

PREFACE – Recent Wave in the Field of Korean Plastic Surgery

Established in 1966, the Korean Society of Plastic Surgery celebrated its 48th anniversary this past May. The Society is nearing a membership of 2,000 board-certified plastic surgeons, and has made considerable contributions to the advancement of medicine and healthcare systems in Korea.

As with the history of other medical specialties in Korea, the founding members of our Society learned of the principles of plastic surgery from centers of postgraduate education in the United States. In the early days, our practice reflected much of the western perspective on what plastic surgery should be. It took a few decades for all subspecialties of plastic surgery to practice medicine in a manner and style more appropriate for Asian culture and tastes, but the wait has been worthwhile. In this early part of 21st century, plastic surgery *à la Korea* has become a standard of aesthetic surgery in East Asia. Our cities have become the plastic surgery mecca because the Korean surgeons have come to understand facial and body aesthetics from the Asian perspective.

Plastic surgery can largely be subdivided into reconstructive surgery and aesthetic surgery. The reconstructive tradition is deeply rooted in normalizing the appearance of bodily defects and deformities, while aesthetic surgery itself was subsequently born from the desire to elevate the *normal* to *beautiful*. Reconstructive principles and techniques, which were developed to address defects and deformities of congenital anomalies, tumor resection, and trauma, are now being utilized for aesthetics. Examples of such spin-off ideas can be found in customized aesthetic operations, antiaging treatments, and minimally invasive approaches.

In the past decade, the most significant growth in plastic surgery has been the basic research. Especially stem cell research has come to receive wider exposure, but the truth is that there have been long lines of investigations into what are primordial constituents of tissue constructs. Some of these innovative studies have yielded tangible tissue substitutes, biocompatible materials, and artificial skin and cartilage – many of which have matured into commercial products and are approved and available for medical applications. All of this can be considered as the result of endless pursuit of curiosity born from clinical and operative observations. Stem cell research has fuelled these incremental efforts in answering fundamental questions regarding tissue biology, and the studies published in this issue of JKMS provide a glimpse of the basic science and clinical research being conducted amongst plastic surgeons in Korea. As it has been with findings in immunology and transplantation, plastic surgery has the potential to contribute valuable insights into the human condition, which far surpasses the boundaries of medical fields.

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