

Hallyu—the Korean Wave:
The Past, Present and Future

• Lecture Outline

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- 2. Factors for the Popularity of *Hallyu*
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I. *HALLYU*: AN INTRODUCTION

- *Hallyu*, also known as the Korean Wave, refers to the spread and surge of South Korean popular culture, particularly its dramas and music, around the world.
- The term was first coined in 1999 in China by Beijing journalists who were surprised by the rapidly growing popularity of Korean popular culture in China.

- The origin of *hallyu* can be traced back to the late 1990s when Korean dramas began to penetrate the Asian television market as the popularity of Hong Kong and Japanese popular culture began to wane.
- Korean television dramas such as *Autumn Fairy Tale*, *Winter Sonata*, and *Daejanggeum* (Jewel in the Palace) became phenomenally popular in the Asian countries.

- The Korean Wave began with television dramas, but it now extends beyond TV to movies, popular music, comic books, fashion, video games, food, and language.
- Example: A Korean pop icon "Rain" (이재민) named in the "100 Most Influential People Who Shape Our World."
- While popular throughout the Asian continent, *hallyu* has had the greatest impact in East Asia, namely Japan, Taiwan, and China, and is now spreading to India, the Middle East, Central Asia, Iran, Israel, Turkey, Russia and even Latin America.

- Of all the forms of Korean popular culture, it is Korean popular music, simply referred to as K-pop (an abbreviation of Korean pop), which has in recent years become the most important part of the Korean wave and is very popular among teenagers in many parts of the world, especially in Asia.
- K-pop, consisting of diverse musical genre, ranging from pop, dance, and electropop to hip hop, R & B and electronic music, has grown into a popular subculture among teenagers and young adults around the world, resulting in widespread interest in the fashion and style of Korean idol groups and singers.

- It largely began with the founding of the country's largest entertainment company or talent agency, S.M. Entertainment, in 1995, which produced the first K-pop boy bands and girl groups.
- By the late 1990s, other entertainment companies, such as YG Entertainment, DSP Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment, were founded and they began to churn out new idol groups.
- Groups such as H.O.T., G.o.d., and Fin.K.L were enormously successful in the 1990s.
- In recent years, many of K-pop's biggest idol groups and solo acts, including BoA, TVXQ, Girls' Generation, BIGBANG, and Rain, have begun to target the Japanese market, some of whom topped the Japanese Oricon chart and sold out shows at arenas and stadiums.

- By 2011, K-pop has become a mainstream genre in many Asian countries, including Japan, Taiwan, Mongolia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam.
- Although K-pop is yet to break into the western musical markets, it is steadily gaining enthusiastic followers.
- In a push to further globalize the genre, K-pop artists are increasingly working with talent outside of Korea.
- In the United States, Korean artists are collaborating with well-known producers, including Kanye West, Rodney Jerkins, and Ludacris.
- In 2011, Billboard, one of music industry's most acclaimed music charts, implemented the K-Pop Hot 100 Chart, showing the growing influence and popularity of K-Pop within the Americas and Europe.

- In the formative years of the Korean Wave, many skeptics predicted that *hallyu* would not last long.
- Recent indicators, however, suggest otherwise.
- Exports of Korean culture, including films, dramas, and revenues from K-pop acts, are expected to rise to \$3.8 billion in 2011, which is a 14% jump from the previous year.
- Korean male stars are now among the highest-paid actors in Asia and these celebrities attract a large number of international visitors to Korea.
- Indeed, tourism to South Korea has increased dramatically since the beginning of *hallyu*. For example, from 2003 to 2004, international tourists jumped from 2.8 million to 3.7 million.

- Other impacts of *hallyu* have been wide-ranging:
 - the formation of positive image of Korea
 - the increased interest in things Korean
 - enhanced understanding of Korean culture
 - amplified interest in the study of Korea as evidenced by greater enrolment in Korean language and culture classes at universities and Korean cultural centers abroad
 - and increase in the consumption of Korean products
- The Korean wave also has been a source of national pride for many Koreans.

- The question is:
- What are the factors that account for the phenomenal success of *hallyu* in many parts of the world, especially in Asia?
- Is *hallyu* a phenomenon related to cultural globalization?
- Is it just a fad or does it have a legitimate chance of establishing itself as a lasting popular culture genre?
- What are the problems facing the Korean Wave and what are the policy issues and implications?

II. FACTORS FOR THE POPULARITY OF KOREAN POPULAR CULTURE

- The popularity of South Korean shows, singers, and movies throughout Asia is due to:
- 1. South Korea's readily evident economic affluence
- South Korea is now the 15th largest economy in the world.
- Asia's Four Tigers, leading IT industry.
- Names like Samsung and Hyundai have become household names

2) Its Relatively Close Cultural Affinity and Familiar Emotions with other East Asian countries

- Asia is fundamentally much more conservative than the west.
- Family responsibilities, duty, honor, "face," personal and group identity resonate much more strongly here.
- This is in contrast to the Hollywood movies that mostly focus on violence and sex to draw the general audience.

- 3) "sophisticated and stylish" appearance and lifestyles
- 4) active role of the government in supporting and promoting Korean popular cultural products in foreign markets
- Korean government has been actively supporting the penetration of Korean popular culture into foreign markets.
- The government moved quickly to increase the national culture industry's budget, to station government specialists in large cities in China and elsewhere, and to set up a "hall of the Korean Wave."

- Other Factors:
- Re-representation of Western cultural themes and products for Asian taste.

III. PERSPECTIVES ON HALLYU

- There are three approaches that try to explain the *hallyu* phenomenon, sometimes clashing and at other times complementing one another in their trajectories:
 - 1) cultural nationalist perspective
 - 2) the neoliberal perspective
 - 3) postcolonialist perspective.

1. The Cultural Nationalist Perspective

a. What is Korean is International!

- After *Joint Security Area* (2000) became a hit movie in Japan and elsewhere, a Korean scholar observed that “the spread of our cultural products throughout the world these days cannot but be good news . . . it appears that the Korean temperament is touching people’s hearts around the world. . . . We can now say that what is Korean is, in fact, international.”

- According to this perspective, a “Korean sensibility” is “the sensibility of the whole world.”
- In regard to the popularity of K-pop, a Korean scholar observed:
- “When we look inside the Korean Wave, we see Chinese teenagers who have had no outlet to express their desires. They appear fascinated by the sophisticated appearance and stylish dance moves of young Korean singers, as well as by the fast, exciting dance music.”
- Q: Your thoughts?

- This emphasis on pride of “Korean culture” or “recovery” is seen as a natural reaction for nationalist people who feel that Korea has finally joined the ranks of advanced nations.
- High expectations that nationalists have of the Korean Wave can be seen as a response to the sense of diminished self that Korean people experienced from a series of national crises, old and new, e.g., the Japanese colonial rule, the Korean War, the division of the country, the financial crisis of 1997.

- b. The Culture of Violence vs. the Culture of Familism
- The prevalent assertion that the popularity of Korean popular culture stems from family values and a Confucian sensibility assumes a common "Asian culture."
- Compared to Western and American as well as Japanese popular culture, which is largely violent, Korean culture is relatively easier to consume because it has been filtered through a Confucian sensibility.

- c. Anti-Japanese Sentiment
- The argument that Korean pop culture is popular in Asia because of anti-Japanese and anti-American sentiments is a point emphasized by many scholars.
- China, for example, is ideologically opposed to the United States: A sense of nationalism operates against the United States.
- It's the same against Japan.
- Q: Is this true?

- Korea is entirely different:
- A Korean scholar has observed that "Just like we turned towards Hong Kong rather than Japan in the past, Chinese feel comfortable with Korea. . . . when the Chinese talk about Korea, they say, 'Somehow, it is not a hateful country,' or, 'It is a country that is strangely attractive.' In a situation in which the United States and Japan are both disliked, Korea becomes the logical choice for China's affections."
- Q: Is this true?

- Koichi Iwabuchi, who has for years researched the reception of Asian dramas, adds that “the remnants of Japanese imperialism in Asia form a barrier to the export of (Japanese) cultural products abroad.”
- Anti-Japanese sentiment arising from Japan’s imperial past or Korea’s status as a “marginal” nation (less threatening to other countries) thus partly accounts for the rising popularity of Korean popular culture.

- However, it must be noted that Japanese dramas and songs are still popular in many parts of Asia.
- For example, China, following economic liberalization and greater socio-cultural openness, was able to break its fantasy about the West and turn to Asia after the mid-1990s, although the nature of this turn to Asia during this period was not the Korean Wave but the "Japanese Wave."
- The Korean Wave followed later, with teenagers acting as its main agents.

- 2. The Industrialist and Neoliberal Position:
"Culture Is Money"

While cultural nationalists emphasize the existence of "authentic culture," industrialists and neoliberals highlight the cultural "industry."

- What excites them is news that Korean companies greatly increased their sales by featuring the main stars of the Korean Wave in ads for products ranging from computers to cellular phones.
- Fear that the Wave will fade like a fad has inspired frequent discussions about the need for state support and appropriate state policies.

- The bulk of editorials and columns by news reporters, government officials, and people in the culture industry are concerned with how to advance and continue the promotion of the Korean Wave.
- Lamenting the lack of strategies, people in the forefront of cultural export institutions sought clever ways to crack open the enormous emerging Asian market.
- To them, the origin or quality of cultural products do not matter as much as the market.

- a. Not the Culture, but the Market, Matters
- The Korean government has taken the position that an export-oriented policy should be established to maximize economic profit.
- And the Korean government has been actively supporting the penetration of Korean popular culture into foreign markets.
- The government moved quickly to increase the national culture industry's budget, to station government specialists in large cities in China and elsewhere, and to set up a "hall of the Korean Wave."

- The main concern has been to transform the Korean Wave into a sustainable source of income.
- Proposals for dismantling the “barriers to maintaining the Korean Wave” included developing a stronger strategy for continuous distribution through larger scale production, regulation of content quality, and delinking the Korean Wave from nationalistic fervor.
- A “cultural engineering mindset” is emphasized over and over in view of ideas concerning the production and sale of competitive cultural content.

- 3. The Postcolonialist Position

Postcolonialism is an intellectual discourse that consists of reactions to, and analysis of, the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism.

- Proponents of postcolonialism argue that the "logic" of colonialism is still active today, as the knowledge about the world is shaped by the powerful and this knowledge is circulated repetitively and finally legitimated in service to certain imperial interests.
- The critical nature of postcolonial theory entails destabilizing or weakening Western ways of thinking.

- A postcolonialist perspective views the Korean Wave as a result of more than a century of modernization, capitalist expansion, and homogenization of global culture.
- Most of those who take this position are cultural researchers sensitive to global shifts.

- IV. A NEW KOREAN WAVE
- Optimists hoped that in a short period of time South Korea would become a first-rate “cultural nation” while more cynical observers predicted that the Korean Wave would soon cool.
- However, contrary to most expectations, the Korean Wave seems to have grown stronger.

- The Samsung Economic Research Institute (2005) drew up a special report on the economic effects of the Korea Wave.
- Entitled "The Korean Wave Sweeps the Globe," the report classifies countries that import Korean pop culture into four stages, in terms of their pattern of consuming Korean cultural products.
- 1. The first stage is that of simply enjoying Korean pop culture, and this is applied to Egypt, Mexico and Russia.
- 2. The second stage involves buying related products such as posters, character items, and tours; Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are classified in this category.
- 3. The third stage is buying "Made in Korea" products; China and Vietnam fit this description.
- 4. The final stage reflects the development of a general preference for Korean culture itself. According to the report, there are no countries that belong to this category yet. The report urges the development of high quality "content" by paying more attention to "marketing strategies," such as the "co-development of content."

- The report concluded by proposing the reinvention of something uniquely Korean.
- This report concluded, "If the Korean Wave represented an East Asian trend in Korean contents, then we need to make people interested in Korean culture through "feeling Korea" and increasing the export of Korean food, drinks, and lifestyles, which contained the essence of Korean aesthetics, emotions, traditions, and culture."
- Modeling itself after "Japonism," through which Japan at the end of the nineteenth century made its existence known to European culture, with expressions like "Japanese style," "Nippon feel," and "Japanese Wave," "feel Korea" was an attempt to create a structure of consciousness and feeling through which South Korea could make itself known to the world.