

## Essay

# **Tiis Ganda: Beauty As a Tool for Consumerism within the Context of the Filipino Media**

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## **The Beauty of the Philippines**

The Philippines is a naturally rich country. As an archipelago, the country has numerous access points to various bodies of water that provide a steady supply of seafood. Our country, also blessed with very fertile land that can produce a wide range of crops, also contain a great amount of mineral deposits. ("About the Philippines" n.d.) Sadly, its own natural beauty and wealth has turned into a curse in itself because it attracted too much attention, which led to its colonization.

The foreign invaders wanted to get their own share of the natural wealth and beauty of the country, and they did. They took what they wanted and they did not care for the native people who lived within it. The locals, the real owners of the land, were reduced to slavery. They were used as tools to tend the land that they own, while their overlords get all the profit. Why is the Philippines considered poor despite all its innate riches? I personally think it has do with the fact that the country has been a colony of various countries for the past hundred years, and the culture that has evolved because of the said colonization has greatly crippled the Filipino people until the present time in various ways.

## **Gandang Pinay**

Before the Spaniards came to conquer the Philippines, the native Filipinos have respected, and to some extent, even revered the beauty and power of the feminine. It was the Spaniards, who brought about the western thinking of men being greater than the woman, because according to P.G. Mallari (2013), "The pre-Hispanic Filipinos put equal importance on warriorship and spirituality; hence, there was greater

symmetry between the warrior or mandirigma and the babaylan—the female ritualist.”

It was the Spanish conquerors who brought about a change in the Filipino mentality. The women were confined to the western concept of beauty within the literal and cultural aspect. They were ingrained with the notion that only the Spaniards were superior in every way, including how they looked and dressed up. The Spanish culture integrated the idea that women should wear layers upon layers of constricting clothing and adhere to the belief that women should remain proper and patiently obey their male patriarch, be it their father or their husband. This was a complete opposite of the pre-colonial Babaylan woman who had the power and respect of her fellowmen and wore clothing that gave them the opportunity to move freely.

The current Filipino Culture, brought about by hundreds of years of oppression, is still very much obsessed on becoming white and western-looking. Beauty comes with respect and pride, and most Filipinos have been conditioned to believe that the only ones who are deemed “beautiful” and “well-respected” are our former foreign overlords. As the saying goes “Imitation is the best form of flattery”. So, many Filipinos want to look like those who they think are in power to get respect. I personally find this fact very sad because it goes against the root of the true identity of the Filipino.

According to E. San Juan Jr. (1999) there are two main unifying features of the Philippines formation: the racial type (Mongoloid) and the Austronesian or Malayo-Polynesian type. Thus, the majority of Filipinos have the physical traits such as having tan skin, a flat nose with wide nostrils and curly hair. These traits are completely different from their own perspective of beauty.

### **The Quest for Beauty: Pinoy-Style Consumerism**

According to GMA News Online (2016), Rhian Ramos was deemed as the “Most Beautiful Filipina” for 2016. I was not surprised, because Rhian Ramos has all the physical traits of what the Filipino culture

deems as “beautiful”. She has a petite physique, a nose with a prominent bridge and small nostrils, smooth white skin and straight hair. Rhian Ramos has these traits because her father is British. She did not work hard to get what she physically possessed; she was born with it. But she is physically not like the majority of Filipinas who want to look as “beautiful” as her, so the others have to do whatever it takes to achieve it.

Filipinas who are determined to attain their ideal sense of beauty, go through extreme lengths and sacrifices in order to achieve it. This need has brought about a niche market that generates a lot of money for corporations every year in beauty products and procedures.

Cosmetic surgery is one of the procedures Filipina women undergo in order to attain their desired look. Cosmetic surgery is defined by [cosmeticsurgery.org](http://cosmeticsurgery.org) as “A unique discipline of medicine focused on enhancing appearance through surgical and medical techniques.” Like any other surgery procedures, it comes with its own set of medical risks. The recovery process is long and tedious, not to mention that it is very painful. But a lot of women (and even men) go through with it because they want to look their best.

Another beauty-related product out in the market is Glutathione. Various soaps, creams, pills and even injections claim to contain Glutathione. According to M. Hayman, MD of Huffington Post (2010 n.p.):

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Glutathione is a mother antioxidant... it's the secret to prevent aging, cancer, heart, disease, dementia and more. Glutathione is a very simple molecule that is produced naturally all the time in your body. It is a combination of three simple building blocks of amino acids—cysteine, glycine and glutamine. The body produces its own glutathione... but poor diet, pollution, toxins, medications and stress deplete your glutathione.”

## The Piracy of Beauty Products

Glutathione is marketed with the notion that that the consumer becomes whiter after a few weeks of use or ingestion. Jessica Soho, in her show *Kapuso Mo*, Jessica Soho (2007) made a documentary about Glutathione and why women use the said product. "*Pagdating sa pagpapaputi, marami sa atin ang hindi magpapahuli*, (When it comes to whitening the skin, a lot of us (Filipinos) would not want to miss the opportunity)" J. Soho stated. "*Kaya nga ba mabenta ang mga produkto na nangangako ng mala-porselanang kutis*. (That is why skin-whitening products are hot sellers.)" Products that contain glutathione have a certain price point, which some Filipinas might not be able to afford. But Filipina women adjust their budget and make certain financial sacrifices in order to afford the said luxury. The Glutathione documentary featured a woman named Joy Maganon who manages a small eatery, struggles to save up in order to get Glutathione injections three times a week. Aside from the financial pain, there is also physical pain involved in the procedure because it involves needles. But for her, the price of pain and money is worth it all, to be able to try and attain her dream of having a whiter skin.

Billboards along major roads and television commercials all push to sell the various products containing glutathione. Sharing with these are the advertisements that sell shampoos and conditioner that claim to make your hair look "straight, shiny, strong and long". Of course, you have to read the label properly to know that the product will not promise anything and will not be liable if the product will not be effective to the said consumer under the notion that "every body is different and would have different reactions from the said product."

## Our Own True Beauty

Soho (2007) also asks in her *Kapuso Mo*, Jessica Soho Glutathione documentary: "*Ang tanong, ligtas ba ito? Lalo na't nakakabili ng mga peke na ito*. (Is it safe? Especially when there are fake ones being sold in the free market.)" Anything that is in demand, but is usually very expensive for most, has a fake version of it. There are fake high-end bags, software, and even makeup and glutathione pills are

being pirated or faked. These pirated products are cheaper, but the consumption of these products come with a certain degree of risk.

According to C. Greenwood of Dailymail.uk (2015) "Counterfeit make-up such as MAC, Benefit and Urban Decay have been found with dangerous levels of lead, mercury and cyanide." These products caused severe allergic reactions to the consumer's bodies and can also lead to organ damage, nerve problems and even death. Fake glutathione pills, injections, creams and soaps can also cause the same effect to the consumer.

## **Our Own True Beauty**

I believe that Filipina women are naturally beautiful, inside and out. The only problem is that a majority of us Filipinas are not confident to be who we really are. Hundreds of years of oppression has brought about a low sense of ownership and belief in oneself, the main ingredients to become a successful person. We should learn to accept ourselves as who we really are, and not as how others would want us to be. By doing so, we will be free to move forward in life and reach for the goals and dreams we have set for ourselves.

I also believe that the media can play an important role in the projection of a positive self-image of the Filipino woman. Media should slowly integrate in their talent pool people who genuinely look like Filipinos, not just those who are mestizos and mestizas. They should create shows that portray the everyday Filipina as someone to look up to and admire.

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## About the Author

**Ma. Daniella Louise Borrero** is an artist and a licensed educator, currently residing in Quezon City, Philippines. She believes that art is an effective tool in the transferring knowledge that can improve a person's quality of life and decision-making skills. As a visual artist, Daniella has exhibited paintings and installations around the Metro. Her works deal with subjects concerning the welfare of children and women. She is passionate about research because she believes it helps bring order and meaning to the chaos of life.

She holds an undergraduate degree in Elementary Education, focusing on Teaching in the Early grades from the University of the Philippines, College of Education. Daniella is currently taking up a Master of Arts Degree in Communication from the College of Mass Communication at the University of the Philippines, Diliman.

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