Almost two decades ago, Chinese news reporters were dismayed by the explosive popularity of Korean TV dramas and pop culture and noted that hallyu (한류), or “Korean Wave,” was sweeping through various parts of East Asian countries. Just two years after Korean film exports to Japan hit a record high (~$60 million), it decreased to what it used to be (~$3 million) before the onset of Korean Wave.\(^1\) The fulcrum of Korean Wave is now comprised of additional cultural artifacts such as K-drama and K-pop which seem to be yielding much stronger influence in different parts of the world. Now, young teenagers in Paris and Santiago are both singing and dancing to their favorite Korean singers’ music. Such international society’s growing interests in Korea’s popular culture has prompted Contemporary Korea to reconsider and redefine their national and cultural identities. From the South Korean government to major universities and organizations, the attempt to understand the seemingly sudden popularity of Korean culture and its international reception resulted in outpouring of books and articles most of

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which attempt to find causes and reasons behind Korean Wave and its cultural significance.

As part of Ewha Womans University’s effort to meet the demands of the international scholars and to provide more comprehensive understanding of contemporary Korean society to the young generations of the 21st century, Ewha’s Korean Studies Series for Globalisation project published four different sets of textbooks, one of which is Understanding Contemporary Korean Culture (Jimoondang, 2011). The timely release of this book reflects the international society’s growing interests in Korea as well as the lack of academic resources or textbooks that could offer broad and deeper insights to Korea’s popular culture. By introducing multiple makings of contemporary Korean culture vis-à-vis food, clothes, architecture, family structure, gender relationship, religion, popular culture, as well as the unique political situation of a divided nation, the book provides critical insights to Korean culture in which competing values of old and new, past and modern are in constant negotiations with each other. The book offers fundamental knowledge of Korean culture from the past to present for those who want to learn more about Korea. At the same time, it addresses scholarly issues pertaining to the causes and effects of Korean Wave and ultimately, Korea’s place in the world.

Authored by five Ewha faculty members, Understanding Contemporary Korean Culture introduces multiple aspects of Korean society by investigating the impacts of historical crises as manifested in mass media such as popular literature, films, newspaper, TV and the internet. Each of the five chapters focus on topics carefully selected to show wide ranges of contemporary Korean culture. Each chapter is then divided into more subsections at the end of which one can find suggested questions for classroom discussions. The book also contains many colorful photos and images to appeal to the young readers. In a way, Understanding Contemporary