



The Han Dynasty 206 BC - 220 AD

Women

White Skin

The white skin phenomena that is so prevalent in Chinese culture through history originally began as a representation of social class. In the Han dynasty, and continuing even into today's culture, people who had lighter skin were considered rich and well taken care of, where if they had darker skin it was associated with working outside in the fields, and therefore being poor. The Chinese believed that having beautiful white skin covers up all faults. Along with using white face powder, they would even drink pearl powder mixed with water, and took extreme measures to cover up their skin when exposed to sunlight.



Size

Throughout history, Chinese women have been expected to be very small, slim, and petite. In the Han Dynasty, small feet were widely appreciated, and they even went to the extent of foot binding to achieve this “delicate” look.

Lips

The lips were considered the sexiest feature on a woman in the Han Dynasty. An intense interest in rouge arose in this time period, and they used it to decorate the lips in shapes like hearts, circles, and flowers. This “lipstick” like rouge was made of vermillion mixed with animal fat or beeswax.

The Four Great Beauties of Ancient China

An ancient Chinese legend about the Four Great Beauties tells stories about four women through different important time periods that were so beautiful, they changed the lives of those around them. Wang Zhaojun was one of these four beauties who lived during the Han Dynasty, and was known to have created peace and harmony throughout because her beauty influenced emperors and rulers. Wang Zhaojun was looked up to by women of all ages as the ideal beauty with her pale skin and dark hair. In another legend, it is said that when women of great beauty died they were rewarded in the afterlife by living on as a deity of a flower. Zhaojun lives on as a poeny to this day, showing the great importance placed on beauty through history, and into modern day Chinese culture.





If you were a woman living in the Han Dynasty as the ideal beauty, what would you look like?



If you were a man living in the Han Dynasty as the ideal beauty, what would you look like?



Men

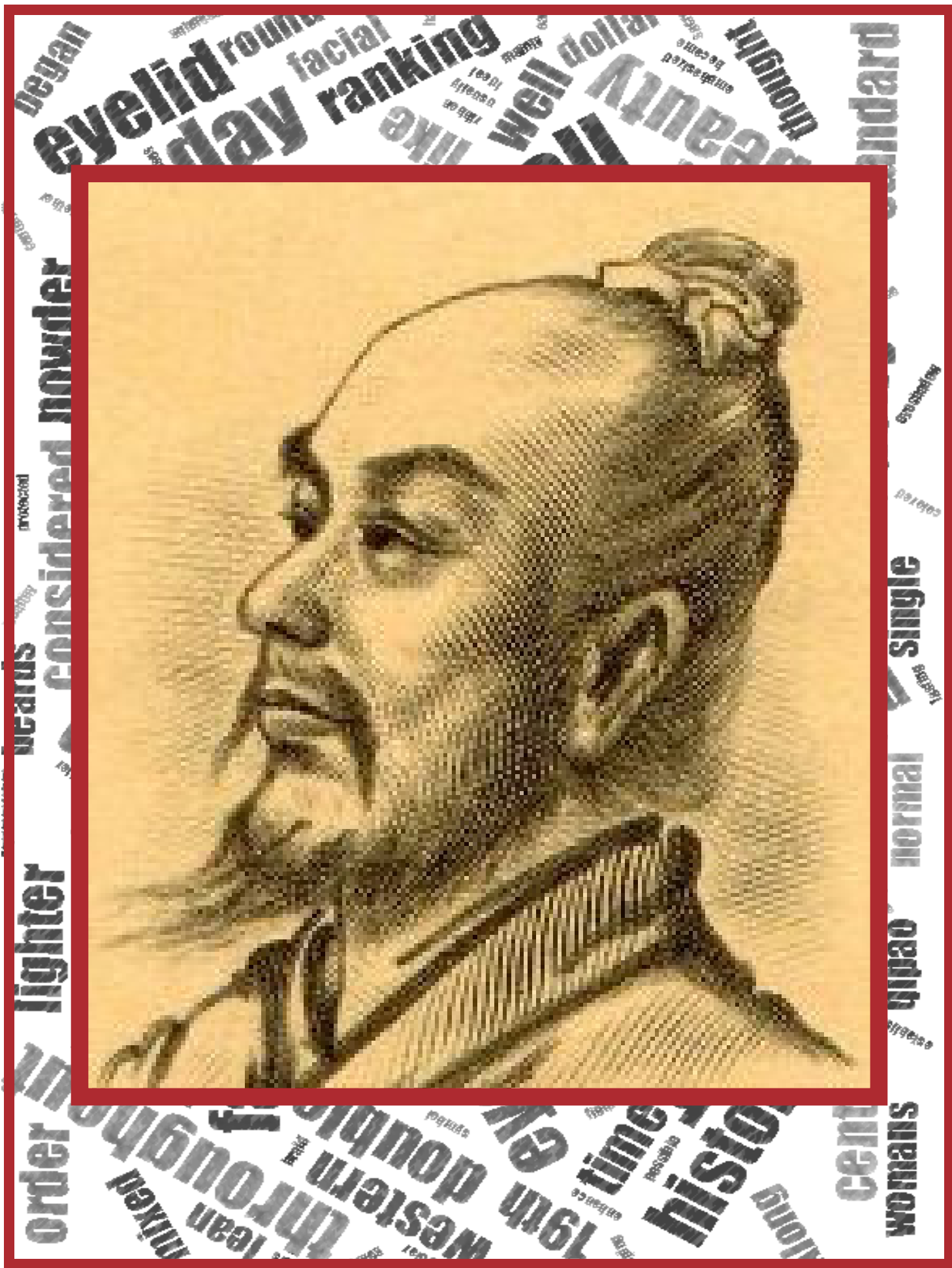
White Skin

In the same way that women desired and were expected to have white skin, men also believed that skin color was an indication of social ranking. The lighter skin a man had, the more rich he was considered to be, where if he had dark skin, it was thought that he was a poor field worker. men occasionally powdered their faces to achieve “pure skin”.

Facial Hair

During the Han Dynasty, facial hair had a prominent significance in a man's life. It was believed that when a man had a long beard, it was a symbol of wisdom and strength. Men who had long beards were promised long healthy lives. Long dark beards tied occasionally with ribbon were a normal standard for men, where the hair on their head was seen as much less important and was not usually done in a specific way.







Women

Lips

Through the 19th century, after the opium war, Chinese beauty standards began to fall under Western influence. Lips were still highly appreciated on women, but the standard changed to a full lip look. It was believed that if a woman's lips were fuller, they would round out the face all together to give a more desirable look.

White Skin

High importance was still placed on white skin and social ranking as it was through history. As well as going to extreme measures to keep a white face, women now started wearing rouge on the cheeks rather than the lips. Along with white face powder, they used light colored blush and eyeshadow to enhance their features, but they appreciated a natural look - and used light makeup to achieve this ideal look.

Clothing

Women began to wear a slim fitting dress called the qipao. These dresses emphasized the woman's figure, and was meant for very slim delicate women. The qipao was mainly adopted in this time period because of western influence.

19th Century China



M E N

Hair

Men were expected to wear a Queue, which was a single long braid that was worn to hang down their back. This hair style was established in earlier centuries, but became popular in the 19th century as it was seen as a submission to the Manchu conquerors that took over in the 1600s. Men in this time period did not believe in cutting their hair short, because it was seen as a sacred and important representation of a long life.

White Skin

A continuing trend for both men and women, men in 19th century China were still focused on keeping a white complexion in order to appear more wealthy. Men protected themselves from the sun by wearing large hats and scarves in order to keep their skin as light as possible.





If you were a woman living in 19th century China as the ideal beauty, what would you look like?





If you were a man living in 19th century
China as the ideal beauty, what would
you look like?





Modern Day China

White Skin

The light skin trend has not died down even in modern day China. Women still desire a light and beautiful complexion, as it has been rooted in their culture all throughout history. Though it no longer tells as much about social ranking as it once did, it is still widely believed that you will be more accepted and successful if you have lighter skin. The skin lightening product industry in China is a \$2 billion dollar per year industry. Women even change their diets in order to keep their skin light on top of using multiple whitening products. A diet heavy in milk and chinese yams are thought to naturally whiten the skin, as well as taking extreme measures to protect their skin from the sun (pictured above, women in masks on the beach).

“One whiteness can cover three kinds of ugliness”

Plastic Surgery

The plastic surgery industry in China is a \$2.5 billion dollar industry that is rapidly growing. The most common procedures desired by women are blepharoplasty (to achieve the double eyelid), and a procedure to create a more pronounced/flattened nose bridge. Chinese women have a desire to be more beautiful because they believe beauty equates to success - and they will be able to live a happier life.

Size

The pressures to be thin and small in China are more aggressive than in nearly any other country. In average Chinese clothing stores, the biggest size easily found, is a US size 4, putting emphasis on the need to be small in modern day China. In shoe stores, the biggest size available is a US size 7. As seen all throughout history, Chinese culture greatly values small, dainty women.

Eyes

The focus of the face in modern day China is on the eyes. Many women desire the “double eyelid” look, which is largely because of western influence. Having the double eyelid makes the eyes appear more large and round, which is the desired look for women.



If you were a woman living in modern day China as the ideal beauty, what would you look like?





If you were a man living in modern day China as the ideal beauty, what would you look like?





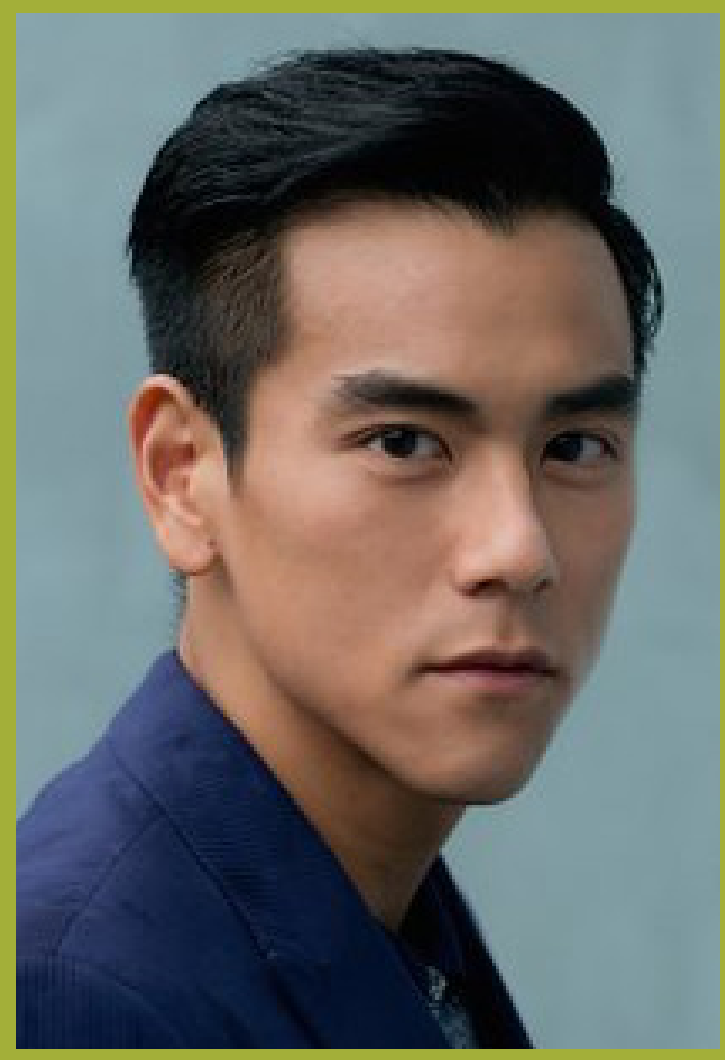
Face Shape

A heavy emphasis is put on having a strong, angular jawline for men. The face shape is one of the most important features to make a man “more attractive” according to modern day beauty standards. A strong jaw line actually signifies that a man has higher levels of testosterone in their body, making them chemically and physically more attractive to women.

MEN

Skin Tone

Unlike the immense importance placed on white skin throughout culture for both men and women, as we move into modern day, it is more acceptable for men to have tan skin. It is not the most desired look, so most men still strive to have white skin (using a wide array of skin whitening products), but a man with tan skin in China is much more common than a woman. Men can be attractive with both light and tan skin in modern day China.





Eyes

Men in modern day China are seen as more attractive if they have large, dark eyes. In contrast to the standard of beauty for women in China, it is much more acceptable for men to have a single eyelid rather than double eyelid, making plastic surgery on the eyes much less common for men.

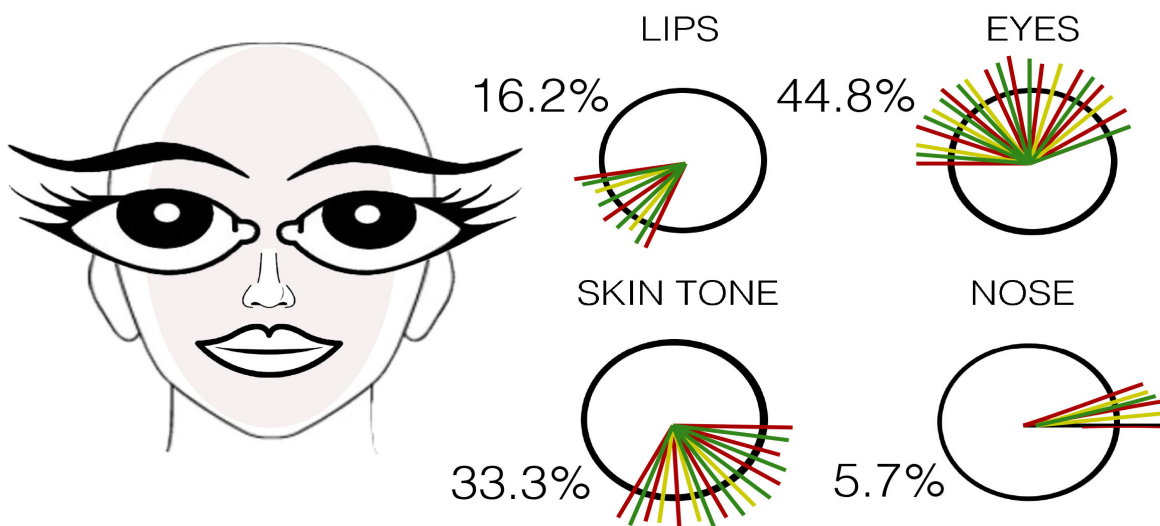
Size

Much like in women's beauty standards, size matters. Men are expected to be small and lean, and overall skinny. Big muscles and bulky forms are not seen as attractive on Chinese men, so a lean, fit man is preferred. The average size in normal clothing stores for men is a 28-29 waist size, even further placing importance on the fact that small size matters in Chinese culture. The average and most desired height for men is around 5'11", again proving this theme of small size in China.



CHINESE BEAUTY STANDARDS

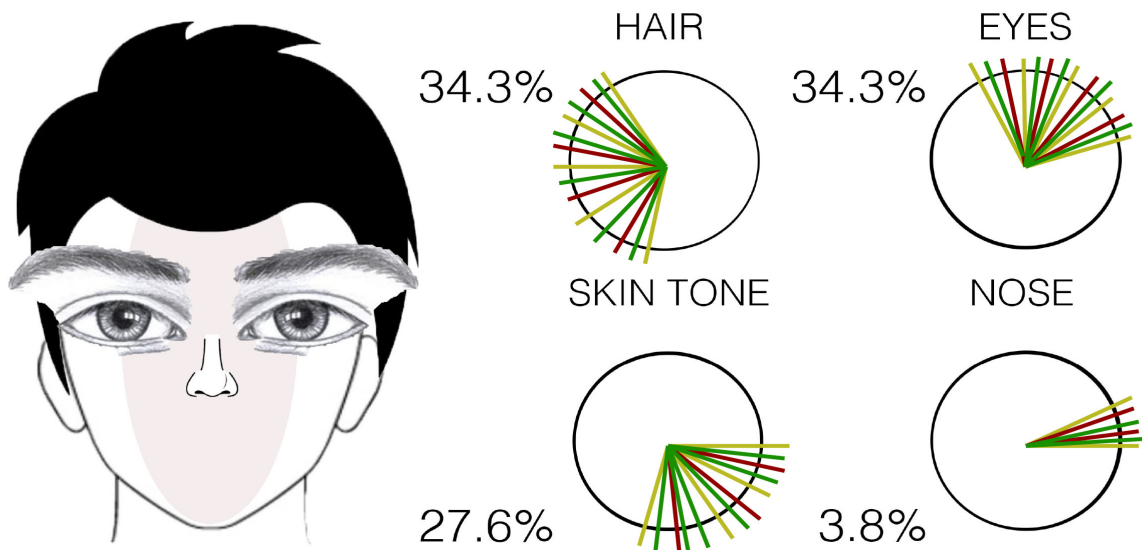
From the woman you chose, what feature made you feel she was more attractive?



Surveyed 105 people between the ages of 18 - 21

CHINESE BEAUTY STANDARDS

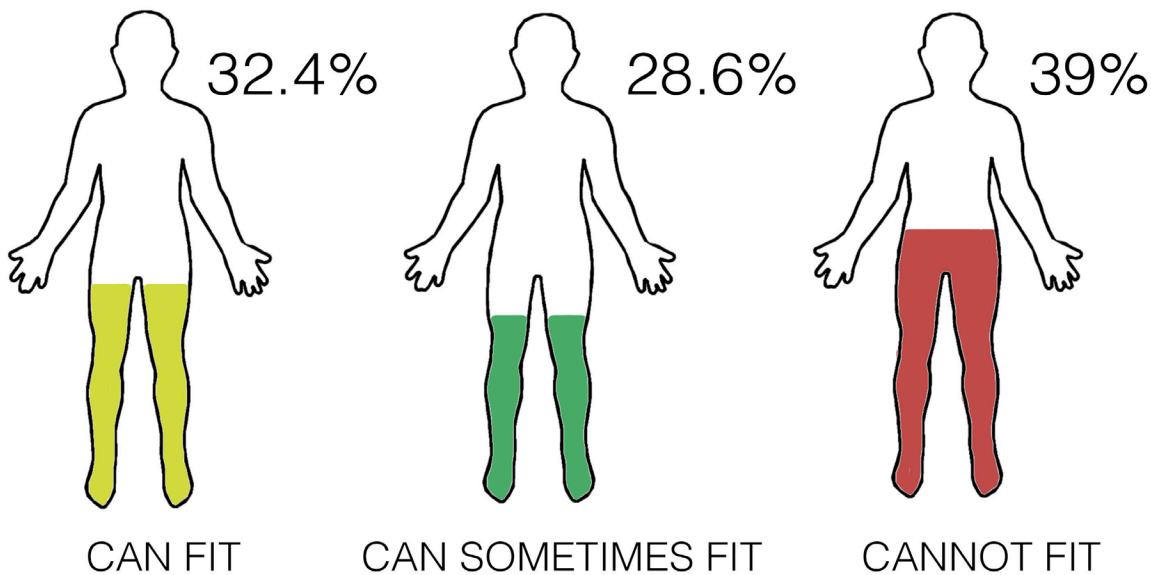
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CHINESE BEAUTY STANDARDS

Average clothing size: 4 for females, 28-29 for males



Surveyed 105 people between the ages of 18 - 21