

"Korean Wave" Phenomenon and Cosmetic Surgery in the Chinese Context

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Abstract: *Owing to the pivotal role played by South Korea's film and television entertainment industry as a catalyst, the phenomenon of cosmetics surgery has been notably accentuated in the South Korean societal landscape. This also forced more people, especially Chinese people to accept cosmetic surgery. Korean dramas through its powerful hints and the perfect image of Korean actors so that Chinese women obsessed. Therefore, they want to transform their appearance through cosmetic surgery. This paper offers an analysis from cultural, societal, and objective perspectives on why Chinese women opt for Korean-style cosmetic surgery, resulting in the significant dominance of the South Korean cosmetic surgery industry in the Chinese market.*

Keywords: *Korean Wave, Korean pop culture, Cosmetic surgery, Chinese women*

1. Introduction

According to South Korea, "Central Daily" news report, Korea Tourism Organization revealed that recently, Chinese people search on the search engine concerning the most frequent words about Korea, "Korean cosmetic surgery costs" ranked 19th. Korean cosmetic surgery has become a symbol of high-end cosmetic industry as well as South Korea has become the manufacturing capital of beauty. It is not unusual when people from Europe and America traveling to South Korea for a cosmetic surgery. An increasing number of Chinese individuals are opting for cosmetic surgery to enhance their appearance, with a willingness to visit cosmetic surgery hospitals in South Korea. The high standards of technology and service excellence are among the contributing factors. Above all, the Objective societal and cultural causes are also worth to research. South Korea (henceforth simply regarded as 'Korea' throughout this paper) set a representative with its cosmetic surgery industry to make the point what relationship it is between market and culture.

2. Explanation of "Korea wave"

According to Davies and Han, "Korean Wave" was originally from the Chinese media, which originated in the late 20th century Korean drama, the film, and South Korea's popular music in China. Subsequently, the Korean media have begun to use the word "Korean Wave" to refer to the influence of Korean pop culture in other countries. [2] Although the Chinese community has borrowed this concept, in the general sense, it is still alleged that the South Korean TV and entertainment and beauty industry in China caused by the popular trend. "Korean Wave" is not a direct reference to popular Korean culture, but a metaphor to borrow the meteorological term "cold" - from high latitudes to low latitude ocean currents, that is cold from the northern cold invasion of the south air, Temperature changes. This metaphor itself contains the influence of Korean pop culture on Chinese fashion and aesthetics. It is a kind of culture and contains very rich content, such as movies, music, animation, fashion, beauty, food, language etc. Especially the drama as a carrier of Korean pop culture, it should not be underestimated the promotion of the "Korean wave".

3. Korea holds a leading position in the field of Cosmetic Surgery

In the article by Joanna and Lee, Korean culture spread under the star lineup. Referring to the Korean star, almost everyone will come up naturally in mind of its "artificial" word. Obviously, more than 90% of South Korean stars have done different levels of dressing through medical means, which is the commonly known as "cosmetic surgery". [5]

According to the research report from MarketReportsOnline.com, Cosmetic Surgery Market has been showed as a new epoch which leads by Korea. Since 2011, Asia has already taken the first place in the count of cosmetic procedures over North America and Europe. The market in Asia is led by Korea with more than 50.4 %. The Korean Cosmetic Surgery has been the most popular and important industry both in domestic and export.

4. The rapid development of Korean Cosmetic Surgery in China

The statistics from Korea Joongang Daily shows that the number of Chinese cosmetic surgery tourists to Korea has increased dramatically. In 2022, the actual number of Chinese tourists traveling to South Korea for medical treatments rose to nearly 44 thousand, making up the second largest share of medical tourists to South Korea. In other words Cosmetic Surgery customers from China has increased 20 times in 5 years. In the perceptiveness of Asian market, there were 7 Chinese customers from every 10 customers, which is 10 times more than Japanese customers who stood the second place followed Chinese. Moreover, the average spend in treatment of each Chinese customers is about 34.5 thousand KRW (around 2000 pound), which is a considerable part of import earning. Those figure only included official Cosmetic Surgery hospital in Korea.

1) The current situation of Korean Cosmetic Surgery in China

Nowadays, Chinese women want to make their faces just like Korean super star instead of western idol and the Korean Cosmetic industry including cosmetic products, SPA, body building and especially Cosmetic Surgery have a great impact on not only youth but also middle age women all over China. Korea has made a perfect standard appearance for them; defined “beauty” and “fashion” at the same time and provide the way to realize it. There is a very common phenomenon in every Chinese city’s billboard on the main street written “Korean Cosmetic Surgery” and there are more than million person-times a year doing Cosmetic Surgery in china, most of them occurred in Korean Cosmetic hospitals and clinics or so-called Korean cooperated clinics.

5. Two kinds of Korean Cosmetic Surgery market in China

5.1 Chinese customers travel to South Korea for the Cosmetic Surgery

The role of tourist and patient are combined as Chinese customer who would chose to travel along to South Korea and spend much more money on their beauty dream. The whole process makes a new way of industry called cosmetic surgery tourism.

In the early stages, only a few Chinese individuals possessed the resources and capability to travel to South Korea, and finding a suitable clinic for facial enhancements was even more challenging; Then some tour guides and medical staff became intermediary between Cosmetic hospital and Chinese patient which has increased so fast and created a big market; After that, some travel agents integrated the travel and treatment along with translator, treatment advisor, driver and so on to solve all problem that Chinese customers might have during the cosmetic surgery journey. These whole services became the industry of cosmetic surgery tourism including travel planning, visa application, Korean cosmetic magazine with the introduction of Korean doctors and hospitals, professional consulting, contact to Cosmetic Surgery hospitals, appointment with specialist, hotel and flight ticket booking, pick-up service etc. About 14% Chinese patient will choose to have a cosmetic surgery journey to South Korea.[7]

5.2 Chinese people do Korean Cosmetic Surgery inland

Except for cosmetic surgery tourism, the majority of Chinese Cosmetic Surgery market is still in China. Recently, Chinese cosmetic surgery institutions refer to private Cosmetic Surgery clinic, beauty salon, Cosmetic Surgery department in public General Hospital and specialized Cosmetic Surgery hospital. Chinese people chose the cosmetic institution under the name of Korea which stands for the high quality and safety. In public General Hospitals, the Cosmetic Surgery departments have also fund different way of cooperation with Korea such as sending doctors to Korean Cosmetic Surgery institution for further studies so that they can not only learn new skills but also attract patients; The most popular specialized Cosmetic Surgery hospitals are those who claimed using Korean advanced equipment and medical technologies; Additionally, there are many private Cosmetic Surgery clinic doing back-alley operations and Chinese patients never stop coming only because the advertisement says they would

treated in a Korean way.

6. Analysis of the causes and motivations of Chinese cosmetic surgery

6.1 The objective reasons

6.1.1 Biogenic conditions make East Asian people want to have better appearance through Cosmetic Surgery

Chinese people are very similar to Korean people who are both famous as East Asian beauty. On the other hand, Chinese people and Korean people have some biological imperfection in common as well. First, Korean people have higher cheekbone and shorter chin which make the face shape appear to be dissatisfied; Second, Korean people are born with fair skin which may cause relative acne easily; Third, the eyes of Korean people are not big enough so that they need some handling especially with double-fold eyelid; Fourth, very few Korean people have high brow ridge and nose so that it is required to make stereoscopic instead of flat faces; [2] Besides, Korean people intend to change the size of breast or other parts in order to build curvaceous body. As consequences, Korean Cosmetic Surgery industry has particular strength and reputation both in Facial Plastic including eyes area, nose and face shape reforming and physical makeover which meet the demand of Chinese people properly.

6.1.2 Korea started to develop Cosmetic Surgery industry early which has already achieved advanced technology over the world

Korean Cosmetic Surgery industry has raised up on 1980s and the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games was like catalyst which encouraged people to accept Cosmetic Surgery and there came a general Consensus that beauty can make life easier. The great demand accelerated the continuous development of Korean Cosmetic Surgery industry in service level as well as the technology. Besides, Korean patients have many specific requirements of details which promote the progress of Cosmetic Surgery research. In this way, Korean Cosmetic Surgery industry has reached the highest place in the rank list. [2]

Korean cosmetic doctors who are very professional with their specific major, for example, a doctor in nose reforming department will always do nose area surgery so that they are able to focus on the high level of request and completeness. Moreover, Korean doctors are very smart and creative; they always come up with new operations and experiment to develop advanced technologies or new types. [6] There are 45 million people living in South Korea and there are more than 2500 Cosmetic Surgery hospitals all over the country. The street of Cosmetic Surgery is full of 200 Cosmetic Surgery hospitals and clinics, some of which contain 3 or 4 hospitals with various advertisements. Excellent teams of experts and a huge number of cosmetic surgery institutions have provided the necessary technical conditions for the Cosmetic Surgery industry.

6.1.3 High level of services in the whole chain of Cosmetic Surgery industry including travel agency, intermediary, translator, advertisement etc

Because of the relatively small domestic market in Korea, in order to promote the development of the Cosmetic Surgery medical industry, in 2009, the Korean government officially legalized the medical tourism industry for foreign patients with their treatments. As a result, various tourism agencies and medical facilities have emerged which attract large numbers of foreigners who go to Cosmetic Surgery and pull the whole industry out of the country. [7] The special project of cosmetic surgery tourism has become an international hotspot since its low cost, highly skilled cosmetic surgeon, luxurious facilities, good environment and excellent services. For example, a Medical Tourism Center in the Gangnam region in Seoul provides a total of 53 kinds of services, including hospital search, clinic treatment, cosmetology and beauty saloon, travel routes recommended and arrangement of free advice for tourists with specialized personnel even draw 3D simulation diagrams. [2]

7. Cultural reasons

7.1 Output of Aesthetics through Korean entertainment industry and pop culture

Chinese people have reasons to love Korean cosmetic surgery because of their entertainment industry which has turned so many Chinese people into fans or admirers for Korean superstars, youth idols and TV drama. Korean national strength has grown in recent years along with the rapid development of its entertainment industry. [3] However, Koreans mainly look relatively flat and normal, not very photogenic,

so that they are interested in cosmetic surgery. As the Korean wave swept all over Asia, gorgeous singer and perfect actress has become the dream image of everyone and the topic about they mostly received cosmetic surgery has spread like wildfire. After cosmetic surgery, Korean stars appear so delicate and comely but natural with no trace of plastic surgery. [9]

Additionally, the perfect image is not only because of cosmetic surgery, but also a system of Aesthetism. The consciousnesses of cosmetic surgery in Korea are mainly based on Korean life attitude which ask them to achieve the perfect in every respect, especially for women. It is neither polite nor cultivated if a woman shows in public without make up.[8]Korean Aesthetism is also more particular about the beauty of human nature and holistic harmony. Therefore, Korean cosmetic surgery requires fit for the body, clothing and coordination with overall effects. Under this concept, Korean star and entertainment industry are forged and decorated as new standard of Asian aesthetism which has a powerful impact on Chinese Aesthetism. After all, it is not difficult to turn fans and admirers into customers when they have already set those idols and stars as example of the perfect products from Korean cosmetic surgery.[3]

7.2 The traditional role and image of woman in Korean culture is similar to Chinese(value the outward appearance; woman should be perfect and cosmetic shows respect)

Korean cosmetic industry become so fanatical in China, tracing the source, is due to a long traditional cultural and appreciation the beauty of life. In Korean traditional culture, women pay attention to their appearance if they meet people or take part in social activities. Woman should dress up when go out of the door, when meet with the family members or with the guests even when stay in front of her husband and children they can not leave dirty traces.[8] Women are regarded as lazy if they don't make up to give people a good impression. In Chinese culture, outward appearance is also considered as highly valuable characters of people, especially women. Korean women focus on the appearance known as a tradition, which is a very particularly decent way of life. Regardless of the age from 20 or 70, Korean women only go out after carefully dressed and make up even just to buy some food. In Korean and Chinese society dominated by the machismo, habit of judging women by appearances is still deeply entrenched. They believe that no matter natural or artificial, as long as it is beautiful it is good. In China, the current situation is not as well as Korea, but people are motivated to have better appearance and outfit both in business occasion and peacetime. The cosmetic surgery is worth to try as a life changing; even some men are willing to take cosmetic surgery to follow the traditional way of beauty with modern methods. To sum up, the traditional factors also contributed to more and more people join the lines of cosmetic surgery.

7.3 The attitude of Korean people towards Cosmetic Surgery as a way of lifestyle is accepted by Chinese

In Korea, Cosmetic Surgery is a common thing instead of personal privacy; people do not hide the experiences of Cosmetic Surgery. Some Korean parents even give cosmetic surgery card to their children as 18 years birthday gift which might bring them a pretty start of their lives. The attitude of Chinese people towards Cosmetic Surgery is kind of complicate, on one hand, people always want to have better attractive appearances and Cosmetic Surgery is a short cut to achieve this target; on the other hand, Chinese people are ashamed to talk about taking Cosmetic Surgery because it seems to admit that inherent face is deficient. However, the older women are, the more open-minded they are to accept Cosmetic Surgery which is shown on the market: middle aged women are the leading customers. [9]

As the advertisement of cosmetic surgery cover up the street in China, more and more people have had experiences of cosmetic surgery and the topic has become more common. Even though Chinese people might hardly admit to have a cosmetic surgery experience in front of others, but the effectiveness could not lie as well as the increasing number of cosmetic customers. Chinese people do like cosmetic surgery more than ever. In the past, Chinese culture appreciate the natural beauty without make up. However, Korean beautiful face and body made by cosmetic surgery become so popular and fully acceptable, so that the attitude of Chinese people towards cosmetic surgery is changing reasonable along with the modern society. Those images of Korean stars have caught massive Chinese affection incredibly, so why do not try to have a perfect outwards appearances just like those idols on TV and billboard.[3]Besides, Korean cosmetic surgery is able to treat patient as nature as possible with many kinds of Micro-cosmetic surgery which is very effective but low profiled so that Chinese people could afford it both in economy and reputation.

7.4 Social reasons

High employment pressure pushes Korean people do Cosmetic Surgery in order to have more opportunities, which fits the current situation in China. Current companies generally require that candidates submit a professional headshot at the top corner of the job application form. [4]It is generally believed that photographs are the first impression for people and the attractive-looking people are intelligent, respectable, and higher in social status, who are, therefore, more likely to be chosen through interviews and get more favored by employers.

Korean people regard cosmetic surgery as an investment for a better chance in the employment market. In China, cosmetic surgery is becoming an investment as well. In 2017 there were 7.49 million Chinese graduate students from universities joining the employment market while in Japan the number is 0.5 million. The more competitor there are, the harder to find an opportunity of employment. Facing the serious situation, some Chinese young people chose to have cosmetic surgery in order to make a little better impression to the job interviewer.[1] Current environment has a great impact on the cosmetic surgery market performance, female employees are willing to spent one third of month salary to make their skin brighter.

China and South Korea has not only beauty Philosophy but also employment environment in common. In some sense, Chinese people is replicating the similar successful experiences from Korea, cosmetic surgery has become social demand rather than personal demand.

8. The trend of Korean Cosmetic Surgery market in China in the future

In general, Korean Cosmetic Surgery market in China will continue expand with high speed. Korean Cosmetic Surgery industry is quite suitable in China. In a larger scale, this is the South Korean Cosmetic advantage ----- uncanny workmanship, just like heaven. Recently, even a lot of China, Japan, South Korea plastic surgeons have to learn shaping technology, great cosmetic surgery craze spread rapidly in East Asia trend. [6]The potential of Chinese market is till underexploited waiting for further development and Korean Cosmetic Surgery industry dominant strength against Chinese domestic industry or western competitors.

However, Korean Cosmetic Surgery market in China also face two possible problems, on one hand, the risk of Cosmetic Surgery and Surgery failure has been the key argument all the time. With the rapid development of Cosmetic Surgery industry, the level of quality, technology and services are uneven which is not easy to introduce a high standard of Cosmetic Surgery industry. Some illegal and unqualified Cosmetic Surgery clinics are hard to supervise and regulate. Besides, some intermediary and tourism agencies make much more extra money, cheat customers without responsibility which is a harmful phenomenon to Korean Cosmetic Surgery industry and it will finally influent the market performance. This new issue requires Korean Cosmetic Surgery industry especially hospitals spend more effort than domestic business; On the other hand, the Korean wave of pop culture will pass by, the way of Korean Cosmetic Surgery would have to change with another trend instead of making everybody as a same model no matter how beautiful it is. The fashion in entertainment moves fast as well as the aesthetic inclination of modern people. The reflection of market demand is sensitive and both Korean and Chinese Cosmetic Surgery industry should prepare for the changes.

9. Conclusion

This paper is focus on Korean Cosmetic Surgery market in China as well as the reason behind this market performance. The main point of this work in to analyze the relationship between the impact of Korean wave and Korean Cosmetic Surgery market. Korean wave includes not only pop culture but also traditional aesthetic which are the main course why Chinese people prefer to do Korean Cosmetic Surgery. Besides, the current employment environment and competition situation also contributed to the Cosmetic Surgery market. Above all, Korean Cosmetic Surgery industry is successful in China because its inherent advantages and outside stimulus which shows how cultural factors reflect in our life.

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