

# THE GLOBALIZING EFFECT OF KOREAN POP CULTURE

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The subject of globalization is typically centered heavily on the economic aspects changing the world. However, the cultural impact of globalization has also left a substantial footprint on all the nations involved in the integrated world system. Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith describe in *The Case Against the Global Economy* that “an intrinsic part of the process of economic globalization is the rapid homogenization of global culture.”<sup>1</sup> The United States is typically seen as the leading agent behind the cultural changes taking place, a role which has sparked protest and opposition. As D. Clayton Brown states, “The most vocal expressions of dissatisfaction have come from spokespersons of other countries who denounced the spread of American culture around the world.”<sup>2</sup> Accusations of McDonaldisation labeled United States’ entry into foreign lands as an act with the malevolent intentions of supplanting local cultures with American commercialism. Richard Barnett and John Cavanagh’s essay in *The Case Against the Global Economy* is rife with examples of American music, Hollywood films, and media corporations like MTV overpowering local media and driving local entertainment aside, with the effect of replacing native tastes with a preference for American pop culture.<sup>3</sup>

The focus and attention on United States’ dominance in the cultural atmosphere of globalization with its crass Americanism distracts attention from other aspects or types of cultural globalization. There is, as well, a tendency to view and categorize characteristics by continents and major cultural groups without careful distinctions. Operas and ballets are associated with Europe; tango dances and reggae are viewed as Latin American; martial arts, bamboo furniture, and feng-shui arrangements are inevitably grouped as Asian. For these reasons, a powerful development emanating from Seoul, South Korea, growing rapidly and resonating throughout the Asian continent for over a decade is relatively unknown in the West. To the majority of people living outside of Asia, the mention of Korea, if there is any cognition at all, will undoubtedly bring forth images of the Korean War and news reports of events around the demilitarized zone. To the denizens of Asia, however, the “Korean Wave” will irrevocably be the most prominent association.

What then, is the Korean Wave? The term, *hanliu* (Mandarin) or Hallyu (Korean), was first coined by the Chinese media to describe what seemed like an overnight explosion of interest in Korean culture inside China.<sup>4</sup> From there, the popularity of all things Korean, from pop bands to fashion, continued to grow and spread throughout the Asian continent. This development was wholly unanticipated and featured all the aspects of cultural globalization as Asian countries one after another embraced Korean pop culture. When viewed in a case-by-case analysis, especially in China and Japan, the Korean Wave has certain differences depending on the country, such as variations in the demographic categories, ef-

fective dates of origin, and reasons to explain the rise in popularity.<sup>5</sup> However, one common factor is involved everywhere the Korean Wave has hit. No matter how early or how late the wave enters, or who makes up the initial base of adherents, the originating agent is always the import of South Korean television dramas. From the initial consumption of these TV serials, the effect then spills over to other cultural areas such as music, film, food, and fashion.<sup>6</sup> This, then, is the established pattern of the Korean Wave.

Due to the central role of television dramas in propelling the Korean Wave abroad, it is constructive to briefly look into the content of these highly potent serials. Certain titles such as *Winter Sonata* (2002), and *Dae Jang Geum* or *Jewel in the Palace* (2003) have repeatedly made headlines or influenced major trends. *Winter Sonata* is a love story that revolves around four central characters who were classmates. Jung-sang and Yu-jin's first romance is ended as the former dies from a car accident. Dramatic events unfold ten years later as Yu-jin, who is now romantically involved with the other male classmate, Sang-hyeok, suddenly runs into her allegedly deceased first love. It is revealed that Jung-sang survived the accident, but lost his memories and has been living under another name. The plot continues to develop as old flames are rekindled and the current romances are broken. *Dae Jang Geum*, or *Jewel in the Palace*, features an entirely different theme. It is based on the story of Jang-geum, a historical figure of the Joseon Dynasty. The drama's novelty lay in the combined factor of two unique and rare themes: that of the success of a female in the historically male-dominated society, and the elements of traditional Korean food and medicine.<sup>7</sup>

The initial phase of the Korean Wave can be traced to South Korea's export of television dramas to mainland China, Taiwan, and several other Southeast Asian countries.<sup>8</sup> The Asian Financial Crisis was shaking the economies of the continent in 1997. It is in this year that South Korean chaebols (Korean business conglomerates) and the government began reevaluating strategies to address the issues with the old economic system. The decision to export the popular culture industry received generous support from the business conglomerates that saw it as an area of potential profit. The South Korean government was also a major proponent of the strategy to draw capital from tourism and foreign investment by improving its national image.<sup>9</sup> Advancements in telecommunications and hi-tech infrastructures in the meantime laid the groundwork for South Korea to efficiently develop its entertainment industry and carry out the newly adopted economic strategy.<sup>10</sup> The government's Culture Ministry initiated its first five-year plan in 1998 to build up the domestic entertainment industry and aided South Korean colleges in opening culture industry departments.<sup>11</sup> The financial crisis affecting the other nations attributed to the attractiveness of South Korea's television dramas. Compared to Japanese and Hong Kong dramas, Korean products cost considerably less.<sup>12</sup> Yet, they were high in quality and Asian broadcast companies found the productions to be impressive.<sup>13</sup> As mentioned by KBS official Park In-soo, "In the eyes of Chinese buyers, the quality of Korean programs are almost as good as that of Japanese soaps, especially with noticeable improvements in Korean shows over the past years. But the price is far cheaper."<sup>14</sup>

*Star in My Heart*, or *Wish Upon a Star*, was the first drama to enter China in 1997 when the Phoenix television network broadcast the series in Hong Kong and subsequently the mainland and Taiwan.<sup>15</sup> The show was an instant hit and Chinese

audiences were drawn in by the modern images of “tall buildings, fancy cars, and high standard of living” projected onto their television screens.<sup>16</sup> The popularity of this first drama resulted in a dramatic increase of Korean broadcasts, an effect enthusiastically hailed by the South Korean press. “In the past, Korean soap operas rarely got broadcast abroad... These days, soap operas starring Korean stars like Chang Dong-kun and Kim Hee-sun are among the hottest items at international TV fairs for Asian buyers,” remarked a 1999 article in the *Korean Herald*.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, Korean pop music was making a similar breakthrough in China and Taiwan. “In particular, the boy band H.O.T. found itself topping the pop charts in China and Taiwan in 1998; the band was so popular that album sales continued to surge, even after the band’s break-up in mid-2001,” wrote Professor Doobo Shim of Singapore National University.<sup>18</sup> In Hong Kong, South Korean stars Song Seung-hun, Song Hye-kyo, and Won Bin became household names after their drama *Autumn in My Heart* created a large following in 2000.<sup>19</sup>

By 2001, the Korean pop culture fever, *han guo re*, was sweeping through in full force and given the term “Korean Wave” by the Chinese media as “a new generation of consumers classified as the ‘Korea Tribes’ in China aggressively [adopted] and [emulated] Korean lifestyles, ranging from fashion, food and consumption patterns to even plastic surgeries.”<sup>20</sup> In many large shopping districts of Beijing such as Women’s Street, fashion stalls loudly advertising “Made in South-Korea” clothing became common features. Young Chinese students such as Ni Zhongwei and his friends often sing Korean songs at karaoke lounges, despite not understanding the language. An official at the South Korean Embassy said in a China Youth Daily interview that the interest in “Korean food, fashion, ornaments and lifestyle is gradually increasing.”<sup>21</sup> Korean shows began to sideline the formerly popular Japanese programs in Taiwan. Huang Tai-yu, a social psychologist remarked, “Just a few years back, when you said you were crazy about showbiz figures from South Korea, you would be regarded as a weirdo. And now you would be criticized as being old-fashioned for not taking in the Korean craze.”<sup>22</sup> The South Korean government, surprised and excited at the pace of events, began to draw up greater plans to support the explosive growth of Korean pop culture abroad. Korean Wave halls were planned to be set up in major cities like Shanghai, Beijing, and Hanoi, where the phenomenon had the heaviest impact. In South Korea as well, a large cultural center featuring exhibitions from all aspects of Korean pop culture was planned to be built near the capital’s famed Dongdaemun (East Gate) to attract tourists and fans. A new “Korean Wave policy planning team” was created to be in charge of these large-scale projects.<sup>23</sup>

In 2002, the government created the Korea Culture and Content Agency to assist in the promotion of the country’s cultural exports.<sup>24</sup> South Korean shows leaking into North Korea influenced its women into copying the hairstyles of popular South Korean actresses, an act the North Korean regime subsequently cracked down upon. The surprising defection of a North Korean soldier who crossed the demilitarized zone stated that his action was spurred by what he saw from South Korean programs.<sup>25</sup> Hong Kong tabloids began to cover South Korean celebrities and local vendors such as Dicky Tsang reported boosts of sales of Korean music and videos. Zhang Jianhua, a Beijing shop owner, expressed that “In the 80s it was Japanese, Taiwanese and Hong Kong singers and movies, but now Korean is the thing.”<sup>26</sup> The popularity of Korean actor Jang Dong-gun and actress Kim Nam-ju

in Vietnam was potent enough to convince the South Korean government to invite them to an official dinner held for the visiting Vietnamese president, Tran Duc Luong. South Korean programs proved so popular that the Vietnamese population “sometimes had to choose between two aired at the same time on Hanoi’s total of four channels.” South Korean fashion also began emerging in the dress styles of trendy youngsters in Vietnam’s major cities.<sup>27</sup> 2003 saw the Korean Wave penetrate the Philippines, where the airing of “*Autumn Story*” started the “Koreanovela” craze. Korean shows that followed surpassed the dominance of local soap operas and the country’s largest TV networks competed intensively for the rights to the latest Korean serials.<sup>28</sup>

2005 was an important year for Hallyu, and commonly viewed by many as the peak of the phenomenon, especially in the regions first hit by the Wave. In the subways of Taiwan’s capital, the television drama *Dae Jang Geum* (*Jewel in the Palace*) was used to advertise South Korea itself.<sup>29</sup> Hong Kong shopping centers and restaurants saw rare and unprecedented declines in business as *Dae Jang Geum* pulled the local population back to their homes during the hours that show was airing on local channels. The show “became the most-viewed TV series in Hong Kong television history” as it pulled in nearly three million viewers.<sup>30</sup> An internet poll conducted by the major Chinese internet news website Sina.com showed that 81 percent of Chinese internet users liked Korean dramas, and 50.2 percent favored Korean productions, far ahead of the 21.7 percent that preferred domestic productions.<sup>31</sup> Headlines were made when Chinese president and General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, Hu Jintao, told visiting South Korean dignitaries that “It’s a pity that I cannot watch ‘*Dae Jang Geum*’ everyday because I am so busy.” Other top officials such as Vice President Zeng Qinghong and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, Wu Bangguo, who also revealed their penchant for the show created a burst of Chinese media coverage on the domestic popularity of Korean culture.<sup>32</sup> It was in 2005 as well that the Korean Wave’s effects began to be noticed far from the Asian continent. South Korean shows gathered large fan bases in the Middle East. The Korean Broadcasting System receives thousands of fan letters from the region. More than 300 Egyptian fans set up an internet fan club and website dedicated to the same series responsible for the Hallyu craze in Japan, *Winter Sonata*. An undergraduate at Cairo’s Ain Shams University expressed her desire to “marry Bae Yong Joon and convert him to Islam,” as she pleaded with South Korean reporters for the actor’s telephone number.<sup>33</sup>

In 2006, Uzbekistan saw the Korean Wave in action as *Winter Sonata* was aired repeatedly on its national broadcasting station and the airing of *Dae Jang Geum* emptied the streets in the evening, much like the occurrence in Hong Kong. The popularity of Korean dramas compelled the Uzbek Foreign Ministry to request the Korean Embassy to invite Bae Yong Joon and Choi Ji-woo, the main stars of *Winter Sonata*, for a state visit.<sup>34</sup> By now, the amount of South Korean programs airing on government TV networks in China was greater than all other foreign shows combined. South Korean president Roh Moo Hyun’s visit to Mexico even saw flocks of local fans carrying placards of their favorite Korean stars gathered outside his hotel.<sup>35</sup> In 2007, Korean pop singer Bi Rain held a concert in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam’s most extravagant stage performance to date, and one that sold out in record time, despite ticket prices costing nearly half of what most city

residents made in a month.<sup>37</sup> Iran also witnessed a surge of interest in Korean dramas after *Dae Jang Geum* was aired in 2007. Since then, the demand for Korean shows has resulted in three of Iran's seven channels airing Korean programs, and many people even use music from these shows as their cellular phone ringtones.<sup>37</sup> In Mongolia, the content of Korean dramas and Korean songs are frequent topics of daily conversations. Popular series such as *Dae Jang Geum* are aired repeatedly during prime time. Songs by popular Korean artists and groups such as Rain and Shinhwa top the Mongolian music charts. Most young children have stationary and accessories featuring Korean celebrities.<sup>38</sup>

In 2009, Johan Jaaffar, a Malaysian journalist, wrote a column for the *New Straits Times* sharing observations of his own daughter as one of the typical followers of the now mainstream Korean Wave. He talked of her habits: hardly watching Hollywood films or listening to English music, but knowledgeable of all the latest Korean dramas and pop groups. Jaaffar also described his amazement at young girls and boys watching Korean game shows, despite not understanding the Korean language. In Malaysia, Korean *manhwa* (comics) also edged out formerly popular Japanese mangas amongst its youth audience.<sup>39</sup> In Singapore, fans such as Nurul Ain Samsuri jumped at the chance to purchase the fast selling tickets for the 2009 Seoul'd Out Concert featuring several popular Korean pop groups. She states while on her way to the airport, "Hallyu is taking over Singapore."<sup>40</sup>

This chronological view of the Korean Wave unfolding and spreading across Asia and further offers an idea of the magnitude and rapid pace of the events. In only two decades, South Korean pop culture has taken pole position above the cultures of former influential powers such as Japan and Hong Kong. In Asia, Korean culture now dictates major trends in a variety of aspects ranging from fashion to tourism. This explosive growth of Hallyu and unanticipated South Korean cultural dominance can be explained by taking an in-depth look at the various regions it affected.

In China, the Korean Wave took off based on a variety of reasons. First and foremost, there is an important cultural connection between the two countries. China and Korea have shared a history of cultural interaction for thousands of years, although it was predominantly that of the Han Chinese influencing Korea's culture - everything from language, to social structures, to customs and values. Confucian traditions and these cultural similarities are instantly familiar to Chinese viewers, a factor acknowledged by members of Korea's media enterprises. As KBS official Park In-soo states, "Chinese viewers don't feel resistance to Korean shows because the two countries share the same cultural background."<sup>42</sup>

An equally important factor was the social context of China itself in the late 1990s when South Korean dramas hit the mainland. A temporary lack in traditional culture created an opportune setting as Korean dramas began to flow in.<sup>43</sup> Memories of the chaotic Cultural Revolution were still relatively fresh in the hearts of the Chinese population. Following a planned economic system during Mao's reign kept the country impoverished. Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Opening" policy of 1978 aimed at addressing these issues drastically changed the economic landscape and resulted in great success, modernizing China at a rapid pace. In the flurry of these tremendous transformations and the decades spent following the Communist ideology of destroying old traditions, China's rich cultural history seemed to have been completely forgotten in its scramble for a new society.

For example, the highly popular drama *Dae Jang Geum* (*Jewel in the Palace*) directly appealed to the Chinese based on the shared historical connection. Known as *Da Changjin* in China, the Korean series was about a woman who rose from humble origins to be the palace physician during the Joseon Dynasty. The setting and plots were very familiar to the Chinese audience because they were “almost identical to China’s Ming Dynasty.”<sup>44</sup>

Yet beyond the historical dramas, the familiar cultural values evident in shows of contemporary settings greatly contributed to Hallyu’s success. Nearly all Korean shows such as the first one to gain widespread popularity, *Star in My Heart*, incorporated traditional elements despite their central plots revolving around romance and heartbreak. As such, these imported dramas instantly struck a chord with China’s viewers living in the rapidly modernizing society void of traditional values. “The Chinese culture and the Korean culture overlap in many ways, so Chinese audiences can easily identify with the characters and their behaviors. We see a purer form of Confucianism and are refreshed by it because we feel a sense of belonging,” explained Jiao Yan, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. “The Confucius tradition reflected in these Korean dramas and books are like *déjà vu* to us because we cannot find it in our own writers and artists,” stated Wang Li, a Beijing publisher with the Chinese rights to several South Korean best-sellers.<sup>45</sup> These dramas, with scenes of “families huddling around dinner tables,”<sup>46</sup> were full of familiar Confucian-based values such as filial piety and family relations; some even felt that the “Koreans [were] more like the Chinese than the Chinese themselves.”<sup>47</sup> The success of Korean dramas benefitted heavily from a longing and nostalgia for values taught to the Chinese as children and other merits from a “more innocent China that [was] vanishing amid the wealth and materialism.”<sup>48</sup>

There was also a more contemporary and individualistic appeal to Korean dramas, that of modernity, the very aspect that the Chinese reforms and social transformations were aimed at. Young Chinese viewers “fascinated by the ‘sophisticated and urban lifestyles’” presented by Korean productions focused their attention on the fashion, hairstyles, and modern images of fancy cars, tall buildings, and luxurious lifestyles.<sup>49</sup> Such images of a modernized Asian country provided a model of a prosperous future that the Chinese, through the rapid developments in their own economy, might be able to attain.<sup>50</sup> As Chong Zi writes in an article for *China Daily*, “I can find bits and pieces of myself and friends within a Korean mini-series whose characters are obsessed with money and social status, and are often depressingly unable to be direct about their true feelings.”<sup>51</sup> Tsinghua University student Qu Yuan shares her opinion, “We feel that we can see a modern lifestyle in those shows... We feel that we can live like them in a few years.”<sup>52</sup>

A slight political component was involved as well in helping boost Korean pop culture, as there was still a noticeable anti-Japanese sentiment lingering in many Asian countries that suffered from Japanese occupation, especially China.<sup>53</sup> As Ms. Jin, who studied both Korean and Japanese languages, explains, “There is no obstacle to our accepting South Korean culture, unlike Japanese culture. Because of the history between China and Japan, if a young person here likes Japanese culture, the parents will get angry.”<sup>54</sup>

Korean dramas were also highly suitable for viewers of all ages with their clean language and stories, and also the fact that there is “generally barely a whiff of sex despite the sometimes turbulent love triangles that emerge.”<sup>55</sup> As veterans

of the Korean industry note, modernizing countries ready to accept Western values still find elements of Japanese and American mass cultures “irrelevant to their reality.”<sup>56</sup> Chinese opinions shed insight into their discomfort with these elements. Huo Kan of Tsinghua University voiced the view that “American dramas are too modern... Something like ‘Sex and the City’ is too alien to us.” Beijing University graduate student Jin Yaxi states, “We like American culture, but we can’t accept it directly.”<sup>57</sup> The Beijing publisher Wang Li agrees, “...a whole family of several generations can enjoy a show together as it is devoid of sex and violence.”<sup>58</sup>

Thus, Korean dramas appealed to the Chinese based on multiple factors: political, historical, cultural, and social. Negative sentiments remaining in the hearts of the Chinese from the brutal occupation by Japan in WWII allowed South Korean pop cultural elements to surpass previously established Japanese influences with relative ease. As well, in contrast with the violence and sex frequently featured in American media, along with the “highbrow” content of European productions, Korean sitcoms presented content that did not generate discomfort with any demographic.<sup>59</sup> The presented historical themes “[awakened] the distant memory of their own traditional civilization” and generated feelings of pride in their rich, influential culture.<sup>60</sup> Emphasis on deeply rooted Confucian values brought forth nostalgia and reminded the Chinese of things lost in the recent decades of extreme changes in all directions.<sup>61</sup> Images of a modernized nation, economic prosperity, and luxurious lifestyles invoked attainable fantasies in the minds of the Chinese.<sup>62</sup> As the Korean Wave’s first splashes hit the shores of China, viewed as having “failed to balance traditional culture and modern Western thought,”<sup>63</sup> the country’s longstanding historical dominance in cultural influence reversed course as the population looked with aspire towards Korea. Lui Mei, a Chinese resident in Seoul expresses this sentiment, “Korean pop culture skillfully blends Western and Asian values to create its own, and the country itself is viewed as a prominent model to follow, both culturally and economically.”<sup>64</sup>

The Korean Wave in Japan took a different shape. Whereas in China, the immediate effects encompassed a wide range of the population, the developments in Japan were centered on one main demographic. Hallyu in Japan also entered a few years behind China and the other Southeast Asian countries. The origins can as well be narrowed to one single title, and effectively to one single actor. The 2002 drama, *Winter Sonata* is credited with triggering the sensational response in Japan and is still recognized as a central element to the Japanese version of the Korean Wave.<sup>65</sup> As the drama was first broadcast in 2002, middle-aged Japanese women including those in the age range of 40 to 60 quickly became enamored by the main actor, Bae Yong-joon.<sup>66</sup> They were mesmerized by his handsome looks, muscular body, and the characteristic of fiercely loyal love that he displayed on screen - all features that are regarded as rare in Japanese men.<sup>67</sup> His character’s undying love that survived ten years of car accidents and amnesia struck a chord with the middle-aged housewives who were reminiscent of their youthful romances and longing for affection.<sup>68</sup> As a result, Bae Yong-joon single-handedly created the “Winter Sonata syndrome” and its massive, loyal fan base.<sup>69</sup> Now known by the honorific title “Yonsama”, he became Korea’s first sex symbol<sup>70</sup> and established the archetype for Korean males in Japan – romantic and sensitive, with strapping bodies.<sup>71</sup>

Despite this narrow spectrum of followers, Hallyu’s effects were being felt in Japan. As a result of Bae’s and *Winter Sonata*’s success, Japan became the largest

market for Korean actors, where almost every major male actor has an “official store” in his name.<sup>72</sup> Bars with names like “Seoul Man” even began popping up in Tokyo’s largest gay district of Shinjuku *Ni-chōme*.<sup>73</sup> Bae Yong-joon’s personal fame earned him television appearances with Japanese prime ministers<sup>74</sup> and becoming a spokesman for Japanese electronics giant Sony.<sup>75</sup> A Japanese ambassador revealed in a press conference in Seoul of a confession that a Japanese businessman made to him, who lamented on his lonely marriage as his wife abandoned him to watch *Winter Sonata* every night it aired.<sup>76</sup> Maki Tsuchida, a journalist who has watched the Korean Wave unfold in Japan reported a distinctive trend of the female population. Women in their 40s and 50s, who were previously considered inactive internet users because they were preoccupied with household duties, became avid bloggers and users of the World Wide Web to find information on events relating to their favorite Korean idols.<sup>77</sup> A crowd of housewives swarming Japanese airports to welcome a South Korean actor is not an uncommon scene.<sup>78</sup>

Due to the irresistible appeal of Korean males as portrayed by the successful dramas, Japanese-Korean matchmaking services such as Rakuen Korea, which had roughly 6,400 clients by 2005, began to emerge in Japan to capitalize on the “Winter Sonata syndrome.” Kazumi Yoshimura, one of the company’s clients who already flew to Seoul 10 times in two years shared her opinion as she was on her way to another blind date with a Korean man, “South Koreans are so sweet and romantic – not at all like Japanese guys, who never say ‘I love you.’”<sup>79</sup>

After the initial Korean pop culture foothold established by television dramas led to a growth of interest in other cultural areas, Korean pop music began to make its own accomplishments and attract a fan base comprised of the younger Japanese generation in their 20s and 30s.<sup>80</sup> As early as 2002, Japan’s leading record label, Avex, began signing distribution deals with South Korean pop artists and groups,<sup>81</sup> a practice that has continued to present day with current popular groups regularly making debuts in Japan.<sup>82</sup> For example, the Korean boy band TVXQ has established a record by becoming the “foreign artist with most number-one singles” on Japan’s Oricon music chart with seven number-one singles since their debut in 2006.<sup>83</sup>

As the Korean Wave penetrated the other countries of Asia and beyond, the developments were also varied but had visible effects. The way it originated never strayed from the set pattern of imported dramas being the first medium to attract a fan base that expanded their interests into other areas of Korean culture. Singaporean fan Loh Choon Fei recounts that her love for all things Korean “all started with dramas. I like to ask teachers about the things I watch on TV.”<sup>84</sup> In the Philippines, identical to China, Korean dramas were first imported for their inexpensive price, where “buying the rights to a Korean drama was cheaper than producing local dramas.<sup>85</sup> As the first drama, *Autumn Story*, was broadcast in the Philippines, the “Koreanovela” phenomenon was born, and those hooked on the dramas advanced their interests to Korea’s culture, food, and culture. Korean language classes increased in demand as fans began to sing along to Korean pop songs in local KTVs (karaoke lounges).<sup>86</sup> The progression was identical in Vietnam, as broadcasters chose dramas like *Autumn Fairy Tale*, *Jewel in the Palace*, and *Winter Sonata* for their high qualities and cheap prices.<sup>87</sup> The exposure and growth of their popularity similarly induced a taste for more Korean related elements. “After I saw ‘*Autumn Fairy Tale*,’ I decided to learn all I could about Korea – the food, the



culture, the history....I've been 'obsessed' with it since!" recounts Nguyen My Ha, who studied Korean language for four years at his university and hopes to land a job in Seoul when he graduates.<sup>88</sup>

The preference for Korean pop culture in these other nations generally went in accordance with the variety of the reasons for its popularity in China and Japan. Historical and political issues were a factor, relevant to many of the South-east Asian countries that experienced Japanese occupation similar to China.<sup>89</sup> In the case of Vietnam, its own rocky history with China made K-pop more welcoming than Chinese pop.<sup>90</sup>

The aesthetic appeal of Korean actors enjoyed by the Japanese was similarly shared by fans in Indonesia, also comprised of mostly women. Hallyu in Indonesia started with the broadcast of *Winter Sonata* as well.<sup>91</sup> Cecilia Ros, a female fan states, "If we are asked what we like about Korean dramas, most of us would say the boys." Another fan, Cinthia, concurs, "All the boys are handsome. Korean faces are delicious."<sup>92</sup> Likewise, Vietnamese fans such as Khat Lan Phuong and Hoang Kim Thanh share this opinion, "The men were so handsome, the women so beautiful and their skin and make up was always so perfect."<sup>93</sup>

The novelty of Korean pop culture and the alternative that it offered prevailed over the already well-known American and Japanese pop cultural elements that were previously dominant.<sup>94</sup> Indonesian movie buff, Shanne, expressed the view that she was "bored with Hollywood movies."<sup>95</sup> Nina in the Philippines was "attracted to K-pop because it was different from the rock scene in the United States and the Philippines." Other Filipinos were also tired of the generic local soap operas that ran for years.<sup>96</sup> Lia, a fan of Korean music from Indonesia, commented on her boredom of music from the West and Indonesia; Korean pop music satisfied her need for "something different."<sup>97</sup>

Shared cultural similarities and values were dominant themes as well. Celcilia Ros preferred Korean movies and dramas because she found that "From the way they talk, to their food, they are close to Indonesia culture."<sup>98</sup> The balance of tradition and modernity was an aspect that also struck a chord with Vietnamese viewers.<sup>99</sup> In the Philippines, what viewers saw in the Korean shows did not differ greatly from Filipino values of "love for family, the importance of respecting elders, and fighting for one's true love."<sup>100</sup> This high regard for traditional values was especially important as the Korean Wave penetrated non-Asian regions in the Middle East. Mohammad Fazaeli, an Iranian journalist, explained television's role as a family entertainment, and the content of Korean dramas was much more suitable than western productions often featuring violence and sexuality.<sup>101</sup> Alireza Abazari is inclined toward Korean dramas due to their "approach toward traditions in the modern day" and the way they "pay attention to socio-humanitarian values."<sup>102</sup> KBS Radio Korea International producer Bae Jung Ok agrees that the Korean shows, featuring little violence and sex, focusing instead on family issues, love, and filial piety fit the conservative values of the Islamic regions.<sup>103</sup>

While Hallyu has dramatically influenced the regions it has penetrated, its effect on the origin nation of South Korea has been just as monumental. The explosive growth in popularity came to be just as much of a shock to the South Koreans themselves. In the early 1990s, no one would have suspected a sudden influx of Korean culture in Asia, where it was far below the recognition and status of Chinese, Japanese, and even Taiwanese cultures.<sup>104</sup> Older generation Koreans

grew up under the influences of Hollywood and the songs of the American Billboard charts.<sup>105</sup> The shift can be seen in the statistics. In Taiwan, where Gala TV paid \$1,000 for an hour of a Korean show compared to up to \$20,000 for a Japanese show in 2000, paid from \$7,000 to \$15,000 for a Korean drama versus that of \$6,000 to \$12,000 for a Japanese drama in 2005.<sup>106</sup> In fact, the substantial rise in the cost of Korean dramas, up to nearly \$20,000 per episode, made them unaffordable for some TV stations, indirectly contributing to a reduction of their airtime.<sup>107</sup> The size of the South Korean entertainment industry itself grew rapidly from \$8.5 billion in 1999 to \$43.5 billion in 2003, a growth of over five times in a four year time span.<sup>108</sup>

Korean male celebrities reaped the benefits, now among the highest-paid actors in the world outside of Hollywood. Jang Dong Gun, who became one of the highest-paid actors in Asia as a result of the Hallyu phenomenon, expressed his own surprise in an interview, stating that it was “still a little hard to believe that it’s gone this far.”<sup>109</sup> Bae Yong Jun, responsible for the “Winter Sonata Syndrome” in Japan, has an estimated worth of \$100 million and charges \$5 million per film, the highest in Asia.<sup>110</sup> Across the continent, many Korean actors became household names, such as Ahn Jae Wook, who bested Leonardo DiCaprio in popularity in a Chinese poll.<sup>111</sup> Some South Korean actors and actresses have even become more popular in other countries than at home.<sup>112</sup>

One of the most visible effects has been its role in improving the national image of South Korea. Prior to the birth of the Korean Wave, the Korean peninsula was often associated with the gloomy image of military regimes and division.<sup>113</sup> Now, cutting-edge technology and trendy entertainers are more likely to be the common association. The transformation in image can be seen in the attitudes of Asians such as Candy Hsieh from Taiwan, who stated that her old image of Korea as a “feudalistic, male-centered society” changed to that of “an open society, democratic.”<sup>114</sup> A survey in 2005 conducted by the Korea Trade center showed that South Korea’s overall image in Japan and China had considerable improvements, with similar results in other Asian countries such as Taiwan and Thailand.<sup>115</sup> Jin Chang-soo, a senior fellow of South Korea’s think tank, the Sejong Institute, notes the improvement of image in Japan, stating that “Japanese people came to have a better understanding of Koreans after they watched Korean dramas.”<sup>116</sup>

An effect experts such as Kim Hyu-jong of Chugye University of Arts earlier predicted came to be true; the heightened national image brought substantial economic benefits for South Korea.<sup>117</sup> Improved national image as a result of Korean dramas’ overseas effects has helped to contribute to the association of Korean goods as quality products, much different from a decade earlier. Restaurant owner Ohn Dae Sung shares the opinion that “If a Japanese television set stopped working, the Chinese would say something’s wrong with the power lines. If a South Korean television set stopped working, they’d say it was the fault of the set.” In complete contrast, South Korean technologies are now coveted products in vogue throughout Asia.<sup>118</sup> Lai Tsung Pi, the vice president of Gala TV in Taiwan, shared his view that the increase in willingness for Taiwanese people to buy Korean products was a result of Korean dramas, referring to the sharp rise in sales of South Korean consumer goods in a five year time span.<sup>119</sup> Jim Sohn, chief executive of LG Electronics in China has stated that he is “sure there is a connection” between improvements in sales and the Korean Wave. Korean automobile manufacturer

Hyundai became “No. 2 in sales among automakers in China,” despite a late entry, and its Chinese division president, Um Kwang Heum, also noted of benefitting from the Korean Wave.<sup>120</sup> Korean fashion shops are now part of Vietnam’s high-end malls such as the Diamond Plaza in Ho Chi Minh City, with their names domestically considered as luxury brands.<sup>121</sup> Even as far as the Middle East, counterfeit products such as satellite receivers with Chinese origins bear “Made in Korea” labels, hoping to catch more sales with the fake stamp.<sup>122</sup>

Korean star power also visibly benefitted Korean products being sold across the continent. Daewoo Electronics, who hired actor Jang Dong Gun in 2001 as its Vietnam spokesperson, saw an increase in its refrigerators’ market share from a nominal number to 34 percent.<sup>123</sup> Samsung Electronics saw skyrocketing sales numbers of their cellular phones and computer monitors as a result of advertisement campaigns featuring popular actor Ahn Jae-wook.<sup>124</sup> In Vietnam, the South Korean company LG Household & Health Care dominated the cosmetics market, rising above international leaders such as Lancome, Shiseido, and Revlon after it hired actress Kim Nam-ju as their model.<sup>125</sup> Bae Yong Joon has helped to establish the Korean cosmetics company, The Face Shop, as a major competitor in Singapore, by becoming the brand’s model. The company went from a single outlet in 2005 to nineteen by 2009.<sup>126</sup>

Korean cuisine has also shared a marked increase in popularity. Long overshadowed and caught between the popular cuisines of China and Japan, Korean cooking has emerged from its small niche as a major pillar of Asian cuisine in recent years due to Hallyu’s effect. Yasushi Hatta, a Japanese freelance journalist and food columnist noted the trend of Korean restaurants “[popping] up here and there” in Japan since 2005 as a result of the Korean Wave.<sup>127</sup> The same pattern was observed in Vietnam, where numerous Korean restaurants specializing in Korean BBQ, noodles, seafood, and rice dishes sprouted up in its major metropolitan areas such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.<sup>128</sup> The interest in Korean cuisine peaked in many regions as a result of the drama, *Dae Jang Geum* (*Jewel in the Palace*), that featured detailed displays of extravagant imperial banquets and Korean cooking. Certain tourism packages offered by Hong Kong travel agencies that took tourists to the filming site of *Dae Jang Geum*, which included the “tasting of ‘authentic’ Korean cuisine” shown in the drama, remained fully booked long after the show was aired on Hong Kong’s TVB Jade channel.<sup>129</sup> A Korean restaurant in Hong Kong even began to offer its own nine-course imperial banquet as part of the menu, resulting in long queues of interested customers waiting outside its doors.<sup>130</sup> A Beijing newspaper reported a 30 percent rise in the business at some Korean restaurants in 2005 due to *Dae Jang Geum*’s popularity. A Korean businessman in Beijing who capitalized on the trend by registering his restaurant under the same name as the television show reaped the benefits as his business expanded into a chain of nine restaurants in the Chinese capital, noting that “Korean pop culture has certainly helped with my business.”<sup>131</sup>

The movement of people across the Asian continent has also shifted dramatically in South Korea’s favor, which has not traditionally been a popular tourist attraction in Asia. From 2003 to 2004 alone, the number of foreign tourists going to South Korea increased from 2.8 million to 3.7 million.<sup>132</sup> South Korea’s booming tourism industry can effectively be attributed to the success of Korean dramas abroad. Many production companies began setting up filming locations of popular

dramas as parts of packaged tours where “housewives as far away as Honolulu came on group tours to visit sites filmed in their favorite Korean soap operas.”<sup>133</sup> The New Fantasy Travel Agency in Taiwan showed that 80 percent of the total travelers going to South Korea pick the television tours to visit the filming sites.<sup>134</sup> As previously stated, tours featuring Korean cuisine also attracted growing numbers of tourists. Customers can even book packages that specifically focus on the Korean dish of kimchi, where they visit a museum dedicated to the dish and its production process.<sup>135</sup> Filipino fans such as Kelly explained that her motivation for going on a “Koreanovela” tour with her friends, where they visited the locations of several popular dramas, was due to the *Spring Waltz* drama, stating that “the sceneries were so lovely that I dreamt of visiting the place.”<sup>136</sup> South Korea became a “top holiday destination” for Singaporeans. Sharon Foo of Dynasty Travel in Singapore, a company that also offers television drama themed tours, stated that they receive “inquiries for the year-end packages as early as May” and sell out every year.<sup>137</sup> Bae Yong Joon’s wildly popular drama continued to exert its influence, where the filming locations of *Winter Sonata* have become “must-go destinations” for fans.<sup>138</sup> According to Andrew Salmon of *The Korea Times*, “‘*Winter Sonata*’ did more for Korea’s image in Japan than any PR activity by the Korean Tourism Authority could ever hope to match,” referring to the frenzy of Japanese tourists visiting South Korea as an effect of Bae’s “Winter Sonata syndrome” to go on “Yonsama shopping tours.”<sup>139</sup> Indonesian fan Lanny Tricya, one such participant of a shopping tour, responded in an interview that she “rewatched Bae Yong-joon’s *Winter Sonata*, memorizing all the beautiful scenes,” and bought “five woolen shawls, a neutral-colored sweater, and an overcoat in a boutique.”<sup>140</sup> Between 2003 and 2004, tourism numbers showed that Japanese visitors to South Korea grew by 40 percent. Bae Yong Joon’s personal residence in Choonchun received 400,000 tourists in 2004, an increase of 165 percent compared to 2003. The “Winter Sonata syndrome” was estimated to have brought South Korea roughly \$1 billion in tourist revenue in 2005.<sup>141</sup>

South Korea has also become a significant center for overseas education. Official statistics in 2010 showed that Chinese students studying in South Korea increased 10-fold in a six year time span and made up 70 percent of South Korea’s entire international student population, an unprecedented situation and one sharply contrasting to the long historical trend of China being the cultural center for Korean students. Chinese students revealed that their decision to study in South Korea stemmed from what they saw of the country through Korean television, which convinced both them and their parents that the modern and developed nation was an ideal place for study abroad.<sup>142</sup> South Korea has also become the biggest destination for Mongolian students seeking overseas education, where 1.2 percent of the total Mongolian population currently resides. In Mongolian schools, Korean is second only to English as the preferred choice of foreign language study, “far ahead of Russian, Chinese, or Japanese.”<sup>143</sup> The increased interest in Korean language studies can also be seen in Singapore, where non-degree courses offered to the public by the National University of Singapore quickly multiplied from two classes to sixty between 2003 and 2009.<sup>144</sup> In the South Korean capital of Seoul, Chung-Ang University has even set up both graduate and doctorate degree programs in the study of the Korean Wave itself.<sup>145</sup>

Indeed, Korean dramas significantly changed Asia’s cultural landscape. Its pop cultural influence greatly enhanced South Korea’s image and anything

originating from this new cultural center of Asia. Korean businessmen in Taiwan have received huge profits by marketing drama-themed photos, books, CDs, and stationary products.<sup>146</sup> K. Kesavapany of Singapore's Institute of South East Asian Studies notes that "Young people delight in Korean movies, fashions, pop stars, foods and Korea-made products such as cars and mobile phones."<sup>147</sup> In China, even the stigma of plastic surgery has visibly lessened. The number of young Chinese visiting cosmetic surgeons, hoping to look more like the beautiful Korean stars they have seen on television after the operation, has visibly increased in the recent decade.<sup>148</sup> The characterization of Seoul as the "'cultural Mecca' of China's Y Generation", replacing that of the West has become a common expression for many.<sup>149</sup>

With the dramatic success of Korean pop culture spreading throughout Asia, its rapid growth has become characterized by some as more of an unrelenting assault rather than peaceful cultural exchange. Over the years, the phenomenon has drawn resistance from parts of the local population as well as concern from local governments. As early as 2001, a state-controlled newspaper in Vietnam listed the dominance of South Korean programs as one of the "10 most embarrassing cultural events" of the year.<sup>150</sup> It is interesting to note that this backlash harkens to the examples made by Barnet and Cavanagh in their essay, "Homogenization of Global Culture."<sup>151</sup> The exception is that antagonism is directed against South Korea rather than the United States. The similarities, however, are striking; for instance, the imported media's dominance over local productions is the case in the Philippines. Buying the rights to Korean dramas was considerably cheaper than the capital needed to produce local shows. An executive of a Filipino broadcasting company revealed the fact that showing an imported drama only required one fourth the capital of a local production, generating more revenue with less investment.<sup>152</sup>

The characterization of "cultural invasion" has been a large component of the backlash against Korean cultural exports.<sup>153</sup> A very outspoken protestor against South Korean influences has been one of China's most prominent and successful actors, Zhang Guoli. He has gone as far as to label Chinese stations broadcasting Korean dramas as "selling out the nation," and has urged citizens to buy Chinese goods instead.<sup>154</sup> Zhang has expressed the feeling that Chinese media has been overly critical and unfavorable toward mainland productions, and that if the very same plots and pacing found in Korean shows were produced by China instead, "it would have been thrown to the dogs." Like Zhang, Hong Kong's own world-renowned celebrity, Jackie Chan, has shared the view of media bias in favor of South Korean productions. He has complained of the Hong Kong press giving too much coverage to South Korea, giving an example that a visiting Korean star might receive as much as four pages from newspapers while local artists received minimal coverage.<sup>155</sup> In Japan, complaints of "cultural imperialism" have been surfacing across blogs and *mangas* (Japanese print cartoons).<sup>156</sup> Xenophobia has characterized the Japanese counter-wave against the Korean Wave. A Japanese comic titled "Hateful Hallyu," critical of not only the Korean Wave but Korean culture and history as well, reached the top of the Japanese Amazon website's reservation list in 2005. On the internet, there is also a prominent "I Hate Korean Wave" campaign.<sup>157</sup>

As the Hallyu effect peaked in the mid-2000s, local governments and media began to take certain measures in response to their concerns about the in-

creasing Korean influence on both culture and local productions. The Taiwanese government considered a 20 percent tariff on Korean programs.<sup>158</sup> Japanese broadcasters reduced and removed special airtimes designated for Korean programs, justifying their actions by claiming that such shows were “no longer commercially viable,” despite the growing popularity of Korean culture.<sup>159</sup> The Chinese government’s concern over Korean products’ sidelining domestic production has led its State Administration for Radio Film and Television (SARFT) to reduce dramatically the airtime of Korean dramas on national television. Statistics produced in 2004 showed that of 12,000 drama episodes produced by mainland China, there was only airtime for 5,000 episodes, resulting in a financial loss of roughly 3 billion RMB (\$427 million).<sup>160</sup> As such, the SARFT called for a stricter screening process and limiting Korean drama airtime in December 2005.<sup>161</sup> The administration took action in 2006 after its initial announcement by reducing the amount of airtime of all foreign programs by 50 percent: Korean dramas consisted of the largest portion.<sup>162</sup> In 2007, SARFT targeted specific Korean dramas and blacklisted several titles due to their “[smearing of] Chinese history.”<sup>163</sup> Yet, despite the backlash and growing challenges in recent years, the Korean Wave still continued its unabated expansion and exerted its influence in the affected regions.

The current situation of the Korean Wave is not as straightforward as in the early 2000s, when its spread and rapid popularization was unquestionably on the rise. The potent influence of Korean pop culture was enough to draw considerable protest in some countries, compelling even the local governments to take action. Many observers both outside and within South Korea have noticed that Hallyu appeared to be gradually waning. It is no longer inducing the near feverish following as it did a few years ago.<sup>164</sup> However, the protectionist policies enacted by the local governments, such as those from China’s SARFT, do not seem to be directly responsible for the slowing down of the Korean Wave. Younghoorn David Kim, a Korean executive who visited China in 2007, reported that, despite government regulations making Korean dramas only available after 10pm, families continued to gather together late at night to view these shows.<sup>165</sup>

Yet, South Korean businesses and government officials are indeed concerned about the future of Hallyu. The recent years have seen a flurry of activity and brainstorming on their part to devise new ways to sustain and propel the Korean Wave, such as the special Hallyu forum that was organized by the Korean Foundation for International Culture Exchange (KOFICE) in collaboration with the Federation of Korean Industries (FKI), it was attended by a wide array of entertainment industry professionals, business leaders, think tank experts and government officials.<sup>166</sup> Financial experts such as Martin Roll are advising major Korean companies such as Samsung and LG to avoid becoming complacent, stating that these brands “have been helped greatly by Hallyu....but will play less of a role in brand building in the future. Hallyu is still important but it will slow down.”<sup>167</sup> Some South Koreans have suggested changing the characteristic of the Korean Wave to find new channels for growth. A recent editorial in the *Korea Herald* suggested that with financial gains from the Korean Wave in decline, “a move away from purely economic concerns may be what is needed to revive and sustain Hallyu,” also calling the overemphasis on government support for promoting Hallyu a mistake.<sup>168</sup> South Korea’s Culture Ministry initiated a large-scale five-year “Han Style project” in 2007, responding to Culture Minister Kim Myung-gon’s calling

for the need to “create new Hallyu.” The Han Style project deviates from the pop culture spectrum of the Korean Wave. Its \$289 million investment instead focuses on “six traditional cultural themes - Hangeul (Korean language), hansik (Korean food), hanji (mulberry paper), hanbok (traditional dress), hanok (traditional house) and hankuk eumak (traditional music).” Kim stated at a news conference, “We have so far failed to redefine the value of Korean culture,” and also stated that the Korean government will “fully support the globalization of Korean culture” with the “Han Brand.”<sup>169</sup>

Entertainment industry executives such as Park Chang-sik reported disappointing figures at the recent forum held by KOFICE and FKI, stating that “Seven out of ten dramas that we have produced failed to get the revenue that we aimed for.”<sup>170</sup> However, many find the Korean entertainment industry itself to be at fault for the waning effect of the Korean Wave. Benny Lau, one of the first in Hong Kong media to take notice of Korean pop culture, reported that “Indeed the Korean Wave in Hong Kong has died down in the recent couple of years.” He suggests that the “core of the Korean force lies in its TV dramas.”<sup>171</sup> This is a reasonable argument, given the central role of Korean dramas in initiating Hallyu in every region it entered. Korean columnists have called for the improvement of Hallyu products, arguing that Korean dramas of recent years that “have relied on tried-and-true formulas” have failed to attract followers.<sup>172</sup> Hwang In-hak, deputy secretary general of KFI, has urged the entertainment industry to “generate creative stories with solid storylines to meet the rising expectations of viewers overseas.”<sup>173</sup> Winnie Tsang of Hong Kong’s Golden Scene film distribution company has also pointed to the lack of new Korean dramas becoming major hits, as well as noting that established celebrities such as Bae Yong Joon have not been producing much in recent years.<sup>174</sup> Even in Mongolia, where the Korean Wave is still going strong, Korean ambassador Park Jin-ho reports that “Mongolians are now a little bit fed-up with the monotonous plots and similar storylines of Korean dramas.” He also called for the Korean television industry to devise more creative content in order to continue the growth of the Korean Wave.<sup>175</sup>

Hallyu’s effects are certainly not as prominent and overpowering as they were in the peak period of 2005. Some scholars such as Anthony Fung, associate professor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong’s School of Journalism and Communication, suggest that the decrease in visibility is only a result of less media coverage due to its mainstream familiarity, lacking the sought after aspect of novelty. He reports that “In fact, Korean idols are still popular among young people in Hong Kong... There is less exposure, but it does not mean Hong Kong people are sick of Korean pop culture.”<sup>176</sup> In this sense, Korean pop culture has simply become a customary feature of daily life. Hallyu is, as well, still reaching out further, past the non-Asian regions. In the United States, Korean dramas are regularly aired on the ethnic channels of major metropolitan areas in such locations as Los Angeles and New York.<sup>177</sup> In 2005, Korean pop artist Rain played two sold-out nights at New York City’s Madison Square Garden.<sup>178</sup> *The San Francisco Chronicle* reported roughly 100,000 people tuning in to the broadcast of *Dang Jang Geum* (*Jewel in the Palace*) in the Bay Area alone.<sup>179</sup> Despite the slowing down of the Korean Wave, attention towards the phenomenon has grown. There has been a variety of coverage, including essays in the *New York Times*, which have been compiled by the Korean Cultural Service into two books: a collection of 52 articles from

2006<sup>180</sup> and a collection of 65 articles from 2007,<sup>181</sup> and explorative articles such as Woongjae Ryo's from the *Asian Journal of Communication* in 2009.<sup>182</sup> Laura Miller, a professor of anthropology at Loyola University, published a detailed study of the Korean Wave in Japan, focusing on Bae Yong Joon and the two megahits: *Winter Sonata* and *Jewel in the Palace*.<sup>183</sup> A study in a 2007 issue of *Tourism Management* also found Korean dramas to have heavily influenced the increased number of tourists from Japan.<sup>184</sup> The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at South Korea's Sungkyunkwan University also published a study that found correlating figures between the Korean Wave and its effect on South Korea's national image, resulting in higher brand equity.<sup>185</sup> This increase of attention towards the Korean Wave suggests that it is certainly still a substantial force. It is then reasonable to say that the Korean Wave is still alive. Despite its effects beginning to plateau in the countries it first passed through, Hallyu is still enjoying a high level of popularity in other regions and continuing to reach further into the non-Asian areas. The sustainability of the Korean Wave as a globalizing force will depend on the actions taking place currently in South Korea - whether or not the Korean entertainment industry can find new creative formulas, or if the South Korean government is successful in their push for the globalization of a rebranded "new Hallyu."



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