

## GLOBALIZATION, NATIONALISM, AND REGIONALIZATION: THE CASE OF KOREAN POPULAR CULTURE\*

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*The recent globalization in Korea was forced by the 1997 economic crisis and subsequent IMF-mandated neoliberal reform, which has prompted patriotism, concern with national identity and nationalism. Nationalism has also been promoted by the 'sunshine' policy toward North Korea. The rise of nationalism has provided young Koreans with an opportunity to take a critical look at imported Western culture as well as their own indigenous culture. At the same time they have acquired more cultural capital than older Koreans and tend to consume popular culture according to their own tastes and considering its quality. The neoliberal reform has also made the Korean culture industry and cultural markets bigger and more open, so that not only Korean consumers have more choices, but also Korean cultural products become more visible in East Asian markets, creating 'Korean wave.' Other countries in this region have followed suit, and exchange of cultural products among them has surged dramatically, suggesting an East Asian Popular Culture in the Making. And it can be a possible candidate for an alternative globalization which refers to the flow from the peripheral or non-Western to the West.*

**Key Words:** *Globalization, Nationalism, Popular Culture, Culture Industry, Regional Culture, East Asia.*

### INTRODUCTION

A controversial movie has hit the Korean cinema market in the summer of 2007. Even before its release on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August, the movie "D-War" (or "Dragon War" in overseas markets) was controversial, because in many ways it was different from previous Korean movies. It was a block-buster with the production cost of about 30 billion Korean won, the most expensive in the history of Korean movie-making. It was a fantasy based on a traditional Korean legend, and utilized extensively cutting-edge computer graphics. It was filmed mostly in the United

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\* This is a revised version of paper presented at the 30th Anniversary Conference, Association for Korean Studies in Europe, Dourdan, France, 16-20 April, 2007. I am grateful for comments from an anonymous reviewer of this journal.

States, featuring American actors and actresses who speak in English in the movie. It was contracted with major international film distributors that more than 1500 cinemas in the U. S. would show the movie in September (Joongang Ilbo, September 4, 2007).

The producer-director of the movie, Sim Hyeong-Rae, whose previous movie with a similar style to this one was a total failure, was very emotional as well as proud in the movie's publicity interview with the mass media, which sparked hot debates among movie critics and netizens. Some critics who saw the movie in the preview criticized the producer as trying to appeal to sympathy and patriotism of Korean movie-goers with a low-quality movie. Others indicated that its story was loose and the acting of actors and actresses was problematic. Despite, or maybe because of, these criticisms, more than four hundred thousand Koreans watched it within a week of its release, and almost 8 million viewers within the first month (Joongang Ilbo, September 4, 2007). At the same time, netizens began to attack the critics so massively and threateningly that it was almost impossible to speak openly against the movie.

This incidence seems to reveal some of the important features of Korean popular culture today. A huge investment in a movie, an extensive use of most advanced computer technology, large contracts with overseas cinema markets, and an immense support (partly out of patriotism or nationalism) of Korean public in spite of some criticism against the movie are relatively new in the Korean cultural scene. It would have been impossible even to imagine a Korean movie of this scale a decade ago. And this cultural change can be attributed to the recent accelerated globalization, which was precipitated by the 1997 economic crisis and subsequent neo-liberal reform, and by the rapid penetration of digital technology into people's everyday life.

The economic and technological changes occurred in the last ten years have not only incorporated Korea<sup>1</sup> more deeply into the world system but also exerted great impacts on other, especially cultural, aspect of Korea society. The culture industry has grown rapidly, nationalism has surged, and cultural tastes of the people have changed to reflect advanced standard of living and cultural modernity. These cultural changes pose a challenge to the West-centered theory of cultural imperialism and suggest an alternative globalization process. The purpose of this study is to examine changes occurred recently in the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Korea' denotes South Korea only in this paper, unless indicated otherwise.

Korean popular culture in the process of accelerated globalization and to interpret them in terms of the recent theories of globalization.

#### THEORIES OF CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION

Globalization is usually defined as the movement or flow of objects, signs and people (or as the material, political and symbolic exchanges) across regions and intercontinental space, and the connectivity or interdependence among them (Held et al., 1999: 16; Tomlinson, 1999: 22). Cultural globalization refers to the cultural dimension of globalization, distinguished from economic and political dimensions. But these three dimensions of globalization are so closely connected that understanding one dimension requires consideration of others.

Cultural globalization has a long history which goes back to the era before the modern. But contemporary process of cultural globalization has been driven by establishment of new global cultural infrastructures, an increase in the intensity, volumes and speed of cultural exchange and communication, the rise of Western popular culture, the dominance of multinational culture industries, and a shift in the geography of global cultural interaction (Held et al., 1999: 341).

The globalization process is also approached in terms of changing conditions of capitalism. For example, James H. Mittelman (2000) traces the origin of the present phase of globalization to the deep recession experienced by the Western countries in the 1970s. It was a turning point in the history of capitalism that the recession was met by new strategies for restructuring production from the Fordist to the post-Fordist one which emphasizes more flexible, capital-intensive and technology-intensive operations. The intensification of these strategies has resulted in restructuring, deregulation, privatization and enhancing competitiveness. According to Mittelman, free-market competition has been elevated to the neo-liberalist ideology, which has been adopted by such international organizations as the IMF, World Bank and the WTO.

In a similar vein, Martin Albrow suggests that capitalism is a major factor in the opposition to state definition and control and for free flow of goods and services across borders and boundaries (Albrow, 1996: 142-143). Mauro F. Guillen notes that globalization is an ideology, often "associated with neoliberalism and with technological solution to economic development and reform" (Guillen, 2001: 236). Ramesh Mishra also argues that globalization is not only the transnational ideology of neoliberalism but also a process to extend and consolidate the hegemony

of Anglo-Saxon form of capitalism world-wide (Mishra, 1999: 7-8).

These approaches that connect globalization with the neoliberal ideology in association with recent changes in capitalist economy have one thing in common: imperialism. Indeed, imperialism is regarded as an earlier model of cultural globalization by many scholars (See, for example, Tomlinson, 1991; Schiller, 1998; Crane, 2002; Curren and Park, 2000). According to Diana Crane, the theory of cultural imperialism is the best known model of cultural globalization which emerges in the 1960s as part of a Marxist critique of advanced capitalist cultures, especially its emphasis on consumerism and mass communication. The key to this model is cultural domination or the imposition of a particular nation's beliefs, values, knowledge, behavioral norms, and style of life by core nations over peripheral ones. Because contemporary cultural domination is usually carried out in the field of media by transnational media corporations, it is often called media imperialism.<sup>2</sup> Cultural imperialism or media imperialism is mostly a form of 'intended' globalization and has the homogenizing effect on culture.

But the theory of media imperialism has been challenged in many fronts. One criticism argues that the flow of global communication is not unidirectional, but multidirectional, and that global media corporations have to accept local cultures and to collaborate with local enterprises for their continuous expansion. Other critiques emphasize local resistance against cultural domination, instances of which include resistance to American cultural products on the part of consumers, and government's efforts to protect local culture and domestic media industry by such means as subsidy, investment allocation and ban on imports (Curren and Park, 2000).

An alternative model to cultural imperialism is the cultural flow or network model which posits that cultural transmission does not necessarily originate in the same place or flow in the same direction. In other words, there is no clearly defined center or periphery; receivers can be originators. The effect of the cultural flows is likely to be "cultural hybridization rather than homogenization" (Crane, 2002: 4). In relation to this model, Peter Berger notes "the increasingly significant phenomenon of alternative globalization, that is, cultural movements with a global outreach originating outside the Western world and indeed

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<sup>2</sup> Some scholars elect to use the concept media domination differently from cultural domination. But the two concepts are closely related, if not the same. See John Tomlinson for detailed discussion on the relationship between these two concepts (Tomlinson, 1991: 20-23).

imparting on the latter," for which Japan is a principal example. (Berger, 2002: 12). There is also what Berger calls 'subglobalization' which refers to cultural movements within a region rather than with a global reach (Berger, 2002: 14). Others call this phenomenon 'regionalization,' which can be found in some regions of the world.

Crane (2002) suggests two more models of cultural globalization, which focus on responses to cultural globalization by various actors. One is reception theory, which deals with public's responses to cultural globalization. The theory hypothesizes the active response of audiences to the transnational media and the different interpretations of the same materials by different groups. Thus, globalization of culture does not breed the homogenized world culture; instead multiculturalism is a dominant trend, with national or local identities being relatively intact.

The other model, proposed by Crane, focuses on various strategies by nations, cities and organizations "for preserving and protecting inherited cultures, regenerating traditional cultures, resisting cultural globalization, and altering or transforming local and national cultures for global consumption" (Crane, 2002: 4). According to this perspective, cultural globalization involves competition, and negotiation in the process of preserving, positioning, or projecting their cultures in global space. Thus, cultural globalization is viewed not as an orderly, unidirectional process, but as a disorderly one fraught with tension, competition and conflict. But a culture can be strong or weak, according to Samuel Huntington (Berger, 2002: 15), and the capacity of governments or organizations to cope with globalization differs. Thus, there can be 'managed' or controlled globalization, or uncontrolled or forced globalization.

We can also approach cultural globalization in terms of the forms of the response. One of the more extreme forms of response is ethnocentrism which regards their own culture as the best and rejects other cultures as inferior or evil. A more common form is nationalism, which promotes national pride and often leads to a revitalization of indigenous cultural tradition. In any case, cultural globalization poses "the great challenge of pluralism: the breakdown of taken for granted traditions and the opening up of multiple options for beliefs, values, and lifestyles," and one takes more often a middle position between "acceptance and militant resistance, between global homogeneity and parochial isolation" (Berger, 2002: 16).

The theories or models of cultural globalization discussed so far are not exclusive from each other in an empirical setting. One is most likely to find multiple factors for, diverse responses to, and many forms of,

globalization in one case. It is mostly a matter of the degree of appropriateness to choose one or other from the many theoretical approaches in an empirical research. In explaining the Korean case of cultural globalization, I will be theoretically as well as empirically selective and attempt to highlight some of the important features that may contribute not only to better understanding of the process of recent cultural globalization in Korea, but also to refinement of the existing theories of globalization.

#### A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION IN KOREA

Korea had been a 'hermit kingdom' until the last decade of 19th century, when it finally opened its doors to the outside world after a long period of seclusion. At that time the Chosun dynasty, the last kingdom in Korea, took a policy of closure to foreign, especially Western influence, but increasing demands from Western powers as well as Japan to open its doors were mounted and could not be resisted by the already weakened dynasty. The dynasty had to open its doors and Western cultures began to enter Korea mostly through Western missionaries and Westernized Japanese.

In 1910, Japan forcefully colonized and ruled Korea until 1945. Japan was already modernized and tried to transform Korea into a modern country resembling the contemporary Japanese society. As a result, Japanese popular culture which may be called Japanized Western culture began to be brought into Korea massively, and soon became a dominant form of popular culture replacing the traditional Korean one. In a sense, the history of modern Korean popular culture started in earnest in the early years of colonial period when such modern forms of mass media as newspapers, magazines, radios, films, and phonographs were introduced for the first time in Korea (INC, 1977).

It was a forced globalization or cultural imperialism by the colonial power. It was also a lopsided one with Japanese culture dominating the Korean indigenous one. Since the colonial period, the traditional culture has no longer been a mainstay in Korea society, but has been retreated to the status of museum pieces.

After liberation from Japan in 1945, American military government ruled Korea for three years, during which major institutions were further transformed into modern Western ones. In 1950 a civil war broke out between the communist North and the liberal South, where the American

military as a major part of the UN allied forces fought for the South. The war ended in 1953, but the American troops has since then stayed in the South, along with American influence. As a consequence many Koreans have chances to have direct contacts with American popular culture and internalize the anti-communist and pro-American ideology. For most Koreans, America has been a close ally and a dream land. Naturally American popular culture has been imported with little resistance and has since been prevalent in Korea.

On the other hand, Japanese influence on Korean popular culture has rapidly waned after decolonization, due primarily to the Korean government's ban on the importation of Japanese popular culture. However, it was smuggled in little by little through various channels. Because of this illegal importation and of the remnants of the Japanese influence from the colonial period, one could still find the Japanese tint in some of the Korean popular culture (Kim, 2003; Yoon and Na, 2005a).

Cultural globalization in Korea, however, had been very much limited until 1987, when democracy was finally restored after almost three decades of military dictatorship, due to the ban on import of foreign cultural products, censorship, and control of foreign travel. It was only 1989 that Korean nationals were allowed to travel overseas freely without any restriction. As a consequence, the number of foreign travel has increased drastically from about 1.5 million in 1993 to over 5 million in 2000 and 15 million in 2006. Pubic performance for art or entertainment purposes had long been censored by the government. The Ethics Committee for Public Performance, (a government agency which was turned to private later), was established in 1976, and screened the script or scenario before a performance and decided whether it could be performed or not. However, in a landmark decision, the Constitution Court ruled that the prior censorship was unconstitutional. As a consequence, the prior censorship was formally abolished in 1999. Korean government has long had a policy to protect its cultural market from outside intrusion. During the 1980s, however there had also been mounting pressure from the West, especially from the United States, to open cultural markets in Korea. Also the 1994 Uruguay Round, the membership of OECD in 1996, and the economic crisis in 1997 have made the Korean government to open its cultural market gradually.

In the mid-1990s, Korea entered into the new (or second) phase of globalization.<sup>3</sup> The Kim Young Sam government which was elected in

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account of this second phase of globalization in Korea, see, Yang (2005).

1992 as the first truly civilian government took neoliberalism as its basic ideology and pursued further globalization by joining the WTO in 1995 and the OECD in 1996. Liberalization of the economy is at least partly responsible for the 1997 financial crisis, which forced the Korean government to ask the IMF for a bailout. As a string attached to the bailout, the IMF imposed on Korean government a series of policy advice which emphasizes liberalization, deregulation and privatization.

The Kim Dae Jung government which succeeded the Kim Young Sam government in 1998, had no choice but to follow the IMF mandate of structural reform, and was successful in overcoming the economic crisis. But in the course of the reform, Korea underwent profound changes not only in economic institutions and practices but also in social organizations and cultural values. Korean society has never been so thoroughly swayed by the liberal economic logic, represented by such values as efficiency, free competition, material wealth, globalization, and survival of the fittest. We are now witnessing in Korea the fast demise of the traditional socio-cultural system supported by Confucian values.

The second phase of globalization may also be characterized by dramatic expansion of information and communications industries and by extensive penetration of such information technologies as personal computers, mobile phones, satellitetelevision, and the internet into the everyday lives of average Koreans. This information revolution has greatly facilitated cultural globalization by providing an almost unlimited access to foreign culture.

But globalization in this phase may be called a forced one, because it was imposed by the IMF. It has restructured the culture industry, and changed institutions and cultural values from the traditional Confucian ones to modern Western ones. Because it was forced by a foreign institution, there have been various types of resistance on the part of Korean people.

In the next sections, I will discuss some of the effects of, and responses to, this phase of globalization. Among the many I will focus on the transformation of cultural industry, nationalistic responses, changing patterns of cultural consumption, and the so-called 'Korean Wave' as a symptom of East Asian regionalization.

#### NATIONALISTIC RESPONSES TO RECENT GLOBALIZATION

The 1997 economic crisis has imposed not only economic hardship but also damaged national pride seriously. Since the 1960s, Korean economy

has grown almost 10 percent annually, reaching ten thousand dollars of per capita income in 1990s, and been regarded by many students of development as one of the most successful case of peripheral development along with other members of the little tigers in East Asia including Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. Koreans were also proud that they hosted the Olympic Games in 1988. Thus the economic crisis and the IMF intervention were almost unbearable for the proud Koreans, and led to the renewed rise of nationalism and patriotism.

The gold collection movement in 1997 and 1998 is an early example of the patriotic reactions to the crisis. The purpose of the movement was to ease the foreign currency crisis by collecting gold from voluntary donators. It was started firstly by the public prosecutor's office and the *Saemaeul* women's club, but soon joined by more than hundred non-government organizations. Within a few months more than one million donators joined the movement by donating their golden jewels, golden plates, even golden teeth and an Olympic gold medal. The total amount of collected gold was exceeding sixteen tons, worth 160 million US dollars (Donga Ilbo, 1998).

Along with patriotism, national identity was also an important concern, evidenced by: the unprecedented popularity of television lecture series on Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism and Taoism the popular catchphrase "The body and the land are inseparable" (*sintobuli*), which means that indigenous products, especially agricultural products, instead of foreign ones, are good for people; a number of best sellers and popular movies that deal with traditional cultural heritages or historical episodes.

These reactions to globalization are only partially responsible for the rise of nationalism. The Kim Dae Jung government's so-called 'sunshine policy' toward the communist North Korea has an effect of stimulating nationalism. Until very recently the anti-communist ideology was (and probably is for many Koreans) the dominant ideology in Korea, and the communist North Korea was regarded as a main enemy, even though for a long time the North and the South Korea had been one nation. The sunshine policy which aimed at establishing better relationship between the two Koreas, and eventually at their reunification, has facilitated increasing contacts and exchanges between them. As a result, a substantial portion of Korean population began to change their attitudes toward North Korea and to see the North-South Korean relationship from a nationalistic point of view rather than from the viewpoint of cold-war ideology.

In fact, a recent survey provides an empirical support for this change. According to the 2005 KGSS (Korean General Social Survey) results, a little less than 60 percent of the respondents regard North Korea as a partner for cooperation or support, in contrast to 36 percent considering it an enemy or a state to guard against. If the survey was conducted 10 years ago, a majority would have answered that North Korea was a main enemy. The survey findings also reveal that about 27 percent of the respondents choose North Korea out of the five countries as the country they feel most close to. The USA was the most favored country by a little less than half of the respondents. North Korea was ahead of Japan and China in this measure. There is another question in the survey that directly measures the degree of national pride. According to the survey results, almost three quarters of the respondents were proud of being Korean, in comparison to only a quarter of negative answers. There are age variations in these results: respondents in their 20s and 30s tend to show more favorable attitudes toward North Korea than those aged more than 40, indicating that attitude changes are more visible among the youth (Kim et al., 2006).

One example of nationalistic occurrences in recent years is the enthusiastic supports for the Korean football team during the Korea-Japan World Cup Games in 2002. It is probably unprecedented that so many people gather together to watch and cheer the Korean team during the games. Whenever the Korean team had a match, not only tens of thousand flocked together in the stadium, but also hundreds of thousands gathered before the big screens installed in public squares. Because the supporters wore red shirts they were called the 'reds.' The reds started as a voluntary supporters group, but soon joined by a great number of unsolicited supporters. During the games they shouted '*Daehanminguk*' (the Korean name of South Korea) passionately and innumerable. It looks like a burst of emotion suppressed during the economic crisis and a strong expression of national pride and patriotism (Joongang Ilbo, 2002).

However, we should also note the rise of cosmopolitanism alongside nationalism. Opening-up of the market to foreign goods allows consumers to choose from goods made in a variety of countries. People have increasingly been accustomed to foreign products, especially cultural products, and show little resistance to consume them. Especially young Koreans who were born and grew in more affluent and globalized years tend to be more cosmopolitan in their consumption behavior, while they actively participate in the nationalistic 'reds.'

This is an indication that their nationalism is not naked or blind one. In terms of popular culture, they no longer subscribe to, or respect, a popular culture item simply because it is of Western origin. Neither they like or consume all the Korean cultural products. Nationalism has provided them with opportunities to reevaluate imported Western culture as well as indigenous Korean or Asian culture. At the same time, as the sons and daughters of modernization and globalization, they have cultivated their own cultural tastes, acquired the ability to select among different ranges of quality, and been given the access to a wide variety of cultural products.

In a sense they are dualistic in their inclination: ideologically they are more inclined to nationalism, but in terms of behavioral, especially consumption, patterns they are more cosmopolitan. And I think this dualism does not necessarily mean to be contradictory and ambivalent, but indicates a degree of differentiation between areas of everyday life, which is characteristic of modernity.

#### THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE KOREAN CULTURE INDUSTRY

As part of the liberalization policy, Korean government has begun to open up its cultural market to foreign influence since the mid 1980s, as discussed in the previous section. The economic crisis in 1997 led the government to further opening-up, because it began to see and emphasize the economic value of the culture and media industry.<sup>4</sup>

Now, Korean cultural markets are wide open to foreign imports and influence, which has made the market more competitive. At the same time, the government allowed big corporations to enter into the culture industry which had long been protected from the intrusion of larger corporations. Thus domestic as well as transnational conglomerates have begun to invest in the Korean culture industry. The culture industry has also been supported greatly by the government's industrial policies. The Korean government established for the first time the Culture Industry Bureau in the Ministry of Culture in 1994, and enacted the Culture Industry Promotion Act in 1999. Since then, promotion of culture industry has become one of the most important industrial strategies in

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<sup>4</sup> It has recently been a world-wide trend that governments of many advanced countries actively promote the culture industry through policy initiatives, because it has become economically more and more important especially when it converges with information technology. In Korea rapid advancement of the IT industry in the late 1990s has greatly facilitated development of the culture and media industry.

Korea. These factors, that is, bigger investment, keener competition and strong government support, have transformed the Korean culture industry and popular culture in general, to a great extent.

As a result of these changing conditions, Korean culture industry has grown rapidly. The market for culture industry has grown 21 percent annually for the period of 1999~2003, which is compared with the GDP growth rate of 6.1 percent for the same period (MCT, 2003: 28). The growth rate has been slowed a little bit since 2003. Still its annual growth rate for the period of 2003~2005 was 10.5 percent, almost twice that for the GDP (MCT, 2007: 23). The total sales of Korean culture industry as a whole in 2005 amount to 6.65 percent of GDP. Among the cultural industries, the publishing industry is the largest (35.9 percent in the total sales of the cultural industry as a whole in 2005), followed by the game industry (16.1 percent), the broadcasting industry (16.0 percent), the advertising industry (15.6 percent), the cinema industry (6.1 percent), the character industry (3.9 percent) and the music industry (3.3 percent) (MCT 2007: 23).

As the Korean cultural industry grows, it began to look outward, and international trade of cultural products between Korea and other countries has grown rapidly. For example, in 1990 Korea exported none of audio-visual and related services, but imported 80 million dollars of the services. International trade of the cultural products for Korea was minimal even in 1999, with the export of 8 million dollars and the import of 80 million dollars (MCT 2003: 70 Table II-2-1). But the total export of cultural products has grown to 631 million dollars in 2003, and doubled in 2005 to 1,236 million dollars. Likewise the import of cultural goods and services has increased greatly from 600 million dollars in 2003 to 2,986 million dollars in 2005. Almost half of the export was from the game industry (45.7 percent) followed by publishing (15.5 percent), character (13.2), broadcasting (9.9 percent), animation (6.3 percent) and cinema (6.1 percent). But in terms of growth rate, the game industry is the highest, with its export grown 76.3 percent during the period of 2003~2005, followed by broadcasting (70.1 percent), cinema (56.6 percent) and music (29.5 percent) (MCT 2007: 30 Table 2-1-5). We will look at some of these industries more closely in the following.

Korean film industry has long been small and fragile, even though watching movies has been one of the most favorite pastimes for Koreans. However it has recently been rapidly growing qualitatively as well as quantitatively, due to such changes as rationalization of production system, stabilization of capital for production, continuous input of

qualified professionals, and investment of big corporations (Park, et al., 2005). For example, the average production cost of a film has increased more than three times since 1997 from 1.3 billion Korean won (KRW, hereafter) in 1997 to 4.2 billion KRW in 2004. At the same time a few blockbusters costing more than 10 billion KRW have been made and successful in drawing a huge number of spectators. In fact the ratio of Korean film viewers to those for foreign, mostly American, films has changed dramatically: in 1996 it was 23 percent versus 77 percent, but it was reversed in 2003, to 53.5 percent versus 46.5 percent. It was for the first time in history that Korean audiences watched Korean films more than foreign ones. Also the share of Korean film in foreign markets has recently increased rapidly. Before 1995 the export of Korean film to foreign countries was minimal. But since 1998 it has increased drastically from less than five hundred thousand US dollars to more than 3 million dollars in 1998 and 30 million dollars in 2003, and 76 million dollars in 2005. The exportation of Korean films is concentrated mostly in Asian markets, which account for sixty to eighty percents of the total exports. The chief importer of Korean films is Japan who imported about 80 percent of the total export. Other Asian importers include Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan and China (Choi, 2006; MCT, 2007: 229).

The TV drama industry provides another example for recent dramatic change. TV dramas have always been popular in Korea, so that major TV channels broadcast two or three dramas every day in the prime time. In the late 1990s the Korean media industry has begun to export its own dramas to other East Asian countries including China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Vietnam, which have been well received by these countries. Since the early 2000s the Korean cultural products have not only been competing with the Japanese ones which have been present and dominant in these East Asian markets for a longer period, but also made an inroad into the Japanese market itself, creating the so-called 'Korean Wave'<sup>5</sup> in this region.

It is ironic that Korean TV dramas have recently made a phenomenal hit in Japan, because most of the Korean TV programs have copied, or adopted Japanese products. Japan has obviously been the front runner in the popular culture market in this region. For example, Japanese TV dramas, especially so-called 'trendy dramas,' were very popular across East Asia in the latter half of 1990s. Since then, however, Korean trendy

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<sup>5</sup> For discussions about 'Korean Wave,' see Cho et al (2003), Shin and Lee (2006), and Yoo et al (2005), among others.

dramas that are influenced by the Japanese ones began to occupy the media space in East and Southeast Asian countries, replacing the latter (Chua, 2004). This does not mean that Japanese influence in this region is all but disappeared. Japanese popular culture in East Asia has been present for long, and is still influential.

The music industry is immensely affected by development of digital technology. The traditional record market where LP, MC and CD are main items is rapidly declining since 2000, with the total sale reduced from 410 billion KRW in 2000 to 134 billion KRW in 2004. On the other hand the total sale of the digital music market including bell-sound download service, background music of mini home page service, and online music streaming service has increased five fold from 45 billion KRW in 2000 to 201 billion KRW in 2004. Likewise, international trade of music records has been diminishing since 2000. Korea exported about 10.3 billion KRW of music records in 2000, but only 6 billion KRW in 2004 (MCT, 2006: 250-255). The recent change in the music industry is often described as a paradigm shift from analogue to digital music, and from record-centered to source-centered.

Paradigm shift is also detected in the styles and contents of popular music in Korea. Until the early 1990s, Korean popular songs were mostly Korean version of Japanese "enka" ballads and some rocks, and were heavily censored by the government. In 1992 a vocal group of three teenage boys, "Seo Taiji and Boys," introduced a totally new styles of musical performance to the Korean audience, and made an immense success. Their music was basically rap mixed with elements of other styles; they danced while they sang; they wore baggy jeans and baseball caps which were very unusual for Korean singers; their music was designed for performance on the stage; lyrics of their songs were mostly about social issues rather than conventional love affair between man and woman; they used recent electronic technologies such as sampling techniques and synthesized accompaniments in their music (Howard, 2002).

In a sense Seo Taiji and Boys revolutionized Korean popular songs. Many music critics agree that their music has upgraded Korean popular songs at least a step forward. Their music not only opened the door to other styles of popular songs, such as hip hop, house, techno, and punk, but also paved the way for Korean pop stars to be able to compete with foreign singers in the international stages.

## CHANGING PATTERNS OF CULTURAL CONSUMPTION AND THE RISE OF REGIONALISM IN EAST ASIA

In the course of cultural globalization in Korea, not only cultural consumption itself has risen, but also its patterns have changed. Before the second phase of globalization, cultural consumption had to be limited due to lack of cultural capital, scarcity of economic means, and limited availability of cultural products. Up to the 1980s, the chief concern of most Koreans was economic wellbeing. Their consumption was dictated mostly by necessity, and their major activities in their leisure time were taking rest, watching TV, or hiking the mountains. Only few could enjoy cultural life and cultural activities.

But cultural concern becomes more and more important in everyday life for Koreans since the 1990s. This is most evident in the consumption behavior of the youth. Korean youth, like those in other advanced countries, tends to consume in order to acquire social distinction and identity (Lee, 2004; Son, 1997). They are the major consumers of cultural products, which are regarded as symbols of status and a means for recognition. When they choose among cultural products, their major criteria are fashion, design, color, brand name and quality, instead of price or quantity (Hwang, 2003). In other words, cultural capital is the determining factor for patterns of cultural consumption of the younger generation, in contrast to economic capital for the older generation (Chang, 2001).

In fact it is argued that cultural globalization is most visible in the youth culture because the youth are the most active recipient of cultural contents across national borders. Korean youth are a typical example. According to a sample survey conducted in 1999, a little less than half of the Korean youth favor foreign cultural products, and about three fourth of them would learn foreign language to get in touch with foreign popular culture. The nationalities of the cultural products they favor most were Japan (55.3%) and America (38.2%) (Lee, Maeng and Chung, 2000: 140-48). But popular cultures from Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, and other East Asian countries have increasingly penetrated into the Korea popular culture. At the same time the latter has been well received in these countries, since the late 1990s.

According to recent surveys, reasons for the Korean youth favoring foreign cultural products include "interesting," "better quality," and "more realistic (closer and more familiar)" (Lee, Maeng and Chung, 2000:

140; Yoon and Na, 2005a). Young Koreans consume cultural products mainly according to their own tastes, regardless of the products' nationalities. They are also concern with such qualities of cultural products as refinement, creativity, individuality, and diversity. They used to find these qualities in American popular culture, but recently in Japan and other East Asian popular cultures as well. Many of them prefer cultural products from East Asian countries than from America, because the former is more familiar and realistic than the latter (Yoon and Na, 2005a: 17-18).

However, reception of foreign popular culture on the part of the Korean youth is neither straight nor without conflict. Due to the unhappy historical experience with Japan, those Korean youth who consume Japanese popular culture have to confront the dilemma between their nationalistic disposition and cultural preference. According to studies on Korean fans of Japanese popular culture, they adopt various strategies to cope with this dilemma, such as keeping distance, differentiation and segmentation (Kim, 2003; Yoon and Na, 2005a). They try to separate cultural tastes from historical context and ideological preference. Also many of the Korean fans of foreign popular culture perceive cultural choice as individual freedom, and establish, not necessarily knowingly, a new transnational cultural identity. They share with fans of other East Asian countries the same experience and emotion, and often regard themselves as global citizens or global cultural mediators (Yang, 2006).

A similar trend can be detected in other East Asian countries. Korean popular culture has been exported to East and South East Asian countries including Japan, China, Taiwan and Vietnam, creating the so-called "Korean Wave." Many studies try to offer explanations for this new phenomenon. For example, Japanese reception of Korean soap operas is interpreted as a nostalgic reaction to modern or postmodern Japan, where traditional Confucian family, primary relationship among people, and emotionally-charged behavior are hardly found or allowed (Chae and Yoon, 2006). On the other hand, Japanese fans of Korean popular songs and movies indicate that Korean cultural products are easy to understand, culturally close, and high in quality (Yoon and Na, 2005b). However, audiences of China and other South-East Asian countries like Korean popular culture, because it is an indigenized Western culture with higher quality than their own (Gim, 2007; Lee et al., 2006; Han, 2005). In other words, Korean popular culture is popular in this region because it represents a new hybrid modernity mixing

Asian culture and Western culture.

Along with Japan and Korea, other countries in this region, such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, have begun to export their own cultural products including movies, TV programs and popular music, mostly to the pan ethnic-Chinese segment of East Asia. As a result one can witness dense flows of cultural products among the East Asian countries, even though the American popular culture is still dominant in major urban centers in this region (Chua, 2004).

The increasing circulation of popular culture within East Asia has been explained utilizing diverse concepts and factors. Some researchers propose two concepts, that is, cultural discount and cultural proximity, which emphasize cultural familiarity, geographical proximity and common Confucian cultural heritage (Yang, 2006; Chua, 2004; Son and Yang, 2003). Others suggest such factors as emergence of democratic governments, economic growth, expansion of consumption, and distribution of transnational media technology in this region (Yoon and Na, 2005a). Whatever the reasons, recent phase of globalization in East Asia is different from the previous one: there is an increasing circulation of popular culture within the region. And it seems to be evident that there emerges a common popular culture in this region, as Chua forcefully argues (Chua, 2004). In other words, regionalism seems to be a powerful response to globalization in East Asia.

But there are disputes among scholars over the nature of the new Asian regional culture. For example, Koichi Iwabuchi and his colleagues argue that "(its) main feature is not Asian values or traditional culture but capitalist consumer/popular culture" (Iwabuchi, Muecke, and Thomas, 2004: 1). In his other book, Iwabuchi also claims that "the experience of West-inflicted capitalist modernity has given birth to various modes of indigenized modernities, in such a way that they have become a source for the articulation of a new notion of Asian cultural commonality, difference and asymmetry" (Iwabuchi, 2002: 6). Cho Hanhyejeong also states that "the new culture consumed by Asian youth has been produced in the process of creating a new modernity out of mixing and hybridizing its own culture and Western and other Asian cultures" (Cho, et al., 2003: 5) It is true that the popular culture circulated in Asia is produced mostly by culture industry for commercial purpose, and in this sense it is a capitalist consumer culture. It is also true that popular cultures in the Asian region are mostly of American or Western origin, with a certain extent of indigenization or hybridization.

However, the rise of nationalism, advancement of cultural modernization,

and the transnational cross-fertilization of popular culture among East Asian nations, which are facilitated by the recent process of globalization, have been critical in the formation of a new Asian popular culture. The result is not simply an indigenized copy of American culture, made suitable to "Asian tastes" (Iwabuchi, 2002: 19). The style and format maybe similar to American or Western one, but the content is increasingly filled with uniquely Asian, sometimes representing Asian values. Keith Howard makes this point clear in discussing new Korean popular songs: "while the stylistic origins of the new music may have been foreign, its content was clearly Korean, tied to an aesthetic of common experience, a shared understanding and appreciation of *mōt* and *mat* (tastes and deliciousness), *hŭng* (ecstasy), and *han* (suffering and grief), framed by the terms *uri nara* (our country) and *uri minjok* (our people), and discussed within nationalistic discourse that maintains Koreans constitute a single homogeneous race" (Howard, 2002: 90). Shin also indicates that nationalism has been a leading theme of Korean popular music in particular and Korean popular culture in general, though nationalism in this case is in a more economic sense, to protect the Korean cultural market from foreign intrusion (Shin, 2005).

According to case studies, Korean TV dramas are popular in Japan and other East Asian countries, because they promote traditional Confucian values such as filial piety and respect for the elderly, communitarian values, familism, romantic and platonic love, and also some aspects of the traditional Korean culture such as foods, fashions, and even emotions and sentiments (Yang, 2006; Lee et al., 2006; Han, 2005). In China, not only contents but also formats in TV game shows are made to fit into the local interests. According to Michael Keane (2004: 68), "Not only are cultural distinctions erased and massaged in the process of engineering a format that sells, but cultural specificity is retained in the process of cleaning the foreign of inappropriate elements." Thus "it is possible to suggest that local content in East Asia has been reinvigorated by the presence of game – and more recently reality game – shows" (Keane, 2004: 68).

From the above discussion it seems clear that the newly emerging regional culture in East Asian is culturally unique and historically novel. And it poses a challenge to Western popular culture and Western dominance of cultural globalization.

## CONCLUSION: TOWARD ALTERNATIVE GLOBALIZATION

Since the fall of communist Eastern bloc in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the Anglo-Saxon form of liberal capitalism has become a dominant ideological force, promoting aggressively free flows of goods and services across borders and boundaries in an effort to extend and consolidate its hegemony. However, this imperialist process of globalization has neither produced the homogenizing effect on global culture nor made Western culture dominating local cultures in Korea and other East Asian countries. Instead it has bred economic crisis in 1997, followed by the IMF-mandated structural reform in Korea, which, in turn, has instigated patriotism, concern with national identity, and nationalism. Nationalism has also been promoted by the so-called 'sunshine policy' toward North Korea which aims at easing the tension between the North and the South Korea by increasing contacts and exchanges.

The rise of nationalism has provided Koreans, especially younger generations, with an opportunity to take a critical look at imported Western culture as well as their own indigenous culture. At the same time they have acquired more cultural capital than older generations due to improved living conditions in their formative years. Thus they tend to consume popular culture according to their own tastes and considering its quality. They also tend to differentiate between their nationalistic ideology and cosmopolitan cultural consumption.

The Korean culture industry has recently been transformed greatly by bigger investment, strong government support, and keener competition due to opening-up of cultural market to foreign imports. As a result, not only Korean consumers have more choices but also Korean cultural products have been more visible in East Asian markets, creating 'Korean Wave.' Exchanges of cultural products among other countries in this region, such as Japan, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, have also surged dramatically, due to geographical and cultural proximity, development of new media technology including the internet, rising standard of living, and structural transformation of global capitalism.

The dense flow of popular culture among East Asian countries in recent years suggests an East Asian popular culture in the making. The East Asian popular culture initially represents as a hybrid modernity mixing Western and Asian cultures. But it seems to increasingly become a unique regional culture, distancing farther from the Western culture

and representing more of the Asian culture. If it is indeed the case, it could be a powerful globalizing force and influence on the Western culture as much as the latter has done on the East Asian one. In this sense the East Asian popular culture can be a possible candidate for alternative globalization, the concept which Peter Berger suggests, referring to the flow from the peripheral or non-Western countries to the West.

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