Korean Bodybuilding
Cultural Hybrid or Instance of Cultural Homogenization?

Author: Marcus Mosesson
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Abstract (in English)
This study deals with the trend of male bodybuilding in Korea and investigates the motivations and aesthetic ideals of Korean male bodybuilders. The author of the study uses the few hitherto academic research works on the subject and tries to give an overview of the history of Korean bodybuilding. Besides, the author has conducted a digital survey in order to collect answers from Korean male bodybuilders about their motivations, aesthetic ideals, etc. The aesthetic ideals of the bodybuilders are then compared to the male aesthetic ideals of modern Korean society and also discussed in relation to the somatic beliefs of Neo-Confucianism. The findings are thereafter analyzed in context of two theses of the cultural consequences of globalization, namely homogenization and hybridization. The study concludes that Korean bodybuilders are more concerned with the arduous process of sculpting their physiques rather than the look of them themselves. Although the research material on Korean bodybuilding is scarce and the responses to the conducted survey are small in terms of both numbers and scale, it may be suggested that Korean bodybuilding appears to be an instance of the hybridization thesis. Lastly, the study emphasizes the need for more extensive research on the subject in question.

Keywords: bodybuilding, fitness, gym culture, globalization, cultural consequences, hybridization, homogenization, male aesthetic ideals, Neo-Confucianism, plastic and cosmetic surgery, Korean society

Abstract (in Swedish)
Denna studie behandlar ämnet koreansk bodybuilding för män och undersöker dels vad som motiverar koreanska kroppsbyggare att utöva sin sport, dels vad deras estetiska ideal är. Studiens författare använder sig av den begränsade befintliga forskningen inom ämnet och försöker även ge en överblick över koreansk bodybuildings historia. Författaren har dessutom utfört en digital undersökning för att samla in svar från koreanska kroppsbyggare om deras drivkrafter, estetiska ideal, etc. Dessa ideal jämförs sedan med det moderna koreanska samhällets motsvarigheter och diskuteras även utifrån de somatiska föreställningarna inom neokonfucianismen. Studiens forskningsresultat analyseras sedan utifrån två teorier om globaliseringens kulturella konsekvenser, närmare bestämt homogenisering respektive hybridisering. Trots det knappa forskningsmaterialet kring koreansk bodybuilding är studiens slutsats att koreanska kroppsbyggare är mer måna om den mödosamma processen i att bygga sina kroppar, snarare än hur dessa ser ut i sig själva. Studien suggererar också att koreansk bodybuilding verkar vara ett exempel på hybridiseringsteorin. Slutligen betonar studien behovet av mer utförlig forskning kring ämnet i fråga.

Nyckelord: bodybuilding, fitness, gymkultur, globalisering, kulturella konsekvenser, hybridisering, homogenisering, manliga estetiska ideal, neokonfucianism, plastikkirurgi, koreanska samhället
1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Study

In the 21st century, fitness and bodybuilding have gained increasing popularity not just in the West where it originated from, but also in other parts of the world such as Brazil and Japan (Andreasson and Johansson 2015, 10). In their book Fitnessrevolutionen (The Fitness Revolution), the Swedish scholars Jesper Andreasson and Thomas Johansson label this growing global phenomenon the “gym culture” (gymkulturen), and discuss how the gym and fitness industry has gained increased ground all over the world (ibid.). They divide the globalization process of this culture into three phases: 1) the early 20th century, when the gymnastics movements spread from Europe to the US; 2) the 1970’s, during which the gym culture received significant global diffusion, internationalization and commercialization thanks to icons such as the bodybuilder and actor Arnold Schwarzenegger; and 3) the 1980s and 1990s, when gym chains developed and established global networks, while simultaneously the gym and fitness business became more professionalized. It is this third globalization phase that the authors call the Fitness Revolution (Andreasson and Johansson 2015, 23-24).

South Korea (henceforth referred to as Korea) has certainly not been unaffected by this growing trend of gym and fitness. However, it is a field of research that so far seems to be unexplored outside the Korean academic circles. I have not been able to find any academic works written in other languages than Korean dealing with the gym and fitness trend in Korea. Furthermore, the Korean research on this subject is scarce, according to what I have been able to find in the databases DBPIA and KISS.

Specifically, the gym and fitness related phenomenon of bodybuilding in Korean society seems to be untouched by non-Korean scholars. Nor does there seem to be any research on the impact of the globalization of fitness and bodybuilding in Korea. Works on other Asian countries, such as Japan (Andreasson and Johansson 2017) and India (Baas 2017) have been conducted on this issue, but Korea remains uncharted ground in this aspect. However, one Korean work on the history of Korean bodybuilding by Hwang Ok-ch’ŏl and An Sŭng-jin from 2004 touches upon this issue, although very briefly.

On the contrary, the research works (both Korean and foreign) on the fairly recent trend of plastic and cosmetic surgery in Korea are many, and the issue is widely discussed even outside of the academic field1. This field of research is of importance since it ties into several aspects of Korean society, such as what body images and beauty ideals the modern Korean has, and also discussions on what it takes to be “successful” and accepted by society at large. Some of this research looks into this fairly recent phenomenon from a cultural-historical perspective, for instance by examining how plastic and cosmetic surgery stands in conflict with Neo-Confucian ideals about the human body (Åberg 2015).

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1 For an example, see the article ”Därför vill Sydkoreas unga byta ut sina ansikten” (Therefore, Young South Koreans Want to Change Their Faces), published on the 5th of October 2017 in the Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter.
Considering what has been mentioned above, there is an unexplored field of research to be investigated. Furthermore, the fact that I am of mixed Korean background as well as being a devoted gym-goer has also contributed substantially to sparking my interest in looking into at least one aspect of Korean bodybuilding. Accordingly, the four research questions for this study are as follows:

- **What are the motivations of Korean male bodybuilders to practice their sport?** What are their perceptions of an aesthetically ideal body? How do their ideals contrast with the Korean male beauty standards and the Neo-Confucian values regarding primarily the human body? How can this be seen in the context of globalization and its cultural consequences?

The aim of the study is to provide insight into a field of research that has so far been unexplored by non-Korean scholars in Korean studies. With the trend of fitness and bodybuilding growing globally and affecting other Asian countries, it is of relevance to look closer on its impact on Korea as well – particularly in a society whose inhabitants in many aspects pay much attention to their appearance. Since the subject of plastic and cosmetic surgery is an integral part of this appearance-obsessed culture, I will to a limited extent examine this subject as well.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study is based on the theses of cultural consequences of globalization. Two academic works will be used as references: the article “Globalization’s Cultural Consequences” (Holton 2000) by Robert Holton, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, and the book *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange 2nd Edition* (Nederveen Pieterse 2009) by Jan Nederveen Pieterse, Mellichamp Professor of Global Studies and Sociology.

The common point of the theses is that there are cultural consequences of globalization; however, the theses differ in their explanation of what these consequences mean, and how these take form, unfold and affect the world’s nations and societies. The homogenization thesis, also known as the McDonaldization thesis, argues that countries and societies all over the world are becoming increasingly westernized and/or Americanized, thus becoming more homogenous. This can be seen in the worldwide implementations of market economy, the emergence of consumer societies, and the diffusion of brands and multinational companies such as McDonald’s and Coca-Cola (Holton 2000, 142-143; Nederveen Pieterse 2009, 51).

However, this thesis has been contested. Holton (2000, 143) asserts that “the strong association of cultural globalization with Americanization is overstated.” He takes former Western colonies as examples, in the sense that these are culturally influenced by their former (non-American) colonizers rather than the US. He also brings up forms of cultural resistance to Americanization, not just in the non-Western world but in Europe as well. Nederveen Pieterse (2009, 52) mentions how the homogenization thesis is challenged by instances of *glocalization* (short for *global localization*), the term for how multinational companies adapt
their businesses to the local culture of the country or society in which they do business. Nederveen Pieterse writes:

“Thus, rather than cultural homogenization McDonald’s and others in the family of Western fast food restaurants (Burger King, KFC, Pizza Hut, Wendy’s) usher in difference and variety, giving rise to and reflecting new, mixed social forms. Where they are imported, they serve different social, cultural, and economic functions than in their place of origin, and their formula is accordingly adapted to local conditions” (Nederveen Pieterse 2009, 53).

This leads us to the second thesis, namely that of hybridization, which is also known by other names, such as syncretization and creolization. This thesis suggests that, as implied by the quote above, cultures interchange and mix with each other as they are spread throughout the world, thus creating new cultural hybrids (Holton 2000, 148; Nederveen Pieterse 2009, 54-55). As with the concept of glocalization, globally transmitted cultural elements are adapted to and combined with the local culture. This can be anything from music and foods to religious and spiritual practices (Holton 2000, 149).

The third and final thesis regarding the consequences of globalization is the polarization thesis. As the name suggests, this thesis argues that as the world’s cultural and national borders disintegrate and meet, polarization and conflicts along cultural, ethnic and/or national lines emerge (Holton 2000, 145). The belated American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington’s literary work Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (Huntington 1996) is representative of this thesis. For my study, I will completely exclude the polarization thesis from the analysis, since it is virtually irrelevant for this study and its purpose.

As for definitions of key terms in my study, it might be necessary to define the term bodybuilding. Judging by what I have found while browsing the Internet, there seems to be few academic works that thoroughly define the phenomenon of bodybuilding. Locks (2012) tries to define bodybuilding, but does not manage to come to a clear definition of the term. However, he makes some relevant points regarding the issue: firstly, as he puts it himself, “[i]n bodybuilding more than anything else size matters” (Locks 2012, 3). As most people would assume, the size of the muscles is an integral part of bodybuilding. Secondly, Locks asserts that the ideals of bodybuilding (specifically for males) are dynamic, since they have been subject to a “continual increase” throughout the sport’s history (ibid.). Taking this into consideration, what was considered a “huge” or an “excellent” bodybuilder physique in the 1950s is likely to be considered “small” and “average” according to today’s standards. Locks further discusses what he calls the “American Classic” aesthetic, which was the aesthetic ideal of (as the name suggests) mostly American male bodybuilders up until the 1980s (Locks 2012, 11). It was inspired by the ancient Greek aesthetic, which “placed emphasis on proportion, shape and symmetry rather than size” (ibid.). However, from the 1980’s onwards an aesthetic ideal that Locks labels “Post-Classic” has become increasingly popular instead (Locks 2012, 15-16). This aesthetic bares little resemblance to the ancient Greek counterpart and is characterized by “excess, disproportion and exaggeration” and puts emphasis on muscle definition and vascularity (Locks 2012, 15-16). He further writes that although the American Classic aesthetic still has its place among contemporary bodybuilders,
the Post-Classic aesthetic remains the contemporary aesthetic ideal for today’s bodybuilders (ibid.).

This is of relevance because it tells us that the definition of bodybuilding (and also its ideals and standards) is not static, but dependent on the historical context it appears in. In order to not confuse apples with oranges, it is important to emphasize that not just anybody who engages in weight training, sticks to a diet and possesses a seemingly fit and muscular physique can be deemed a bodybuilder.

Richardson (2012, 21) makes a brief attempt to discern the difference between bodybuilding and other sports whose practitioners use the same or at least similar diet and weight training exercises that bodybuilders employ. He concludes that while athletes and sportsmen may use bodybuilder techniques and practices in order to improve their performance in their respective sport, bodybuilders have their visible physique as their only goal – regardless of the additional strength and endurance gains that may come as a result of their training and diet (ibid.). As Richardson puts it: “in bodybuilding the development of the muscular physique is the final goal” (ibid.).

In conclusion, bodybuilding of today’s standards can be described as the following: the practice of making the muscles of the body grow (whether with or without use of performance-enhancing drugs), with the goal of getting as “huge” as possible – not in terms of being fat, but muscular and vascular. Strength training, usually with weights, and specific diets are integral parts of this practice, whether the bodybuilder practices his sport naturally (including supplements such as protein powders and creatine) or with medical substances such as anabolic steroids. The physique of the bodybuilder is in turn, in competitive circles, supposed to be exhibited in a competition and judged according to certain criteria, for instance that of the level of muscle definition.

Whether people who engage in the training and diet scheme of bodybuilding, but who do not compete in bodybuilder competitions should be considered bodybuilders or not remains a contested issue (Richardson 2012, 22-23). For my study, the main focus will be on bodybuilding at a competitive level; however, for my self-conducted survey I will also include Korean bodybuilders who do not compete. I will not only include bodybuilders pursuing the contemporary Post-Classic aesthetic, but also include bodybuilders who pursue the American Classic one. This is because – as implied by Locks (2012, 15-16) above – it still plays a role among today’s bodybuilders.

Furthermore, I will consider bodybuilding a sport in this study. Whether bodybuilding should be considered a sport or not is a debated issue, but for the sake of not being too repetitive with my language I will occasionally label it a sport instead of just “practice”, “it”, etc.

Due to the close relationship between the terms fitness and bodybuilding, I will consider bodybuilding a part of the phenomenon of fitness. Accordingly, although bodybuilding could be considered a separate category in the realm of fitness and activities conducted in gyms, I will occasionally make connections between the terms and also use them interchangeably in case the authors whose work I am referring to are doing likewise.

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2 See for instance the article "Is Bodybuilding a Legit Sport?" by Jonathan Salmon, published on April 10, 2015 in *Generation Iron*. 

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Since this study will touch upon the much-debated and well-researched subject of plastic and cosmetic surgery in Korea, it might be of relevance to also define what the two terms actually mean. Despite being seemingly similar and thus often being used interchangeably, plastic surgery and cosmetic surgery are different. Among their differences, the most important distinction for my study is the following: while plastic surgery according to the American Board of Cosmetic Surgery (2018) is defined as “a surgical specialty dedicated to reconstruction of facial and body defects due to birth disorders, trauma, burns, and disease” (including surgical procedures such as breast reconstruction and burn repair surgery), cosmetic surgery is “entirely focused on enhancing a patient’s appearance” (including surgical procedures such as rhinoplasty and liposuction).

These two terms are often used as synonyms in not just newspapers and magazines, but also in academic papers. Therefore, when writing about a paper whose author uses them interchangeably, I will use the words in a similar fashion. However, when it is clear what is intended and when I make my own comments on the issue in general, I will strive to write cosmetic surgery.

I will apply a similar approach to the terms Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, which are similar yet also different. Many scholars, including those whose works I will use for my study, simply write “Confucianism” when they in fact refer to the ideology of Neo-Confucianism. I will therefore strive to be as specific as possible when referring to each ideology. Certain ideals and concepts of the two ideologies overlap, and I will in that case use the term “Confucianism” and the adjective “Confucian.” As explained in the next subchapter, as part of my research I will send a digital survey to Korean bodybuilders. In this survey, I will use the general term of Confucianism (yugyo) instead of specifically Neo-Confucianism (sŏngnihak), since the related question will touch upon Confucian values in general and not just those exclusive to Neo-Confucianism.

Regarding terms referring to the Western world, such as “Western,” I will use them in a general sense and not extensively discuss what exactly the Western world consists of. When referring to the West, I am primarily referring to Western Europe and North America (particularly the Unites States), since contemporary bodybuilding originates from this part of the world.

As for perspectives on issues such as class and gender, I will not take class (neither social nor economic) into consideration in my study or its analysis. This is mainly because the few research works on Korean bodybuilding that I have found and used for my study do not apply any class perspective. Due to this, a class perspective will be generally left out for this study, except for some careful assumptions and brief discussions regarding the issue that I will present in subchapter 2.3.

The issue of gender will be applied in two aspects. Firstly, in this study I will focus on male bodybuilders exclusively, and not females or both sexes. The reason for this is that bodybuilding is a sport mostly practiced by and associated with men, and also that I intend to not turn the study too vast to properly handle. Secondly, I will discuss certain Korean male images and while doing so touch upon concepts of masculinity, femininity and sexuality, albeit to a limited extent. These terms will be used and defined in relation to how they are presented in the sources.
1.3 Methods

Now that I have presented the theoretical framework of my study, I will present the methods I have used. The method is mainly qualitative, by analysis of academic articles, studies, news articles and books on the subject of bodybuilding and other subjects pertinent to my study. I have additionally and to a limited extent browsed the Internet for pictures and videos that could potentially be useful for my study.

I have also used a digital survey created in Google Forms with questions requiring long answers, which I have sent to Korean bodybuilders. The bodybuilders I have sent the questionnaire to have been chosen on basis of convenience sampling on the social media platform Instagram.

The aesthetic ideals of Korean bodybuilders will be examined and compared to the modern Korean popular beauty standards and the Neo-Confucian ideals about the human body, thus also applying a comparative method of research.

1.4 Sources

Most of the sources used in this study are secondary sources, in the form of articles, which are mainly from academic journals but also from newspapers and magazines. Some of the academic articles are written in Korean, while the rest is written in English. The articles from newspapers and magazines are all written in English. Books are also used as sources for the study and these are all written in English, except for *Fitnessrevolutionen* by Jesper Andreasson and Thomas Johansson (2015), which is written in Swedish. I also use certain websites, and these are exclusively written in English.

I have also used a digital questionnaire that I have written in Korean in Google Forms, which I have sent to Korean bodybuilders on Instagram. This works as a primary source for the study.

As discussed in 1.1, Korean bodybuilding is a subject that has not been well researched among Koreans scholars. However, I have found two studies dealing with bodybuilding in a Korean context that I have used for this study: the study by Hwang and An (2004) that examines the history of Korean bodybuilding; and the study by Yi (2012) that discusses the practices and self-perception of Korean male bodybuilders. Unfortunately, the other studies on Korean bodybuilding that I have found have not been useful for my case. This is mainly because both their focus points and approach to the subject render them irrelevant for my research questions.

For instance, one of the Korean studies that I have found deals with the changes in the field of Korean female bodybuilding and what strategies Korean female bodybuilders use to maintain their identity (Yi and Kwôn 2015). Since my study focuses on male bodybuilders only, this study renders irrelevant. Another study by Ch’oe and Kim (2015) applies a philosophical perspective on the subject, whereas the perspective of my own study is different. Neither is the work by Mun (2011) useful for my case. He investigates the relationship between the rate of participation (frequency, duration and intensity) in a
bodybuilding program and the physical self-concept (sinch’ae-jŏk chagigaenyŏm) of six hundred randomly selected participants in the program. While it could perhaps be relevant to mention that Mun (2011, 42-43) concludes that (a higher rate of) participation in a bodybuilding program has positive effects on the participants’ physical self-concept, it does not add any highly important information to my study. This is partly because he mentions earlier research conducted outside Korea that supports the same conclusion (ibid.), which in turn suggests that participating in a bodybuilder program does not affect Koreans much differently than what it does to other peoples. Therefore, Mun’s (2011) study does not tell us anything exceptional about Korean bodybuilding itself. Furthermore, my study does not focus on at what rate Koreans practice bodybuilding and what implications this could have.

Unfortunately, as for the article by Hwang and An (2004), there are some inconsistencies and dubious assumptions that should be pointed out and commented upon. One of them is the article’s overall nationalistic tone and praise of Korea, however this and other issues will be discussed in detail in subchapter 2.2.

Accordingly, not only is the Korean material on the topic of bodybuilding that I have used for my study scarce, but also partly of low quality. It will therefore be difficult to come to definite conclusions about the issue.

1.5 Structure and Scope

The first step of the thesis will be to describe the origin and history of contemporary bodybuilding. This is because of the importance to know the general history of bodybuilding in order to fully comprehend the history of Korean bodybuilding and put it into context.

Thereafter, the history of Korean bodybuilding will be examined, based exclusively on the only academic work that I have found on the matter. Next, a subchapter examining a field study by Andreasson and Johansson (2017) on the fitness and gym culture in Japan will be briefly summarized. I have included this subchapter not just because of the geographic proximity and in certain aspects cultural similarities between Japan and Korea, but also because of their common history through the colonial period. The Japanese case might tell us something about bodybuilding in Korea, such as its historic origin and development.

However, I have not been able to find any material that examines the history of bodybuilding in Japan in detail, and nor is it the main focus of my study to analyze the phenomenon of Japanese bodybuilding. Therefore, the related subchapter will be fairly short.

In the following subchapter, the Neo-Confucian ideals regarding the human body will be examined, in order to provide a basis for discussions in the upcoming chapters. After this subchapter, the modern Korean beauty standards for males will be discussed. Following up is a subchapter in which I will discuss the relationship between these standards and the aesthetic ideals of nine Korean male bodybuilders, and furthermore what motivations these bodybuilders have for practicing their sport. I will base the discussion of this subchapter mostly on the work by Yi So-ŭn (2012). In the next chapter, I will present the answers to a questionnaire that I have formulated and sent to Korean bodybuilders, which will provide a better look into the question of Korean bodybuilders’ own opinions on the subject, while
adding a primary source for the study. Finally, I will discuss and summarize the findings of my study in a concluding chapter.

My study also has some limitations. The most important one is the insufficient material—specifically academic works dealing with the issue of Korean bodybuilding. Also, due to not just the limiting scope of a bachelor thesis but also constraints in regards to both time and financial resources, I have not been able to conduct any fieldwork in Korea. Because of these lacks in both material and time, potential in-depth analysis and extensive discussions will not be possible to elaborate further on. As mentioned previously, the subject of Korean bodybuilding is still an uncharted field of research, and one has to act accordingly and use what little is available.

Another limitation of my study is my choice of method for interviewing Korean bodybuilders, since there are a few downsides with sending a digital survey to respondents. Firstly, as opposed to a face-to-face interview it is not possible to give spontaneous supplementary questions that might come to one’s mind as the interview proceeds. Secondly, there is a lower likelihood of obtaining in-depth answers from the interview subjects, since it is easier for them to give simple and short answers while avoiding complicated and potentially uncomfortable supplementary questions and follow-up inquiries. Thirdly, the risk that the interviewees misunderstand the questions and one’s inability to directly clarify them pose additional problems. Lastly, it can be difficult to decipher nuances and hidden meanings that could potentially be present in the replies of the respondents— one has to accordingly ‘read between the lines’ when analyzing the answers. In this regard, an interview through for instance Skype would potentially render an even more elaborated in-depth analysis than what I will be able to ultimately provide.

However, due to lack of time and time differences between Korea and Sweden, not to mention the busy life of Korean bodybuilders (at least the professional ones), finding an opportunity to do a live interview with even one Korean bodybuilder is quite difficult. Hence, I will choose to send them a digital survey to answer.

1.6 Notes on Romanization and Translation

The names of Korean scholars will be rendered according to the McCune-Reischauer romanization if their names are written in han’gul in the material used. This is regardless of the authors’ personally preferred Latin spelling of their names. If a Korean name is only written in Latin and not han’gul in the material, I will choose the author’s personally preferred Latin spelling of his/her name. Quotes containing romanizations of Korean words that do not follow the McCune-Reischauer romanization will be left untouched, thus being presented in their original form. However, if I subsequently mention the quoted Korean word in the running text, I will for the sake of consistency and clarity for those familiar with Korean studies render it according to the McCune-Reischauer romanization.

I will translate quotes in Korean and Swedish into English, unless anything else is specified.
2. Background

2.1 The History of Bodybuilding

Being able to not just fully comprehend the history of Korean bodybuilding but also put it into context requires some basic knowledge about the general history of bodybuilding. Therefore, this subchapter will deal with the history and development of bodybuilding, from its conception in the 19th century to its modern state.

The origin of what we consider contemporary bodybuilding is usually attributed to Prussian-born Friedrich Wilhelm Müller (1867-1925), who is better known by his stage name Eugen Sandow (see picture 1 in the appendix). He was a showman and strongman, and came to be considered the founder of modern bodybuilding (Encyclopedica Brittanica 2017). While touring through Europe, Sandow was picked up by the American impresario Florenz Ziegfeld, who had seen him in London in 1887 posing on the stage in between acts in a performance of the musical Adonis. Sandow signed a four-year contract with Ziegfeld and became a success while touring through both America and Europe. He did not just lift heavy weights in front of an audience, but also displayed his (at that time considered impressive) physique on stage, which according to Locks (2012, 4) was where his real success lies. Just as Sandow’s own success, the origin of bodybuilding, with its emphasis on exhibiting a well-developed physique, also lies in this instance of commercial body display (ibid.).

Subsequently, an American named Bernarr Macfadden was inspired by Sandow and so held the first American bodybuilding competition in 1903. Shortly after the competition, Sandow coined the term “bodybuilding” for the first time in his book with the same name, in which he referred to bodybuilding as part of Physical Culture (Locks 2012, 6-7). Locks (2012, 7) quotes Sandow’s own description of Physical Culture, which says: “Physical Culture means all-round development whereby the organisms of the body, are brought into a thoroughly healthy condition, so enabling one to realise to the full what real health is.”

Although the emphasis in the quote is on health, Locks (2012) stresses that bodybuilding was also about “displaying the body as an object for contemplation and enjoyment (in either the competition or the photograph)” (ibid.). He also adds that it was a lucrative marketing concept not just for Sandow but also Macfadden – and bodybuilding and fitness have indeed become a global multibillion-dollar industry.

Bodybuilding continued to develop in the US throughout the early twentieth century, not least thanks to the Italian immigrant Angelo Siciliano, who is better known as Charles Atlas, a name he took to better promote himself in the US. His training program became very popular thanks to its successful promotion campaign, which had men who felt “incomplete” and “unmanly” as its main target (Andreasson and Johansson 2015, 26-27). Furthermore, Atlas had strong connections to the movement Muscular Christianity that – in the words of Andreasson and Johansson (2015, 26-27) – “celebrated the strong, manly and Christian body,” which in turn rendered Physical Culture an important part of the “everyday Christian life.” As for another relevant point on this connection between bodybuilding and Christianity, Yi So-ûn (2012, 145) mentions previous research on bodybuilding that suggests that the practice of bodybuilding could be partly explained by the German sociologist Max Weber’s concept of the Protestant work ethic. This is because the faithfulness (sŏngsilsŏng) and self-
management (*chagigwalli*) that can be seen in the everyday-practice of bodybuilding is a reflection of the Protestant work ethic’s emphasis on hard work and discipline (ibid.). Though, Yi continues, to see the practice of bodybuilding simply as motivated by the protestant work ethic renders the pursuit for muscle growth pointless; if the definition of the protestant work ethic in this context is defined as being disciplined and doing hard work (i.e. going to the gym) everyday, then why does the goal have to be a muscular physique, and not something else that could likewise be the result of hard labor? In this regard, Yi asserts, the notion has its limitations (ibid.).

As one inevitably notices, bodybuilding became centered on America, and California in particular (Locks 2012, 7-8). Locks (2012) writes accordingly that Atlas’ “greatest achievement” was to turn the bodybuilder physique into a “populist representation more associated with America than ancient Greece” (Locks 2012, 8). Another step in the “Americanization” of bodybuilding was the change in the coloring of the bodybuilders’ skin. Sandow had covered his skin with chalk to resemble the ancient Greek statuary, while American bodybuilders like Atlas came to prefer the mahogany-colored suntan instead – a coloring that was more associated with the sunny beaches of the American West Coast than ancient Greece (ibid.).

Although Sandow is considered the originator of contemporary bodybuilding, Locks (ibid.) claims that he was still considered a strongman by many people. This in turn was unsurprising, considering that bodybuilding initially was fundamentally connected to strength training, and as the display of muscle was still secondary to the display of strength (ibid.). However, this came to change from 1946 onwards; that year, the Canadian brothers Joseph “Joe” and Benjamin “Ben” Weider founded the International Federation of Bodybuilders (Locks 2012, 8-9), which they later renamed the International Federation of BodyBuilding and Fitness (henceforth referred to as IFBB) (Andreasson and Johansson 2015, 30). The Weider brothers also published bodybuilding magazines, that – in difference to their rival Bob Hoffman’s magazines, such as *Strength and Health*, which were mainly focused on weightlifting displays – focused entirely on the “finished product”, i.e. the bodybuilder’s physique (Locks 2012, 9). This became a crucial recognition of the body as something that could be admired and judged “in its own right.” Both the IFBB and Hoffman’s Amateur Athletic Union (AUU) set up not only rules and regulations but also competition practices and regularized training regimens; however from the 1950s, the IFBB came to be the victor in the bodybuilding federations’ battle for dominance (ibid.). The IFBB kept its political and economic control in the world of bodybuilding and still has a significant role in controlling, regulating and influencing bodybuilding events today. It regulates all the major American bodybuilding competitions, and holds competitions all over the world, including Europe, the Middle East and East Asia (including South Korea) (Locks 2012, 9-10; IFBB 2018).

From the mid to late 1970s, bodybuilding along with fitness in general received growing attention and popularity worldwide, not least thanks to bodybuilders such as Austrian-born Arnold Schwarzenegger (see picture 3) who attained an iconic status. The “Mecca of Bodybuilding,” Gold’s Gym, located at Venice Beach (also known as Muscle Beach) in California became the epicenter of bodybuilding (Locks 2012, 10; Andreasson and Johansson 2015, 30, 33). This was in part attributed to the docudrama film *Pumping Iron* (1977), based on the book with the same name, which helped to place not just the gym but also
Schwarzenegger and other bodybuilders on the international stage (Andreasson and Johansson 2015, 31). It was also at the end of this decade that female bodybuilding emerged (Locks 2012, 16).

Bodybuilders had been using performance-enhancing drugs (henceforth PED) such as anabolic steroids ever since the 1960s; however from the 1970s onwards, the usage of PED by competing bodybuilders increased, thus rendering the size of bodybuilders larger than in previous decades (Locks 2012, 11-12). Despite the growing trend of usage of PED among bodybuilders, bodybuilding continued to gain not just popularity but also acceptance as a mainstream practice (Locks 2012, 13). This growing interest in not just bodybuilding but also fitness in general can also be attributed to the rise of health problems (such as heart disease) in the West, and thus an increased awareness of improving and maintaining one’s health. A “chronic masculinity crisis” is an alternative explanation for the growing interest in bodybuilding (Andreasson and Johansson 2015, 32-33).

While simultaneously receiving growing popularity and proliferation globally, bodybuilding also gained criticism and a bad reputation during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This was due to the increased number of reports on the back sides of the sport, such as the abuse of drugs, eating disorders and the obsession with body image (Andreasson and Johansson 2015, 33). Accordingly, many gyms tried to remove their “bodybuilding label” and instead focused on promoting and enabling other gym activities (Andreasson and Johansson 2015, 36). In fact, as the popularity of fitness and the gym culture grew throughout the 1980s and 1990s, bodybuilding – which arguably can be said to have caused the growing fitness and gym trend in the first place – became somewhat marginalized (ibid.).

As discussed in 1.2, the Post-Classic aesthetic remains the ideal for bodybuilders in the early 21st century. “Mass-at-all-costs” is the general approach of contemporary bodybuilding, which naturally requires usage of several different PED and growth hormones in order to attain what is at least considered an acceptable physique standard. The physiques of classic bodybuilder icons such as Schwarzenegger are no longer considered impressive in comparison with contemporary bodybuilders, such as Ronnie Coleman and Jay Cutler (see picture 4) (Bateman 2014). As Locks (2012) writes:

“[… ] male bodybuilding continues to be dominated by larger, ever more disproportionate, and exceptionally ripped and shredded bodies. The 2010 Mr. Olympia – Jay Cutler – possesses a physique that renders the triumphant body of Arnold Schwarzenegger a historical curiosity” (Locks 2012, 18).

However, as was also mentioned in subchapter 1.2, the American Classic aesthetic still plays a role in contemporary bodybuilding. In fact, as late as in 2015 the National Physique Committee (NPC), which is the largest amateur bodybuilding organization in the US, announced together with IFBB a new men’s division for their bodybuilding competitions called Classic Physique, which “will be for competitors who want to present more muscular
size than is currently acceptable for Men’s Physique\(^3\), but not as extreme as the current standards of bodybuilding\(^4\) (Iron Man Magazine 2015).

2.2 The History of Korean Bodybuilding

Now that the general history of bodybuilding has been examined, it is time to look into the evolution of Korean bodybuilding. As mentioned in the introduction of my study, the only work on the history of Korean bodybuilding that I have found is an article written by Hwang and An (2004). As we shall see, the article unfortunately has many inconsistencies and disputable assertions, which render it dubious in some aspects.

According to Hwang and An (2004), bodybuilding in Korea has its roots in weight lifting (henceforth yŏkt'o), which in turn was introduced to Korea together with modern physical education (kūndae-jŏk ch’aeuyuk) as part of the Kabo Reforms (Kabo kaehyŏk) in the year of 1894 (Hwang and An 2004, 45). The people who were performing yŏkt'o were called yŏksa (strongmen); and one of these men named Sŏ Sang-ch’ŏn (1903-?), also known by his penname Mun’gok is considered by the authors to have been both the leader and the founding father of Korean bodybuilding. After studies in Japan he began researching physical education for the public (sahoe ch’aeuyuk) and teaching at Sŏnch’ŏn sinsŏng hakkyŏ, and the authors assert that it was from this moment that yŏkt'o rooted itself in Korea (ibid.). According to Hwang and An (2004, 46) yŏkt'o should be seen as the origin from which bodybuilding emerged in Korean society, despite the fact that barely any information about or literature on bodybuilding from overseas was known in the country at that time (Hwang and An 2004, 45-46). The authors support their claim by emphasizing that yŏkt'o and bodybuilding have many similarities, and that it thus seems inevitable that the former is the origin of the latter (Hwang and An 2004, 46).

This is the first disputable claim that the authors put forward. As discussed in subchapter 1.2, a bodybuilder of today’s standards is not someone who simply practices weight training like Sŏ Sang-ch’ŏn and other yŏksa of his time did. However, the authors claim that yŏkt'o was the origin of Korean bodybuilding rather than bodybuilding itself. It is not unlikely that Sŏ Sang-ch’ŏn was the originator of Korean bodybuilding, just like Eugene Sandow was the founder of Western bodybuilding; and neither is it preposterous to argue that yŏkt'o was the precursor to Korean bodybuilding, just as the weight and strength training that Sandow and his likes practiced is seen as the progenitor of Western bodybuilding. In any case, the authors do not present any definite proof for the supposed correlation between yŏkt'o and the conception and subsequent development of Korean bodybuilding: it is all assumptions, which even the authors themselves admit.

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\(^3\) Men’s Physique can be described as a division that is not considered bodybuilding, however muscularity to a ‘moderate,’ ‘non-extreme’ degree is important. The North American Natural Bodybuilding Federation (NANBF) writes the following about the division: “Judges will be looking for fit contestants who display proper shape and symmetry combined with muscularity and overall condition. This is not a bodybuilding contest so extreme muscularity should be marked down” (NANBF 2018). For more info, visit: http://nanbf.org/news/new-to-the-nanbf/

\(^4\) Italics added by the author.
Another dubious assertion that the authors put forth relates to Sŏ Sang-ch’ŏn. They claim that he was a nationalist who had said that the only way for the Koreans to free themselves from the “chain of Japanese rule” was by “cultivating strength through exercise” (Hwang and An 2004, 45). They support this claim by mentioning that he, together with Korean alumni from the Japanese Gymnastics School (Ilbon ch’aegyo hakkyo), established gymnasiuums, research centers and research groups such as the Chosŏn Physical Fitness Promotion Research Group (Chosŏn ch’aeryŏk ch’ungjinbŏp yŏn’guso) (ibid.). The authors do not explain further why this has to be interpreted as a definite sign of Korean nationalism. In fact, there is an overall nationalistic tone and praise of Korea throughout their whole article. Another example of this is the mentioning of sports events, or rather the details of these, which seem to be slightly distant and even irrelevant to the evolution of Korean bodybuilding itself. (I will deal with this issue further below in this subchapter.)

After liberation from the Japanese colonial rule on the 15th of August 1945, a subcommittee dedicated to bodybuilding was formed within the Taehan yŏkto yŏnmaeng (The Korean Weight Lifting Federation). Unfortunately, the authors do not mention why, when or by whom this federation was created. The subcommittee was named Podibilding pun’gwa wiwŏnhoe (The Bodybuilding Subcommittee). All events, both domestic and foreign relating to bodybuilding came to be held and supervised by the federation and its subcommittee. Subsequently, the first bodybuilding contest named Misūt’ŏ K’oria (henceforth Mr Korea), held on the 4th of December 1949 in Seoul, was the starting point of the popularization of bodybuilding in the country.

Here, perhaps the most startling of all the inconsistencies in Hwang and An’s (2004) study can be found: namely the mentioning of the location of the first Mr Korea contest. The authors claim in the English abstract that it was held in the Seoul City Hall, while they state in the section dealing with this issue that it was held in a theatre in Myŏngdong (Hwang and An 2004, 46). Finally, in the conclusion of the article they say that it was held in the Sŏulsi konggwan, a building that I do not know of, nor have managed to find any information about (Hwang and An 2004, 51). One can only be quite sure that the contest was held in Seoul, however its exact location remains unclear.

More Mr Korea contests were held throughout the sixties, and the standards according to which the contestants were divided into classes based on height and subsequently weight gradually changed and were adapted to international standards. So-called university bodybuilding (taehak podibilding) was also developing in this decade. The authors however do not specify what this term exactly means, although they imply later in their article that it is bodybuilding practiced by Korean university students, who in turn are trained and supported by their university. (I will discuss this later in this subchapter.) In 1968, the Podibilding pun’gwa wiwŏnhoe became an official member of the IFBB (Hwang and An 2004, 46–47).

In the 1970s, many developed nations enacted sport policies, and so did Korea. As the Korean government invested in sports research and promoting sports to its citizens, national manufacturing of weight training equipment was also launched. Simultaneously, Korean bodybuilding also experienced numerous changes in this decade. In 1970, Korea joined the Asian Bodybuilding and Physique Sports Federation (henceforth ABBF), and the gyms that were previously called tojang or ch’aeyukkwan were now called helsū k’illop (health club) instead. It was also at this time that the word podibilding (bodybuilding) started to be used
instead of the previously used yukch’aemi (physical beauty) (Hwang and An 2004, 47). The contestants in the Mr Korea contests grew in numbers, and Korean bodybuilders started to participate in bodybuilding championships throughout Asia. According to Hwang and An (ibid.), the 1970s was the decade when Korea stepped up on the “real” international bodybuilding scene. In 1970, the University Bodybuilding Championship was held for the first time under the name of Misūt’ŏ yunibŏsits’i taehoe (the Mr University Contest), hosted by the Taehan yŏkto yŏnmaeng and arranged by Chungang University (ibid.). In sum, the 1970s was the time when bodybuilding received the status of a ‘sport of its own’ among the Korean people (Hwang and An 2004, 48).

As the overall field of sports developed and gained interest in Korea in the 1980’s, not least due to the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Summer Olympics (both held in Seoul), the number of bodybuilders as well as gyms kept growing. Taehan podibilding hyŏphoe, the Korean Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation (henceforth KBBF), was also launched in this decade (ibid.).

Some assertions Hwang and An (2004) make (albeit implicitly rather than explicitly) in regards to the 1970s and 1980s can be contested – and this ties back to the nationalistic tone of the article briefly mentioned above. The authors’ implicit notion that there is a correlation between the Korean government’s investments in sports and the increasing popularity of bodybuilding in Korea during these two decades could be questioned. This is because they do not present any references or empirical proof for their assertions. Although one could argue that it makes sense that the Korean government’s sport promotion acts and sport events caused the increased popularity and development of Korean bodybuilding, the alleged correlation might as well be a question of two separate trends that just coincidentally took place at the same time.

As bodybuilding was receiving increasing popularity and recognition as an exclusive sport throughout the 1990s, various Korean universities established their own departments of bodybuilding and invested in professional training of their own top-notch bodybuilders (Hwang and An 2004, 48-49). Bodybuilding was classified as a subject of Liberal Arts and became a Major. Since 1995 the KBBF holds the Mr. University Contest and the Ch’un’yge taehaksaeng taehoe (the University Students’ Spring Tournament) every year. At Yongin University a bodybuilding program was established and only certain students living up to the criteria were selected for the program (Hwang and An 2004, 49).

Since bodybuilding was also becoming increasingly popular among Korean women, the Yŏja podibilding kyŏnggi taehoe (Women's Bodybuilding Tournament) was held in 1995. Korean female bodybuilders had already been participating in international bodybuilding championships since 1983. One year after the launch of Korea’s first national female bodybuilding tournament, the country’s first national couple bodybuilding contest was held (ibid.).

The 21st century saw continuing recognition of Korean bodybuilding, not least with the holding of the Asian Games in Pusan in 2002. The Asian Games’ Bodybuilding Tournament was held between the 3rd and 6th of October in the Pusan Citizen Hall (Pusan simin hoegwan), and many of the South Korean contestants won both gold and bronze medals (Hwang and An 2004, 50). According to Hwang and An (ibid.), this was the prime of Korean bodybuilding.
Since Hwang and An’s study only stretches until 2004, it is unknown whether the year of 2004 is still considered the prime of Korean bodybuilding. In conclusion, the study by Hwang and An (2004) suggests that bodybuilding has been around in Korea since at least the very end of the 1940s. However, due to some inconsistencies and dubious assertions in the study the details of Korean bodybuilding’s development until now are not yet entirely clear, and there is seemingly no summarizing academic work on its development post-2004. More rigorous research on not just the history of Korean bodybuilding until 2004 but also its subsequent changes and development is thus needed.

2.3 The Gym and Fitness Culture in Japan

Since Japan and Korea are close in terms of their geographical position and certain features of their cultures, and not to mention their common history through the Japanese colonial rule in Korea 1910-1945, looking at how the phenomenon of gym and fitness has developed in Japan might be of relevance.

In a field study by Andreasson and Johansson (2017) conducted in 2015 in Tokyo, the authors mention that the Japanese fitness culture at its beginning (the 1980s and 1990s) was adapted to a Japanese context, albeit being heavily influenced by the American counterpart (Andreasson and Johansson 2017, 384).

Although Japanese gyms with a focus on weight training and bodybuilding have increased in numbers during the 21st century, the fitness and gym culture in Japan still bears differences to the Western/American equivalent (ibid.). For instance, effort has been made to render pole dance to be tightly associated with the Japanese gym and fitness culture. According to the authors, in the Western world pole dance is not commonly associated with traditional gym and fitness activities – despite its popularity worldwide as well as in the West itself (ibid.).

Another example of the Japanese gym and fitness culture’s unique traits is the distinct separation of fitness and bodybuilding, as opposed to the West where the two are usually largely intertwined (Andreasson and Johansson 2017, 385). This is likely because of the supposedly low status that bodybuilding has in Japanese society and that it also is a male-dominated activity (ibid.). Unfortunately, the authors do not comment further on why bodybuilding and bodybuilders are considered low status in Japanese society.

Furthermore, Japanese women who do fitness do not – in difference to their female counterparts in the West – have a muscular physique as their goal, but instead strive for being “thin, fit and ‘cute’” (ibid.). According to an Australian physiotherapist residing in Tokyo whom the authors interviewed, even Japanese males do not mind being skinny or slim – he even says that Japanese people consider it healthy to be skinny (Andreasson and Johansson 2017, 389). A male Japanese gymgoer whom the authors interviewed also confirms this goal (ibid.). Speaking of the view on gender roles, although bodybuilding is a male-dominated field in Japan, the Japanese enterprise of fitness is female-dominated, similarly to the beauty and cosmetics businesses (Andreasson and Johansson 2017, 385).

Moreover, the authors observe that many of the gym facilities in Japan (or Tokyo specifically) are designed for “an affluent or middle-class and ageing population” and tend to
have a bigger focus on relaxation and stretching than gyms in for instance America (Andreasson and Johansson 2017, 387-388).

Unfortunately, although Andreasson and Johansson (2017) give interesting insights into the Japanese fitness and gym culture, almost no definite conclusions in regards to Korea can be drawn from the Japanese case. However, it is possible to make some careful assumptions regarding the issues of class and status and whether Korean bodybuilders are considered part of a certain class and/or status category. As mentioned above, the Japanese case shows that bodybuilders are associated with low status, although no explanation for this is given.

Another slightly distant yet perhaps pertinent case dealing with class and status issues in bodybuilding is the work by Baas (2017), in which he describes the growing popularity of bodybuilding and fitness in India. In his article based on his own fieldwork in Delhi, Michiel Baas from the National University of Singapore presents some observations pertaining to socio-economic class. He asserts that “the physical appearance of the male body is increasingly imagined to be an indicator, and facilitator, of socio-economic success,” which recently has caused a dramatic increase in the number of Indian gyms that specifically target the Indian middle class (Baas 2017, 10). While those who attend the gyms are usually hailing from higher middle class backgrounds, the profession of fitness and/or personal trainer attracts men of lower middle class background (ibid.). Baas (ibid.) emphasizes that this must be seen in the context of other professions in which employees and workers of lower class interact with customers and clients of upper middle class background. Baas (2017, 10-11) further asserts that the growing popularity of the personal trainer profession is linked to the “opportunities for social mobility and aspiring middle-classness[…];” that it enables for those who pursue the profession, since their clients are usually of the higher middle classes. In fact, Baas (2017, 11) found that how well a trainer can bridge the “ostensible gap in middle-classness” is an equally if not even more important factor for success in the Indian fitness industry than simply the look of the trainer’s body. Baas’ (ibid.) interactions with clients also confirm this, since the clients do not just look for a trainer who has a good/ideal physique but also someone who can “effectively ‘communicate’ about their bodies in terms of workout routines, dietary regimes and otherwise.” Furthermore, the author mentions how the tables have turned in terms of what was previously considered a body of someone belonging to a wealthy and prosperous middle class and a low-income working class respectively: having a “healthy potbelly” signified the former, while “veininess and lean muscularity” was associated with the latter (ibid.). Nowadays, Baas (ibid.) claims, it is rather the contrary.

While Andreasson and Johansson (2017) do not give any explanation for the low status of bodybuilders in Japan, one could assume that – just like the older times in India – the reason for their low status is that a fit and muscular body was (and still is) associated with those of lower labor classes. Accordingly, it would not be surprising if the case would be the same for Korea. Being a Confucian scholar or someone belonging to the Korean aristocracy, hard physical labor was not part of the daily chores and accordingly the typical physique of the upper classes was most certainly not resembling that of a bodybuilder or athlete.

However, as explained in subchapter 1.2 a class perspective is not applied in any of the Korean studies on bodybuilding that I have included in my study, so it is difficult to make any definite conclusions about this question. Furthermore, the lack of studies on Korean
bodybuilding focusing on the issues of socio-economic class opens up both the opportunity and urgency for future research on the matter.

Going back to Andreasson and Johansson’s (2017) case study, the authors do not give much information about the historical background of bodybuilding in Japan, except for mentioning that the gym and fitness culture started in the 1980s and 1990s. This is probably due to the fact that research on the subject in the case of Japan, just like the Korean case, is scarce – something that the authors mention themselves (Andreasson and Johansson 2017, 385).

Taking the authors’ findings into consideration, bodybuilding does not seem to be a historically old phenomenon in Japan – it seems to be just as old/new as it is in Korea, if not even younger. Moreover, Hwang and An (2004, 46) mention that Korea was six years ahead of Japan in terms of holding its first bodybuilding contest back in 1949, but do not comment further on the issue. If this is the case, it suggests that bodybuilders have been active in Japan for decades before the 1980s, although perhaps in a marginalized position due to the low status they are supposedly labeled with by Japanese society. Neither have I been able to find any other material or studies that deal with the history of Japanese bodybuilding, not to speak of studies dealing with the issue in the context of the colonial period.

However, Andreasson and Johansson’s (2017) study exposes an interesting and clear example of the hybridization thesis, since the gym and fitness culture is adapted to a Japanese context: not only are gyms adapted to Japanese preferences (tranquility and relaxation as opposed to the boisterousness and intensity that Western and American gyms are commonly associated with) but also the body ideals of people doing fitness (being slim and skinny rather than muscular and big). Whether Korea is a similar instance of the hybridization thesis remains to be discussed in the concluding chapter of my study.

### 2.4 Neo-Confucian Ideals about the Human Body

In this chapter, Neo-Confucian ideals pertaining to the human body will be examined. Certain general Confucian ideals and beliefs will also be discussed.

Confucianism (yugyo) originated from the teachings of the Chinese scholar Confucius (551–479 BC), and it became the official ideology in Korea during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910 AD) in the form of Neo-Confucianism (sŏngnihak). The Neo-Confucian ideology keeps influencing Korean society to this day, despite the many substantial changes the country has been through over the last century.

The teachings of Neo-Confucianism do not just encompass issues relating to – inter alia – the importance of education, social roles and how to achieve a harmonious state, but also the human body: how one should treat it, whom it “comes from,” etc. Considering this somatic aspect of Neo-Confucianism and that the concept of the (visible) human body is essential in bodybuilding, it might be of relevance to briefly examine the Neo-Confucian ideas about the human body.

In order to fully understand the somatic aspects of Neo-Confucianism, one first has to look into the cosmological and holistic aspects of not just the Neo-Confucian but also the Confucian ideology as a whole. In Confucianism, the entire universe is seen as one integrated unit: everything organic (including humans) and inorganic is connected with each other in a
“great chain of being” (Ekken 2007, 58-59). What connects everything and thus unifies the cosmos is *ki* (Chin.: *qi*), a material force that lives in all creatures, things and beings. The *ki* is believed to be crucial since it is seen not only as the unifying element of the cosmos, but also “constitutes the basis for a profound reciprocity between humans and the natural world” while being (according to Neo-Confucian thought) “the basis for the continuing process of change and transformation in the universe” (Ekken 2007, 59-60). The *ki* is also believed to be inherited from generation to generation, parent to child (Kim 2003, 99). Related to this, there is the anthropocosmic belief in Neo-Confucianism that the human being is “forming one being with Heaven and Earth,” i.e. the universe (Ekken 2007, 60-61). This renders human beings complete participants in the transformations taking place in the universe (Ekken 2007, 61).

Accordingly, the belief in *ki* and the interconnectedness between humans and the universe is what supports one crucial Neo-Confucian somatic principle called *sinch’aepalbu* (“body, hair, and skin”): that of the human body being sacred and that it thus shall remain unaltered and respected (Kim 2003, 98). Moreover, respecting one’s body is also seen as a form of filial piety – one respects the gift that one has received from one’s parents. In turn, this act of filial piety contributes to harmonizing the universe (Taylor 2004, 47).

An example of the belief in the importance of keeping the body intact was the reaction to the *Tanballyŏng* (the Short Hair Act), which was part of the *Kabo* Reforms that were implemented at the end of the 19th century (Nahm 2004, 165). Koreans, including men, did traditionally not cut their hair during their whole lives, but bundled it together in the form of a topknot. It was a sign of not just the Neo-Confucian society but also that of men’s integrity and authority in Korea. Accordingly, the ordinance to cut their hair met with riots and strong resistance from Neo-Confucian conservatives (ibid.). Furthermore, Holliday and Elfving-Hwang (2012, 76) mention that “Neo-Confucianism also emphasizes care of men’s bodies as well as their minds […]”

The Neo-Confucian idea of keeping the body unaltered has recently become an issue in the practice of cosmetic surgery. However, although cosmetic surgery has been seen as a violation of the traditional Neo-Confucian values and precepts about the human body (Elfving-Hwang 2013, 5, 7), it has in recent years come to be interpreted differently by some people. Due to the general Confucian ideals that one shall show filial piety to one’s parents and always strive to not only care for but also improve oneself, cosmetic surgery is nowadays also regarded by some Koreans as a means of doing just that: taking care of oneself and improving one’s image and status, thereby expressing filial piety and parental duty while also increasing one’s chances of success in both the job market and Korean society at large (Elfving-Hwang 2013, 1-2, 5). Cosmetic surgery has thus come to be interpreted by some as – in the words of Elfving-Hwang (2013, 7) – a “somatic sign of filial piety.”

Taking this into consideration, there could perhaps be a connection between bodybuilding and the Neo-Confucian concept of taking care of one’s body. Since the practice of bodybuilding could be equated to a form of “management” and even “improvement” of one’s body (which will be further examined in subchapter 2.6), there could potentially be a

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5 The references to Ekken are from a part of his work that is written by its translator and editor Mary Evelyn Tucker, thus not Kaibara Ekken himself.
connection between the two. However, it is not clear whether bodybuilding could be seen as a violation of the Neo-Confucian ideal of keeping the body intact, since it does not require any surgical procedures – unless steroids and other PED should be considered such.

Furthermore, there could potentially be other connections between bodybuilding and Confucianism in general that do not pertain to the human body per se. (However, people’s physical appearance has in practice become integral with these non-somatic Confucian values too, as we shall see.) As Wang (2015, 30) writes, “Confucianism puts a strong emphasis on academic and career success, which encourages people to strive for at least a baseline level of achievement and respectability.” As is discussed not just in the academic circles but also in mass media worldwide⁶, Korea is a highly competitive society in which for instance getting admitted to a top university or getting the best jobs requires one to put in the effort. In fact, recently even people’s physical appearance has become a merit for getting hired at a work place, exemplified by some résumés having a space for a photo of the applicant (ibid.; Stiles 2017).

This could bear one explanation for the practice of bodybuilding among Korean males: getting a bodybuilder’s physique might partly be a question of enhancing one’s competitiveness by turning one’s looks into something “impressive” and “over-average,” in turn enhancing one’s chances of success in the work place or society at large. However, as will be examined in the following two chapters, Korean society does not seem to consider the bodybuilder image a definition of success, status or respectability (or even ideal in terms of appearance). For this reason, Korean bodybuilding might not be an expression of Confucianism’s emphasis on success, career and status.

2.5 Modern Korean Beauty Standards for Males

In this subchapter, the modern Korean beauty standards for males will be investigated. As we shall see, major changes have taken place since the end of the 20th century in the popular Korean male image, challenging what in the past was considered an ideal Korean male.

Yi So-ŭn (2012) notes that since the late 1990s, the image of the typical male in Korean commercials has greatly changed; instead of a “muscular, wild and aggressive male who is successful in the public domain,” which was a very common feature in commercials from the 1970s, a new image of a “gentle” Korean male who has some “feminine” features and “moderate” amount of muscle is increasing (Yi 2012, 143).

This description of the typical image of the Korean male in commercials from the 1970s can be questioned, however. When looking at images of Korean commercials from that time (found on Google), the men do not resemble the image that Yi portrays, at least not in terms of their supposed “wild,” “aggressive” and “muscular” features. I however found an exception in the form of a poster for the Korean energy drink *Bacchus D*, that is from somewhere between the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s (see picture 5). It depicts two fairly muscular and flexed (undoubtedly male) arms whose hands are grabbing each other. One

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⁶ See for instance “South Korean students sit college entrance exam, aided by chants, prayers” by Reuters News Agency, published November 23rd 2017 in *The Telegraph*. 
could however argue that this is not a complete male representation, since it is only arms and not a whole body that is being displayed.

Whatever the typical male image up until the 1990s actually was, Holliday and Elfving-Hwang (2012) have also observed the growing Korean trend of a “softer” male image since the 1990s. They describe how Korean males in their twenties aspire to mimic the image of the so-called kkonminam (literally meaning “beautiful flower boy”), which is a popular image of boy-heroes in Korean manhwa (i.e. Korean comics and cartoons) and Japanese manga and anime. The authors assert that this image “has become increasingly prevalent since the late 1990s when popular boy bands began to sport the bishōnen [“beautiful boy” in Japanese] look already popular in Japan” (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012, 60-61). The kkonminam has “soft” features such as a less angular jaw, a smooth and hairless body and a prominent nose tip, however this generally “boyish” look also has some masculine features such as augmented pectoral and bicep muscles, which “give their bodies ‘definition’” (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012, 61). The authors further mention that the popularity of the kkonminam “seems to reflect a desire to break with earlier idealized masculinities which relied on traditional militarized images,” embracing an alternative, feminized masculinity that is less “hard” and more “soft” and “caring;” a contrast to the image of the typical Korean “cool, detached businessman” (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012, 73-74). The authors emphasize that this new effeminate image of masculinity does not have any connotations of gay sexuality, as opposed to what it likely would have in the West (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012, 74).

Roald Maliangkay of Australian National University also discusses this fairly recent feminization of male beauty in Korea (Maliangkay 2010). He attributes its origin to the rise of hallyu (the Korean Wave) in the late 1990s, when Korean pop culture in the form of TV-dramas (K-drama) and pop music (K-pop) received increasing recognition and popularity globally (Maliangkay 2010, 6). He asserts that the artists of this Korean soft power phenomenon “are widely considered kkonminam icons [by the Korean public],” including singer and actor Chŏng Chi-hun (known by his artist name Pi in Korean and Rain in English) and actor Pae Yong-jun (ibid.).

Furthermore, Maliangkay presents several other theories on the origin of and reasons for the popularity of the effeminate kkonminam image. He firstly mentions the popular assertion among scholars in East Asian cultural studies that the kkonminam originates from the Japanese yaoi genre of comics. As Maliangkay puts it, “[i]n the original Japanese yaoi comics, men are commonly depicted with somewhat elf-like features. They often engage in homosexual relationships, and are idealized as soft, sensitive and selfless” (ibid.). According to not just scholars in East Asian cultural studies but also publishers of Japanese magazines, the male characters in yaoi fiction satisfy a desire among women who long for men who have a combination of both masculine and feminine features (ibid.).

Maliangkay secondly mentions James Turnbull, the creator and writer of the website The Grand Narrative, who criticizes this popular assertion (ibid.). Turnbull finds the yaoi-theory anachronistic and claims that the kkonminam emerged when modern Korean literature and films in the 1990s began questioning the traditional Confucian gender roles (Maliangkay 2010, 6-7). According to Maliangkay, Turnbull further posits that Korean women started to desire a different kind of male image not just because of disillusionment with the traditional...
patriarchal gender roles, but also because women in the public sector were the first to be laid off due to the 1997 Asian financial crisis (Maliangkay 2010, 7). Maliangkay adds: “While the softer male image was therefore partly born out of criticism [of traditional Korean gender roles], it also had the potential to make the opposite sex look more powerful” (Maliangkay 2010, 7).

Maliangkay (2010) also puts forth his own theories regarding the issue of the origin and popularity of the kkonminam. One of them is that Korean teenage girls who have a strong interest in popular entertainment nowadays “favour artists who they perceive would not treat them as sexual objects of attraction but as equals,” and that they ”are less likely to find much appeal in the macho type that for decades dominated in popular entertainment,” since these men usually could not go to university and/or were unable to lead “normal, quiet lives” (Maliangkay 2010, 7). He further mentions that this ‘tough guy’ image was an accurate reflection of Korea’s historical experience with two military administrations and their cultural policies and the mandatory military service (that still exists today, albeit in reduced form) (ibid.).

Another of Maliangkay’s own theories is that the embracement of the kkonminam look could be a reaction to the demands of conformity and pressure from Korean society on males to be successful and provide for their families. Korean men therefore try to shun away from the conforming ideals of society and instead embrace an ideal that they find comfortable – however, they are still expected by both women and society at large not to be “too effeminate” or “questionable” in terms of their sexuality (ibid.).

Considering that both Holliday and Elfving-Hwang (2012) and Maliangkay (2010) observe a shift from a tougher, militarized masculinity to a softer, feminized one confirms at least in part what Yi (2012) asserts in her study. Yet, the traditional ideal of a Korean male who is successful in his work and provides for his family, and who in no way is questionable in terms of his sexual orientation, still remains.

Apart from the kkonminam trend itself (or perhaps even as a part of it), it has also been noted that Korean men pay more overall attention to their appearance than before. In a study by Yi, Chŏng and Pyŏn (2015, 867-870), it is concluded that Korean and also Chinese males between their twenties and forties nowadays pay substantial attention to taking care of their appearance in terms of both their body and clothing style, and that they also are sensitive to fashion trends. The authors further assert that the ideal masculinity image of these Korean and Chinese males has slightly shifted from a “traditional” to a “trendy” one, thus challenging the traditional East Asian hegemonic masculinity (Yi, Chŏng and Pyŏn 2015, 873).

Related to Korean males’ increased interest in appearance and fashion, it has also been observed that a growing number of Korean men are choosing to take on cosmetic surgery. In a South China Morning Post article published on July 24, 2017, Crystal Tai interviews Yi Hyŏn-t’aek, head surgeon and founder of the plastic surgery clinic Panobagi sŏnghyŏng oegwa located in Kangnam, Seoul, who claims that the number of male plastic surgery patients has increased by five to ten times since he began his profession in 2002 (Tai 2017).

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7 The name of this author is rendered in both Latin (Bian Lihua) and the Korean script han’gul (Pyŏn Ryŏ-hwa) in the article.
In the same article, Tai notes that Korean men nowadays have the “pretty boy look” (which is Tai’s own phrasing of the kkonminam look) as their ideal, which they partly achieve by going through cosmetic surgery (ibid.). Just like the academic researchers mentioned earlier in this subchapter argue, she attributes this new popular look to the artists and actors in K-pop, K-dramas and reality-TV makeover programs (ibid.). While Korean men who went through cosmetic surgery in the past were striving for a more “masculine” look in terms of their facial features, they nowadays look for a feminine, androgynous face that resembles that of K-pop idols and other Korean celebrities (ibid.). Rhinoplasty (“nose-jobs”), double eyelid surgery and jaw reduction surgery are some of the most common surgeries that Korean men choose. Tai (2017) also notes that cosmetics and beauty products marketed for men, such as BB cream and facial masks, are growing in sales.

Interestingly, Tai (2017) also emphasizes that while Korean men are striving for the “pretty boy” look in terms of their facial features, they also wish to have a “masculine” and muscular body. One of her interviewees, Joy Kang, CEO of the Singapore-based Korean plastic surgery concierge service Eunogo, says that this new ideal of a “young, cute-looking guy with a very muscular and toned body shape” is popularly called chimsing-dol (meaning “beast idol”) (ibid.). Although the chimsing-dol look gives more of a “masculine” impression, it is still – as implied by Kang’s comment – related to the kkonminam image in many aspects. Firstly, even the beast idols are “expected to have exceptionally good-looking faces and polished skin” (Oh 2015, 155); secondly, all Korean male idols (including those belonging to the chimsing-dol category) are expected to be “pretty” (Oh 2015, 156); and finally, not just kkonminam but also the chimsing-dol are “supposed to display some degree of aegyo8 regardless of their physical traits, performing personae, or styles” (ibid.). There are in other words similarities between the two images.

Kang further mentions that liposuction is a common surgical procedure nowadays, since Korean men want to achieve a six-pack without having to work out (Tai 2017). A growing number of Korean men also choose liposuction to reduce their breasts, since they consider them to be “man boobs” because of excessive fat stored in them (ibid.). Tai (2017) further points out that anti-ageing procedures, such as Botox and fillers, have become popular lately among Korean males (ibid.).

Except for the influence of Korean pop culture and its artists and idols, Korean men’s increasing care about their physical appearance could also be attributed to the fierce competition in the job market, in which one’s looks are also an important factor in getting the best jobs (Newell-Hanson 2016; Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012, 73). In fact, physiognomy (kwansanghak), which is the assessment of a person’s character solely based on the person’s physical appearance (particularly the face), has for a long time been an integral part of Korean culture (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012, 69-70). Many young Korean men and also women thus pursue a so-called ŏltchang (meaning “best face”) in order to maximize their positive impressions on other people, and thereby maximizing positive reactions from them (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012, 70). This could be yet another reason explaining

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8 Aegyo is a term for display of affection that involves “cute” and “child-like” gestures, facial expressions and voices. It is similar to the Japanese term kawaii.
why Korean men dedicate themselves to their outer appearance, so that they can navigate as freely as possible in the competitive and demanding Korean society.

In summary, the typical Korean male image and ideal have changed greatly since the 1990s. Instead of a traditional and to some extent even militarized male image, a soft and feminine yet heterosexual image has come to take its place. However, some traditional ideals about the male role still remain in Korean society – for instance, being homosexual or “too effeminate” is still considered unacceptable by society at large.

2.6 Bodybuilding – Reflecting Korean Society’s Beauty Standards, or a Stand-Alone Art Form?

Now that I have discussed the modern popular Korean beauty standards for males, I will in this section examine whether these standards are reflected among Korean bodybuilders and their aesthetic ideals. I will also briefly discuss not only how Korean bodybuilders are viewed by Korean society, but also the bodybuilders’ motivations for practicing their sport.

In a study by Yi So-ûn (2012), in which the author has conducted in-depth interviews with nine Korean male bodybuilders of various backgrounds and experience, it is concluded that the beauty of the bodybuilder physique does not lie in the look or size of the muscles themselves (Yi 2012, 132). Instead, the beauty lies in the difficulty in attaining the ideal physique – namely all the hard work that lies behind it, which does not just consist of the physical training itself but also the diet and food preparations, the sacrifice of relationships, etc. (Yi 2012, 156-160). As the interviewed subjects mention themselves, the physique of a bodybuilder is a living proof of hard work and effort; and it is in the exhibition of this where their satisfaction lies (ibid.). However, some of the interviewees also mention that they started practicing bodybuilding for reasons pertaining to their physical appearance: some of them wanted to lose weight and thus started working out, while others had complexes which they wanted to overcome through training (Yi 2012, 150).

The interviewees also say that they sometimes get negative comments on their physiques, such as “you’ve gotten fat” (“tungittunghaejóta”) and “that’s disgusting” (“chinggurópta”) (Yi 2012, 158). However, the bodybuilders do not mind these remarks, since they claim that it is only “ordinary people” who neither work out nor know anything about bodybuilding themselves who make these comments (ibid.). Nor do the interview subjects care about women’s preferences in terms of physical appearance – their practice of bodybuilding is thus independent from a will to improve their sexual appeal or satisfying women’s desires (Yi 2012, 159-160).

Furthermore, the interviewees mention the Korean word momtchang (meaning “best body”) and how they dislike being compared to the popular standard of Korean celebrities’ fit bodies (yǒnyein momtchang). In the eyes of the interviewees, these yǒnyein momtchang do not reach the standards of an acceptable bodybuilder physique – one of the interviewees even said that all these celebrities do is losing body fat so that their abs become visible, and that “there are many more different aspects in bodybuilding [than that]” (Yi 2012, 158). Furthermore, the interviewees say that as one practices bodybuilding, one develops certain “eyes” for judging whether someone has a good physique. These eyes are something that “ordinary people” do
not possess, and some of the interviewees mention that a physique that they themselves in their early days of training considered “big” and therefore “great” nowadays would be considered “just fat” by them (Yi 2012, 156-157).

Taking Yi’s (2012) findings into consideration, the aesthetic ideals of Korean bodybuilders seem to be more or less completely unrelated (or even opposed) to the popular beauty standards of “ordinary,” non-bodybuilding Koreans. Even having a yŏnyein momtchang is not good enough for the bodybuilders, exemplified by one of them emphasizing that there is more to bodybuilding than simply having six-pack abs.

Nor do the bodybuilders mention anything about the kkonminam look or that they in any way are striving to embrace a “soft” or “effeminate” look; and neither do they mention anything about the chimsŭng-dol image, cosmetic surgery or beauty products for men. Although the bodybuilders do find their own body’s aesthetics in and of themselves important, for instance in terms of “muscle definition” and “balance” (Yi 2012, 156), the main beauty standard for the interviewed bodybuilders is all the hard work that lies behind it, which in turn is reflected in its appearance (Yi 2012, 159-160). To the Korean bodybuilders, what matters most is their pride and satisfaction that lie in their worn body exposing their effort and hard work – something that only people who practice bodybuilding themselves will fully understand and appreciate. Furthermore, they consider themselves having the “proper eyes” and thus the ability to properly judge who has a good or mediocre physique. In the opinion of the bodybuilders, “ordinary people” who do not practice bodybuilding simply do not possess these eyes and thus cannot judge what constitutes a momtchang by (Korean) bodybuilders’ standards.

It could be argued that the testimonies of the nine bodybuilders suggest that bodybuilding is a form of tribalism and subculture that opposes the mainstream culture – the bodybuilders do not pay attention to other people’s comments (unless they are bodybuilders themselves), the popular Korean trends or what most Korean people consider momtchang and visually appealing. To the bodybuilders, it is solely their own community and its standards and judgements that matter. By being a part of this community, they stand out from the rest of the Korean crowd.

The bodybuilders’ pride and satisfaction could be interpreted as an expression of the Confucian ideals of self-improvement, discipline and hard work – and even filial piety, similarly to the way cosmetic surgery has come to be viewed recently. Whereas some might see bodybuilding as solely an expression of vanity and body-obsession, the satisfaction and pride of the bodybuilders can be found in their physiques being a visual sign of self-improvement, hard work and struggle, and not just in the sense of being visually appealing and impressive on their own.

One could also suggest that this is an example of the hybridization thesis of globalization’s cultural consequences, since the original concept of bodybuilding comes from the West and partly has connections to Christianity and perhaps even to the Protestant work ethic (as discussed in subchapter 2.1.), while even some Confucian ideals can be applied to the sport. However, whether Korean bodybuilders’ aesthetic ideals and motivations are a product of a combination of a Western sport and Confucianism, or just one or the other, cannot be confirmed unless one inquires Korean bodybuilders themselves about this issue. (This will be dealt with in the next chapter.)
As for the motivations of Yi’s (2012) interview subjects, the author found the following general motivations that made them start practicing bodybuilding: 1) changing one’s physique or image associated with it, either by losing fat or gaining muscle mass, and 2) learning how to manage one’s time (Yi 2012, 150-151).

However, the motivations for starting to practice bodybuilding were not the same as the ones that made the interviewees continue practicing their sport. Instead of being an “abstract” motive pertaining to for instance one’s body image, the main motive for the bodybuilders to continue with their sport was a “short-term and concrete goal” (Yi 2012, 151). The interviewees exemplify this by explaining how they aim for continuously progressing on their lifts and that “being good at setting up goals is itself a prerequisite for a proper bodybuilder” (Yi 2012, 151-152). Relating to this, the bodybuilders say that bodybuilding is about “change” (pyŏnhwa), i.e. getting stronger – for instance by being able to lift twenty kilograms heavier weight than before on a certain exercise (Yi 2012, 160-161). Having control (t’ongjegam) of this change of one’s body is also something that the bodybuilders consider important, since it gives them a feeling of confidence (chasin’gam) and self-esteem (chajon’gam); and this becomes more important the longer they train (Yi 2012, 160-164). They further mention how they constantly try to push the limits of what their bodies can become, so that they can improve even more (Yi 2012, 163).

Taking the nine bodybuilders’ own thoughts and comments into consideration, one could argue that as people venture into bodybuilding their motivation for continuing with the sport changes from an exclusively appearance-focused kind to a pursuit for self-control (which in turn improves one’s confidence and self-esteem) and a will to constantly change one’s body and break borders and thresholds. This is also reflected in the bodybuilders saying that they ignore what “ordinary people” say about their physiques, and that they in turn emphasize that only bodybuilders themselves can properly judge a bodybuilder physique. If the judgment of the majority of Korean society does not matter to the bodybuilders, why would they continue to practice their sport only for the sake of impressing others than themselves and the relatively small number of Korean bodybuilders?

In the end, it seems as if the motivations of the nine Korean bodybuilders are based on the ideals and standards of a subculture or confined community rather than the popular standards and ideals of Korean society. It is not mainly about looking like a kkonminam or celebrity, but about working hard and exposing the hard work through one’s body – albeit only a small number of people with the “proper eyes” can fully appreciate one’s beauty. However, would not the chimsŭng-dol image, considering its “masculine,” “toned” and “muscular” body be considered ideal or at least acceptable in the eyes of a Korean bodybuilder?

In order to answer this, and also to confirm (or disprove) what Yi (2012) has found in her study, we now turn to the words of Korean bodybuilders whom I have asked self-made questions to.
3. Words of Two Korean Bodybuilders

As mentioned earlier in my study, I sent a digital questionnaire made in Google Forms to Korean bodybuilders that I chose at random on Instagram. I sent the questionnaire to a total of eleven bodybuilders, of whom only two answered. The survey consisted of the following questions:

1. Please introduce yourself briefly! Tell me if you have participated in a bodybuilding contest, what you are working with, etc.
2. Why did you start practicing bodybuilding? What motivated you to start? What motivates you to keep training?
3. As a bodybuilder, do you think that the ideal body of male bodybuilders is different to what Korean people find as the ideal male body? Why do you think so?
4. Do you think Korean bodybuilding has certain characteristics compared to Western bodybuilding? Why do you think so?
5. Do you think that the ideal appearance and aesthetic ideals of Korean male bodybuilders are the same or different to those of Western bodybuilders? Why do you think so?
6. Do you think that the motivations of Western bodybuilders and Korean bodybuilders are similar to or different from each other? Why do you think so?
7. As a bodybuilder, what do you think about the konminam and chimsung-dol image? Why do you think so?
8. Have you ever experienced positive or negative reactions from other people in Korea solely because of you being a bodybuilder? In your opinion, do Korean people have any prejudice or bias towards bodybuilders? If they do, what are they?
9. Do you think that bodybuilding is related to Confucianism (with its concepts of discipline, filial piety, sinch’apalbu, etc.)? Why do you think so?
10. Do you think that bodybuilding is related to cosmetic surgery? Why do you think so?
11. What are you most proud of regarding bodybuilding? Why is it so?

The first respondent of the survey is a man named Sŏl Ki-gwan (see picture 6). According to his reply to the first question of the survey, he is four times winner and representative athlete of the Republic of Korea in the World Championship in Men’s Classic Bodybuilding, which is one of the many championships that the IFBB holds. He also adds that he is a trainer and that he holds “practical lectures [silgi kanggūl] at university.” He does not specify what university he lectures at, or exactly what kind of “practical lectures” he is holding; one has to assume that they address bodybuilding or fitness in general.

The second respondent chooses to be anonymous, however he says that he is currently working as a “professional fitness trainer” (ch’aeoryŏk tallyŏn chŏnmun t’üreinŏ) as well as being a “physique athlete” (p’ijik’u sŏnsu).

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9 See the appendix for the questions written in Korean (the original form).
On the second question, Sŏl says that he has been interested in sports since he was young and that he started training bodybuilding after a suggestion from a friend. He has now practiced bodybuilding for about nineteen years, and he mentions that what has kept him and still keeps him training is that he “has a fascination [with bodybuilding]”. The second respondent said that he initially found it interesting that bodybuilding in difference to other sports “does not depend upon sheer luck” and that he started to practice it because of his interest in the human anatomy and nutrition.

As we can see, what made the respondents of my survey start practicing bodybuilding is neither the same as that of each other, nor that of the interview subjects in Yi’s (2012) study. The nine bodybuilders that Yi (2012) interviewed had either 1) a will to change their bodies and/or the image related to them, or 2) a wish to learn proper time management as their triggering factors. Instead, in the case of Sŏl his own interest in sports and a suggestion from a friend led him to start with what he nowadays competes internationally in. Unfortunately, since he does not give a more elaborate answer to the question it is not possible to be entirely sure what the so-called fascination with the sport that keeps him practicing it really is. It could possibly be the same wish of the nine bodybuilders in Yi’s (2012) study to constantly change their bodies and break thresholds while also having a sense of control over their own body. However, one can only speculate what it is that Sŏl precisely finds so fascinating about bodybuilding. Here, as mentioned in 1.5 a major weakness of my choice of inquiry is obvious. A request for an explanation and clarification of what he finds so attractive about bodybuilding could have been made if I had conducted a live interview with him.

Neither does the second respondent’s reply resonate with the motivations and triggering factors of the bodybuilders in Yi’s (2012) study. Whereas the latter had motivations pertaining to a wish for improvement in terms of their own bodies and/or time management, respondent number two of my survey simply had a curiosity for a supposedly unique trait of bodybuilding and closely related issues (the human anatomy and nutrition) as his motivating factors. He does not specify whether these interests are what keeps him engaged in bodybuilding; his reply suggests that he probably ignored the part of my question inquiring about this issue. Again, a shortcoming of my choice of research method becomes clear in this instance.

As for the third question of the survey, the first respondent asserts that (male) Korean bodybuilders prefer a “slightly bigger body with a slightly more balanced beauty” than most ordinary Koreans, and that the latter can “feel aversion to a body that is too big.” However, he also points out that people seem to show understanding for male bodybuilders if their physique – although being “slightly [too] big” – is “balanced.”

The second respondent says that the ideal male body of bodybuilders is one that has “clear separation [of the muscles]” (sep’ŏreisyŏn-i tturyŏtham) and “strong muscles of high quality” (kangdo nop’ŭn kŭnjil), whereas the equivalent of ordinary Koreans is a body that does not have a protruding belly and can be managed even if one consumes delicious food and dines together with people – an ideal that he considers “unrealistic [to achieve and maintain].” Since Sŏl’s reply is fairly short and does not go further into detail, it is difficult to obtain any new insights worth commenting further upon about the question. It can at least be concluded that as a Korean male bodybuilder, it might be an advantage to have a well-balanced body as opposed to just having a “big” one.
As for the second respondent, he focuses less on the size aspect of bodybuilders and instead mentions ideals pertaining to the look and quality of the muscles themselves. This suggests that the Post-Classic aesthetic ideal is not as strongly influential in Korea as in the West, however the respondent’s reply to question number five (which will be addressed below) contradicts this conclusion. As for the male body ideal of the Korean masses, he thinks that they wish to have a body that in his view is unrealistic due to contradictory wishes: having no protruding belly while eating delicious food together with others.

What is also worth mentioning regarding the second respondent’s reply is his use of the word kŭnjil in his description of ”strong muscles of high quality.” It seems to be a form of slang and/or vogue word used among Korean bodybuilders and does not appear in any official Korean dictionary. I assume that it is a combination of the words kŭnyuk (muscle) and chil (which has several meanings, but is usually translated to “quality” in English) – hence my translation. For instance, there is a website named Kaegŭnjil tatk’ŏm (www.ggjl.com) that provides information on Korean bodybuilding and bodybuilders. While Korean bodybuilders use a lot of English and thus foreign terminology for their sport (such as the very name of the sport itself), kŭnjil is an instance of how they have created new terminology that is adapted to a Korean, i.e. local context. Therefore, one could propose that the creation and usage of kŭnjil is an example of glocalization (see subchapter 1.2), which would support the hybridization thesis.

Furthermore, neither the first nor second respondent mentions anything about the yöneyein momtchang or the seemingly popular kkomminam or chimsŭng-dol images in their answers to the third question, except when explicitly asked about these in the seventh question. This indicates that neither image is especially popular or actively pursued by Korean male bodybuilders.

Sŏl gives an interesting (however dubious) answer to the fourth question. In his view, Korean bodybuilding has something that he calls “balanced beauty” (kyunhyŏngmi) in comparison to the Western counterpart. He further adds that Korean bodybuilders “do not use excessive amounts of drugs” and that they “pursue a balanced development of their physiques,” which I assume he suggests are the reasons for Korean bodybuilders’ apparent “balanced beauty.”

Although I find Sŏl’s testimony to be fully true in his own case, I find his claim that Korean bodybuilders do not use drugs in excessive amounts very doubtful. Even though many other bodybuilders in Korea and also other countries are natural bodybuilders, i.e. bodybuilders who do not use steroids, PED or other drugs, claiming that there are no Korean bodybuilders who use drugs “in excess” is indeed a bold statement. If it indeed is true that Korean bodybuilders do not use drugs in excess compared to bodybuilders in other countries, it could be a sign of the Neo-Confucian ideal that one should not interfere with one’s body or change it by artificial means. In this case, it would support the hybridization thesis.

Not just Sŏl but also respondent number two believes that there are differences between Western and Korean bodybuilding. He asserts that “the size of the muscles is huge” in Western bodybuilding, while – similarly to what he mentioned in his reply to the previous question – Korean bodybuilding is characterized by “strong muscles of high quality” and “divided muscles” (punhaldoen kŭnyuk).
The replies from both respondents suggest that there indeed are some differences between Western and Korean bodybuilding in not only aesthetics but (allegedly) also in the use of drugs. To confirm these assertions, one would also have to ask Western bodybuilders who have some insight into the Korean bodybuilding world for their opinions on the matter. For now, however, one could claim that Korean bodybuilding is less focused on sheer muscle size and instead more so on the quality (kŭn'gang) of the muscles and their separations. This suggests that Korean bodybuilding is an instance of the hybridization thesis, since it is an originally Western sport that has taken on its own local characteristics – in other words being a prime example of glocalization. However, this assumption renders dubious when looking at their respective reply to the following question.

Unfortunately, Sŏl says that he cannot answer the fifth question since he does not know what Western bodybuilders are thinking about the issue. He gives the same answer to the following question. However, the second respondent replies to both of these questions that he believes that the case is “the same” for Western and Korean bodybuilders.

As implied above, what is slightly contradictory with both respondents’ replies to the fifth question is that they both on the one hand (as stated in their answers to question four) believe that there are differences between Western and Korean bodybuilding, while on the other hand Sŏl says that he “does not know” whether there are differences in the ideal appearance and aesthetic ideals and the second respondent believes them to be “the same.” If indeed Korean bodybuilders are more “beautifully balanced” than their Western counterparts and if muscle size truly matters more to the latter than the former, would not that be considered differences in what one believes to be the ideal appearance and aesthetically desirable? Possibly, the respondents might intend to say in their replies to the fourth question that these differences are simply a result of genetic differences between Koreans and Western peoples (for instance in terms of muscle size and body shape), in turn being unrelated to the intentions of the bodybuilders. It is however not clear and hence not possible to confirm what they actually intend to say.

Sŏl’s reply to the seventh question is slightly different to what I had expected, considering what Yi (2012) found in her study. In Sŏl’s opinion, both the kkonminam and the chimsŭng-dol have their own charm. He adds that this is because both of them are aesthetic “from other aspects.” “But” – he further adds – “as a bodybuilder, one prefers the chimsŭng-dol,” and he attributes this to the image’s “healthy beauty” (kŏn’gangmi).

The second respondent’s answer to this question ties into the feminine features of the kkonminam, since he thinks that it is “a style that women prefer.” As for the chimsŭng-dol image, he believes that both men and women prefer it and that it can be “a potentially motivating [form of] existence” (tonggi puyŏ-ga toelmanhan chonjae).

I had expected an answer from both respondents in the style of those of the respondents in Yi’s (2012) study. Instead of dismissing the chimsŭng-dol image in the same way the bodybuilders in Yi’s (2012) study rejected the yŏnyein momtchang, Sŏl does not seem to have any critical remarks or dismissive attitude about it. The case rather seems to be the contrary, in that he thinks that the chimsŭng-dol has a “healthy beauty.” The other respondent seems to have a similar attitude towards the chimsŭng-dol, since he even considers it to be a “potentially motivating [form of] existence.” As for the kkonminam image, Sŏl considers it as well as the image of the “beast idol” to be charming and aesthetic in its own way and from
certain viewpoints. However, the other respondent does not seem to consider the *kkonminam* to be desirable for male bodybuilders, since he says that it is “a style that women prefer.”

Nevertheless, as discussed in subchapter 1.5, it is difficult to clearly decipher the replies of the respondents. As for Sŏl’s reply, it cannot be concluded whether he considers the “beast idol” image to be desirable *in and of itself* among bodybuilders, or if he simply believes that it is the most desirable image *if one only could choose between the two.*

In the case of the second respondent, the way he replied to the question renders it uncertain whether he answered the seventh question specifically from a bodybuilder’s perspective, although I had emphasized that the reply should be made from that specific viewpoint. In difference to that of the first respondent, his reply does not explicitly tie into how particularly bodybuilders look at the issue, but rather reflects the perspective of Korean men and women in general.

As for the following question on positive and negative responses from Korean society, Sŏl replies that there are on the one hand people who find his body good-looking, and on the other hand those who are “ignorant” (*musikhada*) in their perception of it. He also adds that many people tend to consider bodybuilders to be “sincere” (*sŏngsirhada*), since they are aware that bodybuilding requires a lot of effort in the sculpting process of the physique. However, he concludes his answer by commenting that there are also some people who (wrongly) believe that bodybuilders lose their flexibility because of their training.

The second respondent gives an answer pertaining to natural bodybuilders versus those who use steroids. He says that although the former stick to their diets and “struggle with themselves” (*chagi-wa ssaum-ŭl hada*) in order to get on the bodybuilding stage, there yet exist some prejudices that “might be due to the strong influence of steroids in bodybuilding.” “For instance” – he continues – “people think that athletes no matter what have to take drugs, or else they cannot win [bodybuilding contests]; like in this kind of manner.”

The testimony of Sŏl implies that there is seemingly no great bias regarding bodybuilders or bodybuilding in Korean society. He has seemingly not experienced any (serious) discrimination by Korean society solely because of him being a bodybuilder. In fact, some Korean people apparently even consider bodybuilders to be “sincere” in the sense that it takes significant hard work to sculpt and maintain a bodybuilder physique. The types of comments that the interview subjects of Yi’s (2012) study have experienced, such as “you’ve gotten fat,” do not seem to be present in Sŏl’s case. Furthermore, Sŏl’s answer does not show any attitude similar to that of the nine bodybuilders in Yi’s (2012) study: people’s judgments are not dismissed simply because of a supposed lack of “proper eyes.”

In difference to Sŏl, the second respondent does not present any positive reactions form people but only accounts for the prejudice that bodybuilders “no matter what” have to take steroids in order to win a bodybuilding contest. Although this indeed is a negative prejudice, it is still slightly different in nature compared to the negative remarks that Yi’s (2012) subjects bring up. The prejudice does not (at least explicitly) pertain to disgust or aversion, but instead to the supposed requirements and prerequisites for bodybuilders to win bodybuilding contests. It is however dubious whether he means to say that this is a prejudice among non-bodybuilding Koreans, Korean bodybuilders themselves (and also others who are involved in the bodybuilding community and realm of fitness) or even Koreans in general. Since I wrote “Korean people” in the question and not explicitly “Korean people not being
bodybuilders themselves,” he might have misunderstood my question. Again, this shows the flaws of sending a survey to people instead of conducting a live interview with them during which clarifications can be made.

As for the ninth question, the second respondent simply replies, “I do not know,” whereas Sŏl gives his answer from a slightly unexpected viewpoint. He sees the connections between bodybuilding and Confucianism from the perspective of what happens in the gym/training facility itself, rather than that of the phenomenon or concept of bodybuilding as a whole. He says the following: “As one starts training for the first time, one learns basic manners such as greeting [others] and putting the [training] equipment into order. So I think that there is a relationship with Confucianism.”

Sŏl’s reply suggests that there might be a Confucian dimension to certain “gym manners.” Greeting others in the gym and cleaning up one’s used training equipment could be seen as a sign of Confucianism’s emphasis on developing one’s morals, and even filial piety in the broad sense. One could however argue that since Sŏl does not mention exactly whom he greets in the gym (whether it is trainers, people he already knows, or strangers), it might not be a specific Confucian trait. Furthermore, greeting others whom one recognizes or often meets in the gym is not uncommon in Western gyms either. Yet, considering that Sŏl puts the act of greeting others in the gym as the first issue, he probably considers it to be more important than what the average Western bodybuilder would. Furthermore, the act of greeting and also welcoming ceremonies are crucial features in the Korean culture. One example is a scene in the Korean film My Paparotti (P’ap’aro’ti) from 2013, where friends of the main character named Kim Ho-jung greet his music teacher. Despite being members of a criminal gang, they suddenly change their behavior and politely greet the teacher with bows and formal salutations – a behavior that one probably would not expect from typical criminals. Moreover, in the end of the film Kim bows down all the way to the ground before his teacher at the airport to show his gratitude to him. Albeit being a fictional film, these two scenes were most likely not intended to be mainly comical, absurd or alien to the Korean viewer: greeting and welcoming others, especially those who are considered one’s superiors and/or seniors, is a feature of the Korean culture that is too important to be excluded, even if the situation which it appears in can seem absurd at first glance.

However, the action of putting training equipment such as weights one has used back into order is definitely part of “common etiquette” in gyms in the West too10. Therefore, I would argue that at least the second example is more a matter of common etiquette in the general fitness and gym community rather than a specific trait of the Korean Confucian mindset.

Accordingly, provided that the act of greeting others in the gym is indeed more commonplace in Korea than in gyms in the West and elsewhere in the world, it is possible to suggest that Sŏl’s observations are a manifestation of the hybridization thesis of globalization: the originally Western bodybuilding and gym culture and its unwritten rules and etiquette are adapted to a Korean and Confucian context, thereby creating a cultural hybrid.

However, to me it is unknown whether Korean bodybuilders behave differently to bodybuilders from other countries and cultures in the gym, and whether the atmosphere and

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10 See for instance "Gym Etiquette: Racking Weights 101” published on Muscularstrength.com (publishing date not specified).
culture of Korean gyms are much different to that of others. Unfortunately, Sŏl’s answer does not give any more suggestions regarding this issue. Neither have I been able to find any information by browsing videos on YouTube that show Korean bodybuilders training in the gym. Furthermore, since respondent number two does not know whether there is a connection to Confucianism or not, it is difficult to draw more conclusions about this question based on my survey. This further confirms the need for fieldwork in Korean gyms.

While Sŏl believes that bodybuilding has a connection to Confucianism, his reply to the tenth question reveals that he does not believe so about cosmetic surgery. He says that this is because “there are more positive outcomes [of bodybuilding] than cosmetic surgery” and that “maintaining a well-tended body through exercise is easy, but there are many side effects of plastic surgery […]”

Seemingly, Sŏl does not think that bodybuilding is an expression of self-improvement in the same way that cosmetic surgery has come to be regarded recently – perhaps because he, judging by the tone of his answer, might be negatively inclined towards cosmetic surgery in general. Had I formulated the question differently by explicitly inquiring about his view on the supposed self-improvement aspect of cosmetic surgery and its potential connections or similarities to bodybuilding, his answer might have been different.

The second respondent makes a clear distinction between natural bodybuilding and bodybuilding involving steroids on this issue. While he believes that cosmetic surgery cannot be equated to natural bodybuilding, he considers bodybuilding that involves steroids to be a form of cosmetic surgery. He does not clarify or motivate why he thinks so. One could make the careful assumption that he believes so because he sees steroids as an artificial way of altering the body – which in turn could be a sign of a Neo-Confucian mindset.

Sŏl’s reply to the eleventh and conclusive question opens up for discussion too. He says that he is proud of the health and body that he has achieved through bodybuilding, and adds that he also takes pride in the fact that he has never used any illegal drugs such as steroids.

What is fascinating about this answer is his emphasis on health: for Sŏl Ki-gwan, the health that he has achieved seems to be more important than simply “looking huge.” Thus, he does not seem to have a “mass-at-all-costs” mindset, in difference to those who pursue the Post-Classic physique (see subchapter 2.1). This does not in any way equate a disregard for the bodily aesthetics, however it suggests that a “healthy” bodybuilder look which is closer to the American Classic aesthetic is more desirable among Korean bodybuilders than Western ones, who rather opt for the “massive,” Post-Classic look. However, as mentioned in 2.1, the recent introduction of IFBB’s competition category Classic Physique suggests that the rather “healthy” as opposed to “huge” look is gaining popularity also in the West.

One could also argue that Sŏl’s pride in his attainment of a healthy body is comparable to the mindset of the nine bodybuilders interviewed in Yi’s (2012) study, since they find satisfaction and pride in showing off their efforts through their physiques. Although they do not emphasize “(the beauty of) health,” Sŏl’s mindset bares similarities in the sense that he is proud of the body that he has achieved by his own sincere efforts only.

The second respondent’s answer to the final question is also worth commenting upon. He says the following: “I am proud of the self-struggle and the effort and sincerity [that I am putting in] in order to win over my past self in the preparations for the next competition, [and also of] myself who constantly move forward.”
The term “self-struggle” (chagi-wa ssaum) seems to be a keyword among Korean male bodybuilders. Firstly, the second respondent mentions it in not just his reply above but also in his response to the eighth question. Secondly, one of the interviewed bodybuilders in Yi’s (2012, 159) study also mentions the “self-struggle” as “the greatest thing [in bodybuilding].” This suggests that self-struggle is a common ideal among Korean bodybuilders: it is something they are proud of and consider important in their sport. Furthermore, “effort” (noryŏk) seems to be another crucial part of Korean bodybuilders’ mindset: not just both respondents of my survey mentions this in their answers (the first respondent to the eight question; the second one to the eleventh one), but also the interviewees in Yi’s (2012) study emphasize the importance of it throughout the article. Considering this, not only has the second respondent of my survey clearly a similar mindset to the bodybuilders presented in Yi’s (2012) study, but also “self-struggle” and “effort” seem to be integral parts of Korean (male) bodybuilding in general.

There are also two other words that seem to be important in Korean bodybuilding. The first one, sŏngsil, is not only mentioned in the second respondent’s answer to the last question but also in the first respondent’s reply to the eight question. Sŏngsil can be translated to “sincerity” or “faithfulness,” and it could be argued that this is an instance of a Confucian influence on the mindset of Korean bodybuilders. This is supported by a quote that was supposedly uttered by Confucius himself, which can be found in the famous work Analects of Confucius: “Hold faithfulness and sincerity as first principles and be moving continually toward what is right” (Dawson 2005, 31). Although the second respondent claims that he does not know if there is a connection between Confucianism and bodybuilding, one could argue that he has internalized a Confucian mindset regarding bodybuilding – at least to a certain degree. It is therefore possible to suggest that the emphasis on sincerity/faithfulness in Korean bodybuilding is yet another confirmation of the hybridization thesis. This also ties back to Yi’s (2012) study in which she mentions that sŏngsilsŏng (which literally means “sincere/faithful nature” in English) is a characteristic of the Protestant work ethic, which in turn is reflected in bodybuilding.

The second keyword can be found in the part of the second respondent’s reply to the concluding question saying “[...] [and also of] myself who constantly move forward.” The Korean word is pyŏnhamŏpsi, which literally means “changelessly,” however I translated it to “constantly” in order to render the translation natural in English. Of course, the respondent does not mean to say that he does not want his body to change: it is his mind and the path he has chosen that he intends to never change, while continuing to pursue his goal and moving forward. This can also be seen as an instance of a Confucian mindset, when considering the Chinese Confucian philosopher Jizi who emphasized that avoiding biases and keeping on the right path is the way towards a realization of harmony (Li 2014, 85).

In conclusion, the replies from both the bodybuilders in my survey and those in Yi’s (2012) study show that although there are differences between them, for instance in terms of what caused them to start practicing the sport, they also bear similarities to each other. Although not explicitly stated by the respondents of my survey, their answers suggest that Korean bodybuilders highly value the self-struggle and effort that they have to put in to achieve their physiques – just like the bodybuilders in Yi’s (2012) study explicitly state. The first respondent of my survey is proud of the “healthy body” that he has achieved only through
sheer effort and no drugs, while the second respondent is similarly proud of his “self-struggle,” “effort” and “sincerity” that has brought him to where he currently is and will continue to help him achieve his goal. Notwithstanding both respondents’ emphasis on certain aesthetic aspects such as “balanced beauty” and “strong muscles of high quality,” the emphasis is less on the looks of the physiques themselves and more on the struggle to achieve them. Moreover, the words of not only the survey’s two respondents but also of the nine bodybuilders in the study by Yi (2012) do not reveal any aspirations for getting as “huge” as possible, thus suggesting that the Post-Classic aesthetic ideal is not as popular in Korean bodybuilding as in the Western counterpart. Furthermore, despite the second respondent being seemingly unaware of the Confucian influences on bodybuilding, reading between the lines of his replies to other questions suggests that there are at least some Confucian connections with the sport. In fact, I would argue that the replies from both bodybuilders of my survey indicate that they do in fact “unconsciously” agree with the Neo-Confucian ideal that emphasizes the immorality of interfering with one’s body. Firstly, both of them seem to opt for the American Classic physique, which can be achieved without the use of drugs (or at least without excessive amounts of such). The first respondent claiming that he has not taken a single drug during his whole bodybuilding career and that he is proud of this fact exemplifies this. Secondly, both bodybuilders seem to be negatively inclined towards cosmetic surgery in general, which albeit being a separate issue gives us a glimpse of their general mindset about the human body.

These findings thus suggest that as for the case of Korean bodybuilding, the hybridization thesis is the best applicable among the theses of the cultural consequences of globalization.

4. Conclusion

Summarizing the findings in the above chapters, the research questions of my study can be answered as follows. The motivations for Korean male bodybuilders to practice their sport vary on an individual level, however there is a common theme: the pride and satisfaction that they achieve through the arduous process of sculpting their physiques, rather than the final product itself. Effort, self-struggle, sincerity/faithfulness and a determined mindset are all crucial components of the process, while the physique is the living proof of their hard work.

As to Korean bodybuilders’ perceptions of an aesthetically ideal body, the answer is ambiguous since the respondents of my survey give contradictory comments on this particular question. On the one hand, having a “beautifully balanced” physique with “strong muscles” that are “clearly separated” and of “high quality” seems to be ideal in the eyes of Korean bodybuilders. “Health” seems to be another important factor in what they consider a body to be proud of. These ideals are also confirmed by the findings in the other material used in this study. Thus, simply being “massive” in parity to the Western so-called Post-Classic ideal does not seem to be the highest aspiration of Korean bodybuilders. On the other hand, however, the answer of the second respondent of my survey suggests that both the aesthetic ideals and motivations for Korean bodybuilders “are the same” as those of the Western ones. If this would be the case, Korean bodybuilders would also opt for the Post-Classic physique with its
emphasis on mass and size rather than health and symmetry. Considering these contradictory findings, it is too early to give a definite answer to this research question.

The next research question, on the other hand, is slightly easier to answer clearly. As for the somatic values of Neo-Confucianism, in difference to cosmetic surgery, bodybuilding does not seem to be a controversial issue. However, as for Confucian values in general, one of the survey’s respondents claims that there are some connections with Confucianism in Korean bodybuilding: not as a phenomenon per se but in its execution in the gym/training facility. One can discern that the other respondent, too, unconsciously has a Confucian mindset about the sport, since he emphasizes the importance of “sincerity”/”faithfulness” (sŏngsil/sŏngsilsŏng). Furthermore, a Neo-Confucian mindset can be seen in that the respondents consider altering one’s body by artificial means an immoral act. Some of the other research material in this study also implicitly confirms the Confucian influences on Korean bodybuilders. The satisfaction and pride that they find in their bodies being a visual product of self-improvement and hard work and their pursuit for constant changes in their bodies tie into Confucian concepts such as filial piety, the importance of success and constant self-improvement.

As for the modern Korean male beauty ideals, it seems as if Korean bodybuilders are generally not particularly concerned about them. Parts of the research material in my study suggest that they even have a dismissive attitude toward what the Korean general public considers to be the “best body.” Being “slightly bigger and balanced [than the average person]” and having “clear muscle separation” and “strong muscles of high quality” are some of the features that differentiate Korean bodybuilders from the Korean public in terms of aesthetic ideals.

Finally, the findings of my study suggest that Korean bodybuilding has taken on its own local character. Not only the mindsets of the bodybuilders and their motivations discussed above imply this, but also one instance of new terminology is a clear example of this. Therefore, seen in the context of globalization and its cultural consequences, Korean bodybuilding is closest to being an instance of the hybridization thesis. However, this does not mean that my findings have arrived at a definite and unquestionable picture of Korean bodybuilding. Since my study has not investigated Western bodybuilding at a deeper level, the ostensibly unique traits of Korean bodybuilding might as well be similar to the Western counterpart.

Furthermore, due to the small number of respondents in my survey it is difficult and even problematic to generalize about Korean bodybuilders in general, even if one takes the findings of the other research works into consideration. One would have to interview far more Korean bodybuilders and preferably get an estimated number of how many of them there are in total. This task could be a potential basis for a future research project.

Moreover, while I was looking through Instagram to find potential survey participants I stumbled upon countless Korean bodybuilders who upload ample content frequently. I have not had an analysis of Korean bodybuilders’ activity on Instagram and other forms of social media as the purpose of my study, however it could serve as a potentially insightful research project in the future. From what I have observed on these social media platforms, bodybuilding seems to be a growing and already quite well-established phenomenon in Korea. In spite of this, as has been emphasized in this study the subject of Korean
bodybuilding is still a largely unexplored area of research. The scarcity of existing research works does not only render it difficult to make solid conclusions about the subject itself, but also leaves out an area of research that is tightly connected with the relevant and ubiquitous subject of the human body – a subject that has recently become even more relevant in Korea. I would therefore argue that it is time to change the current state of affairs of Korean bodybuilding in the academic circles. There are various possibilities for future in-depth research works and field studies that could tell us more about this hitherto largely ignored yet vividly developing phenomenon.
Bibliography


Åberg, Mia. 2015. “Legitimizing the plastic body: rise of plastic surgery and changing body ideals in contemporary South Korea.” MA diss., Lund University.
Appendix


Picture 3: Arnold Schwarzenegger, exemplifying the American Classic physique. Source: [https://medium.com/the-mission/what-it-takes-to-succeed-according-to-arnold-schwarzenegger-4b13d704a1e1](https://medium.com/the-mission/what-it-takes-to-succeed-according-to-arnold-schwarzenegger-4b13d704a1e1)

Picture 4: Jay Cutler, exemplifying the Post-Classic physique. Source: [https://www.greatestphysiques.com/jay-cutler/](https://www.greatestphysiques.com/jay-cutler/)

보디빌딩에 대한 질문서 (학사 논문 2018 년)

1. 짧은 자기 소개를 해 주십시오! 보디빌딩 대회에 참여하셨는지, 무슨 일을 하시고 계시는지, 등을 알려 주십시오.
2. 왜 보디빌딩을 시작하셨습니까? 시작하시게 된 동기 부여는 무엇이었습니까? 보디빌딩을 계속 하시게 되는 동기 부여는 무엇입니까?
3. 보디빌더로서, 남성 보디빌더들이 생각하는 이상적인 몸매와 한국 사람들이 생각하는 이상적인 남성의 몸매가 차이가 있다고 생각하십니까? 왜 그렇게 생각하십니까?
4. 한국 보디빌딩은 서양 보디빌딩에 비해 특징이 있다고 생각하십니까? 왜 그렇게 생각하십니까?
5. 한국 남성 보디빌더의 이상적 외모와 미적 이상은 서양 남성 보디빌더의 이상적 외모와 미적 이상과 똑같다고 생각하십니까, 다르다고 생각하십니까? 왜 그렇게 생각하십니까?
6. 서양 보디빌더의 동기 부여와 한국 보디빌더의 동기 부여는 비슷하다고 생각하십니까, 다르다고 생각하십니까? 왜 그렇게 생각하십니까?
7. 보디빌더로서, 꽃미남과 짐승돌 각각의 이미지에 대해 어떻게 생각하십니까? 왜 그렇게 생각하십니까?
8. 보디빌더라는 이유로 한국에서 사람들이 긍정적인 혹은 부정적인 반응을 보이는 것을 겪으신 적이 있으십니까? 본인이 생각하시기에 한국 사람들이 보디빌더들에 대해 가지고 있는 편견이나 선입견이 있습니까? 있다면 무엇입니까?
9. 보디빌딩은 유교(규율, 효도, 신체발부 등)와 관계가 있다고 생각하십니까? 왜 그렇게 생각하십니까?
10. 보디빌딩은 성형수술과 관계가 있다고 생각하십니까? 왜 그렇게 생각하십니까?
11. 본인께서는 보디빌딩과 관련된 것 중에 무엇을 제일 자랑스럽게 여기십니까? 왜 그러십니까?