Despite this seeming emphasis on the desire to “fit in” to the norm, there is an implicit subtext: that the strength of our individual self-image is often instilled in us by those close to us, as one of the girl’s particularly overbearing mother makes clear.

This documentary necessitates a skillful and sensitive teacher to handle it as a classroom tool; otherwise it may create the impression that all or most minorities want to fit into the mainstream. Therefore it’s chiefly recommended for college-level students with the proviso that any discussion/activities not focus on a particular ethnic group but on the fact that everyone feels pressure to look a certain way, particularly in adolescence.

Some discussion points that can be the basis of classroom activities:

- Discuss and investigate the changing standards of beauty—look at old movies and fashion magazines. Given that the “ideal” of beauty shifts so much, what’s wrong with concentrating on one’s own personal style, both inside and out? Look at positive role models of successful people of any ethnic group.

- Discuss “the perfect body” and why so many want it. Look at the obsession with body image, which drives teens to diet, use steroids, develop dangerous eating disorders, and create lifelong cycles of low self-esteem. Look at how the body has appeared in Asian and Western art.

- Adolescence is a time when key aspects of our self-image are forged. Look how adolescence is marked in different Asian cultures. Do these rights of passage (or rituals) foster a positive self-image? What is happening to these in our globalized world?

- How can one’s self-esteem be built up? Suggest ways that the girls in the video can build their self-esteem without resorting to surgery.

JENNIFER EAGLETON is a Hong Kong-based writer and editor involved in writing educational materials on Asia. Her current project is compiling a book about modern Chinese history for secondary school students using fiction in translation.