

Beyond the “Fad”: Understanding Hallyu in the Philippines

Jay-Ar M. Igno and Marie Cielo E. Cenidoza

Abstract—The Korean Wave, popularly known as Hallyu (한류) is the rapid spread of Korean popular culture in the form of Korean drama, dance, music, as well as fan clubs for Korean stars, among others. This term is the “Korean wave” written in Chinese characters, said to have been derived from the title of an album compilation of Korean popular songs that became a sudden hit in China during the 1990s.

Some of the people in the Philippines claim that Hallyu is just a fad – a craze, an intense and widely shared enthusiasm for something, most of the time that is short-lived [3] just like its predecessors in the Philippines such as Mexicanovelas, Chinovelas [4] or Jpop (Japanese pop) but as time pass by, Hallyu following increases with no hints of its decline for the next few years.

This paper tries to solve and explain the cultural phenomenon that is revolutionizing the world today which became a mystery to the eyes of most Filipinos. It expounds the deeper root of Hallyu’s staying power in the Philippines as well as the challenges it possess through the concepts of cultural imperialism as explained by Joseph S. Nye’s soft power [4] and Filipino’s sense of cultural identity [5].

Index Terms—Cultural identity, cultural imperialism, Hallyu, Korean wave, soft power.

I. THE KOREAN WAVE IN THE PHILIPPINES: HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS

The Korean wave, has been popular since late 1990’s from China, to East Asia including Taiwan and Japan. The regional distribution of Korean cultural products was begun with trendy dramas, then, extended to popular songs, movies [1], with the growth of Korean media markets bringing the wave to the Philippines’ sea shores. The term *Hallyu* first mentioned in Chinese media and was used to refer to the popularity of Korean cultural products abroad, which include dramas and music. It also means — a sudden cold wave, a warning for the Chinese people to be cautious of Korean popular culture [2].

Hallyu brought South Korean culture to everyone who has access to television, movie houses, and internet. This develops further interest not merely for entertainment’s sake but also of the country, the people and anything Korean. We also say that *Hallyu* is a product of globalization and has deliberately or inadvertently popularized Korean culture in various ways.

According to the Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism [3], Korean dramas in the Philippines, famously known as

Koreanovelas, debuted in GMA7, with *The Successful Story of a Bright Girl*, as a response to the rival station ABS-CBN’s successful airing of the Taiwanese drama *Meteor Garden*. But this drama was not the one that gave much impact to the Filipino television viewers, until the next Koreanovela, *Endless Love 1: Autumn in My Heart* in 2003 paved the way for the rest of the successful Korean dramas in the Philippines. This drama was the first installment of the famous four seasons of Korea-inspired drama entitled *Endless Love*. People say that aside from the good-looking actors and actresses that brought charms of the series, the drama’s story line is quite different in such a way that the lead characters both died in the end which is somewhat unusual for Filipinos who got used to happy endings. This maybe is one of the reasons the Filipino people got struck by the Koreanovelas and waited for the next drama to be shown in the country. In 2004, it was followed by the second installment of *Endless Love*, which was *Winter Sonata*, and on that same year, they aired *Stairway to Heaven*. Also ABS-CBN simultaneously aired their first Koreanovela, *The Truth*, followed by *Lovers in Paris* that started beating the rates of GMA7’s *Stairway to Heaven*. The two rival channels saw the light of using Koreanovelas’ popularity and the Filipino’s vast interest in love stories Korean dramas offering then, for them to import more and more dramas from Korea. However, the next Koreanovelas that became more popular were of different genres that added flavor to the tastes of dramas Filipinos wanted to watch for. These are the *Full House*, a Romantic Comedy which was shown in 2005 and *Jewel in the Palace*, a Historical drama that was aired in 2006 [4]-[7]. Then, Koreanovelas became part of the Filipinos daily dose of television scenes.

Korean music compared to Korean drama was not that popular because in terms of music, Filipinos are limited to Korean drama theme songs. Korean singers were not as popular as Korean actors are back then. Maybe the reason why KPop is less popular is because Korean songs were not dubbed. Thus, Filipinos would hardly understand what it means, then. But recently KPop became popular because of the internet sites and blogs that promote Korean singers thus engaging their audience with their upbeat music and catchy songs with cute girls and boys dancing in accord. Because of curiosity some people would search through the internet about those artists and end up loving them. These days most of the concert acts were filled with these artists’ avid fandom.

Contrary to what most people think that 5-6 years ago that Korean dramas and popular music are just a fad and will disappear after a couple of years, they stayed, for the past 10 years and still counting. On the daily schedule of leading television stations in the Philippines, it is pretty sure that there is no day without a Korean drama on television. And not just the original Korean drama, adaptations of such can be seen once in a while. Even Korean characters on Philippine

Manuscript received January 8, 2015; revised June 1, 2015.

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dramas and movies are also started appearing such as in the series *Koreana*, the movies *Kimmy Dora* and *Born to Love You* with Korean characters or Korea-inspired story.

After Sandara Park got famous, other Kyop^ho or Koreans abroad who managed to get their way into the spotlight were able to capture the audience such as Sam Oh, Grace Lee, Ryan Bang and Jinri Park.

Also, KPop has just recently advanced its popularity in our country, KPop fans before can just download the songs they want or order CDs over the internet, but now Korean songs has started playing in the airwaves too and Korean Audio CDs can now be bought from record stores. Surprisingly, when you ride taxis, buses, jeepneys and other public form of transportation, you can here Korean songs played in the car's stereos, and not the English version anymore but the original instead.

Merely viewing Korean novels has extended to fandom. A number of fan bases for both KPop artists and Korean novel actors keep growing and now that we have Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social networking sites, it is easier for them to interact with one another, resulting to the fast and continued growth of these fan bases.

Recently, more and more Koreans come to the Philippines to relax, tour around, play golf, to invest, put up their own businesses, to study and some even decided to live and others to retire here. In the Philippines-Korea Partnership forum last 2012, it was shared by Counselor Seong Eun Hwang of the Korean Cultural Center in Manila that the numbers of Korean visitors coming in the country almost reach to one million. Consequently, if Korean wave was not present at this time maybe it will be hard for us to appreciate Korean people and its culture. On the other hand Korean wave showed us various faces of Koreans, their personality and a lot more about them, so we learn to communicate with them. We learn to understand and respect their culture.

II. HALLYU IN THE PHILIPPINES: ANALYSIS OF THE WAVE

To understand the recent turn of events in the Philippines, we can look at it in two ways – from the point of view of Korea as a strong nation trying to introduce their culture and point of view of Filipinos receptive to these influences. *Korean Wave as a tool of Cultural Imperialism*

Cultural imperialism is normally defined as the cultural aspects of imperialism. Imperialism is explained as the practice, theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distinct territory [8]. Literally, it is the way when one nation imposes its culture to another or influences them through culture. As compared to colonialism which is more associated with the active manner of domination or known as the hard power, cultural imperialism features a more subtle way of colonization. As such, the latter is less susceptible to resistance as people failed to realize they are being influenced by another nation.

Joseph S. Nye's perspective of —hard power and —soft power confirms the notion of cultural imperialism as a powerful tool in influencing people especially their cultural aspect which can very well explain the why this Korean wave keeps on paving the Philippines shores, as well as reaching to other parts of the globe. Looking back to what Nye said, soft power refers to the power coming from culture, ideology or

policies that make others want what I want, in opposition to that of hard power' such as military force [1], it is without doubt that South Korea uses this strategy to make a big name in the world. *Hallyu* as a form of soft power uses material culture being an example of cultural diplomacy thus referring to the practice of using cultural resources to facilitate the achievement of foreign policy objectives [9], that we can connect to economy and industry. In fact, Korean government even includes such programs and funds supporting this cultural diplomacy through their Cultural Partnership Initiative program participated in by professionals from different parts of the world. Some of the participating government and non-government offices of Korea are Korea Tourism Organization, Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation, Korea Culture and Tourism Institute, Korea National University of Arts, National Theater of Korea, Korea Broadcasting System, Arirang TV, and the International Korean Language Foundation.

III. KOREAN WAVE AS A REFLECTION OF FILIPINO CULTURAL IDENTITY

Culture is defined as an assemblage of meaning which are generated and consumed by a given social group while identity can be defined as something who defines the individual or way an individual sees him- or her- self and projects that self into the world [8]. Cultural identity is the summation of one's nation values, morals, ideals, behavior, etc. as a nation which is shaped by its environment and history. Just like most countries, Philippines' cultural identity is a hybrid of different cultures as an effect of being colonized for more than 300 years. These invaders left a great impact on the country and the trace of their domination is clearly seen on how the nation acquires its cultural identity.

As the Philippines was physically colonized by first the Spaniards, then the Americans and lastly by the Japanese, it was molded to accept that anything from the locality or related to the locals is inferior compared to the colonizers thus birth of inferiority complex among the Filipinos. Whether physically or intellectually, the colonizers make it a point to remind the locals of their secondary position in the society, thus, during the Spanish occupation, the colonizers used the term *Indio* (a term specifically for the Filipinos with a connotation of being unintelligent) and denied them education. The *Indios* were taught to believe and follow blindly what the Spaniards teach them to believe – what is right and wrong or good and evil. Filipinos were discouraged from thinking against those teachings and those who even tried were considered subversive who received punishment immediately. According to an article written by a well-respected writer and wife of a historian, Leticia Constantino, it is during this time that Filipinos developed the habit of being dependent to the Spaniards and allowing the economic and social superiors to do the thinking for them [10].

The manner of reminding the Filipinos of their lowly status and dependency changed during the time of the American occupation. Instead of directly showing or stating it like what its predecessors did, it intensified their inferiority complex through education. Thinking that Americans were their

savior (liberating them from the Spaniards), and satisfying the desire of Filipinos to learn which was deprived to them by the first colonizers, the Filipinos embrace the Americans teaching their values, morals and ideals with open arms. The standards in teaching were intended to glorify the American culture unknown to the Filipinos. The inferiority complex evolved as a cultural trait called Colonial Mentality (or sometimes called cultural cringe).

The said trait greatly affected the way Filipinos see themselves in terms of its cultural strength. Its cultural identity was based on its position against other nation in terms of the latter's standards. They tend to always compare themselves to that of others and doubt their own culture, making the Filipinos embrace the other nation's better culture. Believing that the culture of other nation is superior, Filipinos long to attain those standards even to the point of impersonating them to alleviate their status.

For a long time, Filipinos adopted the Western culture as gauge of its ideals like beauty (in fact there was an urban legend in the Philippines that Filipinos will pinch their nose with clothes clippers in order to make it high as those of the Spaniards). However, there is change now in the Filipinos' standard for colonial cringe as a shift to Asian culture is seen as a new development.

The researchers now tried to explain this occurrence.

Why Asian culture?

Most of the studies attribute the shift to globalization as the many Asian countries started to rise in terms of economy. Although, the mentality of Filipinos that the Western culture as better one is still there, a large number of us increasingly became fascinated to its Asian counterparts namely Japanese, Chinese and recently the Korean culture. The movement may be based on the idea of regionalism as an effect of the globalization. This cultural phenomenon sees the international culture being divided into regions where nations with similarities in their aspirations or history bring them together to form alliance or cultural unities [11]. So, in the case of the Philippines, we identify ourselves with the Asian region as most of the countries experienced being colonized by the Western bloc (Orientalism).

But one may further ask, of all the Asian nations, why the Korean culture appealed to the Filipinos and had a cult following that seems to last?

The answer lies to a deeper origin which most Filipinos failed to realize unlike other Asian nations, Filipinos have the sense of identification with Korea. There are a lot of similarities between the two nations that Filipinos actually see a reflection of their own culture.

For one, both nations have a trace of colonialism by another country such as Japan. The history of Korea reveals that like the Philippines, Japanese invaded their land and Americans helped both of them to repel the gain of their freedom.

Second, the commonalities Filipinos and Koreans share is the value of things being **communal**, particularly sharing of food and things we have. Most Filipinos just like most Koreans share food on the table, commonly using one bowl of food for everyone. We serve soups and stew in a common bowl, some use serving spoon but some are not. It is also common to let a family member or a friend drink from the

same cup, or letting them bite from the same sandwich.

Third, both nations have very close family ties, whether it is immediate or an extended one. Adults still live with parents and some are even already married yet living in the same roof with parents. Old parents are taken care of by their children and not sent to nursing homes. Daughter-in-law moves to the house of their husband. Aunts, uncles, and cousins are considered important part of the family.

Another notable value we share is **respect to elders** (except for the really westernized families). We Filipinos do this gesture of *mano* by getting the right hand of the elders and putting it on our forehead while the Koreans bow in front of their elders. The older the person is in front of them or with a higher position, the lower they have to bow.

As per the politics is concerned, it is very similar to how **politics** is played here in the Philippines. Korea has this democratic system of government like ours and one sad truth is that corruption in the government is also something we have in common. However, knowing our fellowmen and most Koreans, we both have these **aspirations** in life as to holding on, believing, and working hard to fulfill one's dreams.

Filipinos and Koreans also share this characteristic of being **expressive** and **romantic** unlike the western culture that do not. We like gift-giving and expressing love or romance in a lot of ways. Even for friends, when we visit them, we bring something for them and when someone gave you something, you give something back.

We also both share being **hospitable**. The guest will get the best food, the best seat, the best bed, and the utensils you have never used before. We also have this custom of welcoming new neighbors and bringing food to them. We both have this sense of **courteousness** and the **treating culture**. Someone who is more well-off or has something more in their pockets, he or she foots the bill instead of splitting it. Also when something good happens to a person, maybe work promotion, admission to a good university, passing an exam, etc., that person treats his/her friends.

The **association** of our own lives and experiences with them plays a big role why Filipinos embrace their stories in Korean dramas. We tend to see **similarities** in cultural views and ways of life in these dramas are relatively reflective of our Filipino culture.

Because of this sense of self-identification, Filipinos had the inclination to channel their aspirations, which its own society lacks, to the imagined community that they see in the Korean culture. Filipinos tend to believe that because we share a lot in common with Korea, not to mention their proximity, we can also attain what they have if not became like them thus accepting the fact that their culture is better than ours which in turn increase the chance of cultural incorporation. Korean culture gave Filipinos a sense of hope that we can attain that better culture.

One great example is exhibited in terms of beauty and cosmetics. Most Filipinos before tend to like those with light to fair and white skin, high-bridged nose, differently colored-eyes and hair, and even towering height and good physique (just like the Caucasians and Americans). This is manifested with the Filipinos undeniable patronization of different whitening products, supplements for growth,

hair-dyes, colored contact lenses, and even undergoing surgical enhancements.

However now, when Filipinos saw Korean artists very youthful and flawless skin as if they make it seem like the fountain of youth has been discovered, the standard of beauty has somehow changed. One need not be tall or have a high-bridged nose since what is given emphasis now is the youthfulness-like of Koreans. Filipinos resort to mere a change in fashion style (clothes and hair styles) just to look like the Koreans and need not resort to wasting a lot of money just to attain the Caucasian look. This change is openly welcomed by Filipinos as money will not be a problem since Korean fashion is affordable.

After understanding the reasons why Filipinos embrace the Korean culture, we now look at the explanation of its staying power.

The Philippines is actually branded as one of the best markets for other industries especially by Korea. This is because our country is vulnerable. We are very open to what may come to us. In fact, the government creates and implements programs in order to attract other nations to our country whether for pleasure or business. The continuing increase of Korean nationals visiting (and others staying) in the Philippines every year for work, for leisure, for Christian missions, for English studies, among other reasons, strengthens and intensifies the continued chance of the Filipinos' exposure to the Korean people for a longer time and our interactions with each other adds to the height of us getting influenced by their culture as well.

Another factor that can affirm that Hallyu is here to stay is that most Filipinos these days are trendy and techy and Korea is starting to build its empire in this field. We have an easy access to new and updated gadgets and most are internet savvies. We are very internet conscious and are aware of the new and popular trends in and out of the country. Even some of these people learn to speak Korean language in order for them to follow their idols on twitter and other social media sites. Maybe another important thing to note is that, Koreans tend to bring us their material culture since it is also easy for them to communicate with us because we are English speakers.

A lot of fans have even learned the Korean language, have visited/have the desire of visiting South Korea, interacted with fellow Korean fans, frequents Korean restaurants, etc. Some of these people, in their own little circle have adopted much more like name calling "Oppa, Unnie, Hyung, and Nuna. Some women give chocolates to guys on Valentine's Day and also celebrating White Day, and other special Korean days.

The market also affects the culture in some points such as the moment you buy those KPop CDs or even watch Korean novels, you will somehow have this urge to try on things that you saw on TV. Thus doing so can indirectly affect the culture of those involve in the material production. As they continuously cater to what the market needs and dictates, the producers and those people involve in the production tends to adapt to what they think are needed to satisfy the consumers.

Lastly, beyond the vulnerability and other concepts mentioned above, Hallyu is here to stay because Filipinos are

great patron (that most international acts are really fond of the Filipinos way of showing their support and appreciation).

The Koreans continue exporting Korean dramas and music to the Philippines (and other South-East Asian countries) because a lot of Filipinos patronize them continuously. Also, we tend to buy products our idols are endorsing or using. Korean boygroups and girlgroups who came and held concerts in the country were all packed with Filipino fans and became very successful events. Other groups just come to the Philippines for fanmeets and MV shoots, while attracting more and more fans.

This popularity will go on to a stable rise, may likely plateau, yet still rise, steadily compared to JPop, simply because the KPop idols actually come here compared to JPop idols who are not. The novelty will continue simply because we can't marry or merge what we see on TV to how the Koreans here in Manila interact with us and we may take that positively or negatively as per implied.

IV. CHALLENGES TO THE KOREAN WAVE IN THE PHILIPPINES

However, though there are lots of positive and valid reasons for us to say that the Korean wave will still pave its way towards mainstream media and be part of our society, there are still forces that can lead to its desertion.

It is also important to note that these days a lot of new groups in South Korea are coming out that if you are not that fast and keen enough in following what is happening, you would not know them anymore. And if that continuously happens, it can weaken the stronghold in the market. As well as, if Philippine productions continuously produce groups and artists of the same quality and with the same target market, though Down to Mars, XLR8, Upgrade, Detour and the like are still a way to go for them to replace the KPop idols, Korean wave can be weakened.

Another thing that can be detrimental to the success of Philippine-Korean relations is if the Korean men continue coming to the Philippines for the 3 Gs: Girls, Gambling and Golf, it will damage the Koreans' reputation as a whole. Also, not so recently, locals in Baguio City even dubbed Camp John Hay as *Kim Jong Hae* because of the sudden influx of Koreans who play golf there and most of the locals do not like the treatment of these Korean people to them. As well as in Cebu, there are lots of Korean tourists who go there for the weekend just to gamble. There was this one Korean comedian some time three years who got publicized for his huge gambling debts at Waterfront Casino."

Another sentiment we can hear around is that some Koreans mistreat Filipinos in many ways. They find Philippine prices cheap, as such as English courses, goods and services, the people are maybe warm and very accommodating, and well, in a negative way, "uto-uto". This sentiment is being shared that Korea's cultural messengers, including tourists, businessmen, and missionaries, have largely misrepresented the Hallyu while interacting with Southeast Asia.

There are a number of reasons for this why there are people being negative on this matter. First, the exercise of soft power has somehow demonstrated counterproductive when left to the vicissitudes of Korean tourists in the country. Others

might say they are just a few amongst the almost one million residents and tourists all around the Philippines, but this dejected reality still have impacts on locals to the extent that some tourists have been referred to as Ugly Koreans, because of their brutish behavior while travelling around the archipelago. There were reports that some resorts even had to ban Korean tourists because they experienced Korean guests leaving their rooms in shambles after their stay. Other reports featured Koreans being involved in syndicates and illegal activities such as cyber pornography, prostitution, prohibited drugs, and illegal businesses.

The second factor contributing to the negative image of the Korean wave is the aggressive Korean Christian missionaries flocking from the Metro to the far flunk areas. Looking to another perspective, the spread of Christianity, the Korean style has also upset many in Southeast Asians including Filipinos. In a country with the majority of its population religiously entrusts to Catholicism, these Korean missionaries are known to fervently sough to attract locals to their Protestant denominations, which are perceived by local religious leaders with suspicion. These missionaries tend to use financial assistance to recruit locals and new converts to work together with them in evangelizing and establishing churches.

Third, the appalling manner on the part of Korean businesses has also provoked ailing sentiments among Filipinos. Korean businessmen and bosses have increasingly become synonymous with fraud, human rights violators and people who are ignorant of the sensitivity of local cultures. Korean managers also have gained a notorious reputation as being among the harshest and most abusive foreign investors in the world, with the term military culture employed to characterize Korean management practices.

However, the negative aspects of Hallyu are seemingly repairable. This can be attributed particularly in the fact that Korea and Southeast Asia do not have any bad history between them, compare with the case of Japan. Rather, we always go back to where the strength of the Philippines – Korea friendship is rooting, which is during the Korean War with the Japanese occupants where the Philippine government sent troops of soldiers to help the Koreans fight for their independence. With those off-putting factors affecting Philippine – Korean Friendship, Korean tourists, missionaries and businessmen need to be conscious of the growing strain that has taken root in Southeast Asia against many Koreans over the years. As a result, the Korean Embassy in the Philippines and the Korean Cultural Center in Manila are doing initiatives in order to address the abovementioned tension between the cultures. Education programs to guide Koreans on the Filipino traditions and cultural practices may well represent a viable policy option to limit the damage already done.

V. CONCLUSION

Hallyu in the Philippines is not just a mere cultural phenomenon that will suddenly vanish. It shows the identity of the Filipinos, its history as well as its cultural weakness and strength. Korean wave might be popular, but still it cannot escape criticisms. They say that embracing Korean

wave is setting aside Filipino material culture. However, that holds true for some but we can find actual benefits from it. Filipinos can learn a lot from Hallyu – the way Koreans promote themselves and believe in their culture that we can make our culture in the same level as others as well as it can further develop people to people relation.

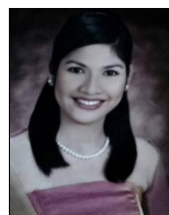
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