Constructing a New Image.
Hallyu in Taiwan

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Abstract
This paper discusses how hallyu—the recent influx of Korean popular culture in Taiwan—has transformed the image of South Korea among the people of Taiwan. South Korea and Taiwan share a similar historical past. Nevertheless, the Taiwanese did not have a positive image of South Korea after 1992, when South Korea broke off diplomatic relations with Taiwan in order to establish diplomatic relations with mainland China.

This work is based on ethnographic research done in Taiwan and South Korea from 2001–2003 and 2007–2009. It explores how hallyu has contributed to the rebuilding of the image of South Korea in Taiwan. It discusses Taiwanese perceptions of this image and the role of the South Korean government in improving it. It focuses on how a once-held negative image of South Korea has been transformed. The hallyu boom inspired many Taiwanese to remark on the influence of South Korean dramas and pop music in renewing their relationship with South Korea. It has provided an opportunity for Taiwan and South Korea to build positive relationships after the break-up of their diplomatic relations. Through hallyu, South Korea became a country that Taiwanese want to emulate, a model nation for Taiwan today.

Keywords
national image; popular culture; hallyu (Korean Wave); nation branding; globalisation; nationalism; identity

Introduction
An unexpected change has occurred in the contemporary Taiwanese cultural landscape: long-beloved Hong Kong pop music and Japanese soap operas are no longer items of prime interest. Since the beginning of 2000, many Taiwanese have begun to prefer something many consider to be fresh and trendy,1

1) Taiwanese people often use the word ‘trendy’ in English when they describe Korean
conveying Asian values and sentiments. More and more Taiwanese are choosing to watch Korean movies, listen to Korean popular music, watch Korean soap operas, and even travel to Korea to visit spots they have seen in their favourite media.

The rise in popularity and dissemination of Korean popular culture, referred to as the Korean Wave, is remarkable, especially in Taiwan, where Korea had not previously seemed notable or attractive and people had long favoured Japanese pop culture; also, Taiwan was involved in the cultural flow among major Chinese-speaking areas, including Hong Kong, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Singapore. Taiwan has been playing a central role in East Asian pop culture. Unlike Japan and Hong Kong, with which Taiwan has had cultural exchanges for centuries, South Korea had a negative image in Taiwan, especially after 1992, when South Korea broke off diplomatic relations with Taiwan and established a new relationship with mainland China. The memory of this seeming betrayal began to change after the Korean Wave started to boom.

During my visits to Taiwan between 1999 and 2009, I have seen a dramatic image transformation: as Korean popular culture increased in popularity, popular opinions of South Korea improved. Viewing Korean television dramas and music performances has led the Taiwanese to replace their old image of South Korea with a new one. In this paper, I analyse this change. I intend to answer to following questions. What elements of Korean popular culture provided a positive image of Korea to the Taiwanese? What was their significance in this change? How did the Korean government upgrade the country’s image through hallyu?

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popular culture. ‘Trendy’ here means something that is up to date and in the forefront of fashion.


4) Sung, Introduction.

5) Hallyu refers to the phenomenon of Korean popular culture, disseminated primarily through the mass media, enjoying a broad popularity outside Korea. Since 1999 the Mandarin term hànliú (韓流), equivalent to the Korean term hallyu, meaning ‘Korean wave, trend, wind’, has become well known in East Asian countries, beginning with Chinese-
This paper discusses the role that *hallyu*, or the Korean Wave, has played in reconstructing the image of South Korea among Taiwanese people. Based on ethnographical research done in Taiwan and South Korea between 2000 and 2009, it focuses on how and why the consumption of Korean popular culture has led the Taiwanese to construct a new image of South Korea and analyses ideas expressed about the process. It relies on Taiwanese ideas, expressed in personal interviews, emailed questionnaires and website interviews, and on analysis of the *hallyu* policy initiated by the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism. The subjects of my interviews were professors, professional radio disc jockeys, sales managers at CD companies, people who work at CD shops, television producers, students, journalists and music critics; however, most of the concepts used in this paper focus on ideas put forward by university professors and professionals at CD companies.

**How is a National Image Constructed Through Pop Culture?**

Many scholars have tried to clarify the definition of the concept of ‘national image’. Among competing definitions and approaches to this topic, I mainly follow Boulding’s, which defines ‘national image’ as the cognitive representation that a person holds of a given country—what a person believes to be true about a nation and its people. The key is how a nation appears to others, and not how it truly is, in any universal sense. This cognitive representation may result from many stimuli, such as wars, disasters or political stances. Some people believe it functions as an important factor in contemporary commerce, and that businesses in a given nation can accelerate their success when potential customers believe that products produced in that nation are more reliable than products produced in other nations.

speaking areas such as the People’s Republic of China (mainland China), the Republic of China (Taiwan), Hong Kong and Singapore, and later spreading to Japan, Thailand, Mongolia and Vietnam. The public media began recognizing Korean popular culture in mainland China in 1997, when the national China Central Television station (CCTV) aired the Korean television drama *What is Love All About?*, which became a big hit, probably because it emphasises conservative Asian values.


What factors create an image of a nation? They may include education and personal experience, but many people perceive a nation’s image through the mass media, especially televised news and newspaper articles, which present people with a picture of the world beyond their physical reach. Similarly, Kunczik says, ‘The mass media influence the way a country’s people form their images of the people and governments of other countries, because it is the mass media that disseminate the greater part of the information about foreign countries.’ Most people develop an image of other nations without firsthand contact with the image object, and they usually have mass-media channels as the sources of their information.

In contrast, how popular culture has influenced a given nation’s image is unexplored territory. In the twenty-first century, where internet and cable channels are so developed, the role that popular culture plays in the construction of national image is immense. By consuming popular culture, people create a certain image in their minds. Asians often think of Western society as more liberal and Asian culture as more conservative. This imagery comes from American films and soap operas. Now that people can watch any music videos, movies and soap operas from the internet, the role popular culture plays in constructing national image is greater. Japan started to pay attention to Korea because of one television drama, Winter Sonata, which had a big impact on Japanese society. This one drama totally changed how many Japanese perceive South Korea. In a survey conducted with 2,200 Japanese by NHK, 26 per cent replied that after watching Winter Sonata their image of Korea had changed, and 22 per cent said there was an increase in interest in South Korea. Clearly, the effect of Winter Sonata was a major and important one. Not only in Japan but many nations where hallyu exists, many have reconstructed their image of South Korea, regarding it as an advanced, modern and internationalised nation thanks to the image portrayed in popular culture.

Although many scholars have analysed the Korean Wave in various settings and from various perspectives, and have also dealt with the role popular culture

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8) Lippmann, Public opinion.
11) Park Jang Sun, Hallyu, Korea and Japan’s Drama War (Seoul: Communication Box, 2008).
12) Park, Hallyu, Korea and Japan’s Drama War.
is playing in national image construction, a thorough study of how certain nations have changed their image construction of South Korea through pop culture has not yet been made. This case study of the Taiwanese will provide a new perspective on the importance of popular culture in national image-building.

How Did Hallyu Start in Taiwan?

Beginning in 1999, Korean popular culture started to appeal widely in neighbouring countries. Unlike the people of China and Japan, the Taiwanese were attracted to Korean popular culture because of the Korean duo dance group CLON (interview with Mike, 3 March 2002). In contrast to popular local and Japanese teenage idol groups, CLON attracted many Taiwanese women, especially in their late 20s and 30s, because of the ‘masculinity’ projected in its performers’ dance movements (interview with Mike, 2 March 2002), but other factors were also involved.

CLON debuted in the Taiwanese music market by performing live at the ‘Nanxing 101’ concert in 1998, and the duo’s success led the Taiwanese music industry to promote additional Korean pop singers. A few Korean musicians had tried and failed in this market before. According to the ROCK Records Company, CLON’s first album sold more than 400,000 copies in Taiwan—many more than competing foreign and local albums (interview with Mike, 2002). When the ROCK producers were looking for something different, they suspected that CLON’s appearance and dance skills would attract many Taiwanese; however, CLON had not previously been marketed in Taiwan and the speed of the duo’s success was surprising. CLON’s performances gave the impression that South Korean popular music was something powerful, fun to listen to. Also, it was ‘easy listening’—danceable music, which Taiwanese audiences could follow effortlessly, even without understanding the lyrics. In Taiwan, interest in CLON led to interest in Korean pop artists in general, and CLON’s success is therefore considered the starting-point of hallyu in Taiwan. Korean dance musicians such as Park Ji Yoon and idol groups such as H.O.T., Shinhwa, Wondergirl, Super Junior and SS501 eventually became leading Korean pop stars in Taiwan.

As part of this trend, the low price and fairly high quality of Korean soap operas led the Taiwanese entertainment industry to begin importing other elements of Korean popular culture, and these imports became the basis of the hallyu phenomenon in Taiwan. According to several scholars who have written about this topic, hallyu owes its existence mostly to the media liberalisation that
swept across Asia in the 1990s, but partly to the economic crisis in Asia, which made Asian buyers prefer Korean products because they were cheaper than Japanese and Hong Kong products. A 2003 article in the Straits Times suggests that, in the year 2000, Korean television dramas were a quarter the price of their Japanese counterparts and one-tenth the price of their Hong Kong counterparts. Lili, a producer at the GTV station in Taiwan, said the main reason that the station had been broadcasting Korean soap operas was their quality and price, compared with the quality and price of comparable Japanese products: ‘Korean soap operas were much better quality than Taiwanese local products, but were cheaper than other foreign products’ (interview with author, 3 February 2002).

GTV started broadcasting Korean soap operas dubbed in Mandarin at the end of the 1990s. Many Taiwanese watched Korean soaps at that time, but those soaps gave only a vague image of Korea because Mandarin-dubbed Korean dramas hardly seemed like foreign products; also, trendy Japanese dramas were proving exceptionally attractive in Taiwan. A few trendy Korean dramas, such as Tomato, Mr Q, Wedding Dress and Stars in My Heart, were notably different from trendy Japanese dramas, but they did not contrast enough to affect the image of South Korea. Finally, as a result of GTV’s constant efforts to import Korean dramas, the Korean drama Fall Story became the most-watched television drama in Taiwan. After this success, the Korean ancient drama Dae Jang-Keum, released in 2003, became a sensation: it reached the very high (for Taiwan) audience figure of 6.27 per cent, and soon another Korean drama, Winter Sonata, enjoyed similar popularity. Taiwanese audiences loved Dae Jang-Keum and Winter Sonata because they dealt with current issues. Dae Jang-Keum nicely introduced Korean traditional culture and stressed the value of Asian traditions. Winter Sonata, a platonic love story, delivered nostalgic feelings about Asia and emphasised family values. This kind of television drama motivated older Taiwanese people to watch these dramas constantly, and Korean dramas remained popular in general. Not all Korean dramas have proved successful in Taiwan, but Full House (2004), My Name is Kim Sam Soon (2005), Coffee Prince (2007) and Boys over Flowers (2009), among others, have caught the Taiwanese people’s imagination, especially among young people. They deal with modern love, city life, single women and even teenagers in school.

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14) Straits Times (8 April 2003).
The importation of Korean soap operas increased in Taiwan until 2006. Since 2006 the rate has not been so high, but the Taiwanese love of Korean soap opera has continued until the present. From 1999 to 2004, Taiwan became one of the biggest consumers of Korean dramas, importing even more Korean products than mainland China.\(^\text{15}\) Even while the importation of Korean dramas was sharply declining in Asia, especially in Japan and China, Taiwan was seeing a constant rise in Korean dramas.\(^\text{16}\) Unlike the regions that saw a decline of *hallyu*, its rise in Taiwan not only affected popular music and television drama, but spread to food, fashion, internet games and even the Korean language. Both the strong image portrayed by Korean pop musicians and the sophisticated storyline of television dramas greatly attracted the Taiwanese.

During several visits to Taiwan, I have seen an increase of the popularity of *hallyu* there. By October 2009, its extent had become impressive. Korean television dramas and Korean dance music were still wildly popular. The trendy drama *Boys over Flowers*, a remake of a Japanese manga\(^\text{17}\) titled *Hana yori Dango*, was the hottest teenage television drama. The Korean version soap opera of this manga was being aired in many different Asian regions, including Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore, and its popularity among teenagers proved that it had not yet faded away. In Taiwan, original soundtrack CDs and merchandise from these dramas were being sold everywhere.

Producers in the Taiwanese music industry said that a second *hallyu* would soon be coming to Taiwan, focused on boy bands such as Super Junior,\(^\text{18}\) whose performance of ‘Sorry Sorry’ reached number one in many music sales charts, and whose photos publicising their new songs were posted everywhere in music record shops in Taipei. According to C. (who declined to be named in the public record), the sales rate of Korean popular music in Taiwan is now as high as that of Japanese CDs. He added:


\(^{16}\) Department of Cultural Industry Policy, Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism, ‘*Hallyu* Support Policy Development Measure Review’, p. 3.

\(^{17}\) ‘Manga’ is an English term for ‘cartoon’ or ‘printed cartoon’, especially one published in Japan.

\(^{18}\) Super Junior, often called S.J. and SuJu, is a Korean teenage boy band, consisting of 13 members (12 Korean, one Chinese). The largest boy band in the world, it is divided into subgroups, such as Super Junior T, Super Junior M, Super Junior Happy and Super Junior K.R.Y, which target different music industries and audiences. Super Junior was originally
Hallyu is no longer a sudden phenomenon. At least in the music market, importing Korean music is the most challenging business at this moment. Every music company wants to release new albums of Korean boy-band groups. It is because the trend is going that direction. Unlike boys, teenage girls are much in love with their idol stars, and they support them by purchasing their CDs. So after Super Junior’s success, every music company is trying to make a contract with new Korean groups.

(Interview with C., October 2009)

My ethnographic research in October 2009 showed that Korean popular culture has not become part of Taiwanese daily life to the extent that Japanese and local products once had; nevertheless, its newfound popularity has not really declined. This success belies what was often predicted by many scholars and journalists, who assumed that hallyu would soon fade away because of its low quality and its lack of fresh content; however, at least in Taiwan, it has become part of the local cultural landscape. Its dance music and dramas continue to attract Taiwanese audiences, especially female, and are now a feature of their daily lives.

Why Korea?

During several visits to Taiwan observing the rise of hallyu, a thought that frequently came to mind was ‘Why Korea? Why did the Taiwanese suddenly become interested in Korean popular culture? Though I have already pointed out some significant factors, such as CLON’s debut and the cheap importation of Korean soaps, interviewing and spending time with Taiwanese people led me to analyse individual ideas and opinions. The reason I wanted to explore more individual opinions was that Taiwan is different. In contrast to other places where hallyu is highly popular, its people had long favoured Japanese pop culture; unlike China and Vietnam, Taiwan received Korean pop culture only in competition with Japanese pop culture. Therefore, I assumed that there might be more underlying reasons why the Taiwanese are interested in consuming Korean pop culture.

After conducting around 40 interviews between 2002 and 2009, I have come to believe that three intangible factors—often raised by interviewees—are essential to the popularity of Korean popular culture in contemporary Taiwan and to the construction of a new image of South Korea.
Confidence was often identified as the primary factor. A large proportion of my Taiwanese informants say the high quality of Korean material and cultural exports has influenced Taiwanese perceptions regarding South Korea. Many Taiwanese consider South Korea an advanced and modernised country which has claimed an honourable position in the global community. According to an editorial in the Taipei Times, ‘Taiwanese must admit they are slow to implement reforms and craft new social policies. The South Koreans are much more brave and determined about seeking innovation, and accepting challenges.’

The term ‘confidence’ (Mandarin 自信感, Korean chapingam) was often mentioned by respondents when they characterised South Korean popular culture. Most used the term when they described the performance of South Korean pop singers. Taiwanese people see in South Korean pop music a confident character, even if it is only the confidence of energy expended in singing and dancing. Many Taiwanese interviewees said South Korean confidence has recently made them curious about Korean society, and this curiosity has led them to learn more about Korean culture. According to Lai, a journalist for the gossip magazine Apple, ‘Korean music is very strong and projects confidence. Just like their nationalism. They are strong and confident’ (interview with author, 3 May 2002). As Lai points out, this may be one reason why performers who project exaggerated masculine or sexy attitudes are favoured in Taiwan. Professor Lin from Tamkang University stressed the importance of confidence:

Koreans have been always hardworking people. In my impression, they were always diligent and creative. I think finally through the pop culture, I can see the confidence they project about their culture. I think it is something Taiwanese should learn from it. We should be also proud of our culture. Taiwanese culture is very special, and it is definitely different from Chinese culture.

(Interview with author, 21 October 2009)

The second factor that emerged through interviews and media reports in Taiwan concerned a sense of group identity and nationalism evident in the intense unity displayed at international events such as the World Cup in 2002. After that event, many people reported that they had so greatly admired the South Korean national team’s solidarity that they themselves had cheered for South Korea. According to Professor Lin, a professor at Academia Sinica,

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19) Taipei Times (12 December 2002).
During the World Cup season, I was in Ganneng, Korea. Some Taiwanese may say that Korea had some trick to make the Korean team benefit. But I was just fascinated by the atmosphere and their national solidarity. I wrote a postcard to my niece and told her that this is Korean nationalism. We have to learn from this World Cup. It was quite impressive, and I learned a very important message from the Koreans.

(Interview with author, 1 April 2002)

Taiwanese people are fascinated by South Korean nationalism because they believe nationalism is something they themselves need. Many of the Taiwanese I interviewed claimed that the Koreans are more nationalistic than the Taiwanese, and that the Taiwanese can learn from them.

With the political and economic transformations of the 1980s and 1990s, such as the process of democratisation and economic growth, Taiwanese identity changed dramatically: it became increasingly inclusive, proud and nationalistic.20 Most Taiwanese respondents said that the Taiwanese long for a more unified national identity. Many noticed a connection between hallyu and the Taiwanese search for their national identity. Journalist Lai said, ‘The Taiwanese acceptance of Korean popular culture connects this relationship with the recognition of the Taiwanese searching for their identity’ (interview with author, 15 February 2002). The nationalism projected by South Koreans during international events motivated the Taiwanese to experience more South Korean popular culture, and the confidence and nationalism shown by Koreans in their popular culture and international sports also inspired many Taiwanese to look into their own cultural identity (Lai, interview with author, 15 February 2002).

According to Professor Chen:

Korea is now acting as a model to Taiwan. We get a lot of inspiration. As you know, Korea and Taiwan were considered as Four Dragons (we Taiwanese always like to quote Dragons and not Tigers), but now Taiwan is like a tail and Korea like a head. Korea is like a motivation for Taiwanese society. Hallyu is not just the popularity of pop culture. Many Taiwanese are very curious about how Korea has managed to have this kind of success. Love of their culture and nation must be the answer.

(Interview with author, 21 October 2009)

Many Taiwanese claim they get a sense of the nationalism of the Korean people from South Korean popular culture. Mally said:

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I think Koreans are very proud of their culture and tradition. When I look at Korean soap operas or movies, I am always so amazed. They try to express Korea. Look at all these ancient dramas! *Dae Jang Geum* for example: I could just feel how proud Koreans are of their tradition and culture. The way clothes, food, history and all those things are explored—it still doesn’t feel like the ancient past. Korean people still feel so confident about themselves.

(Interview with author, 15 June 2004)

A third factor related to South Korean popular culture’s success in Taiwan concerns the feeling many Taiwanese have for ‘East Asian sentiment’. The connection Taiwanese audiences feel with Korean dramas and images in Korean pop music videos appeals to a sense of East Asian cultural identity, a connection that extends beyond the physical boundaries of Taiwan. In interviews, individuals said that the values and sentiments they see in Korean soap operas are much more acceptable than those in Western products because they derive from Confucianism and are the real sentiments of real Asian lives, such as family values and respecting elders. In this sense, some Taiwanese have developed a sense of empathy for Koreans because of ideas regarding shared core cultural values. According to Cho Hae-Joang, ‘Although the products that have recently been called the Korean Wave are said to be similar to American products, they are said to possess the distinction of evoking a sense of familiarity among people in Asia.’21 Cho adds that non-Westerners who have so far confirmed their existence only through the West are finding new opportunities to construct an alternate consciousness through the sharing of popular culture.

Through deeper conversations with many Taiwanese people and multiple visits to the island, I have discovered that the constant love of Korean pop culture is not merely due to attractive cultural products, but reflects many hidden deeper meanings. Taiwanese people are curious about Korea’s success in the entertainment business, and their longing to emulate this makes them want to consume Korean pop culture. Korea motivates the Taiwanese to look into their own cultural products and consider how they should position themselves in international society.

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Is Hallyu a Phenomenon Planned by the Korean Government?

After recognising the importance of developing the nation’s soft power so as to compete more effectively in twenty-first-century global society, the Korean government looked for ways to improve Korea’s national image and decided on reinitiating hallyu. The sudden circulation of hallyu in neighbouring countries had not only confirmed the success of the entertainment industry, but also played an important role in updating the image of South Korea. In less than a decade, South Korea had become a media powerhouse in East and South Asia. By the 1980s, the South Korean government had recognised the importance of developing and promoting popular culture. Since the entrance of Western culture into South Korea, Koreans had considered Western culture superior to their own; however, through many changes of cultural policy, from restriction to promotion, the development of Korean pop culture increased and began to satisfy local people’s tastes. By changing the government’s attitude and recognising the importance of promoting pop culture, the Korean entertainment industry increased the quality of its output. As Michael Robinson has said, ‘No discussion of Korean film or culture is meaningful without considering its production within, until recently, an extraordinarily unstable political context.’

The South Korean government’s involvement in the entertainment industry has always been a close one. In the 1960s and 1970s, President Park Chung-Hee launched a policy of monitoring and purifying Korean society. He was the president who most directly mobilized the power of the state in the service of nationalist cultural construction. Park mobilized nationalism and patriotism to support the legitimacy of the state; his regime also mobilized nationalism in the service of economic development.

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22) The term ‘soft power’ was coined by American scholar, Joseph Nye, who defined it as the ability to obtain what is wanted through cooption or attraction. He first used it in 1990 in his book Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of America (New York: Basic Books) and further developed the concept in Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics (New York: Public Affairs, 2004). He used this term as the opposite of ‘hard power’.

23) Systematic Hallyu Policy 2009 (Seoul: Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism, Cultural Industry Policy Department, 2009).


25) Robinson, Contemporary cultural production, p. 22.
At that time, Korean t’ongkit’a\textsuperscript{26} singers were being arrested to suppress the growing power of pop music and musicians among young people. T’ongkit’a songs emphasised the unforced and unique characteristics of individual voices, and allowed space for a variety of singing styles.\textsuperscript{27} Most t’ongkit’a singers were highly educated university students, and they often expressed anger and frustration about the Korean government and political system. Therefore, despite a government ban on their music, a few t’ongkit’a singers, such as Kim Minki, emerged as anti-government activists and cultural and political icons.\textsuperscript{28} Since popular music was part of university students’ daily lives, the government strictly censored popular lyrics because it feared they might deliver anti-social messages. The government’s control over the entertainment industry diminished in the 1980s, when South Korea adopted an open-door policy, responding to international pressure, largely from the United States, to open its markets in the name of globalisation. This pressure affected various economic sectors, including the film and television industry. Between 1994 and 1995, South Korea faced a turning-point in market liberalisation, pushed by the World Trade Organisation.\textsuperscript{29} Ironically, the ensuing media-market openings eased the export of Korean popular culture.\textsuperscript{30} After opening up its markets, the South Korean government discovered the positive effects of supporting and promoting South Korean products.

Kim Young-Sam, the first non-military president, soon recognised the importance of supporting the entertainment industry. In a speech given in Sydney, Australia, on 17 November 1994, he announced the Segye-hwa policy, through which he emphasised that South Korea should pursue internationalisation and globalisation armed with competitiveness as a survival strategy.\textsuperscript{31} Because South Korea was then so obsessed with the traditional roots of national identity, his policy was not fully successful; however, efforts to improve the international status of the country continued with the next president, Kim Dae

\textsuperscript{27} Hwang, \textit{Ascent and politicization}, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{28} Hwang, \textit{Ascent and politicization}, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{29} Shim, \textit{Hybridity}, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{30} Shim, \textit{Hybridity}, p. 15.
Jung, who not only supported globalisation with enthusiasm, but approached the media sector with interest: ‘Responding to culture’s economic potential, Kim stressed the promotion of the culture industry as a top priority from the very beginning of his administration.’32 He recognised the media industry’s importance as a strategic part of the national economy. His valuation of culture continued in various policy contexts, such as the establishment of the Basic Culture Industry Promotion Law (Munhwa Sanŏp chinhung kibon pŏp) in February 1999 and the Korea Culture and Contents Agency (Hanguk munhwa k’ŏnt’ench’ŏ chinhungwŏn) in 1999.33 These efforts to upgrade South Korea in international society led to *hallyu* in the late 1990s because the government was developing the entertainment industry in a variety of ways. Around 2003, when *hallyu* had reached a new peak, South Korean president Noh Moo-Hyun announced the policy report of ‘the participatory government’s vision of culture industry to achieve world top five culture industry nations’, and *hallyu* was conceived as a key to South Korea’s becoming a nation of cultural power. Since then, it has played a significant part in South Korean cultural and economic policy, and has been recognised as an important kind of soft power with which to upgrade Korea’s image internationally.

The South Korean government invested in the development of popular culture, but *hallyu* was not a planned phenomenon and the government was unprepared to maintain it. Also, the Korean entertainment industry was focusing on profits, rather than trying to provide an upgraded version of its products. For many critical reasons, *hallyu* faced a sudden decline.34 The South Korean government then recognised the importance of maintaining and reinitiating *hallyu* all over Asia, as well as the importance of spreading its popularity to places where *hallyu* had not yet become known. The reinitiation of *hallyu* no longer focused merely on economic benefits but reflected long-term policy, in the belief that *hallyu* would play an important role in upgrading the image of South Korea’s national brand.

South Korea has gone through an astonishing period of economic development and democratisation, but it is still seen as an exotic unknown or unimportant nation in many countries. According to Simon Anholt’s Nation Brand Index, released in 2008, South Korea ranked thirty-third among 50 countries. This index is ‘a report card for countries, measuring the world’s perception of

34 *Systematic Hallyu Policy 2009* (Seoul: Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism, Cultural Industry Policy Department, 2009).
each nation as if it were a public brand’; among the highest ten ‘most positively perceived countries, the ranking reveals a strong correlation between a nation’s overall brand and its economic status’. Being unsatisfied with the result, South Korea in January 2009 launched an ambitious nation-branding programme. The government claimed that South Korea’s global image was far behind what South Koreans thought the nation deserved. Euh Yoo-dae, president of Korea’s Nation Branding, reported to President Lee Myung-Bak with a 10-point action plan to upgrade the national image. The plan includes these steps: to promote taekwondo; to dispatch 3,000 volunteers abroad every year; to adopt the Korean Wave programme; to introduce the Global Korea scholarship; to adopt the Campus Asia programme; to increase external aid; to develop state-of-the-art technologies; to nurture culture and tourism industries; to treat foreigners and multicultural families better; and to help Koreans become ‘global citizens’.

Among these points, the commitment to promote hallyu stands out. Obviously, Euh believed that hallyu could be used to upgrade the image of South Korea. As well as the National Branding Council, the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism also proposed a more detailed policy to reinitiate hallyu. They pointed out the importance of analysis of local markets where hallyu was booming; without knowing the status or situation of the local setting, it could not control the decline of hallyu in many areas. Serious action to use hallyu as a means of improving South Korea’s image had started with the decline of 2004–2005. After recognising this decline, the Korean government came up with the projection that hallyu would die within five years without serious governmental action. Therefore, from 2 to 8 February 2005, governors of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism had met with parties from the broadcasting company to discuss the current broadcasting conditions; they emphasised the importance of constant promotion and systematic supervision, and urged government action. After starting to consider hallyu as a policy object, the government then put more effort into promotion and support. It authorised

research to be done in local contexts, such as market analysis in hallyu-favoured areas of many different localities. Finally, in 2009, the government proposed a more systematic hallyu policy, to reinitiate hallyu on a global scale.\textsuperscript{40}

The effort that South Korea is making to upgrade its national image through hallyu policy and the national branding project continues. The government’s recognition of the possibility of using hallyu as soft power to upgrade the national image is a natural step. In the case of Taiwan, at least, I have seen a dramatic transformation of South Korea’s image as a result of this policy.

**How Has the Image of Korea Been Transformed in Taiwan?**

South Korea and Taiwan share similarities in cultural, historical and political background, especially since the beginning of the twentieth century. They both underwent Japanese colonial rule and became independent after the Second World War; both have been under the control of authoritarian governments at various times, but have transformed themselves into nations with two-party political systems; and both have achieved democratic reform through economic strength. Though the current political situations of these countries are similar,\textsuperscript{41} many citizens in each country lack knowledge of the other. The negative image of South Korea that prevailed in Taiwan until recently made the Taiwanese uncomfortable, especially because Taiwan had helped South Korea during the Korean War and since then the Korean government had always emphasised the close friendship of the two countries.\textsuperscript{42}

Unlike Japan or Hong Kong, South Korea was not a country that the Taiwanese believed it important to follow or emulate—culturally, economically or politically. Like Korea, Taiwan had been colonised by Japan for centuries, but many Taiwanese had a positive impression of Japan and the Japanese, and they still consider Japan to be culturally similar to Taiwan. This situation contrasts sharply with that of South Korea. Koreans’ negative impression of Japan had not declined since the colonial period. There was no cultural exchange with Japan, and the South Korean government strictly banned Japanese pop culture. Only in 1998, for the first time in 53 years, was it legal to play Japanese

\textsuperscript{40} Systematic Hallyu Policy 2009.

\textsuperscript{41} Both countries underwent Japanese colonisation and afterwards settled down as democracies. Currently, both countries face the problem of unification, with the People’s Republic of China in the case of Taiwan, and with North Korea in the case of South Korea, though the situations differ somewhat.

\textsuperscript{42} M. Kim, ‘‘JSA’’ making it big in Japan’, Korea Herald (2 June 2001).
songs in South Korea. President Kim Dae Jung announced that he intended to
lift South Korea’s official ban on Japanese culture; however, progress was slow,
and at first it covered only a few products. In the beginning, the Korean gov-
ernment lifted the ban only on films and videos co-produced by Koreans and
Japanese; it allowed Japanese actors and actresses to take part in Korean movies,
but only Japanese movies that had won an international prize were allowed to
enter the country. Finally, in 2004, all Japanese cultural items were allowed in.
Nevertheless, this change did not please all South Koreans: many cited the dan-
ger of Japanese influence in Korean society, and considered the consumption
of Japanese products unacceptably unpatriotic, and even disloyal.

The Taiwanese love for Japanese pop culture is easily seen in Taiwan and in
Taiwanese mass media. Japanese popular culture has long dominated the local
television soap operas and music industry. In 1999, when I first visited Taiwan,
I saw some South Korean television soap operas on Taiwanese local TV and
heard many South Korean pop songs in Taiwanese streets. The words of these
products had been dubbed into Mandarin to reduce any negative impression
(interview with Lili, 3 February 2002). Because the Taiwanese people were
then being strongly influenced by Japanese culture, the demand for Japanese
pop culture was high, but the Taiwanese economic decline provided a chance
for South Korean pop culture to enter the Taiwanese market. Unlike Japanese
products, Korean pop culture was traditional and favoured conservative topics.
In many interviews, the Taiwanese mentioned that the values they admired
in Korean television dramas were missing from Japanese products. Taiwanese
people feel closer to Korean culture, and this closeness leads them to feel closer
to Korean society. The popularity of a few singers and television dramas has
interested the Taiwanese in Korean cosmetics, food and language, and in Korea
as a travel destination.

The image of South Korea among the Taiwanese changed dramatically after
hallyu struck. In June 2002, the Taipei Times published an article entitled ‘Taiwan’s Korea quandary’; in it, the author argued that Taiwan should no
longer look down on Koreans and should have a new image of South Korea:

Taiwanese have a love–hate relationship with South Korea. There has been a Korea
fever in recent years, due to the popularity of South Korean pop culture. But people
in Taiwan have long looked down on Koreans—a viewpoint brought over from China
by the KMT [Guomindang]. Historically, the Chinese felt a strong sense of superiority
toward Korea since it was a vassal state to imperial China. South Korea’s severing of
ties with Taipei 10 years ago embittered many people in Taiwan, who felt betrayed by
a nation that had for decades been a fellow soldier in the war against communism.
On the other hand, people in Taiwan have never seriously tried to understand their neighbor. ‘Sibling states’ was a term adopted by the two countries to characterize their relationship when they were frontline states in the battle against communism. And like many siblings, they often quarreled over who did what or other trivial matters. While South Korea’s model of political and economic development has been similar to that of Taiwan, economically Taiwan was always stronger. But by the late 1980s, South Korea had caught up. After diplomatic relations were terminated, the two nations deliberately ignored each other’s existence. However, each often secretly viewed the other as a mirror from which it could learn.45

As mentioned in that article, South Korea and Taiwan have had a love–hate relationship throughout history. On the one hand, their similar historical backgrounds led them to feel close; but on the other hand, many misunderstandings widened the political gap between them. After 1949, when the KMT took over Taiwan, numerous economic, political, diplomatic and cultural exchanges occurred between the countries.44

Since the 1970s, when the PRC was recognised by the United Nations as the only government that represents the whole of China, Taiwan has no longer been considered a legitimate country in the eyes of many international organisations.45 Therefore, many countries have broken off diplomatic relations with Taiwan. In 1972, Japan did so and promptly established diplomatic relations with the PRC; the United States severed diplomatic ties in 1979. Between 1948 and 1992, Taiwan and South Korea had a strong relationship with each other.

Interest in Korean pop culture leads Taiwanese people to visit Korea and motivates them to learn about Korean history, economics, language and culture. Korean fashions, food and electronic goods have become popular, and some Taiwanese have even travelled to Korea to have surgery done. According to the KOFACE website,46 the number of Taiwanese people learning the Korean language has increased. According to the cultural language centre in Wenhua University (Culture University) in Taiwan, 1,200 people a year are learning Korean, but only 800 a year are learning Japanese. This is a much larger proportion than before hallyu struck Taiwan.

44) Kim, ‘JSA making it big.
45) Kim, ‘JSA making it big.
Part of the critical response from the Taiwanese is the result of long-cultivated ignorance of Korea. It is also caused by jealousy that South Korea can stand as an independent nation\(^{47}\) while Taiwan cannot participate in a similar capacity in many international events. South Korea hosted the 1998 Olympics and the 2002 World Cup—important international events from which Taiwan was excluded. During the 2000 Olympics, Taiwanese athletes had to participate in the games under the odd banner of ‘Chinese Taipei’\(^{48}\). This kind of international reaction towards Taiwan raised tension between the countries, because the Taiwanese could not accept that South Korea had a strong position in international society while Taiwan did not.

_Hallyu_ has played an important role in transforming this relationship. The _hallyu_ boom inspired mutual interest, which has led many Taiwanese to remark on the influence of Korean dramas and pop music in renewing their relationship with South Korea. Some can point to a time—arguably still current—when Taiwanese people maintained an image of Korea as ‘filled with roughness, violent tendencies, and lack of material and cultural refinement’, or as a country ‘ruled by political unrest and male-centrism’.\(^{49}\) According to scholars such as Kim Hyun-Mi, the image of Korean society took a sharp turn with the trendy dramas, which satisfy ‘the tastes of the video generation’, ‘emphasising visual imagery’, ‘with fast tempo and cheerful background music’, ‘following the latest fashion’.\(^{50}\) Images formerly provided by South Korean dramas and the Taiwanese perception of South Korea as an ‘impoverished country’ have been replaced by images represented by trendy dramas, furnishing the satisfaction of ‘material brilliance’ and ‘simultaneity of desires’ to match the capitalist economic development of both countries.\(^{51}\)

Through face-to-face interviews and website interviews, I have established that the Taiwanese have gained a much more positive image of South Korea as a result of the _hallyu_ phenomenon. The connections they make among music videos, music and dramas, on the one hand, and cultural identity, on the other, suggest that the Taiwanese fascination with Korean popular culture reflects a combination of admiration and a desire to emulate it. For

\(^{47}\) While South Korea is recognised by United Nations as an independent country, Taiwan is not.


\(^{50}\) Kim, _Korean TV dramas_, p. 189.

\(^{51}\) Kim, _Korean TV dramas_, p. 194.
the Taiwanese, Korea stands out as a country that has successfully negotiated a space within global and East Asian society. Longing for internal unification and resistance to Westernisation provided a chance for Korean culture to penetrate the Taiwanese market. The negative impression of South Korea has become transformed into a positive image of a nation with confidence and a strong sense of nationalism—a nation that has successfully developed its culture, having skillfully blended Western and Asian values to create its own. The hallyu phenomenon has provided an opportunity for Taiwan and Korea to build positive relationships after the break-up of diplomatic relations, and it has provided Taiwanese with a new image of South Korea. Hallyu rose and flourished because of cultural similarities—and through it, Taiwan and South Korea are likely to continue building mutual understanding.

Appendix: Interviews

A (Does not wish his real name to be used). Tape recording. Avex office in Taipei. 1 April 2002.

C (Does not wish his real name to be used). Tape recording. Music company (does not wish to be revealed) office in Taipei. 21 October 2009.

Chen Tape recording. Tamkang University English Department. 22 October 2009.


Lili Primary producer of K-Pop Entertainment at Gala-TV. Interview with author. Tape recording. Office in Taipei. 3 February 2002.

Lin Tape recording. Tamkang University English Department. 22 October 2009.


Mike Interview with author. Email. 7 September 2002.

Mike (ROCK Record Company) Interview with author. Tape recording. ROCK Record Company office in Taipei. 3 March 2002.
Venice
Interview with author. Tape recording. Office in Taipei.
12 December 2002.

Yuan, Jau
Interview with author. Tape recording. Taipei. 16 February 2002.

X
(Does not wish his name to be used) Interview with author. Tape
recording. Taipei. 1 April 2002.