On the surface, cosmetic or aesthetic surgery has nothing to do with curing diseases. Yet it is a medical discipline that promotes psychological well-being. It helps to achieve self-confidence and self-esteem. Back in the 1800s and 1900s, cosmetic surgery began to gain attention in Europe and the US. In China, life-prolonging and anti-ageing methods were recorded in as early as the Qin and Han dynasties. Aesthetic practices like hairdressing and removal of blackheads, freckles and scars were described in texts dating back to the Tang and Soong dynasties. Humans are no different from animals in the pursuit of beauty. For reasons ranging from ageing, career development to marriage, cosmetic surgery can make a person look good. In times of economic boom, it’s no wonder that cosmetic surgery, as now being much safer and reliable, is becoming as popular as ever. In fact, a few years ago an article on the Hong Kong Economic Times highlighted the virtues of seeking cosmetic surgery besides the usual grooming routine.

With all the news and advertisements featuring its development, cosmetic surgery has always been in the spotlight of public attention. Starting with a few experienced and well-trained specialists in the 1960s, cosmetic surgery has been developing in Hong Kong for almost half a century. The Association of Plastic & Reconstructive Surgeons was founded in 1967. While the number of plastic surgeons kept increasing in later years, it still remained relatively small at that time. It only began to change when the need of cosmetic surgery was finally recognised by the Government, which approved the practice of over 30 qualified specialists in Hong Kong. With cosmetic surgery as a compulsory subject, courses on par with international standards were conducted in a number of public hospitals. They included the Queen Mary Hospital, the Prince of Wales Hospital, the Kwong Wah Hospital, the Princess Margaret Hospital and the Tuen Mun Hospital. As a member of the Oriental Society of Aesthetic Plastic, Hong Kong hosted its very first international conference in cosmetic surgery in 1998. Today there are more than 40 practising plastic and reconstructive surgeons in Hong Kong. At least half of them are now in private practice and specialised in cosmetic surgery and reconstructive surgery.

As an international city, Hong Kong provides all kinds of cosmetic surgery to people worldwide. Most major surgeries are customised for Asians, e.g. eyelid surgery, rhinoplasty, breast augmentation, liposuction, skin laser and facial endoscopic surgery, all achieving better and better results with decades of technological advances. Being less time-consuming and more cost-effective, minimally invasive techniques are now replacing some of the traditional major surgical procedures.

Back in the early 1960s, a simple surgery like mole removal was no small issue within a family. Women only sought a slight improvement in body shape from breast augmentation surgery. As time changes, the public is being more open-minded towards cosmetic surgery. While some may still have concerns about the procedures, all the reservations over cosmetic surgery are now nothing but history.

Looking forward, I believe that cosmetic surgery, with its ever rising popularity and technological level, will be an indispensable service in the future.