

# Can Beauty Advertisements Empower Women? A Critical Discourse Analysis of the SK-II's “Change Destiny” Campaign

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**Abstract**—This study examines the advertising campaign of a beauty product SK-II, “Change Destiny” through the lens of critical discourse analysis. By unpacking the verbal language and visuals in the three advertisements and a video advertisement, this article aims to investigate how the beauty advertiser SK-II constructs the ideal images of women through discursive strategies in ads and uncover the possible ideologies underlying the advertising discourse. Adopting Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (1990,1996) framework of ‘reading images’ and systemic functional grammar (Butt, 2012; Halliday, 1994) to analyze the texts and visuals in the ads, this study has found that the beauty brand SK-II has utilized various strategies to engage the audiences and market its products, such as problematizing the aging of women, providing personalized solutions to the problem of aging, constructing certain feminist discourses for women, and drawing itself close to the younger generation through women empowerment. The findings show that although the beauty brand claims to empower women through advocating change of destiny for women in its ads, gender ideology remains to be dominant and continues to perpetrate women. It is concluded that these new changes in the ads are simply playful discursive strategies that employed by advertisers to legitimate the new capitalism and commercialism and generate more sales.

**Index Terms**—critical discourse analysis, advertising campaign, systemic functional grammar

## I. INTRODUCTION

In a world filled with numerous advertisements in the billboards, shops, magazines, newspapers, on the television and social media, consumers are encouraged to promote their personal images through emotional, physical and economic consumptions such as buying clothing, accessories and cosmetics. As Cook (2001) points out, “an ad is never the programme they are watching, never the letter they are waiting for, never the website they are seeking, nor the part of the newspaper they are reading” (Cook, 2001:01). Advertisements realized in the form of texts or visual imagery, colors, movements and music are considered as the medium of rhetorical, symbolic and metaphorical meaning (Hirschman & Stern, 2003). Schroeder and Zwick (2004:23) state that “Advertising imagery constitutes ubiquitous and influential bodily representations in public space, incorporating exercises of power, surveillance and normativity within the consumer spectacle”. In recent years, it is seen that some progressive social ideas have emerged in the marketing and promotional campaigns (Barkay, 2013). For instance, Dove, a personal care brand belonged to Unilever originated in the UK, launched a campaign called “Real Beauty” and criticized the dominant media-constructed notion of beauty in 2003. Although this campaign has been very successful and received public attention and increased sales, it was also harshly criticized for using corporate power to create imagery larger size of women. Such representation of women’s image is believed to be conformity to the beauty ideology rather than transgression and feminism (Taylor, Johnston & Whitehead, 2016). After this, more beauty advertisements are advocating to empower women by promoting the images of feminist independence such as encouraging “power”, “freedom” and “change” in the ads. This conspicuous trend has attracted much attention especially when the “#Me too” movement began on social media in 2017. For instance, Olay joined the women empowerment movement and launched the ad campaigns “Your Best Beautiful” and “Face Anything” in 2014 and 2018 respectively. The new trend in beauty advertisement is in line with the so-called new capitalism, referring to “the most recent of a historical series of radical re-structurings through which capitalism has maintained its fundamental continuity” (Jessop, 2000, cited in Fairclough, 2003:4). As Fairclough (2003) argues that the contemporary social changes are certain to have impacts on many areas of our social life, and it is of significance for contemporary social research to focus on the new changes under the new capitalism, such as “globalization”, “consumer culture”, post- or late- “modernity” (p.4). Li (2002) also claims that some public matters in our life are closely connected to the evolution of these issues in news media. As beauty industry has become daily necessity for women, it is worth noting to study how these new changes involved in the advertising discourse and how the gender ideology continues to perpetrating women. Thus, by adopting a CDA approach, this study attempts to examine how the beauty brand has used

various linguistic and visual strategies in its advertisements and to uncover the ideological force interplaying between the advertising discourse and the socio-cultural context in Asia.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its theoretical foundation. As a multidisciplinary approach, CDA focuses on how power relations are exercised, enacted, and naturalized in discourse (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Fairclough (1989) states that “critical” is used to reveal the relationship between language, power and ideology. Critical discourse analysts Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak and Teun van Dijk hold the view that language is a means of social construction: language shapes and is shaped by social structures. It is through discursive practice such as texts and visuals that ideologies are reproduced, legitimated and naturalized as the “taken-for-granted” norms in the society (Fairclough, 2001). Established by theorists like Hodge and Kress (1988) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), social semiotic approach focuses on the meaning-making in visual communications, such as images, photographs, diagrams, media and film studies. Similar to CDA, social semiotics is dedicated to “denaturalize” the taken-for-granted assumptions such as values and beliefs in the visuals and intends to reveal the power interests hidden in the images. Drawing on systemic functional grammar, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) propose the concept of visual communication called “Multimodal Analysis”, focusing on how language, image and other modes of communication work together to construct meaning in media and cultural studies. Unlike the linguistic speech which merely focuses on texts, semiotics gives attention to other non-verbal modes which are in play with speech, such as color, lighting, gesture, facial expression, spatial positioning and etc. The semiotic choices made by meaning makers can signify certain values, ideas, identity and activity through visual communication to audiences, thus these semiotic choices do not simply represent the message but also constitute and maintain certain ideology through social practice (Machin and Mayr, 2012). In CDA, ideology, referring to ideas, beliefs, values, reflects the interests of the powerful and can be found in all aspects of social life. The primary focus in critical discourse studies is to analyze how the power relations entwined with language and visuals and uncover the ideology underlying in the social-cultural context.

Applications of CDA as theoretical foundation in the studies of beauty advertising have been numerous. Considerable studies have been made in exploring how advertisers use various linguistic strategies to represent consumers and promote the action of buying. In terms of research objects, most previous studies concentrated on fashion magazines (Baykal, 2016; Brown & Knight, 2015; Coupland, 2007; Duncan & Klos, 2014; Jerslev, 2017; Machin & Thornborrow, 2003; McLoughlin, 2013; Wilińska & Cedersund, 2010) and online ads (Harrison, 2008; Mullany, 2004). A variety of methodologies have been used to examine the multimodal texts of beauty advertising, including social semiotic theory (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003; McLoughlin, 2013), interviews (McCabe, de Waal Malefyt, & Fabri, 2017; Millard, 2009; Taylor, Johnston, & Whitehead, 2016) and systemic functional grammar (Chander, 2015; Wilińska & Cedersund, 2010). By analyzing the representation of consumers in the advertisements, scholars are dedicated to investigate how certain ideology is continually structured, restructured, reinforced and legitimized in the advertising discourse. De Cort (2009) made a comparative study of the printed beauty advertisements in two countries (Belgium and Malaysia) through using multimodal analysis. The findings show that Western beauty standards are universal even in Asian advertisements despite some different representation existing between the advertisements of these two countries. Wilińska and Cedersund (2010) studied the media discourse of aging in Poland through the examination 121 relevant articles in news magazines reflecting or creating attitudes towards older people in the 2004-2007 periods. By applying Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005), this study found that the media discourse in Poland had discursively constructed stereotypes and discrimination towards the aging population. Negative attitudes towards old people are found to be consistent with the Polish welfare system which encourages personal responsibilities of taking care of the self after retirement – an ideology of anti-welfarism. Chander (2015) explored the linguistic strategies used in beauty advertisements through Halliday’s (1994) systemic functional grammar. It is found that the advertisers have used various linguistic options to attract consumers and purchase their products.

As there is growing attention given to the evolution in the advertising discourse, scholars have begun to concentrate on the innovative linguistic and visual cues employed in the beauty advertisements (Duncan & Klos, 2014; Harrison, 2008; Machin & Thornborrow, 2003; McLoughlin, 2013). Machin and Thornborrow (2003) conducted a visual analysis on gender discourse in the magazine *Cosmopolitan*. In this study, it is found that magazine had generated a fantasy world through visual message of low modality, allowing a particular kind of agency for women, mainly sex, to indicate power. In Harrison’s (2008) study, a new trend of constructing masculine identity was found in an online advertisement for male mascara. Using social semiotic theory and systemic functional grammar as methodology, this study (Harrison, 2008) reveals that the advertisers have generated a dialectic discourse which encourages men to consume the feminine-style products without losing their masculine qualities. Another similar study was conducted by McLoughlin (2013). Through adopting a multimodal analysis, this study examined the representation of British Asian women in the beauty and fashion advertisement of a UK magazine. This study found that the ideological whiteness still plays a dominant role as the skin-lightening products are constructed as a formula for British Asian women to acquire privileges and change the racial identity. Duncan and Klos (2014) analyzed the texts in American women’s fitness/beauty magazines regarding the advice on diet/exercise between 2007 and 2009. It is found that modern practices of consumption are contradictory as the perfection fitness status in the magazines is alluring but also daunting. The

advertisements encourage women to liberate themselves from the fitness/beauty standards while simultaneously call for women to follow the suggestions provided by the magazines or purchase the products/services. Duncan and Klos (2014) concluded that this paradox that lies in the advertisements has been (re)produced and legitimated by the textual contradiction over 20 years albeit the diet/fitness discourse becomes more creative and duplicitous. These studies have showed that the media has playfully and strategically construct a certain representation of men/women based on certain ideologies and interests.

After reviewing the previous literature, two research gaps are identified in the Critical Discourse Analytical literature on beauty advertising discourse. The first is that little attention is paid to the recent new practices of the beauty advertising discourse in Asian context. The second research gap is the lack of a close examination of how a globalized beauty brand promotes its products through international advertisements in a long period. For the object of the analysis in this study, SK-II, a globalized Japanese cosmetics and beauty brand established in the early 1980s, draws our attention as it has successfully branded itself through a series of advertising campaigns both in Western and Asian market. The campaign “Change Destiny” launched in 2015 marked a new chapter as SK-II aroused the women empowerment in its global advertisements. In order to exposes the possible beauty ideologies hidden in the evolutions of the beauty advertisements, this study probes into the discursive patterns hidden in the texts and visuals of the SK-II’s advertisements in the 2010-2017 period by using social semiotics approach and systemic functional grammar as methodology. Three research questions are as followed: i) How is women’s image being constructed in the SK-II advertising campaign in 2010, 2015 and 2017? ii) Is there a social progress for gender equality in the recent SK-II advertisements than that of in earlier years? iii) What is the beauty ideology permeating the beauty advertisements in Asia?

### III. METHODOLOGY

The current study is based on SK-II’s advertisements collected from online websites in the period of 2010 to 2017. SK-II is a global skincare brand owned by parent company Procter & Gamble (P&G) and is selling super-premium skincare products in East Asia, North America, Europe and Australia. The reason for choosing this brand among other beauty-product advertisements was SK-II’s significant success in the promotion of its products. According to the annual report in 2018, SK-II has been very successful in its brand-building as the sales of its leading product – The Facial Treatment Essence (Pitera Essence) has increased in 15 consecutive quarters, contributing more than 30% growth of SK-II’s sales growth in the fiscal year of 2018 (*P&G 2018 Annual Report*, 2018: 08). The advertisement of this product was chosen as it is the SK-II’s bestseller among all of the beauty products. Besides, SK-II has been considered as a luxury beauty brand targeting on the middle class due to its high price and brand image. Thus, four pictures advertisements covering 2010, 2015 and 2017 were selected from magazine and online websites, and a video advertisement of SK-II was extracted from YouTube. The methodologic tools for this study are based on a combination of systemic functional discourse analysis and social semiotic visual analysis as both are considered as part of the “media discourse” approach in CDA (Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2007).

The three meta-semiotic functions of modes, composition-interaction-representation framework will be adopted. Composition discusses the modes such as layout, color, frames in visuals and verbal texts; interaction concentrates on how images and language combine together to create imaginary relationships between the represented participants and imaged viewers; and representation refers to how language and image mix demonstrate the meaning, action, or symbolic concepts (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). At the same time, Halliday’s (1978, 2014) systemic functional linguistics (SFL) studying how meaning are made in different contexts is adopted to analyze the texts. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999:139-141) state that “SFL theories language in a way which harmonizes far more with the perspective of critical social science than other theories of language...[because] it sees language dialectically as structured and structuring”. Thus, visual and textual analysis are equally important in this study as the integration of social semiotics and SFL can help us better understand the ideologies and power relations hidden in the language and visual imagery. Table 1 shows the three metafunctions in SFL.

TABLE I.  
THREE METAFUNCTIONS IN SFL

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL)	
Ideational metafunction	Refers to the internal and external worlds that are constructed by a speaker’s experience. Analyzed by units of ranked clause, it creates representation by the naming the types of participants and the use of different types of process, including Material, Verbal, Mental, Relational and Existential process.
Interpersonal metafunction	Refers to the way that text mediates as exchange between the speaker and audience through modality and Mood – declarative, interrogative, and command.
Textual metafunction	Refers to the way in which the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions integrate to generate a coherent and cohesive text.

Due to the length of this study, it would be impossible to provide a detail description of the three metafunctions. I assume that readers of CDA have already been familiar with SFL, so the table is just the general explanation of the metafunctions in SFL.

## IV. ANALYSIS

The following data shows the transformation in SK-II's advertisement from 2010 to 2017. Excerpt 1 presents an aging woman with natural femininity, creating a sense of intimacy and empathy to connect to the readers through visual and verbal communication in the print advertisement. Excerpt 2 shows the image of entrepreneurial femininity as the image of a professional woman is presented. Excerpt 3 and 4 show an image of a much younger female generation with strong personality, individuality and career success.

## A. Excerpt 1

Figure 1 is the SK-II print advertisement extracted from the magazine *Vogue* in Aug 2010. The famous Hollywood actress Cate Blanchett (41-year old in 2010) has been the earliest ambassador for SK-II since 2002.



Fig. 1 Cate Blanchett - SK-II Print Advertisement, *Vogue*, 2010

The design of this advertisement is a mix of lots of visuals and verbal message in a rectangle of texts under the photo. As for the visual design, the dominant color of the page is a sepia, which is a reddish-brown color. An image with head-and-shoulder creates a warm relation and close distance with the readers. It seems like the visual of the product and the verbal texts are more important as they are in the foreground against the character who is in the background and some of her body parts are hidden by the product. Although the character occupies more space on the page, she is more of sitting in the backdrop and the left side of her body is in the shadow comparing to the shining light shedding of the product on the right-hand of the page, on which there is a salient logo “SK-II” imprinted in the center of the bottle. The sign makers usually attempt to create interactional relationship with the imaged readers, the angle of the shots, the distance, the type of gaze and facial expression all carry meaning (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). In this advertisement, Cate Blanchett is appearing with warm direct eye contact, she is calm, friendly and with slightly mess-up hair and home clothing. With partly naked in her upper body, a sensual and enticing image is created. Besides, she is leaning forward to the reader with her head slightly tilting and her arms crossing in the front. There is more lighting on her face and the right side of upper arm. It can be implied that she just wakes up or about to bed. She might just have finished applying the Facial Treatment Essence on her face after a shower as there are a few hair bands on her right wrist. She is happy and satisfied with her skin look and communicating to readers with direct gaze like a girlfriend sharing her beauty secret. The visual conveys a feminine style and the plot is easily to resonate with female audience as this go-to-bed scene is similar to consumers in everyday life. Such visuals create an intimate relationship with readers and produce imaginary sisterhood and friendship.

As for the language in the ad, the big size words – the “SK-II” logo in the upper right-hand corner, the one imprinted on the product draw readers’ attention in the first place. The title of the advertisement – a quote from Cate Blanchett on the left side of the page written in capital and bold “I BELIEVE IN COMMITMENT” also attracts readers’ attention. The quote is absorbed with the photo and the character’s name is also written with bold and in deep Indian red, exactly the same color with the bold “SK-II” logo on the upper right-hand corner. Another quote below her photo is “I have a long-term friend in SK-II. It looks after me”, implying that readers should have a SK-II friend as well to help you stay as beautiful as I am.

TABLE II.  
PARTICIPANTS AND PROCESSES IN THE TEXT

<i>clause</i>		<i>process</i>
1 $\alpha$	"I <b>BELIEVE</b> IN COMMITMENT."	Mental
2 $\alpha$	"I <b>have</b> a long-term friend in SK-II."	Interpersonal
3 $\alpha$	It <b>looks after</b> me.	Material
4 $\alpha$	FOR A RELATIONSHIP TO TRULY WORK YOU <b>NEED TO BE COMMITTED TO IT</b> .	Mental
5 $\alpha$	And Cate Blanchett's passion for SK-II <b>is</b> a testament to that.	Relational
6 $\alpha$	At the heart of her beauty ritual [ <b>is</b> ] in Facial Treatment Essence	Relational
6 $\beta$	which <b>is</b> the secret key to her luminous, radiant skin.	Relational
7 $\alpha$	Having embraced the SK-II beauty ritual and the power of this seemingly miraculous ingredient Pitera Cate <b>noticed</b> a profound improvement in her skin.	Mental
8 $\alpha$	<b>Come</b> and <b>try</b> the exclusive 250ml limited edition bottle.	Material
9 $\alpha$	<b>Buy</b> [it] online at www.SK-II.com	Material

Note:  $\alpha$  refers to an independent clause;  $\beta$  refers to a dependent clause.

Table 2 illustrates the processes in the text: Material refers to the processes of doing, Mental to processes of sensing, Relational to processes of being. The clausal analysis shows that the SKI-II, the primary participant in the text. In 3 $\alpha$ , SK-II is the Actor that is active, effective and powerful to take care of Cate. 8 $\alpha$  and 9 $\alpha$  are also Material processes while the SK-II is constructed as the Goal. These two clauses serve to promote readers to take prompt action of purchase. The advertiser uses verbs such as "come", "try" and "buy" to allure women consumers to take immediate purchase of the product which is constructed as the Goal in 8 $\alpha$  and 9 $\alpha$ . Women are depicted as Senser who "believe" and "need to be committed to" the beauty product as seen in the Mental clauses 1 $\alpha$  and 4 $\alpha$ . The first-person-references such as "I", "me" and "YOU" and in 1 $\alpha$ , 2 $\alpha$ , 3 $\alpha$ , 4 $\alpha$  have strategically aligned readers as they reduced the distance between the product and readers. The reference "Cate", "her beauty ritual", "her skin" in 5 $\alpha$ , 6 $\alpha$  and 7 $\alpha$  seems to win the consumers' trust as the product has showed its power in keeping Cate Blanchett's beautiful look. In particular, the use of metaphor is seen in 2 $\alpha$  and 3 $\alpha$  as the product is portrayed as "a long-term friend" who can take good care of Cate, which may evoke emotional attachment to readers. In addition, the product arouses readers' desire to feel passionate, glamorous, and confident through a few Relational processes (5 $\alpha$ , 6 $\alpha$  and 6 $\beta$ ). In the Relational process, the SK-II product is attached with the qualities and features such as "a testament", "in Facial Treatment Essence", "luminous and radiant skin". The whole text establishes a kinship with the readers and suggesting that the product is important for her beauty and is fulfilling her life, positive expressions are used in the text 1 $\alpha$ , 2 $\alpha$  and 3 $\alpha$ , such as "commitment", "friend", "relationship... you need to committed to it". Besides, verbs are also showing a close interpersonal relationship with the readers, such as "look after" (text 2), "embraced" (text 6). The nouns including "testament" (text 4), "ritual" (text 5), "power" and "improvement" (text 6) are like testimony, which also aims to create trust and belief for the effectiveness of the product. Adverbs are also frequently used including "truly" (text 3), "seemingly" (text 6) to reinforce the genuine of the message. Imperatives verbs such as "believe" (text 1), "have" (text 2), "notice" (text 6), "come" and "try" (text 7), "buy" (text 8) encourage readers to purchase. The word "Pitera" (text 6) is a scientific term referring to technological advancement for anti-aging and retaining youth. In this way, the advertisement is promoting the belief that the ingredient of the product is essential and helpful for women to fight aging (Coupland, 2007). Overall, the SK-II advertisement in Excerpt 1 conforms to the social norms or expectation of what women should be like, and what they should be dedicated into doing, becoming beautiful.

#### B. Excerpt 2

Launched in 2015, the "Change Destiny" campaign by SK-II aims to encourage women to free themselves from personal and social limitations, such as fear of failure, other people's judgements, explore their dream and take control of their life and future. As SK-II entered in Asian market, Tang Wei, a famous Chinese actress who is in her 30s, became a global ambassador with SK-II since 2010. Tang Wei gains her fame through acting a leading role in Ang Lee's movie. With ups and downs in her film career, she continues challenging herself and becomes one of the most successful actresses.



Fig. 2 Website advertisement of SK-II with Tang Wei (2016)  
<https://www.dfs.com/en/macau/brands/sk-ii>

Figure 2 represents women as modern and sophisticated in a discourse of feminism. As the advertisement is based on the context of Macau, the title is placed on the upper center of the page and written in capitalized English “*CHANGE DESTINY*” and in traditional Chinese character “*改寫命運*”. As the English text is written above the Chinese characters, English language is viewed as the preferred code. With the capitalized English language and traditional Chinese characters, the texts are endowed with symbolic value to show the internationalization of women in the image while maintaining the traditional Chinese virtues of women. According to Machin & Thornborrow (2003: 460), there is often fashionable color coordination and abstract, shiny, cleaning setting populated by beautiful people, signify a different reality in which lipstick, nail polish and shampoo can take the powers of the magic amulet”. The advertisement constructs a clear line of the character through the use of grey-black-white image shown in Figure 2, which might relate to imagery representation of women such as professionalism and success. The grey background might be inferred to the shadow and the past, while the white color (the participant’s shirt) and the light shedding from the upper left side might produce an effect of celestial purity, referring to new life, new change and new hope. The white shirt and a half visible watch band might imply she is a businesswoman who is about to attend a business meeting at the workplace. Unlike Figure 1 which permeating strong femininity, Figure 2 passes a sense of determination to the reader as the character is directly gazing at the reader and more powerful. Although there is little verbal text, the photo with glowing skin has endorsed with the product holding in her hand. Her large space of shiny skin seen from her open collar seems to imply that it is through this beauty products that she got her revival. The SK-II Facial Treatment Essence is like a beauty weapon to empower her, helps her gain independence, beauty, and power.

### C. Excerpt 3

In 2017, SK-II releases limited design for the bottle of the Facial Treatment Essence. One of three represented participants is a young musician Dou Jing Tong from China as shown in Figure 3 and 4. Although she is young, Dou Jing Tong has already had amazing and rich experience in life. By dropping out of school and doing part-time jobs in foreign countries, she continues to create her own music, release her own albums and finally her music and personality is widely recognized among the younger millennial generation. Compared with other ambassadors such as Cate Blanchett and Tang Wei join SK-II in their 40s and 30s, Dou Jing Tong, joins the ambassadorship with SK-II in early 20s.



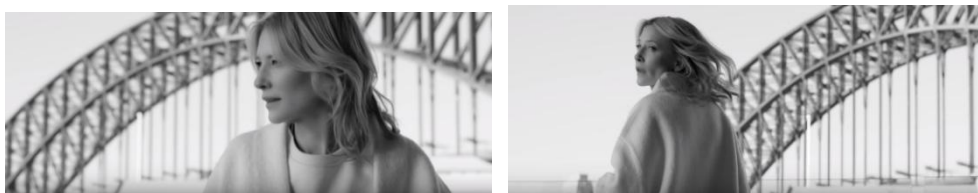
Fig. 3 and 4 Dou Jing Tong with SK-II (2017-)  
<https://www.douban.com/group/topic/108671094/>

Unlike the previous ambassadors who are feminine, graceful and beautiful, Dou Jing Tong expands the definition of “women” by playing a sense of “male-ling” with boldness and strength. The semiosis implies that she is not a traditional woman, rather, she is a cool, powerful postfeminist who dares to be herself and challenge the social convention. Both Figure 3 and 4 are in white-black color and except the logo and the slogan “*BE THE PERSON YOU DECIDE TO BE*” imprinted on the bottle are colorful. The slogan is written in bold and in an arrangement of capital and small letters, implying that women has the power to be anyone they want to be. The blended color used in the slogan might signify the vitality of life, making a striking contrast to the white and black in both Figures. Figure 3 takes a Margin-Center-Margin composition to emphasize the product in the middle. Standing with back towards the reader in a triangle shape, it seems the participant is in a far social distance with the reader, which might involve power. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) comment, “what you see here is part of our world, something we are involved with”. Unlike the previous women image in the advertisement showing femininity through the exposure of skin and feminine appearance, Dou Jingtong appears with short hair, tattoos, wears white and black and has more powerful physical movements. All these features distinct her from previous SK-II ambassadors and show that she is not the typical “she”, “she” could be anyone, male, female or transgender. The imaged readers could be diverse as the femininity has been minimized.

Without eye contact and visible facial expression in Figure 3, it seems like the musician is showing the small secret of her success, the SK-II Facial Treatment Essence is her source of empowerment and creativity. Figure 4 presents a closer social distance which is created by a head-and-shoulder upper body image. In this advertisement, Dou Jing Tong is taking a masculine post, holding the bottle from the back to the front and giving a demanding gaze to the reader, which seems to demand viewers into some kind of imaginary connection with her. The graffiti imprinted on the bottle “*BE The PerRSON you DeCIDE To BE*” is more salient as it is written artistically in bold and in an arrangement of capital and small letters, representing a breakthrough compared to the previous advertisements which do not have such a design on the bottle. Thus, a sense of individuality, uniqueness and strong personality is displayed here. In summary, Figure 3 and 4 are at odds with the traditional ideal image of women set by society, the representation of women is creative, the engaging visuals are contributing to an overwhelming image of modern and powerful women who use the skin product as a weapon to empower themselves. Compare to Excerpt 1 and 2 which locate on women in 30s and 40s, SK-II seems to transform its advertisement to attract the younger generation since 2017. Although this advertisement encourages women to be different, to show their personality and be brave, there seems a paradox that such a strong and powerful woman still need to comply with flawless skin. The SK-II product seems to be a source of power for the character to change the state quos and social norms that subjecting women.

#### D. Excerpt 4

As the video advertisement contains more modes in semiosis such as sound, movement, there seems a need to analyze one of the video advertisements and see if women are empowered in the beauty advertisement. The video advertisement of the SK-II’s “Change Destiny” shows how the character is fighting with life challenges and doing what her inner heart tells her to do in an interview in a narrative format (see Appendix 1). Cate shares her struggle in making new change in life. The video is shifting among several places, outdoor setting, studio, and office. The dominant color of the video is sliver grey, black, and white, which seems to reduce the femininity of women as the cool tone is preferred by man.



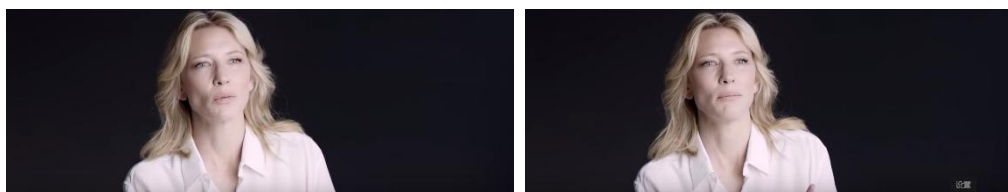
Shots (1-2)

In the shots 1-2, Cate was standing outdoor with the Sydney Harbor Bridge in the background. The vague image of the bridge seems like a symbol connecting the past, present to the future. Standing in the foreground with the image of the bridge in the background indicates that she is able to control her life. Cate shows her attitude and values about change in answering the first question, “The deeper that I’ve embraced change, the richer my life has become.”



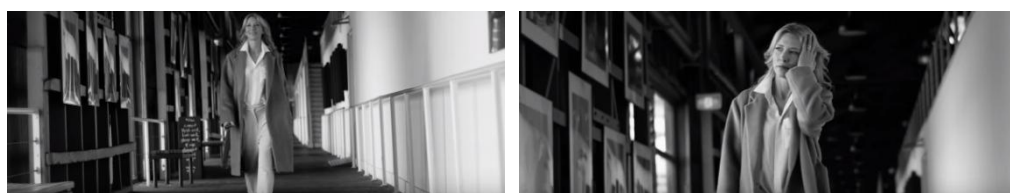
Shots (3-4)

When being interviewed in the studio (shot 3), Cate is not directly gazing and talking to the camera, but to the slightly right side of the camera in the black backdrop. It seems like there is an invisible listener or interviewer next to the camera, which might make the readers more comfortable to listen to the story as a third person. She speaks in a stable, determined voice, the lexical words such as “*exciting*”, “*incredible*”, “*positive*”, “*different*”, “*experiences*” and “*dreams*” might indicate that she is not afraid of aging and she is always exploring possibility in life as an agent. In shot 4, Cate is smiling and standing in front of the bridge, she is looking up somewhere above the camera and smile happily as if she is meditating on great memory about life in Australia.



Shots (5-6)

In shot (5), she talks about the social constrain and power hat limits women in using metaphor “*roadblocks*”, which might create resonance with the audience. In shot (6), Cate shares her own struggle with life and the others’ judgement in social interaction, which indicates how the community and others perpetrate the taken-for-granted ideology on her and tie her to only a limited number of social roles, such as mother, wives, actress but not business person or any other possible roles. The verbs “*impede*”, “*impose*”, “*disrupted*”, “*escape*”, “*challenging*” are in accordance with the black backdrop in the studio, which might represent the social limitations, bias, stereotypes on women which constrains Cate and the female readers from what they want to become.



Shots (7-8)

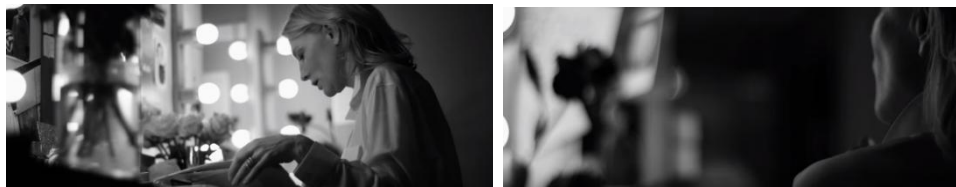
For the last sections (7-16), Cate narrates her own story about making change in life in a chronological sequence and in a “problem-solution-result-evaluation” structure. In the shots (7-8), Cate is walking in a corridor towards the camera in the Sydney theater company which she takes over. Striding through the corridor with pictures in square frames hanging on the left wall and an empty wall on the right side of the corridor create a sense of creativity, success and liberation.





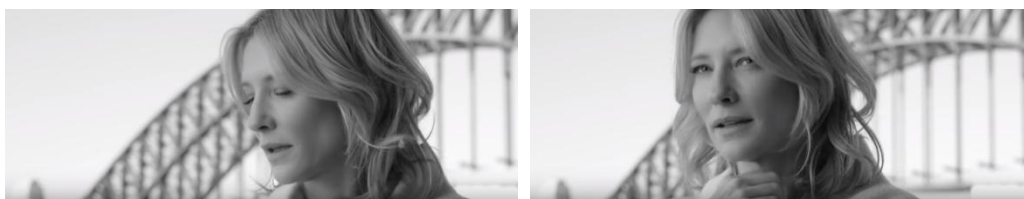
Shots (9-11)

When talking about fear (shots 9-10), Cate is sitting in a place where the background is unclear. She is gazing somewhere in the far and meditating with a pair of glasses and a pen holding in her hand. She explains what she is fearing about repetitively. There is large space for empty in shot 9 and 10, which might imply uncertain future and show how small and powerless she is. In shot 11, she is sitting on a sofa by the window, reading a book and with her head leaning on her hand. She seems tired, weak and alone, the bridge outside the window is like a cage constraining her from being herself.



Shots (12-13)

As the screen moves to the shot 12-13, Cate is reading some script in the studio, the lights, flowers show her femininity. It can be inferred that she has not given up her film career even when she is running new business. In shot 13, she is applying something on her hands with her back facing to the camera, it can be inferred that she is using the SK-II product along her fight with difficulties in her career and life. The last several shots (14-15) repeat the view in the beginning of the video, the camera draws even closer to her face, and she is much calmer, determined and strong this time.



Shots (14-15)

And the last shot (16) shows the logo of SK-II and the campaign of this advertisement in the end. The logo lies in the center with strong lights spreading from the center to the margin. The words are highlighted in bold and making a contrast to the large space in grey.



Shot (16)

Through the narrative story of the famous actress, the video advertisement shows that even a successful woman like Cate has experienced ups and downs during her pursuit of dreams. The video uptakes a

problem-solution-result-evaluation format to highlight that SK-II, a reliable friend and amulet, has accompanied with Cate and consistently gave her support, beauty, and power. In summary, although the video is depicting women with roles at work, it seems contradictory for Cate when she is emphasizing how much she wants to challenge herself and how much she desires to come back to the previous community. When she has achieved what she wants, she shows strong need for recognition from her friends and family. It seems that the eight-year entrepreneurship is valuable but not as important as coming back home and win the friends and family back. The solution provided in the video is not based on a real life but “spirit” and simply “words”. The background in the video is unclear and creating a mysterious atmosphere. In summary, the whole video is more like “acting”. It is imaginary and ideologically indexing that with the purchase and use of the product, Cate is able to accept the change and solve all her problems.





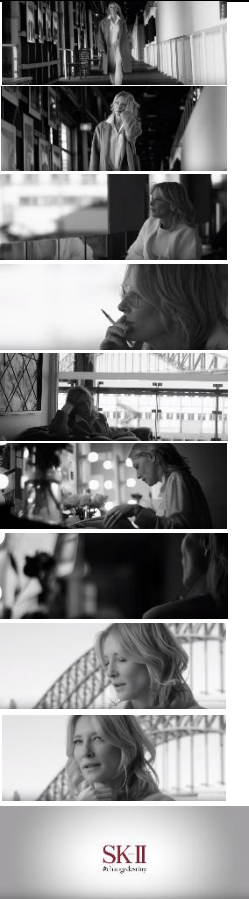
## V. CONCLUSION

This study has explored how beauty advertisement transforms and persuades women to buy the beauty products through a multimodal analysis on SK-II’s advertisement. The first research question – how women’s image is being constructed in the ads, is answered as the ads construct an idealized feminism discourse connecting women’s beauty and their empowerment at various ages, creating a fantasy world through various visual and linguistic strategies. It is found that the advertisement orients itself to the younger generation, constitutes new values and identities for women over the 2010-2017 period. Compared the ads in 2010 with the latest, it can be seen that the SK-II ads show a trend to embrace younger generation in more recent ads. The visual construction of female agency shows the fearless female, masculinity, and suggests the emancipation of women from traditional beauty ideologies - women have little choices to be the person they want to be. The advertisement seems to provide a strong solution for women to empower themselves through the purchase and use of the products. However, this seems to be contradictory as it is implying that only with shining skin that women can be fearless. This paradox of the SK-II’s advertisement indicates that traditional ideologies about women’s role, beauty and identity have not changed at all as the social practices shape and is shaped by the advertising discourse. In this way, it can be concluded that there seems to be a social progress in recent ads than the previous ads on the surface, however, the beauty ideologies that perpetuating women remain dominant. Thus, the second research question is answered.

Although it seems that women are having more power and agency (Figure 2, 3, 4 and the video), the advertisements still overlook the real social, political, economic contexts constraining women, such as unequal treatment in social conventions and the beauty ideologies. The absence of setting reduces modality and changes images away from naturalistic representation to a more planned and idealized, or more abstract representation (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). The way the advertisement is designed is tactical, technique-based and fragmented, which contradicts with its concept of empowering women. By orienting itself to the younger generation, SK-II intends to expand its market share in the younger generation. The shift to feminism aims to encourage consumption and capitalism as always despite the advertising discourse becomes more creative and transformative. The participants appear with flawless and glowing face regardless of age differences. They are resided in an imaginary world with simplicity and modernist aesthetic, which does not reflect the issues in gender equality and the ideology hidden in social practice. The purchase of the product is depicted as the only solution for women to change their destiny at all ages, 20s, 30s, and 40s. The use of “male-ing” representation (Coupland, 2007) for women verbally and visually is manipulated by sign makers to persuade more sales and profits. Despite the transformation in visual and verbal message, the power relation between the sign maker and the women readers remains unchanged. Instead of solving problems through technical, intellectual or business skills like men do, women can only gain self-esteem and confidence through the “female empowerment” in advertising and purchasing. The ideology and constraints that impede women from being who they are in the Asian society has never been questioned and denied.

Last but not the least, there lie some limitations for this study like all the other research. The first limitation is that there is a lack of involvement of readers’ interaction in the study. How readers negotiate and react to the advertisements is not yet touched. Besides, there is also limitation on the choice of the brand and data. Thus, it is suggested to incorporate more advertisements in the postfeminist era and the readers’ performance into the future study. Thirdly, as there is also an interplay seen in advertising discourse which transforms masculinity to a more femininity stylization in recent years. Male beauty advertising is also drawing attention in the future research of advertising discourse and multimodality analysis.

## APPENDIX. #CHANGE DESTINY CATE BLANCHETT 2015

Frame-time	Images shots	Verbal text	On-screen text
00.00-00.14 (1)  (2)		“I don’t really subscribe (.) to the idea there is a pre-determined <b>destiny</b> (.) The deeper that I’ve embraced change-the richer (.) my life has become.”	What do you believe about Destiny?
00.15-00.30 (3)  (4)		“I don’t think about time that way (.) I think life is uh (.) a more <b>exciting</b> and full of (.) <b>incredible positive</b> experiences- and if you brace change and go deeper into it, there’s many many dreams to be had at many many <b>different</b> ages and stages in my life.”	It’s too late to pursue my dreams.
00.31-00.44 (5)		“Depending on where a woman is born, I definitely think there are (.) <b>roadblocks</b> (.) uh, you know those who seek to <b>impede</b> - upon and shape and <b>impose</b> what a woman can become.”	Society limits what I will become.
00.45-1.00 (6)		“The moments in life (.) where I’ve (.) <b>disrupted</b> my sense of myself- by <b>challenging</b> other people’s expectation and all the expectations and limitations that I placed on myself (.) have always resulted in the most fulfilling experiences.”	I cannot escape what I was born with.
1.01-2.13 (7)  (8)  (9)  (10)  (11)  (12)  (13)  (14)  (15)  (16)		“Eight years ago (.) my husband and I were offered the opportunity- to run (.) the Sydney Theatre company which was the largest theatre company in Australia, and I was incredible excited but (1.0) enormously- <b>fearful</b> (.) And a lot of people around me at that point of my life I was at high point of my film career and said what are you doing going back to Australia and run a theatre company (.) And (.) I thought the- only thing that will stop me doing is <b>fear</b> . <b>Fear</b> of the impact it’s going to have on my career (.) for other people think, <b>fear</b> if I’m going to fail at it (.) so that <b>galvanized</b> me actually. As a result, the last eight years have wrought the most profound change not on (.) only on my career- as an actor (.) that I have become a better actor (.) I have become matured I hope (.) but on my life (.) uh-because simultaneously, we ignited the sense of community back here (.) We were back with our family, I have do things back on time and think that- often the only thing stops us from bracing change is <b>fear</b> (.) I’m Cate Blanchett, and I believe in change in destiny.	What holds us back from changing our Destiny?

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to thank National Institute of Education, the Ministry of Education of Singapore, and the Chinese Scholarship Council.

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