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The Influence of Korean Pop Culture in East and Southeast Asian Nations

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ABSTRACT

We tried to find out the cultural influence that the South Korean media industry has commanded over the east and Southeast Asian nations. The Korean cultural influence, often called “hallyu” has experienced huge strides in global expansion, especially in the south-east Asian countries. We try to find out about the literature surrounding the movement and out the cultural influence that the South Korean media industry has over the Asian and southeast Asian nations, along with some of our own qualitative views.

Keyword: K-Pop, Korean Pop Culture, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Asia, State Sponsored Media.

1. INTRODUCTION

South Korean pop culture is growing at an unprecedented rate. The stars of the industry set the trends, and dictates the fashion trends of many Asian nations, directly influencing what gets sold, what will be the next big thing. How did South Korea manage such a feat of global appeal and acceptance? We try to find out about the literature surrounding the movement and out the cultural influence that the South Korean media industry has over the Asian and southeast Asian nations. Kicking off from around the time coinciding with the Asian financial crisis, the term is “hallyu” and it refers to the wave of Korean influence that has millions of people around the world hooked to Korean dramas, Korean pop music, fashion etc.

2. BODY

(Chadha and Kavoori, 2000) “Media imperialism revisited: Some findings from the Asian case”

The case presented studies are two distinct modes of re-localization in non-Western political and cultural formations. While some forces and groups – such as Hindu nationalists in India, and the Taliban in Afghanistan – campaign for a return to the imagined ‘good old days’, others – such as the Asian tiger economies – revisit or strengthen their own developmental routes by embracing and utilizing the new global economic situation.

This embracing of the global by South Koreans have enabled them to capitalize on foreign markets with ease, sporting an international appeal.

(Doobo Shim, 2006) states in “Hybridity and the rise of Korean popular culture in Asia” that the popularity of Korean pop culture has, the regional fans are eager to learn the Korean language and travel to Korea.

In this context, Korean big business is making efforts to transform Korean wave fans into consumers of Korean products and services.

Even Korean corporations have a hand in the Korean wave, as in order to reinforce the existing 'Korean boom' in Vietnam, LG Electronics is reported to have provided Vietnamese television stations with several Korean television dramas for free, even covering the cost of dubbing.

The texts talk about how Korean pop culture had even helped to add to national identity as the comparison of a film to Hyundai cars which at that time were considered the 'pride of Korea' was apt enough to awaken the Korean public to the idea of culture as an industry. 'Learning from Hollywood' was seen as the way for the Korean media industry to model upon and grow.

Hong Kong-based film critic Law has the view that Korean popular culture's success arises from its ability to touch the right chord of Asian sentiments, such as family values.

In the late 1990s, a regional music channel, Channel V, featured different types of boy bands which were topping the charts in China and Taiwan. One of these boy bands, H.O.T., found itself on the top of the charts of the music industry. In 2002, Korean teenage pop sensation BoA's debut album topped the charts of Oricon weekly, Japan's equivalent to American Billboard charts. These influences of the Korean pop culture were influencing and gaining huge popularity in the eastern Asian nations, China and Taiwan being the most watching countries, followed by Japan and other nations. Korean dramas were on the hype as in 1999, the first Korean blockbuster, made in Hollywood style, with a generous budget, "Shiri" was shown in Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, receiving critical acclaim and managing to draw large crowds, thus making a new pathway for the K-pop culture in the world. And significantly, its following is rising and being loved by the other nations.

(Jeongmee Kim, 2007) "Why Does Hallyu Matter? The Significance of the Korean Wave in South Korea" draws the attention to the many reasons that are often cited as being the reasons behind the success of Korean pop media, especially Korean drama, regarding the 'conservative' nature of the expressions, extending to scenes of love and intimacy are directed to portray childish playfulness and innocence. A plethora of South Korean travel agencies, even the local governments have capitalized on the success of "hallyu".

Kim finds it particularly revealing about the Korean wave, as a phenomenon is not what Hallyu means or why it is so successful, but the strange manner in which the term has been applied. Koreans cannot label cultural products as Hallyu straightaway. He mentions Jin-Seok Kang, who explains in his article 'Hanryu is the Cultural Code of East Asia', "Hallyu is a term that can only be applied to a cultural product once it has been exposed to foreign audiences. In other words, not every Korean drama, film or pop song, no matter how popular in Korea, will be labelled Hallyu – only those that have been exported and done so successfully."

Also examined are the junction of Korean image and Korean pop culture image, with the example of Seung-Heon Song, who was involved in a military service scandal. In Korea, it is mandatory for men over the age of 18 to do national service. Seung-Heon Song faced backlash and was accused of trying to avoid the military draft.

In conclusion, he is of the view that hallyu should be seen as an optimistic, positive indicator of a growing openness and willingness to communicate between the Asian countries.

(Younghan Cho, 2011) in his "Desperately seeking East Asia amidst the popularity of South Korean pop culture in Asia" analyses an extensive trove of academic discourse from Korea and proceeds to understand the dispersion of K-pop and identifying and understanding the cultural geographies in Asia.

The government interventions are noted, notably the introduction of the Basic Law for Cultural Industry Promotion in 1999 (accompanied by a budget of \$148.5 million) and establishing the Culture and Content Agency under the purview of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2001 (Shim 2006). The infusion of national interest with the Korean media industry has created an interesting setting and created much discussion and discourse in South Korea itself.

Also discussed is South Korea's national identity as an East Asian entity and the pan-cultural influences, and Korean pop culture as a subset of East Asian pop culture.

3. CONCLUSIONS

K-pop boom started, the popularity of K-pop has spread in Southeast Asian countries (Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines) and even South Korea in terms of popularity as artists are very liked by the people and their lifestyle with their music. In the west, K-pop is largely considered to be a trend. It has been a wealth creation for the nation as with the exports close to \$189 million in 2017. Problems faced by K-pop in other nations might become a threat for the local music culture of other countries as people tend to be attracted to the K-pop culture. K-pop stars are often at the center of controversies. The future of K-pop is at the pace of growing as by combining its past references in terms of growth as a million-dollar industry which is positively carried in the present as well, also the fan following of K-pop artists is at peak, the future seems to be bright. The literature we have examined mostly tries to understand the industry and its relations to the Korean identity, an agent of tourism, the unique government backing that is peculiar to the industry, while at the same time trying to pin the defining factors that are behind the phenomenal success of the industry. Korean pop culture has managed to cross cultural boundaries and ignite the imaginations of people of different cultures and backgrounds.

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