A close-up photograph of a woman's face, focusing on her lips and eyes. She is wearing a red traditional Chinese garment with intricate gold and green embroidery. The text is overlaid on a black background.

# THE TRUTH ABOUT ASIAN WOMEN

**McCANN**  
TRUTH CENTRAL

# INTRODUCTION

Rapid economic changes.

Increasing opportunities for education.

A fast declining birthrate, in part driven by younger women's decisions to put off marriage.

The 'six pocket syndrome'.

The growth of the first 'Little Emperors' and Empresses' to adulthood.

The proliferation of technologies, brands and options.

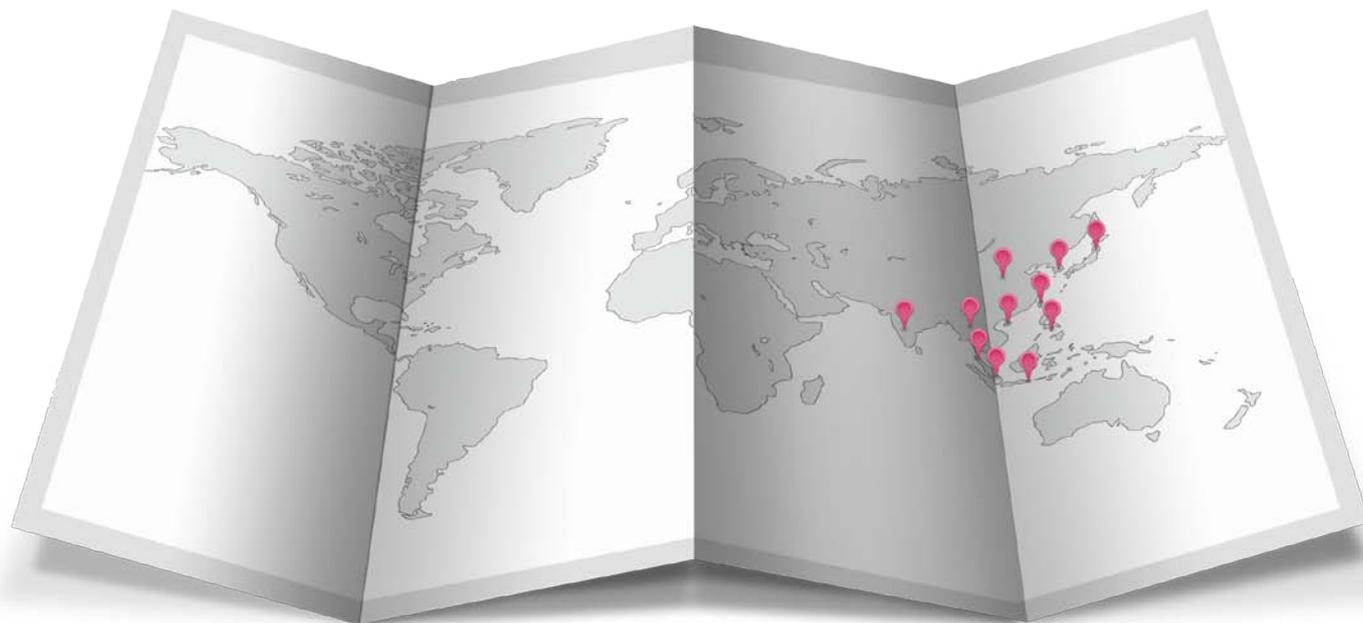
The women of Asia have lived through dramatic times, and continue to do so.

The variations in society, economy and lifestyle defy anyone to think women can be defined, categorised and compartmentalised within a single 'list' though many have tried. From '5 Things You Need To Manage Your Finances Better' to '8 Things You Should Look For To Find The 'Right Man' to 'How To Manage Your Husband After Retirement', it seems every magazine and blog from Japan to Singapore to India has attempted to provide the definitive clues to today's woman.

McCann's Truth Central won't provide all the answers. Instead, it will reveal truths about the way these women are approaching life. Over the last 12 months we have had discussions with 5,000 women across eleven Asian countries exploring the truth about their feelings and attitudes to everything from privacy, to being a mum, to what motivates them and how technology impacts their lives.

Understanding the variety of issues, wants and desires influencing the decisions of women of different ages, cultures, and social standing would be impossible in a single document. However we have noticed some interesting learnings that seems to hold true across the region. In this report we have singled out ten of the most compelling truths affecting Asian women.





The Truth About Asian Women is the result of a total of over sixty focus groups, dozens of interviews with experts and celebrity bloggers and internet surveys with over 5,000 women:

THE TRUTH ABOUT **YOUTH** : Japan, China\*, India\*, Korea, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore

THE TRUTH ABOUT **PRIVACY** : Japan\*, Hong Kong\*, India\*, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand

THE TRUTH ABOUT **BEAUTY** : Japan, China\*, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Korea, Taiwan, Philippines

THE TRUTH ABOUT **MUMS** : Japan\*, China\*, India\*, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia

\*= markets where qualitative and quantitative surveys were undertaken

## TRUTH

# 1 THE UNISEX IDENTITY

**F**rom the ‘carnivorous woman’ trend in Japan where young women are noted for being far more aggressive in their attitudes to life, work and relationships, to a broader trend to being more adventurous, the younger generations of Asian women are questioning roles while challenging themselves. We found 48% of Chinese women in their twenties agreeing with the statement: “Sometimes, you do things just to prove to yourself that you can”. That is 13% more than young Chinese men.

This trend might be called the unisex identity. You see it in many places from India to Indonesia where having a girl in the group lends legitimacy and interest value to acts of defiance that might otherwise be considered ‘over the top’ or banal. It tends to be more a reality in metros and a huge aspiration in small towns.

The unisex identity is about light-hearted camaraderie and activity-based engagement without real sexual overtones. It is just a case of women being recognised as valuable members of the group. In Japan, this is referred to as having ‘neta’ or a certain ingredient that helps provide stickiness for the total group. It is also about acceptance. 83% of young Chinese women strongly agree that “it’s important to always welcome people to come as they are”. That is 11% more than Chinese men and an impressive 28% more welcoming than women from the rest of the world.



TRUTH

# 2 NOW THEY CAN BECOME

**O**ur Truth about Youth study found that 16-29 year old Asian women place a higher importance on the motivation of ‘becoming’ as opposed to Asian men and the global norm. ‘Becoming’ is defined as the need for personal development, greater independence and self-expression. It is important for these women to be seen as making their own decisions.

“ It’s about creating my own story... expressing my likes and dislikes... this allows me to show my character and identity. ”  
— Respondent, Indonesia

The reduction in family size, witnessed across Asia, has helped young women become more independent. Coupled with education opportunities and employment roles that were once only open to men, having a career is becoming a viable option to these women.

The year 1997 saw - for the first time ever - women becoming the majority of Japanese university graduates. Now, when a new graduate enters the workforce, it is likely their supervisor is a woman.

Thus, it is no wonder that 47% of Chinese young women agree with the statement: “We now find ourselves asking introspective questions like: who am I and what do I want”. That compares with only 34% of their male friends who are far less questioning about themselves and their future.



## TRUTH

# 3 LIFE NEEDS TO BE STRATEGICALLY MANAGED

**A**s options grow and advice proliferates, finding the best options in life becomes more difficult. Getting married and having children are two priorities being delayed as young women make decisions as to what they really want in life.

In Singapore, we found that women are more open to expressing life goals in terms of financial success. In Japan, women in their twenties talk of wanting careers and a marriage that will allow them to maintain a unique personality.

Super charged adoption of technologies has led to a generational fracture, especially between younger and older women. Those under 35 cannot remember life without the latest phones and access to online advice. And they rightly rely on it. Our Truth about Mums study found that today's mother, who is in her early thirties, tries to map out the best way to care for her child in a world her own mother cannot recognise, while also wanting to make sure she does not lose her identity and become 'just a mum'.

And so the new technologies become the aid to mapping out life's options. 71% of new mothers in China say that they read parenting blogs or child-related websites at least once a week. Of course, she looks for tips on life from the sources that offer relevance.

Women in China are far more likely to ask friends for beauty tips (44%) than they would ask their mothers, who have no relevant experience of today's beauty world.



TRUTH

# 4 BEAUTY = SUCCESS

As they map out their lives it may not be surprising that Asian women, especially in China and other emerging markets, are far more overt in associating beauty with career success and power than their sisters in the West. They love the dynamism in beauty, partly because they are looking to get ahead in a dynamic world. Our Truth about Beauty study found that Chinese women are much more aggressive in their attitudes to beauty.

Where 35% of women globally generously feel that “everyone is beautiful”, only 15% of Chinese women agree. And where around 30% globally feel that “everyone can be beautiful with a little help”, that number in China is over 50%. It is all about getting an advantage. Hence 58% of Chinese women believe “I want to look as young as possible” compared to 21% from the rest of the world. It may seem politically incorrect in the West but Asian women will aggressively chase and acknowledge that being beautiful is a social and career advantage.

Therefore the more open acknowledgement of using “any means necessary” to create “a more attractive me”. Korea may be world leaders in the open use of surgery to perfect beauty but we see the striving to “get a look that will make me noticed” everywhere, particularly in Thailand.

“Times are tough but that doesn't mean being beautiful is negotiable.”  
— Respondent, Philippines

In China, parents encourage high school girls to get surgery as a reward for good grades and as a means of topping up their chances of getting better jobs and attracting a better looking man.



## TRUTH

# 5 WHOLE BEAUTY IS A NATURAL PROCESS

**A**sian beauty is the balance of Yin (Me) and Yang (We). “Stand out to fit in” is the norm for today’s Asian women. Their perception now changes from “beauty is something you are born with” to something that can be groomed and helps you create a presence. The ideal picture of beauty is reliant on the collective behaviour from peer group acceptance and social judgment. Celebrities and social influencers are still key sources of inspiration as today’s women search for the right holistic look.

“Some beauty bloggers are my real icon, they give me faith that everyone can be beautiful.”

— Respondent, 28 years old, Indonesia

The desire to search for new opportunities is constant. 63% of Chinese women said they “change their routine for types of beauty products or activities about once every couple of months or more.” The same figure for US is 33%, UK 29%, and France 25%.

All parts of a beauty regime are seen as part of that search. The general traditional Asian mindset that health and beauty come from within is being translated into the constant trial and acceptance of consumable beauty aids. Teas, fruit, supplements and all sorts of combinations are seen as natural ways to increase the process of redefining one’s beauty.



TRUTH

# 6 MUM MYTHS ARE TRUE

Sometimes, the stereotypes are just true. When asked what it takes to be a good mother, nearly 30% of Chinese mothers agree with “she pushes her children to be the best they can be” compared with just 9% of mums globally. Indian mothers were the most likely to say that “she wants to give her children a better life than she had” and Japanese mothers were the most likely to say “she always puts her children before herself”.

It is also true that mothers want their children to be happy. We asked mums around the world to trade off what was more important for their children, the factors being ‘happy’, ‘successful’ or ‘rich’. The global average was 83% saying ‘happy’ mattered most. But in China and India, that number fell to 75% and 50% respectively as the importance of ‘successful’ rose. As one Indian mum put it, ‘you can’t be really happy without some success’. The challenge for today’s Asian mum is ensuring that they are doing everything they can to see their family succeed in an aggressive world.

In Singapore, mums also wish happiness for their children. But their definition of ‘happiness’ is slightly different. While global mums wish to instill their children with values such as ‘respectful’, ‘honest’ and ‘smart’ to become happy, Singaporean mums value “happiness through success” as one of the most important factors.

The reason why Singaporean mums have values that are different from the rest of the world is an economic one. When the global recession hit the world in 2008, Singapore stayed almost unaffected by the global recession. While the rest of the world had difficulty recovering, Singaporean mums continued living in a resilient economy which maintained strong aspirations for financial success driven by the belief in the 5 Cs (Car, Cash, Credit Card, Condominium and Country Club).

In Asia, the ‘tiger mum’ stereotype certainly holds true. When we asked mums what their dream app would be, the most popular globally was a ‘time traveller’ that would help sort busy schedules. Chinese mums liked that but their preferred app would be one that acted as a taxi to get their child to all after-school activities efficiently and more.



TRUTH

# 7 MUMS WANT TO BE FRIENDS

**M**ums in Asia are likely to say they want to be friends with their children. This is seen especially in China, where 87% of mums want their children to think of them as their friend compared to a global average of 61%. They are also more likely to say they want to be a role model. Mums from Japan, China and India were much more likely than their Western counterparts to agree with “I want to be a good role model, and if necessary, I will hide bits of myself or my behaviour that I don’t want my children to see”.

In reality, what they often want is to be seen as playmates and life partners.

Asian mums want to come across as playmates because increasingly, today’s Asian mum is choosing to have one or two children. They are in their late twenties at the time they have their first child and are likely to be from the first generation of a family to have moved into a middle class lifestyle. They are used to indulging and spending in a way previous generations may not have been able to afford or imagine. And admittedly, they do not want to give up all that fun. Hence, we see a huge boom in mothers undertaking activities with their children partly to share the fun.

“ My daughter is always complaining about what I’m doing. I just want her to accept me and be proud of me as I am. ”

— Respondent, Japan

They also want to be seen as life partners because having one or two children means more emphasis on making sure there is a close relationship. Today’s Asian mum often tells us she realises that her child is her future. She has chosen to focus that future on a single child and needs to be very open with them in building a relationship that will not fade. As such, they take no risks and always show their children a positive side to everything.



TRUTH

# 8 MUMS ARE NOT MUMS FIRST

**T**raditionally, the role of being a mum involved sacrificing her ‘self’ for her husband and family. Now they are different and are putting themselves as their first priority. That is, they focus more time and energy on their own individual needs instead of others. One mum in Taiwan mentions:

“ My daughter has to fit in with my schedule.  
I won’t give up what I want to do for her.  
I ask her not to disturb me before 12 noon. ”

— Housewife with 3 year old daughter

This may be a bit extreme but it is also true that the new middle class mums across the region are increasingly coming to motherhood later and after having successful working lives when they were able to spend most of the twenties focusing on themselves. 53% of the 25-34 year old women in Taiwan are single, which is an increase of 19.2% compared to ten years ago. Similar figures appear across the region. So it is not surprising that having had ten years of living comfortable lives where they could focus on fashion, their hobbies and interests that when they marry and even after they have children they are not wanting to give up their personal lives.

Despite this insight, this generation of women make devoted mothers. However they look for a balance that says, “let me enjoy my life” in all its aspects. For example, we note that mothers in Japan and China are talking a lot about taking classes with their children. That might be going and doing actual ballet classes with their daughter, or learning an instrument with their son, or joining swimming lessons. Of course this is partly driven by a desire to bond with their, normally, only child. It is also a way they feel they can continue to indulge themselves in pastimes they are interested in and so continue, at least in part a lifestyle they had grown used to before marriage.



TRUTH

# 9 EVERYTHING IS ABOUT BARGAINING

**W**e assume that bargaining is a big part of many cultures. Our Truth about Privacy report has highlighted that for Asian women, even private information is bargaining material for a better deal. We surveyed people on their attitudes to sharing private information, access to rewards and offerings, their inclinations to being contacted by organisations.

Globally, 37% fell into the large consumer type called the ‘Savvy Shoppers’. They are people who are the most likely to sign up for store loyalty cards, and trade limited personal and shopping behaviour data for special offers and rewards. But in Asian markets, the number of people who fall into that group grows dramatically: Japan (60%), Hong Kong (54%).

In Japan where we have been tracking the changing nature of mothers for nearly a decade, we have noted a continuing growth in the number of mothers who would define themselves as ‘economically driven’. These are women who, in the face of married life at a time when the economy has been flat, have grown so used to trying to shop carefully that it has become a goal in itself to be seen as a clever shopper. However even in the fastest growing economies in Asia such as Indonesia, we note that today’s new mums are very ‘deal savvy’. The boom in retail options, the retailers’ own promotional efforts to gain and keep shopper attention and an inclination to shop that has been heightened by this generation’s lifetime experience of always having new possibilities, means that “getting something extra” has become a norm.



# TRUTH 10 TECHNOLOGY IS THEIR FIFTH SENSE

**O**ur Truth about Youth study reported that 56% of 16-22 year old Asians would rather give up their sense of smell rather than their personal technologies. That number rose to over 70% in India and nearly 70% specifically for young women in China. Across the region, it may not be surprising to hear women say that losing their social media accounts would be a disaster.

The degree of importance of online connection is outstanding. Around 40% of people of all ages around the world told us that “it’s important to build a positive image of yourself online”. In India, that number grew to over 70%. Especially in developing Asia, we found women overwhelmingly say that creating their online life was key to grabbing opportunities. We have seen above that, they are more likely to trade information. They are also more likely to use their mobile devices to shop – over 70% of mums who have smart phones told us they use them while shopping. Whether it’s large-scale specialist social sites like @Cosme in Japan (that over 80% of women under fifty use on a weekly basis for personal care advice) or the many celebrity bloggers that have accrued thousands of followers on all aspects of life, Asian women are connecting and “getting the sense of the world” through their personal technology.



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*Uncovering The World's Untold Truths*



# TRUTH STUDIES

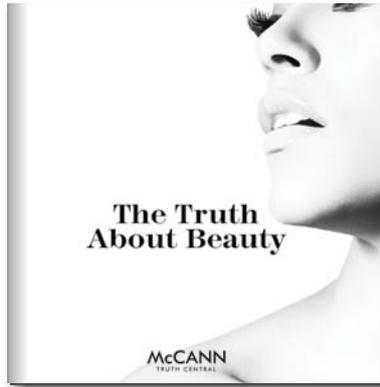
Our pride and joy. We travel the globe to discover truths. Truths have the power to upend conventional wisdom, to spur change that compels growth for our Clients. They unearth peoples' stories from the far reaches of the world. It is these stories that are the very fabric of our studies, illuminating our thinking, our industry, our world, the universe, etc. We believe these truths are a potent force that helps brands to truly make their mark.

For more information, please contact Dave McCaughan, Asia Pacific Truth Central Director, McCann Asia Pacific, at [dave.mccaughan@mccann.com](mailto:dave.mccaughan@mccann.com)

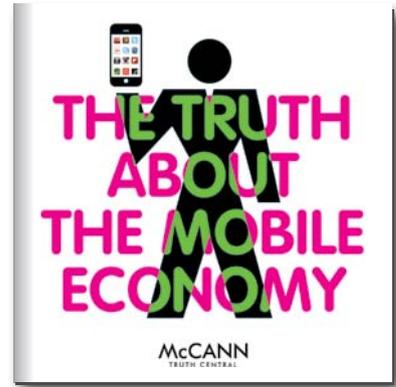




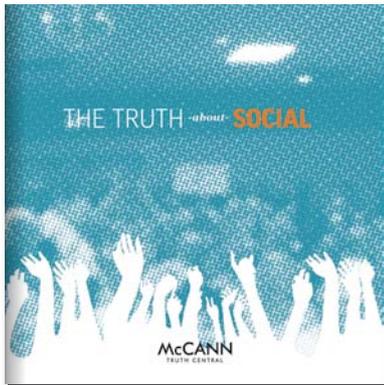
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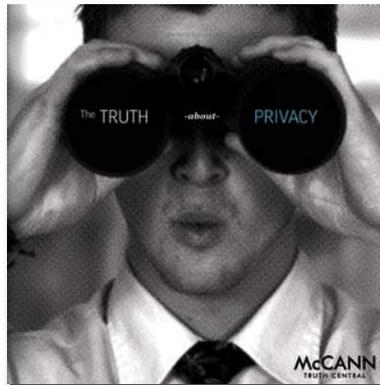
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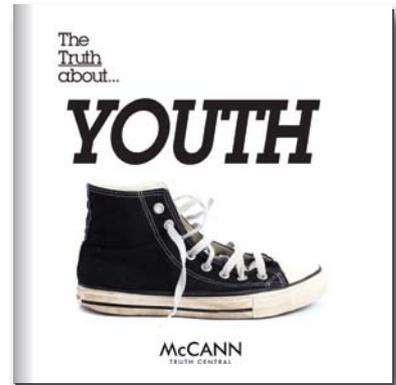
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