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From Globalization to Glocalization: Configuring Korean Pop Culture to Meet Glocal Demands

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Abstract

Despite the influx of Hollywood films and Japanese pop culture throughout the 1990s as well as the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, K-pop and K-dramas have now successfully attained fame domestically and have even spread commercially to Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America. This process of localizing Hallyu and then subsequently globalizing it is what we call glocalization. Simply put, glocalization refers to a successful localization of a foreign global product so much that the original developers of that product want to import the local variations instead of their original version. Glocalization is therefore a highly proactive countermeasure to globalization. Hallyu's success with glocalization demonstrates that the domestic Korean demand for high quality pop culture has brought about new types of competition that call for importing global pop content and simultaneously aiming to produce better quality versions than the originals.

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Introduction

In 2013, we founded the World Association for Hallyu Studies (WAHS; www.iwahs.org) to connect the growing global community interested in Hallyu. This creation of WAHS has resulted in the development of Hallyu Studies, which we have envisioned as an independent discipline apart from Asian Studies or Korean Studies. The rationale for such an assemblage was not immediately apparent to many scholars in Asian Studies who had all too easily bought into a general, though not necessarily well-informed, view that Hallyu would disappear in less than three to five years. To them, Hallyu's sudden popularity was only accidental and therefore, the cultural history of East Asia would quickly rescind back to its normal state of the Chinese, Japanese and Western pop culture domination. Indeed, up until this point, Korean pop culture had never been popular in the form of massive followings and fandom by non-Koreans in the past, which seemed to reinforce their prediction of a quick Hallyu doom.

WAHS is now planning its 8th World Congress at the University of Oxford in September 2021, which suggests that Hallyu has not only become a global phenomenon but has survived as one as well. The very fact of its global nature attests to the justification that Hallyu Studies should be independent from Korean or East Asian Studies. So far, the specialists of the traditional and regional purviews of Korean Studies and East Asian Studies, , have not been able to fully address why Hallyu is global to begin with and why it is predominantly an entertainment form for female audiences (see *inter alia*, Oh 2009, 2011, 2013; Kim 2011; Lie 2014; Otmazgin and Lyan 2014; Lyan 2019; Oh and Kim 2019).

In our fourth congress held at Oxford University in September 2016, several noteworthy papers were presented addressing the theme of “What is the ‘K’ in K-pop?” The basis of this theme was a paper with the same name by our brilliant colleague at WAHS, John Lie from the University of California at Berkeley. Lie published his seminal work on K-pop in a special issue that we edited for *Korea Observer* back in 2012. There, Lie argued that the “K” in K-pop, in fact, denotes anything but “Korea” as its success is derived from its non-Korean or non-Asian (especially Japanese or Chinese) musical elements, specifically its incorporation of European and American dance music styles with fast beats and gyrating dance moves not easily found in the Asian music scenes (Lie 2012, 2014). This paper of his, which was later published into a book, ignited much debate among the congressional participants at Oxford at the time. The whole scholarly interest in Hallyu then was whether Hallyu was Korean in its nature or a form of hybrid culture, epitomized by such concepts as “no nationality” or *mukokuseki* (Iwabuchi 2004). These scholars, however, did not pay attention to a third possibility of Hallyu – its glocal nature.

In this paper, we turn our attention to the concept of glocal pop culture in the 21st century world. Using K-pop as an example, we define what glocal pop culture is and how it is manufactured in Korea, paying close attention to what content is sold glocally and what kind of people love to buy K-pop. In doing so, we provide reasons why K-pop is not merely a hybridized cultural form and why it is distinct from other forms of hybridized pop music or mere copies of Western pop. Unlike previous studies, we therefore focus on why Hallyu and K-pop are predominantly feminine in their fandom structure and why they are global.

Theoretical Backdrop

Lie’s paper and book on K-pop upended the conventional understanding of East Asian pop culture that was previously shaped by specialists of Japanese or Chinese pop culture (including pop music, films, manga/anime, TV dramas and others). The reason for this was his bold argument that the key to any commercial success on a global scale for the Asian cultural industries, like K-pop, was to steer clear of China or Japan and instead copy U.S. and European culture directly (i.e., not through the two Asian super giants).

Prior to this point, the dominant explanation of the global K-pop phenomenon was largely the cultural hybridity perspective. This perspective advances a liberal argument about Chinese, Japanese and Indian cultures as a grand Asian Culture (AC) that may countervail the dominant Western Culture (WC) as a whole (Chua, 2004, 2012; Iwabuchi, 2004, 2013). The word “countervail” here means the sustained success and continuity of local cultures despite the encroachment of Anglo-American cultural hegemony that has accompanied globalization. This is partly because AC has incorporated WC to the point that it can nurture itself and not be overtaken by WC through a process of total assimilation. As Huntington (1993) has acknowledged, Japan is a model country that had mastered the art of mixing AC and WC together, which has resulted in it becoming an extremely successful modern nation without fully assimilating to WC. Authors of this dominant view including Iwabuchi (2004) conclude that the rise of K-pop therefore was to be expected, given that it has successfully incorporated both AC and WC in a fashion that can please not only Asians and but Westerners as well. K-pop has successfully ridden the wave of AC expansion vis-à-vis WC. In this sense, K-pop is not a new cultural force in the global cultural domain as long as it originates from Japan and/or China (i.e., hybrid), both of which have already hybridized their pop culture with WC since the 19th century (Iwabuchi 2004, 2013; Park 2006; Hirata 2008; Ryoo 2009; Shim 2011).

Lie’s contributions to the expanding literature of Hallyu served as a *coup de main* to the notion of cultural hybridity that was prevalent in the mainstream Hallyu discourse. His argument ran counter to that of Iwabuchi’s because he contended that shying away from both China and Japan was a critical factor of Korean pop culture’s success. Lie (2012, 2014) uses examples of both K-drama (e.g., *Winter Sonata*) and K-pop to demonstrate that the drama has nothing that is ordinarily Korean or Chinese in its entire episodes, whereas K-pop uses much faster beats than J-pop.

In this paper, we provide reasons for departing, to some degree, from both contentions. The hybridity thesis has holes from several points of consideration. First of all, hybridity is an obscured concept based on a kind of circular logic. Why is Japanese culture globally popular? Because it is hybrid. How do we know it is hybrid? Because it is globally popular. Hallyu’s popularity can be linked to its hybridity in a similarly fallacious manner. Meanwhile, it is awfully difficult to know how much ratio of native to foreign a successful hybridization involves. Is it 50/50, 70/30 or something different? It is also virtually impossible for Korea to emulate Japan, perhaps the most well-known case of hybridity in the world. Despite modernization and development, Japan has long been recognized for its global success in maintaining both Japanese and Western cultures simultaneously. With this in mind, there is not enough consideration of what exactly the secret of the Japanese formula of hybridity is, what should be abandoned in the process of importing outside culture, and what should be preserved. It is only natural therefore for any average Japanese or Korean to be appalled at how culturally the two countries are different despite the supposed similarities or hybridity.

At the same time, the hybridity explanation does not provide an explanation for failures. Why did Hallyu succeed while Taiwanese pop culture failed, for instance, despite similar degrees of hybridity of Japanese, Chinese, and Western cultures? What did Taiwan do wrong in its hybridization approach? No one among the strong believers of the hybridity tenet seems to have an answer to this question. Finally, this conventional explanation fails to account for the similarity between Japanese pop and Hallyu despite the different degrees of their global success. What is a common hybridity between these two cultures that made them consistently successful? Is this commonality, if it even exists, absent in Taiwanese or Chinese pop culture? In short, the hybridity thesis raises more questions than it answers when considering matters related to globalization and glocalization.

Despite moving beyond the hybridity thesis and providing an enlightening explanation of K-pop's global success, Lie's analysis lacks insight into the anatomy of the production process of the K-pop industry as a whole. Without knowing how to construct a black box of K-pop production, has simply copying Anglo-American culture wholeheartedly led K-pop producers to the global success they have attained? Instead of mixing cultures, there is a new requirement to master the mimicry of the Anglo-American cultural symbols, their syntax, and their semantics. How can that be done without developing a local system of production that can learn WC and reproduce it in a flawless fashion? To provide an example, Japanese car industries have dominated the global car market due to several externally crucial and timely factors, including their precision of mimicking Western cars. However, endogenous factors are just as important as exogenous ones. If global factors are significant for an export industry like car manufacturing, there is also a need to understand why automakers such as Toyota created the Just-in-Time System (JIS) or *Kanban*, the two most famous cost saving and quality improving organizational means developed by Toyota (for JIS and *Kanban*, see Monden 2011). As Lie (2012) himself has succinctly put it, if SM Entertainment is "the single most important" factor behind the global success of K-pop, a meaningful analysis calls for an understanding of the inside organizational dynamics of an industry dominated by firms like SM or Toyota, but not by Cube Entertainment or Isuzu Motors.

Furthermore, a firm-level analysis of the successful Japanese and Korean entertainment companies that have exported cultural content cannot be found in either explanation of cultural hybridity or Anglo-American cultural hegemony. In a previous study, Oh and Park (2012) focused on export management, characterized by SM's business focus shifting from B2C (business to customers) to B2B (business to business, namely SM Entertainment to YouTube). SM Entertainment's core business competence therefore was bifurcated into creativity and export management components. This transformation of SM's international strategy from B2C to B2B necessitated competent international managers like Youngmin Kim, SM's CEO, who was pivotal in successfully introducing BoA and TVXQ to Japan. Kim had considerable experience with Japan, having spent his primary, middle, and high school years there before coming to Korea University for undergraduate studies. While SM founder and chairman Soo

Man Lee solely managed the creativity management side, Kim had full freedom and power to direct the entire firm's export operations. The connection between YouTube and SM, something that Japanese and Chinese entertainment managers have not sought to utilize, was first mapped out by Kim, who accidentally discovered the YouTube icon, pre-installed on a Japanese iPhone that was first released in 2008.

The inside story from SM's perspective therefore adds richness and flesh to the theoretical skeleton presented by Lie (2012). Furthermore, the SM story provides insight into how firms are proactively managing and implementing their policies of cultural mixing in a way that has led to idiosyncratic outcomes of hybridity. In other words, no universal or common formula of cultural hybridity has been conducive to global success. For one thing, the idea of shying away from Japan or China as a part of the cultural hybridity process has been a valuable discovery by Lie (2012) in the study of cultural globalization. Nevertheless, it is also meaningful to divulge the actual process of hybridization between local (either Japanese or Korean in this case) and Western cultures within the cultural industries. Therefore, those who are interested in finding a common factor of success for cultural exports in the global markets need to look elsewhere away from the topics of hybridity or Anglo-American cultural mimicry. The actual proactive process of hybridization and mimicry varies from firm to firm and from country to country. Throughout this paper, we will elaborate on this in a thesis of our own.

As we noted above, Hallyu's two main features are (a) its global spectrum and (b) its feminine fandom. If (a) is an outcome of (b), we believe that Hallyu's idiosyncratic method of either cultural hybridity or mimicking the Anglo-American culture derives from its (c) female universalism, which is realized by female Hallyu fans through proactive Hallyu consumption (e.g., listening to K-pop, watching K-dramas, taking part in Hallyu pilgrimages in Korea, learning the Korean language and experiencing Korean culture as a way of routine life in general). Therefore, an evolutionary process of (c) female universalism → (b) female fandom → (a) global spectrum can be conceptualized. This evolutionary process has made Hallyu distinct from Japanese or Chinese pop, not to mention its Anglo-American counterparts (although one can find elements of all of them embedded within Hallyu). Nonetheless, Hallyu will share the same consequences of its global success with other pop culture products that are based on female universalism. Neither Iwabuchi's argument regarding hybridity nor Lie's emphasis on Anglo-American cultural hegemony explains how a feminine fandom has been established for Hallyu, as both authors opted for a cultural-mixing explanation. Our understanding of female universalism, briefly outlined in this paragraph, will be the focus of the second part of this paper.

Not Globalization but Glocalization

Most scholars working in the field of globalization have widespread misunderstandings regarding globalization, localization, and glocalization. Most scholars seem to agree with the

textbook definition of globalization as the process of integration on a global scale, yet they have enormous difficulties coming up with agreed concepts of localization and glocalization (Jang and Lee 2015; Roudometof 2016). In studies of pop culture, we might as well define globalization as the worldwide domination of one hegemonic culture such as the Anglo-American one (e.g., English, music, dramas, films, food and beverages, fashion, etc.). A component of this Anglo-American globalization can be thought of as a kind of Western male “scientific” universalism, as clearly depicted in such globally popular cultural products as *Sherlock Holmes*, *Superman*, and *Dr Who* (O'Neill 1994; Siegel 2002; Georgiou, M. 2005).

Localization, on the other, refers to the modification of global cultural content in accordance with the demands of local consumers (for localization, see Roudometof 2019). For example, *Sherlock Holmes* became *Aibō* in Japan, whereas *Superman* turned into *My Lover from a Star* in South Korea. However, there is a big difference between Japanese and South Korean localization. For instance, whereas *Aibō* is more popular than *Sherlock Holmes* among the general Japanese public, the former is not popular among Westerners or other Asians, except for a very small number of Japanese drama buffs in Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. Whereas *My Lover from a Star* is not as popular as *Superman* among the general Korean public, it is very popular among female fans of Hallyu all over the world (roughly, 100 million as of 2019, according to the annual survey of global Hallyu fans conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Korea). Japanese localization is so perfect and authentic that no foreign competitor can easily please the Japanese general taste, whereas Korean localization is meant to be re-exported to other parts of the world. Thus, a Koreanized image of a superman, regardless of whether it is “better” than the original superman, has attained global fandom. This is what we call “glocalization”—viz., high quality localization that is meant to be re-exported to other countries to overcome the small size of the domestic market (for glocalization, see Roudometof 2016). All other low-quality localizations would simply remain in their home countries, not being able to be exported to other markets even if some of them would outperform K-pop or K-dramas at home. What matters the most in glocalization therefore is the quality of the cultural product for targeted fans, such as the female fans of K-pop and K-dramas. For these female Hallyu fans, K-pop and K-dramas are “better” than any other competing cultural genres from Korea, even if the latter has outperformed the former at home among general audiences. This can also be considered a reason why the Korean *teuroteu* or Trot genre (an older Korean popular music form similar to Japanese *enka* and based on the two-beat foxtrot rhythm) would never be exported to K-pop fans in particular or general Western markets. To global K-pop fans, K-pop is better than J-pop, Chinese pop, Anglo-American pop, or European music. In fact, the Korean localization of Anglo-American pop music is so perfect that no other competitor can please the female K-pop fans.

We are not arguing that Japan cannot glocalize their cultural products. Japanese products of localization, for example, can also be re-exported back to the originating country, as Japanese cars and cameras have already dominated the U.S. and other global markets for many decades.

Japanese animation, too, which originated from Disney for mass consumption, is currently competing neck and neck with Disney in the global market. What we are arguing, however, is that Japan at the moment is satisfied with the mammoth size of its domestic market, especially when it is difficult to export or license, for example, a Japanese TV drama series to other countries (Lie 2014). Japanese pop culture certainly has its own niche market in the world, but it would not be considered “better” than Korean competitor goods to the members of the massive K-pop and K-drama fanbase.

Be that as it may, what remains striking is the story of Hallyu: how could its localization be so successful that it has readily been re-exported to many different countries in the world. In 2017, a total of US\$362 million worth of TV dramas and formats have been exported all over the world including Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North America, and South America. In the same year, the export revenue for K-pop rose to US\$513 million (KOCCA 2018). Along with the domestic revenues, the total size of the Korean pop culture market puts it in the top five list of competitors in the world. This is a miraculous phenomenon to have taken place in the less than twenty-five years since the liberalization of the South Korean popular culture industries.

Like the precedent case of Japan, the prodigious success of Korean localization involves an array of tacit knowledge that Koreans possess innately and can master more easily than foreigners who find it initially unnatural or awkward. According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), the working definition of tacit knowledge is a kind of knowledge that is difficult to transfer to another person by writing it down or verbalizing it. Therefore, tacit knowledge is the opposite of explicit knowledge that is easily codified and transferred to other people by means of writing or verbalization. Making good sushi dishes is one example of tacit knowledge while producing good animation movies is another. When it comes to tacit knowledge for sushi, few non-Japanese sushi chefs can produce the sushi that the most discriminating Japanese taste experts are pleased with and want to pay big money for. This is not because of a lack of explicit knowledge about making sushi, but rather an absence of sufficient tacit knowledge that would perfect the authenticity of sushi’s taste, which only the most local and highly trained Japanese taste buds can detect. In a similar vein, few non-Korean actors can masterfully reproduce the subtle emotional expressions freely and fitfully shown on Korean women’s faces in Korean dramas. Nor can non-Korean singers easily emulate the highly synchronized K-pop gyrating dance moves in a collective dance format without long periods of dedicated training.

Therefore, tacit knowledge is hardly able to be explained clearly to outsiders in the localization (or hybridization) process that local manufacturers have proactively initiated. This is the same reason hybridity alone as a loose concept cannot explain the success of Japanese anime or K-pop (i.e., glocalization, a form of localization with deep tacit knowledge for innovative improvements from the original import). To understand the glocalization of Hallyu, we therefore need to know what the Korean tacit knowledge (i.e. proactive reaction to globalization) is in addition to the practice of hybridity (i.e. passive reaction to it). Although all

of these K-drama and K-pop genres were not Korean in terms of their origin, they have been exported back to Europe, North America, South America, and Japan by means of tacit knowledge and glocalization.

Table 1 Examples of Korean Glocalization

	Global Brands	Local Brands	Glocal Brands
Car	Ford	Hyundai	Hyundai (N America, S America, China, Vietnam, Middle East)
Instant Noodles	Nissin	Nongshim	Nongshim (N America, S America, China, Japan)
TVs	SONY	Samsung	Samsung (N America, EU, China, SE Asia)
Coffee	Starbucks	Twosome Place	Twosome Place (China, N America, SE Asia)
Cosmetics	L'Oreal	Amore Pacific	Amore Pacific (China, Japan, N America, SE Asia, S America)
Rice Cooker	Jojirushi	Cuckoo	Cuckoo (China)

Source: Various Korean newspapers

As Table 1 shows, the examples of glocalization are not limited to the cultural industry. Following the era of development booms, Korea, like Japan its neighbor to the Southeast, has successfully built up glocal industries that have exported locally hybridized goods to global centers, including North America and the EU. We can list several examples of successful glocalization in Korea, such as Hyundai Motor, a leading Korean car manufacturer that has exported glocally branded automobiles to North America, South America, the Mideast, China, and the ASEAN countries. Nongshim and Samsung are the first two Korean companies that have outperformed Japanese instant noodles (Nissin) and TV (SONY) manufacturers respectively in the global markets. Having explained globalization, localization and glocalization using Hallyu and Japanese pop culture as examples, we will now explain the case of K-pop and its “tacit” glocalization process.

The Glocalization of K-pop: A Tacit Knowledge Model

Globalization in the music industry has progressed rapidly since the fall of the Soviet Union and its Eastern bloc. The wholesale change within the music industry amid globalization implies several things. Firstly, it can refer to a situation where music from the centre can dominate the peripheral music markets (i.e., music imperialism) (Black 1994; During 1997; Fine 1997; McChesny 2001). Secondly, it can mean cosmopolitanism, where a diverse mix of center, peripheral, and semi-peripheral music is sold in the market to sizable groups of fans and “buffs” in each subculture market (Cho-Han et al. 2003; Iwabuchi 2004, 2013). This cosmopolitanism is close to an ideal type of a multicultural music market. Third, globalization can allude to a new global division of labour in music production and dissemination. In the past, for example, Japan exported vinyl American popular music LPs back to the U.S. due to their high quality and cheap prices (i.e., production outsourcing). In another case, European singers and artists went to New York and Hollywood to record and release their albums due to the sheer size of the pop music market in the U.S. (i.e., production and marketing outsourcing). In the new global division of music production, the music products sold in each subculture market are produced by a new system of global division of labour that involves European, Asian, and American music talents, venture capital firms and distributors (Oh and Park 2012). K-pop belongs to the third type of global division of labor. Under this new division of labor, both cosmopolitan and transnational characteristics of the entire industrial ecology loom large for quality and cost requirements (Dunning 1992).

Global consumers, now more than ever, demand cheaper and higher quality goods and services that are easily procurable from the virtual or real global market. It is here where glocalization is an important strategic choice for many multinational corporations, including pop culture manufacturers and distributors. K-pop, by definition, entails the export of music “made in Korea” to global consumers because the domestic music market is drastically hampered by its limited size and rampant, albeit diminishing, piracy. However, before the current K-pop export boom, the Western network of music producers and distributors had neither spotted nor recruited Korean musical talents into their production and distribution systems. Korean popular music was simply not Western at all, as the traditionally popular trot or kayo songs with pentatonic scales had dominated East Asian popular music (Lie 2012, 2014). The export of Korean music on a global scale has only taken place in the 21st century, mainly because of: (1) Korea’s economic ascendance to the semi-periphery of the world system; (2) the massive immigration of Koreans into countries of the centre (Japan, the U.S., Western Europe, etc.); (3) the active participation of the Korean and overseas Korean population in the global cultural industries; and most importantly, (4) the proactive participation of South Korean entertainment firms in the global division of labor system of the music manufacturing and distribution systems.

The glocalization process of K-pop, following its entry into the new global division of labor system, is not as complicated as it may sound. First of all, Korean firms in the semi-

periphery of the world system have to import or outsource raw materials from the periphery while also licensing or learning advanced technologies. At the same time, they borrow financial resources from the center. Like the famous Korean electronics company, Samsung, and automobile manufacturer, Hyundai, which borrowed money and technology from both Japan and the U.S., K-pop companies have outsourced original music scores to Western (notably Swedish, American, and British) music composers. This is the first stage of the globalization of Korean pop music, which had long been dependent on domestic or Japanese musical creativity.

Mere participation in the global division of music production and distribution, however, does not necessarily guarantee the global success of K-pop. For one thing, this participation itself is extremely difficult to engage in, given the domination of European, North American, Central and South American and Japanese music producers and distributors. Equally challenging is the need to sustain popularity in the global music market. K-pop producers and exporters need tacit knowledge about how to glocalize the music they bought from Europe and North America. This is the tacit knowledge that Koreans would naturally acquire in the process of improving the quality of foreign imports before re-exporting them back to Japan, Europe, and North America. We call this localization (see Table 2). This is why the entire process of Global (G) → Local (L) → Glocal (GL) is untenable if the “L” component of the global division of labor is not creative or unique (i.e., product differentiation) enough to attract producers and distributors, not to mention the targeted global fan groups. To repeat, hybridity (i.e., borrowing and mixing) alone is not enough.

K-pop’s differentiation strategy to make the “L” process attractive to global audiences is threefold: (1) numbers; (2) physique; and (3) voice-dance coordination. At a first glance, K-pop’s product differentiation lies in the number of singers on stage at one time. Unlike Chinese popular singers, J-Pop bands, or Michael Jackson, K-pop’s success initially came from the large number of performers singing and dancing simultaneously on stage. TVXQ, Girls’ Generation, Big Bang, Super Junior, 2PM, SHINee, BTS and others feature a special Korean staging formation unmatched by any entertainment experience in the postwar years. Peculiar only to K-pop, singer-dancers on the stage continue to change dancing formations with strict and perfect synchronization (i.e., a similar case found in North Korean mass games with card stunts). From the beginning to the end of a song, singer-dancers take turns occupying the spotlight center stage, as if there were no lead vocalist for the group (Jang and Kim 2013). Everyone in the group highlights supposedly the same vocal and dancing talent in a synchronized gyrated movement sequence.

The number factor alone, however, is not enough to command attention from international audiences. Japan’s top girl bands, AKB48, SKE48, and HKT48, feature up to 48 singers and dancers at the same time, making them constantly the most popular on the Japanese Oricon music chart. However, they have not had any global success akin to that of K-pop girl bands, such as Girls’ Generation or Twice, which feature only nine members. K-pop’s “physique” factor therefore must also be taken into consideration in its differentiation strategy

because any competitor like AKB48 can match the number factor. To take a representative case, Girls' Generation and Wonder Girls members are at least 5 inches taller than AKB48 or HKT48 members, let alone the fact that they show off much sexier and sophisticated looks and bodies than their Japanese counterparts. The five members of Japan's top male idol group, Arashi, also pale in comparison with their Korean counterparts in terms of their physique features. Singers from the K-pop boy bands TVXQ, originally featuring five members, and SHNee, also featuring five members, are at least 10 inches taller than the Arashi members. As a result, to loyal fans, K-pop music videos and concerts are much more visually appealing than those of other Asian (especially Japanese or Chinese) counterparts.

Table 2. K-pop's Glocalization Process (White Cells)

	Global	Local	Transnational
Input Process	European, American, Japanese composers Selling music globally	Competing local composers	Songbay Online original music stores
Manufacturing Process	SONY Universal Warner Related A&Rs	Education & Training Producing in Korea Big 4 K-pop Firms	Global Music Records Online music producers
Distribution Process	MTV SONY, Universal, Warner Global Labels	Korean radio TV networks, Mnet, Korean labels	YouTube iTune Spotify Online streaming sites

Glocal

Finally, even though other non-Korean competing bands may want to rely on the physique factor for their immediate rise to stardom, they often fall short of fans' expectations in terms of their dance-singing coordination in large groups. This voice-dance coordination is the third feature predominant among globally popular K-pop idols. The "L" process within the K-pop industry involves a high level of specific in-house investments provided by entertainment companies themselves that act like venture capital firms. The learning process of mastering how to sing and dance in a synchronous fashion is crucial in the Korean "L" process of the entire global division of labor. Particularly, the length of the learning period is noticeably long often ranging from five to ten years. The three major K-pop managing firms select potential idols through internal auditions and/or their K-pop cram schools. Trainees go through vocal, dancing,

language, and theatrical acting lessons for at least five hours a day in the evening after school and on weekends. They must undergo regular physical fitness training as well as receive skin and other beauty therapies.

The entire program resembles that of a total institution, as trainees are sometimes banned from using cell phones during training (Ho 2012; Lie 2014; Lie and Oh 2014). This is why some critics call the learning process very abusive to the trainees although K-pop managers defend their training programs by arguing that K-pop cram schools are no different from college prep schools, exam cram schools, golf schools, and other similar institutions. K-pop managers emphasize the fact that they pay for all of the K-pop education and training, unlike other private educational institutions in Korea.¹ After the entire period of training, K-pop idols possess very different skills from their Chinese and Japanese competitors; not only of singing and dancing but also of speaking foreign languages and acting. From the training process, they also look much sexier and sophisticated with trimmer bodies than competing singers from other countries.

When most of the system of “L” is completed, distribution, the final stage of K-pop globalization is carried out. As we have mentioned earlier, the “GL” process is not complete without the product’s export and delivery to foreign consumers in massive quantities for a revenue level that is sustainable. What has distinguished the previous Korean pop music from K-pop is the fact that none of the previous Korean popular music genres were able to successfully meet the demands of foreign consumers. This is because the Korean indigenous music distribution companies could never really export and sell their music products overseas. Industries promoting K-pop initially attempted localization strategies of relying on Japanese and Chinese music distributors for their local niche markets of Korean pop music. In Japan, for example, SONY Music Japan and AVEX licensed K-pop music in a way that was localized for the Japanese markets (e.g., BoA, TVXQ, Super Junior, SNSD, etc.). To shy away from Japanese and Chinese distributors and become truly glocal (i.e., distributing K-pop outside of East Asia) however, would require SM Entertainment to embark on a transnational strategy.

A transnational strategy in music distribution involves the revolutionary idea that music can now be distributed beyond the boundaries of nation-states, regions, or economic blocs, thus bypassing all domestic, regional, or even international laws of distributions. Under this bold rubric, music is a free-flowing entertainment content anyone from anywhere can purchase by downloading it from a platform that either distributes music (legally or illegally) or streamlines it for a fee or for free. Furthermore, transnational music distribution entails a truly revolutionary idea of artists and distributors uploading and offering music and music videos themselves for free with the hope of promoting themselves for future returns on investment in the form of domestic CD/DVD sales, concert tour ticket sales, and product endorsements (Oh and Park 2012). Simultaneously, this distribution strategy is open to underdog artists who have neither a domestic market that is huge enough for them to reap massive profits from nor foreign distributors who want to offer contracts to them. Instead of profiting directly from CD and DVD sales, these artists who rely on transnational online distribution must rely on secondary or

tertiary revenues from related products, such as commercial endorsements, royalties from YouTube clicks, royalties from downloads, concert tours, and fan merchandizing goods.

Table 2 captures the basics of the K-pop glocalization process. Each of the three stages of the value chain (input, production, and distribution) has three types of participants (global, local, and transnational). Firms of countries in the center usually choose the global strategy of opting for all three global firms of input, production, and distribution (the Global column). Traditional local firms solely for the domestic market, on the other hand, rely on all three local suppliers, local producers, and distributors (the Local column). Firms engaging in passive hybridity mix global and local firms usually in a top-down fashion according to the order of the global center's mandate of importing finance and technology while at the same time importing raw materials from the periphery. Production and distribution can also be outsourced under the passive hybridity strategy. Transnational firms in the music industry are newcomers who mostly use web/app-based music platforms for input, production, and distribution. However, proactive glocal firms carefully mix global, local, and transnational firms in a bottom-up fashion to engender the glocal effect (the diametric combination of three white cells). In the case of K-pop, K-pop producers like SM have chosen global input firms, local production firms, and glocal (transnational) distribution firms.

Having recapitulated the inside workings of glocalization in the case of K-pop, we move on to the second part of the paper, namely the topic of female universalism, in order to answer the question of why the majority of the Hallyu fans are women whose ages range from their teens to their 70s.

Female Universalism and the Gender Divide

The “K” in K-dramas and K-pop is now obvious to us: the Koreanness represents female universalism that is vividly conveyed in all major works of Hallyu that are exported all over the world. The “K” deliberately targets a female fandom that appreciates female universalism, which can be considered a ubiquitous value shared by most women in the world (i.e., gendered melancholia). This is the area where Korean tacit knowledge is most present and where it performs the most effectively. The subtle emotional actions that Korean TV drama actresses engage in are the best example. Often, these actresses do not receive any prompting and sometimes adlib on their own while showing a wide range of emotions including impromptu tears without the help of artificial tear drops. Female K-pop singers in the capacity of dancers blend difficult aerobic movements with the facial expressions of K-drama actresses—full of subtle facial and body expressions even including tears. What is pervasive among Korean actresses and girl band singers is that their pure physical beauty has become a female universality—viz. all women in the world feel Korean beauty as their ultimate desire to mimic (Epstein and Joo 2012). Here, the physique is not for the sake of sexual suggestiveness but an

ultimate tool with which women can overcome their gender limitations they feel daily in the harsh real world.

The gender divide that facilitated the rise of Hallyu in the world came about from three factors: gendered melancholia, racial melancholia, and post-colonial melancholia (Oh 2011; Oh and Kim 2019). For one to be a Hallyu fan means she has at least one of these three types of melancholia. Melancholia is defined as an emotional outcome from the suppression of sorrow caused by the lack or loss of something or someone to cherish (Butler 2011). Gendered melancholia is an archetypal form of all kinds of melancholia, which arises out of the mournful realization that a woman cannot “weep” openly about the natural sex she is born with. Her duty as a woman is to denounce her mother, sisters, and other girl friends as lifetime sexual companions in order to accept male partners instead. Thus, her adult or sometimes even adolescent sexual partners force her to live with gendered melancholia (Butler 2011). We can also ascertain that males who go through similar gender “troubles” can also experience gendered melancholia, as many gay men cannot openly bemoan the fact that they are born male.

Racial melancholia occurs to men and women who are not born as members of the desired racial group in their society. The fact that one cannot openly lament about the racial category she was born with constitutes the beginning of her melancholic experiences (Eng and Han 2000). Finally, postcolonial melancholia refers to the suppressed sorrow imperialists feel when they lose their colonies back to the people indigenous to the region (Gilroy 2005). Postcolonial melancholia is felt among former imperialists and then re-manifests itself as racism against their former colonial subjects who are living in their former imperial motherlands, such as the U.K., Japan, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the U.S. and so on. Victims of racism, who are minorities living in the global cities of former imperialist countries, therefore feel enhanced racial melancholia that leads to a collective urge of seeking cultural and emotional comfort from their strong ties with their homelands (Appadurai 1990). When myriad minority women find cultural content from their homeland are also filled with sexist, racial, and postcolonial biases, they turn to Hallyu’s female universalism.

Hallyu’s glocal ascendance as an important female entertainment genre in the world is due to its female universalism, which appeals to women all over the world. Particularly important is K-drama’s femininity that espouses heroines who represent wisdom, rationality, tenderness, care, and scientific reasoning along with active social participation, all of which were once considered characteristics of Western male universalism. In Hallyu dramas, it is these heroines who assume the roles of attorneys, prosecutors, politicians, medical doctors, artists, and struggling unemployed ordinary college graduates who want to realize their Cinderella dreams. Female universalism is therefore a universal message of the gendered melancholia and struggle shared by all women in the world who want to break free from their chains to the traditional and male dominant communities of Confucianism, Catholicism, and Islam. It is the will among women to explore the possibilities of building and eventually realizing equal communities where they can freely relieve their gendered, racial, and postcolonial melancholia

without fears of social or state violence against them. Like K-pop, K-drama's success lies in its portrayal of how Korean women can break free from the yoke of Confucianism and other oppressive local values in order to embrace Western values and create a free and inclusive global humanity.

For the first time in Korean pop history, K-pop girl bands have elevated their corporeal beauty to the level of acceptable defiance to the Confucian repression of Korean women. Their dancing and singing have also appealed to many female fans from traditional Catholic, Islam, and Confucian backgrounds in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. Unlike the typical phenomenon of female fans loving boy bands, in the K-pop scene, female fans provide enormous support to girl bands. Girls' Generation, for example, has the most YouTube views among all K-pop singers and in 2017, Red Velvet garnered the number one spot on the K-pop charts for the greatest number of weeks.

Put together, Hallyu cultural content, in its K-pop and K-drama forms, has captured the attention of global female fans, as it is the only truly postcolonial cultural industry (*vis-à-vis* the so-called conviviality cultural industries of the U.K., the U.S., and Japan). Hallyu as a whole deals with gendered and racial/ethnic melancholia on a global scale. Its success is now corroborated by the ongoing observation and empirical evidence that Korean entertainers have excellent tacit knowledge in mixing Western cultural content with Korean-style female universalism. Furthermore, it has demonstrated that it can attract the most female fans in the world who are tired of pop culture from Japan and/or Hollywood (Oh 2011).

Gender Fluidity and Androgynous Men – A Glocal Phenomenon within the K-community

Within the world of female universalism, how does Hallyu package and market Korean males? Are they scientific and rational universal men like white males or their Japanese variations? What value do Korean men have in the world of K-drama and K-pop? These are our final questions in the second part of this paper.

In both K-pop and K-drama, male actors and singers tend to present a very fluid nature of their gender identities, an appalling exposé in the South Korean cultural community where traditional male and female gender roles have been strictly upheld up until the rise of Hallyu. In order to compete with local and global celebrities and cater to female fans all over the world, both K-pop male singers and K-drama actors have undergone a rapid evolution from macho characters to very feminine figures that promote images of androgynous males who are very feminine in their facial looks and body shapes with shaved six packs (C. Oh 2015).

“Beautiful boys” [*misonyeon* or *bishōnen*], however, has been a universally popular term in the West and East Asia for literary and opera characters. In Renaissance Italy, beautiful boys were often perceived by artists as modern manifestations of beauty, whereas in Japanese *kabuki* plays, beautiful boys as *yakusha* wheedled enormous fan support mostly from older women

(Rocke 1998; Fujitani 2006). Beautiful boys, along with beautiful girls [*bishōjō*], also occupy lots of significant positions in modern Japanese *manga* or comic book stories. However, in Korea, such a concept did not exist especially because of the strict Confucian values that distinguished men from women dichotomously by sex from the age of seven. It is only in Korean TV dramas and K-pop scenes that the concept of beautiful boys has emerged and later proliferated in Korea through a careful use of Korean tacit knowledge. Since Koreans had not really been familiar with the Renaissance and Japanese concept of *bishōnen* before, it may seem unlikely that they would possess any tacit knowledge of how to manufacture pretty boys. Yet the reality has proven otherwise. In the Hallyu industry, pretty boys were manufactured according to the demands of the female beholders who knew how to create them.

Korean drama and K-pop producers use enormous means of beauty techniques either through cosmetic products and makeup skills or through outright cosmetic surgeries (Epstein and Joo 2012). Most beauty technicians are of course women who define what constitutes the K-drama or K-pop “pretty” boys. Korean boy bands and actors maintain Renaissance style facial and body compositions (i.e., golden ratios), rarely found in Japan or other Asian countries. Korean beautiful boys, therefore, have garnered enormous fan loyalty from both Chinese and Japanese women, which has resulted in an outbreak of global female fan support from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, North America, and Europe.

In this sense, the K-community, where global fans of K-dramas and K-pop interact either offline or online, is filled with glocalized beautiful boys. These males serve the demands of female universalism shared among female Hallyu fans who want to defy traditional gender roles. Physical beauty is not a given trait but something that has been manufactured in the K-community through proactive applications of beauty and athletic techniques. The modification of their bodies is not to improve their physical appeal to the opposite sexes, but to relieve Hallyu fans of their gendered, racial, and postcolonial melancholia. If 20th century Europe and North America embodied white male universalism, East Asia in the 21st century epitomizes female universalism in the form of gendered melancholia. In a nutshell, female entertainers in Hallyu constitute the Other whom female fans want to become or emulate, whereas the Korean male actors and singers represent their ideal “gender neutral” sexual partners. Often, it is also observable that many of these female fans want to be bewitched by the androgynous male idols who can be both males and females (Oh and Kim 2019). All these gender bending techniques are part of the mental side of Hallyu globalization, which attests to how the Korean Hallyu industry has perfected its tacit knowledge for creating and manufacturing beautiful boys and girls for the new world of female universalism. It is therefore only natural that female universalism in K-pop and Hallyu has promoted proactive fandom including Hallyu pilgrimage tourism to Korea, Korean culture and language learning, K-pop cover dance video production, participation in K-pop auditions, and ultimately joining the K-pop industry as production staff and singers (see *inter alia* Oh 2009, 2011; Kim et al. 2013; Madrid-Morales and Lovric 2015; Otmazgin and Lyan 2019).

Conclusion

In our analysis of Hallyu, using the concepts of glocalization, female universalism and gender fluidity, three findings about Hallyu from the producers' perspectives (i.e., Koreans) are possible. Firstly, Hallyu is not really about Koreanness or Asianness but instead entails the global cultural values of female universalism. Female universalism does not intend to replace white male or scientific male universalism but rather aims to liberate women from the yoke of gendered melancholia, a suppressed desire to identify one's self distinctly from her prescribed gender identity. In so doing, some of these women also suffer from racial and postcolonial melancholia, both of which can be liberated by the same worldview of female universalism. In short, female universalism is the realization of female identity by people who generally possess the problem of gendered melancholia, but not necessarily the other two forms of melancholia.

Secondly, the gender divide in the appeal of Hallyu is not an accidental occurrence but is instead the product of a long period of planning and experimentation by Korean drama writers (mostly women), K-pop producers, K-pop choreographers, voice coaches (mostly women), and Hallyu artists. In hindsight, appealing to female universalism has turned out to be much more successful than appealing to male scientific universalism. The gender divide has created an uneasy outcome for Hallyu, as its fandom is predominantly female with only a small fraction of male followers. One estimate by WAHS is that that more than 90% of the 100 million registered fan club members in the world are female.

Thirdly, Hallyu's success is based entirely on its glocal strategy of business expansion in a way that has bypassed the lures of globalization and localization strategies. However, the glocal strategy will find it difficult to sustain its "L" (i.e. localization), for such a process necessitates the employment of Korean talents. As the global popularity of Hallyu expands to Europe and North America, more fans, most of whom are proactive learners themselves, will likely demand the opening of the "L" to international contenders. When Hallyu opens up its "L" to global contenders, it will have to abandon its glocal strategy in favor of a global strategy, where "L" itself will have to be globalized or transnationalized, just like its input and distribution. If BTS one day were to feature global and transnational boys other than Koreans, would its female universalism be sustainable? Or on the other hand, could it attract more male fans than females? These are some of the immediate futuristic questions we can raise about Hallyu based on the glocalization framework it has maintained so far.

Notes

1. Based on the interviews with the CEO Youngmin Kim and the A&R Manger Chris Lee at SM Entertainment on Nov. 13, 2012 and Dec. 20, 2012, respectively.

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