

## **A Study among Chinese Tourists in their 20s and 30s for Determining their Choice of Medical Tourism Destinations**

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### **Abstract**

*Medical tourism is a tourism activity along with medical treatment and recuperation, and its' cost is relatively less compared to that undeveloped countries. Also, medical tourism has shown a meteoric rise in Asian country, where there are a large number of tourism and recreational facilities and an advanced level of medical services. From the demographic aspect, China is an important market in this area since it is geographically close to South Korea. Therefore, this study attempted to assess the awareness regarding medical tourism among Chinese subjects. A self-administered questionnaire survey targeting the employees in their 20s and 30s who worked for a local Chinese company was performed in this study. A questionnaire was written in Korean initially, and then it was translated into Chinese by an employee who spoke both Chinese and Korean. One hundred thirty copies of the questionnaire were distributed, and it took approximately two weeks to collect the data. Among them, only the results of questionnaires completed by 121 participants were analyzed as they understood the purpose of the study and agreed to participate in this study. On analyzing the questionnaires by using SPSS19.0 Win program, it was confirmed that the participants included 39 males (32.2%) and 82 females (67.8%) who were young people. Also, 79 participants (65.3%) were in their 20s and 42 participants (34.7%) were in their 30s. On analyzing the most preferred country as a medical tourism destination, 38 females (40.9%) responded that they would prefer to visit South Korea the most whereas 19males (38.8%) replied that Japan was their most preferred country. Also, 'safety' was considered the most important factor when choosing the country for medical tourism. Besides, on analysis with the t-test regarding desired countries for medical tourism, a difference was observed between genders.*

**Keywords:** *Medical tourism, Health tourism, Chinese Tourists' Awareness, Korean health care*

### **1. Introduction**

With the recent progress in the society, the improved standard of living has lead to an increased interest in healthy living. Also, there is an increased interest in medical tourism which combines the concept of tourism with medical treatment. South Korea revised the medical law in 2009 [1] in order to promote medical tourism and it has been actively developing legal and institutional support systems for foreigners interested in medical tourism. The government is planning to promote the medical tourism industry as a pioneering model of creative economy since 2013 and each self-governing body puts

spurs to the medical tourism industry [2]. The concept of medical tourism has been discussed since the late 20th century and it has been recognized as a strategic industry by each country since the year 2000 [3]. Recently, the growth in medical tourism has been brisk in developing countries such as India and Thailand. Assuming that Singapore is a leading destination for medical tourism and supposing that it is at a full level of 100%, international competitiveness of the medical tourism industry was evaluated at a level of 88% in South Korea, 84% in Malaysia, and 64% in Thailand. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), China would be the fourth largest tourist-sending country by the year 2020 with 100 million tourists leaving the country [4]. There has been an increase in the number of Chinese medical tourists since the Chinese government designated South Korea as a country to which its people were free to travel in 1998; thus, the travel between the two countries has become easy [5]. Also, both countries are located geographically close to each other. Furthermore, development in medical technologies, cosmetics, and dramas, which have led to the 'Korean Wave' entice many Chinese to visit South Korea as a medical tourism destination [6]. According to the overview of medical tourism in Korea in 2012 [7, 8], the number of Chinese medical tourists who visited South Korea was 31,427, and this number was higher than the number of tourists from the United States and Japan. The main reason why Chinese are visiting South Korea as a medical tourism destination is tourism in conjunction with medical services [9]. Firstly, 10% of the wealthy people hold 63% of the total assets in China. Therefore, it is necessary to develop hierarchically differentiated medical tourism products [10]. Also, cosmetic surgery along with cosmetics, and health diagnosis along with diagnosis and treatment of diseases or health food should be developed.

Therefore, this study attempted to identify the factors which entice Chinese subjects in their 20s-30s to select Korea as a medical tourism destination and the desired medical services. Through this analysis, this study will provide basic data for the development of medical tourism products targeting Chinese subjects in their 20s-30s.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Research Design**

This study was a descriptive survey research for determining the desired medical tourism destination among the Chinese in their 20s-30s and to identify the factors which entice them to select that particular country. A structured, self-fill able questionnaire survey was performed in this study.

### **2.2. Objective of the Study**

For this study, a questionnaire was developed in Korean by researchers and it was sent via e-mail by an employee who worked for a Chinese subsidiary company. After translation of the Korean questionnaire into Chinese by an employee working in China who was fluent in both Chinese and Korean, a total 130 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the employees who were in their 20s and 30s and were working for a local Chinese company. From among them, 121 questionnaires were used for the analysis.

### **2.3. Research Tool**

In this study, the structured questionnaire was used as an evaluation tool. It consisted of a total 16 questions (three questions about normal characteristics, three questions about the experiences of medical tourism, three questions about the preferred country and the reason for preference, four questions about visiting South Korea, one question about expense, one question about companion, and one insurance-related question). In addition, the validity of the questionnaire was enhanced and the measurement tools were developed by allowing 2 medical doctors, 1 doctor of social sciences, and 1 doctor of nursing to

participate in this study. In addition, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was used to determine the reliability, and its value was .87.

## 2.4. Data Collection Methods and Ethical Considerations

It took approximately 20 days (from August 30, 2014 to September 20, 2014) to collect data. The questionnaires were distributed and the purpose and aim of medical tourism were explained to the employees with assistance from a company in China. Then, the questionnaires completed by the subjects who agreed to participate in this study were collected and used as a tool for data collection.

The research approval and the results of study participants were delivered by post to the researcher on October 5, 2014.

## 2.5. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed by using SPSS Win 19.0 program. The general characteristics and the choice of the medical tourism destination were analyzed through frequency analysis by ages and gender.

## 3. Result

### 3.1. General Characteristics of the Study Participants

On analyzing the questionnaires, it was proven that the number of females was about twice that of men among the participants. There were 39 males (32.2%) and 82 females (67.8%). Also, it was confirmed that the study population was composed of young people. Also, 79 subjects (65.3%) were in their 20s and 42 subjects (34.7%) were in their 30s (Table 1).

**Table 1. General Characteristics of the Study Participants (n=121)**

Age	No	Gender		Single (n, %)	Married (n, %)
		Male (n, %)	Female (n, %)		
20-24	15(12.4)	3(2.5)	12(9.9)	13(10.7)	2(1.7)
25-29	64(52.9)	17(14.0)	47(38.8)	46(38.0)	18(14.9)
30-34	36(29.8)	15(12.4)	21(17.4)	12(9.9)	24(19.8)
35-39	6(5.0)	4(3.3)	2(1.7)	1(0.8)	5(4.1)
Total	121(100)	39(32.2)	82(67.8)	72(59.5)	49(40.5)

### 3.2. The Most Preferred Country as a Medical Tourism Destination

On analyzing the most preferred country as a medical tourism destination, 38 females (26.8%) responded that they would prefer to visit South Korea the most whereas 19 males (13.4%) replied that Japan was the most preferred country (Table 2).

**Table 2. The Most Preferred Medical Tourism Destination (n=142)**

Country	No	Gender		Age			
		Male	Female	20~24	25~29	30~34	35~39
Korea	51(35.9)	13(9.2)	38(26.8)	11(7.7)	23(16.2)	16(11.3)	1(0.7)
Singapore	36(25.4)	10(7.0)	26(18.3)	2(1.4)	21(14.8)	13(9.2)	0(0.0)
Thailand	15(10.6)	7(4.9)	8(5.6)	0(0.0)	6(4.2)	8(5.6)	1(0.7)
Japan	40(28.2)	19(13.4)	21(14.8)	3(2.1)	22(15.5)	10(7.0)	5(3.5)
Total	142(100)	49(34.5)	93(65.5)	16(11.3)	72(50.7)	47(33.1)	7(4.9)

### 3.3. Factors that Affected the Choice of the Medical Tourism Destination

On analyzing the factors that affected the choice of the medical tourism destination, 48 females (19.5%) considered ‘safety’ as the most important factor. On the other hand, 21 males (17.9%) responded that they considered recuperation and relaxation, and food culture and shopping each as the important factor (Table 3).

Also, there was a difference according to the age. 10 subjects (2.8%) aged 20-24 years responded that they considered recuperation and relaxation as the most important factor. Among the subjects aged 25-29 years and 30-34 years, 32 subjects (8.8%) and 20 subjects (5.5%) replied that safety should be the most important factor. Among the subjects aged from 35 to 39 years, three subjects (0.8%) each responded that the natural environment, climate or season, and safety should be considered the most important factor.

**Table 3. 3 Factors that Affected the Choice of the Medical Tourism Destination (n=363)**

Factors	No	Gender		Ages			
		Male	Female	20~24	25~29	30~34	35~39
Images of the Country	30(8.3)	11(3.0)	19(5.2)	3(0.8)	19(5.2)	7(1.9)	1(0.3)
Natural Environment	39(10.7)	14(3.9)	25(6.9)	4(1.1)	22(6.1)	10(2.8)	3(0.8)
Experiencing Traditional Culture	19(5.2)	9(2.5)	10(2.8)	1(0.3)	13(3.6)	4(1.1)	1(0.3)
Relaxation and Recuperation	58(16.0)	21(5.8)	37(10.2)	10(2.8)	30(8.3)	16(4.4)	2(0.6)
Food Culture/Shopping	42(11.6)	21(5.8)	21(5.8)	5(1.4)	25(6.9)	10(2.8)	2(0.6)
Climate/Season	36(9.9)	9(2.5)	27(7.4)	3(0.8)	18(5.0)	12(3.3)	3(0.8)
Travel Expenses	51(14.0)	10(2.8)	41(11.3)	5(1.4)	26(7.2)	19(5.2)	1(0.3)
Entertainment Facilities	5(1.4)	2(0.6)	3(0.8)	1(0.3)	1(0.3)	3(0.8)	0(0.0)
Distance/Accessibility	21(5.8)	6(1.7)	15(4.1)	6(1.7)	6(1.7)	7(1.9)	2(0.6)
Safety	62(17.1)	14(3.9)	48(13.2)	7(1.9)	32(8.8)	20(5.5)	3(0.8)
Total	363(100)	117(32.2)	246(67.8)	45(12.4)	192(52.9)	108(29.8)	18(5.0)

### 3.4. The Reasons for Choosing South Korea as a Medical Tourist Destination

On asking the participants to respond to the questions about the reasons for choosing South Korea as a medical tourist destination, 30 male participants (58.8%) and 47 female participants (40.9%) chose South Korea as a medical tourist destination since China is located geographically close to South Korea (Table 4).

**Table 4. The Reasons for Choosing South Korea as a Medical Tourist Destination (n=166)**

Reason	Total	Gender		Age			
		male	female	20~24	25~29	30~34	35~39
Geographically Close	77(46.4)	30(58.8)	47(40.9)	7(41.2)	42(47.7)	25(51.0)	3(25.0)
Low Cost	26(15.7)	6(11.8)	20(17.4)	0(0)	16(18.2)	7(14.3)	3(25.0)
Understandable Language	14(8.4)	3(5.9)	11(9.6)	2(11.8)	7(8.0)	3(6.1)	2(16.7)
Good Quality of Medical Services	45(27.1)	12(23.5)	33(28.7)	7(41.2)	22(25.0)	13(26.5)	3(25.0)
Other	4(2.4)	0(0)	4(3.5)	1(5.9)	1(1.1)	1(2.0)	1(8.3)
Total	166(100)	51(100)	115(100)	17(100)	88(100)	49(100)	12(100)

### 3.5. Desired Medical Service in South Korea

For the question about desired medical service by the Chinese in South Korea, 20 males (12.0%) answered medical check-up whereas 55 females (33.1%) answered beauty treatments and cosmetic surgery (Table 5).

**Table 5. Desired Medical Service in South Korea (n=166)**

Service	Total	Gender		Age			
		Male	Female	20~24	25~29	30~34	35~39
Medical Check	43(25.9)	20(12.0)	23(13.9)	3(1.8)	22(13.3)	13(7.8)	5(3.0)
Severe Disease (Cancer)	7(4.2)	5(3.0)	2(1.2)	0(0.0)	3(1.8)	4(2.4)	0(0.0)
Cosmetic Surgery and Beauty Treatment	71(42.8)	16(9.6)	55(33.1)	10(6.0)	40(24.1)	21(12.7)	0(0.0)
Oriental Medicine	7(4.2)	2(1.2)	5(3.0)	1(0.6)	6(3.6)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)
Dental Clinic	37(22.3)	13(7.8)	24(14.5)	3(1.8)	23(13.9)	8(4.8)	3(1.8)
Etc	1(0.6)	0(0.0)	1(0.6)	0(0.0)	1(0.6)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)
Total	166(100)	56(33.7)	110(66.3)	17(10.2)	95(57.2)	46(27.7)	8(4.8)

### 3.6. The Willingness to Buy Insurance Products

For the question about willingness to buy insurance products in conjunction with medical check-up in South Korea, 26 males (21.5%) and 52 females (43.0%) replied that they were not willing to buy the insurance products.

**Table 6. The Willingness to Buy Insurance Products (n=166)**

The Willingness to Buy Insurance Products	Total	Gender		Age			
		Male	Female	20~24	25~29	30~34	35~39
Yes	43(35.5)	13(10.7)	30(24.8)	6(5.0)	20(16.5)	16(13.2)	1(0.8)
No	78(64.5)	26(21.5)	52(43.0)	9(7.4)	44(36.4)	20(16.5)	5(4.1)
Total	121(100)	39(32.2)	82(67.8)	15(12.4)	64(52.9)	36(29.8)	6(5.0)

#### 4. Conclusions

Overall, it appeared that young Chinese subjects in their 20s and 30s who work at a workplace consider 'safety' as the most important factor when choosing the country for medical tourism. In addition, on analysis using the t-test regarding desired countries for medical tourism, a difference was observed between genders. Factors considered important when choosing the country for medical tourism were recuperation and relaxation, and food culture and shopping in males whereas safety was considered the most important factor by females.

In the study by Kim Min-cheol [11] attribute factors affecting brand image were the pursuit of service and the pursuit of health, and they had positive (+) impact at a significance level of 5%, which was different from the positive (+) impact of image attitude on the final choice. Please review the change. The result may have been obtained due to a difference in the analytical methods or there might be a bias towards the younger generation in this study. Given that China is geographically close to South Korea and it currently has the highest population in the world, China represents a potential market. Desired medical service by the Chinese in South Korea was medical check-up among males, whereas females preferred beauty treatments and cosmetic surgery [12]. It is necessary that different medical services should be provided according to the gender.

For the question about the willingness to buy insurance products which will enhance medical tourism, both males and females replied that they were not willing to buy the insurance products. Therefore, it is thought that it is still early days to develop insurance products which will enhance medical tourism.

The fact that this study directly targeted the employees of a local Chinese company differentiated it from the other studies. However, there is a limitation that the age groups were biased toward the younger generation working for a company and the study was limited to a single company in China. Therefore, it is not possible to extrapolate the results of this study to another study.

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