

CONTEMPORARY KOREA No.1

The KOREAN WAVE

A New Pop Culture Phenomenon



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KOREAN
WAVE**

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The Korean Wave: A New Pop Culture Phenomenon

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“Over the past decade, South Korea, with a population of around 50 million, has become the Hollywood of the East, churning out entertainment that is coveted by millions of fans stretching from Japan to Indonesia.”

Lara Farrar, CNN World, December 31, 2010

“Hallyu—the Korean wave—is rolling over Asia with pop music, TV dramas and movies that dazzle audiences from Tokyo and Beijing to Seattle.”

Lance Dickie, The Seattle Times, June 4, 2006

“Egyptian aficionados of Korean pop culture are a dedicated group, eager to have their Korean pop dreams fulfilled and embraced by the community at large. Whether it’s through films, music, books or food, the ‘Korean wave’ has definitely hit Cairo, and is doing so with much fervor.”

Steven Viney, Al-Masry Al-Youm, July 19, 2011

“The booming South Korean presence on television and in the movies has led Asians to buy up South Korean goods and to travel to South Korea, traditionally not a popular tourist destination.”

Norimitsu Onishi, The New York Times, June 29, 2005



PROLOGUE

On June 10 and 11, 2011, the 7,000-seat Le Zénith de Paris, one of the largest venues in Paris and a place where most of the great names of French pop music have recorded concerts, was packed with young fans. The two-day event was a joint performance of singers with the leading South Korean management company SM Entertainment, and it was recorded as the “official” debut of K-pop (Korean popular music) on the European stage. The audience, who had previously experienced K-pop mostly through the global video sharing site YouTube, went wild at the dynamic live performance by their favorite groups.

The fans, most of them in their teens or 20s, were not just French. They had come from all over Europe. It was a virtual representation of the continent, with fans from Great Britain, Germany, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Poland, Latvia, and Serbia. Regardless of their mother tongue, they shouted out the names of each singer, sang along with the lyrics in Korean, and followed the dance moves. The management company shot video footage of the performance, which it posted in real time to its YouTube account. The electric atmosphere was relayed live not only to local fans unable to attend, but to K-pop fans all over the world.

There was intense media coverage of the event. About 20 European media outlets such as French public broadcaster 2TV and Franco-German



Fans cheer on Korean boy band Super Junior at the SM Town Live concert at Le Zénith de Paris.

public broadcaster Arte TV were in attendance, as well as reporters from Asian media like Japan's Sankei Sports and Fuji TV. They showed intense interest in Korean pop music's advance into Europe. The French press seemed surprised by the explosive popularity of K-pop. The next day, the French daily *Le Monde* ran special features on the performance with headlines like "Korean Pop Wave Reaches Europe." Another French daily, *Le Figaro*, wrote that the stars of K-pop, who were enjoying tremendous

popularity among French youth, had begun to expand beyond Asia into Europe, and that Paris had become the beachhead for the European advance of Korea's new generation of singers.



Spanish K-pop fans go wild at the SM Town Live concert.

The term "Korean Wave" ("Hallyu" in Korean) was coined by the Chinese press a little more than a decade ago to refer to the popularity of Korean pop culture in China. The boom started with the export of Korean television dramas (miniseries) to China in the late 1990s. Since then, South Korea has emerged as a new center for the production of transnational pop culture, exporting a range of cultural products to neighboring Asian countries. More recently, Korean pop culture has begun spreading from its comfort zone in Asia to more global audiences in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

In Japan, which boasts the world's second largest music market after the United States, albums by Korean idol groups have performed greatly in the charts almost as soon as they are released. On YouTube, music videos by Korean groups—as well as the countless videos of fans from all over the



French newspapers *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* report on the SM Town Live concert.



The Korean girl band KARA, which is gaining an enthusiastic following in Japan.

world imitating their songs and dances—set new records for hit counts every day. Fans as far away as the Netherlands travel to Seoul just to see their favorite K-pop stars perform on stage. Flash mobs have been held to demand K-pop performances in countries like Peru, Argentina, Poland, Britain, and the US.

Korean dramas, which initially led the Korean Wave, have stretched beyond Asia to enthrall audiences in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Africa as well as Western Europe and North America. The Korean historical drama *Dae Jang Geum* set astonishing records in Iran, where it enjoyed an audience share of 86%, and was shown in Southeast Asia, the Chinese-speaking world, Australia, the United States, Sweden, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Peru, Colombia, Canada, India, Israel, Hungary, and New Zealand. In the United Kingdom, one blogger



Korean historical drama *Dae Jang Geum*, which aired throughout Asia, Oceania, the Middle East, Europe, North America and Africa



International film festivals have shown a keen interest in Korean films. Director Lee Chang-dong (right) and actress Jeon Do-yeon (center) are shown here attending at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival for their film *Secret Sunshine*. Jeon would win Best Actress award.

demanded the BBC show the program. Watching Korean dramas has become a favorite pastime in the Middle East.

Korean films have become frequent guests to the world's four main film festivals and many more international film festivals, where they are winning awards. Korean actors are breaking into Hollywood, while Hollywood targets more and more Korean films for remakes. This is the first instance of a major global exportation of Korean popular culture in history.

Another interesting thing to note is that a simple enjoyment of dramas, pop music, and film has been transformed into a strong preference for other Korean products like electronics, mobile phones, cars, fashion, cosmetics, and food as well as Korean lifestyles. This growing interest in Korean culture has further triggered a drastic increase in foreign tourists visiting the country. More and more people across the globe are learning



Korean singer Rain performing at the closing ceremony of the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games.

the Korean language, leading many universities to open Korean language courses in answer to popular demand to help people better enjoy the Korean culture. In the past, national images of Korea were negatively associated with the demilitarized zone and political disturbances, but now such images are gradually giving way to the vitality of trendy entertainers and cutting-edge technology.

This “charge” of Korean culture has begun to attract the interest of not only the Asian press but the American and European media as well. In December 2010, America’s CNN reported that the Korean Wave had swept over Asia, and that South Korea had become the Hollywood of the East. France’s 2TV introduced the Korean Wave during a 2011 New Year’s Special, remarking that Korea had become a lifestyle model for Asia.

Never in its 5,000 years of history has Korea enjoyed so big a spotlight on its cultural frontiers. Even as the country experienced legendary economic

growth with the “Miracle on the Han” beginning in the 1960s, Korea remained a “culture importer,” content to accept culture from the United States, Europe, and Japan. That very same country is now “Asia’s Hollywood,” with Korean cultural booms taking place not only in Asia, but also in Europe and the Americas.

This book seeks to shed light on the Korean Wave, which has grown even stronger in recent months, and to analyze the backdrop against which the wave was born and developed. We will also look at why the Korean Wave has received such an enthusiastic welcome through the testimony and analysis of locals on the ground.

In an age when the world has become a global village and nations necessarily have a mutual impact on one another, culture cannot flow in just one direction. The Korean Wave—a recreation in Korean style of culture accepted from abroad—is not just “Korean,” but a byproduct of clashing and communication among several different cultures. Another goal of the book is to promote an understanding of the Korean Wave that allows it to serve as a vehicle for communication between diverse cultures.



CNN article on the Korean Wave, describing Korea as the Hollywood of the East.



Chapter One

BIRTH OF THE KOREAN WAVE

Korea has a history that stretches back some 5,000 years, and in that time it has developed its own unique culture. Starting in the late 19th century, however, the nation was sucked into the vortex of a chaotic world history, suffering the ills of colonialism for many years. The end of colonialism was quickly followed by a civil war in the 1950s. After the Korean War, which destroyed much of the nation's economic and social infrastructure, Korea had to start from scratch in almost everything. Korea embarked on efforts to catch up with developed countries.

Culture was no exception to this. Korea has long been used to imports and open-minded about foreign products. Ancient Koreans absorbed Buddhism, Confucian teachings and Chinese traditions. More recently, Korea began to absorb American lifestyles and education, European

philosophy, and Japanese modernity. During two wars—one at home and another in Vietnam—soldiers of allied forces brought popular and modern culture in from the United States and other countries. Koreans were hooked to the flood of imported music—American folk, lush ballads, rock, French chansons, Italian canzone; Latin and Cuban music, and Japanese enka—and local singers eagerly mimicked the tunes and styles to ride on the explosive popularity of foreign adult contemporary music in Korea. A lineage of American folk, balladry, R&B, British rock, and Japanese group “wannabes” sprouted.

By the 1980s, when South Koreans were able to afford leisure and entertainment after decades of nonstop industrialization at a galloping pace, more American and European pop culture streamed in. With the democratization wave that began in the late 1980s, regulations on the

The variety show *Show Show Show*, which ran on Korean TV for 19 years from 1964 to 1983. The show was extremely popular for introducing the Western variety show format to Korea.



AFKN and Korean Pop Culture

AFN-Korea—or, as it was called until 2001, American Forces Korea Network (AFKN)—is the largest of AFN’s Pacific TV operations. AFN



provides American military personnel stationed overseas with American TV and radio broadcasting. Until recently, Koreans could watch it, too.

Still known as AFKN by many Koreans, AFN-Korea has been operating since 1957, and is in fact Korea’s oldest TV station, preceding KBS by four years. In the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, when Korean TV and radio offered mostly domestically produced programs, AFKN provided a variety of high quality entertainment, and in the process had a large impact on Korean pop culture. One Korean music critic even included “AFKN” as one of the cultural keywords of the 1960s. This was because AFKN allowed viewers to see TV shows, films, music, cartoons and sports programmes that were impossible to see on local stations KBS and MBC. Local youth began emulating American TV and music stars, as did Korean musicians and actors, who took their cues from what they saw and heard on AFKN.

importation of foreign culture were relaxed. It became trendy to hear American and European pop songs on the radio, American dramas on TV, and Hollywood and Hong Kong films in the theaters.

Starting in the mid-1990s, however, things began to change. From the radio, which used to play mostly foreign pop songs, Korean pop music flowed all day long, its genres diverse and its quality greatly improved. Record shops were full of sophisticatedly designed albums by Korean artists. Foreign albums, which just 10 years earlier would have been given pride of place, were banished to a corner. The music industry was pumping out big-time local artists. In less than a decade, Korean pop recouped its

home turf. On countless cable TV channels, Korean dramas were playing 24 hours a day, and on the weekends the theaters were full of people who had come to see Korean films. Films were drawing audiences of 6 million or more for the first time in Korean cinematic history; the records kept being broken until 2006, when another Korean film recorded an amazing 13 million viewers, equivalent to almost 30 percent of the nation's population at the time. Korea had become one of only a handful of nations that consume more locally produced cultural content than foreign content. And Koreans were not the only ones who began to enjoy Korean pop culture.

Birth of the Wave

In June 1997, China's state-run CCTV ran the Korean drama *What is Love*. The family drama—which cheerfully depicted the tensions and resolutions of a husband and wife from two very different families, one liberally minded and one conservatively minded—was the first Korean drama to be

broadcast nation wide throughout China. Chinese audiences were enthralled by the freewheeling attitudes, the likes of which they had never seen under socialism, and the sophisticated lifestyles of modern-day Koreans. Chinese audiences could also more easily relate to Korean dramas, which are largely faithful to family-centered Confucian values, than



What is Love

“The Korean TV series What is Love had been a huge success in China. The Chinese audience had mostly watched TV soaps from Europe, America, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. After What is Love, the Chinese audience fell for Korean dramas as if they had discovered a whole new world. In 1998, Chinese teenagers colored their hair after the Korean idol group H.O.T. In 1999, a shopping center selling Korean products opened in downtown Beijing. By 2003, Hyundai Motor Beijing was turning out cars and soon becoming as big as American and European brands in China.”

Hong Qingbo, editor of *Dangdai*
“Tenth Year of Hallyu,” *Hankyoreh*, November 26, 2007

they could to Western dramas, in which individualist values are stronger. At its height, *What is Love* recorded a 15% audience share, at the time the second highest-ever rating for a foreign program, heightening Chinese interest in Korean dramas.

A Wish Upon a Star, which was broadcast in China in 1999 after becoming a hit with its first broadcast on Hong Kong's Phoenix TV, kept the fever for Korean dramas going and turned actor Ahn Jae-wook into a big-time celebrity in the Chinese-speaking world. After the success of Korean dramas, Korean singers, too, began entering the Chinese, Hong Kong, and Taiwanese markets. The male duo Clon and



A Wish Upon a Star



The Korean acts that represented the first generation of the Korean Wave: H.O.T., S.E.S., Clon, Baby V.O.X., and NRG (clockwise)



“idol groups” H.O.T., NRG, Baby V.O.X., and S.E.S. were a strong presence on the charts in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Thousands of fans flocked to their concerts, while local radio began covering Korean music trends. The Korean Wave provided a bridge over the mutual distrust and disinterest that had persisted between Korea and China for the half-century since the Korean War. One Korean diplomat even said that Korean dramas and songs did in less than a year what diplomats could not despite decades of effort.

The Beginning of the Wave in Japan

The Korean Wave, which showed just how much one drama could change popular attitudes, continued in Japan. In 2003, NHK TV ran the Korean drama *Winter Sonata*. The result was an unprecedented cultural phenomenon. The drama, which told the tale of a man and woman tied together by the fate of first love, met a surprising response from Japanese viewers, and from middle-aged women in particular. It was given several encore runs, and for its fourth run in 2005, NHK—rather extraordinarily for Japanese TV—ran it in the original Korean with Japanese subtitles to preserve the original atmosphere of the show.

The leading actors of the show, including Bae Yong-joon, Choi Ji-woo, and Park Yong-ha, became huge stars in Japan. Thanks to the devoted love shown by his character in the show, Bae, in particular, became a cultural phenomenon. Earning the Japanese nickname “Yon-sama” (“Yon” from his name “Yong-joon,” with the Japanese honorific “sama” added onto it), he grew as popular as the show itself. When Bae visited Japan in April 2004, about 5,000 Japanese women flooded Tokyo’s Haneda Airport, bringing it to a standstill. When one episode of *Winter Sonata* was canceled to make way for a TV special on the Japanese prime minister’s visit to North Korea,

Actor Bae Yong-joon and actress Choi Ji-woo of *Winter Sonata*.



“I’ll make great efforts so that I will be as popular as Yon-sama and be called Jun-sama.”

Former Prime Minister of Japan Junichiro Koizumi during August 2004 elections for the upper house of Parliament.

NHK was inundated with over 3,000 phone calls protesting the move. The Japanese press coined all sorts of words for it—the Yon-sama Syndrome, the Yon-sama Social Phenomenon, the Yon-sama Religion, the Yon-sama Disease—and at one point there were about 50 Japanese journalists in Korea just to cover Bae.

The Yon-sama Syndrome was virtually unprecedented in Japanese society, and social critics, sociologists, and psychologists began offering their analysis. *Winter Sonata* pulled at the heartstrings of highly educated, middle-class women in their late 30s and older, and even the wives of prime ministers. The pure and noble love shown by Bae in the show evoked long-lost feelings of girlish sensitivity and nostalgia in the hearts of

“Fads come and go in Japan, but this one touches upon several deep issues in Japanese society and its relationship with South Korea. In a society gripped by a pervasive malaise, where uncertainty and pessimism fill magazines with headlines about men and women who don’t marry, don’t have children, don’t have sex, Yon-sama seems to touch upon the Japanese nostalgia for an imagined past, and upon middle-aged women’s yearning for an emotional connection that they lack and perhaps believe they cannot find in Japan.”

Norimitsu Onishi, *The New York Times*, December 23, 2004

middle-aged women, providing them with an escape from Japan’s etiquette-conscious and emotionally restrained social atmosphere. A Japanese entertainment magazine analyzed the Yon-sama Syndrome as showing that Korean male actors possess a “romantic charisma” rare on Japanese TV: they are polite, yet know how to make a woman feel good. Professor

(Left) Some 5,000 Japanese fans fill an airport to welcome “Yon-sama” Bae Yong-joon to Japan. (Center) Malaysian fans hold up signs and take photographs at an event to mark the airing of an animated version of *Winter Sonata* at Japan’s Tokyo Dome.



Japanese women taking photos in front of a Bae Yong-joon banner.



Kohari Susumu of Shizuoka University said there were even 50-year-old housewives who want to immigrate to Korea, something Koreans could not believe.

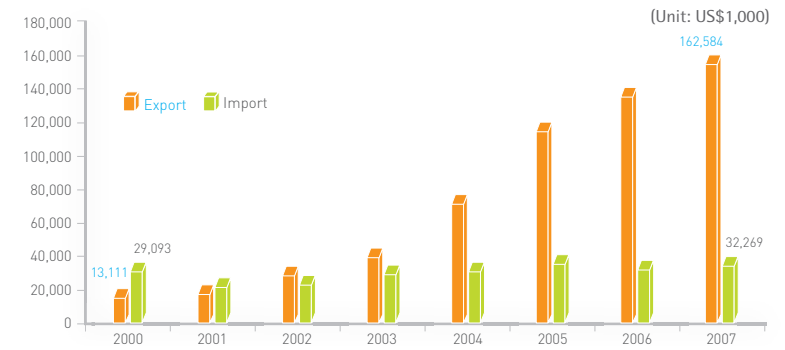
The Yon-sama Syndrome actually changed Japanese people's opinions about Korean people. Japanese now viewed Koreans as polite, generous, and sophisticated. One economic research institute estimated the economic impact of *Winter Sonata* at 84 million won in tourism to Korea and 3 trillion won in DVD sales in Japan. Locations that appeared in the drama, such as Chuncheon, Namiseom Island, and Yongpyeong Ski Resort, became "Korean Wave" tourism destinations.

Korean dramas are considered the first real Korean cultural export to Japan, a nation at that time generally regarded as having a more advanced media and entertainment industry. This was a major development, as previous East Asian cultural exchanges involving Japan had been virtually one-way. The breakthrough of Korean dramas, however, ushered in a period of more balanced media and entertainment exchange in East Asia.

A young Japanese couple marries at Chuncheon's Namiseom Island, a filming location for the drama *Winter Sonata*. The wedding, the first ever at the island, made quite a splash in Korea.



Exports and Imports of Korean TV Programs



(Source: Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2009)

The Wave Goes Global

The drama *Dae Jang Geum* provided an opportunity for Korean dramas, which had garnered popularity in China, Japan, and Southeast Asia, to expand beyond Asia to markets in other continents. *Dae Jang Geum*, also known as *Jewel in the Palace*, depicted the ups and downs of an orphaned girl who becomes the king's chief physician. Based on a real historical figure, it takes place against the backdrop of 16th century Joseon Korea. In its first run in Korea in September 2003, the program enjoyed an audience share of 57%, the highest ever for a Korean drama. The beautiful clothing of the Joseon royal court, the restorations of Joseon architecture, and the colorful palace cuisine sparked global interest in Korean traditional culture. The information on Korean traditional medicine satisfied the global trend toward a healthy living. After first airing in Taiwan in 2004, the drama enjoyed high ratings in Hong Kong and China, touching off a "Dae Jang Geum Fever" in the Chinese-speaking world. In Hong Kong, the show even beat out the 2003 football match between Hong Kong and Spain.



Thai pizza advertisement featuring a character from the Korean drama *Dae Jang Geum*.



One British blogger made a splash by pressing the BBC to run the Korean drama *Dae Jang Geum*. The blog, entitled "Show DJG on BBC," was run by London blogger Alice Bennell with the aim of gaining support for her campaign to get the drama aired.

Streets became empty when the show ran, and newspapers would make colloquial references to the 'Jang Geum spirit' and philosophy. Meanwhile, Korean food and Korean products enjoyed unprecedented popularity in these countries. The editor of a Chinese monthly pointed out that Korean food had become a hot item in China, a veritable miracle in a country that takes pride in being a culinary superpower.

This "miracle" replicated itself in Iran. The country's state-run TV Channel 2 began broadcasting *Dae Jang Geum* under the title *Jewel in the Palace*. It recorded truly impressive ratings of 86% nationwide, and more than 90% in the capital of Tehran. The Chosun Ilbo, a Korean daily, reported that thanks to the program, Iranians had grown more favorable in their attitudes toward Koreans. When Iranians saw people who appeared to be Korean on the street, the paper reported they would suddenly approach them, shake their hands, and say, "Yang Gom (the Iranian pronunciation of the drama's title character, Jang Geum), kaili khube (very good)!" In November 2011, about 100 high-ranking Iranian government officials, including officials from the foreign ministry, oil ministry, and

national broadcast company, attended a reception at the Korean embassy in Tehran marking the end of the show. The Korean ambassador at the time remarked that it was the first time so many high-ranking officials had attended such a function.

Dae Jang Geum was also run in other Middle Eastern states like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. In fact, the drama has so far been aired in dozens of countries, including (but not limited to) China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, India, Turkey, Israel, Nigeria, Romania, Hungary, Bosnia, Russia, Sweden, Colombia, Peru, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand.

The epic drama drew even the most skeptical audiences in Japan, China, and Taiwan and helped to allay male resentment of the exclusively female fan base of Korean dramas and celebrities. Middle-aged Japanese men sat



(Left) The drama *Dae Jang Geum* on the cover of a Japanese magazine.
(Right) The popularity of *Dae Jang Geum* proved a boon to Korean traditional food.

with their wives to watch the drama when they returned home from work. Bilateral ties with Taiwan, which had turned icy after diplomatic relations were suspended, once again warmed, as symbolized by the re-opening of direct flights. Korean restaurants gained immense popularity in Hong Kong in the wake of the series, which had dramatized royal cuisine. After the dramas was rebroadcast for the fourth time in Singapore, the number of Korean restaurants in the city mushroomed from ten to sixty.

K-Pop Joins the Wave

As TV programs shed new light on modern Korean lifestyles, social characteristics, and the development of the Korean entertainment business, Korean popular music and artists steadily gained recognition and popularity, too. Starting in the late 1990s, Hong Kong-based Channel V began to feature Korean pop music videos. Following the success of H.O.T. in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China, drama stars like Ahn Jae-wook and Park Yong-ha, boy bands NRG, Sechs Kies and Shinwha, and girl band Baby V.O.X. held concerts to be packed houses in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Since

then, Korean singers and bands have been recording albums in Chinese and Japanese and regularly holding concerts in Beijing, Hong Kong, and Tokyo. Korean pop music emerged as the next epicenter for pop culture in Asia—a status long enjoyed by Japan—with Asian teenagers rushing to buy concert tickets, CDs, and posters and even learning Korean to sing along with karaoke version.

BoA is one of the first Korean singers to turn genuinely global and earn cult status throughout Asia by gearing her career more to Japan and the United States than to Korea for recordings and live performances. She has become highly successful in the Japanese market, and became the first foreign artist ever to reach the number one spot in Japan's Oricon weekly album chart seven times. The members of TVXQ, also known as Dong Bang Shin Ki in Korean, still enjoy the title of “The Kings of K-Pop” and their group remains one of the most successful in Asia. The group has drawn armfuls of awards in Korea and across the whole of Asia. In Japan, they became the first ever foreign artists to top the Oricon weekly single chart nine times and setting a record for the highest ever sales in the first week of release. They are widely recognized as one of Asia's top groups.



(Left) The boy band NRG (Right) Sechs Kies



BoA (Left), TVXQ
Source: SM Entertainment

Queen of Korean Pop Music: BoA



Source: SM Entertainment

BoA is a Korean singer, active in South Korea, Japan, and the United States. Sometimes referred to as the “Queen of Korean Pop Music,” BoA was discovered by SM Entertainment talent agents when she accompanied her older brother to a talent search. In 2000, after two years of training, she released *ID; Peace B*, her debut Korean album.

Two years later, she released her debut Japanese album, *Listen to My Heart*, becoming the first Korean pop star to break through in Japan following the collapse of barriers that had restricted the importing and exporting of entertainment between the countries since the end of World

War II. At the end of October, 2008, BoA debuted in the United States with the single “Eat You Up.” She released her debut English-language album, *BoA*, on March 17, 2009.

BoA’s multilingual skills (she speaks Japanese and English along with her native Korean and has recorded songs in Mandarin Chinese) have contributed to her commercial success throughout East Asia. She is the only non-Japanese Asian to have three albums sell more than one million copies in Japan, and is the only artist to have had seven studio albums reach the number one position on the Oricon charts since her debut. BoA was also cast in the female lead role of the Hollywood movie *COBU 3D*, due for release in 2012.

Rain

Rain (born Jung Ji-Hoon) is a South Korean pop singer, dancer, model, actor, businessman, and designer. Rain’s musical career includes seven albums (six in Korean, one in Japanese), 19 singles, and numerous concert tours around the world. His acting career began in 2003, when he won the KBS Best New Actor award for his role in the drama *Sang Doo! Let’s Go School*. In 2004, Rain won the KBS Excellence in Acting award for his role in the drama *Full House*. After starring in *A Love To Kill*, he acted in his first Korean film, *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK* (2006), which won the Alfred Bauer Prize at the Berlin International Film Festival.

In 2007, Rain was included among *People’s Most Beautiful People* in its “First-Time Beauties 2007” section. In 2008, he acted in his first American film, the Wachowski Brothers’ *Speed Racer*, where he played Racer Taejo Togokahn. He made his starring role debut in *Ninja Assassin* (2009) as the main character Raizo. *Ninja Assassin* made him the first Korean to win an MTV award.





Chapter Two

THE NEO-KOREAN WAVE

'Korean Invasion?'

On August 12, 2010, a human wave some 3,000 strong descended on the street in front of Shibuya's 109 Department Store on Tokyo's most bustling avenue. The mass of people had heard rumors that the Korean girl group KARA would be holding a so-called "guerrilla gig" to mark the release of its debut single in Japan. The concert—held without any particular advance notice—drew so many more fans than expected that the performance, originally planned to last 30 minutes, had to be suspended just three minutes in for safety reasons. Many Japanese print and broadcast media outlets, including Sankei Sports, gave the event wide coverage. As soon as KARA's debut single "Mister" was released on the same day, it went straight to No. 5 on Oricon's daily chart, surprising industry officials. All three singles released subsequently rose into the top five, rewriting the



business world, being selected as cover models by influential weekly magazine *Nikkei Business*. Their “1st Japan Arena Tour,” which began in May 2011, drew a total audience of 140,000, while their first full album in Japan sold more than 500,000 copies, setting an all time record for foreign artists. The Japanese current events weekly *AERA* reported that K-pop could cause a “Korean invasion” in which Korean groups would dominate the Japanese music market like the British groups—led by the Beatles—that dominated the American music market of the 1960s.

Girls' Generation / Source: SM Entertainment

history of Japan's best-known chart. This event is regarded as the first signal flare sent up marking the start of a new Korea fever heating up Japan. And other K-pop groups, like the nine-member girl group Girls' Generation, the five-member male hip-hop group Big Bang, the five-member male group SHINee, and the six-member boy band 2PM, broke into the Japanese music market, the world's second largest, where they attained great popularity.

Girls' Generation, in particular, drew an audience of 22,000 to the showcase performance that marked its entry into the Japanese market and received intense interest from the Japanese media, including making the headlines on state broadcaster NHK's News Watch 9. The group caught the attention not only of the Japanese general public but also of the country's



The major Korean daily JoongAng Ilbo ran an article in January 2011 analyzing a total of 923 music videos by Korean singers from Korea's three biggest management companies (SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, JYP Entertainment) that had been posted on YouTube, the world's largest online video site. According to the analysis, internet users from 229 countries worldwide had watched the videos 793.57 million times in 2010. By continent, the numbers broke down to 566.27 million from Asia, 123.47 from North America, and 55.37 million from Europe. By nation, Japan came in first with 113.54 million, followed by Thailand with 99.51 million and the United States with 94.87 million; the rise of the United States as a major Korean Wave market was remarkable. A number of Middle Eastern nations, too, had watched the videos 300,000 times or more, including Egypt (about 630,000 views) and Kuwait (about 414,000 views). There were a good many names relatively unfamiliar to Koreans on the list as well, including Montenegro (22,000 views), New Caledonia (14,000 views) and Guadeloupe (10,000 views). Also noteworthy was the fact that North Korea, where Internet access is tightly controlled, still managed 224 hits.

The New Wave

The Korean Wave that began in the late 1990s included several export products, including dramas, music, film and food, but the primary axis of this phenomenon was dramas. Geographically, the impact was focused on Japan, the Chinese-speaking world (including China itself), and Southeast Asia. This began to change greatly right around 2010, however. As we can see with the Paris concert and the YouTube numbers cited above, K-pop—led by so-called “idol” groups—is spearheading a completely new trend while expanding the borders of the Korean Wave beyond Asia to Europe, North America, South and Central America, and elsewhere. In particular, the Internet and social media have effected innovative transformations in the way the Korean Wave is spread, while the speed of the expansion—and its impact—have quickened and deepened so dramatically that no comparison with the Korean Wave of old is possible. The age and class structure of Korean pop culture consumers have grown much more diverse, too. The Korean Wave has taken to classifying this new, transformed Korean Wave as the “Neo-Korean Wave.”

Big Bang at MTV Japan's first-ever
MTV World Stage Video Music Award Japan ceremony.



Photo panel of 2PM at the Shibuya branch of Tsutaya,
Japan's biggest DVD/CD sales and rental shop.



The Korean Wave as Seen Through YouTube Hits for Korean Music Videos

793,574,005 Total Hits

(as of 2010)



* This illustration is based on an image originally published in the JoongAng Daily on January 16, 2011.

Source:



Most Popular Idol Groups



Source: SM Entertainment

Girls' Generation

Formed in 2007, Girls' Generation is a nine-member girl band. In addition to two full Korean albums, the group has also released three Korean mini-albums, one full Japanese album, and numerous singles. They broke into the Japanese market in 2010 with Japanese remakes of their 2009 hits "Tell Me Your Wish (Genie)" and "Gee" under Nayutawave Records, a part of Universal Music. The sensation Girls' Generation caused in Japan was echoed by success not only across the rest of Asia, but as far as Europe and the United States. • Members: Taeyeon, Jessica, Sunny, Tiffany, Hyoyeon, Yuri, Sooyoung, Yoona, and Seohyun (SM Entertainment)

Source: SM Entertainment



Super Junior

One of Korea's most popular boy bands, Super Junior was formed in 2005. In addition to their singing skills, Super Junior's members possess many other talents as MCs, actors and DJs. They also divide into various

smaller units based on various concepts and styles, such as Super Junior-M, which is aimed at Chinese-speaking fans. The group has released over 20 records. Super Junior is popular in Asia, Europe, the United States, South America and the Middle East, making them one of the key players in the global spread of the Korean Wave. (SM Entertainment)

Kara

This girl band takes its name from the Greek "chara," meaning "joy." In addition to success in Korea, the group has also enjoyed success in Japan, where Oricon named them Japan's No. 1 Rookie Artist of 2010 and the Japan Gold Disc Awards selected them as New Artist of the Year (International) • Members: Park Gyuri, Han Seungyeon, Nicole Jung, Goo Hara, and Kang Jiyoung (DSP Media)



Source: DSP Media

Source: SM Entertainment



SHINee

This award-winning contemporary boy band debuted in 2008 with their hit promotional single, "Noonan Neomu Yeppeo (Replay)" ("Girl, You're So Pretty (Replay)"). Since their debut, they have cut two full albums and three mini-albums. They've even gotten their own reality show and become Korean fashion icons. SHINee recently became the first ever Asian group to give a showcase

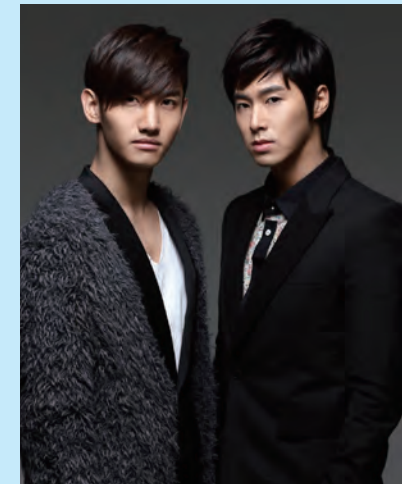
performance at London's Abbey Road Studio, immortalized by The Beatles, confirming their global popularity. • Members: Onew, Jonghyun, Key, Minho, and Taemin (SM Entertainment)

Source: SM Entertainment

TVXQ

An acronym for Tong Vfang Xien Qi ("The Rising Gods of the East"), this boy band came together in 2003 under the SM Entertainment label. They have played a major role in popularizing K-pop overseas. In 2005, they broke into Japan under the Rhythm Zone label as Tohoshinki. The group has scooped up awards in Asian countries such as Korea, Japan, China and Thailand, and is widely recognized as one of Asia's top groups, with numerous fans across the world.

• Members: U-Know Yunho (leader), Max Changmin (SM Entertainment)



2PM

Managed by JYP Entertainment, 2PM is a six-member boy band. 2PM is one of the two subgroups branched out from the eleven-member boy band One Day, the other being 2AM. In 2009, it was named Best Male Group and Artist of the Year at the M.net Asian Music Awards. • Members: Junsu, Junho, Nichkhun, Taecyeon, Wooyoung, and Chansung (JYP Entertainment)



2NE1

This hip-hop/pop girl group's name means both "To Anyone" and "21," the latter meaning "New Evolution of the 21st Century." Since it is debut single "Fire" in 2009, the group has released two EPs and one studio album. Thematically, 2NE1's music explores independence and female empowerment, such as in songs like "Go Away" and "I Don't Care." • Members: Bom, Dara, CL, and Minzy (YG Entertainment)

Source: YG Entertainment



Wonder Girls

Debuting in 2007, the Wonder Girls set the music scene on fire with their hit song "Tell Me." It was the first of four consecutive No. 1 singles. The group also found success in the American market in 2009 with an English version of their hit single "Nobody," which made the Wonder Girls the first Korean group to break into Billboard's

Hot 100. Interestingly, the group's members were selected by audition.

• Members: Sunye (Sun), Yeeun (Yenny), Sohee, Yubin, and Hyerim (JYP Entertainment)

f(x)

This girl group made its debut in 2009 with the hit single "LA chA TA." Their distinctive name comes from the mathematical notation for "function," and they take pride in their ability to perform in a variety of styles and music. They enjoy great popularity in Korea, Asia as well as in other parts of the world.

• Members: Victoria, Amber, Luna, Sulli, and Krystal (SM Entertainment)



Source: SM Entertainment

Big Bang

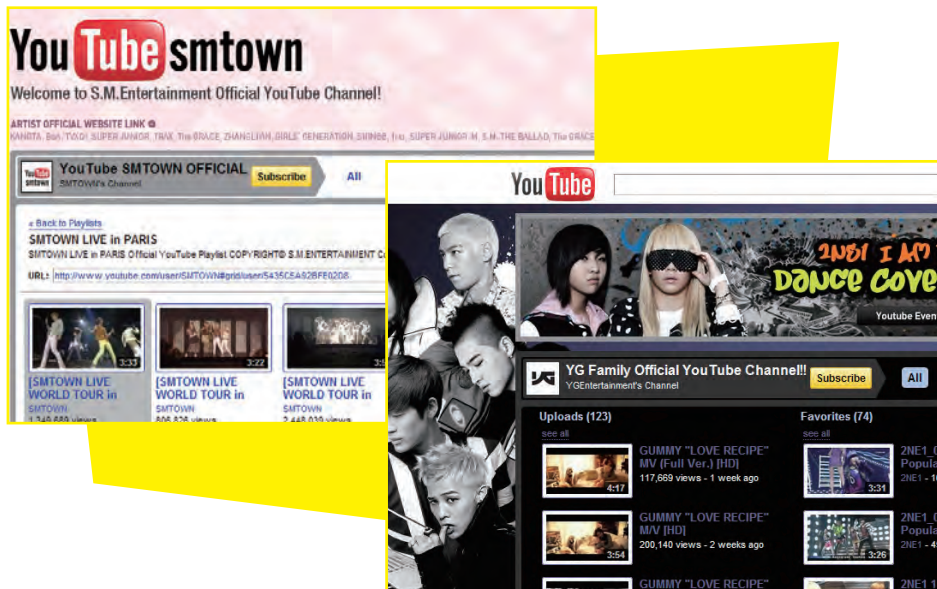
The world got to watch the formation of this boy band in 2006 through the TV series *Big Bang Documentary*. The group has gone on to commercial success, releasing several successful albums and singles and winning the Artist of the Year award from the M.net KM Music Festival and the Seoul Gayo Daesang Award. *Time* magazine described them as one of the "most promising" South Korean acts to venture into Japan.

• Members: T.O.P, Taeyang, G-Dragon, Daesung, and Seungri (YG Entertainment)



Source: YG Entertainment

The thing that sets the Neo-Korean Wave apart from the original Korean Wave is that its propagation has been much more lively and up-to-date thanks to the Internet. Nearly universal access to high-speed Internet service, interconnectivity, and development of a variety of mobile devices are—along with the rapid growth of social media like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter—effecting innovative transformations in the ways in which cultural content is presented, consumed, and distributed. Accordingly, in recent years, most Korean Wave fans, too, have come into contact with and/or consumed K-pop or Korean dramas for the first time through the Internet. People flocked from all over Europe to see performances by Korean idol groups that had never released an album or held a performance in Europe, and Korean K-pop groups were able to sweep the Japanese charts simultaneously with their debuts because consumers were already aware of their music through their videos on YouTube.



The Internet Connects the Wave Fast

The Internet has become an especially influential medium throughout the world. The Korean management agencies driving the K-pop craze have for the last several years been making active use of social network services like Facebook and Twitter and operating their own channels on YouTube. Videos of the famous girl group Girls' Generation, provided on SM Entertainment's YouTube channel, are the most widely loved videos globally. One of those videos, "Gee," had been watched 42 million times as of May 2011, with viewers from all over the world, including Thailand, the United States, Japan, and Europe.

YG Entertainment, another management company leading the K-pop craze, provided a live YouTube broadcast of a showcase marking the release of a new album by the project team "GD & TOP," composed of hip-hop group Big Bang members G-Dragon and Top; the program was watched simultaneously by 390,000 people worldwide. The speed of propagation is getting faster every day due to increasing numbers of social media consumers and fans of K-pop. Soon after the Paris pitch, f(x)'s teaser clip for the new song "Hot Summer" drew more than a million hits within days. It would have taken many months for its video to gather that many views before.

In this digital age, when the world is connected via the Internet, the

Big Bang member Taeyang.



effort and costs required to promote Korean singers overseas has dropped dramatically. In late February 2011, Big Bang announced its fourth mini-album *Tonight*; in the United States the next month, the album was No. 7 on *Billboard's* Heatseekers Albums chart (listing albums by new singers) and No. 3 on its World Albums chart. This surprised industry officials, as little promotion work had been done in the United States, and the album was in Korean, not English. It was a startling development when contrasted with the case of the Korean girl group the Wonder Girls, who broke onto

the *Billboard's* Top 100 a year earlier only after spending a year performing in the United States. *Tonight* reached No. 6 on the United States' iTunes store, and the music video of its title track was watched one million times within two days of being released on YouTube. Big Bang vocalist Taeyang saw his first album hit No. 2 on iTunes' R&B sales charts in the US and No. 1 in Canada within just a month of its online release in 2010. Within a few hours of its US iTunes release, Taeyang's *Solar International* album topped charts in Japan, Canada, and Australia.

Flash Mobs Around the World

A good example of the Korean Wave's growing reach would be the passion displayed by European fans at Le Zénith de Paris, where the SM Town World Tour concert was held on June 10 and 11. Initially, only one performance was planned, but when all 7,000 seats were sold out in just 15 minutes, the hundreds of fans who were unable to buy tickets held a flash mob to demand an additional show. The flash mob built an impromptu stage in the square in front of the Louvre Museum and put on what seemed like a celebration, with participants going on stage to

sing and dance like their favorite Korean stars. Videos of the event went straight onto YouTube, where they became big news. In just a single day, SM Entertainment decided it would add an additional performance.

Influenced by the events in France, another flash mob demanding a K-pop performance took place in Peru a few weeks later. About 500 Peruvian K-pop fans gathered in Lama's Monterrico district carrying pickets with their favorite K-pop singers' name written on them. The flash mob turned into a Korean cultural experience with Korean food, dancing, and even a Taekwondo demonstration. The members also sent messages of support, by emulating the stage routines of various K-pop groups.

(Top) K-pop fan club holding a flash mob event in the Palermo district of Buenos Aires, Argentina, to demand a performance by K-pop singers. (Bottom) K-pop fans in Mexico hold a demonstration asking to be invited to Korea.





The biggest English-language website on K-pop, Allkpop.com, gets 3 million hits a month.

Fans all over the world are “following” Korean singers on Twitter. Siwon and Heechul (members of the boy band Super Junior), Jaejoong and Junsu (members of the trio JYJ), and 2AM’s Jo Kwon all have over 200,000 followers on Twitter, where they communicate with overseas fans in English. Regardless of where they are, be it California, Hanoi or Cyprus, K-pop fans watch the music videos of their favorite signers on YouTube and trade gossip with other fans on Twitter. South American K-pop fans hold regular meetings online and offline to share information about the most recent albums and concerts or promotional activities of their favorite singers.

K-pop appears to be generating more fans and popularity abroad than at home, and the Neo-Korean Wave is sprawling across the globe with a life of its own. The biggest English-language websites on K-pop—Allkpop.com, Soompi.com, and PopSeoul.com—generate more traffic than major Korean music portal sites M.net and Melon. The most visited of these, Allkpop.com, gets 3 million hits and 70 million page views a month. Over 40% of the website’s visitors are in the United States; another 10% are in Canada, 10% are in Singapore, and 10% are in other countries such as

Australia and the United Kingdom. Founded by two Korean-Americans in 2007, the website has played an important role in sparking the online K-pop craze, particularly in North America. Thanks to the K-pop boom, within three years of its launch it had become one of the most visited websites in the world—in 2010, social media website Mashable selected it as its “Must-Follow Brand,” putting it ahead of other leading American brands. Also, K-pop group Super Junior was selected among all global artists as Mashable’s “Must-Follow Personality,” while the “Best Web Video” award went to Jay Park, a former member of 2PM.

The Fun of Copying

There is a rather distinctive phenomenon being discovered among K-pop fans around the world: fans immediately become hooked and loyal by using K-pop as a means of enjoying themselves. The number of “cover dance” videos by K-pop fans being uploaded onto YouTube far exceeds the number of videos by K-pop singers themselves. The “cover dance” is an extraordinary cultural phenomenon in which fans imitate the dances of their favorite singers. Just as countless people imitated the “Moonwalk” of “King of Pop” Michael Jackson during the 1980s, the cover dance is becoming another fad through which the fans of the world can enjoy K-pop. K-pop videos, with their cheerful melodies and dynamic group dances, simply make people want to follow along. K-pop fanatics around the world are constantly uploading videos of themselves doing the same dances in time with the songs of Korean idol groups. Sometimes, there are even dance teams that show more skill than the original artists themselves, and teams that reinterpret dances on their own. It is in this

Source: DR Music



Cover videos copying the dances of girl group RaNia to their song "Dr. Feel Good" on YouTube. Cover dances have become a unique culture and a particular trend among K-pop fans.

way that K-pop is regenerating itself through social media. K-pop, with its catchy beats and synchronized group dance moves, provides the perfect recipe for a cover dance. The international 2011 Cover Dance Festival—part of the Visit Korea Year event—gathered participants from 38 countries, with over 16 million views as of early July for the first round of competition, which ran until July 24.

When a star audition program on Korea's MBC TV network teamed up with YouTube for a global hunt for an Asian pop star, thousands of applicants from all over the world sent in homemade videos to vie for a place in the talent show and join the mainstream K-pop scene. YouTube expressed surprise at the enthusiastic response from applicants from as far away as Chile and Finland who eagerly showcased their devotion to and knowledge of K-pop. Hundreds of aspiring K-pop fans lined up to apply for the global auditions in Thailand, China, Japan, and the US in the hopes of winning one of the 50 tickets to the finals in Seoul. Among the finalists were Americans, Japanese, and Chinese who sang and danced Korean songs in front of judges and Korean audiences live on TV. Eighteen-year-old singer/songwriter Shayne Orok of Toronto, Canada, made the top three finalists in the TV singing competition, which was judged by online voting. Without knowing the language, he wowed Korean audiences with his magical voice and reinterpretation of Korean

Local youths flock to a global audition by SM Entertainment in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The audition drew 1,400 people, a testament to the popularity of K-pop in Central Asia.



songs to become a new teen idol. A contestant of Korean ancestry from Yanbian, China, Baek Chung Kang won the competition and wept at having realized the “Korean Dream” of so many of his fellow Korean-Chinese people. That foreign talents participated in the show, and audiences around the world participated in the voting, underscored just how international a phenomenon K-pop had become.

Distance No Longer a Barrier for K-Dramas

Websites that provide and share information about Korean dramas, programs, and films have mushroomed over recent years. With witty reviews, plot descriptions, actor information, rating recounts, and gossip, Dramabeans.com is playing a role in introducing English-speaking readers to the world of Korean dramas. Regardless of age or gender, American fans visit the site to post about their favorite moments in recent episodes of Korean dramas.

Thanks to sites like DramaFever.com and DramaCrazy.com, American viewers can watch good-quality videos of Korean dramas, legally with English subtitles. Since August 2009, DramaFever.com has offered streaming services of Korean TV content aimed at American and Canadian viewers. It currently has over 1 million subscribers, of whom 70% are non-Asian. With the demand for Korean content continuing to rise, it formed a partnership with the mainstream video streaming site Hulu.com in May 2010, and now exclusively provides Korean content. Hulu.



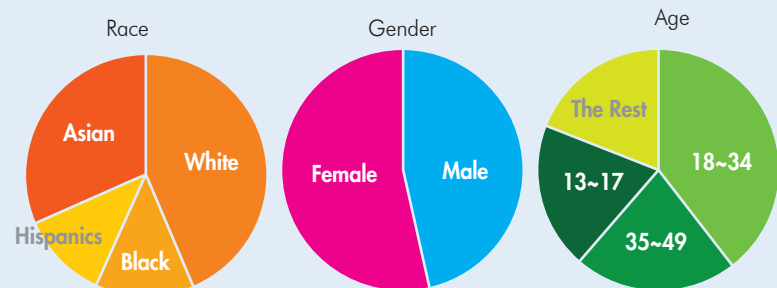
com—a joint venture between American broadcasters NBC, FOX, and ABC—provides streaming videos of American TV programs. These sites broadcast their shows at almost the same time they are broadcast in Korea. Recently, SBS TV’s hit program *Secret Garden* caused a sensation in English-speaking markets similar to the one it caused in Korea.



DramaFever.com, an American website that introduces Korean dramas.

Who Watches Korean Dramas?

According to statistics from DramaFever.com, most people in the United States who watch Korean dramas are non-Asians. Whites make up the largest percentage at 40%, followed by blacks at 18% and Hispanics at 13%. Asians make up the rest. Surprisingly, the gender ratio was roughly equal, with women making up 52% and men making up 48%. By age, 39% were between 18 and 34; 25% were between 35 and 49; and 17% were between 13 and 17.





Chapter Three

WHAT'S KOREAN POP CULTURE GOT?

The global pop music market had been driven by the United States, Europe, and Japan. Now K-pop singers have joined the scene and are causing a new sensation in this market, broadening their fan base worldwide. The young people of the world are registering their approval, even if they cannot comprehend the meaning of the songs when they are sung in Korean. So what is so special about Korean cultural content that it attracts a global audience?

One of the reasons K-pop has come to be loved globally is perhaps that the manner in which the public enjoys music has changed greatly in recent years. In the past, people bought CDs or listened to music on the TV or radio, but nowadays, thanks to the development of YouTube, people search for the music they want on their own. Moreover, because YouTube

provides more music in video rather than just audio format, music is now a multi-sensory experience synthesizing sight and sound. With its dynamic dances, attractive singers, and strong melodies and rhythms, K-pop is breaking down the language barrier to charm music fans worldwide.

Korean public broadcaster KBS once did an online poll on K-pop targeting YouTube users. In the poll, in which 12,161 internet users from 78 nations participated, respondents cited music, dance, and the good looks of the singers as the top reasons they have come to love K-pop. In particular, 46% responded that they enjoyed the music. K-pop site Allkpop.com also conducted a poll of its visitors as to why they loved K-pop, netting similar findings.

K-Pop: 'Music of Fusion'

Appealing Sound

The music of Korean idol groups is praised for blending appealing melodies and strong beats. Particularly pleasing to the listener are the “hooks”—short, catchy riffs that are repeated throughout the song. Some popular music critics say these are effective in getting songs stuck in your head, making you follow along subconsciously. These so-called “hook songs” are prevalent among the K-pop songs now popular in Europe. The listener can easily sing along, even if he or she does not know the words.

Another factor that cannot be ignored in K-pop’s success overseas is that the sound quality of K-pop has improved to a surprising extent. One of the things that allowed the sound quality of K-pop to match that of American and European pop is the activity of former DJs as songwriters, who sampled music from different genres of the global pop music world,



American hip hop singer Missy Elliott poses with Korean hip hop group Epik High.

grafting these samples onto their own musical creations. One also cannot ignore the efforts of writers and producers who have accurately determined global music trends while conducting exchanges with the mainstream pop music worlds of the United States and Europe. They helped craft music with a wide, global appeal.

Collaborating with the World

It is not just the response of fans and music chart ratings that show the changed status of K-pop in the global pop music market. More and more world musicians are contacting Korean singers with an interest in working together. American DJ and music producer Diplo said in his blog that Korean pop was having a tremendous impact on the Asian music market, in particular citing Big Bang, which he praised as mixing elements of New Kids on the Block, Jay-Z, Miley Cyrus, and Justin Bieber in one single group. Recently, many of K-pop songs are being written or produced by globally renowned songwriters, too. The Girls’ Generation song “Genie” was the work of the European songwriting group Design Music, and “Run, Devil, Run” is the work of American busbee, Briton Alex James and Swede Kalle



American producer Teddy Riley, famous for his work with Michael Jackson, Lady Gaga and other American pop stars.

Engström. American producer Teddy Riley, known for his production work with Michael Jackson, Lady Gaga, and the Spice Girls, became a topic of conversation by writing and producing the debut album of multinational girl group RaNia. will.i.m, the star producer and rapper of the Black Eyed Peas, described the four-member

hip-hop girl group 2NE1 in various interviews and Tweets as a potential “superstar across many countries” and is producing songs for the group.

Dancing Makes Music Fun

Dance is another K-pop selling point. Idol groups are composed mostly of teenage girls and boys, each with his or her own personality and charisma. The group dances performed by these teams of attractive youths overwhelm the viewer. Globally renowned choreographers have been invited from the United States and Europe to create choreographed

Korean B-Boy Dancing Goes Global

In the early 70s, African-American and Puerto Rican teens developed a new style of dance called “breaking” in New York City’s South Bronx. Breaking is a main component of hip-hop culture, and is represented by its practitioners, known as “b-boys.” This dance form was introduced to Korea in the early 90s as hip-hop music fused with Korean pop. The younger generation of Koreans became wildly excited at this new aspect of culture. The movements expressed with the human body managed to transcend borders and appeal to Korea’s image-conscious youth. Language did not matter to them, because the dance moves alone conveyed universal emotions and ideas that were easily interpreted by all. Because breakdancing conveys the dancer’s thoughts and feelings, it has become a new medium of expression for this young generation.

Although the idea of b-boy dancing originated in New York City, it has traveled across the globe to Korea and transformed into a new form of art. Keeping pace with Korea’s changing culture and society, b-boy dancing co-evolved into a new mode of expression and language; the younger generation has begun to realize an Asian version of the b-boy flair. In Korea, practitioners showcase their skills and

capabilities for the public at popular youth-centered meeting places like Hongdae (the area around the borders of Hongik University), and have demonstrated their skills at the international competition Dance of the Year in Germany.

Since 2001, Korean teams such as Gambler, Last for One, and Extreme Crew have won first place honors, creating for themselves a new reputation in the dancing world. As a new type of communication, the movements of Korean b-boys express Korea today. Every move the dancer makes reflects his identity as a Korean. Even the small movements from Korea’s top b-boy dancers bear distinctive cultural characteristics and contain unique aspects of Korean life. Through these contributions to the genre, breakdancing has begun to communicate to the world about Korea.

(Adapted an article by Lee Ju-won at www.dynamic-korea.com)



Korean B-boys

dances that maximize the groups' images and the dramatic impact of their music, and the groups put on picture-perfect performances after tireless practice. This is why so many internet users are uploading their own cover dances. One American fan said the groups appear perfect in the videos; when you watch them, you want to follow along. Another said what makes K-pop great is that it makes the viewer want to sing and dance along, and that it makes the music a fun experience.

Leading Trends

The impeccable looks and fashion taste of Korean singers are also playing a role in winning over teenage fans worldwide. Posters of K-pop stars are peppered throughout clothing shops in Japan, China, and Southeast Asia. Bookshops are full of magazines introducing the latest style trends in the K-pop world. K-pop stars are propagating Korean fashion trends across



Big Bang
Source: YG Entertainment

Asia and other regions. Consumer marketing banking on the popularity of Korean Wave style has followed across the globe. One example was the Japanese fashion brand UNIQLO holding a limited sale around 10 Big Bang-themed items, including T-shirts and hooded jumpers, ahead of the group's Asia Tour in February 2011. All products sold out within 15 minutes at 825 shops nationwide; one can get a sense of the popularity of Big Bang in Japan by looking at the long lines that assembled in front of the shops ahead of opening time.

Agencies: Preparing Artists for the Global Stage

Behind the birth of this globally seductive K-pop are the efforts and strategy of Korean management companies. Management companies discover potential talents at a very young age. Moreover, their search is not confined to Korea. They hold regular auditions in the United States, Canada, China, Japan, and Thailand to find talents who can perform on the global stage. Two stars discovered via international auditions were 2PM's Nichkhun, an American-born Thai, and f(x)'s leader Victoria, a ballet major from Qingdao, China. This talent is then molded into multi-skilled global artists trained in singing, dancing, songwriting, foreign languages, speaking, and even acting. It is simply the natural result of these years of effort and training that foreign producers now gush at the talent of Korean idol groups whose members can both sing and dance.

SM Entertainment, one of the leading management companies, has worked hard over the last 10 years to develop advanced music techniques through exchange with overseas songwriters and producers in order to create high-quality music. To produce great dance numbers, it invites famous choreographers to create the best dances for the music, and

to create the best visuals it selects unique concepts for each group. After the SM Town Paris Tour performance, the company invited about 50 famous European songwriters and producers to hold a conference. The goal of the conference was to allow K-pop groups to inform European songwriters and publishers about their own musical styles and build active exchange and ties. American producer Teddy Riley, who attended the event, even said he believed K-pop was now a movement, and not simply a musical genre.



Nichkhun (Thailand) and Victoria (China), two foreign-born artists active with Korean groups.

Well-Rounded Entertainers

Maxim Pake, head of the French K-pop fan club Korean Connection, said in interviews that the winning quality of Korean artists is that they are “total entertainers” capable of singing, acting, dancing, and performing with great ease and style. Korean entertainers undergo rigorous training and are required not only to receive voice and dance training in a variety of genres, but to pursue studies in acting, language, and different cultures. As soon as they debut, they are confident in presenting themselves on variety shows and in performances at home and abroad. But global talents who can crack into the “big” markets are born through years of investment, hard work, and perseverance in overcoming the disadvantages that come with being an Asian minority. They have the common characteristic of

K-Pop as I Know It

An Interview with Maxim Paquet

Maxim Paquet is a head of French K-pop fan club Korean Connection. Korean Connection was formed in 2010, principally by students studying Korean language at the Centre Culturel Coréen in France. Using Facebook, the club has gathered 3,300 fans. These fans once organized a flash mob to demand an extension to the SM Tour’s Paris Concert.

When did you first come into contact with K-pop?

I discovered it three years ago, when I heard Big Bang’s “Lies.” A French friend that I met at the Centre Culturel Coréen introduced me to it. I watched the group’s music videos on YouTube, and from that moment on I had completely fallen for K-pop.

Why do you think French people are going wild over K-pop?

I think K-pop is “total entertainment.” K-pop artists sing well and dance well, too. They are trained perfectly at their entertainment companies, so they always put on a top show. I think the first reason they are popular in France is their high standard of singing. Also, just when French people were getting tired of American and French pop music, they came across these fresh pop songs and shows, in the exotic language of Korean, and were seduced by them. Unlike American pop, K-pop is not sensational or violent, and the singers work hard on their songs.

What do you think K-pop must do to become the world’s hottest music?

It’s important that it maintains its individuality as K-pop, and is not excessively influenced by other music. Entertainment companies will need to invest in artistic creativity and innovation. And they must make K-pop known in the West, particularly in Western Europe, where people are not used to idol music like that of girl groups. That is also the reason why Korean Connection is pursuing an active promotion campaign in European popular media.

(Adapted an interview by Wang Gil Hwan at Yonhap News)

versatility, being successful in both screen and stage performance.

Rain has gained global fame in both acting and singing. He acted in the Wachowski Brothers' *Speed Racer* (2008) and *Ninja Assassin* (2009), making him the first Korean to be named "Biggest Badass Star" at the MTV Awards. He was twice honored with *Time Magazine's* "100 Most Influential People Who Shaped the World" status in 2006 and 2010. In 2007, he was included as one of *People's* "Most Beautiful People." He took his "The Legend of Rainism" tour to Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and finally Las Vegas in December 2009.

Lee Byung-hun, who enjoys huge stardom in Japan and China, has been dubbed one of the "Four Kings" along with other popular actors Song Seung-hun, Won Bin, and Jang Dong-gun. Lee successfully entered Hollywood in the role of Storm Shadow in the American action film *G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra*, which grossed \$302 million worldwide in 2009. He also

won multiple awards with his single in Japan.

Ryu Shi-won is active in both acting and singing in Japan. Jang Na-ra has been busier in China, starring in Chinese TV dramas and shows and releasing Chinese-language songs. She played the lead in the Chinese drama *Bratty Princess* and was the only non-Chinese national to join in the 2008 Olympic song "Beijing Welcomes You." The girl group KARA got its own show in Japan. *URAKARA*, which first aired in January 2011, is a drama series on TV Tokyo revolving around the five members playing themselves searching for love.

K-Pop Legacy Goes Way Back

Korea inevitably came under the influence of Japanese contemporary music during the colonial days. It came to embrace American folk music, pop, British rock, and the Italian canzone when the US and its allies sent large forces during the Korean War. After the Vietnam War, Korean musicians made Western tunes and styles their own and traveled to Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries as well as Europe for international music festivals and tours.

Patti Kim, who gained popularity for her version of "Till," sang on a Las Vegas stage in 1963. Cho Yong-pil became a sensation through his performance at the Asia Music Forum in Japan in 1980. His single "Return to Busan Port" sold more than a million copies in 1975. His popularity crossed the Pacific. His Japanese version ranked among the top 10 songs on the Japanese TV charts in 1980s, and he became one of Japan's top ten domestic newsmakers in 1983. His song was remade by more than 30 Japanese singers. He performed at New York's Carnegie Hall in 1980 and in Beijing in 1988, a first for a Korean artist. Lee Mi-ja and Nam Jin, who adapted Japanese enka tunes, released albums in Japan and performed in the country in 1985.



Lee Byung-hun, who starred in *G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra*, and Jang Dong-gun, who starred in *The Warrior's Way*.



K-Pop Turning Points

Shin Joong-hyun and Seo Taiji Break New Ground

In December 2009, 73-year-old Shin Joong-hyun, widely revered as the godfather of Korean rock, became the sixth guitarist to receive a custom-made guitar from Fender Musical Instruments corp., the world's most renowned guitar manufacturer. Since 1964, Fender has been dedicating custom-made guitars to musicians who have made irrefutable contributions to rock music. Shin is the first Asian to receive this honor shared only with Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Yngwie Malmsteen, and Eddie Van Halen. In an interview with the JoongAng Ilbo in July 2010, Shin said he believed he received the tribute guitar dedicated to famous rock stars despite his lesser fame because he incorporated Korean elements and helped to diversify rock music. Shin was among the first to introduce rock n' roll to his countrymen—Elvis Presley, Bill Haley, and Duane Eddy numbers—from the stages of U.S. Army bases in the late 1950s, where he was called “Jackie Shin.” Soldiers from bases in the countryside came in trucks to see his gigs in Seoul. AFKN and other American media ran features and articles on the rising Asian rock talent. But he was no simple mimic of American and British rock and band music. In 1961, he formed the first Korean rock band, Add 4. He released his first album in 1964 and started a career as a songwriting musician—the first in the country. His classic hits “Beautiful Mountains and Rivers” and “Beauty” brought him popular fame and recognition in the 1970s for his unique guitar style and psychedelic Asian sound. But his fame

was cut short in 1975, when he was arrested for marijuana use back in the 1960s and his music was banned after he turned down a government request to write a song glorifying then-President Park Chung Hee. After he was freed to perform and the ban

Korean rock legend Shin Joong-hyun receives a custom Fender guitar from Fender vice president Richard McDonald.



lifted on his songs following Park's death, the rock trend was replaced by a blend of dance, hip hop, and pop music. Although Shin officially retired in 2006, he remains a legend among rock descendants and is being rediscovered amid the recent limelight on Korean pop music. He is still playing and making music on his Fender guitar.

On the other side of the musical axis in the late 1970s, Korean mainstream broadcasters held annual international music festivals, introducing a variety of world music to the home audience and broadening the musical genre. Since then, Korean musicians have experimented with heavy rock, pop music, Jamaican reggae, hip-hop, dance, and European electronic tunes. By the 1990s, Korean music began to sound original and defined. The arrival of Seo Taiji & Boys in 1992 turned a page in Korean pop music, as the group pioneered the strong beats and stunning stage performances of K-pop that are now gaining global appreciation. The group incorporated American hip-hop and urban rap music into Korean traditional rhythms. Seo—referred as the “President of Culture”—was behind the songwriting, staging, and performance of his albums, each of which broke new ground, presenting contemporary dance, midi, heavy metal, alternative rock, and gangster rap—all in a hybrid form with the original Western styles and including outspoken lyrics on controversial social issues. In a TV interview, pop music critic Lim Jin-mo said Korean popular music had been good in the past, but lacked the exposure K-pop enjoys today. Seo Taiji's band would have been a global superstar if it had had today's Internet accessibility. Despite the band's short four years of activity, Seo Taiji & Boys left a lasting legacy and lineage of quality dance, hip-hop, and alternative rock bands. The Boys—Lee Ju-no and Yang Hyeong-seok—established separate record labels. Yang would turn YG Entertainment into one of the big three agencies, producing successful groups like Big Bang and 2NE1.

Source: Seo Taiji Company



Singer Seo Taiji, who was so influential he was nicknamed “Korea's President of Culture.”

Localization

Over the last decade, entertainment agencies over the last decade have trained and groomed artists largely to promote and present music overseas. At Paris conference, SM Entertainment founder and producer Lee Soo-man described his company's strategy as "culture technology." As with any technology, the global standard had been imported and studied to be redeveloped into a different hybrid technology. Lee said that, unlike information technology, culture technology is more subtle and complicated, as it primarily works with invisible assets and enigmatic human resources and their growth potential. The agencies closely studied the consumer needs and selling points in individual markets to produce artists who could win the hearts of locals. Subgroups like Super Junior M were created especially for China. KANGTA, a singer with the now-defunct idol group H.O.T., formed a duo with Vanness Wu of Taiwan's F4. SM signed a contract with Chinese R&B singer Zhang Liyin and launched her career in China after a Korean debut. "The final state of Hallyu would be sharing and returning added value through localization," Lee said in an interview with KBS.

Keeping the Korean Wave fever alive in neighboring regions has been a bigger challenge. Asian governments have become increasingly protective after Korean dramas and music began to eat away at their entertainment market and trigger cultural trade deficits with Korea. So the Korean industry began its efforts to familiarize and strike closer ties with the local market. Korean artists flew into Asian cities to meet their fans and make direct entries to the Japanese and Chinese TV, film, and music industries. KANGTA was recently cast in the leading role of the upcoming Chinese drama *Di Jin* as the Chinese emperor. *Di Jin*, produced by Shanghai

Dongjin Cultural Communications Co., is based on an original novel by Mu Fei revolving around power struggles within a Chinese royal family. Popular Chinese actress Shin Yan Fei was cast to play KANGTA's female counterpart. KANGTA would be the first non-Chinese person to play the role of a Chinese emperor. Another Korean actress, Lee Tae-ran, was cast in the drama as well.

Korean actors and actresses are no longer foreign on Japanese and Chinese programs. Jang Hyeok played the lead in a Chinese remake of *All About Eve*, a Korean drama series that originally aired in 2000, but was rebroadcast repeatedly in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong due to its undying popularity. The Chinese adaptation aired in September 2010 on China's Zhejiang Satellite TV, scoring ratings of about 40% in just three days after its premiere. It became one of the top three shows in all of China in terms of ratings.



Source: SM Entertainment

K-Dramas: 'Healthy Power'

While K-pop may be the primary agent of the Neo-Korean Wave, Korean dramas have been the driving force behind the Korean Wave in many countries. It is surprising that dramas made in a small nation in East Asia are transcending language and cultural barriers to cross the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, impacting lives in the Americas, Europe, Africa, and elsewhere.

Many observers attribute the growing number of fans around the world to the emotional power of Korean dramas. The K-dramas offer interwoven themes of family, romance, friendship, martial arts, war, and business, and they are seen as able to deal with love relationships in a way that is more tender, meaningful, and emotional than sensual. The level of emotional investment in human relations and social realities constitutes a major source of popular pleasure that continues to draw women to Korean dramas. What also makes those dramas appealing is their dramatization of "Asian sensibilities," including family values and traditional emotive subtleties that are warmly embraced by cross-generational viewers in Asian countries.

A closer look shows that different dramas are popular in different countries for different reasons. Americans find Korean dramas relaxing and cheerful; Europeans find the plots uncomplicated and romantic. Asians, meanwhile, discover lifestyles and trends they wish to emulate. The subtle repression of emotions and intense romantic passion without overt sexuality resonates further with viewers in the Middle East. Muslim countries find the dramas "safe": they are less explicit compared to American ones, and adhere to traditions. Some say that Saudi Arabia's public broadcaster ran *Dae Jang Geum* and *Jumong*, two Korean dramas



Dream High is a drama series about six students at an art high school who work to achieve their dreams of becoming stars in the music industry.

depicting life in Korea's old royal courts, with at least the partial intention of reinforcing support for and loyalty to Saudi Arabia's monarchical government. For similar reasons, other monarchical regimes in the region—the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, for example—also ran the two programs.

The Popwatch segment of *Entertainment Weekly*, an American entertainment magazine, wrote about Korean dramas, "They can appear simplistic and downright campy to an American viewer, but they are also fascinating and weirdly comforting in a 'movie-of-the-week' kind of way—and they are not afraid to whack you over the head with an important moral lesson or social critique."

Positive Vibes

While Asians enjoy the common Confucian tradition and against-all-odds themes in Korean historical epic dramas, Western audiences have discovered and loved the refreshing humor, fanciful plots, and sincerity in Korean dramas. Korean dramas have aired in Mexico, Chile, Peru, and Brazil since 2002, with Peruvian fans being the largest and most devoted contingent. *My Lovely Kim Sam-soon*, and several other dramas were broadcast on major television networks in Peru. The country's national Channel 7 showed Korean dramas in its prime time nine o'clock slot instead of the news. Korean dramas presented a pleasant and comforting alternative to the racier telenovelas, Latin American soap operas that often feature sexual and sensational topics and scenes.

The same appeal has moved European audiences, with the Internet serving as the primary channel for distributing Korean dramas and music. Hong Suk-kyung, a professor at the University of Bordeaux's School of Journalism, wrote a paper after studying the Korean Wave phenomenon in Europe for the last three years. She said she had discovered over 20

websites by European fans devoted to dramas and music. Subtitles for Korean dramas were usually produced in 15 different languages through the voluntary efforts of "fansubbers," a group of fans who translated the Korean-



My Lovely Kim Sam-soon



Boys Over Flowers

language dramas into English and other languages, with the popular *Boys Over Flowers* being subtitled into 20 languages just three days after it was first aired.

Most fans are working women in their 20s to 40s who were first attracted by the "manga" (Japanese comic and animation) features in Korean dramas but were later hooked by the romanticism and modern Cinderella storylines, which are hard to find in European TV series these days. They offer fantasy, adventure, comfort, and a break from reality at the end of a demanding day. Unlike the carefully engineered and brain-teasing plots in American TV series, Korean dramas are easy to relate and contagious in a "feel good kind of way," allowing viewers to laugh and cry along with the actors, a fan wrote in website. A Swedish fan added that it is good to "laugh with somebody rather than at somebody on TV."

Family Entertainment

The strongly family-oriented themes and confident energy of Korean dramas have had a far-reaching influence in sectarian Muslim societies. The Islamic audience was introduced to Korean dramas at a time when it was discovering satellite TV for entertainment and growing tired of mostly propaganda-oriented programs on local TV networks. The Iranian government, worried about the influence of Western culture and media in living rooms, banned satellite TV, but it could not compete with the fast proliferation of satellite dishes. It decided to buy foreign TV programs to lure audiences back, but had trouble selecting appropriate ones.

South Korean TV dramas offered a good option, with decent clothing as well as moral and religiously neutral values. In a rigid society where



Jumong is an epic story set during the ancient Goguryeo Dynasty.



Jumong star Song Il-gook is greeted by the Iranian press.

watching TV is a family ritual, viewers preferred “cleaner” Korean dramas to Hollywood products. Different generations came together while watching another Korean epic drama, *Jumong*—a story following the self-discovery of a hero who overcomes obstacles to become the founder of the ancient Goguryeo Dynasty. The heroic and noble theme delivered a powerful and positive energy to audiences of all ages. The drama was such a hit that many Iranians chose its soundtrack as their cellphone ringtones. When LG Electronics invited the drama’s lead actor Song Il-gook to Iran, he was met with a top celebrity reception.

Jumong and the similar historic hero-themed drama *Emperor of the Sea* enjoyed equal popularity across the Middle East—in Lebanon, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan—for similar reasons. *Emperor of the Sea* was broadcast by Turkish Radio and Television for an hour every Sunday night and was ranked one of the top 30 shows. The fad crossed Central Asia to reach Russia and Eastern Europe and traveled as far as Bhutan and Zimbabwe.

Chapter Four

THE KOREAN WAVE IN OTHER FIELDS



Korean Films

Today, South Korea is one of the few countries where Hollywood productions do not enjoy dominance in the domestic market. Since the turning point of the 1999 film *Shiri*, which is considered the first Hollywood-style big-budget blockbuster in Korea, the Korean film industry has been turning out box office hits at home and abroad. Local products account for more than 50 percent of the movie industry. The quality of technology, storytelling, acting, marketing, and distribution has all developed to rank among the best in Asia. It has led to a critical rediscovery of Korean cinema. Korean films, directors, and actors and actresses have been receiving international recognition and awards. Moreover, production



Shiri

companies have turned global and giant, joining up with Hollywood counterparts and stars for multi-million-dollar film projects. Storylines and stars are actively sought out by foreign filmmakers. A host of Korean films had been remade in Hollywood, Japan, and China and Korean stars were cast in Hollywood, Chinese, and Japanese films. Korean film has moved beyond the periphery and underdog stage and is marching into the global mainstream.

Turning Point

Once dominated by Hollywood and Hong Kong films, Korean cinema turned a new corner in the late 1990s as a new generation of filmmakers influenced by European and American films emerged with new ideas and experiments. Released in 1999, *Shiri* served as a tipping point in many ways, including budgeting, ticket sales, and storyline limitations. The movie, which is about a coup attempt by North Korean agents in Seoul, was seen by 6.5 million people nationwide, beating out Hollywood box office hits like *Titanic*, *The Matrix*, and *Star Wars* in Korea. It earned 1.85

billion yen in Japan alone and was the top-grossing film in Hong Kong. The film touched on the still-sensitive issue of unification and drew critical and popular interest from Western audiences.

The all-time box office hit *The Host* (2006) epitomized everything Korean artists did best—parody, dark humor, fearless political and social critique, visual effects, scale, and great performances. Despite being characterized as a horror/monster film, the movie touches upon the hypocrisy of politicians and the media as well as the American military presence in Korea while returning to a favorite theme—the importance of a family.

The way Korean filmmakers have incorporated Western filmmaking technology and styles to create unique sensitivity and emotional expression and deliver a characteristically Korean originality has drawn interest from filmmakers, audiences, and critics around the globe. Asian audiences feel sympathy rather than resentment at the way Korean movies

outperform Hollywood ones in their markets, while Western audience find the unexpected plot twists, humor, and morals in Korean films inspiring.

In fact, more and more major Hollywood studios are turning to the Korean industry for original scripts, talent, and ideas. Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy* (2004)—runner-up at the 2005 Cannes Film Festival—will be remade into a Hollywood



The King and the Clown



Oldboy

film by Spike Lee. Steven Spielberg and Will Smith initially discussed collaborating on the remake. Foreign films are restricted from broad theatrical distribution in the United States, and remakes serve as the best window to allow American and other English-speaking audiences a taste of Korean filmmaking.

Hollywood Discovers Korea

A recent success was *The Priest*, a supernatural action film released in May 2011 that raked in an estimated worldwide gross of \$66.4 million by the end of the first month of its release. From the plot and scenes of vampires and demons fighting in the American Wild West environment, general audiences would hardly know the movie is based on a comic series by a Korean. Hyung Min-woo's web-based comic series was translated into 15 languages, selling more than 1 million volumes in 30 different countries. In an interview with the Seoul Economic Daily, Hyung said that strong plots that can win over overseas audiences come from a deep understanding of foreign cultures and intercommunication with Korea's own unique

emotions and sensitivity. As music with strong, catchy melodies and beat, Korean pop incorporates dramatic elements. That dramatic emotion has resulted from contact with the embracing of various culture. This kind of emotional expression can better appeal to global audiences through universal imagery and the audio language of music and comic book elements.

Another long-awaited project in the global pipeline is a remake of Bong Joon-ho's box office hit *The Host*. Universal Studios has bought the rights to remake the film, which made \$314,488 on 71 screens in a limited release in North America, for a healthy per-screen average of \$4,429, according to BoxOfficeMojo.com. Other famous remakes were *The Lake House* (2006), starring Oscar-winner Sandra Bullock and Keanu Reeves, which was adapted from the

2006 Korean film *Siworae*, about two people who live in the same house in different time periods and communicate through a shared mailbox, and *My Sassy Girl* (2008), released under the same title with up-and-coming actors Elisha Cuthbert and Jesse Bradford. The psychological thriller *Possession* (2009), starring Sarah Michelle Gellar and Lee Pace, was based on *Addicted*, and *A Tale of Two Sisters*, a horror movie based on



The movie *Priest*, based on an graphic novel by Korean cartoonist Hyung Min-woo.

The Lake House: A Hollywood remake of the Korean film *Siworae*



a Korean fairytale, was remade into *The Uninvited* (2009), co-starring Emily Browning and Elizabeth Banks. The script for the *A Tale of Two Sisters* was sold at \$2 million, topping the \$1 million paid to remake the Japanese film *The Ring*.

Directors, Actors Go Mainstream

Warner Brothers has bought the rights to remake the 2008 serial killer thriller *The Chaser*, a project involving more big-time Hollywood names: Martin Scorsese and Leonardo DiCaprio.

Korean actors have also been courted by Hollywood studios and international filmmakers. Lee Byung-hun, famous for his leading roles in *JSA*, and *The Good, the Bad, the Weird*, starred as Storm Shadow in the American science-fiction action film *G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra*, which grossed \$302 million worldwide in 2009. He will be reprising the role in the sequel, which is slated for a 2012 release. Singer and actor Rain acted in the Wachowski Brothers' *Speed Racer* (2008) and *Ninja Assassin* (2009), which won him the MTV Movie Awards' Biggest Badass Star prize, while Jang Dong-gun, who starred in the blockbusters *Friend* and *Taegukgi* as well as the pan-Asian production *The Promise* by Chinese director Chen Kaige, made his Hollywood debut in 2010 with *The Warrior's Way*, which also starred Kate Bosworth and Geoffrey Rush. Daniel Henney, a Korean-American actor with a Korean fan base, starred alongside Hugh Jackman as Agent Zero in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, which came out in 2009.

Artistic and Industrial Improvements

The turning point for the rise of Korean films stemmed from a variety of factors. A new generation of talented and fearless Korean filmmakers



Korean directors who have broken into Hollywood. (Left) Kim Ji-woon of *The Last Stand*; (right) Park Chan-wook of *The Stoker*.

entered the scene in the late 1990s, experimenting with new story ideas and techniques to produce cinematography that was both commercially and artistic successful. The critically acclaimed Kim Ki-duk and Hong Sangsoo and more commercially successful Park Chan-wook, Lee Chang-dong, Bong Joon-ho, E J-yong, and Hur Jin-ho are of the new generation that took Korean film to a new level with a contemporary Korean touch and identity as well as historical recreations and reinterpretations. They also provided greater sophistication in visuals, music, and genre elements, with the result that Korean films are now recognized for their originality.

The annual hosting of international festivals has also been instrumental in boosting the quality and diversification of Korean cinema. The Pusan International Film Festival, launched in 1996, followed by the Jeonju International Film Festival and Puchon International Fantastic Film Festival,



All-Time Box Office Records

1	The Host Bong Joon-ho	13,019,740	2006
2	The King and the Clown Lee Jun-ik	12,302,831	2005
3	Taegukgi Kang Je-gyu	11,746,135	2004
4	Tidal Wave Yoon Je-kyoon	11,397,749	2009
5	Silmido Kang Woo-suk	11,081,000	2003
6	D-War Shim Hyung-rae	8,426,973	2007
7	Speedy Scandal Kang Hyeong-cheol	8,280,308	2008
8	Friend Kwak Kyung-taek	8,134,500	2001
9	Take Off Kim Yong-hwa	8,092,676	2009
10	Welcome to Dongmakgol Park Kwang-hyun	8,008,622	2005
11	May 18 Kim Ji-hoon	7,307,993	2007
12	Tazza: The High Rollers Choi Dong-hun	6,847,777	2006
13	The Good, the Bad, the Weird Kim Ji-woon	6,719,000	2008
14	200 Pounds Beauty Kim Yong-hwa	6,619,498	2006
15	Sunny Kang Hyeong-cheol	6,594,042	2011
16	The Man from Nowhere Lee Jeong-beom	6,226,886	2010
17	Shiri Kang Je-gyu	6,210,000	1999

* Numbers indicate the amount of tickets sold, not the financial gross (as of July 10, 2011).
[Source: Korean Film Council]

has served as an incubator and promoter for independent and art films. The screening of hundreds of new films from Europe, North America, South America, and Asia year after year also helped to broaden the state of the art in filmmaking.

Starting in the late 1990s, industry capital began to be funneled into the film industry. The Cheil Jedang Group set up CJ Entertainment, while the

Orion Group established Showbox. They would go on to build multiplex theater chains like CJ-CGV and Megabox across the nation and invest heavily in the industry to produce big-budget blockbusters. They also joined up with overseas labels and filmmakers for pan-Asian productions, co-investment, and marketing. Showbox co-distributed John Woo's war epic series *Red Cliff*, which grossed \$248.4 million worldwide.

Koreans Frequent International Festivals

Together with theatrical success and fame, Korean films have begun to earn serious recognition from international festivals at top venues like Cannes, Berlin, Venice, London, New York, Tokyo, and Hong Kong, along with smaller ones worldwide. A new wave of passionate and individualistic Korean filmmakers has helped to develop a distinctive vernacular that communicates more naturally with audiences through refined cinematography and music. Their activity has boosted the artistic quality and international recognition of Korean cinema. As with their heyday in theaters, Korean films rocked the festival circuit from 1999 to 2005. Since then, films, directors, and actors have been annually invited, nominated, and honored year after year.

Veteran director Im Kwon-taek paved the way to Cannes after his 2000 film *Chunhyang* was officially invited to compete at a prestigious film festival for the first time in Korean film history. He received the Best Director award in 2002 for *Chilhwaseon*. In the same year, director Lee Chang-dong won the Special Director's Award at Venice Film Festival for the avant garde film *Oasis*, whose star, actress Moon So-ri, picked up the Marcello Mastroianni Award for Best New Actress for her stunning portrayal of an isolated young woman with cerebral palsy who falls in love with the man who killed her father in a hit-and-run accident.

In 2004, Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy* won the Jury Grand Prize, the second highest honor at the Cannes Film Festival. Lee Chang-dong's *Secret Sunshine* earned Jeon Do-yeon the Best Actress Award at Cannes in 2007. Park returned to Cannes to pick up the 2009 Jury Prize for his vampire film *Thirst*. A Cannes favorite Lee received the 2010 award for Best Screenplay for *Poetry*. Another Cannes regular, Hong Sangsoo won his first Cannes award, the Un Certain Regard prize for *Ha Ha Ha*, after six previous invitations to Cannes. In 2011, another art world favorite, Kim Ki-duk, won the main prize in the Un Certain Regard sidebar for his autobiographical film *Arirang*. Kim had won the award for Best Director at the Berlin Film Festival in 2004 for *Samaritan Girl*, a film about a teenage prostitute. He was also awarded the Silver Lion at Venice in 2004 for *3-Iron*.



Im Kwon-taek



Lee Chang-dong



Hong Sangsoo

Hallyu in Literature

The international popularity and attention earned by Korean popular culture has led to the rediscovery of a broad range of Korean culture and tradition, including serious works of art like literature. As Korean pop artists drew the spotlight in other entertainment corners of various Web-based and traditional media, Korean writers, too, made a small but significant ripple in the international art scenes.

Shin Kyung-sook's novel *Please Look After Mom*, which sold over one million copies in Korea, has been published in 22 other countries. In the United States, it was published in April 2011 by mainstream publishing house Alfred A. Knopf. As of the end of June 2011, the book had been included among Amazon.com's top 10 ebooks of 2011. Twice reviewed by the New York Times, it ranked 14th on the best seller list compiled by the newspaper in the first week of May, and remained in the top 35 throughout the month.

The book, called “a raw tribute to the mysteries of motherhood” by the New York Times, received positive reviews from American critics and readers alike. Online booksellers have rated the book highly, introducing it by saying that the “stunning, deeply moving story of a family's search for their mother...told through the piercing voices and urgent perspectives of a daughter, son, husband and mother...is at once an authentic picture of contemporary life in Korea and a universal story of family love.” Amazon listed the book as the Best Book of the Month in April 2011; a reader review said, “Shin's elegantly spare prose is a joy to read, but it is the quiet interstitial space between her words, where our own remembrances and regrets are allowed to seep in, that convicts each one of us to our core.” On Goodreads.com, the book received 615 ratings and 246 reviews, with



Shin Kyung-sook and her novel *Please Look After Mom*.



many calling it “eye-opening” and praising its portrayal of motherhood and a diorama of nuclear family dynamics not exclusive to Korean culture.

As with popular culture, Americans and people in other parts of the world have been stunned to learn how modern, refined, and universal Korean artists have become in delivering their unique sensitivity, emotions, history, and experience through works of art, be it in the form of serious literature or pop culture.

Modern Style Lures Foreign Publishing Interest

Interest in Korean culture has also led talented foreign authors to pore over Korean literature in search of treasures to share with the broader

global audience. Kim Young-ha's *Photo Shop Murder* and Lee Dong-ha's *Toy City* are listed with positive reviews by online booksellers. Talented translators have led big publishing companies to turn to Korean works, helping to introduce Korean literature to a broader readership through their savvy choices of translators and sophisticated marketing and distribution network.

Along with Shin Kyung-sook's recent publication, *Your Republic is Calling You* by Kim Young-ha has been one of the most successful overseas sellers. It was published by Mariner Books, a part of the historic Houghton Mifflin Harcourt publishing house. Another English translation of work by Kim, *I Have the Right to Destroy Myself*, was published through Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Distinguished academic publishers like Columbia University Press published *Who Ate Up All the Singha* by Park Wan-suh and *There is a Petal Silently Falls* (a collection of three stories by Ch'oe Yun) in translation by Bruce Fulton and Ju-chan Fulton, who also translated *The Dwarf* by Cho Se-hui, a book that was published by the University of Hawaii Press has published. Yi Mun-yol's *Our Twisted Hero* was published by Hyperion Press, a Disney-ABC affiliate. Jo Kyung-ran's *Tongue* was published by Bloomsbury Publishing, a frequent winner of US Publisher of the Year award. New York-based independent publisher Seven Stories Press, known for its cutting-edge fiction, published *The Guest* by Hwang Sok-yong.

Kim Young-ha's books caught the attention of a large publishing house and readership because they are contemporary stories that examine the vagaries of youth, human relations, and existential anguish with an urban sensibility that anyone can relate to, regardless of nationality or social background. *Time Out Chicago* compared his writing to "the sparse but

beautiful prose of Haruki Murakami," while Harcourt Books introduced him as displaying "the emotional tension of Milan Kundera." His transnational imaginary themes and prose have led to be the translation of his book into 10 languages, as well as cinematic and theatric adaptations.





EPILOGUE

Will It Continue?

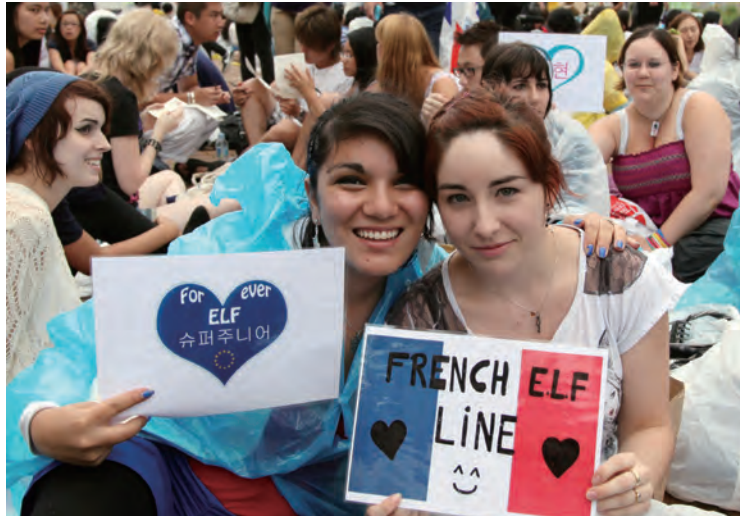
The Korean Wave phenomenon has long been accompanied by intense debate regarding both its causes and future. Some predict that the Korean Wave is nothing more than a passing fad like the Japanese pop culture boom of the 1990s. Others criticize what they see as the Korean government's excessive involvement as in promoting the national brand. Overseas media, on the other hand, have criticized the excessively mechanical nature and commercialization of Korean pop culture.

Still, Korean pop culture is spreading worldwide, where it is being consumed by an increasingly global audience. Korean pop culture fans open up websites completely on their own; these sites, in turn, attract millions of visitors. Korean film, drama, and music buffs download content from the Internet, while streets and shops are covered with ads and posters featuring popular Korean stars. Overseas performances by Korean singers are selling out, while more and more tourists—many inspired by Korean pop culture—visit Korea on holiday. Even a look at the Korean language proficiency test indicates a trend. Some 46,912 people from 32 countries participated in a recent exam, with participants from lands as far off as Paraguay and the Czech Republic. So what is happening here?

A Korean Wave, But Not Just Korean

For starters, Korean pop culture content is high-quality and competitive. Korean dramas, films, animation, music, computer games, literature, and other cultural content are well made, well marketed and well packaged. Despite its lack of history, Korean pop culture sells itself as a global standard, and is now an integral part of Korea's national image and brand, like Korean semiconductors or Korean cars. This did not happen overnight: it was the product of many years of hard work, planning, and investment.

Indeed, one can see the so-called “Korean development model” at work in the pop culture sector, too. With few natural resources to exploit, Korea has depended on its human capital—hard work and the will to succeed—to develop. Much time and money was invested to cultivate talent, and foreign ideas were readily imported, provided such ideas were of a high quality. These ideas were then innovated upon so that they took on



distinctively Korean forms. At first, Korean and Western pop music and film might seem similar, but look closely and the differences jump out. Jian Cai, a professor at Fudan University of China, wrote in his study on Korean Wave that Korea presented “a model of rapid modernization while retaining its traditional culture.” Korean pop culture has incorporated Western elements while staying true to Korean traditional values. Wrote Jian, “Korean pop culture has borrowed the best of Western popular culture and recreated it according to Korean tastes.”

Korea's rare success in discovering its own cultural identity, along with the national rags-to-riches narrative, has inspired hope and envy in Korea's Asian neighbors. To Westerners, the Koreans' adoption of Western styles into their own culture comes off as fresh. Korean pop singers are just as sassy, cool, and energetic as their American counterparts, but much less raunchy. They harmonize the old and new, and while they might behave modestly, they exude a confidence earned through many years of hard work and training. Their songs are written by the best songwriters of Europe and America, their dances scripted by American choreographers. Their videos are produced by the best production teams in the business. Once on the Internet, these videos entertain and inspire countless fans around the world. While distinctively Korean, Korean pop culture is blessed with a universal appeal thanks to its easy-to-follow tunes, dance moves, and storylines.

A Hybrid Culture

New trans-cultural flows like the Korean Wave are challenging the Western-centric nature of contemporary pop culture and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of globalization. While many studies have

criticized the nature of cultural flows between East and West, we should also look at cultural exchange between non-Western nations, reiterating the significance of cultural proximity.

One particularly crucial point about the spread of the Korean Wave is that thanks to digital technology, local cultures can now travel even to remote corners of the world. New media platforms like the Internet and satellite TV have proved vital in spreading Korean culture in markets such as the Middle East, Europe, and beyond.

Inter-Asian cultural affinity has also played an important role in the proliferation of Korean culture overseas. Studies have shown that Asian audiences identify more with Korean culture than with Western culture, or even Japanese culture. Beginning in the late 1990s, Korean dramas took over from Japanese dramas as the new “trendy” urban option for Asian TV audiences.

Korean scholars credit cultural hybridity with simultaneously promoting globalization and localization of Korean pop culture in both the global and local markets. Since the 1990s, Korean culture has grown increasingly globalized. Music legends Seo Taiji and Boys, for instance, revolutionized Korea’s cultural landscape by introducing American pop music styles like rap, metal, and rock. This was only part of the story, however. Their real root of their phenomenal success was their ability to adapt these styles to the needs and sensibilities of Korean youth. Since Seo Taiji, this hybrid hip-hop culture has thrived and even spread beyond Korea’s borders .

Korean pop culture seduces audiences by combining the enticing image of Westernized modernity with just the right amount of Asian sentimentality. This fusion is at the base of the Korean Wave. Korea took advanced foreign cultures, grafted them onto its own, and produced an

advanced culture all its own. In the global village, cultural exchange is no longer a one-way street. Korea pop culture is the product of adoption and adaptation, the result of communication among several cultures. It is not simply Korean. In this sense, the Korean Wave allows diverse cultures to converge and communicate.

Further Reading

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www.soompi.com

www.sarangkpop.com

www.seoulbeats.com

www.k-popped.com

www.dramafever.com

www.dramabeans.com

www.indiefulrok.com

www.popseoul.com

www.koreanwaves.com

www.hancinema.net

www.hallyuwood.com

www.kpopmusic.com

Organizations

Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange www.kofice.co.kr

Korea Tourist Organization www.visitkorea.or.kr

Korea Creative Content Agency www.kocca.kr

Agencies

SM Town www.smtown.com

JYP Entertainment www.jype.com

YG Entertainment www.ygfamily.com

DFSB Kollektive www.dfsb.kr

PHOTOGRAPHS

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The term “Korean Wave” (“Hallyu” in Korean) was coined by the Chinese press a little more than a decade ago to refer to the popularity of Korean pop culture in China. The boom started with the export of Korean television dramas (miniseries) to China in the late 1990s. Since then, South Korea has emerged as a new center for the production of transnational pop culture, exporting a range of cultural products to neighboring Asian countries. More recently, Korean pop culture has begun spreading from its comfort zone in Asia to more global audiences in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.