's Framework of Power/Knowledge

## An Essay Presented to the Department of Communication Arts U. of Wisconsin-Madison

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### (ABSTRACT)

This paper focuses on the discourse analysis of the 90s diet ads in Taiwan. I try to expound how the 90s diet ads form the contemporary slenderness ideal through which the mechanisms of power produce a body to a certain size and configuration. Foucault's framework of power/knowledge is applied here to locate the representations of the 90s diet ads within the relations of social forces to explore how the construal of slenderness as a regulatory norm is written and appropriated on female bodies. There are four findings: first, the ideal of slenderness is invested with the historically contingent nexus of power/knowledge; second, the ideal of slenderness is constructed as the materiality of the body to materialize the appearance--the body shape, size, and style--and it takes place through a set of disciplinary techniques; third, the ideal of slenderness has developed a set of discourses on the body politic, including aesthetic, medical, moral, technological, and commercial dimensions, which exert the productive effects over the oppressive effects of power to carry out two complementary operations--intextuation and incarnation; fourth, female bodies are not just passively grafted with the construal of slenderness, but they are also actively performing the style of the slenderness in everyday life.

**Key words: slenderness, materiality, intextuation, incarnation, subjectification**

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