

# Study on the Causes and Effects of Appearance Anxiety among Women in East Asia

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**Abstract.** The continuous exchange and integration of Eastern and Western cultures has caused East Asian women to have the problem of appearance anxiety. In recent years, with the development of information technology, this phenomenon has become more and more serious. This paper focuses on this phenomenon and analyzes the influence of social, cultural, and personal factors on appearance anxiety in East Asian women. Appearance anxiety is mainly manifested in appearance, figure, psychology, etc. This paper argues that cultural exchange is one of the causes of anxiety among women. The spread of culture expands the definition of beauty, but at the same time, it also reinforces women's cultural preference for appearance. In addition, the development of pop culture has caused women to pursue the ultimate beauty, which creates anxiety. Finally, the development of the Internet has led to the proliferation of relevant information, deepening the influence of East Asian women on this idea. Based on this, this paper argues that it is necessary to fully understand women's psychology and concepts to better serve them. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to practical research and give full play to the positive role of online platforms.

**Keywords:** Appearance anxiety, culture, East Asian women.

## 1. Introduction

In East Asia, beauty ideals have deep historical roots, often tied to Confucian values, societal norms, and traditional aesthetics. For centuries, pale skin, small facial features, and a slim figure have been considered markers of beauty, class, and status. Appearance anxiety was also linked to ongoing social experiences, among young women, it was most evident through their heightened focus on enhancing their appearance [1]. This has been perpetuated through literature, art, and more recently, mass media. The introduction of Western beauty standards during periods of colonization and modernization has further complicated the region's beauty ideals, often blending local traditions with Western influences. Meanwhile, new technologies may intensify appearance-related anxiety among women. For example, in user-generated content shared by many internet influencers on Xiaohongshu, women who receive the most praise often present an idealized image--featuring "perfect faces, slim bodies, and flawless makeup"--enhanced by editing software [2].

Although these issues have received widespread attention, there are still some shortcomings. This article analyzed the causes and effects of appearance anxiety in East Asia. Appearance anxiety refers to the distress and preoccupation individuals feel about their physical appearance and how it is perceived by others. In East Asia, where cultural ideals of beauty often emphasize specific standards and aesthetics, appearance anxiety has become a significant social issue, particularly among women. This study aims to explore the causes and effects of appearance anxiety among women in East Asia, focusing on how societal, cultural, and personal factors contribute to this phenomenon.

## 2. Manifestations of Anxiety in Women

East Asia, especially in countries like South Korea, Japan, and China, places a high value on appearance, often promoting specific beauty ideals, such as pale skin, a slim figure, and a symmetrical face. These ideals are reinforced through media, advertising, and societal expectations, leading to heightened pressure to conform. This will have an impact on women's physical and psychological aspects.

## 2.1. Body and Appearance

In East Asia, the cultural emphasis on a slim figure can cause women to adopt restrictive diets or extreme eating habits. Women may go through cycles of weight loss and gain as they try to adhere to beauty standards. This can put significant stress on the body, leading to nutritional deficiencies, muscle loss, and metabolic imbalances.

Appearance anxiety can lead to unhealthy eating behaviors, such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia, and binge eating disorder. There's a term called Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) Appearance anxiety can lead to body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), a psychological condition where individuals obsess over perceived flaws in their appearance, often to the point of seeing significant defects where there are none. This can result in repetitive behavior such as excessive mirror-checking, picking at skin, or constantly seeking reassurance about appearance. Those with appearance anxiety may spend excessive time grooming, applying makeup, or altering their appearance in an attempt to meet societal beauty standards. This compulsive behavior can affect daily functioning, disrupting school, work, and social life.

Numerous studies and surveys have verified the link between exposure to idealized images and heightened appearance anxiety. This process involves viewing appearance-related photos, which trigger comparisons and subsequently lead to body dissatisfaction [3]. Celebrities, known for their appealing looks, are considered especially problematic as targets for such comparisons [4].

## 2.2. Psychological

There are several psychological impacts of women just like there are so many different voices and vast amounts of information available through networks can overwhelm individuals, leading to a phenomenon known as information overload. Social media, news websites, and constant notifications bombard users with an unmanageable quantity of data. Psychological impact also includes constant exposure to large volumes of information that can create feelings of stress, anxiety, and cognitive fatigue, as individuals struggle to process, prioritize, or make sense of the data, too much information can lead to difficulty in making decisions, causing people to feel stuck or uncertain about even simple choices, information overload can reduce attention span, making it harder for individuals to focus deeply on a single task.

With the rise of social media platforms that disseminate real-time updates, many people experience a fear of missing out (FOMO), worrying that others are having more fulfilling experiences or gaining access to important information that they are not aware of. Examples of this would be seeing others' curated, often idealized posts. It can lead to feelings of inferiority or dissatisfaction with one's own life. Constant checking of networks to stay updated can create anxiety, especially when individuals compare themselves to others who seem to lead more exciting or successful lives. Women who internalize societal pressures to look a certain way may develop perfectionistic tendencies regarding their bodies. This can lead to obsessive grooming or dieting behaviors, with anxiety about falling short of those expectations. A severe form of appearance anxiety where individuals obsess over perceived flaws in their appearance, often minor or unnoticeable to others. Women are slightly more prone to developing BDD, influenced by societal pressures on appearance.

During times of crisis (e.g., natural disasters, pandemics, political unrest), people are afraid and panic about crisis information. This is because information spreads rapidly across networks, sometimes creating panic or fear due to sensationalism or a lack of verified details. Inaccurate or exaggerated information can lead to panic buying, hoarding, or other irrational behaviors driven by fear. Constant exposure to alarming news or crises through networks can induce traumatized or chronic stress, particularly when the crisis affects the individual directly.

## 3. Causation

The influence of Western beauty ideals, driven by globalization, has blended with traditional East Asian beauty standards. Features like large eyes, sharp noses, and slender figures, common in

Western models, are now aspired to in East Asia. In real life, peer pressure to conform to beauty standards comes from family, friends, and co-workers. In online spaces, this pressure is magnified by a larger audience. Family members, particularly in East Asian cultures, often play a significant role in encouraging adherence to beauty standards. Parents or relatives may make comments about appearance, weight, or beauty practices, reinforcing cultural norms. East Asians always thought aging is significant. They viewed aging negatively, and women are encouraged to pursue anti-aging treatments and maintain youthful appearances for as long as possible. According to the survey, 84% of Asians do compare their appearance to someone or somewhere else [5]. From a gender perspective, females are more prone to fears of negative social judgment regarding their physical appearance, making them more susceptible to social appearance anxiety (SAA) than males. In terms of coping mechanisms, women are more likely to engage in rumination, seek social support, and express their emotions when dealing with SAA or other mental health challenges. In contrast, men are more inclined to cope through substance use, denial, or humor [6]. Exposure to these carefully crafted images on social media, which align more closely with society's idealized standards of appearance, leads users to compare themselves upward to these portrayals [7].

### 3.1. Culture

Asia has traditional beauty ideals in East Asian cultures. Traditional beauty standards often emphasize specific features, such as fair skin, slim body, and youthfulness. Historically, fair skin has been associated with higher social status, as it implied wealth and the ability to avoid outdoor labor. This cultural preference persists, with fair skin still seen as a symbol of beauty and status. Thinness is highly valued in many East Asian societies, with slim body types being seen as more desirable. Women are often pressured to maintain a slender figure. Youth and smooth, unblemished skin are central to the ideal of beauty in East Asia. There is a strong cultural preference for looking young, which drives the pursuit of anti-aging treatments and products. Women who do not conform to these standards often experience self-doubt and anxiety about their appearance. Cultural messages reinforce the notion that physical beauty is crucial for social acceptance and success, which can intensify appearance anxiety.

With emphasis on social harmony, respect for authority, and fulfilling one's roles, has deeply influenced gender expectations in East Asia. Women are often expected to maintain a graceful, modest, and beautiful appearance as part of their societal duties. These traditional values reinforce the idea that a woman's appearance is integral to her worth, especially in her roles as a wife or daughter. Failure to meet these expectations can lead to significant anxiety and feelings of inadequacy.

In many East Asian societies, appearance plays a role in professional success. Women may feel pressured to adhere to specific beauty standards to succeed in their careers, particularly in industries like entertainment, fashion, or customer-facing roles. Asian women care about what they look like in public and what others will feel. Consequently, this creates anxiety about appearance, as professional opportunities may be linked to physical attractiveness. Women may invest in beauty products, treatments, or surgery to improve their chances of professional success.

### 3.2. Pop Culture

Asian women are often depicted as "exotic" or hyper-sexualized in Western pop culture. This portrayal reinforces the idea that they are submissive, delicate, or sexually available, a harmful stereotype that stems from colonialism and is perpetuated by media like films, TV shows, and music videos. This objectification leads to the fetishization of Asian women, reducing their identity to racialized fantasies that can contribute to real-world experiences of harassment and discrimination.

With the rise of global media and the internet, particularly in the early 2000s, the proliferation of beauty-related content such as magazines, TV shows, movies, and later social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, began to shape and standardize appearance norms across East Asia. K-pop culture in South Korea, for example, has become a powerful influence on beauty standards not just locally but across the region, encouraging the adoption of features like double eyelids, V-line jaw

shapes, and slim figures. The influence spreads extremely fast, people start to watch these articles everyday everywhere and it causes more and more people to want to change their body appearance shortly.

The advent of social media in the 21st century has drastically changed how women perceive their appearance. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Weibo allow for the constant sharing of highly curated and edited images. Filters that alter physical appearance--lightening skin, narrowing the face, or enlarging eyes--have reinforced unattainable beauty standards. Young women are particularly vulnerable, with many feeling pressure to match the seemingly flawless beauty they see online, leading to increased rates of appearance anxiety.

Pop culture also often appropriates elements of Asian cultures--such as traditional clothing, symbols, or customs--without proper context or understanding. Asian women may see aspects of their culture commercialized or trivialized, which can feel invalidating and lead to feelings of cultural erasure [8].

### 3.3. Network Information Dissemination

Social media influencers and K-pop idols have become trendsetters for beauty ideals, often pushing products or promoting cosmetic surgeries. This contributes to a phenomenon where women are not only passively consuming beauty standards but actively engaging in practices (such as cosmetic enhancements or extreme dieting) to modify their appearance to fit these ideals [9].

Gossip protocols are widely used for efficient and scalable information dissemination in decentralized networks. In these protocols, nodes periodically share information with a few randomly chosen neighbors, who then propagate it further, much like how rumors spread in social networks. This leads to rapid dissemination with minimal coordination overhead and anxiety to people. For example, people post their lives normally on social media, and some people will judge their appearance and even on purpose, which might make people anxious and self-abasement.

The concept of "ideal beauty" promoted by the media gradually becomes internalized by women as their standard. Exposure to these ideals on social media can deepen this internalization, with higher levels of internalization leading to lower satisfaction with one's appearance. This process unfolds subtly over time, as the media continuously shapes people's thoughts. Many young individuals adopt unrealistic body ideals, causing them to feel inadequate and dissatisfied with their appearance. Consequently, social media use has been closely linked to increased social anxiety [10].

## 4. Suggestion

First of all, it is important to focus on and understand the current situation of women's anxiety in detail. The prevalence of appearance anxiety, and its correlation with media consumption, beauty ideals, and mental health outcomes can be measured, among other things, using surveys and other measures. Then try to answer their questions in a targeted manner and give them the right method. Second, conduct in-depth interviews or focus groups with women of different ages, social backgrounds, and ethnicities to gain a more nuanced understanding of their experiences with appearance anxiety. This will provide context to the quantitative findings and explore emotional and personal dimensions. By doing the surveys, should ensure that all survey instruments, interviews, and interventions are culturally appropriate and respect the norms and values of different East Asian societies. Take into account the diversity within the region (e.g., ethnic minorities, rural vs. urban populations). Since appearance anxiety can have serious mental health implications, provide participants with information on mental health resources. Ensure informed consent, especially when discussing sensitive topics like body image and mental health. Protect participants' anonymity and privacy.

Let policy be engaged in. The findings could be used to recommend policies that regulate the portrayal of women in media or restrict the advertising of potentially harmful beauty products (e.g., skin-lightening creams). Also, block the person who is spreading bad perspectives and sending

negative opinions and anxiety via social media platforms. Schools should always develop school-based programs aimed at teaching young women about healthy body image, self-acceptance, and the impact of media on beauty standards.

## 5. Conclusion

Appearance anxiety among women in East Asia is exacerbated by the region's patriarchal societal structures, where women are often judged more harshly on their looks compared to men. The article illustrates the negative effects of pop culture on Asian women are significant, perpetuating harmful cultural effects that apply to body appearance. Both physical and mental influence, unrealistic beauty standards, and cultural misunderstandings. In this context, women face significant pressure to achieve an appearance that is in line with societal expectations.

Addressing these challenges requires more diverse and authentic portrayals of Asian women in pop culture, greater media literacy, and advocacy for responsible representation. Celebrating Asian women's multifaceted identities is crucial to challenging stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive and empowering media landscape.

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