

Globalization of korean popular culture in asia assignment

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Globalization of Korean Popular Culture in Asia 1. Introduction Since 1990s, Korean Popular Culture has had a strong influence in Asian countries, including China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Singapore. This new popular cultural phenomenon in Asia is called the “ Korean Wave”, also known as hallyu in Korean pronunciation, which refers to the surge of popularity of Korean popular culture abroad, particularly in Asia(Kin 284).

The “ Korean Wave” is first coined in mid-1999 by journalists in Beijing who are surprised by the fast growing popularity of Korean entertainment and popular Culture in China(Fiaola 1). Korean Wave certainly brings a big hit to Asian countries, but at the same time, some anti-Korean feelings are aroused as they considered the Korean Wave as a threat that may affect their lives. In China, one of the places where that were first hit by the Korean Wave, Korean TV dramas and pop songs are popular among people.

This aroused anti-Korean feeling from the Chinese directors that they believe the Korean Wave is destroying the Chinese entertaining industries. Hong Kong is also affected by the Korean popular culture since the release of loads of Korean films and TV dramas, together with the associated artists and theme songs, while one of the Korean TV dramas even broke the rating record of Hong Kong TV dramas. These proved the popularity of Korean popular culture in Hong Kong.

Same as China and Hong Kong, Taiwan is also hit by the Korean Wave. After the dubbing of Korean TV dramas, Taiwanese start to follow the TV dramas. Because there is increasing amount of Taiwanese people started watching Korean dramas, more and more Korean dramas are dubbed into Chinese.

Some producers of Taiwan TV stations even stopped making new local dramas but purchase Korean TV dramas instead. Japan also bought imports TV dramas from Korea, which helps Korean artists and singers to successfully gain popularity in Japan.

No matter positive or negative attitudes towards the Korean Wave, it can be clearly seen that the Korean popular culture have an immense popularity in Asia. However, the Korean Wave is not formed in one or two years. The Korean Wave first starts from Korean TV dramas in mid-1990s, followed by films and theme songs, together with pop songs, associated artists and entertaining programs in the 21st century. As a result, Korean popular culture gradually spread into the Asian countries and became one of the major popular cultures in Asia.

In order to have a more specific study on Korean popular culture, in this essay, Korea is referred to South Korea while Korean popular culture mainly specifies TV drama serials, films, pop songs and associated artists and entertaining programs. The purpose of this paper is to examine the reasons of why Korean popular culture can successfully spread into the Asian countries, including both subjective and objective factors. Subjective factors are qualities of Korean entertaining industries and pop stars and the attitude of Korean towards entertaining industries while objective factors are globalization and hybridity.

Finally, the impacts of the Korean Wave will be discussed, including cultural imperialism. 2. Subjective Factor: Qualities of Korean Entertaining Industries and Pop Stars To begin with, for the subjective factor that facilitates the

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spread of Korean popular culture, the Korean entertaining industries and artists produce high quality products, including films, TV dramas, pop songs and variety programs, with associated artists and pop stars, which attract great attention of audience from Asian countries and then spread Korean popular culture to Asia.

Firstly, the Korean entertaining industries, including motion picture companies and TV stations, emphasize in producing good quality films, TV dramas and, music and entertaining programs, which help spread Korean popular culture to Asia. For films, motion picture companies choose the best scripts to produce movies would not produce films without good scripts. *Shiri*, a film produced by Samsung Entertainment Group, is the first Korean film that had caught Asian attention. This, originally, supposed to be the last work of Samsung Entertainment Group and the group will break up afterwards.

Shiri, surprisingly, got a big hit from Korea and other Asian countries. Although it costs only about 2% of average budget of Hollywood films, it was popular throughout the world. As Diffrient mentioned, *Shiri* led to a "pan-Asian phenomenon" after its releases in Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan(42). Later on, films such as *Joint Security Area* and *My Sassy Girl* also gave a big hit to Asia, which further spread Korean popular culture to other Asian countries. As a Hollywood reporter said, "Korea has transformed itself from an embattled cinematic backwater into the hottest film market in Asia"(Segers 14).

Korean TV dramas also floods the daily programming of free-to-air TV stations and even become part of the routine viewing habits of their respective audiences(Beng 2). Starting with What Is Love All About and Stars in My Heart in the late 1990s, and Winter Sonata and Dae Jang Geum in recent years, Korean television drama and its stars such as Bae Yong Jun and Lee Young Ae, have attracted Asian audiences. Korean TV dramas were dubbed into Mandarin in Taiwan in 2004 and into Cantonese in Hong Kong in 2005.

It was soon dubbed for broadcasting in China and Japan in 2006. According to the Television Broadcast Limited(TVB), Dae Jang Geum had broke the rating record of Hong Kong TV dramas since 1991, which rated 50 points, and no other Hong Kong local TV dramas can yet break this record. Korean traditional costume and food then started to become popular in response to Dae Jang Geum. The influence of the Korean Wave can easily be seen. For music and entertaining programs, Korean TV stations produce different programs for singers to publicize their works.

Music Bank from Korean Broadcasting System(KBS), Music Core from Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation(MBC) and Inkigayo from Seoul Broadcasting System(SBS) are some of the examples of music programs. These provided platforms for singers to perform their works of from their newly published CDs. There are also entertaining programs for singers to participate in order to promote their works through games and talk shows, such as Strong Heart and Infinity Challenge. With internet, these music and

entertaining programs are spread rapidly around the world, with subtitles in different languages, which are made voluntarily by fans.

These help concrete artists' works and further promote to other places. Apart from the production of films and programs, Korean entertaining companies are also willing to mobilize resources to train artists for being all-rounded. Artists usually have to be trained be several years before they debut. For instance, in the singing group So Nyeo Shi Dae, most of the members are trained for four to six years and one of the members even received trained for seven years and a half. Being trained for years, Korean artists are proficient at singing, dancing and also acting.

Rain is a typical example. When Rain held a concert in Singapore in 2007, the Singapore Indoor Stadium was fully packed with the most expensive seats, priced at S\$499 (US\$345), were all sold out. His drama Full House also gains popularity in Asia and he won the Best Actor Award in KBS Acting Awards. As one of Rain's fans said, " hard training is essential for the success of Korean pop stars", which can conclude the outcome of the hard work from artists and training from music companies(Shin 520).

Besides, one common nature for entertaining companies to develop their artists is to usually put several singers into a groups, like H. O. T. , S. E. S, Wonder Girls, Tohoshinki and Super Junior. Music companies selecte members with different specialties, such as proficiency in Japanese, Mandarin or English, in order to attract more supporters from different places. Two of the members of S. E. S were selected because of their fluency

of Japanese and English while the Chinese member of Wonder Girls helps the group to gain popularity in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

The strategies of music companies lead to the increasing popularity of Korean Pop(K-Pop) which further intensified the Korean Wave in Asia. 3.

Subjective Factor: Attitude of Koreans towards Korean Entertaining Industries
Superficially, Korean entertaining industries can sustainably developed and expanded is because of the good strategies of the companies, whereas, fundamentally, it is because of the attitude of Koreans towards entertaining industries. Unlike other regions or countries, Koreans consider popular culture as an important factor in improving their lives.

As mentioned before, the influence of Korean Wave is currently spreading across Asia, covering areas include China, Japan and Taiwan, even Hong Kong's popular culture is undergoing revolutionary changes. Influence brought by the Korean Wave is powerful that it seems unstoppable.

However, before the existence of the Korean Wave, the situation is totally different. Japanese popular culture was in fashion and had a great influence to Korea as well as in Asia.

Korean popular culture can never compare with Japanese popular culture, and at the same time, Koreans are inferior to Japanese. When Japanese government implemented the San Francisco peace treaty in 1952, the Japanese government one-sidedly deprived the Japanese nationality from those Koreans who had stayed in Japan, and Koreans are even subjected to the rigid control of alien registration law. Koreans can either choose to return

to Korea or naturalize to be Japanese(Kim 134). The induction of such policy had brought an identity crisis to Koreans.

However, when Korean popular culture rise suddenly and gain immense popularity in Asia, Koreans start to be proud of being a Korean, which has greatly increased their self-recognition and of his country(Kim 136). They believe that the Korean Wave would help in improving their images in Japan and other places in Asia. Therefore, they hold an optimistic view towards Korean entertaining industries. As Koreans recognize the Korean Wave is a possible way of improving their images, they become more willing to enter the entertaining industries.

Their entry provides resources, talents, technology and creativity to Korean entertaining industries. TV dramas no longer have to be with the traditional values, but with new themes, and pop songs are not restricted to be suited with dancing only. After the participation of these new comers, more creative works can be found. Yet, without appropriate actors and singers, the newly composed movie scripts and songs cannot shine with its soul. The young generation is also affected by the Korean Wave that they desire to become pop stars as their idols.

According to a research conducted by Choi, A predominate number of youths express their preference in service sector or entertainment industries(Choi 269). Their parents also support their decisions of being trainees because they think it is their honor to have a pop stars in their families. Therefore, children are sent to the entertaining or music companies for training when they are still receiving secondary education. Although the training period is

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long, which usually take at least four years to up to ten years, they can still keep their faith and endure the brutal trainings.

They believe that they can shine on stage one day. After years of training, their singing, dancing and acting skills are guaranteed before putting on stage. As a result, there are sufficient supply of creative scripts and songs, together with artists and singers, the Korean Wave can be sustainably developed and continue to spread to Asia, leading to an important trend in Asia. 4. Objective Factor: Globalization The Korean entertaining industries grow stronger with the good strategies of entertaining companies and the participation of new comers.

Yet, Korean popular culture cannot turn to the Korean Wave and spread through Asia without the factor of globalization. There are different definitions of globalization from various scholars, but in general terms, globalization can be understood as a multi-dimensional and complex process of profound transformations in all spheres, including technological, economic, political, social, cultural, intimate and personal. With the improvement of communication technology, worldwide social relations and consciousness of world society are intensified.

In other words, globalization suggests the expanding scale, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction(Held and McGrew 3). The Korean Wave is a result of the globalization of technology and the media, as Sung said(vii). With the improvement of communication technology and transportation, the Korean Wave can affect the whole Asia within a short period of time. Firstly, the

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advancement of communication technology, also including TV broadcasting and the Internet, play an important role in intensification of the Korean Wave.

With the invention and popularization of television, products, as well as TV dramas and pop songs can be promoted more easily and effectively. The latest information about Korean popular culture can be known immediately. Korean TV dramas and music videos are also shown on TV frequently. Some of the TV stations even establish a new channel for broadcasting Korean programs, such as J2 in Hong Kong and Channel V in Taiwan. The former broadcasts Korean TV dramas and entertaining programs while the latter featured Korean pop music videos and both of them have created a base for Korean popular culture in Asia.

The invention of internet further facilitates the exchange of information within Korea and other places. One of the advantages of using the Internet is that there is no time difference. People in other places can follow the latest information of Korea through the internet. Besides, the internet also provides an effective platform for promotion. Youtube is a platform for Korean music companies to promote their artists and singers. In July 2006, more than 1.6 million US visitors watched 21 million video streams per day, which means each people watched about 13 video streams every day(Browne 184).

The internet and Youtube are, therefore, used as a useful tool for updating the recent status of artists and publicizing their masterpieces. Apart from the advancement of communication technology, the development of transportation also eliminates the geographical constraints, which encourage

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Korean artists and singers to travel around Asia and promote their works. As travelling time is shortened between destinations, most of Korea's topnotch singers take their concerts to Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Tokyo.

They bring along with their albums, having songs in local languages of the places, to publicize their works and maximize the local support. For instance, Wonder Girls recomposed the lyrics of their song "Nobody" from Korean to Mandarin before holding their concert in Taiwan. And when they go to places where the concerts are held, they take part in the recording of local entertaining programs. As a result, in the journey of holding concerts, they would appear on the entertaining programs, entertainment news and, of course, in the concert, the effect of their visiting and the influence of Korean Wave can easily be imagined

With the improvement of communication technology and popularization of television and internet, the world became flat, as Friedman suggests(4), which means exchange of information is easy. 5. Objective Factor: Hybridity
The simplest definition of hybridity refers to mixture. In the contemporary world, hybridity are used to describe popular culture, racial mixing, cuisine and anything which is combined by two or more elements. In terms of popular culture, hybridity refers to the combination of more than one culture.

There can be two meanings in the case of Korean popular culture, one is that Korean popular culture itself is a hybrid that forms by numerous cultures, so Korean popular culture is more special and can easily to fit in other culture. Another is that cultures nowadays are hybrids; therefore, Korean popular culture is easy to be accepted. For Korean popular culture itself, it combined

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Japanese, Chinese and also American culture together, and formed its Korean popular culture. Korea had become colony of China and Japan, therefore greatly influenced by these two cultures.

From Sui Dynasty, Korea was a vassal state under the protection of China. Korea sent students to Changan, the capital of Tang Dynasty, to learn Chinese culture. Korea is under the influence of Chinese culture from long time ago. The traditional values of Chinese cultures, such as filial piety, respect for elderly and loyalty, also deeply rooted in the Korean culture. When China was defeated by Japan in the Sino-Japanese War, Korea was given to Japan and start to be influence by Japan. Although Korea was freed after the Second World War, it was still under great influence of Japanese culture.

At that time, Japan was receiving post-war assistance from the United States and American culture started to mix with Japanese culture. As a result, Korean popular culture has absorbed foreign elements, such as Chinese, Japanese and American, while still keeping its own traditions and values(Kim 292). This underlying dynamic help put the Korean Wave forward. On the other hand, people usually think that hybrid is stronger and more beautiful than the pure, both historically and biologically(Kim 292). As Korean popular culture involves Chinese, Japanese and American elements, it can fulfill audiences' desire.

Hence, the Korean Wave is formed and intensified within a short period of time. Moreover, because of globalization, information can be transmitted quickly. To keep the own culture without any foreign influence is hard to

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achieve. People generally have a greater acceptance and tolerance towards foreign culture. In this era of hybridity, it is understandable that why Korean popular culture can give a big hit to Asia. With these two definitions together, the reasons why Korean popular culture can affect Asia is obvious, including the rich content of Korean popular culture and the high acceptance of people in Asia. 6.

Impact: Cultural Imperialism Korean popular culture rise and receive strong reaction within a short period of time, it seems only an exchange of culture in different places. Yet, the Korean Wave actually has resulted in cultural imperialism. Imperialism is defined as a function of the inequalities of size, power, wealth, and national resources that are built into the international system as it is a cause of those inequalities (Ninkovich 7). And cultural imperialism, which is also translated into "media imperialism" by some theorists, can take the form of an active, formal policy or a general attitude (Tomlinson 6).

That means the spread of Korean popular culture generally exploited other's local culture. Korean films, TV dramas, pop songs and entertaining programs continue to gain popularity in Asia. As the Korean TV dramas are cheaper than the Japanese one, the Japanese TV dramas are soon replaced by the Korean one. Chinese TV stations also stopped to produce TV dramas because the cost of purchasing a Korean TV drama is lower than producing a new one. Thus, Korean TV dramas, such as *Stairway to Heaven*, *Coffee Prince*, *He's Beautiful*, continued to attract people's attention. Meanwhile, K-pop floods the market of popular music.

Music companies in Asia purchase the copyright of Korean pop songs and rewrite the lyrics in their local language for their artists to perform. In Hong Kong, the lyrics of "Mister" from KARA is recomposed into Cantonese, which is also named "Mister" performed by Miyoko Lau and Renee Lee. In Taiwan, the lyrics of "T. O. P." by Shinhwa is rewritten in Mandarin, which became "Remember" performed by S. H. E. Besides recomposing lyrics, Korean popular songs are also performed by other singers in different occasions. For instance, Show Luo, a male artist from Taiwan, performed "Nobody" from Wonder Girls in an entertaining program.

These can show that the growth of Korean popular culture influences the entertaining industries in Asia. As Tomlinson suggests, cultural imperialism can be seen as the dominance of one culture's media (text, practices) over another or as the global spread of "mass-mediated culture" (22). Although the immense popularity of the Korean Wave helps spread Korean popular culture, at the same time, it destroyed the original and local culture in other places. Before the Korean Wave, composers and artists created their own works, yet, with the Korean Wave, their creativity and originality are affected by the Korean style.

If this continues to happen, the unique culture of each place would diminish and gradually disappear. This will bring serious consequences, and it is possible to occur. 7. Conclusion It is an undeniable and unstoppable truth that the Korean Wave has brought Asia a big hit. By considering the factors that lead to globalization of Korean popular culture, we can understand why

the Korean Wave happens so much, and the answer of whether the Korean Wave still has such a strong effect on Asia is also predictable.

First of all, the Korean entertaining industries and pop stars provide enough support for the continuous development of Korean popular culture. There are impressive films, TV dramas and entertaining programs, with the associated artists, which have already laid down the foundation of the Korean Wave. TV programs are seriously produced with technical experts and professional performers, together with the catchy theme songs, it is difficult to not catch the hearts of people in Asia. The strength of Korean pop stars and artists can also attract people who are tired of their local but weak ones.

Moreover, as the attitude of Koreans towards popular culture do not change, Korean popular culture is possible to further develop. There is sufficient supply reserve for entertaining industries. They facilitate the growth of the Korean Wave and, at the same time, also support the expansion of the influence of Korean popular culture. Adding the factors such as globalization and hybridity, Korean popular culture spread through Asia quickly and effectively. As the communication technology has been improved, information flow becomes more convenient.

The invention of internet, wireless technology and satellite also facilitate information exchange, people can receive Korean latest information easily. The influence of the Korean Wave then becomes stronger and stronger. However, can the Korean Wave further affected people's minds and deep-rooted in the market of popular culture is still questionable. The Korean Wave rose suddenly and swept through Asia in about 10 years, from the late

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1990s to present. Would the Korean Wave leave as fast as it comes? There are some issues that should be paid attention to if the Korean popular culture still aims at maintaining its influence or further expand.

Firstly, as one of the reasons that the Korean wave can be so successful that is the hybridity of its popular culture. Then what if there is another popular culture growing with more foreign elements which arouse the curiosity of people. What if Korean popular culture has no great breakthrough which made people lost interests. The Korean Wave will surely decline if these come true. Secondly, as mentioned in the above paragraphs, the Korean Wave caused cultural imperialism that destroyed the local cultures.

What should Korea respond to the decreasing demand of Korean TV dramas, so as to protect the development of Korean popular culture? The Korean Wave is definitely strong in the early 2000s, but it seems starting to decline these years. There is a Chinese saying "it is easy to open a shop but hard to keep it always open", which Korean popular culture is now facing this issue. In what ways that the Korean popular culture can sustainably grow, both Korean entertaining industries and Koreans should think this issue deeply.

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