

Chinese Medicine and Cosmetics

– by Prof. Shulan Tang

What is True Beauty?

True beauty is natural. The best way to use cosmetics or make up is to be subtle; so that one appears to be wearing very little or no make up at all. One's features can be enhanced in a positive and natural way which suits the individual personality and circumstances. Make up can be used to express something about a person's attitude and temperament.

Also, make up can sometimes be used in a colourful way which looks bright and attractive. Make up which is not so well applied can simply draw attention to itself, rather than to the face underneath. Other people will immediately notice that it looks heavy and see the facial flaws, age or weaknesses which it was meant to hide.

Make up can change the way we feel about ourselves in a negative way and in doing so change our attitudes to other things such as other people and the way that we live our lives. We don't need to place too much reliance upon cosmetics to feel good about ourselves. The best look is often no make up; a natural beauty.

Should we only put time and energy into improving things on the outside?

No! Make up should be the last resort. It can only change small things on a short term and surface way. A far better way to deal with things which we dislike about our outward appearance is to change our constitution and lifestyles, to have a good diet and enough nutrition, take plenty of rest, and do plenty of exercise. The benefits of this will soon show in the healthy and vital condition of your skin and will be much more effective than a surface layer of make up.

How does the health of the inner body appear on the surface?

The earliest Chinese medical classic book 'Huang Di Nei Jin' said: "Heart is the root of life, the store of the spirit. Its colour shows on the face. Lung is the root of Chi (energy), its colour shows on the hair and nourishes the skin. Kidney is the essence of life, its colour shows on the hair and nourishes the bone. Liver is the root of activity, its colour shows on the nails and nourishes the tendons. Spleen and stomach are the root of digestion of food and transportation of nutrition." Its colour shows on the lips".

Therefore, if you have good, healthy internal organs, then this will be evident from your outward appearance, which will have a lively and natural beauty.

How can Chinese Medicine help the outward appearance?

(a) Firstly, Chinese Medicine puts much emphasis on the diet to nourish the skin, hair and eyes.

(i) People over 30 years of age will find that their skin becomes dry and wrinkles begin to appear. Those under thirty are also at risk of developing dryness if they do not pay attention to their diet. The Chinese herbal powder Qing Ren San is available to soften the skin and prevent wrinkles from appearing.

This is very good for the skin, as are carrots, cucumber, tomatoes, apples and most fruits and vegetables. Things to be avoided include smoking, lamb, alcohol, and chocolate which usually make the skin dry and spotty.

(ii) Black sesame seeds and Sang Ye, Gou Qi Zi and tangerines are good for hair and eyes

(iii) Chinese red dates can make the lips look red and the complexion full of life and colour. This is best taken in the winter or spring, with 5-6 pieces every day, to nourish the spleen.

(b) Secondly we must keep exercising. The Chinese say 'life is dependent on movement'. People of every age need to exercise, take lots of fresh air and do deep breathing in a park with green grass and trees all around. Early morning in the park is a popular place to be in China; you will find the young jogging and the old doing Tai Chi.

This is because the Chinese believe in the five natural elements; we inhale through the nose and store the air in the heart and lungs. It then travels up to nourish the face and make it clear, bright and shiny.

(c) Rest and sleep are also very important components of a healthy lifestyle. Nowadays people work very hard. Life's rhythm is fast, and some people stay out late at night. Lack of sleep and excessive sex results in darkness around the eyes which makes people look older.

I have noticed that in Britain and especially in London, a lot of young people have dark shadows around their eyes. In contrast, this is rarely seen in China amongst young people. This is because young Chinese are more intent upon caring for their internal health, and more aware of the benefits of doing so.

(d) In Chinese medicine we have 'Xiu Shen Yan Xin' and 'Tian Dan Xu Wu'. This is another way to profoundly improve one's health. We can read good books, appreciate arts and music, think deeply about our actions before carrying them out. It is positive to be indifferent to fame or gain to feel calm and happy and to be kind to others. We must aim to be self confident and happy about the way we live our lives and have respect for ourselves.

If we follow the above, we will effortlessly have a natural beauty which is totally without need of cosmetic help!

Above all, we must remember that the most effective way to change what we dislike about our outward appearance is not to put time and energy into trying to change the surface. Instead it is better to concentrate on the internal.