Hallyu:
The Rise of Transnational Cultural Consumers in China and Japan

Ingyu Oh*

This paper explains the birth and development of the Hallyu phenomenon in East Asia, using power (center vs. periphery), class (proximity to vs. distance from the mode of production), ethnicity (cultural superiority vs. inferiority), age (forward vs. retrospective learning), and gender (male vs. feminine) as key factors. The study finds that class, gender, and ethnicity variables are commonly found among Hallyu consumers in Taiwan, China, and Japan, although the ethnicity variable changes constantly according to the success or failure of Hallyu. Conceived as the working class female viewers who try to find the universal East Asian entertainment content that can satisfy the desire of both forward and retrospective learning, Hallyu fans

* Ingyu Oh is Senior Lecturer at Bristol Business School, UWE, and Research Fellow at the Centre for East Asian Studies, Bristol University, U.K. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Oregon, U.S.A. He has formerly taught at Waikato University, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, and UC Berkeley. His recent publications include “Education and Development: Why are Koreans Obsessed with Learning?” (2009) and “Virtual Corporation and Technology Innovation: The Role of Project Managers in Neutralizing Uncertainties” (2009). E-mail: oingyu@gmail.com.

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have clearly manifested their agreement that Korean dramas, films, and popular music were acceptable as a midpoint between forward and retrospective learning. The capitalist logic of producing and disseminating Hallyu is to cash in on this demand from East Asian women. This paper argues that the success of Hallyu depends on the continuity of the new role of East Asian women as transnational consumers and learners of popular culture for inter-ethnic cultural understanding. The role of middle-aged Japanese women as leading transnational consumers of Hallyu through retrospective learning is critical in this process, although incorporating the East Asian male population into the Hallyu campaign is also imperative for its future viability.

Key Words: Hallyu, Korean Popular Culture

I. Introduction

The impact of television dramas and movies on the pattern of cultural consumption in both developed and less developed countries has been prolifically reported (see *inter alia*, Ginsberg, 1993; Manketak, 1993; Ang, 1996; Armbrust, 1996; Abu-Lughod, 1997; Mahon, 2000; Wan and Kraus, 2002). In their analyses Hollywood occupies a central market position in the global entertainment industry and wields enormous clout not only in the shaping of people’s views of morality, but in their reflection upon their own life realities through images projected on TV monitors or “silver” screens as well (Black, 1994; During, 1997; Fine, 1997). Cultural discourses on TV dramas, shows, and movies now influence how human beings identify themselves with certain cultural symbols, regardless of whether they come from domestic or foreign sources of entertainment (Abu-Lughod, 1997; Wan and Kraus, 2002).