An Investigation of Korean Wedding Industry and Suggestions for Its Future Development from the Tourism Perspective

YOUNGMI KIM* and DOYUN KIM**

*Youngmi Kim, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism Management, Dongshin University, Naju, South Korea.

**Doyun Kim, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Hotel and Food Service Industry, Gangdong University, Icheon, South Korea.

ABSTRACT

Korean wedding industry has reached its mature stage and demands for its products and services have steadily increased. Recently, there are a variety of wedding ceremonies that include a magic show, cocktail show, weddings on the ship, and cruise wedding. Meanwhile, the increase of business related to the wedding industry has caused fierce competition, which, in turn, resulted in poor quality of products and services. Thus, it is necessary for the Korean wedding industry to develop products and services to satisfy foreign customers rather than just focusing on the domestic market. The current study aims to investigate on Korean wedding industry and suggestions for its future development. Present study is an attempt to examine the history and the status of Korean wedding industry. Through the analysis and feasibility of Korean wedding industry, it would be possible to identify the strengths and weaknesses and the resources necessary to attract foreign customers. Secondly, it aimed to suggest services and products that can be developed to meet the demands and needs of foreign customers based on this feasibility analysis.

KEYWORDS: Korean Wedding Industry; Wedding-Tourism Product

Introduction

Korea had its unique wedding ceremonies from the Three Kingdoms period (also named as ‘Samguk’) to the Goryeo period. In the Joseon Dynasty, wedding ceremonies had been hosted on the basis of 'Saryepyonyonam' which contains four family ritual ceremonies such as coming-of-age ceremony, wedding ceremony, funeral ceremony, and sacrificial rite (Hong, 2012). Under the Japanese imperialism, a variety of cultures of China, Russia, and European countries had been introduced to Korea. At that time, new wedding culture was also created (Choi, 2006).
The biggest difference between traditional wedding ceremony and modern style wedding ceremony is the ‘venue’ (Kim & Cho, 2009). Now, most of weddings are being held at commercialized wedding halls or public places such as city hall, church, and civic center. In addition, there has been newly growing business related to ‘wedding’ such as wedding photography studio, honeymoon travel agencies, shops for articles essential to a marriage ceremony, and wedding planners. Now, diversified consumer needs and demands lead to the development of services and products for wedding.

Looking into more details about wedding industry, it includes sub industries such as wedding hall, wedding dress, makeup and hair, wedding photo shooting, reception, travel agency, hotel, jewelry, and wedding consulting (Kim & Choi, 2011). In recent years, people engaged in wedding industry have been regularly participated a large scale of wedding fairs. They not only share the information but also promote products and services related to wedding. In addition, a wedding planner who plan and consult on the services including wedding hall, reception, makeup and hair, wedding photo shooting, and honeymoon becomes very popular to the young who should save time and money for preparing wedding (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). Moreover, not only the wedding studios employing famous photographers but also the skin care shops that provide care for couples have emerged. Also, credit card companies provide installment payment or payment with points for the purchase of furniture and use of wedding halls (Hwang, 2007). Thus it can be said that Korean wedding industry has reached its mature stage and demands for unique products and services have steadily increased. Recently, a variety of types of wedding ceremonies that include a magic show or cocktail show, weddings on the ship, and cruise wedding are increasing.

Meanwhile, the increase of wedding related companies in the industry produced the fierce competition among them, which, in turn, resulted in poor quality of products and services. For example, a wedding company that coordinates all services related to wedding was sued for improper photo shooting and videotaping service on the wedding day (Korean Broadcasting System, 2008). Moreover, some companies sell extremely expensive products (such as designer wedding dresses and expensive dowry) to differentiate their services, which caused social problems such as excessive consumption. The limited size of Korean wedding market makes these companies compete fiercely and leads them to provide low quality of services and products.

As a result, it is necessary for the Korean wedding industry to develop products and services to satisfy foreign customers rather than just focusing on the domestic market. In other words, the Korean wedding industry needs to find ways to attract foreign customers to overcome the limitations of domestic market by using its resources and know-how. In this vein, the current study aimed to achieve following
objectives. First, it attempted to examine the history and the status of Korean wedding industry. Through the analysis of the environment for Korean wedding industry, it would be possible to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the industry and the resources necessary to attract foreign customers. Second, it aimed to suggest services and products that can be developed to meet the demands and needs of foreign customers based on the environment analysis. When the foreign customers use wedding services and products developed in Korea, they should come to Korea, which accompanies incidental expenses related to transportation, lodging, food and beverage, and tourist attractions (Getz, 2005). Therefore, this study examined future development of wedding industry from the tourism perspective.

Korean Wedding Industry

History of Korean Weddings

Korean marriage customs have changed over time (National Institute of Korean History, 2001). During the Gojoseon period, the lineage was regarded as so important and it was considered to wedding customs in Buyeo: when an elder brother died, his younger brother married his elder brother’s wife. Dongokjeo had the custom of raising future daughter in law. Goguryeo had Seook custom, which was a maternal family custom: man has to live with wife’s parents before childbirth. In Silla, members of royal family married with each other to preserve the purity of lineage. Baekje had monogamy custom, which stressed wife’s fidelity and it seemed that marriage custom was established earlier in Baekje than in Silla and Goguryeo.

During early Goryeo, marriage within the same social class continued and intermarriage was popular. Around late Goryeo, wedding ceremony was considered one of the four most important events in one’s life so it was held on a large scale.

At that time, weddings took place at the house of the bride’s family (Life in Korea, n.d.). The groom usually rode a horse and his attendants or servants would walk to the bride's house (see Fig 1).

Figure 1: Groom’s wedding parade and bowing

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2 The ceremonies of coming of age, marriage, funereal, and ancestral worship
The attendants often played musical instruments to make the mood more festive. The bowing represented the promise of commitment to each other (see Fig 1). The groom and bride each had two attendants who helped them throughout the ceremony. With the aid of her helpers, the groom bowed back once to the bride. The bride then bowed two more times to the groom, who bowed back once more. They finished by kneeling down and facing each other. As the last parts of the ceremony, the bride and groom have couple drinking to signify the harmony together (see Fig 1). The Koreans had continued to celebrate this type of traditional wedding ceremony by Joseon Dynasty.

During the Japanese colonial era, western wedding ceremonies were introduced to Korea; Japan considered the West was the model for modern Japan to emulate (Shida, 1999). The traditional wedding ceremony held at the bride's house with the relatives began to disappear and a combination of western and Korean wedding ceremonies appeared. From this time, community centers and commercial wedding halls began to be used for wedding ceremonies. The wedding ceremony that combined the western wedding ceremony and the traditional Korean ceremony has been established. Taiwan ceded by the weakened Imperial China to Japan under the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895 also adopted the western wedding culture (Lee, 2004). For recent years, young couples look for unique event type wedding ceremonies rather than traditional ceremonies. Wedding ceremonies at luxury hotels began to be permitted in 1999 and hotels have made a lot of efforts on promoting and developing wedding products (see Figure 2) (Wikipedia, n.d.). Compared to other types of weddings, a wedding ceremony at a hotel allows more time for banquet after the wedding ceremony and various events (Adler & Chien, 2004). In addition, the luxurious interior and high quality meals, beverages, and drinks that is sufficient to satisfy customers.

![Figure 2: Wedding ceremony at a luxury hotel](image)

**Current Korean Weddings**

In the past, a wedding ceremony was a feast for the neighbors and relatives. But now, a commercial wedding hall or small space is rented for half a day or a day and
meals, magic shows, mime, singing, cocktail shows or other entertainments are provided (Lau & Hui, 2010). In addition to the weddings at wedding halls and hotels and outdoor weddings, weddings on the cruise ships offered during off-season as part of profit making gain popularity among young people. Recently, a coastal cruise ship called "Minamho" introduced cruise wedding in Busan, Korea (Korea.kr, 2009). In the past, a wedding on shipboard use the deck of anchored ship or a cafe on the waterfront. Now, Minamho and Pan Star Dream targeting people in Osaka, Japan operate wedding ceremony by providing 2 or 3 hour cruise (see Figure 3) (Hankooki.com, 2006). On a cruise ship called Tiffany 21, a wedding ceremony is held while enjoying the beautiful scenery of Busan (Hankooki.com, 2006). As it has many foreign customers as well as Korean customers, it is would be well positioned to promote Korean cruise and wedding on the ship. Tiffany 21 has a live stage on the 1st floor and a conference room-cum-theater with beam projector on the 2nd floor, a karaoke room, an observation deck, and a wedding hall on the 3rd floor. In sum, cruise wedding that provides differentiated service by integrating tourism into wedding can be considered as the future wedding product.

Figure 3: Wedding halls on a shipboard

Situational Analyses

Environmental Analysis of the Korean Wedding Industry

Tangible and intangible infrastructure for the wedding industry such as wedding halls, food and beverage service, and wedding studios are well established in Korea. There are different types of wedding halls with different designs and atmospheres such as hotels, comprehensive wedding halls and outdoor wedding halls. Hotels provide high quality of wedding service and luxurious atmosphere with large parking area and enough time for wedding (Lau & Hui, 2010). Comprehensive wedding halls also provide quality of services and good facilities but still have difficulties with a capacity and parking area (Kim, 2010). Outdoor wedding halls are somewhat expensive compared to other wedding facilities but they can create unique atmosphere with natural environments (Kim, 2010). In addition, wedding photo shooting services and diverse wedding products meet the customers' unique
needs. Moreover, wedding planners and wedding consulting companies that provide various information and package products emerge and their size is growing. These are Korean wedding industry’s strengths.

The weakness of Korean wedding industry is bad management of wedding related companies due to fierce competition in the industry. As mentioned above, consumers complain about unreliable businesses through complaints and lawsuits (KBS, 2008). The Korean wedding industry has focused on the domestic market for a long time and it hasn’t been able to attract foreign customers. One of the reasons the Korean wedding industry was unable to attract foreign customers is because a wedding involves not only the wedding couples but also their family members, friends, and other guests. It will be very difficult for a foreign couple to spend time and money to bring their families and guests to Korea for a wedding.

One external factor favorable to the wedding industry is that tourism related industries such as hotel and cruise are showing a lot of interest and making investment in the wedding industry. Moreover, increased interest in Korean culture and travel due to Hallyu is another external factor favorable to the wedding industry. Especially, wedding couples in China prefer taking Korean style wedding photos and have honeymoon trip to Korea (Lee, 2012).

External threats can be the increase of single women due to the increase of working women. Single working women think they have to take responsibility for bringing up of children as well as housework if they get married (Korea Herald, 2012). In addition, the other reason as economic slump results in higher input prices and dwindling profit margins of the wedding industry (Korea Herald, 2010).

### Table 1: Analysis of the Environment for Korean Wedding Industry

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>well established tangible or intangible assets (wedding halls, food and beverage service, wedding studios and dowry shops)</td>
<td>low quality service provided due to fierce competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional wedding planners and wedding consulting companies</td>
<td>difficult time and money wise for a foreign couple to bring their families and guests to Korea</td>
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<table>
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<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
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<tr>
<td>wedding industry is tourism related industries such as hotel and cruise</td>
<td>increase of single women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increased interest in Korean culture and tour due to Hallyu</td>
<td>economic slump</td>
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### Trends and Characteristics of Weddings in Japan

Wedding ceremonies in Japan changed greatly with the modernization of Japan. Beauty, wedding apparel, studio, event production, and other wedding related industries have been emerged. In the last few years, comprehensive wedding halls
that are equipped with comprehensive system and provide diverse wedding events to meet customer demands have been established. Recently, many couples have their wedding albums made by photo studios. One of such studios called Make Marriage takes pictures of the bride as if she is a model by allowing the bride to select a wedding dress from a wide selection (about 300 types of wedding dress) and providing makeup by an expert (Fisch, 2001).

There are various types of wedding ceremonies including Shinjen (see Figure 4), Christian and hotel types (Shida, 1999; Royalnima, 2004). Japanese tend to spend a lot of money (about 3 million yen on average) on their wedding (Hur, 2000). They mostly invite very close people to the wedding ceremony and have a unique and meaningful reception for the invited guests (Hur, 2000). In general, the bride and groom enter together, exchange rings, and have marriage vows. The bride change 2 or 3 times during the wedding from a wedding dress, to a party dress (evening dress) and kimono (Hur, 2000). Invited women guests do not wear white in consideration of the bride and mostly wear a dress or a kimono. Men usually wear a black suit and a white tie. Regarding the reception, it takes about 2 or 3 hours as in Korea including meal, talent show, and flower presentation to parents, reading letters by friends and relatives, and other activities.

Japanese invite guests by phone and send the invitation and RSVP (Répondez S’il Vous Plaît: please reply) cards afterwards (Fisch, 2001). For the guests, the couples prepare presents worth 5,000-6,000 yen each such as jewelry, cookies, or wine to thank them (Fisch, 2001).

![Figure 4: Japanese wedding ceremony at Shinjen](image)

**Trends and Characteristics of Weddings in U.S.**

Wedding ceremonies in U.S. are diverse ranging from a simple wedding ceremony that reflects the religion and ethnicity of the couple to a luxury wedding that costs millions of dollars (Cho, 2011). One type is a formal wedding ceremony according to certain procedure in front of guests like in Korea and Japan. Sometimes, this type of wedding is combined with an event or large banquet, or held in a church or a cathedral in solemn atmosphere. But many couples just have special time together
(meal at a restaurant or a trip) and register their marriage at City Hall. In general, Americans invite a small number of people to their wedding and the entire process of wedding ceremony focused on the wedding couple. In this respect, it is different from the Korean wedding ceremony which considers parents and guests greatly.

Also, the wedding reception accounts for the largest portion of the wedding expense in U.S. The reception is held at the bride's house or a church and the guests are decided in advance (Cho, 2001). The way seats are differentiated between family and guests in a Korean wedding is similar to that in Japanese wedding and the way friends give gifts to the wedding couple is similar to that in American wedding.

Suggestions for the Wedding-Tourism Products to Attract Foreign Customers

Strategies to attract Japanese customers are as follows. Japanese wedding culture is similar to Korean wedding culture in that a wedding ceremony is conducted formally at a Shinjen, hotel, or wedding hall in front of the family members, friends, and relatives. Moreover, wedding related industries such as unique wedding photo shooting and wedding events industries are well established to suit the fancies of young couples. And the venue of Korean wedding changed from the bride's house in the past to a wedding hall, a hotel, or a church in recent years. And a wedding on a cruise ship is gaining popularity. Pan Star Cruise is currently operating between Busan and Osaka. Therefore, as a strategy to attract Japanese customers who have similar wedding culture, cruise wedding can be suggested.

Japanese have a formal wedding ceremony with many guests like Koreans. When cruise is used, time and money concerns about inviting guests will be solved. For example, as a wedding ceremony takes 2 or 3 hours, a cruise ship departing from Korea could cruise around the coastal areas of Japan. The guests do not need to visit Korea or go on a long cruise tour. It is expected that wedding products developed based on the know-how of cruise ship operation between Japan and Korea will be successful. Moreover, tourism economy can be promoted by providing honeymoon in Korea to the newlyweds who wed on the cruise ship.

Strategies to attract American customers are as follows. As discussed above, Americans have a simple wedding between the couples through an event or a trip. Development of wedding package products for only the bride and groom can be considered. Americans are familiar with overseas trips and they prefer unique and exotic tours rather than standardized tours (Pizam & Sussmann, 1998). Therefore, the wedding products targeting Americans should satisfy their uniqueness and include new elements that cannot be experienced in U.S. For example, photo shooting at a wedding studio with high quality service and technology can attract American customers. Skin care at a hotel or massage shop and selection of a wedding dress shop before photo shooting can increase customers' satisfaction from an exotic wedding. And honeymoon package covering Korean tourist attractions can be provided at lower cost after the wedding. Wedding consulting
companies and travel agencies in Korea can cooperate to develop products that include all these.

Conclusion

This study has attempted an exploratory research for the globalization of Korean well-developed wedding products in the context of tourism management. There has been a huge development in the Korean wedding industry like other service industries such as finance, telecommunications and tourism. Since Korea embraced a variety of culture after the period of the Japanese imperialism, it has brought a modern style wedding culture to a society. Due to the wedding culture, relevant industries such as wedding hall, wedding dress, makeup and hair, wedding photo shooting, reception, travel agency, hotel, jewelry and wedding consulting. However, there has been a slight decrease in demand of the wedding because of several social and political reasons such as the increasing number of one-person homes and economic downturn. Thus this study explores the alternate ways to overcome the crisis of Korean wedding industry by bringing foreign visitors to consume tourism-wedding products. On the basis of the results from the analysis, new target market and tourism-wedding products were suggested. First, it targeted Japanese wedding couples for cruise weddings. Weddings on a shipboard are currently provided to Korean wedding couples and the cruise operates the ferry routes between Korea and Japan. Thus, the cruise company can easily start the service for Japanese wedding couples. Moreover, considering the characteristics of Japanese weddings, Japan’s wedding ceremony is usually held with guests who are family, relatives, and friends like Korea. To invite these guests, the cruise wedding which makes help to save cost and time was recommended. If wedding venue is selected as some wedding halls in Korea, Japanese wedding couples should pay huge cost. Second, this study suggested honey moon packaging trip for wedding couples in U.S. Looking into the purchasing behavior of American wedding couples, most of the young pursue informal wedding ceremony. Thus, wedding products with special programs intensifying the tourism elements such as skin care, wearing wedding dress, and wedding photo shooting were suggested. Moreover, it mentioned that many of the wedding consulting agencies in Korea must play an important role of promoting and selling wedding products to potential customers in U.S.

References


