

# Korean Beauty Empire

By Liliek Soelistyo

To achieve "Korean beauty" has been the obsession of young ladies from all around the world, especially in Indonesia. This is because the wave of popularity in Korean pop music and soap operas, Hallyu, has surged into the life of people here. Hallyu started when Korean TV shows began to spread to other countries. This was followed by other products, such as electronics, films and music. Yes, the fact that a wide range of Korean products have become popular has made it easier for the Korean government to promote the Korean language and its traditions overseas. These promotional activities have also boosted the Korean cosmetics industry, creating a "Korean beauty standard." However, what is this "Korean beauty" that infatuates people across Indonesia?

People say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. This means that different people have different ideas about what is beauty. There has never been a universal definition of beauty because beauty is defined according to when and where the question of beauty is asked. For example, what is perceived as beautiful according to someone from the U.S. might be different from beauty according to a Korean or an Indonesian. However, the word "globalization" refers to the process of international integration as a result of interchanges among views, ideas, and other aspects from around the world, and there comes a time when the globalization of beauty, in many ways, simply describes a Westernized beauty standard. So, as with many things "globalized," the concept of an "ideal beauty" follows many standards that originate in Western concepts of beauty. As you know, the world has become obsessed with all things American, such as hamburgers and Coca-Cola. Sociologists call this "Cocacolonization."

Yet nowadays something similar is happening across East Asia. Many Asians, especially Koreans, have arisen. This is due to the fact that there has been a rapid spread of Korean concepts, products and services across many Asian countries, especially China. The Chinese coined the word "Hallyu" to refer to the influence of Korean standards and Korean concepts in other countries, primarily through media. The popularity of Korean films, music and TV shows has been increasing in many countries and territories such as China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and even Indonesia. Yes, it seems impossible to avoid the power of Korean pop culture and media. The influence of the "Korean screen," for example, has helped people across Asian develop a positive image about Korea. This has led to the consumption of Korean products and services, such as technology, food, fashion and cosmetics.

Talking about fashion and cosmetics, people will admit that Seoul has become one of the most fashionable and culturally influential cities in Asia. That means that Korean standards of beauty and fashion sprout forth from the city of Seoul. Through the fashion and sense of design seen on the streets of Seoul, Korea has established standards for "Korean beauty" overseas. Indonesia, as one such country, is now a potential market for Korean products and services. Many Indonesian youth follow Seoul fashion trends with a passion. Their eyes are glued to the clothes and attire donned by the celebrities of Seoul. They're willing to die for the clothes and accessories worn by their idols, such as actor Lee Min Ho or

actor Kim Bum. This craze for Korean actors and actresses has allowed the youth to identify with their stars and with their beauty standards.

Besides fashion, cosmetics have also won the heart of Indonesian youth. Korean skincare and beauty products are wildly popular among young Indonesians. Korean beauty ideals and standards have been adopted. There are many online shops here that offer Korean beauty products. From their websites, people, especially teenagers and 20-somethings, pamper themselves with Korean beauty products and with related news about their idols, like actress Song Hye-gyo and actress Kim Tae-hee. It's even common to see on Indonesian campuses the ways in which students behave like their Korean idols, imitating their newest makeup or outfits. These people claim to be members of a Korean beauty empire. Through cosmetics and accessories, young people are making themselves up to look just like their idols.

So it can be said that Korean beauty ideals have become the new dominant value that Indonesian young people try to adopt, to adjust to and to use in order to be accepted as members of this new dominant culture. They try to join a new cultural system. Perfect faces and ideal bodies are now an obsession so that they look just a little more like their idols. In other words, girls and women who are not Korean want to look Korean. The standards of beauty that have been the obsession of young women around the world, including in Indonesia, are not for Koreans alone, but for them, too.

In the end, however, beauty is a social construct. Therefore, beauty standards change over time. Besides, as it was said at the beginning, beauty is what and how people see ourselves. We have to remember that we are only truly beautiful when we believe in who we are.