

ANTENNA

Skin Deep

By Hiroyuki Yamamuro

There is a Japanese saying that "a man past 40 is responsible for his own face," meaning that a man's experiences—all the sorrows and joys and vicissitudes he has gone through—are carved into his features. He has no one but himself to blame for the way he looks. Or so people thought until the spring of 1983.

The occasion was the annual New Year party thrown by Japan's cosmetics industry. Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone was guest of honor, and in his speech he expressed his hope that in future the women of Japan would all be beautiful and the men manly.

That sentiment set off bells for Kosei Cosmetics Co. President Reiji Kobayashi. According to a company spokesman, Kobayashi had a sudden flash of inspiration. "Why not," he wondered, "produce cosmetics to make men look manly?" It is only a slight exaggeration to say that Nakasone's speech and Kobayashi's insight combined to overturn centuries of tradition. The era of makeup for Japanese men had begun.

By the end of 1984, Kosei Cosmetics had started marketing male cosmetics. The first to appear was a set of three items—foundation (¥1,500), lip cream (¥800) and an eyebrow pencil (¥800). The results of market surveys quickly overwhelmed lingering resistance within the company. Of the male university students surveyed, 57% replied they were interested in making up their faces. Emboldened, Kosei plunged ahead despite some labor pains, a hint of which can be surmised from the initial advertising sales pitch: "The Pros and Cons of Men Wearing Makeup."

The timing could not have been better. Foundations come in colors that make the face look tanned and healthy, while the year-end in Japan is a time of endless rounds of *bonenkai* (year-end parties) and, for the fortunate, skiing. Young men welcomed the new male foundation because they could use it to cover up the fatigue from nights of heavy drinking, or even look as tanned as if they were fresh

from the slopes, even if they had never been within a hundred miles of a lift. Before long, one cosmetic maker after another was leaping into the male cosmetics field.

Soon, magazines devoted exclusively to men's makeup and grooming were on bookstore racks. One men's fashion magazine, inaugurated by a major publishing house in September 1985, featured articles on "Makeup for an Attractive Face" and "How to Wear Pink." It sold 230,000 copies in two weeks. A photo magazine on men's hairdos published the following month sold 150,000 copies. The popularity of these magazines left even their editors aghast. "Today's young men follow women not only in fashion but in thinking," complained one. "Even their values are influenced by women. The belief that 'men are different from women,' so deeply embedded in the minds of older people, is utterly foreign to the younger generation."

The feminization of Japan's young men has even gone so far as to include cosmetic surgery, long considered the exclusive preserve of women. In October 1986, a plastic surgery hospital exclusively for men opened in Tokyo's Ueno district. The hospital had originally catered exclusively to women. But so many men were visiting it on the sly that it completely reversed its policy.

A look at the clinical records reveals many students of prestigious Tokyo universities among the clientele. The favored operations are for double eyelids and higher noses, the same concerns as young Japanese women. Whenever a university student applies for plastic surgery, the hospital director gives a lecture on the theme that "the face doesn't make the man. Only study and work can do that. It's preposterous to change the face your parents gave you." Sermons notwithstanding, there has been no end to patients visiting the hospital.

The male beauty boom appears to have taken root for good. Many department stores in Tokyo now boast sales counters



One survey found that 57% of male college students are interested in using makeup.

devoted exclusively to male cosmetics, staffed by carefully made-up male sales clerks. One store has begun selling ¥30,000 gift coupons good only for male cosmetics. And one beauty parlor for men in Tokyo's posh Ginza shopping district offers a full beauty course, from counseling on skin conditions and care to facial cleansing and massage, low-frequency cleansing and hair care.

Quite apart from questions of good or bad, what has motivated this rapid and dramatic change? One opinion is quite utilitarian: the ¥1 trillion annual women's cosmetics market is close to the saturation point. Unable to expect much further growth there, cosmetics makers have latched onto male cosmetics as a new business opportunity.

Another opinion is that the population of young men of marriageable age outnumber that of young women, and this theory goes that men will not be able to attract prospective brides unless they make themselves more attractive.

Some social critics suggest that today's young generation has grown up on an intellectual diet of TV programs and comic books and no longer knows how to express itself. Young men turn to cosmetics as a facile way of self-expression.

But lying behind it all there seems to be one inescapable factor, the ever-increasing affluence of a society in which anything, beauty included, can be easily had for money. ●