This article explores the ways in which East Asian countries approach and understand the transnational flows of Korean cultural products. Specifically, it examines newspaper discourses from Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and China concerning the high popularity of a transnationalized Korean drama, Dae Jang-geum, across those societies. By adopting a quantitative and qualitative discourse analysis, the article investigates both report types and news coverage topics, as well as how each society’s newspapers appraise the drama’s popularity and that of the Korean wave in relation to their own society. As a result, the research illuminates the differences and similarities between both the forms and contents of the various newspaper discourses. Simultaneously, it reveals how the discursive practices of newspapers differently situate and localize this Korean drama in their own social contexts. The research ultimately intends to expand our understandings of the relations between trans-cultural practices and the local societies in which they take place.

**Keywords**  transnational culture; Dae Jang-geum; newspaper discourse; Korean wave; discourse analysis; Korean drama

**Introduction**

‘Globalization’ is a term with increasingly divergent and contested meanings, although it has had a privileged status as an ‘influential paradigm in the human sciences since the beginning of the 1990s’ (Featherstone & Lash 1995, p. 1). The recent transnational cultural flow of East Asian media content seems to contribute to the complexity investing the term. This is best exemplified by the rise of South Korea’s new media production centre and the spread of its highly popular media contents across East Asia (Keane 2006, Shim 2006). So far, this success seems regional, but it nevertheless creates a fissure in
West-centered globalization, providing a counter-case to media/cultural imperialism. In addition, this transnational cultural phenomenon necessarily involves ‘consequences for how people understand themselves and their relationship to specific collectivities and territories’ (Negus & Romain-Velázquez 2005, p. 329). Hence, the consequences of these transnational cultural practices in this region become a core concern for media and cultural studies researchers.

In this context, this article aims to examine the ways in which importing countries receive and understand the phenomenon of the Korean television drama, *Dae Jang-geum* (DJG) [*Jewel in the Palace*]. In the recent surge of intense trans-border popularity for Korean popular culture in, especially, Asian countries – the so-called ‘Korean wave’ – the Korean historical television drama, *Dae Jang-geum* (Dae means ‘The Great’ and Jang-geum is the first name of the heroine) has become a hallmark with its huge success. This drama first grabbed the attention of most Korean audiences with an average viewer rate of 47 percent and an all-time high of 57.8 percent as the highest rated drama in South Korean history, and continued to sweep through Taiwan, China, and Japan. In 2005 and 2006, the drama achieved extensive success in South-east Asian countries including Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and Brunei. It has also been shown on channels for diasporic Asian communities in the United States, Canada, and Australia. By using ‘country’ or (to take account of Hong Kong’s situation) ‘society’ as a macro-frame of analysis, this article emphasizes the significance of local social contexts in transnational cultural flows. Specifically it asks, first, how different societies and countries react to similar transnational phenomena; and, second, what kinds of social and cultural meanings about the imported media content are produced in each society.

Until 1990, the tendency of reception studies was commonly to focus on audiences’ cultural practices in relation to domestic media products within a particular country. What made a difference in this area was Liebes and Katz’s (1990) groundbreaking work, *The Export of Meaning*. Motivated by the testing of the media imperialism hypothesis arising from by some European countries’ fears of Americanization, this study explored five different cultural groups’ receptions of the US television drama *Dallas* in a comparative way. Its finding was that cultural groups’ varied interpretations are refracted by their own cultural backgrounds. Unlike the work of Liebes and Katz, however, most reception studies have been limited to audiences residing in a single society, even given the rapid transcultural movements of media products.

In fact, the meanings and consequences of transnational cultural practices rest on local audiences’ understandings and experiences of those practices, as well as on the changing social conditions that the practices entail. Thus, audience-based reception studies are needed, and these have demonstrated that audiences produce meanings from the text by drawing on their own lived
experiences and available social discourses (Morley 1980). Among social discourses, newspapers are a key cultural institution that produces influential social discourses, circulating as public knowledge. Although newspapers often claim as well as pursue objectivity, newspaper reports understood as a social form of knowledge are both constituted of and constituted by social reality in such a way that social values and norms are already ingrained in newspaper discourses.

Social discourse not only defines social incidents and cultural phenomena but also disciplines, normalizes, and produces the objects under scrutiny (Foucault 1980). Newspaper discourse about reality also exerts an influence on audience’s views of that reality through implicit framings which organize discourse in such a way as to guide readers towards a particular perspective or ‘preferred meaning’.

While television contents travel well beyond national boundaries, newspapers tend to remain within boundaries partly due to language barriers and the contents particular to each society. Newspaper discourses affect the public’s thoughts and feelings, and construct everyday reality and even the ‘nation’, as Benedict Anderson (1983) suggests, as an ‘imagined community’. In this vein, the following study aims to illuminate local peoples’ different ways of taking up transnational cultural flows by investigating different Asian countries’ newspaper discourses about DJG. Approaching transnational cultural practices in this way, this research contributes to expanding the scope of reception studies as well.

The Korean wave and Dae Jang-gum (DJG)

The ‘Korean wave’, a term referring to the success of South Korean cultural/media products in Asia since the late 1990s, has drawn a great deal of academic attention. The Korean wave is itself a constitutive part of the uneven, multi-dimensional, and simultaneous processes of globalization. In this sense, the phenomenon is not simply a matter of an extension of cultural activities across national borders or cultural exchanges between and around nations, but rather a matter of a ‘more complex re-articulation of cultural forms on a much larger scale’ (Koh 2005, p. 232).

Korean media contents made successful inroads into many East and South Asian countries beginning in 1997.¹ The emergence of South Korea’s media production capability and its success across Asia was possible in the liberalization context of the media sectors of Asian countries (Ha & Yang 2002, Shim 2006). With an increase in the number of viewing channels, Asian countries that could not afford to produce domestic programs looked to the broadcasts of neighboring countries. Starting with the unexpected success of the Korean action thriller Shiri in 1999 (viewed by 5.8 million people and
surpassing the record of the Hollywood film *Titanic* in Korea), Koreans came to realize the potential of Korean media contents in the Asian pop-cultural landscape. When the Korean television drama *Winter Sonata* was an unprecedented hit in Japan 2004, the Korean government and the media industry gained confidence. Until this event, Japan had been the strongest media content provider in Asian markets. Korean broadcasting content exports reached a turning point when they surpassed the total content imports to Korea in 2003. Subsequently tripling the number of total imports in 2005, the content exports phenomenon transformed the structure of the Korean media industry from import-oriented into export-oriented. Among the content exports, the drama genre accounted for 95.2 percent in 2004 and 92 percent in 2005 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2006).

One of the most prestigious exports is the drama DJG, directed by Lee Byeong-hun, with screenwriter Kim Yeong-hyeon. This drama was produced by a Korean public broadcasting network, Munhwa Broadcasting Corp. It set many new records after it first aired on MBC in South Korea from September 2003 to March 2004, twice a week (54 episodes). After enjoying a massive success in Korea, DJG was next shown on a cable television station in Taiwan in May of 2004 and gained 6 percent ratings, a surprising record for a foreign program. Then in September 2005, the drama instantly grabbed Hong Kong audiences’ attention, hitting the highest viewing record of 48 percent as the number one foreign program in Hong Kong history. DJG was also released in Japan, winning four times more viewers than of *Winter Sonata* to become the most successful Korean drama ever screened in Japan. The ensuing DJG wave surged into China in 2005, once again with high ratings. Many internet-based discussion groups and fan websites were founded and have drawn fans from all over Asia as well as in a few western countries (Lin & Kwan 2005, Leung 2005). This transnational popularity of DJG has also made a significant contribution to Korean tourism by attracting Asian fans to the main filming locations. The success of DJG across national boundaries has certainly been a surprise since the drama was not considered a would-be export at all until it was finished in Korea. Furthermore, given its allusions to specificities of Korean history unknown to foreign audiences, DJG was hardly expected to attract other national audiences outside of Korea.

DJG is based on the real historical figure Jang-geum (played by Lee Young-ae), who became the first female head physician to the King in the patriarchal Confucian society of the Chosun Dynasty of Korea in the mid-sixteenth century. Since descriptions and references of her in historical documents were scarce and mostly brief, the drama was all the more freely based on the writer’s and director’s imaginations. Focusing on the perseverance of Jang-geum, who is a beautiful, virtuous, and intelligent woman blessed with a positive attitude and iron will, two major plots develop in the drama. One is the cooking competition between Jang-geum together with her aids, and the rival party; the other is the
kind of pure love, lacking any obvious sexual tone, between the heroine and the male lead. The main storyline is that Jang-geum enters the royal palace at the age of 10 and dedicates herself to learning cooking with the philosophy that the goal of cooking is to serve the eater’s good health and happiness. During her years in the palace, she undergoes many ordeals which often stem from maneuvering rivals aiming for the head kitchen position, as well as a variety of accidents. However, she overcomes all the difficulties with intelligence and courage, and finally gains recognition for her cooking talents. She also becomes the King’s first female head physician in the end.

The historical drama DJG displays a very distinctive historical genre style in several respects. In addition to the thematic aspect of a woman’s success in an overwhelmingly patriarchal society, DJG deals with little-known people and places: that is, lower-class people such as court ladies, who are often insignificant in historical dramas; and those areas of the palace relegated to minor importance, such as the court kitchen. It also demonstrates strong bonds and affection between women characters (including mother and daughter, mentor and student, and between women friends), which are rarely found in typical Korean historical dramas. Thus the history portrayed in DJG becomes a life and history of the excluded (Ha 2005). A noticeable feature of DJG also lies in its cuisine motif, and the way it blurs the demarcation between the private and the public. Cooking is not considered as belonging only to a private realm: the knowledge, skill, and philosophy of cooking becomes the core concern of a professional and public realm like the court. No one could have imagined that cooking could be a key aspect of dramatic attraction: this drama details cooking procedures from selecting and preparing materials to cutting, steaming, and decorating the food, all presented in fast changing close-up shots catching the colorfulness of the food and the cook’s dexterous skills, accompanied by cheerful music and sound effects. These elements of modern dramatic technique are fused into the conventional style of the Korean historical genre. The female character’s quality surely mixes traditional Confucian values with modern values such as perseverance and hard work as well as career pursuit self-reliance, just as the male lead shows an unchanging care for the female lead as well as his adamant support of her career. These features seem to appeal to many Asian audiences who desire to have both traditional and modern virtues.

Research on the Korean wave and reception studies

The Korean wave phenomenon has been inspiring research by Korean media and communication scholars for several years now. This research is broadly characterized by two approaches. One examines Korean content production capabilities, marketing conditions and cultural export strategies, representing the interests of the Korean government and media industry (see Lee, M. 2005,

The concept of ‘cultural proximity’ has been used to explain Latin audiences’ preference for national media contents first and for regional materials second (Straubhaar 1991). In a similar fashion, Hoskins and Mirus (1988) proposed the concept of ‘cultural discount’ to explain the limitations of a television program’s distribution beyond its initial cultural and national boundaries, in terms of the way in which cultural goods embody distinctive cultural values, styles, beliefs, and behaviors. According to these authors, Hollywood media products achieve dominance even in non-American cultural zones because these products promote a universal rather than a unique cultural flavor. This notion of ‘cultural discount’ is consistent with Iwabuchi’s cultural studies account of Japanese media industry strategy: their media products are stripped of Japanese ‘odor’ so as to neutralize potential audiences’ psychological resistance (Iwabuchi 2004). According to most Korean scholars, the Confucian values embodied within Korean dramas – such as harmony with community, respect for elders, filial duties, and loyalty to family and friends – are considered the source of cultural proximity that contributes to their popularity. The concept of cultural proximity helps us to understand some similar intimate feelings that Asian audiences experience with Korean dramas. However, it essentializes culture reducing it to unchanging attributes, and it ignores differences of reception among Asian audiences, regardless whether they live in Confucian or non-Confucian societies.

One alternative is to examine comparatively diverse Asian societies’ social discourses about their experiences of a single trans-border product, thus moving beyond both the concept of cultural proximity and the reception study limited to individual audiences. However, there are only a few studies of social discourses about the Korean wave, and even these were not truly comparative across countries. For instance, in the case of Winter Sonata as a mega-hit Korean drama in Japan, Kaori Hayashi (2005) shows that viewers find their own pleasures in the drama while the appraisal of their cultural practices is constrained by social discourses produced by major magazines in Japan. According to her, these may be identified as a ‘nationalistic superiority’ discourse, and a ‘gender discrimination’ discourse that treats the female fans as ‘groups of hysterical, dumb, nymphomanic middle-aged women’ (p. 144). This is a very instructive work, even though the discourses were examined only through headlines, and not through whole
reports. More integral analysis of the social discourses on the Korean wave was conducted by a Korean cultural studies scholar, Cho-Han (2003), who examined the newspaper reports and academic and popular expert commentaries of 2001 and 2002. According to Cho-Han, the discourses may be construed as a ‘Korean cultural superiority’ discourse, a ‘Confucian commonality’ discourse, and a ‘cultural industry growth’ discourse imbued with perspectives of ‘cultural nationalism’, and ‘neo-liberalism’. These discourses indeed dominate, and a ‘post-colonial’ perspective rarely circulates in Korean society.

Correspondingly, there have been few transnational studies of reception and none comparing social discourses across those Asian countries that have simultaneously experienced the Korean wave. This research then attempts to fill the void by comparing the forms and contents of social discourses about DJG, circulating in China, Hong Kong, and Japan as well as Korea. It analyses the report types and topics of the news coverage, as well as the appraisals of DJG’s popularity and Korean wave in relation to its own society. The news report type determines the discursive style and furthermore affects the content to some degree. For instance, in ‘interview’ reports in general, individual voices become the main objects of reporting, while individual voices used within ‘straight’ reports tend to function as evidence or as one of various views (Cohen 1987). ‘Feature’ stories deal with the event under scrutiny in a more objective and systematic manner, giving abundant facts, while ‘columns and commentaries’ provide subjective social evaluations, often in an instructive or assertive tone. Thus, it must be important and interesting to find out what kinds of styles each country’s newspapers adopt to report DJG. The topic of each newspaper article is also important since it functions as a basic frame through which the social event is defined and understood in a specific way. It decides the focus as well as the dimension in which the news story is organized and certain information is included or excluded. How, then, do the topics of the newspaper discourses about DJG differ from one another? How does each country’s news coverage assess and react to the success of DJG in its own society? These are the questions addressed in this research.

Research method

Quantitative as well as qualitative discourse analysis was adopted, using a method particularly guided by critical discourse analysis (CDA). A key feature of CDA is to consider discourse as a form of social and cultural practice, and to emphasize an interactive relationship between discursive practices and the contexts in which they occur (Fairclough 1995, 1998, Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). As cultural studies perspectives stress, discourse as a use of language is a historically and socially situated mode of action which shapes social relations, social identities, knowledge, and systems of belief. In turn,
discourse is also shaped by power relations and other social practices in a given society. The construction of newspaper discourse is necessarily selective, entailing decisions as to which aspects of that reality to include. And each selection carries its share of social and cultural values. CDA helps us to understand news reports as discursive social practice and to analyze them with some guidelines (see Fairclough 2003, pp. 191–194).

CDA takes up an integrative approach to discourse analysis, but its proponents tend to analyze very few textual and discursive instances in order to achieve a sophisticated analysis of linguistic structures and rhetoric. To compare discourses across countries, however, a substantial number of cases needs to be examined in order to represent adequately each country’s diverse newspaper discourses on the topic in question. In this respect, cultural studies can advantageously use a quantitative method to help map out the parameters of certain cultural practices including interpretation (Lewis 1997, Kim 2004). In fact, there is an ‘imperative to pairing qualitative and quantitative approaches’ in communication and cultural studies since blending the two methods can solve complex research problems (Huxman & Allen 2004, p. 176). In this vein, a mode of content analysis apt to handle voluminous newspaper reports was designed to embrace qualitative features within the analytical categories reflecting CDA guidelines. The content analysis was not used for testing any hypothesis or causal relation in the typical empiricist way, but rather for the descriptive purpose of revealing tendencies. In that sense, this research is more qualitatively oriented than quantitative.

A total of 695 news reports from eight major newspapers and several small local newspapers in 2004 and 2005 were collected and analyzed. They consist of 139 from Korea, 139 from Japan, 395 from China, and 58 from Hong Kong. In this context, because Hong Kong and China have different social and political histories, the two were analyzed separately. For the quantitative analysis, Korean newspapers were included to see whether a country’s status as an originating or importing country affects the ways of reporting the popularity of DJG. Most of the newspaper articles written in other languages than Korean were translated into Korean for qualitative discourse analysis. Seven fluent bilingual graduates participated in the translation task for one month while three trained bilingual coders participated in the quantitative analysis. Inter-coder reliability exhibited 0.94.

Distinctive newspaper discourses on DJG

News report types and topics

According to the result of the quantitative analysis in table 1, the most common type of news coverage across the countries examined turned out to be, unsurprisingly, ‘straight news’. Within this ‘straight news’ type, however,
Hong Kong outweighed other countries at 96.6 percent in contrast to China, which showed the lowest percentage of straight news at 48.7 percent (Korea 62.6 percent, Japan, 68.3 percent). For Japan, the ‘feature news’ type ranked second with 20 percent, while for China, both ‘feature news’ and ‘column/commentary’ types showed similar proportions, about 19 and 18 percent, respectively. These results lead us to infer that the Hong Kong newspaper discourses on DJG tend to be terse and fact oriented, while the Japanese discourses tend to be more analytical. The Chinese discourses showed more of a relative balance between interpretive and analytical reporting.

Chinese newspapers adopt varied adjectives and rich phrases detailing more information relevant to DJG, and on average, they produce longer articles than those of other countries. Thus, plenty of information presented with relatively high frequencies in the ‘column/commentary’ and ‘feature/series’ types characterizes Chinese news discourse, rendering these more like literary commentaries than typical, objective, fact-oriented news reports. In addition, most voices included in the discourses belong to famous Chinese media practitioners such as a famous national script writer and director. Their views and opinions represent not only the importing country’s perspective but also those of the culturally dominant groups in China. This contrasts with Japanese discourse, where the voices come from Korean experts working in the front line of the media industry, such as international sales persons, or production staff. Accordingly, the voices incorporated in the Chinese discourses take on a subjective evaluative tone in the national state framework, whereas the Japanese discourses show an objective informative approach.

The research outcome of analyzing the topics of each country’s newspaper articles on DJG shows noticeable differences (table 2). While Korea focused most on ‘the popularity of DJG’ (29.5 percent), Japan dealt most with ‘publicity/event’ related to Japanese fans’ activities (35.3 percent). For Hong Kong, the drama ‘stars’ gained the most attention (37.9 percent), while China focused highly on ‘drama analysis’ (32 percent). In Japan, the newspapers tend to report DJG audiences’ fascination with Korean cuisine and medicine: the themes or actors of the drama were scarcely reported. In other words, DJG
drew attention and took on meaning when it became part of fans’ cultural practices. In Hong Kong, the newspaper discourses conveyed the DJG event in a popular, star entertainer-centered, and show business-oriented reporting style, with most reports almost always mentioning the drama’s ratings. Chinese newspaper discourses were distinguished by their foremost attention to the quality, structure, and meanings of the drama text.

Assessment of DJG’s varying influence

I now turn to the impact of DJG as reported in the newspapers of each country. Table 3 demonstrates the aspects of social life in relation to which each newspaper examined the main influence of DJG. All countries seem to reach a similar conclusion. That is, the popularity of DJG contributed to an increase of tourists to Korea, with Japanese newspapers in particular showing the highest percentage (53.3 percent). Korean newspapers highlighted the increase of sales of DJG-related cultural products (29.9 percent) far more than other countries did. Korean newspapers approached DJG’s influence in terms of ‘cultural industry’ understood in an economic frame.6 In contrast, all other countries underscored DJG’s influence on people’s interests and ‘cultural activities’ such as cooking and fashion. Recognized as the most visible main consequences, ‘tourism’ and ‘cultural activities’ are the social areas in which the transnational cultural flow allows audiences to actively incorporate DJG into their lives and to experience a foreign country and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Korea</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drama analysis</td>
<td>17 (12.2)</td>
<td>5 (3.6)</td>
<td>5 (8.6)</td>
<td>115 (32.0)</td>
<td>142 (20.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stars</td>
<td>19 (13.7)</td>
<td>4 (2.9)</td>
<td>22 (37.9)</td>
<td>66 (18.4)</td>
<td>111 (16.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production related</td>
<td>16 (11.5)</td>
<td>4 (2.9)</td>
<td>1 (1.7)</td>
<td>8 (2.2)</td>
<td>29 (4.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing rates</td>
<td>15 (10.8)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>7 (12.1)</td>
<td>15 (4.2)</td>
<td>37 (5.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity of DJG</td>
<td>41 (29.5)</td>
<td>38 (27.3)</td>
<td>18 (31.0)</td>
<td>56 (15.6)</td>
<td>153 (22.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related information</td>
<td>7 (5.0)</td>
<td>10 (7.2)</td>
<td>3 (5.2)</td>
<td>10 (2.8)</td>
<td>30 (4.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>derived from DJG</td>
<td>3 (2.2)</td>
<td>14 (10.1)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>4 (1.1)</td>
<td>21 (3.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing countries/</td>
<td>12 (8.6)</td>
<td>49 (35.3)</td>
<td>1 (1.7)</td>
<td>63 (17.5)</td>
<td>125 (18.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultures</td>
<td>4 (2.9)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>6 (1.7)</td>
<td>10 (1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity/event related</td>
<td>5 (3.6)</td>
<td>15 (10.8)</td>
<td>1 (1.7)</td>
<td>16 (4.5)</td>
<td>37 (5.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing drama with</td>
<td>139 (100)</td>
<td>139 (100)</td>
<td>58 (100)</td>
<td>359 (100)</td>
<td>695 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reality</td>
<td>5 (3.6)</td>
<td>15 (10.8)</td>
<td>1 (1.7)</td>
<td>16 (4.5)</td>
<td>37 (5.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television guide (preview, schedule)</td>
<td>139 (100)</td>
<td>139 (100)</td>
<td>58 (100)</td>
<td>359 (100)</td>
<td>695 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
culture. The changes experienced by audiences, including tours and individual cultural activities, can be considered as involving an expansion of cultural tastes and practices at an individual level. Across regions in Asia, however, these activities can also take on the meaning of expanding social relations as well as of understanding other cultures.

**Interpretation of DJG and reception of its popularity**

Each country’s news discourses about DJG tend to embody its own interpretations of DJG and implicitly reveal their own views of its fans as well as its popularity. In Japan, news reports on DJG barely discuss the story or the meaning of DJG. When they do, the DJG text is often dealt with in comparison with *Winter Sonata*, another Korean hit drama with a predominantly female fan base. Many reports emphasize that, unlike *Winter Sonata*, DJG includes male viewers in their thirties and forties in its audience. The press attributes this phenomenon to the nature of DJG defined as a ‘workplace drama’ or ‘career woman’ drama, which projects the image of the modern worker in a competitive organization. In other words, the workplace story allows male viewers to identify with the heroine’s life.

This framing is quite different from that used in China and Hong Kong which defines DJG as a woman’s success story highlighting her perseverance and humanity. This connects her with Confucian values and culture. According to two Hong Kong newspapers, the drama contains that wisdom of nature that cannot be found in western culture, and carries an aesthetics of patience appealing the desire of a busy Hong Kong citizen. Interestingly enough,
however, not a single Korean news article mentions Confucian values in relation to DJG. On the contrary, Korean news articles point out that the heroine of DJG does challenge the traditional woman’s image and attitudes as rooted in Confucian culture.

Confucian ethics and human virtues are more frequently discussed in Chinese mainland news discourses than in Hong Kong. Chinese reports further instruct the Chinese people to apply Confucian thoughts to modern cultural life. For example, some commentaries argue that dramas infused with Confucian thinking may not only deter people’s interest in low quality western cultural products but will also be able to sell best in the Asian market. In this way, the individual voices embedded in the form of feature stories play a role in instructing society. This kind of discourse reaches a moment of self-reflexivity whereby Confucian ethics and spirits are sparse in Chinese popular products yet are well represented in Korean dramas. By generating abundant detailed analyses of DJG and making comparisons to Chinese domestic dramas, Chinese social discourses provide a developmental perspective and self-reflexivity for readers. This Chinese response to DJG is quite in line with Arif Dirlik’s (2002) and Ian Weber’s (2003) explanations of the Confucian revival in contemporary China. To ‘balance modernization and tradition under the banner of “spiritual civilization”’, the Chinese government intends to limit the influence of western culture in China (Weber 2003, p. 273). As a result, Confucianism now ‘appears as the source of a better, superior, modernity or at least as a cure for some of the ills of western modernity’ (Dirlik 2002, p. 27).

Chinese newspaper discourses also seek to understand Korean culture and history in relation to their own by finding examples of Chinese references in the traditional Korean political system and Chinese words that appear in the drama. On the one hand, the discourse empowers Chinese audiences with a sense of influential cultural origin, and boosts their sense of national prowess and identity. On the other hand, that suggests a similarity between Korean culture and Chinese culture, which explains the Chinese infatuation with DJG.

While reporting on varied DJG-related phenomena such as Korean food events or tour events as the main topic, Japanese newspapers treat DJG as a kind of resource with which Japanese fans can expand their tastes and activities in everyday life. Unlike the case of Winter Sonata, they have little publicity hype around DJG or focus on stars. In contrast, Hong Kong newspapers frequently report fans’ enthusiasm for DJG stars without adopting any critical tone. They allocate considerable space to DJG players’ visits to Hong Kong, reporting their words and deeds in great detail. This tendency suggests that newspaper discourses fuel DJG fandom and channel peoples’ interest into pop-culture consumption. In this way, Hong Kong social discourses seem to frame the popularity of DJG as a direct relation between audiences and actors of the drama, regardless of the program’s country of origin.
This kind of care-free attitude to a transnationalized Korean drama is also revealed in the Hong Kong news story that an elementary school authority decided to include DJG in a textbook in order to teach about the heroine’s virtue and determination (*Apple Daily*, 29 April 2005). This news discourse demonstrates a liberal attitude towards this foreign pop-culture show. When addressing the immense popularity of DJG, Hong Kong media accounts resort neither to nationalist sentiment nor to a worship of the foreign. Rather, Hong Kong reports stress the uniqueness of DJG’s success, saying ‘China and the Hong Kong drama industry is swept by the Korea wave, but it does not mean the decline of our market. Not all Hong Kong movies are like *Kungfu Hustle* or *Infernal Affairs*, neither can all Korean dramas succeed like DJG’ (*Mingpao*, 14 October 2005). A director of the Hong Kong cable channel that imported DJG says, ‘The success of Dae Jang-geum cannot be read as the failure of the Hong Kong production company. On the contrary, they [the Korean broadcasting corp.] succeeded in developing our market; and we will learn from the strengths of the Korean production company’ (*Oriental Daily News*, 3 April 2005). As illustrated so far, Hong Kong social discourses show an openness to the success of a foreign cultural product without being overwhelmed.

Hong Kong newspaper discourse about DJG fans also reveals its underlying assumption that the audience consists of active pursuers of cultural products with high standards. For example:

... Sooner or later, TV’s attractiveness and influence will decline, and the pluralism and diverse selections available in the modern world will break TV’s monopoly. As seen in Dae Jang-geum, Hong Kong people in these times demand the highest quality with efficiency, whatever it may be.

(*Apple Daily*, 3 May 2005)

Hong Kong newspapers’ high respect for the audience is well displayed when they deliver one audience member’s oppositional decoding of DJG. Under the headline, ‘It’s okay to give up’, this viewer argues that ‘the heroine’s life is rough because she does not know when she should give up’. In contrast to the dominant decoding of DJG which praises the heroine’s conviction and perseverance, the viewer says:

Though a woman’s consistence is often valued, it is also important to see carefully whether the object is worth adhering to, or not. It is believed that giving-up is not good; but to give up offers a new opportunity to do and choose something else. [...] To give up in a timely manner is also wisdom.

It is interesting to see that Hong Kong reports incorporate an oppositional reading with a feminist nuance, while other countries do not present oppositional readings of DJG.

**Discourses on the Korean wave**

Japan, Hong Kong and China show different perspectives in understanding the Korean wave as transnational cultural flow. Japanese discourses grasp the Korean wave in the frame of economic competition with Japan for the Asian market. Some news discourses take the tone that the rise of Korean popular culture in Asia threatens the status of Japanese dramas across Asia. One article reports that screening of a Japanese drama on television is being postponed due to the popularity of Korean dramas, and this makes one tour agency representative worry about its negative impact on drama location tours in Japan (Asahi, 3 April 2005). Another report says, ‘Since about 2000, Japanese dramas have not sold well across Asia. The question of why is solved immediately. Korean dramas begin to make inroads into foreign markets with great force’ (Asahi, 7 June 2005). Similar attitudes are also found in other reports: ‘In those days, Japanese dramas were the hot issue across Asia. But, now the status is taken away by Korean dramas. Let’s examine the ways in which Korea sells their dramas and what differs from Japan’ (Asahi, 9 November 2004). Accordingly, a number of analytical and in-depth news accounts for the success of the Korean wave are provided. They conclude that the key factors for the Korean wave are ‘steady and active sales activities of Korean broadcasting companies’ and ‘whole-heartedly Korean governmental support’ (Asahi, 15 March 2005).

Unlike in Japan, Hong Kong discourses tend to view the Korean wave as a transnational cultural flow bringing mutual benefits. Some news reports highlight a Chinese singer’s huge financial success with her Chinese version of a DJG theme song. Others point out that the Korean wave creates great demand for Chinese interpreters of the Korean language, as Korean and Chinese business interaction increases. Hong Kong, then, becomes a hub for Korean-language-speaking interpreters. In addition, Hong Kong social discourses consider the Korean wave as consumer popular culture in general rather than as ‘Korean’ popular culture.

In contrast, mainland Chinese discourses emphasize the need to learn from the success of Korean popular culture, which appears to incorporate cultural values effectively. Furthermore, they generally send the message that respect for other cultures is not incompatible with a sense of dignity and self-worth, although some Chinese actors and government argue against the Korean wave. Several Chinese actors have publicly denounced Chinese viewers of Korean dramas as traitors, and called for cultural nationalism. When the heads of
television stations in China gathered for ‘Leaders Forum for Chinese Drama Industry Development’, some criticized that Korean dramas conquered the Chinese market which is supposed to be filled with domestic programs. However, others argue that competition produces a better product and we should take tolerant attitudes toward cultural products of high quality. These two opposite views of transnational popular cultural products represent both the nationalist and neo-liberal camps which are leading contemporary China toward the national policy of a balanced market economy. Reporting this incident, however, a Chinese reporter concludes, ‘From this reporter’s perspective, there is no free “cheese.” Dae Jang-geum did not take the cheese of our domestic drama market, instead it created our cheese’ (Hunan TV news room, 12 September 2005). This shows that Chinese newspaper discourses consider the Korean wave as a model case for drama production in China.

Chinese newspapers further point out that the Korean wave in China was assisted by various local media, as in this example: ‘To advertise Dae Jang-geum on Hunan TV inadvertently helps the Korean wave’ (Yanzhao City Paper, 7 September 2005). In fact, in order to secure an increase in viewership, both the Hunan TV channel and the local newspaper companies devised various marketing strategies using the popularity of DJG. These strategies included quiz events with a DJG tour prize, a Jang-geum singing contest, and a hot-line survey about DJG. These social practices of the local companies seemed to facilitate the import of Korean dramas.

In addition, Chinese newspapers indicate that domestic Chinese businesses made the first move to copyright the name DJG and succeeded in making a lucrative income. Thus, the People’s Daily advises Korea through a professor’s voice saying ‘Korean corporations urgently need much more careful preparations and relevant strategies if they want to use the Korean wave better’ (People’s Daily, 24 October 2005). This highlights the way in which the globalization of Korean local culture does not necessarily entail economic success for Korea; rather, it can beget considerable economic and cultural opportunities for Chinese local businesses in the process of localizing the global.

As illustrated so far, each country’s newspaper discourses on the popularity of DJG show differentiated understandings of its themes and consequences corresponding to diverse contemporary interests and social contexts. Table 4 outlines a summary of the specific characteristics of the newspaper discourses in Japan, Hong Kong, and China that we have discussed so far.

Concluding remarks

This study shows that the newspaper discourses of Japan, Hong Kong and China have commonalities in acknowledging the audiences’ affection for the
transnationalized Korean drama DJG and the rise of tourism as an effect of the drama’s success. Most of these discourses also recognize the well-crafted plot, the female lead’s excellent acting, the theme of a commoner’s success, the focus on food and medicine, and the fusion style of historical genre with modern dramatic techniques, as the drama’s merits appealing to the Asian audiences. In addition, social discourses about the popularity of the drama allow us to imagine the extension of social relations in the inter-Asian sphere, whether these be relations between stars and audiences, and/or relations between domestic and foreign audiences.

However, each country’s newspaper discourses differentiate when dealing with the popularity of DJG in terms of style, emphasis, and meaning, in spite of assumed similarities among these Asian countries. Japanese newspaper reports seem more audience-centered, and Hong Kong ones seem more star-centered, while Chinese ones seem more text-centered. And Korea and Japan strip DJG of Confucian meanings, in contrast to Hong Kong and China who attribute the success of DJG partly to its Confucian elements. In Japan, the newspaper discourses produced more analytical and objective accounts for the successes of the drama and the Korean wave, with a keen interest in the Asian media content market. In addition, the newspapers report more about the varied leisure activities performed by the Japanese fans than about the DJG text itself. In Hong Kong, the newspapers serve to form a popular commodity-centered culture as well as to boost fandom through the coverage of drama stars in great detail. They appear to consider the Korean wave as a form of mutually beneficiary cultural trade as well as to treat ‘Korea’ as the simple ‘brand name’ of a consumer product, not as a problematic social phenomenon calling for a certain intervention or criticism. Unlike Hong Kong, mainland

<table>
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<tr>
<th>TABLE 4</th>
<th>Summary of the characteristics of the newspaper discourses</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report type</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main topic</td>
<td>Part of other social practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of DJG</td>
<td>Tourism and cultural activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on the drama text</td>
<td>Career woman drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular reception</td>
<td>Audience centered: food or tour event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transnational cultural flows</td>
<td>Competition for Asian market</td>
</tr>
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INTERPRETING TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL PRACTICES 751
Chinese newspaper discourses are distinguished by their foremost attention to the drama text seen as embodying Confucian values such as perseverance, humaneness, and loyalty. These discourses try to balance the impetus towards capitalist success on the one hand and tradition on the other hand, endowing both with a reflexive and didactic tone. They suggest that China learn from the success of Korean cultural products but put some distance from cultural nationalism. The unit of thought and comparison used by each country’s newspapers seems different: it is individual for Hong Kong, the nation-state for China, and the Asian region for Japan.

These differences reveal that the social and cultural reality prevailing in each society permeates through newspaper discourse. In turn, newspaper discursive practices define, evaluate, utilize, and locate the transcultural phenomenon within their cultural and social order, through which audiences’ experiences of it may be redefined. In the process, cultural politics as well as national politics are at play: they vary from curbing the spread of western cultures for Confucian values, to serving commercialism, to competing for the media content market. Television tends to allow local audiences to consume transnational cultures, whereas national and local newspapers serve to localize it. A foreign drama that enthralls the majority of the nation becomes the very terrain in which a society struggles to negotiate its own meanings and moments of self-reflexivity. In this regard, this research on the newspaper discourses across country is a reception study as well as discourse analysis on the macro-level. By showing the ways of localizing the transnational cultural text and practice, this research attempts to reveal not only what the differences are like but also how the differences are created across societies. Thus the research on each society’s newspaper discourses about a transnational cultural text helps not only illuminate dominant interpretations in the society which would affect audiences but also expand our understandings of the cultural and social characteristics of the society itself in relation to a transnational pop culture.

Notes

1 The exports of the Korean culture industry in 2002, 2003, and 2004 are $585 million, $631 million, and $940 million, respectively. Its proportion to the total sales of culture industry increased from 1.43 percent in 2003 to 1.88 percent in 2004. However, its ratio to the total exports of Korea is quite stable around 0.3 percent between 2002 and 2004, since the total exports had increased almost at the same speed.

2 The total exports and imports of broadcasting programs in 2005 were $110 million and $36 million respectively. The exports to the United States, Japan, Hong Kong, and China are $2.6 million, $60.1 million, $3.3 million, and $9.9 million respectively; and the imports from each country are $62.5 million, $18.4 million, $0.6 million, and $2.0 million respectively. Korea is net-importing from the United States, and net-exporting to other countries.
Based on the CDA guidelines, several questions were generated to establish categories for content analysis. These were: what kind of social events and practices do the newspaper discourses relate to the phenomenon of Korean drama’s popularity? How do they frame DJG? What kinds of assumptions are made in the discourses? What kind of news types do they adopt? What kinds of voices are included and excluded in the discourse? What kind of voices is endowed with authority? How do they deal with differences: do they emphasize them? Or suppress them to stress some commonalities? What other texts or discourses do they incorporate in their reports? What kind of vocabularies and metaphors are used to describe the event? All topic categories are derived from the preliminary discourse analyses of 10 newspaper reports of each country.

The newspaper discourses were mostly collected from either the newspapers’ main internet sites in China, Hong Kong, Japan, and Korea, or from a news database (such as KINDS in Korea) by using the keyword Dae Jang-geum. For Korea, two major newspapers representing two contrasting perspectives, the Chosun Ilbo and the Hankyoreh, were selected and searched from September 15, 2003 to March 30, 2004. For Japan, three major newspapers, the Asahi Shimbun, the Daily Yomiuri, and the Mainichi newspapers were searched. For Hong Kong, four newspapers, Wenweipo, Mingpao, the Apple Daily, and Asia Times, were examined between January 24, 2005 and May 1, 2005. For China, initially, a total of 359 reports from both the People’s Daily and the Hunan TV’s internet news site were collected. From the People’s Daily 63 news reports between September 1, 2005 and October 15, 2005 were collected. Hunan TV which aired DJG first in China provided an internet site which collected all Chinese newspapers’ coverage of DJG. During the screening of the drama, a total of 296 reports were analyzed after deleting duplicated contents.

However, since the number of Chinese news reports is large, 100 cases out of 296 news reports from Hunan TV internet site were selected by sampling every third news story for full translation; and in the case of the rest 196 news stories, only the lead paragraph was translated into Korean.

During the period from which the Korean reports are collected, DJG had not yet aired in other countries. Thus, the interest in the sales effect of DJG seems confined to the Korean domestic market at the time being, although this economic impact frame is still found in reports of DJG’s popularity among other countries later.

References


