

## Are Women With Fairskin (Whitened Skin) Beautiful? Perspectives In Asia

Editorial

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In Japan, and in other Asian countries such as Indonesia, India, Thailand, Korea and China, many women use cosmetics, other materials and aesthetic treatments to whiten their skin. In these Asian countries, women with fair (whitened) skin often attract notice, and they are considered beautiful. Many Asian women are influenced by advertising to use certain products to achieve fair skin. In some Asian countries, advertisements in women's magazines describe good skin as "white," and good skin is also described as transparent, young, smooth, pore-less, wrinkle-free, bright, and fine [1]. Good skin is different from beauty; fair skin may be one factor that contributes to beauty, but fair skin is not equal to beauty.

This raises a number of questions. What does it mean to have beautiful skin or to be beautiful? Are pigmented lesions considered a disadvantage or not beautiful? When did the idea arise that women with fairskin look beautiful? It is important that we discuss beauty, fair skin and whitened skin.

Many Asian women consider fair (whitened) skin to be their ideal, and there are a large number of cosmetics, other materials and aesthetic treatments for whitening skin. The concept of whitening skin may have spread from China, because it is said that Yang Kuei Fei was beautiful and she had very light skin. Although the idea of beauty in the past might be different from that in the present, the famed beauty of this one Chinese woman with fair skin may still have an effect on current ideas about beauty, for example, in linking white skin with the concept of beauty.

Generally, white has a more positive image than other colors, be-

cause it is associated with purity, chastity and cleanliness. Thus, wedding dresses and laboratory coats, for example, are traditionally white. Males with fair skin are often considered sickly, while fair skin in women is not seen as evidence of disease. The reason for this is unknown. Generally, skins with a detailed and fine texture are seen as beautiful, but this concept is not the same as whitening skin. There are some criteria of beauty or beautiful skin such as the golden ratio [2, 3], texture, lack of visible pores and lack of blemishes apply to beauty or beautiful skin. There is an ongoing debate about whether beauty is in the eye of the beholder or whether a universal standard exists [4]. One line of thought asserts that beauty is in the eye of the beholder [5], which leads to variety in the standard depending on the specific beholder. This suggests that beauty includes not only the visual experience but also other characteristics such as perceptual experience, the intellect and the moral sense [6].

We have one question: what is beauty? Many people conclude that beauty means no irregularity in shape or form, and the shape or form may have bright colors, as we see in shoes, clothes, buildings, etc. However, natural phenomena are not uniform and yet people see flowers, stars and the sky as beautiful.

Feelings about beauty also vary depending on the environment in which one is raised, one's customs and one's country. We believe that there can be no single definition of beautiful human skin. The beauty of human skin depends heavily on individual feelings, and different people have different criteria for beauty. Furthermore, although fair skin and a particular body shape may be defined by a universal standard of beauty, this standard may have

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been created and spread by advertising media, magazines, television, models, books and mannequins. Fair skin seems to dominate in opinions of beauty, but this may be no more than a prejudice. Marway [7] discusses the relation between beauty norms for fair-skin and race, describing 'a beauty norm for fair skin that exists in particular places and which arbitrarily values particular races or colors because of a history of racism and colorism'. Many Asian young women who admire white skin may not be aware of this background.

Pigmented lesions protect skin from ultraviolet (UV) light. Most people with such lesions are elderly and are unwilling to allow them to develop because these lesions are not considered beautiful. Pigmented lesions often increase with age, and are a normal aspect of aging. Some kinds of malignant skin tumors appear as colored skin lesions, therefore, many people are afraid of these cutaneous developments and hope to remove pigmented lesions.

Sunblock or clothing that protects the skin from sunlight is effective for preventing UV-related skin disorders such as sunburn, skin cancer, or pigmented lesions, but excessive methods of whitening skin may affect the calcium (bone) metabolism. Some women take extreme measures to protect themselves from sunlight to maintain their white skin, and some develop osteoporosis [8]. Many athletes have tanned skin, but their skin often looks better in terms of skin brightness and tone than the skin of non-athletes of the same age. Sunlight is an essential factor in vitamin D synthesis, and UV exposure had some merits as well as harmful ones [8]. There is an opinion among younger women that tanned skin looks better, prettier and healthier [9], but this opinion varies depending on the individual, skin color, race, environment and age.

Skin color varies according to race, as do perceptions of beauty. European and American Caucasians have not always seen darker skin as beautiful, and Banks [10] reports that Black women's bodies and beauty have largely been devalued and rejected by mainstream culture. In the US, fair skin, blue eyes and long, straight, blond hair are traditionally considered beautiful [11]. Asian young women, whose skin is usually darker, may not think about the above, and may admire fair-skinned Caucasians. While the current trend toward fairer skin resulting from protecting skin against UVlight is beneficial, whitening skin cosmetically is not an op-

tion for all people. Skin condition differs with age, race, environment and gender, among other factors. While these factors affect people's perceptions of beauty, tanned skin and pigmented skin are not automatically undervalued by all people. Very recently, increased awareness about racism has led a few companies in Japan to eschew terms such as "whitened skin" and "flesh color" in their advertisements and on their packaging.

## Conclusion

Perceptions about beauty depend on the beholder and are not necessarily related to skin color. Ideas about what constitutes beautiful skin vary, and differ according to factors such as age, race, gender and environment.

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