

ABSTRACT

PHYSIOGNOMY – A SCIENCE OR A PSEUDOSCIENCE

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Contextual Outline

The world today is a dangerous place with criminals, fanatics and terrorists eagerly waiting for an opportunity to inflict harm and cause chaos in society. Due to this, we need the help of every resource at our disposal, no matter how small it may be, to stop this mayhem. Quite a few years ago, a science was developed which believed that it could judge a man's personality by observing his facial structure. The face, it seems, contains certain clues which can reveal much more than previously imagined. This science of reading faces is known as 'Physiognomy' and is currently back into the scene of discussion and debate after a long exile when it was termed a 'pseudoscience' by many. The reason for its reappearance is that two scientists from China's Shanghai Jiao Tong University have produced a study that claims to be able to tell a criminal from a law-abiding citizen in nine cases out of ten, based on a computer algorithm by using the principles of Physiognomy¹². However, this is not the only reason. Quite a few other law enforcement regimes wish to use such a science to trace and track criminals so that the world can be a safer place.

This paper studies and analyses the entire concept of Physiognomy so that we can come to a conclusion whether such a science can be used undisputedly, in the manner prescribed by the Chinese researchers. Its main objective is to develop credibility for the science and in the process analyse its origin, areas of application, benefits, fundamentals and the research done by other reputed scholars.

¹ Return of Physiognomy? Facial Recognition Study Says it Can Identify Criminals from Looks Alone, RT News, published on: 26th November, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/368307-facial-recognition-criminal-china>.

² Xiaolin Wu & Xi Zhang, Automated Inference on Criminality Using Face Images, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1611.04135v1.pdf>.

Methodology of study

This research article is entirely descriptive and analytical, based on secondary resources in the form of books, journals, articles and online resources. It further focuses, studies and critically analyses the various origins, rules, basis and credibility of the topic eclectically. A number of secondary sources have been used and adequate citations and references have been provided for the same in the form of footnotes according to the 19th edition of the Bluebook.

Objectives of this study

- To understand what Physiognomy is.
- To understand the relevance of the topic in today's world by discussing Physiognomy's various applications and the reason for its comeback.
- To study its origins and check if the concept achieves historical validity in the process.
- To recognise the benefits of Physiognomy and how knowledge in it will help every individual.
- To recognise the various traits the subject analyses while trying to predict and understand an individual's personality.
- To study and analyse the experiments and studies done by other renowned researchers in this particular field and bring out credibility to the entire subject.