



Beauty and the East

Japanese and South Korean skincare innovations are driving product development in America and quickly becoming mainstream.

SPA-GOERS HAVE LONG LOOKED TO THE EAST for its wealth of beauty knowledge, and some claim Asian skincare is at least a decade ahead of the rest of the world. Asian beauty trends have crossed many miles to take root in the U.S., and now spa-goers don't need to travel to Asia—namely South Korea or Japan—to experience the benefits of cutting-edge Eastern-inspired skincare. Japan, often regarded as the leading beauty innovator in Asia, has stiff competition from South Korea, which came into the limelight in 2012 with multitasking BB creams. Skin lightening and brightening, a longtime trend in the Asian skincare market, also became more prominent than ever before, promising a more even skintone and radiant complexion. Asian beauty breakthroughs are becoming commonplace in spas and retail—and while we might not have adopted Korea's famous 10-step skincare routine, spas today are definitely incorporating elements of the East into beauty regimens.

Founded in 2012, Tatcha is based in the U.S. while its products are manufactured in and draw inspiration from Japan. "There has been so much

cross-pollination of cultures recently, exposing a Western audience to products and categories that are well-established in Asia," says founder, CEO, and chief treasure hunter Victoria Tsai. "The Asian skincare market is rich with categories not previously seen in the U.S. Now these Asian skincare brands are appearing in the U.S. market and influencing Western brands. American brands are beginning to embrace the 'new' categories and products of Asian beauty, adding cleansing balms and sheet masks and mineral-rich waters to their repertoires. Sephora's focus on Korean beauty in the past year was really a tipping point, bringing what used to be a niche category to a much broader audience."

AmorePacific, a trailblazing Korean skincare company that launched in the U.S. in 2003, brings cutting-edge technology and groundbreaking innovations to the U.S. market. "Skin is a measure of beauty in the Korean culture, and therefore takes priority in Korean women's time, effort, and budget allocation," says Nathalie Paiva, director of marketing and public relations. "I believe it is for this reason that Korean consumers are always curious to find

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out about the newest product to hit the market and are willing to invest just as much in diversifying their skincare portfolios as they do in quality. By definition, Korean skincare is innovation, looking to address every single need the market may have, no matter how great or small.”

Birchbox, a New York City-based online monthly beauty subscription service, is always on the lookout for the best and most intuitive products for customers. “BB and CC Creams are one trend from Asia that has been hugely successful with our customers—our customer loves this multitasking product,” says senior merchant manager of the skincare and body division Jamie Johns. “Japan and Korea are known for their skincare first beauty perspective, which definitely resonates with our perspective as a retailer. There are a lot of unique beauty trends from the region that are too out there for our customer, but the markets there have consistently produced amazing ingredients and technical innovations. So many of the product innovations from these countries have gone on to be replicated by European and American skincare brands.” Birchbox, riding the sheet mask trend in the West, features masks from Biorepublic, Dr. Jart, Manefit, NER:D, Soo Ae, and When.

Global Masquerade

A sheet mask is usually made from soft cotton that is soaked in a serum or essence and pre-

cut to match facial contours, with holes for the mouth, nose, and eyes. The mask traps ingredients, forcing them to absorb into the skin and sealing in moisture. Sheet masks are gaining popularity in the U.S. because of instant brightening, hydrating, and firming effects. Celebrity sheet mask selfies have become popular, and Asia has just upped the ante. According to the Spafinder Wellness 365 2016 Trends Report, expect to see sheet masks shaped like animals. Korean brands have created tiger, raccoon, dog, sheep, monkey, cat, and panda masks, while in Japan, sheet mask enthusiasts can emulate Hello Kitty or members of the rock band KISS during their beauty routines.

At DHC, new products are inspired by what Japan does best: research and development using botanicals and antioxidants of the highest standard. “In Japan, DHC is a household name—it’s one of the most popular health and beauty companies in the country—so the brand holds huge influence in the Asian skincare space, which is now migrating to the West,” says Cynthia Popper, senior copywriter and catalog editor at DHC USA. “Some of the longtime beauty standards in Asia, like sheet masks for example, have been around for awhile. We have carried them for more than 10 years—we’re one of the first companies to introduce sheet masks to the mainstream American beauty consumer. In Japan, women buy sheet masks in bulk to use daily, before a big event, or to target a particular issue. They’re convenient, affordable, and effective.” The newly launched DHC Q10 Sheet Mask is vitamin-packed and features coenzyme Q10, a super antioxidant that improves the look, feel, and overall tone of skin.

In developing its products, Tatcha was influenced by Japanese beauty rituals. “We were inspired by the Geisha’s centuries-old practice of distilling botanicals, soaking swaths of silk with nutrient-rich steam, and laying it on their skin to enjoy the benefits,” says Tsai. “It’s not just about heritage, though, but efficacy. For example, in a clinical study, we found that the Luminous Deep Hydration Lifting Mask increases the moisture content of the skin by 197 percent in 15 minutes.” Thémaé Paris, which creates tea and spring-water-based products, takes its name from the Japanese word for the tea preparation ceremony—a paramount ritual in the culture. According to sales director for the Americas Jeannie Frazier, following trends

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Sheet masks are growing in popularity in the U.S. and offer a host of skincare benefits.



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is a very important part of product development. "Asia is rich in culture, rituals, and wellbeing," says Frazier. "Sheet masks are making a strong presence in facial homecare due to the immediate plumping and radiance to the skin. They are being used in 'red-carpet ready' home treatments, and are perfect for a more intensive treatment in a pouch you can take anywhere. Thémaé's Youth & Radiance Mask, a sheet mask that contains phyto collagen, hyaluronic acid, and essential oils, is also used in the Thémaé Original Beauty Signature Facial (\$240, 90 minutes) at Le Spa Thémaé in Paris.

Asian brands are switching up sheet masks, substituting gel sheets and kelp for cotton. In addition to many other Asian companies, the Korean beauty company TonyMoly carries "hydrogel masks," which are made of a thin gel sheet versus the standard cotton material, allowing for maximum adherence accuracy and boosted hydration. Another unique TonyMoly sheet mask is the Earth Beauty Kelp Mask Sheet, designed to boost elasticity while simultaneously removing pollutants from the skin. The sheet is approximately 90 percent kelp, which delivers abundant minerals and nutrients to the skin, and other ingredients include a *lactobacillus* and *aloe barbadensis* ferment filtrate.

Patchology, a U.S.-based company that sources many of its ingredients from Korea, is also creating



Ancient Geisha beauty rituals inspired the brand Tatcha.

innovative sheet masks. In April, the company launched a SmartMud No-Mess Mud Masque infused with the detoxifying benefits of volcanic mud, sourced from Jeju, a South Korean island. "Our innovation was to put mineral-rich volcanic mud right into a sheet mask, so the mud is easy to apply, comfortable to wear for 10 minutes, and virtually mess-free to remove," says CEO Chris Hobson. "You get all the benefits of mud, but without the mess." Last spring, Patchology launched its FlashMasque sheet masks featuring HydraSurge5, which delivers hydration in five minutes versus 15—a perfect adaptation for the impatient American consumer. The innovative mask material virtually disappears when applied to the skin, and the shape and serum levels are customized for the U.S. market.

Inspired by Korea, Elemis recently introduced the next generation of sheet masks, such as the Elemis Pro-Collagen Hydra-Gel Eye Masks, where the sheet mask itself is made of skin-beneficial ingredients. "Elemis has been very strong in Asia for many years and has consequently taken much inspiration from these regions, adding a further level of creativity and innovation in the UK laboratory," says cofounder and chief marketing officer Oriele Frank, who is responsible for new product development. "We pride ourselves in being a leader in advanced scientifically proven skincare and always well ahead of the trends, which helps position Elemis in the U.S. as a major trendsetter. The future generation in sheet masks will be Bio-Cellulose—expensive but amazingly beneficial to the skin when infused with actives."

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Tea, another long-standing Asian ritual, is also used as a nourishing skincare ingredient.