



Virginia Commonwealth University
VCU Scholars Compass

Auctus: The Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship


2017

Confuciansim and Korean Dramas: How Cultural and Social Proximity, Hybridization of Modernity and Tradition, and Dissimilar Confucian Trajectories Affect Importation Rates of Korean Broadcasting Programs between Japan and China

Brianna Jackson

Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/auctus>

 Part of the [Asian Studies Commons](#), [Broadcast and Video Studies Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), and the [International and Intercultural Communication Commons](#)

© The Author(s)

Downloaded from

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/auctus/42>

This Social Sciences is brought to you for free and open access by VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Auctus: The Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

Confucianism and Korean Dramas: How Cultural and Social Proximity, Hybridization of Modernity and Tradition, and Dissimilar Confucian Trajectories Affect Importation Rates of Korean Broadcasting Programs between Japan and China

By Brianna Jackson

Introduction

On April 3, 2004, five thousand Japanese citizens arrived at Haneda, Tokyo Airport to meet famous Korean actor Bae Yong Joon: the male love interest in the Korean drama *Winter Sonata* (Lee 12). Commonly referred to as Yon-sama (roughly translated to “Prince Yon”), Bae Yong Joon quickly amassed a fanbase of love-struck, middle-aged Japanese women who fell in love with his character. Never before had the relationship between Japan and South Korea been as amicable as it had when Bae made his debut. Not even the 2002 jointly hosted World Cup had succeeded in easing tensions between the two neighboring countries.

In 1990, China decided to open its economy to the rest of the world, a decision that was met with an influx of foreign films and products. Interestingly, the two pop culture super powers, Japan and America, were not able to make a significant impact on Chinese society, most likely because their television tropes were perceived as “too violent and sexual” (J. Kim 9; Kim, Agrusa, and Lee 1342). However, in 2003, the Korean drama *Jewel in the Palace* made a breakthrough in the Chinese market, quickly becoming the most-watched television show in Hong Kong history (Y. Kim 7). *Jewel in the Palace*, a historical drama, follows a female protagonist named Jang Geum who eventually becomes a royal chef through hard work and perseverance (*Jewel*). Because of its emphasis on traditional values and Confucian ethics, the drama was dubbed “more Chinese than Chinese” (J. Kim 9).

Up until the 21st century, South Korea never gained global recognition for its pop culture. In fact, it was not until 2004 that the government began allocating over \$100 million dollars to the culture industry, an investment that proved worthy in the long run (Y. Kim 122).

	Export	Growth rate	Import	Growth rate
1995	5,536		42,218	
1996	5,996	8.3	63,904	51.4
1997	8,318	38.7	52,278	-18.2
1998	10,017	20.4	27,036	-48.3
1999	12,736	27.1	28,732	6.3
2000	13,111	2.9	29,093	1.3
2001	18,920	44.3	20,442	-29.7
2002	28,813	52.3	25,111	22.8
2003	42,135	46.2	28,062	11.8
2004	71,461	69.6	31,096	10.8
2005	123,493	72.8	36,975	18.9
2006	147,743	19.6	31,657	-14.4
2007	162,584	10.0	32,269	1.9
2008	180,168	10.8	21,847	-32.3

Table 1. *South Korean Broadcast Program Import/Export Statistics (Y. Kim 122)*

Even before hit Korean drama series such as *Winter Sonata* and *Jewel in the Palace* were aired in neighboring East Asian countries, the Korean wave was well on its way to becoming a formidable force. In 1999, Beijing journalists coined the term “Hallyu” as a label for the

wave-like effect of Korean pop culture influence (Lee 9).

How did South Korea manage to work its way from a semi-isolated and culturally underdeveloped nation to become a leading global exporter of pop cultural goods? Researchers present different theories ranging from cultural proximity, the idea that countries will gravitate toward media that presents similar cultural and social ideas, to Western antagonism, the idea that South Korean media presents a foil to Western media. Whichever the case, it can be agreed upon that cultural discount plays a significant role in the popularity of Korean dramas in neighboring East Asian countries, such as Taiwan, China, and Japan. Mi Kyung Kim refers to cultural discount as an audience's familiarity with stories, settings, and characters, especially when those elements reflect ideas prevalent in the audience's own culture (2).

Thus, when Confucian principles and conventions formed a rope that tied South Korea, Japan, and China together, it was Korean dramas that ignited that very rope—causing a huge cultural explosion. Suddenly Japan, who had viewed Korea as being “backwards” and “underdeveloped,” recognized cultural similarities with Korea that otherwise would have gone unnoticed (Kim, Agrusa, and Lee 1351). Similarly, China began to culturally connect to South Korea through Korean dramas, which showed “[embedded] Neo-Confucian social concepts... awakening a respect for traditional values lost under communism” (Y. Kim 127).

Therefore, this study aims to examine how dissimilar Confucian trajectories between Japan and China affect the difference in importation rates of Korean dramas between the two countries.

Confucianism in Korean Dramas

Korean citizens' inherent familiarity with Confucianism is credited to China's influence on South Korea, which began in the 4th century and still thrives in modern society today (Levi 9). Confucianism is ingrained in almost every aspect of Korean culture: honorifics, ancestral worship, and social conventions. Thus, it is easy to see how Confucianism can have an inconspicuous impact on Korean pop culture—especially when it comes to television programs, which reflect modern Korean society. When neighboring East Asian countries watch Korean television programs (which are embedded with these Neo-Confucian principles), they, too, recognize cultural similarities between their own society and the society presented in these Korean dramas. This recognition, known as cultural proximity, can encourage neighboring countries to import foreign broadcasting programs (Yang 109).

Therefore, it is no surprise that researchers find that the success of the Hallyu wave can be traced back to these Confucian elements in Korean dramas (Lin and Tong 94; Kim, Mi Kyung 7; Cho 396; Huang 128). However, to understand how cultural proximity works to South Korea's advantage, it is important to understand the five basic principles of Confucianism itself.

The first principle of Confucianism deals with the relationship of self-cultivation and sociopolitical reform. Confucius explained that “the cultivation of the self is the foundation of everything besides,” therefore political order must stem from social order, and social order must stem from individual cultivation (Tsai 159).

The next principle deals with the pursuit of *dao*, which means “road” or “truth.” Simply put, *dao* is used to express the all-encompassing moral order that drives humanity to pursue moral goodness and social order (Tsai 160).

The third principle contains the ethical concepts of *jen* (humaneness), *yi* (righteousness), and *li* (rules of propriety). Arguably, the interaction of *jen*, *yi*, and *li* are at the heart of Confucian ethics, and a significant amount of importance is placed on them. *Jen* denotes the ideal love between people—a signifier for human heartedness—and *yi* denotes obligation and justice. Confucius stressed the importance of the interaction between *jen* and *yi* when it comes

to fulfilling *li*, which often translates to ceremonial duties and rights (Tsai 160). In terms of *jen*, Confucianism defines the ideal love as stemming from familial respect. In essence, this love is often seen as being “gradational,” slowly extending outwards from family to friends to acquaintances. Unlike Western culture, where love is oftentimes seen as being “universal” and stemming primarily from passion, *jen* focuses more on respect and intimacy that is born within the family.

The fourth principle strays into the patriarchal nature of Confucianism, which often leads to modern-day criticism and rejection of its values. *Chun-tze* is a term used to describe the “superior gentleman” who constantly strives to achieve perfection and self-actualization. *Chun-tze* blends two values, self-autonomy and altruism, in order to signify the ideal man. Usually this “ideal man” is manifested in rulers, husbands, and elder brothers—those who assume a superior position on the authoritative spectrum. In exerting his self-autonomy, the ideal man is not making individualistic decisions, but rather considers himself among a multitude of social interactions (Tsai 160). This concept of person-in-relation decision-making is one that oftentimes butts heads with Western individualism. In the example above, post-1990 Chinese citizens lamented the values shown in westernized media, which oftentimes disregarded filial piety in lieu of celebrating individualism (J. Kim 6; Lin and Tong 99; Y. Kim 132). However, in Korean dramas, individualism is shown primarily through *chun-tze*. For example, in the popular Korean drama *Boys over Flowers*, the male lead undergoes a gradual transformation from a selfish man to the “ideal man.” Near the end of the drama, he makes the difficult decision to give up on his romantic love in order to save the female lead. The drama considers the male lead among a multitude of factors—namely family and socioeconomic status—and the audience watches as the lead makes decisions based on these factors rather than his own individualistic desires (*Boys*).

The last principle deals with the *wu-lun*, or the “Five Relationships,” of Confucianism, and is most clearly seen in modern day East Asian societies. These five relationships revolve around the concept of filial piety in the hopes that “good family breeding naturally leads to good social intercourse” (Tsai 160). In the lens of South Korean society, *wu-lun* manifests itself in social interactions. Generally, those who are younger will speak to their elders in formal language, adding *-yo* and *-innida* to the ends of their sentences to denote respect.

Cultural and Social Proximity

Xiaowei Huang claims that “cultural proximity can be considered as one of the most essential reasons for the popularity of Korean TV dramas... People’s acceptance can be reduced by different nationalities and culture” (128). For example, honorifics are not only used in South Korea, but in Japan as well. Similar to how Korean citizens refer to mentors or teachers as *saseongnim*, Japanese citizens must also refer to their teachers/mentors with the proper honorific: *sensei*. These interactions spurred from cultures wherein social status is gravely important. Unlike Western cultures where significance is not placed as much on social position, Asian cultures (such as South Korea, Japan, and China) are only considered “harmonious” if every citizen knows their place. Therefore, when Japanese or Chinese citizens view Korean dramas, they are able to connect culturally to the television program because of the inclusion of these social traditions.

Although the cultural proximity theory is widely regarded as the foremost reason for the popularity of Korean dramas in China and Japan, it is still only a theory based on speculation and logic. Jonghoe Yang cites Shin, Kim, and Yang when he counters that “this cultural commonality approach is obviously not enough to explain the Hallyu phenomenon in Asia... such South Asian countries as Malaysia [that import Korean dramas as well], etc., are not

Confucian and share little cultural elements with Korea” (110). While Yang is correct when he asserts that Korean dramas appeal to non-Confucian countries, he makes the mistake of trying to apply the cultural proximity theory to those countries who do not have anything in common with South Korea. When referring to Lisa Chuang and Hye Eun Lee’s research on the appeal of Korean dramas in the United States (a non-Confucian country), it is clear that “Korean drama success in the United States is not necessarily a result of hybridity [of traditional and modern elements] as it has been in other Asian countries, but rather a result of novelty” (602-603). Chuang and Lee’s research conducted in America is crucial in exploring the reason behind the appeal of Korean drama in these areas. The fact that research has shown that American audiences are attracted to Korean dramas because of novelty as opposed to hybridity seems to suggest that cultural proximity does not play a role in Korean drama appeal when it comes to those nations that are *not* East Asian. Because the Korean Wave tends to act as a facilitator of conversation between different cultures, it would be unavailing to assume the Korean Wave only holds one method of appeal. Younghan Cho expands more on this idea when he implores us to consider that each cultural bloc interprets the Korean Wave differently according to their own experiences (392). In this case, because American audiences do not share the same historical past as East Asian audiences, the reasons for their attraction differ significantly. This does not discount the cultural proximity thesis, but rather highlights how regional and cultural closeness can play a major role in transnational appeal.

However, Cho plays devil’s advocate when he reasons that East Asia is an “empty signifier” because it is seen as a unilateral region which shares the same cultural values—namely Confucianism. However, he contends the Korean Wave still impacted areas of East Asia that were not Confucian in nature. The fact that analytics lump together all of East Asia into one broad sweeping category of “shared Confucian values” ignores the cultural diversity in the region (387). Cho, like Yang, argues that the cultural proximity theory simplifies all of the complexities of the Korean Wave in an effort to understand why Korean dramas appeal to neighboring countries. While it is true that some East Asian countries that are not Confucian in nature import Korean dramas, they also tend to do so at much lower rates than Confucian countries. In Table 2, it is clear to see how those countries that were influenced by Confucianism, such as Japan, China, and Taiwan, import Korean dramas at a much higher rate than those which are not Confucian (presumably included in the Southeast Asia category), such as Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines (Yang 126). Thus, cultural proximity seems to have a significant impact on those countries that import Korean dramas, with Confucian countries (which are more easily able to identify with the traditional elements in the dramas) importing at higher rates than non-Confucian countries.

(Unit: 1,000 US\$, %)

Destination	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Japan	65,511 (61.9)	47,632 (48.2)	53,494 (57.4)	79,113 (68.7)	74,791 (63.1)	81,615 (53.9)
China	12,822 (12.1)	12,442 (12.6)	8,328 (8.9)	9,300 (8.0)	12,171 (10.0)	18,216 (12.0)
Taiwan	11,942 (11.3)	20,473 (20.7)	17,131 (18.4)	7,769 (6.7)	11,616 (9.9)	20,011 (13.2)
Southeast Asia*	8,584 (8.1)	12,686 (12.8)	8,271 (8.9)	4,533 (8.2)	11,857 (10.6)	13,771 (9.1)
U.S.A.	2,281 (2.2)	733 (0.7)	792 (0.8)	6,025 (4.8)	3,996 (3.4)	1,996 (1.3)
Others	4,745 (4.5)	4,878 (4.9)	5,249 (5.6)	3,954 (3.4)	4,065 (3.4)	15,789 (10.4)
Total	105,885 (100.0)	98,844 (100.0)	93,265 (100.0)	115,694 (100.0)	118,496 (100.0)	151,398 (100.0)

Table 2. Exports of Korean Broadcasting Programs by Destination from 2005-2010 (Yang 126)

Jonghoe Yang asserts that social proximity plays a role as well when he explains that “...Social proximity can be an initial factor for East Asian audiences to choose Korean products for the first time... and consuming Korean cultural products can reinforce each other over time...exposure to Hallyu augments social proximity” (131). If cultural proximity fosters familiarization through culture, then social proximity does the same through distance. Generally, those countries that are closer to one another will be more familiar with one another’s culture. In Table 3, it is clear to see how those countries that are closer to South Korea are more likely to watch Korean dramas (Yang 132).

	China	Japan	Taiwan
Modernity-tradition	.050** (3,005)	.017 (2,131)	.067** (2,037)
Globalism-nationalism	.079** (3,005)	-.001 (2128)	.079** (2,025)
Social proximity	.125** (3,005)	.155** (1,994)	.152** (1,959)

NOTE.—* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Correlation between Watching Korean Dramas and Globalism, Modernity, and Proximity (Yang 132)

While social proximity may be an initial factor for watching Korean dramas, Yang also speculates that the second phase of the Hallyu wave will be much different, with Korean dramas being “geared to the tastes of international audiences”(139). In other words, circumstantial reasons may have accounted for neighboring East Asian countries importing Korean dramas, but in light of cultural proximity, Korean dramas may be more deliberately suited to other countries’ tastes. For example, the drama *Jewel in the Palace* took place in historical China, perhaps as a way to appeal to Chinese audiences through familiar settings and historical backgrounds. So, while social proximity may seem to counter the cultural proximity theory, it is more likely that it paved the way for cultural proximity to take place.

Younghan Cho, in the article “Desperately Seeking East Asia Amidst the Popularity of South Korean Pop Culture in Asia,” argues that the appeal of the “Koreanness” in the Hallyu Wave is overestimated. He stresses that “others are skeptical of the notion of Koreanness and its alleged appeal to regional audiences [when it comes to the cultural proximity theory]” (394). Researchers studying the Korean Wave are largely split into two distinct groups concerning the reasons for appeal. One group believes that the Confucian elements are integrated into Western formats, which allows audiences to gain a sense of familiarity and difference. Another group sees “Korean pop culture as merely an imitation of Western culture or at the very least as a hybrid of global and local products” (394). The latter group seems to define the Korean Wave as a phenomenon composed of only two elements, Asian and Western, which makes the mistake of pitting one side against the other. Many see the Korean Wave as a negative response to Western media, and use this explanation to argue that Asian audiences are more attracted to Korean media because of this contrast. While this may be true for some audiences, it does not account for all. Instead, the Korean Wave can be seen as a cultural phenomenon based largely on influences from the West, Japan, China, and other Asian countries. Instead of viewing the Korean Wave as a single entity of its own, with unique Korean values that are coincidentally linked to Confucian values, it would be better to view it as a response to Asian “Waves” in general. More specifically, the historical linkage between Korea, Japan, and China indicates that Confucianism played a heavy role in shaping each society. The influences that were carried from both China and Japan played a major role in shaping Korean society, leading to a culture that was comprised of different assets of different regions which allowed for the Korean Wave to appeal to so many cultures. Thus, cultural proximity is not restricted to just “Korean” ele-

ments, but rather many of the elements that influenced Korean culture.

When contrasting Western dramas and Korean dramas, it is easier to understand how these “Korean” cultural elements appeal to Eastern audiences in a way that Western broadcasting programs fail to. In the article “The Rising East Asian ‘Wave’: Korean Media Go Global,” Youna Kim refers to Ko in order to illuminate the differences between Korean dramas and American dramas: “Unlike American dramas such as *Friends* and *Sex in the City*, in which the focus is on romance between young lovers and the family has all but disappeared, Korean dramas...embrace reality by dealing with diverse relationships in the Confucian familial framework” (132).

Similarly, the same contrast is applied when we look at Japanese drama appeal versus Korean drama appeal. Kim explains that “...unlike Japanese dramas where the urbanity and individual happiness are the themes, the conflicts between Confucian tradition and social modernity are some of the major cultural experiences in Korean dramas” (132). In her research, many of Kim’s respondents exclaim that Japanese dramas are too Westernized, and the emotional depth apparent in Korean dramas was dishearteningly absent. Perhaps this view of Hollywood movies and western television shows illuminates the power and success of the Korean wave across eastern Asia. By retaining traditional Confucian concepts in their dramas, Korea easily appeals to neighboring countries in a way that Western and “Westernized” dramas cannot. Similarly, Avin Lin and Angel Tong’s research comes to the same conclusion. When asked about what dramas they watched before the Korean Wave, many Chinese respondents said they had been fans of Japanese dramas before they switched over to Korean dramas. When asked why, they explained that Korean dramas have “more depth” and portray characters “emotionally” and “realistically.” According to the Chinese respondents, Japanese dramas were too “Westernized” and lacked more traditional values that are apparent in the now-popular Korean dramas. In short, Korean dramas are seen as more “traditional” while Japanese dramas are more “liberal”—especially in their portrayal of sex (Lin and Tong 102-103).

How the Hybridization of Modern and Traditional Elements Enhances Cultural Proximity

The Hallyu wave can be generally explained through a hybridization of culture and social proximity. Because East Asians are attracted to the familiarity of traditional concepts in Korean dramas (i.e., Confucianism) and the slight difference in modernity, it allows them to sympathize easier with the characters and the plot. Traditional elements in Korean dramas are often credited with being Confucian. For example, traditional elements can include respecting elders (a focus on the Confucian principle *wu-lun*) or ancestral worship (a focus on *li*). In the Korean drama *Boys over Flowers*, which gained overwhelming popularity in Japan and China, filial piety is shown when the main character, Gu Jun Pyo, chooses to forego his romantic relationship in order to please his elderly mother (*Boys*). *Boys over Flowers*, which still ranks in the “Top 10 viewed dramas” on the website Drama Fever, was remade into a Japanese and a Taiwanese drama due to its overwhelming success (Z; Cho 389). Perhaps the traditional, Confucian elements prevalent in *Boys over Flowers* allowed the drama to appeal to other countries, spurring them to recreate the storyline in their own cultural framework. Like Younghan Cho said, “significant diversity [has been found] among local receptions of the Korean Wave and the social and cultural meanings associated with it” (392). In essence, the Korean Wave fosters conversation between different cultures, just like it did with *Boys over Flowers*.

In the article “Re-Imagining a Cosmopolitan ‘Asian Us’: Korean Media Flows and Imaginaries of Asian Modern Femininities,” Angel Lin and Avin Tong attempt to define the modern elements in Korean dramas by explaining that they possess “‘modern qualities’, side by side with the ‘Asian’, ‘traditional’ elements that [audiences] value” (100). Additionally, Lin

and Tong specify that “Asian modernity” is not simply a replication of Western modernity, but rather an idealized concept associated with materialism, consumerism, female emancipation, and individualism (122). Even the novel aspects of Korean dramas still hold significant Asian influence, rather than simple “Westernization.” Therefore, the cultural proximity thesis still applies in this case. East Asian audiences can still enjoy Korean dramas for their recognizable traditional elements, while also enjoying the modern aspects as well. Furthermore, in decisive (albeit, unrealistic) endings, these Korean dramas usually resolve the conflicts between modern and traditional elements (e.g., the male protagonist’s family ultimately accepts his marriage to a lower-status woman). Perhaps it is this resolution which fosters a sense of hope, not only in Korea, but in Japan and China as well.

D. .F-C. Tsai, in the article “The Bioethical Principles and Confucius’ Moral Philosophy,” notes that in the context of Confucianism, great importance is put on the concept of *chun-tze*, which blends self-autonomy with altruism. Therefore, individualism is not defined by making choices in a context-free environment, but rather by making choices based on interpersonal relationships (a difference from Westernized “individualism”) (160). Lin and Tong add that Korean dramas appeal to Chinese women because they embrace themes of modernity and tradition in an alternative world of reconciliation and negotiation (122). Additionally, Korean dramas tend to heighten tensions between traditional/Confucian values and more modern values in an effort to appeal to Asian cultures (who probably deal with the same tensions on a daily basis) (94). For instance, a protagonist may be conflicted about whether he should respect his family and inherit his father’s company or if he should instead follow his dream job. Usually, this tension is resolved amicably at the end of the series in a way that resonates with Asian audiences—a way to integrate the new into the old. Another researcher, Kim Youna, seems to agree that the hybridization of modernity and traditionalism in Korean dramas is the key to their success with East Asian audiences (127). Cultural proximity is arguably the most important factor when it comes to retaining traditionalism in these dramas (e.g. local language dubbing, “Asian” social conventions, Asian settings). However, the subtle modern differences in setting and cosmopolitan living make the drama different and novel, which also contributes to its appeal.

Specifically, Angel Lin and Avin Tong cite their 2002 research when they analyze how the plot can illuminate this idea through conflict, such that “contradiction between respect for/obedience to elders and pursuit of individual freedom in the choice of love partners and careers has often been used as a plot device to create dramatic tensions in Korean dramas” (102). For example, in the Korean drama *Winter Sonata*, the female lead, Yu Jin, decides to marry Sang Hyuk over the man she truly loved, Min Yeong, as per her parents’ wishes. However, near the end of the drama, the overwhelming familial pressure creates problems for the protagonists, making the conclusion rife with conflict, tension, and excitement (*Winter Sonata*).

Angel Lin and Avin Tong present a more abstract view when they analyze Korean drama plots, explaining that they show an “imagined reconciliation (in the drama world) of contradictory values of new and old experienced in many rapidly globalizing societies in Asia” (102). It is interesting to note the word “imagined” here, as it implies that reconciliation doesn’t normally happen in South Korea (as opposed to the “drama world”). Lin and Tong’s assertion is interesting because it indicates that Korean dramas may serve more of a purpose than just “shooting pretty/handsome faces of popular artists,” like Japanese drama directors tend to do (109). In a way, Korean dramas may serve as a vessel through which audiences can project their own feelings and beliefs without facing consequences from the real world. As Lin and Tong put it: “[audiences] can also enjoy the fantasy elements as both possible and plausible since the story happens in a different city in Asia and thus offers some room for imagination or fantasy

(e.g., in Seoul)” (94). Thus, the language dubbing and Confucian values offer a comforting familiarization for audiences, yet the slight difference in the settings and “reconciliation” of conflicts brings an almost fantasy element to the dramas. The hybridization of modernity and tradition allows for wishful thinking and succeeds in giving audiences (especially Asian women) hope, something that Western programs fail to give. Youna Kim quotes Iwabuchi when she muses: “things ‘American’ are dreams to be yearned for and conceptual forms to be pursued, but things ‘Korean’ are their ‘accessible future’, examples to be emulated and commodities to be acquired” (127).

Youna Kim quotes from *China Daily* when she explains that Korean TV dramas contain “...elements of both modernity and tradition, and this feature allows them to attract a wider age group in China” (127). However, things change when they are looked at from the perspective of older generations. Youna Kim argues that “for the older generation, Korean dramas are appealing for their Confucian framework: ‘We see a purer form of Confucianism and are refreshed by it because we feel a sense of belonging’” (127). Kim touches on the dissonance between older and younger generations to make the claim that modernity and tradition are used deliberately in Korean dramas to appeal to wider age groups. The decision to include traditional concepts allows Korean dramas to appeal to East Asians; however, the subtle modern concepts appeal to all ages, making Korean dramas appealing to neighboring countries.

The Relationship between Confucianism in China and Korean Drama Importation

Because of the Cultural Revolution and the fact that “[cultural values] tend to retain [their] original character in the transplanted culture longer than in the original culture where [they] continue to evolve,” Confucian values are less firmly entrenched in China than they are in Japan (Stowell 109).

To show the difference in Confucian entrenchment between China and Japan, it is important to first analyze the impact of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Beginning in the late 1950s, communist leader Mao Zedong was under heavy criticism for his political inefficacies. In order to gain the public’s favor again, he created a counterrevolution and blamed Confucius for instituting a capitalistic doctrine that ignored the struggles of the poor (Zhang 200). The period in China from 1966-1976 is called the *Cultural Revolution* because it denounced Confucius’ “four olds” and attempted to “dismantle the traditional family structure” (Stowell 108-109). The Cultural Revolution uprooted the basic framework of society and left China in fragmented pieces. Suddenly, “Old vs. New” became associated with “Bourgeois vs. Proletarian”. To China, Confucius was the embodiment of the “Old” and therefore, became associated with capitalism and greed (Zhang 197-198). “The only way for China to survive,” researcher Tong Zhang writes, “is to replace Confucianism with Western individualism” (203).

Studies conducted by Godwin Chu show how fragmented Chinese citizens are concerning traditional, Confucian values as a result of the Cultural Revolution. With the exception of filial piety, Chinese citizens are hesitant to endorse almost all traditional values (31). According to Chu, Chinese citizens outright rejected the idea of “ancestral worship,” an integral part of Confucian ideology (28). Ting-I Su, a journalist for *Asia Times Online*, shows just how discordant China is when it comes to Confucianism in a survey conducted by *People’s Daily*. It was discovered that “due to the pre-1980 education system, most Chinese over 40 have never read about Confucius” (Su, 2011, para. 14). When a survey was conducted on whether “a Confucius statue should be erected at Tiananmen, 61.6% of the 11 million respondents opposed the idea” (Su, 2011, para. 14). Furthermore, in an effort to revitalize Confucianism, the Chinese government funded a movie titled *Confucius*; however, it was named one of the worst Chinese movies of 2010 (Su, 2011, para. 13). Perhaps this disintegration of Confucian

values in modern Chinese society impacts the way Chinese citizens view Korean dramas.

Godwin Chu expands on this in his research, showing that Confucianism has taken a drastic hit in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. When compared to Japanese endorsement of traditional values, China is very much discordant. Chu makes an interesting observation when he notes that although Japan has experienced rapid modernization and industrialization (which has often been associated with “Westernization”), the nation still maintains a high degree of cultural integrity. While China has also experienced some degree of industrialization and modernization, its cultural values seem to have disintegrated—leading Godwin Chu to make the claim that the Cultural Revolution was responsible for this fragmentation, and not modernization (31). Perhaps because Japan allows modernization, “Westernization,” and traditional values to coexist, Japanese audiences are more likely to feel more connected to Korean dramas. For Chinese audiences (especially middle-aged women), Lin and Tong’s research suggests that when watching Korean dramas, they feel more “bonded with other Asian women who also cherish lost traditional values/virtues” (24). So although Chinese and Japanese audiences identify with the Confucian elements in the dramas, their reasoning and reactions may differ significantly depending on social contexts.

In addition to the Cultural Revolution, the disintegration of Confucian values may have also been caused by the process of cultural diffusion. As mentioned earlier, China was responsible for introducing Confucianism to Korea and Japan. Jessica Stowell, in the article “The Influence of Confucian Values on Interpersonal Communication in South Korea, as Compared to China and Japan,” asserts that “[cultural values] tend to retain [their] original character in the transplanted culture longer than in the original culture where [they] continue to evolve” (109). In this example, China would be considered the original culture, and Japan and Korea would be considered “transplanted cultures” because Confucianism did not originate in their societies. In the book “Culture and Culture Change,” Carol Ember and Melvin Ember explain that cultural diffusion—the spreading out of culture from a point of origin—is a selective process. Generally, when culture or cultural traits are introduced to transplanted cultures, the society will seldom accept every facet of the culture. Instead, it is better to think of it as a pick-and-choose process. Oftentimes, a society will reject those traits of a culture they dislike, only accepting specific traits that they find appealing (28). Thus, it is likely that a transplanted culture will retain the original character of a culture simply because they integrated aspects that they already found agreeable, unlike in the host society where the culture will continue to evolve as those traits that are problematic will either be eradicated or changed. This is especially exemplified in a test conducted by Yu Xie and Emily Greenman, wherein they observed the effects of the segmented assimilation theory on immigrant children in America. One aspect of the segmented assimilation framework suggests that “maintaining the culture of origin can have a protective effect for immigrant children” (Xie 5). Therefore, it is likely that Japan and Korea have a stronger hold on Confucianism than China because of the selective and protective process of cultural diffusion.

Hence the ambivalence regarding Chinese audience’s perception of Confucianism in Korean dramas is likely due to the Cultural Revolution, along with the diffusion process. Before *Jewel in the Palace* became a huge success in China, there was a clear distinction between older and younger generations when it came to preferences in Korean dramas. Generally, younger Chinese citizens enjoyed “trendy,” modern dramas, as opposed to the older generation who enjoyed “family dramas.” When *Jewel in the Palace* became a hit in Hong Kong, it was the first time all age groups had come together to enjoy a Korean drama—one that contained copious amounts of Confucian influences (Hwang). The fact that the younger generation tended to stay away from family Korean dramas (which included more traditional concepts

concerning filial piety) gives insight into the state of China during that time. Perhaps the release of more dramas like *Jewel in the Palace* will spark a renewed interest in China regarding Confucianism.

Until then, the hierarchy of Confucian entrenchment will likely stay the same: with Korea being the most Confucian, Japan being the second most, and China being the least Confucian (Chu; Stowell). This hierarchy correlates with Korean drama import rates as well (Japan with 53.9% of Korean broadcasting imports, China with 12% of Korean broadcasting imports), and suggests that Confucianism plays a heavy role in shaping audience's appeal to Korean dramas (Yang 126).

"Fanatical" Japanese Audiences and Korean Dramas

Although Japan has been proven to be more Confucian than its counterpart, China, it is unclear whether Japan's attraction to Korean dramas is because of its empathy with Korean characters or because of its traditional values.

Confucianism was introduced to Japan in the mid-6th century via the Paekche kingdom in Korea. The reason why Confucianism is particularly strong in Japan mainly deals with its intimate connection with Shintoism, the indigenous religion of Japan. Many Confucian concepts are integrated with Shintoism, which allows Confucianism to be embedded in the foundation of Japanese culture (Levi 10). Perhaps it is this very reason that makes it so difficult for Confucianism to erode in Japan.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that Chu, Hayashi, and Akuto find that traditional values "form a highly integrated core among the Japanese" a heavy contrast to the fragmented and disheveled state of Confucianism in China (31). Similarly, Yan and Pin theorize that "Japanese Confucianism has been absorbing the most advanced part of Chinese Confucianism during its development and including the new changes and development of Chinese Confucianism into Japanese Confucianism. On the contrary, Chinese Confucianism is relatively closed" (111). Again, this ties back into the nature of cultural diffusion. Because Japan creates a highly selective form of Confucianism, it is more likely that Confucianism will thrive in Japanese society. Unfortunately, China does not have the advantage of picking and choosing only agreeable aspects of Confucianism because the basic framework of Chinese society was developed from every facet of the religion. In essence, it would be like removing the infrastructure from a house that has already been built.

Yang refers to Chae and Yoon when he argues that "...the major factor for Korean dramas' appeal in Japan seems to be the nostalgia of the middle-aged Japanese audience who found the Japanese social and cultural atmosphere of 20 to 30 years ago in Korean dramas." (118). Furthermore, Yang refers to Iwabuchi when he finds that Japanese audiences view other Asian countries nostalgically, with the view that "Japan is at a higher level of development than the rest of Asia which is regarded as being culturally and historically backward vis-à-vis Japan" (118). Comparatively, middle-aged Chinese and Japanese audiences seem to view Korean dramas with a sense of "nostalgia"; however, the connotation of "nostalgia" differs significantly based on the social context. For instance, because the Cultural Revolution resulted in the loss of so many Confucian values, many older generation Chinese citizens view Korean dramas with a longing to revert back to more traditional times (Lin and Tong 24). For older Japanese citizens, the nostalgia is accompanied by an air of superiority, as if watching Korean dramas is similar to flipping through a photo album rife with memories of simpler, more archaic times (Yang 118).

It would be nearly impossible to discuss Japan's relationship with Confucianism and Korean dramas without talking about *Winter Sonata*. In 2004, the Korean drama *Winter Sonata*

ta became overwhelmingly popular in Japan, spearheading the Hallyu wave and subsequently boosting Korean television export rates. Youna Kim asserts that “nowhere is the popularity for Korean TV drama stronger than in Japan. The Korean Wave reached its peak in Japan when the Korean romance drama, *Winter Sonata*, became a national phenomenon in 2004” (Y. Kim 126). *Winter Sonata* addresses first love, lost romance, and familial obligation (*Winter Sonata*). Middle-aged Japanese women turned into zealous fans after the broadcast of *Winter Sonata*, notably because of the character Min-Yeong (S. Kim 1342). Interestingly, it was implied that the characteristic traits of the protagonist, Yeong, modeled a more pure, chivalrous man than is seen in modern Japanese society. Because Japanese citizens oftentimes feel nostalgia or a sense of wistfulness when watching Korean dramas, the fact that the male protagonist embodies a conventional attitude suggests that he could be an archetype for a more traditional past. This would in turn suggest that the emotional and humanistic side of the male character traits imply a Japanese emphasis on emotionality in tradition. This contrasts to the popularity of the Korean drama *Jewel in the Palace* in China, which is a historical drama that places significance on the education and intellectualism of both protagonists, suggesting that China feels more nostalgia for the educational and socially harmonic traditional past.

In any case, character development plays a significant role in Korean drama’s appeal in Japan. In Kim, Agrusa, and Lee’s research, they analyze the popularity of the leads in *Winter Sonata*, stating that “The two characters who played the lead roles in *Winter Sonata*, Yong-Jun Bae, and Ji-Woo Choi...have been called ‘[Yeong] sama’ and ‘Ji-Woo hime,’ respectively (‘sama’ and ‘hime’ in Japanese mean ‘prince’ and ‘princess’) by the Japanese mass media” (1342). Additionally, a 2004 article in the New York Times dubbed ‘[Yeong]-sama’ as one of the most famous people in Japan” (1342). When *Winter Sonata* aired in Japan, it contrasted heavily with Japanese modern pop culture, which often contains prevalent themes such as violence, pornography, incest, materialism, corruption, and pedophilia. These themes tended to clash with the more conventional, pure manner of older Japanese citizens (Kim, Agrusa, and Lee 1342). *Winter Sonata*, which portrayed pure love and more conservative, traditional themes, did not align with modern Japanese values. Therefore, when middle-aged Japanese women flocked to the Nami Island in South Korea (a location shown in the drama), it was suggested that one of the main reasons Japanese citizens enjoyed the drama was because they felt reminiscent about their own first love (S. Kim 1342). It is clear to see the dissonance in reasoning between Japanese and Chinese citizens when it comes to the appeal of Korean dramas. For the Japanese, the ability to empathize with Korean characters is the most important aspect of dramas because through characterization, they are able to experience “traditional” values. For Chinese citizens, family-type dramas are most significant for the same reason.

Xiaowei Huang asserts that “[Korean dramas] are not only popular in terms of the fanaticalness of audiences and fans, but also bring considerable profit to the national income” (123). As mentioned above, five thousand Japanese women visited the Haneda airport just to catch a glimpse of Bae Yong Joon (Lee 12). In addition to spending over one thousand dollars on tourist excursions to the filming site, Japanese women were also willing to pay \$145 for photographs of Bae Yong Joon (Takeda). Therefore, it is no surprise that Kim, Agrusa, and Lee’s research finds that “[Japanese respondents’] high level of interest and empathy for leading actors and actresses was a key reason for their preference for Korean TV soap operas” (1351). Kim et al.’s research on the link between Korean drama *Winter Sonata* and Japanese tourists visiting film sites thoroughly explores the reasons why Japanese citizens make Hallyu-based trips. According to the results of the survey, those Japanese tourists who were over the age of 40 were more likely to make a Hallyu trip. Additionally, they were more likely to exhibit a sense of superiority when talking about Japan’s relation to Korea (S. Kim 1351). This seems

to highlight the fact that middle-aged Japanese women enjoy Korean dramas because of the nostalgia they feel (as a result of the apparently traditional values). Because these middle-aged women look upon Korea as a less-developed country, perhaps they see Korea as a manifestation of their own country's past. This could also explain the discrepancy between younger and older generations, the former explaining their reasons for attraction as stemming from "empathy for actors and actresses."

Thus, it is difficult to discern where the line is drawn between Confucian influence and "fanaticalness" for Korean idols when it comes to Japanese audiences. However, one thing is for sure: empathy for characters ostensibly evokes nostalgia for traditional times. Instead of viewing Confucian influence and "fanaticalness" as being two separate, opposing entities, it would be better to view them as interchangeable—both enhancing the other in a way that allows Korean dramas to emotionally connect with Japanese audiences. Perhaps it is the dynamic compatibility between these two concepts that results in higher importation rates of Korean dramas in Japan as opposed to China (Yang 126).

Conclusion

When Confucius developed his religious doctrine over ten centuries ago, he probably did not expect his lessons to manifest themselves in modern Korean pop culture—especially when it involves lighthearted romantic drama series. However, Confucius was ahead of his time, and his principles have shaped Korean society in a plethora of ways. Because of these prevalent Confucian values, modern Korean society is reflected in Korean dramas, adopting the Confucian principles that are concealed in everyday societal interactions. As a result, neighboring east Asian countries, such as Japan and China, are attracted to Korean dramas because they recognize the traditional values shown through plot, characterization, and conflict. This concept—called *cultural proximity*—is perhaps the foremost reason for the Korean Wave's success (Lin and Tong 94; Kim, Mi Kyung 7; Cho 396; Huang 128).

Because Japan and China share a Confucian-laden history with South Korea, they are among the top importers of Korean broadcasting imports (Yang 126). However, the difference in Confucian trajectories between Japan and China resulted in dissimilar endorsements of traditional values. The Cultural Revolution resulted in a fragmentation of Chinese culture, making China considerably less Confucian than Japan (Chu 31). As a result, Chinese audiences are perceptibly less emotionally and culturally connected to Korean dramas, resulting in lower importation rates than its counterpart, Japan (Yang 126).

Thus, when Japanese women gathered at the Haneda Airport to meet their idol, Bae Yong Joon, they most likely didn't realize they were taking part in a significant intercultural unification (Lee 12). As the Korean wave enters its 2nd decade, it is likely that neighboring countries will find it easier to empathize with each other—all because of single-season dramas. Cultural proximity, when used correctly, can become a powerful tool that unites countries that are at odds. Perhaps pop culture influence will inevitably replace economic imperialism, and foreign audiences will find themselves bonding over the newest episode of the next hit Korean drama.

Works Cited

- Boys over Flowers*. By Yoon Ji Ryun. Dir. Jeon Ki Sang. KBS, 5 Jan. 2009. *Dramafever.com*. Web.
- Cho, Younghwan. "Desperately Seeking East Asia amidst the Popularity of South Korean Pop Culture in Asia." *Cultural Studies* 25.3 (2011): 383-404. *Taylor & Francis Online*. Web.
- Chu, Godwin, Chikio Hayashi, and Hiroshi Akuto. "Comparative Analysis of Chinese and Japanese Cultural Values." *Behaviormetrika* 22.1 (1995): 1-35. Web.
- Chuang, Lisa, and Hye Eun Lee. "Korean Wave: Enjoyment Factors of Korean Dramas in the U.S." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 37 (2013): 594-604. Science Direct. Web.
- Ember, Carol, and Melvin Ember. "Culture and Culture Change." *Cultural Anthropology: International Edition*. Boston: Prentice Hall, 2010. 14-39. *Pearson*. Web.
- Huang, Xiaowei. "'Korean Wave' — the Popular Culture, Comes as Both Cultural and Economic Imperialism in the East Asia." *Asian Social Science*. 5.8 (2009): 123-130. Web.
- Hwang, Seongbin. "The Current State of Korean TV Dramas." *JAMCO Online International Symposium* 19 (2010). Web.
- Jewel in the Palace*. Dir. Lee Byung Hoon. MBC, 15 Sep. 2003. *Dramafever.com*. Web.
- Kim, Ji Eun. "'Korean Wave' in China: Its Impact on the South Korean-Chinese Relations." Diss. The University of British Columbia, Vancouver. 2011. Web.
- Kim, Mi Kyung. "Cultural Proximity and the Type of Korean Television Programs in Asian Market." *Centre d'études sur les Médias and Journal of Media Economics* (2004): 1-13. Web.
- Kim, Samuel Seongseop, Jerome Agrusa, Heesung Lee, and Kaye Chon. "Effects of Korean Television Dramas on the Flow of Japanese Tourists." *Tourism Management* 28 (2007): 1340-1353. *Science Direct*. Web.
- Kim, Youna. "The Rising East Asian 'Wave': Korean Media Go Global." *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contra-Flow*. Ed. Daya Kishan Thussu. New York, 2007. 121-135. *Sociology.sunimc.net*. Web.
- Lee, Jonghoon. "'Winter Sonata' Dreams: The Influence of the Korean Wave on Japanese Society." *Florida State University Libraries: Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations* (2010): 1-63. Web.
- Levi, Nicholas. "The Impact of Confucianism in South Korea and Japan." *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensa* 26 (2013): 7-16. Web.
- Lin, Angel, and Avin Tong. "Re-Imagining a Cosmopolitan 'Asian Us': Korean Media Flows

and Imaginaries of Asian Modern Femininities.” *East Asian Pop Culture: Analyzing the Korean Wave*, edited by Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi, Hong Kong University Press, 2008, pp. 91-126.

Stowell, Jessica. “The Influence of Confucian Values on Interpersonal Communication in South Korea, as Compared to China and Japan.” *Intercultural Communication Studies* 12.4 (2003): 105-116. Web.

Su, Ting-I. “Confucius and the China Brand.” *Asia Times Online*. Asia Times Online (Holdings), Ltd., 16 March 2011. Web.

Takeda, Atsushi. “Japanese Middle-Aged Women and the Hanryu Phenomenon.” *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies* (2011). Web.

Tsai, Daniel Fu-Chang. “The Bioethical Principles and Confucius’ Moral Philosophy.” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 31.1 (2005): 159-163. Web.

Winter Sonata. By Kim Eun Hee, Yoon Eun Kyung, and Oh Soo Yeon. Dir. Yoon Seok Ho. KBS2, 14 Jan. 2002. *Dramafever.com*. Web.

Xie, Yu, and Emily Greenman. “The Social Context of Assimilation: Testing Implications of Segmented Assimilation Theory.” *Social Science Research* 40.3 (2011): 965–984. PMC. Web.

Yan, Ping, and Lili Pan. “From ‘Goodness’ in Chinese Confucianism to ‘Truth’ in Japanese Confucianism.” *Asian Social Science* 6.3 (2010): 108-112. Web.

Yang, Jonghoe. “The Korean Wave (Hallyu) in East Asia: A Comparison of Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese Audiences Who Watch Korean TV Dramas.” *Development and Society* 41.1 (2008): 103-147. Web.

Z, Nancy. “DramaFever Top 10 Most-Watched Dramas for 2014.” *DramaFever*. n.p. 29 Dec. 2014. Web.

Zhang, Tong, and Barry Schwartz. “Confucius and the Cultural Revolution: A Study in Collective Memory.” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 11.2 (1997): 189-212. Web.