

# Brilliant *Hallyu* and Plastic Surgery

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*Hallyu*, or “the Korean Wave,” is the name for the tremendous popularity of Korean popular culture that has arisen among Asian countries, including Southeast Asia, Japan, and Taiwan, and even non-Asian countries in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and South America (1). With the record-breaking ratings of the television drama *What is Love All About?* which was aired by the China Central Television Station in the late 90’s, Korean culture has been of increasing interest. After 2000, the year of the H.O.T. boy band concert in China, the term *Hallyu* was first used when one of the Chinese newspapers reported that “Hanryu gave a blow to China!” *Hallyu* is popular content whose unique characteristics were created from the incorporation of international influences and local Korean culture (2). With the explosive growth of Korean pop culture based on dramas and movies in the early stage, additional trends have developed, in which non-Koreans have taken an interest in eating or cooking Korean foods, making friends with Korean people, learning the Korean language, watching *Hallyu* dramas with their family, and purchasing Korean cosmetics. Thus *Hallyu* has been integrated into their daily life.

## CULTURE HALLYU & ECONOMIC HALLYU

‘The *Hallyu* economy’ is the phenomenon in which Korean products are preferred in overseas markets and have high sales volumes. ‘The *Hallyu* economy’ is characterized by combinations of aggressive marketing, a premium image, localization strategies, reasonable prices, and excellent quality and design. To date, marketing of top-tier *Hallyu* stars has been of great help for Korean companies with a low level of global recognition to gain access to the global market (3). The direct economic effects of *Hallyu* are based on the increased export of Korean culture, that is, of cultural content. Exports are a growth motive for the pop culture industry. Indirect economic effects of *Hallyu* may lead to the improved recognition of Korea, the increased sales of Korean consumer products, the promotion of the business activities of Korean companies, and the increased access to global markets for Korean manufacturing and service industries.

## HALLYU AND COSMETICS

In such countries as China and those of Southeast Asia, *Hallyu* stars remain popular. Meanwhile, people in those countries try to imitate the appearance of *Hallyu* stars, leading to a boom in plastic surgery. According to the statistics of the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS), the number of individuals in South Korea who undergo plastic surgery has reached approximately 20,000 per 100,000 of the general population, which corresponds to the third highest frequency in Asian countries after Hong Kong and Taiwan (4). Korea has become known by word-of-mouth as a country with a high frequency of plastic surgery, and as a result, the number of foreigners who undergo plastic surgery by Korean doctors in China or visit Korea itself for surgery has been increasing. Plastic surgery clinics in the Gangnam/Apgujeong area currently provide medical tourism packages for plastic surgery for international visitors.

## ASIAN MEDICAL TOURISM

Currently, Asian countries are experiencing cut-throat competition in attracting medical tourists, with each attempting to become a hub of medical tourism in Asia. Thailand served 1,280,000 international patients in 2005, Singapore served 270,000 in 2004, and India (somewhat of a latecomer to the market) served 180,000 people. According to the 2008 reports of the Korea Health Industry Development Institute (KHIDI), Thailand attracts 1,500,000 medical tourists and earns more than KRW 1,000 billion (about USD 1 billion) every year. In addition, Singapore and India have also become leaders in medical tourism to such an extent that they earn USD 300 million every year (5). In Singapore, a greater nationwide effort is being made to foster the service and tourism industries than the manufacturing industry. In addition, for-profit hospitals in Singapore provide foreign patients with medical services in 4-5 specialty areas (6). Similarly, India is now attempting to launch a medical tourism business in affiliation with a travel business. It is expected that there will be an annual profit of USD 2 billion. Another country that is of interest with regard to medical tourism is China. In the Shanghai In-

ternational Medical Zone (SIMZ) in China, with an area of approximately 11.5 km<sup>2</sup> (four times that of Yeouido in Seoul), there will be two hospitals for international tourists, a multitude of specialized clinics, and international medical schools (7).

### KOREAN HALLYU MEDICAL TOURISM

The Korean National Assembly passed an amendment to the medical law in May 1, 2009, thus providing a legal basis for hospitals to attract foreign patients from overseas countries. This has made it possible to advertise and promote hospitals for medical tourism (8). It is expected that medical tourism in Korea will produce an economic effect of approximately KRW 4,000 billion.

At the present, the Korean Tourism Organization (KTO) and Seoul National University Healthcare System Gangnam Center are collaboratively running a training course for medical tourism coordinators for the responsible administrators and nurses of hospitals (9). Hana Tour and Korea University Medical Center have agreed on a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for collaboration, including an agreement that they would provide medical tourism services for Korean people residing in overseas countries. Asiana Airlines and Hanyang University Medical Center have formed a strategic partnership for the promotion of medical tourism marketing towards non-Korean patients residing outside of Korea. Moreover, Asiana Airlines also formed strategic partnerships with Seoul National University Healthcare System Gangnam Center in 2007 and Cheongshim Hospital in 2008. Thus, the airline is taking initiative in establishing a reliable, efficient collaboration between medical institutions and the airline industry. In addition, Incheon City and Incheon Tourism Organization have formed a strategic partnership with Inha University Hospital to attract foreign patients from Russia and Mongolia (9, 10).

### FUTURE CREATIVE MEDICAL HALLYU DEVELOPMENT

There is a great possibility that Korea may grow to become a hub of medical tourism. *Hallyu* fever has coincided with advancements in plastic surgery techniques and the development of medical tourism. In addition, Korean doctors have technical expertise in successfully performing surgical procedures for Caucasian people with different skin tissue than Asians, not to mention Asian ones.

Now is the time that Korea has just launched medical *Hallyu* in the global market following the previous waves of cultural *Hallyu* and economic *Hallyu*. At the present, however, physi-

cians' technical expertise is continuously increasing in several Asian countries. Likewise, strong competitors in medical tourism are arising in Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, where the medical expenses are lower but the medical services and recreational facilities are equivalent to those of well-developed countries.

Thus medical doctors and hospitals in Korea should make every effort to maintain their superior position in the international medical tourism market. To do so, competitive medical services should be developed for the target market, the current medical services should be differentiated from those offered in other countries, the process of medical tourism should be audited from the patient's perspective, and a one-stop service combining medical treatment and tours should be made available.

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