Hearing the Korean Global: 
*Hallyu* in the Music of K-dramas

By

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Abstract

Initiated by the regional popularity of Korean TV dramas and pop music in the late 1990s, the emergence of *hallyu* (Korean Wave) marks a significant moment in the cultural annals of South Korea, having situated the country as pop culture provider to international audiences. This dissertation investigates the *hallyu* phenomenon and what it means for a contemporary South Korea that is dynamically reforming its cultural identity through cultural forms originally from outside its borders. The study focuses on the TV dramas that have been at the fore of *hallyu*, paying specific attention to the music soundtracks of these dramas and how they work to express *hallyu’s* mode of being globally Korean. Through an examination of specific Korean TV dramas, I show how music plays a crucial role not only in the storytelling of contemporary Korean TV dramas, but also in preserving and accentuating a sense of Koreaness through their stories. In this sense, the dissertation has the dual aims of coming to an understanding of *hallyu* and analyzing music in the contemporary Korean TV drama, and it can be seen as a way of seeing, or hearing, *hallyu* through the music of Korean TV dramas. This study expands discussions on Korean music, specifically in the pop music arena, and contributes to a growing interest in film and media music within ethnomusicology.
INTRODUCTION

Opening Remarks: Encountering Hallyu

During the summer of 2004, I became keenly aware of a Korean TV drama series called *Dae Jang Geum* that *everyone* in the Korean community where I lived had watched or seemed to be watching. I wasn’t a regular watcher of Korean TV dramas, not because I have a disdain for them as some do, but because they were very time-consuming, and never seemed to catch my eye, in any case. I thought that *Dae Jang Geum* must be fun, but was probably just another story, maybe with steeper cliffhangers or an extra-convoluted plot. And if it was really as good as people were saying, maybe it was a one-time fluke. But just as I kept thinking that it was a passing fad, it kept coming up in conversations and in references in South Korean media as well as local Korean media in New York City. There was even a small Korean restaurant called “Dae Jang Geum” that opened up on Northern Boulevard in Flushing, not far from my home.

The intergenerational draw was curious to me. I had never seen a Korean TV drama reel in such a wide age group; from junior high and high school students to grandmothers, it seemed that everyone who was Korean in the area—men, women, young, old—knew about *Dae Jang Geum*. Even my mother, who was not really one to be taken by Korean TV dramas, was not only enjoying it, she was watching every episode of it. My uncle, too, a diligent storeowner who is probably everything that an
American image of “hardworking immigrant” evokes, was consistently seeking it out when he came home after exhausting hours of work.

I finally decided to watch the series for myself, at the very least so that I could have a better idea as to what all the buzz was about. That summer, I ended up marathoning Dae Jang Geum’s fifty-four episodes in the span of a week. The drama, which I really enjoyed, seemed unlike any other Korean TV drama that I had seen (which, admittedly was not too many at that time). It had certain effects on me. I was suddenly interested in Korean food, and for some reason, I really wanted to visit Korea. But most of all, I wanted, almost felt like I needed, the soundtrack to Dae Jang Geum. Luckily, because of the drama’s popularity, it was easy to get, and I ended up getting two copies (and a third later when I went to Korea). “Needing” the soundtrack for a drama was a new feeling for me, as I had never really sought out soundtracks to films or any other TV shows, even for the ones that I liked (with the exception of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon), and I wondered why I felt that way.

Around this time, the term hallyu (“Korean Wave”) was being tossed around online and in the Korean media with enough frequency to give it a place in the Korean vocabulary. The term seemed to refer to the popularity of Korean dramas in neighboring countries in the region. Although it was an interesting thought, I wondered about the life of a word that pointed to something that was most likely transitory in nature. But more and more, I found that people of diverse backgrounds were asking me (once they ascertained that I was Korean) about the latest Korean TV dramas, or about how to cook certain Korean foods, or just trying to practice their
rudimentary-level Korean language skills on me. On one occasion, an Asian American friend who had become a devoted watcher of Korean TV dramas relayed to me how she was watching a Korean TV drama she had borrowed from the local public library on a portable DVD player while waiting in the juror selection hall during a day of jury duty, when an African American woman who was hovering behind her shoulder to see what she was watching, told her, “Oh, I’ve seen that one.” And the two began a conversation about Korean TV dramas there in the juror selection room. I wasn’t sure whether to be more surprised at the fact that the public library carried Korean TV dramas or at the puzzling scenario where an African American woman was discussing Korean TV drama selections with a Chinese American woman.

Having grown up in the States during a time when Korea seemed like an obscure country not among the recognized options that an Asian could be from (“Are you Chinese or Japanese?”), this new interest brought on a curious feeling. I thought that there might be something to hallyu after all, and when I told a Korean American friend whose field of interest is far from Korean pop culture about this new word and possibly new phenomenon, he amusingly responded, “Well, finally, it pays to be Korean!” His reaction said a lot to me. Even as a 1.5-generation Korean American, he was well aware of Korea’s relative “absence” from the world (aside from North Korea’s highly publicized entry into an “axis of evil”). In the area of pop culture, it was difficult to locate a Korean staple; India gives us Bollywood, there was Japanese
anime, and Hong Kong and China had the triad and wuxia films (of which I myself had been a fan). But what comes from Korea?

While it is difficult to point to “the moment” that led me to pursuing a dissertation project on hallyu, these anecdotes surely sowed seeds of inquiry toward this direction. I wanted to know what hallyu was beyond the fact that it denoted the popularity of South Korean TV dramas. I was curious to find its roots, its formation, and what it meant for South Korea. At the same time, I was taken by my own reaction to Dae Jang Geum (which was purportedly a big part of hallyu) and why I felt that I needed to get the soundtrack for it; I knew that it was “just” a drama but it seemed to induce intense viewer engagement. As I was forming a way to talk about all of this, a Korean American friend of mine who is a professor in Seoul, happened to tell me that while she enjoys watching Korean TV dramas, the journey is sometimes so intense that she tries not to watch them during the semester. As she put it, “When a drama is over, I have to go looking for another relationship.” She seemed to touch on an interesting point that hinted at the personal investment that consuming a Korean TV drama often involves.

This dissertation attempts to tie the above threads in a way that offers an understanding of hallyu while also examining the music of Korean TV dramas—the genre that has significantly led its growth. By intersecting an exploration of hallyu with the Korean TV drama, and more specifically its music, this study joins coordinates at different loci to tell a particular story about hallyu. It takes as its main
medium of inquiry the TV drama and how these TV dramas work to tell stories that resonate the larger phenomenon they comprise.

Perhaps as quickly as the word seemed to gain steam, *hallyu* was dismissed by some media critics as nothing but hype, a marketing ploy, or as Robert Cagle notes, a “media non-event” (2008b:9) that had already passed, even as scholars and institutions were beginning to acknowledge its “existence.”¹ But more significantly, perhaps, in South Korea the term had become such an important part of the country’s cultural consciousness, it warranted mention in Lee Myung Bak’s presidential inaugural address of 2008, where he proudly included Korea’s rich traditions as part of the “*hallyu* that was gaining worldwide attention.”² It was clear that the idea of *hallyu* had taken on a certain cachet in South Korea, and coming to a better understanding of the environment that fortifies it is what has largely informed this study.

¹ For example, a forum called “Hallyu In Asia: A Dialogue” was held at Harvard University on 16 Feb 2007; the event, which I was barely able to get a seat at, was standing room only. One of the first of its kind at an academic institution, the forum assembled a panel of East Asian pop culture scholars, historians, and Korean celebrities to discuss *hallyu’s* implications in Asia.

² Additionally, the Academy of Korean Studies, a well-established Korean research institute that is dedicated to improving international understanding of Korean culture, administered a grant specially earmarked for research on the Korean Wave, one of the fruits of which was the *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* special issue on the Korean Wave (see Ravinia 2009).

² From South Korean president Lee Myung Bak’s inauguration speech, 25 Feb 2008. President Lee lauded the development of culture under the banner of *hallyu*, and urged that the country’s culture (and culture industries) needed to maintain high quality and competitiveness for the economy to grow, for the quality of life to improve, and for the country to participate in exchange and advancement on a global level.
Statement of the Project (Scopes and Aims)

This dissertation is an investigation of the hallyu phenomenon and what it means for a contemporary South Korea that is reinventing itself by engaging cultural forms originally from outside its borders, and preserving a sense of Koreanness through them. As something that “flows” outside South Korea, hallyu is both a national and transnational event; in this study however, my discussion on hallyu revolves around a national, South Korean perspective, rather than approaching it through transnational discourses or talking in terms of hallyu’s “transnational implications.”

This study is also concerned with examining the music of the Korean TV drama, and it is through this point of entry that I cross cut hallyu. It has, at the present time, become impossible to discuss Korean TV dramas apart from hallyu, and vice versa, and I am guided by the need to on the one hand, see what hallyu “is all about,” and on the other, stay close to its specific objects, namely the TV drama texts, to fill out an understanding of Korean pop culture, rather than engaging in discussion on a general level. In this sense, my dissertation has the dual aims of coming to understand hallyu, and analyzing the music in the Korean TV drama. I do however offer a glimpse of the on-the-ground reception of hallyu because it does speak to an external presence outside South Korea. I do this through a survey of viewers that eagerly consume Korean TV dramas. Here again, my concern remains close to the dramas and how audiences relate to them, as well as the effects this has brought; as such, this

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3 My use of the word “text” here and throughout the dissertation refers to the actual TV dramas as something to be examined, or analyzed; that is all I mean by this term.
inquiry proceeds through the frame of fans and fandom more than it is informed by a focus on “transnational audiences” of differing cultural and political contexts.

Finding the shape of my dissertation has in some ways felt like encountering the proverbial mass, or block, of marble that a sculptor is said to confront before chipping away at it to reveal the figure inside, only this assignment felt more challenging. For me, understanding hallyu was an important task because it was becoming an increasingly significant term not only in the South Korea of today, but also in the East Asian, Asian, and Asian American departments at institutions of higher learning (at least at American universities) that seemed to notice it and want to discuss it in earnest. Making sense of, or “chipping away” at, my initial block of marble has entailed an investigation of the appeal of Korean TV dramas, and this dissertation project can be seen as a way of seeing, or hearing, hallyu through an understanding of Korean TV dramas and their music.

Such an investigation has also been driven by the ambivalent ways that scholars and academics seem to embrace popular culture in general. While an incisive and intellectual rendering of a pop text analysis can yield valuable insight into the social structures and conditions that it represents, reflects, or resists, even scholars will tend to talk (or murmur) about what they actually like about the text that was just scrutinized or why they like it, as they are leaving their seminar, conference panel, or academic forum. This condition can be detected in a Foreword that Korean American scholar Elaine Kim has written for a recent publication of essays on the Korean Wave and Korean media. In her prefatory remarks, Kim relays how she is an avid watcher
of Korean TV dramas, so much so that she has had to “ration and rationalize” her viewing: “I tell myself that I am analyzing – the gender and family relations, for instance […] Or I try to justify watching by telling myself that everyone, especially work-obsessed Americans, should be allowed some ostensibly harmless guilty pleasures” (E. Kim 2013:xiv-xv).⁴ Kim’s reaction to her own consumption of Korean TV dramas (her “guilty pleasures”) relays an ambivalence that is not uncommon in academia. This dissertation hopes to go some way in offering an understanding of why audiences may feel the way they do about Korean TV dramas; it does not search the text for its “deeper meaning,” but considers how the text “works” and what music’s role is in that work, as well as its relation to the viewer.

Inasmuch as this study has overlapping concerns, it hopes to contribute to discussions in overlapping places. Although the study of Korean music is more populated than it once was, scholarship in this area retains a preference for older styles and more traditional genres. The drumming, dancing, singing, and performance of these musics surely remain an unwaveringly critical part of the world of Korean music. But South Korea’s popular music waits to be explored with more attention. Keith Howard has made such a call to scholars of Korean music. Speaking as one whose own earlier scholarship dealt mainly with folk songs, Korean drumming, and traditional instruments, Howard invites further expansion in the field of Korean music studies, recognizing that scholars in this area have thus far been more intent on exploring Korea’s traditions: “Clearly musicologists and ethnomusicologists have

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⁴ As she mentions in her Forward, Elaine Kim has introduced a class on “Hallyu” (at UC Berkeley) as part of a series on Asian Popular Culture.
been slow to consider Korean pop music [...] However, if popular culture tells us aspects that are valued within the contemporary life of a nation, this does not excuse any relegation of pop music to a backwater” (Howard 2006a.ix). This dissertation responds to this call, and seeks to address a gap in Korean music scholarship that has become more noticeable with the advent of *hallyu*.

As a study on *hallyu* and the music of Korean TV dramas, this dissertation also meets a growing demand for more insight into Korean pop culture, which has formed steadily within Korean Studies with the popularity of Korean dramas, and now, K-pop. *Hallyu* has had an invigorating effect for Koreanists in the American academy, as Kyung Hyun Kim notes,

> unlike Japanese Noh theater, Kurosawa films, and the literature of Yasunari Kawabata and Yukio Mishima during the postwar years that have become the anchoring points of Japanese studies in U.S. academia, Korean studies had a difficult time selling its tradition and modern aesthetics in course syllabuses until *hallyu* (Korean Wave) came along. (K. Kim 2014: 12)

Koreanists have approached *hallyu* from their respective fields in an excited, if impromptu, manner to respond to a growing interest in the topic. Indeed, Kim concedes that the spike in interest in Korean pop culture among university students has found scholars “making the best of an awkward situation in which there is not yet a substantial branch of even a subfield called ‘Korean Popular Culture Studies’” (ibid.).

This dissertation hopes to be a step toward filling this gap.

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5 In a way, this situation was confirmed to me during the course of writing this dissertation when I was contacted by two people (a lecturer and a professor, both on the West Coast) who on separate occasions requested portions of my writing, as they had begun incorporating Korean pop culture modules in their courses and were having difficulty locating works in this area.
But my analyses and case studies of music in Korean TV dramas here will hopefully also go some way in providing insight into a media culture that is not based in the West insofar as this study sits at a juncture that includes film and TV music. In a short introduction to film music, Kathryn Kalinak opens by saying that she is “guided by the need to introduce film music through a global perspective. Although the United States and Western Europe were the first places where film and music were experienced together, the story does not end there” (2010:xiv). The statement serves to recognize that there is a world of film music beyond Hollywood and Europe to be studied, but it also acts as a cordial concession, as she does not go on to cover the globe, selecting accordingly along the way (South Korea is not to be found here). She notes however the need for more studies in this direction: “Film music scholarship has developed over the last twenty-five years into a formidable body of knowledge on the subject, but its blind spot has been nothing less than most of the world” (ibid.). In addition to her acknowledging the need for more scholarship on film music around the globe, she ends by also inviting more scholarship that examines the music of television, which she calls a “frontier” (ibid.:115). As a study that involves the music of Korean TV dramas, this dissertation addresses Kalinak’s two calls, for film music from around the globe and music in television.

Mark Slobin’s *Global Soundtracks* (2008) has perhaps been the most concerted effort to survey the music of film across cinema systems thus far. The

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6. For this dissertation, I borrow from film music studies because of the absence of a relevant body of literature in studies on television music, and because the genre of TV drama bears overlaps with narrative film (explained in more detail in Chapter 2).

7. Kalinak’s brief survey does touch on instances of “world music” (2010:88-90), though these do not develop beyond reference.
anthology has addressed film cultures outside the West through an ensemble of case studies, but has also examined Hollywood’s own system, offering a look into patterns through which the musical instances of global film can shape and play off each other as they acquire new meaning in different contexts. Slobin’s collection also indicates a relatively young but growing interest in film music within the field of ethnomusicology; this dissertation adds to this conversation by offering case studies for South Korean television.8

Thus this dissertation crosses several paths in the discussions that follow, hopefully adding voice and insight as they move along. Carving out this dissertation project has come with a feeling of wonder similar to what Keila Diehl describes in the beginning pages of her ethnography on the Tibetan community-in-exile. As she opens her study, she reflects on the various forces that have shaped her project and led her to arrive at the moment of her completed book, as she acknowledges

the ways in which one is always both entangled in and supported by multiple webs of influence and yet often simply winging it. This book is the product of my own interests and inclinations, anthropological training in a particular program at a particular theoretical moment with particular professors […] and various twists of fate. (Diehl 2002:xi)

8 Ethnomusicology’s attention to film music has become more visible through efforts such as Slobin’s Global Soundtracks, which is valuable for the panoramic view that it offers, referencing mainstream Hollywood and subcultural film as well as providing cases by ethnomusicologists discussing films from different locales across the globe. Another such collection would be the special film music issue of Ethnomusicology Forum 2009 (Vol. 18, No. 1). Here, in the introduction to the issue, Miguel Mera and Anna Morcom discuss some of the critical issues that ethnomusicologists can take up when approaching film, such as those of representation (for example, of the “other”), processes of signification, semiotics, and the shifting relations between media texts and audiences in a virtual environment where texts multiply (Mera and Morcom 2009). Although still not a big presence, the place of film music in ethnomusicology has shown growth over the years, with recent ethnomusicology conferences slowly revealing more scholars presenting papers on film music-related topics (for example, SEM conferences of 2013 and 2014, as well as the joint conference of 2012).
I invoke Diehl’s quote as I close this introduction to my project because my own arrival at the intersection of hallyu and TV drama music has been the result of personal interests, new developments in South Korea as well as in the field of Korean music, and a widening interest in film within ethnomusicology. Much like Diehl, I am reminded that this dissertation is a product that has responded to, and has been influenced by, particular moments in the disciplines that it converses with, certain teachers with whom I have studied, the intellectual environment of a specific school, and the vicissitudes of academic pursuit.

Methodology and Data

Interdisciplinary work, so much discussed these days, is not about confronting already constituted disciplines (none of which, in fact, is willing to let itself go). To do something interdisciplinary it’s not enough to choose a “subject” (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences. Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one.

—Roland Barthes (quoted in Clifford 1986:1)

The interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation has been both exciting for its potential, and sobering for the feeling that it has brought of possibly being severed from the methodological moorings of my home discipline. But the increasing number of interdisciplinary projects in the field of ethnomusicology has attested to the discipline’s resilience in accommodating shifts in our musico-cultural world. And asking, “What is ethnomusicology?” today must necessarily take into consideration the changes in our contemporary cultural environment. As Adelaida Reyes notes, such a question implicitly asks what ethnomusicology has become “as it respond[s] to
new contexts and new contingencies” (Reyes 2009:10). Reyes points out that subject matter “looks to methods as the strategy […] a kind of road map that will get the study to its goal” (ibid.:12). Together, they (subject matter and method) become “co-defining parts” on the path to shedding light on music in contexts big and small.

For many studying the social and cultural aspects of music today, this path entails a looking to other disciplines for different tools with which to handle our topics, something that brings challenges to the discipline’s identity. But this is a challenge with potential, not a threat to the discipline’s integrity. The value of interdisciplinary work perhaps lies not so much in finding what is “useful” in other disciplines that I can use, but in asking what, in the way that scholars in other fields think, I can learn such that I can think that way as well, toward enriching the path of my own inquiry. In a sense, it borrows disciplinary “lenses” to give a more colorful picture of the subject at hand. Interdisciplinary projects are thus rich ones that are open to other ways of thinking, hopefully leading a project to new insights. I have approached this dissertation project with a bricolage of insights, perspectives, and intuition borne of ethnomusicological training, and a reworking of skills that have traditionally defined the field, while also borrowing from other disciplines.

Locating “the field” for this project was elusive. I was interested in tracking down hallyu, but where was, or what was, “the field” in this case? Where could I locate hallyu? These questions affirmed that the topics we pursue and the questions we ask today lead us not necessarily to one locus of concentrated field activity, but to an investigation of different nodes that are dispersed even as they are organic. My
search for *hallyu* led me to the *Hallyu* Academy at Chung Ang University, where I spent a semester attending lectures, workshops, gatherings, and meetings to gain an understanding of how key players (cultural producers, educators, administrators, politicians, artists) were discussing and wielding *hallyu* in South Korea. Lectures were an important source of information, but so was the time spent in conversation with fellow attendees. Conversations led to connections and interviews, and much of my understanding of *hallyu* has been based on what I have observed, seen, and gathered from interactions at the *Hallyu* Academy.

In Korea, I also spent time attending various independent symposia and festivals that embraced *hallyu* and an overall vigor for building culture, including sessions at KOCCA (Korea Culture & Content Agency, now Korea Creative Content Agency). Attendance at these was also valuable, as was generally being immersed in the rhythms and pace of everyday life in South Korea during my time there (2007-2009). The interviews in the *hallyu* and drama music chapters of this dissertation are from this period of fieldwork in South Korea, during which I met and spent time with drama producers, music supervisors, and composers, as well as professors, cultural administrators, and international students who were self-professed fans of Korean TV dramas.

In the drama music and case studies chapters, I draw on theorists in the areas of film music and popular music to guide my analyses. Korean TV dramas are part of a larger family of television entertainment that is familiar to most modern countries with a developed television industry. Indeed, Jeongmee Kim notes that “[i]t is
insufficient to distinguish commonality and Korean-ness/Asian-ness in Korean drama to the exclusion of the format they adopt which exists throughout the world” (2014:251). While Kim notes a certain “local sentimentality” in Korean TV dramas, she also points to the fact that this particular form exists as a global cultural practice (ibid.). Morley and Robins have pointed to American TV as an influencer of other TV cultures, having set standards and characteristics that are recognizable and adhered to in local variation worldwide (1995:220-24). Korean TV dramas engage this format and in this sense share commonality with the broader world of television entertainment.

But the music in Korean TV dramas also has much in common with global tastes and genres. The pop music that now comprises virtually all soundtracks of Korean TV dramas shares styles with American pop music. Timothy Taylor has noted the significant advance of Western pop music outside its borders: “North American and U.K. popular musics have traveled far more widely than any other western idiom, resulting in what Simon Frith has called a ‘universal pop aesthetic’” (Taylor 1997:xv). For the case of South Korea especially, American pop music was prominent when the country was recovering from the war, acting as a sort of musical “significant other” when the country was rebuilding its cultural identity. The Korean pop songs that populate TV drama soundtracks bear similarities to American pop songs in style and affect as well as tonal language. The work of Western pop and film music theorists can go a long way toward elucidating pop music in the South Korean
context, and I borrow their vocabulary here to think through the music of Korean TV dramas.

As mentioned above, the chapter on reception is relayed through the frame of fandom. To be sure, audiences are no longer thought to be passive recipients of media. But if audiences are active, fans are proactive and give a certain life to popular culture, extending and celebrating their fictions as they weave them into their own lives. My inquiry into Korean TV drama fans is not filtered through specific categories of gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, or race. Although these categories can surely provide further insights, I have remained close to viewers’ immediate relations and responses to Korean TV dramas. This chapter is based on the activity of a fan group that has a presence online but also meets for in-person get-togethers. I have attended four of those get-togethers over the years (2011, 2012, 2013, 2015) at which I participated in activities, and distributed surveys at one of them (in 2011). Interaction and communication with Korean TV drama fans has been an ongoing endeavor, and the chapter includes insights from some ten years of talking to people about Korean TV dramas, online and in person, as well as my own watching of them over the years in quantities that are now too numerous to count.

The new cultural environments and realities that constitute our world, particularly through media and pop culture, have led to studies that are perhaps characterized by an “ethnographic spirit” (Taylor 1997:xviii), or those that are “ethnographically-informed” more than they are “pure ethnography.” While my study
presents *hallyu* through a diffusion at different “sites,” it is my hope that its ethnographic echoes will be audible along the way.

**Organization of the Study**

The design of this dissertation is more modular than it is informed by a linear thrust. It loosely follows a tripartite model of production, text, and reception, although I have tried to incorporate insights from all three where possible. Chapter One explores the production of *hallyu*. In this chapter, the focus is national, and material for this chapter, as mentioned above, comes from the creators and producers of *hallyu* from various institutes and locations in South Korea; the chapter aims to lay out *hallyu* as it is being created there. Chapter Two also presents the voices of *hallyu*’s producers, more specifically some of the directors and music supervisors that are active in the TV drama industry. The second half of the chapter offers a general understanding of the use of pop ballads in the contemporary Korean TV drama. This section is not meant to be a “manual” for drama OSTs (Original Soundtracks) in any sense, but seeks to shed light on music as an important aspect of Korean TV dramas.

I move from the general to the specific in Chapter Three, through the case studies of three Korean TV dramas. This chapter stays close to the drama texts, with specific dramas serving as the “site.” These case studies relate specific themes that resonate within *hallyu*. The first case study deals with the past, while the second relates tradition, specifically a traditional folktale in contemporary terms; and the third looks forward to participation in a global community. In this way, these dramas
address the larger themes of hallyu, retaining a sense of Koreanness through the
global format of the TV drama.

Chapter Four offers a portrait of Korean TV drama fandom. The focus here is
on hallyu’s life outside South Korea, and reception can be seen as this chapter’s
“site.” Through fanning activities, these audiences are at the heart of Korean TV
dramas’ global travels; they invest hallyu’s movement with energy, attesting to South
Korea’s new position as a relevant player in the global flow of pop culture, and
realizing hallyu’s goals of being globally Korean.

**Notes on Romanization, Terms, and Usage**

In this dissertation, I follow the Revised Romanization of Korean when
transliterating words from Hangeul to English. However, I make an exception for
names: if an individual has a specific way of spelling their name in English that does
not follow the Revised Romanization system, I defer to their personal spelling.⁹ Also,
names of famous Korean figures are relayed by their widely recognized English
spelling; for example, Kim Young Sam (not Gim Yeong Sam), Lee Myung Bak (not
Yi Myeong Bak). Korean names appear according to Korean convention, with family
name first, followed by given name. But this is not a perfect science. A figure like
Sumi Jo is known by this name (in this order) to the wider operatic world; however,
she is known as Jo Sumi in Korea. Hopefully such inconsistencies will not distract
from content.

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⁹ For example, on business cards, public profiles, websites, email addresses, commercial CDs, or if
they have made these personal spellings otherwise known to me.
Additionally, I have tried to preserve the use of space and hyphenation of names where possible (as they have been made known to me by the individual person). However, when referring to fictional characters in dramas, mostly in the case studies chapter, I combine two-syllable names into one word (for example, “Jun Sang” into “Junsang”), mostly to facilitate reading. Names of Korean and Korean American scholars who publish in English appear by American convention, with given name followed by surname. All translations are by the author.

The term “hallyu” is a Korean word comprised of the Sino-Korean characters for “Korean” (han 한 / 韓) and “flow” (ryu 류 / 流). In fact, the two separate syllables that make up the term would, according to the Revised Romanization system, properly be transliterated as “han” and “ryu” when treated as individual syllables; however, the two syllables together result in the romanization “hallyu” because the pronunciation gets adjusted (according to the Korean grammar rule) when they are combined. In short, because of the resulting pronunciation, the term is romanized, officially, as “hallyu” in South Korea. This spelling is the most widely used among an English readership, and it is the one that I adopt for this dissertation.10

The term “Korean Wave” is an English translation of hallyu, and has come to refer to the popularity mostly of Korean TV dramas and K-pop outside of South Korea. In common usage, there is virtually no difference between the two terms, and they are used interchangeably by fans and in the media. However, if a distinction

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10 The term is also sometimes romanized as “hanliu,” the Pinyin spelling of the two Chinese characters 韓流 (or 韓流); this spelling can occasionally be seen in sources that discuss the phenomenon in China or Taiwan.
could be drawn, while the “Korean Wave” may be used to simply denote the presence or popularity of Korean pop culture products outside South Korea, the term *hallyu* in South Korea has come to encompass and mean more than this; it has become a key term in discussing Korean culture that has gained a particular aura in its global outlook. In South Korea, *hallyu* is a richer term with more potential and more connotations than its pop culture products being popular outside the country. For this dissertation, I mostly use the term *hallyu* to preserve this Korean perspective and because this is the term as it is used in South Korea.

It is unclear exactly when or where the term “K-drama” first emerged. Simply put, a “K-drama” refers to a Korean TV drama, and its usage gained currency among fans with the rise of *hallyu*. In the early stages of Korean TV dramas’ popularity, the term “Koreanovela” (after telenovela) made a short presence, but it did not gain traction; it is difficult to ascertain the reasons why a certain term sticks and another doesn’t within the world of media and fandom. Much like “Korean Wave” and “*hallyu*,” the terms “K-drama” and “Korean TV drama” are used interchangeably in common usage. It is, however, fairly clear that “K-drama” denotes a Korean TV drama in the *hallyu* era. Thus, while all K-dramas are Korean TV dramas, not all Korean TV dramas could appropriately be considered K-dramas. It would be anachronistic, for example, to refer to the TV series *Ordinary People* (*Botong Saramdeul*), a popular drama that aired on KBS in the 1980s as a “K-drama” because the term “K-drama” denotes, among other things, an external audience. This
distinction is offered as a matter of description, and the term “K-drama” is not used here with any particular significance beyond this.
CHAPTER ONE

The Making of Hallyu—Context and Characteristics

Coming to Terms: What is Hallyu?

In the late 1990s, South Korean popular culture began to gain unprecedented attention in the East Asian media, as Korean popular music (K-pop) and Korean TV dramas (K-dramas) saw enthusiastic and rapidly growing audiences across the region. From singers Rain and BoA to TV dramas Winter Sonata and Dae Jang Geum, South Korea began to create a remarkable buzz in Asia with its popular culture offerings.\(^{11}\) Korean media products and pop culture trends were referred to as “kim chic” (Visser 2002), and avid fans of things Korean were labeled hahanzu, a Chinese term for “Korea-crazed tribe” (Pease 2006:177).\(^{12}\) The “ha-han fever,” as Lisa Leung

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\(^{11}\) Korean pop singer and actor Rain was one of the biggest poster figures of hallyu in the early to mid 2000s. He has been touted in the Korean media as not only a “Korean Wave star,” but also “Asia’s star,” “world star,” and “global star” (Shin 2009b:508).

In 2002, Korean pop singer BoA topped Japan’s Oricon Chart (a weekly music chart similar to America’s Billboard Charts); in the same year, she was also featured on the cover of the French daily Le Monde as an icon of cultural exchange between Korea and Japan (Shim 2006:28-30).

The Korean television drama series Winter Sonata (KBS 2002) first aired in Japan in 2003; due to popular demand, the series aired a total of four times from 2003-2004 (Hirata 2008:145). At its height, the series garnered a 20% viewership rating on Japan’s NHK, a remarkably high percentage for Japanese television, especially for a time slot that was close to midnight (Mori 2008:130). A 2004 survey by Japanese national broadcaster NHK estimated that more than 90% of Japanese people, regardless of age, sex or geographical region, were more or less familiar with this drama (Hayashi and Lee 2007).

The Korean television drama series Dae Jang Geum (MBC 2003-2004) was so popular in Singapore that it was re-broadcast immediately after its first run on cable television and subsequently screened a third time on a free-to-air channel (Chua 2008:270n9). In 2005, Dae Jang Geum became, significantly, the first Korean historical drama to be broadcast in China; in cities like Shanghai and Changsha, it surpassed the ratings of local shows aired in the same time slot (Leung 2008:60).

\(^{12}\) “Hahanzu” is a term that is similar to the perhaps more familiar “harizu,” another Chinese term, used to describe obsessive fans of Japanese pop culture (widely known as otaku in Japanese).
describes it, had “spread like wild fire across provinces, ethnicities, and permeated

By the early 2000s, the word *hallyu*, or “Korean Wave,” referring to the
popularity of South Korean pop culture, gained wide currency in print and online, as
the flow of Korean pop culture continued to make inroads into China, Taiwan, Hong
Kong, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam. South
Korean pop culture had become a regular part of the region’s cultural diet; for
example, Korean TV dramas, arguably the biggest agent of *hallyu*, are now part of the
daily programming of television stations in East Asia, and have become part of the
region’s “routine viewing habits” (Chua and Iwabuchi 2008:2).

There are varying accounts as to where *hallyu* actually began. The first
Korean drama to air on CCTV (China Central Television) in China was *Jealousy
(Jiltu)* in 1993, although it was *What is Love (Sarangi Mweogilla)*, broadcast in
1997, that officially announced the onset of the *hallyu* in China (Leung 2008:59). By
1998, Hong Kong-based Phoenix Satellite TV began airing Korean drama series in its
prime time 8pm slot (S. Lee 2003). In Taiwan, Korean dramas were broadcast as
early as 1995 (Hayashi and Lee 2007:200), but *hallyu* is thought to have started there
when Korean rap and dance duo CLON gained popularity after performing at the

Hae-Joang Cho locates the first use of the term “Korean Wave” in a 1999
Chinese newspaper article about the Korean boy band H.O.T. after their concert in
According to Cho’s “informants” in China, the phrase in its early stages had a “cynical nuance,” as it sounded very much like “cold wave.”

Others have suggested that the meteorological reference was simply a playful way to indicate how Korean cultural products were altering the cultural climate of Asia (Osnos 2005; Cagle 2008b:9).

In its early stages, the word was used to refer to two genres: Korean pop music and television dramas. The term quickly crossed over to Korea, however, and once it did, took on new momentum as the Korean media then helped give it a stronger presence by investing it with a positive brand value and leading it into wide circulation. In fact, so great was the excitement over the new term that some in Korea

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13 In Hae-joang Cho’s account, she uses the English phrase “Korean Wave” to describe the first appearance of this term, although seeing as it was used in the Chinese media, the actual word would have presumably appeared in Chinese, most likely as 韩流 (or 韩流), for which the English (Pinyin) would be “hanliu.” It is unclear from her article whether the “term” she points to is a translation of the Chinese, and if the word appeared in this possible first instance as “Korean Wave,” “hanliu,” or “韩流.” Beyond discrepancies in language, however, what Cho is pointing to is the idea of a Korean Wave as distilled in a distinct phrase (whether it was in Chinese, Pinyin, or English); i.e. the notion of a phenomenon denoted by a particular term.

14 The “cynical nuance” that Cho mentions is based on the fact that the Mandarin word for “cold,” (寒 hán) has the same pronunciation and tone as the word for “Korean,” (韓 hán). The word play here also involves Korea’s geographical location; being north of China, a wave from Korea would be “cold” (much like a north wind). The media article on H.O.T.’s 1999 concert that Cho refers to is widely cited as the first usage of the term (i.e. a phrase that points to a Korean Wave) in print. However, other scholars have offered other dates of origin: Hayashi and Lee state that “the term Korean Wave appeared in China toward the end of 1997” (2007:200); Robert Cagle also marks 1997 as the year in which the term first appeared in Chinese newspaper reports, as 韩流 (which he romanizes as hallyu) (2008b:9); and Chua and Iwabuchi offer 1997 as the year in which the popularity of Korean TV dramas, films, and pop music in East Asia “came to be known very quickly as the ‘Korean Wave’ (韩流) among a PRC audience” (2008:2), although they do not mention whether this was in print or a word-of-mouth phenomenon. Youna Kim dates the term (‘Korean Wave’ or ‘Hallyu’) as having emerged in the middle of 1998 in the Chinese news media (2007:135); Keehyeung Lee suggests that “[t]he term Korean Wave was coined by the Chinese mass media in 2001” (2008:176); and Jeongmee Kim offers three possible dates for the origin of the term, one going as far back as 1991 “when a Beijing newspaper used ‘Hallyu’ (translated as ‘cold stream’),” to refer to Chinese youths’ fascination with Korean pop music and drama (2007:47). This instance seems extremely early, and although she uses the word “Hallyu” in relaying this particular incident in her article, the Chinese word was probably 寒流 (“cold wave”) and not 韩流 (“Korean wave”).
apparently claimed credit for creating it. As the term circulated, it became a mix of a real popularity of Korean products outside Korea and a consciously engineered attempt from within Korea to expand that popularity, making it difficult to differentiate the two.

“Hallyu” gradually took on other forms of entertainment and the meaning of the word snowballed to include various avenues of culture, from fashion to traditional cuisine to Internet gaming, cell phones, and even the Korean language. By 2006, as Jeongmee Kim notes, the term hallyu was used to describe a dizzying variety of things: “Hallyu has in fact come to refer to so much that its actual meaning is now hard to pin down” (J. Kim 2007:47). Indeed, when I went to Seoul in 2007, the “hallyu effect,” as Hilary Finchum-Sung has referred to it (2009), seemed to be in full force; the hallyu that I encountered had become a bandwagon that encompassed animation art, musicals, the character industry, Korean B-boys, gugak (Korean traditional music) and fusion gugak, cosmetics, medicine, IT (technology), theme parks, taekwondo (Korean martial arts), jjimjilbang (Korean traditional saunas), and makkeolli (Korean rice wine), among other things (see Figure 1.1). The increasingly large number of culture forms that were claiming the label “Korean Wave” made it seemingly impossible to track. In a sense, pop culture critic Mark Russell was right in calling the Korean Wave a “black box,” suggesting that the term is “a magical answer that explains everything and nothing” (2008:212).

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15 Hae-Joang Cho mentions in her article a story that suggests the term “Korean Wave” was actually created by a Korean record company that used it on the cover of a Korean pop record jacket; and yet another that insists it was a term the Korean government used to promote copies of Korean records.
The difficulty of arriving at a definition for hallyu lies in this lack of clarity and consistency as to what it encompasses, presenting challenges to establishing what it means.\textsuperscript{16} Does hallyu simply mean “anytime anything Korean is loved by

\textsuperscript{16} It is worth mentioning that in 2007, the Korean Cultural Service of New York (a satellite agency of the South Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism) began to publish an annual series called The Korean Wave as Viewed Through the Pages of The New York Times, that presents a collection of Korea-related articles printed in The New York Times throughout the year. Subsumed under the rubric of “Korean Wave” over the first several volumes are articles about Korean golfers, Korean (and Korean American) classical (Western art) musicians, Korean traditional dance, Buddhism, the New York Philharmonic’s 2008 concert in North Korea, and the academic excellence of ethnically Asian students at a high school in New York City. The table of contents includes an “& More” section that conveniently covers all other subjects that do not fit into this already wide and seemingly indiscriminate range of categories.
somebody in another country?” Such an exaggerated definition obviously stretches the word to its limits of usefulness, and is surely not what any analyst could accept as valid. Yet while it is clear that *hallyu* has made a lot of noise, it has been somewhat of a puzzle for culture pundits to pin down as a concept. Scholars who have approached *hallyu* have certainly noted this challenge: Jung-Sun Park has observed that “hallyu is a rather elastic concept which is broad in scope and in constant flux” (2007:273). Eun-Young Jung states, “it should be noted that the term ‘Korean Wave’ […] has become extremely vague” (2007:202). Yuni Ko points out, “Indeed, despite the term’s seemingly definite nature, the Korean Wave phenomenon has created multifaceted dimensions ever since it was conceptualized, making it almost futile to nail down the phenomenon” (2009). And Jeongmee Kim, coming close to the exaggerated question above, concedes, “the indistinctiveness and vagueness of its [*hallyu*’s] actual meaning, allow[s] it to encompass all that is culturally influential in Asia as seen to originate from Korea” (2007:56).

As a cultural phenomenon that “flows” through media outlets and consumer products, perhaps there can be no clear line drawn around what exactly constitutes *hallyu*. As such, it is perhaps more useful here to think of *hallyu* as a mode, and not any particular medium. The story of *hallyu* is intricately intertwined with ongoing issues of identity that have come with globalization in South Korea. Thus it is more than just the products that appropriate its label; it speaks to the processes that lie

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17 This question was asked by an audience member at the “*Hallyu: Korean Pop Culture Sweeps Across Asia*” forum held at The Korea Society in New York on 2 Aug 2006. The hyperbolic nature of the question is telling of the messiness of what *hallyu* actually is, and how it seems to defy any sense of coherent categorization.
underneath. Understanding *hallyu* as a mode circumvents the task of thinking in terms of specific genres and allows for a deeper look into the motivation and tendency behind its cultural production. For South Korea, *hallyu* can be seen as a particular mode of being, a frame of mind where cultural awareness is intimately linked with Korea’s desires to be global, and with its process of participating in a larger network of global culture flow, while maintaining a sense of Koreanness. Such a process entails a duality that is part of the nature of *hallyu*: while *hallyu* as marker of national identity can be thought of as a response to globalization, it is also in essence a result of that globalization.

The overwhelming popularity of Korean pop culture in Asia marks a significant moment for South Korea, signaling a change in its place in the region, and increasingly, the world. South Korea has historically often been on the receiving end of culture; from suzerainty under China to Japanese colonization to occupation by American forces, Korea has long existed in the cultural, political, and economic shadows of stronger foreign powers. Consequently, it has long been, on many fronts, a culture-consuming country more than a culture-producing country. In fact, its creative output in the pop culture arena up until the mid 1990s is so scant that it would take no small effort to locate references to it in academic studies and journalistic reports. For the first time, then, in modern Korean history, South Korea

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18 Doobo Shim has observed, for example, that *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, published in 1996, does not make any reference to Korean cinema, although it claims to cover "every aspect of international film-making" and includes Taiwanese, Hong Kong, Chinese, and Japanese films (2006:25). Similarly, a study on TV soap operas edited around the same time, “to be continued... Soap Operas Around the World,” also does not make any mention of Korean soap operas; indeed the single Asian case mentioned here is a Chinese TV series (Allen 1995). Marilyn Matelski’s *Soap Operas*
has become a dynamic provider and exporter of culture and entertainment, a potential cultural hub that is no longer just a small country “caught between larger powers,” as has often been described. In a historical context, hallyu is a boon to the nation; it is, as Korean scholars Kim and Ryoo point out, “the symbolic hegemony that South Koreans yearned for after centuries of invasions […] rendering it always a receiver and powerless. Hallyu gave the nation its pride and confidence that it lost” (2007:147).

_Hallyu_ is now a keyword in the culturescape of contemporary Korea as a means of claiming cultural identity. The following offers a look into the rise of _hallyu_ and how Korean pop culture—and Korean dramas, specifically—became so popular initially in the East Asian region. The phenomenon is not something that can be attributed to one sole cause. Rather, the answer can be found in a constellation of circumstances that allowed for the wider circulation and exposure of Korean media, as well as the domestic agencies that have continued to contribute to its definition and meaning.

**The Emergence of Hallyu: Timing, Serendipity, and the Rise of the Korean Media**

There is a range of factors that can be noted as having contributed to the emergence of _hallyu_. According to Korean media scholars, the onset of _hallyu_ was due in large part to media liberalization and a growth in the media market that

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*Worldwide: Cultural and Serial Realities* (1998), which covers serial soap operas throughout a wide scope of regions across the globe, also omits Korea. The lacuna has been equally noticeable in the case of Korean popular music.
occurred in Asia in the 1990s (Shim 2006). Following the arrival of satellite Star TV service in Asia early that decade, the region saw an increase in the number of satellite and cable channels that came with a demand for programs that many local industries could not satisfy; Korean media helped to fill an Asian media niche that was forming (Park 2007). Another factor was the price of Korean TV dramas that were exported, which was considerably lower than what Japanese and Hong Kong dramas were commanding at the time (S. Lee 2003); Korean programs were a preferred cheaper option.19

The relaxing of old political tensions also brought about a more fluid exchange between countries. Rhee and Lee (2010) suggest that the enthusiastic Chinese consumption of Korean media products followed the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Korea in 1992, after which there was a marked increase of exchange in cultural products and interpersonal relations. In addition, South Korea’s cultural relationship with Japan also began to ease, as the official Japanese pop culture ban in South Korea began to be lifted, in phases, beginning in 1998. This facilitated the importation of Japanese pop culture.20

19 South Korea first began to export TV dramas to China in 1993. At the time, the quality of Korean dramas was regarded as inferior, and an episode sold for approximately $400-$800; Japanese dramas cost four times as much, and Hollywood and Hong Kong programming cost ten times as much (S. Lee 2003). By the late 1990s, production quality rose, although prices still remained lower than Japanese and Hong Kong exports, making Korean dramas an economical programming choice especially during the Asian economic crisis. Since the rise of hallyu, the cost of Korean dramas has gone up considerably.

20 South Korea’s ban on Japanese pop culture was enforced at the end of WWII as a measure to protect the country’s cultural identity after decades of Japanese colonization (1910-1945). Although South Korea was not totally impervious to Japanese cultural products during the years of the ban, the official ban began to be phased out in 1998 under the Kim Dae Jung administration. The lifting of the ban was advocated by a younger generation of cultural producers and consumers who did not have firsthand
The decline of the Hong Kong film industry in the late 1990s also coincided with the rise of Korean media industries. Anxieties surrounding the 1997 Handover led, in part, to a “brain drain” of the creative minds behind Hong Kong’s film sector, depriving a once-vibrant industry of much creative energy (Leong 2002:1). Along with Hong Kong, Japan was the other key player in the East Asian pop culture arena, but South Korea—and by extension its cultural products—did not carry Japan’s stigma of colonialism throughout the region. For some consumers, Korean entertainment was an alternative to Japanese fare that was easier to accept. As one Chinese fan of Korean TV dramas notes, “We like American culture, but we can’t accept it directly. And there is no obstacle to our accepting South Korean culture, unlike Japanese culture… [b]ecause of the history between China and Japan, if a young person here likes Japanese culture, the parents will get angry” (Onishi 2006).

Another reality that can be seen as having factored into the expansion of Korean media is the emergent youth culture of a growing middle class in Korea and in the Asian region. With increased leisure time and purchasing power, this demographic formed a necessary base and market for Korean pop culture to thrive.

On the domestic side of things, South Korea was coming out of an era of change in its social and political arenas, most notably through its democratization movement. And as Michael Robinson notes, demonstrations for democratic reform by experience or memories of colonization; they argued for the development of Korean pop culture through healthy market competition (Han 2000). The ban was fully lifted by 2004.

21 In 1997, Hong Kong was returned to China in what is commonly known as the Handover, after being under British rule following the Opium Wars of the 19th century. Anthony Leong also mentions a “shoot it fast, shoot it cheap” mentality, along with piracy, as additional factors that contributed to a general decline in the Hong Kong film industry.
the middle class and student activists in the late 1980s (amidst a long legacy of military governments) led to, among other things, a new press law guaranteeing free speech—something denied in previous authoritarian rule. According to Robinson, this allowed a more open public sphere that ultimately paved a way for more diverse and creative cultural production that became notable in the years following, particularly in the film and media industries (2005:16). It is worth mentioning also that the cultural producers who became active in this increasingly open environment were beginning to enjoy facilitated travel that allowed many of them to study abroad, long and short term; the flourishing of hallyu can be seen as coinciding with a return of those with an overseas education who reintegrated themselves into the workforce of the Korean cultural industries.

Furthermore, a notable rise in government investment in Korea’s culture industry began in the 1990s with an eye to its economic potential. According to a now-famous media account, in 1994, the Presidential Advisory Council on Science and Technology presented then-South Korean president Kim Young Sam with statistics revealing that total profits for the Hollywood blockbuster film Jurassic Park were worth the export revenue of 1.5 million Hyundai cars (Shin 2005:53). These numbers brought a sharp realization that led to significant government investment in media and technology. The development of media as a strategic national industry was folded into Kim Young Sam’s larger segyehwa (globalization) project announced that year.
The first civilian government in three decades, the Kim Young Sam administration (1993-1998) initiated this campaign with a desire to develop South Korea into a world-class nation on many fronts. *Segyehwa* was viewed as “the most expedient way for Korea to become a world-class, advanced country” (Kim 2000a:2). It was a project that was designed with the goal of raising Korea not only economically, but in other sectors of Korean life as well—a version of Korean globalization with strong nationalist overtones.\(^\text{22}\) In a 1996 speech on Korea’s reform and globalization, president Kim declared that

> [g]lobalization must be underpinned by Koreanization. We cannot be global citizens without a good understanding of our own culture and tradition. Globalization in the proper sense of the word means that we should march out into the world on the strength of our unique culture and traditional values. Only when we maintain our national identity and uphold our intrinsic national spirit will we be able to successfully globalize. (quoted in Alford 1999:154)

While economic advancement was a key aim of the *segyehwa* project, the building of cultural and national identity was also seen as crucial.\(^\text{23}\) Culture was developed as a key facet of *segyehwa*, and this was furthered by the Kim Dae Jung administration that followed, despite the financial crisis of 1997 and the demoralizing IMF bailout

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\(^{22}\) Samuel Kim notes that the government decided not to translate the term *segyehwa* (comprised of *segye*, “world” and *hwa*, “-ization”) but to keep the original Korean word in its romanized form as the official name for the country’s globalization drive. This was because “[t]oo many foreigners interpreted globalization as simply “economic liberalization,” according to the Ministry of Information and Communications, when in actuality *segyehwa* was far more comprehensive, embracing political, cultural, and social openness and embracing political, economic, social, and cultural enhancement to reach the level of advanced nations in the world” (Kim 2000a:2-3).

\(^{23}\) If previous decades were concerned more with politics in South Korea, the 1990s saw a sharp increase and awareness of culture and its value. In a table tracking the frequency of articles on the culture industry in major Korean newspapers during this time, Jeongsuk Joo notes that while in 1990, there were only nine articles relating to culture, by 2003, there were 492 (Joo 2007:65).
that ensued. Indeed, the emergence of hallyu can be seen as having roots in the push for culture and desire for globalization that began during this era.

**Hallyu’s Roots: Segyehwa—Korea’s Strategic Globalization**

C. Fred Alford makes an astute observation in his book about Korean values in an age of globalization: if internationalization is about opening up to the international community, globalization is about becoming part of it (Alford 1999:143). In 1988, South Korea opened up to the world, literally and symbolically, with its hosting of the Summer Olympics. The event marked an ability, an official “readiness,” on the part of the Korean people, in welcoming foreign visitors and in projecting themselves to a community outside their borders; South Korea was acknowledging that community as it was being acknowledged by it. The segyehwa drive that followed came as a corollary to this opening up, with South Korea becoming “more of itself” while joining a larger arena of global cultural interaction.

The vast (and growing) literature on globalization has revealed it as a complex and contradictory process, the wide range of voices that have treated it agreeing unanimously neither on its definition nor its impact. Although social scientists have toiled to break down analyses of globalization into categories with which we are familiar (the economic, the political, the cultural), in reality, its “complex connectivity” (Tomlinson 1999:13-17) has arguably confounded such taxonomy, leaving us to rely on specific instances and locales for the most instructive illustrations. Yet particular lines of thinking can still be laid out on a spectrum that
ranges from arguments that favor homogenization to those that emphasize
diversification, with related discussions that underscore hybridity, often as a means of
resistance or strategy of negotiation. Often linked to older discussions of imperialism
(sometimes as overlapping, sometimes as opposing), theorists of globalization have
debated its effects with varying emphases on the local.

Earlier proponents of the “homogenization thesis” subscribed to the notion
that a larger system at work would ultimately weaken and destabilize local identity,
with technology and media often being central to this process as “forces that
influence consciousness” (Schiller 1976:1). The assumption of a one-way process,
from the West to an anonymous “the Rest” is inherent in this line of thinking. Critics
like Herbert Schiller argued that the expansion of multinational corporations and the
free flow of information worldwide would bring about the kind of organization that
would end in cultural and ideological homogenization driven by a global U.S.
hegemony that disguises even as it produces its deleterious effects. For Schiller, the
concept of cultural imperialism described “the sum of the processes by which a
society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is
attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to
correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of
the system” (1976:9).

Along similar lines, from economist Kenichi Ohmae’s market perspective, as
pointed out by Shin (2003), although national boundaries may still be intact on a
“political map,” these boundaries would no longer be meaningful on a “competitive
map” that traces larger financial transactions or the circulation of information (Ohmae 1999:18). No longer constrained by national borders, Ohmae argues that such trans-border activity creates a “cross-border civilization” (Ohmae 1995:28-30) that ultimately leads to a “borderless world” marked by the end of national interest (1999:180-198). While Ohmae’s claims are largely concerned with the economic sphere and its control over politics, he intervenes in the cultural realm when he suggests that such a borderless economy would inevitably see a convergence (and homogenization) of global consumer taste—the consequence of a homogenous world economy.

More recently, George Ritzer has coined the term “grobalization” to explain “the imperialistic ambitions of nations, corporations, organizations, and the like and their desire, indeed need, to impose themselves on various geographic areas” (2007:15). Expanding on his earlier theory of “McDonaldization,” Ritzer contends that the main interest of entities that propagate globalization is to grow their power, influence, and profits—hence his term grobalization (ibid.:15-16). This leads to, as he sees it, a rise in “non-places” and “non-things” that come with an increase in sameness throughout the world. What Ritzer is suggesting is that a proliferation of standardized products, places, and services around the globe amounts to an increase of “empty forms” that are devoid of distinctive substance and character, contributing to, in essence, a globalization of “nothing.” In his scheme, the “nothing” that becomes globalized is something that is centrally conceived, controlled, and comparatively devoid of substantive content. “Something,” on the other hand, is a social form that is
indigenously conceived, controlled, and comparatively rich in distinctive, substantive content (ibid.:34-45).

In contrast, and on the other end of the spectrum, are scholars who see heterogenization as a salient outcome of globalization. Such critics prefer to focus on the resurgence of the local in the face of the global. Indeed, most scholars writing on cultural globalization today espouse this as a valid perspective, as William Mazzarella points out: “it has become virtually de rigueur to insist that, contrary to longstanding expectations of McWorld-style homogenization, globalization has in fact led to a revalorization of the local” (2004:352). Anthony Giddens, for example, states that globalization works in contradictory fashion; that while it ‘pulls upwards’ (pulling away power and influence from local communities, and nations, into the global arena), it also has an opposite effect and ‘pushes downwards,’ creating new pressures for local self-determination. Thus, he claims, “globalization is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world” (2000:31).

John Tomlinson also rejects the homogenization argument, stating that although the penetration of local worlds by distant forces transforms localities, weakening ties of culture to place, local identities in effect become more sensitive to their distinguishing characteristics, as people (and national cultures) define and differentiate themselves in relation to others around the globe (1997:127). In fact, Tomlinson suggests that globalization not only does not destroy identities, it has been a most significant force in creating and proliferating them (2003). This resonates with the thinking of many others, such as Anthony Smith, who says that in the context of
globalization, “we can only speak of cultures, never just culture” (Smith 1990:171), and Arjun Appadurai, who notes that homogenization arguments fail to take into consideration the dynamics of indigenization, which tend to appear as rapidly as the would-be homogenizing forces make their way into new societies. According to Appadurai, although globalization involves the use of a variety of instruments of homogenization, they are “absorbed into local political and cultural economies, only to be repatriated as heterogeneous dialogues of national sovereignty…” (Appadurai 1990:307).

Appadurai’s claim reveals an important and related issue that is often incorporated into arguments of globalization, namely the place of nationalism. Similar to the homogenization-diversification dichotomy, discussions on globalization and nationalism have also tended to revolve around two poles. On one end are scholars who see globalization as a force that erodes national boundaries, and accordingly, national identity. Such neoliberal globalization discourse, as Martin Stokes notes in his survey of music in the global order, “portrays nationalism in decline, state efforts to control national economies and distribute welfare on the wane, and borders increasingly irrelevant,” all as a result of increasingly open and free global markets (2004:62). On the other end are those who argue that national solidarity rises as a means of coping with global fragmentation and cultural rupture. Anthony Smith, for example, states, that “[n]ational identity […] remains widely attractive and effective and is felt by many people to satisfy their needs for cultural fulfillment, rootedness, security, and fraternity” (1995:159).
Whether the coming of globalization brings about a decline of the nation-state’s authority, or conversely, spawns national cohesion through the conscious construction of national symbols and narratives remains open to debate. Yet what these lines of thinking share in common is that scholars in both “camps” seem to agree, at least on a certain level, that globalization is inevitably in opposition to nationalism. As Gi-Wook Shin points out, arguments from such opposing viewpoints arrive at a similar conclusion: that globalization cannot coexist with nationalism (2003:8).  

It is here that South Korea’s globalization may be considered an interesting and somewhat anomalistic case. South Korea’s particular path of globalization has tended to heighten an awareness of national identity, perhaps more so as it followed decades of Western-imposed modernization that resulted in a neglect of local culture, as pointed out by Doobo Shim (2006:27). Yet for South Korea, the global and the national have proceeded in tandem; as such, the Korean case cannot easily be situated within a model that casts oppositions.

Koreans’ sense of identity has long been based on the idea of racial homogeneity and common ancestry, as encapsulated in the phrase danil minjok, literally “single-race nation” (see Robinson 1988, 1993; Shin 2006). This concept of ethnic nationalism has been reinforced over the course of Korean history in the face of foreign invasion and colonization. In the last century, the formation of national identity proceeded alongside Korea’s drive to wrest itself from Japanese colonial rule.

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24 See Shin (2003) for an informative overview on the debates of globalization and nationalism, especially for the case of South Korea.
(1910-1945); and it exists today as a theme that is intertwined with the nation’s globalizing endeavors. For example, the Kim Young Sam administration worked to promote Korean Studies (hangukhak) both within and outside of Korea as part of its pursuit of Koreanized globalization (Shin 2003:11). The Kim administration also embarked on other national (and nationalistic) initiatives such as the “rectification of history” (yeoksa baro seugi) project, which was aimed at “making a clean sweep of colonial legacies” to reclaim past glories and put into order the cultural contours of the nation (Han 2000:12). 25

Another national campaign that arose as South Korea started on its road to segyehwa concerned food as an index of national identity. The sintoburi movement of the 1990s, declaring that “body and earth are one” (literally, “body, earth, not, two”), urged people to eat locally produced food—that is, food grown on native soil, in order to maintain “cosmic harmony” (Bak 1997:154). This mantra gained momentum in the public discourse on food when hamburgers (especially those identified with American chains and restaurants) stood in symbolic contrast to something domestic, like Korean rice (ibid.:136). Over the years, McDonald’s has been discussed in ongoing debates regarding dietary choice, and national cultural identity in Korea, and as Sangmee Bak points out, “these controversies are closely linked to a Korean dilemma: people wish to be, simultaneously, nationalistic and global” (ibid.).

25 As a part of “rectifying history,” the building that housed the Korean National Museum, previously occupied by the Japanese colonial government, was torn down; there was also a nationwide movement to remove the steel posts allegedly planted by the colonial government around mountains throughout the country to block the country’s “life veins,” or pungsu (fengshui in Chinese). Also, the remains of patriots who served in the Shanghai Provisional Government of Korea in resistance to Japanese rule were brought back from China (Han 2000).
The era of *seguyehwa* also saw an emergence of cultural festivals and events that were organized to enhance local cultural identity, such as the famous Andong Folk Festival, which showcased, starting from the mid 1990s, traditional rituals and aspects of cultural heritage, from games to music to masked dance.26 These gestures of cultural roots-seeking can be seen as part of the larger *uri munhwa chatgi* (literally, “searching for our culture”) trend, what Hae-Joang Cho has called “a boom in finding us” (1998), that was concurrent with Korea’s *seguyehwa* drive. Cho, a Korean anthropologist, asserts that the search for cultural identity began with the invigoration of the South Korean economy, and indicated a state of economic success. Such cultural narratives were intimately linked to the international market and a capitalistic spirit that desired a national ability to compete internationally, “appeal[ing] to many South Koreans who have a strong yearning for a firm cultural identity” (ibid.:74).27 Laurel Kendall corroborates, stating that finding “our tradition” was a celebration of “a uniquely Korean triumph of the will, a triumph that has been measured by the gross national product of a newly industrialized country…” (1994:166).

Political scientist Samuel Kim has suggested that the nationalist mindset of Korea has been an obstacle to Korea’s push to globalize—that this trait has ultimately and regrettably held the country back despite its growing desire to be global (2000b:242-80). Gi-Wook Shin convincingly notes, however, that Koreans initiated

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26 According to Gi-Wook Shin, the 2001 festival brochure highlighted Confucianism as “an alternative to the spiritual and moral deterioration of the present day…” The festival sought to “reexamine Confucian tradition that is at the center of our national culture and creatively apply it to the present day with a view to achieve cultural diversity” (quoted in Shin 2003:11).

27 According to Cho, some of the keywords during this time were: “national sentiment” (*gukmin jeongseo*), “tradition” (*jeontong*), “finding roots” (*ppuri chatgi*), and “culture wars” (*munhwa jeonjaeng*).
globalization with a clear nationalistic agenda from the outset and pursued it, indeed appropriated it, for nationalist goals. Shin argues that for Koreans, globalization is not contradictory to nationalism. As the country becomes more global, according to Shin, its nationalist outlook does not weaken or subside; rather, it sits alongside globalization, not as a paradox, but as a paradigm (Shin 2003, 2006).

An illustrative example of the Korean-style globalization envisioned by former president Kim Young Sam can be seen in the Korean Minjok Leadership Academy (KMLA), a high-profile educational institution for the gifted that was established in the mid 1990s. With phrases like “Korea in Heart, World in Mind,” and “Honoring the Past, Leading the Future” as guiding mottos, the KMLA aims to produce global leaders that possess a strong national identity. For example, students at the highly regarded KMLA dress in traditional Korean clothes, attend classes in traditional Korean (Korean-architected) buildings, yet are taught in English. They train in Korean traditional music, arts, and sports, and observe various traditional practices, all towards the goal of “mak[ing] the KLMA community more Korean than ordinary Koreans” (Finch and Kim 2009:135). Such cultural grooming is complemented by a rigorous academic course load that includes subjects such as English Literature, World History, and a range of foreign languages, following the academic standards of American SAT and AP exams. The English-only policy on

28 See http://english.minjok.hs.kr/
29 For example, they are taught to practice the Confucian filial ritual of bowing to parents (dormitory parents and teachers serving as parent substitutes while on campus) twice a day, in the evening and early morning.
30 KMLA has an excellent reputation and has received much media attention for consistently sending its graduates to top academic institutions in the U.S. and U.K., including Yale, Stanford, Harvard, and
campus grounds encourages students to master the English language as a tool of advancement; it equips them with a fluency that will presumably help them in further studies at elite institutions abroad, and ultimately in becoming global leaders.\textsuperscript{31}

The KMLA, as Finch and Kim point out, is an institution that embraces globalization; its benchmarks are taken from elite academies across the globe, and its graduates are sent to institutes around the world for continued study. Yet it also works to foster a strong national and cultural identity as it “combines its world-class academic studies with reverence for Korea’s 5-millennium years of history, culture, and tradition.”\textsuperscript{32} That is, KMLA’s pursuit of mastery over global standards of education is channeled ultimately into national pride. Such an attitude has been prevalent in the movement of \textit{hallyu} and its ongoing development. The \textit{hallyu} phenomenon has, thus far, been as much about bringing attention to the Korean as it has about being global; these two streams have progressed in tandem, even as South Korea’s sense of cultural identity continues to transform through interaction with its cultural partners.

Since \textit{hallyu}’s emergence, the country has undertaken efforts to establish and “officialize” it through government-supported initiatives such as the “Han Style

\textsuperscript{31} English is widely considered an important means to success in contemporary Korean society and is thus a highly valued tool. The KMLA hires foreign, native-English speaking faculty to complement its roster of domestic teachers.

\textsuperscript{32} From the KMLA profile (2005), cited in Finch and Kim 2009:125.
Project” as well as through organizations such as KOCCA (Korea Culture & Content Agency) and the Hallyu Academy. The establishment of such organizations signals a shift from unconscious, indeed serendipitous, success to a conscious implementation of the hallyu flow. These entities were created with the goal of perpetuating the initial excitement of hallyu. As a reference base for its ongoing production and discourse, they give hallyu a certain form and shape, and offer a glimpse into its presence and meaning in Korea.

**The Hallyu Academy**

The Hallyu Academy opened in 2005 as part of the Graduate School of Arts at Chung-Ang University in Seoul. The first of its kind, it was established in response to the eager reception of Korean pop culture in and around Asia. Chung-Ang University is well known for its programs in arts and culture, and many of its graduates are now active in the entertainment industry in South Korea; as such, it is an ideal base for fostering hallyu activity.

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33 Formerly known as the “Han Brand Project,” this Ministry of Culture and Tourism initiative was started in the wake of the popularity of Korean pop culture abroad. Its aim is to market the “six pillars” of Korean lifestyle: hangeul (Korean alphabet), hansik (Korean food), hanbok (traditional clothing), hanok (traditional housing), hanji (Korean paper), and hanguk eumak (Korean music). At a hallyu forum held at the Korean Society in New York on 6 Aug 2006, Ji-Hong Lee, a representative of Korean Cultural Service New York, said that this initiative was one way the South Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism was working to find ways of promoting and developing hallyu both within and outside the Asian region (see http://www.han-style.com/english/).

In 2006, there were only four Korean Cultural Service centers around the globe (two in the United States, one in Germany, and one in Japan). There are now twenty-eight such centers worldwide; the opening of additional branches is in part due to the increased interest in Korean culture sparked by the popularity of Korean TV dramas and pop music (Korea Times, 2012; also see http://www.korea.net/AboutUs/Overseas-Korea-Centers/Korean-Cultural-Centers).

34 This agency has since been subsumed into a larger Korea Creative Content Agency.

35 The “peak” of the Korean Wave is thought to have been around 2003, with TV dramas Winter Sonata (2002) and Dae Jang Geum (2003-2004).
The vision of the Academy is broad, with aspirations of developing *hallyu* into Korea’s “soft power of the 21st century.” In a greeting statement entitled “Hallyu and Korea’s Global Vision” printed in the official *Hallyu* Academy brochure (2007), musician and university president Park Beom-Hoon states, “Korea currently faces a critical decision regarding its identity and its vision for the future.” He goes on to say that *hallyu* has brought Korea the opportunity to become “the cultural heart of Northeast Asia.” Thus, it is an important national task that “urgently demands a national initiative.” The nationalist tone that underlies this desire to be culturally relevant in the region is perhaps balanced only by Park’s suggestion that the Academy would “foster better cross-cultural understanding” through the study of other Asian traditional culture. All this would be incorporated into a larger “*hallyuhak*” (“*Hallyu* Studies”), a new field of study that the Academy proposes to initiate. The goal of the Academy is to develop a national cultural policy program that utilizes *hallyu* as an omnidirectional cultural exchange opportunity; employ *hallyu* for mutual exchange for not only popular culture, but culture in general, including traditional culture, fine arts, and high culture.

The Academy has played a part in expanding the scope of *hallyu* and the genres that it encompasses.

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36 Park Beom-Hoon was later recruited by the Lee Myung Bak administration (2008 to 2013) to work in the government’s Department of Education and Culture.
37 The study of the modernization and reinterpretation of Japanese Kabuki and Chinese traditional opera are mentioned here in this regard.
38 From the *Hallyu* Academy brochure (2007).
The *Hallyu* Academy offers three types of programs. The *Hallyu* Masters Degree program is a two-year program open to both Korean nationals and international students and professionals, although there is a particular interest in recruiting government officials of Asian countries, who work in cultural policy. The objective of the Master’s degree program is “to seek ways to expand hallyu’s genres as well as its market region, from culture and arts to taekwondo, fashion, food and further into other fields, such as medicine, IT, education, business, and even subway construction. The globalization of hallyu will then develop into a movement towards upgrading Korea to world-class level.” Upon graduation, it is hoped, students will return to their countries and work in various fields as “hallyu specialists.”

The “Hallyu Expert Program” (also called the “Hallyu CEO Program”) is a one-semester (15-week) program geared toward artists and professionals that consists of lectures and on-site training. The program aims to foster a network of hallyu professionals that can sustain hallyu in their respective fields. The “Hallyu Short-Term Experience Program” is a one-week course targeted towards Asian hallyu fans. With the cooperation of the Korea Tourism Organization, this program offers foreigners cultural experiences in Korea as well as lectures by celebrities. It provides a “traditional culture experience,” replete with cooking classes on kimchi and other culinary staples, for example, from the TV drama series *Dae Jang Geum*, as well as field trips to places of interest (such as various sites of the nation’s IT industry) that the program administrators regard as significant to hallyu.
Of the three programs, I was permitted to attend lectures in the semester-length Expert (“CEO”) Program, which was ushering in its third class since the Academy’s opening in 2005. With classes offered in the evening, the program had a “continuing education” feel, with an air of high socializing and networking. Entry into the CEO Program at the Hallyu Academy is by application, but many of the attendees are either invited to attend or come by way of referral; that is, the Academy does advertise, but most participants come by a selective type of word of mouth that connects friends and acquaintances, a system known as inmaek (personal connections) in Korean. Though it may not have been by conscious design, it was obvious that the participants in my class were people who had achieved a certain amount of success in their field, or held a certain status in society. It was also apparent that most of the members were there by invitation, and did not end up as a participant through any formal process of application.

The approximately forty participants that comprised the third year class included celebrities, TV directors and network professionals, executives from large companies (for example, LG), lawyers, doctors, a judge, fine and performing artists (a painter, a dancer, a veteran pop singer), the principal of an acclaimed arts high school (proudly introduced to the group as K-pop star Rain’s teacher), politicians, and university deans. Aside from the broad range of sectors assembled in the name of national cultural identity, which in itself was intriguing, it was clear that everybody in the class was “somebody.” As such, the class was endowed with a feeling of selectivity, which seemed to complement a general feeling of celebration; it was a
class of recognized figures assembled around the growing recognition of Korea and Korean culture. In fact, I was proudly introduced to the class as a foreign auditor, a Korean American who came to Korea “all the way from the U.S. just to study hallyu.” To add clout, the managing professor who introduced me informed the group that I was even given a scholarship to study this celebrated topic. The fact that I had come from abroad—from the United States, no less—seemed, in some way, to serve as a credential that allowed me to be among the group; in a sense, it also affirmed their gathering, as several members expressed a curious disbelief that I had actually come to Korea to find out more about hallyu.

Classes in the CEO Program were two and a half hours long, once a week, with lectures given by an impressive roster of professors, professionals, and practitioners in the fields of arts and culture, entertainment, and business (see Table 1.1). Speakers offered an investigation into hallyu and its genres, its potential for the development of “Korean culture” and its implications in the region. What was perhaps most striking about the lectures throughout the semester was the fact that the various fields covered were all simply taken for granted as hallyu. This complicated any straightforward approach to understanding hallyu, but offered a view of how Koreans themselves thought about it.

The inclination to consider such a wide range of arts and culture as hallyu is perhaps best explained by Yu In Chon, a Chung-Ang University professor and

39 Socializing was a significant part of participating in the class, and members would often gather together for dinner, go for drinks after class, and engage in other cost-prohibitive activities such as golfing and going away on weekend trips.
40 Past speakers have included renowned Korean poet Kim Ji Ha, celebrity gugak musician Kim Duk Soo, and politicians, such as former Seoul mayor and South Korean president Lee Myung Bak.
veteran actor who has worked in theater and television for decades. Yu, who went on to work as South Korea’s Minister of Culture under the Lee Myung Bak administration, places the need to “find” Korean culture within a national frame and historical context, suggesting that because of Korea’s turbulent legacy of colonization, civil war, military dictatorship, democratic uprisings, and the intense drive for modernization, there has been no room for culture. He asks: “Where do we find culture in all of this?” Yu says, “because of our past, there is today a deep hole in each and every one of us, something we must fill.” Part of the “filling in” of culture includes the reclaiming and restoring of things lost, in which regard he mentions the relatively recently restored Cheonggye Stream in downtown Seoul. He asserts that what is needed is finding “Koreaness,” what is “ours.” Yet his vision of Koreaness is not solely based on a bounded notion of authentic tradition. In answering the question, “What is Koreaness?” he was quick to point to such aspects as the “culture of the city” and “urbanization.”

Yu’s idea of what is Korean is very dynamic, indeed a departure from the more static answer such a question might have elicited some decades ago. He

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41 From Yu’s lecture given at the Hallyu Academy, 2 Oct 2007.
42 The Cheonggyecheon (Cheonggye Stream) is a stream flowing through Seoul that was covered up in the decade following the Korean War (1950-1953), in a push to modernize and develop more roads. The stream underwent restoration in 2003 and was fully uncovered and reopen in 2005. Although the project was not without controversy, the restoration of Cheonggyecheon was widely celebrated for improving the city and the environment, and was symbolic of restoring culture.

Other gestures of reclaiming culture were noticeable when I was in Korea. For example, Gwanghwamun, the main gate to the Gyeongbok Palace and one of the nation’s foremost cultural landmarks in the heart of Seoul underwent a restoration project (2006-2010) that moved the structure to its original location after having been shifted several times throughout years of Japanese colonization and war. Another example is the change of name, in popular usage, of the city’s South Gate—another iconic landmark, and a national treasure; the gate, for many decades called Namdaemun, is now once again being referred to as Sungnyemun, its original name.
expanded on this idea when urged by a member in the class, who asked, “China has spread Confucianism. What can Korea offer (culturally) that is Korean?” Yu responded to this by saying that he thought it was, broadly speaking, “design,” which he went on to explain further as creativity, a talent for adaptation. In a contemporary reality of culture flow and cross-cultural influence, Yu’s opinion is that Koreans’ strength can be seen, for example, in taking an originally foreign cultural form or item (his example was film) from another culture (the West) and making it “Korean.” Yu’s forward-looking definition of what Koreanness is came with a nationalistic impulse that was informed by personal experience. He spoke of his own education, and how as a student abroad, he was often asked to analyze and interpret great works of drama, all of which were Western. In fact, Yu says that he looks to a day when he can ask a class of Western students (he offered the French as an example) to do the same for a Korean work, such as the nationally famous “Tale of Chunhyang.”

Yu In Chon’s search for the “Korean,” or what is “ours,” was echoed by other lecturers at the Academy who also presented Korean culture in relation to outside cultures through personal journeys that ultimately resonate on a national level. In a class on Korean folk music and performance, Kim Seong Nyeo, a gugak musician and actor, who played the role of Wolmae (Chunhyang’s mother) in Im Kwon Taek’s acclaimed film Chunhyang (2000), relayed that when she studied acting during her school days, only Western drama was readily accessible to her; she had to search for Korean material. Likewise, Yun Ho Jin, the director of the musical The Last Empress, described his encounter with various forms of theater in New York and London in the
1980s as a time of “shocking realization.” He recounted the time he first saw the Broadway musical *Cats* as the moment when he understood that “if Korea did not do something about its cultural situation, it would be sucked up by outside culture, and left only with outside cultural options.” It was then that Yun decided to focus on making original Korean musicals.43

The personal anecdotes that decorated the lectures at the *Hallyu* Academy all seemed to embrace the message of a “successful” Korean culture, one that was culturally distinctive yet competitive and on par with current trends and international standards of quality and artistry. Even a traditional artisan like Park Chan Su, a Buddhist monk, Human Cultural Asset, and curator of a wood art museum, emphasized the importance for Korea to be successful in the world, although his view underscored the need to understand the roots of tradition in order for that to be possible. “If the roots are cut,” he explained, “things cannot live; they will fly away.”

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43 Yun Ho Jin points to this as the time he set out on his dream of creating a *segye jeogin* (“world class”) Korean musical. This dream was realized on some level with the production of *The Last Empress*, which played at Lincoln Center in New York City (1997-1998), London (2002), and other cities during its more than ten year run. The show was reviewed positively in the *New York Times* by a writer who noted that the style and sets were Western, but that the songs carried a lot of Korean rhythm and emotion (Kirk 1998). According to the review, “The Last Empress displays the promise of the Korean musical on an international scale.”

More recently, Yun has succeeded in taking another musical, *Hero*, overseas. Its performance at New York’s Lincoln Center was given a relatively positive review in the *New York Times* (Saltz 2011).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<th>Affiliation</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>9/18</td>
<td>OPENING RECEPTION</td>
<td>Third class of the <em>Hallyu</em> Academy CEO Program</td>
<td>Location: Gangnam, Seoul Venue: Marriott Hotel Ballroom</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>9/25</td>
<td>(No Class)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>10/2</td>
<td>Yu In Chon</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>10/16</td>
<td>Baek Won Dam</td>
<td>Professor, Chinese Studies Sungkonghoe University</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>10/23</td>
<td>Lee Hae Gyeong</td>
<td>Shaman</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>10/30</td>
<td>Kim Seong Nyeo</td>
<td><em>Gugak</em> Musician and Professor, Chung-Ang University</td>
<td>“Loving <em>Uri Sori</em> [Our Sound]: Korean Music and <em>Madangnori</em>”</td>
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<td>Yun Ho Jin</td>
<td>Director and Professor, Danguk University</td>
<td>“Globalizing Korean Musicals”</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>11/1</td>
<td>FIELD TRIP</td>
<td>Performance: National Ballet</td>
<td>Venue: Seoul Arts Center</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>11/6</td>
<td>Park Chan Su</td>
<td>Human Cultural Asset, Wood Sculpture</td>
<td>“If I Know Myself, I Can Know the World”</td>
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<td>Hwang Dong Yeol</td>
<td>Managing Professor, The <em>Hallyu</em> Academy</td>
<td>“Asian Value and Korean Culture”</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>11/20</td>
<td>SPECIAL EVENT</td>
<td>“A Night of <em>Hallyu</em>”</td>
<td>Location: Gangnam, Seoul Venue: Hyundai Hillstate Gallery</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>11/27</td>
<td>Jeon Su Cheon</td>
<td>Artist, Professor, Korea Nat’l Univ. of Arts</td>
<td>“Art and Society”</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Speaker(s)</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>11/30 - 12/2 FIELD TRIP (Overseas)</td>
<td>Bae In Suk (Pop Singer (The Pearl Sisters))</td>
<td>“Visiting Other Cultures”</td>
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<td>Destination: Hong Kong, Shenzhen</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>12/4</td>
<td>Kim Beol Lae</td>
<td>Sound Effects and Foley Editor, and Professor, Hongik University</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“Making Korea Sound”</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>12/11</td>
<td>Jeon Taek Su Yun Seok Ho</td>
<td>President, Korea Economic Education Association TV Drama Director (Winter Sonata, etc.)</td>
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<td>“The Modernization of Traditional Culture and Directions for Hallyu”</td>
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<td>“Hallyu through TV Dramas”</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>12/18</td>
<td>Kim Se Ha</td>
<td>Director, Haneol Namsadang Performance Troupe</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“The Transmission of Traditional Culture: Understanding Namdasang”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12/19</td>
<td>END-OF-YEAR PARTY</td>
<td>Medici Tower, Gangnam, Seoul</td>
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Achieving a level of cultural significance, or at least competitiveness, in a global culture market requires a mastery of skill in handling cultural forms, and a “fluency” in communicating them to others. That is, it demands acquiring proficiency in certain styles of art. At an event called “A Night of Hallyu,” which brought together past and present participants of the Hallyu Academy at a posh, upscale venue in Gangnam, Seoul, an after-dinner concert included a solo trumpet performance of the American pop favorite, “I Did It My Way” (of Frank Sinatra fame); a soprano singing the aria “O Mio Babbino Caro” from Puccini’s Gianni Schicchi; a tenor
singing the well-known Italian tune, “O Sole Mio”; a performance from one of the Pearl Sisters (a famous Korean singing duo active in the 1960s and 1970s); a saxophonist who deftly offered tunes in the style of Kenny G; a girl band; a B-boy crew; and a traditional-fusion music group that included Korean, Chinese, and Japanese musicians and instruments. Performers offered a wide range of repertoire that included old Korean pop favorites and Korean folksongs.

All of the performances—billed that night as *hallyu*—were finely executed by talented musicians with professional training and experience. No one questioned the fact that much of the music performed was not of Korean origin; what mattered to the people in the audience was that the musicians excelled in performing it. The thinking was that if Koreans achieve a mastery of a particular art, it becomes theirs culturally. In this regard, an audience member sitting next to me brought to my attention soprano Sumi Jo and violinist Sarah Chang when I asked her what she thought *hallyu* was. Such high achievement renders it acceptable to call certain forms of art “Korean,” and thus gets folded into *hallyu*.

The B-boy phenomenon is a good example of Korea’s “mastery” of an outside pop culture form. Korean B-boys have recently become a point of pride in South Korea, where the phenomenon has taken off with great intensity since the late 1990s. Since 2002, Korean crews have placed a total of fourteen times within the top three at the prestigious annual Battle of the Year contest (six of those included first place titles). The success has put them on *hallyu* posters and brochures, and has

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44 Benson Lee has created an engaging documentary called *Planet B-Boy* (2007), which offers an inside look at the history of B-boying, its place in South Korea, and its community around the globe.
led to crews being featured in ad campaigns released by the Korea Tourism Organization (a government agency) as a vibrant part of *hallyu* and a proud part of Korean culture. Their presence in B-boysing circles has been so significant that South Korea has been called the “world breakdancing capital” (Usher 2011). Although the form is originally American, it has been adopted into the Korean pop culture scene with so much enthusiasm and excellence that it is now considered Korean. Hwang Dong Yeol, the managing professor at the *Hallyu* Academy put it this way:

“What is Korean culture?" he asks. “We have learned that it is not possible to give it a fixed definition. Everything that Koreans have access to today has the potential to become Korean. Our culture is not static; it flows and changes from moment to moment.” In this way, he underscores the importance of seeing Korea as a country that lives contemporaneously (*dongsidaejeok*) with other cultures in modern society.

Some, like celebrity *gugak* musician Kim Duk Soo, attempt to connect B-boysing to Korea’s past, embracing it as an outgrowth of a Korean traditional performing art, as opposed to something Western in origin:

“Everyone seemed to be eager to follow major international trends—especially things flown in from the West—thinking those trends will make them superior to others. As a result, our traditions have been discarded until now. Many don’t know that B-boy dancing is a developed version of *ttangjaeju* (traditional Korean ground dancing).”

(Kim Duk-soo, quoted in S. Lee 2010)

For most, however, it is not a matter of origin. When I went to visit a television drama producer who had worked for decades as the head of the Drama Division at KBS

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45 Personal interview, 19 May 2008.
46 *Ttangjaeju*, literally “ground talent,” also known as *salpan*, is an acrobatic performance and one of the six acts (or *nori*) of the *namsadang*—itinerant performing troupes that were active during the late Joseon era.
(Korea Broadcasting System), he began to boast about Korean B-boys once I mentioned the word hallyu; the director, Yun Heung Sik, also happened to be a consultant for producing B-boy performances. Yun feels that although B-boying is originally American, it was re-created in Korea. He says, “there is nothing Korean about B-boying, but Koreans are very good at it. The body movements are different [from their American counterparts] and their technique is excellent.”

Yun feels that Korean B-boys have raised B-boying to another level, to an art. He also says that it has been an important foundation for nonverbal shows like Jump and Breakout, which were extremely popular with tourists and domestic Koreans, and also toured abroad.

The notion of “fluency” in cultural form, however, is not limited to the mastery of a particular idiom. Fluency goes beyond that to resonate with Yu In Chon’s idea of creativity, which he suggests is at the heart of hallyu. Many of the speakers at the Academy often used the word “global” even as they were asserting the various dimensions of “Koreanness” in their particular art form. Hallyu speaks to the creative ways of “being and becoming” Korean, to follow Stuart Hall’s dynamic formulation of identity (1996, 2003). Through mastery and adaptation, things hallyu are things that carry a Korean identity yet are fluid enough to integrate globally.

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47 Personal interview, 15 Apr 2008.
48 Following the huge popularity of Nanta, a nonverbal Korean show based around a cooking theme that uses Korean samulnori rhythms, Jump (a martial arts show infused with breakdancing) and Breakout (based on breakdancing moves) have played to enthusiastic audiences in South Korea and abroad. Both shows have played off-Broadway in New York City.
Hallyu Integration: Koreanizing the Global

Recent studies on Korean cultural production, such as those in the field of cinema, have pointed to South Korea’s ability to successfully infuse local sentiment into a global form. Within the South Korean film industry, this has created a vibrancy that film scholar Jinhee Choi has referred to as a “renaissance” (2010). Choi does not limit her study on Korean film to discussions of cultural specificity or local content, but looks at its cross-fertilizations with filmic and aesthetic conventions. Her comparative approach reveals how contemporary Korean cinema “creates, adopts, borrows, and transforms film practices and aesthetic norms as it addresses issues that are of immediate concern to Korean audiences, such as national identity, class mobility, gender, and sexuality” (ibid.:11). She focuses on an “interplay between the global and the local: how locality—regardless of whether it is indigenous to a particular culture or hybrid—is transformed and utilized for global and national needs” (ibid.:35).

According to Choi, a genre like the Korean blockbuster differentiates itself from the Hollywood version by appealing to a shared sense of Korean history and sentiment. Much of Korea’s cultural output may, in fact, bear resemblance to what comes out of the U.S., which is not surprising when one considers that American pop culture was set as a model, as Doobo Shim has noted: “In their efforts to create a cultural industry, Koreans emulated and appropriated the American media system with the mantra ‘Learning from Hollywood’” (2006:32). Yet it would be hasty, as Choi argues, to conclude that something like Korean cinema is merely mimicking
Hollywood. Using the recent spate of reunification and war films released in South Korea as supporting text, Choi shows how Hollywood and other national cinema styles are invoked, successfully synthesized, and catered into something more refined, to a “stylistic aesthetic elevation,” with themes that speak to a Korean sensibility (Choi 2010:58). Choi situates the South Korean film industry within the frame of national cinema—a “strategic construct,” which, she suggests, serves “as a guide for both product differentiation and artistic appreciation” (ibid.:10).

Jinhee Choi’s view is echoed by Chris Berry, a film scholar who sees recent Korean blockbusters as something that has been transformed from the original; he writes: “Films such as Shiri and Joint Security Area may emulate Hollywood and seek out international audiences but they also use the blockbuster as a site to speak to local Korean issues” (2003:226). Berry argues that the idea of the blockbuster film can no longer be thought of as “American owned.” He contends that the “idea may be borrowed and translated, but this should not be understood in terms of the original and the copy, where divergence from the original marks failure of authenticity.” Instead, Berry asserts, “in the postcolonial politics and globalized economics of blockbusters, borrowing and translation are only the first step on the road towards agency and creativity” (ibid.:218). He concludes that the “blockbuster is made sense of and practiced according to local cultural and filmmaking contexts,” resulting in a process (however ambivalent) of “de-Westernization.”

In the opening of his article on the de-Westernizing of blockbusters (in Korea and China) Berry includes a quote by Park Chan Wook, noted film director of Korean
domestic box office hits such as *Joint Security Area* (2000), *Oldboy* (2003), and *Thirst* (2009): “At one time, I tried to catch up with Hollywood movies, but it was useless. So, I decided to produce movies that appeal to Koreans’ native sentiments.” Berry suggests that Park Chan Wook, in essence, de-Westernizes the blockbuster when he diverges from the original idea and practice, thus creating difference, a “lack.” It is the space created by this “lack” that drives the hybrid nature of contemporary Korean cinema. Korean scholar and filmmaker Kim So-Young refers to it as relaying Korean content with a “Hollywood tongue” (quoted in Jung 2011:14). Sun Jung echoes Kim’s sentiment in her recent book on the transnational consumption of Korean pop culture, in which she brings to light the hybridity argument:

> this hybridity can be called “Korean” as soon as South Korean cinema reveals its difference from, as well as its similarity to, dominant Western culture. Instead of criticizing South Korean cinema’s lack of purity, Kim So-Young suggests that this hybridity can be regarded as constituting “Koreaness” in contemporary South Korean cinema discourse. (ibid.)

Fluency in “Hollywood-ese,” or proficiency in the “Hollywood tongue,” as Kim So-Young puts it, is a means of appropriating a global form for use in the national context. It is a way to be both Korean and global, and speaks to the ambivalent desires for cultural distinctiveness and cultural belongingness. Indeed in many of the film worlds that exist outside mainstream Hollywood, “the line between opposition and co-optation may not always be clear, and is often blurred,” as Mark Slobin points out (2008:xii). There is a certain power that comes from this blurring, an act that may
be seen as symptomatic of hybrid practices—of “speaking the language” yet retaining a distinct identity.

In his study of globalization and changing values in Korea, C. Fred Alford introduces an interviewee who is quoted as saying, “Koreans are good at putting things together from parts made elsewhere” (Alford 1999:150). It is a notion that one often hears from Koreans both national and diasporic. Alford suggests that Koreans “combine sadae-juui [sadaejuui] with great confidence in their ability to only apparently adopt other people’s ideas, while in fact transforming them into genuine indigenous products…” (ibid.).\(^49\) Whether or not this has to do with a sadaejuui mentality is perhaps open to debate. But this is a trait that Koreans commonly point to about themselves, at times relating it to the iconic Korean traditional dish, bibimbap, which consists of mixing together rice and several other individual side dishes (roots, vegetables, tofu, meat) prepared separately. A “bibimbap identity” is one that creatively adapts, mixes, refashions, and transforms the given into something different. The interviewee in Alford’s account explained Korea’s penchant for “putting [others’] things together” with a “mixture of pride and disparagement,” as Alford describes it. His interviewee’s larger point was that Koreans are “creative with other people’s ideas”; although her (the interviewee’s) sentiment also reveals the ambivalence that Koreans have about globalization in general.

\(^{49}\) The Korean term sadaejuui encapsulates the ideology of glorifying or admiring “the Great.” It denotes an attitude of deference, or obsequiousness, that in the Korean context is sometimes used to describe the cultural environment during Korea’s tributary relationship with China, and more recently under Japanese colonial rule and American occupation. An online Korean-English dictionary (endic.naver.com) translates it as “flunkeyism; cultural toadyism.”
If there can be said to be a “globalizing force,” a cultural hegemony that reaches all parts of the interconnected globe that is our reality today, it is not something that emanates from a homogenizing core. Rather, globalization as it is manifest today, can be seen in “structures of common difference,” as Richard Wilk argues. According to Wilk, “the global stage does not consist of common content, a lexicon of goods or knowledge. Instead it is a common set of formats and structures that mediate between cultures” (Wilk 1995:111). In other words, distinctiveness and authentic difference are intact, but they are expressed, portrayed, dramatized, and communicated through global forms in terms that are “more widely intelligible” (ibid.:118). In localizing and adapting forms like film and television that circulate globally, the South Korean cultural industry is engaging these “structures of common difference” with a fluency and vibrancy that has facilitated the Korean Wave.

**Hallyu as Cosmopatriotism**

The South Korea that now circulates through *hallyu* is one that assumes a vibrant image and dynamic identity. Earlier accounts of Korea often revealed the nation as resistant to, or critical of, foreign cultural influence. The emphatic patriotism inherent in a modernizing South Korea was fueled by an “underdog” mentality that has seen the nation struggle for cultural continuity amid threats of foreign domination (Shim 2008:30); it is what critics such as Kim and Ryoo suggest

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50 Wilk’s frame of reference is the beauty contest, and his local context is Belize. He argues that as Belizeans absorb the beauty pageant into a local context, using a set of standards and ideals, they are entering a “structure of common difference” (Wilk 1995:11).
has driven hallyu (2007). Certainly, the American presence that followed decades of colonization under the Japanese complicated the country’s sense of cultural identity well into the years of liberation. Anxiety of loss and change in a modernizing world was so strong that the South Korean government instituted a mechanism like the Cultural Assets system in an intervening effort to preserve the country’s traditional arts and crafts.\(^{51}\)

Michael Robinson sees Korea’s obsession with traditional roots and national identity as an issue that once tended to cloud cultural production in Korea, especially among an older post-war generation that accepted Western popular culture with ambivalence (Robinson 2005:23). Bruce Cumings, too, has described Korea as guarded and unresponsive to foreign influence: “Ethnocentric and obnoxious to foreigners, a self-contained, autonomous Korea not besmirched by things foreign remains an ideal for many Koreans” (Cumings 1997:137). Fred Alford argues that this closed and defensive nature is a reaction to the threatening effects of globalization. For Koreans, he suggests, this type of response speaks to a fear of “becoming aliens to themselves, living in a world of pure otherness” (1999:155).

Such apprehensive notions resisting foreign culture have largely subsided in critical and popular discourse with the rise of hallyu; the phenomenon has coincided with a transformed outlook on cultural identity in South Korea, marking a departure from previous narratives. This has come about largely because of the media-based

\(^{51}\) The Cultural Property Preservation Law was passed in 1962 to safeguard culture in four categories: Tangible Cultural Properties, Intangible Cultural Properties, Folk Cultural Properties, and Monuments (see Howard 2006b).
nature of *hallyu* and its initial foundation in popular culture. With *hallyu*, the locus of national identity has shifted saliently from the traditional arts to pop culture, allowing—indeed inviting—the embrace of a cosmopolitan way of being.

In a collection of essays on popular culture in Asia, Edwin Jurriëns and Jeroen de Kloet introduce a term that captures aptly the confluence of globalization and nationalism in a country like South Korea. Taken from the words “cosmopolitanism” and “patriotism,” their neologism, “cosmopatriotism,” expresses the dual tendencies of “thinking and feeling simultaneously beyond and within the nation” (2007:13). The anthology brings to light how countries in the Asian region saw an increase in various tropes of patriotism following the financial crisis of the late 1990s. The authors seek to rescue the idea of cosmopolitanism from its negative, often elitist, connotations, and show how living “in the world” as cosmopolitan citizens and travelers (both virtual and real) actually feeds into patriotic affinities. Following sociologist Ulrich Beck, they advocate for a reworking of the national. According to Beck, “the national perspective is a monologic imagination, which excludes the otherness of the other. The cosmopolitan perspective is an alternative imagination, an imagination of alternative ways of life and rationalities, which include the otherness of the other” (Beck, quoted in Jurriëns and de Kloet 2007:11).

Beck’s version of cosmopolitanism rejects the “either-or principle” in favor of a “this-as-well-as-that principle” that allows for what he calls a “rooted cosmopolitanism”; cosmopolitans of this breed are “patriots of two worlds,” or “cosmopolitan patriots” that have the proverbial “roots” as well as “wings” (Beck
In this way, the national is no longer simply the national; rather, it is rediscovered as the “internalized global” (ibid.:23). The explanation resonates with, indeed seems to be an updated version of, Roland Robertson’s earlier buzzword, “glocalization,” which focused on adapting the global to local contexts. Jurriëns and de Kloet, however, offer a more liberated definition that also seems to offer more agency. They also attempt to underscore an affective dimension through their use of the word patriotism. Their definition of cosmopatriotism refers to forms of patriotisms that go beyond the singular love for a locality, just as it moves beyond the, by now saturated, formula of hyphenation, such as Asian-American (Appadurai 413). Instead, it searches for the double articulation that is placed and displaced, territorialized and deterritorialized, at the same time. (Jurriëns and de Kloet 2007:12)

According to Jurriëns and de Kloet, cosmopatriots are “citizens who navigate… between their ironic loyalty to the state and their sense of longing for and belonging to the world” (ibid.:13). The authors suggest that art and popular culture are ideal platforms for exhibiting and examining cosmopatriotic sentiment—in their words, “crucial vehicles for scrutinizing contemporary Cosmopatriot structures of feeling” (ibid.).

Such cosmopatriotic tendencies can be seen, for example, in the Korean skinhead community that appropriates a wider punk ethos to express Korean identity. Participation in the skinhead culture in South Korea ranges from fashion and

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52 Jurriëns and de Kloet acknowledge that patriotism, in its “love for the country,” and nationalism, in its “respect for the state,” are both key terms in conceptualizing roots. They concede that in practice, patriotism and nationalism do overlap, but they prefer the term patriotism for the affective qualities it invokes.
iconography to style and delivery. As Stephen Epstein and Jon Dunbar explain, one
group, Resistance 88, took on the numbers “88” as a proud salute to the 1988 Seoul
Olympics, although the number means something else to other skinheads around the
globe;\(^53\) for this Korean group, “the number was intended to express Korean national
pride” (2007:166). Another skinhead band takes a nationalistic-patriotic stance in a
song that forcefully talks of wrongs committed against Korea (lyrics include
“remember the past, don’t forget what they did to us”). As Epstein and Dunbar
describe it, “The song yokes together the fury of punk, an international form that has
only recently entered Korea, with far more deeply rooted sentiments” (ibid.:159).

Korean skinheads draw upon this originally foreign genre’s emotional
intensity, aggressiveness, indeed anger; they are participants in the spirit of the genre
yet the consciousness of being Korean is not something that simply recedes to the
background and thus they (and Korean punk in general) sit at an intersection of
globalization and nationalism. In fact, the first punk CD album to appear in South
Korea was notably titled *Our Nation* (1997), compiled by artists that were engaging
in what they themselves called “Chosŏn [Joseon] Punk,” as is documented in Stephen

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\(^{53}\) In their chapter, “Skinheads of Korea, Tigers of the East,” Epstein and Dunbar touch upon skinhead
culture’s associations with racism. They relate that the number 88 takes on particular meaning in
skinhead circles as a symbol of white supremacy, the eighth letter of the alphabet being “H” and the 88
standing for “HH” or “Heil Hitler.” Another example involves Korean skinheads’ appropriation of the
color red. To the wider skinhead community, red signifies blood that has been shed for the white race.
However, Korean skinheads see this as the color of the Red Devils, the cheering squad of the national
soccer team during the 2002 World Cup, which was hosted in part by South Korea. The 2002 World
Cup saw virtually all citizens donning themselves in red, and as such, the color has come to suggest
national pride (Epstein and Dunbar 2007:166-7).

\(^{54}\) Songs that have a nationalistic thrust are not uncommon in the Korean skinhead scene as Epstein and
Dunbar introduce yet another group that takes on as a topic Korea’s past of “bitter invasions suffered
for centuries” and “freedom that has been suppressed,” in a song called “Tigers of the East”
(2007:159).
Epstein’s article on the phenomenon (2000). Epstein notes insightfully that the album’s English title speaks to a sort of double allegiance that seeks to “re-create the Korean nation” while aligning itself with the larger punk community (ibid.:27). He argues that “Chosŏn punk cuts into two direction [sic]: declaration of alliance with a foreign genre, but also intense pride in being Korean” (ibid.:29).

Similarly, the B-boy groups that have come to be considered significant representatives of hallyu have also made patriotic contributions. Medalling at international B-boy competitions has given South Korea more visibility and this act alone bestows on them the label “aegukja” (patriot), as one journalist notes (Y. Lee 2007). But they are active as patriots in other ways when they breathe new life into gugak (Korean traditional music) by collaborating with instruments like the gayageum (Korean zither) and an assortment of Korea’s traditional percussion instruments. This fits within the project of “globalizing gugak,” which Yoonhee Chang sees as a patriotic contribution to the nation (2010). More recently, some B-boy groups have been involved with tourism campaigns as representatives of the country. One crew, Last for One, has made a stronger statement by performing on Dokdo Island, a territory whose ownership remains the subject of ongoing dispute between South Korea and Japan (where it is

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55 Stephen Epstein discusses how punk is used by South Korean youth to proclaim a specifically Korean identity (Joseon being the name of Korea’s last dynasty before fully modernizing) (2000). He offers an interesting look into how these musicians refashion this internationally recognizable form to express issues meaningful to local youths. See also his documentary with Timothy Tangherlini, Our Nation: A Korean Punk Rock Community (2002).

56 The gugak group Sorea (Sound of Korea) has famously collaborated with B-boys in their modern take on gugak, or singugak (“new gugak”). See Yoonhee Chang’s 2010 study, which features the development of this group and their role in globalizing Korean traditional music.
known as Takeshima). In 2008, Last for One took pride in being the first B-boy crew to perform on the island, a place they call “our national territory” (S. Kim 2008).

Their performance of the Pachelbel canon with a renowned gayageum ensemble here goes beyond simply breakdancing; the battling B-boys function as ambassadors of their country, and their head spins, slides, flares, and bravado windmills bodily statements of loyalty.

*Hallyu* has broadened the conversation on Korean identity in interesting ways, for embedded in its flow is an acute awareness of the Korean coupled to a cultural vocabulary that is more consciously and conspicuously global—a cosmopolitan competency that allows it to dialogue within a larger network. This is not to say that the forms of popular culture in *hallyu* have trumped older, more traditional forms of culture. These have not decreased in their role as national symbols, but now sit alongside domains of popular culture as representatively Korean. Indeed one of the characteristics of the *hallyu* phenomenon is its Janus-like tendency of looking back while looking forward, of keeping a sensitive eye on the past, on the inside, without losing sight of the future and a place on the outside.

**Hallyu Tourism**

One of the most notable effects of the *hallyu* phenomenon has been a rise in tourism to South Korea. *Hallyu* has brought an opportunity for South Korea to undergo a significant image transformation through the locations, scenery, and characters of popular TV dramas and films. This has been a welcome development
for the country, as only 25 to 30 years ago the nation was still dealing with things like student protests and labor unrest. To an average non-Korean in the States, the thought of South Korea most likely conjured up lingering images of post-Korean War poverty propagated by popular sources such as *M*A*S*H*. Images like these were associated not with brightness or quality, but an air of underdevelopment. In fact, a *New York Times* article on the emergence of Korean popular culture in China describes how in former years, if a Japanese television set stopped working, Chinese consumers would check to see if there was a problem with the electricity, whereas if a South Korean television set stopped working, they would immediately assume that there was something wrong with the television (Onishi 2006). Such an anecdote is telling, and underscores the level of disparity that once existed between South Korea and a country like Japan in foreigners’ minds.

Through *hallyu*, South Korea has gone from cultural backwater to new locus of Asian cool; a desired tourist destination that is no longer simply a stopover or appended excursion while visiting a neighboring country. Much work has been done on this front by the Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which developed “Dynamic Korea” as a national slogan in 2002; and the Korea Tourism Organization, which adopted its own official slogan, “Korea Sparkling,” shortly thereafter as part of a campaign to increase tourism to South Korea. Along with other catchy phrases such as “Hi Seoul—Soul of Asia” (a slogan of the Seoul Metropolitan Government), these campaigns were diligently circulated to raise South Korea’s profile as a popular place to visit. A look at the statistics during this time reveals 2004 to be the year when
tourism figures in South Korea began to rival tourism to Japan. Reports from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism explicitly attribute this rise in tourism to *hallyu*.\(^{57}\)

As part of a more open and cosmopolitan outlook, a non-Korean, Bernhard Quandt, was appointed in 2009 to head the Korea Tourism Organization. Quandt, who has acted in several Korean TV dramas, was the first non-Korean to hold this government-appointed position. Originally born in Germany, Quandt has lived in South Korea for more than thirty years; he is fluent in Korean and took on a Korean name after he became a naturalized citizen. In South Korea, Quandt is known by his Korean name, Lee Charm (이참). As the first foreign-born president of the KTO, Lee Charm has touted himself as the “new and true face of Korea: the Korea that is open, accepting and made up of an amalgam of cultures and influences” (Gould 2009).\(^{58}\)

Korean film and drama stars have also, increasingly, been enlisted in tourism campaigns and media clips as greeters welcoming *hallyu* tourists. For example, K-pop singer and actor Rain was featured in a “Korea Sparkling” TV spot that showcased images and sounds ranging from the traditional to the modern. Bae Yong Jun, an actor who portrayed the sensitive male lead in the hit TV drama series *Winter Sonata* can be found on a poster which places him outside the doorframe of a palace, politely inviting tourists in (Figure 1.2). “Yonsama,” as Bae is widely known to fans in Japan (where the drama was especially popular), clearly invokes his image from Japan.

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\(^{57}\) Figures reveal that Japan had just over 6 million tourists in 2004, while South Korea was a little below this mark in the same year (Korea Annual Statistical Report on Tourism 2005, Ministry of Culture and Tourism). Official yearly tourism reports since 2001 have continued to cite *hallyu* as a major reason for the increase in inbound tourism. The total number of foreign tourists to South Korea in 2013 exceeded 12 million (Jung 2014).

\(^{58}\) After serving four years as head of the KTO, Lee Charm stepped down in 2013 following a scandal. He was the KTO’s longest president.
the drama: he appears gentle and caring, delicate and clean, with glasses, wispy hair, and overall soft features. In the Japanese version of the poster, he is even donning a scarf, which was a key element of his wardrobe in *Winter Sonata* (in the drama, he is often seen wearing a large scarf cuddled around his neck); the iconic look is all too familiar to those who have seen the drama (Figure 1.3). *Winter Sonata* may not have erased a history of postcolonial friction between Japan and Korea, but it has done some work on the ground, it seems, in constructing more positive images of Korea among Japanese fans. According to a Korean scholar of women’s studies and visiting professor at a university in Japan, “In the past, to Japanese, Korea conjured up images of ‘dark, noisy, smelly,’ […] but now Yonsama’s middle-aged fans associate Korea with ‘beautiful things’ and look to him as the idealized male” (Onishi 2004).

Korean drama fans have come to South Korea in increasing numbers to take part in “drama tour packages” through which they visit shooting locations and sites where characters of popular dramas had a significant encounter or shared a special moment. These fans come to see the slick urban cityscapes as well as unsullied countrysides that they see as settings in dramas—the backdrops where memorable stories take place. The Korean Wave Hall located in central Seoul is a hub of information where fans can read about films, dramas, celebrities, and find out about *hallyu* activities around the country (Figures 1.4 & 1.5). They can also pick up detailed information on drama tours and *hallyu*-related venues such as theme parks.

Equipped with an auditorium and ample open floor space, the Korean Wave Hall also
hosts fan meetings; it is a place where fans come by the busload, several times a day, according to one of the Hall’s representatives.\textsuperscript{59}

For South Korea, \textit{hallyu} tourism has become intimately related to “branding” the country, as \textit{hallyu} dramas have become a new platform for cultural identity and a profitable means of marketing the nation. For fans, these tourism itineraries become a way to engage in a “Korean experience” via the locations and various components (sets, props, food, clothes) of their beloved television dramas. The word “experience” is appropriate here because it is in large part the way Korean dramas are consumed; that is, Korean dramas are not merely watched, they are \textit{experienced}—this due in no small part to the emotional investment drawn out episode after episode by dramatic plot lines.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{59} From a personal conversation with a Korean Wave Hall staff member, fall 2007.}
Figure 1.2 Bae Yong Jun from the drama *Winter Sonata* in a KTO “Visit Korea” poster

Figure 1.3 Bae Yong Jun in a scarf wearing his iconic soft looks on Japanese version of KTO poster
Figure 1.4 Korean Wave Hall, Jongno, Seoul
(photo by author)

Figure 1.5 Korean Wave Hall, Jongno, Seoul
(photo by author)
Figure 1.6 Entrance to *Dae Jang Geum* Theme Park, Gyeonggi Province (photo by author)

Figure 1.7 Poster of Jang Geum (Lee Young Ae) at one of the stations at *Dae Jang Geum* Theme Park (photo by author)
Figure 1.8 Inside the royal kitchen at Dae Jang Geum Theme Park (photo by author)

Figure 1.9 Open yard of the royal kitchen at Dae Jang Geum Theme Park (photo by author)
Although the reception of Korean dramas is not something that I mean to discuss at length in this section, it is worth noting the nature of these drama-themed tours and the reason that fans have flocked to South Korea to take them. Visiting sets, studios, and theme parks created around films and television shows is not unusual. This type of tourism is popular even here in the States; an attraction like Universal Studios and the millions of tourists it generates yearly attests to this fact. Yet there seems to be a basic difference in the way tourists interact with the fun available at a venue like Universal Studios, indeed in the reason they tour such attractions. Tourists that visit Universal Studios come, to a certain extent, to “uncover the magic” of the movies. That is, these audiences come with an understanding of the artificiality of the movies; they are aware of it and enjoy it.

By contrast, tourists who seek out drama-themed tour packages and theme parks in South Korea are seemingly there to experience the drama once again—not to see how the fantasy was created, necessarily, but to relive the fantasy. They want to eat the foods that drama characters ate, drink the drinks they drank, and wear the clothes they wore.¹⁰ For example, many Japanese tourists and fans of the drama Hotelier (MBC 2001), starring Bae Yong Jun, seek out the upscale Walkerhill Hotel in northeastern Seoul—one of the filming sites of the drama. The hotel is exclusive and does not allow non-guests to access certain areas on its premises, but according to a musician who played regularly at one of the hotel’s lounges that was featured in the

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¹⁰ A similar observation was made by Michael Shin, a panelist at a forum on Korean pop culture at the Korea Society in New York, 2 Aug 2006.
drama, Japanese fans would pay a meaningful (“almost solemn,” in his words) visit to the lounge and order the dark-colored martini that Bae’s character ordered in the drama. Some, the musician said, would not even drink it, but would just take pictures of it. Fans would also take pictures of a particular stairwell that was featured in the drama at significant moments. These “ritualistic” acts of fandom have not gone unnoticed by the hotel management, which holds special events and inside tours for paying guests from time to time. There are many such locations that draw crowds of fans who come to experience the physical surroundings of a fictional story—usually a romance—that they have made their own through repeated watchings, such as the Yong Pyeong Ski Resort and Nami Island, (both in Gangwon Province), which are popular because they are the locations where the characters of Winter Sonata developed their love for each other.

Another example is the Dae Jang Geum Theme Park located just outside Seoul—a park of village proportions that allows tourists to walk around the palace grounds where the historical series was partially shot (see Figures 1.6 – 1.9). Here, tourists have access to the royal kitchen where the main character Jang Geum (a historical royal chef who later becomes the king’s physician) did most of her cooking. There are also stations where they can try on the traditional Korean clothes that different characters wore, as well as sample some of the royal foods that were

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61 Personal conversation with musician Anastacio Valtinho, 7 Jul 2008.
62 The type of experiencing and “reliving” that tourists engage in at these drama sites is perhaps more in line with the type of tourism that Anne of Green Gables has generated on Prince Edward Island, where fans get to nostalgically absorb the “real place” of innocence, energy, and youth of the fictional main character.
63 Unlike the loud, boisterous theme parks that one finds in the States, the Dae Jang Geum Theme Park does not have rides or shows; it is mostly a spread-out and quiet place.
featured in the drama. Spaces within the court have been left undisturbed and are recognizable to tourists who have watched the drama series, allowing for easy recollection of certain scenes; for example, audiences will be able to pick out the place where the main character, Jang Geum, has the momentous meeting with her teacher after discovering that her teacher was in fact her late mother’s best friend. While the story of *Dae Jang Geum* is fiction, the emotions it incites are real, and these emotions become intrinsically related to the fiction; they also become a part of the image one develops of the country and its culture, after watching the series. Drama-themed venues such as the *Dae Jang Geum* Theme Park offer tourists a chance to revisit that fiction first-hand through the spaces of its sets.

**Korean Television Dramas as Hallyu**

Since its introduction to Korean society in 1956, television has grown to be a ubiquitous fixture in the domestic realm, as Keehyeung Lee reports that by the 1980s, nearly every household in South Korea had more than one television set (2005a:230). The rapidly increasing number of televisions during this time helped it become a preferred medium of entertainment that holds a significant place in Koreans’ daily lives to this day. Korean television programs have developed over the years with influence from the U.S. In fact, in the earliest stages, as Korea was modernizing in the 1960s, television programming was largely dependent on foreign, 64 Keehyeung Lee provides a short history of melodramas on Korean television (2005a). See also Changhee Park for a brief summary on the history of Korean television and the development of TV programming, including the Korean television drama (1995:110-125); and Jinhee Cho Park, who also gives a backdrop of the environment in which Korean television grew in the 1980s and 90s (2001:50-69).
mostly American, programs which were highly popular and broadcast during prime

time. Foreign programs would take up a large share of prime time hours until 1969.

But from the 1970s, Korean dramas began to flourish, pushing foreign programs to

more peripheral time slots (D. Lee 2004:252).

The American (and later Japanese) influences on Korean television have been

significant. In light of the U.S.’s wide-reaching impact on media worldwide, perhaps

this is not surprising, as David Morley and Kevin Robins remind us that the U.S. has
done more than merely distribute its programs across the globe:

It is not simply that America exports a lot of television programmes—beyond that,
America has written the ‘grammar’ of international television—the formats of
television, developed in America, have literally ‘set the frame’ for the production of
television, in most other countries.65 (Morley and Robins1995:223)

But these influences have found local expression and have been mixed with local
cultural tastes and preferences in domestically created programs. Of the many types
of programs, it is the serial television drama that has evolved to become perhaps the
most beloved part of Korean programming.

Much like the American dramatic serial, the Korean TV drama also has roots
in theater, film, and radio—media from which, in its early days, it borrowed content
as well as human resources and talent, including writers, producers, and actors. The

TV drama in South Korea has gone through many developments—from weekly

65 American popular culture in general had a particularly pronounced presence in South Korea after the
Korean War, through AFKN (American Forces Network Korea) radio and TV as well as the clubs that
were to be found on American military bases; there are reported to have been more than 150 bases and
a total of approximately 270 clubs throughout the country during this time (J. Kim 2011:99-100).
These outlets served as significant channels of American popular entertainment during a time when the
country was rebuilding itself culturally.
dramas in the 1960s to daily serials and weekend dramas in the 1970s and 1980s to larger-scale productions and mini-series in the 1990s—to become the significant force in South Korean programming that it is today. As Doobo Shim describes it, “The television drama has always been the centerpiece of television watching among Korean audiences” (Shim 2008:23). Keehyeung Lee further clarifies that it is not simply any television drama that holds such a significant place in South Korea, but the domestic prime-time melodramas that dominate television programming in the country (K. Lee 2005a; D. Lee. 2004). 66

Indeed the TV drama, or “deurama,” as it is simply referred to among Koreans, can be seen as a cultural institution in South Korea for its wide popularity and prevalence in the way it seeps into everyday life. It is not uncommon to hear songs from the soundtrack of a currently running drama fill the air of stores, shops, markets, and public spaces; nor is it difficult to hear parts of a drama’s dialogue trending among people (especially youth) on the streets, or on the Internet; or to see a particular item, trinket, or clothing gain currency among people in everyday use or wear. The place of TV dramas in Korean contemporary culture is summed up nicely in the following passage taken from an article in Audrey Magazine discussing the popularity of the TV drama series My Name is Kim Sam Soon (alternate title: My Lovely Sam Soon), which aired in 2005 to stunning viewership ratings that broke

66 Keehyeung Lee notes that although American melodramas such as Dallas, Dynasty, and Beverly Hills 90210 were broadcast in South Korea throughout the 1990s, reception was at best mixed, and such foreign programs have never been more popular than homegrown dramas (2005a:243n1).
50%. The drama was aired on MBC, one of South Korea’s three major terrestrial networks:

It was a night like any other on Korea’s MBC television network news. Reports of a surge in the won’s value jostled for space with analysis of the imminent six-party nuclear talks and news of a heat wave gripping the nation. But then, something strange happened. The usually impeccably staid newscaster was bringing the program to an end when, in one of those your-dad-dancing-at-the-school-disco moments, he turned to the camera and said, “Don’t miss My Lovely Sam-Soon tonight.”

And there it was. Confirmation, as if any were needed, of the extent to which this 16-part TV series had permeated the Korean consciousness.67

The excerpt encapsulates well the reach and impact that TV dramas can (and often do) have in the daily media culture of the Korean populace; it attests to the significance of dramas in the landscape of Korean pop culture and entertainment.

According to Kim Won, a producer at MBC—the TV network that aired such popular dramas as Dae Jang Geum (2003) and the above-mentioned My Name is Kim Sam Soon—dramas are a crucial part of a station’s program offerings. In Kim’s words, when determining the competitiveness or “success” of a station, “nothing is more important, or plays more important a role, than the dramas of that station.”68

Drama programming is an important way for a station to generate profit and gain popularity. At any given time in South Korea today, one can find anywhere between two to three dozen different dramas playing on television each week.69

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68 Personal interview, 13 May 2008.
69 The three major terrestrial TV networks in Korea are KBS (Korean Broadcasting System), SBS (Seoul Broadcasting System), and MBC (Munhwa Broadcasting System). These three networks together broadcast somewhere around twenty different dramas throughout any given week; the number of dramas aired per week increases when including younger cable channels such as tvN, JTBC, OCN, and Mnet, which have also begun to offer dramas over the years.
Lee Byeong Hun, the director of acclaimed drama series *Dae Jang Geum* calls South Korea a nation that is “crazy about dramas.” In his lecture at the Hallyu Academy, Lee, a veteran director who has been working in the Korean TV industry for forty years, suggested that there was no country in the world that likes dramas as much—or even half as much—as South Korea. Surely, there is no country with a TV culture that doesn’t enjoy fictional dramas; every country likes TV dramas. But Lee notes an interesting phenomenon: in South Korea, prime-time dramas air twice a week. That is, they must air twice a week; dramas that air only once a week are not able to survive. Lee is referring more specifically to dramas that are shown in prime-time slots—programs that are comparable to American series like *NYPD Blue, ER, Dallas*, and *Dynasty*. Programs like these, or more recently *Lost, or 24*, are models of quality popular entertainment, but they air only once a week in their home culture.

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70 *Hallyu* Academy lecture, 31 Aug 2006.
71 Korean TV dramas have also sometimes casually been compared to American soap operas. While there may be some resonance in tone and melodramatic content, Korean dramas differ from American daytime soaps like *The Young and the Restless* and *Days of Our Lives* in overall feel. It should also be noted that popular Korean dramas air during prime time while American soaps remain the preserve of daytime programming; this is the reason director Lee compares Korean dramas to shows like *Dallas* and *NYPD Blue*, although Korean dramas are discrete, limited-run series that do not usually come back in “seasons” like the aforementioned American shows. In addition, unlike the never-ending nature of American daytime soaps, which can go on for decades, Korean dramas are finite, with a clear beginning and end. In this sense, Korean dramas may have more in common with Latin American *telenovelas*, which also have a limited number of episodes.

Prime-time dramas in South Korea air twice a week in one of the following time-slot pairings: “Mon/Tues drama,” “Wed/Thurs drama,” “Weekend (Sat/Sun) drama,” or sometimes a “Fri/Sat drama.” Such two-episode-per-week dramas are often called “mini-series” and usually contain anywhere from 16-24 episodes, with each episode running from 60-70 minutes (though there have been dramas whose episodes have exceeded 70 min). Longer dramas in the two-episode-per-week category can go up to 50-60 episodes; these are often the “weekend dramas” (though some do not necessarily fall in the weekend slot, and when this is the case they are sometimes called “special dramas”). There are also “daily dramas” that have shorter episodes (35 min or so) that air before prime time, fives times a week (Mon-Fri), as well as “morning dramas” that also air five times a week (Mon-Fri mornings), also with shorter episodes. Both “daily dramas” and “morning dramas” have a higher number of episodes, often exceeding 100. Most of the dramas that are associated with the *hallyu* phenomenon are from the prime-time, two-episode-per-week category, which tend to have higher budgets and production value, with attention paid to costumes, locations, and overall visual appeal.
According to director Lee, dramas that air only once a week tend to die out in South Korea as audiences have developed an appetite for two episodes per week. Lee cites The UK as the only other TV culture that airs prime time dramas twice a week.\(^{72}\)

One of the reasons that TV dramas are so beloved in South Korea is perhaps the importance that productions tend to place on audience response. The shooting environment and overall production climate of TV dramas are often frenzied because producers are eager to reflect audience feedback as noted actively across the Internet. In fact, a drama will sometimes start with only a handful of completely written episodes, the rest to be written as the drama progresses, i.e. while the series is airing.\(^{73}\) Although this creates tremendous time pressure and sometimes results in a fly-by-the-seat “live-shoot” mentality, storylines become flexible and are adjusted along the way, ultimately to gain higher ratings.\(^{74}\) For example, in Winter Sonata (KBS 2002), the main character Junsang, played by Bae Yong Jun, was originally supposed to die, but due to fan protest, the director decided to keep him alive in the end and take away only his eyesight.\(^{75}\)

\(^{72}\) BBC’s East Enders and ITV’s Coronation Street, both pillars of British TV programming, were mentioned in this regard, although both programs have seen various scheduling changes throughout their long years.

\(^{73}\) One producer at SBS told me that dramas sometimes begin production with only four episodes in-hand, something that is difficult to fathom. A drama music supervisor at KBS explained to me that dramas usually aim to start production with at least eight fully written episodes, and that even then, they are constantly pressed for time, sometimes barely making airing deadlines.

\(^{74}\) In their e-book on K-dramas, Why Do Dramas Do That? (2013), bloggers “javabeans” and “girlfriday” of the website dramabeans.com briefly discuss the “live-shoot” process as the preferred and dominant method of drama production in South Korea. “Live-shoot” here does not mean that dramas actually go live (in the way that a show like Saturday Night Live does), but that they come dangerously close to broadcast dates; productions have even been known to come very close to the actual airing time. During my time in South Korea, I witnessed such a situation; when visiting the shooting location of Painter of the Wind (SBS 2008) the day before the broadcast of its first episode, I was surprised to find that they were still filming parts of the first episode.

\(^{75}\) Lecture by Yun Seok Ho, director of Winter Sonata, at the Hallyu Academy, 11 Dec 2007.
The extraordinary time pressure that drama productions face is enough to keep some talented creative personnel at bay; for example, when I asked two very active and highly sought-out film music composers about working with TV dramas, they both mentioned, on separate occasions, that the time constraints were too prohibitive and much too stressful. Others, however, consider the intense production atmosphere something positive, something that actually generates creativity. Park Haki, a singer-songwriter who has worked as a music supervisor for TV dramas, says that the Korean *bballi bballi* (“hurry, hurry”) mentality so common to the pace of life in Korea is not necessarily a bad thing. In comparing Korean and Japanese TV dramas, he says:

Koreans have a lot to learn from the Japanese. The Japanese are perfect and thorough in planning, and make no mistakes. They are detailed, down to the final piece, and their products are perfect. However, this leaves no room for improvisation; there is no spontaneity. There are pros and cons to each type of work environment.  

Park sees the ability to think and work on one’s feet as a talent and something that drives creative energy, explaining that all players in a drama production (creators, directors, actors) must possess, to some degree, the ability to ad lib. The *bballi bballi* mentality has often been criticized as an outcome of intense, compressed, rapid modernizing in South Korea, an attitude that sacrifices quality for immediacy. Park himself admits that he used to think of this as a negative trait, but he now sees it as a strength, something that has nurtured Koreans’ “*sunballyeok*” (ability to react to rapidly changing situations), which he sees as a plus.

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76 Personal interview, 22 April 2008.
The intense nature of the production environment may indeed lend spontaneity and energy to the final product, making it more appealing; and surely the inclusion of real-time response can be satisfying to an invested audience. But perhaps the greatest factor that keeps dramas consistently popular in South Korea is the type of story that often gets told. Korean dramas can on the overall be thought of as “melodramas.” Although they are not all sentimental “weepies” in the style of Douglas Sirk, or of the type that this genre might generally invoke to a contemporary Hollywood-bred American audience, Korean TV dramas tend to insert melodramatic moments in the storytelling of almost all dramas. It is an enduring ethos in Korean TV fiction and an essential “ingredient” that is infused into nearly all types of stories, yielding—in addition to the typical (full-fledged) romantic melodrama—hybrid subcategories such as “comedy-melodrama,” “action-melodrama,” “fantasy-melodrama,” “horror-melodrama,” etc.\(^7\)

As Darcy Paquet notes, melodrama has been a dominant genre in Korean film ever since the industry began in 1919. As an early influence of Korean melodrama, Paquet points to the Japanese theatrical form of sinpa, an escapist type of modern social melodrama often involving sentimental plots that gained popular appeal in the 1920s when Korea was under Japanese rule. He also cites Korean pansori, the traditional story-telling art form whose repertoire by that time consisted of five

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\(^7\) Korean TV dramas are known to draw pathos and emotional tears from its viewers even in genres that are otherwise categorizable, such as “comedy,” for instance. In American entertainment, while genres like comedy, action/adventure, mystery, suspense/thriller, and horror can be said to be organized by the emotions they elicit (horror scares, suspense thrills, action electrifies, comedy makes one laugh), Korean dramas will often range the gamut of emotion in one single drama, but they almost always contain melodrama.
canonic texts of dramatic content, each illustrating an aspect of Confucian morality. American films served as another influence; melodramas of Hollywood’s so-called “Golden Age” gained mass appeal when they were widely distributed after World War II (Paquet 2007:44-45).^78

Typically involving situations of heightened emotion surrounding sensational plots, exaggerated characters, seemingly impossible obstacles, and often a polarizing view of good and evil (and the triumph of good), melodramas can be found around the world, recognizable partially by these traits. Indeed the formulaic nature of melodramatic conventions aids the genre in crossing film cultures with facility. Familiar characterizations and storylines act like modules that can carry varying meaning according to how (and where) they are pieced together, and this allows them to localize well (Klein 2010). Film scholar Jeanine Basinger refers to genre as a set of Lego parts, “a bunch of pieces that stay the same,” but can be assembled to build different things (Basinger 1986:16). These Lego bits may be used to construct a similar dramatic form that can carry local stories that resonate different histories and contexts.

Korean melodrama can be said to have taken on its own identity while keeping these traits intact.\^79 Wimal Dissanayake argues that melodrama in Asia has a

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^78 See also Chung (2005) for an exposition of Korean melodrama. Practically speaking, the enduring popularity of melodrama in Korea can also be attributed to its relatively low production cost, which has kept it an appealing genre for producers.

^79 Wimal Dissanayake points out that although the term “melodrama” is used to characterize some types of Asian cinema, no Asian language has an exact synonym (1993). The Korean word choeryumul (“tearjerker”) was used to describe this type of film as Korean cinema burgeoned in the 1950s and 60s. Since then, the Korean vocabulary has come to loosely appropriate the (abbreviated) English word,
different set of associations than what the genre invokes in the West. He points out, for example, that the idea of suffering is crucial, indeed valorized, in most Asian film cultures, and that it cannot be left out of a discussion on Asian melodrama because it is through inevitable human suffering that one gains true insight, and that a “metaphysical understanding of suffering becomes the condition of possibility for participating in the meaning of life” (1993:4).

In the Korean context, this suffering is somewhat encapsulated in the native concept of han, as observed by Paquet, who defines it as “hardship that accumulates over time and that remains unexpressed” (2007:43). Often described as a “national sentiment,” han encompasses a range of emotions including resentment, sorrow, bitterness, longing, and resignation that come about as a result of prolonged injustice (Chung 2005:121). Though the word itself is relatively modern, the sentiment is thought to be embedded in the Korean psyche, the narrative of suffering having been handed down through generations of being the weaker party in relationships of unequal power. Some in the South Korea of today prefer to depart from such burdensome notions and leave this kind of terminology behind, such as film director Park Chan Wook, who was reportedly “quick to dismiss” the idea when asked about

“mello,” to refer to a sentimental story that draws out emotion (usually one involving a heart-wrenching love line).

Korean scholars point to various sources of han: foreign domination (by the Chinese, Japanese, and the West); Confucian patriarchy that has traditionally silenced women; exploitation of the lower class throughout Korea’s class-based history; and the violation of civil rights during military rule (see Chung 2005:121).
it in an interview for the *New York Times*. Hye Seung Chung approaches it usefully by regarding it not as an essentializing aspect of Korean identity but as a historically and culturally specific mobilization of what Peter Brooks defines as the “melodramatic imagination” or “melodramatic mode.” *Han* indeed connotes melodramatic affect and sensibility in the Korean context. However, what is unique about *han* is its context rather than affect in and of itself. (2005:122)

As implied in Chung’s quote, non-Koreans will have no trouble relating to the feelings or emotion of *han*, which they can surely empathize with through their own experiences and struggles. It is not only Koreans that can know or feel *han*; simply put, it is a “vocabulary of expression” (Dissanayake 1993) born of a shared history and context that continues to have currency in the intersubjective experience of Koreans. Tellingly, it is a term that both directors Lee Byeong Hun (*Dae Jang Geum*) and Yun Seok Ho (*Winter Sonata*) use in discussing the intensely emotional and dramatic nature of Korean TV dramas.

Another notable aspect of Asian melodrama, according to Dissanayake, is the prominence of family. Whereas in Western melodrama, the family may be of importance insofar as it provides context to the individual, in Asian melodrama, the family itself is a significant point of interest; that is, a character is not simply an individual, a self that is just part of a family—s/he is part of a more important “familial self” (1993). Family relationships are integral to the meaning-making of characters in Korean dramas. They are a defining factor in who the characters are, and

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81 When asked about the idea of *han* and its potential in shedding light on Park’s acclaimed “Vengeance” films, the director responded by saying, “We don’t like to use that kind of language anymore,” explaining that it was a reminder of traditional society, “when women were said to carry lifelong grudges because they couldn’t have children” (Buruma 2006).
often inform their choices, which can have intergenerational impact.\textsuperscript{82} At the root of this importance is a Confucian ideology that regards the family as an ideal model for human relations. Familial relationships are viewed as the prototype of all human relationships, and social relations are seen as an extension of the family (Lee 1994). In Korea, these relational bonds—ties between family, friends, and acquaintances—are defined culturally in terms of jeong.

While a good amount of attention has been given to the concept of han, the notion of jeong remains largely unexamined in studies of Korean culture. The term speaks to a deep “getting-used-to,” an affective bond that develops between people who share a long period of time and space together. Nancy Abelmann and John Lie describe it as “one part love, equal parts affinity, empathy, obligation, entanglement, bondage, and blood” (Abelmann and Lie 1995:39). Over time, jeong insinuates parties in a cohesive “we-ness” that lies at the heart of shared experience. Its affection is not limited to romance, and the Western notion of love elucidates the concept only partially. Indeed the word resonates in complicated ways that cannot be understood through a binaristic model such as love/hate, and in fact the attachment of jeong can encompass both.\textsuperscript{83}

In an examination of the social impact of globalization in South Korea, C. Fred Alford suggests that while Koreans are eager to globalize their economy, they

\textsuperscript{82} Jen Ang notes the focus on family relationships as a factor that distinguishes Korean dramas from Japanese dramas (2007). Even in stories about young characters that take place in urban settings, Korean dramas interweave immediate, and often extended, family members.

\textsuperscript{83} Jeong has multiple dimensions of intimacy such that one can, for example, develop an attachment for someone with whom one always fights—something referred to as miun jeong (“hateful” or “ugly” jeong). Though seemingly counterintuitive, this is still an instantiation of jeong. One scholar has even suggested that jeong and han are two sides of the same coin (J. Lee, cited in Joh 2003:10).
are at the same time apprehensive about how globalization will inevitably change relationships, turning them into encounters that are mostly instrumental and devoid of affection. He remarks, “Globalization threatens to result in a society without affection, something that Koreans not only dislike but dread, for it is affection that binds humans together in society. It is affection that makes society worthwhile. By affection I mean chǒng [jeong]” (1999:154). The nature of interpersonal bonding may have modulated with Korea’s entry into a modern, and now global, era, and has perhaps become weaker in comparison to an earlier village-based context, but jeong remains an important way of describing and understanding relationships in the Korea of today. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear the mother character in a drama warn her son not to spend too much time with the girl that she disapproves of, fearing that her son might not so much “fall in love” but develop jeong for her. Jeong is an ideal in intimate one-on-one relationships, as well as a crucial dimension in establishing relational harmony in the larger community.

While recent Korean film has been lauded for innovative and eye-catching display in both content and form, Korean TV dramas provide a familiar comfort zone that deals primarily with the melodramatic struggles of suffering and affection between people. The Korean drama has taken a global format (television fiction) and a transnational genre (melodrama) to create a locally specific form of entertainment that underscores things like family and wider societal relationships in

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84 Although melodrama is certainly not absent in film, Korean cinema has in the recent past received critical attention for such things as high-powered gunplay in films like Shiri (Kang Je Gyu, 1999), stylish depiction of violence in stories of transgression (such as in Old Boy by Park Chan Wook, 2004), and experimentation with form (such as in Peppermint Candy by Lee Chang Dong, 1999), largely relegating this once-popular film genre to television.
culturally inflected terms. Culture critic Dong-Hoo Lee has shown, for instance, how even as the Japanese “trendy drama” strongly influenced the Korean trendy dramas that became popular in the 1990s, Korea’s version was not simply a copy of the Japanese (2004). The Japanese formula for trendy dramas was hybridized in the Korean context to accentuate the local, yielding an authentic variation that upheld elements of the original while being imbued with local relevance. Indeed, as Ien Ang observes,

Globalization has meant greater cross-cultural interconnection and confluence, but it has not erased subtle differences—least of all at the level of feeling. Generic variations and local/regional specificities within the landscape of global television fictions are an excellent site for understanding how, in the current world, difference and disjuncture persist beyond the surface of a globalized cultural modernity. (Ang 2007:29)

South Korean TV dramas are a platform of convergence that maintains the dual tendencies of emphasizing the local and engaging the global; as suggested by Ang, these fictions are rich texts through which the sustenance of a local (Korean) identity,

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85 The “trendy drama” is a type of television drama that began in Japan in the 1980s; these dramas starred young, good-looking actors, and often revolved around a romance (or people looking for love), with stylish characters based in a chic, urban setting, although other locations with beautiful scenery could be included. Trendy dramas also tended to show consumer culture in an appealing light. In addition to cast and setting, trendy dramas pay special attention to music, creating a package of good looks, beautiful scenery, and lovely songs that is particularly attractive to younger audiences.

86 Dong-Hoo Lee has analyzed the Japanese trendy drama Tokyo Love Story (Fuji TV 1991) as the model for the Korean drama Jealousy (Jiltu, MBC 1992), which is widely considered to be South Korea’s first trendy drama. According to Lee, although the two dramas do have similar traits, Jealousy differs from Tokyo Love Story in its inclusion of family. Tokyo Love Story focuses on the love between a woman and a man in an environment where family is absent; in contrast, Jealousy includes more supporting characters in its narrative orbit, where “[p]ersonal relationships become extended and intertwined,” and the love between the two leads “becomes not just their personal issue, but also everyone’s issue” (2004:269). Another difference she notes is Jealousy’s adherence to traditional gender relations despite its seemingly pro-feminist façade. Additionally, Jealousy makes a concerted effort to foreground the lifestyles of the main characters, framing props and settings (Western consumer culture) to construct its modern characters.
a “difference,” interacts with recognizable traits to maintain relevancy in a larger network of global television flow. In this sense, they embody well the dynamics of hallyu, which seeks to articulate the Korean while possessing global facility.

Such a mindset is nicely encapsulated on the cover of a hallyu brochure published by the Korea Tourism Organization that features a young woman dressed in a Korean royal hanbok with a fancy royal hairdo, holding a traditional paper fan and a cell phone (Figure 1.10).87 The model in the picture is TV drama actor Yun Eun Hye, the female lead in popular hallyu TV drama Gung (alternate title: Princess Hours, MBC 2006), which takes place in a fictitious present-day Korea that has preserved the royal family with its attendant system and culture. The depiction touches on several facets of hallyu: it foregrounds the Korean through extravagant traditional clothing, and is punctuated by the modern—a cellphone that is the central detail that draws the eyes.88 The glossy hair accessory verges on fusion, and the popular young actor significantly invokes youth, which was, and still is, an important demographic of the hallyu phenomenon, both in terms of talent and audience. It is a tableau which, in its juxtaposition of Korean and modern, past and future, reflects the nature of hallyu globalization and its concatenated, ongoing process of Korean cultural identity-making.

87 KTO brochures are available at airports as well KTO offices and kiosks around the city.
88 The device would surely have been a smartphone had the brochure been from just one or two years ago.
Figure 1.10 Cover of KTO (Korea Tourism Organization) brochure 2006
This chapter has sought to situate the emergence of hallyu by surveying its history and context in South Korea and the region; it has also discussed the characteristics of hallyu by drawing on instances of popular culture that have resulted from a particular climate of cultural production in South Korea. Hallyu is a mode of globalization through which South Korea has joined a larger arena of pop culture. This mode embraces both the past and the future; the traditional and the popular; the national and the global, and the dynamic facility between these points through a competency in cultural forms. Such tendencies—a concern with the past, the seeking of tradition, and striving for the global—can be detected in the TV dramas that have been at the forefront of hallyu. Music is a compelling component of these dramas, and a most integral part of their storytelling; their place in relaying stories with these hallyu-esque themes are dealt with through specific case studies that follow the next chapter which first takes a look into the nature of Korean drama soundtracks, and how they work.
CHAPTER TWO – PART 1

Use and Function of Music in the K-drama

The Korean TV dramas that have been part of the flow of hallyu are composed of music soundtracks that carry significant effect and power in relating tales that deal with love, romance, friendship, and family, even as they communicate the larger “motifs” of the hallyu phenomenon, which I have suggested in the preceding chapter include a desire for tradition and the past, as well as the global. This chapter focuses on the music of contemporary Korean TV dramas, including the nature of the OST (Original Soundtrack) and its role in delivering stories that have garnered audiences outside Korea; it starts with a general review of music’s place—its practical use and function—in television, then moves on to its application in the context of K-drama storytelling.

Music and Television Drama

The medium of television provides a viewing experience that is different from that of film. For scholars working in television sound, one of the main characteristics often singled out as a distinguishing factor between the two is the actual environment in which filmic and televisual fictions are respectively consumed. John Ellis suggests that the “regime of vision” is different for the case of TV and cinema: “TV does not encourage the same degree of spectator concentration. There is no surrounding darkness, no anonymity of the fellow viewers, no large image, no lack of movement
amongst the spectators, no rapt attention…” (Ellis 1982:128). Television warrants a less intense type of watching than film does, engaging viewers in a “look” or a “glance” more than an enclosed, focused “gaze” (ibid.:137). Rick Altman, speaking for American commercial broadcasting, and national systems that resemble it, also explains that the nature of television, from an audience perspective, elicits an “intermittent spectatorship,” meaning that television comes to life in the home (or bar, lounge, waiting room, or shop) amid other simultaneous activities, something he refers to as “household flow” (Altman 1985:42-43). Echoing Altman’s assertion of a “household flow,” Jeremy Butler emphasizes the fact that unlike cinema and theater, television “exists in an environment of competing distractions” (Butler 2002:177).

Sound in television programs thus assumes a critical role, one more active perhaps than sound in film, generally speaking. Ellis explains that because sound can hold a person’s attention more consistently than image, it is used to draw in viewers in the TV context. Altman corroborates this when he writes that the television soundtrack works as a significant mediator of the aforementioned household flow and programming flow. 89 Yet as Kevin Donnelly points out, television music often suffers the constraints of cost and technology, more so than film. On the one hand, smaller budgets typically make it much less illustrious than its “opulent cousin,” film music, as Donnelly describes it. And on the other, traditional television confronts technological limitations in small speakers with a narrow frequency range, that are inadequate for accommodating subtlety, wide dynamics, and overall good musical

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89 Altman’s reference here is to Raymond Williams’ early study of television where he described the characteristic experience of television as one of “flow” (1974).
sound. This has contributed to the “lack of aural ambition that has perennially plagued television” (Donnelly 2005:112).

Despite its limitations, however, music still fulfills certain duties that are crucial to the viewing experience. Jeremy Butler points to four distinct functions of sound on television: 1) capturing viewer attention, 2) manipulating viewer understanding of image, 3) maintaining visual flow, and 4) maintaining continuity within individual scenes (2002:177). Sound in general—and music more specifically—works to smooth over any potentially perceived fragmentation as well as hold viewers captive to the screen; it is employed for formal purposes as well as allure. In general, television music may carry a larger responsibility to entice, or condition, viewers—the first mission on Butler’s list. Theme songs for television programs, for example, embody a “disciplinary function,” as Donnelly calls it, to become sonic markers that alert audiences to come near (2005:113). Signature tunes, while assuming the identity of the show, function as a cue to viewers who may be outside the immediate space of the television, letting them know that the show will start.

But taken as a group, Butler’s four functions of sound on television are not all too dissimilar to the uses of music in feature film, especially when dealing with a format like fictional television drama (as opposed to documentaries, commercials, commercials, commercials).

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90 While television music may never quite equal the luxurious sonic experience of cinema, steady improvements in television sound systems, and perhaps even the changing mode of consuming television (on desktops, laptops, and other personal devices with a headphone), may slowly be challenging the idea that television music is limited by technology.

91 Philip Tagg calls this “reveille music” referring to the reveille played by army buglers to rouse sleeping soldiers in the morning (Donnelly 2005:113); Dorothy Hobson calls the signature tunes of soap operas the “siren call to view” (2003:71).
advertisements, sitcoms, game shows, or news). In the case of popular music, composer and sound editor Robb Wright notes that while popular songs make their way into other avenues of TV and visual media more or less for the purposes of marketing (put to work as an “overt tool”), “only in dramatic film and television are popular songs used in order to help tell a sustained narrative story…” (Wright 2003:9). In terms of function and “control,” the music of television dramas bears many similarities with music in film; the overlaps increase when dealing with works involving melodrama, a mode that pervades the Korean TV drama.92

So although the medium of television may be defined by a particular viewing experience, and should be approached on its own terms (and not, for example, as “a failed or lesser form of cinema,” (Hilmes 2008:160)), the identity of the fictional drama and its application in television allows us to borrow from methods and approaches to soundtrack that have emerged in film music studies, as both make kindred uses of music when it comes to storytelling. Film music offers a sort of “blueprint” to music in television drama, especially in matters of musical underscoring (Donelly 2005:129), and can go a long way in analyzing dramatic televisual texts, which have inherited many of the conventions codified in the film music of Hollywood.

92 In his study of melodrama, Ben Singer suggests understanding melodrama as a dramatic mode, in light of its ambiguousness and “generic slipperiness” (2001). Singer goes on to further develop his idea of melodrama as a “cluster concept” that exhibits a combination of certain key elements that are noticeable across differing genres (see pp. 1-15). This is a useful way of thinking about melodrama, especially in the context of Korean television dramas, which almost always have melodramatic tendencies and exhibit moments that could easily be characterized as “melodramatic emotional excess,” despite a particular drama’s overlap with other genre affiliations (comedy, urban romance, historical drama, horror, action, etc.).
At the end of her seminal study on the narrative functions of film music, Claudia Gorbman encourages her reader to further consider uses of music in other media, such as television, making particular reference to popular music and its place within a changing grid of taste, appeal, production, and economics (1987). Although Gorbman’s main area of study is film, she invites students of music and image to expand their analyses to other forms of media, a call that she repeats in a later essay on the “Aesthetics and Rhetoric” of music in film and other multimedia texts (Gorbman 2004). Here Gorbman advocates approaching music with a consideration of how it affects viewers in its interplay with image and story, as opposed to a more conservative approach that looks at the aesthetics of the music itself (musical form, its development, unity, and internal coherence). Although not necessarily speaking out against an auteurist approach that places the composer at the authorial (and authoritative) center of musical creation and thus musical meaning—a great temptation, especially when composers are alive, accessible, and responsive to interviews—Gorbman is refreshingly concerned with how certain musics actually work in persuading audiences. Paying attention to a text’s rhetoric, she says, “focuses on its manipulations of the audio-viewer […] where those manipulative designs came from and how they are embedded in the work” (2004:14).

Looking at music with an eye to the way in which it persuades, what patterns may be gleaned, how it exerts meaning or gains particular power, and how it might affect a scene, and by extension, a consuming audience, opens up territory that beckons stimulating questions, especially when applied to entertainment cultures
outside the American mainstream, home of the “Hollywood superculture”—an entity which consistently acts as dialogue partner to music-media cultures around the world. Gorbman’s appeal for a wider look at music across various media, and the ways in which it potentially activates meaning in media texts, resonates in ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin’s pioneering collection, *Global Soundtracks*. Slobin’s anthology also approaches music’s manipulative designs within the filmic text, although he gives special attention to the culturally-informed work that it does; he focuses on music not simply as an accompanying element but as a transmitter of cultural meaning. Referencing Gorbman’s “rhetoric,” Slobin’s interest is in looking at all forms of “film music” (his quotation marks suggesting that the label include other visual media) in its “culture-based methods of persuasion” (2008:362n2). Gorbman’s pursuit in analyzing music’s rhetoric, and Slobin’s tendency to locate patterns of persuasion, especially ones that come with cultural clues (and cues), both lend a renewed vigor to hearing music on television.

Jeff Smith’s examination of the rise of popular music in film has taken an insightful look into the organic links between the industrial and commercial aspects of the compilation soundtrack and the aesthetic “result,” that is, the function of such a

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93 In the anthology *Global Soundtracks*, Mark Slobin (2008) invokes the term “superculture,” which he developed as part of a model in an earlier work (Slobin 1993) that maps out musics that exist amid interconnected global musicscapes. In short, “superculture” refers to something that is so dominant that it is in effect taken for granted. In the case of the Hollywood film score—a supercultural force that thoroughly pervades musical practice in Hollywood and media cultures across the globe—the musical content comes from sources such as European romantic symphonic and operatic styles, early 20th century cabaret, and early American popular entertainment, including vaudeville and Broadway. These musical streams have become part of the “sonic wash” that now accompanies all films, everywhere (Slobin 2008:viii).

94 Parts I and III of *Global Soundtracks* are particularly interesting for the wide look they cast on patterns within and across film systems.
soundtrack within a film’s overall narrative. A strong selling point, the compilation soundtrack was “a commercially self-aware alternative to the neo-Romantic orchestral scores of Hollywood’s ‘Golden Age’” (1998:155). Smith’s approach offers a good reference point for television drama music, which has paralleled film in its inclusion of pop music forms; while in film, the trend to tie in pop music began in the 1960s and gained considerable traction into the 1980s, this strategy increasingly moved to television from the late 1990s onward (Donnelly 2005:134). A study like Smith’s is relevant to the case of Korean TV dramas, where music soundtracks serve both dramatic and commercial functions.

With the increased popularity of Korean dramas in hallyu, Korean drama productions have developed the OST as a crucial tie-in to the K-drama package with a keen interest in its market value. A drama producer at Plan B Productions, an independent drama production company, informed me that a big demand in drama OSTs began around 2001-2002. Armed with bigger budgets, drama productions were able to focus on (and invest more in) upgrading album quality. Before hallyu, OSTs were of interest primarily to a domestic market, but attention to this arm of drama production has risen to a bigger scale with foreign audiences showing interest in acquiring them as an artifact of the drama. According to one OST producer, some OSTs are released with slightly differing CD cover designs, according to the target

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95 Smith offers a reading of the music of American Graffiti, as well as analytical comments on the effects of popular music and the attendant associations of style and genre across several films, such as Easy Rider, The Graduate, and The Big Chill, among others (1998:154-85).

96 Interview with Beck Chung Hwa, 26 Feb 2008.
market. For example, the OST cover for the 2007 KBS drama Devil (Mawang) that was released domestically features a photo of the drama’s three main characters with
the female lead in the front, and the two male leads positioned behind her (Figure 2.1). The Japanese version of the same OST notably has the two male characters in the front, with the female lead in the back (Figure 2.2). When I asked what the reason was for this difference, the producer told me that they decided to foreground the male actors (in particular Ju Ji Hun) on the cover of the Japanese version because these actors were especially popular in Japan; it was a strategy to further appeal to audiences in the Japanese market.97

Drama music soundtracks may be a welcome avenue of additional income, but the music they hold should not simply be thought of as a matter of money. As Kay Dickinson reminds us, “it would be naïve to project crass financial opportunism solely onto the pop soundtrack without reflecting upon the strategically embedded notion of the classical composer as Romantic anti-commercial artistic hero” (2001). To think that the European composers of the symphony, or the film composers of early Hollywood who inherited their musical language, were working solely for the purposes of “art” unsullied by any connection to money, while regarding the pop soundtrack solely as an economic device devoid of creativity, would be to fall into the master narrative that Kay Dickinson is pointing to. Robb Wright, a composer for TV and film, also thinks that it would be “clearly unfair to ascribe mercenary motives alone to every pop soundtrack” (Wright 2003:12). The more interesting question, perhaps, is how such soundtracks affect a drama—the text as well as the resulting filmic and televivial experience.

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97 Personal conversation with Lim Jae-Hoan, Pony Canyon Korea, 13 Feb 2008.
Rick Altman distinguishes between “classical” music (his quotation marks meant not to refer to two centuries of art music in the Western tradition but to the implementation of its style in early film) and popular music in the ways they communicate to the filmic audience and thus affect audience experience (Altman 2001:23-26). According to Altman, popular song possesses characteristics that engage audiences more consciously than “classical” music; for one, songs depend on language and this increases involvement in a way that “classical” music does not. In addition, the melodic repetition in popular songs (establishes and) satisfies audience expectations of return to familiar melodic material; in this sense, they are predictable. Popular songs also possess “singability” and “rememberability” because of their accessible range and overall shorter musical phrases. In contrast, “classical music” rarely provides a distinct hummable melody; thus, together with the absence of singable lyrics, “classical” music in film encourages “quiet and attentive listening rather than active participation” (ibid.:24). Altman suggests that popular song tends to be heard as a whole; it functions as “a coherent block that appears to be authored separately from whatever images it accompanies, whereas ‘classical’ music’s meandering capacity often conceals overall structure, implying that the music is generated […] by the image at hand” (ibid.:26). In other words, whereas “classical” music is more relevant to the image (seemingly authored by it), popular song is more relevant to the viewer.

Claudia Gorbman has shown that music—both the traditional nonverbal score and the placement of popular song—can do the work of metaphor in film. She
references Nicholas Cook’s model (itself based on Marshall and Cohen’s model of ascription—i.e. the transfer of attributes from one entity to another),98 which offers a basic way of understanding how media interact, and the resultant effect on perception (its experiential effect) in narrative cinema as well as other forms of multimedia. Gorbman states that popular song can be an “anchor of identification” (Gorbman 2004:19) for certain audiences, but that it can also inflect a scene’s meaning by applying an attributive grid onto the visual narrative.

Anahid Kassabian takes the notion of “identification” as a means to organize two types of relationships that music can establish with the film perceiver (“perceiver” because Kassabian sees that an audience does more than simply view a film; they perceive its words, sounds, images, and music) (2001). “Assimilating identifications” exert considerable control over film perceivers. Film music that “assimilates” its audiences absorbs them into certain identity positions within the storyworld; this is the kind of work the classical Hollywood score was/is known to do. Kassabian claims that it leaves no room for mobility within the film. “Affiliating identifications,” on the other hand, open up the “psychic field” and allow perceivers to imbue the film with knowledge outside the film. This kind of work can be done, she argues, by the compilation score and its use of pre-existing music (such as pop songs). The affiliating identities offered by the compilation score “depend on histories forged outside the film scene, and they allow for a fair bit of mobility within it” (ibid.:3). Pop songs open up a space for perceivers to grasp the story in terms that

include individual knowledge of a particular song; a song’s life outside the film comes with a “threat of history” (ibid.:2)—external associations that can consequently color a scene. For Kassabian, compilation scores are liberating for the non-dominant voices and readings she suggests they allow, especially for women. Her premise is provocative, though one wonders just how much freedom is afforded the audience, especially when pop songs are employed for conventional use; the room for “affiliating identifications” would seem to become narrow (almost as narrow as “assimilating identifications”) when pop songs are used in traditional ways, with supercultural control.

Similar to Kassabian, Ronald Rodman views the pop compilation score as having the power to signify on several levels. Popular songs come with connotations that allow room for signification outside of the film’s diegesis; because of this potential, they “decentre the role of the unique musical work, and draw upon discourses around the musical work such as style and celebrity” (2006:121). This perspective resonates with Kassabian’s, whose “affiliating identities” speak to the devoiding of power traditionally ascribed to an original classical score. However, Rodman actually sees that these pop scores continue to function in ways similar to the classical Hollywood film score model; they may operate on “different semiotic planes,” he says, but they still do the work of the traditional score. Rodman takes a style-as-leitmotif approach in bearing out his claim. He takes the idea of leitmotif, and instead of defining it in terms of a melodic figure, harmonic progression, or rhythmic gesture, imputes to it musical style, so that although a particular song may
not be repeated within a film (repetition being necessary for the leitmotif to work as a device), the recurring of a particular style of music is used to paint a character.

Through an analysis of *Pulp Fiction*, he submits that the contemporary popular music soundtrack “is more than just some pleasant tunes plugged into a film.” Instead, he suggests that the popular song score can, in the hands of a skilled music editor, be used effectively “to signify narrative events and characters in a similar fashion as the classical Hollywood score” (ibid.:135).

Pop and compilation soundtrack studies are relevant to the case of K-dramas, which often infuse a core group of popular-style songs in relaying their televisual fictions. Songs and non-verbal underscoring together comprise music soundtracks that play a significant role in K-drama storytelling; drama soundtracks dialogue with many of the traditional techniques and parameters of film scoring to engage audiences and carry cultural cues as they fulfill their role as narrative agents in the K-drama.

*The K-drama Musicscape*

Korean TV dramas are filled with a generous amount of music. According to Park Haki, a singer songwriter who has worked as a music supervisor for TV dramas, Korean dramas tend to have more music than American TV dramas. Park explains that this is in part because Korean dramas focus more on “small moments.” A regular watcher of American TV, Park says that American dramas are “tightly written, compelling, and very fine.” The stories are interesting and the production has a “high level of completeness.” Korean dramas are much smaller in scale and scope, and tend
to bring out moments that are more personal; Park says that this is the strength of the
K-drama.99 These “smaller” moments often focus on characters (more so than plot),
their romance relationships, and issues that involve family. Practically speaking,
Korean dramas have to work with smaller budgets and limited resources. Drama
director Chang Taeyou thinks that the limited means within which drama productions
must work can act as a motivator for developing intense angles on familiar stories:
“We can’t produce stories about bombs on buses running loose on highways. We
have to work to make stories interesting with small budgets; push situations to an
impossible level in order to create more drama.”100

The recent renaissance of Korea’s film industry occurred within similar
circumstances: according to a TV producer at one of Korea’s major networks, the
Korean film industry’s success in the late 1990s derived, paradoxically, from its
inability to compete with Hollywood blockbusters on equal terms when it came to
production budgets or special effects. As a result, Korean directors were forced to
focus on the quality and originality of their stories, and audiences responded.101 In a
sense, Korea’s “weakness” was turned into a strength. Drama music supervisors, or
eumak gamdok (“music director”), are always working with budgetary concerns in
mind. Prime time dramas (usually mini-series of 16-24 episodes) are known to have
the biggest budgets, and are thus able to focus more on a drama’s music; these dramas

99 Personal interview, 22 Apr 2008.
100 Personal interview, 9 May 2008. Chang’s comparison to a scenario with “bombs on buses running
loose on highways” is a reference to the American film Speed. Korean dramas are known to twist plots
in convoluted ways, and even tread on uncomfortable territory, such as the incest taboo, for example,
to make stories more “impossible.” Such writing, Chang says, partially comes from the need to make
stories suspenseful with small budgets.
have more export potential and often enlist artists who are more famous. Morning and evening (daily) dramas in general tend to have smaller budgets, and often have less music than mini-series that air in prime time slots; some daily dramas do not release commercial versions of their OST.

The scoring of K-dramas often involves patterns that come with relaying stories through a set of conventional methods. For example, most contemporary K-dramas that take place in a present-day setting will have a number of “café scenes” in which characters sit face to face to discuss an important matter. These scenes invariably have music playing within the space of the café, coffee shop, or restaurant that serves as a venue for the conversation, and are a common platform for diegetic music in K-dramas. The music that emerges from these establishments is often American pop music, attesting to the significance of American pop in the Korean pop musicscape (although more and more this type of diegetic music is noticeably becoming replaced by K-pop), and can range from an eumak gamdok’s personal musical preference to songs that subtly comment on the discussion taking place between the characters onscreen.

Another common instance of diegetic music in the K-drama consists of Western classical music, which almost always fills the spaces of fancy dinners, upscale parties, and celebrated events of the upper class. Classical music is a familiar and efficient tool with which to comment on class when used within stories that involve relationships between characters from differing social and economic backgrounds. In these contexts, it serves as a “narrative knot” that secures the
viewer’s understanding of characters’ (often a couple’s) social disparity. Just as the appearance of children singing can effectively make a narrative point about innocence in film (Slobin 2008:337), or the celebratory sounds of a *nagaswaram* (shawm-like instrument) can help a Tamil film audience understand that a wedding is near (ibid.:350), the diegetic sounds of Vivaldi, Boccherini, and Chopin are commonly used as a succinct remark highlighting the class difference between characters, and are typically heard emanating from spaces that include fine wine, western dining, and spectacular decorations (such as ice sculptures).

Non-diegetic music in Korean dramas often consists of a set of Korean pop ballads, or *balladeu*, which are used to portray characters and relationships (commonly of romance); these are the main songs that comprise a drama’s OST, and are often arranged in variations with different instrumentation or in different styles, as well as in instrumental versions without voice. OSTs also often include several key non-diegetic musical numbers (not songs) that are used regularly as background music throughout the drama.

The drama OST has become a popular part of the K-drama package. The first drama OST that gained attention and enjoyed commercial appeal was the music soundtrack for *Jealousy (Jiltu)* (MBC 1992), the series that is widely considered to be Korea’s first trendy drama. Showcasing a slick cityscape with urban fashion, taste, and sensibility, *Jealousy* appealed to the younger generation and was a significant

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102 The different versions of a drama’s main songs can vary in tempo (“slow version,” “fast version”), arrangement (a general “instrumental version,” or separate versions for different instruments, such as a “piano version” or “violin version”), or style (for example, “techno version,” “samba version”).
work that led the craze for trendy dramas, which, according to Dong-Hoo Lee, was an “active agent” in creating *hallyu* (2004:252). This is the time that the OST industry began to develop. According to several drama industry professionals, the OST as an item began to emerge shortly after the popularity of the hit drama *Jealousy* (Figure 2.3).^{103}

![Figure 2.3 Cassette cover flap for *Jealousy (Jiltu)* OST (1992)](image)

A drama’s music and its OST are discussed early on in a meeting between the drama’s director, producer, and music supervisor, where the music’s overall tone and

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^{103} Ahn Sung Gon, a producer who works for SBS, and Kim Hyeon Bo, a drama music composer, both confirm that the drama OST industry appeared in the mid 1990s and developed in earnest in the late 1990s (after 1998); until this time, there were only a few that were produced for commercial release, including the OST for *Jiltu* in 1992 (interview with Ahn Sung Gon, 14 Nov 2007; interview with Kim Hyeon Bo, 8 Dec 2008). Drama OSTs saw a surge in popularity between 2003-2004, with the increased attention of *hallyu* dramas such as *Winter Sonata* in 2002 and *Dae Jang Geum* in 2003-2004 (interview with musician Park Haki, 22 Apr 2008). OSTs have been a stream of consistent sales within Korean pop music; a manager at the music section of Kyobo (main branch), a mega bookstore in Korea, informed me that while sales of pop music albums tended to fluctuate following a downturn in the early 2000s, OST sales were not notably affected by the general music industry climate, and that although they may not be the biggest in terms of profit, they are a consistently popular item in the larger Korean pop music scene (personal conversation, 12 Nov 2007).
“concept” are established. Although a drama’s music ultimately finds itself moving through a “polyphony” of key figures from creation to reception, including the songwriter, singer, music supervisor, viewer, and critic (Slobin 2008:57), efforts are made in the early stages to create songs and enlist artists that best encapsulate a drama’s feel, and will influence audiences such that they will remember the drama through the music. Tom Larsen, president of YA Entertainment, a company that has worked to bring K-dramas to mainstream American audiences through DVDs with English subtitles, considers music soundtracks to be one of Korean TV dramas’ strengths and an aspect that ultimately contributes to their lure to overseas audiences. Larsen feels that the music soundtracks are “true reflections of the stories being told” and that “the music is central to the whole experience…” (2008:144). He adds, “Whereas Americans usually do not purchase and collect the soundtracks of top American TV hits like ‘Desperate Housewives’ or ‘ER’ (where music is used in a more casual way), Korean TV drama fans in the United States do collect the music soundtracks (or OSTs) for Korean TV dramas” (ibid.).

In making a drama’s music approachable and accessible, composers keep certain musical aspects in mind. For example, drama composers point to the importance of creating tunes that are singable, in essence, melodies that can work in the background when necessary, but can also aurally fill out the screen when images accompany. Lee Im Wu, a drama music director who worked with the music staff on the iconic *hallyu* drama *Winter Sonata*, states that “melody is the most important
thing in composing for OSTs.” Instrumentation is also a factor that is considered to be important. While drama directors are known to avoid the saxophone for its connotations of clubs, bars, and seedy nightlife (to a point where they have trouble accepting the idea of a classical saxophone), and are generally not open to using the sounds of jazz for main songs, they defer to the piano for its widespread presence and popularity, and its basic ability to relay melody while providing supporting harmony neatly when necessary.

For some composers working in the field, such as Choi Cheol Ho, the music of dramas is an exciting space for experimenting with new sounds. A longtime professional musician, composer, songwriter, and music supervisor, Choi is a veteran in the field, having worked in TV drama music since the early 1990s. He has worked on dramas in various time slots, including dailies, weekend dramas, and mini-series. Choi states that daily dramas can’t afford to be too experimental with music; partially because of an older audience, the music must be easier to understand. Mini-series (aired in prime-time slots), on the other hand, offer more room to be experimental with musical sounds and instruments. Whereas he finds himself thinking primarily about the audience when composing for daily dramas, when it comes to music for mini-series, Choi explains that he is somewhat freer to include his own musical interests, and is given more artistic license, which he has indulged by drawing from music of other cultures.

105 Personal interview with composer Choi In Hui, 24 Apr 2008.
106 Personal interview with Choi Cheol Ho, 21 May 2008.
Choi is a composer who has tried to change the pace and style of drama music. In his earlier years, when he was in training under other supervisors, he recalls that there was a time when he did not compose for a whole year. "Everything in drama music was piano and violin," he relays, because "that's what my seniors, advisors, and other colleagues in the field were doing." He wasn’t allowed to play with instrumentation (or even add instruments like drums) and was tired of writing music for the piano. When he became a music director himself, Choi tried consciously to change this, and has made efforts to incorporate foreign instruments. Along the way, Choi hopes to bring change, however slowly, to mainstream Korean audiences; he hopes to open their listening to new musical sounds and ideas, little by little, through the music of dramas.

Choi Cheol Ho’s desire to expand the musical palette is shared by several musicians who work within and outside the drama industry; it is in essence a reflection of the Korean music scene, where there is little presence of world music and music of other cultures. This was an issue that was also brought up by a younger drama composer, Choi In Hui, who explained that during one particular drama production in the past, she encountered the need to incorporate flamenco music on guitar, but that the music team could not find any musicians who were familiar with the genre. According to Choi In Hui, there may be Koreans who listen to flamenco and other kinds of non-mainstream music, but there are no musicians who actually play or perform these musics. By comparison, you can find such musicians in Japan,
whose overall music scene and market Choi In Hui feels are considerably more open to different musical tastes and thus more cosmopolitan and culturally developed.\textsuperscript{107}

According to Choi Cheol Ho, drama music began to see growth with the success of \textit{Winter Sonata}, a drama that had a lot of music and spent much attention to OST production. In a way, the \textit{hallyu} boom has allowed drama composers to introduce new sounds while preserving the mainstay of drama music, namely songs (pop ballads). The \textit{sageuk} (historical drama) is perhaps an ideal vehicle for the infusion of new sounds since it takes place in the past and is thus more open to unfamiliar and non-everyday musical sounds. While working on the KBS \textit{sageuk Daewang Sejong (The Great King Sejong, 2008)}, Choi Cheol Ho decided to draw on Irish music to musically paint 15\textsuperscript{th} century Korea. The decision to do this was driven by the fact that popular audiences in Korea, and the younger generation in particular, do not tend to respond favorably to the sounds of Korea’s own traditional music. In Choi Cheol Ho’s estimation, Irish music is more approachable even as it shares certain attributes with Korean traditional music (he pointed to modal tendency and overall sentiment); thus he decided to invest instruments such as the Irish tin whistle and the \textit{drehleier}, or hurdy gurdy, with “Korean-sounding melodies,” and use rhythmic features such as triple meter to loosely interpret Korean \textit{jangdan} (rhythmic cycles), while adding instruments like the bodhrán.

Kim Hyeon Bo is another musician and drama composer who has confronted the popular reluctance towards \textit{gugak} that Choi mentions. Kim worked on the music

\textsuperscript{107} Personal interview with Choi In Hui, 24 Apr 2008.
for the hallyu drama *Gung* (also known as *Princess Hours*, MBC 2006), which takes place in a fictional present-day Korea that has preserved the traditional royal system and culture. For this project he was asked explicitly by the drama director not to use *gugak*; other than this, there were no specific guidelines or requests regarding the music. Kim’s solution was to add an Irish flair as well, and wrote in the tin whistle, mandolin, guitar, and fiddle, along with cello and piano to create a *gugak* “feel” through pentatonic modes and triple meter, without actually inserting *gugak*. In fact, the drama, which was hugely popular around Asia, includes very little *gugak*, which occasionally makes appearances as source music, filling the spaces of traditional restaurants and teahouses, and also, for example, when the *daegeum* is played in a symbolic cultural welcome performance for foreign dignitaries.

And yet there are other cases where composers and directors make an effort to preserve the sounds of *gugak* in a more prominent way in sageuk dramas. One such case is *Painter of the Wind* (*Baramui Hwawon*, SBS 2008), a drama that uses *gugak* instruments (*haegeum*, *daegeum*, *sogeum*, *gayageym*) with Western instruments. Composer Jeon Chang Yeop explained to me that while there were other world instrument options that they could have gone with, such as the Chinese *erhu*, which has a softer tone than the harsher-sounding *haegeum*, the production wanted to keep all traditional instruments Korean for this drama. Thus the music staff worked to incorporate Korean instruments without alienating viewers, which they did by mixing the Korean subtly into Western musical textures and idioms. The OST for *Baramui*

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Hwawon includes a set of core pop ballads (which has become somewhat of a requisite for drama OSTs), but also features the sounds of Korean instruments as incidental musical companion to its story about two famous Joseon era painters. Rather than avoiding traditional sounds, Korean music is here worked into the musical canvas as a means of preserving the Korean.

With the arrival of Damo (MBC, 2003), Korea’s first “fusion sageuk,” historical dramas have become, and continue to be, a popular sub-category within K-drama. Traditional sageuks dealing with pre-modern Korean history have always been a part of Korean TV programming, ever since the early years of Korean television, but they were considered old and boring by many audiences, as they retold tales of the same famous kings and situations with little novelty. Thus they have traditionally held a small percentage of viewership, mostly among the older generation; they also cost a lot to produce and hence were not a preferred genre for television networks.\footnote{Interview with Yoon Heung Sik, Director of Drama Division, KBS, 15 Apr 2008.} When fusion sageuks came along, they were easier to relate to because of the contemporary sensibility of the stories, which essentially situated relationships of love, romance, and friendship within the colorful backdrop of old Korea, often alluringly framing different aspects of Korean traditional culture, such as fashion, painting, crafts and handiwork, music, high traditional cuisine, or traditional medicine. The focus on human emotion over historical reality, the transformation of dry palace politics into court intrigue, and the blending of old and new in aspects such
as speech, costume, and settings, raised this new type of sageuk to a level of popularity that it still enjoys today. Fusion sageuks have been able to gain wide viewership across generation and gender, and capture audiences outside of Korea because they free themselves from the constraints of historical, often dry, storytelling that characterizes the traditional sageuk. For example, the stunning popularity of Dae Jang Geum (MBC 2003-2004), according to a culture critic and professor of Cultural Contents at Hanyang University, had much to do with the fact that the drama was about traditional food and medicine as much as it was about the characters, and that the hero was a woman—aspects that differentiate it from the traditional sageuk. A significant part of the fusion sageuk effect is the music that portrays these faraway tales placed in the past. The Dae Jang Geum soundtrack features several gugak instruments, including gayageum, geomungo, ggwaengwari, buk, daegeum, cheolhyeongeum, and saenghwang, as well as the vocal style of pansori that blend with Western instruments; the soundtrack also uses non-Korean instruments such as the erhu.

The significant use of these Korean traditional instruments on the Dae Jang Geum soundtrack was a choice that composer Im Se Hyeon made not because she is a gugak expert, but because she felt that non-Koreans were writing for gugak instruments more effectively and successfully than Koreans themselves, and that

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110 Some of the most popular fusion sageuks include the early hallyu hit, Dae Jang Geum (MBC 2003-2004), Hwang Jini (KBS 2006), Taewangsasingi (The Legend, MBC 2007), Yi San (MBC 2007-2008), Hong Gil Dong (KBS 2008), Painter of the Wind (SBS 2008), Dong Yi (MBC 2010), Chuno (KBS 2010), Sungkyungwan Scandal (KBS 2010), Arang and the Magistrate (MBC 2012), Moon that Embraces the Sun (MBC 2012), and Night Watchman’s Journal (MBC 2014); these dramas have been a significant part of the hallyu flow.

111 Bak Gi Su, lecture at KOCCA (Korea Creative Content Agency), 8 Mar 2008.
Koreans should reawaken interest in their own musical past. She also felt that there were rich sounds to be drawn from the arsenal of Korean traditional instruments, such that she did not find a need to present this epic drama through Western instruments alone. So while she kept the musical writing grounded in Western tonal language, she made substitutions with Korean instruments to exploit the feelings that these traditional instruments could invoke—something that to a musician like herself, trained in Western popular music overseas, opened up a new world of options in setting tone and emotion.\(^{112}\) For Im, writing for *gugak* instruments in *Dae Jang Geum* was a chance to bring the sounds of traditional Korea closer to the Korean mainstream through songs and tunes that were friendly to modern ears more accustomed to Western music.

On the other hand, Im did not feel bound by the idea of necessarily searching for Korean talent for all the vocals on the soundtrack. For the song “*Hamangyeon*,” one of the main numbers on the *Dae Jang Geum* OST, Im enlisted Italian popera singer Alessandro Safina solely on his vocal talent and ability, despite criticism that she was overlooking a large pool of talented Korean singers. For Im, finding the right vocal color for *Hamangyeon*, a song with both a Western and Eastern feel, that is neither pop nor *gugak*, was the most important task, and she looked beyond national, cultural, and ethnic orientation to locate the singer who was able to relay music for this Korean story and express the inherent Korean sentiment most appropriately.

Along with several other numbers on the *Dae Jang Geum* soundtrack, “*Hamangyeon*”

\(^{112}\) “Recording Studio Sketch and Interview” with composer Im Se Hyeon, *Daejangkeum [Dae Jang Geum]* Original Soundtrack, INC Music Co, BMG Korea, 2004.
(which essentially functions as the drama’s principal pop ballad) is characterized by a new age feel, something that the drama’s director, Lee Byeong Hun, wanted in the music from the outset. Lee felt that new age music would make the drama easier to approach for a younger audience than scoring it with gugak proper, or even with Western classical music. The new age style that runs through much of Dae Jang Geum’s OST was perhaps an ideal choice, as it carries an “anonymous” feel that is adaptable to many contexts outside Korea as well, helping audiences to receive the story through an easy musical style. The Dae Jang Geum OST was a celebrated hit that sold enormously well for a soundtrack,\textsuperscript{113} and the drama’s acclaimed theme song, Onara, has enjoyed a life of its own as a popular piece of gugak, gaining recognition from professional gugak musicians and being programmed at various cultural events.\textsuperscript{114}

Another fusion sageuk that made an impression with its music was Chuno (KBS 2010). With Choi Cheol Ho as composer and music supervisor, this series, a story about slaves in the Joseon era, included a wide spectrum of musical sounds and styles, from the Korean haegeum to the ocarina to the ukulele, to the imposing and hollow sounds of Gregorian Chant (with Latin text) to invoke a sense of ancientness, to hard rock and a variety of electric instruments, to rap and hip-hop to capture the

\textsuperscript{113} Drama music supervisor Kim Hyeon Bo informed me that the Dae Jang Geum OST sold more than 100,000 copies when it was released in 2004, which was considered to be a huge success (personal interview, 8 Dec 2008).

\textsuperscript{114} For example, Onara was presented at a concert of Korean traditional music by the Chung-Ang University Department of Gugak, where it was included in a medley of minyo (folk songs) performed by an ensemble of gayageum hyeongchang artists at the National Gugak Center in Seoul, 19 Sept 2007. Onara was also taught as a repertoire piece to a class of beginning foreigner gayageum students at the National Gugak Center in the fall of 2008, where it was considered to be a representative piece of Korean folk music; the song was performed by the class at the end-of-semester recital.
rage of slaves on the run. Choi took a risk with this soundtrack and these sounds were unprecedented in *sageuk* scoring, but the OST gained much positive attention as the series gained high viewer ratings, surpassing 30%, finding popularity especially among younger viewers.\(^{115}\)

The above drama music creators have worked to widen the scope of Korean drama music and broaden the musical vocabulary of K-dramas by converting and popularizing old Korean sounds and by drawing from non-Korean, non-Western musical sources to aurally construct stories in both old and contemporary Korean settings. These composers have worked on dramas that have been at the forefront of the *hallyu* phenomenon, and continue to shape the drama musicscape as they incorporate new, seemingly old, and appealingly foreign sounds. Such a situation reflects the larger cultural climate of *hallyu*, which on the one hand seeks to reacquaint Korea with what is traditionally Korean, while on the other being open to, indeed incorporating, outside cultural material to add dimension to, if not define, what being culturally Korean is in the global present. Thus when *gisaeng* (courtesans) of the Joseon era dance to techno music at a *gisaeng* house, or perform belly dancing as they do, or when the main character uses a *pungi*-like recorder to charm her missing pet cobra back home in the fusion *sageuk Hong Gil Dong* (KBS 2008),\(^{116}\) the amusing mix of references speaks to a contemporary Korea that is aware of the cultural options on the larger media horizon, and is not bound by sticking to “Korea-only” sources.

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\(^{115}\) *Yonhap News*, 2010.

\(^{116}\) See episodes 2, 4, and 9.
Perhaps the most salient aspect of a drama’s OST is the prominence of pop-style ballads, which are included on the music soundtracks of both *sageuks* and fusion *sageuks* as well as in dramas that take place in the present day. These ballads of love are featured as “foreground music” and are often accompanied by images, sometimes in montage style, or played simultaneously with dialogue (at a comparable volume) in “music video moments” that punctuate a scene’s emotions. The “music video moment,” which is often written in by a drama’s writer, was not always part of the Korean TV drama; it began to appear in the late 1990s and was initially geared toward younger audiences. Practically speaking, the featuring of a pop song during these musical moments may be an ideal way to sell the soundtrack, but it also works as a narrative device, sometimes compressing development, and from the perspective of the drama viewer, these songs potentially become moments invested with sheer emotion that the viewer can take away in a song. These “music video moments” lie somewhere between economic directive and artistic process, and have become a hallmark of K-dramas in the *hallyu* era.

Using pop songs in films and TV dramas is certainly not a practice that is unique to the Korean industry. It is a technique that can readily be seen in American feature films and TV dramas. The appearance of pop songs as non-diegetic music complements the dialogue and action, and can lend, as Kevin Donnelly characterizes it, a “sense of the everyday” to a story while giving emotional direction to a scene. He explains, “The inclusion of a romantic pop song rather than orchestral music suggests

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117 Personal interview with Yun Heung Sik, Director of Drama Division at KBS, 15 Apr 2008.
something of the everyday character of the couple and the normality of their love…” (Donnelly 2005:136). Donnelly suggests that the use of a significant number of pop songs in the British television show Cathy Come Home “firmly embed[d] the drama in the materiality of contemporaneous Britain” (ibid.). In a similar way, inserting popular music in K-dramas can ground the onscreen character and his/her emotions in a world that is contemporary and relatable. Using pop ballads for sageuks and fusion sageuks “works” despite the obvious discrepancy in time period because the emotions in a historical drama can still feel, indeed are meant to feel, current. Using a pop song to comment on a romance of the Joseon Dynasty brings that story forward, making it relevant through a vocabulary of modern emotions.

Yet if there is a difference between the use of pop songs in American and Korean TV dramas, it is that while American (and British) films and TV shows typically use popular music that already exists, the pop songs inserted into Korean dramas are for the most part original, written specifically for a drama’s original soundtrack. Including pre-existing songs and tunes runs the risk of also introducing the baggage that comes with the music’s original context. As Robb Wright notes, “…previously heard pop songs carry their own sets of feelings and associations, often developed over months or years of repeated hearings” (2003:12). Wright suggests that

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118 There have been instances where K-dramas have used existing pop songs or melodies; some examples include: the insertion of a tune from the French film 13 Jours en France (1968) in Winter Sonata (KBS 2002), where it was retitled “Hayan Yeonindeul” (“White Lovers”); the inclusion of French band Nouvelle Vague’s “This is Not a Love Song” (itself a cover of a Public Image Ltd original) among others for the soundtrack of Soulmate (MBC 2006); and the use of Korean rocker Jiny’s “Free,” and Japanese American pop artist Ai’s “Alive” in Kwaegeol Chunhyang (Sassy Girl Chunhyang, KBS 2005). Although using pre-existing pop music does occur from time to time in Korean dramas, the overwhelmingly majority of K-drama OSTs are comprised of new, unique songs that are written for a specific drama.
because of this, such songs have the potential to deliver an emotional punch much
greater than that of a “virgin score.”

Certainly the evoking of history, and of time and place, can at times be most
effectively and succinctly accomplished through a song that simply “takes one back.”
However, the prior associations of a song can also potentially cloud the reception of a
scene or drama, making it difficult to inscribe it with new memories. In this sense, the
use of original pop songs—new, unheard, and unused—is an ideal way to tie a drama
and its music, helping audiences to recall the drama and its specific scenes, moments,
and emotions without any extraneous attachments. With no prior associative baggage,
pop songs in Korean dramas serve as a clean slate, a sort of “musical tabula rasa” in
the sense that they have no previous history, optimal for conditioning associations
with the story at hand; they are, essentially, more open to becoming signifiers of the
love or relationship being played out on screen. For watchers of K-drama, music on
the soundtrack often becomes the sonic embodiment of a memorable romance and a
way in which they can immediately re-experience it, which is why fans are known to
seek out a drama’s OST during or after they are done watching it. Using original
songs instead of pre-existing pop songs can also keep a drama from feeling dated,
which can potentially impede or distract from the desired emotional effect, as Wright
also points out. With each new K-drama, the core set of new songs invokes a familiar
style (the pop ballad idiom) rather than employing existing songs that already have a
life of their own.
K-drama OSTs have the general feel of a compilation soundtrack. In some instances where dramas use pre-existing pop songs, this would be an accurate description, but most OSTs consist of original pop songs that are composed for, and put into the service of, unique dramas. OSTs are a crucial layer of expression in the K-drama package that bear the tone and emotional pull of a drama; they are an integral part of K-drama consumption and have seen rising popularity among fans in tandem with the *hallyu* dramas that now circulate outside Korea. The following part of this chapter explores more closely the use of music, specifically song, and the way that it works to bring together relationships onscreen while also involving the audience.
The Role of Music in Building Romance

The Success of Korean TV Dramas

As one of the earliest and most significant channels of *hallyu*, Korean TV dramas (K-dramas) have been the subject of much media and scholarly analysis. With a healthy focus on audience research, these analyses have gone some way in trying to figure out the reason/s behind K-dramas’ popularity in neighboring countries. Scholars such as Lisa Leung have suggested that Korean TV dramas employ an “Asian formula” that combines urban appeal, romance, family values, and an idol (celebrity) effect that speaks to Asian modernities while presenting an option that challenges the cultural hegemony of the U.S. and Europe (2004). Jim Dator and Yongseok Seo also argue that the regional success of Korean pop culture is the flowering of a pan-Asian culture that goes against “the erstwhile domination” of American/Western culture; sociologist Habib Khondker affirms this by referring to the Korean fad as part of a region-wide “reassertion of Asian identity,” where Asian audiences “can look for alternative cultures, not necessarily European or American” (quoted in Dator and Seo 2004:33).

The popularity of K-dramas seems to reflect, to a degree, a growing regional identity—the awareness of an “Asianness” and Asian media options within the global mediascape. On an immediate level, Asian consumers of Korean TV drama may feel a closeness to the characters portrayed by the mere fact that the dramas, though
foreign, have actors that appear ethnically familiar. While Korean pop culture is “fresh and edgy,” says one Beijing resident, it’s “non-threatening because they’re Asian and look like us” (Zhang Jianhua, quoted in Dator and Seo 2004:33). Korean TV dramas’ successful circulation may also have to do with the fact that they bear some similarity to other dramas in the region. For example, Dong-Hoo Lee has shown how modern Korean TV dramas bear certain resemblances in format and style to Japanese *doramas* (dramas), by which they have been influenced, thus making them accessible to audiences in Japan (2004).

Indeed the flows and exchanges taking place between culture industries within the region (significantly intra-Asian) point to an emerging “East Asian pop culture sphere” that now caters to an assembly of pan-East Asian consumers, as noted by Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi in their Introduction to *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave* (2008). Throughout this edited collection, Chua and Iwabuchi, along with the other authors, discuss these flows apart from any reference to the West, usefully setting the discussion of the production, circulation, and consumption of Asian (in this case, Korean) TV programs squarely within Asia. From the “identification and distancing” that occurs among Asian audiences when watching East Asian TV drama (Chua), to fan behavior (e.g. chapters by Mori and Hirata), to cultural politics (e.g. chapters by Lee and Iwabuchi), the essays offer various insights into why Korean TV dramas are loved and what that might mean for the region.
Locating cultural answers for the popularity of K-dramas is by no means a simple task. In reality, the reasons for the cross-cultural popularity of K-dramas are many and involve much more than one answer could cover; certainly it would be difficult to peg their success on a single, overarching reason. Whether audiences tune in for good storylines, appealing actors, high production value, or a combination of these, South Korea is, seemingly, “simply producing the types of drama that Asians want to see at the moment” (J. Kim 2007:56). If this is the case, then understanding this “moment” in Asia would appear to be an important task.

To be sure, the region as a whole has in recent decades experienced rapid growth and cultural change, having been affected by both economic crisis and affluence, and the ensuing effects on traditions, selves, and identities. In his assessment of Korean Wave dramas, Sheng-mei Ma suggests that Korean dramas resonate with Asian and Asian diasporic audiences because they transport them “back to an unsullied Asian essence.” Korean dramas, and the Korean Wave, he says, enact “nostalgia for the old ways” and “drives a wedge into American assimilation and veers toward nostalgic Asian identity” after having spent a century’s time mimicking the West (2006:135). The real existence of an “unsullied Asian essence” is surely debatable, and what Ma is perhaps pointing toward is a certain desire for the past. The longing for a pre-modern past—“simpler times”—reveals an emotional exhaustion that can be seen as a symptom of the intense drive in the region to modernize and globalize. Michael Shin, a panelist at a hallyu forum at the Korea Society in New York City has pointed this out convincingly:
In Korean dramas[,] the locus of authentic experience is outside of work […] The reason this might resonate with audiences is that there’s something unpleasant about the nature of work at this time. There’s been a massive shift, an intensification of capitalist development in the Asian region; work has become so unpleasant, they’re constantly dreaming of an escape, something outside of this.¹¹⁹

Shin explains that Korean TV dramas tend toward a glorification of the private life over career. While a focus on personal experience is not an unusual trait in modern works of fiction, Korean dramas are always concerned about the achievement of love, something that takes center stage in their stories and for which characters (often willingly) sacrifice careers and dreams. Shin instructively points out that Korean hallyu dramas can be understood as an “outsourcing of emotional labor.” The intense emotional nature of Korean dramas is what audiences look for, and this is key to their success. According to Shin, “There’s something going on in Korea, that when it gets expressed in the form of TV dramas, it expresses something to the audiences outside of Korea that they couldn’t express themselves.”

Explanations like these are helpful in understanding part of the larger reason that Korean TV dramas have amassed the audiences they have in the region. And they come away dynamically from relying on theories of “cultural proximity” (Straubhaar 1991) and “cultural discount” (Hoskins and Mirus 1988) that mechanically explain why TV programs are more or less popular as they cross national and cultural boundaries. Indeed as Koichi Iwabuchi has suggested, the popularity of Korean TV programs may well have less to do with the overlapping of static cultural traits and

similarities than it does with audiences “feeling ‘real time’ resonance in other non-western modernities while simultaneously recognising difference” (Iwabuchi 2001:73).

Taken together, all of the above shed valuable light on understanding some of the social and cultural currents—the important, “real” issues—surrounding the significance and success of Korean TV dramas in the Asian region. Yet they also leave something to be desired when it comes to understanding how the dramas actually work as what they are: entertainment. While K-dramas may reflect latent desires, and give voice to societal conditions and psychological states, they are, first and foremost, a form of entertainment, a phenomenon that often goes by the wayside in studies that are more concerned with analyzing the “deeper meaning” of the text. Richard Dyer has addressed a similar syndrome within film studies:

Because it is so easy to use the term [entertainment], I don’t think we easily know what it means and involves. At the same time, I am resistant to understanding it in terms which attempt to explain it with reference to that which is not entertainment, to privilege the intellectual paradigms and ‘depth models’ of, notably, economics, ideology and the unconscious, over the evidence of experience and consciousness. (Dyer 1992:iix)

Dyer approaches his study of entertainment with the keen understanding that it carries an “anti-seriousness” related to the feeling of enjoyment that resists (perhaps repels) academics from tackling it: he knowingly states, “most attempts to take entertainment seriously do so in ways that avoid treating it as entertainment” (ibid.:2). Scholars have, instead, tended to look to issues beyond and around it, employing lofty

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120 They also do not offer much in the way of explaining K-dramas’ growing popularity in non-Asian communities.
approaches, such as psychoanalysis, to explain, for example, “why socialists and feminists liked things they thought they ought not to” (ibid.:4). In this regard, Dyer critiques what he has come to call the “but also” approach, a stance often taken in film studies that concedes that “such-and-such is entertaining, granted and that’s fine, but it is also something else”—any ensuing analyses then going on to talk about that something else:

Time and time again, we are not told why Westerns are exciting, why horror films horrify, why weepies make us cry, but instead are told that, while they are exciting, horrifying, or tearjerking, the films also deal with history, society, psychology, gender roles, indeed, the meaning of life. (1992:3)

Dyer’s indictment is enough to make his reader pause and reconsider how one is actually affected by entertainment. While not necessarily denying the “something else” that entertainment might be, his approach refreshingly encourages us to think about how audiences engage with entertainment beyond things like mise-en-scène, visual grammar, frame-by-frame analyses, and other textual readings.

This call to explore how entertainment functions has fueled my inquiry into the popularity of K-dramas and how audiences enjoy them. A significant part of the appeal of K-dramas, I suggest, has much to do with the way that music, particularly song, is infused into the drama, and the aesthetic that this creates; it has to do not only with the story, or the themes of the story, but also with the way that the K-drama tells the story.
Underscoring of Understatement and the Transnational Appeal of the Korean Television Drama

“The most exciting thing is not doing it. If you fall in love with someone and never do it, it’s much more exciting.”
-Andy Warhol

While music in the K-drama does not stray very far from its basic functions of establishing character, setting, tone, and emotion, the OST does not merely exist as background; it is perhaps here that it diverges from its traditional place in film scoring. Melodies in the K-drama are not “unheard,” as Claudia Gorbman has famously described for the case of traditional narrative film. In the K-drama, music is both more noticeable and more memorable, as it takes on an active role in furthering the narrative, and in deepening connections between the characters and the audience as well as between the characters themselves. K-drama blogger “girlfriday” of the website dramabeans.com thinks of music in the K-drama as “narrative shorthand,” a dimension of the K-drama that is effectively able to condense scenes, develop plot, and shape perception.

The significance of music in K-dramas is noted by other fans like “mtlandis,” founder and moderator of the online fan community koreandramas.net:

I think soundtracks play a bigger part in Korean [dramas]. I once heard a Disney songwriter talking about the songs in Disney movies. He said something to the effect that songs were not placed in Disney productions (such as Beauty & the Beast, The Lion King, etc) unless they moved the story along. In other words, no gratuitous singing. For me, that is what the music does in KDramas – it advances the story.

121 Guest lecture at Wesleyan University (“Korean Music from Gugak to K-pop” class), 10 Apr 2013.
To this day, I can hear a piece of music [from a drama OST] and when I close my eyes I can see the actors, remember the scene, and often, feel the emotions I felt when I first watched it. The only time I have ever experienced that with anything American was the Star Wars soundtracks.\textsuperscript{122}

For mtlandis, music is an essential ingredient of the K-drama and a crucial part of its charm. She continues, “I honestly think that without the music the dramas would not be so special and certainly not as memorable.”\textsuperscript{123} Another K-drama fan and active member of this online group, “hammycatt,” also considers music to be a core element of K-dramas. For hammycatt, a professional in her late forties, the music effectively encapsulates what is being emoted onscreen: “I watched ‘Goong’ and the music just captivated me. I had never watched anything on TV where the music had so perfectly captured the feelings of the story—American or Korean.”\textsuperscript{124} She goes on to describe music as an integral part of the K-drama experience:

The songs are so much a part of the story that I could not separate them from the drama if I tried. As wonderful as the story [Save the Last Dance for Me] was, the music was what made it unforgettable […] there are some dramas where it is the music that makes the drama. By itself, it might be a nice story, but not particularly memorable… but the music moves it up to a new level!

The music can make a good drama great and a great drama unforgettable, so I think it’s an indispensible part of the whole equation.\textsuperscript{125}

The place of music in the K-drama is perhaps better understood within the larger context of their general appeal. K-dramas are often touted by fans for the way

\textsuperscript{122} Email correspondence, 28 Jan 2011.
\textsuperscript{123} Survey response, 30 Apr 2011.
\textsuperscript{124} Email correspondence, 7 Feb 2011.
\textsuperscript{125} Email correspondence, 9 Feb 2011. \textit{Save the Last Dance for Me (Majimak Chumeun Nawa Hamkke)} is a 20-episode drama that aired on SBS, 2004-2005.
that they, on the one hand, are intensely emotional, and on the other, depict “pure” love and relationships of sincere affection between characters. Heterosexual romance is often at the center of these dramas but is usually presented in terms of restraint and at times self-sacrifice, characters sometimes giving up their romantic pursuit for the good of the very person they love; that is, while feelings of love may be keenly high, they are often harnessed by chaste interaction. Mtlandis sees this as a big draw of the K-drama; in relaying what she enjoys most about K-dramas, she says,

"The biggest thing for me is the lack of sex and violence. Because of this, the writers are forced to tell a story."

"[...] Since the sex is implied (maybe) the writers have to fill time by actually telling a story. (Imagine that! American screenwriters would be at a total loss on how to fill 16 1-hour episodes with no sex). The violence is also at a minimum. There is always a stress on core values – family, love, friendships, doing the right thing. Don’t get me wrong – we love to poke fun at the clichés. We have a hysterical thread dedicated to just that."

This reserved manner of communicating love is appreciated by younger viewers as well. A Japanese woman in her twenties, SK, who was studying in Seoul when I met her, told me that she enjoys K-dramas because in their stories, love always seems to come first. An aspiring TV drama writer who became exposed to Korea through TV dramas, SK describes K-dramas as having more gamjeong (emotion, sentiment) than Japanese doramas; yet the characters don’t just jump into bed, something that she likes about Korean TV dramas. Another young K-drama fan, EB, an African American woman and recent university graduate enjoys this less explicit way of

\[^{126}\] Email correspondence, 26 Jan 2011.
\[^{127}\] Personal interview, 10 Apr 2008.
developing love onscreen. According to EB, who decided to move to Korea shortly after graduation, K-dramas are good because they are “more wholesome, more pure.” She states, “Not all American kids are wild and smutty, or want to watch people shooting people down.” The sweetness and cleanliness are part of the reason she watches K-dramas, which have, for her, become a preferred option in entertainment.

In a lecture at the Hallyu Academy in Seoul, Yun Seok Ho, director of the hugely popular “season” drama series (Autumn Fairy Tale, 2000; Winter Sonata, 2002; Summer Scent, 2003; Spring Waltz, 2006) said that framing something like the slight touch of a finger, or other instances of subtle seukinsip (“skinship”—as it is called in popular Korean parlance—between lovers, can be very beautiful and filling moments. Yun believes that such small moments have the potential to produce a powerful effect. The love that often goes “unexpressed” in K-dramas, however, is not necessarily undeveloped. Love relationships form over time and are bonded through musical moments on the soundtrack where a song fills in, giving expression to words and gestures that remain understated, or unstated. What results is a musical framing of the relationship; in effect, in lieu of what might be a bed scene in Western fare, we are presented with a song that preserves propriety onscreen and leaves the rest up to the viewer.

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128 Personal interview, 12 May 2008.
129 Lecture given at the Hallyu Academy, Chung-Ang University, 11 Dec 2007.
Songs in the K-drama and the Hollywood Musical

K-drama soundtracks feature songs that often stand in for a particular relationship, usually romantic, that may not be easily expressed through dialogue or realized onscreen. In this regard, the K-drama bears comparison to the classical Hollywood musical; like the Hollywood musical, the K-drama showcases musical moments that invert the conventional image-sound hierarchy, a reversal that “lies at the center of the musical genre” (Altman 1987:71). These moments feature a song that briefly takes over the storytelling, and allows for the development—and very often, sublimation—of the relationship onscreen.

Of course K-dramas are not musicals in the commonsense understanding of the term; that is, characters in the K-drama normally do not break into song and dance. Rather, the visual interpretation of song in the K-drama is presented in segments that resemble music video, a format that can be seen as a modern-day counterpart to the classical musical number. Pop songs relayed in these “music video moments” within the K-drama are interspersed throughout the story in the way that songs were interwoven and used to punctuate moments in the classical musical film. Here again, like the musical, it’s the “how” that entertains K-drama viewers as much as, or perhaps more than, the “what.” To note another parallel, in the Hollywood musical, viewers are not required to be as sensitive to plot progression or causality in the story as they are to the coming together of the male and female leads. As Rick Altman has suggested, in the musical, “the couple is the plot” (1987:35); similarly, in the K-drama, the plot is built around relationships that are ultimately meant to be
brought together. The secondary importance of plot to characters (and character relationships), and indeed the formulaic nature of K-dramas, is not something that goes undetected by drama fans, who are well aware of how stories will eventually unfold yet enjoy the journey despite this knowledge. On this point, hammycatt, of koreandramas.net comments:

> It doesn’t matter if I am watching a drama that I can predict the next plot twist, know the ending before it starts, etc. Because it’s the getting there that is the fun – and the music is a big part of that.\(^{130}\)

A look at the Hollywood musical *The Gay Divorcee* (Mark Sandrich, 1934), starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, serves as a good example in illustrating the function and power of song (and in this case, dance as well) in securing the relationship between the two romantic leads. In the scene featuring the song “Night and Day,” Guy Holden (Fred Astaire) is in the midst of pursuing an interested but hesitant Mimi Glossop (Ginger Rogers), who is spending the weekend at a beachside hotel. Mimi is in the middle of a ploy that she hopes will get her a much-wanted divorce from her husband. The scene does not require much else besides music and dance, and perhaps Cole Porter’s risqué lyrics, in developing their relationship. Although Mimi resists at the outset, she yields over the course of the song, and by the end of the number, she has submitted. The scene illustrates the song’s skillful ability to unite the leads while containing their actions in dance. As Scott Henderson has noted, “Musical numbers in the classical musical are often about controlling and

\(^{130}\) Email correspondence, 9 Feb 2011.
channeling sexual energy” (2006:148). The “Night and Day” number featured in *The Gay Divorcee* illustrates well this most powerful of music’s functions.

The restraint, or the lack of overt physical passion here, is something that was most likely informed by the Hays Office, an agency which set the industry standards of censorship in Hollywood at the time. Among other things, these guidelines prohibited scenes of lustful kissing, embracing, nakedness, and suggestive dancing. As the sequence here “dances around” the Hays Code, it sublimates the physical relationship through the song and dance. And perhaps the scene’s very appeal—what makes it beautiful and memorable in the mind of the viewer—lies in the fact that Fred & Ginger do not engage in explicit acts of physical affection. Yet something intimate has happened between them, this signaled by Mimi’s wordless gaze; indeed, one is almost invited to read into how the segment cadences with Guy offering her a cigarette. Sublimation here is worked into an *underscoring of understatement*, as their relationship is foregrounded and advanced implicitly through the “Night and Day” number (see Figures 2.4 – 2.8).

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Figure 2.4 *The Gay Divorcee*
Guy entreats Mimi to keep him company

Figure 2.5 Guy persuades Mimi to dance as “Night and Day” plays

Figure 2.6 Guy sits Mimi down as their dance ends
Song in *Painter of the Wind*

Much like the way “Night and Day” endows a special glow on Fred and Ginger’s union, songs in the K-drama work in similar ways to emphasize courtship. When I asked a composer who works as a music director and sound engineer in K-drama production, about the significant amount of music in the K-drama, she told me:
“Sometimes it’s just easier to put music there. You know, there are some things that you just can’t say; it’s better to put in a musical interlude.”

Segments that feature pop songs can be found readily in K-dramas. A closer look at one example will be useful in shedding light on their function. *Painter of the Wind* is a 20-episode historical drama that aired on SBS in Korea in 2008, and was bought by several neighboring countries including Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Malaysia. Its popularity outside Asia can be noted in online reviews and blogs, the writers of whom access the drama through streaming sites such as dramafever.com, hulu.com, and viki.com (all of which offer the drama with English subtitles). A Malaysian drama agency has hailed *Painter of the Wind* as a drama that transcends nationality with its visual appeal, offering a glimpse of “Korean beauty” (*hangukui mi*) as well as “Asian beauty” (*dongyangui mi*). For Asian audiences, *Painter of the Wind* offers the foreign and the familiar; the drama is exotic enough to fascinate, yet recognizable enough to be accessible.

The story revolves around the lives and relationship of two of Joseon’s most celebrated painters: Kim Hongdo and Sin Yunbok. Based on a novel published the year prior to the drama, the story depicts Sin Yunbok as a woman who is disguised as a man in order to study painting at the art house of the royal court. *Painter of the Wind*...

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133 “Painter of the Wind Reignites Hallyu” (2008).
134 There has been no historical evidence to suggest that Sin Yunbok was really a woman, although many of the artist’s paintings capture women in very fine detail. Both Kim Hongdo and Sin Yunbok were men. Part of *Painter*’s intrigue is the fictional premise that he was actually a woman who gets by as a man in a patriarchal society, and within the *Dohwaseo* (Royal Art Bureau), to which only men were allowed entry.
Wind is a recent addition to an increasing number of sageuks, or period dramas, that have been reacquainting contemporary audiences with various forms of traditional art and culture.

Like many a K-drama, Painter of the Wind contains a lot of music. In fact, the music director for this drama felt that there was so much music in each episode, he once commented, after a particularly arduous sound editing session, “Painter of the Wind is not an art drama; it’s a music drama.”135 This is not to discount the practical reason that there is a lot of music in K-dramas. The musical aesthetic of the K-drama certainly intersects with an economic directive to sell the OST. Drama music supervisors have told me that showcasing/featuring songs, and repeating them within the drama, is a good way to sell the OST. Many of them also say that consuming the song with images is an effective way of communicating with today’s media-saturated audiences.

Painter of the Wind portrays the art of painting in a story that involves a mysterious past murder and hidden identity, but it focuses on its characters and their relationships, a trait that has arguably allowed the Korean sageuk to become popular outside its national boundaries. As Beng Huat Chua has noted, “[a]lthough every East Asian location, with the exception of Singapore, produces a substantial amount of historical costume dramas, very few of these are exported successfully” (2008:77). The focus on human relationships, and the way in which they’re developed throughout the series, notably in moments of song, is a trait that contributes to K-

dramas’ accessibility cross-culturally. And it makes something like the *sageuk* more palatable to a contemporary generation that pop music scholar John Mundy has referred to as “young people of all ages” (1999:232).

In a scene from episode 4 of *Painter of the Wind*, Kim Hongdo and Sin Yunbok work together on a mural that will later be offered to the king. Hongdo is Yunbok’s teacher; Yunbok is Hongdo’s outstanding disciple. The two respect and grow fond of each other, and their feelings eventually grow beyond their student-teacher relationship. The mural scene does not exist in the original novel, but the director wanted to include a sequence of the two painting together. At this point in the story, Yunbok is trying to recover from a series of traumatic events that has caused him to vow never to paint again. The scene serves multiple functions, as Hongdo tries to lift the young Yunbok out of depression, through a sort-of art therapy, while the two draw closer together. Hongdo does not know that Yunbok is a young woman at this point, which heightens the nervous energy between the two. The pop song featured in the scene, “Song of the Wind” (“Baramui Norae”) is sung by Jo Sung Mo, a popular singer who is loved for his mellow voice, and often dubbed the “prince of ballads” in South Korea.

The lilting rhythm of the pop ballad “Song of the Wind” coupled with the sheer size of the drawing lifts the act of painting (and painting together) to a grander scale; the scene takes on movement and becomes like a dance. Lyrics play a role here too, as the singer yearns after a lover who “seems close yet remains faint, blown away

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136 *Painter of the Wind* TV Special aired on SBS, 15 Oct 2008.
by the wind.” By the end of the segment, Hongdo and Yunbok have created something together and Yunbok’s love for painting has been restored. In fact, the director wanted to give the impression that the two were dancing—in his words, something like a waltz—in the overlapping of hands and feet that bring them together, however tentatively; the triple meter of the song also lends itself to something like a waltz. The director also said that while shooting this particular scene, he and the staff were discussing the pottery scene in the American film Ghost (Jerry Zucker, 1990) with Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore, although the scene from Painter is not as explicit or suggestive as the famous scene from Ghost. The mural scene, and attendant song, comes to a close with both painters lying on the floor in a dissolve shot that has a decidedly “morning after” feel signaled by brighter lighting and the sound of birds, along with a fleeting view of candles burned down to their end.

Because K-dramas are comprised of a set number of episodes, much of the consuming experience is about watching relationships build week after week. Over time, the recurring segments with song may take on a different feel for a viewer than one musical number in a film. But in both the “Night and Day” scene from The Gay Divorcee and the mural scene in Painter of the Wind, something has happened. The musical moment has brought the characters closer in a very short time (the length of a song), without dialogue. The understatement in the scene from Painter of Wind is not

137 This scene in Painter of the Wind has the two character painting together; in other dramas the context can be anything from the two leads making snowmen together, to making kimchi or baking pastries together, to riding bicycles or enjoying rides at an amusement park together, etc. At times the song is foregrounded over a montage of the characters’ past encounters.

unlike the restraint in romance seen in Hollywood musicals; although the segment from *Painter of Wind* may not have the sexual frisson contained in Fred and Ginger’s “Night and Day,” it too underscores the emotional while understating the physical.

In K-drama relationships, it’s not so much what is said, but what is not said that piques the psychology of the viewer. In effect, what is left unsaid and unseen, but hinted at, is to an extent left to the viewer’s imagination, which adds a special dimension to the viewing pleasure. The moment of song offers emotional possibilities that evade, or transcend, the obstacles that are set up in the narrative, which, in the case of Hongdo and Yunbok, range from gender, to age, to their student-teacher relationship. John Mundy has pointed out that in classical Hollywood musicals, the musical numbers often resolve situations that seem impossible in the progressing story. He explains, “Whilst the problems and misunderstandings are perpetuated within the dialogic narrative, their resolution and the ultimate realization of love and romance is achieved through the numbers, the singing and dancing” (1999:65).

Although the featured song in this scene is not a musical number in the traditional sense, it functions in a similar way by giving the two main characters space to come together while the song—“their song”—is foregrounded (see Figures 2.9 – 2.13).

Figure 2.9 *Painter of the Wind* Ep. 4 Hongdo and Yunbok begin their mural session
Figure 2.10 Hongdo grasps Yunbok’s brush-held hand to start

Figure 2.11 Hongdo and Yunbok paint together as “Song of the Wind” plays

Figure 2.12 Hongdo’s foot overlaps Yunbok’s as they paint
Figure 2.13 Yunbok and Hongdo find themselves in close proximity

*Song of the Wind*¹³⁹

Under the moonlight so close, you and I
You’re within sight, within reach, yet remain faint
How long until I can be with you
I can barely make a sound, take a breath, yet I call to you

(Refrain)
You’re in my arms, the wind blows, my heart soars
Like the dream of a child, a young girl’s dream
With you in my arms I run; to the ends of the earth I run
Like a young dream that’s gone, now a distant memory
I stop and wait; I stay up the night
Painting you from memory until it goes dark

(Bridge)
As always you feign return, but disappear like the wind
My heart, like the wind, will go to you; just come to me
I’ll embrace you
The wind blows, my heart soars
Atop the green hills, shining over the world

¹³⁹ Lyrics translated by author.
On one level, a break in dialogic flow and the full indulgence in a completely non-diegetic pop song may distance the audience; yet on another it makes the occasion more personal, taking the viewer into the special domain of song, so that it becomes a moment of affection for the couple, and a moment of affect for the viewer. Robert Cagle has suggested, similarly, that musical interludes in the contemporary Korean television drama can be moments of intense personal engagement between viewer and text; that they make the viewing experience unique by individualizing the fantasy onscreen (Cagle 2014:202). Such moments in which viewers can particularize the text are in part possible because of an understatement that insinuates; viewers are led, yet not overtly fed, and this lets dimensions of the text take place in the viewers’ minds.

The type of understatement seen in the scenes above can have as strong an impact as something that is explicitly drawn out. As a brief comparison, one may recall the scenes of love that occur, for instance, in the operas of Wagner and Debussy. A Wagnerian declaration of love, e.g. in an opera like Tristan und Isolde, builds over pages and pages of lush strings that swell amid a full orchestra at fortissimo. The confession of love in a work such as Debussy’s Pelléas et Mélisande is by contrast understated, taking place over a quick flourish to a climax in which the orchestra drops out and the profession stated in voice alone. The rapid build focuses attention and draws the anticipating listener into a finish that calls for input; the listener completes the moment by interpreting (and investing) the emotions that simmer under a surface of control. Although Wagner’s dense and richly chromatic
passages involve a satisfyingly ardent display of characters wearing their hearts on their sleeves, the exchange of simply spoken and whispered words (je t’aime) in Debussy creates an emotional thrust that is no less penetrating to an involved audience.

The attainment of romantic love between characters is very often an important goal in the K-drama, regardless of subgenre (comedy, suspense, action). Building this relationship over time indirectly (i.e. not through dialogue or action) through an allotted song sustains anticipation in a way that involves the audience. The story comes to a close when obstacles to the relationship are cleared and the leads can successfully come together; until this time, much of the enjoyment lies in the process of getting there. A Korean American male drama watcher in his thirties, AH, has alluded to this as a characteristic that, for him, makes K-drama fun to watch: “I watched Secret Garden. I thought it started out great, but it started going down hill as soon as they officially confessed their love for one another. For a while after, the story stopped moving…” The deferring, or sometimes denial, of love that is typical in the K-drama is complemented and supplemented by a pop song which creates an aural space that allows for romance.

140 Though not many, there have been dramas in the past where romance lines do not occupy a central role in the narrative. For example, Mawang (The Devil) (KBS 2007) does suggest a romantic pairing, but it is not emphasized as a main part of the story; God of Study (KBS 2010) also does not foreground romance. These two dramas focus more on friendship and struggles with the self. More recently, in the historical epic Jeong Do Jeon (KBS 2014), romance takes a back seat to intense relationships among men; in this drama, “male melodrama” (or “bromance”) takes precedence over the traditional heterosexual romance.

141 These usually involve social and economic class, family background, and ill-fated histories.

142 AH, email correspondence, 30 Jan 2011.
Relaying Imyeon—the Inner Dimension

Inviting the audience to use their imagination, and at times indulge in emotion, is an important part of effective storytelling; it is a way of keeping the audience involved on a visceral level and engaged as active participants in the unfolding drama. Mtlandis, founder of koreandramas.net, has commented on this aspect of K-dramas: “American dramas treat you like a three-year old—they take you from point to point. K-dramas let you fill in a lot. They don’t look down on your intelligence or emotion.”\textsuperscript{143} As formulaic and conventional as K-dramas may appear, giving the audience a chance to “fill in” spaces of the story on their own lets them participate in the storytelling journey while allowing them to individualize it in their respective ways. What is not said—spoken or shown—yet channeled through song, as I have suggested above, is part of what entices K-drama audiences. That is, a dimension of the story is relayed to the audience through the vehicle of the song, which facilitates imagination and activates emotion.

Drawing out an “inner dimension,” the so-called imyeon, is an idea that was at the heart of Korea’s traditional storytelling genre, pansori. Performed by a lone singer on a simple straw mat with no costumes, sets, or props, except for a fan and perhaps a handkerchief, pansori was visually minimalistic and thus rather bland to watch, in terms of color and motion. Yet the art was not bound by such simplicity; rather, an uncluttered, indeed unfilled, stage served as a platform for pansori’s vocal richness, which would take listeners into “a world of imagination with the voice as the

\textsuperscript{143} Personal conversation, 9 Apr 2011.
principal guide” (Park 2003:3). Accompanied by a single drum, the pansori singer would sing in an open marketplace or village square, relating familiar and favorite folktales to the assembled townspeople who, despite the utter lack of a visually stimulating stage or set, would stay for hours and hours. Key to this scenario was the singer’s ability to tell a story well, and this involved successfully realizing through vocal performance what pansori theorists and practitioners refer to as imyeon, literally the “inner side” or “interior.”

In addition to acting as narrator, the singer would take on various roles in a story, delivering the characters’ respective thoughts as s/he alternated between stylized speech and song. In Chan Park’s words, the pansori singer’s voice was like a “paintbrush” that painted a story’s scenery or dramatic action, moving through melodic and rhythmic paths to reveal a “deeper sense of the word, the phrase, and the stanza in each song”; in this way, the singer would relay the “vocal metaphor of the picture within” (Park 1998:17). Such vocal tone painting, or vocalized visualization, is referred to as imyeon geurigi (“drawing the interior”), and executing this successfully is what lies at the center of pansori’s power as a communicative art form. In fact, expressing imyeon is what pansori practitioners often claim to be an ultimate goal (Kwon 2012:114).

Practically speaking, imyeon can be externalized through devices such as onomatopoeia, with the voice imitating the sounds of nature, matching sounds of the landscape, or following the pace of characters, in accordance with the accompanying rhythm played out on the drum. Yet imyeon is not to be found merely in vocal
acrobatics, and encompasses more than a singer’s vocal mimicry. The “inner dimension” also speaks to an emotional core—the scope of emotions contained within the pansori text. Donna Kwon has described imyeon as “the emotional interiority and deeper meaning of the text” (2012:114). For pansori singer Chan Park, this deeper meaning, the imyeon, forms over many long years; in Park’s own words: “imyeon is what I see from years of learning, practicing, thinking about, and living with, the text.” The ability to convey the meaning of a text through a range of feelings with the seasoned gradations of intensity, subtlety, ambivalence, and resoluteness that lay within was integral to tapping into a story’s imyeon.

Indeed, projecting a story’s imyeon to the audience was a crucial part of effective storytelling in pansori, perhaps more so in the absence of visual aid. However, insofar as the “interior dimension” encompassed the feeling, tone, and emotional tenor of a text, the imyeon was and is something that exists within a story, waiting to be expressed, even with the presence of visual resources. That is, even a story with accompanying visual imagery had an imyeon to be drawn out despite the fact that this might seem unnecessary. Relaying imyeon in conjunction with visuals would seem to call for certain adjustments in the way a story is presented; adapting pansori to an image-based medium such as film, for instance, presents challenges to the traditional transmission of imyeon.

Veteran Korean director Im Kwon-Taek has experimented with mapping the fantasy of pansori storytelling onscreen in his filmic rendition of the “Tale of

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144 Email correspondence, 13 Nov 2007.
Chunhyang” (*Chunhyang*, 2000), one of the most beloved texts in the *pansori* canon. Im’s cinematic version opens with a fade-in to the sounds of a *pansori* singer and his drummer, both mounted beneath the spotlight on a darkened stage. The film viewer is shortly thereafter taken into the narrative world of the text, which contrasts strikingly with the actual *pansori* performance in color, motion, and breadth. Unlike the sedentary shots that frame the actual *pansori* singer in bland hues, the visual language within the *pansori* diegesis comes to life in bright colors, as the camera uninhibitedly captures expansive landscapes and animated motion. While most of the film is a visual representation of the *pansori* tale, Im occasionally toggles back to the staged performance as a recurring frame for the story. One such instance occurs during a climactic scene where the main character, the courtesan Chunhyang, is being tortured for not obliging the new town magistrate. Chunhyang remains chastely loyal to her husband even in his absence; the punishment she endures highlights the Confucian moral of wifely fidelity, around which the tale is built.

In the scene where Chunhyang undergoes the punishment of “Ten Lashes” (known as “Shipjangga” in the *pansori* text), there is a striking moment where two audio tracks converge, and we hear Chunhyang simultaneously speaking the words that the *pansori* singer is himself singing onstage. In this sequence, Chunhyang, despite her duress, deftly wields words as she cries out a clever retort for each lash she endures, her sentences referencing the number of each respective lash. Visually, the scene starts off in the *pansori* storyworld, but as the singer’s narrating voice
begins to parallel Chunhyang’s at the height of her pain, the audience is markedly taken back to the staged singer, whose intense emotions close out the segment.

Approaching this scene in terms of imyeon seems to go some way in understanding the choices involved in its construction; Im’s handling of this scene can conceivably be seen as a way of preserving the imyeon of the text. The manipulation of visuals here, that is, interrupting the torture scene to refocus on the modestly staged pansori singer, may seem somewhat jarring, especially at such a critical moment in the story. Yet it restores imaginative agency to the viewer—during Chunhyang’s most painful moments, the viewer is left on her own. Chunhyang’s suffering, and the film viewer’s mentation of it, comes to life not onscreen, but in the viewer’s mind through the voice of the singer and his vicarious pain. Imyeon, in this sense, remains abstract and subjective, relayed through the vessel of the singer and realized by the listener. The cut to the “real life” pansori performance here is more than just the framing of emotion as worn by the narrating singer; it cues viewers to themselves “complete” the remainder of the scene, in effect redirecting subjectivity to the viewer and allowing for a more traditional kind of pansori consumption—going through a tale together with the storyteller, and calling up one’s own emotions on the journey.

The imyeon of pansori was something in which the listening audience participated with personalized understanding, as individuals recreated in their minds the tale that flowed from the singer’s voice. Korean film scholar Hyangjin Lee attests that “the deep feeling and overwhelming emotional power which are expressed in
*imyŏn* [*imyeon*] cannot easily be translated into the images” (H. Lee 2005:73). It is reasonably more effective, then, to forgo graphic images and let *imyeon* come alive through visual denial, as I am suggesting is the case in Im’s filmic portrayal of Chunhyang’s “Ten Lashes.”

I refer to the above as an example of how *imyeon* can be relayed through visual media, such as film and television. The placement of song at strategic moments in the K-drama parallels the above scene in that it invites the viewer to invoke dimensions that are invisible, offering a window to the emotion of the moment. Such songs can “convey and clarify the emotional significance of a scene, the true ‘real’ feelings of the characters involved in it. Music, in short, reveals what is ‘underneath’ or ‘behind’ a film’s observable gestures” (Frith 1988:134). This is possible because, as film composer Elmer Bernstein explains, visual language is intellectual. “You look at an image and you then have to interpret what it means, whereas if you listen to something or someone and you understand what you hear—that’s an emotional process. Music is particularly emotional—if you are affected by it, you don’t have to ask what it means” (quoted in Frith 1998:134).

If song in the K-drama serves as an aural platform for a viewer’s emotions, it is of interest, then, to examine the type of song that is played during those segments where images are a mere suggestion, or where dialogue recedes. While song in these moments works to deepen the relationship between the two leads in a drama, as I have suggested, it also manages to keep it—and romantic love—in the realm of the ideal. In fact, Hongdo and Yunbok never do kiss in *Painter of the Wind* (neither do
Fred and Ginger in *The Gay Divorcee*), nor do they become demonstrative even when many of the obstacles to their romance are gone, after Yunbok is revealed to be a woman. This sense of an ideal love is facilitated in no small part by the type of song that is used. Although a drama’s OST can be comprised of songs that vary in style and tempo, the type of music that gets most airtime as “feature song” (i.e. not background music) in the course of a drama is the pop song, or pop ballad, which is the preferred genre in conveying relationships of romance and love.

**The Pop Ballad as Ideal Vehicle of Love**

Nearly all of the K-drama watchers I’ve interviewed or had conversations with have mentioned, or alluded to, “cleanliness,” “decency,” or “reserve” as favorable traits of the K-drama. Yet viewers also invariably mention the satisfaction they derive from the dramas’ emotional nature, and the manner in which they incite, as one Caucasian American K-drama fan, PBS, describes it, “tears that are so well earned.”145 The pleasure is to be located, seemingly, in between these poles of intensity and restraint.

In her classic text *Watching Dallas*, Ien Ang explores why and how audiences engage in the internationally popular U.S. soap opera *Dallas* (1985). Ang is less interested in explaining the success of *Dallas* in terms that analyze the socio-psychological or economic characteristics of the viewing public, or a pre-determined need that the show fulfills. Much like Dyer, she is more concerned with the process of

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watching *Dallas*—how viewers experience it and how it works to create pleasure. Ang’s study reveals that audiences’ consumption of *Dallas* is intertwined significantly with its dimensions of “emotional realism.” According to Ang, viewers are not very concerned with the show’s capacity for verisimilitude, that is, how objectively or accurately the show depicts social reality (which she refers to as “empiricist realism”). Nor are they particularly taken with how the show successfully creates illusion by concealing its status as narrative—the text’s constructedness (what she calls “classical realism”) by which the story is believable and thus “speaks for itself”—a situation where the reader/viewer is unaware that the narrative has a narrator (1985:38). Both types of realism function on a cognitive level, and Ang’s conclusion is that these two conceptions are inadequate in explaining the realism experienced by *Dallas* fans.

The realism experienced by *Dallas* fans, Ang explains, “bears no relation to this cognitive level—it is situated at the emotional level: what is recognized as real is not knowledge of the world, but a subjective experience of the world: a ‘structure of feeling’. It is emotions which count in a structure of feeling” (ibid.:45). Ang suggests, in other words, that beyond the denotative level of the text (the literal likeness between fictional and real worlds), viewers watch *Dallas* for its connotative associations—what is implied through the interaction of characters and situations. Emotions are the point of entry into the drama, and what keeps the audience meaningfully engaged.
International K-drama fans watch Korean dramas for this pleasure of emotional realism— to tune in to emotions that are real, that they can identify with. In fact, in a survey that I administered to the fan group at koreandramas.net, many members noted “emotion” as one of the things they enjoy most about Korean TV dramas. KD, a late-fifties fan of Irish descent says that the best part of K-dramas is the “music and emotions,” while MJ, a woman in her forties, lists “family bonds, deep emotions” as what she enjoys most. ES, a Caucasian fan in her mid-sixties says that K-dramas confirmed for her “how we’re all alike, even more than I knew.” Similarly, AML, a fan of Polish and Czech heritage in her fifties wrote that Korean dramas showed her that “even though our culture is different, we are still all the same.” The “sameness” or “alikeness” noted by these drama watchers encompasses an emotional reality that they can recognize, and to which they can relate. The dramatic twists and turns that a character is met with, and the emotions they engender, are points of recognition and empathy for these viewers. Mtlandis even feels that “the stories themselves are very real. For most of these dramas, this could be happening to my neighbors (if they are having a really bad day).”

Indeed emotions can run high in the K-drama, and the accompanying soundtrack can work to accentuate or temper these feelings, depending on the moment. As indicated above, music is an element that is perceived consciously by fans as they watch a drama. For some, the music compellingly carries and expresses love, as noted, for example, by AA, a Saudi Arabian graduate student and K-drama

146 Survey distributed in person at the annual koreandramas.net get-together, 30 April 2011.
watcher. AA says that while he watches Korean dramas for the good-looking male and female actors, as well as the stories, music is his favorite part of the K-drama package; he comments: “I think Korean music is the best in the world for love.”

The type of music that AA is referring to is the pop ballad—typically a slow or moderately slow, melodic song of love sung in a tone that is at times soothing, at times yearning. The pop song (pop ballad) is the overwhelming choice of song in the K-drama, and its main musical agent of love. Its conceptualization of love brings a layer of idealism to the field of intense emotion—the emotional realism—that is generated from K-dramas’ dramatic storylines.

While it is not my intention to go into a comparison of Korean and American pop ballads, it is worth mentioning here that aside from the use of the Korean language, pop ballads in K-dramas are not much different from American pop ballads, musically or in their handling of the subject of love. Following a long history of American pop music influence, contemporary Korean pop ballads are built on the Western diatonic scale, within the frame of tonal harmony. And they possess similar traits and conventions, a similar “poetry,” to American pop in expressing feelings of love. Singers use, as music sociologist Simon Frith points out, “non-verbal

as well as verbal devices to make their points—emphasis, sighs, hesitations, changes

147 Personal interview, 28 Mar 2008.
148 K-drama OSTs will invariably include at least one or two main pop ballads, which are infused into the drama to musically paint relationships of love or friendship (although often the relationship in question is one of heterosexual romance). A small number of dramas in the past have tried to take on an overall different musical feel with their OST, for example Soulmate (MBC 2006), which attempted a more indie sound, and branched out with international music; and Ireland (MBC, 2004), which also worked with an indie feel, and had some World Music influences; both of these dramas, however, still included the requisite pop ballad.
149 For a review of American popular music in South Korea, see Kim and Shin 2010; Maliangkay 2006; Kwon 2012:155-58.
of tone; lyrics involve pleas, sneers and commands…” (Frith 1989:90). While lyrics are undoubtedly an important part of a song, Frith notes that a song’s message is in more than just the words themselves; it is embedded in the performance of those words: “It’s not just what they sing, but the way they sing it” (ibid.) that determines meaning. Indeed, much can be harvested through the sound of the voice; aspects such as vocal timbre work with other characteristics, such as a song’s register and contour, to persuasively bring the listening viewer into a world of emotion.

For international audiences of K-drama especially, pop ballads can create a comfortable familiarity, an aural buffer zone for what can potentially appear unfamiliar onscreen, whether in terms of images or cultural codes. But the resonance of the pop ballad does more. Frith argues that to understand how pop music works in film, we must first consider how it works more generally. According to Frith, pop songs come with certain types of baggage that tend to “drag all sorts of meanings into and out of films” (1988:130); thus, the inclusion of pop songs “place[s] films in a much wider framework of pop romance and pop common sense” (ibid.).

Pop songs (love songs) and their “standard pop account of love” are imbued with a romantic ideology that is characterized by an ideal outlook, or at least the desire for one. Frith suggests that this perhaps had something to do with the landscape of changing values in an earlier era:

In a period when divorce rates were rising, family stability declining, pastoral life styles disappearing, bureaucratic impersonality and organization increasing, popular music constructed a universe in which adolescent innocence and naiveté became a permanent state. Men and women (often referred to in the songs as boys and girls) dreamed pure dreams, hopefully waited for an ideal love to appear (the gift of some
beneficent power that remained undefined and unnamed), and built not castles but bungalows in the air complete with birds, brooks, blossoms, and babies. (Lawrence Levine, quoted in Frith 1996:161-62)

In contrast to a genre like the blues, which related the experience of love more realistically as something multidimensional, and thus had a “truthfulness” to it, pop songs had a dreamlike appeal with “formulas of love” that often pictured ethereal relationships (Frith 1996:161-62). Pop songs also entail a different experience than something like rock or disco. Richard Dyer illustrates that while one can argue that all popular music is erotic, there are differences in how we feel this eroticism in various types of popular music. In short, Dyer elucidates these differences in terms of movement: “Rock’s eroticism is thrusting, grinding—it is not whole body, but phallic. […] rock’s repeated phrases trap you in their relentless push…” (1992:153). Disco is characterized by insistent rhythms; its successive repetition of beats and phrases makes it undeniably physical, involving the whole body.

On the other hand, the eroticism of popular song can be described as mainly “disembodied.” As Dyer puts it, popular song “succeeds in expressing a sense of the erotic which yet denies eroticism’s physicality” (ibid.:152). Unlike rock and disco, popular song conceives of passion as something that emanates from the inside, that is, from the heart or soul: “Thus the yearning cadences of popular song express an erotic yearning of the inner person, not the body” (ibid.:153). Far from the pounding urgency of disco or the forceful, driving energy of rock, the construction of love in popular song takes place within a less kinetic, less corporeal rhythmic sphere that invokes the intangible and suggests something spiritual, something ideal. The melodic
departure and dutiful return to tonic in popular song also lend a feeling of enclosure that, in a sense, seals it from continuous interaction with the listener. In comparison to the typical disco tune, which “drives beyond itself” in endlessly repeated phrases, popular songs have an air of security and containment; although they may, and often do, wander from their melodic and harmonic beginnings, they ultimately return to them to neatly cadence and “close off” the song. This, in effect, curtails the song from encroaching on the body in the way that disco does, for instance, through its open-endedness (Dyer 1999:152-53).

In style and sensibility, the pop ballad injects a streak of idealism that balances the dramatic impossibilities in a story. But it is also an ideal vehicle for its broad accessibility as a template for love. Pop songs are efficient because they are readily appropriable, that is, their meaning does not hinge upon individual singers as much as it does on the situations the songs portray. Although people may prefer certain balladists to others, the specialness of a pop song is not contingent on the individual singer or his/her musical persona in the way that, for example, a rock song’s significance is closely tied to a rock musician’s singular style. Whereas often a rock number will be defined in large part by its singer, and the singer’s identity, pop songs suffer less control, less “ownership,” and are thus more employable to a wider audience. Music critic Dave Laing likens this difference to the distinction between the auteur and metteur in film. Literally, “director,” the metteur of a film is one who skillfully implements the scenes of a film. Although the resulting film may not have a
signature style, as an auteur’s would, the metteur delivers the film with proficiency and executes it to effect.

The musical equivalent of the metteurs en scène is the performer who regards a song as an actor does his part – as something to be expressed, something to get across. His aim is to render the lyric faithfully. The vocal style of the singer is determined almost entirely by the emotional connotations of the words. The approach of the rock auteur, however, is determined not by the unique features of the song but by his personal style [...]. (Laing, quoted in Frith 1989:92)

In discussing the work of song lyrics, Frith notes that musical auteurs have been considered superior to metteurs ever since the early days of rock, and that lyrics have since then been held to auteur standards. He argues, however, that the music of a star like Buddy Holly is remembered not for its words, but for the exceptional nature of Holly’s exclusive singing style and aspects such as his instrumental accompaniment. The appeal of rock auteurs, he suggests, is not organized around their lyrics; rockers are mostly recognized and lauded for their distinguishing mark. By contrast, the pop song has a generic charm that is more inviting through words and situations that are waiting to be felt. The allure of the pop song—its “easiness”—is that it does not place undue importance on distinct personal style. Frith offers the words of vocal legend Billy Holiday, who in his estimation represents Tin Pan Alley’s metteur par excellence:

Young kids always ask me what my style derived from and how it evolved and all that. What can I tell you? If you find a tune and it’s got something to do with you, you don’t have to evolve anything. You just feel it, and when you sing it other people feel something too. (quoted in Frith 1989:93)
The conversational tone of pop (one lover addressing another) is conducive to easy adoption by listeners who can access a song’s lyrics and readily use them to express and experience their own emotions. Frith asserts, “song words matter most, as words, when they are not part of an auteur-ial unity, when they are still open to interpretation—not just by their singers, but by their listeners too” (1989:93). The pleasure of pop, he adds, is that “we can “feel” tunes, perform them, in imagination, for ourselves” (ibid.). Pop songs allow for participation and personalization, characteristics that in no small way account for their widespread appeal. They grant the listener the joy of “hearing secret harmonies,” or as Frith otherwise explains it, “the furtive pleasure of indulging in private fantasies in public places.” As Frith sees it, this has been one of popular music’s most useful purposes over the last century (Frith 1988:129). This is the flexibility and strength of the pop song; its prominent inclusion in K-dramas is something that has made them more palatable to fans.

In marked contrast to the “extreme” of recent Korean cinema, Korean television dramas have appealed to audiences through what they do not show, in moments that are further underscored by music in the storytelling process. Filling these gaps with pop ballads has become a significant characteristic of the K-drama, and one that has contributed to the genre’s accessibility as it has crossed borders through hallyu. This chapter has explored the basic use and function of music in the K-drama, in particular the pop ballad, with special attention to how it “activates” the audience while fulfilling its narrative role. The next chapter zooms in to three case studies that offer a look into how the music soundtrack in K-drama also organically
works to convey some of the larger “hallyu sensibilities” laid out in the previous chapter.
CHAPTER THREE

Music in K-Dramas—A Closer Look (Case Studies)

The following case studies explore the ways in which music works to bring out some of the larger characteristics of hallyu as they are embedded in the actual dramas. The first case study, Winter Sonata, broadly works the motif of “the past,” and resonates a slowness and sincerity to audiences exposed to the quick pace of modern life and the toll that it takes on relationships of affection. The second case study, Sassy Girl Chunhyang is more directly concerned with Korean identity, as it deals with tradition, notably in the present, and how a classic Korean folktale can have relevance in a modern setting; the reinterpretation of a traditional tale in a contemporary context can be seen as an underscoring of cultural identity, which the drama aims to do for a younger generation. The third case study, Dream High, conspicuously looks ahead to joining a global community, a step that the drama eagerly takes through the other big medium of hallyu: K-pop. These dramas instantiate different aspects of hallyu’s desires as they relate to Korea, even as they have appealed to audiences outside Korea.
CASE STUDY 1

Affective Memories: Recalling the Past in *Winter Sonata*

Sometime during the writing phase of this dissertation, a friend of mine who is a clergy worker in the Pacific Northwest contacted me to see if I could help him understand why one of his congregation members, an elderly Japanese American woman who had recently passed, had requested the music for *Winter Sonata* to be played at her funeral. For my friend, who conducted her funeral services, it seemed to be an odd request, in part because the person was not Korean, but mostly because it was just a TV show, and seemingly unrelated to her real life. I had heard of many stories, both in the media and from people in my immediate surroundings, about *Winter Sonata* affecting middle-aged women, especially in Japan; how fans were watching the whole twenty-episode series from beginning to end multiple times (some well over a dozen); how some fans were purchasing two copies of the series on DVD—a “museum copy,” for keeping purposes (not to be watched), and a viewing copy; how they were enrolling in Korean classes in their area; and how some were even beginning to seek out Korean men, a real-life “Seoul mate.” But this was the first time that I had heard of someone wanting to make it (or any Korean drama) part of such an important life-cycle ritual.\(^\text{150}\) It was clear that my friend’s congregation member had a special relationship with this drama, to a point where she wanted to close out her life with its music. The drama was not real, but the feelings that it

\(^{150}\) Since this incident, I have heard of other cases where people have requested or wanted the music of a particular Korean drama to be played at their wedding.
incited in her were, and I told my friend that Korean dramas had a way of affecting viewers in ways that went beyond simple enjoyment.

Much has been written about *Winter Sonata* (*Gyeoul Yeonga*, KBS 2002). From the thousands of fans that descended on a Tokyo airport when the drama’s leading male actor, Bae Yong Jun (endearingly endowed an honorific and known as “Yon-sama”) visited during the height of the drama’s popularity, to the throngs that ambushed his hotel, to the widely publicized comment that former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi made during an election season, pledging to “make great efforts” so that he could “be as popular as Yon-sama and be called Jun-sama” (Onishi 2004), the series is significant in the history of the Korean Wave, and is the work that marked the onset of *hallyu* in earnest in Japan. Some have suggested that the drama has “served to create renewed momentum for the two countries to maintain friendlier relations” (Chon, quoted in Han and Lee 2008:123), or that it has even changed Korea-Japan dynamics to an extent that politicians could talk about the two countries’ shared history in terms of a “before-” and “after-” *Winter Sonata* (Mori, cited in Han 2008). Such statements are perhaps overly optimistic, but what is certain is that the drama succeeded in moving an audience in numbers that were difficult, perhaps impossible, to ignore, prompting journalists and media analysts to talk in terms of the collective nation.

*Winter Sonata* is known for its melodramatic and melancholic depiction of “pure love and devotion,” “first love,” and related ideas such as “lost love” (Hanaki et al 2007; Kim et al 2009), and is often discussed in terms of the nostalgia that it
engenders for these ideals through its story (Han 2008; Lee and Ju 2010). The drama revolves around two main characters: the brooding male lead, Junsang (played by Bae Yong Jun) and the cheerful female lead, Yujin (played by Choi Ji Woo), who meet in high school, fall in love—both for the first time—and are tragically separated when a car accident kills Junsang. The drama intensifies when the story jumps ten years ahead (early on in the series) and Junsang reemerges, only he returns as another man, Minhyeong; of course he is actually Junsang but has suffered amnesia since the fateful car accident, and has been sent to the States by his mother, where he has further undergone hypnosis to erase a painful past. The goal of the narrative is to finally bring Yujin and Junsang (as himself) together again; related subplots include Junsang searching for his father, and the possibility that the two lovers are actually half siblings (a fear that is laid to rest in time), and Minhyeong searching for his lost identity as well as his memories with Yujin. All this takes place amidst a backdrop of beautiful visuals comprised of rural scenery, which significantly adds to the dream-like charm that fans have come to appreciate about it.

If *Winter Sonata* could be said to have a theme, it is arguably “the past.” The story contains elements that invite reading, such as the loss of memory that the main character undergoes. Textual interpretation might explain this as a symptom of discontent or restlessness with historical trauma, and that amnesia erases the pain yet makes the past an elusive object of obsession, always part of the present. Indeed the trope of amnesia—the metaphoric return to a state of innocence—is something that film scholars have pointed to as a salient characteristic of contemporary South Korean
cinema. Frances Gateward discusses South Korean cinema’s obsession with time and the past in relation to the country’s experiences with painful and disruptive historical incidents, such as colonization under Japan, the sexual slavery that took place under the Japanese imperial army, national division, military dictatorship, and the *minjung* (democratization) movement (2007). In the field of Korean cinema, this can be seen in the treatment of time, in terms of narrative structure and form. Gateward notes that “an unusually large number of [South Korean] films are concerned with issues of history and memory,” and that the motif of memory is a phenomenon that pervades many genres of the nation’s cinema, from the supernatural thriller to the gangster film to the romantic comedy to mystery to melodrama, and even to horror (ibid.:193-94). She suggests that films that deal with issues of memory loss, exhibit fragmentation, and reenact history “reveal an anxious nation that, as it looks to the future, is attempting to reconcile tragic historical conflicts while attending to the inevitable return of the repressed.” She further writes, “This fixation with history and memory is indicative of what I would characterize as the preeminent project of contemporary Korean cinema…” (ibid.:194, italics in original). Her assessment is insightful and resonates with one of the impulses of the larger *hallyu* phenomenon insofar as it has become a project that is embraced and wielded by the nation—that is, a drive to recover the past, make up for the past, or illustrate the past in and through culture.

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151 This would include, for example, narrational strategies that do not follow a linear progression. Gateward explains that audiences of contemporary South Korean films have come to expect divergent and varying narrational trajectories, as films are known to “offer a repetition of events from varied perspectives, parallel-time structures, regressive causal momentum, violations of the space/time continuum, time travel, and most common, and perhaps most telling, a reliance on flashbacks to explicate the present.” (2007:193).
In many of South Korea’s films, a preoccupation with the past may reveal itself through formal experimentation as well as historical content; in *Winter Sonata*, the past is worked as a theme that creates a nostalgic impulse for a time that was idyllic and ideal. For instance, the use of flashbacks, a common device in Korean films is used extensively in *Winter Sonata*. In Korean films, it is often used to complicate the narrative, and directors have shown a preference for complex versions, such as “parallel flashbacks, contradictory flashbacks, open-ended flashbacks, and sometimes even flashbacks within flashbacks” (Gateward 2007:193). Whereas in Korean films it is employed to confound linear time, in *Winter Sonata*, the device is used for simpler, more traditional purposes, to cue memory and recall past events. The repeated use of flashbacks in *Winter Sonata* cements those memories and increases an emotional attachment to the past, both for the fictional characters and the viewers who constantly witness their recollections; and it generates a yearning for the emotions embedded in those memories.

For Japan, such emotions speak to a better time that is now gone, as Japanese pop culture analyst Koichi Iwabuchi explains:

Japanese media consumption of East Asian popular culture is sharply marked by a nostalgic longing for a loss. It shows that many Japanese are attempting to recuperate something they believe Japan allegedly is losing or has lost. For the case of Hong Kong, it is mostly social energy and vigor that audiences nostalgically appreciate. And it is pure love that connotes innocent sentiment and caring human relationships in the case of the Korean TV drama *Winter Sonata*. (Iwabuchi 2008:157)

The nostalgia that *Winter Sonata* creates is laced with a utopian dimension that soothes a “longing for continuity in a fragmented world” (Boym 2001:xiv). In a study
on nostalgia, Svetlana Boym asserts that nostalgia arises as a “defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals” (ibid.); it expresses a yearning for “the slower rhythms of our dreams” and is a “rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress” (ibid.:xv). Nostalgia, or the longing for a different, lost time is “coeval with modernity,” writes Boym, and can be seen as a feature of global culture.

The director of Winter Sonata, Yun Seok Ho, created the drama hoping that the places it featured and the episodes it relayed would be a small reminder of what people could be when distanced from the hectic reality of the modern everyday. He said that the idea of “first love” was used to invoke the thrill and excitement (seolleim) of youthful romance and to serve as an impetus for reclaiming what has been left behind and forgotten when it comes to human interaction. If contemporary South Korean films exhibit a desire to revisit, or reclaim, history in terms of the events of the past, Winter Sonata shows a desire to recover the emotions of the past—emotions that belong to a time when feelings between people were more genuine and less clouded by the imperatives of modern life. C. Fred Alford has pointed to such a “condition,” noting the uneasiness surrounding the shifting nature of personal relationships that has accompanied the desire for globalization in Korea:

At the core of the Korean discussion of globalization is a collective fantasy: that Koreans can globalize their economy but not themselves, not their relationships. It is such a powerful fantasy because it conceals such a terrible dread: that globalization will transform every relationship based on affection into strictly instrumental encounters. Koreans will become others to themselves. (Alford 1999:151)

152 Lecture given at the Hallyu Academy, Chung-Ang University, 11 Dec 2007.
The affection the Alford touches on, that is at risk of being lost with Korea’s
globalizing efforts, can be encapsulated in the notion of jeong, a term that defines
affection between people. Jeong (discussed in further detail below) speaks to an
emotional bond that ties people in meaningful relationships of comfort and
familiarity; it is a sentiment that comprises an important dynamic in interpersonal
Korean relationships, and is something that is susceptible to being overlooked amid
the intense climate of individual and collective striving for success that has
characterized Korea’s globalization.

Yun, Winter Sonata’s director, said that the drama contained unrealistic,
“faraway” aspects that made it feel like a fairy-tale; for example, much of the
shooting was done on location at resorts, by waters, in open fields, and by beautiful
tree-lined paths. Yun wanted to capture as much of nature as possible because, as he
explained in his lecture at the Hallyu Academy, “in nature, we feel relaxed and our
greed subsides.” The physical scenery in Winter Sonata was framed as a cathartic
getaway from the busy demands that crowd daily life, and it is fed into the nostalgic
loss and longing for a simpler, uncluttered time. It is also tied to the love that
develops between the characters Junsang and Yujin; according to Sangkyun Kim,
who conducted an interview with the director, the “privileging of visual display over

153 A similar sentiment was expressed by former South Korean Minister of Culture Yu In Chon, who,
in his lecture at the Hallyu Academy, described the need for Koreans to spend time and effort in
engaging with culture, and on finding rest from the unrelenting grind that the country has become in its
race for success; this was a way, Yu suggested, that modern South Koreans could once again “notice
the person next to you,” and recover a sense of humanity that was somewhat lost during South Korea’s
compressed, incessant drive toward modernization (2 Oct 2007).
narrative action is a desire or an intention of the production team, not only to portray Nami Island’s sheer beauty in the form of a more aesthetically pleasing image, but also to maximise the sense of romantic feelings between the characters” (2010:65).  

The feelings of youth, innocence, purity can be gathered from many of the drama’s details, from the high school uniforms and toggle coats that the characters wear in the earlier episodes, to the nostalgic cue of playing ABBA’s 1970s hit song “Dancing Queen” from the student radio booth, to the symbolic first footprints that Yujin and Junsang make in a field of new, untrodden snow on one of their dates—a sequence that is significantly underscored by music, and turned into a “moment” that later becomes a memory. In fact, music is a crucial part of memory-making in Winter Sonata; a dimension through which viewers take part in the characters’ memories. Because the work of music can be implicit and influence us subliminally, as Wright points out, it can be pervasive and deeply affecting (2003:12). The music of Winter Sonata plays an integral role in creating affect and emotion, and is significant to how audiences actually experience the narrative; it is a dimension of the drama that has contributed largely to the drama’s leading place in the flow of hallyu.

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154 The beauty and significance of the scenery in Winter Sonata has made many of the shooting locations extremely popular tourist sites for K-drama fans; some fans have been known to reenact the drama’s most iconic scenes at the respective spots on the location grounds (see Kim 2010; Han and Lee 2008).
The Past through Music

*Winter Sonata* is very much a melodrama in the original sense of the word in that it presents a “*drame*,” or drama, with a significant amount of “*melos*” (song, or music). The OST for the series was released in different versions and is filled with

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155 There is a Korean version, a Japanese version, and a *Winter Sonata* “Classics” version.
a combination of the drama’s main songs and instrumental tracks; there is also an accompanying songbook, arranged for piano accompaniment. The director, Yun Seok Ho, specifically wanted piano (and violin) to accompany this story of pure love. As such, it is prevalent in the songs and arrangements on the music soundtrack.

The piano serves as a backbone for much of the OST’s music, but it is also an instrument that symbolically binds the two characters together. One of the first affectionate and meaningful moments between Yujin and Junsang occurs at the piano, when Yujin attempts to teach the recently transferred Junsang how to play, as a means of thanking him for helping her escape a dangerous situation the night before. Yujin decides to repay Junsang by helping him practice for their music exam, for which students are required to play a simple piece on the piano. Little does she know that he is actually gifted at playing, and that his mother is a touring concert pianist. The two sit at a piano in an empty hall tinged with warm sunlight that seeps through drawn curtains; the scene, towards the end of Episode 1, marks their first moment of bonding.

The piece that Yujin begins to play, presumably their exam piece, is *Träumerei* (“Dreaming”), from Schumann’s *Kinderszenen* (“Scenes From Childhood”), a musical collection of reminiscences. *Träumerei* is perhaps the most famous of this set of simple yet poetic musings designed for adults (that is, not written for children); the piece offers an adult perspective of childhood memories and is thus laced with a quiet sense of nostalgia, which it captures in dynamics, tempo,

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156 Personal conversation with music director Lee Im Woo, 16 Oct 2008.
texture, and pacing. The placement of *Träumerei* here is befitting and serves to set the tone of the scene as it comments on the moment taking place (it will become a youthful recollection). Claudia Gorbman has argued that diegetic music, or music that comes from a source on screen, has as much power as non-diegetic music when it appears in a story and should not be “divorced from the task of articulating moods and dramatic tensions” (Gorbman 1987:23). The piece here efficiently summarizes the scene and infuses it with the sense of reverie that it was originally meant to invoke. When Yujin stops playing somewhere in the middle because she has forgotten the notes, Junsang picks up where she has her memory slip; Yujin, of course, is surprised that Junsang knows how to play. After finishing off the phrase in the Schumann, Junsang begins to play another piece—this time a non-Classical tune, soft and lyrical in character—which surprises and impresses Yujin. When Yujin asks, Junsang tells her that the song’s title is “*Cheoeum*” (“First Time”); it is a song that will appear later on, as something that grounds Yujin’s memory with Junsang.

The scene at the piano is effective in many ways. Aside from establishing Junsang as a sensitive male character—he plays the piano, after all—it is set up as a future memory. Visually, the room is infused with a warm glow of sunlight that bathes the onscreen images in faded sepia tones. As if to match these tones, the piano here is slightly out of tune, giving the impression of an old, dated moment in time; in fact, the out-of-tune piano here can be heard as the aural equivalent of the sepia-toned visuals. Additionally, an over-dampening (pedaling) of tones so that they sustain and overlap in a slightly messy fashion in slow tempo, along with small touches of reverb,
also contribute to a hazy sonic effect that aurally captures a feeling of the past (Figures 3.3 – 3.6). What is more, at a certain point into Junsang’s private recital of “First Time,” the visuals crank into slow motion and we are given a montage-like effect of images and reflections (on the piano) overlapping as they dissolve into each other. This happens while the song does not change in tempo; that is, sound and image in this sequence start out matching each other, but when the visuals shift to slow motion, the audio remains unchanged.

The effect resembles something that Rick Altman calls an “audio dissolve,” which he explains as a crossing over between the diegetic track (the track that provides a story’s realistic sounds, e.g. the sounds of traffic, or of people talking) and the music track (the track that provides instrumental accompaniment, e.g. when a love theme swells over a romantic moment) (1987:62-74). The technique is typically used in the American film musical, where a number will begin with source music—something from the diegetic narrative, for example a piano—but then expands to include instruments that have no discernible source, no visual anchor, such as a full orchestra that has somehow joined in. This passage from one track to another signals a transition to a “place of transcendence where time stands still, where contingent concerns are stripped away to reveal the essence of things” (ibid.:66). Altman suggests that “[b]y breaking down the barrier separating the two tracks, the musical blurs the borders between the real and the ideal” (ibid.:63).
Figure 3.3 *Winter Sonata* Ep. 2 Yujin has a memory slip on the piano

Figure 3.4 Yujin and Junsang create memories at the piano

Figure 3.5 Junsang plays “First Time” for Yujin

Figure 3.6 Yujin and Junsang complete an early memory
The resulting music—which can be classified neither fully as diegetic music nor as non-diegetic music yet is in a sense partially both—is something that Altman refers to as “supra-diegetic music.” In these instances of audio dissolve, the diegetic source creates a “bridge between time-bound narrative and the timeless transcendence of supra-diegetic music” (ibid.:67). The scene where Junsang plays “First Time” does not mark a case of supra-diegetic music in the strict sense, since the piano is the only sound that we hear throughout the song; however, there is a feeling of an audio dissolve when the diegetic track (the sound of Junsang playing) turns into the music track (accompanying music) once the hands playing piano move into slow motion and the image track no longer seems to be causing the piano sounds that we hear. The remainder of the sequence extends this mode of reverie before returning to the diegetic present where image and audio tracks once again snap back “in sync.”

In an essay entitled “Music in Kyoul yonga [Gyeoul Yeonga (Winter Sonata)]: the piano and borderless musical modernity,” Alison Tokita contends that the piano is a “symbol of musical modernity that is central to the Korean television drama series Winter Sonata…” (2006:2). She suggests that since the piano is an instrument of Western music that came into Korea when the country was beginning to modernize, that it symbolizes the modern while signaling mobility within a global circuit, this implied by Junsang’s mother’s concert activity. Tokita’s remarks are puzzling. Junsang’s mother is a minor character whose activities (concert itinerary) are not addressed in any significant way throughout the story. But more importantly, the
piano as a cultural artifact is very much a well-established, indeed prominent, part of everyday musical life in contemporary Korea, from young children to adults.

Western art music took deep root in Korea as it did in Japan when it entered those countries in the late 19th century; its effect was so profound that it marginalized indigenous musics and became an essential, permanent part of music education, in both countries. If anything, the piano is something that the characters (and audience) of Winter Sonata would have considered to be a part of their youth; not something that belongs to the West, but something from their own past. More to the point, however, is the fact that it is used in the drama to connote a memory, inscribed as it is with Junsang and Yujin’s early encounter in high school, which, further on in the series (in the characters’ adult years) serves as a sound that encapsulates past emotions. That is, it functions as an instrument of nostalgia in terms of the associations it stirs with its characters; the piano does not symbolize modernity, as Tokita suggests, but signals a moment captured in the past.

If the first two episodes of Winter Sonata are about making memories, the remaining episodes in the story are about recollecting them. Ben Min Han has noted this aspect of the drama, suggesting that the characters’ recollections serve as a pathway into a viewers’ own past; while audiences watch Yujin and Junsang make memories as they get closer to each other, says Han, “viewers are also engaging in deconstructing their own memories—memories of high school years, dislikeable teachers, trips, and most importantly our first love” (2008:28-29). Although Yujin’s recollections are her own, Han argues, “they also become the collective memory of
viewers as they share the same act of remembering as Yu-jin.” The entry into these memories, always marked by music, recur as important moments that accumulate significantly over the series to deliver and define its overall sense of nostalgia.

The first act of remembrance takes place in episode 3, in the last scene before the story jumps ten years ahead, into the middle of the characters’ busily progressing adult lives. In this last scene of their younger years, Yujin and her close classmates hold a small memorial for Junsang, who has died in a car accident. After saying their farewells, Yujin comes home to find a cassette tape that has come through the postal mail. On playing this cassette tape, she learns that it is a gift from Junsang a recording of him playing the song “First Time” on the piano—something he’d sent to her days earlier, after their first moment at the piano. The appearance of a cassette player here can itself be read as an icon of the past, creating an effect comparable to the one that a gramophone is capable of creating.

Mark Slobin has pointed out that the gramophone often makes an appearance in films set in the early twentieth century, either as a symbol of the ruling class or of the onset of modernity (2008:337-39). In these instances, “the unfamiliar playback device appears ceremoniously, as a semi-sacred object representing a distant, technologically advanced urban lifestyle with strong implications of class or colonial power” (ibid.:338). Much in the way that the image of the gramophone brings a sense of novelty, the cassette player in Winter Sonata appears as one of nostalgia—an un-modern artifact that replays an aural memory in the receptacle of a song on cassette. As Slobin explains for the case of the gramophone on screen, the cassette player
similarly “economically offers a compact image that bundles the visual and the sonic, and this very condensation makes it a metaphoric motor to drive the narrative in the desired direction” (ibid.:338-39).

The cassette player contributes to constructing the idea of the past, appearing as it does when compact discs were already in currency and the world of music playback technology was changing over to this new medium. But it also cues the memory of Junsang. When Yujin starts listening to Junsang’s cassette tape, she is clearly affected by the song, which motivates a flashback to the sepia-toned images from the scene at the piano (above) in episode 1. As the melody is playing on the cassette player, there is a slight moment of dissonance where the diegetic sound of piano playing from the cassette tape overlaps with non-diegetic music on the music soundtrack, which then takes over as Yujin emotionally recalls her memories with him. The non-diegetic song that takes precedence on the music soundtrack is “My Memory,” a pop ballad that is one of the drama’s main theme songs and is used extensively over the remainder of the series; all other diegetic sounds drop out, and as the camera zooms in for a close up on Yujin’s tearful face, the pop ballad floods the

157 Another musical relic of the past in Winter Sonata is the LP (and turntable), which can be seen throughout episodes 1 and 2 when Yujin and Junsang, both members of their school’s radio club, play records from the school’s sound booth. In episode 1, significantly, Yujin plays an LP of ABBA’s “Dancing Queen,” which floods the school’s speakers for nearly three minutes. The use of a non-Korean pop song here is not unusual, as this worldwide hit was also popular in South Korea, a country that was already very accustomed to the sounds of Western (mostly American) pop music since the 1950s; thus the song, much like the instrument of the piano, would have been considered part of the audience’s own musical past, and should not be read as something “foreign.” The effect of the song is one of nostalgia, not of something Western or from outside the Korean cultural context, and it ties real history to the history of the characters in an efficient way. A scene in episode 2 shows the two playing an LP of the tune “First Time” (the song that Junsang plays for Yujin at the piano in episode 1), while they count the many “firsts” that they’ve shared together, such as playing hooky together, jumping the school wall together, riding a bicycle together, holding hands; these firsts have already become memories for them.
soundtrack and provides entry into Yujin’s point of view as it musically narrates her subjective emotions. The treatment of music and sound here allows, indeed invites, the audience not only to identify with Yujin’s emotional recollection, but also to share in them, as familiar images of their scene at the piano reappear onscreen.

Cinema expert and Korean drama enthusiast Robert Cagle has suggested that the musical interludes in Korean TV dramas encourage a “distracted mode of viewing” that allows room for spectators to make associations between their personal memories and the memories taking place on screen (Cagle 2014:202), echoing Ben Min Han’s assertion that viewers are led to recall their own pasts through the drama. The manner by which this happens in Winter Sonata involves certain narrative elements, such as the lives of the characters beginning in the past, and the fact that this, in essence, situates the viewer in a position of hearing the story in a “once upon a time” fashion (Cagle 2008a:264). As the drama hearkens back to an earlier time through flashbacks, Cagle suggests that viewers come to a point where they may actually see these flashbacks “not merely those of the characters, but, in fact, recollections of their own,” given that they have been watching it regularly over several weeks. The viewers are “remembering” this material too, and according to Cagle, the “boundary between personal and viewing experience begins to erode away” (ibid.:264-65). The mechanism of the flashback, Cagle suggests, works to generate nostalgia for audiences, who adopt these moments to initiate a remembrance for emotions within the story and their own similar, personal emotions.
The flashbacks in Winter Sonata are always treated musically and appear with a song or melody, often with little or no dialogue, making them readily consumable aurally and visually. The resulting fusion of music and image pushes these reminiscences into a realm that resembles the music video. Ann Kaplan has typologized the music video into five basic categories, including the “romantic,” which aptly describes the musical segments of memory in Winter Sonata. The romantic music video is defined by an “overall nostalgic, sentimental and yearning quality” involving a love relationship. These videos tend to have a narrative chain that reproduces the song lines about love, loss, and reunion, but it is “a weak narrative chain, the main focus being on the emotions of loss” rather than its causes or conditions (Kaplan 1987:58-59). This type of music video is a platform for dwelling on emotion, and is concerned with inducing spectators to feel (intuitively) more than it is with moving them to think (intellectually). The regular distribution of such segments throughout Winter Sonata highly affects the drama’s overall effect on the spectator.

In Cagle’s essay on Winter Sonata, he very appropriately draws on Hee Eun Lee’s study on Korean music videos (2005), and insightfully compares them to the drama’s musical interludes, even offering them as a prototype in style and affect (2014). His comparison is useful here because early music videos, in the era of Jo Sung Mo’s ballads of the late 1990s, were “infatuated with innocence” (H. Lee

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158 The remaining four in Kaplan’s categorization of music videos by theme are: the “socially conscious,” which relays a “struggle for autonomy”; the “nihilistic,” whose anti-narrative style reveals anarchic tendencies; the “classical,” which assumes a “male gaze” in its voyeuristic nature; and the “post-modernist,” which is characterized more by pastiche than linear images, denying any clear position in its assembly of textual elements that undermine each other (Kaplan 1987: 49-88).
and worked the theme of the past through various symbols and representations to create nostalgia; the nostalgia, though, was for a past that was “imagined” or “invented.” Lee writes, “Nostalgia in Korean music videos is not exactly about rewinding to the past; rather nostalgia is invented in such a way that allows people to experience the past without pain…” (ibid.:137). The desire was for “something they might have had”—that is, not for the real, but for an ideal. Through a combination of visual images and sentimental music, these ballad videos “allow[ed] audiences to construct their identities via affection, rather than knowledge” (ibid.:114); they were melodramatic musical vignettes that communicated situations and emotions familiar enough to relate to and generic enough to take as one’s own. The flashback sequences in Winter Sonata play out with an emotional pull similar to these ballad videos; their appearance throughout the series provides a musical entryway into an idealized past of first love, and what emerges through these interludes is a sense of longing that increases as the song gets repeated over the course of the drama.159

Cagle’s remarks on Winter Sonata and his referencing the early Korean music (ballad) video are indeed illuminating; they take us a long way into understanding how the drama affects its viewers in theme and content, and why audiences may respond to it with such personalized emotion. The idea of past or first love, and the approach to hearkening back to that idea within the drama, are certainly things that an

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159 The sense of longing is something that can be found in many contemporary Korean TV dramas, and is usually reinforced by the drama’s music. One regular K-drama watcher considers the longing that Korean dramas create as one of the aspects that makes them good: “Of course it’s nice if things are simple and get resolved. But happy endings you forget. Longing you remember. It stays with you” (personal conversation with drama fan HYC, 4 Mar 2010).
audience may be able to relate to on an emotional level. But it is perhaps the sheer frequency of such scenes that actually embeds it so successfully in their minds. The frequency of musical interludes (including flashback sequences) in *Winter Sonata* may indeed make them seem repetitive over time, but this very repetition is a key factor in Cagle’s suggestion that viewers begin to remember these memories as their own over time. Repetition within the drama is what gives it a feeling of familiarity and attachment to its viewers.

*Repetition as Jeong*

“There’s no such thing as a bad song.”
– Ahn Sung Gon (TV producer)

The use of repetition can be seen as a technique that runs through *Winter Sonata*; indeed the recalling of memories again and again becomes part of the drama’s identity. Repeating things, such as engaging in the same act in the same place creates a sense of familiarity, and this is one way that the drama approaches its audience. For example, the repetition of image can be seen when Yujin and Junsang meet at the same lovely location for their innocent high school trysts. Situating the couple in the same place establishes it as a recurring space where their love repeatedly grows, and the physical place acquires special meaning as it becomes familiar (Figure 3.7). A similar effect can be seen in the use of repetition in the

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160 The revisiting of the same place in this drama is something that was pointed out by Bak Gi Su in a lecture on storytelling strategy at KOCCA (Korea Creative Content Agency), 18 Mar 2008.
drama’s music soundtrack, which establishes a feeling not only of familiarity but also, ultimately, of emotional attachment. The main title of the drama, a ballad called “From the Beginning Until Now” (“Cheoeumbuteo Jigeumkkaji”) appears more than forty times throughout the twenty-episode series; the same is true for another one of the drama’s signature songs, “My Memory,” which also appears more than forty times.161 These main theme songs, along with the other tracks on the OST (mostly in lyrical ballad style),162 appear constantly throughout the series, often to accompany flashbacks but also to underscore other poignant moments between characters.

![Figure 3.7 Repetition of space in Winter Sonata](image)

Yujin and Junsang meet by the lake in autumn (Ep. 1), and in winter (Ep. 2)

The repetition of music is not something that has gone unnoticed by the drama’s audiences. One fan has noted that the repetition in Winter Sonata works to achieve an effect that makes it stand out in its emotional impact. PBS, a communications manager and non-Korean fan who has been watching Korean dramas

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161 See Tokita 2006 for a partial listing of soundtrack songs and their number of occurrences in the series.

162 The OST (both Korean and Japanese versions) consists of seventeen tracks of a handful of original songs and their various arrangements; these tracks do not comprise all the music from the drama.
regularly since 2002, observes, “I can’t think of a drama—and I’ve watched a lot of them—that uses music more powerfully and uses flashback so much… there’s just that feeling that you’re watching the same fifteen scenes over and over and over…”

For a viewer such as PBS, the repetition of music in the drama gave it an overwhelmingly emotional feel that worked well with the story and made an impression that helped keep it in her memory. Another K-drama watcher, SL, a Korean American male office worker in his late twenties, feels that

[h]aving a variety of music is great too, but there is something to be said about using a certain playlist of songs as a catalyst for emotion. I also think it has to do with memory and how each song can spark different memories. I am sure we all know how powerful memories can be in that you realize why you fell in love, or why you are angry at someone, or why someone is important. In dramas, these songs can definitely serve as reminders to the viewer of past scenes and actions that create an imminent future for these characters.

The repeating of music in *Winter Sonata* is presumably not unrelated to practical concerns, such as selling the OST, or working within a limited budget. But repetition is also a way to connect the audience to the story. Kang Dong Yun, a drama music composer and supervisor told me that dramas tend to repeat songs because it’s a way of acquainting viewers with the story. Songs are used strategically so that viewers can develop a familiarity with a drama and as a result, feel connected to it. This was echoed to me by another professional in the industry, Ahn Sung Gon, who has directed dramas as well as variety shows; in commenting on the use of repetition

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163 Personal interview, 24 Feb 2008.
164 Email correspondence, 9 Feb 2011.
in drama, Ahn resolutely told me that there was “no such thing as a bad song.” According to Ahn, audiences are bound to develop a relationship with a particular piece of music if they hear it enough times, especially if that music is associated with a particular story. The idea is that repetition can not only breed familiarity, but if done right over a stretch of time, also designate preference.

In order to make these repetitions feel less repetitive, music supervisors take a main theme song and arrange it in different versions, or for different instruments; in *Winter Sonata*, for instance, the song “My Memory” comes in a “piano version” and a “piano & violin version” that work together with the main song version (a pop ballad) to give the audience a comfortable sense of aural recognition as the music does its work in underscoring respective moments of drama, emotion, and musing. Repetition facilitates consumption, and through these repeat hearings, audiences are able to build an emotional connection to the drama. Over the length of the series, the repetition of melodies and songs, including their variations, also lends unity to the soundtrack. As Jeff Smith has noted in his study of the pop soundtrack, the relatively short length of pop songs, their tendency to be melodic, and their simple, repetitive harmony and rhythm, make them well suited to address audiences that are musically untrained. Smith sees the pop song’s hook as the pop score’s formal counterpart to the Romantic leitmotif (Smith 1998:11-23), which served to give a musical work a sense of organization and overall unity.

\[166\] Interview with Ahn Sung Gon, TV producer, 14 Nov 2007.
On one level, the music in *Winter Sonata* is very much about actual memory, as the songs capture (in lyrics and mood, and in images when they accompany flashbacks) the past that the characters are trying to recover. But it does more than that; it binds viewers to the characters as well as the characters to each other. The building of Yujin and Junsang’s relationship occurs through accumulated repetition of “their” songs, which are heard again and again on the music soundtrack; through this repetition, the viewer becomes increasingly accustomed to them. The resultant feeling can be described as one of *jeong*—an affectionate attachment that develops over time.

Inherent in the Korean concept of *jeong* is the idea of repeated interaction with a person, place, or thing until a bond is created. Among persons, a relationship of *jeong* often involves an empathy, or affinity, that emerges over time. The feeling of personal attachment that is characteristic in a *jeong* relationship is not something that comes “at first sight,” nor is it something that one is overwhelmed with or “struck” by. *Jeong* is not dramatic; rather, its mode is gradual, formed as it is through repeated contact until there can be said to be some sort of history between the people involved, or between a person and object. Continued contact deepens *jeong*, and the person or thing that one feels *jeong* for not only affects you, but in a sense also becomes a part of you. The sentiment of *jeong* is certainly not exclusive to Korean culture, but within Korean culture, the construct of *jeong* serves as a basis for collective identity, which has roots in the Confucian notion that an individual is not an isolated self but belongs to a set of relationships—a relatedness which ideally leads to harmony and order, in family and in society (Hong 2008:99-105).
In episode 7 of *Winter Sonata*, there is a scene where Minhyeong (still not recovered as Junsang) asks Yujin what she and Junsang did when they were younger. The scene is reminiscent of earlier moments when the two were in high school: on their outings by the lake, Yujin would hop on a fallen tree by the lake and balance-walk its length. Now an adult, she balance-walks on the fallen tree in this episode, repeating this gesture as if guided by bodily memory, and answers Minhyeong: “We played hooky from school and went on a date at the lake. We made snowmen together when the first snow came… come to think of it, we really didn’t do much” (Figure 3.8). In fact, the young Yujin and Junsang did not do much at all—their memories are few. But their interaction, based on small moments doing mundane things together, repeating simple activities in the same spaces, fostered a feeling of *jeong* for each other. More significantly, the viewer comes away feeling as if they did share a lot of time and space together, even though Yujin says that they “really didn’t do much,” because of the repeated recollections of those few moments throughout the seventeen episodes of their adult lives. The point here is that these memories are, for the viewer, frequent and familiar, a part of the drama that they are well acquainted with, and through which they become close to its characters.
One of the romantic notions that lingers behind *Winter Sonata* is the fact that although Junsang has lost his memory (and accordingly his past) and reappears anew, as a completely different person, he falls in love with Yujin *again*. For a romantic, this could point to the sweeping idea that they were “meant to be,” or attest to the work of “true love.” Although these may be captivating thoughts, the development of love between Yujin and Minhyeong (the “new” Junsang) happens to a large extent practically because of their repeat encounters, instigated by conditions such as Yujin’s coincidental assignment to a project with Minhyeong’s firm, their being snowed in together at a ski lodge due to a storm, and other similar occasions that cause them to have to meet repeatedly. These encounters, often underscored by the drama’s main songs (or their instrumental versions), occur repeatedly until Minhyeong finally finds his memories and is merged with the Junsang character. Just
as repeatedly recalling the past is important to the characters in the drama, repetition in the soundtrack functions as an important means of addressing the audience.

The frequency of the characters’ encounters and the constant repetition of a set of core songs in Winter Sonata may seem to run the risk of creating a counter effect, causing viewers to actually form a dislike for the music because of its redundancy. Studies on the effects of repetition on the likeability of popular music have shown, in fact, that preference for repeated music has a tendency to decrease over an extended period of time. This effect can be described in terms of an “inverted-U theory” which states that “if a piece of initially unfamiliar music is heard repeatedly over a period of time its familiarity will increase progressively but its likeability will first increase and then decrease…” (Russell 1987:188). The explanation resonates with the common understanding that a popular recording will first “grow on you” with repeated hearing but then lose its appeal through over-repetition, as summed up by Philip Russell. Winter Sonata is able to effectively balance this fine line between familiarity and oversaturation on one hand because it is tied to a developing drama. But it is also related to its format—the limited number of episodes. The repetition of music is not overly concentrated in a single episode but is spaced over a longer period of time, regularly; what is important about this consistent repetition is that it comes to an end after the allotted time. Scoring longer-running series in the same way as Winter Sonata would presumably produce different, perhaps adverse, effects. But for Winter Sonata, repetition is an effective way to emotionally bind the viewer to its story of memory, within a specific time frame.
JH, a Korean American law student and drama watcher in her thirties, attests to the persuasive power of song repetition as she describes its effect on her:

The 2 or 3 songs they play repetitively throughout the drama makes you connect the song to the drama and whenever you hear the music, the familiarity I guess draws you in… it’s familiar and comforting. I develop sort of an affinity to the drama because of the music.

I don’t always immediately LOVE the songs… Sometimes the repetitiveness makes me develop a 반가운 [bangaun, “pleased” or “delighted”] feeling when I hear it again and it tricks me into thinking I love it! …My brother and I were once talking about how Koreans are good at making you love a song the more you hear it, even if you didn’t like it the first time. I think that’s what the music does to dramas too – makes you love the drama the more you hear its theme song.¹⁶⁷

For JH, the mechanism of recurrence creates an affinity to the drama that enables her to comfortably build a relationship with it.

Continually featuring the drama’s songs and revisiting the emotions embedded in these songs in Winter Sonata allows viewers to develop a relationship with the characters and with the drama’s music soundtrack; this facilitates the assertions of Ben Min Han and Robert Cagle that Winter Sonata audiences invoke their own personal memories through the drama’s narrative of memory and nostalgia. Much of this invoking happens, I am suggesting, through the music, and the constant repetition of this music, which produces a familiarity, and ultimately, a feeling of jeong for the drama, its characters, and its music. The resulting effect is not simply one of liking the drama, but speaks to an affectionate bond that becomes more personal, something that can infiltrate one’s real life, as it seemingly did for the woman who requested Winter Sonata’s music for her funeral; the soundtrack to this

¹⁶⁷ Email correspondence, 29 Jan 2011.
drama was affecting enough for her to use it as a soundtrack to an event where her own life was recalled and remembered.

It is difficult to say definitively how the multitude of fans that ultimately made Winter Sonata a hallyu phenomenon individually related, on an immediate level, to this drama that reportedly created nostalgia for the past; yet the nostalgia that the drama engenders seems organically related to the work of its soundtrack. The above has been an exploration into how that past is created and experienced through the layers of music in the drama. Winter Sonata’s highlighting of the past is achieved significantly through music, both diegetic and non-diegetic, in a way that allows viewers to develop a relationship to its memories and emotions with personalized meaning; and this is an attribute that has allowed the drama to speak to audiences outside Korea.

Followers of K-drama and hallyu would probably agree that Winter Sonata is a “hallyu classic” in that it jumpstarted K-drama watching for many audiences, and was at the forefront of K-drama popularity during the height of hallyu; the drama is also classic in the sense that it so faithfully carries the intense emotions that K-dramas have come to be known for. But it can also be seen as “classically hallyu” in yet another sense, for it embraces the idea of the past—an aspect that partly comprises hallyu’s outlook. What Winter Sonata captures in this past is the sincerity of human relationships—bonds that are pure and un-tainted, as seen through the idea of “first love.” The drama takes audiences back to the value of relationships that are not useful or beneficial, as they are given to be in a modern, globalizing world, but simply
sincere. *Winter Sonata* has resonated with contemporary Korean audiences fatigued by capitalistic drive and the imperatives of success, reminding them of the *jeong* that must not be left behind on the path to becoming globally Korean.
CASE STUDY 2

Repackaging Tradition: A Sassy Chunhyang for a New Audience

The Tale of Chunhyang in Korea

The legend of Chunhyang is arguably the most enduring folktale in Korea. Its narratives of struggle and hardship, perseverance, love, and fidelity have been popular fodder for imagining, indeed defining, a “traditional Korean spirit” informed by Confucian mores, especially within the historical context of a nation that has experienced cultural disruption and massive foreign cultural influence. The tale has reemerged in the popular imagination of successive generations, reflecting the spirit of each era while maintaining a recognizable moral core. One of its more recent renditions is the seventeen-episode TV drama series Sassy Girl Chunhyang (Kwaegol Chunhyang, KBS 2005), which played to high ratings in South Korea during a time when Korean dramas were gaining remarkable attention in the region through the Korean Wave. Sassy Girl Chunhyang joins a repertory of existing versions that have retold the tale as a reminder of Korean tradition. As a symbol of Korean culture—a status that the folktale has accrued over history—it is unsurprising that the Chunhyang story would emerge once again at the height of hallyu, a phenomenon that is very much concerned with matters of cultural identity.

168 Alternate English title: Delightful Girl Choon Hyang.
169 The series impressively surpassed a 30% viewership rating during its initial run on TV (E. Kim 2005).
The origins of the tale of Chunhyang lie in a shamanistic ritual—Chunhyanggut—of Namwon, an area in southwestern Korea. The purpose of the ritual was to appease the soul of a young girl named Chunhyang who, as legend had it, died of grief because of her plain appearance (H. Lee 2000a:69-70). According to the story, Chunhyang was so unattractive that no one wanted to marry her, and as a result she died a virgin, without fulfilling her sexual desire; her death was followed by years of famine and drought as well as mysterious deaths in the region. It is from this legend that the prototype of the folktale emerged. In what has become the traditional tale, Chunhyang appears as a beautiful girl that marries a yangban (aristocratic male) and lives “happily ever after.”

Since its inception, the story of Chunhyang has had a significant place in the history of Korean arts and entertainment. Eunah Kong notes that it was one of the most widely read novels in the latter half of the nineteenth century, scholars having found more than 120 versions of the story (1998:117-21). According to Kong, the tale was also transformed into the first, and subsequently most performed, changjak opera (newly composed Korean opera). Marshall Pihl identifies it as the source for Korea’s first changgeuk opera as well (1994:41). Indeed it has been the bearer of many “firsts” in Korea: Korea’s first sound film (1935), first color film (1958), and

\(^{170}\) See H. Lee 2000a:100n6 for minor variations of the original story.
\(^{171}\) Changjak opera is a form of contemporary Korean opera composed (usually) by Korean composers, drawing on Western musical materials; the genre emerged in the mid 20th century, and the categorization is used to distinguish Korean works from Western operatic works.
\(^{172}\) Changgeuk is a form of musical theater with roots in pansori that emerged in the early 20th century; it draws on pansori’s musical characteristics and repertoire, but in contrast to pansori, includes multiple actors, costumes, sets, and an accompanying instrumental ensemble, in accordance with its overall intention for the modern stage.
first digital animation (1999) were all based on the Chunhyang story.\textsuperscript{173} And in recent Korean film history, it has seen the honor of being the first Korean film selected to compete at Cannes.\textsuperscript{174} The arrival of \textit{Sassy Girl Chunhyang} adds its own contribution to this list by being the first Korean TV drama to sell remake rights to another country, which it did to China (E. Lee 2005).

The Chunhyang tale has seen different incarnations through time, but it is perhaps most commonly remembered in the form of \textit{pansori}—the traditional Korean art of storytelling. It is in its life as a \textit{pansori} text that many of the themes, motifs, and narrative details that are now a familiar part of the story were first established. For instance, in its \textit{pansori} version, Chunhyang became the daughter of a retired \textit{gisaeng} (courtesan) and a \textit{yangban} (aristocrat). And as Korean film scholar Hyangjin Lee observes, it was \textit{pansori}’s treatment of the story that introduced the dramatic elements of romantic encounter, forced separation, heroine’s trial and suffering, and lover’s return (H. Lee 2000a:70). The tale’s entry into the \textit{pansori} canon also saw a further underscoring of the Confucian moral embedded in the narrative, namely a wife’s fidelity to her husband.\textsuperscript{175} This occurred within the context of \textit{pansori} culture making a consciously upward move in nineteenth century Korea to cater to elite tastes

\textsuperscript{173} Joo and Kim’s survey of Chunhyang in Korean cinema lists a total of seventeen filmic versions of the tale (2000:19-41); see also H. Lee 2000a:67-101, as well as her article of 2005, for a brief review and exploration of the significance of Chunhyang in Korean film history.

\textsuperscript{174} Veteran director Im Kwon-Taek’s film \textit{Chunhyang} (2000) was chosen for official competition at the 2000 Cannes Film Festival, marking the first time ever a Korean film was entered (H. Lee 2000a:73-74; James 2002:78n10).

\textsuperscript{175} Each of the five extant \textit{pansori} narratives highlights one of the five moral rules that together inform the “five principal human relations” in accordance with Confucian pedagogy. The \textit{Song of Chunhyang} teaches wifely fidelity, while the remaining stories relate the virtues of filial piety, sibling order, loyalty to government (king), and honor among peers.
and ultimately become a type of entertainment that illustrated proper Confucian behavior.

It is worth summarizing briefly the pansori version of Chunhyang here, as this has become the classic version on which many ensuing adaptations, including the TV drama, have been based. The story begins when Mongnyong, the handsome and noble son of Namwon’s new magistrate moves to town. It is not long before Mongnyong notices Chunhyang, the daughter of a gisaeng, known across the land for her beauty and talent; in time, the two fall in love and pledge marriage to each other. However, when Mongnyong’s father is relocated to Seoul, Mongnyong finds himself having to leave Chunhyang in order to dutifully remain by his father’s side. Namwon receives a new magistrate, the villainous Byeon Hakdo, who upon arriving hears of Chunhyang’s unrivaled beauty. Byeon immediately demands for her services in his chambers, but Chunhyang firmly refuses, as she is devoted to Mongyong and faithful to him alone. Her consistent refusals eventually lead Byeon to order for her beheading at an extravagant feast in his honor. Mongnyong has passed the important state examination in Seoul, however, and newly invested with royal authority, he returns to Namwon in a timely fashion to not only rescue Chunhyang from death, but also save the town’s exploited citizens and punish Byeon Hakdo for his evil governance.

The story’s melodramatic ingredients have made it an ideal source to remake as popular entertainment time and time again. In its capacity as entertainment, Hyangjin Lee asserts that the text—with its foregrounding of a love that transcends class boundaries, and its satisfying punishment of corrupt politicians—has traversed
generations to become “an outlet for [people’s] unfulfilled desires and hidden anxieties,” each renewed version tailoring narrative aspects “according to the aesthetic standards and pragmatic needs” of the times (H. Lee 2000a:71). While presenting its Confucian lesson, the story’s basic elements are universal enough to appeal to audiences across time, and this has helped the story to become the elevated cultural text that it has in the Korean imaginary.

Sassy Girl Chunhyang stays true to the romance and melodrama of the classic tale, but adds comedy and parody to speak to a new generation of viewers. Targeted to younger audiences, the series unfolds through the characters’ high school, college, and young adult years. Perhaps the most outstanding quality about Sassy Girl Chunhyang, in light of preceding versions of the tale, is the fact that it takes place in present-day Korea; while prior versions have reworked the story in its original Joseon time period, Sassy Girl Chunhyang brings the story forward to modern day with characters that are hip to current fashion, lingo, and attitude. According to the drama’s website, the makers wanted to discard the stuffy hanbok (Korean traditional dress) and tell a story about a girl who instead wears jeans and a fitted tee.\(^\text{176}\) In asking “Why Chunhyang?” and “Why today?” the creators address the impatience and unbearable lightness of today’s world in which love is no longer burdened by commitment or weighty responsibility. These are times, the drama’s creators concede, when people consider love to be something that is “on the move”—a far cry from the consistency and stationary nature that characterized love relationships in historical

\(^{176}\text{http://www.kbs.co.kr/end_program/drama/qgirl/about/plan/index.html (accessed 9 Feb 2015).}\)
Joseon; it is a time when the proverbial “virtuous woman” (yeollyeo) is nowhere to be found. But such a climate, they suggest, may be the very reason that we long for Chunhyang today. The drama’s intention was to rediscover the value of sincere, true love by revisiting this classic tale, and the series can be seen as a gesture in relaying a sense of traditional value and identity to modern youth.

In Sassy Girl Chunhyang, our main character is a hardworking middle-class girl, the daughter of a single mom whose original gisaeng status has been translated into a career as a cabaret singer. Chunhyang is a bright student and the top in her class; she is kind-hearted, independent and works part-time jobs to make her own money. She is also the prettiest girl in school. Her artistic abilities, seen in the original through her musical talents on the gayageum, are realized in the drama through her special knack for making small accessories and fashion jewelry items; in fact she is so good that she goes on to open her own shop and become her own boss. Mongnyong appears as the son of Namwon’s new police commissioner, but he is irresponsible and has more run-ins with the law than his law-enforcing father would like. Through forces of fate, Chunhyang and Mongnyong find themselves legally married to each other in their last year of high school at the outset of the story; one of their challenges will be to fall, and remain, in love.

The servants in the original tale, Bangja and Hyangdan, emerge in the drama as Chunhyang’s classmates and close friends who also provide a “B-story” to the central romance between Chunhyang and Mongnyong. The dirty politician Byeon Hakdo comes to life as the rich and powerful head of a large entertainment company.
The story exploits the love triangle typical of Korean melodrama as both he and Mongnyong vie for Chunhyang’s love, and the plot is further complicated by the presence of Chaerin (a character not in the original story), a longtime family friend who serves to distract Mongyong.

*Sassy Girl Chunhyang*’s appeal and approach to a new and young generation can be noted in aspects such as its Korean title, *Kwaegeol Chunhyang*, which is a combination of *kwae*, the Korean prefix for happy or delightful, and the English loanword, “girl” (*geol*). Indeed the drama is playful in juxtaposing the old and new, past and present. For instance, it celebrates the past by skillfully parodying it through short vignettes that close out each episode; these vignettes, acted out by the same cast members, pay homage to the classic tale—they take place in the correct historical time period, which is invoked through traditional costumes, sets, and language, and function as a loose summary of each episode. The sketches start out solemnly, but they invariably depart from seriousness and end in parody. This is done, for example, by mixing modes of speech (old, formal Korean with modern colloquial), or by anachronistic cultural references, such as the appearance of a cell phone (vignette of ep. 12). In this manner, the sketches conflate time in a comical, self-conscious way.

But their content also deviates; the vignette of episode 13, for example, shows Chunhyang in prison—a scene in the original—but she has apparently landed there because she has lost a game of cards to Byeon Hakdo (not because she’s refused his advances) and cannot pay the wagered money; thus, she waits longingly for Mongnyong and his money to bail her out.
Parody is introduced in the very first scene of *Sassy Girl Chunhyang*; in a brief prelude that introduces the characters and clues us into the dynamics of the story, the tone is one of humor. This opening sketch starts out in the mode of a Korean *sageuk* (historical drama), mixed with an obvious nod to Hong Kong martial arts movies, in wire choreography and Foley editing. The segment begins with a dramatically resounding gong followed by ominous drumbeats that place us in what is seemingly the Joseon Dynasty on the solemn day that Byeon Hakdo orders Chunhyang’s death. Chunhyang is in distress, her neck pilloried in a long wooden plank as she sits captive at the center of the court. Outside the compound walls, Mongnyong is assembling a group of men to carry out his rescue mission. With the swishing sounds of rapid wall-scaling feet, a melodramatic male voice singing a popera selection kicks in on the soundtrack as Mongnyong’s men swiftly infiltrate the compound. The fight sequence is both exciting and comical, as it is obviously meant to invoke the heroics of Hong Kong action. The amusement does not end here, however. Once Mongnyong has entered the inner compound and located Chunhyang, the music comes to a close. In fact, the entire epic mode comes to a screeching halt and the music shifts to the contemporary sounds of a cheerful boogie-woogie figuration on the piano as Mongnyong discovers that Chunhyang—far from needing rescue—has taken care of things. With a menacing stick in her hand, she is clearly in control of the situation, to a point where she is disciplining Byeon Hakdo and his entourage.
The sketch ends here and we are redirected, this time to the “real story,” which opens with the iconic image of Chunhyang dressed in *hanbok*, standing on a swing as she swings back and forth in the open air. Our main character, it turns out, earns money at the Gwanghallu Pavilion in Namwon—the famous site of the original folktale—where she takes photos with tourists, dressed as Chunhyang. The drama cleverly references the folktale in a self-aware manner that keeps it close to the original. The gist of the original story remains the same, and the themes of fidelity and endurance are kept intact, but the original Confucian codes of the story are playfully inverted, even as the moral bottom line is maintained. For example, as the opening sketch alludes, whereas the original tale of Chunhyang ends with Mongnyong rescuing Chunhyang from death, in *Sassy Girl Chunhyang*, the power relation is inverted and it is Chunhyang—still notably through her sacrifice and her undying love—that ultimately saves Mongnyong from the hands of Byeon Hakdo who, in an attempt to eliminate his competition, devises a scheme to frame Mongnyong for a crime he did not commit. If there is one big difference between the original tale and the drama, it is the radical difference in the character of Chunhyang. And the music soundtrack in this drama plays a leading role in rewriting the character as well as the tale.

*Sounding a Modern Woman of Virtue*

*Sassy Girl Chunhyang* uses a pop soundtrack comprised of new and existing songs to construct its characters. The OST contains a number of pop ballads that do
their underlying work in expressing the main characters’ feelings as their romance grows throughout the drama. But the series is branded, evocatively, by its main title, “Jayurowa” (“Free”) sung by Korean female rocker Jiny. The song sets the tone of the drama as it plays over credits at the opening and closing of each episode, functioning structurally as a “musical frame.” The title song is a crucial part of a drama’s identity, and it works here to sonically brand our heroine—one whose tag line throughout the drama is “Mind your own business!” The song “Jayurowa” falls along the lines of hard rock with strident sounds of electric guitar and the pumping rhythm of drums. The song, which also recurs within episodes in addition to its use over credits, is tied to a female identity and perspective, from which it sings of independence and agency:

Whatever I choose, it’s up to me…
Whether I scream or not
Can’t belong to anyone
Because there’s only one you
Now shout it out…

(Refrain)
Me! Me! Me! Me! I am free!
My thoughts! My actions! My everything!
Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey! Whoa!

Whether you’re lied to, or cursed at
Forget about them
You can’t please everyone
Just don’t mind them
And shout it out…

177 Lyrics translated by author.
With its vibrant tempo and exciting energy, the song speaks to youth and also points to Chunhyang’s active personality. Its hard rock aesthetic, moreover, invokes the genre’s anti-establishment tendencies and its cultural associations with opposition and rebellion (Wright 2003:13). The idiomatic sound of rock serves as an appropriate means through which to comment on gender conventions, which it does through its female-empowering lyrics. In a sense, the style of the song places the female within “rock’s deeply macho structure of feeling,” as Toynbee has referred to it (2006:344). But it also subverts the masculinity traditionally associated with rock performance. It does this in part by employing the trope of the scream, which, according to Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald, is a non-verbal articulation that “can be read as a kind of jouissance, a female body language that evades the necessity to signify within male-defined conventions and meanings” (2006:359). Screams, they explain, are “emotional ejaculations” that female rockers use strategically to evoke “rage, terror, pleasure, and/or primal self-assertion” (ibid.). In female punk, the woman’s shrill and assertive voice situates the “singer as subject not object” (Frith, quoted in Gottlieb and Wald 2006:357). Such an orientation can be detected in Jiny’s stylized shouting on the first-person syllable, Na! (“Me!”)—a word that is given weighty rhythmic repetition in “Jayurowa.”

Looking back to the classic tale, this new portrait of Chunhyang as a free, “liberated” woman, constructed by the title song’s musical sounds, and implied by its lyrics, is antithetical to the quiet, modest reserve associated with the prototypical Confucian woman. It is in terms of a demure, well-mannered Confucian femininity
that Hyangjin Lee analyzes the main character in acclaimed director Sin Sangok’s
*Seong Chunhyang* (1961), one of the most famous filmic adaptations of the Chunyang
tale in Korean film history. In this film, Lee notes an overbearing “male gaze”
reinforced by a high-angled camera position when Mongnyong first sets his eyes on
Chunhyang (Figure 3.9). The alignment with a male gaze, she observes, can
additionally be seen in Chunhyang’s first encounter with Byeon Hakdo; in both
instances, the camera “dwarfs Ch’unhyang’s status, visually evoking her
powerlessness and inferiority, which are equated with her femininity” (H. Lee
2000a:75). Lee argues that the audience is made to identify with Mongnyong as he
“looks down” at her from a higher position, and suggests that this disparity of
physical planes defines their relationship visually.

![Figure 3.9 Seong Chunhyang (Sin Sangok, 1961)](image)
Mongnyong’s first glimpse of Chunhyang, from an elevated position
Chunhyang and Mongyong’s first meeting in *Sassy Girl Chunhyang* plays with spatial dynamics in such a way that it literally reverses the spatial order of the two characters. It may perhaps be unorthodox to talk of a “gaze” when dealing with programs made for television, but dimensions such as visual spacing and character perspective are still coded to offer valuable information to the viewer. The first encounter between the two characters plays out in episode 1 with Chunhyang jumping over a wall to get to her part-time job at Gwanghallu, while Mongnyong, new to town, is taking pictures inside the Gwanghallu grounds, much like a tourist.

The first meeting thus captures Chunhyang flying above, glimpsing Mongnyong on the ground below, while Mongyong, from below, notices her above him; the editing alternates between the two perspectives, lingering shortly on each before Chunhyang plunges from the sky and lands on top of him in a moment that is sonically bolstered by the hard rock sounds of electric guitar and drums characteristic of the title song, “Jayurowa” (Figures 3.10 – 3.12). Before the scene cadences, the music extends over shots of Chunhyang clubbing Mongyong with her schoolbag—at this point, he is a perfect stranger whom she believes to have been taking pictures of her from below (she is wearing the short skirt of her school uniform). The use of music here exhibits a control that encourages the viewer to identify with Chunhyang; she is not passive, but rather, tough and forceful. The pacing of the scene may preclude analysis in terms of a “female gaze,” but the message relayed to the audience is that Chunhyang is a girl who is bold, in charge, and “on top.”
Figure 3.10 *Sassy Girl Chunhyang* Ep. 1
First Meeting: Chunhyang sees Mongyong from above

Figure 3.11 Mongnyong sees Chunhyang from below

Figure 3.12 Chunhyang lands on top of Mongnyong
The image of an independent woman can be noted in another one of the drama’s main songs: *Alive*, sung by Japanese American female pop artist Ai. The song talks about being a woman who is free, as seen in the song’s refrain:

> Because I’m free! (*na neun jayuya*  
> Free! Doin’ what I wanna do now  
> Free! No one’s gonna hold me back; no matter what, I’m movin’ on  
> I’m Free! Tell me, can you hear me?  
> Free! Cuz I’m losing control  
> Free! Now I know I’m getting closer; I feel so alive

With an interest in using Ai’s song, the drama’s director, Jeon Gi Sang, approached the singer directly to seek permission to include it on the soundtrack, and at his request, she recorded a version for the drama. While the entire song is in English, the phrase “I’m free” is, significantly, re-uttered in Korean. As Mark Slobin points out on the efficacy of music in film, “Music cues are one channel on which artists send messages to their audience, and they can be more subtle and supple than dialogue or plotlines…” (Slobin 2009:156).

The song *Alive* is put to use in episodes to send a message about our main character Chunhyang; it appears in moments where it comments variously on Chunhyang’s actions and outlook. For example, in episode 9, the song accompanies a scene at a restaurant where Chunhyang is having dinner with both Byeon Hakdo and Mongyong. Mongnyong, the “third wheel” in this particular scene, is obviously jealous of Byeon Hakdo, who is ingratiating, wealthy, and generous (Byeon is treating); the dynamics between the two men is uncomfortable as they both work to gain Chunhyang’s attention at the table. Ai’s musical repetition of “Free!” in this
context alludes to Chunhyang’s upper-hand position as a woman with options, underscoring her freedom to choose between the two men. The use of modern English is significant, as the language itself is widely associated with ideas of freedom and self-expression; it is a language that Robert McCrum characterizes as a “proud badge of independence” (2010:105), one that is touted for its “reputation for simplicity and directness” (ibid.:114). The use of English on the soundtrack additionally grants the drama, and the tale, an international feel, and resonates a cosmopolitan outlook that would be difficult to achieve with the use of Korean alone.

While the character of Chunhyang is represented musically by rock, the two male characters, Mongnyong and Byeon Hakdo, who are each “given a song” in the drama, are by contrast represented by soft ballads.178 This indicates a reversal in the overall emotional balance of the characters, as the themes of loss and longing—seen especially in Mongnyong’s popera-inflected song, “I Wish You Happiness” (Haengbokhagil Barae)—are ones normally carried by Chunhyang, who is traditionally depicted as maudlin and helpless while waiting for Mongnyong’s return.179 Similar modifications can be seen in Sassy Girl Chunhyang’s narrative, which presents a “trial” to Mongnyong through the Chaerin character. In the original

178 The assigning of a song to a character is a technique that can occasionally be seen in Korean dramas, although songs are used to symbolize a relationship more often than a single person. In Sassy Girl Chunhyang, the pop songs on the soundtrack are loosely assigned to the three main characters: Chunhyang, Mongnyong, and Byeon Hakdo. Although the linking of a song to a character is nowhere near the tightly conceived leitmotivic system seen in Western art music, appearances of songs and characters occur often enough to establish association.

179 The image of Chunhyang as a proactive woman and the one who “leads” in the relationship can be noted in other subtleties, such as the scene of the two riding a bicycle together in episode 3, in which Chunhyang is sitting in front. The bicycle-riding scene is one that appears often in Korean dramas, usually as a romantic activity shared between a couple, one that also symbolizes youth or youthful innocence; these bicycle scenes usually have the male sitting in front, steering, and the woman sitting behind, either on a tandem or one-seat bicycle.
tale, Chunhyang is put to the test with Mongnyong’s departure when Byeon Hakdo arrives and makes advances at her. With the drama’s inclusion of the new character Chaerin, an attractive and crafty woman who has amorous feelings for Mongnyong, Mongnyong is equally put to the test and must prove his love for Chunhyang.

Towards the end of *Sassy Girl Chunhyang*, Mongnyong, who ultimately becomes a public prosecutor with a deep passion for stopping crime, is falsely charged with an incident that can ruin his career and future. Knowing that Byeon Hakdo has the power to clear Mongnyong as well as damage him further, Chunhyang agrees to a deal that will protect Mongnyong, and through her resourcefulness, also manages to free herself from having to give in to Byeon’s ultimatum. In other words, Chunhyang is in a position to save Mongnyong, and not the other way around, as in the original tale. The important thing is that her actions are motivated by loyalty and love; she even incurs harm to her own career along the path to saving him. That is, much like the classic tale, she endures sacrifice and remains devoted to her husband to the end.

The cleverness in *Sassy Girl Chunhyang* is that while the drama rewrites the character, it manages to successfully relay her duty as faithful wife, and thus deliver the moral. It ushers in a new Chunhyang who may have a fixed role, but not fixed characteristics. The soundtrack intervenes in the work of constructing a character that is strong and self-sufficient, and is effectively complicit in bringing a new, modern Chunhyang to life.
In a Global Grid of Culture: Parody and Self-Consciousness in a Classic Tale

While the music on a drama’s soundtrack can go a long way in portraying, indeed establishing, its characters, a survey of the entire range of a drama’s music—including music not found on the soundtrack album—can offer insights into the cultural makeup of the drama. For example, the Chopin Waltz in E-flat Major that plays in the spaces of a formal dinner party celebrating an event at Byeon’s entertainment agency (episode 7) reveals Western art music as a marker of social status in the circles of South Korea’s wealthy, while musical entrances such as Frank Sinatra’s “I Did It My Way,” which plays at the café where Mongnyong’s father appeals to Chunhyang’s sympathies in trying to get her back with his son (also episode 7), points to Korea’s ongoing and natural relationship with American popular music. Such instances of source music, and other music not on a film’s soundtrack, may vary in status and degree, from brief and fleeting, to noteworthy, employed as commentary. The various types of music that emerge from within a source in the diegesis may function on a different perceptual, and narrative, level than dialogue; however, they can still affect the overall diegesis in suggestive ways.

A conspicuous dose of the source, or “quasi-source,” music that appears in Sassy Girl Chunhyang stems from characters’ imaginations, and comes in a handful of parodies that reference other media texts, from both within and outside Korea. Indeed, cultural references abound in Sassy Girl Chunhyang, and although they do

\[180\] Music that occurs within a character’s imagination—still technically diegetic (or source) music—is something that Claudia Gorbman calls “meta-diegetic”; the sound stems from the diegesis, belonging as it does to a character’s mind, although the source is not visually tied to a musical instrument or other physical object such as a radio.
not have a direct bearing on the plot per se, they color the story in rich and enjoyable ways. They also mark the drama as a “knowing” text, a classic that is more approachable because of its modern media savvy. Audiences will certainly recognize the parody of Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1996) in episode 10 when Mongnyong’s paranoid mind imagines Chunhyang and Byeon Hakdo, in costume, enacting the roles of the two main characters over singer Des’ree’s original rendition of “Kissing You” (from the film’s soundtrack); or the parody of *Pretty Woman* (1990) that follows, with Chunhyang modeling clothes for Byeon Hakdo at a clothing boutique, over Roy Orbison’s singing. These are followed by yet another parodic tableau, when Mongnyong this time conjures up an image of Byeon Hakdo and Chunhyang posing as Rhett and Scarlett, over Max Steiner’s sweeping score (Figure 3.13). These imaginations, all accompanied by the films’ respective soundtracks, are prompted by the movies that continually catch Mongyong’s eye while he helps a friend at his DVD rental shop.181

The summoning of these works adds to the drama’s comic playfulness, but it also places the story of Chunhyang on a par with these texts; the invoking of these specific stories—some of the West’s most famous romances—situates it alongside the most widely recognized Western classics. A further reading might suggest that while

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181 Mongnyong’s friend Bang Jihyeok’s DVD rental shop is an appropriate setting for the movie’s running theme of referencing other media texts. Other films that appear, or are cited, among the drama’s abundant references are: *Love Actually* (ep. 6), *Lord of the Rings* (ep. 8), the Korean film *Volcano High* (ep. 1), *Untold Scandal* (a Korean remake of *Dangerous Liaisons*, in ep. 10), and the famous bullet dodging scene from *The Matrix*, when Mongnyong invokes Neo’s backbend while evading a visually reverberating object being thrown at him in slow motion (ep. 1). Some of these references pass by quickly (indeed some appearances are fleeting), while others are captured or played out more consciously. But their accumulation over the series adds to the drama’s appeal and effect as a text that is not secluded in the archives of Korean history, but one that is relevant and exists among other texts.
the tale of Chunhyang is on an “equal footing” with these love stories, it at the same
time denies a neat comparison, as the two lovers in the parodies are not actually
Chunhyang and Mongnyong, but Chunhyang and Byeon Hakdo; that is, the two main
characters in this Korean love story do not come together “as” Romeo and Juliet or
“as” Rhett Butler and Scarlett O’Hara, but properly only as Chunhyang and
Mongnyong in the end.  

Figure 3.13 Sassy Girl Chunhyang Ep. 10 “Vivid Imaginations”
Mongnyong pictures Byeon Hakdo and Chunhyang as Rhett and Scarlett

The quotation of other media texts in Sassy Girl Chunhyang includes non-Western sources as well. For example, in a scene in episode 8, Mongnyong and
Byeon Hakdo engage in a “drink-off” as they fight over Chunhyang. The scene is a
dramatic duel of determination between the two competing men, and is played out
over a melody that martial arts fans will recognize as the “General’s Theme,”

182 A reference to Romeo and Juliet can be seen early on, in episode 3, when Chunhyang and
Mongnyong’s campus theater group puts on a production of Romeo and Juliet; here again, Chunhyang
plays the role of Juliet, but Mongnyong is not Romeo, which would make for a more facile (and direct)
comparison between the two love stories.
otherwise known as the “Wong Fei Hong theme song.” But of all the intertextual referencing and parodying that goes on in *Sassy Girl Chunhyang*, perhaps what makes it most comical is its self-reflexivity and the blatant way that it brings attention to its identity as a television drama. At the beginning of episode 16, Mongnyong has finally found Chunhyang, who has made an agreement with Byeon Hakdo to remain out of Mongnyong’s life in exchange for his safety. In explaining her absence to Mongnyong, who demands an explanation, Chunhyang fabricates a series of tales that play out in would-be flashback sequences accounting for her life since the time they lost touch.

Here, the immensely popular television drama *Winter Sonata* (2002) is parodied when the drama’s main title song begins playing over a picturesque image of Chunhyang and Byeon Hakdo in a moment that is clearly meant to invoke the main characters from that series. Chunhyang then goes on to recount another episode for Mongnyong that leads into a flashback of a scene from *I’m Sorry I Love You* (2004), the successful TV drama that played in the very time slot that *Sassy Girl Chunhyang* subsequently occupied. The drama’s theme song plays over this segment as well, with Chunhyang and her accessory factory manager acting out this drama’s most iconic scenes, respectively dressed in the characters’ famous outfits. This is followed by yet another false flashback, this time of a scene from the TV drama *Full House* (2004), which again initiates the drama’s main theme song on the soundtrack. After

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183 Wong Fei Hong is a famous Chinese martial artist and folk hero who has been valorized in popular memory as the subject of over one hundred Chinese films, throughout which he has appeared in slight variation as the defender of Confucian values. Indeed the constant re-invention of Chunhyang as a folk symbol over generations is not unlike the figure of Wong Fei Hong in Chinese lore.
Chunhyang finishes relaying these episodes to Mongnyong, he knowingly comments, “Gee, your life sure flew by unbelievably, like some TV drama.”

The three K-dramas that fill out the above sequence of parodies are all works that attained high viewership ratings within South Korea, and also played outside Korea to popular acclaim (the third drama features Korean pop star Rain as the male lead); all three were significant contributors to the Korean Wave. The insertion of these texts exhibits an awareness of its status as a television drama as it joins *Sassy Girl Chunhyang* with some of the Korean Wave’s most popular works. It assumes that viewers will have enough local televisual literacy to appreciate the references and also positions itself through them. They celebrate the Chunhyang tale not as an isolated, archaic text belonging to a pre-modern Korea, but one that lives among present-day texts.

Taken together, the above sampling situates *Sassy Girl Chunhyang* in a matrix of cultural references that nest the drama in a wider network of local, regional, and global media culture; surely this has contributed to making the drama a vehicle of Korean culture that is more accessible, for new audiences both in age and nationality.\(^{184}\) For some drama watchers, *Sassy Girl Chunhyang* sparked a curiosity

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\(^{184}\) A TV rating study showed that teenagers comprised some 30% of *Sassy Girl Chunhyang*’s viewership, a number that is dramatically higher than the average 3.6% of teenagers who watched dramas on the three major terrestrial channels (KBS, SBS, MBC) in that time slot in 2004 (Moon 2005).

*Sassy Girl Chunhyang* was broadcast in Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines, but video platforms such as YouTube reveal complete versions of the drama subtitled in other languages, such as Indonesian and Spanish, in addition to English.
about the original Korean tale.\footnote{EEK, a Korean American K-drama watcher related to me that watching \textit{Sassy Girl Chunhyang} made her want to know more about the Korean story, something she had only heard of in passing (personal conversation, 30 Jan 2011); similarly, a watcher on the website dramafever.com posted on \textit{Sassy Girl Chunhyang}'s (listed as \textit{Delightful Girl Choon Hyang}) “Reviews” page that the drama “Makes me want to know about the story it’s based upon…” (“TippTopp83,” posted 22 Jan 2015).} Such a response aligns with \textit{hallyu}’s efforts to introduce and internationalize Korean culture through a revisiting and recreating of tradition; \textit{Sassy Girl Chunhyang} embodies the search for tradition that partially fuels \textit{hallyu}, even as it engages the contemporary. The drama rewards the values of a Confucian folktale, seen in the happy ending that finally comes after seventeen episodes of perseverance, sacrifice, chastity, and loyalty; and its reinvention of a new Chunhyang character joins an ongoing re-writing of an important symbol in the Korean cultural imagination.

This contribution to the Chunhyang canon realizes some of \textit{hallyu}’s most pressing interests: it affirms a Korean cultural identity by reintroducing a traditional icon with contemporary meaning to a domestic audience, but it also sees an internationalization of this icon through the drama’s circulation outside Korea, which in turn can spark an awareness, and potentially, ensuing interest in Korean culture. What is more, it indexes the story’s elevated status by invoking other well-known works of fiction, including popular works and classics from Western literature and film, indirectly assuming parity through referencing. Setting the domestic tale within a larger media repertoire expresses well the nature of \textit{hallyu}; embedding tradition in the present and tying the Korean to the global has imbued the tale with a dynamic energy as it has become renewed through \textit{hallyu}. 
CASE STUDY 3

Toward a Global Community: Dreaming High with K-pop

The sixteen-episode drama Dream High (KBS, 2011) is a series that significantly uses music to carry its forward-looking message, one that is decidedly global in outlook. Although the drama does not refer explicitly to South Korea’s hallyu phenomenon in the way that other dramas have, it celebrates Korean popular music and entertainment by integrating it intimately into the drama’s narrative.

Dream High follows six high school students who train at a prestigious arts school in Seoul as they prepare to become successful performing artists, and ultimately, stars. As they hone their craft, their journeys are met with tribulation, rivalry, friendship, self-discovery, and love.

The premise of the show resembles that of the American TV series Fame, of the 1980s, which also dealt with the joys and conflicts of aspiring performing artists. But while the episodes of Fame largely focused on the drama that surrounded the path of each performer, Dream High culminates in a situation where the characters’ successes are more than just their own; they point to the success of South Korea through popular music—more specifically, through the contemporary brand of music.

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186 Since the mid-2000s, an increasing number of K-dramas have consciously incorporated the hallyu phenomenon in big and small ways: for example, the female lead in My Girl (Maigeol, SBS 2005) starts out as a hallyu tour guide; one of the main characters in Secret Garden (Sikeurit Gadeun, SBS 2010) is a hallyu star who frequently leaves Korea to give concerts in Japan; King of Dramas (Deuramaui Jewang, SBS 2012-2013) features a main character who is known for his talent in producing successful hallyu dramas; The Greatest Love (Chwoegoui Sarang, MBC 2011) revolves around the member of a once-popular girl group, and a top hallyu actor who is courted by the likes of famed director “Peter Jason”; the female lead in My Love From Another Star (Byeoleseo On Geudae, SBS 2013-2014) is played by an accredited real-life hallyu star who plays a hallyu star in the drama.
widely known as K-pop. This marriage of K-pop to K-drama makes *Dream High* an ideal *hallyu* text.

The first episode of *Dream High* opens in the year 2018 with news coverage of a historical moment: singer “K” is the first Korean to win a Grammy award and is getting ready to perform at the 60th Grammy Awards Ceremony at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, an event that the news anchor reports has riveted the national gaze. A sequence of shots reveals the bustling of standby preparations at the Grammys interspersed with news coverage of this momentous occasion playing on several exterior mega screens amid Seoul’s cityscape, after which we finally approach our singer backstage at the venue, dressed in costume and looking at a photograph of high school friends (in uniform) in the dressing room one last time before taking the stage. Next to this photograph is a pendant with the letter “K”; it is a pendant that, we soon find out, was given to a promising student by the director of Kirin Performing Arts High School. Since the shot of the pendant and photo of friends is framed in a close-up that reveals only part of the artist, we do not know who K is, that is, which of the six friends in the picture has become K. Indeed the pendant changes hands many times over the course of the drama, and though the trinket itself is a minor thread in the larger story, part of the drama’s fun is that we are left guessing until the end. Shortly after the brief opening segment that takes place in present-day 2018, we are taken back to the time at Kirin Performing Arts School implied by the photograph. In essence, the drama is one big flashback that leads up to the crowning moment we are given a glimpse of at the beginning, and revisit at the end.
In many ways, *Dream High* is a musical; it is a drama in which singing and dancing play an essential role. Moreover, it works like a musical in the way that it insinuates the audience in the progression of musical growth and the ultimate success of music. In fact, *Dream High* displays several traits of the musical, in particular the “backstage musical,” as pointed out by Jane Feuer in her insightful discussions of this Hollywood subgenre (1981, 1993). Backstage musicals, Feuer explains, are reflexive in that they incorporate the type of entertainment represented in the films themselves. These musicals are not only entertaining, but are also about entertainment, and this makes them self-referential. Within this frame of entertainment, the musical often sets up a conflict between popular and classical music—something Feuer calls the “opera vs. swing” narrative—in which the popular style always comes out victorious. As such, these musicals are not only self-reflective, they are also self-affirming in the way they applaud popular forms within their stories. Classical music, Feuer points out, is an element in the musical’s vocabulary, and the oppositional setup to popular music, part of the genre’s syntax (1993:54-57).

The juxtaposition of classical and pop styles, and ensuing (predictable) outcome, has become a well-entrenched node in supercultural film music. “Supercultural film music,” as defined by Mark Slobin, refers to musical codes and conventions begun in Hollywood that have become standard and are taken for granted, in Hollywood and beyond (2008:vii-62). Certain conventions have traveled well, and find themselves more frequently in other cinema cultures; the “classical-pop duel” is one of them. Slobin refers to this type of scheme as a “figure” that is able to
create meaning within a film. Figures such as the classical-pop arrangement are recognizable and useful, as Slobin shows through his comparative approach, in shoring up a film’s narrative. His analyses and case studies show that the “classical pop-duel figure is alive and well, seventy years after the supercultural pioneers set it up” (ibid.:341).

The theme of elite art opposing popular art makes an appearance early on in *Dream High*, as one of our main characters, Go Hyemi (played by K-pop idol Suzy), is forced to confront her disdain for popular music. Hyemi is a gifted opera singer who has studied under, and performed with, renowned soprano Sumi Jo; the first episode shows Hyemi and Sumi Jo (making a cameo) in concert, singing the famous “Flower Duet” from Delibes’ *Lakmé* (Figure 3.14). Hyemi has been awarded a chance to study at Juilliard prep, but because of her father’s financial debt, must give up this golden opportunity.

![Figure 3.14 Dream High Ep. 1](image)

Hyemi (played by Suzy), left, performs the “Flower Duet” with soprano Sumi Jo (as herself)
Through circumstances beyond her control, she finds herself applying to Kirin, a highly regarded arts school that has graduated many of Korea’s pop stars, but which Hyemi sees as a “cesspool” that produces “trash not worthy to be called music.” Her mission, we understand, is to overcome her prejudice against popular music. The beginning of her transformation begins toward the end of the first episode, in an audition scene where she is insulted and outraged at her apparent rejection.

_Dream High_ appropriates the classical pop-duel figure in persuading the audience of the value of pop. But it also takes advantage of other narrative units established by the Hollywood superculture, such as the audition scene. The audition scene is a sequence that captures “bored producers watching a chain of hopeless wannabes until they find the future star” (Slobin 2008:47). This familiar scene crops up in _Dream High_ and is used to effect, but not without a twist. After a string of auditionees, we arrive at Hyemi, who is undeniably talented. The litany of audition snippets is clearly meant to lead up to Hyemi’s audition, but they also serve to display an array of talented Korean youth, from saxophonists to pop singers to break-dancers to human beat boxes to traditional vocalists. Spanning _pansori_ to hip-hop in the span of a few minutes, the lengthy sequence serves as a sampler of the diversity of genres in the contemporary Korean musicscape (Figure 3.15).
These aspirants are not wannabes, but skilled musicians that show the high level of the school, and several of them are granted admission along the way (results being given right after each audition). When we finally get to our star Hyemi, her song is given full time on screen, as she and her friend sing their audition piece—the duet arrangement of a Korean pop song—from beginning to end. Hyemi has vocal chops, but fails the audition on the spot, while her friend is accepted.

*Dream High* takes the template of the audition scene to jumpstart our character’s career in popular music, as the scene is conventionally meant to, but the occasion does not come in a glorious moment of discovery; our star is not born at the top, amid a sea of other applicants who are hopelessly untalented. Rather, her moment begins at the bottom, when she fails because of a haughty attitude that clearly comes out in her pompous singing style. Hyemi’s singing is technical and cold, especially in
comparison to her harmonizing friend, Baekhui, who is warm, spontaneous, and emotive.

Hyemi’s extended audition moment goes on to reveal her fatal fault. When she refuses to accept the results and challenges the school’s director, even questioning his ability to evaluate good singing, the director agrees to give Hyemi another chance: if she can identify what he plays on the piano, he will overturn the decision. He goes on to play an arrangement of Gershwin’s “Summertime” interspersed with an extremely famous Korean trot song, “I Only Know Love” (“Sarangbakken Nan Molla”). Hyemi recognizes the Gershwin (here representing classical music) but fails this second test because she is unable to determine the second piece, although everybody else in the room—along with all the others in the building watching these open auditions on screens within the school—clearly knows; in fact, they wonder why the director would pick something so incredibly easy. Hyemi incorrectly guesses Saint-Saëns, and when the director asks her audition partner for the correct answer, Hyemi is appalled that he would “dare” mix Gershwin with “crap like trot.” She fails this test not because she doesn’t recognize the song, but because she can’t conceive that the two (high and low forms) could possibly be mixed in one arrangement. This exposes her prejudice, which the director pinpoints as her critical flaw.

The director explains that while the school accepts first-rate students, i.e. those who have talent and work hard; and second-rate students, i.e. those who lack

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187 Known as teuroteu in Korean, “trot” (from the English word “foxtrot”) is a type of popular music that began in Korea in the early 20th century. Teuroteu bears similarities to Japanese enka, but is considered by many to be characteristically Korean, and is widely loved in South Korea, especially among older generations.
talent but work hard; they are not in the habit of accepting third-rate students, i.e. those who are biased. The director of Kirin Arts School (and of the audition scene in question) is played by actor Bae Yong Jun, a well-known and nationally lauded hallyu star who played the lead in Winter Sonata, a drama that significantly spearheaded the Korean Wave. Bae makes an extended cameo in Dream High to address Hyemi’s biggest shortcoming and deliver her first important lesson—that she must overcome her prejudiced mindset in order to progress. The message from this hallyu star resonates beyond the boundaries of the drama, and Dream High’s embracing of popular entertainment can be seen as an affirmation of hallyu itself. The drama is a coming-of-age story of Hyemi, but also speaks to the journey of a country that once looked down on popular music in favor of traditional styles and Western classical forms, especially when it came to cultural identity.\footnote{See also Okon Hwang (2006), who states that popular music was until recently, considered to be inferior by scholars as well. In her article of 2009, she briefly discusses the disparity of social status between popular musicians and musicians of Western classical music in South Korea.} With the advent of hallyu, popular entertainers, once derogatorily referred to as “ttanttara,”\footnote{In colloquial Korean, ttanttara is a pejorative term used for entertainers, which rings with a particular air of gaudiness. The jester is perhaps a close parallel, although it does not bear the appropriate feeling of cheapness; a female ttanttara might be akin to a showgirl, while a male ttanttara might be equivalent to a dancing gigolo in the West.} have risen in national profile, as the country now finds itself sponsoring, indeed proudly advancing, K-pop stars as national cultural ambassadors.

Although Hyemi initially fails the Kirin audition, she is ultimately allowed into the school through its “Special Admissions” class, due to a quota that the school finds itself having to fill. The Special Admissions class is a degraded class of “misfits” and the school’s lowest rung of students, a place from which she of course
eventually moves up. If at the beginning of *Dream High*, we are introduced to a character that is forced into popular music because she has no other choice, in the end, we are left with one that is transformed and enlightened about her path in music. After a year at Kirin, towards the end of the drama, Hyemi finds herself at a crossroads when she is met with another chance to go to Juilliard and resume studies in classical voice. However, this time she passes it up and decides to stay; that is, she *chooses* popular music. In a self-introduction video that she submits to “EMG,” an international music company that is seeking the next big star, she recites in a voiceover soliloquy (episode 15):

Go Hyemi: Until a year ago, I was studying classical voice. I was even pretty good, good enough to sing with Jo Sumi.

To be honest, I first turned to popular music because of money. I thought popular music was third-rate garbage, not worthy to be called music.

But this past year, I learned that I could make people happy, cheer them on, comfort them, and encourage them… all through popular music.

As I look back, I realize that I myself was third-rate, being prejudiced and looking down on popular music.

This year, I escaped from third-rate status. And I believe that I can become first-rate in no time.

Hyemi’s realization is well earned and meaningful, as it comes after many episodes that have molded her musical identity; her thoughtful monologue comes to us over a montage of flashbacks that revisits these colorful episodes, allowing the audience to recall them as well. Throughout the course of the drama, Hyemi has gone from stiff,
impossible diva to approachable and caring friend. Her realization elevates popular music and attests to its victory over its classical opponent.

Backstage & Off Screen: Art Referencing Life

Jane Feuer points out that the backstage musical—the most persistent subgenre within the musical film—usually involves kids (or adults) “getting together and putting on a show” (1981). A plot point like this makes it convenient, no doubt, for the musical to manifest its desire to “valorize” entertainment, as Feuer says. But it also, she tells us, “demystifies” the production of entertainment by giving us a delightful (and often endearing) behind-the-scenes look. In essence, this revelation, the backstage perspective, gives pleasure to the audience by allowing us to witness the steps to its success. The “putting on a show” conceit cleverly exposes the mechanism of entertainment without destroying its magic, which stays safely sealed on celluloid.

What is at work here is a “myth of integration” that gives audiences a sense of participation in the creation of, on one level, the show, and another, the film itself. Feuer suggests that this myth works to make the collectively produced show seem like a cooperative effort that includes the film’s viewers. The film audience takes part in the team effort, and this in effect cancels out the alienation inherent in the viewing situation (1993:17). The myth of integration promotes audience identification, and in so doing, conceals its status as mass art—a mere product of commercialism—and turns it into something more communal. In this way, “[t]he musical film becomes a
mass art which aspires to the condition of a folk art—produced and consumed by the same integrated community” (1981:168).

Surely one of the most appealing aspects of the backstage design is the way that the audience is made to root for the characters; we are invested in their success because we have been privy to their efforts and earnest desires to put on their show. The connection between audience and character is established in *Dream High* through this convention. *Dream High*’s borrowing of the backstage pattern can be seen in the way that it relays the process to K-pop stardom. Indeed the drama can be seen as an enjoyable how-to of K-pop, a “manual” that reveals its requirements and necessary steps, through the experiences of characters that constantly tweak and improve themselves—characters that we develop a fondness for, and ultimately root for.

While a Hollywood backstage musical typically shows rehearsals that lead up to a crowning opening night performance within the time frame of the individual film, the “putting on a show” effect is distributed over the episodes of *Dream High*. In *Dream High*, our Kirin trainees are seen putting on “showcases” (as they are called in the drama) several times over the course of the drama’s sixteen episodes—some showcases real, some fake, some performances successful, others failures with valuable lessons. In the larger picture, these showcases can be seen as rehearsals that prepare them for the ultimate showcase—the Grammys (Figures 3.16 & 3.17).
And yet the “backstageness” and self-referentiality of *Dream High* are made to work on another level. As a drama about a specific type of entertainment—K-pop—it advances its message through casting: five of the story’s six main characters
are played by real-life K-pop idols. Our opening would-be star, Hyemi, is played by Suzy, a member of the K-pop group Miss A; the rapper and street dancer Jinguk is played by Taecyeon of 2PM; Hyemi’s friend and audition partner Baekhui is played by T-ARA’s Eunjeong; the singer-dancer student from abroad, Jason, is played by 2PM’s Wooyoung; and the gifted vocalist Pilsuk is played by guitarist and singer songwriter IU. Hyemi’s ultimate love interest, the country bumpkin and musical genius, Samdong, is played by Kim Soo Hyun, the only non-idol among the drama’s six main characters.

Casting idols to play young characters that aspire to become idols blurs the line between characters and stars, and pulls in a self-consciousness that is playful to the audience, while infusing the drama with a special feeling of endorsement. It also brings a level of familiarity that bleeds over into the fictional story and feeds into the audience’s relationship with the characters. Brian Hu has shown how the presence of real-life pop stars in films (particularly Hong Kong films) can affect the way audiences engage with a film, especially “knowing” audiences who are familiar with

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190 An “idol” in Korean pop culture generally refers to a young celebrity who has been trained and groomed for several years by a management agency before debuting, usually as a singer. Idols must possess good looks and slender (frail or fit, according to gender) physiques. They are active on many platforms in the entertainment industry (singing, acting, emceeing, brand modeling), and are central to the pop culture diet of tweens, teens, and young adults—groups that make up the bulk of their audiences.

191 Dream High plays with this “meta” aspect in moments that knowingly acknowledge reality within its fictional world. For example, in episode 2, one of the main characters, Pilsuk (played by IU, who is an idol in real life), is shown admiring a picture of her idol crush, Kim Hyeonjung, who is a real K-pop idol and supposedly a graduate of Kirin Arts School; Kim makes a cameo here as himself, early in the drama. In another example, Baekhui (played by T-ARA’s Eunjeong) is shown dancing to K-pop group Miss A’s hit song “Good Girl, Bad Girl” in a performance showcase in episode 4, while main character Hyemi looks on in resentment; the knowing reference here is that Hyemi is played by Suzy, who is a real-life member of the group Miss A. Over the course of the drama, idols from K-pop groups Super Junior (Leeteuk, Eunhyeok) and 2PM (Nickhun) also make appearances, as themselves.
the pop star outside the film (2006). When Canto-pop superstar Andy Lau plays a
dance instructor in Dance of a Dream (Andy Lau, 2001), audiences “read his
character as more than simply Lau, the dance instructor, but as an extension of Lau,
the star” (2006:414). Lau’s identity as one of Hong Kong’s most popular music acts
shapes audiences’ responses to the filmic story, such that “the presence of [a] song
half-way into the film does not break the fantasy of the story since that fantasy had
already included the audience’s extra-cinematic experiences of Lau from the very
start of the film.” Andy Lau’s fictional and real selves, Hu suggests, are “bundled
together to create both person and persona on the screen in a way which is multiple
but coherent” (ibid.).

While presumably no watcher of Dream High will have trouble differentiating
fictional plot from reality, using idols to portray idols enacts “multiple but coherent”
levels of identities that include an off screen awareness which gives the text a fluidity
and added layer of facility in delivering its message of entertainment. A similar type
of cross-referential borrowing was once seen during Hollywood’s studio era.
According to Feuer, musicals were known to invoke the audience’s memories of
stars’ previous musicals. This was meant to evoke nostalgia, and such attempts were
part of “the star system’s desire to erase the boundaries between star persona and
character, between on-screen and off-screen personalities.” In this way, musicals used
intertextuality and star iconography as a means of manipulating audience response
(1981:170). The placement of some of the country’s most popular K-pop stars in
Dream High plays on the audience’s familiarity of the idols’ careers off screen, and this becomes factored into the drama’s overall effect.

The impressive roster of real-life K-pop idols in Dream High is reinforced by the presence of another real-life K-pop figure—veteran pop, dance, and R&B musician Park Jin Young, who joins the cast as one of the teachers at Kirin. Known widely as “JYP,” Park is a Korean singer songwriter and founder of JYP Entertainment, one of South Korea’s “big three” entertainment agencies. As a well-known and respected K-pop mogul, Park, who co-produced the drama and composed many of the soundtrack’s songs, lends validation to the drama’s story of K-pop.

Assembled together, this cast becomes a community onscreen that extends a “backstage” view to the drama-watching community offscreen, inviting them to take part in making their entertainment dreams come true. In this regard, K-pop is perhaps an ideal vehicle because of the way in which it is made to enlist the audience. K-pop intersects with the backstage nature of Dream High to build community with a Korean ethos. But before further exploring this aspect, it would be useful here to zoom in for a closer look at K-pop itself.

By Way of Introduction—The “Korean” in K-pop

As a term, “K-pop” has been in use among overseas fans and diasporic Korean communities since at least the late 1990s, although it did not permeate Korean

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192 The other two entertainment agencies are YG Entertainment and SM Entertainment. The name of Park’s character is something of an in-joke here; his name, Yang Jinman, is an amalgam of all three agencies: the “Yang” from Yang Hyeon Seok, founder of YG; the “Jin” from his own name, Park Jin Young, founder of JYP; and the “Man” from Lee Soo Man, founder of SM.
domestic media channels until very recently. The term was most likely created by the Japanese music industry, according to Shin (2009a:106), and was probably used initially to differentiate it from “J-pop,” a term that was already in existence since the late 1980s. While J-pop was basically a domestic phenomenon, K-pop from the start indicates an external popularity, the term itself having been created outside Korea.

K-pop has been the topic of an increasing number of reviews and articles that on the one hand, recognize its growing fan bases outside Asia, and on the other, note its resemblance to foreign (mostly American) styles and genres—an observation that, however indirectly, brings attention to the “K” of its title. John Seabrook describes K-pop as an “East-West mash-up” with complex synchronized dance moves that accompany music that is Western: “hip-hop verses, Euro-pop choruses, rapping, and dubstep breaks” (Seabrook 2012). Another music critic has written that K-pop borrows from American and European styles without carrying any “fingerprints”—this mélange being K-pop’s signature aesthetic (Caramanica 2012).

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193 It is difficult to locate exactly when the term “K-pop” started to see common use among listeners overseas. Most Korean pop aficionados would probably agree that it began during the time between landmark groups Seo Taiji & Boys, who debuted in 1992, and H.O.T., who debuted in 1996; Seo Taiji’s group was still referred to as gayo at the time, but H.O.T. was called K-pop (by audiences outside Korea). Some overseas fans have retroactively referred to Seo Taiji & Boys as “classic K-pop” or “oldies K-pop,” although within the line between gayo and K-pop lies a difference in production system, distribution and marketing, and means of consumption. 2011 was the year when the domestic Korean media (news platforms, and music, entertainment, and variety shows) and domestic Koreans notably began, en masse, to use the term “keipap” (케이팝 or K팝), which has now largely replaced “gayo,” the older term for pop songs in Korea.

194 “J-pop” was coined by Japanese radio station J-WAVE in 1988, to refer to a new and fashionable type of Japanese pop song that catered to trendy, urban youth. J-pop music captured the sounds of Euro-American styles and often had English or “English-like” Japanese lyrics. This was a time of globalization in Japan when the prefix “J” was beginning to replace an older identity moored to the letter “N,” for Nippon/Nihon (Mori 2009:475-79).
Some critics of K-pop have faulted its “manufactured” nature and the resulting artificiality of cookie-cutter idols that are all too replaceable. K-pop’s happy, saccharine feel makes one commentator state that “watching more than five K-pop music videos in a row can lead to cavities, diabetes, epilepsy, and a general sense of shame” (Sonn 2014). Others have diminished K-pop as mere copy, a watered-down imitation of American pop. Jon Pareles, a regular writer for The New York Times, has voiced this critique in a review of K-pop singer Rain: “If there’s anything beyond the lyrics that’s particularly Korean about Rain’s song, it’s not obvious.” He writes further, “The obstacle to Rain’s intended United States career is that by the time Mr. Park [his manager] has figured out how to imitate the latest English-speaking hit, American pop will have jumped ahead of him” (Pareles 2006).

Perhaps Pareles is right; the only things that are obviously Korean to an average non-Korean consumer are the Korean lyrics, and Rain’s Korean body—an aspect that is “trivial,” to like-minded critics like John Lie (2012:359). But Pareles’ dismissal seems to be based on a notion of Korean that he does not further clarify; it remains unclear what sort of “noticeably Korean” aspects would have made Rain’s performance pass as Korean and thus acceptable, if not completely endorsable. John Lie seems to find Koreanness in the traditional, something he looks for in K-pop:

…traditional Korean music was pentatonic, the singing style stressed melismatic and raspy vocalization, and the performer stood still: the stress was on the sound. K-pop is uniformly diatonic, lyrics peppered with English phrases, the singing style is resolutely syllabic of “western” pop, and dance is an integral element of the performance. Chosŏn [Joseon]-period pansori singers would recognized [sic] Cho Yong-pil’s singing; it is highly unlikely that they could make any sense of Girls’ Generation as fellow musicians. In terms of music, there is very little, if anything, of traditional Korean music. (ibid.:360)
It is curious that Lie would search for the iconic sounds of Korea’s traditional music in something like contemporary Korean pop music, or think that Joseon’s pansori singers would (or should) “make any sense” of a group like Girls’ Generation—musicians from a different time and context. Although some culturally specific pop musics are known to include indigenous instruments, vocalizations, or other traditional musical characteristics (such as bhangra, dangdut, or even Korean trot), the fact is that many vibrant popular musics around the globe today are heavily influenced by Western pop and speak its language without necessarily inflecting it with the respective home culture’s “traditional sonic identity,” one with roots in a musical past.

Lie’s notion of the “Korean” seems onerously fixed to a bounded idea of culture that makes it difficult to discuss something like cultural identity within the overlapping frames of modern, global, and popular. Identities that are “in-flux” and “becoming” have dynamically dislodged from physical territories and reductive definitions, to allow for a more complex and multi-layered rendering in our contemporary setting. Assigning cultural identities through popular culture today involves absorbing a certain amount of otherness within the self. Pop music scholar Motti Regev recognizes this when he says, “in late modernity, many of the art works and cultural products that signify contemporary ethno-national cultural uniqueness

\[195\text{ Although there has recently been a push by some younger gugak groups, such as Miji (a fusion gugak girl group that debuted in 2010), to appropriate “idolness” in performance, presentation, and repertoire, efforts toward a “gugak idol project” are still in the overwhelming minority within the K-pop scene proper.} \]
routinely and intentionally include elements drawn from ‘outside’ the nation or
ethnicity which they represent” (2007:318). K-pop instantiates this syndrome; it is a
stream of pop music that is not ethnically-sonically “marked.” K-pop music is not
based on traditional modes, nor, generally, does it feature sounds of the gayageum, or
rhythm cycles on the janggo. Its musical language is plainly derived from Euro-
American styles, reworked to fit a Korean context.

To be fair, however, the “K” in K-pop does serve as a marker that denotes an
identity, and the above critics touch on a question that is worth addressing. Indeed, as
a Korean American and student of the K-pop phenomenon, I have often found myself
facing similar questions from those unfamiliar with it: How Korean is K-pop? What
is so Korean about it? Part of the answer to the “K” of K-pop can be found in the
nature of the songs, which are, on the overall, more subdued than what is found in
American popular music. K-pop groups may border on the sensual, but they rarely
venture into the sexual. As Seabrook describes it, “The girls’ sexy but demure style
recalls groups of the early sixties—the Shirelles, the Crystals, and the Ronettes.
Neither the boys’ nor the girls’ lyrics or videos generally refer to sex, drinking, or
clubbing—the great themes of Western hit-makers” (2012). This is a characteristic

196 While not an issue that I can discuss at length here, it should be mentioned that the label “K-pop”
has come to be a very broad one, encompassing many styles and genres of music that get swept under
its blanket category. Just as “A-pop” would not be a useful, or appropriate, descriptor for contemporary
American popular music (pop, rock, R&B, hip-hop, house, techno, EDM, etc.), the title “K-pop”
conceals a diversity of styles. Although many K-pop artists are known to mix various styles of music
within one song, this is not always the case. From Apink’s bubblegum aesthetic in “No No No” to
K.Will’s soulful ballads to Big Bang’s electro-techno feel in “Fantastic Baby,” K-pop artists and songs
span the gamut.

197 The past two or so years have seen the appearance of some more sexually suggestive songs and
videos that cannot be ignored because they are performed by K-pop idols and are considered to be K-
pop; these frustrate the idea that K-pop is wholesome across the board. Hyun A’s “Ice Cream” (2012)
that has drawn American audiences which join Seabrook, a self-proclaimed fan, in K-
pop’s growing fan base. American enthusiast “hammymcatt,” a consumer of both K-
dramas and K-pop, and member of fan community koreandramas.net, explains in the
following lengthy excerpt why she enjoys K-pop:

K-pop [is] somewhat “American” in feel […] That was what hooked me… listening
to Group S and Lee Jee Hoon, SS501, etc, I was taken back to the “feel” I
remembered from my 1960’s pop music – yes, it was mass produced and probably
somewhat cliché in theme – BUT in a good way – the music itself, it was fresh and
happy – no message to push in my face, only love and loss, fun and sadness. Just
pure emotion. I used to get so mad at all the people who dissed the Monkees because
they were a “manufactured” group in the beginning. A constant criticism was they
were not “real musicians.” But did it really matter? They were GREAT entertainers
and the fact that their music was so “produced” is what gave them so many fabulous
hits – and isn’t that what most performers want? To make hits that people like? That
entertain, uplift or move them?

K-pop always does this perfectly. It has an innocence, an exuberance that I love. I
guess it’s kind of “American retro” and incorporates the best of American pop with a
Korean feel. I think of it as “retro” because of its relative innocence in lyrics. For the
most part, the ones I get English translations of are gentle, romantic songs or sad,
emotional songs – not hard-edged or harsh in any way. If there is anything sexual, it’s
implied rather than “in your face.” I like that. I think the lyrics often have a beauty
and subtlety that current American music lacks […]

So while the music itself may somewhat be an imitation musically of some elements
of American pop, I think Koreans [have] taken it the next level!198

K-pop’s vibrancy, harmless lyrics, and ability to relay love that is more
romantic than sexual comprise a “pop perfectionism,” as John Lie calls it, that is non-
threatening and fills a demand for those who have appetites for “U.S.-led pop music”

198 Email correspondence, 7 Feb 2011.
but don’t want the excess (Lie 2012:356). Such traits differentiate K-pop from its American counterpart; they are part of K-pop’s appeal and contribute to the identity of the “K.” Pareles may have mildly disparaged Rain as a “nostalgia act” in his review, but the toned-down, PG-rating approach to love is a significant part of what makes K-pop pleasantly consumable to a general audience. Despite Lie’s largely cynical view of K-pop, he adequately encapsulates part of its allure: “K-pop exemplifies middle-class, urban and suburban values that seek to be acceptable at once to college-aspiring youths and their parents: a world that suggests nothing of inner-city poverty and violence, corporal or sexual radicalism, or social deviance and cultural alienation” (Lie 2012:355).

Another aspect to which K-pop’s “K” can partially lay claim is the actual process of making K-pop idols. K-pop idols typically sprout from comprehensive management agencies that invest millions of dollars yearly to develop and train a singer until the right time for a debut. In addition to taking care of an idol’s education, entertainment agencies also provide singing, dancing, and acting lessons, tutoring in foreign languages, and coaching on things like how to behave, and how to interact with the media. Agencies are known to house idols too, and management complexes include dormitories and eateries in addition to studios for practicing, recording, and producing. From composing and arranging to choreography, styling, and marketing, entertainment agencies integrate all, or most, aspects of production and
management. The idol system appeared earlier in Japan with Johnny & Associates, but the system has been fine-tuned in South Korea, with notable contribution from Lee Soo Man, founder of SM Entertainment.

K-pop idols emerge from a formula that, at its worst, may seem like cloning. It is perhaps ironic to think that it belongs to *hallyu*, a moment in South Korea that bespeaks a flowing of culture, and implied creativity. The K-pop model is a counterintuitive thought because this cultural flourishing is seemingly cranking out same-ish products, one might argue. I would here redirect focus not to the product itself, but rather to the process. Former South Korean Minister of Culture Yu In Chon has pointed to “design” and the capacity for creative adaptation, as part of contemporary South Korea’s cultural strength, and what it can offer to the theater of global culture. Yu’s words ring with relevance for the case of K-pop; South Korea may not be the origins of the musical language that K-pop is built on, but it has created an original “laboratory,” as one commentator has put it, that seasons and packages singers to levels of excellence in the art of entertaining.

Closely intertwined with the K-pop idol-making process is an ingredient that is perhaps the most crucial to an idol’s success, namely hard work. Although idols

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199 The control that management agencies have over their stars (and the results that they expect in return) has given rise to the term “slave contracts,” which has become somewhat of a “dark side” to K-pop management culture.

200 With his experience as a musician, producer, radio host, and student in the United States, Lee had a good handle on different musical styles and was able to zero in on what could speak to youth in the Asian region at a time when South Korea was globalizing. His agency, SM, was responsible for developing H.O.T., one of Korea’s first-generation idol groups. SM is home to top tier K-pop artists such as BoA, Super Junior, TVXQ, Girls’ Generation, SHINee, EXO, and f(x).

201 Lecture at the *Hallyu* Academy, Chung-Ang University, Seoul, South Korea, October 2, 2007.

202 Robert Bound, Culture Editor at Bloomberg Monocle, has referred to South Korea as a “laboratory for the future of pop music” (“Kpop Industry,” *Bloomberg Monocle*, n.d.).
must have natural ability to start on the road to K-pop success, much of their talent is “learned”—it is not so much discovered as it is formed and made along the way. Since idol training entails a combination of rigorous regimens, the biggest talents that an idol can possess are perhaps endurance and perseverance. A strong work ethic is a requisite attribute of idol training that most K-pop fans are familiar with, and one that they invariably come to respect about their respective idols.  

Hard work as a criterion is referenced in Dream High when the international music label “EMG” announces its application requirements in their call for aspiring stars—impossible requirements that include elements such as: one originally composed song, one three-minute music video with English subtitles, fluency in at least three foreign languages, and awards from at least ten past music competitions. Although none of the six characters fully qualify, they all apply and surprisingly pass the first cut, because the first cut was meant to test an applicant’s undeterred courage, aptitude for facing challenges, and potential for endless effort. The theme of hard work is also seen keenly in the case of one of our six characters, Samdong, who develops tinnitus in the latter part of the drama and is plagued by bouts of hearing loss at unannounced moments. Despite his condition, Samdong does not give up; although initially devastated, he eventually resumes rigorous training, and although

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203 John Lie contends that K-pop (and the Korean Wave in general) does not have anything to do with traditional Korean Confucian culture (which would adequately qualify it as Korean). According to Lie, “there is almost nothing ‘Korean’ about K-pop” when it comes to traditional culture (2012:360). In his estimation, it is globally competitive because it has freed itself of the “encumbrance of traditional Korea” (ibid.). To be sure, an idol’s surface appearance and dance gestures, indeed the occupation itself, could not easily pass through traditional Confucian censors. But there are Confucian-informed attitudes to be found in the idol-making process and culture, such as self-discipline, a respect for hierarchy between seonbae (senior) and hubae (junior) relationships among trainees and artists, and a sense of duty to bring honor to the family name, in this case, the country as larger family.
he is not “cured,” he overcomes this handicap by learning to deal with it, which he does with Beethovenian fortitude. Samdong, significantly, goes on to become our ultimate star. Hard work, the drama seems to say, is what will help K-pop make it to the world stage.

The aforementioned characteristics are arguably part of what makes K-pop unique—enough to be called “Korean” in the larger streams of global pop today. But there is still something missing here, and that is K-pop’s effect on the audience. What often goes unmentioned in discussions of K-pop where issues of “authenticity” and “imitation” take precedence is the community that tends to form around K-pop. Attention to musical roots is certainly important, but to focus on the “music alone” is to risk missing certain aspects of its culture, and in fact, K-pop can be better understood as a culture more than a genre.

**Building Community: The Uri of K-pop**

One of K-pop’s most striking aspects is its visual appeal; it is not music that is simply meant to be listened to, but music that is made to be watched. K-pop songs are a type of “total entertainment” that includes choreography, fashion, style, and personality, all of which are packaged into a piece that is visually stimulating. The music video is very much a part of a new song’s release, and not an afterthought or “attachment” that comes later, after a song has been debuted. In K-pop, the song comes with the video from the start, and for many K-pop fans, especially those
without access to the Korean language, the video is the point of the song. Slick and colorful visuals, catchy hooks, and mimicable signature dance moves give K-pop an energy that has the potential to “activate” onlookers to join in.

Simply put, K-pop is made to interact with its audience through dance, which is learned through media platforms such as YouTube. Those who have learned a particular song’s choreography through repeat watchings and tutorials can reshare the song through their own versions online, and in this way, dance in “virtual togetherness.” This perhaps is the very aspect that makes K-pop contagious; its infectious nature is driven not so much by the circulation of a song’s original video as it is by the cover versions posted by fans from all places and all walks of life on the open community that is the World Wide Web. The shareability inherent in K-pop lessens the boundary between audience and performer, as the initial allure of artists singing on stage becomes an appealing invitation to replicate the choreography and dance along. The audience is a crucial part of the K-pop equation, and one of the factors that drives its culture. Indeed if American pop can be said to be “all about the artist,” K-pop is very much about the audience.

The importance of communal spirit is something that can readily be detected in Korean culture. The sense of an aggregate “we” is built into the language, where the distinction between “yours” and “mine” in common Korean parlance often defers

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204 In a feature on NPR’s *Planet Money* (“Why K-Pop Is Taking Over The World,” 16 Oct 2012), blog reporter Zoe Chace provides a helpful explanation of K-pop’s appeal and the path to its rise in popularity; she brings to light the importance of video in K-pop and sees it as an aspect that has contributed to K-pop’s success abroad. She remarks that K-pop is “well prepared to serve the video-obsessed, mobile phone-carrying” media population.
to the collective “our,” or the “uri.”205 The idea of uri was important to many of Korea’s traditional folk arts, to which audience participation was integral. For example, the art of pungmulnori, a genre of percussion music that flourished as a form of ritual and entertainment in the village-based agrarian society of Korea before modernization, was based heavily on the concept of audience participation. Itinerant pungmul troupes would raise the spirit of a crowd through performance in an open space, or a “madang,” in a village. Sometimes also known as a “pan” (public arena), the madang functioned not only as a physical space but also an important emotional and spiritual space where people gathered as one.206 As Donna Kwon explains, madang and pan are terms that are “imbued with evocative social connotations of communal gathering and embodied participation” (Kwon 2005:2). In Korean folk performance, the madang opens up the relationship between performer and audience, reinforcing a sense of solidarity in the absence of barriers.

Pungmulnori was not just music; it was a tradition that also included dance. As dynamic rhythms were played out on percussion instruments, dance movements, along with chuimsae (vocal cries of joy and encouragement), gave expression to an elevated state of excitement in both audience and performer. This heightened enthusiasm, described in traditional terms as heung (mirth, joy), and sinmyeong (spirited cheerfulness), culminated in a festive state of oneness that extended to

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205 Uri can be translated as “we,” “us,” or “our.” In everyday speech, Koreans commonly refer to things like country, home, and various family members with the possessive pronoun “our,” such that the phrase “my country” would be translated as “uri nara” (literally, “our country”); “my home” would be “uri jip” (literally, “our house”); and “my mother” would be “uri eomma” (literally, “our mother”).

206 Pansori scholar and practitioner Chan Park notes that the term pan, which “conjures both mental and physical space for wholehearted participation,” can be used as a prefix or suffix to variously denote: frame, mold, situation, event, occasion, arena, or a public occasion (Park 2003:1).
everyone in the madang. In stark contrast to a performance mounted on a stage, with a clear distinction between artist and observer, the accessible rhythms and stylized dance gestures of pungmulnori encouraged audiences to participate. That is, performer and audience were united in the same space, with neither party worried about making mistakes or concerned with things like “artistic perfection.” Although pungmul performers were themselves professionals skilled in their art, a performance was considered successful only when it stirred the audience to join in; if a crowd’s sinmyeong, or “lively spirit,” was not aroused, the performance was meaningless—in essence a dead performance.²⁰⁷

To aid in bringing about an organic experience with the audience, pungmul performances often included a cast of characters, together called “japsaek,” that represented various members in the community; their purpose was to increase audience identification. Katherine Lee explains it well:

In most forms of p’ungmul [pungmul], a limited number of character actors known as chapsaek [japsaek] (literally, “various colors”) dress as stock figures from Korean society. This motley crew of societal archetypes, such as the yangban (learned aristocrat), chorijung [jorijung] (Buddhist monk), and the halmi (grandmother), serve to add comic relief, encourage audience participation, and administer to the overall festive mood of a p’ungmul performance. This is achieved through the performance of stylized dance gestures, animated facial expressions, commentary that borders on the lewd or absurd, and physical exaggeration of the stock figure’s stereotypic image or defining characteristics (e.g., the halmi is usually played hunched over, using a walking cane as a prop). The chapsaek also pay attention to the various choreographies that p’ungmul performers engage in, keeping the alignment of patterned or choreographed formations (chinhŏp) [jinbeop] in check.²⁰⁸ (Lee 2012:185-86)

²⁰⁷ According to Korean folk scholar Kim Inu, “If you step away from a performance of p’ungmulgut [pungmulgut] that is going very well for just a moment and look back, you see that everyone is floating about in a spiritual state/state of oneness” (Hesselink 1999/2000:7).
²⁰⁸ Also often included in the japsaek lineup is the mudong (little boy) and gaksi (young bride), although characters can vary from performance to performance.
Japsaek personalities were essential to invoking the “we” of folk performance because they were easy to relate to. As characters from society, they facilitated the mingling of the villagers gathered, and stirred them toward the goal of collective sinmyeong through the enlivening act of dance.

To shift focus back to K-pop, the idea of a participating audience built around the component of dance can be seen in the fan communities that have formed to learn K-pop choreographies. A look at group design reveals that a similar pattern is employed to promote audience identification and draw in these communities. The member formation of K-pop groups reflects a keen awareness of audience; most K-pop groups are composed of several members (some with twelve or thirteen) as a technique to reach a wider audience, the thinking being that people will identify with, or will simply like, at least one of them. Members may wear a certain identity within the group (for example, the maknae—the “baby,” or youngest of a group), which makes them endearing, relatable, or more accessible. This “japsaek effect” has proved successful, as many K-pop fans often zero in on, or develop a preference for, a

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209 K-pop groups are well known for having many members; the larger groups have been some of K-pop’s most popular, for example, Super Junior, which originally had thirteen members; Girls’ Generation, which originally had nine members; and EXO, which originally had twelve members. Some other popular groups include: After School (eight members), T-ARA (six members), Apink (six members), SHINee (five members), Wonder Girls (five members), f(x) (five members), Big Bang (five members), 4minute (five members), and Secret, KARA, Miss A, Brown Eyed Girls, Sistar, and 2NE1, which all have four members each. In the case of solo artists, a group of backup dancers is commonly arranged to accompany the artist with synchronized choreography.
particular member (something referred to as a “bias” in English-speaking K-pop fan circles) once they are initially exposed to a group’s songs.\textsuperscript{210}

Indeed the six main characters in \textit{Dream High} are built around a similar design. Each of our characters clearly has musical ability, but they also each possess a weakness: Hyemi is talented but has a bias against popular music; Jason is talented but lacks discipline; Jinguk is talented but lacks vision; Pilsuk is talented but lacks physical beauty (she is overweight); Baekhui is talented but lacks confidence; and Samdong is a diamond in the rough—a country boy with a regional accent who is naturally gifted but lacks training and is unaware of his potential. Viewers will be able to relate to at least one of these traits, and by extension the characters, who with fine tuning and hard work, ultimately go on to become the new group “Dream High” that goes viral on the Internet and debuts on national television.

This is not to suggest that K-pop is the modern heir to the \textit{pungmul} troupes of pre-modern Korea, but only to show that this consciousness can be found in an entertainment form like K-pop; certainly it has been a crucial part of K-pop’s success, which is ultimately driven by fans, now from increasingly varying backgrounds, nationalities, and age groups. Nor do I mean to ignore that a larger marketing strategy devised by a profit-seeking entertainment industry is also at work here; it would be difficult to deny the presence of such tactics. In John Lie’s assessment, K-pop group structure is “dictated in part by cold-blooded business calculations” (2012:358). For

\textsuperscript{210} Despite the common critique that K-pop idols are “all the same,” a closer look will reveal that there is diversity within members of a given group, as well as differences across groups, such that they can have a certain sound or distinct “feel” about them.
Lie, K-pop is a form of “naked commercialism” (ibid.:362); nothing more than “a business in which financial and other business concerns consistently trump musical or artistic considerations” (ibid.:357).

Indeed it would be difficult to find any pop music that is not manufactured, commercialized, or driven at least in part by profit, in the history of any country that has a culture industry with a bottom line and a desire to reach the widest possible audience; and Lie’s critique here is perhaps more appropriately directed toward the “pop” than the “K.” What Lie still leaves out of his discussion of K-pop is how the engineering of groups actually reaches out to audiences, and the fans that have formed as a community around them. Group structure may have something to do with maximizing profit, but the focus on creating music with hooks and digestible choreography that can stir audiences to join, acknowledges a communal “we” on the way to generating K-pop’s energy and enthusiasm, notwithstanding the practical commercial motives involved.

The notion of being part of a collective entity can also be seen in the way that management agencies refer to themselves. Each of the three big agencies, for example, goes by a larger group identity: singers from YG Entertainment are collectively known as “YG Family,” while SM Entertainment singers are billed as “SM Town,” and artists from JYP Entertainment are together called “JYP Nation.” This idea of belonging to a larger unit is, in turn, extended to the fans, who are welcomed into a “family,” “town,” or “nation” when they engage in K-pop.
The spirit of *uri* is effectively captured onscreen through the mobilization of the filmic audience in *Dream High*. Jane Feuer notes that audiences *within* a musical film have a vicarious function, that they often serve as a point of identification for audiences *of* the film; this works towards the larger effort of making the film appear less like mass art and more like something communal (1981). At times, the onscreen audience is integrated through camera language, as when we are shown the point of view of spectators in a theater audience (often from the third or fourth row). Other times, shots of applauding audiences are interspersed as a strategy that is akin to the way canned laughter is used in television. Perhaps most effective, though, are scenes that actually show an audience—ordinary people, amateurs—involved in musical action. Feuer explains, for instance, that the “Skip to My Lou” sequence from *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944), shows young men and women joining in a group dance that “projects a folk quality through and through” (1993:10). Certainly the use of a folk song lends an air of community bonding to the scene, but the mechanisms of unrehearsed music and dance lend an inclusivity that further accentuates this feeling.

The “Dancing in the Dark” sequence from *Band Wagon* (Vincente Minnelli, 1953), to draw another example, is also purposeful because Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse’s dance flows as a natural extension of a group of ordinary people dancing in Central Park (Feuer 1981:168). By implying that entertainment is from the folk, these scenes add to the musical’s aspirations to creating community. Feuer elucidates, “Audiences in the films suggest a contagious spirit inherent in musical performance,
related to the suggestion that the MGM musical is a folk art; the audience must be shown as participating in the production of entertainment” (ibid.:170).

In episode 16, the last episode of Dream High, the energy of a participating audience is put to work in the way that the audience-within-a-film is meant to, but it is inflected with the *uri* of Korean folk performance. Toward the end of the story, our six main characters are preparing to debut (as the group “Dream High”) under a professional management agency, but decide to take the group’s publicity into their own hands when one of their teachers, Mr. Yang (played by JYP), comes up with the idea of organizing a flash mob with their debut song (also called “Dream High”).

The flash mob takes place in an open space—a madang—and begins with Mr. Yang, who is joined by the group’s (and the school’s) members, two and three at a time. The flash mob is a sensation, and soon a large crowd is gathered to watch and participate; the moment has become a festive community occasion where all are invited and take part. The spirit of entertainment permeates the crowd, and toward the end of the sequence, a division between performer and audience is no longer noticeable (Figures 3.18 – 3.22). The scene is one of the group’s (and the drama’s) crowning highlights. When the flash mob is posted on the Internet by a teacher, it goes viral, and as the group’s teachers observe the phenomenon together on a tablet, the camera zooms in on its screen to show us that the original song is quickly joined by cover versions (Figures 3.23 & 3.24). This, in essence, transforms the K-pop madang into a “virtual madang”—an extension of the physical space in cyber space;
the *uri* of K-pop’s physical *madang* here generates new energy through a synergy with online participatory culture.

Figure 3.18 *Dream High* Ep. 16
Flash mob led by Kirin teacher (JYP) and members of the group Dream High

Figure 3.19 The contagious spirit of musical performance: audiences participating

Figure 3.20 Generating *heung* (excited joy) through music and dance in the “K-pop *madang*”
Figure 3.21 Increasingly indistinguishable barrier between performer and audience

Figure 3.22 The uri of K-pop: community fully integrated through music and dance

Figure 3.23 K-pop’s virtual madang: chefs join cover versions of the dance online
Thus the building of community through the backstage design in *Dream High* converges with the “*uri*” in K-pop culture, to integrate audience and turn the drama into a communal success, one that is culturally informed.

Shortly after the culminating flash mob, the group Dream High is picked up by a TV station and invited to make their live debut on national television (Figure 3.25). The drama concludes with the group’s success, but not before returning us to the beginning episode, backstage at the Grammys. Like a faithful backstage musical,
Dream High’s story includes a love relationship that has paralleled success on the stage—a narrative strategy typical of the subgenre (Feuer 1981:160). Maturation of the showcases has been juxtaposed with the making of our romantic couple, Hyemi and Samdong (Figure 3.26). By the end of the drama, the “K” pendant is in Hyemi’s possession, but she commits it to Samdong when he has a chance to make an album in the States, yet insists on giving it up in order to stay in Korea to be with Hyemi. Samdong goes on to become the singer K, and the drama’s final shots of his performance at the Grammys—now back in present day 2018—are interspersed with shots of a performance given by Hyemi, who has also become a famous singer (of popular music, of course), and is celebrating her own milestone concert in Korea; she dedicates her first song to Samdong.

The clear implication as the drama closes is that the two “end up together,” even though they are apart. Samdong’s success as singer K is not his own; it is shared with Hyemi, whose relationship with him corresponds with his success. It is worth mentioning here that Dream High goes against a pattern often seen in K-drama, of orchestrating a romantic couple toward each other because of a shared history, a past that meaningfully binds them and dictates that they are meant to be together (sometimes through promises or pledges made in childhood or youth, other times through the trope of “first love”). In fact, Hyemi’s childhood memories are with Dream High co-member Jinguk (who also becomes a famous singer and pop star in the Asian region by the drama’s end); but her choice in love is not informed by her past; it looks ahead to a new history.
Jane Feuer has suggested that backstage musicals that incorporate group numbers in which everybody on screen participates, speaks to a wistful yearning for a more communal time in the country. “Choreography [that] blurs the dividing line between performer and audience, between principals and chorus in dance, between audience and film” allow the dance to become a “community ritual” that reveals a “nostalgia for America’s mythical communal past” (1993:15-16). While the Hollywood musical may have used the group dance number as a nostalgic lens for a bygone time, the communal dance effort in *Dream High* propels it forward, toward a community that is global.

Ending as it does at the Grammys, in the United States—the world’s biggest music market—the drama’s “backstage feel” is introduced to an international stage, a beginning that is at once a victory and a challenge. Empowered on the one hand by the potential of social media, the stage heralds an opportunity to interact with an even broader audience. This is the message of *Dream High* through its celebration of entertainment: it points to a larger community and aspires to the global through K-
pop, while keeping its cultural identity intact. The self-reflective musical, according to Feuer, “offers a vision of musical performance originating in the folk, generating love and a cooperative spirit which includes everyone in its grasp and which can conquer all obstacles” (Feuer 1981:168). The overcoming of obstacles in *Dream High* produces happiness and bears success not only for its characters, but for South Korea as well, by way of K-pop.

**Coda: Life Imitating Art**

In July of 2012, a year and a half after the televised broadcast of *Dream High*, Korean pop and hip-hop musician Psy released a song that went on to make history on the World Wide Web. With well over two billion hits on YouTube at the time of this writing, it is safe to say that the “Gangnam Style” has been a success. Finding renewed energy with flash mobs and cover versions posted by groups and individuals across the Internet (which themselves went viral), the song has become the most viewed clip on YouTube, and its signature “horse dance” has proceeded to enter the mainstream American popular lexicon.\(^{211}\) It became, as reported on *Good Morning America* (ABC), “the dance sweeping the world.”\(^{212}\)

Although not the Grammys, Psy was invited to appear at the MTV VMAs (Video Music Awards) in 2012 following the feverish reception of his colorful,

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\(^{211}\) At its height, references to the song (verbal and physical) were made on some of the most popular shows on American TV, including *South Park*, *Glee*, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, and *The Colbert Report*. “Gangnam Style” was mentioned via social media outlets by several pop celebrities, including T-Pain, Josh Groban, Robbie Williams, and Katy Perry, and due to the song’s sensation, Psy was subsequently invited to perform on *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, where he taught the dance to Britney Spears.

\(^{212}\) 12 Sept 2012.
quirky song and dance. His appearances on shows and festivals around the world raised the profile of South Korea, and Psy was quickly regarded as a domestic hero; in 2012, he was awarded the prestigious Okgwan Order of Cultural Merit by the South Korean Ministry of Culture for his “contribution to increasing the world’s awareness of Korean pop music and ensuing interest in Korea” (H. Lee 2012). Psy himself has seen his rise to fame as a celebrated moment for his country, referencing South Korea in many of his interviews.213 Surely, it is not uncommon for a viral hit to enter the mainstream; what was remarkable in this case was that it came from South Korea—a place that a country like America does not typically look to for popular culture.

In many ways, Psy is an anomaly within K-pop because he is not an idol: he did not go through the idol-making system; he is known to write his own music; and to boot, he is neither physically trim, nor does he have what idol pundits would consider to be “good looks.” Nevertheless, he was able to create a festive node in cyberspace that turned the “You” in YouTube into a “We” that together shared joy through dancing and the consuming of dance. For some, the horse dance may have been no more than an empty meme floating on the Internet, or perhaps a passing “Macarena” of the moment. Indeed in the American context, his success comes with shadows that call up an uncomfortable image of an “acceptable” Asian male in the

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213 For example, during an outdoor interview on the NBC Today show (14 Sept 2012), when host Savannah Guthrie asked him what it meant that his song was a phenomenon in the States, Psy briefly excused himself to utter in Korean, “Daehanminguk manse! (Hurray, Korea!).”
mainstream imaginary. But the song also did other things, like stretch the American tolerance for foreign languages in pop culture.

From a Korean perspective, what is significant about “Gangnam Style” is not simply the content; it is the function of the content that is exciting. Whether or not non-Korean audiences understood all the cultural references in the video, it succeeded in bringing attention to K-pop, serving as it did as a “gateway” to other songs, sometimes by inciting enough interest in viewers to motivate a click on one of the “recommended videos” suggestions supplied on the side. It put Gangnam on the global pop map, and by extension raised awareness of South Korea, situating the country visibly within a global network of culture, an aim of hallyu.

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214 Psy’s image as a comic figure in the video may serve, to a certain extent, as an easy access point to American viewers familiar with a handful of representations in the mainstream American media that have depicted Asian males through demasculinized stereotypes, such as “non-threatening geek,” “model minority,” “comic relief” (or humorous sidekick), or “inscrutable evil” (Yellow Peril). This would point more toward an acceptance of “Psy the comedian” than “Psy the musician.” Certainly there may be truth to the notion that a familiar stock idea of “Asian buffoonery” made the video easier for American audiences to consume. However, it would also be an incomplete assessment to think that his success was undergirded totally by subconscious notions of racism, since the song was a global phenomenon, with participating viewers from various races, ethnicities, and nations, as well as age groups. There is virtually no way to survey the deeper reasons behind two billion-plus views. While I do give a certain amount of credence to a potential “racist facilitation” theory pertaining to “Gangnam Style,” and indeed feel that it is important to point out, and critique, such a perspective, I also think it is important to keep in mind that “Gangnam Style” was a catchy, fun song.

215 Although “Gangnam Style” comes wrapped in an attractive beat with addictively repetitive syncopations on consumable vowel sounds (“Op — op—op—oppan Gangnam style”), and even includes an English phrase (the hook, “Heeey, sexy lady!”), which altogether make for a low threshold in terms of language, the song’s lyrics are in Korean, making its embrace by an American public normally averse to passing through foreign language hurdles (for example, reading English subtitles for foreign films) quite significant. It was remarkable to hear “Gangnam Style,” a foreign-language song, take up as much airplay as it did on mainstream American radio, at one time being one of the most requested songs and reaching No. 2 on the U.S. Billboard Chart (Smith 2012).

216 Although K-pop had been gaining momentum in the online world before the coming of Psy, with SM, YG, and JYP artists having together amassed 2,280,000,000 views on YouTube in 2012 (three times the number in 2010), of which some were attributed to fans in faraway locales such as Cuba and Sierra Leone (Ono and Kwon 2013), data show that views of Korean groups (official music videos of K-pop artists) tripled following the release of “Gangnam Style,” jumping to a total of over 7 billion views (Gruger 2013).
From an American perspective, although “Gangnam Style” is known to have spurred first-time watchers of Korean pop music to find out more about K-pop, 
Korean culture, and Korean language, the song probably did not inspire anything more than a superficial interest in most of its viewers. Still, as media scholar Henry Jenkins notes, even though “pop cosmopolitanism”—which he refers to as the way in which transcultural flows of pop culture inspire global cultural competency—may not lead to any real understanding or political consciousness, and in its worse form, may amount to nothing more than an iteration of orientalism, it does offer something of a starting point that “opens consumers to alternative cultural perspectives and the possibility of feeling what Matt Hills calls ‘semiotic solidarity’ with others worldwide who share their tastes and interests…” (Jenkins 2004:117). With its multi-directional flow (and relatively low cost), media such as YouTube allow K-pop—a Western influenced brand of pop music—to simultaneously affect and influence Western culture. Reproduction of K-pop through cover versions reshapes K-pop, articulating it to new cultural expressions, forms, and identities, which ultimately has the potential to undermine traditional relations of power in the “worlding” of culture (Ono and Kwon 2013).217

K-pop’s entry into an international pop consciousness has been growing steadily for several years, seeing milestones such as Big Bang’s winning of the “Best Worldwide Act” award at the MTV EMAs (European Music Awards) in 2011, and

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217 Ono and Kwon analyze K-pop through the frame of “worlding” culture, following Gayatri Spivak, who originally described it as a “process of implicitly reinscribing imperial culture into ‘the Third World’ contexts in order to legitimize dominance” (Ono and Kwon 2013:199-200). Ono and Kwon suggest that “consuming K-pop has the potential to undermine traditional colonial relations” (ibid.:211).
Girls’ Generation’s win at the first YouTube Music Awards in 2013, where they beat out the likes of Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, Miley Cyrus, and One Direction. Unlike the Grammys and MTV VMAs, the YouTube Music Awards is based on an “algorithm [of] likes, shares, views, and other metrics of ‘fan engagement’” (Yang 2013).

Industry magazines have taken notice, too: *Billboard* and *Billboard Korea* together launched a K-pop Chart (“K-pop Hot 100”) in 2011, and *Rolling Stone* magazine printed its first article on K-pop in 2012.

Inciting flash mobs from Moscow to Paris to Toronto, and gaining visibility on high profile platforms, the aspirations of *Dream High* are being evinced in small ways around the globe, manifesting K-pop’s (and South Korea’s) desire to be part of a “global uri.” With fluency in a global cultural form, K-pop, as characterized in a sanguine metaphor by culture critic Robert Bound, has its “arms stretched around the world.” The expression points to the international stage and World Wide Web that *Dream High*’s narrative also alludes to through K-pop. Through its use of K-pop, *Dream High* reveals *hallyu*’s ambition of participating in the global while also maintaining an identity that can be said to be Korean within the worldwide flows of popular culture.

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218 Other visible events include the Wonder Girls opening for American band Jonas Brothers on their 2009 world tour and 2NE1 being crowned MTV Iggy’s “Best New Band in the World” in 2011. Girls’ Generation also made appearances on the *Late Show With David Letterman* and *Live! With Kelly Ripa* in 2012 before going on to win the YouTube Awards in 2013. More recently, Crayon Pop opened for Lady Gaga on her 2014 summer tour.

219 In 2013, *Billboard* inaugurated a separate K-pop column called “K-Town.”

220 “The 10 K-Pop Groups Most Likely to Break in America” (see Benjamin 2012).

221 “Kpop Industry” (*Bloomberg Monocle*, n.d.).
The case studies in this chapter have examined some of the ways that music actively contributes to telling the “story of hallyu,” even as it is employed to construct narrative and engage the audience within respective K-drama texts. Music soundtracks are intimately woven into these K-dramas to cue certain themes that are found in hallyu itself, and they are rich avenues to explore in this regard. Thus far in the dissertation, I have attempted to paint hallyu in strokes that give shape to its thrusts and characteristics, after which I have zoomed into the work of music in K-drama, and ventured into specific drama texts for a closer look at how music soundtracks are complicit in communicating the message of hallyu. The next chapter surveys the receiving end—the audiences of K-drama that comprise a crucial module to the movement of hallyu, one that has ultimately made the phenomenon possible.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Effects of K-drama: Fans and Reception

The previous chapters in this dissertation have dealt with the dimensions of production and text, as they have constituted hallyu, with a special focus on the musical workings of K-drama. This chapter turns to the fans that consume these dramas—the “reception module” of the study. This section perhaps may not “complete” the picture of hallyu in any finite way, but it aims to lend some depth to it through the voices of real audiences who have made K-dramas a part of their lives. Fans are a consequential entity and an important part of discussions on hallyu because they are, in no small way, the ones that supply hallyu with vitality and animated movement. The following offers a sense of fans’ relationships to Korean TV dramas as well as the effects that K-dramas have had on their real lives.

The consumption of Korean dramas outside Korea has long been an activity associated almost exclusively with diasporic communities. In regions such as North America, first-generation Korean immigrants of the 1970s and 1980s residing in enclave communities were known to rent videos from the local Korean market on weekends—some “by the box,” as many second-generation children will be able to attest. For first-generationers, these programs provided a way to maintain a connection to their native land and keep up with “life” back home; they also offered a reprieve from very long working hours and were a way to enjoy the leisure of television comfortably in their own cultural language.
Much has changed with *hallyu*, and as Korean TV dramas have found increased audienceship outside Korean communities, the activities surrounding these programs—and the genre in general—has also seen growth. Ethnic (second-generation) Koreans may still comprise a solid number of the K-drama watchers outside Korea, but they are now joined by non-Korean audiences; together these viewers constitute a wider group distinctly called “fans,” in identity and activity. With new audiences searching for forums to discuss Korean dramas (from plots to actors to matters of culture), K-drama fan groups began to sprout across the Internet in the mid-2000s with the arrival of *hallyu*.

**Preliminary Words (The Case of Fans)**

In a persuasive study of fan culture, *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins points out that the difference between simply watching a (TV) series and “becoming a fan” lies in the intensity of a person’s emotional engagement and intellectual involvement (1992:56). Fans show more than just a casual interest; they commit themselves to a show—its episodes, narratives, cast, and other aspects of show content—to a point where the show takes on meaning in, and has an effect on, the fan’s personal life. Speaking as an insider with direct knowledge and a personal investment in some of the most intense fandoms that have formed around American science fiction television, Jenkins elucidates that “fannish” activities (such as analysis, discussion, repeat watching, fanzine writing, artwork) are driven by a closeness to the text that allows media content to become part of fans’ everyday lives. The text, he explains,
“is drawn close not so that the fan can be possessed by it but rather so that the fan may more fully possess it” (ibid.:62). Jenkins touches here on the notion of agency, something that is at the heart of fan behavior, and which has traditionally been denied audiences in earlier accounts of media theory that instead positioned a passive reader/spectator in fixed relation to a text and its ideological underpinnings.

Borrowing Michel de Certeau’s idea of “textual poaching,” Jenkins argues that fans of television fictions appropriate textual material and rework them into the context of lived experience, and that this results in a culture that is richly participatory in nature.

Fans’ close engagement with TV texts and the intense activities this prompts have often been met with reservation by “critically-minded” people (non-fans) who disapprove of a loss of perspective that presumably fuels such behavior. Lingering behind this mindset is the image of a stereotypical fan that has persisted among a hierarchy of taste, and it is something that Jenkins addresses. As he notes, the idea of the fan—from the word “fanatic”—conjures up images of people who are isolated, emotionally unstable, intellectually debased, or socially immature and out of touch with reality. But fans cannot be wholly dismissed as intellectually inferior because they are, as Jenkins’ first-hand experience shows, often highly educated, “respectable” people with middle-class values and “normal” day jobs (ibid.:18-19).

Indeed my own contact with fans of Korean drama revealed many to belong to an array of impressive professions spanning the gamut, from pharmacist to microbiologist to computer engineer to librarian to financial analyst to university professor to civilian worker at the USAF, just to name a few. Jenkins suggests, rather,
that the fan stereotype has more to do with a discomfort that the general public has with the transgression of bourgeois taste; he states that the stereotypical image of the fan, “while not without a limited factual basis, amounts to a projection of anxieties about the violation of dominant cultural hierarchies” (ibid.:17).

The reading practices of fans—some of which include close and intense scrutiny, elaborate exegesis, and careful, prolonged rereading—while acceptable when applied to works of “serious merit,” seem misdirected or inappropriate when applied to texts that belong to the category of mass culture. Jenkins points out that the “scandal” surrounding fannish activities “stems from the perceived merits and cultural status of particular works rather than anything intrinsic to the fans’ behavior.” For example, he continues, “[w]ould these same practices […] be read as extreme if they were applied to Shakespeare instead of Star Trek, Italian opera instead of Japanese animation, or Balzac instead of Beauty and the Beast?” (ibid.:53). What these distinctions reveal is an institutional bias against works deemed as low art, and their assumed difference from works culturally sanctioned as high art. Jenkins contends that in a sense, the popular embrace of television can be seen “as a conscious repudiation of high culture or at least of the traditional boundaries between high culture and popular culture” (ibid.:18).

Jenkins does not mean to suggest that all television programs have the potential equivalency of quality literature and should be considered for inclusion into a high art canon. He does, however—aside from pointing out that Shakespeare, opera, and Balzac also once belonged to the masses rather than the elite—suggest that there
is value to the cultural experiences of a text apart from any allegedly inherent merits of the text. And as Jenkins notes, the limitations or shortcomings of a text can actually be an impetus for creativity in handling and re-forming the material, causing readers to fill in gaps where they may seem to exist, or emphasize particular aspects that feel underdeveloped to them. Fan activity is rich because of such interaction, because of what a reader brings to the text, beyond what s/he finds there (ibid.:74). Indeed the impact of television fictions (in this case K-dramas) on fans—why they watch, how they experience and actively engage them, and the effect they have on realities—remains a rich dimension of the K-drama equation and the larger culture surrounding hallyu, perhaps more so in light of the fact that these dramas are now being consumed by fans with limited or no knowledge of the country of origin, or its culture.

**The Forming of K-drama Fandom—A Glimpse of the Fanscape**

Much of the fandom surrounding Korean dramas has grown on the Internet as part of an ecosystem that includes fansubbing, recapping, commentary, and online discussion. Although many fans are known to blog about their personal K-drama “addictions,” some websites have amassed a significant following; one such site is dramabeans.com. Dramabeans is a place for “recaps,” run by a Korean American who started the site in early 2007 as an outgrowth of her personal blog. As

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222 There are now several English-language K-drama “recapping” sites (for example, koalasplayground.com, couch-kimchi.com) that join a number of others dedicated to Korean pop culture in general (for example, soompi.com, allkpop.com).

223 Email correspondence, 15 Jan 2008.
explained on her “About” page, she created the website out of a need to talk about K-dramas in a way that went beyond mere adulation or celebrity worship:

I started this site because I couldn’t find a site providing meaty (or any) analysis for K-dramas […] I enjoy marveling at the pretty as much as anyone, but also wanted to express appreciation for quality that didn’t automatically dismiss something for being popular. Or, on the flipside of that same coin, to discuss something popular that went beyond surface discussion of the plot or hot cast. […] My underlying modus operandi: Just because it’s pop culture doesn’t mean discourse has to be shallow. I’d like to sustain a fun but hopefully substantive level of conversation, mixed with some irreverence.

Armed with an elite education and writing experience, the creator of Dramabeans (known by the handle “javabeans”) has filled a void for people who want to consider more closely the textual, emotional, and cultural dynamics of K-drama. The main purpose of dramabeans.com is to provide “recaps”—reviews of drama episodes that come with screenshots and a musical selection (sometimes but not always from the drama’s OST). Editorial commentary is threaded throughout, but recaps are also followed by a separate “Comments” section that further explores anything from the episode’s strengths and weaknesses, to plot progression and narrative development, to character motivation and analysis, to the drama’s overall structure. The awareness of a large number of fellow fans and the need for a community around K-dramas came to javabeans during the first year of her website while recapping the series Coffee Prince (MBC 2007); receiving 30,000+ page views, her site repeatedly

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224 Marion Schulze has referred to such analysis as “ethno-hermeneutic reading,” in the layers of interpretation that emerge from “thinking along with” a text in a drama-world that has its own set of rules, conventions, and cultural codes (2013).

225 Full drama title: First Shop of Coffee Prince (Keopi Peurinseu Ilhojeom).
crashed and she realized that the drama was popular not just in the U.S. but in far-flung countries like Singapore and Malaysia with fans eager to get recaps right after episodes aired.\textsuperscript{226}

Fans who visit dramabeans.com find a space to hear about, and get information on, their favorite dramas. Visitors to the site generally read recaps after watching an episode, although some read prior to watching.\textsuperscript{227} Through an encounter with these recaps, which amount to much more than simple summaries, fans are able to, as Regina Lee suggests, relive the drama, this time experiencing both their own “affective echoes,” as recalled from watching particular scenes, as well as the recapper’s deeply felt reaction, captured in the writing (2014:93). Javabeans also fills a crucial role as interpreter for audiences unfamiliar with Korean culture; as a legitimate voice on Korean culture, she is singled out as an “expert of Korea” in a “hierarchy of credibility” that exists among international K-drama fans on the Internet, as described by Marion Schulze in a study surveying online K-drama fandom (2013:388-91). The site provides a link to a growing glossary of terms commonly heard in K-drama with cultural explanations; with up-to-date information on drama productions and related entertainment news, the site has become a “go-to” source for English-based K-drama fans, and a meeting place for an international readership. As an “authority” on K-drama, javabeans has been invited to major events

\textsuperscript{226} Email correspondence, 15 Jan 2008.
\textsuperscript{227} Some K-drama fans that frequent the site are known to consume a K-drama by reading the recaps only, without actually watching the drama. With a comfortable voice and writing style presented in clear, fluid recaps, javabeans’ mediation of K-dramas has given rise to her (and the site’s) own fans. The website is now staffed with a group of writers to accommodate the increasing demand for recaps.
such as KCON, in Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{228} She has also co-authored an e-book on K-drama (\textit{Why Do Dramas Do That?}).\textsuperscript{229} Although mainly a site for recaps, dramabeans.com has facilitated the online exchange of information, opinions, and ideas about K-dramas among a growing community of fans that seek to revisit and linger on a text and its inner workings, extending contact with it beyond initial consumption.

Another online fan practice that Korean dramas have sparked is the production of original videos composed of scenes from existing dramas, skillfully edited to tell a different story; these are mini-dramas in their own right and also come in episodes, following the K-drama format. For example, a team of four authors known as “DBLTWINS” (whose productions are posted under the name “azngirly25” on YouTube) has taken the “B-story” romance of K-drama hit \textit{Boys Over Flowers} (KBS 2009) and developed this pairing as the main subject of a newly created story. The tale of “SoEul” (between \textit{Boys Over Flowers} characters So Yijeong and Chu Gaeul) is essentially an organized collage of isolated snippets gleaned from \textit{Boys Over Flowers} as well as the two actors’ other individual drama repertoires, arranged in a remarkably coherent fashion with actual dialogue grafted from these sources, and scored with a compilation of various related OSTs, that reveals an intimate knowledge of K-drama storytelling and aesthetics. As producers, not merely

\textsuperscript{228} KCON is a Korean pop convention inaugurated in 2012, dedicated to “All Things Hallyu” (see kconusa.com); similar to Comic Con, the convention brings together fans of Korean pop culture, and is known to invite K-drama actors as well as K-pop stars. The first annual convention in 2012 was held in LA and attended by 10,000 people; in 2013, the number grew to over 20,000; and in 2014, attendees numbered over 42,000 (Benjamin 2014). In 2015, KCON expanded to also take place in Japan (Saitama) and the New York City area.

\textsuperscript{229} Dimension Four Publishers, 2013. Marion Schulze (2013:390n43) suggests that the success of dramabeans.com is due in part to the website’s (now) two main writers’ (javabeans and girlfriday) position as Korean Americans with first-hand knowledge of Korean culture, something that allows them to comment with insider insight on the cultural nuances of Korean dramas.
consumers, fans such as DBLTWINS have channeled their familiarity of the drama (and the genre) to create a new fiction around parts of the text, reworked according to a preferred logic with a more catered design.

The kind of manipulation that DBLTWINS exhibits with the original K-drama text is explained by Jenkins not as a disintegration of the original but as sort of a “home improvement” that is made to “refit prefabricated materials to consumer desires” (1992:52). Jenkins encapsulates this kind of behavior through an effective illustration from the classic children’s tale, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, where the senior toy in a child’s playroom, Skin Horse, explains to a new toy, the stuffed velveteen rabbit of the story’s title, how the value of a toy lies not in its physical qualities but in how it is used and integrated into the owner’s imaginative experience, which is what ultimately makes a toy become real. Unrelated to a toy’s ostensible merits or even its purpose as envisioned by the toymaker, it is the personal meanings that become attached to a toy, and the relationship it engenders, that give it significance, no matter how disfigured, faded, or tattered the toy becomes over time (ibid.:50-51). In the story, the rabbit becomes the child’s favorite toy and inevitably becomes worn through the child’s love, gaining significance with repeated handling; it is in a similar way that fans like DBLTWINS interact with their favorite K-drama texts, twisting and handling them in a way that brings out nuances and threads from the original story left unexplored or unactualized.

While fans such as javabeans analyze K-dramas, and a group such as DBLTWINS creates new narratives with existing K-drama material, still others, such
as writer Adrienne Leslie, have used K-drama as an impetus in creating completely original texts. Adrienne Leslie is a K-drama fan that left a long career as a public school teacher to pursue writing; she first came across Korean dramas while surfing TV channels some twenty-five years ago and has been watching ever since.\(^{230}\) Her fascination with K-dramas informs much of her first two novels, *Bird and Fish* (2008) and *Sea and Sky* (2009), which are modeled after the K-drama. In both, chapters are written as “episodes,” and Leslie plays with some typical plot elements of K-drama, including family obligation, the recovery of a child given up at birth, and obstacles to romance (which, in her novels amounts to a difference in race and culture, not of class, as is typically the case in K-drama).\(^{231}\)

Leslie says that she is taken by Korean television dramas’ portrayal of love that is sweeping yet innocent, and has even created a female lead—a redheaded Caucasian American woman—who is herself “addicted to Korean television drama,” as she introduces early on. Leslie’s writing stays true to K-drama’s tendency for emotion and romance, without the sex; she feels that there is an audience for this kind of love, noting the growing number of fans who follow a series for months just to see the slightest hint of physical interaction. Many of Leslie’s readers are K-drama fans that recognize and appreciate the similarities in storytelling that her novels embrace.\(^{232}\) Her writing extends K-drama fandom in a way that departs from a more

\(^{230}\) Personal interview, 23 Apr 2011.

\(^{231}\) She also incorporates some activities that are cliché to K-drama. For example, in *Sea and Sky*, the main male character, a Korean man, buys a lock to place on top of Seoul Tower as a symbol for the woman he loves; this is a trendy dating activity and one that is commonly seen in contemporary K-dramas.

\(^{232}\) Book reviews on sites such as amazon.com reveal many of her readers to be K-drama fans.
traditional admiration of a text and pays homage to K-drama as a genre, extracting its narrative essence and transferring it to the medium of the novel. Her books have attracted existing K-drama fans through a new medium, while they also potentially appeal to new readers to whom the novels may serve as an entrée into contemporary Korean culture.

If the above can be seen as a snapshot of some of the ways that fans have engaged with K-drama following the burgeoning of hallyu, the following takes a closer look at one specific group, offering insight into its members’ relationship to K-dramas, individually and collectively, including the motivations behind their viewing.

**Portrait of a Fan Community: Koreandramas.net**

Koreandramas.net is a K-drama fan forum that began as a Yahoo Group in 2003; the group moved to a web-based forum under its current address in 2006, and is called the Korean Drama Group—or *Hanguk Muri* (한국 무리) in Korean, for “Korean Crowd,” or “Korean Bunch.” The majority of the group’s members are from the northeast (NY-NJ-Philadelphia area), although membership extends to those from outside the region, and country. The group’s founder, “mtlandis,” is particular

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233 Koreandramas.net is one of several “geographically based” K-drama fan boards in the U.S. that have a presence on the web. Other similar boards dedicated to K-dramas include a Chicago-based forum (Chicago Korean Drama Fan Club) and a Hawaii-based forum (Hawaii K-Drama Fans); there is also a California-based fan forum with a broader scope that covers Chinese, Japanese, and Korean dramas. Tying an Internet-based fan forum to a geographical location may seem somewhat curious, as web fandom is typically borderless and often anonymous, but this is presumably because fans end up wanting to meet with other fans in actual meetings, turning online gatherings into physical gatherings.

234 Although comprised of mostly American-based fans, international members vary widely and number more than just a few; the group includes members from Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Canada, Australia, England, and Wales; additionally, the group’s moderator told me that the forum’s newsletters are opened by fans in Mexico, Brazil, Spain, France, Ireland, Denmark, Poland,
about maintaining a group that is active online, and as such, periodically sends out notifications reminding members that she “culls the herd” every six months to weed out those who are inactive—that is, those who do not log on. The website features discussions on currently running dramas (in Korea as well as the northeast), but has expanded to include other related topics, including conversations on Korean music, food, humor, and general Korean culture.

There are also threads on technical advice that, in addition to acclimating new members to the intricacies of the board, offer help in facilitating the viewing of K-dramas for international audiences here in the States (for example, tutorials on adding permanent subtitles, and how to burn video files). Many among the group came into Korean dramas by simply channel surfing, arriving at an episode one evening, lingering, and then finding themselves coming back the next day to seek out the program again. After this initial exposure, many went online for information on the program (including what exactly it was), as well as how to watch more. Because of the limited access to Korean dramas in the Philadelphia area, a core group of about fifty members banded together in the group’s early years to form a video lending library (Video Club) that pooled and shared DVDs, making it easier for group members to view more dramas.

Switzerland, the Netherlands, Hungary, Romania, Turkey, Iran, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia (email correspondence, 26 Jan 2011).

235 The original board crashed in 2012, and although the site was resuscitated, some old threads and content were unsalvageable; the rehabilitated version of the website is somewhat less visually appealing with an interface that is comparatively less user-friendly.

236 With well over 500 titles, the Video Library had an impressively wide inventory of Korean dramas, films, and OSTs, some of which were donated by organizations such as the KTO (Korea Tourism
Discussions about K-dramas on the board involve special terminology created by the site’s users; for example, members use the term “EMIL” to refer to an “evil mother-in-law” in K-drama, or “GPB” to refer to a “generic pretty boy,” one that often does not get the girl. There are also threads for topics such as the “DOM” (Drama of the Month), which hosts discussions about a selected drama over the course of its airing; discussants in this group are called “DOMmies” (Figure 4.1). The customized language stems from members’ specialized knowledge of K-drama; it is an aspect that binds the group as a community dedicated to the genre, fostering a communal sense of identity around their object of fandom.

Figure 4.1
Drama of the Month image (koreandramas.net)

The group’s passion for K-drama has not gone unnoticed; in addition to being picked up by local Korean media, the group was approached by KBS America (a subsidiary of KBS), when members were interviewed in a special that was aired in

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237 The list of “in-language” is somewhat extensive. “EMIL” is part of a longer list of abbreviated in-laws that includes FIL, MIL, SIL, and BIL. Another term, “CG,” for Chipmunk Girl/Guy is understood to mean a character who is obsessively in love with one of the leads and inclined to do reckless things, such as attempt suicide, to gain the attention of the one s/he longs for; the term originated from a discussion about a particular drama in 2005, and has gained currency among the group since then. Other abbreviations include title shortenings, for example, “WS” for Winter Sonata (from the thread “Abbreviations We Use,” started 14 Jan 2007 on the original board).
the spring of 2007. In early 2008, a crew from KBS attended a group meeting to feature the members in an episode of the TV show *VJ Teukgongdae* (“VJ On the Scene”), which aired in Korea. And in the fall of 2008, some of the group’s members were invited to sing at a special episode of the long-running Korean entertainment show *Jeonguk Norae Jarang* (“Nationwide Singing Showcase”), hosted by veteran Korean emcee Song Hae, which was filmed in New York for the *Chuseok* (harvest) holiday that year.

For mtlandis, the moderator of the website, the recognition is a welcome affirmation to her fanning activities, as she wants to be taken seriously as a “legitimate fan,” both to her own American friends and to Koreans abroad, and not as a “crazy, fly-by-night ajumma” mindlessly entertaining a passing fad. The Korean media’s recognition of a fan group like koreandramas.net is fueled by a fascination that American audiences would be so taken with Korean programs (and Koreana in general), even as it feeds into Korea’s own self image as a “global supplier” of popular culture with the rise of *hallyu*, especially as this fan group is based in the U.S. and not Asia (as has been more typical with the *hallyu* phenomenon).

When I came across koreandramas.net and learned about their various “accolades,” I was curious as to who these K-drama fans were, and what motivated them to gather around K-dramas as avidly as they did, especially as it occurred to me

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239 *VJ Teukgongdae* (“VJ [Video Journalist] On the Scene”) is an informational entertainment program that airs on KBS; the show covers various aspects of culture and society. Koreandramas.net was featured in an episode that aired in Korea on 23 May 2008.
240 Personal conversation, 9 Apr 2011. The Korean term *ajumma*, or “auntie,” is used to refer to an older or middle-aged woman, similar to the Japanese *obasan*. 
from browsing through board discussions that there were non-Koreans among the group. After my initial contact with the members through the forum, I discovered that they actually met in person, as a complementary “real life” extension to their communal excitement for K-dramas online. Participating in these gatherings has enriched my sense of the fandom surrounding Korean dramas in the U.S.

**From Online to Offline Community**

One of the fanning activities of koreandramas.net is the get-together, an event where members in the group meet to talk about and socialize around K-dramas. In short, it is a celebration of Korean TV dramas, a day filled with food, games, gifts, prizes, and crafts, as well as the revisiting and sharing of information on K-dramas. The get-togethers, held around the Philadelphia or southern New Jersey area, began in October 2005 as a semi-annual event; the group now gathers for a bigger meeting once a year. According to the website administrator who runs the event, logistics and preparations for the yearly get-together require about a week’s worth of work. RSVPs are taken through the board online, and participants are capped at approximately eighty people to ensure quality control and for other practical reasons, such as making sure that there is enough food as well as prizes (which are partially covered by an entrance fee). Fans are eager to share custom-made buttons, clips, and other artwork during the gathering; the group also often receives donations from organizations such as dramafever.com, one of the biggest K-drama streaming sites in North America, the Korea Tourism Organization, and KBS, as well as other companies that are related to
K-dramas in some way.\textsuperscript{241} The first get-together that I attended in the spring of 2011 included over ninety people, mostly from the area, although there were those from out of the region, such as one member who had driven all the way from Florida to attend.

In \textit{Balkan Fascination}, a study exploring the vibrant community of Balkan musical practices in America, ethnomusicologist Mirjana Lausevic begins by describing what turned out to be a memorable first night of research for her. A Balkan party in New York City was featuring bands playing Balkan music, and Lausevic relates how she found herself excitedly entering the scene that night—a crowded space bustling with festivity and catered with foods and pastries from back home, seemingly authentic and aromatic. Part of Lausevic’s excitement, she explains, had to do with the anticipation of meeting people from her homeland and the joyful prospect of being able to converse in Serbo-Croatian once again, a comfort that she hadn’t been able to enjoy for a long time during her studies in the States. As she began to meet the attendees, however, she realized that the group of Balkan music fans that had gathered was not at all what she had expected. Far from meeting people from Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, or Macedonia, she met those from Philly, Boston, and New York; second-generation Balkan immigrants were not to be found either, as questions such as “Where are your parents from?” (the natural follow-up to an initial “Where

\textsuperscript{241} For example, one get-together was attended by a representative of the Korean company Lock & Lock, which sells a particular type of food storage container very often seen in Korean TV dramas; that year, all participants were given a multi-pack set of Lock & Lock containers as a gift. Other donations to get-togethers have included a one-year subscription to paid, subtitled K-drama streaming sites (such as MVIBO.com). In the past, KBS has been known to send posters of dramas and other paraphernalia from currently running dramas as a gesture of support; for example, one year they sent iron-on cloth patches of the “Kirin” school uniform logo worn by the main cast of students in the drama \textit{Dream High} (KBS 2011).
are you from?”) soon revealed. Instead, that night she learned the term “WASP,” and thus was open a world of inquiry into the performance and consumption of Balkan music and dance by “Balkanites” far from the music’s land of origin (2007:3-13).

I walked into my first koreandramas.net get-together with a sense of wonder similar to the fascination that marked Mirjana Lausevic’s first Balkan party in New York. In truth, my surprise was probably less grand in comparison, since I was aware beforehand that the online forum consisted of non-Koreans. Yet even as I knew this, I expected to see at least some second-generation Koreans there, or some other Asians or Asian Americans, especially when I noted the familiar smell of “fancy Korean food” (different than everyday fare) wafting through the door with the right mix of hot pepper, garlic, and oil. I soon found out that the only Asians in the room were myself, the three family members I had enlisted to accompany me, a couple of representatives from the K-drama streaming site dramafever.com, and a representative from the KTO (Korea Tourism Organization)—that is, people who were there for other reasons, and not simply as members of the forum; other than this handful, there was one Korean adoptee among the group attending as a member among the body of non-Asian participants that day. This left me perhaps no less puzzled than Lausevic was at the non-Balkan “Balkanites” that she encountered in her opening anecdote. *Hallyu* was, after all, mostly an Asian phenomenon, wasn’t it? What were a bunch of non-Koreans, non-Asians who call themselves the “Korean Bunch” doing there, exactly, in the name of K-drama, and what was in K-drama for them? I learned from the site administrator shortly afterwards that the core online
group is, and always has been, non-Asian. The group is predominately female (approximately \( \frac{3}{4} \) of the group, according to the administrator), with a general age range of 30s to 50s.

The proceedings for the day were planned out in an orderly fashion. At check-in, participants received a small bag of sundry items, including Korean candies and cookies, post cards and stickers of various K-dramas, chopsticks, a chopstick training brace, a magnet, keychain, bookmark, and information on Korean establishments and events in the area. In the large reception hall, seating was assigned by table; longer tables against the walls held an array of gifts that included boxed DVD sets of K-dramas, OSTs, and clothing (t-shirts, socks) and other items that bore the design, logo, or picture of a K-drama.\(^{242}\) Before the highly anticipated lunch, catered by a Korean restaurant, members excitedly shared little Korean things among themselves; for example, one woman was giving out Korean “stick coffee” (tubes of 3-in-1 instant coffee mix)—a drink often seen in K-dramas. Others congregated in smaller groups to busily talk about what they were watching, how a drama was “so good,” “so funny,” or “sort of silly but still so addictive,” how they had just finished binge-watching, or marathoning, a series, or how certain actors had improved from their last dramas; at times they would talk about a drama and its characters as if they (their actions, choices, consequences) really existed outside the life of the drama, much in

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\(^{242}\) Get-togethers have been held at various venues, depending on availability and rental space. The group often looks for an open space where they can set up the required tables. For the 2011 get-together, the group rented the reception hall of a church. Other get-togethers have been held at restaurants.
the way that the sci-fi fans in Jenkins’ study blur boundaries between fact and fiction (1992:16-24).

The exchange of DVDs was also a common practice. At this get-together, one woman showed me a bag of DVDs that she brought to give to her “K-drama virgin” friend whom she had invited to the gathering. Indeed, as a sort of “flip side” to fans encountering strange reactions from non-K-drama watchers who think that the habit is strange or incomprehensible, K-drama fans find themselves becoming agents of K-drama, “recruiting” others when possible; often this starts with giving DVDs to try as a sample, or watching together with a “newbie” friend during their first exposure to K-drama, so that they can answer questions, or otherwise comment and explain as they go along. The buzz in the room was accompanied by K-dramas continuously being projected onto one of the walls, and various drama OSTs being played in the background—visual and audio streams that filled the space for most of the event, except during games and announcements.

The games after lunch included several rounds of “K-drama Bingo” (Figure 4.2), as well as “Name that Drama” in two versions: one where participants had to guess the drama solely by listening to a brief excerpt from its OST, and another where participants had to guess the drama by a short video clip projected without sound. Both versions of the game were impressively difficult, but what was more surprising was the speed (and rate of success) with which excerpts were identified, for both visual and audio clips. Another game involved several speed rounds of listening to

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243 Games have varied over the years; when the group was smaller, I was told that they used to hold rounds of “K-drama Jeopardy!”
short clips of K-pop songs, where members were supposed to write down the title and artist, much like a listening exam that is commonly administered in music classes. These games were a testament to the passion and energy that these fans had for K-dramas and K-pop.

As I witnessed their intimate knowledge of dramas, soundtracks, K-pop songs, and trivia, I experienced a peculiar mix of disbelief and mild shame, not because I identify as Korean American and thus “should know” more about Korean pop culture than non-Koreans, but because I had a self-professed interest in the culture of hallyu, including its content, and considered myself to be reasonably knowledgeable and fairly well informed about the current K-drama and K-pop scenes; compared to these fans, my K-drama and K-pop knowledge seemed to have lots of holes. With prizes at stake, the games were competitive, but mostly they fostered a friendly atmosphere that added to the overall feeling of community that the gathering was ultimately meant to provide.

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Figure 4.2 Koreandramas.net Get-Together Bingo Card
The activities that take place, and the items that circulate, at these meetings may not necessarily be “important” in and of themselves, but they enable the building of fans as a community (Jenkins 1992:53). In a big way, the meeting is a support group where fans feel comfortable obliging their fannish tendencies in solidarity with likeminded others—people who “know what you’re talking about”—without being the potential target of a gaze that views such behavior as abnormal. For PM, an immunology supervisor and member of the group, entering the world of K-dramas was a lonely endeavor: “When I first started watching Korean dramas, my friends thought I had lost it. It was great to find people who understand me and enjoy what I do.” PM’s interest in K-dramas has taken her to South Korea, where she has gone on the Winter Sonata tour, and visited other drama-related sites such as the Dae Jang Geum theme park and KBS studios. Her comments are echoed by a fellow forum member who drove up to the get-together from central Florida:

…it’s such a pleasure being with other people who enjoy what I enjoy, without having to ~ EXPLAIN ~ how good Korean TV really is… because we already know it, and can have face-to-face discussions about recent shows, plotlines, favorite actors/actresses, etc. without “the electronic wall” of computers getting in our way.

That’s one of the reasons [the moderator] has to practically yell over the talking that never stops. We all have so much to say to each other.

The trip up to New Jersey was rather expensive, (thanks to the price of gas) but I don’t waste my money on things that aren’t important to me.

244 Email correspondence, 6 May 2011.
245 GF, email correspondence, 4 May 2011.
The yearly get-together also turns out to be a place for new friendships, as discussions about K-drama inevitably turn into more personal conversations that veer away from the common interest that initially brought members together. As DH writes, “The games are fun and everyone seems to love all the prizes, but I mostly like to see people who have become new friends. One woman and I have become like family over the years, so it has been very meaningful.”

According to group member CB, K-dramas are acting as an institution that forms bonds, something that is becoming increasingly rare in our atomistic culture: “Society is so fragmented. In today’s world, it’s hard to make personal connections anymore. K-dramas are filling a need. […] It’s like finding a long lost cousin you never knew you had.”

Viewers like JC, a woman in her mid-thirties, notes the diversity that the get-togethers are slowly beginning to reflect; she has attended the get-togethers since the very first one, missing only one over the years. Although she enjoys the games and the energy of the get-togethers, as a “K-culture” enthusiast, she appreciates how the gathering is growing to show that more people of different races are becoming aware of these dramas and getting into Korean culture.

Her observations are noted by KG, who also likes the increasing diversity of people in a group that has become a valuable community to her:

I enjoy the fact that when I arrive at the get-togethers I see all sorts of people there. Men and women, many different races and educational levels as well as lately different ages. The group has grown to reflect a wide variety of talent and interests. Sometimes when I talk on the web site I can ask a question and it is amazing the

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246 Email correspondence, 4 May 2011.
247 Personal conversation, 9 Apr 2011.
248 Email correspondence, 4 May 2011.
response I get. Not just about K Dramas, I have heard opinions about how to accomplish a goal, what to do with my business. There was a retired army man that had so much knowledge and helped me when my nephew returned from Afghanistan. It is a support system of strangers that have become friends, with one single thread... the K-Dramas.\footnote{Email correspondence, 4 May 2011. The “many different races” in KG’s comment refers to Caucasian Americans, African Americans, and very small percentage of Latino Americans.}

At these get-togethers, K-drama serves as a base that provides a “shared set of references for discussing common experiences and feelings with others with whom one may never have enjoyed face-to-face contact” (Jenkins 1992:81). The plotlines, characters, and fictional story worlds of K-drama are a catalyst for the forging of new relationships even as they are at the center of fan activity. It is clear that the group offers community to K-drama fans. But what makes these fans come to K-drama in the first place?

**Why We Watch: K-dramas as Window and Mirror**

The path to becoming a K-drama fan may be slightly different for each viewer. Still, there are certain reasons that members seem to have in common. Comments posted to a “Why We Watch” thread offer a sense of why some members initially turned to K-dramas; for many in the group, K-dramas are an alternative to the often immodest, risqué, or violent nature of programming found on American TV, as described in the following posts.\footnote{The thread, started on the original board, was lost when the website was revived in 2012.}

—I’m not captivated or inspired by much on American tv […] some of the themes in these [Korean] dramas stir things up for me and make me consider things about family and responsibility. My 11 year old son was watching Pure In Heart with me
one afternoon and saw the male lead teaching the girl how to ride a bike. They were flirting k-drama style, and I glanced at my son and he was smiling […] and it hit me that my two boys never see that kind of innocent fun and friendship between the sexes on American tv, it goes straight to the heavy hook-up. (posted by “seacorrie”)

—I don’t find American TV humor funny any more. It is too risqué or offensive, while Korean dramas remind me of the screwball comedies of the 30s thru 60s (Doris Day & Cary Grant). I loved the movies from that time and Kdramas allow me to have that in modern settings […] My son who just turned 13 also loves kdramas too […] He also likes the slow process of being together romantically unlike American [TV] which he really can’t relate to – he is a bit shy. (posted by “thirddyfrk”)

—I like having to agonize through half of the episodes and loads of eyesex before there’s a kiss. Korean television is just more romantic than American television! (posted by “Majicatt”)

—I’ve noticed less fetishizing of sexuality on korean shows. For instance some of these kdramas show not even a kiss but there is sooooooo much romance. Kshows are more into the cuteness factor rather than BLATANT sexuality. […] complete opposite to dumbed down western shows that automatically equate sex/physicality with romance. (posted by “evianceclear”)

—I have never liked American soaps, but K-dramas are different […] They are refreshingly free from the sex and violence that permeate American TV, and the aspects of people overcoming adversity (such as Gwon Obok in HITW and Jang Saebyuk in YAMD), the relationship between the haves and have-nots, the use of Shakespearean-like comic relief, and the whole filial piety thing are among the elements I find most interesting about K-dramas. (“Dae Han”)

—I like how korean dramas […] build tension and chemistry between characters without any physical touching or anything sexual. That’s good writing, where you can feel a character’s feeling for another without them having to get touchy feely in order for it to come across. (“lettle”)

These comments reveal K-dramas as an entertainment option that offers the journey of drama without the aspects of American TV that viewers find distasteful; they

251 Posted 13 Mar 2010.
254 Posted 6 Jun 2010.
255 Email correspondence, 28 Mar 2011. “HITW” refers to the drama Happiness in the Wind (Barambuleo Joecnal, KBS 2010), and “YAMD” refers to the drama You Are My Destiny (Neoneun Nae Unmyeong, KBS 2008-2009).
256 Email correspondence, 15 May 2011.
invoke feelings and emotions that are familiar, with a cultural backdrop that avoids physical excess and gratuitousness on screen. But K-dramas also serve as a platform that showcases other dimensions of culture, such as family dynamics, and how something like tradition (the “old”) plays off the new in a contemporary context; these are aspects that viewers can appreciate or identify with as part of their own culture:

Because my parents are Hispanic (from Puerto Rico) I have always watched Spanish programming to some extent. When I was younger, I did watch telenovelas but I got kind of tired of them. They got to be too much like American soap operas, which are all about meeting someone and jumping into bed. Part of what drew me into Korean dramas was the fact that it isn’t about that. This actually allows for the development of the relationship […] you actually see the characters’ relationship growing and falling in love and when they first hold hands, you smile and when they have that first kiss, it’s like YES!! :)

Another thing that drew me to the Korean Dramas is the family dynamic. In American culture, your kid turns 18 and you are booting them out the door… in Hispanic cultures your kids live with you till they get married and sometimes even after… this is a similarity that I could clearly relate to in Korean Dramas/culture.

In fact, members’ enthusiasm for K-dramas has in many cases led them to investigate various aspects of Korean culture; in effect, K-dramas—and the behaviors, gestures, and cultural codes they represent—have served as an entryway into Korean culture. Marion Schulze has suggested that international K-drama fans do not simply receive K-dramas as taken-for-granted transmitters of Korean culture or society, but that these dramas serve as “screens” onto which certain ideas about

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257 The “slow” nature of romance in K-dramas is something that fans often make fun of. A regular K-drama watcher once explained to me how the development of the main love line was so slow in a particular daily she was watching, that during one episode, she found herself goading the characters on as she yelled at the screen, “Come on! Hold her hand already!”

258 MA, email correspondence, 4 May 2011.
culture (Korean and their own) are projected (Schulze 2013). Fans do not accept “Korean culture” as such, *a priori*; rather, Schulze states that the idea of the “Korean” is constructed through a process of negotiation and collective activity that involves cultural “experts” who are able to mediate and interpret, even as they knowingly talk in terms of fictional worlds (“K-Dramaland” as opposed to “real Korean culture”). Thus, she warns against easy assumptions that K-drama watchers wholly equate Korean dramas with Korean culture. Her call for caution in making such conclusive statements is understandable, even admirable in the way that it treats fans as well as the way it regards “culture” (as something ongoing and continuous, not bounded or homogenous). Yet Korean TV dramas, although they may not be accurate, empirical reflections of “Korean culture” in the sense that the stories may not parallel real lives in current South Korea, are still *from* South Korea; they emerge from within Korea and as such present narratives, however dramatized, that are carriers of certain ways of thinking and living that are meant to speak to a domestic population among whom they would have currency. In this sense, despite Schulze’s words of caution, they can indeed be seen as texts that are “rooted” in Korean culture and thus provide certain insights into a particular way of life.

What is of significance is that for many members of koreandramas.net, this curiosity about culture as seen in Korean dramas has translated into an active interest in “real Korean culture.” Whether members were drawn in because of storylines, characters, emotional pull, or overall production value, they, perhaps naturally, developed an accompanying curiosity about the culture that these dramas represent.
Many in the group profess to having had no knowledge about South Korea before being exposed to K-dramas. Several members told me that they “didn’t think about Korea before,” that it was “just another Asian country,” or that they “didn’t know anything about it except for the war.” One very ardent member puts it more directly:

Before Kdramas, all I knew about Korea was MASH […]. They [the dramas] have certainly projected Korea in a much more positive light. Let’s face it, for most of the Western World there is little difference between North and South Korea… Kdramas have opened up a whole new world.259

K-dramas have offered glimpses into the lifestyles of a country that was once a non-entity; some even said that they “can tell the difference between Asian cultures now.” These dramas have made Korea more than just a name to people who have become fans; they have made viewers curious about the country and have planted a desire to learn more about its culture. Some, like LK, say that K-dramas have stirred her to become so interested in Korea that she now reads every book that she can find on Korean history.260 The effect has been similar for JL, who says that she was not aware of Korean culture prior to her introduction to K-dramas, but that “now Korea/Korean culture is a constant awareness,”261 and AML, who “never gave much thought to Korea” but is now learning more about the country with heightened interest.262 Others now read Korean news online and consciously research Korean culture,263 or have

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259 TL, email correspondence, 6 May 2011.
260 Survey response, 30 Apr 2011.
261 Survey response, 30 Apr 2011.
262 Survey response, 30 Apr 2011.
263 SDL, survey response, 30 Apr 2011.
been inspired to go further and seek out, more broadly, Asian culture and history, as has been the case with “Changgunesse”:

I found Korean drama on a cable TV station when I moved to a new location in Virginia... it was Dae Jo Young [KBS 2006-2007] and was I ever puzzled at first about what country these people represented. I was totally ignorant about Korea, its history, its modern development. K-drama has given me a lot of pleasure & food for thought. It’s also led me to research Asian history.  

Viewers may not take what they see in K-dramas as face-value equivalents of Korean culture—that is, as Korean culture—any more, probably, than watchers of soap opera in the States regard their exaggerated scenarios as anything more than distorted or overdone depictions of American life. K-dramas have, however, served as a springboard into Korean culture as they have aroused interest, and at the least, brought about cultural awareness to these non-Korean audiences; they have put Korea “on the map” for more than a few viewers in this forum.

In a sense, K-dramas can be seen as a “window” into Korea, as they display another culture, another world, with situations that happen to another people. With both identifiable and unfamiliar elements, K-dramas work a balance of “different but alike” for many non-Korean viewers, and this is an aspect that engages them. As laid out above, K-dramas have introduced a new world to many who are now fans. Cultural aspects that may seem foreign in K-dramas are in time, usually, properly understood in cultural context. “Nanzarpoet” explains how she came to learn that sleeping on the floor in Korea was not an indicator of poverty:

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\[264\] Email correspondence, 7 Feb 2011.
My first drama was “Yellow Handkerchief.” It played on a UHF station in my area (WYBE) and it didn’t even come in that well. I think my husband started watching first, but before long we were both hooked. […]

At first the customs were all so strange. I remember thinking the people must be very poor since they don’t even have beds! It took a few years to understand how the people there lived.  

From minor aspects to sleeping on the floor, to more consequential acts that touch on issues such as piety or the relational dynamics and responsibilities of family, Korean dramas are, as a representative from the KTO (Korea Tourism Organization) put it, “the fastest way to learn about Korean culture and Korean people.”

Certainly, some non-Korean K-drama watchers are initially allured by the novelty of “exotic costumes,” “gorgeous outfits,” or other visually appealing images that signify a culture of difference, such as “ponytails, topknots, flaming arrows, and warriors with kick-a$$ martial arts skills” (mostly in the sageuks, or historical dramas). Such aspects infuse K-dramas with a “cultural odor” that makes them palatable to audiences who seek new worlds—settings and locations different than their own. “Cultural odorlessness” is an idea that Japanese media scholar Koichi Iwabuchi has used to explain the success of Japanese cultural exports. Simply put, a product is “culturally odorless” when it does not bear traces of its producing country; this in turn essentially allows for easy adoption into new cultures. For example, Japanese products, such as the “three C’s” of the Japanese culture industries—

\[265\] Email correspondence, 16 Mar 2011.  
\[266\] Personal conversation, 30 Apr 2011.  
\[267\] Posted by “mugwump” on the “Why We Watch” thread on koreandramas.net, 16 Mar 2010 (see footnote no. 250).
consumer technologies (such as karaoke and the Walkman), computer games, and
cartoons (including comics and characters)—do not carry distinct cultural
characteristics; with virtually no visible markers to suggest a particular race or
ethnicity, they are potentially more appealing to a wide range of audiences across the
globe.\footnote{268}

Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green have given some perspective to
this theory, arguing that for some transnational anime fans, the opposite tendency is
actually at work: “often, the fetishization of cultural differences acts as a means of
signaling the fans’ own “distinctiveness” from the culture around them. These anime
fans seek out Japanese “soft cultural goods” because they are Japanese, not despite
their Japaneseness” (2013:275). The “search for cultural difference” can be seen as
symptomatic of a desire to escape the parochialism of one’s own culture, and the
embracing of materials from elsewhere can be seen as a strategy that addresses this.
This is, to a certain degree, what motivates American fans of anime, manga, or
something like Bollywood, and what presumably motivates, at least in part, Chinese
fans of a show like\emph{Prison Break}, according to Jenkins, Ford, and Green. These
authors suggest that contents that have a bit of “cultural odor” are very likely to
circulate outside their home cultures as well.

Indeed, Korean dramas seem to be gaining attention because they do have a
certain “cultural odor,” or “fragrance,” whether it be in immediate aspects such as the
visually attractive costumes and sets of the historical dramas, or in the cultural

\footnote{268}{See Iwabuchi 1995, 1998, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, for example.}
gestures and behaviors that inform the narratives. For a fan like SDL, K-dramas are “a way for me to journey to other places and experience snippets of a different world. […] I am fascinated by how various cultures would view similar situations.”

Similarly, “lanelhs” watches K-dramas “because it makes me understand other cultures more […] For monetary reasons, I can’t travel to foreign destinations, but I can through the dramas.”

The metaphor of K-dramas being a “window” into culture was suggested to me by an articulate K-drama watcher who explained that for her, K-dramas were meaningful because of the way they were different yet relevant:

…my explanation as to why k-drama is so good is that it does a good job of being a “window” and a “mirror.” I first start a drama and think that it is about others, a window to another world or life or situation. But if it stays too foreign for too long, we lose interest. So we begin watching because it is a window, and this satisfies our “voyeuristic” tendencies. But we keep watching because it is also a mirror on/of our own lives. We connect to the people, emotions, situations and plights; we feel for them and want to root them on.

So a good drama has to have both the aspects of window and mirror. A good balance of “strangeness” and “familiarity.”

As the viewer points out, K-dramas are able to draw foreign audiences because there are also elements with which these audiences can identify; these dramas may be novel but they also importantly invoke the familiar. The sense of familiarity for non-Korean viewers can come from practical, physical settings, or ideas like “the city,” for instance. Many fans for whom K-drama was the first exposure to Korea told me that

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269 SDL, email correspondence, 5 May 2011.
270 Posted on the “Why We Watch” thread on koreandramas.net, 15 May 2010 (see footnote no. 250).
271 EEK, email correspondence, 9 Feb 2011.
they “didn’t know that Korea was so modern,” or that they were “surprised at how westernized the country is,” or that “[o]ther than a language barrier, I would think I was in any big American city,” seemingly mundane observations that nevertheless served as a facet of the dramas that they could relate to. The composition and rhythm of a modern metropolis can be seen as a common denominator that eases acceptance or affiliation among different cultures. Sociologist and media culture specialist Beng Huat Chua sees this as an aspect that has allowed products like culture-specific dramas and films to circulate inter-regionally in East Asia:

The emphasis of the urban facilitates culture-border crossing; in contrast to the idea of ‘tradition’ that specifies ‘uniqueness’ and ‘boundedness’ of a culture, the urban increasingly lacks specificity, it is ‘anywhere’, ‘anyplace’ and ‘anyone’, the urban thus passes through cultural boundaries thorough its insistence on ‘sameness.’ (Chua 2004:216)

As Chua explains, dramas that depict middle-class, urban consumer lifestyles suppress nationality and foster audience identification. In the East Asian context, this feeds into an idea of “Asian-ness” that potentially becomes part of a contemporary “East Asian identity” forged through popular culture (ibid.:215-18). Chua is quick to note that among East Asian audiences, Asian bodies on screen may seem “interchangeable” to a certain extent because of some similarities in physical features, despite real differences in geography, culture, or economy. Still, he sees the urban landscape (banks, hotels, shopping malls, restaurants, modern buildings) and the environment it implies as a significant factor in easing the flow of cultural texts.

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274 JH, survey response, 30 Apr 2011.
outside national boundaries. On a surface level, the setting of the modern city is something that can be seen as having facilitated K-dramas outside Asia as well, as images of office buildings and hotels serve as familiar visual anchors in a culturally unfamiliar drama.

Yet perhaps more than such visual details, it is the emotion that is generated from the situational and relational architecture of and between drama characters that is a more significantly relatable dimension, as the following viewers relay:

—I got interested in Kdrama from seeing “My Sweetheart, My Darling” on cable, and loving the emotional connection that the kdrama storylines create between the characters and the audience. I feel very moved when I watch the dramas. The emotions are pure—love, grief, happiness, anger—I was tired of US tv’s blatant sexuality, bad language and extreme violence. I find when I watch the dramas I’m drawn in emotionally, I really care about the characters [...] I find myself moved by simple gestures—holding a hand, cooking a meal, caring for someone—again basic things that draw an emotional connection. My 20 yr old daughter will watch with me too… the dramas’ appeal goes beyond the ahjumma bracket, like me, to people her age too.275

—...the nature of the characters and the plots [of K-dramas] makes me become emotional invested [...] protagonists embody virtues, while antagonists embody non-virtues. [...] Ha Jiwon’s character (in Secret Garden) was tough but sensitive and she fought to protect the integrity of her father and her poor self. How can anybody not admire people like that? [...] The characters are people that I, as the average person could relate to [...] This is not possible with many American shows like 24. What the heck do I know about counter-terrorism? [...] Shows like 24 entertain the viewer, Korean dramas engage the viewer. It’s a much deeper connection.276

—[K-dramas] are a break from American culture. I love the innocence of the romantic comedies, or the magic k-dramas portray that seems like it actually exists because the situation seems so real. The Jersey Shore or CSI is really something I can’t take too much of.277

275 “mjholland,” email correspondence, 7 Feb 2011. The Korean term “ajumma” refers to a middle-aged woman (see footnote no. 240).
276 AH, email correspondence, 30 Jan 2011.
277 SL, email correspondence, 27 Jan 2011.
While all of these comments touch on the issue of relatability through indirect comparison to American TV, the second and third suggest that in drawing on emotions that feel real, K-dramas offer something that American series do not seem to particularly make room for, despite storylines and scenarios that are sharp and smart. As SHJ, a non-Korean fan from koreandramas.net sees it,

…there seems to be a moral code and emotional tone… that is unique to K-dramas. There is some indescribable aspect to this that may be a hidden reason for K-dramas’ worldwide appeal and following. American TV series certainly lack this attribute, emphasizing instead the logic or “reason” for characters’ behavior…

Surely it would be a misrepresentation to say that American TV dramas depict characters that have little emotional dimension to them; such a statement would be inaccurate at best. Yet as that above viewers suggest, it is the alluring complexities of cutting-edge plots, intricate or heart-pumping action, or a fascinating premise, that seem to be the primary appeal in much of prime-time American TV fiction—aspects that seemingly take precedence over the dynamics and nuances of person-to-person relationships that are at the forefront of K-drama.

Spending time with a Korean TV drama series from beginning to end opens up a world that shows another culture presented as everyday life, inviting connection on a visceral level, notwithstanding cultural difference. One fan feels that “[a]fter a while the characters feel like your own friends and family,” while another (non-

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278 SHJ, email correspondence, 24 Feb 2011.
279 Posted by “prettypat” on the “Why We Watch” thread on koreandramas.net, 12 May 2010 (see footnote no. 250).
Korean fan) feels that the characters and emotions are so comfortably familiar, she is optimistic that she would feel right at home in Korea:

My biggest dream is to actually get to Korea some day. I really think I would feel quite comfortable and at home there, despite not being fluent in the language. Just being there will feel like some kind of homecoming, I am sure. Lol! Is that strange?!\textsuperscript{280}

Viewers participate in K-dramas’ fictional worlds through emotion—something that holds a central place in virtually all K-dramas; these emotions are “real” and relevant because they are true to the viewers’ personal lives. This “emotional realism” (Ang 1985:41-50) is what can be seen as the “mirror” in K-drama. The emotional realism that emerges in fictional texts like the K-drama turns them into an interpretative process in which viewers take part on an immediate level, drawing upon their own personal backgrounds, as they make meaning of its narratives (Jenkins 1992:107).

\textit{The OST as Soundtrack to Emotion}

Most K-drama viewers are very aware of a drama’s songs; indeed the music is a part of the drama that many fans enjoy, and can “keep,” by getting the songs as they are released during or after a drama’s run. As described by the fan below, music soundtracks of K-dramas bear an intimate relation to the emotions that are felt while consuming the stories:

It seems that in k-dramas, they very carefully craft the songs, whether instrumental or with vocals, to really dovetail with an element of the story or a character or an emotion – so it becomes, in its own way almost as important as the actors in moving

\textsuperscript{280} CAK, email correspondence, 3 May 2011.
the story forward and bringing the audience into the emotions and happenings on
screen.

I really think that the way they place the music and use it to stir up emotions is the
reason kdrama moves me to tears the way no other type of tv entertainment ever
does. You see an emotionally moving scene and the “signature music” for those
characters or that emotion is playing and it sticks with you… then the next time you
hear it, it moves you to that same level of emotion even before the actors have a
chance to do it. So when they add to it by actually doing their scene, you are already
emotionally primed, it tips the bucket… LOL! […] Nothing and I mean NOTHING
has ever had me weeping the way kdrama manages to. 281

In essence, OSTs become a “sonic emotional capsule” that bears the various feelings
of a drama as experienced by the viewer, and this is, at least in part, what makes K-
drama OSTs a popular item for fans. Unlike followers of American TV shows,
viewers of K-drama will often seek out the OST of a series that they like, purchasing
them from iTunes or other online sites (such as yesasia.com), or locating them on
various streaming sites and video platforms. 282

Objectively speaking, the music that comprises contemporary K-drama
soundtracks—typically a handful of pop songs that include ballads—are not
particularly sophisticated; that is, it would be difficult to characterize them as “high
quality” in a strictly musical sense. Songs are overwhelmingly similar from one OST
to another, for instance in harmonic pattern, motivic development (or lack thereof),
texture, and even range, as well as color, despite the timbral variances of different
singers; in short, they bear the identifiable traits of a genre in their moderate to slow,
melodic expressions of heartache and longing. Yet viewers often talk about how a

281 CAK, email correspondence, 9 Feb 2011.
282 According to the moderator of koreandramas.net, when the group’s Video Lending Library was in
active operation, one of the most requested items was the OST for a particular drama (email
correspondence, 5 May 2011; see footnote 236).
particular drama’s OST was the “best music ever” or the “best soundtrack ever”—assessments that may seem puzzling, given that pop ballads more or less come from the same musical fabric. One K-drama fan earnestly explained to me how he would play a particular song from the Bad Couple OST (SBS 2007) because it was “the most moving song” he had ever heard in a K-drama.283 There is nothing particularly special about the music in the Bad Couple OST; like many a K-drama OST, the Bad Couple soundtrack contains pop songs that probably sound very common to the average listener. Fans seem to have similar reactions to drama OSTs; for example, another K-drama viewer relates her experience with drama music:

WINTER SONATA was the first drama I bought. I watched it straight thru in one day/evening/night -- I never left my sofa except to get more tissues to cry and to get a drink to keep me from passing out! I was hooked […] the music was as important a character as any others in that show -- it’s the most gorgeous music ever. I still to this day, play the music in my car, and it is the ring tone on my cell phone!284

OSTs invariably become the “best ever” music because of the degree of emotion that gets channeled into a drama’s songs—the emotional connotations and memories that are subjectively ascribed to them. Early on in the forming of this dissertation topic, there was an occasion where I asked my sister to take a listen to the OST to Full House (KBS 2004), a light-hearted sixteen-episode drama that I had come across and enjoyed and whose music I had grown accustomed to, even fond of, over its sixteen episodes. I shared the OST— which consisted of ballads and other pop songs—with her because I enjoyed the music, but I was also curious to see what

284 KD, email correspondence, 13 Feb 2011.
she would make of it, not having seen the drama. After a brief but seemingly fair trial listen, my sister returned the CD to me accompanied by a lukewarm appraisal; to her, it was mediocre-sounding music, indistinct, with nothing special about it. My sister happened to end up watching all of *Full House* sometime after this, and as she finished up the series, she asked me where my OST for it was; it turned out she really liked the music and wanted to burn a copy for herself. A similar story was related to me by a K-drama fan who explains: “I heard the samsoon theme before watching the show and thought, ‘what the heck?’ but after watching the show, it really became music to my ears :).”  

The OST is a layer of K-drama that increases audience identification and involvement, leading viewers to understand characters and relationships aurally as well as visually. As Korean American fan YJH relates:

> If there’s a sad scene and it comes with a good (sad) song, it really emphasizes the sadness for me. That strong emotion of sadness psychologically connects me to the characters in the drama and I like the drama much more because of it. [...] You connect to people because you feel for them, no? Maybe that’s what K-drama is all about [...] I think strong emotional ties is what keeps the audience coming back!

The connection that a viewer feels with a drama’s characters, and their interpersonal relationships, often occurs through songs that function to underscore particular moments—songs which then become invested with the viewer’s own emotion, as is the case with the above viewer. To a large extent, it is this emotional participation

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285 EEK, email correspondence, 9 Feb 2011; the reference is to *My Name is Kim Sam Soon* (MBC), one of the most popular dramas of 2005.
286 Email correspondence, 8 Feb 2011.
that engages the viewer in K-drama, especially when the music itself does the storytelling:

I do get misty-eyed from dramas sometimes. I blame the music! Whether it is a moment where a character realizes the sacrifices of another for their sake, a sweet moment that can hardly be found in real romance, a heroic speech from a teacher, a sorrowful departure of someone they care for, etc. […] The characters do not need to say a thing, through the music the viewer knows EXACTLY what they are thinking/feeling.

I download the [OST] songs as they come out. I can’t even wait till the whole OST comes out.287

Although characters may not “say a thing,” as the above viewer says, the scene in question still takes on meaning through audience involvement—through an emotional “filling in” that the viewer inevitably does in the absence of dialogue or even action. As Ien Ang has noted in her famous study on audiences of Dallas, most viewers are not duped or deterred by unreal depictions in soap opera because the emotions involved in watching are still real (1985). To the viewer above, the moving scene in a drama may “hardly be found in real romance,” as he notes, but the emotion that fills out the scene is something that he can relate to, and it is this real emotion that infuses the song that a scene comes with. This is why OSTs tend to take on special meaning—they become a soundtrack to the viewer’s individual emotions.

The process of OSTs turning into a soundtrack of personal emotions is also related to the repetition of songs over the course of a drama, as TS, a K-drama fan and university student describes:

Music in the dramas, to me, is so important. […] the songs help to maintain my attention and interest… especially with hour-long episodes. […] Hear it the first time, it is new and sounds nice. Hear it again, it is familiar and I can attach an emotion or meaning to it.288

The last part of TS’s comment is telling. OST songs are not particularly special in and of themselves; rather it is the attaching of certain emotions to these songs, especially as they recur throughout a drama series, that is a key part of making an OST “the best music ever.” These songs accrue significance as they are played over a drama’s many episodes (in fragments, in entirety, in different styles, versions, and instruments), and speak to the particular feelings of the viewer that has journeyed with them, creating a sense of jeong (affectionate attachment) for the music and for the drama. Repetition of songs also creates a comfortable familiarity that viewers come to enjoy, as “jmceschan” says, “If it’s a repeating piece, I know what’s coming and I love it!”289

Typically, K-drama audiences acquire OSTs so that they can relive or revisit the feelings of a particular drama that they liked. OSTs can be a repository of emotional memories from a drama; as one OST collector and enthusiast puts it, “Whenever I hear those songs, I can readily recall my emotions and theirs [the characters’].”290 Viewers commonly want a drama’s songs because of the meanings that they have acquired. Buying an OST is a simple way for the K-drama fan to incorporate their favorite dramas in everyday real life, as EEK writes:

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288 Email correspondence, 21 Mar 2011.  
289 Email correspondence, 17 Apr 2011.  
290 TL, email correspondence, 28 Jan 2011.
I get an OST because I want to sustain the good experience of the drama even in the car or in my room when the show is not on. I buy the cd’s and dvd’s because I want to own a piece of the product and experience, so I can “recreate” it again [...] OSTs may not be a real soundtrack to a fan’s life, but they become a soundtrack of emotion that pervades a fan’s everyday—in the car, on the computer, through ringtones, and on tablets and other smart devices. They allow K-drama viewers to extend a favorite drama outside its fictional world as they interweave its songs into their real lives.

Most fans listen to the OST of a favorite drama during day-to-day activities; in this way, it becomes part of daily life. The practice of listening may seem like a passive activity, especially in comparison to the more proactive, creative (and more respected) process of “making” music, either by composing or performing; it is thus relegated, sometimes indirectly, as being “less important,” especially in fields of academic study that are more concerned with the “intrinsic value” of a musical text, or the “musical object itself,” an approach that has traditionally informed disciplines such as musicology and music theory. Pop music scholars and music sociologists have tried to remedy this by focusing attention to the receiving end, that is, how music is actually experienced by people. Indeed for many citizens of the modern world, engaging in music rarely consists of actual performance or acts of brilliant original creation, or even partaking in the structured, ritual activity of concert attendance at a designated venue. Instead, “taking part” in music consists of an interaction with it, i.e. listening to it, in commonplace and ordinary contexts. As pop

291 Email correspondence, 9 Feb 2011.
music scholar Daniel Cavicchi points out, for millions of people in the Western world, “music is experienced only in everyday life, only as a brief, fleeting part of life’s mundane moments,” such as commuting to work, going shopping, doing chores, playing with children, etc. (Cavicchi 2002:2, italics in original).

Music sociologist Tia DeNora has made a case for such mundane musical experiences, arguing that they allow individuals to demonstrate a certain “agentive power” in constructing the self. Selecting, playing, and listening to music, whether at a karaoke bar or while taking a bath, is an important part of who we are and how we shape, manage, and give meaning to ourselves. In this sense, music is a “technology of identity” (2000:xii), a way through which a person can “spin the tale” of self, for self and others, in the process of identity work in daily life (ibid.:68-74). Music is a resource to which people turn as they organize themselves as “aesthetic agents, as feeling, thinking, and acting beings in their day-to-day lives” (ibid.:62).

K-drama fans who buy OSTs play them as an accompaniment to daily settings; for example, one social service worker has her favorite K-drama OSTs playing on her computer all day at work (at a low volume). Another fan tends to listen to them at night with a cup of tea and her cat (which, according to her, recognizes the music as well) to relax, as she winds down for the day. Others turn on OSTs while doing “busy work” at home. Fans establish a relationship to OST music through the dramas that are their original context, and fondness for a drama and its characters is organically related to a favorable feeling toward the OST; letting its music come to life on the platform of the real everyday is a way of extending positive engagement
with it. As the intimate feelings, emotions, and memories that the music recreates gets incorporated into “vernacular realities” (Cavicchi 2002:10), they become a part of real life; these quotidian audio practices thread K-dramas into the process of identity-making that constitute daily life for fans.

**Post-text Activities**

Aside from downloading, buying, burning, and replaying OSTs and DVDs, K-drama fans are known to make other common decisions motivated by K-drama in their everyday lives. Such “post-text cultural practices,” as Chua and Iwabuchi refer to them in describing the response of Japanese audiences to Korean dramas (particularly *Winter Sonata*), have been a visible part of the *hallyu* phenomenon, especially in Asia (2008:9). The most common things that non-Korean K-drama fans are inspired to do include venturing into Korean food, shopping at the Korean grocery, and making efforts to learn the Korean language. These are small ways through which they can participate in the larger Korean culture that is represented in K-dramas. Some fans have begun to incorporate Korean words in their vocabulary. For example, one fan told me that her granddaughter now calls her *halmeoni* (Korean for “grandmother”); another woman says that some of her fellow non-Korean friends who are also K-drama fans have begun using the term *eonni* (the title that a younger

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292 These were the most common responses that I received to the question “What kind of Korean activities, if any, do you engage in as a result of your K-drama watching?” on a survey distributed at the koreandramas.net get-together, 30 Apr 2011. For many of these fans, eating Korean food has gone beyond a simple tasting or “trying,” to become a more deliberate and regular affair, as has been the case with visiting the local Korean market.
sister uses to call her older sister) when referring to each other—both terms are very commonly heard in Korean drama dialogue.  

Practical decisions also include purchasing satellite TV (based solely on the availability of Korean programming), as several fans from koreandramas.net have done. Some have purchased region-free DVD players, and others have cut their cable services altogether because they realized that they were no longer watching American TV (watching only K-dramas through DVD and online sites). On the creative side, one fan, “Nanzarpoet,” has written several poems about K-drama stories, including a few on her favorite historical, The Iron Empress (Cheonchu Taehu, KBS 2009). “Lyricallor,” a writer of children’s books, decided to include a Korean character in one of her children’s stories as a result of her enchantment with K-drama; these gestures are ways that K-drama fans continue their relationships with drama texts in the real world, and how the dramas become interwoven into their culture of daily life.

Perhaps the most notable thing that fans have been inspired to do “post-text” is actually travel to South Korea to see the locations and sites of their favorite dramas. In contrast to avid fandoms that have formed around fictions such as Star Trek and Star Wars, fans of K-drama inevitably develop a desire to travel to Korea to

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293 Putting the Korean language to use also happens in other ways. For example, the regular organizer for the yearly koreandramas.net gatherings was unable to take on the responsibility for the 2015 get-together due to personal reasons. On a thread announcing that someone had stepped in and that the get-together would be on, the new organizer posted: “To quote just about every K-Drama character ‘I am lacking, please take care of me!’” (posted by “chinamom,” 22 Feb 2015). The Korean expression that she invokes, “jal butakdeuripnida,” often seen in subtitles translated (somewhat awkwardly) as “please take care of me,” is impressively appropriate here. In Korean, the phrase relays a polite modesty; it is something that a new person would use when introducing oneself to a new acquaintance or group, especially when an official relationship is being established, or when both parties set out on a venture together.

294 Email correspondence, 16 Mar 2011.

295 Email correspondence, 4 May 2011.
experience the country first hand; this has been reflected in the rise in drama-themed tour packages designed especially for the hallyu tourists that began flocking to the country since the early-mid 2000s. Part of this desire would seem to come from the fact that many K-dramas are rooted in everyday life and feature stories that unfold within this everyday context. While fans of Star Trek or Star Wars would have a hard time locating and visiting the real physical spaces of these fictions, for which fantasy makes up a big portion of its lure, fans of K-drama invariably end up wanting to eat at the real “tent bars” (pojangmacha) that populate the streets of Seoul, or walk along the stone wall of Deoksugung (Deoksu Palace), or sit by the Han River, or visit the dirt-covered schoolyard of a typical elementary school, or sit on one of the flexible swings at a local park, or walk up Seoul Tower to contribute their own “padlock of love”—these are all familiar scenes in K-drama, and accessible to anyone.

Fans are motivated by the meaningful, small gestures in K-drama that take place at various locations around the country, and they journey there to seek out those settings. Once there, fans absorb the scenery, perhaps eat the foods that characters were shown to be eating, walk the path that characters walked, and engage in other small, ritualistic acts as they recall and “recreate” their favorite dramas through individual affective memories. “Lettle,” a koreandramas.net member, who has traveled to South Korea following her passion for K-drama, explains how she enacted certain activities that she had seen in K-dramas; for lettle, the desire for these places even led her (almost) to go beyond some internal fears:

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296 Wanting to visit Korea was something that was indicated on a large number of the surveys that I administered at the koreandramas.net get-together.
We went on a boat cruise of the Han River (you know in dramas that’s the place people go to think, cry, get angry etc. I call it the River of Angst). I’m afraid of water but I wasn’t going to miss this. I stayed inside the whole time and didn’t really look out the windows. Lol. We went to Seoul Tower too (I’m afraid of heights). I didn’t go to the top, I was too afraid, and I really wanted to see the love locks, but [my friends] took pics so I did see them that way.²⁹⁷

Film scholar Youngmin Choe has suggested that emotion (“kamtong” [gamdong]) is a primary motivator for film-induced tourism, or “screen tourism.” Choe’s illuminations on the screen tourism phenomenon are instructive for the case of TV dramas, as K-dramas also deal in melodrama, a defining element in the films (and related tours) that she discusses. Choe says that screen tourists seek out certain locations because they want to re-experience a certain affect; thus she calls these places “affective sites”—they are “destinations of screen tourism induced by melodramas, in which tourists are moved by certain film scenes to travel to the sites in hopes of recapturing, through mimicry, the bodily emotional sensations prompted by the film” (2009:116).

At these affective sites, spectators can “view” a film or drama again, reconstructing narrative as they pass through and embody its cinematic space as laid out across the tourist grounds; the film acts as a sort of “emotional map,” says Choe, and the tourist’s interest here is not so much in where the film was made as much as it is in entering the world of the film itself. According to Choe, screen tourists do not necessarily seek authenticity, simulacra, or even proximity to celebrities. What they seek goes beyond the visual, beyond merely seeing the “content” of a certain place,

²⁹⁷ Email correspondence, 15 May 2011.
toward a more affective experience—the “intense sensation and emotions acted and impinged upon the body while viewing the film, which they hope to re-embodi by traversing the palpable space of film, spatially at the location” (ibid.:114).

Choe explains that affective sites tend to evoke affectation: “tourists mimic the movements in hopes of retrieving that body memory of embodied affect elicited during viewing” (ibid.:121). For example, on the tour designed around the melodramatic film April Snow (Oechul, Hur Jin-Ho 2005), tourists travel to the city of Samcheok in Gangwon Province, where they can “sleep in the same room, eat the same foods, sip coffee at the same table, and walk the same streets” that the main characters Insu and Seoyeong did. And on a tour for the film One Fine Spring Day (Bonnaleun Ganda, Hur Jin-Ho 2001), she describes how “visitors to the bamboo forest […] at the base of the mountain can go past the side of the elderly couple’s house to stand in the forest, just like the characters did” (ibid.). As Choe elucidates, screen tourism is not a passive response that extends the “gaze” of film, but is a participatory endeavor that “collaps[es] the distinctions between filmic gaze and tourist gaze, filmic experience and tourist experience” (ibid.:110). In a sense, the sites of these drama tours become a performance stage once again, this time for the spectator/tourist who can create their own personal and “authentic” experiences on them, a participatory effort that adds a unique dimension to their drama experience.

Reliving a drama through simulating scenes at an actual location has become part of an “extended K-drama experience” that is organically related to the rise of hallyu tourism. Regardless of how or to what degree K-dramas may idealize romance
or other relationships of love, between friends, family, classmates, colleagues, or coworkers, this idealized notion does not hinder K-drama fans from traveling to Korea to “see for themselves,” because these dramas become so personal to viewers; what is important is not whether such a place “really exists,” which might simply lead to frustration, but being able to embody certain spaces, as Choe suggests, as a matter of re-experiencing their favorite dramas. This is perhaps why fans who go on hallyu drama tours in Korea rarely come away feeling disappointed; satisfaction comes not from being entertained on a tour, or enlightened on how the technical mechanisms of a set gave a scene its magic. Their experiences are more subjective, not to be evaluated by any standard or straightforward metric.

During my visits to different drama locations in Korea, I witnessed fans repeating familiar gestures, activities, or parts of a drama at respective locations. Tourists would engage in such behavior with differing degrees of gravity, self-consciousness, and joy, but it was apparent that re-enacting a portion of the drama was something meaningful to them, whether it was trying on palace clothes at the hanbok kiosk in Dae Jang Geum park, or sitting to pose with their hands on the two mini year-round snowmen at the “first kiss” bench on Nami Island, one of the locations for Winter Sonata.298 These are ways that tourists “simultaneously produce and perform their own individualized texts” in relation to the filmic or dramatic text (Aden et al. 1995:377). Screen tourists of Winter Sonata can come into the space

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298 Sangkyung Kim has also discussed how screen tourist couples who make a pilgrimage to Nami Island make it a point to ride a bicycle together, down the tree-lined path on which Winter Sonata’s main characters did, as a ritual to their own love (2010).
where main characters Junsang and Yujin shared their first kiss, recalling it as if it was their own experience because of an attachment of personal emotion that has brought it to life for them. Physically engaging in this space can thus be very meaningful because it complements an emotional engagement; in a sense, drama-themed tours can feel like a “homecoming” of emotion for the viewer (Figures 4.3–4.7).

“Jmceschan,” another member of koreandramas.net who has traveled to South Korea, relates how a couple from Thailand with whom she traveled on the Winter Sonata tour, was very excited at being able to see certain places. The tour was the couple’s sole purpose for coming to Korea, and the woman was especially moved at certain points on the tour, so much so that she cried at some of the places. Jmceschan thinks that what makes fans want to seek out certain locations that they see in K-dramas has little to do with their intellect or sense of rationale, which are usually intact: “I think that no matter how educated, some people just love TV & expect that what they’re seeing is true – or just really want it to be…”

This feeling of “wanting it to be true” is connected to a close personal relation with drama texts on an emotional level, and this potential, or “hope,” for emotion is partially what impels screen tourists to pursue the sites of their favorite dramas with anticipatory excitement. Tourism to drama locations is a most effective (and affective) post-text practice that engages fans in their favorite dramas beyond an initial viewing experience.

299 Email correspondence, 11 May 2011.
Figure 4.3 Tree-lined path on Nami Island, one of the shooting locations for *Winter Sonata* (photo by author)

Figure 4.4 Scenic grounds on Nami Island (photo by author)

Figure 4.5 Photo of lake on Nami Island (by author)

Figure 4.6 Location of “First Kiss” on Nami Island (photo by author)
The fan practices outlined above have been part and parcel to the movement of hallyu; the active fans at the “receiving” end of K-dramas animate the hallyu flow, affecting Korea in ways that are indirect (as when fans learn Korean) and direct (as when fans travel to Korea to take part in drama-themed tours). For fans, the interest in K-drama is often tied to an emotional appeal that serves as a gateway to broader Korean culture, sparking a relationship with Korea, in big and small ways. The rich participatory culture of fandom is comprised of many dimensions and planes; as Henry Jenkins has pointed out, fans do not “simply consume preproduced stories”
(1992:45). Rather, they manufacture their own stories, write their own novels, poems, and literature, and create their own videos and performances as they celebrate those original fictions and make them part of everyday life. Jenkins quotes a fan writer who explains that

Trekfandom…. is friends and letters and crafts and fanzines and trivia and costumes and artwork and songs and buttons and film clips and conventions—something for everybody who has in common the inspiration of a television show which grew far beyond its TV and film incarnations to become a living part of world culture. (ibid.)

The fans introduced in this chapter reveal K-drama fandom as a similarly vibrant and variegated tableau of affairs. These fans are a rich component of hallyu that has led Korean drama beyond its narrative borders in the process of fans weaving them into their lives, fueling K-drama’s cross-cultural, global journeys along the way and strengthening its place in the vistas of global entertainment as it becomes a “living part of world culture.”

This chapter has offered a view of K-drama fandom through a sampling of fan activities that have surfaced alongside hallyu. For many of these fans, the entry into K-dramas was initiated by the dramas’ “innocent” or “non-offensive” codes of behavior, or a simple curiosity about a new culture, but it was often coupled with the stories’ strong emotional pull; that is, the draw of the K-drama lay in the dramas’ dual properties as “window” (to another culture) and “mirror” (of familiar emotion). Indeed K-drama’s penchant for sentimental tales may yet be its strength, consistently offering stories that handle and wield human relationships in ways that invest audiences and elicit emotional responses. As suggested by several fans above, the
emotional tone of K-drama is something that is less readily available in current American fare, which still easily leads in the global entertainment market, but often, and famously, with stories that offer high-octane action showcasing a prowess in special effects, or ingeniously woven narratives with brilliant plot maneuvering. In this sense, K-dramas may be filling a “gap” for audiences who seek more of an emotional involvement in their entertainment fictions. Emotions are a point of entry into K-drama for many fans, a means by which they can participate in the drama; and a drama’s OST plays a special role in this regard, serving as a channel of participation through which viewers can personalize the drama. As a result, OSTs are a popular piece of the K-drama package, consumed by fans in daily settings as an emotional vestige of the drama.

But while fans may come to K-drama because of an emotional connection, these fans often end up developing deeper relationships with Korean culture, invoking and consuming Korea-related things (as experienced through the dramas) when possible in everyday life, and sharing them at gatherings. Because of K-dramas, a greater amount of attention is being directed toward South Korea—its culture, history, as well as the ways of daily life there. For South Korea, this boost in awareness and acknowledgement has been a welcome development that feeds into the country’s improved image while it points to a rise in its cultural “status” through pop culture. The response and reactions of K-drama fans is an affirmation to South Korea, contributing to its cultural confidence as it continues to make a name for itself in the global culturesphere through hallyu.
CHAPTER FIVE

Concluding Remarks

Korea’s New Place in the Sun

This dissertation has explored the cultural phenomenon of hallyu through an examination of the Korean TV dramas that have been at the fore of its movement, with a special focus on the music in these dramas and how they work to express hallyu’s characteristic concerns while also involving external audiences. Following decades of intense modernization and tumultuous growth, hallyu has emerged in South Korea to mark a moment of cultural flourishing. For South Korea, this has seen the surfacing of issues related to cultural ownership and identity that dovetail with the country’s earlier project of globalization. Although hallyu, by definition, is an external phenomenon—the “flow of Korea” outside its borders—it is intimately related to an internal cultural climate that has fostered the production of its media products; and the success of hallyu, though somewhat serendipitous, can be traced back to roots with a national agenda. Indeed, as I have suggested in this dissertation, hallyu is fueled by dual ambitions—to underscore the Korean while being global. Hallyu has both a cosmopolitan thrust and a patriotic pull; it is a mode of Korean globalization with a Janus-faced disposition that has sights on both past and future.

As a significant “carrier” of hallyu, Korean dramas manifest such tendencies in their texts. Through the global format of the TV drama series, K-dramas relate stories that address hallyu’s aims to varying degrees. In this dissertation, I have
pointed to the dramas’ music as a crucial layer of storytelling that works to relay these themes while also serving as a means through which audiences can participate.

*Winter Sonata* is concerned with recovering a past that deals with relationships of sincere emotion through the trope of “first love.” It revisits the value of affectionate bonding between people as a reminder in the midst of a modern, globalizing world where relationships are threatened by a lack of *jeong*. *Winter Sonata* speaks to a desire for relationships of sincerity by capturing the essence of affectionate attachment idealized in youth; this is tied to memories that integrate and are activated through music. *Sassy Girl Chunhyang* brings a historical Korean folktale forward to the present, imbuing it with a contemporary feel, and scoring it with a dynamic soundtrack that rewrites the main character, all while preserving its Confucian moral core. It also dynamically intersects this national Korean tale with extra-Korean media texts; the referencing of well known filmic and literary works from outside Korea situates this folktale as one that lives among other famous and popular works in the global repertory. *Dream High* assumes a vision for the global by borrowing the frame of the musical and threading it with K-pop, a genre whose visual nature, choreography, and “ethos” are informed by a collective togetherness. The potential that K-pop has in generating communal energy is directed toward global platforms as this particular brand of South Korean pop music seeks recognition and participation from international audiences, increasingly through the World Wide Web.
These dramas are consumed by a growing number of audiences outside Korea who have entered these stories through their emotional pathways—ones that are often guided by the dramas’ musical work, which allows viewers to personalize stories as they go along. Though perhaps foreign to a certain extent, K-dramas also appeal through the familiar, and the texts serve as a gateway to a more substantial foray into the real South Korea. Fanning activities direct new interest and attention to South Korea, raising the country’s visibility as well as its “cultural credibility.” These fans are an organic entity that feed the expansion of *hallyu*; they instantiate *hallyu*’s presence and growth, even as their activities strengthen Korean pop culture as a distinct entertainment option within the wider flows of global pop culture. And they validate South Korea as cultural provider and as a participator in a global network, which in turn informs the nation’s ongoing identity and place in a contemporary world.

In his book on the modern history of the Korean peninsula, *Korea’s Place in the Sun* (1997), Bruce Cumings traces the toils and pains that the country underwent on its way to becoming—in the case of the South—a modern, industrialized nation. After a long journey of “pell-mell economic growth,” “continuous crisis,” and “hell-bent-for-leather modernization” (ibid.:494), South Korea, towards the latter half of the twentieth century had joined, as Cumings puts it, the “solar system” of “advanced industrial states and their incessant competition” (ibid.:9). Perhaps South Korea has yet to find its “true place in the sun” on the horizon of world politics, a position that Cumings ultimately suggests may be attained only when the peninsula is once again
united. But for now, South Korea is making a place for itself, at least, in the “solar system” of pop culture, as it flexes its cultural muscle through *hallyu*. This may not have placed South Korea in any position of cultural prominence, but it has slowly earned one of favor among international audiences. With *hallyu* as the country’s new “cultural calling card,” South Korea (through K-dramas, and increasingly K-pop) has integrated itself as a relevant and competitive player not only in Asia but also in the larger currents of popular culture around the world.

*Closing Thoughts: Post-*hallyu* and the Choco-Pie Theory*

I began this dissertation with an exploration of the larger phenomenon of *hallyu* before zooming into their leading agent, the K-drama, with a special focus on its music. As I close this study, it seems appropriate to step back again, for a broader look at *hallyu*—its possible future, and how it may interact with outside cultural developments, especially in the neighboring region. After more than a decade since the term came to life in the media, *hallyu* has perhaps passed its initial stage of “surging” in terms of popularity. But to say that pop culture moves in and out of phases of popularity is perhaps to point to its natural path. To work with the metaphor, waves crest and fall. Similarly, the general excitement surrounding the tide of Korean pop culture will ebb as a course of nature (though perhaps more slowly among fans), and the “Korean Wave” as a phrase may cease to have currency, especially as Korean pop culture graduates to become a more consistent entertainment option among outside audiences. Indeed, as performing arts critic Lee
Dong-Yeun notes, in a “post-hallyu” world, the term hallyu would no longer be needed (2013).

But for South Korea, the term will continue to have significance for a long time to come because it bespeaks the dynamism of Korean culture beyond its borders. Insofar as hallyu is tied to Korean cultural identity, image, and national pride, efforts to sustain it continue in earnest. For example, KOCIS (Korean Culture and Information Service), a branch of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, recently hosted a series of conferences for cultural directors from twenty-four countries to foster discussion on how to expand hallyu’s reach and better publicize Korean “contents” (Kwon 2015). Although hallyu started notably with dramas, and has developed more fully recently with K-pop, strategies are continually in the works to keep it alive through a conscious diversification of genres, such that the portfolio of South Korean pop culture encompasses an array of Korean culture that is global and competitive. For a cultural producer like Lee Soo Man, founder of Korea’s biggest K-pop agency (SM Entertainment), developing hallyu should entail building value around the label “Made by Korea,” not “Made in Korea” (Y. Lee 2008:296). Introducing “Brand Korea” in ways that are creative and distinct, remain a goal in the “post-hallyu” era, and a task that the country’s cultural bureaus will be occupied with, at least for the foreseeable future.

Yet as much as hallyu is an external phenomenon, its flow will be met and shaped by cultural currents from other nations, particularly in the immediate region.

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300 These conferences took place in March 2015 at various venues including the National Museum of Contemporary Korean History in Seoul and the National Library of Korea in Sejong City (Kwon 2015).
As other countries further develop their economies and culture industries, they may also turn out products that catch the attention of external audiences and thus become proudly tied to a national identity—products that will surely be consumed enthusiastically by a domestic audience as well. There is a scene in the Korean film *Joint Security Area* (Park Chan Wook, 2000) that goes some way in capturing this dynamic. *Joint Security Area* relays the bonding between four soldiers at the Demilitarized Zone that separates North and South Korea; over the course of the film, these soldiers (two from the North, two from the South) engage in an illicit friendship that forms during secret meetings by the border on the North Korean side. The soldiers develop a warm rapport with each other at these repeated meetings, even coming to address each other in brotherly terms.

The scene in question takes place in the usual bunker where the four soldiers are sitting around comfortably, not doing much. In a relaxed moment, Gyeongpil, the older of the North Korean soldiers, excitedly unwraps a Choco Pie that Suhyeok, his South Korean friend, has brought for him. Obviously something he likes, Gyeongpil beams at the treat, wondering aloud why his country can’t make things like these. As he places the treat into his mouth, whole, Suhyeok, looking somewhat unnerved, takes a bold step to ask his new North Korean brother: “Hey… don’t you want to come down to the South? You could eat all the Choco Pies you want.” At this, Gyeongpil’s disarming smile stops in its tracks; his expression instantaneously becomes severe and the room seems to go cold as he spits the half-chewed lump of 

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*301* A Choco Pie is a small chocolate-covered cake snack with a layer of marshmallow in the middle (similar to a Moon Pie); it is a popular treat in South Korea.
Choco Pie back in his hand. He faces Suhyeok to say in a threatening tone: “I’m only going to say this once, so listen good. My dream… is that one day… our Republic will make candy bars much tastier than South Korea’s! Got that?” After a tense moment of silence, he turns to the cud of Choco Pie he is holding, and with a bittersweet look on his face, continues, “Until then, all I can do… is long for these Choco Pies…” as he ruefully feeds it back into his mouth.

The scene illustrates the close connection between national pride and items of popular culture, expressed here through the case of a candy bar. For countries that have yet to gain visibility in a competitive global culture market, the consumption of outside entertainment may be laced with an ambivalent desire that enjoys another country’s “Choco Pies” with an abiding hope that their country can make tasty equivalents too. The Choco Pie scene in *JSA* is perhaps a dramatic example, but its moral rings in real life cases. For example, in a study on the role of the Korean Wave in the construction of Taiwanese identities, Sang-Yeon Sung concludes that one of the reasons Taiwanese audiences like Korean pop culture and look to it is because the case of *hallyu* offers something of a model that they want to emulate for the pride that it has brought to South Korea. These Taiwanese audiences may enjoy Korean TV dramas for their touching stories, but Sung suggests that *hallyu* ultimately causes the Taiwanese to reflect on their own cultural situation. She says that *hallyu* (*hanliu* in her study) “functions in Taiwan as an inspiration for building cultural identity” (2008:178); and in a later article, writes, “Korea motivates the Taiwanese to look into their own cultural products and consider how they should position themselves in
international society” (Sung 2010:35). Their “admiration” for Korean pop culture is related to an impulse for their own national/cultural project.

What seems to loom over Sung’s findings is the idea that Korean pop culture may be holding Taiwanese audiences over until their own develops (to “wave” proportions). That is, to the extent that Taiwanese audiences’ enjoyment of Korean pop culture is related to their own national aspirations, hallyu may be met with a competitive flow once a “Taiwanese Tsunami” gathers momentum. More recently, an article in The Washington Post relayed how Chinese delegates of the CPPCC (a committee of China’s political advisory body) discussed at a meeting not the economic slowdown or a recent terrorist attack or trouble in the government, but the reaction to a particular K-drama that had stirred a craze in China. The effects were so palpable, one official remarked, “It is more than just a Korean soap opera. It hurts our culture dignity.” Members of the committee reportedly spent that morning “bemoaning why China can’t make a show as good and as big of a hit” (Wan 2014).

These comments resonate with the audience responses found in Sung’s study in Taiwan, revealing the ambivalence of audiences who, on the one hand, may enjoy another country’s dramas and films, and on the other, turn to ask, “what about us?” Such “pop nationalism” (Joo 2011) is perhaps the typical reaction for nations

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302 The K-drama My Love From Another Star (Byeoleseo On Geudae, SBS 2013) garnered top viewership ratings in China, and set off a frenzy for “beer and fried chicken,” a popular combination (colloquially called “chimaek” in Korean) that the leading female character liked.

303 “Pop nationalism” is a phrase that Jeongsuk Joo has used to describe South Korea’s own “nationalistic pride in the transnational advance of Korean popular culture” (Joo 2011:496).
whose pop culture clout is yet underdeveloped or still developing in the global culture market. Thus there may be future instances of other cultural waves in the region as countries strengthen their own pop sectors; and in a “post-hallyu” world, we may yet see a “Thai-dal Wave” (Maliangkay 2008:221), or encounter a “Vietnamese Vortex,” “Malaysian Monsoon,” or any other meteorological metaphor that capture’s a nation’s forceful cultural appeal, proudly embraced by the producing nation. In truth, the spread, presence, and effect of hallyu is uneven, with reception and response varying from place to place. The response that K-drama and K-pop elicit in Asia is different than their effects in a place like the U.S. or Canada. Indeed the effect of hallyu may well differ from country to country even within Asia, depending on the consuming country’s own cultural status in the global context. But what is certain is that for South Korea, hallyu marks a significant moment in its cultural history that has ushered in a distinct phase where Koreanness communicates cosmopolitan competence and wider cultural belongingness while displaying a badge of distinctiveness.

The story of hallyu is still being told, so perhaps time will be the best teller of this study’s “conclusion.” For now, as K-drama and K-pop lead to more “K” options such as “K-art,” “K-dance,” “K-food,” “K-fashion,” and “K-sool [sul] (liquor),” all of

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304 Although a close examination of the relation between pop entertainment and political tension across countries is beyond the scope of this study, it must be mentioned that a cultural phenomenon like hallyu exists amid a grid of national sentiments, especially in the region; the emergence of an “anti-hallyu” movement in Japan is an example of this. A “Hating the Korean Wave” comic (Manga Kenkanryu) appealed to a surprisingly large domestic readership when it came out in 2005 following the feverish reception of Korean pop culture there, initiated by Winter Sonata. The manga portrays Koreans as a base people with no culture to be proud of (Onishi 2005b).
which have made small appearances online and in festivals with the coming of *hallyu*, South Korea will continue to dynamically make a space for itself on its way to becoming more Korean on the global horizon.

**Suggestions for Further Study**

My double aim of investigating *hallyu* and exploring the music of K-dramas in this study has kept it close to the text, the music in the text, and its immediate relation to the viewer. Through a specific node in the “*hallyusphere,*” it is my hope that this dissertation has expanded the conversation on Korean TV dramas by examining the workings of their music, while also offering some insight to the cultural phenomenon of *hallyu* with which they are entwined. But this study is a small contribution, and there is more investigating to be done. A further study might cross cut, for example, a study of *hallyu* fandom across gender, ethnicity, nationality, or with a focus on Korean diasporic audiences to tease out the subtle interactions among differing audiences, filling out a fuller picture of audience reception.

As well, there are more case studies waiting to be done, for instance, on the music of Korean films, video games, and other avenues of Korean pop culture that also fill out *hallyu*’s advance. Such studies would not only go further toward filling the gaps in knowledge on music in film and media cultures around the world, but also offer a broader understanding of Korean pop culture, as the building of its scholarship follows South Korea’s entry into wider awareness through *hallyu.*
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