

Transnationalization of Korean Popular Culture and the Rise of “Pop Nationalism” in Korea

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THIS ARTICLE AIMS TO EXAMINE THE SURGE OF POPULAR NATIONALISM IN Korea concerning the recent transnational advance of South Korean (hereafter Korean) popular culture.¹ Since Korea has never enjoyed regional as well as international acclaim for its popular culture, the transnational recognition of its pop culture has become a point of national pride in Korea. In this context, the article will first present a brief overview of the transformation of Korean popular culture from an obscure cultural backwater to a new fountain of trendy entertainment in Asia. Then, it will examine how transnationalization of Korean popular culture has been largely seen in Korea within nationalistic discourses and interests or “pop nationalism.”

The idea of pop nationalism is inspired by what Koichi Iwabuchi called “trans/nationalism.” He coined this term to refer to the nationalistic ways in which the export of Japanese popular culture is discussed in Japan (18). With the rise of similar nationalistic discourses in Korea concerning transnationalizing Korean popular culture, this article aims to examine it as specific to the Korean context. It will point out the ironies and ambiguities of pop nationalism and the need to recognize the continuing active role of nation-states and nationalism in shaping cultural experiences of globalization. In addition, despite the nationalistic rhetoric, the article will point out that Korean popular culture is a site of the global–local encounter and interaction.

Historically, Korea has been concerned more about the influx of foreign cultures—be it Chinese, Japanese, or American—than the

advance of its own. Hence, the opening up of the Korean market to global forces had long been accompanied by the fear of foreign cultural invasion in Korea, a fear often amplified by the uncertainty of the competitiveness of Korean popular culture. For example, with the unhindered import of Hollywood films since the late 1980s when Korea liberalized its market under the pressure from the US government, Korea has had its share of emotional charges against “American cultural imperialism.” Similarly, the Korean government’s decision to gradually lift the ban on Japanese popular culture in 1998—imposed since Korea’s liberation from the Japanese colonial rule in 1945—predictably provoked the fear of being swamped by more competitive Japanese pop culture. Cultural globalization has been largely received in Korea within this context. According to C. Fred Alford, globalization—symbolizing the market liberalization in Korea—is experienced by Koreans as “posing the gravest danger to the self, the danger of becoming other to one’s self, self’s stranger” (12). Thus, Alford argues that most discussion of globalization in Korea has the aura of fear. Even when Koreans seem to embrace globalization, it is to keep it at bay (12, 148).

Considering this longstanding concern with the influence of foreign cultures and the reception of globalization within this tradition, something quite puzzling and even anomalous has been happening in Korean popular culture. Reminiscent of its “compressed modernity,” which squeezed social changes into a few years, Korea has successfully reinvented itself within the past several years from an obscure cultural backwater to a new center of cultural production in Asia. Dubbed as the “Korean Wave” in Asia, Korean popular culture has increasingly defined “what the disparate people in East Asia watch, listen to and play” (Onishi, “Roll Over” A3). Korea has become a “Blockbuster Nation,” “beating Hollywood” at home and garnering critical as well as commercial acclaim abroad (Russell and Wehrfritz). Meanwhile, Korean stars are mobbed like big Hollywood stars throughout Asia and people flock to Korea to visit locations where their favorite shows were filmed, giving an unexpected boost to tourism. Even in Japan where Hollywood stars once fetched big money by pushing various commodities on commercials, Asian stars and celebrities are increasingly embraced, the catalyst for which has been its newly found love affair with Korean popular culture (Wallace A4).

Shunned by its own people at home and practically unknown outside its border, the current ascendancy of Korean popular culture in Asia was inconceivable in the early 1990s. For example, the Korean film industry seemed to be almost dead amid onslaught from Hollywood films, taking only 15.9% of the national market in 1993, down from 34.2% in 1985, just before the market liberalization in Korea. The Korean music industry fared a little better than the film industry, with international pop and rock music taking 60% of the Korean market in the early 1990s. In addition, between 1993 and 1996, three major terrestrial broadcasters in Korea—KBS, MBC, and SBS—imported a total of US\$99.5 million, while their export was only US\$19.7 million. The United States accounted for 68.3% of the total import in 1996 (Koh M34). In this context, exporting Korean cultural contents was something least expected, and, with their export amount so negligible, the Korean government could not provide an estimate until the late 1990s (Onishi, "Roll Over" A3).

However, with what seemed to be the coming of age of Korean popular culture, the situation dramatically reversed by the late 1990s. For example, local Korean pop music had 60% of the domestic music market by the late 1990s. With this share growing further, Savannah Hahn, deputy managing director of Sony Music Korea, said in 2001, "we've been left with no choice but to go local" in Korea (qtd. in Yoon 94). In addition, the Korean film industry began to churn out films combining local themes and Hollywood-style production values from the late 1990s. Its Korean market share skyrocketed from 25% in 1998 to 39.7% in 1999, and has hovered around, or even over, 50% since then. Thus, almost overnight Korea became one of the few countries with a vibrant film industry that has successfully challenged the dominant position of Hollywood films in the local market. Korean content also came to dominate primetime on terrestrial TV channels. Foreign programs, when imported, are largely relegated to unpopular hours, typically drawing only a fraction of 20–30% in the ratings often enjoyed by Korean dramas.

While largely replacing foreign content at home, Korean popular culture soon began to play an increasingly visible role in transnational markets. The Korean singer, BoA, who debuted in Japan in 2001 at the age of 14, has topped Japan's Oricon pop music charts several times, and other Korean pop singers and bands have become household names throughout Asia. What especially initially gave an edge to K-pop

(as Korean music is known in Asia) was localized hip-hop that toned down the harsh beats of the American genre and dealt with issues more resonant with the Asian youth (Yoon 92–93). Meanwhile, there has also been an exponential growth in the export sales of Korean films. While total export sales of Korean films were a meager US\$472,000 in 1997, they leaped to US\$11 million in 2001, to US\$31 million in 2003, and to US\$58 million in 2004. With the Asian market accounting for 77.8% of the total film export in 2004, Korean films have become a key commercial component in the region (Korean Film Council 13). In addition, if one-way traffic previously characterized the film trade between the United States and Korea, the boom in Korean films has resulted in several Korean films being picked up by Hollywood majors and independent distributors for limited releases as well as for remakes in the United States.²

However, serialized Korean TV dramas called mini-series—running typically from sixteen to twenty-four episodes, with each episode lasting about fifty minutes—have been the major driving force of the Korean Wave. Often compared with soap operas and characterized by emotional story lines centering on families and/or heart-wrenching love stories, Korean TV dramas were initially considered as cheap alternatives to their Japanese counterparts. For example, in 2000, Taiwanese Gala TV paid US\$1,000 for an hour of a Korean drama compared with US\$15,000–20,000 for a Japanese one. Yet, these days a Korean TV drama outperforms its Japanese counterpart, between US\$7,000 and US\$15,000, compared with between US\$6,000 and US\$12,000 for a Japanese one (Onishi, “Roll Over” A3).

In Hong Kong, *Taejanggŭm/Jewel in the Palace*, a drama about an orphan girl who became a court cook and then the royal physician during Korea’s Chosun Dynasty five hundred years ago, set a new record in the ratings, notching 47% (Chung 82). According to the Korean National Tourism Organization, Korean dramas accounted for over 25% of all foreign dramas in 2003 and 2004 in China, where they were first imported in the mid-1990s (Russell, “Wave” 17). Korean popular culture even found itself in the most unlikely place, North Korea, where copies of South Korean dramas and music smuggled from China are watched and listened to “in violation of laws against the import of enemy culture” (Demick A4).

Yet, nowhere is the sudden fervor for Korean popular culture more surprising than in Japan, given the tumultuous relationship between

Japan and Korea. For example, the Japanese colonization of Korea from 1910 to 1945 and what in Korea is seen as Japan's attempts to cover up its imperial history, to name just the least, have contributed to an uneasy relationship between the two countries. In addition, the memory and legacy of forceful assimilation during the Japanese colonization have made many Koreans fearful of Japanization as much as Americanization, especially as Japan's already significant economic power was coupled with the rise of its popular culture in Asia during the 1990s, Japan was often viewed as the "America of Asia" in Korea (Choi 146). In this context, the lift of the ban on Japanese popular culture in 1998 provoked a grim warning of another Japanese cultural assimilation in Korea. While Japan, on its part, did not impose any ban on Korean popular culture, it mostly remained indifferent to its former colony, which was seen as inferior both racially and economically.

However, Korean fears of another cultural assimilation by Japan proved to be largely unwarranted. While award-winning Japanese films, the first category allowed to be imported, generally underperformed in Korea amid competitive local films, Korean popular culture has found a receptive market in Japan.³ For example, *Swiri/Swiri* (aka *Shiri*), a Korean blockbuster which signaled the renaissance of the Korean film industry, became the first Korean film to open nationwide in Japan in 2000, grossing over US\$15 million. *Kongdong Kyŏngbi Kuyŏk JSA/Joint Security Area*, another Korean film released a year later, also did well, earning over US\$10 million at the box office in Japan. Thus, Japan alone accounted for 43.8% (or US\$6.58 million) of the total export revenue of Korean films in 2002 (Korean Film Commission 15). However, despite the success of a few Korean films and singers, the Korean Wave, which was sweeping across other East Asian countries by this time, remained relatively calm in Japan.

Then, all of sudden, *Kyŏul Yŏn'ga/Winter Sonata*, a Korean TV drama about "pure" or "true" love amid countless obstacles and convoluted plots, jumpstarted the Korean Wave in Japan on an unprecedented scale. First aired on Japan's NHK satellite channel in 2003, and again on NHK terrestrial channel in 2004, *Winter Sonata* absolutely mesmerized middle-aged Japanese women. While Korean dramas often offer a glimpse of a modern lifestyle to the aspiring Chinese, *Winter Sonata* struck a chord with these women's nostalgia and yearning for how they think things used to be in Japan. For these women, the male character of the drama as well as the actor, Bae Yong Joon, who played

the role, represents “old-fashioned virtues”—qualities of being gentle, sincere, sensitive, and caring—that contemporary Japanese men seem to lack. Thus, in November 2004, when Bae—affectionately called “Yon-sama” (sama is an honorific reserved for Japanese royalty) in Japan—visited the country, thousands of his female fans greeted him at the airport to get a glimpse of him. In addition, almost everything related to the show—the original soundtrack, the novel based on the script, mufflers and glasses worn by Bae, and even wigs modeled after Bae’s hairstyle in the drama—became hot sellers, resulting in US\$2.3 billion in economic activities between Japan and Korea (Onishi, “What’s Korean” A3).

The success of *Winter Sonata* has led to the sudden boom of Korean popular culture in Japan, turning several Korean actors into superstars and fueling further demand for Korean popular culture. Japan’s fascination with all things Korean, Korean films have become “the hottest ticket in town,” commanding ever higher prices (Schwarzacher 18). For example, *Oech’ull/April Snow*, a Korean film starring none other than Bae, was sold to Japan for US\$7 million at its preproduction stage in early 2005, easily topping the previous US\$3.2 million presale record for a Korean film (Russell, “Korea” 12). Japan’s share of the total export revenue of Korean films likewise skyrocketed from 44.8% (or US\$13.8 million) in 2003 to 69.3% (or US\$40.4 million) in 2004 (Korean Film Council 14). The Korean Wave in Japan has grown so strong that it is said to even crowd out US independent films and European films in theaters, and also negatively affect the market for American TV programs (Chung 88).

Since foreign or transnational popular culture in Asia has often been associated with America, Japan, or Hong Kong, the sudden rise of Korean popular culture took many people in Asia by surprise. For example, concerning Japan’s sudden embrace of Asian, especially Korean, talent in the wake of the Yon-sama craze, Tomoko Kamiguchi of Dentsu Casting & Entertainment admits that “five years ago, two years ago even, I could never have imagined this happening” (qtd. in Wallace A4). However, no one seems to be more puzzled by and least prepared for the ascendancy of Korean popular culture in Asia than Koreans themselves. This is because Koreans have always been concerned about the influx of foreign cultures and never expected their popular culture to be liked outside Korea.

To many Koreans, witnessing the transnational advance of Korean popular culture for the first time indeed came as a surprise. Thus, when

the Korean media first reported the growing fervor for Korean popular culture in Asia in early 2001, some Korean people were initially skeptical of these reports, often doubting the validity of reports or seeing the popularity of Korean popular culture as a passing fad. In addition, Koreans seem to have trouble explaining the sudden ascendancy of Korean popular culture, presenting rather absurd answers. For example, regarding the Yon-sama craze in Japan, Youn Jung Suk, a "specialist" on Korean–Japan relations at the Sejong Institute in Korea, reasons that Japanese women were "genetically predisposed" to like Bae. This is because he is from Pusan, a city located in the southeastern part of Korea, where many Japanese originally came from (qtd. in Onishi, "What's Korean" A3).

However, despite its newness, the Korean Wave phenomenon has quickly discredited the argument that Korea is threatened by foreign cultural invasion. Certainly, it is difficult for Koreans to maintain this argument, when Korean popular culture has made a huge imprint in many Asian countries. For example, in the wake of *Winter Sonata* in Japan, there has been surging interest in learning the Korean language, boosted by NHK's decision to use material from the drama for its Korean language course. In Hong Kong, people eat the kinds of food introduced in *Jewel in the Palace* and parents are dressing their children up in Korean traditional costumes (Chung 82). Korean stars are credited for establishing Korean ethnic features as a standard of beauty across Asia, with women in the region having their faces changed following their favorite Korean stars (Fairclough A8).

The Korean Wave phenomenon has also meant palpable economic spin-offs. Korea has suddenly emerged as one of the most popular tourist destinations, as TV dramas have brought in a spate of the "Korean Wave tourists" from various corners of Asia. Owing to the "pilgrimage" to *Winter Sonata* locations in Korea, Japanese tourism to Korea alone increased by 40% during the first ten months of 2004 (Onishi, "What's Korean" A3). The number of Taiwanese tourists to Korea also increased from 108,831 in 2000 to 298,325 in 2003, despite the general decline in overseas travel in Taiwan during the same period (Onishi, "Roll Over" A3). In order to meet the surging demand to visit Korea, the direct flight between Taiwan and Korea, which was discontinued when Korea switched its recognition from Taiwan to China in 1992, was resumed in September 2004 (AFP). In addition, Mark Youn of CJ Entertainment, Korea's leading media company,

credited the Korean Wave for making such Korean brands as “Hyundai cars and Samsung mobile phones more fashionable” (qtd. in Ward 12).

Given these economic and cultural reverberations of the Korean Wave, Andrew Ward of the *Financial Times* argues that Korean popular culture is staging its own version of “cultural imperialism by expanding into neighboring Asian markets” (12). Since globalization was largely feared as the influx of foreign cultures in Korea, this dramatic reversal of fortune for Korean popular culture presents a unique and fertile ground to critically reexamine globalization. For example, with Korean popular culture increasingly flowing out, the Korean Wave phenomenon is one of the latest examples refuting the view that equates globalization with an undisrupted advance of American popular culture. What is interesting in this regard is that it is often indigenized and hybrid versions of American popular culture—hip-hop, the blockbuster, and soap operas—which came to not only replace foreign cultural contents in Korea, but also build up export profiles of Korean popular culture in Asia. Thus, instead of Americanization, intensified global flows of American popular culture have come to unsettle its own hegemony by inadvertently invigorating local popular culture industries.

However, rather than critical reexamination of globalization, nationalistic fear of foreign cultural invasion is largely replaced by equally nationalistic pride in the transnational advance of Korean popular culture, or pop nationalism, which views the Korean Wave phenomenon within nationalistic discourses and interests. For example, the Korean Wave is lauded for helping enhance images of Korea as refined and sophisticated and for spreading the awareness of Korea and its culture across Asia and beyond. Ban Ki Moon, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Korea, said that the Korean Wave has brought the country “long-overdue respect,” since Korea’s soft power is now increasingly matching its economic sway as the 11th largest economy in the world. Yang Kee Ho, a professor in Korea, similarly comments that “the Korean Wave shows we’re not just a small country anymore” (qtd. in Spaeth and Macintyre).

Given these nationalistic tones concerning the Korean Wave phenomenon, it is no wonder that Bae is considered in Korea as something like “a national treasure” or, as one old Korean woman put it, a “true patriot” for improving the nation’s image as well as its relations with Japan (Demick A4). Reflecting this public sentiment, while popular

culture was long looked down upon in Korea as a low form of culture with vulgar influence, and "traditional" Korean culture was often presented as the culture of Korea, Korean popular culture is now regarded as a valuable vehicle for spreading Korean culture. An official at the Korean National Tourism Organization articulates this changing view by arguing that "popular culture is also very precious and should be treated accordingly" (Demick A5).

The Korean media not only echoes, but also fuels the nationalistic euphoria and celebration concerning the Korean Wave phenomenon. Stories of how Korean popular culture makes headway in foreign box offices and small screens, and how Korean stars are met with adoring crowds in many Asian countries, have taken the center stage in Korean media. The coverage of the Korean Wave phenomenon by foreign, especially western, media—*New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Financial Times*, to name just a few—and comments on Korean films by internationally recognized figures have similarly made headlines in the Korean media. Not surprisingly, there were commotions in the Korean media, when Jang Dong Gun, for the first time as a Korean actor, decorated the cover of *Time Asia* for the week of November 14, 2005. In addition, the Korean media proudly report that Korean stars have been courted by transnational brands—such as Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton, and Lancôme—to be their Asian faces.

The Korean Wave, however, does not always mean kudos for Korean popular culture and stars, since it has also triggered the growing uneasiness with the Korean Wave phenomenon in Asia. As one concerned scholar notes, much like Koreans in the late 1980s when they charged against American cultural imperialism, the Chinese and Vietnamese are now critical of the Korean Wave as cultural imperialism (Pak). Indeed, in Vietnam where fashion-conscious young Vietnamese eagerly embraced what they identified as "Seoul fashion"—the darker makeup colors, thinly shaved eyebrows, and square-toed shoes—the Korean Wave was voted as "one of the 10 most embarrassing cultural events" of 2001 by one of its national newspapers (Visser A23). China recently announced its plan to restrict the import of Korean dramas to the country from 2006. The Taiwanese government also has been considering the idea of slapping a tax on Korean content (Onishi, "Roll Over" A3). In Japan, a comic book titled *Hating the Korean Wave* has become an unexpected best seller, even to the surprise of the book's editors (Onishi, "Ugly Images" A6).

However, in popular discourses in Korea, the uneasiness with the Korean Wave is often conveniently interpreted as envy of the growing acclaim for Korean popular culture or the sense of crisis felt by some Asian countries—notably China and Japan—since their position as a cultural hegemon in the region is threatened by the Korean Wave. While there is some truth to this observation, the uneasiness with the Korean Wave in other Asian countries also stems from the asymmetrical nature of cultural exchange and reception between Korea and other Asian countries. As Darcy Paquet rightly points out, while Korean stars are met by enthusiastic fans in other Asian countries, Koreans often remain indifferent to other Asian popular cultures. In addition, the uneasiness reflects the kind of concern Korea once had, when it was fretting over the influences of foreign cultures in Korea. However, complacent nationalistic discourses have meant that, while Korean teenagers who wanted to imitate Rambo in the 1980s were “off-springs of neo-colonialism,” Vietnamese teenagers now following Korean actors’ hairstyles are largely viewed as consumers of Korean brands (Pak).

With the perceived and real spin-offs of the Korean Wave, the Korean government has also happily jumped on the Korean Wave bandwagon, implementing various measures to advance Korean popular culture and reap economic benefits from it. For example, the Korea National Tourism Organization under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has been busy bringing the Korean Wave and tourism industry together. It has appointed the Korean Wave stars as tourism ambassadors of Korea and opened the Korean Entertainment Hall of Fame in September 2004, while at the same time hosting events for overseas fan clubs of Korean stars in order to sustain the Korean Wave. It even asked producers of TV dramas to build more durable sets at scenic locations, which can be later used as tourist attractions (Demick A5). Meanwhile, the Korean Overseas Information Service gave *Winter Sonata* to the Egyptian Radio & TV Union in 2004, hoping to foster not only goodwill toward Korean soldiers stationed in northern Iraq, but also as an opening for the Korean Wave in the Middle East (Onishi, “Roll Over” A3). The Korean Broadcasting Commission sent delegations to India, Thailand, and Indonesia in May 2005 to promote the Korean Wave in regions where it was relatively unknown.

The most ambitious move to capitalize on the Korean Wave, however, is the plan by the Kyonggi provincial government to build a US\$1.9 billion theme park called “Hallyu-wood” (combination of

"Hallyu," the Korean word for the Korean Wave, and Hollywood) just northwest of Seoul. Positing a need for a place that "celebrates Asian entertainment and stands a world away from US-dominated pop culture," Sohn Hak-kyu, the governor of Kyonggi province, hopes that Hallyu-wood will ultimately create an East Asian culture which can compete with western culture represented by Hollywood ("Hallyu-wood"). Despite this rhetoric of confrontation, Hallyu-wood is in fact the outcome of the Korean government's plan to develop the tourism industry modeled after western theme parks (Russell, "Korea" 12). With the Korean Wave unexpectedly drawing people in, the government is simply bringing the Korean Wave and the theme park together, with features like streets, restaurants, hotels, and shops named after Korean stars.

The Korean government's eagerness to promote the Korean Wave should not be surprising at all. This is not just because of general interest of any government in encouraging the export of their cultural content "as a form of cultural diplomacy and for intrinsic economic reasons" (Sinclair, Jacka, and Cunningham 21). In the case of Korea, the Korean Wave phenomenon nicely dovetailed with the Korean government's priority to restructure the Korean economy in the wake of the financial crisis of 1997–98. As China's low-cost labor has increasingly undermined Korea's decades-old growth strategy based on export of manufactured goods, the Korean government has been striving to steer the country toward a knowledge- and service-based economy (Burton 4). Thus, aligning the country with cutting-edge knowledge and service industries—such as IT, biotech, cultural contents, logistics, and tourism—that can generate greater added values compared with the manufacturing sector has been the "national mantras," a new national growth strategy for Korea (Spaeth and Macintyre).

It is in this context that the Kim Dae Jung administration that came to power in 1998 designated the media and entertainment sector as one of the key growth industries in Korea. Echoing the government's priority, the Bank of Korea often compared the value created by a successful film with the number of cars, highlighting the potential economic effect one film can generate as compared with Korea's most staple export.⁴ Considering this economic significance, the Kim administration reasoned that the media and entertainment sector deserved the same state support that the manufacturing industry once received (Burton 4). The lift of the ban on Japanese popular culture

gave added urgency to the rationale for the state's support for the media and entertainment sector.

In this context, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism implemented a five-year plan to build up the Korean media and entertainment sector, encouraging colleges to open departments related to it and then providing scholarship and equipment to them (Onishi, "Long Indifferent" 12). The state-funded Korean Film Council, revamped from its predecessor Korea Motion Picture Promotion Corporation in 1999, also came to play a pivotal role in channeling funds to the heretofore cash-strapped film industry and promoting export of Korean films. In addition, in 2000, the Korean Culture and Content Agency was established under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to promote exports of cultural content. Thus, Norimitsu Onishi of the *New York Times* argues that the boom of Korean popular culture was born for "business and political reasons" in the late 1990s ("Roll Over" A3).

While globalization is often seen to undermine nation-states and nationalism with the rise of globalization, the surge of popular nationalism in Korea concerning the transnational advance of Korean popular culture indicates that forces of globalization are not completely free from nationalizing impulses. Indeed, pop nationalism in Korea is an attempt to appropriate transnationalizing Korean popular culture in a way that celebrates the nation and asserts its cultural prominence. Moreover, despite all the supposed strictures imposed on nation-states by forces of globalization, the Korean state is still a formidable catalyst for globalization. Thus, if globalization has exposed the precariousness of nation-states, nationalism and national identities, it has been continuously mediated and shaped by these forces. It is in this context that Michael Peter Smith argues for "the continuing significance of borders, state policies, and national identities even as these are often transgressed by transnational communication circuits and social practices" (3).

The attempts in Korea to appropriate transnational Korean popular culture within the nationalistic discourses are not without ironies or ambiguities. For example, it is ironic to see that Korea, once resentful of the one-way flow of foreign cultures in Korea, now finds national pride in the asymmetrical exchange and reception of popular cultures with other Asian countries. In addition, there seems to be more than an adequate dose of narcissism in the nationalistic celebration of transnational recognition of Korean popular culture and stars. What is never

mentioned in the nationalistic celebration in the Korean media is that Jang Dong Gun was one of two covers (the other was a Chinese sports star Yao Ming) of *Time Asia* issued in that week. It is very likely that Jang appeared only on the cover of *Time Asia* issued in Korea, while the Chinese athlete appears on the cover published in the rest of Asia. Moreover, if transnational brands woo Korean talents as their Asian face, this is because of the newly acquired marketability of Korean stars across Asia, not some sort of tribute to Korean culture and stars. More than anything, these examples indicate the localization strategy of transnational corporations in order to make their products more palatable to Asians by using Asian talents. If there is anything to be proud of in these cases, it is made possible because Korea and other Asian countries have become significant capitalist markets that transnational corporations cannot ignore.

Finally, despite nationalistic discourses, Korean popular culture is not simply local or national cut off from global influences and context. As seen above, Korean popular culture has often imitated and indigenized American popular culture. In this regard, the planned theme park, Hallyu-wood, is a telling example. Even when it aspires to be an alternative to American popular culture, it is not only named after Hollywood, but also modeled after a western theme park rooted in American consumer culture.

However, this is not to merely reaffirm the continued hegemony of American popular culture. As mentioned above, the global circulation of American popular culture has led to local imitation and indigenization in Korea, which have come to unsettle American cultural power. Thus, James L. Watson argues that, "by inspiring non-Western competitors to 'go global,' American pop culture industries may be creating the conditions of their own demise" (168). Moreover, the rise of multiple actors and the resulting multidirectional cultural flows has meant that global culture not only flows out from America, but is increasingly flowing into it as well, thus complicating the very meaning of "Americanization."

The continued influence of American popular culture in Korea indicates that global elements are already significantly present in the construction and articulation of Korean popular culture. However, local or national Korean popular culture might seem, it is not a closed site untouched by global forces. Instead, Korean popular culture is one of numerous sites of the global-local encounter and interaction. What

makes Korean popular culture Korean in this context is not some essentialized and unalloyed Koreanness, but rather its appropriation of and negotiation with global forces. Likewise, pop nationalism in Korea, while seemingly celebrating “national” popular culture, is in fact an articulation of Korean popular culture that exists in the transnational context. After all, the surge of national pride in Korean popular culture is made possible by its “transnational” recognition and visibility. While pop nationalism articulates the continued significance of the nation-state and nationalism in shaping globalization, it is an articulation of the nation and nationalism that are situated within and reworked by ongoing globalization.

Notes

1. In this article, the McCune-Reischauer system is used to Romanize Korean words and names, except for the names of people quoted from other sources or where there is already widely accepted Romanization such as Kim Dae Jung and Bae Yong Joon. Complying with the Korean practice for Korean names, the family name precedes the given name. In the case of Korean dramas and films, the Korean title precedes the English title and then the English title is used throughout the article.
2. Since Miramax first purchased the remake right to a Korean film, *Chop'ok Manura/My Wife is a Gangster*, at US\$950,000 in late 2001, allegedly after watching it even without subtitles, over 12 Korean films have been sold to Hollywood producers for remakes.
3. While it was initially predicted that Japanese films would take about 10% of the Korean market, they gained just 3% in 1998 when the ban was partially lifted. Even though their market share increased to 7.4% in 2000, it fell back to 3.2% in the following year. Thus, despite the success of several Japanese films, Japanese popular culture generally failed to make the expected huge inroads in Korea.
4. Despite this dramatic comparison to highlight the potential economic gains from cultural content, the export revenue from cultural contents is still meager compared to that of manufactured goods. For example, while export revenue from films was US\$42 million in the first half of 2005 and computer-games exports were to reach US\$480 million in 2005, electronics exports alone were expected to be over US\$100 billion in the same year (Spaeth and Macintyre).

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