

“The Return of Morena Beauty”

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The mestiza has always been smackdab in the center of the beauty standard stage. For the longest time, milky fair skin that is as white as snow has always been the rage, and Filipina women have been coerced since forever into working and aspiring for such features. From 1940s movie stars to barely subtle ads, the Filipina has been led to believe that her skin is not one to be embraced and one that must be changed –but has the country finally kept up with the times? 2016 might just have marked the start of the return of morena beauty.

Maybe it's part of human nature – the desire to become someone you're not. While westerners desire tanned skin and curly hair, Asians - and not just Filipinos, have been imposed with ideals that “white is beautiful.” In local TV shows and advertisements, the “ugly” one has always been depicted with huge curly hair, dark skin, and other little flaws; while the “beautiful” one has straight long hair and skin as fair as day. The “maitim at mahirap” trope is still very much alive, but there are so many more tropes that involve the Filipina's natural skin color. While none of these have been addressed outright, these ideas have been transmitted subliminally, thus, ingraining the idea of self-loathing into something more than just skin deep.

Has the Filipina's dark skin forced her to be well, in the dark? While this might be the story that still stands until this day, Philippine mainstream media has taken a few steps forward. What has always been taught to us as flaws are now slowly becoming assets, thanks to the emergence of fresh faces on our TV screens. Case in point, Kathryn Bernardo and Nadine Lustre, who are undeniably the two hottest and biggest teen stars to date. Both have similar features - from the color of their skin to their facial structure, and even their sweet and charming auras; features that are very much Filipina. We also see these two leading ladies take on power roles and characters that truly represent the modern Filipina. This is quite a major change from the derogatory tropes from before. With their legions of fans endlessly worshipping their idols and with their familiar faces plastered in almost every corner of the Metro, we ought to take that beauty in.

The morena has always been the dark horse in the home country, but it seems like it's not the case at the global – or rather, universal scale. Miss Universe has been a vital influencer on Filipinas when it comes to knowing what makes her beautiful.

The currently reigning Binibining Pilipinas- Grand International Nicole Cordoves credits past titleholders in taking Filipina beauty to the global stage. Nicole shares, *“I think the spark was really lit by Venus Raj, followed by Shamcey, Ara, and Janine. When these ladies gave a winning streak for the Philippines, Filipinos looked up to Filipina beauty again as opposed to envying foreign beauties that are tantamount to qualities that are so extremely far from our natural traits as Filipinos.”* Through the help of these beauty queens' intelligence and grace, we finally took the crown with Miss Universe 2015 Pia Wurtzbach, but most of all - the Filipina has never been prouder of calling herself one.

What seems to be a strategic move by the Binibining Pilipinas management for the past years has proved to be effective not only in the pageant world, but in shifting the ideals of Filipina beauty. Nicole, being an anchor of Filipina beauty herself, plans to empower her fellow Filipinas even more once she embarks on her Miss Grand International 2016 journey.

She believes that *“us Filipinas have a unique kind of “humble beauty” - we are not afraid of really hard work to get to where we want to be, and we do not demand entitlement at the end of the day. And this encompasses through everything we do and how we carry ourselves. That is how I would carry the Philippines sash.”* There is no doubt that with her undeniable beauty and intelligence, Binibining Pilipinas- Grand International 2016 Nicole Cordoves will shine just as bright – or maybe even brighter, than her predecessors.

Another evident shift is seen in the beauty industry, particularly in whitening. It's no question that the whitening industry is huge in the country, but these brands are slowly trying to shift their brand positioning - a little less harsh and more down to earth. The term “whitening” is seeing its demise; while a more friendly and empowering “brightening” is taking its place in the game. Celebrity Dermatologist Dra. Vicki Belo explains this shift. *“The transition from whitening to brightening is because people want to carry their own “light,”*” but the beauty expert says that achieving that isn't just about getting fairer, but it's a matter of getting your skin tone even. She explains further and says that *“usually when people look at you people think that the glow is because you're white, but it's more of your skin tone being even. It's better for your skin to be*

evenly toned. You see, when light hits your skin and your skin is even, it bounces back so it make you look like you have your own glow.”

While business is still booming, the beauty biz is taking on a new face. We now see celebrities of different beauties gracing billboards, making the consumer feel beautiful and not change, but rather, improve how they look like with glowing - and not necessarily fairer, skin.

Dra. Belo and her brand has also been working hard in convincing Filipinas to give lots of love to their skin. She says, *“I am really a believer of prevention, so we have been trying for the last 5 years to make Filipinos more into wearing sunblock.”* With this said, Belo’s line of beauty products came up with their own tinted moisturizer and BB cream. These products aim to take care of their skin and to let their natural beauty shine. Dra. Belo believes that these all new products *“give you the protection from the sun and evens out your skin tone. It is also very light sheer makeup. Because I think the days of putting a lot of foundation and makeup are getting obsolete. The bare skin is in. They say the best make up you wear is a naked face.”*

The beauty world has become friendlier and wider. For Tamara Pineda, Training Coordinator at Bobbi Brown Cosmetics, believes that *“Filipinas have beautiful morena skin and I would love for Filipinas to embrace this feature more rather than try to mask their skin with foundations that don’t match.”* It is no doubt that one of the biggest issues for any woman of color is the lack of foundation shades that are more inclined to their skin tone, and with many cosmetic brands widening their make up lines, it is no question that more and more and getting on board with a more “colorful” beauty world.

It also helps that natural beauty trends than aim to enhance rather than alter features never seem to fade - especially that with these, skin color doesn’t matter at all. Now, the Filipina is armed and ready to kill these trends like strobing and contouring, as the market has enough products made just for them to help them do so. Tamara adds to this and says that *“natural beauty trends are so hot right now because they are easier to attain and caters more to the everyday woman- which i think are most of the women out there who want to look like themselves only prettier and more confident.”*

And as a makeup artist herself for Bobbi Brown Cosmetics, she carries that belief that she’d also rather accentuate than cover up. The Filipina beauty is quite on a league of its own, and Tamara shares to every woman - and not just to the morena that *“I think it’s important for a*

woman to believe that she is pretty without makeup, because what you naturally have makes you unique. Makeup should just be an accessory in bringing out your best features.”

With all of this said, **the morena is lucky to now live in a world of beauty where there's a place for every woman.** They now simply want to stand out with what they have, and they want to shine for who they are. With the vast amount of products available for morenas and other women of color, she can now feel beautiful no matter way she wants - whether it's with a bold lip or a bare face. The morena has created an entirely new beauty game altogether, making sure that companies create a line friendly to every woman out there. Being beautiful in this day and age isn't a monopoly anymore, and gone are the days when a Filipina was called “maganda para sa morena” - because she is now simply “maganda.”

The Filipina, now being more comfortable in her skin more than ever, now believes that her beauty doesn't just lie on the surface of her skin. Just like Nicole Cordoves says that for the women of today, *“the definition of beauty has not been confined to physicality alone but has broadened into considering the totality of a woman like who she is, what she does for fun, what are her dreams, what are the things she believes in.”* Through the help of media being worldlier with beauty ideals and with the universe taking notice, the Filipina is slowly keeping up with the rest of the world in recognizing that she is quite beautiful herself.

So what's next for the morena? While the stage is still definitely shared with the mestiza - not that there are any complaints, it was just a matter of time that she's now front and center. This major shift in Filipina beauty ideals is more than just what it is. For a Filipina who has that brown skin, that small nose, and those dark eyes that they were made to hate, suddenly telling her that those are what make her beautiful marks empowerment and confidence – things that spark from within.

From the world's eyes to hers, she's not just morena anymore - she's Filipina beautiful, and back in a big way.