

The Korean Wave and Its Implications for the Korea-China Relationship*

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the phenomenon of the Korean Wave (hallyu) in China and explore its implications for the Korea-China relationship. As a cultural phenomenon, hallyu had a significant bearing on the perception of Korea by Chinese people. Korean TV dramas, films, and pop music served as a special window through which Chinese audiences gained an understanding of Korean society and formed a sense of cultural familiarity towards Korea. It also helped generate cultural synchronization between the two countries. As an economic phenomenon, it stimulated collaboration as well as competition between the Korean and Chinese cultural industries. Collaboration in the production and distribution of TV shows and films continues to be widened and diversified. Finally, hallyu served as fertile soil for cultural politics, as it was often entangled with disputes in other realms of the Korea-China relationship, including such issues as cultural heritage, history, and nationalism.

Keywords: *Korean Wave, Hallyu, Popular Culture, Cultural Industries, Korea-China Relationship, Cultural Similarity, Cultural Synchronization, Nationalism*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the Korea-China relationship has progressed at an impressive pace. Since China started implementing an open door policy, Korea and China have been in the process of rebuilding friendly relations as neighbors, casting away remnants of the Cold War period. Especially, the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 between the two countries accelerated mutual exchange and cooperation in all areas encompassing politics, economy, society and culture. However, the relationship has not been all smooth sailing. Despite overall improvements, friction and conflicts emerge from time to time.

This paper is an attempt to examine, with a focus on the phenomenon of the 'Korean Wave' (*hallyu*, hereafter),¹ the complicated nature of the Korea-China relationship over the last two decades. There are reasons that I believe *hallyu* can serve as a useful window for this. First of all, as a cultural phenomenon, it can have a significant bearing on the perception of Korea by Chinese people. Korean popular culture is the principal channel through which Chinese people obtain information and construct images of Korean society, and for that matter, has a substantial cultural implication for the Korea-China relationship. Secondly, as a phenomenon intimately connected with cultural industries, it will let us clearly see the criss-crossing of economic cooperation and competition between Korean and Chinese industries. Thirdly, *hallyu* serves as fertile soil for cultural politics. It goes beyond the realm of popular

* This work was supported by the Research Grant of Kwangwoon University in 2005.

¹ *Hallyu* can mean different things to different people, but my focus is concentrated on the wide popularity of Korean TV dramas, pop music, and films and the emergence of passionate fandoms of Korean stars in Asia and beyond.

culture and economics and is often entangled with national pride, cultural nationalism, and the like. In this respect, it has a notable political implication for the Korea-China relationship.

Before moving on to discuss its cultural, economic, and political implications, let me start with a brief overview of the emergence and development of the *hallyu* phenomenon in China.

2. THE RISE OF *HALLYU* IN CHINA

Hallyu in China is mostly about Korean TV dramas. Korean pop culture's entry into China officially began with the export of drama series "Jealousy" (*Jiltu*) and "Eyes at Daybreak" (*Yeomyeongui Nundongja*) in 1993. However, the actual impact became noticeable after "What is Love (*Saranggi Mwogillae*)" was broadcast on Channel 1 of China Central Television (CCTV, hereafter) in 1997. It recorded the second highest viewer ratings ever among imported foreign drama serials. This show was televised once more during prime time on CCTV's Channel 2 in 1998 upon viewers' request. Another popular show was "A Wish Upon a Star" (*Byeoreun Nae Gaseume*), which was broadcast in 1998 on Phoenix TV, an affiliate of Hong Kong's Star TV. This show also recorded high ratings in mainland China as well as Taiwan and Hong Kong. The main male character, Jae-wook Ahn, became a well-recognized *hallyu* star thanks to the popularity of this drama series and the show's theme song, 'Forever,' which he sang himself.

Since Korean dramas guaranteed high ratings, Chinese TV broadcasting stations began to competitively import popular Korean shows. Trendy drama series such as "Tomato," "Autumn Fable" (*Gaeuldonghwa*), "Hotelier," home dramas such as "Men of a Bath House" (*Mogyoktangjip Namjadeul*) and "Miss Mermaid" (*Ineoagassi*), historical series like "Ladies of the Palace" (*Yeoinceonha*) and "A Jewel in the Palace" (*Daejanggeum*), and sitcoms like "Soonpong Clinic" (*Sunpungsanbuingwa*) were broadcast to Chinese homes all over the country (Gwak, 2005; Gang and Yi, 2009).

The so-called "drama *hallyu*" reached its pinnacle with the *Daejanggeum* fever² in 2005 and started to steeply decline in popularity in 2006. This was largely due to a decrease in the number of shows that passed the stricter screening standards the Chinese government started to enforce on foreign TV shows starting in early 2006, and the restriction on the number of Korean drama imports as a result of a policy to diversify import countries.³ The rapid increase in export prices of Korean TV shows⁴ and the diversification of Chinese viewers' appetite were all contributing factors (Gang and Yi, 2009: 176). After a few years of slump, however, "drama *hallyu*" seems to be on a path towards recovery (see Table 1).

Recently, separate from the Korean drama series that are shown on TV stations, there has been an increase in people watching shows on the internet. Watching pirated VCDs or DVDs and downloading shows illegally have been widespread in China. Nonetheless, over the last few years, new internet pay-per-view and free viewing services have been launched: in 2010, Chinese portal site Sohu.com set up a section exclusively for Korean drama series; in 2011,

² *Daejanggeum*, which was broadcast on Hunan Satellite TV, received an average of 4% ratings, making it the most-watched show nationally in its time slot (Jin, 2008:3).

³ The percentage of foreign drama series broadcast on public television decreased from 17.1% in 2007 to 11.1% in 2009 (KOFICE, 2010:18).

⁴ The unit price of exported Korean drama series greatly increased from US\$840 per series in 2001 to US\$4,921 in 2005. It fell to US\$3,183 in 2008 (Gwon and Gim, 2009:21).

Table 1. Korean Drama Series and Episodes Imported to China, 2003-2008

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No. of Series/Episodes	9/175	8/154	29/571	14/245	16/305	28/523

Note: refer to Gang and Yi (2009:168-171).

PPTV, the largest video-sharing channel in China, began to offer Korean shows through their *hallyu* section. These internet services are expected to help encourage the watching of Korean dramas (KOFICE, 2011:26-7).

Another key element of *hallyu* in China is K-pop. Chinese audiences became familiar with K-pop through TV drama theme songs like Jae-wook Ahn's 'Forever.' Yet, It started to receive wider attention through radio programs. A Beijing FM station began playing K-pop on a program, "Seoul Music Hall" (*Hancheng Yinyueting* in Chinese), in 1996. Thanks to this two-hour long weekly program, many K-pop music fans emerged. Jumping on the bandwagon of K-pop's success, numerous radio stations in China created programs that covered K-pop exclusively. For instance, the Beijing Traffic Station began to broadcast K-pop on its daily program, "Nighttime at Han River" (*Hanjiangzhiye* in Chinese) in 1999. The China National Radio created an hour-long program, "Listen to Korea" (*Lingting Hanguo* in Chinese),⁵ in 2001. This was part of a strategy by these broadcasting stations to increase listener ratings. These examples indicate that the spread of K-pop *hallyu* was accelerated by the needs of Chinese broadcasting companies.

Among Chinese teenagers, Korean dance music was tremendously popular. In 1998, a famous Korean boy band H.O.T. surprised music critics by selling tens of thousands of copies over a short period, despite being the first Korean singers to release an album in China. NRG also sold as many copies as H.O.T. when they released their album in 1999. Clon's Beijing concert in 1999 was a surprise success and H.O.T.'s Beijing concert in 2000 also attracted a big crowd. The explosive reaction that Chinese teenagers showed towards these concerts led the Chinese media to shed a spotlight on the *hallyu* phenomenon.

The potential of the Chinese music market attracted many Korean singers. There were a number of popular solo artists such as Jae-wook Ahn, Jung-hyun Lee, Steve Seungjun Yoo, Rain, Na-ra Jang, and Keun-suk Jang, but Korean idol musical bands were the dominant force. H.O.T. and NRG sparked the Korean dance music fever, which was passed on through Baby V.O.X., S.E.S., Fin. K.L., TVXQ, Super Junior, and so on. Their influence was not confined to music, but overspilled into the lifestyles and fashions of Chinese fans. Teenagers styled themselves after Korean singers, imitating their clothing styles, wearing the same jewelry and dyeing their hair yellow, which became a social phenomenon covered extensively by the media.

It seems as though K-pop *hallyu*, after a stagnant few years, has gained momentum once again. Similar to how K-pop became popular worldwide by people sharing music videos and information through Youtube and other social networking services, many video-sharing websites like *Tudou* and *Youku* in China have contributed significantly towards the second coming of K-pop. K-pop shows, music videos and other appearances of popular singers are instantaneously shared in real time through these sites. Popular Chinese portal sites have

⁵ This program was created by a Korean businessman Yoon-Ho Kim, CEO of Ujeon Soft. He also produced "Seoul Music Hall" program and played a crucial role in expanding the K-pop market to China.

exclusive sections for K-pop which deliver the most recent K-pop news. Chinese fans can now watch all programs produced by Mnet, the largest Korean music channel, on a famous Chinese video-sharing site, *Baomihuawang*. Regardless of whether they perform regularly in China, idol groups such as Girls' Generation, Big Bang, 2NE1, f(x), 2PM, Wonder Girls, F.T. Island, SS501, SHINee, KARA, T-ara, CNBLUE all boast a large number of Chinese fans.

In the case of films, there are only a limited number of Korean films released in Chinese movie theaters. The first Korean film introduced to Chinese audiences was "A Story of Marriage" (*Gyeolhon Iyagi*) which was released in Shanghai in 1998. "Out Live" (*Bicheonmu*, 2000) and "The Warrior" (*Musa*, 2003), jointly produced by Korea and China, were received favorably by Chinese movie-goers. "The Classic" (2003), the first film to be exported by a profit-sharing system, also fared well. "Daisy" (2006) attracted Chinese audiences thanks to the participation of Hong Kong director Andrew Lau and top *hallyu* stars Ji-hyun Jun and Woo-sung Jung. So far, the top box-office record is held by "Late Autumn" (*Manchu*), which earned 64.8 million yuan.⁶ Before that, "D-war" held the record at 29.6 million yuan, trailed closely by "Sector 7" (*Chilgwanggu*), "7th Grade Civil Servant" (*Chilgeup Gongmuwon*), "200 Pounds Beauty" (*Minyeoneun Goerowo*), and "The Host" (*Goemul*) (Korea Film Council, 2011: 135).

It should be noted that Korean films are more widely known than the number of film releases indicates. The bad news is that watching pirated products is still a common practice in China. Many Korean films meet Chinese audiences only via illegal VCDs and DVDs, as in the case of "My Sassy Girl" (*Yeopgijeogin Geunyeo*). The good news is that the amount of films legally shown on the internet is rising. Thanks to the growth of the internet in China, there has been a substantial increase in demand for all-media copyrights of Korean films. "The Seventh Grade Civil Servant," "The Good, The Bad, The Weird" (*Joeun Nom, Nappeun Nom, Isanghan Nom*) and "Jeon Woochi: The Taoist Wizard" are some examples. As internet services continue to grow, it is anticipated that competition among Chinese enterprises to purchase Korean film copyrights will increase (Korea Film Council, 2011:130-131).

3. CULTURAL FAMILIARITY AND SYNCHRONIZATION

Hallyu has significant implications for the Korea-China relationship since it affects Chinese people's perception of Korea. In this part of the paper, I will underline the importance of *hallyu* from two perspectives: cultural familiarity and cultural synchronization.

When *hallyu* began to attract attention in the early 2000s, Korea itself was not of particular interest to China. It is true that the story of Korea's economic miracle, '86 Seoul Asian Games, '88 Seoul Olympics, and the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 boosted interest in Korea among Chinese people (Jang, 2003). Yet, as one Chinese scholar aptly put it, "China had no time to spare for neighboring countries, because its eyes only traveled across the Pacific to rest in the United States"(Kuang, 2002:41). Economically and politically, Korea was not important enough to attract nation-wide attention. In the sphere of popular culture, however, it was a different story. Chinese people felt a strong presence of Korea, as they were exposed to Korean television shows, films, and songs in everyday life.

⁶ According to the Korea Film Council and the Korea Copyright Commission, the reason behind Late Autumn's success in China was the effective shutdown of illegal online distribution.

Hallyu was a convenient channel through which Chinese people gained an understanding of Korea. The perception gained through pop culture does not always correspond to the reality of Korea. Nevertheless, as one Chinese scholar emphasized, pop culture became a “de facto unique window through which an absolute majority of the Chinese understood Korea” (Zhang, 2006:144). Korean drama series gave them a glimpse into Korean family life and society, history and culture, in a more vivid and emotionally charged way than through news reports focusing on facts.

Both critics and the public are deeply divided in their evaluation of Korean pop culture: on one hand, Korean pop culture is viewed as a cheap imitation of Western pop culture which has managed to enjoy a temporary spike in popularity; on the other hand, the Korean cultural industry is spoken highly of for its creativity, mixing Western and Eastern culture with a distinctive Korean color. The respective reactions towards Korean TV dramas, films, and K-pop are also divided. In the case of drama series, for example, some Chinese praise Korean dramas’ excellent scenarios, refined and detailed portrayal of emotions, sophisticated camera work, good-looking actors and their stellar performances, great soundtracks, and so on; others criticize the slow pace at which stories unfold, lack of variety in subjects, stereotypical characters, and overuse of coincidental plots.

No matter how Korean pop culture is evaluated by individual Chinese, it has undoubtedly contributed to the improvement of the Korea-China relationship by helping the Chinese form a sense of familiarity towards Korea. While there are a variety of elements that help constitute familiarity, two elements stand out. The first one is related to the past that the two countries share. It is what Chinese people call Eastern culture (*dongfang wenhua* in Chinese). They believe that Eastern culture, with Confucian traditions at its core, underlies Korean pop culture. The other one is related to the present. They feel that the life depicted in Korean dramas, for example, is not much different from what they experience daily.

To Chinese people, Eastern culture is visible in Korean pop culture. The form Korean TV dramas take can be Western, but they believe the content carries a strong Eastern flavor.

Korea is a country with an archetypal Eastern cultural tradition. The customs, social relationships, and cultural meanings revealed in Korean drama series awaken people to the unique meaning and charm of Eastern culture (*People’s Daily*, November 4th, 2001).

Korean culture is similar to Chinese culture in many ways, both being part of Eastern culture. Thus, it is easier for the Chinese to embrace it, compared to Western culture (*China Youth Daily*, October 8th, 2003).

Korean pop culture is a kind of mirror that lets Chinese people reflect on their own culture. Through it, they have come to believe that Korea is an exemplary Asian country which has succeeded, unlike China, in preserving its tradition despite rapid modernization (Onishi, 2006).⁷ Of course it also leads them to find differences between the two countries: the patriarchal family culture often depicted in Korean shows, for instance, is odd and anachronistic to the contemporary Chinese. Yet, they are also reminded of their lost traditions and become nostalgic for the past (which they believe is pure and beautiful in such reflexive moments), as they see characters in Korean drama episodes representing desirable

⁷ In a sense, Chinese see what they want to see in Korean dramas and films. They tend to pay attention to what is lacking in China.

Eastern moral values such as respect for the elderly, family bonds, and loyalty between friends (Yun, 2006:51-54). Such cultural connectedness leads them to form a feeling of familiarity towards Korea.

The Chinese find similarities in the present, too. To them, what drama characters go through in everyday life, agonize over, and wish for are similar to their own experiences. Every modernizing society experiences huge shifts in relationships and values. Korean TV dramas do extremely well in portraying the troubles and issues that occur in the process (Xu, 2005).

Since the Chinese think that what Korea has gone through in the process of economic and social transformation is what China is facing now or will face in the future, they also tend to believe that the family life and social situations represented in Korean dramas are and will be the reality of Chinese families and society (Zhang, 2006:148).

It is no wonder that Chinese viewers feel empathy towards the characters representing all that is going on in their own lives. Such empathy, along with the aforementioned feeling of connectedness through Eastern culture, strengthens Chinese people's sense of cultural familiarity towards Korea and Koreans.⁸

Another important effect of *hallyu* relating to the relationship between the two countries is cultural synchronization. Today, Korean pop culture is delivered to China without much of a time lag. Not only has the period of time before pop culture content is exported been shortened, but it has also become possible to consume Korean TV shows, films and songs in real time thanks to innovations in information and communications technology. Due to such simultaneous consumption of cultural products, transnational convergence in cultural tastes and needs occurs. The craze for Korean fashion, beauty treatments and plastic surgery is a good example of this phenomenon.

To Chinese youth who have been influenced by *hallyu*, Korea has become synonymous with 'fashionable' or 'stylish' (Onish, 2006). The new generation's fashion follows Korean fashion trends (Gim and Bak, 2004). The fashion of Korean male singers like H.O.T., dyeing their hair yellow and wearing wide leg hip hop pants, became popular amongst trend-sensitive young Chinese for some time. Straightened or curled hair, bootcut pants and platform shoes of Korean female stars also became hot items. In major cities like Beijing, shops that exclusively sold Korean clothing and accessories cropped up all over the place. Encouraged by this trend, many Korean clothing brands have started to expand into the Chinese market. E-LAND and BASIC HOUSE are raising brand recognition by using *hallyu* stars as models (Hyeon, Bak, and Jang, 2010:249).

Cultural synchronization is also apparent in the beauty treatment and plastic surgery industry. Korean cosmetic brands and cosmetology are recognized throughout the Asian region. Korean cosmetic brands are widely loved in China. 'Amore Pacific,' 'Hercyna,' 'The Faceshop,' 'VOV,' 'Charmzone' are all brands that Chinese women buy (Lu, 2007:49). In plastic surgery, Korea has become the "capital of the world" (Kim, 2012). With the spread of *hallyu*, Korean top stars, such as Tae-hee Kim, Hee-sun Kim, Hye-kyo Song, and Ji-woo Choi, are upheld as standards of Asian beauty. Among Asian women, it is a fad to imitate

⁸ Based on a survey conducted in Chinese cities, Rhee and Lee (2010) show that Korean media products such as TV dramas, films, and music have played an important role in enhancing Chinese consumers' understanding of and identification with Korea.

these stars' makeup styles and, on many occasions, come to Korea for plastic surgery.⁹ Transnational convergence is happening not only with items that adorn one's body (clothes, hair style, accessories), but also the body itself.

From the perspective of Chinese people's perception of Korea, *Hallyu's* contribution to the improvement of the Korea-China relationship has been substantial. The relationship between the two countries has benefited greatly from the favorable atmosphere built by cultivating a sense of cultural affinity among Chinese people.

4. INDUSTRIAL INTERESTS: COOPERATION AND COMPETITION

To fully appreciate *hallyu's* implications for the Korea-China relationship, we need to place it in a broader context. The penetration of Korean cultural products into Chinese and other overseas markets began in the late 1990s when both Korea and China were facing serious challenges. For Korea, the chaotic state the economy was in after the 1997 Asian financial crisis meant there was an urgent need for economic breakthroughs. In China, restructuring, downsizing, and other reform measures put media companies in sharp competition against each other for relatively cheap but high-quality programs that would guarantee high audience ratings. *Hallyu*, therefore, was considered a matter of great economic importance for both countries.

Since the 1980s, as China became more open, the Chinese public's interest and appetite for new culture expanded. This led to a rapid expansion in cultural industries. At the beginning of the reform, China's infrastructure for cultural industries was weak: black-and-white television, let alone color TV, was a rare item for individual households to own. By 2000, however, color television became a household necessity. In urban areas, the number of color TV sets each household owned reached 1.16 on average. VCD and DVD players also became household staples. There were merely 100 TV stations and 32 radio stations in 1978, but the numbers increased to 1,238 and 880 by 1996. While the number of broadcasting stations later fell sharply due to mergers and restructuring, TV and radio broadcasting became available to people all over the country and the number of channels individual households could choose from greatly increased. Moreover, from the mid-1990s, cable and satellite TV channels started to increase their market shares rapidly. In the case of cable TV, the number of subscribers rose to 100 million by 2003. These figures show that Chinese consumers' demand for cultural products was expanding at a fast pace (Han, 2004:135-137).

The amount of domestic cultural products had grown considerably in China,¹⁰ but not enough to satisfy the rising consumer demand. In addition, these products could not satisfy the diversified cultural tastes and appetite of consumers, because they were produced mainly for propaganda purposes.¹¹ It was Hong Kong and Taiwan's pop culture that first entered

⁹ This of course cannot be explained solely by *hallyu* effect. It is a combined result of Korea's outstanding plastic surgery technology, relatively cheap cost, promotion programs and other contributing factors.

¹⁰ For example, the number of TV drama series produced jumped approximately 52 times during 18 years from 1980 to 1998 (Yi, 2004:180).

¹¹ Before the open-door policy, all forms of arts and culture were instrumental for socialist propaganda. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese Communist Party organized cultural intellectuals such as writers and artists into party-controlled institutions and let them produce

China to fill this gap. With the relaxation of the ban on foreign culture during the early phase of reform, soft popular culture including Deng Lijun's songs, martial arts novels by such writers as Jin Yong and Gu Long, and romance novels by, for instance, Qiong Yao and San Mao spread like fire across the mainland through a variety of channels (Jeon, 2004; Jang 2005). Drama series and other TV programs from Hong Kong and Taiwan also grew popular among Chinese audiences. Hong Kong films, especially martial arts and action films, were extremely popular in the mainland (Jeon, 2006). Films from Taiwan did not make much of an impression, but Taiwanese companies participated in joint ventures for cinema co-production with Hong Kong and mainland China. Popular culture from outside the Greater China was also introduced to mainlanders. Japanese drama series and American films and rock music garnered considerable attention. Korean pop culture was introduced to the Chinese market in the mid-1990s, when such inflow of foreign cultural products was being accelerated.

From the perspective of China's cultural industries, *hallyu* possesses elements of cooperation as well as competition. In its initial stage, its cooperative side stood out. The rapid diffusion of Korean popular culture in early years could not have been possible without Chinese TV stations and other companies actively importing Korean drama series, music, and other cultural products. *Hallyu* was not a well-planned project on the part of Korean industries. It was rather a response to the call from the Chinese market.

In the mid-1990s, China's cultural industries were undergoing structural changes. Under the government's protection over a long period of time, so many small-sized, inefficient, unproductive companies mushroomed. With an imminent worldwide economic crisis looming overhead in the late 1990s, the Chinese government launched a reform process in the media industry to induce corporate mergers and restructuring (Yi, 2004:173-179). Korean dramas, films and pop music entered the Chinese market when Chinese media companies were in urgent need of good programs that could help them survive the competition.

Korean TV dramas were especially welcome. When some Korean drama series that had been introduced to test the water unexpectedly gained wild popularity, TV stations started to competitively import Korean shows, which they found were not only popular among Chinese audiences but also relatively cheap in price. Korean dramas, however, were a double-bladed knife to Chinese cultural industries.

On the issue of importing Korean drama series, China's broadcasting stations and drama production companies have different interests. It is rational for television broadcasting stations to increase imports of popular Korean series because they are in an intense competition for ratings in order to obtain high advertising revenue. However, the rise in imports of Korean and other foreign drama series dealt a blow to drama production companies that were already suffering from bad management conditions. Overall, while the Chinese drama industry did grow,¹² it had many problems such as bad production

only work that suited public interests. Under Mao's China, art and cultural activities did not pursue economic profits. They were not "cultural industries" (*wenhuachanye* in Chinese) – "activities that provide popular cultural products and services to consumers through the market" – but "cultural undertakings" (*wenhuashiye* in Chinese) – "activities that supply art and cultural services to the public for free with financial support by the government" (Han, 2006:160-165).

¹² Starting in 2003, the scale of drama production surpassed 10,000 episodes every year for five years in a row. In 2007, a total of 14,670 episodes were produced, which was twice the amount in 2000.

infrastructure and low revenue. A serious issue was that more than 40% of drama series produced were not broadcast for a variety of reasons and were stashed in storage (Gang & Yi, 2009:27). Thus, it is not surprising that people who were part of the Chinese drama industry became antagonistic towards *hallyu* at its height in the mid-2000s, as Korean series were robbing them of the opportunity to broadcast their own shows (Nam, 2011:39-41).

After *Daejanggeum* was broadcast in 2005, efforts to curb imports of Korean drama series began to materialize. Public opinion sided with the complaints of the Chinese production companies. It was argued that Korean dramas were receiving special treatment in the Chinese market. Critics demanded that broadcasting of Korean dramas be reduced to protect the domestic drama industry.¹³

The Chinese government embraced this sentiment by limiting the number of hours a day and time slots a foreign drama series could be broadcast. Furthermore, it made screening standards stricter and virtually placed a limit on the number of Korean drama imports by adopting a policy to diversify the number of foreign countries it imported from. The government's policy direction moved towards protecting and developing the domestic arts and cultural industry. As a result, Korean drama imports dropped drastically from 2006 onward.

Despite there being these areas of conflict, media industries in both countries sought ways to cooperate. Not stopping at merely importing and then broadcasting Korean TV shows, they endeavored to make profits using the popularity of Korean drama series and *hallyu* stars.¹⁴ The most common method was to use *hallyu* stars as the leads in domestic dramas by entering into a contract with Korean entertainment management agencies. Jae-wook Ahn in "Apartment" (*Bailinggongyu*), In-pyo Cha in "The Four" (*Sidamingbu*), Na-ra Jang in "My Bratty Princess" (*Diaomangongzhu*), and most recently, Seo-hee Jang in "Chef Lin in Seoul" (*Linshifu zai Shower*) are some of the most successful cases. This method of utilizing the popularity of *hallyu* stars to secure high ratings is still widely adopted.

Joint production is another method that has been actively promoted. Korean production companies usually invest capital and provide essential production components, including personnel. For instance, "Lostway" (*Milu*) is a co-production by China's Shanghai Media Group and Korea's Samhwa Networks. The Korean company provided original work, that is KBS drama series "My Husband's Woman" (*Nampyeonui Yeoja*), director (Yong-woo Chang), and lead characters (Jong Won Lee, Ae Shin). "Love Strategy" (*Lianaibingfa*) was also a series jointly produced with Chinese and Korean investments and, like "Lostway", the core elements were supplied by Korea. Even though the series was co-produced, it was registered as a Chinese product, because otherwise it could not be aired during prime time.

There were only 432 drama production units in 2003, which increased to 2,511 in 2007 (Gang and Yi, 2009:25).

¹³ Of course, there were, albeit weaker, other voices. Blatant attacks on Korean dramas by industry leaders, media commentators, and netizens were countered by the voice that, speaking highly of the overall quality of Korean dramas, demanded more effort on the side of Chinese producers (Leung, 2008:67; Yun, 2006:57-65).

¹⁴ The renting of other East Asian popular culture in the media industry reflects the need for a greater variety of cultural content in an age of fast industrial change. With the onset of globalization, domestic and foreign TV shows, films, online games, mobile games are all engaged in a competition to procure more consumers. To survive in this competitive environment, it is vital for local broadcasting stations to diversify strategies (Lim, 2008).

For Korea, joint production is an alternative route for penetrating the Chinese market under the current policy of import diversification. China has much to gain from cooperating with Korea in terms of attracting financing, improving the quality of products, expanding the sales network and so on.

Considering the fact that only a small number of Korean films can enter the Chinese market, the chance of industrial collision occurring in the film industry is not so high as in the drama industry, except on the issue of copyright protection. Apart from the sales of finished products, a variety of collaborative projects have been produced in the film industry (Korea Film Council, 2011:141-167).

Collaboration between Korean and Chinese film industry began with simple assistance on the Chinese side in finding filming locations for Korean films. Recently, however, joint productions have become increasingly diverse. Both countries cooperate on issues such as filming location, personnel (actors, director, staff), and the planning, production, investment, marketing of a film. For example, when filming “Anarchists,” CineWorld hired a Korean director, Korean actors for the core characters, and Korean staff members for some parts, leaving the rest (costume, art direction, props, supporting actors and extras, set, location, and the like) to the co-producing Chinese company. On “Three Kingdoms: Resurrection of the Dragon” (*Samgukji: Yonguibuhwal*), the co-producing Chinese company was responsible for securing the director and actors, while the Korean partner took care of everything else from investment and production to distribution. There are a substantial number of multinational film projects such as “Seven Swords” (*Chilgeom*), which was jointly invested in by Korea, China, Hong Kong and Japan. Korea’s Boram Entertainment took the lead in planning the project, but actual production was led by Hong Kong and China. The role of Korean and Japanese companies was largely restricted to supplying actors and technological support. Films such as “Daisy,” “The Promise” (*Mugeuk*), “Battle of Wits” (*Mukgong*), “Red Cliff” (*Jeokbyeokdaejeon*), “A Good Rain Knows” (*Housijeol*) and “Sophie’s Revenge” (*Sopiui Yeonaemaenyueol*) show that the film industries of the two countries are combining forces to penetrate into the Korean, Chinese, Asian, and international market.

The music industry still faces many problems on the issue of cooperation. It is true that individual Korean singers and bands boast large Chinese fandoms, but K-pop comes up against difficulties when trying to expand to the Chinese market. All businesses including album releases, concerts, and digital music sales face various bumps in the road ahead.

Releasing albums has two problems. First, there is weak demand since the great majority of those who enjoy K-pop are young Chinese whose buying power is limited. A bigger issue is piracy. Infringement of copyrights is socially tolerated in China. Since the price gap between the real product and a pirated one is so large, piracy is prevalent.¹⁵ Piracy is a problem of serious magnitude to the extent that the same factory manufactures real products during the day and switches to pirated ones at night (Maliangkay, 2010). Due to such practice Korean companies are reluctant to invest in releasing albums in China.

Producing concerts is not easy either. Upon the success of H.O.T.’s Beijing concert in 2000, Korean music companies came to believe that China’s music market had a great potential. Despite the Chinese government’s strict approval procedures and sanctions and heated disputes with local agencies on profit-sharing and contract details, a substantial

¹⁵ According to some research agencies, it is estimated that 85% of sales are pirated products in the case of music CDs (Maliangkay, 2010:35). Pease (2010), quoting a person working in the Chinese music industry, says that the ratio of pirated Korean CDs to real ones is between 5:1 to 7:1.

number of Korean singers and bands had the chance to perform live before their Chinese fans. But, few made money from these concerts. If there had been no sponsorships from Korean corporations that used *hallyu* to improve their image, the profitability problem could have been worse.¹⁶

Like albums, profits from digital music sales are low due to chronic piracy. The combined effort by the Chinese government and music industry to stop piracy has proven largely ineffective and illegal downloading of music files is still prevalent. Yet, with new online services that encourage legal distribution of digital music and the government's stricter dealings with copyright issues, it is likely that the situation will improve in the long run. Korean and Chinese music industries will accordingly strengthen mutual cooperation in online music sales.

5. ANTI-HALLYU MOVEMENT AND NATIONALIST DISCOURSES

Figuratively speaking, *hallyu* is a stage upon which mutual misunderstanding and friction in other realms of the Korea-China relationship are played out. Korean pop culture has potential as an engine for transnational connectivity, but it often gets involved in a war of words in which national interests and pride are at stake. What is usually called anti-*hallyu* (*banhallyu*) or counter-*hallyu* (*hanghallyu*) movement tells the story.

The anti-*hallyu* movement is not a well-planned one with the purpose of blocking Korean popular culture from entering the Chinese market,¹⁷ but a wide variety of critical voices about Korean pop culture that are expressed by the media and netizens. It fluctuates considerably and reflects what is going on between the two countries at a certain time. According to Yun (2006:57-65), it was in the mid-2000s when drama *hallyu* reached its pinnacle with the *Daejanggeum* fever that many Chinese voiced worries, discontent and antagonism towards *hallyu*. Strong antagonism has largely subsided, but criticisms on certain elements of *hallyu* continue to surface through the Chinese media and internet.

There are diverse anti-*hallyu* voices in China. There is an abundance of direct criticisms of Korean cultural products and pop stars. For example, Korean TV dramas are often criticized for repetitive stereotypical stories, lack of variety in subjects, too many coincidental elements, and the like. Entertainment news tend to focus on individual stars and their behavioral problems, which include arrogance, bad manners, and the narrow-mindedness of seeing China only as another market to make money from. Another line of criticism concerns *hallyu*'s negative effects on Chinese audiences, especially youthful ones among whom *Hallyu* finds most passionate fans known as '*hahanzu*.'¹⁸ *Hallyu*, it is worried, can mislead young Chinese and prevent them from growing up in a normal way.¹⁹

¹⁶ Despite these problems, Korean singers continue to hold concerts in China. They do so because they know that Chinese fans think highly of celebrities who are considerate of their fans and that concerts are a symbol of the sincere bond between singers and fans (Pease, 2010).

¹⁷ According to a recent survey of Chinese media reports, there is not much that can be called anti-*hallyu* movement *per se* (Yi et al., 2009:61-71).

¹⁸ Literally, '*hahanzu*' means a 'crazed for Korea' tribe. '*Hanmi*' (Korea maniac) is another term the Chinese media often used to refer to these enthusiastic *hallyu* fans.

¹⁹ Yet, it should be noted that such a criticism is not specifically aimed at *hallyu*. Any foreign popular culture can be blamed for that.

Harsher criticisms are leveled at, not the phenomenon itself, but its economic, political, and sociocultural implications. First of all, trade imbalance in cultural products is an issue. As described earlier, many Chinese people in the cultural industry showed their dissatisfaction with trade imbalance in TV dramas. They accused Korea, which was enjoying a dramatic increase in drama exports, of not willing to increase imports of Chinese cultural products.²⁰ One Chinese scholar represents this voice in a somewhat subdued manner (Lu, 2007:54).

We believe that for China to become an equal partner of complete cultural exchange, we need to slow down the import of Korean drama series through an indirect method (slackening the pace of official screening of Korean dramas). This is merely a trade balancing strategy. I believe that, if Korean friends want to resolve the problem [of the dwindling drama exports to China], they should come up with a solution to tackle the trade imbalance problem that both sides can agree on, so that *hallyu* can thrive in China. I am saying this, because the Chinese audience likes and loves *hallyu*.

Similar voices appear from time to time on the Chinese media, ranging from critical comments on the Korean cultural industry's interest in short-term gains, to broader accusations of Korea's trade protectionism. Sometimes the blame is aimed at the Korean government. *Hallyu* as it is today, they believe, could not have been possible without the all-out support of the government.²¹ Seeing it as a state-level project to expand economic gains and deepen cultural influence, they find the trade deficit in cultural commodities even more unfair.

The case of anti-*daejanggeum* narratives shows how an economic dispute can turn into a war of cultural nationalism (Leung, 2008). It was a well-known drama producer in mainland China, Guoli Zhang, who vocalized the first anti-*daejanggeum* sentiments in 2005. He first criticized *daejanggeum*'s content and furthermore accused the drama of cultural theft, having claimed as Korean what must be Chinese cultural heritage (acupuncture, for example). This was soon followed by a torrent of patriotic responses on the web. *Hallyu* fans and Hunan TV that broadcast the drama were called traitors by Producer Zhang and Chinese netizens. There emerged an equally vociferous defense for the drama. This incident is a classic example of cultural nationalism creeping into the realm of popular culture.

Much of what we consider the anti-*hallyu* movement, in fact, comes from debates outside the realm of popular culture. As a Chinese scholar put it, "disputes on the issue of 'Korea in

²⁰ In contrast to the amount of Korean drama exports to China at 9.31 million US dollars in 2005, the amount of Chinese drama imports to Korea was at a mere 1.48 million dollars. In 2008, both amounts dropped sharply, the prior being 4.51 million dollars and the latter 0.60 million dollars. Korea's drama exports to China bounced back in 2010, with the earnings of 15.57 million dollars, but drama imports from China amounted to 0.39 million dollars only (KOCCA Chinese Office, 2012). While some Chinese drama series were being aired on Korean cable channels, ratings were low. Taking into consideration China's grievances about trade inequality, KOFICE is importing Chinese shows and airing them on Junghwa TV and other channels (Gwon and Gim, 2009:144-145).

²¹ In fact, various government agencies have played a significant role in promoting *hallyu*. The Korean Culture and Contents Agency (KOCCA), which was set up in 2001 to specifically support cultural industries at home and facilitate cultural exports and exchange, is a good example. Other government agencies including the Korean National Tourism Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade are also involved in various projects promoting *hallyu*.

the eyes of the Chinese' or 'China in the eyes of the Koreans' continue endlessly on the internet, outside the television screen, while there is a Korean TV drama boom" (Zhang, 2006:144). Nationalistic sentiments often find ways to implicate *hallyu* in heated debates on Korea-China relations in other realms. Noteworthy is the cyber dispute that occurred in the mid-2000s upon the registration of Korea's *Gangneung Dano* festival on the UNESCO cultural heritage list.

This festival has its origin in Chinese *Duanwu*, sharing the name and the date (the fifth day of the fifth month on the lunar calendar). But, as a localized tradition, it is largely different from the *Duanwu* festival. It is a month-long festival with two main activities, namely, the performance of exorcism and folk entertainment such as mask dances, swings, and traditional wrestling, none of which was performed during the *Duanwu* festival. Soon, there was a flurry of criticism on the internet that accused Korea of registering Chinese cultural heritage as its own. Many Chinese netizens were furious, because they believed that the festival was a variation of Chinese *Duanwu*, and that it was China, not Korea, which had the right to file such an application. Although there were some different perspectives on the issue of the ownership of cultural heritage, the prevailing view was that China should have the upper hand. Some even accused Korea of stealing Chinese cultural assets. A heated war of words with a nationalistic tone broke out, as many Korean netizens, offended by the abrasive comments of Chinese people, immediately backfired with equally abusive language. The initial furor over the registration of the *Gangneung Dano* festival eventually died down, but this led to the establishment of national policies to protect cultural heritage and promote traditional festivals in China (Park, 2010).

Nationalistic sentiments sparked by such an issue often spill over into negative reactions to *hallyu*. Many Chinese netizens and media commentators accused *Daejanggeum* and other Korean (especially history) dramas of portraying Chinese with certain prejudices, distorting historical facts on China, and showing strong nationalism (Leung, 2008). Although some criticisms have proven to be groundless as in the case involving Confucius' ethnic origin, there still remains much antagonism towards Korean popular culture and its nationalistic flavor. Unlike China's young *hallyu* fans who do not care about their stars' nationality (Pease, 2009), nationality matters to most other young Chinese.

Since overseas markets have become so important to cultural contents companies in Korea, they take precautions not to stir up nationalistic sentiments among overseas audiences. Examples such as "The Story of the Great King's Four Gods (*Taewangsasingi*), a historical cum Kung Fu drama, which removed substantial historical details from drama characters, show how debates occurring outside the television screen affect cultural production itself. Despite such efforts, however, it will not be easy for cultural contents companies in both countries to prevent disputes on other issues from spilling over into their own field, because nationalism today shows strong gripping power among younger generations as well as old nationalists. Furthermore, news media, whose survival depends on the amount of attention they get from the masses, often add fuel to the fire. Not only do mass media facilitate interchanges of criticism by broadcasting the reactions of the other country, but they also often augment the intensity of nationalistic emotions by releasing selectively chosen information.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Speaking of the implications for the Korea-China relationship, *Hallyu* is like a double-bladed knife. It can cause conflicts as well as encourage collaboration. The Korean and Chinese cultural industries will continue to compete and cooperate with each other, as they adapt to the rapid changes in domestic, regional and global markets. There will be more competition than cooperation in the drama industry, perhaps. As the case of the Hunan Satellite TV exemplifies, the level of Chinese drama production has moved up a notch (Leung, 2008), and with Chinese viewers' interest shifting to dramas from other foreign countries, Korean dramas will probably face stronger competition in the future. At the same time, collaboration in the cultural industry as a whole is likely to be widened and diversified. We will see more collaborative projects in East Asia in the production and distribution of TV dramas, films, and music. It will be interesting to see if this can lead to a blossoming of East Asian cultural hybridities that can transcend rigid national boundaries and nationalist discourses characterizing the current politics in the region (Mori, 2008).

As we have discussed, *hallyu* helped boost Chinese people's interest in and change their perception of Korea. Through popular culture, they came to know Korea more concretely and intimately. *Hallyu* reminded them of the two countries' common cultural background, that is, Eastern culture based on Confucian traditions. At the same time, it made them realize that they shared a lot with Koreans in everyday life. Then, can the sense of cultural affinity *hallyu* generates among its fans develop into counter-hegemonic political potential which can effectively contain the reemerging political ideologies of chauvinistic nationalism and militant patriotism?

Noticing signs of transborder dialogue between Asian audiences caused by increased transnational flows of popular culture in the region, scholars like Hae-Joang Cho (2005) and Wondam Baek (2005) answered positively to the question. According to them, *hallyu* and other cultural flows in the region, which augment transborder communication and exchange, can lead to the shaping of an Asian consciousness. To me, this is more like a wishful thinking than a realistic projection. As Iwabuchi (2009) notes, political and economic structural restraints can severely hamper the publicness of media culture and the possibility of transborder dialogue. In the case of *hallyu* in China, it is hard to imagine that its Chinese fans will be able to create a counter-hegemonic discourse which may be placed on the same plane with nationalist discourses. There is no doubt that *hallyu* promotes transnational connectivity between Chinese and Korean fans to some degree. Yet, the question is if its holding power can be strong enough to resist the emotionally charged narratives of nationalism (Jang, 2005).

Friction and collision will occur both within and outside the realm of popular culture. It is unrealistic to expect that we will be able to come up with certain miracle solutions to stop that. What we can do is to prevent disputes in one problem area from spilling over into other area, to make efforts to subdue militant nationalism that can be detrimental to the relationship between the two countries, and continue to find areas of collaboration and mutual benefits.

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