

HEALTH

When Global Marketing Meets Beauty, Health, and Culture

by Danielle Miguel



Cross-cultural trade of beauty products has homogenized beauty and health standards. The pursuit of aesthetic appeal also holds broad economic, political, and public health implications.

✓ **INSIGHT** | NOTE 15 Jan 2016

The struggle for aesthetic perfection happens on a daily basis - we contour our faces to make our noses longer, our cheekbones higher, and our jawlines more defined. Men go out for biweekly haircuts, while women spend tons of money on their nails, hair, and anti-aging beauty products. The traditional adage says beauty is only skin-deep, but let's be real - we all strive for a flawless appearance. But who creates these standards? Are we buying in? What products are worth the investment? And what's the cost of our consumerism? At

the intersection of health and beauty exists a complex maze of these questions and, while the globalization of aesthetic standards manifests itself in the production of numerous beauty products from lipstick to cologne, it is important for us to honestly admit that it is we who strive to be the fairest in the land and to examine why we are compelled to do so.

East Meets West: A Testimonial to Cultural Exchanges and International Trade

People of all backgrounds and cultures have relied heavily on the association between health and beauty and have extensively affirmed culture changes based on standards of appearance. As an Asian American woman, I have witnessed cultural exchanges in the international beauty trade first-hand. My family often leaves the United States every few years to visit the land from which our bloodline originally flourished - the Philippines. Though we knew we would bring plenty back home with us (from spam to shoes) in the iconic Balikbayan boxes, we made sure we brought American soaps, shampoos, and deodorants in bulk to gift to our relatives. In return, they would give us whitening soap. Lots and lots of whitening soap. At the age of 13, while on a trip to the Philippines, I started using these soaps myself because I was immersed in a culture that had one singular obsession: beauty.

I have realized over the years that this obsession is a grotesque mix of healthy and unhealthy and can be manifested in an immense range of forms. Though it is safe to say that, in my situation, I chose to use whitening soaps in moderation for their health and exfoliation benefits, I strongly believe Paracelsus was right when he realized that oftentimes it was the “dose making the poison”. I chose to limit my use of these products with an understanding of the benefits and detriments they held, not only for my health but also for my cultural values, my identity, and my experiences.

In terms of critical thinking, my thoughts focused on the historic exchanges between Europe and Asia as precursors to the international beauty structures of trade of today. In many parts of Asia, skin color has and continues to showcase one's class. When European powers colonized the continent, from Japan to Vietnam, this concept was reaffirmed and given an additional culture twist: narrower, longer noses and sharper facial features seen

often on Europeans permeated Asian beauty standards. These standards manifested themselves into competitions between countries and cultures, which channeled issues of colorism from both the Eastern and Western spheres. In the Philippines it translated into a passion for beauty pageants, fueling the country to pursue win after win, title after title. Recently, another milestone was achieved by the crowning of Pia Wurtzbach as the country's third winner of the Miss Universe Pageant. It is important to recognize that we exist in an age in which the details of history have influenced and shaped the global market of beauty

The Impact on Health on International Business

Health and beauty products like Filipino Papaya Soaps and Korean BB Creams have undeniably built momentum in the western markets, including that of the United States, via increased sales and the winning of numerous beauty awards. The exchange between products made in the East and sellers in the West has been accompanied not only by globalized beauty standards, but medical and entertainment influences. In the last 10 years, the Korean Hallyu Wave has won global popularity for their TV dramas and music groups. The entertainment company has used their domestic and international exposure to successfully share modern Korean culture and stimulate the spur in Korean plastic surgeries and beauty product sales by encouraging emulation of their beautiful stars by investment in the procedures and goods.

The Dangers of Cosmetic Use and Surgical Enhancement

Although cosmetics are often sold to enhance one's physical appearance and health, they are also prone to harming health. You can find a good amount of lead in some of your favorite lipsticks, formaldehyde in nail polish, and hydroquinone in your favorite skin whitening products[1]. In addition, if you buy whitening products in from Asia, there's a 25% chance that they product may contain mercury. Some beauty products have even been found to have potential carcinogens in them, leading policy makers in the U.S. to

push for stricter FDA regulation and screening policies. Overseas Asian nations have also implemented their own regulators: the MHLW (Minister of Health, Labor, and Welfare) in Japan and KFDA (Korean Food and Drug Administration) in Korea determine safety and qualifications for products sales, while in Southeast Asian nations such as Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Laos, the ACD (ASEAN Cosmetic Directive) handles the labeling, safety, quality, and trade of products[3].

As much as people buy into the appeals of cosmetic enhancement, both temporary and permanent, going through surgery and investing into more beauty products come with a price and a health risk. In Thailand, where cosmetic surgeries are about one third of the price of those in Western nations, it is normal for foreigners to come to country to seek deals on rhinoplasties and other alterations. However, some doctors aren't qualified to perform surgeries and some hospitals aren't well equipped, which led to cases like that of Helena Grace, who according to BBC news, came in for a nose job but received an undesirable result. They also have increased rates of infection. That isn't to say that the surgeries aren't popular domestically - 20% of South Korean women have altered how they look in order to increase their chances of finding jobs and obtaining internal solace in fantasies of double eyelids, smaller noses, and delicate jawlines. The popularity of these procedures have propagated medical tourism, but it is important to note the risks that accompany these overseas surgeries.

As Dr. Park Sanghooh once said, "beautification through plastic surgery is about survival". Whereas the exchange between East and West push and pull between beauty standards, culture, and historically hegemonic ideals, it seems that, in the modern day, the impact of beauty challenges the way those afflicted take on the markets. Whether it is seen as a reclamation and progression of culture or as a submission to the influences of social and economic hierarchy, there is no doubt that the world of health, beauty, and culture invigorate the demand of medical, business, and political attention.



Danielle Miguel [Follow](#)

Danielle Miguel is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, where she studied Public

Danielle Pinget is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, where she studied Public Health, Public Policy, and Political Economy.