Abstract

The term Korean Wave refers to a cultural trend which started in the mid-1990s outside of Korea, mainly in China and Japan, then gradually spread to other Asian countries and further on to other continents. It includes Korean-identified television dramas, movies, internet games, fashion and popular music. Among discussions about this phenomenon, the consensus is that there is a “beyond” Korean Wave that has to be positioned and could do something to connect international cultural relationships. How and why did Korean Wave become one of the most loved pop-cultures among Asian fans and beyond? How can Korean Wave contribute to East Asia’s peaceful cultural cooperation in the future? Interchange of creative cultural products and artists can be a window which might pull down the walls among countries, but at the same time, such interchange often creates confrontation when exaggerated patriotism is triggered. The government should refrain from trying to manipulate this naturally evolved cultural connector that has already achieved cross-cultural regional status. Korean Wave should undertake the role of a communication tool to strengthen cultural diversity. Korean Wave’s impact cannot be measured but the potent window already connects Korea and East Asia.

Key words

Korean Wave, Koreanization, Glocalization, Globalization, Intercultural Communication
I. Introduction

The term Korean Wave or Hallyu refers to a cultural trend which started in the mid-1990s outside of Korea, mainly in China and Japan, then gradually spread to other Asian countries and further on to other continents. It includes Korean-identified television dramas, movies, internet games, fashion and popular music, or as J.Y. Park, an internationally famous and successful Korean entertainment CEO indicates, “created and performed by Koreans and made in Korea” pop-culture products (Hallyu in Asia:A Dialogue, John F. Kennedy School, Harvard University, July 16, 2007). I would add the definition of Korean Wave as one which employs a combination of Western style pop-culture and the Koreanization of Western pop-culture aiming for international markets, since this article sets up Koreanization as a tool which could connect Korea and East Asia.

Since the Korean contemporary pop culture has gained popularity not only in Asia, but also in Europe and the U.S.A. and some other regions, discussion about this phenomenon has noticeably increased. Hyun-kyung Kang sees the Korean Wave as “the 21st Century version of the Silk Road which once served as a conduit for trade and cultural exchanges between the East and West” (The Korea Times, June 5, 2009). Jung-sook Park emphasized Korean Wave as “spurred by advanced information technology, particularly Web 2.0, Hallyu, which used to be a tiny bud, has finally become a flower in full bloom in the post-Cold war era” (World Civic Forum 2009). Besides some exaggerated praise like the above, inside Korea entrepreneurs, politicians and academics have been formulating diverse comments depending on each one’s position and interests. The more Korean Wave became successful, the more criticism arose about it, the more academic theories evolved to explain this phenomenon. More positive and negative attitudes surfaced regarding its future. The current consensus is that there is a “beyond” Korean Wave that has to be positioned and could do something to connect and improve international cultural relationships.

First of all, Korean Wave must be explained within Asian syncretism. Asian contemporary cultures may be characterized by syncretism which makes this region’s soft power more attractive. Joseph J. Tobin, editor of the book named Re·Made in Japan (1994) characterized the Japanese consumer in recent decades as those who, rather than simply imitate or borrow from the West, reinterpret and transform Western products and practices to suit their culture. David Chung (2001) mentioned Korean “religious syncretism” in his book Syncretism: the Religious Context of Christian Beginnings in Korea. Korea is a unique case in so far as Christianity was not brought to this country by missionaries like in other Asian countries, but was studied by the Koreans themselves in the 1770s. H. Richard Neibuhr’s triple process, that is, finding equivalent elements among cults, establishing a consensus among various religions on their essential aspects, and communicating among different religions by means of language and artistic creations, was widely adopted by Koreans. Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, three traditional religions smoothly borrowed elements from one another without internal contradictions as those religions were easily crossed with Korean native indigenous Shamanism.

The process of syncretism, which implicates accommodation, adaptation, indigenization, contextualization, incarnation, localization and inculturation (or acculturation), commonly occurred in Asia where each country developed its own peculiarities. When asked, my Chilean students tend to identify Japanese and Korean popular culture in a very intuitive way.
saying “Japanese products look Japanese but Korean? You never know where it comes from until you know that it is Korean.” I think this is a consequence of Korea’s geopolitical position and the country’s formation of social and cultural identity through its history which will be addressed later. Referring to Korean Wave, I call it Korea’s syncretism as a part of the process of Koreanization, and nowadays one step further, a process of Glocalization.

In spite of some prudent points to consider, this paper will analyze how the Korean Wave has already begun to connect Korea and East Asia through Koreanization and Glocalization. Historically, Korea was a bridge between China and Japan and also a scapegoat when both of them needed a bridge. But that victim consciousness does not help in this 21st Century’s globalized world. Instead, the role of cultural links should be more highlighted. Among Korean diplomats in and outside Korea, Korean dramas are long been an issue of conversation. Since South Korean diplomats spend a long time to explain that Korea is not a country that developed overnight, they found that traditional and well-made contemporary cultural products are efficient tools to change the national contemporary image. Recently, SBS (Seoul Broadcasting System) one of the main channels reported on a North Korean family that was secretly watching a South Korean movie (SBS News, Jan. 9, 2011). The news quoted North Korean defectors’ testimonies that North Koreans who sell Korean dramas and movies were captured by the North Korean government and classified as anti Communist reactionaries. In fact, party officials may be compulsive viewers as an excuse to censor South Korean seized CDs, according to the same news report. Such examples show how cultural flows occur naturally and how effectively South Korean popular culture penetrates North Korea despite the friction of censorship and punishment.

In this sense, cultural flows like Korean Wave may even contribute to East Asian cooperation in the context of international relations as this paper aims to show. Asian countries have been constantly debating whether they should have become a union in the name of Asia, like the European Community did decades ago. Even though they could not unite (or marry), all of the Asian countries realized that they had to interact peacefully to survive in the new World order. Whether they wanted it or not, economic cooperation became an indispensible task. Human and cultural exchange follows economic cooperation. In the 21st Century, cultural exchange flows more easily through media and internet. National boundaries are rarely significant on websites, but intercultural understanding and ethics are needed in this atmosphere. Therefore, there is a growing awareness of the importance of “soft power.” Economic growth has enabled Asian countries to develop cultural products and has brought commercial exchanges as well as human resource movement. Technological development and the internet have been facilitating an almost invisible “spread” of cultural products. While economic trade requires more detailed regulations, the rights of cultural products are harder to regulate. While lively discussions of proposals for an Asian Community have been underway to confront bigger markets, like the USA and the European Community, on one hand, political issues, tensions and rivalries among countries continue to be undeniable facts. On the other hand, cultural and human exchanges have been increasing independently and seemingly irrelevantly to diplomatic and political debate. In Asian countries, there are accumulated problems of national interests, competition and rivalries through their long history. There also exists a great concern about whether one country could take the initiative of cooperation in the name of an “Asian Community.” Cultural experts have pointed out that cultural integration is more sensitive and difficult to achieve than economic integration. If each country insists on its own exclusiveness, cultural integration will continue to be a dream that will never occur.
Joseph Nye’s Soft Power Concept is one of today’s icons that could replace the realism and liberalism that set up the international order in the 20th Century. Nye (1990, 2004) outlined soft power as a nation’s ability to pursue its goals by attracting others to adopt them. Surely the *Korean Wave* as a soft power may be a diplomatic bridge in a private sector. However, seeing the rising popularity of *Korean Wave*, the policymakers who had traditionally disregarded popular culture as a sub-culture have begun to seek the role of government to link this cultural boom to international trade over the past decades. Myeong-gon Kim, ex minister (2006-2007) of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism defined the *Korean Wave* as “promoting Korean culture abroad”. As Jae-woong Yoo (2007) and Jung-sook Park (2009) argued, the more the people watched Korean dramas, the more Korea’s rating rose. But, the government’s efforts to promote *Korean Wave* boom have produced few tangible outcomes. People often enjoy the contents themselves. As Ki-tae Park (2009) and J.Y. Park insisted in several occasions, the role of government should not be overt because injecting too much nationalism into a non-political, consumer-driven process will eventually draw a backlash from people living in other countries.

Therefore, this article focuses on the process of *Koreanization* (without overlooking *Glocalization*) of the foreign cultures which have penetrated into the Korean Peninsula from the 1870s, and its syncretism through the development of Korea’s popular culture during the 1990s. This will illustrate how and why *Korean Wave* became one of the most loved pop-cultures among Asian fans and beyond. And, this article will also suggest some ways *Korean Wave* can contribute to East Asia’s peaceful cultural cooperation in the future.

**II. Nationalization of the Global & Globalization of the National**

A Singaporean Chua Beng Huat (2004) argues that an East Asian popular culture, linked to the production, distribution and consumption of products such as music, film and television dramas, has been emerging from as long ago as the 1980s, when Hong Kong made noteworthy contributions to this sphere, and other members of the Sinosphere offered glimmers of more dynamic futures to come (Black, Epstein and Tokita et al. 2010:ix). We can remember the world-wide popularity of Jackie Chan during the late 70s and 80s. If Hong Kong’s film noir dominated the 80’s theater and J-pop was a hot issue of the 90’s, Korean TV dramas and K-pop have been driving mass media fans crazy from the end of the 90s and its popularity began to reach the peak from the year 2000.

In fact, it is unnecessary to argue who went first. As I mentioned earlier about Asia’s syncretism, contemporary Asian pop-cultures have developed along a Western style because they have been influenced by Western culture since the late 19th Century. As the Asian region’s pop cultural industries and technology have developed, more than simply imitate the Western style, they also integrate traditional culture into newly accepted one, whether consciously and/or unconsciously, and naturally attract Asian consumers as well as Westerners.

Since Matthew Perry and ‘black ships’ of the US navy arrived in Uraga Bay in 1853, cultural influences should not be seen as simply accidental or inevitable in Japan: new technologies sometimes allow influences to move against prevailing currents (Black, Epstein and Tokita et al. 2010:v). US popular culture began to sink into Japanese life during the Occupation (1945-
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1952), but entirely ‘re-made in Japan’ (Tobin 1992) began to succeed in the domestic and world markets. Japanese cartoons have been exported since the 1960s and Japanese music, fashion and TV have been influential in most parts of East Asia since the 1980s. But it began to drop off from the early 1990s when Japan’s economic bubble collapsed. Whether Japanese products are deliberately intended to appear Japanese or are recognized as Japanese by foreigners, Japanese culture has developed its own particularity that everyone recognizes Japanese.

After the Opium Wars (1840-1842, 1856-1860) between China under the Qing Dynasty and the British Empire, China’s so called “Century of Humiliation” began. Unequal treaties from the Chinese perspective followed European influences as well as increasing the opium trade. Li Hongtu(2004) stated that China’s “modernization” in the fields of industry, agriculture, national defense and science and technology began in order to defeat the West. Patrick D. Murphy and Wu Dingbo collected descriptive studies of a wide range of popular subjects available in English to exhibit extremely diverse and richly complex Chinese traditional and popular culture (Handbook of Chinese Popular Culture, 1994). The book deals with the Chinese lifestyles, food, tea drinking, religion, herbal medicine, sports, Taijiqian and Qigong, Wushu, Chinese mass media, film, traditional Chinese drama, Chinese gallant fiction, comic art, calligraphy, popular rural architecture, and transportation in the People’s Republic of China. It seems to be focused on a version of Chinese traditional culture that satisfies Western taste. Actually, China has been a major importer of Japanese and Korean popular cultural products. But China’s economy is rapidly increasing and many young people are being trained in Korea or in Japan by local entertainment companies. Some Korean entertainment companies also focus on Chinese celebrities seeking the Chinese market, so its future seems promising.

Korean popular culture has always been an undeniably hybrid product shaped by international cultural influences and the sociopolitical conditions within Korea (Jae H. Roe, 2009, American Studies in Asia, Hong Kong University, in preparation). Kee-hyeung Lee (2008:184) also sees the Korean Wave products as a hybrid of Western culture and Japanese genres and formats that reflect cosmopolitan lifestyles, rather than embodying a uniquely Korean creativity. Korean popular music began in 1855 when missionaries like Underwood and Appenzeller introduced religious songs. Since the Korean Peninsula first opened its ports in 1876, Koreans had to accept new foreign trends without being prepared for such encounters. Cinema was introduced to Gojong, Korean King of Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) in 1899 when American traveler Elias Burton Holmes traveled through the Korean Peninsula and filmed the city of Seoul. TV dramas began to appear in the 1960s when the first TV companies like KBS, TBC and MBC were established.

Thus, Asian countries have developed their own syncretism in similar and/or different ways. More examples of other countries and further comment about syncretism are not needed. As mentioned above, Koreans created their own popular culture with new imported technology and succeeded in sublimating their tragic history into popular culture. Such painful history like the Japanese occupation (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953) became materials for dramas (ex. Road number one 2010 MBC) and films (ex. Death Song 1991, The General’s Son 1990, Brotherhood of War 2004, Welcome to Dongmakgol 2005, Rikidozan: A Hero Extraordinary 2004), which sometimes suggest potential resolutions for reunification. Korean dramas are based on the universality of the story adding a visual novelty and sophistication. In Asian countries with Confucian traditions which emphasize education, school dramas have
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relatively high popularity (ex. Master of Study 2010 KBS2). Universal topics like food and traditional medicine gain popularity, too (ex. Princess Hours 2006 MBC, Jewel in the Palace 2003-2004 MBC, Jeungwon 2010 SBS, Dong-yi 2010 MBC). When the drama Jewel in the Palace, that deals with Joseon Dynasty’s palace cook and female doctor, succeeded in Singapore, many Korean restaurants were named after the drama that was launched in Singapore, thereby increasing the popularity of drama and interest in Korean food. Moreover, other Korean historical topics have also emerged together with daily life today. Drama locations have become tourist attractions, and South Korean cosmetic brands used by actresses in successful dramas as models are popping up and competing alongside the famous European cosmetic brands. Korean Airlines and Asiana Airlines, two Korean airlines put such Korean cosmetic brands on their duty free shop lists to be sold on some Korea-Asian countries’ routes because of the models’ success in those regions. Scarves and glasses which famous Korean actor Bae Yong-jun, so called Yonsama in Japan, worn in a TV drama were sold out in Japanese malls. Such is the impact that the Korean Wave can have on regional integration. Because, though it may seem just mere curiosity or interest, these examples could represent the first step of getting to know each other in the private sector.

On the other hand, cultural products could be complicated by political issues. For example, when Korean drama Jumong (2006 MBC), who was a king of Goguyro (B.C.37~A.C.668) was aired in China, the Chinese government interpreted that drama as a confronting to China’s Northeast Asian Project. However, despite all the political disputes, the drama itself was a huge success in China. The existence of anti-Korean Wave groups in Japan, I think, provide evidence of interest groups and their counterparts.

After “Wonder Girls” success in South Korea as well as in the U.S.A., J.Y. Park, the founder and owner of JYP Entertainment has emerged as a symbol of Korean Wave promoters. Under this circumstance, he once said that he felt as if he were wearing the national flag on his chest everyday and questioned how Korean culture could be defined. He confessed that his own concern is how to make his business as profitable as it could be. For him the nationality is not as important as government people would want. Since contemporary Korean pop culture is a hybrid product, he questioned to what degree Korean culture can truly be called Korean.

In July 2010, JYP entertainment established a new female group “Miss A”, which ranked number 1 on M Countdown, one of the famous music lists in South Korea. JYP Entertainment’s goal with “Miss A” was to establish an Asian group crossing borders. So “Miss A” includes two South Korean girls and two Chinese girls, and their first album appeared in Korean and Chinese. “Miss A” symbolizes ASIA and the new trend of Korean Wave. At a John F. Kennedy School of Harvard University conference about Korean Wave, a Japanese Ph.D. student majoring in Korean history asked Park whether Korean government would consider such a business as Korean Wave and support it despite its multinational character. Park wondered too!

People tend to enjoy cultural products for themselves, yet sometimes they are bound to wonder about the origin of the cultural products they purchase as well as any other consumer products. Even the entertainment producers like JYP tend to hide the creator’s cultural identity but the creator’s cultural identity formed by his/her background and experiences should be revealed whether they want it to be or not. Current Korean popular culture has been formed through imitation, appropriation, revision and so on, by external influences and it has generated Koreans’ own sociopolitical significance in its specific time and space, with values
that are found everywhere in popular culture products.

Let’s take the example of *Oriental Express*, a fusion music performance group formed by Korean musicians playing jazz combined with traditional Korean instruments like Haegeum and Gayageum and is well received by national and international audiences. J.Y. Park said he had to put his name as JYP to avoid showing his Korean identity since he plays black music. But he also acknowledged that his personal characteristics are not going anywhere. Therefore, jazz with traditional Korean musical instruments and black music performed by Korean artists can be recognized as examples of how the global has been nationalized and syncretized in Korean society during its history, among many other examples.

Looking at the other side of global and national, for a long time, the Hollywood blockbuster has dominated the world’s entertainment. But recently, Asia has been rising up as a market leader in the entertainment industry with its four billion people. This means Asian countries have also been capturing Western markets rather than remaining mere consumers. This has happened naturally following the Asian countries’ economic growth, apparently unintentionally. Many people say that in the near future Asia will replace the USA, the present market master. Western markets are paying more attention to Asia as North America’s entertainment industry growth has slowed down due to the financial crises, while economic growth in Asian countries helps to make their market more attractive. Japan became the second largest economy in the world after World War II. Highly developed economies of the four Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan) emerged as newly industrialized countries during the 1960s through 1990s and are still the world’s fast growing industrialized economies. In China, a capitalist middle class has been emerging and expanding with the economic opening and reforms. The new consumer generation has emerged in Southeast Asia like it did in Korea in the 1990s, so the Southeast Asian countries are developing and confronting the characteristics of consumer societies. An economic transformation of this region has been taking place very quickly in Asia. As mentioned earlier, now Asian countries are not mere consumers but also very active producers.

During the 1970’s and 1980’s many Korean university students heard Elvis Presley, Elton John, Olivia Newton-John, Bee Gees, Beatles, etc. When Leif Per Garrett visited Korea in 1980, he received enthusiastic and fervent welcome from the teen age girls in spite of Korea’s heavy-handed dictator period during those decades. Soon Korean jazz musicians in US military clubs and young intellectual singers with guitars began to appear and showed the possibility of Western music interpreted by Koreans. When the differences between Western and Korean music were reduced over time Koreans preferred to listen to Western style music performed by Koreans because it was easier to understand and they felt closer to the Korean version of Western music. In addition, a domestic popular culture industry, with industrial growth in Korea, began to develop rapidly. Since there are no natural resources, South Korean industry is based on exportation and due to its small population, compared to other Asian countries, it is difficult to maintain business with the domestic market alone. Furthermore, rapid development of technology could not be satisfied with only the domestic market. Therefore, popular cultural products began to seek and find markets abroad.

It was relatively easy to expand into the Asian market. First, Asian people felt emotionally closer to Korean pop culture than Americans. As mentioned above, Asian countries have shared a hybridization process through Western cultures, so they are familiar with Western style pop culture. However, cultural gaps cannot be ignored. Second, Some Asian countries
had Western imperialistic experiences and many Asian countries were also invaded by Japan and China. But Korea has never once invaded a foreign country, so there is no hostility to Korea.

Third, Korean Wave was ripe in the 90s and took immediate advantage of the www., broad distribution potential. As Black, Epstein and Tokita indicated, from the 1990s, the rise of the World Wide Web has provided an unprecedented capacity for media consumers to produce, circulate, rework, discuss and otherwise actively engage with texts of all kinds. The ever more widespread diffusion of the Internet and the enthusiastic adoption of blogging, online social networking and user-generated content are creating new communities among consumers of cultural commodities. Such fan networks serve as a powerful tool for testing and opening new international markets and have allowed consumers a substantial degree of control over the dissemination and modification of popular texts (Black, Epstein and Tokita indicated, 2008:iv). The internet has been transforming the practices of well-established international fandoms for such East Asian genres as Japanese animation and Hong Kong action cinema in important ways (Jenkins 2002: 238ff.). New communication networks have allowed these forms to be circulated globally outside traditional channels of distribution, which remained constrained by the interests of the companies that controlled them. While such companies had little financial incentive to bring media texts to small international fan or diasporic communities, informal networks of distribution are driven largely by unpaid labour and the contravention of intellectual property laws, permitting economics to be subordinated to audience desires (Black, Epstein and Tokita indicated, 2008:xii).

The colonial period and liberation (1910-1945), Civil War (1950-1953), violent history including industrialization and democratization of fluctuations during the 70s and 80s had a tremendous effect on Korean society. However, these experiences offer multiple inspiration to pop culture producers. Chinese Inmin Ilbo (Oct. 21, 2005) analyzed the success of Korean Wave because of its interest in society, contemplation about life and deep flavor of life, and consistently expressed details of reality. Inmin Ilbo added that the Hollywood-style violence stems from imagination and exaggeration, while the Korean TV dramas and movies show violence to reflect life and its deep association with fierce humanity. But not long ago (Feb., 2005) the same newspaper quoted Bonghwang Cable TV of Hong Kong’s director who said that Korean Wave was China’s shame, because Korean Wave’s fundamental Confucianism is Chinese but the Chinese do not know how to take advantage of it. But Inmin Ilbo’s October report stressed that in the global era, it is important to understand that people from different cultural backgrounds have open and inclusive attitudes, impress others and are impressed by others. Regarding the movement to blockade Korean Wave celebrities in Taiwan, Inmin Ilbo mentioned that import sanction policies violate international trends. Therefore, rather than block imports, it would be better to admit that Taiwanese dramas are not competitive. Taiwanese media has been insisting on reducing cultural product imports, like the Chinese State Administration of Radio, Film and Television has been doing. But broadcasting companies that benefit from Korean Wave are against such import sanctions. This shows how political nationalism clashes with free economic markets in Asia.

Korean Wave is a newly emerging global culture and cultural resource in the area of Asian cultural diversity. At the same time, it offers the possibility of being incorporated into global cultural capital or reshaped as sub-cultural capital due to its local nature. In fact, its glocalization through hybrid and syncretic characteristics has already made it successful.
III. The role of Government

As the Korean Wave’s success increased, the South Korean government became more interested and involved in it. For example, the National Tourism Office under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism emphasized Han-Style as a national brand.1 Han-Style includes Hangeul (Korean alphabet), Hansik (food), Hanok (house), Hanbok (clothes), Hanji (paper) and Hanguk-Eumak (music). Overseas Information Service Centers under the same Ministry utilize Korean Wave more actively. These examples suggest not only the economic but the political impact of Korean Wave as well.

This happens not just in Korea but also in Japan. In the May-June 2002 issue of Foreign Policy, American journalist Douglas McGray published an influential article in which, drawing on Nye, he proclaimed that Japan’s combination of culture and technology allowed it to exhibit soft power in the form of ‘Gross National Cool’. He noted the development of popular culture alongside more traditionally privileged forms (haute couture, architecture and so on) and their consumption outside Japan. Japanese media and officialdom, grateful for McGray’s outsider perspective, avidly took up his label of ‘GNC’. Since a foreigner had argued for Japan’s status as a kingpin of National Cool, it could not be dismissed as wishful thinking (Black, Epstein and Tokita 2008:viii).

Recent nationalist discourses throughout East Asia have emphasized popular culture and media industries and encouraged a new approach to pursuing diplomatic objectives (cf. Berry et al. 2009). These cultural flows, therefore, are not neutral, but highly politicized. Emerging in government and business publications and in the popular form of the mass media, they become a key component of attempts to unify or mobilize national audiences (Black, Epstein and Tokita 2008:viii).

Cultural exchanges can be a window which might pull down the wall between countries, but at the same time, such exchanges often create confrontation when exaggerated patriotism is provoked. For example, importing Japanese pop culture in Korea was prohibited until 1998. As Korean Wave gained popularity in China and Japan since 2000, an anti-Korean Wave also began arising strongly in those countries. As mentioned earlier, China’s and Chinese Taipei’s governments are seriously considering the enforcement of import restriction policies on Korean TV dramas.

Once Joongang Ilbo, one of the main Korean newspapers, warned against the hasty action of the South Korean government (August 30, 2001). It was because the government had decided to build a “Korean Wave Experience Gallery” in Beijing and Shanghai in China and support Korean popular culture exhibits in foreign countries. The newspaper agreed with the purpose, but it seemed that the Korean government had forgotten that China is a socialist country. As a matter of fact, some socialist countries like China and Vietnam have been carefully watching how Korean dramas, pop music and on-line games have penetrated into their countries. They fear the unhealthy influence of pop culture of capitalist countries. In effect, the Korean government’s movement may seem like a war proclamation against the cultural officials of those countries.

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1 http://www.han-style.com/english/
While the *Korean Wave* has drawn global media and academic attention, arguably the most striking transformation it has engendered has been in Korea’s self-perception. Popular discourse, as propagated by the media and encouraged by government and business interests, has frequently come to portray the country as a cultural dynamo whose products have enough attractive power to conquer larger neighbours. Not in vain did the nation call itself ‘Dynamic Korea’ for several years, cherishing a vision of itself as an underdog nation with a can-do spirit that is able to tackle giants (Black, Epstein and Tokita 2008:x). In fact, foreign media does not use the term *Korean Wave* when they present Korean cultural products like films, TV dramas and K-pops, but Korean government officials insist on this term. Foreigners should free to recognize and judge each cultural product individually.

Lee Dong-yeon (2005) defined three phases in the formation of *Korean Wave*’s cultural capital. First is the logic of popular culture industry which means *Korean Wave* contributes to the advancement of Korean cultural industry. The variety of *Korean Wave*’s cultural contents played a decisive role in obtaining the international status of Korean culture industry. It also strengthens cooperation among Asian entertainment companies in production, capital investment and distribution. Second is the logic of nationalism. Media promoting nationalism tend to use *Korean Wave* to benefit the national image, increase the people’s pride in being Korean and enhance national competitiveness. The last phase is that of consumer culture. This means *Korean Wave* does not belong to a monopoly of any culture industry nor government but acts as a gateway that broaden daily cultural interchange among Asian consumers through fan clubs, called ‘fandom’. Fandoms are formed spontaneously and naturally expand communication among Asian culture consumers.

David Leheny points out that the cultural preference for one country does not necessarily mean liking (or favoring) the country (Hallyu in Asia:A Dialogue, John F. Kennedy School, Harvard University, July 16, 2007). Political science professor Ki-jung Kim expressed his concern about excessive commercialism and politization of *Korean Wave* (*The Daily Naeil*, May 19, 2010). He said that it is true that the *Korean Wave* has been playing an important role in projecting the national image but it is very dangerous to use this cultural phenomenon to try to solve diplomatic and political problems or conflicts. Furthermore, the entertainment companies no longer want the government to be a coordinator because when the government tries to coordinate, it seems to become a bureaucratic obstacle for the companies that prefer the freedom and flexibility of market capitalism.

One of the Korean government’s considerations is that the national image does not match the level of economic development. In the Anholt-GMI National Brands Index of 2008 Korea’s national image ranked 33 while its economic level ranked 13. A relatively low level of the national image affects the product prices that do not match with their quality. *Joongang Ilbo* reported that now in many Asian countries, Korean cosmetic brands and plastic surgery tourism are guaranteed (March 22, 2011). According to various media, regardless of fluctuations of the popular cultural product exports, *Korean Wave* itself has been making profound contributions in national image brand making. National image making and company and product marketing should be linked through an overall integrated approach and convergency. But again, the government’s chief role should be that of administrative support. Therefore, instead of using cultural products to resolve immediate international conflicts, it might be better to focus on the national ability to invest in the cultural sector.
IV. Observation

*Korean Wave* is a big soft asset whose impact signifies an important turning point in the private nature of the making, diffusion and projection of Korea’s image at home and abroad. But these private initiatives should not be subjected to governmental pressure for commercial, political or diplomatic purposes. *Korean Wave* should simply be allowed to continue its creative work. Black, Epstein and Tokita mentioned Hyangjin Lee’s research on the Japanese reception of Korean TV drama called *Winter Sonata*. She found that the Korean drama generated enthusiastic Japanese fan clubs and social activity that empowered them to express their desire to travel to Korea, to do Korean Studies, and more (2008:xv).

Cultural interchange can help reduce the wall between countries, but at the same time, often provokes potential confrontation in cases of exaggerated patriotism. Therefore, both producers and government officials interested in cultural interchange must be aware of other cultures’ potential reactions and perceptions of the cultural product. Until now, rather than enjoying each other’s cultural products, it has been more like feeling satisfied to sell products “made in Korea”. The term “conquest” has often been used to describe Korean TV drama, movies and artists’ success in foreign countries, mostly in Japan, as if it could compensate for Korea’s past history of the Japanese Occupation. The entertainment business market has been trying to create more borderless products, while the government tends to emphasize more national sentiments. Korea’s one-way export-oriented policy distorted the real meaning of the term *Korean Wave*, which was born in China when referring to foreign culture for the Chinese. The Korean government and news media attached a nationalistic connotation to it.

One of JYP’s successes in the US was his in-depth preparation in understanding local culture. There are limits to a country’s capacity to appreciate entertainment in a foreign language as Koreans appreciated Western culture before. People naturally want to and need to learn about other cultures, therefore any unilateral export policy should be avoided. Cultural exchange offers people the opportunity to share each other’s cultures and thereby develop meaningful communication among different cultures.

Youngmin Kim of SM Entertainment suggests that China, Japan and Korea should try to make a single market to strengthen market forces. To do this, cooperation is more effective than rivalry. Korea’s productive power, China’s human resources and potential markets and Japan’s capital and marketing offer different advantages. If these three different factors collaborated with each other, Asian markets would benefit from the effective synergy and develop enormous power. But in reality, competition is prevailing due to the priority given to historical and political relationships among these countries. For example, even though *Korean Wave* may be popular in Japan, an anti-*Korean Wave* emerges against it. Likewise, when J-Pop and/or Japanese TV dramas become popular in Korea, some people are questioned and blamed for their lack of patriotism.

To develop an Asian Community like the European Community with its requirements may be politically unachievable. Although many different paths of economic cooperation have already been tried, perhaps it would be better to work towards Asian co-existence in the World order through the combination of economic and cultural cooperation. *Korean Wave* is currently cultivating the Asian countries cultural strength and, at the same time, it shakes hands with global standards. The government should refrain from trying to manipulate this naturally evolved cultural connector that has already achieved cross-cultural regional status. *Korean Wave* should undertake the role of a communication tool to strengthen cultural
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diversity to make it resistant enough to global cultural capital and/or any national capital.

When Japan was damaged by the huge earthquake in March 2011, donations were sent by several successful Korean celebrities and VANK (Volunteer Agency Network of Korea), a non-governmental South Korean organization which provides correct historical information about Korea. Korean celebrities wanted to show humanitarian consideration for their Japanese fans. VANK is a frequent target attacked by Japanese internet users on political issues between Korea and Japan such as Dokdo-Takeshima Island conflict, Comfort Women etc. However, humanitarian issues are different from political debates.

*Korean Wave’s* impact cannot be measured yet, but the potent window already connects Korea and East Asia. Surely, cultural policies are related to national law, therefore the nation’s cultural functions related to those policies. The national government should maintain an intermediary and administrative position while permitting the people to produce their cultural products without governmental pressure, and yet benefit from the support they need to carry out peaceful cultural cooperation with their neighbors. Political integration could evolve from such “imperceptible” cultural interchange.

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