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**Body Image in Frances Cha's**  
***If I Had Your Face (2020)***

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for a **Master's degree in Literature and  
Civilization**

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## **Abstract**

The present research examines the role of body image in Frances Cha's *If I Had Your Face* (2020), from a feminist perspective. The study focuses on showing how body image is represented through the major female characters. Moreover, it exposes the South Korean society's great emphasis on physical appearance and its pressure on women to alter their bodies and conform to the rigid societal beauty standards. Additionally, it demonstrates that physiognomy is a cultural belief that influences women's decision to undergo cosmetic surgery and change their outward appearance.

**Key Words:** Body Image, cosmetic surgery, South Korea, Feminism, South Korean American Literature.

## **Dedication**

To my beloved parents for their endless love, support, and encouragement.

To my beloved sisters Melissa, Marissa, and Melina who supported me to accomplish this work.

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Abstract in French (Résumé)

Abstract in Arabic (ملخص)

## **General Introduction**

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Throughout history, the perception of feminine beauty has undergone significant transformations with numerous beauty ideals emerging and fading. There has always been standards of beauty that must be met by women. These standards are linked to physical characteristics that the society deems acceptable and attractive. Women are held to standards of beauty set by the society which frequently shift with time as new perspectives on what it means to be physically attractive appear. The standards of beauty impose unrealistic beauty norms that have an impact on women's body image because society has equated outward attractiveness with self-worth.

The characteristics of each culture's ideal body image are developed when a society establishes its own set of desirable traits. For its part, South Korean culture has its own set of standards that determine what is beautiful and physically attractive. South Korean beauty standards are characterized by a small face, larger eyes, pale skin, and a v-shaped jaw. South Korea is known for its meticulous, high-maintenance beauty regimens. Over the last years, the word K-beauty has been popular alluding to South Korea's global affect on aesthetics and cosmetics. The expansion of the cosmetic industry in South Korea has caused a rise in social pressure on women's looks. This society's constraints on women to look beautiful is pushing them to change their outward appearance in a variety of ways, including make-up, hair dyeing, and even going to extremes to enhance their physical attractiveness by undergoing cosmetic surgery procedures.

Accordingly, many writers have used their words to denounce the society's pressure on women to look beautiful. Amongst these writers, one may name the South Korean American writer Frances Cha and her work *If I Had Your Face* (2020).

*If I Had Your Face*, Frances Cha's gripping debut novel, is set in contemporary Seoul, South Korea. It is about a group of young women navigating a society marked by

unachievable ideals of beauty. The novel recounts the story of these women as they manage romantic and financial crises, filial expectations, job aspirations, and deeply held traumas.

### **Thesis Statement**

This research examines how body image is represented in Frances Cha's *If I Had Your Face* from a feminist perspective. More exactly, it shows how women are victims of a materialistic, consumerist, lookist society that puts great emphasis on physical appearance, which pushes them ultimately to alter their bodies by undergoing cosmetic surgery.

### **Rationale and Criteria for Primary Text Selection**

My interest in reading South Korean literature is prompted by my love for South Korean culture, tradition, and the Korean language, which I discovered through K-drama and K-pop. Throughout my readings of the South Korean literature I have discovered the South Korean American author Frances Cha and her debut novel *If I Had Your Face* which reveals the rigid beauty standards in the South Korean society and women's struggles in living in a society where physical appearance is highly valued. I was already aware and familiar with the South Korean beauty standards and women's preoccupation with body image in South Korea through K-drama. When I have found Frances Cha's novel *If I Had Your Face* that denounces the South Korean society's pressure on women to conform to the societal beauty standards by undergoing cosmetic surgery I was more motivated to choose the novel and body image as the topic for my dissertation.

### **The Review of Literature**

Due to the recent publication of Frances Cha's *If I Had Your Face*, there is a lack of literary criticism and academic articles on the novel. For this reason, we have relied on works that examined beauty and body image.

In her book entitled *The Beauty Myth : How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (1991), Naomi Wolf explains how women are exposed to great pressure to conform to the beauty standards imposed by the society, and how the strain on women to be beautiful induces them to engage in hazardous behaviours and be obsessed with looks. Wolf states, “the contemporary ravages of the beauty backlash are destroying women physically and depleting us psychologically”(19). The society’s pressure on women to be physically attractive propels them to seek cosmetic surgery and have low self-esteem.

In her turn, Susan Bordo in her article entitled “Twenty Years in the Twilight Zone” (2009), argues that a great amount of body alteration is constantly portrayed as a requirement for relationship prospects, and is frequently requested by employers. Bordo views that despite all the discourses on autonomy and free will, the word agency has no allure, and cosmetic surgery is an oppressive practice aimed to impel women to alter their bodies and conform to the societal beauty ideals.

Kathy Davis, in her article entitled “Revisiting Feminist Debates on Cosmetic Surgery : Some Reflections on Suffering, Agency, and Embodied Difference” (2009), argues that cosmetic surgery reflects women’s agency and autonomy. She attempts to comprehend how cosmetic surgery could be the best solution for a certain woman at a specific stage in life, whilst analysing the environmental, societal, and cultural restrictions that render aesthetic surgery a choice in the first place. Davis states that feminists should investigate what makes cosmetic surgery both fiercely sought and ultimately troublesome for women.

Park Hyejung, in her article entitled “THROWING OFF THE CORSET: A CONTEMPORARY HISTORY OF THE BEAUTY RESISTANCE MOVEMENT IN SOUTH KOREA” (2020), states that the popularity of cosmetic surgery in South Korea puts a lot of pressure on women to be beautiful and modify their physical appearance in order to adhere to the societal beauty standards. As a response to the strict patriarchal views and harsh

beauty regiments, the Tal-Corset movement formed in 2015, and in early 2018, the movement was brought to the notice of South Korean people. The Tal-Corset movement a beauty resistance campaign, tossing aside feminine apparel, and beauty practices. The Korean word *Tal* means to take off or to detach from and the corset signifies patriarchal social traditions enforced on women, particularly beauty routines. This movement's followers frequently cut their long hair short and avoid wearing cosmetics and fashionable clothes. As women discover how does it feel to live without a corset, their newly acquired perspectives into how beauty practices subjugate women are actively conveyed, prompting other women to reconsider their own beauty habits.

### **Significance of the Study**

It is important to note that during the process of our research, we have noticed that there is a lack of literary criticism on Frances Cha's *If I Had Your Face* due to its recent publication. Most of the criticisms on Frances Cha's work are non-academic articles, but reviews of the novel. Yet, to our knowledge, none of the previous studies has studied body image in the novel from a Feminist perspective.

### **Research Questions**

The present study attempts to address the following main research questions :

- How does the main characters respond to the society's pressures to conform to the beauty standards ?
- What are the reasons behind the main protagonist's choice of undergoing cosmetic surgery ?

### **Methodology**

This research examines the role of body image in Frances Cha's novel *If I Had Your Face* from a feminist perspective. It focuses on showing how body image is represented

through various characters, and how physical appearance is highly valued in job recruitments, in addition to the influence of media images and physiognomy on the main protagonist's decision to undertake cosmetic surgery.

### **Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into two chapters. The first chapter presents the historical, literary, and theoretical contexts of Frances Cha's *If I Had Your Face*. The second chapter analyses how body image is represented in the novel from a feminist perspective, through the main female protagonists.

## **Chapter I**

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***If I Had Your Face* in Context : Socio-Historical, Literary,  
and Theoretical Backgrounds**

## **Introduction**

This chapter presents a general framework of the whole research. It is divided into three sections that introduce the socio-historical, literary, and theoretical backgrounds of Frances Cha's *If I Had Your Face*. The first section is devoted to the socio-historical overview of the South Korean society. We explain the major changes that the South Korean society underwent between the 1970s and 1990s and the influence of Confucianism and body image on the South Korean society. We, show the role of lookism and the images presented in media in affecting South Korean people's body image. Furthermore, we demonstrate the development of cosmetic surgery in South Korea and the importance of physiognomy in influencing people's decision to modify their physical appearance. In the second section, a brief review of the South Korean and South Korean American literature is provided. The literary profile of Frances Cha is also presented in this section ; in addition to the plot summary of the novel under study. The third section focuses on the theoretical framework in which we introduce body image through a Feminist perspective.

### **1) Socio-Historical Background**

#### **1.1. Modern South Korean Society and Culture**

South Korean society underwent several changes between the 1970s and 1990s. The 1970s was a period of relatively fast economic expansion which is known as the miracle of the Han River. Powerful economic strategies and industrial development was fulfilled effectively. However, this was at a significant expense. The agrarian sector of the society nearly disintegrated, creating a disparity between social classes. The fast urbanization spawned new issues such as environmental degradation, cultural and customs decay. Adding to that, the frustrations of the working population, who bore the burden of the sufferings brought on by industrialization but were left out of the financial allocation procedure, were

particularly intense. Simultaneously, a new group of people emerged. Playing instruments and wearing jeans, long hair, and short skirts, the youngsters generated an atmosphere of liberty and dissent, frequently showing their discord against the military dictatorship that was widened with the Yusin Reforms (Yi et al 49).

In 1980, the inhabitants of Gwangju, which is a city in the southwest corner of South Korea staged a major demonstration against the repressive regime. Following the incident, intellectuals, labourers, and students raised their voices in opposition, and the demand for democratization got bigger among the South Korean people. Ultimately, in 1987, constitutional change and new presidential elections laid the groundwork for establishing a democratic political order. The election of a civilian president in a peaceful and fair election in 1992 enhanced political liberty, reducing the urge for revolt. The livelihoods of the regular South Korean residents were also changed as a result of these significant transformations in the political sphere.

The 1990s was defined by excessive consumption and a growing desire for a more luxurious lifestyle. Moreover, South Korea's shift of interest into technology advancement has permitted the dominance of a commercialised popular culture such as K-pop and K-drama. The young stars of popular culture became an inspiration for the youngsters. As such, the entertainment sector saw a rise in activity as did modern culture consumption. As a result, South Korean people's social norms and mindsets have changed. They adopted a modernist view towards art, culture, and style; a new vision of what is appreciated and considered as beautiful. Society was then dominated by individual's personal desires instead of common ones. Youngsters especially, abandoned old social traditions, obligations, and values in favour of the glitz of mass culture. The new generation's beliefs and norms started to expand throughout society (Yi et al 76-77).



Furthermore, rapid industrialization and urbanization have propelled South Korean women into modern lifestyles, presenting a threat to Confucianism's traditional feminine norms. They have evolved from being the angle of the house to being great builders of economic advancement and social transformation. On a national scale, South Korean women have grown significantly more engaged in a variety of professional and administrative fields. There are multiple explanations for this change. One of them is the society's positive gaze towards working spouses that contradicted the conventional idea that women should stay at home and take care of their children. Another reason for this change is the creation of more employment opportunities for women (Chung 111-112). Moreover, women postponed marital relationships in order to get access to university and have an appropriate job. Likewise, the conventional gaze of daughters as strangers once in their husbands houses faded. Due to various shifting behaviours in regard to female's position, male partners started to share household responsibilities with their partners. The Confucian male supremacy heritage has notably diminished (Chung 113-114).

## **1.2. Confucianism**

According to *Open Education Sociology Dictionary*, Confucianism means “the ethical and philosophical system based on the teachings of Confucius (551-479 BCE), a Chinese philosopher, who emphasized devotion to family (including ancestor worship) ; education ; love for humanity ; and morality ” (“Confucianism”). In other words, Confucianism is a philosophy that was derived from China and was established by Confucius. That focuses on the high value given to learning, loyalty towards family, peace, and justice. It also emphasizes the significance of avoiding confrontation and maintaining societal peace.

South Korea's culture was heavily influenced by China. South Koreans had modelled their government systems, legal principles, literature, and art after the Chinese. For more than

500 years, Confucianism has pervaded South Korean's daily lives as a state ideology. In fact, South Koreans undergo four rites of passage in the Confucian tradition : coming of age, marriage, mourning, and ancestral rituals (Kim, Shim, Kim 2). Ancestral rites are the most essential of the four family rites as they represent Confucianism's core tenet of filial piety. Ancestral rites are viewed as a form of remuneration for parental love, with descendents believing that forebears became family gods who ensure the success and continuance of the family, and that ignoring one's ancestors brings misfortune to the family.

Confucianism is regarded as a primitive ideology and was heavily criticized during Japanese colonization (1910-1945) and the Post-Korean War modernization period (1950-1953). The Japanese colonists wanted to change South Korean culture to more closely resemble Japanese culture. Despite the fact that the Japanese imperialism rejected the Confucian philosophy and tried to implement other ideals into the South Korean society, Confucianism's influence on South Korean moral norms, including family and education, is still apparent. Even though Confucianism's position as the country's official ideology ceased, the nation's history of Confucian ideas and social patterns still has a profound indirect influence on South Korean culture today.

Confucian ideas are frequently incorporated into the Korean language of morals and etiquette. With its many layers of conveying propriety and civility, the South Korean style of speech, gesture, and etiquette embodies Confucian related values. For instance, *Kyongŏ* (honorific language) is a basic feature of the Korean language that reflects the Confucian philosophy. *Kyongŏ* denotes one's strong sensitivity to age differences, social status, occupation, degree of intimacy, and nature of previous interaction between the interlocutor, the recipient, and any third-party referent. South Koreans have a habit of favouring family and collective terminology over individualistic words. Both South Korean women and men regard

themselves as socially accepted and mentally comfortable inside a network of groups such as their families, schools, and places of work (Chung 82).

However, it was the newly revitalised form known as Neo-Confucianism that had the greatest influence. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, Neo-Confucianism is “a rationalistic revival of Confucian philosophy in the 11th century A.D. that exercised a pronounced influence on Chinese thought for over 800 years” (Walker). To put it in another way, Neo-Confucianism is a philosophy that dominated the Chinese culture and eventually expanded to South Korea.

Neo-Confucianism places a strong emphasis on gender roles, especially for women. Women’s subjugation and submissiveness to men is the key and organizing factor in these gender roles : girls are to be submissive to their father ; wives are to be submissive to their spouse, and widows are to be submissive to their eldest son. Moreover, the body was considered sacred by Neo-Confucians. The body had to be respected and unaltered because it was bequeathed by one’s parents. The South Korean aversion to body manipulation appears to have been a long-standing cultural principle, completely abandoned in the last few years of proliferating plastic surgery.

### **1.3. Body Image in South Korea**

In this section we are going to focus on showing how lookism and the images presented in the media affect South Korean people’s body image. In addition to that, a focus will be put on cosmetic surgery’s development and the importance of physiognomy in influencing individual’s decision to alter their bodies.

Prior to the 1970s in South Korean society, displaying an interest in the human body, particularly the female body, and cosmetic initiatives at look maintenance, were considered poorly due to traditional Confucian values. Body-baring apparel, hair dyeing and tattoos, for

example, were not accepted, if not outright prohibited. South Korean culture clung to traditional fashions from early 20th century to the 1970s, refusing to acknowledge latest fashions. Females at the time embraced Hanbok, a traditional South Korean costume, along with the South Korean make-up and hairstyles. However, from the 1980s, multiple social, economic and political transformations in South Korea occurred, and the public's perspective of the human body rapidly changed, and interest in the human body grew. These changes, included a great reform in the political arena as the brutal military regime was replaced by a strong democratic government. Adding to that, a significant increase in the earnings was noticed as the country implemented a market economy that grew into a prominent industrial force.

Women's images have been utilized in South Korea since the 1980s in subways, roads, and periodicals, together with dieting regimens, exercise programs, and diet products. In most advertisements, people may see a woman with an extremely slim and boney form, long hair, as well as a beautiful face referred as "Ulzzang", that signifies "prettiest face" in Korean language. In fact, South Korea, a country that has undergone significant socio-cultural transformations, places a high value on beauty and body image. The importance of maintaining thinness as a cornerstone to self-presentation is emphasised in South Korea by significant social conventions. Indeed, South Koreans are preoccupied with dieting and body size, and weight-related remarks are widespread in ordinary conversations.

### **1.3.1. Media**

The media's emphasis on women to be slender has been linked to an increase in low self-esteem, and the media's portrayal of the perfect body has a negative impact on women's attitudes. That is, when women are subjected to media scrutiny to be slim, they are more likely to have negative evaluations of their bodies and embrace the media's norms as their

own. Entertainment, especially K-drama which is a business that has evolved into a dominant ideology, has infiltrated the brains of its viewers. Women emulate the behaviours shown in South Korean dramas. They imitate what they see from South Korean superstar's hairstyles and clothing.

### **1.3.2. Lookism**

The media is one of the pillars that stimulate lookism in South Korean society. Lookism is a word that applies to unequal treatment based on an individual's physical appearance ; the perception that one's physical attractiveness plays an important role in one's success or failure. One of the factors that contributes to lookism is the evolution of the media. The media has a crucial function in sustaining and enhancing people's look. Lookism, which depicts an idealized and desirable body from a physical standpoint, has grown in popularity as the media has evolved. People today put a lot of emphasis on their external look in a world where particular face features and physique are regarded as attractive, in a time where the contemporary society instructs that the most significant attribute for individuals is their external beauty.

Physical attractiveness is used as a basis for making key decisions in modern life. People's belief that a person with a small, attractive face and a slim figure not only attracts attention but also obtains favourable treatment while applying for jobs. Individuals with attractive appearances are content with themselves, live freely, and have self-confidence, whereas those with unattractive appearances are socially constrained and do not receive favourable treatment from others. As a result of the increased concern in physical beauty, lookism has been developed. Additionally, lookism has become an important component of the South Korean society nowadays. Individuals are extremely concerned with their physical appearance and waste effort and money trying to improve it.

Kim Sang-hui points out that “in a lookist society, it is not just about self-maintenance, it is that unbeautiful women are seen as lazy and incapable. Lookism discrimination is pervasive in job hunting and marriage and such discrimination based on looks is deemed ok by this society” (qtd. in Heijin Lee17). In other words, lookism is an unfair treatment towards individuals who are assessed solely on the basis of their outward appearance in different situational contexts, especially women who are perceived as work-shy and not putting too much effort into their looks. This is a well-known phenomenon in South Korean society, in which a girl is conditioned to believe that beauty is associated with a variety of aspects of one’s life, including personal career, the convenience that one can find an ideal future spouse and contentment through physical attractiveness.

With men holding the majority of political roles and the greatest seats in the workplace, they establish the principles that women should attain in order to achieve the social, political, and economic standing that they aspire to. Gender equality reforms and Feminist Movements have aided in certain cases. Nevertheless, women are still being pushed to change their look to become pretty in order to retain desired position and role in society.

A South Korean feminist nonprofit organization, Yosong Minuhoe, known in English as Korean Womenlink, identified lookism “ as the major social problem driving plastic surgery consumption ” (qtd.in Heijin Lee 13). We might then understand that people undergo cosmetic surgery procedures due to the discriminatory treatment they receive from their social environment, which is based on their physical appearance. Moreover, plastic surgery is a way for women to adhere to patriarchal conceptions of beauty in order to increase their prospects of marital and financial prosperity.

### **1.3.3. Cosmetic Surgery**

In the 1990s South Korea has become an extremely desirable tourist spot given the rapid advancements in technology including everything from handsets to its streamlined transportation network ; however, the most remarkable appeal in South Korea is the multitude of cosmetic surgery centres that stretched throughout the capital city's richest localities. The plastic surgery sector in South Korea grew rapidly in the 1990s, a period in which South Korea's commercial culture and consumer society flourished as a result of the society's fast industrialization in the 1980s, whilst retaining to its historical customs and ideals.

Since the initial exports of South Korean popular culture in the 1990s, Hallyu which is the Korean wave has symbolised South Korea's multimedia accomplishment : its entertainment items have produced vast sums. The popularity of Hallyu, which has managed to break into the foreign arena, pushed the South Koreans to have more interest in cosmetic surgery. Plastic surgeries were first pushed apace with existing Hallyu pillars of cinema, television, and music as a stand alone export sector featuring South Korean stars. Adding to that, the South Korean government, specifically the Seoul Metropolitan Government, has launched a Tourism Promotion Strategy in response to the cosmetic surgeries epidemic. The strategy aims to increase the number of international medical visitors in South Korea. The South Korean government has reacted favorably to the cosmetic surgeries craze since this is one of the most profitable industries of foreign exchange income.

Cosmetic surgery became popular in the 2000s as a way to conform to traditional ideals that equate outward attractiveness to accomplishment. Plastic surgery serves as a stage of life ; it is a promise of achievement. It is an important part of building one's own unique transition experience for those who have had cosmetic surgery. Besides, plastic operations are indicative of how women react to the norms imposed by the society. Female's self worth is dependent on their bodies undergoing surgery.

Furthermore, the increase in the number of South Korean women seeking cosmetic surgery is attributed to a society of lookism (Park, Myers, Langstein 4), like the presence of photos on resume images or curriculum vitae (CV) while seeking a job. Firms in South Korea are fiercely competitive in hiring individuals based on initial impressions of outward appearance on recruitment applications as a determinant for employment. This encouraged South Koreans to seek cosmetic surgery in order to find work, not to improve oneself. Hence, appearance is now a requirement that women in South Korea need to adhere to, since they suffer social discrimination to look feminine in order to acquire a job ahead of other women.

Altering one's body has not been accepted by the South Korean society as a legitimate act because Confucianism puts a great emphasis on filial piety which says that the body has to remain unaltered because one's body is bequeathed by one's parents. Yet, as a result of its industrialisation, South Korea is currently among the most popular destinations for plastic surgery. Cosmetic surgery has evolved to meet the needs of society, and it is now used to fix imperfect body parts, besides becoming a way of life in this modern time. Cosmetic surgery has become a natural and cultural phenomenon in South Korea.

#### **1.3.4. Physiognomy**

Aesthetic operations became common in South Korea throughout the 2000s, appearance has been an important part of South Korean culture for generations. Physiognomy, a tradition that stretches back to the Goryeo and Chosun Dynasties, is one source of cultural fascination with changing facial characteristics. Physiognomy is a popular belief in South Korean culture that states that someone's face dictates a person's fate, and that changing one's look affects one's fortune. As a result, South Koreans seek for visual traits like a prominent nose bridge, not out of a desire to appear Western but because of its mystical relation to success. Furthermore, physiognomy has a significant impact on the job markets since



recruiters place a great value on applicants appearances when making hiring decisions. Though cosmetic surgery became popular in South Korea in the 2000s, the attempt to change somebody's look is not a new phenomenon. It stems from a long-standing South Korean traditional concept in physiognomy which continues to influence decisions to undergo bodily modifications nowadays.

Traditional systems of prediction, such as astrology and physiognomy, are considered legitimate components of South Korean culture. With the rising prosperity of South Korean Society, the unlucky face, which had traditionally sentenced its owner to a lifetime of misfortune can now be corrected. Despite the fact that changing one's outward look has traditionally been regarded as insulting to someone's forebears, physiognomic surgery is becoming popular as South Korean customers want fortunate faces in addition to pretty ones. Many people who want to undergo cosmetic surgery speak with a physiologist first. Adding to that, aesthetic surgeons and physiologists collaborate closely to provide joint advice to customers. The prevalent practise of requesting consent of surgical treatments from acquaintances emphasises the necessity of having the " appropriate " face.

## **2) The Literary Background of *If I Had Your Face***

### **2.1. An Introduction to Modern South Korean Literature**

Modern South Korean literature arose amid South Korea's modernization. Modern South Korean literature has emerged in the middle of tremendous social and political upheaval and has served as a portal into the country's tumultuous modern history. Before the invention of the Hangul, which is the South Korean writing system, South Korean literature was written in classical Chinese as a kind of phonetic alphabet. The introduction of Hangul led to a major shift in the South Korean field of writing. South Koreans can now write and read their literary works in their own language (Kwon and Fulton 101-102). The writings in

Hangul contributed to the on-going development of the modern South Korean literature. Accordingly, South Korea had developed a remarkable tradition of prose writing in the form of *Solhwa* (legends), *Sosol* (fiction), and *Japmun* which is a book containing a collection of pieces of writings by different authors.

Korea was freed from Japanese domination in 1945, yet because of the United States, the Soviet, and the Chinese interference, Korea was split into two countries : South Korea and North Korea. Hence, all the South Korean literature after 1945 is referred to as division era literature, and most of the modern South Korean writers are still inspired by the split. Moreover, the Korean War in 1950 was among the most controversial topics in modern South Korean literature. During this time, authors tended to focus on the social realities of chaos and ruin, attempting to portray the image of people searching for stability. In the 1970s and 1980s, modern South Korean literature addressed the difficulties associated with the development of industrialization : the gap between the rich and the poor, worker alienation, expanding consumerism in society, cultural corruption, and the gradual destruction of agrarian society.

In 1990s, the literary and artistic milieu underwent a transformation and was faced with differences from the past, due to numerous changes in social circumstances. Most notably, on the moves from being printed and analogue to digital and image culture media. Modern South Korean literature transformed in a world where personal needs were vigorously sought instead of social interests. Writers were able to surpass their own variety and multiplicity. Protagonists who live a life free of the societal constraints or conventional order are common in fiction. The individual's experiences are portrayed in their writings and make the corps of their storyline. These writers of the 1990s analyse the new reality in a positive mindset by demonstrating the eventual hollow and pointlessness of such existence.

Contemporary South Korean literature is characterized by a vigorous activity of young women writers who challenge the patriarchal order of South Korean society. These female writers often write against established traditions and social expectations. Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*, first published in 2007, was translated into the English language in 2015 and was awarded the Man Booker Prize for fiction. *The Vegetarian* tells the story of Yeong-hye Kim, a young, unhappy married woman in modern-day Seoul, whose decision to become a vegetarian is the beginning of an interesting and provoking story, since vegetarianism is nearly unheard of in South Korea. Yeong-hye Kim's attitude is questioned by everyone around her, but she stays strong.

Cho Nam Joo's *Kim Jiyoung Born 1982*, published in 2016, sold more than a million copies in South Korea. It was adopted into a film in 2019. The novel depicts not just the difficulties that the female protagonist has faced since childhood due to her gender, but also the stories of other women. It portrays the women's experiences with prejudice and social judgement, as well as their reactions to it. In addition to that, it addresses issues of pervasive sexism and institutional tyranny.

## **2.2. An Introduction to South Korean American literature**

The literature of the South Korean diaspora, or writing by people of South Korean descent living outside of South Korea is becoming prominent in contemporary South Korean literature yet it is infrequently treated in academic texts. These works are now often written in the adoptive country's language. The literature of the South Korean diaspora written in English is particularly well represented. According to American scholars, South Korean American literature is "writing in English, by Americans of Korean origin. It is typically assumed that this writing is somehow connected to issues of ethnicity or at least includes a character or narrator who is Korean or Korean American" (qtd in. Fenkl 25). In other words,

South Korean American literature covers all the works written in English by people of South Korean descent living in America.

South Korean American literature reveals the history, ideals, and cultural reality of many South Korean Americans in the United States. It is portrayed in a variety of forms including autobiographies, prose, poems, and short stories dealing with a wide range of issues notably South Korean people's life in the United States, and the junction of American and South Korean culture in the lives of South Korean Americans. Moreover, in South Korean American literature, characters are constantly confronted with the complexity of facing new values in a diverse world, in addition to the marginalisation they have faced since their arrival to the United States.

Adoption stories are also a distinctive element in South Korean American literature. Those books portray a unique period in the United States's history when mixed-race and South Korean children were raised by American families. Although the majority of them are not familiar with traditional South Korean ideals and customs, many are intrigued about them since their appearances remind them that their background is distinct from that of those around them. They do not know whether or not to embrace their native culture and to which community they should identify themselves to. In this context, Marie Lee's *If It Hadn't Been For Yoon Jun* published in 1993 recounts the story of Alice, a Korean girl that was adopted by an American family who wants her to make friends with a Korean immigrant as a way to get in touch with her heritage.

Focusing on intellectual immigrants' viewpoints, Yonghill Kang, a precursor of South Korean American writing is the most well-known of the early writers. In the eyes of the Americans, Kang encapsulates South Korea and South Koreans. *The Grass Roof* (1931) tells the story of the author's life in South Korea prior to his departure to the United States. *East*

*Goes West* (1937) depicts the circumstances of Korean writers who live abroad in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s.

*Native Speaker* (1995) Chang-Rae Lee's inaugural work won the prestigious Hemingway Foundation Award for a first novel in 1995. It recounts the story of a Korean immigrant son, who acts as a corporate secret agent for a private company. He struggles with an unstable marriage and the loss of a son and becomes entangled in political turmoil. His former spouse depicts him as a political and emotional outsider. He is, in fact, a person who exists in two realms but does not belong to any of them. *Memories of My Ghost Brother* (1996) by Heinz Insu Fenkl a narrative of a mixed-race boy growing up in American military camptown in Korea, is another remarkable tale about a prior life in Korea.

Helen Kim's *The Long Season of Rain* published in 1996 examines the condition of subjugated women in traditional South Korean society. The novel tells the story of Junehee and her mother who is experiencing frequent demeaning treatment from her husband and mother-in-law. She is responsible for all domestic duties but has little decision-making ability. Additionally, An Na's *A Step From Heaven* (2001) won the Michael L. Printz Award and the Asian American Award for Literature. The novel recounts the story of a woman who does numerous jobs in order to maintain her family while being beaten by her husband on a regular basis. Wives had to work outside the home to help support their families in many immigrant homes. Many husbands are frustrated by this change because they are unable to provide for their family. They respond by demanding that their wives be more submissive at home.

Don Lee's *Yellow* that was published in 2001 is among the first South Korean American writings of the 21st century. His characters are clever and talented, but they are frequently perplexed. The colour yellow in the novel could allude in an implicit way to both fear, bravery, and even to the protagonist's race. Don Lee's female characters are often

strong, intelligent, accomplished, self-assured, autonomous, and sexually assertive. Lee's men on the other hand have a wider range of abilities and are more forceful. Furthermore, Frances Cha's *If I Had Your Face* (2020), is a young-adult fiction set in contemporary Seoul, South Korea, about young women making their way in a society defined by rigid beauty standards.

### **2.3. Literary Profile of Frances Cha**

Frances Cha was born in Minnesota, United States. She spent her childhood in Hong Kong before moving to South Korea at the age of 12. She graduated from Dartmouth College with a BA in English literature and Asian studies. For her MFA in creative writing, she attended Columbia University where she received a Dean's Fellowship. Frances Cha is a former travel and culture editor for CNN International in Seoul and Hong Kong. She worked as the assistant managing editor of Samsung Economic Research Institute's business journal in Seoul. She has written for *The Atlantic*, *The Believer*, and the Yonhap News Agency, among others, and has lectured at Columbia University, Seoul National University. She has taught media studies at Ewha Womans University, and creative writing at Yonsei University. She lives in Brooklyn.

Frances Cha began writing from an early age while living in a province outside of Seoul in South Korea. She spent her youth traveling between the United States, Hong Kong, and South Korea, devouring novels and perfecting her writing style. Frances Cha's debut novel *If I Had Your Face* was published in 2020. This novel is a fictional story set in modern-day Seoul, South Korea, about four young women making their way in a society marked by impossible beauty standards and strict social hierarchy. It was named one of the best books of the year by *Time Magazine*, NPR, and BBC. The journalist turned novelist does not just skim over the issues but she delves deep into the story of each of the four young women who share a flat in Seoul.

In “Author Frances Cha on Achieving the Feminine Ideal” (2020), Frances Cha says that she felt compelled to write about the individuals she met back in South Korea on a daily basis. She has read Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) at so many occasions that the hardcover has fallen off. After reading it, she recognized that having an Asian protagonist and exploring topics like filial piety which is the long-standing historical and cultural virtue of profound regard, support, and affection for one’s parents and elders, was achievable. Writing a political novel was not her objective. She aspired to write a story about young ladies set in contemporary South Korea. As a former culture editor at CNN International where she interviewed people in Korean language, she had a lot of experience. She was creating stories for an international audience and was contextualising them.

Moreover, in an article entitled, “If I Had Your Face review : Are South Korean women really obsessed with beauty ?” (2020), Frances Cha states that she initially envisioned the novel as a collection of interconnected short stories. She liked the concept of situating the story in an apartment building since her mother’s residence in South Korea is directly next to an office-tell. She sees a lot of young women going in and out of the building at all hours of the day and night and she knows there are a lot of tales going on there. She says that the novel has completely changed from its early draft. The story teller on whom she had spent the most effort was completely removed. She will be the main character in her second book which will be published soon.

#### **2.4. Plot Overview of *If I Had Your Face***

*If I Had Your Face*, is Frances Cha’s debut novel, set in contemporary Seoul, South Korea. It is about a group of young women navigating in a society marked by unachievable ideals of beauty, secret room salons catering to wealthy men, severe social hierarchies, and K-pop fanaticism. Each of the female characters fantasises about escaping her precarious

situation in various ways. The narrative is informed by the search for beauty since it gives us a glimpse into the lives of the protagonists. It is a story about female friendship, but it is also a tale about consumerism and obsessive beauty culture.

The young-adult novel is narrated from alternating first-person perspectives of four main characters living in an office-tell. We first hear from Ara, a hairstylist who lives down the hall in their apartment building and who has gone mute after a terrible incident when she was younger. She is preoccupied with two things: an obsession with a boy-band pop singer and a best friend called Sujin who is saving up money for the extreme plastic surgery. Although Ara works at a fancy salon in Gangnam, her parents are concerned about her possibilities of marrying and fear that she would be alone when she reaches their age. What they do not realise is that Ara has a wonderful set of friends who are not interested in marriage either.

Kyuri is a stunning woman who works in an expensive room salon where she entertains businessmen as they drink. She is romantically involved with one man, and though she finds him rude and selfish, she is attracted to what he represents: wealth and a way out of her miserable life. Her later actions demonstrate that the beliefs created by the environment in which she works are at odds with her innermost sentiments. Another protagonist is their downstairs neighbor, Wonna, who is married and dealing with pregnancy issues. She is convinced her fourth pregnancy will not work after three miscarriages. Her husband works in middle management and does not generate enough money for them to afford a house. Wonna works for a corporation and earns a modest wage. So, she is not sure if they will be able to afford a child. The cost of childcare is exorbitant and there is no family to assist them. Wonna's mother abandoned her when she was young, and her husband's mother died.



Miho, Kyuri's roommate, is a gifted artist who grew up in an orphanage but got a scholarship to study art in New York City. When she returns to South Korea after college, she finds herself in a perilous relationship with the heir to one of South Korea's most powerful enterprises. The stories of the four protagonists weave together to form an engrossing tale that is both foreign and universal, in which their tentative friendships may prove to be the thing that saves them in the end.

### **3) Theoretical Context**

#### **3.1. Body Image from a Feminist Perspective**

Body image is defined as "a person's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about his or her body" (Grogan 4). That is to say, body image is an individual's favourable or negative assessment of his or her physical appearance, as well as the thoughts and emotions that come with that perspective.

Since the inception of the Feminist Movement, feminists have been concerned about how women's bodies restrict their freedom. One of the rights mentioned in 1914 to safeguard women's equality in the United States was the right to ignore fashion. During the second wave of the Feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the body's role in confining women's life experiences was extensively examined (Murnen and Seabrook 438). Women questioned society's pressures to enhance their physical appearance by removing hair, applying cosmetic products, and dieting. Feminists brought into question why women's physical appearance needed to be enhanced (ibid.)

In her book *The Beauty Myth*, third-wave feminist Naomi Wolf states that, "More women have more money and power and scope and legal recognition than we have ever had before ; but in terms of how we feel about ourselves *physically*, we may actually be worse off than our unliberated grandmothers" (10). In others words, even though many women have

obtained their legal rights, they are not satisfied with their body image. As the society puts a lot of pressure on them to change their physical appearance and adhere to the unrealistic social ideals of physical attractiveness, women question their self-worth and lack self-confidence.

Moreover, Deborah L. Rhode in *The Beauty Myth Bias : The Injustice of Appearance in Life and Law* (2010), discusses the pressure on women to be physically attractive. She attests that, “Compared with other inequities that the contemporary women’s movement has targeted, those related to appearance have shown strikingly little improvement. In fact, by some measures, such as the rise in cosmetic surgery and eating disorders, our preoccupation with attractiveness is getting worse” (2-3). We might then understand that there is a long way to go to eradicate discrimination based on physical appearance as women are conforming to the beauty ideals set by the society.

### **3.2. Cosmetic Surgery From a Feminist Perspective**

Cosmetic surgery, which is the surgery that is performed exclusively for the purpose of improving one’s appearance has grown in popularity and has received much attention among Feminist discourses. Female beautification and modification of their bodies by undergoing cosmetic surgery are seen as patriarchal oppression by second-wave radical Feminism. They argue that women alter their physical appearance in order to conform to socially imposed ideals of beauty, and mostly to please patriarchal norms (Heggenstaller et al 52).

Susan Bordo, in “Twenty Years in the Twilight Zone”, argues that despite all the discourses on autonomy and free will, the word agency has no allure, and cosmetic surgery is an oppressive practice aimed to impel women to alter their bodies and conform to the societal beauty ideals (24). That is to say, women’s decisions to undertake cosmetic surgery are

impacted by the society's pressure on them to improve their physical appearance and adhere to societal beauty standards. They do not subject to cosmetic surgery because they want too. However, women modify their bodies in order to be accepted by the society and improve their prospects in life.

Furthermore, Kathy Davis in, *Reshaping the Female Body* (1995) states that, "Cosmetic surgery is not about beauty, but about identity. For a woman who feels trapped in a body which does not fit her sense of who she is, cosmetic surgery becomes a way to renegotiate identity through her body" (163). Rather than viewing these women who are considering cosmetic surgery as an option to change their physical appearance as accepting the pressure of the society on them to conform to beauty ideals, it would be more accurate to understand their decision to alter their bodies as beneficial for them.

Throughout the study of body image from a feminist perspective, we will demonstrate how women are victims of a materialistic, lookist society that gives high value to outward attractiveness. Moreover, we will discuss the reasons behind women's decisions to alter their bodies by undergoing cosmetic surgery. In addition to that, we will discuss the South Korean society's pressures on women that push them to change their physical appearance and conform to the rigid societal beauty standards.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have given an overall view of the socio-historical background of South Korea. Following this, we have presented the literary context of the study. The focus has been laid on the modern South Korean and South Korean American literature with special attention to contemporary writings. Then, we have provided the biography of Frances Cha's *If I Had Your Face* by highlighting her works and accomplishments, and we have given the synopsis of *If I Had Your Face* to provide a general insight into the text. In the end, we have

examined body image from a feminist perspective and considered feminists standpoints on women's practice of cosmetic surgery. Dealing with body image, the upcoming chapter is devoted to the examination of the representation of body image in the novel, through the main protagonists Sujin, Kyuri, Miho, Ara, and Wonna.

## **Chapter II**

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### **Body Image in Frances Cha's *If I Had Your Face***

## **Introduction**

The present chapter analyses how body image is represented and viewed in the novel from a Feminist perspective, through the major female characters. The first section examines the main protagonists Sujin, Kyuri, and Miho's attitudes towards cosmetic surgery. The second section discloses the negative influence of physical appearance on the main protagonists Ara, Wonna, and Kyuri. The third section focuses on the influence of physiognomy on Kyuri's decision to undergo cosmetic surgery.

### **1) Plastic Surgery in *If I Had Your Face***

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, plastic surgery is “a branch of surgery concerned with improving the function or appearance of parts of the body through reconstructive or cosmetic medical procedure” (“Plastic Surgery”). In other words, plastic surgery was at first developed in order to cure bodily deformities. However, nowadays it is used to improve people's look through enhancing physical aspects of attractiveness.

Throughout the characters' analysis of *If I Had Your*, we will attempt to demonstrate that the female protagonists are victims of a materialistic, consumerist society that puts a great emphasis on body image, and which is defined by unrealistic beauty standards that are only attainable by undergoing cosmetic surgery. The struggle of living in an appearance-oriented society is demonstrated through the lens of the three female protagonists Sujin, Kyuri, and Miho.

#### **1.2. Sujin**

Sujin is desperately yearning for survival in an appearance-oriented society. She is a twenty-two years old woman who grew up in an orphanage. Her story is told by her friend Ara and is perceived through the eyes of other characters. Sujin is hell-bent on getting a high-quality plastic surgery in addition to her eyelid surgery to become a successful salon girl and

earn more money. She has invited their neighbor Kyuri to their apartment in order to ask her questions about plastic surgery and to seek advice from her. She shows Kyuri her eyelid surgery but Kyuri thinks that the surgery was not well executed :

“I got mine done back in Cheongju,” says Sujin sorrowfully to Kyuri. “What a mistake. I mean, just look at me.” She opens her eyes extra wide. And it’s true, the fold on her right eyelid has been stitched just a little too high, giving her a sly, slanted look. Unfortunately, the truth is that even apart from her asymmetrical eyelids, Sujin’s face is too square for her to ever be considered pretty in the true Korean sense. Her lower jaw also protrudes too much”. (4)

This passage shows that the South Korean society has rigid beauty standards that are characterized by a small face, larger eyes, pale skin, and a v-shaped jaw. Sujin has to undergo plastic surgery to fit the strict standards of beauty imposed by the materialistic society. The feminist Susan Bordo in “Twenty Years in the Twilight Zone” (2009) defines cosmetic surgery “as more than an individual choice. It is a burgeoning industry and an increasingly normative cultural practice. As such, it is a significant contributory cause of women’s suffering by continually upping the ante on what counts as an acceptable face and body” (24). Cosmetic surgery became a regular cultural practice in a society that urges women to alter their bodies in order to be accepted as physically attractive by the society. Sujin, by altering her body and changing her physical appearance conformed to the beauty standards imposed by the materialistic society that judges people according to their outward attractiveness.

After Sujin sees Kyuri’s eyelid surgery, she regrets getting her eye surgery done in Cheongju which is a small town in South Korea. Sujin says, “ ‘I was so stupid. I should have waited till I was older.’” With another envious look at Kyuri’s perfect creases, Sujin sighs and peers at her eyes again in a little hand mirror. ‘What a waste of money, ’ she says” (5). This

indicates that even though Sujin has undergone eyelid surgery, she is still not satisfied with her appearance and compares herself to Kyuri which shows that she has low self-esteem.

An important point that is worth examining is the context in which Sujin performed her eyelid surgery. Ara says, “The doctor who performed the surgery was the husband of one of our teachers, who ran a small plastic surgery practice in Cheongju. About half of our school got their eyes done there that year because the teacher offered us a 50 percent discount” (6). This shows that Sujin’s teacher influenced her to undergo an eyelid surgery and change her physical appearance. Sujin was confronted to the rigid beauty standards inflected by the society from a young age. In “Revisiting Feminist Debates on Cosmetic Surgery : Some Reflections on Suffering, Agency, and Embodied Difference” (2009) Kathy Davis argues that, “for many Feminists, any woman who would willingly put her body under the surgeon’s knife [...] had been manipulated by profit-hunger surgeons” (35). It might then be understood that surgeons exploit women and push them to alter their bodies. The doctor who conducted Sujin’s surgery pushed her to undergo cosmetic surgery because he is greedy and only cares about his own interests by persuading his wife to inform her pupils that they will receive a 50 percent discount on the original fee.

Sujin wants to have a jaw surgery and asks Kyuri to introduce her to Dr. Shim Hyuk Sang, a well-known plastic surgeon who graduated top of his class at Seoul National University. Dr. Shim Hyuk Sang is a skilled doctor who really understands beauty trends and what girls want to look like. He works in Cinderella Clinic which is one of the most popular plastic surgery clinics in South Korea, known as the Pretty Factory. Sujin has read a lot about Dr. Shim Hyuk Sang on Beauty Hacker, which is an online surgery forum where one can learn about cosmetic surgery in South Korea by reading reviews on aesthetic surgery. The waiting list to see Dr. Shim Hyuk Sang is months long. Kyuri has performed her jaw surgery at Cinderella Clinic with Dr. Shim Hyuk Sang, and Sujin finds that Kyuri’s jawline is the



prettiest she has ever seen. Sujin says, “ ‘Well it’s going to be the biggest investment of my life, and I’ve been saving for a while now.’ Sujin tosses her head and shoots a quick look at me as she says this” (10). This indicates that Sujin was interested in plastic surgery for a long time and thought of cosmetic surgery as a turning point in her life. However, even though Kyuri believed that having jaw surgery changed her life, she does not recommend it to Sujin because it is too expensive. Kyuri claims what follows:

“Look, I am not saying I regret having jaw surgery. It was the turning point of my life. And I’m not saying that it won’t change your life— in fact, it definitely will. But I *still* can’t say I recommend it. Also, Dr. Shim’s really busy and that hospital is really expensive. *Really* expensive, even without the premium. He only takes cash. They say they take cards, but they bait you with such a big discount if you pay cash that you can’t possibly not pay cash. It’s just too expensive, unless you’re an actress who has signed with a major agency, and then he’ll sponsor you.” Kyuri downs the rest of the soju and blinks her feathery lashes. “Otherwise, you’re going to have to borrow money from somewhere else. And then you have to pay off the interest forever”. (9-10)

The above-mentioned quote demonstrates that cosmetic surgery demands a lot of money. Sujin has to borrow money in order to afford the surgery and get a job at the room salon where Kyuri works. She has to live with the burden and the thought of how to pay back the money with the interest.

Despite the fact that plastic surgery procedures are very expensive, Sujin still wanted to alter her body. She even borrowed money from a store where Kyuri sells her bags. The store’s main business is lending money. Ara states, ‘Sujin trembles with excitement as I pat her arm. ‘I can’t wait’, she says. ‘I am only going to eat ramen until I pay back that loan so fast that there won’t be time for any interest to grow’ ” (13). This indicates that Sujin is so anxious

to alter her body to the point that she is ready to continue her life eating just ramen, known in the West as noodles which is a cheap meal in South Korea in order to save money and pay back the loan.

Sujin was aware of the consequences and the dangers a plastic surgery procedure may inflict. Ara says, “We had read many news stories about patients who died from flecks of jaw bone getting lodged in arteries, causing them to choke to death on blood filling up in their throats while they slept. I made her stop after the first few articles, but secretly, I read them all” (14-15). This shows that in spite of the risk of death during the surgery, Sujin decided to undergo the surgery. Sujin was so affected by the beauty standards imposed by the society that she decided to alter her body. She wanted to conform to these beauty standards in order to have a normal social life and get a job. Additionally, Sujin has left a letter to her friend Ara on the day of her surgery. Sujin says, “I *Leave Everything* I own to my roommate, Park Ara, it says” (15). This indicates that Sujin thought that she may die during the surgery. Kathy Davis in her article entitled “‘MY BODY IS MY ART’: COSMETIC SURGERY AS FEMINIST UTOPIA ?” (1999) claims that, “Like many Feminists, I was deeply troubled by the fact that so many women willingly and enthusiastically have their bodies altered surgically despite considerable hardship and risk to themselves” (455). That is to say, although cosmetic surgery has significant hazards, women take the risk and modify their bodies. Sujin knowingly altered her body despite the considerable repercussions that a cosmetic surgery procedure may entail.

Frances Cha in *If I Had Your Face* depicts how the media’s influence on Sujin pushed her to alter her body and conform to the rigid beauty standards imposed by the society. In fact, according to Ara, Sujin spends a significant amount of time watching television:

Sujin’s favorite program is this variety show called *Extreme to Extreme*, where they feature several severely deformed (or sometimes just really ugly) people every week

and have the public phone in their votes on who should win free plastic surgery from the best doctors in the country. She loves watching the final makeover, when the chosen step out from behind a curtain while their families—who have not seen them in months while they recover from surgery—scream and cry and fall to their knees when they see how unrecognizably beautiful the winner has become. It is very dramatic.

(12)

The passage shows that Sujin is influenced by the media's portrayal of the perfect body image. Sujin was tempted to undergo cosmetic surgery and change her outward appearance after watching the variety show called *Extreme to Extreme*, that impels women to alter their bodies and improve their appearance. As Susan Bordo affirms, “nowdays, however, many women who are basically satisfied with their appearance begin to question their self-image on the basis of images and advice presented in magazine features” (28). Sujin aspired to improve her body image despite her natural beauty. The media's presentation of an ideal body image has an impact on her pushing her to question her body image, and propelling her to alter her body and adhere to the rigorous beauty standards set by the lookist, materialistic society.

## **1.2. Kyuri**

Besides Sujin, Kyuri is another female character who underwent cosmetic surgery. She is a young twenty-two years old woman who works at a room salon where she entertains and pours drinks to wealthy men. According to Ara, Kyuri is very beautiful. She describes her in what follows:

Kyuri, on the other hand, is one of those electrically beautiful girls. The stitches on her double eyelids look naturally faint, while her nose is raised, her cheekbones tapered, and her entire jaw realigned and shaved into a slim v-line. Long feathery eyelashes have been planted along her tattooed eye line, and she does routine light therapy on

her skin, which glistens cloudy white, like skim milk. Earlier, she was waxing on about the benefits of lotus leaf masks and ceramide supplements for budding neck lines. The only unaltered part of her is surprisingly her hair, which unfolds like a dark river down her back. (4-5)

This shows that Kyuri is the representation of the South Korean beauty. However, Kyuri has undergone multiple cosmetic surgery procedures; her hair is the only part which is natural. The fact that Kyuri underwent cosmetic surgery indicates that she conformed to the strict standards of beauty of the South Korean society. Moreover, despite the fact that cosmetic surgery procedures cause a lot of pain and may have considerable side effects, and even lead to death, Kyuri altered her body ignoring the consequences :

When I finally awoke the evening of my jaw surgery and the anesthesia began to wear off, I started screaming from the pain, but my mouth would not open and no sound came out. After hours of persistent agony, the only thing I could think was how I wanted to kill myself to stop it—I tried to find a balcony to jump from and when I couldn't, frantically searched for anything sharp or glass ; a belt to hang on a showerhead. (25-26)

This indicates that Kyuri has suffered after the plastic surgery procedure. The pain was unbearable that she even thought of killing herself to end the suffering. Kathy Davis in her article entitled ““MY BODY IS MY ART”: COSMETIC SURGERY AS FEMINIST UTOPIA ?” states that “ cosmetic surgery represented one of the more pernicious horrors inflicted by the medical system upon women’s bodies” (455). It causes a lot of pain to women. Kyuri had to endure a lot of pain after her cosmetic surgery procedure, to the extent of considering suicide as the only way to end her agony.

After three long and subdued weeks at home, Kyuri wanted to go out after work with her friend Sujin. They decided to meet at Kyuri's favourite *Samgyeopsal* place, which is a typical South Korean restaurant where they sell pork belly. As Kyuri watches Sujin eating meat, she remembers how difficult it is to shew after getting jaw surgery. Kyuri says, "After my own surgeries I had to work hard to stop myself from stretching my neck like a crane and constantly picking my chin because I couldn't feel it. Sensation never came back" (206). This shows the aftermath and the side effects of Kyuri's cosmetic surgery procedures. In a way, Kyuri had to sacrifice the ability to feel her chin in order to comply to the society's beauty standards.

In the novel, Kyuri speaks about a girl named Ji who was a customer in the room salon. She says, "Up close, I could see that her face was devoid of surgery—her eyes were single-lidded and her nose was flat. I would not have been caught dead walking around with a face like that. But clearly, from the way she walked and held her head, she came from the kind of money that didn't need any" (16-17). This shows that beauty is a very important aspect to Kyuri. According to her, if a girl is not beautiful in the true Korean sense, she has to alter her body. Kyuri interprets Ji's decision to not undergo any plastic surgery by the fact that she is wealthy so she does not have to alter her body and be beautiful to get employed.

In another passage of the novel, Kyuri speaks about her supervisor who works at the room salon. She says, "'Sometimes I just can't stop thinking about how ugly she is. I mean, why doesn't she just get surgery? Why? I really don't understand ugly people. Especially if they have money. Are they stupid?' She studies herself in the mirror, tilting her head to the side until I right it again. 'Are they perverted?'" (12). This demonstrates that Kyuri turned into an appearance-oriented person. She thinks that rich women who are not beautiful should undergo cosmetic surgery to conform to the beauty standards set by the society and be physically attractive.

In a conversation with her friend Nami, Kyuri discussed their pre-surgery physical appearance. Kyuri says, “we both look so different now, Nami and I. Sometimes she [Nami] says she wishes she had a photo of us from those days. 'Are you joking ? Why would you want any evidence ?' I say, appalled. I would kill someone and rot in jail before I would let them see what I looked like pre-surgery” (78). As we notice, Kyuri feels insecure about her outward pre-surgery appearance. She despises the way she used to look before altering her body. Adding to that, she gained self-confidence and learned to appreciate herself more after undergoing cosmetic surgery procedures. Kathy Davis views cosmetic surgery as “a complex dilemma : problem and solution, symptom of oppression and act of empowerment, all in one” (455). That is to say, cosmetic surgery can be both empowering and oppressive to women. Kyuri has increased her self-confidence by modifying her body, but she has also submitted to the society’s rigorous beauty standards.

Kyuri believes that beauty can only be achieved by undergoing cosmetic surgery. She states, “I am genuinely curious. Miho is pretty but not to the level of perfection you can achieve with surgery” (80). For her, women must alter their bodies, even if they are inherently attractive. Moreover, while looking for a job in Hong Kong and New York, Kyuri said “Apparently the standards of beauty are very low in those cities and people walk around with all kinds of ugly faces”(90). This demonstrates Kyuri’s transformation into a person obsessed with appearances, who believes that unattractive people should have cosmetic surgery and adhere to the society’s rigorous beauty standards.

On a Saturday morning, Kyuri went to Cinderella Clinic and in the waiting room she passed her time judging the other patients. She says, “She looks stupidly timid and not pretty at all — she has not had much surgery— just her eyes and maybe filler as far as I can tell”(215). This indicates that with all the plastic surgery Kyuri has undergone, she has become an expert in the field, and she can determine who has had plastic surgery just by

glancing at people's faces. She has turned into a person who cannot pertain herself from judging people according to their physical attractiveness.

Kyuri was influenced by media's portrayal of the perfect body image. When she visited her regular cosmetic surgery clinic, she saw the girl she modelled her face after. The girl's name is Candy and she is a singer. Kyuri says, "I'd brought in photos of Candy's face when I had my first consultations with Dr. Shim. She has a slight upturned bump at the end of her nose that makes her so uniquely, startlingly beautiful. Dr. Shim was the surgeon who gave it to her, which is the reason I had come to him" (26). This shows that Kyuri is very influenced by the stars and the entertainment business. She decided on Dr. Shim for her cosmetic surgery procedure after learning that he was the one who altered Candy's appearance. The celebrities portrayal of the perfect body image pushed Kyuri to perform cosmetic surgery and conform to the rigid beauty standards imposed by the society.

### **1.3. Miho**

Miho, the other main protagonist, grew up in an orphanage and went to study abroad after getting an art scholarship. She is naturally beautiful ; she did not get any plastic surgery. In a conversation with her friend Kyuri, Miho asks her about Nami who is one of Kyuri's friends. Kyuri says, "Miho tells me that Nami seems much too young to be having so much surgery. 'Won't she regret it later, when she is older ?' " (79). This shows that Miho is against the practice of plastic surgery. She believes that cosmetic surgery is a waste of time and money. Adding to that, Kyuri is jealous of Miho because she is slim without any diet. Kyuri states, "I get jealous because it is so hard for me to diet but she [Miho] doesn't even spend a thought on her weight and remains impossibly slender" (79). This indicates that Miho is not preoccupied with her outward attractiveness. She is not someone who gives high value to physical appearance. She is unconcerned with the society's beauty standards. Furthermore,

Miho believes that she is the only girl among her friends who is naturally beautiful. Miho claims, “I think I’m the only girl in the entire office-tel who doesn’t wear full makeup or have dyed or permed hair” (43). As we see, Miho is not interested in the use of cosmetic products. She does not want to adhere to the beauty ideals imposed by the society.

Miho and her roommate Kyuri had an argument one day. Miho says, “The one time we got into a fight was a few months ago, when we were drinking together on the weekend and she [Kyuri] accused me [Miho] of feeling superior to her because I was pretty without having surgery”(46). Miho is accused of arrogance because she is attractive without undergoing cosmetic surgery. Miho feels a pinch of pride when someone asks her if she has had surgery and she can say no. Despite the fact that Miho is not an appearance oriented person, she is proud of being pretty without altering her body and without conforming to the beauty standards set by the society. Naomi Wolf in her book entitled *The Beauty Myth* asserts, “This constant comparison, in which one woman’s worth fluctuates through the presence of another, divides and conquers. It forces women to be acutely critical of the “choices” other women make about how they look” (284). It may then be understood that when women compare their physical appearance with other women’s appearances, it influences their perception of their own body image. This causes envy and pushes them to criticize each other’s looks. Kyuri feels envious of Miho because she is naturally beautiful. Her continuous comparison with Miho prompts her to dislike her own body image and lack self-confidence.

In a passage from the novel, Miho and her friend Sujin were bickering about whether Sujin should visit the orphanage they grew up in and Miss Loring’s grave or not. According to Sujin, Miss Loring, the orphanage supervisor, only liked Miho because she was beautiful. “ ‘She liked you because you were talented and pretty’, says Sujin ”(124). One may argue that individuals who are attractive receive positive treatment in a society where physical appearance is highly valued.



In another passage, Miho opens up about the head of the department in her workplace. She says, “Our department head has gone so far as to make me promise not to cut my hair, which is torturously unmanageable now that it hits my waist” (47). This demonstrates that physical attractiveness is very important at work. Individuals are assessed according to their outward appearance. Miho is required to adhere to her employer’s beauty norms in order to keep her job. Moreover, in the end of the novel, Miho has decided to cut her hair. She says, “ ‘I actually cried when Ara cut it off. Ara almost cried too. I was the one who had to convince her for a good twenty minutes that I really wanted to cut it’ ” (213). This shows that Miho did not conform to the rigid beauty standards imposed by the society. One might argue that Miho’s decision to cut her hair can be considered as a symbol of her newfound independence, empowerment, and freedom of choice. She changed her hairstyle and did not adhere to the beauty ideals imposed by her employer who told her to not cut her hair.

## **2) Physical Appearance in *If I Had Your Face***

In *If I Had Your Face*, Frances Cha describes how lookism, which is an adverse judgement and unfair treatment based on one’s outward appearance, influences the main female protagonists. Living in a lookist society where physical appearance is highly valued pushes the main characters to doubt their self-worth and have low self-esteem, in addition to turning into appearance-oriented persons.

### **2.1. Ara**

Ara is a mute full-fledged hairstylist who is concerned with people’s looks and is exposed to comments on physical appearance everyday. Going back to her school days, she used to have a part time job with her friend Sujin. Ara says, “Sweet potatoes are good for your skin ! we’d yell. ‘Gives you health and beauty ! And they’re so delicious !’ ” (7). This indicates that Ara was influenced by physical appearance from a young age. She impelled

people to buy sweet potatoes by telling them that they are beneficial for skin care. She wanted people to take care of their outward attractiveness. Moreover, a senior girl at Ara's school used to send her off to buy her things. Ara states, "The man at the corner store wouldn't sell them to her because he didn't like her face" (8). This shows the importance of physical appearance in daily interactions with people. Ara's pretty face makes her life easier in a society where body image is very important in judging people's personality. Furthermore, before moving to Seoul, Ara used to work in a small hair shop. She says,

During that summer I was working here, when the salon had only been open for a few months, there had been long waits for a haircut by Mr. Moon, especially after he gave the grocery store owner a drastic haircut that miraculously transformed her face, and subsequently her personality. He never bothered with his own hair, which is still shaggy and wild, and now even from across the street I can see that it is unwashed and graying. (139)

The above-mentioned passage indicates that people are judged according to their outward attractiveness. Ara is an appearance-oriented person who thinks that changing someone's haircut will lead to a change in the individual's personality as well. For Ara, people's personalities are reflected in their looks. She views that one's facial attributes represent an individual's personality. Living in a lookist society, she turned into a person who thinks that physical appearance determines one's character. She judges people according to their appearances.

Ara's friend kyuri comes to the hair salon where Ara works. Ara says, "She looks breathtaking, with her cascade of waves and carefully made-up face. Next to her, I look even more faded, with my ordinary face and my ordinary hair, which Manager Kwon is constantly harping at me to style more dramatically" (14). As we understand from this passage, Ara

compares herself to Kyuri whom she finds very beautiful, and thinks that Kyuri is prettier than her. Ara has a low self-esteem, she is not comfortable in her own skin. Furthermore, her manager Kwon puts a lot of pressure on her to change her hairstyle in order to attract more clients and enhance them to change their looks. Naomi Wolf claims that, “Women score lower than men on tests to measure self-esteem ; we do need to overcome 'years of negative influence'— internalized female self-hatred”(115). That is to say, women still have a long way to go to overcome their poor self-esteem and all the pressures that they have been subjected to in terms of their physical appearance. To acquire self-confidence, Ara has to love herself first and accept her body image.

One night Ara wanted to go out, so she borrowed clothes and make-up from her friend Kyuri. Ara says, “Kyuri’s tools do not make Kyuri’s face, however, and I emerge from her room looking a bit too pale and wide-eyed for my liking. Eyeliner was never my strong point. At least my hair will look perfect” (201). We may understand that Ara is self-conscious about her physical appearance by wearing Kyuri’s make-up and clothes, and she is aware that she will not be able to match Kyuri’s beauty, which indicates a lack of self-esteem. Ara is not confident about her outward attractiveness. Naomi Wolf argues, “The beauty myth generates low self-esteem for women and high profits for corporations as a result” (49). Women suffer from low self-esteem, and business companies benefit from that as women do not have enough self-confidence to fight for their legitimate rights. Kwon, Ara’s manager, takes advantage of her lack of self-confidence and pushes her to change her outward appearance in order to attract more clients and impel them to change their looks as well.

Ara has decided to go with her friends Sujin and Miho to Cheongju, which is her hometown, in order to see her parents whom she has not seen in three years. For this special occasion, she has dyed her hair. She says, “Manager Kwon loved the idea of my going pink and offered to do the initial bleach himself— he always pushes us to experiment with colours

in our own hair, the more maniacal the better. He says customers are happier entrusting their hair to people with imagination” (123). As we see, Ara’s manager Kwon urged her to change her look. He exerts a great deal of pressure on Ara in order to change her appearance. Ara lives in a society where looks are important in order to keep a job. She conformed to the beauty ideals imposed by her manager by dyeing her hair into pink, in order to maintain her position in her workplace. We may understand that, in a lookist society where employers put a lot of emphasis on outward attractiveness in order to higher employees, Ara did not fight for her right to have a choice to decide whether or not to change her look. Instead, she submitted to her manager’s will and altered her appearance by changing her hair colour.

## **2.2. Wonna**

Wonna is a young married woman who is convinced that her fourth pregnancy will not work after three miscarriages. Wonna’s mother abandoned her when she was a child, and her father had to go abroad to find a job. So, she has found herself living with her notorious, severe grand-mother in a small stone house in Namyangju, northeast Seoul. Her grand-mother, who used to beat and chastise her, has left a lasting impression on her. Wonna’s grand-mother used to sell cosmetic products to the neighbors. She placed a high value on the cosmetics she was selling. Wonna says,

One time, after her guests had left, she rummaged through her cosmetics bag and said that one of them must have taken her gold cream. At the time it was my grandmother’s most prized possession—a heavy tub of face cream with a gold lid that my aunt had sent the previous month. E-suh-tae Ro-oo-duh was the name of the cream. After going through my little cupboard to make sure I hadn’t taken it, she said that it must have been Mrs. Joo, who had always been bitter that her daughter had been rejected by all three of my grandmother’s

sons. My grandmother cursed the poor woman for days with a fearsome breadth of language that I have rarely heard since. (33-34)

The passage shows that Wonna was raised by an appearance-oriented grand-mother who placed a high value on physical attractiveness. Wonna grew up in an environment where physical appearance is highly valued. Besides, she used to have no friends at school, and she assumed it was due to her outward appearance. Wonna states what follows:

OURS WAS NOT a wealthy neighborhood but the children who went to our school were usually dressed in neat clothes and had things like siblings and haircuts and change to spend in the stationery store. I didn't know this then, but when I look at the few photos I have from my childhood, I see I am dressed poorly, in my grandmother's old undershirts. I have never seen a photo of me wearing children's colors. It was not something I missed or craved or even noticed. The other children did not pick on me, but they did not seek my company either, and so it was a natural thing for me to play alone by the creek after school or in the garden of our church. (31-32)

As we understand from the above quote, Wonna was a lonely child, who had no friends because she was poorly dressed. Wonna was exposed to the great importance given to physical attractiveness from a very young age.

During Wonna's junior year of college, her father took her to a mental health clinic because he has discovered that she had stopped attending her classes and instead was spending her days in a comic book cafe, immersed in piles of comic books. Wonna says,

So we sat there, the therapist and I, for an hour of valiant, gentle parrying on her part. She was a disappointment to the imagination in both looks and speech, from the moment she walked into the small room wearing a cheap nylon sweater and faded pants that hardly inspired any respect, let alone soul-sharing. (39)

The aforementioned passage shows that Wonna turned into an appearance oriented person. In the clinic, she was just interested in the doctor's physical appearance. She changed into someone who believes that attractive individuals are the only ones who are worthy of respect.

Furthermore, when Wonna's cousins visited her, she took them out in order to show them her vegetable garden in the churchyard. Wonna states, "It was my aim to spend as much time out, and to have as many people see my expensively dressed cousins, as possible— this was a way of thinking I had picked up from my grandmother" (36-37). Wonna is influenced by her grand-mother who puts great emphasis on outward appearance and she has changed into a person who is concerned with physical attractiveness. For instance Wonna was very impressed by her cousin's looks and fashion style. Wonna says, "I still remember the sun flower dress my cousin was wearing that day. It flared out at the waist in a way I had never seen a dress do, and she had a matching yellow and red hairband adorned with a tiny sunflower. And her gold shoes ! I think that was the first time I was ever struck speechless by the power of clothing" (36). As we notice, Wonna was fascinated by her cousin's clothes and physical appearance. She thinks that an individual's outward attractiveness defines one's personality. She turned into a lookist person who cannot prevent herself from reflecting on other people's appearances.

### **2.3. Kyuri**

Kyuri is also influenced by physical appearance. She went to Ara's salon to get her hair done. She says, "'no just waves please.' She absently combs her fingers through her hair. 'I guess I haven't told you, but it's actually a rule at Ajax. They can't have too many girls with the same hairstyle, so we get assigned a look for the season'" (11). This passage shows that Kyuri was compelled to present herself in a particular fashion. She has no authority over her

physical appearance. She must adhere to the beauty norms enforced by her employer to keep her job.

Kyuri enjoys working at a room salon that only hires the most attractive women. She says, “These days, it’s nice to finally be working at a “10 percent” a salon that supposedly employs the prettiest 10 percent of girls in the industry” (24). Kyuri is proud to be working in a place where women are selected according to their outward appearance. She has submitted to the materialistic, lookist society that places great value on physical appearance and forces women to change their appearance to get a job. As Deborah L. Rhode explains in *The Beauty Bias: The Injustice of Appearance In Life And Law*, “in employment contexts, women face a standard more difficult to satisfy; they can lose by either too attractive or not attractive enough” (31). This demonstrates that women are assessed on the basis of their physical attractiveness in order to get employed. Kyuri had to conform to the beauty ideals set by her employer to maintain her position at her workplace

### **3) Physiognomy in *If I Had Your Face***

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, physiognomy is “the art of discovering temperament and character from outward appearance” (“physiognomy”). That is to say, physiognomy is the process of determining a person’s personality on the basis of their physical appearance. Physiognomy or the skill of reading people’s faces has been practiced in South Korea for generations to discern a person’s future. South Korean people also think that an individual’s face characteristics mirror their personality.

#### **3.1. Kyuri**

In Frances Cha’s *If I Had Your Face*, physical characteristics are associated with superstition, and it is thought that someone’s face dictates a person’s fate and future. The

protagonist Kyuri is one of the female characters who altered her body after a fortune teller told her that changing her face would bring her good luck. Kyuri says,

YEARS AGO, back when I was still conflicted about whether to proceed with my surgeries, I went to a well-known fortune-teller who told me that shaving my jaw would take away all the luck that follows in old age. But when she took down my name and date and time of birth and calculated my saju and my future, her face changed. She said that my later years held only terrible luck, so I should try everything I could to alter my fate. Grimacing in pity, she told me that because of the shape of my nose, all the money that would flow into my life would flow right out again. (214)

The above mentioned passage explains Kyuri's decision to undertake cosmetic surgery. The fortune teller incited Kyuri to alter her body by convincing her that her facial traits bring her misfortune. In a lookist society where physical attractiveness is highly valued and physiognomy is a widespread cultural belief, Kyuri found herself obligated to adhere to the societal beauty standards in order to improve her prospects in life.

In another passage from the novel, Kyuri said, "even as a girl, I knew the only chance I had was to change my face. When I looked in the mirror, I knew everything in it had to change, even before a fortune teller told me so" (25). This denotes that Kyuri was impacted by her physical appearance from a young age. She believed that by modifying her physical appearance, she would improve her chances in life and obtain a good job. Since outward attractiveness is highly valued when making hiring decisions, Kyuri changed her physical appearance. As Susan Bordo affirms, "physical modification is continually presented as a prerequisite for romantic success and very often demanded by employers as well" (24). We may understand that women are required to alter their appearance in order to have a successful career and a happy marital life. In a lookist society where physical attractiveness is



crucial and decisive in one's life, Kyuri found herself obliged to undertake cosmetic surgery in order to obtain employment.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, we analysed how body image is represented in the novel. We first analyzed the major characters in *If I Had Your Face* and their attitudes towards cosmetic surgery, from a Feminist perspective. Then, we have revealed the negative influence of physical appearance on the main protagonists Ara, Wanna, and Kyuri. Moreover, we have exposed the influence of physiognomy on Kyuri's decision to alter her body.

## **General Conclusion**

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The current research examined the influence of body image on the main female characters in Frances Cha's *If I Had Your Face*. It explored how the materialistic, lookist society forced women to conform to the unrealistic beauty standards and alter their bodies. Besides, it showed how women are impacted by the society's emphasis on body image.

In the first chapter, we have presented the socio-historical, literary, and theoretical backgrounds. The first section was devoted to the socio-historical background, we have shed light on the main events that shaped the South Korean people's mindsets, in addition to the influence of Confucianism as a philosophy and body image on the South Korean society. Accordingly, we have demonstrated the impact of lookism and the images depicted in the media on the South Korean society. We have also discussed the evolution of cosmetic surgery in South Korea and the role of physiognomy in determining people's decisions to undertake cosmetic surgery. Then, we have provided a brief review of the South Korean and South Korean American literature. We also, presented the author's biography and discussed her major achievements, and we have provided the plot overview of the novel. At last, we gave an insight on body image from a Feminist perspective.

The second chapter was devoted to the analysis of body image in Cha's novel from a feminist perspective. We have examined the main protagonists Sujin, Kyuri, and Miho's attitudes towards cosmetic surgery. Then, we have revealed the negative influence of physical appearance on the main protagonists Ara, Wonna, and Kyuri. Besides, we have displayed the importance of physiognomy on affecting Kyuri's decision to undergo cosmetic surgery.

Throughout the study of the main protagonists in *If I Had Your Face*, we have come to the conclusion that women are subjected to pervasive societal pressure that urges them to adhere to the rigid beauty standards by undergoing cosmetic surgery. The novel reveals how women are desperately yearning for survival in an appearance-oriented society.

During the analysis of the main female characters, we have come to know that some protagonists adhered to society's rigorous beauty standards, while others refused to bow to societal pressures to modify their appearance. On the one hand, the main protagonists Sujin and Kyuri conformed to the beauty standards set by the society by altering their bodies. Also, we have realized that outward attractiveness is highly valued in job recruitments. For instance, Sujin and Kyuri had to undertake cosmetic surgery in order to fit the beauty norms set by employers. Besides, despite the fact that cosmetic surgery procedures are very expensive and may lead to death, Sujin and Kyuri altered their bodies ignoring the consequences, in order to be accepted by the appearance-oriented society and improve their prospects in life. On the other hand, the main protagonist Miho is against the practice of cosmetic surgery and did not adhere to her employer's beauty norms. Miho is the representation of natural beauty; she did not want to change her physical appearance and conform to the strict beauty standards imposed by the society.

Moreover, living in a lookist society where physical appearance is very important had a negative influence on the main protagonists Ara, Wanna, and Kyuri. They have turned into appearance-oriented persons who think that an individual's personality is reflected in his or her outward attractiveness. Furthermore, we deduced that Ara compares herself to Kyuri whom she finds prettier than her which compelled her to dislike her body image and lack self-confidence. The society's pressure on women to look beautiful pushes them to compare their physical appearance with other women and to have low self-esteem. At last, we revealed that physiognomy is a cultural belief that impels women to alter their bodies and enhance their physical appearance in order to improve their life prospects.

Our research has demonstrated that the lookist, materialistic South Korean society puts a lot of pressure on women to conform to the rigid beauty standards. Women are forced to

seek cosmetic surgery in order to fit the beauty ideals imposed by an appearance-oriented society.

While reading the title of the novel *If I Had Your Face*, readers might instantly feel that they understand the whole book without glancing at a single page. When making a connection between the title and the novel's content, readers will immediately associate the events with the title. Kyuri shows her longing for a new face and expressed her wish when she spoke about Candy, the girl she modeled her face after, and says that she would live a much better life if she had Candy's face. We can assume that Frances Cha used the title to foreshadow the novel's theme.

Besides, Frances Cha's description of Sujin's desire to undergo cosmetic surgery and be like Kyuri in order to have a job in a room salon, in addition to Kyuri's jealousy of Miho's natural beauty reflects the novel's theme. *If I Had Your Face* is more than a novel title; it depicts and mirrors the main protagonist's quest for beauty and longing for another appearance.

However, due to time restrictions, this research could not cover further details. Therefore, it will be interesting to examine the novel from a Confucian perspective through the characters analysis and discuss Confucianism's influence on women's decision to change their physical appearance by undergoing cosmetic surgery. We realized that analyzing Frances Cha's *If I Had Your Face* from a psychoanalyst feminist perspective would be interesting.

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## Résumé

La présente recherche examine le rôle de l'image corporelle dans *If I Had Your Face* (2020) de Frances Cha, d'un point de vue féministe. L'étude vise à montrer comment l'image corporelle est représentée à travers les principaux personnages féminins. De plus, il expose la grande importance accordée par la société Sud-Coréenne à l'apparence physique et sa pression sur les femmes pour qu'elles modifient leur corps et se conforment aux normes de beauté rigides de la société. De plus, cela démontre que la physionomie est une croyance culturelle qui influence la décision des femmes de subir une chirurgie esthétique et de changer leur apparence physique.

**Mots clés :** Image corporelle, Chirurgie esthétique, Corée du Sud, Féminisme, Littérature Sud-Coréenne Américaine.

## ملخص

يدرس البحث الحالي دور صورة الجسد في رواية (2020) *If I Had Your Face* من Frances Cha ، من منظور نسوي. تركز الدراسة على إظهار كيفية تمثيل صورة الجسد من خلال الشخصيات النسائية الرئيسية. علاوة على ذلك، فإنه يوضح تركيز المجتمع الكوري الجنوبي الكبير على المظهر الجسدي وضغطه على النساء لتغيير أجسادهن والتوافق مع معايير الجمال المجتمعية الصارمة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، يوضح أن علم الفراسة هو اعتقاد ثقافي يؤثر على قرار المرأة بالخضوع لجراحة تجميلية وتغيير مظهرها الخارجي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** صورة الجسم ، الجراحة التجميلية ، كوريا الجنوبية ، النسوية ، الأدب الكوري الجنوبي الأمريكي .